

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



# Among the Thugs

Bill Buford

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## **ABOUT THE BOOK**

What sort of man spends his Saturday afternoons with people named Bone Head, Paraffin Pete and Steamin' Sammy?

Bill Buford's acclaimed *Among the Thugs* is a terrifying, malevolently funny, supremely chilling book about the experience, and the eerie allure, of crowd violence.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Bill Buford, born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 1954, has lived in England since 1977. He is the editor of the literary magazine *Granta*.

# **AMONG THE THUGS**

**Bill Buford**



arrow books

For Stephen Booth

# PART ONE

A STATION OUTSIDE CARDIFF



One of the causes of the downfall of Rome was that people, being fed by the State . . . ceased to have any responsibility for themselves or their children, and consequently became a nation of wasters. They frequented circuses, where paid performers appeared before them in the arena, much as we see the crowds now flocking to look on at paid players playing football . . . Thousands of boys and young men, pale, narrow-chested, hunched-up, miserable specimens, smoking endless cigarettes, numbers of them betting, all of them learning to be hysterical as they groan or cheer in panic unison with their neighbours—the worst sound of all being the hysterical scream of laughter that greets any little trip or fall of a player. One wonders whether this can be the same nation which had gained for itself the reputation of being a stolid, pipe-sucking manhood, unmoved by panic or excitement, and reliable in the tightest of places. Get the lads away from this—teach them to be manly.

R. Baden-Powell  
*Scouting for Boys* (1908)

SOME TIME AGO, I came home from Wales by train. The station was a village station just outside Cardiff, and I arrived early. I bought a cup of tea. It was a cold Saturday evening, and only three or four other passengers were on the platform. A man was reading a newspaper, rocking back and forth on his feet. We waited, and there was an announcement on the loudspeaker about an unscheduled train. A little later, there was another announcement: the unscheduled train was about to appear, and everyone was to stand ten feet from the edge of the platform. It was an unusual instruction, and the man with the newspaper raised an eyebrow. Perhaps, I thought, it was a military train of some kind. A few minutes later, police appeared, emerging from the stairs nearby.

The train was a football special, and it had been taken over by supporters. They were from Liverpool, and there were hundreds of them—I had never seen a train with so many people inside—and they were singing in unison: ‘Liverpool, la-la-la, Liverpool, la-la-la.’ The words look silly now, but they did not sound silly. A minute before there had been virtual silence: a misty, sleepy Welsh winter evening. And then this song, pounded out with increasing ferocity, echoing off the walls of the station. A guard had been injured, and as the train stopped he was rushed off, holding his face. Someone inside was trying to smash a window with a table leg, but the window wouldn’t break. A fat man with a red face stumbled out of one of the carriages, and six policemen rushed up to him, wrestled him to the ground and bent his arm violently behind his back. The police were over-reacting—the train was so packed that the fat man had popped out of an open door—but the police were frightened. For that matter, I was frightened (I remember my arms

folded stupidly across my chest), as was everyone else on the platform. It was peculiar: I was at a railway station where everyone around me spoke Welsh; I was there to catch a train: then this sudden display. I thought that it was intended for us, that this violent chant was a way of telling us that they, the supporters, were in the position to do anything they wanted.

The train left. It was silent.

I got home at one-thirty in the morning, and the country seemed to consist of a long cordon of police. At Paddington Station two hundred officers were waiting to escort everyone from the platform to the Underground. I changed trains four times; three were taken over by supporters. One was torn apart: the seats had been ripped out, and the bar, which had been closed beforehand, was broken up, its metal shutter-door split into pieces and drink handed out to anyone who walked past. I did not know what was more surprising, the destructiveness, which was gratuitous and relentless, or that, with so many police, no one seemed able to stop it: it just went on. Hoping to avoid trouble, I sat in a first-class carriage at the very front of one train, opposite a man who had paid for his first-class ticket. He was a slim, elegant man with a thin moustache, wearing a woollen suit and expensive, shiny shoes: a civilized sort of fellow reading a civilized sort of book—a hardback novel with a dust-jacket. A supporter had been staring at him for a long time. The supporter was drunk. Every now and then, he lit a match and threw it at the civilized man's shiny shoes, hoping to set his trousers on fire. The civilized man ignored him, but the supporter, puffy and bloodshot, persisted. It was a telling image: one of the disenfranchised, flouting the codes of civilized conduct, casually setting a member of a more privileged class alight.

