

GIVEN BY GOD, SPORT OF KINGS, OR A MUG'S GAME:
HORSE RACING IN AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

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In 1914, A.B. 'Banjo' Paterson completed a long manuscript, entitled 'Racehorses and Racing', which he hoped Angus and Robertson would publish as a book. In finally giving it the thumbs down, A & R determined that the Banjo's epigraph beginning chapter one, which he labelled the 'Australian Declaration of Independence', would not receive the publicity it appeared to deserve. The Declaration states that:

'All men are born free and equal; and each man is entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of horse racing.'

Paterson's progressive sentiments have not yet been included in our constitution, but who knows in the future? The will of the people might not be denied.

Horse racing is more than just a national sport, it is a cherished part of our cultural heritage. On the first Tuesday in November, for example, Australians young and old, from east coast to west coast, are preoccupied, studying the form credentials in anticipation of a two mile horse race. Frank Hardy wrote some years ago that if

a small fraction of the cunnings, guiles, mathematical skills, thoughts, studies, obsessions, horses for courses cogitations, state of the track transactions, that go into horse racing went into science and culture, we would have bred a race of geniuses instead of idiots.²

Hardy might be right, but if we became a race of geniuses at such a cost, we'd be a pretty bloody boring lot. Visit the Humanities Research Centre, at the ANU, and then imagine if you can a nation of such individuals. No, this country needs its racing.

Fortunately even in Canberra, the place one Australian writer recently rather unkindly labelled one big 'cemetery with lights',³ horse racing infiltrates the daily human transactions in strange and wondrous ways. For instance, driving to work in Canberra each Thursday, it is impossible for me, or any commuter,

to miss the curious cheap little signs at quite a number of traffic light intersections. The cryptic message simply reads: 'TLOTS SAT NITE'. 'Trots Sat Nite.' One wonders what the numerous foreign-embassy officials in the city make of this. wholly meaningful, of course, to native form students of the 'red 'otters' but only another antipodean mystery to the non-initiate. The signs break up the spacious, planned streets, inject a bit of soul.

My other heartening Canberra story concerns Q.E.2, - the Buckingham Palace property holder, this time, not the boat or stadium. Liz lobbed in Canberra early in May for the opening of the new Parliament House. She would scarcely have anticipated, however, being completely upstaged that same weekend by two other truly regal representatives - of the four-legged variety: namely, Beau Zam and Bonecrusher. To their everlasting credit, Canberrans flocked to the airport in big numbers for the arrival of the quadruped royalty; the biped monarch was completely overshadowed. The highlight of that weekend was certainly not the Capital Hill ceremony but the epic finish to the Queen Elizabeth Stakes on the Monday. All the sweeter, I'd have to say, because I took the odds-on Beau Zam. Whereas, if you saw the live T.V. coverage, it was patently obvious that Her Majesty did not. She appears to be a devotee of the 'odds on, look on' school.

Horse racing in Australia is folklore, a movable feast for each succeeding generation. In giving attention to the Turf in their work, then, Australian writers have only been endorsing the established national pattern, obeying the dictates of verisimilitude. In his book on Banjo Paterson, *The Banjo of the Bush* (1986), Clement Semmler writes that 'Paterson alone of any Australian writer has made it [horse-racing] a considerable and enduring subject of his attention'.⁴ Perusing the form on the board of the very smart field of this country's finest creative writers, it is impossible to disagree with him. Yet Semmler mentions, in addition to Paterson, only Adam Lindsay Gordon, Frank Hardy, Cecil Mann and Nat Gould (hardly an Australian writer, since only eleven of his sixty-two years were spent in this country), as writers who have shown any worthwhile interest

in racing, which leads him to the assertion that the 'Sport of Kings' has made only 'a slight impact on our literature'. In fact, racing has had a suitably colourful, distinctive role in the work of major writers as diverse and important as Marcus Clarke, Rolf Boldrewood, Xavier Herbert and, recently, the very popular Peter Carey.

In this paper I will focus attention on the theme of horse racing as it is used, and on occasion abused, in the work of these writers. In the first section I'll give a brief retrospect of racing in the formative early years of the Australian colonies, concentrating particularly on the comments of that zealous, controversial Presbyterian minister, the Rev. John Dunmore Lang, and an English writer of talent who stayed in Australia for a few years in the later 1850s, Frank Fowler. Both Lang and Fowler - early contributors to an infant white Australian literature - assail gambling and the grim bohemian world it supports. Their comments anticipate the second part of my paper, where I'll comment on the writings of Adam Lindsay Gordon and Marcus Clarke as the most instructive early examples of the way later Australian writers - Paterson, Hardy, Dal Stivens, Vincent Buckley, Herbert and Carey - would deal with the racing theme. If Paterson's prolific racing output continues to retain value for the student of literature and racing alike, then Peter Carey's terrific recent novel, *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), integrates the racing motif into the study from yet another individual angle. Carey investigates the psychology, the philosophy, even the spiritual implications of the Punt. This wide spectrum of literary opinion is reflected in my chosen title: is horse-racing given by God to men of 'Christian industry', as the Reverend Oscar Hopkins firmly believes in Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*? Is it Paterson's 'Sport of Kings'? Or is it, as Frank Hardy's novel *The Four-Legged Lottery* (1958) suggests, 'a mug's game'?

