

# The Joseph Crabtree Oration 2024

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## Crossing the Line: Crabtree's Polymorphous Personality: the Early Years

### Abstract

*A discussion of the development through transgression (both literal and figurative) of the young Joseph Crabtree's unique epistemic turn attendant upon his engagement on Cook's First Voyage (1768-71) through to his years back in London (with diversions) 1771-1776, some of which finds fullest expression in the scenic design of Philippe de Loutherbourg in the production of Omai, or A Voyage Around the World at Covent Garden in 1785-6: years where Crabtree's influence hitherto was less well-documented. Crabtree's developing understanding of complex gender identities: initially on board Endeavour; was heightened during the observation of the Transit of Venus in Tahiti. On his return to London, Crabtree's response to the binary tyranny imposed on the Chevalier D'Éon de Beaumont (1728-1810) has hitherto not been mentioned. New light is shed on the complicated relationship between Crabtree's tutor at The Queen's College, Oxford, (whom Williams argues was more likely Thomas Nicolson than Joseph Jefferson). Lingering societal confusion of gender roles associated with the dramatic presentation of classical texts by students finds fullest resolution (and some circularity) in the relationship with de Loutherbourg at the Theatre Royal and the 1785-6 production of Omai. This is the voyage of Crabtree from the Enlightenment to the Romantic sublime.*

Distinguished Crabtree Scholars, Elders, Keepers of the likeness and the Eternal Memory,

One of the earlier orators commented that a year in Crabtree studies is too short a time to be initiated into the mysteries, still less in which to discover something new; but diligent work online, offline and wombling free in both undigitized print and manuscript sources has yielded some quite surprising finds, namely – and I quote from innumerable scholars here:

“There is nothing in Crabtree studies, that cannot be solved by additional funding...”

I

Let us set the scene with Camões *Lusiads*<sup>1</sup>

From the open sea I looked my last  
At the constellations of the North  
For we had by now crossed the burning line  
Which mark's division in the Earth's design

....

We saw both bears for all Juno taught us  
Plunging headlong into Neptune's waters.

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<sup>1</sup> Camões *Lusiads* V, vv. 13-15 trans Llandeg White (Oxford: OUP) 1997 (World's Classics).

Bear with me here, if you'll excuse the pun. This is the journey, both literal and figurative that Joseph Crabtree makes in those years, following in the wake of Camões, between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five. Ten, significant years.

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I had originally typed 'Polymorphous Perversity', a coinage of Sigmund Freud. The subtitle of tonight's Oration "Polymorphous Personality" is a coinage of Autocorrect. The prim authority of autocorrect prevails.

Those of you, like me, with no background in psychology will know that Freud's term relates to the projection by the self of infant sexual desires on unlikely subject matter – dealt with first, in Sterne terms, as early as 1976 by Cadwallader.<sup>2</sup> Instead Autocorrect has directed me to speak about the ungendering journey of his late teens and early twenties towards the polymorphous personality.

Crabtree, whose undeniable role in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and the Positivism of the Victorian epoch, is also a child in time. This child of Chipping Sodbury, of non-conformist origins, before he took his place in the world of Crabtree studies, first had to cross the line.

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Cadwallader claims Crabtree first crossed it in Bristol aged nine. That was up a mainmast. Next we find him on *HMB Endeavour* somewhere between 30 July 1768 when the Admiralty ordered the ship's company to join their ship at Deptford and 28 August when he/she/it/they sailed from Plymouth.

[The record] notes the fourteen year-old Crabtree's position in the crew was 'flute boy'. We know that for Banks's next voyage of discovery to Iceland, Banks had upped his requirements to two french-horn players.<sup>3</sup> For the first journey, one flute boy would have to do.

The next crossing of the line is literal. On 25 October 1768 which happened to be St Crispin's Day, the patron saint of shoemakers, Crabtree made a thoroughly well-documented crossing of the Equator.

Joseph Banks writes:

This morn about 8 O'Clock crossed the line in about 33 degrees West Longitude from Greenwich....

Capt'n Cooke and Doctor Solander were on the Black list as were my self my servants and doggs which I was obliged to compound for by giving the Duckers a certain quantity of Brandy for which they willingly excused us the ceremony. Many of the Men however chose to be duck'd rather than give up 4 days allowance of wine which was the price fixd upon, and as for the boys they are always duck'd of course;<sup>4</sup>

Not only did the fourteen year-old Crabtree cross the line, he went under it.

**[Fig 1]** Customarily, King Neptune flanked by his wife (usually the best-looking boatswain's mate) and two bears (Ursa Major and Minor) with their helpers marked the ceremony by shaving the candidates

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<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Brian & Harte, Negley (eds) *The Crabtree Orations Vol I (1954-1994)* (London: Crabtree Foundation) 1997, Vol II (1995-2003), 2004, Vol III 2004-2018, 2018; Cadwallader, FJJ Oration 23 "Crabtree and the Sea" (1976) pp161-168; (Individual orations referred to by oration number henceforth).

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Marchant and Richard Holbrooke (Keiza p241 n15 ref Banks Papers Ser06 SLNSW).

<sup>4</sup> '...so that about 21 underwent the ceremony...' Project Gutenberg Australia *The Endeavour Journal of Sir Joseph Banks* e-book no 0501141h.html (Nov 2005) Entry for 25 October 1768 (source consulted 25 October 2023)

before the ducking. In this case it was by means of a line passed through a block on the main yard with three dunks in the ocean at an atmospheric temperature, according to Banks of 80 to 82 F.<sup>5</sup> The external temperature wasn't the problem. The fact that most sailors of the day couldn't swim and they were a thousand miles from land probably was. Banks did observe that though some came up grinning, others were 'almost suffocated'.

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After nearly a year at sea via Madeira and Rio, the arrival of *Endeavour* in Tahiti left the flute boy in no doubt that the South Seas were different. Sydney Parkinson, observant artist that he was, twigged almost immediately that a number of Tahitian women had rather large hands. The crew also rapidly discovered that the application of noses and mouths in social intercourse were somewhat inverted. Sometimes we say that iron entered the soul. In the case of the *Endeavour's* crew, the iron successfully negotiated a whole transcendent experience, over and over again. At least one officer got more than he bargained for: twice. Crabtree's eyes had been opened.<sup>6</sup>

After the construction and deconstruction of Fort Venus, from which the Transit was observed on 3 June 1769. [Fig. 2] Crabtree's role as flute boy was augmented by Taiata who came on board *Endeavour* with priest, chief and navigator, Tupaia.

