

Australian identity through poetry essay sample

[Parts of the World](#), [Australia](#)



The Australian identity is as diverse as the country itself. Each and every Australian has a unique perception of Australia, yet there is also a common awareness of Australia as a whole. The Australian identity also concerns the way Australians are viewed by other people. There are many different aspects to this identity, which include historical icons, such as bushrangers and convicts, and more recent developments in Australia, such as the surfing culture, and even our language, which has been adapted over two hundred years to become what it is today. There are many stereotypes of Australia, yet most of these are based on real traditions or quirks.

This essay will analyse the poems *Clancy of the Overflow* written by A. B. Paterson, and compare and contrast it with *Andy's Gone With Cattle* by Henry Lawson. Both of these poems are about life without the men that have 'gone a-droving' in Queensland. Droving is one of the original stereotypes of Australia, and is an important part of our identity.

Clancy of the Overflow is one of 'Banjo' Paterson's most famous works. It is a wistful poem comparing the freedom of droving to the monotonous toil of city life. This is expressed with phrases such as "For the drover's life has pleasures that the townsfolk never know". Paterson uses many techniques to portray the conflicting lives of city slickers and farmers. He uses visual imagery to perfection, painting a vivid picture of 'Clancy', leading a jolly life droving cattle and living under the stars, and then compares it with "the foetid air and gritty of the dusty, dirty city through the open window floating". 'Banjo' also uses metaphor, again to emphasise the differences between city and country life, especially in verse six, with "And in place of lowing cattle, I can hear the fiendish rattle of the tramways and the buses

making hurry down the street” which also appeals to the senses. Clancy of the Overflow is a very ordered poem, using metred verse, with an aa bc dd ec rhyme pattern. Overall, this poem expresses an interesting view of Australia, mainly using contrast to express the point of view. It communicates most Australians’ love of the bush, and the outdoors, and their pride in Australia, and also the very stereotypical, but somewhat relevant ‘ Crocodile Dundee, the average Aussie bloke’ attitude/approach. Paterson spent his most enjoyable years in the bush, doing one job or another, which is something he had in common with his character ‘ Clancy’.

Andy’s Gone With Cattle by Henry Lawson, is also about a cheerful character with a love for the outback. However, Lawson himself was very bitter about the bush, and bush life, although it was the topic of many of his works. He had an unhappy childhood, and was deaf by the age of 14. He was a writer for many newspapers, but although he was a fantastic writer, he often had trouble keeping jobs, because of his alcoholism and depression, and he was often in jail. Mental illness ran in his family, and he even attempted suicide once.

Despite this, he was a well known poet, and he once met Banjo Paterson, and debated with him over their conflicting views of life in the bush. This conflict in opinion is apparent, when comparing Andy’s Gone With Cattle and Clancy of the Overflow. For example, Lawson describes droving as going to “ battle ... ‘ gainst Drought, the red marauder”, and uses personification to express drought as a villain, which sneaks up when you aren’t looking, and

steals away the rain, whereas Paterson describes droving as a privilege, an elusive life of freedom, “ where the seasons come and go”.

Lawson uses many techniques to express the sad, worried and almost bitter mood of the poem, including repetition, with the words “ Andy’s gone with cattle” and “ Andy went a-droving” to stress the fact that ‘ Andy’ is gone. The name ‘ Andy’ is also repeated throughout the poem, to emphasise his importance on the selection he has left to go droving, and how he was taken for granted before he left. This is quite different from Clancy of the Overflow where there is no repetition.

As in Paterson’s poem, Andy’s Gone With Cattle uses metred verse in strictly throughout the poem, but in an ABAB pattern, and uses short lines, which gives the impression of detached resignation to unfortunate circumstances, however in Clancy of the Overflow the mood is more of wistful regret.

In both poems, the main character’s voice is completely silent, the poems are about them, however we do not hear anything of their opinions on the subject matter. We do not know what ‘ Andy’ thought of leaving his home for droving, or what thoughts ‘ Clancy’ had on droving compared to city life.

As with Clancy of the Overflow, Andy’s Gone With Cattle is about a famous and distinctive Australian tradition that is a very important part of Australia’s identity as a nation, which is very dependant on the bush as a source for icons. Most of our national icons are based around the bush, or bush life, for example, bushrangers, squatters, kangaroos and wallabies, backyard barbecues, and flies.

Although at first glance these two poems appear quite similar, they are in truth quite different in the stance that each takes about droving, and the Australian bush. This is supported by the background information on both poems and poets. However both poems express valid views of life in the bush, which is an important Australian icon and a significant part of the Australian identity.