

BRED IN THE BUSH
THE AUSTRALIAN RACING NOVELS OF NAT GOULD

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Some years ago I wrote that Nat Gould's 'Australian racing novels are ... close to being works of history. A study of them is long overdue.¹

I regret the unhappy circumstance that has forced me to respond to my own injunction.

Barry Andrews wrote the article on Nat Gould for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (vol. 9), and among his many interests were literature and horse-racing - although whether he would count Gould's novels as literature might be in doubt. He was, in addition, no stranger to popular fiction, nor a snob, and his article on Gould hints at the value the novels might have for the historian.

Nat Gould, born in Manchester in 1857, and dying, back in England, in 1919, spent eleven years in Australia, those between 1884 and 1895. He lived principally in Sydney, but also spent time in Brisbane and Bathurst, and travelled extensively in the eastern colonies. He was a journalist, but whilst in Australia became a novelist, having his racing serial 'With The Tide', written for the *Sydney Referee*, published as *The Double Event* in London in 1891.

It was such a success that his publishers demanded more, and for the rest of his life Gould obliged, writing four or five novels annually, initially whilst also continuing as a weekly journalist. So prolific was he that his publishers could not keep up with him and at his death there were twenty-two novels in existence that were published posthumously over the years.²

His sales were prodigious, his rewards relatively meagre - for he sold outright the copyright of each novel. His estate at his death was valued at less than £8,000.³ Nonetheless, he enjoyed, upon his return to England, a life of leisure and pleasure, which included gambling.

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Of his 130 or so novels, Barry Andrews tell us 'three dozen or more were set in Australia'. I have identified some twenty-four of these among the shelves-full held in the Australian National Library, the first, as mentioned, *The Double Event* published in 1891, the last, *The Smasher* in 1917, with the majority coming out in the early 1900s, some time after he had returned to England. Twenty-three of these novels are referred to in the text of this article, the exception is *Whirlwind's Year* (1908).

It is, I would guess, a representative selection, for Gould was necessarily a formula writer, shuffling a limited set of plots, characters and attitudes before dealing them out through the medium of his novels. One may be sure that his equine hero (or heroine - or gelding) will always come from behind to win in the last stride - a chancy business with no photofinish in operation at that time; but Nat's nags never suffered from crook or incapable judges, their runs being timed to an exciting nicety.

I have found only one exception to the Gould rule that winners always come from behind. The Outlaw, in *Running it Off* (1892) pp.102-3, wins a run off for the Sydney Cup (in itself an oddity) in a desperate finish after leading all the way, despite the villain letting off a pistol, causing the hero's horse to swerve (but not, of course, the villain's).

One may always be sure, too, that any new chum from Derbyshire, as in *His Last Plunge* (1900), has the right stuff in him. Gould adored the small northern county wherein he spent much of his childhood, choosing indeed to be buried there. In *The Magic of Sport* (1909)⁴ he wrote of

the bright, clean scene of the Peak of Derbyshire! The open air, the green pastures, the murmuring waters of the Dove - most beautiful of streams - the songs of birds, the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the contented grunting of the pigs, the rattling of the milk-churns, the smell of the earth, bathed in dew, the cheerful neighing of the horses, and the thousand and one sights and sounds that make up such a band of harmony as only Nature knows how to conduct.

Gould's predictability, and his concentration upon what he knew (and his inability properly to portray worlds outside his own) has been criticised, most notably in Chapter XII of T.W.H.

Crosland's *Who Goes Racing*, published in London in 1909, but for a generation of readers a Gould novel guaranteed excitement, and within his limits, expertise.

Best sellers, written to a formula, have a particular value for the historian. It is impossible to determine the argument as to whether the attributes of a single author fully reflect the spirit of the age, but with a best seller one can fairly suggest that the points of view being put were at the very least acceptable to a large paying readership. Nat Gould's popularity was based upon his assessment of what people wanted to read.

As for the formulas employed, their constant repetition enables the historian to build up a picture of the aspects of social life that Gould dwells most upon. There is much of incidental value in the novels that an article of this length cannot include. A further study is still necessary, but I have chosen a number of typical and representative themes to which Gould had regular recourse in order to illustrate wherein lies his value to the historian, not only specifically of sport, but of aspects of turn-of-the-century Australia.

Horse-racing is the dominating feature of the novels. "I've got to put races in every one of them or they won't be read", he was reported as saying.⁵ He tried to break away, but *The Doctor's Double* (1896) a story based on fact, of twins, one of them insane, in love with the same girl, was a flop with a public that clamoured for his racing yarns.⁶

Even a novel whose central concern is other than racing, for example *Golden Ruin* (c.1900) involves the major character, Edward Burden, in racehorse ownership once he has become a millionaire, and entangles him again with Bertie Wollaston, the hero he has ruined, by way of a familiar Gould device, the offer of a racing manager's job to a down-and-out.

The racing formula was remarkably consistent. The typical plot was of a man, of good breeding and character, down on his luck - through gambling, family misfortune or malfesance on another's part - who is befriended by a wealthy station owner or racing identity. He goes bush, develops an interest in a neglected, despised or feared horse, trains it, has it brought to

Sydney or Melbourne, where, heavily backed by the hero who has fallen in love with the benefactor's ward or daughter, it triumphs despite the nobbling efforts of a villain or villains who bear a grudge against either the hero or his patron.