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It is difficult to establish with certainty what additional roles Crabtree performed after the Transit of Venus; but his position as flute boy indicates an above-stairs role. The artist Alexander Buchan had died early in the voyage. Buchan had been engaged to record figures, dress and scenes, whilst Sydney Parkinson was to record the flora and fauna. The crude figures recorded after Buchan's death indicate the hand of Crabtree, guided in part, perhaps by Taitia at one of the desks in the chartroom.

The chartroom was used as both a studio for recording what Banks and Solander collected but also for the explication by Tupaia of his navigational knowledge both of winds and currents, augmented by his expert navigation from the southern stars.<sup>7</sup> Crabtree was absorbing the skills at which he was later to excel, all captured in the industry that went on in that rear Stateroom. Each evening when he was off watch he returned to the forecabin, flute in hand, to simpler entertainments with his fellow crewmen 'below stairs'.<sup>8</sup>

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There are many cruces in Crabtree studies and one of the most crucificatory was identified by Negley Harte, editor of the Crabtree papers.<sup>9</sup> Harte, rightly in my opinion, identified Crabtree as the delimiter of the actuarial atomic quantity of the 'fictitious life' in 1769. How fitting that Crabtree should have developed this concept somewhere in South Seas - though he was not in a position to transmit it until

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* Banks observed discrepancy occurred in the thermometers above 80°F.

<sup>6</sup> Parkinson *Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas* pp.10-11 (Quoted Grantlee Kieza *Banks* (Sydney: ABC Books) 2020,2021, p.138)

<sup>7</sup> My thanks to Dr Harriet Parsons, Chair of Currency House Inc, for introducing me over a decade ago to the subject of her Doctoral research: Collaborative Drawing on Captain Cook's *Endeavour* Voyage 1768-1771: An Intellectual History of Artistic Practice" University of Melbourne Ph.D. Thesis, School of Culture & Communication December 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Fanny Burney's nephew James, spent time instructing Omai on Cook's second voyage to unlearn language he learnt in the foc'sl see *Cook & Omai* (Canberra: NLA/ANU) 2001 p.52.

<sup>9</sup> "Crabtree and Political Arithmetic" Oration 35 Vol I pp251- 261 at 252.

after the first *Endeavour* voyage returned in the northern summer of 1771.<sup>10</sup> By then dysentery and malaria contracted in Batavia/Jakarta left the ship's complement suffering from a heavily depleted number of actual lives, among them both Tupaia and Taiata. Crabtree's lifelong remuneration from the Bank of England for this algorithm was hard-won.

## II

Now aged eighteen, flute-boy no longer, Crabtree came ashore in Deptford into the midst of the cross-dressing, blackmailing double-agent, the Chevalier D'Éon's gender confusion<sup>11</sup> and the Wilkesite riots of that summer<sup>12</sup> - tattooed discreetly, carrying his kitbag, wearing his sailor's knitted cap – we might call it a beanie today.

Though Crabtree didn't know it, his own headgear was the height of revolutionary fashion – **[Fig 3]** within a few years to be feted in France as the Phrygian cap. On his way into central London, he could not help but describe those he saw about him swigging gin, smashing windows, shouting cries of "Wilkes and Liberty", making off with other peoples' property as 'Phrygian idiots'.

For that remark alone, Crabtree is obscured on the wrong side of history.

And then there was the pivotal meeting with **[Fig 4]** the Chevalier D'Éon whom I just mentioned. Not everyone knows about the Chevalier, some do, but not everyone. May I explain.

In the six weeks between *Endeavour's* return and Crabtree's discharge, the Chevalier was in trouble. The Londo Insurance Market – we now call them bookmakers - were laying bets on the Chevalier's gender. The stakes were getting so high – the book was said to be worth somewhere between £25,000 and £200,000 - that the Chevalier disappeared from their flat in Petty France in mid-May.

The Chevalier's problem was twofold: first they were seeking to return to France by blackmailing Louis XV over certain compromising letters – complicated but true - but might lose their liberty to a long sentence on the hulks on the Thames if seen to be betting on their own gender.<sup>13</sup>

Creditors ransacked the flat, carrying away goods to satisfy unpaid debts, and the press speculated that they (the Chevalier, not the creditors – language gets confusing at this point) had been abducted

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<sup>10</sup> Banks went ashore from Deal on 11 July, Cook on 13 July, and the remainder of the crew sailed the ship round to Galleons' Reach in the ensuing fortnight and the botanical and other specimens from the voyage came ashore to Bank's house at 14 New Burlington Street (Keiza p226); Crabtree almost certainly came ashore as supercargo at the earlier date.

<sup>11</sup> Half of London argued the sometime ambassador of France and double-agent was Charles Geneviève Louis Auguste André Timothée d'Éon de Beaumont, the other half was betting on Charlotte Geneviève Louise Augusta, Andréa Timothéa d'Éon de Beaumont (1728-1810); see also Bram Stoker's chapter on the Chevalier in *Famous Impostors* (1910). A freemason of London's Immortality Lodge (1768) the Chevalier's gender was the subject of a betting pool on the London Stock Exchange in the 1770s but the Chevalier refused to join and the pool drained. After their pension was stopped by the French Revolution, the Chevalier returned to London in 1785 and participated in trouncing male counterparts in exhibition fencing matches, in full bonnet and fashionable gowns until wounded in Southampton (a very painful place) in 1796 and dying in poverty aged 81. The Beaumont Society, an organisation for transgender people is named after them.

<sup>12</sup> Wilkes had been expelled from the House of Commons, raided in March 1771, prosecuted for seditious libel, elected Mayor of London and then, as an Alderman on the Bench, dismissed charges of seditious libel brought by the Crown against his own publisher.

<sup>13</sup> <https://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> March-July 1771

by Louis XV's agents and some reports were that they (the Chevalier, not the reporters) had been executed in the Bastille.

