

## **Abstract**

The global appeal of the game of football, soccer here in the United States, has resulted in its playing a role in multiple artistic mediums throughout numerous cultures. This thesis seeks to explore the role of football specifically in global literature, focusing on literary works from England, Spain, Africa and South and Central America. The works studied lend themselves particularly well to a discussion of the role football plays in defining identity on both the personal and national level in these countries and regions. Each one has a unique approach to the game which is reflected in their attitude toward it in their literature. Football plays a different role in these different regions, and therefore the way in which it helps define cultural identity varies from place to place. Toward the end, certain colonial connections also become apparent and are discussed.

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Honors Research Project

8/8/10

### The Role of Soccer in Defining Identity in World Literature

In America we call it soccer. In other countries it is known as football, voetbol, saker, calcio, putbol, balompié, ritnitop, Fußball, knattspyrna, ball-coise, chukgu, and bóng đá. The list could go on forever. It has followers more widespread than any of the world's major religions. It has the artistry and self-expression of dance but is shared by more cultures than any waltz or samba. It permeates nations of almost every imaginable political persuasion. It exists in all climates, terrains and conditions. The United Nations currently recognizes 192 member nations. The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) recognizes 202 international teams, all of whom compete every four years to play on the world's largest sporting stage. In the introduction to their book on the 2010 World cup, Steven and Harrison Stark suggest that "Soccer is the closest thing we have to a global language and currency" (6).

It should be no surprise, then, that as a game of such global significance it often finds its way into matters of other cultural significance, managing to influence or be influenced by the goings on of the "real" world. Any time that Brazil fails to win a World Cup the national government itself launches an investigation. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi also acts as the owner of AC Milan, the nation's premier team, and even appropriated the soccer cheer "Forza Italia" as the title for his political party (Stark 8). The game has been known to start wars, like the Soccer War between El Salvador and Honduras in 1969, as well as help to resolve them, as in the Ivorian Civil War in 2005. Even the working elements of the game have

managed to surpass the bounds of mere sport, as evidenced by Zinedine Zidane's 2002 game-winning goal for Real Madrid, an act of physical expression which the head of the Scottish Arts Council described as "pure ballet" (Turnbull 72). Soccer has managed to prove itself to be significant in realms from politics to art.

The same can be said of the game's contributions to the field of literature. The massive popularity that the game has gained in the last century, as well as our newfound ability to broadcast games from all over the world to our own living rooms, has coincided with an influx of writers who incorporate their love and understanding of the game into their writing. This manifests itself in a variety of ways of course, and spans nearly every genre imaginable. The personal relationship which most writers have with the game lends itself easily to the issue of identity, both personal and within the larger context of a community or nation. But the unique position of the game as one that is shared by almost every culture known today also offers a rare look into the way these varying relationships with the game reflect the cultures in question. By looking at examples of soccer literature from the hotbeds of the contemporary game, we can see this relationship between identity and soccer even more clearly. Examining literature from Africa, South and Central America, England and Spain we can see how these writer's relationships with the game both reflect and define the larger identities of their nations.

The history of football literature is somewhat nebulous. It has certainly been only in recent decades that any interest has been taken in writing focused entirely on sports. Even now, when sports writing has become more popular and plenty of material is available, the unfortunate truth is that most of it is not very good. When any athlete can write his or her autobiography five years into a career and any literate fan can find a publisher for his or her experience of the game,

it can be challenging to separate what can be called football literature from what is just fluff. Beyond this there are the challenges of defining the genre itself. Works of Shakespeare are some of the earliest literature that make reference to football or football players. Should these be included in the genre of football literature or should the genre be defined historically, comprising only those works written since the founding of FIFA in 1904? For that matter, should nonfiction works be included in the catalogue of football literature or can only created characters and situations elevate representations of the game to artistic levels?

Lee McGowan offers his own definition of the genre in his blog *the simplest game*. His is limited strictly to fiction: “Any work of fiction with a significant reliance on football as a central or substantive element of the narrative”. While this explicitly excludes any work of nonfiction, its key principles can still be generalized to include works outside of the purely imaginative. Nonfiction works that rely significantly on football as a substantive part of their argument or demonstration could also be fitted to these same criteria. I would also suggest that the ability of piece of football writing to speak to larger issues, within its own society or otherwise, is a key factor in defining it as a work of football literature. The definition is not perfect. It still leaves a good deal of subjectivity to determining what qualifies and what does not. For instance, Barry Hines’ *A Kestrel for a Knave* (1968) has nothing to do with football, save the twenty-page description of one game which turns out to have serious implications for the development of the main character. Should this then qualify as football literature? Does one important section count as a “significant reliance” on the game or as a “substantive element of the narrative”?

These are the sort of questions that can stimulate literary debates which can never be resolved in any conclusive way. What can be argued, however, is the quality of works on an individual basis. The level of quality here refers not only to the overall style of writing itself, but also to the way in which a writer is able to use either the words themselves or the situations being described to illicit an emotional response from a reader comparable to any other work of quality literature. It may be difficult to articulate every trait that is necessary for a work to qualify as football literature, but it is much more manageable to determine whether a specific work fits our held conceptions of what football literature is. Each of the works examined for this project have thus been selected on a case by case basis. For the most part, all primary sources are drawn from two books.

