

THE POET'S PLACE IN A DEMOCRACY

Oh yes, I know! The dough's easy for
a poet. He just screams his life away,
accepts the rejections with incidental
cheques from grim editors overcrowded by
bad verse. He should write a novel, but
writes poetry – an hour a day's job.

His

industry channelled through commerce may
piece the rocks' jigsaws together in
a forced labour camp, compelled by hunger.
Ridiculous to whimper he has suffered
from such an affliction upon him since
his youth – realising after 60 he
does not fit into an economy.

The people like beer and football. The brash
politicians like votes . . . own racehorses.
You'll never sew books of poems into
their brains; though they scent there are
poets which a democracy must boast – dead
preferably: like Paterson, Kendall, Lawson
whom they have mockingly effigied on
banknotes (who knows?) may someday have huge
physiognomies of them sculptured on Ayers Rock
beside a colossus of each governor-
general, a judge, a prime-minister and
a 'famous' jockey: cheek by jowl, fittingly
for the tourists to defile – über-all
like the American gods in their Grand Canyon.

Even in their days, not poets, but slaves were
in a more tolerable predicament.
Jefferson drove some, kept a black mistress
who bore him brats. How much of that past
was the true bed of democracy?