MÁS QUE UN JUEGO: LIVES AT PLAY IN THE HISPANIC FOOTBALL NOVEL

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Abstract:

Football in the Hispanic World is king. This dissertation explores the significance and function of professional and international football in the Hispanic World as viewed through its fictional representation in four football novels. In each novel - one from Chile, Argentina, Spain, and Colombia - football plays a primary role in the broader societal institutions and exercises great influence over the lives of individuals both in and outside the formal “football world.” My analysis examines the way the literary representation of the game intervenes in the game’s real world history - Pinochet’s military coup of 1973, Argentina’s hosting and winning of the 1978 World Cup under military rule, Spain’s return to democratic rule and Barcelona’s preparations to host the 1992 Olympics, and the Colombian National team’s tragic performance at the 1994 World Cup during the informal rule of the infamous drug cartels - interrogating, revealing, affirming, and at times decrying, the use of the game for non-sporting ends, particularly the pursuit of political agendas and financial gain and the power relations which underlie and support the global game. By considering the subjective experiences of actors such as players, coaches, agents, ownership, and everyday people as represented in these novels, I explore the ways the sport has come to constitute much more than a game. This analysis shows literature, the novel in particular, to be a fruitful lens through which one may glean a deeper understanding of the power and importance this simple game wields in the lives of individuals and the state of nations in the Hispanic world.

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Introduction –

Football Club Barcelona is one of the richest and most famous football clubs in the world. Yet aside from the money, the glitz and glamor of their star players, and the obvious fact that they are, in legal terms, a football club, a professional sports entity, they are perhaps best known for their famous slogan: més que un club. This short but significant Catalan phrase is writ large in the history and culture of the institution, literally painted across the seats of their iconic stadium, Camp Nou. For club leadership, management, players, members, and fans alike, the club represents a number of values, ideals, and purposes that go beyond what transpires on the pitch.

Just as FC Barcelona is an example of a club, a team and a game that constitute much more than mere sport and spectacle, the central premise of this dissertation is the exceptional and significant nature of football, specifically professional football, in the Hispanic world.¹ ² Since its introduction to the American continent and its expansion

¹ A short explanation of terms: This dissertation will analyze four novels; three from Spanish America (Chile, Argentina and Colombia) and one from Spain. The transatlantic inclusion of Spain makes any one simple label difficult, such as Latin America or Spanish. Thus, I have opted for the phrase “hispanic world” to speak to the linguistic, cultural and geographical diversity present in a nevertheless shared cultural tradition. Additionally, I have opted for the term football to speak of the sport officially called “Association Football”; soccer in the United States and fútbol throughout the Spanish speaking world.

The assertion that football represents a field of exceptional meaning and importance in the Hispanic world does not imply that such is not the case in other parts of the globe. Indeed, there are many regions, nations, and traditions in which such a statement is equally true. However, this paper will focus on its significance specifically in the Hispanic tradition.

² I chose to include a Spanish novel and not limit the scope of my dissertation to only Latin America due to the longtime political, linguistic, artistic, and cultural connection between Spain and Spanish America. As one of the strongest football leagues and traditions in Europe, long since the most influential and powerful football region in the world, Spain is where most young Latin American children dream of playing, and the number of South American idols who have or currently are making their careers in La Liga is evidence of the importance of such a connection. Such a connection is similarly seen in many of the authors who write/wrote football fiction, such as Jorge Valdano and Roberto Bolaños, who relocated to Spain after having grown up in Latin America.
into Spain, via British port workers and expatriates at the turn of the 20th century, football has served many different purposes beyond the field of play, inspiring admiration and soliciting critique from participants and (dis)interested viewers the world over.

At first the game was perceived as a mark of civilizing modernity, a cultural import from Europe. Such a pursuit was suitable to and instrumental in the development of proper gentlemen: hence the nickname, the gentleman’s game. It was seen as a means of improving the physical and moral state of the nations. It encouraged strength and physical prowess, as well as teaching discipline, perseverance, teamwork, and cooperation. It constituted a passion of the people, serving to unify communities and nations. While some saw the sport as a means of genuine unity and noble patriotism, others deemed it an opiate of the people, distracting youth and ordinary citizens from social engagement that really mattered, and even as a mere facade to hide violence and corruption of political and economic elites. Indeed, it was Vicente Calderón, former president of Atlético de Madrid, who once said, “Football keeps people from thinking about more dangerous things” (Farred 85).

In short, many have extolled the virtues of the game, while others have vilified the less savory aspects of its influence on society. What both sides of the argument recognize is football’s undeniable presence and influence on society. Football is no longer, nor perhaps ever was, a simple game confined to the stadium or neighborhood field, rather, it has become “one of the most widely practiced, consumed, and debated cultural forms across South America [and Spain] (Wood 219).
In addition to the social and political ends for which football has been employed by those in positions of power, perhaps the most undeniable truth about the state of football now is that it is a “producto de consumo masivo, un espectáculo, un negocio” (Armus and Rinke 9). Since the onset of professionalism -first occurring in Spain and the Americas as early as the 1930s, with the last nations establishing a professional league as late as the 70s- the potential financial gain for players, coaches, agents, and owners transformed the game into industry. Eduardo Galeano puts it this way: “La historia del fútbol es un triste viaje del placer al deber. A medida que el deporte se ha hecho industria, ha ido desterrando la belleza que nace de la alegría de jugar porque sí. En este mundo del fin de siglo, el fútbol profesional condena lo que es inútil, y es inútil lo que no es rentable” (A sol y sombra 13). The game loses its ludic function as the imperative to win in pursuit of profit replaces the intrinsic motivation to play for fun.

Galeano goes on to highlight the gap that exists between the perception of the fan and the experience of the player now subject to a new sort of game not immediately visible to the casual observer. Where the young girl or boy sees the football star who gets paid to have fun, the player “que había empezado jugando por el placer de jugar, en las calles de tierra de los suburbios, ahora juega en los estadios por el deber de trabajar y tiene la obligación de ganar o ganar” (15). Such an image highlights the tension that arises as football takes on the status of más que un juego.

At this point it is worth asking whether professional football can even still be considered a game. In his study of the play-element in culture, Johan Huizinga seems to

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3 See Alabarces, Historia mínima, “Cobrar por jugar, jugar para cobrar” pp. 169-183.
agree with Galeano, that professionalization of the sport, which brings about “the increasing systematization and regimentation of sport” leads to a loss of the pure play-quality. He argues, “the spirit of the professional is no longer the true play-spirit; it is lacking in spontaneity and carelessness” (197). While there is certainly some merit to Huizinga’s argument, García Cames draws on another theorist of play, Roger Caillois, to argue that it is still possible to find play in the world of professional football. Caillois asserts that the notion of play stands on four fundamental characteristics, “la competencia (agon), el azar (alea), la imitación (mimicry) y el vértigo (ilinx)” (García Cames 270). The first two elements pertain more immediately to the players who compete on the field, while the latter two are more indicative of the fans.

While I agree with Huizinga and Galeano, in part, that in the purest sense of the word, professional football has ceased to be only a game, I find the four elements of play put forth by Caillois to be clearly evident, even in the highly regimented, measured and controlled world that is professional football today. Action on the pitch is still motivated in great measure by a love for the game,4 a desire to play, perform and compete and to do so by the rules. Nevertheless, players, coaches, agents and others are aware of the potential outcomes on-field actions can pose for their quality of life off it. The professionalization and politicization of football results in power struggles in which “el juego se ve sometido a los intereses que lo envuelven...y pasa a ser

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4 Alabarces remarks, I believe correctly, that regardless of the potential for social and financial ascent via football success, “posiblemente, la razón principal, y que no debe ser olvidada, por la que los hombres de las clases populares latinoamericanas comenzaron a jugar fútbol es porque la pasaban bien, muy bien” (Historia mínima 170).
considerado apenas como una forma de alcanzar determinados intereses políticos económicos alejados de la esfera original de la disputa agonística que se da en el fútbol” (García Cames 272). It is this tension between the nature of play, of the spirit of the game, and the requirements of business and politics, particularly the possibility of chance - essential in any real competition and sense of tension, inherent in play - which threaten the sure profit the games’ owners (clubs, sponsors, agents, politicians, etc.) and affects the power relations in football.

In considering the nature of said power relations I will rely primarily on the theoretical contributions of Michel Foucault, specifically his notions of biopower and biopolitics. Put simply, biopolitics is a system of governance or mode of subjectification that takes as its subject the administration of life and populations. Biopower is the means by which biopolitics is applied in society. This concern with the administration of life constitutes a shift in focus of the traditional notion of power, what Foucault calls sovereign power, which operates as a negative force; a ruler governed by restriction, submission, and elimination. The primary mode of governance was to “take life or let live” (Foucault 138). Biopower, on the other hand, is a positive mode of subjectification, in that it concerns itself with the management and control of bodies in life. Whereas the old sovereign power concerned itself with death, biopower is “concerned with the management of life by very “precise controls” and “comprehensive regulations” (Foucault 137). This form of power is meant to produce docile subjects, bodies employed to achieve the means and desires of those in power, which could be employed in a controlled workforce.
For Foucault, biopower operates through what he called a *dispositif*, which Deleuze renders as “social apparatus” (Deleuze 159). These social apparatuses function as “institutions of power”, yet they are not limited to solely political institutions. Some examples offered by Foucault are the family, schools, hospitals, the military, and prisons (Foucault 141). Each of these entities constitutes a sort of “disciplinary institution in which bodies can be corralled and marshalled” (Kelly 99). Organizations such as football clubs, regional and national football federations, and supporters’ groups, among others also function similarly, with the intent to organize and corral bodies into specific spaces and assign them roles within their social confines. Once the jurisdiction, so to speak, of one of these institutes of power is established, how is biopower applied to the bodies of a given social apparatus? Foucault argues that there are two poles of biopower, one of which he denominates as “anatamo-politics of the human body”. Such “anatamo-politics” are applied in society through forms of discipline aimed towards “the optimization of [the body’s] capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls” (139). The other is what he calls the biopolitics of the population, dealing with level of health, longevity of life and other such factors.

My argument is that biopower plays a significant role in the socio-cultural phenomenon of football in the Hispanic World. The power relations in the footballing arena are both profoundly affected by the mechanisms of biopower and a tool of biopower exercised over larger swaths of society as a means of perpetuating economic and political hierarchies. My study will examine the social apparatuses associated with
football in society as portrayed, interrogated, and problematized in literature:

considering football clubs, including directors, fans, and players, national teams, and the international footballing community as dispositifs.

It is at this juncture of the imposition of and potential resistance to power relations between the game of football and the larger political and economic forces in society that I argue literature constitutes a fruitful field of study to think about football, not only the intricacies of the game itself, but, more importantly, the effects of such a massive cultural form on society at large as well as on the lives of the individuals immersed in such a culture.

Due in large part to the general disdain that many intellectuals, both on the left and the right, have had for football, an assumption exists that there is no good football fiction. Nevertheless, while critical academic study of football fiction is only just starting to pick up, there is indeed a rich canon of football literature, written by well-established and esteemed authors as well as lesser-known ones. Canonical writers such as Horacio Quiroga, Jorge Luis Borges, Augusto Roa Bastos, Roberto Bolaño, Mario

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5 By using the term “football literature” I do not employ it as a denomination of its own genre or subgenre, rather as Juan Sasturain puts it, as merely “tema literario: es apenas uno más. Se puede hacer buena literatura o basura con él: hay ejemplos abundantes en ambos sentidos. No define un género ni una subclase…” (“Con palabras a la cancha” http://www.elortiba.org/old/pasastu.html). For this work, I have chosen texts that I believe to be good literature which incorporate football as a principal theme.

6 In the introduction to their anthology of football short stories (as recent as 2019), Shawn Stein and Nicolás Campisi state, “There are no extensive bibliographies in existence and surprisingly few critical studies of Latin American football fiction” (8). For the most complete examples of both bibliographies and critical studies of Spanish language football literatures see David Wood’s Football and Literature in South America (2017) and David García Cames’ La jugada de los tiempos: fútbol, mito, y literatura (2018).

7 Borges is most well-known for his public disdain of the sport. Nevertheless, he composed, together with his friend Bioy Cáseres, one of the most oft read football short stories, “Esse est percipi”.

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Vargas Llosa, Mario Benedetti, Camilo José Celá, Rafael Alberti and others have produced stunning works of literature with football as a central theme.

Among the literature produced, the majority is either poetry or short stories. These examples often focus on a single player or event, describing the play on the field and drawing the reader's attention to the experience of playing (Wood 218). As García Cames puts it, “tradicionalmente se ha considerado el cuento como la [forma] más idónea para transmitir y hacer llegar al lector aquello que se vive y padece en la cancha” (32). Nevertheless, there are indeed many examples of footballing novels which often distinguish themselves in style from the short stories in that they “focus on the social and political framework within which football is practised, and on the discourses through which it is constituted, rather than on the action of football as practice” (Wood 218). This focus on the context in which football is practiced, understood, and discussed and attention to the political and social influence on the game and vice versa, as well as the space to contribute to a less studied form of football fiction led me to focus on the Hispanic football novel.

The novels I analyze in this dissertation are narratives that first and foremost assert that football is much more than a game and show how the many individuals who participate in and/or are touched by the action and influence of the global game experience the complex phenomenon of football in their everyday lives, for better and for worse. More than a win or a loss, what is at play in the beautiful game is life itself.

The present project takes as its objects of study four Spanish language novels that have football as a central or prominent theme. Each of these novels was chosen for
the fact that it corresponds to a specific moment in which football was seen publicly as an important element in the historical and social developments of their respective nations.

Antonio Skármeta writes and then publishes his novel, *Soñé que la nieve ardía*, from exile in 1975 as a direct response to the 1973 military coup and subsequent dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. At the time, football most visibly reflected on the nation in light of the events surrounding the national team’s efforts to qualify for the 1974 World Cup and the use of the national stadium as a detention center and torture site.

Martín Kohan takes the 1978 World Cup held in Argentina, a tournament in which Argentina would end up as champion, as the temporal and geographical frame for his chilling novel, *Dos veces junio*. Published in 2002, more than twenty years after the events in narrates, the novel shows how deeply that footballing victory, achieved at the expense of moral and political loss, remains engraved on the Argentine psyche and how significant an event it is in both Argentine history and the lives of so many individuals who lived through it.

The third novel, *El delantero centro fue asesinado al atardecer* (1989), by Spanish writer Manuel Vásquez Montalbán, takes place in the years just prior to the 1992 Olympic Games to be held in Barcelona. Along with the Olympics, the megaevent that looms large in the memories of Spaniards, Catalonians, and football fans the world over is the famed European Championship victory of the 1992 FC Barcelona squad. Both the Olympics and the European Championship brought attention to post-Franco Spain,
recently returning to democratic rule and increased international presence eager to prosper and present the best image possible to the rest of the world.

Last, both in publication (2009) as well as historical referent, is the novel *Autogol*, by Colombian author Ricardo Silva Romero. The novel focuses on the events surrounding the Colombian national team at the 1994 World Cup, specifically the tragic murder of the beloved Andrés Escobar after he scored an own goal which ultimately resulted in the team’s elimination from the tournament and the forfeiture of the best generation of Colombian footballers to stand out on the world stage. Football was desperately promoted as an alternative national symbol to the drugs and violence of the infamous drug cartels, specifically the reputation and image of Pablo Escobar.

Each of these novels takes as its subject a very well-known historical event or time period in Latin America or Spain. Yet my analysis of such narratives aims to explore and reveal not the macro vision of large historical events but rather the personal experiences of “aquellos personajes que...protagonizan [en el fútbol], universo simbólico donde capturar experiencias fundamentales del ser humano” (García Cames 30). Good football literature helps the reader to “pensar...que las jugadas públicas que vemos en la cancha tienen una vida privada desconocida para la mayoría del público” (30).

The greatest amount of existent literary criticism is by and large focused on the more well-known corpus of short stories. Of the four novels I’ve selected, *Delantero* and *Soñé* are the two which have received the most critical attention. However, most of the articles written on these novels focus on the non-footballing action and themes. My
research focuses primarily on the relationships between the football action on the pitch and its extra-ludic/sporting consequences and societal influence. In each of these novels the actions of powerful individuals and institutions influence players and coaches to act in certain ways on the pitch which contaminate the purity of the game. Such confluence of non-sporting interests in a specific football action similarly imbues the play on the pitch with meaning beyond the mere purposes of the sport. A shot, a pass, a goal or a rash action on the pitch which affects a game in a way contrary to the interest of the non-sporting actors can carry dire consequences, financially, physically or socially. Likewise, a sporting outcome or any number of in-game actions which coincide with the desires and occasional mandates of such powers can result in added gain, in money, fame, status and influence. The quality of life, the control over one’s own or that of many others, and at times even the question of life or death, often hang in the balance when the teams and players take to the field to “play a game”. My analysis of these novels will show how football is only ever, yet never only a game. There is always much more at stake than a mere win or a loss.

I have chosen to treat each novel and historic period/event as a sort of case study. The literary account and representation of each episode highlights several different perspectives all of which highlight a different manner in which football transcends the limits of a game and influences the private and public lives of its protagonists. The chapters are ordered chronologically, referring to the time period of the novel -not the publication date- and proceed as follows.
In Chapter 1 we will examine Antonio Skármeta’s novel, *Soñé que la nieve ardía* (1975), which explores the convergence of football and politics. This chapter contests the notion that some football thinkers have put forward that there exists a clear style of play corresponding to both a “fútbol de izquierdas” and “de derechas” and questions whether there is indeed a “proper political form of football” (Critchley 7). Rather than propose one “correct” political hermeneutics of football, we will explore the ways the language of play and sports symbolism are used to express and represent both sides of the political spectrum. A close reading of the novel reveals the depth and complexity of political representation in football and allows us to discern how the author uses the sport to both level political criticism and educate readers on the political issues of his time.

Chapter two will look more closely at the way state actors can and have used football as a tool for social control and nationalist propaganda. The 1978 World Cup is most famous for having been won by the host nation during the height of a military government. Martín Kohan’s depiction of life during both the 1978 and 1982 World Cups in his novel, *Dos veces junio* (2002) draws on the analogy of football as war by other means to reveal what the junta tried to conceal with their hosting and control of the World Cup -that being the atrocious crimes committed against their own citizens in their attempts to cure the nation of the ills of leftist, socialist, communist ideology. Like the previous chapter, my analysis of this novel shows not only the mechanisms of power relations which function within the footballing world, but rather how football itself is used as a tool to discipline and control the nation as a whole.
While the first two chapters focus primarily on the political potential of football and the influence of the game on society at large, Chapter three shifts its focus to the financial interests that motivate the rich to invest in football. Though the novel, *El delantero centro fue asesinado al atardecer* (1989), by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, does use football to draw important comparisons between Francoist Spain and that of the democratic Transition, the main thrust of my analysis will focus on the physical, mental and emotional toll exacted from players in the pursuit of profit. We will consider the commonalities as well as the differences that exist amongst players in all levels of the professional game and deconstruct the myth of the homogenous millionaire footballer. Lastly, our examination of the president of FC Barcelona opens a door into the inner workings of one of the biggest and most successful football clubs in the world.

The final chapter will continue to explore the economic benefit of association with football. Ricardo Silva Romero presents the reader with a striking representation of *narcofútbol* in his novel *Autogol* (2009). Much like the previous chapter, the death of a star player is at the center of the story. We will consider the sporting imperative to win at all costs and examine the ways in which individuals and the country as a whole lost themselves out of desperation to secure a win in football, they felt could restitute all the loss they had incurred during years of the drug conflict.

In his book *Niños futbolistas*, Juan Pablo Meneses articulates what each of these novels demonstrates in their own unique way:
El fútbol en América Latina es, con todo, mucho más que dinero. Más que traspasos y managers y agentes y ventas y comisiones y niños transferidos... se trata de una pasión, una descarga, una locura, una catarsis, un sueño, un grito, un gol, un goooool...

En América Latina el fútbol es importante. Eso debe quedar claro. Y no solo por su relación con la política, con las pasiones de Estado.... Va más allá del manejo que hicieron de este deporte las dictaduras latinoamericanas. Y más allá del ocio como industria en el continente con mayor desigualdad del planeta. El fútbol es algo serio, como cualquier locura. (99)

These four novels offer a penetrating view into the intricacies of a sport, an industry, a way of life, that even though it is ‘just a game’ has come to represent so much more. In these novels people live and die for football. It will always only be 22 players chasing a ball around a field for 90 minutes, but somehow it will also be much more as well.
Chapter 1 - Playing Politics: Style of play as ideology in *Soñé que la nieve*

ardía

“Juego, luego soy: el estilo de jugar es un modo de ser, que revela el perfil propio de cada comunidad y afirma su derecho a la diferencia. Dime cómo juegas y te diré quién eres[.]”

-Eduardo Galeano

In a column published in 2002, the Spanish author Manuel Vázquez Montalbán mused over an idea shared with him by fellow football intellectual/writer, ex-player and manager, the Argentine Jorge Valdano. Vásquez Montalbán relates Valdano’s assertion that there exists a clear distinction between “fútbol de izquierdas” and “fútbol de derechas”: “Según me reveló Valdano, el fútbol creativo es de izquierdas y el meramente de fuerza, marrullería y patadón es de derechas”. In his chapter exploring the sporting, personal, social and political profile of the Brazilian midfielder Sócrates, Daniel Gutti draws upon this thesis, unpacking and contesting it, to establish the potential political significance expressed through the beautiful game. Gutti’s analysis of Valdano’s thesis challenges the simple conclusion that there is one clear-cut way of playing fútbol de izquierda and/or fútbol de derechas. Rather than revise Valdano’s thesis and propose his own theory of football politics, the main takeaway is that football is inevitably political, in both explicit and implicit ways. Any theory ascribing one clear

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8 For the full article, see https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=10450
9 The Brazilian midfielder, Sócrates, is most famously remembered for his spearheading the historic *Democracia Corintiana*, wherein the players actively voted on every decision regarding the club and the team as a way of embodying lived democracy in a Brazil under authoritarian reign. His use of football to promote the ideas of democracy and even socialism stand in stark contrast to the nationalist and military rhetoric with which the dictatorship of Medici presented and utilized in the World Cup triumph of 1970, just a decade earlier. See Gatti, Daniel. “Balón Rojo” in *El equipo soñado, 20 goles de perfil*. Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental. 2018, Pp 96-109. Print.
cut distinction between a football of the left and that of the right will inevitably have expectations and contradictions. Yet this is the beauty and richness of reading the political in football. Football constitutes a rich and complex lens through which one can examine the politics of a given region, nation or individual, or serve as a powerful means to communicate political ideals, morals, and values.

Valdano draws his political distinctions based on the sole criteria of style of play. I, along with Gutti, argue that a political hermeneutics of football can be found in several different aspects of the game, not just a general style of team play. Different player positions and formations, individual as well as team’s style of play and tactics, clubs’ origins and historical traditions, demographics of a club’s supporters, and club’s association with political figures of power all embody specific political meaning and can serve as powerful rhetorical tools to argue for any number of varying schools of political thought. Football is truly an empty signifier, capable of serving the means of varied and even opposing schools of thought, historical tradition, or political and personal agendas.

Historically, football in Latin America, as a practice and as an object of study, has most often been ignored or disregarded as a mere “opium of the people” or “bread and circus”; a cultural phenomenon and practice not worthy of serious consideration or status within modern societies. While politicians could see a natural and significant relationship and use for the game among the masses, the sport itself was long derided by intellectuals and artists on both sides of the divide. Eduardo Galeano, one of the sport's most prominent and influential ambassadors, expended great effort in his
writing and interactions with his fellow writers and intellectuals to combat the stereotypical judgments passed by the political right and left. In his assessment, both sides drew generalized conclusions which failed to see the full picture of the nature of football and its effect on the general populations which hold it dear:

El desprecio de muchos intelectuales conservadores se funda en la certeza de que...poseída por el fútbol, la plebe piensa con los pies.... El instinto animal se impone a la razón humana, la ignorancia aplasta a la Cultura, y así la chusma tiene lo que quiere.

En cambio, muchos intelectuales de izquierda descalifican al fútbol porque castra a las masas y desvía su energía revolucionaria...[H]ipnotizados por la pelota...los obreros atrofian su conciencia y se dejan llevar como un rebaño por sus enemigos de clase. (68)

Such criticism, fears and stereotypes of the most popular sport and cultural practice of Latin America also point to football’s appeal for political leaders the world over. David Goldblatt affirms this historical disdain of the beautiful game and goes a step further to argue that such condemnation of the sport, specifically from the political left, only further fomented the use of the sport by those they most disdained. “For the most part...and for most of the twentieth century, the left tended, and not without good reason, to see fútbol as mere bread and circuses. In doing so, of course, it left the field open to the right, who were only too happy to score a hatful of goals for their variety of unpleasant military dictatorships and post-junta governments” (162).
Such a perspective arose from having witnessed multiple authoritarian and fascist governments employ the sport to serve their ideological and social ideals of social Darwinism and exert control over their respective populations. The most blatant examples are the 1934 World Cup, hosted by Mussolini’s Italy and won by the azzurri,\textsuperscript{10} the 1936 Olympics in Hitler’s Germany, Franco’s blatant connection to and use of Real Madrid and the nation’s premiere football tournaments\textsuperscript{11}, and closer to home, Getulio Vargas’ use of the game to write a new kind of national identity, incorporating previously marginalized communities, particularly the black population, and promoting economic, technological, and artistic development through the positivism of his new “Estado Novo” of the 40s and 50s.\textsuperscript{12}

While each of these historical examples are unique and complex in their own way, the basic ideas that motivated their use of the game are the same. As one example, Michael Correia offers a glimpse of the manner in which sports, football in particular, were viewed by these right-wing leaders of the time. In the context of Mussolini’s Italy, he writes, “La política deportiva mussoliniana aspira a formar futuros

\textsuperscript{10} The azzurri is the common name by which the Italian national team is known. For more on this subject see “Una pequeña forma de decir ‘no’: Italia, USSR, España: Los estadios en los regímenes totalitarios”, by Mickaël Correia, in his book, \textit{Una historia popular del fútbol} (2019).

\textsuperscript{11} “…consciente de que los españoles son fervientes amantes del esférico, en 1939 el poder ordena a la Federación Española de Fútbol que cambie el nombre de la Copa del Rey por el de “Copa del Generalísimo”. El Rojo de las camisetas de la selección nacional es reemplazado por el azul falangista y los aficionados son exhortados a entonar el himno fascista \textit{Cara al sol} y gritar desde las gradas “¡Viva Franco!” (Correia 129). “Bajo el régimen franquista, el digno representante de la furia en los estadios españoles e internacionales es el Real Madrid Club de Fútbol. Equipo favorito del Caudillo, la Casa Blanca -referencia a sus uniformes blancos- encarna, tanto para el régimen como para los aficionados, la unidad de la nación española y el centralismo del Estado” (130).

soldados, listos para defender a la patria, y a hacer surgir un hombre nuevo, orgullo de una nación sana y regenerada” (my emphasis 112). These historical examples of football’s significance in the hands of authoritarian leaders is what led to the political left’s criticism and avoidance of the sport and ironically created the space and opportunity for the atrocious examples of dictatorship football seen throughout the continent from the 60s to the late 80s.\textsuperscript{13}

Ironically, a very similar language is used to articulate the aims of the leaders of a small club in Jesús María, Argentina, El Club Social, Atlético y Deportivo Ernesto Che Guevara. For this club, its leadership, fans, and players, football is also a useful means to accomplish a greater end in the development of the players. In his book, Niños futbolistas, Juan Pablo Meneses reports, “la idea de la presidenta del club, es que de aquí salgan los nuevos líderes de la barriada, los agentes del cambio social de las zonas pobres de la ciudad de Jesús María. Antes que luminarias, dicen aquí, de este club debería salir el Hombre Nuevo. Proyecto incluso más ambicioso que el de formar estrellas de fútbol” (my emphasis 91-92). Though one utterance is that of the president of a nation and the other that of a provincial lower league football club, they both illustrate the significance of the beautiful game to affect the lives, character and formation of individuals and in doing so shape communities, clubs and even nations according to the tenants of a given ideology or philosophy.

\textsuperscript{13} Football was a powerful tool for social control, image white-washing, and political maneuvering in all the dictatorships of the region, including Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Brazil, and Paraguay.
Like the previously mentioned example of Italy under Mussolini, Chile’s political and social elite also saw the popular acceptance of football throughout society as an invitation to influence the game’s institutions as a way to mold the nation and its people. In his “historia política” of Chilean football, Daniel Matamala recognizes and articulates the nascent ideas of football’s potential effect on the nation’s people. “Esta idea del deporte [circa 1927] como instrumento para ‘eliminar las lacras que aniquilan moral e intelectualmente al pueblo’, desterrando el alcoholismo y otros vicios y mejorando la constitución física de la población, puede adivinarse detrás de todas las primeras intervenciones estatales en el deporte” (22). Similarly, it is around this time that Chile’s tradition of democratic stability begins to form, a time in which the support of the working and popular classes are essential for political power. It is in this context in which football is viewed as something “capaz de arrastrar grandes masas de aficionados, justo en un momento en que esas masas adquieren vital importancia para la consecución o mantención del poder del Estado” (Matamala 25). This school of thought and consequent state intervention in the sport would grow steadily in the subsequent decades and while many of the traditional intellectuals, both left and right, had their reasons to disregard the sport as a potential source of culture, art, and thought, such an opinion of the masses and popular culture would begin to change with the emergence of the “post-boom literature”, a critical and aesthetic movement of which Skarmetá was “perhaps the most representative writer” (Giardinelli 2). As such, Skármeta’s recourse to football is indicative of that most telling characteristic of the literature of the time, “namely a shift... towards interest in the social and the political
situation in the region” (Shaw 8-11) as well as “an emphasis on youth and youth culture” (Wood 103).

It is a common trope, seen in the view of fans, pundits, and even football administrators, that football as an institution - meaning its clubs, (con)federations, and players should refrain from explicitly espousing any political messaging or advocacy. One of FIFA’s official statutes specifically prohibits any of its members to promote any political message, party, candidate, etc. and the organization has oft fined and/or punished teams and players for such violations.\footnote{The most explicit instance of this rule is found in Law 04 The Players Equipment, in the official document “The Laws of the Game 2018/19” published by IFAB (The International Football Association Board), which specifically prohibits “any political, religious or personal slogans, statements or images. Players must not reveal undergarments that show political, religious, personal slogans, statements or images, or advertising other than the manufacturer’s logo. For any offence the player and/or the team will be sanctioned by the competition organiser, national football association or by FIFA”.

Though many would like to see football as an escape from the drama, conflict and commitment of politics, the novel I analyze in this chapter, Soñé que la nieve ardía, shows that football is always political. Skármeta illustrates the profound political history of Chile’s most important clubs and its national team, great regional and national institutions, and also illuminates the depth and richness found in football, in its rules, positions, tactics, etc. and shows how such symbolism can be used to communicate particular political ideals and preferences through its literary representation.

In the novel, sport generally and football specifically constitutes “the means by which Skármeta explores social relations and the position of the individual in relation to existential issues” (Wood 104). Skármeta employs “the language of play and the symbolism of sport...[in] an effort to achieve communication between the political
leadership and the masses...” (Wood 104) For him, football functions as a rhetorical tool capable of powerfully and effectively conveying and challenging different ideologies and practices which pervaded the political and social context of his country in the years building up to and immediately following the military coup of September 1973. His representation of the role of football in Chilean society and politics, the historical context of the nation’s most important teams, and the specific style of play of potential young footballing talents show the political potential of football on both sides of the spectrum. While his novel seems to present a vote for “fútbol de izquierda”, the debate represented in the character arc of the protagonist serves to illustrate its potential to embody multiple schools of ideological thought.

*Soñé que la nieve ardía (1975)* was Skármeta’s first novel and was written/completed and published in exile as a direct response to the Pinochet regime which had assumed power just two years prior. David Wood describes it as “an attempt to make sense of the country’s recent political landscape and offer a vision of resistance and hope in the face of the Pinochet regime” (105). The novel tells the story of Arturo, an adolescent boy who leaves his home in rural southern Chile, to go to Santiago and make it big as a soccer player and to meet women. The narrative follows Arturo as he arrives in Santiago at the beginning of the year 1973 and encounters the political and social agitation coursing through the city. It is here where he meets a small group of youth activists, fervent members of Allende’s ruling party, Unidad popular.

In the months leading up to the infamous coup of Sept 11, 1973, Arturo is forced to confront and navigate the tension between his individual goals of becoming a
wealthy and famous footballer, plying his skills at one of the country’s biggest professional clubs, and the persistent invitations of his new friends and housemates intent on opening his eyes to the political reality of the moment and join the efforts of the Unidad Popular to defend and protect the government of the people, embodied in Allende’s administration. The novel is a sort of political coming of age story, in which football is presented as a potential manifestation of the politics of the time as well as a distraction and escape from the responsibilities of a true citizen and a real man. Arturo’s play on the field and the way he prioritizes his time, energy and focus are all symbolic of his struggle to mature and assume the ‘proper’ political stance.

From the outset Arturo is presented as a solitary figure, doggedly insistent on his personal freedom. Yet such freedom is not as positive as one might assume. Skármeta gives nuance to Arturo’s declared freedom by presenting him in a way which shows not only freedom, but also loneliness, isolation, and detachment. We first meet Arturo as he stands on the platform with his grandfather awaiting the arrival of his train. This picture of a family, of Arturo as one of a group and belonging to a community, is immediately broken when he imagines the train’s arrival at the station. “Vendría el tren para él...para que él, solo él, lo montara” (my emphasis, 10). Arturo dreams of leaving his family behind, abandoning the family, community, and communal work expected of him, to head off by himself to the big city.

Arturo’s individualistic and selfish desires and actions are called into question from the outset. His grandfather tells him, “Si su señor padre hubiera tenido más hijos usted no sería mi nieto predilecto. Mi nieto estaría trabajando con nosotros” (my
emphasis 10). And when his grandfather introduces him to another traveler, asking him
to keep an eye on his grandson, the narrator describes how, “sonriéndole [el abuelo]
acusó a Arturo con el dedo. - Éste es mi nieto - dijo-. Él juega al fútbol. Va para el norte”
(my emphasis 12-13). The allure of football and his hope to “triunfar, no más” (11), on
his own, away from the bonds, commitment, and responsibility of family, atomize
Arturo and set him and his desires and actions apart from the ideal set for him by his
family.

This freedom and lack of attachment or commitment is highlighted once again in
his first interaction with his housemates. When Arturo hesitates to answer the question
of his political allegiance, Susana, the immediate object of attraction for young Arturo,
proceeds to ask him about his football allegiance. “Conque eres bueno para el
fútbol...en qué equipo juegas?” (42). Having just arrived in Santiago, and not having
been recruited by any team beforehand, he responds, “en ninguno...soy independiente”
(42). As Arturo expresses it, “independiente” would seem to have a positive connotation
of freedom and liberty, nevertheless, what it really means in this context is that he has
no team. He has no place of belonging, no community or team to work with or to
support him. He is entirely dependent on himself to succeed or fail, to live or die. This is
problematic on a political and social level as well as a sporting one.

Of course, the necessities of life - a place to stay, food to eat, the need for
sociality - will force Arturo to continually (re)evaluate his position regarding his place in
and relationship to a community. As he disembarks from the train in Estación Central,
Arturo is met by a certain Don Manuel, who offers him accommodation in his hotel. It is
here where Arturo first encounters the political fervor of the city, specifically the activism of the youth of Unidad Popular. In the pension he is presented with a new potential community, almost all of which are active members of the leftist party. The explicit political nature of life in Santiago and the pension are impossible to avoid as are the interactions with his new companions. As he takes his first steps into his new home, he finds a few of them, el ‘Negro’, el ‘Gordo’, Susana and Carlos, in the midst of a debate regarding the state of the party and the threat of the political right to their progress and future aims.

The pension is immediately and explicitly marked as leftist ‘territory’ by “la foto del presidente con sus gruesos carrillos y anteojos de profesor provinciano y el orgulloso pecho de palomo con la cinta tricolor condecorándoselo” (Skármeta 35) hung on the wall directly in front of him. The debate is in response to el Negro’s assertion, “ya salgamos a la calle y enfrentemos a los huevones”...which el Gordo makes explicitly political by correcting his companion, “no son ‘ueones son fascistas ‘hueón” (36). This group of Allende supporters, leftist, socialist youth groups, feel challenged and even attacked by the “faschista” right, embodied in “los pacos”15 and “los milicos” (36). While his new housemates debate the pros and cons of resorting to physical violence,16 questions of the nature of power and who holds it,17 political control of public space,18

15 “Pacos” is Chilean slang for the police, formally known as “los carabineros”.
16 “Lo que tenís que ver primero...es si el enfrentamiento ahora nos conviene...porque si nos sacan de la legalidad alto nos meten los milicos de atrasito” (36).
17 “El problema real es el del poder dijo la Susana” (36).
18 “Ni siquiera la calle es de la izquierda, se la tenemos que dejar para sus viejas, sus cacerolas y sus lolos, por la chucha...” (37).
and the idea of progress in the nation, Arturo merely stands there, silently
“[agarrándose] de la pelota como si fuera un poste” (35). The image of Arturo gripping the ball tightly, as a sort of safety object, in the midst of a political debate shows his political immaturity and lack of commitment to a serious cause. Such an image shows “the contrast between Arturo’s reliance on football as his source of strength and identification, and the equivalent support and inspiration the others find in the portrait of President Allende, symbol of commitment to the political cause” (Wood 106).

Arturo’s introduction to this new community of fellow tenants and his first interactions with them serve to highlight just how stark a difference there is between the two sides. Don Manuel tells the group, “Y dice el joven aquí es futbolista” to which they all respond simply by “mirándolo así como así, como si pasaran delante de una vitrina que exhibe un traje y se acercaran un poco a mirar el precio” (Skármeta 42).

Unlike the young activists, Arturo is not a student or a factory worker. He is a footballer. Their reaction makes it obvious to Arturo and to the reader that they believe such an occupation, if one can call it that, is of little societal value. Rather than a valued individual who offers a needed good or service to the people, his new companions see him as if he were a mere luxury product whose worth is determined solely by the demands of the free market and offers little if any real value to those who choose to consume it. This first encounter between Arturo and the young activists seems to

19 “La conciencia del pueblo no se echa atrás, por qué no cachái que tenemos problemas pero vamos bien Guatón” (37).

20 Conversely, Daniel Matamala reports that even by the 1930s in Chile, “los precios de las entradas de los partidos de fútbol pasan a engrosar la lista de productos y servicios de primera necesidad para, en tal condición, ser fijados, temporada a temporada, por las autoridades del Ministerio de Economía” (my emphasis 34).
present football as an activity unworthy of the attention of a committed citizen, a primarily individualistic and capitalist activity - representative of the neoliberal economic and political agenda of the political right - which places it opposite the communal, selfless focus and efforts of the political left, working hard to defend the democratic socialist project of the Allende government.

While his new companions recognize that Arturo does not share their political convictions they are not exclusionary. Instead, they invite this newly arrived young man to join them at one of the party’s volunteer work days. Once again, just as with his grandfather, Arturo chooses the individual pursuit of football greatness, rather than community and social work. He turns down the invitation by saying, “yo quiero entrenar todos todos los días, incluso el domingo...y además yo soy apolítico” (my emphasis, Skármeta 43). Arturo is focused entirely on his football, an arena he naively assumes to be apolitical, as he believes he is. His is in fact a perfect example of a specific group of footballers to which Carlos Caszely called attention in this precise historical moment. Brenda Elsey reports, “Carlos Caszely, one of the few outspoken leftist players, warned that professional footballers would not support the Popular Unity government. He predicted, ‘Among players, a group exists that generally defines itself as apolitical, but at

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21 It is important to note that such a simple division of left and right is not representative of the nuances of political philosophy or the lived experience of politics in Chile, let alone any other nation. Nevertheless, the novel portrays the debate in mostly generalized viewpoints, perhaps due to the political illiteracy of its protagonist. For example, when el Negro asks Arturo about his political affiliation, another one of the companions, Mari, explains, “que si eres de izquierda no hay ningún problema, que aquí nadie es sectario si eres de izquierda” (42). Such a remark admits the variety in specific schools of leftist politics while simultaneously reasserting a shared viewpoint among those differences. Therefore my discussion of left and right will follow the basic tenets of each side as given in the novel.

22 The central thesis of Quique Peinado in his book, Futbolistas de Izquierda (2013), is that if you’re not revolutionary/leftist then you are of the right. For him, the “apolitical” is a myth or a lie. If you support the ‘status quo’ you are part of the right, the conservative establishment most often in power.
the decisive moment, like most of the ‘apolitical,’ it will identify with the Right’” (233). To claim to be ‘apolitical’ in the novel, as in Chilean society at the time, was interpreted as a way of implicitly identifying and sympathizing with the Right when push came to show.

Though Arturo has yet to embody or propose any explicitly right-wing political thought or policy in the novel, the opening pages present the reader with two markedly leftist communities, the rural campesino workers and the young urban activists of the Unidad Popular, who make concerted efforts to assimilate or convert Arturo to the social cause which he forcefully refuses in a sustained effort to assert his individuality and pursue a place in the upper echelons of society through wealth, sporting accolades, and fame. In a moment in which Chile is governed by a democratically elected socialist president seeking to consolidate power, win over social approval, and stave off the attacks from the right, Arturo stands as a symbol, first, of resistance, later, as a challenge before eventually becoming a sympathizer, to the socialist project of Allende’s government and the Unidad Popular. Skármeta’s choice to make Arturo a footballer then places the professional football industry in opposition to the political left. Football, as Arturo understands, practices and pursues it, is most definitely a potential socioeconomic ladder, characterized by meritocracy, nevertheless, the novel also shows the game’s potential to embody and express tenets and values of the political left, thus complicating a simple black and white political interpretation. By showing the competing systems of meaning/interpretation, Skármeta illuminates football’s political and social potential in the lived experience of communities and nations as well as the
game’s symbolic and literary potential to support and challenge different political ideologies, policies, parties and individuals.

**Football as “work”?**

Arturo’s use of football as the reason for his escape from both left-leaning communities both serves to guide the reader’s reading, finding in his description of the teams, the game, the market, etc. as potential right-wing discourse, and an invitation to consider the validity of such a hypothesis. Does football and therefore footballers constitute a space governed and controlled by the Right, either as a historical accident or by some innate aspect of the sport itself. Additionally, such a reaction from the committed and active party members of Unidad Popular to the revelation that Arutro is a footballer prompts the question, “is professional football work?” Should footballers be considered “workers” just the same as the factory worker or the miner (or any number of other industrial roles)?

This criticism of Arturo’s choice of football as a vocation and the distinction between playing football and “real” work is present from the first pages of the novels. According to his grandfather, Arturo’s choice to pursue a football career in the city is a choice to abandon the communal work expected of him. He even tells his grandson, as a response to Arturo’s stated desire to play football, “*Mi nieto estaría trabajando con nosotros*” (my emphasis, Skármeta 10). Family ties come with a certain sense of obligation, just like that of a nation. A loyal citizen should work hard in a worthwhile job that contributes to society, just as a worthwhile grandson should work alongside his family to help provide for the whole.
When his grandfather introduces him to a fellow traveler on the train platform, asking him to keep an eye on his grandson, the narrator describes how, “sonriéndole [el abuelo] acusó a Arturo con el dedo” (my emphasis, Skármeta 12). And just what is Arturo “accused” of? The grandfather continues, “Éste es mi nieto - dijo. Él juega al fútbol” (13). The potential weight of this criticism is seen when compared to the other ways Artur’s life choice is presented by other characters in the novel. When he is introduced to his new housemates, Don Manuel says “el joven dice ser futbolista”. In one instance Arturo “plays football” and in the other he “is a footballer”. The grandfather’s description of Arturo’s actions presents them as a child merely playing a game. Football, to him, is nothing more than a game or leisure activity, which detracts from real work. And while the reaction of his housemates doesn’t provide an endorsement for football as a worthwhile occupation, it does at least admit that football as work is a readily understood and perhaps even accepted profession in the city.

Aside from Arturo and the personal criticism he receives from his family and peers regarding his choice of profession, the novel also shows how important the theme of work and the figure of the worker had become in Allende’s Chile. Arturo’s new companions are constantly working, performing physical and communal activities: “Trabajo, trabajo trabajo, laburo” (Skármeta 68). And while such work is laudable and many would argue, even necessary for the success of the party and progress of the nation, it also displaces other kinds of activities, like play. The narrator ponders, even laments (ironically), the loss of play, specifically football, because of the incessant demand to work. “Y puta el gustito que me sube hasta la garganta cuando pienso en
todos los huevones que este domingo están saliendo de sus casa pa’ír a laburar meta
fierro no más mi alma, meta cantar, y se fue a la cresta la pichanguita dominguera...se
fue a la cresta la diversión...” (my emphasis 71). Work has become the totality of life
among the middle and lower class to such an extent that the simple pleasures of a
Sunday pickup game of football among other forms of “diversion” are lost.

Nevertheless, even as Arturo, as a representative of the professional footballer,
is shown as uncommitted to the real work of the nation, indulging in mere childish
illusions of fame and fortune, he in fact stands in contrast to the historic reality of
Chilean footballers from the time of the novel. As the political left begins to gather more
support among the people, “las convulsiones políticas de los años setenta también se
manifiestan de otro modo en el mundo del fútbol. El auge de los sindicatos y de la
conciencia social obrera, incentivada por la Democracia Cristiana y los partidos de
izquierda, llega a los futbolistas, que comienzan a verse a sí mismo como ‘trabajadores
de fútbol’” (Matamala 37). Moreover, the very rights which Arturo enjoys as a
professional footballer regarding his freedom of movement, the ability to decide for
whom he plays and the possibility to set/influence many of the conditions of his
contract, are outcomes of the first strike of footballers from the Unión de futbolistas
profesionales, who in 1960 “exig[en] la libertad de acción al finalizar los contratos,
petición que a la larga se consigue” (37).

It may not have been accepted in all circles, but it is nonetheless a historical
truth that as professionalism began to consolidate its institutions and administrative
structures, the individuals who constituted the workforce of this new industry saw
themselves as workers who deserved and advocated for their rights regarding pay, freedom of movement (from club/employer to club/employer), standard of workplace and other conditions similar to those of workers of other industries. Nevertheless there seemed to exist among footballers an underdeveloped sense of the responsibilities that accompanied the rights the worker sought.

[In the fall of 1971], [t]he sportswriter Edgardo Marín criticized the union for co-opting the language of workers without having a relationship to other labor organizations: “The definition of a football player as a worker has come to dominate the union leadership, has brought some consciousness of the social problem, and is supported by a rank and file that has an exaggerated consciousness of its rights and very little understanding of its duties. (Elsey 233)

Arturo insists on maintaining his ‘rights’ as a worker/footballer, to pursue fair wages, adequate physical/medical treatment, etc. yet refuses to contribute to or collaborate with his fellow working-class companions.

Arturo’s presentation to his first club in Santiago even speaks of the life of a footballer, specifically one in that particular club, in terms of “work conditions”, employee expectations, etc. “La vida en el club es muy ascética...Nada de chupar, comer con moderación, etcétera. En buenas cuentas, ser futbolista es un lujo que tiene su vía crucis. Un campeón es un hombre de acero...Usted es joven y para un joven hay muchos cantos de sirena” (Skármeta 46). While football is obviously a game, it also constitutes the base activity of a profession. Being a professional footballer demands discipline and imposes rules of physical behavior on the players who wish to earn their living, remain
in good standing and ultimately be successful in their field. Moreover, as a profession, the football industry then creates additional rules by which the player/employees must abide off the field of play. The game is constituted by the rules which circumscribe it, spatially, temporally and behaviorally, but these rules only constrain the actions of the players during a game. In this interaction with his coach, Arturo comes to see that being a professional comes with an additional set of rules, decided and enforced by the owners and management of the club, which he must abide. The demand of the game thus exerts a force which transcends the boundaries of field of play and affects the day to day lived experience of the players.

It is also important to note that Arturo is a footballer but he is not representative of all footballers. He is only one kind of a footballer/worker in an industry that has many different approaches to the work required of them. Among his teammates are players who exhibit different attitudes toward their “work” as a footballer, their place within the structure of the team, the club and society. Arturo is of the ‘everyman for themself’ mentality, refusing to teach his teammates how to perform the technical skills which grant him the value teams covet. He acts as a sort of footballing mercenary, selling his services to the highest bidder, regardless of any other motive, duty or commitment. Others, like some of his teammates, play football, but are workers in a more conventional sense as well. When Arutro makes a passive aggressive slight to his teammate who asks him to teach him how to be a better dribbler, asking him if he has even gone to school, his teammate, Jáuregui, responds confidently, “Hice la primaria, Ahora trabajo en una curtiembre...Me gusta mi trabajo” (Skármeta 80). This attitude
towards work, enjoying one’s work and doing it for the good of the whole, be it company, community, club or nation, is absent from Arturo’s approach to his “work” as a footballer.

Jáuregui’s conversation with Arturo also highlights the difference between an amatuer or semi-amatuer and a professional approach to the game. Though Jáuregui plays on a lower division professional team, he also works at a tanning factory. He may earn a small amount of money for his football skills but he does not depend solely on the football club for his income. The politics of (semi)-amateur vs the professional player are representative of the differences most often exhibited at the club level as well. Just like players, “Football clubs did not...adopt a unified political ideology” (Elsey 6). Elsey goes on to explain the discrepancies and distinct approaches to politics adopted by these different institutions:

After the emergence of professionalism in the 1930s, divisions arose between professional and amateur clubs over their approaches to politics. The market for football created a strong incentive for professionals to adopt politically “neutral” positions. In the 1950s and 1960s, professional football clubs attacked their amateur counterparts for their ties to leftist parties. Amateurs, for their part, criticized the impact of market logic on football. (6)

Arturo represents the stance of the professional clubs in the early 70s, insistent on political neutrality while simultaneously criticizing the left and what he understands to be their purpose, “que todos seamos iguales” (Skármeta 59). Whereas the amateur clubs and factory teams assert that “Lo importante es competir y no ganar” (171),
Arturo believes otherwise. Nevertheless, for Arturo “Lo importante” is not to win, rather, “triunfar” (11). Arturo seeks personal triumph, even amongst his teammates, with whom he competes as a professional for money and status.

**Play for Pay**

If football is indeed work, then it is safe to say that money is an important aspect of the footballer’s experience. Consequently, the professionalization and therefore “the commodification of football...shaped its political significance” (Elsey 1). The novel presents differing perspectives on the business of football which allow Skármeta to speak indirectly to the specific political situation of the regime change. As Wood argues, football “is used to express the political ideologies in conflict in contemporary Chile, with capitalism based on the individual versus collective and voluntary solidarity” (Wood 107). Arturo stands apart from the collective not only because he is new to the city and has yet to be signed by a team. Rather, his solitary status is due to his own desire. The individualistic nature of Arturo’s style of play not only shows how he views the other members of his team, but also reveals how he views the rest of society and the football’s function within it. He is clearly talented and set on becoming a better player, but the novel never shows Arturo to be one of those footballers who plays for the pure love of the game. The game, the sport, and the profession of football is a utilitarian means to an end; money, fame, and pleasure. His approach to the game threatens to contaminate it and pervert it in the eyes of the people who truly love it.

This use of the game as business is also representative of the Pinochet government’s efforts to impose neoliberal free-market principles upon the nation in
general and football clubs in particular. In his prologue to Daniel Matmala’s book, *Goles y Autogoles: Historia política del fútbol chileno*, Esteban Abarzúa highlights what he views as an “herencia de la dictadura: la transformación económica del fútbol chileno, que tuvo sus primeros brotes en el frustrado experimento de los Chicago Boys en Colo-Colo durante la segunda mitad de los años setenta” which consisted of “el neoliberalismo que intentó sin éxito convertir a Colo-Colo en un ejemplo de futbol-empresa” (11). It is through the lens of football as a market that Arturo sees himself and frames his ambitions.

In his first training with the second division club in which he very clearly and almost easily demonstrates his footballing superiority, compared to the rest of the team, he explains to the manager the logic of his choice to pursue a place on a second division club rather than going directly to one of the big teams in the first division. “Quiero que me descubran en un barrio, que vengan a verme, y *poner yo el precio* (my emphasis, Skármeta 50). Once again, every decision he makes as he embarks on his new career is about money. His approach to his work exemplifies the “commercialised, professional soccer [...] [in which] collective team spirit has been eroded by the star system and the commodity value of single outstanding players” (Shaw 82).

The explicit reference to neoliberalism, free market economics and the determination of supply and demand could not be made any more clearly than in a conversation between Arturo and one of his teammates after a game. When his teammates ask how he dribbles so well, he gives vague and generic answers such as “inspiración” and “técnica” (Skármeta 79). Then when one teammate presses him to
teach the rest of the team he forcefully declines. His justification is summed up as a simple, ‘why should I?’. “¿Para qué voy a hacerlo? Con uno como yo en el equipo basta. Cuando hay uno solo, ése es más caro. Es la huevá que te enseñan en el colegio. ¿No ha ido al colegio?” (79). In a team sport it would make sense to assume that a greater number of highly skilled players on one team would be preferred to only one. This takes the pressure off just the one player to always perform at peak capacity and increases the team’s chances of victory. Moreover, more skilled players almost always translates into a more pleasing aesthetic of play as well. Nevertheless, none of these purposes factor into Arturo’s aim. He views even his teammates as competitors, not to win or lose any particular game, but as other potential earners in the football market. If there are fewer players who can do what Arturo does, his value goes up. That is all he cares about. Such an approach to the game ignores the general rules, parameters and structure of the game itself, reappropriating and determining the purpose of playing the game.