It was obvious that the violence was a protest. It made sense that it would be: that football matches were providing an outlet for frustrations of a powerful nature. So many

young people were out of work or had never been able to find any. The violence, it followed, was a rebellion of some kind—social rebellion, class rebellion, something. I wanted to know more. I had read about the violence and, to the extent that I thought about it, had assumed that it was an isolated thing or mysterious in the way that crowd violence is meant to be mysterious: unpredictable, spontaneous, the mob. My journey from Wales suggested that it might be more intended, more willed. It offered up a vision of the English Saturday, the shopping day, that was different from the one I had known: that in the towns and cities, you might find hundreds of police, military in their comprehensiveness, out to contain young, male sports fans who, after attending an athletic contest, were determined to break or destroy the things that were in their way. It was hard to believe.

I repeated the story of my journey to friends, but I was surprised by how unsurprised they were. Some acted as if they were disgusted; others were amused; no one thought it was anything extraordinary. It was one of the things you put up with: that every Saturday young males trashed your trains, broke the windows of your pubs, destroyed your cars, wreaked havoc on your town centres. I didn't buy it, but it seemed to be so. In fact the only time I felt that I had said something surprising was when I revealed that, although I had now seen a football crowd, I had never been to an English football match. This, it seemed, was shocking.

And so, I explained: that although I had come to England as a student in 1977 and stayed on, I had attended only one football game and that was years before when I happened to be in Mexico City: the Mexican national team, which was not very good, was playing host to my home team visiting from the United States, which was terrible. There may have been two hundred people in attendance. Mexico won, eight-nil. In the suburbs of Los Angeles where I grew up, the game of 'soccer' (as we called it) was not a young male's pastime.

My friends were unimpressed. *Never* been to a match? They were incredulous. The implication seemed to be that *that* was why I found the behaviour of the supporters so bizarre and difficult to understand.

I do not remember many things about my visit to the Tottenham Hotspur football ground at White Hart Lane, where two friends took me to see my first English football match at the end of the 1983 season. I don't remember if any goals were scored. I don't remember the other team. I do remember that we were late and that it took twenty minutes of pushing, grabbing, squeezing, groaning, inching, striving, wrestling before finally securing our place, a tiny expanse of cold concrete step, crushed between a number of lads—how else to describe them?—ten years younger than me and five stone heavier whose passion for expression seldom went beyond the simple but effectively direct (and often repeated) phrase: 'You fuckin' bastard.' I remember the mirth that accompanied the spectacle of the individual below us who, detecting precipitation along the back of his neck, reached behind him to discover that he was being urinated upon from above. And I remember the unease I felt realizing that the two young men near me were wearing National Front badges—one of my friends was Indian, the other a dark Latin American. The two young men and their friends began a chant—'Wogs out'—which was repeated with increasing volume until it was interrupted by a fight which was then interrupted by the police, whose progress towards it, pushing, grabbing, squeezing, groaning, inching, striving, wrestling, and clubbing, was inhibited when their helmets were removed and thrown on to the pitch.

For my friends it was an ordinary day out—a bit amusing when the policemen lost their helmets, but otherwise nothing special. True, you wouldn't expect someone in, say, the theatre to urinate upon other members of the audience,

but lads don't go to the theatre, do they? Lads go to matches on Saturday.

I thought I'd go on my own. I didn't know that it wasn't done, that lads went with lads or that lads went with dads, but there was so much I didn't know—which was the point. I wanted to find out what I didn't know; I wanted to meet one of 'them' and didn't know any other way to go about it.

