

The Crabtree Foundation (Australian Chapter) 46th Annual Oration
The Mnemonic Cake: What Proust Owes to Crabtree
Presented at The Savage Club 12th February 2020 by Dr Angela O'Brien

Mr President, Madame Chair, Elders, Scholars

Time is interesting concept – we live through it or perhaps by it – but it remains elusive. We can lose it or find it depending on temperament or indeed age or imagination. But sometimes it is only with time, in good time, that we can find the truth. Such is it with Crabtree scholarship – only time and its patient application have facilitated the initiation and consolidation of Crabtree research and allowed scholarship to come to terms with the truth of attribution. So many discoveries, inventions and great works of literature have, at last, have been rightfully attributed to Crabtree since the 100th anniversary of his death, and tonight we add another.

The journey of time is also central to my talk tonight not the least because the research which underpins the new Crabtree attribution that I am about to propose to you has been long in gestation, albeit that the anagnorisis and denouement have been as brief and electrifying as a lightning bolt. I note, to my surprise, that a long research lead-up is not unusual with in Crabtree research with Elder Compte beginning his research in the 1960s¹ and the late Professor John Salmond in 1970s², each of us finding material that we initially ignored and later found to be the basis of subsequent significant revelations. Tonight, I reveal some new unpublished writings of Crabtree published (with variation) more than a hundred years later by the sickly and strange Marcel Proust. Like many former orators I have experienced the serendipitous nature of Crabtree research, replete with happy coincidence, found manuscripts, secret messages, encryptions and linguistic puzzles, the significance of which eluded me for half a lifetime. But despite this intellectual pathology, in retrospect, I am convinced (and with good evidence) that in some extraordinary way, Crabtree himself, or his spirit, has been beside me all these years urging me to look at what was before my eyes and I, not mindful but mindless, failed to do so until recently. In this sense I share the experience of Elder O'Brien, perhaps it is a familial benefit, that I have been chosen, destined as it were, to extend Crabtree's great body of work, and so I find myself here tonight, humbled but supported by the power of truth and the kindly good will of you all. And, as you all know, discovery is inspired by what we experience, but for it to bear fruit, it must be augmented by creative deduction and imaginative reconstruction, so I hope I have found that balance in my oration this evening. And Ladies and Gentlemen it's a long story, so it might take a bit of time.

My Crabtree journey began in the late 1970s when I was a postgraduate student at the University of Lancaster, a youthful but aspirant academic institution seeking to make its mark with emerging disciplines—sexual anthropology, practical computing for business, gender studies, Viking studies, and theatre studies, the last an embodied scholarship in

¹ "Crabtree the Composer: Under the Lamplight" , Oration 42, 17 February 2016,
<http://www.crabtreemelbourne.org/Oration2017.pdf>

² "Crabtree in the White House", Oration 16, February 1994,
<http://www.crabtreemelbourne.org/Oration1994.pdf>

which I engaged with considerable histrionic flair. To my shame I had never heard of Crabtree at this time and it would seem neither had Lancaster University. Despite its unique commitment to a mosaic of alternative and topical curricula, and even though they had been gifted some extraordinary evidentiary material supporting Crabtree scholarship, Lancaster had ignored it, when they might have had the perspicacity to create the first Chair in Crabtree Studies and advance the cause of polymathy. I hear you ask - was there a reason for that?

In my second term at the university, having found my lifestyle incompatible with living in the gender specific college halls, I moved into digs in one of the quaint picturesque Lancastrian countryside villages called Claughton-on-Brock. I and two fellow postgraduates, a Jewish psychologist from New York and a science post-doc Californian transgender separatist feminist, found ourselves living in one of three workers' cottages on an estate formerly owned by a minor British aristocrat, and now by a business magnate who had made his fortune in organising children's parties catering for newborns to teenagers. As you might image as a theatre student I was more practical than either of my housemates and so when it came to housewifery, I was the girl. We were poor so we took every opportunity to use local produce and were never averse to living off roadkill or edible weeds and herbs growing by the small river and roads near Bowland Forest which we walked every day.

