

The Crabtree Foundation (Australian Chapter)
1992 Annual Oration
Erotic Influences On Crabtree's Musical Contribution To The Chinese Pizza Industry

Jim McGrath
February 1992

The men and women who built the British Empire had to contend with the most dreadful hardships: climatic inhospitability; squalid and unhealthy living conditions; the close proximity of ignorant and savage natives; unreliable supplies of unappetising food; English beer; the Times crossword. And their distinctive method of coping was to escape from Britain to just about anywhere else in the world. One of those men and women was Joseph Crabtree, sometimes known as Peking Crabtree, after the capital of China, which itself is sometimes known as Bayjing or Beejing or Byjing, and even as B'jing by those who want to play it safe.

Tonight I intend to produce some truly amazing revelations about Crabtree's musical contribution to the Chinese Pizza Industry – a topic which is clearly central to an understanding of the man and his age, yet also full of relevance for our present troubled times. I have chosen the topic because the whole story of the Peking Pizza Parlour deserves to be far better known. But I have an even larger purpose. For I intend this oration to be a reminder of the sort of heights that classical Crabtree research used to rise to, and a model of what a Crabtree oration ought to be.

It is my belief that such a model is sorely needed. The need is best demonstrated by a brief history of the discipline of Crabtree studies, and of the rise and fall of the classical Crabtree oration. Let me provide that brief history.

It is notorious that Crabtree was forgotten within days of his death. We can explain the relatively poor attendance at his funeral by pointing to the sheer shortage of exact contemporaries, the bad weather on the day, and the distraction provided by the Chipping Sodbury Hunt Cup, which started only minutes before the memorial service. It is harder, however, to explain the more lasting neglect of his life and work.

That neglect began almost immediately. The sales of his books increased so little at the news of his death that one has to suspect a conspiracy of booksellers. His work was also snubbed by contemporary anthologists, such as Palgrave, who included in his *Golden Treasury of English Verse*, first published in 1861, only six poems by Crabtree, and attributed all of them to other poets.

The neglect of his work continued well into the twentieth century. Only a conspiracy theory can explain the unanimous failure of publishers in 1905 to take advantage of the expiry of copyright on Crabtree's works. But scholars were equally guilty. Lewis Namier, in *England in the Age of the American Revolution*, Kingsley Martin in *French Liberal Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, Basil Willey in *The Eighteenth Century Background*, all did something that none of us could do today: they wrote authoritative books on subjects such as these without making a single mention of Crabtree.

But in the third quarter of the 20th century an intellectual earthquake occurred, and one of its epicentres was this very campus of this very university. For it was then – and here – that a few distinguished scholars braved the contempt of their peers and undertook the task of reviving Crabtree's reputation. I should like to pay particular tribute to the work of Professors Charlwood,

Coogan, Hudson, Kilbride, and Bennets, all of whom are with us tonight, and I ask these gentlemen to stand if they are able to do so. They are famous among fellows of the Foundation, and I urge guests, who may be unfamiliar with these men, to look on them as intellectually well-hung giants who have done mighty things, and not as the wine-sodden wrecks they now appear to be.

They produced almost apocalyptic revelations about Crabtree's life and work – revelations that, in their day, inspired the staid fellows of this Foundation to hail them as enthusiastic teenagers and disc jockeys now hail pop stars – with shouts of *unreal! fantastic! incredible!* They also made enormous contributions to the methodology of Crabtree Studies. In particular they developed to an extent previously undreamed of, expressions such as *most modern scholars now believe, we cannot deny the possibility, recent research indicates, science shows*, and other labour-saving devices. As a result of their efforts Crabtree's influence spread through the departments and centres of this University to an extent matched only by the influence of Karl Marx.

The extent of that influence can be adequately demonstrated by just a few examples. In the Monash Department of Usury, third year students are now required to be able to derive Crabtree's formula, which states that if a borrower accelerates by a factor of $F\%$ his repayment of a loan of $\$L$, taken for a period of Y years at an initial rate of $R\%$, then the effect on the total debt (D) is $4/5$ of $5/8$ of a very small amount. In the Centre for the Study of the Theory of Copulation, Crabtree's frequent seminal contributions are regularly referred to. The staff of the Monash Centre for Human Eugenics and Animal Equality now openly acknowledge that their centre owes almost as much to Crabtree as it does to the author of *Animal Farm* and *1984*. His influence is just as obvious in the Department of Physiognomy, the Department of Phrenology, the Centre for Peripheral Studies, and the Department of Environmental Conversation. And in the Centre for the Study of Human Faeces, Crabtree's footprints are everywhere.