This plot enables Gould to show us his knowledge of a variety of aspects of racing, among them the atmosphere of the Sydney Tattersall's Club on settling day, or while wagers are.. being made, redolent of cigars, champagne, despair and greed, yet with a sense of the honour of gentlemen of the turf when it comes to meeting their losses. The very first novel of all, *The Double Event*, opens in Sydney Tatt's and Gould had frequent further recount to that setting to emphasise his admiration for the prosperity and power of Sydney's racing establishment, even when not all of the gentlemen concluding their agreements were truly gentlemen.

Gould knew the other world of betting too, not only the Chinese gambling dens, but the back-street betting shops taking wages on doubles. In *Banker and Broker*, (1893) p.57, Alec Ward, a trainer, visits a typical Chinese den, where sums varying from shillings to hundreds of pounds are gambled away in an ambience of opium and prostitution. The tobacconist's shop as a front for small betting is described in *The Roar of the Ring*, (1900) p.11

"I soon learned the nature of his business. He ostensibly had a tobacconist's shop, but it was used for investing money on horse-races. Now at that time I knew nothing at all about racing, and had- not the faintest idea of what making a book meant. I have some idea now."

His hearers smiled, and nodded, and Joe Shap said - "I should rather think you had, Mark!"

"I could see from the way the business was worked that a dishonest man had ample opportunities of taking money from his employer with very little chance of detection. A 'tote', or totalizator, was worked in the back of the shop, and the first week I was there overtures were made to me by one of the clerks to 'work the tote' - that was how he put it. It was done in this way: Supposing there were twenty horses in a race, and it was a five shilling 'tote'; if an outsider won, there might be only one or two tickets taken on that horse, and then there would be a big dividend. It was suggested to me that we should slip in a couple of tickets on our own account, after we knew what had won.

He knew the course bookmakers, and the excitement engendered by plunges, rumours - fake and true - and the eternal sadness and ecstasy that comes, still, from winning and losing.

Harry Dearden, desperate to get on Workman for the Rosehill Handicap rushes into the ring in Landed at Last (1899) pp.136-7

"Ten to one if you are quick," said Jack.

"By Jove!" said Harry and hurried off to the bookmakers.

James Price saw him speak to Jack Challis, then leave him and go into the ring, and he followed him. There was never any concealment about Harry Dearden. He did not whisper "What price Workman?" but said it out boldly in a half-defiant tone of voice, as much as to say "That's the winner and don't you forget it."

"Workman? Yes, Mr. Dearden - eight to one," said a bookmaker.

"Tens," said Harry.

"No bet; he's well-backed," said the man.

Harry hurried round to different members of the ring; but six and seven to one was the best price he was offered. Away he went back to the man he had first asked the odds. During Harry's absence the bookmaker had laid his book against Workman to James Price, who overheard what Harry Dearden had said. "I'll take sixteen pounds to two," said Harry, panting.

"Can't do it," said the bookmaker. "I'm full against Workman."

Harry muttered an imprecation, and then tore round the ring, jostling against people, who made sundry remarks as to his sanity. Eventually Harry had to accept six to one against Workman, a couple of points less than he could have obtained when he first entered the ring.

He hurried back to the stand and thrust his way among the people until he reached his wife and Bel, who had been joined by Jack Challis. 1

"How hot you are, Harry!" said Mrs. Dearden, looking somewhat disdainfully at him.

The appraisal of horseflesh is always shrewd, as befitted a man who, as a journalist, was a leading tipster who picked the first three (but not the trifecta) in the Sydney Summer Cup in 1887 and who, as a punter, backed the card at Randwick on Metropolitan Day at a time when he was temporarily unemployed.⁷

He believed in breeding, hence the emphasis on the true thoroughbred provenance of seemingly ill-bred station brumbies,

The ring-in is, even today, given the wide-ranging physical extension of Australian horse-racing, by no means unknown. In the less regulated days of which Gould wrote, the possibilities for fraud, of theft, and of unrestricted breeding were greater.

In *Only a Commoner* (1895) the horse, aptly named 'Mystery' is entered 'pedigree unknown' for the Hobart Cup, eliciting intense speculation ("Nothing without a pedigree could possibly win the Hobart Cup" [p.23]). Mystery had, naturally, impeccable breeding - unfortunately its dam, equally aptly named Abduction had been stolen from a New South Wales property; but all is put to rights, the horse not only winning the Cup but kicking the villain to death with a well-placed hoof on the chest.

In *The Smasher* another champion, illegally begot whilst its dam was in the clutches of horse thieves, proves triumphant, as does the horse hero in *Bred in the Bush* (1904). It is a favourite claim of Gould that breeding will out: 'a horse without pedigree is like a man without character' as he wrote (p.18) in *Bred in the Bush*, and none of his winning horses, however unlikely their backgrounds, lack the true thoroughbred strain. Eugenics is omnipresent in all Gould's works - specifically acknowledged in the case of horses, implied when it comes to mankind, although once again there is ambivalence in his treatment of the nature-nurture argument.

