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Errors, Great and Small

History is in deep trouble once it leaves its empiricist base.

Robin W. Winks (2001)¹

Peter Ryan observed that ‘of all the people I have met, Manning’s character was the most elusive, the most baffling to pin down and describe’.² But he reckoned that he had cracked the code by virtue of ‘the Doctor Johnson factor’:

If Doctor Johnson is correct, that no man may write about the life of another ‘but those that have eat and drunk and lived in social intercourse with him’,³ [then] I have that qualification, in regard to the man and also in regard to his book.⁴

It is not as it seems. Despite their long association, Ryan states that Manning Clark had ‘beaten the grog’⁵ and in fact many of Clark’s friends and associates were also under the impression that Clark had renounced the demon drink.⁶ Clark’s problem was that he suffered from

1 Bruce Harding, ‘The Historian as Detective: Interview with Professor Robin Winks’, *History Now*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2001, pp. 2–4, specifically p. 4.

2 Ryan, Peter, ‘Manning Clark’, in his *Lines of Fire: Manning Clark & Other Writings*, ed. A.K. Macdougall, Binalong, NSW: Clarion Editions, 1997, pp. 179–214, specifically p. 201.

3 John Wilson Croker (ed.), *Boswell’s Life of Johnson: Including their Tour to the Hebrides*, London: John Murray, 1848, p. 235.

4 Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, p. 181.

5 Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, p. 201.

6 Geoffrey Dutton, *Out in the Open: An Autobiography*, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1994, p. 492; Humphrey McQueen, *Suspect History: Manning Clark and the Future of Australia’s Past*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1997, p. 121; Bruce Grant, *Subtle Moments: Scenes on a Life’s Journey*, Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2017, p. 54. Ryan repeats the assertion that Clark had beaten the grog in ‘Folk Memory v History’, *Quadrant*, vol. 43, no. 10, October 1999, pp. 70–72, specifically p. 72.

grand mal epilepsy and, in consequence, was a two-pot screamer.⁷ It was during a study leave in Oxford in 1956 that Clark resolved to give up drinking and to start writing the *History*.⁸ He largely avoided alcohol thereafter, although there were spectacular lapses, including the occasion in 1969 when he disgraced himself in Government House at a gathering of writers and artists.⁹ But Ryan categorically states that Clark had become ‘a strict and faintly tedious teetotaller’¹⁰ and he claims to be speaking from a position of Johnsonian authority.

Ryan makes mistake after mistake about the person he berates for inaccuracies. He criticises Clark for misspelling a friend’s surname,¹¹ to which Stuart Macintyre remarked that neither Ryan nor Manne was able to spell his own surname correctly.¹² More seriously, Ryan states that Clark found satisfaction and enjoyed academic freedom during his early years at Canberra University College.¹³ Rather, this was a frustrating time for Clark. Thanks to ASIO intervention, the course he taught to diplomatic cadets was taken from him.¹⁴ Neither did Clark care for Canberra’s lack of ‘refinement’, and he liked even less his department’s courses and exam results having to be approved by the parent department at the University of Melbourne. A further source of discontent was the contiguous Australian National University, whose academics had no undergraduates and were able to concentrate on their research. In fact, Clark was desperate to get back to the University of Melbourne and was acutely disappointed when his attempt to occupy the newly created second chair of history came to nothing.¹⁵

7 Katerina and Axel Clark, interviewed by Susan Marsden, 19 June 2001, NLA, ORAL TRC 4770 (p. 11 of transcript). At the time of the interview, Katerina Clark was under the impression that her father had petit mal epilepsy. She later discovered that it was more likely he had grand mal epilepsy. Katerina Clark, email to author, 3 August 2019.

8 Katerina Clark, email to author, 2 August 2019.

9 Geoffrey Bolton, *Paul Hasluck: A Life*, Perth: UWA Publishing, 2014, p. 431; Brian Matthews, *Manning Clark: A Life*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2008, p. 302.

10 Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, p. 181.

11 Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, p. 207.

12 Stuart Macintyre, ‘Why do the Tories hate Manning Clark?’, in (‘Symposium Defending Manning Clark’), *Evatt Papers*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1993, pp. 17–20, specifically p. 17.

13 Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, pp. 190–91.

14 Manning Clark, *The Quest for Grace*, Ringwood: Penguin, 1991, p. 204; Mark McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity: The Life of Manning Clark*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2011, p. 395.

15 Fay Anderson, *An Historian’s Life: Max Crawford and the Politics of Academic Freedom*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press (hereafter MUP), 2005, pp. 230, 246–50, 280–89; Stephen Holt, ‘War of words’, *Courier Mail Weekend* (Brisbane), 2 August 1997, p. 7.

To complain about low-grade inaccuracies risks the charge of being ‘obsessed with little things of the mind and spirit’, the phrase used in an excoriating review of Volume 1 of the *History*.¹⁶ Rather, Ryan’s minor inaccuracies are forewarning that larger errors of fact and representation are afoot, one of them being Ryan’s depiction of the publishing trajectory of Clark’s *History*. He asserts that the Sydney publisher Angus & Robertson’s experience of publishing Clark’s two-volume *Documents in Australian History* was so off-putting that they turned down his *History* and shuffled it on to Gwyn James, Ryan’s predecessor at MUP.¹⁷ Actually, Clark chose MUP over Angus & Robertson because he felt his *History* was ‘appropriate for a University press’ and because ‘Melbourne was the place where the passion for these things was first conceived’.¹⁸ Clark was formally invited to commit his *History* to MUP by James, who added his remorse at having turned down Clark’s two-volume *Documents* a decade earlier.¹⁹ For their part, Angus & Robertson regretted not being chosen to publish the *History* and were ‘delighted’ with the consolation prize of Clark’s *Meeting Soviet Man* (1960)—a book that caused him much grief in the years to come.²⁰