Outside our house there was a huge crab-apple tree and I was determined, in the spirit of the 1970s, country life, and frugality, to use its fruit – to the last bitter little crabby apple. The crabtree as you will all know, is a well hung tree with abundant fruit. Unsure of my culinary acumen, I went to the library and asked if they had any recipes for crab-apple jelly, or cakes, or chutney. The librarian sent me to the archivist. After scrabbling around for some time and making one of two hasty phone calls, the archivist, a little round lady with a waist circumference eclipsing that of both hips and breasts, her face as small and red as an apple and her aspect just a little crabby, reluctantly handed me a file. The file was labelled, eponymously, "Crabtree". She informed me it had come from the local historical society who had given all their old stuff to the University and how it now fell to her, unreasonably, to look after it all. I was told not to copy the file.

I remember reading the whole file in a day – the recipes were there but hard to find - as it was full of interesting letters which all historians and lawyers know is a much more engaging read than going through financial statements or registers of birth, deaths and marriages. Being a girly swat of 23, who had been told by our theatre studies lecturer to engage with our emotions not rules or books, I ignored the archivist and made a good copy of anything in that file which I thought I might be able to use in a playscript which I was intending to write for my thesis. My recollection of the contents of the file was: firstly, 4 bundles of letters between a whole host of women, including one Eveline Crabtree, some written in English and some in French - this material was clearly the basis of very good feminist play; secondly a sheaf of recipes for three jellies, crab-apple, rose and mint, various cakes, tarts, herb based unctions and medicinal tonics, and home-made elderberry wine – useful for my impoverished student lifestyle; and thirdly a thick wad of 60 papers or more in an envelope labelled JC which included various ruminations on life, bits of poetry and doggerel, a record of hundreds of social events, and gossip about everyone in the neighbourhood, often salacious and sometimes even mean. It was written in a prose, complex yet simple, turgid

yet illuminating and old fashioned in the best sense of the word. Prima facie this didn't seem to be much use. At first I thought I would just transcribe the letters but something told me I should also take notes of the JC file. And as I did so, I recognised descriptions of the walking paths along which my friends and I daily rambled: to the left towards the old mill (now a motel) past an ancient sign that said Swan's way and to the right towards the owner's big house where there was still the quaint old church of "St Joseph the long", straight out of an Emily Bronte novel.

On one of my subsequent visits to the library I asked the archivist if she knew of any descendants of the Crabtree letter writer Eveline. With characteristic brevity she gave me a pamphlet advertising *Crabtree Narrow Boat Hire*, fortuitously only a short ramble from where we lived in the gamekeeper's cottage. We decided to take a tour up the creek with the waterman. Mr Crabtree was a man of small words and big muscles – a bit like Brad Pitt. As he steered us through the Lancaster Canal system, and upon significant prompting, he shared the intelligence that his ancestors had lived around here for generations – they were related to the Yorkshire branch of the Crabtrees, who he could not abide as they were generally cloth-makers and swindlers³. Otherwise he had no interest in archaeology but his ex-wife was the 'archaeologist' in the University library and she might know something. I was little apoplexed by this confession (was it the archivist I had met? why hadn't she shared her Crabtree links? – most curious!) but having finished my transcription thought it best to leave well alone. I did however look for further evidence of Eveline Crabtree and discovered a plethora of leads including Crabtree Orchard about 5 minutes' drive from us, which was on, quite spookily, Crabtree Road. Then my supervisor canned the idea of the epistolary playscript for no apparent reason and I abandoned this line of research.

I finished my Master's degree not long after and packed up my fair and rough copies of material from the Crabtree file, my books, various short plays I had written and theatre programs of our many student productions and the local Duke's playhouse run by a bloke called Peter Oyston who I was to meet again half a lifetime later at the Victorian College of the Arts.

