

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Look What They've Done to my Bay

by N. A. Harman

EXTRACT

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'LOOK WHAT THEY'VE DONE TO MY BAY' - a play

By N.A. Harman

(adapted from his 1987 novel of the same title)

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The story of Captain Cook's accidental return to Botany Bay in the Bicentennial year of 1988, (which commemorated 200 years of settlement) - aboard the ship used for his second voyage of discovery, *Resolution*.

Premise:

In 1773, after reaching New Zealand during the Second Voyage, Cook somewhat reluctantly obeys provisional Admiralty orders to divert to Australia for the purposes of surveying Port Jackson (Sydney Harbour) - a natural harbour just north of Botany Bay, the existence of which he had noted during his first visit to the area in 1770, but not investigated.

Unfortunately for Captain Cook and his crew, while off the east coast of Australia and approaching Botany Bay for the 2nd time - the ship sails into 'The Wollongong Rectangle' and passes through a time warp.

Captain Cook thinks he is returning to Botany Bay only 3 years after his first visit, but the ship is now in April 1988 - almost exactly 218 years later.

Basically - Captain Cook is an illegal immigrant and multi-law breaker for merely repeating a visit he had made as a form of supreme authority 218 years previously. He wants to know what the 'Stralians' have done to the place in only 3 years - they think he must be part of the Bicentennial celebrations.

The whole episode is a foul-up of crossed wires, misunderstandings and suspicion from beginning to end, as the 18th century meets the 20th - and neither side ends up much the wiser.

NB All the laws, regulations & (basic) procedures cited, are authentic, as either State or Federal, for the year of 1988.

‘LOOK WHAT THEY’VE DONE TO MY BAY’

CAST

Male - speaking parts

1. Captain Cook
2. Lt. Clerke
3. Lt. Pickersgill
4. Wales (Royal Society)
5. Bayly (Royal Society)
6. Hodges (Royal Society)
7. Midshipman Barnes
8. Loggie (seaman)
9. Bosun (seaman)
10. Old Bearded Man
11. 2 Old Diggers
12. Middle-Aged Man
13. Det. Sgt Glitch
14. Det. Con. Rumble
15. Insp. Fester
16. Health Insp.
17. Health doctor
18. 2 Immigration officers
19. 2 Customs officers
20. Police Constable *
21. Water Police Sgt.
22. Police Prosecutor
- Cook’s Crew (2)

Male - voices only

- 3 Cabin Cruiser Crew
Truckie’s voice
Motorist’s voice *
2 Oil Tanker Crew
Lookout’s voice
Water Police megaphone voice

Male, non-speaking parts

23. Silent Drunk
24. Friend, of Middle-Aged Man

Female - main roles

25. Office Worker
26. Barmaid
27. Magistrate
28. Public solicitor

Extras

- Court Recorder - (F) optional inclusion
Court Usher - (M) - optional inclusion
Uniformed Police (ship guards) M/F mix
– 4 min. (* Constable drawn from these?)
2 Health Dept. Workers – M M/F
Crew – min. 6 (M) besides Loggie & Bosun

Misc.

1 of the Customs Officers poss. female.
All Voice-only parts can be doubled
within the cast (poss. recorded).
M/F Voices from smallcraft sound
effects as the ship is trying to leave the
dock. Some Crew parts could be doubled
- numerous ‘doubling’ possibilities
throughout. * Motorist’s voice could
be female – as a quirk of modern road
rage.

'LOOK WHAT THEY'VE DONE TO MY BAY'

The Stageplay

AUTHOR'S PRODUCTION NOTES/SUGGESTIONS (Inc. HISTORICAL ASPECTS - CHARACTERS, PLOT etc)

The play is adapted from the 1987 novel of the same title.

FLEXIBILITY

Most of the play has to fit together to maintain continuity of story – which necessarily makes it a large production given the plot & characters inherently involved.

Notwithstanding the possible presentation of a shorter version, consisting deliberately of random, selected scenes than the full story – there is designed room within the script for a degree of abbreviation without major alteration or loss of story continuity. For example, the opening of the 2nd part of Scene 9 could be omitted (Health Insp. leaving the ship before meeting the two detectives dockside), and Scene 10 omitted (Customs & Immigration trying to board Cook's ship).

