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Review article
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City 'till I Die? Recent Trends in Popular Football Writing

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Popular football writing's importance to the sports book market continues to grow. Reference works apart, the most numerous categories of football writing are personality-oriented (mainly autobiographies), issue-oriented (dominated by 'hooliganism') and club-oriented. This article surveys recent trends in these areas focusing especially on club-oriented works. Three texts on Manchester City F.C. are reviewed. The discussion particularly concerns their coverage of City's fan base, portrayed as humorous, loyal in adversity and with a strong sense of local identity. These attributes - summed up by the slogan 'City 'till I die!' - are situated in the context of recent academic work demonstrating that they are typical of traditional English football fandom in general. Club-oriented writing is valuable, then, for the insight it provides into the nature of football perceived as a collective, community-based partisan

passion.

Sport is one of the biggest subject areas for adult non-fiction book sales in the United Kingdom. About half of the entire sports book market is accounted for by works devoted to football and it is not unusual for up to a third of the titles on the country's best sellers list to be football books. Just as football's importance to television, radio and the press has expanded exponentially in recent years, so, too, has the game come to dominate the British sports book market to an extent that would have been inconceivable a few decades ago. Furthermore, it is not only in the popular book market that football's appeal has increased. There has been a veritable explosion of scholarly works on football in academic circles as well. The impetus for this came from the growth of social history in the 1970s and James Walvin's seminal study, *The People's Game*,¹ was followed by several other notable contributions to the history of football.² From the 1980s academics working in areas other than social history have turned their attentions to football generating a plethora of books on the subject joining those in the popular market spearheaded by *soccerati* such as Nick Hornby and Colin Schindler.³ As Perryman notes, 'the sagging shelves of male confessionals in the wake of *Fever Pitch* have been accompanied by almost every imaginable academic discipline - anthropology, psycho-analysis, business studies, sociology and more - all claiming that they've got something useful to say on sport, and they insist on saying it, too, footnotes and all'.⁴ It is not the intention here, however, to survey the growth and direction of academic writing on football. Excellent accounts already exist.⁵ Rather we shall put the accent on popular football writing (although, as we shall see, the distinction between academic and popular is not always as clear cut as might be thought). What are the main trends in this area? How has popular football writing

developed in Great Britain recently? Within the increasingly personality dominated arena of football, what should be the place in the football book market for works devoted not to individuals but to clubs as a whole?

A simple analysis of British popular football writing reveals that, apart from works of reference and statistics, the three biggest categories in terms of the volume of books on offer are what might be classed personality-oriented, issue-oriented and club-oriented. My own survey of the on line catalogues of two of Britain's Internet sports book sellers⁶ conducted in the summer of 2000 reveals the following results: at Sports Books Direct, 28 per cent of the 335 football books on sale were club-oriented, 21 per cent were issue-oriented, 12 per cent were biographies and autobiographies and 15 per cent reference, annuals and statistics; at Soccer Books, 47 per cent of the 678 books on offer were reference, annuals and statistics, 37 per cent were club-oriented, 12 per cent were autobiographies and biographies and 6 per cent were issue-oriented. The balance is accounted for by books on world football, photo-journalism, humour, technical/coaching manuals and fiction. Within the issue-oriented category, almost a third of the books on sale in the two outlets (29 and 31 per cent respectively) were devoted to 'hooliganism.'

Personality-oriented works are biographies of players and managers and, especially, autobiographies. The genre is by no means new. In the post-war period up to 1960, some 36 autobiographical titles were published including works by Denis Compton, Tommy Lawton, Stanley Matthews and Billy Wright.⁷ It was, however, the 1970s that saw the real boom in this particular category of writing. Irish international Eamon Dunphy's autobiography, recording events from the Millwall dressing room during the 1973/74 season, appeared as a painfully honest, disillusioned insider's view of football, the sheer forthrightness of which broke with the previous tradition of

