Back in the 1980s, the autodidact bookseller Bob Gould pressed a book into my hands as was his way whenever I visited the Aladdin’s Cave rabbit warrens of his Sydney bookshop. “Comrade, you’ve got to read this”, usually his way of recommending the latest or neglected anti-Stalinist publication. This time it was *Going Away: A Report, A Memoir* by Clancy Sigal, the 1963 UK Cape Edition, a pile of which Bob had on the floor by his side at the counter, for the reduced remainder cost of $2.95 a copy. “One of the best books about America”, he added. I later learned Bob had been recommending the book ever since it was published.

Bob could be brusque, at times confrontational, always single-mindedly and aggressively anti-Stalinist, but behind all this and in calmer moments, was hugely knowledgeable about books and literature and would comment significantly in a learned and rewarding way if you could stay the distance. From what I gathered, according to Bob, Sigal’s *Going Away* was the sort of road-book Jack Kerouac might have written had he stayed with his originating politics. So I bought a copy, and was not disappointed.

There is a form of literary appreciation which argues that an author’s work can be read independently of understanding its creator; that a work of literature is its own self, and speaks for itself with its own voice and authority. Well, yes and no. In the case of Sigal, life and literature were one; writing for him was a form of breathing. Most of his books, and there are seven of them, all in print, with another due for release, are close to the author; he mined his own experiences and personal history and is never far from his text.

Clarence (Clancy) Sigal (1926-2017) was born in Chicago, Illinois, son of unwed industrial workers and union organisers Leo Sigal and Jennie Persily. He was named after the labour and criminal lawyer Clarence Darrow of the Scopes ‘monkey trial’ case, a friend of Sigal’s mother. Sigal’s father was absent during much of his childhood and parenting was in the hands of Jennie, a tough Jewish woman who managed to live by her politics in the roughhouse of Depression Chicago. Young Clancy often accompanied her on organising and political activities, on one occasion at the age of five, sharing her cell during an overnight political arrest. Jennie, “a warrior queen, a crazy bohemian”, is the subject of his gritty and loving memoir/biography *A Woman of Uncertain Character: The Amorous and Radical Adventures of My Mother Jennie (Who Always Wanted to Be a Respectable Jewish Mom) by Her Bastard Son* (2006).

From about mid-adolescence onwards, Sigal variously engaged in leftist political and organising work on his own initiative, before being drafted into the US Army towards the end of World War 11.
He did not see action, becoming part of the post-war US Occupation force in Germany as a sergeant, and attending the Nuremberg War Crimes trial.

Following demobilisation in 1946, he briefly worked for the United Auto Workers in Detroit, but was expelled in an anti-communist purge. Subsequently he attended the University of California, was managing editor of the campus student newspaper, and gained a BA in English (1950). Making his way to Hollywood, Sigal worked as a story analyst for Columbia Pictures, then as a talent agent with the Jaffe Agency, with prestigious clients like Barbara Stanwyck and Humphrey Bogart. Wherever he went, Sigal engaged in leftist activities, either openly or otherwise, and had long been the subject of FBI scrutiny and monitoring. The House Un-American Activities Committee issued a subpoena for him to appear before it, but did not follow through. Sigal’s Hollywood experiences are the subject of his memoir *Black Sunset: Hollywood Sex, Lies, Glamour, Betrayal and Raging Egos* (2016).

An aspirant writer since early adolescence, in 1956, with McCarthyism attempting to expunge leftist from America and Hollywood in particular, Sigal gained a literary fellowship to write his first novel. He quit the US, went to Paris, mixed briefly in the left intellectual scene and in the heady politics fermented by the Algerian War of independence, then crossed to Britain in 1957 and stayed some thirty years.

In Britain Sigal earned his living as a journalist and BBC broadcaster, became involved in the anti-nuclear protest movement, and initially as a patient and later collaborator, part of the anti-psychiatry movement associated with psychiatrists R. D. Laing and David Cooper. In this role he helped establish Kingsley Hall, a half-way house for schizophrenics in the East End of London. From 1957-1960 Sigal lived with novelist Doris Lessing, appearing in her major work *The Golden Notebook* (1962) as Saul Green, Lessing drawing significant material for this from Sigal’s private papers, now held by the University of Texas. During the Vietnam War Sigal was part of a UK network helping American military deserters and draft-dodgers evade authorities, with a safe-house, document forging capabilities and finances. Sigal’s UK experiences are the subject of two of his novels, *Zone of the Interior* (1976), and *The Secret Defector* (1992).

