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Precarious Territorializing, Contingent Territories in Michael Crummey's *The Innocents* (2019)

Anne-Sophie Letessier♦

In a remote cove on the coast of northern Newfoundland, two orphaned siblings eke out a precarious existence, their isolation only interrupted by the visits of a trading schooner and the chance arrival of outsiders. Thus summarized, Newfoundland writer Michael Crummey's *The Innocents* (2019) may appear to deliberately steer away from the considerations on Newfoundland collective identity which informed his previous historical novels—*River Thieves* (2001) and *Galore* (2009)—by deliberately narrowing the scope of the narrative to the fate of two isolated children. Readers familiar with his work will nonetheless identify a common thread for once again, Crummey revisits the history of outport Newfoundland in a manner that is reminiscent of what Robert Eaglestone terms a "contrapuntal approach" which "appropriates the past knowingly and rewrites tropes, narratives, identities from the past" (314).

The Innocents is neither a "tale of pioneering" nor "a memorial to an all-but-vanished way of life," as some of the reviews quoted on the sleeve jacket promise it to be. What provides the narrative impetus is less "the rigid single-mindedness required to keep body and soul together" (36),[1] than the ways it intertwines with the challenges the two youngsters face when negotiating uncertain passages into adulthood. In that regard, the title is at once programmatic and somewhat misleading. For Ada and Evered Sennet, the eponymous "innocents," the cove is at first "the heart and sum of all creation" (5), and one visitor, amazed at the extent of their ignorance, cannot refrain from quoting *Genesis*: "who told thee that thou wast naked?" (166). At a first level, the twist on Biblical onomastics—Ada(m) and Eve(red)—seems related to the onset of adolescent sexuality: nights of sleeping innocent in the same bed for warmth and comfort giving way to "nights of furtive

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1 Subsequent references to the novel will appear directly in the text.

trade" (107) and sexual yearnings which consume and confuse the siblings in equal measure. The term "innocence" takes on additional connotations when one understands that the timeframe of the novel[2] coincides with the extinction of the Beothuk, an event which has come to be seen as an "original/originary sin" constitutive of nation founding (Sugars, 2005: 148). Because the extinction of the original inhabitant of Newfoundland "leaves no 'native' contradiction" (Goldie, 1989: 157), it forestalls what Homi Bhabha identifies as the "threatening reversal" the "colonialist demand for narrative carries with it": "Tell us why we are here" (2004:142). That this assessment immediately follows his consideration on the etymological derivation of the word "territory"—"from both *terra* (land) and *terrere* (to frighten)" (2004: 142)[3]—has a bearing on *The Innocents*. Unlike the settler characters in *River Thieves*,[4] Ada and Evered neither participate in the extinction of the Beothuk, nor have direct contact with them. Yet the cove is no pre-lapsarian world: when the novel opens, it is already "a place from which people [have been] frightened off" (2004: 142).

Territory as a notion is largely absent from the criticism on Crummey which has primarily concentrated on the ways Crummey's site writing addresses "place myths" (Fuller, 2004: 23) to unsettle the topoi of Newfoundland's place-bound identity and its defining relation to the land.[5] Although the concepts of place and territory may intersect inasmuch as both relate to intertwined issues of locality, gender, ethnicity and class, they are not equivalent.[6] As a matter of fact, contemporary reassessments of place can be construed as an effort to de-territorialize its definition as a bounded unit whose identity is fixed and singular—an approach which is particularly fruitful when one studies how Crummey's other novels question the assumptions of "a culture embedded in place" (Massey, 1994: 1). What distinguishes territory from other forms of social space, political geographer David Delaney argues, is the constitutive relation

2 No date is given in the text, but the life story of John Warren, who served during the American war of Independence (212) would suggest the novel is set in the late 18th century, early 19th century.

3 Political scientist William Connolly relates this etymology to a more common one which derives the word from the Latin *terra*: land, earth, nourishment, sustenance. "Perhaps these two contending derivations continue to occupy territory today. To occupy territory to receive sustenance and to exercise violence" (quoted in Delaney 14).

4 In her thought-provoking essay on the novel, Cynthia Sugars appraises its postcolonial project when invoking the Beothuk as an irretrievable and unrepresentable loss. In *Rivers Thieves*, postcolonial reckoning and colonial nostalgia are "irrevocably linked," she argues (2005: 149): the novel's discomforting ambivalence stems from its exploration of the settler characters' "ambiguous position," at once "haunted" and "constituted" by the loss of the Beothuk (2005: 172).

