

## **Fourth Manning Clark Lecture**

# **Fear: the Politics of Submission in Australian History**

**Delivered by Judy Davis**

**On March 3 2003, in the Great Hall, University House, ANU**

Members of the Clark family - Sebastian, Andrew, and Prof. Katarina Clark, Prof. Adam Schumacher, Harriet Elvin from the Cultural Facilities Corporation, Penny Ramsay from Manning Clark House, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Firstly, for asking me to speak here tonight. It was an unexpected honour, and I must admit the prospect has given me more than a couple of sleepless nights.

I never met Manning Clark. He saw me perform once, years ago, in a performance of "Hedda Gabler". I played Hedda, the tortured, brilliant, suicidal dilettante, and Colin Friels played Loveborg, the tortured, brilliant, suicidal poet.

Manning Clark sent Colin a letter - short but potent. He had rarely, if ever, witnessed such poetic power onstage - apparently.

I searched, alas in vain, for some mention of myself.

It may be difficult for non-practitioners to understand the recovery time needed after such a shock. And of course Colin gloated.

I won't repeat what I said.

In the end, after much soul-searching, I decided to blame the playwright. Such is the power of our historians.

We're in great need of poets and historians now. Australia has been a sovereign nation for nearly one hundred years, but appears unable to find the courage, or the belief in itself, to be independent, to stand alone if necessary, when matters of exceptional moral gravity arise.

And there is nothing more serious than the killing of innocent people.

For these are extraordinary times. I am speaking to you at one of the most important crossroads of our history, and it would be remiss of me to evade the issue. So please bear with me for a moment - or two.

We stand at the brink of a war that will re-shape the world in ways that cannot be foreseen by any of us, not by the men who are driving events, nor by we the citizens who will shortly become unwilling witnesses to large-scale massacre.

The events of September 11 were the catalyst. For myself, the image of the World Trade Centre pierced by those two planes, and the ultimate collapse of the twin towers had all the power of horrifying poetry. It profoundly changed my understanding of the world. It woke me from a deep Western slumber.

Millions of people awoke.

The tragedy is that now, at a time when conversation between the West and the great Islamic world seems more possible than ever before, our leaders appear bent on destruction.

We are told that the "War on Terror" is not a war against Islam, but more than half the world remains unconvinced.

It is, perhaps, Modernity's war on Islam. The West is impatient, intolerant of the complexities that have made the process of modernisation so difficult for the Middle-East, intolerant of different ways of seeing the world.

But it's a war the West cannot win. Every bomb will create more chaos, more terror and more recruits to terrorism. America will lose what little credibility it has left as a respectable nation, and we'll be left clinging to the remnants of once great institutions like the United Nations.

The Bush mantra, "If you're not with us you're against us" has found fertile ground here. With their heads down and their backsides up, our leaders have set about doing Washington's dirty work, slandering the anti-war movement, and regurgitating the latest Bush administration's cant, as though an attack on Iraq will drag Australia into a safer, more prosperous future.

But this is not America. Mr Howard's borrowed Imperialistic bombast - "we reserve the right to make pre-emptive strikes"- is at best foolish, at worst suicidal. A country of 18 million or so inhabitants cannot indulge in the belligerent rhetoric of America, a far greater nation. The largest Islamic country in the world is at our doorstep. We alienate Indonesia at our peril.

To imagine that "Son of Star Wars" - it's hard to keep a straight face - will protect us only serves to prove that the lessons of September 11 not been learnt.

"Who would have thought they'd fly planes into a building?" So said Condaleeza Rice.

Mr Howard may anticipate the pleasures that come from backing a winner, but if he expects to be given a share of the booty he'll be disappointed. That will be reserved for the main players.

Indeed, if the Free Trade Agreement goes ahead we will in effect forego our self-determination on crucial economic matters. And although Mr Bush may want to reward us for our loyalty, he cannot over-ride congressional protection for the U.S. farmers. American domestic policy comes first.

We're paying a high price for so little in return.

We're revealed as opportunists - scavengers on the world stage.

We are in desperate need of courageous leadership. The best Mr Howard could do in response to the hundreds of thousands of families that marched in peace rallies through the cities of Australia was to call them a mob, traitors - "comforters of Saddam."

This is not courageous. This is not leadership.

We've had to stomach months of anti-Saddam hysteria. The comparison to Hitler, in particular, has been hammered. It's note-worthy that when Nasser decided to nationalise the Suez Canal in 1956, the British Prime Minister at the time, Sir Anthony Eden, denounced the Egyptian leader as "that Hitler on the Nile."

