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PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE
Biographies of Historians – or, The Cliographer’s Craft*

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There is a recent named sub-set of biographies—cliographies—dealing with historians. This article will explore who are the subjects and authors of cliographies and what are their nature. My quest is both normative and explanatory in seeking to analyse the practices and issues of these works, not least the way cliographies are changing, and what cliographies might tell us about the historical discipline. I will argue that cliographies, while not always innovative given where they sit in the profession, are nonetheless significant histories in themselves.

The term ‘cliographer’ was coined by John Clive in 1989 as shorthand for an historian’s biographer.1 Full-scale cliographies are by no means an everyday occurrence but are sufficiently numerous to form a discrete genre that warrants attention along the lines of Jeremy Popkin’s major study of historians’ autobiographies. Like Popkin, ‘my objective is not to provide a systematic history or catalog but rather to define and analyze the issues that such works raise’.2 To sharpen the focus, the present discussion concentrates on book-length biographies of twentieth-century historians, including those who lived and worked in Australasia. Just as Australian historians’ memoirs are ‘major contributions to the national literature’,3 so have biographies of Australian historians enhanced the growing genre of cliography. I will argue that historian’s biographies matter because they are a valid and important form of intellectual enquiry that are capable of illuminating the best practices of history and inducing more professional respect for its subjects: past practitioners of history.

Subjects and authors of cliography

An almost unvarying rule is that historians at the top of the food chain might be the subject of a book-length biography whilst the bottom feeders seldom rate even article-length treatment. Even then, eminence is no guarantee that a cliography will follow, and even if it does, there is little risk that great historians, unlike great

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3 Popkin, 90.
novelists, will have more written about them than they ever wrote themselves. In the Australian context, there is a certain randomness in that J. J. Auchmuty (1909–81) has a biography while John M. Ward (1919–90), Gordon Greenwood (1913–86), Russel Ward (1914–95) and John La Nauze (1911–90) have yet to find their recording angels. Auchmuty seems the least likely candidate on grounds of scholarship, although he led a varied and interesting life: his is more the biography of a vice-chancellor than of an historian.4 There are no insuperable obstacles to cliographies of the others. The simple fact is that no one has stepped forward on their behalf. For the meanwhile they are consigned to flitting in and out of institutional histories and to cameo roles in the biographies of other Australian historians.

As well as professional distinction, one almost always has to have a broader public reputation, whether through political activism, being a public intellectual or cultural critic, or by participating in the affairs of state. A number of cliographies are subtitled ‘a life in history’ but in reality they are ‘a life in history and beyond’, and for such reasons cliographies have appeared under such titles as More Than A Historian and Immersed in Great Affairs.5 It also helps to have a derelict personal life (and to document it) and to be a controversialist. Such struggles with self and with others give a text the bold contours and sharp relief necessarily lacking in a life bereft of conflict. The moral is clear: placid lives within the academy—or anywhere else for that matter—do not make good biographical copy. The same applies to histories of universities, where the quiet achievers are screened out in favour of the extroverts and prima donnas.

Nowhere is the appeal of a controversial public presence more evident than with Manning Clark (1915–91) and A. J. P. Taylor (1906–90), who have received three cliographies apiece.6 There is considerable symmetry in their careers and in their attributes. Both were compulsive writers and each had a high public profile. Taylor was the original ‘television don’ whose media performances and extensive journalism, not to mention his desire to shock and be shocking, excited the ire and envy of the academic establishment. His Origins of the Second World War (1961) created uproar, as did the first volume of Clark’s History of Australia (1962) in its own way. Their perversity attracted the very criticism that so offended them, and not only from fellow academics. Clark had an ‘unsurpassed talent for getting up conservative nostrils’.7 Although prone to gnomic utterances, he ‘sometimes despair[ed] of ever being able to say

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something without being misunderstood. And in death, Clark had further notoriety thrust upon him with his former publisher, Peter Ryan, launching an out-of-the-blue attack on Clark’s six volume History of Australia, and the Brisbane Courier-Mail making unfounded allegations that he was a Soviet spy. That made good copy!

Broadly speaking, cliographers—the historian biographers of other historians—fit a mould. They are nearly always formally-trained historians holding academic positions and who work in the same or an adjacent field as their subject. It is difficult to imagine a successful biography, say, of Marc Bloch (1886–1944) without a background in French history and fluency in the French language. That in itself is a reflection of the increasing specialisation and Balkanisation of the historical profession. Cliographers have nearly always written other histories first—although there are exceptions. They are generally middle-aged or beyond, apparently in keeping with the dictum that the young are insufficiently endowed with worldly experience to write about another person’s life and that biography is a poor career choice for a budding academic.

