

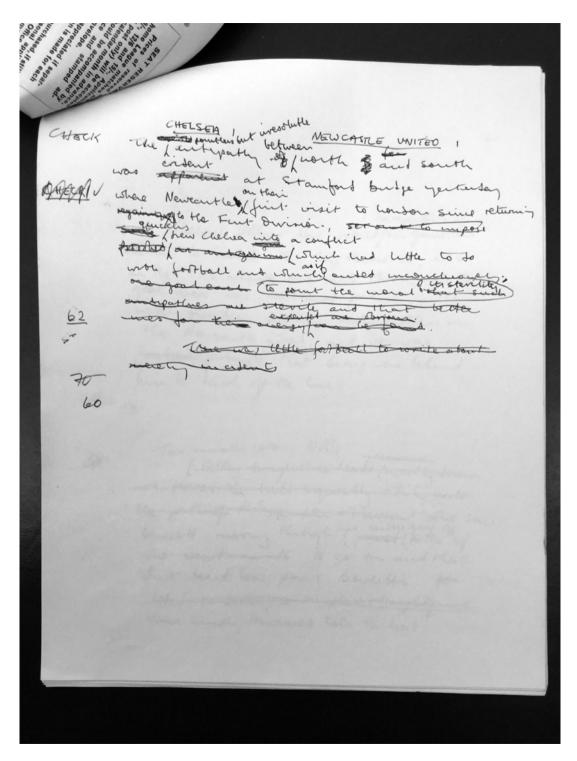
B.S. Johnson is mainly known as a novelist—"Britain's one-man literary avant-garde of the 1960s," according to Jonathan Coe's biography of the writer, Like a Fiery Elephant. Johnson published six novels between 1956 and 1971 before taking his own life at the age of 40 in 1973. (Another one, the first in an intended triloau, was published two years later.) What's often overlooked, however, is that Johnson was an unusually industrious polymath: he also published poetry; variously scripted and directed several plays, short films, and a TV program; and regularly contributed articles and essays to a wide range of magazines, journals, and newspapers. A lifelong Chelsea supporter, in the mid-1960s Johnson reported on weeklu English league and cup matches for *The Observer*, plus 32 World Cup match reports for the *Times of India* when it was held in England in 1966 (including England's 4-2 World Cup victory over West Germany, which is reprinted verbatim in Coe's biography). During the same period he also covered a handful of major tennis tournaments.

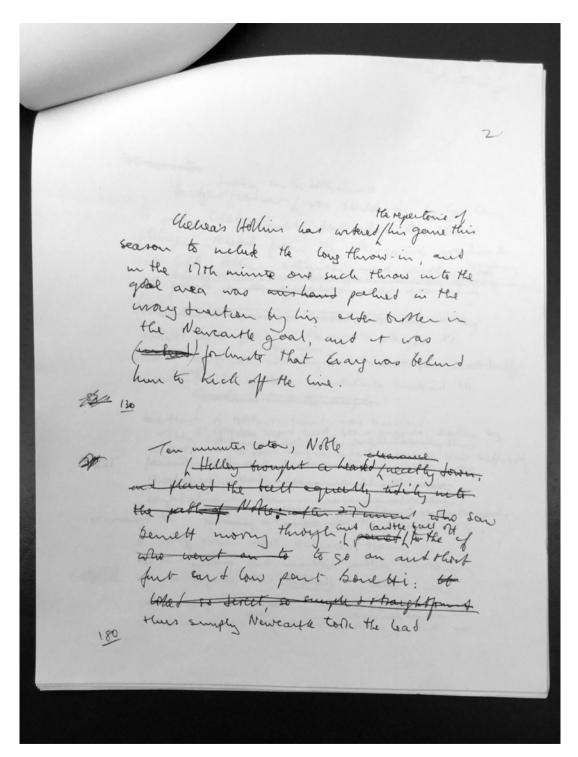
In 2014, artist Chris Evans found and copied a number of the soccer reports on microfiche at British Library Newspapers, Colindale, and later photographed the writer's original manuscripts for the same games in the B.S. Johnson archive, held at the Manuscripts Department of the British Library, St. Pancras. Johnson was a notoriously belligerent and exacting writer, and Evans was curious to see the transition from on-the-spot reportage to the published result. These manuscripts, such as the one reprinted on the cover and first few pages here, show the jobbing reporter writing to the paper's tight word count and near-immediate deadline whilst striving to maintain a literary integrity that was more dogged and ideological than most. Criticizing a fellow reporter in an article on football for the World Cup issue of the *Sunday Times Magazine* in 1966, Johnson wrote: "his reports read like written-down talk rather than worked-out writing: interesting, well-informed talk, to be sure, but not writing."

