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## **Marking out the pitch: a historiography and taxonomy of football fiction**

### **Abstract**

Football, or soccer as it is more commonly referred to in Australia and the US, is arguably the world's most popular sport. It generates a proportionate volume of related writing. Within this landscape, works of fiction are seemingly rare.

This paper establishes and maps a substantial body of football fiction works, explores elements and qualities exhibited individually and collectively. In bringing together current, limited surveys of the field, it presents the first rigorous definition of football fiction and captures the first historiography of the corpus. Drawing on Distant Reading methods developed in conjunction with closer textual analyses, the historiography and subsequent taxonomy represent the first articulation of relationships across the body of work, identify growth areas and establish a number of movements and trends.

In advancing the understanding of football fiction as a collective body, the paper lays foundations for further research and consideration of the works in generic terms.

### **Introduction**

Football, or soccer, fiction is important in a number of ways. Through its historical longevity, it reflects changing cultures around the game. It offers creative space to understand and explore football in new and diverse ways and has an invaluable role for historians making use of mimetic narratives to develop deeper understanding around social contexts and specific events. It captures the football moment, expands and breathes life into smaller aspects - the simple pass, the kids' game in the park, the quiet, consistent defender - in a game too often played out in blinding technicolour on the world stage. Football fiction provides opportunities for readers to digest and reflect on the sport's meaning amid seemingly endless fixture lists, wrangles over television rights, tired match reports and jaded speculation. Yet with few notable exceptions, to football writers, critics and academics, it has largely been invisible.

This paper draws together previous surveys, anecdotal evidence and original research to demonstrate the breadth and depth of football fiction. In adapting one of the distant reading models of abstraction suggested by Franco Moretti<sup>1</sup>, and using it in conjunction with closer textual analyses, it captures the fiction's emergence, development and contemporary state of play. The resulting historiography and subsequent taxonomy enable, for the first time, a mapping of relationships across the body of work against a more accurate and fully understood context. They establish a number of broader trends and divergences and facilitate

the identification of new growth areas. They enable the development of a topographic perspective, illustrate strengths and distinctions in its collective identity, and present a much clearer view of specific areas for further research.

### ***Football Fiction***

The body of football fiction is most often dismissed<sup>2</sup> either outright, or as a flawed element of Football Writing (which is itself, a subsection of the more amorphous genre of Sports Writing). There are a limited number of academic analyses. They limit their concern to individual works<sup>3</sup> or provide overviews of multiple works<sup>4</sup>. The most comprehensive collection to date, *The Football Compendium: A Comprehensive Guide to the Literature of Association Football* assembled by Peter Seddon, lists close to one hundred and fifty adult and young adult novels, and many more anthologies and collections of short stories, plays, poetry and art. These surveys and analyses tend not to provide a clear definition of football fiction, and in general fail to draw out the generic features of the works; rather they speculate on why the form seems disproportionately scarce in relative comparison to non-fiction football works.

A pragmatic, theorised and academically rigorous definition is required to examine the field. Michael Oriard's view that a sport should be indispensable in the sport's fiction's overall effectiveness<sup>5</sup> is useful, but too broad for purpose here. This is also true of Seddon's definition that insists football fictions must rely on unqualified references to the game<sup>6</sup>. While this offers context within the broader terms of football literature, in many cases the texts he cites have minimal football references. For clarity, I have adapted Brooke Horvath and William Palmer's view on sports fiction<sup>7</sup> - a football novel should offer insight other forms of football writing or analysis cannot. I have therefore determined the following definition of a football fiction as:

*a fictive work, which relies on football, or soccer if there is a preference for the term, as a substantive element, including but not restricted to narrative, voice, structure, setting and/or character development.*

Football fiction has proliferated over a period of close to one hundred and twenty years<sup>8</sup>. It has moved and changed in ways any large body of literature would. While the body of works will be discussed in more detail later, it is possible to note similarities across works and key

moments in the genre's development (and their relationship to the wider culture in which they took place) in a brief overview.

As education standards and the 'comic book' form of delivery became prevalent in the late 1800s short form fictional accounts concerning football began to appear in Victorian boys' journals and magazines. In the early 1900s, novel-length works aimed at young adults became popular. Authors such as Arnold Bennet, like the clubs of the day, began drafting professional players, and the issues that come with them, into stories for male adult readers. And during WWI, female characters, such as *Nell O' Newcastle* and *Meg Foster*, played football while they stood up for factory workers rights<sup>9</sup>. Alongside the rising popularity of the professional game, interest in these and other football fictions surged in the 1920s and 30s. Sydney Horler wrote around twenty football novels between 1920 and the mid 1950s, and contributed to a number of titles in the *Aldine Football Novel* series which, along with the Amalgamated Press's *Football and Sports Library*, were the best known of the era. In the 1950s football fiction began to dispense with the romanticism and moralistic consensus abundant in entertaining if somewhat simplistic earlier works. Instead it began to offer emotionally charged and sophisticated, socio-political commentaries such as Robin Jenkins' highly acclaimed *The Thistle and The Grail* (1954). The advent of tabloid journalism in the mid 1970s thrust professional players into limelight as, for the first time, football fiction sought broader markets. And in the 1990s, the sport was embraced as the must-have accessory for the British middle-classes<sup>10</sup>. Nick Hornby's celebrated work *Fever Pitch* (1992) is often credited with making football fashionable<sup>11</sup> and with it, football writing. The 'soccerati'<sup>12</sup> – Hunter Davies, Simon Kuper, DJ Taylor, Nalinaksha Bhattacharya and others, – wrote works where football took on a greater literary or figurative significance<sup>13</sup>.

