

POETRY AND AUSTRALIAN IDENTITY

Popular texts: advertisements, songs and television shows: encourage

Australians to revere certain aspects often upheld as integral to our cultural identity, aspects such as larrikinism, men who are tough and mateship. The famous Hahn beer advertisements make us laugh out loud at larrikins who bomb their sheilas while they luxuriate in the spa. Likewise, the Toyota Border Security ad reinforces the dominant paradigm that Australia's outback is a tough place and that Australia is peopled by tough blokes. Furthermore, everyone over the age of 30 must remember Rolph Harris' chart topping single, *Two Little Boys*. We all loved that the mateship, forged between two youngsters as they played with their horses, was the very thing that enabled them to see out the war later in their lives. Ultimately, it is television, the drug of the nation, that reinforces the idea that tough blokes who stick together and have a bit of a laugh are the true and righteous inhabitants of Australia. Think of Aunty Jack and Paul Hogan in the 1970s and *Bikie Wars: Brothers in Arms*, currently screening across Australia. Our poets, however, often challenge what could be regarded as a misplaced reverence for idealised entities. Poets and artists often provoke readers to rethink life, relationships, ideas and experiences in unexpected and evocative ways. Poetry is not popular as readers are often obliged to take philosophical, emotional and intellectual risks; when we engage with a poem, this can be confronting.