In a script he wrote for the ABC in 1935, Banjo Paterson mused on the importance of racing, a subject close to his heart:

Before the North Pole was discovered, some cynic said that it would be discovered easily enough by advertising a race meeting there, when a couple of dozen Australians would infallibly turn up with their horses...6

He's exaggerating, and yet a quick flick through any of the early histories and memoirs of the Australian colonies shows that from the first decades of white settlement horse racing was immensely popular, arguably the pre-eminent sport. As early as 1810, it was the 'leading feature' of a gala day of sports at the village of Parramatta, according to the *Sydney Gazette* of May 5. In October of the same year, a Race Week in Sydney's Hyde Park culminated in the Subscriber's Ball, 'the first liberal amusement instituted in the colony'. Racing was gaining social acceptance.⁷

The residents of Van Diemen's Land, the second colony to be established, displayed a similar devotion. 'Horse racing', a letter to the *Hobart Town Magazine* declared in 1833, 'is the amusement, which is carried on with the most energetic spirit'. The writer, obviously a closet punter committed to propagandizing, went further, steadfastly maintaining that the colony should 'sedulously cultivate this fine and manly pastime'. In the Western Australian colony, established in 1829, the locals were no different. They liked a sport of running after pigs with greased tails, but they loved their horse and pony races.⁸

Unfortunately for the rapidly increasing coterie of colonial punters, while the local law-makers shared their passion, they indulged it more selectively. If Terra Australis was to resemble Sodom, it would do so, the lawmakers decreed, only six days a week. The Sabbath was out indefinitely. A select committee in N.S.W. decided in 1840 to ban horse racing on Sundays, along with 'all other riotous pastimes for amusement or profit'.⁹ Alas, too little, too late; the Australian propensity for the sacrilegious continued unabated, if the 1850 letter home of one recently arrived English emigrant to Melbourne is any guide. A real pommie whinger, this bloke complained that 'I get very dull there is no notice taken of Easter here. I worked all day on Good Friday and Easter Monday the Melbourne races are thought the most of it lasts 3 days but I worked all the time and did not go to see them ...[sic]¹⁰ One can see a bit of a struggle for that poor chap to join Frank Hardy's ideal intellectual elite. The poet John O'Brien was not quite as humourless and preoccupied

when he addressed the same colonial tendency in his poem 'Tangmalangaloo':

And oh, how pleased his lordship was, and how he smiled to say,
 'That's good, my boy. Come, tell me now; and what is Christmas
 Day?'
 The ready answer bared a fact no bishop ever knew
 'It's the day before the races out at Tangmalangaloo.'¹¹

In Australia last century, the horse racing myth, of so much yarning and humour and egalitarianism, was born.

For a good part of the nineteenth century, Presbyterian Rev. John Dunmore Lang made it his business to decry publicly those numerous good-for-nothings in the colony given to racing, drink and general sloth. Lang, who was twenty-four when he arrived in the Antipodes in 1823, would have no truck with Catholicism, sexual licence or the punting passion. In his *Historical and Statistical Description of NSW* (1834), he fumed:

... the march of improvement is much too weak a phrase for the meridian of New South Wales: we must there speak of the race of improvement; for the three appropriate and never-failing accompaniments of advancing civilization in that colony are a race-course, a public-house, and a gaol.⁴⁴

Lang strongly criticized the Governor, Sir Thomas Brisbane, for his patronage and encouragement of racing, referring to him as 'the Patron-Saint of Australian jockeyship'. He would not forgive Brisbane for setting up a racing association (the Sydney Turf Club), 'the certain tendency of which was to deteriorate and to debase the breed of men, notwithstanding its holding forth the chance of improving the breed of horse'.¹³ Obviously Lang appreciated irony as much as the next man, though in summing up the effect of horse racing in New South Wales, he uncharacteristically abandoned humour. Not concerned with whom he offended, he scolded all ranks of the community, maintaining that race meetings were the signal not only for the 'periodical assemblage of all the wealth and beauty of the colony'. This was disgrace enough. They also bore the blame for 'all its vice and villany [sic], and for the consequent recurrence of scenes of gambling, and drunkenness, and dissipation ...'