The training stables themselves are precisely located and described, peopled with characters from life, steady and honest, dedicated or corrupt. Although a constant advocate of the basic honesty and worthiness of racing, he was aware of the rogueries of doping, pulling, interference in running, nobbling the jockey and so on that could determine a race result.

As in so many of his attitudes, counter-pressures to his beliefs were at work. In love with racing, he was forced, by his very plots - and by his honesty - to acknowledge that there was a criminal element involved, much as there were people who gambled foolishly or too heavily. The melodrama was not, on the evidence of such books of true life reminiscence as A.D. Luckman's *Sharps, Flats, Gamblers and Racehorses* (London 1894), too remote from reality.

For a time when interest in horse racing exceeded even that in cricket and certainly that in football, Gould's portrayal is social history as much as fiction. That interest was exemplified by the Melbourne Cup. For Gould, Sydney-based as he was for the bulk of his Australian sojourn, the Melbourne Cup was, as it was then and now for all Australia, the greatest horse race.

The first novel in this, as in so much else, set the pattern. The 'double event' of the title is the contest for the VRC Derby and the Melbourne Cup - a great double, rarely won, as the Derby is, of course, for three year olds only. Caloola, the hero's horse, wins them both despite its regular jockey being chloroformed on Cup Day ("Great Heavens! They've hocused him, and its only twenty minutes before the race" [p.74]), the substitute jockey having to ride two pounds over.

The Cup, won by Malua (as in real life in 1884) ruins Cyril Melrose; the embezzling banker in *Banker and Broker*. In *Landed at Last* the whole plot is resolved on the Derby-Cup weekend, with Banbury winning sufficient on Workman "to free Rookwood Farm from all encumbrances and set its owner on his legs again" (p.221). Gould waxes lyrical (and perceptive) about the Cup day atmosphere (pp.207-8). Similarly, the victory of Gossalvo (previously winner of the Brisbane Cup) sets Gay Lumley up in *His Last Plunge*. Gould takes Ned Carey (Kelly) to Melbourne at Cup time in *Stuck Up* (c.1900), The Pearl winning as indeed it did in 1871. The atmosphere is one of boisterous bustle, of country folk coming to town, of a city stopping to follow a race.

Another real life Cup, that in which Carbine, 'the most courageous horse that ever looked through a bridle' (p.21), failed to carry ten stone to victory over Bravo in 1890 begins *A Racing Sinner* (1902), but in *Chance of a Lifetime* (1907) the freer scope of fiction allows Keepsake to win the Cup in front of 100,000 people on a brilliant day, it having already won both the AJC and VRC Derbies and the Caulfield Cup!

It is not only major metropolitan meetings and men that figure in Gould's novels. His descriptions of bush races, and of goldfields' meetings show his knowledge of such events, gained at first hand through his stay at Bathurst, and from travellers'

tales from such as Frank Gerald, the actor manager (and much else) whose experiences on the Yilgarn goldfield in Western Australia form the basis for the plot of *The Miners Cup* (1896).⁸

Match races persisted in the country long after handicaps and multi-entry weight-for-age races had taken over in the cities. In *A Straight Goer* (1906) pp.261-2 the miners' race that climaxes the tale is held in Western New South Wales

All over the district the event excited great interest, and men rode many miles to Moraine to be present. There were visitors even from Sydney, and all the townships sent contingents, while the squatters and their hands mustered in strong force. Every house in Moraine was crowded with visitors, who were received with true colonial hospitality, which in cases of this kind is boundless. Harry Ranger had much difficulty in finding accommodation for one quarter of the people who asked to be put up. Every room in the house, at night, contained beds and "shake downs," even the verandahs were occupied by sleeping men who were accustomed to camping out, and thought nothing of it. |

There was much speculation over the various events, wagers between owners being freely laid to considerable sums. The bulk of the miners were in funds, and drank and gambled to their hearts, content. The squatters bet with each other, backing their respective horses, the hands followed suit, and the Dimboola men were always ready to back their champions.

The night before the races had been one of boisterous merriment. Men who had not met for months greeted each other heartily, and went to the Diggers' Rest, which much belied its name on this occasion. Even Sergeant Schaaf was met with a flow of good-humoured chaff which he was sufficiently wise not to resent. As for his troopers, they were having a very good time indeed, and would not have been of much use in quieting a crowd, the members of which they so freely fraternized with.

Clarence Newly saw the potations of the night induced thirst on the race morning, and he calculated that by night time things would be riotously lively.

As the morning wore on the merriment increased, and by the time racing commenced the excitement rose to fever pitch.

In *Running it Off, The Miners Cup, The Dark Horse* (1899), *The Sporting Squatter* (1906) and *The Smasher* there are similar descriptions of community excitement, and Ned Carey's involvement in the Benalla Purse meeting is Dimboola (Gould's Dimboola, that is) revisited (p-105).

