

6

A Complicit Academy?

Clark's self-imposed task is awe-inspiring: to write a history of Australia is to expose oneself to slings and arrows which hurt the more if their target has offered the throwers some free ammunition. Like every historian who commits himself on paper, Clark is a standing target, especially for those who judge history only on a factual basis. Less beyond criticism are those who offer over-adulatory praise, a sort of backlash against the way volume one was greeted when it burst upon an unsuspecting public ... A history written on this scale deserves to be judged at many levels. Anything less would be unjust and patronizing.

Lloyd Robson (1968)¹

Among those who admire him, Manning Clark has become so esteemed a prophet (by which I mean he is seen as speaking for his generation) that even if you seek to praise him you have to watch what you say; otherwise you might offend his cult followers.

Donald Horne (1981)²

M[anning] C[lark] was not always my cup of tea, nor anyone's I guess, but his *imagination* of Australia was a gift to us all [emphasis in original].

Donna Merwick (1993)³

1 L.L. Robson, 'Once More with Feeling: Manning Clark's History of Australia', review of Volume 2 (1822–38), *Meanjin Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1968, pp. 497–502, specifically p. 498. Robson (1931–1990), whose PhD thesis had been co-supervised by Clark, ended his career as reader in history at the University of Melbourne.

2 Donald Horne, 'Australia fails its test', review of Volume 5 (1890–1915), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October 1981, p. 45.

3 Donna Merwick to Stuart Macintyre, 16 September 1993, Macintyre Papers, National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA), MS 9389, Series 1, Box 5, Folder 32. Merwick at the time was a senior lecturer in history at the University of Melbourne.

A central plank in Ryan's argument rests on the supposed failure of an allegedly closed-shop historical profession to expose Clark as the charlatan and fraud that Ryan thought he was. It is therefore worth going into in some detail as to whether or not the Australian historical profession was soft on Clark when assessing the *History* and to dissect the bases for Ryan's allegations.

Ryan notes that *Quadrant* received 'five sheepish refusals' from historians who had been asked to review Volume 5.⁴ The culpable silence of historians, according to Ryan, amounted to the '*trahison des professeurs* [betrayal of teachers] which, by degrees, allowed the *History* a free run, exempt from criticism by many of the most rigorous scholarly minds'⁵—what he also described as 'cowardice, professional complacency and critical complicity'.⁶

* * *

A trio of episodes can be used to illustrate that the historical profession was neither uncritical nor, as time went on, sufficiently critical of the *History*. Taken together, these sets of responses show that the reaction to successive volumes of the *History* was convoluted and, moreover, overlaid by personal loyalties and antagonisms that often had little to do with the *History* itself. The first two episodes also demonstrate the extent to which Manning Clark and his *History* were gaining a public profile.

The first episode—actually a series of instalments in 1962–63—concerned the fall-out from a review of exceptional harshness and vitriol titled 'History without Facts' by the journalist and historian Malcolm Ellis (1890–1969) in the *Sydney Bulletin*: 'Was ever such nonsense written?' was one of the kindlier of Ellis's remarks.⁷ As the biographer of several important figures spanning the period covered in Volume 1 of the *History*, Ellis was a more than qualified reviewer. But he did so from

4 Peter Ryan, 'Manning Clark', in his *Lines of Fire: Manning Clark & Other Writings*, ed. A.K. Macdougall, Binalong, NSW: Clarion Editions, 1997, pp. 179–214, specifically pp. 192–93, 198. Ryan obtained this information from A.G.L. Shaw. See Ryan, notes of telephone conversation with Shaw, 4 October 1993, Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 6, Box 10, Folder 4.

5 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 192.

6 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', for quotation see p. 199; Ryan, 'A Reply to my Critics', his *Lines of Fire*, pp. 214–22, specifically pp. 220–21.

7 Malcolm Ellis, 'History without Facts', *Bulletin*, 22 September 1962, pp. 36–37, reprinted in Carl Bridge (ed.), *Manning Clark: Essays on his Place in History*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press (hereafter MUP), 1994, pp. 70–77.

an animus towards Clark over matters concerning their respective roles in relation to the nascent *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, which Ellis almost shipwrecked. Ellis's comments were also sharpened by his highly conservative political outlook.⁸ Although Ellis took issue with some of Clark's interpretations and criticised his limited use of primary sources, the review was essentially a catalogue of factual errors.

Clark received considerable sympathy within the historical profession at being the target of Ellis's scalding and so obviously malicious review, as Ryan himself recognised.⁹ In the hope of promoting more reasoned debate, the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom (in August the following year) organised a seminar to give Clark the opportunity to respond to his critics, one of whom was J.W. Forsyth, a lawyer by profession and an ardent amateur historian of the European exploration of coastal Australia. What ought to have cleared the air turned into farce when Forsyth pointed out inaccuracies in translations of Dutch sources on which Clark had relied. Whereupon Clark accused him of insulting Dymphna, who had translated those passages. Clark proceeded to hijack the meeting and then found himself cast in the role of villain for his emotional and unprofessional response to constructive criticism. In a matter of minutes, he had diminished his standing in the profession. One of those in the embarrassed audience was Allan Martin, who told me in the late 1990s that Clark had behaved badly by rounding on Forsyth in the way he did.¹⁰ As it happened, Forsyth's strictures and a laudatory review article by a Clark admirer were published as a review forum, which epitomised the range of reactions that Volume 1 provoked.¹¹

8 Andrew Moore, "'History without Facts': M.H. Ellis, Manning Clark and the origins of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*", *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 85, no. 2, 1999, pp. 71–84; Kenneth R. Dutton, *Auchmuty: The Life of James Johnston Auchmuty (1909–1981)*, Mount Nebo, Qld: Boombana Publications, 2000, p.319.

9 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 194; and e.g. L.R. Gardiner and A.W. Martin, 'History without Facts' (letter), *Bulletin*, 15 December 1962, p. 35; O.H.K. Spate, review of Volume 1, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1963, pp. 267–69, specifically p. 267, doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8497.1963.tb01066.x; Robson, 'Once More with Feeling: Manning Clark's History of Australia', p. 498.

10 A.W. Martin (1926–2002) at the time was a history lecturer at the University of Melbourne. A political biographer, he went on to occupy the foundation chair of history at La Trobe University and ended his career at The Australian National University.

11 J.W. Forsyth, 'Clio Etwas Gebuckt: Professor Clark's "The Forerunners"', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 49, no. 6, 1964, pp. 423–52; Jill Conway, 'A Vision of Australian History', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 49, no. 6, 1964, pp. 453–59; see also J.W. Forsyth, 'History without Facts' (letter), *Bulletin*, 3 November 1962, pp. 31–32.

