Isabella Valancy Crawford's Poetic Technique

Robert Alan Burns

Among the critics who claim to have sensed a quality of modernity in Isabella Crawford's verse, John Ower and Frank Bessai have been the most specific in identifying what they mean by the term "modern." Ower detects in "The Canoe" a "subtle sense of paradox and a skilful use of irony which make the poem seem surprisingly modern," while Bessai sees in Crawford's best lyrics the work of a naive, original genius whose manner exhibits a quality of "felt thought" through which she is able "to transcend the poetics of the Victorians [and] invent for herself a modern idiom."[1] Interestingly, Bessai uses the same critical vocabulary applied by T.S. Eliot to the metaphysical poets, especially Donne, in whose ingeniousy elaborated metaphors Eliot discovers "a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling."[2]

Although it is a critical commonplace that the modern poetic idiom owes more to the seventeenth century than to the intervening two hundred years, Bessai prefers to disregard a possible direct influence upon Crawford by the metaphysical poets in favor of the theory that Crawford's creative genius allowed her to achieve or rather "invent" a modern idiom, a feat that seems little short of preternatural for a poet whose work many critics see as flawed and derivative. To my mind, if there is modernity in Crawford's verse, she came to it as did Browning—whose dramatic monologues influenced her own—by way of the Donne tradition, the influence of which is clearly shown in Crawford's poem "Love, Stay For Me," published in the Toronto *Evening Telegram* on July 30, 1883.

The first stanza introduces an overheard conversation among mourners at the beloved's funeral, a device recalling the

1 See John B. Ower, "Isabella Valancy Crawford: 'The Canoe'," *Canadian Literature* 34 (1967): 62, and Frank Bessai, "The Ambivalence of Love in the Poetry Isabella Valancy Crawford," *Queen's Quarterly* 77 (1970): 406.

2 T.S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* 2, ed. M.H. Abrams, et al. (New York: Norton, 1968) 1818.

mild passing of virtuous men in Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." Crawford employs the device to contrast dramatically the cant of the whispering mourners with the passion of the bereft lover.

> They whisper "Lo! how lovely she lies dead!
> Death only, like some misty bridal veil,
> Makes her dear face a little strange and pale:
> God rest her tender soul!" I hear, but I
> Cleave their soft whispers with a winged cry
> Cast up the steeps to thee:
> Love, stay for me.

In the second stanza, Crawford uses the imagery of metalworking to develop a metaphor for the strength of love:

> Turn, turn thee on the threshold of the spheres
> Lean down and clasp my hand, O, not with tears;
> I clamour to thee! Love welds iron bands—
> Steel knots, the sinews in my soul's stretched hands
> Nor will my strong clasp wholly let thee go . . . .

While "iron bands" and "steel knots" may seem to bear little resemblance to "gold to airy thinness beat," the function of Crawford's metaphor is similar to that of Donne's simile in that Crawford uses worked metal to suggest the connective power of love, enduring, in this case, past death. Crawford's spheres do not trepidate, but there is considerable interplay of loving souls in stanza four, recalling more than one of Donne's profane and sacred lyrics:

> Thou can'st not choose but stay, my soul is thine,
> In its chief part of love thy soul is mine.
> Each was a God and built the other's heart.
> Each rear'd the other's grand, diviner, part.
> I gave thee love—the blood that builds the soul
> Thou gav'st me, love—let souls outward roll,
> Gloss'd bubbles on the sea
> Of far eternity . . . .

Admittedly, the parallelism of the third and fourth lines seems to lack the usual compression of the metaphysical lyric, but the word-play in lines five and six is clearly typical of what appear to be the seventeenth-century origins of Crawford's poem. In the final stanza, Crawford completes her metaphorical array with a starkly powerful conceit:

> Love, stay for me—
> While drop the lingering years as raindrops crash
> From the dark cloud scarr'd with the lightening's flash,
> When falls the last, the cloud is gone . . . .

However closely Crawford may have read the metaphysical poets, she did not develop her remarkably original imagination by mere imitation. Her metaphorical style represents a synthesis of lyrical ability, eroticism, a tendency to personify, and the use of verbs to generate images. The result is an ability to evoke the features of the natural landscape in the imagery of living flesh and blood, tense with erotic energy. First published on October 9, 1883, "Song of the Arrow" displays in its initial stanza Crawford's skill in metaphoric compression:

> What know I
> As I bite the blue veins of the throbbing sky
> To the quarry's breast,
> Hot from the sides of the sleek, smooth nest?

Here, both arrow and eagle seem thrust through a living, pulsating medium, energized by the releases of a bowstring and the heat from "the sides of the sleek, smooth nest." All is animate—arrow, sky, breast, and nest—and all participates in the inevitable, fatal conjunction of missile and bird. Crawford enhanced the erotic suggestiveness of the "sleek, smooth nest" when she later incorporated "Song of the Arrow" into "Gisli, the Chieftain," where the eagle represents the newly betrayed husband of Brynhild, slain by Gisli's spear. Disburdened of the lines added to adapt it to the longer poem, "Song of the Arrow" stands as a technical *tour de force,* precisely syllabic, utilizing exactly the same end rhymes in three of its four stanzas.

In a sequential examination of her verse, beginning with her earliest unpublished lyric and continuing through the poems she published in newspapers, the following discussion sets forth an argument that for Crawford poetry was more a matter of craftsmanship learned over many years than a product of inspired but naive genius.

I

The earliest of Crawford's known poems is a brief lyric incorporated into a fairy tale called "The Waterlily," written while the poet was a teenager living with her family in Lakefield. The poem is sung as a dialogue between a helpful naiad and a chorus

of water-spirits, or "voices," as the naiad attempts to assist the fairy Goldenball in his search for a kidnapped fairy princess.[3] The naiad's quatrain contains alternating lines of seven/five and eight/six syllables:

> "Voices! murm'ring voices, rise
> "From the waves and say
> "If aught ye know of Crystalcoat
> "And her he stole away!"

The reply of the water-spirit chorus is longer and more syllabically regular:

> "On the lake a lily lies
> "Glimmering in the silver ray,
> "In its bosom pearly white,
> "Sad and lonely dwells the Fay.
> "Sprite, nor Fay, nor Elfin band
> "E'er can break the potent spell
> "Yet a mortal has the power!
> "This is all that we may tell."

If the schwas in *glimmering* and *power* were elided as is the one in *murm'ring* in the naiad's quatrain, each of these eight lines would contain exactly seven syllables, suggesting that, while the poet may not have consciously counted the syllables, she could well have grown up reading French verse, the syllabic character of which probably would have conditioned her ear.

