

Among the Thugs Study Guide

Among the Thugs by Bill Buford

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Plot Summary

The novel *AMONG THE THUGS* by Bill Buford is a novel about the sociological concepts of the mob mentality and the anger of youth. Bill Buford follows a firm of young football fans as they travel around the world to follow their team, Manchester United. He witnesses their crimes as well as participates in their horrific acts and finds himself enticed to violence and fascinated by crowd violence. However, in the end, he realizes the youths are simply members of the same bored working class that has always existed, and that their violence is extreme only because they have no real societal ties.

Buford begins his journey by introducing himself to members of the Manchester United firm, where he meets Mick, who teaches him much about football as well as firms in general. He finds himself swept along with the firm as they travel to Italy and writes of his experiences as part of a mob that destroys much of a city. Throughout his journey, he learns about the causes for football violence as well as what it means to be a member of a firm. He details the feelings and emotions involved in become part of a crowd and shows readers why violence in crowds is such an integral part of society. In addition, he debunks many of the myths about football supporters but investigates where such myths arise. He examines the skinhead culture of football supporters, the illegal activities of many leaders, and the ties that bind these individuals together. He meets and discusses several supporters and examines how those supporters fit in with national stereotypes of "hooligan" football youths. Although he understands the violence, in the end he finds himself appalled and disgusted by the behaviors of these young men and determines they are simply members of what used to be the working class who are bored and seeking some form of entertainment that makes them feel alive and as though they belong to a group. While an interesting look at the violence among football supporters of England, this book is, at heart, an examination of what occurs during crowd violence and how such violence erupts to destroy and kill anything in its path.

A Station outside Cardiff

A Station outside Cardiff Summary and Analysis

AMONG THE THUGS is a novel about the football firms of England and their violent behaviors as fans. Bill Buford embeds himself in the world of a firm to bring readers first hand stories of the violence, alcohol, and mob mentality of football fans in England. Through his journey, however, he also shows readers a deeper understanding of how football firms function and the reasoning behind the intense violence.

In this first chapter, we find Buford learning not only about the game of football but also about himself. Buford is standing in a train station outside Cardiff as he notices several police officers approaching the platform for an uncertain reason. Shortly, however, a train containing several hundred football supporters arrives from Liverpool. The fans appear to be drunken, and as one man falls out, he is immediately arrested. Buford is surprised at this but soon learns as he changes trains several times just to reach home that the fans have taken over many of the trains with violence and mayhem. While he believes at first the violence is random, he later realizes it is an intentional act and finds himself wanting to learn more, particularly when his friends note the fans always behave in this manner. His friends are only surprised at the fact that Buford himself has never seen an English football game. When he finally attends the Tottenham Hotspur game at White Hart Lane, he remembers little other than being in a small space with hundreds of people, all crammed together. There are many younger individuals, all of whom seem to swear violently and fight.

Buford decides to attend a game on his own, although he is unsure of how to join a firm, or a football fan club. He goes to Stamford Bridge, as he is aware of the Chelsea supporters. They arrive at "the Shed," or a terrace on the Chelsea side of the grounds early. He notices many police on the way, helicopters, and police vehicles. He watches as police on horseback lead the visiting fans through the Chelsea crowd. He is frisked on entering the grounds and suddenly realizes he is in a mob of bodies, unable to move other than through a method called the "simple squeeze," or wedging his body through the crowd, or a method called "the shove." The shove involves pushing the person in front of you to force the mob to move. Neither method is particularly effective, but either succeeds in creating a constantly moving mass of bodies. Buford attempts to locate a "thug" to interview about being a fan, but all seem hostile. He leaves, unsuccessful but attends other matches in London and Glasgow, where he discovers seats filled with rotten odors, Roker Park, Hampden, and other places. He finds he has a liking for the game, although he isn't "in" any of the firms yet. Buford is surprised he finds himself enjoying the crowds, the cramped, dirty, and volatile conditions, and realizes it has become much like an addiction, in that it is disgusting at first, pleasurable over time, and, reflectively, self destructive.



Manchester

Manchester Summary and Analysis

Buford is intrigued by the Manchester United firm, as they are the only fans banned from attending matches in Italy by their own team. Buford attends the first match of the semi-finals between Manchester United and the Turin Juventus in Manchester and searches again for someone to ingratiate himself with to learn more about firms. He meets Mick, a heavy man with a stained T-shirt, huge stomach, and a lot of fried food, surrounded by already empty beer cans. Mick admits he hates wankers and journalists after Buford asks him for an interview but still takes him to a pub on their arrival in Manchester, to the game, and back to a pub. He drinks heavily and buys round after round for Buford. However, as he talks, Buford learns his ideas about members of firms may be incorrect. Mick is employed as a skilled electrician and is not at all disenfranchised. Buford learns Mick is rather well off, in that he has never missed a match in four years. He explains that there are several firms, each of which has specific, proud members with various nicknames. Nearly everyone is at some point in jail or charged with a crime. Many are on the jib, which Mick explains to mean they travel to games without spending any money. The Manchester firm, or football fan group, was named the ICJ, or Inner City Jibbers. Mick mentions several individuals such as Sammy, the professional thief, Roy Downes, and Banana Bob, all of whom are leaders of the ICJ. Mick admits that a good leader is one who does the right thing under certain circumstances but also admits that having more than one leader is problematic, in that they all compete with one another, and all have individual followers. By the time the game is to begin, Buford has had two cans of lager and eight pints of bitter. Mick, however, has had mountains of food along with four cans of lager, a large bottle of Vodka, and eighteen pints of bitter.

Buford calculates that Mick spends nearly sixty pounds that evening, and Mick admits he spent one hundred fifty-five pounds on a travel package to the game in Turin. Buford notes that the package is interesting in that Manchester fans have been banned from England but without enforcement. The package is handled by Bobby Boss Travel agency. As Mick leaves, he takes another four pints of lager, and Buford realizes Mick trusts him. The following day, Buford buys the package, which is supposed to include air travel, hotel, and match tickets. He arrives with others and takes a minibus to the Manchester airport, where he again finds Mick. Buford learns that those in command made separate travel arrangements and that the men on this flight were merely foot soldiers. Buford suddenly realizes that the fans, with their cameras and hideous clothing, really appear to simply be harmless tourists. The flight is uneventful, and Buford begins to think the hype about violence is overstated but admits he discovers later he is very wrong, foreshadowing the violence in the following chapter.