*Fever Pitch* is a novel by Nick Hornby in which the author uses his life as an Arsenal fan to frame his memoirs. The novel has long been praised as one of the most well written and most artistically significant works of English football literature. Its use of football throughout as a means of relating to the world certainly places it in the starting eleven works of football literature. There are, however, those critics who are skeptical of the novel's classification as football literature on the grounds that the work is not fundamentally about the game. In truth, football is more of a means of relating to the world and to the internal conflicts a young English boy experiences coming of age in suburbia. Whatever its true focus, the novel makes extensive use of football to illustrate the points that Hornby wants to make, and as such earns its starting spot.

The remainder of research was conducted based on short works drawn from John Turnbull's fantastic anthology of football related literature *The Global Game: Writers on Soccer*.

The book pulls together over fifty short works or excerpts from larger works, translating them into English when necessary. As such it has served as an invaluable resource. While not all of its 56 selections could be universally accepted as football literature, I believe that the ones used in this paper have earned their spot.

Four primary and fundamentally varied cultural regions that can be fairly easily addressed in this discussion are Africa, South and Central America, Spain, and England. Each region has a unique history with the game and a recognizable approach to it both on the field and in literature.

## **I. Africa**

In the Postcolonial era, literature coming out of and about Africa has flourished in a way that was previously impossible. Increase of literacy on the continent has allowed more writers within various African nations to express themselves in new ways. Still, the tradition of oral storytelling continues to impact the new written literature that develops out of the continent more each day. In his contribution to *Understanding Contemporary Africa* George Joseph suggests that this connection has resulted in an acceptance that:

"Literature" can also imply an artistic use of words for the sake of art alone...

[T]raditionally, Africans do not radically separate art from teaching. Rather than write or sing for beauty in itself, African writers, taking their cue from oral literature, use beauty to help communicate important truths and information to society. Indeed, an object is considered beautiful because of the truths it reveals and the communities it helps to build (304).

It makes sense, then, that soccer, a game whose beauty has been the subject of growing appreciation in the modern era, should figure prominently in not only the literature coming out of the continent, but also in literature about the nations of Africa. Two such works included in *The Global Game* are Bea Vidacs' "The Daily Life of Cameroonian Football" and Paul Richards' "Sierra Leone, Social Learning, and Soccer." Both are nonfiction works that make use of the game in order to speak to larger issues that shape their relative African nations. Even the descriptions of games and situations in these works of nonfiction at times deserve the label of artistry in their own right. Each writer slowly unfolds an understanding of the role that soccer plays in defining both individual identity and cultural identity in two very different African nations.

In "The Daily Life of Cameroonian Football" Vidacs focuses largely on the wider cultural and social significance of the game in a nation whose playing fields consist primarily of scarred and barren surfaces. However, her work is not without its appreciation of the more personal relationship Cameroonian people have with football. Her descriptions of the battered pitches players must overcome and the ways in which they adapt their game to these conditions emphasize the very individualistic and expressive qualities of the game. She describes spontaneous matches and mini championships that materialize in the streets as both children and adults kick the ball regardless of weather or space, because they simply "appreciat[e] the joy of the game" (17). One particularly hair-raising passage describes a young girl playing with a kitchen knife behind her back, having abandoned her chores momentarily to share in the game. The game allows her a temporary escape from the harsh realities of her life. The author admits that after having spent more than a year sharing in the sporting culture of the country, she now

sees the players who pursue the game at a higher level “in a heroic light” (16). Through football, the people of Cameroon find, on an individual level, an escape from their daily lives, be it a pick up game or a professional division match. Dirty streets and massacréd pitches serve to elevate men to heroic status and offer release to anyone who plays.

More important, still, than the various relationships that individual Cameroonians have with the game in Cameroon is the role it plays in defining cultural identity for the nation as a whole as well as for smaller village communities within Cameroon. Turnbull mentions in his introduction that Vidacs’ descriptions of the people and games of the Cameroonians “showcase a soccer-loving nation where playing styles are strongly tied to national self-perceptions” (16). The hardships of play which their athletes have needed to overcome reflect themselves in the way in which Cameroonians play the game. Toward the end of her excerpt Vidacs discusses how some players accustomed to playing in poor conditions can actually be thrown off by playing on well manicured fields. On fields overgrown to the point that passes cannot be controlled, all strategy must be abandoned and players must learn to push forward without any plan. In these scenarios Vidacs shows us how the Cameroonian landscape itself effects the style with which their teams learn to play, and thus create an unmistakable national identity in the team. Village championships also play a social role in the crowds that they attract. Vidacs’ observes that in such situations audiences gather as much to see each other as to watch the game: “The social nature of these village championships explains why there are almost equal numbers of women and men among the spectators, which is never the case when official teams play” (18). These games allow women in these villages to attain a level of equality and social involvement that might not be as easily acquired in other more mainstream events. Vidacs specifically notes the

desire of professional Cameroonian players to do something that will be greater than themselves as part of their desire to show that “Cameroon football represents an antithesis of the zombification, inertia, and impasses of the postcolonial condition” (16). Through her discussion of gender roles and postcolonial politics, Vidacs shows the reader that the game is able to perform a greater cultural function than might seem possible.

