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Reflection: Peter Ryan's Motives

My essay arose from a troubled, deep concern about the survival of historical truth in my country. Only an advanced victim of *paranoia politica* could find there any political motivation.

Peter Ryan (1994)¹

We all know of examples ... of people who could scarcely rise from their beds in the morning were it not for the energy given to them by their hatreds and the political activities which express them.

Raimond Gaita (1992)²

Peter Ryan attacked Manning Clark for a variety of reasons, each adding its weight to the others. As well as sheer vindictiveness, there was professional jealousy, feelings of marginalisation and the insecurity that goes with it, a corresponding desire to restore his public profile, political differences and a need to renounce his part in bringing out successive volumes of the *History*. Ryan launched his attacks in the most public manner possible and in ways that would maximise the damage to Clark.

1 Peter Ryan, 'The Charge of the Lightweight Brigade', in his *Lines of Fire: Manning Clark & Other Writings*, ed. A.K. Macdougall, Binalong, NSW: Clarion Editions, 1997, pp. 222–34, specifically p. 225.

2 Raimond Gaita, 'The Political Responsibilities of Intellectuals: Intellectual Combatants', *Quadrant*, vol. 36, no. 6, June 1992, pp. 23–25, specifically p. 25. Gaita came to Australia with his family as one of Hitler's émigrés in 1950 as a three-year-old. He is a prominent Australian philosopher and public intellectual. Of his many books, *Romulus, My Father*, Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1998, breaks the mould in that an autobiography-cum-family-history seldom enters the canon so promptly. The book has also been made into a film.

Some of Ryan's grievances stemmed from Clark not being an 'easy' author. He was unpunctual and in the later stages of the *History* Ryan was justifiably concerned that Clark's heavy schedule of speaking commitments was distracting him from completing Volume 6.³ When manuscripts did finally arrive, they had 'every technical blemish known to the editorial craft ... strewn thick upon his pages', requiring expensive editorial input.⁴ Clark then resisted suggestions for textual changes.⁵ There were also Clark's frequent requests for cash advances in the early years, although Ryan might also have mentioned that he declined to take 'full advantage' of Clark's offer to forego royalties on the money-losing commemorative edition of the *History*.⁶ To cap it off was Clark's 'duplicitous' in entering into informal but unauthorised discussions with other publishers concerning their acquiring the paperback rights of the *History*.⁷ Ryan was within his rights to be annoyed on that score, even if they did provide an opportunity to off-load the *History*.

On quite another level, Clark's emotional neediness meant that he required constant mollicoddling: 'He seemed deeply, at times almost incapacitatingly insecure', remarked Ryan.⁸ Shortly before the publication of Volume 1, Ryan had an early taste of how petulantly demanding Clark could be. He was 'caught rather off balance' by an 'agitated' phone call from a distraught and angry Clark, demanding to know why he had not received an advance copy. It turned out that Clark had been misinformed by another publisher that Volume 1 was already in print. He kicked up an inordinate fuss and was not easily mollified, thus providing an early warning that he was going to be a high-maintenance author.⁹

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3 Peter Ryan, 'Manning Clark', in his *Lines of Fire*, pp. 179–214, specifically p. 203; see also Tim Curnow to Ryan, 5 November 1984, Records of Melbourne University Press (hereafter MUP Records), 2003.0129, Unit 21 (vol. 6). For an idea of Clark's schedule of engagements, see Brian Matthews, *Manning Clark: A Life*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2008, p. 389.

4 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 195.

5 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', pp. 195–96.

6 Ryan to Clark, 17 September and 24 September 1987, and Clark to Ryan, 21 September 1987, all in MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 21 (vol. 6); Mark McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity: The Life of Manning Clark*, Melbourne: Miegonyah Press, 2011, p. 614.

7 For example, Ryan to Clark, 25 June 1969, MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 20 (vol. 2); Peter Ryan, *Final Proof: Memoirs of a Publisher*, Sydney: Quadrant Books, 2010, p. 135.

8 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 201.

9 Ryan to Halstead Press, 22 August 1962; Halstead Press to Ryan, 23 August 1962; all in MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 20 (vol. 1); Ryan to Clark, 27 August 1962, Manning Clark Papers, National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA), MS 7550, Series 18, Box 156, Folder 2.