Likewise the first part of Scene 5 (encountering 20th century traffic) with its necessity for sound pre-recordings and some set road delineation. However, in that case, while not affecting actual continuity of the story – they do get to the office from the dock somehow – the scene was included because the crazy cab scene in the novel was omitted on grounds of stage practicality, and what is there at least is some demonstration of their first-hand problems with yet another facet of the 20th century – road traffic, and speed. (They had already had a visual demonstration of boat speed & power, coming in).

HISTORICAL FIGURES

In most cases they are authentic and drawn from *Resolution's* actual crew for Cook's second voyage (see CHARACTER NOTES). In some cases - such as Bayly or Midshipman Barnes - artistic licence has been used to include them. In other cases (such as *Resolution's* actual 1st Lieutenant, Cooper) - some members have either been left out of both forms of the story completely; omitted from one form, or only *referred to* in a form of the story.

Obviously, given the numbers involved, it was not practical to include everyone of the ship's complement in the plot. I researched into what was known of the character of the main historical players and added/subtracted from those.

The main point of artistic licence used, is that *Resolution* actually sailed in company with a second ship, *Adventure*, on the 2nd voyage, and the (novel) story states that some crew were transferred between ships in New Zealand. It is not stated but *inferred*, that some *Resolution* crew anomalies occurred at this point (such as Bayly, who actually sailed aboard *Adventure*). And no marines were included in the story.

Cook's 1st voyage, aboard *Endeavour*, is documented in great detail in many texts – 2nd voyage, *Resolution & Adventure*, apart from the journals & main players - to a much lesser extent. Nobody except scholars in such matters, would know precisely who sailed aboard those latter two ships and the story is entirely fiction anyway.

So characters were used, who particularly stood out from contemporary accounts, such as Clerke, Pickersgill, Wales, Hodges, Bayly & Loggie - and of course, Captain James Cook himself. Such aspects as known character traits or personality conflicts were utilised in my interpretation of how they would respond to a sequence of totally extraordinary & inexplicable events as the 18th century met the 20th.

Capt. James Cook - some notes on portrayal.
Aged 44 at the time of the story.

He was not always quite the compassionate man that has passed into public legend. He was a straightforward, practical, no-nonsense man with a great deal of responsibility on his shoulders: he could be stubborn, irascible, and did have a powerful temper. Like all commanders of his time, he took a dim view of theft and he could be hard on anyone if he thought the situation warranted it.

I have given him a sense of humour somewhere between dry wit and sarcasm, depending on the circumstances. In this story, my intention is not, and never has been - to denigrate or ridicule the achievements, or the man - one of the most outstanding characters England has ever produced. The bare fact is, he is suddenly confronted with 20th century standards and demands of bureaucracy he cannot possibly meet, enforced by an alien people he cannot identify with.

It is pertinent to consider - with what we know of history, it would be far easier for us to travel *back* 250 years and at least have some understanding of our surroundings and circumstances - than it would for someone like Cook (regardless of all his talents and abilities) to instantly travel 250 years into the *future*. We have little enough concept of time-travel - the people of his times had absolutely no concept of it. For that reason, I rather think it is some aspects of the 20th century, and the characters Cook tangles with, that really come off second best; as the real fools - they had one of the great characters of history in their midst and not the nous to realise it. It is important that whatever 20th century crazy situation Cook finds himself in, he retains a strong measure of his 18th century dignity & bearing. And the same goes for his executive & Royal Society associates. It is not their fault what they are taken for.

Cook's dialogue (and that of others) reflects four aspects combined: my concept of 18th century Georgian speech; nautical terminology; how the dialogue would be spelled if written (such as foolbegg'd); and in Cook's case - tinges of northern/Yorkshire accent. For both practical & humorous purposes, some compromises were made in Cook's dialogue – whatever's there, is there for a reason.

Lieuts. Clerke & Pickersgill

Clerke aged in his late 20's

Pickersgill aged in his mid 20's

These were men of ability and strong characters in their own right (particularly Clerke, who always carried out his duties, and evidently liked an ale or two all his life as well). I chose Clerke for the tanker scene because, from reading historical texts, the escapade seemed to fit the sort of thing he could get tangled up in, in real life.

William Wales & William Bayly

Wales aged in his late 30's

Bayly aged about 30

Of he and Bayly, it seems in real life, Wales had the easiest working relationship with Cook, whereas the relationship between Cook & Bayly could be difficult at times. I mirrored this in the story - whereby Wales acts as the calming influence during confrontations and Bayly, more of a sceptical irritation. (As previously mentioned, historically, Bayly was part of the accompanying ship, *Adventure's* complement, not *Resolution's*. I achieved the switch via the fictitious transfers in NZ because I wished to use his character in the story).