I must say something about Proust now because you are probably wondering what these musings have to do with him or indeed any relationship he might have with Crabtree given that Proust was not born until 1871, 17 years after Crabtree's death.⁴ I am coming to that in my circumlocutory way. Until about 2016 my only acquaintance with Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* or *In Search of Lost Time* had been the Mad Magazine version in which Alfred E Neumann searches for time but fails to find it, concluding it has been irrevocably lost. Unfortunately, I lost that copy or maybe it was Elder O'Brien's copy. We didn't read Proust in my undergraduate English degree (which included a French minor) at Queensland University – probably because none of the staff had read it either. I am not sure why but in 2017 after many years of procrastination I read the 7 volumes of the translation by Scott Moncrieff entitled *Remembrance of Things Past*. As I read this endless

³ Hugh Smith, "The Family Crabtree", British Orator 6, 959, *The Crabtree Orations, 1954-1994*, Bennet and Harte (eds)The Crabtree Foundation: University of London 1997 pp33-38. In his information to us, the CNBH Mr Crabtree affirmed the historical research findings of Hugh Smith.

⁴ Marcel Proust lived from 1871 until 1922. *In Search of Lost Time* was written by Proust between 2009 and 1922.

novel, purported to be the best ever written and the greatest influence on twentieth century writers, I felt an ongoing sense that these ideas were not new to me and I had read at least sections of this work before. I knew it wasn't in Mad magazine. Now I now you will all have read Proust, probably many, very many years ago, but just to refresh your memory, the novel's protagonist Marcel, most likely based on Proust, recalls his life from his childhood in the village of Combray France, and his development as an aspiring writer against a backdrop of his family and a great multitude of characters, mainly from the upper social strata and generally based on people he knew in his life. The idea of the book is encapsulated in the title: time and memory, but it is also about desire.

In around 2014 I was introduced to Crabtree scholarship; my first oration was Elder Kate Burridge's illumination of Crabtree's skills as a lexicographer and writer of dictionaries⁵ I was fascinated and delighted by her scholarly revelation about dictionaries and determined to find out more – about Crabtree. As I attended more orations, I was very taken by the potential in Crabtree scholarship – in fact I felt somehow driven towards it like a mule with huge burden eager to relieve myself. When it had been mooted that I might be one day called to the Orator's podium, I spent many hours reading past orations.

From my first Crabtree meeting I had been taken by the Likeness, so the very early British oration (1956) by Terence Spencer, *The Iconography of Crabtree*⁶ struck a chord. Professor Spencer proposes that William Blake's famous drawing, *The Ghost of a Flea*⁷, is in fact a caricature of Crabtree. Professor Spencer posits, inter alia, that "the likeness with the Sutherland portrait is indisputable. There is the same chin of doubtful direction.. the same pouchiness about the lower left jaw" and so on. Having studied Professor Spencer's argument closely along with detailed study of the Likeness and the purported caricature by Blake, I support his thesis but with one gloss. I do not see it as a cruel caricature as does Professor Spencer, but rather as a homage to Crabtree spirit, a clever metaphor, still with its intimation of the worldly Likeness which we had before us this evening. Think of the Blake drawing: the well-muscled scaly body as a metaphor for great intellectual strength with a shield against the blows of ignorance and barbs of jealousy, the long poet's fingers, the gaze into the basket representing life in all its complexity (like Hilary Clinton's basket of deplorables) and the platonic idea of the flea, a creature with the propensity to suck the essence, the very blood, out of life, clearing referencing Crabtree's bold appetites.

This view was further supported by a personal experience which I can only describe as Cartesian⁸. On or around 11.50 pm February 14, 2018 (I believe it was the night of the oration) I fell into a deep sleep while studying the Likeness and the Blake drawing. I had a dream in which I was at a great ball drinking red wine and eating jelly tarts. I could smell the claret and the crab-apple jelly filling. Then the embodied Ghost of a Flea appeared before me, fortunately not naked, but in a cutaway coat with satin waistcoat and breeches, leading

⁵ "Joseph Crabtree — Rogue Lexicographer, Wild Etymologist." Oration 40, 12 February 2014.

⁶ British Oration 3, 1956, *The Crabtree Orations, 1954-1994*, Bennet and Harte (eds)The Crabtree Foundation: University of London 1997 pp 18-23.

⁷ See Page 11 herein for an Illustration of *The Ghost of a Flea*.