Returning to live in the US after the 1984 Miners’ Strike, Segal taught writing and journalism, becoming a Professor Emeritus at the Annenberg School of Journalism, University of Southern California. He married writer Janice Tidwell in 1992, with whom he had a son; worked on screenplays with Tidwell for the films *In Love and War* (1996), about the World War 1 experiences of Ernest Hemingway, and *Frida* (2002) about painters Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. He also wrote a book about Hemingway (*Hemingway Lives!*, 2013), and continued writing deadline journalism and commentaries, much of this published in *CounterPunch* magazine.

For me, reading *Going Away* brings to mind the beautiful Christian hymn *Amazing Grace* by ex-slaver John Newton (1725-1807). The hymn is about being spiritually lost and found. Forget the metaphysics and the theological, and instead think existential. *Going Away* combines being lost and found in an existential/political way. It is a large rambling mass of a book, filled with leftist characters and events and places, enlivened by Sigal’s wit, his sharp descriptive powers, his ear for dialogue, and acute sociological comment. The action takes place in 1956 and revolves around the twenty-nine year old narrator, based on Clancy, driving across the US from Los Angeles to New York “in a red-and-white De Soto convertible”, visiting people and places and events from his leftist past, haunted by his sense of psychological depression.
The process is like picking through a spilled deck of cards, the narrator aware he will have to try to bring some sense of order to it somewhere along the line, to makes sense of his life and leftist, and his engagements with American society and culture. Sigal’s narrator is heading for Europe where he intends to write an autobiographical novel, which will possibly go some way towards creating this order, the road-trip providing the raw data he will draw upon. Going Away ends with the narrator on board a passenger vessel, moving down the Hudson River en-route to Europe, listening to a broadcast from Radio Budapest as the Soviet military extinguishes the Hungarian Revolution.

In gestation when Sigal left for Europe, ‘Going Away’ was difficult to write, undergoing revisions and rewrites. It was published in 1962 after his first novel, Weekend in Dinlock (1960), a confronting and deeply sympathetic account of a Midlands mining town - the mines, mining, the miners, their lives, families, culture and community. Going Away took time because it is personal and complex; while the novel’s narrator is ‘lost’, by the time he was ready to publish, author Sigal had got his head around things and was ‘found’, the novel reflecting both political and psychological states.

Herein lies the power of Going Away, its life, and relevance. The novel/memoir is driven politically, but not ideologically. The bulk of the characters revisited on the road-trip, mostly movement foot-soldiers, have variously struggled and campaigned for social justice issues in the past, and contested the arrogances of wealth and power. Some have burned out, some have sold-out, some are still committed and fight on. The battles and struggles and campaigns remembered are variously big and small, some almost invisible, and variously involve victories, compromises, and defeats. Stalinism is questioned, the narrator and others discussing at one stage their former allegiances and questioning why it was so. Sigal had joined the Communist Party (USA) in mid-adolescence, much to the chagrin of his mother who did not regard socialism and communism as compatible.

But the book is without rancour. It is as though what matters for Sigal is the act of rebellion, of taking and making a stand. Rather than identifying with an ideology, Sigal identifies with a broad historic tradition, a sort of rebel commons, which he describes thus:

“...My racial memory was that of the borderer, the outlaw observer, the gangster Essene, the lustful Brook Valleyite, the Proudhonist with finger at side of nose, the irrevocably homeless revolutionary.”

It is easy to label this as romanticism, but that would be a mistake. Because it is from this sort of broad historical thinking and generosity, the awareness of the past it brings, the inspiration it provides, minus the cages and blinkers and fragmentations of ideologies, the long view of history that sustains when the present might offer defeats and the loss of hope, that keeps dreams and visions and hopes for better worlds alive, and from which social movements and revolutions are born. Which for me is the gift of Going Away, and Sigal’s message to the future.

News that Clancy had died came via Facebook in July 2017, in a message to his friends from his wife. It read: “This is Janice, Clancy’s wife. Clancy died last night. You all meant so much to him. He went out fighting for justice and continued to write to the end. End of Sentence. End of Paragraph”. There was in that brief message a great deal of strength and dignity, a fitting conclusion to a writing life. And as I read the message, I shed some tears.