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Fictional Representations of English Football and Fan Cultures, Cyprian Piskurek, Palgrave MacMillan, 2018, £79.00 (Hardback) ISBN 9783319767611

Given the recent World Cup successes of England's men and women, Cyprian Piskurek's book on the fictional representations of English football could not be timed better. While the national teams flourish, England's domestic scene faces new crises. At the time of writing, financial mismanagement at Bury has led to their expulsion from the English Football League, and teams such as Bolton and Coventry teeter on amidst economic uncertainty. At the same time, the premier's top clubs spend extortionate sums in the two transfer windows. Piskurek's first and second chapters explain how English football got to this point. Beyond sketching out football's recent history of commercialisation, Piskurek comprehensively details previous sociological research into the beautiful game. Indeed, this thorough review of the literature makes clear the book's original contribution. Although scholars have explored the social impact of Hillsborough, the Taylor Report and the creation of the English Premier League, none have examined how such events have penetrated fictional representations. It is here that Piskurek finds his gap, explaining that football fiction is a relatively recent addition to the literary field. The author's central argument is that these fictional forms reflect the lived experience of football and fan culture post-Taylor report. Indeed, Piskurek contends that the Taylor report was a 'watershed event for modern football' (p.9), substantially changing the experience of the English game. One of these changes relates to the demographic makeup of football fandom, with 'slum people' (p.24) quickly replaced by a 'new generation of "customers"' (p.41).

To analyse fictional accounts of football, the author relies upon the theories of Raymond Williams. Grounded in a cultural materialist perspective, Piskurek draws upon Williams' (1965) notion of 'structures of feeling' to make sense of football fiction. The author's third chapter confidently explains Williams' nuanced concept of 'structure', noting that it avoids the determinism of classical structuralism (p.58) by allowing for an understanding of how social formations in the present are both 'forming and formative' (p.59). The author argues that historical analysis of cultures is always limited in its ability to 'grasp the complex whole' (p.59), but instead captures the structures of feeling that operate at the time. The second half of chapter three details the sensate experiences of football, advancing the 'feeling' in Williams' concept. Here the author defends the utility of subjective fan experience that moves beyond the 'documentary' (p.67) nature of more objective analyses. Aside from the theoretical use of Williams, the text briefly draws upon other social theorists such as Anderson, Baudrillard, Bauman, Bourdieu, Foucault, Lacan, Said and Zizek. These theorists are used to contextualise multiple aspects of modern football experience. For example, Piskurek uses Foucault's (1977) work on disciplinary technologies to explain the consequences of installing CCTV surveillance at football stadiums; one suggestion from the Taylor report. The author uses these theorists appropriately, but it is unclear how it adds to his central argument. In general, the author defends his use of Williams well, providing a suitable analytic tool throughout.

Chapter four initially explores the history of writing and filming football, noting the development of fanzines in the 1980s and, eventually, football fiction in the 1990s. The second half of the chapter focuses on Nick Hornby's (1992) *Fever Pitch*, which Piskurek argues to be a pivotal text that inspired a 'wave of New Football Writing' (p.95). It is this

corpus of work, not expanded upon in chapter four, that makes up Piskurek's analysis in chapters five, six and seven.

Chapter five begins by exploring the fictional representations of football players. Piskurek refers to numerous texts set within the North of England, reproducing narratives of the left behind post-industrial North and the tale of 'it's tough up North'. This stereotype is present elsewhere in the book, with the author linking the economic and social history of the area to the disenchantment that pervades many accounts of post-Taylor football. Later in the chapter, the focus shifts to managers with Piskurek directing most of his analysis to the fictional representations of Brian Clough and Bill Shankley. David Peace (2006, 2013) writes fictional accounts of both managers, with Piskurek noting the explicitly political way in which Peace details the struggles of each manager left behind by the commercialisation and modernisation of football. Throughout the chapter managers are presented through 'sympathetic portrayals' (p.163), often contrasting with less favourable accounts of chairmen and owners. A strong point of this section is Piskurek's handling of the post-Taylor influx of foreign owners that represent the global elite. The section briefly discusses the likes of Roman Abramovich and Sheik Mansour before drawing upon Said's (2003) 'orientalism' to note how football fiction xenophobically presents middle eastern owners as the 'oriental Other' (p.161). These texts homogenise international owners as dangerous interlopers who threaten the values of the English game.