And so, with the new season, I went to Stamford Bridge. I knew about Chelsea, the reputation of its supporters and of 'the Shed'—the canopied standing-room terraces on the Chelsea side of the ground. I arrived early. On the way, I saw many police—they were at each stop along the District Line—but by the time I reached Fulham Broadway they were wherever I looked. There were dogs at the top of the stairs of the Underground station and, outside, horses bearing police with four-foot truncheons. As I walked towards the ground, I saw men with radios: there was one on almost every corner. A helicopter was circling overhead, and vans were driving slowly past the pubs and down the back streets. And then something occurred that I could never have imagined. I heard the clop-clop sound of horses, and jeering, and broken glass, and shouts of abuse. Coming down the Broadway was an escort consisting of ten horses and a chain of police surrounding a compact but large body of people—maybe a thousand: they were the visitors.

It seems curious that I should have been surprised, having now seen this same procession so many times since, but I was. The procession consisted of ordinary people, dedicated supporters of a team, many of them middle-aged. Along with their sons or wives or friends from work, they had organized a Saturday outing, bought their tickets in advance, booked a coach for the return journey, and yet they were in such danger of being physically attacked that they had to be protected by a battalion of police with dogs and horses, followed overhead by a helicopter.

I entered the grounds and was frisked—my comb, because it had long teeth, was confiscated—and emerged from the turnstile to find people everywhere, on the steps, sitting atop fences, on posts, suspended from bits of architecture. There was a narrow human alley, and I joined the mob pushing its way through for a place from which to watch the match.

Except that there was no place. There was a movable crush. It was impossible, once inside, to change my mind—to decide that I didn't want to see the game after all, that I wanted to go home—because I couldn't move left or right, let alone turn around and walk back the way I came. There was only one direction: forward. For some reason, there was an advantage, an advantage worth defending, in being one step ahead of wherever it was that you happened to be. And that was where everybody was trying to go.

There was a range of tactics for achieving this. The most common was the *simple squeeze*: by lifting your crushed arm from between the two bodies that had wedged you in place and slipping it in front and by then twisting yourself in such a way that your body, obeying natural principles, actually followed your arm, you could inch towards that mysterious spot just ahead of you. The simple squeeze was popular—I assumed that most people had learned the technique trying to buy a drink in London pubs—and everybody did it, until interrupted by the *shove*.

The principle of the shove was this: somebody, somewhere behind you, frustrated at not getting to this mysterious spot just one step ahead, would give up and throw his weight into the person in front of him; then, amid cries of 'fuckin' bastard', everybody tumbled forward. Nobody fell if only because each person was pressed so tightly against the one in front who was in turn pressed so tightly against the one in front of him that no one, apparently, was in any *real* danger. But I wondered about the person at the very front and was convinced that

somebody must be feeling very frightened at the increasingly likely prospect of being crushed against a wall—for eventually there must be a wall. And it must have been this fear, felt by the panicked, slowly-suffocating one at the front whose ribs were buckling painfully, which contributed to the *counter-shove*, an effort of animal strength, which seemed to occur shortly after you had abandoned the simple squeeze and, being unable to stop yourself from tumbling uncontrollably forwards, had resigned yourself to the authority of the shove, when suddenly, inexplicably, there was the counter-shove and you were travelling uncontrollably backwards.

The movement never ceased.

I had always assumed that a sporting event was a paid-for entertainment, like a night at the cinema; that it was an exchange: you gave up a small part of your earnings and were rewarded by a span (an hour, two hours) of pleasure, frequently characterized by features—edible food, working lavatories, a managed crowd, a place to park your car—that tended to encourage you to return the following week. I thought this was normal. I could see that I was wrong. What principle governed the British sporting event? It appeared that, in exchange for a few pounds, you received one hour and forty-five minutes characterized by the greatest possible exposure to the worst possible weather, the greatest number of people in the smallest possible space and the greatest number of obstacles—unreliable transport, no parking, an intensely dangerous crush at the only exit, a repellent polio pond to pee into, last minute changes of the starting time—to keep you from ever attending a match again.

And yet, here they all were, having their Saturday.