Benalla racecourse was crowded with a mixed throng. All sorts of vehicles were present, from the humble labourer's tip-cart to the

heavy drag from Murraystone. Scores of men on horseback, hundreds on foot. The village beauties, in their gayest attire, ogling the Melbourne "swells," and casting shy glances at some of the good-looking young mounted constables, as they strolled about in their well-fitted jackets, tight trousers, and top boots. Fine, stalwart young fellows many of them, and well bred into the bargain.

It was an orderly crowd up till now, and although Michael O'Shea had a couple of booths for thirsty people to refresh themselves within, they had not been much patronised at present.

By the time the second race had been run, however, they were doing a roaring trade.

Despite the fact that his heroes always valued horseflesh for itself alone (although they were never averse to winning a fortune from the bookies) racing in the novels is as it is in real life, an adjunct to gambling. Gould's attitude to gambling holds some ambivalences. Successful wagers particularly upon horses of mysterious antecedence trained by the hero, are the customary means by which he gains, or restores, his fortune and is enabled to live happily ever after. The story of winning the Cup (be it the Melbourne, the Kalgoorlie, the Sydney - or the bush-variety) is prized, but it is 'the collect' that puts the world to rights. Only the discovery of the inexhaustible gold mine rivals the winning bet as the means to the happy end.

Yet Gould despises those who value the racing for gambling alone. In *Running it Off* pp.70-1, he contrasts his hero, Rolf Standish, with his villain, Richard Rushton.

Racing was with Rushton a passion. He had almost a mania for it. But it was not the healthy, wholesome enjoyment of possessing a good horse and seeing it win on its merits that stimulated his excitement. He cared but little for horses except as a means to gratify an end, which was gambling. It was nothing to Rushton if his horse made a gallant fight with a big weight and struggled into second place against some animal with a light impost. He would curse the noble animal that bore his colours well and gallantly if he did not manage to win him his heavy bets. The love of a horse for its own sake was not a feeling Rushton could ever know. He had too base a nature for such a sensation. Here was the vast difference between Rolf Standish and Rushton. Rolf loved a horse, and cared more for it than the amount of money it could win him. He has seen many a well-riden race without having a fraction on it, and got as excited over the result as though thousands depended upon it. When he rode a horse he felt his pulses beat and his whole being glow with pleasure as it bounded under him, rejoicing in its strength and in the mastery of the

rider. The true nature of a man can often be discovered by his actions towards dumb animals.

At other times, Gould is quick to defend the gambling instinct, especially when exercised in relation to racing. In *The Roar of the Ring*, p.46, he declares

To the man who is plodding along, earning three or four pounds a week, the prospect of making as much in a few hours as he can gain in a year is alluring. A couple of hundred pounds down looks far more than the same amount doled out at the rate of four pounds a week. The risk attached to any form of speculation makes it more attractive. There is no more harm in speculating on a horse race than in dabbling in stocks and shares. Racing men have unlimited confidence in each other's integrity. Thousands upon thousands of pounds are lost and won in the Ring, and no formality of any kind is connected with the transaction. A backer takes a thousand to a hundred about a horse and a bookmaker enters the wager in his volume. After the race he pays if he loses and receives if he wins. There is mutual confidence and trust between bookmaker and backer. No receipts are necessary, everything is left to the honour of the parties. In what other business does a similar system prevail?

There is, on occasion, the touch of the worldly wise in Gould on gambling. 'It is', he notes in *A Racing Sinner*, p.86, 'a tendency to bet on every race that beats the backer in the end', and there can be no doubt that Gould knew in detail the methodology and the work-practices of the bookmaking industry. There are a number of technical descriptions of how the market may be fixed - legitimately and illegally - and the hero's success is often due as much to a well-devised coup as to the merit of the horse.

It is not only for their picture of racing that we can use the novels. A whole society formed a backdrop to his horse-dramas. Gould was too honest and too forthright a writer not to say what he thought about some aspects of that society, and, being a popular novelist, was too much a prisoner of his time not to convey and respond to the opinions of the times in which he lived.

Romance comes second only to racing in the novels. Hero wins not only the final race, but in the last chapter, often because of the result of that race, the heroine as well. Villains not only interfere with the running of races, but with the course of true love. Gould mixed much in theatrical circles,

and his women, good, bad and fallen, have many stagy, larger than life characteristics. Women can be sexually attractive, but, because Gould chose never to write a line that could not be read aloud in the family circle, they were always described within the limits of decency.¹⁰ Tilly Briscoe, in *Running it Off*, p.3, is typical.

A beautiful girl. Glowing with health, her cheeks flushed with excitement, and her rosy lips parted in a winning smile, disclosing pearly white teeth, and below a small, dimpled chin. Her hat had come off in the struggle, and her -nut-brown hair floated in the breeze for a few moments and then settled in graceful folds, until it swept the mare's back. Lovely hair! It could not be bought at any price. Nature had adorned Tilly Briscoe with a lavish hand. Her bright eyes, blue as the skies above, were shaded by long, silken lashes - destined to do much execution if ever eyes were. Her neat, compact figure, set off to perfection in her tight-fitting habit, and a ringing voice that thrilled its listeners. This is but a faint picture of the squatter's daughter.

Her wholesomeness is emphasised on the following page, particularly in her rural provenance.

