

Isabella Valancy Crawford and Elizabeth Barrett Browning

by Wanda Campbell

Isabella Valancy Crawford's long poem *Malcolm's Katie: A Love Story* has been convincingly linked with Tennyson's domestic idylls by Elizabeth Waterston,¹ but what has yet to be explored is the influence of a poet whose reputation flourished alongside Tennyson's and for whom Crawford would have felt a strong affinity, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. During Crawford's lifetime, Barrett Browning's poetry was widely available and immensely popular on both sides of the Atlantic;² it is safe to assume that Crawford, who by all accounts read widely and voraciously, would have been familiar with the work of the most famous woman poet of the nineteenth century. In 1845, Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote, "I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none."³ A few decades later, Isabella Valancy Crawford no longer faced such a predicament; she could turn for inspiration and ideas to a woman who surmounted challenges of gender and poetic aspiration similar to her own.

A Drama of Exile, the Barrett Browning poem which is most relevant to a discussion of *Malcolm's Katie*, is an attempt to redefine the Eden story in female and romantic terms.⁴ Though this poem never achieved the popular success of *Sonnets from the Portuguese* or the critical success of *Aurora Leigh*, Barrett Browning valued it as an exploration of several themes close to her heart: the relationship between humanity and nature, men and women, knowledge and power. In the preface to *Poems 1844*, the collection in which *A Drama of Exile* first appears (and the last to bear her maiden name), Barrett Browning explains her purpose in writing it:

My subject was the new and strange experience of the fallen humanity as it went forth from Paradise into the wilderness; with a peculiar reference to Eve's allotted grief, which considering that self-sacrifice belonged to her womanhood, and the consciousness of originating the Fall to her offence, — appeared to be imperfectly apprehended hitherto, and more expressible by a woman than a man. (vii)

In her effort to defend herself against what Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have defined as "Milton's bogey,"⁵ she continues:

I had promised my own prudence to shut close the gates of Eden between Milton and myself, so that none might say I dared to walk in his footsteps. He should be within, I thought, with his Adam and Eve unfallen or falling, — and I without, with my EXILES, — I also an exile! (viii)

This, too, is what Crawford has done, carrying her tale beyond the gates of Eden, and discovering, with Barrett Browning, "the lyrical emotion in those first steps into the wilderness" (vii). Crawford's creatively subversive response to *Paradise Lost* is revealed not only in the explicit references to Eden in the final section of *Malcolm's Katie*, but also through her careful manipulation of the elements of the story of the Garden throughout the poem. She manages to close the door between herself and Milton even more tightly by transposing her tale to a contemporary pioneer setting. Filled as it is with realistic details of the pioneering process, *Malcolm's Katie* seems far removed from Barrett Browning's dramatic retelling of the expulsion from Eden, but both poets assert that "Exiled is not lost" (A

Drama of Exile 2258) and insist upon the transforming power of sorrow. In her Preface, Barrett Browning challenges Milton by claiming a superior understanding of Eve's position. Crawford, too, responds to *Paradise Lost* with a story of maturation through love and suffering in which the hierarchical relationship imposed upon Adam and Eve by Milton is explored and redefined. Though there are as many differences between *A Drama of Exile* and *Malcolm's Katie* as there are similarities (Barrett Browning presents her tale in the form of Greek tragedy, Crawford in the form of popular romance), a comparison between the two poems illuminates the role of Eve/Katie in relation to her lover, her tempter, and the natural world in which she lives.

Eve first appears in *A Drama of Exile* in a trembling heap at Adam's feet. Overwhelmed by grief, she seeks punishment for her part in the Fall and only Adam's loving strength lifts her from despair. Feminists have long struggled with the Genesis story "with its linguistically powerful Adam and its anxious, tongue-tied Eve" (*No Man's Land* 265). Recently, however, some feminists have argued that the interpretation of Eve as powerless is a misreading of the Biblical account: "Throughout the myth [Eve] is the more intelligent one, the more aggressive one, and the one with the greater sensibilities."⁶ These are all qualities Crawford gives to Katie in the opening passage of her poem. Barrett Browning's Eve is ready to embrace death and must be reminded of future joys. Yet unchastened by sorrow and separation, Katie rejoices in life and this joy is one source of her power. She rejects Max's characterization of her as the "fairest unsupported Flow'r" (*Paradise Lost* IX.433) and is confident of her power to withstand temptation while Max is away carving a home out of the wilderness. She deconstructs his horticultural metaphor by turning it in a new direction; while Max builds words "up" into the conventional metaphor of woman as flower, Katie pushes words "down" below the surface of the soil to reveal the stronger half of that same metaphor, the deep roots that serve as anchor.