More seriously, Ryan misrepresents the nature of Clark’s contractual arrangements with MUP. This was not a matter of debate in late 1993 because no one had reason to doubt Ryan’s explanation that he was locked into the contract he had inherited from Gwyn James. Ryan is adamant on this point,²¹ which he repeats on subsequent occasions, culminating with assertions in his autobiography that

16 Malcolm Ellis, ‘History without Facts’, *Bulletin*, 22 September 1962, pp. 36–37, specifically p. 36.

17 Peter Ryan, *Final Proof: Memoirs of a Publisher*, Sydney: Quadrant Books, 2010, pp. 32, 96; Ryan, ‘Hollow Man of Yesterday’, review of *Manning Clark: A Life*, by Brian Matthews, *Quadrant*, vol. 53, nos 1–2, January–February 2009, pp. 127–28, specifically p. 127.

18 Roslyn Russell (ed.), *Ever, Manning: Selected Letters of Manning Clark, 1938–1991*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2008, p. 178 (Clark to George Ferguson, 13 January 1961). Instead, Angus & Robertson published Marjorie Barnard’s 710-page *A History of Australia*. It appeared in the same year as Volume 1 of Clark’s *A History of Australia*, and was eclipsed by it.

19 G.F. James to Clark, 10 March 1959, Manning Clark Papers, National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA), MS 7550, Series 1, Box 3, Folder 23; C.M.H. Clark (ed.), *Documents in Australian History*, 2 vols, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1950 and 1956.

20 Beatrice Davis to Clark, 26 June 1959, Manning Clark Papers, MS 7550, Series 1, Box 3, Folder 22; Ferguson to Clark, 23 January 1961, Manning Clark Papers, MS 7550, Series 1, Box 5, Folder 34.

21 Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, p. 180.

the Press had made an open-ended commitment to Manning to publish succeeding numbers in the series without the slightest idea of how many volumes that might eventually be, nor over how many years [and, further, that] ... under our contract, MUP was committed to completing the *History*.²²

Such claims are a travesty. When James enquired, in March 1959, whether Clark would be interested in having MUP publish his forthcoming *magnum opus*, he did have in mind an open-ended arrangement whereby Clark would be allowed 'whatever number of volumes' it took to complete his *History of Australia*.²³ But James's offer required confirmation by MUP's Board of Management. The board was cautious and, in September 1960, deferred its decision until the complete manuscript of Volume 1 was to hand.²⁴ In January 1961, upon receipt of the first five chapters of Volume 1, Clark was informed that Macmahon Ball, in his capacity of chairman of the MUP Board, had 'confirmed the acceptance of the entire project'.²⁵ At this point it starts to get murky. Ryan states that Ball had opposed taking on the *History*,²⁶ and he repeats himself in his autobiography.²⁷ But the MUP Board minutes corroborate that the commitment to publish the work rested with the chairman's action. Clearly, James had managed to prevail upon a reluctant Ball, probably on the back of Cambridge University Press agreeing to take significant numbers of unbound copies (or 'sheets', in publishing parlance). A disgruntled Ball then got a measure of revenge by 'browbeat[ing]' the board into reducing the proposed print run of Volume 1 and accusing James of 'culpably under-pricing' the cost of sheets to Cambridge University Press. Whatever the justice of the allegation, James's economic management had been deficient in other respects, resulting in a horrendous overdraft and ultimately in his

22 Peter Ryan, 'Folk Memory v History', review of *A Short History of Manning Clark*, by Stephen Holt, *Quadrant*, vol. 43, no. 10, October 1999, pp. 70–71, specifically p. 71; Ryan, 'My Life as a Leper', *Quadrant*, vol. 55, nos 1–2, January–February 2011, pp. 127–28, specifically p. 128; Ryan, *Final Proof*, p. 31 for quotation, also p. 138. Clark initially intended the *History* to comprise two volumes but it blew out to six. Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, 2nd edn, Melbourne: MUP, 2004, p. 55; McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, p. 343.

23 James to Clark, 10 March 1959, Manning Clark Papers, MS 7550, Series 1, Box 3, Folder 23.

24 Minutes of the Board of Management, 26 September 1960, Records of Melbourne University Press (hereafter MUP Records), 2003.0118.

25 James to Clark, 5 January 1961, Manning Clark Papers, MS 7550, Series 18, Box 156, Folder 1.

26 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 182.

27 Ryan, *Final Proof*, pp. 16–17.

constructive dismissal; in a restructuring of the press, he was to remain as director but without a place on the board. Rather than submit to such indignity, he resigned.²⁸

There is a second point of contention. Contrary to Ryan's assertions, no actual contract had been drawn up by the time that Volume 1 of the *History* was published in September 1962, some months after James's departure. Ryan did not inherit a contract as he claimed but presented Clark with one (technically an 'agreement') the following year. It was the standard MUP contract and it specified, in Ryan's handwriting, that the *History* would comprise four volumes and that each volume be delivered at two-yearly intervals, unless extensions of time had been granted.²⁹ The formal contract for four volumes, of course, overrode the open-ended but informal offer from James to write as many volumes as Clark chose.