As their conversation continues Arturo’s stance takes on a more explicitly political color. Rather than Arturo simply being an “apolitical” footballer trying to make as much money as he can, his stance crystalizes into a more apparent representation of Pinochet’s policy23 when he analyzes and labels his teammate in oppositional and

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23 “En la segunda mitad de la década de los setenta, mientras en el resto del mundo futbolístico se habla del “fútbol-total” aplicado por la Selección Holandesa de Rinus Michel, en Chile el vocablo de moda es otro: “fútbol-empresa”.

El fútbol-empresa es la aplicación de las nuevas teorías económicas neoliberales de los Chicago Boys al ámbito del fútbol. Estas debían suponer la organización de los clubes de fútbol como empresas, con una estructura formada por profesionales competentes en todas las áreas: administradores de empresa, ingenieros, publicistas...

Estas empresas debían orientarse, como cualquier otra, a trabajar en sistema de libre mercado, como efectivamente tendía a serlo el deporte con la eliminación de los precios fijados por el gobierno a las entradas. Así, el fútbol debía venderse como cualquier otro producto” (Matamala 102).
political terms. In response to Arturo’s inquiry about his level of education his teammate
tells him that he only attended elementary school and now works in a factory. This
teammate is content with this life and claims to enjoy his work. This simple status quo
would never be sufficient for Arturo. He pushes back against this idea, ever more
prominent in Allende’s Chile, observing, “en la ciudad todos se conforman con lo que
tienen. Yo no, gallo. Yo quiero hacerla en grande. Jamás me iría a meter en una
fabriquita” (79). These opposing lifestyles are then made explicit when Arturo labels his
teammate, “Te reís porque soi comunista”. However, this accusation doesn’t seem to
carry much weight at a time when the current administration is led by an increasingly
more socialist/communist president. The teammate calmly responds, “y qué tiene?”. When Arturo offers his view of what such an ideology will bring, one in which the
communists all end up “pidiendo plata en la calle”, his teammate is quick to offer his
own critique of Arturo’s approach. In his view, “Me da la impresión de que no te
importara el país” (80). With the fate of the nation at stake, these contrasting ideologies
are presented as mutually exclusive forms of patriotism or indifference.

Now that we have explored the connotations of football as work, within the
novel and Chilean society, establishing the political nature of such work, both
collectively and individually, I would now like to turn my attention to the specifics of the
work of a footballer, particularly Arturo. The position Arturo occupies within his chosen
field and the manner in which he performs his responsibilities are also symbolic of the

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24 Common slang among urban youth in Chile. Rather than “tu eres”, the construction “tu soi” is used as a
way of saying “you are”.

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different political parties, schools of thought and ideological contentions of this significant moment in Chilean history.

Positional politics:

Arturo plays as a center forward. This tactical position on the soccer field and the role and function of such players is full of symbolic potential, specifically in relation to Arturo’s personal politics and the political circumstances of his time. The term “center forward” indicates two different kinds of positioning or alignment, one horizontal and one vertical. Both contexts offer potential political interpretation and speak to Arturo’s personality and character.

Firstly, let us examine the symbolic potential of the forward. The forward plays, as the name indicates, in an advanced position on the field. He occupies the space closest to the opposition’s goal and faces up against the rival’s defense. The forward’s purpose is to score goals. To do so a forward must be positive, progressive, and disruptive. The forward’s job is to break down the opposition defense. This is done by technical skill, dribbling and shooting, sometimes trickery and deceit, or simply by superior speed and strength. Arturo defines himself as a forward by both what he does and does not do, simultaneously drawing comparison to the role of the defender. On his first day of tryouts with a second division team in the capital, he explains to the coach “soy malazo para volver. No sirvo mucho en la defensa” (Skármeta 46).

The potential political symbolism of the forward position is made clearer by contrast with the primary objectives of its immediate opposite position, that of defense. Whereas I characterize the forward’s play as positive, creative, and intricate, all in order
to produce a beautiful play and eventually a goal, I characterize the defender’s role as negative. The defender, in its purest sense, is defined merely by his ability to neutralize the threats and attacks of the forward. The defender is conservative in nature, his primary objective is to conserve the integrity of the goal, keeping the opposing offense out of their area. To many, such a focus on “stop[ping] the other team rather than scoring goals...can make soccer boring and even cynical” (Dubois 64). Defenders are foremost “trying to stop everything that is beautiful and exhilarating about the game” (64).

These characterizations of forwards and defenders are admittedly simple and do not reflect the nuances of any great team or player, in which even the greatest forwards must defend within the structure of the team and the most stalwart defenders only increase their value if they are able to generate offensive movements from their defensive positions. Nevertheless, if we follow Valdano’s thesis of football politics - leftist football defined by “la creatividad, el buen juego, la finta [y] la gambeta” (Gatti 97), right as “la mera fuerza, la marrullería , el patadón” - the left undoubtedly lends itself more to forwards, while the right more readily serves the purposes of the defender.

Interestingly enough, the history of Chilean football offers one of the most explicit examples of the progressive leftist attacker, Carlos Caszely, and the stalwart conservative defender of the political right, Elías Figueroa. Such historical referents serve as illuminating and problematic points of comparison with Arturo, his football and his politics.
Carlos Caszely was one of Chile’s greatest footballers and goalscorers, “admirado por la izquierda cultural y por la izquierda popular, exquisito estilista del área chica y el futbolista chileno que más ha incursionado en el campo de la política” (Matamala 210). From his early playing days as a young star with Colo-Colo, the equipo del pueblo, all the way up to his time in Spain and into retirement, Caszely was a vocal supporter of the Chilean left in general and Allende in particular. His open support of Unidad Popular candidates during Allende's administration made him “el favorito de la prensa oficialista” (210). However, this relationship “entre Caszely y el poder se cortó de manera abrupta...el 11 de septiembre de 1973” (211). After that date, his “public declarations of support for the political left...led to him being known as ‘el rojo de la Roja’ (Wood 102). No act was more important in this regard as the instance in which he famously refused to shake Pinochet’s hand when the entire team was summoned to meet with the General prior to their trip to the Soviet Union to face the USSR in hopes to qualify for the 1974 World Cup.26

His opposition to Pinochet even continued beyond his playing days. When the General allowed a plebiscite in 1988, in which the Chilean people would have the opportunity to vote for Pinochet to stay in power or to demand he leave and give way to a democratically elected president, it was Caszely, not a “político, dirigente sindical, o sacerdote de cierta notoriedad” (220) who was chosen as the face of the “NO”

25 “La Roja” is the name by which the Chilean National team is known, due to the red color of their home jerseys.
26 ESPN produced a great documentary feature of Caszely and the Chilean team surrounding this incident, called The opposition (2014).
campaign. It was not a politician who had the most influence over the people and their voting interests, rather, it was a footballer who was able to speak to the desire and the will of the people and parlay his footballing popularity into political influence.

Teammates on the field, Caszely and Figueroa could be considered political rivals and opponents off it. In the wake of the dictatorship, Carlos would be replaced by Elías in the officialist press of the Pinochet regime as the main figure of the national team and Chilean football in general (Matamala 212). The defender and captain of the National team was always known as a vocal patriot, whose nationalist rhetoric lent itself very well to the new government of the Junta Militar. And when Caszely would turn out to be the face of the “NO” campaign in 1988, it would be none other than Elías, Caszely’s former teammate who would be one of the most prominent voices to “declarar su público apoyo a la opción “Sí” en el plebiscito” (227).

Caszely was the “futbolista de izquierda” par excellence, both in style- according to Valdano- he was an undoubtedly creative and elegant attacking player, and in politics. Though Arturo never speaks of Caszely’s potential influence on his own football development nor of his political stance in support of Allende, the novel does make one explicit connection between the two forwards. The association, however, does not reflect positively on Arturo. Arturo shows up to his tryout for a team in Santiago “con los colores completos del flamante intacto infalible glorioso Seleccionado Nacional” (Skármeta 47). Upon seeing him enter the field, these potential teammates stop in their tracks during their training routines, shocked at the choice of clothing and all it says about this unknown player. Arturo’s choice of attire for this tryout, a full National team
jersey, is a blatant show of ego and incredible self-centeredness, not only revealing what he thinks about his own talent but also distinguishing himself from the rest of his potential teammates, all of which would be wearing a different team jersey.

One teammate takes particular dislike to this supposed “héroe sureño que venía todo en Caszely” (my emphasis Skármeta 47). Arturo explains that he wears the full national team kit merely as a way of inspiring and reminding himself “adónde voy para no perderme” (47). Such a motivational tactic may be genuine but what is made blatantly obvious is the discrepancy between the jersey he wears, the player he represents through such attire (Caszely), and who he is at that moment. The coach goes so far as to explicitly reassure the rest of the players “que [Arturo] lleva la camiseta patria nada más que de monería, porque de ser seleccionado no es” (my emphasis 47). Though the gap between the caliber of player Arturo is at that moment and the one he hopes to become - starting center forward for the national team, Cazsely’s position - is large, there exists an even wider gap between Arturo’s political stance and commitment and that of the famed Caszely.

Arturo’s positional status as a forward combined with his explicitly stated apolitical stance, as well as later criticism of Lenin and communism (Skármeta 59), challenges the simple idea of forwards as the embodiment of a “fútbol de izquierdas”. Though Skármeta did not write with this theory in mind, it is possible to see the specific horizontal alignment of young Arturo as another more specific commentary on Arturo’s view of politics and its relationship to football. Arturo is not described merely as a “delantero”, rather he plays specifically as a “centrodelantero” (my emphasis 48). This
positional specificity takes on greater symbolic meaning when compared with other positional terms such as left or right winger.\(^{27}\)

Coincidentally, the figure of the left winger in Latin American football literature\(^{28}\) is most clearly present in the short story of another of Chile’s most lauded authors, Roberto Bolaño. Though written more than a decade after *Soñé que la nieve ardía*, anyone familiar with football literature in the region will see Arturo as a stark juxtaposition to Bolaño’s protagonist, Acevedo, in his short story “Buba”.\(^{29}\) Acevedo’s experience as a top professional footballer at one of the world’s biggest clubs, FC Barcelona, leads him to anticipate the day in which he will have to change positions on the field due to the inevitable physical decline which accompanies the passing of time, declaring “la vida de un extremo izquierdo es corta” (Bolaño 87). While such a statement is clearly offered in the context of his footballing possibilities, it is nonetheless a heavily loaded political statement, speaking to the power and influence wielded by the rich due to the prominence of neoliberal policies most firmly instilled in Chile and other countries of Latin America during the authoritarian regimes of the 70s and 80s. Seen in the light of other positional possibilities for Arturo, I argue that Skármeta’s choice of center forward as Arturo’s position on the field is meant to reflect his attempted political neutrality. Not only is football as a whole a world and an endeavor which Arturo naively views as an escape from the politics of the world around

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\(^{27}\) His set position is never given as “extremo derecho”, however, in one of the radio narrations of his play, the commentator does describe an action in which Arturo occupies a space on the right of the field as he begins an attacking move: “Arturito en la punta derecha” (my emphasis, Skármeta 77).

\(^{28}\) The most explicit and well-known example of the left winger in Latin American football literature is the short story, “Puntero izquierdo” (1954/55), by the famed Uruguayan author, Mario Benedetti.

him, but the specificity of his position serves to drive home his insistence that he is “apolítico”.

Political stylings

So far Arturo’s character problematizes the simplicity and straightforward nature of Valdano and Vázquez Montalbán’s theory of football politics. Yet such irony and contradiction between Arturo’s football and his (lack of) politics shows the multifaceted possibilities of football literature as a tool of social and political rhetoric. Up to this point, we have examined the political potential of Arturo’s character based solely on the identiary labels of his assigned position on the football pitch: centrodelantero. While a position is generic and used to generally describe the placement, role and function of any given player on any given team on the field of play and in relation to its teammates, each individual then exhibits a certain style of play when they actually take the field and engage in competition and play.

The specific style of play can then be interpreted in political terms representative of a given ideology. According to Valdano and Vásquez Montalbán, the players who tend to play creatively, to improvise, dribble and dance through the area, represent a leftist approach to the sport, and those who play with brute strength, direct runs, headers and even dirty physical play are those who exhibit style of play of the political right. So where does Arturo fall along this political/footballing spectrum?

The novel presents the reader with multiple accounts and perspectives of Arturo’s style of play. The first such instance is a self-evaluation, description and partial
critique from Arturo himself. At his first tryout with a Santiago team in the second division, he gives a detailed description of his preferred way to play:

Mire, yo juego funcional. Centro delantero adelantado. La cuestión es que yo suelto la pelota por el centro desde atrás y salgo disparado hasta el tope. Es decir, yo tiro la pelota a cualquiera de los wings y el primero que llegue ahí la agarra y me la chutea chanchita tratando de achuntarle más o menos a la entrada del área. Y si es cañonazo y por bajo mejor porque a veces en las defensas ponen pailones que te ganan la cabezota o que te meten por detrás cuando la estái sacando de pecho, y ésta es toda la cuestión, y yo ahí ya me las arreglo solito. (my emphasis 48)

While his description does assert a certain directness to his play, it nonetheless leans more to the characterization of a left. Rather than an intricate buildup working the ball through the middle of the pitch or an extended dribble, taking on multiple defenders and carrying the ball over long distances toward the goal, he plays the ball out wide and then hopes to beat his defenders with direct runs into the box,30 expecting a cross from his teammates on the wings. However, he doesn’t describe himself as an imposing presence who physically dominates the opposing defenders, winning the ball

30 Ironically, the description of Arturo’s play shows him to the novel’s description of Arturo’s tactics and preferred way to play as a forward do suggest potential connections to Caszely. The famous center forward was known popularly as “el rey del metro cuadrado”, referring to his ability to receive, control, and manipulate the ball - as well as the defenders - in the small spaces of the 6 and 18 yard boxes and score efficiently from such places on the field. Arturo explains to his potential new coach that, as he sees it, the ideal strategy is for him to pass the ball out to the wings after which they advance the ball up the sidelines to ultimately pass the ball back to him “a la entrada del área” (48). Of course, any forward will spend the majority of their time in the opposing team’s 18 and 6 yard boxes. Nevertheless, the continued explicit reference to “la área” along with the mention of Caszely and the context of Chilean football suggests a reference to the aforementioned forward. Such parallels continue to present contradicting potential political interpretations of Arturo’s football.
in the area and muscling the ball into the goal. He specifically cites the physical play of
defenders who “te ganen la cabezota o que te meten por detrás” (Skármeta 48). For this
very reason he explains that he prefers the hard low passes that arrive at his feet, thus
providing him the opportunity to elude the physical challenges of the defenders who
would break up his attempts at creative play, such as controlling the ball with his chest
before sorting out his attack with some sort of dribble, feint, and/or shot. Arturo clearly
sees himself as a creative and improvisational player who must be daring and clever in
his attempts to evade the physical roughness of opposing defenders.

Following Arturo’s prescription of his preferred method of play the narrator
describes his first attacking play as he takes the field against his soon to be teammates.
Upon receiving the hard and low cross which he seeks, “Arturo amasa en la entrada del
área, se baila a Carrasco, amaga izquierda y resuelve derecho frente a Vicuña, se la pisa
al arquero, le lleva pegada al botín hasta el arco y no infla la red, sino que, sobrador,
deposita la pelota justo detrás de la línea, más poniendo un huevo que metiendo un
gol” (my emphasis, Skármeta 48). Whereas “fútbol de derecha” is “meramente de
fuerza...y patadón”, Arturo’s decision not to smash the ball into the net but rather,
gently place the ball over the line, after having “danced” past and “faked out”
defenders, is decidedly representative of “fútbol de izquierda”. Another account of his
football performance, this one through the perspective of Susana, Arturo’s
romantic/sexual interest and one of the youths of the Unidad Popular, also highlights
the artistry and aesthetic beauty of his play. “Ella lo había visto jugar, aprendió con sus
propios ojos encendidos la música de su gambeteo, la admiración de los chicos del club,
la gula del entrenador” (51). Arturo’s play is not merely effective in terms of sporting aims, but also serves a higher aesthetic purpose.

Arturo, as a footballer, as a worker, has created popular art with his football stylings, transforming football into a creative expression of “poder popular in which workers would become producers of culture rather than consumers” (Elsey 222). Throughout the novel, primarily through the figure of Susana, Skármeta shows how the left employed music, theater, and poetry, “democratizing what had previously been considered high culture” (224). Elsey explains that within the UP’s agenda “physical exercise received far less attention than activities classified as cerebral”, a fact which is evident in the (lack of) esteem Arturo’s companions exhibit for football. Though Arturo would not deem his football as artistic expression, let alone political art, the representation of his play in the novel invites the reader to consider that possibility. Rather than all out action, description of violent physical movements and encounters between players, Arturo performs dance, music, art, poetry in motion, with the ball at his feet.

**No “I” in Team**

The general thesis posited by Valdano regarding a type of leftist football vs rightist football can be applied at both a personal and team level. The analysis of Arturo’s individual style of play has proved to contradict the common assumptions

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31 Susana is fascinated by the figure of a “compañero” in the party who is a poet. He is a “compañero escritor jurado en Casa de las Américas” who writes “poesía política” (Skármeta 140, 141). On one occasion Arturo recalls hearing Susana “puls[ar] un par de teclas, e insinu[ar] los primeros compases del himno de la izquierda” (60). Music and poetry are important expressions of the political project.
which underlie the aforementioned thesis. Arturo demonstrates a great deal of creativity, improvisation and skill in his play. He plays with a certain aesthetic flare and not only doesn’t exhibit those attributes most readily attributed to a “fútbol de derechas”, rather, he is repeatedly shown to confront those specific kinds of players and tactics when he takes the field. If his individual style of play casts him in a leftist light, an interpretation which explicitly discredits his public and repeated stance of being “apolitical”, his style of play when viewed in relation to the rest of his teammates is more indicative of an individualist and opportunistic stance which more readily exemplifies the motivating ideas and principles of the neoliberal agenda imposed by the Pinochet regime on the football industry as well as the country at large.

Of course, style of play and its potential political signification is only one factor in any other number of signifiers attached to a given club or national team. When Gatti relates the original thesis, posited and then relayed by Valdano and Vázquez Montalbán, he cites two other “filósofos del fútbol”, the Argentines, Martín Caparrós and Juan Sasturain, who challenge theirs simplistic division. Caparrós states, “me cuesta creer que los equipos ‘de izquierda’ sean River, el Real Madrid, o el Manchester y que los equipos ‘de derecha’ sean Boca, Peñarol...Hay algo que no va” (Gatti 98). Each team mentioned cited by Caparrós exemplifies a club defined historically by its beautiful play, evident in intricate movement and passing, and invention and creativity, as well as great technical skill, seen in the dribbling and attacking prowess of their players. While these teams seem to exhibit a style of play more akin to the characteristic of the left, according to Valdano, these same clubs are also historically associated either implicitly - in style or
fan culture - or explicitly - in ownership, supporter groups, and even political control and affiliation - with the right.

Once again, the task of assigning political affiliation, representation or expression, to any one club or player, results more complex and contradictory than any simple explanation can comprehend. More will be said regarding the specific teams represented in the novel and Arturo’s perception of and affiliation with the historic clubs and their political connotations but for now I would like to turn my attention to the manner in which a team’s style of play, approach to the game, rules, practices and cultures within the club can exemplify either the right or the left.

Simon Critchley makes the bold assertion “we might say that the proper political form of football is socialism” (7). He supports this claim by drawing attention to the basic structure of the team, its goals and functions: “Unlike sports like golf and tennis, or even baseball, cricket and basketball, football is not individualistic... It is about the team. Football is essentially collaborative. It is about the movement between players who play together and play with and for each other... (my emphasis 4). The very name of the sport, Association Football (abbreviated as soccer in the US) (my emphasis 7), drives home the importance of associative teamwork, of the relationships between the players as opposed to any one individual.

Critchley further illustrates his claim by drawing on the work of the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and his decision to turn to football when “he was trying to think about the nature of organization” (5). Critchley explains:
the free action of activity - what Sartre calls ‘praxis’ - of the individual player is subordinate to the team, both integrated into it and transcending it, where the collective action of the group permits the refinement of individual action through immersion into the organizational structure of the team. What is taking place in an organized team is a never ceasing dialectic between the associative, collective activity of the group and the supportive, flourishing individual actions of the players whose being is only given through the team. (5)

While the individual is an essential part of the team, no one individual can assert its being or value independent of their place in and relationship to the whole.

The fate of the individual is inextricably linked to that of the team. One cannot win if the other loses. The one exists to serve the many and the many support and allow the one to thrive. The ideal relationship between the individual and the team is symbiotic. The work, skill and commitment of the individual player strengthens the team as a whole, allowing it to keep its shape, provide support and structure both in defense and attack, while the foundation of the team provides a springboard for the individual to then realize great personal feats that can affect the outcome of the game, such as a key pass, a penetrating dribble an important defensive intervention or most importantly, a goal scored. Each of these individual feats of personal skill are laudable, but none constitute the goal of playing the game. A goal, a good pass, or a key tackle is only important inasmuch as it contributes to the overall team win. Thus, pursuing individual attention, accolades, or accomplishment, with no regard to how it may
detrimentally affect the team objectives, ruins the game itself, perverting the purpose and function of the team for an extra-ludic intent.

This approach to football as socialism fits very well into the historical origin of many of the football clubs all over the word, the majority of which developed out of factories, churches, or other community organizations. The football club was yet another tool to strengthen commitment to the whole, to bolster comradery, and incorporate individuals into a project for the greater good. While the majority of the football presented in the novel focuses on the professional sphere, and draws attention to the emerging “celebrity driven star-system where players demand and exert ever-increasing amounts of financial autonomy” (Critchley 4), the author does include an important scene in which Arturo is recruited by his friends of the Unidad Popular to coach their factory team. When explicitly political appeals to arturo seemed to have failed to incorporate him into the cause for socialist rule and reform in Chile football serves as a potential alternative means.

In one of the party’s meetings the agenda includes reports on such things as “cómo van las actividades recreativas compañera, que cómo va el asunto del teatro testimonio, y sobre todo compañeros cómo va el asunto deportivo... (Skármeta 168). Included among other cultural activities meant to educate and express the ideals of the party, such as testimonial theater, literature and art, is the “asunto deportivo”. According to el Gordo, “la cuestión del deporte es un asunto que atañe a la fábrica” (my emphasis 168). Sport, and in this case football, serves as a binding activity, something which ties the individuals members together, strengthens bonds and fortifies the party.
Interestingly enough, this ideological tenet of socialism, the subordination of the individual to the needs and duties required of the community, is not mentioned explicitly as one of the purposes of the sporting activities of the party. Rather, the group leaders emphasize that sport - football - improves the physical quality of the workers’ bodies, strengthening muscles and getting them into shape. As el Negro observes “está bueno que todos los guatones que hay aquí se dejen de ser deportistas nada más que en la galera y que ya se ven unas panzas de algunos que dan susto...” (Skármeta 168). While football, professional football specifically, is a spectator sport and growing economic industry, its importance for the party lies in the playing of the game, rather than spectating. This statement is a call to action, to play the game.

In addition to helping them get into better shape, “es bueno que echen a andar de una buena vez la actividad recreativa porque aquí hay muchos compañeros que se están iniciando al trago los sábados por la noche y que no vienen a trabajos voluntarios y muchas esposas que acuden a reclamar que los niños pasan el día callejeando y anda medio raquíticos...” (Skármeta 169). Football serves as a channel to focus the energies of the workers and to protect them from habits and vices, such as alcoholism and idleness, which would impede them from being able to fulfill their familial, party and community responsibilities.

Having established the political and party purposes which sport can offer the political left we can then see why the party would like to see if Arturo, “un futbolista muy distinguido, un auténtico profesional [...] se interesaría en entrenar un equipo de la industria, en hacer algunas clases de técnica del balón” (Skármeta 170). Perhaps football
would succeed where more explicitly political approaches had failed to persuade the young man to see the state of the nation around him clearly and join the efforts of the party to strengthen and defend the Allende government as the mounting pressure from the right continued to grow.

Critchley’s analysis of the socialist nature of football itself and the historical and literary examples of the latent potential found in football to embody and encourage a leftist approach to play, politics, and life itself. Nevertheless, even when Arturo accepts the invitation to coach the team, the importance of selfless commitment to the purpose and goals of the community continue to elude him. We have already seen that Arturo recognizes his lack of desire and willingness to do the hard work off the ball, such as defend, to benefit the rest of the team. He emphasizes that he prefers and is best in attack, specifically free kicks (Skármeta 48). As a player, all his effort and focus is concentrated solely on his individual actions, disregarding the skills, potential and needs of his teammates and the team overall.

If we review once again the tactical proposal he offers his potential coach on the day of his tryouts, we can once again see how Arturo views his relationship to the rest of the team. Arturo does recognize the presence of his teammates and even admits the functionality of each player, according to their assigned position, but he does so with a different final goal in mind than that of the ideal team. Where the nature of the

32 Most often the free kick is executed by a single player and results in a direct shot on goal. The stoppage and restart of play, breaking the usual free flow of a football match, is one of the few instances which gives the individual a solo platform on which to perform, as opposed to the intricate team movements usually needed to break down one’s opponent and create good opportunities to score.
relationship of the individual to the whole within an ideal team would be termed as symbiotic, the two parties benefiting each other mutually, Arturo’s understanding is more representative of a parasitic relationship. “La cuestión es que yo suelto la pelota por el centro desde atrás y salgo disparado hasta el tope. Es decir, yo tiro la pelota a cualquiera de los wings y el primero que llegue ahí la agarra y me la chutea...más o menos a la entrada del área. [...] y yo ahí ya me las arreglo solito” (my emphasis, Skármeta 48).

As Arturo sees it, all team play is defined in relation to his abilities and necessity to be the one who scores. This view of his own importance and role on the pitch highlights “his extreme individualism, whereby others are there merely to serve his personal goals” (Wood 107). Arturo starts and finishes the scoring move, highlighting his centrality. Moreover, there is no mention of winning or losing, or any other potential team goal. The only thing that matters to Arturo is that he scores. In all of his interactions and conversations, Arturo is emphatic in stating what he needs and wants, asserting the individual and his desire for success, viewed in terms of money, fame and influence, as the principal focus.

This me-first mentality and view of the team as a means to serve a personal end extends beyond his individual style of play and he articulates his need to exert his will upon others even as he accepts the invitation to “help” the factory team as their coach. He recognizes that he is capable of helping them yet he is quick to remind them once again “que él tiene mucho que entrenar individualmente hablando, que hay gente interesada en que él viaje fuera del país porque los gringos quieren formar un plantel”
Nevertheless, seeing as they already have a field and are all present, he is gracious enough to bless them with his presence, knowledge and expertise while he waits for his personal situation to be sorted out.

He will be their coach, but only on the condition “de que donde manda capitán no manda marinero y que si él iba a dar algo de sí esperaba que por los menos los señores actuaran con disciplina que la disciplina es lo fundamental que si él citaba a las ocho de la mañana a los señores a las ocho los señores tenían que estar…” (170-71).

Even as a coach, Arturo asserts his will and influence upon the actions of his team(mates). What matters to him is that he maintains his freedom and lack of commitment from others yet expects them to perform the tasks that either he demands as a coach or expects as a player. Where the members of the party highlight the values of comradery, teamwork, physical and self improvement, Arturo emphasizes the importance of discipline and obedience. Where a socialist view of football and the nature of a team stresses the importance of horizontal relationships and commitments, Arturo stresses a more traditionally authoritarian hierarchy of vertical relationships which requires strict obedience to the orders of those individuals placed above others.

Once again, the novel shows how football is and can be used to embody the principles and further the agendas of both left and right political ideologies. The overlap between football and politics as a form of discourse by which one can better understand Chilean society around the time of the coup and the initial years of the dictatorship is seen in the sequence of actions narrated in the novel. Skármeta consistently alternates between football scenes - training, games, discussions among teammates and coaches,
radio commentary, etc, - and political activity - ideological debates, voluntary work activities, factory meetings, etc. The constant back and forth allows the thoughts and perspectives presented in one arena to bleed into the other, footballizing politics and politicizing football.

The juxtaposition of politics and football is reinforced through another juxtaposition, that of attack and defense. As shown previously, it is the use of these two opposites which casts into relief the most important aspects of each. This is seen, firstly, in Arturo. The individualist and egocentric aspects of the young man’s character not only motivate the things he does but also influence his decisions regarding the actions and responsibilities he refuses to perform. On the drive from the train station to the pension he explains to his new landlord, “No alcanzo a volver bien a la defensa. Cuando voy adelante, no me para nadie, ¿entiende? Pero vuelvo atrás desanimado” (my emphasis, Skármeta 23). When evaluating his own skills and abilities as a player, he shows the ability to be self-critical, yet his assessment reveals his weakness as a player to be a problem of desire and choice rather than a lack of ability. In Arturo’s mind, he could be a great defender, if he wanted to. Defense depends more on willingness to make the effort to get back, to work together with teammates and commit to the physical requirements of the task, rather than any particular technical ability which may be ascribed to innate talent.

Arturo’s unwillingness to defend, his disinterest in rallying with his teammates to protect his own goal, is yet another indicator of Arturo’s political failures and his lack of commitment to the cause of justice and defense of the people of the nation. It is worth
noting, however, that Arturo does recognize his weakness as a defender, even if he attributes it to mere disinterest. He even tells his coach in one of their first interactions, “quiero que usted me prepare para la defensa. Ahora en el fútbol nuevo todos atacan y defienden...A mí me gustaría ser perfecto” (50). Such a confession opens the possibility for growth and development. His interactions with his new friends and their continued efforts to teach him, expose him to the realities of the life in the city and include him in their party activities, will offer Arturo the opportunity to grow, to learn and develop, and perhaps even join the party and commit to the proper political and moral stances. Such a hope is nevertheless dampened by the last phrase of his admission. At the same time Arturo recognizes the need to defend and therefore a desire to improve, he reveals once again his selfish desires to improve only himself, to increase his individual value and stand apart from the rest of the team as the “perfect” player.

Arturo’s unwillingness to do the “dirty work”, (getting back on defense), of self sacrifice for the benefit of the team without drawing particular attention to himself, makes it clear that the overriding priority for Arturo on the field is his own personal comfort, desires and need to stand out. The supersedence of personal distinction over the collective goals of the team is seen most clearly in the radio commentary of Arutro’s play in a competitive game. In one particular scoring chance, Arturo leads an attack which should inevitably result in a goal. Arturo carries the ball into the 18-yard box: “Solo a su lado ahora Jáuregui que le pide el balón!, pero Arturo intenta ahora driblar al arquero, salta sobre él levantando un poquito el esférico y ¡córner!...” (77). Arturo is so fixated on scoring the goal himself that he refuses to pass the ball to his wide-open
teammate, which ironically, is the reason the team does not score. “En vez de meterlo en el arco se ponen a cavar su propio hoyo... (77). Such an action reflects on Arturo personally, highlighting his own shortcomings, his perversion of the game itself, availing himself of the benefits of the industry as a means of socioeconomic advancement and self-aggrandizement.

Moreover, the particular commentators of this game see his actions as representative of a more general, national trait of the Chilean players, and perhaps chilean society overall. As one commentator, Márquez, remarks to his colleague:

“...Facús, la vocación de navío náufrago que acomete al delantero nacional en el área chica, ese gusto masoquista por hacer agua y hundirse cuando ya se ha llegado a puerto tras una tormentosa travesía, es algo endémico, topográfico del país, Facús, viene en los cromosomas del jugador nacional” (my emphasis 78).

Such a conclusion regarding Arturo’s faults as a player can be interpreted as descriptive of the national community in this particular historical moment. After the hard work of having elected the first democratically chosen socialist president in Latin America and done the arduous work of nationalizing the most important industries of the country, evicting the rich foreign owners of large swaths of land and natural resources - the political “tormentosa travesía” - they get close to “port” only to falter at the last step, manifest in the brutal “foul” committed by the military in the coup d'etat, thus nullifying all the hard work done up till then and ushering in the onset of a completely opposite political and economic policy which would last for decades, even beyond the return to civilian democratic rule. This generalizing interpretation of one
specific action in a football match illustrates Galeano’s theory found in this chapter’s epigraph, “el estilo de jugar...revela el perfil propio de cada comunidad” (El fútbol a sol y sombra 364). The esteemed commentators, those who interpret the actions on the pitch and communicate not only what has happened but the reasons and significance of such actions, extrapolate certain national traits deemed natural not only to a style of play of Chilean footballers but representational of the character of all Chilean citizens.

This generalizing critique of Chile, its players and its citizens is repeated and extended after the last footballing action of the novel, in which Arturo similarly opts for the individualist play, ignoring his teammates, and eventually results in his individual and team loss. Upon seeing Arturo leave the field after receiving a red card the commentators lament the apparent fall from grace and loss of a player who seemed to offer great potential:

Veníamos a ver el despegue de un cohete a la fama y hemos asistido al naufragio de un bote a remo, porque no otro juicio merece a los técnicos la performance de Arturito: flojo en los arranques, desarmado en la recaptura de posiciones de retaguardia, enredado en driblings de fantasía cuando los wings aguardaban el pase en profundidad, en fin, los típicos males, las pestes endémicas de los talentos latinoamericanos [...] Una alegría para ingenuos, pero no los cimientos de una infraestructura que dé a esta América Latina, tan amada y tan nuestra, tanto astros futbolísticos como estrellas encandilan su cielo joven. (183)

Arturo possesses great skill, shows flashes of brilliance, great dribbles, and remarkable shots and goals. Nevertheless, his laziness, refusal to get back and work with
his teammates to defend and the way he ignores his teammates who are open to receive a pass show the cracks in his foundation as a player. While he may be worthy of a few highlights, he is not a player which a team, a club, or a nation can build upon for any sustained success. He can fill the role of desired commodity for a brief period, only to be discarded when he ‘breaks’ and the next flashy player comes along. Such a critique of Arturo as a player must also be read as a critique of the differing political practices each style of play seems to represent, that of the collective and hardworking left and the consumerist and individualist right.

These scenes of football action are full of symbolism and playful language which invite a political and social interpretation of the game. Yet, in addition to these stand-alone sporting scenes, the invitation to read the political over the football and vice versa is seen in the author’s choice to alternate between football scenes and those of leftist political activism. This narrative technique shows there is another ‘field of play’ beyond the confines of the stadium. And just as the juxtaposition between attack and defense has been employed to present conflicting ideologies, these principles of action, attack and defense are equally employed in these non-footballing scenes as competing ‘teams’ and parties pursue victory and assert not only a political but even an ethical correctness.

If we recall the first conversation Arturo hears between his new friends of the Unidad Popular when he arrives at the pension, the leftist comrades are debating the justification of violence, of physical attack, as an appropriate response to their political opposition, the “fascist” military, police and generally right wing extremists. Contrary to
the general interpretation I put forth earlier of leftist “attackers”, progressive, creative, and forward minded, and “right” defenders, conservative protectors of the status quo, the historical context of Chilean politics at that moment inverts the former notions. Due to the fact that Allende, a democratic socialist president, is in power, the left-wing activists are not revolutionary, they are the members of the governing party, tasked with the responsibility to protect the new policies and actions of their president and strive to consolidate the economic and social changes throughout the nation. When the Chilean political left and right come up against each other to compete for the welfare and state of the nation, “ellos [los fascistas] les toca atacar a nosotros nos toca defender…” (Skármeta 154). Eventually the politics arrive in the streets as opposing political factions seek to exercise their influence.

Skármeta follows this line of call and response between attack and defense to introduce not only different approaches to play and politics but also the question of fair versus foul play. Which of the two forces, that of attack of defense, abides by the rules of the game?

Fair/Foul Play

As Gatti explains in his initial elaboration of Valdano’s thesis of football politics, “al fútbol de izquierda...corresponde...incluso el fair play” (97). Fair play is an essential element of competitive sport. It assumes that there is a fixed set of rules by which all competitors abide during the course of a game which ensures the integrity of the competition and validates the outcome of the match. In his theory of play and games, Caillois explains the centrality and necessity of rules to the very existence and nature of
what can be considered a game. “Todo juego es un sistema de reglas. Estas definen lo que es o no es juego, es decir lo permitido y lo prohibido” (original emphasis 11). The imperative to abide by the rules is what preserves the game’s ludic nature, placing the importance on the act of play itself, of competing, rather than winning.

This statement of purpose of playing football is made explicit by a member of the party who solicits Arturo’s service to act as the manager of the factory team that plays friendly matches against other industry teams. After recounting the mediocre results of their season up to that point he reminds the workers/players, “Lo importante es competir y no ganar” (Skarmeta 171). Seeing the competition itself, and the effect such competition has on the growth and development of the individual player, and therefore the collective, rather than the imperative to win [at all/any cost[s]] reinforces the importance of playing by the rules. One can enjoy the game, even while taking it seriously, because the consequences of the play do not extend to the players’ lives beyond the limits of the contest. Huizinga explains as much when he asserts, “cheating as a means of winning a game robs the action of its play-character and spoils it altogether, because for us the essence of play is that the rules be kept -that it be fair play” (Huizinga 52). The appearance of cheating, of foul play, corrupts the game itself and turns the contest into something more.

The question of fair or foul play does manifest itself in the football action of the novel, but only after having been foregrounded in the field of political struggle. The perception of fair or foul play occupies a key position in the political battle between left and right because it either confirms or negates the legitimacy of the governing party. As
mentioned previously, at the outset of the novel one of the leaders of the Unidad
Popular youth proposes that the party members should physically confront “los
huevones fascistas” (Skármeta 36) that have begun to assert their control in the streets.
His comrade goes to great lengths to explain that such a response would violate the
“rules of the game” - in other words, would be foul play. The moral, social, and political
legitimacy of the Chilean left “se ganó por el voto y por la ley” (36). The basic rules of
the political game, as generally accepted, follow the tenets of democracy, rather than
authoritarian coercion and force. El Gordo firmly states “nuestra línea es democrática,”
foregrounding the rules of the game to then explain the danger of breaking them. “Si te
salís de la línea, si te salís de la legalidad validái que los otros huevones se pongan fuera
de la legalidad” (38). While not a football team, the “players” of the leftist Unidad
Popular are insistent on abiding by the rules of the game - staying within the “lines” of
the field of play -, legitimizing their government and their politics by doing so and
simultaneously proving the foul play of their opponents, who resort to physical violence
and intimidation to win the game by illegal means.

This rhetoric of playing by the rules, opting for peaceful, creative and intelligent
responses to their political rivals is manifest in action throughout the novel. El Negro
exhorts his comrades, rather than physically confront their fascist antagonists,
“organicemos a los vecinos en el barrio, los comités de vigilancia en las fábricas,
hagamos los trabajos voluntarios, en buenas cuentas” (Skármeta 37). Despite their best
efforts to avoid violent conflict, tensions come to a head on June 29, 1973, the day on
which “el regimiento Blindados número 2 de Santiago se alzó en una intentona
The novel relates this historic event with great accuracy through the point of view of one of Arturo’s housemates, a young soldier who recounts the experience of one of his friends who serves in the Guardia de Palacio and who defended La Moneda, the presidential office, that day.

The young soldier frames his actions and the events of both sides within the context of a struggle in which one side plays by the rules and another does not. “Éstos de afuera quieren botar al presidente legitimo y a nosotros nos pusieron aquí justamente para defenderlo” (my emphasis, Skármeta 153). Whereas the right-wing faction of the military resorts to illegal means of violence in attempts to “win,” the legitimate president and government of the Left solely defend what is rightfully due them by the rules of the game. Not only does the left exhibit the fair play ascribed to them in Valdano’s thesis, we once again see the potential for defense and attack, in their symbolic readings, to serve both sides of the political spectrum.

The question of fair play moves from discourse to political/military action, and finally culminates in the form of play on the football field in one of the last chapters of the novel. The climax of Arturo’s play and his effort to make it to the “big time” as a footballer comes by way of our faithful commentators Fácus and Márquez, who present their radio listeners and the reader with their perspective of the key play of the game and an interpretation of the actions of both the players and the referee and their consequences.
Facús follows the action as Arturo’s teammates, García and Santillana, move up the field, exchanging the ball between them to finally open up space for Arturo to make his move and find him with a precise pass deep in the opposition’s 18-yard box. As the pass arrives in the area:

tomó así contacto con el balón el crack del Flecha, [el defensa rival, Navarro,] lo enterró de un zapatazo que pareció a muchos el ruido que hace el cadáver al ser arrojado a la fosa, eliminó con un dribling la presencia de Navarro, y al enfrentar solito y solo al arquero, se le arrojó éste ya no al balón, sino a las precisas piernas de Arturo inhabilitándolo para evacuar sus extremidades inferiores y hacer efectivo, no el presagio ni la intuición, sino la certeza que anidó en el corazón de los hinchas de que la pelota iría hasta el mismo fondo de la red. (177-78)

At this point in the novel, Arturo’s political stance has begun to tilt more towards the left as he has gotten to know and learned from el ‘Gordo’, el ‘Negro’ and la Susana. He has joined the party activists, if not ideologically, at least socially, volunteering his time and talents as the factory team coach, and has begun to acquaint himself with some of the artistic and literary production of the left, acquiring an appreciation for Neruda’s poetry in particular. These political, social and artistic turns toward the left are then reflected in their alleged football equivalents of “dribling” (gambeteo), teamwork (interplay with his teammates) and forward thrust, creative and improvisatory play to overcome the rival defense. Therefore, the fact that this newly

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33 The characters are presented in the novel with the article preceding their (nick)name. This literary choice is a realist attempt at representing the local manner of speech. It is common for Chileans to use the definite article when talking about individuals. I.e. “Hablé con la Carla ayer.”
adopted turn to the left, off the field, and now apparent reconciliation of Arturo’s style of play on the field with that of its ‘traditional’ political interpretation, be halted violently by foul play, most readily attributed to the “fútbol de la derecha” - “fuerza, marullería, y patadón,” reads as a clear allegory of the golpe de estado committed by the far-right forces of Pinochet against the legitimately elected socialist government of Salvador Allende.\textsuperscript{34} A political foul committed against the ethically superior rival who respects and plays by the rules of the game.

But is this play a true breach of the rules and in fact constitute foul play? The players of both teams, the home and rival fans, the radio commentators, and the referee all saw the same play, which could be described any number of ways from any one of their differing perspectives. The perspective presented in the novel is merely one way of perceiving the action. The significance of the narration is found in its own admission of subjectivity along with the recognition that such interpretation is not reflected in the decisions taken on the field. The harsh reality for Arturo and his teammates is that “no fue penal porque el árbitro no lo cobró, si no lo cobró el árbitro...esa falta ya nunca nadie más podrá cobrarla” (Skármeta 177).

\textsuperscript{34} The importance of fair play even shows up in the explicit political posturing of Salvador Allende. The former senator began establishing and maintaining closer relationships with Chile’s footballing institutions and its footballers years prior to his eventual assent and election to the presidency. As a senator during Chile’s hosting of the 1962 World Cup, Allende traveled with the team to their game versus the Soviet Union, before which he promised the players “si ganan limpiamente, les prometo que le consigo una casa a cada uno” (Matamala 56). Clean and fair play on the field was paramount in the politician’s mind as he feared any negative consequence of “posibles roces que pudieran producirse” when the players competed on the field. As the diplomat and politician saw it, clean play on the field was imperative to ensuring good relations and clean play off it.
The game is structured and played around a certain set of rules, yet those rules must always be interpreted and enforced by a referee in the course of the game. His decisions are inevitably incomplete, potentially biased or conditioned; in a word, 
\textit{arbitrary}. Galeano summed it up best: “El árbitro es arbitrario por definición” (26).

While the rules of the game are the same for all players who enter the field of play, it is ultimately the referee who interprets, applies, and enforces them according to his vantage point and therefore determines which actions will be judged legitimate and fair or prohibited and foul. Thus, the truth, uttered by the commentator, Márquez, that if the referee did not signal a penalty, there was no foul committed. Such a decision spits in the face of the perspective of the player(s) and all the other observers who saw something entirely different.

Rather than a clean footballing play, one which attempts to make an honest play on the ball, defending within the limits of the game, the commentator judges that “El arquero Pizzuti tomó posesión de ambas dos piernas de Arturo con el evidente propósito de dificultarles su capacidad de traslación horizontal” (Skármeta 181). Though the defender seems to have acted with no intention of winning the ball cleanly, playing the ball and not the man, even as “la voz ‘penal’ hizo comulgar en sus dos sílabas las bocas de todo el estadio...[y] sentóse entonces el player damnificado a la espera del pitazo sancionador” (182), “el árbitro sacudió su mano derecha frente al rostro, no tanto ventilándose, como significado con eso el tradicional gesto de que no, de que \textit{no pasó}
nada, \textsuperscript{35} señores” (original emphasis, 182). With his right hand, the referee dismisses any notion that a foul was committed, therefore legitimizing the violent actions taken by the defenders. Such action perfectly represented Galeano’s characterization of the figure of the referee as “el abominable tirano que ejerce su dictadura sin oposición posible” (26).

In this instance in which the referee permits a harsh act of physical violence against Arturo, the referee can be “percibido como un villano, un verdugo capaz de echar por tierra la hazaña del héroe o, como llega a decirse en ocasiones, la ilusión de todo un país” (García Cames 332).

The commentators continue to discuss the dissonance between the actions they and the rest of the spectators observed on the field with the blind eye turned by the referee. Fácus strongly asserts, “los hechos tienen una mecánica irreversible y lo que pasó pasó y lo vio todo el estadio;\textsuperscript{36} por mucho subjetivismo que el fútbol permita hay coordenadas morales que no deben vulnerarse para mantener en sí la integridad del espectáculo; aquí, el árbitro... rompe los límites de la cordura” (Skármeta 182).

\textsuperscript{35} Significantly, Skármeta’s next novel would be titled \textit{No pasó nada} (1977). It is a novel that deals with the legacy of the coup, specifically how the next generation, children of political exiles of the 70s, perceives and understands what happened during the coup and what it means for the nation.

\textsuperscript{36} This line, referring to the foul on Arturo and play in question, will also evoke the memory of what has become known as the “gol fantasma” or “gol de vergüenza”. A bizarre event in which the Chilean national team was obligated to take to the field for an official match against no opponent. The Soviet team had refused to come play in Chile, citing Pinochet’s use of the National stadium as a concentration camp and torture site. After sending a delegation to investigate the claims and “inspect” the state of the facilities, FIFA decided that the USSR must come and play in Santiago or forfeit the game and therefore their place in the 1974 World Cup. Nevertheless, the Chileans were still required to take to the field, kick the ball off and dribble down the field to score a goal in order to secure the victory and advance to the World Cup the following year. (See Goldblatt, \textit{Ball is Round} 609-610)

While the game was meant to illustrate that “aquí no pasó nada”, the bizarre spectacle of one team scoring a goal against an inexistent opponent actually served to highlight the exceptional nature of the event and point to the truth, “pasó lo que pasó”. The stadium was in fact serving as a detention and torture facility for enemies of the new regime and the game will forever point to that fact and the truth that Pinochet, FIFA and others in position of authority merely turned a blind eye.
judgment of the situation, the play itself as well as the referee’s response, or lack thereof, is made not only in sporting terms but in the framework of moral rules. The referee, the tyrannous dictator who, with his right hand, discredits the violence suffered by the ‘leftist’ forward, as if it never happened, thus justifies a new set of rules or at least a certain interpretation of the rules of the game.

It is this breaking or altering of the rules, as it is perceived by Arturo, his teammates, the fans and the commentators, which provokes his first and only active response to stand up to the immoral abuse of power. Upon getting up off the ground Arturo moves immediately to land a punch “con singular violencia...[en] la mandíbula del árbitro” (Skármeta 182). This provoked and thus justified (182) act of physical violence against the figure of the right-winged authoritarian represented in the referee not only highlights the foul-play of the right but also signals the pivotal moment in which Arturo makes the official turn to the left. While the non-sporting foul play of the defender who assaulted Arturo, impeding him from scoring is left unpunished and even legitimized by the non-call, Arturo’s non-sporting action, in retaliation against the ref who he perceived to have wronged him leads “al juez Molina a tomar la drástica medida de acometer y zaherir a Arturo con la tarjeta roja” (my emphasis 180).

It is ironic that the act that marks Arturo’s transition, or at least the beginning of a transition to a leftist, sympathizer if not activist, both takes place on the football field, a space which Arturo has insisted throughout the novel is apolitical, and immediately after his friend and prominent figure in the Unidad Popular, el Gordo, is assaulted and severely injured by their political rivals on the right. As his friend is run down in a car
and then beaten and kicked, Arturo makes no effort to defend - remember, “soy malo para defender”- or protect his friend, opting to run instead and watch the violence from a distance (Skármeta 172-75). His inaction regarding what really matters, the life of a friend, the political/social state of the nation, and therefore his lack of political commitment and maturity is made all the more apparent by the fact that he is willing to act in response to the extra-sporting violence he suffers on the football field, one which ultimately spells his personal failure as a professional. Though a symbolic/metaphoric reading of the action on the field allows us to view Arturo as a newly minted leftist who suffers at the hands of the violent and authoritarian right, a more realist reading of his off-the-field actions and more explicitly political demonstrations of his character show his conversion to be incomplete. He is still driven by an excessive self-interest more than any sense of commitment to the wellbeing of others and the larger community.

In addition to highlighting the incomplete nature of Arturo’s political transition and character development, his choice to resort to violence and therefore transgress the rules of the game illustrates and proves the very point which el Negro made to el Gordo at the beginning of the novel, which I have drawn on as the first example of fair vs foul play. As was said regarding the potential violent response to the physical violence committed by the political right, “Si te salís de la línea, si te salís de la legalidad validái que los otros huevones se pongan fuera de la legalidad” (38). Arturo’s violent response to the foul he suffered could only exacerbate his problems, resulting in his expulsion and giving his rivals and the authorities the justification for doing so, thus casting them in the role of victim rather than victimizer. His personal experience
provoked him to see the wrong committed, but his myopic and self-serving perspective and focus keeps him from responding in an appropriate manner.

**Football and/or politics**

It is no coincidence that this expulsion from the game and his ensuing failure as a professional footballer comes immediately after his experience with political violence, the guilt he feels for his inaction, and his next actions to at least begin to entertain the ideas of the political and cultural left and move towards greater political awareness and involvement. Wood observes as much, arguing that the Arturo’s footballing decline is directly related to his political awakening, citing the way each aspect highlights the “political symbolism inherent in the tension between the individual’s actions and the team’s performance on the pitch...: The brilliance of his individualism may have been dazzling in the short term, but it cannot form the basis of long-term success, which, it is implied, must be founded on communal action” (Wood 108). Likewise, such an interpretation allows the reader to impose a sporting conclusion on the political scene; that while such individualist focus in the economy and throughout society may bring apparent wealth and success, such gains are only ever fleeting and not widely distributed among society. Long-term success must be founded on the standards of community.

Moreover, the end of the novel shows Arturo returning to the south with his family and leaving his footballing aspirations behind, seemingly to say that political activism is incompatible with the practice of football. Such a novelistic rendering perhaps reinforces the stereotype that “football may be an opium of the people that
distracts them from more significant forms of activity” (Wood 109). Nevertheless, the novel as a whole is evident of how “Skármeta takes football as a symbol to show precisely the value of political engagement, while at the same time demonstrating that its value as a shared experience renders it an important means of establishing political and cultural allegiances, and of expressing values” (109). Skármeta uses football in such a way as to show it as both a potential distraction, an escapist tool which undermines the political potential of the populace, as well as “a key means of challenging the hegemonic discourse of the dictatorship, either through the practice of the sport itself (for example, the use of stadium chants) or via the literary representation of the sport to explore ideologies in conflict” (118).

The manner in which Skármeta employs the language of play and the symbolism of the game, along with the precise historical details and contours that constitute the geographic and temporal frame of the novel show the ways in which football stands at odds with politics as well as the many ways it is employed by those in power in Chilean society. The novel relies upon the communicability of the language of such a popular cultural activity to explore, challenge, and respond to the political and social changes of the moment.

The main thrust of my argument and focus in this chapter has been on the symbolic and figurative interpretation of football as a rhetorical tool to explore the political tension of the moment in which Skármeta wrote his novel. Such efforts aim to show the fruitful relationship that exists between football and politics, arguing that not even football is an apolitical field. The game is more than a game, constituting a
language and a field of practice and understanding which serves to articulate and challenge different political ideologies. Elements such as positioning on the field, style of play, and the relationship between the individual and the team, all constitute potential political stances and possible arguments for or against them.

**Estadio Nacional**

Nevertheless, as I bring this chapter to a close, I also hope to address how Skármeta incorporates specific historic events which bring football and politics together in meaningful ways to speak to specific ways in which football has been woven into the lived reality of 1970s Chile. Specifically, the final chapter of the novel recounts the fall of Allende’s government to the military actions taken by General Pinochet. Whereas the main content of the novel occurs before the coup, during a time in which freedom, possibility and hope were prevalent in every interaction, as individuals sought to assert their opinion and influence to bring about a reality they felt was best, the novel’s epilogue is marked by a sense of determinism, hopelessness and loss. It is here where football makes its final appearance in the novel, in the form of the Estadio Nacional. And “it is here that the notion of the world upside down,\(^37\) evident in the novel’s title, appears with force” (Wood 108).

