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Girl number twenty: Towards an anthology of creative writing on sport by Australian women

Abstract:
While women are equally engaged in the practice of sport, is active participation enough to embed them within the cultural narrative of Australian sport? This article examines women's cultural knowledge of sport, games, and physical activity represented in literature, especially memoir, creative fiction, non-fiction, and poetry.

Biographical note:
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Introduction

In his popular 1854 serialised novel *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens created the character Thomas Gradgrind, a school superintendent described as a "man of facts and calculations" (Dickens, 1931, pp. 2-4). Gradgrind calls out an unknown girl in his class whom he addresses as "Girl number twenty". The girl identifies herself as Sissy Jupe, and when asked "what is your father?", she replies that he "belongs to the horseriding". Not satisfied with this explanation, Gradgrind interrogates Sissy further and concludes her father to be a "veterinary surgeon, a farrier, and horsebreaker" when, in fact, he works in the circus. Gradgrind turns on Sissy, and demands, "Give me your definition of a horse". Unsurprisingly, Sissy is thrown "into the greatest alarm by this demand" and Gradgrind quickly declares "Girl number twenty unable to define a horse!" The superintendent turns to a boy, Bitzer, for a definition. Bitzer confidently recites a zoological definition of a horse "Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty-teeth" and so on. Sissy is humiliated and "would have blushed deeper, if she could have blushed deeper than she had blushed all this time". Ironically, Girl number twenty, herself a member of the circus, knows far more about horses than any of her classmates, a situation all too familiar in women's sport in Australia.

It is a truth, universally acknowledged, that to understand the history of women and sport, research must extend beyond the back pages of mainstream newspapers. But the absence of women from popular press coverage of sport does not mean an absence from the wider sporting narrative. Rather, it requires alternate sources to be located and interrogated. And it requires the definition of what society regards as "sport" to be expanded. In addition, these alternate sources must be "read" with different eyes. In researching *Half the Race: A History of Australian Women in Sport* (Stell) in the early 1990s, it was considered radical to turn away from the back pages of newspapers and sporting journals and instead turn to such sources as women's magazines, to school reports and histories, to university records and archives, to art, photography and film, and to memoir, creative fiction, and non-fiction. Here among these expanded resources can be found women's strong and consistent participation in sport. Sport as part of life, part of childhood, part of girlhood, and part of womanhood. With the resources thus available it can be easily argued that women hold their own in sport participation. They are omnipresent, competent, and experienced. But is active participation enough to embed them within the cultural narrative of Australian sport?

The purpose of this review is therefore to build the contribution presented in *Half the Race* and work an anthology of creative writing on sport by Australian women writers. At the time of writing, no such work exists in Australian literature. There are works that touch on creative endeavours in Latin America, such as *Futbolera: A History of Women and Sports in Latin America* (Elsey & Nadel, 2019) and *Football and Literature in South America* (Wood, 2017) and a range of works that tend to focus on sports journalism (see Schoch, 2013, for example); however, despite growing interest in the field, examples of academic scrutiny of creative writing related to Australian women's sport are extremely limited (Symons, 2019). If we are to place women comfortably and centrally within the sporting narrative, we must also examine

women's cultural knowledge of sport represented in all forms of literature. We must look for "Girl number twenty" hidden in every classroom.

Memoir

Women's knowledge of sport as narrative can be classified into four genres – memoir, creative non-fiction, creative fiction, and poetry. Rather than these categories being fixed or exclusive, they inform each other, and draw on traditions in Australian literature where women are not only part of the narrative but also control and write the narrative. In *Half the Race*, I made use of the memoir genre, especially in the chapter "Outdoors in the Outback" (Stell, 1991, pp. 140-154). This chapter drew on stories of women who had grown up outside cities, and their knowledge and competence in horse-riding, horse breaking, and rough riding; as well as shooting and fishing as a part of their daily lives; and picnic races, boating, inland swimming, tennis, and other team sports as part of their leisure and recreation time. Patsy Adam-Smith's *Hear the Train Blow* (1987), Mary Durack's *Sons in the Saddle* (1983), Connie Miller's *After Summer Merrily* (1980), Jessie Street's, *Truth or Repose* (1966), Roslyn Taylor's *Your Hills are Too High* (1986), and Judith Wallace's *Memories of a Country Childhood* (1977) all informed the chapter. Adam-Smith, who grew up in rural Victoria in the 1920s, wrote "there was never a time in our lives when we couldn't ride" (1987, p. 38). She recounts that her father laid down a tennis court at their homestead (p. 86). Although not an everyday event, Adam-Smith draws us in to the action of her mother running in the "Married Ladies Race", part of the picnic races at a country fair:

> In a few minutes she was racing down the unmarked track, her shoes in one hand, the other holding her hat on her head. Sixteen women were in the race. The men came over from the wood-chopping arena to watch. We could hear Dad shouting, "Come on, Birdie! You little beauty" And Mum had won … "Put your hat straight", she reprimanded me. "Wherever will people think we've come from!" (p. 16)

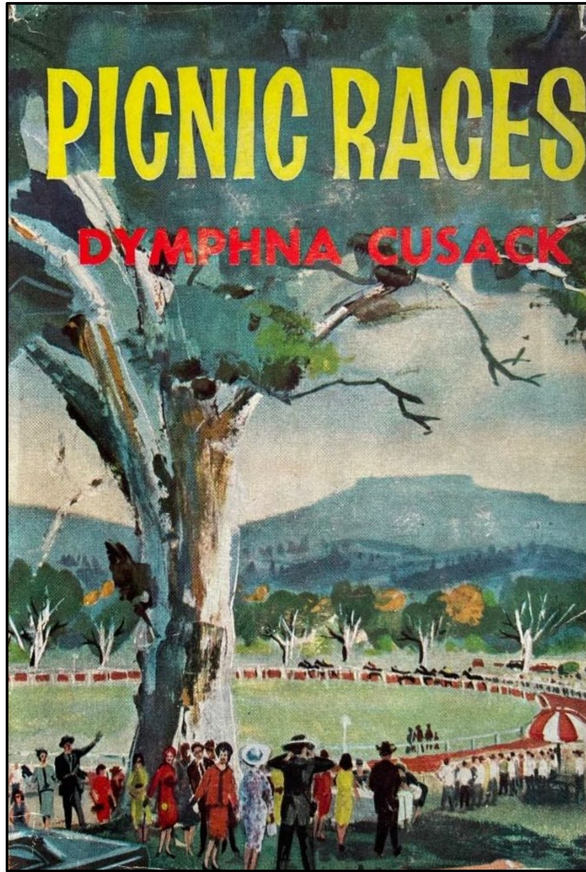

Figure 1: Cover of Picnic Races by Dymphna Cusack (Readers Book Club, Melbourne, 1963)

Not only has Adam-Smith captured the sights and sounds of the race, she also overlays the competition with an understanding of the social complexities of country life. In New England, New South Wales, Judith Wallace and her sister were each gifted horses by an aunt. Wallace recalled, “she transformed our lives. From then on we practically lived on horseback” (1977, p. 52). Wallace details how she and her sister were thwarted in their attempts to enter the rough riding events at the local rodeo:

> The next time there was a rodeo on we thought we would like to try our luck. However, when we went up to the chutes and asked to be included, the men looked at us in disbelief and embarrassment and we never did get a turn. Mother was rather disappointed. (p. 52)

Again, referencing the attitude of Mother conveys an additional level of expectation and underlines a level of social acceptance despite the men’s hostility. After moving to the city, Jessie Street (1966) later recalled her childhood on the upper Clarence River in New South Wales: “I used to swim in the river with some of the [A]boriginal women whom I admired immensely as they could swim underwater for quite a distance and come up in unexpected places” (p. 16).

