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In contrast to the USA, sports writing in the UK has a limited, albeit growing, body of celebrated sports literature (see Hill, 2006). Cricket and boxing have traditionally been the sports deemed worthy of literary attention, with soccer rarely seen as an appropriate topic for serious writers, this despite some fine writing on the back pages of daily newspapers. For a long period football writing suffered a surfeit of poorly written, ghosted autobiographies and a dearth of respected football writers, although there were notable exceptions such as Arthur Hopcraft (1960s), Hunter Davies (1970s), Pete Davies and Nick Hornby (1990s). Within sports writing, examples from genre of fiction are extremely rare, although one might include in this category the recent spate of football hooligan memoirs.[1] Highlighting the role played by football in popular culture, Hopcraft noted that 'it has not been a sideshow this century. What happens on the football field matters, not in the way that food matters but as poetry does to some people and alcohol does to others: it engages the personality.'[2]

It is usually the on-field performers who receive the media and academics' attention.[3] Rarely does a team manager warrant consideration, a recent exception being Carter's informative study on British football managers.[4] Arguably, the most controversial manager in British football history is Brian Clough. On and off the field, he achieved outstanding success with his immense character and opinionated personality endearing him to many and aggravating others. Since Clough's death in 2004, there have been attempts to mythologize him, the most high profile being The *Dammed Utd* by David Peace.[5] Published in 2007 to critical acclaim it generated significant interest beyond the sports pages, garnering the attention of the arts and cultural cognoscenti.[6] As with all sports literature one can debate 'what constitutes a sports book'; Peace places Brian Clough at the centre of his story and one cannot discuss Clough without discussing football. Peace's *factional* account was made into a film and spawned numerous spin-off books and television documentaries - all of which created a wave of interest generated by Peace's original contribution. It is the popular attention garnered by *The Damned Utd* that makes it worthy of academic reflection. This review focuses on Peace's text and the subsequent film, and considers other Clough-focused media.

The Damned Book

The Damned Utd is based on forty-four days in 1974 when Clough became manager of England's most successful club side, Leeds United. Divided into forty-four chapters, the book presents two alternating accounts with a narrative that uses flashbacks (identified by italic text), to cover his time at Hartlepools United, Derby County and Leeds United.[7] The two timelines run parallel and contrast the popularity of Clough at Derby with his unpopularity at Leeds. Each parallel storyline builds upon the other to create a tension that concludes with the two strands converging. The book uses a first-person narrative and constructs an imagined dialogue of Clough's inner thoughts on the players and chairmen he encounters. What is presented is a man experiencing bouts of paranoia and obsession, the streams of consciousness littered with expletives. The writing style uses so much repetition that at times it reads like poem in staccato style that follows few of the conventions regarding grammar or structure. Comparisons can be made with James Ellroy with the flat descriptions, pared down prose and repetitive phrasing used to create a sense of the claustrophobic atmosphere which surrounded Clough when he inherited the best team in the land:

> They are not my team. Not mine. Not this team, and they never will be. They are his team. His Leeds. His dirty fucking Leeds, and they always will be. Not my team. Never. Not mine. Never. Not mine. Never. Not this team. Never –
>
> It's gone midnight and I cannot sleep. I've drunk too bloody much again and I've got a thumping fucking headache. The hotel room is too hot and the pillows are too hard and I miss my wife, I miss my kids and I wish I wasn't me, Brian Howard Clough. Not for tonight and not for tomorrow. I get out my address book. I pick up the phone. I dial his number and I wake him up... .[8]

Clough's family objected to the image of a drunken, paranoid man who swore and smoked too much, and are reported as saying "For somebody Peace had never met to engender in him such an obviously personal dislike is perplexing."[9] Very few characters in the book have any redeeming features, with most of the Leeds players viewed in the same light as Clough's main protagonist – the previous Leeds' manager, Don Revie. These portrayals received widespread criticism with accusations that had any of the main protagonists still been alive (for example Don Revie; Billy Bremner, the club's captain; or Syd Owen, the chief coach), the book would not have been published. One of those still alive, former leading player Johnny Giles (described in the book as 'The Irishman'),

did take legal action, claiming he had been misrepresented in the book. Giles is on record as stating that he had differences of opinion with Clough during his days at Leeds, but felt Peace's description was wholly untrue and unfair.[10] Claiming Peace had included fictitious conversations between himself and Clough, Giles sued the publishers, Faber and Faber, and settled the case out of court. As part of the settlement, the publishers changed certain passages in subsequent editions, including one that described how Giles had plotted against Clough and wanted him removed from the post.