So pervasive indeed has Crabtree's influence become that it is about to receive official recognition. I can now tell you, although I must ask you to promise that the information does not go beyond this room, because it was told me in the strictest confidence by Richard Sebo, that the Naming Committee is about to recommend to the University Council that the name MONASH be abandoned, because of its unfortunate elitist connotations, and replaced by the name CRABTREE. An announcement is expected shortly.

And yet, paradoxically, just as the Crabtree studies movement has come to stand proud and erect its palsied hand has fallen limply by its side. For in recent years there has been a sad decline in the quality of Crabtree research. In recent papers there has been a move away from the indicative mood towards the subjunctive the conditional and the optative. There has been a move away from simple narration towards criticism: modernist, post-modernist, feminist, postfeminist, futurist and post-futurist. There has been a move away from classical Crabtreean research towards the neo-crabtreean, the quasi-crabtreean, the metacrabtreean and the pseudocrabtreean. There has been a welter of analysis and interpretation, which have added much to the sum of human worry but nothing to the sum of human knowledge. Let us agree with Crabtree's contemporary, the great educator and epistemologist Thomas Gradgrind, that what we want is fact.

Worst of all there has been a deplorable increase in the amount of levity with which the subject has been treated. I say worst of all because the greatest and most highly regarded academic disciplines are grim, glum, lugubrious and lachrymose. You will all remember the words of Dr Johnson's friend, Mr Edwards: *I did often begin to study philosophy, but cheerfulness would ever break in.* And, as Oscar Wilde might have said had he adapted Carlyle, *Economics is a dismal science and so is science.* I believe that this foundation, if it is to survive, must become more grave and, if possible, more sober.

The paper that follows is a brilliant model of classical Crabtreean research. I am reluctant to point out its virtues, not only because they will be obvious to scholars of the Foundation but also because I am the most modest person alive. But I will identify some of its more brilliant features for fear that our guests, unversed as they are in the finer points of scholarship, might otherwise miss them.

First of all the topic I have chosen is both multicultural and interdisciplinary. As a result funding, now recognised as the ultimate measure of research quality, has come from all directions. As another result I expect to be able to publish this paper in twenty-three different journals, without – as they say – anyone being any the wiser. Secondly, where some recent papers can be fairly described as floaters, my work is linked to the whole body of extant knowledge by a substantial bibliography, which includes the books I have mentioned already, the names I expect to drop over the next six hours or so, and the catalogues of 37 American university presses. Thirdly my paper cunningly advances my own career by settling the hash of my arch-rival, Professor Belshaw, and indeed the whole Belshavian school of musicology. As a result all his hopes for promotion are destroyed, and I will have his chair, his office and his secretary. Finally my paper has the two qualities essential to serious academic writing: it is neither interesting nor intelligible to the layman.

But now let me begin.

The year 1781 saw two major events in the life of Joseph Crabtree. The first was a giant step forward in his career: he joined the service of the British East India Company.

He was not of course the only important literary figure of his age to have done so: James Mill, John Stuart Mill and Charles Lamb are just a few of the other eminent figures to have been Company employees. But the manner of his joining the company was unusual. He was halfway through serving out a fortnight's contract as poet-in-residence with the Thames Valley Water and Sewerage Board when that organisation merged, for obvious reasons, with the Company. And, because of the generous terms offered to the Water Board's staff as a result of the amalgamation, he emerged a month later as Senior Assistant Deputy Administrative Officer in the Circumlocution and Ulterior Decoration Office of the British East India Company

The Circumlocution and Ulterior Decoration Office (sometimes known as CUD) was, to use its own expression, a recent innovation. Until its establishment a year earlier, the company's annual reports had comprised no more than bald statistics of sales, profits, Indians killed and percentage increases in the area of the red bits on the map. But CUD's mission was so far-sighted as to be visionary. For its tasks were to justify the ways of God to man, and of the Court of Directors to the human resources; to convince the aforesaid human resources that the hardships endured by the senior staff in India House were at least as great as those endured by human resources in India; to urge those same human resources in India to be entrepreneurial; to ejaculate good news as early as possible – or even earlier – and to remind Company employees how happy they were in the service.