To queer the pitch was Clark's extreme sensitivity to criticism. He took the view that 'whoso attacks my [work] is undermining my deepest self'¹²—and this from someone who could be pointedly critical of the work of others. He was preposterously hurt by negative comment and his malice in the face of criticism was well known within the profession and to Ryan alike.¹³ He gave early warning that he would treat critics harshly when he abruptly terminated his friendship with John McManners (professor of history at the University of Sydney) for his review of Volume 1. McManners was a cleric as well as an academic and he had taken exception to Clark's depiction of Protestantism.¹⁴ McManners's departmental colleague A.G.L. Shaw was also consigned to outer oblivion for the same indiscretion, which was doubly sad. As well as being best man at Clark's wedding and godfather of his eldest son, Shaw was a thoroughly decent person: 'a paragon of the scholar-gentleman—cultured, disinterested, unmoved by political or intellectual fashion' and a patron of the arts.¹⁵ Such was Clark's vindictiveness in the face of criticism that Noel McLachlan (who reappears in Chapter 7) of the University of Melbourne wrote his review of Volume 5 in the form of an ingratiating letter, taking care to preface mildly expressed criticisms with such words as 'I wonder ...', and even using the phrase 'I hope, Manning, you won't mind my having been completely candid in this way'.¹⁶

Clearly, Clark was not held in universal esteem by the Australian historical profession, although the *History* did receive gratifying reviews from some North Americans who found his approach refreshing.¹⁷ English reviewers

12 Quoted in Mark McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity: The Life of Manning Clark*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2011, p. 444.

13 Peter Ryan, interviewed by John Farquarson, 10–11 October 2000 (p. 37 of typescript), NLA, ORAL TRC 4631.

14 John McManners, 'Creeds in the Cradle', *Nation*, 20 October 1962, pp. 19–21. McManners (1916–2006) became regius professor of ecclesiastical history at the University of Oxford in 1972.

15 A.G.L. Shaw, 'Clark's History of Australia', *Meanjin Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1963, pp. 117–19; Graeme Davison, 'Alan George Lewers Shaw, 1916–2012', *Annual Report 2012*, Canberra: Australian Academy for the Humanities, 2012, pp. 36–38, for quotation see p. 37, available at: www.humanities.org.au/about-us/annual-reports/.

16 Noel McLachlan, 'Manning Clark's Australian History', *Arena*, vol. 60, 1982, pp. 172–75. Such obsequience contrasts with McLachlan's typically acrid book reviews. For example, McLachlan, review of *Imperial Control of Colonial Legislation, 1813–1865*, by D.B. Swinfen, *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1973, pp. 85–88, available at: www.nzjh.auckland.ac.nz/docs/1973/NZJH_07_1_09.pdf.

17 Robin W. Winks, review of Volume 1, *American Historical Review*, vol. 69, no. 4, 1964, pp. 1067–68, doi.org/10.2307/1842969; Robert Kubicek, review of Volumes 1–4, *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 53, no. 2, 1980, pp. 378–80, doi.org/10.2307/2757518; see also McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, p. 759 n.26.

were far less enamoured.¹⁸ Sometimes it was sheer bewilderment as to what he was on about. Writing to Geoffrey Blainey about Volume 2, Melbourne historian Kathleen Fitzpatrick felt as if she

were being swept along in a whirlwind, going dizzily around one of the lower circles of the Inferno. I don't know what to make of it, only what it makes of me. I wonder if you can keep your head better and form an opinion?¹⁹

To further complicate the picture is a lengthy and unqualified defence by historian Bede Nairn (1917–2006), proclaiming Volume 1 a work of great scholarly and literary merit. His article is a detailed rebuttal of the critical reviews, especially Ellis's 'History without Facts', and he does say that 'if [the critics] are right, I am absurdly wrong'.²⁰ What is interesting is the background to Nairn's publication in a special issue on 'Historical Approaches' in the Sydney-based Catholic journal *Manna*. It happened that its editor was Nairn's fellow Catholic and departmental colleague at the University of New South Wales, Patrick O'Farrell (1933–2003). Four years earlier, Clark, in his capacity as an examiner, had prevented O'Farrell's PhD thesis from being failed. O'Farrell went on to write highly favourable reviews of the first two volumes of the *History*, and Clark wrote equally favourable referee's reports on behalf of O'Farrell, one of which proclaimed:

O'Farrell is something more than the academic historian. He is a man who has something essential to say. About the great issues of his day. This has helped to endow everything he has written with a liveliness and indeed a suggestion of grandeur.²¹

18 For example, D.K. Fieldhouse, review of Volume 1, *History*, vol. 49, no. 165 (1964), pp. 133–34 ('Its eccentricity, coupled with its readiness to attach emotional significance to routine matters ... is likely to prevent it from becoming a standard work.');

'Currency lads and lasses', review of Volume 2, *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 January 1969, p. 11 ('This is, indeed, a strange history by a strange historian').

19 Quoted in Geoffrey Blainey, *Before I Forget: An Early Memoir*, Melbourne: Hamish Hamilton, 2019, p. 156. Fitzpatrick (1908–1990) spent her working life in the history department at the University of Melbourne. Although she and Clark were initially adversaries (with Clark referring to her as 'Auntie Katie'), they later became close friends and confidants. Susan Davies (ed.), *Dear Kathleen, Dear Manning: The Correspondence of Manning Clark and Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 1949–1990*, Melbourne: MUP, 1996.

20 Bede Nairn, 'Writing Australian History', *Manna*, vol. 6, 1963, pp. 107–30, for quotation see p. 109.

21 Len Richardson, 'Patrick O'Farrell and the Making of *Harry Holland: Militant Socialist*', *Labour History*, no. 115, 2018, pp. 27–46, specifically 40–41, doi.org/10.5263/labourhistory.115.0027; O'Farrell to Clark, 15 September 1963, Manning Clark Papers, NLA, MS 7750, Series 18, Box 156, Folder 2; Patrick O'Farrell, review of Volume 1, *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 15, no. 57, 1966, pp. 93–95, doi.org/10.1017/S0021121400035045; O'Farrell, review of Volume 2 (1822–38), *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 17, no. 66, 1970, pp. 289–90, doi.org/10.1017/S0021121400111551; Clark to Frank Crowley (University of New South Wales), 24 April 1970, Manning Clark Papers, NLA, MS 7550, Series 7, Box 42, Folder 390.

O'Farrell had a clear motive in publishing a defence of Clark's work, and he provides an example of the networks of loyalty and obligation that to a certain extent shielded Clark.

There were also hidden expressions of sympathy. Max Harris, the editor of the *Australian Book Review* (and the victim of the Ern Malley hoax), was so incensed that he considered arranging a debate 'but only among historical scholars of some repute [emphasis in original]'.²² He was unable to bring the idea to fruition. And in 1965, historian Samuel McCulloch (1916–2013), an Australian who made a career in the United States and with whom Clark was on friendly terms, commissioned Douglas Pike to write an article for the *Journal of British Studies* once Volume 2 had appeared. This too fell by the wayside but, again, the motive was to give favourable publicity to Clark's *History*.²³ Clark had both supporters and detractors so there is no merit in asserting, as does Ryan, that the historical profession was uniform in its allegedly favourable assessment of the *History*.

* * *

The complex dynamic of the historical profession's attitude to Clark is further illustrated by a second series of episodes, in 1978, shortly before the publication of the fourth volume of the *History*. By this time, the *History* was becoming a national saga and Clark was becoming something of a household name. His just published *In Search of Henry Lawson* provoked a hostile review in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by his old adversary Colin Roderick, whose PhD thesis Clark had recommended be failed some 20 years earlier.²⁴ Roderick followed up by demanding Clark resign from the Australia Council, resulting in a flurry in the *Australian* that underscored the divide between the defenders and detractors of Manning Clark.

22 Harris to Clark [undated but probably September 1962], Manning Clark Papers, NLA, MS 7550, Series 18, Box 156, Folder 2.

23 McCulloch to Pike, 30 April 1965, Pike Papers, NLA, MS 6869, Box 8, Folder 4. Pike (1908–1974) was appointed foundation general editor of the ANU-based *Dictionary of Australian Biography* in 1962.