She had no false pride about her. Some town-bred, over-schooled, and over-pampered girls would have called her bad style and have said she was too fast and forward. Tilly was nothing of the kind. She was an open-hearted, free-handed, generous girl of eighteen, with a liberal idea of the rights of others, and a wish to make all around her happy. Not a thought of evil ever crossed the girl's pure mind. She was heartfree, and no man had as yet even aroused the maiden feelings within her. She hated town life, and loved the pure country air. To gallop a score miles at high speed, inhaling the breeze and feeling the high-mettled steed bounding under her, was the delight of Tilly's heart.

The 'modern woman' (of the 1890s that is) gets short shrift from Gould. Nora Heath in *Seeing Him Through* (1897) pp.83-4

detested divided skirts and 'knickers' [knicker-bockers] gave her the horrors. She preferred a horse to a bicycle, and had not the faintest interest in women's rights and ladies' clubs ... she had no ambition to divide herself, as some ladies did their skirts, and turn one half of her anatomy into a mass. She thought womanly ways were best suited to a woman . . . To Nora the 'new woman, was an abomination.

As her reward she marries the wealthy Danby Widdrington 'the manliest of men' (p.283).

Gould's women are bush beauties, heiresses, wronged partners or slatterns. There are women of spirit and intelligence; but

most female intellectual endeavour is devoted to scheming revenge. Lydia Andros in *Golden Ruin* is exceptional in that she is an authoress - only of romances it is true - but Gould uses her as a vehicle for his own amorality.

Her writings were wholesome, and sexual problems troubled her not. She thought it degrading to expose the weakness of her own sex . . . She had learned to pity frail women, whose minds were unwholesome, for she knew their supposed happiness in their mis-called pleasures was a delusion (p.49).

After an unfortunate marriage, one that stifles her creativity, to the gold-mad Edward Burden, (incidentally a remarkable fictional precursor of Goldfinger) a marriage ended by Edward's death, she weds the longsuffering Bertie Wollaston. This enables her to lead a country life, and indulge in proper creativity : 'the charm of maternity was added to Lydia's other attractive qualities, and she quickly proved what an excellent mother she was' (p-251). There is no further mention of her writing.

Olive Thwaites, in *Roar of the Ring* pp.78-9, is another who, literally, embodies and benefits from country virtues.

In the country districts of Australia there is a freedom from restraint and ordinary conventional rules, which must render the lives of such girls as Olive Thwaites far more pleasant than under more stringent conditions ... She loved the country, and well she might, for it gave her health and strength and the bloom on her cheeks, and the freshness of body and soul which rendered her far more attractive than any artificial restorative. There was nothing artificial about Olive Thwaites. She was genuine, sound in body and mind, and would probably have had the bad taste to be disgusted at a problem play; happily for her such false representations of society had never been placed in her way. She cantered her horse on the grass, while the fresh air blew around her, and she gloried in the joy of living.

Gould's rejection of city values in favour of those of the bush is often articulated in relation to women. In *His Last Plunge* pp.109-110, he is typically specific.

These girls would have pined away in the heart of a big city. They would not have understood the sham, artificial life led there, and balls, routs and receptions, crushes and crams, would have bored them, as they do many people who make it a religion to attend them. They were as free as the air they breathed, and as pure. Untainted by false admiration, and still falser compliment, their thoughts were virgin soil from which sprang pure growths and clean minds.

Obviously *Bred in the Bush* could not be without its symbol of country-bred female. Essie Holt, 'a merry, mischievous, laughing girl', is used as a vehicle for Gould's affirmation of nurture (P-17).

Essie, fortunately, inherited her father's constitution, and also his love of station life. Born at Glengarry, she had never known what the delights of a city life were, and it is questionable whether she would have preferred them under any circumstances. She was bred in the bush, a daughter of the lonely plains, the vast unpeopled tracts of land of central Northern Queensland. Environment moulds our natures, fashions and shapes them to suit the locality in which we live, and it was so with Essie Holt. That she had not experienced she did not miss, and like her almost constant companion, Barry Green, she had no idea of cities or crowds, or the rush and tumult incidental to a state of existence the exact opposite to her own.

Gould has occasional recourse to *femmes fatales*. They are, like his bush girl heroines, stereotyped, almost as revealingly so. The villain in *The Smasher* Asher Kitz, has a half sister, a widow whose husband has died in a mad-house. 'A thoroughly unscrupulous, handsome, attractive woman', she was 'dark, brilliant ... her figure exquisite, her face perfectly formed, her eyes alluring, her smile ravishing, a woman men looked at and her own sex admired' (pp.78-9). Kitz attempts to use her to confound the hero, the Gold King of Kalgoorlie, Dick Pedrick, but she proves, after all, to be a good woman. She is punished by sustaining a near-crippling spinal injury, but, wedded to Dick, becomes 'almost herself again' - without, one hopes, the unscrupulousness.

There is often to be observed in Gould an unresolved sexual tension - unresolved at least in that he never gives way to completion of the act he is contemplating describing. The convention of Victorian respectability would dictate that, particularly in the genre he was writing, there be no overt sexual description. Yet at times Gould comes near to violating his own code, always to draw back in time.

