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Justified or Not?

The raking over of a life ... is the proper role of the biographer, and who would fairly dispute this responsibility? Less clear is the way information which may only become available after death is used.

Christopher Bantick (1994)¹

In October 1994, some 13 months after his first onslaught, Ryan wrote a further reply to his critics. Titled 'The Charge of the Lightweight Brigade', the denigration continues unabated. Part of the equation is that Ryan is such a good writer—too good for his own good unless harnessed by a sense of restraint—with a powerful prose style, an expansive vocabulary, a fine turn of phrase and the gift of evocative imagery, all enhanced by wide reading. But he lacked a sense of self-control and was prone to distortion.² At one point he pours scorn on Geoffrey Bolton's statement, which he quotes out of context, 'that there may be cause to remove [Clark's] icon to a lower shelf. It would be conceding too much to the Australian habit of self-hatred if we smashed it altogether'.³ To which Ryan responded, 'Bolton wins first prize for facing both ways at once'.⁴

1 Christopher Bantick, 'Death by character assassination', *Canberra Times*, 9 October 1994, p. 19.

2 The positive and negative aspects of Ryan as a writer are on full display in 'New Guinea and I', review of *Throwim Way Leg*, by Tim Flannery, *Quadrant*, vol. 42, no. 5, May 1998, pp. 71–72.

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

4 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 pp. 225–26.

Ryan had a merry time in traducing his critics with whatever weapon came to hand, but he deludes himself by claiming that his criticism of Clark ‘nowhere transgresses propriety’⁵ and was ‘politely phrased’.⁶ One would have to be tone deaf not to realise that unusually vitriolic, vindictive and belittling elements were at play. Take, for example, Ryan’s trash-talk:

The six volumes [of the *History*] are almost unbelievably prolix—the opinion of one who has read the entire work not merely once throughout, but three times, and some parts oftener. It is a vast cauldron of very thin verbal soup, in which swim morsels of nourishing meat, widely spaced. I have been told that a single-volume abridgment is in preparation. The scholar preparing it can hardly find his commission a serious challenge. He need—metaphorically—merely stick a pin in the mass and allow the gaseous verbal excess to hiss its way out.⁷

It is hard to imagine anything more impolite. Nothing could be less calculated to generate the reasoned debate that Robert Manne wanted to encourage; and Manne himself was criticised for allowing the ‘animus’, which had ‘no relevance to Ryan’s central thesis of Clark being a bad and wayward historian’, to be waved through.⁸

Writer Helen Garner lamented:

Perhaps if Mr Ryan were prepared, even a little, to address the source of this rage in himself, he might be able to present his criticisms in a form which would invite a decent response.⁹

But Garner misses the point entirely. Ryan had no interest in a reasoned and evidentiary-based discussion of Clark. Rather than attempting to lower the temperature, he sought to raise it. He wanted to start a shouting match as distinct from engaging in a conversation about the pros and cons

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

6 Ryan, ‘The Charge of the Lightweight Brigade’, p. 230.

7 Peter Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, in his *Lines of Fire*, 179–214, for quotation see p. 213; Ryan, ‘The Charge of the Lightweight Brigade’, p. 223. To the contrary, Cathcart’s commission proved unexpectedly difficult, taking a full two years. It was not a matter of omitting five out of every six paragraphs but of significant deliberation and rearrangement. Cathcart, ‘Preface’ to *Manning Clark’s History of Australia*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press (hereafter MUP), 1994, pp. ix–xi; Cathcart, telephone interview with author, 20 October 2017; Mark McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity: The Life of Manning Clark*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2011, p. 459.

