



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

**“Blood and Piss, the Great British
Cocktail”**

**A Literary and Sociological Exploration of Football
Hooliganism in the 1980s in John King's Novel *The Football
Factory* and Bill Buford's Investigative Journalism in *Among
the Thugs***

B.A. Essay

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January 2015

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Abstract

This essay's main purpose is to view in detail the portrayal of football hooligans in John King's novel, *The Football Factory*, and to compare its characters with Bill Buford's descriptions of football hooligans in his book *Among the Thugs*, which he wrote on his travels as he accompanied groups of football supporters for a period of eight years in the 1980s. The essay will offer information on the rise of football hooliganism in the 1960s, its peak in the 1980s and the government's attempts at intervention, leading to its decline. The essay explores the similarities and differences of the fictionalized violence in John King's novel and the factual violence in Bill Buford's account, and their shared themes of confrontations with law enforcement, search for a sense of identity, and the importance of the role of the media in the world of football hooliganism. It also explores several aspects that seem to coalesce in the football hooligans' lifestyle, such as excessive alcohol consumption leading to physical violence, racism, misogyny and general lawlessness. The essay's ultimate goal is to determine whether John King's characters are a realistic and convincing representation of English football hooligans of the 1980s.

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Introduction

Having been an avid supporter of Chelsea Football Club for the last 15 years, I have found myself increasingly interested in the culture surrounding football in England. Seemingly pointless violence and alcohol-infused brawls have co-existed with English football since long before the establishment of the Premier League in 1992, but where does this relationship come from? Unfortunately, I have never personally been to a football match in England, so I will have to rely completely on documented sources in my research. The passion of football fans never ceases to amaze me, although I am one of them. I love and support a club that plays a sport that I have never practiced, a team that I have never personally seen play, based in a country that I have never even visited. Nonetheless, my week is ruined if this team, which I have randomly chosen to support, loses against Arsenal. Although football violence is not a common problem in Iceland, I have witnessed two grown men sitting at a bar, violently screaming at each other and finally breaking into a fight, for the sole reason that one of them supported Manchester United, and the other supported Liverpool. The two teams were not even playing at the time.

My main point of interest, and the purpose of this essay, is to view in detail the portrayal of football hooligans in popular fiction, but also compare them to their real-life counterparts from documented sources, with the main focus being on the hooligans' confrontations with both each other and law enforcement, and the importance of media coverage of these confrontations, as well as assessing how accurate and believable these characters are by exploring any similarities between the fictionalized hooligans and the factual ones. This I intend to do by covering John King's novel, *The Football*

Factory, from 1996, a novel which has been claimed to be a brutally honest depiction of football hooliganism in the 1980s (King N.pag.), and comparing John King's characters to actual sources on hooliganism from works of journalism, namely Bill Buford's *Among the Thugs*, a book he published in 1991, in which he wrote on his endeavours as he accompanied football hooligans for a period of eight years.

1. Origins of Football and Hooliganism in the United Kingdom

Association football formally originated from a series of meetings held in London in 1863, and was at first mostly a game for social elites at public schools. By the late 1870s it had become more popular among the working class, however, and the power on the pitch was transferred from the public schools to football clubs. Since then, the majority of players and supporters have emerged from the working class, while the clubs' ownerships and administrations has mostly been in the hands of the middle and upper-middle classes (Armstrong and Giulianotti 15-16). In a chapter of *Football Cultures and Identities*, David Russell claims that working-class fans subsequently succeeded in stamping football with their identity, values and culture through active spectatorship featuring noise, spectacle and partisanship (Armstrong and Giulianotti 16). In *British Cultural Identities*, a typical 1950s male member of the working class is described as an uneducated manual worker with a regional accent, who spends his free time drinking beer at a pub, betting and going to football matches (Storry and Childs 187). Recent studies, however, have shown that the working class manual worker of the 2000s spends much less time at the pub, which has become a venue frequently visited by youths, and at football matches, with members of the middle class becoming more regular attendants (Storry and Childs 191).

The game of football has for long been associated with masculinity, and was at first only practiced and watched by males. David Russell explains that from the beginnings of football, it has been a field for expression and experimentation with a variety of masculine identities, with many of the emotions expressed within football being viewed as characteristics of “true masculinity”. For example, the celebration of physical strength and loyalty to “mates” and specific territories are a vital part of football culture, with British supporters being especially fond of strength, speed and an aggressive form of playing (Armstrong and Giulianotti 17). As football rose to prominence in the late nineteenth century, the supporters’ sense of identity was positively renewed, as they became a part of a unity by supporting their local team with thousands of others, most of whom did not know each other, and for years to come football was associated with tolerance and decency. However, that changed in the mid-1960s, with the emergence of racism and the rise of football hooliganism (Armstrong and Giulianotti 19-22).

In *Social Issues in Sport*, Mike Slep recounts Ian Taylor’s assessment of the rise of hooliganism in the 1960s. Taylor has claimed that although there have been issues with hooliganism before, a change in football’s organization led to a more serious form of spectator violence. Football had been a working class sport, but with the introduction of middle and upper class management, the working class felt that they had lost control and ownership of the game, and the violence was their reaction to this process. Dunning, Murphy and Waddington argue that the increase in violence might result from media exaggerations of the scale and seriousness of the violence, which could have led more aggressive characters starting to attend football matches, and therefore in a way, the hooligans began living up to their violent reputation (Slep 164). Slep supports this claim to some extent, and offers an example of how the media tends to exaggerate the

seriousness of the violence with a news story which claimed that 200 supporters had been arrested at a match, when in reality the actual total was only 7 (172-173). Hobbs and Robins propose a simpler reason for the rise of hooliganism, and argue that while at first, football violence was football related, in later years it had become simply a form of entertainment, and that the football hooligans simply have a “love for fighting” (Sleap 165). Football hooliganism reached its peak in the 1980s with the stadium disasters at Heysel and Hillsborough, in which 134 people were crushed to death. After the tragedy at Heysel in 1985, authorities sought new ways of reducing and eliminating the problem; more effort was put into segregating the away fans from the home fans, perimeter fencing was erected around pitches (Sleap 176), and a ban on alcoholic beverages was introduced, as violent behaviour was deemed to be largely a result of alcohol consumption. Sleap however mentions that although the banning of alcohol might have reduced violent behaviour in the stadia, it was still possible to drink at pubs before and after matches, so the violence might only have been transferred to another location (Sleap 177). Despite all these measures, hooliganism continued, and after the Hillsborough stadium disaster in 1989, the Taylor Report recommended the abolition of terracing in favour of all-seater stadia, a law which took effect a few years later (Sleap 177). Since then, although violent encounters still take place occasionally, football violence within grounds has declined significantly. As a result, football is again celebrated in the media, rather than vilified (Conn).