Then we come to another contractual matter. Historian Geoffrey Bolton did wonder—and doubted—whether MUP had followed the usual procedure that the manuscripts of successive volumes had been sent to 'one or two qualified readers' for comment on their suitability.³⁰ This was not the case, because Ryan had neglected to make any such provision. Although the first volume of the *History* had already been published, provision for subsequent refereeing ought to have been written into the belated contract. In other words, it was Ryan's doing that subsequent volumes of the *History* were not subject to peer review, something he never publicly acknowledged. As Ryan would have said, this is 'no way to run a long-term publishing venture'.³¹

28 Minutes of the Board of Management, 27 March 1961, MUP Records, 2003.0118; James to Clark, 5 January 1961, and James to Clark, 5 April 1961, both in Manning Clark Papers, MS 7550, Series 18, Box 156, Folder 1; James to Clark, 6 August 1987, Manning Clark Papers, MS 7550, Series 18, Box 160, Folder 29; Stephen Holt, *A Short History of Manning Clark*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999, pp. 129–31.

29 Ryan to Clark, 17 July 1963 and 19 August 1963, MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 20 (Folder: History of Australia, vol. 1). An unsigned copy of the contract, but containing Ryan's handwritten insertions, is in the MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 20 (Folder: History of Australia, vol. 2). Ryan's intention that there be four volumes seems to have been known around town. In his review of Volume 1 of the *History*, Stuart Sayers (literary editor of the *Age*) refers to 'what promises to be a four-volume work'. See Sayers, 'A new history of Australia: "restless human forces and passions"', *Age*, 8 September 1962, p. 17.

30 Geoffrey Bolton, 'Don't smash the icon', *Bulletin*, 12 October 1993, pp. 42–43, specifically p. 43. Bolton (1931–2015) was prominent within the Australian historical profession. He was an exponent of 'the middle way' and in public debate he instinctively assumed the role of 'an observer rather than a controversialist'. Stuart Macintyre, 'Geoffrey Bolton, A Lifetime in History', in Stuart Macintyre, Lenore Layman and Jenny Gregory (eds), *A Historian for all Seasons: Essays for Geoffrey Bolton*, Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2017, pp. 1–39, for quotation see p. 31.

31 Ryan, *Final Proof*, p. 31.

Ryan's autobiography contains a confusion of ideas and statements that Volume 1 had been foisted upon him. On the one hand, he asserts that its publication came at a most opportune moment for the financially beleaguered MUP. A few pages earlier, however, he expresses dissatisfaction that he had to 'get in the nation's bookshops a work of which I had not previously read the manuscript before recommending it to the [MUP Board of Management] for acceptance', as though something untoward was afoot.³² But every incoming managing editor of a publishing house inherits a list. Ryan wants it both ways, because he also complains that the existing list, when he commenced duties, 'would [only] hold the MUP fort briefly; after that, a void, unless urgent steps were taken to fill it'.³³ Such inconsistencies, as we will see, are typical of the manner in which Ryan's arguments can shift around.

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As mentioned, Ryan asserts that he was locked into an association with Clark from which there was no exit door, unless Clark decided to cease producing volumes. On the contrary, Ryan had ample opportunity to terminate the project. In his original *Quadrant* article, Ryan mentioned that 'Manning more than once, in disgust and discouragement, declared to me his intention to abandon all thought of future volumes'.³⁴ Surprisingly, no one noticed in late August/early September 1993 that Clark had provided escape routes, or else questions would have been asked as to why Ryan had persisted with a work he described as 'unworthy of the imprint of a scholarly publishing house'.³⁵ In fact, Ryan had the chance to sign off as early as July 1964 when Clark 'wondered whether it is worthwhile going on'. In despair at some of the reviews, Clark thought 'it may be wise to write no more'. To which Ryan promptly responded:

Of course we think it worth going on with. It is certainly one of the most distinguished and exciting titles in our List ... your great history will certainly be one of the best known pieces of Australian scholarship and literature for many, many years to come.³⁶

32 Ryan, *Final Proof*, p. 30.

33 Ryan, *Final Proof*, p. 28, for quotation see p. 36, also pp. 63–65.

34 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 194.

35 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 181.

36 Russell, *Ever, Manning*, p. 230 (Clark to Ryan, 28 July 1964); Ryan to Clark, 1 July [should be August] 1964, Manning Clark Papers, MS 7550, Series 1, Box 5, Folder 40.

A further opportunity presented itself three years later, in September 1967, when Clark asked Ryan ‘to tell me honestly if you and the M.U.P. want me to write a third volume’.³⁷ Ryan’s blandishments then switched from praise of quality to public interest in the project, which are two different things.

This is in reply to your letter of 5 September, asking whether we *really* want a third (and indeed a fourth) volume from your pen. The answer is clearly and emphatically ‘Yes’, and upon several counts. Firstly ... we feel that there is an obligation, following the announced plan of the work years ago, to carry it through. Secondly, volume I established for itself a place quite unique in Australian history, and the continuing level of interest is proved by the fact that, (yet again!) it has to be reprinted to meet the demand. Thirdly, the advance interest in volume II is keen, and we have not the slightest doubt that it will be a great success. So how can you doubt that volume 3 could be anything but one of the most eagerly awaited MSS. we have upon our list?³⁸

Clark was having a difficult time with Volume 3 and the following year he burdened Ryan with further self-doubts:

Chance and circumstance may well cause me to stop at 1851 or December 1852, call it a day, and call the whole work, *A History of Australia down to the discovery of Gold*. Then I could get on with other things, and bow out from the world of the men who presume to establish a standards’ laboratory for the great questions of the human heart.³⁹

And again his publisher mounted a rescue mission:

I hope you will not, upon reflection, conclude your history with volume 3 in 1852. This would be a disappointment to your immense and avid public, *and a great loss to Australians’ awareness of themselves* [my emphasis].⁴⁰

Ryan followed up a few months later, and his argument switched back to quality. Fondly recalling his days as Clark’s student at the University of Melbourne, he expressed the hope that Clark would continue ‘at least up to 1901 ... It is unthinkable that all this should not eventually be gathered

37 Russell, *Ever, Manning*, p. 262 (Clark to Ryan, 5 September 1967).

38 Ryan to Clark, 7 September 1967, MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 20 (vol. 2).

39 Russell, *Ever, Manning*, p. 270 (Clark to Ryan, 28 March 1968).

40 Ryan to Clark, 9 April 1968, MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 20 (vol. 2).

into the great work'.⁴¹ Even then, Clark continued to voice his doubts and again Ryan urged him to forget the 'nitpickers' and to forge ahead.⁴² All this cajoling amounted, in a phrase of Ryan's in another context, to 'moral evasiveness'.⁴³

Clark's crises of confidence provide insight as to what Ryan was up against; and Clark may just have been angling for reassurance. But, why was Ryan so anxious for subsequent volumes of a work about which he was becoming increasingly disenchanted? He could have taken the ostensibly humanitarian approach by letting Clark go in peace, citing concerns for his health and welfare in the face of a task that was grinding him down. The impediment to ditching the *History*, according to Ryan, was that it was 'highly doubtful' he could prevail upon MUP's Board of Management to discontinue Clark's *History*:⁴⁴ 'The book was a success, wasn't it. Sales were stupendous, weren't they? The professional historians seemed to approve, didn't they? So who was I to judge such matters?'⁴⁵ Geoffrey Bolton wondered—and, again, doubted—whether this was a valid argument, stating that Ryan was casting aspersions on his Board of Management and noting that he could have sought outside opinions on Clark's work.⁴⁶ Armed with negative outside advice there is reason to believe that Ryan's misgivings would have prevailed. In his autobiography he represents the board as comprising sensible chaps who would listen to reason, whose interactions with the director were based on mutual trust and who were motivated by an overriding concern for the good standing of the press.⁴⁷ Yet Ryan never raised with the board, much less with Clark, his qualms about the quality of the *History* and his perception that it was putting MUP's reputation at risk. A former chairman of the board attests that Ryan 'meticulously ... briefed the Board and its various committees',

41 Ryan to Clark, 21 May 1968, MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 20 (vol. 2). Shortly after taking up the reins at MUP, Ryan told Clark that Volume 1 of the *History* was 'a great work'. See Matthews, *Manning Clark*, p. 229.

42 Russell, *Ever, Manning*, pp. 277–78 (Clark to Ryan, 14 August 1968 and 3 September 1968) and p. 384 (Clark to Ryan, 8 November 1978); Ryan to Clark, 16 September 1968, MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 21 (vol. 3).

43 Peter Ryan, 'Journey into Greenland' (1989), in his *Lines of Fire*, pp. 75–79, specifically p. 76.

44 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 196.

45 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 182.

46 Geoffrey Bolton, 'Don't smash the icon', *Bulletin*, 12 October 1993, pp. 42–43; Christopher Bantick, 'Clark's place in historical discourse', *Australian*, 8 September 1993, p. 22.

47 Ryan, *Final Proof*, pp. 28–29, 42, 65, 67, 74, 144.

and another board member avers that ‘he ran a lean and orderly ship’.⁴⁸ But instead of sharing his concerns with the MUP Board of Management he lays the blame on others, arguing that academic approval of the *History* precluded him from approaching the board with a view to terminating the project.

Ryan’s other explanation for not ditching the *History* was the press’s precarious financial position. When he took up duties in mid-1962, MUP was still paying off a sizeable overdraft and ‘the *History* was a valuable revenue earner ... income not lightly to be thrown away’.⁴⁹ Moreover, ‘The reception given to Volume 1 was everything a publisher prays for—keen and occasionally acrimonious criticism, extending over months. Sales soared’.⁵⁰ Volume 1, in fact, came at a heaven-sent moment for both the beleaguered MUP and the newly arrived Ryan: ‘Apart from providing urgently needed sales revenue ... it gave reassurance to both booksellers and the public that “MUP is still *definitely* in business”’.⁵¹ The notion among MUP staff that ‘Manning pays all our wages’⁵² is an exaggeration but revenue from the earlier volumes of the *History* was clearly of great help to the firm’s straightened finances. The *History* was indeed a high-selling title—‘at almost any time one volume or another was in the printer’s hands for a reprint’⁵³—to the extent that it had ‘chalked up aggregate prints of over 40,000 copies’ by 1988.⁵⁴ Such was the success

48 John Poynter, ‘Peter Ryan the Publisher’, *Quadrant*, vol. 60, no. 3, March 2016, pp. 58–59, specifically p. 59; Geoffrey Blainey, ‘Peter Ryan’s Life (2)’, *Quadrant*, vol. 60, no. 3, March 2016, pp. 57–58, specifically p. 58. The minutes of the MUP Board of Management are a record of decisions; only occasionally do they relate the discussions leading to a decision. Still, it is inconceivable that a matter of such importance as abandoning Clark’s *History* would have escaped being recorded in the minutes, had the subject been raised. Once the *History* had been formally accepted, the board minutes simply record such routine matters as the receipt of Clark’s manuscripts, the stage of editing, printing processes and the size of the print runs.