8 Christopher Bantick, ‘Clark’s place in historical discourse’, *Australian*, 8 September 1993, p. 22.

9 Helen Garner, ‘Dumping One’s Shadow’ (letter), *Quadrant*, vol. 38, no. 11, November 1994, p. 6.

of the *History* and its author. Ryan's intention was to insult and to provoke a diarrhoea of outrage; and he knew that his status as Clark's 'friend' and former editor gave his attack a seeming authenticity that no one else could muster. In the heightened divisiveness of the History Wars, it was more important to bring Clark down, by whatever means, than to engage in disinterested debate.

At this point we return to the role of Manne. He had little regard for Clark as a scholar, describing him as 'cavalier with facts, unreliable in his mastery of documentary sources, [and] uninterested in the work of other historians', all of which are correct.¹⁰ As mentioned, Manne states that a particular value of Ryan's essay was to show the interconnectedness and the linkages between Clark and his writings. Manne also insisted Ryan had demonstrated that Clark's 'long decline as an historian' was due to 'what Clark might have called his fatal flaw—extraordinary vanity', together with an 'extraordinary unwillingness to listen to criticism, his self-absorption, above all his determination to fabricate for himself a grand prophetic persona'.¹¹

Manne wanted a serious discussion of Clark's work, but he took Ryan's authority, as Clark's publisher and long-time associate, too much on trust. If vanity is all that Ryan can come up with to explain the relationship between Clark's life and work, then his article should have been rejected on those grounds alone. At no time, for example, does Ryan so much as mention the central point that the *History* had assumed an increasingly autobiographical dimension, which had been commented on by others since at least 1987.¹² Of course, a great deal of historical writing contains an element of concealed autobiography. The very choice of subject can be rooted in the historian's own past and conclusions may unduly derive from personal experience, but Clark took the self-referential side of history to extremes. The autobiographical element was 'so noticeable in Manning Clark', his friend Edmund Campion, a Catholic priest and historian, remarked, 'that when I first read Volume Six I thought of suggesting to

10 Robert Manne, 'The Puzzles of Manning Clark' (editorial), *Quadrant*, vol. 38, no. 11, November 1994, pp. 2–3, specifically p. 2; see also Manne, 'Clark's fading vision of colonial struggle', *Age*, 19 October 1994, p. 17.

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

12 See Mark McKenna, "'National Awakening", Autobiography, and the Invention of Manning Clark', *Life Writing*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2016, pp. 207–20, specifically p. 211, doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2016.1162263.

Melbourne University Press that they rejacket it as his autobiography'.¹³ Historian Frank Clarke complained that attention was being diverted from an analysis of the *History* and centred 'on the personality of the author', but this was hard to avoid when Manning Clark's writings were so self-referential.¹⁴ Ryan's obvious vilification might also have given Manne pause for thought, if only to go no further than requiring Ryan to tone down his reproofs and thus make his message more effective.

This raises a further question: where, on the spectrum of authorial autonomy, does a journal editor draw the line? Put another way, are editors supposed to publish only what they agree with? Authors rightly require large areas of discretion but there are limits, and Manne did reject a submission in which Clark was accused of being anti-Semitic.¹⁵ Besides, there had already been three *Quadrant* articles in which Clark had featured since his death only two-and-a-half years before—the critiques by La Trobe University historians John Barrett and John Hirst, and in Geoffrey Blainey's Latham Lecture on black-armband history.¹⁶ In the latter, Clark is the subject of a single paragraph but it carried a double significance—namely that Clark and Blainey, who were both atypical of the academic profession, had always been publicly supportive of the other and held each other in warm regard, despite their increasingly divergent political views.¹⁷

It could be argued either way if these three articles were sufficient for the time being or whether more needed saying about Clark's view of Australian history and his merits as an historian. All the same, it is a bit much that Ryan, having set the tone, should conclude his second *Quadrant* article

13 Edmund Campion, 'Manning Clark', *Scripta*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1989, pp. 183–87, specifically pp. 185–86.

14 E.G. Clarke, 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. Clarke is emeritus professor of Australian history at Macquarie University.

