

Clancy Departs Dog Eat Bone World: Richard Freadman remembers Laurie Clancy

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One of my first sightings of Laurie was in a framed photo in the old Eagle Bar at La Trobe University. Entitled 'The Coach,' the photo featured a young and rather fit-looking Captain Coach addressing his players at the quarter or three-quarter time break. The players, it has to be said, look completely uninterested in proceedings; but according to the picture's caption Laurie is pulling out all the rhetorical stops. The caption reads:

Senior Lecturer in English Laurie Clancy urges on the football team in mid-1969 with accounts of existentialism and the thinking of Kierkegaard.

Laurie was one of those naturally funny people. Great company and a marvellous droll wit, he could also be hilarious without meaning to. Tall and angular with huge ruckman's hands, bulbous eyes and a 'bog-Irish' face, he often looked abstracted, as if on the way to, or perhaps recovering from, a hangover. And indeed this was not infrequently the case. Laurie, as they say, liked a drink. One of his fictional characters, taking a leaf out of his author's book, frames the motto '*in vino veritas*' for himself. A refugee from a stern Catholic childhood, Laurie the writer could still put liturgical Latin to good use.

An appearance of slightly shambolic approximation about Laurie was both accurate and misleading. Ann Blake, a colleague from the early days in the La Trobe English Department, remembers slapstick-like instances of Clancy absentmindedness over details like lecture times and venues. But she also remembers this same colleague coming in to work early, tapping furiously at an old portable typewriter whence issued a steady stream of novels, stories, reviews and opinion pieces. Beneath the laconic exterior Laurie was a man of high ambition and high accomplishment. He published four novels, three volumes of short stories, four works of literary scholarship, a book length introduction to Australian culture, and a vast, as yet uncounted, number of literary reviews and occasional pieces. He was one of several important early La Trobe academics who won the University its enviable and ongoing reputation as a home for public intellectuals. Laurie was equally at ease publishing in refereed literary journals, the *Bulletin* and the *Sun*. Left-wing, always a touch home-spun, and a passionate Richmond supporter, he viewed the High Theory that permeated his academic domain of literary studies from the 1980s onwards with bemusement and even suspicion.

Laurie made a lasting contribution to the La Trobe English Department (now Program). He played a major part in the introduction of courses in Australian literature in the early 1970s (a move spearheaded by John Barnes). In addition to a great deal of effective team teaching with colleagues on big undergraduate courses he designed and taught an innovative course in Contemporary Literature which continued, with revisions that reflected Laurie's wide reading in late twentieth century fiction, until he retired from La Trobe in 1994. Hugh Underhill, who sometimes took seminars in the course with Laurie, says: 'What stands out for me, indelibly still, are Laurie's easy friendliness towards and never-failing solicitude towards his students, his way with anecdote or an amusingly apt riposte, and his egalitarian no-nonsense manner with us all.' He was indeed immensely popular with students, some of whom became personal

broke things up inside me all over again that I thought had been settled for some time.

In short, I fell in love all over again but on a new and deeper plain. I discovered that I could give myself up to love in a way I never had before because I was certain my feelings were returned. I could be as sentimental as I liked. I could moon about like some crappy-faced teenager and not feel the slightest embarrassment. And that gave me a glorious feeling of liberation.

Through it all another love persisted: parked in front of the TV in track pants or a dressing gown he'd watch every game Richmond played, taking particular interest in the 'young kids' who would have to lift the team from the condition of abject mediocrity it had generally been in since its glory days in the 1970s. Now indeed something remarkable happened—a something that is best told with the aid of a dialect of English to which Laurie and friends often defaulted: Footballese.

Suddenly the 'Tiges' (Richmond Tigers) were on a roll. 'Cuz' ('disgraced recovering drug addict Ben Cousins') started to get the pill in the middle. Kids who could not bloody play started to. 'Brilliant young forward' 'Jumpin' Jack Riewoldt was hanging off clouds taking 'speccies' in the goal square. In four glorious weeks the results were:

Round 12:	Sun June 13	Richmond	19.12	126	West Coast Eagles	11.11	77
Round 13:	Sat June 19	Richmond	15.15	105	Brisbane Lions	12.14	86
Round 14:	Sun July 4	Richmond	14.5	89	Sydney	12.13	85
Round 15:	Sat July 10	Richmond	15.10	100	Fremantle	11.15	81

'The Tiges are back in town' proclaimed the commentators.

Like the Tiger of old
We're strong and we're bold

intoned fans in euphoric renditions of the club song. All was well; all manner of things were well.

And then, suddenly, the wheels, which has been spinning on good will, momentum, youthful promise and a lick of grease, all fell off at once.

In Round 16, 16 July 2010, the Tiges were thumped by the Kangeroos to the tune of 50 points (7.11.53/15/13/103).

'Tiger bubble bursts' trumpeted the headlines.

'Like the Tigers of old' intoned the knockers and the cynics. But it didn't matter any more. As the commentators are apt to say late in one-sided games, before 'returning you back to the studio', it was 'all academic now,' because the Big Fella had departed this dog eat bone world on Friday 16 July.