We can be reasonably confident that Crabtree identified the *zeitgeist*, one of political and gender confusion in the market, from the moment he set foot in London in July 1771. We don't know when or where in those weeks he identified the Chevalier's confidence in their own gender fluidity, but Crabtree's eye was in. From Crabtree's Polynesian experiences, the erotics of the market were an open book to him.

Only Crabtree could have convinced the Chevalier to swear and publish an affidavit disclaiming all financial interest in the question about their gender. The Phrygians returned to their idiocy: [Fig 5] the Chevalier could resume exhibition fencing matches, their fellowship with John Wilkes and their relationship with Beaumarchais. Crabtree's wisdom on the transgender issue far outweighed his years. His advice to the Chevalier preserved the market, and drew the line, without crossing back over it. A bet on the side would not have hurt Crabtree's fortunes either – a £25 wager was said to be worth £700 by the time a jury found the Chevalier female, on the balance of probabilities, in 1777.<sup>14</sup>

Obviously, the London market had never played the game of two-up. Two heads or two tails, each a one in four chance, paid out. Otherwise, all bets were off.

### III

Return from the South Seas was not easy. It was two hundred years early for a diagnosis of PTSD: Crabtree had been on the so-called 'healthiest' voyage 'round the world and still 45 of the 95 crew had died. An erratic tendency to ridicule was an understandable response. Crabtree was financially secure but far from settled.

Romantic by temperament, having literally crossed the line twice, now of independent means, enquiring, Crabtree's *mind* was ready for the Enlightenment. After Crabtree's almost inevitable expulsion from Eton, Oxford didn't stand a chance.

And so, Crabtree went up<sup>15</sup> in Michaelmas Term in 1772. He entered residence at The Queen's College. Despite having been completely rebuilt in the Baroque style thirty years before, its medieval origins, ensured its medieval values combined neatly with the decline in academic activity that marked the mid-eighteenth-century university.<sup>16</sup>

The Queen's College (I emphasise that the apostrophe is before the 's' despite some undergraduate sniggering) had a preponderance of northerners from Cumberland and Westmorland particularly from

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<sup>14</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer* 9 July 1771 p4; *Hayes v Jaques* (*Norfolk Chronicle* 5 July 1777). £60,000 in unpaid wagers were said to ride on the result. On top of his Bank of England income this probably assisted Crabtree's mobility after this date. The Chevalier was only allowed to live in France on the express condition that they lived as a woman. Louis XVI provided funds for a complete wardrobe and the Chevalier continue to wear their military insignia. In France "he combined the long train of his gown and three deep ruffles on his sleeves with the attitude and conversation of a grenadier which made him very disagreeable company" according to the ladies of those salons to which he was admitted. In 1777 a medal was struck in England in recognition of the Chevalier's transmigrations to France in his/her transgendered status. (Roberts p183 n.)

<sup>15</sup> As far as we can tell, the record being, tellingly, expunged.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Gibbon described his fourteen months at Oxford as the most unproductive fourteen months of his life: Peter Moore *Endeavour The Ship and Attitude that Changed the World* (London: Chatto & Windus)/(North Sydney: Vintage Aust) p 133.

feeder schools, such as St Bee's in the Lake District. It still does.<sup>17</sup> Crabtree, though a Southerner, was clearly broad-minded enough not to mind. Queen's also took a number of wealthy students from the Barbados and Jamaica.

Then there were the customs of closed societies. Queen's had at least five different classes of student: Servitors, Battelers (or Batlers), Commoners, Gentlemen Commoners, Scholars and Taberdars. The category of Battelar, as a student who received no 'commons' and had to pay their way for everything, is now only used in Australian English in the term 'little Aussie Battelar'.<sup>18 19</sup>

The Queen's College also had a long history of debates about gender and representation. It was the College of one of the most famous biblical scholars of the late sixteenth century, John Rainolds.<sup>20</sup> Rainolds fulminated in 1599 against cross dressing on stage on the grounds it transgressed natural law.<sup>21</sup> This failed to upset another graduate of Queen's, Thomas Middleton, who went down from Queen's in 1601, and began writing for the Boys' Companies, notably Paul's Boys and managed thirty-nine plays, ten Lord Mayor's Pageants and a number of Masques, every one of which contained boys and men playing the female parts, often with Aristophanic verve.

Such was the ethos that Crabtree entered only 170 years later.

Most accounts of both eighteenth-century English universities are unanimous in condemning the intellectual bankruptcy of the institutions – Queen's in particular was "one of the most exclusive and consequently one of the idlest in Oxford",<sup>22</sup> The College neglected specific student exercises, particularly the acting of Greek and Latin texts. [Fig 6] Time was spent instead in the dressing and powdering of student hair: the regulation style was 'the kidney' – those of you familiar with eighteenth-century styling (and the obsession of teenage boys with hair-styling) will know that the 'club' or the 'quince' favoured by fifteen-year old males was strictly prohibited.<sup>23</sup>

Sutherland argues Crabtree was sent down for penning satirical verses on the topic of his tutor, Jacob Jefferson – whom Jeremy Bentham had described as 'a morose and gloomy personage – a sort of Protestant monk'.<sup>24</sup> I must take issue with this. Plenty of other undergraduates of the time, Gibbon, Bentham and the lawyer [Edward Thurlow] all ridiculed their tutors.<sup>25</sup> Crabtree had no need to plough that furrow.

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<sup>17</sup> The comedian, Rowan Atkinson, for example, is an alumnus of both: QCO and St Bee's websites, passim.

<sup>18</sup> See, Evans, Margaret (ed) *The Letters of Richard Radcliffe and John James of Queen's College, Oxford 1755-1783* (Oxford: Oxford Historical Society) 1888 pp vi-vii; Sprigge, Timothy LS (ed) *The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham* (London: UCL Press) 2017, Vol 1 1752-76 p26

<sup>19</sup> Again, nothing strange to Crabtree's eyes. At the beginning of New Year, he witnessed the Needle and Thread Gaudy. The Bursar greeted each guest by threading a needle into their clothing, advising them to be thrifty (it's an English-to-French-to-English pun on Robert d'Eglesfield, the Founder: 'aiguilles et fils', needles and threads). [www.instagram.com/queenscollegeoxford](https://www.instagram.com/queenscollegeoxford) (site visited 16 January 2024)

<sup>20</sup> DNB His portraits may be found in Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford reproduced Dennis, G and Stewart, C (eds) *Oil Paintings in Public Ownership in Oxford University* (London: The Public Catalogue Foundation) 2015, reproduced Vol 1 pp125,128.