Lang was not alone in this opinion. A succession of visitors to Australian shores throughout the nineteenth century

were forcibly struck by the connection between gambling and vice. An interesting variation on this pattern, however, was Frank Fowler, a gifted English writer with the right London connections who was forced through bad health to come to Australia in the mid 1850s. His principal publication, *Southern Lights and Shadows* (1859), brief notes on his three years in Australia, became a cause celebre in the colonies because of the condescension of its author when discussing certain local literary people. Fowler also gave considerable space in his book to the much maligned relationship between the convict past of the country and the characteristics of its present population. He identified what he called 'the most hideous developments of old and new world ruffianism', voicing his total opposition to transportation, that system which only made Australia 'a depot for the scum and scoundrelism of the old world'.¹⁴ Fowler described, in Dickensian tones, the particularly seedy slums in Sydney and Melbourne, full of brazen women, hulking bullies and grimy children. Perhaps surprisingly, in this web of despair he identified racing as 'comparatively harmless'. I suspect Mr Fowler had had a few successful days at country tracks when he wrote the following:

Every little Australian settlement has its racecourse. Some townships entirely consist of this, a pound (which serves also for a lock-up), a gibbet with the skeleton of a black in it, and a finger post with 'this is Manchester', or, 'this is Liverpool', painted upon it. Still, somehow or other, races come off in these uninhabited spots, and hundreds of folks gather to take part in the sport. When far up in the country, I came across a bullock driver, early one morning, sitting under a dray 'making up his book...'

Fowler failed, or refused, to establish any connection between racing and the bohemian lifestyle led by growing numbers of Australians in the main urban centres. Racing, for him, was not a component of the 'every-day debauchery' of the colony. Two of his more popular contemporaries, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Marcus Clarke, were more severe. Gordon arrived from England as a fresh-faced though hardly innocent twenty-year-old in Australia in 1853 and Clarke disembarked on southern shores a decade later, aged twenty-seven. Unlike Fowler, both Gordon and Clarke were

destined to spend the remainder of their relatively short lives in Australia. Perhaps accordingly, they had experienced far more of the seamier side of horse-racing than the effete Fowler. Theirs was, to invoke the latest cliché, a 'hands on' knowledge. Gordon loved horses and horse racing, especially steeplechasing; Clarke, in his capacity as a journalist, covered all aspects of the sport for the *Argus* and the *Melbourne Herald*. When committing their responses to print - Gordon as the passionate balladeer, Clarke as the sometimes cynical reporter - both writers establish most of the patterns of response of all Australian writers to follow.

The positive aspects of racing are given an airing by both writers, especially Gordon. These include: the beauty, dignity and courage of thoroughbred racehorses; the excitement and spectacle of Australia's most famous, mythologized race, the Melbourne Cup; the wry humour and individual style surrounding aspects of the Turf, particularly the sub-cultures of race-tipping and race-fixing; and last, but I'm sure for many readers of this journal by no means least, the art, for some the science, of punting successfully. Winning. Gordon and Clarke also canvas, and far more descriptively, the forbidding aspects of the turf. Clarke in particular strips away the glamour often attached to racing to explore what he perceives as its darker underbelly: namely, what punters, punting and bookmaking are really like. In his novel, *Long Odds* (1869), Clarke portrays betting shops as the receptacles of society's human refuse. I have a bit of an idea what he's talking about, having a few years ago regularly frequented the forbidding Darwin betting shops before they become illegal; yet I can't help thinking that Clarke's perceptions were based on bitter and costly personal experience. I'm getting ahead of myself. More of that later,

First, the positive images of the Punt in Australian literature. Gordon is rightly remembered as the first Antipodean man of action to put his experiences into poetry. In his five-part poem 'Hippodromania; or, Whiffs from the Pipe' he explores most aspects of racing. If Part 5 of the poem is 'experience'. then Part 1 is 'innocence'. In the latter, entitled 'Visions in the Smoke', he speaks of his great love of horses:

...if man, of all the Creator plann'd,
 His noblest work is reckoned,
 Of the works of His hand, by sea or by land,
 The horse may at least rank second.¹⁵

There have been many specific tributes to racehorses written since - most, as we know, written about one horse: the legendary Phar Lap. A recent poem in this genre, of infinitely superior quality to the doggerel of the 1930s, is Vincent Buckley's affectionate testament to the Goondiwindi grey, the mighty Gunsynd. It begins:

Yes, the stride announces, coming forward
 he will put this field to the walled
 oval of his eyes, he will divide it
 with the prominent white face.

It's a fine poem, though I admit to bias, having been at Royal Randwick (and backed him) when Gunsynd exploded round the turn in an Epsom, and was never in doubt.

Not all racing tributes in the literature, however, are written to horses. Typically, Banjo Paterson, (of it was said that in his heyday - the 1920s - he could give the breeding of any horse nominated up to three removes back¹⁷) appreciates and eulogizes all aspects of the game. The two-year-old trials, for example:

Nothing in racing is more pleasant than these quiet, after-breakfast trials. The course is sweet with the scent of newly cut grass: the gaunt empty stands seem to sleep in the sun: all the early workers have gone here and left the world to sunlight and to us. There is something restful about the morning sun on an empty racecourse....¹⁸

Paterson admires courage, too, especially the courage of steeplechase riders. Poems like 'Only a Jockey' (in memory of fourteen-year-old Richard Bennison, an apprentice), 'The Open Steeplechase', 'Tommy Corrigan' and the *Bulletin* prose piece 'Concerning a Steeplechase Rider', celebrate the remarkable fortitude and nerve required to be a steeplechase jockey.¹⁹ In these elegies, Paterson invariably eases the pain by conjuring an afterlife where it's always race day. Tommy Corrigan is once again teamed up with the horse that made his name, Lone Hand, in the poem's last two lines:

And let us hope that far land, where shades of brave men reign,
That gallant Tommy Corrigan will ride Lone Hand again.