2. The Football Factory

Although *The Football Factory* is the first in a trilogy of novels by John King, I have decided not to include the second two novels, *Headhunters*, and *England Away*,

respectively, simply for the reason that my research of the novel is much more dedicated to the characters' portrayal and coming to an understanding of the characters' frame of mind as active football hooligans, rather than focusing on all their life events in chronological order. I feel that this information is sufficiently attainable from the first book of the trilogy. Also, despite the narrative voices being exchanged regularly to focus on different characters as the novel progresses, I will mainly be focusing on Tom Johnson and his hooligan friends, while still giving some insights into the role of the other characters in the novel's bigger picture.

Although the purpose of John King's novel may very well be to shock its readers, it has been described by critics as offering a realistic representation of the daily struggles of ordinary people (Searle). It has also been noted by critics to be very similar in character to works of Irvine Welsh, a good friend of King's, especially his first novel, *Trainspotting*, which has a very similar narrative form as *The Football Factory*, being composed of a series of short stories that are only very subtly connected, which can be quite confusing for the reader, as sometimes a character appears, whose connection to other characters is only hinted at, so the reader is left to make his own assumptions (Bradbury). Irvine Welsh, who is famous for his crude language and ruthlessness regarding taboo subjects, praises the novel in its opening pages, stating that it is: "The best book [he's] read about football and working class culture since the war" (King N.pag.). In his novel, John King certainly relies heavily on dark humour as well as shocking actions and statements from his characters, and like Irvine Welsh, he also uses sex, profanity, drugs, alcohol and other taboo subjects in large doses. Hugh Macdonald claims in his review of the book that, although controversial, King's characters are the authentic voice of the self-confessed white trash, and likens the novel to "*Fever Pitch*,

with testosterone and eight pints of lager” (Macdonald). It therefore must be taken into consideration, when wondering about the authenticity of his characters, whether he is trying to create realistic characters or if he is creating exaggerated characters whose purpose is to shock readers and create publicity.

The reader only needs to read the first few pages of John King's novel, *The Football Factory*, to become disgusted with its characters. These die-hard football fans are from the beginning portrayed as racist, homophobic, misogynistic and sadist drunkards. They follow their routine weekend schedule, which is first and foremost filling themselves up with lager at a local pub, then watching their club play, after which they continue with drinking beer, and not uncommonly get in a fight with the supporters of the contending club. Their shocking world views and pitch black humour are perfectly described in the first three sentences of the novel, which starts as follows: “Coventry are fuck all. They've got a shit team and shit support. Hitler had the right idea when he flattened the place.” (King 1).

2.1. Characters

The plot of *The Football Factory* follows the lives of a few individuals who are all in some way connected to the culture of football hooliganism in the United Kingdom. The novel is divided by chapters to focus on separate characters, which may or may not know each other, and their exploits are not easily connectable. Some characters the novel focuses on have very little effect on the storyline of *The Football Factory*, but play a bigger role in John King's third instalment to the Trilogy, *England Away*. The main character of the novel is Tom Johnson, who serves as a narrator, with chapters focusing on him being written in the first person singular, whilst chapters

focusing on other characters are written in the third person singular, with the exception of one chapter involving a Chelsea fan magazine editor named Vince Matthews.

Johnson is a warehouse worker who frequently gets involved in violent encounters with supporters of other football clubs. He manages to hold his job, and at work he portrays the persona of the joker, a fairly normal guy, although his workmates know that he is a passionate Chelsea fan. When at the pub before a match, however, Tom is transformed into a person whose morals are at best questionable. After being introduced to Tom Johnson and his hooligan friends, Mark and Rob, the reader is introduced to a few other characters, who are also the focus of the novel's storyline. One of them is Sid Parkinson, a workmate of Tom Johnson's. He is a forklift operator who passes his time daydreaming. Sometimes he daydreams about being a top player at his favourite club, Queens Park Rangers, and at other times he has just won millions in the lottery, and needs to figure out how to spend his fortune. Sid Parkinson is a relaxed run-of-the-mill guy who enjoys football simply because of the football. He does not like the football hooligan trouble-makers who ruin things for everyone else, but still he likes Tom Johnson, who always treats him well at work.

Will Dobson is a sports journalist who is educating a younger colleague, Jennifer Simpson, on the world of football. He claims whole-heartedly that football hooliganism is dead, and that nowadays it is simply a figment of imagination. He claims that after the Heysel stadium disaster of 1985, football hooligans were priced out of the game, and subsequently became extinct. He also attributes this to the Tories' eradication of the class system. The pair is saddened by this, with Dobson reminiscing in the glory that would surround a sports journalist who could write countless stories on football hooligans in the good old days, and Jennifer Simpson complaining about the sheer

boredom of football without the presence of the ever exciting trouble-makers.