24 Colin Roderick, 'Is this Lawson?', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 May 1978, pp. 7–8; Manning Clark, *In Search of Henry Lawson*, Melbourne: Macmillan, 1978; McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, p. 747 n.1. Roderick (1911–2000) was a foremost (and highly proprietorial) scholar of Henry Lawson and foundation professor of English at James Cook University.

The first salvo came from an unlikely quarter—Bob Ryan, an MA student at Macquarie University, who anticipated many of Peter Ryan's later strictures in deploring Clark's factual errors ('Surely we expect more rigorous writing of history from one so eminent') and in asserting that Clark was a holy cow and beyond criticism by the profession. He hopefully opined that Roderick's 'outright condemnation' had spelt Clark's death-knell 'as Australia's leading historian'.²⁵ Such temerity towards an elder and better generated a number of letters to the editor, the gist of which was that 'the business of criticism must be more than the finding of small errors'. One such letter came from a group of Monash University historians (including A.G.L. Shaw) who put the young whippersnapper in his place by saying that his pettifoggery only served to obscure the fact that Clark was

concerned to express, on a grand scale, a vision of Australian history, and indeed to see it as part of the human predicament in a more general sense ... Whether one agrees with it or not, it is an enterprise of courage and scale, and Mr Ryan would be better served in examining it in those terms.²⁶

That same issue of the *Australian* also carried a pairing of commissioned articles, pro- and anti-Clark. In the latter, Max Harris reversed his earlier pronouncement—'how vast, original and readable the great Manning Clark History is going to be'—and was now saying that 'the man writes ghastly prose'.²⁷ In Clark's defence his former student, Ian Turner (1922–1987) of Monash University, pointed out that 'the eager accumulation of minor error may bring joy to the critic's ego but it does not touch the centre of the historian's work', and, further, that disagreement with the *History's* approach 'is not to challenge the integrity of Clark's intent'.²⁸ The battle lines remained firmly drawn between accuracy and factuality as against imaginative insight and a broader vision, and in ways that would be played out in future debates.²⁹

25 Bob Ryan (presumably no relation of Peter), 'Is this the beginning of the end for Manning Clark?', *Australian*, 18 May 1978, p. 9; Stephen Holt, *A Short History of Manning Clark*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999, p. 190.

26 A.G.L. Shaw, J.D. Legge, J.D. Rickard and Ian Turner, 'In praise of Manning Clark' (letter), *Australian*, 25 May 1978, p. 6.

27 Max Harris, 'The issue—he writes ghastly prose', *Australian*, 25 May 1978, p. 7.

28 Ian Turner, 'Humbling talent is the national sickness...', *Australian*, 25 May 1978, p. 7; see also Geoffrey Fairbairn, 'Prophet not scapegoat', *Weekend Australian*, 27–28 May 1978, p. 10.

29 The special pleading for the factual errors in the *History* never quite ceased. For example, George Parsons, review of Volume 5 (1890–1915) and *Manning Clark and Australian History*, by Stephen Holt, *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 7, no. 13, 1983, pp. 95–96, doi.org/10.1080/14443058309386877; Humphrey McQueen, review of Volume 6 (1916–35), *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1988, pp. 134–40, specifically pp. 137–38, doi.org/10.1080/10304318809359344.

A third episode involved John Molony (1927–2018), a former Catholic priest and recently retired history professor at ANU. He had been Clark's departmental colleague since the mid-1960s and he owed it to Clark for appointing him to an academic position, which he probably would not have secured otherwise. He was more than aware of Clark's foibles. They ultimately came to have little regard for each other, with Clark referring to Molony's 'past treacheries'.³⁰ One of those incidents was probably Molony being a member of the committee that decided to exclude anyone over the age of 55 from writing chapters for a bicentennial project, *Australians: A Historical Library* (1987). Outraged by the decision and succumbing to his sense of entitlement, Clark regarded the rebuff as 'my great wound'—another example of Clark's 'degree of paranoia' and 'hair trigger sensitivity' resulting in him falling out with friends and colleagues.³¹ Molony, for his part, felt that Clark ought not to be diverted from completing the final volume of the *History* by bicentennial matters. Over the years, Molony had become increasingly disappointed with Clark, culminating in the latter's refusal in the late 1980s to lend support to the eventually successful attempts within ANU to fight off amalgamation with the Canberra College of Advanced Education.³²

Immediately after the publication of Ryan's first *Quadrant* article, Molony confided to his diary, 'I agree with some of Peter's criticisms but he sounds like an embittered old man which is sad'. A few days later he noted that 'all this argument about Manning means so little to me. The bubble had to burst some day', and he passively resisted attempts to embroil himself in Clark's defence. He eventually wrote Dymphna a letter of commiseration, which may not have been sent, in which he praised her dignity under fire and deplored the 'dreadful attack on Manning's character', seeing it as

30 McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, pp. 9, 505, 533, 759 n.32, for quotation see p. 717 n.10.

31 Oliver MacDonagh, 'The Making of *Australians: A Historical Library*—A Personal Retrospect', in *Australians: A Guide and an Index*, Sydney: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, 1988, pp. 1–9, specifically p. 3; McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, p. 716 n.10 ('my great wound'); A.W. Martin to Clark, 4 November 1982, Martin Papers, NLA, MS 9802, Series 1, Box 3, Folder 29; Brian Matthews, *Manning Clark: A Life*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2008, pp. 151, 157, 236.

32 Barry Ninham, email to author, 13 February 2020 (Ninham was Professor of Applied Mathematics at ANU and a close friend of Molony); Sally Peters, 'The ANU–CCAE Merger: Why the Intended Amalgamation Failed', BA (Hons) thesis, La Trobe University, 1997; S.G. Foster and Margaret M. Varghese, *The Making of The Australian National University, 1946–1996*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996, pp. 343–47; Roger Scott, 'A Personal Memoir of Policy Failure: The Failed Merger of ANU and the Canberra CAE', *Australian Universities Review*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2004, pp. 10–20, available at: www.aur.org.au/archive/2000s.

part of a wider conservative conspiracy. He praised Clark's values but was non-committal about the worth of the *History*, saying that 'it speaks for itself and stands for itself'.³³

Whatever the personal-cum-professional issues involved in their falling out, Molony's attitude towards Clark's work is a barometer of diminishing regard for Clark within the historical profession. Upon the publication of Volume 1, Clark received several congratulatory letters from fellow historians. Their praise of 'the accomplishment of your task' may have been heightened by Ellis's review but their tone is sincere, even when in disagreement. Allan Martin's verdict was:

This is the most distinguished work we have on Australia yet. Not that I always *understand* the vision, but it excites me, even in those places where I balk at acceptance. Beyond that, we of this generation are not likely to see anything else as elegant as this, or so close to being History in the sense La Nauze used that word in his Anzaas address a few years ago. When I told you that you sometimes make me want to give it all away, I sincerely meant it.³⁴

If a generalisation can be made, it is that Clark's reputation among his peers rose appreciably with the publication of Volume 1 but faltered with the fluctuating quality of the later volumes; it is alarming to compare the readability and general control of Volume 1 with the travesty that is Volume 6. The other part of the equation was that Clark increasingly irritated or alienated people. The ruptures involved a combination of the political, the personal and the professional. Clark's ANU colleague, economist Heinz Arndt (1915–2002), who had progressively moved to the conservative side of politics, had liked Clark 'very much' when they

33 Molony, Diary, 27 August 1993, Molony Papers, NLA, MS 6634, Series 6, Box 35, Folder 28; Diary, 3 & 6 September 1993, Molony Papers, NLA, MS 6634, Series 6, Box 35, Folder 29; Molony to Dymphna Clark, 28 September 1993, Molony Papers, NLA, MS 6634, Series 3, Box 27, Folder 83. The letter is handwritten. There isn't a copy in the Dymphna Clark Papers, which leads to the suspicion that it was never sent.