These titles only touch the surface of the wealth of women’s writing on sport in memoir as an integral part of their childhood in the country and as part of the accepted social mores. Sport may be a casual passing line, a minor incident, or central to the story, but whenever it is present

the use of sport often demonstrates a deep understanding and appreciation of the role of games and physical activity in women's lives. Similar non-fictional accounts exist in the memoirs of writers such as Barbara Corbett. Corbett's memoir, *No Ordinary Childhood* (1994), recounts growing up in the 1920s, when physical activity around the water is a daily event at Dora Creek, west of Lake Macquarie:

> for that little boat added a whole new dimension to my life. It was unpredictable, full of spirit! It was like a playmate. What long happy hours I spent, racing, swooping and chasing that little gull-like craft. Adjusting the sails so it would go straight, or in great lazy curves. (p. 28)

Similarly, in Ellen Campbell's *An Australian Childhood* (1892) at Carcoar, New South Wales:

> Bathing in the creek used to be a very favourite amusement of ours in the long hot afternoons, and we had a most delightful place for it, a deep shady hole underneath a small waterfall, where we could splash, swim, and dive to our heart's content. (p. 11)

The letters of colonial emigrant Rachel Henning written in 1862, and published together to constitute a form of memoir, demonstrate a deep knowledge and interest in cricket, riding, walking, and climbing. In his 1969 foreword to the letters, which he also illustrated, artist Norman Lindsay noted "Most of all, there is the exhilarating cult of the horse. She becomes a fine rider, breaks her own horse" (as cited in Adams, 1985, p. vii), yet some of Lindsay's drawings that accompanied the text patronisingly mock Henning's adventurous spirit on various excursions and expeditions (pp. 228, 276). Writing of cricket, Henning reveals an understanding not only of cricket scores and performance, but of the complex colonial relations present in any cricket match:

> You will see in the papers the result of the cricket match between England and Victoria. I thought England would win, but nobody expected such a victory as it turned out – that, 11 men to 18, they should win the match in one innings, with a hundred to spare. The numbers were: Victoria first innings, 117; 2nd innings 91; total, 208. All England first innings, 305; winning with 97 to spare. This ought to take down the colonial "bounce" a little. The English players are coming to Sydney next, I believe, as the Sydneyites wish for a beating also. There was some talk of getting them up to Bathurst, but since the result of the Victorian match came out there has been nothing more said about it. It was a most audacious thing of the colonists to challenge the first players in the world, and to imagine that they could teacher their respected Grandmother. (as cited in Adams, 1985, p. 81)

Creative non-fiction

While memoirs about childhood are often published for their content rather than their literary quality, there are some that stand out as creative non-fiction. The celebration of the art of fishing extends back to *The Compleat Angler* by Izaak Walton (1653), which established the importance of song and poetry mixed with mirth, expression, art, and wit in writing on fishing,

rather than on “sports of charge or noise” (1935, pp. 12-14). Much attention was paid to the environment, whether a stream within a city or country setting. In this tradition, Inga Clendinnen’s *Tiger’s Eye: A Memoir* (2000) is as evocative as any writing on fishing, where she demonstrated an intimate knowledge of both trout fishing, “the gossamer lines”, as well as the specialised skill and art of trout tickling. Clendinnen wrote of her escapades with her brother along the Wye River in Victoria as a teenager avoiding and outsmarting Fisheries and Wildlife officers tasked with monitoring bag limits for trout:

> They asked me what the eel spear was for … I was afraid that if I opened my mouth they’d see my heart beating – it felt as if it had come right up into my throat – but I managed to say my big brother had made it for me so snakes wouldn’t bother me, and they laughed and said the snakes had better watch out … It was just as well they expected fourteen-year-old girls to be idiots. (2000, pp. 61-63)

Clendinnen takes the reader with her to hide in the boobialla bush from the officers, our hearts pounding with hers at the threat of imminent discovery, running with her to safety through the elephant grass and patches of blackberry. But it is in Clendinnen’s deep knowledge of the trout themselves, gained from a childhood spent along the Wye River, where her writing excels:

> Tickling trout is an addictive enterprise. You find a likely river, a likely pool and, placing yourself in knee- to hip-deep water, you begin feeling delicately along banks, under rock ledges, around the edges of boulders. You map in your mind the underwater topography – here weeds, here gravel, here a shelving fall.
>
> And then, if you are lucky, your fingertips touch something, a living something, holding against the current and very slightly vibrating. Your job is to move your fingers tenderly along its length. Now you are mapping the body of the fish – praying it will curve and swell, that it is not long and thin and sinisterly muscled, that it will not transform under your fingers into a vicious-toothed eel – until you have exactly learnt it with your blind fingertips: here the tail, here the head, here the gills. And all the while tenderly, tenderly stroking, so that the fish is mesmerized by the sliding fingers. (2000, p. 74)

Her experience comes not from research or from a book, or from talking to old timers; it is hers, and it has a profound influence on her life. She wrote, “I think I developed a taste for ethnographic history tickling trout in the Wye River” (p. 75).

The lived experience of the outdoors exudes through Clendinnen’s writing just as it does from those women who were already part of the established Australian literary scene, but who had turned their attention to essays, travel writing, and other forms of creative non-fiction. Jean Devanny, a New Zealand-born writer who had moved to Sydney in 1929, took the reader underwater in her *Travels in North Queensland* (1951) in her first diving experience on the Great Barrier Reef wearing a seventy-five-pound diving suit to observe the corals and fishes:

> I took each rung of the ladder with care. Once below the surface, with each step the weight lessened. At the bottom of the ladder I dropped off. Standing on the white coral

> sand of the sea floor I felt at home. But I soon learned that I must move warily, for a careless movement brought my nose smack against the glass. The strength of the currents running through the corals forced me to bend forward and dig my toes in to get along. But my spirits rose continually. This was the life! I felt native to the ocean. The feel of the water on the nude parts of my body was like silk. As I moved out towards the coral patches fish hovered about me curiously, darting just out of reach when I snatched at them. And what a surprise when I reached the banks of corals! … After that, the time I spent below in corselet and helmet was limited only by the willingness of the men to start up and operate the gear for me. (1951, pp. 40-41)

Writer Nettie Palmer in her literary essay on Green Island (1932) also on the Great Barrier Reef where she camped for eight months, observed the competence of women sailing and living on the Reef:

> I lay on the deck, with a mackintosh over me, talking to Dora Birtles. She is using her experience on the Gullmarn to do a thesis on Cook's navigation of the Barrier waters. And what experiences they've already had, days of learning to live neatly in a space not big enough to swing a cat-o'-nine tails, shortage of supplies that made them glad of the goat Hedley shot on one of the Whitsundays. The girls are all standing up to it well. There's a professional casualness about them in their shorts and sunburn: they all take their trick at the wheel and are rostered for other duties. (as cited in Smith, 1988, p. 96)

Through observation and personal experience both writers convey a sense of adventure, commitment, and passion when given the opportunity to take on new physical challenges.

Creative fiction

The literary accounts by writers such as Clendinnen, Devanny, and Palmer draw on lived experience, and the writing shines with knowledge and understanding on sports and recreation and the Australian environment. These are firsthand experiences, gleaned through childhoods spent on the land and on the rivers, and in adulthood through travel and adventure. But what of women's writing on sport in creative literary fiction and poetry? Here, Australian writers such as Charmian Clift, Gillian Mears, Kate Grenville, Janette Turner Hospital, the collaborative partnership M. Barnard Eldershaw, and poets Judith Wright and Lesbia Harford, all write about sport, sometimes including these references in a minor character or plot development, sometimes as central to the fiction or poetry itself. More often than not, their research is based on real world experience of the sports they write about. But such efforts were often dismissed. In 1938, in his review of cricket in fiction, English cricketer Kenneth Scott asserted that "Many a novelist – the majority of them women – dragged cricket matches into the corners of their books and made flagrant howlers" (1938, p. 7). Nearly eighty years later when the *Telegraph* newspaper in the United Kingdom sought the opinions of their sports writers for a list of the 50 best sports books ever written it included only one by a woman – Laura Hilldebrand's number one *New York Times* bestseller on racehorse *Seabiscuit: An American Legend*, even

though they found her account "slightly overwritten". Here, women's writing is dismissed by newspaper sports writers. More problematic still is the absence of women from the list itself, which more fundamentally underlines their exclusion by the journalists from a major publishing genre.