When he describes the process of colonization, Max rejects the violence of imperialism and the tyranny of commerce in favour of a humble agricultural ideal that resembles Eden:

. . . — four walls, perhaps a lowly roof;
"Kine in a peaceful posture; modest fields
"A man and woman standing hand in hand
"In hale old age, who, looking o'er the land
"Say "Thank the Lord, it all is mine and thine!"
(I.104-108)

Significantly, this is a post-lapsarian vision. Enclosure is required against the elements, whereas only a flowery bower was needed in the perpetual summer of Paradise. Expelled from the luxurious abundance of the garden, this pair has had to work for "modest fields." Instead of the perpetual youth they might have enjoyed, they must experience old age, albeit filled with health and gratitude. To attain this regenerated world Max and Katie must first suffer trial and loss. The transforming power of sorrow awaits them outside the gates of Eden.

A Drama of Exile like *Malcolm's Katie* is written in blank verse interspersed with various lyrics. This was a favorite technique of Tennyson's and in itself proves nothing; but, in *A Drama of Exile*, interspersed among the dialogue between the central characters Lucifer, Adam and Eve, who correspond roughly to Alfred, Max and Katie, are the songs of various Eden and Earth spirits. Barrett Browning's decision to incorporate "organic and inorganic natures" (1034) into her poem provoked much criticism from her reviewers, but may well have given Crawford a model for the integration of the Indian material which she so skillfully employs to mark the passage of the seasons (Waterston 75). Like other poets before her, Crawford is careful to stress that the land Max pioneers is uninhabited waste,⁷ thus

incorporating the Indian presence in a mythopoeic rather than realistic fashion, with the exception of the "hald-breed lad" who helps Max in his labours (II.165). Hayden White describes the "fetishization" of the natives of the New World as evoking a sense of the magical, the extravagant and the libidinal, all elements which are present both in Crawford's Indian passages and Barrett Browning's Spirit songs. White indicates, however, that this "idolization" occurs "only *after* the conflict between the Europeans and the native had already been decided,"⁸ representing a desire for a way of life already passed into myth and no longer accessible.

In *A Drama of Exile* the Eden Spirits, whose songs haunt Adam and Eve with a sense of lost beauty, are represented in order by the Spirits of the Trees, River Spirits, a Bird Spirit, and Flower Spirits. This order corresponds almost exactly to the arrangement of the Indian passages in *Malcolm's Katie* which were "once thought to be gratuitous ornamentation"⁹ but have since attracted so much critical attention and praise.¹⁰ Of course, to argue for Barrett Browning's presence in these passages is not to deny the influence of Crawford's personal experience of nature during her years in Paisley and Lakefield (possibly under the capable tutelage of Catherine Parr Traill), and her imaginative ability to animate that world with myths local and universal. In addition, Crawford's poetry is suffused with an intense sensuality and richness of imagery which Barrett Browning's poetry attains to only after her marriage to Robert Browning.

The incidents Crawford describes in *Malcolm's Katie* operate in the realm of the actual, but also successfully incorporate larger mythic patterns. Midway through *A Drama of Exile*, Lucifer describes the natural world at the moment of the Fall:

On a mountain-peak
Half-sheathed in primal woods and glittering
In spasms of awful sunshine at that hour,
A lion couched, part raised upon his paws. . .
When the ended curse
Left silence in the world, right suddenly
He sprang up rampant and stood staring and stiff . . .
And roared so wild, and smote from all the hills
Such fast keen echoes crumbling down the vales
Precipitately, — that the forest beasts,
One after one, did mutter a response
Of savage and of sorrowful complaint
Which trailed along the gorges. Then, at once,
He fell back, and rolled crashing from the height
Into the dusk of pines. (1347-1366)