<sup>21</sup> *Th'Overthrow of stage plays*, 1599; Corpus Christi Coll. Oxford (CCC) MS352, CCC MS 166; Queen's Coll. Oxford MS 359 – MW DPhil notes Vol VI, 321ff. Reference in my Doctoral research notes Corpus Christi and Queen's College archives, Oxford, 1986.

<sup>22</sup> Victor Cohen *Jeremy Bentham* (London: Fabian Society 1927 (Fabian Tract No. 221) p1.

<sup>23</sup> Bowring *op. cit.* X p39; see also, generally, Lynn Festa "Personal Effects: Wigs and Possessive Individualism in the Long Eighteenth Century" (2005) 21 *Eighteenth-Century Life* pp.47-90 (Spring 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Oration 1, Vol 1 pp1-9 at p3.

<sup>25</sup> Gibbon *Decline & Fall* (1816 ed) Vol 8 p 31; Gibbon on Dr Winchester at Christ Church: A tutor 'who well remembered he had a salary to receive, and only forgot that he had a duty to perform'. I consider Crabtree is

Records confirm Jefferson left Queen's College in 1768 - whilst Crabtree was on *Endeavour* - and was replaced by Thomas Nicolson who it is reported was "exceeding good-natured and makes up for his predecessor". Other dons were delighted with his company: "he is often with us, and two days a week we chop logic together".<sup>26</sup>

Crabtree's 'pilling' is said to be Hilary Term 1773 somewhere between the beginning of the term in January and Easter. I favour the earlier date but I suggest he wasn't sent down. Like several of the Jamaican students of Queen's, he went down of his own accord.

What we do know that some student theatrical exercises were continued at the Queen's College feeder school, St Bee's, by a don and headmaster, Dr John James, who "developed a company of tragedians, acting Cato". As with the cash-strapped schools of today but before the child labour legislation, there was an ulterior motive: "With the profits we intend to purchase a library, decorate the school and yard, etc." <sup>27</sup> Crabtree, hearing the 'ker-ching' of 18<sup>th</sup> century academic entrepreneurship, more likely, objected to being exploited.

To the extent that student theatre persisted, and unlike the professional eighteenth-century stage, the undergraduates would still be playing the female roles. With a good-natured tutor, Crabtree's third all(apparently)-male institution since he embarked on the barque, *Endeavour*; with the prospect of spending most mornings in the hands of his hairdresser; dining at 12; and faced with the prospect of staring into the eyes of a spotty twelve year-old Calpurnia, or playing a thirty year-old Messalina, I can see absolutely no reason for believing Crabtree had nothing but confidence in his own gender identity; but I am quite sure that in his experience of student theatre he once more 'crossed the line'.

It was time for Crabtree to re-evaluate the company he was keeping. Crabtree was going down before he was sent down. The London stage was his goal.

## IV

The invaluable work of A'Vard during his Churchill Fellowship in 1986<sup>28</sup> allows us to take up the threads again. By this we know that in 1773, Crabtree, like so many looking for the pure relationship and the Theatre Third, was pining for several of the apparently cis-female actors of the Chipping Sodbury Repertory, affectionately known as the Chipping Sods. A'Vard also records Crabtree's work as a part-time stage manager with Sheridan, before the London run of *The Rivals* at Drury Lane in 1775. Thanks to contemporary research tools we can now fill in the frames between.

That we lost Crabtree to the London stage as an actor is one of the great regrets of the age. **[Fig 7]** Like the famous Master Betty who rode on Crabtree's coat-tails, Crabtree's capacity both in breeches and cross dressing rôles was matched only by his prodigious capacity for memorising his lines, first

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sometimes confused with Thurlow, who was allegedly sent down by the Dean for idling in the court at Caius [College], Cambridge. Thurlow, budding lawyer he was, retorted that whenever he walked through the court he saw the Dean idling by his window (Roberts *George III op cit* p.343 n.) As with the missing matriculation records, it is telling that no portraits of the Provost, Fellows or Tutors from Crabtree's relatively brief undergraduate stint at The Queen's College exist, despite the efforts of the editors of the magisterial catalogue raisonné of Oxford portraiture to locate them. See Dennis, G and Stewart, C (eds) *Oil Paintings in Public Ownership in Oxford University* Vol II The Queen's College pp77-92 (London: The Public Catalogue Foundation) 2015.

<sup>26</sup> John Bowring *Collected works of Jeremy Bentham* (Edinburgh: William Tait) 1843 Vol X p.37; Evans, ed (op cit.) p.xxvii.

<sup>27</sup> Evans *Letters of Richard Radcliffe & John James op cit* (James to Radcliffe Dec 3, 1759) p.vii.

<sup>28</sup> Phil A'Vard AM, Australian Crabtree Oration 2001.

established in Oxford. Betty, that's Master William Betty to you, was known to have memorised the whole of the part of Hamlet in three hours, Crabtree did it in two and a half.<sup>29</sup>

A'Vard established Crabtree's career as an *homme de theatre* but tonight I believe it's possible to go one further and confirm Crabtree's contribution to the history of European theatre through his undeniable influence on the greatest theatre designer of the day, Philip de Loutherbourg. de Loutherbourg<sup>30</sup> had arrived in London in 1771<sup>31</sup> and began to work with the great actor-manager David Garrick (himself previously a vintner) at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. Here again, Crabtree was in the right place at the right time. On 14 July 1774, almost exactly three years since *Endeavour's* return, Captain Tobias Furneaux's ship *HMS Adventure*, bearing Mai, mistakenly referred to as Omai, anchored at Spithead.<sup>32</sup>

Mai, became the first Polynesian to come to England and return to tell the tale.<sup>33</sup> Thanks to Crabtree's knowledge of Jenner's methods, Mai was inoculated against smallpox immediately he came ashore; through Crabtree's knowledge of Polynesian languages and careful mediation between Banks, Lord Sandwich and Solander, Mai was able to fire the imagination of de Loutherbourg's set construction enterprises first for Drury Lane and, spectacularly as we shall see, the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden.