In one of his best known poems, 'Old Pardon, the Son of Reprieve', Paterson draws together a variety of the reference points in racing literature: Pardon is no thoroughbred, he's a bush horse 'bred...out back on the "Never",' in the best Australian egalitarian rags-to-riches tradition;²⁰ the smarties try to nobble him with 'a regular skinful' of green barley; then, in the poem's conclusion, the Son of Reprieve shrugs off the added load and wins big. The conclusion is familiar Paterson, and clever:

And surely the thoroughbred horses
Will rise up again and begin
Fresh faces on faraway courses
And p'rhaps they might let me slip in.
It would look rather well the race card on
'Mongst cherubs and seraphs and things,
'Angel Harrison's black gelding Pardon,
Blue halo, white body and wings'.²¹

Inevitably in the literature, Australia's greatest horse race dominates. In 'Hippodromania', Gordon writes of the fervour of the fifth Melbourne Cup (1865), with its 'gloss and polish and lustre'.²² Marcus Clarke covered the Cup two years later for the Argus and it is obvious in his article that the passion and the spectacle and the devotion of the entire Australian community were already at an intense level. If, as Clarke says, 'Anglo Saxons are proverbially partial to racing',²³ their Australian descendants were seriously smitten. Of the 1867 Cup, he observed that:

To each and all, bookmaker and spectator, to the rich squatter from the country, clerk from his bank or warehouse, or labourer from the field, the race for the Melbourne Cup was the central point of interest of the day.²⁴

Little has changed in the many intervening decades. On November 1, 1867, according to Clarke, the course 'was in splendid order, the turf fresh and green'. About the only difference between then and now lies in the nature of the paddock attractions. Then, 'nigger melodists practised their customary absurdities'; now it's Toorak yuppies and dinks given to a bit of high-brow foolery.

By the time the celebrated American novelist and speaker Mark Twain visited Australia in the later 1890s, most of the peculiarities surrounding the Melbourne Cup - the myths and the madness - had become institutionalized. In his Australian section of *Following the Equator* (1897), Twain felt bound to comment on this unique southern phenomenon. Melbourne, he remarked, 'is the mitred Metropolitan of the Horse-Racing Cult. Its background is the Mecca of Australasia'.²⁵ He went on:

The Melbourne Cup is the Australasian National Day....I can call to mind no specialized annual day in any country, which can be named by that large name - Supreme. I can call to mind no specialized annual day, in any country, whose approach fires the whole land with a conflagration of conversation and preparation and anticipation and jubilation. No day save this one; but this one does it.

Twain spent most of his time commenting on the spectacle of the Cup, which he felt was 'unique, solitary, unfellowed'.²⁶ He gave little space to, probably wasn't interested in, gambling. Adam Lindsay Gordon, horseman par excellence, was. So much so that he was asked by the editors of *Bell's Life in Victoria* to contribute a poem to their pages in the fashion of the day: an elaborate forecast of the Cup winner, in verse.²⁷ 'Racy dreamers' were all the rage last century.²⁸ In an era of spiritualism, many people considered dreams a more reliable guide to betting success than form on the board. But, as my father has always said, verily there are no short cuts to success where horses are concerned. Gordon, a keen judge of quality horseflesh, laboured through many stanzas of 'Hippodromania' to finally give the nod to Tim Whiffler. He finished fourth. Banjo Paterson, like Gordon a man with impeccable judging credentials, was enticed to try and tip the 1886 Melbourne Cup winner in verse for *Bulletin* readers, in his 'A Dream of the Melbourne Cup', and the Sydney Cup winner in 1899. His Melbourne Cup sling, Trident, also finished fourth. He should have quit while he was near the mark. Of his two selections for the Sydney Cup, one failed to start and the other finished an inglorious eleventh,

Tippling is a tough trade, fraught with peril. As the worldly-wise Billy Borker tells young Jerome Smith in Frank Hardy's *The Yarns of Billy Borker* (1965), 'there's no certainties in

racing...Only two kinds of people punt the horses, the needy and the greedy... It's not a sport mate, it's a lottery with four-legged tickets'. The Billy Borker stories take a humorous look at racing, especially the rorts of the tipping profession. Two shady tipsters, Black Snowy and Integrity Hanson, for example, try their hand at the mail order business, basing their actions on the 'smarties' principle: never give a sucker an even break. Or, as W.C. Fields used to put it, 'never smarten up a chump'. One of Hardy's best creations is 'Don't Tell a Soul' - 'the world's worst urger'. He's described as 'a little bloke with a ginger moustache, wearing a spotted bow tie, pointy-toed tan shoes and a narrow-brimmed hat with a yellow feather in the band', who preys on the racing innocent, such as Hot Horse Herbie's mate 'Parrot' in the story 'The World's Worst Urger'.²⁹ Though they are still about, urgers of the 'Don't Tell a Soul' variety are a dying breed. Racing literature rightly gives them immortality.