34 Martin to Clark, 27 September 1962, Manning Clark Papers, NLA, MS 7550, Series 18, Box 156, Folder 2. The other letters are: John La Nauze to Clark, 21 September 1962 ('profoundly impressed by it'); Max Crawford to Clark, 25 September 1962; Douglas Pike to Clark, 17 October 1962; Michael Roe [undated], all in Manning Clark Papers, NLA, MS 7550, Series 18, Box 156, Folder 2. La Nauze's ANZAAS presidential address was published as 'The Study of Australian History, 1929–1959', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, vol. 9, no. 33, 1959, pp. 1–11, doi.org/10.1080/10314615908595147. La Nauze (1911–1990) ended his career as professor of history, Institute of Advanced Studies, ANU. Forbidding in manner, austere in historical outlook, and an adversary of Manning Clark, he is chiefly remembered as Alfred Deakin's biographer and for his follow-up work on the making of the Australian Constitution.

first met at Oxford in 1938 but came to dislike him ‘in proportion as he grew as a guru’.³⁵ And Bede Nairn was ‘not upset—only sad’ when the controversy erupted.³⁶ The same person who had staunchly defended Clark 30 years before was now beyond caring. He did send Dymphna a letter of commiseration, but it was a criticism of Ryan rather than a defence of the *History*.³⁷ Hence, the answer to whether Clark was being shielded from valid criticism by a defensive history profession is both ‘Yes’ and ‘No’.

* * *

Another historian who tired of Clark was the gentle and self-deprecating Allan Martin, who pointed out to Ryan:

Yes, you are right, most of us have kept quiet: I lost count of the number of times I turned down requests to review the volumes as they came out. You will, no doubt correctly, think of that as a kind of cop-out. I suppose it was partly because I wanted to get on with my own work and thought controversy in the clever-clever Oxbridge sense somewhat trivial beside doing some sound research, and partly because Manning seemed so vulnerable about things that didn’t matter to others and were simply best left alone.³⁸

Martin’s statement about Clark’s vulnerability identifies what confronted many potential reviewers of the *History*. One part of the equation is that Clark cultivated his reviewers, somewhat in the manner that resulted in the English novelist Hugh Walpole being lampooned in W. Somerset Maugham’s *Cakes and Ale* (1930).³⁹ In that vein, Stuart Macintyre relates that Clark ‘wrote to express his appreciation of my review of volume 4 ... He was not alone in doing this, but the effect was to establish a relationship that inhibited criticism’.⁴⁰ Clark also co-operated with Rob Pascoe to ensure, as best he could, that the latter would say only nice things about him in the MA thesis that became *The Manufacture of Australian History*

35 Ryan, note of telephone conversation with Arndt, 3 May 1993, Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 6, Box 10, Folder 3.

36 Molony, Diary, 27 August 1993, Molony Papers, NLA, MS 6634, Series 6, Box 35, Folder 28.

37 Nairn to Dymphna Clark, 2 September 1993, Dymphna Clark Papers, NLA, MS 9873, Series 10, Box 35, Folder 1.

38 Martin to Ryan, 7 October 1994, Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 6, Box 10, Folder 6.

39 Robin Maugham, *Somerset and All the Maughams*, Harmondsworth: Penguin edn, 1975, pp. 160–69.

40 Stuart Macintyre, comment on draft of this book, 26 June 2018.

(1979). The favour was returned in a referee's report where Clark opined that 'Pascoe seems to be a man who has already stretched his capacity to the limit' and disparaged the book as 'a rather disastrous plunge into the murk of theory'.⁴¹

The resort to flattery and manipulation extended only so far. Others were outside Clark's orbit. Ryan seems to have forgotten the excoriating review of Volume 5 by one such independent, Tony Griffiths of Flinders University, in the *Age Monthly Review*, whose opening paragraph reads:

Manning Clark's fifth volume of his *History* is a strange and charming work. It is an existential analysis, in which all criticism is disarmed in advance by the author's disclaimer (which appears to be correct here at least) that 'the story of Australia will probably always elude its narrators'. If the story of Australia is absent, the personality and values of Manning Clark are not, and his determination to avoid the airy, if not the fairy, gives the work of nearly 500 pages an earthiness which is aptly in tune with his approach to his craft, essentially that of a story-teller rather than a social scientist. For Manning Clark has, at last, achieved his aim of writing fiction. While *Disquiet and other stories* failed as dull pieces of contrived writing, volume five of his History of Australia is a classical example of historical fiction.⁴²

In other words, the *History's* weaknesses were repeatedly identified by academic reviewers—to the extent that a reviewer of Volume 5 was expressing concern that it was 'becoming fashionable in certain Australian circles to denigrate [Clark's] considerable achievement'.⁴³

* * *

41 Clark to Academic Registrar, ANU, 30 May 1980, Manning Clark Papers, NLA, MS 7550, Series 1, Box 8, Folder 65; Rob Pascoe, 'The Making of Manning Clark', *National Times*, 27 May–2 June 1978, pp. 18–20, 22–23, available at: core.ac.uk/download/pdf/10836119.pdf; Pascoe, *The Manufacture of Australian History*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 74–92.

42 Tony Griffiths, 'A bitter history', *Age Monthly Review*, December 1981, pp. 21–22 (clipping in the Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 6, Box 10, Folder 4). Griffiths is the author of *Contemporary Australia*, London: Croom Helm, 1977.

43 F.G. Clarke et al., review of Volume 5 (1890–1915), *American Historical Review*, vol. 87, no. 5, 1982, pp. 1450–51, specifically p. 1450, doi.org/10.2307/1857052.

A few days after the controversy broke University of Adelaide historian Wilfrid Prest entered the fray with a letter to the *Australian*:

Your leader of 28-29/8 endorses Peter Ryan's claim that a mixture of 'cowardice, professional complacency and critical complicity' has hitherto prevented academic historians from properly assessing—ie denouncing—Manning Clark and his history of Australia. The truth of the matter is that the reception of the successive volumes by reviewers in the professional historical journals was far from wholly adulatory or uncritical. Thus, in the case of Volume V, which according to Ryan 'escape(d) entirely apart from an attack by Edward Kynaston in *The Weekend Australian*', Duncan Waterson's review in the premier Australian journal, *Historical Studies* (vol 20, 1983) speaks of 'irritating errors', 'history from the perspective of the pulpit', a 'less than satisfying' treatment of the colonial bourgeoisie and an overall approach 'relatively unconcerned with the values, passions and lives of the great majority of the people'. At the same time Waterson praises the epic qualities of Clark's work and his readiness to see the history of Australia as part of the 'broad river of human experience'.⁴⁴