In his most melodramatic Australian novel, *Seeing Him Through* - which incidentally has the running page title 'Through Thick and Thin' - the beautiful actress Vera Vecchi (an orphan seized in infancy by Italian brigands) who lives with her putative father,

a villainous racing identity, Paolo, is lusted after by her supposed parent. He drugs her with the contents of 'a small dark coloured bottle' which he had used before to seduce a woman (p-195). Vera is forced to sign a hefty cheque, then threatened with the drug again

'I care for you, Vera. I have watched you grow up from a mere child. I have seen you develop into girlhood, and then grow into a beautiful woman. I have watched and longed for the time when all those expanding charms should be mine. It is because I desire you above all other women that I hate Ross Gordon and have tried to make a tool of Hector St. Albans. I never meant you to marry any other man but myself. If I have been stern with you it has been for your own good. I have had you in my power all these years. Think how I might have used that power. The drug I have had always in my possession, but you have never felt its power until now." You are the woman I have vowed to make my wife, and I shall keep my vow.' (p.204)

She struggles, but is too weak : the drug is again produced.

'You shall drink it all!' he hissed. 'Then you are mine to do with as I will.'

A readership anxious to discover if Vera will suffer the fate worse than death is treated (literally) to an anti-climax (p-207).

She struggled desperately, but he stifled her, and in her weak state her strength soon gave way. In a few moments she had fainted.

'Good!' muttered Paolo Vecchi, looking at her. 'Now for it.'

He took up a glass, poured out a small quantity of water and emptied half the contents of the bottle into it. He then forced open Vera's lips and poured the liquid down her throat.

'I will leave her now,' he said.

He rang the bell violently.

'My daughter has fainted,' he said. 'Please see to her at once. I will go for the doctor.'

When he once more attempts to force the drug upon her, Vera, having discovered the secret of her birth, shoots him - but is acquitted.

Gould, as we have seen in regard to bush beauties and *femmes fatales* is not unobservant of the constituents of feminine

attraction. Kitty Carey, the heroine of *Stuck UP* the novel based closely on the Ned Kelly story (the tragic hero is indeed called Ned Carey) is 'as nature formed her' (P.11).

She was of medium height, and had a splendid figure. Her arms were bare and muscular, far more powerful than some pampered youths' at her age.

She was as nature formed her, and owed nothing to art. Her waist was not confined, but many a city dame would have envied Kitty Carey her exquisitely-moulded shape, which her well-formed bust set off to the best advantage.

Her head was well poised on her shapely neck and shoulders. She had clear, blue, fearless eyes, and a bright intelligent expression. Had she not looked quite so bold and fearless she would have been pretty. But this boldness suited the girl and her surroundings, and Kitty Carey was a decidedly attractive person.

Her nut-brown hair fell in wavy folds down to her waist, and was bound near the neck with a blue ribbon. She had on a plain brown gown, which suited her, but would have been out of place on an ill-shaped woman.

Constable Donnelly (cf. Fitzpatrick in reality) arrives and is, understandably, smitten. 'Tome, give me a kiss', he cries (P.18).

"Leave me alone," she said, as Donnelly caught her round the waist. She struggled to get free, but the constable was a powerful fellow.

She felt his hot breath upon her cheek, and heard a whisper in her ear that made her face crimson. It was more than a kiss she had to fight for now, and Kitty Carey was no maudlin young lady.

Kitty's brothers, including Ned, hearing this, pursue Donnelly eventually to his death.

Passion, flirtation, and near adultery are frequent in the novels, but true love has always to wait until the death of the previous ill-chosen partner (as in, for example, *Golden Ruin* and *Basher and Broker*, or until the hero has sufficient means to enable wedlock (as in, e.g., *The Double Event*, *The Miners Cup*, *A Racing Sinner* and *Bred in the Bush*).

Just as the historian's interests of today have much to do with the position of women in society, contemporary interest in race relations is high. Gould does not fail those who would look for evidence of past Australian racism - although there is the

occasional surprising qualification. The novels convey an unfavourable picture of the Aboriginal, and yet occasionally there is an indication of understanding what might have brought about the degradation he so often describes. In *Lad of Mettle* (1897) a friendly Aboriginal, Yacka (who turns out to be part-European, a device Gould often uses to explain possession of acceptable qualities - acceptable to adults that is)¹¹ replies to the query 'Going in search of the lost tribe?' with the surprisingly modern remark, 'All tribes lost since the white men came' (p.113). Again, in *King of the Ranges* (1902), a foray into early Tasmanian history, a character remarks (p.115)

The blacks are not so cruel as the whites; they do not slay little ones and burn our farms, but they steal, and sometimes kill. They have cause, they have cause! Some of them have been badly used by settlers ...

Bred in the Bush, with its underlying theme of environmental determination of character has its noble blacks, headed by 'a very formidable fellow' King Charlie (who, inevitably, [p.164] has 'some white blood in his veins'), It also has its 'utterly degraded lot, hardly human', but they are so because 'When they come near a town they get demoralised, and take to drink whenever they can obtain it'. What is more, they are provoked to violence because in conflict with armed whites on the goldfields, they are beaten 'and that makes them revengeful' (pp.153-4).