Given this syllabic regularity, it is not surprising to discover that among the earliest and most important of the poetic forms that influenced Crawford's development as a lyric poet were the traditional English lyric and the French *chanson populaire.* Crawford's early celebrations of love, the seasons, innocence, and youth recall the great practitioners of English song from the "makers" of *Tottel's Miscellany* through masters such as Shakespeare, Jonson, Herrick, Burns, Blake, and Tennyson. From the beginning, her work is marked by elaborate musical effects, numerous rhyming patterns, and considerable prosodic variety. She executes with equal facility the paired, unrhymed amphibrachs of "March" and the perfect fourteeners in "A Fragment."[4]

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3 Lorne Pierce Collection, Ms., Queen's University Archives, Kingston, Ontario.

4 Toronto *Evening Telegram,* 19 March, 4 June, 1881.

Crawford's accomplishment in the development of sound values in her earliest lyric poems is best and most appropriately illustrated in "The Inspiration of Song," her allegory on the creative process in poetry.[5] The poem is made up of eight stanzas of eight decasyllabic lines. Each octave is composed of paired quatrains, the alternating rhymes of which sometimes reverbrate in the subsequent lines, creating an interlocking effect similar to that of *terza rima.* There is surprising frequency of approximate rhyme in the poem, and occasionally alternate lines are left unrhymed altogether. This modulation of end-rhyme is further complicated by Crawford's use of enjambment, softening the tendency of the final beat of the line to fall on the rhyming syllable. Close examination further reveals complicated patterns of assonance expanded contrapuntally throughout a given quatrain or octave, as, for instance, in the first quatrain of the fourth stanza:

> Whiter than whitest dove her flowing robe
> Of precious samite, and the border round
> Glow'd with all the rarest gems of every hue;
> And at her feet, crouch'd on the pearly ground . . . .

In the first line, two significant vowel sounds are introduced and repeated, the diphthong *i* in *whiter* and *whitest* and the long *o* in *flowing robe.* The *i* is repeated in *samite* in the following line, where the *o* is modulated to the shorter vowel of *border,* which is re-expanded in *glowed* at the beginning of line three. A third assonating element, the *ou* of *round* is brought in at the end of line two, shortened to *crouched* in the last line, and repeated in *ground,* the final rhyme of the quatrain. These are the major assonating elements in the quatrain, repeated and modulated in contrapuntal progression: aa bb/ aBc/ b/Cc. Interwoven with this pattern are the less obtrusive reverberations of the *a* in *than, samite* and *and* the shorter *o* in *dove* and *of* and the short *e* of *whitest, precious, gems,* and *every.*

Finally, it should be noted that, with only one or two exceptions, there are exactly ten syllables per line in "The Inspiration of Song," a technical feat again suggesting familiarity with the precision of French models. The skill with which Crawford executed "The Inspiration of Song" indicated that while the poem may have been one of her first published, it was probably the product of a craft learned over years of practice.

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[5] *The Favorite,* 15 February 1873.

The lyrics published in *The National* from 1876 to 1879 reveal a diversification of subject and technique with an abiding concern for syllabic exactitude. In "Filigrane!" for instance, Crawford employs ten-line stanzas rhyming ababcdcdee in which she alternates six and seven syllable lines.[6] "The Death of a Queen" features quatrains alternating ten with six-syllable verses.[7] While the precise "numbers" of these two poems may suggest as much of Jonson and Herrick as they do of the French, more direct evidence of French influence, notably that of Pierre-Jean de Béranger, may be found in "Roger Bontemps" and "La Blanchisseuse." Roger Bontemps was the given name of Roger de Collerye, a sixteenth-century French poet who sought the company of vagabonds and cultivated the temperament of a bon vivant. According to the *Grand Larousse*, "Béranger l'a popularisé par son surnom de Roger Bontemps, qui désigne aujourd'hui un homme de caractère jovial et insoucient."[8] Béranger, an immensely popular poet and song-writer whose *Oeuvres complètes* were published in Paris in 1834, was at best a mediocre talent, whose reputation resulted from his appeal to the popular imagination during the revolutionary period spanning the first third of the nineteenth century. His songs and poems range from political and anticlerical satire to humourous, off-color love-lyrics and drinking songs, always sympathetic to impoverished common man and his vulnerability to abuse by the wealthy and powerful.

Béranger's poems present a variety of verse patterns and stanza structures, often, like Crawford's, employing a lyric refrain. In the work of both poets, the refrain may vary from a single, exclamatory word to several lines. Béranger's Roger Bontemps is a very different character from Crawford's however.[9] Béranger sets before his reader a lovable ne'er-do-well, as whimsically arrayed as Leonard Cohen's Suzanne, displaying a temperament reminiscent of Falstaff *sans tromperie:*

Du Chapeau de son père,
Coiffé dans les grands jours
De rose ou de lierre
Le rajeunir toujours;
Mettre un manteau de bure
Viel ami de vingt ans;

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6 26 September 1878.

7 10 October 1878.

8 "Collerye, Roger de," *Grand Larousse Encyclopedique*, 1960.

9 "Roger Bontemps," *Oeuvres Complètes* ts. 1: 18-20.

Eh gai! c'est la parure
De gros Roger Bontemps. (18)

Bontemps' living quarters are as nondescript as his habilments:

Posséder dans sa hutte
Une table, un vieux lit,
Des cartes, une flûte,
Un broc que Dieu remplit
Un portrait de maîtresse,
Un coffre et rien dedans;
Eh gai! c'est la richesse
De gros Roger Bontemps. (19)

His amusements reflect appropriate simplicity and humility:

Faute de vin d'élite,
Sabler ceux du canton;
Préférer Marguerite
Aux dames du grand ton;
De joie et de tendresse
Remplir tous ses instants;
Eh gai! c'est la sagesse
De gros Roger Bontemps. (20)

Crawford's Roger more closely resembles Falstaff the rogue. He is the lazy and unscrupulous owner of a vineyard and a mill, with neither the industry to crush his grapes into wine, nor the inclination to grind the wheat of his waiting customers.[10]

"Pouf!" cries he, "why let it be;
  Vintage time is care and pother:
Wine I'll sip, with smacking lip,
  Host Pierrot is my sworn brother!"

In reply to complaints from his neighbors to "Mend thy sails," Roger proffers a similar rebuff:

"Pouf!" cries he, "why let them be;
  Other grain I have a-grinding.
Widow Claire is rich and fair
  There is silver for the finding."