To this task Crabtree brought not only his usual missionary enthusiasm but also three new stylistic devices: the tautological redundancy, the attenuated banality and the mixed cliché. He produced some memorable sentences:

‘There is’, he wrote once, ‘an old English proverb which effectively says that *if you fail to initially accomplish your aims, goals and objectives then you should strive to continuously re-persevere*’.

On another occasion he wrote

‘We must leave no stone unturned in our endeavours to blaze new ground.’

So happy were the senior officers of the Company with the quantity of his output, so convinced were they that his heart was in the right place, and so little did they feel intellectually threatened by him, that he might well have remained there for the rest of his life, jowl by cheek with his masters, at least in the way that second-row rugby forwards are jowl by cheek with the front rowers. But Cupid intervened. For the second important thing to happen to Crabtree that year was that he fell in love.

Manning Clark was fond of saying that the flaw in Crabtree's makeup, the tare in his clay, was a tendency to attacks of lust which obscured his noble vision of the main chance. On this occasion the object of his affection was one of the three beautiful daughters of Daniel MacGillicuddy, fourth earl of Kerry. It was not, alas, the eldest, the bountiful Hermione, who more than requited every passion that she ever inspired. Nor, regrettably was it the second daughter, the brilliant Penelope, whose books on road, canal and bridge construction are still among the bestselling books in the whole of the Virago engineering list. It was, alas, the third daughter, Hypothermia, whose icy loveliness still looks down on us from Gainsborough's portrait whenever we eat in the small breakfast room at Buckingham Palace.

At first he admired her from a distance. Such was his fascination that for weeks he followed her about London, hoping for an introduction. He records in that great romantic memoir, *The Sorrows of Young Joseph*, how one day, when he caught a glimpse of her ankle, he nearly turned into a pool of melted butter, and how on another occasion when he saw her walking arm in arm with a handsome young gentleman he retired to his garret and would have completed in one night his immortal *Ode to Hemlock* had he not been afflicted with a severe attack of writers' droop.

After some months of this wild pursuit he began to fear that they were destined never to meet. But on the second of December, 1781, it happened to Hypothermia, as it has to so many other pedestrians in London that she stepped in something nasty, and Crabtree, who was nearby at the time, romantically seized the opportunity to scrape acquaintance.

Hypothermia did not immediately embrace him, but she did invite him to tea the following Sunday, and he was thereby admitted to the select gathering of a dozen or so admirers who gathered weekly at her father's London residence to worship her. She gave each of them grounds for hope and in doing so gave Crabtree reason for despair. But on three successive Sundays in January she smiled at him. On the first Sunday in February she asked him to fetch her smelling salts. On the third Sunday of that month she communicated her affection by giving him a pet name – Fido. And on the last Sunday of February she invited him to her birthday party, to be held on Sunday the first of April at the villa her father had rented on the outskirts of the little town of Corleone on the Italian Riverina.

Crabtree felt greatly honoured to have been invited, but the cost of getting to Italy was, at that stage of his life, beyond him. He was, however, terrified by the advantage that his absence from the festivities might give to his rivals. He was close to despair when fortune again intervened.

Another eminent employee of the company at that time was Donald Macdonald, the author of the Macdonald theory of imperialism, which states that military force is an inefficient way of

subjugating an empire, but that if you can sell fast food and fizzy drinks to uncivilised peoples then their hearts and minds will follow.

The first application of this theory had been a less than successful chain of hamburger joints set up to feed pilgrims in the neighbourhood of the major Hindu shrines. The failure of this experiment had led Macdonald to conclude that German foods were inappropriate. Throughout the early 1780's he had teams of people searching Europe for alternatives. Indeed in that very third week of February a group of senior officers of the Company, together with their wives, were in Paris, investigating the possibility that the ideal fast food might be a three-course meal comprising a cheese soufflé, chateaubriand with bearnaise sauce, and a dessert made of milk that had been sweetened, flavoured and thickened into curd. This was known as a junket.