Peace has stated that the book should be seen neither as a verbatim account of Clough's time at Leeds, nor as an orthodox biography. While many of the events described by Peace undoubtedly happened, the use of 'hear-say and half-truths' allows the book to drift between fact and fiction, so much so that it becomes almost impossible to distinguish which is which. The use of real people creates a strong impression of fact and, responding to criticism of his book, Peace insisted it was a work of fiction, perhaps as a defence against threats of defamation. The appellation of fiction soon became 'faction' (a term Peace rejected), which increased the blurring of where fact ended and fiction began.[11] Indeed, the first chapter is sub-titled 'An English Fairy Story,' with the book's final page containing the statement that 'This novel is another fiction, based on another fact.' Even with these 'health warnings,' Giles remained highly critical of the style of writing, stating that 'You can't have it both ways, using real names in a factual setting but then writing fiction about them.'[12] Despite being a work of literary fiction, one finishes the book with an over-riding impression that Clough was an alcoholic, an egotist and deeply complex man.

For those who read no other book, *The Damned Utd* paints a controversial and influential portrait of Clough with Peace's interpretation of the facts causing great offence to his family. Along with Giles, Clough's family were outspoken in their criticism of the book and its 'ludicrous interpretation' of him, in particular its unrecognisable portrayal of a 'chain-smoking, obscenity-spouting, selfishly driven man.'[13] Peace's use of a real person is reminiscent of Bernard Malamud's fictionalised character Roy Hobbs in *The Natural*. Although a work of fiction, Malamud drew upon the real-lives of baseball players Babe Ruth and Eddie Waitkus, while Bud Schulberg was more explicit in using the events that surrounded Italian boxer Primo Carnera and journalist Harold Conrad when writing *The Harder the Fall*.[14] As with Peace's text, both these books were made into successful sports films.

The Damned Film

The process by which literary texts are transformed into films, issues of intertextuality and the changes made in adapting source material is a popular media topic.[15] One important criterion is the

extent to which the film interprets the original text so much so that it becomes a new text or form. As discussed above, Peace's unremittingly dark novel uses a rambling, unforgiving narrative to portray Clough as a paranoid alcoholic. In contrast, the film removes the internal monologues and replaces them with Clough's humour and wit, including reconstructing the challenge to Muhammad Ali to a fight, in reality said during a television interview, transposed in the film to his front room surrounded by his family. What is thus presented is a more rounded, gentler portrait of Clough and one that many football fans will recall with affection.

The film presents a story of the relationships between Clough and Peter Taylor, and between Clough and Don Revie. Clough and Taylor's friendship began when the two played together at Middlesbrough in 1955. Clough invited Taylor to become his assistant at Hartlepools United in 1965 with the couple going on to work together at Derby County and Nottingham Forest. The film offers an aura of a mutual homo-admiration between Clough and Taylor (not evident in the book), while the relationship between Clough and Revie is clearly adversarial. The simmering rivalry between Clough and Revie is seen to originate with a spurned handshake during the latter's visit to Derby's ground. Seeking to gain the respect of Revie, the film has Clough preparing for the visit of the 'mighty Leeds' by polishing two glasses to be used for a post-match managerial drink. After the game, Revie slights Clough by neither shaking his hand nor meeting for this customary drink. The film later recreates a live television interview in which Revie denies any memory of this incident. The respect Clough had for Revie's footballing achievements was tainted by what was seen as excessive gamesmanship and cheating by the Leeds players and a win-at-all-costs ethos promoted by Revie. The film ends with contrasting images of Revie's lack of success after leaving Leeds whilst Clough (with Taylor) went on to manage Nottingham Forest to two consecutive European Cup wins.

