

## 12 Love thy neighbour or a Red rag to a Blue?

Reflections on the City–United dynamic in and around Manchester

*David Hand*

I love Manchester United, they are great – I know because I watch them on Sky TV all the time. I once drove past Manchester on my way to a wedding ... but I didn't have time to get to a match ... I love getting together with all my Man United supporter friends here in London to watch old videos of Bobby Charlton and George Best ... I love all of Man United's strips and I have bought them all for sitting in front of the telly ... I once met a couple of blokes from Manchester but they supported a team called City ... it's unheard of someone from London would support City. I can't understand why anyone would support a team that hasn't won anything in years. Some people support a team just because they were born there – they must be mad!

(MCIVTA, 2002)

Any comprehensive coverage of the United phenomenon must eventually emulate the spoof Internet posting above and consider Manchester City. To an extent, the experience of City's supporters in particular is defined (and lived) differentially in relation to what has latterly become the domineering presence of the United Other. The City–United dynamic is, therefore, a highly significant football and, indeed, social issue in Greater Manchester. This chapter aims, then, to reflect upon Manchester City supporters' perceptions of their neighbour from Stretford. Perceptions are vital to the creation and maintenance of an imagined identity and it will be interesting to consider how the identity of United is portrayed in City fans' projects and other cultural products. The data for the study are drawn from a variety of sources including fans' use of colour, terrace chants, contributions to fanzines, e-zines and Internet postings and popular football writing. Additionally, a recent fictional representation of the City–United dynamic, the film *There's Only One Jimmy Grimble* (Hay, 2000), will be examined for the light it sheds upon the conflictual relationship between the two clubs' supporters. The methodological approach adopted is qualitative and exploratory. The cognitive and affective elements of football fandom are at least as significant as the behavioural and sociological factors which are the subject of other studies (e.g. Waddington *et al.*, 1998). Indeed, given that usually English football fans interest in the game is so intensely emotional that parts of everyday life itself are imbued with the defining features and qualities of fandom (Jones, 1997), it would seem important to *identify* and *interpret* the ways in which Manchester City fans' projects represent their lived experience as defined by opposition to United. In this way, the deep meanings and values associated with Mancunian football fandom can be ascertained and discussed. To establish the framework in which the City–United dynamic operates, a number of questions will be addressed. How are United – the club and its followers – portrayed by City fans? What forms do these representations take? Most importantly, what are the principal characteristics of the City–United dialectic as it is played out in and around Manchester?

### **Colour schemes**

Colour matters in Manchester. One is either a 'Blue' or a 'Red', determined by allegiance to City or United, and the ways in which these colours are used constitute a powerful if simplistic symbolic code for Mancunians. In City fans' eyes, (light) blue is good, red is bad. Anecdotes are legion, therefore, about City fans' almost pathological aversion to the colour red. In *Maine Road Voices*, for instance, one fan reports his initiation into local colour rituals when, as a youngster, his wearing of a red T-shirt prompted an explosive reaction from his 'Blue' grandfather: 'Don't ever come here again wearing anything red!' (Waldon, 2002: 79–80). Similarly, another fan wryly notes that his father, 'a Blue ... wouldn't eat bacon ... because it was red and white' (Waldon, 2002: 78). Aversion to red is also much in evidence in the banners and flags carried to City's matches by their supporters. Union flags occasionally appear and when they do, the red crosses of Saints George and Patrick are invariably replaced with sky blue ones while a banner that has appeared frequently over the years speaks volumes about the metaphorical associations of the conflicting colours by proclaiming, 'I'd rather be dead than Red.'

The importance of colour in the City–United dynamic is so significant that commercial companies operating in Manchester must demonstrate some sensitivity towards it. In 2001, for example, staff at a branch of supermarket chain Asda were puzzled by the reaction of certain local children who refused to enter Father Christmas's grotto at the store until it became evident the problem derived from Santa's red-and-white attire: Father Christmas was obviously a United follower and, therefore, a bad man. Once a second Santa was installed, this time resplendent in sky blue, peace and harmony were restored to the local community. In similar vein, sportswear manufacturers Le Coq Sportif, City's official supplier, have been careful to ensure that their traditional logo of a cockerel on a triangular red background is always replaced with a blue background on any merchandise or, indeed, publicity connected with Manchester City.