William Hodges - aged in his late 20's

Could find nothing of significance to use historically - so he is as he is, in the play.

Loggie

He was a teenager in fact and a Midshipman - but given compatriot accounts of his scruffy and somewhat extraordinary appearance (supposed to have had a trepanned head/ hair in tufts) and unruly behaviour - I have omitted any reference to being a Midshipman (ordinary seaman instead) and I see him more around 30, or older, in the story.

Again - only those with historical knowledge would know anything about this actual character anyway).

ODDBALL CHARACTER NAMES

Were used in the novel as part of the comedy – and to guard against similarity with actual people, or people who might be associated with certain areas of responsibility at the time. Where necessary for reference/orientation, they have been carried over into the play.

REGULATIONS, LAWS, PROCEDURES etc

Notwithstanding the somewhat zealous fashion in which they are treated - the laws & regulations cited anywhere in the story or play, are authentic for the year of 1988 and are a mixture of International, Federal, State or local (such as Port Authority). Some licence has been taken in procedures, (such as condensing them) but basically the context in which they are applied, is accurate.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

Where they relate to characters pointing in a specified direction, ship pointing a certain way in a set, geographical reference etc., they have been carefully worked out and should be adhered-to, to prevent confusion. They relate to the ship being in a certain position off, or in Botany Bay; tied up at, or off the wharf and facing in a certain direction at any given time. The directions maintain orientation & continuity. (Botany Bay measures approx 6 nautical miles by 5).

SCENE/SET CHANGES

I have used a mix of curtains close or dim/blackout for the 18 scenes. I think audiences will tolerate several curtain closings during the course of a play - if they are looking forward to whatever what new piece of entertainment the re-opening will reveal.

COSTUME - finer points

Cook & his Lieutenants - period dress commensurate with rank, plus hats.

Royal Society Associates - neat, period bourgeois dress, all scenes.

Customs Officers – dark trousers, blue short-sleeved shirts with a simple, rectangular ‘Customs’ badge in yellow lettering at bicep level on each sleeve. Black police-style thick soled footwear/boots.

Health Dept. Workers - White overalls, ‘Health Dept’ stencilled on the back.

Police - For authentic NSW police officer uniform details circa 1988, if required - Customer Assistance Unit, Police Service NSW, Police Headquarters Sydney. (Police Public Relations, Sydney helped with relevant research originally for the novel).

Cook scooping flotsam with dropnet (scene 3, page 6).

This can be achieved on stage by a border at the far side of the ship (stage rear). A stagehand lies on the floor behind the props and unseen by the audience, places the items in the net which is dropped near him. Stagehand remains in position until the scene ends.

Telescope

Preferably an antique brass one.

Hurled belaying pin

Of balsa!

Navigation equipment (Scene 3, page 5)

Can consist of the print of an old coastal antique map; an antique sextant or replica, dividers, wooden ruler, and a chronometer. A mock-up of (Kendalls) chronometer is easily made by using an open-topped wooden box 125 mm (5in) square and about 75mm (3in) high with an old brass gauge or similar, inside it.

Alt. could be referred-to only when Cook demands if anyone has been meddling with the equipment.

Cabin cruiser encounter (scene 3, page 7)

It is obviously signified by appropriate recorded sound effects. Voices from behind a rear curtain and the same device used for the dropnet/flotsam action can be used, with an unseen, prone stagehand throwing the cans etc at the ship's crew.

Longboat alongside the tanker

The painted mock-up of the rowboat should reflect the tiered, clinker built construction of such a boat at that time. Not plain - no marine ply around at time.

Voices from above and the means of refuse coming down from above, would obviously depend on the stage facilities.

Luigi's cab

Would have liked to use the crazy scene from the novel at the end of scene 5 in the play (where Cook and his 2 companions try to get on/in a modern cab), but this would prove too impractical. But the *sound effects* of this scene, (drawn from the novel) could be included and enacted unseen in the wings.

Australian currency (pub scene, scene 10) For the year of 1988, the \$10 & \$5 notes used in this scene must be of the old paper (not plastic) type, which can be bought from any coin dealer at not much over face value. Joseph Bank's portrait only appeared on the old paper \$5 note.