Ryan had gripes of a more personal nature and these stemmed from another of his quirks of character—namely, his admiration for practical, self-made people like himself. In this regard he presents a contrast to Clark, who had never been other than a student, a school teacher and an academic. Ryan prided himself on his own ‘can do’ attitude and the ‘will do’ bustle of Melbourne University Press (hereafter MUP), and he was justly proud of his war service record. Ryan warmed to other ex-servicemen and he could be judgmental towards those who hadn’t been in uniform.¹⁰ That was the case with Clark, whose grand mal epilepsy precluded him from being enlisted. It is not surprising that Ryan was put out by Clark’s seeming indifference to his singular war record.¹¹ He was also horrified by Clark’s depictions of WWII in one of his popular books, but gave him no credit for visiting Gallipoli and other WWI battlefields with a view ‘to do the impossible—to evoke Ypres, the Somme & Pozieres’.¹²

There were also Ryan’s increasingly negative feelings about academic life and academics generally. His varied background in the school of hard knocks helps explain his disdain for ‘the sheltered workshop mentality and habit of Australian academics’,¹³ whom he considered had ‘no notion of the glory of soaring in the real world, nor of its perils’.¹⁴ It was anathema to Ryan that anyone could spend their lives in ‘the leisurely corridors of academe’ as a member of a ‘narrow priesthood of the professionals’, bereft of ‘experience in worldly affairs’, insulated from ‘the gritty world of real work’, revelling in the ‘blackberry thicket of academic sniping and spite’, and reduced to shuffling papers rather than ‘actually *making* something’.¹⁵ The irony is that Ryan’s hostility towards academia may, in part, have been the resentment at his own dependence on the academy and its occupants.¹⁶ He fulminated against university presses for being what he described as “thesis mills” serving academic ambitions for promotion and

10 Ryan, *Final Proof*, pp. 52, 60–61, 116–17, 124–25, 155–57, 166.

11 Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, p. 185.

12 McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, p. 294 (‘Only when Clark saw the lie of the land could he begin to understand its past’), pp. 468, 690; Stephen Holt, *A Short History of Manning Clark*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999, for quotation see p. 209; Tom Griffiths, *The Art of Time Travel: Historians and their Craft*, Melbourne: Black Inc., 2016, pp. 11–12.

13 Peter Ryan, ‘A Reply to my Critics’, in his *Lines of Fire*, pp. 214–22, specifically p. 220.

14 Ryan, ‘The Charge of the Lightweight Brigade’, p. 233.

15 Ryan, *Final Proof*, pp. 37, 45, 72.

16 That said, some academics place more stress on Ryan’s positive qualities and still hold him in good regard—e.g. Robert Wallace, email to author, 4 May 2016; John Poynter, ‘Peter Ryan the Publisher’, *Quadrant*, vol. 60, no. 3, March 2016, pp. 58–59; Brenda Niall, *Life Class: The Education of a Biographer*, Melbourne: MUP, 2007, pp. 149–50.

a sort of extravagant public relations adjunct to their universities'.¹⁷ A pet hate was being approached to publish revised (and sometimes unrevised) PhD theses:

How many dutiful young doctors, theses limp in hand, have waited in the ante-rooms of publishers, hoping to learn that alchemy can convert their academic goose into a swan—preferably one winged between hard covers. Persistence and departmental subsidy swings it with awful oftenness. Awful? Ask any bookseller, any librarian; any general reader.¹⁸

In his view, academic historians had 'turned history into a private game for salaried professionals'¹⁹ and he was apt to treat them in a belittling fashion. When Peter McPhee was working on his biography of scientist R.D. Wright (1907–1990), McPhee sought explicit approval for quotation rights from everyone he had interviewed. The only one to decline was 'that self-important cockerel Peter Ryan'.²⁰ On an earlier occasion he was approached by Geoffrey Gray for information on the role of anthropologists within DORCA (the Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs) during WWII. Without warning, Ryan launched into 'an unasked for' and irrelevant tirade against the University of Melbourne anthropologist Donald Thomson (1901–1970) that shocked his unsuspecting listener.²¹ Even when being helpful to researchers, Ryan could still be disconcerting—on one occasion by his curious combination of anti-intellectualism *and* deference to academic status when being interviewed in 2004 by Sylvia Martin for her biography of librarian Ida Leeson (1885–1964). Ryan thought highly of Leeson, who had been his colleague at DORCA; without Leeson's intercession *Fear Drive My Feet*

17 Ryan to Tony Eggleton (press secretary to the prime minister), 8 February 1968, Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1.

18 Peter Ryan, 'Young historians wasting their time trying to milk the bull', *Age*, 14 July 1990, p. Extra 2 ('As I Please' column).

19 Peter Ryan, 'As Lost as Burke and Wills', *Quadrant*, vol. 44, nos 1–2, January–February 2000, pp. 119–20, specifically p. 120.

20 Peter McPhee, discussion with author, Melbourne, 7 December 2015, and email to author, 11 June 2016; McPhee, *Pansy: A Life of Roy Douglas Wright*, Melbourne: MUP, 1999. McPhee held a personal chair in history at the University of Melbourne and ended his career as provost.