15 Peter F. Alexander, *Les Murray: A Life in Progress*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 283.

16 John Barrett, 'Manning Clark: The Historian', *Quadrant*, vol. 35, nos 7–8, July–August 1991, pp. 8–9, republished as 'Two Clarks', in Carl Bridge (ed.), *Manning Clark: Essays on his Place in History*, Melbourne: MUP, 1994, pp. 113–16; John Hirst, 'Australian History and European Civilisation', *Quadrant*, vol. 37, no. 5, May 1993, pp. 28–38, first section republished as 'The Whole Game Escaped Him', in Bridge, *Manning Clark*, pp. 117–21; Geoffrey Blainey, 'Drawing up a Balance Sheet of Our History', *Quadrant*, vol. 37, nos 7–8, July–August 1993, pp. 10–15. Hirst (1942–2016) was an historian and social commentator of right-wing leanings and widely admired even by those who did not share his viewpoint.

17 Geoffrey Blainey, *Before I Forget: An Early Memoir*, Melbourne: Hamish Hamilton, 2019, pp. 154–57; Blainey, 'Manning Clark: a gifted man of quiet dignity', *Age*, 24 May 1991, p. 11; Carl Bridge, 'Introduction', to Bridge, *Manning Clark*, pp. 1–9, specifically p. 7.

by stating that ‘we should forget name-calling and have a fresh and critical examination of the truth and value of the *History* of Manning Clark’,¹⁸ while all the time exempting himself from his own injunction. Michael Cathcart’s hope that ‘the debate [would] continue with better grace than that with which it begun’ was a prayer unanswered.¹⁹

There is a sequel that illustrates the depth of Ryan’s dislike of Clark. Sometime after the publication of the abridged edition of the *History*, a mutual friend arranged a lunch at the Melbourne Club so that Cathcart and Ryan could meet, and perhaps even find common ground. Instead, Ryan launched into ‘toxic gossip’ that was delivered with ‘venom’ and obvious relish. He shared ‘detailed dirt on people’ including Clark, who he said, among other things, was a homosexual. Cathcart’s lasting impression was that Ryan was ‘a very bitter and unpleasant man’.²⁰

* * *

The question is, how far did Ryan go in satisfying Robert Manne’s statement that he had revealed the relationship between Clark the man and Clark the historian? In his first *Quadrant* article, Ryan stated that Clark’s *History* was ‘utterly a projection and a part of the author’s personality’,²¹ which is true enough. But having made the statement, Ryan then neglects to develop his case. He does not demonstrate how particular facets of Clark’s character resulted in specific faults in the *History*. How, for example, did Clark’s inability to hold his liquor impinge on the *History*. And one does wonder whether Ryan was an innocent bystander in Clark’s drunken escapades in the late 1940s²² given the heavy drinking culture at the Directorate of Research and Civil Administration (DORCA) and the fact that several of Ryan’s fellow students at the University of Melbourne affirm ‘that the escapades he attributes to the drunken Manning were more than matched by [his own]’.²³ Edmund Campion saw a link between Clark’s problems with alcohol and the *History*, remarking that Clark had ‘a special place for those who battled the booze, almost as if he were writing an alcoholic history of Australia’, but the connection

18 Ryan, ‘A Reply to my Critics’, p. 222.

19 Michael Cathcart, ‘The sage under siege’, *Age*, 27 August 1993, p. 13.

20 Michael Cathcart, email to author, 19 October 2017.

21 Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, p. 184.

22 Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, pp. 186–87.

