

Upsetting the Equilibrium: the Dramatic Arc in Football Commentary

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Abstract

The football commentator's responsibility has lately broadened to incorporate drama and suspense in his utterances. It is necessary to examine the commentators' application of these performance attributes to transform the factual proceedings of football matches into narrative. This study establishes that television football commentary draws on Aristotle's dramatic arc to infuse narrativity into his craft. My argument is that football commentators use the conflicts inherent in football matches to enhance viewers' emotional experiences by presenting them with moments of exposition, inciting incidents, rising actions, climax, falling action and denouement. Consequently, the events mediated shift from a state of equilibrium to disequilibrium and back to a new equilibrium. I conclude that Aristotle's dramatic arc gives football commentary the requisite narrativity that transforms it into a form of narrative.

Key Words: *equilibrium, the dramatic arc, inciting incident, rising moment, climax, falling action, denouement.*

1.0 Introduction

One of the most enduring narrative structures is Aristotle's dramatic arc, a storytelling structure that plots the main turning points of a story. Aristotle applied the arc to a unified plot structure of drama. Gustav Freytag magnified Aristotle's structure to apply sketchily to narrative. Subsequently, writers have conveniently used the structure to conceptualize the various dramatic stages in a wide range of conventional narrative forms. The dramatic arc structure has, however, never been thought to exist in works deemed non-literary, such as television football commentary.

1.1 Background to the Study

Narrative refers to a type of communication which portrays a sequence of events that are both triggered and encountered by characters, according to Czarniawska (2004). Narratologists readily acknowledge the narrative qualities of fairy tales, novels, films, and epic poems. However, narratological studies have barely scrutinized the football commentator's recently acquired function of fashioning his craft into narrative. The commentator's responsibility has lately broadened to incorporate drama, suspense and other key elements that characterize the narrative form. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the commentators' application of these performance attributes to transform the factual proceedings of football matches into narrative.

The commentaries tend to create an emotional curve that directs the audience to a complete appreciation of the storytelling exercise. This is in line with Aristotle's understanding of narrative structure as outlined in his dramatic arc, and modified by Gustav Freytag to embrace six basic stages. The exposition presents the principal characters and establishes the scene. The inciting incident introduces a conflict, which powers the rest of the story. The rising action is the stage at which the intensity of events increases and the conflicts grow. This leads to the climax – the turning point where events and situations change either for better or for worse. Next, there is the falling action where suspense is prolonged as complications are met head-on and questions are acknowledged and occasionally answered. The main character predictably surmounts the conflict at this stage. The story ends with a resolution or denouement, the point where the pending concerns are settled and status quo is restored. Madej and Lee(2012) suggest that the dramatic arc directs a narrative to begin with a state in which any potentially conflicting forces are in equilibrium. This state is upset by some action which

triggers a succession of events. Eventually, order is established with a reinstatement of equilibrium in the fiction world.

Aristotle's dramatic arc was meant to be applied to the genre of drama. However, Pearce (1998) suggested that the commentary of a game may follow a storyline similar to the emotional curve of the arc. According to him, at the heart of the game is a dynamic conflict between the teams and sub conflicts among individual players. The narrative is heightened by various subplots such as conflicts between team mates, personal accounts of players or regional contentions. Although Pearce's assertions were based on the commentary of basketball, Aristotle's arc can be perceived in the utterances of TV football commentators. This may imply that either football commentary falls under the realm of narrative or Aristotle's dramatic arc may provide narrativity to a non-literary form such as football commentary. I argue in this paper that the use of the dramatic arc in football commentary gives it the necessary literariness to propel it into the sphere of narrative.

2.0 Literature Review

The study establishes that football commentary exhibits numerous significant literary elements that categorize it as narrative. One of these elements is what Propp (1984) terms as a narrative function. According to him, a narrative function involves events that generate the narrative when arranged in a sequence. In football commentary, such events emanate from the field of play, within and around the stadium and from any other setting the cameras may capture. Secondly, a narrative form requires a text in order to present events and portray the narrative characters. According to Huisman (1997), the terms used to describe texts are usually the same names given to genres. The corpus of narrative texts has traditionally consisted of novels, novellas, short stories, fairy tales and newspaper articles. Over the years, however, there has been an explosion of other forms of narrative texts in all aspects of literature, according to Polkinghorne (1988). Wortham (2001) defines a narrative text as one in which a narrative agent tells a story. In other words, a narrative text is conveyed to recipients using a medium. Wortham asserts that a medium connotes a set of signs produced by an agent who conveys the text. This agent is a fictional spokesman technically christened the narrator. Thus, taking into account the interpretation of a text advanced above, football commentary presents itself as a form of narrative text created from the game of football.