Turin

Turin Summary and Analysis

Michael Wicks, the acting British Consul, meets the fans as they exit the plane in Turin. Clayton, a very heavy man now drunken is the first off the plane, and Buford notices Wicks simply smiles and greets the drunken passengers. A woman named Jackie steps from the group and announces she is Bobby's assistant. The fans board buses after a speech from Wicks about behaving themselves. The English become more rude and crude as they drive through the streets, where onlookers gaze. They begin to chant obscenities, moon the crowd, and finally, someone throws a bottle through the window at the Italian crowd. Suddenly, they all begin to throw bottles, and when one Italian lad throws a rock back at the bus, the English are furious, and begin to throw everything breakable at the crowd directly. The bus driver swerves the bus to the right and left, knocking the English off their feet. They arrive at Piazza San Carlo to an already-packed crowd of Manchester supporters. While Jackie attempts to discover who is supposed to be staying where, several English break into one of the hotels, which then refuses the remaining guests. However, Buford notes, no one seems to care as they drink heavily in the square. He sees hundreds of drunken English with tattoos related to the Manchester United Football Club and wonders why these individuals would choose to do this to their bodies. Buford realizes he is alone in the crowd but refuses to allow himself to feel uncomfortable. People know he is a reporter, and most simply ignore him. He remembers a story about a journalist who kept asking a firm about their violence but who ran at the first sign of things "going off," or the beginnings of violence, and he promises himself he will stay with the firm, even in rough circumstances.

As Buford interviews people, he realizes he does not want to believe they are not hooligans as they claim they are not because to do so would be to ignore that he wants to see the violence. He finds himself fascinated at the rude actions of the English as do many of the Italians who stand in awe outside of the square. Everyone is drunk and taking photographs. Mick appears and announces to Buford the arrival of Roy Downes and Tony Roberts. Tony is a well-dressed leader who jumps from position to position; whereas, Roy is a true thug. Recently released from prison, Roy is a serious man who Buford recalls being the victim of several stabbings by rival firms. Buford attempts to speak to Roy but is brushed off quickly. He finds Mick asleep in the square and begins to speak with the unfortunately ugly Gurney and his firm, the Cockney Reds. They explain that all Manchester supporters exist in a large circle and within that circle are several smaller ones. The first is the official Manchester United Supporters Club. In the second are the unofficial supporters or the members of firms. Within the second are those who live outside Manchester, the ICJ, and those who live in Manchester. The ICJ is further broken into those from London, the Cockney Reds, and those who are not. They explain that being on the jib simply requires one to find ways around paying for tickets and other travel needs through either confrontation or large numbers. Gurney tells Buford of the members that were arrested on the way to Turin, including Daft Donald, Scotty, and Barmy Bernie. The group admit they are all on the jib, and as they



talk of their thievery, the group grows as each man tells his own story, thereby giving Buford a close look at the process. Buford admits he is amazed these men not only trust him but feel a need to prove their status to him and prove they are not hooligans. He also admits he begins to believe they are not.

Buford goes to a nearby pub to eat and is amazed at the rudeness of the English supporters. He sees a young Italian brave the square, hoping to practice his English, who is kicked in the groin and led away by his friends. He learns Mick has been arrested and notices the increase in Italian fans around the square. They announce the buses have arrived to take the fans to the match, and he sees Mr. Wicks in the crowd, no longer smiling. Buford realizes he cannot be objective in his reporting but also admits he is very drunk. They arrive at the match, only to have Italian supporters attempt to overturn their buses. The Italian army arrives and escorts them to the match, where they are told they have no tickets. Bobby Boss never set them up. While they wait for an area to be arranged for them, they are attacked by bottles and other flying debris from Italians above them in the stands. They are led to a concrete area directly below the Italians and are placed there throughout the match, even though the Italians continue to bombard them with bottles and other flying weapons despite an increase in police with riot gear. As the match nears an end, there is a scream and the English supporters flee down the tunnel to the gate but find it is locked. Buford hears people around him note it's "going to go off," meaning violence is about to erupt. When one woman begins to scream, she is passed to the front of the group, and the gate is opened to allow her exit. The fans shove forward, exit the grounds, avoid the police line escort, and move as a mob into the streets. Buford follows Sammy and notices Sammy has control over the mob or over several young men who surround him and maintain quiet order in the ranks of the now running mob. Buford falls to the back of the mob after being noticed by Sammy, but suddenly, Sammy has the entire group turn, putting Buford in the front, where he finds a mob of Italian supporters. As the two sides rush toward one another, Buford is knocked to the ground and hit by police. He sees a young Italian in front of him being beaten severely by eight English supporters. Buford notes he should stop it, but doesn't, and continues to watch as he tries to protect himself against the blows and kicks, but cannot. A policeman appears and the group scatters. Buford rises and runs only to see several Italians lying on the ground in similar situations, bleeding profusely. Buford hears the men around him comment on their happiness. He witnesses the mob attack a man in front of his family, attack an eleven-year-old boy, break into shops, destroy property, and smash an Italian's head into a table repeatedly. When someone hurls a manifold through a bus window, the violence increases as the mob attacks the bus and the patrons. An Italian mob appears, and suddenly Roy is there with a pool stick, beating several Italians while the English attack, as well. Buford looks back to see flames from many windows, cars overturned, and the ground littered with glass and bodies. Finally, police arrive, and the mob disperses. Sammy notes that they took the city.

They arrive back at the square, where the army is now standing guard. When the hotel runs out of beer and a riot starts, the army takes control in an attempt to return the English to their hotels. Mr. Wicks arrives, and Jackie begins to assign hotels. Wicks brings with him Robert Boss, who Buford had assumed did not exist. The group is taken



to their hotels in armored vehicles. The following morning, Mick is again in the square, drinking an eight liter bottle of wine. The supporters, already drunk, are taken to the airport, where Buford realizes the plane is stuffed with those on the jib, hiding under seats or in the carry on spaces. When the plane takes off, the stowaways leave their places, resulting in a far over-packed plane. Roy produces cocaine and has a sudden group around him. Buford arrives in London, finally, hungover and tired and angry at the events of the night before. As he passes a slow older couple on the stairs, he finds himself swearing at them and pushing them aside, showing he has clearly taken on traits of the firm. He notes that the following year, that thirty-nine people are killed six-hundred are injured during the only match against a Manchester team and the Juventus.



Sunderland and Manchester

Sunderland and Manchester Summary and Analysis

In Sunderland, Buford speaks to police superintendent R. McAllister of the Wearside Police about crowd problems, but the man appears more interested in discussing American football. He asks several questions about the game and about the lack of crowd problems, and seems amazed at the concept of few issues with large crowds and few police.