Any given cliography can be located at a point along a conceptual continuum, with austerely intellectual biography at one end and personal biography at the other. Some cliographers are adamant that biography of any sort is primarily about a person—‘looking at the man behind the scholar...’ is how J. C. Beaglehole’s (1901–71) biographer-son describes his approach. Adam Sisman takes this approach to excessive lengths in his biographies A. J. P. Taylor and Hugh Trevor-Roper (1914–2003). Coming from a background in publishing, Sisman is not sufficiently familiar with the various intellectual contexts to assess his subjects’ work. His discussion does not pass muster as intellectual history and a dimension is missing from his work. By contrast, Stephen Holt started as the historian of Manning Clark’s ideas; only later did he write a separate biography of Clark. Most cliographers, however, adopt a more integrated approach that intertwines ‘the works’ and ‘the life’ while incorporating ‘the times’. Cliography, then, is as much an arrangement of events as it is a version of events and thus as prone to authorial priorities and narrative techniques as other types of history: some cliographies are chronological, others thematic, and others a mix of each. On the latter score, the cliography of Sidney Pollard (1925–98) is almost equally divided into two parts—biographical, followed by a discussion of his works, and one of the cliographies of Tawney.

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is divided into three roughly equal parts—on his life, his socialism, and his contemporary relevance.13

Purely pragmatic considerations are also at play, dictated to a large extent by the subject and archive. Lack of personal and family papers or the subject still being alive may leave a cliographer with little alternative but to write an intellectual biography.14 The subject’s personality may also have a bearing: it comes as no surprise that the ‘[s]hy, withdrawn, and frequently morose’ Carl Becker (1873–1945), who ‘shrank from public involvement...’, hardly lends himself to a personal biography.15 Becker’s close colleague Charles Beard was anything but withdrawn and the extent of his civic engagement provides further inducement for a cliographer. But Beard’s destruction of his incoming correspondence, combined with his historian-wife’s opposition, prevented a rounded biography immediately after his death—although a number of intellectual biographies and historiographical criticisms have appeared down the years.16 Another permutation entwined Geoffrey Serle’s biography. As a condition of the widow’s co-operation the first twenty-eight years of Serle’s life are presented biographically, but after his marriage the book bifurcates into an intellectual history.17

Then there is the matter of attraction, or ‘kinship’. The provenance of a cliography is often a grand gesture of solidarity toward a person or a type of history. David Cannadine’s sense of fellow feeling with G. M. Trevelyan (1876–1962) has the genealogy of Trevelyan being PhD supervisor of J. H. Plumb, who in turn became a mentor and a patron of the younger Cannadine. A further attraction was that all three consider history a branch of literature, or at least a discipline where literary merit is a given; all have addressed public as well as professional audiences.18 Others might develop a belated affinity. Stuart Macintyre was a tearaway postgraduate student when he first considered Ernest Scott (1867–1939) in the early 1970s, and framed him for many of the sins of bourgeois empiricism. Nearly twenty years later he returned to Scott with a more tolerant eye for his inaugural lecture as the Ernest Scott Professor of History at the University of Melbourne. Re-reading Scott’s work and consulting

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his papers for the first time, Macintyre saw merit in the man and his works and decided to expand his inaugural lecture into a cliography. 19

As often, the affinity is more personal in that the cliographer knew the subject. Max Crawford’s biography of G. Arnold Wood (1865–1928) was a gesture of loyalty to an old teacher, by someone who himself was more a teacher than a researcher; and John Thompson was taught by Serle as an undergraduate student and they later co-operated on a number of archives and library issues. 20

It is no disqualification not having known one’s subject personally: it was more important that Linda Colley have a background in eighteenth-century British political history than to have shaken the hand of Sir Lewis Namier (1888–1960). 21 Nonetheless, cliographers who did know their subject aver the advantage—just as cliographers who never met their subjects wish they had, or else share Brian Matthews’ lament that he had not known Manning Clark better. 22 And it was clearly unhelpful that Beaglehole seldom discussed history with his historian son and later biographer. 23

Most cliographers are too professional to be laudatory even where they have links to their subject. Jim Davidson probably exemplifies the prevalent approach in ‘striving for fairness’ rather than engaging in ‘advocacy’. 24 All the same, Jonathan Haslam’s readers are left in no doubt as to the extent of E. H. Carr’s self-absorption and insensitivity to others; Fay Anderson does not accept the argument that Max Crawford was a ‘very rare, exceptional case’ of a God Professor who had the ‘sheer ability and charismatic quality to make the system work at its best’; and Don Watson concedes that Brian Fitzpatrick’s ‘drinking habit’ was largely responsible for his inability to secure academic employment—a point that Fitzpatrick’s historian daughter does not dispute. 25 Cliographers harbour few illusions about the subject’s shortcomings but still tend to be positive and even indulgent. Mark McKenna put it nicely in saying that ‘[b]iography’s purpose is not to put someone on trial [or] to court martial or judge. Biography’s purpose is to lay things out . . . and to do so in a way which is always fair and sympathetic to the person as can be possible’. 26