On a wider note, a research opportunity awaits for a thorough analysis of the negative impact that commercial companies' sponsorship of football clubs might have on certain consumers. In other words, how many potential customers are lost because a firm sponsors a rival club? The question is not without merit and companies that have sponsored United over the years, like Pepsi, Nike and Sharp, would be advised to consider it. The story that City fans keep their kitchen knives blunt to avoid having anything Sharp in the house is humorous (and apocryphal) but also carries with it an important commercial message that telecommunications giant Vodafone appears to have acknowledged. Shortly after it began sponsoring United in 2000, posters appeared in Manchester city centre bearing the slogan 'Vodafone supports the whole of Manchester' which might be interpreted as a (failed) attempt to avoid alienating City fans from its products and services.

### **Chants for the memory**

The antipathy between City and United supporters, from which Vodafone rather clumsily tried to distance itself, is also revealed in chants sung by City fans themselves at matches, as is the rather more obvious devotion to all things blue. City fans' theme song is a rendition of Rodgers and Hart's 'Blue moon'. Hodgkinson finds the song uniquely

appropriate to the long-suffering fans of a football team that has known little success recently, because, 'It is a lament, a torch song for the bruised, the last swig of hope for the sentimental ... a sweet refrain offered to the sky and whatever lies above it' (1999: 8). Alternatively – and somewhat more prosaically – it might well have been adopted simply because it contains the keyword 'blue' in its title.

Fans' chants are, indeed, still an important feature of the English game. Through their chanting, fans verbalise their affiliations, recount their allegiances and, most importantly from the perspective of the present study, affirm facets of their identity, often defined in opposition to that of their rivals. In addition to the familiar chants of 'If you hate Man United, clap your hands' and 'Stand up if you hate Man U', which are current fare the length and breadth of England, other more specifically Mancunian chants may be heard at City matches that offer further insights into City fans' perceptions of themselves and their neighbours. 'I never felt more like singing the blues/than when City win and United lose/Oh City, you got me singing the blues' is, for instance, a chant that lends some credibility to the belief that a United defeat is at least as pleasurable to a City fan as a City victory. Other chants go beyond the confines of performance on the pitch and affirm almost a moral superiority of City fans over their counterparts. 'City, City, the only football team to come from Manchester', for example, is a shorthand operating on two levels that reaffirms a vital element in the definition of the perceived identities of City and United. First, it points to the fact that both City's old home, Maine Road (from 1923 to 2003) and the new one, the City of Manchester Stadium (to which City moved in 2003) are located in Manchester itself whilst Old Trafford is over the border in Stretford in the borough of Trafford and, therefore, outside the boundaries of Manchester proper. Second, the chant draws attention to the perception that City is the local club, a team primarily for Mancunians, whilst United, with its national and global appeal as well as its widespread fan base, cannot be seen as a truly and uniquely Mancunian phenomenon. A moral superiority is thus asserted by the chant's reassertion of City's local appeal. United's being the 'world's premier national and international "super" club' (Mellor, 2000: 151) cuts no ice with the faithful for whom City remains a site for the celebration of local identity and an integral part of the local community.

This facet of the two clubs' imagined identities is often brought into sharper focus by the chanting at derby games between the two teams. Should the chant go up from United followers that 'We're the pride of all Europe', it is frequently met with the rejoinder from City fans: 'You're the pride of Singapore!' The word 'pride' is employed as a hinge upon which the premise of the chanting is turned away from United's recent sporting dominance towards the club's moral deficiencies in not being a wholly locally supported team. The fact that the rejoinder is immediate suggests City fans are well rehearsed in such degradation rituals. However ritualistic the interaction might be, though, it is nonetheless deeply felt and therefore important. Whether United have more followers in Singapore than Manchester is a moot point. That City have supporters' clubs throughout Europe, in North America, South Africa and Australasia might also be factored into the equation, demonstrating, as it does, that City's fanbase, although admittedly not as sizeable, is at least as internationally widespread as United's. Further complexity is added by recent research demonstrating that, at both clubs, about three-quarters of the season-

ticket holders actually live in the northwest of England, the local region (Brown, 2002). However, the same research also shows that, proportionally, significantly more of City's season-ticket holders live in Manchester than United's (40.5 per cent versus 28.2 per cent respectively). The reality is complex; the perception, foregrounded by terrace chants, is simple: City is the Manchester club, United is not.