In Manchester, Buford attends a match against West Ham at the invitation of members of the firm. He arrives at the Brunswick, a pub, and meets several individuals he has heard of, such as Daft Donald and Berlin Red. He also meets Richard, who admits that being a member of the firm is his most important role in life, and Buford realizes these men take pride in their positions and seek to inform the world of their self-respect. As different individuals tell him stories, he is forced to go to the bathroom to write them all down so as not to appear to be taking notes. He meets a boy who looks like Keith Richards who explains that he believes the violence of football is simply a part of human nature, and that if the men did not express it at the games, they would "go off" elsewhere. Another man, Robert, points out that you have to have humor, as well. The group leaves for Yates's, and Buford talks with Mark, a telecom engineer. He reminds Buford that for these men, the feeling of making history is well worth everything, whether the history is good or bad. He also notes the euphoric highs and excitement is addictive. Buford then speaks with Steve, who he believes has his life in order. Steve notes the last time Manchester played West Ham, great plans had been made, but nothing had "gone off." Steve believes the problem is with the multiple leaders of the group but also believes the police should simply allow the violence to happen, since it is organized and planned violence. The group moves to the streets and arrives at the train station, where the next train is to be carrying the West Ham supporters. Buford finds himself propelled into a jog with the crowd, yelling "Kill, Kill, Kill" as they prepare to storm into the station. Suddenly the group stops, and chaos ensues as they scatter. Buford sees police dog handlers on the ramp into the station and watches as they allow the dogs to maim fallen Manchester supporters. From the station come five-hundred West Ham supporters, all in organized lines, following their sole leader, Bill Gardiner. The Manchester supporters begin to throw bottles randomly, but the West Ham supporters do not even flinch. Their police escort arrives, and West Ham supporters leave, knowing they have bested and humiliated the Manchester supporters. As the latter regroup, they wonder aloud why they have been bested and note they work well only in foreign countries. Incidents of violence occur throughout the day. Sammy takes one hundred supporters to meet the leaving train of the West Ham supporters but is unable to convince them to attack. He counts his men, and Buford is happy to realize he is one of the counted.



Bury St. Edmunds

Bury St. Edmunds Summary and Analysis

Buford attends a First National Front disco in Bury St. Edmunds, where he finds himself slammed against a lamppost by a man named Dougie, the brother of the new chairman of the group, Neil. Earlier, Buford meets Neil at a Cambridge United football match, where several skinheads are present. He learns that the NF, or National Front, operates out of Bury, and is told he will be contacted. A few days later, he receives the newspaper Bulldog, which promotes an end to blacks and other minorities in England. Buford realizes the NF is a racist political group and discovers he finds the concept repellent but intriguing in terms of an interest in why they believe as they do. He recounts the sound made at games by these individuals when a black player receives the ball and notes the face and sound is supposed to imitate an ape. He takes a friend to a match and is embarrassed at having to explain this racist behavior. He also receives a more political based media, that of the newspaper National Front News. On the back page are listed several leaders of the group, including Ian Anderson, the deputy chairman, head of Branch Liaison Department, head of the Administration Department, member of the Activities Department. When Buford calls the number given to him in the packet, he speaks with Ian, and, after several conversations, arranges to attend a disco. He also receives several more publications rooted in racism that clearly identify a link between the NF and football supporters. He is to attend the disco, and Neil is to be his host for the evening. He arrives and speaks to the bar staff, who openly admit to being the most racist bar in Bury and appear proud of that fact. More people arrive, and are clearly uneasy about a journalist attending. Buford, realizing he is not ready for this level of the NF, but, having no choice, also determines he will simply get very drunk. As the evening wears on, he finds himself repeatedly talking to a man named Phil Andrews who repeats his beliefs that the NF is more than football violence and is a true political movement. He also finds it annoying that the NF is often blamed for football violence when in fact, they have nothing to do with the problem. Buford watches young skinhead men dance, which consists of violent jumping up and down and notices their girlfriends sit at the other side of the bar, seemingly invisible. The NF crowd gets louder and more violent, and Buford notices a number of men in suits, who apparently make up the leadership of the NF. As Buford wanders the crowd, he sees swastikas, Nazi armbands, and even those in full SS uniforms. When the White Power music begins to play, the men become more violent in their dancing, and the atmosphere becomes dangerous. Dougie suddenly throws a bar stool across the room, and the party ends.

Buford admits he cannot recall how he came to be being beaten against a lamppost by Dougie following the party, but soon, Neil arrives and talks him down gently, promising he can throw bricks through the windows of Indians later. Buford is freed and follows the group through their evening, doing drugs and drinking. He remembers little but awakens in the only bed of the squatter residence of Neil And Dougie, surrounded by twenty sleeping skinheads. He leaves that afternoon. Over time, Buford follows the events of the NF and occasionally visits marches and speeches. On reflection, Buford realizes

that the power of the NF, much like that of football, depends on the crowd mentality. Although the NF appears to be politically directed, he notes, they are based in the idea that a member of a crowd will believe whatever the crowd believes. They create the crowd through the marches, discos, and speeches, and then turn that crowd to politics.



Cambridge

Cambridge Summary and Analysis

Buford is attempting to explain the feelings of waiting for a goal during a football match. He describes his own experiences at one of the final rounds of the FA Cup as Cambridge and Millwall battle for the semifinals. The game is a rematch, in that the two teams have played days before and ended in a no score draw. During the first half, he feels a part of the crowd as they tense up each time a goal is almost scored. During half time after a no scoring first half, however, he notes that the crowd breaks down again into individuals. When the game begins again, however, the crowd reforms and one loses identity among the moving mass. Buford compares the experience to those of livestock in a pen. He notes that the horrible conditions of the terraces, with their lack of seats, fencing, overflowing toilets, and locked gates only add to the crowd mentality. He believes that to come to a game under these conditions forces one to change and to become someone else, a part of a crowd. And, as the game goes to overtime without a goal, he wonders what happens when all the energy of waiting for a goal is not released by a goal. He recalls that Cambridge has made it to these games by tying several teams and winning only in second or third rematches. He points out that many games end without a score. Buford recalls a game between two Glasgow teams. When a goal is finally scored, the crowd erupts in joy, resulting in several injuries from falling as individuals fall in a packed area, forcing several to fall down the steps. He notes another game where the crowd uproots the goal posts and sets fire to the stands after the game ends without a goal. The Cambridge Millwall game ends when Millwall scores against its self. When Buford walks back to his car, he sees a man he knows was beside him through the game. He notes that the two men do not speak, as they are again individuals.