Third parties, however, may be less enamored. People can be very judgmental as to whether a given historian ‘deserves’ a biography, and cliographers often wish that their output were judged on its merits rather

22 Matthews, 485.
23 Beaglehole, 296.
25 Haslam, passim; Anderson, 371; Don Watson, Brian Fitzpatrick: A Radical Life (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1979), 275–76; Sheila Fitzpatrick, My Father’s Daughter: Memories of an Australian Childhood (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010), 140–1, 162.
than on the basis of others’ subjectivities towards the person under discussion. Donald Wright, who is working on the cross-grained Canadian historian Donald Creighton (1902–79), is under no illusions that his colleagues are expecting ‘a certain Donald Creighton which they are not going to find in my [eventual] book’, and he remarks on the ‘very unhistorical understanding’ they have of Creighton.27 Cliographers assume their sizable commitment because they feel the person concerned is worth the effort, regardless of contrary opinion—although, in time, deflating cliographies of beleaguered members of the profession such as Stephen Ambrose (1936–2002) and David Irving might yet appear. The single instance of a debunking cliography is by a family member. Hendrik van Loon’s (1882–1944) son Willem decided to ‘set the record straight’, but in the words of van Loon’s other son, ‘Willem was just bent on emptying the slops on his old man and he only filled his own pants in the effort’.28 Few cliographers fail to admire his or her subject, but the relationship can end with a measure of disenchantment. William H. McNeill found the research on Arnold J. Toynbee (1889–1975) a ‘difficult and disappointing’ experience, and he had forewarning in the early 1950s when he observed that Toynbee, in the interests of completing the final four volumes of A Study of History, was simply not interested in taking on board new ideas. Nor did it help that McNeill’s reward for providing Toynbee extensive comments on the eighth volume was Toynbee including a verbatim transcript in a footnote but ignoring them in his text. Then came the crunch: ‘my praise of the enlargement he brought to historical consciousness—however heartfelt—was effectively eclipsed... [by] the self-betrayal and cover-up of which he was guilty during and after World War I, when he used a phoney medical excuse to dodge military service and escape the horror and misery of the trenches’. It resulted in a ‘painful diminution’ of McNeill’s high regard for his former mentor, even if this helped explain much else about Toynbee.29

The practices of cliography

Cliography mirrors the more candid character of biographies that have emerged since the 1960s, when boundary-breaking legal battles over the banning of such ‘immoral’ novels as Lady Chatterley’s Lover, Lolita, Tropic of Capricorn, Fanny Adams and Portnoy’s Complaint both reflected and contributed to a less buttoned-up moral climate that permitted greater personal disclosure. Biographies

generally are embedded within current societal mores, and some biographers are more prepared to push the boundaries than are others. The fine line between public and private was spectacularly pulled back by Michael Holroyd’s *Lytton Strachey* (1967–68), a full-frontal exposure of the writer and his circle that resembles Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* (1918) in its contribution to the evolution of the biographical form. These developments helped sanction a greater degree of openness and directness on the part of biographers (and cliographers).

However, some remain reticent about discarding the ‘great man’ tradition.

C. T. McIntire affecting to draw a discreet veil over Herbert Butterfield’s (1900–79) personal life, on the grounds that it is voyeuristic to do otherwise, only serves to highlight the extent to which cliography has become more a matter of disclosure than of restraint—especially when McIntire provides some of the very material he considers off-limits. Max Crawford accorded the same deference to Arnold Wood that he expected from colleagues when he headed the Melbourne School of History, and he elevated discretion to an art form in disguising the fact of Wood’s suicide. Indirect evidence of such gentlemanly reticence is suggested by Allan Martin and especially John La Nauze who, in their respective political biographies of Henry Parkes and Alfred Deakin, could not bring themselves to publish aspects of their subjects’ private lives and personal foibles. Such intrusiveness was not the done thing for historians of that generation and La Nauze, had he been approached by a prospective cliographer, would undoubtedly have displayed ‘[t]he irony of the biographer as reluctant subject...’. Such was the extent to which La Nauze eschewed his subject’s inner life that the wags described *Alfred Deakin* as ‘the last of the [Victorian] two-volume biographies’.

The times also played a role in how historians’ lives were approached in the United States, which helps explain why it was not until the 1980s that more personal cliographies began to appear in that country.