21 Geoffrey Gray, emails to author, 30 July 2018 and 14 August 2018. At the time, Gray had a grant from the Australian War Memorial to study DORCA. He is now an adjunct professor of history at the University of Queensland.

might never have been published.²² The interview was conducted in the company of John Legge, an old friend of Ryan's from their days at DORCA, and Martin went away with decidedly ambivalent feelings:

[Ryan] was friendly, if slightly obsequious, rather pointedly calling me Dr Martin all the time. I now wonder whether he was being mockingly deferential. His talk was full of racy stories about life at the Directorate—all a bit sleazy. John Legge was a quiet man who tried to tone Peter down and I didn't feel he was trying to impress me, unlike Peter. That said, he did give me his time and was generous with it.²³

The wonder is that he stuck with his job as a university publisher for 25 years when he deplored its *raison d'être* and harboured such an obvious prejudice against academics as a group, which was fully reciprocated. Symptomatic of Ryan's anti-academic attitudes are the pointed references to some of his favourite MUP authors being non-academics.²⁴

That Clark and Ryan were not cut from the same cloth only served to fuel Ryan's growing disenchantment, especially when he (Ryan) had capacities for unqualified friendship and deadly enmity in equal measures, with little sign of a middle ground. He was loyal to his friends, about whom he wrote with great affection,²⁵ and Clark's insulting remarks about W. Macmahon Ball, whom Ryan revered but whom Clark dismissed as a yesterday's man, were intolerable.²⁶ Yet despite his qualms, Ryan locked himself into a deadly embrace and never discussed with Clark his concerns about the *History*, resulting in 25 years of largely suppressed resentments finally coming to the boil and overflowing onto the pages of *Quadrant*. Ryan did say that Clark's *History* 'could, without gross exaggeration, be called a daily preoccupation of my life' at MUP.²⁷

22 Sylvia Martin, *Ida Leeson: A Life: Not a Blue-Stocking Lady*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2006, p. 158; Peter Ryan, 'Preface' (2000), to *Fear Drive my Feet*, Melbourne: Text Classics, 2015, pp. 7–10. Ryan's esteem for Leeson—the essential "bigness" of this tiny woman', as he put it—is heart-warmingly expressed in his book *Brief Lives*, Sydney: Duffy & Snellgrove, 2004, pp. 139–52.

23 Sylvia Martin, email to author, 22 June 2018. J.D. Legge (1921–2016) was Foundation Professor of History (later Emerita Professor) at Monash University.

24 Peter Ryan, 'Elsie Webster, Scholar' (1994), in his *Lines of Fire*, pp. 91–94; Ryan, *Final Proof*, pp. 85, 130–31, 152, 156–64, 169.

25 See his selection of essays on such 'Men of Character', in his *Lines of Fire*, pp. 119–76; and Ryan, *Brief Lives*, *passim*.

26 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 183; see also Manning Clark, *The Quest for Grace*, Ringwood: Viking, 1990, pp. 22–25. Clark was not alone among contemporaries in feeling that Ball had failed to realise his academic potential. See Ai Kobayashi, *W. Macmahon Ball: Politics for the People*, Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2013, pp. 197–99.

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

It became an increasingly disagreeable preoccupation. It bears mentioning that Ryan stayed away from the launch of Volume 6 ‘and an association of fifty years came to an end’.²⁸ ‘Manning was quite upset about that’, recalled Dymphna, adding that this was one of a number of episodes that led to a cooling of Clark’s friendship with Ryan. ‘There were many indications’, she remarked in retrospect, that Ryan was becoming ‘very sour’ towards Manning.²⁹

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A further set of reasons why Ryan turned on Clark—namely, a mixture of personal grievances, professional insecurities and political antagonisms—were shrewdly identified by Brian Matthews in a newspaper interview:

I think he is a very disappointed man. He never did satisfactorily answer the question of why he blew the whistle so late. Ryan was a man who fought for his country. He wrote a very good book about it. But he didn’t write anything comparable again. He’s a man who always moved in intellectual, academic circles. But it was always somehow in reflected glory.

Then Clark dies and has this enormous funeral. And where is Ryan? No longer director of Melbourne University Press. No longer has his column in ‘The Age’. He is, as he might see it, rejected by a society which looks like being ruled by the Labor Party until the millenium, a party whose philosophies he does not like in a country he fought famously for, which no longer seems to acknowledge him but which seems to have established Clark as an icon.³⁰

28 Ryan, *Final Proof*, p. 139.

29 Dymphna Clark, interviewed by Heather Rusden, 13 February 1997 (74.04 minutes), NLA, ORAL TRC 3548, available at: nla.gov.au/nla.obj-217338911/listen; Sebastian Clark, telephone discussion with author, 14 July 2020.