### **Fan-tastic journeys**

The antagonism between City and United is further displayed in fans' projects beyond the use of colour and terrace chanting. In 1995, for instance, the *Manchester Evening News* conducted a poll on United manager Alex Ferguson's future following a trophy-less season in which several crowd favourites had been sold. The majority of voters agreed Ferguson should be dismissed but there still remains the suspicion that the figures were artificially inflated by mischievous City fans participating in the poll. Revenge for the alleged poll-rigging incident, however, was achieved in 2001 when it became apparent that many United followers were joining radio phone-ins pretending to be City fans. Identifying themselves to their co-conspirators by employing the code word 'massive' in their descriptions of City (thereby mimicking and mocking City fans' aspirations for their own club), the impostors severely criticised the Maine Road club and called for the dismissal of the then manager, Joe Royle. The devious campaign's principal target was BBC Radio 5 Live's '606' programme. Sensing his phone-ins were being hijacked, presenter Richard Littlejohn alerted City's chief operations officer, Chris Bird, who, in turn, contacted several other radio stations to request they be more vigilant when vetting callers: 'At first the whole thing just seemed mischievous, but the campaign has gone on too long and is too concerted to ignore,' noted Bird in an open acknowledgement of the success of the project (Soccernet, 2001). Occasionally, the Mancunian mischief-makers who poke fun at their rivals do so with considerable imagination and creativity. Prior to a 1991 derby, for instance, City fans executed a stunt that was spectacular in the extreme by using funds generated from sales of the first City fanzine, *Blueprint*, to hire a light aircraft to circle Old Trafford trailing a banner with the inscription 'MCFC [Manchester City Football Club] The Pride of Manchester', thereby taunting the United crowd with a reassertion of Mancunian identity that is so central to City fans. Remarkably, 10 years later, before the 2001 derby, the stunt was repeated. This time, the aeroplane's banner read: 'MCFC Real Club Real Fans'. The message was blunt, if, once again, possibly a touch unfair in its sweeping generalisation. Explicitly, City are an authentic football club; implicitly, United are not.

Perpetuating the same theme, another group of City fans has actually recorded a music CD: 'Project Blue Book' decries United's corporate followers, who, according to Roy Keane's infamous outburst, are too busy eating prawn sandwiches to cheer on their team, by referring to them as 'customers' and mocking their club's status as a plc. City fan turned songwriter Pete Boyle claims United followers are frustrated by 'supporting a plc which is more interested in profits than its fans' as well as affirming that City supporters are 'fans of a football club, not customers of a business' (*Manchester Evening News*, 5 April 2001). In so doing, he highlights another of the most important distinctions that is made when portraying the clashing identities of City and United. Rightly or wrongly, City are perceived as a traditional, community-based football club whilst United's

projected identity revolves around its status as a global, commercial, money-making company (for further discussion, see Hand, 2001).

