

# Joan Crate, Indigenous Identity, and the Reach of Global Colonialism in *Foreign Homes*

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**Abstract** Canadian Metis author Joan Crate explores the fraught existence of those with Indigenous ancestry within the Canadian nation in her volume of poems, *Foreign Homes*. The definition and understanding of multiply constituted identities, the tenuous position — socially and politically — of Indigenous Canadians, and the uncertain narrative of indigeneity in contemporary Canada are examined in her volume as is consideration for how Indigenous identities are formed globally, shaped through colonial contact and the imperialistic ambitions of European powers. The volume's title reflects this tension of identity and place in its invocation of a home that is signalled by its otherness as foreign space. This tension is particularly liminal, suggesting that an individual's status as an Indigenous person within the Canadian nation is bounded by global — and thus foreign — forces that disrupt a sense of rootedness in place, a disruption that spans centuries.

**Key words** colonialism; liminality; Indigenous identity; poetry; postcolonialism

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## Introduction

In her 2001 volume of poetry, *Foreign Homes*, Canadian Metis writer Joan Crate suggests a liminal status that relates to the reach of colonialism, from first contact to the contemporary. Crate signals in *Foreign Homes* that the identity of those with Indigenous ancestry within the Canadian nation are rightly situated in relationship to a global sensibility that is firmly defined by the ideological forces of colonialism reaching back over five centuries. Indigenous identities are typically situated in the Canadian cultural and political spheres in highly localized tribal and First Nation terms (e.g. Anishinaabe, Saltaux, Nakota, Mik'maq), yet Crate indicates that this local sense of identity is situated within a broader set of global concerns.<sup>1</sup> Her poems in *Foreign Homes* underscore the fraught existence of those with Indigenous ancestry within the Canadian nation, implicate the very definition and understanding of multiply constituted identities, the tenuous position — socially and politically — of Indigenous Canadians, and the uncertain narrative of indigeneity in contemporary Canada. Interlaced with these concerns is consideration for how Indigenous identities are formed globally, shaped through colonial contact and the imperialistic ambitions of European powers. The volume's title reflects this tension of identity and place in its invocation of a home that is signalled by its otherness as foreign space. This tension is particularly liminal, suggesting that an individual's status as an Indigenous person within the Canadian nation is bounded by global — and thus foreign — forces that disrupt a sense of rootedness in place, a disruption that spans centuries. For Crate, the play of local and global is expressed as a form of liminality, which Jill J. Morawski defines "as the threshold, the betwixt and between of established social states" (54) and Victor Turner states that "the most characteristic midliminal symbolism is that of paradox, or being *both* this and *that*" (37). If Crate's articulation of Canadian Indigenous identity in the current age is marked by being in-between states, neither local nor global, then it is also inevitably infused by both, shaped by the ongoing flux of colonialism's effects.

Robert JC Young insightfully points out the legacy that colonialism has in the contemporary moment, which is usefully recast in the context of Crate's exploration of Indigenous identity in *Foreign Homes*. "In a sense," he writes, "postcolonialism has always been about the ongoing life of residues, living remains, lingering legacies" (10). For Crate, the effects of colonialism are ever present, shaping the

1 Saskatchewan and Manitoba author and film maker Warren Cariou explores the continuing global influences on the local and Indigenous in his films, *Overburden* and *Land of Oil and Water*, set in Alberta's northern oil fields.