⁸ On 10 November 1619 Rene Descartes had three dreams which he saw as medium for the divine spirit to reveal to him a new philosophy, subsequently the basis for *Discourse on the Method*. My dream was similarly revelatory.

a dog dressed as a cavalier. (As an aside I remind you that Blake also first saw the ghostly insect in a dream before he painted the portrait.) The flea – quite man-sized – but not tall, stocky like Brad Pitt - asked me to dance with him. I agreed and felt no fear, having much experience with strange dance partners. As we danced he put his mouth to my ear (I think he put his tongue in as well) and hissed “write this down”. In my dream I could not find paper but in my reticule I located a dance card and small pen which I used to record the message. Difficult when a flea has its tongue in your ear. The dream ended. What seemed like a moment later I felt a nip on my neck behind my ear and I woke in fright. I had been bitten – I thought by my ghostly dream partner but recognised it was possibly through a medium, as on that night two cats and two dogs were on my bed, three in living flesh and one in spirit – my cavalier dog Sir Harry having died just months before, and now having appeared in my dream. A Myers receipt was on the bed – written on it in lipstick were the words “My wine soup & rose tart”, with the “and” written as an ampersand. I struggled until dawn to understand this ghostly esoteric message. Remembering earlier Crabtree scholarship and Elder Burridge’s oration, which had provided ample evidence of Crabtree’s love of wordplay, I wondered if it was an anagram and spent more hours following that idea. My hunch was right, and I finally deciphered “Prousty owes mine art &”. “Prousty” – clearly a derogatory nickname for Proust, (ladies and gentlemen, what luck or providence that I had decided to read Proust in the last year or so); “mine”, that was just an old fashioned way of saying “my” and the ampersand meant “and more”. On reading this my memory was immediately reawakened – images flooded back of the Crabtree papers, the smell of cooking crab-apples and voice of Crabtree’s doughty descendant taking me up the creek with his small craft. I suddenly suspected why Proust’s writing seemed so familiar to me.

The next day I rang Lancaster University and asked had they digitalised the archival records and could they email me the Crabtree file. I was finally put through to Bethany who was very helpful but to no avail. After searching through her computer (that was new since I was there!) and making a few phone calls, she advised me that the University had returned or destroyed everything that had not been accessed for 30 years. She was not sure of the fate of the Crabtree file – but she referred me to the *Crabtree Narrow Boat Hire* which was still operating. I rang the CNBH and spoke to a young man, Rob Hood, who told me he was a recent purchaser for good consideration of the *Crabtree Narrow Boat Hire* company but no Crabtree himself. He was less than helpful and quite abrupt when he learned that I was not an Australian tour operator. Now, ladies and gentlemen, we have long known that there has been an academic conspiracy to obscure Crabtree’s work and influence and frustrate his scholarship. I have progressed my Crabtree research sufficiently to confidently submit to you that the likely destruction of the invaluable Crabtree file, I suspect probably not long after I had accessed it, is one of the most blatant examples of this conspiracy. And I also wonder about the fate of the Crabtree narrow boatsman and his less than narrow ex-wife – had they been collateral victims of this conspiracy to smother Crabtree research? After all, why would one sell a narrow boat business in Lancashire in one’s very own name? It also explains why my supervisor at Lancaster had quashed my research into the Eveline Crabtree letters.

I realised that I must turn to my copies of the files – my memory of what I had taken down was sketchy but I believed it might be adequate to support my hypothesis. I knew that they

were packed with my important University of Melbourne boxes of books and papers; they had not been opened since 2009. I found what I was looking for about halfway through my search of the 50 or so boxes. What I found exceeded the expectations of my memory. I had actually worked on the play I envisaged when first reading the file. There was, in fact, an entire manuscript typed on my Olivetti portable titled; *Une Entente Féminine: an epistolary play*, on reflection a rather juvenile and pretentious title. Clearly I had been reading Goethe's *Werther*⁹.

