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Ambivalent Inheritance and Colonial Desire in Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie*

by Mark Libin

Although sporadic—owing to the limited critical attention allotted to the nineteenth-century Canadian long poem—there has been ongoing debate about Isabella Valancy Crawford's use of Native imagery and themes in her 1884 opus, *Malcolm's Katie: A Love Story.* This debate dates back as far as Northrop Frye's 1956 discussion of the poem in his "Preface to an Uncollected Anthology," and reaches to the present day, including Cecily Devereux's critique of Frye's assessment (2005), and Ceilidh Hart's attempt at "Exploring the Competing Narratives of Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie*" (2006). The gist of this debate, as might be imagined, is the appropriateness of Crawford's composition of sizeable but isolated sections of poetry—found at the openings of Part II and Part IV of the poem—that anthropomorphize the seasons, elements, and nature in general into figures from a Longfellow-esque vision of First Nations characters, culture, and dialect. This debate relates to evaluations of the poem's integral unity and aesthetics, since these passages are self-contained and held at a remove from the main narrative, and also to issues of cultural representation, since aside from these figurative passages there are no explicit references to Native Canadians in the main narrative of the poem. As we move into the twenty-first century, these debates take on more urgency, as may be observed in the sudden frequency of articles dealing with the representation of First Nations in Crawford's poem. Up to the present, the arguments of these articles appear to be polarized, representing Crawford as either a forward thinker in terms of respect for First Nations and the environment, or as a fairly typical nineteenth-century colonist who wants to represent Canada as a virgin territory belonging to the Anglo-Europeans who claim it as their own. None of these analyses have, to date, looked closely at the references to hybridity and miscegenation in the text that, although extremely rare and brief, gesture towards a more complex ambivalence in Crawford's poem, indeed towards what Robert Young identifies as a manifestation of "colonial desire."

What is always at the forefront of the issue of representation in Crawford's poem is the striking juxtaposition between the descriptive passages that Elizabeth Waterston refers to as "legendary Indian materials" (75), and the central narrative of *Malcolm's Katie*. The main narrative of the poem tells the story of Katie, the daughter of Canadian lumber baron Malcolm Graem, and her true love, Max Gordon. In order to prove himself worthy of Malcolm's blessing, Max ventures out into the untamed wilderness to clear a homestead for his beloved. In the meantime, Katie is alternately tempted and menaced by Alfred, a smooth-talking opportunist who scorns Max's love both of Katie and of Canada itself, contending that neither romantic love nor patriotic feeling are justifiable emotions, since the only constant in life is death. Max's steadfast love ultimately prevails over Alfred's devious machinations, and the final image of the poem is of Max, Katie, Malcolm, and a newborn infant comfortably ensconced in the family home that Max has built for them.

This, then, is a poem concerned thematically with inheritance. The narrative celebrates how both the virginal female and the virgin wilderness are successfully bequeathed from Malcolm Graem to the rightful heir who bears the same initials, Max Gordon. Katie, figured as a possession from the poem's very title, is herself an inheritance whose value, as D.M.R. Bentley notes, derives "less from her value as a person than from her various positions as dutiful daughter, adoring wife, and fertile mother in a patriarchal system whose continuity and genealogy she assures" (xvii). The new addition of a baby boy to the family guarantees that a patriarchal link of inheritance will be continued for at least one more generation, and the bountiful land, the "rich, fresh fields" (*Malcolm's Katie* 37) will pass without contest from Malcolm to Max to Max's new son, Alfred. That the new heir is named for the former villain is, as Crawford's narrator notes, "the seal of pardon set / Upon the heart of one who sinn'd and woke / To sorrow for his sins" (37), emphasizing that the nihilist dogma of the elder Alfred—his assertions that there is no stability or continuity in life—has been completely supplanted and "reborn" as a confident assurance of permanence. In this way, *Malcolm's Katie* is a poem about seamless and successful inheritance, and the land itself is presented as a similarly uncontested bequest; the narrator unambiguously informs us in Part II that the land that Max has claimed as his own has never been occupied by Canada's original inhabitants:

> For never had the patriarch of the herd
> Seen, limn'd against the farthest rim of light
> Of the low-dipping sky, the plume or bow

> Of the red hunter; now, when stoop'd to drink,
> Had from the rustling rice-beds heard the shaft
> Of the still hunter hidden in its spears.
>
> (9)

Like Katie, the land itself is virginal and more than willing to be incorporated into a patriarchal system of inheritance.