life of her speaker and penetrating her fundamental sense of self. Young defines this sort of permeation of the past as a function of “postcolonial remains” which “invoke historical trajectories that have hitherto been scarcely visible, but which offer potential resources for critiques” (22). For Young, the postcolonial is similar to Derrida’s assertion that “there will always be something ‘left over’ [...] the postcolonial will always be left over. Something remains, and the postcolonial is in many ways about such unfinished business, the continuing projection of past conflicts into the experience of the present, the insistent persistence of the afterimages of historical memory that drive the desire to transform the present” (R. Young 11). The notion of the palpable reach of the colonial into the contemporary leaving its traceable inheritance is central to Crate’s figuring of Indigenous existence in the current age, with its exposure to ongoing prejudicial political, social and cultural power structures. Young remarks that “Analysis of such phenomena requires shifting conceptualizations, but it does not necessarily require the regular production of new theoretical paradigms: the issue is rather to locate the hidden rhizomes of colonialism’s historical reach, of what remains invisible, unseen, silent, or unspoken” (10). As Crate demonstrates in *Foreign Homes*, that which is “left over” is the legacy of the global within the localized context, and her articulation of Indigenous identity in the contemporary moment reflects and acknowledges this assertion of the global as it intersects the immediate. Identity thus becomes mired in the liminal, of being betwixt and between, neither here nor there, simultaneously global and local, and existing in an uncertain status. Her poems in *Foreign Homes* underscore the fraught existence of those with Indigenous ancestry within the Canadian nation, implicate the very definition and understanding of multiply constituted identities, the tenuous position — socially and politically — of Indigenous Canadians, and the uncertain narrative of indigeneity in contemporary Canada, and point to the hidden rhizomes of coloniality found at the intersection of the global and local.

*Foreign Homes* covers significant geographical and temporal terrain in its three sections as Crate explores Indigenous identity in contemporary Canada. Largely autobiographical in nature, the first and third (and final) sections — “Dowries” and “Thieves” — explore the speaker’s difficult first marriage and early life and the tragic fall of her former husband into alcoholism and drug addiction, her reflections on her new relationship and marriage, and the forming of a new family and home life, as well as investigations of family and ancestry. The middle section, titled “Loose Feathers on Stone: for Shawnandithit,” gives voice and space to Shawnandithit, reputed to be the last Beothuk, who died in 1829. “Loose Feathers on Stone”

provides a political force to the other sections, establishing the relationship between the arc of an individual life to the larger colonial forces that have shaped and formed that life. For Crate, the forces of European colonization that marginalized, diseased and ultimately eradicated a completely distinct First Nation two hundred years ago are the same forces that have an impact on her sense of self and identity, in addition to her material well-being in the present moment. The relevance of these historical forces in the present underscores the liminality of contemporary indigeneity in Canada. Crate establishes these connections thematically, but also formally through a double-voicing technique that itself thematizes the way in which Crate conceives of how identity is multiply and historically formed. As Crate tells the story of another, issues of appropriation of culture and voice come into play; aligning her own subject position with that of Shawnandithit, Crate legitimizes her ability to speak in the voice of the Other, which is given context by the first and last sections of the volume, "Dowries" and "Thieves." By establishing her legitimacy to speak for Shanawndithit, and by extension the Beothuk, Crate inserts herself into theoretical discourses of how othering typically operates within a colonially-oriented binary. Crate steps outside this binary, challenging what Robert JC Young identifies as a failure of postcolonialism to implicitly accept the identity categories of self and other and thus reinforcing discriminatory categories of identification:

Othering is what the postcolonial should be trying to deconstruct, but the tendency to use the concept remains: the often-posed question of how "we" (implicitly the majority or dominant group) can know "the other," who remains implicitly unknowable and unapproachable, or how "the other" can be encouraged to represent itself in its otherness rather than merely be represented as other, is simply the product of having made the discriminatory conceptual distinction in the first place. It accepts the discriminatory gesture of social and political othering that it appears to contest. The question is not how to come to know "the other," but for majority groups to stop othering minorities altogether, at which point minorities will be able to represent themselves as they are, in their specific forms of difference, rather than as they are othered. (R. Young 29-30)

Crate's challenge to the binary is itself a symptom of the liminal status of colonial and postcoloniality in Canada's present moment, for even the fundamental — and racialized — categories by which we identify who belongs to the dominant (and

colonial) group and who serves as Other are contested and uncertain.<sup>1</sup> As Robert JC Young remarks, “The idea that there is a category of people, implicitly third-world, visibly different to the casual eye, essentially different, and ‘other,’ is itself a product of racial theory, its presuppositions drawn from the discriminatory foundations of modernity. The legacy of this, of course, is the existence of minorities, who struggle for full participation within a society that continues to other them as ‘the other’” (29). Thus, *Foreign Homes*’s three-part structure serves to illustrate the fraught and complex existence of those with Indigenous ancestry.