Even with such broad strokes, individual text-level commonalities such as setting, the role of football, its impact on the protagonist and the use of football language begin to emerge. There is therefore academic value in a deeper examination of football fiction. Italian Literary theorist, Franco Moretti's distant reading methods offer a useful means to mark trends in the literature. They are used here to map historical developments and refine understanding of the body of work's extensive make-up. While there is not room here for a detailed *close textual* examination, the addition of a closer (than distant) level of analysis will further demonstrate divergent trends, patterns and tensions.

### ***Historiography***

Moretti leveraged the Annales school historiographer Fernand Braudel's notions of the *longue durée* to create three distant reading models, *Graphs*, *Maps* and *Trees*<sup>14</sup>. Each method stresses the benefits of a long-range consideration of its subject. Applying this approach to the history of the novel, Moretti constructed a *Historiography of British novelistic genres, between 1740-1900*<sup>15</sup>. He placed forty-four discrete genre studies of novel genres on one graph and was able to make a number of determinations, including the observation that most genres cycles appeared to last for twenty five to thirty years. He notes without 'distance' such a finding would not have been possible<sup>16</sup>. Interestingly he suggests his historiographic model of abstraction, as a means of distant reading, may not be useful for the examination of a single genre or one that lasted for a much longer period<sup>17</sup>. Given football fiction's breadth and the depth (outlined more fully in the next section), this paper will demonstrate that it is possible to consider the development of an individual genre on a graph. It will demonstrate that, provided it is done in conjunction with a close textual analysis<sup>18</sup> where the examination of the inner workings of individual texts can offer a much sharper sense of the texts' interconnection with others, the historiographic model offers a compatible and engaging structure to map a genre. In doing so, it can provide the means to identify distinct movements across the body of work – particularly where those movements offer a common ideology, trend or tendency towards a particular aspect or type.

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The rest of this paper is dedicated to a two part historiographic table and the identification of key 'movements' in the genre of football fiction that emerge from this process of historiographic analysis. The primary concern of this paper is to establish the ground of football fiction. The synthesis of previous studies, and my own analysis of a large number of football fiction texts, has allowed the creation of a taxonomy, a series of "movements" which, when presented together, give a sense of the ways in which the genre of football fiction has developed over its history. The identification of key movements or types, – patterns identified within and across the body of work – is the main intellectual contribution of this article, it is also a necessary means to organise and understand such a substantial collective. While there are a number of terms that would have been useful, *Movements* or *Types* have been selected as effective terms to describe different modes of football fiction. In a field that has undergone very little academic scrutiny I believe this research provides an important foundation for better understanding the genre.

The graphs, which follow, are the first visual representation of the history of the genre and are based on the collation of over 335 individual football novels. They identify key texts and highlight the beginnings, endings and development of significant or emblematic patterns. In doing so they represent the genre's landscape and plot its inception, evolution and maturation to its current contemporary status. Part one charts the history of adult football fiction. Part two, its young adult fiction counterpart. Both address the period between 1893 and 2011. The research highlights a number of significant differences in how football fiction is presented to these disparate readerships. Among the divergences there are differences in use of voice, use of language, the role of the game in the narrative and the protagonist's role within the text too. These characteristics bear longer discussion than is possible in this introductory paper. In brief, from my analysis of the genre, I would argue that this is the most important internal division. The young adult form of football fiction is also supported by greater evidence of historical longevity. It is one of the few kinds of football fiction that has been in continuous production since its inception.

**[Figure a (Full page) goes here.]**

**[Figure b (Full page) follows.]**

The graphs, separated for reasons of manageability<sup>19</sup>, are constructed through determination of the chronological position of a work that qualifies as football fiction (year of publication) against the main focus of the work's football content (prominent themes, narratives, settings etc.) which determines the *Movement* it is most representative of. Due to limitations of scope and scale, for the purposes of this paper, the graphs do not include every piece of football fiction released over the period in question. Rather they draw attention to the most significant texts. These were determined using a number of criteria: texts which are included by multiple previous researchers; the first and last texts in each movement have been included as they mark the significant points in its development; representative works by prolific authors are included as I regard them as significant contributors; and texts which are significant due to their cultural impact - their level of innovation, influence on the genre, and exceptional commercial and/or critical success. Where a work crosses the boundaries between one

movement and another, I have placed it where it would be regarded to have the more important role. Novels by Irvine Welsh and John King for example, deal with football violence and could be added to *Hooligan Literature*. The quality of writing (compared with other works of hooligan literature) and literary techniques, such as experimentation with voice, structure and point of view, employed by these writers, coupled with Redhead's theoretic positioning of them as a working-class social response to the 'soccerati', would, I suggest, mark them as a subset to *Literary football fiction*. The team manager's dilemma and the corruption central to Gordon Williams and Terry Venables' *They Used to Play on Grass* (1971) might place it in crime-related football fiction, but its near-futuristic (and at times spookily accurate) spin subjects it to scrutiny as *Speculative football fiction* and has for the purposes of manageability, been placed with the broader movement of *Fantasy football fiction*. A large number of young adult texts could also be placed within different movements.

### **Taxonomy.**

Building on the organisation illustrated in the historiographic table, the next section offers a brief historical context, identifies the main characteristics and discusses significant texts in each movement, the bricks in my construction of the genre. The movements represent recognition of trends and types within the field of football fiction.