The lasting image of football is not that of beautiful play on the field, players striving individually and together to score a goal and to perform for a jubilant and passionate group of fans, all engaged in the shared spectacle of the beautiful game.

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\(^{37}\) “Soñé que la nieve ardía” literally translates as “I dreamt the snow burned”. Such surrealist and sensorial imagery evokes a world impossible to make sense of, an almost apocalyptic or dystopian scene in which one cannot be certain of the potential threatening state of the fantastic elements.
Instead, the stadium is presented in its function as a detention camp and torture center for political enemies of the dictatorship.38 The very first lines of the epilogue introduce the stadium as a place of “suffering and shame” (Wood 108) from which Don Manuel, the owner of the pension where Arturo lived with all the young UP activists, has emerged after having suffered imprisonment, interrogation and other hardships at the hands of the military in the wake of the coup.

Don Manuel’s account of what happened during the coup is presented as if in an interview with a journalist who plans to write and publish an account of the event(s). Don Manuel’s account of this interview begins in media res: “Si de mí quiere sacarme algo, compañero, diga que nací de nuevo, que nací al revés como un muerto, que en vez de venir del vientre de mi madre salí de entre medio de esta sombra humillante, que así salí del Estadio” (Skármeta 214). The stadium is no longer a beacon, a symbol of beauty, life and effervescence, rather, an imposing shadow of death and suffering that looms over the city/country. Brenda Elsey explains this change in symbolism and function of stadiums. “The structure of stadiums enabled soldiers to watch over prisoners, who, in turn, were forced to watch the interrogation and murder of others in the center of the arena. Larger stadiums, such as the National Stadium and Estadio Chile, once celebrated by sportsmen as physical manifestations of democracy and progress, became symbols of the military’s brutality” (242).

38 For an in depth examination of the history and legacy of this dark chapter of Chilean (football) history see the documentary Estadio Nacional (2003) by Carmen Luz Parot.
After mentioning the stadium and the impact of his experience there, transforming him into a “muerto”, he points out the scars he carries with him, “míreme los dedos estos\(^{39}\) y anótame estas costillas…” (Skármeta 214). Such physical record of his experience there points to the use of torture within those walls. These acts of physical violence mark a stark departure from the regulated violence associated with the physical competition of the football games held at the stadium. Rather than contests of strength, skill, strategy and will, the stadium now houses the foul play of the dictatorship, in their attempt to purge the country of what they view as a scourge of communism, socialism, and any other leftist ideology.

Don Manuel later recounts the details of how he was detained and his interactions with the military officials that took him to the stadium. As was oft reported by other detainees, Don Manuel was taken from the streets for no apparent reason. “Las calles una pura oscuridad pegajosa y los milicos ahí fumando debajo del poste, y con las manos arriba que vamos preso me dijo uno y que otro cliente para el Estadio…que allá vas a contar toda la resistencia” (Skármeta 224). Though not an even playing field, nor a fair confrontation, or even a game willingly entered into by both parties, the soldiers include Don Manuel in an opposition team to the military and therefore the government. The language of play even makes its way into the soldiers’ commentary about what awaits their new prisoner at the stadium. However, this play is

\(^{39}\) The mention of fingers also reminds anyone familiar with the legacy of the dictatorship of the case of Victor Jara, the famed folk singer who was extremely outspoken against Pinochet and the dictatorship. Jara had written political songs decrying the acts of the dictatorship and his torturers specifically broke his fingers prior to his execution when he was held in the Estadio Chile, later renamed Estadio Victor Jara, as a way of silencing him.
charged with a very real consequence not consistent with the parameters of a game or sport. As they make their way to the stadium they muse, “si ahora en el Estadio se juegan una pichanguita antes que nosotros los goleemos a balazos...” (224). The recognition that the stadium is rightfully a place of sport, of playful contest, is used as a mere stay of execution, a sort of mercy or time allotted to the prisoners before they “lose the game”. Regardless of the score, the members of the “resistencia” are destined to lose in a blowout, suffering bullet after bullet as if they were mere goals. Such convergence of the language of play, the playfulness of sport and football, with the seriousness and fatal consequences of authoritarian politics drives home the fouls committed by the regime against the players/citizens of the nation.

Such dark and violent depictions of the stadium and its use in the hands of the dictatorship speaks truth to power and seeks to expose the horrible ways the dictatorship appropriated the game and its most potent symbols to exert control over the population. Though the stadium would later be named a Sitio de Memoria, and portions of the stadium would be converted into historical tours and museum features, commemorating and explaining the use of the stadium as a torture center and memorializing the names of all those who passed through its gates, at the time of its publication, the novel represented one of the few voices of dissent against the dictatorship. Where earlier in the novel football represented a field of encounter, a

40 Though not included in the novel, it is worth noting that the stadium did later serve as one of the few places where the public could gather and demonstrate their opposition to the dictatorship’s rule via chants during football matches. Daniel Matamala explains, “Esta efervescencia en los estadios cumple, en mi opinión, un rol no despreciable en la formación de la respuesta social al régimen. La visita al estadio, al no ser una actividad primariamente política, permite que ciudadanos tibios o apolíticos se vean, de pronto, formando parte de una masa que corea el: “Y va a caer” o brincando al son de “Él que no salta es
battle ground, between competing ideologies and political factions, it now was
dominated and controlled by the forces of the dictatorship, functioning merely as one
more tool to remake society as they saw fit.

This epilogue and the emergence of the Estadio Nacional communicate the
message Skármeta seems to drive home throughout the novel, that it is impossible to
have football without politics. In its form as a professional industry, the
commercialization and the mere popular interest attract political interests in order to
fund the clubs, stadia and facilities, leagues and federations, to serve as alternative
platforms on which aspiring politicians may gain experience and influence, and to
promote a positive image with which said political figure can successfully link
themselves to the teams and players of the greatest popularity. Additionally, the
structure of the sport itself, the relationships between players it requires and facilitates
to function properly, and even the metaphorical and symbolic potential dormant in
different positions and tactics, all allow football to function as a political language to
promote or oppose political ideologies all along the spectrum. The stark juxtaposition
between football and politics at the beginning of the novel which eventually gives way
to convergence of political and footballing arenas, both in matter of content and
sequence, forces the reader to understand and interrogate the two ‘opposing’
disciplines in similar terms.

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Pinochet”, y sintiéndose, por esa vía, partes de un movimiento social y político mayoritario” (Matamala 66-67).
While football is decidedly political, a specific political hermeneutics of football is difficult to pin down. Valdano, Vásquez Montalbán and others ascribe a certain style of play to either the political left or right. Yet when viewed through a historical lens and at multiple levels, such as player, club, national team, etc, the theoretical political conclusion can often contradict the historical realities of clubs, national federations and individual style of play. Such contradictions are manifest in the character of Arturo. The accounts of Arturo’s skill and individual style of play fit squarely into the category of “fútbol de izquierda”, as explained in his chapter, yet his use of his skills and view of his own place within the footballing world are just as clearly indicative of “fútbol de derecha.” What is made clear in the novel is the multifaceted nature of professional football, of the potential for the sport to embody conflicting political ideologies and parties, thus constituting football as a sort of proxy for political debate. *Soñé que la nieve ardía* shows Skármeta to be another one of “[los] poetas, [los] prosistas y hasta [los] filósofos...[d]el fútbol de izquierdas... ubica[dos] en su mayoría en América Latina” (Gatti 97). His novel is an important addition to the discussion of the place of football within Latin American society, its importance within the culture and prominence in politics, as well as its rich symbolism, language of play, metaphorical potential, and historical significance that allow it to serve as an effective instrument to communicate important political and social messages to the popular classes. Football is neither “de izquierdas” or “de derechas”, rather it is both.
Argentina is one of the perennial powerhouses of international football. From Maradonna and Messi to Di Stéfano, Kempes, and Riquelme the nation boasts some of the game’s greatest ever players and footballing icons along with some of the most decorated and historic club teams in Boca Juniors and River Plate. As a two-time World Cup champion, first in 1978, second in 1986, Argentina is by and large considered one of the most successful and esteemed footballing traditions in the world. With such a famous and successful footballing image and tradition in mind, Grant Farred’s statement, “Argentine victory in the World Cup is always tainted” (60), offers a starkly counterintuitive way to interpret Argentine football history. The most famous Argentine victory, their 2-1 win against England in the quarterfinal of the 1986 World Cup en route to the championship, is “tainted” by the devilishly tricky cheat of Diego Maradona’s infamous “mano de Dios” goal, scored with his hand. Nevertheless, the more serious transgression committed in pursuit of World Cup victory was committed by the junta militar of General Videla and performed by the selección albiceleste of the 1978 tournament.

The dictatorship’s appropriation of the national pastime and use of the tournament to further its political and social agenda is what Farred refers to as the...
“original Argentine transgression...[both in regard to] the matter of on-field indiscretions (to phrase it politely), and ...the more biopolitically fatal matter of the junta’s mistreatment (to understand the issue substantially) of its own citizens” (my emphasis, Farred 61). The acknowledgment of the suspicious forces influencing the nation’s first World Cup victory and the uneasiness many Argentines still feel regarding the conflicting realities of the brutality and oppression of the dictatorship and the joy and celebration of the footballing victory contribute to the fact that “not enough has been written about the ill-fated 1978 World Cup” (Heroes machos y patriotas 71), as lamented by noted Argentine sociologist and football academic, Pablo Alabarcos.

This chapter will explore the ways in which Martin Kohan contests the triumphant legacy of the 1978 World Cup and the military junta’s use/manipulation of the beautiful game, more specifically la selección nacional/albiceleste of said tournament, in his novel Dos veces junio (2002). I argue that the author’s choice of games included in the novel, his explicit connecting of the 1978 tournament to that of 1982, and the presence of the tragic war of las Malvinas,\(^{41}\) show that the true legacy of the 1978 World Cup victory is undeniably tied to the crimes, violence and failure of the

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\(^{41}\) This military conflict is referred to in English as the Falkland Islands war. The sovereignty of the Islands has been disputed among French, Spanish, English, USA, and Argentine forces and governments as early as 1764 and throughout the rest of the colonial period. Against the wishes of the Buenos Aires government, the English took control of the Island 1840, designating it as a Crown colony, and it remains a British territory to this day. However, in popular opinion as well as the minds and discourse of Argentinians, the islands, known locally as las Malvinas, are ‘rightfully’ Argentine. Goldblatt reports that “as the World cup squad gather[ed] and flew to Spain to defend the title, the team paraded in front of a banner proclaiming, ‘Las Malvinas Son Argentinass’“ (623). This act and sentiment still repeats and endures today, seen as recently as 2014 when the national team posed behind an enormous banner emblazoned with the same text before a friendly match against Slovenia, in the run-up to the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. Because the novel is narrated from an Argentine point of view, I will refer to them throughout the chapter as las Malvinas and the conflict as “the war of las Malvinas”.

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junta. Just as David Wood posits in his assessment of the novel, “Kohan invites reflection on the potential not to see the 1982 defeat as a moral victory, but to reconsider the 1978 victory as a moral defeat” (140). I will draw upon the novel’s commentary of the sporting action, the composition of the team, and the national discourse surrounding the tournament to examine the junta’s ‘dirty play’, both in the tournament itself and its use of the tournament as foul play against its own people. Moreover, I will draw meaningful connections between the author’s explicit discussion of the game to reveal the truth of the systematic and scientific disappearance, torture, and control of the regime’s political enemies.

The novel’s title is an explicit reference to the month of June of both 1978 and 1982, however, it is also an implicit reference to the duplicitous reality of the Argentine experience in both those instances; the image of unity and triumph seen in the performance of la selección and an account of the military efforts in the war of las Malvinas (‘82) as well as the disappearances, torture and killings of those deemed political dissidents and enemies of the state (‘78).

Temporally, the novel is foregrounded in June 1978, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the time of both the military dictatorship and the World Cup. However, the novel’s epilogue jumps in chronology from 1978 to 1982, another world cup year, in which Argentina finds itself at war’ in las Malvinas. Ironically, “football itself does not feature significantly in the narrative” of Kohan’s novel (Wood 139). In fact, even the choice of footballing results included in the novel, a secondhand account of the host nation’s loss to Italy during group play, the team’s only loss, contributes to the novel’s subversive use
of the game to undermine the triumphant, successful and unified message which the

dictatorship sought to project through the team’s sporting actions and eventual victory.

Rather than focus on the experience of the national team players or coaches, the
action and outcomes of the games played, or the commentary surrounding the team, its
performance, and the rumors of the dictatorship’s regime of terror, the novel deals primarily
with the daily observations of military life as seen through the eyes of a young conscript
assigned to chofer and assist a high-ranking military doctor, Doctor Messiano. The
author’s use of a young military conscript, an everyday citizen drafted at random into
the military, is not insignificant. The protagonist is never named and is merely a number
produced by a lottery. The opening chapter is titled, “Cuatrocientos noventa y siete”,
the conscript’s draft number, attributing to him a sort of everyman status, allowing the
reader to imagine that it could have been them just as it could have been him, to be
obligated to join the military service. The conscript tells us in the opening page, “en los
números no se jugaba otra cosa que la suerte” (Kohan 11). The question the novel will
pose each reader is if it should be considered bad or good luck to have been drafted.

The questions around the actions of military members during the time of the
dictatorship are directly related to the novel and arise for very specific reasons. David
Wood explains that the timing of the novel’s publication is no coincidence, that it
coincides with “a time when Argentina’s relationship with the period of El Proceso was
under review through a revisiting of previous decisions to grant pardons to the leaders
of the dictatorship” (139). The reader must answer difficult questions about the
protagonist’s culpability and complicity or innocence and even victimhood in relation to
the crimes committed during the reign of the junta. The protagonist is conscripted into the dirty play of the dictatorship, just as the national football team. Through this young man’s eyes the reader will be made privy to the grizzly details of the military’s disappearance and torture of political prisoners while also trying to make sense of the human descriptions of military doctors and a soldier’s opinion of the national spectacle and the legacy of the military regime in Argentina.

The novel opens with the chilling question, “A partir de qué edad se puede empezar a torturar a un niño?” (my emphasis, Kohan 11). This written communication is the beginning of the protagonist narrator’s involvement in the novel. He is sent to secure an answer to the question from his commanding officer, Dr. Mesiano. Consequently, his attempt to locate the doctor and then obtain the answer to this question constitutes the motivation of the novel’s main action. The primary focus of the novel, as presented in this initial question, and further follow-up inquiries, is the torture of a montonera prisoner who has just given birth and who, thus far, has resisted the torture techniques of her captors, refusing to divulge the names, places, and information they seek. The question asked of Dr. Mesiano is an effort to leverage the recent motherhood of the prisoner to obtain the vital information they seek. The rest of the novel follows the conscript in his efforts to do his duty as a soldier, which takes us to the stadium, allows us to hear the radio broadcasts about the team and their

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42 The word “empesar” appears here in italics merely to draw attention to an important aspect of the novel’s orthography. The protagonist is the one who relates reading this question written in a notebook and rather than comment on the terrible nature of the question his focus is on the minor spelling error committed by the soldier who wrote it.
performance, and listen to the doctor’s “armchair manager” critique of the coach and the team in the wake of their only loss of the tournament.

This first-person narration and point of view, however, does not constitute the only narrative voice or focalization of the novel, nor does the narration follow a singular linear path. The novel also includes what seem to be official reports, journal entries, notes and short messages of assorted provenance relating to any number of subjects:

- Alguns reproducen el tono triunfal o nacionalista de las transmisiones radiales, otros una especie de manual de estrategia de campo que hace del deporte un sucedáneo de la guerra (artilleros, ataques, defensas, flancos, maniobras, tiros), otros repiten según distintas variables la formación de la selección argentina de 1978...; todos quedan conjugados, así, con el discurso delirante de Mesiano sobre la historia argentina, con el discurso del soldado narrador sobre la “ciencia” médica que admira en su jefe y, sobre todo, con la obsesión de orden numérico que recorre todo el relato. (Dalmaroni 38)

The novel contains two registers; one, a first-person narration of the conscript protagonist, and the other, a sort of partial archive. Lombardo views an apparent disparity between the kinds of documents presented in this textual archive of 1978/82:

“en Dos veces junio, el contraste entre los archivos detallados sobre el fútbol, opuestos a la ausencia de archivos sobre los crímenes, apunta también al lugar y a la importancia que la comunidad le otorga al fútbol en detrimento de los crímenes de lesa humanidad” (46). In some regards, I agree with Lombardo, there are a great number of details presented regarding the *la selección* and the World Cup tournament (even if there is a
lack of any real footballing action), where there is a lack of detailed accounts of the military crimes. However, the novel does present a narrative of the plight of a montonera prisoner, including indirect representations of the crimes she suffered at the hands of the junta. More importantly, I argue that the apparent abundance of footballing texts does not hide the junta’s crimes from view, rather, the author’s use of footballing accounts subverts the intent of the junta to distract the public from their unsavory actions, and speaks metaphorically through football to illuminate their crimes for all to see. Regardless, all these fragmentary accounts and varying texts are parts of a whole that must be (re)constructed by the reader.

Rather than constituting multiple different narrative threads, the fragmentary structure brings all these disparate parts of the Argentine reality of ‘78 (and later ‘82) to illustrate the complex and at times contradictory discourses, events, and interpretations of the novel’s present moment. While footballing action along with the experiences and perspectives of footballers and other prominent figures of the national team does not occupy a primary focus of the novel, the tournament, the discourse surrounding the team and its players, and discussion of football strategy and history form essential parts of the novel’s structure and reflect the way in which the game was used to organize the nation and present a unified and upstanding nation to the international community.

David Wood views such a narrative strategy as a way to “[build] Argentina’s

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43 The author admits as much in an interview about the novel. He explains that the crimes of the junta are largely revealed by means of “el desplazamiento, la omisión, la elipsis. En Dos veces junio nunca se ve una tortura, yo jamás contaría cómo el esbirro mete la picana. Hay un trasfondo de silencio; algo no puede ser testimoniado. En la novela no hay estetización de la tortura porque está desplazada a la humillación de la prisionera que acaba de dar a luz o a las palabras: esas escenas están narradas en discurso indirecto” (Saban 167).
participation in the football tournament into the fabric of the novel and, by extension, into the core of its subject matter, the systematic (and scientific) torture and disappearance of detainees” (139).

The novel’s incorporation of the 1978 World cup symbolizes the manner in which the dictatorship sought to appropriate football’s significance and function to both appease and control their own population while projecting an image of unity throughout the nation. Moreover, the novel’s refusal to address the specific sporting actions and the sports coverage of the tournament, supplanting the dictatorship’s focus on the World Cup with explicit detail and observation of the very acts the dictatorship sought to cover up and censure, reveals the subversive nature of the novel itself.

**Football as more than a game and the imperative to win**

Argentina’s first World Cup victory is infamously remembered for its connection to the *junta militar* of General Jorge Videla and the *guerra sucia*. The dictatorship used the attraction of the World Cup to present a prosperous and joyous image of their nation to the rest of the world at a moment in which much of the international community had levelled accusations of human rights abuses and political oppression. The junta’s recognition of such accusations and attempts to refute them are clearly seen in Videla’s slogan “Los Argentinos somos derechos y humanos,” released in response to Amnesty international’s suggestion that foreign journalists look for signs of oppression while attending the tournament (Wilson 194).

While the images projected around the world, via color television and in the international press, were key to the junta’s aims in hosting the tournament, it wasn’t
only hosting that mattered, rather, winning was of paramount importance. Simon Kuper illustrates the junta’s mindset in this regard as follows:

The generals had a simple, fascist view of society. A country must be strong and united. If all the people are cheering as one...the country is strong and united. The way to bring about this happy state of things is through triumphs. Triumphs are not boring achievements like providing work, housing and a stable currency. No! Triumphs are military victories or great patriotic occasions. The biggest triumphs they scheduled were the hosting and winning of the World Cup, and the invasion of the Falkland Islands. This was all the same thing, so much so that the World Cup song, “Vamos Argentina, Vamos a Ganar”...was cranked out again during the Falklands War. (Kuper 216-17)

Winning the whole tournament was so vital to the military regime that even after having spent an estimated 700 million dollars on infrastructure, advertising, stadium construction and renovation, and other preparations to host the tournament (Kuper 211, Goldblatt 617, Wilson 193), there is strong evidence that the junta went so far as to bribe the players and the government of their semi-final opponent, Peru, to reach the final. All this to ensure victory and project success, unity and strength both

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45 Consider the following observation to further illustrate this point: “General Videla, in full military regalia, held a reception for the national team on the eve of the World Cup at the presidential palace. His expectations were made clear: ‘Like the commander says to his troops before battle, you will be winners’” (Goldblatt 619).

46 “The regime of General Jorge Rafael Videla not only paid the Peruvians to throw the game - the Argentine “central bank agreed to unfreeze a $50 million line of credit to Peru” - but they also shipped 35,000 tons of grain to a nation desperately in need of it on the verge of that match. And probably some arms too, for good measure, to the Peruvian dictatorship” (Farred 61). Such extreme measures of cheating to reach the final. Argentina needed to beat their fellow South Americans by at least 4 goals, a less than common sporting outcome. The final score of the all-important game was 6-0.
at home and abroad, while simultaneously concealing a more sinister, violent, and oppressive Argentina lying beneath the surface and out of sight.

It is this necessity to win and the way it will motivate the junta to act upon the field of play which threaten the ludic nature of the game. Huizinga, in his treatment of the role of play in society and the human species as a whole, *Homo Ludens* (2014), argues, “the passion to win sometimes threatens to obliterate the levity proper to a game” (47). One form in which play manifests itself is “contest”, a form which “is largely devoid of purpose. That is to say, the action begins and ends in itself, and the outcome does not contribute to the necessary life-processes of the group” (49). ‘True’ play does not posit greater significance in the act of winning more than having overcome one’s opponent in the realm of the game. For the junta, the significance and effect of winning transcends the temporal, spatial and signifying limits of the contest. Imposing an extra-ludic quality on the act of winning shatters the limits of the game world and transforms the contest into something else entirely. Such “passion to win” is ultimately what led the junta to cheat, employing physical intimidation, scare tactics, and bribes to ensure they made it to the final match. For Huizinga, the act of cheating breaks the rules of play and games: “To our way of thinking, cheating as a means of winning a game robs the action of its play-character and spoils it altogether, because for us the essence of play is that the rules be kept -that it be fair play” (52). The junta recognized the passion to win, innately present in any true fan of a team, national or club, and sought to weaponize such passion to root out any individuals unsympathetic to the nationalist cause of the junta. Of course, the football contest was a mere proxy for a more serious ideological
and political contest, “against what was left of the EPZ rural revolt in the north and the Montoneros urban guerilla movement in the cities. The military then extended the war to include the eradication of all political opposition: radicals, students and workers” (Goldblatt 617). The consequences of such a contest were a matter of life or death, not just winning or losing.

Fandom as law, conscription and war

It has been said that when the players take the field for their national team, “once hombres de pantalón corto son la espada del barrio, la ciudad o la nación. Estos guerreros sin armas ni corazas exorcizan los demonios de la multitud, y le confirman la fe: en cada enfrentamiento entre dos equipos, entran en combate viejos odios y amores heredados de padres e hijos” (Galeano 39). This idea, that the national team somehow embodies the nation itself, its citizens and leaders, along with its storied history, while admittedly simplistic and largely recognized as such among football fans and critics, nevertheless retains a certain weight in footballing history and present. Dos veces junio adopts this notion, accepted and promoted by the junta, in its representation of the importance of the national team, its success, and, of particular importance, fandom; public and genuine voiced support of the national team in the Mundial stands in for patriotism and public support of not only the nation, but the junta.

The phrase “war by other means”, in reference to international football, even in its seemingly most serious utterances, is generally considered metaphorical,
continuing to grant the sporting contest the status of a game. In this instance, the generals saw the opportunity to turn sport, a ludic contest circumscribed by a certain set of rules and whose outcome and consequences are supposedly limited in time and place, into more than a game. They believed that the game could have consequences that would transcend the pitch, the stadium, and the game itself to influence their nation and the international community in a way that would bolster their government’s image. In this instance, “la selección tenía que ganar en lo que se consideró una misión de guerra” (original emphasis, García Cames 373). In the hands of the junta, football, rather than war by other means, became the means of war, a war fought against their own ‘team’ and on home field.

As previously discussed, much of what occurs in the novel is an account of military actions regarding their possession and treatment of a montonera prisoner as they attempt to extract information pursuant to their goal of rooting out leftist individuals and ideology from the nation. Nevertheless, the account of interactions and discussions among soldiers, and even among military leaders, clearly shows the interest in and attention paid to the football tournament and its outcomes. In a moment of chastisement for having left his post absent longer than allowed, the young soldier

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esos momentos se le transfiere al deporte una épica de Estado. Por eso exagerando se podría decir que el fútbol es la continuación de la guerra por otros medios...hay fragmentos en Dos veces junio en los que efectivamente se leen tácticas de fútbol, pero podría tratarse lo mismo de Clausewitz” (my emphasis, Saban 70).

48 To illustrate this point, one need only look to the example of Argentina’s victory over England in the 1986 World Cup. When the two teams took the field, the Argentines saw this as an opportunity to avenge their loss in the war of las Malvinas just four years before. The perceived injustice done to the Argentines during that armed conflict was even put forth by Diego Maradona as justification for his “cheating” act of punching the ball into the net for the first goal of the victory.
confesses, “Es cierto que las conjeturas sobre el próximo partido lo demoraron en conversaciones que no había previsto” (Kohan 38). The outcome of each game was of great interest to most of the soldiers and could or would, at times, distract from the immediate requirements of their duties.

Interest in the games and the success of the national team was not necessarily bad. In his interaction with one of his commanding officers, the protagonist comments that upon hearing about the football content of the soldiers’ conversations in the mess hall, the sergeant “Preguntó al cabo si acaso alguien andaba queriendo poner en duda que la victoria sería, una vez más, de los argentinos” (Kohan 40). The sergeant doesn’t have any problem with the fact that the soldiers were focused on the upcoming game so long as they expressed assurance of an Argentine victory. The conscript is quick to dispel any semblance of doubt in an Argentine win. “El cabo pronto le aclaró que no, que acerca de la victoria argentina nadie mostraba ninguna vacilación; pero que respecto de las maneras de obtener esa victoria existían distintos pareceres” (my emphasis, 40). This brief interaction between a lowly conscript and a superior officer shows the meaning with which the military leaders had imbued the footballing actions of the national team. The team clearly represents the nation, specifically the junta and its faithful adherents, and therefore what is expected and required of the argentine soldier and by extension, a citizen, is a sure conviction that Argentina will win.

The sergeant goes beyond merely questioning the soldiers’ confidence in a winning outcome to question whether the soldiers support the makeup of the team and the coach’s selection of players. “El sargento quiso saber si aún persistían las
sempiternas lamentaciones por las ausencias de Jota Jota López o de Vicente Pernía. El cabo respondió que aquellas renzillas se habían superado ya completamente, y que tanto Jorge Olguín como Osvaldo Ardiles concitaban una adhesión unánime de todos los argentinos bien nacidos” (my emphasis, Kohan 40). The conscript is sure to make it clear that there is no criticism of the players the coach has selected to compete in this tournament, and that such unity of thought and opinion would be expected of any ‘true’ Argentine. Football serves as a litmus test to measure loyalty to country and commitment to the national project.

The necessity to express absolute belief in the national team extended beyond the barracks and penetrated the national discourse about the tournament in general and the team’s coach and players in particular. To calm his nerves as he searches for Dr. Mesiano, the protagonist recruit turns on the car radio and listens to the pregame analysis and predictions for Argentina’s game vs Italy. The commentators “hacían conjetura sobre el partido: mostraban cautela, pero no dudaban de la victoria argentina” (my emphasis, Kohan 56). Just like the soldiers and the sergeant, the media also shows a nationalist unity in their resolute prediction of victory. It could be argued that such self-assuring opinions could be explained as merely fan’s bias. Of course, the Argentines believe they will win! Nevertheless, it is significant that the novel doesn’t voice a single expression of doubt that anything but victory will follow.

Such one-sided and positive representation of the national team, its coach and players, was in fact a government mandate. Just as the state censured any press that sought to critique the government or espouse any opposing and therefore ‘subversive’
political or ideological messages, the government similarly prohibited any negative coverage of the national team, and in doing so bestowed upon the team and its players the status of ‘official’ representative of the junta and the nation. Alabarces explains, “Tanto la organización como el desarrollo del torneo se hicieron en un clima ominoso y represivo, que incluyó la prohibición explícita de criticar en los medios deportivos el desempleo de la selección de fútbol” (234). Love of the beautiful game and support of the national team, as well as the coach and players themselves, were tools to be employed by the junta in pursuit of national unity, “funcionario[s] del Proceso de Reorganización nacional” (original emphasis, García Cames 373).

The importance of football and the performance of the national team in the Mundial of 78 is further emphasized in another scene with the young conscript as he waits for Dr. Mesiano to appear from the stadium after attending a game with his son. The conscript leaves the abandoned streets in the neighborhood surrounding the stadium and enters a similarly empty restaurant to order some food. The only other person in the restaurant with him is an old man listening to a portable radio with headphones. The young soldier assumes, as one would, that the old man is listening to

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49 Interestingly enough, this censured and purely positive representation of the football team would then be repeated in the Argentine press’s reporting the conflict in las Malvinas. The truth of the state of the conflict was published in international press and ironically it was the 1982 World Cup which enabled the nation’s proxy soldiers, la selección albiceleste, to realize the real state of the nation and the failure of the junta. David Goldblatt contextualizes this realization of the players in his quotation from Jimmy Burns’ book on Maradona, The Hand of God: “Fantasy could not keep reality at bay for much longer. Menotti’s second World Cup campaign began with none of the brio of hope of 1978. Maradona described the devastating impact of arriving in Spain and encountering that reality in their own language in the uncensored Spanish press. ‘We were convinced we were winning the war, and like any patriot my allegiance was to the national flag. But then we got to Spain and we discovered the truth. It was a huge blow to everyone on the team.’ Argentina were beaten by Belgium. Humiliating. The next day the British accepted the Argentine surrender at Port Stanley” (Burns 94). (Goldblatt 623-24).
the game and asks to know the score, to which the old man replies that it is still a scoreless tie. Shortly after their interaction the old man gets up to use the bathroom and leaves his radio unattended. Desirous to know what is happening in the game, the conscript quickly goes over and puts on the headphones only to hear classical music. When the man returns, the conscript asks “si había alguna novedad” in the game, to which the man responds with no hesitation, “ninguna” (Kohan 67). Why would the old man pretend to be listening to, and therefore be interested and invested in the outcome of the game? Such an interaction clearly shows that even indifference or lack of interest betrayed the expectations of the government (remember that the conscript is a soldier, a uniformed representative of the state).

In the same scene the conscript observes the interaction between a policeman and the woman attendant at the restaurant. Upon entering the locale, the policeman expresses surprise and disappointment at the fact that the woman hasn’t put the game on the radio for customers to hear. When he asks the woman, “¿y el partido”, she quickly explains, “Es cábalas, nomás, agente, para que hoy ganen los nuestros. Contra los tanos en Alemania acá mismo me escuché la transmisión y el partido se nos iba si no era por Houseman” (Kohan 66). Once again, it could be argued that the women’s excuse is completely genuine. Football fanatics are known to be superstitious and perform any number of arbitrary rituals which they believe will bring their team victory. The woman’s response is even quite ingenious, turning an apparent disinterest in or dislike of the national team and its appropriation by the junta into an action that can be construed as an effort to help the team. Nevertheless, the policeman’s evident surprise and even
displeasure at the fact that the game is not being broadcast and closely followed reveals the prevailing notion that any true Argentine, a proud patriotic citizen, must be a football fan, a national team supporter, and earnestly follow their performance in this World Cup.

For the *junta*, fandom of the national team, and therefore support of the national reorganization project, was not merely observing, encouraging and cheering. More than a secondary action the junta proposed fandom as a way of being Argentine and supporting ‘the cause’ as an active duty of each citizen. As Grant Farred explains, “to impose a national singularity upon Argentina, Videla’s *junta* coined that now-ignominious slogan, ‘25 Million Will Play in the World Cup’” (63). Of course, the 25 Million Argentines did not actually take the field with the team and physically compete in the contest, but the slogan was a call to action, to loyal and dutiful engagement in the national political project of ‘rescuing’ the country from the grips of leftist ideology.

Interestingly enough, Chapter 5, the section which presents a playbook of military/football tactics, alternating with the conscript’s narration of events outside the stadium as the game versus Italy is played, is titled “Veinticinco millones” (Kohan 64). The slogan also implies that only those that subscribe to the *junta*’s political ideology, policies and practices will be counted among those 25 Million, and will be included in the state ‘team’ of Argentina. The *junta* sought to use passion for football and desire for victory as a form of conscription, to draft each individual of the nation into the aims of *El Proceso*.

Farred goes on to clarify:
Of course, what Videla and the militares meant was a very different kind of national arithmetic: twenty-five million minus the desaparecidos…. The junta’s equation was a simple one: less opposition equals greater national unity; addition through subtraction. Except, in this case, it meant the literal subtraction of Argentines from the nation. Less is more in Videla’s dictatorial calculus.

(Farred 63)

The potential threat which both the woman working the restaurant and the solitary male customer with the portable radio face is that of being disappeared; subtracted from the Argentine nation, embodied by the selección. In other words, being ‘kicked off the team’. When each of them is questioned by official representatives of the state, a policeman and a soldier respectively, each makes sure to quickly and resolutely express their interest in and sincere engagement with the team and its pursuit of victory. Their active support of the national team implicitly equated support for the junta and demonstrated ‘true’ patriotism. To express indifference or critique of the team would be tantamount to treason and potentially endanger themselves. This interpretation of these examples parallels that of Grant Farred in his assessment of the place - or lack thereof- of the Madres de Mayo, the famous mothers, grandmothers and sisters of the desaparecidos who would protest every Thursday in the Plaza de Mayo, demanding an answer from the government as to the whereabouts of their husbands, fathers and brothers, at the moment of World Cup victory. “To be against the nation in the moment of triumph was to be without the legitimate position as national subject; to
be against the triumph, if not against the team itself, was to be disenfranchised, without a critical space in the ebullient nation” (75).

The way in which fandom and support of the national team has been discussed up to this point in the chapter has admittedly been quite Manichean. One could either support the team, endorse each move made by coach and player, and in doing so demonstrate support for the junta, their administration, and El Proceso or they could criticize, oppose, or even show indifference to the national team and its performance in the World Cup, revealing their opposition to the dictatorship and thus making themselves social pariahs and potential targets of state persecution. Nevertheless, one must ask if such a clean distinction and simplistic way of thinking is valid. Can one root for the team and still oppose the dictatorship? Does blind support and belief in la selección signify blind obedience to a brutally repressive regime? And what of the players and the coach? Are they complicit extensions of the junta and the military whose actions serve to distract and subvert any potential resistance to the atrocious crimes perpetrated by the generals? Or are they public victims of the threat of fear and government control, public figures who are easier to target for their fame and notoriety?

We can discern a potentially more nuanced reality in one of the conscript’s observations of a particular part of the city. Just outside the stadium, in the surrounding neighborhoods, the protagonist observes one of the walls which the government had erected in the build-up to the tournament to hide the more poor and unsightly parts of
The conscript is well aware of the purpose of the walls: “Les habían levantado unas paredes de cemento alrededor para que desde afuera no se notaran los yuyos y los escombros” (Kohan 69-70). Yet, in addition to hiding the parts the junta did not want the international community to see, the regime also used such spaces to advertise the image and messaging they did want to transmit.

While such campaigning was meant to persuade the population to subscribe to the tenets of the military government, it nevertheless provided an opportunity for those same people to anonymously contest and deface the image of the junta. “Sobre esas paredes después se pusieron afiches de propaganda. Ahora no quedaba ninguna que estuviese entera y pudiese leerse bien, porque al parecer la gente que pasaba hacia el estadio los iba arrancando y los dejaba hechos jirones. Colgaban hacia afuera las grandes tiras de papel, como si fuesen los muros los que estaban desgajando” (Kohan 70). While on their way to the stadium to support and cheer for their team, the citizen fans would take the opportunity to rip and tear down the propaganda posted by the junta and make it appear as if the very walls which the junta had erected to cover up and whitewash the ‘real’ Argentina were coming apart.

One can see potential fandom and support of the football team while still maintaining an active opposition to the junta. While I would not argue that this passage

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50 Kuper reports that such walls were found not only in Buenos Aires but throughout the country in the cities that had been selected to host games for the tournament. “Along the main road into Rosario, the generals built a wall, painted with the facades of nice houses, to hide the city’s slums from the view of passing foreigners. The “Misery Wall” was short lived: at night the slum dwellers would steal the slabs of concrete for their own houses” (213). Jonathan Wilson repeats this observation and describes “the most scandalous aspect [of the redevelopment of Buenos Aires] which was the construction of a vast concrete wall to hide the view of the villas miserias - the shanty towns - from the highway into the center of town from Ezeiza” (193).
betrays a rebellious or oppositional stance toward the junta in the protagonist, I would draw attention to his use of the word “propaganda” (Kohan 70). The recognition by the young man that such posters were not merely “patriotic” or some other benign communication, but rather “propaganda” shows him to be aware of the government’s attempt to influence the population to subscribe to a potentially dangerous ideology and political rhetoric. Such a simple conception of footballing nationalism is an error which Kuper and the Argentine author, Osvaldo Bayer, critique in a conversation reported in Kuper’s book, *Soccer Against the Enemy*:

> People can think. If they are poor, and frightened, and champions of the world, they are pleased to be champions of the world and upset to be poor and frightened. Maybe bread and games are all the people want, but as Bayer points out, in 1978 they had lots of games and little bread. The fans made no mental connection between the national team and the junta. They cheered the players and (some of them at least) whistled at General Videla when he appeared in a stadium. (216)

In a society under authoritarian rule, subject to censorship, curfew, the disbanding of unions, and suppression of group protests, the communal gathering in the stadiums among “the soccer terraces, ...the weight of numbers offered a sense of anonymity [and] became a locus for limited dissent” (Wilson 192). I will address the function of the stadium as portrayed in the novel and its implications for the organization and control of the nation later in the chapter. For now, the point I hope to have illustrated is the fact that while the government sought to make fandom and
support of the national team equal to patriotism, loyalty and support of the junta, the novel shows cognitive and emotional dissonance experienced by Argentines both in and out of the military at the time. Many Argentines felt great conflict when faced with the question of whether they supported the national team, understanding its association with the forces in power at the moment. Nevertheless, many, including the coach and some players, found it was possible to both play, cheer for and/or support la selección albiceleste and actively disavow and denounce the junta and their crimes against their own people.51

The perception and reaction of spectators to the performance and influence of the national team in the World Cup is only one part of the discussion about the conflation of football and the junta. In addition to the fans, the players played an important role in the junta’s success to channel the joy and excitement surrounding the World Cup to unify the nation through feelings of patriotism while simultaneously distracting the population from the state violence and human rights violations committed as part of El Proceso. The generals were counting on an element of play and contest which corresponds to the winners of a given game. Huizinga explains, “another

51 Jonathan Wilson reports part of the speech supposedly given by Menotti in the locker room before kickoff of the championship game. His words make it clear that, in his eyes, the team did not represent the nation, the political entity headed by the junta, rather, they represented the people, the inhabitants of the geographical region known as Argentina, its history, culture and customs. “We are the people...We come from the victimized classes, and we represent the only thing that is legitimate in this country - soccer. We are not playing for the expensive seats full of military officers. We represent freedom, not the dictatorship’. In soccer, the old romantic, bohemian style of soccer, Menotti located the soul of argentinidad, just as Borocotó and Hipólito Yrigoyen had, in different ways, a half century earlier; in the victory of his team, playing a modified version of that style, one that had room for tactical fouling and cynical handballs, he saw a triumph of the Left.... Menotti...tended to refer to a victory for the ‘people’ rather than the ‘nation’.... His soccer, [he argued,] being free and creative, offered a reminder of the free, creative Argentina that existed before the junta” (204).
very important characteristic of play is that success won readily passes from the individual to the group” (50). This can be readily seen in the quotidian conversations between fans of any given team. A supporter of Boca Juniors won’t say, “Boca won on Saturday against River”. Rather, that fan will say “We won on Saturday”! “We beat River”. By merit of support and loyalty to a team the fan becomes co-participant in the game and co-recipient of the team’s successes and failures.

This conundrum of identity, of parsing the question of the political team/fans of Argentina and the football team/fans of Argentina raises difficult questions for the players, the individuals cast in the role of official state representatives. Do they represent the junta, the military, the ‘torturers’, or do they represent the people, the victims, the ‘tortured’? Grant Farred includes an emotive and provocative account of Osvaldo Ardiles’ reflection on this very question years after his participation in this infamous edition of the World Cup. Farred reports Ardiles’ consideration of the possible experience of political prisoners on the day of the final listening to the guards talk about the ongoing events of the game: “The guards would tell the prisoners, ‘We are winning,’ is probably how they would put it. They would not say Argentina is winning, they would say ‘We’. One is the torturer; the other is the victim” (74). As Farred goes on to explain, “Ardiles’ moral quandary has not only produced a lingering sense of guilt but, more importantly, it has raised the specter of potential complicity” (75).

Just as the everyday Argentine had to ask themselves if they can root for the national team without backing the junta, if the team has become too tainted an object to morally justify to support on the field of play, similarly, the players are thrust into a
difficult task of introspection. They must deal with the fact that their names are explicitly connected with other important names of the *junta*, as de facto “representatives par excellence of Videla’s repressive state. Names that were known.

Along with General Videla, Admiral Emilio Massera (head of the Navy), General Roberto Viola, Admiral Armando Lambruschini, Brigadier Orlando Agosta” (Farred 67). Farred sums up the issue in the following question: “How could the prisoner have cheered for Ardiles or Kempes or Passarella or Tarantini without also cheering for Videla, for Massera, for Agosti” (75)? Similarly, how does the player reconcile the possibility that their success as a footballer may be due to the foul play of the dictatorship? And worse, can they live with the possibility that their performance and their success could have contributed, even indirectly, to the suffering of their friends and family, or at the very least, their compatriots?

As previously mentioned, the coach, Cesar Luis Menotti, was a known proponent of left-wing politics, and it had been suggested that the only reason he was not removed from his position was due to the money owed him if his contract were terminated (Wilson 195). Similarly, other players on the team were known to come from poorer upbringings which often produced individuals of leftist sympathies and from which a

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52 Due to their status as World Cup winners, many argentines were sought by European clubs after the conclusion of the 1978 tournament. Ardiles and one other teammate, Ricardo “Ricky” Villa, secured a noteworthy move to Tottenham in England. Their success at the international level directly influenced their ability to secure a life of greater wealth and status. Ardiles’ social clout as a world cup winner and his connection to England as a professional player would go on to grant him access to individuals and records which would help him find closure for his extended family who lost a member in the war of las Malvinas (See *Blue, White, Blue*, an ESPN documentary for a more in-depth history and treatment of the events). Of course, the conflict between Argentina and England put enormous pressure and stress on the two Argentines plying their trade abroad in ‘enemy territory’.
great many montoneros came. Two players in particular are known to have (in)directly suffered the violence and repression of the junta: Tarantini and René Houseman. Interestingly enough, René Houseman is one of the only players discussed in any detail in the novel. The brief mention of him, made by Dr. Mesiano, is enough to allow us to consider the potential tension felt among the players as they tried to balance playing for a team that was explicitly tied to a regime which represented a very real threat to their friends, families and potentially themselves.

In his effort to understand how Argentina could have lost against the Italians, Dr. Mesiano makes note of the uncharacteristically poor performance of the veteran star winger, René “Hueso” Houseman. The protagonist explains the doctor’s analysis as follows: “El doctor Mesiano, muy dado al análisis de tácticas y estrategias, no afirmaba del todo la idea de que la erradicación, inconsulta pero impostergable, de la villa miseria del Bajo Belgrano, pudiese haber afectado el rendimiento de René Houseman” (Kohan 80). The significance of this passage is found in the doctor’s preference for tactics and strategies as principal explanatory principles as opposed to the ability and performance of individual players. Just as in the military, success depends on sound tactics, clever strategy, and the ability of players to follow the coach’s order and strategy to the letter. A player, in the mind of the doctor, is merely a piece to be marshalled and moved about by the mind and will of the man in charge. This preference for the system over the

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53 “Tarantini was not only the youngest member of that Argentine team, he was also arguably the player most opposed to Videla’s regime because he had friends who had been disappeared by the good General. Ironically, Tarantini was only drafted into Menotti’s team because, rumor has it, the first choice left back, Jorge Carrascosa, did not want to play for a team representing the dictatorship” (Farred 66-67).
individual is symptomatic of the ideology and practice of the *junta*. What matters is hierarchy, order, and obedience.

Secondly, his mention of the player’s personal circumstances surrounding the date of the game and his mental state, while eventually discarded as a possible explanation for his performance, nevertheless admits the reality of the threats to the life and livelihoods faced by many Argentines. Houseman famously grew up and continued to live in the extremely poor neighborhood of Belgrano, even after having gained a semblance of wealth and notoriety as a footballer. The doctor admits to the unannounced “erradicación” of the villa miseria Bajo Belgrano, in the lead up to the world cup. Such actions, deemed “impostergable” by the doctor, were part of what the *militares* called “Operation El Barrido, raiding flats and “disappearing” up to 200 people a day. They did not want the politically suspect to be around to meet foreign journalists” (Farred 72). For Housemann that meant that “antes del debut, la dictadura militar le tiró la casa abajo en la villa del Bajo Belgrano y forzó a su familia a abandonar el lugar donde vivían desde hacía casi dos décadas” (Larraquy).54

How could the loss of your home and forcible eviction of your loved ones not affect your mental and emotional state before entering the crucible of pressure that is a World Cup match, let alone one hosted in your home country with the military imperative to win placed explicitly on the team and on the individual as a team leader?

54 An in-depth account of Houseman’s career and his connection to the villa Bajo Belgrano is chronicled in this article by Marcelo Larruquy: “René Houseman y el Mundial ‘78: cómo la dictadura desalojó a su familia de la villa del Bajo Belgrano para “embellecer” la Ciudad” https://www.infobae.com/historia/2018/06/18/rene-houseman-y-el-mundial-78-como-la-dictadura-desalojo-a-su-familia-de-la-villa-del-bajo-belgrano-para-embellecer-la-ciudad/
While it may be convenient to see Houseman, and other players as complicit in the \textit{junta}'s use of the national team, for having participated in “the Mundial of death” (Farred 75), it is perhaps more logical to see the fear of retribution that opposing the military would represent as a motivating factor in his willingness to play for the team and strive to win.

Mesiano’s criticism of his play and denial of the effect the loss of his home neighborhood would have on his play is indicative of the military’s tendency to dehumanize the players. Their ideal of duty and obedience establishes the expectation that regardless of the personal circumstances, there is no excuse for not “doing your job”, for allowing feeling or sentiment to affect your dutiful fulfillment of obligations to one’s nation or superior.

Another observation of importance is that the only criticisms leveled against the team or its players to be found in the novel are uttered by a high-ranking military official, Doctor Mesiano. This violation of the government mandate illustrates just how difficult it would prove to truly consolidate control over the perception, discourse and representation of the most important cultural object, football, and its physical manifestation in the national team and its performance.

Upon their reunion after the team’s loss to Italy, the protagonist conscript recounts Dr. Mesiano’s reaction to and analysis of the loss. “El doctor Mesiano ahora decía que si en el arco esta noche hubiese estado Gatti, y no Fillol, el remate decisivo no hubiese llegado a destino, porque Gatti jugaba debidamente adelantado, y no debajo de los tres palos, como Fillol” (Kohan 78). Mesiano continues to critique not only the
original starting line-up but also the choice of when to make substitutions and which players to include. As he further considered how Argentina could have lost, “se inclinó por pensar que a Houseman lo habían hecho entrar demasiado tarde esta noche, y que no había tenido tiempo para desarrollar sus aptitudes con plenitud” (80). Though the first two criticisms deal with how the coach chose to make use of the players at his disposal for the game, Mesiano’s last point of criticism is to call into question the team selection in the first place, and more specifically the omission of a certain pibe, who would go on to only be considered by many the greatest player to ever play the game of football and the individual who would embody the Argentine way of playing as well as the national personality. The conscript tells us that after having rehearsed a long list of examples of “personajes de la historia, especialmente de la historia argentina, que habían tenido una actuación destacada en la política o en la guerra, si es que cabía hacer tal distinción, siendo todavía muy jóvenes...concluía: ‘Ha sido un gran error hacer a un lado al pibe Maradona’. ...insistía en que había sido un grave error tener prejuicios con los más jóvenes y en consecuencia apartar al pibe Maradona” (81-82).

Such a comment not only makes an explicit claim that the coach had made a grave error, but also establishes a direct connection between political/military heroes and the national team players. In the eyes of Doctor Mesiano, even footballers can be considered ‘patriots’ and ‘heroes’ just as the soldiers who also sacrifice their bodies and sometimes their lives in service to their country. It is of course ironic that the military doctor felt that the omission of Diego Armando Maradona, an individual who would go on to become one of the most vocal supporters of the political left and retroactively a
harsh critic of the military government, was what the team/nation needed for victory. As the junta was calling for soldiers/players, Mesiano saw the salvation of the team in the rebellious pibe from Villa Fiorito.

Where Dr. Mesiano expresses criticism of the team selection and management, critiques therefore leveled at the coach, the only other character in the novel to express a less than enthusiastic opinion of the national team and their performance in the World Cup is his 14-year-old son, Sergio. In a moment which reveals the deeply paternalistic nature of the military experience, the conscript protagonist laments the fact that Dr. Mesiano did not invite him to attend the Italy game, taking his son instead. Following the game, the narrator joins the Doctor and his son as they go for pizza and a drink to “salvar esa noche de mierda” (Kohan 88). The Doctor steps away to make a call, during which time the conscript broaches the awkward silence between him and Sergio with a couple innocuous questions about the game: “Fue difícil el partido? ¿Quedamos lejos del empate? (93). The son responds, “No sé, el fútbol no me gusta, y no lo entiendo” (93). Such a statement of disinterest and apathy regarding the national pastime, the national team, and its performance in this specific tournament, are sentiments which would not be confidently expressed by the everyday citizen, such as the attendant at the restaurant or her lone customer. Perhaps it is only those in positions of power and status, like the Doctor and his family, who are granted the luxury

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55 Manuel Vásquez Montalbán describes Maradona as “El jugador [que] confiesa su admiración por el Che Guevara, por Fidel Castro, su desprecio a las grandes potencias capitalistas que han abandonado a Argentina en la guerra de las Malvinas, y cuando el gobierno de Estados Unidos le niega el visado, viaja hasta La Habana para entregarle a Fidel Castro una de sus camisetas” (39).
of a personal opinion when the rest of the nation falls silent under fear and paranoia of being disappeared for even the smallest evidence of dissent.

Despite the faltering state of the military regime at the time, the *junta* sought once again to associate themselves with the national team in the runup to the 1982 World Cup in Spain as a way of endearing themselves to the nation and to solicit the approval of the people.\(^5\) However, the state of Argentine football and the national team specifically was not the same as it was four years prior and confidence in the team’s ability to win had eroded. While driving home from a brief reunion with Dr. Mesiano, the narrator hears a radio commentator in Spain who relates “que en la atmósfera de la concentración argentina se nota que hay preocupación, pero no desesperanza. Dice que nadie quiere resignarse a la derrota y que ésa es la tesitura general (Kohan 187). The lack of confidence in the face of diminishing performance and the erosion of public belief and support also mirrors the state of the Argentine forces at war in *las Malvinas* and the entirety of the military government.

It was this reluctance to accept the truth of the situation at home which led Galtieri to incite a war in the first place. Whereas the 1978 World Cup was a sort of metaphorical war, showing a white-washed image of a prosperous and just nation to defeat the “campaign of lies” against Argentina waged by foreign journalists, Galtieri figured that “even better than a World Cup for generating a sense of national unity...was a war” (Wilson 225). And while the conflict with the British in *las Malvinas*

\(^5\) In February 1982, Galtieri visited the Argentina squad at their pre-World Cup training camp, embracing Maradona for the cameras...Galtieri had seen the impact of success four years earlier and was desperate for a repeat in Spain” (Wilson 225).
did unite many of even the most severe critics of the *junta* in their love of country and
desire for self-determination, such unity would not be enough to secure victory nor
stave off the feeling of impending defeat.

Perhaps the language of concession and lack of faith in the ability to win in the
World Cup could be due to the fact that the nation was on the verge of surrender just
days before the start of the tournament. The composition of the team, “con la escasa
excepción de dos integrantes...se ha conservado idéntica desde la vez anterior, como si
los años no hubiesen pasado” (Kohan 159). Just as the military would like to project an
image of control and influence as prevalent and powerful as four years prior, the team
reflects an almost obstinate attempt to deny the problems and weakened state of the
team/nation that accompanied the previous four years. Whereas this same team just
four years ago was crowned world champion, the players now appear before the public
in “fotos turbias y grises que muestran una hilera de cabezas gachas...[una]
imagen...irremediablemente sombría” (160). The images of the players with their heads
hanging in defeat only served to confirm the opinions of the media as they came to
terms with the fact that “las chances de que la Argentina pueda derrotar [a su rival] en
el próximo partido son muy pocas, por no decir nulas” (184).