More common these days, and far more sophisticated, is race fixing. I'm sure Queensland readers of this paper will know all about this one. Fixing is as old as the first betting on a horse race, and it has been the source-of much of the humour - especially of the tall-tale variety - in Australian racing literature. One of the best scenes in Rolf Boldrewood's minor classic *Robbery Under Arms* (1888) occurs in chapter XLII, when Starlight, the Marstons and Old Jacob Benton, successfully ring-in Starlight's fleet-footed horse Rainbow into the Turon Grand Handicap, of two miles, in front of 20,000 wildly enthusiastic miners desperately trying to lose their dough. The boys expect to get 20-1 but, in the totally realistic way of racing, the word gets out and they're forced to take 8s and 9s. A perfectly respectable prize, as it turns out, because despite Old Jacob's fears of Rainbow being 'got at', Starlight's prize equine possession bolts in.

Again, Frank Hardy and Banjo Paterson produce the most memorable accounts of fixing, Hardy in stories such as 'The Greatest Slanter in the History of the Game' and 'The Smart Bookmaker from the South Who Took His Horse to the Darwin Races',³⁰ and Paterson in a number of wonderfully comic poems.

In his beginners' guide to the turf, 'Racehorses and Racing', Paterson does comment at some length, and with uncharacteristic seriousness, on the potential disaster to the sport of repeatedly rigged races:

How many horses are run with no intention of winning? Can a man who runs honestly hope to have any reasonable amount of success against the unscrupulous? These are questions that the turf has to answer, and if they cannot be answered satisfactorily, if the turf is allowed to sink into a mere gambling hell, and unfair gambling is that, where dishonesty is winked at and successful roguery is admired, then the sooner the turf is abolished the better.³¹

Gordon, in one of his more optimistic moments, penned 'How We Beat the Favourite'. Paterson reacts to such romanticizing with his 'How the Favourite Beat Us'. Printed, significantly, in the Rosehill racebook of November 9, 1894, the opening two stanzas take their place as part of punting - and literary - folklore:

'Aye,' said the boozer, 'I tell you it's true, sir,
I once was a punter with plenty of pelf,
But gone is my glory, I'll tell you my story
How I stiffened my horse and got stiffened myself.

And the trainer came with a visage blue
With rage, when the race- concluded:
Said he, 'I thought you'd have pulled us through,
But the man on the black horse planted too,
And nearer to home than you did!'³³

Similar interaction between fate and human avarice causes the fix in 'A disqualified Jockey's Story' to go wrong. Paterson, however, does write of the odd success - for example in the three-page, three-scene unpublished drama entitled 'Shakespeare on the Turf', sub-titled 'A Winter's Turf Tale', and also in the poem 'Father Riley's Horse', all about Father Riley's smoker in the Riley's Crossing steeplechase.³⁴ The plan in the latter poem, concocted to the last detail to help all the helpless and poor of the area, succeeds admirably, having been predicted by Hogan the dog poisoner, an 'aged man and very wise'. Hogan is a sort of Australian turf equivalent of Wordsworth's leech gatherer, Stoic, immovable, above all, race-smart,

The message of even the humorous poems in our racing literature is overwhelmingly Billy Borker's adage: there are no

certainties in racing, so cop it sweet and laugh about it. Which leads to the central punting paradox: a little success and knowledge can be a dangerous thing. While excited by the prospects of monetary gain with Rainbow in the Turon Grand Handicap, Dick Marston (of Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms*), philosophizes accordingly:

My word, Australia is a horsey country, and no mistake...With the exception of Arabia, perhaps as they tell about, I can't think as there's a country on the face of the earth where the people's fonder of horses....And a horse race, don't they love it? Wouldn't they give their souls almost - and they do often enough - for a real flyer, a thoroughbred, able to run away from everything in a country race.³⁵

so far so good. But then, in the midst of this lofty and intoxicated exaltation, a caveat:

The horse is a fatal arrival to us natives, and many a man's ruin starts from a bit of horse-flesh not honestly come by

Warnings such as this, recalling John Dunmore Lang's forecasts of misery and suffering, recur throughout the literature. Story upon story of the anguish of betting on a horse race. As their writing clearly demonstrates, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Marcus Clarke were failed punters, Both might well qualify as Lang's 'gentlemen of the first rank', in unwitting league 'with the veriest publicans and sinners' in Australian society because of their interest in racing.³⁶ Gordon becomes totally cynical by the end of 'Hippodromania', arguably after a succession of losing investments. His epilogue begins:

He wins; he wins, upon paper,
He hasn't yet won upon turf,
And these rhymes are but moonshine and vapour,
Air bubbles and spume from the surf.³⁷

He's even more frank at the end of Part II, on the score of tipsters and tipping:

He wins all the way, and the rest - sweet they say,
Is the smell of the newly turn'd plough, friend,
But you smell it too close when it stops eyes and nose
And you can't tell your horse from your cow, friend.⁵⁸

The rest for Gordon? The rest is bullshit. Marcus Clarke no doubt wished he'd taken Gordon's wise words to heart before he

ventured to Flemington for the Melbourne Cup carnival in 1867. His first *Argus* article is suitably bright and optimistic. There were many winners in the programmes to come. His second article, however, written just three days later, contrasts markedly. The sentiments expressed in the opening lines of his second instalment will strike a responsive chord for those readers with a weakness for the Punt:

We have come to the conclusion that all (sportingly speaking) is vanity. We have just returned, weary, dusty, and penniless from the races.