What is intriguing about critical discussions of the "legendary Indian materials" is that they present themselves as consistently concerned—in varied and often surprising ways—with the question of inheritance: inheritance of style, inheritance of theme, as well as the larger issue of the inheritance of Canada. Further, I would argue that upon closer examination of the two extended passages of "Indian materials," these seemingly self-contained and even anomalous passages offer us a compelling glimpse at another narrative of national inheritance: this time a fraught, contested, and ultimately unresolved narrative that exposes the poem's own ambivalences and anxieties about the settlement it documents.

Literary Inheritance

The narrative conceit that Crawford's pioneers are clearing unclaimed territory seems, in comparison to earlier examples of Canadian long poems such as Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village*, Joseph Howe's *Acadia*, or Thomas Cary's *Abram's Plains*, markedly progressive in its refusal to represent the First Nations as murderous interlopers (Monkman 133). At the same time, one may wonder, as C.D. Mazoff wonders, which is worse: consciously disparaging the culture of the other, or "simply expropriating that people and their history by completely ignoring them" (90). The assertion that her protagonists' territory is uninhabited allows Crawford to avoid dwelling on the effects of the colonial expansionist enterprise on the land's original inhabitants by representing the territory in question as *terra nullius* (Devereux 286), as Cecily Devereux maintains: "Colonization and imperial expansion are here represented as benevolent outsourcing" ("The Search for a Livable Past" 298). Indeed, Katie's final assessment of the land she now homesteads is that it is "fairer far / Than Eden's self" (*Malcolm's Katie* 37), compelling us to understand the territory as an idyllic bower inhabited only by God's chosen few, a representation that K.P. Stich describes as a manifestation of "capitalist pastoralism" (54).[1]

The critical question therefore becomes how we are meant to reconcile this explicit representation of a land without Natives with the extended passages in Part II and IV that conspicuously evoke First Nations' culture,

thus reminding us of precisely the issue that the poem encourages us to forget. Frye, most famously, describes these passages as "mythopoetic," and contends that they "integrat[e] the literary tradition of the country by deliberately re-establishing the broken cultural link with Indian civilization" (181). Diana Relke uses the same integrative model, but her focus is not on the First Nations *per se*, but on the literal environment that is in the process of transfiguration. Nevertheless, like Frye she posits that Indigenous mythology is deployed in order to mediate the conflicting positions located within the central narrative: the interplay of mythological Native figures "both mirrors and magnifies the web of human relationships in the love story" (62), and provides an "alternative epistemology" that breaks down the "hierarchical" binaries of our Western systems of representation (63).

Although they are separated by forty-five years, in both Frye's and Relke's arguments Crawford is championed as a poet who has taken up an inheritance of outmoded nineteenth-century ideas and replaced them with a far more progressive perspective. In both arguments, Crawford cunningly builds a bridge between two antagonistic factions—settlers and Natives, lumberjacks and the environment—and bequeaths to us a regenerative vision that solidifies this harmonious and progressive outlook. Crawford invests her inheritance in the business of reinstating aboriginal culture, and in the transcendent vision of reseeding the clearcut forests of Upper Canada.

Even when discussing the aesthetics of these descriptive passages, critics rely on a model of inheritance and innovation. Elizabeth Waterston, for example, focuses on the influence of Tennyson on Crawford's style in her "Indian materials," arguing that Crawford benefits from this British inheritance at the same time that the heiress transcends her benefactor. Crawford, Waterston writes, "captures the uniquely Indian attitude to pride, to shame, to generosity, to endurance, to possession" (75), in a way that could not have been realized by the resolutely European mind of Tennyson. Waterston analyzes the passage in question to discover that the poetry is at once exclusive to Crawford and indebted to Tennyson: "the vision of the tranced soundless world of Indian summer is Canadian. But Crawford has learned the technique for presenting the scene and for placing it effectively, in a medley, from Tennyson" (76). Similarly, for Bentley, in his Introduction to the critical edition of *Malcolm's Katie*, the descriptive passages allow room for comparison and contrast with Crawford's predecessors, most notably Tennyson, Swinburne, and Longfellow. The "Indian materials," as they are contextualized by Waterston and Bentley, invoke an inheritance that serves as a foundation to be built upon, that *has been* built upon

by the Canadian poet who is able to access the riches of her British forebears as well as the abundant resources of the new culture to which she has become the geographical heir.

