

Australian Poetry and Sport: A Reflection of Nationhood

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Australian poetry has its own distinctive character, idioms, and traditions. and is not simply an offshoot of English poetry. It is unique and reflects the new society from which it emerged. There is, indeed, no parallel to the bush ballads and folk songs that are so firmly rooted in the minds of the average Australian. Poetry, as well as other aspects of literature. helped to define the separate and distinct personality of the Australian and helped to create a national self-image.

Some of the features which emerged from a study of the sporting poetry were love of country. a dominating theme, coupled with a love of the beauty and the harshness of the land. Freedom was another emerging characteristic, as was the loneliness that often accompanied freedom in such a vast land and as epitomized by the drover and the stockman. The "bushman ethos" also emerged, characterized by "tough masculinity, lack of affectation, courage and mateship."

Four poets in particular highlighted the movements toward nationalism. Adam Lindsay Gordon pioneered the bush ballad with "The Sick Stockrider." In "Jim the Splitter," "The Sliprails and the Spur," "The Drover's Sweetheart." and so many others, Henry Kendall Lawson achieved an understanding of the geography of Australia. Andre Barton "Banjo" Paterson attained a place in Australian history through "Clancy of the Overflow,," "The Man from Snowy River," and the words of "Waltzing Matilda." Finally, C. J. Dennis injected humour in such poems as "The Sentimental Bloke."

That poetry related to sport was a factor in establishing the Australian's self-image. Such factors as humour, mateship, lack of affectation, a never-give-up philosophy, tough masculinity, courage, rugged individualism, and independence can be clearly evidenced in the literature.



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