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[10] Crawford, "Roger Bontemps," *The National,* 13 March 1879: 5.

Even though this cynical fortune-hunter may bear little resemblence to his French prototype, structural similarities between the poems suggest that Crawford was familiar with Béranger's poem. While Béranger's eight-line stanzas are four lines shorter than Crawford's, both poets use stanzas made up of quatrains, two in the French to three in the English. Béranger's lines vary from six to seven syllables, Crawford's from seven to eight. Both poems employ exclamatory refrain elements, "Eh gai!" and "'Pouf!' cries he."

The principal differences between the poems reside in their comparative levels of literary quality. Béranger's poem is a sentimental appeal to the anti-bourgeois attitudes of the common people, "pour exemple donné . . . aux gens atrabilaire . . . les mécontents" (18). Crawford's Roger is a scoundrel, a character realized dramatically for the purpose of irony and satire. Crawford's poem, though shorter, is richer in detail and incident, more oblique in effect. It is likely that Crawford had her puritanical upper-Canadian audience in mind when she chose to present Roger as a slothful and unscrupulous rather than as amiably "jovial et insouciant." Moreover, Crawford was careful to purge the original of risqué elements, which although likely to amuse a cosmopolitan Parisian audience, would horrify the Canadian newspaper-reading public of the 1870's:

Aux enfants de la ville
Montrer de petits jeux;
Entre un faiseur habile
de contes graveleux . . . . (19)

Similarly, Crawford presents in "La Blanchisseuse" a scrubbed and starched version of Béranger's Margot:

Margaton's a shapely maid;
Laughter haunts her large, soft eye;
When she trips by vineyard shade
Trips the shade with her, say I.[11]

Here is Béranger's original:

Chantons Margot, nos amours,
Margot leste et bien tournée

[11] John W. Garvin, ed., *Collected Poems of Isabella Valancy Crawford* (1905; rpt. with an additional intro. by James Reaney, Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1972) 41-43.

> *Que l'on peut baiser toujours*
> *Qui toujours est chiffonée . . .*[12]

Béranger is certainly less fastidious than Crawford in describing Margot's charms, but there is more than an echo of "Margot leste est bien tournée" in "Margoton's a shapely maid." In both poems, the quatrains are composed of seven-syllable verses. Further influence of Béranger on Crawford may be detected by comparing the ten-line stanzas of Crawford's "La Bouquetiére" [sic] with those of Béranger's "La Bouquetière et Le Croque-Mort."[13]

Crawford is neither a translator nor an adaptor of Béranger. She is an original poet, utilizing the French sources of her lyric poems as she would later handle the French source of "Malcolm's Katie." The source may suggest a subject, a theme, a verse form, a plot, or the outline of a character; but once the process of synthesis has absorbed and transmuted the parent material, the result is a new, and wholly original, work of art.

II

Among the diverse influences revealed in the *The National* group, "The New Shoes O' Protection" and "I'll Laugh to See the Year In" echo the satirical and lyric manners of Burns, while "The Farmer's Daughter Cherry" is Crawford's first contribution to humorous North American dialect poetry of the sort popularized by John Hay, James Whitcomb Riley, and Bret Harte.[14] Crawford wrote six poems in rural dialect between 1878 and 1882, four of which—"How Deacon Fry Bought a 'Duchess'," "Farmer Downs Changes his Opinion of Nature," "The Deacon and His Daughter," and "Old Spense"—appeared in the eleven-month period between October, 1879 and September, 1880. These poems vary in length from 90 to 350 lines and indicate what was, at least temporarily, an area of considerable interest to the poet, important enough to her to include all six dialect poems in *Old Spookses' Pass, Malcolm's Katie and Other Poems,* published two years after the last of them, "Some of Farmer Stebbin's Opinions," had appeared.

As their titles suggest, Crawford's North American dialect poems are written about farmers and country clergymen who

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12 Béranger, *Oeuvres Complètes* ts. 1: 281.

13 Béranger, ts. 2: 98-100.

14 28 November 1878; 29 December 1877; 5 September 1878, repectively.

display varying levels of shrewdness, practicality, compassion, piety, ignorance, narrow-mindedness, self-righteousness, and hypocrisy. Crawford's farmers divide roughly along the lines of ignorant and superstitious on one side, over against shrewd and practical on the other. In "The Farmer's Daughter Cherry," dull but hard-working Farmer Brown is outwitted by his daughter so that she may marry the schoolmaster from town. Similarly, but less good-humoredly, Farmer Downs is foiled in his ambition to marry his daughter to a wealthy but elderly neighbor. Presenting himself as "one as respecks Natur's laws," Farmer Downs fails to grasp the relationship between "skyentific papers" and the natural phenomena they explain.[15] His unwillingness to see the value in practices such as "crop ratotations" ironically discloses his ignorance, rather than his understanding, of nature. Ignorance, fueled by greed, explodes into fury when his daughter prefers a man of her own age to the squire of seventy-five. With characteristic illogic, Farmer Downs feels that "Natur'" has betrayed him, and so he vows to abandon her and "run the farm by skyence papers."

"Old Spense" provides a new variation on the old motif of the farmer's daughter and the traveling salesman. In this case, the salesman is a lightening-rod agent, a dealer in faulty goods whose covert amorous activities earn him a bath of Spense's fresh cream. The persona in "Old Spense" is a jealous neighbor who describes Spense with grudging admiration as one whose "place was grand,/ With not a stump upon it" and as "one of them chaps . . . that set/ A mighty store on muscle."[16] Not only is Spense hard-working and shrewd, he is compassionate as well:

> . . . his heart
> Wus builded sort of spacious
> An' solid—ev'ry beam an' plank . . . (89)

In short, Spense is a success, both in his family and in his business, a prototype of Malcolm Graeme on a less ostentatious scale. When the parson corners Spense to cross-examine him on his faith, the farmer shows through his actions that his charity is geniune and natural, while the preacher's own sense of religious duty is inspired by sudden appearance of a "caliker sun bonnet."

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15 *Old Spookses' Pass, Malcolm's Katies and Other Poems* (Toronto: Thomas Bain, 1884) 121.

16 *Old Pookses' Pass* 88-89.