polite and gentle celebrity autobiography thereby setting the trend for the genre now dominating the popular football market, at least in terms of sales.⁸ By the 1990s, autobiography had become big business. 1999 and 2000, in particular, seemed to be vintage years packed with major personalities' autobiographies including memoirs from John Barnes, David Beckham, Andy Cole, David Ginola, Alan Hansen, Paul Merson, Neil Ruddock, David Seaman, Graeme Souness and Dennis Wise. Reflecting on the news that Michael Owen had just been commissioned to join the rolling bandwagon, one observer commented that 'footballer's [sic] autobiographies are renowned for being amongst the least interesting forms of publishing yet invented'.⁹ As one individual's subjective value judgement, this cannot, of course, be refuted. However the opinion does not seem to be shared by the overwhelming majority of readers whose avid interest propels works such as Tony Adams's *Addicted* and Alex Ferguson's *Managing My Life*¹⁰ to the best sellers list. Indeed, Ferguson's autobiography quickly became the best selling sports book of all time, rapidly clocking up half a million sales and still counting, leading to its being duly voted Book of the Year 1999. The success of autobiography is relatively easy to explain. Many works are ghost written by professional writers rather than penned by the celebrities themselves which at least ensures that the prose is fluent, lively and readable. The personalities covered are also generally well-known and popular among fans of the game, considerations at the forefront of publishers' minds when commissioning likely candidates as Ian Marshall of Headline Publishing has indicated: he looks to take on 'personalities who have a strong identity and an easy fan base'.¹¹ Finally, despite Marshall's assertions that autobiographies' 'success does not so much depend on how sensational they are, but on how popular the personality concerned is',¹² there is little doubt that sensationalist accounts of, for example,

Merson's battles with drugs, Adams's with drink, Ruddock's with his team-mates and Ferguson's with his former colleagues do attract attention, generate interest and boost sales.

Issue-oriented football writing is neither as extensive nor as popular as biography and autobiography. The one issue that does seem to have captured the popular imagination to an extent is that of 'hooliganism' with the demand for 'hoolifan' literature remaining quite high. Colin Ward's *Steaming In*,¹³ an account of terrace life in the 1970s and 1980s replete with its confrontations, chauvinism, racism and unprovoked violence, probably set the pace with further impetus to this growth area provided by the Brimsons' *Everywhere We Go*,¹⁴ a chilling read which itself has provoked what sports publisher Ian Marshall calls 'a whole rash of imitators' such as Colin Johnson's *St George in my Heart*, the 'confessions' of an England follower with 'bottle' (literally as well as metaphorically) whose perverse logic attempts to elevate the 'hooligan' to the status of true patriot.¹⁵ 'Rash' is, indeed, the correct term for books such as these as they are often ugly, irritating and symptomatic of something seriously wrong. Their supposedly authentic accounts represent the dark side of the force that is football writing as they celebrate the violent elements of football fandom; they are overtly racist and sexist and foster an aggressive sense of young, white masculinity deriving from a counter culture that is rejected by the majority in football ... and yet, they sell.

There are, of course, other issues which find a more deserving place on football book publishers' lists. More than ten years after the event and because the injustice has still not been overturned, the Hillsborough disaster and its implications continue to receive coverage in football writing most notably with the recent publication by Mainstream of *Hillsborough The Truth*¹⁶ which raises important

questions about the effectiveness of the emergency services, the abuse of police power and the rights of victims' families and friends. Similarly, the inequities in the game caused by football's mad, headlong rush into the open and deceptively endearing arms of commercialism and the enterprise culture have also featured in this category with David Conn's consummate exposé, *The Football Business*,¹⁷ providing the most noteworthy coverage to date of the effects of the transformation of football into a business venture. Questions of identity linked to ethnicity and gender are also exercising minds in this post-modern age. Popular football writing has, albeit on a relatively small scale, begun to explore these issues, too. Stella Orakwue's penetrating analysis of the experience of African-Caribbean footballers in England is timely particularly given its focus on exposing the stereotypes of black players that pepper football match reports and related articles in the tabloid press. It is in this area of identity that the interface of academics with popular writing proves most fruitful. For example, Jez Bains's *Corner Flags and Corner Shops*¹⁸ is a commendable attempt to popularise the results of the author's work on British Asians' involvement with football while Liz Crolley's short, often highly personalised accounts of gender issues in football are illuminating a subject which has still not received the attention it merits in either the academic or popular arenas.¹⁹ However worthy the latter examples of football writing might be, though, it has to be said that high sales are not generated by them. *Headline's* Ian Marshall reports that 'It is our experience that the readers want to buy books about their heroes, their clubs or about other fans' activities and anything else gets pretty much squeezed out'.²⁰

Club-oriented literature, then, the third of our categories of popular football writing for the purposes of this analysis, would initially seem to be an important area for readers and publishers alike. Indeed, the volume of work devoted to clubs is

considerable amounting to a good third of all football books currently on sale. However, the trend may have peaked as Mainstream's Bill Campbell believes this category to be on the wane.²¹ It is our contention here that such a downturn would be regrettable within the broader social context of the sport of football for reasons that will be outlined through a case study of some recent club-oriented work devoted to the poignant tale of Manchester City Football Club.