Ryan claimed that he slightly moderated his stance in response to Prest, but in fact he engaged in sleight of hand. He states:

an eminent historian who has abstained from the controversy directed me to a round a dozen articles and reviews. All these I have now read, and in greater or lesser measure, or in one particular or another, all make indubitable criticisms of Clark's six-volume *History* and of his other work as it appeared. Twelve critical articles over twenty-five years can hardly be called an excess (though there could be others of which I remain unaware). Their total practical effect was inadequate to apply to Clark the check and scrutiny he needed. Nevertheless it is not the case that all historians neglected their duty, and it gives me pleasure to acknowledge this.⁴⁵

What Ryan avoids disclosing is that the 'eminent historian' was Geoffrey Serle of Monash University and, more to the point, that Serle had privately rebuked him. This happened when Serle had dropped by to give Ryan the manuscript of his biography of the architect Robin Boyd to read. As Ryan explains in a note to himself:

44 Wilfrid Prest, 'Don't let's just stop with Clark' (letter), *Australian*, 3 September 1993, p. 20.

45 Peter Ryan, 'The Charge of the Lightweight Brigade', in his *Lines of Fire*, pp. 222–34, specifically p. 224.

He did not raise [the matter of] M. Clark—I did. He said I had done my credit great harm by (i) putting ‘all that personal rubbish’ about M.C. and (ii) attacking in general the work and attitude of Australian historians ‘of which I knew absolutely nothing’.⁴⁶

This reprimand from a long-standing friend, whose books Ryan had published, did nothing to stop Ryan from continuing his attacks on both Clark and the historical profession; and one does have to wonder why he retained such incriminating material in his own papers. Having taken pains to avoid disclosing such matters during the controversy, he leaves behind evidence that exposes his strategic silences.

During his conversation with Ryan, Serle pointed out ‘he had turned up “at least six major articles” *contra* Clark’. Ryan had no idea about the existence of these so Serle provided him with a list of the relevant articles and reviews that he ‘could recall or dig out quickly’. Among these was Macintyre’s assessment of the reviews of the first five volumes of the *History*, which likens the reviewing of successive volumes of the *History* to a perpetual, if sporadic, duck-shooting season.⁴⁷ Ryan then asked George Thomas, the assistant editor of *Quadrant*, to locate and fax him copies of some of the reviews mentioned by Serle as well as Macintyre’s article—evidence of whose existence he was quite unaware. From this material he made four pages of notes, mostly identifying passages critical of Clark’s work.⁴⁸

At one point Macintyre observed that Clark’s ‘critics seldom went into print’, and Ryan underlines this passage. He then ignores Macintyre’s following sentences:

Some [of the critics] bore scars and shrank from further controversy; some were reluctant to become involved in a witch-hunt; but most were prepared to accept the validity of the enterprise on its own terms for the notion no longer prevailed that a general history must

46 Ryan, note to himself, 13 January 1994, Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 6, Box 10, Folder 2. Serle (1922–1998) was one of the ex-servicemen who commenced university studies (or in his case resumed his studies) after WWII. He graduated at the University of Melbourne before Ryan resumed his own studies there and then took the customary path to academic preferment involving a second degree at Oxford. See John Thompson, *The Patrician and the Bloke: Geoffrey Serle and the Making of Australian History*, Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2006.

47 Serle to Ryan [undated], Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 6, Box 10, Folder 4; Macintyre, ‘Manning Clark’s Critics’, pp. 442–52.

48 Ryan to George Thomas, 21 July 1994, Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 6, Box 10, Folder 4. Ryan’s notes from the reviews (which are headed ‘Serle’s List’), as well as the faxed copies of Macintyre’s article and many of the reviews mentioned in ‘Serle’s List’ are also in the Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 6, Box 10, Folder 4.

be all-inclusive in its coverage, strictly empiricist in its method and free of moral judgement. The historians' reviews of volume five were by no means uncritical, but the great majority accepted the shortcomings as part of the price paid for Clark's historical vision.⁴⁹

That Ryan, when confronted by such counter evidence, only marginally softened his accusation of a negligent historical profession is dishonest and shows an unwillingness to own up to the extent of his original error. One also wonders why Ryan unerringly unscored passages in the reviews that are critical of Clark yet persists in his belief that Clark got a free ride from the profession. And to say that there were only about 'twelve critical articles over twenty-five years', when Macintyre's round-up of the reviews indicates many times more, is outright falsification on Ryan's part.

There are further incongruities. That Ryan needed to have the reviews drawn to his attention in the first place is a question in itself: how could he have been unaware of their existence considering they likely crossed his desk when he was director of MUP?⁵⁰ And why did he not check his accuracy, when proclaiming so confidently on the reviews, before publishing his first *Quadrant* article? It may well have been a case of forgetting what he did not want to remember and suppressing anything contrary to what he wanted people to believe. One also wonders what Ryan would have thought of the 'soft' reviews of the *History* by Serle and Blainey, both of whom he held in high regard, had these also been pointed out to him.⁵¹

Despite such expressions of praise, by the time of Volume 5 (covering the years 1888–1915) many historians were becoming increasingly impatient with the ongoing faults of style and substance, with one reviewer referring to its 'striking mixture of archaisms, grotesquery and narrational irony'.⁵² Macintyre did say that 'it is possible to enter into the spirit of Clark's enterprise and retain certain misgivings'.⁵³ The latter predominated.

49 Macintyre, 'Manning Clark's Critics', p. 448.

50 MUP assiduously collected reviews of its books and placed them in scrapbooks alphabetically arranged by author surname. Records of Melbourne University Press (hereafter MUP Records), 2003.0134, UM992.

51 Geoffrey Serle, 'One Man's Window on Our Past: Manning Clark's Third Volume', *Meanjin Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1974, pp. 86–88; Serle, 'Some Stirrers and Shakers of the 1950s and 1960s', *Overland*, no. 128, 1992, pp. 16–21; Geoffrey Blainey, 'Towards History', review of Volume 5 (1890–1915), *Hemisphere*, September–October 1982, pp. 98–99; Blainey, 'Speaking volumes of history', review of Volume 6 (1916–35), *Herald Sun*, 24 August 1987, p. 11; Matthews, *Manning Clark*, p. 348.

52 Chris Wallace-Crabbe, 'Manning Clark[s] Troubled Landscape, with figures', *Scipsi*, Summer/Autumn 1982, pp. 86–89, specifically p. 86.

53 Stuart Macintyre, 'Clark's epic history sweeps to new peak', review of Volume 5 (1890–1915), *Age*, 10 October 1981, p. 25.

Even then, opinions on the relative merits of the various volumes of the *History* vary. Some regard Volumes 3 and 4 as the strongest, whereas Macintyre told Geoffrey Bolton that Volume 5 was ‘the best yet’.⁵⁴ Some historians also change their minds, with Robert Murray reversing his verdict on Volume 6; in 2001 he thought it ‘a good, vivid account ... provided you can forgive the increasing crankiness and it being about 100 pages too long’, whereas in 2020 he was saying that Volume 5 and 6 are ‘the worst’ of the six volumes comprising ‘waffle, harangues and adolescent personality attacks on tall poppies’.⁵⁵

I would agree with the thrust of Murray’s later verdict. By Volume 5, the grand and metaphysical theme of the clash of the three great European influences had degenerated into late nineteenth- and twentieth-century personality politics, emphatically nationalistic in tone. An offended non-academic reviewer of Volume 5 observed:

Strange mixture of sarcasm, spleen and cliché, activated by prejudice. Manning Clark castigates politicians, any vice-regal representative as elitists and betrayers of the Australian dream, and then substitutes another elitism—what Manning Clark thinks is best. Those who don’t agree are quickly labelled ‘bourgeois’ or worse.⁵⁶

One of the castigated politicians was Alfred Deakin, which led Bolton to observe that Clark’s ‘niggling and belittling assessment’ showed a troubling ‘failure of empathy’.⁵⁷ Certainly, none of Deakin’s biographers have bothered with Clark’s depiction. Judith Brett’s *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, the most significant biography since La Nauze, does not mention Clark or even cite him in her bibliography, despite her focus, like Clark’s, being on the interior life.⁵⁸

54 Geoff [Bolton] to Clark, 9 October 1981, Manning Clark Papers, NLA, MS 7550, Series 18, Box 158, Folder 20.

55 Robert Murray, ‘Forty Years of Manning Clark’, *Quadrant*, vol. 45, no. 10, November 2001, 46–53; Murray, ‘The Punch and Sparkle of Peter Ryan’, review of *Ryan’s Luck: A Life of Peter Ryan, MM*, by John Tidey, *Quadrant*, vol. 64, no. 12, December 2020, pp. 91–93, specifically p. 92.