5 See for example the critical reception of *Sweetland* (2014): Chafe 2017, Rae, Brinklow.

6 W.H. New delineates the conceptual differences between land, place, space and territory in the introduction of *Land Sliding*. His essay, which focuses on the various articulations between configurations of land and configuration of power (1997: 5), defines territory as "the designation of a claim over land" (1997: 21).

between the meanings it conveys and social power (2005: 17). Territory and territoriality, however, should not be reduced to "a strategy for control of space", he adds: it implicates and is implicated in ways of being-in-the world (2005: 12), which in part explains why the term has been used outside explicitly political contexts. This necessarily brief overview allows me to introduce the reasons why I propose to reorient the discussion towards the questions of appropriation, spatial organization, and material and imaginative practices which underpin the definition of territory. *The Innocents* problematizes the inscription of its characters in territorializing processes by drawing on a range of land-claiming narratives to examine the articulations between entitlement to the land and mercantile exploitation, gendered territoriality and sexual exploration, landscape and indigenization. In doing so, it reflects on the way itself may perform as a precarious and contingent territorialization of Newfoundland's past.

"Their prospects in the cove" (35): entitlement to the land

The harrowing first chapter which chronicles the successive deaths of Ada and Evered's baby sister and parents ends on a spatial description which functions as a—albeit minimal—topographical charting:

> They were left together in the cove then with its dirt-floored stud tilt, with its garden of root vegetables and its scatter of outbuildings, with its looming circle of hills and rattling brook and its view of the ocean's grey expanse beyond the harbour skerries.(5)

The orderly progression of images, in which the shaping forces of weather and physical terrain are as yet muted, is held together by the repetition of the possessive pronoun which evidences a process of topical convergence making the cove a center of orientation even as the succession of prepositional clauses unfolds in an outward movement. The view on which the sentence concludes implicates more than the visual; it is rather a prospect, in the dual sense of the term, for what is seen includes a "mental looking forward" (Glickman, 1998: 33), a vision of a future now made even more uncertain. Weathering the end of winter and waiting for the trading schooner which is their only connection to the world beyond, the Sennet children have yet to decide whether to "muck it out here" and take up their parents' fishery (9). What binds the siblings to the cove is the promise Ada extracted from her brother never to leave Martha, their baby sister now buried above the vegetable garden. Even that bond is precarious: Evered is acutely aware that their life in the cove is but "a tenuous proposition" (268) to be revisited every time "their prospects" (35) are failing. Running through

the narrative is the possibility of having to "shift across", "shift over" (8, 35, 62, 149, 273) to Mockbeggar, a phrase which significantly intimates that leaving is envisaged neither as a rupture nor as a dispossession but as a mere exchange, one place of work replacing another.

The term "property" which is repeatedly used to refer to the cove (9, 32, 35, 160) is thus somewhat misleading. While the text attends to the material and physical reality of labour—from the slow and difficult learning of skills to the afflictions ailing the youngsters—, labour itself never elicits a sense of entitlement, a proprietary claim on the physical environment. Settlement in Newfoundland, where the primary form of colonization was not the cultivation of the land (New, 1997: 58), sits indeed uneasily with the legitimizing narratives of annexation through labour derived from the political philosophy of John Locke. His discussion of property and land ownership, which sanctions the appropriation of the New World, is premised on an agrarian model indexed in the very etymology of the word colony—the Latin *colonus* deriving from *colere*, to inhabit, to cultivate, to guard (New, 1997: 58). By "till[ing], plant[ing], improv[ing], cultivat[ing]", the colonists appropriate the "Fruits of the Earth" and make their claim to land (Locke, 1993: 277).[7] Unsurprisingly, in this model, "the focus on soil emphasizes the physicality of the territory that is coveted, occupied, […] turned into plantations" (Young, quoted in New, 1997: 58). The cove, however, is no pastoral enclave and the terrain is unsuitable for cultivation, the vegetable garden being "the only bit of ground within walking distance deep enough to plant" (25).[8] Camille van der Marel notes how the "climates, ecologies, and biophysical expressions" of certain environments "place physical boundaries on the practices central to colonial ideology" (2014, 16 and 20). Contrary to Canada's Arctic regions she writes about, Newfoundland was nonetheless settled, but her analysis resonates with Patrick O'Flaherty's comment that the sea "does not show the marks of human industry" (quoted in Chafe, 2016: 4). Nor does the backcountry into which Crummey's characters eventually venture, one might add. The halfway lean-to the youngsters build on their trapline (200), the stagehead where the fish is cleaned and salted are temporary structures subject to natural degradation, which precludes the certainty of a future of improvement and exploitation.[9] Newfoundland, the "wind-battered rock" (Fuller, 2004: 24)