The third key element of narrative is what Berger (1997) calls binary framing. Stories are organized in terms of opposites, such as heroes and villains, good and evil, or beautiful and ugly. According to Berger, stories revolve around central characters who are archetypal, with character traits which make them straightforwardly identified as heroes or villains. The presence of binary framing in football is glaringly manifested in the actions of the competing teams, individual players and nation or city rivalries. The aspects of binary framing depicted in football commentary play a key role in enhancing conflict, which is a major feature of narrative plot.

In addition, Carr (1991) introduces the aspect of language as used by members of a cultural community. Language is very closely linked to social conventions, and so members of a linguistic community can make out the intended aim of narrative and react accordingly. Consequently, narrative reveals a strong relationship between previous knowledge the audience had and the emerging information. The audience's reaction, argues Carr, involves putting the narrative to its intended use, such as internalizing the moral of the story. Watson and Hill(2006) state that each narrative genre encompasses an assortment of signifiers and conventions that the

audience recognizes. The audience can also realize when these conventions are contravened. Watson and Hill posit that familiarity with routines forms a dynamic liaison between the encoder and the decoder, which is central to the responsiveness of narration genres. Commentators elicit audience responsiveness by making references to widely acclaimed football events and characters and drawing upon apposite football register and jargon in their utterances.

Rudrum (2005), however, observes that all these elements fall short of qualifying a text as narrative in the absence of what he terms narrativity. Sturgess (1992) describes narrativity as a function of a pattern of signals that creates a text from a sequence of events. Prince (1995) asserts that a text qualifies to be narrative owing to the degree that it demonstrates narrativity. The more the repertoires set into play during the dispensation of a narrative sequence, the more the sequence ascribes to narrativity. Prince argues that narrativity must involve the structural interrelation between the various parts of the narrative whole. Watson and Hill push this assertion further, arguing that for narrativity to be achieved, an event that generates a state of disequilibrium or imbalance occurs, altering irrepressibly the characters' initial status of stability.

The emergent state of affairs has to be resolved, and in the resolution, the audience will decipher core meanings. This argument agrees with Todorov's transformational aspect of narrative. According to him, narrative derives narrativity from the transformation of the sequence of events from equilibrium through disequilibrium and back to a new equilibrium. The unfolding of an action sieves through a narrative process that methodically distorts it, and every distortion constitutes a new narrative link. This transformational movement is based on Aristotle's Arc of narrative structure, which has been applied to classify a broad spectrum of texts, comprising novels, novellas, short stories and fairy tales as narrative. The listing, however, disregards football commentary. This study establishes that TV football commentators adopt Aristotle's Arc of narrative structure in their utterances to infuse aspects of narrativity. The arc helps them trace the sequence of events from a state of equilibrium through disequilibrium and to a new equilibrium.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

This study utilized narratology as a theoretical framework. The term narratology was invented by Tzvetan Todorov in 1969, and it was developed out of structuralism and Russian formalism. At times, narratology is referred to as the study of narrative. According to Groden, Kreiswirth, and Szeman (2012), narratology aims at defining the narrative-specific conventions governing narrative production and presentation. Narratology also delves into what makes one form of narrative differ from another, and in so doing it incorporates various narrative forms.

Narratology explores the main narrative tools of structure that appear in narrative media. This exploration makes reference to concepts which are shared by all media and forms, and other models which describe specific forms within given media. Narratology employs the "constructionist" viewpoint which embraces the social nature of the construction of meaning. Thus, the representational procedure rather than the producer or the item being represented facilitates the manifestation of meaning. Narratology regards story and discourse as the most basic features of narrative representation. As stated by Genette (1988), in its formal bearing, narratology indicates the study of narrative discourse; while in its thematic form it connotes an inquiry into the progression of events and actions associated with this discourse.