Similarly, Raul Richards’ “Sierra Leone, Social Learning, and Soccer” spends a great deal of time discussing the social role that the game plays in Sierra Leone. However, in this case the obstacles to be overcome are not only a lack of suitable conditions but also external political forces which influence the game. At the time that Richards’ series of self-proclaimed vignettes were written, Sierra Leone was in the midst of a brutal civil war which would not reach its conclusion for another six years. As a result, the author uses soccer in his work to demonstrate a certain method by which a social order and identity can be built and how individuals should act within this order.

Richards makes no secret about his intentions right from the beginning. Turnbull’s introduction notes that, “Richards views the local, grassroots game as a social resource for reintegrating disaffected soldiers of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), many of them teenagers, back into society” (Turnbull 201). This view of the game is unsurprising considering the heavily social and largely inclusive roles the game plays in other African communities which have already been discussed. Be it breaking traditional gender roles or defining the character of a region, casual soccer matches prove to be events of enormous involvement and incorporation. The matter is taken a step further when Richards describes a situation in which his arrival in a new town was greeted with an invitation to pick and captain a team against the village eleven

(201). In this case, he notes, the game was able to function not only as an act of community but as a social facilitator and form of hospitality.

One of the Richards' "vignettes" particularly emphasizes the social, even national, identity for which the game acts as a catalyst. In it, he describes how one of his colleagues is drafted as a volunteer referee into a novelty match between health workers and agricultural workers as a volunteer referee. As the match begins he points out the obvious difficulty of calling offsides with no linesmen, thus forcing the players to accept any decisions his colleague makes. Inevitably, a goal is scored and the defending team, along with a portion of the crowd, besieges the referee. Fighting breaks out while accusations fly that he was mistaken, biased, even bribed. However, when he begins to walk away and abandon the game, the clamor turns to pleas for him to stay. The makeshift referee reaffirms the difficulties in making the correct calls on his own and again insists that players must abide by his decisions. The teams assent and the game continues without incident.

Richards immediately draws a connection between his portrait of the referee and Sierra Leonean culture as the players agree to the compromise the referee sets forth, alluding to a proverb: "bad osban beta pas empti os (a bad husband is better than an empty house)" (203). By juxtaposing these two images Richards highlights the role of compromise in overcoming the political turmoil facing the country, using the referee as the central symbol of this compromise. However, what this image means to the people of Sierra Leone is abruptly brought to the fore as the author mentions that many of the kids playing in these games, and thus wrestling with the precarious balance in question, are of exactly the age that the rebels aimed to capture as recruits in their raid on the village. The lessons learned from the game, then, become far more political

than the simple notion of give and take. The same effect is achieved when a conversation over famous refereeing controversies includes mention of the social purpose of the referee. Richards notes, “[T]hen, as if reminded by the engines of war in the background, their attention swung back to the social purposes of the referee. Without an official there cannot be a game. Beggars cannot be choosers. Referees and their red cards are a necessary evil” (204). Richards’ constant comparison of elements of soccer with similar political conflicts helps to emphasize the relationship between football culture and Sierra Leone’s national character.

What is most interesting, though, is the way in which Richards concludes his short sketch. The author speaks to a young man for whom soccer is a window into human nature. Richards asks:

Was it the glory of victory or the tragedy of defeat that attracted his interest? No, he said, he paid less attention to the competitive aspects of the game than to what was happening to players on the same side. Studying the game closely made one understand team effort. Some players were too selfish. Others combined and co-operated well. In life, it was the people on your own side you had to watch and understand, more than your opponents even (205).

It seems odd that Richards would close on this note considering the focus on referees and compromise throughout the majority of the short work. What the shift in topic does is create a final movement from the broad social identity which the conflict between players and referee brings to the more individual processes of self-identification the players experience. The young man that the author speaks to draws a connection between the teams on the playing field and the

co-operation necessary as a member of a larger community. Richards thus draws the final emphasis away from the game's role in defining Sierra Leone's national culture to the way it characterizes the role of the individual.

## II. Latin America

Literature in Latin America experienced its first period of true recognition after World War II during an era of increased prosperity and confidence. This era saw literature from Central and South America gain prominence in literary circles and begin to develop an identity which was truly its own. Authors enjoyed experimenting with literary conventions and pushing linguistic boundaries in new and exciting ways. Their efforts gave rise to the literary style known as magical realism. Contemporary writers, though, have also begun to explore more journalistic approaches to writing. Such journalistic approaches obviously must rely on cultural norms. With the role that soccer plays in the everyday lives of so many people, it is no surprise that the game is often featured in this type of writing. This role of soccer in influencing regional or cultural identity can be seen in both Alvaro Enrique's short story "Readymade" and Maria Graciela Rodriguez's personal chronicle "'Get Him a Body Bag!' (A Brief, Enthusiastic Account)," both of which appear in *The Global Game*.