It appeared I had sorted the bundles of letters written by the (I now realised) eight women and discovered they represented a historical conversation between members of the English Crabtree family and members of the Proust family over four generations between 1784 to the final letter in 1909. Fortunately, the style of the play was VEET (verbatim eyewitness epistolary theatre) which means 99% of this play at least was directly quoted from the letters so it was still of value archivally. As I read them again I realized to what great extent these letters ratified Crabtree scholarship to date. We know from the 1959 Oration of Hugh Smith that Crabtree had relations in Sowerby Yorkshire where he attended school from 1766 until he left to read at Oxford.¹⁰ One Robert Crabtree, father of John Crabtree gent. author of the History of the parish of Halifax, moved some 40 miles to take up a position as steward with the Lord of Bowland (then Charles Townley) in 1755. He and his much younger wife Eveline were provided with a house on the estate at Claughton-on-Brock. The young Joseph Crabtree visited them on his school holidays, finding the gentle undulations of that region more suited to his temperate nature than the harsh Yorkshire moors, and the potential association with minor nobility more in line with his social aspirations. After Robert's death in 1775 Eveline stayed in the house as companion and friend to Lady Barbara Townley and Crabtree continued to visit Claughton-on-Brock whenever he could until his death in Haworth Yorkshire. This domestic attachment to Claughton-on-Brock is not surprising given the madness of his peripatetic lifestyle and his oft discussed close relationship with the Lake poets.

To return to the Eveline Crabtree letters which not only provide an historical link between the Crabtree and Proust families but also offer an international insight into the socio-political opinions of middle class women over 125 years, I must tell you I cannot possibly refer to all of the letters so I now quote from just a few of the letters which mention Joseph Crabtree. And incidentally, the Crabtree women were sufficiently prescient to take a fair copy of each of the letters they sent. The first letter was from the titular letter writer Eveline to Mathilde Proust.

Claughton-on-Brock,

May 1784

Dear Mme Proust

I am writing to thank you for being so kind to my dearest nephew Joseph. He speaks of you so warmly and I believe you have entertained him on many occasions since he has been

⁹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* was an epistolary novel written in 1774

¹⁰ Much of this information is taken from Smith's Oration, *The Family Crabtree*, op cit, supplemented by information from the "Eveline Crabtree Letters".

engaged by my brother Oliver in the wine business Crabtree and Hillier¹¹. As I write, the dear boy is visiting me following his trip to Bristol where he met with a publisher..... He is such a jolly and bully boy and with a great appetite He sits here eating my crab apple tarts which he so enjoys with his claret. I shall send some to you..... He is also wonderful with children – he sits my daughter Lydia on his lap (she is 11) and tickles her till she laughs and weeps and must run away. Then he chases her throwing daffodils¹² after her and calling out as in a grand play: “So pensive Lydia is then your warmth abated”¹³. Of course, I then must chide and distract him..... We walk each day – he has created a sign for one of our rambles called Swan’s way. He says if Anna Seward can call herself the Swan of Lichfield¹⁴, then he shall be the Swan of Chipping-Sodbury and the Swan of Claughton-on-Brock as well, wherewith he found some wood and created a sign Swan’s Way leading away from my cottage.....

*Gratefully yours
Eveline Crabtree*

Illiers

14 July 1784

Ma chère Eveline

Puis je vous appeler comme ca? Je crois que nous serons ces bonnes amies. I have enjoyed looking after your Joseph as I am so lonely since my husband died. As you know my brother-in-law of Crabtree and Hillier is from our town. He is Mr Hillier of Illiers and we have always believed the family must have some long connection with our town, the Hilliers of Illiers, n’est pas?.....Joseph brought me your tarts but by the time he arrived he has eaten 6 and after he arrived proceeded to eat a further 3 along with the bottle of claret he had brought me from C and H. I could not remain angry with him as he was sweet in his remorse and accepted his penance..... Mon Dieu, certainement c’est un homme de si grands Appetits. It is kind of him to give so much attention to a poor country widow..... J’ai aussie une fille. J’espère qu’eux aussie seront bonnes amies. Nous serons une entente feminine.

Cordialement

Mathilde Proust

Claughton-on-Brock

¹¹ James Sutherland: “Homage to Crabtree”, British Oration 1, 1959, *The Crabtree Orations, 1954-1994*, Bennet and Harte (eds)The Crabtree Foundation: University of London 1997 pp 1-9.

¹² See Bryony Cosgrove: Joseph Crabtree, “Purveyor of the Daffodil as a Tool of Seduction” for an analysis of Crabtree’s use of daffodils, Oration 37, 16 February 2011.