4.0 Methodology

The study adopted the analytical research design. The researcher analyzed recorded television commentaries of three crucial 2014 FIFA World Cup matches broadcast by BBC and ESPN. The commentaries were recorded from Super Sport; a South African group of television channels owned by Multi choice and carried on the DS tv satellite platform. A television set connected to a satellite dish, a DVD recorder and blank digital versatile discs were used to record live transmissions of the selected commentaries. The researcher highlighted and coded specific phrases, sentences, paragraphs and ideas that explicitly signified the existence of the dramatic arc. Eventually, the researcher critically analyzed the pre-stated objective through a systematic assessment of the coded material. Narrative, a qualitative data presentation format was used to present data collected; with direct quotes and paraphrases used to support and illustrate the stated objective.

5.0 Results and Discussion

This investigation establishes that football commentary achieves narrativity by following a storyline similar to the emotional curve of Aristotle's dramatic arc. Pearce (1998) argues that at the heart of a game is a dynamic conflict between the teams and sub conflicts among individual players. Pearce calls this the experiential aspect. The narrative is heightened by the augmentary subject matter of media reporting at the viewer's disposal during the game. This content entails various subplots such as conflicts between team mates, personal accounts of players or regional contentions. Although Pearce based his assertions on the commentary of basketball, this study demonstrates that football commentary can follow a curve similar to Aristotle's dramatic arc. By pursuing this arc football commentary ends up creating a meaningful narrative from the proceedings of a football match.

5.1 The Exposition

The exposition presents the major characters and sets the scene. In football commentary the major participants in the game are made known to the spectators. These overviews begin with the commentators introducing themselves. Ordinarily, there is a main match commentator and a color or expert commentator. Next to be presented are the match officials, the coaches, teams and government officials that accompany the teams. Team captains, top players or any controversially notable players are typically pinpointed by the commentators for exclusive mention. Exposition is well illustrated by Steve Watson and Martin Keown in the BBC commentary of the quarter final match between Brazil and Germany. The commentators begin by introducing themselves before presenting the major performers in the match. Watson is the main match commentator while Keown will be the expert commentator.

The commentators use exposition to create a sense of despondency to the Brazilian fans. The Brazilian team line-up is read to spectators, and one name that features prominently at this stage is that of Neymar, the immensely gifted Brazilian striker who, paradoxically, is going to forego the game due to injury. So decisive is Neymar's place in the Brazil team that their national anthem is played with the player's shirt held high. Also unavailable is Thiago Silva, the Brazil captain who had been suspended in the team's previous game. Brazil's prospects of winning the game indeed appear precarious in the absence of their most polished players. According to Watson, Brazil lost the match the last time they played without Neymar and Thiago Silva in the team. Coincidentally, that was during the quarter final of 2010 World Cup against the Netherlands. Since then Neymar has featured in every Brazil game and they have won. The veneration of the two Brazilian players enhances the hero worship motif that has for long been associated with Brazilian football. Watson is also keen to present statistics which portray them as the favorites to win the match. According to him, Brazil have

played 66 competitive games since the team was last beaten at home, and they are five times World Cup winners.

In contrast, the most decorated German player is Miroslav Klose who is playing his 23rd World Cup finals match. He has scored 15 world cup goals, equal to Brazil's Ronaldo, and has played in four World Cup semi-finals. Germany are three times victors and have reached the semi-final or better in 12 of the last 16 world cups. Most revealingly though is the fact that they have never beaten Brazil in a competitive game. Watson also introduces the two coaches; and while he says very little about Germany's Joachim Loew, he is quick to point out that the game is Scholari's 3rd world cup semi-final: one with Portugal and two with Brazil. Watson is here propagating a thinly veiled assumption that Brazil are the favorites, though somewhat marginally.

The most spectacular introduction is reserved for the centre referee of the match, Marco Antonio Rodriguez Moreno. According to Watson, this Mexican referee has been entrusted with the match by FIFA "despite missing Suarez bite." Watson is referring to an incident during Italy's final group stage game against Uruguay in which Luis Suárez, the Uruguayan top striker, bites Giorgio Chiellini, an Italian defender on the shoulder before Suárez himself tumbles, theatrically clutching his face. After the biting incident, an apparently clueless Rodriguez walks away from the incident without taking any action. As the Italian players protest to the referee for not penalizing Suárez, Uruguay win a corner kick and score to secure a 1–0 triumph and qualify for the last 16 at the expense of Italy. Watson is tactfully disparaging the tournament's organizers for settling on such a disreputable referee to preside over such a crucial match. But the rationale behind the elaborate preamble is to present to the audience the main characters in the narrative. Additionally, the commentator also attempts to heighten the viewers' sense of suspense and interest.