### ***Adult football fiction***

The first Adult football fictions were predominantly concerned with romanticised notions of how football should be played. It has since diversified and gathered momentum in novel-length forms these early writers would never have imagined. In order to capture the whole picture in an ordered fashion, my research categorises the works in the following movements:

#### *i) Mainstream football fiction*

Written for a (predominantly male) football audience, *mainstream football fiction* are stable, formulaic football fictions and are among the first football fictions. Beatrice Fry's semi-fictional novel, *A Mother's Son*, (1907) and Arnold Bennett's gentle capture of early professionalism in the game in *The Card* in 1911<sup>20</sup> are good early examples. Primarily concerned with a romanticised view of the game popularised by writers such as Horler<sup>21</sup>, these misty-eyed works of hero-worship and 'how to save our football team' feature heavily throughout this movement. *The Return of the Busby Babes* (2001) by Des Dillon and *The*

*Ripple Effect* (2004) by Dominic Holland contemporaneously capture similar sentiment. Other popular forms are third person perspectives from managers, fans or footballers. Derek Dougan's *The Footballer* (1974) and Greg Williams' *Football Crazy* (1999) are two examples of footballers getting or giving themselves a hard time.

Valuable social commentary on the game and its culture can emerge in *mainstream football fiction*. Workers and women's rights<sup>22</sup> and themes around social justice are touched on in a range of texts. A more recent Dillon text, *Singing, I'm No A Billy I'm A Tim* (2005) is one example that deals with the religious divide in urban Scotland. Recent titles in the movement, *The Team* (2006) by Gianni Mininni and Keith Exall's *Football Mad* series (2008-2009) are world soccer and attitudinal critiques dressed as fiction, but they do speak to notions of the game's social impact. In contrast, *The Kilburn Social Club* (2009) by Robert Hudson makes comment in various guises. The text though has all the hallmarks, eccentric or otherwise, of mainstream football fiction. The works that populate this movement are generally written for entertainment. They tend to be less formally challenging and do not problematise the game's perceived, 'low' or working-class status<sup>23</sup>.

## ii) *Crime-related football fiction*

Football serves as an integral part of the narrative in *crime-related football fiction*. Criminal subplots, corruption and bribery for example, often feature in early mainstream fiction. Players were kidnapped<sup>24</sup> or pushed to throw a game<sup>25</sup>. The climactic football match was always magnificent and the day was always saved. The crime-related movement represents a darker edge and a more serious air to the works. Leonard Gribble's *The Arsenal Stadium Mystery* (1939) spawned a successful movie and a slew of real life player and club mysteries, including Gribble's sequel and *They Kidnapped Stanley Mathews* (1950). *Inspector West Kicks Off* (1949)<sup>26</sup> takes a different direction as it follows the 'trail' of a body discovered at a football match, through the echelons of club football and onto, into organised crime. John Creasey and Freeman Gregg<sup>27</sup> set the tone for the more gruesome texts that would follow in the 1970s and 1980s. Former player and manager Terry Venables infamously<sup>28</sup> collaborated with Gordon Williams, under the joint pseudonym P.B. Yuill in the mid to late 1970s on the notorious Hazell series<sup>29</sup>, which see a former footballer, ex-police, private detective solve crime in the football world. *Duffy* (1980) and *Putting The Boot In* (1985)<sup>30</sup> deal with football-related crime, while sports lawyer, former commentator and one-time players' agent, Mel Stein's trilogy (*Marked Man* (1986), *Red Card* (1987) and *White Lines* (1998)) provides a comparable seediness in his behind-the-scenes insight. Phil Andrews' football mysteries,

*Own Goals* (1999) and *Goodnight Vienna* (2000) are more literary than Stein's work, but they tend to operate in similar tableaux. On the other hand, *Offside* (2001)<sup>31</sup>, a murder mystery immersed in FC Barcelona football club, and *Pitch Black* (2008)<sup>32</sup>, a contemporary Scottish novel which opens with the brutal murder of a football referee – a very persuasive way to win over football fans – are polished page-turners which incorporate the attributes of the genres they connect. The most recent entry to the movement, *Only A Game* (2010)<sup>33</sup> follows these texts' murderous footsteps into the realm of a football club. While these works can be regarded as crime fiction, there is enough football content within their pages to merit their inclusion in the *crime-related football fiction* movement.

### iii) *Hooligan literature*

*Hooligan literature*, "Hoolie Lit"<sup>34</sup> or "Hoolie porn"<sup>35</sup> could be considered as crime-related football fiction due to hooliganism's inherent illegality, but through sheer volume and proliferation, these works warrant their own movement. Rising tensions and rivalries at football grounds and a more aggressive view of the sport by supporters, coinciding with upheaval

in the structure and marketing of football in the 1990s, seems to have created an imaginative space with which hooligans can be viewed by readers as a safely distanced...vicarious pleasure<sup>36</sup>.

Written in the form of confessional 'sports' fan memoir, these frequently embellished biographies posing as fiction offer the immediacy of following a football club at a particular time in the much the same way war stories do for enthusiasts. They could not have been further from the literary style and social function of contemporaneous 'soccerati' writings discussed in the next section. The Hoolie Lit movement emerged in the 1970s, in Richard Allen's *Skinhead* (1970 -1974) series and Dick Morland's landmark text *Albion, Albion* (1974)<sup>37</sup>. Morland's work focuses on football hooligans. Allen's work, crucially influential on the work of John King and others, concentrates more on capturing a culture. They do so with a sense of realism not seen in many of the works that follow. The most recent examples are Dougie Brimson's *Top Dog* (2001), a sequel to *The Crew* (1999)<sup>38</sup>, which sees the 'lunatics take over the asylum' at Upton Park, West Ham United's home ground. Phil Tadman's *Domestic Football* (2003) provides something of an appropriate end to the movement as it follows a hooligan's path to domestication. The increase of 'hit and tell'<sup>39</sup> memoir has it seems, overwhelmed the publication of fictional accounts.