Yes: here they all were, but having met the unspectacular challenge of getting myself to a football match on my own, what was I meant to do next? How was I to go about getting to know one of 'them'? I wanted to meet a football thug, but



to my untrained eye everyone around me looked like one. I identified a likely thuggish-looking prospect—in that he was bigger than the others and more energetic, screaming and singing in a way that suggested incipient epilepsy—but the police identified him as well. Before the match began he was ejected for no apparent reason other than that he *looked* like he might do something. What next? Hi, you look ugly and violent, can I buy you a drink? I was uncomfortable, swaying in the crush, trying to make eye contact or strike up a conversation—it wasn't the place for a chat—and, after a while, I became convinced that my manner was starting to make everyone around me uncomfortable as well: that they thought that I was a strange, creepy little moron, and that I should disappear, *and* that I was a deviant homosexual who deserved to be injured badly. 'Stop staring at me like that,' one of them said, and so I gave up and tried to watch the game, but I couldn't find it—there were too many people in the way—and so I simply gave up. And swayed.

I did not judge my first outing on my own to have been a success.

Other matches followed.

I took the Metropolitan Line to the nether regions of East London to watch West Ham, but I remember little about the visit except the sign that I saw on my way out: 'Remember Ibrox, Please Leave Slowly.' 'Ibrox' is Ibrox Park in Glasgow, and so I went to Glasgow as well: it was there, in 1971, that sixty-six people were asphyxiated from the crush trying to get out. I attended a match at the appropriately named 'Plough Lane', the wooden, rickety ground of the Wimbledon football team, an architect's bad memory stewing in the stench of the enveloping pollution and muck. It was the first time in my life as a spectator that I felt I might be overcome by the odours rising out of my seat, so powerfully rotten were the stands on which it had been fixed. I went to Millwall, south of the Thames, famous for its crowd violence.

No other ground, I discovered, had been closed more times from the trouble caused by its supporters. But I found no crowd violence. I was grateful to have found the match. The ground is hidden—even the overhead lights seem to be subterranean—at the end of narrow Victorian streets and dark tunnels, amid railway tracks and heaps of bricks and tiles that must date from the Blitz. And then suddenly there it was, the evocatively-named ‘Den’ on Cold Blow Lane opposite the Isle of Dogs.

There were other excursions—Roker Park in Sunderland; Hampden in Glasgow; the supposedly grand Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield—and, while I couldn’t say that I had developed a rapport with any one of ‘them’ *yet*, I did find that I was developing a taste for the game. I had figured out how to stand on the terraces and watch the play on the pitch—an achievement of sorts. In fact I was also starting to enjoy the conditions of the terraces themselves. This, I admit, surprised me. This, it would seem, was neither natural nor logical. It was, I see now on reflection, not unlike alcohol or tobacco: disgusting, at first; pleasurable, with effort; addictive, over time. And perhaps, in the end, a little self-destroying.

MANCHESTER

What are we to do with the 'Hooligan'? Who or what is responsible for his growth? Every week some incident shows that certain parts of London are more perilous for the peaceable wayfarer than remote districts of Calabria, Sicily, or Greece, once the classic haunts of brigands. Every day in some police-court are narrated the details of acts of brutality of which the sufferers are unoffending men and women. So long as the 'Hooligan' maltreated only the 'Hooligan'—so long as we heard chiefly of the attacks and counter-attacks of bands, even if armed sometimes with deadly weapons—the matter was far less important than it has become . . . There is no looking calmly, however, on the frequently recurring outbursts of ruffians, the systematic lawlessness of groups of lads and young men who are the terror of the neighbourhood in which they dwell.

Our 'Hooligans' go from bad to worse. They are an ugly growth on the body politic, and the worse circumstance is that they multiply, and that School Boards and prisons, police magistrates and philanthropists, do not seem to ameliorate them. Other great cities may throw off elements more perilous to the State. Nevertheless the 'Hooligan' is a hideous excrescence on our civilization.