Evocations of Hitler produce powerful responses in the minds of the public, but it's hardly responsible politics. Hitler had invaded 4 countries by the commencement of WW2, with more to come under a strategy of deliberate aggression. He was responsible for the systematic murder of about 6million people. Saddam Hussein, supported prior to 1991 by the West, is a dictator; he has used brutal methods at times to control his country, but Hitler he most certainly is not. Nor was Nassar.

It works, though, and as we all know, truth is the first casualty in war.

The media, with a few notable exceptions, has been busy vilifying individuals, and disseminating Washington's propagandist terms like "old and new Europe" as though they've been current for decades, busy helping Washington denigrate its one serious rival. The E.C. is now fractured, its turmoil fed by Washington's alternating system of bribes and threats. As Nigel Thompson, in a brave letter to a Sydney newspaper stated: "That other war - the war against the English language and clear thinking - about which George Orwell warned us has already ended in total victory for the practitioners of doublespeak and doublethink."

Some of the smartest boys in Washington, and on our own shores, have been in over-drive in their attempts to convince the public that the war is just, and that the danger posed by Iraq is imminent.

A few weeks ago I had the disconcerting experience of sitting on a panel discussing this war. I was sat opposite a pro-war enthusiast. He was rather charming and self-depreciatory backstage, but once in the hallowed chamber of Old Parliament House he transformed into a Washington gallant, supremely confident. His belief in the virtue of a war against Iraq was total, unhampered by any moral uncertainties.

I live a sheltered life - he was my initiation into the iron-willed world of the political right, and I found myself disliking him pretty much on as grand a scale as his support for Washington's war.

But then, I've never claimed to be a pacifist.

For littered amongst the rest of the reactionary tripe that's been hurled at those opposed to this war is the accusation of limp-wristed pacifism.

History has proved the necessity of "The Just War".

What is being disputed here is the notion of a pre-emptive war against a country already broken by 12 years of unrelenting warfare. In October 1999 American officials were telling the Wall Street Journal they would soon be running out of targets - "We're down to the last outhouse." By early 2001 the bombardment of Iraq had lasted longer than the U.S. invasion of Vietnam.

What is being disputed is the moral justification of waging war on a country of children. Over half of Iraq's population of 22 million are children under the age of 18.

What is being disputed is the truth behind our leader's claims that they are concerned for the well-being, the liberation of the Iraqi people. All we need do is briefly shift our focus back to Afghanistan; a shattered country once again courtesy of "The coalition of the Willing", with a U.S. installed government, courtesy of the great democratic West.

Two weeks ago, in the U.S. senate, the former Senate Democrat leader, senator Robert Byrd gave a speech. This is part of what he had to say:

"This coming battle, if it materialises, represents a turning point in U.S. foreign policy and possibly a turning point in the recent history of the world.

This nation is about to embark upon the first test of a revolutionary doctrine applied in an extraordinary way at an unfortunate time. The doctrine of pre-emption - the idea that the United States or any other nation can legitimately attack a nation not imminently threatening but may be threatening in the future - is a radical new twist on traditional self-defence. It appears to be in contravention of international law and the UN Charter. And it is being tested at a time of worldwide terrorism, making many countries wonder if they will soon be on our hit list or someone else's..."

Iraq presents no imminent threat. Indeed, its military arsenal is an estimated 10% of what it was prior to the 1991 Gulf War.

The U.S. accuses Iraq of possibly having Nuclear weapons, and yet it has an arsenal of over 10,000 nuclear warheads itself.

It accuses Iraq of using chemical weapons, but the U.S. itself used about 20 million gallons of the dioxin Agent Orange in the invasion of Vietnam.

It accuses Iraq of having biological weapons, and yet President Bush, in his first few months in office, rejected an international accord to enforce the 1972 Treaty banning germ warfare.

And as we speak there are U.N. weapons inspectors doing their job, trying desperately to avert war.

But this is not a war about weapons of mass destruction; this is not a war about Terrorism - although it will unquestionably incite retaliatory acts.

It's a war about oil and American economic dominance.

It's a war about Israel's long-term security and its crucial function as the key American satellite in the Middle-East.