Manchester City are an enigma. Their history, potential resources, commercial appeal and remarkable fan base should guarantee them a place of pre-eminence among English football's élite.²² However, as was once famously remarked, football is a funny old game and City are only now, with promotion back to the Premiership achieved in May 2000, emerging from the depths of their worst ever league position in over a hundred years of existence: fourteenth in Division 2, plumped on 31 August 1998. Within the popular vogue for football writing, Manchester City have recently become the subject of a number of books devoted not to explaining the mystery of one of the country's most popular but underachieving clubs - as if such a thing were possible - but rather to describing and documenting it often from a distinctly personalised perspective.²³

Mark Hodkinson's *Blue Moon* traces a season in the life of Manchester City, the 1998/99 campaign spent in English football's third flight which ended in the dramatic, crazy promotion back to Division 1 via the play-offs.²⁴ The short articles constituting the text were originally commissioned as a series of pieces for the 'quality' broadsheet newspaper *The Times*. Here, assembled, revised and supplemented with further anecdotes and reflexions, they provide a unique insight from 'a writer-in-residence' asked 'to relate the fortunes of a big club in the small time' (pp.7-8). The result, in Hodkinson's own words, is both 'comical and moving'

(p.7) and represents something of a milestone in fly-on-the-wall sports journalism. However, it has to be said that the shadow of the club's media relations officer, Chris Bird, loomed over the whole project. He even insisted on being present when Hodgkinson interviewed the cleaners in City's laundry (lest they divulge which brand of washing powder they prefer? - pp.129-30). The author himself, though, significantly, felt under no severe constraints and writes freely and fluently about the club that 'stares at the stars but crashes into a lamp-post while its gaze is averted' (p.35). It is to Manchester City's great credit, then, that they allowed unprecedented access to their personnel to a journalist and the author revelled in the opportunities afforded him by this 'magnanimous ... welcoming and generous' club (p.10) to record interviews with an impressive list of people including the Chair of the club, the manager (and ex-managers), players (and former players), directors (and ex-directors), coaches, the club statistician, fanzine editors, celebrity supporters and 'ordinary' fans. Hodgkinson, a word-smith by profession, of course, often portrays Manchester City most effectively through a series of imaginative metaphors which will delight both the avid City supporter and the general reader alike with their apposite qualities. Through his eyes, City is a 'cartoon world' (p.92), a Picasso painting 'upside down, back to front, any way you like' (p.22) and Maine Road, City's home, is the 'Bates Motel, a place where the strange is commonplace' (p.35). He even regards the wildly asymmetrical stadium, where four stands of different heights and designs glare at each other, as symbolic of the division and disagreement which, until recently, racked the club from the Board of Directors down.²⁵ *Blue Moon* is, then, more than a factual account, more than a mere record documenting the beginning of the rebirth of a once great football club. It is a compelling narrative the literary qualities of which lend it a readability that not all club-oriented works possess.

Chris Murray's *Attitude Blue* is an attempt to make accessible to the general public the results of his research over a 20 year period into football crowd psychology and organisational dynamics especially in the area of leisure industry management. The text is also presented as a study guide for social science students which leaves the work as a whole sitting rather uneasily between two stools. It does have the merit, though, of presenting valuable insights into the psychology of a football club evolving from the mid 1970s to the 1990s. The first section, for instance, places the emphasis on the effects of policing on crowd behaviour at Maine Road in the 1970s while the second examines the profound changes brought about in the late 1980s/early 1990s following the redesign of the stadium under the impetus of the Popplewell and Taylor reports. Murray concludes that 'police arrangements ... ground layout, the collective force of shared memories, incidents on the field of play and the psychological importance of the match all contribute to that complex interplay of fused relationships we call "the crowd"' (p.100). The third section of the book draws attention to the ways in which a football club's organisational development, especially at management level, can be driven, at least in part, by forces emanating from its fan base. Murray covers the 'Forward with Franny' movement which prompted the arrival as Chair of Manchester City of former player Francis Lee as well as examining much less widely publicised developments of the 1990s such as the club's increased focus on commercialisation and public relations. Throughout the period of his research Murray had access to many key agents in the processes of change at Manchester City and his list of interviewees is impressive including as it does senior police officers, architects, City's former coach, Sam Ellis, former manager, Alan Ball, Francis Lee and successive merchandising managers. Most of the interviews, along with Murray's encounters with unnamed fans, are transcribed verbatim lending a raw immediacy to

the text as a whole which is not without interest.