The protagonist reports that even “El doctor Mesiano dice que, para él, ya está
todo perdido” (Kohan 183). After having seen the name of the doctor’s son in the list of
fallen soldiers published in the paper, he felt the need to go see his old commanding

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57 The first day of the 1982 Spain World Cup, June 13th, was just one day before the official surrender of
Argentine forces and therefore the end of the war of *las Malvinas* on June 14th.
officer, mentor and role model. In conversation with his brother in law at a backyard barbeque Dr. Mesiano doubles down on his opinion: “ya no hay nada que hacer, y que conviene ir acomodándose a la idea de que está todo perdido” (183). The absence of a clear referent of this defeatist opinion allows us to interpret its meaning as both a comment on the World Cup as well as the outcome of the conflict in las Malvinas and the junta’s eventual downfall. Just as the media assert that there is little chance, if any, that the Argentines will win their next game, one in which “los jugadores argentinos...lo disputarán a vida o muerte” (159), there is similarly no chance the Argentines win the war in las Malvinas, and consequently no chance for the militares - a group which Dr. Mesiano is a part of - to maintain their positions of power and control in the government. Beyond the hope of the national team it is perhaps the fate of the junta and his loss of status which leads him to tell his young friend, “ahora se avecinan tiempos difíciles” (186). For the militares, just as for the team, “está todo perdido” (183).

Yet, even as the nation comes to accept defeat, the media seek to find a lesson to take from their loss in the team’s previous game to Italy. “En la radio hablan los analistas. Opinan que lo importante, incluso perdiendo, es ser fieles a una historia y una tradición de juego. Que el estilo argentino es lo que importa, más allá de las derrotas contingentes” (Kohan 185-86). This is the same logic that motivated the junta to invade and occupy the Malvinas. As their government began to fail, the decision to ‘take back’ las Malvinas, just like hosting the World Cup, sought to use a shared history, tradition, and sense of national identity to unify the nation and distract from the crimes and
problems of the military regime: “The World Cup and the Falklands War both allowed Argentinians to lose themselves in a blind patriotism that ignored the reality of a faltering economy and a government that had no mandate and increasingly little sense of control” (Wilson 227).

In a final comment, recorded by the narrator, the radio commentators assert, “Los argentinos tenemos que saber que merecíamos otra suerte, y que sólo una confabulación inopinada de hechos adversos pudo sorprendernos con esta nueva frustración” (my emphasis, Kohan 186-87). Here the commentator’s remarks prompt the ever-important question, who is included in that “we”? Who has the national team come to represent at this specific juncture in time? Does an association with this team still carry with it a latent support of the junta and their reign of terror? The political prisoners, friends and family of the disappeared, and even the “neutral” citizen could just as well utter, “los argentinos...merecíamos otra suerte”, referring not to the national team and its performance but to the junta and its governance. Because of the interspersed order of the novel’s narration of acts of the guerra sucia along with those of the mundial, the reader is not only allowed but prompted to read both registers interchangeably, in conjunction and conflict with one another. The ambiguity and contradictions produced in the simultaneous reading of these conflicting registers creates the cognitive, emotional, and moral dissonance symptomatic of the time of the junta’s control and the difficult tension still present when the reader looks back on the moment as a historical fact and seeks to assign judgment, justice and blame.

How to win a war by other means: military strategy as football tactics
La selección is a football team which stands in for the junta, another sort of ‘team’, engaged in another sort of contest. In Simon Critchley’s, What We Think About When We Think About Soccer, he makes some important observations about the nature of teams and the potential to read football as war, in the aim and efforts of the team to secure victory.

The purpose of the shape of the team...is to occupy and control space. The way a football team tries to control space has obvious analogies with the policing of space or the militarization of space...A football team should be organized like a small army: a compact, unified, mobile and skilled force with a clear chain of command. As many have said before, football is a continuation of war by other means, but the means of football are clearly bellicose: it is about victory (and sometimes heroic defeat). (1-2)

This obvious parallel in the way an army and a team focus on the control and occupation of space, the coordination of movements and actions, and reactions against opposition provide the reader with the opportunity to read a string of passages in the novel both as military tactics as well as footballing strategy. 58 These passages are the

58 Simon Kuper relates a singular experience in which he visits with an Argentina general, a member of the Supreme Council of the Argentina Armed Forces, who presented him with a detailed book of personal notes on football tactics, to which Kuper sought to draw military parallels: “General Sánchez (Pseudonym)] had primed himself for our meeting. He was carrying two files, one containing his incidental writings on soccer, and the other his book on soccer tactics. Written in 1951, it had never been published, and what he had in the file was the original, yellowed, typed manuscript. He looked nervous: he had walked around with his ideas in these dusty files for 40 years, and here was someone who wanted to know. It was why he had overcome his natural caution to speak to me” (234).

“I suggested that his ideas on soccer rang somewhat military. ‘No, it’s not military,’ he snapped before adding: ‘The principles of war can be applied to anything.’ I suspected that he had done things the other way around: that he had applied his theories on soccer to military strategy, rather than vice versa. It was chilling to listen to: old men all around the world expound half-baked coaching-manual wisdoms, but here was one who might use them on a battlefield” (235).
only examples of football action within the novel, though they are not descriptions of actual play, rather tactics that can be followed in a given situation; a playbook. They are narrated in the third person, presented as impersonal observations devoid of any personal or temporal contextualization.

The first tactic responds to the obstacles presented by any “contrario que agrede por medio de contraataques” (Kohan 64). The counterattack is generally a common strategy for teams of less attacking prowess and overall technical ability. It is the tool of the ‘underdog’. Such a description, both of the sorts of teams which would rely on a tactic of counterattacking and the sorts of attacks leveled clearly resonate with the smaller resistance groups of leftist subversives, groups that would sit deep in defense only to venture forward in attack in a moment of weakness or error committed by the sporting/military favorite. Similarly, another tactical approach put forth is a response to “contrarios [que] ensayan movimientos engañosos en el campo. Así, por ejemplo, ocupan posiciones ofensivas por el flanco derecho, cuando su verdadera intención es atacar por el flanco izquierdo...” (68). The focus on deceitful trickery in the sporting/military action of one’s adversary fits well into the concept of guerilla warfare, the most common sort of attacks perpetrated by small rebel factions, similar to the opposition of the junta. It is also significant that in the hypothetical attack against which the tactician prepares to respond, his rival pretends to attack on the right but actually attacks from the left wing. In a moment in which the entire hemisphere is subsumed by an ideological war between right and left, it is no coincidence that the enemy, the threat to the control, power, and victory of the junta/tactician, comes from the left wing.
Of further interest is the prescribed counter to such an attack. “De esta manera, se neutraliza una maniobra engañosa, no con una maniobra verdadera, sino con otra maniobra engañosa” (Kohan 68). When presented as merely tactics such actions seem benign in consequence. On the field of play, deception and ‘minor’ cheating would not carry grave moral or mortal repercussions. However, if contextualized by the events of the guerra sucia, one can read a certain justification of morally reprehensible actions in which the blame lies with the enemy who resorted to deceit in the first place. “Una maniobra engañosa”, perhaps the disappearance of an alleged left winger, is justified by the deceit of their resistance in the first place.

Moreover, a close reading of these tactics reveals the point of view of the tactician. Each of these “plays” have been reactionary, defensive, and apparently geared towards a team which boasts superior technical ability, physical strength and attacking prowess. While on the surface such passages pretend a certain objectivity, a close reader may be excused to interpret these tactics of that of the junta in response to the “contraataques” and “maniobras engañosas” of the montoneros and other leftist factions.

The last tactic is perhaps the most applicable to the political situation, in addition to the practice of football. In this instance, the tactician advocates for “marcación personal”, arguing that such a defense constitutes “un sistema defensivo de mayor

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59 There is only one offensive tactic presented: “Cuando se va en persecución de un contrario, no es conveniente ponerse justo detrás de él. Su propio cuerpo se convierte así en un obstáculo que dificulta la visión y nos impide darle alcance. Lo más adecuado, si se cuenta con la fuerza suficiente, es abrirse de la línea de carrera y sobrepasarlo por un costado, adelantar un buen tramo y ganarle metros, y recién entonces girar para ofrecerle un punto de choque desde una posición frontal” (69).
eficacia”, when compared with its alternative, “la marcación zonal” (Kohan 72,73). The next sections of the chapter will discuss in greater depth the intense personal surveillance and control to which the Argentine citizenry was subject during the dictatorship. Anyone deemed a potential threat would be investigated, tailed, surveilled and, if necessary, disappeared. As the tactician elaborates, such an approach to defensive tactics “supone un reconocimiento de hecho de la peligrosidad de los contrarios” (72). The rival players deemed most dangerous are those that solicit “man-marking”, as the footballers would call it. Nevertheless, while man-marking was effective for the most dangerous of opponents, “la marcación zonal” serves a purpose as well when facing different individual rivals and certain situations: “aunque ofrece mayores brechas defensivas, se basa ante todo en el control espacial del propio terreno. La defensa se afirma así en un sector del campo que está bajo su dominio y que el contrario tiene todavía que conquistar” (73). Here we return to the basic purpose of a team, or a small-army, that of “el control espacial del propio terreno”. Of course, in the case of the dictatorship, due to their perceived notion of themselves being the valid authorities of the nation, all Argentine territory was theirs to control and to defend. During the ‘78 World Cup the opposition, the radical left, did not possess any “terreno propio” to defend, seeing as they were confined to the national borders in a country wherein the political right asserted a tight control over space and territory as well as institutions and companies. This would of course change in ‘82 during the conflict in las Malvinas, in which the dictatorship played the role of aggressor, seeking to conquer British territory which the English held in control and sought to defend.
What is significant in the examples of military/football tactics, presented chronologically during the height of the dictatorship and the summer of the 1978 World Cup, is that the tactician posits its actions as purely defensive. Any attack comes from the “flanco izquierdo” via “maniobras engañosas”. The tactician’s team is merely defending its territory from their rival’s attempts to conquer it. The power play of the tactician/junta is to control its own territory via zonal marking while actively pursuing those rivals deemed sufficiently dangerous to merit man-marking, seeking to disrupt their potential for surprise counterattacks.

The stadium as battleground and panopticon

An important aspect of the junta’s governance was their “zonal marking”, their efforts to control the space and the movement of individuals throughout the nation. The designation of specific spaces for specific purposes imbues them with meaning. Grant Farred observes how the time of a nation can be lived spatially. As an example, he provides an account of a few important landmarks, spaces which represent distinct histories, agendas, and ideas of the nation:

The spaces the militares commandeered often stood in close proximity to those tentatively claimed by las Madres - the marches at the Plaza de Mayo took place within view of the Casa Rosa, the building that houses the Argentine rulers; the

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60 This notion that different specific spaces can constitute distinct realities which share the same chronological moment in time is what Farred calls “chronometrics”. Chronometrics, as he states it, are understood as “precise moments in time” and as “a spatial, social and geopolitical construct” which “allow for thinking how the time of the nation is lived spatially” (68-69). I argue that the different spaces and precise times of the events of the novel that transpire around the Mundial of 78, the government and repression of the junta, and the subsequent war of las Malvinas of 82, are represented in the novel as intersecting and conflicting histories of a general shared moment. Since each year, ’78 and ’82, is shown to be a dual reality - at least -, the novel in fact presents the reader with four different Junes.
Mundial final was played within kicking distance of EMSA’s headquarters, where several “dissidents” were detained “EMSA, “Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada” [the Navy Mechanics school]...These spaces represented radically opposing articulations of the Argentine nation: its repressive and oppositional faces; spaces ideologically in conflict with each other; spaces contesting the conception, representation and understanding of the Argentine nation. (69)

This reality of competing spaces in 1978 Argentina is seen in the conscript’s observations of his surroundings as he waits for Dr. Mesiano outside the stadium and remarks on the different locales in the neighborhood. One site of particular importance is a shooting range, “el Tiro Federal” (Kohan 59). From the car the protagonist can see how “Las luces blancas del estadio aclaraban con su reflejo los muros del Tiro Federal. En ese lugar, durante la instrucción, yo había hecho mis prácticas de tiro, y había recibido dos lecciones definitivas” (my emphasis 59). This particular shooting range was not necessarily a strictly military facility. Nevertheless, the name of the range along with the activities carried out within its confines no doubt lead the reader to interpret the place as a site of site violence, or at the very least, training of potential agents of said violence.

The stadium is traditionally a play of joy, emotion, communion, and the popular expressions of the people. It is significant, then, that in this instance the lights of the

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61 Kuper recounts a telling anecdote which illustrates the potential misunderstandings and apparent conflicts between the two spaces, the stadium and the shooting range: “One Frenchman, hearing distant gunfire during the World Cup opening ceremony, reported that people were being shot on the streets outside. He was not to know about the shooting club beside the River Plate stadium, and he paid for his mistake: Argentine journalists beat him up at the press center” (214).

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stadium illuminate not just the action of the field, but their reflection actually casts light on a different space, representative of the violence of the junta. This image is another way of illustrating a common phrase that came out of Argentina’s hosting of the tournament:“The World Cup was bad for investment and tourism in Argentina, and good for human rights” (Farred 64) (Kuper 215). Rather than occlude or divert the view of the nation and international community from the violence, disappearance, torture, and murder taking place under the junta’s reign, the stadium cast light on those very issues, illuminating the walls of the space where military conscripts would learn to proficiently discharge firearms.

The quote which introduced these two contending spaces also alluded to lessons imparted to the conscript as he learned how to fire his weapon. The first of which is purely technical - the importance of breathing to an accurate shot - the second, however, is much more sinister: “la segunda, que no había que dudar en un disparo, que al que dudaba en matar, lo mataban” (Kohan 59). The Tiro Federal is not for sport, leisure, or entertainment, rather, it is a place to teach and motivate young soldiers to shoot to kill. Soldiers are taught that the only way to survive is to kill. Interestingly enough, the lesson could be read in two ways: if one hesitates to pull the trigger on the enemy, los montoneros, the enemy will kill the soldier; or, if the young soldier hesitates

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62 Kuper reports further cultural evidence of this irony: “All in all, the World Cup was no coup for the generals. Rather, it helped the rest of the world see what a nasty lot the militares were. Every spectator at the World Cup, a witness of the real Argentina, as the Montonero slogan had it. Europeans suddenly found themselves reading about Latin American politics and society over breakfast, and they saw or even bought a World Cup bumper sticker that depicted a soccer ball covered by barbed wire. ‘It’s thanks to the Mundial that we became known in the world’, the Madres told us” (214-215).
or refuses to comply with the orders to kill one of their countrymen/women, they risk
death themselves in becoming the enemy, a traitor to the cause.

The author’s representation of the stadium in the novel serves to highlight the
sites of violence and state control in the nation rather than illuminate a joyous display of
the best of Argentine culture - foremost football, of course- and unity. Football, played
within the confines of the stadium, just as the actual tournament, served to attract the
foreign gaze and in fact brought the very things, people, and messages the junta had
hoped to hide to the attention of the world at large.

The junta understood the importance of stadiums as sites and symbols of power,
identity, and meaning” (Gaffney 24). They serve as visible examples of the country’s
development, presenting modern feats of architecture to the world, as well as their
power to unite a divided society in a concentrated space and time by gathering large
numbers of the population together to share in a communal emotional experience.

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63 The level of importance afforded stadiums by the junta is seen clearly in the large sums they spent on
the remodeling and construction of six different sites throughout the nation. “Around 10 percent of the
national budget, more than 700$ million...was spent on remodeling the stadiums of River Plate, Vélez
Sarsfield, and Rosario Central; building new grounds in Córdoba, Mar del Plata, and Mendoza,
constructing a press center and facilities for color television transmission; and improving airports and
roads” (Wilson 193). Of course, the stadiums did not require the full $700 million. Nevertheless, they
constituted a large part of the funds the government dedicated to preparing the nation to host the
tournament.

64 Gaffney explains that the design and construction of the stadiums were important marks of intelligence,
civilization, and sophistication for the emerging Latin American nations. “It was during the early decades
of the twentieth century that stadiums emerged as a new form of public space that initially served as sites
and symbols of cosmopolitan sophistication and social exclusion....The first modern stadiums in Latin
America were self-conscious expressions of European styles, tastes, and habits” (35). “As stadiums and
sporting cultures expanded to include a larger socioeconomic profile throughout Latin America, stadiums
assumed many of the integrative social characteristics traditionally associated with plazas” (36).

Nevertheless, the function and symbolism of the stadiums changed over the years, “If not
imagined as monuments in their own right, many state-funded stadiums were of immense dimensions,
creating cavernous public spaces that were more products of political ideologies than functional urban
design. Conceived and constructed in a ‘modernist’ moment, these stadiums lacked the intimacy,
character, and architectural nuance of stadiums built in the early decades of the twentieth century” (36).
These quasi-public spaces, sites of public gatherings, entry to which is strictly controlled by the state, are sites of tension, places where the individual is liberated from the constraints of everyday expectations yet closely monitored, corralled and directed, both by fellow spectators as well as authorities, in regard to what spaces they are allowed to occupy and liable for punishment if their observed behavior violates the standards of expectations.65

The metaphor of the stadium as a cathedral is a powerful and popular conception of these imposing structures, though, perhaps a more fitting metaphor for the stadium in late twentieth century South America and in Dos veces junio is that of a prison. Football stadiums have an ignominious association with the South American dictatorships of the time. Perhaps the most notable case is that of the Estadio Nacional in Chile, “el espacio designado para el juego, [que] había sido transformado por la dictadura en campo de concentración y exterminio de detenidos políticos” (Alabarces 230).66 Yet while some stadiums were used as detention centers to hold, interrogate, torture and kill political prisoners, they also afforded a unique opportunity to dissent. In the later years of the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, as well as during el Mundialito - a regional football tournament invented and hosted by the Uruguayan dictatorship to commemorate the 50 year anniversary of having hosted (and won) the first World Cup and in an effort to reconsolidate their control over the nation - fans of the national team

65 Gaffney defines the term: “Quasi-public spaces are those that allow for access to the general public under specific temporal and social conditions determined by their controlling interests. The architecture and social structures of quasi-public spaces are organized according to a specific hierarchy that tends to limit movement and free association with the aid of police forces or other forms of social control” (33).
66 The case of the Estadio Nacional is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1.
and citizens of the nation shouted together “Y va a caer” in unison in protest against their respective juntas (Alabraces 229). The juxtaposition of footballing fandom and political demonstration in footballing spaces has been discussed previously, recalling the conscript’s account of the actions of fans tearing down the propaganda posters that adorn the ‘misery walls’ on the way to the stadium.

While the stadium as a site of contest is important to consider, the author’s representation of the stadium in Dos veces junio is decidedly more one sided, a contest which has been won by the junta. The novel focuses on how the stadium controls the space, the observation and surveillance to which all who enter are subject, and the freedom or lack thereof of movement allowed to those within. Such a portrayal provides a clear example of Gaffney’s observation that “The smooth functioning of stadiums requires a militarized control of space and the uninterrupted functioning of state power” (29). In the novel, the protagonist’s observations of the stadium, its nature and function, serve as a metaphor for the mechanisms of state control, surveillance and restriction exerted upon the populace throughout the nation, in neighborhoods and schools as well as within detention centers.

This whole series of meditations on and observations of the stadium occurs when the conscript is informed by another soldier that Dr. Mesiano has already left work to attend the game versus Italy that night. The protagonist is under pressure to procure an answer from the Doctor as soon as possible in response to the novel’s opening question, “A qué edad se puede empezar a torturar un niño?” Since he does not have time to wait for the doctor to return from the game, he must search for him at
the stadium. A daunting task. He sadly admits, “no dejaba de comprender que...las probabilidades que yo tenía de encontrar al Doctor Mesiano en el acceso al estadio eran tan pocas que incluso la imagen de la aguja en el pajar resultaba insuficiente” (Kohan 57).

As he ponders his task, the conscript provides the reader with important details and observations of the stadium itself: “Gracias a las reformas indicadas y luego supervisadas por el Ente Autárquico, la capacidad del estadio alcanzaba ahora a casi ochenta mil espectadores” (Kohan 57). We learn here of the military’s occupation of the physical site, the costs in money, labor and time invested in the repairs and additions, and the final capacity of the stadium. I find it significant that the conscript’s immediate reaction to the thought of the multitude gathered within the walls of the stadium is to imagine if that number of people were to gather outside of it. “Me costaba calcular lo que representaba esa cantidad de personas aglomeradas en las calles de un barrio” (57). In one instance the stadium literally serves to corral and gather immense numbers of people within its walls, entranced by their passion for a game and the performance of the players on the pitch, while at the same time the stadium figuratively serves to illustrate the ways in which the citizens of a neighborhood or a nation may be gathered, marshaled and controlled by a military state. Though one might argue that these mass gatherings of people are exactly what the junta feared, especially if manifested in the

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67 The “Ente Autárquico del Mundial” is the name given to the military committee tasked to oversee all preparations for the 1978 World Cup. The committee was led by Admiral Carlos Alberto Lacoste, who took control after the “mysterious” death of General Omar Actis (Wilson 193).
form of protests, revolts, or other subversive activities, I argue that it shows the military’s capacity to control large numbers of their population via their love for football, the national team, and the hosting of the World Cup.

With the scope of the conscript’s task in mind, the reader can now appreciate the protagonist’s relief when he remembers that he “contaba con el dato preciso del sector en el que debía buscar” (Kohan 57). He remembers that the other conscript who informed him of the Doctor’s whereabouts had also told him, “El coronel Maidana le había conseguido al doctor Mesiano dos entradas de favor por el partido de esa noche. ‘Platea Belgrano alta’, precisó, ‘sector B’. Esas entradas provenían directamente de un obsequio del contralmirante Lacoste” (my emphasis, 50). This important information allows the reader to, once again, recognize the state control over every aspect of the tournament. Not only was the Ente Autárquico del Mundial in control of the preparations for the tournament, but the military also controlled who would and would not be permitted to enter the stadiums and exactly where they would go and could be found within its confines. The military understood that “entry to the stadium is regulated through ticketing mechanisms that tend to separate spectators by socioeconomic [or political] level.” Space within the stadium itself is organized to control human movement and action in a patterned and deliberate manner” (my emphasis, Gaffney 18).

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68 Remember Menotti’s speech to his players before the championship match of the final, “We are not playing for the expensive seats full of military officers” (Wilson 204). In the context of the dictatorship the socioeconomic and the sociopolitical are conflated.
This understanding of the stadium “as [a] [collection] of analytically arranged and segmented territories that distribute, locate and separate bodies in a system wherein every individual is observable in their ascribed, purchased, or allotted place” would allow the conscript to rather easily determine where he should go to locate the Doctor (Gaffney 29). Similarly, just as the stadium allowed him to know precisely where he should look for Dr. Mesiano, the military’s control of space, clearly separated and organized according to different social factors, mirrors many of the junta’s efforts throughout the nation’s major cities - for example, Operation El Barrido, the demolition of Bajo Belgrano, etc. The stadium serves as a metaphor for the way the junta controlled and patrolled the use of space and the access of specific individuals to it, which allowed them to locate and pursue their suspected political enemies just as the conscript is able to successfully seek for and locate the doctor.

This obvious and explicit military control of space, movement through it, and actions within it, is presented vividly in the scenes the conscript describes when witnessing the mass of 80,000 people leaving the stadium after the loss to Italy. If you’ve ever been to a mass sporting event you know the chaos and disorder that descends upon the streets in the moments following the match as everyone rushes to get home, finds a place to eat or drink, or just loiters in the streets. After a shock loss like this you might expect to see anger and violence erupt between rival fans or other performative acts of aggression and release of emotion and excess energy. This scene, however, strikes a very different tone:
Pero aquí la desazón se derramaba con un orden, porque para eso estaban los vallados infranqueables, y las motos de luces brillantes, y los caballos quietos pero intranquilos, señalando los lugares por donde se podía pasar y por donde no se podía pasar. Y así los que vivían en el oeste llegaban al cuarenta y dos, los que vivían en Pacheco llegaban a quince, y los que vivían en la Boca llegaban al veintinueve. (my emphasis, Kohan 78-79)

Rather than open space and free movement awaiting the fans outside the stadium, the constraints, barriers and structures that organized and corralled them in the stadium are reproduced outside it, directing the human traffic, ensuring that no one goes where they shouldn’t and that everyone eventually arrives home to their corresponding neighborhood.

Beyond the immediate surroundings of the stadium, where state authorities, impassible fences, and bright lights dictate the movements of fans leaving the game, the protagonist observes even further measures taken by the junta to ensure order, efficiency, and control:

Para que la desconcentración fuese tan pronta como ordenada, se contaba además con una serie de micros escolares...Esos micro anaranjados, que apenas unas horas después estarían llevando a decenas de niños desolados a las escuelas de la ciudad, se colmaban ahora con decenas de adultos igualmente desolados. Sus gestos adustos y ausentes, dispuestos en estos micros, adquirían un aire muy propio de la infancia. (Kohan 80)
Rather than seeing individuals make their way to the metro, hail a taxi or search for their own car in a parking garage, these “adultos desolados” are ushered onto state provided transportation which will make sure they each get to their proper and assigned destination. It should not be lost on the reader the connection the protagonist makes between these devastated adults and the children who normally ride these school busses. The junta sought to infantilize the population in a very real way, establishing paternalism as the law. The state will take care of its citizens as the father does his children. And just as the father has the final say in determining the actions of his children, the state has the final say in the matters of its citizens.

This imposition of the junta’s will over that of its citizens is driven home further by the narrator. Upon seeing the masses of people begin to spread out as they exit the stadium he remarks, “Si a los que salían del estadio, después de asistir a lo que había pasado, los hubiesen dejado librados a su propia voluntad, se hubiese visto que no tenían voluntad: se hubiese visto que se ponían a deambular sin sentido, a dar vueltas igual que se le da vueltas a un problema que no tiene solución” (my emphasis, Kohan 78). Such a description can be read as a victory in the eyes of the junta, a sign of the compliance and obedience now part of the national character. The dictatorship seems

69 Simon Critchley sees the dynamics of relationships such as manager/players, even when carried to the metaphors of teacher/pupil or general/soldier as stark examples that “football is still deeply marked by paternalism and can tend easily toward authoritarianism” (164). It is not surprising then that the most visible relationship in the novel is that between Dr. Mesiano and the conscript protagonist. Though the reader is briefly introduced to the conscript’s father via a memory the soldier recounts, it becomes increasingly clear that the conscript comes to see the military doctor as the most prominent father figure in this life, indicative of the state ultimately supplanting the biological paternity. Kohan himself states as much in an interview given in 2009: “es la relación de padre-hijo primero y de Mesiano-recluta después, otra relación paterna desplazada. Hay un triple mandato circulando en la novel; la obediencia ante todo, el orgullo por la identidad nacional y los valores del machismo argentino” (Saban 169).
to have achieved order, efficiency and control, yet something is still wrong with this picture.

Kohan could have chosen any game besides this one to include in his novel and the scenes the conscript witnesses as the people left that stadium would be entirely different. Out of all the games played, this one, against Italy, was the only one they lost. Kohan states that this moment of the tournament is the most interesting and literary for him, in that the loss represents or allows us to see “el quiebre en el sistema” (Saban 170). How different would the scenes have been if the people were celebrating a victory, let alone the country’s first World Cup victory? The waving of the argentine flags among the jubilant crowds shouting and singing together would communicate a triumphant, vibrant and happy Argentina. After his loss, however, the crowds of Argentines pouring out of the stadium appeared “una especie de infinita marcha fúnebre, uno de esos fenómenos excepcionales de tristeza general” (Kohan 78). Instead of victory and life, the loss of the national team is represented as a collective death and consequent task of mourning. Rather than showing the footballing victory - tainted as it may be - the novel shows the legacy of the 1978 tournament to be one of loss. It shows how the nation has already lost, subject to all the strict controls and restrictions on their individual and collective liberties, corralled into their designated spaces, even foreshadowing the future loss in *las Malvinas* and subsequent downfall of the dictatorship, along with the sporting failure of the ‘82 World Cup.

The use of the image of a funeral march should not only be read as metaphorical, defeat of the team as death, but rather a commentary on the “*Mundial of
death”, during which time thousands of Argentines were disappeared, tortured and killed (Farred 75). Rather than celebrating the footballing victory the nation should be mourning and remembering the loss of life of their own families, friends, and fellow citizens. Here I will turn to the novel’s treatment of the “biopolitically fatal matter of the junta’s mistreatment (to understand the issue substantially) of its own citizens” (61).

**Getting Physical: using the body**

The character in the novel that best helps illustrate what Farred calls the “biopolitically fatal mistreatment” of Argentine citizens is Dr. Mesiano. As a medical doctor his role in the military may seem lesser than that of the highest ranking leaders, such as General Videla or Galtieri. However, the guerra sucia was a different kind of war. As a clandestine war waged against its own people, there were of course casualties, though the aim of the military was not to destroy the nation, rather, to control and shape the society, the individuals which constitute the body politic, in their image.

The power of the military in this instance was not manifest in the destruction of life but in its administration. Such administration of life has thus far been discussed in this chapter in the context of controlling the space and the flow of people throughout the nation, while seeking to coerce them to adhere to the regime’s dictates through intimidation, fear, and a nationalist and patriotic rhetoric of unity. The other side of this effort to control the population was more intimate and individual and was manifest in their treatment of those bodies deemed to be defective or unfit for a healthy nation;
any individual who ascribed to the tenets of leftist ideologies, communist, Marxist, subversive, etc.

If we take the metaphor of the nation as a body, then the leftist revolutionaries represented a cancer, which, if left unchecked, would grow and spread until it infected the whole body and ultimately killed it. In their effort to heal the nation/body, the junta sought to completely eradicate even the slightest evidence of this ‘sickness’. Their ability to do so depended on their ability to extract names, places, plans, and other information from those prisoners they disappeared to then locate and eliminate all other traces of their enemy. Medicine, the study of the human body, its make-up and capability then became essential fields of knowledge that would allow them to access the information they sought, not by killing their enemies - at least not at first - rather by causing pain while keeping them alive. The novel makes this practice explicit when a medical colleague informs Dr. Mesiano upon his arrival to the detention center, “Tengo acá una piba en el borde entre la vida y la muerte...Y en mi opinión ya no resiste ni una pregunta más...puede que la perdamos...como fuente de información” (Kohan 122-122).

Doctor Mesiano waxes almost poetic on several occasions while speaking about his medical knowledge and its application: “La medicina es una ciencia del cuerpo humano. Es un saber sistematizado acerca del cuerpo humano, que a veces se aplica sobre su medianía, sobre el nivel promedio de lo que se considera la normalidad, y otras veces se aplica sobre sus límites, sobre los niveles a los que un cuerpo puede ser llevado” (Kohan 82). This understanding of the human body is essential to pushing individuals to achieve the highest levels of physical performance, the wishes of any
professional athlete, yet also potentially one of the cruelest forms of torture, knowing precisely how to stretch the body to its absolute limit, causing pain and damage to the body, yet keeping them alive. As doctor Mesiano explains, “Esta ciencia consistía en llevar a cada persona hasta el límite de su capacidad en llevar a cada persona hasta el límite de su capacidad de resistencia, fuera cual fuese esa capacidad de resistencia” (30). Dr. Mesiano, while an apparently knowledgeable doctor, also represents a danger, one which sees the body as a mere object of study and experimentation. His description of the study and practice of medicine is devoid of any humanity and only ever expressed in matter-of-fact empirical observations.

I argue that the novel’s description of the players, specifically their bodies and personal details, leads the reader to understand them as stand-ins for the disappeared and the tortured. Such a presentation reveals the junta’s focus on the bodies of its citizens, the administration of life by precise controls and scientific knowledge, which may be brought to bear on any individual who may begin to show ‘symptoms’ of the disease of leftist politics.

The connections between these two groups, the players and the disappeared, can begin to be seen in the fact that the players are stripped of any individuality in their novelistic representation. While the national team players are named individually, they appear fleetingly and only ever in a list among many others. Rather than narrate any of

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70 The narrator offers an account of the montonera’s disposition before the prospect of death via torture: “Tras haberse resignado a que iba a morir, tenía que resignarse ahora a que la vida seguiría” (my emphasis, 54). It seems counterintuitive to argue that being left alive could be more unbearable than being killed. This is the insidious administration of life employed by the junta.
the footballing action of the players, a beautiful pass, a cross of pinpoint accuracy, a
towering header or a powerful shot, the only information, descriptions, or
characterizations presented in the novel are numbers constituting the measurements
and composition of their bodies, geographical locations indicative of their place of origin
and facts of personal information such as their date of birth. Rather than individual
human beings with personality, charisma, history, and desire, they are presented to the
reader simply as “La formación de Argentina” (45).71

The national team players are introduced as follows: “Fillol; Olguín, Galván,
Passarella, Tarantini; Ardiles, Gallego, Kempes; Bertoni, Valencia, Ortiz” (Kohan 45).
Following this report of the players in the starting lineup, the novel alternates between
narration of the young conscript’s search for Dr. Mesiano and subsequent lists of the
players, only with the addition of a specific category of order and classification
pertaining to each player. Following the presentation of their names, we then read
reports of the same “formación de Argentina” but “con especial atención a los
nombres” (46), “a las posiciones” (57), “a la procedencia” (48), “a la numeración” (50),

71 While “formación” is not an unusual word used to describe the selection of players which the coach has
chosen to start a particular game, it more often is used to indicate the system of play or the formation in
which the coach has placed each player as part of their team strategy and tactics. A more common choice
would be “la selección argentina”. I therefore find it significant that the specific phrase appears in another
context in the novel. The narrator recalls how “El doctor Mesiano cierta vez me había dicho: dos fuerzas
chocaron en la formación de la Argentina: una caótica, irregular, desordenada, la de las montoneras; otra
sistemática, regular, planificada, la del ejército” (my emphasis Kohan 38). “La formación de la Argentina”
refers to the formation of the nation itself. At a time when the nation was battling to determine which of
these two forces would constitute the formation of the nation, the junta sought to appropriate the team,
an army by another name, one which was constituted in a specific, orderly and systematic way, to bring
victory to the nation. The choice of the word “formación” to introduce the players of the national team is
a linguistic weapon to lead the people to see the team as the nation and associate its victory and support
with that of the nation and its leaders.
“a las fechas de nacimiento” (51), “a la estatura” (52), y “al peso de los integrantes” (51).

Such minute details of each individual and detailed knowledge of the players’ homes, bodies, ages, etc., is eerily reminiscent of that practice of surveillance and control practiced by the junta to ‘reorganize’ and reconstitute the nation in an orderly manner, eliminating any body which did not meet their standards of ideological and behavioral requirements. If the players on the team represent the citizens of the nation, one can read into the report of the players the fact that just as the government has a database containing the essential personal information of all its players, it also has an extensive record of the personal information of the rest of the population, information which allows them to exert influence and control over each of those bodies to shape them into the nation they desire.

Of particular importance in the list of categories by which the players are catalogued is the last, “con especial atención al peso de los integrantes” (Kohan 51). The matter of weight in the novel provides a direct connection between the bodies of the footballers and those of the political prisoners being tortured in clandestine detention centers throughout the country, some within earshot of the stadium where the World Cup final would be played. The whole action of the novel is motivated by the need to answer the terrible question scribbled down by a soldier and then edited by the conscript protagonist, “¿A partir de qué edad se puede empezar a torturar a un niño?”

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72 The verb “reorganize” is used to call attention to the specific name the junta gave to their administration’s purpose, vision and therefore justification for the inhumane treatment exerted on their population, El Proceso de Reorganización Nacional.
When the conscript finally catches up to Dr. Mesiano and returns him to the detention center to discuss the question and course of action with the other medical officers, the doctor then provides his subordinates and the readers with an equally terrible, yet practical, answer.

The conscript offers his own answer when interrogated by the sergeant at the beginning of the novel, “A partir del momento en que la Patria lo requiera” (Kohan 26). Such a crass answer doesn’t address the sergeant’s needs, but it does show the reader the view the junta holds regarding their citizens, that the body is not the property of oneself but rather that of the government. At a later moment the conscript elaborates, “en una guerra los cuerpos ya tampoco son de nadie: son pura entrega, son puro darse a una bandera y a una causa. Así razonaba el doctor Mesiano cuando en la guerra se acciona sobre un cuerpo, se está accionando sobre algo que ya no le pertenece a nadie” (120). This is the very logic, perhaps a descriptive truth (as opposed to a prescriptive moral ideal), that has brought the conscript into the military in the first place. He was drafted, during an alleged time of peace, and therefore required to submit his body to the dictates and will of the military. He was required to be trained physically, to learn

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73 The context in which this question is uttered refers to the fact that during the guerra sucia many pregnant women were disappeared by the government who then gave birth to children in captivity. Most of these children were then given to families of military and government officials. This question of when they can begin to torture a child refers to the tactic of torturing the child to extract the information they seek from the mother, who has up to this point resisted their torture and refused to divulge any information she may or may not have: “Todos los métodos fallaron con esta piba. Se la ve muy preparada. Pero tenemos al chiquito” (122).

74 His account of his training at the Tiro Federal is assumed to be only a part of “basic training” common to all military recruits/conscripts.
obedience,\textsuperscript{75} to abide by strict schedules and protocols,\textsuperscript{76} always reporting his actions and whereabouts to his direct superior.\textsuperscript{77} As a conscripted soldier, his body and therefore his life, are no longer his own. Through the montonera prisoner, her newborn son, the national team players and even the conscript, we can view the \textit{junta}'s “insistence on the physical incarnation of sacrifice in the name of the national [and the placement of] the body at the centre of the individual’s relationship to the nation-state” (McAllister 462). The \textit{junta} sought to conscript each individual in the nation, willingly or not. And therein lies the difference between the conscript and the montonera prisoner at the center of the novel’s action.

With this idea in mind the rest of the military personnel have no problem discussing in a very matter of fact manner the different potential answers to their pressing situation. It is Dr. Mesiano who then points out that the military officials are asking the wrong question. He berates the sergeant with the question, “A quién se le ocurre que lo que cuenta en esto es la edad? (Kohan 123), before providing the key insight: “Aquí lo que importa es la masa corporal...Es el peso lo que importa, y no la edad. Hasta un estudiante de medicina lo hubiese sabido” (124). The terrifying aspect of this question and the respective answer is the glaring absence of any ethical

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{75} \textit{Recuerdo que mi padre dijo: “Los milicos son gente de reglas claras”. La primera de esas reglas establecía: “El superior siempre tiene razón, y más aún cuando no la tiene”. Recuerdo que me dijo que entendiera bien eso, porque si entendía eso, entendía todo” (Kohan 16).}
\item \textsuperscript{76} \textit{A las seis y media en punto de la mañana, yo pasaba a buscar al doctor...Que el día fuese liviano o intenso no importaba. Lo importante era llevar un ritmo metódico, porque en la vida, según decía el doctor Mesiano, todo es cuestión de método” (Kohan 42-43).}
\item \textsuperscript{77} \textit{“Cada integrante del servicio estaba obligado, sin que importara su función o su jerarquía, a reportarse sin demoras si se precisaba su presencia. Era uno de los requisitos fundamentales para que el sistema funcionara” (Kohan 47).}
\end{itemize}
consideration. There is no debate about whether it is morally or ethically acceptable to
torture a child in the first place. The body of the child, as well as the mother - a
montonera insurgent - are merely material objects to be treated as deemed necessary
for the needs of the nation.

This section, which treats the question of the child’s weight, begins with the
conscripts’ observation of an old scale, “una que tenía una pesa de metal que había que
deslizar en una barra, y que indicaba el número correspondiente cuando la barra
quedaba en suspenso” (my emphasis, Kohan 121). The title/heading of the chapter is
the very weight of the baby, “dos trescientos” (two grams and 300 miligrams) (121,
126). Such an observation of the function of the scale illustrates the dehumanizing
action of the junta, in their reduction any given individual to “un número
correspondiente”, an action seen in the account of the montonera prisoner’s newborn
child and repeated in the “peso de los integrantes” of the national team and by
extension the nation.78 As the doctor explains, it is all a matter of determining whether
“se trata de un cuerpo resistente o no” (124). Does the body possess “resistencia”?

This attribute is similarly important among both prisoners and players.
Specifically in football, one of the most sought-after characteristics of a good player is
endurance; the ability to weather knocks, fights, sprints, and great physical exertion

78 “El número correspondiente” of the players could also refer to the assigned number each player wears
on their back. In many instances the number will stand in place of a name or surname and the player may
be identified solely by their number, devoid of a name or identity independent of their status as a
footballer and their role in the squad. Certain numbers indicate different positions occupied and roles
fulfilled on the pitch. Numbers 0-6 are most often goalies, defenders, and defensive midfielders, while
numbers 7-11 are traditionally creative and attacking players, midfielders and forwards. Players can be
assigned both an identity and a role determined by the number they are given.
while maintaining the strength and skill necessary to still perform the necessary functions to play well and win. To ensure that players develop this essential physical quality, coaches will impose strict restrictions on their players regarding diet, extra-sporting activities, and training regimes. The body is subject to the controls and stresses determined by the coach and/or the fitness staff. Indeed, Gaffney suspects that “the modern professional athlete is perhaps the most controlled and conditioned human subject - both on and off the field (30).

However, for a footballer, it is not usually a matter of life or death, as it is for the prisoner. If a prisoner lacks “resistencia” or is taken beyond their physical capacity, the result is death. Whereas the media speaks metaphorically when they announce that the national team, in the 1982 World Cup, will play their next game - against Brazil - as if it were a case of life or death (Kohan 159), the conscript speaks literally when he expresses his hesitancy to state so explicitly upon informing Dr. Mesiano of the situation: “‘Doctor’, insistí, ‘se trata de un caso de cierta urgencia’. No quise decir de vida o muerte, porque era una frase hecha, vacía de sentido, una estupidez” (86). While the tendency to speak of any situation in which we feel intensely invested has

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79 Of particular note and importance was the emphasis on pace and pressure in Menotti’s approach to game planning and tactics. Jonathan Wilson reports, “Pace became central to Menotti’s conception” and cites Omar Larrosa, a player in the 1978 team, who recalls the “emphasis on physical fitness as the major difference between the Menotti he had previously played for and the one who led Argentina at the World Cup. Larrosa remarks “Menotti was the same when it came to thinking, philosophy, ball possession, but a completely new Menotti in terms of fitness, diets, and training” (Wilson 195). The importance of this endurance in securing victory in the championship final against Holland was evident once again in Menotti’s comments to his players after having just avoided being scored on, when a Dutch shot hit the post: “Remain calm. Don’t rush. We still have thirty minutes. I see you’re fit. We have more physical reserves than them, and we will impose our rhythm” (my emphasis, Wilson 203).
diminished the force of such a phrase, to state that the question at hand in this case is a question of life or death, is anything but an empty or stupid phrase.

Furthermore, the footballer is one of the most visible individuals in nations such as Argentina. Not only does the spectator view and judge each minute movement and gesture, whether live in the stadium, or on the tv at home or in a bar on tv, but due to their celebrity status, the vigilance, criticism and commentary on the most minimal detail of their daily lives are often broadcast in the news, published in tabloids, and discussed ad nauseum among pundits as well as friends and fans. The political prisoner, particularly “un desaparecido”, is hidden from any public view, subject to the gaze and treatment of only their tormenter. While the junta would have you focus on the footballer, the author’s representation of the players in the novel, while not going so far as to narrate the act of torture or interrogation, nonetheless co-opts the military’s objects of distraction to draw the reader’s attention to the bodies of the “desparacidos” via the minute medical language of each player’s categorization.

Remembering the ‘victory’ of 1978 through the loss of 1982

In his remarks from the 2007 conference, *Football in the Americas: Fútbol*, *Futebol, Soccer*, Pablo Alabarces recalls one of the first attempts at reconciling the effect of the dictatorship on the outcome of the 1978 World Cup and its legacy within the nation.80 In “the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1978...victory, in July 2003”:  

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80 This commemorative event was held in the Estadio Monumental (Estadio Antonio Vespucio Liberti, to be specific) and further provoked debate and discussion about the link between football and the dictatorship. Gaffney explains, “The game was attended by tens of thousands of people, but many tens of
Most journalists insisted that at the time the military dictatorship was credited with Argentina’s success and that football itself was not given a high enough profile. Some of the players involved in the organisation of the celebration (in particularly Ricky Villa, who had played in the World Cup and Claudio Morresi, brother of a desaparecido) tried to balance the debt that football had with the memory of the dictatorship at the River Plate stadium, involving a tribute to human rights organisations. However, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo were not invited to be a part of the ceremony, and attendance was also low. The football establishment was not willing to accept a recognition of its complicity with the military governments of 1976-83 - and nor were the fans prepared to recognise that. (109)

Though Dos veces junio was published the year preceding the 25th anniversary celebration, it sought to recognise the complicity of the football establishment that neither they nor the fans were willing to recognize even a year later. The novel refuses to focus on the actual action of the tournament, the goals scored by iconic and historic players, or the jubilant celebrations throughout Buenos Aires and the whole nation. Football is a prominent part of the novel, but is more a vehicle to tell another story, that of the crimes of the junta and the plight of the desaparecidos, than it is the main focus itself. For as much as the nation would like to forget the atrocities of the dictatorship thousands more consciously stayed away because they associated the event and the space of the stadium with the military dictatorship and the “dirty war.” By staging a commemorative event in the Monumental, the AFA was viewed by many as continuing the troubling association between soccer, the stadium, and political violence” (198).
and bask in the glory of footballing immortality, it is in fact the football and the circumstances which contributed to Argentine victory that will forever prohibit the evocation of one, the footballing victory, without the other, the crimes of the dictatorship.

The “hero” of the novel is not Mario Kempes, René Housemann or Daniel Passarella, nor is it the conscript or Dr. Mesiano - though his name may hint at such an interpretation. The hero, or rather, heroine, is the montonera prisoner who never betrays any of her comrades, resisting the long and brutal tortures and refusing to give up any names or locations while nevertheless showing an intense love and care for her newborn son who has been ripped from her arms at birth (Saban 167). She is also the voice of chastisement and reflection for the conscript and for the reader.

While waiting for Dr. Mesiano and Dr. Padilla to finish their discussion regarding the ability to torture the child, the conscript finds himself alone in a cement hallway, standing watch of the montonera’s cell. Making the most of a perceived opportunity, the woman tells the conscript, “Vos no sos uno de ellos. Vos me tenés que ayudar” (Kohan 135). In a last ditch effort to secure her freedom she begs the protagonist to call a lawyer whose number she knows and tell him where they are keeping her and her son.

Mesiano has a clear ring of “Mesías” to it. This is perhaps a fortunate irony of the novel, that a doctor, one whose purpose is to “save” patients from death, does strive to keep his patients alive, but only to make them suffer enough to be of use to the dictatorship. He is no savior. Football fanatics may also hear echoes of another famous individual, named Lionel Messi. While Messi is indeed the new and perhaps everlasting star of Argentine, if not world, football, he would have only been 15 years old at the time of the novel’s publication, still working his way through the famed La Masia academy of Barcelona. The author tells that Mesiano is actually “un jugador de fútbol de los años 60 que se hizo famoso porque en un partido entre Argentina y Brasil estaba marcando bien a Pelé que le dio un codazo y le rompió la nariz” (Saban 169).
When her petitions fall on deaf ears she then appeals to his humanity anyway she can.

Here, the significance of a first person narration is of paramount importance to the thrust of the novel and its effect on the reader. The personal “me”/yo forces the reader to put themselves in the place of the conscript and consider the things this new mother is telling and asking of him/her.

“Ella me empezó a contar las cosas que estaban pasando...La voz ronca me fue diciendo cada cosa que le había hecho. En un momento no quise escuchar más...pero ella seguía hablando” (my emphasis, 137). “Ella quería que yo escuchara cada cosa, que yo supiera cada cosa, y después quería que avisara” (138). “‘En unos meses te largan,’ me dijo. ‘En unos meses estás afuera y sos el de siempre’...Me pidió que le salvara al hijo...y me pedía por el hijo y los compañeros” (my emphasis, 139). “Me pidió que pensara en las cosas que estaban pasando. Con lujo de detalles: cada cosa que le habían hecho, que le habían dicho, lo que había escuchado, lo que había sabido” (my emphasis, 140).

“Me pidió por el hijo y por los compañeros. Me dijo: ‘Vos no sos uno de ellos’. Me dijo que podía ayudarlos sin correr ningún peligro. Me dijo: ‘No ves lo que está pasando’...; me dijo que esa noche yo iba a soñar con las cosas que me había contado” (my emphasis, 141).

How can one hear such petitions, such accounts of torment and torture, such yearning and concern for a child and compañeros and not feel compelled to do what you can to save the child, if not the mother also, to make known all the horrible things which this woman has seen, heard, known, and experience? The protagonist offers a
kurt, if not angry response, “No ayudo a los extremistas” (Kohan 140). How does each individual reader respond? This is the real task of the novel. And while the author does not narrate any torture scenes, any detailed accounts of disappearances, murders, and other such crimes, he uses football, both in his account of the players as well as potential tactics, to give the reader an idea of the junta’s actions against its enemies, both domestic and foreign. Football becomes the language through which the author reveals the hidden realities of 1978 World Cup Argentina beyond the mere footballing spectacle.

Even after the first June of 1978, a trace of the mother remains to forever remind the nation of its bloody history and the Mundial’s complicity in it. In the final pages of the epilogue, the protagonist, no longer a military conscript, has joined Dr. Mesiano and his family at their house for a cookout after having learned of his son’s death in las Malvinas. Present at that family gathering is a conspicuous little boy, “un chico de pelo castaño” (Kohan 178) “al que llaman Antonio” (179). When the little boy is asked his age, “[él] muestra con orgullo, la mano en alto, los...cuatro dedos extendidos” (179), after which “El doctor Mesiano agrega: ‘Recién cumplidos’” (179). These minute chronological details regarding the boy’s age immediately point to the uncomfortable truth that this little boy is the child the montonera gave birth to while in detention during the ’78 World Cup. If there were any doubt, his ‘real’ name is confirmed by the narrator of the epilogue. While being held prisoner, the boys mother “pensó un nombre por si había nacido varón, y otro nombre por si había nacido mujer, sin saber si esos nombres quedarian o serian despojados. Fue varón, y se llamó Guillermo” (my emphasis,
24). In the page preceding that, in which the protagonist relays the boy’s age, “al que llamaban Antonio” (my emphasis 179), the narrator reveals that the “chico de pelo castaño...se llama Guillermo” (178).

In the waning moments of the dictatorship and la selección’s time in the ‘82 World Cup, “el chico juega con una pelota azul y blanca. La levanta con las dos manos y después la tira al suelo” (Kohan 181). On the outside this little boy seems to demonstrate the natural and proud combination of patriotism and football. The colors of the ball and the game to which the ball corresponds connect the political/national and the sporting. Nevertheless, there is something incongruous, rebellious even, about the child’s behavior. “El cuñado del doctor Mesiano quiere que el chico juegue con los pies, no con las manos. ‘Con los pies, Antonio. Con las manos juegan las nenas’” (182). The correct behavior and treatment of the symbols of the nation and la selección is ignored by this boy who would rather play a different game, one supposedly played by girls. Perhaps a girl like his mother. The child is even described as “un poco rebelde” (187), an attribute clearly meant to be explained by his true parentage. A trait which his new ‘family’ is trying hard to cure him of. They tell the protagonist that Antonio/Guillermo “va mejorando su conducta día a día...” (187).

Later in the visit Dr. Mesiano continues to instruct Antonio/Guillermo on how to correctly play with the ball. “Le dice que patee como pateaba Kempes contra los holandeses: fuerte y al gol” (Kohan 183). During a tournament in which la selección has played poorly and will very soon be eliminated, Dr. Mesiano can’t help but recall the glory of Kempes scoring the winning goal versus Holland just four years earlier, when
both Argentine football and the dictatorship were at the height of their powers. Here at the end of the novel, when, we assume, Guillermo’s mother has already been killed and disposed of, she remains. As Grant Farred puts it, “The children of the desaparecidos live among the Argenines. The nation lives with its own bloody past in, and as, its present, the effect of the Guerra Sucia mutating like a virus, from one generation to the next” (78). In these last pages the author uses the child as the ever-present reminder of the moral and human cost of victory four years prior.

In a moment in which the loss of la selección in the ‘82 World Cup led many commentators to call for unity and being true to an Argentine way of playing the game, as a sort of moral victory, the author’s use of Guillermo to connect the two tournaments and continue to turn the readers view back to the hidden crimes that supported the victory of ‘78, force the reader to continue to work to reconcile these two incommensurate histories of one time and place.