### **The root of all evil?**

In reality, of course, the distinction is not so clear cut and the debate would benefit from some nuancing. Manchester City are also, not surprisingly, engaged in a policy that ultimately aims to emulate United's commercial success. City is itself a plc (quoted on Off Exchange Market [OFEX] rather than the Stock Exchange) and was, indeed, the best-performing English club in 2001 in terms of share prices (Sturgess, 2002: 5). Similarly, attracting hefty commercial sponsorship is by no means the sole prerogative of United. The shirt sponsorship deal City secured with electronics giant Brother in 1997 brought in an estimated £1 million a year and was, relatively, the country's fifth biggest deal, only slightly behind United's reputed £1.25 million/annum partnership with Sharp (Szymanski and Kuypers, 1999: 70). Again, City has not been slow to recognise the moneyspinning opportunities afforded by the provision of corporate hospitality at their grounds. When Maine Road was redeveloped in the mid-1990s, 48 executive boxes were installed in the Platt Lane Stand and a further 32 in the new Kippax, features which delighted the chair of the board, the late Peter Swales, who regarded them as a vital component in the club's commercial activities (Murray, 1997: 32). Indeed, the new City of Manchester Stadium is similarly well-equipped (with 68 boxes) and reportedly has the best corporate facilities in England. Whether or not prawn is one of the fillings in the sandwiches served at City matches, the club cannot be said in reality to be diametrically opposed to United in its approach to corporate clientele. Finally, City are now even profiting from their acquisition of Chinese international defender, Jihai Sun. Sun's exploits are followed with considerable interest in his homeland and City directors were quick to visit the world's most populous country to promote commercial links. Mirroring United's activities in the Far East, City is establishing retail outlets in Shanghai and Peking while director Chris Bird, regarding China as 'a land of opportunity', anticipates the generation of 'considerable income over the next 12 to 18 months' (*Manchester Evening News*, 21 October 2002).

For all this, still the image persists that it is United and certainly not City which is tarnished by an overzealous concern with money-making activities. For example, when news broke that United had secreted five mobile phone masts inside their Stretford stadium, a newspaper, reporting that local residents had not been directly consulted, once again foregrounded the image of United as a faceless, insensitive, commercial concern. 'Nothing the club does surprises me any more,' lamented one resident, while another railed: 'The club never tell us anything ... It's just all about money with them and to hell with everybody else' (*Manchester Evening News*, 11 October 2002). Furthermore, even neutral observers of the football industry perpetuate these differences in the imagined identities of City and United:

With its international marketing reach, one might reasonably ask exactly what it is that ties United to Manchester (especially when a majority of Mancunians are said to support the rival club Manchester City) ... United is distinguished as being a club which does not appear to draw its support

primarily from its local area. In Manchester itself, it is said that City is the most popular team, but United is supported all over the country. Moreover, in international terms United is probably the most well recognised English football club. In that sense it is like a brand name such as Coca-Cola, Marlboro or Nescafé. (Szymanski and Kuypers, 1999: 230)

Hodkinson concurs and further extends the dichotomous images by claiming: ‘In stereotypical terms, United is your out-of-town hypermarket, faceless, homogenised and shamelessly avaricious, while City is your friendly corner shop, all how-are-you? and nice-to-see-you, love’ (1999: 150. Note the pertinent reference to United being out of town). Having noted that a certain amount of stereotyping is at work in depictions of the two clubs, and despite the reality that their commercial strategies are probably now converging (on United’s model) rather than diverging, it should be remembered that stereotypes, for all their inherent distortions and exaggerations, are nonetheless usually rooted in objective realities (for further discussion, see Crolley and Hand, 2002). There are, indeed, still examples of the two clubs doing business differently that serve to reinforce the dichotomy already noted. Even when City belatedly accepted the need to develop its merchandising operations, the merchandising manager, Mike Peak, still highlighted City’s difference in this respect from that of their neighbours: sales would be maximised by offering customers desirable quality products ‘and not, as is the case at Old Trafford, [by] filling up a big warehouse full of products and saying, “there, go on, just buy it” ’ (Murray, 1997: 80). Again, shortly after United increased season-ticket prices by twice the rate of inflation for all but executive seat holders (BBC1, 2000), City actually froze their 2003 prices even though the club was moving to bigger and better facilities at their new stadium. Similarly, it would be hard to imagine City allocating a full one-third of its tickets for a derby to executive box holders and commercial partners, which is precisely what United did for the last ever derby held at Maine Road (in November 2002, won by City), much to the disgust of the Independent Manchester United Supporters Association (*Manchester Evening News*, 7 November 2002). So, to regard City as a friendly corner shop placing service to the community over a desire to make a profit might well be slightly erroneous in the context of the football industry of the early 21st century but, insofar as United’s equally stereotypical reputation for shameless greed is concerned, the proverb ‘there’s no smoke without fire’ springs to mind.

