

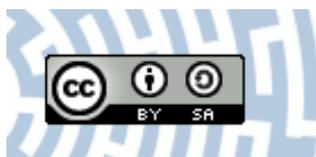


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Author: Ewa Wylęzek

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Ewa Wylężek

Tropes of Tauromachy:
Representations of Bullfighting
in Selected Texts of Anglophone Literature



UNIWERSYTET ŚLĄSKI
WYDAWNICTWO

Tropes of Tauromachy:
Representations of Bullfighting
in Selected Texts of Anglophone Literature

Dziękuję Profesorowi Zbigniewowi Białasowi
za nieocenione wsparcie
Dziękuję Rodzicom za wiarę we mnie

Dla M., z miłością

Ewa Wylężek

Tropes of Tauromachy:

Representations of Bullfighting
in Selected Texts of Anglophone Literature

Reviewer
Grzegorz Moroz

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Introduction

The Bull Myth(ologies)

The 2014 exhibition *Picasso Dalí Goya. Tauromachia—The Bullfight* held by the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, Poland, showed that the interest in the subject of bulls and bullfighting is more than noticeable and proves that it occupies a significant space in contemporary culture. The works by some of the world's most recognizable artists: Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí, and Francisco Goya comment on the figure of a bull and the phenomenon of tauromachy. The former stands for physical strength, fertility, and drive, whereas the latter is a relatively broad term that refers to a centuries-long tradition of fighting bulls. This tradition, transformed and modified, is by no means forgotten and lends itself to readers of belles-lettres. A bull has been a leitmotif of the most prominent myths and legends of the ancient times as well as Western culture. The historical background I share offers the bull's presence at festivals, ferias, and religious and/or cultural ceremonies and rites. The interest of this book is, therefore, the complex meaning attached to the bull and its societal context, as well as to the changes the relation between a bull and a man has undergone, and whether it holds any significance contemporarily.

For centuries humanity has been fascinated by the figure of a bull. Cattle were of paramount importance even in the Paleolithic period as their presence and worth are confirmed by paintings on caves' walls in France or Spain. The famous Lascaux dis-

covery from between 28000 and 10000 BCE presents five bulls, cows, and big game. It is the earliest existing example of the artistic creation of people and demonstrates the significance of these animals to the survival of those people. They constructed pictorial equivalents of the animals they hunted and killed as it was considered crucial to “replace” the dead bulls, if only on a symbolic stratum.

Nowadays, bullfighting still provides a mirror for the elusive human condition and cultural tensions that occur within a collective, such as a fear of dying, sex, male/female relations. These concepts are investigated mainly in the context of Bakhtinian carnival that emphasizes the ludic element ever so enjoyed by humankind. I have decided to employ Mikhail Bakhtin’s theoretical standings on carnival since its willful and somewhat perverse aura corresponds to the controversial spectacle that *corrida* certainly is. Bakhtin acutely recognizes what constitutes the *carnival* sense of the world. For him, it is the familiar and free interaction between people, eccentric behavior, carnivalistic *mésalliances*, and profanation.¹ *Corrida* does indeed synthesize these elements as it brings together the unlikeliest members of society and welcomes otherwise appalling acts of violence. Such a perspective that introduces lax laws renders carnival an adequate methodological angle. Even more so, as there is a closeness between the Russian philosopher and Johan Huizinga whose study of play-element in culture and ludicity echoes the carnival. The way I approach their outlooks is that they both sense there is a world that is separated, opposed to the official one (that is not too prone to change). This “second” world resonates in ludic and carnivalesque activities and seeks to shake the thus existing echelon and taboos that accompany it as the non-serious reality revels in lower bodily stratum, vulgar humor, eroticism, and violence. Such a theoretical horizon for examining the notions of sport, game, play, and ritual allows the reader to contextualize

¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 122–123.

the phenomenon of bullfighting and notice meanings that may be, at first glance, disregarded. Ludicity was also studied by Sigmund Freud whose works should prove helpful while trying to confront the individual self, whether it is a person fighting a bull, observing a corrida or making love to a matador, and social pressures and processes that surround a person. Freud's works on death and love also support the claim that corrida could be seen as more than just a skirmish between a man and an animal.

* * *

In the realm of American literature, the work that marks the beginning of what I call *tauromachy* literature is of course *Death in the Afternoon*² by Ernest Hemingway. This 1932 book introduced the subject to Hemingway's readers in a highly romanticized manner and paved the way for contemporary writers who drew abundantly from the larger than life persona of Spain's beloved aficionado. He inspired, among others, Leslie Charters, whose 1947 translation of the biography of a matador *Juan Belmonte, Killer of Bulls*³ proved to be a great success, and Sidney Franklin, an American matador, who published an autobiography *Bullfighter from Brooklyn*⁴ in 1952. The very same year, yet another bestseller on bullfighting appeared, namely, *Matador*⁵ by Barnaby Conrad, which was of interest to the readers not only because of the intriguing topic but also because Conrad decided to write it in an experimental, patchwork-like manner. Another substantial contribution to the bullfighting genre was a 1957 publication of *Biography of the Bulls: An Anthology of Spanish Bullfighting*,⁶ edited by Rex Smith who collected various reports and representations of corrida.

² Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Scribners, 1996).

³ Juan Belmonte, *Juan Belmonte, Killer of Bulls*, trans. Leslie Charters (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1947).

⁴ Sidney Franklin, *Bullfighter from Brooklyn* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1952).

⁵ Barnaby Conrad, *Matador* (Ashland, OR: Blackstone Audio Inc, 1952).

⁶ Rex Smith, ed. *Biography of the Bulls: An Anthology of Spanish Bullfighting* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 1957).

Surprisingly, the contemporary literary stage does not shun away from the matter as well. An interesting addition to the studies of a bull, one that does not, however, directly correspond to bullfighting, is *Minos and the Moderns*⁷ by Theodore Ziolkowski. This 2008 work considers mythological texts that oscillate around the figure of a bull. Ziolkowski draws examples from literature, painting, opera, and sculpture and proves that the myths depicting bulls are still present in contemporary imagery and imagination. A year later, Cathy Gere published *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism*.⁸ It is a text that illustrates the fascination of Cretan bull-leaping and provides examples from literature and art. In 2011, Jason Webster, an American writer, published a novel *Or the Bull Kills You*⁹: a classic detective story that is a part of a larger series revolving around a police inspector Max Cámara. In this volume, Cámara is portrayed as a man who hates corrida but is forced to become a judge at a bullfighting festival when he discovers blood in the bullring. The same year, *Into the Arena—The World of the Spanish Bullfight*¹⁰ by Alexander Fiske-Harrison, an English author and journalist, appeared. Fiske-Harrison spent a year with Spanish bullfighters: he travelled with them and observed their work. His book reminds one of the Hemingwayesque manner of getting to know the subject: immersing oneself into the environment. (Fiske-Harrison even tried to enter the bullring himself.)

What is interesting, Polish literature also did not shun the theme of bullfighting. Dating back to 1905, one finds out that Henryk Sienkiewicz wrote extensively on the subject in question. His *Walka byków*¹¹ (the title could be translated into *The*

⁷ Theodore Ziolkowski, *Minos and the Moderns* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁸ Cathy Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁹ Jason Webster, *Or the Bull Kills You* (London: Vintage Books, 2011).

¹⁰ Alexander Fiske-Harrison, *Into The Arena—The World of the Spanish Bullfight* (London: Profile Books, 2011).

¹¹ Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Walka byków* (Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff, 1905).

Bulls' Fight or *The Fight of Bulls*) provides detailed descriptions of fights he attended and matadors that impressed him. A century later, Polish journalist Janusz Kasza has published *Korrida. Taniec i krew*¹² (which could be translated into *Corrida. Dance and Blood*), a comprehensive study of bullfighting with his personal commentaries and memories from Spain. On a global scale, the following year presented a slightly different take on bullfighting as J. M. Porup, an American author, published *Death on Taurus*¹³ that takes corrida into the future where a new species, that of a half-man half-bull, reigns. The creatures slaughter their victims as sacrifice to gods. This ritual resembles the ancient framework of bull-oriented activities. Interestingly enough, as the finishing touches were put to this book, the Warsaw opera house premieres *Carmen* (directed by a popular Polish actor Andrzej Chyra), showing the everlasting fascination with tauromachy.

This book seeks and then examines different tropes of bullfighting in the Anglophone literature of the 20th and 21st centuries. The basis for this work is that corrida, controversial as it may seem, constitutes a point of departure for interpretations that go beyond perceiving this phenomenon as an act of animal cruelty. The contemporary portrayals of corrida that I have gathered differ from the romantic and somewhat pompous representations that have been produced by, for example, Ernest Hemingway. The nine books I have selected were published between the years 2000 and 2013 and include, in chronological order, *On Bullfighting* by a Scottish writer Alison Louise Kennedy, *The Making of Toro* by an American Mark Sundeen, *A Cape in the Wind* written by Paul Moran, Jr., *Torera* created by the US-based R. Paul Sardanas and Tisha Garcia, *Two Matadors* written by Marcus McGee, *Matador; Mi Amor. A Story of Romance* by William Maltese, *Death of a Matador* by Everett Powers, *Matadora* by Elisabeth Ruth, and *The Last Matador* by Marc Newman. The common denominator for the works is naturally the subject matter, that is, cor-

¹² Janusz Kasza, *Korrida. Taniec i krew* (Kraków: Otwarte na świat, 2011).

¹³ J. M. Porup, *Death on Taurus* (Toronto: JMPorup, 2013).

rida. All of the authors are either British or American and capture an Anglophone protagonist against the Spanish background. The books belong into a popular literature genre which only goes to prove how vivid the traces of bullfighting are. Therefore, it is interesting to see how this theme could be approached within an academic scope. Moreover, some of the works I have selected employ irony or even directly question the very premise of the combat in the bullring. In others, the readers notice a reversal of a convention of bullfighting genre by, for instance, introducing a female matador. Such a change in approach towards this alluring phenomenon calls for new tools needed to read *corrida* in a richer and fuller way. For this reason, I refer to theoretical frameworks used in studies of games, play, sports, carnival, and ritual. The complexity of *corrida* renders it impossible to rely solely on one methodology and, instead, I will refer to the notions that share, if only temporarily, a quality of a topsy-turvy world.

First, I provide a historical draft of the bull and its presence in history. This part examines the role the bull has had in culture and societies, their ways, and mythologies. It is also here where I present the current state of literature on the subject and justify my attempt to explore the phenomenon of bullfighting.

Chapter One is an attempt to create a definition of *corrida*. I will confront bullfighting with theoretical frameworks of sport, game, and play, and decide whether treating bullfighting as one of these ludic concepts is justified. Ludicity—which, in my opinion, constitutes *corrida*'s background—allows to abandon rigid societal norms and encourages to celebrate transgressions. The latter is, to my way of thinking, a crucial element of bullfighting and I study this relation between *corrida* and transgression in the second chapter of this book. I also confront *corrida*'s phases and structure with theoretical standings of Sigmund Freud and George Bataille.

Chapter Two deals with *corrida*'s peculiar quality of facilitating transgressions of various kinds: societal, gender, and moral ones. Additionally, I will examine selected male and female representations of bullfighters and the way social restraints influence

their paths and perception of their profession by the audiences. This should demonstrate how being a matador is a way of establishing one's dominance and a role within a society by risking one's life.

Death, inevitable in every *corrida* is indeed an end of a spectacle but, at the same time, it is a beginning of a symbolic rebirth. In Chapter Two, I also offer an analysis of different descriptions of death taking place in the arena. This chapter should demonstrate that death is not an uncrossable line but can be tamed and even ridiculed. Mockery, absurd, irony, and grotesque are the concepts upon which I comment in Chapter Three that treats on carnival. From my point of view, *corrida* and carnival share numerous similarities and I avail myself of Bakhtin's theories as I look at selected works and their carnivalesque undertone. What is more, the aim of Chapter Three is, therefore, to demonstrate the reason for employing carnival and one of its most important qualities, grotesque, and to decide if it could be inscribed into a wider interpretive framework.

In Chapter Four, I discuss Johan Huizinga's notion of the magic circle in which the echelon is revered, and the community becomes more inclusive. Numerous passages from the selected works should prove that *corrida* is, also because of the magic circle, a sphere that is separate from the thus far familiar collective space.

The final Chapter Five provides a theoretical bridge between *corrida* and a ritual. Rituals are based on a collective and they mark transitions between significant phases of one's life. Selected depictions of *corrida* certainly raise the questions about the meaning of a bullfighters' gestures and habits. It should be seen that, within *corrida*, even brutal gestures, acquire a different, symbolic level. Expanding possible readings of bullfights is validated by the Anglophone literature of the 20th and 21st centuries on *corrida*, which shows that this phenomenon is not only a morbid form of entertainment for bloodthirsty tourists: it could be perceived as a form of carnival and ritual which allows, or even promotes, celebration of life and death.

Chapter One

Defining the Bullfight

Concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the other are not.¹

Ferdinand de Saussure's words should serve as a departure point for this chapter, as he explains a methodological predicament which *corrida* inhabits. *Corrida* is considered a symbol of Spain, it has been, and still is, an essential element of various local fiestas, national celebrations, and cultural exchange with foreigners. To understand the significance and popularity it holds for society, an attempt at defining and contextualizing this unusual encounter between a man and an animal should be made. When trying to answer a seemingly simple question, "What is *corrida*?" an equally rudimentary response, "a Spaniard killing a bull," regrettably proves not to be sufficient. Such a plain definition does not even scratch the surface of the phenomenon, which has developed its own traditions, techniques, and iconography.

If it were only carnage taking place inside an arena, *corrida* would become an outdoor slaughterhouse and the *torero* mere-

¹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1959), 117.

ly a butcher. The hundreds of tourists who purchase tickets to a performance that has remained popular unto this day and been portrayed in numerous works of art must be lured by more than collective yelling and the martyring of cattle. Though this practice is condemned by many organizations and worldwide movements (it has been abolished in Catalonia where in 2012 a ban on *corrida* was introduced), this unique spectacle attracts vivid interest and the violence presented in the ring remains a subject of a heated debate. For some, it is animal cruelty, and for others, the bloodshed is somehow intertwined with everyday life, as Ernest Hemingway provocatively said: “Of course, bullfighting has elements of brutality, but so does surgery, hunting, and the income tax.”² Without a doubt, the subject in question is polarizing. The issue is a source of cultural fascination and a prominent theme in literature. I wish to contextualize the phenomenon and place it beyond its usual framework of Spanish tourism and animal rights.

My aim for this chapter is to examine some of theoretical approaches to the concepts of sport, game, and play and, by comparing premises of each notion with *corrida*’s characteristics and literary portrayals, try to discuss these concepts and see which aspects are not compatible with *corrida*’s objectives and depictions. As a result, I will hopefully be able to find a concept that may encompass the complexity of bullfighting and serve as a theoretical framework of the phenomenon. However, I will not refer to the ever-growing field of animal studies. The development of the field over the past decades has intensified by author such as Paul Waldau whose 2013 work *Animal Studies*³ inspired the debate anew. Several books on the subject have been published and notable scholars such as Maud Ellmann and Marianne DeKoven created university courses in Modernist Literary Animals and Modernism and Animality. The reason behind my

² Ernest Hemingway, *The Dangerous Summer* (New York: Scribners, 1985), 18.

³ Paul Waldau, *Animal Studies—An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

decision is by no means a disregard toward animal studies, my sole aim is that I do not want to hinder otherwise inclined literary interpretations.

The existing discourse of animal studies aims at finding both the relationship between modernism and animality as well as the nature of this bond. The focus on the animal within human reality also includes studies on *corrida*. For instance, in 2010 Elisabeth Hardouin-Fugier published *Bullfighting: A Troubled History*⁴ where she attempts to place this phenomenon in the context of rapid social changes. Still, her work does not offer a broader understanding of *corrida* but rather focuses on historical facts. The meeting point between a human and an animal in case of bullfighting is not as easily seen as in, for instance, farming or horse races. I will discuss the presence of a bull in mythology in order to prove how complex the bull's presence in people's realm has been.

The aficionados recognize some deeply profound qualities of a bull. They claim: "The bull is the sole adversary that man considers worthy of him. It is the animal against which he can measure himself with pride, and which he consequently treats him with the loyalty the enemy of his measure deserves."⁵ Such a preoccupation with this animal and animality may refer to Freud's suggestion that humanity attempts to conquer one's instincts. Trying to subdue one's own animality can prove futile and, eventually, a need to destroy inhibitions should occur: this sublimation of repressed emotions will take place in the ring.

For this reason, I offer a perspective inspired by gender studies, ludology, and psychoanalysis. The latter is particularly useful when examining the bull and the matador as a symbol of eros/thanatos duality. I also focus on concepts that treat play as a structured cultural phenomenon and use a classification of games made by Roger Caillois as well as Johan Huizinga's concepts on the subject.

⁴ Elisabeth Hardouin-Fugier, *Bullfighting: A Troubled History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010).

⁵ Francis Wolff, *50 Reasons to Defend the Corrida*, trans. Barbara Ann Sapp Padilla (Seville: Libros Editores y Libreros, 2014), 208.

Antiquity

In Europe, cattle were not domesticated until around 3000 BCE, long after other animals such as sheep, goats, and dogs. When it finally happened, their respectable size made them the prime sacrificial offering for gods throughout the ancient Mediterranean region.

Worshipping animals would often revolve around a religious cult and this inevitably led into economic power struggle. Cattle in the ancient and medieval world, where exchanges were mostly conducted by barter rather than money, were a measure of one's affluence as the value of the first coins was established by the number of animals one could obtain. Interestingly enough, the earliest coins were stamped with an image of cattle, and this association of wealth and money has survived centuries as the word "pecuniary" referring to finances comes from the Latin word "pecus" which means a domestic herd animal.

Bulls were worshipped, given a high status and, what is of utmost importance, acquired a stratum of symbolism. Some stood for an incarnation of an actual god—that is, the case of Apis (also known as the Hapis Bull)—the sacred bull of Memphis which, from at least the First Dynasty period, was perceived as an incarnation of Osiris himself and had a temple in Egypt. Unlike other totem animals, it did not only provide an association or a link to the deity—Apis was considered a god itself. Initially, it was not Osiris that manifested himself in the bull. Ptah (demiurge of Memphis) was originally perceived as its god yet, as Ptah and Osiris merged, the bull has become as Plutarch wrote "fair and beautiful image of the soul of Osiris."⁶ This sacred bull was elevated to be an Oracle and his breath was considered a gift of prophecy.⁷ Each person who smelled the breath of the bull was

⁶ John Gardner Wilkinson, *The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*. Vol. 2. (London: Forgotten Books, 2013), 347.

⁷ Simson Najovits, *Egypt, Trunk of the Tree, vol. I: A Modern Survey of Ancient Land* (New York: Agora Publishing, 2003), 207.

believed to obtain a fortune-telling gift. The animal was also asked questions and its movements were interpreted, as well as its reaction to the food that it has been offered—acceptance was considered a good omen, whereas rejection, a devastating one. The reigning Pharaoh was referred to as “strong bull of his mother” or “Bull of Bulls,” whereas the sun was called the “valiant bull.” The relation between the sun and a bull was not uncommon in antiquity. The animal’s horns were recognizable emblems of the rays of the sun and solar deities were repeatedly represented by a bull. It was believed that a flash of lightning or a ray of sunshine struck a cow, which made her conceive Apis, and from that time it would never bear any young again.⁸ Apis’s mother enjoyed great respect and was given the title “Isis cow.”⁹ Egyptians also celebrated the Festival of the Apis Bull, which lasted for seven days. People assembled in Memphis to witness a priest leading the bull in a procession through the city. After Apis’s death, which caused a wide mourning in the lands, its body would be embalmed and receive a funeral with full honors. It was mummified and placed in a royal sarcophagus in a series of galleries known as the Serapeum at Memphis.¹⁰ Noteworthy is the fact that the bovine cult was not limited to Memphis only, it spread throughout the territory of ancient Egypt.

Another instance of such devotion was the Buchis bull worshipped in Hermonthis (modern Armant) region in southern Egypt. It was believed to be a manifestation of life-force god Ka, the war god Montu, and, to a lesser degree, Osiris. The animal’s name “is a reference to the ‘Ba’ and ‘Akh,’ two of the parts of the Ka. As Ka is also the Egyptian word for bull.”¹¹ Similarly to the Apis’s case, certain ceremonies of burial were performed once the bull died. It was mummified and put into tombs that

⁸ Janusz Kasza, *Korrida. Taniec i krew* (Kraków: Otwarte na świat, 2011), 36.

⁹ Najovits, *Egypt, Trunk of the Tree*, 208.

¹⁰ Thomas G. H. James and William V. Davies, *Egyptian Sculpture* (London: The British Museum Press, 1998).

¹¹ Jenny Hill, *Bull Cults in Ancient Egypt*, accessed September 16, 2016, <http://www.ancientegyptonline.co.uk/bullcult.html>.

were called “bucheums.”¹² What is more, mothers of the bulls also received a ceremonial burial.¹³ In addition to the Apis and Buchis bulls, there was yet another figure of importance, namely, the Mnevis bull. It was the sacred animal of Heliopolis—one of the oldest cities of ancient Egypt and a capital of ancient Lower Egypt. Mnevis was a manifestation of the Atum-Ra deity and a bull that was chosen to have this title needed to be black—hence his other name, “Kemwer,” which translates into “great black.”¹⁴ Even though it was at times associated with the more popular Apis bull, its “iconography is at the outset distinct from the Apis, with curved horns enclosing a sun disk.”¹⁵ Those solar associations seem to offer an answer as to why the bull cult was so popular. The sun and its light as the most obvious illustration of life-giving energy and power are connected with fertile and strong animals. The latter were worshipped not only by the Egyptians. Babylonians also revered the animal as the symbol of their most powerful gods—Marduk and Sin. Inanna (the goddess Ishtar) has the cow for symbol on very ancient seal cylinders, and when this nude or half-nude goddess appears in Israel, she often stands on a bull or cow. Her connection with the bull is by no means accidental. The two are a part of what is believed to be world’s first great epic—*The Epic of Gilgamesh*. In short, it tells the story about a historical figure, a sovereign who reigned over Uruk—a Sumerian city-state around 2700 BCE. The king was handsome, wise, and strong, which made Ishtar, the goddess of love, fall in love with him. Unfortunately, the feeling was not mutual, and the Gilgamesh spurned her. Rejected and ashamed, the goddess asked Anu who her father was and, at the same time, called upon the god of the sky to avenge her. He then sent the Bull of Heaven to punish Gilgamesh and, as a result, the animal

¹² W. Max Muller, *Egyptian Mythology* (Boston: Kessinger Publishing, 2004).

¹³ Salima Ikram, *Divine Creatures: Animal Mummies from Ancient Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo, 2005).

¹⁴ Hill, *Bull Cults in Ancient Egypt*.

¹⁵ Aidan Dodson, “Bull Cults,” in *Divine Creatures: Animal Mummies from Ancient Egypt*, ed. Salima Ikram (Cairo: American University in Cairo, 2005), 71.

brought seven years of famine. The king together with his friend Enkidu fought and slew the animal, and later offered its heart to Shamash, the sun god. This saddened Ishtar who became even more humiliated as Enkidu threw the bull's hindquarters at her.¹⁶

Babylonians would also place a large, winged bull at the entrance to the palaces with inscriptions guarding their temples as they were symbols of strength and power. Those features were immensely appreciated as few hymns in Babylon contain greater admiration and spiritual knowledge than those addressed to the bull gods or to others honored with this title, for example, the one to the god Sin (the god of the moon in the Mesopotamian mythology):

the "heifer of Anu," Strong young bull; with strong horns, [...] with beard of lapis lazuli color [...] self-created, full of developed fruit [...] Mother-womb who has taken up his abode, begetter of all things, exalted habitation among living creatures; O merciful gracious father, in whose hand rests the life of the whole world; O Lord, thy divinity is full of awe like the far-off heaven and the broad ocean!¹⁷

Strength is one of the characteristics of aurochs (wild bulls) that evoke the most recognition. Even Julius Caesar mentions it in his commentaries on the *The Gallic Wars*:

their strength and speed are extraordinary; they spare neither man nor wild beast which they have espied. These the Germans take with much pains in pits and kill them. The young men harden themselves with this exercise, and practice themselves in this sort of hunting, and those who have slain the greatest number of them, having produced the horns in public, to serve as evidence, receive great praise. But not even when taken very

¹⁶ Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia. Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁷ M. Cobern Camden, *Calf, Golden*, accessed September 4, 2016, <http://classic.net.bible.org/dictionary.php?word=Calf,%20Golden>.

young can they be rendered familiar to men and tamed. The size, shape, and appearance of their horns differ much from the horns of our oxen. These they anxiously seek after, and bind at the tips with silver, and use as cups at their most sumptuous entertainments.¹⁸

It is visible that the figure of a bull was linked either to an entertaining spectacle or a sphere of religion. One of the earliest forms of bull worship was present in Mithraism practiced in the Roman Empire from circa 1st century to the 4th century AD. It was a somewhat mysterious religion, with the god Mithra as the angelic divinity. Moreover, its name derives from a noun *mitrá* signifying “contract” that connotes “covenant, agreement, treaty, alliance, promise.”¹⁹ Mithra is also another deity that refers to the figure of a bull and the sun as “he is the first of the spiritual gods to rise over the mountain range Harā before the swift-horsed, immortal sun.”²⁰ The first time Mithra was connected with the sun comes from the Greek writer and geographer Strabo, who reported in his famous work *Geographica* that the Persians worship the sun and call it Mithra (who was also the guardian of cattle). To lend credibility to his observation I quote a line from a Mythraic prayer: “We worship *Mithra*, possessing vast pastures for cattle, *Mithra* who presents herds of cattle.”²¹ What is more, Mithraic iconography uses imagery of cattle quite frequently. The iconic representations of Mithra depict the god Mithra himself slaughtering a bull by stabbing it in the neck which clearly corresponds to the modern-day corrida. This image of bull-killing is called tauroc-

¹⁸ Julius Caesar, (50–58 BCE), *The Gallic Wars*, <http://classics.mit.edu/Caesar/gallic.6.6.html>, accessed September 4, 2016.

¹⁹ Hans-Peter Schmidt, “Mithra in Old Indian and Mithra in Old Iranian,” accessed September 5, 2016, <https://pl.scribd.com/document/253014820/Mithra-in-Old-Indian-and-Mithra-in-Old-Iranian-The-Circle-of-Ancient-Iranian-Studies-CAIS>.

²⁰ Schmidt, “Mithra in Old Indian and Mithra in Old Iranian.”

²¹ Elena E. Kuz'mina, *The Origin of the Indo-Iranians*, ed. James Patrick Mallory (Leiden and Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007), 179.

tony²² and refers to a genre of reliefs placed in all Mithraea: the cult's most paramount place of worship. Not only was it located there but, what signalizes its value for the people, it was placed in the center of the temple. Several meanings and interpretations are ascribed to the reliefs. What is undeniably recognizable is the sun situated above the bull. Following this logic, it would suggest that the animal itself represents the Earth. With such a celestial map the perspective is from the earth upward, towards the sky but "if, however, the tauroctony were not so much a celestial map, but rather, an emblematic portrayal of a geocentric cosmology, then this would give the bull a completely different meaning,"²³ one that transgresses the human existence. The bull is always centric to the tauroctony sacrifice and it is perhaps for this reason that some see it as a symbol and "a container for a mystical, life-giving force."²⁴ Its natural and tremendous power has fascinated people and evoked awe while its affiliations with gods and the sphere of sacrum granted it respect and admiration. The above might be what inspired Alexander the Great, the king of Macedonia, to name his famous horse Bucephalus which translates into "ox head"²⁵ and which lends the horse some mythical prowess and potential.

Probably one of the best-known myths concerning bulls is the Greek one about Europe and Zeus. The former, a Phoenician noblewoman became an object of Olympus ruler's desire. In or-

²² One of the most prominent scholars of the subject, Roger Beck, argues that the term was not coined in antiquity but is a modern one. Its etymology might, however, come from a Greek word *tauroktonos* (*ταυροκτόνος*, "slaughtering bulls," see: *The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire: Mysteries of the Unconquered Sun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

²³ Eric Pijeau, *An Analysis of the Tauroctony (Mithraic Bull-Slaying) and the Resultant Corollaries*, accessed September 23, 2016, https://www.travelingtemple.com/2016/08/the-mithraic-mysteries-part-2_9.html.

²⁴ Manfred Clauss, *The Roman Cult of Mithras: The God and His Mysteries* (Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 80–81.

²⁵ Rolf Winkes, "Boukephalos," in *Miscellanea Mediterranea (Archaeologia Transatlantica XV/III)* (Providence, RI: Center for Old World Archaeology and Art, Brown University, 2000), 101–107.

der to seduce her, he transformed himself into a white, docile bull and mingled with her father's herds. The bull's unique appearance and his tame nature drew Europe's attention and she allowed him to take her to the island of Crete where Zeus came back to his old body and revealed the truth. As a result of their love affair Europe gave birth to Minos who would become the king of Crete. His existence began with a bull and its figure would reappear later in his life as he received a snow-white bull (this bull was known as a Cretan Bull, the very same which was to be captured by Hercules as one of his twelve labors) from Poseidon and decided to keep it instead of sacrificing it to the God of Seas. As a punishment for this display of pride, the gods made Minos's wife Pasiphae fall in love with the white bull. Their offspring was the "part man and part bull,"²⁶ Minotaur. The Minotaur myth is yet another illustration of the strong feelings of fear and respect attached to the animal. At the same time, it suggests that human pride is inseparable from the struggle between human/culture and bull/nature. This leads to one of the most explicit examples of human pride and bulls' presence in the sphere of sacrum, namely, the biblical story of a Golden Calf. The idol was created by Aaron and worshipped by the Hebrews during the period of their Exodus from Egypt in the 13th century BCE and is interpreted as a supreme act of apostasy.²⁷

It is visible that the presence of bulls in mythologies and legends often depicts humans convinced of their superiority over animals. Such hubris proves to have fatal consequences. This notion of competing with nature represented by a bull is not solely limited to antiquity but permeates centuries.

²⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, "Minotaur," accessed July 16, 2015, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/minotaur>.

²⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Golden Calf," accessed September 5, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/237545/golden-calf>.

The Middle Ages

A bull in the Middle Ages was not only a sacred emissary, as it was the case in antiquity, but also a very tangible measure of affluence. Being a visible emblem of one's wealth, the animal gained rather a positive reputation and its presence in Celto-Roman imagery can be characterized as affirmative; however, due to societal fascination with monsters, the perception of the animal was also associated with superior (to that of humans) drives and energy.

The medieval interest in animal forms, animality, and its rivalry with humanity can be best observed in a late 7th- or early 8th-century Anglo-Latin catalog of creatures *Liber Monstrorum*, which contains various anxieties and fears concerning England's contemporary societal and ecclesiastical predicament as reflected in the monstrous bodies described on the pages. Even though it confirms human dominance—"when humankind has multiplied and the lands of the earth have been filled, fewer monsters are produced under the stars"²⁸—it also documents an uneasiness about the uncanny that dwells in the medieval reality. Monsters were a source of fascination, but also fear. Detailed descriptions of such creatures may have facilitated a containment of anxieties but, paradoxically, this very procedure enhanced both the believability of monsters and the distinction between what is animalistic (nature) and what is human (culture) as it is depicted in *Liber Monstrorum*: "Whatever is found on land or in the sea of unknown and fearsome form of terrible bodily appearance can be called a beast."²⁹ The latter ought to be tamed and if it were to be beyond human powers to do so, it would merge with an image of a human being and become object of worship. Representing deities as a synthesis of animal and human forms was more than frequent and the medieval period was no exception.

²⁸ Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 257.

²⁹ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 289.

One of the most prominent zoomorphic deities which had a crucial meaning in an Irish hero-tale is Donn Cuailnge—the Brown Bull of Cooley. It is present in the legendary epic of early Irish literature *Táin Bó Cuailnge*³⁰ (*The Cattle Raid of Cooley*) where the bull serves a highly symbolic and a didactic role. The story begins with a king Aihill and a queen Maeve of Connacht who, once they compared their respective wealth, found that the only thing that makes king Aihill richer was his white bull called Finnbhennach—Whitehorned. Jealous of this mighty animal, Queen Maeve asked her knights if there was another bull like Finnbhennach in Ireland. One of them claimed that there indeed was a marvelous bull called the Brown Bull of Cooley—Donn Cúailnge which was to be found in Ulster. Maeve sent there a messenger to inquire about the animal. The bull's owner refused to give it away, igniting the Queen's wrath and making her send her army to obtain the bull. The knights were killed one by one by Cú Chulainn—an Irish hero who, in the end, had no-one to fight with but his friend Ferdiad. After three days of fighting, Cú Chulainn killed his opponent reaching victory over Maeve's people. Nonetheless, Queen's unfettered greed led her to stealing the bull and bringing it to her castle.

When Finnbhennach and Donn Cúailnge faced each other, the fight resulted in Donn Cúailnge's victory and its departure to Ulster. Once on its way, the animal died. This symbolic depiction of the precious bull as an object of desire serves a didactic role and ought to teach the people of the time that in fighting for wealth no-one ever wins.

Clearly, as the quoted legend indicates, the bull is predominantly connected to two notions. First, to prosperity and wealth, and second, to being noble and honorable. There is, however, yet another aspect of the animal that is described in one of the Anglo-Saxon riddles of the 10th-century *Exeter Book*, namely, the drive and even a certain *élan vital* of the creature, which can be seen in the Riddle 38 titled "Bull-calf":

³⁰ John A. MacCulloch, *Celtic Mythology* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publication, 2009).

I saw the creature, of the arms-bearing kind,
 greedy for youth's joys. As its due it let
 four nourishing fountains, brightly shining,
 shoot forth noisily, as is right and proper.

Then spake a man, who said to me:

“The creature, if it lives, will break up the hillside;
 if rent apart, will bind the living.”³¹

The calf proves to be an energetic “creature” of enormous strength, yet covetous, desiring, and difficult to control. This riddle may also be viewed as an allegory of “the complex motivations and shortcomings of foolish men, boys, and beast,”³² proving the relation between a man and a bull and their affinities that exist not only in the bullring. A particularly accurate summary of this riddle is offered by Stopford A. Brooke, who writes:

Among the cattle on the pasture, the young bull was tethered. With his close sympathy with animals the poet paints him as rejoicing in his turbulent youth and fed with the four fountains of his mother. Suddenly, he saw the beast dash loose and rush from the pasture into the tilled land. Then Cynewulf let his imagination loose also, and pictured the bull breaking up the clods of earth left by the plough, as a monster might break up the hills.³³

Although words such as *beast* and *monster* are commonly used to describe cattle, this description refers primarily to men and their rebellious nature. Furthermore, ideas of nourishing and

³¹ Loius Rodrigues (ed. and trans.), *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, vol. 1 (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994).

³² Patrick J. Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 77.

³³ Stopford A. Brooke, *The History of Early English Literature: Being the History of English Poetry from Its Beginnings to the Accession of King Ælfre* (Macmillan and Co, 1892), accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/48451/48451-h/48451-h.htm>.