I quote this passage at length to demonstrate how Crawford successfully transposes the fall of the lion, the king of the forest, into Max's slaying of "The mossy king of all the woody tribes" (II.151). The tree responds to his axe with a "full, lion-throated roar" rousing "echoes" and "strange thunders" "Till the bare woodland bellow'd in its rage, / As the first-slain slow topp'd to his fall" (II.155, 158-59). Much attention has been paid to the complex ways in which the mythopoeic Indian passages relate to the surrounding action. One function they serve is similar to that of the songs of the spirits in *A Drama of Exile*; they remind the reader of the wild garden no longer available to the central characters of the poem. Crawford acknowledges the violence against the land necessary to the pioneering process, but not without regret.

Apparently oblivious to the destruction his axe has caused, Max's thoughts return to love:

For Love, once set within a lover's breast,
 Has its own Sun — its own peculiar sky,
 All one great daffodil — on which do lie
 The sun, the moon, the stars — all seen at once,
 And never setting; but all shining straight
 Into the faces of the trinity, —
 The one belov'd, the lover, and sweet Love!
 (II.184-90)

This "daffodil apocalypse" has been traced by D.M.R. Bentley to Tennyson's "Maud," and Dante's *La Vita Nuova*.¹¹ In a lyric in *A Drama of Exile* entitled "Song of the Morning Star to Lucifer," the morning star describes the experience of Love:

Stars, planets, suns, and moons dilated broad,
 Then flashed together into a single sun,
 And wound and wound in one:
 And as they wound I wound, — around, around,
 In a great fire I almost took for God. (862-867)

Max, like Adam before him, is fortified by love for the difficult passage from a horticultural to an agricultural way of life. Yet, Max is not alone "in these new days" (II. 193); many others have come, "smooth coated men, with eager eyes (II. 230). The anaphoric passage that describes the advent of technology has been interpreted as Crawford's critique of the machine age, but Crawford may well have been in favour of the progress that was transforming the wilderness into a bountiful garden. In her poem "Canada to England" she writes:

The times have won a change. Nature no more
 Lords it alone and binds the lonely land
 A serf to tongueless solitudes; but Nature's self
 Is led, glad captive, in light fetters rich
 As music-sounding silver can adorn;
 And man has forged them, and our silent God
 Behind His flaming worlds smiles on the deed.
 (CP 237)

This expansionist attitude also expressed by Max's "No slave beneath its pillars, but — a King!" (II. 164), echoes Adam's effort to subdue the Earth Spirits in *A Drama of Exile*: "I charge you into silence — trample you / Down to obedience. I am king of you!" (1722-724). When Adam is unsuccessful, a vision of Christ rebukes the spirits of nature on his behalf:

This regent and sublime Humanity,
 Though fallen, exceeds you! this shall film your sun
 Shall hunt your lightning to its lair of cloud,
 Turn back your rivers, footpath all your seas,
 Lay flat your forests [. . .] Nay without this law
 Of mandom, ye would perish, — beast by beast
 Devouring, — tree by tree, with strangling roots
 And trunks set tuskwise. [. . .] Therefore over you
 Receive man's sceptre! (1780-788)

Christ expands upon God's command to Adam and Eve to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28) by asserting that nature requires the ruling presence of man in order to

escape being "serf d by its own wealth" as is the "pulseless forest, lock'd and interlock'd" (II.32-34) in the South Wind passage. Thus, as Leslie Monkman points out, "Max is not simply cutting down trees as an ordinary pioneer. He is asserting a new order where, before his arrival, the forest was a prisoner of its own abundance" (134). Crawford was intimately aware of the stages of pioneer development through her moves from the backwoods settlement of Paisley, to the village of Lakefield, to the town of Peterborough, and finally to urban industrial Toronto; "Her history is Canada's history in microcosm."¹² Her later narrative, *Hugh and Ion*, suggests that she was aware not only of the triumphs of progress, but of its tragedies as well. The process of *Bildung* is one to which the land must submit, but it carries with it a measure of violence and grief just as the maturation of Katie and Max involves suffering and trial. Like Eve who begs forgiveness of the wailing earth spirits in *A Drama of Exile*, Crawford expresses regret for "the wail / Of the falling forests" (II.238-39) and couches her description of the bold violence of Max's axe in subtle irony. The inadequacy of Max's vision is reflected in "the black slope all bristling with burn'd stumps" that the women refer to as "Max's house" (II.252). They know it takes a woman's creative touch to transform man's destructive labour into a "home" (VII.3). In her discussion of the settlement of North America, Annette Kolodny suggests that men dream of raping the land, while women dream of nurturing it:

Massive exploitation and alteration of the continent do not seem to have been part of women's fantasies. They dreamed, more modestly, of locating a home and a familial human community within a cultivated garden.¹³

Barrett Browning's Eve seeks reconciliation with the natural world that suffers the consequences of the Fall: "let some tender peace, made of our pain, / Grow up betwixt us, as a tree might grow, With boughs on both sides!" (1308-09).

In *Malcolm's Katie*, the two aspects of the pioneering process, the destructive and the creative, are linked by the use of the word "smooth" to describe the garments of the men who come to crush, saw and grind, and the garment of Katie. She has blended "smooth urban ways" with the "healthy" vine of rustic life, resulting in a hybrid similar to the trees of Milton's Paradise that bear "Blossoms and Fruits at once" (IV.147-148). Apparently, no one has yet linked the passage describing Katie's education with the notorious "smooth-coated men" passage of Part Two, though the anaphoric structure is exactly parallel. While the men lay iron tracks across the land, Katie learns to plough a handsome furrow; while they build mills to "saw the great wide-arm'd trees," Katie learns to plant an orchard. Mary Joy Macdonald argues that Katie receives this "second potentially empowering education only by default"¹⁴ because Malcolm does not have a son. Nevertheless she does receive an education, not like Eve passively through her dreams or second-hand from her husband, but directly from the father; ironically, it is the father who receives messages in dreams. Gilbert and Gubar note that "one of the most dramatic emblems of Eve's alienation from the masculine garden in which she finds herself is her motherlessness" (*Madwoman in the Attic* 243), but Crawford inscribes the mother as a voice that speaks from beyond the grave to protect Katie's interests. Here in the Eden of Malcolm's making, Katie is still confined to the domestic sphere, but she is preparing for the hard life beyond the walls of innocence and ease. A symbol of this process is her "gay garden," but even here the garden breaks "on the peak'd roof" of Malcolm's grim stone house (III.19, 21). In *A Drama of Exile*, Eve fondly remembers her reign as queen of the garden:

Could I touch
A rose with my white hand, but it became
Redder at once? Could I walk leisurely
Along our swarded garden, but the grass
Tracked me with greenness? (1239-43)

But Katie must emerge from Eden into the adult world of passion and pain. Malcolm's desire for fences has been interpreted as a sign of his materialism, but the resemblance between his enclosures and "the verdurous wall of Paradise up sprung" (*PL* IV.143) prepares for the entrance of Alfred as a "Thief bent to unhoard the cash / Of some rich Burgher, whose substantial doors, / Cross-barr'd and bolted fast, fear no assault" (*PL* IV.185-88).

Several critics have noted how Alfred's language and behaviour resemble that of Milton's Satan, but Crawford's portrayal also bears a strong resemblance to Barrett Browning's Lucifer who confronts the lovers in exile; Eve's poignant response is: "Adam! hold / My right hand strongly! It is Lucifer — / And we have love to lose" (645-47). The seducer's presence only strengthens Eve's commitment to her first love; similarly, Alfred's wooing reinforces Katie's fidelity to Max. In her preface, Barrett Browning explains that she included Lucifer in her poem as "an extreme Adam to represent the ultimate tendencies of sin and loss, — that it might be strong to bear up the contrary Idea of the Heavenly love and purity" (viii), a notion that illuminates the relationship between Max and Alfred. Max's red birth mark is echoed in the red blood on Albert's forehead after his rescue; Lucifer, too, has a red mark as "God's sign that it bows not unto God" (83-85). All three are thus associated with Cain who first brought mortality into the world.