One of the conditions Leeds United placed on the filmmakers, who requested use of the stadium for filming some scenes, was that the Leeds players, including local hero Billy Bremner, be made more sympathetic.[16] However, for those familiar with the original Bremner, the actor's wig is especially ill-fitting, while his team-mates deportment is at times almost comedic. The filmmakers, like Peace, were accused of dishonesty (excessive artistic licence?) in their dealing with factual events. The film omits Clough's brief time managing Brighton (post-Derby / pre-Leeds), nor does it explore why Clough was successful as a manager. For a film that focuses so much on the relationship between Clough and Taylor, there is no mention of their subsequent argument in 1983, a dispute that remained unresolved when Taylor died in 1990.

The film captures a period in British football when big business and celebrity were beginning to transform the sport. Footballing culture is recreated in the muddy pitches, bone-crunching tackles,

bad haircuts and purple tracksuits. One scene has Clough laying out towels, half-time oranges and ashtrays in a drab dressing room, and whilst some have questioned the accuracy of such an occurrence, it does have an authentic feel. The film makes reference to wider political events during the early 1970s, a period of significant political and social transition. In the book the character of Clough can be seen as continuation of the 'angry young man' realism found in Storey's *This Sporting Life* and Sillitoe's *The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner*.[17] By contrast, the film can be seen in the lineage of northern 'feel-good' films of more recent years such as *Brassed Off*, *The Full Monty* and *Billy Elliott*.

Despite the hyperbole surrounding the book and film, one is cognisant that very few football films have received critical or popular acclaim. One reason why sports films, and in particular football films, have struggled is that if the on-field action does not look right, then the whole film can fail (*Escape to Victory* being a notable example). In common with other soccer films (e.g. *Bend it Like Beckham; Gregory's Girl;* the football hooligan films), *The Damned United* limits the amount of actual football it shows, using the reactions of Clough and Taylor to convey what is happening on the pitch. Part of the difficulty of showing on-field action in feature films is that audiences have been exposed to high-quality television coverage, peripheral vision and wide-shots to show numerous players, both on and off the ball, to build excitement. Feature films that have been successful in capturing the action have done so because their sport is more suitable for close-ups and slow-motion (e.g. *Raging Bull; Chariots of Fire; Bull Durham; The Natural*), although the recent documentary film featuring Zinedine Zidane demonstrates that football can utilise artistic techniques.[18]

Reactions to the film were vociferous amongst fans of Leeds United, with Internet message-boards stating that fans should boycott the film as it perpetuated the stereotype of 'Dirty Leeds.' The official Leeds United fans magazine recommended seeing the film, but that 'there is way too much anti-Leeds twaddle in it for it to be taken a serious motion picture.'[19] After suggesting that the novel is not anti-Leeds, the review saw the film as 'definitely anti-Leeds, specifically its one dimensional depictions of Don Revie, Billy Bremner, Johnny Giles and Norman Hunter.' The review concludes that the film 'is biased against our club, and misrepresented some of the men who helped make Leeds United a British institution.' The film used the controversy created by the book to promote the film, but ultimately the film is very different from the original novel. This drew criticism from those who felt that the film was a sanitized adaptation of the book. However, as with the book, the family were very critical of the film prior to its release and, although invited by the filmmakers, did not attend the film's premier because of the original book's inaccuracies: 'The film, unfortunately, may reach a wider and more impressionable audience. People will, of course, go to see the film - Dad has always

been extremely popular - but as a family, we sincerely hope they don't believe its ludicrous interpretation of people and events.''[20]

The Mythologizing of Brian Clough

At the end of his book, Peace lists some thirty-eight texts which focus on Clough or contain information on this significant figure in football history. Much of the furore that surrounded the book was the extent to which the book, and subsequent film, was based on fact. To explore this one can look to the growing number of written accounts by those involved during that period, cognisant of the limitations in using sporting auto/biographies.[21] Ten players from the Leeds squad (1973 / 74 season) have auto/biographies with most mentioning the 44-day period, although this is often limited to one or two paragraphs.[22] One of the central themes running through Peace's book is Clough's relationship with Billy Bremner, the team captain, and Johnny Giles. As discussed above Giles legal action resulted in many references to him being removed by the publishers, and one awaits his autobiography. Although Bremner did not write an autobiography, Bale's 200-page biography recounts a single paragraph that references the forty-four day period,