Similarly, the Brazil versus Colombia match called by Ian Darke and Steve Macmanaman for ESPN bears an extravagant exposition. Darke is the main commentator and even though he says nothing about himself, he elaborately presents his expert partner, Macmanaman as "the former Liverpool, England and Real Madrid star." Darke is indisputably profiling his counterpart's résumé in order to render credibility to Macmanaman's projected specialist analysis. And to stimulate the spectator's expectations of the match, Darke describes it as a "potentially heavy South American cocktail." The players stride into the pitch from the dressing room holding each other's shoulders from behind to form a single file, a spectacle Darke describes as a "familiar routine" but wonders whether it will be "familiar results" at the final whistle. Brazil has dominated the previous encounters between the two nations and so Darke is applying this rhetorical device to prepare his audience for either a likely Brazil win or a shock defeat by the Colombians.

Exposition is extremely theatrical in the final game played between Argentina and Germany at Maracana Stadium. The match commentators are still Ian Darke and Steve Macmanaman. To begin with, the trophy is purposefully placed on display in full view of cameras and the spectators. The match ball is an Adidas Brazuca embellished with inscriptions of the two teams and the event. The ball bears glittering colors that reflect those of the Brazilian flag, the official FIFA World Cup logo and the dazzlingly colored bands worn by the Brazilian fans. It is displayed at the centre circle next to the World Cup trophy to symbolize the imminent conflict that is about to unfold. The clear-cut irony here is that despite the copiousness of the Brazilian colors in the stadium, Brazil have already been eliminated from the tournament.

Commentators also use exposition to play into the participants' preconceived notions about competing teams and certain players. In the Germany versus Argentina match, for instance, it is instructive to note that as the Argentine National anthem is played, exceptional attention is focused on Lionel Messi, their most important player. In contrast, however, the whole of Germany team is shown during the rendition of their national anthem. The commentators are playing to the perception advanced throughout the tournament that the Argentine team is a one man's show, while the German team, popularly known as the "German Machine", play like a unit.

The centre referee, Nikola Rizzoli is intriguingly in charge of a game involving Argentina in this tournament for the 3rd time. His appointment is, however, quite contentious, having been the target of criticism from the Belgium coach, Marc Wilmots after the 1-0 quarter-final defeat by Argentina. Wilmots faulted the Italian official for giving preferentiality to Argentina and Lionel Messi, claiming that Rizzoli never gave fouls against Argentina. The understandable insinuation here is that Rizzoli is likely to favor Argentina, though Darke is quick to point out that Germany are happy with him. The coaches are also introduced, and while nothing is said about the Germany coach, Loew, Darke describes the Argentine tactician, Sabella as "impulsive as ever". The implication of the silence regarding the Germans is that the German team and their coach are either confident of a win or have resigned to a thrashing by Messi and company. It can also be a deliberate attempt by the commentator to keep the audience guessing.

5.2 The Inciting Moment

The inciting incident is the first important plot point in a narrative. This point refers to the moment when an event changes the course of things and thrusts the protagonist into the main action of the story. Ideally, the inciting incident happens to the protagonist since he has the most at stake in the story, as stated by Campbell (2008). A game of football presents innumerable diverse interests represented by players, fans, teams and officials, and so establishing the protagonist depends on the privileged point of view. For the television audience which is not physically at the heart of the drama, the privileged point of view that determines the protagonist is that of the narrator. This point of view, however, is hardly unprejudiced as it is persuaded by deliberations such as the home team status, the favorites to win the game based on form and FIFA rankings, the pedigree of players and the history of previous encounters between the two teams competing. The protagonist is presently discerned from the utterances of the commentator in relation to these considerations. And as in all narrative forms the primary conflict is ascertained and associated with an objective for the protagonist. In football, the primary aim of the protagonist is a score, victory or qualification for a subsequent stage.

The inciting incident presents a conflict which undermines the favorite's status of the protagonist. Ordinarily, the inciting incident occurs at the initial stages of the narrative plot. However, in football commentary, the nature of the inciting moment is somewhat different from what is expected in drama since the exact point of its occurrence remains unknown even to the narrator. Thus the spontaneous nature of its occurrence takes the narrator and the audience equally by surprise.