In this same novel Gould departs from his theme to indulge in his customary view of blacks. They are described as generally 'coarse or repulsive' (the women more so than the men), and 'treacherous and jealous' (with again the women more so than the men' (pp.164-166).

Ugliness and treachery frequently occur as features of the Aboriginal, the latter being described as 'an inherent part of his nature' in *The Dark Horse* (p.60), and the physical ugliness contrasted with the beauty of their legends in *Banker and Broker* (p.83), a point also made in *The Dark Horse*, p.184.

The insults delivered to Aboriginals are nothing in Gould's novels to what he has to say about the Chinese. The most repulsive portrayal is of Loo Key, ('for a Chinaman, good looking') 'a bland persuasive villain' in *Banker and Broker*, The

repressed sexuality that is so often apparent in Gould comes close to the surface as he describes the villain's Sydney opium den (p.58)

There were girls in this den, not women, but girls of from sixteen to eighteen years of age. The majority of them had their vile calling stamped in an unmistakable manner on their faces. In a room at the back of the gambling saloon, reclining on benches, were half-a-dozen of these girls, all smoking opium.

The fumes gradually lulled them into dreamland, and then they became an easy prey for the vilest wretches on the face of the earth. The low-bred Chinaman has no equal in his vice in this direction. He invents with devilish cunning, and his victims are so lost to all sense of shame that his vices are readily pandered to.

Horrible scenes, heart-rending scenes are often witnessed in these places of infamy. White slaves in the service of yellow skins. Hideous-looking fiends, at the sight of whose loathsome faces even hardened men recoil. Girls, enticed from their homes and taught the fearful opium-smoking habit, are sought by their heart-broken parents, and, despite their anguish and entreaties, decline to leave their destroyers.

Another den, and another proprietor, Ah Tong, to whom the wretched Eric Crane has recourse in *A Sporting Squatter* (pp.23102) are little different. Ah Tong, 'the almond-eyed celestial' is 'a typical Chinaman, cunning, avaricious, hoarding up his gains, looking forward to returning to the flowery land with the spoils of the white man'. He is obsequious ('sleek, humble, fawning') to the whites, yet he hates them, and plots vengeance which extends to their daughter, as Gould again describes in ambivalent terms.

Daughter of the white men came to his den. When they first entered it they were good to look upon, when at last Ah Tong refused them admission their faces were as hideous² as the ivory god he called upon to wreck their bodies and souls!²

If not evil and repulsive, Chinese are comic. In *The Bush Jumper* (1909), they are both. The hero, Diggory Desmond (Gould was of course always in danger, so prolific was he, of running out of names for his characters) sinks so low early on that 'he even sank to gambling with Chinamen' (p.6). But he retains sufficient manliness to rescue a woman from a den run by a 'heathen brute'. He seizes him by his pigtail, and, dashing him

to the ground, beats him insensible with a stick. Later, on the goldfields, swarming with Chinamen 'like locusts, gathered in heaps', he hires Ah San as a cook, He is at least 'fairly reliable' and gives his opinion of Diggory's child, Derick, in this lovable way.

"Mas' Delly him welly nicey boy, him goody goody boy, me like-a-him welly muchy".

The 1890s was an age of both nationalism and imperialism - in Australia's case of emergent nationalism experienced in literary, sporting and political aspiration. Gould was responsive to these developments. His autobiographical works display those responses, as do the novels. He was an unashamed and at times unrestrained advocate for Australia. Horse-racing Down Under he compared most favourably to the English version

They know how to race in Australia. The courses are well managed, kept in first-rate order, and there is every comfort for visitors in all departments. I expect there have been more improvements made since I left in 1895, but with eleven years' experience in the colonies I can speak with authority and personal knowledge. There is no cramping on Australian courses; crowds are not driven into enclosures, much too small for them, like sheep; there is ample room for all. At Randwick, Sydney, and Flemington, Melbourne, racing is carried on in a way that would astonish English race-goers. The charges are moderate. You can enter the lawn, ring, and paddock for a couple of pounds for the four days on either course. Contrast this with one day at Epsom, Ascot, Newmarket, or Goodwood, when a big event is run for. The stands are ample in all enclosures. There are number boards that can be seen without damage to the eyesight or dislocation of the neck. The numbers are all up on boards before racing commences, and as the horses are struck out their numbers are taken down at once. Saddle-cloths, with a number corresponding to that on the card, are used, so that the horses are easily recognized by the public as they gallop past. This is an admirable plan, and there is no danger of infection attached to it, as some people think. At Randwick and Flemington there is room enough for thousands more than attend the races; it is just the opposite in England. I consider the bulk of the half-crown rings on English race-courses totally inadequate. People are crowded in such small space that it is difficult to see anything at all of the racing. The wonder to me is that they stand it: they would not do so in Australia.¹³

He did not confine his praise to the race-tracks. Apart from criticism of Aborigines, Chinese, larrikins and trade-union leaders,¹⁴ he sprinkled his novels with passages that would have done credit to an immigration brochure,

In *The Miner's Cup* pp.86-7, Alec, an English migrant who strikes it lucky in the West, voices his confidence in Australia

"A huge population will then have arrived on its shores. There will be millions where there are now thousands of people, and population increases wealth. It is an absolute necessity to the welfare of a country, to the making of a great nation."