SCENE 1. CAPTAIN COOK, 2nd LIEUT. CLERKE, 3rd LIEUT. PICKERSGILL, WALES, BAYLY, & HODGES.

The curtains open on a meeting in the great cabin of *Resolution*, prior to arrival at Botany Bay. 2nd LIEUT. CLERKE & 3rd LIEUT. PICKERSGILL sit one side of a table, Royal Society fellows WALES, BAYLY & HODGES sit on the other.

There are murmurs of conversation around the table which die away as CAPTAIN COOK begins his address.

Cook: Gentlemen. For those who were with me on my last voyage to these waters, t'is landfall at New South Wales once more. And for those who were not ... your lives have been none the poorer.

(He indicates on a map).

We are here to survey a large natural harbour 3 leagues to the north of Botany Bay, which I have named Port Jackson. For the purposes of the survey, I shall set down a party on the northern shore of Botany Bay ... to make their way overland to the southern shores of Port Jackson ... making such observations as are necessary and worthwhile. I will proceed with the ship and chart our passage into Port Jackson. The shore party will rendezvous with the ship by means of signal fire. Questions?

Pickersgill: If you've no mind to my asking, sir ... what's the reason behind such manoeuvres? Surely the Government can't have any settlement plans for sandy scrub and God-forsaken swamp land so far from the civilised world?

Clerke: 'Place is awash with flies and mosquitoes, as big as Essex sparrows.

Cook: Aye. And well may you wonder. Our task is of some curiosity to me. There's no fair reason for the survey, that's apparent - but orders be orders.

Hodges: Is there any thing of note for me to sketch?

Cook: There's nothing much of note at all. Of that countryside, I've seen far better. As Mr Pickersgill has said, it's mostly swamp and scrub. Apart from a few natives - empty. Useless for settlement. Useless.

Bayly: How long do you intend to stay at Port Jackson?

Cook: Mr Bayly - we have a vast Southern Ocean to explore. The need is not mine...to travel thousands of miles out of our way, to produce a map of use to no-one. I'll not tarry a moment longer in these parts than necessary to meet our orders. But thinks I, a toast to safe execution of the task at hand, however misconceived ... and swift departure!

BLACKOUT/DIM LIGHTS.

SCENE 2. COOK, CLERKE, PICKERSGILL, CREWMEN.

Scene opens (morning) with some crew working on deck. The ship is taken to be sailing stage left, to right. CAPTAIN COOK is with Lieutenants CLERKE and PICKERSGILL. As the ship passes through the time-warp there are strange eerie grating noises and the men look about them. The ship shudders and those on deck totter around for a few moments, bewildered. Noise & shuddering stops. The OFFICERS and CREW rush to the sides of the ship to look for signs of grounding.

Clerke: Perhaps we've struck, sir!

Cook: Send below! Examine the ship for damage!

(The two OFFICERS, & CREW exit).

BLACKOUT/DIM LIGHTS.

Scene re-opens - deck of the ship, some hours later. COOK is consulting a chart with CLERKE and PICKERSGILL, CREW are working about the deck.

Crewman: *(Looking over the starboard rail up for 'ard and pointing to something close by the ship's side).* Look at thart! What be them's a floating by?

(COOK hurries over to the CREWMAN, followed by CLERKE and PICKERSGILL).

Cook: *(Looks).* Quick! Fetch the drop net!
(A 2nd CREWMAN nearby, rushes aft, stage left).
... Hurry man!

(COOK & CREW move slowly aft, following the drift of the objects. 2nd CREWMAN returns with a round hoop drop net on a rope. COOK quickly casts the net over the side (into backstage) a CREWMAN brings it back inboard with a soggy mess inside. He dumps the catch on the deck - they all gather round.

A 3rd CREWMAN fishes the sodden oil-stained objects out of the net one by one, and COOK holds them up/examines them for all to see: he holds up some clingwrap, an old rubber thong, a plastic shopping bag, then a condom, which he stretches and twangs. Finally he holds up an empty soft drink can and scratches his head in wonder - other CREW look on).

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 3. CLERKE, PICKERSGILL, COOK, CREWMEN inc. LOOKOUT'S VOICE & LOGGIE, WALES, BAYLY, HODGES, MIDSHIPMAN BARNES, CRUISER CREW (3 VOICES), BOSUN.