The middle section, “Loose Feathers on Stones,” most effectively illustrates Crate’s exploration of identity as it relates to the globalized forces of colonialism as they pertain to the contemporary experience of those of Indigenous ancestry. Central to the sequence of poems is the figure of Shawnandithit, the last known member of the Beothuk, a First Nation of Newfoundland eradicated through genocide. Crate explores the situation of Shawnandithit, who has become a servant of colonials and provides the only existing records of the Beothuk through her mappings of the Beothuk territory. Taking my cue from work in cultural and social cartography, I read Shawnandithit’s maps as expressions of her indigenous knowledge: they challenge Eurocentric notions of how her ancestral landscape signifies and how it relates to her identity. Crate figures Shawnandithit and her maps as a way of undermining binarized understandings of Indigenous writing that view culture and identity as fixed categories, and thus she authorizes Indigenous knowledge systems; this knowledge in turn situates her own identity as Metis, indigene, and Canadian. Shawnandithit’s maps portray a landscape that is neither “new,” as the colonizers term it, nor do they conform to the usage patterns that the Europeans imposed. For Crate, the maps function metonymically for how she conceives her own sense — as expressed in her poems — of identity and ancestry separate from colonially-derived modes of understanding; they become sources of Indigenous knowledge that transcend place and time to inform her sense of herself. I read Crate’s poetic project in *Foreign Homes* as deriving out of a complex set of concerns that ultimately serve to underscore the notion of a plurality of Indigenous identity, which is legitimized through a valuing of Indigenous knowledge systems and which illustrates the shared experience of global influence on local Indigenous social, cultural, and political experience. Crate employs this paradigm to authorize and give weight to her own use of Shawnandithit’s story.

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1 Indeed, the controversy that erupted in December 2016 surrounding the identification and self-identification of best-selling author Joseph Boyden’s status as Indigenous author speaks to the very terms that are invoked in Young’s construction.

Cultural cartography serves well as an entry to Crate's consideration of these concerns in her poems. Brian Harley notes in "Re-reading the Maps of the Columbian Encounter" that "[Colonial boundaries drawn on maps] provide perhaps the most spectacular illustrations of how an anticipatory geography served to frame colonial territories in the minds of statesmen and territorial speculators back in Europe. Maps were the first step in the appropriation of territory. Such visualizations from a distance became critical in choreographing the colonial expansion of early Modern Europe" (532). As Harley argues in another essay, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power," "maps have been the weapons of imperialism. [...] Surveyors marched alongside soldiers, initially mapping for reconnaissance, then for general information, and eventually as a tool for pacification, civilization, and exploitation in the defined colonies" (282).

In his essay on mapping and Shawnandithit, Matthew Sparke argues that "there can be no doubt that those negotiating with imperial rule sometimes used maps to present to the colonialists a pre-European understanding of the land. In so doing, they demonstrated indigenous cartographic skills, and also reaffirmed — in a way that remains vital for contemporary struggles to decolonize — the land's deep inscription through millennial pre-contact historical geographies" (1). Shawnandithit's maps, then, figure not just resistance to colonization but also legitimize long-term understandings of how geography means. As Sparke notes, "A singularized script has emerged for the Beothuk, their experience has become homogenized, and their place in the process of colonization has been diminished to that of either a cute, or a criminal, bit-part in the drama of their own destruction" (6). The maps drawn by Shawnandithit can serve, he argues, to signify a broader sense of the plight of the Beothuk that does not rely exclusively on Eurocentric notions of colonization and defeat. In effect, valuing indigenous knowledge in the maps shifts away from the colonizer's gaze.

For Shawnandithit, "The situation [under which she drew the maps] was alive with colonial power relations. Urging her on was Cormack, eager to salvage information; reporting how through his 'persevering attention' and constant tending of 'paper and pencils of various colours,' Shawnandithit 'was enabled to communicate what would otherwise have been lost'" (Sparke 8). Sparke argues that Shawnandithit was in fact not enabled but rather was disabled by the context of her drawing. Her language was treated as "gibberish" and thus her "record of pain and misery" was not understood nor was her "Beothuk representation of space" (8).