iv) *Literary football fiction*

Football novels that have achieved a degree of literary status dispute Seddon's notion of football and literature being 'uncomfortable bedfellows'<sup>40</sup> and offer argument against popular misconceptions regarding the lack of quality football fiction. *Literary football fiction* began to emerge in the 1950s with Robin Jenkins' *The Thistle and The Grail*. These texts are comparatively rare, but have a strong pedigree. Sam Hanna Bell's novel *Hollow Ball* (1961) focuses on football and politics<sup>41</sup>. Acclaimed non-fiction football writer, Hunter Davies' *Body Charge* (1971) features the genre's first exploration of sexual identity and Gordon Williams' novel, *From Scenes Like These* (1968), was shortlisted for the 1969 Booker Prize. The football field, 'the pitch', became a place for working-class writers to express themselves, a place to voice societal concern and outrage and the opportunity to engage with their own playing experiences<sup>42</sup>. Theorists and critics<sup>43</sup> note *The Match*, included in *The Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner* (1959)<sup>44</sup>, as an excellent short fiction example. Writers offered deeper explorations of football and its culture. Brian Glanville's realist fiction, *The Rise of Gerry Logan* (1965), lyrically illustrates the footballer's struggle and is regarded by critics and writers alike<sup>45</sup> as one of the foremost literary works of football fiction. J.L. Carr's *How Steeple Sinderby Won The FA Cup* (1975) uses contemporary vernacular to cleverly recapture, while simultaneously parodying, football story romance of 1920s and 1930s<sup>46</sup>. The second of Glanville's football novels, *The Dying of the Light* (1978) and Jenkins' *A Would Be Saint* (1978) discuss the game's role in the lives of ordinary working-class families<sup>47</sup> in the 70s. The intrinsic cultural role of the fan takes a central role<sup>48</sup> alongside the violence in the works of John King, in particular, *The Football Factory* (1996) and *Skinhead* (2007)) and plays at the periphery of works by Irvine Welsh, particularly in *The Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1995) and *The Acid House* (1993) which offer complex and sophisticated studies within football fiction's discussion of class.

*London Fields* (1989) by Martin Amis includes a number of sly football references, and alongside *A History of the World in 10 and a Half Chapters* (1989) by Julian Barnes is commonly placed amid football fiction surveys. While both works lack substantial football content and cannot be defined as football fiction, they are useful, as Taylor points out<sup>49</sup>, in demonstrating the sport's infiltration into the literary corners of mainstream fiction. Their publication accompanied, perhaps significantly in terms of the sport's 'new' middle-class following, by the BBC's operatically themed coverage of the 1990 FIFA World Cup<sup>50</sup> in Italy, foreshadowed the new wave of football writing.

Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch* is, it could be contended, football writing's most important work. Jeff Hill presents a persuasive argument why it should be regarded as a work of fiction<sup>51</sup>, but it is not. It is an angst-ridden autobiography about the nature of one fan's football compulsions. While Hunter Davies' satire, *Striker* (1992), failed to make an impact, an impressive roll call of literary authors did succeed. Among them Whitbread Biography Award Winner D.J. Taylor<sup>52</sup>, Booker Prize winner Roddy Doyle<sup>53</sup> and Indian novelist Nalinaksha Bhattacharya, whose debut novel *Hem and Football* (1992) and its sequel, based on the life of Jasminder Bhamra, a London-based Sikh footballer, struck unprecedented success a decade later when it inspired the *Bend it Like Beckham* movie<sup>54</sup>. Nick Hornby's editorial gathering of work by the aforementioned notables in *My Favourite Year* (1993) and Simon Kuper's excellent soccer journal, *Perfect Pitch* (1997-1998) affirmed their places as leading literary football writers. The most recent contributions to this movement, *The Damned United* (2006)<sup>55</sup>, *In the Crowd* (2008),<sup>56</sup> and *Heartland* (2009)<sup>57</sup>, all play with literary form, the use of point of view, language, and structure.

v) *Lipstick-smearred scandal fiction*

In stark contrast, *Lipstick-smearred scandal fiction* ranges from pornography to football WAGs (Wives and Girlfriends) and 'widow' novels. These soapy serials are filled with sex, drugs and scandal and are remarkably similar in content and context. The earliest sex and scandal filled work in this movement is *The Winner* (1976)<sup>58</sup>; its cover boasts of its being "the first book of its kind". Famous player/notorious drinker, Jimmy Greaves put his name to a similar series of titles, including *The Ball Game* (1980), a misogynistic player's alcohol-fuelled, sex-filled misadventures. Football also provides the setting, the characters and gleefully, the sleaze in Karren Brady's books *United* (1997) and *Trophy Wives* (1998) and Mel Stein's *Football Babylon* (2008), an 'insider's' factional series of anecdotes drafted as fiction and wholly focused on lascivious football intrigues. The re-issue of Elizabeth Coldwell's pornographic novel *Playing the Field* (2010)<sup>59</sup>, marks a growing popularity of this kind of 'erotic soccer romance' or 'sex and scandal in the football world' type of fiction, particularly in the ebook market.

vi) *Soccer Mom fiction*

The advent of the soccer mom phenomenon and with it the *Soccer Mom* novel has coincided with the rise in the game's popularity in the US<sup>60</sup>. Titles range from practical, humorous and horror fantasy to the contemporary equivalent of football-watching, bodice-rippers. *Soccer*

*Mom* novels make up approximately 40% of the published works in adult football fiction in the last five years<sup>61</sup>. With few exceptions, the closest these works get to a game is to collect the children from practice<sup>62</sup>. While few *Soccer Mom* novels qualify as football fiction due, unremarkably, to their lack of football content, they are part of a phenomenon in fiction that has grown exponentially.