Dawes Road, Fulham

Dawes Road, Fulham Summary and Analysis

Buford explains what actually occurs when it "goes off," or when violence sparks in the football supporter crowd. He and Robert are headed to Tottenham along with a mob of other supporters. Robert describes, as they walk, the death of a supporter in previous years and tells Buford that Sammy is now believed to have killed a man. The United fans suddenly come head to head with thousands of Tottenham supporters, and Robert warns Buford to be wary. A police officer attempting to stop the impending violence hits Buford with the chain for his dog, and Buford argues with him. He suddenly realizes he has become one of the supporters instead of a journalist. The two crowds face one another across a street, but the tension simply mounts as the police in the middle attempt to hold it off. On each side, young men attempt to kick start it by rushing across the void, but no one follows. Buford points out that crowds are mindless, primitive, unpredictable beasts who have been written about throughout history by individuals such as Clarendon, Tarde, Plato, LeBon, and even Hitler. They are violent and made up of a variety of individuals from criminals to the working class who have given up their own judgment and allow others to think for them, thereby giving total control to any leader. Buford notes that crowd theories often come from those victimized by the crowd, and not those within one, and as such, only explain why a crowd behaves a certain way. The theories do not explain what happens, which Buford is clearly trying to convey. He explains a photograph of Croatian nationalists attacking an army tank in Yugoslavia, and notes that one man in the crowd has scaled the tank and pulled the commander out by his head. He points out that in another example, a march on Downing Street protesting a poll tax turned violent and 132 people were injured while millions of pounds of property were destroyed. In another example, two soldiers are ripped from their vehicle and brutally killed by a crowd. In other examples, he discusses violent picket lines, the deaths at Heysel stadium, violent miners, and other football violence. Buford notes that in all these instances, people claim the crowd is not us, that it is simply the work of outsiders and a few troublemakers. He believes, after seeing crowd violence in person, that every crowd has a threshold of violence. There are boundaries of space and behavior that are not crossed initially by members of a crowd. However, once one individual crosses that line, it is simple to follow. The first to cross the line is rarely a leader, but simply someone who believes strongly enough in his or her causes to violate social norms. Buford points out the individuals attacking the tank are not afraid or in panic but exhilarated. Buford notes that in life, most things serve to remind us we are civilized and that our world is a net to hold us safely. However, he points out this net is also a barrier, in that it stops us from exploring the other side, the lawless side of life. He admits that he is excited by the edge where antisocial, anti-civilized behaviors lead one to turn off all individuality and become one with a crowd acting in violence. In another example, Buford tells of a crowd of supporters kept in check from their arrival at the station throughout the match. While small, highly-targeted moments of violence occur, the crowd violence is suppressed. After the match, hundreds of supporters, including Buford and Robert, sneak past police and finally form a crowd. The feeling is



heightened in that they have been boxed and limited throughout the day, where tensions have built, and now, they are free. Buford notes that Sammy is in the front of the group, and he suddenly realizes this crowd, and the violence about to occur, was planned instead of spontaneous. The mob begins to destroy the buildings, and suddenly with a roar, the crowd goes over the edge, and is now lawless. Buford explains this moment. He notes that human consciousness continuously operates on many different levels, thinking ahead and behind and in the present simultaneously. However, when violence "goes off," there is a single moment of consciousness when one is aware only of the present, and only of violent animalistic survival. Buford admits it is one of the most pleasurable experiences, and that to give oneself over to that moment is as addictive as any drug. Buford explains that for him, that moment was one of absolute completeness.



Dusseldorf

Dusseldorf Summary and Analysis

Buford introduces readers to DJ, a supporter of West Ham and a budding photographer. Buford is introduced to DJ by a friend, whose influence extends over at least the West Ham supporters. He describes an outing of supporters who pick up an escaped young female mental patient. They fondle her, urinate on her, and intend to rape her, by the friend stops them. Since the European Championship is to be held in Germany, DJ is fronted money to go take photographs of the crowds. Buford and DJ meet several times before the championships, and Buford finds DJ has plenty of stories about football and violence. DJ himself, however, seems different from other supporters, in that he is highly educated, Jewish, speaks French, is well read and comes from a background of money. Buford admits he believes DJ proves his theory of the football violence, that violence is simply this generation's antisocial behavior, but he is still unclear as to why this behavior exists. He notes most crowd violence happens for a political or economical cause, but that football violence appears to have, at its root, no cause. Buford begins subscribing to a news service that reports on football violence and reads about several court cases. The first story is about John Johnstone and his friends, who terrorize London for an evening, destroying property, beating several individuals, and finally killing another supporter. However, he only receives three years in prison because, as Buford explains, the court system finds the crowd to be responsible for the violence and thus, Johnstone is only partially responsible. Buford then describes several events in local and national papers. There are several about minor skirmishes at local matches. In Chester, 150 people are injured. In Huddersfield, Leeds, skinhead supporters attack and nearly kill a reggae band. In Bournemouth, supporters take over and destroy a hotel. In Peterborough, 150 Derby supporters attack a group of local boys, breaking one's skull. In another case, two friends, Neil Watson and Terry Moore are attacked by supporters. They beat Moore into unconsciousness, leave, and then return to kick him again. This process repeats several times. Moore awakens from a coma after twelve days and is unable to move or speak for the rest of his life.

Buford flies to the match in Dusseldorf and notes the city looks like Beirut with the number of police stationed. Buford meets a man he nicknames Grimsby. He follows Grimsby throughout the evening as he belittles taxi drivers, chants Nazi statements at the working class, and swears violently at a Dutch supporter eating dinner with his family. Buford notes it is individuals like Grimsby who have a violent sense of nationalism and who fight a war, of sorts, against those who go against that nationalism. The two end up in a Dutch bar, where Grimsby picks fights for an hour before finally finding one. Buford talks police out of arresting him, escorts him back to the railway station, and leaves. He hears from DJ, who says he has to fly back to Greece hurriedly because of a business problem. Buford then receives a call that DJ has been arrested in Greece for using counterfeit money. While waiting for his trial, Buford resumes a friendship with Tom Melody, the landlord of a pub, and a football supporter. The two attend a match in London where the crowd is violent, and three hundred riot police are



called in. After the match, they return to the pub to celebrate, where Buford meets Harry, another supporter. Harry, like so many others, is a mild-mannered individual with a wife and two children who becomes a violent creature during football games. Buford discovers later that Tom walked away from the pub because of its violence and instead opened a higher-end club in East London. Tom admits he finds East London as violent as his previous location. He informs him that Harry is in jail on four counts of affray. He attacked the landlord of a pub, a bar, and a policeman. He sucked the eyeball out of the policeman's head and bit it off. Buford finds himself beginning to be sickened by the violent nature of football.