Rather than remember 1978 purely as a footballing triumph, Dos veces junio shows that that victory “can never stand outside the ghostly presence of the post-autonomous desaparecidos. Ardiles and his teammates stand in violent relation to those other names...Delia Giovanola de Califano, Jotar Britos, Paula Logares Grinspon...Madres, abuelas, desaparecidas, con vida. Una gran familia” (Farred 80).
Chapter 3 - Power Plays: Players and Presidents in Vázquez Montalbán’s *El delantero centro fue asesinado al atardecer*

“Football is not a matter of life or death, it’s much more important than that.”
- Bill Shankly, Liverpool FC manager

The title says it all, “el delantero centro fue asesinado al atardecer”. Before a word of the novel is read the reader learns that the center forward is involved in a game of life and death. The positional description of the novel’s primary character establishes the subject of sport, specifically football, while the latter description of events introduces violence and mortal risk into the world of the game. The title provokes many questions to entice the reader, forcing him/her to assume the role of detective, just as the novel’s protagonist, searching the text for clues and answers: Who would kill a footballer? Why? If it is important that the “center forward” die and not specifically the individual who occupies that role, what is it about the player and his footballing actions that could provoke another to seek his life and thus precipitate his death? The distinction between “center forward” and the individual behind the label also provokes the simple question, who is the player who dies? Additionally, what does it all matter? What is the significance of the center forward’s assassination for potential readers?

While such a list of questions is far from exhaustive, I hope to have planted in this reader’s mind some questions to guide my examination of Manual Vazquéz Montalabán’s novel, *El delantero centro fue asesinado al atardecer* (1989), which point to the pressures and controls imposed upon the actors of the football world, players in

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82 The novel’s title is also a clear allusion and homage to the Argentine play, *El centroforward murió al amanecer* (1955), by Agustín Cuzzani.
particular. Such questions also highlight the importance and influence of the game of football in Catalán/Spanish society, constituting an important mechanism of both economic and political transition from the authoritarian Spain of Franco to a democratic post-Franco Spain preparing to show itself as modern, developed and cosmopolitan in preparation to host the 1992 Olympics.\textsuperscript{83} The novel shows what underlies the superficial image and rhetoric of the time, often referred to as “Happy Spain”. This title “is a reference to the national euphoria that surrounded events such as the ’92 Olympic Games in Barcelona” (Seguín). Sid Lowe similarly asserts, “Nineteen ninety-two was Barcelona’s year. That was the year and that was the team, one against which all others would be judged. The Olympic Games, held in Barcelona that summer, were the showcase for a dynamic, modern, successful city, confident, artistic, and international” (original emphasis, 287). The novel takes up the prominence of this euphoria and desire to show the best of the nation/region to the world, but it shows much of that rhetoric to be “a sense of progress and prosperity [which] distracted people from large-scale corruption that... was taking place at the time” (Seguín).

This work is one of the last in Vázsquez Montalbán’s Carvalho Series, a collection of noir novels that follow the cases of the detective, Pepe Carvalho. This series is representative of the novela negra, a genre which football has shown to lend itself

\textsuperscript{83} Franco’s regime ended with his death in 1975. While the main political transition was generally consolidated before the precise historic moment of the novel, signaled by the first democratically elected president in the wake of the Caudillo’s death - Felipe González in 1982-, the novel makes constant references to and critiques of the legacy and enduring effects of Franco’s reign as well as the ways in which the country is changing as it emerges from more than 40 years of authoritarian rule and isolation. Thus, I see a great part of the novel’s thrust as a commentary on the transition to democracy, perhaps more so as manifest in its cultural and societal aspects than mere political structure.
particularly well. As David García Cames points out, the fascination of the sport among authors of this genre is due primarily to the fact that the world of football serves as a “microcosmos desde el que abordar algunos temas habituales del género como los intereses económicos, la violencia, el poder político, las maduras, las apuestas y, en definitiva, todas aquellas circunstancias que rodean a este deporte” (100). As an avid football fan, writer and critic, Vázquez Montalbán “writes about the sport as a sociopolitical phenomenon and offers a historical and semiological analysis of football as popular culture (Rix 140). Montalbán reveals the off-the-field realities of the “delantero centro” and in the process of his protagonist detective’s investigation uncovers the forces of corruption underlying Spanish football in the aftermath of the Franco dictatorship.

Private eye Pepe Carvalho is hired by FC Barcelona and tasked with deciphering a handful of anonymous notes, written as poems, which threaten to kill the club’s newly acquired center forward. His investigation is done in parallel to that of the official police force, however, as a single autonomous individual he is able to move with greater subtlety and agility within the structures of the club, offering efficiency in resolving the threats before they can be realized. To facilitate his investigation, the club gives him the cover of team psychologist conducting a study on “psicología de grupo y entidades

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84 In addition to this novel, Vázquez Montalbán produced over 700 texts, mostly journalistic in nature, on sport and specifically football. For an in depth quantitative and qualitative assessment of sport in his writing, as well as a possible critical theory of sport, see Jordi Osúa’s work, “Manuel Vázquez Montalbán: una teoría critica del deporte” and “Análisis temático de la obra deportiva de Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (1960-2003)”.

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deportivas” (Vázquez Montalbán 17). This way he is able to "hablar con todos los relacionados con [el] club sin inspirar sospechas” (17). The detective’s search leads him through all levels of the administration of one of the world’s biggest football clubs. This task gives him access to the most powerful and influential men within the club as well as all the players, coaches, and backroom staff. Montalbán uses Carvalho to pull back the curtain on the inner workings of the club, revealing the motives and actions of the team president thus granting the reader access to the typically distant and unseen figure.

Susana Bayó Belenguer observes, “Delantero gives the author...a chance to dwell again on unsavory land developers” (original emphasis 32) dead-set on consolidating properties of value for the infrastructural development in the buildup to the 1992 Olympic games in Barcelona. While the author grounds the story around a historical event, the fictional account allows for a commentary on the power mechanisms at work in these varied levels of government and private ownership as well as the ways in which such dynamics affect the lives of players, fans, and public alike. It is also worth noting that the novel is not written looking back on a past event. Published in 1989, the writing and publication of the novel precedes the grounding historical event it anticipates, constituting a fictionalized representation of the author’s present moment. The novel as an account of Pepe’s investigation reads as a sort of official report just like the supposed purpose of his cover in the football club. It is a study of “group psychology and sporting entities” (Vásquez Montalbán 17), an x-ray of the football world which “plasma la visión crítica de la sociedad catalana de finales de los ochenta a través de la ficcionalización de personajes y episodios reales” (García Cames 101).
Pepe Carvalho is the reader’s guide through FC Barcelona - the physical facilities, the coach, the players, the head of public relations, and the board of directors -, however, this club and all it comprises are only one part of the drama of the novel. Along with the riches, prestige, success and glamor of FC Barcelona, the novel also tells the story of an aging journeyman center forward, Alberto Palacín, who has just returned to Spain to play for a lower division team, Centellas, as he seeks out his estranged wife and son in hopes of reconciling and reuniting with them as he approaches the end of his career. Much of the novel is focalized through Pepe as he strives to solve the mystery of the anonymous death threats, nevertheless, Palacín is potentially a more prominent protagonist. He is the player the reader comes to know most intimately, and it is his perspective which most forcefully highlights the weight imposed and costs exacted from the personal lives of professional footballers.

The dual perspectives employed by the author give a more comprehensive view of the football world, offering the opinions and observations of an outsider -Carvalho, who believes the sport to be “una ordinariez estúpida” (Vázquez Montalbán 18)- and the first-hand experiences on and off the pitch of an insider -Palacín, who has graced the halls and stadiums of giant teams like Barcelona, tiny lower division teams like Centellas, and many more inbetween. Additionally, the inclusion of a second “center forward” in Palacín, contributes to the uncertainty of the reference of the title and therefore the intrigue of the novel. At this juncture I will offer an introduction to the two center forwards of the novel, comparing their individual situations, their lives, status and sporting importance, while also highlighting some of the mutual plights they face as
pawns of the game played by the rich and powerful directors and presidents of their respective clubs.

The “first” center forward of the novel, implied in the title, is introduced to Carvalho and the reader when Pepe is summoned to the office of Camps O’Shea, the director of Public Relations at FC Barcelona, to hear the details of the job he is being hired to do. After having shared with Pepe the first “anónimo” which reads in part:

Porque habéis usurpado la función de los dioses que en otro tiempo guiaron la conducta de los hombres, sin aportar consuelos sobrenaturales, sino simplemente la terapia del grito más irracional: el delantero centro será asesinado al atardecer.

Porque vuestro delantero centro es el instrumento que utilizáis para sentiros dioses gestores de victorias y derrotas, desde la cómoda poltrona de césares menores: el delantero centro será asesinado al atardecer. (15)

The detective naively asks, “¿A qué delantero centro se refiere?” (Vázquez Montalbán 15). Incrédulo, O’Shea asks if Carvalho even reads the newspaper or watches TV, to which the latter responds, “no”. Having to answer a question he believes to be common knowledge, he explains, “Hemos trabajado para recomponer [la plantilla] y nos faltaba un gran crack, una figura internacional que devolviera la ilusión al público. Jack Mortimer. Bota de oro” (16). It is this Englishman, Jack Mortimer, the “crack” superstar player, who is the intended target of this death threat.

What is unusual and significant about the anonymous death threat(s), aside from being written in poetic verse, is that they are directed to the leadership of the club,
rather than the player itself. The death of the player is intended to hurt the club and its directors, indirectly, by destroying a valued “instrumento” that the directors use “para sentir[se] dioses” (Vázquez Montalbán 15). The anonymous author of this fictional threat expresses the same judgment asserted by García Cames regarding the directors and owners of football clubs: “Los directivos del fútbol no hacen otra cosa que jugar con sus equipos como hacen los niños con sus videojuegos” (369). Furthermore, aside from the illegality of the promised action, what is most disturbing about this violence, is the ease with which the humanity and individuality of the center forward is dismissed. The would-be assassin, if he carries out the crime, is guilty of the same justification he condemns, using the center forward, a human being with a life and loved ones, as a mere “instrumento” to carry out his own sense of justice/punishment.

This brief examination of the first threat brings to light two of the important themes I will discuss in this chapter. First, the experience of the players, specifically the two center forwards, Palacín and Mortimer, along with their teammates, who are treated as tools and commodities, rather than humans. Each player is an object acquired to fulfill a specific function and then disposed of when no longer serviceable. I will examine the bodily, emotional and financial costs imposed on the players in their efforts to extract the greatest wealth possible for and from the clubs before they expire (either in footballing or mortal terms). The author’s account of two vastly different players shows both the diversity of the player experience, dispelling the myth that all professional athletes are a monolith, while simultaneously showing the shared plight of the player in relation to the real “owners” of the sport and to the general public.
Secondly, I will examine the novel’s representation of the nature and power of the clubs, specifically the fictional versions of FC Barcelona and Centellas, their agendas and goals, sporting and otherwise, and the way they control and dominate their players in pursuit of such goals. The author’s inclusion and description of characters such as Camps O’Shea, Basté de Linyola, and Ignacio Sánchez Zapico -all front-office employees or club executives/presidents- gives the reader insight into the backroom dealings, motives and corruptive forces which appropriate the beautiful game, its institutions and individuals, for their own non-sporting purposes. These actions and intentions of the club presidents show how the rich and powerful have appropriated one game, football, for their own game of life. Their knowledge and control of the many aspects of the football club, its protagonists and the actions that take place on one field of play are directed towards the accumulation and retention of great power.

**A Tale of Two Center Forwards:**

Mortimer and Palacín, though both center forwards, are two markedly distinct players and individuals. “Mortimer is a recognisable archetype..., the Golden Boot European Footballer of the Year who contrasts sharply with the almost forgotten hero of the last generation of Spanish players” (Rix 144). As previously indicated, Mortimer, is deemed a “crack”, a star player capable of taking a team on his shoulders and a game into his own hands at any given moment. He is a flashy, highly lauded and acclaimed foreign player, arriving at FC Barcelona at the peak of his sporting prime. It is no coincidence that he is a foreign player, representative of modern Europe, to which Spain is only recently re-integrating itself, its economy, politics and culture, as part of the
nation’s transition to democracy. As part of the nationalist policy of the Franco regime there was a strict prohibitive ban on any foreign players in *La Liga* between 1963 and 1974 (Goldblatt 415, 417). The return and prominence of foreign players in Spain’s premier league exemplifies the growing economic and cultural connections between Spain and the rest of the world, in particular their European neighbors. Similarly, it is no coincidence that Mortimer arrives to play at FC Barcelona, a club founded by a Swiss sportsman, Joan Gamper, at the turn of the 20th century and one which has always sought to embody a diverse and cosmopolitan spirit and team, which strongly contrasted with the nationalist and isolationist rhetoric and policy of Francisco Franco.

During the dictatorship, when regional autonomy and expressions of Catalán culture were not permitted, FC Barcelona was one of the most important institutions that afforded a certain sense of freedom and resistance to the centralist castilian imposition. More will be discussed about the history, significance and function of the club later in the chapter. Suffice it to say that the author’s choice of a star foreign player arriving to play for the famously Catalán club shows Barcelona as the primary modern Spanish city

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85 The ban appears in the novel in the account of aging football agent, Raurell, who recalls the work-arounds he had to employ to find talented prospects capable of playing in the league beyond the national youth academies. The narrator describes the actions of the agent who “…en los años sesenta, cuando sólo se podían fichar oriundo latinoamericanos,…había llenado España de hijos de padres españoles, falsos casi todos ellos” (Vázquez Montalbán 203). He himself recalls, “…Yo me iba a América y en cuanto veía a un jugador joven, barquito, eso sí, que despuntaba un poco, le arreglaba los papeles y a España, a presumir de padre o de abuelo extremeño. Hecha la ley, hecha la trampa” (210).

86 In the 2015 Netflix documentary, *Barça Dreams*, journalist Ramón Besa remarks, “Barca has always had its own footballing culture, but that culture has been transferred to the pitch by a foreigner. It’s funny that it happened with Kubala, it’s funny that it happened with Cruyff,… Ronaldinho, and…Messi. That is something that does not happen in many clubs, you know? Barca is able to create a team, but who makes the difference is normally a foreign player who absorbs the culé culture and style of play, and raises the standard in a way that seems difficult for a local player. And that is interesting, since it links very well to [Joan] Gamper’s spirit” (min 23).
rising to prominence in a new era of democratic freedom following the long years of the Franco dictatorship.

This new player, a foreign import, is introduced to the Spanish public with a welcome ceremony complete with highlight videos and a press conference. As the “mejor futbolista europeo” of the moment and due to his stature as a “gran figura internacional”, his arrival provokes a great amount of interest from the press and excitement from the fans (Vázquez Montalbán 16). In the public eye, both in the press conference and on the pitch, he exudes a certain “aura de dios de las áreas” (21). His sporting prowess has granted him individual awards among his peers and allowed him to translate his physical abilities into profitable business, assuring the financial means to provide not only for the needs of his family but to afford them a life of luxury. Such luxury is seen in a passing comment by Carvalho who relates seeing a member of the club leadership give him “las llaves de un Porsche que Mortimer había exigido como una de las condiciones contractuales” (22). He is a prime example of the fact that “the commodification of sport has brought considerable benefits for players” (Walsh and Giulianotti 7).

Such benefits afforded professional footballers were not lost on the public, as they began to see more and more players making ever greater sums of money and attaining greater autonomy over the terms of their contracts and the conditions in which they participated in their teams. Such public awareness is seen in the critique offered by a Barcelona citizen who Palacín comes across as he searches for his ex-wife at her former residence. Once the man who answers the door recognizes Palacín as the
once great Barcelona striker slated to be the next star of Spanish football, he begins to wax nostalgic for the old days and lament the current state of the football landscape. The players now, he explains, are living in “los buenos tiempos” (Vázquez Montalbán 27). “Todos millonarios y unos sin sustancia. El día que quieren jugar, juegan, y el que no quieren jugar se esconden detrás del árbitro o detrás de los postes” (27). Though this observation about the wealth of modern professional footballers is grounded in some truth, it is nevertheless oversimplified and incomplete.

Towards the latter part of the novel the detective meets with a notable football agent, Raurel, who gives an uncensored and truthful account of the state of most footballers’ finances. He starts from the assumption, and partial truth, that many footballers earn outrageous sums of money. However, he reminds Pepe that most players “no [saben] guardar lo que ganan o no ganen tanto como la gente cree” (Vázquez Montalbán 210). He elaborates further, “La gente sólo habla de los contratos millonarios y no sabe nada, o no quiere enterarse, del caso de la mayoría” (210). Additionally, though many players do make great sums of money, even the most successful are means to generate profit for others. Agents, clubs, and sponsors benefit from the success of their respective players, often exacting a percentage of the players earnings or gaining access to greater social and economic opportunity due to their connection to the player. Even family members and friends are often guilty of pushing a player down a certain path, motivated not by the best long-term interest for the player but for immediate financial gain.
I will return later to the case of the majority of players, here referred to by Raurel as unknown, forgotten or neglected. However, the accusation leveled at the modern footballer by this old man is indeed true for Mortimer, at least regarding his earnings (his substance and quality as a player constitute the topic of a subjective opinion). He even singles out Mortimer specifically as an example of the modern player, prophesying what he believes will be a rude awakening for the pampered millionaire who will shrink from the physicality of the defenders in La Liga. “Y ese que han fichado ahora, Mortimer, a ese paleto le van a enseñar los tacos los asesinos que hay por esos campos y le van a quitar las ganas hasta de ponerse las botas” (Vázquez Montalbán 27).

Such figurative language is yet another example of the convergence between the ludic and extraludic. Though the man doesn’t mean it literally, he uses the same words as the anonymous threat endangering the same player, Mortimer. The defenders Mortimer will confront on the pitch are “asesinos”. And whereas these assassins don’t usually pose a mortal threat to the players, they are mostly certainly a professional threat. A particularly violent tackle could result in a severe injury and thus kill the career of the other player. This sporting/figurative threat to the center forwards and millionaire players of today is a perfect segue from Mortimer to Palacín.

It is this threat of sporting ‘assassination’ which initially links the two forwards. Whereas the threat of injury and to the career of Mortimer is merely a possibility, it is a lived history for Palacín, one which drastically influenced his life on and off the field, leading him to the desperate situation in which he finds himself at the outset of the novel. Palacín, contrary to Mortimer, is a player representative of the time gone by. In
contrast to Mortimer, Palacín’s career and body bear “all the scars inflicted by a system which gave little or no support to those who fell from grace” (Rix 144). At the peak of his career, Palacín was also a center forward for FC Barcelona. However, “le lesionó aquél asesino...aquel defensa central”, which resulted in a “rotura de menisco, de ligamento interior y de ligamento exterior derecha” (my emphasis, Vázquez Montalbán 26). Such a horrendous injury didn’t terminate his playing career altogether, but sent him on the path of a mediocre footballer, going wherever someone was willing to pay him enough to get by, working in smaller, less prestigious leagues, before eventually ending up in the last professional division of Spanish football. His career trajectory more closely follows that of the majority of players, who “como los pícaros del Siglo de Oro, aunque con un poder adquisitivo considerablemente superior,...llevan una vida de nómadas modernos, de mozos de muchos amos que ...aspiran a arrimarse a los buenos, que en su caso se llaman Boca Juniors, River Plate o, para los más ambiciosos, Real Madrid, Barca, ...etc. (Kunz 262). Only, Palacín lived this life in reverse, having made it to the top so early in his career only to fall back down the ladder and start again after suffering his traumatic injury.

In contrast to Mortimer’s grandiose presentation, Palacín’s introduction at Centellas is limited to a small note in the sports pages. The journalist summarizes the journey to his new club, describing him as “aquel delantero centro que en los años setenta fue saludado como el nuevo Marcelino y que luego se eclipsó después de una grave lesión. A continuación militó en el fútbol yanqui y finalmente fue un ídolo para la afición de Oaxaca (México)....A sus treinta y seis años, Palacín ha declarado que piensa
ayudar al Centellas a subir a tercera división y que después se retirará” (Vázquez Montalbán 41). Rather than a player at his physical peak, arriving at the pinnacle of professional achievement, Palacín finds himself on the other side of that journey. Having once been the young starlet with the world at his feet, he now finds himself and the end of his footballing career descended to the lowest possible ranks of professional football. Rather than a millionaire player, living large and driving luxury cars, Palacín is relegated to “vivir en un barrio como éste” - an old, run down, less than desirable neighborhood (Vázquez Montalbán 14). His mere presence as a professional footballer in such a neighborhood surprises the landlord and serves to highlight a little acknowledged truth that, contrary to popular opinion, “most players aren’t rich” (Kuper and Szymanski 96). It is this fallacy of the millionaire footballer which marks Palacín as a target for a destitute prostitute, Marta, and her drug addict friend. Upon his arrival in their neighborhood, the scheming young woman muses to her friend, “Mire. El futbolista. Un futbolista gana un pastón, ¿no?” (Vázquez Montalbán 102). Her belief that all footballers are rich is what leads her to approach Palacín, an interaction which will eventually lead to his own fall into drugs and ultimately end in the loss of his career and life.

The corporeal cost associated with life as a professional footballer is in fact the very first thing we learn about Palacín. The first impression offered the reader is that of the footballer’s landlord, Doña Concha. Upon meeting her new tenant, she notes “a musculatura tensa bajo la camisa blanca” and a heavy “olor a medicina...un olor a linimento” (Vázquez Montalbán 14). Palacín’s physical appearance marks him as a
footballer. Yet, while the body of the ideal footballer is a sculpted Adonis-like figure of strength and prowess, Palacín's figure is markedly diminished. At this point in his career Palacín is only able to continue playing because of “linimentos y sprays contra el dolor muscular” (original emphasis, 133). On another occasion at the end of the novel, Doña Concha gives her lasting impression of Palacín: “olía demasiado a linimento.” The narrator then hammers home the point, “Olía a hombre golpeado” (194). The money and potential fame that can come from life as a footballer often come at the cost of one’s physical well being.

It is not solely the desire and ambition of the player which extracts such physical costs, rather the club ownership or directors, which profit off the bodily action of their players, can require the players to give of themselves even when in less than ideal physical condition. The imperative to maintain the spectacle and provide the product for which millions of fans clamor often leads to players going to extreme measures, sometimes at the insistence of their employers, to play through pain and risk themselves to even greater injury. Palacín’s state is just one example of what Galeano dubs the duties imposed on players in professional football: “los entrenamientos extenuantes, los partidos que se juegan un día sí y otro también, la obligación de rendir más a cambio de menos, el bombardeo de drogas que queman la juventud pero permiten jugar a pesar del agotamiento y de las lesiones...” (my emphasis, Puro Fútbol 215). Such obligations, according to Galeano, only highlight the lack of player rights which “en cambio, brillan por su ausencia” (215).
Such a stance argues for clubs to be viewed as what Foucault called "disciplinary matrices", which serve to “create ‘docile bodies’: controlled, healthy, and regulated bodies, bodies whose training extends their capacity and usefulness” (Cole, Giardina and Andrews 212). While the players seek to use their skills and physical ability to leverage the clubs for financial, physical and social wellbeing not afforded them in other lines of work or of great occurrence for so many of the players which come from lives of poverty, it is ultimately the clubs and the individuals who run them which are in power to exert control over the players’ actions.

In his book, Fútbol y Franquismo, Duncan Shaw enumerates many of the controls placed upon footballers in their status as “esclavos de oro” (133). He argues that much of the poor treatment of players during this period is due to the prerogative of the regime to treat the players “de una manera protectora y paternalista” to avoid “una incómoda comparación con las condiciones de trabajo, generalmente pobres, de la mayoría” (134). Most footballers were, and many still are, subject to a “lista...interminable de pequeñas reglas y regulaciones que debían ser aceptadas obedientemente...los jugadores eran tratados siempre como niños irresponsables que necesitaban un padre severo que los cuidase.... Todo aspecto de su vida era controlado y regulado” (138).

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87 I recognize that the chronological present of the novel (~1990) is more than a decade after the death of Franco (1975) and the transition to democracy. Nevertheless, Palacín would have begun his football career in Spain under these conditions and other characters, such as the agent Raurel, make explicit references to the Francoist restrictions on the footballing world. Moreover, while Shaw argues that many of these aspects result directly from Franco’s political actions, it is nevertheless true that such work conditions and restrictive professional restraints have been and in some cases continue to be present in many other nations..
In addition to these imposing duties were the many prohibitions and lack of rights of self-advocacy. A few such prohibitions were “el derecho de llevar sus quejas a los tribunales de justicia o [de formar] sus propios sindicatos” (Shaw 134). Moreover, footballers were even excluded (unlike other Spanish workers) from the sistema de Seguridad Social. This was most important when the player came to the end of his career (which is a much younger age for a footballer than most other lines of work). Such exclusion meant that “cuando un jugador se retiraba, no recibía ninguna pensión, de modo que debía recurrir al dinero ahorrado cuando jugaba para sostener a su familia mientras buscaba otro trabajo” (136). Even if a given player were able to earn a good living while playing, the career of a footballer comes to an end by the early to mid 30s. Such a short period is hardly sufficient to have saved up enough to retire.

Clubs, the players' employers, possessed almost total control over the terms of employment and the players' will to seek better conditions. As Shaw explains, “los clubs de fútbol solían anular unilateralmente los contratos de jugadores considerados poco obedientes o que habían sido lesionados demasiado seriamente como para seguir jugando” (my emphasis, 135). The clubs also held “el derecho de retención” which prohibited any player to move to another club, even once their contract had ended “a menos que el club diera su aprobación” (137). This allowed clubs to hold players hostage, so to speak, to deprive them of the ability to progress in their career or make a
living, if moving the player on were not in the direct self-interest of the club, i.e. if the player wanted to move to a direct rival.88

This power over the bodies and lives of their players is called into question in the second and third death threat received by FC Barcelona. The second highlights the fragility of the players seemingly muscular form: “Los delanteros centro tienen la cabeza de piedra y el cuerpo de coral rosa, por eso se rompen cuando rematan contra los acantilados (Vázquez Montalbán 58). It further remarks that while the players are biologically superior -bigger, stronger, faster- and are ultimately the idols and epic heroes the directors will never be, the image and status of powerful owners are nevertheless bolstered by the players they ‘own’ and employ. It is their stature which grows “sobre los cadáveres” (58) of the center forwards/great players.

Though players like Mortimer, and previously Palacín, are viewed as epic heroes when seen in action on the field, they are still relegated to an inferior status when compared with the truly powerful in society. Even the best player in all of Europe, Jack Mortimer, shrinks in the presence of the club president, Basté de Linyola. In the young englishman’s first private meeting with the president, “desaparecidos los fotógrafos y los periodistas, Mortimer había perdido el aura de dios de las áreas chicas y parecía un muchacho que se había equivocado de salón y de compañía. Especialmente en relación con Basté de Linyola, empresario y ex político que había hecho de la presidencia del club una cuestión de penúltimas significación social” (Vázquez Montalbán 21). Carvalho

88 This issue would be most visibly debated and addressed in the Bosman case, 6 years after the publication of the novel in 1995. The ruling granted players the freedom to sign for any team in the EU after the expiration of their contract without needing the permission of their current/previous club.
observes this enormous distinction between the perceived stature of the players on the field and the reality of their status off it as he waits outside the locker room following one of the team’s victories. “A la cruda luz de los focos, a Carvalho los jugadores le parecían tan jóvenes que no le recordaban los sólidos y decididos figurines uniformados que había visto correr por el campo, investidos de una significación de héroes de la tarde.... Más bien le parecían chicos sorprendidos de una figuración que les excedía” (144). Vásquez Montablán’s use of a third party observer, particularly one who is disinterested in the sport, shows the humanity of the footballers which lies beneath the facade of sporting celebrity and physical prowess. This glimpse of the state of the individual behind the label of professional footballer sheds light on the subservient status of the players. While many may ascend to high levels of wealth and fame, they inevitably run into a glass ceiling at some point, at which even they are excluded from the class of truly powerful political and financial elites, who run the football world and use its structures and subjects to further their own agendas.

This control over the players is further emphasized in the third note in which the poet warns, “Abriré las jaulas donde guardáis vuestros animales de lujo y el brillo de sus músculos iluminará el atardecer más que la luna de Samarcanda” (Vázquez Montalbán 164). The poet sees the controls and constraints placed on the players through their contracts and other mechanisms as “cages” in which the players are held and where they may be viewed and appreciated for their physical beauty by the public. In some ways one may even think of the stadium and other forms of gathering and
concentration of players for training and competition as cages. These are enclosed and controlled spaces placed in view of the public to come and admire, not unlike a zoo.

Of course, as “animales de lujo”, the players enjoy the privilege of special care of their physical bodies. Camps O’Shea confesses his impression upon seeing the players run out onto the field before a game. What most readily comes to mind is “el brillo de los músculos de los jugadores cuando salta al campo, muchos de ellos recién salidos de la mesa del masajista (Vázquez Montalbán 165). The masseur primarily serves the interest of the club - his/her employer-, not the player, by keeping the players’ muscles in prime condition to play and entertain, the shining physical specimen serving to attract the public to the stadium and the TV screen, assuring that the fan becomes a consumer, paying for a product the club offers in the manifestation of its players. It is this control and use of the player’s physical bodies and the effort to buy and maintain the best specimens for their team which justifies the poet’s accusation that the owners are “mercaderes de músculos, los culpables morales de esta historia” (Vázquez Montalbán 164).

The anonymous threats refer specifically to the experience, value, and control of a star center forward for one of the biggest clubs in the world. And while the accusations the poet levels at the club directors can certainly be applied in a general sense to any professional footballer it is also important to recognize that the experience of a star center-forward is not the same as that of a lower-level defender, for example. The novel shows the individuality of each player, not only the contrast between Palacín and Mortimer, but extending to players of different positions on the same team, players
in different divisions, and even the distinction between fully and semi-professional or amateur players. Perhaps Palacín says it most concisely, in response to an attempt to generalize the physical state and character of all footballers, when he rebuts “Cada futbolista es cada futbolista.” (Vázquez Montalbán 121). This assertion not only requires the recognition of the variety of positions and circumstances of a player within a team, division, country, etc., it asks the individual to consider the humanity of each footballer, seeing the person behind the title of ‘footballer’. The physical state and personality of any given player goes beyond any deterministic label of ‘footballer’.

**Intraclub hierarchy**

The first and most obvious distinction between players is that of their positions on the field. Each position values certain physical and mental attributes which differ from one another. While certain players are granted a modicum of freedom, to express themselves individually, improvising individual actions on the ball - dribbling, occupying any space on the field they feel is most advantageous, etc - others are confined to their role in the system, limited to merely carry out the role/function respective to their position and limited to specific spaces on the field. In strategy sessions with FC Barcelona’s coach, Gerrardo Passani, the narrator explains how this distinction affects the players in the squad. Passani’s tactics reduce all the players to mere variables in a mathematical formula to win.

A brief aside regarding the symbolic significance of the tactical philosophy of the two clubs and their respective coaches highlights yet another aspect of the novel by which the author highlights the desire of FC Barcelona to represent a modern and
sophisticated approach to the game, distinctly different from the prevailing tactics of the Franco years. FC Barcelona’s coach, Passani, was an “italoargentino, [quien] había aprendido buena parte de su teoría del fútbol en clubes ingleses” (Vázquez Montalbán 117). He derived his coaching philosophy from the most sophisticated tactical schools of thought of his time, the English and Italian. This modern approach to football is a stark contrast and marked departure from that of the president and coach of Centellas, both Spaniards, who highlight the value of their newest acquisition, Palacín, not in his tactical acumen or technical ability, but in his masculine strength and courage. Palacín “es un delantero centro...con dos cojones, como tiene que ser” (41). This need to play with “cojones” is of course, a vulgar rendering of what is most often referred to as la furia roja, the physical, aggressive and direct style of play which characterized the best Spanish teams, usually of Basque origin, during the first half of the 20th century.

The “Spanishness” of this style of play is made all the more apparent in the advice Justo Precioso, the coach of Centellas, gives Palacín during one of his first games: “Si te tengo que dar un consejo técnico, ahí va: huevos. Un delantero centro sin huevos es como una tortilla de patatas sin huevos” (134). The man’s man kind of footballer, who aims to triumph via pure strength and fortitude of will is a part of national culture, as recognizably Spanish as the Spanish omelet. It is against this style of play, paradigmatic of the Selección española during the dictatorship that the more sophisticated style emerges in the post-transition Barcelona and will culminate in FC Barcelona teams of the early 2000’s. Llopis Roig sees this transition from one style of play to another as “la sustitución de la españolidad futbolística tradicional por una
nueva concepción del juego que se aleja de los elementos diacríticos del estilo anterior - forjados durante el periodo franquista -, y se muestra más sensible a la pluralidad cultural y deportiva de la sociedad española de principios del siglo XXI” (original emphasis 60). Whereas Centellas is an old, defunct and dying club of the past, FC Barcelona aims to develop a style of play reflective of a more open, diverse, cosmopolitan society.

Returning now to the diversity of roles and varying levels of importance within a given club we will examine more of the particulars of the FC Barcelona tactics as presented in the novel. Passani’s formula focused exclusively on those positions and players which he deemed part of the “punch decisivo” of the team, a group of only seven players, therefore omitting four of the eleven found on the pitch (original emphasis, Vázquez Montalbán 119). The seven players represented were Mortimer, the star attacker, as well as a forward and midfield line of 3. This omission of the defenders and the goalie highlights the hierarchy of value built into the game, in which certain players are valued more, and therefore cared for and incorporated in the team and club with greater attention. Such disregard for the less glamorous players is seen in the “la impresión de frustración” written on the faces of the defenders, who, upon noticing their omission from the team formula, asked the coach, “Míster, ¿nosotros qué número tenemos?” (119).

Moreover, while ‘less important’ players were omitted altogether, the most important player is the only one to be assigned a personalized letter just for himself. “Cierto es que sólo Mortimer disponía de una inicial que le individualizaba y que no todo
el mundo aceptó aquella ventajosa posibilidad de identificación con generosidad, pero al fin y al cabo Mortimer era la vedette, era el gran reclamo de los espectadores y pronto se acallaron las protestas si es que llegaron a formularse” (Vázquez Montalbán 119). Such recognition of discontent yet eventual acceptance of the status quo -unequal level of privilege for certain (types of) players- shows the persistent tension which permeates locker rooms and clubs throughout professional sports.

This individual attention and praise was not only prevalent in the strategic planning for game action but also influenced the care Mortimer received after practices and games and showed a privileging of one player over the others. The narrator makes a point of saying there were no differences among players regarding their equipment, the lockers in the dressing room, nor the showers and other common spaces. Nevertheless, Passani and Camps O’shea do make the explicit effort to “convencer a los jugadores que dejaran la piscina cubierta situada en el itinerario del vestuario libre el suficiente tiempo para que Mortimer hiciera ejercicios de relajación flotante...indispensable para los paquetes musculares de Mortimer” (Vásquez Montalbán 119-120). All this to say, that the club system of ownership/directors, training staff, and coaches all ascribe different levels of value to players, which contributes to the individual attention, physical care, and financial remuneration a player may receive. The value of the player depends solely on their profitability for the club in both financial and social capital and affects how well that player's body and life are cared for.

Interclub/league disparity
The novelistic example of FC Barcelona shows the hierarchy of players within a team. And while there are clear instances of privilege and discrimination, overall, the members of this team are all “elite players [with] opportunities to develop their skills to far higher levels than would be possible if they were restricted to part-time play due to other working commitments. Players enjoy better training facilities, opportunities for travel, and a host of other benefits” in addition to top-level instruction and compensation (Walsh and Giulianotti 7). These are the privileges which accompany the biopolitical duties of a professional footballer at the highest level. However, the experience of the few players who actually make it to the very top of the game looks very different from that of the majority of individuals laboring in the lower divisions of professional and semi-professional leagues around the world.

Centellas is one of these teams, and its players, even Palacín -the old legend- experience a much different balance of duties and privileges in the lowest division of Spanish football. Centellas is an “equipo con historia de barrio con historia, en los orígenes del fútbol catalán capaz de luchar por la hegemonía con el Barcelona, el Europa, el Español o el San Andrés, pero desde la guerra civil apenas un club superviviente que se sucedía a sí mismo” (Vásquez Montalbán 40). Whereas the club once stood on equal footing with Barcelona, it now stands in stark contrast to the luxury, riches and prestige of the latter. Barcelona has a beautifully manicured field, separate training grounds, a full locker room, complete with a pool and other amenities. Meanwhile, at Centellas the players have to practice on just one half of their stadium field. The team was limited to the use of “aquel gol sur para el que se reservaba la
iluminación *economizada* hasta la penumbra, mientras el resto del campo [quedaba] en sombras (my emphasis, 42).

Not only are the on-field accommodations for player training and team practice less than optimal, perhaps even hazardous, but the off-field facilities, such as the locker room, also barely function and fail to meet the basic needs of the players to help their bodies recover and heal after each training and game. Sometimes, in the locker room “no había agua caliente para todos a pesar de que Sánchez Zapico [the club owner] había regalado al club un poderoso calentador de gas propano...El calentador era el único elemento con futuro en aquel vestuario lleno de goteras y humedades en las paredes desconchadas, en el que cada armario cerraba o no cerraba según una secreta voluntad que ningún carpintero había tratado de corregir en los últimos diez años” (Vásquez Montalbán 44). In addition to the facilities’ poor standard of quality the players are even worried about the lack of security. “El campo es una mierda. Por no poder, no se puede uno ni duchar a gusto, ni cerrar la puerta del vestuario. Un día van a entrar y nos van a dejar hasta sin calzoncillos” (129). Though the Centellas players perform the same ‘work’ as those of Barcelona, their respective privileges, the level of care and protection they receive, and the amount of investment in their professional development differ drastically. Ironically, it is Palacín who remarks on the lack of security and the ease with which one could enter the locker room and rob the players. Such observation and conjecture, shared with Marta, the prostitute addict, foreshadows and leads to Palacín’s eventual demise.
Such difference between the two clubs reveals the disparity between the commonly accepted notion of the privileged status of all professional footballers, viewing the exceptional as the norm, and the abject reality of most players and clubs. Though Carvalho’s observations of training and locker room dynamics at Barcelona reveal a certain hierarchy of varying levels of privilege among players it is the view inside Centellas, revealed by Palacín, which shows the hardships suffered by the players who continue to dedicate themselves to a game turned profession in their pursuit of the promised wealth and success which only a relative few ever achieve.

**Football stardom: Exception, not the norm**

Centellas is, like FC Barcelona, a professional club, yet in the lower divisions where there is a lack of money to fully fund player contracts and development, the facilities and all the upkeep, not all the players are solely footballers. Palacín relates that there were only “tres profesionales [en] un club de jugadores pluriempleados que solían entrenarse a partir de las siete de la tarde cuando terminaban sus trabajos más estables” (Vázquez Montalbán 169). The majority of the team earn so little as to force them to work multiple jobs to make a living. Of course, it is possible that while most aspire to make a living solely as a footballer, others have no such ambition and are true amateurs, individuals who can make a good enough living in a non-football industry that they have enough time and effort to commit to a game which they play for the love of it. However, such cases are most definitely the exception rather than the norm.
could eventually result in “esa llamada que cambia la vida, que da sentido para siempre a lo que había empezado siendo un sueño” (Vázquez Montlabán 169). Palacín’s arrival and initial success in the team is such a welcome advent not so much for the wins they achieve but due to the fact that “Si el Centellas daba la campanada volverían los ojeadores de los equipos grandes” (169). Once again we see how the purely ludic motivation, competing to win, is replaced by the utilitarian, serving merely as a means to a financial and social aspiration to make a living and improve one’s status. Of course, these two purposes are not mutually exclusive, however the players’ opinion as told by the narrator reveals the economic and social progress as the main priority among these two motivations. This illusion of the success of the few, promoted by the media, agents, and club leadership, as a realistic achievement for all serves as both motivation as well as coercion which allows the clubs, both big and small, to provide the minimum support to players in the present.

This is the reality that Raurel, the long-time player agent responsible for facilitating Palacín’s arrival at Centellas, referred to when he tells Pepe that the majority of players earn and/or manage to retain very little money over the course of their careers. He explains:

Hay equipos de primera división que deben seis meses de nómina y equipos de segunda que deben un año y van pagando anticipos.90 Y eso que ahora los jugadores están más protegidos y están más preparados, pero hace veinte,

90 Shaw argues that while this may occur in other countries, players would have the possibility to seek repair for their losses by appealing to their unions. However, “en la España franquista todo lo que los jugadores podían hacer era aguardar y tener esperanza” (137).
treinta años los jugadores eran carne de cañón que no sabían defender sus derechos y se creían que en cuanto reunían dos pesetas tenían que poner un bar y vivir de renta. He conocido a más de cien jugadores de primera división, personalmente, y solo veinte han prosperado, o menos. Los otros viven de los que han sido y malviven.⁹¹ (210-211)

Palacín is the perfect example of the player who lives off of “lo que [ha] sido y [malvive]” (Vázquez Montalbán 211), and his teammates at Centellas are those who never earn enough, who are consistently unpaid or paid late by ownership that either doesn’t have or mismanages the funds needed to run a club.⁹² The financial reality of the majority notwithstanding, along with the allure of potential wealth, being a footballer is most children’s biggest dream due to the cultural importance and popularity of the sport as well as the fact that it seems more accessible to all levels of society, regardless of income or educational status and personal background. No matter how cut-throat and exceptional success truly is, the industry will forever enjoy an excess of supply for the demand of footballers,⁹³ thus granting the directors of clubs and

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⁹¹ This need to live off of whatever they may have been able to save or retain from their playing days speaks to another one of the Francoist regulations on footballers, their exclusion from Social Security (Shaw 136).

⁹² Sánchez Zapico claims to have shown great care for the payment of his players and their needs. When asked to explain the incident in which the team’s locker room was broken into, resulting in Palacín’s death, and the discovery of drugs in at least 4 players lockers, he responds that while he doesn’t have an answer, he does know that this scandal will result in the death of the club, but not for any fault of his. “Ahora tendré que plegar, ya estuvimos a punto de plegar cuando los futbolistas hicieron vaga, con la junta anterior. Desde que soy el presidente les pago cada mes trinco, trinco...a veces puedo retrasarme quince días, pero los profesionales cobran” (original emphasis, Vázquez Montalbán 204). Though he claims to have always paid his players at least within a reasonable time frame, his adamant defense as well as the accusation of the failures of the previous ownership points to the prevalence of the issue for these lower division clubs.

⁹³ Interestingly, the weathered agent, Raurel, notes that “cada día salen menos jugadores porque los chicos jóvenes prefieren estudiar ciencias económicas, y bien que hacen” (Vázquez Montalbán 211). It
leagues the leverage they need to take advantage of their players and use the game to pursue their personal goals of wealth and fame.

(Footballing) Violence: On the field of “play”

The previous section has shown how the promise of wealth and success, and the illusion that such promise is the norm for all professional footballers, works to persuade players to accept and endure poor work conditions, excessive behavioral regulation, and minimal career protection. On the other hand, not only is it the positive incentive of potential success, but also the ever present risk of loss and failure, which can push players to exert themselves to the limits of their physical capability, to subject themselves to arbitrary rules and regulations of the clubs and leagues, or act zealously, on and/or off the field, potentially endangering the wellbeing of their colleagues, knowing that football is a zero-sum industry: there are a limited number of opportunities and the success of one almost certainly means the loss of another.

In his first practice session with Centellas, Palacín receives a rather rude welcome from one of his teammates. The central defender, Toté, was so eager to show his merit that “se le pegó al cuerpo hasta sentirlo como una lapa sobre su espalda y su culo, y cuando Palacín frenaba la carrera...un codo le desequilibraba o un rodillazo en el muslo lo convertía en un hombre caído o a punto de caer” (Vázquez Montalbán 43). In one of these physical encounters Toté crashes into Palacín’s bad knee, sending him to

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may be that more and more children, or at least their parents, had come to realize that a career in football was not as sure or wise a bet as was once assumed. Nevertheless, though the total number of children who attempt to pursue a living as a footballer may drop, it will always still be sufficient to fill all the spots on the many levels of professional teams many times over.
the ground and provoking the center forward to confront him physically, responding
violently to what he felt was an egregious and dangerous tackle. After training, another
of Palacín’s teammate explains to the new star forward, that Toté “no [le] entraba de
mala leche, es que le caduca el contrato en junio y hace méritos” (44).

The fear of losing a contract and therefore one’s livelihood is sufficient to cause
a player to act in a way which could cost the health and career of another, even a
teammate. It should be noted that in most cases, as in this example, the player does not
act with malicious intent. Nevertheless, the scarce resources and uneven distribution of
wealth among clubs and players of differing levels incites a ‘dog eat dog’ attitude and
cut-throat approach to their craft from players that ultimately endangers as many
players as it potentially bolsters. The irony, of course, is that while players recognise just
how precarious their profession is, they are nevertheless ever risking and sacrificing
their health and ability to play in order to achieve a better position or at least maintain
the one they currently have.

In the majority of instances players do not act maliciously in their efforts to
defeat their rivals, rather it is most often a case of recklessness or overzealous lack of
restraint. Of course, in a ‘win at all costs’ industry, both among players and teams, there
will always be those who do transgress the spirit, if not the letter of the law, in how they
engage in physical contest with opposing teams. In one game, Palacín finds himself
matched up with a defender who has received “instrucciones alarmantes de su
entrenador” (Vázquez Montalbán 135) to hit the center forward as hard and often as
possible, testing - so to speak - his “rodilla de cristal” (136) and the “aparente fragilidad
de Palacín” (135). As a result, Palacín spends the entirety of the game focusing on how to avoid the physical blows the defender attempts to land rather than doing the job of a center forward, looking to create space and opportunity to receive the ball in dangerous areas and provide/take opportunities to score.

In order to protect himself, Palacín feels obligated to retaliate in kind. After having been kneed in the thigh and again in his bad knee during the first half, Palacín begins the second half looking to deter the aggressive defender’s attempts to take him out. In the next encounter between the two players, Palacín recounts that as the defender, Pedrosa, went to make his move, Palacín “ya lo esperaba y le clavó los tacos de la bota en el muslo con el pretexto de saltar sobre su pierna cúbica cruzada como una hacha” (Vázquez Montalbán 138). The imperative to win at all costs, often by inflicting physical violence on one’s opponent, thus threatening each player's ability to make a living, shows how the sport as a professional industry functions as more than a game.

Football, thus, becomes a channel for certain kinds of violence which are prohibited in everyday life. Whereas many have argued for sport generally, and football in particular, as a sort of peaceful sublimation of war and violence, essential in the civilizing process of Western society, Simon Critchley argues that rather than pacify the violence, football is in fact “a certain legal organization of violence...that continually threaten[s] to spill over into actual violence” (166).94 I will return later to this theme of

violence that surrounds the game, however, at this moment my analysis will focus on
the sporting violence committed among players on the field of play. In this regard one
can begin to see the threat and eventual realization of the real life assassination of the
center forward as a natural progression from the on-field violence, motivated initially by
the agonistic nature of competitive sport which later gives way to the more utilitarian
and extraludic need to provide for the necessities of life, often at another’s expense.

Interestingly enough this violence among players, malicious or not, is often
accepted by the players as an occupational hazard one must simply live with. Even after
such blatant acts of violence specifically aimed at injuring Palacín, as a way of ensuring
the center-forward doesn’t score, the two players share un “apretón de manos que
quien minutos antes habría tratado de asesinarle” (Vázquez Montalbán 139). Pedrosa
congratulates Palacín for having scored the winning goal and rather than muttering
threats of retaliation or decrying the dirty play, Palacín simply replies, “hasta otra,
matador” (my emphasis, 139). Such an exchange is proof of Mortimer’s claim at the
outset of the novel when he is first presented as a Barcelona player. In response to an
interview question about whether he holds any animosity or grudge towards a rival
player, his answer is simple and succinct: “Fuera del campo se olvida…. últimamente
despues de cada batacazo, lo diera él o lo diera yo, nos guiñábamos el ojo. Somos
profesionales. El fútbol es nuestro pan” (my emphasis, 28-29). His response draws a
clear line between the separate fields of play, that of the game and real life, and
recognizes the shared understanding amongst players of the risks and realities of their
profession. What happens on the field should be confined to the time and place of the
encounter. Yet, in reality, what happens on the field inevitably affects the lives of the players off it.

According to Mortimer’s logic, the fact that the players are professionals allows them to give and receive such violence dispassionately. Such is the ideal, and in truth, it is a statement that does often reflect the behavior of most players. However, as seen in the first cited example of Palacín’s encounter with his own teammate, any allowance of physical confrontation - a basic staple of the game - will often lead to raised tempers and retaliatory responses in the heat of the moment. This animosity is repeated in later training sessions, when the two players once again find themselves “empeñado en un duelo de choques, patadas y codazos que el entrenador tuvo que cortar” (Vázquez Montalbán 169). The seriousness with which a player might approach the prospect of specifically targeted violence against their person is only heightened by the fact that they are professionals. Whereas amateur footballers may suffer an injury which keeps them from playing for a short or even an extended amount of time, such an absence from the game would not affect their ability to provide for themselves and their family. A professional footballer, in contrast, risks not only their ability to play and the prospect of winning but lays on the line their very means of subsistence. Thus, the threat of injuries and therefore the proper maintenance and care for the physical body constitute the highest concern and greatest priority of any professional footballer.

**Football as life, injuries as death and the end of a career**

Raurel explains the ephemeral nature of a professional career, reminding Pepe, “El fútbol dura diez, quince años si te respetan las lesiones” (Vázquez Montalbán 211).
But perhaps the most important part of this declaration is the question that follows, “¿Y luego qué?” (211). Since so many players come from poor backgrounds, with little formal education, vocational or professional training, many often missing the latter years of grade school in order to participate in a club academy or train with the first team, they come to the end of their playing career with little idea of what to do next or any real qualifications for much beyond physical labor. Even Palacín, a player who had a storied career, made it to the top echelon (at least briefly), who, one assumes, had earned a good deal of money over the years, is left to rely on the kindness of his club owner, Sánchez Zapico, for a sure way to earn a living after his contract expires.

He expresses his own doubt regarding his physical ability, confessing that “no se fiaba del rendimiento de su pierna, era el último contrato de su vida y el señor Sánchez le había permitido un trabajo auxiliar en sus empresas para cuando tuviera que colgar las botas” (Vázquez Montalbán 69). Moreover, even those who stay relatively free of major injuries and manage to earn a decent living all face the long-term physical consequences of a profession which has extracted from and worn down their bodies for years. Additionally, realizing the fact that one’s profession plays such a foundational role in our notion of self-identity, there is a psychological and emotional cost that comes with the end of a career. For many a player, being a footballer constitutes an ontological fact, which then results in tragic existential crises when the career comes to an end.

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The Uruguayan historian Gerardo Caetano remarked on this phenomenon in an interview he gave in 2017: “[Los futbolistas] Ingresan precozmente y mal en los roles de la adultez. Pueden ganar mucho dinero, pero no tienen oficio ni otros intereses. Cuando el buen momento deportivo se termina, todo lo demás se corta abruptamente. A los 35 años, la mejor edad, a ellos les parece que lo mejor de la vida ya pasó. Y no están preparados para enfrentar todos los años que les quedan” (Prats).
At this stage of his career, Palacín is essentially in a state of early-onset retirement. He is competing against time as much, if not more, as he is his rival opponents or the expectations of a coach or the public. As one commentator puts it in his analysis of Palacín’s first performance with Centellas, “Como le den mucho tiempo a Palacín, se jubila. Ése tiene ya casi veinte años en cada pierna” (Vázquez Montalbán 137). His legs’ eventual expiration and therefore inability to play brings back the existential crisis he faced years ago in the wake of his first major injury. The press at the time summed it up nicely: “Palacín ni regatea, ni remata, ni corre, ni existe” (my emphasis, 71). Palacín returns to the question of what awaits him after this last season, all the while cognizant of Sánchez Zapico’s promise of an easy and well-paid job as a representative for his company. Yet even with the owner’s assurance, Palacín “no se veía a sí mismo representando otra cosa que su miedo de fondo y la sombra de su propia memoria” (171). Though he should be safe in the knowledge that he would have a steady job, Palacín can only see fear and the prospect of becoming a shell of himself once he is no longer a footballer. The anxiety he suffers as he approaches his imminent retirement exemplifies the difficult truth: “No matter how professional the club is in preparing players for that moment, the actual experience of retirement can be akin to a form of public death”96 (Giulianotti 124).

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96 In his book on football, the Mexican author Juan Villoro relates the opening lines of the iconic French footballer Michel Platini’s biography which drives home the player experience of retirement as the end of their life. The autobiography, titled Mi vida como un partido, begins with the dramatic declaration: “Morí el 17 de mayo de 1987, a la edad de treinta y dos años, día en que me retiré del fútbol”. Villoro then comments, “Sólo los recuerdos otorgan un más allá al futbolista jubilado, lo inscriben en la leyenda o dejan de pasarle la pelota” (Dios es redondo 69).
Due to the squalid conditions of his neighborhood, his loneliness and the shambles of a family life he was striving to repair, along with the imminent end of his career, Palacín finds himself susceptible to other vices and temptations, off-field threats to his bodily performance and therefore his life/livelihood. His association with Marta eventually leads to regular sexual encounters and drug use. One day at practice he finds himself distracted by “la sospecha de que no podría dejar pasar demasiados días sin recurrir a Marta y a su ración de coca y sexo subalterno” (Vázquez Montalbán 170). His subpar performance at this training session and mental distraction lead the coach to send him home early. As he enters the locker room, he comes across three men raiding the players lockers and taking anything valuable they find. Palacín had now seen too much and in fear that he would report them, the three armed delinquents stab him and leave him for dead, bleeding out on the locker room floor. His last season as a footballer also became the last of his life.