Finally, Craig Winstanley's *Bleak and Blue* is a fan's view of an 'obsession' with Manchester City Football Club which has 'rarely been ... uneventful' (p. i). The term obsession sounds Hornbyesque but *Bleak and Blue* is not written with the fluent prose of *Fever Pitch* nor it does match the mellifluous eloquence of Schindler's *Manchester United Ruined My Life*. Winstanley's text can be heavy going at times as he presents a direct chronicle of his involvement with the club as a supporter over a 22 year period. Much of the work has been constructed from material supplied by match day programmes, newspaper articles and the author's own notes and provides a highly personalised review of Manchester City's fortunes from the 1975/76 campaign to the end of the relegation season of 1997/98. The accumulation of details, statistics and match facts would probably appear tedious to non-City fans but fellow travellers will rejoice as their memory is jogged by Winstanley's text of half-forgotten players, long dead terrace chants and shared references and in-jokes. What the general reader will not fail to be impressed by, though, is the heartfelt nature of the work and, in this respect, humour is Winstanley's most effective tool. A wild, wonderful and weird brand of humour has, indeed, permeated Maine Road for many years. During the 1988/89 season, for instance (yet another spent outside the top flight), Manchester City fans would demonstrate their carnivalesque qualities by attending matches carrying inflatable bananas: 'big bananas or more sensibly sized bananas ... which were shaken vigorously to ... celebrate goals and pointed to disarming effect as an accompaniment to chanting' (pp.160). It is pointless to ask the obvious question; no satisfactory reason has ever been offered for the popularity of the tropical fruits in question. The delight in Winstanley's account is transparent, though, as he reminds us that later in the season the bananas were:

joined by more esoteric inflatables such as a paddling pool, a fried egg, Godzilla, Frankenstein's monster, a hammer, a dinosaur and a shark ... and every time the fans were a little bored there came the rejoinder: "*We've got bananas, You've not!*" There really is no suitable reply! (pp.160-61).

Also in evidence throughout Winstanley's work is the much vaunted daft gallows humour of Manchester City supporters described recently by Paul Weaver of *The Guardian* as 'a nice line in black humour ... dry and wry, gloomy and phlegmatic' (8 May 2000). 'Wallowing in the incompetence of our beloved team is a natural and most enjoyable pastime for ... City fans' Winstanley explains (p.123). Similarly, on the brink of relegation to Division 2:

the chant of "I'm City 'till I die" [became] increasingly common. I know that it's intended to display an admirable defiance in the face of adversity but to me it's beginning to sound like a form of punishment. I can imagine a judge, a fat, bald man, not unlike a typical English referee but younger and sporting a ludicrous wig, looking me sternly in the eye and proclaiming: "I sentence you to be taken from this place to another place where you shall be City 'till you die, and may God have mercy on your soul" (p.293).

Clearly, then, Winstanley did not have the unparalleled access to the club's personnel that was granted Hodkinson nor does he write with Murray's academic background and educationist aim. His perspective, though, that of the Manchester City fan 'trapped [with] no escape' from the events surrounding his chosen team (p.297), is equally valuable, not least of all for the light it throws on the everyday concerns and undulating emotions of an 'ordinary' football supporter.

Indeed, despite the very different perspectives from which the texts under consideration were written, there is nonetheless one element they have in common.

Because of their subject matter, they have to address the topic of Manchester City's fan base, remarkable for its size and loyalty. High attendances are historically a feature of Maine Road. The ground opened in 1923 with an initial capacity of 75,000 and still holds the record for the highest attendance at a domestic match outside Wembley: 84,569 on 6 March 1934 for the FA Cup visit of Stoke City. Even more recently, crowds well in excess of 40,000 were commonplace throughout the 1970s while the average attendance in 1999/2000 was 32,090 which is 96 per cent of the capacity of the restructured, post-Taylor, all seater stadium. In all probability, the new City of Manchester Stadium to which the club will move in 2003 will find its initial capacity limit of 48,000 somewhat stretched. Indeed, City Chair David Bernstein conceded at the club's annual general meeting in 2000 that the decision to fix the capacity at this figure was 'a difficult call'.²⁶ Second, Manchester City supporters have remained loyal to their club through thin and thin. According to *The Guardian*, 'They are a miracle' (8 May 2000). With no major trophy won since 1976 and the club operating in the third flight of English football, Maine Road's average attendance in 1998/99 was still some 28,261, double the division's next best (Stoke), higher than all but one of the clubs in Division 1 and better than nine of those in the Premiership.²⁷ Hodkinson, Murray and Winstanley offer a variety of explanations for this phenomenon. Murray and Winstanley both draw attention to the psychological aspects of football fandom. For Murray, to be a supporter of a particular club is to be a member of a group whose cohesion is primarily assured by a common goal and 'the importance of memories past and reactive recollections' (p.33). Shared memories and references help to foster a sense of loyalty to a football club which a lack of success on the pitch - at least in the case of Manchester City - does little to erode. Indeed, as Winstanley notes, shared torment is equally if not more effective than shared triumph