Where now the green turf of Clarke's earlier article? Whither the gay spectacle? Ah, what a truth is here my friends. If you're doing your dough, no amount of sunshine or fine racing can revive your spirits. Conversely, even if it's pouring with rain, and you're backing successful mudlarks, the sun is beaming within you. Clarke's inner sun had well and truly set that day. He attacks the fashion-conscious women for looking good 'to the detriment of their husband's banking accounts'; he expresses disgust at not only having to lose his money, but to lose it in the same betting area as 'well-known ruffians'; and he laments the numerous-alternative ways of losing your money at the track between races. His inability to resist the cries of the con-men obviously prompted this outpouring:

For our part, the 'humours' of a racecourse are delusions. Do we not all know what they are? Have we not all played 'doodlembuck', 'aunt sally', and 'red, blue, feather, and star'? How is it that people can go on year after year being gulled by these fellows?⁴⁰

Clarke, it seems, could indeed continue to be gulled. Furthermore, doing your dough affects your judgement and, sometimes, your state of mind. Clarke is no exception. Bookies at one point are described with tangible resentment:

The greasy gentlemen with the battered faces and the dilapidated corduroys, drove a roaring trade, and the betting-booths were besieged with the shop boys, all 'down' with the gambling fever.

In the unkindest cut of all, it becomes clear that Clarke lost so badly that he had to walk home. All, indeed, is Vanity.

Clarke's *Long Odds* (1869) novel, most of it written after the personally disastrous 1867 Melbourne Cup carnival, reflects the lessons hard earned. In it, horses are pulled and nobbled; racing jargon is castigated as crude and plebeian; race-goers are dismissed as 'crowds of eager turfites'; and the frenetic atmosphere of the betting shop is masterfully captured:

'Five to one! - Fifty to five! - In ponies? - No, can't do it, my lord! - I'll lay against Fly-by-night! - Fifty to five against Lemon-peel! - How are you, Jack? - Ha, Fitz! - Vell - vell! no m'lord, 'pon my sough, can't do it at the prish! - Well, Windermere, when did you come back? - Ministry going out? - nonsense! I heard it on the best authority! - How is la belle Helene? - Och, don't mention her, the little whiper! - Twenty to one! - Give me a light, Tom, will you! - Seen the 'oss last night! - Sam Dowton came down - lay in a ditch out there by the castle, rheumatism in his back, and can't walk! - Ha, mon cher Vitz Vederique, je vais mes compliments! - How do', Gablentz; broken 'nother bank? - I'll lay against Andromeda! - What's your figure? Done with you! - Haven't the honour of your name, sir. - A modest pony. Smashed up! - Bolted from college with some women. - Irish Church must go - As fast as you can clap your hands. - S'elp me, but I saw it with my own eyes! - Too much weight - never catch her! - A hundred to two! - Remember me to the old boy! - Nantwich will do it. - Poor old Snuff-box! - Who's that man backing the Cardinal? - Calverly - rich Australian. - Ah, gweasy, gweasy! - Sixty to one, sir; yes, sir, in monkies. - Anything in my way, my lord? - The neatest leg and foot I ever say in my life - give you my honour - danced the Romalis in the market-place - good cigar - stopping at the Bell - hot grog - broke his neck - Rome - Newmarket - carries two stone - lost my hat - ecarte in the carriage - Fly-by-night - Lemon-peel - best run of the season - over the mahogany - chaff - ruined - broken - done - lose your money - damme, sir, you're on my toes,' etc. etc.

Banjo Paterson and Frank Hardy also address this dark side of racing at some length. Having dealt with the background to the Turf in the early chapters of 'Racehorses and Racing', in chapter IX (entitled 'Backing 'Em'), Paterson ventures, as he puts it.

...into the wild, whirling maelstrom that makes up a modern racecourse. Owners, backers, bookmakers, trainers, jockeys, battlers, hard-heads, touts, and whispers; ponies, potates and prawn merchants; actresses, society leaders, ladies, wives and daughters of the populace...what a kaleidoscope of humanity, what a fascinating gamble is here presented!⁴²

Paterson is hardest on the sleaze element of humanity at a racecourse. Like Hardy in his sombre realist novel *The Four-Legged*

Lottery (1958), Paterson describes in detail the types encountered: 'knowledge boxes', 'hard-heads', 'whisperers', 'battlers', 'runners' and good old 'urgers' and 'hangers on', like Dear Boy Dickson and Spider Ryan in *The Shearer's Colt (1936)*.⁴³ With such a variety of con-men at the course, little wonder that the innocent and naive are usually separated from their money.