After all the games he played throughout his career, “El último partido de su vida lo perdió por tres puñaladas a cero” (Vázquez Montalbán 194). The confluence of his footballing and mortal life as represented in the novel emphasizes the thesis of this dissertation, that football is much more than a game. Though the assassination is not a direct result of his play on the field, his death is merely the culmination of the long-lasting physical deterioration of the Spanish footballer’s body over the years, after witnessing the many threats of potential career assassination via (barely) legal sporting.

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97 Coincidentally, these men are the three Arabic mafia members whom Carvalho seeks out throughout the novel in his attempts to find any tips about who could be behind the death threats to Mortimer.
plays - in terms of the game/sport -, and in tangential connection to the vices of drugs and permiscuous behavior which also represent a threat to his corporeal performance.

In the context of Palacín’s long career, along with his history of injuries and the recent addition of drug use, one could read his death ultimately as the natural consequence of his actions or merely an unfortunate tragedy. However, Carvalho relates a bad dream he had in the days after Palacín’s death which points toward a more sinister interpretation. In this dream, Carvalho sees “sobre el mármol de Morgue... el delantero centro acuchillado, un cuerpo vestido de futbolista y cosido a puñaladas, ... como si fuera un muñeco con la identidad debida al rugido de los públicos. Nadie parecía reclamar aquel cadáver.... Le importaba menos la memoria rota que la presencia actualizada de aquel juguete roto...” (Vázquez Montalbán 193). Viewing the player as nothing more than a stitched up doll or a broken toy points to the dehumanization of the footballer and ascribes a certain culpability to the individual whose “toy” it is.

In this case, it may be fruitful to return to the assertion of García Cames, mentioned previously, that “los directivos del fútbol no hacen otra cosa que jugar con sus equipos” (369). As an extension of the team, it can be said that the club owners and boards of directors play with the players, as if there were dolls or toys, mere playthings. The maintenance and care for the body is only prioritized when the body can offer value to the game and its outcomes for those who control it. Thus, when the body can no longer perform as expected, the life, either professional or mortal, is discarded.

Implicit in the import and care of the player is also the public, the fans. As Carvalho puts it, the identity, role and importance of this body/doll, dressed as a
footballer, are dictated at least in part by the “rugido de los públicos” (Vázquez Montalbán 193). This public acclaim and pseudo worship of a player grants the individual the status, wealth and wellbeing most often associated with these celebrity footballers. Yet, such public acclaim is so often fleeting and once forgotten or discarded for the next exciting talent many of these great players quickly fall from their privileged status. Out of sight and therefore out of mind many of these players suffer from the lack of support and care for their wellbeing, spiraling in a negative trajectory and even coming to tragic ends. The death of a player often brings to light the plight of a footballer’s post-playing career and provokes a level of introspection in the fans and media who once adored him/her. Giulianotti observes:

Often, the announcement of the death of leading former players leads to a fuller reassessment of the collective memory that must immortalize glorious careers. In some instances the sentiments of loss also harbour feelings of guilt and complicity. The once adulatory public may realize the failure to recompense their memories through finance and affection during the rest of their hero’s lives. (125)

The death of a former great player often thrusts a figure back into the light of public view and asks the fans, media, and footballing institutions to question what could

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98 Perhaps the best example of this is the legendary Brazilian winger, Garrincha, who stands alongside Pelé as potentially the best Brazilian player ever. Unlike Pele, however, he was left to his own devices to squander all of his earnings and die at a young age in the depths of poverty. Millions of Brazilians flooded the streets to commemorate his death, flocking to get a view of the iconic legend as his body was carried through the streets of Rio de Janeiro during a 4-hour funeral procession. For an in-depth examination of his life, legend and tragic death, see the ESPN documentary, The Myth of Garrincha (2014) directed by Marcos Horacio Azevedo.
have gone so wrong? How can such an important public figure meet such an end? Such a question inevitably points to the fact that players are valued for what they provide the clubs, media and fans. It illuminates a truth that we rarely see or value the human beneath the jersey and are all too ready to treat them however best serves us.

This is indeed the case of Palacín, which Carvalho’s investigation uncovers. Palacín is destined to break from the moment he arrives at Centellas. Through conversations between Sánchez Zapico and Dosrius, Basté de Linyola’s lawyer, and further discussions between Dosrius and his employer, as well as reports from the agent who facilitated Palacín’s arrival, Raurel, we learn that Palacín was only ever a pawn, meant to play a small but significant role to help the presidents of Centellas and FC Barcelona acquire and then sell the land of the Centellas stadium as prime real estate sought after for the infrastructure development in preparation for the upcoming Olympics. Unbeknownst to him, Palacín’s every move was monitored and every effort was made to guarantee he played the part he was unwittingly brought in to play.

The president of Centellas, Sánchez Zapico, struck a deal with the President of FC Barcelona, Basté de Linyola, to sell him the stadium land. Basté’s lawyer Dosrius, reassures Sánchez Zapico, “tú ganarás mucha pasta cuando se construya en los terrenos del Centellas” (Vázquez Montalbán 77). Nevertheless, the transaction isn’t quite as simple as an agreement, even a fixed one, between two parties when it comes to the sale of the stadium. Due to the stadium’s location the club has long been the target of many attempts to buy it over the years. Nevertheless, “El patronato de fundadores del Centellas había resistido todas las tentaciones de venta del campo, tanto en las
expansiones urbanas de los años cincuenta y sesenta, como cuando empezaron a husmearlo los cazadores de la futura especulación en todos los alrededores de la Villa Olímpica,” respecting the history of the club and “impulsado por la incondicionalidad de una afición de barrio” (40). To justify the sale of the stadium and essentially dissolve the club, Sánchez Zapico and Basté de Linyola must make sure that the team continues to lose and finishes the season in the last places of the league table. Such a finish would mean relegation for the club, and seeing as they are already in the lowest tier of Spanish football, such an outcome would mean the club’s loss of professional status. If the team were to be relegated, as they very nearly were the season before, “eso implicaría la muerte” (148).

This summary of the club’s history is important to show the structure of the club and the power dynamics within it. Sánchez Zapico, just as Basté de Linyola, is the president of the club, not the owner. As such, even these powerful men within their clubs cannot make unilateral decisions regarding any aspect of the club, especially one that would affect its very existence. Richard Giulianotti explains this important aspect of the club structure in Spain: “In most European nations, football clubs are privately owned organizations in which a small number of large shareholders control the boardroom. However, in Iberia and in Latin America, clubs are organized as private

99 This general distinction between privately owned and collectively shared organizations is true historically and, in some cases, still is. However, the economic and legal structure of football clubs the world over have seen many changes since the writing of this novel which slightly complicate the distinction. In Spain specifically, Béquer Seguín explains how the Ley del deporte, passed in 1990: forced nearly all of Spain’s first- and second-division soccer clubs to turn into publicly traded companies by July 1, 1992. The idea behind the Sports Law was, presumably, purely economic: to be able to better hold accountable one person or an ownership group for a club’s debt. But its upshot was largely political: the law effectively handed over exclusive power in what used to be a
sports associations, controlled by the socios (‘members’) who pay a monthly or annual subscription” (87).

Even as President, Sánchez Zapico must seek the approval and support of the club’s socios and its board of directors. The difficult situation in which the president finds himself is that of making sure his team loses while still appearing to do all he can to help them win and avoid relegation. Due to a couple of wins in the league following Palacín’s arrival Basté sends Dosrius to check up on Sánchez Zapico and remind him of their deal. When they criticize him for having bought “una estrella”, he reminds Dosrius, “Yo no puedo ser presidente del Centellas y empezar la temporada sin un fichaje que demuestre que yo quiero que el club continúe (Vázquez Montalbán 75). After the scare of almost being relegated the previous season “la junta directiva del Centellas le presionó para que [reforzara] el equipo” (149), leading to Sánchez Zapico’s purchase of Palacín.

Once again, such a confession shows the power of the board of directors and the socios. This is the very fear which Basté explains to Dosrius: “el equipo ha ganado y eso crea afición. Imagina que en el próximo desplazamiento vuelven a ganar. Más gente al

100 From this point on I will use the term socios, rather than fans, to distinguish specifically between the casual observer who chooses to root for a team - a fan- and the committed, dues paying, club member, - un socio-. The socios are those who still maintain at least a semblance of power within the club as they vote for leadership positions, such as the president and board of directors, and have a say at the table regarding other substantial issues that arise within the club.
...¿Quién propone en ese clima comprar el campo y clausurar la sociedad?” (Vázquez Montalbán 148). These men of the social and financial elite are well aware that “fútbol es cultura popular” (76) and therefore clubs are tied up in questions of “identidad cultural” (76). The socios are able to say no to the president.

Sánchez Zapico is obviously aware of the power of the socios and the need to therefore appear fully invested in the success of the team. Nevertheless, he is not as concerned as his partners that the acquisition of Palacín will present any threat to their goals of sporting sabotage and financial gain. Though he has indeed signed a player, “con cierta leyenda, que había creado memoria” (Vázquez Montalbán 149), the team was far beyond the repair of one signing of an aging once formidable player: “Tengo un equipo de cojos y un entrenador imbécil, hemos perdido mil socios en una temporada, hemos perdido tres de los cuatro primeros partidos de la Liga” (74). As for Palacín, at this point in his career he was all but “acabado” (149).

Palacín’s aging and deteriorating physical state aside, Sanchez Zapico was never going to leave the fate of the club and therefore his potential financial gain to chance. He explains to Dosrius, “Ya tengo a un defensa encargado de lisiarle la rodilla más de lo que la tiene al Palacín...y ese defensa lo tengo más amarrado que Dios (Vázquez Montalbán 76). This confession shows the illicit manner in which this club president attempts to control and, in this case, damage the body of one of the players to pursue his own financial goals. It also casts a different light on the repeated physical altercations I examined earlier in this chapter, between Palacín and Tote, the veteran
defender on his own team. Though other teammates told Palacín that Toté wasn’t kicking him in his bad knee on purpose, this confession shows that assumption to be false. Toté was targeting Palacín specifically, not merely ‘playing hard’ in hopes of showing his merit for a new contract. His motive may not have been personal, but it was financial, just not in the standard way one would assume. The corruption within the club resorted to using the game of football to exert violence upon an individual that would not be permitted outside of the game. And in this case, physical contact with the intent to injure is also a sporting infraction. Toté has been paid not only to hurt Palacín, but to do so in a manner that appears to be normal physical contact within the context of the game.

The assumption is that the loss of Palacín to injury, as well as the sacking of the manager will ultimately result in the team once again sinking to the bottom of the league table. Sánchez Zapico explains that such an unfolding of events will then allow him to close the club and eventually sell the land to Basté. He assures his associates, “En cuanto estemos en la cola y con el fichaje roto, reuniré la junta directiva y una asamblea extraordinaria de socios y les diré: señores, hem de plegar!” (Vázquez Montalbán 76). Only in such a state of disrepair would the locals, members and directors of the club, finally accept its dissolution and the consequent sale of its land and facilities.

Usually clubs, their presidents, directors, managers, etc. exert control over players by inserting themselves into the minutiae of their lives and enforcing strict prohibitive rules via the terms of their contracts and the rigors of team training. However, in the case of Palacín, it is just the opposite. Due to his own personal issues,
the president’s approach to his player is one of neglect. Aside from the ‘hit’ he places on Palacín, by way of Toté “el defensa”, Sánchez Zapico, along with Basté de Linyola, is content to watch the life of this once great player fall apart. As Dosrius explains to Basté, “su vida personal es un desastre. Separado de la mujer y cocainómano” (Vázquez Montalbán 149). A summary of his personal life is assurance for Basté that even though in the short term Palacín has managed to score and help Centellas win -which would be a possible foil to the presidents’ plans- there is no reason to worry because the center forward “ésta enganchado y un día u otro se va a romper. Sin su concurso, el Centellas no existe” (150).

The fact that so many individuals in positions of power saw the danger and trouble in which Palacín found himself and chose to do nothing is indeed egregious, yet what is even worse is that this purpose and treatment of the player was premeditated. In his interview with Carvalho, the agent Raurel reveals that he and the club were well aware of Palacín’s delicate state, in both physical footballing terms as well as in his personal life. He explains, “Y además tenía un lío familiar de no te menees...este chico es carne de desastre, y le advertí a Sánchez Zapico: este chico puede romperse si no le ayudan psicológicamente, porque se ve, se ve que tiene la cabeza en otro sitio. Pero a los de Centellas nos les importó y lo ficharon” (Vázquez Montalbán 212). Palacín is the perfect example of an expendable commodity, a dehumanized individual, whose value is solely determined by his ability to perform a certain function for the club, and in this case, for the powerful men who run it. Of course, this sordid plan is an extreme example of the corruption that can, and sadly does, infiltrate the footballing world, yet it must be
noted that such cases are indeed the exception, rather than the norm. Though the plot against Palacín’s physical and psychological/emotional wellbeing are extreme, they do nevertheless illustrate the plight of the player, particularly an older one, left to take any opportunity he may get to provide as best he can for himself and his family before the only career he’s even known comes to an end. He is forever subject to the controlling interests and powers of the sporting and social elite who run the clubs and employ the players as means to their own ends, sporting or otherwise.

**FC Barcelona: Més que un club**

After having considered the manners in which professional football is much more than a game for the players I would now like to turn my attention in greater detail to the significance of the club, specifically FC Barcelona, to examine the way in which Vázquez Montalbán takes to task the famous slogan for which the club is known: *més que un club*.\(^{101}\) Of course, much has been written on this subject, but I will focus primarily on the club’s fictional representation in the novel rather than attempting to discuss the full spectrum of potential interpretations and application of this ethos in real life.

The special significance and magnitude of the club is thrust into the foreground of the novel from the beginning. In the narrator’s description of the club for which

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\(^{101}\) “Més que un club” is the phrase in Catalán, which of course, is “más que un club” in Spanish. Grant Farred gives a great review of the origins and significance of this iconic motto: “This phrase, some argue, predates Franco’s rule. (There is another dating, a historically loaded one, of the phrase: 1968, the year of the “Cultural Revolution” in Europe. In this instance, however, 1968 had nothing to do with the Paris Commune of the Prague Spring. It was the year tha Barca’s newly elected president, Narcis de Carreras, first pronounced the phrase, *Som més que un club*, in his acceptance speech). Whatever its origin, during the long decades of the dictatorship the phrase undoubtedly gained a hard ideological sheen, a resiliency, and a longevity that has survived *El Caudillo*” (91).
Camps O’Shea works as the director of public relations and the individual in charge of spearheading the internal investigation of the anonymous death threats, the character and the club are introduced in the same breath as “el joven jefe de relaciones públicas del club de fútbol más poderoso de la ciudad, de Cataluña, del universo” (Vázquez Montalbán 15). In the first dialogue between Camps O’Shea and Carvalho, the public relations director gives the detective and the reader a more tangible sense of the size of the club and the reach of its influence. FC Barcelona is “un club con más de cien mil socios y con una expectación social que implica a millones de personas” (16). Whereas for Centellas the loss of a thousand socios represents a huge loss in paid dues and local support, for Barcelona it would be a mere drop in the ocean.¹⁰² What is clear however is the societal buy-in, both financial and emotional, from the socios, the consequent structure of the club as a democratic institution of the Catalan community, as well as its cosmopolitan, international and universal outreach.

No sooner have the narrator and O’Shea established the primacy of the club among its local, regional, and universal rivals do the media members in the novel also affirm the prestige and social significance of the club, beyond the mere scope of financial or sporting power. In Mortimer’s introductory press conference one of the first questions the media direct at this new arrival is, “¿Qué impresión se siente cuando se

¹⁰² Nevertheless, the need for consistent, if not growing, membership in the club is similarly important to Barcelona. It is just a question of scale. Where Sánchez Zapico speaks of the risk of losing 1,000 socios, Basté fears the same thing, just on a greater scale. He explains to Carvalho, “El club sale de momentos difíciles y ha costado devolver la confianza al socio y al público. Este club con cien mil socios es el más poderoso del mundo. Con setenta mil, así de pronto, podría ser un gigante con pies de barro. Mueve el dinero que anticipan cien mil socios al comienzo de cada temporada. Bajar al dinero de setenta mil socios puede ser una catástrofe” (my emphasis, Vázquez Montalbán 85).
ficha por un club tan poderoso como éste?...¿conoce usted la significación social y nacional del club por el que ha fichado?” (my emphasis, Vázquez Montalbán 20). The subsequent questions posed by the media all refer to various aspects of Catalan culture and identity, such as Catalan baby names for the child his wife is expecting, the famous “pan con tomate a la catalan”, and paella.103 Though the novel does not relate specific responses to each of these questions, it is clear that the club is representative of much more than a mere sporting entity. The media questions show how they and the fans expect the incoming players to not only integrate into the team, the club ethos and style of play, but to also, perhaps just as importantly, adopt and assimilate the lived Catalan culture. The overlap between club and city/region is made implicitly when the media welcomes Mortimer, not merely as a new player or member of the club, rather as “un ciudadano más de Barcelona” (28). Civil citizenship in Barcelona, and Catalonia by extension, is synonymous with sporting play and fandom/support of FC Barcelona.

The notion of Mortimer as a “citizen” of the city via his integration into the football club speaks to the nature of the club itself and the values it claims to stand for within the greater society, not merely the world of professional football. In his analysis of Barcelona’s stance as “more than a club” and its relation to the state/regional autonomy of Catalonia, Grant Farred explains, “for the fan, there is no distinction between the two institutions, Catalonia and FC Barcelona: the one operates not in

103 The exchange reminds the well-versed Barcelona fan of another foreign star player, the legendary Johan Cruyff, who named his son Jordi, a traditionally Catalán name, even though he is Dutch (Farred 126). The journalist asks, “Mortimer, usted se ha casado hace poco y espera un hijo. ¿Le pondrá Jordi si es niño o Núria si es niña? (my emphasis, Vázquez Montalbán 20).
excess of but through the other - interchangeably - the one ontologizes the others” (89).

This entanglement or enmeshing of the two entities, the football club and the autonomous region of Catalonia, is acknowledged and put forth at multiple stages of the novel. Both Basté de Linyola and Camps O’Shea give voice to the popular phrase, coined by Vázquez Montalbán himself: “Se ha dicho que nuestro equipo de fútbol señero es más que un club y se ha añadido que es el ejército simbólico y desarmado de Cataluña, una nación sin estado y por lo tanto, sin ejército. Y puede ser cierto” (my emphasis, Vásquez Montalbán 105).

This status of the club as representative of Catalanian nationalism, culture and resistance to centralist Castilian aggression has a long history and stems from the days of the Spanish Civil War. Specifically, after the military defeat of the Guerra Civil “it was left to FC Barcelona to bear the burden of resistance and representation” (Farred 91). Even before the military defeat, the club and its players were cultural and political ambassadors and refugees of the Catalán and Republican cause. In spring of 1937 (just a year after the start of the conflict), the Barcelona players who had not been conscripted embarked on a tour to Mexico and the United States as a means of escaping the hardships and dangers of Franco’s expanding control. The tour served as a platform to raise awareness for the civil war and the players functioned as “embajadores de la causa republicana con el fin de recaudar fondos tanto para el club como para la resistencia antifranquista” (Correia 132-133).

It is during the Franco years, as the historian Josep Solé i Sabaté explains, that “FC Barcelona empieza a afirmarse como un arma de resistencia sociopolítica y se
convierte, no en un club barcelonés, sino en cierto modo el club de Cataluña” (Eaude 258). Amid Franco’s own attempts to channel football for his own purposes, this relationship between the club and that ‘nation’ of Catalonia is firmly cemented. Supporting FC Barcelona is not only a matter of sporting allegiance, rather, club support inevitably also represents “una forma de antifranquismo popular al alcance de cualquier español, sea cual sea su categoría social” (Correia 134).

Back home, during the years of the dictatorship, Barcelona’s stadiums were some of the only places where cules could gather and show displays of Catalonian culture.104 Duncan Shaw gives a concise description of the immense significance of the club during the long decades of the dictatorship: “Los partidos en Les Corts y luego en el Camp Nou ofrecían una oportunidad regular tolerada para miles de catalanes de reunirse y hablar en su desalentada lengua materna, cantar canciones tradicionales prohibidas...expresar su frustración política mofándose de Real Madrid y...hacer ponderar la senyera, la proscripita bandera nacional” (63).

Shaw’s assertion points to just one of the ways football was a site of political and cultural control under the Franco regime. The clubs were no longer permitted to conduct their affairs in the Catalan language, going so far as to change the official names of clubs so that they all be rendered in Castilian Spanish.105 For a brief period, FC

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104 Culé being the colloquial nickname for Barcelona fans, affectionately referring to the backside of fan’s which would show over the wall surrounding the original field, les cortes, as crowds would exceed the seating capacity and climb the wall to be able to watch the match.

105 It is significant then, that Sánchez Zapico makes a point to tell Dosrius that he always speaks Catalan in the meetings with the board of directors and socios: “En cuanto estemos en la cola y con el fichaje roto, reuniré la junta directiva y una asamblea extraordinaria de socios y les diré: señores, hem de plegar!; en la junta hablo en catalán porque tengo en la directiva a cuatro tenderos de Convergencia” (76).
Barcelona (Football Club) was changed to CF Barcelona (Club de fútbol), and the rival club, Espanyol (Catalan spelling) was changed to Español (Correia 132). Though the regime sought to impose their centrist Castilian rule on the makeup and administration of the clubs as social institutions, it was in the stands where the Catalan public retained a bastion of freedom and even a small means of resistance.\textsuperscript{106}

While some dissent and opposition was permitted or at least tolerated in the guise of football fandom and performance, Franco, nevertheless, understood the power of football as popular culture and even employed it skillfully throughout his regime to bolster his power, to distract and divert the public from more serious issues during his rule, and to promote his vision of Castilian hegemony as the one true Spanish identity.\textsuperscript{107} Franco consistently attached his name and influence to Real Madrid, the capital’s team, precisely as they rose to prominence as the best team in Europe during the 50s and 60s. Just how concrete a connection or complicit relation existed between the Franco regime and Spain’s most decorated club has been and will continue to be a

\textsuperscript{106} In his book, \textit{La Roja: How Soccer Conquered Spain and How Spanish Soccer Conquered the World}, Jimmy Burns relates the testimony of then head of the Catalan Communist Party, Gregorio López Raimundo, who gives a vivid description of this clashing of political ideologies at the football stadium during the Franco years: “Out in the city, fascism was very visible - the names of the streets, the Falangist crests, the portraits of Franco, the flags. But in the stadium you were among the masses, and I felt - maybe I was imagining it, but I felt it all the same - that everyone around me was really antifascist deep down, at least in the stands. Maybe things were a little different where people were sitting; the club management was pro regime, handpicked no doubt during the early Franco years but not the fans - they identified themselves with a democratic Catalonia” (Burns 202).

\textsuperscript{107} In addition to his strong implicit connection to Real Madrid and the enforced named changes of traditionally regional clubs to castilian Spanish, Franco also changed the name of the country’s domestic tournament and the color of the national team’s jerseys: “Consciente de que los españoles son fervientes amantes del esférico, en 1939 el poder ordena a la Federación Española de Fútbol que cambie el nombre de la Copa del Rey por el de ‘Copa del Generalísimo.’ El rojo de las camisetas de la selección nacional es reemplazado por el azul falangista y los aficionados son exhortados a entonar el himno fascista \textit{Cara al sol} y a gritar desde las gradas ‘¡Viva Franco!’” (Correia 129).
topic of heated debate. Nevertheless, neither fans nor rivals of Real Madrid can deny that the team has been and still is known, at least popularly, as “el equipo del régimen”, and that the success of the team during the dictatorship, especially in Europe, served to bolster the image of both the Franco regime as well as the nation generally. As Grant Farred explains, “because so much of that success occurred during the Franco years, Real’s success will always be tainted, perpetually impure. It is a taint that FC Barcelona fans will never consider erased, a contamination by fascism that Barca fans will never allow their Madrid enemies to forget” (125).

Perhaps the most important takeaway from this historical overview of the cultural and political importance of Spanish football generally and the two rival clubs specifically is to recognize that in Spain “the politics of representation is nowhere more forcefully and viscerally evident than in the culture of sport” (Farred 84). Thus, the sport and the clubs perform significant functions in politics and culture far beyond the sphere of football. This explanation of the political and social enmity between Spain’s two biggest clubs also makes explicit what the description of FC Barcelona as “el ejército desarmado de la nación” only implies. An army is only significant in its deployment against an enemy. Yet the novel barely mentions or alludes to the eternal enemy of FC Barcelona and Catalonia; Real Madrid. The need for the club as the external enemy to FC Barcelona and the autonomous community of Catalonia is made all the more apparent due to its glaring absence. There are no narrations of encounters with the two teams on the field, not even a question about the rivalry -for many, the biggest sport

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108 For a brief summary and analysis of the arguments see Shaw pp 44-62.
rivalry in the world- for Mortimer at his welcome press conference. The only mention of this political and cultural, to say nothing of sporting, adversary comes from Camps O'Shea as he muses about the mythic and epic symbolism and function of football to Carvalho and the detective’s description of a run-down bar, adorned with old Real Madrid paraphernalia, where he meets with an informant.

Though conspicuously sparse, the novel’s treatment of Real Madrid is significant as it confirms the rivalry and enmity felt between the capital club and FC Barcelona while also providing an opportunity for Carvalho to highlight one of the themes of the novel, which is the use of FC Barcelona as a symbol for the new, modern, and democratic Spain of the Transition compared to the outdated, defunct and fascist Spain of the dictatorship. Carvalho observes this temporal break when he steps off the streets of Barcelona and enters the little bar where he meets his source. He remarks that in doing so, “había traspasado el dintel del tiempo” (Vázquez Montalbán 124):

A este lado de la puerta, la Barcelona democrática, olímpica y yuppie, y al otro un rincón para la nostalgia de la España franquista, una madriguera color vino donde hasta las jarras de cerveza llevaban la bandera española y las postales eran señales de una identidad nostálgica...La ideología del local era tan coherente que hasta los emblemas deportivos tenían un signo vertebrador de España: o el Real Madrid o del Español.¹⁰⁹ Ni una fisura. Fundamentalismo. Puro fundamentalismo franquista, tan puro que el tiempo lo había hecho inocente,

¹⁰⁹ “Español or “Espanyol, the “other” Catalanian team, the club sympathetic to and sometimes even supportive of the Castilian project” (Farred 126).
tan inocente como toda causa no sólo inútil sino convertida en arqueología sentimental. (original emphasis, 124)

Barcelona is characterized as inherently democratic, and outward facing. An “olympic” Barcelona is a city that opens itself to athletes, dignitaries, and tourists from all over the world. One which celebrates diversity of ideas, cultures and practices which inevitably come with the visitors. Real Madrid, however, is a relic of the past; decidedly nationalistic, seen in the abundance of Spanish flags, and fundamentalist. The two clubs are representative of two different political and social realities, still at odds in the novelistic present. The Real Madrid artifacts are spatially isolated to this old, run-down bar, a property which, much like Centellas’ stadium and facilities, has fallen into disrepair and should give way to the new, capitalist, and entrepreneurial impetus remaking the city to prepare for the Olympic games and better represent an ideal Barcelona, and by extension Spain, to the world.

This oppositional posture and adversarial relationship are further emphasized in Camps O’Shea’s conception of the symbolic and sociological significance of football in Catalán and Spanish society. For him, “el héroe deportivo sustituye a los Napoleones locales y los dirigentes del deporte a los dioses ordenadores del caos. Y traslade usted este esquema a España, a Cataluña, a nuestro club. Nuestro club es sant Jordi y el dragón el enemigo exterior: España para los más ambiciosos simbólicamente, el Real Madrid para los más concretos”110 (Vázquez Montalbán 98). Not only does the young

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110 It may seem strange to one unfamiliar with Spanish history to read that Spain is considered an “external” enemy to Catalonia. While the region is a part of what is the present-day nation state of Spain, like most regions of Spain, the area existed as its own kingdom for centuries before the consolidation of
director of public relations clarify the symbolic and concrete adversaries of FC Barcelona and therefore Catalonia as Spain and Real Madrid, he declares both entities to be more than mere competitive rivals; they are qualitatively categorized as evil, as the devil himself.

Camps O’Shea ultimately argues for a fútbolización of modern society; politics, religion, commerce, etc. Football is the medium through which all other aspects of culture and life derive their meaning. Farred asserts, “Barca fandom is so constitutive of culé and Catalan life that, for significant sections of the population, it is the form-of-life without which “life” itself is inconceivable” (89). The rival, therefore, in this case Real Madrid, Spain, and historically Franco, are a threat not only to victory on the field, but to (the way of) life itself of Barca fans.

Camps O’Shea’s interpretation of the clubs’ significance is important to establish the connection between Real Madrid and FC Barcelona and to understand their respective symbolism, at least from a Catalan perspective. Moreover, Camps O’Shea specifies distinct actors/roles, which constitute the focus of the novel generally: the player, specifically the sporting hero (a center-forward perhaps?), and the sporting director, the gods who give form to the chaos underlying the footballing world and control its many actors. It is in this relationship that the power exercised by the “gods” of the football world upon the players, the “heroes”, is seen. The gods’ utilitarian

the nation state, only losing its independence in 1714. Additionally, in the years following Franco’s death when the new constitution was written in 1978, Catalonia was one of a handful of regions in the nation granted the status of “comunidad autónoma”. Though in international geopolitics, Madrid/Spain would not be considered a domestic “enemy”, in the eyes of Catalanians, their nation is Catalonia and therefore Spain and/or Madrid are foreign or external entities.
approach to the sporting heroes and to the clubs themselves as means to secure their own personal success are the very impetus for the action of the novel. A closer examination of Basté Linyola, his view and use of the club he leads and the role of the players, both Mortimer and Palacín, will further confirm the criticism the anonymous author asserts.

Basté de Linyola: President of FC Barcelona and “dueño de la ciudad”

In Camps O’Shea’s assessment, Basté de Linyola occupies the role of “god,” the man in power who attempts to give form, order, and structure to the football club, and by extension Catalonia itself. It is in this light that O’Shea describes his boss as a man who “ha querido ordenar la economía, la democracia, Cataluña, y ahora quiere ordenar la sentimentalidad épica de este país devolviendo al club su carácter de ejército simbólico no armado de la catalanidad” (my emphasis, Vázquez Montalbán 97). Basté’s project includes, yet goes far beyond, the football world. Before becoming president of the club Basté already had a reputation as “uno de los ‘últimos señores de Barcelona’... que [había] hecho historia democrática de la ciudad, de Cataluña y de España” (105). Because FC Barcelona is “more than a club,” Basté feels the need to rebuild the club in the wake of the Franco regime, thus “devolviendo” the club’s full socio-political significance.

This transition from an outgoing administration which left the club in shambles can be read into O’Shea’s early explanation of the importance of having signed Mortimer. He explains to Carvalho, “La junta directiva saliente nos dejó una plantilla descompensada y en cierto sentido quemada” (Vázquez Montalbán 15). The difference
between the old and the new is further emphasized in his characterization of the current sporting and institutional project: “la nueva directiva recién nombrada respondía a un nuevo espíritu, lejos de antiguas zafiedades, improvisaciones, premodernidades que habían caracterizado a los anteriores mandatarios del club” (my emphasis, 15). Though FC Barcelona is representative of Catalonia, it is important to note that many of the club directors during the dictatorship were either Franco loyalists, made by political appointment, or individuals whose names had to at least be approved by Francoist officials in the Real Federación Española de Fútbol.111 The new democratically elected President and directors of the club stand in political and cultural contrast to their Francoist predecessors and their main task is to revitalize and rebuild the club, instilling it with the spirit of Catalan nationalism and democratic values, returning to the club to its status of representative of the Catalán “nation”.

This is the sentimental and social rhetoric espoused by Basté as the president of the would-be nation’s most visible institution. The novel, however, shows, primarily through ‘confidential’ dialogue with both his lawyer, Dosrius, as well as Carvlaho, that Basté uses the power and influence of his position primarily to maintain and improve his own wealth and status as opposed to growing and strengthening the club. All of Basté’s comments and actions in the novel deal primarily with his illegal dealings to obtain the Centellas land, interactions with political and economic elites, and bolstering his image

111 Under the Franco regime, the R.F.E.F administered “La liga nacional, la Copa del Generalísimo y la Selección Nacional” (Shaw 37). Not only were Franco appointments found in the national league offices, “During General Franco’s rule...Football in Catalunya was no exception and Franco appointed state officials to run football clubs” (Crolley and Hand 119-120).
as a public figure, championing “crecimiento urbano y esperanza olímpica” (Vásquez Montalbán 104).

Interestingly enough, as O’Shea tells it, Basté “había estado a punto de ser ministro del Gobierno de España, consejero del Gobierno autonómico de Cataluña y alcalde de Barcelona” (Vázquez Montalbán 21). But as he aged and realized the stress and pressure that would come with such political aspirations he decided to settle for a ‘less demanding’ job, president of FC Barcelona: “La presidencia del club era la antesala de la jubilación, pero le convertía en un poder fáctico y amaba el poder como único antídoto contra la autodestrucción” (21-22). Though the club is not an official government entity or an institutional power with legal authority anywhere outside its own walls, its social significance granted Basté a “de facto power” which was perhaps even greater. And though Basté did not shoulder the responsibilities of an elected government official, his status as president of such an important club granted him a place in the same social circles.

As the narration switches from the action at one of Centellas’ matches to that at FC Barcelona, the introduction to the setting of the game, the action and its significance for the fans and the city starts with the introduction of key political figures at the game. The narrator describes how Basté welcomes “el presidente de la Generalitat de Cataluña y el alcalde de Barcelona...al ascenso del palco presidencial” (Vázquez Montalban 141). Basté is thus a gatekeeper for those politicians who hope to benefit from a positive association with the club. Such high-ranking politicians appear at the game to connect
their politics to the success, strategy and symbolism of the club. Such entwining of political figures with the club leadership allows Basté to enjoy a degree of political power and influence while not occupying an explicitly political role.

Nevertheless, political power is not Basté’s main interest nor his source of greatest influence. The narrator explains it was not his history as one of “los prinicipes predilectos de la democracia” that garnered him the requisite respect and esteem he needs with his business associates (Vázquez Montalbán 151). Such respect “se lo había ganado desde que presidía la junta directiva del club de fútbol más poderoso y rico de la ciudad. Aquel cargo lo entendían. Los otros no. Cualquier cargo que no fuera jefe de Gobierno, ministro o presidente de la Generalitat no lo entendía o les parecía de un mérito menor” (151). The characteristics of the club which are highlighted in this quote, “powerful” and “rich” are also the primary characteristics which Basté pursues and embodies, as opposed to the more idealistic possibilities such as democracy, tolerance, or integrity. Granted, the omission of such ideals in this one description does not preclude them from the club’s identity. Nevertheless, the choice of the two adjectives voiced in this one instance foregrounds power and riches as the primary interests for Basté and his business associates which the club and association with it make possible.

112 A member of the governing party at the moment is quoted as having said “si este equipo va adelante, el país va adelante y viceversa” (Vázquez Montalbán 142). The other political post-match comment is that of a member of the “Partit dels Socialistes Catalans” and European representative, inscribing the actions of the team into an explicitly political stance of his espoused party: “Hasta ahora se ha jugado desde el ensimismamiento y a partir de ahora el equipo parece dispuesto a redescubrir la otredad. Es la otredad donde se marcan goles, no en uno mismo” (142). In the post Franco era, the nation(s), both Spain and Catalonia, are emerging from an isolationist and self-centered political stance, now turning outward in reintegrating into the European and international community. Such “otherness” can also be seen in the signing of a foregin player, Mortimer, as evidence of this political, economic and social turn. It is in this “otherness”, the Englishman, where the goals are scored; Mortimer of course, is the team’s main scorer, and happens to score both goals in the game these politicians attended.
In a brief interview with Carvalho, as part of his ongoing investigation, Basté himself reveals the egocentric motives to his presidency and life goals in a moment of jarring honesty. Carvalho directly asks the president if he is rich, to which Basté flatly responds, “Bastante” (Vázquez Montalbán 87). As a follow-up, Carvalho pushes him as to why he feels the need to be even richer. The blunt truth, Basté explains, is that “eso es lo que da sentido a mi vida” (87). There is no false modesty, deflection or any attempt to construe himself as an ideal leader, first and foremost concerned for the well-being of his employees or the Catalán people. He recognizes that his position as club president gives him “un poder subalterno pero goloso” that most importantly, will allow him to “seguir siendo rico” (87). Money and power, while understandably desirable goals, are a far cry from the idealistic notion of “más que un club.”

What matters most to Basté is the accumulation of wealth and power and to maintain the appearance of upright moral behavior, hiding any possible indiscretion or wrongdoing. And just as players or coaches at times yield to temptations to cheat in order to win at any cost, the private discussions between Basté and Dosrius, as well as some remarks by the narrator, show us that the real Basté is not the same man who “desde los treinta años había conseguido construir una imagen pública de honestidad democrática” (my emphasis, Vázquez Montalbán 151). And though he is also known as an “empresario privado que predicaba la filosofía del neoliberalismo creador,” (151) much of his business is conducted in less than legal ways.

It is his wealth and political and social clout which cause Carvalho to label Basté “uno de los dueños de la ciudad” (Vázquez Montalbán 85). Basté explains that such
status depends on knowing “qué hay que comprar y a quién hay que comprar” (86).

When Pepe asks what precisely those things are, Basté responds resoundly, “como siempre. Hay que comprar terrenos y comprar a los que pueden recalificar terrenos” (86). Just like the players of a football team, power is claimed and asserted in acquisition and control of space. Whereas the players play on a small patch of grass, the game the club president and “dueño de la ciudad” plays comprises all of the city land. As state control fades away after the dictatorship and both domestic and foreign investment grows in the country, there is land to be acquired and developed. It is this focus which provokes such urgency in Dosrius, when he challenges Sánchez Zapico’s decisions with Centellas, which led to a brief winning streak:

Imagine that the partners decide to prolong the agony of Centellas until the same Olympics, or afterwards, when speculation on land has already skyrocketed and all that remains within five kilometers of the Olympic Village is gold. Imagine then, that our group… cannot outbid other groups, even foreign ones. (75)

Basté concerns himself with the purchase of land itself as well as that of the people who will grant him access to that land, such as Sánchez Zapico.

Over the years, Dosrius has helped Basté keep his hands clean from “esos negocios que su ex mujer le habría reprimendido como especulador y cínico” (Vázquez Montalbán 151). His interest in “la operación de terrenos del Centellas” (151) necessitated his involvement, albeit through his intermediary, in the demise and
eventual death of Palacín. When Dosrius explains that he has had someone tail him and report on the centerforward’s abject condition, physically, financially, and mentally, Basté immediately reminds his lawyer, “No me gusta este asunto. Puede ser muy sucio, Dosrius, y yo no puedo ensuciarme” (150). Such an acknowledgement of wrongdoing and tacit endorsement of the actions taken to finalize the deal for the Centellas land is itself a confession of corruption.

Once news of Palacín’s death comes to light, Camps O’Shea summons Basté to his home to comment on the coincidence that a center forward was assassinated at sunset just as the threats promised and feels compelled to confess that he was the author of the threats. When he confesses his feelings of guilt, though he didn’t kill anyone, Basté’s only concern is that O’Shea keep his mouth shut and not mention any of his involvement to the police. He worries that the police will relate the death of Palacín to the threats received at FC Barcelona, and regardless of any legal outcome, he declares, “Nada tienen que ver y no estoy dispuesto a mezclar el nombre del club con algo sórdido” (182). He claims that what matters most is the club’s name and image. Again, his explanation, “no es por mí. Es por el prestigio de lo que represento”, rather than being true appears to be in fact an admission of the contrary. By insisting that he acts in the best interest of the club, and not his own self-interest, he gives us reason to doubt. Camps O’Shea calls him out for his true motives, “Sólo le interesa tapar la mierda” (183).

The details of the locker-room robbery of Palacín’s subsequent death are not conclusive, but they lead the reader to speculate that the whole thing may have been a
hit made to look like a terrible misfortune. Regardless of whether Basté, or one of his associates, orchestrated Palacín’s death, he makes sure to take advantage of the aftermath of the situation to profit both financially and socially. The consequences of the crimes at Centellas, the death of their top scoring forward foremost among them, “pueden poner en peligro la supervivencia del histórico club...amenazado de cierre tras una larga agonía deportiva paralela a la no menos larga y determinante agonía económica” (Vázquez Montalbán 184). Just as Basté, Dosrius, and Sánchez Zapico planned, now that the club will be dissolved, “el campo del Centellas quedaría engullido en el futuro por la Barcelona que crecería a partir del núcleo irradiador de la Villa Olímpica convertida en bloques de apartamentos para la nueva pequeña burguesía postolímpica” (40). Their image as stewards of Catalan heritage and pride, primarily Basté, in his role as president of FC Barcelona, is thus made bare as nothing more than a facade to the real allure of their positions, that of using the social and financial clout of their institutions to pursue their own riches and benefit via backdoor channels and illegal manipulation of people, funds and property.

Though the primary aim of such dealings and manipulation was to acquire the Centellas properties and sell them off for development in preparation for the Olympic

113 Carvalho’s underworld informants, three arabic men, the leader of which simply goes by “Mohamed”, come to him after the fact of the murder to declare their innocence since they assume Carvalho would believe they were to blame. Though they deny any culpability, they admit to knowing that “alguien había contratado a un grupo para colocar un consumado, para hacer un montaje y pringar a unos tipos. Se lo encargaron a gente bastante tonta, poco profesional, gente que está drogada y hace lo que sea a cambio de una dosis. Lo hicieron muy mal y hubo un muerto, pero nosotros no tenemos nada que ver” (Vázquez Montalbán 216-217). Though there are other narrative clues that would lead the reader to assume these three are lying and that it was actually they who planted the drugs in the locker room and killed Palacín, the fact of the matter is that they confirm the truth that someone else ordered this staged crime to negatively affect the club and the team, ultimately leading to the club’s closing and making the land available for Basté to acquire.
games, Basté also stands to gain from Palacín’s death in a much more disturbing way.

Having established the importance of appearance for both Basté himself and that of the club, the president capitalizes on the former connection between Palacín and FC Barcelona to profit even more from the death of the center forward. In a press conference just a few days following Palacín’s death, Basté exclaims, “Aunque el suceso nada tiene que ver con la vida normal de un club transparente y glorioso como el nuestro, no podemos permanecer insensible a algo, y sobre todo a alguien, que forma parte de la memoria de nuestra institución” (Vázquez Montalbán 219). After once again declaring the club’s complete lack of involvement in the death of the former star, defense which once again leads one to question rather than believe such a statement, Basté informs the public that the club, “y al decir ‘el club’ no me refiero sólo a la junta directiva, sino a la plantilla en pleno y a la masa de seguidores”, wants to honor the memory of their former player by organizing an honorary game between FC Barcelona and a collection of foreign players in La Liga (219). And to add to the fanfare the club has made arrangements to locate Palacín’s ex-wife and son and fly them back to Barcelona for the event.

Of course, the prospect of being reunited with his estranged family was the very reason Palacín returned to Barcelona and joined Centellas in the first place. Dosrius and Basté knew this from the beginning, yet they did nothing to help the player then. Palacín even recounts a dream he had of an honorary game held for him in the famous Barcelona stadium, with his son present to see him, as he ends his career and retires from the game. Palacín’s dream does come true, only his retirement is mortal rather
than professional. Palacín’s experience shows the reductive view of footballers held by those who dictate their movement, rights and privileges -club and league administrators, agencies and coaches-, as well as much of the general public. The individuals who have chosen to pursue a professional career in football are constrained by such identification, seemingly devoid of identity and life outside the game’s sphere. For Palacín, the end of his playing days thus results in the loss of life.

In life, Palacín’s value and therefore the treatment he received was dependent on his ability to create profit for the club and its owners/directors. Tragically, he can’t escape his commodification even in death. As Rob Rix points out, through this spectacle, engineered after Palacín’s death, “Basté de Linyola (implicated for the reader in Palacín’s death) makes media capital out of his tragedy: everything is a photo opportunity or a soundbite” (150). Such a ‘noble gesture’ to honor a forgotten and fallen hero will only increase Basté’s popularity and improve his reputation while the ticket revenue, concessions, jersey sales and tv contracts for the game to be held in his honor will be another way to generate revenue, none of which will go to the player.115

It is Palacín’s death that ironically also brings the visibility and notoriety he had always sought to Sánchez Zapico. The narrator highlights how the interview and

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114 The irony of all the laudatory remarks and honoring of this once great player is that it comes too late. While he was still alive and his life had fallen into disrepair he was a forgotten figure. Only in his death does the public remember him and celebrate him in a way he deserved in life. The celebration should also be marked by a sense of guilt and shame for having forgotten him and done little to care for the humane treatment of such an important public figure as stated by Giulianotti previously in this chapter.

115 This act of holding an honorary game for a player at the end of their career was one of the few practices which clubs occasionally did for retiring players as a way to help them transition into a post-football life. Shaw explains, “Los clubs - en un estilo típicamente paternalista y protector - habitualmente concedían al jugador que se retiraba un partido homenaje, del que recibía la recaudación de la taquilla, pero esto sólo suponía una considerable suma de dinero en el caso de las pocas grandes estrellas” (136).
subsequent articles published in the news covering the crime and death at Centellas had worked to thrust the president of this languishing club into the limelight: “Sánchez Zapico había conseguido por fin un protagonismo público y aparecía fotografiado y expresando una vez más su desconcierto y el grave peligro de supervivencia que se cernía sobre el club” (Vázquez Montalbán 193). In such a moment, the president of the club uses the death of one of his players and the grim implications of drugs within the club as a way to highlight his own difficulties and showcase his efforts to save the club, rather than focusing on those who truly lost something of value. The players’ lives, living and dead, serve the narrative the president wants to assert in pursuit of his own prominence and benefit.

Though referring to Mortimer, following a particularly impressive display, Palacín could have well be the player described by one sports commentator who declared, “Este hombre es de oro y hará que se llenen de oro todas las taquillas de los campos de fútbol de España” (Vázquez Montalbán 141). Palacín, his name, legend, and history, not the man himself, are, like Mortimer, used by those in power to line their own pockets. Such is the reality of football as a professional business, even one as ‘exceptional’ as FC Barcelona. Yet again, Palacín shares the role of representation of the “delantero centro” threatened to be assassinated in the anónimos received at FC Barcelona, explicitly meant for Mortimer. The author of the threats argues that the “delantero centro es el instrumento que [los directores] utilizáis para sentiros dioses” (15). Mortimer is indeed an instrument in the hands of the directors to secure victory on the field, to pacify and indulge the desires of the fans, but Palacín is also an unwitting tool for both his current
club president as well as that of his former club. And what better example of the
presidents as “dioses” than the control these men exercise over the life and death of the
once great footballer.

The anonymous threats, fabrications written and submitted by Camps O’Shea,
which constitute a threat from outside the club are actually fulfilled by the very
presidents which the death of the center forward is assumed to hurt. The death threats
claim to target the center forward(s) as a way of hurting the clubs, specifically the
presidents, directors and other club leadership that use the players as mere pawns in
their game of ordering and controlling the society in which these players are worshiped
as heroes. While Mortimer’s death would certainly play out much differently in the
press and have severe negative consequences for FC Barcelona, it is still the fact that the
“delantero centro fue asesinado al atardecer,” but rather than hurting the presidents of
these clubs, it seems to have been orchestrated by these very individuals and its effects
benefit both their financial and social capital.

Palacín’s death brings about the capitulation of Centellas and provokes the club’s
foreclosure and sale of its property, as was planned, resulting in profit for Basté,
Dosrius, Sánchez Zapico and the rest of their investment group and converting the once
proud cultural center of a historic neighborhood into a gentrified and redeveloped part
of the new Olympic Village. Additionally, Palacín’s history as a former player with FC
Barcelona provides the perfect opportunity to host a celebratory match in his honor. Of
course, the decision to plan and host such a match and the spectacle of bringing home
this tragic hero’s family to honor and pay homage to ‘one of their own’ only enhances
Basté de Linyola’s image and reputation as an upstanding leader, a steward of the club and Catalonia at large, deflecting and obscuring the truth behind his public actions.

It is the author’s use of Carvalho, the private detective, and his intimate focus on Palacín, the realities and difficulties of his life, on and off the field, which show the truth which lies beneath the public facade of these powerful individuals and institutions. The narrator relates an assumed interpretation of the motives, actors and actions behind Palacín’s death, the robbery and subsequent finding and seizing of drugs in the Centellas locker room, casting blame on the typical actors of the poor, delinquent underworld. All the while Pepe later asserts that rather than the typical stereotype of dangerous individuals, ‘los chorizos’, most often black, moorish, and poor, it is, in reality, “Basté de Linyola o Camps O’Shea … las personas inteligentes más peligrosas que había conocido...[que] eran unos chorizos, dos chorizos esenciales y caucasianos, confundidos con todos los chorizos esenciales y caucasianos, más diíciles de identificar en las comisarías que los moros o los negros” (Vázquez Montalbán 192). It is these two individuals of the social and economic upper class who through philosophy, financial maneuvering, or even poetry, play with football, the institutions and individuals which comprise it, thus using the very lives of players, fans, and others to pursue their own self-interest, often at the expense or detriment of others (192).

What the novel makes plain in every way is that football is much more than a game. What is at stake in the sporting play of individuals from the lowest to the highest professional leagues of Spain is much more than a mere wins or losses. As the title of the novel indicates, the stakes are life and death. The experiences of the two center
forwards, Mortimer and Palacín, as related by the players themselves and as observed by the ‘team psychologist’/detective, show the stringent controls placed on the lives of the players. Club personnel take interest not only in how they conduct themselves on the field and the sporting feats they produce, but even take care to monitor and either enforce or neglect specific behaviors which they deem detrimental to the player, the team, and/or the club.

Mortimer is indeed the international superstar, receiving special treatment due to his elevated status, earning great sums of money, and experiencing fame and notoriety in society around him, he nonetheless sinks into the background in the presence of truly powerful individuals, such as Basté. A player may gain great wealth and power and even climb the social ranks, but only so far. The divide between player and president seems to be just as stark as that of star athlete and common citizen. Palacín serves as both a tragic opposite to Mortimer, the journeyman player of the lower leagues, struggling to make ends meet and left to succumb to the moral and physical pitfalls of degenerate life, as well as a sort of foreshadowing. While Mortimer is in the prime of his career, Palacín is in the twilight of his. Though they seem two different cases altogether, who is to say that Palacín is not simply the reality which awaits Mortimer. If nothing else, Palacín is the perfect reminder that even the best of players are only one bad tackle away from losing it all.

Both players live by football, and Palacín’s experience shows emphatically the reality that, for many, there is no life beyond football, be it figurative or literal. This dual interpretation of the central motivation of the novel, to decipher and protect against
the crimes proposed in the anonymous threats received at FC Barcelona, provides the
perfect opportunity to compare the differing experiences of players while
simultaneously recognizing the shared plight they all face as the workforce and
commodities of an ever-growing industry. Though the Iberain football clubs boast a
tradition of communal, socialist, and democratic structure and governance, in the post-
Franco days, as industry and capitalism grow, the clubs increasingly follow the dictates
of profit. In the worst of cases, those entrusted with stewardship of such significant
social institutions, use the clubs to pursue their own financial benefit not only through
legal channels, an aspect of the modern game already lamented by many a “purist”,
but through morally and legally questionable means if not outright illicit practice. The death of the center forward, both the act and the novel, bring together the
subjective experience of the player(s), the role of said player(s) within and between the
team(s) and club(s), and consequently the importance of the club(s) and its players
within society at large. The game has very real consequences felt both on and off the
pitch, for players and fans alike, and simultaneously serves important symbolic functions

116 Mortimer comments on the commercial aspect of his transfer during his first press conference. The
journalists ask the new striker if the fans of his former club were upset at his departure for a foreign club.
His response shows how the rationality of economics supplants the emotion of fandom: “Allí hay muchos
delanteros centro y mi club hizo un buen negocio. Mi club es una sociedad anónima y el producto de mi
fichaje ayudará al superávit del balance anual” (my emphasis, Vázquez Montalbán 28).
117 Perhaps the most relevant real-life example of this kind of owner, who seeks out leadership in one of
the nation’s premier football clubs as a mere means to fame and fortune, is Jesus Gil y Gil, the infamous
former owner of Atletico Madrid. Bécquer Seguín paints a detailed picture of this caricature of an owner
in his article, “The Many Crimes of Jesús Gil”. While Basté is most certainly a more proper owner and
representative of a nobility and class above that of Gil, his illegal maneuvering and use of FC Barcelona for
his own means certainly alludes to the actions of this real life individual. Gil had just assumed leadership
of Atletico Madrid in 1987, two years prior to the novel’s publication. The fact that Gil managed to win the
presidency thanks in large part to his promise to acquire the young star forward, Paulo Futre, if elected
prompts me to believe that Vázquez Montalbán had him in mind in the creation of his fictional club
president.
throughout Catalonia, Spain and beyond as the region and the nation seek to assert themselves once again on a national and international stage.
Chapter 4 - *Narcofútbol* and the Cost of a Goal in Ricardo Silva Romero’s *Autogol*

“El fútbol en América Latina es, con todo, mucho más que dinero. Más que traspasos y managers y agentes y ventas y comisiones y niños transferidos y pasaportes falsos y robo entre clubes y robo entre representantes de futbolistas y pobres que se hacen millonarios y millonarios que compran pobres y ricos más ricos y pobres siempre pobres. Además y a pesar de lo anterior, se trata de una pasión, una descarga, una locura, una catarsis, un sueño, un grito, un gol,”

-Juan Pablo Meneses, *Niños futbolistas* (99)

“Eran las 5:09 p.m. del miércoles 22 de junio en el Mundial de Fútbol de 1994.