*The Times*, 30 October 1890

IN THE SPRING of 1984, Manchester United reached the semi-finals of the Cup-Winners Cup and was scheduled to play Turin's Juventus. The teams were to play twice: the first leg in Manchester, the second, two weeks later, in Turin. I had been intrigued by Manchester United for some time. Before May 1985, English teams had not been banned from playing on the continent; the supporters of Manchester United, however, had been: by the team itself. I wanted to find out what these supporters were like. It seemed an extraordinary thing for the team's management to ban its own fans.

The first match was on a Wednesday evening, and I got a train to Manchester from London at around three in the afternoon. Inside, it was the familiar sight: people packed into the seats, on the floor, suspended from the luggage racks, playing cards, rolling dice, drinking unimaginable quantities of alcohol, steadily sinking consciousness into a blurry stupor.

I walked from carriage to carriage, looking for one of 'them', and came across someone who was truly spectacular to look at, qualifying for that special category of human being—one of its most repellent specimens. He had a fat, flat bulldog face and was extremely large. His T-shirt had inched its way up his belly and was discoloured by something sticky and dark. The belly itself was a tub of sorts, swirling, I would discover, with litres and litres of lager, partly-chewed chunks of fried potato and moist, undigested balls of over-processed carbohydrate. His arms—puffy, doughy things—were stained with tattoos. On his right bicep was an image of the Red Devils, the logo of the Manchester United team; on his forearm, a Union Jack.

When I came upon him, he had just tossed an empty beer can into the overhead luggage rack—quite a few were there already—and had started in on a bottle of Tesco's vodka.

I introduced myself. I was writing about football supporters. Did he mind if I asked him some questions?

He stared at me. Then he said, 'All Americans are wankers.' And paused. 'All journalists,' he added, showing, perhaps, that his mind did not work along strictly nationalist lines, 'are cunts.'

We had established a rapport.

His name was Mick and, on arriving in Manchester, he rushed me across the street to a nearby pub for three pints of beer, drunk with considerable speed. I accompanied Mick to the match, where he led me to the Stretford End, the standing-room section of Old Trafford, packed, enclosed, so that the chants, showing an impressive command of history and linguistic dexterity—'Where were you in World War Two?'; '*Va fanculo*' ('Fuck off in Italian)—were so amplified that it was hours before my ears stopped ringing: as I fell asleep that night I found myself relentlessly repeating the not especially somniferous slogan that 'Mussolini was a wanker.' At half-time, Mick rushed off again for refreshment, which this time included two meat pies, a cheeseburger and a plastic cup of something which Mick insisted was lager but whose temperature and consistency reminded me of vegetable soup. I couldn't touch it, and not losing a minute, Mick—waste not, want not—drank mine as well. At the end of the match, Mick grabbed me by my sleeve, tugged me through the crowd, ushered me down the Warwick Road North—a quick stop for two orders of fish'n'chips, grease pouring through the newspapers, Mick's T-shirt by now a work of art—and then across the street into the pub, where, after three quick rounds at the bar, Mick bought a further two pints before sitting down with me at a table. I was the one who asked that we sit. I was starting to bloat.

In Mick, I felt that I had finally met one of 'them'. At the same time, I felt that perhaps he wasn't the best one of 'them' to have met. There were problems. For a start I could see that he was not going to fit easily into my thesis: he was not unemployed or, it seemed, in any way disenfranchised. Instead he appeared to be a perfectly happy, skilled electrician from Blackpool, recently brought in as part of a team rewiring a block of flats in London. He also had a very large wad of twenty-pound notes stuffed into his trousers: I know this because Mick continued to buy rounds, and the wad never seemed to diminish.