In the Brazil versus Germany match the protagonist is clearly Brazil, as demonstrated by the utterances of BBC's Steve Wilson and Martin Keown: Brazil are the tournament hosts, they have won the World Cup a record five times, they have never lost to Germany in a competitive match and they have never lost on home soil for 66 years. This state of equilibrium is, nevertheless, rattled in the 10th minute of the match when Germany win a corner kick. The ensuing kick is feebly defended by Brazil and Muller fires Germany in front. The goal presents "a big test for Brazilian character," according to Wilson, which prompts Keown to say: "we'll see what they are made of." Thus, the goal sets the inciting moment which sparks off a flurry of intensive reactions as Brazil endeavor to recoup their favorite status.

The inciting incident is projected to happen to the person who has the most at stake in the narrative events. In the tournament's opening match between Brazil and Croatia, Brazil are portrayed as the clear-cut favorites and hence the team with the most at stake. The match is also called for ESPN by Ian Darke and Steve Macmanaman. As the players stream in, Darke comments poetically: "Brazil ... what a burden of expectation for them!" He recollects Filipe Scolari, the Brazil coach announcing in an interview that "this is our time ... if there is a team better than us ... but they will have to show it."

Darke underscores the lofty status of Brazil by contrasting them with Croatia, their opponents in the match. Brazil are coming to the tournament having won all the five matches of the Confederations Cup the previous year and according to him, "the basic message is that whenever it matters, they never lose at home, and they haven't done that in a competitive game since 1975." Croatia, on the other hand, is "40 times smaller than Brazil" and only came into existence "after the war that tore the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s." Their football CV has not been impressive either, having been knocked out in the group stage in the last two World Cups they contested and, as stated by Darke, "they didn't make it four years ago." Thus having painted them as minnows, Darke concludes that "Croatia is determined to spoil the party" for the Brazilians. He quotes the Croatia's coach, Kovac who had said that "they won't close shop – they will go for it." This might not be possible going by the passion and vigor with which Brazil players sing their national anthem, a manner Darke describes as "a show of maniac desire."

Brazil's favorite's standing is undermined in the 10th minute when Marcelo, their left full back scores an own goal, thus presenting the inciting incident. A close-up of the befuddled face of Marcelo defines the conflict created by this unanticipated turn of events. Darke describes the match as "a nervy start, not at all in their script." And to elucidate his opinion, he points out that it is the first time Croatia have scored against Brazil in their World Cup history, an incident he describes as "a nightmare start for the host nation." And to pile on the conflict occasioned by the inciting moment, Darke says that Brazil were never behind in the Confederations Cup last year, and that this is their first own goal in their World Cup history. But he also observes that there is plenty of time to turn matters around, a remark that seems to pave the way for the ensuing rising action.

5.3 The Rising Action

The inciting incident gives way to the rising action. This, according to Freytag, is the stage at which the intensity of events increases and the conflict grows. The basic conflict gathers force and the audience begin to sense the rising tension this conflict radiates. Other obstacles that further confound the basic conflict and foil the protagonist's endeavors to achieve his objectives are ushered in. These secondary hurdles, which may emanate from the antagonist or other less significant rivals, help to create dramatic tension. In football commentary, inciting incidences are more numerous than in other forms of narrative. The built up tension may

be relieved by a goal scored or an attack successfully defended. Whatever happens, however, the play must go on until full time. Therefore, the intensity of the conflict notwithstanding, the audience are aware that the final resolution is actually time bound.

The manifestation of the rising action moment in commentary is most fittingly elucidated in Steve Wilson's BBC utterances in the semi-final match between Brazil and Germany. Wilson uses the inciting moment occasioned by the goal scored by Germany as a spring board to present new conflicts that are awfully aggravating to the Brazilian team and fans. He exacerbates their qualms when he states that the Germans are "too dangerous on the break and Brazil so open as they counter." And to intensify the surging tension Wilson describes the Germany midfield as "exceptional." He accentuates the enormity of a probable Brazil loss to the Germans by reminding the host nation about their past football superiority:

... "66 competitive matches Brazil since they were last beaten on home soil in a game that mattered...back in 1975 Copa America Peru beating them on this ground.