According to Macdonald, Alfred plays a positive role in making Katie strong, a role which Barrett Browning's Lucifer shares. Bentley describes Alfred as a "selfish but highly articulate and physically attractive nihilist" with "intellectual appeal" (xxviii). Lucifer also displays "energy, cleverness, and (what is all too rarely allowed to enter Elizabeth Barrett's earlier poetry) verbal irony, in a way that recalls Jacobean tragedy" ¹⁵ Lucifer stands "Most absolute in beauty" (756) and "hast one day worn a crown" (708) like Alfred who has "the jewels of some virtues set on his broad brow" (III.59). To Lucifer's question "Am I beautiful?" Eve is forced to admit: "Thou hast a glorious darkness" (751-752). But because Lucifer has lost "The essence of all beauty . . . Love" (777), he descends to nihilism and a belief that death is triumphant. ¹⁶ He adopts a policy of "scorning the past and damning the to-come" (74). The angel Gabriel tells Lucifer that he shall be:

an Idea to all souls
A monumental melancholy gloom
Seen down all the ages, whence to mark despair
And measure out the distances from good. (35-38)

When Lucifer and Adam confront each other in the wilderness, Lucifer mocks the simplicity of Adam's doctrine of love and faith:

Ha, my clay-king!
Thou wilt not rule by wisdom very long
The after generations. Earth, methinks,
Will disinherit thy philosophy
For a new doctrine suited to thine heirs
And class these present dogmas with the rest
of the old-world traditions, Eden fruits
And Saurian fossils. (731-738)

This, in brief, is the "subtle" argument with which Alfred confronts Max when the two are alone in the wintry woods. Though Alfred appears to be promoting egalitarian relationships, the possessiveness for which he criticized Max emerges the moment he believes Max is dead: "Now Katie, are you mine" (V.224). His "pangs for gold must needs be fed" (III.150), but he desires the treasure without the attendant labour. While Max is swinging an axe, Alfred is lounging by the river bank with a pipe and book; Max's relationship to the land makes him a

more worthy suitor than Alfred who hopes to acquire gold by stealth rather than honest labour. As Crawford reveals in her fairy tale "How the Nightingale and the Parrot Wooed the Rose," the suitor who acts "for the benefit of others" is the most worthy.¹⁷ Persistent evidence of Katie's faith in her choice drives Albert into the arms "of that cold mistress" Nothingness (V.152).

In contrast to Alfred's barren union with his "cold mistress," Max and Katie's relationship with Sorrow is a fruitful one. From that "Dark Matrix" their "light souls" emerge chastened and strong. Significantly, the language of the Invocation to Sorrow that opens Part VI is woven into the narrative of Max's rescue of Katie and Alfred which closes that section. These linguistic parallels suggest that Katie, rather than becoming "radically disempowered" (Macdonald 42), functions as a creative, if passive, "instrument" of change. Her tears and anguished wail associate her with Sorrow without whom the "Soul but lightly built / Of indeterminate spirit, like a mist / Would lapse into Chaos" (VI.9-11). Katie sees in Max's eyes "a larger soul / Than that light spirit that before she knew" (VI.132-33). Earlier, Katie had insisted to Alfred that "[Max] is true since I am faithful still" (V.131). This assertion is more than rhetoric on her part; she is insisting upon her role in the shaping of his spiritual strength. Just as "Sorrow, dark mother of the soul" is asked to "Arise," Katie is asked to "Arise" and see the change her faith has wrought in Max. After witnessing Max's victory over evil, Katie is "Close-clasp'd against his breast" (VI.168), just as Sorrow, the "Helper of the Universe," is "Close-clasp'd within the great Creative Hand" (VI. 18). This passive helping role is subordinate to the active Christ-like role of Max according to the hierarchy advocated by Victorian society where, "to have influence, the middle-class woman was urged to relinquish self-definition; she was urged to become identified by her services to others, in particular to men."¹⁸ In her preface to *Poems 1844* Barrett Browning elevates this role of self-abnegation: "if knowledge is power, suffering should be acceptable as a part of knowledge" (x). She insists that suffering is a source of knowledge and power to which those traditionally excluded from the educative process may have access. For a moment, Katie allows herself to forget the man who has taught her a painful lesson about the nature of evil, and remember only "the broad green earth" (VI.170) which symbolizes the creative force she personifies throughout the poem.