First, Crabtree had to earn his spurs both in defending Garrick and de Loutherbourg's sets over at Drury Lane. Regrettably, supporters of a rival play, *The Blackamoor*, which by its title alone whipped away all moral ground from their cause, began a disturbance.<sup>34</sup> The outcome is reported in the *Kentish Gazette* of 6 February 1776. I think we can recognise our protagonist's hand here:

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<sup>29</sup> Giles Playfair *The Prodigy* (London: Secker & Warburg) 1967; Michael Arditti, *The Young Pretender: What Master Betty Did Next* (London: Arcadia) 2022

<sup>30</sup> I am indebted to my late uncle, the architect, town planner and stage designer Mr APW Williams, for the introduction to the work of Philippe Jacques (or Philip James) de Loutherbourg.

<sup>31</sup> (1740-1812) Studied in France under Francis Casanova, RA 1781 "His fires, storms, volcanoes and cloud effects were much admired" (*DNB* entry); Brown, John Russell (ed) *Oxford Companion to the Theatre* (Oxford OUP) 1995 p262.

<sup>32</sup> There is another crucificatory point here. Some scholars place Crabtree in America during 1774. Others claim he signed on to Cook's Second Voyage as Thomas Perry. I favour neither.

<sup>33</sup> Mai was enrolled in the *Adventure's* complement as "Tetubey Homey Huahine, Society Islands, AB" – Greg Dening "Ó Mai This is Mai: A Masque of a Sort" *Cook & Omai* op cit p 52.

<sup>34</sup> The available evidence indicates it occurred on a very cold Saturday night of the third of February 1776. Garrick was playing Lusignan in Aaron Hill's play *Zara*. A print depicting Garrick in the role is at British Museum Cat. Ee,3.296 [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_Ee-3-296](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_Ee-3-296); a further copy is in the Royal Collection RCIN 655005 <https://www.rct.uk/collection/themes/exhibitions/george-iv-art-spectacle/the-queens-gallery-buckingham-palace/prints-of>



Some gentlemen, civil and military, in the side boxes, opposed the piece, and a few in the King's box, with a degree of wantonness: hissing even Louthembourg's scenes, which both the rational friends and foes of the new Opera join in applauding. At length the *liegemen* of the author experiencing that the *defendit numeris* was clearly in their favour, lost their prudence, and one of them, a tall, brown-coated young man, in a Harlequin-like manner descended from the gallery to the pit, and flapped his wooden sword against the boxes, in token of defiance. The box residents, inspired by wine as well as valour, joined issue with the challenger: a scrambling fight ensued, each side (the brown-coated Harlequin assailant being joined by some of the pit squadron) interchanged and received various blows from their sticks and different missiles, such as apples, oranges, and half-pence. At length one of the box champions jumped on the stage, and after him another, an officer in regimentals; no sooner had they gained the opposite side wing, than they were followed by the valorous Knight of the clinch'd-fist, who had descended from the gallery. The moment he came up to the officer, he greeted him with a lusty blow under the chin; an immediate conflict took place, but the friends of each party joining them, it gave rise to a general battle, and in a second or two the stage was full of combatants, and blows with fists and sticks were indiscriminately and liberally dealt about. Whether the modesty or the prudence of those who sought was the cause, we know not; but as they retired behind the curtain to wage their war, we were deprived of an opportunity of celebrating, in humble imitation of Homer and Virgil, or Pope and Glover, the particular valour and martial skill of each leader; or of doing descriptive justice to the blood-followed thwacks, the eye-closing blows, and the breath-depriving bread basketers that were exchanged. The curtain was indeed once drawn aside, which discovered for a moment the scene of battle; and we must do the performers the justice to say, we never saw a more spirited and characteristic representation of hostile combat. Either owing to the superior prowess

## V

The old order, even when defended by the new, was passing. 30 May that year was David Garrick's last performance of Hamlet and, fittingly all proceeds were donated as a "Benefit towards increasing a fund for the relief of those who from their infirmities shall be oblig'd to retire from the Stage".<sup>35</sup> Four weeks later, Mai left on his return journey with Cook's third and last voyage in July 1776.

We see now that under Sheridan's new management and Crabtree continuing backstage support it is no co-incidence that de Louthenberg produced a spectacular scenic evocation of the South Seas<sup>36</sup> in *Omai, Or a Trip Around the World* by John O'Keefe.<sup>37</sup> *Omai* is the culmination of Crabtree's influence on de Louthenberg [Fig 8] such that our understanding of the Romantic movement in Britain is shaped almost entirely by Crabtree's insistence on the sublime and the terrible, his accounts of waterspouts and volcanoes, [Fig 9] the exotic regions of the South Seas and the relaxed attitude to gender stereotypes, inspiring de Louthenberg to develop [Fig 10] scenic, mechanical and lighting effects never before seen in Europe. The newspapers of the time also noted the collaborative nature of Crabtree's achievement:

From the astonishing execution of the scenes in the new pantomime at Covent Garden, it is universally allowed to be the finest spectacle ever exhibited upon the British Theatre. The sublime pencil of de Louthenberg with the auxiliary talents of Richards, Carver, Cotton, &c., accompanied by the music of Shields, gave the Otaheite hero, Omai, a new and enchanting triumphal entry into the metropolis.<sup>38</sup>

As ever in Crabtree studies, the "&c" illuminates Crabtree, as ever, there in the wings.

After an astonishingly long run of seventy performances in December 1785 to 1786 (George III, Queen Charlotte, two princesses and three princes saw it in May).<sup>39</sup> It was still doing great business at Covent

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<sup>35</sup> London Stage Database "David Garrick" for 30 May 1776. The part of Lucianus was played by one, Parsons, who had been promoted from the role of second gravedigger – a part he played with distinction to Garrick's Hamlet for over ten years.