There are very few contemporary critics who would argue that Crawford "captures" *anything* "unique" to First Nations culture; that there exists an authentic relationship to Native language, culture or mythology in the poet's "Indian materials." Indeed, to the contemporary reader the terminology in these passages may seem anachronistically indebted to Longfellow's fabricated world of Hiawatha, as in this lengthy soliloquy from the aptly named "Indian Summer:"

> "'I, who, slain by the cold Moon of Terror,
> "'Can return across the Path of Spirits,
> "'Bearing still my heart of love and fire,
> "'Looking with my eyes of warmth and splendour,
> "'Whisp'ring lowly thro' your sleep of sunshine.
> "'I, the laughing Summer, am not turn'd
> "'Into dry dust, whirling on the prairies,—
> "'Into red clay, crush'd beneath the snowdrifts.
> "'I am still the mother of sweet flowers
> "'Growing but an arrow's flight beyond you—
> "'In the Happy Hunting Ground . . . .'"
>
> (10)

This speech is representative of the vocabulary and imagery Crawford deploys in order to "capture uniquely Indian attitudes." Not a line passes in which the speaker—generally a personified elemental force or season—does not announce his/her 'Indian-ness' in some way[2]: either through references to 'Indian' mythology ("the Happy Hunting Ground"), the use of figurative nomenclature ("the cold Moon of Terror"), the adaptation of markers of Indian culture as systems of knowledge and measure ("but an arrow's flight beyond you"), or the use of colour as a racial marker ("red clay"). It appears that Crawford, afraid to let the façade of cultural representation slip for even one moment, is obsessively cramming every available stereotype and cultural image into these passages.[3]

Lyrical Coherence

Enigmatic and singular in their language, Crawford's 'Indian' passages pose a challenge to critics who attempt to produce a coherent and totalizing reading of *Malcolm's Katie*. Kenneth Hughes and Birk Sproxton, for exam-

ple, argue that the text's "Indian materials" contextualize the narrative as a whole by "provid[ing] a background onto which other images of society can be superimposed in much the same way as succeeding forms of an evolving Western culture were superimposed on a land that formerly belonged to the Indian" (60). Because 'Indian' culture "did not (generally) seek to transform nature," its representation through these passages serves as a "useful background for the cultures of the white men who did" (60). In this way, the description of the North Wind slaying the already weakened trees and rivers with his arrows and his ice club (20-1), for example, prepares the reader for the image of Max performing "immortal tasks" (22) with his axe (Relke 64).

Relke similarly contends that Crawford establishes a dramatic tension between the main characters' relationship to the new land and the position articulated in the "Indian materials." In her analysis, Relke interprets the gender of the personified elements to suggest that Crawford subverts a Romantic convention that deliberately perceives Nature as exclusively female in order to allow the male poet to interact with and ultimately gain possession and mastery over "her" (55). In Relke's view, "the narrator's vision [in these passages] enlarges Katie's by presenting us with a whole community of metaphors that only just begins to express the endless variety in nature" (63).

Relke's argument, as well as Hughes's and Sproxton's, returns the reader to the Frygian emphasis on thematic unity, and the understanding that these lyric passages articulate Crawford's overarching "cosmology" (Relke 68) or "mythopoetics" (Frye). I would argue, however, that the relationship between the "Indian materials" and the central narrative is not one of unity or interconnectedness, but rather one of rupture and separateness. The 'Indian' passages inaugurate Part II and Part IV of *Malcolm's Katie*, and should, therefore, provide an entry into the main narrative. In Part II, however, almost one hundred and fifty lines of lyrical description culminate suddenly and abruptly in the prosaic re-introduction of Crawford's protagonist:

> "'Sleep, my children, smiling in your heart-seeds
> "'At the spirit words of Indian Summer!'
> "Thus, O Moon of Falling Leaves, I mock you!
> "Have you slain my gold-ey'd squaw, the Summer?"
> The mighty morn strode laughing up the land,
> And Max, the labourer and the lover, stood
> Within the forest's edge, beside a tree ....
>
> (10)

The Sun's mockery of the Moon, his lengthy invocation of "Indian Summer," ends searchingly, its questioning hastily suspended as the personified and 'Indian'-ized elements are bundled off the textual stage to make room for Max's reappearance.

The narrative's abrupt shift from the lyrical to the expository—the Sun abruptly yielding to Max—represents a lack of connection between these two discursive modes within Crawford's text. Max appears, upon his entrance in Part II, refigured and reborn as "the labourer and the lover," and his transformation disperses the 'Indian' qualities of the forest into which he steps. Rather than as a "wigwam of green leaves" (7), Max refers to the trees surrounding him as "Kings." Indeed, as Max fells his first tree, he cries out "O King of Desolation, art thou dead?" (10), in this way conspicuously referencing European modes of poetic discourse.