49 Ryan, *Final Proof*, p. 31, for quotation see p. 138. Both Ryan and Ball were assiduous in finding ways to reduce the overdraft: e.g. Ball to F.R. Mansridge (Cambridge University Press, New York), 21 March 1963, Ball Papers, NLA, MS 7851, Series 1, Box 3, Folder 22; Ryan to Jim Main, 12 September 1966, J.M. Main Archive, Special Collections, Flinders University Library, PGp 2/183/10; Ryan to Douglas Pike, 1 December 1966, Pike Papers, NLA, MS 6869, Box 8, Folder 4.

50 Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, p. 192.

51 Ryan, *Final Proof*, p. 38.

52 Dymphna Clark, interviewed by Heather Rusden, 13 February 1997 (starting at 71.53 minutes), NLA, ORAL TRC 3548, available at: nla.gov.au/nla.obj-217338911/listen.

53 Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, p. 205.

54 Ryan to Sayers, 16 October 1973, MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 21 (vol. 3). Sales figures for various volumes of the *History* are provided by Matthews, *Manning Clark*, pp. 229–30, 267, 363; McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, pp. 438, 592, 615, 772 n.80.

that eventually hardback and paperback sets of the entire six volumes of the *History* were 'selling strongly at recommended retail prices of \$210 and \$155.70, respectively'.⁵⁵

A key phrase in Ryan's critique went unnoticed at the time, namely the assertion that 'Manning's sales revenues were large and they were welcome, but the Press would not have sunk without them'.⁵⁶ Indeed, the overdraft, which stood at £161,000 (or \$322,000) at the end of 1962, was extinguished in 1971.⁵⁷ An important factor in MUP's return to financial health was the sale of the printery and the building it occupied, which 'yielded a handsome sum in ready cash'.⁵⁸ Although MUP was out of financial danger and had other high-selling titles,⁵⁹ Ryan, by his own account, sold his soul and continued to publish the *History*—whose limitations, he said, were 'conspicuous and disappointing'.⁶⁰ In other words, after Volume 3 the *History* was by no means the economic be-all-and-end-all that justified Ryan persisting against his 'better judgement'.

He was then reduced to flattery to deceive, as people attest. David Carment, a former postgraduate student of Clark's, recalls an occasion in the late 1970s at the Clarks' home when Ryan was loud in his praise for the forthcoming volume of the *History*; and Clark's son Axel told Roslyn Russell that Ryan always flattered his father outrageously.⁶¹ It is not that the family resented criticism *per se*; responding to historian James Griffin's review of Cathcart's abridgement of the *History*, Axel reassured Griffin that his 'severe judgments' constituted 'serious criticism' and that no offence had been taken.⁶²

55 Nick Walker (MUP Manager – Sales & Marketing) to Ryan and others, 8 March 1988, and Walker to 'Dear Bookseller', 1 December 1987, both in MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 21 (vol. 6).

56 Peter Ryan, 'A Reply to my Critics', in his *Lines of Fire*, pp. 214–22, specifically p. 218.

57 Ryan to Macmahon Ball, 19 July 1963, Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1; John Poynter and Carol Rasmussen, *A Place Apart: The University of Melbourne: Decades of Challenge*, Melbourne: MUP, 1996, pp. 438, 513 n.16.

58 Ryan, *Final Proof*, p. 61.

59 Ryan, *Final Proof*, pp. 73, 86–88, 95, 102–3, 109, 119–21, 163.

60 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 206.

61 Carment, 'Exemplary scholar' (letter), *Australian*, 31 August 1993, p. 10; Carment to Dymphna Clark, 27 August 1993, Dymphna Clark Papers, NLA, MS 9873, Series 10, Box 35, Folder 1; Roslyn Russell, email to author, 31 August 2017.

62 James Griffin, 'Selected histrionics', *Weekend Australian Review*, 26–27 September 1993, p. 9; Axel Clark to Griffin, 6 September [should be October] 1993, Dymphna Clark Papers, NLA, MS 9873, Series 10, Box 35, Folder 2.

For all his cajoling and flattery, Ryan had never been enamoured of the *History* as history. At an early stage he told an associate at Cambridge University Press (the *History's* copublisher) that Clark was an oddball character writing oddball history:

We think [the *History*] will cause a good deal of controversy and interest. It is highly opinionated, and I am sure it will drive a lot of historians mad. I must say it is not my own cup of tea, as a once-professional historian. *Nevertheless, as a publisher I am sure that we have a most valuable work* [my emphasis]. And if I may close on a very private note, thank God volume 2 is almost out of the way. He is a charming fellow ... but for temperamental difficulties, give me Kitson Clark any day!⁶³

When corresponding with Clark, however, Ryan was repeatedly complimentary (apart from complaints about the technical faults in the manuscripts that Clark submitted). In a letter of encouragement in 1968, he beseeched Clark not to

underestimate the importance of the work, nor the impact it has made upon historians and plain readers alike, nor the very high level of excited anticipation with which the public awaits the next volume. When our sales representatives call upon bookshops or meet history teachers, the question they are most likely to be asked is: 'When will there be another volume of Manning Clark?' It continues to sell steadily. Not one day passes without orders for 4s and 6s and 12s. This may sound sensational, but to continue like that (both volumes) is much better than a brief burst of interest, and then eclipse. It is my very firm belief that your History of Australia will go on attracting readers in large numbers long after you or I are here to know anything about it.⁶⁴

He later told Clark that 'it is splendid news that we are to have a fourth volume',⁶⁵ and the year after that he was importuning:

The booksellers and many individuals ask me ... 'when can we expect volume 4?' Of course I say that Rome wasn't built in a day, that even God laboured seven days over the Creation, etc. etc.,

63 Ryan to P.J. Tickell, 9 March 1967, MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 20 (vol. 2). George Kitson Clark (1900–1975) of Cambridge University was a 'character' and was accustomed to getting his own way. He came to Melbourne in 1964 to deliver the George Ascott Lectures at Ormond College, which were published as *An Expanding Society: Britain 1830–1900*, Melbourne: MUP, 1967.