56 Patrick Coady, ‘Manning’s imagination transcends history’, *Catholic Weekly*, 17 January 1982 (clipping provided by Clive Moore).

57 Geoffrey Bolton, ‘Through a Glass Darkly’, review of Volume 5 (1890–1915), *Australian Book Review*, no. 37, 1981, pp. 3–4, specifically p. 3.

58 Judith Brett, *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2017.

Volume 6 is even more nationalistic, deploring Australia's self-inflicted political and cultural subordination to Britain, and is framed by the superficial dichotomy of the Old Tree Dead ('British colonial culture, conservative, bourgeois and philistine') and the Young Tree Green ('the native Australia struggling for a radical identity, a national voice and an authentic faith').⁵⁹ Along the way are the absurd representations of 'Joe Lyons, the genial gollywog from the Nut, [who] changed the apron strings of his aunts for the apron strings of his wife', and

Jimmy Scullin ... [who] spoke the language of the measurers and the money-changers. He spoke not as a man who believed Australians could steal fire from heaven, not as a man with fire in the belly for an Australians' Australia as distinct from the Imperial Firm of John Bull and Co. in which Bruce, Page and Bob Menzies placed their trust.

We also hear that 'Miles Franklin spluttered and spat as only she could splutter and spit', and so on.⁶⁰ The writer and activist Beatrice Faust, who had no stake in the controversy, considered the prose 'banal, diffuse, over-written, old-fashioned, sentimental and unsubstantial' and could not understand why Clark 'was thought well of'.⁶¹

Another person who was perturbed was Roslyn Russell, the research assistant for Volume 6 and at the time an MA student in Australian history at the University of Sydney:

I had my doubts as to the narrow choice of sources at the time, and of course with the passage of over 30 years and my own practice of history, these doubts remain. I only wish that I could have saved him from himself a bit more, but as his research assistant I was in too humble a position to challenge either his choice of material or its interpretation.⁶²

59 The definitions are provided by Helen Bourke, 'Above the Mainstream: Manning Clark's History of Australia', *Overland*, no. 109, 1987, pp. 21–24, specifically p. 22.

60 C.M.H. Clark, *A History of Australia*, Volume 6: *The old dead tree and the young green tree*, 1916–1935, Melbourne: MUP, 1987, pp. 263, 315, 480 respectively.

61 Beatrice Faust, 'Making sense of the real Manning Clark', *Australian*, 3 September 1993, p. 21.

62 Roslyn Russell, email to author, 10 May 2018.



Figure 7. Roslyn and Katie Russell, 1981.

Roslyn started work as Manning Clark's research assistant in January 1982. She and her daughter Katie 'shared the Manning and Dymphna experience'. They were included in many events at the home of the Clarks, and Katie retains vivid memories of both Dymphna and Manning.

Source. Provided by Roslyn Russell (photographer unknown) and reproduced with the subjects' permission.

Indeed, Volume 6 reads like a long vendetta against R.G. Menzies, who had scarcely made his mark by Clark's cut-off date of 1935. Clark did not view Menzies through 'the eye of pity' but regards him instead as an imperial lackey. As with Deakin, Menzies's biographers give Clark short shrift. There is no reference to Clark in Allan Martin's two-volume biography and Brett, in *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*, is curtly dismissive of Clark's notion that Menzies was 'a hollow man' bereft of an interior life.⁶³ Just as Clark very largely ignored existing scholarship, subsequent scholarship has returned the compliment.

Nor did Volume 6 get a free ride from the reviewers, although Ryan is justified in feeling that many of the assessments were muted and insufficiently severe. Many historians and non-specialists alike seem to have been carried away by the euphoria and media fanfare surrounding

63 A.W. Martin, *Robert Menzies: A Life*, 2 vols, Melbourne: MUP, 1993–96; Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*, Sydney: Macmillan Australia, 1992, pp. 195–96.

the culmination of the epic project that was C.M.H. Clark's *A History of Australia*. The sense of occasion was anticipated in a poem by historian-turned-novelist Peter Corris (1942–2018), the first stanza of which reads:

Five vols down and one to go
Clark puts on a mighty show.
See—men of God and men of Mammon
Make it through the years of famine
Grow the wheat, the spuds and vino,
Ride upon the great Merino.⁶⁴

Part of the heightened reception was Volume 6 winning the inaugural Gold Banjo Award of the National Book Council for the Australian book of the year (but only, it transpired, because the judging panel's chairman, Clark's friend Geoffrey Dutton, exerted improper influence on his co-judges).⁶⁵ And behind the scenes a number of senior historians wrote privately to Clark, congratulating him on the accomplishment of bringing his project to fruition but avoiding any semblance of actual assessment.⁶⁶

Many reviewers did subject Volume 6 to a degree of rigorous appraisal that stopped well short of denunciation, thus lending credence to Ryan's observation that Clark's *History* was 'measured by standards other than those applied to the work of "ordinary historians"'.⁶⁷ Certainly, no academic historian in the late 1980s, apart from Tony Griffiths, made a comment remotely similar to Mark McKenna's later statement that Clark's interpretations had 'become so fictitious as to bear little resemblance to the historical events and people described'.⁶⁸ Any other academic, writing as Clark did in Volume 6, would have been severely

64 Peter Corris, 'A History of Australia (C.M.H. Clark)', in Geoffrey Lehmann (ed.), *The Flight of the Emu: Contemporary Light Verse*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1990, p. 68.

65 Matthews, *Manning Clark*, p. 384. Among his many other activities, Dutton (1922–1998) was a cofounder of Sun Books, which made fruitless efforts to secure the paperback rights of the *History*.

66 For example, Hugh Stretton to Clark, 7 August 1987, Manning Clark Papers, NLA, MS 7550, Series 18, Box 158, Folder 27; Richard Boswell to Clark, 2 October 1987, Manning Clark Papers, NLA, MS 7550, Series 18, Box 159, Folder 31.

67 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 194. Reviews of a critical nature include: A.G.L. Shaw, 'Clark completes his history', *Age*, 5 September 1987, p. 12 (described by Clark as 'a wintry sneer'); Colin Roderick, 'Not quite the history of Australia', *Courier-Mail Weekend*, 26 September 1987, p. 5; Peter Cochrane, review in *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 74, no. 2, 1988, pp. 170–74; Bill Cope, review in *Labour History*, no. 55, 1988, pp. 92–94, doi.org/10.2307/27508902; Michael Roe, review in *Tasmanian Historical Research Association – Papers & Proceedings*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1987, pp. 131–32; Beverley Kingston, review in *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 23, no. 91, 1988, pp. 204–5; John Lack, 'Manning Clark's History', *Arena*, no. 82, 1988, pp. 168–73.