Mr. Farrell is an older gentleman and a veteran of the Second World War. After the war he married his Jewish wife, who has passed away, and recently he has also lost his good friend Albert Moss, a veteran of the war in Burma. He has great difficulties coping with the deaths of his loved ones, and still has daily conversations with his deceased wife at home. He is a part of a generation that he feels has been forgotten by almost everyone. The politicians only remember his generation on one day a year, on Remembrance Day, and he is deeply saddened with younger generations and how the world has turned out, with young boys beating up defenceless immigrants because that is how they were raised. He believes that people around the world are all the same, and that the only thing that drives people to do bad things is fear. People look at him as a hero, but in fact they have no idea what he has seen and done. Vince Matthews is Mr. Farrell's grandson. He is a former football hooligan who has travelled the world and lived in exotic places. He now holds a steady job at a Chelsea Football Club fan magazine called *No Exceptions*.

2.2. Summary

The novel's plot mainly revolves around Tom Johnson and a few of his friends who are hard-core fans of Chelsea Football Club. They go to every game, be it home or away, to support their club. Before and after the football matches, they go looking for supporters of either the opposing team, or simply just supporters of any rival team, with the intention of fighting them. The plot revolves around these violent encounters that Johnson and his friends have with other supporters, as well as cutting away to completely different people living their lives, most of whom have connections to

football hooliganism, and some possibly without even knowing it. The main plot however continues to follow Tom Johnson, with the reader briefly visiting his surprisingly normal childhood and then continuing with following Johnson in his fights against law enforcement officials, the judicial system, and finally a group of football hooligans that proves too much to handle. Johnson is hospitalized after getting a serious beating from fans of Millwall Football Club, one of Chelsea's biggest rivals. While being kicked repeatedly in the face, groin and stomach, Johnson feels abandoned and starts fearing for his life, and wonders if this is the end for him. He does wake up, however, in a hospital bed, and soon enough, after he has recovered, he has returned to the stands, is ready to fight, and has learned absolutely nothing from the experience.

3. Among the Thugs

In order to determine how accurate John King's portrayal of football hooligans really is, the most viable option is to compare it to real-life sources and evidence. In his book, *Among the Thugs*, Bill Buford, an American journalist living in Britain, has documented his experiences as he accompanied groups of football supporters for a period of eight years. His works are not fictitious, but his own recollections, and he swears that he will be as truthful as he possibly can, although he confesses that some of his memories are blurry, since he was not uncommonly under the influence of alcohol in his exploits.

3.1. Summary

His story begins as he witnesses a gang of football supporters vandalize a train in Wales. He witnesses the supporters tear the inside of the train apart by ripping out the

seats and breaking its furnishings, smashing windows and harassing other passengers. He is shocked by the fact that the police seem unable to control the situation, and although they manage to subdue an occasional culprit, they are utterly powerless against the crowd, and Buford recalls detecting visible fear in their eyes (Buford 14). As an American, he has never experienced anything quite like it, and is intrigued and excited by the passion of these football fans, so and he decides to study their ways, with the intention of writing a story on them.

His first venture is therefore to attend football matches in England, which he had not done before. During the matches he would then try to find hooligans, introduce himself as a journalist, and then ask them questions. The first supporter he befriends is Mick, an electrician from Blackpool and supporter of Manchester United. The two sit down at a pub for a drink and a conversation, despite Mick's immediate declaration of disgust towards both Americans and journalists. Buford is surprised to hear that Mick does not fall into the category of rebels that he had expected most hooligans to be a part of, as he is skilled at his job and apparently has quite a sum of money, which he unselfishly spends on buying rounds at the bar. Mick also claims to be a part of a firm (the supporters' own term for their gangs), but denies that they are at all violent, stating that although he had been arrested before, that was due to a misunderstanding (Buford 26-28). Later on, when Buford questions others on the subject, they all give similar answers. They wholeheartedly deny being hooligans, and insist that they are merely football supporters.

After attending his first few football matches in England, Buford feels that he is already developing a taste for the game, almost enjoying the experience from the start. He compares the experience to alcohol and tobacco, and states that although addictive,

the whole ordeal is probably a little self-destructing (Buford 21). In Turin, he meets a number of supporters who all deny being violent hooligans. As a journalist, he wants to witness violence, because that is what he has come to see. He hears of other journalists that had previously followed the supporters; one was very interested in the violence, but when trouble began, he fled, which was frowned upon, and led to him being attacked when he finally returned. The other offered supporters money for throwing rocks and shouting obscenities (Buford 50-51). After hearing this, Buford realizes that whatever happens, he must not give in and run away, he has to stay in the fight.

After having been involved with the hooligans for some time, Buford's own personality starts to change. When he gets stuck behind an elderly couple on a staircase for a brief moment, he is suddenly angered, shoves them to the side and yells at them (Buford 106). Also, at a match some time later, he is shouting at a police officer when he realizes that he has become too much involved. He has become one of the hooligans (Buford 182). The pleasure he gets from violence is shocking to him. He had expected to experience excitement, but did not expect to ever find as pure an elemental pleasure as he found in crowd-violence (Buford 219). After having followed hooligans to matches for years, Buford decides against going to the 1990 World Cup in Italy, and feels he has had enough. However, upon hearing of the expected trouble between the English and Dutch supporters, his enthusiasm rises, and he is drawn to book a flight (Buford 277). After once again witnessing the horrendous brutality of the supporters, and becoming a victim of police violence, he books a flight to Turin, where the next matches are to take place, but sinks into deep depression. He is exhausted, has no interest in having anything do with the hooligans, and realizes that he cannot follow this lifestyle anymore, at which point his story ends (Buford 316).