### **Zine-age angst**

The perception that City are Manchester’s authentic local club whilst United’s national and global business concerns deny it the right to be regarded as a purely Mancunian football phenomenon, already apparent in fans’ terrace chants and other projects, has also been spotlighted by this brief analysis of commercial activities. Not unsurprisingly, it is additionally one of the mainstays of cultural products devised by City fans. The fanzine movement, for instance, is replete with further examples. Irreverent humour and fierce denigration of the local rival are two of the principal features of fanzine culture (Haynes, 1995) and, as such, are frequently in evidence in publications like *City ’till I Cry*, founded by Tom Ritchie in 1998 to offer a view of the world ‘that would fit in with our perception of being humorous and idiosyncratic, and with a raging hatred of all things “Man Yoo”’ (Waldon, 2002: 111). These traits are ably demonstrated in this fanzine and in its even

longer-running homologues *King of the Kippax* (over a hundred issues since 1988) and *Bert Trautmann's Helmet* (from 1989, originally *Electric Blue*). *City 'till I Cry*, for instance, reacted 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 by claiming to have discovered the content of the royal message inscribed on the offending spheroid: 'Why doesn't one naff orrrfff and support one's local team?' (*City 'till I Cry*, 13 October 1998). Other examples of this sharp-edged Mancunian humour abound. The preview in *Bert Trautmann's Helmet* of the first derby following City's return to the Premiership in 2000–1 included the remark: 'This Saturday United play their first match in Manchester for four years' (*Bert Trautmann's Helmet*, 15 November 2000), reiterating the fact that United is not actually based in Manchester proper and thereby reinforcing what is seen as a key element in City fans' self-definition: Mancunian status.

It has been noted, however, that the heyday of the fanzine movement has passed (Waldon, 2002: 114–25) and certainly output is not now so voluminous in this area. It could be, though, that what is happening is not a downturn in the production of fanzine-type material but rather a relocation of it from photocopiers and printing presses to the Internet. E-zines, message boards and websites might well be progressively conquering the space previously occupied by fanzines. One City e-zine, for instance, claims over 3,000 subscribers (Manchester City Information Via the Alps [MCIVTA], 2002). There are, therefore, plenty of examples of the dominant themes of the City–United dynamic to be found in cyberspace. The familiar taunt that too many of United's followers are not Mancunians, for instance, is frequently reiterated through spiky humour. 'What have Old Trafford on a Saturday afternoon at 4.45 p.m. and Wormwood Scrubs got in common?' asks one fan: 'They are both full of Cockneys trying to get out' (MCIVTA, 2002). Similarly, another wag announces a spoof newsflash: 'In light of the fact the vast majority of United fans may have missed out on the recent open top bus tour of Manchester, Chairman Martin Edwards today announced a second bus tour around the M25' (MCIVTA, 2002). Examples of the process could be added almost indefinitely. A third poses a question full of irony of United's directors: 'Why not relocate and build a brand new stadium somewhere near London to reward your loyal lifelong supporters with a shorter journey home after matches?' (MCIVTA, 2002), while a fourth reflects on City's departure from Maine Road and suggests that 'our illustrious neighbours [might] like to rent the ground occasionally so they can visit Manchester more than once a season' (MCFC, 2001). Finally, Internet postings also reinforce the perception that many United followers are: transient glory-seekers, 'How many Reds does it take to change a light bulb? None, they all fled at the first sign [it] was failing' (MCIVTA, 2002); not true fanatics, 'What have the moon and Old Trafford got in common? No atmosphere' (BlueView, 2002); or merely armchair supporters (see Figure 12.1).

The vibrant culture of contestation pioneered by fanzines (Jary *et al.*, 1991) is extended to the Internet, then, where City's 'traditional' fans constantly challenge the new forces of commercialism incarnated by United and resist the discourse and practices of media-driven consumerism.