68 McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, p. 626.

dealt with by reviewers, academic or otherwise. But ultimately it was not the book being 'reviewed' so much as its celebrity author and the great moment of culmination.

* * *

The irony of the Ryan–Clark controversy is that many historians were defending the late Manning Clark, and yet the *History* had been increasingly disregarded during Clark's lifetime as serious scholarship. There were, certainly, some feelings of envy about the impressive sales of his *History* as well as disapproval of his public profile and his role as national prophet.⁶⁹ But there was a more deeply entrenched resentment because Clark scorned his fellow historians for being uninspired 'Dry-as-Dusts' and disparaged the academy while at the same time drawing his salary *and* authority from his senior university position.⁷⁰ Clark's future biographer Brian Matthews recalls how offended he was with Clark during their first encounter, at a conference in 1973, when Clark quoted with obvious relish Henry Lawson's putdown of his 'cultured friends':

I leave you alone in your cultured halls
To drivel and croak and cavil:
Till your voice goes further than college walls,
Keep out of the tracks we travel!⁷¹

This sneer, to a perplexed Matthews, was tantamount to betrayal:

I was very upset by this performance: angry at Clark, exasperated by ... [Clark's] apparently easy rejection of much that he himself stood for and belonged with. [It was] immensely puzzling to me at the time; and discouraging, enraging.⁷²

Clark, however, wanted it both ways, referring to the profession in slighting terms as 'Historical Industries Propriety Limited'. He resented the elite status of historians at the Institute of Advanced Studies at ANU who were unencumbered with undergraduate teaching, in contrast to his own department across campus in the School of General Studies (renamed

69 Humphrey McQueen, *Suspect History: Manning Clark and the Future of Australia's Past*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1997, p. 126; McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, pp. 573, 598; Wallace-Crabbe, 'Manning Clark[s] Troubled Landscape', p. 86.

70 McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, p. 499.

71 Henry Lawson, 'The Uncultured Rhymer to his Cultured Critics', *Poemhunter.com*, available at: www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-uncultured-rhymer-to-his-cultured-critics/.

72 Gia Metherell, 'Skirmishes in cultured halls', *Canberra Times*, 14 June 1997, for quotation see p. C3; Matthews, *Manning Clark*, pp. 317–18, 508–09.

The Faculties). On one occasion he sarcastically asked a newly arrived historian at ANU, 'how are you getting on among those Great Minds in the Institute?'⁷³ The newcomer didn't have a clue what he was talking about. Sarcasm or not, Clark still craved the indulgence and adulation of the academy and took extreme umbrage at real and imagined slights of his work. At his behest, MUP sent out hundreds of review copies of the *History*,⁷⁴ but Clark made no attempt to address the reviewers' criticisms, much less to incorporate the latest scholarship into his work. Yet in later life he was hoping that future historians would not judge him harshly.⁷⁵

Macintyre probably sums up best Clark's professional standing among his peers:

Historians criticised the volumes of the *History* and by the 1980s they paid very little attention to it. The *Documents*, and to a lesser extent the early volumes of the *History*, had an appreciable effect on the understanding of Australian history: his view of the convicts, his attention to the religious dimension, his treatment of the explorers, his account of self-government, etc. But it was rare to find any reference to Manning in work published after the 1970s.⁷⁶

Ryan would probably have agreed with these criticisms, but he misconstrues the *History* in other respects. Given that it was increasingly considered unsuitable as undergraduate reading, Ryan was being disingenuous as well as implausible in repeatedly stating that he was acting on behalf of 'the young and innocent'.⁷⁷ It is difficult to be precise about the extent to which the *History* was set reading for undergraduates, but my discussions indicate that students received less exposure to it as time went on.⁷⁸ Perhaps what happened at the University of Adelaide provides an accurate enough summation. In 1964 the discussion for history honours students in the first week of the course was 'Manning Clark's *History of Australia*, vol. 1—

73 Stephen Foster, email to author, 9 December 2018.

74 For example, Internal memo, 7 March 1968 [five pages], MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 20 (vol. 2); 'Review copies', 24 August 1987 [also five pages in length], MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 21 (vol. 6).

75 Michael Dargaville, 'Unasked questions killing the country', *Mercury* (Hobart), 29 August 1987, p. 23.

76 Stuart Macintyre, email to author, 3 April 2018; see also Bourke, 'Above the Mainstream'. An example of Clark being ignored, when he might justifiably have been noticed, is Deborah Gare, 'Britishness in Recent Australian Historiography', *Historical Journal*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2000, pp. 1145–55, doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X00001564.

77 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 212; 'A Reply to my Critics', p. 214; 'The Charge of the Lightweight Brigade', for quotation see p. 234.

78 Brian Dickey, discussion with author, 31 July 2015; Maurice French, email to author, 26 July 2019.

success or failure?’ A few years later, in 1968, the second-term tutorials in the second-year Australian history course were based on eight books, one of which was Volume 1 of Clark’s *History*. The following year Clark’s volumes of *Select Documents* were routinely prescribed, but the *History* was off the menu. In 1973 Clark’s *Select Documents* continued to be on the reading list but, again, not the *History*. There was a similar pattern of diminishing exposure to the *History* at the University of Melbourne.⁷⁹

There are good reasons for the increasing neglect of Clark’s *History* as a teaching tool: both secondary and tertiary students were likely to be bemused. Besides, the *History* was never intended as ‘a work of reference’ and Ryan misunderstands its nature to describe it as such—just as Malcolm Ellis did before him in describing Volume 1 as a ‘text-book’.⁸⁰ It was a dramatic grand narrative epic in the literary traditions of the great nineteenth-century historians, as Clark himself explains in his third volume of autobiography.⁸¹ Ryan knew about the autobiography, having referred to it in his first *Quadrant* article⁸² but had either not read those passages or they had slipped his mind.

Ryan also misunderstood, or chose not to understand, the unspoken etiquette that academic reviews are normally couched in reasonably courteous language. The image of the ideal review is one that focuses on the strengths of the work at hand and yet conveys its limitations. Rudeness, incivility and destructive negativity are generally frowned upon within the profession. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Humphrey McQueen believed that Australian historians’ courteousness towards each other’s work—‘the gentility principle’, as he called it—was inimical to ‘the idea of the university as a clash of ideas’, and he was going to put things to rights. Colleagues were disconcerted by his adversarial style, which ran counter to the tacitly accepted way of doing things.⁸³ There was certainly a perception in some quarters that historians wrote ‘soft’ reviews.⁸⁴

79 The relevant course outlines and tutorial guides for Adelaide are in the Tregenza Papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, MSS 0047, Series 4.1, and for Melbourne in the Archive of J.M. Main, Special Collections, Flinders University Library, PGp2/116A.

80 Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, p. 206; Ellis, ‘History without Facts’, in Bridge, *Manning Clark*, p. 70.

81 Manning Clark, *An Historian’s Apprenticeship*, Melbourne: MUP, 1992, pp. 31–35.

82 Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, p. 209.