<http://www.crabtreemelbourne.org/Oration2011.pdf>

¹³ Elders and scholars will recognise this as a line is from the play *The Rivals* by Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Elder Burleigh writes that Joseph Crabtree was involved in the rewrite of this play in 1775. It may well be one of the lines written by Crabtree. Diana Burleigh, “Joseph Crabtree, son of Mnemosyane, brother to Calliope, Melpomone and Thalia”. Oration 43, February 2017.

<http://www.crabtreemelbourne.org/Oration2017.pdf>

¹⁴ Crabtree is first described as the Swan of Sodbury in the Oration by Leonard Tancock, “Crabtree in France” British Oration 7, 1960 *The Crabtree Orations, 1954-1994*, Bennet and Harte (eds)The Crabtree Foundation: University of London 1997 p 41. Peter Armour’s 1992 British Oration “Crabtree’s Vision: Ambivalence, Angst, Apocalypse” provides some insight into the antipathy between Crabtree and Anna Seward, the “bitchy Swan of Lichfield”. *The Crabtree Orations, 1954-1994*, Bennett and Harte (eds)The Crabtree Foundation: University of London 1997, p. 294.

August 1799

My dear Mathilde

Not a lot to report except my social life has improved since Joseph has been dropping by in between his work and travels as I now have a companion to take..... We have attended quite a few soirees and dinners at Townley Hall and Bowland Manor and even a ball at Leighton. Things have quietened down now the season is over and many of our circle are travelling back to London. Joseph is writing a country novel – he tells me it is very new and fashionable to write about country matters. I have read a few little pieces and it seems to me that the characters are all based on our family and neighbours and our social events; some of his stories are not so kind..... Joseph has fallen in love with Baroness Euphemia Worthington Longstaff, but she is impervious to his charms.....¹⁵ Mr Wordsworth, a young friend of Joseph's came by with him last week – they had been hiking up in the lakes after some travels abroad. Mr Wordsworth is still a student but apparently he is a published poet. His sister arrived 20 minutes after the men, exhausted and somewhat bedraggled. Strange girl. The poor creatures have no parents, and I think they enjoyed some of my home fare. Joseph is doing his best with them.

Your loving friend

Eveline

I could just keep reading letters but my time is running out. So, I will now move to a letter from a fourth generation Evelyn to Elisabeth Amiot, Proust's aunt, who provided the inspiration for Aunt Léonie.

Cloughton-on-Brock

June 1909

Dearest Elisabeth

How are you my dear? Are you still confined to your bed? I am sorry not to have written but I am so busy with the suffrage movement that each night I fall into bed exhausted. It will be good for me to have a country break even though I am using this time to try to rally the troops up in the north..... Your nephew Marcel arrived. He is not well. As promised I am trying to get him out each day to walk – the air is clean here and it is warm..... He seems to be taking some pleasure from going through some old papers of an ancestor of mine – fellow by the name of Joseph Crabtree – apparently quite an eccentric. I must take them to the local history society but for the time being at least they are useful to Marcel. He sits and reads and scribbles all day in between sleeping and my forced hikes around the country..... He remarked on an old sign "Swan's Way" that had fallen to the ground – wanted to know its history. I didn't have a clue but he picked it up and declared he would repair it, which he did forthwith..... He is a little brighter when the ladies come around and rather a marvellous conversationalist at his best. He has also pallied up with some toffy lads up here at the on term break from Manchester University, and they hang about a bit and go fishing and swimming, nude. Elisabeth – I must ask you – is he homosexual?

Your loving friend

Evelyn

¹⁵ The JC file contains many descriptions of the social events in Lancashire and social doyens in the area. There are distinct parallels between the descriptions and Proust's descriptions of the Parisian social scene of the Duchesse de Guermantes and Mme Vendurin.

That was the last letter in the bundle and with no explanation as to why the generational conversation had come to an end. Perhaps Elisabeth passed on or was shocked by Evelyn's blunt question. Or Evelyn may have just got too busy with her causes, and in any case she was a single lady with no daughter to carry on the story.