Chapter six explores hooligan fiction, with Piskurek acknowledging that hooliganism as a phenomenon has been 'over-researched' (p.171). After detailing the theories of Taylor (1971), Marsh, (1978), and Dunning et al., (1988), Piskurek describes the influx of hooligan memoirs and fictional accounts that followed the Taylor report. With the Taylor report leading to the installation of various surveillance technologies that deterred violence, the author argues that fictional accounts rely upon a misplaced nostalgia that places hooliganism as symbolic of football's golden age. Moreover, the chapter sufficiently details the nationalist reactionary political ideologies that underpin many fictional accounts of hooliganism. Framing the continental away day as a 'crusade', the author aptly captures how fictional hooligans build upon a deeply conservative collective memory of what it means to be 'English'. The author's analysis of John King's *England Away* (1999) also highlights an anti-EU sentiment that festered long before the Brexit referendum. Another thought-provoking section of this chapter lies in its analysis of hierarchies within hooligan fiction. The section presents many hooligans as enduring a crisis of masculinity, one that is somewhat satiated by adherence to the hooligan group. As a surrogate for class and nation, the fictional hooligan group is nostalgically presented as 'something lost' (p.208).

Chapter seven details the social exclusion of fans within a context of neoliberalism. Following the reminiscence of the previous chapter, contemporary football is again presented as corrupted from a once glorious time where football clubs were representative of authentic communities. Instead, the modern club is presented as a middle-class playground; a fan space now dominated by the consumption of 'prawn sandwiches' (p.226). Indeed, Piskurek summarises that modern football 'forces fans into a form of either docility or social exclusion' (p.226). These fictional accounts use multiple senses to evoke this sense of docility, with, for example, contemporary middle-class fans facing criticism for their quietness. Concurrently, many accounts forward the idea of the left behind, authentic, working-class fan. The idea is best exemplified in Piskurek's analysis of *Purely Belter*

(Herman, 2007), a movie adaptation of the 2000 novel *The Season Ticket* (Tulloch, 2000). Here, two young working-class men from the North East of England attempt to find the money to pay for a season ticket at their beloved Newcastle United. Their efforts become increasingly criminal, bizarrely culminating in the grand theft auto of Alan Shearer's car. Piskurek neatly details the process by which the two men come to recognise their fixed position in society, a location that no longer accommodates attendance at the football.

Piskurek summarises his overarching thesis in chapter eight, arguing convincingly that fictional accounts of football and its cultures reflect socio-economic changes to football. It is in this section that Piskurek best captures the seeming irrationality of modern fandom. These fictional accounts demonstrate that fans are aware of changes that impact upon their pastime, yet are unable to challenge what fandom has become. At the centre of it, football fiction presents the game as entrenched in neoliberal consumerism, unable to move beyond its current nostalgia of the not-so-distant past. Indeed, Piskurek questions whether the act of producing football fiction is itself a middle-class past time for presenting middle-class voices that selectively construct 'the working-class subject in opposition to the forces of modernity' (p.267). When Piskurek derides football fiction as reproducing a dichotomy of 'past = good, present = bad' (p.268), it's hard to disagree. From the author's conclusion, it's fair to assume that football fiction is another space where middle-class authors again tell the stories of the left behind.

In general, the book is a useful addition to the field, justifying its focus on literary forms, drawing upon appropriate social theory and presenting a coherent narrative throughout. As a reader who had not read much football fiction, Piskurek sufficiently details the various plot lines and narrative devices to whet my appetite. The book will be useful for those interested in sport sociology and cultural studies, as well as historians who are interested in how recent football history has translated into literary artefacts.

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