Even more poignantly than Spense, Farmer Stebbin shames the self-righteous parson by his eloquent description of the simple beauties in the natural setting of his strenuous daily labor:

> His back is stiff from six days' toil—
> So God takes hold an' preaches,
> In boughs ov rustlin' maple an'
> In whisperin' leaves ov beaches . . .
>
> Let up a mite this day on toil
> 'Tain't made for holy bustle . . .
>
> Let them old sorrels jog along
> With mighty slack-like traces,
> Half dreamin' es my sunbeams fleck
> Their venerable faces . . .
>
> Jest let 'em laze a spell whar thick
> My lily-buds air blowing'
> An' whar my trees cast shadders on
> My silver creeklet flowin' . . . . (175-6)

Throughout her sequence of rural dialect poems, Crawford juxtaposes the cant and hypocrisy of institutional religion with the natural decency and simple reverence of country folk. One of the least attractive of Crawford's country clergymen is a miserly Deacon Fry, "the boss," says the narrative persona, "of all the 'tarnal set that clutches/ Their dollars firm" (214). "How Deacon Fry Bought a 'Duchess'" is the briefest of Crawford's rural dialect poems, an elaborate joke that turns on the simple irony that the greedy, vainglorious deacon is fatuous enough to pay five hundred dollars for a cow he believes to be purebred. The "Duchess" turns out to be his neighbor's stolen bossie.

Crawford's clergymen are not altogether contemptible, however. The deacon in "The Deacon and His Daughter" represents a comic mixture of conservative piety and practical common sense, eschewing with equal alacrity newfangled ideas in religion and agriculture:

> He did not hold creosote,
> Or new plans of salvation;
> He said that "Works would show the man,
> The smoke-house tell upon the ham!" (178)

Even as she ridicules him, Crawford gives the deacon admirable qualities such as his willingness to work hard and his devotion

to his family. At circus time, he takes his children to see the enviable clown and shows his own naivete in not being able to tell zebras fron painted donkeys. However, there is one area of the animal kingdom where the deacon depends on faith to help him make distinctions:

> Am' when he gave the boys a dime
> For cakes to feed the monkeys,
> He never thought, in any shape,
> He has descended from an ape! (178)

The deacon's anti-Darwinism provides Crawford with further naturally selected grist for her satirical mill:

> And when he saw some shallow-pate,
> With smallest brain possession,
> He uttered no filosofy
> On Nature's retrogression
> To ancient types, by Darwin's rule,
> He simply said, "Wal, darn a fool!" (179)

Here, as earlier in "The New Shoes O' Protection," Crawford attempts to make satirical use of Darwin without really taking a position on evolution. The deacon is the butt of her wit, and if the deacon is incapable of distinguishing zebras from donkeys, the reader should not expect him to be able to tell a figurative shallow-pate from a literal one. "Wal, darn a fool!" may apply as well to deacon as to dunce.

Taken as a whole, Crawford's North American dialect poetry succeeds more as straightforward humorous narrative than as satire. A successful satirist deals in types; Crawford's imagination produces individualized characters, replete with contradictions and incongruities. It is precisely in this mixture of the contemptible with the admirable, stirred by the warm good humor of country dialect, that Crawford's satire of rural provincialism dissolves. Only when she abandons dialect altogether is her satire really successful.

In the last of her "deacon" poems, "The Deacon's Fate," Crawford's rural dialect yields place to a voice of sophistication and wit.[17] In seventeen quatrains of modulated iambic tetrameter, the small-town concert-band, the building fund, boosterism, and religion as an expression of community spirit in turn receive their share of Crawford's mockery.

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[17] Toronto *Evening Telegram*, 13 October 1881.

The pious influence of the age,
We owe no more to cell and cloister;
But in the place of doctors sage
We have the strawberry and oyster!

The milk for babes give way to cream,
O'er blushing berry thinly driven;
Ten cents a plate—delicious scheme!
To eat ourselves a road to heaven.

A country deacon, a "very Jar of Grace," has come to town to make the necessary preparations to marry the ineveitable Miss Brown. On his wide-eyed tour of the village precincts, he notices a poster announcing an ice cream festival, complete with musical entertainment, to benefit the building fund of a local church:

The great bass, Toots, "The Storm" will sing
And eke "Sweet Bye and Bye,"
Selections from great Offenbach,
Our own town band will try.

Martyred to the building fund "from pious over-eating," the deacon is shipped home in a coffin shaped like a packing crate. A grateful congregation makes the appropriate commemorative gesture:

And in the church he died to build,
The admiring people pinn'd, oh,
His name to pious Fame's sad skirt
In a grand memorial window!

"The Deacon's Fate" is a witty, short satirical piece, revealing an urbane, mildly Horatian turn of mind, reminiscent of Sara Jeannette Duncan's. The success of the satire in the poem may be attributed to the quality of amused detachment in the narrative voice, allowing for good-humored but pointed ridicule of values and conventions not honored by the sophisticated persona. A more ambitious satirical undertaking had been published less than two months earlier, a *tour de force* utilizing the metrics of the most bourgeois of poets to traduce one of the most sacrosanct of bourgeois rituals.[18]

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow made exactly two contributions to the accomplishment of Isabella Valancy Crawford, both

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[18] "A Wooing," Toronto *Evening Telegram*, 20 August 1881.

of them from "The Song of Hiawatha." First, Crawford used Longfellow's Ojibway glossary in "The Wooing of Gheezis" and "Malcolm's Katie." Second, she turned to ingeniously satirical effect a portion of the absurdly stilted metre of Longfellow's "Indian edda."

> Daughter of the House of Jackson,
> Maiden of the amber chignon,
> Damsel of the graceful tie-back,
> Virgin of the flatly ulster,
> May I lay my heart before thee?
> May I show my bank-book to thee?
> May I, can I, dare to woo thee?

The parallel treatment of the heart and bank-book present love and commerce on equal terms, allowing the cynically pragmatic values of the marketplace to debase the traditionally exalted status of courtship. The levelling effect of this ironic juxtaposition is reinforced by the regularity of the metre:

> In the woodland's dim recesses,
> Shine the blue eyes of the violets,
> Like thine eyes of azure pensive.
> In the dim and lone recesses
> Of a bank, the very safest,
> Lie my bonds and lurk my coupons;
> Shine my dollars like to Hesper . . . .

The terms of the marriage agreement assume epic dimensions as Crawford displays her skill in the conventions of mock-heroic verse:

> Maiden, all the stars of the evening,
> Are the hoof-prints of the horses,
> Horses which have whirl'd the red sun
> All day across the heavens.
> Maiden, thro' the parks and gay streets,
> I will drive two spanking trotters,
> Curried, burnished like the clear pools,
> And their bits shall be of silver,
> Silver, not electro-plate . . . .