7 "As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property. […] God gave the world to men in common. […] He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational, (and labour was to be his title to it)" (Locke, 1993: 277).
8 Similarly, in *Galore*, Crummey has the agent's merchant explain: "This is all stone and boulders and plates of shale, not fit for growing. You gets two feet down into that and you're liable to believe the land don't want us here" (2015: 57).
9 Paul Chafe also draws on van der Marel's essay in his eco-critical reading of Crummey's *Sweetland*, a novel set during the provincial and federal governments' resettlement programs of the second half of the 20th century. For Moses Sweetland, the descendant of the first settlers to land the island they named after themselves, inheritance and labour

and its untamed and untamable landscape and seascape are something of a worn yet enduring cliché feeding its own land-claiming narrative, that of distinctive identity shaped by the struggle against the elements, which becomes "the title (entitlement) to the land itself" (Fee, 2015: 6). One may only think of the "Ode to Newfoundland", the national anthem, and its evocation of a frozen, windswept land, blind storms and wild waves lashing the strand. Crummey's text nods to such topoi in the two storm scenes which all but put an end to the siblings' life in the cove. In both episodes, the destructive power of the "bray[ing]," "howl[ing]" wind (90) and of "billowing cloud and rain" (246) is troped in military terms, the weather an "invad[ing]" force laying "siege" on the tilt where the children are sheltering (90), later to turn into "a marauding army advancing on a field" which Evered, alone at sea, cannot evade (247). Watching helpless his desperate attempts to stay afloat, Ada becomes the spectator of "a pantomime play[ing] out on the boards of the ocean's monumental theatre" (247), an image which brings sharply into focus the frailty of human efforts to "wrestle a living from land and sea" (Mackey, 2019: n.p.).

Crummey, however, displaces the motif. In their day-to-day labor, his characters compose rather than battle against the adverse forces of weather and physical terrain. The dominating force in their existence, what determines their continuing presence in the cove, is less the "vagaries of weather" (13)—a wet summer ruining the curing of the fish and the plantation in the vegetable garden; an extended winter with a dwindling store—than the merchant's agent who "preside[s] over their livelihood" (45) and the ledger in which he tallies the goods he sells the siblings and the season's catch he receives later as payment. In the credit-based economy of the truck system, "the enterprise in the cove [is] provisional and [can] be voided outright" (57) if the agent deems the catch too poor or too meagre to front the supplies necessary to "keep [them] from perishing though the full of a winter." (82) Delaney uses the settler, among others, as an example of "territorialized social roles and figures" whose definition is relational (2005: 11), the verb form drawing attention to the practices and processes which produce territory under specific historical and social conditions (2005: 15-16). In Newfoundland English, the Sennets are livyers, a word which indexes the shift from migratory to resident fishery coinciding with the emergence of the truck system (Higgins, 2007: n.p.). The agent's ledger hence functions as a synecdoche for the economic structures underlying the territorial organization of outport Newfoundland. Similarly, *The Hope*'s bi-annual visit—"the fulcrum on which life in the cove turned" (44) –, like the arrivals of the itinerant Captain Truss, a former soldier in the East India (154), and of the crew of HMS *Medusa*, an old Indiaman (204), reframes the children's occupying of the cove into the larger

justify his claim over land. His sense of entitlement is intimately intertwined in his sense of self until he becomes "unhomed and undone by a landscape too formidable to be tamed" (Chafe, 2017: 20).

political economy of utility and trade. "[B]rown sugar and tea and butter and two hogsheads of pickling salt, […] yeast and calico and twine and tar and fish hooks and nails" (44): the list of supplies Ada and Evered get from selling the season's catch, some of which is then shipped to the West Indies (81), points to the trading networks of Empire.