<sup>36</sup> Pieces set in the South Seas were by now a box-office certainty that had kept giving for over 150 years: See, for example John Fletcher's *The Island Princess* (1621) 1<sup>st</sup> folio 1647, 2<sup>nd</sup> Folio 1679 - McManus, Claire (ed) (London: Methuen) 2012; Aphra Behn's novel *Oroonoko* (1695) adapted for the stage as *Oroonoko, A Tragedy* by Thomas Southerne (staged 1695 published 1696 with acknowledgement to Behn), never out of print in the eighteenth century; later adapted as *Oroonoko or The Royal Slave* (1748), *The Royal Captive* (Little Theatre, Haymarket, 18 Sept 1767) which the twelve-year-old Crabtree may well have seen; and further adapted as *The Royal Slave* by Francis Gentleman performed 11 March 1769 by which time Crabtree was at sea. London Stage Database 'Oroonoko' – Crabtree speculation, my own.

<sup>37</sup> A reconstruction of some of the scenery may be found at <https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/article/omai-or-a-trip-around-the-world> (site visited 28 January 2023). First performed at Covent Garden in December 1785, subsequent playbills refer to it having been played seven years previously (somewhere between 1779 and 1782 – far more likely in any Crabtree scholar's view); see also Gerald Frow *Oh, Yes it Is! A History of Pantomime* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation) 1985 pp152-3.

<sup>38</sup> *Newcastle Courant*, 31 December 1785 p2; the *Bath Chronicle* of 29 December however described the piece as having a "most laughable effect": <https://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>; see also Ian McCalman "Spectacles of Knowledge: Omai as Ethnographic Travelogue" in *Cook & Omai* p11 quoting *Times* 26 December 1785.

<sup>39</sup> *Bath Chronicle* 25 May 1786 p2 *et passim*; *Cook, Omai: the Cult of the South Seas* (Canberra: NLA/ANU) 2001 p12.

Garden years later.<sup>40</sup> Even now, in a recent reconstruction that may be seen on YouTube, we can see Crabtree's hand guiding de Louthenberg in every detail of set and costume which concluded:

With a Procession exactly representing the Dresses, Weapons, and Manners of the Inhabitants of Otaheite, New Zealand, Tanna, Marquesas, the Friendly, Sandwich and Easter Islands, Tschutzki, Siberia, Kamtschatka, Nootka Sound, Onalashka, Prince William's Sound, and the other Countries visited by Captain Cook.<sup>41</sup>

**[Fig 11]** And here, perhaps, one more tantalising hint in the de Louthembourg sketch from Omai of 'Obereyau, Enchantress' now in the National Library of Australia and reproduced by kind permission.<sup>42</sup> Do we detect a slight indication that this figure just might be our gender-confident patron, returning to the stage for one last time in 1785 before matters of state began to occupy his attention.

Once again Crabtree studies prove, if proof were needed by the august members of this Foundation, that evidence of absence is uncanny evidence of presence. That is one of the many lessons Derrida prepared us for in a post-truth world. To put it in Iain McCalman's words, regarding the performances of *Omai*, **[Fig 12]** we must remain on our guard against a "type of pseudo realism disguised as entertainment".<sup>43</sup>

Like Schrodinger's cat, Crabtree is among us and, if his lessons are imperfectly taught, all of us in the academy bear that responsibility.

I conclude with the words of Australia's finest eighteenth-century poet, AD Hope:

The modern critics of the maggot breed  
Writhe in their carcasses and seethe and feed  
Each purblind scholar and each well-trained dunce  
From the Old World and the New they come  
To search the rubbish heaps of Christendom!  
Is there a minor poet by others missed  
Dull sermoneer or maudlin novelist  
...  
Round greater tombs they mine and counter mine:  
One shrieks 'Stand off, his first ten years are mine!'.  
...  
With muck-rake zeal they ferret from the dead  
All that each genius farted, belched or said;

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<sup>40</sup> Entry for Omai 24 March 1788. Not acted these 3 years [acted in place of Love Makes a Man, advertised on playbill of 15 Mar.]. Afterpiece: Louthembourg's celebrated Pantomime. Not acted these 3 years [acted 4 Dec. 1786]. With new Decorations, and the Scenery new painted. Receipts: £256 17s. 6d. (London Stage Database Omai – visited 28 December 2023).

<https://www.eighteenthcenturydrama.amdigital.co.uk/LondonStage/Database?searchparam=workperformed:Omai|rl:Omai>

<sup>41</sup> Sixty of De Louthembourg's detailed sketches for Omai were purchased by the National Library of Australia in 1934 and may be found with the Rex Nan Kivell collection in Canberra:

[https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog?search\\_field=all\\_fields&q=Louthembourg](https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog?search_field=all_fields&q=Louthembourg) (site visited 8 January 2024).

<sup>42</sup> Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg "Obereyau Enchantress" sketch for *O'Mai or A Voyage Around the World* (1785) National Library of Australia CDC10830186.

<sup>43</sup> Iain McCalman p14 quoting Roland Barthes *Mythologies*.

Flip-flap and fly-leaves, dates and deeds and wills  
They publish everything from midwives' bills  
To epitaphs: whole books grow out of what  
His aunts remembered or his dad forgot...<sup>44</sup>

And so I give you, a critical, ten years of Joseph Crabtree.

Mark Williams

February 2024

3613 words (excluding footnotes and end material)

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<sup>44</sup> AD Hope *Dunciad Minor An Heroick Poem* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press) 1970 Book III, 185-204.

From the chronology with additions by me in **bold italics**; Australian chronological additions in *itals*.

**1768 – 30 July to 26 August Endeavour crewed and provisioned before setting sail from Plymouth**

1768 Flute boy on Endeavour's first voyage (Freeman R) ***Assists Alexander Buchan, figure and costume painter on the Endeavour. On Buchan's premature death, Crabtree's imperfect skills may be seen in a number of dreadful figure drawings of Tahitian and Maori peoples.***

1769 Helped build Fort Venus, Tahiti (Fisher)

1770 Said to have been involved with Jenner & a milkmaid and attended Eton in the name of Burke (before returning from Cook's first voyage) (Jones/Grantham-Campbell)

**1771 July 10 – Endeavour anchors off Kent, Cook's first voyage completed. Assists Chevalier d'Éon out of his difficulties.**