These, the brute realities of racing, lead me to the third part of my paper: discussion of those writers who move beyond the Nat Gould's clichés to explore new turf terrain. I'll look at Frank Hardy, again the Banjo and, more recently, Peter Carey. Each writer approaches the subject in a different way. Hardy graphically portrays the horrors of betting through the increasingly tortured and aberrant acts of his three principal male characters in *The Four-Legged Lottery*: Tom Roberts, his son Jim Roberts and Jim's friend and the novel's narrator Paul Whittaker. When Jim was ten, his father Tom already

...lived from race day to race day. Like most such men, his reading was confined to the racing columns of the newspapers and to the special racing sheets.⁴³

Tom, we learn, 'was smitten with those gambling habits which keep bookmakers wealthy', He could also be deceitful, All these traits return to haunt the son, Jim. He, too, is dishonest and capable of stealing from his friends and his mother 'to satisfy a craving....' Finally, the narrator falls victim to what is labelled 'a perversion', betting 'like a man demented'. Tom dies, a husk of a man; Jim is hung for the murder of his local S.P. bookie; while Paul is left to cool his heels in gaol (for fraud) trying to make sense of the tragedy. Hardy clearly endorses the sentiments of Paul Whittaker and another character in the book, Gerald Roberts, who maintain that 'The game is run to make money for big-business interests.... The poor rank-and-file punter runs a bad last; he almost always loses; the game is conducted expressly to exploit him'. The melodramatic ending of the novel (Paul reliving Jim's execution), reinforces this class interpretation.⁴⁴

Banjo Paterson's reaction to the pitfalls of racing is decidedly less doctrinaire, If the betting of a percentage of the population can deteriorate to the point of being 'a craze', or even a 'disease', then the problem has to be treated practically. Paterson's 'Racehorses and Racing', and a 'wireless talk' he once gave, are veritable mother lodes of helpful hints for the prospective punter, compendiums of invaluable knowledge of the racehorse. The maxims and anecdotes come thick and fast:

An ounce of luck is worth a ton of judgement.

He is a ruined man and the son of a ruined man who buys horses to cure them.

Old Arabian proverb

Racing is, on the average, a losing business.

If you back favourites, you'll have no laces in your boots
English bookmaker, Joe Thompson

If you back outsiders you'll have no boots.
- same source

I don't know which is the hardest, the human race or the horse race.

If you don't put down a brick you can't pick up a castle.

Betting is like drinking and card playing; it's all right in moderation...⁴⁵

- and, finally, the allegory in the three lines opening chapter xv of 'Racehorses and Racing':

Bookmaker's Son: Doctor, run quick! Father's gone mad.
Doctor: How do you know he's gone mad?
Son: He's gone down town backin' 'orses!⁴⁶

It is this punting parable which anticipates the subject matter of the last book I want to discuss: Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988). Carey's two protagonists, Oscar Hopkins and Lucinda Lepleistrier, the obsessive and compulsive punters respectively, wrestle with their passion for gambling throughout the book. Oscar, born into a strict Plymouth Brethren family, decides through a strange game - a glorified toss of the coin - that he will walk the spiritual path of an Anglican, with the help of the pitiful local minister, the Reverend Hugh Stretton. Ultimately Oscar heads to Oxford, and Oriel College, where he is

exposed, not to the more elaborate and sustaining of High Church comforts, but to a Mr Wardley-Fish - you guessed it, a student betting man, given to regularly singing this ditty:

Oh, I like the track, I love the track,
 'Tis torture sweet
 'Tis the scourge, the rack.
 But I love the track, al alack,
 I love the track, alack.⁴⁷

Shortly after they meet, Wardley-Fish enquires of Oscar (whose Oxford nickname is Odd Bod): 'I say, Odd Bod, do you like a flutter?'⁴⁸ Oscar doesn't, but he will. They head to Epsom, though Wardley-Fish proves himself to be a less than imposing teacher. Having lectured Oscar at length to avoid becoming 'a plunger', an 'opium eater of the track' with a 'sordid appetite for gambling', and having explained his intricate betting system at length, no sooner is Wardley-Fish in the Epsom gates than he falls victim to what Paterson would call a 'whisperer' or urger. By this time, however, Oscar is completely unconcerned, being personally convinced that God has chosen the betting avenue for him and will 'make funds available'. Indeed, the 'Almighty would be Oscar's source of "information".' Would we were all so lucky. When Oscar's first horse wins, the case history of a pathological gambler begins; Oscar, however, is a special study, because he firmly believes that 'God's hand is everywhere about - book-makers' favourites boxed in at the rails, carried off at the turn, interfered with, broken down, playing up at the barrier...'⁴⁹

After years of careful planning and refining his system, Oscar ends up with sixteen black clothbound journals - books, we are told,

...intimately involved with his life, were his life, his obsession, his diaries, his communion with his God, his tie to the monster who must be fed.⁵⁰

Hence, when sometime later, in the chapter called 'Confession', Lucinda asks for absolution from Oscar and doesn't get it, she confronts him in a scene which is the moral and spiritual climax of the book:

But you have not absolved me.