Within the framework of metrical regularity, Crawford is able to time her satirical thrusts for optimal comic effect, lampooning the gamut of middle-class pretensions to gentility and reducing the courtship ritual to a species of bribery:

Daughter of esteem'd old Jackson,
Maiden of the pencill'd eyebrow,
Damsel of the songs of Schumann
Virgin of the notes of Thalberg;
I have just foreclos'd a mortgage,
Mortgage on a beauteous mansion,
Builded with a hot-air furnace . . . .

The suitor's final offer reflects his desperation and the level to which he will abase himself to achieve his object. There is a clear implication that such degradation is a *sine qua non* of the marketplace, and so debasement of the courtship ritual is taken as a natural course of events by lady and suitor alike:

On thy silver thread of laughter,
I will string rare, shining di'monds,
I will hang the moonlit pearls,
And my heart shall bleed in rubies.
I will make a large insurance
On my life and on my mansion;
I will seek a larger interest
For my dollars Hesper-shining,
Be more sure about my coupons,
Grub more closely in the gold dust . . . .

Whereas Crawford usually attacks commerce as a personified abstraction draped in a "robe of cheatery and shame," in "A Wooing," she specifically characterizes businessmen and their practices as contemptible and degrading to traditional patterns of human relationship. The word *traditional* is important here. Successful satire implies a standard against which that which is ridiculed is measured and found wanting. In the eighteenth century, satire among whigs and tories alike argued a conservative standard, and it is such a conservative assumption that underlies the success of "A Wooing." Just as Crawford's compassion for the poor was probably motivated both by a sense of *noblesse oblige* and her own direct experience of poverty, so was her criticism of commerce at once revolutionary and reactionary. While Crawford found commerce reprehensible for the role it played in the oppression of the poverty-stricken, she ridiculed the pretensions of the commercial class from the point of view of one born into gentility, what Norman Newton has called an archaic aristocratic view characteristic of nineteenth-century Canadian poetry.[19] In other words, "A Wooing" satirizes

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[19] See Norman Newton,"Classical Canadian Poetry and the Public Muse," in *Colony and*

late Victorian conventions from a turn-of-the-century aristocratic bias. Although Crawford was not primarily a satirist, the relative success of pieces such as "The Deacon's Fate" and "A Wooing" demonstrates that she possessed a talent and disposition for satire. The scarcity of her satirical verse suggests that her revolutionary temperament dominated her personality, helping to provide the impetus for her original and often experinental lyric verse.

III

Crawford's development as a writer of narrative and dramatic blank verse may be explored in a sequence of poems published in the Toronto *Daily Mail* between 1873 and 1875. By the time she began writing for the *Mail,* Crawford had already shown her ability to write rhymed lyrics. In the *Daily Mail* group, she adapts this skill to the writing of blank verse, a learning process that apparently causes her some difficulty. "The Vesper Star," "A Wishing Star," and "A Battle," published over six months in 1873-74, indicate a transition from lyrical to narrative experiments in blank verse, the latter being the more successful. The first of her attempts in blank verse, "The Vesper Star," reveals an awkward wedding of matter and manner in which the versification is too heavy and inflexible to convey the delicacy of the poet's perceptions.[20] In the first verse-paragraph, the lines seem to have been wrenched into decasyllabic regularity:

> Unfold thy pinions, drooping to the sun,
> Just plung'd behind the round-brow'd mountain, deep,
> Crown'd with the snows of hawthorn, avalanch'd
> All down its sloping shoulder with the bloom
> Of orchards, blushing to the ardent South,
> And to the evening oriflamme of rose,
> That arches the blue concave of sky.

What is apparently intended by Crawford to be a rush of floral imagery is stalled in the structural repetition of the second and third lines, where "deep" and "avalanch'd" seem tagged on to validate the syllable-count and forcibly enjamb the downward flow of the expanding image. By the fifth and sixth lines, the blush of sunset on the mountainside has reflected back to the evening sky through an accretion of prepositional phrases, the easy control of which disintegrates in the mere prose of line

Confederation: Early Canadian Poets and Their Background, ed. George Woodcock (Vancouver: British Columbia, 1974) 19-20.

[20] 24 December 1873.

seven. Although technically weak, "The Vesper Star" shows us that Crawford can expand a single image over as many as a dozen lines, modulating the medium of animation—in the instance the failing light of sunset—through a variety of dynamic shapes. Also of interest is the introduction of the erotic figure of "ardent night . . . who steals, dark giant, to caress the Earth,"

> And hangs upon the air with brooding wings,
> Of shadow, shadow, stretching everywhere.

Crawford got into worse difficulties in "The Wishing Star," another descriptive lyric, this time cast in the form of a first-person narrative, featuring the masculine persona familiar to readers of her love lyrics.[21] Again, Night appears as an erotic figure, this time as the lover of Day, "with his starry lances in pursuit across the sky." The image of erotic pursuit is complicated by the introduction of the moon, identified with Aphrodite rather than Artemis or Diana:

> From the faint-ting'd ridges of the sea the moon
> Sprang up like Aphrodite from the wave
> Which, as she climb'd the jewelled sky, still held
> Her golden tresses to its swelling breast.

By the light of the newly risen moon, a terrace is revealed, in Britain, in front of "a wall of Norman William's time," complete with an appropriately carved casement, "(A *fleur-de-lis* bound with an English rose)." As the narrative develops, the reader soon discovers that he or she is being served up a portion of sentimental and melodramatic colonial-chic, decadent romanticism amply sprinkled with hackneyed diction such as "rosy," "jetty," and "jewelled." While the blank verse in "The Wishing Star" may be somewhat smoother than that of "The Vesper Star," "The Wishing Star" has little else to recommend it, save to show the reader Crawford at her most derivative, imitating the stale conventions of late Victorian album verse. Following the examples of "The Vesper Star" and "The Wishing Star," "A Battle" is essentially a descriptive lyric in blank verse not quite fully realized as distanced, third-person narrative.[22] Even though the blank verse of "A Battle" seems stiff and overwrought, Crawford shows us that she is learning to modulate rhythm through the use of a pronounced caesura, complementing her usual enjambment and a seemingly greater flexibility of grammatical structure:

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[21] 25 March 1874.

[22] 26 June 1874.

> Slowly the moon her banderoles of light
> Unfurls upon the sky; and from her fingers drip
> Pale tides of silver; her armour'd warriors
> Leave day's bright tents of azure and of gold . . .

In lines ten through fourteen, the poet's newly exhibited grammatical variety reverts to the amateurish accumulation of prepositional phrases, six of which occur in four of five consecutive lines:

> The starry host with silver lances prick
> The scarlet fringes of the tents of day
> And turn their crystal shields upon their breasts,
> And point their radiant lances and so wait
> The stirring of the giant in his caves.