Brazil are the favorites going by past glory and their host status, and so the team as a character is the narrative's protagonist. Germany as the antagonists are determined to create more hurdles for Brazil and in the process aggravate more tension and drama. Klose scores the second goal for Germany in the 22nd minute and Wilson points out that "Brazil have a mountain to climb in their own backyard". According to Wilson, "they look lost." Wilson's words are validated when the camera focusses on the painted face of a young female Brazilian fan with brimming eyes and tautened lips. And referring to the face, Wilson observes that "tears are not too far away already." But the image that epitomizes the magnitude of the new conflict is that of the Brazilian coach Scolari, who is shown clutching the barriers behind the dugout like a man frenziedly groping for an escape route.

Brazil's efforts to pull a goal back are thwarted each time they make an attempt. Wilson wonders how Brazil would "shake up the unshakable." He comments on the forlorn image of Bernard, the Brazil striker who breaks through on goal only to be gruffly blocked by the huge body of Neuer, the German goalie whom Wilson refers to as "the man mountain." The mountain imagery denotes the inevitability of the fall of the protagonist. More events that happen in quick succession unfold and the narrator capitalizes on them to further verbalize the rising action. This prepares the audience for the moment of a predictable third German goal whose urgency the narrator captures with a few incomplete but succinct sentences: "Muller ... it could be embarrassing ... it is three ... Toni Kroos ... Brazil have fallen apart inside 25 minutes ... Germany 3: Brazil 0. For a team of Brazil's pedigree, however, the situation is reversible, though the chances could be quite distant, but not so after the fourth Germany goal which is going to be discussed later.

In the tournament's opening match between Brazil and Croatia the rising action is characterized by near misses at both ends of the pitch. The rising action, however, shows the distasteful probability of Brazil squandering their impeccable record in this match. After observing raid after raid on the host nation's goal, the narrator says that Brazil "are really feeling the shock waves." One of the many frustrating misses comes in the 14th minute of play when Neymar, despite making an acrobatic aerial leap, completely misses a cross from Oscar right in the face of the Croatian goal. Darke says acerbically that "they need this magic now – Neymar." And in the wake of this appalling miss, the narrator adds that Brazil haven't lost in the opening game of the World Cup since 1934. The choice of the word "magic" may imply that unlike in the past when Brazil would be expected to reach the final of the tournament, it would require supernatural intervention to win their first

match. With all this misfiring Darke remarks: As we promised you there will be two thousand stories this month. I think we got one already – Brazil going behind in the opening match.

Interestingly, some of the shock waves emanate from very improbable quarters such as the state of the stadium, which Darke says “got only ready in time.” According to him, “some of the lights have gone out and the stadium will get dark. There is no floodlight ... half-light in patches.” Such a situation might be portentous, given that the match will have to be discontinued to the chagrin of the host nation. The failing light are emblematic of Brazil’s shambolic development of the requisite infrastructure for the staging of the tournament as well as the team’s awful performance in the game so far. Thus, as observed by the narrator, when they finally resume their usual playing rhythm and get an equalizer, “the lights have gone on for Brazil.”

And in the field, more events that accentuate the rising action keep on occurring. In the 26th minute of play, for instance, Neymar commits a foul by elbowing a Croatian player. It is a yellow card as per the narrator – “the first yellow card of the World Cup” which goes to Neymar, Brazil’s star forward. The call precipitates some pushing and shoving among players from both teams. Brazil, as stated by the narrator, think that Croatia are making” too much of this,” though replays show Neymar evidently making the infringement. Soon, Julio Cesar, Brazil’s goalkeeper is forced to make a desperate save as a result of what the narrator calls “another menacing attack from Croatia.” With all these frantic moments for the host nation the narrator concludes that “this might be the most difficult game for Brazil.”

However, Brazil get a goal against the run of play, thanks to Neymar. The goal does not by all means define the climax since it only evens out Croatia’s goal. But the narrator draws on the occurrence to present more rising action. He says “Neymar didn’t quite get hold of it ... it doesn’t matter, because he scores it.” As the camera focusses on the crowds as they break into rapture and frenzy of wild celebrations, and as the players and team officials enthusiastically hug Neymar for the goal, the narrator exclaims: “Look at the relief ... look at it! According to him, “a nation rejoices, and that (goal) should have Brazil to settle.” The situation created here reverberates beyond the events in the field of play. The narrator says that from where they sit they can see outside the stadium “fireworks everywhere going off ... it is extraordinary.” This moment, according to him, sets the mood not only for the present match, but for the rest of the tournament as is evident in these remarks: “Welcome to the World Cup, ladies, gentlemen, children ... I hope your appetite is whetted.” This is also the narrator’s style of readying the audience for the impending climax of the plot.