30 Quoted in Fiona Capp, ‘London Calling’, *Age*, 2 July 1994, p. 8. Ryan threatened to sue when Matthews branded him a frustrated and embittered one-trick pony. See Ryan’s annotations (12 September 1994) on Matthews to Ryan, 4 August 1994; see also Christopher Sexton to Ryan, 11 July 1994 and Ryan to Sexton, 14 July 1994, all in Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 6, Box 10, Folder 5. Matthews and Ryan had a ‘history’. Ryan had published Matthews’s first book, *The Receding Wave: Henry Lawson’s Prose* (1972). Matthews had promised Ryan first right of refusal for his next book, a factionalised biography of Lawson’s mother, and refuse it he did: ‘[Ryan] was rather scathing and “wondered” what I would think of it in years to come (i.e. by implication, when I’d “matured” a bit)’. Matthews, emails to author, 26 July 2014 and 4 July 2018. The manuscript was not only published, as *Louisa*, by McPhee Gribble in 1987, but won literary prizes and was twice republished. The editors of the *Australian Book Review* ‘liked *Louisa* so much’ that they reprinted its opening pages: ‘And Now, the Book...’, *Australian Book Review*, no. 97 (December 1987–January 1988), pp. 8–10.

As Matthews implies, Ryan could hardly have been indifferent to the honours bestowed in abundance upon Clark. In 1975 Clark became a Companion of the Order of Australia and in 1980 was Australian of the Year. As well, his books won several literary awards,³¹ and he had honorary doctorates from Melbourne, Newcastle and Sydney universities—ironically given his increasing disdain of the academy. He was also one of the writers whom Louis Kahan sketched for *Meanjin Quarterly*.³² A symposium was held in Melbourne in 1979 to discuss Volume 4 of the *History*, and the year after his death Carl Bridge organised a full-scale seminar on his life and work at the University of New England, the proceedings of which were also published.³³ There are biographies of Clark by Stephen Holt (1999), Brian Matthews (2008) and Mark McKenna (2011) and the quasi-biography by Humphrey McQueen (*Suspect History*, 1997), not to mention Holt's earlier intellectual biography (*Manning Clark and Australian History, 1915–1963*, 1982). He and Brian Fitzpatrick are joint subjects of an edited collection (*Against the Grain*, 2007). Two collections of his correspondence have appeared—*Dear Kathleen, Dear Manning* (1996) and *Ever, Manning* (2008). He has an entry in *The Oxford History of Australia* and several brief appearances in *The Cambridge History of Australia* (whereas Ryan is mentioned in neither publication).³⁴

At ANU, a chair of history was named in his honour as well as a building: the Manning Clark Centre. The structure was demolished in a major redevelopment of the Copland area of ANU in 2017 but the name has been perpetuated with the erection of the imposing Manning Clark Hall in the adjacent Kambri Precinct of the campus.³⁵ In 2015, a Manning Clark Centenary seminar honoured 'Manning Clark's contribution and legacy as a publicly engaged historian'. Elsewhere in Canberra, he and Dymphna

31 Volume 1 shared the Ernest Scott Prize and Volume 2 was the outright winner. It was the same for the Barbara Ramsden Award with Volume 3 sharing the prize and Volume 4 having it all to itself. As well, Volume 2 won the Rothman's Moomba Festival Award for Australian Literature and the Australian Literary Society Gold Medal; Volume 3 shared *The Age* Book of the Year Award; Volume 4 won the New South Wales Premier's Award, 1979; and Volume 6 took out the Gold Banjo Award.

32 Louis Kahan [sketch of Manning Clark], *Meanjin Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1973, p. 244; Kahan, *Australian Writers: The Face of Literature*, Melbourne: MUP, 1981, portrait 7.

33 Ailsa McLeary (ed.), 'Manning Clark and Australian Historiography', *Australia 1888*, vol. 3, 1979, pp. 4–73; Carl Bridge (ed.), *Manning Clark: Essays on his Place in History*, Melbourne: MUP, 1994.

34 Carl Bridge, 'Manning Clark', in Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 128–29; Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *The Cambridge History of Australia*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2013, vol. 1, pp. 179, 244 and vol. 2, pp. 180, 573, 574, 575.

35 'Manning Clark Hall officially opened at ANU', 12 March 2019, available at: www.anu.edu.au/news/all-news/manning-clark-hall-officially-opened-at-anu.

share a plaque on the Australian Capital Territory Honour Walk; a street has been named after him in the northern suburb of Franklin; and the family home has been converted into Manning Clark House, a non-profit organisation to promote Australian culture and history. One of its events is an annual Manning Clark Lecture.