- to which he replies:

Where is the sinOur whole faith is a wager, Miss Leplaistrier. We bet....we bet there is a God. We bet our life on it. We calculate the odds, the return, that we shall sit with the saints in paradise.⁵¹

Oscar simply won't accept that god could 'look unkindly on a chap wagering a few quid on the likelihood of a dumb animal crossing a line....'

So, punters, can we take comfort from Oscar Hopkins' spiritual investigations? If he is right, then the after-life might well be Banjo Paterson's extended Spring carnival, where those of us lucky enough to get a ticket through the heavenly turnstiles are destined to enjoy one long winning streak, But he may be wrong, in which case we're all mugs.

Notes and References:

1. A.B. Paterson, *Racehorses and Racing*, in Rosamund Campbell and Phillipa Harvie (colls.), *Songs of the Pen - Complete Works 1900-41* (Sydney, 1983), p.275.
2. Frank Hardy, *The Unlucky Australians* (Melbourne, 1968), p.18.
3. See Gordon Francis, *God's Best Country* (Sydney), p.36.
4. Clement Semmler, *The Banjo of the Bush* (St Lucia, 1974), p.195.
5. I have not included Xavier Herbert in my discussion in this paper because the theme of horse racing in his magnum opus *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975) is dealt with at some length in an earlier article, See David Headon, 'To See a Racecourse Become a Pandemonium: Horse Racing in the Northern Territory in the First Decades of White Settlement', *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 3, NO.2 (May 1987), pp.137-51.
6. Quoted in Semmler, *op. cit.*, p.194.
7. See Frank Crowley, *Colonial Australia 1788-1840* (A Documentary History of Australia - Vol. 1) (West Melbourne, 1980), pp.173, 176,
8. *Ibid.*, p.456, 525-6.
9. Frank Crowley, *Colonial Australia 1841-1874* (A Documentary History of Australia - Vol. 2) (West Melbourne, 1980), p.12.
10. *Ibid.*, p.159.

11. John O'Brien, 'Tangmalangaloo', quoted in Stephen Murray-Smith, ed., *The Dictionary of Australian Quotations* (Richmond, 1984), p.204.
12. John Dunmore Lang, *An Historical and Statistical Account of New South Wales, both as a penal Settlement and as a British Colony* (2 vols.) (London, 1834), I, p.173.
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16. Vincent Buckley, *Golden Builders and Other Poems* (Sydney, 1976), p.27.
17. Semmler, *op. cit.*, p.210.
18. Paterson II, *op. cit.*, p.294.
19. Paterson I, *op. cit.*, p.52, 158, 218, 263-5.
20. On this point, see also Paterson II, *op. cit.*, p.697; Gordon, *op. cit.*, p.87; and Rolf Boldrewood, *Robbery Under Arms* 1893; repr. in *Rolf Boldrewood*, ed. Alan Brissenden (Portable Australian Authors), (St Lucia, 1979), p.326.
21. Paterson I, *op. cit.*, p.64.
22. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p.85.
23. Marcus Clarke, 'The Turf at the Antipodes', *Argus* (November 1 1867); repr. in *A Colonial City: High and Low Life - Selected Journalism of Marcus Clarke*, ed. L.T. Hergenhan (St Lucia, 1972), p.175.
24. *Ibid.*, p.177.
25. Mark Twain, *Following the Equator*, 1897; repr. *Mark Twain in Australia and New Zealand* (Middlesex, 1973), pp.161-3.
26. *Ibid.*, p.164.
27. See Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp.375-6.
28. See Headon, *op. cit.*, pp.146-7.
29. Frank Hardy, *Billy Borker Yarns Again* (Melbourne, 1967), p.17.
30. Frank Hardy, *The Yarns of Billy Borker* (Sydney, 1977), pp.70-2; Hardy, *op. cit.*, pp.48-53,
31. Paterson II, *op. cit.*, p.301.
32. Paterson I, *op. cit.*, p.221.
33. Paterson II, *op. cit.*, p.147.

34. *Ibid.*, pp.435-7; Paterson I, *op. cit.*, p.337-8.
35. Boldrewood, *op. cit.*, p.330.
36. Lang, *op. cit.*, p.174.
37. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p.101; see also Gordon, p.98.
38. *Ibid.*, p.90.
39. Marcus Clarke, 'The Melbourne Spring Meeting', *Argus* (November 4 1867), repr. in Clarke, *op. cit.*, p.179.
40. *Ibid.*, p.180.
41. Marcus Clarke, *Long Odds* (Melbourne, 1869), pp.302-3.
42. Paterson II, *op. cit.*, pp.308-9.
43. *Ibid.*, pp.314-17; p.674.
44. Frank Hardy, *The Four-Legged Lottery* (London, 1958), pp.10,61, 75, 170-1.
45. Paterson II, *op. cit.*, pp.283, 285, 289, 320, 555, 557,
46. *Ibid.*, p.337.
47. Peter Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda* (St Lucia, 1988), p.111.
48. *Ibid.*, p.106.
49. *Ibid.*, p.108, 117, 180.
50. *Ibid.*, p.223.
51. *Ibid.*, p.261.