And now the apotheosis of my oration – the mnemonic cake. We turn to the final evidence – the pages of the putative novel that Crabtree had begun, that formed the bulk of the Crabtree file, but which I only partially copied. There are many passages which are later echoed in Proust's work and time does not permit me to introduce you to them all. The most pertinent relates to the most famous passage in *Remembrance of things Past* – the madeleine which serves as a barb to memory. Here's Proust's published version first – it's a bit over the top.

No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory—this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me it was me. ... Whence did it come? What did it mean? How could I seize and apprehend it? ... And suddenly the memory revealed itself. The taste was that of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because on those mornings I did not go out before mass), when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my aunt Léonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of tea or tisane. The sight of the little madeleine had recalled nothing to my mind before I tasted it. And all from my cup of tea.¹⁶

And this is what Crabtree wrote about a century before:

No sooner had I consumed several of the crab-apple tarts, washed down with half a good bottle of claret I felt a great warmth seep over me, followed by a sweet swelling. As I brought the glass to my lips, I stopped, intent on understanding this impact on my being. I took another sip and bite of cake and deep pleasure invaded my senses, followed by a great tumescence of my person. What was this? What did it mean? I was quite alone. Suddenly the memory shewed itself. I sat by the Old Mill Stream in a clearing with a sweet maid, amongst a field of golden daffodils. We had laid out wine and crab-apple tarts from my aunt's store, on a blanket, and after our feast, and well into the evening, we dallied. The luxurious sights and sounds and smells of that day came back, her dove eyes, the daffodils, the fine claret, and the taste of tart redolent with sweet rose and crab-apple. And with the return of memory came a great release and all because of my little tart.

Just a note here, in the manuscript he had crossed out "wild eyes" and substituted "dove eyes"; two clues to the identity of the maid. Can you guess who it might be?¹⁷ On a separate

¹⁶ *Remembrance of Things Past*, Volume 1, Swann's Way, Penguin Classics, 2016, p.53.

¹⁷ In "Lines composed above Tintern Abbey" (1798), Wordsworth says of his sister Dorothy "in thy voice I catch/The language of my former heart and read/ My former pleasures in the shooting lights /Of thy wild eyes. Around that time Wordsworth and Dorothy moved into Dove Cottage. Crabtree is likely to have been referring to Dorothy Wordsworth with these clues, as well as the reference to daffodils.

sheet there was a charming poem relating to the same experience. It is quite reminiscent of *Ode to Claret*, although written in experimental Iambic Tetrameter, and I must share it with you:

Ode to Cake

*Erstwhile love's joy was an ephemery,
But a little tart brought back the memory -
A little tart that tastes sublime
And doth improve with good red wine
And it has a name quite like mine.
Oh! little cake, dear little cake
You bring back the lover's ache;
Oh! little tart, crab-apple tart
You are the muse for some of my art.*

Sadly, I do not have time for more readings. There are many pages detailing Crabtree's love for the Baroness Worthington Longstaff and a description of how he gazes at her intently in the little church at Bowland, St Joseph the Long, just as Proust describes his passion for the Duchesse de Guermentes and follows her into the church of Gilbert the Bad at Combray. And there is a third passage where the Proust's debt to Crabtree is most evident – in Book 4, *Cities of the Plain* (also known as *Sodom and Gomorrah*) Proust's protagonist observes the invert Baron de Charlus in a compromising situation with the Tailor Jupien. This passage is almost word for word taken from Crabtree's account of his observation of the Baron Worthington Longstaff caught in flagrante with a pretty ewe. But, of course, it would be indelicate of me to share these passages with you.

My time is up, but ladies and gentlemen, it is clear is it not? Proust was exposed to Crabtree's nascent novel and he snaffled bits of it for his own work. But more importantly, given that the fundamental ideas of returned memory and desire were clearly Crabtree's, we cannot deny his significant influence on not only Proust but on Freud, the Freudians and the whole history of the modern novel with its fascination with remembering. Not only is he with Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Beethoven and Mozart, he is also with Proust and Freud and it seems the dear little departed dog Sir Harry, an appropriate companion for the ghostly Crabtree with their shared love of luxury and cake.

Thank you

Angela O'Brien



The Ghost of a Flea by William Blake, Circa 1819