By contrast, the honours bestowed on Ryan amount to a thoroughly merited Military Medal (and four service medals) as well as being Mentioned in Despatches for his wartime service in New Guinea; sharing *Quadrant's* George Watson Essay Prize (with Geoffrey Partington), in 1987, for the best published essay on a political subject by an Australian citizen or resident of Australia;³⁶ and the short biography by John Tidey (*Ryan's Luck*, 2020). The 143-word note on Ryan in *The Australian Companion to Literature* is overshadowed by the 995-word essay on Clark in the same volume.³⁷ It is not as though Ryan's life was bereft of achievement—far from it—but more honours had come Clark's way and it clearly irked Ryan that he had contributed to Clark becoming something of a national celebrity. It got to the stage that, in 2009, Ryan just wished that Clark would disappear from sight and mind, and he beseeched his readers, 'Now could we all forget about Manning Clark? Anything more "yesterday" can hardly be imagined'.³⁸

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At the time, people did state that Ryan was politically motivated: 'I can only believe', said historian and family friend of the Clarks, David Fitzpatrick, 'that the whole thing is "political" & that Manning's place in it is merely "useful" but otherwise accidental [incidental?]'.³⁹ In the fraught History Wars setting, politicians on both sides entered the fray, reinforcing the polarised and divisive setting that the Ryan affair reflected.

36 'Announcement: The George Watson Essay Prize 1987: A Tie', *Quadrant*, vol. 32, nos 1–2, January–February 1988, p. 5; Peter Ryan, 'True Journalists' (1996), in his *Lines of Fire*, pp. 137–40, specifically p. 140; John Tidey, *Ryan's Luck: A Life of Peter Ryan MM*, Melbourne: Arcadia, 2020, pp. 92–93.

37 William Wilde, Joy Hooton and Barry Andrews (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, 2nd edn, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 167–68 (Clark), p. 668 (Ryan).

38 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. 128.

39 For example, David [Fitzpatrick] to Dymphna Clark [September 2009], Dymphna Clark Papers, NLA, MS 9873, Series 10, Box 35, Folder 3; see also Humphrey McQueen, 'Manning Clark Revisited', *ABC Radio 24 Hours*, March 1994, pp. 55–58.

Paul Keating, by then prime minister, intervened on the very evening that Ryan's first *Quadrant* attack appeared in the bookshops, dismissing Clark's critics as being 'bitchy' and deploring their small-mindedness.

Lindsay Tanner of the Labor left faction put it explicitly in saying that Ryan's intervention:

Was essentially a politically motivated attack which comes from what I would describe as the old Right within the Australian community, which has for a long time felt very keenly the lack of intellectuals in the literary and the historical arena on the right of the political spectrum. That part of the community has been keen to ensure that people such as Manning Clark, who has been seen to have essentially Left-oriented perspectives on Australian history in society, should be denigrated and torn down.⁴⁰

Ryan strongly denied accusations of being politically motivated,⁴¹ but the evidence says otherwise, especially when the environment at the time and his own politics are taken into account. He started as a 'young leftie' in the University of Melbourne Labour Club. Whether he was ever *really* a man of the left may be doubted in view of the fact that he was an ASIO snitch during the 1950s—he informed on Max Crawford, the history professor at Melbourne—which Ryan made light of when he was outed in 1999 in the *Age*.⁴² He attributed his shift in political allegiance to the follies of the Whitlam Government, especially the granting of independence to the Territory of Papua New Guinea in 1975, and by 1986 he was referring to his 'total change of [political] outlook'.⁴³

40 *Hansard* (House of Representatives), 1 September 1993, for quotation see p. 702; Fred Chaney to Dymphna Clark, 27 August [1993], Dymphna Clark Papers, NLA, MS 9873, Series 10, Box 35, Folder 2.

41 Ryan, 'The Charge of the Lightweight Brigade', p. 225.

42 Fay Anderson, *An Historian's Life: Max Crawford and the Politics of Academic Freedom*, Melbourne: MUP, 2005, pp. 295–96, 316 n.113. Ryan's cover was blown because his name was not redacted in Crawford's ASIO file. See Stuart Macintyre, 'Max Crawford: A Casualty of the Cold War', *Overland*, no. 155, 1999, pp. 19–22, specifically p. 22. The first volume of Ryan's ASIO file (NAA: A6119, 2616), shows that he was under surveillance from 1952, available at: recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=3901342. Its later contents suggest a tacit understanding that Ryan would provide information, when asked, in return for ceasing to be a person of interest to the organisation.

43 Peter Ryan, 'End of the Dreamtime' (1986), in his *Lines of Fire*, pp. 101–11, for quotation see p. 105; Ryan, 'Humanity's Crimes', *Quadrant*, vol. 43, no. 3, March 1999, pp. 87–88, specifically p. 87; Ryan, 'Curtin, Chifley and Whitlam', *Quadrant*, vol. 59, nos 1–2, January–February 2015, pp. 143–44, specifically p. 144; Tidey, *Ryan's Luck*, p. 83.