23 Stuart Macintyre, email to author 3 April 2018. Ryan refers to his own earlier ‘drinking days’ in ‘The Foreign Legion’ (1997), in his *Lines of Fire*, pp. 115–18, specifically p. 117.

eluded Ryan.²⁴ Only once in Ryan's somewhat meandering text does he come close to identifying any linkages between Clark the man and Clark the historian—namely, that Clark's disdain for 'Yarraside' (middle-class rectitude) accounts for his 'repeated sneers at the bourgeoisie', or what one historian described as his 'pathological hostility towards "Yarraside" and the straighteners of the "Protestant Ascendancy"'.²⁵ Or, as Cathcart observed, '[Clark] saw himself as a firebrand radical—yet he was, in so many ways, an eccentric aristocrat'.²⁶

Ryan is quite right to point out the incongruity of Clark's disparagement of the bourgeoisie.²⁷ Of course, such attitudes were routinely expressed among Clark's generation. 'Oh, you're so bourgeois!', or 'How bourgeois!' were commonly heard put-downs of the time—which make Clark's strictures all-the-more-silly considering he lived contentedly enough in Canberra suburbia while at the same time railing against what he saw as middle-class philistinism. But there is nothing to show that Ryan saw an *explicit* linkage between Clark's embrace of 'bourgeois culture' and his needless 'sneers' at the bourgeoisie. He is saying that Clark had no right to disparage the bourgeoisie given his own upbringing and lifestyle, which is fair comment. It never occurs to Ryan that Clark's counter-reaction to his own class origins might have resulted in how he depicted the bourgeoisie in the *History*—whereas Clark's near contemporary, writer and self-professed 'radical nationalist' Stephen Murray-Smith (1922–1988), was more perceptive in postulating that Clark's attitude to 'Yarraside' was a function of his 'parsonage upbringing' and his 'metaphysical yearnings'.²⁸

* * *

The remarkable feature of Ryan's critique of the *History* is that it is all so familiar, precisely because it is so derivative.²⁹ Every one of Ryan's strictures, which he overwhelmingly presents as new information, had already been expressed in academic (and often in newspaper) reviews of the *History* and in more general discussions of Clark's work. It started with the widespread recognition that the clash of cultures—Protestantism, Catholicism and the Enlightenment—that informed the earlier volumes

24 Edmund Campion, 'Manning chose Ned', *Bulletin*, 5 October 1993, p. 107.

25 Carolyn Holbrook, 'Marxism for Beginner Nations: Radical Nationalist Historians and the Great War', *Labour History*, vol. 103, 2012, pp. 123–44, specifically p. 133, doi.org/10.5263/labourhistory.103.0123.

26 Michael Cathcart, email to author, 20 October 2017.

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

28 John McLaren, *Free Radicals of the Left in Postwar Melbourne*, Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2003, p. 203.

29 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', pp. 202, 206–13.

of the *History* was an increasingly unsuitable explanatory framework for the later volumes. In saying that Clark had 'lost his compass', Ryan was parroting what Hirst had said a few months earlier in a thoughtful critique of Clark's work—published in *Quadrant*, no less—when pointing out that that Clark's original vision of the fate of European civilisation in Australian 'had become attenuated and debased'.³⁰

Contra Ryan, Clark had critics within the academy who were not backward in drawing attention to other perceived faults. There was his 'carelessness in matters of detail' and his 'sloppy' historical practice, as well as his narrow range of sources, limited range of themes, a neglect of vast impersonal forces and a corresponding preoccupation with individuals. The criticisms also included the 'tendentious or trivialised' depictions of those individuals; not to mention that Clark omnisciently divined what was going on in his historical characters' minds, whether or not the evidence justified such speculations.³¹ Ryan's other criticisms of the *History* were equally in the public domain. Clark's 'mostly trivial, irrelevant and embarrassingly juvenile' sniping at the bourgeoisie;³² his eccentric and melodramatic narrative; the overblown stylistic gestures; the resort to clichés and stock phrases as a substitute for thinking through issues;³³ the extent of his factual inaccuracies;³⁴ his 'lofty view of the rest of mankind, *de haut en bas*';³⁵ that he was writing history from the top down rather than 'history from below'; and his unduly gloomy view of the past had all been pointed out before.³⁶

30 Hirst, 'Australian History and European Civilisation', p. 29. The quotes in the following paragraph are Ryan's.

31 Stuart Macintyre has assessed the reception of the first five volumes of the *History*, to which readers can refer for specific details. Macintyre, 'Manning Clark's Critics', *Meanjin Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 4, 1982, pp. 442–52.