4. Violence Unaffected by Football

At the beginning of *The Football Factory*, Tom Johnson talks about the fact that his firm does not expect Coventry to put up a fight. Instead, after they have watched Chelsea play Coventry, they go out searching for Tottenham Hotspur fans, their main rivals, even though they are playing a completely different team that day. This goes to show that the football match itself and its result is not really what the violence is about. The violent encounters between the two firms are seemingly unaffected by the Football League system itself, and these encounters would continue to exist even if the two clubs would no longer play in the same division. Johnson describes brutal fights with other supporters, with an example being Chelsea's visit to Tottenham. On that occasion, the Chelsea boys spot a gang of Tottenham supporters at a pub. They start by throwing bricks through the windows, breaking all of them, and as the supporters come running out, they are met with bricks, fists and knives, and a brutal fight ensues. Johnson continues to describe how he breaks noses with his punches, and kicks a man lying down in his head, groin and stomach with no regard for the fact that the blows could well prove fatal (King 28-29). During the course of the novel, Tom Johnson and his hooligan friends commit almost unspeakable acts of violence, and not only in drunken brawls against other firms. On one occasion, during a trip with his friends up to Manchester, Johnson spots a blonde-haired guy at the bar and decides he doesn't like him. He waits until his target needs to use the toilets and follows him in. For no explicable reason, he then gets a good hold of the poor man's hair and smashes his face as hard as he can into the wall tiles, and watches as he sinks down into a pool of blood and piss, a combination which he then affectionately refers to as "the great English

cocktail.” He then alerts his friends, and they quickly make their way to the next pub (King 84). Later, he does wonder what happened to his victim, and knows full well that he could easily have killed him. He shows no remorse, although he is not very keen on the idea of going to prison for twenty years or so.

The hooligans often create riots and are unafraid of getting into fights and trashing pubs as well as taking part in all other kinds of vandalism, but they still have standards. The fighting, as well as the vandalism, must be efficient. When travelling on trains, the younger boys sometimes wish to indulge in what Johnson calls “juvenile hooliganism”, scaring onlookers or committing petty property vandalism, which is frowned upon by the older hooligans, as it just attracts the attention of law enforcement quicker, revealing the fact that these rebels value efficiency over simple rioting (King 225).

In his book, *Among the Thugs* Bill Buford describes countless violent encounters. Some are between two gangs of hooligans, others are assaults on civilians and yet others are violent confrontations with law enforcement officers. Some of the violence he has witnessed himself, but many of his descriptions come from stories he hears from other hooligans on his travels. The first time he witnesses crowd violence is during his trip to a European match between Manchester United and Juventus in Turin. The supporters of Manchester United were at the time banned from attending European matches because of rioting, but still a group of 257 supporters made their way to Italy to watch the game. After the game, the supporters follow Sammy, one of the firm’s leaders, who leads them to a big fight with the Italian supporters. Buford himself is in the middle of the fight, and witnesses a brutal assault on a young Italian boy who has fallen to the ground. A group of eight hooligans surround him, and take turns kicking him as he is

lying there. At one point Buford can see that three of them are kicking the boy in the face, and the rest are kicking him in the body, and although the boy is covered in blood from head to toe, the beating doesn't stop until a lone police officer finally manages to fend the supporters off (Buford 86-87). This beating was far from being an isolated incident, and Buford quickly realizes that exactly the same is happening to countless others around him. No one is safe from the violence, not even families and children. Buford describes a man running from the hooligans with his wife and two sons. He rushes them into their car, but before he can get in himself, he is struck in the face with a heavy metal bar and then subsequently endures kicks to his face, ribs, stomach and spine from countless hooligans running past him. Shortly after, a boy, whom Buford suspects is about twelve years old, is knocked down by the hooligans, and he receives the exact same relentless treatment from a swarm of supporters (Buford 89-90). Buford makes a note of how methodical the supporters are amid their spurts of violence. They are serious, silent and extremely organized. This is exactly how John King's characters in *The Football Factory* behave, valuing the efficiency of their violence over pure mayhem. As Buford mentions himself in the book, the countless accounts of violence he witnesses or hears about on his travels are far too many to list, but in order to display the barbaric nature of some of the attacks he describes, two more will be presented. The first is a description that Buford reads from a prosecution of a man named John Johnstone. Johnstone, a Millwall supporter, attends a match against Crystal Palace, and afterwards becomes extremely violent. He and friends begin by assaulting a man on a train, punching him repeatedly in the face, until a ticket collector tries to intervene and gets similar treatment. They are then apprehended by the police when the train stops, but are released shortly after and are free to continue with their evening plans. After

having threatened two men at a McDonald's restaurant with a knife, they spot a man sporting a spider-tattoo on his forehead, which they don't like, so they beat him severely. They continue their journey, and many more become victims of their attacks, both men and women, but finally they meet a West Ham supporter whom they follow in a chase, and eventually stab him six times through the heart, killing him (Buford 221-223). The second violent act is performed by Harry, a charming and seemingly good-natured family man with whom Buford becomes acquainted, claiming that it is impossible not to like him (Buford 236). However, that is before he goes on a drunken spree, and invades a party in a restaurant, where he starts breaking things and attacking those present, not realizing that it is a party consisting solely of policemen. During the fight that breaks out, Harry manages to knock a policeman unconscious, and then proceeds to suck one of the policeman's eye-balls into his mouth, and finally bites it off, before he walks home and takes his wife out for a midnight snack at Kentucky Fried Chicken, where he is then arrested (Buford 240-242). Both Johnson's and Buford's narratives contain brutal descriptions of violence, but naturally, Buford's stories are far more detailed, and being gathered from supporters of different clubs on journeys all over the world over a period of eight years, they naturally outnumber the ones in King's novel, which only follows a few months in the life of Tom Johnson and his friends.