1771 Expelled from Eton (Grantham-Campbell)

1772 Met Jeremiaiah 'Bramah' Postlethwaite (Rowe). Met Joseph Priestley (Mullin) ***(ensured Priestley rejected from Cook's second voyage)*** – invention of soda water ***wrongly attributed to Priestley***. Aboard Resolution on Cook's Second Voyage (Charlwood) In Rome as Giuseppe Maria Silvestri; associated with agents of Pope Clement XIV in suppression of the Jesuits; tobacco in the treatment of syphilis (Crawford) *Travelled to Egypt and The Sudan in search of the source of the Nile (Martin Williams) Explored the Glaciers of Mount Kilimanjaro (Kershaw)*

**1772 Michaelmas – matriculates at Queen's College, Oxford. (inference) – though he might have gone straight up to Oxford after expulsion from Eton in October 1771 but unlikely given researches of Crawford, Martin Williams and Kershaw)**

1773 Sent down from Queen's College Oxford for writing satirical verses (Sutherland) ***Went down of his own accord following discovery of true self in student theatre.***

*Stage Manager Chipping Sodbury (A'vard)*

*Cambridge Univ Library bindery*

*Living in London with Bramah/Postlethwaite inventing the beer pump (Rowe)*

1774 resided at the Crabtree Tavern, Tottenham Court Road (Mullin) ***Admitted as a student at Gray's Inn (Kilbride)***

**1775 Stage Manager for The Rivals at Drury Lane (A'Vard)**

1776 Possible involved in drafting the US Declaration of Independence (Freeman M)

**1776 (Feb) Defends de Louthembourg sets and Garrick's performance at Drury Lane**

1783 Employed in Uncle Oliver's wine business, Crabtree & Hillier, Orleans (Sutherland)

1785 *Assists de Loutherbourg's realisation of sets and costumes for Omai or A Voyage Around the World at Covent Garden – though likely to have been planning with de Loutherbourg over several years.*





**[Fig 1]** Crossing the Line Ceremony, probably on board HMAS MELBOURNE c 1928, showing King Neptune, his court and bears dunking inductees.  
ANMS0823[228] ANMM Collection Gift from Margaret Kiley-Balas

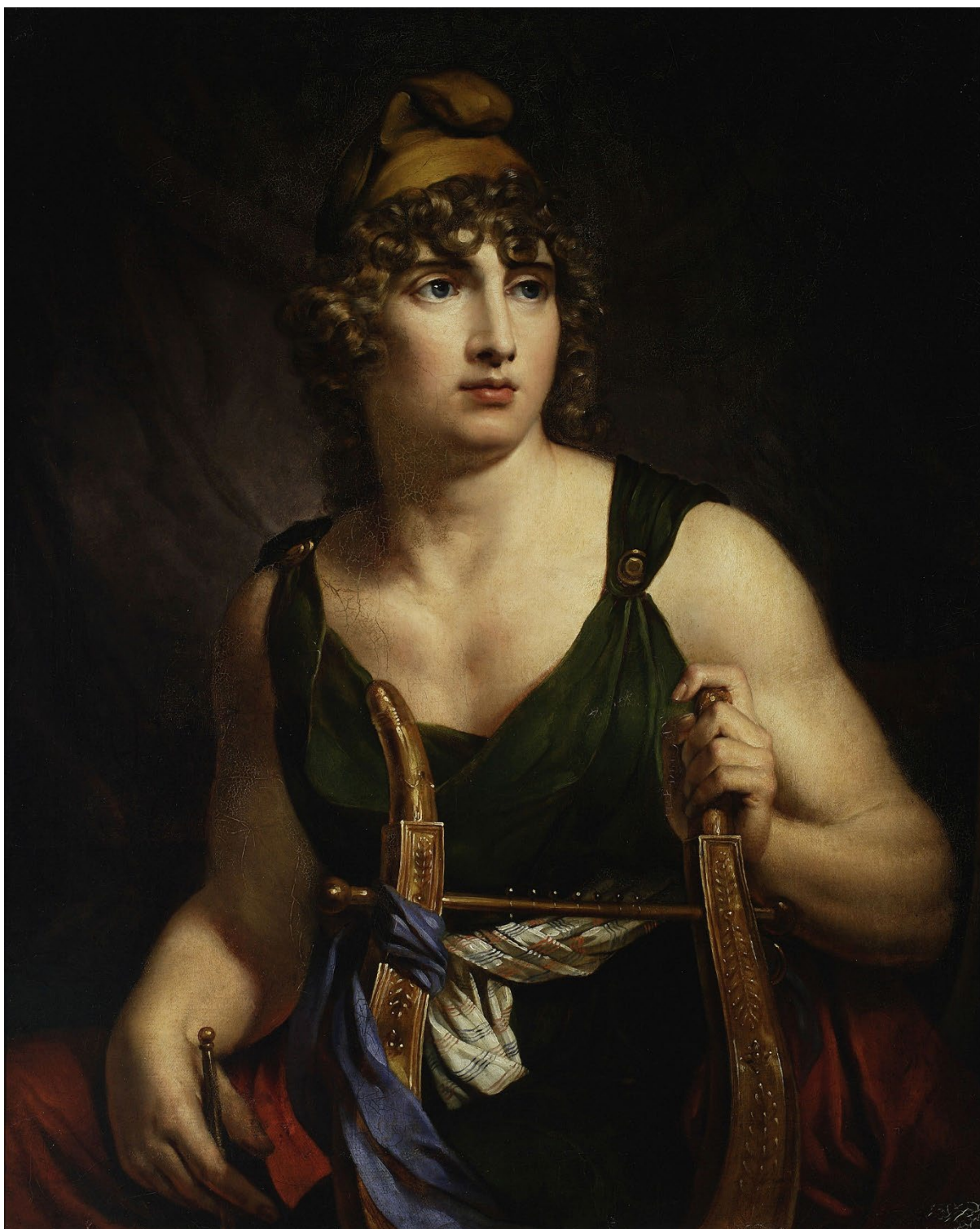




Taiyota [Taita], a boy from Otaheite (Tahiti), playing the nose-flute. Etching by R.B. Godfrey, 1773, after S. Parkinson. Wellcome Collection. Public Domain Mark. Source: Wellcome Collection.  
<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/p4sxamvm>

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**[Fig 3]** Alexander Brodowski "Paris in the Phrygian Cap" 1813, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, reproduced under Creative Commons Licence

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**[Fig 4]** Thomas Stewart: Chevalier D'Éon de Beaumont (1792) National Portrait Gallery, London





[Fig 5] Fencing match between [Monsieur de Saint-George](#) and [Mademoiselle](#) La chevalière d'Éon de Beaumont at [Carlton House](#) on 9 April 1787. Engraving by Victor Marie Picot, based on the original painting by [Abbé Alexandre-Auguste Robineau](#). Creative Commons Share-Attribution Licence.