If the siblings are unaware of the territoriality of Empire—Mockbeggar is "the celestial realm of dry goods" (130) and "even Fogo Island and Labrador exist on the very fringes of [their] knowledge of the world" (155)—, the economy of utility and exchange which underpins it is woven into the fabric of their lives. Significantly, it underlies the motif of the "Indian bone pendant" which Ada "smuggle[s] away from [a] gravesite" despite intuitively knowing that the Indigenous cultural materials are different from the scavenged objects she and her brother have been collecting (102). The text dispels any assumption readers might have about the innocence of the character's fascination with its suggestion of meaning (101) and "exotic" beauty (102) by having her contend with the shame of having stolen it and the greed the gesture betrayed (142-3). Culling her collection of "scavenged bric-à-brac" (20) the pendant never belonged to in the first place, she is confounded at the sudden realization that "magic and beauty and mystery [can] leach out of a thing, [that] it could be used like a store of winter supplies," (184) as, years later, remembering her murky feelings about the pendant, she concludes that pleasure and shame are the "world's currencies. And [that] it paid out in equal measure" (260.) The image of thought has previously been given a literal expression when the beauty and mystery of the bone pendant become commodified values. Ada offers the pendant in exchange for the bear teeth Captain Truth has brought back from an expedition in the backcountry, Truss in turn paying her back with powder, balls and shot (180) for the flintlock they have inherited. Crucially, the old firearm "sat [in the Sennets' store] practically forgotten" until the discovery of the Indigenous gravesite which the siblings understand as evidence of prior occupation and which reminds Evered of his father trying "to guard against being set upon" by "Red Indians" (101). The transaction between Ada and Truss therefore ties issues relating to land occupation and territorial conflict to the mercantile system on which the siblings' presence in the cove is predicated.

That Ada meant to present the pendant as "compensation for his missing the burial site" (181) elicits further remarks. While the description of the burial ground translates the children's awe, the almost ethnographic attention given to the ways in which the cultural materials are arranged around and on the bodies jarringly resonates with Captain Truss's "lengthy treatise on the Indians" as a "remarkable" yet vanishing race a few pages later (169), a passage in which Crummey has his character repeat almost verbatim 18th-century British explorer

George Cartwright's prediction about the extinction of the Beothuk.[10] Their foreseen disappearance justifies raiding the burial site and the enterprise is presented along the lines of ethnographic salvage: "Don't we owe it to them to learn what we can of their ways before they disappear altogether?" (173) Truss's question hinges on the idea of a moral obligation which makes preservation a redemptive enterprise, the European colonizers becoming the custodians of the culture they were instrumental in wiping out.[11] Evered's response—"If it was me, I expect I'd want to be left out of it" (173)—places the character on the strategically safe side of the ideological divide. The novel, on the other hand, evinces the impossibility of leaving the Beothuk "out of it". By featuring a character intent on collecting "treasures" and "relict[s]" (168), it reflects on its own invoking of Newfoundland's original inhabitants and positions itself as a participant in a conversation which relates the appropriation and commodification of Indigenous cultural materials and knowledge to the extinction discourse which legitimized conquest.[12]

"Plotting a useful path" (112): gendered territorializing

At the level of the plot, the pendant, which Ada has hidden from her brother, provides something tangible to channel the turmoil provoked by the siblings' "first encounter" (139), the mixture of pleasure, residual shame and lingering regret (107) neither knows how to unpuzzle. In a fit of unwitting jealousy caused by the interest his sister shows in a young sailor glimpsed aboard *The Hope*, Evered upbraids her for wanting to add him to her collection as she did with the bone pendant (136-137). The "barbed conversation" leads his sister to defiantly "scor[e] [the object]'s shape and markings" around the hearth, thereby temporarily laying claim on the shared space of the tilt. The episode is but one in a series which progressively erodes the siblings' "illusion" of "being of a piece"

10 "I fear that race will be totally extinct in a few years," "they are the most forlorn of nay of the human species which have yet to come to my knowledge." (quoted in Sugars, 2005: 151)

11 I borrow the terms "custodians" and "redemptive" from James Clifford's analysis of the constructed coincidence between the disappearance of traditional cultures and their ethnographic recording (2008: 113).

12 Opaskawak Cree Nation scholar Greg Younging underscores the concomitance between violent assimilation policies and processes of documenting and recording manifestations of Indigenous knowledge. He identifies in those practices a counterpart of the *terra nullius* doctrine which he names *gnaritas nullius* (n.p.). In the Newfoundland context, the issues he raises are compounded with the actual extinction of the Beothuk. Sugars quotes American anthropologist Frank Speck who, in his 1922 *Beothuk and Micmac*, "laments[s] […] the fact that little or nothing of the language and customs of the tribe had been recorded before the opportunity had passed" (Sugars, 2005: 157).