When DJ goes to trial, he has two groups of individuals. One is led by his wealthy mother and includes a high-priced lawyer, DJ's older brother and sister-in-law. The second team includes Michelle, DJ's fiancée, and her father, Jim, as well as Robert, DJ's friend. Buford realizes these two teams represent the two parts to DJ's life: his socially acceptable, upstanding side and his football hooligan side. DJ is freed and returns to the room of his fiancée, clearly disappointing his mother and brother. Buford decides he has had enough and returns on the next flight home. He realizes DJ had nothing to teach him, and that the violence he sought to explain is the same violence the working class has always expressed, albeit in a different form. On his way home, he listens as the game at Hillsborough is stopped due to tragedy. He explains that several thousand supporters were originally denied entrance to the stadium and gained access only through a small doorway finally opened at the beginning of the match. The thousands filed into the stands, which were already full, crushing those in the front and on the sides against the fencing placed to keep the crowds separated. Someone with a video camera records a young boy telling police his brother is being crushed to death. When people finally begin to climb the fence to escape the pressure, police finally realize the problem, and halt the match. In the end, ninety-five people are killed as a result of being crushed to death, and over seven hundred are wounded. Buford realizes the killing power of a crowd.

DJ returns from Greece, and he and Buford attend a West Ham match. A minute of silence is requested at the beginning of the match to honor the ninety-five dead, and the Millwall supporters begin chanting "Nobody likes us, and we don't care." Buford, disgusted with this show of a lack of respect, elects not to attend a party that night for DJ, nor his wedding later in the summer. Buford notes that Orwell once described an image of life in the future, and that his predictions were fairly close. Buford believes we have no working class, but that individuals still seem to hold a connection to the term itself and to have pride in the term that no longer applies to them. He believes these individuals, the "non-working class of the working class generation," use violence in exaggerated manners because they have no substance and nothing to belong to. Buford notes this is a bored, empty generation that is so deadened to the world that it uses violence simply to feel.



Sardinia

Sardinia Summary and Analysis

Buford reports that, by 1990, Sammy has been institutionalized and is on high levels of medication; Roy has been arrested for drugs, and Robert has moved to the United States and fallen in love. In May of 1990, however, Buford sees all these men when Manchester United plays in the FA Cup final. However, Buford notices that being a hoodlum is no longer popular, that it is fading into history. However, he does notice the press expecting trouble during the match between England and the Dutch on the island of Sardinia. The British sports minister persuades the island vendors, the buses, and all flights not to serve alcohol on game days. Buford follows the stories in the paper as more police arrive on the island and more journalists report on the supporters. Buford, now convinced there will be trouble, flies to the island. The supporter camps are miles away from the stadium without buses or any other form of transportation. Roads are closed off, forcing supporters to follow one route into the city. Police are everywhere. It is extremely hot, and supporters are becoming restless. Buford arrives at the train station and hears a man he names Mutton Chops telling everyone to plan for six o'clock. He learns a march is planned. Buford explains that the first step in any crowd is that people choose to stop being individuals and become one group. In Sardinia at six o'clock, one individual braves to walk out in front of the gathered supporters and is joined by others, beginning the crowd. They begin to walk, and then quicken the pace, only to find police lined up at the bottom of a hill. The supporters stop, and one tries to attack police but is arrested.

One of the officers, however, fires a gun into the air, and the crowd riots. They begin throwing tear gas canisters, but the canisters are thrown back at police. The supporters begin throwing stones at the police, as well as destroying everything around them. They proceed up the hill, but the policemen at the other end charge. The mob runs, regroups, and charges back at police. This continues repeatedly. Buford witnesses a man destroying a small local shop square and is disgusted. The Italian police appear to retreat, and the supporters begin to march toward the stadium. Buford makes his way to the front just as teargas canisters begin to bombard them. The police have called reinforcements, and there are now four long rows of riot police waiting at the top of the hill, with the Italian police now at the bottom, behind the crowd. Buford, attempting to escape, curls into a ball between two vehicles. Soon, however, he is brutally beaten by four police officers. Buford is grateful for the pain, which allows him to experience the moment fully but realizes they are trying to kill him. Eventually, they stop, and Buford rises, severely in pain. He sees hundreds of supporters with severe wounds, and a journalist appears, noting that the entire scenario was stupid. Buford agrees and flies home the following day. He follows the news in the papers as England wins and is set to return to Turin for the final match. Buford books a ticket, but in the end, decides he has finished his research and cancels the flight. He is sickened at the idea of the alcohol and violence and mayhem. While there is a little violence in Turin, Buford admits most of

the violence occurs in England as the team loses overseas. Property is again destroyed, and three blocks from his home, a German boy is stabbed to death.



Characters

Bill Buford

Bill Buford is the author of the novel and the primary character in the book. He is a writer who is researching the subculture of football firms. As such, he reports first hand his activities as he learns about the game, attends his first matches, and participates in violent crowd activities such as the destruction of property and the beating of other supporters. As a narrator, his descriptions are vital, in that one can experience first hand not only the damage done by the crowds, but also the feelings and emotions associated with being in the crowd. Further, one is able to see his character change from an innocent reporter to a football thug to a man who tires of the violent subculture, which again helps to show the football subculture in all aspects.

By his own descriptions, Buford fits the image of a football supporter, in that he is slightly overweight and tends to dress comfortably; however, he differs in that he is a journalist, and most supporters despise the media. It is only through his attempts to prove he will portray these individuals in a positive light that Buford is able to bring readers the stories contained in the novel. Buford's journey helps readers to understand both crowd violence as well as nationalism and the working class identity in England. In addition, it is Buford's own changing opinions of football supporters that allow readers to make their own judgments about the fans.

Mick

Mick is one of the first football supporters Buford meets in the story. He is heavy with a flat, bulldog face. He often wears stained clothing, and tattoos of the Union Jack, Manchester United, and other patriotic images cover his body. He drinks massive amounts of lager and other liquors and eats vats of fried foods. During the week, Mick works as a skilled electrician and is highly successful. He has not missed a Manchester United match in four years, showing his true colors as a football supporter. Mick, although large and often drunk, teaches Buford much about firms, including their organization and overall viewpoints. Mick shows Buford the ins and outs of being a fan, allowing Buford to fit into the group more easily. Mick travels with Buford to several matches as well as to Turin but is arrested for public intoxication before the violence erupts in Turin. Although Mick is not often involved in the stories of violence told in the novel, he is the first fan introduced, and his story helps set the stage for the rest of the novel.

