



## PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP  
OPENING OF MANNING CLARK CENTRE, ANU, CANBERRA  
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I count it as a great honour to be asked to open this Centre tonight - I count the late Manning Clark as a great Australian.

And I may as well say at the beginning, I have absolutely no doubt that his work and reputation will long out live his recent detractors.

Generosity will always triumph over meanness. Creativity over negativity.

I used to pay Manning Clark an occasional visit in Tasmania Circle on my way home from work.

I was by no means a close friend and on the face we had not much in common.

Manning was a man of great formal learning. I left school at 15.

Manning went to Melbourne Grammar, Melbourne University and Oxford.

I went to De La Salle, Bankstown, Belmore Technical College, the Federated Municipal and Shire Council Employees Union, and the Australian Labor Party.

I am a politician. Manning was an historian.

Perhaps for these reasons we talked less about Australian politics than Australian possibilities, less about Australia's history than Australia's future.

In fact we found that we had a good deal in common.

I know Manning has developed a reputation as a pessimist, but I never found him to be that. It is true that he had deep awareness of opportunities lost - opportunities for building a more just society. A kinder and more creative society. A society with a more independent view, a more mature identity.

He was disappointed by what he believed had been promise squandered by faint hearts and narrow minds.

That did not mean he had no regard for what Australians had achieved, or love for the character and traditions of the place. His affection for Australia was huge - it defined him.

And he had enormous regard for Australian achievements.

Surely, no one left more evidence of that regard than he did in his six volume history, his countless other books and articles on Australian history and in his immense contribution as a teacher of Australian history.

This Centre will not only bear his name, but I hope carry on his work.

Among such distinguished academic company and people who knew Manning Clark very well over a long period, it would not be appropriate for me to even attempt an appreciation of Manning's work.

I can only say that from what I know of it and what I knew of him, I drew a lot of inspiration.

He wanted to believe in Australia and, through all the doubts he had, he did believe.

And I confess that there have been times in the last two years when I have wished that he was alive to see some of the things which are happening in Australia now.

I mean in part the initiatives we have taken on issues broadly related to our national identity.

I also mean the stand we have taken and the legislation we passed in response to the High Court decision on native title - and I must say I wish he had been in Darwin the weekend before last to see a well appreciated multicultural football match between Collingwood and the Aboriginal All Stars.

But I also believe Manning Clark would have appreciated what I think is a new confidence and optimism, a new sense among Australians of their capacity to carve out a good society and a creative role in the world.

In other words, I think he would be excited by the signs that in the 1990s we might be about to truly live up to both our best traditions and our unique potential.

As I said, I'm not an historian - not in the sense that Manning Clark was and many of the people here are. But I've been in the Labor Party for 35 years and in the Labor Party we are all historians.

We know how important having a story is - it's just about the most important thing there is.

Because Manning Clark, as a teacher and writer, did more than anyone else to unravel and tell that story I know how much Australia owes him.

Which is why I said at the beginning that I count it as a great honour to formally open this Manning Clark Centre - and that is what I now formally do.