32 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 202. See especially the criticisms by Brian Dickey, 'History with a personal touch', review of Volume 4 (1851–88), *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 8 April 1978, p. 21.

33 For example, Malcolm Thomis, 'Author's ideal is too elusive', review of Volume 5 (1888–1915), *Courier-Mail*, 9 January 1982, p. 24, who refers to 'the slang and the slapstick that take over when the author is in his hearty moods and applying the common touch, with homespun language and homespun philosophy'.

34 For example, K.J. Cable, review of Volume 2 (1822–38), *Australian Economic History Review*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1968, pp. 164–66, specifically p. 166, doi.org/10.1111/aeht.82br1.

35 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 208.

36 See especially John Rickard, review of Volume 5 (1890–1915), *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1983, pp. 90–92, available at: www.nzjh.auckland.ac.nz/document.php?wid=1132&action=null. Regarding Clark's use of the language of the times he was writing about, his former postgraduate student Michael Roe was the first to point out Clark's habit of interweaving his own words with those from the contemporary sources, leaving the reader wondering where the one begins and the other leaves off. Roe, review of Volume 1, *Quadrant*, vol. 7, no. 1, Summer 1962–63, pp. 73–76, specifically p. 75.

To give two apposite examples, the matter of the *History* being ‘pervaded by a sense of failure’ was troubling to Clark’s former departmental colleague W.F. (Bill) Mandle. In a statement that reflected a widespread view, and which anticipated one of Ryan’s major criticisms, Mandle regretted

that a man should know so much about his own country and see so little good in its past is saddening, as saddening as to realise that this great lover of humanity finds so little in the human condition to warm the heart. The forebodings raised in volume three about the direction this great man in his great book was taking us, have in this one been confirmed. We are heading, bad or broken people, into a horrid desert.³⁷

The second example involves a demolition of Volume 5 by La Trobe University sociologist Claudio Véliz whose major complaint was that Clark ‘trivialis[ed] important themes’, one of which was that ‘Professor Clark would have his readers believe that during the quarter of a century that preceded the First World War Australia was constantly on the verge of mass violence’.³⁸ Other reviewers barely noticed what so exercised Véliz, but Ryan certainly did and again there is a lack of originality; he echoes the thrust of Véliz’s argument, saying that ‘one of [Clark’s] apocalyptic signature tunes [was] dark hints of civil war and blood staining the wattle’³⁹ as opposed to his own (and Véliz’s) view that Australia had experienced an uncommonly peaceful and prosperous history.⁴⁰ It is quite possible Ryan’s decision to attack Clark in print can be traced back to a series of negative reviews and commentaries on Volume 5 by non-historians, which reinforced his misgivings about the *History* as a whole. In addition to Véliz’s critique were those of another La Trobe sociologist, John Carroll, who deplored ‘the mumbo-jumbo of Professor Manning Clark’; described the *History* as being ‘mean and rancorous, giving a demoralising picture of the building of Australian society’ and

37 W.F. Mandle, ‘Through a Glass Compassionately’, review of Volume 4 (1851–88), *Australian Book Review*, no. 1, June 1978, pp. 1 and 4, specifically p. 4. An earlier and more extended statement along these lines is by Bruce Mansfield, ‘A History the Lotus has Eaten: Manning Clark’s Australia’, *Teaching History*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1979, pp. 3–12.

38 Claudio Véliz, ‘Bad History’, review of Volume 5 (1890–1915), *Quadrant*, vol. 26, no. 5, May 1982, pp. 21–26, for quotation see p. 22; see also Philip Ayres, ‘The Worlds of Claudio Véliz, Part II’, *Quadrant*, vol. 59, nos 1–2, January–February 2015, p. 58–64, specifically pp. 59–60.