5.4 The Climax

The climax is the turning point where events and situations change, either for better or for worse. It marks a change of destiny in the protagonist’s undertakings. This change of fortune, as per Aristotle, occurs in total defiance to the expectations of the audience, though it is nevertheless an inevitable aftermath of the antecedent proceedings. At three goals down, Brazil still have a credible prospect of turning the match around. But Germany’s fourth goal diminishes all hope, hence creating appropriate circumstances for the narrator’s presentation of the climax. The narrator captures the moment by stating that “Brazil is being humiliated, humbled and taken apart, and that the fantasy is well and truly dead.” The situation has turned murkier for Brazil, the favorites at the beginning of the match but now desperately running after a game they were primed to win.

The narrator underscores the culmination of Brazil's annihilation by stating: "I'm afraid the dream is gone." It seems clear after the goal that Brazil have conceded defeat. The narrator describes them as being "so poor defensively," with no one getting tight ... like a testimonial match." To reinforce the utterances, the camera captures Brazil's apparent submission to defeat by streaming the faces of Brazil's fans that reveal all manner of emotions: bemusement, disinterestedness, embarrassment, mockery, but all of which find convergence at a state of acceptance of the heavy trouncing. At the start of the second half of the match, the camera shifts to the many unoccupied seats in the stadium, a state the narrator attributes to people who "have not returned from half time or those who didn't intend to return". This confirms that the fourth and fifth goals, which are scored in quick succession, present the perfect background for the presentation of the climax of the narration.

The above example demonstrates a situation where the climax can present the fortunes of the protagonist changing for worse. But the change occasioned by the turning point can also benefit the protagonist as exemplified by the tournament's opening match between Brazil and Croatia. A suitable atmosphere for a climax is created in the 68th minute when Brazil are controversially awarded a penalty kick after Croatia's Dejan Lovren appears to have brought down Brazil's Fred in the penalty area. There are wild protests from the Croatian players as the referee, Yuishi Nishimura points to the penalty post as he comically runs clear of the raucously remonstrating Croats. The narrator terms the call "a massive fiber that the referee Nishimura has given to Brazil." And on seeing a video replay of the incident he exclaims dramatically "no! no! no! no! no! ... never in a million years." He describes the fake penalty call as "the first major, major refereeing controversy of the World Cup." Neymar scores the spot kick and the narrator captures this climactic moment by remarking that Neymar has done it again ... Brazil has taken the lead 2:1 amid raging controversy. Thus this poor decision by the referee and the resultant penalty kick and goal define the turning point in the match.

5.5 The Falling Action

The falling action is what occurs after the climax of the story, leading towards the resolution of what happens. Falling action concludes the narrative and leads toward the resolution. In other words, it poses the direct effects of the climax. The conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist is settled, with the protagonist losing to the antagonist. The former realizes epiphany, the moment in the story where he attains awareness and comes to appreciate his place in the scheme of things.

The semi-final match between Brazil and Germany mentioned earlier presents the spot-on conditions for the falling action to unfold. As argued before, the fourth Germany goal clearly puts the match beyond the reach of Brazil. The narrator says that after the fourth goal "it is about restoring pride" for the Brazilians. The camera buttresses this observation by picking images that unveil rage, anguish and disbelief, the most expressive of which are the close-up shots of the distraught face of a female Brazilian fan, the sorry appearance of a bespectacled young spectator desperately trying to cover his mouth with a Coca Cola can and the long shot of other spectators struggling to turn their faces away from the goings on in the field. The emotions and reactions portrayed by these shots dominate the scene, and against the background the narrator states:

The fantasy is well and truly dead ... it has turned into near silence here in Belo Horizonte ... it has got to a stage where Germany have stopped celebrating their goals.