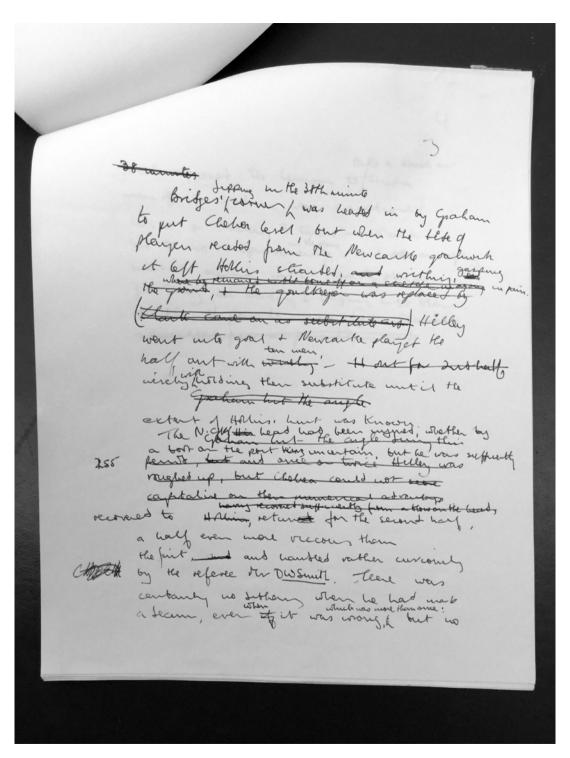
In the same piece, he explains his approach — and the consequences: "I am a writer and I enjoy watching football: combining the two, I saw soccer reporting as an opportunity to be paid for watching matches from the best seats. And I enjoyed it, too, both the soccer and the writing: it was what appeared in print that was usually such a pain. I would take great trouble to try to make my copy as good a piece of writing as anything else I might do, as good as a poem written under the same conditions, even (imagining anyone would want to write a poem in half an hour in a cold, windswept football stadium), and the sub-editors would almost invariably ruin it not only by cutting it, but also by re-writing to some faceless sub-standard of their own: I would go to great lengths to avoid the use of clichés, and the subs would go to equal trouble to put them back in again."

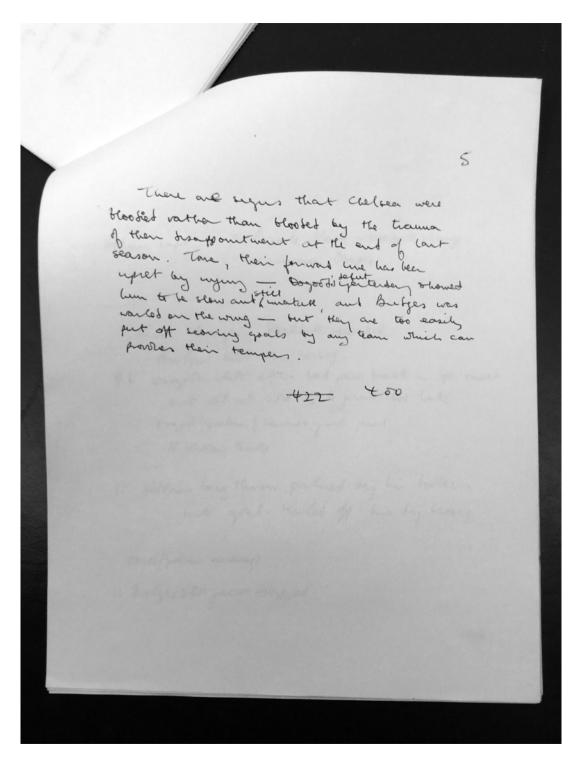
See: Jonathan Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant* (London: Picador, 2004); Jonathan Coe, Philip Tew, and Julia Jordan, eds., *Well Done God!* Selected Prose and Drama of B.S. Johnson (London: Picador, 2013)

Cover and pages 101–106: manuscript of Chelsea vs. Newcastle United, 25 September, 1965.

