

## FINDING MANNING CLARK

Roslyn Russell reads the historian's correspondence in the Library's Manuscripts Collection

## IN THE LETTERS

For several years now, I have been compiling a selection of Manning Clark's letters. The resulting publication, *Ever, Manning: Selected Correspondence of Manning Clark, 1938–1991*, is to appear next year.

The letters sent by Australia's best-known historian to a wide range of correspondents, over a period of half a century, offer an unparalleled view of his complex intellectual and emotional life. Clark did not keep copies of all the letters he wrote—far from it. The National Library's collection of his papers (MS 7550) contains some of the outward correspondence, often carbon copies of letters typed by his research assistants, and letters to his publisher Peter Ryan at Melbourne University Press, discussing drafts of *A History of Australia*. His letters also appear in the papers of numerous friends and colleagues within the National Library's Collection. There is, however, no comprehensive single collection of Clark letters held in any one library in Australia. My task has therefore been to gather his letters from a range of libraries and archives, and from many individuals.

Why should people be interested in Clark's letters? His autobiographies, *The Puzzles of Childhood* (1988) and *The Quest for Grace* (1990), as well as the historical and

fictional works he penned over his lifetime, give insights into his life experiences, the intellectual and spiritual traditions which most influenced him, and his intensive study and chronicling of the history of Australia. They are, however, carefully crafted artefacts offering only a partial and retrospective view of 'what mattered most' in his life. The immediacy of the letters allows us to see a Manning Clark not always visible in his published work.

Collections of letters enable readers to encounter at first hand the different 'voices' that live inside every individual. In Clark's case, his interior voices were many, as historian Mark McKenna has recently remarked:

Clark often referred to himself as a 'polyphon', a man of many voices. He claimed to hear the future-of-humanity voice, the sceptical voice, the eye of pity, the voice of doubt about everything, the voice of 'Mr Passion' and countless other nondescript voices within 'Mr Passion'. In Clark's mind, these played constantly, usually in unresolved tension, conveying 'an eternal restlessness and discontent'. (*The Monthly*, March 2007)

There were other voices, with which Clark 'spoke' to those with whom he corresponded. There

above:  
Manning Clark (1915–1991)  
Draft of letter to Roger Evans,  
and signature, 1954  
Manuscripts Collection  
MS 7550

below:  
Jeff Carter (b.1928)  
*Portrait of Professor Manning  
Clark, early 1960s*  
gelatin silver photograph  
20.0 x 25.0 cm  
Pictures Collection  
nla.pic-an9070712





are the voices of the son and son-in-law, the brother, the fiancé and husband, the father, the teacher, the academic colleague, the writer (to publisher, editor, or research assistant), the mentor, the idol to the acolyte, and, abundantly, the friend writing to a friend.

And there are the 'voices' of other people who speak through Clark's letters, as they do through his published

works. These are the voices of the chroniclers, psalmists and prophets from the Old Testament, of Jesus and St Paul from the New Testament, of Shakespeare, Pushkin, Goethe, Ibsen, Hardy, James, Tolstoy, de Tocqueville, Carlyle, Dickens, Emily Brontë, Chekhov, Turgenev, Marx and Lenin, Bunyan and Newman and—of course—of Dostoevsky, to mention only a representative sample of those whose words filled his mind and inspired his writings. A major task of an editor of letters is to find and note the sources of these utterances.

As has been noted, although the Library's Manning Clark papers do not include a significant amount of his outward correspondence, nevertheless in addition to what can be gleaned from his own papers, there are many other collections of papers in which one can locate illuminating letters from Clark. The papers of Dymphna Clark (MS 9873), David Campbell (MS 5028), Eleanor Dark (MS 4998), Patrick White (MS 9982), Frank Kellaway (MS 7071) and Judah Waten (MS 4536) are some of these.

Manning and Dymphna were married in Oxford in 1939, and returned to Australia with their baby son Sebastian in 1940. In early 1941, Clark became a schoolmaster at Geelong Grammar, and in 1944 was appointed a lecturer in the University of Melbourne's School of Politics and History.

There he began to teach the history of Australia.

Although he came to Canberra in late 1949 as Professor of History at the Canberra University College (later to become part of the Australian National University), he nevertheless still hankered for a professorial position back at Melbourne, an ambition which was not to be fulfilled. He therefore struck out in a different direction, writing to Roger F. Evans of the Rockefeller Foundation, in the United States, in late 1954:

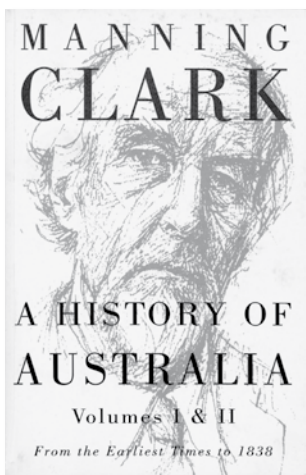
You may remember during your recent tour of Australia I mentioned to you that I would like to apply for a grant in aid from the Rockefeller Foundation to enable my wife as my research assistant and myself to work in South East Asia for six months from December 1955 until May 1956. I now wish formally to apply for such a grant.

I want to visit South East Asia to collect material and to gain impressions to help me with the writing of a two volume history of Australia. One of the themes which I wish to develop in this work is that the history of Australia is part of the history of the Europeanisation of Asia, and not, as discussed in previous work, the history of an Anglo-Saxon colony in the south seas. To collect such material I wish to work at the following centres: Colombo, Delhi, Rangoon, Djakarta, and Singapore.