Ryan's shift of allegiances happened when Clark was becoming more politically prominent in the wake of *The Dismissal*. There may well have been an element of jealousy as Clark stumped the countryside making a name for himself with what Ryan regarded as a pernicious message. Added to this was Clark's theatricality and his increasingly eccentric attire, worn in order to draw attention to himself in his contrived persona as the nation's sage.⁴⁴ Ryan sneered at Clark's studied façade, including the matching attire of Akubra hat, three-piece suit replete with pocket-watch and chain, boots and wide belt. The beard and the walking stick completed the picture. Wherever he appeared, everyone knew who he was. The trademark hat was a necessity as well as an affectation—to prevent sunburn and to avoid getting more cancer spots—but he also kept it on his head in quite unnecessary situations, such as dinner parties and at conference presentations.⁴⁵

The attire added to Clark's messiah image. Frank Bongiorno has an explanation for his 'extraordinary career as national prophet and preacher from the early 1970s through to his death in 1991', while acknowledging that there does remain 'something odd about it all':

How was it that in a country seen as secular-minded, egalitarian, democratic, informal and even anti-intellectual, Manning Clark—with his searching spirituality, his well-honed biblical language and his cryptic allusions to the writings of Dostoyevsky and Lawrence—came to achieve this strange celebrity status? My own feeling is that the national stereotype itself is flawed; that many Australians of the 1970s and 1980s possessed a remarkably old-fashioned hunger for a dignified symbolism of nationhood that could be taken seriously by 'old' countries. How convenient to have found a man of such bearing and eloquence. Clark looked and sounded like many people's idea of an Old Testament prophet and yet under a famous hat that seemed glued to the bald dome of his head, he also cultivated the unlikely image of a simple boy from the Australian bush. Here was evidence that after the British Empire, Australia had a conscience and a soul. And his books showed it had a history.⁴⁶

44 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', pp. 196–97.

45 Katerina and Axel Clark, interviewed by Susan Marsden, 19 June 2001, NLA, ORAL TRC 4770 (p. 6 of transcript); Carl Bridge, 'Manning Clark and the Ratbag Tradition', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 21, nos 54–55, 1997, pp. 91–95, specifically p. 92, doi.org/10.1080/14443059709387341; Richard J. Evans, email to author, 26 August 2018.

46 Frank Bongiorno, review of *An Eye for Eternity*, by Mark McKenna, *Britain and the World*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2013, pp. 291–93, specifically p. 292.

The content of Clark's message both as an historian and as a public intellectual seriously annoyed Ryan, who loved his country,⁴⁷ and here was Clark telling him, or so he thought, that it was not worthy of his love. It never seemed to occur to Ryan that Clark also loved Australia, if in a different way. He had clearly forgotten that Clark, in 1964, had told him that Australia is 'the country I go on loving to distraction'.⁴⁸ Clark's Menzies-bashing offended Ryan in equal measure to his black-armband, gloom-and-doom view of Australian history, including that of Aboriginal dispossession, and what Ryan described as his 'glum depiction of [Australia as] a mob of born losers'.⁴⁹ Black-armband history was, in Ryan's view 'nationally insulting bunkum'.⁵⁰

This is where Ryan's point of attack shifted from the person-cum-professional and locked into the History Wars. Ryan considered Clark's depiction of history as part and parcel of a 'sour revisionism' that Australia had a shameful past, and he disagreed with Clark's glorification, as he saw it, of radicalism.⁵¹ As Ryan later remarked:

My objection to much recent ideology-driven history is that it tends to leach away our self-respect. You and I are portrayed as guilty successors to generations whose lives were devoted to doing little but harm, ancestors for whom no good word can be found ... This depressing and debilitating presentation of our history leads to nowhere, except perhaps to some great southern wailing wall.⁵²

Or take Ryan peddling the view that there had not been 'a single race riot' in Australian history, quite forgetting Clark's description of the 1861 Lambing Flat riots in Volume 4 of the *History*, which he claimed to have read on at least three occasions.⁵³

47 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 186.

48 Roslyn Russell (ed.), *Ever, Manning: Selected Letters of Manning Clark, 1938–1993*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2008, p. 201 (Clark to Ryan, 10 February 1964); see also McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, p. 557.

49 Ryan, 'A Reply to my Critics', p. 214.

50 Ryan, 'A Reply to my Critics', p. 214.

51 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', pp. 199–200, 212–13; Ryan, 'The Charge of the Lightweight Brigade', pp. 229–30.