But Macdonald needed someone else to visit Italy to investigate and report on the relative merits of pizza and pasta as tools of imperialism. For he had a dream – the dream of winning China for the Company, and he looked to Italy for the product because he had read that the Polo family of Venice had successfully developed the Chinese fast food market centuries before, and that both Polo's Peking Pizza Parlour and Polo's Peking Pasta Palace were for sale.

The question before him was which one should the Company buy. He let it be known around India House that he wanted a volunteer to travel to Italy to research the relative suitability of pasta and pizza for the Chinese market. And within half an hour of Macdonald's expressing the wish Crabtree was knocking on his door to argue persuasively that his skill at report-writing more than compensated for his total ignorance of Italy, China or fast food.

Crabtree arrived in Italy on March 12, and proceeded to eat his way down the peninsula. He tasted several varieties of pizza, pronounced them satisfactory, and repaired to the town of Corleone, arriving there two days before the birthday party. He took a room in the third best of the town's inns, ate a hearty evening meal of pizza, and retired to bed. He slept well, woke too late the next morning to sample the standard breakfast of porridge bolognese, and therefore took himself into the piazza in search of an early lunch. He stopped at one of the cafes in the piazza, asked for the plat du jour, and fell in love again. For the plat du jour was spaghetti pescatora, made of long strands of virgin spaghetti, garlic, basil, olive oil and a pot-pourri of twenty different sorts of seafood, all of them sun-ripened in barrels which sat outside the restaurant door. He was so taken with the dish that he had a second helping and a third; he returned at dinner time for more. Ready learner that he was he had mastered by his eighth or ninth plateful the skill of getting the spaghetti into his mouth without dropping any in his lap. He breakfasted on spaghetti pescatora the next day, and decided about eleven-thirty in the morning, despite a certain bloated feeling, to have a light lunch of spaghetti before he set out on the walk to the villa McGillicuddy.

The Italian Riverina is not known for volcanic activity, and yet it seemed to Crabtree, as he was bolting this last plate of spaghetti, that he could detect both sulphurous emissions and certain ominous rumblings – the signs of an imminent eruption. As the Town Hall clock began to strike noon he rose to his feet and began to run.

Ever since 1782 the municipality of Corleone has conducted an annual challenge race know as La Corsa di Crabtree. In that event contestants are invited to try in the time that it takes the town hall clock to strike twelve, to run from a table on the south side of the piazza to the public lavatories behind the church. It is a condition of the competition that challengers make the run under the same conditions that obtained when Crabtree made it on that fateful day. They must wear high-heeled

eighteenth century shoes and tight eighteenth century breeches; they must have eaten five kilogrammes of spaghetti pescatora in the previous 24 hours; they must run with teeth clenched, arms folded and buttocks pursed; they must make one complete circuit of the fountain in the centre of the piazza; they must stop twice to ask, in sign language, for directions. And, when they introduced the Challenge two hundred years ago, the town fathers also had placed on the town hall wall a marble slab on which were to be engraved the names of all those who covered the distance in the time. After two hundred years the slab has only one name on it. That name is Giuseppe Crabtree. Two surreptitious smokers, emerging hand in hand from one of the cubicles in an attempt to evade the town's draconian anti-smoking regulations by pretending to have merely been buggering each other, subsequently testified that Crabtree's front foot was half a tile past the threshold of the jakes at the twelfth stroke of the clock.

He was almost fast enough. But, in his last strides, a shattering eruption destroyed in one stroke his equanimity, his equilibrium, his social presentability, his willingness to face Hypothermia, and his good opinion of pasta. He did not attend Hypothermia's party that day, though he did send her, on a tiny scrap of paper, the famous note ILL. PASTA. FIDO. Instead he remained closeted until nightfall, before returning to his lodgings from where, early the following morning, he returned quietly to Venice and thence to London.

His report to Macdonald contained, to the surprise of many, a strong recommendation in favour of pizza and his own offer to travel to China, or even further, to take personal charge of the project. His advice and his offer were accepted: Macdonald bought the Peking Pizza Parlour for the Company, and by October of that year, after travelling south, Crabtree had arrived in Peking and was ready for his rendezvous with destiny as manager of the British East India Company's first Chinese subsidiary.