Cliographers (and biographers generally) are following La Nauze in returning to the mammoth proportions of the typical Victorian biography, but without its tendency to hero-worship and reticence. Mark McKenna’s biography of Manning Clark weighs in at almost 800 pages (of which almost 100 are endnotes, index and the like). In largely abandoning the impressionistic memoir, cliographers have assumed the mantle of exhaustive researcher. McKenna commented: ‘I’ve turned down quite a few dead end streets, but you can’t let your mind rest until you can be sure there is nothing there’. This exhaustiveness, in turn, is facilitated by the general availability of personal and institutional papers. Destroying one’s personal papers and putting a curse on any

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31 Crawford, 368–9.
34 Quoted in Davidson, *Three-Cornered Life*, 419.
35 Mark McKenna, e-mail to author, 27 September 2009.
would-be biographer, as did Trevelyan, is no guarantee of exemption. A good deal of Trevelyan’s outward correspondence survives in other peoples’ papers, resulting in his cliographer trawling through fifty-seven such collections.\(^{36}\) To complete the circle, the increasing emphasis on revelation and the impulse to thoroughness results in interviews, which fuel the personal dimension and contributes to bigger books.

Cliographers avail themselves of oral testimony whenever possible. G. P. Gooch’s (1873–1968) biographer makes it clear that his job was made more difficult by the lack of an oral history record as a result of Gooch outliving most of his contemporaries and many younger associates.\(^{37}\) It would be criminally negligent not to tap into memory but the same biographers who assiduously interview and correspond with family members and colleagues of their subject are acutely aware that such evidence has its limitations. As Haslam, E. H. Carr’s biographer stated: ‘Memory, we need to be reminded, is a continuous process of recreation rather than a static store of reminiscence’.\(^{38}\) Thus the evidential basis overwhelmingly remains the contemporary documentation.

Regarding methodology, for better or for worse, cliographers have not availed themselves of psychohistory as a model for their subjects, although a few invite such consideration given difficult childhoods and awkward relations with women. Cliographers also eschew theory, especially literary theory, and Kathleen Burk speaks for the group in describing herself as ‘a proud defiant empiricist’, just as she does in affirming that biographical understanding is a matter of degrees rather than of comprehensiveness: ‘Biography is a bitch, to be frank: sometimes I felt that I was making it up. Who can know the true inwardness of a man’s thoughts, of his life, or of his marriage?’\(^{39}\) The fact that omniscience and objectivity are unattainable is not therefore a summons to deprecate the goal of aspiring to truth, nor an invitation to sloppy relativism or historical Pyrrhonism.\(^{40}\) Cliographers (and biographers generally) ignore the self-defeating injunctions of the theorists, but not at their peril. Like bumblebees they remain aloft in ignorance, indeed defiance, of the laws of aerodynamics.\(^{41}\) Or as political biographer Ian Hancock has put it, ‘despite decades of theoretical under-nourishment, and feeling quite healthy nonetheless, I sallied

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\(^{36}\) Cannadine, 243–4.


\(^{39}\) Burk, ‘Author’s Response’ [to Paul Addison’s review of Burk, Troublemaker], http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Whatishistory/burk2.html

\(^{40}\) Nick Salvatore, ‘Biography and Social History: An Intimate Relationship’, Labour History, 87 (2004), 189.

forth remembering the tale of Hilaire Belloc’s water beetle—best just to swim, for to stop and think, would be to sink’. 42 Cliographers often steer clear of the autobiographies of their subjects preferring the archives since autobiographies are prone to evasions and silences and they are sometimes downright unrevealing or even dishonest. 43 Jim Davidson avoided using W. K. Hancock’s (1899–1988) autobiographical writings wherever possible, preferring to rely on his own archival research. 44 Also, as Matthews remarks: ‘Just as there is not much puzzle in The Puzzles of Childhood, there is not much quest in Clark’s second book of autobiography, The Quest for Grace...’. 45 Historians’ autobiographies often contain marvellous evocations of childhood, which cliographers usually find to be the least documented time of a person’s life. 46 On the other hand, the contents of historians’ autobiographies are not readily verifiable. A further limitation is that historian-autobiographers usually adhere to tacit rules of the game, especially as Popkin observes the ‘obligation to maintain the group’s image in the eyes of outsiders’. Thus conflicts with colleagues are generally erased, which means omitting much of what shaped and gave meaning to an individual’s professional life. 47 Cliographers, like biographers, often set nothing as off-limits, ranging over: upbringing and early influences, formal training, public lives, courtship and marriage, 48 family life, dealings with publishers and relations with colleagues are all cliographers’ fare, if to varying degrees. Nor do cliographers necessarily stop at the bedroom door: A. J. P. Taylor lost his virginity by going to a Viennese prostitute; Manning Clark was physically attracted to teenage boys when a teacher at Geelong Grammar; and G. D. H. Cole’s (1889–1959) biographer-wife is nothing if not forthright in revealing his ‘low-powered’ sex drive and his increasingly puritanical attitude to sex generally. 49 The vagaries of academic appointments—that most sensitive of professional areas—receive detailed and repeated mention.