5. Good vs. Evil

One interesting point in John King's portrayal of the culture surrounding football hooliganism, and an interesting point to look at in order to understand the mentality of his characters, is their tendency to point the finger at someone else and hold them responsible for whatever action they feel they need to take. In their own view, it is in

many cases a simple meeting of good and evil, with every firm seeing their rivals as the enemy, who is savage in every act, and associating them with stealing, mindless assaults on civilians and even rape. Examples of this can be found all over the novel, with one example being Anthony's warnings to his journalist girlfriend Jennifer Simpson, that the Chelsea crowd "revelled in indiscriminate violence" and that Stamford Bridge was "a breeding ground for white supremacists", where black spectators would go in fear of their lives, and even going as far as saying that she would be in serious risk of mutilation and gang rape if she dared to set foot in the stadium (King 56). Another example can be seen as the Chelsea firm is taking the train to watch Chelsea play Tottenham away. Johnson looks around and sees women all around them looking worried, as if they expect to be assaulted any minute, on which he comments: "We're Chelsea, not fucking Tottenham", clearly suggesting that Tottenham fans are much more likely to be sexual predators (King 26). When watching England away, the situation changes completely. Then, all of a sudden, the supporters that would normally be fighting each other have a common enemy, and stick together. Johnson admits that it is impossible to apply logic to that situation. He also feels that logic is unnecessary, as it's not about thinking things through, but rather about having fun (King 124). He does, however, believe that if he would meet a familiar face from an international game, he would not fight him at home. Later in the novel, exactly that situation arises, as Johnson and his mates meet a gang of Derby supporters, one of whom Johnson recognizes from an England match in Poland. The Derby supporters are greatly outnumbered, and Johnson likes the guy, so he doesn't want to see him injured. All turns out well, in Johnson's opinion, as the Derby supporter pulls up a knife and stabs a member of the Chelsea firm, so they hurriedly disperse (King 260-262).

In a short essay on the comparison of football hooliganism in John King's novels and warfare, Silvia Mergenthal addresses this dilemma faced by football supporters. She claims that structurally, football narratives are built in a similar way as modern war narratives. The English, be it soldiers or football supporters, embark on a journey to defeat their enemies, and in order to unite against their enemy, their self-proclaimed patriotism demands that they put aside their difference in upbringing, religious views or club rivalries (Mergenthal 266-267).

Bill Buford describes events that portray a very similar mentality as the ones described in John King's novel. When Buford, with a group of Manchester United supporters, arrived in Turin for a European Match against Juventus, they received a police escort from the airport in four buses. The supporters start by singing chants, one of which consists solely of the words: "Fuck the Pope", and then things escalate when one supporter decides to throw a bottle out of the bus window. The other supporters follow his lead, and begin to throw bottles in all directions, until at last, an Italian civilian, offended by the supporters' behaviour, responds by hurling a rock at the bus. The supporters, shocked at this person's insolence, then proceed to throw everything they can out the windows, from beer bottles to cartons of juice. The driver of the bus Buford is on tries to calm his passengers, to no avail, before he takes matters into his own hands by swerving the bus from left to right repeatedly, successfully knocking his passengers down to the floor. His efforts turn the supporters' attention, with the subsequent verbal abuse, directed at him, and when the bus has arrived to its destination and the passengers are vacating, he is repaid with a spit in the face, as his unhappy customers feel that he was completely out of order (Buford 44-46). The supporters' behaviour and complete feeling of being violated by the civilians, who are only

responding to their missile attacks, strongly resemble the views of Tom Johnson and his friends in John King's *The Football Factory*. The supporters seem blind to their own actions, and anyone who opposes them, even in self-defence, instantly becomes an enemy. Buford himself admits that the supporters are very convincing, and are so biased in their reactions that an onlooker would agree that the Italian civilians retaliating the attacks must have been horrible people indeed (Buford 45).

6. Confrontations with Law Enforcement

Despite the pure hatred between the firms of rival clubs, these emotions do not come close to the hatred the fans feel towards law enforcement. When taking a close look at the behaviour of football hooligans in the novel, in order to understand their motives, it is equally vital to take a closer look at those who are generally supposed to keep things in order. According to the novel, the police officers are almost no better than the worst hooligans, as seen by their frequent use of derogatory language when addressing them, as well as their violent and hateful manner. This results in horrific, violent encounters with “the old bill”, as they are called, as seen during the brawl between the Chelsea and Tottenham supporters. After the police arrive, a sergeant beats up a young member of the Chelsea gang, but gets punished not long after, as the hooligans vastly outnumber the police. He receives a massive amount of punches and kicks all over his limp body from Johnson himself and a few others, and Johnson even comments that they could not care less if he died. Then, when the majority of the hooligans have dispersed, Johnson describes how he observes the remaining police officers attack innocent fans who have only then just arrived via train, and then witnesses them verbally abuse a woman, who is screaming at them to stop the violence,

before knocking her unconscious with a single blow. During the fight, Johnson reveals his views on the police, which he describes as follows: “The old bill are the scum of the earth. They’re the shit of creation. Lower than niggers, Pakis, yids, whatever because at least they don’t hide behind a uniform” (King 31). He criticizes law enforcement for their police brutality, which according to him is pointless to complain about, since the judicial system would never take a white football hooligan’s word over a police officer’s. He also believes that the whole judicial system is flawed. The police officers do not care if they arrest the right people or not, they simply have to arrest someone if a crime has been committed or if a fight has broken out (King 31). The ones arrested then get no benefit from denying their charges, as that takes up more time and resources than just pleading guilty and paying the fine (King 185-186). He even professes that the police officers actually want the football fans to put up a fight, because they enjoy the fighting just as much as the hooligans do. The aggressive behaviour of police officers can furthermore be seen after they arrest Johnson when he is caught in a fight with fans of Manchester City. The officers show little professionalism as they continue to jab him in his groin after they have apprehended him, all the while verbally abusing him and asserting that he should be shot. They then shout racist slurs towards a black man, accusing him of causing trouble “in the white man’s streets”, and tell him he should have stayed where he belongs, with his drugs and whores (King 169). Johnson also tells a few stories to describe how dishonest the law enforcement officers are. He claims that they like to play mind-games and scare detainees. At one previous arrest of Johnson’s, he woke up in a cell not remembering anything that had taken place the night before. When he asks a police officer what he is in for, he learns that he was arrested the previous night for rape. Johnson has no recollection of the events but has no reason to

doubt the officer, and is left to sweat in his cell until another officer comes along and informs him that he was just arrested for disorderly conduct and was picked up by the police while kicking garbage bins and singing football chants in the middle of the street (King 174). Johnson actually reveals his disappointment in the dishonesty of law enforcement officials, as he claims that he was taught to respect men in uniform, and therefore by breaking his trust, the police officers are worse than the average hooligan (King 31). In a society where those responsible for enforcing the laws break them and show as little respect to the people that they are hired to serve and protect, as seen in the novel, it is not so strange that they in turn receive little or no respect themselves. However, all the accounts of police violence and misconduct mentioned in the novel, as well as every situation in which law enforcement is criticized, comes directly from Tom Johnson's heavily biased narrative.