39 Ryan, ‘Manning Clark’, p. 198.

40 Peter Ryan, *Final Proof: Memoirs of a Publisher*, Sydney: Quadrant Books, 2010, pp. 150–51.

‘a travesty of the truth about Australia’.⁴¹ There were also the contributions by journalists Edward Kynaston (1924–2002), who attacked Volume 5 on matters of style and substance, and Tim Hewat (1928–2004), who faulted Clark’s ‘monumental labour of loathing’.⁴² Ryan would resurrect these same sentiments some 10 years later.

Neither was Ryan novel in contrasting the two Manning Clarks, pre- and post-1955. This notion had been emphatically stated in *Quadrant* articles by Barrett and Hirst. Whereas the first Clark was inspirational, as per his two-volume *Documents in Australian History*, according to Barrett:⁴³

The second Clark [was] a tragedy of a man because he was becoming a travesty of a historian. He might have become a historical novelist and retained his greatness. As a historian, he lost respect.⁴⁴

Historian Beverley Kingston went one step further in stating that Clark’s essentially biographical approach did not work beyond the early nineteenth century. She explained that ‘while it was possible that personalities altered the dynamics of a claustrophobic society in the early nineteenth century’, the technique did ‘not adapt well to the larger scale of twentieth century Australia’.⁴⁵

Had Ryan wanted to make a contribution he might have gone beyond Hirst and anticipated the analysis of historian Neville Meaney, who remarked that Clark originally intended to transcend the nationalist stereotype of the nation’s past and yet Volumes 5 and 6 had reverted to just that.⁴⁶ Neither did Ryan pause to consider the extent to which

41 John Carroll, ‘National Identity’, in John Carroll (ed.), *Intruders in the Bush: The Australian Quest for Identity*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982, pp. 209–25, specifically p. 220; Carroll, ‘Manning Clark’s Vision Splendid’, *Quadrant*, vol. 26, no. 10, October 1982, pp. 61–64, specifically p. 64.

42 Edward Kynaston, ‘Turning history’s pages—cliche by cliche’, *Weekend Australian Magazine*, 24–25 October 1981, p. 10; Tim Hewat, ‘Manning Clark’s monumental labour of loathing’, *Weekend Australian Magazine*, 13–14 February 1982, p. 10. On Hewat, see Michael Bromley, ‘From Noted “Phenomenon” to “Missing Person”: A Case of the Historical Construction of the Under-Journalist’, *Journalism*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2010, pp. 259–75, doi.org/10.1177/1464884909360919.

43 Barrett, ‘Manning Clark’, pp. 8–9; Hirst, ‘Australian History and European Civilisation’, pp. 28–38.

44 Barrett, ‘Two Clarks’, in Bridge, *Manning Clark*, p. 114.

45 Beverley Kingston, review of Volume 6 (1916–35), *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 23, no. 91, 1988, pp. 204–5, specifically p. 205, doi.org/10.1080/10314618808595805.

46 Neville Meaney, ‘Britishness and Australian Identity: The Problem of Nationalism in Australian History and Historiography’, *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 32, no. 116, 2001, pp. 76–90, specifically p. 77 n.2, doi.org/10.1080/10314610108596148.

The Dismissal of the Whitlam Government might have affected Clark's depiction of his country's past in later volumes of the *History*. Even less does Ryan consider the inseparability of Clark's 'spiritual searching' and the history he wrote.⁴⁷ Ryan implies the over-personalised nature of the *History* but does not discuss it.