83 Frank Bongiorno, ‘Two Radical Legends: Russel Ward, Humphrey McQueen and the New Left Challenge in Australian Historiography’, *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2008, pp. 201–22, specifically pp. 214–15. Contrast with Christopher Pearson, ‘Standover Left axes debate’, *Weekend Australian*, 6–7 September 2003, p. 20.

84 Adrian Merritt, ‘Methodological and Theoretical Implications of the Study of Law and Crime’, *Labour History*, no. 37, 1979, pp. 108–19, specifically p. 108 n.2, doi.org/10.2307/127508388.

Ryan did express his amazement that ‘the emotional championship of Clark—instant, hot and angry—stands in strangest contrast to the reserved and embarrassed character of his intellectual support’.⁸⁵ The defence of the *History* was, indeed, highly qualified and it was noted at the time that ‘if Clark could not cut the mustard in terms of historical scholarship then the Ryan case was more than half proved’.⁸⁶ To assert that Clark’s work would outlive his critics was never going to make headway, and the claim that Clark had a vision for Australia is readily undermined if his methods and accuracy can be faulted. Neither would newspaper headings such as ‘Forget the fairy floss, this is history writ large’, ‘Manning Clark will outlast most critics’ and ‘Clark’s legacy undimmed’ carry the day.⁸⁷ It was certainly easier to assert than to explain why Clark’s imagining of Australia might be uplifting. The difficulty is summed up by Alan Atkinson. He expressed no doubts that Clark was ‘a great historian’ while still admitting that ‘it is not easy to work out the elements of his greatness, taking account especially of the serious charges which are often laid against his scholarship’.⁸⁸ Neither were sweeping, but nebulous, statements that the *History* was a ‘many-voiced epic of national life’ or that it ‘began to show Australians that they were as richly endowed with spirituality, tragedy and splendour as any other people’ going to gain traction in the face of hard-nosed scepticism.⁸⁹

Many years later, Ryan asserted that ‘every one of the clear and specific criticisms made of Clark in *Quadrant* back in 1993 remains fudged but never refuted by his supporters’.⁹⁰ They did try, and often did effectively refute, but he was not listening. The problem for Clark’s defenders was being thrown back on a relativist argument, or as Macintyre pointed out:

Remarkable is Ryan’s complaint that Clark intrudes his views into the history and hence distorts objective historical truth. This notion of a formed historical truth lying outside the historian’s

85 Ryan, ‘The Charge of the Lightweight Brigade’, p. 223.

86 Peter Craven, ‘The Ryan Affair’, in Bridge, *Manning Clark*, pp. 165–87 (text), p. 224 (endnotes), specifically p. 182.

87 Steve Dow, ‘Forget the fairy floss, this is history writ large’, *Australian*, 30 August 1993, p. 9; ‘Manning Clark will outlive most critics’ (editorial), *Canberra Times*, 28 August 1993, p. 12; Michael Cathcart, ‘Clark’s legacy undimmed’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 August 1993, p. 11.

88 Alan Atkinson, ‘A Great Historian?’ in Bridge, *Manning Clark*, pp. 122–35 (text), pp. 220–21 (endnotes), specifically p. 122.

89 Peter Craven, ‘Excerpts from Clark’s rich and strange history’, *Age*, 23 June 1994, pp. 12–13 (Green Recording Guide); Michael Cathcart, ‘The sage under siege’, *Age*, 27 August 1993, p. 13.

90 Peter Ryan, ‘Hollow Man of Yesterday’, review of *Manning Clark: A Life*, by Brian Matthews, *Quadrant*, vol. 53, nos 1–2, January–February 2009, pp. 126–28, specifically p. 126.

experience and framework of values, a truth that the historian simply apprehends and reproduces, is simply pre-Copernican. Ryan seems not to have grasped that the facts do not speak for themselves, and that every work of historical scholarship conducts a dialogue between past and present.⁹¹

Others also commented with some bewilderment on Ryan's arch-empiricist approach:

Ryan is one of those mildly totalitarian men who long for books which will reveal 'objective' truths about history, mainly final 'truths' fully in accord with set-in-concrete views they already hold.⁹²

There is also a newspaper clipping in the Ryan Papers with a marked-up passage that reads: 'Theory can be no more than this: a trap set in the hope that reality will be naive enough to fall into it'; and another one, again marked up, where Clark is quoted as saying: 'Everyone's got a bias ... I'm not very interested in being objective'.⁹³ Ryan was nothing if not an unreconstructed positivist but one who was challenged in getting his own facts right and in representing situations accurately—or, for that matter, being 'objective'.

Even so, Ryan won the round of the contest concerning his critics being unable to defend Clark's work wholeheartedly—for the simple reason that most of them had no desire to defend the *History* but, rather, were disturbed by the tenor of Ryan's attacks and the debasing of public debate. In any case, none of Ryan's criticisms of the *History* were original and he emphatically failed to demonstrate the intertwining of Clark's personal failings and the failings of the *History*; to which might be added his own failure to confront Clark about the fluctuating and eventually declining quality of the *History* during the latter's lifetime. He complains that 'there was not one occasion when Manning would discuss [his factual] errors simply on a matter-of-fact basis',⁹⁴ without seeming to realise that it was

91 Stuart Macintyre, 'Clark's work sure to outlive its detractors', *Age*, 28 August 1993, p. 17.

92 Andrew Field, 'Clark's editor: a paragon of infidelity', *Courier-Mail*, 15 September 1999, for quotation see p. 8; Michael Cathcart, 'The sage under siege', *Age*, 27 August 1993, p. 13; Maurilia Meehan, 'Spot the Invisible Man', *Australian Book Review*, no. 156, November 1993, pp. 34–37, specifically pp. 36–37.

93 Bryan Appleyard, 'Now the orgy is over', *Spectator*, 15 May 1993, p. 39; 'They said it', *Canberra Times*, 7 October 1989, p. 9, respectively (copies in the Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 6, Box 10, Folder 2).

94 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', pp. 193–94.

his responsibility as Clark's publisher to voice concerns about the quality of the *History*. In the absence of such complaints, Clark had every right to believe that he was performing to his publisher's satisfaction.

Ryan's silence raises another matter. The critics maintained that Ryan's posthumous attack on Clark was an act of base cowardice, which Robert Manne disputes in the light of Ryan's wartime record and his foreknowledge of 'the social ostracism which would be visited upon him by [Clark's] vast network of friends and admirers'.⁹⁵ Clearly, bravery comes in more than one guise. It is not necessary to take *Fear Drive My Feet* at face value to realise that Ryan fought for his country with distinction: his mention in despatches confirms that he did.⁹⁶ Yet he lacked the intestinal fortitude to confront Clark about the shortcomings of the *History* or to debate face-to-face with his critics on television or radio. Bismarck is on the mark in drawing a distinction, back in 1864, between military courage and *Zivilcourage*.⁹⁷

95 Robert Manne, 'A holy cow called history', *Age*, 1 September 1993, for quotation see p. 16; Manne, comments on a draft of this book, 11 March 2019.

96 Enclosed in Ryan's Service file, NAA: B883, VX128541 (p. 35).

97 Richard Swedberg, 'Civil Courage (*Zivilcourage*): The Case of Knut Wicksell', *Theory & Society*, vol. 28, no. 4, 1999, pp. 501–28, specifically p. 501.

This text is taken from *History Wars: The Peter Ryan – Manning Clark Controversy*, by Doug Munro, published 2021 by ANU Press,
The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/HW.2021.06