It's a war about water - according to the World Bank the Middle-east region is by far the driest and most water-scarce region in the world. Stephen Pelletiere, a former C.I.A. senior political analyst on Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war, writing in the New York Times in February said: ".Iraq has the most extensive river system in the Middle-east. In addition to the Tigris and Euphrates, there are the Greater Zab and Lesser Zab rivers in the north of the country. In the 1990's there was much discussion over the construction of a so-called Peace Pipeline that would bring the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates south to the parched Gulf States and, by extension, Israel. No progress has been made on this. With Iraq in American hands, of course, this could all change."

It's a war about re-drawing the map of the Middle-East, as ambitious a plan as the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916.

There is a great deal at stake for America. Even Mr Howard admitted it. It's future as the world's dominant economy is at stake. And we need only look at the Middle East itself to see what can happen to a fallen empire.

Britain and France carved up the Great Ottoman Empire with purely their own interests in mind. New countries were created with no understanding of the enormous cultural and religious complexities of the region.

Now America wants to do it again, all under the banner of Democratisation.

But in a region dominated by Islam, we can be fairly sure this rhetoric is again mere cant. The disposal of the U.S. installed Shah of Iran caused massive consternation in Washington, and led the U.S. to back Iraq in the Iran/Iraq war.

And what of The House of Saud, its fragile hold on power protected by the U.S. military, while the Saudi people languish in poverty.

What of Algeria, where the democratically elected Front Islamique du Salut was overthrown by a military coup supported by the French. History suggests we have a preference for governments installed by the West.

Democracy is a great idea - too great an idea to be used as bait, then discarded when it produces unsatisfactory results.

I think Howard's problem is that he believes we no longer have the power to act independently. He believes that Australia's economic survival and long-term security depends on full commitment to the American world vision. We can't afford the big moral debates - the World's too frightening a place.

But a small country across the Tasman has proved time and time again that you do not need to cower before the red, white and blue.

The great Russian playwright Anton Chekov wrote that he spent all his life fighting the little person inside. "We should be giants," he said.

This is no time for John Howard to face that demon. To fight the little person inside, to align himself with those he believes may give him power; Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld - even Bradman!

The little person in all of us is vindictive, discriminatory and above all, fearful.

Fear: it is so often used as a tool of control.

In times such as these, it seems reasonable to ask what it is precisely that we're being told to fear. We have become entangled with the minutiae of the present crisis, but we must remember that Fear is driving our country into an open-ended war - The War on Terror, the nature and scope of which defies rational discussion. It is a war created by the cabals of Washington, esoteric, fluid, and the greatest potential threat to world peace we have ever faced.

What is the nature of the fear that has led Australia, through its membership of "The coalition of the Willing", to legitimise such ill-considered foreign policy?

When the xenophobe Pauline Hanson hit the scene, the common refrain was "she's let the genie out of the bottle." The media was relentless in its vilification of both Ms. Hanson and her supporters. They fought fire with fire, and by the end, after slandering fish and chip shop owners generally, all redheads, all Queenslanders fond of floral prints, and the entire population of Burnie Tasmania, in the end, the media revealed nothing quite so much as their own distaste and intolerance for open debate. The Hanson debacle offered an opportunity for a serious examination of our culture, warts and all, but instead we went into damage control.

Paul Keating, last year, said that the events of September 11 made us understand the world better, that the tribulations at the margin of society would eventually upset the contentment at its centre. The same could be said for the phenomenon that Hanson set in motion. The country seemed suddenly unrecognisable.

But then we've always been a little coy about our history.

In 1788 the British government established a penal colony on the continent of Australia. For nearly a hundred years it forcibly removed its underclass, or, depending on one's political bent, criminal class, thousands of miles away to somehow forge a society. It's difficult to imagine a more challenging beginning for a country.

Manning Clark described the fundamental basis of the new settlement thus:

"To assist Governor Phillip in the administration of affairs there was to be a criminal court, presided over by a judge advocate and six military officers, and a civil court, consisting of the judge advocate and two officers appointed by the Governor. It was a government designed to ensure law and order and subordination by terror, a government designed for men living in servitude rather than for free men."

And it sounds a lot like post-war Iraq.

We celebrate events like the Eureka Uprising, and defiant characters like Ned Kelly, as if they offer proof that the vast bureaucratic system that ran the country did not succeed in

breaking the will of the people. The abortive Irish uprising at Castle Hill on March 4, 1804, however, was the only concerted uprising of convicts ever to take place on the Australian mainland.

For the over-whelming need was survival and rehabilitation. The convicts that were politically inclined - the Irish mostly - were moved constantly. As Governor King remarked a year after the 1804 uprising: "Altho' there are some violent perturbators in this colony, however, by their being occasionally removed from one settlement to another, there is no present cause for apprehension."