Mr. Wicks

Mr. Wicks is the acting British Consul for Italy and greets a flight of supporters, booked by a Robert Boss, from England to Turin. Mr. Wicks' first sight of the supporters is of a drunken, singing mob of individuals. English supporters are banned from attending



matches outside of England, but Mr. Wicks allows the group passage with a smile and seems genuinely happy to help them. He discusses with the drunken crowd their responsibilities as English citizens and the local laws and customs but knows his words are falling on deaf ears. However, instead of detaining them, Mr. Wicks allows the supporters into Turin, even without locating the booking agent, Mr. Boss. At the match, Mr. Wicks again appears to encourage the stadium to make room for the supporters who do not have tickets. Although these individuals have already wreaked havoc on the city, Wicks continues to support their right to see their team play. He succeeds in obtaining for them a place from which to watch the game.

After the extreme violence in Turin, however, Mr. Wicks reappears with the Italian military and with Mr. Boss himself. Again, however, although Wicks is now clearly upset, he does not punish or detain the supporters but simply has the military show them to their hotels and makes sure they make the flight the following day. The character of Mr. Wicks appears to serve two purposes in the account. First, the way he is treated by supporters helps to show their complete lack of respect for anyone outside their own firm. Additionally, his lack of punishment for the supporters helps to convey an overall sense of a lack of structure or governmental authority over the supporters.

Roy Downes

Roy Downes is one of the leaders of the Manchester United firms and represents the leadership style of football firms. Roy has spent the last few years in prison for cracking a hotel safe in Bulgaria. Since his imprisonment, Roy has become quiet and serious. He clearly has much money, although no one really knows what he does for a living. He watches the matches from the seats of the stadiums, not the terraces with the rest of the firm, and enjoys spending his time in bars. Roy has been the target of several firm clashes and has a large scar from being nearly stabbed to death. Roy is a black man with a smaller frame. When Buford attempts to interview him, Roy remains silent and clearly uninterested. Buford spots Roy in the crowd of supporters that attack Turin, and again in the square telling others about the evening activities, but also points out he is rarely seen elsewhere. On the plane back to England, it is Roy who is seen distributing drugs to supporters on the plane. He is eventually arrested for drugs.

Roy represents the problem with the firm management of Manchester's team. Roy is concerned primarily with himself and his own monetary gain. He appears to care little for the firm or for their well being. He is not looked at as a leader, although he is admired. His lack of leadership results in an overall sense of a lack of order within the firm.

Sammy

Sammy is another leader of the Manchester United firm. Sammy is a professional thief and has the largest group of sub-lieutenants around him at all times. These individuals are responsible for carrying out the orders of Sammy. In Turin, Sammy is the leader who



leads the group away from police, and whose instructions and knowledge allow the crowd of supporters to virtually take over the city for a period of time. While Sammy is certainly more organized than Roy, his style of leadership is drastically in competition with Roy's and as a result, the firm is less cohesive than others. Sammy is eventually hospitalized after a series of arsons and placed on tranquilizers.

Ian Anderson

Ian Anderson is Buford's original contact at the National Front. Ian is the deputy chairman, head of the Branch Liaison Department, head of the Administration department, is involved in the Activities Department, and is joint head of the Activities Department. When Buford phones Ian, he is clearly unfriendly with journalists but also shows a desire to be represented in a positive manner. Buford believes the National Front is an organization of which little is known and pledges to try to understand Ian and his cause. Ian continues to send Buford clippings from newspapers, and Buford finds most of them intelligent and useful, if not tasteful. Ian's character represents the leaders of the deviant subculture, in that Ian is clearly a force behind the NF and is charged with organizing a crowd, much like the leaders of the firms. He understands the need for publicity, even if that publicity is negative, in order to motivate the crowd.

DJ

DJ is a strong football supporter who also dreams of being a photojournalist. Having been given a chance to show his talent, DJ attends the European Championship. DJ claims to be in the import export business, although it is unclear what his imports or exports include. DJ has been a supporter since age 10, and as a result, has many stories of violence and a reputation for being hot headed. DJ is Jewish, from a high-class background, well educated, and from high social circles. In the beginning, Buford believes DJ is his missing link, in that DJ represents, he believes, a different class of supporter. However, when DJ is arrested for counterfeit money, uses his upper-class family to win his case, and returns rapidly to his old way of life, Buford realizes he is the same as most supporters.

Grimsby

Grimsby is a supporter Buford meets in Dusseldorf and is representative of the nationalistic supporter. Grimsby speaks with Buford because he thinks of him as an author rather than a journalist. Grimsby spends his evening offending female cab drivers until he is thrown out; he finds fights wherever he goes. Thrown out of a number of working class bars, Grimsby yells "Heil Hitler" in another and is escorted out by Buford. He attacks a Dutch man in front of his sons by calling him names. He even enters a Dutch bar and picks fights by pointing out England's win against Germany and his assertions that the Dutch are spineless. Buford eventually defends him so he is not arrested and leaves him at a station.



Tom Melody

Tom Melody is a supporter who originally ran a pub in Croydon. He befriends Buford, and the two attend a match where the supporters are violently and vocally racist against the black players. After the riot police appear, they return to the pub. Some time later, Buford meets Tom again only to find he has sold the pub in exchange for a higher end club, where he can limit his clients, as well as the race of those who enter. He has changed, and appears to hold grudges against the "young people" or the hoodlums that now have control of the firms. This character represents the dying breed of supporter who believes his own reasons for violence and anger are justified; whereas, the new generation's is not.

Harry

Harry is a character who represents the duality of the football supporter. Harry is a married man with a loving wife and two children. He is gainfully employed and appears to be a highly friendly and cheerful individual; however, when participating in the football firm, Harry turns violent, and often ends up in the police station. This duality eventually closes in on Harry's regular life when he is arrested on four counts of affray. He attacked the landlord of a pub, a bar, and a policeman. He sucked the eyeball out of the policeman's head and bit it off. Buford discovers at this point he is sickened by football violence, and this character shows clearly that the duality of football violence and a regular existence cannot coincide forever without blending.



Objects/Places

Football

Football is the English word for the game of soccer.

Simple Squeeze

During a football match, fans use a method of movement called the simple squeeze to move through the mob. This movement involves lifting an arm and slipping it through a hole between two people, and then twisting the body to slide between the individuals.

