

the depths of country life. In the depths of the countryside there was misery and ignorance, and that is the truth and not the lie.

Viewed from the train, all this truth appears to be a game of words, but it must be seen with the eyes of those who remain when the train goes. One should contemplate the railroad from the outside and realize that it is a living three-dimensional body and not a net of black lines on a white background as it appears on the maps. That white background is our countryside; full of truth and life, it is the guts and the source of the children of tomorrow. The progress of the Republic opposed to the interest of those who made it prosper, and no progress can be achieved until this relationship is changed. It will happen when the entire body is in a state of health and not just the euphoria of a severed head.

Translated by Alain Swietlicki

## Soccer and Popular Joy

Roberto Arlt

*Roberto Arlt (1900–1938) was a prolific writer and journalist who forged his literature from the marginal discourses and cultural practices of modern Buenos Aires in the 1920s and 1930s. The son of poor immigrant parents, completely self-taught, his literature and public persona represent the plebeian side of cultural modernization, in contrast with the artistic avant-garde. In his writings, popular culture is always linked to utopian revolution and political contestation. Besides several fictional works, he wrote a significant number of urban chronicles for the daily press that he called aguafuertes porteñas. In the following aguafuerte, “Yesterday I Saw the Argentines Win,” Arlt portrays the popular joy and sensual excess of an afternoon at a crowded soccer stadium, at a time when sports were becoming a democratic source of civic identification that went beyond social differences by creating a national community of (male) fans.*

You will say that I am the most extraordinary liar in the whole world from what I am going to tell you:

Yesterday was the first soccer game I ever saw in my twenty-nine years of existence, if you don't count as soccer the games that kids play with tiny balls and that all of us, when we were younger, took a try at to the detriment of our shoes and clothes.

Yes. The first game. So don't be surprised by the silly rubbish I'm going to write. . . .

A rotten orange smashed a crazed fan on the head. Forty thousand handkerchiefs whirled around in the air, and Ferreyra, with his magnificent kick, made the first goal. Not even a bunch of machine gunners could have made more noise than those eighty thousand hands that were applauding the Argentine success. So many people were clapping for the Argentine success. So many people were applauding behind my ears that the wind created by their hands buzzed by my cheeks. Then the enthusiasm died down, and I began to take notes. Here goes — so you'll see how a journalist works who doesn't half under-



Soccer stadium (1930). An afternoon at the soccer stadium. Courtesy Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires.

stand *football* (I think that's the way the British refer to it) does his job. Here's what I saw.

A poor man selling a broken umbrella to shade out the sun. A whole regiment of young boys selling bricks, boxes, tables, oranges, apples, soft drinks, newspapers, pictures of soccer players, caramels, etc., etc.

An Argentine player fell down. Cherro missed a goal; immediate applause. And, from the box seats, applause galore. The "Little Bull from Mataderos" was passing by a section of admirers. Behind me a voice shouts: "That Evaristo is center stage all afternoon." (And it was Evaristo who made the second goal with Ferreyra.)

Another rotten orange burst open on the head of the same crazed fan. Hundreds of rascals look on and laugh.

Cherro misses another goal, and some guy who is hiding behind his mustache goes out of control to the rhythm of the worst of words.

The stands are packed with spectators. Over these forty thousand *porteños* some mysterious hand continuously sends flying missiles that fall between the air and the sun with the brilliance of silver leaves. Uruguayan and Argentine players are circled around a player who is lying on the ground. It was a kick to the neck. There's no point in talking about it; sports are wholesome.

Yet another rotten orange lands on the head of the same crazed fan. Ferreyra prances around, happy. There's no point in discussing it; he's the best player

on the team besides Evaristo. "Ferreyra is number one!" shouts someone in the stands. And another: "What a scientific game."

### *From a Rooftop*

South of the stadium of San Lorenzo of Almagro, on La Plata Avenue, there is a building with a pointed roof and various skylights. Suddenly, people began to look over there, and, from the two skylights, just like ants, curious spectators navigating on four legs were going to install themselves on the ridge of the roof. Something like in the movies.

With this the first half ended. Then, from behind the wire fence that separates general admission from the reserved seats, I saw the fellow who had gotten hit with the rotten oranges leaving. The back of his neck was dripping with rotten garbage, his face was worn out from clinging to the fence for so long, and he sank down on the cement walkway. To the great satisfaction of the hurler of all those oranges. Now the ground became a gypsy encampment. I began to walk around.

There was one thing that got my attention, and that was the water that continually fell from the top of the stands. I asked a spectator why they were doing all that watering, and the spectator answered me that they were Argentine citizens who, within their constitutional rights, answered Nature's call from the heights. I also saw a formidable thing, and it was a bunch of young kids hanging from the iron structures that supported the stands, that is to say, from the back sides where only the feet of the spectators could be seen. All these boys competed with each other in grabbing the legs of spectators, to whom they were invisible. . . .

I left the playing field a few minutes before Evaristo made the second goal. All the gates on La Plata Avenue were decked out with magnificent young girls. Boy are there beautiful girls on this La Plata Avenue! All at once a thunder of applause burst from the crowd; from high in the stands an arm with a signal flag made a mysterious sign on the celestial background, and all the girls suddenly raised their voices in a shout:

"The Argentines won: 2 to 0."

It's been a long time since the *porteños* could play with courage and decisiveness.

The Uruguayan players gave the impression of developing a more harmonious game, but the Argentines, even if they were rowdy, worked with the only thing that brings success in life: enthusiasm.

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