> The players didn't dispense with Clough's services, the board did. His style of management just would not work with the Leeds players and yes, we did have our moans and groans about the situation. We were all interested in the future of Leeds United and we knew that the only way to continue our successful run under Don Revie was to keep the same style of management and the same style of play.[23]

Recalling the truism that what is one person's version of history is another person's fiction, Peace offers a much more vivid version of events:

> Bremner doesn't knock. Bremner opens the door and says, 'You wanted to see me?'
>
> 'Yes,' I tell him. 'Have a seat, Billy. Pull up a pew, mate.'
>
> Bremner doesn't speak. Bremner sits down in the chair and waits.
>
> 'You're out for the next three games,' I tell him. 'Possibly longer.'
>
> Bremner doesn't speak. Bremner just sits in the chair and waits.
>
> 'Now I don't know what your thoughts are about this,' I ask him, 'but as team captain and a natural leader, it would be a bloody shame to lose your presence in the dressing room, as well as on the pitch, for these three games.'

Bremner still doesn't speak. Bremner just sits in his chair and waits.

'I'd like you to be here for the home games at least,' I tell him. 'I'd also value your input in the team talks; over lunch, in the dressing room, and on the bench with me.'

Bremner stands up. Bremner says, 'Is that all?'[24]

In the early 1970s Leeds United were arguably the best team in the country although they were seen by many as a 'dirty team'.[25] Hunter Davies, in *The Glory Game,* sought to redress this reputation, as did Bagchi and Rogerson in their partisan account.[26] Updated in 2009 to tie-in with the interest generated by the book and film, their account lacks any pretence of objectivity, seeing the 'dirty, dirty Leeds' reputation as a creation of a prejudiced southern (London) based media, biased officials and other teams' jealousy of their success. In a book whose dust-cover photograph and title are very similar to Peace's original, Rostron offers a sympathetic portrait of Don Revie and his Leeds team and a more neutral description of Clough. Extensive quotations from Leeds United players and journalists are supplemented by newspaper match reports and book extracts. These multiple accounts lead to some repetition which the author dilutes with digressions into the biographies of those involved at the time and the teams for whom they played.[27]

Whilst Peace concentrates on Clough's relationship with the recently departed Don Revie, Clough's relationship with Peter Taylor was a central theme in the film. Clough and Taylor played together at Middlesboro with Clough inviting Taylor to join him in his first managerial position at Hartlepools United in 1965. In his autobiography written shortly after the double European Cup success with Nottingham Forest, Taylor recounts his decision not to go to Leeds with Clough, but choosing instead to stay at Brighton. Of the forty-four days, Taylor recalls that Clough 'often talked about those forty-four days and believes the two of us could have overcome the difficulties of trying to run a club that he felt was ganged up against him.'[28] He quotes Clough as pointing to 'Giles and Bremner seemed to be the main spokesman, but I heard only the start of the argument because Sam Bolton [the Leeds United Chairman] asked me to leave, saying that the discussion was being inhibited. Then I knew I could no longer manage the club.[29] Taylor recounts another conversation with Clough on how, 'Fear spread through that club. The directors were frightened because I hadn't won the first seven games; the players were frightened of their age. It was the culmination of a thousand things – bad results, a few players who worshiped Revie and disliked me, a staff set in their ways. But mostly fear.'[30]

The literature on Clough includes three biographies, one by Murphy whose sympathetic account contains a chapter regarding the Leeds affair, with two further texts seeking to ride the

resurgent interest in Clough.[31] Clough's two autobiographies (both ghosted by sports journalist, John Sadler) cover his childhood, the career-ending injury, politics, his failure to land the England mangers job and his success at Nottingham Forest. In his first autobiography, a fifteen-page chapter is dedicated to his 44 days at Leeds,

> I despised what they stood for – systematically putting referees under intolerable pressure with their violent behaviour, both physical and verbal, their overreactions, and the unsavoury spectacle of skipper Billy Bremner running alongside the harassed referee, constantly yelling in his ear. They angered and offended me to such an extent that I took every opportunity to condemn their cynicism which, to me, devalued so much of what they achieved and the marvellous football of which they were capable – a high level of skill and organised teamwork that I, like millions admired. Leeds in those days, cheated – and I was more than happy to draw people's attention to the fact.[32]

In his second autobiography, the Leeds experience is condensed to four pages (out of three hundred), with the 'seething, resentful, spiteful dressing room' still evident, but this time surrounded by regret over his handling of the players.[33] Clough's respect for Johnny Giles is evident, noting that they might even have worked together in management, as is his sense of isolation without the advice and friendship of Peter Taylor.