(85), "their shared vision of the world" (29). At a narrative level, the depiction of the "severe round" of seasonal labour (89) which "choke[s] their conscious lives" (242) makes way for the siblings' introspective musings, the text oscillating between the two characters' perspectives as each tries to make sense of themselves, of the other and of the world around them. The way Crummey discusses the writing of the novel calls to mind the basic definition of the *Bildungsroman* as a "narrative offer[ing] privileged access to the psychological development of a central character whose sense of identity is in flux" (Graham: 1).[13] While a traditional view of the genre sees successful social integration as the conclusion to the journey into adulthood (Graham, 2019: 3), in *The Innocents*, the challenges of maturity, however, are left unresolved: the novel ends just before brother and sister leave the cove for Mockbeggar. If the Robinsonade in the second half of *Sweetland* is dominated by the "threatening erasure of the self" (Chafe, 2017: 16), *The Innocents* examines the workings of mental isolation in the processes of self-formation. That Crummey proposes to read the book "almost like a road novel" in which there is no road and the characters do not go anywhere (Crummey and Rogers, 2019: n.p.), is thus more than a witty hint at the worn metaphor of the journey. It brings to the fore the ways the characters' tentative efforts "to plot a useful path" (112) are given a spatial expression which draws on the "basic grammar of territory" (Ferrata quoted in Besse, 2018: 17).

To signpost their passage into adulthood, the siblings only have a few religious maxims, proverbs, and practical precepts their parents have passed on before their deaths (5-6), along with the skills necessary to help in the fishery: "the garden was the women's preserve, trenching and weeding the plot while Evered and his father were off in the boat after the fish" (25). The text explores the contingency of those micro-territories of everyday life: boundaries change, their significance alters, proximity and distance are redefined as the characters' spatial practices adapt both to necessity and to their intermittent, "undeclared conflict" (200). With sexual yearnings the siblings experience as an intrusion upsetting the balance of their relationship, gendered territoriality becomes a strategy[14] whereby they try to grapple with the unfamiliar distance their unspoken nighttime encounters produces. During the "weeks of sullen estrangement" (141), both resolutely set to their tasks alone and head in opposite directions (261). The shared spaces of childhood, which are at first associated with rare interludes of innocent pleasure—eating berries from the bushes, steeping in moving water—,

13 Crummey explains how "[a] lot of the book was about getting inside the heads of these children, who are so innocent and ignorant of the world." (Crummey and Rogers, 2019: n.p.)

14 Delaney stresses that "territory is always a means to some other end." (2005: 19) Although a purely functional approach of territory and territoriality comes with its own limits and difficulties, he argues, "thinking of [them] in terms of effects or consequences, whether or not these are intended or strategic" upsets the "apparent thingness" associated with the noun and the assumption that human territoriality is somehow natural (2005: 20).

progressively become Ada's preserve (144-146) as her brother seeks the "privacy of the woods" (180). In that regard, the text pays closer attention to Evered's evasions, his efforts to avoid his sister's company (139) so as to negotiate an increasingly precarious "equilibrium" (100) between his absolute dependence on his sister and his fumbling attempts to find a place for himself:

> It was a torment and a respite to be away from his sister, to escape the confines of time spent with someone he would have died for and could hardly manage to speak to anymore. All the days of his life had been inclined to her orbit and he canted toward her still though she seemed as distant as the moon. (181-182)

"[R]elinquish[ing] all say in their affairs" (190), failing at "rais[ing] the fish off the shoal ground" as his father used to (67), or letting a fox escape from one of his traps (271): Evered's perceived limitations reawaken his feeling of being "a green youngster […] only playing at being a man" (67). Over the course of the novel, he is "initiated" (50) into "men's business" (83) which his sister is not privy to, and to male companionship, from which she is excluded. With each new visit to the cove, he gains an—albeit temporary—admittance into "a fraternity he'd aspired to all his day without knowing what he hankered after" (271): from the crew of *The Hope* sharing rum and bawdy stories (79), Truss baptizing him according to an old Scottish tradition after his first hunt (177-8), to the riotous welcome of the *Medusa*'s crew and the "celebratory chatter" prompted by his scuffle with one of the sailors (229). At the same time, each new encounter feeds throbbing erotic dreams and the "onanistic indulgences" (180) to which Evered eventually surrenders leave him with a sense of being "more a mystery to himself with every passing season" (140). If the character's trajectory is marked by those bemusing rites of passage, no such possibility presents itself to his sister. The few words of wisdom about "women's business" (104) offered by her mother and Mrs. Brace, Captain Truss' companion, are vaguely ominous, and Ada mulls them in her incessant one-sided conversation with her dead infant sister, a childhood habit she never outgrows unlike her collection. Both, at first, play a similar function in that they allow her to inventory and piece together her world. Yet, the objects she adds to her shelf of treasures—the silver button (22), the bone pendant, the book found on the *Ark of Malaga* (116)—are all suggestive of meanings which eludes her and point to a world beyond "the cove and its mingy handful of satellites" (219). The "tug of jealousy" she fights when learning that her brother has "a mark and place" in a book similar to the one she has discovered (116) is the first sign of the character's impatience with the narrow confines of her world, "with the circumstances she was born into, with the cockeyed rules that governed all things" (259).