Of these five lines, the second and the fifth are structurally identical, as are the third and the fourth. Similar lapses in craftsmanship were to continue occasionally to mar Crawford's verse throughout the remainder of her career.

While the interplay of Night/Earth and Night/Day is presented as erotic allegory in "The Vesper Star" and "The Wishing Star," in "A Battle" the combative dialect of light and darkness suggests the influence of Zoroastrian and Manichaean myth, and, in the triumph of the forces of light over Titan Darkness, the conflict takes on mythopoeic overtones. The casting down of the Titan echoes classical prototypes:

> The silvery dartings of the lances prick
> His fingers from the mountain . . .
>
> Level their diamond tips against his breast,
> And force him down to lair within his pit . . .
>
> To quicken Hell with horror—for the strength
> Which is not of the Heavens is of Hell.

Like Kronos, hurled into Tartarus by Zeus, the Titan Darkness is forced into the pit, his hand "thro' its chinks thrust down." The Titan is brought forward as a "blind old king," powerful but not necessarily evil, and the final issue of the battle presents heaven and hell as emblems of opposing power, stangely devoid of moral significance. Again, as in the final section of "The Inspiration of Song," there are echoes of Blake, particularly of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.*

More successful than her first experiments with blank verse, Crawford's earliest dramatic monologues reveal rapidly developing ease and dexterity in the manipulation of the unrhymed decasyllabic line. Perhaps blank verse more naturally and effectively conveys the spoken word, or, as more than one of her admirers aver, Crawford's talent may have inclined toward drama. Whatever the explanation, she wrote and published her first dramtic monologues during the same period that her non-dramatic blank-verse experiments appeared, and the monologues demonstrate significantly more structural integrity and sureness of touch.

"Esther" is the earliest of the monologues that can be dated with any certainty.[23] However, since "Vashti, the Queen" originated in the same book of *The Bible* and displays similar rhetorical characteristics, it is not unreasonable to suspect that the two poems were written at about the same time, and, following the biblical sequence, "Vashti" may have been published earlier.[24] Both poems present aristocratic female speakers in stressful situations, Vashti's rhetoric being tellingly more bombastic:

> Vashti, the Queen, appear? Nay, slaves, begone
> Before mine anger blaze fierce as the sun
> On the red plains that stretch beyond the shades
> Of palm-defended Shushan!

From the outset, the frantic tone is established by the expansion of simile over three long prepositional phrases in the second and third lines. Although it could be argued that such tumid syntax is consistent with the character of the proud and angry queen, the effect is one of overdone shrillness unrelentingly intoned throughout the poem.

"Esther" presents a far more complex program, varied to reflect the heroine's changing mood as the tension builds within her. Esther, it will be remembered, has replaced the uncooperative Vashti as the wife of Ahasuerus (Xerxes). On learning from her uncle Mordecai that their Hebrew brethren are to be slaughtered *en masse,* she prepares to intercede with the king on behalf of her people. Crawford's poem picks up the story here and carries narrative to the point of Esther's final commitment to an act that may prove fatal to her. The development of the poem reflects the growth of Esther's resolve in psychological, emotional, spiritual, and moral terms.

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[23] 7 March 1874.

[24] The text for "Vashti, the Queen" is available as a newspaper clipping in the Lorne Pierce Collection.

In her sleep, "voices called all night . . . young voices, the strong cries/ Of men and women," supplicating Esther to "move the King/ To sheath the sword that lies upon the throats/ Of thine own people." At dawn, the dread called up by the image of the sword-at-the-throat suffuses the sunrise in a tide of lurid red:

> His tresses were as blood that stained the courts,
> And beat upon the walls, and sent its tide
> To bathe my naked feet when I thrust back
> The golden tissue of the door to catch
> Some sweetness of the morn upon my brow;
> And lo! my God, a sweetness filled my soul
> That came not from the morning but from thee!

Over a scant eight lines, Crawford modulates the waxing light of sunrise through the terror of a sanguine flood to an epiphany of mystical illumination. Though the transition is swift, it is neither abrupt nor shrill; rather it is carried forward in the smooth pulse of successive monosyllables, varied by an occasional salutary heave of trochaic energy from "tresses," "naked," "sweetness," and "morning." Following her moment of spiritual fulfillment, Esther's resolve grows to the point where she is able to overcome her personal fear—"my courage is so weak a blade/ It trembles at a breath"—and achieve a final sense of the ironic futility of transient wealth and power:

> . . . O robes of state,
> Ye jewell'd splendours, how ye mock this flesh,
> That quivers with monitions of that hour,
> When night's moon shall peer above the palms
> And find no life in Esther; but that cold life
> Blazing from di'mond crown and golden robe,
> Mocks of her life's brief sun and briefer state.

In the last eight lines of the poem, Esther returns to her immediate objective to confront the king. From this point, the melodramatic bombast that has been steadily creeping into her speech takes on character of hysterical frenzy, recalling the general tone of "Vashti, the Queen." It seems likely that Crawford wrote "Vashti" and "Esther" as companion pieces to compare and contrast the dramatic situations of a queen who refuses to appear when bidden and a queen who must appear unbidden, the former risking humiliation and abandonment, the latter, death.

"The Roman Rose-Seller" is the last and most successful of the short dramatic monologues in the *Daily Mail* group.[25] Here, the reader discovers himself or herself to be a bystander on a busy street in ancient Rome, where a street pedler of indeterminate sex hawks roses to the passing crowd. For purposes of this discussion, the pedlar is referred to in the feminine, no prejudice intended.

> Not from Paestum come my roses; Patrons, see
> My flowers are Roma-blown; their nectaries
> Drop honey amber, and their petals throw
> Rich crimson . . . .

Ranging from nine to twelve syllables per line, the blank verse of "The Roman Rose-Seller" is well-suited to the text of the poem, which comprises an overheard sales pitch, varying by turns from cajoling to effusive, its rhetoric never outrunning the seemingly effortless modulation of rhythm as the speaker turns from one potential customer to another:

> . . . Marcus Lucius, thou
> To-day dost wed; buy roses, roses, roses,
> To mingle with the nuptial myrtle; look,
> I strip the polish'd thorns from the stems,
> The nuptial rose should be a stingless flower;
> Luciana, pass not by my roses . . . .