[Fig 6] William Hogarth 'The Five Orders of Periwigs' (1761) illustrated in Festa op. cit. source Houghton Library, Harvard University.



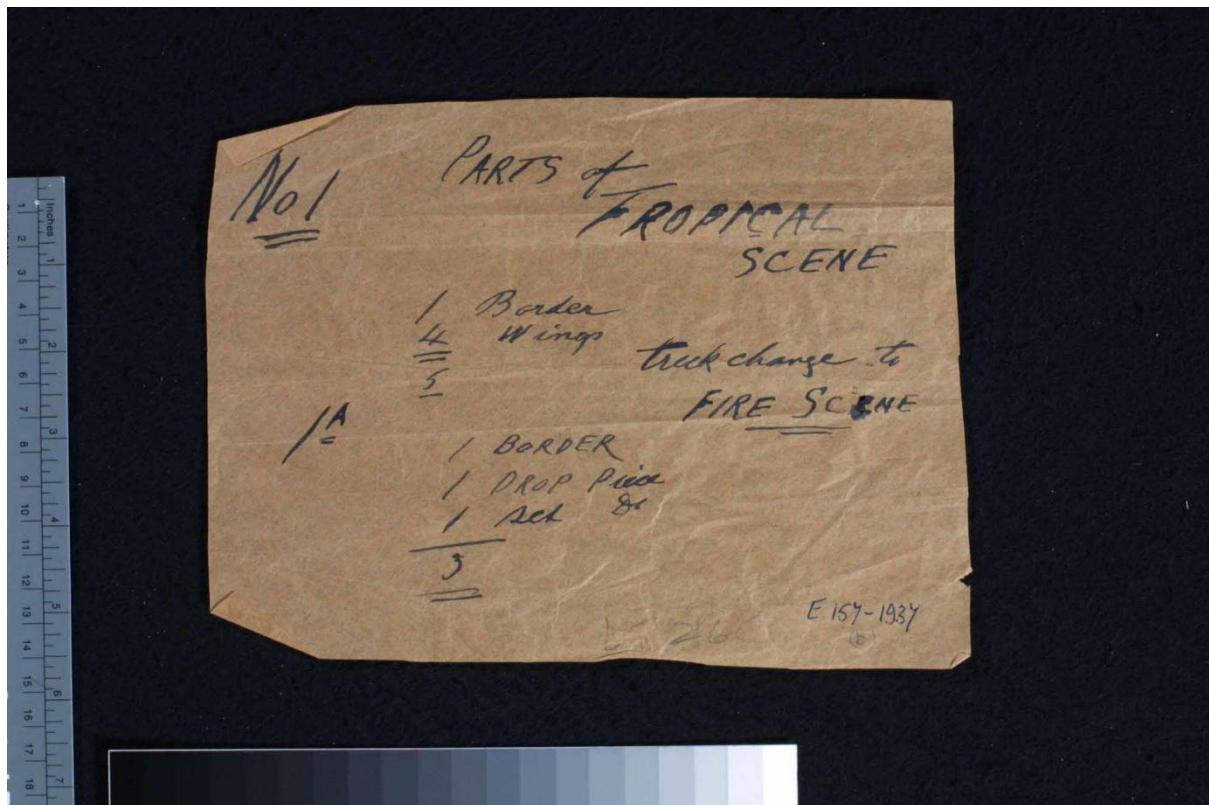


**[Fig 7]** Master Betty, Portrait of William Henry West Betty, oil on canvas 1804 by John Opie ©National Portrait Gallery, London, reproduced by permission for purposes of research and private study under licence 30/01/2024



**[Fig 8]** Set model by Philip James de Loutherbourg for Kensington Gardens scene in John O'Keeffe's pantomime *Omai*. Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, London. 1785 Accession E.158:1-1937

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O735198/omai-set-model-loutherbourg-philip-james/>



**[Fig 9]** Set model by Philip James de Louthembourg for the Hut at Kamchatka in John O'Keeffe's pantomime *Omai*. Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, London. 1785 Accession Nos. E.157:1 to 8-1937

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1113412/set-model-louthembourg-philip-james/>



**[Fig 10]** Set model by Philip James de Loutherbourg for the Hut at Kamchatka in John O'Keeffe's pantomime *Omai* . Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, London. 1785 Accession Nos. E.157:1 to 8-1937

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1113412/set-model-loutherbourg-philip-james/>





[Fig 11] Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg "Obereyau Enchantress" sketch for *O'Mai or A Voyage Around the World* (1785) National Library of Australia CDC10830186. Reproduced by permission.



[Fig 12] Webber, John, 1752-1793 & Louthembourg, Philippe Jacques de, 1740-1812. 1794, *The apotheosis of Captain Cook* [picture] / from a design of P.J. de Louthembourg, the view of Karakakooa Bay is from a drawing by John Webber (the last he made) in the collection of Mr G. Baker.  
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-135692347>

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<sup>i</sup> Mark Williams read for the combined degree of BA(Hons) (English Language and History) at the University of Melbourne, and was admitted to practise as a Barrister & Solicitor in 1984. He matriculated at Wadham College Oxford in 1985, completing a D Phil in the dramaturgy of the early-seventeenth-century playwright, Thomas Middleton. He returned to Australia and developed a legal practice with emphasis on intellectual property laws in technology capture and commercialisation both in universities, research organisations and the private sector whilst maintaining an active professional and academic association with the arts and performing arts in particular. For ten years he was Adjunct Professor in the School of Art at RMIT University, perhaps the first lawyer in Australia to hold such a post in a school of art, and has published widely on the protection of artists' rights and welfare. He has served on the Boards of numerous arts institutions, notably the copyright collecting society Viscopy and the Victorian Actors' Benevolent Trust, and was influential in the formation of a national body in support of artists' welfare during the COVID-19 epidemic. He also wrote and produced undergraduate comedy in both Melbourne and Oxford long after he should have known better.