Clough was one of the first managers to engage and exploit the media which has created a legacy of audio-visual material.[34] The interest generated by Peace's book led to the marketing of a DVD ('*Clough in His Own Words'*), whilst ITV screened a documentary (released in DVD format: '*Clough – The Brian Clough Story'),* which contains footage of the many interviews Clough gave to local media and the studio interview (recreated in the film) in which Clough engages his nemesis, Don Revie. Clough's family participated in the ITV documentary which was shown, as a spoiler, on the eve of the film's general release. Their participation can be seen as an attempt to redress the imbalance and inaccuracies created by *The Damned Utd / United* book and film. One can also access original television footage of Clough on the Internet (e.g. YouTube).

In Peace's text, Clough's successful Derby days were interwoven with his the failings at Leeds and in order to fully understand the significance of Clough's forty-four days at Leeds, one needs to be cognisant of the events that came before and after. Shaw's biography recounts Clough's period managing Derby County, starting in 1967 and their rise to the top of English football, quickly followed by their demise and his rancorous, regretful resignation in 1973.[35] One notes that Shaw was

instrumental in the 'Keep Clough at Derby' campaign in 1973, which makes this a somewhat partisan account. Local journalist Edwards covers the same period as Shaw, and whilst it contains many Clough-related anecdotes, the author devotes much of the book to his own personal sporting interests.[36] Hamilton offers a significant contribution to the mythologizing of Clough, winning the UK's leading prize for sports literature.[37] His 20-year relationship during Clough's successful period with Nottingham Forest is an affectionate account, recounting time spent in Clough's office in the City Ground where alcohol and music formed the backdrop to Clough's football insight and arrogance, coupled to his displays of fragile vulnerability and self-doubt.

Conclusion

In the past few years, there has been a growing interest in Clough, with the significant contribution being Peace's groundbreaking text. The body of literature that surrounds Clough (and football) would have been unimaginable 15 years ago, with each 'new' text on Clough purporting to offer a fresh insight and contribute another layer to the growing mythology that surrounds him. The often excessive use in football of hyperbolic language is actually appropriate to use when describing Clough's success. However, as with all sporting stars one needs to locate their lives in a wider frame of reference. Clough played along with his 'larger-than-life' reputation which is why he, and not others, is so attractive to the writer and reader. Whilst he would have supported the erection of statues outside his former clubs, he probably would have been horrified at any attempts to canonise him. Like most people, sports stars or otherwise, he is too complex to be summed up by a single text.

The focus of this review has been on the different ways Clough has been represented in popular literature. One can legitimately ask how many more texts are possible on Clough without reaching saturation point, although the reception of Peace's book, the related film and the bandwagon-jumping books shows there is public appetite for what happened during those disastrous forty-four days at Leeds – even if this is at the expense of other periods in Clough's colourful life. Its highly original format will create an on-going debate on its blurring of fact and fiction, with some questioning whether it is actually a 'sports book'. Similarly, the film defies easy description being a comedy, a bio-pic and drama. What is certain is that with *The Damned Utd* Peace has made a significant contribution to the body of sports literature.

Notes

[1] Naughton, *Goalkeeper's Revenge.* Davies, *Striker.* Glanville, *Goalkeepers are Different*. Dart, 'Confessional tales'.

[2] Hopcraft, *The Football Man,* 12.

[3] Andrews & Jackson, *Sport Star*; Cashmore & Parker, 'One David Beckham?'; Douglas & Jamieson, A Farewell to Remember'; Lee, Jackson & Lee, 'South Korea's "Glocal" Hero:'; Nalapat & Parker, Sport, Celebrity and Popular Culture'; Smart, *The Sport Star*; Walton, 'Steve Prefontaine'; Whannel, *Media Sports Stars*.

[4] Carter, *The Football Manger*. See also Kelly & Waddington, 'Abuse, Intimidation and Violence as Aspects of Managerial Control'.