Other important aspects of professional life also tend to be glossed over in historians’ biographies, on account of their routine character. The detail of committee work is a notable example. Undergraduate teaching is another. 50

43 Exceptions include the painful honesty in W. H. Oliver, Looking for the Phoenix (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2002).
45 Matthews, 419.
47 Popkin, 152.
48 Notably, Sisman, Trevor-Roper, chs.13–14 (‘Lover’ and ‘Husband’); Davidson, Three-Cornered Life, ch.12 (‘Theaden: Portrait of a Marriage’).
50 An exception is McKenna, An Eye for Eternity, ch.19 (‘The Teacher’).
further activity not often addressed in any detail is postgraduate supervision, unless there is high drama. The actual mechanics of research and writing are also downplayed or truncated, despite being central to academic life. However, there are some models of writing about research. There is nothing to compare in detail and instructiveness with Tim Beaglehole’s two substantial chapters about his father’s work on Pacific exploration and how J. C. Beaglehole’s fieldwork informed the published outcome. Also illuminating are Jim Davidson’s account of how Hancock approached and wrote his two-volume biography of J. C. Smuts and Greg Pfitzer’s extended retelling of Samuel Elliot Morison’s (1887–1976) replication of Columbus’s voyages in 1937.

Biography and for that matter cliography is not held in universal esteem by the historical profession. For some, biography implies the primacy of personality over structure when in fact biography is only one way of approaching the past: it complements the wider body of historical writing. Something of the same prejudice is applied to biographies of historians by an austere school that holds that cliography is the trivial pursuit of the chattering classes, a sentiment that is graphically expressed in Robert Cole’s intellectual history of A. J. P. Taylor:

I have no interest in discussing his relationships with his wives (he had three) or children (he had six), what he ate for lunch, how much money he earned, where and how often he went on holiday (unless he claimed to have learned something of value to his work from the experience), or why he was addicted to bow ties. This is biography to the extent that it is intellectual biography, a study of the growth and evolution of his ideas as they appeared in his historical and political writing. Taylor’s ‘life’ appears only in brief sketches of his origins, early life in the North of England, and education, as well as reference to those events and personalities which appear to have influenced his writings later, and the way he perceived their purpose. I am happy to leave the rest to others.

There is, in fact, widespread disagreement to notions of a split between the life and the work. Even when the cliographer places emphasis on ‘the works’ there is usually still a great deal of biographical information on the basis of archival research, thus enabling ‘the life’ and ‘the works’ (both books and public

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51 Beaglehole, 349–521
54 Robert Cole, A. J. P. Taylor: The Traitor within the Gates (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), x. At the opposite extreme, it is difficult for biography (and biographers) to be taken seriously when some media reportage focuses entirely on over-dramatised titillation; e.g. Gia Metherell, ‘The Secret History: Clark’s Lovers and Self-Loathing’, Canberra Times, 15 November 2008.
activities) to gel. Or as Richard Hofstadter’s (1916–70) biographer points out, ‘An exploration of Hofstadter’s inner life provides an indispensable tool for evaluating his scholarship and politics within the context of his sense of identity. If we approach Hofstadter only through his books and reputation, we are in danger of leaving much out...’. 55 In a similar vein, Linda Colley points out that ‘unless we understand something of the peculiar circumstances of Namier’s life and career, we will not be able to appreciate why his historical writings took the form they did’. 56

Revealingly, cliographers who start with the idea of writing a purely intellectual history almost always end up by reassessing their intentions and writing more rounded biographies. 57 The increasing concern with ‘the life’ is only to acknowledge that an amalgam of background, training and experience, which are refracted through the prism of upbringing and temperament, all shape the continuum of life and work. Cliography does show that historians are affected by their wider environment in their individual ways, as well as demonstrating ‘the impossibility of neatly separating what is individual and private from what is common and public’. 58