While it depicts to a large degree real places and true historical events, Enrique's "Readymade" in particular emphasizes identity through the search for a club to support. While Enrique's work cannot be called true nonfiction as it does not attempt to draw any direct connection between the life of the author and the experiences of the narrator, the story's protagonist struggles to understand the conflicting perspectives he encounters in his search for a

Mexican club to support, a search which John Turnbull relates to the search for a home (48).

This fictional account draws on real names, places and events, fictionalizing the protagonist's navigation through them in search of some sense of regional identity.

One element of Enrique's portrayal of the game in Mexico which is clear throughout the story is the connection between football and Mexican history. In 16 short vignettes, the protagonist of "Readymade" shares the story of his experience as a fan in Mexico. One of the defining moments in his life is his grandmother informing him that he is from Pachuca, not Mexico City (where he currently lives) or Guadalajara (where he was in fact born). He tells us that, "She would say this, obviously, to amuse herself. I rooted for the Pachuca Tuzos for years because of her" (52). Here, in only the second section of the story, an extremely strong connection is drawn between the past and how people perceive themselves. The nameless narrator feels an obligation to be a fan of the town of his supposed origin, even though he has no memory of or sincere connection to either the place or the team. The role of history in Mexican football is further expanded on in the short introduction to the story, which briefly explores the Aztec prototype of the game that would come to be so culturally relevant (even to the point that they would name their national stadium the Azteca). Specifically, Turnbull mentions that Pachuca's football club was originally founded by British laborers who would play the game when not mining the region's silver (48). This touches on the theme of colonialism, something common to the football traditions of many Latin American nations, and calls upon a concept that is discussed briefly in the introduction to C.L.R. James' book *Beyond A Boundary*. James' focus is cricket, but the ideas put forth are just as relevant to football:

It seemed like a classic ploy by the conquerors: games...could be imposed upon the colonies to tame them, to herd them into psychic boundaries where they would learn the values and ethics of the colonist.

But once given the opportunity to play the master's game, to excel at it, the colonials gained a self-esteem that would eventually free them (xiii).

This concept is reaffirmed simply with the name of Pachuca's stadium, mentioned in passing by Enrique: "Mexican Revolution" Stadium (51). The sense of cultural identity that comes with throwing off their oppressors comes through to lend a sense of identity to their game as well.

This sense of the game both reflecting and dictating regional styles and attitudes is something which permeates the entire story. From the very first paragraph Enrique sets the tone when he says of Alfonso "the Fool" Madrigal, the legendary Pachuca player who permeates the story's wanderings, "his game was true to his neighborhood's stereotype: clever, easygoing, and flashy" (49). Here, the playing style of "the Fool" is directly linked to the character of the town from which he hails. The narrative as a whole explores the development of this character, as the narrator reflects that his grandmother's original intentions in convincing him that he is from Pachuca must have been some "ruthless trick" that "originated in how thoroughly bad the team...really was" and "its reputation for ugliness" (53). But with the rise of Alfonso Madrigal and the cunning style he was able to translate from the streets to the field, supporting Pachuca became, for the narrator, an experience which was almost defining in nature. He tells the reader toward the end that, "I never recovered from not having been born in Pachuca: my parents' insistence on the fact that I was from Guadalajara was not unlike being cast out of Paradise" (54-55). For him, this uprooting causes a disorienting crisis of identity which clearly

demonstrates the role that style of play has in defining the character of both people and places in Latin America.

Maria Graciela Rodriguez's "Get Him a Body Bag!" continues this same line of thought, highlighting the gender separation and machismo that is central to Argentine football. Rodriguez mentions early on that she is inexperienced in the culture of football in Argentina simply because she is a woman. The conception by many within the country has always been that women lack the expertise and passion to truly appreciate the game, thus creating in Argentine football culture a very strong form of male identification. Her presence at this game, then, is an act which challenges that "maleness". In only the second sentence Rodriguez draws her line in the sand, identifying herself with the side she was raised to support: "I'm a *gallina* (hen) by birth (one doesn't question these inheritances)" (59). Oddly enough, however, she chooses to sit with the visiting fans, aligning herself with the visiting *cuervos* (ravens). Turnbull notes in the introduction to Rodriguez's chronicle that by associating herself with the enemy, "She enhances the psychic distance from the overwhelmingly male crowd" (58). Finding herself, thus, in the most unfamiliar position possible, her perspective on the behavior of fans on both sides of the divide has a great deal of clarity. She notes the use of homophobic chanting connects this to the theories of anthropologist Eduardo Archetti who claims: "The affirmation of masculinity depends upon depriving the other of his masculinity" (58). In the chants and songs that tear down the opposition just such a definition of masculinity is acted out, with fans asserting their dominance over the enemy by cutting them down. Yet even in defeat, a certain element of the machismo is present. As the *cuervos* are dismantled the author notices a certain strength in the men around her:

for the first time in my life, I understand what “supporter” means: it takes a lot of balls to sit in the stands, quiet and stoic, the humiliation of the River fans’ cheers inflamed by a dance that will end 4-0...I realized that it is a very masculine feeling, almost exclusive to men.