As the two siblings watch the *Medusa* sail away and acknowledge to each other they wish they were "off with them," (239) "each in their own way [is] beginning to doubt their pairing [is] requisite to what they might want from life" (240). The sea indeed offers different prospects: for Evered, the possibility of taking his place among the riotous sailors; for Ada, "the earth's vast labyrinth and the teeming lives within it" Warren's tales of his travels have revealed to them (219). During the four days the crew spends in the cove, both siblings try and find ways to remedy their ignorance. Evered choosing the company of the sailors whose "vulgar cant" he tries to comprehend (215), Ada spends her evenings having Warren "redraw the map of each of his journeys in the sand […], place the cove on an outline of Newfoundland and […] sketch in the continents around the island." (230) The sentence, which highlights the different scales of this "expanding atlas" (230), presents it as a medium allowing the character to make sense of the world she inhabits. The mention of naval vessels, traders, and South Sea whalers are nonetheless an oblique reminder that it is "a practical consequence of the monetary and strategic value of geographical knowledge" (Ashcroft, 2001: 128). Warren's "strange" and "diverting" vignettes (212) about the mores of the peoples he encountered—the Tartar girls of Hong Kong, the Indians of Nootka Sound, the natives of the Sandwich Islands—cannot but bring to mind other tales of colonial encounters to be found in exploration writing and voyage literature whose imaginative construction of otherness was "as effectively 'capturing' as commercial exploitation and conquest" (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2000: 113). The cooper's sense of propriety in the presence of Ada compels him to gloss over the strong associations between exploration and sexuality which the crew's rowdy jokes and lewd anecdotes insistently imply. The text makes a point to note how they cement the solidarity of the sailors (215) and become a way to welcome Evered into their midst. It also hints at the sexual desires and fears[15] on which they are premised and which resonate with the two siblings' anxieties regarding their own sexuality. When Evered attempts to articulate his resentment at her "proprietary claim" to Warren's story, his jealousy at how "she may have made that purchase" (255), the vocabulary of sexual traffic harkens back to the sailors' stories of seamen taking Tahitian wives in exchange for a couple of iron nails (218)[16] and their insinuations about Warren "tapp[ing] [Ada's] dirty puzzle"

15 Some of the sailors' jokes and stories may be read as a lowbrow translation of the "long tradition of male travel as an erotics of ravishment" Ann McClintock discusses in *Imperial Leather* (1995: 22). Africa, the Americas, Asia, she notes, became "what can be called a porno-tropics for the European imagination—a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears." (1995: 22)

16 Crummey borrows the notorious anecdote, which is repeated twice (213 and 218), from James Cook's account of his voyage to Tahiti (see for example the entry for June 6th, 1769 in Cook, 2003: n.p.). Historian Katherine Hermes notes how "the 'trade' between English men and island women of sex for nails […] has captured scholarly and popular imagination", and underscores how "the model of prostitution, a bargained for exchange,

(228). Similarly, after her brother tries to force himself on her "like there was something [she] had belonged to him" (265), Ada remembers the cooper's veiled warnings about going among the crew unchaperoned (210), and to account for what happened, quotes his words: "a sailor like the rest" (265).

"That curious landscape" (184): embodied practices and indigenization

The reader knows Evered's assumptions about the brief companionship Ada develops with Warren are erroneous, and that the yearnings it alleviates have less to do with sexual exploration than with the privations of an imagination stifled by "the utilitarian," "the raw austerity and moil" of life in the cove (69). The image of the character "paging through" the tales of the cooper's voyages harkens back to her fascination with the book from the ice-bound ship whose pages she "leaf[s] through." (148) Whereas the maps are legible, the "handwriting's inscrutable patterns," to her unlettered eyes, form a "curious landscape of headlands and valleys and waves and trees and stones." (184) The metaphor might have passed unnoticed as another evidence of the character's ignorance. Crummey's use of the trope is somewhat more deceptive than it might appear at a superficial reading since the paratactic juxtaposition in the prepositional phrases listing aspects precludes the composition, the ordered vision which the term landscape may imply.