Although Max, Katie, Alfred and Malcolm are always interacting with their environment, they establish no contact with any natural forces personified as 'Indian.' Although the environment is still anthropomorphized in the central narrative, it is articulated in Anglicized, literate, even philosophical language, as opposed to the action-oriented, rough-hewn pidgin spoken in the 'Indian' passages. For example, when Alfred deceives Max into believing that Kate has promised Alfred her hand, Max swears a murderous vow to Satan. God's response to Max's blasphemy is swift and scornful: the tree Max has been chopping promptly falls and crushes him into the snowy ground:

> With a shrill shriek of tearing fibres, rock'd
> The half-hewn tree above his fated head;
> And, tott'ring, asked the sudden blast, "Which way?"
> And, answ'ring its windy arms, crash'd and broke
> Thro' other lacing boughs, with one loud roar
> Of woody thunder; all its pointed boughs
> Pierc'd the deep snow—its round and mighty corpse,
> Bark flay'd and shudd'ring, quivered into death.
> And Max—as some frail, wither'd reed, the sharp
> And piercing branches caught at him, as hands
> In a death-throe, and beat him to the earth—
> And the dead tree upon its slayer lay.
>
> (26)

In this crucial scene we see that—as in the lyrical passages—nature is anthropomorphized, sentient, and integrally involved in the human relationship played out within its purview. In this case, however, the tree's

soliloquy is notably concise. Compared to the extended, flowery monologues of the sun, moon, and north wind in the 'Indian' passages, this Anglicized, Christian tree is poignant in its non-figurative brevity, calling out "Which way?" to its Lord and maker—an exhortation reminiscent of Jesus' plaintive cry on the Cross—before acquiescing into a spectacular death throe. This tree seems to embody all that is non-'Indian' in Crawford's poem, demonstrating quite clearly how the two discourses remain strangers to one another.

The staged exit of the sun in Part II is paralleled with a more explicit theme of concealment at the culmination of the 'Indian' passage in Part IV, which describes the onset of winter. This descriptive passage focuses on the North Wind, which is portrayed as a fierce warrior who kills the forest with his wintry weapons:

> From his far wigwam sprang the strong North Wind
> And rush'd with war cry down the steep ravines,
> And wrestl'd with the giants of the woods;
> And with his ice-club beat the swelling crests
> Of the deep watercourses into death;
> And with his chill foot froze the whirling leaves
> Of dun and gold and fire in icy banks;
> And smote the tall reeds to the harden'd earth;
> And sent his whistling arrows o'er the plains,
> Scatt'ring the ling'ring herds....
>
> (20)

Once again, the text explicitly invokes the codes of 'Indian'-ness at every opportunity, compulsively reiterating that the Wind is now an 'Indian brave.' However, it is not long before the warrior experiences remorse for having chosen a prey already weakened by the impending winter. The North Wind realizes his cowardice, and knows he is disgraced in the eyes of his "tribe:"

> "And all the braves of my loud tribe will mock
> "And point at me—when our great chief, the Sun,
> "Relights his Council fire in the Moon
> "Of Budding Leaves: 'Ugh! Ugh! he is a brave!
> "'He fights with squaws and takes the scalps of babes!'"
>
> (21)

Recognizing his abject position, the North Wind calls upon his "white squaw," the snow, to "'Spread thy white blanket on the twice-slain dead, /

And hide them, ere the waking of the Sun!'" (21).[4] Significantly, it is at the very moment of this call for concealment that the scene ends and that the narrative voice changes register:

> *High grew the snow beneath the low-hung sky,*
> *And all was silent in the Wilderness;*
> *In trance of stillness Nature heard her God*
> *Rebuilding her spent fires, and veil'd her face*
> *While the Great Worker brooded o'er His work.*
> (21)

Here the narrative moves back from the particular to the general: the varied 'Indian' characters merge into an amorphous "Wilderness" and "Nature." The narrative clearly invokes a singular and masculine God who holds sway over this environment. Having successfully hidden its 'Indian'-ness, the narrative moves towards the European discourse once again and the passage that names Nature as a generous feminine entity is followed by Max's "Song of the Axe."[5]

The question remains as to how the Canadian poet is employing her poetic inheritance. Certainly, Crawford explicitly invokes the imagery of 'Indian'-ness in two extended passages, albeit in images refracted through the lens of her forebears' poetic representations. At the same time, however, Devereux's critique of Frye's mythopoetic reading seems valid: "the absence of aboriginal peoples *on* the land is the salient feature of the poem" ("The Search for a Livable Past" 298). Yet both readings ignore the issue of inheritance as it is hinted at—perhaps unconsciously and certainly ambivalently—in the main narrative of the text. That is, there are small, easily overlooked spaces in the central storyline where we can find traces of a seepage, an intermingling, between Max's story and the "Indian materials;" where the first sprouts of a hybrid text poke through.