"And you think, Alec, that in years to come Australia will become a great nation?" she asked.

"Oh yes. Everything points to it. Where she now asks she will in future demand, No Colonial Office will be able to dictate terms to her. The new nation, sprung from the loins of the old, will be the protector of its Motherland, for it is hard to believe that English-speaking nations will ever again war upon each other.

"Australia will rule the southern seas as England does the northern. Her banner will float over a powerful fleet, but it will be the fleet of merchandise, not the fleet of war. Commerce will overpower war, and mutual advantage will band all the English-speaking lands together."

"You are quite romantic, Alec," said Lizzie.

It is noticeable how Gould chooses to see Australia's future as distinct from Imperial control; for him any federation of Empire was to be at least one of equals, with a hint that eventually Australia would prove to be a leader. Staunch admirer of England as he was, he saw much to prefer in Australia, For example, Henry Keyston, a squatter visiting England in *A Dead A Certainty* (1900) p.281 cries out, 'I'm sick and tired of this country, where a man has to knuckle under to all sorts of people if he wishes to push his way. Give me Australia, and station-life!'

A divided mind can sometimes be seen at work. In *A Lad of Mettle* (p.90), new chum Edgar Foster is taken around Sydney by the old seaman, Walter Jessop. He marvels at the sights

The more Edgar saw of the city, the more he marvelled at its wondrous growth. He had been taught much at school about the colonies, but he had no idea such vast cities as Sydney lay on the other side of the world. Young though he was, he saw at once how greatly such possessions as Australia must enhance the power and importance of the mother-country. He saw how widespread the influence and example of England was, and every name and building tended to revive some association with the old country.

He then bemoans the fact that Englishmen are taught so little about Australia. Walter tells him that 'on this side of the world our youngsters are taught more about old England than Australia'. 'That should not be,' replies Edgar.

In *His Last Plunge* the recently arrived Gay Lumley meets an Australian in a train (visiting his parents' native county, which, as it is Derbyshire, guarantees the stranger to be beyond reproach). 'Wonderful country, I believe,' says Gay. 'You bet it is. There's everything to be got there on top of the ground and in the ground' (p.41).

Edmund Boyson, for such is the stranger's name, has no great opinion of some Englishmen. He has himself 'fought for his own land and succeeded', he is therefore contemptuous of the 'lot of idle beggars there are in England, fellows who have never had any occasion to work' (p.67-8).

The book makes constant reference to the wonders of Australia. Lumley, wandering through Brisbane, is impressed by the buildings, and by the 'vitality of the people', unaffected by the heat (p.98). Later the English horse-trainer Charled Mold compares the Melbourne Cup favourably with anything in England: 'We do not see two-mile races in England like that. Probably it would be better if we did' (p.201).

In time Boyson becomes an architect of Federation - and, obviously, something of an Imperial Federationist.

He was an ardent Federationist, and believed in the future of a united Australia. He foresaw the time when the vast continent would teem with millions of prosperous people, and when Australia would become a great nation, with a literature and art of her own; a cultured, intellectual community whose people recognised the indissoluble ties that bound them to the Mother Country, and united them with her, not against the world, but to lead the nations of the world.

There is much else in the novels - a study of Australian mining, the goldfields and of mining speculation would benefit from a reading of them for example, but enough has now been said to indicate how even the most unashamed pulp fiction can be of use to the interpreter of a past age. For Barry, who found in the Ginger Meggs cartoons of Charles Bancks one of the keys to enter Australia between the wars, it would come as no surprise.

Notes and References:

1. W.F. Mandle. 'Sports History' in G. Osborne and W.F. Mandle (eds.), *New History Studying Australia Today* (Sydney 1982), p.84.
2. *Dictionary of National Biography 1912-1921*, Oxford 1927, p.221; J. Welcome, 'Nat Gould Novelist of the Turf', *London Magazine*, vol. 7, no. 5 (August 1967), p.54.
3. *Sporting Globe*, 24 February, 1951.
4. *Ibid.*, 28 October 1950.
5. *Ibid.*, 10 February, 1951; F. Gerald, *A Millionaire in Memories* (London 1936), c.9.
6. N. Gould, *The Magic of Sport* (London 1909), p.145; *Sporting Globe*, 2 December, 1950.
7. F. Gerald, *op.cit.*, pp. 334-44.
8. *Stuck up*, p.105.
9. *Sporting Globe*, 28 October, 1950.
10. See, e.g., *His Last Plunge*, p.128; *Bred in the Bush*, p.164.
11. Cf. N. Gould, *Town and Bush* (London 1896), p.110.
12. *Magic of Sport*, pp.280-1.
13. For larrikins, than whom low Chinamen were not more vile, see *Town and Bush* p.104; for trade union leaders and socialists, *ibid.*, p.148 and *On and Off the Turf in Australia* (London 1895), p.243.