According to Bill Buford's own experiences, law enforcement officers, completely powerless against a crowd of drunken football supporters, feel the need to resort to questionable actions to protect themselves and to prevent rioting. For instance, at the first football match Buford attends in England, he witnesses a man being ejected from the stands by police officers, seemingly for *looking* like he might cause trouble (Buford 19). When Buford is attending a match between Chelsea and Manchester United, he notes that the police surrounding the supporters are actually happy to "unobserve" the violence that is taking place inside the perimeter they have formed, because anyone inside the crowd probably deserves getting hurt for being there (Buford 198). He also notes how the police actually give in to the supporters, to prevent confrontations; trains go past their usual stops and go straight to the supporters' destination to get them off sooner, and supporters who don't have tickets to matches are

still let in to the overcrowded stadiums, as that is deemed far less problematic than having them out on the streets (Buford 197-198). At one point, Buford recalls a conversation with Steve, a supporter of Manchester United, who had very interesting views on the police. He felt that law enforcement officials should simply not intervene with the fighting among hooligans, as that only makes matters worse. He feels that since all parties involved want to fight, the police should allow them to do so, and consequently not get attacked themselves. Steve even goes so far as to say that police are to blame for the severity of the violence, because nowadays the policing is so good that supporters have to inflict as much damage as possible in the shortest amount of time, causing supporters to start carrying knives (Buford 120). Buford naturally finds these claims interesting and summarizes Steve's views in four curious statements; "The police were bad because they were so good. Knifings were good because they had the potential to be so bad. The violence was so good because it was so well organized. Crowd violence can be blamed not on the people causing it but on the ones stopping it" (Buford 121).

In his book, Buford describes multiple accounts of police violence that he personally witnesses, and even becomes a victim of such an attack himself. After the European cup match in Turin, he witnesses Italian riot police officers kick an English supporter who had fallen down (Buford 78), and a few moments later, after having been struck with a full can of beer and knocked down, a police officer clubs him in the back of his head with his truncheon, not because he is being violent, but just because he is there (Buford 86). This however, doesn't come close to the violence Buford suffered at the 1990 World Cup in Cagliari, Sardinia. It was a few hours before England was to play the Netherlands, and after having followed the English supporters, and watched as

they assaulted both Italian citizens and policemen, smashed windows and cars and quite simply made an effort to destroy everything in their path, the Italian police finally retaliated. The policemen had retreated from the fight earlier, but only to regroup at the end of a street, leaving the supporters trapped, and unable to escape. Buford himself had been the first from the group of supporters to reach the top of the hill that exposed them to the awaiting police force, and for that reason, he was mistakenly identified as their leader. He concluded that his only option to escape without severe injuries was surrendering, which he did by curling up on the ground and covering his head in his hands. This does not stop the Italian police when they arrive, and three officers dedicate their time to beat him up with their truncheons. To inflict as much pain as he can, one officer carefully aims each of his blows at Buford's kidney, the second officer desperately breaks Buford's fingers in an attempt to reach his head underneath, and the third points his blows towards Buford's shoulders, trying to break his collarbone in half. The beating goes on for so long that Buford loses track of time. When the policemen finally let him be, Buford stumbles around and sees the damage the police have inflicted on the supporters; many have head wounds and some have broken limbs. He describes a man in shock, screaming from pain as he had been beaten with such force that his thigh bone was broken into several parts. He also describes seeing supporters vomiting from pain, while still being kicked by police officers (Buford 309-313).

As Buford is conversing with the Manchester United supporters in Turin, they reveal to him a fact that they have learned which sums up the hooligans' view on law enforcement. They claim that "everyone – including the police – is powerless against a large number of people who have decided not to obey *any* rules. Or put another way: with numbers there are no laws (Buford 63-64)." This point of view, although not

directly mentioned in *The Football Factory*, still describes Tom Johnson's morals perfectly. He and his fellow hooligans have no respect for the law, and don't hesitate to attack police officers if they outnumber them, and are therefore sure to get away with it. Buford himself notes at one point that he feels it is wrong to attack the police, but although he opposes this, he has learned that: "You don't attack the police – unless, it follows, you are able to beat them up so effectively that it is then impossible to get arrested" (Buford 184). The same applies to other members of society, such as train ticket salesmen or shopkeepers. If hundreds of supporters storm through and simply refuse to pay, one man can do little to stop them. Buford recalls having witnessed a café-owner answer rule-breaking with rule-breaking by shooting a supporter dead when faced with this problem, although that particular supporter had actually paid his bill (Buford 64). Buford also recalls his travel companions' abusive nature at a bar in Turin. A hundred supporters had gathered at the bar, some took off without paying for their drinks and one man was urinating through the door of the neighbouring café. Meanwhile the Italian police stood by and observed hesitantly, unable to handle the troublemakers (Buford 68).