In the novel, there are, in fact, few landscapes in the common understanding of the word: "a portion of the land the eye can comprehend in a single view" (*Webster*). The dictionary definition adumbrates its relation with surveying, which has led scholars to examine the visual appropriation of space it operates and naturalizes (see Wylie: 122-125). When writing about his characters' natural surroundings, Crummey strays away from the topos of Newfoundland's "rugged beauty". "[O]ne of the most overused oxymoronic descriptions of [its] landscape" (Chafe, 2016: 683), the phrase is suggestive of the interplay between visual characteristics and symbolic meanings which can make landscape the "mediator" of a territorial identity (Wylie, 2007: 191).[17] On one occasion, the text pauses to describe the vista the siblings discover on the first night of their twin expedition into the backcountry: "The deep dark strangeness of the country, the black amphitheatre of hills topped by a glittering strip of stars, made them feel new to the world" (196). The passage seems to flaunt its self-conscious reliance on formulaic

affected both the perception and the retelling" of sexual experience in Polynesia (2009: 373).

17 The relation between territory and landscape can be traced back to the Germanic etymology of the latter term and its original definition "as a tract of land, regarded as a territorial and customary unit." (Wylie, 2007: 195)

phrases and motifs. The catachresis of the natural "amphitheater", especially, is a reminder that the landscape term 'scenery' can also refer to the painted background on a theater stage. What we are offered is a familiar composition: two isolated figures in an awe-inspiring landscape. That this description should follow the evocation of the characters' progress through a rugged *terrain* is, in itself, telling. The adjective here pertains less to visual characteristics than to the geographical features which constitute both orientation markers and constraints in what is an embodied, corporeal experience: a "valley of forested hillsides" (191) providing shelter from the wind which blows almost too cold to walk along the coast (189, 193), the rattles of a river indicating where it is not completely iced over, forcing the characters to "scramble through the bush" (192), the "steep tricky climb" down a rumbling waterfall as light is failing (195). The descriptive notations do not merely function as a series of aspects whose unfolding marks the characters' difficult progression. In the attention given to the materiality of the terrain, perceptual cognition and sensuous involvement cannot be dissociated from the activity they are involved in and through which they relate to their surroundings. Landscape then becomes "an up-close, intimate, and proximate material milieu of engagement and practice" (Wylie 167), Crummey's writing translating the conceptual shift proposed by the cultural geographies of landscape influenced by phenomenology.[18]

The emphasis such approach of landscape lays on relationality entices the reader and the critic to consider more closely the recurring tropes which link the characters' embodied experience to what bemuses them. The most extended one[19] occurs when the text recounts the temporary stay of the *Medusa* crew and the effect their presence has on the siblings: "Their needling debates and catcalls and laughter like a rattling brook running through the cove, a steady racket at the centre of their days, a cold rushing current they waded into and kicked up and soaked in" (224). Readers will easily identify the image of an animating force whose incessant and seemingly aimless movement the siblings try to immerse themselves in but which remains exterior to them. Perhaps less obvious is the way the juxtaposition of the phrasal verb and the nominal clause conveys both the shift in the balance of their lives and adumbrates separation. One might be tempted to read the trope as intertwining the characters' interiority with their natural surroundings, but understanding the characters as "embedded in [a] landscape" they know "as intimately as [their] own bod[ies]" (Brinklow, 2016:

18 In his critical overview of the different conceptualizations of landscape, John Wylie explains how, divesting the term of "assumptions regarding observation, distance and spectatorship" and moving away from its definition as a specific visual mode (2007: 149), phenomenological approaches lay stress on embodied practices in which "self and landscape are intertwined and emergent" (2007: 14).

19 Other examples include the "bewildering enormity" of Martha's birth which is likened to "taking a gale of wind broadside of the boat" (19), Ada's first orgasm which is troped as "an echo coming off a cliff surface." (106)

138),[20] is, I would argue, a problematic simplification. It would indeed reiterate the environmental determinism which postulates "a seemingly constitutive interconnection between people and land, making the people elementally of the land rather than mere inhabitants upon it" (Sugars, 2010: n.p.).[21] The use of analogies allows Crummey to engage with such discursive constructions of indigeneity to better depart from it. As Paul Ricoeur points out, the rhetorical and ontological functioning of the copula which conjoins two distinct elements precludes conflation since "being as" means both identity and difference, at once "to be and not to be" (1988: 155). The resemblance the analogy posits is thus relational rather than essential (1988: 151). Crummey's tropes, which give form to the way the characters "try to make sense of things they have no words for" (Crummey and Rogers, 2019: n.p.), testify to the ongoing effort to find some measure of congruence in a world which "cripple[s] any "notion of certainty." (45) The intimacy and the familiarity they may be construed as evincing therefore needs to be qualified. In highlighting the siblings' inarticulateness, the text does not so much suggest an unmediated, pre-understanding experience of the natural environment as it probes into assumptions underwriting romantic ideals of primal, authentic relations to nature.