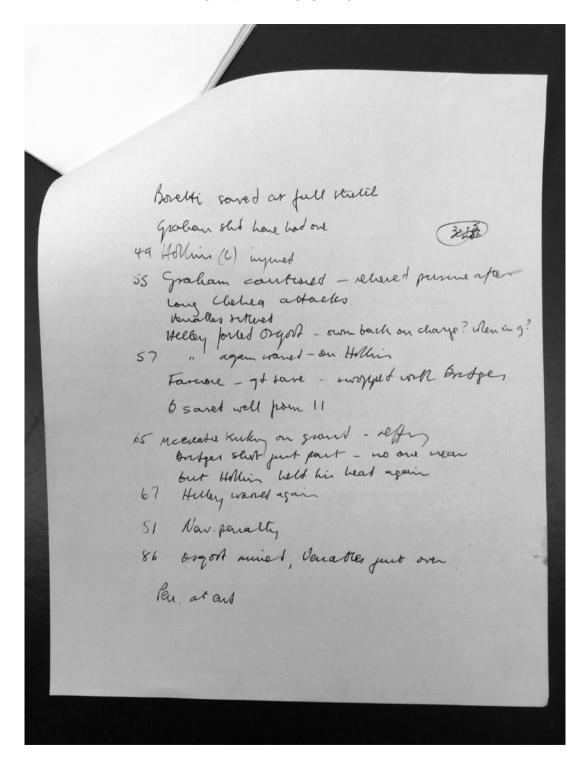








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Newcastle Utd1 THE POINTLESS but insoluble antipathy between north and south was evident at Stamford Bridge yesterday where Newcastle, on their first visit to London since returning to the First Division, quickly drew Chelsea into a conflict which had little to do with football

Chelsea's Hollins had widened the repertoire of his game this season to include the long throw in, and in the seventeenth minute one such throw to the goal area was palmed in the wrong direction by his elder brother in the Newcastle goal, and it was fortunate that Craig was behind him

and which ended inconclusively.

to kick off the line. Ten minutes later, Noble saw Bennett moving through, and laid the ball off for the centre-forward to go on and shoot fast and low past Bonetti: thus simply Newcastle took

the lead. Bridges's dipping corner in the thirty-eighth minute was headed in by Graham to put Chelsea level, but when the tide of players receded from the Newcastle goalmouth it left Hollins stranded, writhing, gasping in pain. Hilley went into goal and Newcastle played the half out with 10 men, wisely withholding their substitute, who was not a goalkeeper, until the extent of Hollins' hurt was known.

Back again

The Newcastle goalkeeper's head had been injured, whether by a boot or a post being uncertain, but he was sufficiently recovered to return for the second half, a half even rougher than the first and handled rather curiously by the referee, Mr D. W. Smith. There was certainly no dithering when he had made a decision, even when it was wrong, which was more than once.

Graham was cautioned twice and Hilley three times, which led to no improvement in the play, and an ugly match ended with 20 players jostling, kicking and laying about them in the

Newcastle penalty area. Osgood's league debut showed him to be slow and still immature, and Bridges was wasted on the wingbut Chelsea are too easily put off

coning by any team which can provoke their tempers.

Chelsea—Bonetti; Shellito, McCredde; Hollins, Young, Harris; Bridges, Graham, Osgood, Venables, Fascione.

Newcastle—Hollins; Craig, Burton; Anderson, McGrath, Moncur; Hockey, Noble, Bennett. Hilley, Knox.

The Observer, 25 September, 1965

Eastham fires Arsenal attack

from B. S. JOHNSON

SUNDERLAND in all positions but one were the equal of Arsenal. But that one position was insideleft. And the man playing there

was George Eastham.

with seconds left he scored one of the finest solo goals imaginable. He beat four men in a 40-yard run, held off two last-second challenges, then chipped a perfect shot into the corner against the direction of his run.