7. Reasons for Violence

Tom Johnson does explain some aspects of the football hooligan's way of life during the course of *The Football Factory*, although the details don't come close to Buford's analysis in *Among the Thugs*. First and foremost, he states that members of the firms live in a completely different world than the average person, and he realizes that the average person has no understanding of his lifestyle. He is frustrated with people accusing the hooligans of not being true fans, and calling them violent criminals whose

only goal is to wreak havoc, and he blames their opinion on their ignorance on the subject. The public's opinion is dictated by the media, which according to Johnson "distorts everything" (King 108). He claims that when English teams are playing in Europe, the British media fill the papers with lies and exaggerations, portraying the English supporters as scum, while completely ignoring the wrongdoings of others (King 106). He knows that there are people who simply enjoy watching football in the privacy of their own home and that in their minds the hooligans bring shame to the sport and the country as a whole, but he doesn't care. He feels that without passion, football is pointless. Then it is simply twenty-two grown men running around on grass, which is a ridiculous image (King 157). He also laughs at the fact that it is called "football violence", because it has got nothing to do with football at all (King 260). He claims that the fighting isn't necessarily about winning or losing, but about "sticking together", and "pushing yourself a bit further showing what you've got inside" (King 245). However, the main reason for the violence is simply the pleasure it brings him. He spends his week at his boring job, and the fighting is something exciting that he can look forward to. While searching for Tottenham supporters before a match, he starts to feel the tension of the impending fight, and this reveals his excitement as he has been looking forward to this moment all week (King 28). He then describes his feelings of genuine joy as he kicks a man in the head, groin and stomach, a particularly sweet moment as the man in question had previously frightened him by flashing a machete (King 29). The feeling he gets as he storms into a fight is like nothing he has ever experienced. He claims it is better than sex and speeding. He describes his feelings after the brutal clash with the Tottenham fans, in which he severely injured a police sergeant, as if he was in paradise. He feels great inside, his body is tingling and he feels the rush

of adrenaline pump through his veins and he loves it; it's his addiction. Then, after copious amounts of alcohol, fighting and starting a riot, then he is finally ready to watch some football (King 32).

In the novel, Johnson describes one of his first fights, which he and his friend Rod, had with about twenty Norwich City fans. They took a severe beating and never really stood a chance, but stood their ground all the same. The experience was eye-opening for a young man still in his teens, and from that moment he realized that it was not enough to just shout insults and look hard, he would have to learn how to fight. Also, he discovered that if he was to get in a fight, it was best that he himself had started it, and that he would have to have a larger crew around him, to minimize the damage if things went wrong. He does not however feel hatred towards Norwich fans, but rather looks back at the experience as an initiation of some sort (King 100-104).

The reader sees a glimpse of Johnson's childhood in one chapter of the novel, and it is actually surprisingly ordinary. He obviously looks up to his father, which he affectionately compares to Superman, despite noting that Superman does not have a West Ham tattoo. It is evident, however, that Johnson's violent tendencies do not, to Johnson's knowledge, come directly from his father, since when Johnson is lying in the hospital after being severely injured, his father tells him stories of his young self in the world of football hooliganism, stories that leave Johnson astonished, as he had no idea his father had been involved in such activities (King 149-150).

In his novel, John King creates characters of very different social status, with completely different viewpoints on the world. He tells the story of Mark Jennings, an amateur video game programmer who works in surveillance. He is everything Tom Johnson does not want to be. Jennings lives an ordinary life with his ordinary wife, and

it is clear that this non-exciting way of living life is in Johnson's opinion not a life worth living at all and therefore no better than being dead. Johnson's workmate Sid Parkinson is another example of a contrasting persona to Johnson, as he is a dedicated football fan who is still very opposed to the violence surrounding the game.

One of Bill Buford's main agendas in his study of football hooligans is to discover the reasons for their violent conduct. After having denied all links to violence at first, the supporters begin to open up to Buford when they get to know him, as they feel that he has become one of them. At that point they feel comfortable discussing the violence, and explain to him what it is all about. They explain to him that football is a religion, and all the supporters in the "cult" feel that football is the most meaningful thing in their lives. They also feel satisfaction in being a part of something (Buford 114). One supporter comments that violence exists within everyone, and that they are simply trying to find an acceptable way of letting it out, stating that if they would not let it out at football matches, they would have to let it out elsewhere (Buford 116). Another supporter explains that to most of them, football is all they have. During the week, they live ordinary lives in low-paying jobs, but at weekends they feel like they are more important (Buford 117). However, the reason that most supporters give, and even Buford himself experiences when he gets involved in the crowd violence, is that the violence makes the supporters feel good, and fills them with a wide range of pleasurable emotions. One supporter lists for example the feeling of fear, anger and excitement as his motives for participating in the violence, and claims that he has never felt anything like it (Buford 117). After having been involved himself, Buford explains that violence is one of life's most intense experiences, and that when someone gives himself over to it, it can become one of life's greatest pleasures. He describes the feeling as

weightlessness, and compares it to a drug-induced high. He is in a state of adrenaline euphoria and describes his feelings as an experience of absolute completeness (Buford 207).

8. Sexism and Racism

Although Johnson and his friends are eager to impress one another by telling heroic tales of their achievements in the bedroom, often speaking of women with deep disrespect, as well as being very disrespectful to women they meet at pubs, Johnson still mentions at one point in the novel that deep down he actually does have respect for women, buried under all the insults and jokes (King 85). It is likely that he believes this himself, but the reader isn't as easily convinced, as throughout the novel, Johnson usually refers to women as "slags", and claims that all women are promiscuous cheaters, and are not to be trusted (King 44). At one point in the novel, Rod, a friend of Johnson's, claims that a woman who cheats is far worse than a man who cheats, although he cannot explain why. He just feels it is somehow different (King 209). As well as disrespecting women, Johnson and his friends are portrayed as very racist and homophobic, constantly speaking negatively about everyone slightly different to themselves. They shout Nazi slogans at Tottenham fans, who they claim are all Jewish, compare homosexuals to child molesters and resort to extreme name calling towards people of both African and Asian origin, but Johnson still maintains that he does have some hidden respect towards racial minorities, mainly because, unlike the police, they don't hide behind uniforms (King 31).

As is the case with Tom Johnson and his friends, Bill Buford describes the hooligans' misogynistic behaviour. They are extremely rude to waitresses and

stewardesses, for instance at the hotel bar in Turin, where the Manchester United supporters, all heavily drunk, verbally abuse the waitresses and sexually harass them by exposing their genitals (Buford 90). Another example of the vile nature of hooligans is described later in the book, this time involving West Ham United supporters. On a bus tour, they pass a mental institution where they pick up a seventeen year old girl. She is not of sound mind, the supporters have been drinking heavily and using cocaine, and they take advantage of her. They strip her down, stroke her body and urinate on her, before dragging her along to pubs, treating her like a mascot of sorts (Buford 214-215).