Poetic Miscegenation

Discussing the hybrid styles discernable in Crawford's long poem in his critical introduction, Bentley remarks, almost off-handedly, that the "half-breed lad" who appears briefly in Part II would serve as a fortuitous and exemplary "image of synthesizing ability" that allows the European modes Crawford inherits from Tennyson and Swinburne to co-exist with the words and images derived from Crawford's North American experience (xlvi). Following the debate so far charted on the seeming dichotomy between the central narrative of *Malcolm's Katie* and the "Indian materi-

als," the image of the "half-breed lad" certainly presents itself as a potential suture to join the disparate fabrics together, and offers Crawford's reader a glimpse into the enigmatic and controversial relationship between the poet and the First Nations of Canada.

The "half-breed lad" appears only once in Crawford's poem; he is mentioned just after the culmination of the first 'Indian' passage, with the arrival of the triumphantly reborn Max. Oblivious to the receding laughter of the Indigenous Sun, Max moves into the textual frame, felling his first tree and proclaiming himself the new "King" to replace the monarchs of the forest now tumbling before him:

> 'And have I slain a King?
> 'Above his ashes will I build my house—
> 'No slave beneath its pillars, but—a King!'
> (10)

As Max's words identify him as a colonial ruler bent on subjugating the territory of his purview, the narrative shifts our gaze briefly towards another figure occupying that space: "Max wrought alone, but for a half-breed lad, / With tough, lithe sinews and deep Indian eyes, / Lit with a Gallic sparkle" (10-11). With his appearance, the heretofore disparate realms of Crawford's poem—the European settler culture and the territory of the 'Indian'—suddenly intersect in the fleeting but noticeably eroticized image of the "half-breed lad."

Certainly, it is important to think about the "half-breed lad" in relation to the otherwise hermetically contained realms that Crawford has set up in her poem: the *terra nullius* of Malcolm Graem's settlement and an environment suffused by the language and characteristics of the 'Indian.' The "half-breed" lad clearly occupies the space of the exotic, a space wherein, as Renata Wasserman suggests, otherness is recontextualized within the space of the imperial culture. After the long 'Indian' passage that inaugurates Part II, Max's heroic entry as an (almost) solitary, robust, active slayer of kings, a "soldier of the ax," seems to definitively mark off the territory once again as a "bloodless field" easily claimed by the European settler (*Malcolm's Katie* 3). The "half-breed lad" becomes the first incorporated disruption of this untrammeled space, a sign both that the First Nations actually exist in this area as real humans, and that there has been tangible interaction between the European settlers and the Indigenous peoples. Seemingly mentioned only to disrupt Max's lofty sense of aloneness, to subvert his heroic isolation, the "half-breed lad" exemplifies Wasserman's

notion of the exotic by energizing the space of the European colonial with an alien eroticism.

The inscrutable figure is only recognizable in Crawford's text as a product of his cultural heritage, as a "half-breed lad," and as an erotically charged figure whose aboriginal otherness is rendered more appealing when illuminated by the "Gallic sparkle" of his European heritage. The description of the "half-breed lad" is significant for its focus on the physical attractiveness of the young man, significant for its subtle disruption of Max's solitary dominion, but also significant because the appearance of the lad is elusive, brief and singular; it is never repeated again in Crawford's long poem. It seems, then, that this exotic figure darts out of the narrative almost unconsciously and then is quickly suppressed, banished or erased.

The almost instantaneous disavowal of the "half-breed lad," an ephemeral and enigmatic figure even in its brief appearance, accords again with Wasserman's definition of the "exotic," which hinges on the neutralization of the seductively alien power of the exotic object even as this power is harnessed for the edification of the colonial audience: the exotic "had an amusing strangeness that could be controlled and, if necessary, subdued" (132). It seems clear that the "strangeness" that attracts the narrator to the "half-breed lad" is swiftly and irrevocably "subdued" for the remainder of the narrative. Yet it is the question of why this image is so abruptly materialized and so abruptly subdued, as well as the hybrid nature of the exotic figure, that leads our inquiry into Crawford's problematic relationship with her "Indian materials" and further into a discussion of what Robert Young terms "colonial desire."

Young begins his provocative study, *Colonial Desire*, by positing the inherent ambivalence of the term "hybridity" as it was deployed in colonial discourse, connoting as it does both attraction to and repulsion from the colonized (9). Critiquing the contemporary recuperation of the term as a vehicle of postcolonial emancipation, a generative "third space," as theorists such as Homi Bhabha would have it, Young excavates the genealogical roots of "hybridity" in order to contend that the term delineates the fascination and fear resulting from the lure of "commerce" both in the economic and the sexual sense of the word (181). As a result, "sexual exchange and its miscegenated product" quickly became "the dominant paradigm through which the passionate and economic trafficking of colonialism was conceived" (182). Young painstakingly details and analyzes the proliferation of discourse surrounding the issue of racial miscegenation in the colonial era to show that "the soft underbelly of that power relation [is] fuelled by the multifarious forms of colonial desire" (175).