### vii) *Fantasy football fiction*

Novels that could legitimately be defined as Fantasy football fiction are rare. The ‘near’ future setting of *They Used to Play on Grass* and Pele’s even less convincing *World Cup Murder* (1986)<sup>63</sup> made extremely limited forays into speculative football fiction and have been included in this movement. The first true fantasy football novel, *Knees Up Mother Earth* (2004)<sup>64</sup>, features a Monty-Python-esque cast of time-travellers, monsters from hell and aliens from outer space. Two recent publications, the very short *Ayresome Angels* (2008)<sup>65</sup> and *The Return of George Camsell’s Football Boots* (2009)<sup>66</sup>, are aimed very specifically at older, adult supporters of the Middlesbrough Football Club. *Unseen Academicals* (2009), Terry Pratchett’s thirty-seventh Discworld novel, is the most significant, for the author’s popularity and the work’s status as a ‘crossover novel’, a text accepted by adult and young adult readerships alike.

### ***Young adult football fiction***

Young adult football fiction novels were massively popular in the 1920, and are, once again, experiencing formidable growth. This work is still not as far reaching in its diversity or representation of the game as its adult counterpart, yet it is the only area of football fiction where there are dedicated football fiction writers such as Tom Palmer, Dan Freedman and Liz Deep-Jones<sup>67</sup>. There is a distinct history of young adult football fiction, and distinct movements within it. The following section highlights common themes and important texts within the body of works.

### i) *Boys own adventure stories*

The comic book, particularly the British comic book, has a long football fiction tradition. *The Boys Own Paper*<sup>68</sup> featured pictures, short stories and comic strips on a range of subjects and sports, including football, which was garnering public interest when the comic began. These *boys own adventure stories* offer important clues to the origins of football fiction and also

where the football fiction novel appears to disappear between the 1890s and the 1920s. Included on the historiography to underline longevity of interest, comic book football fiction has been in continual existence since their publication began in the late 1870s. One example *Hotshot Hamish* is currently published weekly in a tabloid newspaper<sup>69</sup>.

ii) *Young adult male football fiction*

While football fictions fraught with the struggles of class-consciousness were brought to the fore in the 1920s<sup>70</sup> the romanticised, moralistic model of the *young adult male football fiction* narrative remains resolute as author and reader's most popular choice. These texts tend to follow familiar lines, formulaic plots, interchangeable characters and a climactic match as a finish. Prominent authors include Paul Cockburn, Alan Gibbons, Rob Childs (over 50 titles) and Michael Hardcastle (over 140). Glanville's well-written short story collections<sup>71</sup> and Sophie McKenzie's *The Fix* (2009) stretch the boundaries with innovation and insight, but the works in this movement tend to operate around the traditional didactic premise or derivations of the 'football-as-a-lesson-for-life' story. Professional footballer endorsement has returned with an affirmative spin. David Beckham<sup>72</sup> and Mark Schwarzer<sup>73</sup> have attached their names to series that stop just short of being 'life-lesson' instructive and reflect football's positive impact on the reader. Steve Bruce<sup>74</sup> and Theo Walcott<sup>75</sup> have written their own versions. A number of young adult male football novels offer more complex subject matter. Schwarzer and Montagnana-Wallace have the characters in the *Megs Morrison* series deal with a range of issues including race and religious tolerance and, in the final text in the series, an exploration of historical political movements in Australia, but not to the challenging depth or extent of the texts seen in the *smarter young adult fiction* movement. These texts are commonly published as serials and could be viewed as the contemporary equivalent of the simplistic works published in the 1920s<sup>76</sup>. They are being produced with increasing frequency for the contemporary market.

iii) *Young adult female football fiction*

Emerging in the 1990s, *young adult female football fiction* tends to follow the model of the young male texts, with the exception, obviously that stories feature a female protagonist. Strong messages of inclusion and equality are prominent. Trends suggest a mushrooming in publication – from two or less titles a year between 2006 and 2008 to six and seven titles in 2009 and 2010 respectively. Examples include Helen Pielichaty's simplistic ten part *Girls FC* series (2009-2011) and Narinder Dharmi's *Beautiful Girls* series (2008-2011), which follows

her highly successful novelisation of the *Bend it Like Beckham* movie (2004). While these examples have some value as introductory works, most entries into *young adult female football fiction* continue to make it a most dynamic area of development in the genre. Rather than follow the formulae, the authors of young adult female football fictions have extended, stretched and subverted them. Through works such as *Kick Off* (2007)<sup>77</sup>, which sees a young American woman settle into life in a new country through football and *Down the Rabbit Hole* (2006)<sup>78</sup>, the first part of the Echo Falls detective series, positions a female footballer as the mystery solver, there is a marked progression in these texts towards *smarter young adult fiction*. Character development is becoming increasingly complex and layered and in their construction of intricate relationships they are more engaging as a result. Liz Deep-Jones' *Lucy Zeezou*<sup>79</sup> double follow a model footballer in her quest for acceptance in a male team without losing her femininity and Cath Crowley's Gracie Faltrain series (2004, 2006), particularly the third book, *Gracie Faltrain Gets It Right (Finally)* (2008), positions familiar football-related tribulations at its centre while Gracie encounters deeper relationship troubles. Aimed at readers who are a little older these texts use football as a vehicle to draw on a wide range of familial and relationship issues in more complex ways than their male counterparts and collectively bridge the gap between simplistic 'football-as-a-lesson-for-life' stories and more sophisticated texts.