Minuto

33 del primer tiempo del partido nefasto que Colombia jugaba contra los Estados Unidos. En las pantallas gigantes del estadio en donde sucedía el encuentro, el Rose Bowl de Los Ángeles, se repetía por segunda vez la jugada de pesadilla que acababa de ocurrir: ese horrendo autogol…. [P]erdíamos 0 a 1 con los locales porque el defensa Andrés Escobar Saldarriaga, inquebrantable número 2 de la selección colombiana, había hecho un gol en su propia portería.” (Silva 13)

Thus begins the novel, *Autogol* (2008), by the Colombian writer, Ricardo Silva Romero. The novel is a fictional retelling of this historic event and the tragic consequences of this unfortunate sporting error which would culminate in the death of the “unbreakable” defender, Andrés Escobar. Such a violent and tragic end to the life of one of Colombia’s most admired and visible figures of the time would send shockwaves through the footballing world, at home and abroad, and serve as a catalyst to provoke introspection and self-examination in Colombian society. The novel shows that the story of Andrés and the Colombian national team in the 1994 World Cup is much more than a sports story. Silva shows how football serves as an important lens through which one
can, and indeed must, examine the power relations at play in the Colombia of the 90s and how such relations affect the lives of the nation’s citizens and the functioning of the country’s institutions.

From the outset, the author presents the reader with what I argue is a detailed description of a crime scene. From the first page, the reader, just like the narrator protagonist, becomes a witness to a crime. Despite his best efforts to avoid it, Andrés Escobar commits the worst error a footballer can imagine, that of scoring on his own team, on the biggest stage possible, the FIFA World Cup. The first paragraph of the novel reads like a police report, recording the exact date, time - down to the minute -, place, criminal act, and guilty party. All that is missing is a victim and a motive.

From a sporting perspective, the immediate victim is the Colombian national team itself; Escobar and his teammates. The ‘team’ extends to the coach, the staff, and the Federación Colombiana de Fútbol. The consequences of the ‘crime’ reach even further, radiating out to the fans - thousands present in person as well as millions in Colombia and around the globe -, all of whom placed their hopes and dreams on seeing their team win the tournament and bring home the joy and prestige of World Cup glory to a country languishing in social chaos, horrendous violence, and deep-seated corruption. The question of motive is, of course, more difficult to answer. Was the act intentional? What did Andrés Escobar stand to gain by committing such an act of

118 Among the first questions the protagonist is asked, as those around him try to make sense of his sudden loss of voice in connection to the events of the game, is: “Me preguntó si acababa de ser testigo de algún acto de violencia. Yo negué con la cabeza” (Silva 28). And while our protagonist responds negatively in the moment, the question of violence is clear foreshadowing to the violent end Andrés will meet, a violent act which the protagonist will seek to exact himself, as punishment for the crime committed by the defender.
‘treason’? Was this a crime committed under duress? If so, who or what had sufficient power to control the actions of this (inter)national football star on the biggest stage of his burgeoning professional career?

Just as important as the questions of victim and motive, if not more so, is that of the consequences. While this exact goal did not mark the precise moment in which the Colombian national team would be eliminated from the World Cup, to this day it is seen as the nail in the coffin for a high-flying team, dubbed by the great Pelé himself as his favorite to win it all. This was a game in which one of the tournament favorites faced a supposedly vastly inferior team in that of the host nation, the United States.\textsuperscript{119} It was also a game which they could not afford to lose, having already lost their first game of the tournament to Romania. The own goal was a mentally and psychologically demoralizing act as well as a sporting disadvantage which would prove too big an obstacle to overcome. The own goal defeated the team morally, as well as on the scoreboard.

The coach and players became pariahs, objects of scorn and criticism. Sociologist David Goldblatt explains, “On their return to Colombia all members of the squad were subject to some kind of abuse. Maturana and Gómez got theirs mainly in the press. Valderama was cross examined and criticized for his supposed laziness, Asprilla and Rincón for their attitudes, midfielders Lozano and Álvarez were roughed up and

\textsuperscript{119} It should not be lost on the reader the significance of this rival. At the time, the United States of America was a conspicuous and overt actor within Colombia in the DEA’s battle against the drug cartels. As one of the characters in the novel tells Pepe, “lo único malo de ese negocio, [el narcotráfico], era perseguirlo, satanizarlo, convertirlo en guerra, era el negocio de los Estados Unidos de América (355). The competition between the two football teams was a mere symbol of the struggle between the DEA and the cartels: “\textit{Página 12 había llamado a esta triste historia ‘DEA 2, Colombia 1’}” (169).
hospitalized” (788). The juxtaposition of pre and post tournament narratives regarding this team and the players was as stark as could be. Pepe recounts that all the media “[que] los habían endiosado a todos desde los días de las eliminatorias, se dedicaron a molerlo a punta de palabra...lo único que les faltaba era pedir la cabeza ensortijada de Valderrama ensartada en un asta de hierro” (Silva Romero 177). Whereas the team had once represented a symbol of national pride, many now saw them as “[un] decepcionante onceno de esta patria oxidada por la corrupción de unas élites empalagosas” (173). Such a reaction to sporting failure, in large part the consequence of one errant kick, illuminates the far-reaching influence of football. Additionally, such figuratively violent language, regarding the consequent treatment of those deemed responsible for said failure, constitutes a clear foreshadowing of the most tragic consequence of the own goal and the one that remains engraved in the minds and hearts of Colombians to this day: the murder of Andés Escobar.

Andrés’ death, just 5 days after his own goal, on July 1, 1994, is the event responsible for forging the moment into the collective memory of a nation. The narration of this event is once again presented as a crime scene, related by a witness who recounts “la hora exacta” in which he heard the fatal gunshots in a parking lot outside a Medellín nightclub: “eran las 3:13 a.m.” (Silva 376). The novel, once again, makes us witness to a crime. Andrés’ terrible fate illustrates the argument of this thesis, which is that “el fútbol...es una cuestión de vida o muerte” (my emphasis, 173). What does such a response to a simple sporting error say about the importance and value of football in the lives of those who practice, direct, and consume it? What does this tragic
event tell us about the society in which it unfolds? These are some of the questions which the novel poses to its readers.

The novel also responds to a question posed by the author himself in an interview with literary scholar Shawn Stein: “How do you explain...that in this corner of the planet we kill players for committing an own-goal?” (130). Along those lines, the novel uses football as a way to highlight and critique the importance society places on scoring and winning or, conversely, being scored on and losing in all aspects of life. Shining a light on the circumstances surrounding Andres’ death and all the events which led to it inevitably shows the enmeshment of the drug cartels in the football world. The football world thus functions as a microcosm of the cartel’s influence and power throughout all the institutions of the nation. By showing the mechanisms and systems of control placed upon the football world and observing the way the cartels use the game - the clubs, players, national team, etc. - to further their agenda, we see the true powers of the nation. The author uses the language of football to reveal the power dynamics of the broader society and in the same stroke shows how the sport functions as more than a game. It is apparent that actions occurring within the limits of a stadium have consequences which extend far beyond the field of play. Likewise, the actions and interests of non-sporting actors may determine any number of actions and events which occur on the pitch.

The sporting action of greatest consequence in this instance is, of course, Andrés’ own goal. And while Andrés and his tragic error are indeed the catalyst for the novel, it is the resulting consequence of that action, manifested in the body, psyche and
life of the novel’s protagonist, Pepe Calderón Tovar, which constitute its main focus and give it its structure. It is the author’s choice and use of this protagonist as narrator that allows the reader full access to the football world and reveals the inner workings of the power dynamics in question.

Pepe is neither player nor coach. He isn’t even immediately involved in the sporting action on the field. Pepe is a fifty-something, overweight sports commentator; a man who has spent his whole life obsessed with and dictated by his love of football and the task of conveying all its beauty and meaning to his fellow Colombians. Like so many others, Pepe tells us, “Soy un jugador frustrado. Mi sueño fue, en un principio, ser un futbolista como Eusebio...” (Silva Romero 439). However, his weight, lack of athleticism and fear of the ball slowly pushed him further and further from the action itself; to goalie, to coach, and finally to commentator. His childhood love of football never subsided. His passion for the game and absorption in the world that surrounds it is absolute: “Debo confesar que no entiendo qué hace en sus ratos libres la gente a la que no le gusta el fútbol. Y tengo que reconocer que ver goles es la vida de mi vida” (my emphasis 31).

Pepe is essential, as he represents the footballization of life in Colombia. Not only that, but his life is one of a conscientious and detailed observer. Rather than an active

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120 This feeling of being pushed out is stated explicitly when Pepe explains his reasoning for the title he assigned the book’s epilogue. “Le puse de título Fuera de lugar porque me pareció que no solo así había sido mi vida sino que nadie había entendido por qué había sido como fue” (Silva 432). Pepe is a man “out of place” or in footballing terms, “offside” - in an illegal position of play - and observes from the margins of the game and of society as a whole the forces at play in the larger game of life. His story is an attempt to write himself back into the game, finding his place within the larger story and gaining a sense of autonomy and control over the outcome of his own life.
participant, Pepe occupies a position that allows him to “ver las cosas desde arriba” (Silva Romero 439). His position places him within the “familia de fútbol” but also affords a distance and objectivity regarding the object of his work and personal passion. As a long tenured member of the footballing press, he is an ideal character through which the author can shine a light on the inner workings of the football world and its connections to and influences on the world beyond.

As a commentator, he contributes to the creation of the football narrative. Players, coaches, and owners alike, seek his services to bolster their reputation, increase their notoriety and garner greater professional and financial opportunity. His vocation grants him access to individuals of great visibility, power, and influence, ranging from club presidents and owners to coaches and star players. In addition to the most powerful and prominent figures in Colombian football, Pepe has also covered many of the lower leagues and teams, becoming acquainted with the realities of the smaller ‘clubes de barrio’ and the lesser-known players struggling to make their way. Pepe is even described by others of having “más recuerdos de los partidos que de la vida” (Silva Romero 430). His perspective grants the reader access to encyclopedic knowledge of Colombian soccer, its history, its current state and structure, the most influential individuals, and even the sordid and illicit activities which have brought it to the stature it enjoys at the time of the 1994 World Cup.

At the moment of the own goal, Pepe is separated from his wife, who left him for ‘more successful’ man. He believes that “una de las razones por las que me había dejado mi esposa era porque jamás me había logrado convertirme en un comentarista
deportivo de sueldo millonario” (Silva Romero 27). For this reason, and in hopes of winning back the respect and affection of his wife, he accepts a job offer with a new broadcasting company. By accepting the offer “me convertiría en esa persona interesante a la que todavía le hacían ofertas...[y]...así iba a recobrar a mi mujer” (140).

Football has granted Pepe a measure of social capital, of status and recognition among his peers, but it has not brought him the financial success he feels his wife and children desire and expect. To emphasize just how much Pepe believed in the power of ‘don Dinero,’ he confesses that he bet “los ahorros de toda mi vida a que [la selección nacional llegara] a la fase final [de la Copa Mundial]. Estaba seguro de que ese triunfo iba a salvarme de la rutina trágica en la que acababa de caer” (26). Just as many children, particularly those from impoverished and minority communities, seek fame and riches by becoming a professional footballer, Pepe seeks the money and stature worthy of his wife’s attention through his accomplishments in the world of football.

Pepe has invested everything he has, his time, skills, and money, as well as the hopes for his marriage, family and career, in football, specifically, in the outcome of the national team. The team’s victory would be his, as would their loss. Countless others, as well as the nation itself, invested heavily in the team’s fortunes in this tournament, and thus brought about the terrible consequences of their loss.

The action of the novel is motivated by Pepe’s response to the inexplicable loss of his voice immediately after witnessing the star defender score in his own goal. The loss of Pepe’s voice is absolute and inexplicable. The loss of this physical ability is so serious because with it he loses not only the ability to communicate with family and
friends, but also the means to secure his livelihood. The source of his power to assert himself, his desires and wishes is lost and he is now another one of the voiceless and powerless in society, unable to advocate for themselves and speak to the forces of power exerted upon them in their daily lives.

The trouble in which Pepe finds himself, due to his inability to perform the duties of his profession, is cast into relief by the fact that it occurs in the exact moment he is called upon to comment: “Estábamos al aire. Había llegado mi turno de opinar sobre la tragedia. Y en vivo y en directo, en plena transmisión radial, se me morían todas las palabras entre la garganta” (Silva Romero 13). Pepe’s loss of voice is the first event in a chain reaction leading to the loss of his life savings, his job, his sense of self, and his personal autonomy. The novel is the protagonist’s attempt to make sense of his life, to recount his efforts to exact revenge for his losses, to explain and justify his own sins and errors, and to regain his voice. Put succinctly, Autogol tells the story of how and why Pepe Calderón Tovar, a longtime friend and admirer of “el caballero de la cancha”, as Escobar was known, came to be the defender’s would-be assassin. The narration follows him from the commentator’s booth, in the iconic Rose Bowl Stadium in Los Angeles, back to Colombia and across the country to the parking lot of a Medellín night club where the defender was ultimately gunned down. Along the way Pepe takes the reader back in time, to distant childhood memories, and around the country and much of South America - following him from game to game and tournament to tournament - giving the reader insight into his personal history as well as that of the country/region.
Pepe’s account is part autobiography, part memoir, and part confession. In fact, the novel is the product of his therapy sessions in an attempt to regain his voice, twelve years after having lost it. As an exercise, his therapist invited him to write back and forth with her via Messenger about their lives. He began to write “lo que [le] parecía importante de [su] vida”, and by the end of the year his doctor, Lozano de Rivera, handed him a folder filled with the printed copies of all their conversations, with the challenge; “¿Por qué no lo vuelves un libro?” (Silva Romero 426). Pepe makes a point of highlighting his therapist’s insistence that “la idea de escribir este libro es confesar cosas” (120). In order to accomplish this momentous task, he enlists the help of a few fellow journalists to edit and structure the content for a book. They are integral in his effort to “reorganizarlo todo porque mi vida era más una novela que una biografía” (428). One of their key suggestions is to start with and frame the entire book around “el día en que me quedaba sin voz: el día de ese horrendo autogol” (429).

Pepe’s memoir is of great interest to the editors, other journalists and the general public, but Pepe’s primary intention behind writing and publishing this book is personal. In the wake of his sudden dismissal and then disappearance back in Colombia, the main news outlets “asociaron mi extravío de la jornada pasada con mis supuestos nexos oscuros con los ‘peligrosos’ hombres de los carteles” (Silva Romero 284). The immediate assumption was that Pepe was no more than “otro ejemplo de la nefasta influencia de los dineros mal habidos en el balompié criollo” (285). While Pepe recognizes the many errors made throughout his life, both personal and professional, it is against these sensational and damning claims which he writes. He feels obliged to
defend his reputation and “poner al día a Ángel, explicarle a Angelito por qué hice lo que hice... Lo que digo es que no andaría en esta página...si no tuviera tantas ganas de que el hijo de mi hija supiera cómo fueron las cosas” (321).

Beyond the personal scope, Pepe’s story is also an exposé. His attempts to understand his own story, the part he played in the development of Colombian football, and Andrés’s death serve as a metaphor for the rest of the nation, questioning the power dynamics and structures which led the nation, the footballing world, and the citizens to submit to the dictates of the drug cartels and examining the costs such decisions have wrought. Pepe’s story claims to be the ‘true’ history of the ‘narcofútbol’ era in Colombia. His story completes and corrects the other versions in circulation, such as “los escandalosos libros del hijo del señor de Cali, la amante glamorosa del capo de Medellín y el soberbio líder paramilitar que se negaba a hablar de su pasado violento” (Silva Romero 321). While others’ accounts are (self)-censored or even patently false, Pepe assures the reader, “Juro por Dios que no me he callado nada de lo que me han pedido que me calle...que me he negado a maquillar lo que sucedió” (321). Not only will Pepe’s book recount “en efecto, como fue” (321), revealing the truth beyond the generalizing narratives of the moment, but he also claims an originality in his record of “las cosas que nadie más sabía” (my emphasis, 427).

This act of speaking truth to power, which would otherwise silence the most damaging facts, is facilitated by the fact that Pepe’s confessional, autobiographical and historical account is spoken from beyond the grave. Pepe speaks directly to the reader as he opens his epilogue and explains: “Usted tiene este libro en sus manos porque yo
estoy muerto. Usted tiene a un fantasma sentado en sus dos palmas. He roto los códigos de la familia del fútbol: no he dejado que lo que pase adentro se quede adentro” (Silva Romero 417). One of the conditions he insists upon before agreeing to write the book is that it not be published until 6 months after his death. Just as Andrés’ action would cost him his life, Pepe understood, or at least feared, that telling the truth of that story and pulling back the curtain on the workings of those in power in the “familia de fútbol” would also cost him his life. With so much at stake it is no wonder that he has taken twelve years to try and explain just how it all transpired; his plan and intent to assassinate Andrés Escobar and all the other people and events surrounding that event.

The novel is thus a story about the power over life exercised upon players, coaches, media and citizens at large, as well as an example of the same dynamic. This novel is in a sense Pepe’s ‘autogol’. The book is a work of confession, penitence and criticism that he hopes will result in the return of his voice. Pepe’s last words, in fact, serve as a mantra, and a hope he is still trying to convince himself of. “Yo sé que la voz me va a volver cuando le ponga el punto final a esta frase. Yo lo sé” (Silva Romero 444). His statement of certainty is undercut by the very repetition he is compelled to express. He is desperate to recuperate his voice, yet in the same moment he tries to convince himself that he will, he also admits to the ominous threat of death he feels is imminent: “Tengo nervios porque sospecho que lo que sigue, apenas acabe, es la muerte. Pero sé que no puedo aplazar el final ni una sola página más. Lo último que escribo es que a veces sueño con que ese balón pega en el palo en el minuto 33 del primer tiempo. Lo último que confieso es que a veces pienso que el marcador sigue 0 a 0” (444). The very
act of seeking his life will cost him the same. And his life, that of Andrés and that of the nation are dependent on that one crucial goal. Football is the medium through which life is maintained, controlled and terminated, manifest in the life story of Pepe Calderón Tovar.

Just as Pepe’s life is structured by his relationship to and understanding of the game of football, the beautiful game is the frame that gives the novel structure and serves as the lens through which the state of the nation and the lives of its citizens are viewed and understood. Just as Pepe proposed a footballing phrase for his book title, “Fuera de lugar”, the individual elements and the organization of the book also take their queue from the temporal structure of a football match.

The novel consists of a “primer tiempo” and “segundo tiempo” of three chapters each, one played away (in the USA) and one at home (in Colombia), with a “Tiempo extra” to determine the outcome of the match. Pepe falls behind in the score in the first half when he loses his voice, subsequently loses his job, and is even accused of sexual harassment by a hotel employee. All of these losses lead him to a change of tactics. The new tactic, in which he goes on the offensive, consists of designing and attempting a plan to kill the man he holds responsible for all his loss, Andrés Escobar. The second half sees Pepe back in Colombia, settling his affairs with family and work, before heading off to carry out the premeditated murder to exact the justice and revenge he believes will settle the scores of the National team’s failures and recover his ability to speak. His best attempt at a second-half comeback is foiled when someone else kills Andrés before he can. However, he attains a small sense of victory during extra time, giving meaning and
purpose to his actions by explaining the history and process of the novel’s composition, including the gathering of sources, the outcomes of the lives of the many the story’s characters and justification and explanation for his role in this darkest of moments for Colombian football as well as a reflection on his life and the history of a culture and a country he so dearly loved.

For Pepe, football was a way of not only structuring and understanding his book, but it was a language which helped communicate certain truths about life in general. It is football which helps him to understand and accept all “los giros inesperados [de la vida, como los que tiene] un partido de fútbol. Tiros de esquina absurdos. Contragolpes milagrosos. Autogoles. Así pasó en la mía” (Silva Romero 132). This metaphorical language of play and sport is not uncommon, particularly as parents and friends seek to comfort and guide friends and family through difficult times. Pepe uses football as a vehicle to understand and process the events of his life. Additionally, it is in the content of the game itself where he finds meaning and purpose. As he comes to the end of his narration he declares: “Todo lo bonito que tiene la vida está esperando debajo de los tres palos del arco. No es necesario salir de la cancha. No es indispensable ponerse a buscar en otro sitio. Todo lo que puede pasar en el mundo pasa en el campo de fútbol” (438). The game is the source of his joy, entertainment, community, awe and wonder, as well as meaning and fulfillment.

While football is undeniably a source of immense joy and fulfillment, for many, it can also teach some of the most difficult and frustrating truths about life. Just as in football, if life is a game, there are those who make the rules, those who enforce them,
those who win and those who lose. As a competition, football and life pit individuals against one another, create inequalities, and produce disparate outcomes. Upon observing his son’s failing sports merchandise kiosk before he leaves Bogotá in pursuit of Andrés, Pepe reflects on the sad reality of winners and losers in society and life:

Se me aguaron los ojos de la rabia por culpa de un mundo que puede hacer sentir a los unos menos que los otros. Pero...así son las cosas, así han sido siempre y así van a ser güstenos o no. Sí hay que asumir el juego, sí se debe interpretar el papel que haga menos grave el paso de uno por la vida, se debe encontrar, en pocas palabras, la manera propia de hacerse el pendejo, de resignarse en paz, para no andar por ahí reclamándole al destino lo que no nos dio. O aceptás que hasta en el cielo hay jerarquías o te morís pensando que te están debiendo algo. (my emphasis, 251)

This resignation to live life by the rules imposed upon you by those in power in society, to ‘play the game’ so to say, is a succinct summary of Pepe’s approach to life and work, as well as how he understands his place in society. It is ironically also the life philosophy which his testimony serves to challenge and critique. “Se me fue la vida ya sin haberle hecho daño a nadie que no lo mereciera. Y juro por Dios que solo he estallado una vez, como un demente, en lo que va mi vida: la vez que estoy narrando” (Silva Romero 35). The novel is a voice of protest against the powers that appropriated control of football and the country and turned both into a “gigantesco negocio agonal orientado a satisfacer las ansias del poder político y económico de quienes lo dominan a su antojo” (García Cames 367).
Before going into greater detail regarding the power dynamics dominating Colombian football and society I will give a brief overview of the origins of the sport in Colombia, the forces which brought about its golden years and allowed the cartels to get a foothold in the sport and consequently the nation at large.

‘El Dorado’ and its Return: The golden years of Colombian football

Football first arrived in Colombia in the early part of the 20th century just as it did in many other Latin American nations. However, it did not initially take off as a national obsession or produce any grand historical moments like it did in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. Due to the topographical difficulty of the terrain and the lack of infrastructure to connect the nation’s main cities, football was largely restricted to the coastal city of Barranquilla (Goldblatt 277). The economic boom of the coffee industry facilitated the expansion and development of the national infrastructure which connected the big cities, such as Bogotá, Cali and Medellín, to each other and to the rest of the nation. With a newly consolidated national geography and a healthy economy, football in the country was finally able to form its first national professional league.

In 1947, DiMayor, a new professional league based in Bogotá, arose to challenge the existing amateur league, Adefútbol of Barranquilla. In an effort to maintain hegemony as Colombia’s premier football association, Adefútbol lobbied FIFA to ban DiMayor from any international competition. While this decision to exclude DiMayor from the world of sanctioned football association and competition was supposed to be its downfall, rather than lament what seemed to be a set back, the new professional league, headed by a leading lawyer of Bogotá, Alfonso Senior Quevedo, “saw a silver
lining: leagues and clubs that were no longer members of FIFA were no longer bound by FIFA regulations concerning player transfers. There would of course be no transfer fees and this would fund an alluring level of wages” (Goldblatt 278). Freed by the institutional and financial regulations of the global football governing body, Colombia now represented an extremely attractive option for players looking for good money and opportunity as professional footballers.

For many Latin American players this had meant traveling overseas to play in leagues such as Italy’s Serie A - a road already taken by many Argentines and Uruguayans with Italian heritage. Italy embraced professionalism early, being more pragmatic than their idealistic colleagues intent on maintaining the game as a cultural expression of the social elite, the practice of moral and physical development for the modern gentleman. Freed from the large prices clubs usually had to pay the former clubs of players whose services they wished to secure, the Colombian clubs now had money to spare. As Goldblatt explains, this shift constituted an inversion of the traditional power structures of world football: “The lure of El Dorado was so strong that in a singular reversal of the normal geographical patterns of the global football transfer market Colombia could attract players from all over Europe, including England, Scotland, Ireland, Hungary and France” (278). A freedom from the traditional financial laws and governing bodies of world football paved the way for Colombian football to emerge as the fabled ‘el dorado’ of the Americas; a place of money, beauty and extravagance, both in style and quality of play as well as lifestyle for the footballers. Nevertheless, the
political and social state of affairs in Colombia would not allow this arrangement to last long.

Early in the same year DiMayor was founded, the liberal presidential candidate, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was assassinated, which set off a chain of violence and political unrest from the urban and rural poor. The next few years have come to be known historically simply as la violencia. As the ruling class of social and economic elites faced growing organization and dissent from the far Left and peasant class, they sought to capitalize on the positive image and success of DiMayor, partially subsidizing and sponsoring the league to distract their political opponents from their revolutionary fervor. As Goldblatt put it, “DiMayor football provided the distraction and dreamland of the circus (279-280).

Among this scene of violence and instability, foreign players felt more at risk, the local and national economies suffered, and while teams could initially pay high wages to incentivize the best national players to stay and the best foreign players to come, such exorbitant wage bills were not sustainable. In 1951 DiMayor struck an agreement with FIFA to abide by the financial and institutional structures, so long as Colombian teams were given full entrance to the international world of football. The cost of joining the global football fraternity was the loss of complete financial freedom and therefore a mass exodus of the league's best players, who returned to the bigger Latin American leagues of Argentina and Brazil or made the leap across the Atlantic to the top leagues of western Europe.
The first golden years of Colombian football came about due to a confluence of new capital, a form of extralegal existence and attraction amid a society full of violence and political unrest, in which politicians and wealthy individuals alike sought to invest in Colombian football to pursue political and financial objectives. Following the brief few years of ‘El Dorado’, Colombian football, domestic and (inter)national, would languish until a similar set of circumstances would once again coincide to produce Colombia’s best club and national teams; football would again be financed by ‘new money’, born of questionable and illicit practices, and used as means to further both economic interests and political agendas.

Whereas many Latin American nations and leaders, such as Perón in Argentina and Vargas in Brazil, turned to football as an important means of forging a more inclusive national identity and used it as a tool to incorporate previously marginal social groups into the idea of the nation, Colombia did not. Once the elite had squashed the attempts of the urban and rural poor to assert themselves in society and politics during the first years of the 50s, “Colombia’s conservative and liberal parties created a political system which systematically distributed patronage, money and power between them. [The] elite [did not seek or desire] any further populist mobilization of their publics; football was of no use to them” (Goldblatt 642). Nevertheless, by the end of the 70s Colombia would witness the rise of the infamous drug cartels, primarily those of Medellín and Cali, that would come to dominate all aspects of Colombian life, economy, and politics in the ensuing decades. Football was a true passion for many and would serve essential functions for most in their economic growth, social influence and power,
and their image. The influx of drug money would bring about the return of ‘El Dorado’ to Colombian football.

The confluence of two opposite trajectories, one, the profitability of the drug cartels, and two the inability of the country's old elite and formal economy to generate new wealth, brought about a sweeping change in the controlling powers of Colombian football. Pepe recalls a football radio program which aired in the days following the national team’s exit from the World Cup that provides context and offers an explanation for the state of the team and the nation. The newscast begins, “había una vez, a mediados de los años setenta, una liga de fútbol a punto de quebrarse: la liga colombiana” (Silva Romero 281). Pepe remembers that in that time “la inflación del país era altísima, las taquillas de los estadios eran paupérrimas, los patrocinadores de los equipos no aparecían por ninguna parte” (281). In order to finish the season and keep their clubs from going under, the owners had to turn to the dirty money of the drug cartels.

The tenuous financial state of the football clubs at this time speaks to the little known truth that while football clubs appear to be flush with cash, in reality, they generate little to no profit. In their book Soccernomics, Simon Kuper and Stefan Szymanski explain: “Soccer is small business. This feels like a contradiction. We all know that soccer is huge. Some of the most famous people on earth are soccer players, and the most watched television program in history is generally the most recent World Cup final. Nonetheless, soccer clubs are puny businesses” (58). This is not to say that there isn't money to be had in football. There is! Mexican author and football fanatic, Juan
Villoro, insists that football is “la pasión que más dinero produce en el planeta” (*Balón dividido*, 24). However, all that money produced by the game, does not translate into profit. An owner cannot expect a football club to be an effective means of accruing new wealth via ticket and jersey sales. Nevertheless, if an owner already has sufficient wealth, generated from outside the game, a football club can be a very useful vehicle to safeguard said wealth and open avenues for potential growth.

In Colombia’s case, the high demand for cocaine in the US and Western Europe allowed the nascent drug cartels, particularly those of Medellín, led by the infamous Pablo Escobar, and Calí, headed by the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers, to accrue immense wealth. To protect their investment and perpetuate their illicit activities they began to put their money to ‘good use’, buying up people of influence throughout the government and other parts of society, which would allow them to proceed unchecked. Goldblatt affirms the commonly held understanding that “no sector of Colombian society was left untouched by the polhydrous power of the drug industry; politicians, police, the armed forces, judges, journalists and football clubs were all bought” (646). The attraction of football for the new rich was so great that “[by] the mid-1980s at least seventeen of the twenty teams in the top division had major connections to the drug cartels” (646). While positions of legal administration such as politicians, police, members of the armed forces and judges, as well as prominent voices in the media, serve obvious purposes to ensure the cartels’ prosperity, it is worth asking why the cartels would be interested in football clubs. What value did football, its clubs and
institutions, offer to the cartels and what purposes did they serve to these growing organizations?

Cartel leaders saw football as a useful means to launder their money, flushing the clubs with cash to both legitimize their illicit earnings and provide the financial backing the clubs needed to secure the services of the best players, to coerce match officials to fix games, and pursue sporting supremacy. In his book, *Historia mínima del fútbol Latinoamericano*, Pablo Alabarces explains, “el ‘patrocinio’ del narcotráfico permitía otra operación en gran escala: sencillamente, el blanqueo de ganancias por medio de las inversiones futbolísticas (242). The football clubs served a vital function to legitimize the enormous quantities of money brought in by the drug trade. As one cartel middleman explains to Pepe, “[el] lavado de dólares no era tan difícil como parecía: era solo cuestión de repetirse la frase ‘invertir, gastar, recoger’” (Silva Romero 391).

The examples discussed thus far show how useful club ownership was to the growth and prosperity of the drug cartels, for their ability to legitimize and facilitate the movement of dirty money, neither of which make any new earnings for the cartels. Just as football represented a means of legitimizing illegal practices and consolidating their profits, the games and their outcomes also served to finally make a profit by betting on the specific outcomes of matches, statistical performance of players, and particular actions that may (or may not) transpire during the game.121 “The stakes in Colombian

121 Once again Pepe shares his experience of seeing businessmen and others engage is this type of betting, going beyond the simple choice of one team to win the game, and betting on the most minimal of actions that can transpire during a match: “Ciertos hinchas, no solo hombres de negocios por el estilo del Bizco, le suman a la angustia de cada partido la angustia de perder apuestas durante los 90 minutos. ¿Quién va a hacer el primer saque de banda? ¿Qué equipo va a cobrar el primer tiro de esquina? ¿Cuál de las dos selecciones va a recibir la primera tarjeta amarilla? ¿En qué terreno sucederá el primer fuera de lugar?
football were rising as the cartels and their cash-flush members took to wild bouts of gambling on football matches” (Goldblatt 648). In such a context a win or a loss not only affected a team’s place in a league table, but each sporting action and potential outcome could mean the difference of thousands of dollars for individuals who had bet on the game. “Intimidation, buying out, and murdering of referees as a way of guaranteeing winnings from bets” (Goldblatt 648) became common, and the acts of violence, coercion and manipulation against players, coaches and referees became the norm within the Colombian football league.

Pepe and his colleagues were well aware of and acquainted with not only the practice, but also the specific individuals who were “[los] encargado[s] de comprar a los árbitros para los equipos de los hermanos de Cali” (Silva Romero 101). The fact that betting represents an easy way to make money, both for those in positions of power as well as the everyday fan, is one of the main factors which contributes to the novel’s plot.

Pepe, a man who should know better, as one who knows how things work behind the curtains, confesses that he fell to the temptation of betting on football: “A mí también se me había pasado por la cabeza que la selección Colombia iba a ganar el Mundial de fútbol de los Estados Unidos. Le había apostado los ahorros de toda mi vida a que llegábamos a la fase final” (Silva 26). Such a risky investment seems even more incomprehensible when the same man is the one who explains in great detail the reality

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¿En qué minutos pitará el árbitro el primer tiro libre? Al Bizco le gustaba apostar ese tipo de cosas. Lo había aprendido de tanto verlo en las tribunas del Pascual Guerrero, en Cali, al lado de los empresarios que se aburrían en el estadio si no corrían riesgos. Y ahí estaba haciéndolo con un par de hombres de gafas oscuras” (Sivla Romero 172).
that what we as spectators believe to be an undecided battle of skill and will, of players and coaches on opposing teams, is often no more than a fixed and controlled spectacle to entertain the masses and generate large sums of money for those in the know:

Se sabe que en todos los partidos que se juegan hay alguien que conoce de antemano el resultado...Se trata de un hombre impasible que ha invertido toneladas de dinero en alguno de los dos equipos que van a entrar a la cancha. Y que prefiere invertirle un poco más, pagarle cinco sueldos más al árbitro, sobornar a los jugadores del cuadro contrario con una maleta, intimidar a ese directivo que tiene fama de intachable en vez de dejar su inversión completamente en manos de la suerte. (Silva Romero 101)

So much is invested in the pursuit of scoring and winning that the flip side of such outcomes, conceding goals, not to speak of scoring on yourself, and thus losing carries such dire consequences for the losers. And while all the possible means of securing one result may be taken, it is just as true that despite all those preparations, the desired outcome will come to naught. As Pepe painfully knows, and is tragically reminded by Andrés’ horrendous error, “Uno nunca sabe. Uno no sabe ni siquiera cuando sabe...” (Silva Romero 103). He continues, “La chepa tiene que ver en cualquier partido, en cualquier torneo, así se planee hasta el más mínimo drible, así se baje la guardia para ganarse algún dinero, así esté el árbitro comprado” (79).

In addition to the financial opportunities afforded the cartels through the football clubs, the position of owner or president of a football club in Colombia held a status which these newly wealthy men were drawn to. Pepe explains: “Los cabecillas del
fútbol colombiano acudieron a los empresarios de la droga. Y los hermanos Rodríguez Orejuela, jefes del cartel de Cali, *empezaron a verse hombro a hombro con los notables de la ciudad desde que consiguieron tomar las riendas de la junta directiva del América*” (my emphasis, 282). This idea of sports ownership as social capital is perhaps an even more powerful motive to own a team than is the potential for financial gain. In their book, *Gaming the World*, Markovitz and Lars explain this phenomenon: “Likewise for some team owners, sports embody symbolic, social and ‘cultural capital’ at least as much as they fulfill monetary interests. In many cases, such teams are not even profitable and represent a financial burden. However, they invariably serve as sources of pride and social status for their owners” (4). Football clubs are fixtures of the local communities where they reside and offer the presidents/owners a channel to ingratiate themselves with the people and bolster their image and reputation.

The infamous Pablo Escobar (no relation to Andrés) was famously loved by the poor and marginalized communities in Colombia, due in no small part to his provision of homes, jobs, and other public services. Goldblatt explains that, for many of the cartel leaders, “football offered an instrument of civic patronage and a *public measure of power* and status where most of the conventional institutions of the state and civil society had dissolved. Escobar in particular spent money on practice pitches, floodlights, and kits for kids in the *barrios* of Medellín” (my emphasis, 646). Pepe tells us that Escobar’s interest in and association with the Colombian league began even before his status as a drug kingpin was well known. He recalls when “el Patrón Pablo Escobar Gaviria, al que vi con estos ojos que se han de comer los gusanos hacer un saque de
honor (no sabíamos que era semejante capo) en la lujosa cancha de un barrio populoso de Medellín, comenzó a vinculársele con el equipo que más triunfo obtuvo en los ochenta: el mismo cuadro verdolaga, Atlético Nacional” (Silva Romero 282).

It was through football ownership that many of the cartels established a positive reputation and an affinity among the people, even as the violence and destruction that inescapably accompanied their rise to power became more prevalent. It wasn’t only Escobar, but increasingly more “líderes de los cárteles narcos volcaron enormes cantidades de dinero hacia actividades sociales que les granjearon simpatías populares. Una de ellas fue el fútbol colombiano, que languidecía entre la pobreza económica y la pobreza de resultados” (Alabarces 242). Football’s place in society as the sport of the working class and poor people of the nation provided the cartels an important channel through which they could exert their influence, slowly displacing the power of the state and asserting themselves as the real powers within Colombian society.

The business and politics of football: vying for la selección

It is, of course, essential to note that it wasn’t only the drug cartels which sought to appropriate the image, narrative, and influence of football in the lives of its fans and the citizens of the nation. Beatriz Vélez goes so far as to argue, “hoy el fútbol está determinado por condiciones donde lo que cuenta es la producción y la circulación del dinero y del poder” (221). Football constituted perhaps the most important battle-ground over which politicians, corporations and the cartels fought, to harness the controlling influence of the Colombian people.
In the couple years preceding the ’94 World Cup, the Colombian national team was experiencing success like never before. Such success inevitably attracted companies and parties who wanted to attach their brand to the enormously popular team and star players. With the arrival of powerful sponsors, more often than not, ‘el podersoso caballero, don dinero’ began to dictate the times and places the team would play. This lack of control over the team’s games and opponents is seen in Pepe’s observation that the very coach of the team, the legendary Francisco Maturana, “terminó volviéndose esclavo...por culpa de los tontos partidos de preparación (jugaron contra las suplencias de los equipos más absurdos que pueden imaginarse) que se inventó para satisfacer a los peligrosos patrocinadores de la selección” (Silva Romero 83). According to his sources, “el magnate Julio Mario Santo Domingo, dueño de la cervecería aquella que los patrocinaba, invirtió en la selección por lo menos dos mil millones de pesos de ese entonces” (83). All this money pouring into the team, bribing players with cars, phones, and cash, persuaded them to lend their likeness and influence to “las empresas que querían llevarse una tajada del mundial” (84).

Just as the large corporations sought to cash in on the opportunity that was the 1994 World Cup, the image and symbol of the national team was a vehicle that politicians sought to employ to promote a more positive image of a nation than that of the cartels. Individual politicians sought relationships with star players to boost their

122 Goldblatt offers some of the historical specifics of this beer sponsor and the relationship with the national team and its players: “Colombian beer giant Bavaria had the team play an endless string of advertising friendlies, eventually provoking a players’ revolt when they were asked to play another Italian second-division side; though when the company awarded $300 for every goal celebration that matched their own advertising logo - a single pointed finger - the squad were more than happy to collaborate” (787).
popularity and solicit voter support. Being directly associated with the success of the national team, Pepe notes, was so beneficial that “el presidente saliente César Gaviria Trujillo...había volado veintiocho horas en un avión de la Fuerza Aérea para visitar cuatro veces en cinco días el camerino de su selección” (my emphasis, Silva Romero 394). Pepe highlights the possessive nature of the presidential relationship with the team. It was not only “la selección”, but “su selección.”

Not only did politicians depend on the appropriation of the symbolic value of the team, the influence of individual players was also a powerful tool. It would appear that their influence extended to the potential outcomes of elections and changing hands of power. Such a reality is evident in the remarks of one of the team’s waterboys, directed to the novelized version of the star midfielder, Carlos Valderama:

[El] presidente nuevo, que había aparecido en el tarjetón electoral con el número diez, no había sido elegido gracias al dinero de los narcos sino gracias a él: a ese comercial de televisión en que el 10 de la selección, que no confiaba en los políticos, tenía el descaro de pedirle a la gente ‘vote por Samper’: ‘Samper, la mejor elección, con el 10 todo bien, todo bien’. (Silva Romero 166-167)

The connection to the footballer, and his endorsement was made both implicitly, via the number with which the president appeared on the ballot matching the number adorned by the player, and explicitly in a nationwide commercial. This association suggests that if you would trust the player to secure a win on the pitch, the fan should logically also trust Samper to be the best candidate for a prosperous Colombia. The team, as a collective, and the players, as individuals, were all employed as a promotional
tactic. While they serve to advocate for certain individuals and ideas, they also provide a juxtaposition to the evils and dangers of the cartels. Whereas the cartels controlled the professional clubs, the national team was a more contested entity, one which more readily assumed the role of symbol of the nation.

Peter Watson argues that just as important as the team’s success was the style with which the team played: “Not only did this golden generation bring success with qualification to the World Cups in 1990 and 1994, it was achieved with an attractive style of football articulated by the manager Francisco Maturana and the press as being ‘authentically’ Colombian” (406). The importance of the style of play should not be understated. Watson continues:

The style played by the national team, and this metonymic version of the nation, was opposed to a Narcolombia ‘other’. The ‘other’ is the worst of Colombia, the Colombia of drug cartel-related violence and resultant fear and misery. There is an attempted construction of a ‘real’ Colombia obscured by perpetual violence and the dominance of negative reporting in the media. The Colombian nation that the national football team symbolizes is that happy and festive Colombia that is trying to emerge. (406)

This yearning for a more positive national image, is poniently expressed in one of Pepe ‘s memories: “A veces recuerdo que frente al Rose Bowl de Los Ángeles se parqueaba un camión que algún cristiano trasformó en chiva. Veo bien esa pancarta, “Colombia is more than drugs”, sostenida por un grupo de hinchas disfrazados del Pibe Valderrama en los alrededores del estadio” (Silva Romero 85). In a tournament taking
place on the home turf of the current cultural enemy, the United States of America, the national team fans take the opportunity to push back on the stereotypical and myopic national image. Rather than a sign declaring their love for a certain player, wishes for success and declarations of certain victory, these fictional fans choose to assume the position of the national team players, wearing wigs to look like the iconic midfielder, Carlos ‘el pibe’ Valderrama, and assert the publicly dismissed truth about the ‘real’ Colombia.

Their proposed vision of a truer Colombia, beyond that of the drug cartels, is immediately dismissed in Pepe’s recollection. “Y entonces, siempre que lo veo, recuerdo la frase que me dijo al oído Sara Olarte apenas lo vio: “No, it’s not” (Silva Romero 85). It is significant that the rebuttal of the claim of a Colombia more than drugs is uttered in English. Sara Olarte is Colombian, and this is one of the only times we see her use English in the entire novel. One could argue that such a choice of language merely reflects the language of the event’s geographic location. Nevertheless, she whispers this response to Pepe, a man who demonstrates his ignorance of the English language multiple times throughout the novel. In fact, it is a misunderstanding due to this cultural and linguistic barrier that results in his run-in with the law regarding claims of sexual harassment during his stay in Los Angeles. Why then does the author choose to communicate this damning statement in English? This is the view from the outside looking in. This is the rhetoric promoted by the United States. Likewise, the fan’s banner is also written in English. The intended audience of such a message, therefore, is not native Colombians, but rather the United States and other members of the international
community. While the Colombians fight against the stereotype of a country and a people defined by the drug trade, the international audience, and tellingly so also a native Colombian, refuses to accept such a notion. Rather than a fact, the image of Colombia more than drugs is a hope.

The choice to accept or deny such a statement differs from country to country. However, the fact that such a paradigm is the presumed reality of the moment is demonstrated in the headlines of the papers Pepe relates having read the day after the loss. The periodical “Página 12 había llamado a esta triste historia ‘DEA 2, Colombia 1’. Y El Mercurio acababa de resumirlo todo con el titular ‘Puro cartel!” (Silva Romero 169-170). Agree or disagree with the representation, it was nevertheless the narrative which Colombian fans and the national government had to confront. Pepe, as one who knows the realities of the football world, recognizes the truth of the headlines, and therefore the near total control of the national institutions and culture by the cartels. He nonetheless feels the same need to push back on the narrative. “Yo no sé por qué me ofendía la verdad. Sería por lo mismo por lo que al hijo de una puta le hierve la sangre cuando lo llaman hijo de puta” (169-70). Pepe is clear about what he knows of the real Colombia seen in Colombia football: “Yo les llevo la cuerda...a los hinchas que un día descubren, con una decepción que pronto pasa, que la mafia de las drogas también domina el fútbol del mundo” (my emphasis, 36). Such a quick passing of shock is indicative of the fact that the fans and the public know the truth, if not cognitively then at least emotionally, and the feigned ignorance is merely an attempt to deny the sad truth and to escape from the difficult reality they experience each day.
Irrespective of the anger and despair felt upon seeing such headlines, Pepe is forced to recognize the veracity of the claims. Such an alternative narrative of the country at the time is what the politicians and footballers wanted not only to believe, but to prove, through the use of footballing success. Yet, Autogol shows the irony of choosing football as the vehicle for such an argument and the impossibility of football to serve that function.

**The benefits and burdens of fútbol-negocio**

What all of these examples demonstrate, from the investment of the drug cartels in Colombian football teams, to the commercialization of the national team, and even the political and national rhetoric of the team as nation and a symbol of hope of the ‘true’ Colombia, is the reality that professional and international football ceased to be a game in which the sporting action was an end unto itself. While a well-intentioned mother may console her son with the oft stated refrain, “mi amor: no llores que es solo un juego”, it is clear that the financial, political and social motives imposed upon the game have corrupted and transformed it into something else (Silva 191). David García Cames confirms this evaluation in his assessment of what constitutes a game and the influences which endanger it’s ludic nature: “El juego empieza a corromperse desde el momento en que se orienta a obtener una ganancia, tanto real como simbólica, de tal forma que el elemento lúdico se devalúa cuanto mayor es el contagio con la realidad”

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123 David García Cames offers a helpful definition of this term: “El fútbol-negocio se ve sometido a los designios de organizaciones con métodos criminales interesadas apenas en la producción industrial de ídolos. El fútbol deja de ser un fin y pasa a convertirse en un instrumento empleado por estos poderes para perpetuarse en sus puestos de privilegio. Fichajes, representantes, paraísos fiscales, apuestas, dopaje, sobornos, nacionalismo, racismo, represión, dictaduras o guerras; las amenazas de la realidad son múltiples e insidiosas” (367).
In such a context the game of football is corrupted. However, it gives way to another sort of game. It is a game everyone plays for him or herself and one which is motivated by the need to sustain and promote one's own life. It is a game of the market, played within the limits of neoliberalism.

In their study of biopower, Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze argue that the game constitutes a form of biopower. Each individual is constrained to act in a certain way in order to achieve their individual salvation:

Foucault revealed how, among other things, neoliberalism can accomplish the political aims it inherits from pastoral power - its attempts, that is to say, to provide for the “salvation” of both one and all - only on condition that it first produces a subject who conducts himself as an “entrepreneur of himself”.

Neoliberalism governs by metaphorizing individuals and populations as players for whom all choices are in principle possible - with the one exception of the choice not to play the game of the market at all. (my emphasis 20)

This is the system of power to which all these actors - the players, agents, coaches, media, owners, etc. - are subject, and by which they can hope to attain a “salvation” in the form of material gain and economic prosperity. It is due to these normalized rules of the market that sporting aims are relegated to the background as mere means to achieve the more important, life-sustaining end of financial success.

This dissolution of football’s ludic nature brings with it monumental implications for its players, coaches, and other actors. No longer are they merely playing a game, engaging in an activity which has no consequence outside of the possibility of winning or
Winning, losing, or any other small action - positive or negative - now assumes a weight of significance and a power to improve or destroy the real lives of individuals. The actions of players, the decisions of coaches, and the representation of all that transpires within this world of passion and energy all affect the interests of those in positions of power. It should be said, however, that just as those in power often co-opt the game for their personal gain, these extra-ludic ends also offered new benefits and privileges to the lesser actors.

As mentioned before, corporate sponsors were eager to employ the image of players to boost their sales and strengthen their brand. Moreover, the players also benefited from this commercialization. As a first hand observer, Pepe recalls, “Fui testigo de cómo los jugadores poco a poco se fueron ahogando en los carros, los teléfonos celulares y los equipos de sonido que les regalaban las empresas que querían llevarse una tajada del mundial” (Silva Romero 84). Though corporate sponsors compel and incentivize players to cooperate with money and material goods all they need from the player is an appearance, an image, or a quote.

The other forms of extra-legal benefits afforded to players came through betting circles and cartels. Rather than a mere picture or quote, match-fixers require that the players alter their actions on the field of play to influence the outcome of a game. When football becomes a means to a financial end, rather than the end itself, winning or losing become relative terms. A player may lose a game in order to win money for himself. This was the suspicion of many regarding the poor performance of the national team in their first match of the group stages. Israel ‘el Aristórcata’ Monroy, Pepe’s best friend, reveals
as much when he poses the following rhetorical question to Pepe after the loss versus the United States: “¿Por qué cree que los que sabemos se enloquecieron cuando perdieron con Rumania? Pues porque estaban seguros de que podían vender un partido a buen precio ya que iban a ganar los otros dos...” (Silva Romero 43). Just as important as winning the game, perhaps even more important, was the opportunity to win money. The illegal betting and match fixing was so rampant and assumed in many cases, that el Aristócrata “estaba completamente seguro de que un par de jugadores del equipo de Colombia... les habían vendido a los apostadores gringos el partido contra los Estados Unidos” (41). With more investment in the specific outcomes of sporting contests and even the specifics of who plays and what happens during those 90 minutes, those who have risked the money will go to extreme lengths to protect against their losses and/or punish those guilty of adverse outcomes, most often through the threat of violence.

It was a conflict of commercial interest and the threat of violence if one side didn’t prevail that threw the national team into a nervous breakdown the morning of the ill-fated game versus the US. Early that morning, news of bomb threats, kidnappings and violence against the families of players came to light. In the hotel Pepe hears that “al profe Maturana le había dejado una amenaza de muerte hacía una hora, cerca de las 10:00am, en el servicio de mensajes del televisor de la habitación: ‘habrá bombas en su casa y en la de la familia de Barrabás Gómez si lo ponen a jugar’, decía” (Silva Romero 95). In this war between cartels and betting establishments, between clubs and the national team, presidents, directors and mafias, the players had become mere pawns in a bigger game. Whether it was desire for money and luxury goods or fear for one’s life,
players more often than not, were compelled to act in ways often contrary to their best sporting interest. The blessing and burden of the footballer is to inhabit “un mundo doblegado por los intereses económicos” (58).

Even the best-case scenario for a professional footballer in which he makes good money, achieves notable sporting accomplishments, and plays for the biggest teams is, nevertheless, short lived. The most fortunate players may last till age 35. This is the image of the ideal sporting career that awaited Andrés Escobar following that World Cup performance. After playing for Atlético Nacional, Pablo’s team, where he developed into a true professional, he then awaited “su traslado al fútbol de Italia como defensor central del AC Milan” (Silva Romero 273). At the time the Italian league was considered the best in the world and thus such a long anticipated transfer to the storied European club would represent “la cumbre de esa carrera corta como la vida de un insecto que es la carrera de futbolista” (my emphasis, 273). Even the best players had a short shelf-life, determined by their commercial value to the controlling interests of the football industry.

The transfer market, domestic and international, is the aspect of the footballing world which most clearly illustrates the commodification of the modern footballer. Football writer Simon Kuper and economist Stefan Szymanski argue that the football transfer market is “essentially a system of human trafficking, which gives many people the right to control where a player works” (95). They go on to elaborate in greater detail the intricacies of the interests at play in the life and work of the players: “The transfer system allows their employers to extort a fee for letting them move [from one club to
another]...When a player changes clubs, his agent and club manager (and who knows who else besides?) might dip their paws into the deal. The money that these criminals siphon out of the game is money that ought to go to the employee” (95-96).

A transfer from one club to another - particularly from Latin America to Europe - can represent great opportunity and earnings for the player and their family. However, very few players command sufficient influence and leverage to determine where they want to play and under what conditions. Rather, they are subject to the whims of club owners and agents who leech what money they can from the players’ sporting and/or commercial potential. More often than not, the only ‘liberty’ the player has is to perform the best he can in the circumstances into which he is thrust.

Pepe’s profession puts him in contact with club owners, coaches, agents, and players in all levels of Colombian football. His interactions with these actors allows him to see the less savory realities of the industry. In his opinion, “la tras escena del fútbol es una trata de personas que si acaso saben leer. El futbolista es un esclavo de tiempos de la esclavitud (un negocio, un pedazo de carne, una res que muere mucho más de lo que vive. No digo que esté mal. No digo que esté bien. Digo, simplemente, que es así” (Silva Romero 33). The last few sentences offer a supposedly objective description of the system, nevertheless, when Pepe goes on to describe his personal experiences it is obvious that while he loves football, he is very critical of the systems, institutions and practices which sustain its commercial existence.