The maps have been read historically as contributing to accounts of Captain David Buchan's attempts to return the dead body of the captured Beothuk woman

Demasduit. Never is the position of the Beothuk as both observers and as possessors of knowledge — which is transmitted through the map — considered. As Sparke notes, “Clearly marked on the map are the travels and camping sites of the Beothuk. [...] Shawnandithit’s drawing shows where they camped, the places from where they observed Buchan’s party, and the tracks along which they followed him. [...] Shawnandithit’s cartography documents the fact that the Beothuk were also observers and agents of geographic interpretation” (10). Shawnandithit reflects the Beothuk understanding of space, which is not a sea bound discourse, and relates the new knowledge of how space can be understood as variable or plural.

This notion of the variable and plural is central to Joan Crate’s valuing of Indigenous knowledge, which she affirms in the biographical statement that precedes her contributions to *Native Poetry in Canada: A Contemporary Anthology*, edited by Jeanette Armstrong:

The experiences of moving from place to place, being of mixed nations (Cree and five million other things), and having been part of different socio-economic groups at different periods in my life, have made me think of the concepts of “home” and “belonging” as somewhat transitory, really existing in terms of the spirit within the universe, rather than the physical body at some address or part of some identifiable group. My work with Pauline Johnson and Shawandithit has allowed me to feel (and hopefully express) the existence of those of the past in our present lives as part of the landscape which they inhabit(ed), both physical and spiritual. I thank my father for his insistence on making us familiar with whichever native culture we were living near or amongst at the time, and his love of First Nations art at a time it was devalued. (227)

Crate expresses here a view of ancestry, culture, and identity that is detached from place and time. Discussions of appropriation of voice binarize the relationship of self to Other, primarily along the axis of colonizer and colonized, but Crate’s biography reinforces how writing in the voice of the Other can in fact be seen as an alignment of voices and history. To be “Cree and five million other things,” as she notes, is to erase cultural and racial oppositions (Crate 227). The Cree culture and history is different from that of the Beothuk, clearly, but the underlying colonial patterns are similar enough to allow Shawnandithit’s story and voice to serve the purpose of Shawnandithit’s articulation as well as that of Crate. Her sense of self is rooted in a broad set of associations that are appropriately set within notions of



Indigenous knowledge. Ladislaus M. Semali and Joe L. Kincheloe remark in “What is Indigenous Knowledge?” that “The term indigenous, and thus the concept of indigenous knowledge has often been associated in the Western context with the primitive, the wild, the natural. [...] [I]ndigenous knowledge reflects the dynamic way in which the residents of an area have come to understand themselves in relationship to their natural environment” (3). For Semali and Kincheloe, “A central tenet [...] [is] belief in the transformative power of indigenous knowledge, the ways that such knowledge can be used to foster empowerment and justice in a variety of cultural contexts” (15). Semali and Kincheloe emphasize the value of developing an understanding of Indigenous epistemology, which they argue “provides Western peoples with another view of knowledge production in diverse cultural sites. Such a perspective holds transformative possibilities, as they come to understand the overtly cultural processes by which information is legitimated and delimited. An awareness of the ways epistemological ‘truth production’ operates in the lived world may shake the Western scientific faith in Cartesian-Newtonian epistemological foundationalism, as well as the certainty and ethnocentrism that often accompany it” (17).

For Crate, as for the work in cultural cartography undertaken by Sparke and others the drawings are a rejection of European notions and means of signification, and are signifiatory in their own right. To recast Shawnandithit’s maps points to a different way of seeing and thus considering identity. The maps are misread and misunderstood by imperialist agents, but can be seen as counter-colonial or anti-colonial statements as they recognize alternative, pre-European modes of understanding space and place, and they figure resistance to the destruction that Shawnandithit and her family and community experienced at the hands of settler colonists.

The poems in “Loose Feathers on Stone,” then, present a multi-vocal perspective on colonialism’s effects on Indigenous life in North America. She speaks betimes in her own voice, in the voice of Shawnandithit, and at times through a double voice. By using multiple voices, Crate acknowledges the difficulties of speaking for others but also asserts her legitimacy or authority to at least try to speak for Shawnandithit. The poems that comprise “Loose Feathers on Stone” establish a historical imperative for Crate and indicate an ethical perspective on her need and desire to articulate identity through her poetry. The opening and closing sections of *Foreign Homes* frame “Loose Feathers on Stone” by including poems about family, her youth, ancestry, failed marriage, her new marriage, and her relationships with various family members in the present. Read as a complete



structure, the volume suggests a complex representation of the inter-relation of colonialism, post-colonialism, and contemporary life in Canada, what can be seen as the ongoing liminal intertwining of the global and the local.