(Letter, 15 December 1954, Clark papers, NLA MS 7550)

This visit was the first step towards production of Clark's epic work, *A History of Australia*. He began writing the first volume in 1956, and its publication in 1962 marked a turning point in his life—not least because of the furious reaction the book caused among some fellow historians. From that time on, Clark was constantly engaged in writing what became a six-volume series—always fearing his inadequacy to tell the story in the way he thought it should be told; always apprehensive of critical reaction. He also tackled other works of biography and short fiction in between.

In 1958, Clark was in a delegation of Australian writers which visited the Soviet Union. His letters to Dymphna from there in 1958 were published in the *Bulletin*. He later drew on these letters and his diaries to write *Meeting Soviet Man* (1960), a book which managed to annoy not only conservatives in



above top:  
Loui Seselja (b.1948)  
*Manning Clark's Study, Manning Clark House, Canberra, 2001*  
b&tw negative; 5.5 x 5.5 cm  
Pictures Collection  
nla.pic-an23161905

above:  
Cover of *A History of Australia*  
(Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1999)

Australia, but also his travelling companion, novelist Judah Waten. In a letter to Waten, Clark set out the position he had taken in the book:

I am sorry you feel the way you do, as I respect your judgement, and value your friendship. Jim McAuley thinks the book is pro-Soviet and is saying so in an emotional review in *Quadrant*. The people here who have seen it think it is sympathetic to the Soviet. That is the mood in which it was written, and I hope others will see it that way. As you know I do not share their Marxist philosophy, and have said so ...

(Letter, 5 February 1960,  
Judah Waten papers, NLA MS 4536)

From September 1978 to January 1979, Clark was Visiting Professor of Australian Studies at Harvard University. He came to view the American experience as one of the highlights of his life, particularly in contrast to the ambivalence which he felt about Australia, and to Australian attitudes to his work. The 1970s had been a troubling decade. Student unrest had affected the Australian National University, and the years preceding Clark's retirement had been the least enjoyable of his teaching career. A series of controversial public lectures he gave had drawn vehement criticism. So had some of his books, notably *In Search of Henry Lawson* (1978).

A letter Clark wrote from Harvard to his great friend, the Canberra poet David Campbell, expresses the contrast between the negative attitudes he felt directed



towards him in Australia, and his positive Harvard experience:

Here people of all creeds, colours, and convictions engage in lively but never painful exchanges (as in Australia) on what life is all about. The talented ones (and there are thousands of them) perform from time to time. They read poetry, sing unearthly music, play music—I also find many of them very beautiful. In the dining room here at Dunster House I sometimes look up from my plate, and see a face of great beauty. Am also loving the lecturing. It took a week or so for teacher and class to discover each other. But now they clap most generously and warmly at the end of each lecture ... I have loved it all—despite the pains and memories of those people in Australia ... I had no idea there was still a place on the earth like Harvard, where so many people turn out to be people you can talk to—and show them the view without running any risk whatsoever ... what you are interested in, and what you live by.

(Letter, 15 November 1978,  
David Campbell papers,  
NLA MS 5028)

Back in Australia, Clark found it difficult to come to terms with his ongoing disenchantment with his countrymen, writing to Campbell:

above:  
Heide Smith  
*Manning and Dymphna Clark at Wapengo 1989*  
Courtesy Heide Smith

below left:  
Unknown photographer  
*Manning Clark, National Press Club, 21 August 1987*  
b&w photograph; 15.3 x 13.5 cm  
Pictures Collection  
nla.pic-vn3573331



Yesterday was one of those radiant days on the far south coast when, even if human beings seem eternally unapproachable, the fish were very friendly—and that was rather fun. Unfortunately just at the moment Australian men and women have lost their charm for me. That will come back. But for the moment I am finding the casualness, the vast indifference to things that touch me deeply quite painful. I can only hope the previous love will return—because one can live without many things, but not without a love for the people at large ...

(Letter, 10 March 1979,  
David Campbell papers, NLA MS 5028)

Clark's health declined through the 1980s, and he struggled to complete the writing of the sixth and final volume of *A History of Australia*. A letter to Manoly Lascaris on the death of novelist Patrick White demonstrates his capacity to express his love for the person who has died, and for all that that person had meant to him. It also, in equal measure, shows Clark's ability to reach out to the living with the assurance that the part they had played is remembered and appreciated:

An artist needs a muse—and you were to Patrick what Clío is to all historians, the muse which brings out all that is inside the man. I remember you always with great affection—

I remember the beauty of your face when you and Patrick were happy together.

You were more than a server. You were a lover and a source of both strength and inspiration. In Patrick's presence we should stand in awe. He made me glad to be alive—and I always felt and feel now what a privilege it was to know a little of his love.

(Letter, 3 October 1990,  
Patrick White papers, NLA MS 9982)

Manning Clark died in his Canberra home on 23 May 1991. His funeral service, attended by Prime Minister Bob Hawke, many other parliamentarians, members of the academic community, and the general public, packed out St Christopher's Catholic Cathedral at Manuka. Allegations that Clark promoted a 'black-armband' view of Australia's history, or held left-wing or Soviet sympathies, and suggestions that he played fast and loose with the 'facts' of history, can still command newspaper headlines 16 years after this controversial Australian's death.

Manning Clark (1915–1991)  
Letter to Manoly Lascaris, 1990  
Manuscripts Collection  
MS 9982

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