### Writing wrongs?

Issues of place, identification with a locality and fan authenticity and loyalty appear as constants in City fans' perceptions as communicated through the new media of fanzines and the Internet. These concerns are also frequently voiced in the older medium of the book market through popular football writing. The vogue that developed in the 1980s for books in which fans reflect upon their lives in football hardly seems to have abated. Manchester City in particular, presumably because of their high-profile trials and tribulations in the last 20 years, have generated a large number of such works, many with something to say about the City–United dynamic. The most celebrated work of this nature is, of course, Schindler's *Manchester United Ruined My Life* (1998). Schindler, a cinema and television screenplay writer who follows in the line of *soccerati* begun by Hornby, author of *Fever Pitch* (1992), presents an eloquent case for choosing City over United. To opt for City might be irrational in view of cold sporting logic but it is a choice based upon the concept of self-definition via difference and distinction. The masses blindly follow United simply because they win. Using the technique of portraying City and United through a series of antitheses that is, in the light of the present study, increasingly familiar, Schindler notes that City are 'Wrong but Wromantic, United ... Right but Repulsive' (Schindler, 1998: 7). Schindler's work has received considerable attention, though, and it is more illuminating to consider other works that have received less coverage but which, nonetheless, amply reinforce the identity of United as imagined by Manchester City fans. Winstanley's *Bleak and Blue* (1999), for instance, is unequivocal in this respect and is worth quoting at some length for its humorous foregrounding of many of the features of United's identity that have already been identified in other areas. United is:

- not a Manchester team: 'There is a team based in the borough of Trafford that I cannot avoid mentioning' (Winstanley, 1999: 8);
- not a traditional football club: 'Well, to be honest, they are not so much a football team as a renowned financial concern and fashion house' (p.8);
- not necessarily followed primarily by Mancunians: 'The sight of somebody wearing a shirt in their famous colours – red, speckled blue, green and yellow, black, pink with yellow dots, puce and orange stripes, invisible grey, makes me wince. The only comfort comes when the accent of the wearer reveals origins somewhere between 150 and several thousand miles from Manchester' (p.9);
- not a local concern but a national one: Winstanley refers to United throughout as '*The Nation's Team* (*The World's Team* might be more appropriate)' (p.8) both as a euphemism because he is 'heartily sick of seeing their name in print' (p.8) and as an ironic reference to United's national appeal which is itself not viewed positively but rather as a negative example of the way in which football's traditional driving forces of match-going fanaticism and civic patriotism are being challenged by the new imperatives of media-driven consumerism and commercialism;



- not wholly supported by ‘real’ fans but followed primarily by television consumers: ‘The sheer level of publicity ensures that little boys will claim to support *The Nation’s Team* because they are the only team they have heard of, and because it’s easy. You don’t have to leave your living room. You just sit in front of the television, wearing one of your myriad choice of official replica shirts, then you go and unleash your misguided superiority complex on your friends’ (p.9);

- not an object of affection under any circumstances: ‘They are the enemy ... whoever, wherever and whenever *The Nation’s Team* play, I will support the opposition even if [they] located Mussolini in goal, with a back four of Kissinger, Saddam Hussein, Pol Pot and Hitler, a midfield with Thatcher on the right, Stalin on the left, a couple of Radio 1 DJ’s ... in the middle, and Rupert Murdoch up front with David Mellor’ (p.10).

Another recent text, *Maine Road Voices*, covers similar ground by allowing fans to recollect their memories of supporting City and denigrating United. ‘My mother, my uncles, my grandparents and my cousins were all Reds’ notes one contributor, ‘(though all but one uncle and his son were true Reds, that is never went near the ground but had comfy armchairs)’ (Waldon, 2002: 86). Others highlight City and United’s contrasting characteristics: ‘I’ve always had a sense of humour, despised big heads, preferred blue and have been proud of the city of Manchester, having been born there ... I could only support Manchester City, couldn’t I?’ (p.87). Is the implication in this act of self-definition that many United followers are humourless, arrogant non-Mancunians? Indeed, so important is the attachment to Manchester and its perceived role in the City–United dynamic that several contributors to Waldon’s book cannot bring themselves to use the word ‘Manchester’ in conjunction with ‘United’ at all, preferring instead epithets that highlight United’s non-Mancunian status such as ‘our friends from Salford’ (p.24) and ‘Stretford Rangers’ (p.118).

The latter mirrors the usage of local media and football personalities. For example, *Manchester Evening News* journalist (and former City player) Paul Hince often refers to ‘Trafford Rangers’ in his columns; BBC Greater Manchester Radio’s (GMR) Ian Cheeseman speaks of ‘Stretford United’ and former City director Ian Niven would speak of ‘Stretford Rangers’ (Buckley and Burgess, 2000: 28).