Which is presumably what Mr Howard would like to do to all the peace protesters.

A country in continual need of rehabilitation. It wasn't until the 1970's that the convict heritage was openly discussed. For a brief decade it even became fashionable to discover a convict link, particularly a first-fleeter. But just when we thought it was safe to come out of the closet, the hoary old debate about genetic inheritance re-immersed, thanks, in the main, to the brilliance of U.S. geneticists. We ran for cover.

Manning Clarke said of Governor Phillip. "He was in many ways a fine flower of the eighteenth century, a common-sense man with a contempt for the consolation of religion but, at the same time, a belief in the established church as a means to promote the subordination of the lower orders in society. The members of the upper classes, he believed, should cultivate the Roman virtues of self-discipline, self-mastery, and endurance."

Rupert Murdoch is, perhaps, the outstanding example of the latter virtues. He said a couple of weeks ago in the Bulletin that cheap Iraqi oil would be very good for the U.S. economy. We can usually count on him, in true Roman style, to reveal the truth. Perhaps it's that Papal knighthood kicking in.

Not that I'm immune to Papal decrees myself. I was born in 1955 and grew up in Perth, Western Australia. My memories are dominated by the landscape, flat and sandy, the daunting power of the sun, that made a mis-fit of me, and the over-whelming power of the Catholic Church.

The sun. I used to sun-bake in my mother's backyard, covered in tanning oil. It was futile, and led to disastrous results - I'd slowly transform into a crazed patchwork of second-degree burns, freckles, and tantalising little sections of tan. I felt like the Australian landscape, which we all knew couldn't be trusted. But every summer I'd try again, such was the cultural imperative. I wanted to be like everyone else.

For it was a remarkably homogenized world. The culture was divided roughly between Catholics and Protestants, all of whom had shared the enormously galvanising experience of the Second World War. The city was punctuated with new suburbs filled with returned soldiers and their burgeoning families, one of which was ours, all living on modest salaries, enjoying similar holidays, mostly voting for Robert Menzies.

Perth, the most isolated city in the Western world, a small, mostly white outpost of the fading but still Great British Empire, safe and secure. And then the migrants came

First there were the British themselves, often commandeering the corner stores. My mother thought they looked down on her. I concurred, though as I grew older and began to learn a

little about Australian history it seemed more logical to assume that the "Stain" lay at the heart of the troubled British/Australian relationship. The Convict Stain: we might tell ourselves it all lay deep in the past, but those pommy migrants were just itching to rub it in again.

Manning Clark again. "Chaplain Johnston said of the first convicts that they indulged themselves in mere sloth and idleness, engaged in the most profane and unclean conversation, and committed abominations it would defile his pen to describe"

Yes, but not at the corner store for heaven sake!

And then the Italians. The Constantinos moved in across the road when I was about seven or eight, and over-night the street was filled with strange aromas, finally identified as macaroni. My mother complained, but for me, with no memory of the war, the Constantinos were magical and I used every covert method I could think of to cage a dinner invitation.

I succeeded - it was easily won - and I was introduced to the extraordinary world that lay, gossamer-veiled, just beyond the boundaries of meat and three vegetables.

But the Italians had lost the war, after all. They suffered the contempt levelled by all victors upon the vanquished. The consensus appeared to be that they had been cowards in the war - this was a lethal weapon against them.

I lived in fear that the Constantinos would move away. Their dog bit me, in the end, which to my mother confirmed that Italians couldn't be trusted, but for me proved that I was a mis-fit that no amount of macaroni could cure.

Manning Clark said of Chifley. "For his part he would not turn away anyone who had the will to become a good Australian citizen. For it was never doubted that anyone who came to this country would become a "dinkum Aussie." "

But the migrants weren't the problem - I was.

I sought refuge with the Catholics.

The Catholic doctrine in those days was tough. First, and most important, no non-Catholic could ever get into Heaven. This was beyond any debate or plea-bargaining.

The Protestants in particular could never, ever get into Heaven.

I had mixed feelings - there were an awful lot of Protestants to be eventually located somewhere, after all. But my natural sense of justice and sheer logic were tempered by - I have to admit it - relief. I was terrified of the children in the light blue, always more confident, always in great loud gangs.

They'd spoil Heaven. They'd take over.

The Jews were a more serious matter - they'd killed Jesus. Mother Michael, our deceptively beautiful 5th grade teacher, would speak of the Jews in whispers. The Jews killed Jesus...it was unthinkable.