in generating ‘a thoroughly irrational loyalty’ to a club in its fans (p.297). He also goes on to explain that the psychological factors involved in the sunk cost fallacy, usually applied to gamblers who continue to pour money into their losses in a mistaken belief that their luck must soon change, also applies to Manchester City fans: ‘I’ve invested so much in that team that if the payback comes, I want my share ...It is irrational behaviour. That’s what football fandom is all about’ (p.8). Hodkinson would probably not wish to minimise the general psychological factors at work in a group of football fans but he does prefer to regard the psychology of Manchester City supporters as a legacy of sociological factors. He cites the views of Cary Cooper, a social scientist at UMIST, who regards City’s fans as ‘a snapshot of better days gone by ... holding on to values that few people believe in any more, but which are so important’ (p.178) namely loyalty, commitment, devotion and determination. City supporters are, then, ‘a cause of real celebration ... in it for the duration when all around them was fickle and transitory’ (p.12). Cooper traces this to their ‘working class’ origins, Manchester’s industrial past and the legacy of trade unionism within all of which the values of steadfastness, solidarity and defiance in the face of adversity were generated and upheld.²⁸ In short, Manchester City is a community in the full sense of the word. Finally, both Hodkinson and Winstanley provide numerous examples of the ways in which that community defines itself by its opposition to a common adversary. As is so often the case, a sense of identity is thrown into sharper focus by reference to a significant Other. Here, of course, Manchester City are uniquely blessed given the dark shadow cast by the monstrous nearby presence of United, their neighbours from Stretford, looming over them.

The wealth, success and hype associated with United has quite simply served to strengthen further key aspects of the identity of Manchester City Football Club in

general and of its supporters in particular. First, City attract what are often termed ‘true’ or ‘real’ football fans who, given the club’s lack of success recently, cannot be seen as jumping on a media driven bandwagon: ‘being a City fan brings with it a certain credibility - nobody could seriously accuse us of being glory-seekers’ notes Winstanley (p.298). Similarly, Hodkinson quotes the views of two more fans:

Being a City fan is all about tradition, birthright, tears of torment and joy. A feeling of belonging to something you can’t just join because they’ve won something ... [we] can actually share more *true* emotion at finishing third in Division 2 than was shown by those winning the treble (p.218).

Hodkinson himself concurs. He admits to setting out to debunk the myths surrounding City and United but found he could not and concludes that ‘While their Stretford neighbours attract capricious lightweights, City fans are true [people] of steel, cut from character-building torment’ (p.46). Second, in contradistinction to United, Manchester City has developed a reputation for being a football club with a ‘good heart’ (Hodkinson, p.69) that serves the local community from which it draws most of its support. Whilst United’s directors refer to their club as ‘the company’ and attempt to sell it off to satellite television giants BSkyB against the express wishes of its own supporters’ associations,²⁹ Manchester City quietly concentrate on enhancing their much envied young supporters club network, the Junior Blues, the largest in the country; whilst United declare a stock market value of £1 billion and promptly increase average season ticket prices by twice the rate of inflation while freezing those for executive seats, City continue to develop the Football in the Community scheme of which they were one of only six original founders in 1986. For instance, the country’s first purpose-built football after school study centre complete with ICT suite was recently set up by City in conjunction with the DfEE as the Blue Zone. City

have now also entered into an agreement with the Manchester Metropolitan University whereby PGCE students can undertake part of their teacher training at the Blue Zone centre.³⁰ Finally, but perhaps most significantly, City supporters will define themselves according to a strong sense of Mancunian identity which, they would argue, cannot be claimed by their neighbours at United. The popular chant at Maine Road, 'City, City, the only football team to come from Manchester' refers initially to the fact that United's Old Trafford head office is situated in Stretford in the borough of Trafford, outside the boundaries of the city of Manchester proper. Latterly, however, it also points towards the fact that United's appeal and, indeed, their financial and marketing strategies are national, even global. Winstanley refers to United throughout as 'the Nation's Team (the World's Team might be more appropriate)' (p.8), both as a euphemism - 'as I am heartily sick of seeing their name in print and not wishing to contribute in any way to this unfortunate trend' (*ibid.*) - and as an ironic reference to the inordinate amount of coverage they claim in the national media. Moreover, United, with their national and global appeal attracting 'glory-seekers from far and wide' (Winstanley, p.11), cannot, therefore, be truly regarded as a uniquely Manchester phenomenon, a defining facet of City's identity which is so important. 'For the uninitiated,' Winstanley remarks, 'it should be explained that Mancunian status is important for a true Manchester City believer because without it there is little ammunition left to attack the Nation's Team and their followers' (p.2). Indeed, the sight of somebody wearing a replica United shirt (of which there are many, in all the colours of the rainbow) is, of course, distressing for City fans but 'comfort comes when the accent of the wearer reveals origins somewhere between 150 and several thousand miles from Manchester' (Winstanley, p.9). In similar vein, Hodkinson recounts one City fanzine's reaction to the news that,