Because the “endurance” is to support a symbolic death without saying a word; it is to demonstrate a manliness from which one gains added valor (61).

What Rodriguez notes here is that the sense of masculinity is affirmed for the Argentine fans regardless of the result of the match. As the victorious you have destroyed the opposition, but as the defeated you have loyally weathered that destruction.

### **III. England**

The connection between football and the English psyche is perhaps stronger than in any other culture. The impact the game has on society as a whole is best reflected in the gravity with which the British treat the game. Ever since their first, and only, World Cup victory in 1966 the Three Lions have borne the overzealous expectations of their nation. Even down to the fact the England is generally accepted as the birthplace of the game in its modern form, whether historically accurate or not, the English have always connected themselves, and been connected by others, to the game in a very personal and definitive way. This tortured relationship between the English and “their” game is something that is often reflected in their football literature. One prime example is Nick Hornby’s *Fever Pitch* in which the author structures his memoirs around his relationship with his favored club team, Arsenal. In so doing, he demonstrates the role that football plays for the English fan, as well as the social fragmentation that can be caused by the game.

In the United States we generally think of sports fandom as a leisure activity, as something that is pursued for the happiness it can bring or for the entertainment it provides. Perhaps one of *Fever Pitch*'s most noticeable aspects is the sense of angst and frustration that is constantly present, seemingly in the stead of the joy and exuberance that we as American sports fans might expect. Hornby's descriptions of his trips to Highbury, be it as an exasperated middle-class teenager or as a slightly less than well adjusted adult, can begin to sound more to the reader like self flagellation than any participation that results from a reasonable sense of loyalty. It is, however, one of the primary themes of Hornby's memoirs that the game's purpose, for him and for many others, is something far beyond simple entertainment. Misery, in fact, seems to be a fundamental part of the English football experience. In a moment of doubt as a young man, Hornby bemoans the fate of a football fan: "When our teams lose at Wembley we think of the colleagues and classmates we have to face on Monday morning, and the delirium that has been denied us; it seems inconceivable that we will allow ourselves to be this vulnerable ever again. I felt I didn't have the *courage* to be a football fan" (58). Later in life he admits that the beauty of the game is irrelevant to him, he can have no aesthetic appreciation for the artistry of a goal scored against his beloved Arsenal because he is an Arsenal fan first and a football fan second. "Football is an alternative universe," he says, "as serious and as stressful as work, with the same worries and hopes and disappointments and occasional elations. I go to football for loads of reasons, but I don't go for entertainment" (127). It would seem, then, that Hornby, as an English football fan, takes little of value from the game itself, weathering long periods of torment only to be unable to enjoy the independent beauty it can offer.

If the game itself offers only misery with no sense of true enjoyment in return, then it is the paradoxical relation between identity and lack thereof that, Hornby's work suggests, keeps football fans packing the stands. He demonstrates this through the story of a man by the name of Neil Kaas, who is a fan of small club called Luton. Neil Kaas is the type of fan who looks down even on Hornby's dedication to his team, claiming that merely attending every home game as inadequate. The result of Kaas' unflagging support however is an eternal association with the achievements of his small club of Luton, "so when his friends hear the results on a Saturday, on national radio and television, or on the tannoys of other League grounds, they think, simply, 'Neil Kaas' when they hear the Luton score" (186). Hornby admits that this appeal is a slow one but one that has a powerful attraction nonetheless: "*I like the thought of people remembering me on a regular basis*" (186). The attraction does not end there, however. For the author, football "is not an escape, or a form of entertainment, but a different version of the world;" a version of the world in which liberation from social roles is possible. The author's own suburban heritage weighs on him throughout *Fever Pitch* as he longs to find a greater sense of identity. Marching to an away match with fellow Arsenal supporters and protection from cops on both sides, the young Hornby is allowed to let his fantasies of a different social role run wild:

[T]hose who mumble about the loss of identity football fans must endure miss the point: this loss of identity can be a paradoxically enriching process. Who wants to be stuck with who they are the whole time? I for one wanted time out from being a jug-eared, bespectacled, suburban twerp once in a while; I loved being able to frighten the shoppers in Derby or Norwich or Southampton (and they were frightened--you could see it)...I knew it

wasn't *me* that made people hurry to the other side of the road, hauling their children after them; it was *us*, and I was a part of us, an organ in the hooligan body" (46)

The author demonstrates, here, the odd relationship between anonymity and identity within British football culture. Hornby is able to lose himself within the mob of hooliganism as a way of redefining himself, if only momentarily, as something besides another generic son of the suburbs, using football as a means of coping with one of the great identity crises of the twentieth century.