64 Ryan to Clark, 22 August 1968, MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 21 (vol. 3).

65 Ryan to Clark, 7 May 1973, MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 21 (vol. 3).

which they take in good part but with impatience. It is good to have such an eager audience in keen anticipation, and I wondered whether you might like to give me a tentative date. Like the old song, it's never too late but it's never too soon!⁶⁶

Upon receipt of the manuscript of Volume 4, Ryan switched back to praising the quality of Clark's work:

Vintage Clark! Your innumerable fans will go wild. The thematic treatment is wholly successful, and the episodes you have selected for close scrutiny are very discriminatingly chosen. The individual persons used to typify trends and arguments and social attitudes (Stawell, Clarke etc.) are a really rich and representative gallery.⁶⁷

And his exuberant reaction to the first instalment of Volume 6 was to tell Clark that he had

read the first seven chapters in two long sittings—yesterday and this morning—and write hot from pleasure. (*You* know which pleasure!) Verdict: Vintage Clark; a fine keystone to complete the arch.⁶⁸

Yet in his first attack in *Quadrant*, Ryan refers to Clark's 'high-flown style, the vague, pretentious sentences, the ill-carpentered paragraphs, [and] the cavalcades of clichés',⁶⁹ as well as Clark's characters being a 'dismal gallery of distorted portraits'.⁷⁰ In 1997 he described Clark's books as being 'sloppy, slanted and boring'.⁷¹ Ryan's posthumous attacks on Clark's *History* are in stark contrast to his public effusions and private flattery, yet he told Mark McKenna in 2007 that 'Manning was a hypocrite'.⁷²

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Ryan's determination to hang on to the *History* stemmed from a quirk of personality as much as it did an early preoccupation with dollars. He was a turf warrior with a strong desire to have and to hold. The *History* was 'his', in a sense, and he was not prepared to let it go despite his qualms *and*

66 Ryan to Clark, 12 February 1976, MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 21 (vol. 4).

67 Ryan to Clark, 15 June 1976, MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 21 (vol. 4).

68 Ryan to Clark, 13 January 1987, Manning Clark Papers, NLA, MS 7550, Series 18, Box 158, Folder 28.

69 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 199.

70 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 210.

71 Peter Ryan, 'Sunk from the start', *Courier-Mail*, 14 June 1997, p. 8.

72 Quoted in McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, p. 690.

the opportunities to be rid of it. His handwritten codicil to the contract provided that successive volumes be submitted at two-yearly intervals, which was a palpably untenable timetable. Clark was invariably late and Ryan would have been within his legal rights to abandon the project rather than giving extensions of time; he was tempted to do so at least as early as 1968 simply to see the back of an author whom he feared lacked

the staying power to carry it through—& he's getting odder and odder ... [sic]. One always suspects, of course, that he'll then switch instantly to (say) Cassells for an advance of \$10,000. Do we care?⁷³

Various other publishers—Cassells, Angus & Robertson, Penguin, Macmillan, Ure Smith and, in particular, Sun Books—were all clamouring for the paperback rights, but Ryan kept them at bay by one means or another.⁷⁴

In the event Ryan's instinct proved correct: the *History* was 'a tidy little earner' that sold in ever-increasing numbers, with the appearance of each new volume stimulating the sales of its predecessors. There was also the bonanza, in 1988, when the Australia New Zealand Foundation funded the purchase of 450 boxed sets of all six volumes for distribution to every secondary school in New Zealand.⁷⁵ That boosted total sales to 170,000 copies and 22,000 for Volume 6 in the eight months following its release.⁷⁶ In a sense, the high profile and the profitability of the *History* worked to Ryan's disadvantage, in that it became increasingly difficult to terminate Clark's profitable association with MUP as time moved on, even had he wanted to. To add to Ryan's quandary, the *History* was routinely winning book awards—some of which Ryan nominated himself.

Yet, had Ryan played his cards carefully—and he was a shrewd negotiator—he could have off-loaded the *History* to another eager publisher at least as early as 1968, and in all likelihood, there would have been a bidding war. It was a risk that he was obliged to take given his feelings about the *History*'s quality and his view that MUP's 'duty was to scholarship, and

73 Ryan, handwritten note to MUP deputy director [1968], MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 21 (vol. 3).

74 McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, pp. 588, 596, 770 n.46; Matthews, *Manning Clark*, pp. 311–12.

75 New Zealand High Commissioner (Canberra) to Clark, 24 February 1988, Manning Clark Papers, NLA, MS 7550, Series 18, Box 159, Folder 35; 'Manning Clark's History—wall to wall!' *University [of Melbourne] News*, May 1988 (clipping in Manning Clark Papers, NLA, MS 7550, Series 18, Box 159, Folder 36); 'Gift of Australian history', *Dominion* (Wellington), 2 July 1988, p. 2.