52 Peter Ryan, 'Geoffrey Blainey's History' (1995), in his *Lines of Fire*, pp. 87–90, for quotation see p. 89.

53 Peter Ryan, 'Immigration', *Quadrant*, vol. 42, no. 5, May 1998, pp. 87–88, specifically p. 87; Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 213; C.M.H. Clark, *A History of Australia*, Volume 4: *The Earth Abideth Forever, 1851–1888*, Melbourne: MUP, 1978, pp. 128–34, 143, 350–52 278–82.

Ryan's bland and sanitised view of Australian history precluded any meaningful acknowledgment of the darker episodes in the country's past. Not for him the notion that 'there is, of course, much to be bleak about'.⁵⁴ Yet Ryan had his own version of black-arch history, except that it worked in reverse. He saw a meritorious past but surmised that the country was going to the dogs in a deplorable present—the standard conservative language of cultural and moral decline. The paradox with Clark, as Peter Coleman observed, was 'a gloom-and-failure-sodden view of the Australian past, while often holding a simple opportunistic "Progressive" view of our future'.⁵⁵ Ryan's unease only deepened when confronted, in 1981, by ALP attempts to have Volume 5 associated with the party by way of joint ventures and launches on Labor premises.⁵⁶ None of this excuses Ryan's attempt, in his capacity of director of MUP, to arrange a hostile article in the *Age*, based on the proofs of Volume 5.⁵⁷ It was an explicit act of disloyalty to both his author *and* employer that undermines Ryan's claim that 'I was ... paid to do my damndest for the Press, and I did'.⁵⁸ For his part, Clark was becoming concerned, yet professed to remain mystified, about Ryan's political repositioning and his anti-intellectualism.⁵⁹

Ryan's distaste for Clark's politics, and the growing public stature that accompanied his public appearances, together with his contempt for Clark's view of Australian history, were integral to the *Quadrant* attacks. Ryan, the aggressor, then clothes himself in the garb of victimhood, never ceasing to complain that his 'polite' observations received a veritable flood of abuse. But there is another way of looking at it. Far from being

54 Michael Sexton, 'It's war, and the rest is history', review of *The History Wars*, by Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *Sydney Morning Herald Spectrum*, 6 September 2003, p. 15, available at: www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/the-history-wars-20030906-gdhcbm.html.

55 For example, Ryan, 'End of the Dreamtime' (1986), in his *Lines of Fire*, pp. 101–11; Ryan, 'A Better Place', *Quadrant*, vol. 47, nos 1–2, January–February 2003, pp. 119–20; John McLaren, *Free Radicals on the Left in Postwar Melbourne*, Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2003, for quotation see p. 218.

56 Ryan to Clark, 9 February 1981; David Combe (National Secretary of the ALP) to Ryan, 9 June 1981, and Ryan to Combe, 15 June 1981, in MUP Records, 2003.0129, Unit 21 (vol. 5).

57 McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, pp. 596–97.

58 Ryan, 'A Reply to my Critics', p. 217. It transpires that Ryan cost MUP sales in the mid-1970s, at a time of credit squeeze, by insisting on 30-day terms with booksellers, who then declined to stock MUP books. See Frank Bongiorno, 'The Road from Preston: *The Australian Colonists* and Ken Inglis's Explorations in Social History', in Peter Browne and Seamus Spark (eds), *'I Wonder': The Life and Work of Ken Inglis*, Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2020, pp. 216–39, specifically p. 227.

59 Susan Davies (ed.), *Dear Kathleen, Dear Manning: The Correspondence of Manning Clark and Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 1949–1990*, Melbourne: MUP, 1996, p. 113 (Clark to Fitzpatrick, July 1987).

an act of 'civic courage', his increasingly strident *Quadrant* articles were written with the deliberate purpose of causing offence and distancing himself even further from the 'loquacious Left'. He needed to atone for being Clark's publisher. By vilifying his former author and the *History* so publicly and vehemently, Ryan confirmed where his political loyalties lay and contributed to the demolition of Clark's credibility in the eyes of the political right.

In short, Ryan's attack on Clark was a decidedly political intervention that can be explained by his change of allegiances and his need to reaffirm where his loyalties now lay; by his embrace of the 'three-cheers' school of history; and by a desire to absolve himself of responsibility for being Clark's publisher, along with the claim that his hands were tied in the matter. Perhaps he was even angling to become a columnist for *Quadrant*.