“binding the living” hint at renewal and celebration of life. This stands in accordance with the bull being a symbol of fertility and re-birth in a myth about a Celtic deity Taruos Trigaranos (or Tarvos Trigaranus), who is depicted in two stone reliefs in Paris and Trier, Germany. He was a Gaulish bull-god accompanied by three cranes and was sometimes depicted as a three-horned figure which undoubtedly alludes to trinity as a holy concept.

The myth tells a story of a unique, golden-red bull that was followed by three cranes. One day, Esus, the hunter god, wished to kill Trigaranus, and after a long combat, the animal was slain. The cranes fled to the South and the whole world became cold and dark, forcing people to pray to gods for a miracle. As if in response to the prayers, the three cranes returned and one of them poured some blood of the golden-red bull upon the earth.³⁴ Miraculously, the animal was reborn from the earth. For this reason, the Tarvos tends to be viewed as a deity of the circle of life, death, and re-birth.

Far less spiritual is a festivity called “bull-baiting” that gained popularity during the Middle Ages. It was a peculiar kind of a spectacle enjoyed by members of all classes. Similarly to where modern *corrida* takes place, bull-baiting was organized in coliseum-type buildings with amphitheater seatings so each member of the audience could witness the event. Robert Chambers gave a detailed description of bull-baiting:

They tie a rope to the root of the horns of the bull, and fasten the other end of the cord to an iron ring fixed to a stake driven into the ground; so that this cord, being about fifteen feet long, the bull is confined to a space of about thirty feet diameter. Several butchers, or other gentlevien [sic], that are desirous to exercise their dogs, stand round about, each holding his own by the ears; and when the sport begins, they let loose one of the dogs. The dog runs at the bull; the bull, immovable, looks down upon

³⁴ Patricia Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore* (New York: Facts On File, 2004).

the dog with an eye of scorn, and only turns a horn to him, to hinder him from coming near. The dog is not daunted at this, he runs round him, and tries to get beneath his belly. The bull then puts himself into a posture of defence; he beats the ground with his feet, which he joins together as closely as possible, and his chief aim is not to gore the dog with the point of his horn (which, when too sharp, is put into a kind of wooden sheath), but to slide one of them under the dog's belly, who creeps close to the ground, to hinder it, and to throw him so high in the air that he may break his neck in the fall.³⁵

The above passage shows a shift of perspective and attitude towards bulls. As time progressed, the animals lost the esteem they have thus far enjoyed and became a source of entertainment for the common mob. To my judgment, the domestication of the animal resulted in “movement of culture,” a phrase coined by Jacques Derrida who, in a 1990 interview explained the relation between monstrosity and culture. He claimed that

as soon as one perceives a monster in a monster, one begins to domesticate it, one begins, because of the ‘as such’—it is a monster *as* monster—to compare it to the norms, to analyze it, consequently, to master whatever could be terrifying in this figure of the monster.³⁶

It is visible how, for the very first time, the combat between culture and nature acquired a literal, violent sense. Man's dominance over animal needed to be established, and the Middle Ages was a time of such cruel practices that have paved the way to modern-day corrida.

³⁵ Robert Chambers, *The Book of Days: A Miscellany of Popular Antiquities in Connection with the Calendar, Including Anecdote, Biography, & History, Curiosities of Literature and Oddities of Human Life and Character* (W. & R. Chambers, 1864), accessed November 20, 2016. http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/Chambers%27_Book_of_Days.

³⁶ Jacques Derrida, “Passages—From Traumatism to Promise,” in *Points... Interviews, 1974–1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 372–398.

Modern Period

Ancient patterns and medieval traditions may prove very persistent, even when the contemporary culture ceased to sanction or regulate them. By the Middle Ages, the prevalent outlook on the bull was highly symbolic and allegorical, and even though it has become more and more naturalistic and organic in the modern period, some of the medieval, or even ancient customs, remained in the era. A good example of such an attitude were the animal martyrs that would be sacrificed at the request of Pope Leo X who, desperate to stop the black plague, allowed people to slay bulls as offerings in the Old Roman Coliseum³⁷ even after the ban on animal sacrifice.

The constant presence of the figure of a bull in culture proves its significance. The realms the animal dominated have been revolving around entertainment, virility, and sacrificial rites. Bulls were often thought of as beasts, monsters, and embodiments of obscene conditions of an individual that escaped one's control. Therefore, to conquer and tame the strength of an animal by a man was not only an entertaining spectacle but also one of the first epitomes of the eternal clash between nature and culture that signalizes one of the perspectives I wish to show in this book. Bulls represent an explosive, destructive, natural power, and the ability to wrestle a bull suggests humanity's ability (and desire) to harness nature's power. My reading of myths, legends, and other works of literature suggests a close, even intimate, relation between bulls and human beings that has become formalized and transformed throughout centuries and has developed into a highly symbolic and complex connection.

Before I proceed to examine the available denotations of the term *bullfight*, I believe a brief historical background of the phenomenon is needed. Instead of trying to bridge the history of bullfighting with political and economic changes, this sketch's

³⁷ Boria Sax, *The Mythical Zoo: An Encyclopedia of Animals in World Myth, Legend, and Literature* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2001).

objective is to provide a general overview of factors that contributed to the modern shape of *corrida de toros*. What also needs to be clarified for the sake of coherence and comprehension is the fact that I use the term *corrida* or *corrida de toros* and bullfighting interchangeably, even though there are some theoreticians or aficionados who would not treat them synonymously. The reasoning behind this choice stems from a translational impossibility of obtaining a perfect equivalent of the term *corrida* in the English language. *Corrida* literally signifies “running” of the bulls, yet, historians and anthropologists have long deliberated on the cultural origins of the phenomenon. It has been linked with Cretan bull-leaping or with Iberian celebrations with a religious overtone. The latter interpretations are based on Roman influence on the peninsula and perceive the games held in Roman amphitheaters as a prototype of the modern version of bullfighting.³⁸ Another common explanation relates to an aristocratic pastime activity, that is, hunting wild bulls from horseback and then lancing them to death, which may have paved the way to what we now associate with a bullfight. This notion is especially supported by those who believe that the Moors (the medieval Muslim inhabitants of Iberian Peninsula) played a pivotal role in popularizing bull hunting and turning it into more of a public spectacle.³⁹ Against this suggestion are those who seek the roots of the event in Christian contests involving bulls and men. Clearly, one of the problems that emerges when trying to define the origins of bullfighting is the issue of defining the phenomenon itself. It has been justly detected by Luis Toro Buiza that

³⁸ This idea is proposed by a Spanish historian and essayist Ángel Álvarez de Miranda Vicuña in one of his works *Ritos y Juegos del Toro* from 1962 in which he seeks the origins of the modern *corrida* in Roman animal-human contests.

³⁹ Moors and their contribution to the development of *corrida* is mentioned in *Carta histórica sobre el origen y progresos de las fiestas de los toros en España* from 1777 written by a Spanish dramatist, translator and neoclassical poet, Nicolás Fernández de Moratín.

the majority of our specialist historians incur imprecision and confusion in treating the theme [that of the history of *corrida*] in a general way without limiting themselves to a clearly demarcated model. Various sports and games, with a more or less remote origin, both on foot and on horseback have grown up around the fighting bull in Spain and they cannot be studied in a unitary or synchronic scheme.⁴⁰

Americans like Tom Lea and Barnaby Conrad, the British like John Marks and Leslie Charter have since added to the growing bibliography of books in English on bullfighting. While bullfighting can be seen as morally reprehensive and as a “morbid entertainment,”⁴¹ it undoubtedly remains an alluring spectacle. The sheer volume of artists, intellectuals, and writers who have engaged with and interpreted the Spanish institution that *corrida* constitutes has not been exhausted even after Ernest Hemingway, probably its most acclaimed aficionado, has approached this theme. The status quo seems to be far from it: there is a startling number of contemporary Anglophone authors who employ this subject matter as a complex metaphor for various predicaments. It has proved to be an abundant source of inspiration that captures audience’s attention. For some critics, it is an “uneven but a loyal combat”⁴² that inspired so many writers, cinematographers, and artists. Indeed, the fascination of the bullfight may stem from the fact that it is, as Michel Leiris puts it, a metaphor for “certain dark parts of ourselves.”⁴³ It means that *corrida* has not only supplied literature with curious and attractive content but also is a metaphor for various, not infrequent taboo, phenomena.

⁴⁰ Toro Luis Buiz, *Sevilla en la Historia del Torero* (Seville: Publicaciones del Ayuntamiento, 1947), 19.

⁴¹ Matthieu Ricard, *A Plea for the Animals: The Moral, Philosophical, and Evolutionary Imperative to Treat All Beings with Compassion* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications Inc., 2016), 202.

⁴² Francis Wolff, *50 Reasons to Defend the Corrida*, 32.

⁴³ Michel Leiris, *Mirror of Tauromachy* (London: Atlas Press, 2007), 27.

The Beauty of Blood Sport

Man loves danger and sport.⁴⁴

If there were ever an activity that would combine the two alleged passions of man, it would have to be *corrida*. Of course, the majority of sports entail some level of risk and one may argue that, for instance, boxing is just as satisfying a response to the abovementioned human needs as *corrida* might be. Although it does indeed combine the two—danger and a competitive physical activity—boxing’s aim, however, is merely to knock out the opponent; dangerous and gory as it surely is, it still is a far cry from the ultimate objective of *corrida*—a killing.

Modern *corrida* has its origins in antiquity when Cretan bull-leaping was one of the most physically demanding spectator sports. To vault over animals’ backs required agility and courage; however, killing of the bull was not a necessary part of the spectacle. Over the centuries, bull-leaping underwent changes and developed *corrida* giving it new forms and new objectives.⁴⁵ Bearing in mind its beginnings, the sport undertone of bullfighting cannot be denied yet, at the same time, placing it in the sports realm together with football or golf would be a mistake. Furthermore, when paging through Spanish newspapers, one will never see articles and reports on *corrida* in the sport sections—they have their own space on pages, which separates them from “ordinary” competitions. This may come as a surprise given the Spanish term *corrida de toros* which literally means “running of the bulls” and somehow underlines the physical aspect of the activity; even the English term “bullfighting” does connote sport but, as I have already stated, the goal of *corrida* is incomparably more

⁴⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, Friedrich Nietzsche Quotes. Jar of Quotes, 2020, accessed January 17, 2017, <https://www.jarofquotes.com/view.php?id=the-man-loves-danger-sport-that-is-why-he-loves-woman-most-dangerous-all-sports-friedrich-nietzsche>.

⁴⁵ Alison Louise Kennedy, *On Bullfighting* (London: Yellow Jersey Press, 2000).

morbid than any other kind of match. Ernest Hemingway, a *corrida* aficionado, whose passion for *corrida* and friendships with toreros should make him a credible source of information, wrote:

The bullfight is not a sport in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the word; that is, it is not an equal contest or an attempt at an equal contest between a bull and a man. Rather, it is a tragedy; the death of the bull, which is played, more or less well, by the bull and the man involved and in which there is danger for the man but certain death for the animal.⁴⁶

The inequality between bullfight's contestants is the greatest objection to calling it a sport as there cannot be a measurable score except for survival of the man. It is not an equal playing field and the disparity does not necessarily favor the man. In *Death in the Afternoon*, one of the matadors, Gallo, is asked about his training and the exercises he does in order to face the bull and he responds: "What do I want with strength, man? The bull weighs half a ton. Should I take exercises for strength to match him? Let the bull have the strength."⁴⁷ Again, it shows how unjust the distribution of chance is. This contradicts the very basic foundation of sport—as Michel Leiris puts it.

In sport, everything is wholesome, everything is straight... Never will a swimmer (no matter how at one he may be with the world summed up by the wave in which he moves, and no matter how imminent the danger that his skill enables him to escape) come as close to the crucial point as the torero does, the poet or the one whose entire action is founded on the tiny but tragic flaw by which the unfinished (literally infinite) part of our condition shows itself.⁴⁸

This explicitly shows how inadequate it is to consider *corrida* as sport. It may be physical in form and take place in a rink, yet

⁴⁶ Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 16.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁸ Leiris, *Mirror of Tauromachy*, 43.

its content represents something that goes beyond the simple dichotomy of winning and losing.

In his 1938 essay-turned-book, *Mirror of Tauromachy*, Leiris signals that corrida is “something more than a sport, on account of the tragic element inherent in it—doubly tragic since there is a death and a death entailing an immediate risk to the life of the celebrant.”⁴⁹ This fatal conclusion of the encounter makes it a more elusive and mysterious occasion than other blood sports and perhaps it is the reason for numerous publications and cinematographic representations of corrida that, as it has been already seen, surpasses those devoted to an ordinary pastime. Gilbert Lewis, an American anthropologist, claimed that certain activities display “alerting qualities”⁵⁰—features that carry more symbolic meaning, evoke more emotions, and trigger more profound reactions. In Lewis’s views these activities are

bound by rules which govern the order and sequence of performance. These are clear and explicit to the people who perform it. It is a form of custom. The fixity, the public attention, the colour and excitement or solemnity that go with such performances are what catch the anthropologist’s attention.⁵¹

When one compares Lewis’s requirements with corrida’s somewhat alarming goal—killing of an animal—it becomes clear why bullfighting draws such attention.

It seems that the sport element of corrida is widely recognized but the existence of a deeper layer is also acknowledged. Another example of a writer for whom corrida transcends sport was John Hay, an American diplomat and assistant to Abraham Lincoln, who called corrida sport and yet, in his writing, did not ignore the event’s particular aura—he saw corrida as a “realm of enchantment”⁵² which lends it another stratum of meaning and

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Gilbert Lewis, *Day of Shining Red* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵¹ Ibid., 7.

⁵² John Hay, *Castilian Days* (Madrid: BiblioBazaar, 2006), 23.

deepens the discrepancy between the bullfighter's struggle and sport. The enchanting allure of bullfighting may only be witnessed live. The matter of immediacy, first-handedness of sorts, constitutes another major difference from sport, for while watching sports on TV, one still is able to enjoy and experience, at least to a certain degree, the emotional load of the event, whereas watching *corrida* on TV would be an experience lacking the tension and suspense that is present in the arena and shared by the crowd.

The parallels between *corrida* and sports could be narrowed down to the figure of a *torero* and an athlete but, even in this case, the comparison is fraught with difficulty. Undoubtedly, to be a *matador* one requires some physical training to be in shape, yet, on the other hand, not every athlete needs to face death during his or her performance. Even though Johan Huizinga's claim that equates a *matador* with a person who is playing sports does seem relevant for more ordinary activities, the idea that "the sportsman, too, plays with all the fervor of a man enraptured, but he still knows that he is playing"⁵³ does not apply to *corrida*, as the stakes for the *matador* exceed those of any sport activity. The *matador* must be aware of the artificiality of the setting (an arena, tickets, the fake pigtailed he wears) but the possibility of a bull goring is real and that makes him more than an athlete, it makes him a target. Therefore, the similarities between them revolve around the ways they are perceived by the public and the manner in which they view their line of work.

The athlete's imperative task is "to know, to govern and to conquer himself"⁵⁴ which agrees with what the narrator in the novel *Two Matadors* describes as needed factors allowing one to become a good *matador*: "The *matador* must first make tame the nature in his heart in order to subdue what lies beyond."⁵⁵ Be-

⁵³ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 18.

⁵⁴ Pierre de Coubertin, *Olympism: Selected Writings* (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2000), 611.

⁵⁵ Marcus McGee, *Two Matadors* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2012), 6.

ing able to exercise one's will more successfully than an average individual is what makes a matador and an athlete excel and win. The victory is a celebration of man's discipline. In consequence, both become worshipped by their audiences, whereas a lack of self-control deprives them of glory.

Being celebrated is another and perhaps the most vivid resemblance between a professional sportsperson and a matador. It could be claimed that because of the ultimate nature of the matador's challenge he is a model athlete. Such a presumption could perhaps shed some light on to why in response to Manolete's fatal goring⁵⁶ in 1947, General Francisco Franco, then dictator of Spain, ordered three days of national mourning. The scale of praise and respect that a triumphant torero may enjoy reminds the one of sport celebrities. Alison Louise Kennedy, too, notes that matadors may have the "populist appeal that say—boxers have"⁵⁷ which does not surprise her as she knows the adoration fans can have for their idol may go far beyond common sense; for instance, the said Manolete—the beloved Madrilenian who met his end in the arena—"was, one could say, aficionado's Diana Spencer,"⁵⁸ which elevates him way above the level of athletes. This glorification is sometimes misunderstood by American protagonists; in *Two Matadors* an outside visitor talks with an acclaimed matador exposing all his naiveté: "So being a matador is like being a rock star?" I asked. 'No, more like a sport star... Like an NBA player, like Miguel Jordan—he was a Bull, no?'"⁵⁹—the matador ironically replies.

Demonstrating how fickle fans' admiration may be if their expectations of the performance are not met, Hemingway writes that "there was no natural sympathy for uncontrollable nervous-

⁵⁶ Manuel Laureano Rodríguez Sánchez, known as Manolete (4 July 1917–29 August 1947), a Spanish bullfighter, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Manolete>, accessed January 17, 2017.

⁵⁷ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 88.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁵⁹ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 64.

ness, because he was a paid public performer,”⁶⁰ and because of his public function his technique and behavior are subject to constant evaluations and those who manage to confirm their talent and skill are the ones that may aspire to stardom and a better life. At the end of the day, the matadors receive money for their performances which, essentially, makes entering an arena and killing a bull a job. Surprisingly enough, even the very matadors in the novels perceive it as such, starting with the famous Romero in Hemingway’s *Death in the Afternoon*, who surprised his American friends as he “talked of his work as something altogether apart from himself”⁶¹ instead of creating a romantic aura around his seemingly one true calling. A similar standing is showed in *A Cape in the Wind* by Juan, a corrida has-been who, in a heated discussion with his colleague, says, “One thing Paco [...] You can quit that sucking job, whatever it is,”⁶² exposing an utter lack of loftiness towards their own profession. Even more, Juan blankly encapsulates his disillusionment with the corrida industry when he at some point says, “it was just show biz,”⁶³ unequivocally denying it any sportsmanship and sublimity.

Hemingway is also far from romanticizing the mechanisms of the corrida world, but he knows that those who are “brave, honorable, skillful and not lacking in knowledge of [their] work, will always be one of the day laborers of bullfighting and paid accordingly,”⁶⁴ and for that reason, it is in matadors’ best interest, however, to enhance their ‘labor’ with finesse.

The style that one possesses is another component that makes a torero and an athlete stand out. To make this competition a picturesque spectacle, attention to aesthetics needs to be paid as “there is no complete and perfect joy in sport without style. One’s performance may satisfy the mind, but style benefits one’s

⁶⁰ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 17.

⁶¹ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Scribners, 2004), 178.

⁶² Paul Moran, Jr., *A Cape in the Wind* (Charleston, SC: Booksurge Publishing, 2009), 57.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁴ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 183.

whole being”⁶⁵; therefore, I am inclined to believe there exists a deeply rooted sense of artistry in *corrida*. The focus on performance’s visual aspects in some fashion contradicts sport’s objective which is to win disregarding one’s poise, whereas in *corrida*, one may witness “absolute purity of line.”⁶⁶ Torero’s movements—called *pases*—are well-organized pieces of routine that, when viewed and understood by an aficionado, resemble “superhuman geometrical beauty, the archetype, the Platonic idea which the matador represents,”⁶⁷ which shows not only the significance of the matador’s *panache* but also indicates a level of awareness on the audience’s side. Many a time the arrangement of gestures seems random to an untrained eye. In *The Making of Toro*, a young American writer comments upon the difference between a regular sports fan and an expert admirer of *corrida*: “Unlike a football fan who can just sit there and holler like an idiot, an aficionado is expected to know something,”⁶⁸ which reveals that to appreciate *corrida* one needs to do more than to attend one. In the novels I have selected this importance of understanding *corrida* is quite noticeable. In *The Last Matador*, Cassandra, whose cousin is an emerging matador, is having a dinner with a group of Americans and one of them says:

“I just want to go on record by saying that I think it’s [*corrida*] just barbaric. That is—that I think it is a cruel sport.” “I appreciate your opinion, Mrs. Rodman, but it is actually not a sport at all.” She then goes on: “You may see it that way from your American perspective. And I would even agree with you that there are many inebriated spectators in the plaza, much like we could find at ... one of your football games.”⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Henry de Montherlant, *Romans et oeuvres de fiction non theatrales* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pleide, 1959), 259.

⁶⁶ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, 134.

⁶⁷ Leiris, *Mirror of Tauromachy*, 30.

⁶⁸ Mark Sundeen, *The Making of Toro* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 61.

⁶⁹ Marc Newman, *The Last Matador* (North Charleston, SC: Erev Press, 2013), 169.

Those who understand *corrida* try to refer some of its aspects to sport in order to explain or familiarize the outsiders, but the attempts are doomed to fail, as there are too few points of tangency to make it fully comprehensible.

In *Matador, Mi Amor* a naïve American woman who inherits a hacienda in Spain confesses to a matador: “My exposure to bullfighting has been very limited. It’s not your everyday American sport you know”—and is responded to with—“Actually, it’s not considered a sport at all, in Spain, but an art form,” he corrected.”⁷⁰ The only outsider in the works who seems to have grasped a deeper understanding of the affair is Alison Louise Kennedy, who in her journey through Spain, attends a *novillada* (a bullfight in which matadors younger in age have a chance to perform). Upon purchasing the ticket, she ponders: “The adversaries of *corrida* would tell me that by paying the price of my ticket, I’ve just helped to support a barbaric sport”⁷¹—yet, she claims—“For me... *corrida* is not a sport” although “some rings now have giant screens for action replays or even—blasphemous rumor, this—sponsorship logos on torero’s *trajes*.”⁷² And again, *corrida* is being compared to sport-oriented matters in order to domesticate it. The inadequacy of the analogy is not lost on the protagonist Mark Sundeen who in *The Making of Toro* desires to become a second Hemingway and, under the pen-name Travis LaFrance, tries to write a book on bullfighting only to realize that it is “an ancient ritual almost indecipherable to Americans. Half artist and half athlete, the bullfighter combines bravery with finesse, strength with dance.”⁷³ He starts to understand that there is no equivalent for this phenomenon and that it would prove futile to continue with the sport comparison as the two do not have a considerable amount of shared qualities; Hemingway at some point states that “it takes more *cojones* to be a sportsman

⁷⁰ William Maltese, *Matador, Mi Amor. A Novel of Romance* (Rockville: Wildside Press LCC, 2012), 77.

⁷¹ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 82.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷³ Sundeen, *The Making of Toro*, 9.

when death is a closer part to the game,”⁷⁴ and in saying so he puts a matador above a sportsperson. The initial athlete/matador comparison also does not work for Leiris for whom sport contains a sense of freedom of which, because of fixed rules, *corrida* is deprived. For him, the principles and the dynamics of bullfighting are unique and there is only one discipline and one sportsperson that could compare, namely, an acrobat who performs extraordinary routines based on agility and balance. Leiris says, “Only the acrobat—and particularly the aerial acrobat who moves in the void and whose body seems abstracted from its environment, or at least held only by a thread—sometimes communicates his sacred vertigo.”⁷⁵ In his view, the acrobat’s act that he feels could be compared to a matador’s act is *sacred*, which adds to both phenomena and transforms what could be perceived as a “scheduled combat”⁷⁶ into something more intricate than sport. This conclusion is also found in Leiris’s writing for whom *tauromachy*⁷⁷ “can be regarded as a sport augmented by an art.”⁷⁸ A bullfight is then similar to sport as it requires physical activity between competing parties and has a defined goal but, at the same time, it asks for elegance and style that may enrich it and allow it to be perceived as art.

Art signifies a vast spectrum of activities and is a broad enough term to include such an ambiguous combination of sport and cruelty. This seems to be a promising definition of bullfighting and could also be found in Hemingway’s writings on the subject: “Provided the audience believes that a *matador* remains capable of giving a great *faena* [a set of passes performed with a sword before the kill—E. W.], they will willingly endure ‘mediocre work, cowardly work [and] disastrous work’ because the promise of artistry remains.”⁷⁹ This somewhat modernist approach, shared by

⁷⁴ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 22.

⁷⁵ Leiris, *Mirror of Tauromachy*, 44.

⁷⁶ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 9.

⁷⁷ Leiris uses the term *tauromachy* interchangeably with the term *corrida*.

⁷⁸ Leiris, *Mirror of Tauromachy*, 33.

⁷⁹ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 144.

Leiris and Hemingway, is in contrast to a different interpretation presented in *The Making of Toro* where the protagonist says, “It is a commercial art and an egotistical art, not an authentic art,”⁸⁰ and is desolated when faced with the brutal mechanisms of the business of bullfighting. For him, the methods, or, rather tricks, a matador uses are artificial and superfluous, therefore he or she is not an honest artist who takes his or her strength and artistry from within. The matador must deceive the bull which goes against truthful expression indispensable in art.

Kennedy is also suspicious of calling the phenomenon art and even more so, of those who propose such a practice. The author claims: “The corrida is also not an art, although it has been described as such by its admirers, most notably by a group of artists who wished to describe Juan Belmonte as an artist and, by extension, to define torero as art.”⁸¹ In her opinion, the cruelty that cannot be eliminated from corrida makes it impossible to be of artistic value. After she witnesses one performance, her reactions are strong and she says that the suffering that is an imminent part of each confrontation “seems to remove the possibility of the corrida’s promised artistry ever making an appearance,”⁸² adding that “this is much nearer butchery and farce than art,”⁸³ and illustrating how remote from any art form corrida is. Her definition of the latter may be seen as incoherent but, perhaps, more accurate. For Kennedy, corrida is a mixture of various abstract elements, that is, “part entertainment, part outrage, part sacrament,”⁸⁴ which shows how problematic it is to specify what could such an elusive spectacle entail. Even her patchwork, make-shift definition could be questioned as entertainment should provide relief and offer a resolution of negative emotions, and yet the following conversation between the narrator and a waiter in *The Sun Also Rises* undermines the existence of entertaining quali-

⁸⁰ Sundeen, *The Making of Toro*, 94.

⁸¹ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 86.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 131.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

ties. The narrator asks about the opening ceremony of bullfighting and the waiter tells him about one man who was hurt:

“Badly cogido [gored—E. W.],” he said. “All for sport. All for pleasure.”

He went away and came back with the long-handled coffee and milk pots. [...]

“Badly cogido through the back,” he said. He put the pots down on the table and sat down in the chair at the table. “A big horn wound. All for fun. Just for fun. What do you think of that?”

“I don’t know.”

“That’s it. All for fun. Fun, you understand.”

“You’re not an aficionado?”

“Me? What are bulls? Animals. Brute animals.” He stood up and put his hand on the small of his back. “Right through the back. A cornada right through the back. For fun—you understand.”

He shook his head and walked away, carrying the coffee-pots. Two men were going by in the street. The waiter shouted to them. They were grave-looking. One shook his head. “Muerto!” he called.

The waiter nodded his head. The two men went on. They were on some errand. The waiter came over to my table.

“You hear? Muerto. Dead. He’s dead. With a horn through him. All for morning fun. Es muy flamenco.”

“It’s bad.”

“Not for me,” the waiter said. “No fun in that for me.”⁸⁵

The dialog discloses the state of dispiritedness caused by the unnecessary victim of a deplorable event that fails to elate and, what is more, adds sorrow, in this particular case of Hemingway and his contemporaries, to a society that was labeled lost.

The exhaustion of post-war over-intellectualizing life philosophies resulted in an apotheosis of physicality, which could justify the fascination with *corrida*. Despite its deadly end, it forces one

⁸⁵ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, 201.

to test his or her abilities, strive to win, and ultimately, survive. The return to the visceral in the arena took place because “like war, sport and tauromachy affirmed life,”⁸⁶ and the Lost Generation, who went through the ordeal of the First World War, needed to place whatever faith they might have left into something that evoked strong reactions, and to that end, *corrida* proved perfect as the inherent danger of it together with the aura of festivity combined the physical with the spiritual. Because *corrida* combines the profane and the sacred, I would be reluctant to define bullfighting as sport. Perhaps it would be useful to briefly distinguish between what is considered profane and what is sacred. To my way of thinking, the best distinction is the one offered by Émile Durkheim; the profane stratum consists of phenomena that one can access and handle directly and, on the other side of the spectrum, there is the stratum of the sacred that goes beyond everyday reality and comprehension. *Corrida* is an example of a way of familiarizing people with the sacred yet, because the latter has a sublime, uncanny, or magic aura, the process needs to be controlled—hence the limitations, rules, and focus that are required and imposed upon bullfighting. Also, because *corrida* does aim at taming and somehow explaining the sphere of *scrum*, it may be perceived as a ritual, understood as a means of presenting and administering the sacred.

Even though I do not deny *corrida*’s origins in sport and competition and certain similarities between the matador and an athlete, I am inclined to believe a careful and methodically performed killing of an animal by a man wearing an elegant *suit of light* lies outside our contemporary understanding of sport. As Leiris wrote, “whatever the risks and the challenges it [sport] implies, no sport will cross the boundary that separates the profane from the sacred”⁸⁷ as *corrida* does. In other words, the brutality that is involved in it may be common for other disciplines as well,

⁸⁶ Jeffrey Segrave, *The Knighthood of Nothingness* (Lausanne: International Centre for Olympic Studies, 2010), 35.

⁸⁷ Leiris, *Mirror of Tauromachy*, 43.

yet the emotional load that it offers could not be supplied by any sport, for to reach a certain level of mindfulness and appreciation of life, death must be introduced.

A Serious Game

He thinks it's just a game.⁸⁸

Having arrived at the conclusion that death is a necessary component of *corrida*, it might render it problematic to see it as something as trivial as a game, for, seemingly, a game's levity is far from jeopardizing one's life. However, to overlook the affinities between the two concepts would be unsound—even though bullfighting deals with the ultimate and games are recognized as risible and fun, I do think that solemnity is not and should not be separated from what is playful. This premise has ramifications for the fashions in which *corrida* is represented and perceived by its audiences.

Therefore, I want to consider the “game” element in *corrida*. It should be interesting to acknowledge it on two strata; first, on the level of form as both notions are rule-bound and highly organized and, second, on the level of experience and the emotional reactions it aims to evoke. What I would like to emphasize at the very outset is that I do not equate *corrida* with a game, yet analyzing the game element of this phenomenon should be helpful in understanding this multi-faceted spectacle.

A game is an activity limited in time that makes willful participants follow a set of rules established beforehand in order to achieve a certain outcome. Johan Huizinga in his seminal work *Homo Ludens* offers the following features of a game: it is free, it means it is voluntary, it is not a *real* life as it is restricted in, for instance, time or space. It is not profit-oriented—no goods are produced, and, what I believe is of most importance, it is

⁸⁸ Sundeen, *The Making of Toro*, 150.

rule-bound and structured. What I think should be added to the list of characteristics is the concept of chance. The impossibility of predicting the outcome of a game is what adds another layer of risk and meaning. It may evoke associations with circus acts; to a certain degree, it is similar to lion-tamers or trapeze performances as they too welcome danger as well as a level of uncertainty and luck. What is shared with the concept of game is the rules governing the structure of the event and the uncertainty regarding the outcome of the contest. This unpredictability regulates, to a great extent, the emotional load a game can present both to a player and to player's audiences.

Before people can play chess, poker, or a computer game, they are required to be familiarized with the rules in order to, first, enter the game, and, hopefully, have the full experience a game can offer. A matador is not an exception to this rule and knowledge of the rules is asked of him: "He should, however, increase this danger [of getting closer to the bull], *within the rules provided for his protection*"⁸⁹ as disregarding the rules is thought to be not only reckless, but also disrespectful.

The manuals present a player with choices, strategies, and tricks that make it easier to navigate within a game and to win. The question of winning a game is not as obvious as it may seem. For Huizinga, the game-elements are associated with chance and contest.⁹⁰ In contrast to play, which may be free from both of these aspects, games, as Brian Sutton-Smith writes, "imply some opposition or antithesis between players."⁹¹ In other words, for a game to take place, there needs to be rivalry as without it, there cannot be a winner. For Hans-Georg Gadamer, however, the essence of the game lies somewhere else. The score is of no or little importance, and what counts and produces meaning is the process of playing a game—"the purpose of the game is not really solving the task, but ordering and shaping the movement

⁸⁹ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 21. Emphasis original.

⁹⁰ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 34.

⁹¹ Elliott M. Avedon and Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Study of Games* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971), 7.

of the game itself.”⁹² This agrees with what frequently happens during *corrida*—the audience’s reactions are not evoked by the result, for they understand the odds and the probable outcome—they do not come to the arena to experience suspense of a win/lose confrontation, but to appreciate the skills, agility, and overall aesthetic and emotional impact of the event. The torero and author Mario Carrión writes: “A bullfight fan screams *olé* not because the matador has won, but because of the manner, the form, of the torero performing,”⁹³ which suggests the score has rather a symbolic value or perhaps serves as a final justification of what has been already demonstrated during the fight. It is not about one’s victory or, at least, not entirely. Also Huizinga detected that the meaning of this spectacle somehow escapes the scoreboard. In *Homo Ludens* he writes:

What is “winning,” and what is “won”? Winning means showing oneself superior in the outcome of a game. Nevertheless, the evidence of this superiority tends to confer upon the winner semblance of superiority in general. In this respect he wins something more than the game as such. He has won esteem, obtained honour; and this honour and esteem at once accrue to the benefit of the group to which the victor belongs.⁹⁴

Indeed, the score itself confirms the thesis that has been somehow established from the outset—a matador will trick the animal and win. For this reason, some people find it difficult to succumb to the alleged allure of the show. In *The Making of Toro* Don Carlos comments upon *corrida*: “There is no drama because the outcome is certain. I prefer basketball. Or football.”⁹⁵ For him, there is but little suspense in the event; he is convinced

⁹² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (2nd revised ed.) (London: Continuum, 2006), 107.

⁹³ Mario Carrión, “Spanish Fiesta Brava, A History of Bullfighting,” in *The Mexico File*, 1997, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://www.mexicofile.com/bullfightinghistory.htm>.

⁹⁴ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 50.

⁹⁵ Sundeen, *The Making of Toro*, 94.

of man's superiority and for that reason does not find the fight worthwhile and exciting. The only thing it seems to do, is to show the symbolic victory of the civilized over the untamed. In that sense, the matador's success does not fully belong to him; it is shared by his audience. Huizinga supports this claim as in *Homo Ludens* he writes that each victory represents a collective achievement—he defines it as “the triumph of the good powers over the bad, and at the same time the salvation of the group that effects it”⁹⁶ which, in this case, is constituted by *corrida*'s witnesses.

Still, even though man is equipped with a sword and may rely on his helpers in case of danger—*picadores* and *rejoneadores*—there is, without a doubt, a fair share of risk he is willing to take in order to perform and satisfy the crowd. The game is serious to him, because even though he follows the rules and order, the bull's resistance and movements cannot be positively predicted. This element of uncertainty forces the man to rely on luck which is a feature of all bullfights. In his work, Sutton-Smith famously stated that “luck is very much fate's last hope,”⁹⁷ proving that although the victory over the bull is symbolic, it hinges on circumstances present in the arena. The mortality that is implicit in the confrontation is regulated by (mere?) chance. This relation which can be noticed in the arena is symptomatic for all mankind outside the ring. Luck, which is a part of each game, does also, to a certain degree, govern human life. Matadors “rely on what chance gives them,”⁹⁸ but so does the rest of us.