Close examination of Crawford's text reveals the push and pull of attraction and repulsion that Young contends is everpresent in the ambivalence of colonial desire. The repulsion, as Devereux has clearly outlined, may be evidenced in the compartmentalization of the two discourses of *Malcolm's Katie*: the Eurocentric narrative that documents the claiming of the "bloodless fields" of Canada and the conspicuously dematerialized and disembodied discourse of a harmless, essentially absent, aboriginal culture. The attraction, as critics such as Frye would have it, is evident in the deliberate inclusion of the "Indian materials." However, the subtle but suggestive fascination with racial miscegenation that Young contends is the salient feature of colonial desire is also apparent. The "half-breed lad" never speaks, never acts, and is never mentioned again. Yet, despite his silence and passivity, his presence constitutes a formidable resistance, a rebuff to Max's confident assertions. A brief glance at the lad's face, particularly his eyes, reveals the two other cultures that also lay claim to Max's territory: the French and the First Nations. Although the "Indian Summer" and the Indigenous Sun have been driven from the text by Max, who declares his only obstacles to be the "kingly" trees of the forest, his impassive apprentice stands as a point of access to the concealed narratives that problematize Max's ambitions and his belief that he is "alone" in his labours (10).

The image of miscegenation is fleeting, however, and the mention of the "half-breed lad" is superceded by a new figuration of Max's environment, as Crawford provides an unequivocal description of the sublime act of colonial settlement:

> The thin winds swept a cosmos of red sparks
> Across the bleak, midnight sky; and the sun
> Walk'd pale behind the resinous, black smoke.
> And Max car'd little for the blotted sun,
> And nothing for the startl'd, outshone stars;
> For Love, once set within a lover's breast,
> Has its own Sun....
>
> (11)

The 'Indian' Sun, once the protagonist of this dramatic narrative, is blotted out by the "resinous, black" smoke of Max's enterprise, and replaced by a new light, the Sun of Max's love.

Transformed figuratively into Max's "own sun," love stands separate from, and even eclipses, the natural world. Similarly, Part II of *Malcolm's Katie* concludes with a song, "O, Love builds on the Azure Sea" (13), a

song that personifies love as a resolute and industrious settler: "On cloud or land, or mist or sea— / Love's solid land is everywhere!" (13). It quickly becomes clear that love is not only alien to the Canadian wilderness, a European import that two white settlers alone are worthy of, but it is also conflated with the mercantile enterprise of colonialism. However, this definition of love has already been subtly undermined by the presence of the "half-breed lad," the boy who is the product of an illicit, forbidden love, a love that, by its nature, challenges the purity of the colonial endeavour.

Normative love is more explicitly challenged by miscegenation in Part V of the poem. When Max's nemesis, the opportunistic Alfred, attempts to win Katie's heart and subvert her steadfast devotion to Max, he fabricates the story of Max's marriage to an "Indian woman":

> "He has a wife," said Alfred, "lithe and bronz'd,
> "An Indian woman, comelier than her kind;
> "And on her knee a child with yellow locks,
> "And lake-like eyes of mystic Indian brown.
> "And so you knew him? He is doing well."
>
> (30)

Alfred's professed goal, of course, is to shake Katie's faith in her beloved, but the execution of this plan reveals the colonial fascination with sexual hybridity. Certainly, Alfred's narrative requires another woman to realize its dastardly purpose, but his particular choice reflects the conventional mode in which the Indian maiden is exoticized and sexualized by the Western imagination. Deploying the erotic potential of the Indian woman not only plays on Katie's insecurities about Max's fidelity, but taps into a more pervasive Western fear of the colonial "gone native." In this case, however, the fear derives not from the image of Max going "wild" with primitive libido, but from the fear of a transgressive Max bringing a primitive woman into the sphere of bourgeois domesticity which is the hallmark of Western culture.

Alicia Ostriker has argued that one of the conventional genres relied upon by the nineteenth century female poet was the "Indian romance," a genre that allowed the poet to explore eroticism, albeit in an encoded and "duplicitous" fashion" (32). Certainly, an excellent example of this tendency could be seen in Crawford's own, "The Lily Bed," which was published autonomously and as a part of *Hugh and Ion*. Yet Alfred's narrative spends surprisingly little time drawing out the taboo connotations of the Indian maiden's erotic wiles. What is striking is that in his narrative Alfred—and behind his character, of course, Crawford—is compelled to

add a "half-breed" progeny to the tale, with the result that greater focus is given to the child's physical characteristics than to the wife's. It is the "half-breed lad" who dominates the foreground of the image, until he is again banished from the story by a declaration of normative love, this time in the form of Katie's refusal to believe in Max's purported infidelity. Katie denies Alfred's story with the passion of a woman desperate to believe in her beloved, and with the passion of an innocent horrified by the possibility of interracial sexual commerce:

> "False, false!" said Katie, lifting up her head.
> "O, you know not the Max my father means!"
> "He came from yonder farm-house on the slope."
> "Some other Max—we speak not of the same."
> "He has a red mark on his temple set."
>
> (30)

It seems telling that Alfred's first "proof" that he speaks of the same Max Gordon whom Katie loves—what follows is a lengthy debate of supporting evidence—is a "red mark," once again metonymically linking Max with the 'Indians.' The text forecloses on the possibility of Max authentically intermingling with the 'Indian' as swiftly as Katie insists on the falseness of Alfred's story, but the material trace, the "red mark," remains as an ambivalent stain on an otherwise effectively segregated text.

The poem concludes, as already discussed, with a newborn on Katie's knee: a boy boasting purely Scottish-Canadian blood. Again, this seems to occlude the previous image of the "child with yellow locks / And lake-like eyes of mystic Indian brown;" it seems the attendant rejection that counteracts the text's previous attraction to the idea of miscegenation, is as shrill and hysterical as Katie's "'False, false!'" Yet this new, idyllic image is notable for its paucity of figurative details. As opposed to the "half-breed lad, / With tough, lithe sinews and deep Indian eyes, / Lit with a Gallic sparkle," or to the "child with yellow locks / And lake-like eyes of mystic Indian brown," the authentic and pure-blooded child of Malcolm and Katie is described only as "a little, smiling child" (37). The description of the real child seems anemic and vague, to say the least, lacking in the passionate attention of colonial desire to lend it descriptive resonance. Apparently, the true progeny of normative love is not as fascinating or as attractive as the fantasy of the "half-breed lad." Despite the brevity of these furtive thoughts of miscegenation, despite the vehemence with which these images are abolished from the text, these hybrid images are more tangible,

more vivid and resonant than the images that the text explicitly endorses as appropriate and sanctioned.[6]

One could certainly track the subtle but persistent traces of Crawford's "colonial desire" into *Hugh and Ion*, the unfinished long poem that has been assumed to have been composed following the completion of *Malcolm's Katie*. In *Hugh and Ion*, the protagonist, Hugh, is a jilted lover from Toronto who idealistically believes that a sojourn in the untrammeled wilderness of Ontario will cure him of his ills. Late in the unfinished manuscript Crawford reveals that Hugh is himself a "half-breed lad":

> Hugh's eyes held all the heritage of light,
> From Council fires that fac'd a thousand moons,
> And warm'd the tribal wisdom into life,
> From age to age—so loved he prairie crests
> And awful forests, and the might of hills,
> The surfs of quaking lakes—and like a net
> His heart cast out at men to draw them up
> From swarming city shallows—light the locks
> Of Saxon yellow fell on Saxon brows
> And the stern humour of the Saxon stood
> Built of firm flint within his steadfast soul
> With flames to leap against a trial touch
> Of cynic steel, and all his creeds and faiths
> Had flinty feet, and iron in their veins.
>
> (*Hugh and Ion* 18)

The incomplete nature of the manuscript does not allow for speculation as to how the "half-breed" nature of Hugh's character might have been employed in a final textual form; the description in the existent draft, although fairly lengthy is singular and like the characterizations in *Malcolm's Katie*, rather ephemeral. Up until this point, Part IX, in the poem, there has been no significant mention of Hugh's genealogy, and after this revelation the poem moves into a more abstract philosophical dialogue between Hugh and Ion on the human condition. There is never any explicit attempt to connect Hugh's miscegenated lineage to his status as an unrequited lover or as a pastoral idealist.

As in the critical reception of *Malcolm's Katie*, though, the brief mention of Hugh's cultural background has sparked two polarized positions. Robert Alan Burns recognizes Hugh as an homage to Louis Riel not just in their shared Métis background but in their shared belief in the utopian possibilities of the Canadian wilderness (67). Cecily Devereux, however, disputes Burns's reading, suggesting that in Crawford's description of Hugh,

"his external appearance rather belies than supports the identification of Hugh as Métis," and that Hugh's "'Saxon' idealism is also framed in a discourse that configured colonization and expansion as an imperial enterprise, something Riel was seen to threaten" ("'And let them wash me'" 101). Once again, then, the critical assessment of Crawford's representation of the First Nations, or in this case the Métis, is sharply divided, demonstrating, as I have tried to show in my discussion of *Malcolm's Katie*, Crawford's ambivalent relationship to the First Nations other: on one hand she is repeatedly seduced by the image of the aboriginal and the "half-breed lad," and on the other hand her writing silences and erases these figurations of "colonial desire" immediately after they are articulated.