In the first half, after Strong, at long range had forced a fine save from McLaughlan, Eastham first cunningly engineered and then decisively executed a goal to give Arsenal the lead they just about deserved.

He distracted attention from Baker, who was coming through the centre with the ball, and then contrived that he himself was unmarked for a pass which he hit uncompromisingly hard past the Sunderland goalkeeper.

past the Sunderland goalkeeper.

The second half started shortly before McLaughlan, the Sunderland goalkeeper, appeared to realise it had done so. After two minutes he was fait to one side of his goal when a

20-yard ground shot from Strong went in off the other post. *

Without Eastham, the Arsenal attack would have looked very ordinary, but his swerve and ball control gave Arsenal a huge advantage over Sunderland. In the seventy-fifth minute his pass put Baker through but Hurley brought the centre-forward down.

McLaughlan made up for his earlier lapse by brilliantly saving the resultant penalty—taken by Skirton—diving and punching the ball to the wing.

Irwin, the Sunderland right-back, went off with a cut eye at the same time as this penalty, but Baker and Skirton failed to take advantage of his misfortune...

Sunderland hit back five minutes from time with one taken by Sharkey at the second attempt from close in, but any hope of saving a point was dismissed by Eastham's final 20 seconds of genius.

seconds of genius,
Arsenal.—Furnell: Howe, Clarke; Strong,
Ferry, Neill, Skirton, Court, Baker, Eastham,
Armstrong.

Sunderland.—McLaughlan: Irwin. Ashurst; Harvey, Hurley, McNab; Usher, Herd, Sharkey, Crossan, Mulhall.

The Observer, 12 September, 1964

Villa slip on West Ham's carpet

from B. S. JOHNSON

West Ham 3 Aston Villa 0

UPTON PARK, October 10 ONE SIMPLE THEME, repeated again and again like the pattern of a carpet and with the same blurring effect, on the mind, characterised West Ham's home win against Aston Villa.

It was the sight of a West Ham forward, now indistinguishable in the memory as Brabrook, Sissons, Byrne or Hurst put through, often by exceilent approach work, but making an unbelieveable hash of straight-

forwardly scoring.

At first, after 20 minutes of tedium. it was welcome as a relief and for an assumed certainty of the impossibility of its continuing. Brabrook's bullet header was parried by Sidebottom, and then the Villa goalkeeper went down well to hold Byrne's first-time return shot.

The economic Sidebottom did not feel it necessary to move Brabrook's next attempt, and the shot indeed went wide. Nor was the goalkeeper much perturbed by Brabrook's lovely centre to an unmarked Byrne. for the centre-forward headed over from only a yard out.

Like strangers

Meanwhile, back in defence, West Ham easily held a Villa attack which played as though its members had never met until the kick-off.

Another 20 minutes passed, slightly

more interestingly, and then Hurst, fiercely possessive and hard-running, cut back to give Byrne the simplest of chances to sidefoot the ball past Sidebottom. It was almost the only foot Byrne put right the whole afternoon.

It was in the second half that the pattern became blurred by repetition. Certainly, occasional details were different (Byrne stunning the ball and then stumbling over it for Sidebottom to seize it in the interval left by the centre-forward's momentum, Hurst hitting the bar, and Sissons the sidenetting).

And certainly West Ham scored twice more through Boyce, after 67 minutes, and Peters, in injury time. But the only thing that really seemed to alter the pattern was the final whistle.

Weis Ham Standen; Bond, Peters; Bovington, Brown, Moore; Brabtook, Boyce, Byrne, Hurst, Sissons.

Asten Villa Sidebottom; Wright, Altken; Indall, Siecuwenhock, Lee; Pounturey, MacLeod, Hateley, Wylie, Burrows.

The Observer, 10 October, 1964

Torquay hit Canterbury for six

from B. S. JOHNSON

Canterbury City & Torquay United 6
FORQUAY UNITED the first
League team to visit Canterbury in
the first round of the F.A. Cup,
easily beat the non-League club in
a match that was pleasantly free of
the kind of incident now marring
more senior matches.

The home side field their own for only the first quarter of an hour; with two attempts from Ray sustaining hope but then the first move of the match free of any element of luck.