Superficial critics of the Peking Pizza Parlour had long deplored its more easily visible failings: inferior ingredients, insane recipes, poor cooking, excessive prices, a total lack of service. It took a man or woman of Crabtree's perspicacity to recognise that these were peripheral shortcomings, and that the central need was for microeconomic reform. And he provided the reform. He re-organized the factory staff into departments: ingredient preparation, dough mixing, rolling, baking, segmentation, packaging, secretarial and so on. He established a personnel department, a public relations department, and all the other essential mechanisms of modern management. He required that every worker in the parlour complete a detailed position description. And he introduced music as a means of inspiring and edifying his workforce. The pizza parlour was alive with the sound of music, and the music was written by Crabtree himself

Tragically, much of that music has disappeared. It is particularly regrettable that we have lost both the words and the music of that inspiring song *Come all ye loyal and industrious workers of the Peking Pizza Parlour*. But some of it remains. One notable remnant is a piece which is falsely attributed by the Belshavians to Johann Schmalz, but which I am now able to reveal tonight to be the work of Crabtree. He wrote it to improve productivity in the segmentation department, where the staff were used to cutting at about half the government stroke. Crabtree increased productivity twentyfold, and made it possible to shed thirty eight human resources by getting the remaining couple to cut in time to his own composition.

This was the pizzacutter polka.

He destroyed the business of his strongest competitor, the Peking Pasta Palace, by sponsoring free public performances of his opera *Ill. Pasta. Fido*. And as we shall see shortly he also found a musical solution for the tendency of the baking department to burn the pizza black or leave it seriously underdone.

Because of all these changes the pizza factory prospered, especially after the introduction of Crabtree's new system of accounting, and the great yo-yo craze of 1782, which produced a demand, unknown in China until then, for food that could be eaten with one hand. It is true that some of the superficial failings continued, but Crabtree silenced his critics decisively by establishing a planning department and setting it the goal of producing, within five years, a strategy for making the pizza more edible than silage. It was a solid record of achievement.

But dark forces were at work. Competing local victuallers resented the loss of business. Local parents were alarmed by what they saw as the pizza parlour's seductive and corrupting influence on their children. And there was discontent even among some of Crabtree's workers – especially those in the packaging and secretarial departments – that is to say, among the boxers and the taipings.

On the third of September some hundreds of members of this unholy alliance attacked the pizza parlour and, when driven off by the loyal and industrious human resources, laid siege to the building.

Crabtree's behaviour in this crisis was a model of leadership. He disposed his forces in strong tactical positions, armed them with cooking utensils and mozzarella cheeses, and then locked himself in the cellar, from which central position he proceeded to inspire his human resources by playing Clarke's Trumpet Voluntary over and over again on the bagpipes.

Despite his efforts things were looking decidedly grim when down the Tientsin road came a man on horseback. This man was none other than Colonel Sir Cecil Cameron, and marching behind him were three battalions of his regiment, the Royal Gorbals Highlanders: not the first battalion, commonly known as the Brutal and Licentious Gorbals, who had stayed behind in barracks to defend the taverns and brothels of Glasgow against the ever-present danger of invasion by the French; but the second battalion, sometimes known as the Gallant Gorbals: tall, strapping, young fellows with brave hearts and true; followed by the third battalion – often referred to as the Grim Gorbals: short, squat, hulking men with narrow foreheads, flat noses and knuckles bloodied from dragging along the ground as they marched; and behind them came the fourth battalion – the Gay Gorbals.

They had set out five months earlier to sail from Calcutta to Bombay, in one of the Company's shuttle ships which plied between Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay, by way of the Cape of Good Hope and Batavia. When Cameron, in his own bluff way, told the captain that the regiment could reach their destination faster on foot, the Captain unloaded them at Tsientsin and invited him to try.

They were only a few days on their way when they heard a commotion, and saw to their amazement a large crowd attacking a building from the top of which still flew proudly the flag of the East India Company. Cameron, without a moment's hesitation gave the famous command: *The Royal Gorbals Highlanders will advance*. And the Gallant Gorbals carved, and the Grim Gorbals hacked, and the Gay Gorbals minced, until the besiegers had been either driven from the field or cut

into very small pieces. In this way was the Peking Pizza Parlour relieved.