It is not necessarily the case that studies of the historical profession are more revealing of the wider profession than are cliographies. Jacqueline Goggin’s intellectual biography of Carter G. Woodson (1875–1950), the impresario of Afro-American history, tells far more about the development of that specialisation than the relevant section of Peter Novick’s incomparable study of the American historical profession. It depends on what the author hopes to accomplish and where the selective stress lies. Woodson’s almost one-man band role in establishing African-American history as a recognised specialisation, together with a dearth of personal papers, lends itself to an emphasis on his institutional role, whereas Novick’s theme is the contested ‘ownership’ of African-American historiography and ‘the relationship of black historians to an overwhelmingly white historical profession...’. 59 There are always trade-offs and individual historians are frequently subordinated in accounts of the historical profession—pressed into service to illustrate a wider point, usually making it impossible to trace the course of a particular career. Studies of the historical profession also tend to pigeon-hole historians into categories and schools of thought, which carries the risk of ignoring ‘the special, personal quality of each particular historian’. 60 Such is not the case,

55 Brown, Hofstadter, xviii.
56 Colley, 4.
57 Haslam, xii; Anderson, 7; Wrigley, vii. See also Ronald Fraser, ‘A Fox in Spain’, Times Literary Supplement, 29 July 2011: 3–4.
58 Stefan Collini, Common Reading: Critics, Historians, Publics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 110.
59 Goggin, passim; Novick, 472–91 (quotation, 490).
given the nature of the enquiry, in studies of history departments, which deal with individuals and their interactions within an institutional setting rather than with their scholarship.61

Cliographies are almost always conventional narratives as well as being conventionally narrative. That does not preclude creativity and Jim Davidson has guardedly linked biography and creative writing in their need to capture ambiance—problematic for an historian yet an element of ingenuity is inseparable from any kind of narrative: ‘A life story is a narrative waiting to be excavated’, despite gaps in the evidence.62 Rarely do we find the experimental flashes that are increasingly pushing the limits of historians’ autobiographies—such as Inga Clendinnen’s Tiger’s Eye (2001), which traverses ‘the fragile boundary between truth and hallucination’.63

A notably unconventional cliography is Brian Matthews’ Manning Clark. A combination of access to intimate diaries and Matthews’ background in English literature is both illuminating and cautionary. The diaries painfully reveal the tensions in Clark’s marriage, of which an earlier cliographer was unaware, such was the success of Manning and Dymphna in presenting a united front to the world and the collusion of friends.64 Matthews is particularly adept at reading between lines and extracting meaning from Clark’s often obscure and coded language in ways that would elude many historians—of interpreting a text in and of itself. He has, however, come under criticism for insufficient archival research, excessive block quotations from the dairies, the uneven treatment of Clark’s oeuvre, too little consideration to Clark’s role as Head of the History Department at the Australian National University, and inadequate attention to Clark’s public life.65 And at one point at least Matthews read too much into his material, asserting that Clark’s letters to one of his research assistants, Lyndall Ryan, are ‘increasingly and frankly the letters of a lover’—prompting the response from Ryan, ‘Let me set the record straight. I did not have an affair with Manning Clark’.66 Matthews also believed Clark’s diary entries to be ‘unvarnished and unguarded’, containing ‘not the slightest suggestion of... refining’.67 To the contrary, Matthews’ own evidence reveals that there was more to Clark than the incessant whining and self-disgust of the diaries, and other historians have noted the contrived quality of the diary

62 Davidson, ‘Bouncing’, 44.
63 The characterisation is Popkin’s, 266.
64 Matthews, ch.14; Holt, Short History, 127, and phone conversation, 23 March 2009.
67 Matthews, Manning Clark, 456.
entries. Neither does Matthews seem aware that Clark had an overweening desire to have his story told, to the extent of leaving notes for his future biographer amongst his substantial archive—hence the title of Mark McKenna’s later chigography of Clark being An Eye for Eternity.

An Eye for Eternity equally has its own unorthodox and experimental features, notably in the first two chapters. The first chapter, instead of the being the customary account of family background and upbringing, allowed the subject to unfold through the prism of peoples’ contrasting recollections: each reflects one or more of the many images of himself that Clark projected to the world and foreshadows the curious mixture of clarification and confusion that personified Manning Clark. The chapter commenced with the qualities of Clark’s voice, which enabled him ‘to hold an audience’, just as McKenna must hold the reader over the next 700 pages of text. Setting and context further unfold in the second chapter by way of an extended meditation on the Clark Papers, the ways in which Clark doctored his vast creation. In his desire to be remembered at all costs—no matter at what cost to others—Clark ‘sculpted the documentary monument of his own life’ and so beckoned and channelled the future biographers that he knew would come. As McKenna wrote elsewhere in the book, ‘Tending his archive, [Clark] compiled the raw materials of his own biography in the shadow of the life of his artist heroes, hoping that one day he would join them in the pantheon of the literary gods’.