### **The big picture**

Finally, it is worth considering a recent fictional representation of the City–United dynamic for the light it sheds upon the conflictual relationship between the two clubs’ supporters. In the British film *There’s Only One Jimmy Grimble*, the eponymous hero is a modest schoolboy footballer and City fan, bullied by his peers, who ultimately overcomes his physical and psychological limitations to achieve success on the pitch. The film may be read as a metaphor of the City–United divide because of its director’s desire to make Manchester ‘a real character’ in the picture (Hay, 2000). Indeed, the locations are set in the city and, in fact, in and around Maine Road itself while the soundtrack is largely made up of elements from the famous Manchester music scene.

Grimble is, then, a ‘City boy’ who describes himself as ‘on the endangered species list ... in the heart of the Man U jungle’ (Hay, 2000) as he suffers verbal and physical abuse at the hands of rival United followers at his school. His tormentors outnumber him, symbolising the numerical superiority of United followers over their City counterparts; they are all also bigger and stronger than him, reflecting United’s dominance in the real world; and, whilst Grimble is shy and modest, the United bullies are confident and arrogant. In one scene, they urinate on Grimble’s City holdall, a powerful representation of the attitude adopted by some United followers towards their neighbours from Manchester. Grimble’s chief tormentor is ‘gorgeous’ Gordon Burley, who may be read as a personification of United itself, at least as seen through City eyes: he is popular and photogenic but vain, a skilful footballer but an obnoxious character. Interestingly, his father is an equally repulsive out-of-town businessman who uses his financial sponsorship of his son’s school to dictate team selections to the subservient sports teacher, Eric Wirral. Burley senior thus represents the financial clout behind United and the unadulteratedly commercial elements supporting them. Just as the Burleys represent certain facets of United’s perceived identity, Grimble’s benefactors in the film may be interpreted as reinforcing the contrasting identity of City. Grimble’s adult friend Harry is a likeable Mancunian and fellow City fan who is kind and supportive – the complete antithesis of the Burleys – while Wirral is modest and self-deprecating. The latter, who significantly lives on Maine Road, is an ex-City player struggling to cope professionally with his former glories well behind him, a metaphor for Manchester City itself, perhaps, which has known decline on the pitch (but not on the terraces) for some 20 years.

That the film as a whole is constructed on antithesis is further reinforced by the director’s use of colour. The clashing colours of blue and red are here employed systematically in a powerful symbolic code that affirms blue as the colour of comfort, safety and right with red being the colour of anger, danger and wrong. Grimble’s school team significantly play in sky blue whilst their opponents are frequently seen in red. In the bullying scenes, Grimble’s tormentors generally wear red clothing and in one particular scene, Grimble takes refuge behind the safety of a blue car. Grimble’s confidant, Wirral, dresses in a blue tracksuit and drives the schoolboy footballers around in a light blue minibus. Harry’s antagonistic wife is wearing red in a scene where she berates him and, finally, the naturally blue trimmings of Maine Road are colour enhanced to glow with an eerie intensity as the backdrop to Grimble’s ultimate triumph on the pitch as he steers his team to victory in the Cup Final there. Reflecting the colour dynamics employed by City fans in their projects, the mutually hostile colours of blue and red are simply but effectively used by the film to represent good and bad in a manner reminiscent of Hollywood’s use of white and black in old westerns.

	<i>City</i> <i>Positive</i>	<i>United</i> <i>Negative</i>
<b>Appeal</b>	local	(inter)national
<b>Imperative</b>	community	commercial
<b>Quality</b>	‘real’	inauthentic
<b>Personality</b>	humble	arrogant

Table 12.1 A City–United dynamic synoptic framework

### Conclusion

There is substantial evidence to suggest that the attitude adopted by Manchester City fans towards United is not based upon the principle of ‘love thy neighbour’. In the context of traditional English football fandom, founded as it is upon civic pride and fierce local rivalries and antagonisms, there is little reason to suppose it would be otherwise. What it has been interesting to isolate and analyse in the present study, however, are the various forms that this antipathy assumes in and around Manchester. Ultimately and not withstanding the full complexity and contradictions of City and United’s identities as social facts, it is clear that perceptions of United held by many City fans deliberately polarise the protagonists in the dynamic and, therefore, portray them through a series of antipathic binary oppositions that serve to establish the projected identity of United as the complete antithesis of City. Consequently, the City–United dynamic operates in the synoptic framework illustrated in Table 12.1.