Having luck as a factor determining one's performance or life can be perceived in a defeatist way as it deprives one of any control over the course of the events, yet Sutton-Smith offers some consolation—to his way of thinking, luck may be an escape

⁹⁶ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 56.

⁹⁷ Brian Sutton-Smith, “Conclusion: The Persuasive Rhetorics of Play,” in *The Future of Play Theory. A Multidisciplinary Inquiry into the Contribution of Brian Sutton-Smith*, ed. Anthony D. Pellegrini (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 53.

⁹⁸ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 14.

mechanism which allows one to flee from harm. When all skill and talent is exhausted, luck becomes the only way out; he claims: "There is a sense in which the irrevocability of fate leaves no answers except the most desperate and universal of human answers, which is that one might perhaps escape by luck or its personified equivalent, God's favor."⁹⁹ Matadors are especially prone to concepts of luck and superstition and, before the fight, even the aficionados turn to fortune. An old Spanish man in *The Last Matador* says just before one of the toreros enters the ring: "Let us see if we have good luck today."¹⁰⁰ The Spanish word for fortune is *suerte*; this term, however, serves a number of purposes, because it stands for chance, luck, fortune, hazard, destiny, doom, and a way, or a trick. For Hemingway, *suerte* means "all predetermined maneuvers in a bullfight, any move which has rules for the manner of its execution."¹⁰¹ Parallel to this notion Roger Caillois writes on *alea* which he understands as a game category. Caillois, in his influential *Man, Play and Games*, puts forward two types of play and four play forms. *Alea*, as defined by the scholar "signifies and reveals the favor of destiny,"¹⁰² which is similar to the concept of *suerte*. Nonetheless, *corrida* is not entirely reflected in *alea*; the latter disregards skill which, by all means, is of pivotal importance for the concept of bullfighting. It flirts with *alea* as it may be perceived as a "surrender to destiny"¹⁰³ and the unknown. In the continuum of play forms created by Caillois, *alea* would place closer to *paidia*, which is a form of play that affirms spontaneity and, in a way, passiveness as the player has little influence on the result. In opposition to the free play, he introduces *ludus*, which is the kernel of a more developed and demanding forms of play—it requires limits and following of rules. Caillois himself claims that:

⁹⁹ Sutton-Smith, "Conclusion: The Persuasive Rhetorics of Play," 53.

¹⁰⁰ Newman, *The Last Matador*, 94.

¹⁰¹ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 451

¹⁰² Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 17.

¹⁰³ Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 19.

Games without *paidia* seem ultimately sterile, formulaic settings in which players quickly lose interest; but games without sufficient ludic elements also lack appeal in that they do not lead the player toward increasingly sophisticated challenges or permit complex social interaction.¹⁰⁴

I am inclined to believe *corrida* is an exact meeting point between the two notions. Skill and technique would be assigned to a category of games called *agon* in which chances are equally distributed between the competitors. One may question whether the distribution of power is just in case of a man and a bull. Clearly, the bull remains unaware of the rules and fights to survive and not “win” in a sense that the man may be victorious. The spectators detect the unfairness of the procedure and negate any idea that the bull could stand a chance against the matador. Upon seeing the fight, an American family initially has a romantic vision of the battle yet, as it progresses, they realize there is no voluntary participation on the bull’s side: “‘He [the bull—E. W.] has such a sweet face’ says Mom. ‘He thinks it’s just a game’ [...] ‘And when the blood begins to drip into the sand,’ Mom says, ‘He doesn’t want to play anymore.’”¹⁰⁵ Another argument that *corrida* is not entirely a game in Caillois’s understanding of the term is the following passage by Homer Casteel:

The mistake most people make about the bullfight is that they assume it is a contest between the man and the bull. It is not. It is a contest within the man himself. He puts his bravery and his training, which dictates he must plant his feet and pass the horns as closely past his body as possible, against the innate human impulse to get the hell out of the way.¹⁰⁶

In this regard, it would not be correct to define *corrida* as a game, which requires two willing participants on a more or less

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Sundeen, *The Making of Toro*, 150.

¹⁰⁶ Homer Casteel, *The Running of the Bulls* (New York: Faber & Faber, 1954), 11.

equal playing field who understand the rule-bound manner of their encounter. The bullfight, despite two parties and numerous members of audience, becomes a one-sided piece of work:

It is the difference between playing cards with an individual who, giving no importance to the game and having no sum at stake, gives no attention to the rules and makes the game impossible and one who having learned the rules, through having them forced on him and through losing; and now, having his fortune and life at stake, gives much importance to the game and the rules, finding them forced upon him, and does his best with utmost seriousness. It is up to the bullfighter to make the bull play and to enforce the rules.¹⁰⁷

Because the bull is removed from the equation the question of whether a man wins or loses ceases to be of significance. Instead, a matador may deliver either a beautiful and meaningful performance or a mere reenactment of steps and moves. There is indeed some space for a matador to express his personal style and, in using it, present a unique performance while trying not to yield to pressure and survive. Escaping death in the ring substantiates the premise that *corrida*, in principle, draws abundantly from games of chance and despite all rules that are introduced and carefully followed, the element of disorder creates another framework for bullfighting. Sutton-Smith notes these two opposing fields that coexist within the phenomenon. He writes, “There are two conflicting rhetoric about the play: one that says it is positive, as a mode of cultural origination, humanization, catharsis, or socialization, and another that says it is a site for power seeking, domination, and hegemony, or disorder, inversion, and resistance”¹⁰⁸—the latter qualities, that is, disorder and inversion need to be produced and displayed by either a matador or a bull as they are forbidden and frowned upon in everyday life but require to be addressed and realized as well.

¹⁰⁷ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 147.

¹⁰⁸ Sutton-Smith, “Conclusion: The Persuasive Rhetorics of Play,” 81.

Bullfighting is an ideal environment for them to be recognized as bullfighting is, to borrow a term from a British philosopher Jeremy Bentham, a “deep play” signifying a game with stakes so high that “it is irrational for anyone to engage in it at all, since the marginal utility of what you stand to win is grossly outweighed by the disutility of what you stand to lose”¹⁰⁹—this surely agrees with the abovementioned symbolic value of potential victory compared with the fatal danger which threatens the *torero*. The concept of a game that may be described as *deep* was used by an American anthropologist Clifford Geertz to describe Balinese cockfights which he saw as reflections of social relations and conflicts and the human condition.¹¹⁰

Thus, I think that referring to *corrida* as a deep game is justified for, in Geertz’s view—the deeper and more meaningful the game becomes, the higher the stakes, and, clearly, no stakes could be higher than one’s own life. The members of the audience too demand the encounter to be risky and dangerous at the same time and they expect the *matador* to deliver a well-executed routine and the joy from watching this game comes from the point of tangency between these two axes: Caillois accurately summarizes that the pleasure of the game is inseparable from the risk of losing (although the outcome may be anticipated beforehand). Winning the game in style is crucial to the audience’s satisfaction. One does not expect an Olympic athlete to simply win but they are asked to deliver a triumphant piece of work—Huizinga mentions the skill and finesse that must be included in a game for it to be appreciated amongst members of the society: “Once a game is beautiful to look at, its cultural value is obvious”¹¹¹—this is especially needed in a peculiar encounter between two different forces that may be difficult to comprehend without some balance and agility. In the arena, it is the *matador* who is responsible for evoking aesthetic pleasure and creating

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 81–82.

¹¹⁰ Clifford Geertz, “Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Boston: Basic Books, 1973), 384.

¹¹¹ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 48.

a spectacle. In *The Dangerous Summer* one of the matadors is able to demonstrate his dominance over the bull: “Antonio gave him [the bull E. W.] confidence [...] and then showing him how he could follow the lure without pain and that it could be a game.”¹¹² This shows that the game is not fair because the powers are not equally distributed even though there are two “contestants” and they may get close to one another: “Then they [Antonio and the bull] played the game together with either hand, round and round.”¹¹³ The ringleader is the man. His ability to master the animal reflects some cultural and social content. Huizinga, too, shifts his focus from the visual aspects of the event to the meaning the power struggle carries: “physical, intellectual, moral or spiritual values can equally well raise play to the cultural level.”¹¹⁴ These features can be offered and played out during a bullfight thanks to the meticulously organized structure guiding the duel. This bears similarity to Bakhtin’s concept of carnival and, moreover, one of his descriptions of carnival’s functions may even serve as a commentary on the game element in bullfighting: “Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection”¹¹⁵ precisely because of its rules and regulations. A 2003 publication on games (especially computer games and game design) by American-based scholars Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman considers rules as a distinctive feature of games that influence their relations with the players and their milieu. In *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*, they write: “As a system, a game can be considered to have an open or closed relationship to its context. Considered as RULES, a game is closed. Considered as PLAY, a game is both open and closed. Considered as CULTURE, a game is open,”¹¹⁶ which is why one cannot equate games with

¹¹² Ernest Hemingway, *The Dangerous Summer* (New York: Scribners, 1985), 89.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 48.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹¹⁶ Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2003), 96.

play, but, at the same time, it would be useful to think of them, when considering corrida, as two sides of the same coin. Henry, a character from *The Last Matador*, sees how “two children *played a game* of matador”¹¹⁷ and this quotation perhaps best illustrates how the two concepts overlap. Not only do the children perform a free, make-believe activity but concurrently, they are subjects to rules of the game itself, as they follow the behaviors of real bullfighters. This proves that the player is also the subject within the time- and rule-bound frame of the activity. Jacques Ehrmann, a French literary theorist, in his critique of Huizinga and Caillois notes how the two neglected the matter of one’s immersion in the game. From his standpoint both of them “forgot that players may be played, that, as an object in the game, the player can be its stakes (*enjeu*) and its toy (*jouet*).”¹¹⁸ This may come as a surprise, as it seems natural that in order for a game to be performed well, the players need to somehow “lose” themselves in the process. What needs to be stressed is that corrida provides an ideal setting for such behavior because it combines chaos, chance, structure, a celebration of life, and death. For Caillois, such fundamentals invite “diversion, turbulence, free improvisation and carefree gaiety”¹¹⁹ which facilitate the experience of being absorbed by something beyond one’s self. Once the matador ceases to be a unique player, he becomes a symbolic figure which stands for the human condition in general. Michel Leiris elaborated on corrida’s power to serve as a ‘mirror’ that reveals the darker sides of a human being and has the ability to illustrate social, cultural, and emotional tensions present only so vividly in the modernist discourse. In his detailed analysis of the connection between modernism and bullfighting, Leiris says that the latter is an attempt to “impose form on chaos and the apparent proximity of eroticism, ritual and

¹¹⁷ Newman, *The Last Matador*, 86. Emphasis mine.

¹¹⁸ Jacques Ehrmann, “Homo Ludens Revisited,” trans. Cathy and Phil Lewis, in *Game, Play, Literature*, ed. Jacques Ehrmann (Boston: Beacon, 1971), 31–57.

¹¹⁹ Mihai Spărius, *Dionysus Reborn: Play and the Aesthetic Dimension in Modern Philosophical and Scientific Discourse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

violence”¹²⁰ and the proximity of which he speaks could also be seen as quite literal, as the closer the bullfighter gets to the animal and its horns, the greater the experience of fear, excitement, and elation that is offered. These emotions are also markers of sacred ceremonies and rituals and, even though, traditionally, in culture games and ceremonials belong to two opposing spheres, there is no denying they share a vast emotional load.

The game element of bullfighting, namely, its structure and rules, does not deprive it of the right to be a carrier of representation. The question of representing something greater than itself is a feature of all play activities.

Playing Havoc—Bullfighting and Play

Everything plays itself out in the dangerous proximity of a threshold as thin as a razorblade, in a slender range of interference, in a psychological no man’s land, in a domain of the sacrum par excellence: on a knife-edge, over which hovers taboo (whose only significance is to prevent sacrilege, to inhibit profanation), at the limits where all things lose the directionless, amorphous nature of the secular, and polarize into left and right.¹²¹

Huizinga, who introduced the play concept into academic discourse and opened up a discussion about the place that it occupies in culture, was aware that it needs to be interpreted not as a sum of activities and forms that it can take. Therefore, children’s play, sports, social games, and theatrical plays should be seen as entities that focus more on the content and its meaning than on their form. I want to present an interpretation of the concept of play

¹²⁰ Lawrence Foley, *The Last Serious Thing: Modernist Responses to the Bullfight*, accessed February 18, 2017, https://qmro.qmro.ac.uk/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/8903/Foley_Lawrence_PhD_180515.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

¹²¹ Leiris, *Mirror of Tauromachy*, 10.

that would encapsulate all the aspects of this notion and could be used to examine whether *corrida* is compatible with the definition of play at which I arrive. I understand that it may include sometimes contradictory qualities, but I believe it is important to acknowledge the dichotomies as they represent the complexity of human life and play's presence in it. Also, I approach play in the context of art, which I believe can enrich the understanding of what *corrida* is. Still, art should not be treated as play but only as a layer that may or may not be present in play as such.

Play is a well-known and recognizable element of everyday life, and is even common among animals, yet, despite its ubiquity and universal character, it has no universal definition. For the precursor of serious treatment of play sees it the following way: "It is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from "ordinary life."¹²² This definition, however, may as well describe a game which I believe is a subcategory of play. What then differentiates play from games or art? They all share the inherent quality of voluntariness that is underlined by all the theoreticians whose work I have discussed.

Another tempting and common practice of explaining play is contrasting it with seriousness. This still does not offer a full definition as it entails yet another difficulty, that of defining what is serious. Leiris tries to mitigate this conundrum and writes: "Play is less the opposite of seriousness than the vital ground of spirit as nature, a form of restraint and freedom at one and the same time"¹²³ which forces one to face the paradox of synthesizing freedom and control. Binary oppositions are more than frequent when discussing play: play/work, serious/playful, productive/wasteful, real/make-believe are contrasting, yet pivotal

¹²² Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 28.

¹²³ Hans-Georg Gadamer and Robert Bernasconi, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 130.

elements of play. This duality of play can be transferred onto the stratum of interpretation and be seen as symbolic representations of life/death, the sacred/the profane. This capacity to contain contradictions is called by Jacques Derrida the *undecidability* of play.¹²⁴ Such an ability to work within elements that are conflicting is a perfect foundation of ambiguity, metaphors, and symbols which are all used in the works I have selected for discussion. This position of being in a constant state of in-between offers a wide scope of interpretations and is one of the most paramount characteristics of play.

Although play is a necessary act that serves a purpose beyond its own forms and the purely physical or biological activities which it asks of its contestants, what needs to be remembered is the fact that it is not a task. Still, it demands knowledge of this elusive quality of action that constitutes play. In Huizinga's words, it "demands order absolute and supreme."¹²⁵ What he may be suggesting is that play is indeed a manifestation of power and control that are both natural (the animal) and cultural forces (matador and his skills). What is more, the author of *Homo Ludens* proposes that play may remind one of intangible aspects of existence, as he states: "The words we use to denote the elements of play belong for the most part to aesthetics, terms with which we try to describe the effects of beauty: tension, poise, balance, contrast, variation, solution, resolution,"¹²⁶ and these factors are the very same factors used to evaluate a successful and moving bullfight. The aim of the latter is parallel to play's objective—to release pressure and repressed feeling. In other words, it can be regarded as an "abreaction, an outlet for harmful impulses, as the necessary restorer of energy"¹²⁷ which will later be questioned by Caillois's claim that play is wasteful. Huizinga's attempts to delimit the concept of play are not conclusive; however, likening

¹²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

¹²⁵ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 10.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

various phenomena to play (“law and order, commerce and profit, craft and art, poetry, wisdom and science. All are rooted in the primeval soil of play”¹²⁸) allows me to draw parallels between the latter and the complexities of corrida.

Regardless of the theoretical frameworks one may be tempted to employ, play is not defined as an inferior aspect of human life. Even though it refers to pastime activities, it should not be perceived as marginal and separate from more “important” social issues. Thus, play cannot be equated with solely one interpretation or function. It oscillates freely within various approaches and links opposing ideas. Yet, its meaning needs to be always produced using *rhetoric* (as Brian Sutton-Smith writes)—a methodological framework to contextualize it. For him, there are seven “play histories,” or as he clarifies it, “historically derived persuasive discourses” that function as frames for play. The seven discourses are:

1. play as *progress* (development, learning);
2. play as *power* (competition, challenge, conflict);
3. play as *identity* (community);
4. play as *the self* (self-actualization, optimal life experience);
5. play as *the imaginary* (invention, creativity);
6. play as *fate* (gods’ will, luck);
7. play as *frivolity* (this category is perhaps the most elusive one to define; it is connected to human folly and the figure of a trickster).¹²⁹

Each of these frames may be successfully traced in the works I selected. A brief analysis of the frames’ presence should help to deepen the understanding of the play element in bullfighting.

Unquestionably, one of the most vivid features of play is the one connected with progress. That is especially true for children and animals who acquire and develop skills through play. This developmental condition, however, may go beyond childhood or children’s games and be displayed by adult protagonists who, by

¹²⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹²⁹ Sutton-Smith, “Conclusion: The Persuasive Rhetorics of Play,” 278.

taking part in a bullfight, grow and mature. This is also true for passive as well as active participants of the phenomenon since the experience itself is of such force that no-one is left indifferent. An immediate example that proves that bullfighting does contain the play as a progress element can be found in Maia Wojciechowska's *Shadow of a Bull*,¹³⁰ where 9-year-old Manolo is put under pressure to learn and become a torero following in the footsteps of his late father (who was a legendary torero). He becomes the focus of the town, Arcangel, and is expected to mature far quicker than his peers as the townsfolk foresee his bright future as a matador: "Now the town of Arcangel was waiting, for that hero had left them a son who was growing up to once again take arms against death."¹³¹ This statement shows how play may only seemingly be a voluntary activity. The story continues with an even gloomier atmosphere revolving around developing his artistry as a future bullfighter. The boy realizes how important this role is for his surroundings as he knows that "he must learn. He must begin immediately"¹³² to meet the expectations. When an experienced matador dedicates a bull to him, the boy recognizes the reason he was brought to the fight—to observe and study the dangerous encounter. He starts to pray that the spectacle will make him comprehend the rules and form the technique needed to perform. He prays "for the man and for the bull, for their mutual bravery to teach him the length and breadth of pride and courage"¹³³ that are asked of him. Bullfighting is, therefore, a tool needed for him to progress as a man. However, this advancement is not limited to the future matador. Corrida does allow progression even for more experienced individuals.

In *Two Matadors* an older fighter shares his reflections and appreciates the wisdom corrido has given him: "Facing danger in the ring gave me more worldly knowledge than he could ever

¹³⁰ Maia Wojciechowska, *Shadow of a Bull* (New York: Alladin, 2007).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 36.

hope to learn [...] hiding behind books,”¹³⁴ yet again presenting the affinity between *corrida*’s enriching qualities and the play element Sutton-Smith discusses. This maturing through bullfighting is introduced in *The Last Matador* where José, an emerging torero, is asked about his reasons to perform in a ring. He recalls being taught by his father—“While others were playing football, I was practicing with a homemade *toro* fashioned from a sun-bleached skull and an old wheelbarrow. [...] He sacrificed much to give me this opportunity. I must not waste it. It was always his dream, and now it has become mine.”¹³⁵ It is apparent that all three examples portray bullfighting as an experience that helps people develop. In spite of that, Manolo and José demonstrate a slightly less optimistic undertone—as it may be seen, their participation in play is not entirely voluntary, which goes against the kernel of play. For this reason, it would not be entirely justified to assign the play as progress element to *corrida*.

Another aspect of play one could associate with *corrida* is the one implying that power lies at the heart of the phenomenon. Power indicates a superiority/inferiority dichotomy that is inevitably connected to play as playing is more often than not based on competition and/or opposing roles. *Corrida* is an adequate example of such an approach for its essence is conflict and various dichotomies (man/animal, culture/nature, male/female). Nonetheless, power is not (and should not be) distributed equally between the participants. The old aficionado in *Two Matadors* says: “To fight a bull is an impossible task. A man alone can never win against the bull. The bull is too strong and too fast,”¹³⁶ emphasizing just how unfair the odds are. However, he then states, “the contest is with nature, not with the bull,”¹³⁷ which renders other interpretations possible.

Power could be seen as a prerational and arbitrary force. I am referring here to notions discussed by Mihai Sparioușu, who, in

¹³⁴ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 11.

¹³⁵ Newman, *The Last Matador*, 68.

¹³⁶ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 5.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

his *Dionysus Reborn: Play and the Aesthetic Dimension in Modern Philosophical and Scientific Discourse*, comprehensively discusses the relation between power and play. The following passage explains the two kinds of power that could be derived from play:

Prerational thought generally conceives of play as a manifestation of power in its “natural,” unashamed, unmediated form, ranging from the sheer delight of emotional release to raw and arbitrary violence. Power can be experienced both as ecstatic, exuberant, and violent play and as a pleasurable welling up and gushing forth of stronger motion. Rational thought, in contrast, generally separates play from both unmediated or “innocent” power and raw violence. Indeed, it sees play as a form of mediation between what it now represses as the “irrational” [...] and controlling Reason.¹³⁸

Corrida combines the contradictory aspects of power, for one can find both the raw violence displayed by an enraged bull and controlled movements aimed at killing performed by a matador. Power that brings forth an ecstatic feeling and emotional release could be observed upon a reading in which the bull stands for a woman and the matador for a man who wishes to seduce her. A vivid description of such a reading is present in *Two Matadors* where a seasoned matador Antonio recalls his affair with the beautiful Isabella. He likens it to a bullfight. In his narrative, she is the bull and he is the sword. He summarizes it: “It was a conquest that I never would forget.”¹³⁹ The man wishes to conquer and desires to “train, wear down and subdue the woman, while the woman asserts her independence, her strength and the power of her nature,”¹⁴⁰ which clearly implies that the ring is a field in which a power struggle takes place. The fact that each party has a different set of skills and talents makes the spectacle even more

¹³⁸ Mihai Spăriosu, *Dionysus Reborn: Play and the Aesthetic Dimension in Modern Philosophical and Scientific Discourse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 12.

¹³⁹ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 49.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

captivating. This triumph of male over female touches upon the next feature applied when discussing play, that is, play as the imaginary.

Corrida as an eminently theatrical sight invites its audiences and performers into the realm of fantasy and imagination. The arena becomes a place for projecting one's fears (the matador who stands for culture ought to dominate the bull, which is a representative of nature in order to reassure the observers) as well as desires (when seeing the matador as a seducer and the bull as a woman to be captivated). Applying the play as fantasy concept when discussing corrido, especially when referring to the projection of one's desires, does not entirely force one to universal treatment of one's object of desire. Instead, this realm of fantasy, limited in space and time, offers a symbolic reenactment of how desire works. Slavoj Žižek in his *The Plague of Fantasies* extensively discusses the mechanisms of fantasy and its connection to desire. His thinking lends justification to my claim that the fantasy element that can be seen in corrido is not limited to one or two imageries, but it leads the way to an individual experience. As Žižek writes, fantasy "teaches us how to desire"¹⁴¹ and leaves the actual object desired to one's own taste. The question of individualization is linked to the fourth play framework—play as self. Even though corrido is a spectator activity, it has already been suggested that enormous focus is placed upon an individual and his or her experience of each bullfight as its focal point.

A personal involvement on an emotional level should lead to a fuller understanding of oneself and realizing one's innermost aspects of personality. While observing or fighting in the very battle, it is the self that undergoes, at least a temporary, metamorphosis. It is especially true for matadors who risk their life in the arena. For a modern American literature scholar Thomas Strychacz,¹⁴² it is in this peculiar space that manhood is per-

¹⁴¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 2008), 7.

¹⁴² Thomas Strychacz, *Hemingway's Theaters of Masculinity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

formed and fashioned. In a way, the matador in the arena becomes the man he aspires to be and his performance forms both his identity and the manner in which he is perceived by the audience. The play as the self component of bullfighting proves that play triggers the process of becoming oneself. Juan, a has-been matador, in a way started his existence only after his first encounter with the animal. He was “baptized in the blood of brave bulls”¹⁴³ and, at that moment, his life commenced. Also Kennedy acknowledges *corrida* as an identity-building occasion. In her view, upon stepping into the ring, matadors protect the image they have obtained and prolong their own legend. This gives them a chance to “accept their vocation and save their identity”¹⁴⁴ that has been shaped in the very ring in the first place, as the case of Juan proves. Nonetheless, what one needs to remember is that the self-element of play is connected with the fantasy component and following this connection it could be said that one’s identity and self are based upon a fantasy, a mere projection of what it means to be a man or a woman. Unreal as the self may seem, the belief in it is genuine. As Kennedy learns more and more about *corrida*, its *aficionados*, and heroes, she comments upon one of Spain’s most appreciated icons, Juan Belmonte: “His belief in his own identity as a matador was woundingly intense,”¹⁴⁵ demonstrating how play as self coexists with play as the imaginary. Play invites the self as it is, an individual that invents it, and the fantasy as the imaginary by definition needs to be outside what is familiar and tangible. In this framework, *corrida* may seem like a make-believe sphere and a state of mind. In *A Cape in the Wind*, the once famous matador shows how this rhetoric is used when he sees an arena for the first time: “The plaza was as good and as bad as he had imagined. The good was a sturdy black *barrena* on buried posts an arena of dirt. There were shields [...] but no passageway called the *callejon* behind the plank wall.”¹⁴⁶ This passage

¹⁴³ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 4.

¹⁴⁴ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 61.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁴⁶ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 33.

shows the reader how, even for the most involved in the event, it might seem arbitrary and beyond the rational.

Thus, the irrational constitutes another framework of play—play as fate. It connects play to ancient mythology and divine capriciousness. The belief that the entire sphere of bullfighting is governed by external and sublime forces renders the outcome of each encounter even more substantial. Victory and defeat cease to be man-achieved and invite various agents of destiny to interfere with matador's life. In *Shadow of a Bull* the aspiring matador puts his fate and possible career in the hands of a higher power, it is visible when he talks (and is talked about) with one of the aficionados—when the latter asks: “You’ll be a great torero someday?”—he responds—“If it is the will of God,” to which the man replies, “I wish you God’s will then,”¹⁴⁷ this shows how little the skill and training may mean when all the faith is put into the intangible. To my way of thinking, being aware of one’s limited control over the fight introduces fear into the play. Two matadors from *A Cape in the Wind* feel deprived of control and this leads them to dismay:

Jesus, Paco. Is this some kind of witchcraft? First, we inherit another man’s corrida, then we draw this monster. What the hell is going on?¹⁴⁸

What kind of fate reached into the basket of eternity and pulled out a monster like this?¹⁴⁹

Tell me that you are not superstitious, Salvatore. Tell me you don’t believe this stuff about evil fate. Tell me you are not an old woman¹⁵⁰

The belief and disbelief concerning fate are equally dangerous in play. Trusting God or gods diminishes one’s sense of respon-

¹⁴⁷ Wojciechowska, *Shadow of a Bull*, 130.

¹⁴⁸ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 63.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

sibility and, at the same time, facilitates a false sense of purpose of predestination. A good example of that is young Manolo who is put under pressure to become the next great matador.

The believers depicted in the novels are always confronted with a voice of reason which attempts to question the unwavering people of faith. In *Shadow of a Bull* a renown corrida expert tries to reason with the men who decided to train Manolo and he warns them: “It seems to me that we have taken upon ourselves God’s prerogative: playing with the destiny of a human being.”¹⁵¹ This concern for transgressing boundaries is what I find the most useful in the fate rhetoric. However, I wish to use bullfighting not necessarily as a display of God’s will but rather as a threshold to a sphere of sacrum that may entail one’s belief in a higher power. It is well illustrated in *A Cape in the Wind*, where a priest and a matador converse about each other’s approach towards sacrum and its connection or lack thereof to corrida. The men are aware of the binary opposition their attitudes present (flesh/soul, sin/virtue, the profane/the sacrum), yet, in a paradoxical way, they find a way to sympathize with one another. They recognize what it is that draws them into their professions and that, perhaps, it might be a similar calling. Even though the matador notices bitterly: “Well, here we are,” Juan said brightly, “a matador who never goes to church and a priest who never goes to a corrida,”¹⁵² which, at least on the surface, deepens the discrepancy between the phenomena moving them further away from one another. Eventually, Juan finds himself slightly less arrogant and acquires respect for the priest who ultimately attends a bullfight.

The link between God and corrida is a peculiar one. Matadors create little altars in their hotel rooms and pray in front of the Virgin of Hope of Macarena—a patron saint of matadors. Kennedy, in her account of corrida in Spain, reveals how important this spiritual stratum proves to be. She writes: “Every bull ring

¹⁵¹ Wojciechowska, *Shadow of a Bull*, 127.

¹⁵² Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 114.

of any size at all offers some variety of space set aside for toreros who wish to pray and, beyond prayer, toreros? and the members of their *cuadrillas* have patterns and layers of habits and charms to coax in and secure good luck¹⁵³ which confirms that God's will, a certain kind of predestination, is always present at the event and navigates the moods and attitudes of those who partake in it. The possible result stems from higher powers and therefore is easier to understand and becomes more bearable.

In Caillois's perspective, the score is no longer a random result of uncontrolled forces but a part of a divine plan. He states in his writings: "As for chance, it is not an abstract expression of a statistical coefficient but a sacred sign of the favor of the gods"¹⁵⁴ introducing fate as one of the fundamentals of bullfighting (which does not necessarily have to be a positive thing). Kennedy's approach to fate and higher powers is ambivalent at best; on the one hand, she comprehends the role religions have and the way people navigate through life using their faith and yet, on the other, her remarks may seem somewhat cynical. The author says: "I am not unaware that faith makes living supportable, can make sense out of death"¹⁵⁵ and, at the same time, she is quick to disregard it and substitute it with another abstract phenomenon—luck: "When religion seems inadequate or impossibly exalted, we can all resort to courting luck"¹⁵⁶ and in so doing, she confirms how complex and ambiguous fate is in relation to bullfighting.

Even though she admits she seeks beliefs ("In writing this book I am looking for faith"¹⁵⁷), she detects a layer of untruthfulness and dishonesty in those prayers whispered by matadors who kneel moments before they attempt to kill an animal.

As said before, one of the aficionados who was to recognize the great talent in young Manolo in *Shadow of a Bull* after watching the boy—scared and confused—comes to a surpris-

¹⁵³ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 12.

¹⁵⁴ Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 126.

¹⁵⁵ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 12.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

ing conclusion: “It seems to me that we have taken upon ourselves God’s prerogative: playing with the destiny of a human being,”¹⁵⁸ which he finds disgraceful and all the more so, as it is a child with whose destiny people toy. The aura of tampering with one’s fortune connects the works I have chosen for discussion to a category Sutton-Smith names—play as frivolity.¹⁵⁹ As I have already suggested, this framework could be seen as puzzling, for frivolity is not an easy concept to define (it refers to absurdity) human folly as well as clowns or traditional roles of, for instance, Shakespearean tricksters. Sutton-Smith reaches even further in his description as he attaches frivolity in play to a mythological figure of a trickster-god who meddles with people and their fate. The figure of a trickster, according to Sutton-Smith, was crucial as a part of a symbolic rebellion against the social order and constraints. Such a role of a witty fool whose playfulness ought to serve a purpose within and beyond the bullring can be found in *The Making of Toro* where the protagonist, Travis LaFrance, is commissioned to write a novel on bullfighting and, in a self-mocking fashion, he exposes levity of this noble motif. This Hemingway-wannabe derides the pretentiousness of bullfighting literature and his contribution to the topic: “The more I considered a winter in Moab collecting unemployment and applying for heat assistance, the more I realized that, yes, what literature really needs at his moment is a book about bullfighting by a young white American man. I’ll do it.”¹⁶⁰ Upon accepting the job, he becomes a trickster and contributes to portraying corrido as frivolous and playful, which stands in contrary to grand symbolisms of thus far published literature on the subject.

The novel revolves around his supplementary writings on corrido which, in his view, creates a brilliant marketing strategy; he justifies his decision in a twisted way:

¹⁵⁸ Wojciechowska, *Shadow of a Bull*, 127.

¹⁵⁹ Sutton-Smith, “Conclusion: The Persuasive Rhetorics of Play,” 278.

¹⁶⁰ Sundeen, *The Making of Toro*, 5.

No matter how great the book is, no one will read it if they don't hear about it, and I vowed early that *Toro* would not slip into the same cracks that held *Fun with Falconry*. Having seen television shows like "The Making of Titanic," I know that a blockbuster is not the work of some recluse behind a typewriter, but the result of slick marketing that hypes the final product as so fabulous that it merits a documentary on its very creation. What works for movies should work for books, and so as I set out to write *Toro* I also began this behind-the-scenes memoir of the forging of a classic. Call it a companion piece to genius.¹⁶¹

In ridiculing his greedy and mischievous ways he brings to light vices shared by his readers and, in so doing, he realizes his frivolous role of a trickster. Meta-jokes reverberate throughout the novel and deromanticize the phenomenon. Travis writes: "To write a book about bullfighting I needed to learn something about bullfighting. As winter fell in Utah, I ordered some expensive book and began reading. Within a month, I was, in all modesty, an expert,"¹⁶² which reveals more than common naïveté shared by the members of the audience. What is interesting, similar glimmers of apprehensiveness are noticeable in Kennedy's work, where she shows her lukewarm approach towards the aura of machismo: "The Hemingway bravado did nothing for me"¹⁶³—she also uses irony to display her skepticism and confusion regarding the spectacle and, by discrediting Ernest Hemingway (probably the most famous agent, proxy, and an ambassador of *corrida* in the Western literature), she is able to discredit an entire generation of perceiving bullfighting. LaFrance employs the same technique of breaking off with the Hemingwayesque viewpoint as he teases his readers with innuendos and direct references to the Nobel Prize winner:

I lay in my sleeping bag and wrote the memorable opening to Chapter one: The desert night is as still as quite as a freshly

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶² Ibid., 9.

¹⁶³ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 36.

killed carcass. [...] We ride along in the darkness [...]. There is no turning back now. The owl beckons us thither, southward. Ask not for whom the owl hoots Travis, it hoots for thee.¹⁶⁴

Despite the fact that Hemingway echoes John Donne in the title of his eminent novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, I believe it is justified to claim that LaFrance recalls an American aficionado rather than a British metaphysical poet. Further tropes lend credibility to my stance as he uses Hemingway's work to show the absurd character of *corrida* whose position in the society has changed since the last romantic novel on the matter. Paradoxically, perhaps "truthful treatment of material"¹⁶⁵ includes nowadays a greater amount of playfulness:

Unlike a football fan who can just sit there and holler like an idiot, an aficionado is expected to know something. So before leaving California I photocopied the thirty-four-page glossary of terms from *Death in the Afternoon* which I plan to carry with me at all times to distinguish myself as a true aficionado and not just another dim gringo.¹⁶⁶

Playfulness and frivolity can be traced in the novel precisely because of the intertextual character of Mark Sundeen's work. After meeting a *torera* named Carmen, Sundeen's protagonist wonders: "Why not marry her? [...] It's pretty to think about now, but that which we do is never as pretty as that which we think about. It's all nada, anyhow. Nada y nada y pues nada."¹⁶⁷ The quoted passage is a fusion of *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* by Hemingway and portrays the narrator as the one playing tricks on the narrative and its readers. Such a role is by no means redundant—he is a sum of societal vices and follies at which audiences may laugh and, because of that, resolve any

¹⁶⁴ Sundeen, *The Making of a Toro*, 17.