during an official visit to Malaysia, the Queen autographed a United football held up to her somewhat unceremoniously by local youths. The fanzine claimed to have discovered the content of the royal message inscribed with a wave of the hand on the offending spheroid: ‘Why doesn’t one naff orrrfff and support one’s local team?’ (p.59). Irreverent humour and self-definition via fierce denigration of the local rival are, of course, two of the principal features of football fanzine culture.³¹

Essentially the contrasting identities of City and United can be read as symptomatic of the conflict taking place in contemporary English football culture between two forces that have, in varying measures and in complex ways, driven the game for some time: commercialism and supporterism. To be a United follower is for many to engage in an act of consumerism, increasingly prevalent especially at old Division 1/Premiership level since the 1970s, that is to select a quality product (a successful team) that has been extensively marketed nationally and globally (benefited from widespread media exposure) whilst to be a City supporter is usually to engage in an act of football fanaticism and civic patriotism, the dominant forces in the game during its first hundred years up to the 1960s, that is to opt for a club because of a strong emotional bond to the (usually) urban area in which it is based and which it is felt to represent. If support for the local team has truly become recently a far less decisive factor in fan allegiance, it is nonetheless still a very important feature of the football landscape. The phenomenon of United’s dispersed following proves the validity of Bale’s assertion that ‘today and in the future fandom can and will exist as a community without propinquity’.³² Manchester City supporters, however, are generally fans in the more traditional, original football sense for whom self-definition via a sense of place and pride in an attachment to a given locality remains important.³³

In summary, Manchester City supporters are portrayed as humorous, loyal,

passionate, defiant in adversity and with a strongly developed sense of local identity, attributes that are encapsulated by their own slogan 'I'm City 'till I die' (sung to the tune of 'I'm h-a-p-p-y'). These qualities have earned them the respect and admiration of many in football circles. City fans are perceived as the aristocrats of fandom, the 'supporters' supporters' (Hodkinson, p.45). It could be argued that the reason is that these virtues are in essence those still prized by most football supporters the length and breadth of the country from Stockport to Swindon and from Torquay to Tranmere. As Hodkinson notes, 'Within us *all* there is the potential to martyrdom-by-football club, and this has been fulfilled ... at City' (p.45, my italics). Indeed, a relatively recent survey of Luton Town supporters has revealed that the principal characteristics of fandom there are precisely, as at Maine Road, a high level of commitment to the club resulting in a strong loyalty that remains largely unaffected by a lack of success on the pitch, a feeling of solidarity and common identity with other fans of the club often expressed through hostility to nearby rivals and a considerable pride in supporting the geographically local team.³⁴ Other fans around the country, then, can recognise themselves, albeit on a larger stage, in greater numbers and in higher profile, in Manchester City's supporters because they personify basic football values. Admittedly, this style of supporterism which is rooted in the origins of the game itself is increasingly under threat in an age where media driven commercialism threatens to transform football into a sanitised consumer product and football clubs into company brands and yet it is a form of fandom that simply (and rightly) will not go away. Most fans will not switch allegiances in line with clubs' performances as if selecting a better product in a supermarket; most fans still support a given team on the basis not of media coverage, fame and success but on the strength of a choice, usually made early in life, which is reinforced by an affective attachment

to the locality that the club itself is perceived to represent. Manchester City supporters, thrown into prominence because of the size, history and recent plight of their club, therefore, are not unique; they are rather the biggest and best example of the traditional qualities of English football fandom.