After the fifth Germany goal the narrator calls the Brazilian situation “absolute humiliation” and lets “those who have just joined us” know that “the score board is correct.” According to him, with score at 5:0, “Brazil can only salvage a tiny snippet of self-respect in the game.” This realization is a direct consequence of the climax which occurred when the decisive fourth goal was scored. The protagonists have already acknowledged the fact that they are not proceeding to the Maracana for the tournament final. When Willian comes on for Brazil as a substitute the narrator comments: “Willian does not seem thrilled to play, but he is on” and the Brazilian crowd “... many of them are off.” All these reactions attest to the Brazilians’ appreciation of epiphany. The narrator wonders where the Brazilian players will go after the humiliation in Belo Horizonte. The answer, which further reaffirms the protagonists’ moment of epiphany, is that “they will go to Brasilia for the third place play-off and then go into hiding.” The Brazilians realize, according to the narrator, that they “have been third best rather than second best.”

After the climax of the story, the plot drifts towards the resolution of the conflict. This is the case in Brazil versus Croatia tournament’s opener. The physical and psychological reactions of the Croats, as well as the remarks of the narrator show a team rapidly drifting towards despair. For instance, the camera shifts to Pletikosa with his hands on his head in mourning for failing to stop Neymar’s shot that he appeared to lay his hands on. The narrator says that Pletikosa will “have a long time thinking about what happens just there.” According to him, there are now more frequent raids on the Croatia’s goal than before. Neymar, for instance, is quite a handful prompting the narrator to describe his movements as so clever ... the only way to stop him is for Rakitic (for Croatia) to foul him.”

5.6 Denouement

Denouement is the resolution of the conflict in fiction. The narrative ends with the protagonists getting worse off than they were at the beginning of the narrative. But the main character experiences epiphany which propels him to face the world from a new viewpoint. Denouement also affords the audience a moment of catharsis or the purgation of emotions. In the Germany versus Brazil match, the last two goals scored by Schurrle for Germany are almost inconsequential, and so is the last minute goal scored by Oscar for Brazil: the outcome of the match has already been determined in the Germans’ favor, and the present situation has to be put into perspective. According to the narrator, the Germans are “the overriding favorites” to win the world Cup, and so Oscar’s last gasp goal has only “given them something to work on before the final.” Thus, when Bernard for Brazil makes a terrible miss in front of an open goal, the narrator calls it “a shocking finish,” which is emblematical of the capitulation of the entire team.

Intriguingly, the Brazilian fans find fault with their own team rather than with the match officials or the opposing players. For instance, whenever the camera picks Fred, the Brazilian striker who has already been substituted, the crowd jeers and whistles at him occasioning the narrator to say: “listen to the reactions ... whenever his picture is on the big screen.” Furthermore, in order to express their acceptance of defeat, the Brazilian fans give a standing ovation to the Germans rather than to their own team. The narrator says that “the Brazilians ... have stood up and applauded the team that has dismantled their heroes, limb from limb.”

Indisputably, the Brazilians now cherish the supremacy of the Germans, so much that when their team pulls one goal back the narrator calls it “the most pointless of World Cup goals.” The match winds down as a tragedy to the Brazilians, and in line with all tragedies, they can now comprehend the world from a new perspective. This new standpoint is captured aptly by the narrator who construes that “Brazilian football will

have to go through a period of intense self-examination after this.” At this point the players and their supporters experience a cathartic moment which the narrator captures by stating that “the fans are singing ... I don’t think they are singing ‘we can win.’” In denouement, all the pieces of the dramatic puzzle fall into place as the narrator poetically suggests: “Brazil ... thoroughly unforgivable performance, Germany ... thoroughly unforgettable performance.” Possible future ramifications of the game’s outcome are also hinted at: “Some players (Brazilian) may never recover from the loss ... Scolari will try and protect his players by taking the blame.”

5.7 Conclusion

The commentaries analyzed show a methodical application of Aristotle’s dramatic arc in the utterances of the commentators. Exposition occurs when the major participants in the events are introduced to the audience. It has also been established that inciting incident undermines the favorite’s status of the protagonist. The rising action arises with the increase in the intensity of the conflict and tension. The climax marks a change of fortune in the endeavors of the protagonist. Thus the situation which has hitherto been sympathetic to the protagonist becomes unfavorable. The falling action resolves the conflict and leads toward the resolution. Denouement presents the resolution. The protagonist experiences epiphany which impels him to attain a new worldview. Briefly put, the events mediated attain narrativity by moving from a state of equilibrium to disequilibrium and then back to a new equilibrium. Additionally, the elements of conflict inherent in these matches enhance audience emotional experience by presenting characters, challenges and the fulfillment that result from the resolution. Thus the inclusion of Aristotle’s dramatic arc in football commentary propels the form into the realms of narrative.

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