Crummey, however, refuses to displace authenticity onto the narrative itself, that is, to present it as "a more authentic version" (Wyile, 2002: 262) in which recurring tropes and narratives about Newfoundland's past would be corrected. Unlike *Galore* and *Sweetland* which ends on characters "unhomed and unstoried" (Chafe, 2017: 33), *The Innocents* ponders the construction of the story of "Orphan cove" (204), the last chapter of the novel taking a decisive metafictional turn. By then, Ada is pregnant although neither of the two siblings can fathom "how such a thing might come to pass" (276). Evered, nevertheless, has learnt just enough from his interactions with the crew of *The Hope* to worry about the "fables [which] ha[ve] already attached themselves to he and Ada" (282). The youngster is indeed still rattled by the tale of the murderous love triangle and the body buried at the edge of a peat bog (227) which grimly echoes the little he knows about his parents' past and about the grave above the family's vegetable garden (281). More than that, it reminds him of discovering his family "pinned and held" in the agent's book (86) and the lesson that it seems to impart: "someday it would get put down in a book somewhere […] and that would be the fact of it" (227).

20 The sentence I quote from Laurie Brinklow's article on *Sweetland* introduces her analysis of the character's creeping sense of placelessness. *The Innocents* precludes the equation she posits when, in the penultimate chapter, the narrative voice notes how Ada's "body was a neighbour she'd cultivated only a nodding acquaintance with over the years, a creature she knew well but not intimately" (264).

21 In the introduction to her comparative analysis of *Galore* and Kenneth Harvey's *The Town That Forgot How to Breathe* (2006), Sugars discusses at length the long history of "the mystique of geographical and historical determinism" in discourse about Newfoundland (2010: n.p.).

When giving voice to the character's mistrust of authority and definitiveness conferred to the written word, Crummey circumvents the "nostalgia for a kind of prelapsarian oral state prior to the alienating advent of literacy" (Wyile, 2002: 186). What is at stake is made explicit in Evered's reflection about the dubious "authenticity" of the tale (281):

> The death of a horse is the life of a crow and a story was a rank scavenger from all he could tell, feeding on rumour and innuendo and naked confabulation where the truth was too nimble to chase down or too tough to chew. And making no distinction between one meal and the other. (282)

Earlier in the novel, the proverb bears on the "salvag[ing]" enterprise of the characters collecting the shipwrecked materials which ensure their survival during a drawn-out winter (102). The excerpt reorients its significance and inverts the idea which serves as a starting point in Crummey's interview with Cynthia Sugars, that stories are "a form of sustenance, in part because they affirm a sense of continuity over time." (Crummey and Sugars, 2012: 106) The focus no longer is on the need storying feeds, but on its indiscriminate appetite and the troubling imagery of eating and preying, which challenges the possibility of a "consolatory narrative" (Wyile, 2002: 261), gives emphasis to what resists absorption and assimilation by opposing the elusive to the inedible. In doing so, it testifies to the "precarious stance"[22] of a novel which itself salvaged the unknown story of isolated siblings from an old Newfoundland newspaper (Crummey and Rogers, 2019: n.p.). For Crummey, "appropriating the past knowingly"—to return to Eaglestone's words quoted in the introduction—entails "the somewhat paradoxical task of making [his] history and questioning it too" (Wyile, 2002: 253). Paul Chafe remarks how the writer's metaphor of a "papered over" wall in *Sweetland* and *River Thieves* contradicts the claim made by a 2004 CBC documentary that Newfoundland is "an uncharted territory" since it has not been "papered over" as other places have been (*Hote Type* quoted in Chafe, 2017: 27). In *The Innocents*, the two siblings have to contend with both a lacunary past and the commercial and imaginative practices which have territorialized the narrow world they inhabit. With the self-reflexive image of scavenging, the novel articulates the two, thereby weighing the "literary land-claims" (Fee, 2015: n.p.) it strives to eschew.

22 I borrow the phrase from Sugars who, in her article on *River Thieves*, uses it to refer to Crummey's ethical predicament in representing both the Beothuk (20) and the colonists who contributed to their extinction (05: 149).

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