To conclude, we have seen that recent trends in popular British football writing suggest that the vogue for biography and autobiography will continue leaving relatively less space in the book market for texts dealing with major issues in the game or for club-oriented work. Club-oriented football writing, in particular, however, still merits its place within the sports book market even if the revenue it generates for its publishers (and authors) is relatively small. It adds value to the game and enriches our understanding of some of the mechanisms underpinning it notably by correcting the erroneous impression that football is primarily concerned with heroic individuals and dynamic cult personalities. Club-oriented writing, as recent examples devoted to Manchester City Football Club ably and amply demonstrate, redresses the imbalance, it puts the focus on clubs, the people in them and, above all, on their supporters, in other words on the collective. As such, this sub-genre reminds us that football is still essentially a collective partisan passion actively shared by communities of people both for itself and for the sense of solidarity and local identity it is capable of promoting.

NOTES

I am grateful to Ian Marshall of Headline Book Publishing Ltd and to Katie at Manchester City Football Club for sparing the time to answer my questions.

1. J. Walvin, *The People's Game. A Social History of British Football* (London: Allen Lane, 1975).
2. E.g. T. Mason, *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980) and S. Wagg, *The Football World: A Contemporary Social History* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984).
3. N. Hornby, *Fever Pitch* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1992) and C. Schindler, *Manchester United Ruined My Life* (London: Headline, 1998). *Soccerati* is the term given to new football writers with literary ambitions or careers. Hornby is a novelist and Schindler, already a cinema and television screenplay writer, has also recently become an author. For further discussion of what has become known as the 'new' football writing, see R. Boyle and R. Haynes, *Power Play: Sport, the Media and Popular Culture* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2000), pp. 180-85.
4. M. Perryman (ed.), *The Ingerland Factor. Home Truths from Football* (Edinburgh: Headline, 1999), p.20. The comment must be read with some irony given that Perryman himself is not averse to commissioning academics to contribute to his books which add further to the weight of the volumes on football causing book shop shelves to sag.
5. E.g. R. Giulianotti, *Football Media in the UK: a Cultural Studies Perspective* (1997) www.sportquest.com/revista/efdxtes.htm which contains a succinct survey of the field as a prelude to a study of fanzines and the new football culture and D. Russell, *Football and the English. A Social History of Association Football in*

England 1863-1995 (Preston: Carnegie, 1997) which is a work of synthesis on which I have drawn here that combines the author's original research with a review of academic work particularly in the areas of social history and sociology.

6. Sports Books Direct: www.sportsbooksdirect.co.uk and Soccer Books: www.soccer-books.co.uk
7. Russell, *Football and the English*, p.141.
8. E. Dunphy, *Only a Game? The Diary of a Professional Footballer* (Harmondsworth: Kestrel Books, 1976).
9. P. Cornwall, 'The Making of Saint Michael' in Perryman, *The Ingerland Factor*, p.98.
10. T. Adams, *Addicted* (London: Collins Willow, 1998) and A. Ferguson, *Managing My Life. My Autobiography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999).
11. *Match of the Day* (December 1999), 15.
12. Personal communication, 5 January 2000.
13. C. Ward, *Steaming In: Journal of a Football Fan* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1989).

14. D. Brimson and E. Brimson, *Everywhere We Go. Behind the Matchday Madness* (London: Headline, 1996).

15. Personal communication, 5 January 2000. C. Johnson, *St George in my Heart. Confessions of an England Fan* (Lockerbie: ST Publishing/Terrace Banter, 2000).
The large place taken up in issue-oriented popular writing by ‘hooliganism’ interestingly parallels, of course, the considerable body of literature dedicated to the topic in academic circles among which notable contributions include: J. Williams, P. Murphy and E. Dunning (eds), *Hooligans Abroad. The Behaviour and Control of English Fans in Continental Europe* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), E. Dunning, P. Murphy and J. Williams, *The Roots of Football Hooliganism. An Historical and Sociological Study* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), R. Giulianotti, N. Bonney and M. Hepworth (eds), *Football, Violence and Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994) and G. Armstrong, *Football Hooligans: Knowing the Score* (Oxford: Berg, 1998).

16. P. Scraton, *Hillsborough, the Truth* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1999).

17. D. Conn, *The Football Business. Fair Game in the '90s?* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1997).

18. J. Bains and S. Johal, *Corner Flags and Corner Shops. The Asian Football Experience* (London: Orion, 1998).

19. See, for instance, L. Crolley, ‘The Green, Green Grass of Anfield’ in M. Mora Y

Araujo and S. Kuper (eds), *Perfect Pitch: Men and Women* (London: Headline, 1998), pp.40-53 and 'Lads Will Be Lads' in Perryman, *The Ingerland Factor*, pp.59-70. Few book length treatments of this issue exist. Foremost amongst those that do, though, is S. Lopez, *Women on the Ball. A Guide to Women's Football* (London: Scarlet Press, 1997).