The final section of *Malcolm's Katie* opens with the possibility of new hope on the far side of Eden's gate. In *A Drama of Exile* Eve says: "Noble work / Shall hold me in the place of garden-rest" (1899-1900), but she is forced to admit that this fallen world includes the "pressures of an alien tyranny / With its dynastic reasons of larger bones / And stronger sinews" (1865-1867), a negative possibility echoed in the image of Max twisting "Katie's hair / About his naked arm" (VII.16-17). There is room, even here, for a positive interpretation. Max's arm which once "fell, wither'd in its strength" before the wintry forces of despair (IV. 173), is once again strong from his toil. In *Paradise Lost*, one of the gardening tasks of Adam and Eve is to lead "the Vine / To wed her Elm" that she may bring "Her dow'r th'adopted Clusters, to adorn / His barren leaves" (V.215-219). Earlier, Eve's hair is compared to the tendrils of the Vine (*PL* IV.307); Crawford may have conflated these two images to suggest conjugal intimacy, as they do elsewhere in her poetry, but the image is nonetheless still one of hierarchical dependence. Katie now looks "o'er the rich, fresh fields" (VII.5) like her father before her, but this is not, as Max would have it, paradise regained. The garden Max and Katie have struggled "hand in hand" to build is surrounded by "fleers from the waves of want" (VII. 38). At the close of *A Drama of Exile*, Christ admonishes Adam and Eve to "Live and love . . . that the smile of [their] heroic cheer may float / Above all floods of earthly agonies" (1995, 2001-2003). Eve receives her particular mandate from Adam:

Rise, woman, rise
To thy peculiar and best altitudes
Of doing good and of enduring ill,

Of comforting for ill, and teaching good,
And reconciling all that ill and good
Unto the patience of a constant hope . . . (1842-47)

She who has been reconciled must carry on the work of reconciliation. Katie's vision of a regenerated world resembles the new earth described by God to his Son in *Paradise Lost* (III.334-338), a world that can only be attained through sacrifice and reconciliation. Some readers have found Alfred's repentance and forgiveness at the end of *Malcolm's Katie* "some what abrupt and not artistically credible."¹⁹ In a *Drama of Exile*, Eve pardons Lucifer because she shares his exile. Adam is overwhelmed by anger, but Eve forgives Lucifer "as freely as the streams of Eden flowed" with the plea that he will not "seek / To harm [them] any more or scoff at [them]" (691, 694-95). Katie's child is named Alfred, a detail that ambiguously inscribes not only her forgiveness, but also Alfred's values into the discourse of the future.

The closing line of *Malcolm's Katie* has been the source of much critical controversy because it informs all that precedes it. Bentley suggests that Katie's assertion that "Adam had not Max's soul" (VII. 30) is flattery, but to prefer Adam is to deny the long process of *Bildung* which has transformed Max from "a light spirit" to an unselfish and noble man, and Katie's role in that process. A positive interpretation of Part VII finds Katie looking out upon fields that she may well have been instrumental in creating with the education she received from her father. She has become independent from Malcolm without alienating his love for her, so much so that he now relies on her. She has won the suitor of her choice and she speaks to the future through her son, as Eve does through her "seed." She appears whole, rather than in the bits and pieces through which the metonymical male imagination had hitherto perceived her. And she who once kept silent before the "thunder" of her father's voice is granted the last word.

However, the nature of that "last word" places a positive interpretation in doubt. Katie's closing "if I knew my mind!" imperfectly echoes Alfred's "If I know my mind" (III.51). The line could be interpreted ironically since the exclamation mark implies the same tone of condescension that marks the first exclamation in the poem, Max's "But womankind is wise!" (1.12), and since Katie alone remains true to her original intentions, though all three men in the "Love Story" attempt to sway her mind. Alfred believes his pangs of love for gold will be assuaged, if he knows his mind (III.150-51), but they are not. Max believes Katie's heart will be swayed by a wooer, but she remains constant. Malcolm believes Max to be a drone who "never will put honey in the hive" (V.85), but Max builds a farm large enough to accommodate all of Malcolm's herds. Katie alone sees her predictions fully realized. Yet, the hesitancy of her closing words suggests her inability to fully inscribe an egalitarian vision. The men in the poem inscribe themselves upon the world through poems and "potent" initials; Katie's mind is the shield in which Max's name is carved (III. 265-268):