¹⁶⁵ William Dean Howell, *Criticism and Fiction* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1891), 73.

¹⁶⁶ Sundeen, *The Making of a Toro*, 61.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

pre-existing tensions or conflicts. Tricksters in their frivolous behavior deconstruct societal practices and mock traditional codes of conduct. LaFrance is an adequate example of how subverting rules and mechanisms is inscribed into the system which he attempts to debase as he agrees to write the book even though he neither cares for, nor wishes to appreciate *corrida*.

Here I would like to bridge play as frivolity with the one category that still has not been examined—play as identity. I have decided not to follow the order of play categories proposed by Sutton-Smith as I see a connection between the two frameworks. Yet, before the link is made apparent, the rhetoric of play as identity should be presented. The use of the term “identity” is not unequivocal as it is not attributed to what could be an obvious first association—an individual perception of the self. The way Sutton-Smith employs it indicates a collective, cultural identity. He puts emphasis on social order and cultural roles. In a sense, this framework could be equaled with Alberto Mellucci’s notion of collective identity¹⁶⁸ whose members share experiences and worldviews. The shared outlook has tremendous influence of social movements and relations and can be reflected precisely in playful activities that require gatherings—*corrida* being a perfect example of such an occasion. Treating *corrida* as play that carries a significant societal function agrees with Huizinga’s comment upon play in general. For him, “it adorns life, amplifies it and is to that extent a necessity both for the individual—as a life function—and for society by reason of the meaning it contains, its significance, its expressive value, its spiritual and social associations, in short, as a culture function.”¹⁶⁹

This short passage incontrovertibly introduces a connection between play and a collective that can be found in folk events or festivals whose function is to build and strengthen a feeling of community and represent, as it has been already mentioned, the

¹⁶⁸ Alberto Melucci, *The Process of Collective Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

¹⁶⁹ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 9.

power struggle within a group of people. Kennedy illustrates this unity of otherwise divided individuals: “The rich and impeccable wrestle slowly into place [in a bullring], alongside the parties of housewives, the working-class fathers, carefully introducing the corrida to their sons.”¹⁷⁰ In her voyeuristic journey through Spain, Kennedy pays equal attention to both, the fight and the observers, trying to grasp the fascination of the people who, for a brief moment, share an emotional reaction to what they witness. I believe it is useful to introduce a term originating from Ancient Greece, that is, *phratría*,¹⁷¹ which means a clan, kinfolk, and was also used by Huizinga to describe the community gathered around the fight. For him, the sensation they have in common lasts much longer than the performance itself. Huizinga writes: “But the feeling of being ‘apart together’ in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game.”¹⁷² For this reason, I believe the play as (collective) identity is of greater significance than the rest of examined rhetoric. All of them, however, may be applied when discussing corrida as play, nevertheless, they do not exhaust the interpretative field of this phenomenon. Still, they do expand the horizon and I should return to some of them later in the book, yet, as Sutton-Smith admits, “there is the possibility of bridging them with some more unifying discourse,”¹⁷³ and before I proceed to situate them within another, broader notion I turn to a few other play theoreticians.

Huizinga, whose work was precursory for contemporary approaches toward game studies, did not perceive material and tangible aspects of play as its kernel. For him, it is one of the main

¹⁷⁰ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 152.

¹⁷¹ Christian Meier, *The Greek Discovery of Politics* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1990), 56.

¹⁷² Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 12.

¹⁷³ Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2001), 7.

“bases of civilization” and a meaningful “social construction,”¹⁷⁴ and these two qualities of play resound in Caillois’s oeuvre where, based on Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*, he postulates play not as obligatory and unproductive (meaning it does not produce objects, goods: “play is an occasion of pure waste”¹⁷⁵). How can then this be contextualized within the phenomenon of corrida? For both Huizinga and Caillois, play is a means of celebration that is allowed by and for a collective. Caillois writes that play “is not merely an individual pastime”¹⁷⁶ which invites participants to observe and imbibe the spectacle. Witnessing play proves to be a rewarding experience—Kennedy writes, “He was bleeding for me to see,” showing how captivating or, as Huizinga says, “enchanting”¹⁷⁷ play is in casting a spell over its audiences.

In his analysis Caillois presents two axes that delimit all play and game activities. The first axis is constituted by a continuum between *paidia* and *ludus*, and the second one is based on a distinction between *agôn*—competition, *alea*—chance, *mimesis*—role-play, and *ilinx*—sensation.

Ludus and *paidia* are connected to one another, which only makes the task of defining play and relating it to corrida more precarious. The former is a rational element of the play concept: rules, limits, and a definite score are all *ludus* components, whereas the latter is associated with spontaneity and improvisation that can be observed in children’s play in which they create rules as the play progresses.

In corrida both these elements can be found as the matador follows a rigorous set of rules and must adjust his steps to guidelines that have already been established—a division of the fight into *tercios*, organized routines of torero’s helpers (*ludus*) and, at the same time, randomness of bull’s reactions and matador’s technique (*paidia*). The second axis that Caillois introduces consists of four play forms that help one to navigate through the

¹⁷⁴ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 4.

¹⁷⁵ Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 5.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁷⁷ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 10.

concept of playfulness (the classification of the forms was made according to the dominant element of the notion).

The first form is called *agôn*—competition that is closer to the rational side of playfulness for it revolves around control and score. Even though, as it has been demonstrated before, the score is not the pivotal part of *corrida*, it does contain this element. Caillois's explanation somehow questions this connection, for him *agôn* cannot be linked to any sports involving animals as he says: "In principle, it would seem that *agôn* is unknown among animals, which have no conception of limits or rules, only seeking a brutal victory in merciless combat."¹⁷⁸ I am inclined to believe that a role the matador plays and his domination over the animal suffice to recognize an *agôn* element in bullfighting.

Huizinga's standing is that play creates harmony and order and, that is why it requires a more profound meaning which may be seen as paradoxical—after all, game may be seen as the opposite of seriousness. Gadamer defines this contradiction as "a form of restraint and freedom at one and at the same time"¹⁷⁹ embracing the difficulties dwelling within this phenomenon.

¹⁷⁸ Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 15.

¹⁷⁹ Gadamer and Bernasconi, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, 130.

Chapter Two

Violating the Rules—Taboo, Transgression, and Bullfighting

Transgression has been an intriguing phenomenon frequently commented upon by thinkers for whom its elusiveness and ambiguity were considered allurements rather than a hindrance. Foucault likens it to a lightning that shines for a brief moment, as he writes:

Perhaps [transgression] is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies, which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised singularity.¹

Certainly, even though by definition transgression is aimed against something, for the French philosopher it could be seen as an added value and a useful tool helping to comprehend one's condition. Transgression is, therefore, a bridge between one's reality constructed by tradition, conventions, and social norms and taboos present in every community. Of course, one needs to be aware that what is perceived a taboo is always a matter of time and place within the narrative of history. To name just a few of

¹ Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 100.

taboo's interpretations I should cite Sigmund Freud who summarizes it as follows:

The objects of taboo are many: direct taboos aim at: (a) protection of important persons—chiefs, priests, etc.—and things against harm; (b) safeguarding of the weak—women, children and common people generally—from the powerful mana (magical influence) of chiefs and priests; (c) providing against the dangers incurred by handling or coming in contact with corpses, by eating certain food, etc.; (d) guarding the chief acts of life—births, initiation, marriage and sexual functions—against interference; (e) securing human beings against the wrath or power of gods and spirits.²

Yet, the approaches to taboos, reservations and attempts to keep them at bay are rather universal. Particular conventions or practices that accompany them are just variable factors expressed against the prohibited. Taboo does not exist in separation; it needs its correlation with laws and conventions against which transgression may take place. I believe that transgression occurs at the very moment taboo trickles through thus far rigid laws. Transgression works in a direct relation to norms and various codes of conducts and, when separated from the social background, it loses its meaning. It is only when seen against the righteous and organized framework of societal acceptance that one is able to see the fissure filled with questionable morale or mischievous activities. For Foucault, despite being full of darkness, such space may bring about a positive effect, because it has been crossed. He contemplates:

In that zone which our culture affords for our gestures and speech, transgression prescribes not only the sole manner of discovering the sacred in its unmediated substance, but also a way

² Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. Project Gutenberg, accessed February 11, 2016, <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/41214>.

of recomposing its empty form, its absence, through which it becomes all the more scintillating.³

Foucault emphasizes that transgressing the sacred may bring the “enlightening” effect. Thus, at the very onset, a paradoxical observation should be made, that is, transgression requires structure. It is organized and planned, otherwise it would cease to be transgressive as chaos is hardly considered as purposeful offense. Bataille comments upon it in a similar way: the most pivotal characteristic of transgression is “to make order out of what is essentially chaos.”⁴ It may come as a surprise to consider transgression an organizing factor in one’s life, yet in order for an individual to experience continuity of being (which for Bataille is one of the main objectives in one’s life) or a wholeness of existence, borders ought to be contemplated and crossed, in other words, transgressed.

In representations of bullfighting such crossing of boundaries is often detectable. There is always a binary opposition to be encountered and overcome, such as man versus animal, a lonely *torero* versus the collective, male versus female, the sacred against the blasphemous, life versus death. Sigmund Freud in his commentary on perversions linked their existence with a counterpart that is necessary for the existence of both. To his way of thinking:

Every active perversion is thus accompanied by its passive counterpart: anyone who is an exhibitionist in his unconscious is at the same time a voyeur, in anyone who suffers from the consequences of repressed sadistic impulses there is sure to be another determinant of his symptoms which has its source in masochistic inclinations. The complete agreement which is here shown with what we have found to exist in the corresponding ‘positive’ perversions is most remarkable, though in the actual symptoms

³ Michel Foucault, *Religion and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 58.

⁴ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. Mary Dalwood (London: Penguin Press 1986), 119.

one or other of the opposing tendencies plays the predominant part.⁵

This is in line with the way Bataille perceives the relation between transgression and norms, as he claims: “Transgression is complementary to the profane world, exceeding its limits but not destroying it.”⁶ Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that a contrast is the only way in which these phenomena are portrayed. In the works I examine, the oppositions become less and less contradictory and the borders of antagonistic counterparts end up blurred. Still, the pillars of transgression remain rather vivid—people are drawn to sex, violence, and death—these are the subjects with which taboos are predominantly concerned. Nevertheless, violence is a principal constituent of bullfighting and is not hidden in between the symbolic strata but is direct and even expected. Therefore, its presence should not be seen as transgressive to decipher sexual innuendos or perform a metaphorical reading of *corrida* as a ritualistic sacrifice. The meaning of bullfighting is expended and becomes a metaphor for a series of other transgressive behaviors that usually are called for or evoked during holidays and feasts. Such rare occasions usually commemorate or celebrate the dead, the defeated, the victorious, as well as the divine. It is my understanding that *corrida* encapsulates all of these areas and that is why arriving at one definition of bullfighting proved to be puzzling.

The analyzed works treat on various manners of experiencing bullfighting by the British or the Americans, for whom the aura or a sense of transgression is magnified by the unfamiliar milieu of a foreign country and an uncanny ritual of killing bulls. Observing it extracts them from the safety net of well-known rules, and they

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (Eastford: Martino Fine Books, 1955), https://archive.org/stream/SigmundFreud/Sigmund%20Freud%20%5B1905%5D%20Three%20Essays%20on%20the%20Theory%20of%20Sexuality%20%28James%20Strachey%20translation%2C%201955%29_djvu.txt.

⁶ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 67.

struggle with new governing structures that may, at first, appear brute. Foucault's writing may support my claim that a bullfight is an event particularly prone to violating principles. He notes:

The play of limits and transgression seems to be regulated by a simple obstinacy: transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration, and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable.⁷

It could be read as a parallel to a matador who moves closer and closer tempting the bull, just to shun away when the bull almost touches and kills him. This morbid interest in the imminent danger shows how the collective desires to be in touch with what is considered gruesome not only on the literal, physically painful level, but also in other, elusive forms. Foucault attempts to trace the form of transgression; he reflects, it "is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage [...]; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses."⁸ Therefore, the arena where all bullfights take place becomes a paddock for metaphors of transgression and upon leaving it, the order of social conventions is restored.

Leading into Temptation—The Erotic Aspect of Bullfighting

And gradually she lost her fear, and he
Offered his breast for her virgin caresses,
His horns for her to wind with chains of flowers
Until the princess dared to mount his back
Her pet bull's back, unwitting whom she rode.
Then—slowly, slowly down the broad, dry beach—
First in the shallow waves the great god set
His spurious hooves, then sauntered further out

⁷ Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, 34.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

'til in the open sea he bore his prize
 Fear filled her heart as, gazing back, she saw
 The fast receding sands. Her right hand grasped
 A horn, the other lent upon his back
 Her fluttering tunic floated in the breeze.⁹

For Bataille the atmosphere of bullfight is sensual, sacred, and opens up the space for sexuality to be expressed. In his work, he concludes that eroticism is an experience that allows one to transcend the limits of a discursive and organized approach towards taboo and transgression. The two are artificially created pillars on which eroticism is based. Interestingly enough, they complement and contradict each other at the same time. The contradiction refers to the inability of an individual to transgress taboo without simultaneously strengthening it, and the impossibility of respecting a taboo without paving the way for transgression. The everlasting suspension between the two proves to Bataille that human existence is inherently heterogeneous, and, what is more, in a state of flux. The philosopher holds that one's life can be described by two, mutually exclusive states: that of continuity and that of discontinuity. The former relates to intangible existence taking place before one is born and after one dies. What happens in between constitutes a discontinuous being that is guarded by one's own individuality and is separated from other beings. Death brings an end to all discontinuous beings. Bataille claims that the wish to experience continuity is one of the primal needs. From his point of view, "what we desire is to bring into a world founded on discontinuity all the continuity such a world can sustain."¹⁰ Corrida, which revolves around life and death and is a liminal phenomenon, opens the door for this process. Furthermore, Bataille compares eroticism and formal philosophical notions only to maintain their independence from one another; he does not attempt to merge them and purposefully fails to present a unified methodological tool

⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 862, trans. Alan D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 50.

¹⁰ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 19.

that could be used in discussion on eroticism. Thereby he proves the constraints of sensible reasoning and makes one realize that creating a comprehensive methodology (governed by modernistic premise that there is a universal and defined truth) is untenable (as he puts it, “Generally speaking, philosophy is at fault in being divorced from life”¹¹). This justifies the use of various theoretical stands when interpreting the metaphorical and symbolic aspects of selected works in reference to eroticism.

To try and provide a definition of the subject may prove futile, but some attempts have been made. Foucault, for instance, writes: “A precise definition of eroticism, it would have to be the following: an experience of sexuality that links for its own ends, an overcoming of limits to the death of God”¹²—such an explanation suggests that eroticism ensures God’s absence and human will, and the ability to live without him. Simultaneously, since it “links for its own ends”¹³ it can be said that, in contrast to the desire to exist in a world without God, a counterdesire emerges—that for the sacred and godly. Alternatively stated, for Foucault, erotic transgression allows to question and subvert what is abstract. He remarks that sexuality

permits a profanation without object, a profanation that is empty and turned inward upon itself and whose instruments are brought to bear on nothing but each other. Profanation in a world which no longer recognizes any positive meaning in the sacred—is this not more or less what we may call transgression?¹⁴

The bullring is an ideal place for it all: proving human supremacy and independence, and seeking God. Another desire that may cause suffering if not fulfilled is the wish to be unified with the world in a state continuity. Corrida, as a spectator sport, not only allows this to happen, it facilitates the practice. Having said that, it needs to be stressed that transiting from the state of disconti-

¹¹ Ibid., 12.

¹² Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, 33. Emphasis mine.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 30.

nunity to continuity requires destroying or dissolving of the discontinuous subject and, for that reason, it is a violent process. To alleviate the pain of transition and in order to avoid annihilation of oneself, one should immerse oneself in eroticism—it is, again, a liminal space that lets an individual experience *la petite mort* and feel as one with the world. By getting rid of borders standing between two people and permitting their fusion into one erotic being, the coveted state of continuity is temporarily achieved. Nonetheless, Bataille's understanding of erotic transgression is hardly narrowed down to attraction to the prohibited; his notion expands to assume that official prohibitions, bans, as well as rather personal feelings of disgust and terror, are factors responsible for amplifying the magnitude of erotic pleasure. What can be deduced from his works is that the human condition is constructed by, and based on restrictions, and these restrictions are caused by one's awareness of eroticism and death. For him, transgression is firmly linked to these two phenomena as he says: "Eroticism is a violation bordering on death, bordering on murder"¹⁵ and the following sections should present and examine the ambiguous relation between *corrida* and eroticism.

The first affinity is related to arbitrariness which controls both eroticism and the bullfight. Neither is a natural occurrence, as "eroticism unlike simple sexual activity is a psychological quest independent of the natural goal [which is procreation—E. W.]"¹⁶; and so is *corrida* as it is not a "natural" activity (by which I mean it is not forced by the circumstance—the combat is artificially organized and, but for matador's own will, it would not have taken place). Another similarity is that both acts are of sacrificial nature. Leiris notices the parallels between bullfighting and love-making and says that this "gives the *corrida* an emotional value insofar as the presence of something sacred causes a disturbance that involves the sexual emotion"¹⁷—it is important to acknowl-

¹⁵ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 16.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Michel Leiris, *Manhood: A Journey from Childhood into the Fierce Order of Virility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 38.

edge he does not see bullfighting itself as erotic on the structural level. Still, it “involves” and evokes erotic aura. It might be that the fight itself is not erotic *per se*, but the eroticism shows through, in spite of its form and structure.

Changing one’s perception of one’s place in the world is one more affinity to be studied. Although both experiences correspond to infinity, Foucault makes a rather conflicting observation: “At the root of sexuality, of the movement that nothing can ever limit [...] a singular experience is shaped: that of transgression.”¹⁸ What is striking about it is that he rejects the notion of merging into one being that presumably takes place together with a sexual act; instead, he claims that sexuality may even have a limiting undertone to it. He continues: “Sexuality is a fissure—not only which surrounds us as the basis of our isolation or individuality but one which marks the limit within us and designates us as a limit.”¹⁹ However, I do believe that those limits that are imposed on an individual are surpassed at a bullfight. From Bataille’s perspective such a postulate seems validated as he explains: “There [in a sexual act—E. W.] is a meeting between two beings projected beyond their limits by the sexual orgasm,”²⁰ thus, the limits may be crossed. Notwithstanding, he too has his doubts. A particularly curious claim regarding the roles partners have in a sexual act can be found in the very same passage. For Bataille

there is a meeting between two beings projected beyond their limits by the sexual orgasm, slowly for the female, but often for the male with fulminating force. At the moment of conjunction, the animal couple is not made up of two discontinuous beings drawing close together in uniting in a current of momentary continuity: there is no real union: two individuals in the grip of violence [...].²¹

¹⁸ Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁰ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 103.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Consequently, Bataille sees that such an intimate interaction may also pose a threat to one's identity and there is a risk of losing oneself in overwhelming eroticism. Yet, I am of the opinion that this loss of "I" and letting oneself be immersed in a sexual activity or a representation of such, may lead to a self-discovery or a new, enriched identity. The young and impressionable protagonist of *Matador, Mi Amor* undergoes a metamorphosis because she falls for a matador named Adriano, who proves to be irresistible. When she is considering whether to stay in Spain or to return to the United States, she realizes that yielding to the alluring matador is the only option she truly wants, though she knows she should not, as she is fully aware of limits and norms that are asked of a young woman:

Alyssa wanted to stay, even though she had been embarrassed when caught trying. She told herself her desire to stay had been nothing more than natural curiosity. What else could it have been, since Adriano had hardly looked like God's gift to women with his swollen eyes and split lip? Besides, Alyssa had never seen a naked man. Not in the living flesh anyway.²²

At first, it could be understood she is able to control her "animal lusts"²³ but the moment the focus of her attention moves to the matador's physicality, she is lured into the fissure of eroticism and enters the "pleasingly profane world of the animals."²⁴ The torero in question was:

attractive as hell, if you liked dark, brooding, good looks on a man. He had black hair, fairly short but pleasantly tousled to hang a curtain of confused strands over his forehead. He had black eyebrows that almost, but not quite, came together. His eyelashes were long and lush resting on his cheeks now that his

²² William Maltese, *Matador, Mi Amor. A Novel of Romance* (Rockville: Wildside Press LCC, 2012), 41.

²³ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁴ Michel Foucault and James D. Faubion, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology* (London: New Press, 1998), 30.

eyes were shut. His mouth showed indication of being full and sensuous even without the additional bee-stung look caused by his split lower lip. He had a decidedly square jaw that managed to escape being overly blockish with its deep chin-cleft so deep as to leave Alyssa wondering how he possibly shaved within its inner crease [...]. The hair on his arms and along the visible top of his chest grew atop an intricate display of well-delineated muscles.²⁵

The young American is visibly attracted to the matador who performs in the city in which she, suddenly and to her surprise, has inherited a bull farm. Alyssa finds herself breaking limits, not only those of erotic hue, on multiple occasions:

She wondered how many Spanish taboos she was about to break. She had read all of these stories about how unmarried women in Spain never entertained gentlemen without *duennas* in attendance. Surely none of that archaic formality, though, could possibly apply to Alyssa. It seemed absurd that she might somehow assume that it did. She was an American, and thus definitely removed from Spanish mores.²⁶

Curiously enough, at the beginning, Alyssa does not feel that being removed from an American framework means she should acquire or adjust to Spanish societal order and respect its taboos. She even scolds herself when she realizes she is starting to feel more and more comfortable in her new environment: “She was affected by the fairy-tale quality of the whole incident: Alyssa Dunlop in Spain; a wounded man on her doorstep; a few kisses. It all added up to an interlude, albeit pleasant, but an interlude, nevertheless.”²⁷ She rejects any inklings that she might be influenced by *corrida*’s allure. When one aficionado warns her that “there’s something about the *corrida de toros* that makes female blood run hot,” she

²⁵ Maltese, *Matador, Mi Amor*, 42.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 50–51.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

deigns to reply, “I’ll have to take your word for it.”²⁸ With time, however, as she gets involved with Adriano, she starts to grow, both as a sexual being and a member of a community.

Witnessing corrida does serve as a triggering factor for exploring one’s sexuality. In *The Last Matador* Henry’s lover is so impressed with what she thinks constitutes corrida that she dresses up as a torero and sends a picture of herself to arouse her beloved Henry, who was the one introducing her to the world of bullfighting in Madrid. He sees the photo of Carolyn and comments upon it: “God bless her. There she was partially dressed in only the tight-fitting pink embroidered pants of a matador. She appeared almost profile and topless, wearing a *montera* [a matador’s hat—E. W.] with both hands fashioned on her hips. Her back was turned slightly to the camera as she looked coyly over one shoulder.”²⁹ Carolyn assumes the role of a matador who is in charge of the combat and, on a symbolic stratum, she becomes a man, who has been traditionally expected to be the active party in sexual activities. Allegedly, a she-matador possesses a broader range of tools than a male matador. As Antonio, a matador in *Two Matadors*, observes:

It is always the woman who tempts with the *muleta*—what she wears—the presentation of the well-formed legs, the pretty feet in shoes that tease the eye, the tender neck and the succulent breasts. [...] temptation on the limb that caused the fall of man, good to the eyes, the irresistible, intoxicating fruit that woman holds and gives to man. Under its influence, man will follow as she dances, and he is led as she *performs gijjar, chicuelina, corer la mano, pase por bajo, citar, llamar* and finally, *suerte de matar!* The man has seldom a chance.³⁰

The passage above clearly emphasizes the power a woman might have. Antonio further experiences the irresistible force of

²⁸ Ibid., 104.

²⁹ Marc Newman, *The Last Matador* (North Charleston, SC: Erev Press), 264.

³⁰ Marcus McGee, *Two Matadors* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2012), 66.

such a tempting bullfighter when his dear Isabella boldly gets closer to him: “And looking toward me, she approached, cape as *muleta*, she dared me to indulge her in the *pasodoble* a flamenco, an invitation I could not refuse. And so, we danced, Isabella as torero and I as bull, pass after pass, until the very end.”³¹ The all too familiar and oversimplified understanding of the man-the-conqueror and woman-the-conquered pattern collapses, for woman is no longer the defenseless prey. Isabella’s lover salutes her skills and sees them as complementary to his own abilities. The way he perceives this dynamic is that:

The man is the matador under the sun. The woman the matador under the moon. The man leads the day, but the woman rules the night. In matters of love, in the passion of nighttime darkness, it is the man who has the horns and the woman—she holds the instrument of fate.³²

This “instrument” raises suspicion and is associated with an uncontrollable female sexuality that requires taming. Nonetheless, there are instances where it is the torero that becomes subdued. Carrie B. Douglas, an American author and scholar, came to a conclusion that the female role is granted to the losing side—the bull, when *estocada* is done right, she is penetrated; or the *torero* becomes a metaphor for a cuckold and must suffer dishonor when the horns are laid upon him. Carolyn’s somewhat subversive action is supported by Freud who warns his readers: “You soon see how inadequate it is to make masculine behavior coincide with activity and feminine with passivity.”³³ This sudden reversal of roles is even more dramatic when contrasted with the submissive behavior of other female protagonists. Carolyn’s behavior could not be more different from the initially passive Alyssa, or Europa

³¹ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 70.

³² *Ibid.*, 66.

³³ Camille Roman, Suzanne Juhasz, and Cristanne Miller, *The Women and Language Debate: A Sourcebook* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), accessed July 8, 2017, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1997>.

from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, who allowed themselves to be tamed. The same mode of vocal existence is employed in *Torera*, a 2011 novel by R. Paul Sardanas and Lucy Van Pelt (writing as Tisha Garcia). The heroine, Lucretia Maria Calderonisa, is a has-been dancer who enters the world of Spanish bullfighting in the 1960s. She engages in two intense love affairs that reflect the dual nature of bullfighting—Lucretia is torn between a good-natured and naïve dancer named Christian and a macho, somewhat devilish matador, Diego. Ambiguity is present throughout the narrative for her passion for fighting in the arena is contrasted with apprehensive responses from the audience.

After a successful corrida the reactions of people may leave her disappointed, but the torera proves stronger than they would expect: “After the bull is down, shout all you want, fuckers.’ Lucretia raised her gaze to sweep the stands, taking in the blur of expressions on the faces of the spectators, ranging from gaiety to frowning disapproval, but most of all excitement”³⁴—a female matador evokes extreme emotions. The female was thought to be represented by the bull and her sexuality was seen as tamed by a masculine torero. Here, however, these positions are reversed and, for this reason, spectators try to label her back as a submissive female: “Other cheers and catcalls rippled through the air, threaded through with music in a background as trumpeters and other players high above the ring added their strains of drama and festivity.”³⁵ Lucretia is painfully aware of the manner her femininity is exposed and abused by the crowd: “She took off her Córdoba hat and sent it spinning up into the crowd, then shook out her braided hair to let golden locks tumble down to her shoulders, which raised the crescendo of the cheers to an even greater fever-pitch,”³⁶ but she manages to overcome the disdainful reception. She displays courage and strength both inside and outside the arena. She re-

³⁴ R. Paul Sardanas and Tisha Garcia, *Torera* (Albion: Passion in Print Press, 2011).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

mains collected and focuses on celebrating herself: “A wild extravagance [...] buying another hat would cut into what would be meager profits from a woman torera’s pay. But what did she care? ‘Today a woman fought! This day belonged to her,’”³⁷ and is able to maintain her pride.

However interesting it is to observe a description of a female bullfighter, most such descriptions are delivered by a male narrator who treats a she-torero in a peculiar way. Travis LaFrance in Sundeen’s novel sees female bullfighters in the following manner:

And then I saw Carmen. *A girl bullfighter!* Waving the cape in her warm-up suit and sneakers, Carmen looked as much like a tennis player as a torera. I’d have her wear something more exotic for the book. I moved to a bench where I could watch her better, and in an instant, she blossomed, like Proust’s cookie, into the passionate, sensual, and tortured damsel you remember from Toro. My Carmen is un-corrupted by modernity, pulsing with blood more pure and rich than those anemic American girls bottle-fed with computers and career counseling.³⁸

Undeniably, his *matadora* is highly romanticized and somewhat incongruous when compared with the real Carmen he met, who is confident and strong. Evidently, the use of this particular name is not accidental; Carmen is the heroine brought to life by Prosper Mérimée in his 1845 novella *Carmen*³⁹ and later in 1875 by Georges Bizet’s opera with the same title.⁴⁰ The girl of Roma origin who openly admits to her passions and drives generated a remarkably persistent cultural myth depicting the unbridled femininity: “She had a strange, wild beauty, a face that was dis-

³⁷ Ibid., 50.

³⁸ Mark Sundeen, *The Making of Toro* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 85. Emphasis mine.

³⁹ Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen and Other Stories* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴⁰ Georges Bizet, *Carmen*, trans. Alan Gregory, 1964, accessed December 20, 2017, http://www.murashev.com/opera/Carmen_libretto_French_English.

concerting at first, but unforgettable. Her eyes in particular had an expression, at once voluptuous and fierce, that I have never seen on any human face.”⁴¹ Such a description matches various passages describing untamed bulls: “That is no *toro*. That is a demon from hell,”⁴² or “Bulls of death [...] aggression and strength.”⁴³ Carmen’s body is similar to that of bulls in a sense of being subjected to an external, presumably superior, male toreador. By following her instincts (she seduces a young, naïve soldier Don José and then she flees with a famous toreador), she keeps her freedom and refuses to be controlled by social norms. When she realizes Don José feels scorned and revengeful, she tells him: “‘You want to kill me, I can see that,’ she said. ‘It is fated. But you shall not make me submit.’”⁴⁴ Carmen undermines the alleged domination of a man: she would rather die than succumb to her ex-lover. Perhaps it was her refusal to submit to a man that earned her a questionable reputation: “sluttish and lecherous femme fatale who destroyed a decent, upright soldier.”⁴⁵ Carmen’s deep awareness of herself and her motivations grant her the role of a villain: “‘You are the Devil incarnate,’ I said to her. ‘Yes,’ she replied.”⁴⁶ Her confidence, however, is not welcomed, and she meets her end: Don José kills her and, in so doing, he restores the hegemonic order and male dominance that Carmen subverted. Another illustration of a headstrong female who resists traditional gender roles is a character from a 2013 novel by an American Canadian writer, Elizabeth Ruth, whose *Matadora* centers around an orphaned girl named Luna Caballero Garcia, who works as a servant of the famed Garcia family. Luna is more than determined to

⁴¹ Mérimée, *Carmen and Other Stories*, 14.

⁴² Moran, *A Cape in the Wind* (Charleston, SC: Booksurge Publishing, 2009), 76.

⁴³ Newman, *The Last Matador*, 35.

⁴⁴ Mérimée, *Carmen and Other Stories*, 52.

⁴⁵ Fisher D. Burton, *Bizet’s CARMEN Opera Journeys Mini Guide* (Florida: Opera Journeys Publishing, 2000), 19.

⁴⁶ Mérimée, *Carmen and Other Stories*, 39.

overcome her low social status and become a bullfighter. When one of her mentors invites her to a bullfight, she becomes even more determined to achieve her goal. As she observes a torero, she starts to realize what her calling is. What she sees is described as follows:

Belmonte shook the *muleta* and taunted the bull until he charged, and when he made his famous arch, bending one arm to slay the bull instantly, young women in the crowd indeed swooned, though Luna was not one of them. She knew she didn't want to become one of Belmont's lovers, at her unlikely age, or at any other. She wanted to become Belmonte.⁴⁷

Luna is prepared to challenge tradition in an unexpected manner and subvert the gender roles that delimit her passion. This seeming liberation, however, comes at the price of self-doubt and hindered relationships. Ruth has forged a compelling study of a young woman who goes through an identity crisis as she asks herself: "Was she still a girl? Had a taste for power and blood made her less of one?"⁴⁸ reflecting the narrow role of a woman within the macho-oriented society of the 1930s in Spain. She faces resistance not only from within herself but, even more so, from the external world as, at that time, it was illegal for a woman to fight. The only way she is allowed to become a successful, and ergo profitable, matador is to stand against a bull in a man's costume. Her master's sons see the chance to use the girl's talents to profit financially, and they let her travel and fight but only if she is disguised as a man. Pretending to be a man in order to perform in the arena proves to cause grave problems outside it. Her lover finds it difficult to come to terms with his partner's vocation—he insists on being in control, if only on a symbolic level. He wonders: "A poet must be bold, he thought, as daring as a bullfighter, and yet he still hadn't learned to let go. He turned to Luna. 'No pants

⁴⁷ Elisabeth Ruth, *Matadora* (Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2013), 86.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

outside the ring,' he said, trying to regain some composure⁴⁹ and showing that a female bullfighter enjoys far more limited admiration than a male one.

Corrida is a place and a moment in time not only to realize one's sexuality but also to acknowledge one's power. One of the female protagonists in *Two Matadors*, Veronica, when faced with a disappointment caused by her beloved, undergoes a transformation that turns her from a meek lover into a fierce fighter: "She was a beast, an agile creature, a *serio*, cutting off the ring so that there was no escape, her bearing dangerous, portending death"⁵⁰ signaling her resemblance to an animal. It is tempting to approach the matter with Freudian theories of repressed sexual desire and the eros/thanatos duality. Repressing sexuality is caused by "structures of morality and authority erected by society."⁵¹ For Alyssa, a sheltered young woman, who has no sexual experience, it is particularly overwhelming to become deeply engaged in such a strongly eroticized affair as bullfighting. Suddenly, owning a bull farm and being thrown into a space inhabited by toreros and aficionados demands changes in her approach and self-identification. She manages to overcome her repressing mechanisms and achieves liberation. Following the Freudian outlook on bullfighting one can see that, in Freud's eyes, the fight correlates to a dialectic of sexual desire (eros) and the perseverance of death (thanatos). Nevertheless, I believe death and eroticism are not entirely opposing concepts but, are in fact, factors that build desire. Death could be seen as the greatest threat to love, yet the awareness of death intensifies love.

The eternal conflict of life and death may be represented in bullfighting if one looks at a torero, who, with each step he takes, becomes more and more a seductress trying to attract the bull only to sacrifice the animal's masculinity in a ritual to satisfy the audience's cravings. The picture of people who sit in the arena dif-

⁴⁹ Ibid., 135.

⁵⁰ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 40.

⁵¹ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 23.

fers from the glorified praises of matadors. They are portrayed as vile and wicked and, what could be said about people who come and pay to watch a man kill an animal in three acts, is perhaps most acutely stated by Bataille: “There is nothing in our world to parallel the capricious excitement of a crowd obeying impulses of violence with acute sensitivity and unamenable to reason.”⁵² The fatal end of what resembles a sexual encounter shows the perverse side of the spectators who display such sinister behavior:

The crowd went straight to the dead bull’s testicles and began kicking them, stomping them, spitting at them, grinding them under their heels, while their eyes held a glazed and excited look of sadism. One would have had to be psychologically blind to miss the meaning of that. They went straight to the real object on that dead bull’s body that the bull had symbolized for them and poured out the hate and frustration and bewilderment of their troubled and confused consciousness. I was later told that in some of the back villages the men and the women smeared their faces and their bodies with the blood of the dead bull hoping thereby to gain potency or be cured of various diseases, particularly tuberculosis.⁵³

This savage abuse of a dead animal makes one realize that the significance of a sexual act is not to be disregarded solely as behavior governed by a pleasure principle. It explicitly demonstrates how strong the sexual drive dwells within a being and that it is not possible to eradicate an instinct. Bataille is fully aware of this union and so is Thomas Strychacz, for whom the sexual drive is triggered and displayed by the audience and could be referred to as “communion of the spectators, who participate in this murder, who acclaim or jeer the matador depending on whether he is great enough for them to identify themselves with him, and who encourage him with their *olé*,”⁵⁴ observing the way aficiona-

⁵² Bataille, *Eroticism*, 164.