Of course Jesus himself was a Jew, which should've scored them a few points, but as Mother Michael had a large, black strap, which she used rather liberally, I chose to keep the debate internal. I wanted to be just like everyone else - I was learning what happened to those who weren't

She spoke about Communism. We must be prepared to die for our faith when the Communists finally arrived. They would arrive via Indonesia, millions of Asian Communists on a screaming, bloody rampage. We sat in a dazed silence, for the fear of Communism was everywhere. My father had taken part in the Malayan campaign, and I could remember his farewell, my mother's aura of martyrdom, and my father's firm surety of the rightness of the cause.

I was becoming convinced that the world was a very dangerous place indeed. In Clark's words I wanted to inhabit "a fortress against both the enemy without and the enemy within."

These were the years of Fortress Australia - The White Australia Policy.

Clark again: " European domination in Asia was taken to illustrate the teaching of Darwin on the survival of the fittest. The Asian and the Pacific Islanders, it was argued, were doomed for the wall, while the Europeans must avoid the fate of Humpty Dumpty. The workers were convinced that the use of coloured labour threatened their standard of living and their privileges. The middle classes were afraid of the threat to European civilization and to British political institutions, as well as the evils of miscegenation - inter-breeding."

What a litany of fears.

Political power in Australia has a long history of subordination through fear. Its been used to both dismiss objectors, and reinforce natural prejudices, born from the isolation which has so marked our own history.

Separation by sea and by force was the foundation upon which the colony of mis-fits, the colony of the unwanted, was built. The nail in almost every coffin of the convicts was the fact that they were never likely to return to England.

It's not surprising that we have re-visited the theme of separation as though it were the panacea for any social problem that might come our way. From the stolen generations of Aboriginal children, to the Pacific Solution for asylum seekers, we appear to be congenitally pre-disposed to the medicinal benefits of isolation.

But building walls of legislation to protect our island has never worked.

Our history is pock-marked with attempts at "border protection", that sombre term which hides a plethora of racist attitudes.

The lure of fast riches attracted tens of thousands of Chinese immigrants during the Australian gold rush of the 1850's. So concerned were the lawmakers of the time that specific legislation was hurried through the parliaments of Victoria and New South Wales. The new laws not only discriminated against those Chinese already in Australia, but also restricted entry into both states.

Clark describes what happened next:

"Undaunted, the Chinese began to land in South Australia and walk overland in single file in groups of six or seven hundred from Adelaide to the Victorian goldfields."

It is ironic when one considers the government actions 150 years later in dealing with the asylum seekers on board the Tampa.

In the 1850's it was the South Australian Solution, in the year 2001 it was the Pacific Solution.

In both instances, the very borders of Australia have been manipulated for the express purpose of preventing the migration of those considered undesirable. Mr Howard would have found many friends in the legislative chambers of New South Wales and Victoria in the 1850s.

But human nature is resilient. The imperatives of war, persecution and hunger will always overcome legislative opposition. Australia cannot change its destiny in this way.

As Paul Keating has said: "The only thing we can choose is our future and this is where the country has been let down."

That we now live in a truly multi-cultural society cannot be disputed. It presents a challenge: we are challenged to lose a part of what we hold dear in order to embrace the unknown, and to become larger as a consequence. This is the challenge Australia has faced from its infancy as a nation. It takes courage and humility.

It also requires curiosity. We're often encouraged to find the similarities between us, not often enough to explore the profound differences. That's where the adventure lies. That's where we grow as a people.

There is perhaps no greater example for us than the Aboriginal people. Despite all the atrocities that have been visited on them since white settlement, they have maintained their humanity and survived. Despite the massacres, the stolen land, the enforced separation, the brutal discrimination, they have maintained their belief in the power of connection, and have reached out the hand of friendship.

In Chekhov's greatest play "The Cherry Orchard", the character of Lopakhin says:

""Well, you should know, I'm always up soon after four. I work from morning till night, and then - well, I'm always handling money, both mine and other people's, and I can see what people around me are really like. All you have to do is start a job of work to realize how few decent, honest people there are. Sometimes, when I can't sleep, I think to myself: "Dear God, you've given us such vast forests, such boundless plains, such limitless horizons, we who live in this land really ought to be giants."

The challenge has never been greater. Perhaps if we start listening to our poets and historians, we can avoid the hell we're almost certainly otherwise destined for.

Thank you for your patience.