The primary poem that references Shawnandithit's mapping is "Sentences: at the Culls" — which I will return to in a moment — but the pattern of resistance to the signfactory practices of her captors is repeated in a number of other poems as well. In the poem "Burial" Crate expresses her personal interest in Shawnandithit's story, wondering about the lack of knowledge about her in her own time, a sentiment that also extends to our time:

No one thinks of her  
now, didn't  
spend much time thinking of her  
when she was alive. (53)

This lack of knowledge is similar to Shawnandithit's inability to be articulate, as Crate notes: "Did she ever speak?" (53). In answer to this question, Crate asserts her own interest in the story of Shawnandithit and the Beothuk: "She is the silence / ... / I try so hard to hear" (53). In this paradox of silence and hearing is the imperative to articulate. Whatever the legitimacy of speaking for an Other might be, Crate asserts that what is silent can never be heard and that to speak in the voice of Shawnandithit is an ethical move intended to fill an absence. In the final poem in the sequence, "The Pleiades," Crate notes the danger of lost history and story and the importance of remembering and telling stories that have been nearly forgotten. Imagining Shawnandithit as the lost star, she fears that all that is left is a shadow of a story:

alling star-  
woman,  
like you Shawandithit,  
reduced to dust. (56)

Crate connects herself to Shawnandithit's story by noting how she is touched by the loss of Shawnandithit's story:

Now when I look up  
  
there are just six stars in the sky

and some forgotten story sliding  
down the long gullet of night. (56)

Crate uses familial terms to figure Shawnandithit, thinking of her as one of the lost sisters (the “near-sighted sister,” for example), reinforcing her role in remembering the Beothuk woman. This act of remembrance is figured as the writing of the poems themselves but also, importantly, as an integral connection of writer to victimized Aboriginal and through her status as woman. Shawandithit is presented as a “sister” and as “woman,” as is emphasized by the isolation of the word in the first passage quoted above. Crate’s speaker is “like” Shawandithit, the phrasing suggests, and thus is also “reduced to dust” and a “falling star.” The mythical reflections are made clear by the speaker here, but the cosmic associations should not be overlooked, for they assert that the effects of colonialism encompass the breadth of the sky under which we exist.

Several poems from the middle section of “Loose Feathers on Stones” reinforce the difference in knowledge systems at work when Shawnandithit is exposed to colonial rule. Her story is told — in her voice and through Crate’s speaker. In “Heirlooms,” Crate notes the dichotomies of colonizer and colonized through the imagery and symbolism of drinking glasses, which contain in their form and function imperial designs:

How the glasses came to them — imported from England  
in great oak and canvas chests — how it held  
the English sun, soft as a worn cotton rag  
rubbed in the eye. She dusted each piece,  
placed them in the kitchen cupboard. (46)

The cupboard contains all that seems free and natural to Shawandithit, as the speaker notes: “The spring water changed / in those jugs and goblets” and the water becomes symbolic of “Centuries of decay” that are conveyed to her mouth. The water from the “cut glass” reinforces her misery, as the water is “shoved down her throat” (47). In another poem, “Working for the Peytons,” Crate speaks in the voice of Shawnandithit, who speaks her oppression, figuring it as captivity. The work is defined by boundaries and restrictions, and all are alien and constricting to her. She feels out of the normal cycle of life, “lost,” as she notes, “shed by all seasons” (48). Her work in the vegetable garden is colonial, reflecting her mastery by foreign forces:

I garden, coerce  
 the soil to surrender its caressing grasses  
 and sucking grubs, impose boundaries,  
 plant an invasion—watercress and English cucumber—  
 row upon row of betrayal.