While the picture Hornby paints is one in which football serves a greater social role for the fans who pursue it, it is also one in which the game sows seeds of social fragmentation. Ironically, this seems to come as a direct result of the sense of inclusion and identification that is so important to the author and his compatriots as they support their team. He notes that it is only as the boys in his class grow older and start to recognize the differences between themselves and others that a sense of discomfort and isolation begins to sink in with regard to the different teams they support. For the author, in particular, this sense of loneliness is heightened by the fact that he is the only Arsenal fan within his social group. As he describes a scene in which a mob of boys and girls attack him on the playground in retaliation for his team's loss in the Cup Final Hornby reflects, "Football was still, in essence, a unifying interest--nothing had changed in that way. But as the months passed, our allegiances had become much more defined, and we were much quicker to tease...For the first time in my life I was different and on my own, and I hated it" (20). Finding himself the victim not of his own despair at backing the losing side but also of his classmate's jokes and attacks, he wishes that his father had never taken him to their first

Arsenal match. He is faced for the first time with the idea of exclusion on the basis of something as seemingly arbitrary as a football team.

But the social separation related to supporting different teams is not something of which the young Hornby was entirely ignorant. Being born and raised in the southern part of England the author became quickly aware of the difference between himself and the fans of his adopted club in north London: “Ever since I have been old enough to understand what it means to be suburban I have wanted to come from somewhere else, preferably north London” (40). His allegiance to Arsenal allows him the convenient opportunity to live out this fantasy of alternate origins. He recounts how after attending his first Arsenal home matches he began to attempt to eliminate any elements of his regional dialect from his speech, slowly creating an environment in which he could be what he wanted to be rather than what he had been born into. He says that as post-war grammar school boys and girls, “none of the available cultures seemed to belong to us, and we had to pinch one quick. And what is suburban post-war middle-class English culture anyway” (41). Feeling lost and without any firm sense of identity he lunges at the opportunity to define himself as something other than what he sees as the ambiguous suburban Englishman. Ofcourse the elaborate fantasy falls apart when he falls in with a local family watching Arsenal play a local club. His stories and half-truths are only able to take him so far and eventually it is discovered that he is rooting for Arsenal against his own local side. “It was the most humiliating moment of my teenage years,” Hornby says, “A complete, elaborate and perfectly imagined world came crashing down around me and fell in chunks at my feet” (42). The incident, while traumatic in the moment, does little more than discourage him from attending Arsenal games

against local clubs. Still, it serves to highlight both the greater sense of isolation he experiences as a modern youth in suburban England and the way in which football helps him to cope with it.

#### **IV. Spain**

This summer, when the Spanish national soccer team won the World Cup, commentators all across the globe called the win a victory for beautiful soccer. During its recent history, it has become a trait of Spanish soccer to play an open, free-flowing game with intricate patterns of player roaming and positional interchange. It is a style that is considered particularly expressive and allows for the creativity and individual character of players to shine through on the field. Similarly, modernist literature in Spain has been characterized, in part, by the pursuit of perfect form and beauty in the medium itself. It follows naturally, then, that this same theme and style of beauty is primarily reflected in the football literature of the nation. Two prime examples of this are Javier Marias' short essay "Fallen From the Sky" and Rafael Alberti's poem "Platko". Perhaps the most controversial piece discussed here, Javier Marias' short article "Fallen From the Sky" is more or less a brief analysis of the goal that made French sporting icon Zinedine Zidane famous. The language he uses, though, along with the almost philosophical way in which he tries to define what can take a physical action and transform it into something supernatural most certainly elevates the article above simple reporting. On the other hand, the poem "Platko," which appears in *The Global Game*, dramatizes the skills of a real goalkeeper, but does so in a manner that could hardly be called anything but artistic. Both celebrate and demonstrate the beauty and appreciation of form that is inherent not only in Spanish soccer, but also in the literature surrounding it.

The introduction to “Fallen From the Sky” contains a quote from former Episcopal Bishop and head of the Scottish Arts Council Richard Holloway. He describes a goal by Zinedine Zidane in the European Cup final as “pure ballet” and continues to say that “I’m not a great football supporter but I had a rhapsodic moment watching that” (72). The goal in question was one of spectacular grace and skill, forged out of almost nothing. As a hopeful ball came down into the box to Zidane and he contorted his body, rotating on his right foot and swinging his left across his body toward goal. The ball then curled into the top corner of the goal and eventually sealed the win for Spanish club Real Madrid, but interestingly this is not the aspect which Javier Marias chooses to focus on. In his essay Marias examines what it is that makes goal like Zidane’s truly beautiful.

Marias refers to the Zidane goal as one of the “supernatural ones” (72). These are goals that have a sense of impossibility about them, that “seem like gifts fallen from the sky.” One of the most interesting aspects of the essay is that the results of the goal itself play no significant role in how Marias defines its stature. In fact, Marias believes that the goal is wonderful, in part, “because the victory was icing on the cake” (73). But even then, if the goal had not been unexpected by everyone, even Zidane until the very last moment, the goal would not have been supernatural. A tremendous amount of weight is put on these two elements of the goal in defining its beauty. In these ideas is highlighted the fundamental conception of beauty in Spanish soccer: that it is something that is independent of victory and is found, most fundamentally, in improvisation. This is the reason that Holloway’s comparison of the goal to ballet is not entirely farfetched. There is a certain element of dance-like improvisation of the

moment in the goal that Zidane scored, and Marias' exploration of the moment further exposes the core of beauty in Spanish soccer.