iv) *Smarter young adult football fiction*

The works in *smarter young adult football fiction* movement have characteristically more dimension and depth than previously discussed models of young adult football fiction. They combine an educated knowledge of the game with more involved themes, issues and character dilemmas and regularly merge genres. The first novel-length work in the movement is Barry Hines' powerful novel, *The Blinder* (1966). The story follows the fortunes of a footballer in his late teens. It quickly becomes a forceful and searing commentary on British working-class culture and its attachment to and the inflated value it places on football. Mal Peet's novels use the famed South American passion for the game as a backdrop, and feature demanding storylines, deep character studies and explorations of meaning in football culture and, through football, meaning in much wider aspects of culture. *The Penalty* (2006) delves into issues around the slave trade and when one star player disappears, the subject of missing persons in the work's fictional South American state. Mark Reeder's *The Soccer Field Is Empty* (2002) discusses pressures and difficulties associated with young adult sexuality; in *Boy Overboard* (2002) Morris Gleitzman tackles issues of immigration and refugee detention

centres in Australia and György Dragomán's *A Fehér Király* (The White King, 2005) offers social commentary on Hungarian politics. Dan Freedman's five part *Jamie Johnson* series (2007-2011) and Tom Palmer's five part *Foul Play* series (2008-2011) splice football with well-plotted, fast-paced detective fiction, while Nick Hale's three part *Striker* series (2010-2011) echoes Horler's 1920s bygone hero, *Tiger Standish*, as it mixes football with international espionage. The 2009 Guardian Award winner *Exposure* by Peet features more adult leads than young adult as it takes the characters, story and themes from *Othello* and twists them into an emotive tale of football celebrity. Packed with intertextual references, from Shakespeare's work to parodies of the British Sports Press, it plays across prose, through inspired scene-setting, into the realm of theatre and makes a strong case for its inclusion in *literary football fiction*. One recent text that cannot boast of the author's knowledge of football is *The Boy In The Dress* (2009), David Walliams' tale of a young cross-dressing footballer that does challenge a range of perceptions including body image and transgender issues.

## Conclusion

In the last five years, a relatively large number of divergent football fictions have been published. Reprints of both Carr's and Jenkins'<sup>80</sup> novels might suggest renewed interest in quality football fiction. Mel Stein's *Football Babylon* (2008) and TV shows like *Footballer's Wives*<sup>81</sup> suggest there is some demand for scandalised, lipstick-smeared, football fiction and through Gray and Gregson, the practice of combining football with murder continues. 'Hoolie lit' is still popular. It seems, however, to be largely as a result of big screen adaptations rather than new and original work<sup>82</sup>. The increase of 'hit and tell' memoir also appears to have overwhelmed the publication of fictional accounts. The publication of adult football fiction appears to be slowing against the increasing rush of publications and diversification of young adult (YA) football fiction, where multiple edition series are commonplace and writers and professional footballers are most actively involved, with the exception of areas where female writers have entered the market. This research has outlined and interrogated the genre of football fiction, and its history. It has adapted Moretti's models of abstraction, identified seminal texts, considered long-range trends and through identification of further text level tensions and divergences has established taxonomic movements. It has firmly established that football and literature can be 'comfortable bedfellows', and that they have been in existence, together, for some time. There is a substantial body of work in this genre, one that fits the first academically rigorous coherent definition, with its own parameters and distinctions.

There is diversity in the genre's use and presentation of the game and these texts are able to offer an informed and informative perspective on the sport. Framing and mapping the body of work in this way has given substance to arguments for its legitimacy as a field for continuing academic research. Beyond the individual novels, there is evidence of patterns of repetition and significance. To advance understanding and the parameters of this marginalised domain of fiction, the works require further, more detailed unpacking; an examination of potential conventions, including setting and narrative structure, the role of football and its impact on the protagonist, which inform and influence football fiction must follow. It could be argued that this step is not as important as the next, the establishment of generic characteristics, but that next step could not be made without a clear and informed sense of the shape and forms the body of work incorporates. Previous assumptions of football fiction's scarcity and lack of quality and diversity had obstructed the real view of football fiction. Through this research, things have changed. This is not the final whistle. Before the shins and the egos are bruised, before the goals are scored, it has tested the ground and run some drills. This research is a warm up before the game begins in earnest. The pitch for football fiction has only just been marked out.

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<sup>1</sup> Moretti, *Graphs, Maps and Trees*, 67.

<sup>2</sup> Delaney, *The Footballer's Fireside Book*, xv; Plimpton, *Norton Book of Sports*, 14; Hamilton *The Faber Book of Soccer*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Bairner, 'Football and the literary imagination: Sam Hanna Bell's *The Hollow Ball* and Robin Jenkins' *A Would-Be Saint*'; D'Arcy, *The European Soccer Novel: Hans-Jørgen Nielsen's Fodboldenglen and David Peace's The Damned United*, and Hill, *Sport and the literary imagination: essays in history, literature, and sport*, 35, 73, 113. In three separate essays, Jeff Hill examines *The Jenkins' Thistle and The Grail*, *The Rise of Gerry Logan* by Glanville 1970, and Hornby's, *Fever Pitch*.

<sup>4</sup> These include overlapping explorations by Taylor, 'Rally Round You Havens!': Soccer and the Literary Imagination', 97; Cox, Russell and Vamplew, *Encyclopaedia of British Football*; and Buckley, 'British Obsession with Football'.

<sup>5</sup> Oriard, *Dreaming of Heroes: American Sports Fiction, 1868-1980*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Seddon, *The Football Compendium: A Comprehensive Guide to the Literature of Association Football*, 486

<sup>7</sup> Horvath and Palmer, 'Preface', 3.