Ultimately, for Shawnandithit, her experience of work in the Peytons' house is one inherently opposite to the existence she knew beforehand: "the European / vegetables refuse our laws of gravity / and fly from my hands." Crate's use of the concept of a law of gravity is interesting here, for it signals her figuring of the colonial oppression as unnatural and alien to the world that exists in this place. The result of Shawandithit's experience is that her culture is lost as her memory erodes:

I fumble with memories, already  
 a memory, chew legends I heard  
 lifetimes ago, my entrance into the cavity of tomorrow.

For Crate, the writing of Shawnandithit's story is integral to a recuperation of her as well as the Beothuk's story, lest she become forever a "suspended sentence," as Shawnandithit puts it in "Sentences: at the Culls." Crate links this notion of recuperation to her sense of connection to Shawandithit's story of mastery and oppression. As Crate's speaker notes in another poem in this section, "She is crying in a corner / of my mind, next to the dirty laundry" (51). To forget her is also to close herself off to her past and its traumatic history:

I can hardly hear her  
 screams sinking like a scalpel through a sense  
 and absence, but she is with me,  
 with us all. (51)

In "Sentences: at the Culls," Crate directly addresses the issue of the maps that Shawnandithit draws in response to the question of her captors: "What shall we do with her?" Shawnandithit is set to "sketch my lives for them," as she puts it. For Shawnandithit, the pages are "blank pages" and "vast white sheets," both ironically comment on notions expounded by European cartographers and on epistemological differences between indigene and European colonizer: the sheet of paper is neither

blank nor the appropriate implement to map a way of life. Shawnandithit conveys her resistance to the drawing she is asked to undertake by her refusal to use most of the writing implements she receives: “I choose graphite, refuse colours— / yellow, blue, the flowing red” (50). The result is a series of drawings (there were four, in fact) that reflect “frustrated inks” and that reinforce the irony of the Beothuk situation: “New-found-land the title, / a joke, a riddle” (50). There are naturally potential challenges reading Crate’s figuring of Shawnandithit’s drawings as emanating from the voice of Shawnandithit herself. One might consider how we understand Crate’s apparent position that the Beothuk Indigenous knowledge is also itself a part of her own Indigeneity, and how we read the recuperation of the past and someone else’s story as a legitimate aspect of the articulation of her own identity and as political act of decolonization, which raises questions about her signifying practice.

To begin to answer these questions I want to consider poems from other sections of *Foreign Homes*, poems that frame and contextualize the poems in “Loose Feathers on Stone.” The Beothuk story of colonial oppression, Crate indicates, is paradigmatic of contemporary Indigenous concerns, concerns that continue to be shaped by the global colonial forces that have persisted for hundreds of years in North America. In the first section of *Foreign Homes*, titled “Dowries,” Crate outlines several of the effects of colonialism that have framed her existence, reinforcing her compulsion to write the story of Shawandithit as she does. By contemplating broken and dislocated lives, as well as ancestral issues, in this section of the volume, Crate implicitly links her sense of being a “fallen star” like “Shawandithit.” In “You who have disappeared,” the speaker contemplates the lost people in her life. They “pock my dreams with disease,” she writes; “Are you stumbling streets wine-and piss-soaked, / filthy, ragged, railing?” (26). Her abusive, alcoholic, ex-husband is one of the lost figures that mark her memory, as is evident in “Dirty Dream,” where his presence in the marriage is as a “drunk, raging, burning” (29). The poem focuses on an encounter with him years later, when she and his son find him in the street, dispossessed and lost to ordinary life:

And when was it?  
 At least two years ago,  
 your son and I found you on the street,  
 your mouth grimacing recognition,  
 eyes swimming.  
 That’s worse

than any anger — your silent weeping over us,  
 grime and tear-stripped cheeks,  
 nicotine-stained fingers pawing  
 sad air (29)

The speaker asserts her ongoing love for him and recognizes the “open wound you are” (29). The open wound that he is, however, is one that remains with her, shadowing and haunting her life:

Yet you return  
 night after night  
 young and fresh as maggots,  
 and rage—that rust knife  
 guts me (30)

The “rust knife” can be read as a metonym for the global forces of colonialism that continuously and repeatedly create wounds in the localized existence of its subjects. Other poems in this section deal with her teenaged pregnancy and rebellion, as well as with her attempts to make her life anew in a fresh relationship.

