

# Fear & Intuition

Peter Botsman

20 January, 2025



# Age, time<sup>and scholarship bring the ability to appreciate and comprehend strange confluences.</sup>

At 11 Tasmania Circle, Forest on the 16 May 1978, I met the grand historian of Australia, Manning Clark for the first time.

It was a memorable morning.

Lyndal Ryan, who had been Clark's research assistant and would also go on to make a great mark on the writing of Australian history, arranged the meeting. It was characteristic generosity of both of them.

Clark had given up drinking on advice. But that seemed to encourage him to ply me with Russian vodka.

I think he saw in me, someone who might carry his work and influence into another era. I was 22, he was 63 and at the height of his powers.

In his kitchen, with the ladder to his writing loft nearby, pulled down, I got the full man. He was passionate, instinctive with deep knowledge and intuition. We connected and wrote letters over many subsequent years. His blue aerograms treasured, when they arrived with spiritual advice on love, death and life, at various student hovels in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney.

With Bach's Resurrection Oratorio on full blast: "Imagine Dirk Hartog clambering up the cliffs of Wirruwana as this was composed.." he yelled.

So this is a historian. Not a mindless ordering of events, but the creation of great vessels of meaning that can occupy a thousand thoughts over years, decades. Imagining the unimaginable from the perch of time, creating an enlightened library that no-one else can compile.

"When a man writes he leaves his mark, and you'd better hope that it's a big mark." It was.

Hartog clambered up the steep cliffs of Western Australia, maybe fifty years earlier than Bach's great work. Over four hundred years of myriad complexity, it was a miracle to get that symbolism of death, resurrection and Hartog's Eentracht ("Concord") bobbing around bewildered, then en route to a fatal encounter at Ujung Pandang with Macassan traders plying their trade between the Yolŋu and Beijing.

Tying Bach and Hartog together was a great intuition about a time, say five hundred years before the Sydney settlement, that is still busy and crammed with "undiscovered" events locked in Aboriginal ceremony, Indonesian, Dutch, Spanish, Chinese history.

I was being pointed at great mysteries and what thirty years later would become for me, profound periods of enlightenment with Aboriginal teachers.

Historical intuition brings ideas and events together in ways that construct our present and which can never be thought of by anyone but us in this constellation of now.

How did white fellas come here? was what dhuway Bätumbil and yäpa Dhänggal wanted to know. Where did all you white ants come from and why?

In Wakuwäl I told them a story about my great, great, great grandmother Honor Hughes transported to Van Diemens Land from Ireland with two of her children - one, my great, great grand-

mother Mary.

Wakuwal was a very imperfect construction full of conceits, fears and intuitions that led to me and them.

How to mirror their deft facility of knowing intimately an endless procession of m<sup>ä</sup>ris and mari'mus and then an abacus like structure of related clans and families back to the beginning of time and across human experience into the plant and animal worlds and even seasons, seas, space? An impossible but wonderfully challenging mission.

I failed but at least though now I can easily go back five generations in my head with expanded awareness of my own direct family relations thanks to those two wise leaders.

In Wakuwal I looked at my mari'mu father's mothers kinship lines, the tangent of my mari'mu father's fathers line was another story of fear and intuition.

Honor Hughes was a victim of the potato famine. She and her children were transported to Van Diemens Land on the convict ship Maria on 23 July, 1849. There was no choice, it was a terrible ordeal and over several generations the convict stain gradually lost its evil effect.

My father's father's father's father Karel (alternately Carl) gave us the name Botsman. Karel was a seaman/blacksmith born in Reval (now Tallinn), alternately part of Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Russia and now Estonia. My middle name is Carl after him. On his application for citizenship it records that he arrived in Melbourne on 12 May 1852 aboard the Dutch ship Passaroeang based in the "Netherland East Indies" ie Java.

The road in a way, with the Passaroeang leads back to dhuway and yäpa. For their ancestors had routinely traded with the Macassans who transgress the Netherlands East Indies Companies trade.

I wish my grandfather and father were alive so that I could have a conversation about Karel. He is listed on the foreigners register in Amsterdam as a seaman and was in hospital there from August to September 1852 - a man of mysteries.

There were quite a few Botsmans, originally from the Netherlands, in Russia many probably came with Peter 1 from Amsterdam as boat builders to establish the port at Reval/Tallinn, 324 kilometres from Saint Petersburg on the southern side of the Gulf of Finland on the Baltic Sea. That is the family rumour anyway.

I went to St Petersburg in 1991 and felt a lost connection.

Fear and intuition were certainly an important dimension of Karel's compass. The Botsman family must have negotiated Peter and Catherine's era well but according to my distant cousin Yana no-one in Karel's line survived the tumult of the Russian Civil War, the Soviet Revolution, WWI and WWII.

For one reason or another, driven by fear and intuition, Karel was the sole survivor. He settled in Buckingham St, Richmond. He married Ellen Smith in 1857, they had eleven children.

Surviving the warring tribes of Europe, revolutions, empires and tyrants is why so many people came to this land. Dhuway and yäpa I hope you understand a bit more now. Perhaps too those of us who have these family lines can understand the conservatism and natural reluctance of Australians to embrace radical change and feel fearful to even acknowledge that our security and prosperity came at a price for our first nations communities.



Slow as we go is ok, but if we are not to repeat the errors and carnage of other nations we have to come out from under the covers at some point.

Our constitution needs to be renewed. Our first nations need to be acknowledged. Treaties need to be undertaken which provide compensation to those who, in seeking security, we have displaced and hurt as extremely as any revolution or tyrant or empire.

This is our duty now.



Reval on a calm day, 1844, Ivan Aivazovsky

# MANNING CLARK

## a discovery of australia

*For Peter Botman,*

*In memory of a very pleasant  
morning in Canberra.*

*Manning Clark  
16 May 1978.*



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