

Good Patrick

Tony Birch

Bruce McGuinness Research Fellow,
Moondani Balluk Academic Unit, Victoria University

The Aboriginal community of Victoria have an intellectual, cultural and emotional investment in both our own history and the colonial past we share with 'settler' society. Behind the gates of university campuses intellectual practice is regarded as the fundamental value underpinning academic history, while 'culture' remains a ubiquitous but ill-defined attachment of the discipline. A serious concern for many academics is emotion. It supposedly threatens objectivity, undermines reason and causes the *professional historian* discomfort. Aboriginal people working in academia are not subject to the same heartburn. In fact, according to the professionals we harbour an abundance of emotion. We are *inherently* emotional people. We have an emotional attachment to the past. And at times we are perceived as *over*-emotional, even when we possess a professionally certified PhD. As a consequence, however close we come to the profession, we are never quite part of it. We remain *tainted*, as does our scholarship.

Patrick was one of the true intellects of colonial history, both in Australia and globally. My first meetings with him were during an Honours level class, *History and Theory*. I was one of many students in the room who found 'doing theory' threatening and difficult. While Patrick was not teaching the class, in a formal sense, at least, he was a wonderful teacher. Not unexpectedly, he had read more widely than any person in the room. Equally, while most of us attempted to decipher such concepts as hermeneutics with limited success, Patrick was able to engage with the most sophisticated ideas and apply them to the *realities* of our engagement with the past. Patrick could have so easily have paraded

his intellectual prowess. Many male academics, in particular, do so. He never behaved in such a manner. Patrick was cheeky. And he was mischievous. But he was never intellectually arrogant or narcissistic.

I began the first of two decades of many conversations with Patrick about history in that classroom; conversations that grew into a deep friendship, based initially on mutual respect, and eventually love. Patrick himself also believed that Aboriginal people have an emotional investment in the past. He understood why this is so. He knew that the deep injustices suffered by Aboriginal people at the hands of colonial violence impact deeply on contemporary Aboriginal society. As far as Patrick was concerned, this did not set us apart from academic history, not in an inferior intellectual sense. If anything, he strongly felt that our *subjectivity*, rather than being a dirty word, was an intellectual asset. For this reason alone, I remain indebted to his deep sensibility. Further, let us not forget, that while Patrick was a true intellect, he was also an openly emotional thinker.

For a time, Patrick taught versions of Aboriginal and colonial history at the University of Melbourne. He did so during the mid-1990s. It was both a challenging and invigorating time to teach in the area. Political debate surrounding university walls at the time was politically charged. Regardless of whether the reactionary Pauline Hanson was a puppet of the then prime minister, John Howard (a proponent of the *relaxed and comfortable* view of history), or if it was Howard occasionally dancing for her, between the partnership they pushed the necessary populist hot-buttons of the history and culture wars. Their bad behaviour was able to penetrate the walls of the academy – even the seemingly impenetrable sandstone of the University of Melbourne. Taking these people on did require a *war*, rather than some genteel debate left to the Masonic-like aristocrats of the profession. Patrick possessed the rigour to successfully challenge those driven by the mentality of colonial throwbacks. Thankfully he remained something of an outsider, never losing the swagger and determination of the street-educated kid who knew a serious arsehole when he saw one, and was prepared to call it how he saw it.

In recent years I have written more fiction than academic writing. Many within universities regard the genres as mutually exclusive. Not Patrick. On each occasion that I published a new book he would contact me, firstly to tell me how much he enjoyed the writing. Secondly, and usually over lunch, he would talk about the insights into our shared understanding of the past that my writing provided. Always, I walked away from those conversations buoyed by his remarkable capacity for generosity. In our final exchange, following the release of my most recent novel, *Ghost River*, he wrote that he was proud of me. Patrick – he *was and always will be* a good and giving person.

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