So mutually exclusive are the imagined identities of Greater Manchester’s two dominant footballing forces that, once the right choice is made and a commitment established, there can be only total, utter rejection of the Other. At the end of *There’s Only One Jimmy Grimble*, for instance, the hero speaks for all those born with a blue moon rising when he rejects a scout’s proposal to join United in favour of ‘a better offer’ (Hay, 2000). Looking suitably incredulous, the scout enquires, ‘What could be better than Man United, son?’ To which Grimble heart-warmingly replies, ‘Man City!’

### References

- BBC1 (2000) ‘North West Tonight’, 13 April, television programme.
- BlueView (2002) available online at <http://manchestercity.rivals.net/default.asp?sId=914&stId=7954254&p=2> (accessed December 2002).
- Brown, A. (2002) *Do You Come From Manchester? A Postcode Analysis of the Location of Manchester United and Manchester City Season Ticket Holders, 2001*, available online at <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/h-ss/mipc/docs/SeasonTicketReport.pdf>.
- Buckley, A. and Burgess, R. (2000) *Blue Moon Rising*, Bury: Milo Books.
- Crolley, L. and Hand, D. (2002) *Football, Europe and the Press*, London: Frank Cass.
- Hand, D. (2001) ‘City ’till I die? Recent trends in popular football writing’, *Soccer and Society*, 2(1): 99–112.
- Hay, J. (Dir.) (2000) ‘There’s Only One Jimmy Grimble’, Pathé Pictures, DVD.

Table 12.1 A City–United dynamic synoptic framework

### *City United*

*positive negative*

**Appeal** local (inter)national

**Imperative** community commercial

**Quality** ‘real’ inauthentic

**Personality** humble arrogant

202 David Hand

Haynes, R. (1995) *The Football Imagination: The Rise of Football Fanzine Culture*, Aldershot: Arena.

Hodkinson, M. (1999) *Blue Moon*, Edinburgh: Mainstream.

Hornby, N. (1992) *Fever Pitch*, London: Victor Gollancz.

Jary, D., Horne, J. and Bucke, T. (1991) 'Football fanzines and football culture', *Sociological Review*, 39(4): 581–97.

Jones, I. (1997) 'Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods in sports fan research: *The Qualitative Report*, 3(4), available online at <http://www.nova.edu/SSSS/QR/QR3-4/jones.html>.

Manchester City Football Club (MCFC) (2001) available online at <http://www.mcfc.co.uk/active.asp?article=26551&display=article> (accessed January 2001).

Manchester City Information Via the Alps (MCIVTA) (2002) available online at <http://www.uit.no/mancity/mcivta/> (accessed November 2002).

Manchester City Supporters Homepage (2002) available online at <http://www.uit.no/mancity/humour.html> (accessed October 2002).

Mellor, G. (2000) 'The genesis of Manchester United as a national and international "super-club"', *Soccer and Society*, 1(2): 151–66.

Murray, C. (1997) *Attitude Blue: Crowd Psychology at Manchester City FC*, Stockport: MUS.

Schindler, C. (1998) *Manchester United Ruined My Life*, London: Headline.

Soccernet (2001) available online at [www.soccernet.com/england/today/news/index.html](http://www.soccernet.com/england/today/news/index.html). (accessed January 2002)

Sturgess, B. (2002) 'City view', *Soccer Analyst*, 3(1): 5–7.

Szymanski, S. and Kuypers, T. (1999) *Winners and Losers: The Business Strategy of Football*, London: Penguin.

Waddington, I., Malcolm, D. and Horak, R. (1998) 'The social composition of football crowds in Western Europe', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 33(2): 155–69.

Waldon, A. (2002) *Maine Road Voices*, Stroud: Tempus Publishing.

Winstanley, C. (1999) *Bleak and Blue*, Wilmslow: Sigma Leisure.