In her essay “The Properties of Culture and the Possession of Identity: Postcolonial Struggle and the Legal Imagination,” Rosemary J. Coombs remarks that “Native peoples discuss the issue of cultural appropriation in a manner that links the issues of cultural representation with a history of political powerlessness, a history of having Indian identity continually defined and determined by forces committed to its eradication” (88). Many of Crate’s poems in the first and last sections of *Foreign Homes* establish a framework that reinforces Coombs’s statement, for as she figures Shawandithit’s life and experience, Crate also make implicit links to the colonial roots that define and shape the life of her speaker. Thus, Crate’s discursive practice becomes simultaneously personal and political. James O. Young notes that “The concept of cultural appropriation has no application unless insiders and outsiders, members and nonmembers of a culture, can be distinguished” (136). Crate positions herself as insider and outsider seeing identity as transitory, that to define herself is to do so in the historical and cultural and not necessarily purely in a chronological and locational manner—asserting indeed that the liminality of colonialism establishes uncertainty of identity, blurs divisions. Thus, Young’s notion that cultures are intertwined and overlap is applicable to Crate’s sensibility here. Young borrows from Wittgenstein’s idea that culture is “a family

resemblance concept [...] A culture is to be defined in terms of having enough of a certain range of characteristics. Perhaps at least some basic core values and beliefs is essential to a culture” (J. Young 137).

Crate chooses to speak for Shawandithit out of this context of the persistent influence of liminal global colonialism, the last of the Beothuk, who in her own life had no opportunity to be articulate and who was clearly subsumed by colonial forces that were beyond her control. Typical criticism of speaking for another rests upon a polarized conception of colonizer and colonized, but Crate operates outside this dichotomy as she identifies her speaker in *Foreign Homes* as subject of colonial practice, and so when she speaks for and in the voice of Shawandithit, she also speaks for and in her own voice. Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao point out in their introduction to *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* that in recent debates about cultural appropriation in Canada, “The main concern has been whether white novelists were wrong in appropriating Native voices by writing about Native culture or by speaking through the intermediaries of Native characters” (17). The fraught nature of this discussion is well defined by Jonathan Hart when he writes, “Cultural appropriation becomes a question of cultural rights and difference and enriches or makes problematic, depending on the view, the possibility of community” (138). We need to consider here the notion of how Crate uses the Beothuk story for her own means, but then legitimizes it and I suggest authorizes it to create a sense of shared community. This move is marked by aesthetic and imaginative concerns. The notion of the role of the poet’s imagination is central to Crate’s conception of an appropriate articulating ethos, for the careful crafting of the poems underscores the contemporary voice of the poet even as she speaks in and for Shawandithit. This notion is made clear, for example, in the choice of the sonnet form for the opening poem in the “Loose Feathers on Stone” sequence. Crate chooses a highly conventional and rigid form, firmly rooted in European culture, to frame and contextualize her articulation of the lost voice. Her strategy here signifies the centrality of European forms to Crate’s creative and imaginative practice, and also announces the impossibility for speaking for Shawandithit without being implicated in the cultural and political structures of colonialism, even when one is also subject to those same forces as Crate is.

The opening poem of the sequence, “Unmarked Grave,” reinforces the role that Crate takes as rememberer, and as writer who is implicated in the story she tells about Shawandithit. The poem’s second person voice is both general and double-voiced, to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s terminology. The story of the unmarked grave is both specific to Shawandithit, to Crate, and to Indigenous victimization

and suffering. Crate asserts here that the losses of the past are centrally implicated in the losses of the present that she suffers as both are related to colonial practices. Further, her need to articulate her own losses is related to the need to state those of Shawandithit. When Crate writes in the opening lines of “Unmarked Graves,” she speaks for the Other and for herself and her losses: “There is no stone, no word, or prayer to mark / Our fleet lives, our staggering deaths” (45). The assertion of negation—that there is no stone—is however ironically and paradoxically undone by her writing of the poem: the text becomes that which marks both their lives in its articulation. The metaphors she chooses reinforce the racially motivated effects of colonial practice on herself and on the Beothuk:

Everything  
We were is buried in silence under dark  
White plot. (45)

The split of “dark” and “white” across these two lines underscores the racial polarities that marks colonial practice and that continues in colonial discursive practice.