Australian literature is enriched by accounts penned by some of Australia's most evocative writers on all aspects of sporting life. Expatriate Charmian Clift in *Mermaid Singing* (1958) writes on the freedom and exhilaration of swimming in Kalymnos, Greece:

> And now we are transformed. Our bodies, freed of their weight, float and flow in the greenish-gold, the goldish-green, the sun-dapple, the cavernous shadows. Our hair streams in the seashine, our bodies, following each other, are wet brown scrawls wavering over the weeds and the sand. We are forced to the sun-sparkling, dancing surface only by the gulping need of our gill-less bodies, and we float there gasping. But this too is wonderful – to bathe in both elements at once – the warm air and the cold sea, with little dizzy currents of warmth lapping our legs and flowing on. (Clift, 1989, p. 215)

Similarly Kate Grenville's character Harley Savage in *The Idea of Perfection* (1999) explored the local swimming spot in a dying country town, the fictional Karakarook, where Harley:

> stroked slowly across the pool, parting the water quietly in front of her. At every stroke she could feel it painting itself against her skin, washing another layer of warmth off her body. She swam shallowly, keeping herself up out of the colder depths. It was thin and slippery water that seemed to draw her down, rather than buoy her up, so that her movements felt labored, as if she had forgotten how to swim. (2001, p. 347)

These pieces evoke an experience of swimming, an experience that is learned in childhood and carried through into adulthood. The swimming has rhythm and cadence evoking both pleasure and danger. Queensland writer, Janette Turner Hospital's character Katherine in her novel *Charades* (1988) is sent to collect firewood at a picnic, but instead strays off the track and takes the reader mountain climbing in the Glass House Mountains, inland from the Sunshine Coast. Her journey evokes the smells and sounds, the danger and exhilaration of the climb:

> She breathes in the sweet harsh smell of Tibrogargan. She climbs, the picnic falling away from her ankles like moulting feathers. Stones clatter from her feet and ring like little bells against the plates of rock. She listens to them pinging and bouncing, echoing faintly far down, a measurement of freedom. Once or twice her canvas shoes slide suddenly from under her legs, the gravel giving way, and she clutches at tufts of spiky brown grass. Along her forearm, beads of blood appear against white scratch marks. She climbs quickly … Ahead and above is a long stretch of rock, dimpled, hot to the fingers, treeless. She finds a ledge and sits and leans back; she can feel the mountain breathing like a heart against her spine. She pushes up the sleeves of her blouse and rolls her jeans up past her knees and turns her face, eyes closed, to the sun. There will never be words for this, she thinks. It will never need words. (Hospital, 1988, pp. 196-197)

Central to Gillian Mears's novel *Foal's Bread* (2011) is a deep visceral knowledge of horse riding and show jumping. Mears follows the show jumping careers of two generations of the fictional Nancarrow family, Noah and her daughter Lainey, in rural New South Wales prior to World War II. Mears translates her own horse jumping experiences from childhood and acknowledges her sister Yvonne's horse jumping-themed novel shortlisted for the 1995 Vogel prize as sources for her writing. Of her character Lainey, Mears writes:

> If a high jump is equivalent to the challenges and vicissitudes arising in a life, the heights that must be scaled or at least attempted, then it was worth knowing that some horses need holding back to stop them galloping in, others need pushing … She knew as soon as she turned in to the jump that she'd calculated the run-up well. Even so, for an instant the young horse hesitated, and she put one arm out and down to sort of urge him forward. It worked. (2011, pp. 278-279)

Both the writing and the horse riding sparkle with experience. If she had needed to ask them, none of Mears's characters would have had trouble defining a horse.