In his younger days, a naive and idealistic Pepe sought to use his connections with key individuals within professional clubs and his role as a commentator to give a
impoverished young player the opportunity to live the dream of becoming a professional footballer. Pepe confesses to the guilt he feels for the downfall of “Julio ‘el Maniquí’ Carabalí, ese pobre negro gigante que por mi culpa firmó (no sabía escribir: hacía una equis que parecía un crucifijo) para jugar en el Quindío, en el Pereira, en el Sporting, antes de convertirse en una egnate mula de la mafia” (Silva Romero 49).

Carabalí is the perfect example of the oft ignored reality, that only the smallest percentage of young players ever ‘arrive’ at the level of superstar status, which would grant them the financial power to dictate their own lives. Juan Pablo Meneses makes the point that even the most successful players, those which become sporting icons and millionaires, what you really see in them when you look closely at their history is “el niño, el que fue vendido y comprado y comprado y vendido y manoseado y utilizado y explotado y obligado a trabajar” (179).

The poor kid from the barrios of Latin America has come to constitute an enticing potential income for even the most amateur of ‘agents.’ Pepe insists that his efforts with ‘el Maniquí’ was not motivated by the allure of easy money: “no le cobré ni un solo peso por haberlo sacado adelante. No le hice firmar ningún contrato con una equis. No gané comisiones, como otros, por hablar bien de él en mi programa” (Silva Romero 187). Nevertheless, it is his experience with this part of the football industry which elucidates the moral failings that underlie the sordid reality of “niños futbolistas.” Pepe’s witnessing of the tragic treatment that awaits even the most talented prospect informs his efforts to do whatever it takes to protect his grandson, Angelito, from becoming part of that world. And while his pleading seems to be enough to convince his
son in law, Rolando, from pushing his grandson into that world, his story, ironically, also inspires this same son in law to want to become a football agent.

The dream of becoming rich by buying and selling a young undiscovered footballer to a big club in South America or Europe is evident in Ronaldo’s impatient declaration to Pepe while he is away covering the World cup: “Ya sé cómo vamos a hacernos rico, suegrito, el pelado samario que le conté resultó ser un crac para hacer goles” (Silva Romero 51). In his attempt to get all he can out of this young footballer, he peppers Pepe with all the essential questions to make his investment the most profitable: “¿Cuánto habría que darle a la familia? ¿Cuánto podía uno pedirles a los argentinos? ¿Era mejor que no supiera leer ni escribir?” (52). In the questions regarding the selection and treatment of the player, it is clear that the young boy is considered firstly as a commodity to be bought and sold rather than a human being. What matters to Rolando is that he possesses all the footballing skills necessary to entice a club to pay for him, yet ignorant and vulnerable enough to be easily manipulated.

For some reason there is a big disconnect between the humanity of one footballer over another. Just because Pepe has convinced Rolando of how dangerous and corrupt the system is, he sees no problem with the potential that “un niño desconocido, un niño perdido en los barrios de Santa Marta...[se convirtiera] en el centro delantero que estaba necesitando el San Lorenzo de Almagro” (Silva Romero 52). Meneses’ own assessment of the situation, explained in great detail in his insightful book, *Niños futbolistas*, shows that it isn’t just Rolando, the symbolic agent, looking to make easy money at the expense of a child’s well-being, who turns a blind eye to the
ugly aspects of the football world. He argues that all of us, fans of the beautiful game,
“seguimos en la eterna contradicción del consumo. Pensar que...explotar y vender y
transportar niños que jueguen a fútbol es malísimo, pero ver a los muchachos que
ganan las copas para nuestro club es buenísimo, y lo vamos a celebrar” (187). This is the
contradiction which Pepe seeks to resolve in this book. His account of the power of dirty
money and the interests of corrupt organizations to dictate and often destroy the lives
of Colombian citizens and footballers is meant as a call to introspection, reevaluation,
and change.

Thus far we have examined how those in power, be it political or commercial,
and even the players themselves have sought to employ (the promise of) footballing
ability as a way of securing the benefits made possible by the commercialization of the
global passion for football. These extra-sporting ends call into question the very purpose
of the game itself. If the purpose of the game is no longer to win for winning sake, who
then is in charge? In a purely sporting context, the most visible authority figure is that of
the coach. It is the coach who decides which individuals will play each game and in
which positions, what formation the team will employ and what style they will adopt.
Moreover, the coach often drives the decisions of which players are moved on to other
clubs and which are recruited to his team.

The coach who figures most prominently in the story of Colombian football and
in Pepe’s narrative is Francisco “el Negro” Maturana. Maturana was the coach at the
helm of the national team for the 1994 World Cup. Maturana is well regarded for his
construction of a truly Colombian team, one which embraced its own roots and played
in a style and an attitude that reflected the reality of the country and not a mere imitation of the European ideal: “La estrategia de Maturana incorporó la idiosincrasia colombiana, encarnada en las diferencias culturales, los talentos individuales y el papel que puede jugar el fútbol en la cohesión nacional en un país muy dividido por las diferencias socioeconómicas y regionales” (Vélez 218).

This specific representation of the nation through the players is largely expressed as positive, highlighting the virtues of hard work, discipline, creativity and improvisation. Conversely, Pepe’s description of Maturana’s ability as a coach and his task to prepare the players for the tournament highlights the negative traits of the players, symbolic of the failures of the nation and the social ills it faces in the rise of the cartels. Speaking to Maturana’s task of corralling the players, Pepe asserts that ‘el Negro’ “entendía muy bien...que los colombianos no somos alemanes, supo llevar a sus jugadores durante mucho tiempo como a una pandilla de niños genios malcriados” (my emphasis, Silva Romero 83). The description of the players as a “pandilla” - a clear allusion to the idea of the cartel - suggests that the players not only didn’t represent a potential Colombia that was “more than drugs”, but were in fact connected to the influence and power of the cartels, both in their behavior and in their explicit connections to the organizations themselves.

124 Peter Watson cites a Sports Illustrated article, published the month before the start of the World Cup, that explains that the team was “made up of constituent parts representing the regional stereotypes of the nation. Maturana said ‘[Leonel] Álvarez and Gabriel Gómez are midfielders from Antioquia, a region of hardworking, disciplined people — and they’re the ones who have to keep things under control. The fantasy I leave to Asprilla, Rincón, Valderrama — people from Cali and the coast. Those people are always partying; they’re harder to discipline. They take care of the creative part’ (406).
In retrospect, Pepe recalls seeing the cracks in the team begin to appear in those final days before the tournament. While traveling with the team to Los Angeles for the tournament, he offers the self-reproach, “debió darme cuenta de lo que estaba pasando. La vanidad, la ignorancia, la rebeldía sin causa estaban desbocadas. Nadie tenía autoridad sobre nadie” (Silva Romero 84). And while Maturana succeeded for a time to exert his influence over the players to keep them in check, his positive influence and control was undermined by the same forces of power corrupting the other institutions of the nation; dirty money and (the threat of) violence of the cartels.

The most brazen example of this threat of violence was the death threat Maturana received, insisting he not play Barrabás Gómez. The threat of violence and death imposed upon the coach, his players and their families was a power against which Maturana would not fight. Barrabás didn’t play, Andrés deflected a hopeful cross into his own goal, the team lost, and the control which the coach once had was completely gone. When the news of the threat came through and the whole world was waiting to see what Maturana would do, “El preparador físico del onceño, Diego Barragán, nos dijo ‘ya da igual ganar o perder’ porque sentía que el terrorismo era ahora el verdadero director técnico de la selección colombiana de fútbol” (my emphasis, Silva Romero 99).

The ever-present threat of violence and its exercise throughout society revokes the power from the traditional authority figures in the footballing world and posits the controlling interest in those who wield those means of violence.

This show of power and undermining of Maturana’s control as coach was by far the most significant and public of his tenure. It was not, however, the first. In fact,
according to Pepe’s account, the very fact that Maturana found himself at the helm of the national team was a demotion, a dislocation from his previous and desired position as the coach of the storied team América de Cali. The example Pepe provides of one particular instance in which the coach’s authority was challenged and his power revoked highlights the displacement of sporting ends for commercial motives and an imposition of the will of the owners on the makeup of the team.

The commentator relates how the Orejuela brothers, the owners of America de Cali, wanted to buy a goal-scoring Argentine, Gabriel Amato, to sell on to another bigger club. Maturana, “que odiaba que le dijeran qué tenía que hacer, hacía todo lo posible para llevarles la contraria” (Silva Romero 62). For Pepe, this defiance was an example of Maturana’s character. In a world controlled by corrupt and illicit forces of money and violence Maturana stood out as “un hombre honesto que nunca se sintió cómodo en el América porque no era su equipo sino el de aquellos hermanos traficantes” (63). While it is no doubt true that the club belongs to the owners, “los hermanos traficantes”, Pepe’s choice of the term “equipo” denotes a division of authority. The club belongs to the owners, but the team should ‘belong’ to the coach. Maturana flinches at the owners’ overreach, asserting their commercial desires in place of the sporting decisions which should be dictated by the coach. The venerated coach “impidió la contratación del delantero argentino (sin siquiera haberse volteado a verlo) para demostrar que él era el que mandaba en el campo de juego” (my emphasis, 63-64). Ironically, the choice to impede the transfer of the striker also betrays the moral of putting sporting purposes first. It may be that the player is not the best option for Maturana and his team,
nevertheless, he chose to pass the player up solely to assert and defend his authority and autonomy as coach. The footballing decisions have thus been appropriated both by the ownership and the coach as a mere tool in a power struggle.

The fictional Maturana’s choice to forego acquiring the Argentine striker resulted in a significant financial loss for the owners. Pepe reports, “unos meses después Amato fue vendido por siete millones de dólares a un club europeo” (Silva Romero 64). Actions such as this are what lead Pepe to describe Maturana as “el terco entrenador..., aquel hombre mirado de reojo por tantos caprichos que les costaban tanto dinero a los magnates de la droga” - a seemingly negative connotation, yet one which Pepe himself admired. Maturana was one of the few individuals who would not submit to the cartel’s demands. Of course, the coach did possess a certain level of visibility and stature, due to his coaching success, that such resistance did not necessarily constitute an offense that might cost him his life. Although, Pepe does explain that in certain wiretap recordings there were conversations in which “Francisco Maturana le dijo al segundo Rodríguez Orejuela que temía por su propia vida si las cosas seguían como iban en el peligrosísimo campeonato del fútbol colombiano” (354). It was not only his life that would be in danger as a consequence of defying those in positions of power, but also his livelihood. Following his actions regarding the Argentine striker, “se vio obligado a aceptar una vez más el cargo de seleccionador nacional de Colombia” (64). It would seem that the cartel’s influence reached far beyond the confines of just the one club many of them owned, rather it extended into more expansive institutions, such as the Colombian Football Federation.
Even a man of Maturana’s stature was used as a pawn to serve economic and social agendas beyond footballing aims. Maturana’s life and experience with Colombian football provide an answer in and of themselves to an interview question Pepe had prepared to ask coach: “¿es imposible ser un hombre independiente en un mundo doblegado por los intereses económicos? (Silva Romero 58). Maturana sought to prove it was possible to be an independent man in such a world. He opposed the occasional demands of the powerful Orejeula Brothers and did not give in to the bribes and coercion that were so common throughout the game. Nevertheless, when his life or that of his players and their families were at risk, he ultimately had to yield to the powers that be and forfeit that independence and autonomy he so desperately sought to retain.

Of course, any discussion of football as more than a game would be incomplete without a discussion on the role of the media. In his introduction to the edited volume, Fútbol-espectáculo, Samuel Martínez López reminds us that while the football industry is made up of “goles, héroes y exorbitantes ganancias, habrá que aceptar que la industria del fútbol-espectáculo también es una bizarra máquina de palabras” (15). Of all the many actors of the football world “es un hecho que los periodistas, los reporteros, los comentaristas, analistas y cronistas deportivos son los principales forjadores de una buena parte de las palabras que se emiten alrededor del fútbol-espectáculo” (16). Indicative of the role of the media and the influence of the commentators, reporters, and journalists in the prevailing narratives and official discourse of Colombian football
and society is the fact that the protagonist and narrator of the novel is by profession a football journalist, radio announcer and TV commentator.

The words spoken and written by major new outlets not only describe or reflect the supposed objective reality of any specific event, circumstance, or person, rather, they shape the very reality they describe. Regarding sport, the power of the radio commentator is significantly greater than that of a TV announcer. Whereas television allows an infinite number of individuals to witness the sporting action and determine their own interpretation of what they see, the meaning and reality of any narrated event is mediated and therefore determined by the voice who narrates.

In a moment of reflection Pepe considers the potentially mortal consequences between these two modes of representation. Specifically, in relation to the fateful own goal, Pepe laments the fact that “si todo hubiera seguido en manos de la radio, si la gente se hubiera imaginado el partido en vez de verlo, el autogol de Escobar habría podido pasar como ‘el intento de Andrés por salvarnos del primer gol de los gringos’. Y nadie se habría dado cuenta del daño” (Silva Romero 110). Of course, the purely empirical facts of what occurred on the pitch would not change a bit, but the power to interpret the event and then posit that interpretation as reality speaks to the power vested in those who compose and control the narrative.

The novel itself is one narrative among many, offering one representation of the people, places, events, and circumstances of a given history. The reading of the novel alongside other historical accounts will present dozens of contested claims which a reader must decipher to determine the ‘truth.’ This implicit understanding of competing
narratives is not only a task of the critical reader, but is made explicit by Pepe, who in
several instances quotes and challenges some of those competing narratives put forth
regarding the goal, the state of Colombian football, and role of commentators in the
decadence of the league and the control of the cartels. During his journey to Medellín,
in pursuit of Andrés, he remembers hearing: “El narrador de voz melodiosa [que] se
atrevió a decir que los comentaristas deportivos habíamos sido los primeros en jugarles
el juego a los mafiosos: que nos habíamos dedicado a servirles lo mejor que habíamos
podido: a promocionarles sus escuadras, a mitificarles sus jugadores, a lavarles sus
 nombres como ellos lavaban sus fondos” (my emphasis, Silva Romero 283). Just like in
his experience with ‘el Maniquí’, Pepe denies ever having used his position and
influence to falsely promote a player or a club in exchange for money.

That he never accepted money from agents, players, or owners to speak well of
them does not mean, however, that the story of the “narrador de voz melodiosa” about
the role of commentators in promoting the players and clubs of the cartels has no merit.
In fact, Pepe’s experience is proof of the influence of dirty money in the elaboration of
false narratives and the manipulation of information to secure money and opportunity
for others. *Autogol* is Pepe’s effort to clear his name, in the hopes of showing his
grandson that he didn’t do what others have accused him of. It is ironic, then, that Pepe
prides himself on not having taken the money on offer for his services. He portrays it as
an act of courage to stand up against the ‘mafias’ yet others close to him, like his son,
see it as evidence of his failure as a father and a mark of cowardice.
When a mysterious military man who has been looking for Pepe ever since the day before the game vs USA finally catches up to him at home in Bogotá with his family, his children come to see the opportunity that had been present his whole life for much greater wealth than Pepe was able to accrue legally. The man, Coronel Rozo, hands Pepe a check to “darle las gracias por haberle hecho fuerza en el programa al muchacho que nos trajimos de por allá en enero” (Silva Romero 408). Such an exchange would seem to be evidence contrary to Pepe’s purported innocence. However, upon receiving the check and after the colonel has left, Pepe places the check in a small cracker box where he has kept “todos los cheques que me habían dado en la vida para que hablara bien de alguna persona” (407). Rather than a show of honor and integrity, the realization that Pepe received so many checks received over the years which he refused to cash causes consternation and anger. Pepe’s adult son, Jorgito, interrogates his father: “quería que me explicaras por qué te habías acobardado a la hora de hacernos ricos” (Silva Romero 408). Jorgito “exigía saber por qué [Pepe se] había rehusado a cobrar esos cheques: qué diablos hacía con quinientos ochenta y nueve millones de pesos inservibles entre el closet” (408).

Pepe resented the control the rich and the powerful sought to impose on him. He explains that the check the coronel brought him was in fact due to the actions of his boss, Felix Cortés, who “seguía ofreciéndole mis servicios a la gente de los equipos como si fuera una puta, siempre a mis espaldas, para luego quedarse con la plata” (Silva Romero 409). When the directors of the news outlets begin to accept the bribes and then pressure their commentators to fulfill its conditions, they compromise the agency
of the individuals not only as it relates to informal and extralegal benefits, but in regard to their official conditions of employment. Not only might Pepe forfeit some extra cash or anger a third party, rather he could be in danger of losing his job, for ‘following the rules’. How is one supposed to be independent and retain their autonomy in a world in which everyone has given themselves over to the influence of money? This is Pepe’s dilemma. Nevertheless, Pepe does explain to his children and to potential readers that while he courteously received gifts, small cash payments and checks (which he never cashed) over the years, he never asked for them nor allowed them to dictate how he did his job. He would not be bought or compromised, but if people wanted to give him a ‘tip’, who was he to say no? (411).

For Pepe, the game and his relationship to it, via matches he commentates, players he endorses, and clubs he admires, is sacred. While he recognizes that the game has been appropriated by all those forces that have facilitated its growth and development to become the global spectacle it is, he refuses to sell his and the game’s soul to the influence of money, violence, and politics in an effort to uphold the nature of the beautiful game. It is telling that the first time -that we know of- Pepe resorts to non-traditional forms of monetizing his knowledge and love for the game, by betting his life savings on the success of the national team at this tournament, that the game betrays him and the downfall of the team constitutes his own personal and professional downfall. By placing that bet, Pepe stepped out of the realm of sporting purity - the game for the sake of the game - and became, in a small part, like all those around him who had perverted and corrupted the game for their own personal gain.
Pepe’s bet on the 1994 World Cup constituted a change in the way he interacted with the game of football. Nevertheless, from his youth Pepe has used his love of football as a career. Making a career out of football necessarily converts the sport into more than a game. Broadcasting and media rights and markets around the game constitute the industry which has perhaps best monetized the sport and which now exerts great control on the decisions which organize and direct the leagues, tournaments, teams and players. As football becomes more and more of a spectacle and the amount of people who wanted to follow/see each game, the broadcast industry becomes more and more indispensable to transmit the actions of the games beyond the stadium and into the very homes of fans all over. Pepe’s ability to narrate and interpret the actions on the pitch in such an entertaining way for the many listeners and then viewers, allows him to make a living and provide for his family.

The presentation of Pepe’s skills and abilities as a commentator throughout the novel mimic the experience of a player, who is evaluated based on their corporal and mental ability and then sought after to be employed to perform. Just like a young player coming through the lower leagues, hoping to be seen by a scout of a big team, Pepe recalls when he was first discovered:

La gente de Radio Reloj, de Caracol, escuchó mi voz como si fuera un gran acontecimiento. Pensó que era una voz que no se parecía a ninguna otra. Me ofrecieron setecientos pesos al mes, de 1970, por decir la hora entre canciones. Dije que sí. Nunca dudé en seguir adelante. Dos meses más tarde estaba
While the novel does highlight Pepe’s wit, eloquence and unique lexical choices which make him a great commentator, we can observe that what made the difference for Pepe’s discovery was simply his voice; that corporal and sonic attribute which granted him entry into the field of professionals.

The next career move he describes is that of his recruitment and hiring for the position he holds at the time of the ‘94 World Cup. If he was an unknown talent being discovered for the first time in the previous example, Pepe is now a proven entity, a well-known figure with a good following who requires persuasion, both in praise and in money, to secure his services. Since Pepe would be going to a smaller, newer network, his potential employers “sabían que no iba a ser fácil convencerme. Pero para ello habían pensado en doblarme el sueldo, transmitir Vox Populi en España y darme una columna de opinión en un diario que el grupo aspiraba a comprar” (142). Just like an established player in his prime, the network felt compelled to offer an improved contract, greater range of influence and a new project to entice Pepe. Of course, the worth of Pepe’s services would also depend on the interest in Colombian football and the demand for not only the games but the programming and writing that went along with them.

This relationship of supply and demand highlights how the game transcends the ludic limits. The performances on the field, the beauty and entertainment of the play, as well as the success of the teams, could affect the profitability of the networks and their
owners. After having joined the new network and after the first stages of the qualifying matches for the World Cup, Pepe recalls hearing rumors of layoffs and the possibility that he and his co-commentator might be fired. Many of the promised stipulations of his contract had not yet been fulfilled and Pepe began to complain to his boss, Sara Olarte. In her attempts to assure him that the network would be ok, even as she was asking him to take a pay cut, she reminds him “que Colombia iba a ser campeona del mundo: ese solo hecho, dijo, iba a salvarnos a todos de la quiebra” (142).\textsuperscript{125} Implied in her argument, whether we believe it or not, is the fact that success on the field translates into success off it, for all parties involved.

This same logic informs the reaction of ‘el Aristócrata’ Monroy, Pepe’s co-commentator, in the wake of the team’s loss and imminent exit from the tournament: “El Aristócrata quedó convencido, eso sí, de que la salida de Colombia del Mundial no le convendría mucho a sus negocios.... Sintió que nadie iba a querer oír ni una palabra de fútbol durante un par de siglos” (Silva Romero 94). The idea that people wouldn’t want to hear about football for a few centuries is obviously hyperbole, but such exaggeration speaks to the reality of the passion for the game and the extreme emotions that accompany both winning and losing. And while football continues to drive the production and circulation of millions and even billions of dollars in Colombia, South America, and beyond, the loss of the national team did constitute an enormous loss for Pepe, Andrés, and many others.

\textsuperscript{125} Sara makes the same bet as Pepe. She places her hopes of financial success in the outcome of the tournament. She, however, does not have a personal stake in the bet, only a professional hope.
By some unexplained medical phenomenon or mere rhetorical device, Pepe loses his voice in the exact moment Andrés directs the ball into his own goal, never to speak again. This physical injury constitutes the loss of his livelihood. Pepe’s account of his loss once again draws an explicit parallel between his labor and that of the players. At the team breakfast the morning after the game, Pepe notes that the players “hicieron una pausa para hacernos saber que mi enfermedad les parecía una injusticia” (Silva Romero 159). The players sympathized with Pepe. They of all people “sabían que mi dolor se parecía a quedarse sin piernas” (159). The loss of his voice, just like a player’s loss of legs, renders him unfit for the tasks which constitute his value. Pepe could only assume that unless his voice returned he would inevitably lose his livelihood.

It is the bodily capabilities and the actions of the players that teams, coaches, and clubs seek to tame in pursuit of their own financial goals. A professional footballer is first and foremost a commodified object, valuable only insofar as it can fulfill the corporal requirements necessary to ensure the sporting success or predetermined outcome which will bring the player’s agent, coach, and club the money, esteem or fame they seek. Pepe is, of course, not a player, yet he sees his role within the sports media industry and his company as the same kind of relationship.

The network decides to terminate Pepe’s contract after the fiasco at the World Cup, and while the owner assures him that he will always be esteemed and appreciated for his work, Pepe sees through the feigned praise and care and accuses them of their true motives: “me están botando al basurero porque ya no soy negocio?” (my emphasis, Silva Romero 186). Rather than a historic and cultural figure who carries value and
meaning beyond the purely economic, the owners of the network dump Pepe the first chance they get, once he is no longer profitable.

“Yo soy un puto ser humano, por Dios, merezco un poco de respeto…Yo he dejado mi vida en esos micrófonos sin pedirle a nadie nada aparte de que no me maten…Yo solo he cometido el crimen de amar el fútbol sobre todas las cosas….

Me gané mi trabajo moliendo veinticuatro horas al día durante los ocho días de la semana. Fui perdiendo la voz, fui gastándola en canchas, en carreteras, en donde fuera necesario, para que la gente no se enloqueciera de tanto matarse en sus empleos de mierda. (my emphasis, 186)

The great sin of the football industry is the dehumanization of its labor. The commodification of individuals is most obvious and flagrant in the treatment of players. Nevertheless, Pepe wants to show that players are not the only laborers in this industry whose bodily capabilities are subjected to the controls and mechanisms of the market. After defending his own humanity and advocating for being treated with basic decency he then draws the reader’s attention to the physical cost of his life’s work. Even though Pepe experienced an immediate loss of the ability to speak upon witnessing Andrés’ error, here he characterizes the loss of his voice as a gradual deterioration due to years of work and physical exertion.

Just as a player will, in time, suffer more injuries of greater severity and eventually diminish physically, Pepe has also dedicated his entire life, his body and his mind to the dictates of the football schedule and the choices of the media owners who decide what will be broadcast and who will commentate. Pepe’s account of his work
schedule, “veinticuatro horas al día durante los ocho días de semana”, highlights the excessive demands of his bosses, demands which would eventually wear out his voice completely. Pepe has literally “dejado [su] vida en estos micrófonos” (Silva Romero 186). His life as he knew it was lost with his voice. The novel is his attempt to recover not only his voice, but also his life.

After sitting through his visit with Díaz Laverde, the owner of the network, voiceless and unable to speak his mind, he ultimately recognizes the futility of any attempt to save himself while simultaneously highlighting the tragic reality of his life as well as that of the players and the everyday citizens of his home: “Ya, me rindo, quedense con su imperio de siempre, sigan enseñándoles a todos a firmar con una equis, hágannos creer que les interesamos un poco más que el dinero. Escupan, humillen, vean a los demás como una cosa que no les da todo el dinero que quisieran” (my emphasis, Silva Romero 188). The power of ‘don Dinero’ in the era of narcofútbol is highlighted further by the fact that the three characters of the novel who suffer most in the aftermath of Colombia’s World Cup elimination are Andrés Escobra, Francisco Maturana, and Pepe, the only “tres personas...que...han sido capaces de no arrodillársele al dinero de tanta gente que tiene dinero en este país” (188). Their respective deaths, losses and downfalls are proof that money always wins and resisting its influence will only result in loss.

An impossible salvation: Andrés and Pepe as redeemer and scapegoat

The narrative of football as modern-day religion is not new. Many have written how teams and players inspire devotion in their followers. Fans dedicate time, money,
thought, and energy to support and encourage their team. Stadiums are modern day cathedrals, places of worship and communion in which individual followers gather to give thanks and experience moments of bliss and joy, all the while yearning to be witness to moments of transcendence, of ineffable sporting beauty and feats of athletic excellence.\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Autogol} doesn’t adopt this discourse of football as the religion of the people, though many characters in the novel display a great devotion and reverence to the sport. Rather, the author employs important biblical allusions to characterize Andrés as a Christ figure, both savior and scapegoat, to retell his death as a potentially redeeming sacrifice for a world steeped in corruption and evil. Reframing Andrés’ death as the necessary sacrifice of innocent life also functions as a small justification for Pepe’s misguided plan to kill him.

As he recalls the countless little details about the days and hours that led up to the game vs USA, Pepe recounts the comments of one of his colleagues as they make their way up to the commentators box before kick-off. In reference to the sudden bomb threats the commentator remarks: “Ya se lavaron las manos entregando a Barrabás - me dijo mi compañero mientras subíamos las últimas escaleras del via crucis -. Ahora solo falta un crucificado” (my emphasis, Silva Romero 100). Perhaps it was the nickname of this player, Barrabás, which led Silva Romero to conceive of the narrative of Andrés’ death, not as a tragedy, but as potential redemption for a country and a culture trapped in the grip of violence, greed, and corruption. Whatever the case may be, the novel

\textsuperscript{126} The examples of this approach to an analysis of football fandom are numerous. Two examples are \textit{Fútbol: Una religión en busca de un Dios} (2006), by Manuel Vásquez Montalbán, and \textit{Temples of the Earthbound Gods} (2008), by Christopher Thomas Gaffney
clearly recasts the story of the bomb threat, and the own goal to follow, as that of
Christ’s trial before Pontious Pilate, in which the people of Jerusalem chose to free the
criminal, Barrabas, and condemn the innocent Jesus to death on the cross (Book of
Matthew Chapter 27).

As the commentators climb the last steps to the press box before the game, it is
as if they are climbing the hill of Golgotha to witness the crucifixion of the innocent king.
While the commentator does not yet know which player will become the “crucificado”,
the reader is well aware of who will assume that harrowing role. Moreover, though the
novel doesn’t seem to imply that Barrabás, the player, is a notable criminal, it does
indicate the purity and innocence of the one to die, a man rejected and killed by the
very people he was meant to save. Such language may be hyperbolic, yet it is not
without grounds for belief. Andrés was the kind of player Pepe was sure would be
“designado capitán tarde o temprano” (Silva Romero 366), the team’s most stalwart and
reliable defender, a player whose greatest responsibility was to save goals, and thus
ensure victory for his team.

Christ was imagined to be a military and political savior who would free the Jews
from Roman subjugation, just as Andrés was supposed to lead the Colombian team to
victory against all rivals and bring the title of World Cup Champion to a country seeking
validation as a true footballing nation. Victory would bring joy, success and a positive
representation of the ‘true’ Colombia, overshadowed by the negative associations with
the cartels. And like Jesus, the salvation that Andrés would provide, would not come in
the form of sporting victory and triumph but in physical death and defeat.
Of course, there are important differences between the Christ story and that of Andrés. Andrés did not willingly give himself up to die nor did he rise from the dead. This narrative of Andrés and his death as savior and salvation was written by one man, attempting to understand his own involvement in the player’s death. From the moment Pepe decides to kill Andrés, the defender is cast as a scapegoat, one who will bear the blame of the loss and hurt of all the Colombians who believed it was their right to win the world cup:

Sí, Escobar tenía que pagar porque era el hombre que me lo había quitado todo, el hombre que nos lo había quitado todo: los ahorros de toda una vida; la casa familiar de los sueños que por fin íbamos a comparar; la posibilidad de recobrar, así, a las esposas de siempre; la voz, y, sin voz, el trabajo que nos había hecho las personas que éramos, y, sin nuestros oficios amados, las amigas seductoras que habrían podido salvarnos de nosotros mismos. (my emphasis, 200-201)

In his justification for Andrés’ death, Pepe combines the personal and collective loss experienced that day. The interchangeable first person singular and plural speaks to the infamous “nosotros” of the fan/citizen mentality, a conflation of the individual identity with that of the group; the team, the club, the family.

Interestingly enough, Pepe also believes that his decision to kill Andrés will also perform a salvific function, recasting his plan to kill Andrés as a necessary sacrificial act, which constitutes his life’s purpose: “Tuve claro que tenía una misión, que nada podía detenerme en ese punto, que había sido elegido para llevar a cabo un trabajo que era superior a mí mismo: el de castigar el error que había arruinado nuestro destino” (Silva
Romero 230). Ironically, Pepe’s undertaking depicts him both as a saving agent and a Judas. If Andrés is the sacrificial lamb, the one who must die to pay for the sins of a nation and a football culture which has given itself over completely to the corrupt and violent control of the drug world, Pepe is the necessary Judas. While Judas is written as the traitor *par excellence*, he is also necessary to bring about the crucifixion and redeeming death of the Savior.

Throughout his career Andrés was known as a consummate professional; ‘el caballero de la cancha.’ He was serious and disciplined both on and off the field. His upbringing differed from most of his teammates. While most of them came from the poorer parts of the country Andrés was born into an upper-middle class family and raised a devout catholic. While football was his passion and the goal of becoming a professional was a dream come true for him it was not a way out of extreme poverty or the sole possibility for him to make something of himself and his life (*The Two Escobars* min 5). It is perhaps this background and the opportunity afforded him for a successful life outside of football that allows him to resist the tentacles of corruption, money, and violence that made their way so easily into the lives of many of his teammates.

Andrés came of age as a footballer and began to make his way in both the professional league as well as the national team during a time in which essentially all Colombian football was controlled or heavily influenced by the drug cartels. The immense amount of money generated by the cartels offered amazing opportunities for individuals to make large sums of money in the football industry. Of course, along with the opportunity to secure a good standard of living came the potential for fame and
fortune, a life of extravagance and excess which often led to corruption and illicit activity. Players, referees, and coaches were enticed to accept bribes to guarantee favorable outcomes of individual games and even entire tournaments. Along with the incentive to perform certain actions there was also a threat of violence, and even death, spoken or not, behind such directions. And while much of the footballing world would yield to the corrupting power of money and the insidious threat of violence, the novel portrays Andrés as the notable exception to the rule. Pepe’s interactions with Andrés and the opportunities he had to observe him throughout his career lead him to see the defender as “el tipo que...me hacía creer, tal vez a destiempo, que era posible pasar por la vida sin venderles el espíritu a tantos postores...” (Silva Romero 93). His exemplary conduct provokes the question asked by Pepe and perhaps all Colombians of that era: “¿Cuál era su secreto para morir siendo un hombre independiente en un mundo doblegado por los hacedores del dinero?” (93).

The author’s choice of the word “morir” in this question is significant. Implied in his question is the unavoidable fact that being “un hombre independiente”, one who resists the power and temptations of money, is to choose death. One does not live as an independent man, but dies. In choosing to accept or resist the controlling influence of money one is in fact choosing life or death. Either you live by the rules of the controlling economic forces, in this case the cartels, forfeiting autonomy and independence or you forfeit your life. It is impossible to live a life of an independent individual in the world of corrupting and controlling monetary power.
In an informal exchange between the two, Pepe relates Andrés’ advice on “cómo sobreviv[ir] [como] un hombre decente igual que él en un mundo gobernado por oscuros hombres de negocios. - Tenés que ser fuerte para no dejarte arrastrar” (Silva Romero 96). In the eyes of his peers, his fans, and the general public Andrés is clearly different from his peers. In a world dominated by unsavory and illicit power and controls bought by dirty money and secured by violence, Andrés is one of the very few decent and independent men who by willpower and moral fortitude insists on fighting to keep himself free of the stain that pervades Colombian football and society. Such autonomy, however, comes at a cost; his life. Andrés represents the hope of many Colombians, footballers and ordinary citizens alike, that the control of the cartels is not absolute, and that freedom is attainable.

Pepe reports that he was not the only individual who held the famous defender in such high esteem. Andrés’s reputation was such that “nadie podría decir de él nada aparte de que era un hombre leal” (Silva Romero 366). In the funeral services held in the national stadium following his demise, the outgoing president of the nation, César Gaviria Trujillo, highlighted the upright nature and character of Andrés as a “jugador leal”, an “hombre íntegro” and “buen miembro de la familia” (394). Such a high standard of expectation was evident not only after his death, but in Andrés’ own account of his struggles. During one of their few conversations following the own goal, Andrés vents to Pepe about the difficulty of the situation, even as he sought to project a sense of assurance and optimism for the future. Though Pepe tells us that Andrés “sabía sentirse afortunado en las peores circunstancias,” Andrés also admitted, “no era fácil ser
el ‘hombre perfecto’ que había caído a destiempo” (my emphasis, 313). Andrés was the “perfect” man and player, one of only three people who hadn’t been bought by the cartels.

This perfection and innocence was hammered home with strong pathos in the lament of his teammate, Carlos ‘el Pibe’ Valderrama, who upon receiving the news of Andrés’ death “lloraba en el aeropuerto como un niño porque ‘no puede ser que un hombre que mamaba gallo, que no tenía problemas con nadie, que estaba siempre respaldando al equipo, se vaya de la vida por jugar fútbol’” (Silva Romero 394). Andrés was innocent. Not only was it criminal for anyone to die because of a game of football, but it was incomprehensible that a player so ‘perfect’ as Andrés should be the one to pay the ultimate price.

What purpose, then, does Andrés’ death serve? After accepting the representation of Andrés as a Christ figure, as the innocent made guilty for the sins of a nation, sacrificed in place of those teammates, and by extension the citizens of the nation, we must ask, how does Andrés save? As previously mentioned, Andrés differs from the Christ of the Judeo-christian tradition, in that he does not rise from the dead and affect salvation for his people in some future life. The salvation made possible by Andrés’ death is not some future metaphysical redemption, but an imminent salvation for a people subject to the violence and corruption of the cartels and the elite who act with impunity. Pepe himself is one of the many Colombian citizens who has suffered at the hands of the wealthy elite without receiving any semblance of justice or recompense for the injury inflicted.
When he was a new father with young children, his son was hit by a drunk driver, an event which left him partially lame the rest of his life. While his son and his family were permanently affected by this action, the guilty party, the son of a government representative, paid off the judges to receive only a minor warning and small financial fine to pay towards the boy’s medical expenses. While his wife expects him to do more to exact justice for their son, Pepe is reluctant to do so knowing that there was very little chance, if any, that the justice system would act as it should in the face of the money it would receive to do otherwise. Pepe symbolizes a nation resigned to its fate of victimhood, a society in which money dictates and supersedes any notion of fairness and rule of law. This one event serves as a catalyzing experience which instills a deeply seated sense of failure as a husband and father. Pepe’s choice to take the law into his own hands and make sure that the guilty party paid for the sin of failing a nation held up in hopes of World Cup glory is, in part, a response to his certainty that one of the great ills that ails him, his family, and his nation is that of impunity.

“El gran problema de Colombia, la razón por la que no lográbamos salir de semejante atraso, era la impunidad. No teníamos por qué aguantarnos que los hijos de los hijos de los dueños de todo nos echaran como a un pobre director técnico que lleva seis fechas sin ganar. No podíamos seguir diciéndonos ‘lo mejor es no decir nada’ cuando el hijo borracho de un representante atropellara a nuestro hijo.” (230-231)

In this one passage Pepe speaks to the problems of a family, a football team, and a nation. “Los dueños de todo” are the rich and powerful who, via economic incentive or
punishment and threat of violence have cast the rest of society into passive roles to accept the dictates of the “los dueños” in the most minimal of details. The wealthy can do as they choose. They can fire and hire coaches on a whim, whenever they feel results haven’t been good enough. They can get away with crimes by buying their way out of the requirements of law and inspiring fear in those around them.

In fact, Pepe tells us that he learned this attitude as a young child in the wake of his parents’ separation, when upon learning that his father was leaving, Pepe remembers wanting to confront his Father and his mother simply telling him “que lo dejara solo” instead of demanding an explanation., In response, he recalls, “la seguí a ella sin reclamarle nada porque fui siempre un niño sumiso” (Silva Romero 263). Pepe doesn’t characterize himself as lazy or passive, rather, “sumiso”. This submissiveness he manifests as a child is a trait that not only stays with him into his adult years, one which ironically potentially results in his wife leaving him, but can be attributed to a whole nation. Hence, Pepe’s criticism of his country and the impunity which reigns over the people, leaving all power and authority in the hands of those who wrest it from the people and the institutions via the influence of money and (the threat of) violence.

The novel and his narration of everything surrounding Andrés’ death, the state of Colombian football, and his personal life constitute an abrupt change of character, an instance in which Pepe recovers his agency to speak truth to “los patrones mezquinos que se han puesto en la tarea de someternos” (Silva Romero 272). As if he were on the stand in a court of law, or at least that of public opinion, he testifies: “Y juro por Dios que solo he estallado una vez, como un demente, en lo que va de mi vida: la vez que
estoy narrando (35). This uncharacteristic outburst and proclamation of a truth seldom expressed, is voiced to redeem a nation suffering from the cruel acts and financial control of forces within its own borders. It is a call against the reigning impunity of the rich and powerful and a demand that justice be done for the own goal committed not only by Andrés, but by the cartels, businessmen and corrupt politicians who have oppressed the Colombian citizens in pursuit of power and wealth.

While still pondering and justifying his decision to kill Andrés, Pepe argues, “alguien tenía que morir para que jamás olvidáramos nuestro fracaso en el Mundial....Tenía que morir la persona más visible de todas, el tipo que hizo el autogol, para que pasar la página fuera al fin posible” (Silva Romero 231). Pepe can no longer abide not saying anything. To do so would be to remain stuck on the ‘same page.’ Pepe’s rationale for the justice, not revenge, he planned to exact was that such an act was required not only for his losses, but also for the crimes and guilt of a nation: “No era nada más porque lo había perdido todo por su culpa: no se trataba de una venganza como todas...es que la historia de un mundo solo se parte en dos el día en que se encuentra un mártir para sacrificar. Ya era hora de que empezáramos un segundo capítulo” (my emphasis, 367). Andrés’ death would serve a larger purpose than merely paying for his sporting error. Andrés, in Pepe’s view, would become a martyr whose life would be consecrated to a larger purpose. His death would mark the closing of a dark chapter of Colombian football and national history and allow society to ‘turn the page’ and ‘start a new chapter.’
Taking the life of another human being is an act of no small consequence, one which Pepe undertook with conviction but also with great trepidation. Not to mention the fact that Pepe and Andrés shared a personal relationship. It was in fact Pepe, with whom Andrés spoke and sat next to on the plane home, and with whom he shared a draft of the op-ed piece he had written for the newspaper *El Tiempo*. This column, represented in the novel according to the historical truth, closed with the ironically tragic last line, “la vida no termina aquí” (Silva Romero 210). Pepe wasn’t immune to moments of doubt. Nevertheless, when he considered the question “¿qué sentido podía tener indultar a mi víctima? (366), his own answer revealed the deeper motives behind his decision and saving hopes he placed in the planned martyrdom. If Andrés’s life was spared and his crime pardoned nothing would change. There is no way forward if the football world and the nation [insistían] en avergonzar[se] de nuestros capitales subterráneos” (357).

In his column, Andrés had written that the unfortunate outcome “es simplemente un llamado a la cordura” (Silva Romero 209), a wakeup call for the players and the Federation, all of whom had allowed hubris to destroy their focus and performance. While such an analysis is undoubtedly true, Pepe saw beyond the scope of the game and the tournament. Andrés’ death was necessary because, as the “persona más visible de todas”(231) and as part of the footballing world, “el mundo más visible de Colombia” (395), his demise would be the only act sufficient to provoke the “llamado a la cordura” needed throughout not only football, but the whole nation.
This logic would play out in Pepe’s account of the influential commentators and figures of the moment, who, in the aftermath of Andrés death, “proponían que se llevaran a cabo investigaciones para probar los vínculos de los clubes del balompié criollo con el crimen organizado... [y] que el gobierno interveniera el fútbol, en busca de la influencia del narcotráfico, pero solo si también intervenían todas las actividades del país” (my emphasis, Silva Romero 394-95). It was the death of Andrés and its surrounding circumstances which would move an entire nation and provoke the necessary pressure at home and abroad to demand an accounting of those in power who had allowed the country to be run entirely by the dictates of the cartels.

I have already shown that this iteration of the national team was held up as the ‘true’ image of Colombia, in opposition to the prevailing associations with drugs and violence. One could argue that the expectation of victory and the attractive and joyful style of the team were the prime example of how football “es proyectado como narrativa para la redención de la nación” (Vélez 214). However, such a redemption was never possible, since Colombian football was not separate from the world of the cartels. The golden age of Colombian football and this team’s winning potential was owed to the influence of the drug cartels and their immense investments in the national club teams and players.

Even still, football could serve as a persuasive distraction and escape from the true ills of a nation. Pepe reports Maturana’s interpretation of the harsh criticism the team received after the tournament in an email interview he had with the coach as he compiled the novel. Even in loss, Maturana argues that the team’s failure was “un falso
fracaso que servía para ‘hacernos olvidar de la descomposición social de nuestro país en esa época’. Que era perfecto para no pensar que ‘la intolerancia, el irrespeto, el poco valor a la vida, el narcotráfico y la beligerancia era lo reinante” (Silva Romero 434).

Football is a powerful force in Colombian society and the lives of individuals. Nevertheless, no action on the field, victory or loss, would be capable of revealing and redeeming the true ills the country faced. Andres’ death constituted a nexus between the two realities of the game and ‘real life’. His death was attributed to his error committed on the field of play, yet its consequences transcended the limits of the game and could affect change throughout society.

Pepe felt called to a higher cause, to exact justice and to save a nation by sacrificing the life of the most exemplary footballer of the time. Andres was both guilty, having scored the own goal, and innocent, seemingly one of the only individuals to resist the corruption of the cartels in football and everyday life. While the outpouring of sadness and anger at the moment of his death was great and did inspire efforts to investigate and extricate the influence of the cartels in Colombian football and society, not even his death could ultimately rescue the nation. As Goldblatt confirms, “Escobar’s death appeared to herald a defeat for the power of the narco-traffickers in Colombian politics and football” (my emphasis, 812). However, early signs of success were diminished by other signs of the old status quo, such as the continued narco funding of political campaigns, like that of Federal President Ernesto Samper Pizano in 1995. Despite the shock of Andre´s death, “Colombian society, football included, clearly remained closely enmeshed with the drug industry” (Goldblatt 812).
While the specifics of the political and social situation continued to change over the years, Pepe bemoans the lack of societal and institutional reform since the days of the ‘94 World Cup. Pepe’s account of this period of Colombian history ends with an epilogue, written 12 years after the event which prompted the very idea of the book, which explains the impetus behind its writing, its methodology, the voices and sources involved in its composition and editing, and to elaborate his confessional and therapeutic aims. The twelve years between the events he narrates and the moment of his writing also allows Pepe to reflect on the consequences of his actions and the many things which occurred following the World Cup. Included in this section is an account of the interview Pepe had with Maturana over email. In response to the great detail in which Maturana describes and laments the “Colombia de esa época”, Pepe makes a point to “dejar en claro que ‘la Colombia de esa época’ era también la Colombia de ahora” (Silva Romero 435).

The demand for justice and the hope for a reformed society had come to naught. Just as Pepe failed to deliver the sacrificial blow to Andres, Andres’ death failed to provoke and promote the necessary change to redeem Colombian society. After all the chaos, the unrest, and anger, the forces of corruption, violence, and money continue to dictate the workings of society at large and the lives of individuals. If Pepe once hoped that something good could come out of Andrés’ death, that somehow Andrés could be

127 Which would be the year 2006, also a World Cup year. Germany played host to the tournament that year and it was the first time after three consecutive tournaments that Colombia did not qualify to play. The results of the team once again are reflected in Pepe’s observations of Colombian Society. “Por algo no había clasificado la selección al Mundial por primera vez en los últimos tres campeonatos. Porque la gente parecía agotada de hacer parte de todo lo que fuera colombiano” (424).
the martyr and savior of a whole nation, he now only hopes for the return of his voice; a hope which even he finds difficult to sustain.

Football is certainly a way of life, a secular religion of sorts and a potent symbol. Nevertheless, it falls short as a redeeming force and a vehicle for real change. What Autogol does make clear is the immense symbolic, commercial, and existential value afforded the sport in the individuals’ lives, in businesses, and in social and political institutions. Interestingly, the value and meaning of football is determined by how much we as individuals or the general public invest in it. As the investment, financial, emotional, political, and social, increases so does the costs of loss and sporting failure.128

As politicians, commercial enterprises, gambling rings, drug cartels and everyday citizens attached their success to that of their respective footballing institutions - a specific club, a star player, or the national team itself - they became more willing to do what was necessary to ensure victory. In one of his final transmissions covering the 94 World Cup, Pepe’s colleague and best friend, ‘el Aristócrata’ Monroy, declares: “el fútbol nos lo ha dado todo para entender hasta dónde es capaz de llegar un ser humano con tal de ganar el partido” (Silva Romero 305). The bribing of officials and players, the threats and acts of physical violence against players, rival fans, and referees and many other social ills derive in large part from this need to win at all costs. The idea that

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128 One of the many “specialists” Pepe saw while at the World Cup in an attempt to cure his ailment and recover his speech told him that his voice would return when he took his vengeance. This phrase rang in his head and motivated his need to kill Andrés himself. While recuperating in the hospital after Andrés’ death and upon realizing that someone else had actually shot him, he comes to the inevitable conclusion: “Y tuve claro que estaba condenado a andar sin voz porque me había salvado de vengarme: era un loco que se había salvado de meter una locura. La palabra del diccionario es ‘ironía’” (Silva 395).
sporting victory contributes to one’s sense of personal, social, or national victory erases the traditional barriers between the game and reality. Pepe is himself an example of this. The investment of his life savings on the game, and the loss of his voice, and therefore his livelihood, led him to contemplate and attempt an act he never thought himself capable, murder. Pepe’s ‘novel’ is a self-accusation, a reproach of his own behavior and an act of repentance which he hopes would be reflected in society itself.

Andrés’ own goal cost him his life. It cost Pepe his voice, his life savings, his reputation, his potential reunion with his wife, and his livelihood. The case of Andrés Escobar and Colombian narcofútbol of the late 20th-century make it clear that the world of professional football is much more than a game. Fortunes, financial and social, as well as human lives are at stake. It’s only fitting, therefore, that as Pepe is contemplating his life and writing the book’s last sentences he reflects on the outcome of that historic game. His reflection elucidates his certainty that everything would be different if it weren’t for that one tragic deflection: “Lo último que escribo es que a veces sueño con que ese balón pega en el palo en el minuto 33 del primer tiempo. Lo último que confieso es que a veces pienso que el marcador sigue 0 a 0” (Silva Romero 444).
Conclusion -

I would like to end by posing the question to which each of these novels ultimately offers a myriad of possible and potential answers. What is football? Laurent Dubois offers a smattering of his own answers to this question by way of introduction in his book, *The Language of the Game: How to Understand Soccer* (2018). Some of his responses include: It is a game; it is possibility; is life; is grounded in a specific history; it is a language; every game is a story; is corrupt; it is a good place for thinking; is boring; is powerful; is immigrant (1-22). Each of these answers could, and possibly does, constitute the subject matter of an entire book itself.

How would Arturo, Susana, or any of his pension mates and teammates answer this same question? For Arturo, football was a dream and a way to fame. It was the key to his self-esteem and a naive understanding of his identity. For el Gordo, el Negro, and the other members of the Unidad Popular it was a form of exercise to encourage collective action, healthy competition and a way to pursue strong and healthy living. Ultimately, football also came to represent the individualistic and capitalist political agenda of Augusto Pinochet. For none of them was it merely a game.

Just as Skármeta’s novel ends with scenes of state control of the nation’s footballing institutions and most important sites, Kohan’s novel begins with military control and administration of the beautiful game. Football for the generals constituted an essential tool to whitewash their image, to disavow and disprove any allegations of human rights abuse while ironically also constituting a distraction and cover to further pursue their agenda of ideological purification. While many, both then and now, may
think back on those two months of June and simply remember the exultation of victory and the despair of defeat on the football field, it is necessary to reflect on the mortal consequences the game had for so many more.

The experiences of Palacín and Mortimer must certainly be mixed. As players they undoubtedly chose their path because football was/is their passion. Nevertheless, football for Palacín was also pain, both physical and emotional. Mortimer experienced football as a world apart in which he reigned supreme on the pitch but then seemed a shadow of himself off it, far from home in a foreign culture. Camps O’Shea and Carvalho viewed the game with disinterested curiosity, impressed by the sociological and anthropological aspects of the game and football culture. And though we don’t know for sure if Basté or Sánchez Zapico would consider themselves true fans, we do know that even such fandom and interest in the sport would pale in comparison to their desire to profit from it. For them the game and their position in it was a matter of status, wealth, and influence.

And what of Pepe Calderón, the poor mute, overweight, single, and aging former football commentator turned writer and pseudo historian? Even in such an unappealing and tragic state at the end of his life, I believe Pepe would still proclaim an undying love for the game which gave him a voice, provided him a living, granted him an audience and intimate access to many of his sporting idols over the years and even afforded him a role in the elaboration of Colombian football culture and history. Of course, his unfortunate decisions, along with Andres’ unfortunate error, worked to eventually deprive him of the same things the game had given him. Nevertheless, Pepe is one of
the best examples of that old man all of us football fanatics know who lives and breathes football. Perhaps Eduardo Galeano sums up Pepe best when he confesses his own relationship to the beautiful game: “Yo no soy más que un mendigo de buen fútbol. Voy por el mundo, sombrero en mano, y en los estadios suplico - Una linda jugadita, por amor de Dios. Y cuando el buen fútbol ocurre, agradezco el milagro sin que me importe cuál es el club o el país que me lo ofrece” (original emphasis, A sol y sombra 12).

The above list of responses to that (not so) simple question, What is football?, only begins to scratch the surface of potential answers all based on lived experience. We could easily double the list if we considered even one or two more secondary or tertiary characters in each of these novels. Nevertheless, every single one of them could fit under the one common response, “more than a game”. Football means something in Hispanic world culture even if one is not a personal fan of the game.

This dissertation is, of course, only the beginning of a potentially much vaster corpus. As García Cames remarks regarding the current state of academic analysis of football literature: “Frente a la notable presencia del fútbol en otras disciplinas como la sociología, la antropología o también la lingüística; la investigación literaria goza todavía de un amplio margen para ahondar en nuevas perspectivas” (my emphasis, 37). Not included in this study are such esteemed novels as La pena máxima, by Santiago Roncagliolo, O Drible, by Sergio Rodrigues, La luz oscura, by Nicolás Vidal, and El último milagro, by Horacio Convertini, to name a few. Though I have chosen to specifically focus on novels which deal with the world of professional football, there are many other
iterations of the beautiful game such as amateur leagues, informal neighborhood play, etc. which all carry great cultural significance and are not included in this present study.

Additionally, nations such as Bolivia, Peru, México and Ecuador have received little attention compared to traditional powerhouse footballing and publishing nations like Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. Furthermore, there is a large absence of work on female writers of football that must be addressed. In short, there is much more work ahead. I can only hope to add my efforts to the work of “los [actuales] críticos que...han sido encargados de dar un pase en profundidad [y] sobre que habrá de armarse el discurso académico en los próximos años” (García Cames 37).
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