



# non-fiction

## **An Eye for Eternity**

**Mark McKenna**

Miegunyah Press, \$54.95

MANNING Clark is not an easy subject. He has become heavily politicised in the context of the History wars, but would have been a difficult study anyway. Clark was a man of many faces, one who performed in private as well as public, and who embodied many paradoxes. He was a socialist who could never embrace communism, a non-believer who sought private Catholic Masses, and an ardent Australian who lived his life inspired by the Russian novelist Dostoyevsky. All of this makes McKenna's biography a remarkable achievement, at every level. His research is extensive and he has been rewarded with discoveries about Clark's private life that have hitherto received little to no coverage. Some of it is not pleasant reading - he often treated his devoted and long-

suffering wife Dymphna rather callously, especially when forming repeated crushes on attractive young research assistants. In attempting to convey Clark to his readers, one of McKenna's great gifts is to preserve the multi-faceted nature of Clark, avoiding the temptation to derive a single characterisation that would obscure as much of the man as it would illuminate. We are all bundles of contradictions - Clark more so than most - and McKenna brings Clark's complexity to life. At nearly 800 pages this is a weighty work, but another of its many virtues is that McKenna's easy prose and extensive use of photographs makes it manageable. Indeed, McKenna, even after 800 pages, left me yearning for more.

**Martin Crotty**