Shove

The shove is another method of movement used by individuals in a mob of people at a football game. The movement involves shoving violently into the person directly ahead in an effort to push the entire mob forward.

ICJ

The ICJ stands for Inner City Jibbers, the firm that follows Manchester United football team.

Turin Juventus

This is the team that competes against the Manchester United in Turin, after which the English supporters destroy part of the city.

First National Front

The First National Front is a group of political racists who aim to rid England of all minority races.

Skinhead

A skinhead is a member of the NF that generally believes in white supremacy.

Moody

Moody is the English word for counterfeit money.



The Cage

The cage is the fenced-in area for supporters in an English football stadium.

Tout

A tout is a ticket scalper and a major cause of rioting, in that they encourage more supporters to attend matches than there are tickets.

Hillsborough

Hillsborough is the stadium in which ninety-five people are smothered to death.

Sardinia

Sardinia is the island where the FA Cup is played. It is done on an island in an attempt to keep English supporters in line.



Themes

Crowd Violence

The basic plot of *AMONG THE THUGS* is the examination of crowd violence in the form of football supporter "firms." Buford begins this examination by simply describing the violence from an external perspective to show the depth of destruction of which these individuals are capable. Through his eyes, readers see individuals who beat others senseless, destroy property, and have a complete disregard for others. Buford explains shortly, however, that as a part of this crowd, he begins to understand what happens when crowds turn violent. Buford points out that individuals cease to be individuals when placed into a crowd, and they instead become a part of something larger and less identifiable. As such, they become more susceptible to leaders, since their own sense of individuality has been removed. If one person, whether a leader or not, makes a move toward violence, the entire crowd is likely to follow. However, each person, according to Buford, makes a conscious decision whether or not to become a part of the crowd. Buford also notes that individuals such as Hitler and Plato understood the power of a crowd and used it for their own advantages.

In addition, Buford notes that the violence of a crowd is a direct result of the situation in which the crowd finds its self. In terms of the football game, Buford believes the violence often stems from the nature of football, in that there is often a game without a score. Supporters become a crowd when in the stadium, and as such, experience high levels of excitement. When no goal is scored, there is no outlet for this energy, and thus, violence is often the result. In other cases, such as confrontation, any violence that occurs, such as a gunshot or the appearance of tanks, can set off violence in a patriotic sense. He notes that most crowds are violent due to an underlying issue that is political or economical in nature. However, Buford also believes that football violence, while stemming from the expected violence of the middle class, stems not from any particular reason, but from boredom and a lack of feeling among the given generation.

Nationalism

Buford's discourse of football violence also has an underlying theme of nationalism and the lengths to which some will go to prove their nationalism, whether or not it is in question. In the book, Buford meets many individuals who have a fierce sense of nationalism in terms of England. This is ironic, in that these football supporters are seen by the media and the population as hooligans and hoodlums that should be controlled. Yet these people still have a strong sense of belonging in terms of their country. When they are abroad, this sense of nationalism turns violent, and these youths, who have never fought in war nor lived through war, consistently reference World War II. Buford explains they are a generation that belong to nothing and as a result, violently defend their nation since they feel a link to it.



This nationalism leads many to battle even those who do not question their loyalty. The skinheads Buford meets defend their country against what they believe to be an attacking force, that of blacks, Asians, and other minorities. Some of the supporters even shout against football players who are black. Some seek out supporters from other countries to battle, in a seemingly made-up war of nations represented by football. While a sense of belonging to a nation is normally an accepted form of patriotism, the football supporters alter it into a reason for violence and mayhem, showing that nationalism can be a positive or negative force.

Deviant subculture

Another theme represented in *AMONG THE THUGS* is the concept of the power of a deviant subculture. First, there are the football firms themselves. The individuals within these firms vary greatly, but their activities include counterfeit money, drugs, rape, theft, vandalism, affray, destruction of property, and even murder. Such actions under normal circumstances are frowned upon in general society, but in a football firm, are highly valued acts. This powerful draw of the subculture perpetuates the cycle of violence and mayhem in that it rewards its members for such behaviors. Since many individuals in the firm feel much closer to this subculture than to society in general, the punishments of general society do little to deter these behaviors.

This is further shown through the subculture of skinheads, which is in turn a subculture of the firms. For skinheads, being a football supporter is only one role. Being against minorities is another and coincides with football. The National Front, an organization against minorities, clearly supports governmental legislation to ban minorities from many areas of society. In addition, the subculture rewards members for acts against minorities. As a member of both the skinhead subculture and the football firm subculture, members are doubly rewarded for any actions against football clubs of other races and cultures. Again, this serves to reinforce the behaviors, even if society deems them inexcusable.

Style

Perspective

As a journalist, Buford himself points out that his perspective is supposed to be unbiased and fair to all parties. However, he also notes his complete inability to do so, in that as a writer writes of experiences he or she has had personally, he or she cannot help to interject opinion. What is reported becomes an opinion, since Buford reports only those events he himself finds intriguing or enlightening. The result, however, is not so much one of biased opinion, but one of raw, emotional, and complete storytelling that still allows the reader to draw his or her own conclusions about the reasons for behaviors. The story is told from a first person point of view in most cases, which serves to add authenticity to the events being described. The stories told in third person are vital, however, in that they show a propensity of football supporters to over-exaggerate events to make for a better story.

The first person view of Buford during the violent crowd moments also serves to prove Buford's own points about crowd violence. As a member of the crowd, and not simply a bystander, Buford is able to convey the senses and emotions flowing through the crowd before, during, and after the violence to help readers understand the causes of such behaviors. Without a first person view, these stories simply become third person representations, which Buford shows are often only based on partial truths. Thus, by combining his own experiences as well as those told by others, and by admitting his biases and allowing them to serve as tools, Buford is able to tell a complete story of football supporters and crowd violence.

Tone

Buford uses several tones throughout the course of the novel, which simply adds to the authenticity of the book. In the beginning, his tone is sincerely inquisitive as he seeks to discover the hows and whys of football supporters, and of the violence they appear to be known for. He is ignorantly innocent in the beginning, and is clearly in awe of what he sees around him. As he progresses through his novel, he experiences the violence of the football crowd first hand, and his tone becomes excited and more partisan. He begins to understand the youths, or believes he does, and understands their fascination both with the game and with the crowd attraction. His tone toward society, much like that used by his supporter friends, becomes less tolerable and more antisocial.

After several years of this violence, however, Buford's tone changes again to one of boredom. He reports events not with the innocence of his original tone nor with excitement, but with a sense of duty. He begins to write almost scornfully of the group. By the end of the novel, his tone is combative against these same individuals, as he is disgusted and disheartened by what he now feels are simply violent thugs acting out against society.