A large section of the book is then dedicated to Buford's experiences while associating with supporters of Chelsea, who were members of the National Front, a radical nationalist movement in Britain. Being involved in the National Front, these hooligans were obviously extremely racist, and one of their priorities was to get the general public to realize what they perceived as the threat that black people were posing to their country, claiming that white girls were being forced into prostitution by black pimps (Buford 134). Buford also describes a newsletter he received called the *Young National Front*, which contained a football section where supporters would send in letters to brag about how racist their firm was (Buford 135). Buford also describes an incident that took place when a friend of his came over from the United States and accompanied him to a Queens Park Rangers match. Seemingly everyone in the stand around them, including whole families, made ape grunts every time a black player touched the ball, leaving the Americans in a state of incomprehension and disgust (Buford 137).

9. Conclusion

Johnson and Buford offer two completely different viewpoints on the football hooligan experience, with the greatest difference being the obvious fact that Johnson is a fictional character and the reader has complete access to all his thoughts, whereas Buford is a real person writing down his own recollections from memory, and although he claims that he is being as truthful as he can, he could still omit any feelings or thoughts that he does not wish to be made public. At first, Buford does not consider himself to be a part of the menacing crowd, but an onlooker. He does engage in conversations with hard-core hooligans, but unlike Johnson, they can choose which thoughts they share, and which ones they keep to themselves. In both narratives, a certain climax is reached when the protagonists become victims of serious attacks, Johnson by Millwall supporters, and Buford by Italian police officers. Initially, their reactions are similar, and as the beating is occurring, they fear for their general health, and even their lives. After the whole ordeal, however, Johnson recovers briefly in a hospital before continuing his lifestyle without a thought, while Buford feels he has seen enough, and retires from following hooligans.

When I first read *The Football Factory*, I found the horrific details of violence repulsive and had difficulties believing that Tom Johnson and the others were actually realistic characters from 1980s Britain. However, when comparing John King's novel to Bill Buford's documented experiences, the similarities are striking. The first thing that bears a strong resemblance between them is the brutal nature of the so-called "football violence". Both John King's novel and Bill Buford's book describe gruesome violent encounters between supporters of different football teams, often taking place in the form of crowd violence, where neither side actually feels football is really relevant to the

violence. According to both narratives, racist and sexist views are common among football hooligans, who are portrayed as extremely prejudiced against anyone slightly different to themselves, although Johnson professes that despite all the rude remarks, he does have some respect for both women and racial minorities. While the violence described in *The Football Factory* is disturbing, Bill Buford recounts stories of considerable shock value, and after reciting the story of Harry's confrontation with the police officer, he comments that biting out a policeman's eye must be just about as violent as a person can get without killing someone (Buford 242). The most brutal cases of violence described seem unplanned, and are usually the result of the excessive alcohol consumption of an individual with violent tendencies, who finds a victim he simply doesn't like the look of.

Under most circumstances, in both King's and Buford's stories, the supporters are heavily intoxicated and alcohol certainly seems to play a vital role in the hooligans' way of life. It also seems that an important aspect of the hooligan lifestyle is the complete lack of respect for authority and disbelief in law enforcement. In both Tom Johnson's and Bill Buford's narratives, it is a recurring theme that the hooligans feel deep hatred for the police, and if they suspect they can get away with it, they don't hesitate to attack officers, both foreign and domestic. The lack of respect might originate from the supporters feeling mistreated by law enforcement and the judicial system as a whole, and Johnson expresses his disappointment with how the police handles trouble. Buford is more understanding of law enforcement's difficulties with keeping order, as he realizes how powerless they are against very large crowds of people, which can lead to frightening situations that result in police violence and the use of excessive force. He does however interview supporters who truly believe that the

police is the source of the brutality and violence between firms, and that if the police would turn a blind eye, the use of weapons would diminish significantly.

A recurring theme in both narratives is the hooligans' need for a sense of identity, and this is shown by their desperate attempts at being something more than just bored factory workers, and their desire to belong to a unity. By defending the honour of their firm, the supporters gain a feeling of enriched masculinity, which is attained not only by defeating their opponents, but also by standing their ground and losing with dignity. Another theme is the importance of media and their attitude towards football violence. The supporters claim to hate journalists, a fact that Bill Buford is often reminded of in his exploits, and one of the reasons for this could be the exaggerated portrayal of football hooligans in British newspapers in the 1980s. Buford learns that journalists previously travelling with the Manchester United supporters had even paid them to behave in a disorderly fashion when attending matches away in Europe, in order to take pictures for the British papers. Buford himself tries his best not to encourage violence, but confesses that violence is precisely what he wants to see. King's characters, Will Dobson and Jennifer Simpson, are of a similar sort, and feel nostalgia for the time when football hooliganism was more visible, as that was the golden age of sports journalism. Johnson himself expresses his views on the British media, which he accuses of feeding lies and exaggerations on the true nature of football hooliganism to the public, leading to many common misconceptions.

I personally feel that Buford's detailed analysis of football hooliganism in *Among the Thugs* is beneficial to the reader of *The Football Factory* in any attempt to understand its characters' actions, since rather than explaining Johnson's actions, the novel is seen from his perspective, which doesn't depend on logic. Johnson claims that

logic is irrelevant to football hooliganism, and naively states that it is all just about having fun, while Buford uses logic to explain what he witnesses.

The result remains that many aspects of football hooliganism are portrayed in similar fashion in both narratives, with many of the same themes being the focus of attention. It is fair to say that while King's characters' vile nature is shocking to the reader, his novel certainly seems to be an exceptionally realistic fictional representation of a dark era of English social history.

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