⁵³ Richard Wright, *Pagan Spain* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 131.

⁵⁴ Michel Leiris, *Manhood: A Journey from Childhood into the Fierce Order of Virility*, 38.

dos and regular members of audience react. It is easily gathered that they too vent their instincts that cannot be removed but only discharged (such a discharge of energy could be read as similar to the feeling of being spent after sexual intercourse) in an appropriate context. Leiris, in the introduction to his *Mirror of Tauromachy*, states that there are certain situations and events whose sole purpose is to make us face what is most intimate and obscure. Such occurrences allow instincts to come to the surface and reach the level of acceptable behaviors and reactions. Today, there is fewer and fewer such opportunities and corrida seems to be one of the few left. Therefore, Bataille maintains:

[the] animal quality that persists in man, his sexual exuberance, could only be thought of as a thing if we had the power to abolish it and to go on living as if it did not exist. We do indeed deny it but vainly. Sexuality, thought of as filthy or beastly, is still the greatest barrier to the reduction of man to the level of the thing.⁵⁵

It is in the reduced and dying body that eroticism is realized and brings satisfaction and resolution. After all, death is the promise of something new and exciting: “The anguish of death and death itself are the antipodes of pleasure.”⁵⁶ Alison Louis Kennedy also detected this relation between pain and pleasure: “Fear and pain can open a way to bring in their own *duende*, a kind of acute peace beyond the unendurable and before the next nasty surprise;”⁵⁷ a death that occurs during a bullfight filters negative emotions and anxieties and purifies the experience. During a bullfight, the tension needs to be relieved, the bull dead, and the man spent in order to move forward with life, and, for this reason, death is the culminating point of each spectacle.

Another dynamic that could be observed through erotic frame-

⁵⁵ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 158.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁵⁷ Alison Louise Kennedy, *On Bullfighting* (London: Yellow Jersey Press, 2000), 141.

work is that between the torero and his audience, namely, corrida becomes an expanded metaphor for a sexual act between the matador and the public. In a project that was not published, because Norman Mailer found himself unable to finish it, we find that.

the idea of a bullfight as a bout of love between the ring and the public. First come the capes—[the] petting, then [the] pics (off with the clothes and down to business), then the quites (necking and disrobing). Then the banderillas—the move to the bed (once in a while delicious in itself) and then the faena—the fucking which can be anything from glorious to hideous and every shade in between and like fucking is generally less than the preliminaries but when it's good it's very exciting, and finally the kill—the orgasm, and if that's ruined no matter how good everything else was its lost a little and given to bad after-taste. But when that too is good, and one takes the tour of the ring, well it's like the public is a vast female embracing with admiration the lover who's mastered her.⁵⁸

Mailer explicitly likens consecutive stages and movements required in the ring to various phases of sexual activities. He is not alone in employing such vivid imagery. As narrator in Kennedy's work takes her seat, she realizes:

Why, beneath the banal sexuality of the skin-tight silk, there is something sexual about the faena. [...] He [torero] brings himself into a space he has created where one living creature seems to entirely anticipate the physical will of another."⁵⁹

Physical closeness, sexual encounters, and love, too, might be conceived as a means of escaping death or keeping it at bay.

⁵⁸ Norman Mailer, "Notebook on Bullfighting"—a project that Mailer started with the intention on creating a novel on Hemingway, Spanish bullfighting and its undeniable allure. Mailer stated: "The thing I love more and more about bullfighting is its panoramic violent extrapolation of the agony of the artist, the half-artist, and the never-will-be artist." Norman Mailer, "Deer Park' Letters," *The New York Review of Books*. February 26, 2009.

⁵⁹ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 165.

Michel Leiris writes that love (physical love) is a way of deceiving death or at least

denying it or, practical terms forgetting it. This is perhaps because we somehow sense that it is the only means we have for experiencing death to whatever degree for in coitus at least we know what happens afterwards and can witness—however dismayed—the consequent disaster.⁶⁰

The unavoidable tragedy Leiris warns one about is in agreement with Bataille's outlook: "The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives."⁶¹ Hence the objective of eroticism is to tarnish and blemish those who partake in it. Bataille claims:

The whole business of eroticism is to strike to the inmost core of the living being, so that the heart stands still. The transition from the normal state to that of erotic desire presupposes a partial dissolution of the person as he exists in the realm of discontinuity. Dissolution of this expression corresponds with dissolute life, the familiar phrase linked with erotic activity. In the process of dissolution, the male partner has generally an active role, while the female partner is passive. The passive, female side is essentially the one that is dissolved as a separate entity.⁶²

These quotations should suggest that death and eroticism share a unique affinity: a disintegration of the participant. The loss that accompanies both phenomena calls human existence into question and again, temporarily separates an individual from constructs and norms. What Bataille advocates about female and male roles in the erotic activity is lent credibility by Leiris, who asserts:

The bullfight is representative of the love affair between a man and a woman, a choreographed dance involving danger and de-

⁶⁰ Michel Leiris, *Mirror of Tauromachy* (London: Atlas Press, 2007), 51.

⁶¹ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 17.

⁶² *Ibid.*

ception, blood and passion, flesh and spirit, heart and mind [...] The matador is the man and the woman, like the bull, is the object of his conquest.⁶³

The conquest needs to be successful the same way the myth of a matador-lover, who bears similarities to notorious Don Juan, and needs to exhume aura of excessive masculinity and potency. The animal that comes near a matador is thought to transfer some of its *élan vital* to the man. Isabella, in a way, expects her lover to possess animal virility—she shares her views with her husband, Fernando, who is a scholar:

“Passionate?” she tisked. “Come! You were never passionate! Why you were boring in the bed I realized, is because you do not have the bull in you and that explains why you have never given any of the bull to me, like Antonio did. A life of passion only was a dream to me, but I awakened from that fantasy and left the bed. Perhaps Romero, who is an inconsequential matador, perhaps this man can give my life a small degree of passion and excitement [...]”⁶⁴

The proximity of the animal makes a man richer in affection and spirit, and corrida is for her a source of tangible markers of masculinity. It may be proof of one’s gender that is sought after by toreros and audiences. She goes on cruelly comparing her husband with other lovers:

Remember you? For making love? Are you crazy? It was never good after Antonio. No one could satisfy me after him. It was a shower to a flood. Here you have never fought a bull, though you are capable, at least for once. You are outside nature so that you cannot appreciate the nature that is yours within.⁶⁵

For the women portrayed in the books a torero is a promise of excitement and elation impossible to encounter elsewhere. For

⁶³ Leiris, *Mirror of Tauromachy*, 24.

⁶⁴ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 42.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

Alyssa, Lady Brett, and Isabella, bullfighters represent the ultimate masculinity as they risk their lives in the arena. Glorified matadors are contrasted with “regular” men who are far from the extraordinary peril of a fatal combat. Whether they are all-American men (such as Alyssa’s high-school sweetheart, Ty) or a banker (Henry), or a war correspondent (Jake Barnes), they simply do not rise to the occasion and fail their women. Isabella relentlessly reminds Fernando how pale in comparison to hot-blooded matadors, ordinary men are:

Your brother was intensely passionate! At Las Ventanas he fought three times and dedicated the Miura ears and tail to me before the people as a public declaration of his love. An act of love so grand was to remember and a special gift that no one else, except the finest matador, could give.⁶⁶

The exceptional erotic tension emerging as one watches corrida draws women to those who are able to execute it. The event offers an experience of the sublime that is uneasy to comprehend. For this reason, the genuine feeling of bliss may not come to everybody. Antonio shares a story about his conquests:

Real women, quality women came to me, not like the cheap, drunk, and drug crazy women of the rock stars. The women who came to me were lawyers, doctors, teachers, celebrities, royalty—respectable women who knew that there is nothing better than true passion in a man, and there is no man who has more passion than the matador.⁶⁷

The passion the matador is gifted with reverberates through all parts of a bullfight. An excellent illustration of a desirous bullfighter is Escamillo: the vaunted, notorious macho character from Bizet’s *Carmen*. Even though he is not a character from contemporary Anglophone literature, Escamillo’s figure has laid the foundation for literary (and not only: he is one of the figures in

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 64.

a computer game *Legends of the Cryptids*) depictions of a matador figure. The way he emerges in the opera's plot is certainly worthy of a matador—his entrance is announced by the procession and a song of a chorus “Vivat, vivat le Toréro.” He emanates confidence and is welcomed with an equally noble response as the people sing:

Toreador, on guard! Toreador! Toreador!
And contemplate well, yes contemplate!
as you fight,
that a dark eye is watching you,
and that love is waiting for you,
Toreador, love, love is waiting for you!⁶⁸

Showing the prestige of a bullfighter and the belief that they are destined for and connected to love in a manner greater than the rest of men (such as Don José). Basking in glory seems to suit Escamillo—fully aware of his charm—turns to Carmen and says: “A word, pretty one: what do they call you? In my worst danger I want to utter your name,”⁶⁹ fully convinced she should succumb to his allure.

The machismo associated with being a bullfighter is expected and present not only during the encounter with a bull. Escamillo enjoys his fame and strengthens his position by underlining his talent. To prove his superiority over a non-matador, he invites him to watch his performance: “Allow me at least, before I say goodbye, to invite you all to the bullfights at Seville. I expect to be at my most brilliant there, and who loves me will come”⁷⁰—his own conviction that he is better and surely genius feeds audience's need to worship someone, or something, during the carnival when the “regular” deities represented by the church are dethroned. A man who willingly faces such danger becomes

⁶⁸ Georges Bizet, *Carmen*, trans. Lea Frey, accessed December 20, 2017, <http://www.aria-database.com/translations/carmen.txt>.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

a worthy subject of worship. The people in *Carmen* idolize the matadors as they chant:

How handsome they are!
 How they'll torment the bull's flanks with the tips of their lances!
(At last Escamillo appears, accompanied by a radiant and magnificently dressed Carmen.)
 The Matador! Escamillo!
 It's the Matador, the skilled swordsman,

He who comes to finish things off, who appears at the drama's end
 and strikes the last blow!
 Long live Escamillo! Ah bravo!
 Here they are! Here's the *cuadrilla!*⁷¹

This shows the superhuman context and a strong bond of love and emotions matadors enjoy. However, one's understating of love should not be limited to the sphere of romantic ravishment as it most often is linked with more carnal ecstasies. The final act of *corrida*—getting closer and closer to the bull just to step away from it for a second is especially bathed in “erotic atmosphere.”⁷² The culmination of emotions and intensity must find its outlet. Leiris speaks of the relief that is felt the moment the bull is killed or sexual *jouissance* achieved at this very moment, and defines it as “discharge” which in bullfighting is materialized by standing ovations that “rain” over the arena. Leiris also draws parallels between the feeling of exhaustion and separation of lovers after *la petite mort* and the demise and split that both take place when either a matador or a bull takes their last breath. In the moment of climax, one may feel “there is a minor rupture suggestive of death; and conversely the idea of death may play a part in setting sensuality in motion,”⁷³ which is quite explicitly

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Leiris, *Mirror of Tauromachy*, 26.

⁷³ Ibid., 107.

described in *Two Matadors* where a sexual act is a reflection of *tercio de muerte*. The woman—Veronica⁷⁴—is the bull and Antonio is the matador (the roles correspond to Bataille’s theory as he writes, “Here and now, however, I must emphasize that the female partner in eroticism was seen as the victim, the male as the sacrificer, both during the consummation losing themselves in the continuity established by the first destructive act”⁷⁵). In the novel, Antonio has the lance and he is ‘preparing’ her/the animal for the *estocada* (the act of thrusting the sword into the bull’s neck and killing it) which is nothing but a penetration simile. This final thrust of the sword between the bull’s shoulder blades, read as an explicit analogy, should not come as a surprise. Following Leiris’s notion that the idea of beauty touches upon, among others, the idea of sensual love and allure, *corrida* then is nothing short of a beautiful and intimate occurrence and it is not unjustified to draw parallels between love-making and bullfighting. Also Kennedy observes that “matadors often liken the *faena* to making love,”⁷⁶ and indeed, Antonio from *Two Matadors* says, while sharing the details of the night he spent with Veronica, “I plunged the sword” and “My tongue, an expertly placed *banderilla* [a colorful and decorative barbed stick used before *estocada*—E. W.], drove her to delirium.”⁷⁷ The woman-bull is successively tortured in order to experience the climax-death (“the seizure of death has an analogy with the sexual spasm”⁷⁸) and learns the truth about herself. As claimed by Kennedy, “cruelty is more real than tenderness.”⁷⁹ Perhaps a (small) death is more real than life.

In Mark Sunden’s *The Making of Toro*, the protagonist, a keen *corrida* aficionado and a writer, boasts of having tempted death

⁷⁴ *Veronica* is also a figure during *corrida* in which a matador gently moves his cloak trail over the bull’s head as the animal passes by him.

⁷⁵ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 18.

⁷⁶ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 165.

⁷⁷ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 49.

⁷⁸ Leiris, *Mirror of Tauromachy*, 51.

⁷⁹ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 82.

the same way a man tries to seduce a woman. He creates his own protagonist, a female-torero (torera) for whom the act of killing resembles an erotic experience. The phallic shape of the *banderilla* evokes most lustful and sexual imagery and, what is more, “killing bulls releases not only her feminist rage, but also her untapped sexual fury and each thrust of the sword whips her into a primal frenzy.”⁸⁰ Such desire combined with hurting an animal may evoke a feeling of shame in spectators’ eyes, and the *jouissance* should not come from watching the bull suffer. The pleasure ought to be derived from what may be regarded as the culminating moment of human existence—paradoxically enough, climax and eroticism connect loss, a rupture, a destruction of “established patterns, the patterns, I repeat, of the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence as defined and separate individual.”⁸¹ Unquestionably, lust does not aim at separation. Quite conversely, an individual seeks someone into whom he or she may dissolve, and this is the truth that Veronica learns. She would not be the first woman to derive (perhaps slightly perverse) sexual pleasure from bullfighting. A trope of it can be found in the notorious *Story of the Eye* by George Bataille. Sexual ecstasy takes place in tandem with violence. Its transgressive load becomes lessened by being displayed in sexual activities. As I have stated at the beginning of this section, thanks to such a transition it ceases to be a taboo. It is a descent into one’s deepest unfulfilled desires and an ascent of sexuality as such that alters, at least for a limited amount of time, one’s perception of gore and the violent character of the final *tercio de muerte*.

A curious parallel between eroticism and a religious offering is made by Bataille for whom the woman in an erotic act is perceived as the victim and the man as a “sacrificer.” It is not uncommon to equate the bull with the female-victim and the torero with the male-minister performing the act of sacrifice. At the same time, Bataille stresses that both parties need to lose

⁸⁰ Sundeen, *The Making of Toro*, 85.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

themselves “in the continuity”⁸² as it becomes noticeable how the act of dissolution is pivotal in both religious eroticism and bullfighting. However, the most striking similarity is a process of simultaneous amalgamation of two beings that, when joined, transcend reality, as Bataille and Stoekl put it: “The cosmos undergoes a constant metamorphosis [...] through the eroticized eternal return of a supersexed and universal ‘polymorphous coitus.’”⁸³ Such a union is the core of religious eroticism, yet it is also the essence of bullfighting as a torero and an animal merge in a deadly combat in order to transgress the world and reality with which one is familiar. There is one more consequence or reason for this fusion. It ought to take place in order for the entire world to move. It is described as a process in which “the earth, by turning, makes animals and men have coitus and (because the result is as much the cause as that which provokes it) that animals and men make the earth turn by having coitus.”⁸⁴ What should be seen as one of the most significant conclusions here is the reciprocity of the act, that is, an individual experience spreads all over a collective which, once set in motion, scoops up an individual and includes him or her in itself.

The collective is of vital importance for interpreting corrido. Kennedy grants a great role to people watching the confrontation, as she observes the matador “was bleeding for me to see” and he would act “much as gladiators would have saluted the senior dignitary present in a Roman ring [...]”⁸⁵ The impression of a matador as a gladiator is not an uncommon one, as it reverberates through various texts on the subject, for example, that of John Hay, an American statesman and author who shares his reaction to matadors passing by: “They walk towards the box which holds the city fathers, under whose patronage the show is given, and formally salute the authority. This is all very classic,

⁸² Bataille, *Eroticism*, 18.

⁸³ Georges Bataille and Allan Stoekl, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 6.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 135.

also, recalling the *Ave Caesar, morituri*, etc., of the gladiators.⁸⁶ And, in a way, they are gladiators—their elementary goal is to provide entertainment to those who have gathered to watch them. What then might be of greater importance than witnessing the moment of death itself, is the reaction it triggers in the beholders. The shout *olé* that can be heard after an especially dangerous move by the matador comes, as Leiris sees it, not from spectators' throats but from their entire bodies, resembling the screams and shivers that accompany orgasms. This point of tangency between witnessing horror and experiencing ecstasy is also found in the infamous *Story of the Eye* by Georges Bataille. When the unnamed adolescent protagonist-narrator and his partner, Simone, attend a bullfight, the matador named Granero cuts off the bull's testicles. This action is read as a symbol of Granero's power and victory. Simone desperately begs their companion to give her the trophies. When she receives them, and as she slips the bull's eye-like testicle into her vagina, Granero's eye is gored by a different bull; the matador

was thrown back by the bull and wedged against the balustrade; the horns struck the balustrade three times at full speed; at the third blow, one horn plunged into the right eye and through the head. A shriek of unmeasured horror coincided with a brief orgasm for Simone, who was lifted up from the stone seat only to be flung back with a bleeding nose, under a blinding sun.⁸⁷

Such a strong link between Simone and the bullfighter, along with all the violence of his death and the sexual tension and discharge, transforms the transgressive experience into a sacred one. To Leiris, this comes as no surprise, as he writes: "I have the impression of watching something real: a ritual death."⁸⁸ Watching, witnessing, observing the *tercios* suggest that we scrutinize the role of the eye in experiencing *corrida*. Foucault comments on the

⁸⁶ John Hay, *Castilian Days* (Madrid: BiblioBazaar, 2006), 24.

⁸⁷ Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 29.

⁸⁸ Leiris, *Manhood*, 38.

role of the eye in Bataille's work as a "figure of being in the act of transgressing its own limit."⁸⁹ In the same section, Foucault writes about the abovementioned bullfight scene and he reads the gouging of the eye as the "extinguished flash of its being."⁹⁰

One could risk saying that as Granero's eye is dangling from his head, he may experience continuity of being. An eye is elevated and is held in high esteem; it also becomes emblematic of transgression, sex, death, and human life.

The Masculinity Myth

Despite the fact that the significance of *corrida* depends on both, a human being and an animal, and the meaning of the phenomenon is defined by dominance of the former over the latter, it needs to be repeated that, traditionally, it was not just any person who was allowed to confront the bull—throughout the centuries it had to be a man. Bullfighting therefore is a male-regulated and male-oriented spectacle whose goal is to establish and display one proper, although complex, mode of masculinity that is supposed to be followed. Such a single, superior and hegemonic mode of masculinity is frequently present in sports and physical activities such as *corrida*, which gives a man a chance to establish a difference between him and a woman by displaying strength and courage when faced with an angered animal.

The idea of male hegemony entails questions about its form and desired patterns of behavior. Does it rely on tradition? Is it noticeable in shared imagery? To what extent it is connected to men's physicality and endurance? Is it strictly heteronormative?

Hegemonic masculinity is understood as a form a gender practice that promotes toughness, dominance, decisiveness. In her prominent analysis of maleness and gender performativity, Raewyn W. Connell emphasizes the "the physical sense of

⁸⁹ Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, 48.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

maleness"⁹¹ and the direct correlation between doing well in sports and male sense of gender identity. Her thinking allows me to relate bullfighter's prowess to his social position.

What is examined here is the persistent presence of accumulations of power and powerful resources by certain men, the doing of power and dominance in many men's practices, and the pervasive association of the social category of men with power. Men's power and dominance can be structural and interpersonal, public and/or private, accepted and taken-for-granted and/or recognized and resisted, obvious or subtle. It also includes violations and violences of all the various kinds and a form of unanimous consent. The latter is granted by other men, and, in a different manner, women, who observe, root for, and admire the bullfighters.

For Michael J. Cozzillio and Robert L. Hayman the arena is a focal point of masculinity which is understood as a battlefield where a man shows his "best" self, and through interaction, with the spectators he asserts his superiority over women and other men.⁹²

Clearly (and hopefully), not all individuals want and are able to become a matador—*the one who kills*. What features then make them suited for such a particular pursuit? Spain, which serves as a background or a point of reference in the selected books, is associated with an archetype of a macho man. *Macho* in collective imagery is a man who sees aggressiveness as manly, danger as alluring, and himself as a warrior. Throughout Hemingway's prose on the subject, matadors were perceived as superior to the rest of their community because of their exaggerated maleness—*machismo*. An interesting point regarding such extreme mode of masculinity was made in 1967 by Gilles Deleuze, who in his 1967 book *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*⁹³ proposes that masculinity

⁹¹ Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 18.

⁹² Michael J. Cozzillio and Robert L. Hayman, Jr., *Sports and Inequality* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2005).

⁹³ Gilles Deleuze and Leopold Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty. Together with the Entire Text of Venus in Furs* (New York: G. Braziller, 1971).

is expressed by masochism. This claim seems justified when considered the gore and painful ways of corrida. Furthermore, Ronaldo Andrade, a Latin Americanist scrutinized the phenomenon of macho and categorized the concept of machismo. In his opinion, this mode of behavior could be divided into, among others, the aggressive warrior “Conqueror Macho” and the misogynistic and womanizer “Playboy Macho,”⁹⁴ which seem to correspond to the representations of bullfighters in the books I discuss. Such imagery of machismo is still very popular within mainstream culture: a womanizer not neglecting fine liquor and an occasional brawl. His reputation precedes him as he travels from town to town, and whether he becomes a glorified idol surrounded by fans and admirers or a laughingstock, hinges on the way he performs in the arena.

Traditionally in Spain, to befriend a matador and be honored to enter his inner circle was an ennoblement; at the same time, the matador without his crowd was merely a butcher. His performance had to be witnessed by the public in order for the matador to be validated as a man. This is in contrast to female protagonists whose presence is introduced into the narratives through male proxies. In *Two Matadors* the female character is described by her male family members: “One of her grandfathers was a Moor. The other grandfather was the cousin to my own grandfather,”⁹⁵ or, likewise, in *A Cape in the Wind*: “She is a very young widow and she is without children. She now owns her husband’s ranch near Puebla.”⁹⁶ It is only the matador who is defined by his actions and public appreciation. His identity as a man needs to be externally represented and seen in order to be justified. He needs to prove his male heroism which has been for centuries claimed and legitimized by winning competitions, violence, and more often than not, misogyny. Physical activities and being in a good shape are crucial components in the creation of

⁹⁴ A. Rolando Andrade, “Machismo: A Universal Malady,” *Journal of American Culture*, vol. 15, no. 4 (1992): 33–34.

⁹⁵ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 10.

⁹⁶ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 26.

masculine hegemony. To facilitate this process, violence is also required, as it is an enhancing force that externalizes maleness. By means of sports, physical struggle, and sexual prowess the masculinity myth is constructed and perpetuated. It ceases to be a private and inherent matter and becomes a negotiation between the matador and the audience. This way, the latter become a party in a process of (self-)identification; they “must play a major role in the construction of his meanings about manhood”⁹⁷ and not only his own but, as the viewers expect bravado, virility, and grace, he becomes a projection of audience’s desires and goals. Matadors display the features to which women are attracted and which men aspire to have. Should he fail to meet their expectations, a rain of seat cushions would fall upon him. Surprisingly enough, the audience plays an active role during the event as well. The entire phenomenon is designed to evoke a reaction or represent a gesture that has its equivalent in the real world, be it conquering nature or seducing a woman, it ought to be done in a comprehensible and well-executed manner because “the audience must be prepared to read the situation and activate cultural codes about manly behavior, one of which is that men commonly watch other men perform as men; another of which is that men performing as men are frequently seen as faking their manhood,”⁹⁸ in other words, a matador needs to act out the image of the man that members of the audience have brought with them to the arena.

This reciprocity, which has been already emphasized, is an important factor in bullfighting. Both parties are required to remain honest or faithful to their instincts, otherwise the ritual is deprived of its essence. Without honesty and by disregarding *corrida*’s structure, whether by the spectators or the torero, the latter turns into a torturer. Henry Rothman, a character of *The Last Matador*, reflects upon one bullfight of a questionable quality:

⁹⁷ Thomas Strychacz, *Hemingway’s Theaters of Masculinity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

Lainey and I had attended a grotesque spectacle while on vacation in Mexico several years before. A small mob of drunken Americans (which included us, I'm ashamed to now admit) sat in the stands at a small local ring hooting and jeering as two bulls were virtually taunted and tortured by two impostors posing as matadors.⁹⁹

For him, authenticity and mutual respect are crucial elements of a bullfight, because they evoke the sublime and fully realize the symbolic potential of the spectacle. Hemingway confirms this attachment to truth when he writes: "a really good bullfighter is to come and remain honest, sincere, without tricks and mystification there must be a nucleus of spectators that he can play for when he comes."¹⁰⁰ Thus, the function of a bullfighter is not solely to win by killing the animal; it is to go through the meticulously arranged routine that the audience await and judge. The matador needs his public, as the viewers perform what may be defined an "act of heroic witnessing."¹⁰¹ It can be called heroic, as watching one's death, whether it is of an animal or a man, is not a painless thing to do. However, in so doing, they become a vital part of the ceremony together with the two entities in the arena.

Even though sincerity is a crucial factor for experiencing the performance, at the same time, *corrida* is an event governed by artificial and arbitrary rules. The audience purchase a ticket, a matador puts on his suit of light and plays his part. His steps and gestures are not natural but, precisely thanks to them, his *real* masculinity is confirmed. It seems justified then to refer to Judith Butler's concepts of gender performance and performativity which clarify why manhood may be acquired through a set of motions that shape and enhance viewers' understanding of masculinity and, as Hemingway puts it, by "privileging of action

⁹⁹ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 65.

¹⁰⁰ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 163.

¹⁰¹ Strychacz, *Hemingway's Theaters of Masculinity*, 42.

over mere words.”¹⁰² A bullfighter must not claim to be valiant; he must prove it by executing the killing flawlessly. The matador’s gender certainly is then an identity that is being built as he executes his moves properly and with a satisfying level of finesse. Butler writes about:

an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.¹⁰³

It is easy to see at this point that, as trivial as a matador’s proper posture and clothing may seem, each of these components is indispensable in eliciting the feeling of the sublime and the overall experience that is being transferred to the audience. The feeling may be understood as “the states of ecstasy, of rapture, at least of mediated emotion.”¹⁰⁴ Having satisfied the audience’s desire by displaying strength, the matador’s masculinity is externally represented, witnessed, and asserted. In *A Cape in the Wind* the matador Juan Silvera who, as a result of an unsuccessful corrida, finds himself out of work and forgotten, says, “someone once said the true beast in a plaza is the crowd,”¹⁰⁵ and this demonstrates the way the ritual revolves around the man and the audience who demand qualities that they associate with manhood: strength, heroism, and potency. Moreover, the interchangeable feelings of thrill, fear, and sublimity resonate well with the audience. However, as much as the spectacle involves the aforemen-

¹⁰² Ibid., 14.

¹⁰³ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” in Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan David York, “Flesh and Consciousness: Georges Bataille and the Dionysian,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, vol. 4, no. 3. (2003): 54.

¹⁰⁵ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 83.

tioned parties, real and tangible danger does not threaten the observers, only the matador.

Whether he dies in an attempt to impress the spectators or becomes obliterated by them demonstrates how the crowd “were loving their matadors to death.”¹⁰⁶ This is linked with eroticism as discussed by Bataille. For him, the rapacious and greedy approach of the spectators correlates with the desire to own a beloved person (or an object) and the imminence of death magnifies the emotional load carried by the aficionados. According to his theory “the idea of death is linked with the urge to possess”¹⁰⁷—in other words—the closer to death a torero is, the more affectionate his audience becomes. The death that unavoidably arrives at the end of the spectacle facilitates a process of understanding; it grants the viewers a moment of comprehension and the sublime. The latter comes to surface when, through dying of an animal or a man, the observers realize the limits and finitude of their own existence. It is reflected in the following passage by Bataille:

This sacredness is the revelation of continuity through the death of a discontinuous being to those who watch as a solemn rite. A violent death disrupts the creature’s discontinuity; what remains, what the tense onlookers experience in the succeeding silence, is the continuity of all existence with which the victim is now one. Only a spectacular killing, carried out as the solemn and collective nature of religion dictates, has the power to reveal what normally escapes notice.¹⁰⁸

And, what normally escapes one’s attention, is the awareness of death that makes audience bestow god-like status on their favorite toreros while the latter push their luck to the very limits as if they were immortal. The torero’s goal is then to survive, and his role is to be a medium of masculine qualities to be repre-

¹⁰⁶ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 76.

¹⁰⁷ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 20.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

sented in extraordinary circumstances. Still, if he does meet his end in the arena, the aura of supreme maleness disappears, and those who witness it, must evaluate the cost of the rite. As Kennedy notes: “there’s nothing like the death of a well-loved torero for showing the aficionado an uncomfortable self-portrait: pointing up the voyeurism, the non-combatant’s pedantry, the appetite for dangerous excellence in the corrida’s audience.”¹⁰⁹ By and large, the bullfighter manages the process of self-identification and sometimes falls victim to this procedure. One could say that he himself is the audience’s bull that needs to be subdued—he offers himself to the people and “he gives the feeling of his immortality, and, as you watch it, it becomes yours. Then when it belongs to both of you, he proves it with the sword.”¹¹⁰ It is seen that the question of control and submission is present in more than one dynamic. The power struggle develops between the matador and the animal, the matador and the audience, and between the matador and a female. Undoubtedly, these relations are highly symbolic and bear affinities to one another, yet it should be more fruitful to examine them separately.

To my way of thinking, the shift of power from the matador to people that takes place in the ring, the Huizingan magic circle where the former is abandoned by the latter (this is also “where the comfort of and the delight of his [matador’s] vocation have led. This is where he’s on his own”¹¹¹), may seem fairly unexpected because a matador is usually seen as a representative of the masses. More often than not, he comes from the commoners with a vision of a career in the arena: the focal point and the soul of a city is a promise of a better, financially improved life, which, for an aspiring young man, is a reason enough to risk his life. A fitting example of such a rags-to-riches story is found in a book by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre with the very telling title *Or I’ll Dress You in Mourning*, in which Manuel Benitez,

¹⁰⁹ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 119.

¹¹⁰ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 213.

¹¹¹ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 109.

an underprivileged illiterate boy from a small Andalusian town, affected by a movie on bullfighting, decides to become a matador. He struggles for years and, finally, thanks to his friend and manager, who pawns jewelry in order to send Manuel into the ring, the dream comes true: Manuel becomes the beloved “Manolete” who, at some point in his life, realizes the price he might pay for his passion and says to his sister: “Either I’ll buy you a house or I will dress you in mourning”¹¹² suggesting the extreme nature of his vocation.

A prosperous matador becomes a role-model and enjoys his stardom, especially if his beginnings were modest; Marvin in his study on the subject writes: “the torero who emerges from nothing is the synthesis of the people, a born leader, an example of self-sufficiency”¹¹³ (in a way a story similar to the American Dream ethos). His status allows him to participate in the cultural and social life of his fans; a renowned journalist and corrido expert, Nestor Lujan, described the popularity of José Delgado Guerra (known as Pepe-Hillo) who before being fatally gored by a bull:

took part in the pleasures and entertainments of the people of the town, serving as judge in the cockfights, taking part in the wild duck hunts in the corrals on the outskirts of the town, and there was no baptism nor dance in the outlying districts where Pepe-Hillo was not given a formal invitation to come.¹¹⁴

Certainly, matadors have a special role in the community and particularly so during celebrations, fiestas, and holidays. Their position seems like that of giants in Bakhtin’s writings, naturally, the bullfighters preponderate in a metaphorical way, yet both groups “enjoyed immense vogue, were familiar to everyone, and

¹¹² Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, *Or I’ll Dress You in Mourning* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1968), 278.

¹¹³ Garry Marvin, *Bullfight* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 107.

¹¹⁴ Lucjan Nestor, *Historia del toreo* (Barcelona: Destino, 1967), 72.

were saturated with the free atmosphere of the marketplace,”¹¹⁵ fiesta, or carnival. Paradoxically, it is outside the arena where a matador holds more power. As stated before, when he is performing, it is the audience’s projections of masculinity that count, and the torero is there to exemplify these concepts. His representation of desired bravery shapes viewers’ idea of masculinity and gender relations within a given society and serves as a point of reference for other men. Should he fail (by being gored or proving to be unskillful) his masculinity would be called into question and he would no longer function as a model man. It can be seen that manhood in the bullfight is never on its own; it requires an audience in order to exist and be justified. Because *corrida* is a spectacle, or, as I argue, a carnivalesque spectacle, it does provide a special frame for projections of masculinity, its externalizations and self-identifications. The identities, complex as they are, usually emphasize one feature over others; however, what they all share is a sense of control which constitutes the key difference between humans and animals. The latter, when unrestrained, pose a threat to organized reality and their animality is this very quality humankind wants to suppress in favor of balance and order.

Exercising control strengthens male dominance over an untamed and primitive beast and is, at the same time, a triumphant celebration of man’s control of himself. A willful and conscious decision to fight a wild creature proves how disciplined a torero is, as before he faces danger in the arena, he must control his own nature and fear – one of the observers in *Two Matadors* explains why the man who kills for a living is so unique: “the matador must first make tame the nature in his heart in order to subdue what lies beyond.”¹¹⁶ He stands for a cultural element which triumphs over the “natural” fear of death and allows one to operate in spite of it and, for that reason, he is closer to excellence than any other individual. That notwithstanding, man’s self-control,

¹¹⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 248.

¹¹⁶ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 6.

required and admired as it is, must not be of absolute character. The occasional failure of will proves his human essence and, paradoxically, his temporary loss of control substantiates his otherwise exceptional skills at mastering his human flaws when necessary. A momentary suspension of power enables the audience to identify with the very human aspect of a bullfighter and, at the same time, it inspires them to go beyond their own limitations and vices, and to see another human being who is “like the rest of us, naked in the grip of reality,”¹¹⁷ and delivers an outstanding performance, risking his own life, he gives them something for which they can strive; in other words, bullfighting offers them “a pursuit of an idealized, full manhood to be a worthy and to-be-longed-for goal”¹¹⁸ as a matador is the most a man can become.