Atkinson, the Torquay rightwinger, went past his back like a whippet and so angled his cross from the line that it beat Tennant's outstretched fingers and left Cox to shoot accurately into an open goal.

Slip-up

Shortly afterwards Cox hit the bar, and within a few minutes Stubbs added an almost identical goal to the first when a defensive error had let slip Atkinson again.

Three minutes later Somers on the left-wing survived three desperate tackles and passed to Cox, whose fine shot left Tennant standing, although perhaps unsighted

All three soals had come about through bad marking as Canterbury, deployed too much defensive mannower in seeking to stop the fast, determined Torquay wingers.

Three minutes from half-time the Torquay left-back handled: Tornkys took the penalty in an atmosphere of suppressed delirium which uncorked itself into a shout of despair as he missed by a foot.

missed by a fbot.

Two great swans cased themselves out of the flat Kent sky to fly across the pitch at the start of the second half, but if they were an omen it was not for a charge in the local fortunes.

At 49 minutes Stubbs worked us way through the middle, was tripped, but seythed a leg at the ball in falling and it went wide of Tennant to nut Torquay four up. Then Northcott added the best goal of the match when he dived to glance in Somers's centre.

The Torquay defence blayed Vic Groves out of the game, and made the former Arsenal man look as ordinary as the rest of the Canterbury forward-line.

Northcott provided the only two moments of the rest of the match, putting one ball into the rivet nearby and its replacement into the net to complete the scoring.

complete the scoring.

Canterbury City: Tennant Bichard, Buscall: Hodgkins Carragher, Bailey Tonksys, Groves, Ry, Clueston, Heard, Torquay United: Addinator: Smith, Alten: Benson, Beitany, Wolstenholme; Atkinson, Cox, Simbs, Northdott, Soriers,

The Observer, 14 November, 1964

from B. S. JOHNSON

Leyton Orient 0

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Wolverhampton Wanderers ...

WOLVES, in their away win over Leyton Orient yesterday, demonstrated that they are in an interesting transitional stage between First and Second Division classes of football.

While their skill made it clear after . the first six minutes that they were considerably better than the London side, nevertheless it was they who began that unnecessary harshness unpretty crudeness and " which characterises much play in the lower Division.

It took only six minutes for Wolves to exchange the cheque of their superiority for the cash of a goal. Nelson clumsily let through McIlmoyle and the Wolves centre-forward hit a high and precise ball for Wagstaffe, unmarked as he ran in, to half-volley with perfect timing past Rouse.

The first injury was an innocent one, Flatt leaving with a twisted knee to give his substitute, Scott, 81 minutes of the game. But the slight, schoolboyish Knowles was off-not so innocently—for a short while during which Metchick nearly put Orient level with an overhead shot which MacLaren punched away.

At 21 minutes Wolves went gratuitously further ahead when Wharton's low cross was deflected past his own goalkeeper by Ferry.

Wolves' defence consolidated this good luck by playing with a surely uncalled-for vigour against the lightweight Leyton forwards, and just before half-time Wilson, their rightback, had his name taken for a quite pointless tackle on Metchick.

MacLaren made a fine soaring save to keep out a Webb header from Metchick's centre as the second half started, then Metchick himself took a flyer at a half-chance and hit the post, and Webb, a full-back reshuffled into attack, again tried hard with a well overhead shot:

But Ferry was having a disastrous afternoon for Orient, and in attempting to clear in the fifty-sixth minute he put through his own goal for the second time to give Wolves a lead quite disproportionate to their share

of the chances.

Herry's lapse demoralised Orient to such an extent that the only further interest in the match unless you took a sadistic delight in bloody injuries. was (only slightly less morbid) whether or not Ferry would make t a hat-trick

Leyton Orient—Rouse: Webb. Worrall;
Sorrell, Nelson, Smith; Price, Gregory, Flatt,
Ferry Metchick. Sub | Scott,
Wolves — MacLaren; Wilson, Thomson;
Flowers, Woodfield, Holsgrove; Wharton,
Hunt, McIlmoyle, Knowles, Wagstaffe.