76 Patricia Rolfe, 'Maggie Thatcher, Sales Catcher', *Bulletin*, 3 May 1988, p. 25.

the high standing of its parent university'.⁷⁷ Ryan also had the option of insisting that the project be wrapped up with Volume 4, as per the contract, or of bowing to Clark's suggestion to terminate the project at 1851, or even with the publication of Volume 2. As mentioned, he could also have enforced the two-year period between volumes, as per the contract. Another alternative was to vary the terms of the contract by inserting a clause that future volumes be refereed in accordance with MUP policy and indeed with scholarly practice.⁷⁸

But it was not within Ryan to either enforce or vary the contract; although he was capable of lording it over authors of junior status, he seemed unwilling or unable to bring big-name authors such as Manning Clark and architect Robin Boyd (1919–1971) to heel.⁷⁹ Perhaps he wanted to avoid the rancour he had experienced in his early years at MUP with Sir John Barry (1903–1969), the criminologist and judge, over the latter's biography of the penal administrator John Price.⁸⁰ In the event, Ryan hung on to the *History* to the bitter end and in doing so subjected himself to much aggravation.

Another aspect of Ryan's turf warrior mentality was his resentment when potential books went to other publishers. When offered the manuscript of *Studies in the Australian Capital Market* (1964), the dismayed editors learned that it would take 12 months to publish. They took it to Cheshire, who got it out in three months. Ryan's reaction to this rebuff, when he next saw one of the editors, was to tell him that 'you're no gentleman!'⁸¹ On a later occasion, invoking MUP's on-campus monopoly of book sales, he unsuccessfully tried to prevent the launch on university premises of a book he had declined to publish.⁸² He also lobbied vigorously for MUP to become the principal beneficiary of the Grimwade bequests. Failing to appreciate the complexities of the wills, he was volubly aggrieved when this did not come to pass.⁸³

77 Ryan, *Final Proof*, p. 29.

78 Ryan, *Final Proof*, pp. 36, 66–67, 93, 159.

79 For Boyd, see Ryan, *Final Proof*, p. 181.

80 Mark Finnane with the assistance of John Myrtle, *J.V. Barry: A Life*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007, pp. 249–50.

81 Robert Wallace, discussion with author (Adelaide, 31 July 2015) and follow-up email (4 May 2016); R.R. Hirst and R.H. Wallace (eds), *Studies in the Australian Capital Market*, Melbourne: Cheshire, 1964.

82 Patricia Grimshaw and Lynne Strahan (eds), *The Half-Open Door: Sixteen Modern Australian Women Look at Professional Life and Achievement*, Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1982.

83 John Poynter and Benjamin Thomas, *Miegunyah: The Bequests of Russell and Mab Grimshaw*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2015, pp. 85–91, 131–33, 252; John Poynter, 'Peter Ryan the Publisher', *Quadrant*, vol. 60, no. 3, March 2016, p. 59; Ryan, *Final Proof*, pp. 171–77.

Ryan demonstrated his possessiveness even more resolutely in 1988, bringing in the lawyers against the producers of *Manning Clark's History of Australia: The Musical* and threatening that the show would not open if Penguin Books attempted to sell copies of its reprint of Clark's *Short History of Australia* in the foyer in competition with the six volumes of the *History*. Dymphna recalls that 'he was very, very nasty about it and totally unrelenting'.⁸⁴ In schoolboy parlance, he was playing for keeps, despite thinking that MUP should in no way be associated with what he regarded as a farcical show, and all on behalf of a book for which he only had contempt.⁸⁵ After his departure from MUP, Ryan took his proprietorial attitude to new heights. Upon hearing that his chosen successor had not been appointed, he returned his retirement gifts. The futility of the gesture is only matched by an astonishing lack of self-awareness that he was being downright churlish, not to mention that he had no right to be so presumptuous in the first place.⁸⁶

* * *

Clark's defenders took the wrong tack in that the thrust of their criticisms of Ryan went into defending Clark's character and in asserting, rather than demonstrating, the merits of his work. In doing so they were debating issues on Ryan's terms, which got them nowhere. Historian Alan Powell, for one, felt that Clark's supporters did little more than 'pussyfoot around the vital core of Ryan's charges'.⁸⁷ Much of the reaction was based on indignation at Ryan's ad hominem approach, his betrayal of a friendship and the breach of publishing ethics—deploring his tactics and condemning his bad taste. In the view of Pulitzer Prize winner and La Trobe University historian Rhys Isaac (1937–2010), Ryan was 'as much an ignorant fool as a treacherous bastard!'⁸⁸ There were certainly some angry retorts, but

84 Dymphna Clark, interviewed by Heather Rusden, 13 February 1997 (starting at 74.20 minutes), NLA, ORAL TRC 3548, available at: nla.gov.au/nla.obj-217338911/listen; John Timlin, 'A Little Footnote to *A History of Australia*', *Australian Book Review*, no. 98, March 1988, pp. 46–48; John Rickard, "'A fine song and dance": Manning Clark's History—The Musical', *Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 59, nos 3–4, 1988, pp. 3–20; Ryan, *Final Proof*, pp. 135–36.

85 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', pp. 203–4.

86 Ryan, *Final Proof*, pp. 203–5. Even Ryan's gentle biographer says that 'the decision on his replacement was actually none of his business. Nor should it have been'. John Tidey, *Ryan's Luck: A Life of Peter Ryan MM*, Melbourne, Arcadia, 2020, p. 95.

87 Alan Powell, 'Manning Clark's Imagination of Australia', review of *Manning Clark*, ed. Carl Bridge, *Northern Perspective*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1995, pp. 226–28, specifically p. 227. Powell (1936–2020) was Emeritus Professor of History at Charles Darwin University.