Instead of being graphed by distinguished inscriptions,
women leave indistinguishable traces, natural
accretions like the "rings of a tree" whose very
presence attests to the absence of cultural identity.
(*No Man's Land* 238)

In *A Drama of Exile* "Eve has to accept a woman's part and replace the lost maternal Eden by becoming a mother herself" (Mermin 88). Adam tells Eve:

A child's kiss
Set on thy sighing lips shall make thee glad;
A poor man served by thee shall made thee rich;
A sick man helped by thee shall make thee strong;

Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense
Of service which thou renderest. (1869-74)

These are also Katie's rewards for bearing a little son, loving Max in the days of his poverty, tending an injured Alfred, and serving her aging father. Because of her sacrificial participation in the process of life the "wild woods and plains are fairer far / Than Eden's self" (VII. 31 - 32). Katie's assertion that the wild woods are "bounteous mothers" who beckon "pale starvelings with their fresh, green hands" (VII.32) echoes the closing song of the Earth Spirits who encourage Adam and Eve not to "tremble when surrounded / By our forest pine:"

Ye shall find us tender nurses
To your weariness of nature,
And our hands shall stroke the curse's
Dreary furrows from the creature,
Till your bodies shall lie smooth in death
and straight and slumberful. (2044-49)

Eve's first words in *A Drama of Exile* are ones of despair; the poem is the story of her progress back to hope. Katie's first words are ones of hope. Looking at the ring Max has given her on which are carved their intertwined initials, Katie notes that he has "run the lines in such a way / That M. is part of K., and K. of M.," (I.6-7). Crawford also desired to "run the lines" of her poem in such a way that a portrait of an equal and interdependent partnership would emerge, but "few pioneer women actually encountered such idealized configurations as daily reality" (Kolodny 176), and Crawford's poetic sincerity does not allow her to deny the reality that surrounded her. Though she insists with Elizabeth Barrett Browning that "Exiled is not lost" (2258), she admits that her world is fallen one. Like Adam in *A Drama of Exile*, she "bless[es]" her characters not only "to the memory of Edenic joys," but also to their contraries, "the desert and the thorns" (1892).

Notes

1. Elizabeth Waterston, "Crawford, Tennyson and the Domestic Idyll." *The Isabella Valancy Crawford Symposium*, ed. Frank Tierney (Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1979) 66. [\[back\]](#)
2. The *National Union Catalogue* reveals that over fifty editions of Barrett Browning's collected poetry containing *A Drama of Exile* (the poem that is the focus of this essay) were published between 1844 when the poem first appeared and 1884 when *Malcolm's Katie* was published. Over half of these were published in the United States and an article entitled "The Death of Mrs. Barrett Browning" in the *Toronto Daily Globe* (July 22, 1861) confirms that her popularity extended north of the border into Canada: "The publication in 1850 of her collected poems in two volumes, gave a great impetus to her reputation, and obtained very general knowledge of her title to rank, in many points of view, as the first female poet of the age." [\[back\]](#)
3. *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Frederic G. Kenyon, 4th ed. 2 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, 1898) 1:232. [\[back\]](#)
4. References to *A Drama of Exile* from *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Boston: Houghton Muffin, 1974) pp. 67-89, will be cited by line number. Elizabeth Barrett's "Preface" to *Poems of 1844* (rpt; London: Routledge, 1891) will be cited by page number. References to *Malcolm's Katie: A Love Story* are to D.M.R. Bentley's edition (London, Ont.: Canadian Poetry P, 1987). [\[back\]](#)

5. Sandra M. Gilbert, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1979) 187. I will also be referring to Gilbert and Gubar's *No Man's Land: Volume 1, The War of the Words* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1988). Subsequent references to both works will appear in the text. [\[back\]](#)
6. Phyllis Trible, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread." *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979) 79. [\[back\]](#)
7. Leslie Monkman makes this point in *A Native Heritage* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1981)133. [\[back\]](#)
8. Hayden White, "The Noble Savage as Fetish." *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1978) 184, 186. [\[back\]](#)
9. Frank Bessai, "The Ambivalence of Love in the Poetry of Isabella Valancy Crawford," *Queen's Quarterly* 77 (Winter 1970): 416. [\[back\]](#)
10. The South Wind passage that opens Part II largely concerns "The pulseless forest "In Barrett Browning the trees of Eden are "still throbbing in vibration" from the voice of God:

Which divine impulsion cleaves
 In dim movement to the leaves
 Dropt and lifted, dropt and lifted
 In the sunlight greenly sifted,—
 In the sunlight and the moonlight
 Greenly sifted through the trees. (285-290)

Barrett Browning's poetic skill is here inferior to Crawford's, but the subject and the mood are similar. The next Indian passage, which begins Part IV, tells how the North wind "with his ice-club beat the swelling crests / Of the deep watercourses into death" (IV. 4-5). In *A Drama of Exile*, the River Spirits remind Adam and Eve: "How the silence round you shivers, / While our voices through it go, / Cold and clear" (305-307), but the river-sounds become inaudible, as they "Expire at Eden's door" (324). Crawford begins the next non-narrative section with a description of an eagle waiting to strike down a "pale dove beside her nest" (V.16). In Barrett Browning the Bird Spirit speaks of "The poor brown bird, alas" that "Sings in the garden, sweet and true" (339, 340) but will soon be silenced. The Song of the Flower Spirits corresponds to the song of the "Forget-me-not" which Katie sings in Part V with its emphasis on nostalgia:

We are spirit-aromas
 Of blossom and bloom.
 We call your thoughts home, — as
 Ye breathe our perfume. (359-62)

Later in *A Drama of Exile* two Spirits, one "the spirit of the harmless earth" (1053), and the other "the spirit of the harmless beasts," (1067) confront Adam and Eve with the losses they have suffered through the Fall and the harsh seasons that accompanied it, seasons, which according to Milton, were a direct result of the Fall: "else had the Spring / Perpetual smil'd on Earth (*PL* X.678-79). Two examples from the songs of the Earth Spirits suggest how these passages may have influenced Crawford:

I bounded with my panthers . . .

My stag, the river at his fetlocks, poised
Then dipped his antlers through the golden weather.
(*A Drama of Exile* 1092, 1094-95)

As panthers stretch to try their velvet limbs . . .
The warrior stags, with does and tripping fawns,
Like shadows, black upon the throbbing mist
Of Evening's rose, flash'd thro' the singing woods —
(*Malcolm's Katie* II.13, 80-82)

My roses on the bough did bud not pale,
My rivers did not loiter in the sun;
I was obedient. Wherefore in my centre
Do I thrill at this curse of death and winter?
(*A Drama of Exile* 1129-32)

— its deep and dusky heart,
In a deep trance of shadow, felt no throb
To such soft wooing answer: thro' its dream
Brown rivers of deep waters sunless stole . . .
In this shrill Moon the scouts of Winter ran . . .
(*Malcolm's Katie* II. 41-44, 50). [\[back\]](#)

11. James Reaney first described this scene as a "daffodil apocalypse" in his article on Crawford in *Our Living Tradition*, 2nd and 3rd Series (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1959) 276. Bentley's comments are from the "Explanatory Notes" of his edition of *Malcolm's Katie*. [\[back\]](#)
12. Dorothy Farmiloe, *Isabella Valancy Crawford: The Life and the Legends* (Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1983) xv. [\[back\]](#)
13. Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984) xiii. [\[back\]](#)
14. Mary Joy Macdonald, "Inglorious Battles: People and Power in Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie*," *Canadian Poetry*, 23 (Fall/Winter 1988) 32. [\[back\]](#)
15. Dorothy Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989) 88. [\[back\]](#)
16. For a discussion of Alfred's nihilism see David S. West, "*Malcolm's Katie*: Alfred as Nihilist not Rapist," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 3 (Winter 1978) 137-141. [\[back\]](#)
17. *Selected Stories of Isabella Valancy Crawford*, ed. Penny Petrone (Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1987) 34. [\[back\]](#)
18. Judith Lowder Newton, *Women, Power and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction 1778-1860*. (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1981) 4. [\[back\]](#)
19. Kenneth Rader, "Patterns of Meaning: Isabella Crawford's 'Malcolm's Katie'," *Dalhousie Review* 57 (Summer 1977) 331. [\[back\]](#)