As the essay closes, though, the beauty which the author examines earlier begins to transcend even simple art. So transfixed by the concept of improvisation and intention, Marias asks the questions "When did it come? When did it finally become intentional?" These questions take the discussion to a nearly philosophical level, delving into what it means to have purpose in an action and how that purpose, or even lack thereof, effects the beauty of the action. In the closing lines of the essay the author even takes the discussion to spiritual or religious heights. Just as he claimed earlier that supernatural goals are gifts fallen from the sky, he suggests that Zidane was able to recognize this gift because he, too, is fallen from the sky. "That's how he recognized it," Marias says, "and the gift became flesh, and then verb" (73). The last phrase carries with it Biblical echoes, posturing Zidane as almost a Christ figure. While this is certainly literary hyperbole, it functions to embody the concept of beauty in the player himself. The gift of transcendent beauty on the pitch takes form, if only momentarily, in the shape of a player, through whom the abstract can become a tangible action.

Rafael Alberti's poem "Platko," on the other hand, makes use of beauty in form to help further illustrate beauty on the field. The poem describes the play of Hungarian keeper Franz Platko in the Spanish King's cup final between Barcelona and Real Sociedad on May 20, 1928. The poem exhibits deep human sympathy, in part perhaps because the author is not a fan with a vested interest in either team. His perspective on the game allows him to appreciate the role on the field that the keeper plays without the bias of supporter enthusiasms.

In his article “Taking a turn ‘in the woods,’ confronting the goalkeeper’s choice”, John Turnbull suggests that an understanding of historical context is vital to Alberti’s poem. He points out that “Alberti refers to *camisetas reales* (royal jerseys) and *las doradas insignias* (golden emblems) of Real Sociedad, which means Royal Society. Alberti emphasizes that a team of monarchy—a monarchy propped up by dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera—plays a Catalan side of Republican resistance” (4). Previous to this game, supporters had been banned for three months from going to Barcelona matches after they had booed the Spanish national anthem. Turnbull says that Platko “transcends the goalkeeper’s natural position of anxiety and defends a 1-0 Barcelona victory,” continuing to find significance in the fact that “Platko is foreign, displaced, yet able to reclaim identity by backing a just cause” (5). The sense of beauty the author finds in the heroic Platko, then, has as much to do with the role he is playing, and the additional significance that each of his actions takes on in this role.

This idea leads into one of the key aspects of defining Platko’s actions and the beauty that Alberti sees in them. Not once is the score of the game mentioned, nor any significance given to Platko’s movements with regard to the game itself. The keeper is not revered for his ability to make a fantastic save or to step up and make a play at some crucial point in the match. Instead, it is Platko’s actions within a greater scheme that creates the beauty of situation that is so moving to the author. “Without your blood,” the poet says, “your instinct, your stops, your leaps,/ the insignias were frightened” (215). Here, it is not the athleticism of his movements that makes him beautiful, the “blond bear from Hungary,” but the purpose and meaning behind them. Later, Alberti even describes Platko as a force of nature, an embodiment of the wind:

It was the return of the wind.

The return of hope to the heart.

It was your return.

Heroic blue and crimson,

surged through air into the veins.

Wings, azure and white wings, broken,

embattled wings, whitewashed the pitch, plucked featherless.

And the air had legs,

a body, arms, a head (216).

In these lines Platko takes on almost godly characteristics, commanding the wind as well as the hopeful hearts of his companions. The beauty here is not just that of the subject matter, however, even if the image itself is beautiful. But the poetic techniques which Alberti employs add to the emotional impact the work has on the reader. The images he employs are sweeping and create in the reader a sense of what is at stake here, well beyond the reaches of a simple soccer match. He embodies the “rebel” side as insignias, lending them a sense of military cohesion and discipline, as well as the implication of a force fighting for some greater cause. Even the repetitive use of Platko’s name begins to sound like a plea in itself. The reader can almost hear the angst in the author’s voice as he cries in the closing lines of the poem “Oh Platko, Platko, Platko,/ so far from Hungary!” (217) The use of his name at the close of numerous lines further seems to have a similar effect, creating a beautiful sense of desperation in the poet’s voice. These techniques add

another level of poetic beauty to the work, illustrating the beauty of the keeper's actions not only on the field but in the words themselves.

## **Conclusion**

The relationships between these various football cultures and the cultural role they play are particularly interesting for individuals seeking to better understand these national communities. But what is equally interesting is the connections which seem to emerge between each of the metropolises and the peripheries from which the literary works emerge. Sport has long been used as a method of cultural imperialism and, in a much harsher sense, even a way of placating and distracting a hostile public. In our own time, the dis-ease which Americans feel with regard to the general failure of prototypically "American" sports to take hold and gain popularity in other countries reflects the important role that sport plays in spreading culture. The case for soccer is somewhat different since records seem to indicate the development of a game very similar to soccer in multiple corners of the globe without any interaction between them. There seems to be something about the game which naturally begs to be played. This being the case, cultural imperialism has less to do with spreading the game itself as with the role that the game plays or the structure and style of the game. Drawing on the research done above, connections can be drawn between African football and its English counterpart as well as between the game in Latin America and its Spanish predecessor.