The Observer, 9 October, 1965

from B. S. JOHNSON

..... 2 Blackburn Rovers

THE CHIEF DELIGHT in watching Arsenal was until recently the trail genius of George Eastham, who controlled from inside-left the highly imaginative concept of attacking football. Now he is squandered on the wing, his ceverness is peripheral to an Arsenal side exhibiting simple failures in the skills which, one would have hought, should have become in training second nature to perform successfully.

Billy Wright the Arsenal manager, would perhaps seek empiri-cally to justify this misapplication of Eastham by pointing to the team's higher League position this season, but even so this is certainly at the expense of attractive foot-

Blackburn, too, have moved their international centre-half England to centre-forward, and on this showing he is certainly not of international standard in the new position. Early on, he showed poor control, and once waited for the bounce when to have wated for the bottles when to have hit it first, time would surely have been to score from three yards. Arsenal, though further fortunate when everyone but the referee saw Naill beautile in the presents are Neill bandle: in the penalty area, were unlucky when Blackburn scored a curious goal in the fourteenth

Harrison on the left wing could beat the ponderous Howe easily and from a return pass he headed hard against the Arsenal bar. The ball bounced down and out, Harrison appealed, but before the referee could grant or deny him, Court tragically headed into his own net trying to achieve some purpose known only to-

him this goal was hard on Arsenal, their subsequent attempts to equalise lost them sympathy. McCullough, lost them; sympathy. McCullough, Sammels and twice McLintock missed with shots heinously outside. Only Baker forced Else to a moderately difficult save, while Burns at the other end found himself several times in the last ditch.

McLintock's third attempt at goal. however, where he used his head to a cross by Armstrong, put Arsenal level in the 36th minute. McCul-lough could stop Ferguson only by fouling him just outside the Arsenal area in the 53rd minute, an example of sheer lack of resource, and England headed a fine goal from the free kick to put Blackburn 2-1 up.

Blackburn's left back was the only element of an offside line which failed to move in the 62nd minute, leaving Baker clear and from Court's pass able to shoot low past Else to bring Arshal level.

Arsetial—Burns; Howe, McCullough; McLintock, Neill, Court; Armstrong, Radford, Baker, Sammels, Eastham, Sub: Tawse.

Blackburn—Else: Newton, Wilson; Clayton, Molvaney, Sharples: Ferguson, McEwoy Engladd, Byrom, Harrison, Sub: Blore.

The Observer, 23 October, 1965

from B. S. JOHNSON

Millwall 2 Grimsby Town 1 THAT POLITICAL truism which states that the status quo is more difficult to change than to maintain was demonstrated in soccer yesterday at Millwall, where the top Third Division sides met and ended up two further points apart.

On a pitch even this early clearly showing itself the child of the father and mother of a mudpatch it later becomes, and despite refereeing more officibus than efficient, Millwall and Grimsby played football more exciting and, yes, more skilful than that of at least half the First Division matches I have seen this season.

Just after Stepney had justified, by a piece of spectacularly unorthodox improvisation, the form which earned his choice as England's Under 23 goalkeeper, Grimsby scored a good goal past him at 16 minutes when Hill, their right-winger, missed the ball at his first attempt but then hit it all too accurately.

Rain fell briefly the crowd chanted and demanded, and two minutes later

Millwall were level.

Julians, whose ball control had earlier been uncertain, timed his header perfectly to a cross from Rowan.

Millwall's high confidence from this position was remarkable, for they now played as though the game were theirs by right; but it was not until the seventieth minute, when Wilson headed Rowan's high corner from the closest of positions, that the match was theirs

Millwall Stepney; Gilchrist, Cripps; Jones, nowdon, Wilson; Rowan, Julians, Brown, Snowdon, Wi Jacks, Clarke,

Grimsby T.—Wright; Thompson, Taylor; Ross, Joblin, Cockerill; Hill, Tees, Green, Foster, Collins.

The Observer, 30 October, 1965

rom B. S. JOHNSON

West Bromwich A. 1 Manchester U. 1 CUFFS WELL DOWN over his hands and shoulders hunched against the cold, Denis Law came out at West Bromwich to give this ordinary League match an interest it would not normally have had.

But, in contrast to the last match before his previous suspension, there was no multi-goal exit in the grand manner, and Manchester were worth no more than a draw.