That she writes about the past and also about her present is evident close to the end of the poem when she employs contemporary imagery:

We languish in sorrow and dirt, betrayed.  
Stake me with fences, bullshit, provisions  
Of guilt, Weed ‘n Feed. I am silence crowing,  
Broken wing soaring, language beyond their knowing. (45)

Silence is paradoxically also language, growing out of betrayal. Staked by fences the self and Other are enacted upon by the encounter with colonial enterprise. By speaking in the second person — “we” — Crate connects the fertilizer and chemicals of her present with the story of Shawandithit’s oppression and death. Ultimately, in this poem Crate establishes a context or frame for how one should consider the poems that follow in the “Loose Feathers on Stone” section of the volume. Shawandithit’s concerns become both her own and reflect the speaker’s own concerns of identity and politics.

In moving to conclusions, it is worth returning to my earlier considerations of Indigenous knowledge systems, which Semali and Kincheloe argue provide transformative potential, erasing the either-or oppositional epistemological



foundationalism that informs ethnocentric (and typically Eurocentric) visions of knowledge and hierarchical power structures. By side-stepping oppositional epistemological systems, Crate asserts her valuing of cultural relation as epistemologically valid. She effectively shifts herself from what Abdul JanMohamed has defined as the manichean allegory, which is the “central trope” (*Manichean Aesthetics* 80) of an entire colonialist “economy” (80) of representation that is based on a transformation of racial difference into moral and even metaphysical difference. Though the phenomenological origins of this metonymic transformation may lie in the ‘neutral’ perception of physical difference (skin colour, physical features, and such), its allegorical extensions come to dominate every facet of imperialist mentality. (80)

My argument is that Crate’s alignment with Shawnandithi is itself an assertion of the self-other dynamic that is core to colonialist mentality but that also — most importantly — informs perspectives on what constitutes cultural appropriation. JanMohamed has challenged post-colonial critics to recognize in their own thinking (most famously, perhaps, Homi Babha, in JanMohamed’s essay “The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature”) the oppositional qualities of the manichean allegory. As he elaborates:

The dominant model of power — and interest — relations in all colonial societies is the manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native. This axis in turn provides the central feature of the colonialist cognitive framework and colonialist literary representation: the manichean allegory — a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilisation and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object. (82)

Crate, however, is able to see beyond the manichean allegory to figure the experience of colonial subjugation as rooted in exploitative disenfranchising practices in which she is implicated as subject, as self and other simultaneously.

These considerations can be extended by looking to Australian articulations of the interrelationship of colonialism and the trauma of that subjugation experienced by Indigenous peoples. The pattern of trauma in contemporary life experienced by Crate’s characters and her speaker, as well as the trauma of the historical figure of Shawnandithi that she figures, is uncannily reflected in the characterization of the contemporary experience of Aboriginal peoples in Australia that Irene Watson

discusses:

The face of contemporary suicide is not so much death by shooting or poisoning, as occurred in the nineteenth century; it is death arising out of severe trauma and a pain so big that many of our people let go of life. Indigenous peoples of the modern world have “discovered” ways to kill the pain: suicide, drugs, alcohol. If we were to measure the contemporary impact of genocide and its experience, some of the worst indicators would be found in the mental and health statistics of the Nungas. Our profiles are Third World standard, in a country that enjoys being a leader among global capitalistic economies. (134)

Maria Giannacopoulos argues that Watson presents “a powerful argument [...] built around the changing face of colonialism, first killing in an overt manner and then leaving people to self-destruct” (183). Watson’s colonialism is rooted in global forces that impact local communities and identities, forces that cannot be exorcised from long histories of colonial activity in consideration of the contemporary. As Joan Crate demonstrates in her volume of poetry, *Foreign Homes*, the trauma of current Indigenous experience in Canada follows similar and complex patterns of engagement with global forces. The experience of Beothuk genocide she articulates reflects the less overt forces of destruction that flow through contemporary Indigenous experience, not dissimilarly to Watson’s articulation of Australian experience. For Crate, the local — “home” — is foreign precisely because it is dramatically and violently infused with ongoing global forces of colonialism resulting in a seemingly endless liminal status.

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