Although one may conclude that courage and control are the key constituents of the matador’s masculinity, the concept is not entirely free from ambiguities. One of them is associated with *traje de luces* (a suit of lights)—a traditional, richly embroidered and very tight outfit which is a far cry from what is traditionally associated with male fashion. However, the space in which he is obligated to wear it justifies such a decorative costume—in this respect, it resembles a priest’s cassock: “I began to realize what a symbol the *corrida* is—a ritual in which matadors wear bright silk to celebrate courage and honor death, the way a priest wears vestments to pray for redemption and to honor God,”¹¹⁹ signifying the twofold function of the suit. Firstly, on the very basic level, it brings visual pleasure and accentuates the beauty of the matador’s body and evokes admiration. A young American, who sees a bullfight for the very first time, is certainly impressed: “Like silver coated lures flashing in an ocean, the glitter of thousands and thousands of sequins and flood of brilliant colors captured his gaze. The matadors had arrived.”¹²⁰ To stand out visually is a goal in itself—it underlines the fact that a matador is someone

¹¹⁷ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 14.

¹¹⁸ Strychacz, *Hemingway’s Theaters of Masculinity*, 7.

¹¹⁹ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 189.

¹²⁰ Connor, *After the Bullfight*, 43.

who is different from the members of his audience and surpasses them. To illustrate that the visuality (coming back to the significance of an eye) is of key meaning I should use a description of the gored matador Granero, before he begins his fight:

Granero stood out from the rest of the matadors because there was nothing of the butcher about him: he looked more like a very manly Prince Charming with a perfectly elegant figure. In this respect, the matador's costume is quite expressive, for it safeguards the straight line shooting up so rigid and erect every time the lunging bull grazes the body and because the pants so tightly sheathe the behind. A bright red cloth and a brilliant sword (before the dying bull whose hide steams with sweat and blood) completes the metamorphosis, bringing out the most captivating features of the game. One must also bear in mind the typical torrid Spanish sky, which never has the colour or harshness one imagines: it is just perfectly sunny with a dazzling but mellow sheen, hot, turbid, at times even unreal when the combined intensities of light and heat suggest the freedom of the senses.¹²¹

The picturesque qualities of the event and Granero himself illustrate how multilayered the experience is. It starts with a long preparation that includes prolonged ceremonies and rituals and employs multitudes of gestures and symbols.

The second role of these brilliantly decorated costumes, which could be perceived as a more perverse affair, promises a sense of satisfaction and pleasure that is derived from the possibility that the matador's beauty may be blemished and destroyed—after all, “the greater the beauty, the more it is befouled.”¹²² The rich ornaments and careful selection of the finest fabrics and details bring joy because they might be tarnished, and the sculpture-like perfection of the matador should be destroyed. One could say that matadors are dressed in danger and are almost expected to suffer the consequences of their decision to fight a bull.

¹²¹ Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, 27.

¹²² Bataille, *Eroticism*, 145.

The suit of lights would not be complete without the *muleta*—a cape whose movements are said to attract the bull. It is also a decorative piece of fabric that adds to the glamorous image of a matador and catches everyone's attention. When Adriano was in the ring and took in his hands the "magenta and yellow" cape he "fanned it in a series of intricate flourishes that had colored material billowing all round him; there was thunderous applause."¹²³ He uses it skillfully and waves it to get closer to the animal, so it looks as if "the man and the animal were merged within the colorful swirl of the cloth."¹²⁴ The entire *corrida* revolves around a close physical relation of two creatures and, as has been already established, requires a connection, a fusion of the two, ending in death which brings about a liberation from the dying itself and a sense of sublime.

An unexpected paradox can be observed while discussing masculinity in the context of *corrida*. First, a man needs to prove he is masculine by killing the bull. In so doing, he asserts his superiority over both, the animals, and other men of a given collective. At the same time, his virility is compared to that of the animal and he is proud to be compared, if it accentuates his potency and strength. This could be summarized by Bataille who also notes a certain type of a double standard regarding male dominance over animals. One reads: "the connection is not with the animal denied but with the deep and incommensurable element of animal nature."¹²⁵ This shows the ambiguous nature of the phenomenon—it both asserts human supremacy by subduing the animal to man's will and establishes a connection, and it is a positive one, between individuals and their animalistic qualities.

Such dedication to costume and its design may seem at odds with the diehard and somewhat brutal matador but it is not the *traje de luces* that may reduce his masculinity: it is the physical wounds. The opening up of his body is believed to feminize the

¹²³ William Maltese, *Matador, Mi Amor. A Novel of Romance* (Rockville: Wildside Press LCC, 2012), 124.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹²⁵ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 158.

torero. If the sword is read as a metonymy for the penis, goring should imply penetration and thus female, not male, passive sexuality. Getting hurt or injured means being weakened not only in a purely physical sense, the wounds go much deeper and shake the male's identity. Perhaps being gored by a bull has the same consequences for a man as being wounded outside arena. A wounded man becomes a reduced, feminized unit. There is a Spanish proverb that blatantly manifests this notion—*toro muerto, vaca es*, which translates into 'a dead bull is a cow' showing how fragile and arbitrary the construct of masculinity is. This certainly applies not exclusively for the ones performing in the ring; an adequate illustration of such debasement for a man is naturally Hemingway's Jake Barnes, whose war injuries deprived him of the ability to fulfill sexual desire (but did not eliminate the desire himself) and who ceased to be perceived as a man by the object of his affection. For Barnes, attending a bullfight is a way of outsourcing eroticism that cannot be realized. Leiris speaks even of "castrated life" that spectators hope can become potent again thanks to their proximity to masculinity in the arena.

One reads: "Hence boredom, a feeling of a castrated life, so strong, that in such people even the most catastrophic events seem desirable as at least they can shake the core of our being."¹²⁶ Sitting in the arena in Spain for a sheltered foreigner is indeed an experience that disturbs their self-awareness. Their alien ways become more flexible and, thus far, distant yearnings are realized on both levels: mental and physical. Connor, who in a short story called "After the Bullfight," falls in love with a Spanish woman, plucks up his courage to talk to her after leaving Sevilla's best bullring, the Plaza de Toros. Going to see a bullfight was the sole purpose of his trip to Europe, ("The young man had only one thing on his agenda: attend the bullfight at the Plaza de Toros de Sevilla"¹²⁷) and his goal is stated on the very first page of the

¹²⁶ Leiris, *Mirror of Tauromachy*, 23.

¹²⁷ Robert Leon Casey, *After the Bullfight, and Other Stories* (Scotts Valey, South Carolina: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2009), 29.

story. He is elated to be there: “He was certain that fortune had surely smiled upon him, for it was in that legendary edifice that he would attend his very first bullfight.”¹²⁸ Clearly, he pins his hopes on this event and expects an unforgettable experience. His naivety and romanticized perception of bullfighting are quickly shaken to the core. As the story, and the bullfight start, he is immature and “with the curiosity of a child, he watched the dignified parade begin.”¹²⁹ As the events were unfolding in front of his eyes and he “wore an impenetrable mask of false bravado,”¹³⁰ he started to realize his courage diminished. Perhaps not at that very moment, but, as the long-awaited dream was realized, Connor has undergone a metamorphosis. At the end of the story he himself starts to act like a matador: “He finally made a decision. It was his turn to boldly lead. He was finally taking control. He was taking charge”¹³¹—he was no longer a wide-eyed boy and has successfully built his masculinity using the experience. Based on the descriptions, being a man means to be able to dictate reality by being in charge of it. Seemingly, the faint-hearted should not find a place in such an equation. With that being said, sensitivity is just as desired as is strength. Alyssa learns that and, to her surprise, is captivated by it; when Adriano shares his fears of performing in the ring, she understands that

in the same instance, his admission of being capable of fear somehow brought him all that much closer to Alyssa, in that the young woman found that admission of his vulnerability exceptionally appealing. She found it a decided strength that he was able to admit to his fear.¹³²

Such a moment of witnessing superhuman courage and all-too-human fear results in pushing to the surface the most inher-

¹²⁸ Ibid., 30.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 40.

¹³¹ Ibid., 92.

¹³² Maltese, *Matador, Mi Amor*, 79.

ent particles of one's existence and offers a fullness of human experience.

An Introduction to Death

There is no better way to know death than to link it with some licentious image.¹³³

Labeled as both, Spain's most treasured and simultaneously most notorious tradition, *corrida* inevitably has its end in death. Violence, desire, and sacrifice are merely an organized prelude to a glorified dissolution of life. One cannot deny the controversy of such a social practice yet, by following Éric Baratay's proposition to look beyond the tangible layer of animal existence in his *Le Point de vue animal, une autre version de l'histoire*, I would like to move the focus from the moral judgment upon death in *corrida* towards its symbolic significance. The three acts into which *corrida* is divided were once compared by Ernest Hemingway to a trial, the sentencing, and the execution, respectively. The latter, which is also called in the jargon "the moment of truth" raises most questions as to its meaning. What it communicates should not be viewed simply as animal cruelty in the case of the matador killing the bull, or as a terrifying mishap, if it is the man who is fatally gored. Hemingway does not create any additional intricacies on the subject; for him violence that has its resolution in death is not a complicated matter ("One of the simplest things of all and the most fundamental is violent death"¹³⁴). Nonetheless, if it were only a plain act of dying witnessed by hundreds of people on a Sunday afternoon it would not be as elaborated in form and metaphorical in essence. Instead, the way it is portrayed in culture may suggest quite an elevated perspective on the somber matter in question. Paradoxically enough, death in the arena allows an individual (for a brief moment) to approach immortality

¹³³ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 11.

¹³⁴ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 2.

and, at the same time, by witnessing it from a safe distance, be immersed in dying. As Kennedy writes:

The corrida can be seen as an extraordinary effort to elevate the familiar, mysterious slapstick, the irrevocable, indecipherable logic of damage and death, into something almost accessible; both a ritualized escape from destruction and a bloody search for meaning in the end of a life, an exorcism and an act of faith.¹³⁵

That is why oversimplifying the final *tercio* would be fallacious. It may stand for numerous mindsets and occurrences; one of them recalls conclusions of previous sections as death is a highly eroticized element of culture and that eroticism is connected to death and even may substitute for it in some cases. Both corrida and eroticism revolve around the intangible sphere of sacrum which towers over mundane reality and may be enticing and revolting at the same time. Leiris writes that:

If love is often conceived of as a means of escaping death—or denying it or, in practical even claiming of having just moved an otherwise, in practical terms, forgetting it—this is perhaps because we somehow sense that it is the only means we have for experiencing death to whatever degree for in coitus at least we know what happens afterward and can witness however dismayed—the consequent disaster.¹³⁶

To put it differently, death needs an aura or context of licentiousness as, otherwise, it is unbearable to face. Lacan's outlook on this bond is quite radical: "all drives are sexual drives, and every drive is a death drive since every drive is excessive, repetitive, and ultimately destructive."¹³⁷ How then interpret the man's

¹³⁵ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 11–12.

¹³⁶ Michel Leiris, *Manhood: A Journey from Childhood into the Fierce Order of Virility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 51.

¹³⁷ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), 49.

willful submission to death in the ring? For Bataille, dying in the arena is a cleft that paradoxically opens up a continuity of being; a prolongation of existence rather than a destructive end. Possibly that is why Hemingway asserts: “Nobody ever lives their life all the way up except bullfighters,”¹³⁸ despite the fact that they might die sooner than their aficionados.

The very act of killing takes place in the last part of *corrida*—*tercio de muerte* where a torero using an *estocada* stabs the bull to death. This is preceded by a gradual intensification of emotions that results in what Michel Leiris refers to as paroxysm which ends with the animal’s or the torero’s dying; only after that, one can feel relief. The satisfaction and relief emerge from the peculiar charm of witnessing the ultimate and may be an individual epiphany as well as a collective experience of cosmological proportion. Whichever path it should lead, it is the death that is symbolically molded and imagined to fit and represent the audience’s needs and desires. It is inextricable from the fabric of bullfighting and I believe it can represent a fight between culture and nature, a metaphorical rendering of a sexual encounter, and a transcendental ritual elevating humankind.

Dualities that I have already mentioned that go hand in hand with the phenomenon of *corrida*, such as man versus animal, culture versus nature, and male versus female are, at first glance, sharpened and made more visible because of the serious tone of the combat taking place in the arena. Bataille seems to be aware of the fact that the fewer the elements distracting the audience’s attention, the more powerful the impact they have on the viewers. For instance, death that can be eradicated neither from the ring nor from one’s life becomes vividly present, as one observes it up close; Bataille writes: “Indeed the deep respect for the solemn image of death found in idealistic civilization alone comes out in radical opposition”¹³⁹ and seldom does a more “radical” opposition happen than a tournament

¹³⁸ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 13.

¹³⁹ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 56.

between two living creatures in which only one may win, and ultimately, survive.

The nature/culture dichotomy that is a basis for various anthropological theories is only so vivid while analyzing corrido. This clash is central to the bullfight's logic; without it, no epiphany may come to fruition and no depths may be revealed. The bull, that "is nature, but in its most powerful, intelligent and dangerous form,"¹⁴⁰ is forced to confront the "icy stillness"¹⁴¹ of a matador before "an audience that can observe and learn from it in safety."¹⁴² The knowledge that is gained from witnessing killing at first glance is rather regrettable—in *Two Matadors*, a matador says: "We [matadors] demonstrate an awful truth. We take the most noble, the most fierce, the most arrogant beast on earth because he reflects what a man is inside,"¹⁴³ namely, a ruthless and selfish creature. In the story, two twin brothers, one a university teacher, Fernando, and Antonio, a matador, decide, as a result of a heated discussion, to swap professions. They have little respect for each other's lines of work—Fernando says: "You believe I am a coward, always hiding in the books [...]? You believe this, while I believe that you are base, uncivilized and ignorant [...]."¹⁴⁴ The brothers epitomize culture and nature, and the incompatibility of their respective environments lets the readers watch the collision of two otherwise separate and guarded spheres of existence. Initially, they show nothing but disdain for the unfamiliar milieu—Antonio says to his brother, Fernando "Close your books and come to the living, bleeding side of all your knowledge,"¹⁴⁵ which may seem paradoxical when considering that the goal of the corrido, at least on the physical stratum is death. Still, he continues to explain: "Fake matadors [...] are only 'technically skillful'. They take no pleasure in the art

¹⁴⁰ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 6.

¹⁴¹ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 122.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 148.

¹⁴⁴ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 22.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 21.

of bullfighting. They derive no emotion, elation or benefit from it."¹⁴⁶ Accordingly, to be a genuine torero, one needs to abandon books and culture which are of no avail in the physical world of glorified peril to which the bull belongs.

Fernando is finally given an opportunity to fight a formidable bull named Muerte (Death). Disregarding his brother's advice, he is determined to risk his life. Antonio's attempts to warn his brother are of no use because Fernando's pride proves to be unswerving. He does not seem to have gained any knowledge from the swap, while his twin comes to a conclusion: "I have learned from what you taught your students. Muerte is more than just a bull, Muerte is a manifestation from the universe, a reminder that the lives and the ambitions of men are vanity."¹⁴⁷ The notion of matador's pride and denial are frequent in writings on bullfighting. Hemingway wrote on the subject: "The faena that takes a man out of himself and makes him feel immortal while it is proceeding, that gives him an ecstasy, that is, while momentary, is as profound as any religious ecstasy"¹⁴⁸ and

when a man is still in rebellion against death, he has pleasure in taking to himself one of the Godlike attributes; that of giving it. This is one of the most profound feelings in those men who enjoy killing. These things are done in pride and pride, of course, is a Christian sin, and a pagan virtue.¹⁴⁹

Thus, killing a bull does not establish man's superiority over the animal. It does, however, provoke the realization that torero and toro become a unity that reaches a unique equilibrium: "Death balanced against death, absolute loss against absolute loss: this in the corrida, it constitutes truth."¹⁵⁰ There is a sense of harmony and unity. This concept of oneness achieved in the mo-

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 25.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴⁸ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 165.

¹⁴⁹ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, 233.

¹⁵⁰ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 123.

ment of death agrees with Hemingway's remarks: "once the fear of death has been overcome, the fullness of life can be appreciated to the utmost."¹⁵¹ The fear of death is one of the factors that triggers the emergence of the culture/nature and man/animal binary opposition. In order to protect oneself from fate—represented by the wild animal—humankind created an entire system of distancing themselves from the inevitable. Bataille makes a worthy observation; in his view it is the corpse that creates the distance and people put the dead body "between themselves and violence,"¹⁵² violence that is perceived as taboo. The carcass, whether that of the torero or a bull is also a bridge between their refusing to accept their own mortality and realizing the universality of the final departure.

Corrida may be one of the attempts at taming the fear of death in a detailed arrangement of steps, controlled movements, and techniques that represent geometric symmetry or, as Michel Leiris sees it, "a Platonic ideal"¹⁵³ that is "only comparable with the harmony of celestial bodies"¹⁵⁴ which is juxtaposed with the fierce force of the animal which does not follow any rules or strategies except for one—the primal will to survive. Leiris believes this dichotomy disappears as the man and the animal are joined in a synchronized performance. He adds: "Toro and torero are interlocked like machine cogs, fighting as to who will throw whom into the invisible grave constituted by the arena,"¹⁵⁵ but the fight he recalls cannot have any victor but death. Whether the torero masters the bull or he himself falls prey to the animal, the result – cheating death – remains the same. The outcome and removal of the frontier between the civilized man and untamed animal is noticeable to the audience of the combat. They partake in this event and are given a chance to temporarily move beyond the social perception of dying; the bloody ritual "elevates the vic-

¹⁵¹ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 25.

¹⁵² Bataille, *Eroticism*, 44.

¹⁵³ Leiris, *Mirror of Tauromachy*, 31.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

tim above the humdrum world where men live out their calculated lives"¹⁵⁶ and through this experience, through this proximity to death to recognize the existence of nature, the man, and lastly, the nature of the man. As Bataille puts it: "[death] penetrates to the very depth of the animal's being, and the bloody ritual reveals these secret depths"¹⁵⁷ which, probably, would have otherwise been left repressed or denied. This redemption is offered in the arena and not in a temple: the reason for this is, in my view, the fact that church, unlike a bull, is closer to culture than nature. In *A Cape in the Wind* by Paul Moran, Jr., a torero and a priest have a conversation concerning God's existence and the priest confesses to the torero: "Juan. If you ever find Him, I think it will happen in the arena and not in church,"¹⁵⁸ suggesting that sublime and transcendental is closer to nature than any social constructs.

Killing the bull in the arena instead of, for example, a church means that the offering is truer and deeper as "the sacrificer is constantly threatened with death"¹⁵⁹ and when he does suffer the ultimate sacrifice and is conquered by the brute force of an animal, the man regains his utmost self and is reconnected with nature. In *Death in the Afternoon* Hemingway writes:

When he stood up, his face white and dirty and the silk of his breeches opened from waist to knee, it was the dirtiness of the rented breeches, the dirtiness of his slit underwear and the clean, clean, unbearably clean whiteness of the thigh bone that I had seen, and it was that which was important.¹⁶⁰

The innocence of matador's bare bone contrasted with embellished clothes reveals that each wound caused by a horn exposes an authentic aspect of a human being, allows the essence

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 82.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 117.

¹⁵⁹ Leiris, *Manhood*, 38.

¹⁶⁰ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 25.

to come to the surface, and permits a complete and pure return to the primal human condition the moment one takes the last breath. Therefore, death is a means of removing long-established barriers between human culture, and nature. Perhaps, for this reason, people believe “there is no other death worth dying, not except to die upon the plaza sand”¹⁶¹ since it offers sublime and universal experience that leads to a connection beyond the mundane existence. Although a bullfight has death at its center, it is an elaborate ritual that intersects with the social order and celebrates life. Consequently, death is no longer viewed as an end point but as a point of departure for further transformations and metamorphosis. Should the dead animal be treated as merely a victim of an ornamented spectacle, there would be no talk of transcendence—the body on the sand, however, is hardly just a carcass, to follow Bakhtin’s thought:

[...] death brings nothing to an end, for it does not concern the ancestral body, which is renewed in the next generation. The events of the grotesque sphere are always developed on the boundary dividing one body from the other and, as it were, at their points of intersection. One body offers its death, the other its birth but they are merged in a two-bodied image.¹⁶²

This duality justifies the collective nature of the *tercio de muerte* in which the fears and desires of the matador-priest, the bull-offering, and the audience-sinners become one, just to have this unity disrupted by a violent killing that leaves the onlookers with, what Bataille defines as, “the continuity of all existence with which the victim is now one. Only a spectacular killing, carried out as the solemn and collective nature of religion dictates, has the power to reveal what normally escapes notice [...]”¹⁶³ By introducing death into a social gathering the matador fractures

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 25

¹⁶² Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), 228.

¹⁶³ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 22.

the familiar and organized world and brings to the surface the eternal fear of dying (for Hemingway this was the most feared phenomenon¹⁶⁴) in order to try to tame it and show the audience a way of accepting it. Moran's narrator notices the exchange between the audience and the matador: "They [the spectators] wanted you to teach them how to die, but not today. Today they get to walk in the sun beside the man in bright silk and let the toro die for them. Today they could live, and the toro's death was their escape."¹⁶⁵ Such moments welcome the sacred but, at the same time, are continually fraught with horror and a sense of a foreseeable tragedy—those are the moments when

[t]he torero plays with death, escaping it only miraculously, charming it; thereby he becomes the hero, incarnating the crowd which attains through him to immortality, to an eternity all the more intoxicating for hanging by only a thread.¹⁶⁶

Clearly, the killing is done in order to salvage the viewers and the bull's body gives them another life. The body, subject to destruction as it is, does not fear its decay as "death holds no terror for it [the body]. The death of the individual is only one moment in the triumphant life of the people of mankind, a moment indispensable for their renewal and improvement."¹⁶⁷ There is a profound understanding of the sacrifice and access it provides; when one thing dies, another comes to life and this the death-renewal process of which Bakhtin speaks is essential to a bullfight.

This prolongation of life, or rather opening of a new life, is the harbinger of yet another aspect of the final act—"the easiness of the infinite."¹⁶⁸ A human life, now, because of the sacrifice made in the arena is prolonged and "eternally unfin-

¹⁶⁴ "There have always been five things that people fear: war, disease, flood, hunger, and death. And of these, death has always been feared the most." Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 234.

¹⁶⁵ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 8.

¹⁶⁶ Leiris, *Manhood*, 38.

¹⁶⁷ Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought*, 246.

¹⁶⁸ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 44.

ished and acephalic, a world like a bleeding wound, endlessly creating and destroying particular finite beings.”¹⁶⁹ Because of the wounds and dead bodies, one reaches the lowest abjection from which one is eventually raised—and so death exceeds its own aim. It ceases to be a final phase of a social spectacle and becomes a transition—“an arena for people to find their fate. An arena of hope”¹⁷⁰ where, collectively, the audience is steadily prepared for death; it is also a place “where our needs are unfolded for us, where we can transcend ourselves, not alone.”¹⁷¹ The aspect of togetherness is very important in viewing the death as a ritual. Firstly, an individual ceremony would not have any impact upon social order. It requires audience and a priest—in *Two Matadors*, one of the brothers is told seconds before entering the arena:

You are High Priest before the people, and today you come to make atonement for inequities of humans crawling on the sand between the sky and earth. So you must spill compensatory blood to cleanse them from their sins.¹⁷²

In killing the animal, a man is able to redeem the sins of the people and break the taboos that caused them to sin in the first place. The matador teaches the audience “the length and breadth of pride and courage”¹⁷³ and forces them to face their own mortality through his cruel deed. The spectators are aware of the importance of the matador’s and bull’s roles; even though they act as agents, middlemen of sorts, they are the channel for the people to experience death in safety. They say,

without the toros, we have no witness to the brave. The bravest men die alone on battlefields and in burning buildings; they die a thousand ways, but mostly unplanned, unseen. There is

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁷⁰ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 43.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 164.

¹⁷² McGee, *Two Matadors*, 11.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 36.

no celebration of having lived, only a funeral. Without toros there is no way to celebrate brave dying, no way to see it happening.¹⁷⁴

Death is necessary for one's existence. Death asserts one's existence, as the latter, to use Bataille's words is "even proved by death."¹⁷⁵

Interestingly enough, the act of killing is suspended somewhere beyond moral dilemmas and ethical questions. Again, Hemingway's clarification appears too plain. He assumes a matador must derive joy from killing the animals and that such a feeling of delight makes a matador an acclaimed man. The passage below raises one more suspicion:

He [the matador] must have a spiritual enjoyment of the moment of killing. Killing cleanly and in a way, which gives you esthetic pleasure and pride has always been one of the greatest enjoyments of a part of the human race. * * * Once you accept the rule of death, thou shalt not kill is an easily and naturally obeyed commandment. But when a man is still in rebellion against death he has pleasure in taking to himself one of the Godlike attributes, that of giving it. This is one of the most profound feelings in those men who enjoy killing. These things are done in pride and pride, of course, is a Christian sin and a pagan virtue. But it is pride which makes the bull-fight and true enjoyment of killing which makes the great matador.¹⁷⁶

His claim about killing clearly and aesthetically contradicts Bataille's and Foucault's, as well as Leiris's views regarding the goal of killing the bull. Following their way of thinking the killing does not bring pleasure; it needs to happen in order to preserve the continuity of one's being and is not done lightly. What is more, even Hemingway himself contradicts his own assertion and, when he ventures to ponder upon the ethics of killing the

¹⁷⁴ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 92.

¹⁷⁵ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 20.

¹⁷⁶ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 232.

animal, he presents this conclusion: "I think death for the toro is the sun going out. He is innocent. He has done nothing wrong, only defended himself against attack by an enemy he does not understand. In a way he dies a martyr's death"¹⁷⁷ which only proves how glorious death can be. This ritual is a reenactment of human existence with a different than usual outcome as it does not end in a definite, closed death of an individual but, thanks to the sacrificial killing, it inspires a sense of immortality. In this one instance, death is a prelude to life and, perhaps for this reason, it is believed to be the very last thing to take place at the end of civilization for it gives hope for reaching beyond what one may consider the ultimate.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 93.

Chapter Three

Every Day Should Be a Fiesta—From Carnival to Corrida

The origins of the word *carnival* are not certain. One may seek its roots in the Italian word *carnevale* which may derive from the Latin *carne(m) levare* (to remove meat) or *carno vale* (farewell, meat) which referred to the time before Lent begins. Another possible hypothesis is that this word derives from the Latin phrase *carrus navalis* describing a vehicle on wheels, in the shape of a ship, that was used in a celebratory parade organized in ancient Rome to honor and worship the goddess Isis and, subsequently, Bacchus—the god of wine, fertility and intoxication (his Greek counterpart is Dionysus).¹ Regardless of the etymology, it is clear to see that carnival accompanies ludic traditions, levity, and merry making. As such, it comes as no surprise that it did not escape academic attention. In literary studies it has attracted interest due to the work of a Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, and, in a broader anthropological framework, the concept of carnival was examined by Johan Huizinga. These two have paved the way for numerous scholars commenting upon carnival and the culture of laughter, such as Peter Burke, Roger Caillois, James C. Scott and Astrid Ensslin, to name just a few.

¹ Wojciech Dudzik, *Karnawały w kulturze* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2005).



Photo. 1. *The Speed and Daring of Juanito Apiñani in the Ring of Madrid*, Francisco Goya, 1815–1816. Accessed December 20, 2017. <https://www.wikiart.org/en/francisco-goya/the-speed-and-daring-of-juanito-api%c3%blani-in-the-ring-of-madrid-1816>.

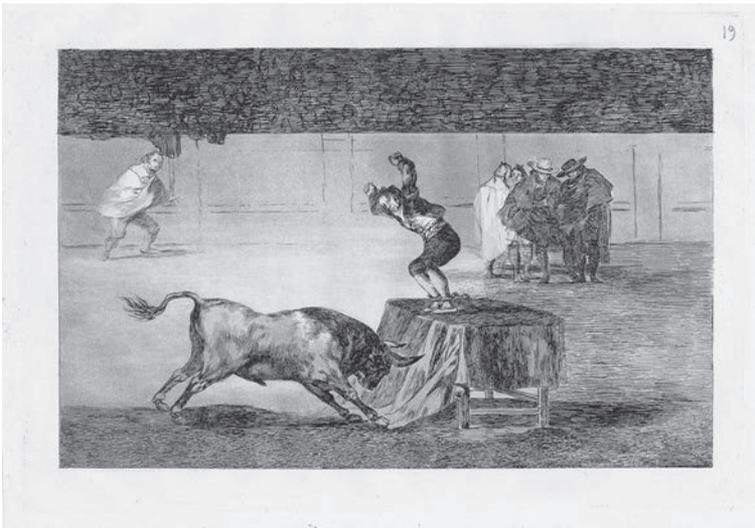


Photo. 2. [*Boldness of Martincho in the Bullring at Saragossa*] *Another Madness of His in the Same Bullring*, Francisco Goya, 1816. Accessed December 20, 2017. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/333828>.

Folklore, with its customs and tradition, is the milieu from which carnival emerges. Carnival proliferated in feudal Europe and, as Bakhtin stated, it “became the symbol and incarnation of the true folk festival, completely independent of Church and State but tolerated by them.”² I do doubt, however, the independence the philosopher proclaims as it was the Catholic Church and its laws that guarded the sacred, monitored, and supervised limitations of time and space of carnival. It could be perceived as independent in the sense that it does not merely constitute an opposition to the Church and otherwise valid regulations but encompasses and absorbs them. Additionally, as carnival’s existence needs to be contrasted with something that is its opposition in order to be appreciated, the two are rather complementary and not, as Bakhtin would like to see, antagonistic. As Bakhtin states in the introduction to *Rabelais and His World*, “[people] live in it and everyone participates because the very idea embraces all.”³ Ergo, carnival could be defined as a festive event that takes place within a collective or a gathering and is a breach in the daily routines that are governed by rules and restrictions. Since it is a breach, not a change, it suggests temporality and ephemerality but, at the same time, it is not accidental; paradoxically, with all its frivolity, it does fit into a certain framework which, as I believe, may be likened to that of corrida. Here, another quality of the phenomenon of carnival can be detected—its peculiar capability of combining binary oppositions.

As I have already stated, it is simultaneously methodical (it takes place in a limited space and time and is planned beforehand) and disordered (no one is able to predict what happens). What is more, it is both central (it must be shared by a community), and individual (one is offered a chance to alter his/her inner experience of existence). It is sublime—it moves people closer to the divine—but also has a debased side to it as it focuses on

² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 220.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

excess and debauchery. Bataille notices this link as he writes: “religious sensibility, and it always links desire closely with terror, intense pleasure and anguish”⁴—showing the way carnival blends with what seems contradictory.

Rigid societal and ecclesiastical norms would be suspended during the celebrations allowing carnival and its participants to transcend the status quo and live, even though for a limited period of time, in an alternative reality, challenging the Church morals and principles. It does, however, administer a new dominion, that of excess and reversal, resulting in societal transformations because carnival, catering to the wishes of those in the lower echelon of society, brings about a reversal of power distribution, undermines the significance of dominant classes, and social groups. Its essence is anti-hegemonic. Still, the primary purpose of carnival is that it functions as an escape allowing repressions to surface and desires to be expressed and fulfilled. Such occurrences would cause neither condemnation nor punishment as the carnival’s objectives were to offer relief to what would have been otherwise oppressed and muted, that is, bodily needs and drives. As far as carnival’s theoretical framework is concerned, it is of importance to distinguish between the two terms of carnival and carnivalesque. The former is a temporal phenomenon, whereas the latter, coined by Bakhtin himself, is more of an abstract notion. It may be understood as a manifestation of carnival’s aura or attitude. The concept’s roots may be traced back to Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel* where readers face exaggeration and liberation from principles. Carnivalesque is therefore “opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook.”⁵ What needs to be noted is that carnivalesque does not necessarily define the carnival as such, it rather reflects the aura and subversive atmosphere of the celebration. The latter, according to Bakhtin can be divided into two subcategories: official holi-

⁴ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 38.

⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 3.

days and unofficial ones. The first kind includes state and church holidays, and the second one, occasions that are not regulated by people in an official position of power. Corrida, however, does show aspects of both kinds. It is commonly connected with a town's patron saint; authorities organize a fiesta in honor of her or him and corrido is just as much inscribed into official celebrations as a parade or a procession. In *The Last Matador* the protagonists ponder upon the way such festivity functions: "Some old saint they patronize every year. It's just an excuse for the town to get drunk and slaughter some cattle."⁶ It reveals that fiesta with corrido and their carnivalesque character do not escape shallowness and might not be as congruent with the official/unofficial distinction as Bakhtin suggests. A similar image of a fiesta that includes a bullfight is presented in *Bull Fever* by a British author, Kenneth Tynan, who describes it as "the annual orgy, an ordeal by noise and wine"⁷—a phrase that is unseemly, especially when narrating a celebration of a patron saint, and questions the separation the Russian theoretician presents.

All celebrations are official and unofficial at the same time; this claim is lent credibility in *Shadow of a Bull* when the narrator points to a linear and coherent line of events of a fiesta: "During the fiesta, Arcangel becomes a chaos of color and music. The people do not sleep, and they do not work during those three days. It always begins with the Mass and ends in a litter of paper, exhaustion, and dying music"⁸—the event encapsulates the sacred and religious and the profane and human. Being in touch with one's emotional side and sensitivity carries a special meaning during the time of carnival. In Bizet's opera, a strong relation between carnival and bullfighting is celebrated and expressed. The people sing:

⁶ Marc Newman, *The Last Matador* (North Charleston, SC: Erev Press, 2013), 255.

⁷ Kenneth Tynan, *Bull Fever* (New York: Longmans Green, 1955), 141.

⁸ Maia Wojciechowska, *Shadow of a Bull* (New York: Aladdin, 2007), 58. Emphasis mine.

Your toast, I can give it to you
 Sirs, sirs, for along with the soldiers
 Yes, the Toreros, can understand;
 For pleasures, for pleasures. They have combats!
 The arena is full, it is the feast. The arena is full, from top to
 bottom;
 The spectators are losing their heads,
 The spectators began a big fracas!
 Apostrophes, cries, and uproar grow to a furor!
 Because it is a celebration of courage! It is the celebration of
*people with heart!*⁹

The passage demonstrates the celebratory and joyful atmosphere of the two parallel events. What is especially appreciated by those who have “a heart” and are able to redistribute moral accents is that carnival brings the ironclad order of reality to a halt, and introduces an unconventional, festive reality that is governed by playfulness. It is a complex, alternate reality that does include its own peculiar rules: when corrido takes place, there is no escaping it, the matador must not leave until the fight is finished. As long as it is happening, no other law and no other reality can exist and neither does the future. Temporality is crucial for carnival but not only in the sense that it lasts for a limited period of time, but also in a sense of its *nowness*. Ernest Hemingway remarks upon this: “The things that happened could only have happened during a fiesta. Everything became quite unreal finally and it seemed as though nothing could have any consequences. It seemed out of place to think of consequences during the fiesta”¹⁰ showing the suspension of familiar rules and moral judgment. It is an extraordinary circumstance hinging on lunacy. Fiesta and bullfighting are both liberated from reality and liberating still, there is awareness of boundaries (a circus tent, the arena’s walls) that validates the breach. Had it not been there,

⁹ Lea Frey, “*Carmen*. A direct translation for singers,” The Aria Database, <http://www.aria-database.com/translations/carmen.txt>. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Scribners, 2004), 158.

carnival would have been shapeless void contributing nothing. In “A Preface to Transgression” Foucault writes: “A limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows.”¹¹ Therefore, the limits must be known and need to be present in everyday life for the people to relish their wrongdoings during the time of carnival. What needs to be emphasized is that corrida does not eliminate the rules and norms; it moves them away from the center so that they cease to govern one’s life and are suspended for a limited time. I would not fully agree with Bakhtin, who stated, “Life has been lifted out of its routine, the web of conventions has been torn; all the official hierarchic limits have been swept away”¹² as this altogether disconnects the carnival from rules while, in reality, it both deconstructs and constructs, dissolves and reinforces, negates and affirms.