88 Rhys [Isaac] to Stuart Macintyre, 1 September 1993, Macintyre Papers, NLA, MS 9389, Series 1, Box 5, Folder 32.

generally less immoderate in tone than Ryan makes out; he didn't touch off a powder keg. All the same, the critics' responses were anything but a convincing endorsement of Clark's *History*. They were caught in a bind of their own making. They tried to mount defences of a work that was not held in high esteem as historical scholarship but, in doing so, they fell back on assertions that Clark had a vision and was no fraud. Such an approach played into Ryan's hands and let him off the hook, at least in those respects. A better strategy would have been to concentrate on the sheer unoriginality of Ryan's assessment of the *History*, which would have exposed his intellectual deficiencies. McKenna has pointed out that 'the substance of Ryan's criticisms of Clark's work was hardly startling', but no one, apart from Gerard Henderson, said this at the time.⁸⁹

Apart from deploying the wrong tactics, the critics were poorly placed to mount an effective counterattack, despite *Quadrant* and the *Australian* giving them generous enough column inches to do so. Crucially, the critics had no way of knowing that Ryan had misrepresented MUP's contractual arrangements with Clark and everyone missed Ryan's statement that Clark had wanted to terminate the project at an early juncture.⁹⁰ Posing these issues would have left Ryan vulnerable to counterattack; and it was unfortunate that MUP did not check its own records at the time and enlighten the public accordingly. All the same, the critics might have been more effective had they hammered away at Ryan's obvious point of weakness—that he was the *History*'s publisher and therefore culpable and complicit. As the writer and social critic Donald Horne (1921–2005) put it:

I think it is absolutely disgusting that Peter Ryan was at MUP for that whole period and did not express those views to Manning Clark directly at the time. Here is a man who was publishing Manning Clark for 30 [should be 25] years and apparently did not have any honest conversations with him.⁹¹

89 McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, p. 687; Gerard Henderson, 'Bless him, it is 30 years since he sinned', *Age*, 27 August 1993, p. 13; Henderson, 'The belated Mr Ryan owes us a penance', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 August 1993, p. 11.

90 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 194.

91 Quoted in Lisa Clauden, 'Publisher ridicules Manning Clark work', *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 27 August 1993, p. 5. Ryan returned the favour when reviewing Horne's omnibus autobiography. See Peter Ryan, 'Donald Horne: A Self-Made Man', review of *An Interrupted Life* by Donald Horne, *Quadrant*, vol. 42, no. 9, September 1999, pp. 28–33, the final sentence of which reads, 'This one is "For Your Dustbin", but fit a non-corrosive bottom first'.

The only time on record when Ryan expressed negative feelings about the content of the *History* to Clark himself was in 1968, and in decided undertones:

I don't by any means always agree with your writings or your approaches myself, but this doesn't stop me from seeing that much of the criticism you receive comes from people whose books nobody much wants to read, but who resent the fact that people *do* want to read yours.⁹²

Ryan's critics might also have paid greater attention to the fact that Ryan continued to publish successive volumes of the *History*, which he claimed were becoming a liability to MUP's scholarly reputation. The Melbourne writer, Christopher Bantick, did state that Ryan's rationalisations for persisting with the *History* were 'totally inadequate and unconvincing'.⁹³ But no one followed-up on this central issue, apart from Geoffrey Bolton, who raised questions about 'MUP's role in all this':

Ryan had apparently convinced himself that Clark was a fraud. Yet his firm still invested its resources in Clark's writings, gave its extremely respectable name to his publications and took the public's money for them. Authors have a particular bond of trust with their publishers. Their endorsement is a guarantee of quality. If an author's work needs improvement, it is the publisher's job to give that advice. If the work is no good, it should be rejected. This should be done during the author's lifetime. Ryan has added a new terror to death.⁹⁴

What should have happened, then and later, was to insistently demand that Ryan explain why he published successive volumes of the *History*, which he described as 'goeey subjective pap',⁹⁵ rather than allowing him to dodge the issue by remaining silent. The critics might also have made capital out of the fact that Ryan actually wanted the *History* to fail and be laughed out of court.⁹⁶ It is not just the spitefulness of such an attitude but the incongruity of it all—expending enormous effort on a project

92 Quoted in Matthews, *Manning Clark*, pp. 266–67.

93 Christopher Bantick, 'Clark's place in historical discourse', *Australian*, 8 September 1993, p. 22; also 'Questions of history', *Independent Monthly*, September 1993, p. 45.

94 Geoffrey Bolton, 'Don't smash the icon', *Bulletin*, 12 October 1993, pp. 42–43.

95 Ryan, 'A Reply to my Critics', p. 221. Rebuttals that cover most of the bases include Bolton, 'Don't smash the icon', *Bulletin*, 6 October 1993, p. 43; and 'Manning Clark's history lives', *Sydney Morning Herald* (editorial), 28 August 1993, p. 28, but these were too thinly spread to make a widespread impression.

96 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', pp. 208, 211–12.

that one part of him wanted to clap out. There was also a feeling among Ryan's critics that to dignify him with further responses would lead to a never-ending slanging match, which would only serve to give Ryan further traction and from which no good would emerge.⁹⁷ As it was, the divisive History Wars atmosphere of the time meant that positions were entrenched. Lines had been drawn in the sand, and no amount of reasoning was likely to change people's minds either way.

97 Stuart Macintyre to Dymphna Clark, 8 October [1993], Dymphna Clark Papers, NLA, MS 9873, Series 1, Box 10, Folder 55; Macintyre, 'Why do the Tories hate Manning Clark?' *Evatt Papers*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1993, pp. 17–20, specifically p. 17.

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