Afterwards the troops celebrated in their traditional way, with cheering, dancing, drunkenness, and vomiting. Towards the end of the celebration, Sir Cecil, in that grand old way that he had about him, slid from his chair like a great ship being launched down a Clyde slipway, to lie flat upon the floor under the head table. But a moment later he raised his head and uttered those immortal words that bring a tear to the heart of every true child of the empire. 'Hark!', he said. "Do ye no hear the pipes?' He collapsed again, but his faithful second in command summoned a plumber, whose searches of the bowels of the building found Crabtree and the bagpipes still gasping at each other.

When news of the affair seeped back, first to Calcutta and then to London, there was, of course, a tremendous scandal. The whole business was hushed up, but it constituted a major reason for Pitt's India Act of 1784, and for the recall and impeachment of Warren Hastings. There were other casualties. The Gorbals Highlanders were disbanded for a few years and then reconstituted as the New South Wales Corps. Crabtree left the service of the Company, and forswore fast food forever. Furthermore the damage done to his lungs during that marathon performance played no small part in bringing about his premature death 71 years later. The bagpipes never played again.

But there were positive parts of the legacy too. We should be careful not to go too far. Pizza did not flourish in China. We may say about it what Paul Murray Kendall said about Warwick the Kingmaker – that it represents a course that history did not take. But we can see the effect on the Chinese restaurant business, which adopted several standard pizza industry practices: the practice of constructing a menu of vast length from different combinations of about eight ingredients; the practice of identifying menu items by numbers; above all the practice of making the takeaway customers sit around like fools under the contemptuous gaze of those who are eating it here.

But the most important part of the legacy is the music: not just the pizzacutta polka; not just the brilliant arrangement, unlikely ever to be surpassed, of the Trumpet Voluntary for the bagpipes; not just Ill Pasta Fido; but also the greatest piece of music ever composed – a piece which has been falsely attributed by the Belshavians to Irving Schmaltz, a grandson of Johann, but which I can now show to be the work of Crabtree.

We don't know everything that happened, but we know some of it. Using new techniques which I have developed, and bearing in mind Occam's advice that the simplest explanation is the best, I can now give you an object lesson in theory formulation. Here is the reconstruction.

We know that there was in the government an official named Wun Lo – a Mandarin so senior that he let his little fingernails grow long to prove that he did no work, and so senior, indeed that he was allowed the private use of a company elephant. It is notorious that one night, when he was hurrying home from the pizza factory, he took a corner too fast and rolled the elephant. We can reasonably conclude that one effect of the accident was to roll the stiff, thin, black pizza into something that was even stiffer and thinner and blacker, by extrapolating from the effect of the accident on Wun Lo himself. And it is logical to assume that as pizza, man and elephant rolled over and over together, Wun Lo's last screams were somehow scratched onto the hard disk through his fingernail, and that the result of this process was something like this. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

It is obvious that the perspicacious Crabtree, when called to the scene of the accident, would have grasped at once all that had happened. And I rather think we can now agree that the true father

of phonography was not Edison, but Crabtree, a century earlier. There is conclusive evidence to support this theory. For in the vaults of the Peking Museum of the History of Culinary Music are the fragments of just such an object. And after years of study I am now able to reveal its meaning.

First of all there is the picture, thought until now, to be a picture of Nipper listening to his master's voice. Using the McGrath technique of semiotic analysis, however, I can now reveal that the picture constitutes the dedication, and that it is really a picture of Crabtree thinking of Hypothermia – that is to say a picture of a small dog, who can only be Fido, whimpering plaintively through an enormous ear trumpet into a deaf box.

More important than this however is the music that was recorded on this shattered disc. Because only fragments remain we cannot, of course, listen to the music. Nor can we easily read the label, for only two thirds of the fragments have been recovered, and fully half of those are illegible. But using the McGrath technique of textual reconstruction I have been able to establish that what was recorded on this disc is the greatest single piece of music ever written – a piece which I am now able to show to be the work of Crabtree. For when I reconstruct the label it tells me that this is a song about the ideal pizza – not overdone, not underdone, but cooked to perfection. It is in fact a song by Joseph Crabtree, sometimes known as Peking Crabtree, or Bayjing or Beejing or Byjing Crabtree, or as it says here, by B'jing Crabtree, called *I'm Dreaming of the Right Crispness*.