There had to be quite a lot of money if only because Mick had not missed a match in four years. Not one. In fact, Mick said he couldn't imagine how it would be possible to miss one in the future. The future, I pointed out, was quite a long time, and Mick agreed, but, still, it was not a prospect—'Miss Man United?'—that his mind could accommodate comfortably. I didn't know how he had been permitted to leave his building site earlier in the day to catch the train up to Manchester, but I knew that he intended to be back there first thing in the morning. Some time later in the night, after closing time, he would wander down to Manchester Piccadilly and, with cans of lager stuffed into his coat pockets, make his way to the milk train that would get him to London in time for work. I have, since wondered what it would be like to have your house rewired by Mick and imagined that moment—the children just finishing their breakfast, the rush to get them off to school—when the bell rings and there, with the members of your curious family clustering round the door beside you, is Mick, recently ejected from the milk train, still swaying, a light fixture in hand.

It was my turn to buy a round and when I returned Mick explained to me how the 'firm' worked. He mentioned some of the characters, whose nicknames were remarkably self-explanatory: Bone Head, Paraffin Pete, Speedie, Barmy

Bernie, One-Eyed Billy, Red (the communist) and Daft Donald, a fellow of notoriously limited intelligence who tended to destroy things with chains. At the time, he was in jail. For that matter, at one time or another, just about everyone, if not actually in jail, was at least facing a criminal charge or had recently been tried for one. Mick, who was not of a violent disposition, had been arrested once, although it was, he assured me, an unusual occurrence and one marred by bad timing: the police happened to enter the pub the moment that Mick, standing astride the unfortunate lad whom he had almost rendered unconscious, had raised a bar stool in the air, poised to bring it crashing down with maximum force and maximum damage. 'But I wasn't actually going to do it,' Mick said. There was no chance to argue, because in no time Mick was up again and heading for the bar, saying over his shoulder, 'Same again?'

Same again?

I could not see how I would make it to closing time. I got up to go to the loo—my fifth visit—and, hearing a terrible sloshing sound from within, reached out to a chair for support. Mick's thirst appeared unstoppable, or was at least as unstoppable as his stomach was large, and his stomach was very, very large. By the time I returned from the loo. there he was again, approaching the table, two pint glasses in hand. For a moment, the scene appeared to me in duplicate: a watery second Mick and an endless succession of pint glasses in his many hands. I was in trouble. I exhaled deeply. My stomach rolled. Once again, there was another, completely full pint glass. Once again, the froth on top. It was detestable. I stared at it.

Mick gulped.

Most of the supporters, he went on to explain, alcohol having no visible effect, came from either Manchester or London. 'The ones from London are known as the Cockney Reds. Gurney is a Cockney Red. He doesn't travel anywhere unless he's on the jib.'



Mick was surprised I didn't know what 'being on the jib' meant. I was surprised I was able to pronounce the words.

'Being on the jib,' Mick continued, with only a half-pint now remaining in his glass, 'means never spending money. That's always the challenge. You never want to pay for Underground tickets or train tickets or match tickets. In fact, if you're on the jib when you go abroad, you usually come back in profit.'

'In profit?'

'Yeah. You know. Money.'

Manchester United's firm was known as the ICJ, the Inter-City Jibbers (named after the British Rail commuter service), and Mick proceeded to list the great moments in the ICJ's history—in Valencia and Barcelona during the World Cup when it was in Spain, in France during the qualifying matches for the European championship. Or Luxembourg. That, apparently, was from where Banana Bob returned wearing a fur coat and diamond rings on each of his fingers. Or Germany. That was where he boarded the train back to London with his underpants full of Deutschmarks. Roy Downes was another one. He had just been released from prison in Bulgaria, where he had been caught trying to crack the hotel safe. And there was Sammy. 'Sammy is a professional.'

'A professional hooligan?'

'No, no. A professional thief.'

Sammy, Roy Downes and Banana Bob were all leaders, or at least that's how Mick described them. I had no idea that there were leaders. It sounded like some kind of tribe. Clearly I would have to meet them. They were the ones to get to. I pursued the subject.

What, I asked Mick innocently, made a leader exactly?

'Doing,' Mick said and then paused, clearly refining his thought, 'yes, doing the right thing in the right circumstances at the right time.'

Ah. 'That's not,' I offered gently, 'a particularly helpful definition.'