As the pedlar adapts her presentation to the changing character of the passing crowd, her own character emerges. She is experienced in working the holiday throng, sufficiently familiar with the patrician aristocracy to call them by their names, able to play upon the excited anticipation of a bridegroom-soon-to-be, and capable of turning to advantage the grief of the newly widowed wife of Claudius:

> . . . Virginia,
> Here is a rose that has a canker in't, and yet
> It is most glorious-dyed and sweeter smells
> Than those death hath not touched. To-day they bear
> The shield of Claudius with his spear upon it,
> Close upon Caeser's chariot—heap, heap it up
> With roses such as these; 'tis true he's dead
> And there's the canker! but, Romans, he
> Died glorious, there's the perfume! and his virtues
> Are these bright petals; so buy my roses, Widow.

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[25] See *Old Spookses' Pass* 100-01

Apparently a small crowd has gathered around Virginia to hear extolled the glories of the martial Claudius. Immediately, the vendor expands the focus of her appeal from the individual grief of the widow to the collective patriotism of the crowd, no doubt distributing blossoms in the process. Following her bid to the crowd, the pedlar again turns her attention to Virginia, using the implied reinforcement of group pressure to close the sale.

The skill and, one suspects, professional pride of the rose-seller are underlined by her final audacious display of salesmanship, adjuring a Vestal Virgin in the name of love:

> . . . Priestess, priestess!
> The ivory chariot stay; here's a rose and not
> A white one, though thy chaste hands attend
> On Vesta's flame. Love's of a colour—be it that
> Which ladders Heaven and lives amongst the Gods . . .

After the pedlar's last rose is presented as a gift to a humble Helot slave, she rushes off in excitement to witness the triumph of the returning emperor.

The range and variety of this poem's appeal elevates "The Roman Rose-Seller" to a level unapproached by Crawford's earlier compositions in blank verse. The poet must have recognized the quality of this poem as it was the only dramatic monologue from the *Daily Mail* group included in *Old Spookses' Pass.*

IV

As Crawford continued in the early 1880's to produce the traditional melic strain of lyric, an important new emphasis began to appear in her work. On March 13, 1882, "Two Songs" were published in the Toronto *Evening Telegram,* the first of which features Crawford's familiar masculine persona in a poem recalling the songs of Shakespeare:

> When spring in summer woodland lay,
> And gilded buds were sparely set
> On oak tree and the thorny may,
> I gave my love a violet.
> "Oh Love," she said and kissed my mouth
> With one light, tender maiden kiss,
> "There are no rich blooms in the south
> So fair to me as this!"

The second song is radically different from the first, taking the form of a seductive apostrophe directed to a potential sexual partner by a succubus-like feminine persona. The persona, who calls herself "Lilla," addresses the sought-after young man as "moth," "elf," "sprite," and, finally, "silly love," pretending—by means of increasingly pronounced erotic imagery—to warn him of the menace in her charms:

> I would tell thee silly moth,
> What bright dangers here there be,
> For to see thee sing'd I'm loth;
> Haste thee, love, and flee,
> Ah, I still implore thee haste.
> Plume thy wings for other skies—
> I would not behold thee waste,
> Scorch'd in Lilla's careless eyes!

In a manner reminiscent of Petrarchan conventions, Crawford evoke's Lilla's passion in polarities of heat and cold, as in stanza two "moth" becomes "elf" and "bright dangers" became "White" and "frozen." The third stanza reveals Lilla's true intentions:

> I would tell thee, silly sprite,
> Glossy perils still are found;
> Tho' the toils be golden bright
> Loth I am to see thee bound!
> Ah, I still implore thee, flee
> Or my bosom rend with care—
> Love, thy rosy limbs I'll see
> Tangl'd in bright Lilla's hair!

In the final two lines of the third stanza, Lilla momentarily drops her pretense of wishing her beloved to flee. Diction such as "glossy," "toils," "bound," "limbs," and "tangl'd" renders explicitly what was previously erotically suggestive. The rending of the bosom, indicating sexual consummation, recurs in the final stanza:

> I would tell thee, silly love,
> If thou wilt not flee away,
> Where thy hiding place must prove,
> If thou wilt still dare to stay,
> Ah—I still implore thee, seek
> Secret place to dwell apart,
> Thro' her snowy bosom break—
> Hide thyself in Lilla's heart.

The apparently contradictory nature of Lilla's advice to her "silly love" is resolved dramatically for the reader who sees the poem as a speech reflecting action taking place in the immediate fictional present. As Lilla's sexual arousal intensifies, her protestations weaken, and the erotic imagery becomes increasing explicit.

Intense eroticism such as that of the second song remains an important element in Crawford's poetry and contributes to the development of what Frank Bessai has called "a poetic complex" by means of which Crawford achieves her most arresting metaphorical effects.[26] As both Bessai and Northrop Frye have suggested, Crawford personofies and animates in order to mythologize, and her mythopoeia often employs markedly erotic imagery. For example, in "The Lily Bed," which Bessai refers to as a "sexual idyll," Bessai detects "three stages of congress" depicting "through gentle loving motion a sense of peace and beauty, conveyed in the imagery of union."[27] Bessai's text is Garvin's edition, which, remarkably, varies only one word from the original newspaper version.[28] In compiling his edition, Garvin used some manuscripts, the text of *Old Spookses' Pass,* the newspapers themselves, and Crawford's working papers, comprised of letter-sized sheets upon which she pasted newspaper printings of her poems. In the margins of these sheets, she made occasional corrections, noted average word-counts, and numbered the pages as though for a new collection of poems.[29] Sometimes, the variations between the newspaper printings and Garvin's edition represent the corrections Crawford made on her working sheets.[30] In the case of "The Lily Bed," however, the word "placid," interpolated before "bay" in the second couplet, is apparently Garvin's addition, since it does not exist in the *Hugh and Ion* manuscript, into which Crawford incorporated the poem.

There are presently five extant versions of "The Lily Bed." First there is the newpaper printing from which Garvin's version is taken.[31] More recently, Dorothy Livesay and Glenn Clever have published readings taken from the *Hugh and Ion* manu-

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26 Bessai 407.

27 Bessai 408-09.

28 *The Collected Poems* 169.

29 Lorne Pierce Collection.

30 See S.R. McGillivray, "Garvin, Crawford and the Editorial Problem," in *The Crawford Symposium*, ed. Frank M. Tierney (Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1979) 97-106.