Corrida as Carnival

Reverberating through Bataille’s *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux, or the Birth of Art* is the claim that society is founded on prohibition. He frequently claims that “for an animal nothing is ever forbidden.”¹³ One can depict in this quotation a longing to be an animal and for animalistic freedom. Further on, the writer discusses the concept of the taboo and narrows it down to two kinds—regarding death, and regarding sex. In his view, these prohibitions elevate humans and distinguish us from other animals but at the same time deprive us of uninhibited desires and unconstrained trust of our own instincts. As civilization develops

¹¹ Michel Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 34.

¹² Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 273.

¹³ Georges Bataille, *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux, or the Birth of Art* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 31.

homo faber begins their creation—a new order of things and tools that denote a timeframe, conceptual and long-range activities. In Bataille's perspective, a flee from such arrest was rendered possible thanks to art. Art celebrates life and, concurrently, moves its recipients beyond the ordinary routines of their lives. As it transports them away from everyday activities people are able to move closer to a sphere of sacrum impenetrable without art's aid. For him, idle activities that are not prerequisites for survival, such as art or play, are the sublime ones; he even equates the two—"At its outset art was primarily a game. In a major sense it still is. It is play; while tool-making is primarily work"¹⁴—and in order to break away from the unadventurous condition of *homo faber*, carnival provides a magnificent return to the more virile existence of *homo ludens*.

Carnival, with its levity, lax behaviors, and games brings back and restores the awareness of the sacred character of life which is normally underplayed. This can also be said of bullfighting, which is a ritualized practice dedicated to and shared by a community that aims at transcending reality. However, Bataille does not define transgression merely as breaking or ignoring the law. For him, it is a communal event where all trespassing is witnessed and shared—corrida, with its strong element of play, high level of artistry, and imposed limitation of time and space strongly resembles carnival. Both events are spectacles, yet they require more than passive observation. They need to happen among people, so they retain their collective character. Elena in *The Last Matador* understood this challenge as she tells the history of corridas' communal aura: "Long before any bullrings were constructed in Spain, the town square would be blocked off so bullfight could be played out in the public."¹⁵ This mirrors Bakhtin's theoretical standing as he explains:

Carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators.

¹⁴ Ibid., 27.

¹⁵ Newman, *The Last Matador*, 36.

Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people.¹⁶

This quotation validates the affinities between carnival and corrida because the latter also has a form of “free and familiar contact [that] reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age.”¹⁷ In both cases the dichotomy between the bullfight, the spectators, and carnival and its participants are dissolved: “Popularity and age have no significance”¹⁸ and hegemonies are subverted. Corrida is just as eccentric and marked by extravagance and excess as carnival. Both share various functions (social, moral, private, collective, transcendental) and combine both self-satire and self-celebration. Corrida, the same way carnival does, synthesizes the topsy-turvy component of Dionysian aesthetics within an organized Apollonian framework which respects rules and upholds conventions: “Thus we have here a complete turnabout, the replacement of the higher by the lower level,”¹⁹ which alters the perspective of the participants. Barnaby Conrad in his writings mentions a peculiar example of this twofold nature of corrida:

Once the mayor of the town declared the pastime barbarous and outlawed it whereupon the outraged citizenry, defending their inalienable right to self-maim, clapped the mayor in jail and left him there until the fiesta was over.²⁰

This instance demonstrates the manner in which bullfighting assumes a contradictory right to defy morality. Another illustration of corrida’s audience provoking changes and altering

¹⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 7. Emphasis mine.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁸ Newman, *The Last Matador*, 86.

¹⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 382.

²⁰ Conrad Barnaby, *La fiesta Brava* (Houston: Blackstone Audio Inc., 1952), 230–231.

the reality is seen in *A Cape in the Wind* where people's reaction pressured a mayor to pardon an animal: "The shouts became an all-encompassing roar that finally convinced a reluctant authority who rose to his feet, and, bathed in approving cheers, waved his own official white flag of indulgence."²¹ This indicates the power people enjoy during the corrida which reflects the upside-down *modus operandi* of both carnival and corrida.

The contrast and correspondence between Dionysian and Apollonian dichotomy are a curious case portrayed in *Two Matadors*, where two brothers represent the two sides of the spectrum brought together in an arena. As I have previously said, Fernando, an acclaimed scholar who teaches philosophy, and his identical twin Antonio, a famous matador, as a result of yet another dispute decide to switch professions. The somewhat dull and plain academic tries his luck in a fatal fight with a bull, whereas the passionate and unbridled torero faces a reality governed by order. The fact that they are identical twins only so pointedly illustrates how inextricably related the two extremities are. After the swap has taken place the scholarly Fernando says as he takes his last breath after the goring: "Today, I have lived. I have lived the perfect day. And for this day, I thank you, Antonio,"²² which could suggest that the carnivalesque overpowers the organized world; yet, before Fernando dies, he manages to execute a perfect fight introducing absolute balance in the cosmos of the arena: "It was as if he taught the bull to understand his place within the order of the universe. He knew his place and Fernando knew his proper place."²³ This harmony was achieved by provoking reality and introducing change. Altering everyday norms is pivotal for corrida. The brothers decided to take each other's roles in the world and so does everybody else during corrida as it is a dynamic spectacle. In *Matadora*, the narrator lays out the constant flux of corrida's scene:

²¹ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 217.

²² Marcus McGee, *Two Matadors* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2012), 34.

²³ *Ibid.*, 29.

A carnival of colour washed over them like holy water. Sun bathed one side of the ring in pure amber light. The other fell into shadow. The sand was a flat gold circle, smooth as velvet, and above them, a cloudless blue sky. The stands were packed all the way around, pale stone pillars and arches framing a flurry of motion as women in each section fanned themselves, handbills flew, and men argued and placed bets while their children ran the length of the stone bleachers.²⁴

This saturated description comprehensively touches upon all senses; it is rich and unapologetic. Kennedy, in her work, shares a similar perception of bullfight's audience and their behavior in the following way: "it amuses me to watch the rich and impeccable wrestle slowly into place, alongside the parties of housewives, the working-class fathers, carefully introducing the *corrida* to their sons,"²⁵ confirming the egalitarian nature of the event. She writes:

My knees are unavoidably pressed into the upper back of the man seated in front of me, while an unavoidable pair of knees is, likewise, pressed into my upper back, courtesy of the row behind, and both my elbows are nipped in by, to my left, a well-dressed Madrid woman of middle age, and, to my right, a young man in a T-shirt and baseball cap.²⁶

This diversified crowd is, for once, seen and heard and such a right to express oneself echoes in carnival for both (it and *corrida*) are polyphonic.²⁷ In contrast to the praise of polyphony, Bataille holds a slightly more cautious standing:

As a rule, social homogeneity is a precarious form, at the mercy of violence and even of internal dissent. It forms spontaneously

²⁴ Elisabeth Ruth, *Matadora* (Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2013), 60.

²⁵ Alison Louise Kennedy, *On Bullfighting* (London: Yellow Jersey Press), 152.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁷ Bakhtin applied this musical term to literature and elaborated on it in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.

in the play of productive organization but must constantly be protected from the various unruly elements that do not benefit from production, or not enough to suit.²⁸

Yet, *corrida* together with its carnivalesque nature proves that unity is also possible, even when it consists of a mosaic of voices. Various professions, ages, and lifestyles mingle and

the sound of the crowd in the plaza was a deep rumbling base with overtones of individual voices rising in tenor and over it all sharp soprano of shrill laughing. This symphony played overhead.²⁹

The collective through being together gains agency and causality which may influence others, for instance a *matador*, who performs for the very crowd that challenges him: “For a moment he had put the sound of the crowd out of his mind, but it returned now in a shrill cacophony.”³⁰ Although people witness the bullfight individually, their power is multiplied, which can be seen in the unified emotion accompanying their reaction to what they interpret as unsuccessful *corrida*: “The crowd was a living flow of angry shouts and waving fists as it rolled down into the arena”³¹ and “the cry of *olé* had swelled from the stands the moment Ortega made his first move, the celebration continuing until he had finished with a fancy swirl of cape and walked away with all proper disdain”³²—people become one body consisting of multitude of selves expressing a unanimous attitude: “Then the gate was opened, and the crowd let out huge cheers. The trumpets sounded and the band struck up a spirited *Pasadoble*,”³³ such a unity is seen not exclusively around the bullring but also during a carnival:

²⁸ Georges Bataille, Fred Botting, and Scott Wilson, *The Bataille Reader* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1997), 124.

²⁹ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 199.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

³² *Ibid.*, 69.

³³ Newman, *The Last Matador*, 92.

The carnivalesque crowd in the marketplace or in the streets is not merely a crowd. It is the people as a whole, but organized in their own way, the way of the people. It is outside of and contrary to all existing forms of the coercive socio-economic and political organization, which is suspended for the time of festivity.³⁴

This wholeness is possible thanks to the pivotal aspect of both occurrences, *corrida* and *carnival*—namely, the desire of the attendees to be there. They are voluntary activities, and neither is fundamental for survivor, participants choose oblivion and disarray. Kennedy notes their festive moods: “People stand to wave at friends, there is a fair amount of laughter, melodious chat.”³⁵ They are happier and thrilled recognizing and employing extraordinary practices and demeanors. To foreigners, it seems an elusive feature that is advertised by the Spaniards; Cass encourages Henry to visit Spain for *corrida*: “I’m thinking you should come early for San Isidro. As you already know it’s amazing time of year. Madrid is cool and comfortable, and everyone is feeling spring. The festival is quite the celebration, and there is one added reason.”³⁶ It can be seen that anticipation and elation are imperative for experiencing *corrida* properly. Such a profound ambient is characteristic of *corrida*’s tropes—just before Alyssa, the naive protagonist in *Matador, Mi Amor*, takes her seat in the arena, she notices: “The whole atmosphere was one of charged excitement”³⁷ and that it is a direct, tangible experience of indirect, ethereal phenomena such as God, desire, death, and rebirth. The performance in the arena reflects the most dramatic and glorious encounters in human life. It could be considered the sole moment of truth given to an individual. An old *matador* describes his reflections on what takes place in the arena:

³⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 255.

³⁵ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 111.

³⁶ Newman, *The Last Matador*, 228.

³⁷ William Maltese, *Matador, Mi Amor. A Novel of Romance* (Rockville: Wildside Press LCC., 2012), 159.

This is the exact moment when the look passes untouched through each non-blinking and wide-opened window, traveling from the outer, tangible physical being and into the hidden world of the very soul, discovering and exposing its perpetual beauty. This is the moment when the look traverses the flesh of the body and pierces the heart. This is the moment of truth.³⁸

This claim is that during a bullfight a transition takes place— one's soul and spirit escapes physicality and wanders freely. The liberation of which the old man speaks is possible because of the inherent danger dwelling in *corrida*; its absurd proximity to death renders life all the more precious. Rabelais detects this correlation between one's vulnerability, risk, bliss, and sublime. One reads in introduction to his work:

Moreover, through all the stages of historic development feasts were linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society and man. Moments of death and revival, of change and renewal always led to a festive perception of the world. These moments, expressed in concrete form, created the peculiar character of the feasts.³⁹

Thus, all the moves the torero makes and audience's reaction, overshadowed by the threat of immanent death, leads to a better and fuller understanding of life. Even though *corrida* could be described as barbaric, and even as sacrilege, both, *corrida* and carnival, serve a more profound purpose: that of taming fears and unveiling the sinister substance of human nature. In so doing, the two sanctify the profane. *Corrida*, as well as carnival, is a symbolic end of a certain world and its order. It needs to occur so that a new world and a new order can emerge resulting in "the world's rebirth."⁴⁰

³⁸ Robert Leon Casey, *After the Bullfight, and Other Stories* (Scotts Valey, SC: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2009), 47.

³⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 241.

Carnival for Bakhtin “belongs to the borderline between art and life.” In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of “play,”⁴¹ and, as I have so far established, play is also an important component of *corrida*. Play and in-betweenness are present throughout Bakhtin’s writing on carnival: “The boundaries between the play and life are intentionally erased. Life itself is on stage,”⁴² underscoring the importance of crossing the boundaries and trespassing order. Lacan as well stresses the desirable effects of breaking rules, for him, it is necessary in order to achieve fulfillment. In *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* he boldly postulates:

Without a transgression there is no access to *jouissance*, and, to return to Saint Paul, that that is precisely the function of the Law. Transgression in the direction of *jouissance* only takes place if it is supported by the oppositional principle, by the forms of the Law. If the paths to *jouissance* have something in them that dies out, that tends to make them impassable, prohibition, if I may say so, becomes its all-terrain vehicle, its half-track truck, that gets it out of the circuitous routes that lead man back in a roundabout way toward the rut of a short and well-trodden satisfaction.⁴³

In other words, in Lacan’s view, *jouissance* and laws are mutually dependent. There must exist authority and laws to breach for *jouissance* to be conceivable and vice versa: there must be a chance for transgression to happen, in order for the laws to have significance. Lacan’s *jouissance* is Bataille’s eroticism and Bakhtin’s carnival, and they all can be realized by, and in, *corrida*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 258.

⁴³ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960* (New York: Norton, 1992), 177.

The Gore and the Grotesque

The grotesque world is—and is not—our own world.⁴⁴

Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* identifies the concept of “grotesque realism” and the “grotesque body” as key ideas in Rabelais’s work. The grotesque aspect takes what is spiritual and sublime and subverts it so that it becomes, or appears to be, revolting and debased, and what may be inferred from the quotation above is that the grotesque essentially offers ambiguity. Grotesque is an art of openness, transitional loci, eeriness but, as it “is” our own world, the uncanny must carry some verisimilitude to our milieu. The equivocal way in which grotesque influences its recipients results from “our awareness that the familiar and apparently harmonious world is alienated under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence”⁴⁵—in other words, one’s thus far solid moral judgment of reality may be tested, since the grotesque is “apt to jest, sometimes bitterly, with under-current of sternest pathos, sometimes waywardly, sometimes slightly and wickedly, with death and sin”⁴⁶ as John Ruskin asserts.

Although grotesque elements possess playful and affirmative features, it is its darker and more lugubrious aspect that draws one’s attention. Such a morose tone is an inevitable facet of *corrida* and it too, in line with Kayser’s theory regarding grotesque, aims to “invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world.”⁴⁷ The grotesque, to which Bakhtin dedicates a considerable amount of attention in his writings, has the human body as its focal point. The bodily element with the body’s biological functions becomes glorified during the carnival; sexuality, excessive

⁴⁴ Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1963), 37.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁶ George Paul Landow, “And the World Became Strange: Realms of Literary Fantasy,” *The Georgia Review*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 15–16.

⁴⁷ Kayser, *The Grotesque*, 37.

drinking, violence, and bodily fluids, seemingly defiling, elevate human's position in the universe. Degradation, a pivotal feature of the grotesque, is understood as a "transfer to material level, to the sphere of earth and body"⁴⁸—for it is there, within the body that death happens, and so it must be in the body where death can be conquered. Bakhtin formulates that in the following way: "Immortality [is] linked with the body, with earthly life, accessible to a living experience."⁴⁹ Therefore, it should be stressed that *corrida's* awareness of human (im)mortality is closely linked to the limitations of one's body and the transformations it is able, or forced to, undergo. Hence, grotesque imagery would consist of themes related to mundane and physiological aspects, such as for instance food or "sweating, [...] copulation, dismemberment."⁵⁰ The grotesque's essence, however, does not diminish the value of a given phenomenon; quite the contrary, it steers one's attention toward frequently silenced elements of "the fruitful earth and the womb"⁵¹ or, as *corrida* manifests, to the gore component of human existence and survival. Irony and mockery are also vital for the grotesque. An adequate illustration of self-ridicule is voiced in *The Making of Toro* where the impressionable American author, Travis LaFrance, gives an account of his first *corrida*. Towards the end of the spectacle he sees:

The bullfighter has already saluted the judge, but I can see the bull is still panting in a puddle of blood. Out jogs a paunchy Pink-Socks in a torero suit he bought before acquiring his gut [...] and now I see the flash of a dagger [...] I see no one is even watching and then without meaning to, I yell "Somebody stop that man!" My eyes and throat are burning. "He has a knife!" There is an instant of silence around me, and then a burst of laughter. "Mira el gringo! Llorando, llorando." "Pobrecito yan-

⁴⁸ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 20.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 405.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

qui. Le gusta el torito.”⁵² I don’t know what they’re saying; maybe I’ve recruited some helpers. I look around at the jeering faces [...] I’m an American: We don’t let this sort of torture go unpunished. Out comes a squad of guys dressed like milkmen who rake the puddles of blood. With chains and a wooden yoke they harness a pair of draft horses to the carcass, moving with frightening expertise. The dead bull gets a final round of boos as he’s hauled out through the tunnel. And with one bull dead, there are five more to go. Nobody kills on the first try, and throughout the afternoon the bloody swords bounce in the dirt. “Today’s corrida was a thing of beauty,” I write. “How brave the man, how noble the beast, how profound the ritual! My eyes are still wet with the tears I’ve wept: tears borne from the sheer glory and art of the ceremony I’ve seen.”⁵³

This ironic excerpt above shows how easy it is to miscomprehend and misinterpret corrida. Travis LaFrance realizes the debasement that happens in front of his eyes yet, as to seem a respectful and educated aficionado, he chooses not to write down his genuine impressions in his diary—his pretending to be a snob also introduces another layer of grotesque element. Travis fails to achieve a fuller comprehension of carnival which is to come nearer truth; for Rabelais it is also the “unmasking” and disclosing of “the unvarnished truth under the veil of false claims and arbitrary ranks”⁵⁴ which LaFrance refuses to perform for the fear of looking incompetent and unappreciative. Even before the aspiring writer goes to Europe, the misconceptions about bullfighting come to surface. Upon boasting to his parents about his new project he hears:

“I remember reading a book of his about bullfighting when I was in Europe,” said Dad. “Must have been forty years ago.”

⁵² In English, trans. mine: ‘Look at Yankee! He’s crying! Poor Yankee, he likes the little bull!’

⁵³ Mark Sundeen, *The Making of Toro* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 61, 67–69.

⁵⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, foreword.

“Death in the Afternoon?” “I think it was called Fiesta. Does that sound right?” “Never heard of it. He didn’t write it.” “Maybe it was This Side of...” Maybe it was This Side of Paradise,” said Mom. “That’s about Italy. Dad must be thinking of The Sun Also Rises. Wasn’t he friends with the matador?” “An acquaintance.” “And they both loved Ashley Brett?” “But she couldn’t stay with Jake because of his old bullfighting wound.”⁵⁵

The quoted dialogue does not only mock the wannabe aficionado attitude that many Americans display but also, diminishes the larger than life legendary and lofty adventures of Hemingway, who raised the bar of bullfighting literature impossibly high (in terms of strong bonds with the bullfighters) for his followers. It is not solely the way of writing about *corrida* that is parodied. The very phenomenon is not free from mockery. Starting with outrageous and surprising clothes of the matador to the carcass being dragged to a local butchery after the final *tercio*, all phases of bullfight incur travesty. There exists even a notion of a comic *toreo*—*toreo comico*—a peculiar type of *corrida* that involves dancing, elements of slapstick, and musical. *Toreros comicos* do not kill the animals which are usually calves. They are to entertain and evoke laughter at pretended clumsiness and confusion. The aura of sublime, at times, is also subject to satire as it may seem pompous. This aspiring writer, LaFrance, explores the environment of fans and experts attending each Sunday bullfight. He observes:

I’ve heard it before: the sound of great bullfighting happening while I’m in the men’s room or snack shack or out in the tunnel for fresh air. I’m writing a book, and the guy whose job it is to lug the beef onto the truck demands to be interviewed. So, while the matador is killing with a single graceful thrust, I’m outside the meat truck learning about Oscar Rodriguez.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Sundeen, *The Making of Toro*, 28–29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

His complaint shifts the focus from the grand and heroic macho facing death to the mundane points building up the background. He shows the unglamorous particles which are as important as the star-torero. What is more, the great persona of the bullfighter also turns out to contain comedy potential. His tight costume, his pigtail, and knee socks as well as the members of his team may make one smirk. LaFrance is ruthless in his criticism:

The crowd shrieks, and by the sound of it they believe that Tweedledee deserves the trampling he's getting, so I open my mouth and holler some meaningless syllables along with them. With a fanfare of trumpets Tweedledee and Tweedledum limp away. There are so many guys in pink socks that I don't know who is who. One of them trades his cape for a pair of sticks wrapped in colored paper, which from where I sit look like something a clown would bring to a birthday party.⁵⁷

He brutally diminishes the artistic value of the performance and places it in a domestic context that limits his perception, resulting in a grotesque depiction of *corrida*. He continues:

Who are these people? They've got the horse dressed like a bed, quilt and mattress included, pillowcase over the head so it can't see a thing. Tweedledee leans toward the charging bull and sinks a lance between its shoulders, and everyone screams and boos, but I can't tell if they're mad at the bull or at the rider. How could I be so stupid as to forget my notes? I'm blowing it. I open my wallet and sort through receipts and maps but still can't find my glossary.⁵⁸

The matter of Spanish nomenclature is also a curious case. Vocabulary concerning bullfighting in English literature is marked by the use of italics and, additionally, numerous authors (for in-

⁵⁷ Ibid., 65.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

stance Ernest Hemingway and Alison Louise Kennedy) decide to include a glossary with definitions of the terms employed throughout the work. The variety of voices/languages within a single perspective/work has been defined by Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination* as heteroglossia.⁵⁹ A multitude of outlooks expressed by plurality of dialects or jargons challenge official discourses that use one, official and approved language. Folk and festive languages oppose this domination and diversify it and, in so doing, the centralized viewpoint becomes defamiliarized as it is seen, heard, or written from a standpoint of others. The opinions on the inclusion or evasion of Spanish terminology in Anglophone literature vary. LaFrance's comment seems to be a funny, provocative remark whereas in a 1956 *New York Times* review of *Bull Fever* titled "A Ring Full of Grace, Valor, Poise and Pride" Thomas Dozier applauds Kenneth Tynan's attempt to delimit Spanish language in the book. Dozier compliments the way: "Mr. Tynan not only avoids the trap of italics," and frowns upon those who preceded him, for "They have come, seen, been conquered, and have gone away to explain the wonders of tauromachy to their unenlightened countrymen, scattering italics through their pages."⁶⁰ A contrasting approach towards moderation in italics and restraint of description is detected in Kennedy's work. Her journey to Spain was to find peace and quiet. Unsurprisingly, her destination offers anything but what she thinks she seeks. Spanish cities present various possibilities and overwhelm her. At her first corrida she is bewildered by the magnitude and intensity of the event. She allows herself to be captivated by the sensation:

the blare of each magenta and yellow *capote de brega*, the lurid colors of the *traje de luces*, the bright cloaking of blood on each

⁵⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 262.

⁶⁰ Thomas Dozier, "A Ring Full of Grace, Valor, Poise and Pride," review of *Bull Fever* by Kenneth Tynnan, *The New York Times* (October 9, 1956), accessed January 17, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/1955/10/09/archives/a-ring-full-of-grace-valor-poise-and-pride-bull-fever-by-kenneth.html>.

bull's shoulder, the *banderillas* caught in the midst of movement and dust, fanning out from the *modrillo* like an absurd crest, the weird prefiguring of an impact yet to come. Anything beyond the monochrome hurts my eyes.⁶¹

As unpleasant and garish as this experience initially was, Kennedy starts to appreciate it as it helps her to gain courage and to introspect. The woman realizes how influential *corrida* proves to be: “The proximity of so much dying tends to demand a certain honesty from observers”⁶² which she finally musters and shares with the readers her reason to come to Spain to find peace, namely, her recent suicide attempt. In her view, a close encounter with death is a universal affair and serves as a translator between people. The motif of death as renewal, the combination of death and birth, and the pictures of glorified death play an important part in the system of grotesque imagery in Rabelais’s novel. Grotesque death is not to be treated lightly for death is the highest point of one’s life. Bakhtin explores this theme and he writes: “The death of the individual is only one moment in the triumphant life of the people and of mankind, a moment indispensable for their renewal and improvement,”⁶³ and such a renewal is a part of Kennedy’s experience of *corrida*. Witnessing the fight, she concludes: “What follows in the *corrida*, also stained with blood and sweat, forms another self-portrait, both particular and general—one of fear and faith, luck and skill, pain cut close to joy.”⁶⁴ Her review proves and straightens the duality of *corrida* that Bakhtin ascribes to carnival. The twofold nature is visible on all strata that accompany *corrida*. It begins with the unity and rupture of the man and the animal—“man and bull, merged and swirled apart, again and again.”⁶⁵ The two complement and eradicate one another in a similar way that Francisco

⁶¹ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 82.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶³ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 341.

⁶⁴ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 114.

⁶⁵ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 213.

Goya captured the precarious bond between the matador and the bull.

The dynamic relationship between order and discord, balance and imbalance, is fundamental to Goya's work which opens this chapter. The subject of the etchings is balance: the matador is desperately trying to conquer the forces of nature the bull represents, loses his balance and achieves fleeting perfection in defying gravity. The upside-down logic of *corrida* is reflected not only in the performers' artistic movements or clothes, and the audience's behavior but also in the effect it all produces; the *torero's* skill overthrows animalistic force just to be proved useless the very next second. Such a fusion is communicated by Johan Huizinga, who wrote, "Play and seriousness constantly turn into each other. Play loses its quality of independence and lack of inhibition and wants to pass for seriousness. At the same time, one finds serious technical and economic activities involved in the realm of play,"⁶⁶ which corresponds to the duality of grotesque and *corrida* that on the one hand bridge the prosaic, earthly days with the divine but, on the other debase and mock all purity. Indeed, even the representatives of the church are not immune to the imbalance that *corrida* provokes. Juan Silvera, the matador whom I have already mentioned in his conversation with the priest, illustrates the opaque mindset of carnival ("I would gladly resign my kingdom, matador", he [the priest] said. 'If I could stand in your world for one afternoon and make the thing with one bull'"⁶⁷). Such a wish to reverse the valid state of affairs is the kernel of carnival. The author of *Rabelais and His World* enumerates various forms of such a desire. Interestingly enough, all of them are found in *corrida*, for, as Bakhtin observes: "We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' (*a l'envers*), of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations,

⁶⁶ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, Huizinga, 1971), 52.

⁶⁷ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 12.

profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings.”⁶⁸ The constant shift of focus from the sublime to the degraded is usually done by reaching for body imagery and the most embarrassing aspects of one’s physicality.

Such symbolism is continuously portrayed in literature on corrido. LaFrance’s girlfriend who accompanies him to a bullfight, says, “I got hit by a flying piece of meat,” she says. “I almost barfed”⁶⁹—body and flesh, life and death are, again, put to scrutiny in a grotesque manner. The Matadors in *A Cape in the Wind* also surrender to their bodies’ cravings: “They should have been drunk, but they had passed that, sinking instead into a dim comfortable malaise, tasting cigars and feeling full bellies”⁷⁰—visions of a body are served up in a humiliating or disgraced form which falls in line with Bakhtin’s theories on the grotesque. For him, “exaggeration, hyperbolism, and excess are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style”⁷¹—thus, for the body to be grotesque, it needs to be disproportionate.

The reason behind adopting such a notion is to temporarily focus on the lower strata of human existence and to celebrate this disruption of harmony and divine proportions. It is, at the same time, cosmological and counter-transcendent. Strict divisions and classifications become blurred and the audience receives a new world vision and a new hierarchy. In such a context, this structure of topsy-turvy proves the relative and variable nature of things and enriches viewer’s understating of the world. Corrida’s physical language and the rawness of its experience result in an apotheosis of the body; it is inscribed into carnival’s philosophy in which “the outward and inward features are often merged into one,”⁷² so, the guts, quite literally, are spilled. Still, the gory descriptions of the outcome of the fight—“blood is everywhere, guts fill a bucket. The skinless heads whisper in

⁶⁸ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 11.

⁶⁹ Sundeen, *The Making of Toro*, 153.

⁷⁰ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 7.

⁷¹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 303.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 241.

a huddle and big black hearts thump in stew”⁷³—carry a more contemplative meaning: the body with its all viscera is the focal point. The body-as-world attitude gains, although temporarily, advantage over the dull status quo. A carnival individual is aware of his/her own physicality and physiognomy and ready to satisfy its desires by accessing the excess. This position of power of the body is a result of a collision between the living and the one who may die in the arena. The grotesque, primal body is in a constant state of flux. Bakhtin sees it as follows:

In the grotesque body, on the contrary, death brings nothing to an end, for it does not concern the ancestral body, which is renewed in the next generation. The events of the grotesque sphere are always developed on the boundary dividing one body from the other and, as it were, at their points of intersection. One body offers its death, the other its birth, but they are merged in a two-bodied image.⁷⁴

The grotesque body therefore is a body in the process of becoming. It is never perfected nor finished for it is constantly built and building other bodies. Corrida contains numerous constituents of the grotesque present in Rabelais: putting on one’s clothes inside out, humiliating the noble and debasing officials, the apotheosis of fools, blasphemy, parody, exposing sexual organs (if gored or hurt) and explicitly expressing sexuality and, what is of crucial importance—synthesizing the moment of birth and death. All these elements contribute to creating a world with an opaque mentality. The duality of this corrido-festival is based on contrasting the sacred with the profane. Facing this contradictory fullness of one’s existence is the core of grotesque and corrido. These components do not merely coexist, but they morph into each other; that which is high and lofty, becomes ridiculed, and what is low and vulgar is granted praise producing an effect of grotesque.

⁷³ Sundeen, *The Making of Toro*, 150.

⁷⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 322.

The Animal One Is

The emergence of an anthropological category of *homo faber* triggered by the creation of tools brought about a new perspective of work: the tools allowed for long term projects and initiated a slower, more balanced life where immediate gratification ceased to be crucial for one's survival. Losing this immediacy meant moving further away from one's animality. Animals are not able to plan prospective strategies and their mindset is now-oriented, whereas *homo faber* organizes and drafts tactics. Partaking in *corrida* is an opportunity to, although briefly, reclaim this part of the self. Although it is cruel and, most probably, ends with the death of the bull, a certain passion for the animal needs to be recognized. A Spanish writer, Antonio Gala, wrote: "Take away the bull from here and we'll see what is left"⁷⁵ highlighting the complex approach towards the animal. It is based on respect for the animal, admiration of its physical beauty and strength, and, principally, its uncompromised bravery. The animal evolved into a symbol that considerably impacted the cultural identity of the Spanish and the image of the Spanish employed in collective imagination. Travis LaFrance admits, in an ironic comment, that he shares the stereotypical opinion of *corrida* in the States: "We Americans who come from such a superficial culture might consider the *fiesta brava* gruesome or barbaric, but who are we to criticize"⁷⁶—showing how people are willing to witness a violent spectacle if it serves a purpose beyond the brutality itself. Even though *corrida* focuses on the body and sensuality, the two do not constitute a goal in itself. The aim is a deeper understanding of reality that is not limited to the mundane, but also touches upon transcendence. The bull stands for the beast that cannot be tamed, as well as for the male element of the world. A bullfight provides one with an opportunity to try and establish dominance

⁷⁵ Antonio Gala, *Samarkanda* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), 7. Trans. mine.

⁷⁶ Sundeen, *The Making of Toro*, 9.

over the animal. The means to do that were no less wild than the animal itself. In discussion about the relationship towards cattle an anthropologist, Elizabeth Lawrence, explains: “Violence toward animals was part of virtually every daily range task. At the least, the creatures were swatted, kicked, quirted, bitten, spurred, roped, and driven to the limit of their endurance”⁷⁷—the bull turns into a prop that the torero uses to prove his superiority and to mimic the animal’s potency in the carnivalesque framework. “We also see the downward movement in fights, beatings, and blows; they throw the adversary to the ground, trample him into the earth.”⁷⁸

Fighting the animal is perceived to be sexually charged. In *Blood Sport: A Social History of Spanish Bullfighting* Timothy Mitchell stresses: “[...] [the religious power] eventually dissolved into cult techniques that sought to harness the bull’s sexual potency for human purposes of fertility or procreation”⁷⁹—tauromachy is vividly sexualized but it could be seen as a positive quality as it reconnects one with the animalistic side of one’s psyche. It resonates in Bakhtin’s analysis on Rabelais, when he affirms the body and lust: “In grotesque realism, therefore, the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people”⁸⁰ that supports the corrida’s collective essence.

It is also suggested by Bataille for whom sex and death are the two taboos that in fact are borders preventing one from restoring instincts. According to Bataille one can only become fully human once work is exchanged for play, and an animal might be an appropriate agent in this process: “This man bows before a force which surpasses him infinitely, which is sovereign, so very sov-

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, *Rodeo: An Anthropologist Looks at the Wild and the Tame* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984), 62.

⁷⁸ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 370.

⁷⁹ Timothy Mitchell, *Blood Sport: A Social History of Spanish Bullfighting* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 40.

⁸⁰ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 19.

ereign to work's human attitude that the animal may be used to express it,"⁸¹ so, the bull could be understood as a synthetic device in an attempt to reclaim one's freedom. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari support this assertion for they concluded in their final work, *What is Philosophy?*⁸² that "Art is continually haunted by the animal"⁸³ and there is no greater art involving an animal than *corrida*.

An organic aspect of carnival and, by extension, *corrida*, is just as positive and constructive as the erotic one. Flesh is where life dwells—a joyful credo by Francis Bacon—"Flesh and meat are life!"⁸⁴ reminds us of the substance that constitutes one's existence. If one scrutinizes the idea that carnival is connected with meat the links with *corrida* are also visible. After the fight the carcass is collected and transported to a nearby butcher. It is indeed a farewell to flesh. For a Polish scholar of carnival, Wojciech Dzik, carnival and Lent are inextricably linked and they "should not be viewed separately and the relation between them does not have to be described in categories of a fight"⁸⁵ so, one can see the original battle changing into a unified organism. They both belong to a liturgical year which, in essence, is a symbolic repetition of a Jesus' life which leads to a conclusion that it is a repetition of the story of salvation. This corresponds to a reading of *corrida* as a process of redemption and resurrection. It creates a possibility to be reborn, perhaps in a different, but not an unfamiliar form: "Man becomes animal, but he does not become so without the animal simultaneously becoming spirit, the spirit of man,

⁸¹ Bataille, *Prehistoric Paintings*, 127.

⁸² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1994).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁸⁴ Francis Bacon, An Interview with Francis Giacobetti (1991). "Francis Bacon: The Last Interview," accessed December 10, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/francis-bacon-the-last-interview-8368727.html>.