Law's incredibly fast reactions gave Manchester a goal after 14 minutes against the run of the play. Chariton worked his way into the penalty area, crossed, and a defender's miskick went to Law.

Injustice

He directed it past Potter before the West Bromwich goalkeeper had no more than a chance to lean in its direction. West Bromwich hauled themselves up from this injustice, and created two chances for every one Manchester did.

After 33 minutes a downward header by Kaye caused a scuffle and heaping of bodies at the foot of a Manchester post. The referee Manchester post. decided the ball had crossed the line and justice had been done, if hardly seen. As Kaye was the last person anyone saw touch the ball, he was credited with the goal.

Some bad refereeing decisions one guite blatant with a West Bromwich man playing a free kick twice without being penalised-angered Manchester.

Sadly, at about 20 minutes from time, the truth became apparent that Law was not really having a good match. A section of the crowd began not very musically to maintain that nevertheless he was a jolly good fellow.

West Bromwich Albion—Potter; Fairfax, Williams; Fraser, Jones, Simpson; Fosgo, Kaye, Astle, Hore, Clark.
Manchester United—Dunne (P); Brennan, Dunne (A); Crerand, Foulkes, Stiles; Connelly, Charlton, Herd, Law, Best.

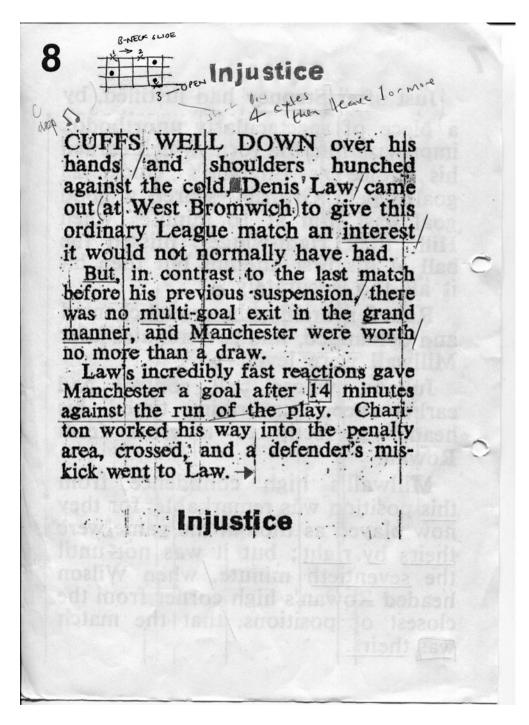
The Observer, 12 December, 1964

In 1969, Johnson published the loosely autobiographical *The Unfortunates*, a novel following a sportswriter who's sent to a city to report a football match, only to find himself confronted by ghosts from his past. As "a better solution to the problem of conveying the mind's randomness than the imposed order of a bound book," the author published the novel in 25 loose, stapled sections, whereby any reading of the book would produce a different sequence of events, part authored by Johnson, part authored by chance.

In 2014, Evans invited typographer Will Holder to collaborate on performing B.S. Johnson's football reports set to music. Titled by one of the more allusive headlines: "Errors hit Orient," they scored eight of the match reports for speech, to be read by Holder over eight improvised themes played "bottleneck" by Evans on bass guitar. The speech is never delivered at the same speed, since its timing adapts to the bass and vice versa. In addition, two modular accompaniments of different lengths loop together: percussive (clapping, no clapping) and affective (dramatic rise, dramatic fall, silence). Algorithmically, this produces six possible variations of the spoken football reports' drama, resulting in an aleatory composition in the manner of *The Unfortunates*' random sections. The last two pages here show a copy of the last game in the suite marked-up for live deliveru.

To coincide with this Bulletin, Evans and Holder have recorded two takes, forthcoming as a double-A 12" record. Take "1" can be heard at www.servinglibrary.org/errors-hit-orient. Take "2" is available at www.praxes.de, and www.sinkhole-audio.net.

Permission to publish this material was granted by The Estate of B.S. Johnson. We are thankful for their generosity and cooperation, as well as to Northumbria University and Liverpool John Moores University, who stumped up cash for the recording.



Copy of B.S. Johnson's report of West Bromwich Albion vs. Manchester United, *The Observer*, 23 June, 1972, marked-up for live performance by Chris Evans and Will Holder

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