31 *Evening Telegram*, 30 October 1884.

script.[32] The manuscript appears to be the most authoritative text for the latest revision of the lyric.[33] Of particular interest for me are the textual variants between the newspaper version and Crawford's revision in the *Hugh and Ion* manuscript.[34] Probably the most significant change is that of line 46, which describes in explicitly erotic imagery the union of the canoe's hull with the blossoms of the waterlilies. Here is the newpaper version:

> All lily-locked, all lily-lock'd
> His light bark in the blossooms rock'd.
>
> Their cool lips 'round the sharp prow sang,
> Their soft clasp to the frail sides sprang.

In the *Hugh and Ion* manuscript, Crawford revised "Clasp to the frail" to "palms to the pale," making more definite the suggestion of human sexual excitement in the expanding metaphor. "The Lily Bed" is Crawford's fullest treatment of an erotic subject, and the revisions she made on the newspaper version of the poem indicate that she consciuously and purposely manipulated erotic elements to enhance sexual implications on her poetry. More importantly, the poet's concern to inform her work with increasingly verbal imagery, capable of generating dynamic, expanding metaphors, clearly places her later work in the modern category. More than any of her older and younger contemporaries, Crawford employed verbal imagery to generate, modulate, and expand metaphor.[35]

On May 29, 1886, two of Crawford's poems appeared in the Toronto newspapers. The first, published in the *Globe,* was entitled "The Pessimist," a darkly ironic evocation of dissolution and the return of chaos. The second, appearing later in the *Evening Telegram,* represents an ebullient advance in the handling of metaphor. "The Rolling Pin," composed in six quatrains, evokes a secret and abundant life of the imagination concealed within the habit of "grave Sister Claudia." After the second line of the first quatrain, it is obvious that Crawford has applied the

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[32] Livesay, "The Hunters Twain," *Canadian Literature* 55 (1973): 75-98; and Clever, ed., *Hugh and Ion* (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1977).

[33] Lorne Pierce Collection.

[34] Not counting punctuation changes, there are 28 variants, and while they are not all improvements, it is clear that they were meant to be, as, for the most part, they animate, evoke and intensify, substituting verbal muscle for trite decoration. Examples include "pulses" for "crystal" in line seven, "flash'd" for "rose" in line ten, "dash'" for "beat" in twelve and "fire and flame" for "jewels all" in thirteen. Clearly, Crawford was working from her newspaper text, for the manuscript shows that she changed characteristic upper case "R" to the "F" of "Flash'd" in revised line ten.

[35] See my article, "Crawford and Gounod: Irony and Ambiguity in 'Malcolm's Katie'," in Fall/Winter (1984) issue of *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 13-14 for a discussion of Crawford's use of verbal imagery in "Malcolm's Katie."

epithet "droops," her fancy soars, as, in her imagination, she "drops frolic glances from far skies/ Upon her fairy rollingpin." To the child-like nun, the convent maple is a "leafy playmate," and all her grief has been spent over the death of a single pet dove:

> The golden shuttle of her years
>   Across the loom of life has fled
> In light, gay flashes . . . .

To describe sister Claudia's laugh, Crawford blends visual, auditory, and kinesthetic effects in succinct metaphorical progression:

> Her laugh, a zigzag butterfly
>   Of silver sound, that hardly knows
> Against what joyous blossom's dye
>   Mirth's breath its fairy flutt'ring blows.

In the figure of the "zigzag butterfly/ Of silver sound," the poet has modulated visual to auditory imagery while defining a zigzag configuration between the second hemistitch of line one and the first half of the second verse. In lines three and four, kinesthesis is complicated by a hint of olfaction in the play of "mirth's breath" upon "what joyous blossom's dye."

All of nature—maple tree, vine, dove, butterfly, and blossom—seems to respond to Sister Claudia, whose touch, in turn, enhances the processes of change in nature and in time:

> The rose rays on her finger tips
>   Kiss satin rose to rip'ning mold;
> She purses up her rose-bright lips,
>   She twines the thread of glitt'ring gold.

Conspicuously absent from this evocation of Sister Claudia's vivid but innocent imagination are the erotic overtones that usually contribute to the intensity of Crawford's metaphorical effects. Perhaps the erotic impulse has its analogue in Sister Claudia's paradoxical attachment to the natural world, her innocence assuming the character of reversed sensuality as her imagination transmutes the most menial of everyday chores:

> A snowflake fair her soul might stain
>   A lily-cup hold all her sin
> An stainless stay. O fairy toil,
>   The decking of a Rolling Pin!

The contrast suggested between Sister Claudia's staid appearance and the richeness of her inward life may provide some solace to those who still grieve over Crawford's early death. But the poet's memory would be far better served by the responsible editing of her work than by agonizing over what she might have accomplished had she been fortunate enough to live longer.

As more of her work becomes accessible to critical scrutiny, the image of Crawford as an "angelic mendicant," a "blessed gypsy of the Canadian woods and streams," or a naive, reclusive genius escaping from the difficulties of her life into a world of fantasy must yield place to a more accurate portrait of a tough-minded, conscious artist whose development as a poet reflects a working knowledge of the great tradition of the English lyric, an acquaintance with nineteenth-century *chansons populaires,* and familiarity with the masters of blank verse in English from Shakespeare through Browning. Moreover, her poems suggest that her reading included American poets such as Whitman, Poe, Longfellow, and, perhaps, Riley, the influence of whom she assimilated and transmuted into her own unique style. Crawford's verse exhibits a variety of tones, from witty Horatian satire to caustic irony and intensly evocative lyricism. In her longer narrative poems and dramatic monologues, she shows remarkable skill in blank verse, and her shorter newspaper verse displays a plethora of verse forms, ranging from paired amphibrachs to fourteeners.

No nineteenth-century Canadian poet has attracted so mixed a critical response as has Crawford. Praised for originality, power, and subtlety by Brown, Smith, Woodcock, and Frye, she has been attacked for excessiveness by Pacey, Rashley, and more recently, Dudek, and John Metcalf. Even among her most sympathetic interpreters, such as Frank Bessai and Fred Cogswell, there seems to be a reluctance to attribute to a young, Canadian, Victorian woman, educated at home and lacking in material advantages, the possibility of having been capable of the sort of conscious artistry we usually associate with the work of a major poet. The evidence now shows, however, that in addition to her skill as a poet, Crawford possessed a wide-ranging critical intelligence capable of perspicacious social criticism, as well as of understanding and assimilating into her work the philosophical idealism current in the Canadian universities of her time. If the quality of her verse is uneven, the imperfections may be attributed to her lack of time to polish her work, as well as her need for a professional community to provide her with editorial guidance. Even at its worst, however, Crawford's verse is often

interesting. At its best, it deserves to be recognized as the work of Canada's first major poet.

Colby College