20. Personal communication, 5 January 2000. My own rather limited survey of the market supports this view.

21. *Match of the Day* (December 1999), 15.

22. City's honours include: two (old) Division 1 titles, six (old) Division 2 triumphs, four FA Cup final victories, two League Cups, one European Cup Winners' Cup and three Charity Shields. The last of these trophies, however, was won as long ago as 1976 since when the club has had three Chairs and 14 managers and been relegated four times. See Manchester City Football Club, www.mcfc.co.uk Internet site and *Manchester Evening News*, 'A Century of Sport' (13 December 1999), 16-17.

23. Among the books devoted to City in addition to the three that will be reviewed here are: G. James, *Manchester the Greatest City* (Leicester: Polar Print Group, 1997), the definitive history of the club and a model for its genre; A. Shaw, *Cups for Cock-ups* (Stretford: Empire, 1998), an ultimately disappointing piece covering Francis Lee's disastrous tenure as Chair of the club controversially written by a self-confessed follower of a neighbouring plc; and D. Chidlow, *City*

'till I Die (Leicester: Polar Print Group, 1999), an idiosyncratic, largely pictorial but always heart warming account of City fans' experiences of the 1999 Division 2 play-off final.

24. City were 0-2 down to Gillingham with one minute left in the play-off final, came back to 2-2 and won promotion on penalties. Hodgkinson had engaged in a similar, season long study of a football club (Barnsley) the year before which was published as *Life at the Top* (Harpenden: Queen Anne Press, 1998).

25. Until the realignment following David Bernstein's appointment as Chair (supplemented by BSkyB's subsequent purchase of 9.9 % of the club's share capital in 1999), the Board was divided into four factions of major shareholders: JD Sports, Greenall's, Francis Lee and the late Stephen Boler.

26. *Manchester Evening News* (6 October 2000).

27. Hodgkinson, *Blue Moon*, p.175.

28. For further analysis of the links between 'working class' culture and football, see in addition to the works by Mason, Russell, Wagg and Walvin already cited, N. Fishwick, *English Football and Society 1910-1950* (Manchester: MUP, 1989), R. Holt, 'Working-class Football and the City', *British Journal of Sports History*, III, 1 (May 1986), 5-17 and R. Holt, 'Football and the Urban Way of Life in Nineteenth Century Britain' in J. A. Mangan (ed.), *Pleasure, Profit and Proselytism: British Culture at Home and Abroad 1700-1914* (London: Frank

Cass, 1988), pp.67-85.

29. For an account of how the proposed BSkyB take-over of United was thwarted largely by fan pressure, see A. Brown and A. Walsh, *Not For Sale. Manchester United, Murdoch and the Defeat of BSkyB* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1999).

30. BBC 1, *North West Tonight* (13 April 2000), television programme. For further information on the Junior Blues and Football in the Community, see Manchester City Football Club, www.mfc.co.uk Internet site. For a discussion of the Football in the Community scheme in general, see J. Williams and R. Taylor, *The National Football and the Community Programme: a Research Report* (Leicester: Sir Norman Chester Centre, 1994). Information about the Blue Zone is taken from The Manchester Metropolitan University, *Review 1998/99* (Manchester: MMU Marketing Office, 1999), pp.3-5; for a general introduction to the DfEE's Playing for Success scheme, see DfEE, *Playing for Success*, www.dfes.gov.uk/playing/index.htm Internet site.

31. For further discussion, see R. Haynes, *The Football Imagination: the Rise of Football Fanzine Culture* (Aldershot: Arena, 1995) and Giulianotti, *Football Media in the UK*. The above examples are by no means isolated. More recent illustrations of this Mancunian humour with an edge include one fanzine's preview of the first City-United match following City's return to the Premiership in the 2000/01 season: 'this Saturday ... United play their first match in Manchester for four years' (*Bert Trautmann's Helmet* 15 November 2000); and one wag's views on what to do with Maine Road when City leave for a new

stadium: 'Perhaps our illustrious neighbours would like to rent the ground occasionally so that they can visit Manchester more than once a season' (www.mcfc.co.uk/archive.asp?article=26551&display=article).

32. J. Bale, 'The Changing Face of Football: Stadiums and Communities', *Soccer and Society*, I, 1 (2000), 91.
33. For further discussion of fan culture and football's traditional rôle of promoting a sense of local identity, see Russell, *Football and the English* and J. Hill and J. Williams (eds), *Sport and Identity in the North of England* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996).
34. D. Malcolm, I. Jones and I. Waddington, 'The People's Game? Football Spectatorship and Demographic Change', *Soccer and Society*, I, 1 (2000), 138-40.