Two vignettes sum up Ryan's lack of originality. For all his stress on Clark's 'unreliability with mere facts',⁴⁸ Ryan actually identifies very few such errors in his first *Quadrant* article.⁴⁹ He notes that Phar Lap won the Melbourne Cup only once, not twice as Clark had it, but this was pointed out to him by an MUP storeman.⁵⁰ The second instance of Ryan pinching someone else's observation concerns H.V. Evatt. Ryan rightly derides Clark's hyperbole that Evatt had 'the image of Christ in his heart'.⁵¹ The fact remains that Ryan did not pluck this gem from the *History* but from a newspaper article by Gerard Henderson, a clipping of which is in the Ryan Papers with the operative paragraph marked up.⁵²

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Clearly, Ryan's intervention did not result in the informed discussion of Manning Clark and his *History* that Robert Manne expected; and it never could, given its unoriginal content and ad hominem nature. A model of how Ryan might have proceeded was provided eight years later in a curiously neglected article by historian and journalist Robert Murray. Writing in *Quadrant* and spurred by the imminent fortieth anniversary of the *History*, Murray comments:

47 McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity*, p. 376.

48 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', p. 190, for quotation see p. 195; Ryan, 'The Charge of the Lightweight Brigade', p. 227.

49 See Leo Scheps, 'Historical Misinformation' (letter), *Quadrant*, vol. 38, no. 12, December 1994, p. 8. In 'The Charge of the Lightweight Brigade', pp. 227–28, Ryan reveals eight factual errors of Clark's concerning Australia's first prime minister, Edmund Barton (1849–1920). He acknowledged that the information came from Rev. John Parsons, who was researching Barton, but the errors still had to be pointed out to him. The correspondence between Ryan and Parsons, which the latter initiated on 1 October 1993, is in the Ryan Papers, National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA) MS 9897, Series 6, Box 10, Folder 5.

50 Ryan, 'Manning Clark', pp. 206–7.

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

52 Gerard Henderson, 'Evatt: canonisation or cannonade?' (by-line column), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 December 1992, p. 9 (clipping in the Ryan Papers, NLA, MS 9897, Series 6, Box 9, Folder 1).

since the name Manning Clark still excites so much publicity, so much derision and admiration, it seems permissible to throw in a few more opinions. The first confession is that I actually enjoyed reading most of the books, partly because at their best they were good and partly because at their most, well, Manning Clark, they were so infuriating.⁵³

Murray goes on to say, *inter alia*, that the six volumes should have been compressed into four; that they are ‘over-indulgent of ... reader patience with hobbyhorses, generalised insults against both people in authority ... and the fickle, philistine masses’; that ‘Clark’s alleged Marxism and softness on communism is one of the least important things about his work’; that the ‘frequent preoccupation with social class ... is mostly decorative, bereft of serious analysis and seldom more than raspberries for the ruling class, bourgeoisie and squatters’; and neither can Murray ‘accept that there is anywhere a great “vision”, grand theme, striking “insights”, nor much virtue in his “history from the heart” approach’.⁵⁴ The merits and demerits of successive volumes are discussed sequentially, in a considered manner. Murray bucks the received wisdom in some quarters, that each volume was inferior to its predecessor, arguing that Volume 3 ‘is a huge improvement’ on Volume 2, which he considered ‘a tedious disaster’. He argues that Volume 4:

is some of the best Australian history—indeed history of any kind—I have read. The best of it approaches greatness, in that it takes a reader back, much more than a film or novel can, into the nineteenth century.⁵⁵

Murray claims that Volume 6 ‘is actually a good, vivid account of Australia in this period—provided you can forgive the increasing crankiness and it being about 100 pages too long’. As will be seen, I disagree with Murray’s assessment of the last three volumes and especially of Volume 6, but he does provide a platform for reasoned discussion whereas Ryan’s tone and tactics were calculated to preclude fruitful debate.

53 Robert Murray, ‘Forty Years of Manning Clark’, *Quadrant*, vol. 45, no. 11, November 2001, pp. 46–53, specifically p. 46.

54 Murray, ‘Forty Years of Manning Clark’, p. 46.

55 Murray, ‘Forty Years of Manning Clark’, p. 50.

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