[5] The book is titled *The Damned Utd,* whilst the film is titled *The Damned United*.

[6] *The Damned Utd* was the subject of Britain's leading television serious arts programme, *The South Bank Show,* which in over 700 episodes had not previously featured a sports-related topic.

[7] In 1977 Hartlepools United changed its name to Hartlepool United. They currently play alongside Leeds United in the English Football League One.

[8] Peace, *The Damned Utd,* 83

[9] Nikkhah, 'The Damned United: Football manager Brian Clough's family to boycott film about his life'.

[10] Wynne, Clough Justice. Giles' anger at Damned Utd's portrayal of former boss Brian'.

[11] Mullen, 'The Damned Utd'.

[12] Dickinson, 'The panned United is still a work of genius'.

[13] McLean, 'The Damned United: they shoot, they score'.

[14] Oriad, *Dreaming of Heroes.* Carino, 'History as Myth in Bernard Malamud's The Natural'. Baker, 124.

[15] Lev, 'The Future of Adaptation studies'

[16] News of the World, 'Bremner bully role Damned'

[17] Storey's (1960) *This Sporting Life* and Sillitoe's (1959 / 2007) *The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner.* See Hughson, 'Why He Must Run'.

[18] Rowe, 'Time and timelessness in sport film'.

[19] Endeacott, 'The Damned United'.

[20] Nikkhah, 'The Damned United: Football manager Brian Clough's family to boycott film about his life.'; See also Gibson, 'Clough family boycott film of legendary manager's life.'

[21] Whannel, *Media Sports Stars*; Bale, Christensen, and Pfister, *Writing Lives in Sport*; Woolridge, 'These Sporting Lives.'

[22] The Leeds players with auto/biography are *Bremner!: The Legend of Billy Bremner* by Bernard Bale, 1999; *Sniffer: The Life and Times of Allan Clarke* by David Saffer, 2001; *Marching on Together: My Life at Leeds United* by Eddie Gray, 2001; *Biting Talk: My Autobiography* by Norman Hunter, 2004; *The Life and Times of Mick Jones* by David Saffer, 2002; *Behind the Dream: My Autobiography* by Joe Jordan, 2005; *Peter Lorimer: Leeds and Scotland Hero* by Peter Lorimer and Phil Rostron, 2005; *Leeds United Rolls Royce: The Paul Madeley Story* by David Saffer, 2003; *Careless Hands: The Forgotten Truth of Gary Sprake* by Stuart Sprake and Tim Johnson, 2007; *Hard Man, Hard Knocks* by Terry Yorath and Grahame Lloyd, 2004.

[23] Bale, *Bremner!*, 123

[24] Peace, *The Damned Utd*, 169.

[25] During the period between 1968 and 1974 Leeds won the League Championships twice (1968/9 and 1973/4), and were runners-up in 1969/70, 1970/71 and 1971/72. They won the League Cup in 1968, and the F.A. Cup in 1972 (being runners-up in 1970 and 1973). They won the Inter-Cities Fairs Cups in 1968 and 1971 (runners-up in 1967), and were losing finalists in the European Cup Winners Cup in 1973.

[26] Hunter Davies, *The Glory Game*; Bagchi and Rogerson, *The Unforgiven.*

[27] Rostron, *We are the Damned United*.

[28] Taylor, *With Clough By Taylor* , 106.

[29] Ibid, 110.

[30] Ibid, 111.

[31] Murphy, *His Way. The Brian Clough Story.* Armitage, *Cloughie - the Inside Stories.* Williams, *Brian Clough: The Ultimate Biography*.

[32] Clough, *Clough. The Autobiography,* 139-140.

[33] Clough, *Cloughie*. *Walking on Water.*

[34] Carter, *The Football Manger.*

[35] Shaw, *Clough's War.*

[36] Edwards, *Right Place Right Time.*

[37] Hamilton, *Provided you don't kiss me.* Details of the William Hill Sports Book of the Year available at http://www.williamhillmedia.com/sportsbook_index.asp.

The author would like to thank John Hughson for his comments, in particular drawing attention to the Malamud and Schulberg texts, and the regionally-based 'feel-good' films (e.g. *Billy Elliott* and *Brassed Off*).

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