Chigographers, like all biographers, typically have to relate to family members and associates of the subject, and often enough must negotiate access to sources (and quotation costs) with libraries and literary estates. Families are generally obliging enough, realising that the chigographer is writing from a position of affirmation, and that the eventual book will showcase the deceased spouse or parent. But difficulties arise more often than they should. Kathleen Burk sent ‘virtually the entire thing’ (including footnotes) to A. J. P. Taylor’s widow, and post-publication was presented with ‘a rather large bill’ for having quoted from Taylor’s writings; nothing had been said about this beforehand. Richard Hofstadter’s widow made it clear to David Brown that quotation rights would be withheld unless he changed numerous interpretative points, whereupon Brown expunged the quotations and reworked his manuscript. As well as delaying publication, the lack of Hofstadter’s ‘voice’ resulted in Brown’s narrative inevitably having an element of Hamlet without the prince. More recently Fred Inglis encountered double trouble when writing about R. G. Collingwood (1889–1943). His qualifications were questioned by the readers to whom his

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69 McKenna, An Eye for Eternity, 27–34.
70 McKenna, An Eye for Eternity, 663.
71 Kathleen Burk, e-mail to author, 29 December 2010; Burk, Troublemaker, xiv.
proposal was sent, forcing Inglis to change publishers. Worse, Collingwood’s youngest daughter was uncommunicative and uncooperative: ‘there is certainly an unseen stock of Collingwood’s letters’, lamented Inglis, ‘perhaps totalling hundreds...’. Obstructiveness does not necessarily prevent cliography but it does affect the result. It follows that cliographers are not accountable for misapprehensions that stem directly from denial of access to sources, although inferences must be based on reasonable evidence.

Elitism versus representativeness

Book-length cliography is elitist and thus conveys a skewed sampling of the historical profession. The same applies to published and on-line interviews of historians, and to edited collections on individual historians. This cult of exceptionalism will bring no joy to those who believe that the proper business of history is ordinary people. The term ‘elitism’ can carry unnecessarily pejorative overtones: if elitism implies competence and accomplishment, then so be it. On those grounds, one might question the justification of extended biographical treatment being accorded, in David Cannadine’s phrase, to ‘those historians who spend their lives storing up vast mounds of esoteric erudition, but who can scarcely bring themselves to write an article, let alone a book, and who are condescendingly remembered and euphemistically obituarised as good teachers and sound college chaps’? Who would want to read such a work and would any publisher touch it?

This is not to say that the pitfalls of ‘top history’ go unrecognised—‘it doesn’t make much sense’, says Peter Novick, ‘to ground generalizations about professional attitudes as a whole on the study of those who are most unrepresentative’—but a more subaltern perspective seems elusive. Even when middle ranking historians are pressed into service in broadly-based studies of the historical profession, an ‘elite bias’ remains. The same applies, surprisingly at first sight, to women historians of previous generations. Whereas biographers of male historians usually plead that their subject be restored to his proper prominence, those of females often want to remedy their subject’s lack of recognition in her own lifetime. Given the difficulties women encountered in

75 Novick, 8. As John G. Reid has pointed out (e-mail to author, 19 January 2011), histories of the historical profession fit into the expanding literature on professionalisation as a social phenomenon, not just in the academic professions but across a wide spectrum of occupations that have sought self-advancement by such means.
entering the profession and then having their contributions recognised and rewarded, such studies are not simply ‘rescue history’ but ‘redress history’.77 They too are unrepresentative, even of females generally. Whereas the ordinary lives of typical women are catered for in Gender Studies, they are nowhere to be seen in cliography, precisely because women historians of earlier generations were neither ‘typical’ or ‘ordinary’. Rather, they occupied an unusual niche—marginalised within the profession but often of good social standing in the wider community. There are also article-length studies that underscore the disabilities that women historians encountered, which celebrate their achievements, and not least point out that ‘their efforts to raise issues of women and gender deserve appreciation from current historians...’.78 Even so, studies of women historians need to go beyond redress history. John Reid remarked with regard to his own biography of Viola Florence Barnes (1885–1979), he had to situate Barnes in ‘a wider societal context while also being true to the obligation to portray her life in a way that is interpretively coherent and defensible’.79

Conclusion

The present style of cliography, along with the broader studies of the historical profession, provides a surer sense of how the discipline of history has developed and functions than do the autobiographies of historians. On the personal level, the picture that emerges is not always edifying. Frequent enough themes are; the contrast between professional success and personal unhappiness, and the wretchedness of old age. Sometimes the urge for professional success was to the egregious sacrifice of family life and callousness towards colleagues. Cliographers write about individual historians in generally respectful terms, but viewed collectively, these same historians present an unattractive picture.