I asked if there was one principal leader at United, but Mick said, No, there wasn't one leader, which was a problem, but several. 'Sammy, Roy, Banana Bob, Robert the Sneak Thief. They all end up competing with each other. And each has his own firm, his own following—with as many as thirty or forty people. Most of the followers are little fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds who are out to prove they can be a "bob" and will do anything. They're the most dangerous. They're the ones who start most of the fights. They're like sub-lieutenants and they answer only to their own leader. Sammy probably has the most loyal following.'

And then Mick stopped, suddenly.

I thought that my questions were making him uncomfortable—leaders? sub-lieutenants? little armies?—but, no, Mick was looking at my beer, noticing that, while he had finished his pint, my glass was still full, although I had repeatedly brought it to my lips. 'You're not much of a drinker, are you?'

It was eleven o'clock at last, and someone was calling 'Time' (beautifully, I thought), and I calculated that in addition to an order of fish'n'chips and a thoroughly indigestible cheeseburger I had had two cans of lager and eight pints of bitter. That was a lot, I thought. I had done rather well. But now Mick was telling me that I wasn't much of a drinker. Mick certainly was. He was not keeping track of what he consumed, but I was so impressed that I was. In addition to a newspaper full of fish'n'chips, his *two* cheeseburgers, his *two* meat pies, his *four* bags of bacon-flavoured crisps *and* the Indian take-away he was about to purchase on his way to the station, Mick had had the following: four cans of Harp lager, a large part of a bottle of Tesco's vodka and *eighteen* pints of bitter. As the pub closed, Mick bought a further four cans of lager for the train-ride home.

It was an expensive business being a football supporter, and I could see that it was important that Mick not miss work in the morning. For although Mick might have talked about being on the jib as if it were the most natural thing in the world, I noticed that he had a return ticket to London and had had a ticket for the match. All in all, he had spent about sixty pounds that evening. He mentioned that, the previous Saturday, he had spent about the same. He also said that he had spent £155 the day before on a package tour to Turin for the second match with Juventus. That is, between Saturday and Wednesday, Mick had spent £275 on football. In all likelihood he would spend another fifty or sixty pounds the following Saturday—£335 in a week, an exceptional week perhaps, but, even so, more than most members of the British population were spending on their monthly mortgages.

The package to Turin was interesting for another reason. As I knew, Manchester United's supporters were banned from matches played in Europe—the ban, according to Mick, was because there was a riot every time the team played abroad—but it appeared to be enforced in a rather casual way: the club's management had simply refused to take up the standard allocation of tickets for the visiting team. But what was to stop the supporters from going over on their own and buying from touts? Or what was to stop some enterprising entrepreneur from buying a lot directly from Italy and selling them expensively here in England?

Mick explained the package, which included air fare, hotel, and match tickets—seats, not standing. That was a big feature: they would be good tickets. He pulled out a tiny newspaper clipping, two centimetres of a column, taken from the *Manchester Evening News*. It was all being handled by a travel agent whom, for reasons that will eventually become apparent, I cannot refer to by his real name. I will call him Bobby Boss. And his agency? The Bobby Boss Travel Agency.

Mick disappeared into the Manchester night—the streets around Old Trafford were now deserted—and started off on the two-mile walk to the station, eating a second Indian take-away on the way, his weighted coat pockets swinging with his stride. He was, it must be said, not fun to look at, but, finally, not a bad sort. For all his stories of violence and mayhem, he himself seemed to play by the rules. It was just a good time out; it was a club. He was excited to have the chance to talk about it, and the more he talked about it the more excited he got. He was open and generous and trusting. That was the thing: he trusted me.

I FOUND BOBBY Boss in Soho, up stairs that smelled vividly of the people who had slept there the night before and in a very big room shared with several other businesses, each divided by an elaborate but flimsy network of highly portable plywood partitions. In fact, I did not find Bobby Boss himself, but only his business, represented by a perfectly agreeable receptionist named Jackie or Nicky or Tracy, something light and cheerful, someone, in any event, who seemed not to share my anxiety about embarking on a clandestine trip that had been banned by the management of Manchester United, the supporters' club, the Football Association and the UEFA executive. Business was business; I gave her £155 and she gave me a piece of paper. It said 'Received with thanks.' Match tickets, I was assured, would come later.