* * *

A final consideration is Ryan's need for notoriety and notice. He was not so much a prophet without a cause as a preacher without a pulpit. Like Clark, he had a 'passion to be a public figure',⁶⁰ but in 1993 he lost his audience upon the termination of his fortnightly by-line column in the *Age* ('As I Please'). This stemmed from the fallout from a potentially libellous column Ryan had written three months earlier about the incumbent prime minister's financial involvement in a piggery.⁶¹ Much earlier, he had provided the 'Spy' column in the fortnightly magazine *Nation* and a restaurant column in the *Australian Financial Review*; he was not named as its author but that was known among the circle whose approval he valued.⁶² He had also written for the *Australian*. His qualifications for these gigs were literary facility, an opinionated outlook and a determinedly independent stance on life and affairs. His employment with the *Age* stemmed from a need to 'balance' its progressive tone, and probably to stir up the readership for good measure, thus giving scope to the personalised

60 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 202.

61 Ryan, 'Answers please, Mr PM!', *Age*, 16 January 1993, p. 2; see also Michael Baume (interjection), *Hansard* (Senate), 7 September 1993, p. 1120; Bruce Anderson to the editor, *Australian* [undated; not published], attached to Anderson to Dymphna Clark, 18 August 1995, Dymphna Clark Papers, NLA, MS 9873, Series 10, Box 35, Folder 3; A.K. Macdougall, 'Introduction' to Ryan, *Lines of Fire*, pp. 6–18, specifically p. 17; Peter Ryan, 'The Year of the Swine', *Quadrant*, vol. 43, no. 10, October 1999, pp. 87–88; and especially Tidey, *Ryan's Luck*, pp. 103–4.

62 Tidey, *Ryan's Luck*, pp. 82–83. His first contribution to *Nation* was an insightful book review of *Orr*, by W.H.C. Eddy, *Nation*, vol. 69, no. 20, May 1961, pp. 20–21.

and often nasty edge that was never far beneath the surface.⁶³ The *Age* had employed a number of contrarian columnists, and Ryan was made to order. But he was now out of that line of work and bereft of public platform. Obscurity beckoned.

Ryan extracted himself from his predicament via Clark. While the precise dates of ensuing events cannot always be ascertained, a time line can nonetheless be established. Ryan's last column in the *Age* was in late April 1993.⁶⁴ A little later he enquired whether Robert Manne was still interested in an article on Manning Clark for *Quadrant* and was assured that this was the case.⁶⁵ Freed from the treadmill of writing for the *Age*, Ryan then set about composing his attack on Clark, which appeared nominally in September but in fact in late August. Around this time—exactly when is uncertain—Manne went a step further and offered Ryan an ongoing column in *Quadrant*.⁶⁶ In this way Ryan's public profile was restored with the added advantage of a platform from which to continue sniping at Clark.

Ryan insisted, implausibly, that he attacked Clark 'without relish'⁶⁷ and without bitterness.⁶⁸ The poet Bruce Anderson, a family friend of the Clarks, was having none of this, telling Dymphna:

When you think about it ... that remark of Peter's ['You never hear Manning Clark mentioned today'] is very sick. What he is saying is, 'Look at me. I have wiped someone out. What an achievement! How powerful I am! You may think it is some kind of intellectual sadism or you might wonder what accounts in my psyche for such a compulsion but I did it out of a great sense of public duty. I have struck down a mighty from his seat, and oh, how I am enjoying the fame!'⁶⁹

63 For example, Peter Ryan, 'Constitution is not the problem', *Age*, 2 January 1993, p. Extra 2.

64 Peter Ryan, 'In memory of a unit ahead of its time [DORCA]', *Age*, 24 April 1993, p. 20.

65 Robert Manne, 'A holy cow called history', *Age*, 1 September 1993, p. 16.

66 Robert Manne, email to author, 20 March 2019.

67 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 182; Ryan, 'The Charge of the Lightweight Brigade', p. 233.

68 Ryan to Max Suich, 23 August 1993, Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 6, Box 10, Folder 4; Ryan to J.P. Parsons, 16 December 1993, Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 6, Box 10, Folder 5.

69 Anderson to Dymphna Clark (postscript), 18 August 1995, Dymphna Clark Papers, NLA, MS 9873, Series 10, Box 35, Folder 3.

The statement to which Anderson so objected was quoted in the *Weekend Australian Magazine* and shows that Ryan was nothing if not unrepentant. As reported by the journalist in question:

Scathing and harsh though Ryan's criticisms were, he rejects they were in any way an outburst, nor were they malicious. He re-read all of the historian's published works in the three years before the article. 'Manning created a phoney Australian ethos. I felt I had to redress the balance. It was not an easy moral position; I'd been his publisher, I'd been his friend. But I felt it had got out of hand.' Many people never spoke to him again. 'It didn't trouble me much because when I reflected [about his critics] I thought yes ... yes, you have been getting pretty wishy-washy a bit of late, and you've been a professional for 30 years and you've written f...-all, and said f...-all and probably done f...-all work, too.'⁷⁰

70 *Weekend Australian Magazine*, 29 July 1995, p. 17.

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