Cliographies also reveal a lost world of academic work practices in which a previous cohort of historians toiled under conditions that now seem incomprehensible (and intolerable). The present generation, wedded to their world of cyberspace, air travel, and digital cameras might pause to ask how their forebears accomplished so much when only fifty years ago the accoutrements

77 See Donald Wright, The Professionalization of History in English Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), ch. 5 ('The Importance of Being Sexist: The Masculinization of History').
were sea travel, fountain pens, blotting paper, aerograms, telegrams, manual typewriters, carbon paper and Gestetner duplicating machines. Another way, therefore, in which cliography advances the study of history is that the ancestors might be viewed in a more appreciative light. Neil Jumonville’s rhetorical question regarding posterity’s disdain is apposite: ‘Can the profession of history afford to ignore and bury its intellectual heritage in a way that painting and literature have not? If so, what a painful irony from a field—history!—that is the least grateful to its own intellectual past, an occupation in which a book a decade old or an interpretation a generation old are not only thought to be out of date but also considered an embarrassment’. 80

Cliographers are an adaptable and versatile breed, who perform to a high standard, despite sometimes working in a genre and in areas far removed from their previous work. William McNeill experienced no particular difficulties in the transition from macro-history to cliography, apart from finding that ‘biography required greater leaps of the imagination that I remember making when writing world history or any other kind of history’. 81 He had shifted gears from one book to the next and had often said that history, like maps, can be done on any scale with advantages and disadvantages to each choice. Using primary sources made no difference because the ‘mental processes were the same... framing hypotheses, testing them by further reading and then writing them down’. He is not impressed with the suggestion that biographers or historians (or novelists or scientists) are born, not made: ‘we create ourselves by messages in and messages out, beginning in infancy, intensified by formal education, and achieved by actual practice’. 82 My only qualification would be that an aptitude for cliography has to be there to begin with.

Cliography has a clearly defined place within the wider genre of biography. The spectrum of biography is amazing for its diversity, from the quickies and penny dreadfuls through to the massive tomes that were years in the making. Biographies are as variable in their size, purpose and quality as in their subject matter. There are hatchet jobs, such as Kitty Kelly’s demolitions of high profile individuals. There is an over-emphasis on celebrities, so much so that the terms ‘glitzerature’ and ‘celebography’ may get currency. There are ‘authorised’ biographies (a problematic term) and there are some deeply unauthorised biographies, a fact that is sometimes turned into a publicity ploy to imply the biographer’s detachment and objectivity. Cliography sits at the ‘respectable’ end of the spectrum and as a genre is variable only within limits. In terms of commonalities, cliographies are deeply researched and are written with a high seriousness of purpose. They are becoming increasingly lengthy, although not in the same league as the biographies of some United States Presidents. Five biographies of Australian historians have been published since 2005 and the two shortest (of Max Crawford and Geoffrey Serle) are almost 400 pages apiece.

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Monograph-length cliography is heavily empirical, innocent of theory, and herein lies another reason for its relative homogeneity. It is a conservative form, as is biography generally—competent and orthodox rather than being what might be termed innovative and cutting edge; this probably stems from cliographers being mid-life and institutionally-minded scholars. Also, there is simply not the same scope in cliography for the inventiveness and experimentation that is increasingly on display in historians’ autobiographies. A recent example is Sheila Fitzpatrick’s memoir, *My Father’s Daughter*—something of an autobiography of her earlier years, something of family history (and in some respects a portrait of her parent’s marriage), something of a biography of her father and in part an exploration of memory. There is not the same compass for such ingenuity and inventiveness in cliography. All the same, the latest biographies of Manning Clark (by Brian Matthews and Mark McKenna) have shown creativities that point the way to reshaping cliography, as has Jim Davidson’s biography of W. K. Hancock. Just as the autobiographies of Australian historians have made an ‘important contribution to the national literature’, Australian cliographers are starting to make important advances to biographical practice generally.

Cliography often reveals the practice of history at its best. Yet it is often judged as of lesser status. Cliography requires a wider range of skills while still satisfying the usual historical criteria. A rounded cliography is more difficult to research and write than a purely intellectual history, and for readily apparent reasons. Whilst historians are formally trained to deal with ‘situations, events, policies, organizations, administration, and legislation’ rather than with people, the practitioners who write at length about other practitioners typically have to develop new talents and move into unfamiliar territory embraced by the life. In terms of input and output, cliography is an accomplished genre of history, even whilst agreeing with John Sutherland that ‘Only God...can write the perfect biography. And He, as far as one knows, has not signed up with any publisher yet’.

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83 Popkin, ch. 9 (‘Historians and the Reshaping of Personal Narrative’).
84 Fitzpatrick, 1–8.