Based on the discussion above, England's footballing culture is one largely of social definition. Backing a certain team implies a certain background of your own. Regional rivalries are inflated into conflicts with both social and economic motivations and implications. A fan

can, in a very real way, be defined by the team they support, making it little wonder how English fans become so famously passionate about their teams. The dangerous side of this passion is in extremes like hooliganism. This brand of identification widens gulfs between “us and them,” creates more reason to hate the other. Separation appears to be a key element to the English identification with the game, defining both sides as much as it pushes them apart. Paradoxically, though, an element of anonymity and the freedom of identity that produces is also present. In a sense, choosing to follow a team, knowing full well the socioeconomic implications that team carries, can allow a fan to choose their identity in a way that they could not upon birth. A suburban boy can pretend to be a thug and a thug can pretend to be well-off, if only for a few hours. Even here though, there is the strong sense of alienation between differing cultures within England.

England’s impact on African soccer can be seen by the survival of some of these same elements of social definition, but they manifest themselves in a far different way in the African game. While social definition in England seems to further stratify the population, this same sense of definition in Africa seems to result in unification. Soccer has often been regarded as a game in which individual character will inevitably show on the field, where the play will reflect the personality of the person or team playing. This element of the game seems particularly important in Africa as the unique and highly expressive style of African football brings nations together in ways that politics and religion have been unable to. The game even helps to instruct those who play it in how they should behave in daily life. Teams are forced, within their conditions, to make compromises in order to pursue the greater enjoyment of the game, and this attitude is then reflected in the way they view their national situation and how they choose to

treat others. It is particularly interesting to see how the very same element of the game can manifest itself in such different extremes on different soil.

Similarly, Spanish football shares certain key cultural elements with its colonial counterparts as reflected in the presented texts. Spanish football's obsession with beauty has fundamentally to do with style: an open style versus a defensive style, expression versus order. Here, not unlike the African nations which use football as a means of national and cultural identity, the beauty of their game becomes an end in itself. Winning or losing becomes, in a sense, secondary to playing a style that is both aesthetically pleasing and articulate. This same philosophy is reflected in literature about Spanish football, as what is emphasized is not the gravity of a goal or a performance in some specific situation. It is not whether the goal or save won or lost the match that is important, but rather the nature of the performance itself. Zidane's goal is what it is not because it was so important in the course of the tournament, but because of the creative process involved. Style is fundamentally definitive for Spanish football and plays a key role in establishing its identity.

In Latin America style also plays a fundamental identifying role, but in a far more divisive way. Playing styles, in the literature discussed, become indicative of certain regions creating geographical identifiers within the game itself. Playing styles mirror behavioral patterns and habits, creating an identification with certain ideologies and a greater divide between regions. Enrique shows just how jarring it can be to feel conflicted over which region to identify with and even the existential crisis that can occur. These very personal and deeply ingrained styles function on an individual level the same way as Spain's appreciation of their own style.

But within a larger network of varying approaches and geographical definition they can create separations that are fundamentally problematic.

Looking at different cultures of football literature cross culturally brings to light certain relationships between nations and certain constants within the game itself, but there is certainly more that could be done. The connections between individual nations and the style of game they play, as well as the role the game plays in their culture, is certainly a more sociological approach that could yield some very interesting research. It has been said that national mentalities can be seen reflected in the game their teams play on the field. “Watch the Italians with their emphasis on artistry (sometimes to the exclusion of scoring goals) and one begins to understand some of the attributes that gave birth to the Renaissance,” says English writer Peter Davies, “Follow the English as they forge ahead offensively, ignoring defense, and one glimpses what helped give rise to the industrial revolution and the wasted cities it left behind” (Stark 8). Ofcourse a more in-depth approach could always be taken with regard to the research conducted here.

Interactions between certain regions of Africa and French colonization could be explored, as well as the connections between the English game and other colonial offshoots such as Australia and the United States. Relations between the game and other regions of Great Britain like Scotland and Ireland could also be pursued.

One other direction to go would be to look closely at the culture of soccer literature in the United States as the game takes hold. Domestic soccer has made tremendous progress in the last decade, breaking free of its role as nothing more than a suburban past time. There is a core of US fans and players as dedicated and knowledgeable as any in Europe or South America, and this core group is growing stronger everyday. With that growth comes increased popular interest,

as evidenced by ESPN's recent dedication to airing soccer in the US. The United States is still very much in the process of developing its own soccer identity, and it will be interesting to see how this identity manifests itself in soccer literature in the homeland.

### **Acknowledgements**

This project has been a great joy to work on and I would like to thank those who made it possible. I would like to thank Dr. Delugach and Dr. Schenker for allowing me the opportunity to produce this work and giving me the go-ahead on a project that was not necessarily an orthodox one. I would like to thank Dr. Flint for acting as my advisor on this project, particularly for her help in organizing the larger framework of my ideas and for all her editing and suggestions along the way. And I would like to thank my friends and family who have put up with my incessant soccer talk during (and well before) the time I was working on this project.

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