What these brief but significant glimpses of the "half-breed lad" reveal in Crawford's text is the point of interconnection between the central love story of *Malcolm's Katie* and the seemingly digressive and unrelated "Indian materials." These disparate aspects do not, as Frye, Sproxton, Hughes, Relke, and Hart would have it, fuse into a holistic, mythopoetic circuit that realizes a more complete vision of Canada. These aspects do not dramatize, as Mazoff and Devereux would have it, a colonial de-materialization of the First Nations, but rather reveal the ambivalent play of colonial desire: an attraction to and repulsion from the Aboriginal other made manifest in a poem that at once invokes and segregates, erases and conjugates the insistent figure of the First Nations, a figure that persists and endures, even under erasure, through *Malcolm's Katie* and into her unfinished *Hugh and Ion*. It is, finally, the "half-breed lad" who is named as the heir to Crawford's poetic inheritance.

Notes

1 Stich speculates that Crawford might have sufficient critical distance to question this "capitalist pastoralism" that he sees unironically presented in *The Rising Village* and *The Emigrant*. See also Bentley xvii. Hart also reads Katie's analogy as ironic (11).

2 I use the term 'Indian' in order to identify the figure Crawford has textually constructed, a representational personification whose connections to historical First Nations bands of Canada or North America and their systems of belief may be contingent, ambiguous, or even spurious. In so doing I am following the argument of Gerald Vizenor, who writes the term "Indian" in lower case letters to highlight the term's colonial roots and implications: "the invention of the *indian* as a simulation and commodity" (Vizenor 24). I will rely on the term 'Indian' to negotiate between the figures employed by Crawford and whatever historical, anthropological and/or sociological materials may dispute her constructions, and I will keep the term in single quotation marks to emphasize that the word 'Indian' reflects a representation rather than an existing community.

3 Bentley's explanatory notes direct the reader consistently to Longfellow's "The Vocab-

ulary to the Song of Hiawatha," thus casting suspicion on the 'Indian-ness' of these passages and implicitly questioning whether Crawford's poem might be an ill-fitting cast-off of a squandered inheritance.

4 Notice how the narrative of the 'Indian passage' in Part IV parallels the narrative in Part II. In both cases a warrior figure attempts to kill a personified element of the natural world, and in each case the warrior is thwarted. The Sun mocks the "Moon of Falling Leaves" for killing the Summer, first by shaming it (II 108-110), and then by informing the Moon that she is not dead but will return again. Similarly, the North Wind "slays" the trees and waters, only to realize the cowardice of this act. The North Wind further exacerbates his cowardice by calling on his "squaw," snow, to help him conceal this dastardly act. At the same time, the North Wind, like the Moon in the previous passage, demonstrates his ignorance of the natural cycle of seasons by believing in this death, even as he realizes that the Sun will return and reinvigorate nature (V 22-30). In each case, 'Indian' nature shows itself to be *unnatural*, in its dishonourable behaviour and in its displacement within the recurring cycle of the seasons. Terry Goldie, in his study of "images of the indigene" in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand literatures, speaks to such contradictory discourses by which the "natural" indigene is both valourized and vilified (23).

5 Bentley suggests that the term "Great Worker" may be informed by the figure of the Manitou (Great Spirit) in Aboriginal theology. However, he also suggests that the figure of the Manitou in this case is blended with the Christian idea that "the Holy Spirit…effected God's plan in the creation of the world" (63). Bentley's point destabilizes my reading of the passage as a "European" movement away from the 'Indian' lyricism in order to return to a central narrative line.

I am troubled, however, with Bentley's reading since this passage seems conspicuously devoid of references to 'Indian' mythology and culture, whereas the lines that precede it are saturated with such cues. At the same time, I am unable to explain the figure of the "Great Worker" to my own satisfaction. It may well be that this term defies explanation. Perhaps it stands as a strange hybrid of Indigenous and Christian belief systems, an aporia where two discourses meet without entirely comprehending one another, the result resistant to explication by either system of meaning.

6 Interestingly, Bentley discerns the same competing discourses of affection and ambivalence towards the First Nations in the poetry of Duncan Campbell Scott. In his discussion of "Racial Haunting" in Scott's poetry, Bentley describes how Scott's public policies (as a high-level bureaucrat within the federal Department of Indian Affairs) and public statements articulate a belief that the First Nations would eventually be absorbed, through assimilation, into the general (European) population of Canada (754), but argues that these prosaic utterances are contradicted by the "manifest pathos and sympathy" towards the First Nations which Bentley reads in Scott's poetry (767).

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