Structure

The novel is three-hundred-eighteen pages in length. It is broken into three parts, a glossary, and an acknowledgment. The first part includes Buford's experiences in Cardiff, Manchester, Turin, and Sunderland, and shows the beginnings of his travels with the football supporters. Part two describes further events in Bury St. Edmunds, Cambridge, and Fulham and represents the turn of his beliefs, in that he begins to analyze crowd violence on a more academic level. Part three includes stories from Dusseldorf and Sardinia and represents Buford's loss of interest in the topic. The glossary provides readers with a listing of football terms, and the acknowledgment lists sources for some of the stories included in the novel.

The language used in the novel is easy to read, although may prove difficult for some readers. Additionally, the violent descriptions used to describe Buford's experiences may be distasteful to some readers but are necessary to convey the true situation. The language, although crude in some areas and violent in others, helps to tell the story of the football supporters, their beliefs, and their actions, and help readers understand the mentality of those within the group.



Quotes

"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?" - "A Station outside Cardiff", page 19.

"...[W]hile I couldn't say that I had developed a rapport with any one of "them" yet, I did find out 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-destructing." - "A Station outside Cardiff", page 21.

"The group seemed harmless on the whole, and fun, and I found that all of it - the strain of my early rising, the discomfort of riding from London to Manchester with a boy who could not afford a handkerchief, the sudden exposure to so many peculiar people - was starting to drop away. Frankly, I was enjoying myself. The fact, however, was this: tourist trash was on its way to devastate the country it was visiting. For then it arrived in Turin. " - "Manchester", page 34.

"There was the realization - his face seemed to convey the pain and the regret of it - that he had just ranted freedom to a body of unusual beings, beings who should be treated in a humane fashion (fed, viewed appreciated with affection) but who should never have been allowed to enter the city of Turin. Never. Not even on a leash." - "Turin", page 42.

"A chant has started: 'United, United, United.' The chant was clipped and sure. 'United, United, United.' The word was repeated, United, and, through the repetition, its meaning started chanting, pertaining less to a sporting event or a football club and sounding instead like a chant of unity - something political. It had become the chant of a mob." - "Turin", page 79.

"There was an Italian boy, eleven or twelve years old, alone, who had got confused and ran straight into the middle of the group and past me. I looked behind me and saw that the boy was already on the ground. I couldn't tell who had knocked him down, because by the time I looked back six or seven English supporters had already set upon him, swarming over his body, frenzied." - "Turin", page. 89.

"They were used to the fact that the world was interested in them and accustomed to dealing with television and newspaper journalists in a way that few people, however



educated in media matters, could hope to be. It was a perverse notion, but they believed that they were involved in a historical moment, that they were making history. And now that they didn't have to hide from me that their thing was violence - now that the pretense of being a good supporter could be abandoned - they all wanted to talk about it." - "Manchester", page 115.

"It was a matter of freedom and responsibility: the freedom for them to inflict as much injury on each other as they were prepared to withstand and the responsibility to ensure that others were not involved..." "Manchester", page 120.

"I was told that they were an organized army, that football had brought them together, that they were creating a police force that they tried to take over the places they visited. I was told that they were warriors. I was told that the banks were run by Jews and that the banks ran the country, that the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust was vastly exaggerated. I was told that the Labour Party was a shambles, that the Conservative Party was a shambles, that all American soldiers should leave Britain." - "Bury St. Edmunds", page 152.

"A crowd reveals our Freudian selves, regressing to a state of elemental, primitive urgency. A crowd killed Socrates; a crowd killed Jesus. A crowd kills - in the Bastille, at the Commune, in front of the Winter Palace, in the streets of Vienna, down a dirt road in Mississippi or Soweto." - "Dawes Road, Fulham", page 183.

"I am attracted to the moment when consciousness ceases; the moments of survival, of animal intensity, of violence, when there is no multiplicity, no potential for different levels of thought: there is only one - the present in its absoluteness." "Dawes Road, Fulham", page 205.

"I had not expected the violence to be so pleasurable. I would have assumed, if I had thought to think about it, that the violence would be exciting - in the way that a traffic accident is exciting - but the pure elemental pleasure was of an intensity that was unlike anything I had foreseen or experienced before. But it was not just any violence. It wasn't random violence or Saturday night violence or fights in the pub; it was crowd violence - that was what mattered: the very particular workings of the violence numbers." "Dusseldorf", page 217.

"Nothing substantive is there: there is nothing to belong to, although it is still possible, I suppose, to belong to a phrase - the working class- a piece of language that serves to reinforce certain social customs and a way of talking that obscures the fact that the only thing hiding behind it is a highly mannered suburban society stripped of culture and sophistication and living only for its affectations: a bloated code of maleness, an exaggerated, embarrassing patriotism, a violent nationalism, an array of bankrupt antisocial habits. This bored, empty, decadent generation consists of nothing more than what it appears to be. It is a lad culture without mystery, so deadened that it uses violence to wake itself up. It pricks itself so that it has feeling, burns its flesh so that it has smell." "Dusseldorf", page 262.



"It was such a simple but enormous thought: these fools, despised at home, ridiculed in the press, incapable of being contained by any act of impulsive legislation that the government had devised, wanted an England to defend. They didn't want Europe; they didn't understand Europe and didn't want to. They wanted a war. They wanted a nation to belong to and fight for, even if the fight was this absurd piece of street theater with the local Italian police." "Sardinia", page 301.



Topics for Discussion

Buford explains crowd violence in the case of English football supporters as being the result of bored working class individuals who are detached from society. Do you agree with his conclusion? Why or why not?

Buford notes that he is surprised to find himself excited by violence. How does he explain this excitement? Do you agree with his explanation? Why or why not?

There are many acts of violence by crowds discussed in the novel. Choose one and discuss the event in depth. Be sure to include causes of the violence, events leading to the event, and any consequences.

Describe the situation at Hillsborough. What happened, and why? What could have been done to prevent the situation?

Throughout the novel, there are mentions of racist and Nazi behaviors. Why do you think football and these types of groups are often closely associated? What do you think this says about football, if anything? What does it say about supporters?

In the end of the novel, Buford and hundreds of other supporters are brutally beaten by Italian police. Do you believe this act was justified by the supporters' behaviors? Why or why not?

Describe what Buford discovers to be a typical football supporter. Does such an individual fit what you thought to be a profile prior to reading the book? Do you think the profile given by Buford is accurate? Why or why not?