<sup>8</sup> Galeano and Happe are among those who suggest football fictive references began with Shakespeare. In the *Comedy of Errors* (1592) Dromio of Ephesus asks, "Am I so round with you as you with me, That like a football you do spurn me thus? (2.i.355-356) and in *King Lear*, (1606) Kent states, "Nor tripped neither, you base football player" (1.iv.56). It should be noted that the sport's formal beginnings in 1862 are taken as the starting point for its literature

<sup>9</sup> Melling, 'Ray of the Rovers: the working class heroine in popular football fiction 1915-1925', 98.

<sup>10</sup> Cox, Vamplew and Russell, *Encyclopedia of British Football*, 202.

<sup>11</sup> Redhead, 'Hit and Tell: A Review Essay on the Soccer Hooligan Memoir'.

<sup>12</sup> Steve Redhead described the work of Hornby et al as a "burgeoning movement of football writing which was essentially seen, self-consciously, as a new bourgeois genre in literature," 294, and

frequently refers to the writers as the ‘soccerati’, a label collectively attached by cultural commentator, Tony Parsons, 126.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor ‘‘Rally Round You Havens!’: Soccer and the Literary Imagination’, 97.

<sup>14</sup> First published as a series of papers in *New Left Review* in 2003, and 2004, then together in one volume in 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Moretti, *Graphs, Maps and Trees*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>17</sup> The *Taxonomy of the Forms*, 31, which accompanies Moretti’s Graph lists the information sources represented and notes neglect of two specific genre cycles: ‘Detective Fiction’ and ‘Science Fiction’. Moretti argues “these genres achieve their modern form around 1890 and experience considerable change in the 1920s”. As a result, their seemingly erratic and lengthy duration would appear to require an alternative approach. This is an odd obstacle to the use of distant reading methods. It led to consideration of Andrew Milner’s 2004 work, *When Worlds Collide: Comparative Literature, World Systems Theory and Science Fiction*. While Milner’s work focuses on the science fiction genre as a possible illustration of a “world literature” system, it is an effective analysis of the theory and, a useful illustration of a global, though notably diagram free, map of the genre. Football fiction is not quite as prolific as science fiction, but its genre cycle or collective body of works is similar in duration. *When Worlds Collide* demonstrates consideration of a genre cycle through the engagement of a method of distant reading. The literary historian did not suggest a specific method to organise larger ‘anomalous’ genre cycles. However, if a single genre cycle is substantive enough to warrant such an approach, then distant reading models of abstraction can legitimately be applied to analyse football fiction.

<sup>18</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak suggests distant reading must be accompanied with a close reading of texts, 102. Bulson states a distant reading cannot function effectively without it. Christopher Prendergast describes the combination of close and distant reading as a “potentially fertile if unwieldy marriage”, 2001, 120. Moretti’s position while initial one of binary opposition to the idea, has since softened. While he sees such an arrangement as ‘odd’ and adds that it amounts “to saying that literature requires two conceptually opposite approaches” (2006a) there is the possibility that any literary study of literature can be enriched by, both close reading and abstraction, by interpretation and explanation (2006a). *The Novel*, (Volume 1, *History, Geography and Culture*, published in 2006 and Volume 2, *Forms and Themes*, in 2007), what Bulson describes as Moretti’s grand and eloquent attempt to “reconceive world literature”, 10, is a ‘patchwork’ which appears to ‘stitch’ together separate bits of knowledge about individual cases and relies heavily on a number of close analyses to broaden its picture.

<sup>19</sup> Moretti claims, his focus on the modern novel, allowed examination of a phenomenon that is possible to isolate, which also affords ‘like for like’ comparison, 2003, 73. His methods have been criticised, by Prendergast, for their fixation on one form at the cost of consideration of other forms of literature (2001). Football fiction has seen many forms, however, I chose here to follow Moretti’s example in order to maintain simplicity and manageability in the research.

<sup>20</sup> Taylor ‘‘Rally Round You Havens!’: Soccer and the Literary Imagination’, 97; Seddon, *The Football Compendium: A Comprehensive Guide to the Literature of Association Football*, 486; and Cox, Vamplew and Russell, *Encyclopedia of British Football*, 202.

<sup>21</sup> In a period stretching over 20 years Sidney Horler produced 157 football fiction works in his own name. There are at least 20 titles among their number: including *McPhee* (1923), *The Man Who Saved the Club* (1935), and *Tiger Standish Takes the Field* (1939). Horler also appears to have contributed a significant number of titles to the *Aldine* and *Amalgamated* series under a range of pseudonyms – though this observation would require further closer textual examination.

<sup>22</sup> Melling, ‘Ray of the Rovers: the working class heroine in popular football fiction 1915-1925’.

<sup>23</sup> Cox, Vamplew and Russell *Encyclopedia of British Football*, 199.

<sup>24</sup> There are many examples. Horler’s *The Ball of Fortune*, is a colourful example.

<sup>25</sup> Such as in Grant’s, *The Football Suspects*.

<sup>26</sup> Creasey.

<sup>27</sup> *Professional Jealousy* (1960).

<sup>28</sup> Buckley suggests, Venables offered Williams a piece of paper with a blunt outline for a novel; “There’s a naked blonde on the bed. Dead. And underneath the bed a suitcase stuffed with a million nicker [Pounds sterling]. All yours, Gordon.”

<sup>29</sup> Four novels were published in the series between 1974-1977. The relationship with football had diminished significantly by the final episode.

<sup>30</sup> *Putting the Boot In* (1985), by Julian Barnes, writing as Dan Kavanagh, is a seedy detective novel, which uses corruption at a lower division football club as its backdrop. The investigative lead, a private detective, reflects on a number of questions including whether or not he is tall enough to be a goalkeeper.