Not all women's writing on sport, especially horses, is country based. In the country, horses were for riding, but in the city they revolved around gambling and the races, often perceived as men's interests. In *Caddie: A Sydney Barmaid* (1953), Caddie, who is herself a skilled horse rider, takes over as bookmaker at her local pub: "Missus was only too anxious to have one of her staff as the pub S.P. as it attracted custom. I used to take bets in the bar for the Wednesday and Saturday race meetings" (1976, p. 175). Women's knowledge of the horse racing industry extended to betting as well as bookmaking. M. Barnard Eldershaw evokes the gritty working class poverty of Sydney in *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (1947/1983):

> Mrs Blan initiated Ally into the pleasures of S.P. betting. It was illegal and Sol Morris in the newspaper shop arranged it for them on the telephone. They bet in small sums, sixpences and occasionally shillings. Sometimes Ally won and sometimes she lost. The small trickle of excitement went on all the time. It was like an itch, but an itch that she soon could not do without. The races were reported over the air and Ally and Mrs Blan could hang over her wireless set waiting with febrile eagerness to know if they had picked a winner. It filled the days, supplied an interest. The wireless, Ally felt, justified itself. It was almost a business investment. (1947/1983, p. 87)

The gamblers, as well as the riders, are central to the culture of horse racing and knowledge of the turf. Kate Grenville mirrors this knowledge in *One Life: My Mother's Story* (2015):

> Miss Cohen drove a car to school. Nance had never seen a woman behind the wheel before. A girl who lived near her said Miss Cohen smoked and wore trousers at home. Miss Cohen made no secret of the fact that she spent her weekends betting at the horse races. Girls, she told them, I'm living proof that there's money to be made in mathematics. (2015, p. 28)

These characters demonstrated a competency in betting and gambling, as part of their everyday lives, which speaks to their established places within Australia's horse racing culture. Janette Turner Hospital, in *Charades*, also evokes "Girl number twenty" and her classroom knowledge of horses, and the ever present ridicule. But Hospital allows her character Kay more internal dialogue than "Girl number twenty" is permitted:

> Kay felt she would run out of storage room for all the puzzling things she knew. Most of her knowledge was of the wrong kind. She could, for example, rattle through the names of the books of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, but could not produce the name of a single horse in the Melbourne Cup. She had never even heard of Phar Lap – "the *legendary* Phar Lap," Miss Kennedy said, incredulous. (1988, p. 131)

Hospital's character Kay takes control of her situation and her lack of knowledge:

> She had gone and *memorised* the page on Phar Lap in the picture-book encyclopedia. She waited and waited and when at last he was mentioned again by Miss Kennedy, her hand shot up. "His greatest win was the 1930 Cup," she said, breathless. "He had thirty-seven wins, the last one in America. And then," she rattled on, "he was murdered by the Americans, but his heart was one and a half times the normal size for a thoroughbred."
>
> There was an eerie silence.
>
> They all looked at her very strangely, she could feel the stares likes pins and needles on her skin.
>
> "What would *youuuuu* know?" someone taunted.
>
> Wowser, wowser, wowser! voices said.
>
> "*Youuu've* never been to the races in yer life". (p. 132)

Kay has become Bitzer, with his encyclopedic knowledge, but despite the author reversing the situation, the ridicule for women's cultural knowledge of sport comes through.

Poetry

Australian women poets also depict the visceral nature of sport. Celebrated artist Margaret Preston's woodcut series depicting women and sport in 1934 at the time of the Melbourne Centenary Celebrations of women playing cricket, hiking, and yo-yoing is worthy of note. It captures and at once speaks to a need for expanded definition of sport and physical activity expressed through art. It is as instructive to follow Australia's poets. Some striking examples I have unearthed include Kate Jennings's poem "The properties of water" (1993), Judith Wright's poem "Sports field" (1963), and Lesbia Harford's "The Melbourne Cup". These poems draw on the instinct rather than the intellect. Jennings reinforces the participatory experience. In "The properties of water" (1993), she demonstrates lived experience of the dangers and possibilities of ocean swimming and surfing, "Gasp your wits together. Quickly, under the next wave":

> We surfed until we shone.