The journey began the following week, many hours before the sun came up, just outside the Cumberland Hotel by Marble Arch. For some reason, the airport had been changed the night before and a minibus had been hired to drive us all to Manchester. Nobody in the group found this particularly remarkable. On the other hand, there was nothing particularly remarkable about the group. There was a boy in glasses, with a clogged-up nose, who kept saying, 'There'll

be no trouble. We are here for the football.' There was a lawyer. And there was a bunch of kids. Why was I doing this? I knew nobody. Mick, although meant to be working in London, wasn't there. I resolved never again to make travel plans after drinking eight pints of beer.

As it turned out I did happen to sit among three people who knew each other, Steve—an electrician, who was married and lived in St Ives, the sleepy, suburban town forty miles north of London—and an improbably named pair, Ricky and Micky, good-looking boyish fellows in jeans and jackets. I asked them what they did, and they were guarded and suspicious—just what was an American doing on this minibus, anyway? 'This and that,' Ricky said, and turned to his paper, the *Sun*, which everybody else was reading as well. I couldn't be bothered. It was five o'clock in the morning. I couldn't imagine that Ricky and Micky—who, with their floppy dark hair and innocent round faces, looked like teenage pop stars from the early sixties—could possibly be relevant to what I was doing. But I had much to learn.

We arrived at Manchester Airport around nine o'clock. Mick was there after all, looking grey and bleary-eyed—obviously the morning after a night spent with a real drinker. He had grown more and more enthusiastic about the prospect of seeing his name in print, and, hoping that I might be accompanied by a photographer, had dressed for the occasion: a T-shirt—'I don't have a drinking problem unless I can't find a drink'—and, regrettably, a pair of very tight-fitting shorts. He had sun-glasses and an instamatic camera and was in a great hurry to get to the duty-free shop. I asked him if he could identify any of the people he had mentioned to me before—Sammy, Banana Bob, Roy Downes, Robert the Sneak Thief—but they were not to be on the flight. Foot—soldiers, that's what I would learn we were called. Those on the flight were just the troops. The generals, as would be expected of them, made separate travel arrangements.

Until I came to live in England I had always assumed that the ugly tourist—with his money, his broad accent, his ignorance—was an American. But the American tourist—intimidated by the size of the world and always surprised at just how old it is—is a quiet, deferential one, even if a little goofy to look at sometimes. He's not ugly. I had not been to the Costa del Sol yet. I had not met a lager lout. I had not met tourist trash. Tourist trash, who travels only on package holidays, has an ever—present little camera, a peculiar way of dressing which usually exposes great expanses of flesh best left covered and an irrepressible appetite for cheap wine, two-litre bottles of lager and, regardless of the country or the language, vast, greasy, *Mail-on-Sunday-newspaper* quantities of fish'n'chips. Tourist trash is conspicuous when it travels. But football supporters are different; they're worse. Much, much worse.

Two hundred fifty-seven Manchester United supporters arrived on Wednesday morning, courtesy of Bobby Boss, to travel by air to Turin to a match from which they had been banned. Most of the supporters on the plane knew each other: this was a club outing. Nobody knew where we'd be staying; nobody had a match ticket. But everyone was in a holiday mood; everyone was proud to be a member of tourist trash. There were so many pictures to take. There was the picture of checking in for the flight. The picture of entering the duty-free shop and the one of leaving the duty-free shop. There was the one of opening the bottle bought from the duty-free shop and the one, taken once we had acquired our cruising altitude, of the duty-free shop bottle half-empty. And while I admit it seemed a little peculiar to find so many people half-way through litre bottles of vodka at ten o'clock in the morning, our flight to Turin was largely uneventful—noisy, spirited, but finally no different from what I supposed any other English package holiday must be like. The group seemed harmless on the whole, and fun, and I found that all of it—the strain of my early rising, the