<sup>31</sup> Montalban.

<sup>32</sup> Gray.

<sup>33</sup> Gregson.

<sup>34</sup> Brimson interview.

<sup>35</sup> Turnbull interview.

<sup>36</sup> Cox, Vamplew and Russell, *Encyclopedia of British Football*, 201.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> The ebook edition of *The Crew* published late in 2011, reached number one on the Amazon UK and US free download charts.

<sup>39</sup> Redhead, ‘Hit and Tell: A Review Essay on the Soccer Hooligan Memoir’, 392.

<sup>40</sup> Seddon, *The Football Compendium: A Comprehensive Guide to the Literature of Association Football*, 487.

<sup>41</sup> Bairner, ‘Football and the literary imagination: Sam Hanna Bell’s *The Hollow Ball*’, 32.

<sup>42</sup> Naughton, *The Goalkeeper’s Revenge*, and, Glanville, *Goalkeepers are Crazy and Goalkeepers Are Different*.

<sup>43</sup> Taylor, ‘Rally Round You Havens!’: Soccer and the Literary Imagination’, 92; Kuper, ‘Sporting Fictions’.

<sup>44</sup> Sillitoe.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid; Kuper, ‘Sporting Fictions’; Buckley ‘British Obsession with Football’; and Braunias, ‘There’s a writer of the field’.

<sup>46</sup> Carr is more famous for *A Season in Sinji* (1968), widely regarded as one of the great works of cricket fiction (Taylor 1997, 98).

<sup>47</sup> Bairner, ‘Football and the literary imagination: Sam Hanna Bell’s *The Hollow Ball*’, 34.

<sup>48</sup> Redhead, ‘Hit and Tell: A Review Essay on the Soccer Hooligan Memoir’, 394.

<sup>49</sup> Taylor, ‘Rally Round You Havens!’: Soccer and the Literary Imagination’, 97.

<sup>50</sup> Pavarotti’s version of *Nessun Dorma* was used as the soundtrack

<sup>51</sup> Hill describes *Fever Pitch* as ‘the classic bourgeois novel’ and makes a strong argument for Hornby’s non-fiction memoir, like many autobiographies, being ‘deceptive’ and more akin to similar ‘subtle fictions’, particularly those which he cites as the works most likely influences – Tobias Wolfe’s *This Boy’s Life: A Memoir* (1989) and *A Fan’s Notes: A Fictional Memoir* (1970) by Frederick Exley, 130.

<sup>52</sup> Taylor, *English Settlement*.

<sup>53</sup> Doyle, *The Van*.

<sup>54</sup> Chadha, Bindra and Berges, *Bend it Like Beckham*.

<sup>55</sup> *The Damned United* reached a new audience in 2010 when a Film adaptation gained critical success and assisted with the novel enjoying a subsequent wave of success.

<sup>56</sup> Mauvingnier, translated by Whiteside in 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Cartwright.

<sup>58</sup> Osbourn.

<sup>59</sup> This text was originally published in 1998, and reissued in 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Montoya, ‘A new novel, reality series, off-Broadway play, YouTube talk show and movie put stay-at-home moms in the spotlight’.

<sup>61</sup> McGowan, ‘Faster Than Words’.

<sup>62</sup> Robin Harding’s *Secret Desires of a Soccer Mom* has one very short football scene, it amounts to less than half of one page and involves the protagonist picking up a child from the ‘soccer’ field, 27.

<sup>63</sup> With Resnicow.

- <sup>64</sup> Rankin.
- <sup>65</sup> Wilson's *Ayresome Angels* is 52 pages long.
- <sup>66</sup> Wilson.
- <sup>67</sup> These authors, as well as a number of others, have created series which
- <sup>68</sup> *The Boys Own Paper* run weekly from 1879-1967.
- <sup>69</sup> *The Scottish Sunday Mail*.
- <sup>70</sup> Taylor, 'Rally Round You Havens!': Soccer and the Literary Imagination', 97.
- <sup>71</sup> Glanville's short story collections *Goalkeeper's are Crazy* (1964) and *Goalkeepers Are Different* (1971) are included here because of his importance as a football fiction writer.
- <sup>72</sup> Beckham put his name to the *Football Academy* which was published between 2009 and 2011. The authors have not been named on the texts.
- <sup>73</sup> Schwarzer put his name and provided an intro for the *Megs Morrison* series between 2007 and 2010 with author Neil Montagnana-Wallace.
- <sup>74</sup> Bruce, *Sweeper!* and *Defender!*
- <sup>75</sup> In the book's notes Walcott celebrates his writing of the four part *TJ* series.
- <sup>76</sup> Cox, Vamplew and Russell, *Encyclopedia of British Football*, 200.
- <sup>77</sup> D. King.
- <sup>78</sup> Abraham
- <sup>79</sup> Jones, Lucy Zeezou's Goal, Lucy Zeezou's Glamour Game.
- <sup>80</sup> Carr's novel *How Steeple Sinderby Won the FA Cup* originally published in 1975 was reprinted due to popular demand in 2005, and Jenkins' work, *The Thistle and The Grail* originally published in 1954 has enjoyed several resurgences in popularity. It was published to critical success in 1992 and again in 2006.
- <sup>81</sup> Chadwick and McManus.
- <sup>82</sup> After the success of a number of fictional works, including those by Sampson and King, making the leap to the screen, a large number of non-fictional works have been adapted for film, including *Cass* (2008) and *The Rise of the Footsoldier* (2010). Brimson's *Green Street Hooligans* (2005), a fictional tale inspired by his non-fictional works, recently inspired a sequel.

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