Our eyes stung. Our skins smelled of sun.
We lapped our way to dreams of Olympic fame
In the pool cemented to the rock of the headland. (Jennings, 2010, pp. 65-66)

In “Sports field”, Wright depicts the sports field as a living breathing organism:

Naked all night the field
breathed its dew until
the great gold ball of day
sprang up from the dark hill. (1963, p. 80)

Wright’s sports ground is not placed in time or space, but rather sits quietly. It is the arrival of children that brings the sports field to life, as they “crouch at the marks to run, and spring, and run together” (1963, p. 81). They run “like running water” (1963, p. 81). Wright concedes that “what’s real here is the field, the starter’s gun, the lane, the ball dropped or held” (1963, p. 81). She concludes:

So pride and pain are fastened
into the heart’s future,
while naked and perilous
the night and the field glitter. (p. 82)

Hers is not an evocation of the sounds of the sports field, but rather the sight of it at different times of day. Such experiential knowledge speaks to the poet as spectator, perhaps even observing the sports carnival or football game and returning to the sports field when empty. Did Wright often walk past a sports ground close to her home, imagining the participants when it was empty, and contemplating the previous stillness of the field when it was occupied?

Lesbia Harford grew up in Melbourne and enrolled in a law degree at the University of Melbourne in 1916 before working in Sydney factories. Her poems often reflect her concerns with women’s working class factory life. One early poem titled “The Melbourne Cup” is dated to Tuesday 6 November 1917, the exact day the cup was run. Was Harford herself part of what the *Melbourne Herald* called the “enormous crowd” (1917, p. 1) of 80,000 at Flemington on Tuesday 6th November? Perhaps she was among the “sensibly clad women” on the lawn at Flemington for whom “practical coats and skirts had taken the place of the diaphanous gala frocks that made their appearance on Derby Day. The atmosphere was too chilly for the wearing of flimsy frocks” (*Melbourne Herald*, 1917, p. 1). Maybe she watched the horse Westcourt ridden by W.H. McLachlan and trained by Joe Burton win the cup at 4/1 odds by a short half head. She might have returned home after the race by train and later penned her short poem “The Melbourne Cup”:

I like the riders
Clad in rose and blue;
Their colours glitter
And their horses too.

Swift go the riders
On incarnate speed.
My thought can scarcely
Follow where they lead.

Delicate, strong, long
Lines of colour flow,
And all the people
Tremble as they go

6.11.17 (Harford, 1917/1985, p. 87)

Harford's poem addresses the cinematic blur of the race, and the visceral effect of the contest on the crowd. The use of the word "tremble" implies firsthand experience of the crowd. It seems likely that she was an eyewitness to the race. At university, Harford had been "embroiled in the anti-war and anti-conscription agitation" (Lamb 1983/2006) and perhaps she was at the Melbourne Cup to protest against the recruitment speeches made after the third race by members of the military forces on the day in an effort to boost the recruitment of young men to the war effort. Or perhaps this was not her first visit and she just enjoyed the races and the horses. Further research might shed more light on her motivations.

In reporting the race, the *Melbourne Argus* thought that women at the 1917 Melbourne Cup had more success on the day than their male counterparts in the betting ring:

> The knowledge of women on the subject of horses was regarded with doubt by some of their male friends … Results showed that, after all, the masculine knowledge was sometimes inferior. Perhaps like "Girl number twenty" in Dickens' Hard Times, the girls of these hard times know something about horses even without being able to define a horse on demand as a "quadruped". (1917, p. 7)

Towards an anthology

"Girl number twenty" has enough knowledge to write about horses, horse racing, and indeed all forms of sport in memoir, essays, literature, and poetry. Women take their places confidently within the sporting narrative with deep embedded knowledge, blushing no more.

The construction of an anthology revisits the individual sources through which we understand the variety of lived experiences of women writers in their relationship to sports and all forms of recreation. Assembled, the sources begin to weave together a world where women can demonstrate an intimate and innate understanding of the place of sports in cultural life. Further investigation will yield more knowledge of the intersecting and complex nuances of class, race, sexuality, indigeneity, ability, and other factors in their writing.

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