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On the Shoulders of Giants

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A wise man's observation once provided explanation
regarding debts of gratitude to those who've gone before.
To stand on giants' shoulders is to see beyond the boulders
that block our view and hinder us from reaching out for more.

I put my pen to paper in this bush verse writing caper –
quite conscious of the history and tenets that infuse
by very definition, this true Aussie-born tradition
which stirs my beating heart and is the genre that I choose.

A sense of underpinning marked the earliest beginning
as ballads of the convicts shaped the style of things to come.
Their dirges and lamenting, set to verse, were circumventing
the scourge of isolation and dejection felt by some.

The growing population founded schools for education.
As learning levels rose, new generations found a voice.
When entertainers travelled, songs and stories were unravelled
to goldfields and to squatters who selected land by choice.

Some poets felt a duty to extol the rugged beauty
of landscapes which transcended all the scope their words expressed,
while others told the stories filled with drama, shame and glories,
of pioneers and outlaws as they pushed out further west.

A golden age was dawning! Times of turbulence were spawning
much comment based on modern themes, as Federation loomed.
The Bulletin would quote it as our master wordsmiths wrote it,
and all across the land poetic portions were consumed.

They told of droving cattle, fighting fire and waging battle
with fiendish floods and parching droughts, to tame the rugged bush,
and how, by campfire's flicker, seeds of mateship sprang up, quicker
than city people knew as they competed in the "push".

The struggles were ongoing, yet a sense of hope was glowing through penship of our poets as they sang the nation's song. We stood a little prouder as our rhyming verse grew louder and helped us forge identity – the place where we belong.

We loved and learned to savour the vernacular and flavour of speech that no amount of spit and polish could disguise. We joined in tears and laughter, shared those dreams of “ever after”, and saw ourselves reflected in the larrikin's bright eyes.

Through years of fickle fashion, some have lost that early passion, but though new forms of poetry block rhyming verse from view – like urban grass when banished, it has never really vanished, but lies in wait for drops of rain to make it sprout anew.

At festivals and musters, devotees spring up in clusters. Performers love to feature it along grey nomad trails. Groups keep alive the mission of the written competition with tireless volunteers whose dedication never fails.

Now times are swiftly changing – views and values rearranging – so some have questioned relevance of art forms such as this. But can we just efface it, supersede it or replace it with nothing? Can we be content with simply “hit and miss”?

True bush verse needs protecting. We should show we are respecting the legacy bequeathed to us by those before our time. It must remain unbroken, whether written down or spoken – to lose it to oblivion would surely be a crime.

Through tragedy and humour, true life stories, yarns and rumour, we wend our way as inspiration guides each rhyming pen to tug the heartstrings tighter, and to paint the picture brighter. So wield the wand of words – and make Australia grin again!

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