⁸⁵ Dudzik, *Karnawał*, 62. Trans. mine.

the physical spirit of man presented Eumenides or fate;⁸⁶ such a temporal loss or suspension of selfhood asserts ambivalence.

The carnivalesque imagery of meat involves slaughter, dismemberment, disemboweling, and those are the very wounds that either bull or torero suffer in the ring. One of them dies a martyr's death surrounded by people who came expecting it. Even more so, the audience arrived in hope of witnessing a resurrection that clearly may only materialize upon death. One of the bodies needs to die for the sake of everybody's salvation: "Bloodshed, dismemberment, burning, death, beatings, blows, curses, and abuses"⁸⁷—all these elements are steeped in "merry time, time which *kills* and *gives birth*, which allows nothing old to be perpetuated and never ceases to generate"⁸⁸ linking the violence towards, or by, the animal with carnival.

⁸⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *The Body, the Meat and the Spirit: Becoming Animal. The Artist's Body* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 197.

⁸⁷ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 211.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Chapter Four

Penetrating the Magic Circle

A bullfighting arena's diameter cannot be more than 70 meters and less than 45 meters. It is divided into two sectors, *sombra* and *sol*—the shadow and the sun. In the shadow part that protects the audience from the sizzling sun usually the rich, the noble, and the powerful have their seats. The president of the corrida, as well as other dignitaries, have their own box from where they are able to observe the fight. At the same time, sitting up high makes him or her easier to spot for other members of the audience. It is by no means accidental and corresponds to what has been already mentioned: the topsy-turvy aesthetic of carnival; a president is after all a representative of state and as such, is often whistled at, ridiculed, and offended. At the same time, the borders of the magic circle serve a social function—they protect the audience and the performers as they provide a comprehensible context for realizing audience's desires and drives and, what is most important, they sanctify all actions that occur within it. To have it happened outside the arena would deprive it of its special, spiritual atmosphere and would be considered slaughter. Arena is not merely a more elaborate stadium. It is an autonomous zone that triggers certain behaviors. John Hay in his prominent work reveals the impression a bullring has made on him as he notes:

One does not soon forget the first sight of the full coliseum. In the centre is the sanded arena, surrounded by a high barrier. Around this rises the graded succession of stone benches for the people; then numbered seats for the connoisseurs; and above a row of boxes extending around the circle. The building holds, when full, some fourteen thousand persons; and there is rarely any vacant space. For myself I can say that what I vainly strove to imagine in the coliseum at Rome, and in the more solemn solitude of the amphitheatres of Capua and Pompeii, came up before me with the vividness of life on entering the bullring.¹

Hay sees all the possibilities and magnitude that surrounds the arena. The circular shape of the ring demarcates the space in which *corrida* is performed, lends it grandeur and creates an enchanted space that delimits the boundaries of the confrontation. Such a function is parallel to that of a *magic circle*. The term “magic circle” was first coined by Johan Huizinga in his *Homo Ludens*. He connects the notion of play with a particular limited space within which an activity occurs. Of course, this spatiotemporal frame is not exclusive to playful activities. Other, quite different in tone, social gatherings also revolve around a circle. Various temples and rites call for an enclosed space that is marked by particular behavior valid only for the time of the ceremony. For Huizinga it is:

The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc. are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden sports, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart.²

It is seen then how accurately it refers to a “world within a world” that is offered by carnival and *corrida*. Fittingly as it

¹ John Hay, *Castilian Days* (Madrid: BiblioBazaar, 2006), 23.

² Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 10.

seems to be employed when conducting an analysis on corrida, the term has been widely discussed and questioned by numerous of scholars, especially in recent and more and more developing game studies. Building upon Huizinga's theoretical standing, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman propose to view a magic circle as a separated zone where play takes place. They define it as "the idea of a special place in time and space created by a game,"³ and, similarly to Huizinga's thinking, they too see it as governed by distinct rules that require tangible manifestation. Such a separation may be, as Huizinga claims it, sharp—such as an announced beginning and an end of a round, or signified by an actual token, for instance, as another game scholar Hector Rodriguez, states: "a chessboard, ring, arena, field, stadium, stage, altar"⁴ and clearly, corrida shares affinities with all of the above.

Employing an artificial setting for a performance to unfold calls for creating artificial regulations and, most importantly, a general acceptance of said settings and principles. Salen and Zimmerman's, as well as Huizinga's magic circle, is accessed voluntarily and with full comprehension of its arbitrariness. Things and actions acquire meaning within a magic circle that is given to them by a collective; the meaning however must differ from their everyday significance: a bull ceases to be a herd animal and becomes a formidable opponent, a man with a pigtail wearing a suit covered in sequins does not raise questions—he becomes an idol admired by many. The bonds with the outside world need to be ignored for the sake of the game and, as a result, a new, isolated realm emerges to the surface. An American sociologist Erving Goffman confirms this statement for he writes: "Games, then, are world-building activities"⁵ and carnival indeed does

³ Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2003), 95.

⁴ Hector Rodriguez, "The Playful and the Serious: An Approximation to Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*," *Game Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2006), accessed January 2017, <http://gamestudies.org/0601/articles/rodriges>.

⁵ Erving Goffman, *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction* (London: Martino Fine Books, 1961).

create a novel, though temporary, reality. Such an alternative reality, constructed by and for a community, is described by yet another scholar Jacob L. Moreno as *surplus reality*⁶—following Karl Marx’s theory of surplus value. In Moreno’s perspective surplus reality is a social area that is shared and used as a field in which an individual is allowed, or even encouraged to tackle their fears and problems. Since it is more than reality, one can endure and experience nearly all their desires and construct a new, richer, if not fulfilled, existence.

Surely, when entering this realm of “more” or breaking into a magic circle, a positive change and an affirmative action is to occur. Positive as it may seem, the concept has been criticized as too simplistic when it comes to its relation with the real world and thus, a yet another metaphor for the complementary nature of the bond between play and the world outside has been offered by Jesper Juul for who it is a puzzle piece⁷ that could be seen as a prolongation of the everyday reality that, together with a game/play aspect added to it, constitutes a holistic unit. Wojciechowska in her work seems to have lent credibility to Juul’s notion as she writes: “The town of Arcangel has both a soul and a heart. Its soul is the bull ring, and its heart is the marketplace”⁸ showing how the mundane and the play element of one’s life should be treated as corresponding and having a point of tangency. Ostensibly, arena is purely a concrete building dedicated to matadors to exhibit courage and *machismo*. In the beginning of his work Hay firmly sees it as a one-dimensional construction and reports:

The Plaza de Toros stands just outside the monumental gate of the Alcalá. It is a low, squat, prison-like circus of stone, stuccoed and whitewashed, with no pretence of ornament or architectural

⁶ Jacob L. Moreno, “Therapeutic Vehicles and the Concept of Surplus Reality,” *Group Psychotherapy*, vol. 18 (1965): 211–216.

⁷ Jesper Juul, “The Magic Circle and the Puzzle Piece,” in *Conference Proceedings of the Philosophy of Computer Games*, ed. Stephan Günzel, Michael Liebe, and Dieter Mersch (Potsdam: Potsdam University Press, 2008), 56–67.

⁸ Maia Wojciechowska, *Shadow of a Bull* (New York: Aladdin, 2007), 56.

effect. There is no nonsense whatever about it. It is built for the killing of bulls and for no other purpose.⁹

Nonetheless, he cannot remain immune to what he sees and later he observes:

The way to the bull-ring is one of indescribable animation. The cabmen drive furiously this day their broken-kneed nags, who will soon be found on the horns of the bulls, for this is the natural death of the Madrid cab-horse; the omnibus teams dash gayly along with their shrill chime of bells; there are the rude jests of clowns and the high voices of excited girls; the water-venders droning their tempting cry, "Cool as the snow!" the sellers of fans and the merchants of gingerbread picking up their harvests in the hot and hungry crowd.¹⁰

The city and its habitants recognize the importance and meaning of the bullring. It is there, where inhibitions cease to exist and for this reason it constitutes this meaningful point of contact between the sacred and the profane. Eventually Hay too acknowledges this elusive quality of the arena that facilitates various transformations. Before the start of the corrida, he observes: "Many a red hand grasps the magic ticket which is to open the *realm of enchantment*"¹¹ professing the wonderful layer of corrida that may be entered through the magic circle of the ring. This idea of the circle being a gate to the enchanted has been pushed even further by Edward Castronova who suggested that a term *membrane*¹² reflects in a better way the thin border between the two worlds. For the scholar, a membrane does not guarantee an imporous blockade and because of that, his proposition does not

⁹ Hay, *Castillan Days*, 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.* Emphasis mine.

¹² Edward Castronova, *Synthetic Worlds. The Business and Culture of Online Games* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005). Castronova's main interest is online games, however, in my view, his proposition seems justified enough to be contrasted with Huizinga's magic circle.

seem unjustified when taking in consideration the need for a permeable barrier that allows people who are outside *corrida*/carnival to enter it and immerse into its content. The same standing is represented by Thomas Malaby, who doubts whether a sharp, clean-cut distinction between play and ordinary life is possible to render. He writes: “Any game can have important consequences not only materially but also socially and culturally,”¹³ and his thesis is undoubtedly relevant, especially in case of the gambling context, but *corrida* as well—it was enough for Juan Silvera to fail to meet audience’s expectations of a fight only once and, as a result, he became almost an outcast no one wants to see in the ring again. His social status was diminished and reputation damaged, and he no longer was welcome to perform in the best arenas. While he is looking for a job with his assistants, he realizes that each arena has its own prestige. Trying to be hired to fight, he visits an *empresario*, Eladio Cruz he quickly, and harshly brings him down to reality:

He was playing a game with Juan and Paco—the game of the *empresario* with the upper hand. All those tables in Virginia’s were privileged to see bullfighters speaking to the local maestro of the bullring. They were watching a small drama.
 “Always the same thing *Patron*,” Juan said. “Looking for work. Looking for a decent card.”
 “In my poor plaza?” Eladio said, holding the cigar in this left and, winking at those around him.
 “Any plaza will do,” Juan said with a face of stone.
 Eladio stopped smiling. “Any plaza? I wonder if you mean that?”
 Juan thought he did.¹⁴

The passage demonstrates the way arena is indeed a place that, even though embraces an extraordinary carnivalesque realm, may

¹³ Thomas M. Malaby, “Beyond Play: A New Approach to Games,” *Games and Culture*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2007): 107.

¹⁴ Paul Moran, Jr., *A Cape in the Wind* (Charleston, SC: Booksurge Publishing, 2009), 13.

interfere with one's existence outside of it and after the corrida is complete. Regardless of the degree of correspondence with the real world, the *magic* arena offers its own outcome. Kennedy distinguishes its peculiar harvest: "What happens in the ring is more complicated, repellent, fascinating, *grotesque*, sacramental, ugly, ritualistic, haphazard, sacred and blasphemous than any fight."¹⁵ What is more, it is used as a place for exercising one's will and discipline, exhibiting strength and evoking awe—one of the brothers in *Two Matadors* explains: "Facing danger in the ring gave me more worldly knowledge than he could ever hope to learn..."¹⁶ and so, one can see that arena is not fully isolated from the external world and, at times, the outside may be willfully and purposely transferred into the ring. At last Juan Silvera is given an opportunity to redeem himself, even though in a lesser of arenas, and must show his gratitude to a town's mayor who allowed him to perform and for whom being acknowledged by a matador before a fight is a distinction: "When asked to speak, Juan expressed he would do his best to honor it with his presence in the ring tomorrow"¹⁷—it is not difficult to see that the measure of separation between the magic and the mundane is therefore difficult to assess, however it does not bring entirely detrimental consequences. Such an ease in entering and leaving by the audience does correspond to Huizinga's magic circle and carnival's social aspect.

Whether it is a circle, a puzzle, a membrane, or literally an arena, it creates enchanted space which makes one withdrawn from the thus far familiar milieu. This conceptual, temporal border that more than aptly corresponds to carnival's foundation—a limited in time suspension of everyday behavior. When one is inside, he/she is protected from the regulations of "ordinary" life and trusts that the magic circle is a safe environment for one's realizations of desires, dreams, and conquering one's fears.

¹⁵ Alison Louise Kennedy, *On Bullfighting* (London: Yellow Jersey Press), 8.

¹⁶ Marcus McGee, *Two Matadors* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2012), 11.

¹⁷ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 14

Even though the circle is psychological—it is more of a figment of collective imagination, it relies on physical representation in order to be more universal and comprehensible and in this sense, more egalitarian. In case of *corrida*, such a frame is constituted by the arena. It reminds people that they are under special conditions and allows them to navigate through the *corrida*/carnival and to recognize that others also participate and agree on the carnivalesque *modus operandi*. There needs to be consensus as to acknowledging the space that separates the real from the carnivalesque.

As stated before, carnival needs to be governed a unique time-zone. For this purpose, arena in which the bullfighting takes place proves to be the most appropriate of spheres with magic circle potential as it is, *par excellence*, a circle. Its shape is just as significant as the perspective it entails. As a closed entity it has neither a beginning nor an end and in such a way it is parallel to carnival's suspension of linearity as well as a dissolution of time. Furthermore, one may even compare an arena to a clock face and see how the two regulate or manipulate one's perception of time. Such a space offers a subversion of Western direction of thinking aimed at linearity and is a breakage of order. *Corrida* in itself is also an attack on structure and perhaps that is why it needs at least a form that is organized. Foucault notices this link and notes: "Essentially, the product of fissures, abrupt descents, and broken contours, this misshapen and crag-like language describes a circle."¹⁸ This particular shape opens a gate to a new, affirmative world that removes any doubts from the reality.

Following Bakhtin's standings on hierarchy, a circle is a perfect metonymy for carnival. At the very beginning of *Two Matadors* the narrator pays a visit to a bullring and after being awestruck, when he needs to continue his journey, he thinks to himself: "I was about to leave that circular wonder"¹⁹—the bull-

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 44

¹⁹ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 1.

ring imposes a unique perspective on reality that allows the fantastic to be experienced. It is upon the arena where a matador proves to be superhuman as one of the picadors says to a matador: "You took this *toro* and began to work magic."²⁰

The circular movement echoes through all strata of *corrida*. It is the ever-renewing circle of life, a turn of a human body, and the fullness of the animal and the man. It could be said then that the magic circle, the portal to another universe can be entered in three different places—the arena itself, the seats taken by the members of audience, and the matador's body. These three loci isolate the game from the daily living and are gates behind which a realm of the carnivalesque unfolds. The body of the matador upon entering is no longer reduced to its physical form. It becomes elevated and a field upon which the cosmos may be discontinued and resumed and, in so doing, a human existence becomes asserted. Bataille stresses this significance and also notices this slightly impersonal nature of such transition: "The main thing is the moment of violent contact, when life slips from one person to another in a feeling of magical subversion"²¹—moving beyond an individual and, at the same time, affirming one's significance. A moderately different view is offered by John Cruickshank for whom:

The sanded arena is the terrain of truth precisely because the matador, facing the bull, is seen as he really is. He cannot deceive himself, nor can he easily deceive the spectators. Genuine danger, and the skill necessary to avert it, combine to remove his human disguises and enforce honesty.²²

He seems to detect the importance of matador's body and the function it serves for the entire phenomenon yet, refuses to de-

²⁰ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 7.

²¹ Georges Bataille, Fred Botting, and Scott Wilson, *The Bataille Reader* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1997), 61.

²² John Cruickshank, "Montherlant: Disorder and Unity," *London Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1961): 58.

prive him of his identity and stresses his unique self. The writer does however observe that arena is an extraordinary locus that has a meaning reaching further than its sanded veneer could offer at a first glance and, perhaps for this reason, one could risk to propose that the permission to extend the meaning of a matador's body beyond its very self is given and his body can be treated as an isolated magic circle. When Juan enters the ring, he thinks to himself: "The plaza was as good and as bad as he had *imagined*"²³ exposing the danger of Cruickshank's statement that treats the sanded arena as an oracle of definite truth.

The importance of trusting the imagination and allowing it to dominate is distinctly stressed by Huizinga himself. For him, it aids the very existence of a game and if a participant cheats or refuses to follow previously agreed upon rules they "rob" the play: "He robs play of its illusion—a pregnant word which means literally 'in-play' (from *inlusio*, *illudere* or *includere*). Therefore, he must be cast out, for he threatens the existence of the play-community."²⁴ Thus, using one's imagination is obligatory in order to enter and benefit from the magic circle. The latter by all means refers also to a mental space in addition to a tangible geographic site.

Another scholar who supports such an imagined location is Victor Turner with his idea of liminal spaces²⁵ that designate changes in one's approach and the frontier between the sacred and the profane. He likens it with events such as carnival as even though one remains within familiar environment, a new attitude is encouraged and displayed. The way Turner sees it, such space is designed to accommodate a community. This aspect of his theory is in concurrence with inclusive and egalitarian nature of carnival in which all echelons are leveled. Turner writes: "The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude

²³ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 33. Emphasis mine.

²⁴ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 11. Emphasis mine.

²⁵ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co, 1969).

or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space”²⁶—a magic circle then introduces and celebrates duality that is one of carnival’s and *corrida*’s objectives. The inclusive character of the event promotes a temporary suspension of social hierarchy and accordingly, those who entered the magic circle are, in Turner’s outlook, deprived of any markers that would give away their status. In his mind, people who are within the liminal space: “have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, or a position in a kinship system—in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands”²⁷ so that the collective response to *corrida*’s ultimate result is not contaminated by an artificial social structure.

There is an emerging conundrum regarding the magic circle: the fact that, at times, it could be problematic to distinguish between the animal and the man who are in a combat. The figures may seem to try and embrace one another rather than attempt to prove one’s dominance marked by the death of the competitor. Such a disintegration conforms to the grotesque element of *corrida*. The grotesque idea of a body connects it with the cosmos and the sacred but also, as one reads in Bakhtin’s work, “with the social, utopian, and historic theme, and above all with the theme of the change of epochs and the renewal of culture”²⁸ allowing one to see again how crucial the concept of the renewal and continuity promised by a circle is.

The imagery that accompanies a body entering the arena is connected with either sexuality (penetration by a bull’s horn, Simone in *Story of the Eye* entering a bull’s testicle into her vagina) or womb, death, and rebirth. The same set of symbols is recalled by Turner, who notes: “Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness,

²⁶ Turner, “Liminality and Communitas,” in *The Ritual Process*, 95.

²⁷ Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), 96.

²⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 325.

to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon²⁹ and Bakhtin, who invokes even more of circular images that correspond to the low and filthy and yet, are a reminiscence of a sacrifice: “Earth is an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and, at the same time, an element of birth, of renascence (the maternal breasts)”³⁰ and such a layer of connotation finds its counterpart in Bakhtin’s analysis of features that go with grotesque:

Its grossly carnivalesque traits are obvious. The first death (according to the Bible, Abel was the first man to die) renewed the earth’s fertility. Here we have the combination of killing and birth with which we are familiar. Death, the dead body, blood as a seed buried in the earth, rising for another life—this is one of the oldest and most widespread themes. A variant is death inseminating mother earth and making her bear fruit once more. This variant often produces a flowering of erotic images (of course, not in the narrow, specific sense of the word).³¹

Corrida entails associations with all the phenomena Bakhtin discusses—it celebrates the destruction—death of the old, and the creation of a new framework. The death, that is usually more violent and gore in the arena than outside it, and the resurrection, that takes place on the symbolic level, are merged into one as their causes and ways of manifestations coincide: the blood that comes out a wound, a sword penetrating bull’s neck or bull’s horn goring the man. Bacon’s depiction of the two sides fighting in the ring does capture in an accurate manner the way matador and the bull intertwine. Bakhtin, in his work, writes what could serve as both, a description of the painting and a summary of the relationship between the animal and the bull:

These images create with great artistry extremely dense atmosphere of the body as a whole in which all the dividing lines be-

²⁹ Turner, “Liminality and Communitas,” 95.

³⁰ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 21.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 327.

tween man and beast, between the consuming and consumed bowels are intentionally erased [...]. We thus obtain a truly grotesque image of one single, superindividual bodily life, of the great bowels that devour and are devoured, generate and are generated. But this, of course, is not an “animal” or “biological” bodily life.³²

Per contra to Bakhtin’s viewpoint, I do think that to perceive the grotesque body as “animal” or “biological” is justified. Relying on Bataille’s understanding of the notion of heterology one may recognize such a statement proves credible. Heterology in Greek means ‘a difference’ and concerns a study of difference and lack of correspondence between representatives of a species. In Bataille’s approach it is applicable to cultural studies and, within this spectrum, it refers to the excessive and the incongruous—for him it is “the science of what is completely other”³³ and what needs to be removed or extracted from what is familiar and same so that it remains familiar and same. On a bodily stratum it refers to excretions of various kinds and opening of a body and on a more symbolic level—to being sacrificed.³⁴ The otherwise hidden and shameful acquires attention and is seen as paramount in the science of dirt that upholds the pristine and sacred. Such a scatological field of interest links corrida to a concept of abjection that stresses degradation. It should not be, however, regarded as destructive per se, as Bakhtin finds and extracts a beneficial undertone from it:

Negation and destruction (death of the old) are included as an essential phase, inseparable from affirmation, from the birth of something new and better. The very material bodily lower stratum of the grotesque image (food, wine, the genital force, the organs of the body) bears a deeply positive character.³⁵

³² Ibid., 127.

³³ Georges Bataille and Allan Stoekl, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 1159.

³⁴ Bataille and Stoekl, *Visions of Excess*.

³⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 63.

In other words, to degrade and to kill is to, simultaneously, produce something more and better than solely a loss. As a philosopher Kurt Riezler puts it: “The game is a little cosmos of its own”³⁶ and therefore, the concept of a magic circle is more than suitable when analyzing *corrida*—the way I see it, the instinct, the profane and the obscure become isolated and glorified, but the process does not stop once the abjection is celebrated. The sacred must become debased again and subsequently sanctified. Bakhtin summarizes this process the following way: “The entire spiritual topography is turned upside down”³⁷ and so, the *circle* needs to remain unfinished.

The imagery Bakhtin studies, underlines the negation of time and promotes lower strata of life: “the inside out, and the topsy-turvy”³⁸ this reversal is the center of bullfighting as well. The portrayal of what happens in the ring often relates to the opaque: when one matador tries to explain to a layman the intricacies of the performances he says: “He [the bull] will catch your pants with a horn. He will drag you around the arena upside down until you fall out of your pants and land on your head. You will be wearing underwear in the arena.”³⁹

The passage proves that *corrida*, the same way carnival does, employs distorted proportions, disorder, and celebrates this destruction by allowing the new to triumph over the old. If a matador’s body can be treated as a magic circle it gives the body a permission to be an element of cosmos and, to paraphrase Bakhtin’s writing, it could be said that the old body that has been destroyed, is offered to the audience “together with the new world [body] and is represented with it as the dying part of the dual body.”⁴⁰ Duality and ambiguity are not absent from the ordinary life, even more so, they are inherent and indispensable in

³⁶ Kurt Riezler, “Play and Seriousness,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 38, no. 19 (1941): 505.

³⁷ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 367.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 411.

³⁹ Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 20.

⁴⁰ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 411.

every community, they are only celebrated and appreciated upon entering a magic circle. The collective recognition of the dual nature of things denotes the second space that could be treated as a magic circle within the bullfighting, namely, the audience.

A circle, as it has neither a distinctive beginning nor end, equals harmony. Equality that it entails reflects the idea that Salen and Zimmerman proposed in their work: “Considered as rules, a game is closed. Considered as PLAY, a game is both open and closed. Considered as CULTURE, a game is open”⁴¹ and, having mentioned cultural consequences of events taking place in the magic circle, it seems just to say *corrida* is a phenomenon that is essentially open. It unites people of various backgrounds for a brief moment of history. The audience, as a collective, is a human magic circle, not only creating a union as they take seats forming a circle around the fight, but also in a sense of allowing themselves and one another to experience the extraordinary. Their shared and willful agreement to suspend the social codes grants them a permission to enter the surplus reality in which they face the imponderables. Their reactions are also allied—“At this moment [when the audience witnessed a matador’s victory] the huge plaza rose above and around them like a giant bowl of dreams.”⁴² This shows that being together in exceptional circumstances and sharing a unique sensation retains the magic that carnival offers. Being withdrawn from their professions and social roles emphasizes the universality of *corrida* and also its liberating powers. The magic circle is then a place for building a temporary shelter from the rigid regulations and moral norms. It needs to be built and experienced in a social setting for it requires an encounter; in other words:

Compared to the reality of everyday life, other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience. The paramount reality envelopes them on all sides, as it

⁴¹ Salen and Zimmerman, *Rules of Play*, 96. Emphasis in the original.

⁴² Moran, *A Cape in the Wind*, 163.

were, and consciousness always returns to the paramount reality as from excursion.⁴³

Although a magic circle provides an alternative reality for those within it (as they are permitted to test a new mode of approaching the world, the one that is rich in ambivalence), it must not substitute the thus far existing functioning of a community. Temporality is crucial for the participants, for without it, it ceases to be *magic* and becomes reduced to being a sports arena. It could be concluded then the arena is a magic circle understood as a form of a social contract that requires an external manifestation in both: an edifice, and in the act of experiencing *corrida*. After having entered the bullring a playful mindset ought to be applied. This play-oriented perspective is that of ambiguity and an upside-down hierarchy. However, it can solely be bestowed upon the participants after they agree to respect the socially accepted temporal borders of the event. In Kennedy's interpretation, the bullring could be "an arena for people to find their fate. An arena of hope."⁴⁴ What then, in her view, is given in return for entering the magic circle is a domain in which people realize their desires and sublimate their fears.

Although several other notions attempting to define and reflect the point of tangency between the "real" world and the festive one have emerged, I do believe that Huizinga's concept of a magic circle remains the most fitting one when examining *corrida* as one reads in his work: "It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means"⁴⁵ and this description certainly matches *corrida*'s framework. *Corrida* does take place on a spatiotemporal site and is universally recognized as a place for ludic activities.

⁴³ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966), 25.

⁴⁴ Robert Leon Casey, *After the Bullfight, and Other Stories* (Scotts Valey, SC: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2009), 43.

⁴⁵ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 22.

It is a place the imagination and dreams are built in and also a sphere of escapism. The most important function of it is nonetheless the transformative element—every time a person leaves the magic circle, they are bestowed a new, impossible to achieve in ordinary life, experience.

Chapter Five

Corrida as a Ritual

There are the two curses of Spain, the bulls and the priests.¹

Hemingway's diagnosis of Spain's condition is directly linked with a concept of a ritual. As previously discussed, bullfighting is an immensely structured phenomenon and to liken it to a painstakingly methodical church mass is not entirely unjustified. It is even more so, as one realizes that throughout history, there was a time where the two realized similar objectives, although using different means and rhetoric.

In 1567, Pope Pius V decided to refuse Christian funeral ceremonies for people who were killed by bulls in the arena. Almost a decade later Pope Gregorio XVIII lifted this ban, but, in 1586, Pope Sixtus V reinstated the order of Pius V and even more so, considered excommunication to people who would kill a bull. On the official level, the ultimate separation between Church and taumachy took place in 1596 when the Pope Clemente VIII lifted the excommunication but still, unofficially, the Church supported corrido through Catholic holidays and festivities that still accommodated bullfighting.

¹ Ernest Hemingway. Originally, this passage comes from the short story "The Capital of the World" from 1936 but has been subsequently cut out by censors.

Both religion and bullfight work on a symbolic level within a collective that is imperative for the very existence of them both. Kennedy writes on these historical parallels the following way:

As the Inquisition, with its demand for symbols of Christian pain and sacrifice, waned in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the corrido flourished, even stronger, with its symbols borrowed from Pagan pain and sacrifice. To the corrido, the spilling of blood was, and largely remains, essential. For the Holy Inquisition, heretics were burned in the auto-da-fé because the church was—in theory, at least—forbidden to spill a drop of human blood. In auto-da-fé, faith in God, the King and the church's power were publicly proved in acts of ultimate violence and their observation.²

Kennedy distinctly pinpoints the common denominator for corrido and ritual; for her, it is the pain, or the suffering shared by the both phenomena. Kennedy is not alone in her linking pain, ritual, and carnival's grotesque; Bakhtin expressed his apprehensiveness the following way:

Behind the abuses and curses are the Church's intolerance, intimidation, and *autos-da-fé*. The ecclesiastical policy is translated into the language of ironical hawking. But the prologue is wider and deeper than the usual grotesque parody.³

The historical torment and abuse of power ascribed to the institution of the Church is committed in the name of something abstract and transcendental. Although the link between the divine and Inquisition is rather comprehensible, the connection between corrido and the spiritual might trigger suspicion. Still, the way I see it, the occurrences taking place in the arena unequivocally touch faith and its practices. It is both, one's private and innermost conviction, as well as a broader understanding

² Alison Louise Kennedy, *On Bullfighting* (London: Yellow Jersey Press), 9.

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 167.

of the concept, a superstition shared by a collective that may be traced back to pre-Christian questions regarding life, its end, and its conquest. Paganism and Catholicism overlap and tauromachy constitutes an enthralling shared area between them: that of (predominantly Catholic) ritual framework and carnivalesque celebration of life. Protagonists in the examined works seem to be aware of corrido's background and its historical saturation. The old matador explains:

And at this sacred vernal gathering, commemorated with the trumpet blasts I went there before the crowd. But sacrificing bulls to save mankind is nothing new, my son. Religious holy men and cultures have been doing this throughout all time. The bullfight borrows from the ancient, sacred ceremonies of the past.⁴

He briefly describes the two components of corrido that are of paramount meaning—the “sacred vernal gathering”—being the carnivalesque celebration of life that should bring about a resurrection—and “sacrificing bulls to save mankind,” and all this accompanied by the sound of trumpets making the festive aura even stronger. Carnival more than any other celebration is inscribed into the ever-present dialectic of the sacred and profane. Perhaps, while discussing the sacred element of rituals I should attempt to provide a definition, or at least a description of the term “sacred.” In my view, the sacred, whose realm of application is rather vast, cannot be simplistically characterized as the opposite of the profane. This observation has been promptly contained in Rudolf Otto's concept of the numinous in his work *The Idea of the Holy*.⁵ For Otto, the holy or, the sacred, is an experience of that which is non-rational in a religion; he calls it the *numinous* and it is a fearful and fascinating mystery—*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. The first component, *mysterium*, stands for

⁴ Marcus McGee, *Two Matadors* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2012), 12.

⁵ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950).

the “wholly other”: things and practices that radically differ from what is experienced in ordinary day-to-day existence. In Otto’s theory, *mysterium* signifies “blank wonder, an astonishment that strikes us dumb, amazement absolute”⁶ that leaves its participants in awe. The second aspect, *tremendum*, represents awfulness, unapproachability, the wrath of God and its might. This feeling emphasizes the nothingness of an individual in contrast to the power of the divine. *Tremendum* is able to provoke fear as it overwhelms with its impact, energy, and vitality. The third factor of the sacred, *fascinans*, is presented as merciful, charming, and potent despite the remaining element of terror and fear. Because Otto’s idea of the sacred is not free from negative emotions, it can be said that the sacred is not an absolute, harmonious perfection but is rather uncanny. Otto’s holy is “a profound emotional experience”⁷ that marks religion. Moreover, the fearful and fascinating mystery, that Otto ascribe to the sacred, are essential for corrido and carnival.

Every celebration, whether it is Saturnalia, medieval tournaments or corrido, idolizes and glorifies elements pivotal for a given community, for example, harvest, athleticism, and modes of masculinity. Such factors are not however the *raison d’être* of collective festivity. The justification reaches beyond what is tangible and it is inherently subversive. To come back to Bakhtin’s diagnosis of carnival: it “was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal”⁸ and these are precisely the objectives of corrido but, at the same, the goals of a ritual. He further speaks of a “feast ritual” that also corresponds to bullfighting for “Indeed, the ritual of the feast tended to project the play of time itself, which kills and gives birth at the same time, recasting the old into the new, allowing nothing to perpetuate itself”⁹ and corrido is an experience of the circle of life—death and re-birth. It is not only expressed on the symbolic level—a man killing an ani-

⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁸ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.

⁹ Ibid., 82.

mal and staying alive—but also, as it has been mentioned, in the circularity reverberating within tauromachy. The arena reflects the concept of the magic circle that is as well present and significant for carnival; as Bakhtin puts it: “This logic of the ‘wrong side out’ and of ‘bottoms up’ is also expressed in gestures and other movements: to walk backward, to ride a horse facing its tail, to stand on one’s head, to show one’s backside.”¹⁰ Thus, it is not groundless to claim that carnival and ritual interfuse, and this merger happens most visibly during a bullfight. It offers people not only a prolongation of life as the man kills the bull, but a second life, parallel to their mundane existence. The latter, with its formal regulations and restrictions, is suspended for a limited time whereas the carnival-corrida life consecrates and focuses on “now.”

Both corridas and ritual subvert familiar orders and transgress seemingly stable thresholds of identity and social hierarchy. The presence of a bull in the arena should be read therefore as a reminiscence of a primitive man within rituals. Paradoxically, despite the fact that a ritual is an organized affair, it is the victory of the intuitive and natural rather than imposed and external, and one cannot perform a real ritual, real in the sense that people experience it and learn from it: without at least a glimmer of carnivalesque. Without this element of carnival, *homo ludens* could not experience the transition of their continuity in a holistic manner. Bakhtin bonds the risible with the genuine participation in a celebration:

Unlike the earlier and purer feast, the official one asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions. It was the triumph of a truth already established, the prevailing truth asserted as eternal and indisputable. This is why the tone of the official feast was monolithically serious and why the element of laughter was alien to it. The true nature of human festivity was betrayed and distorted.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., 411.

¹¹ Ibid., 9.

Such a status quo does not favor human nature and, in Bakhtin's view, may be destructive to it. In his work he concluded that the Church's standing has led to a broadening of previous frameworks accompanying various religious occasions. For him

this intolerant seriousness of the official Church ideology made it necessary to legalize the gaiety, laughter, and jests which had been eliminated from the canonized ritual and etiquette. Thus, forms of pure laughter were created parallel to the official forms.¹²

Seriousness therefore is a betrayal of human primary instincts—each rite requires an undertone of levity and corrido offers precisely that—it both carnivalizes one's existences and ritualizes it, so that one's life may continue. This twofold spectacle reflects therefore “a contradictory world of becoming”¹³ that can be inhabited only by experiencing corrido. A continuation, a *sui generis* prolongation of a life offered in the world of becoming may take place at a price of negating traditional principles. The life-as-play frame of mind is summarized by Bakhtin as a form of liberation:

Life was presented as a miniature play (translated into the language of traditional symbols), a play without footlights. At the same time games drew the players out of the bounds of everyday life, liberated them from usual laws and regulations, and replaced established conventions by other, lighter conventionalities.¹⁴

Such a festive suspension of ordinance includes a degradation of morality and a distortion of one's perception of a body. A comprehensive debasement is a fundamental element of carnival that, paradoxically, aims at experiencing a feeling of sublime that is the foundation of a ritual. Elation, a sense of bliss, suspension of norms, acting out roles, and a distinctive attitude towards the body all present in corrido, also oscillate around a concept of a ritual.

¹² *Ibid.*, 84.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

I have already explored the assumption that corrido is, in fact, a form of play. Here, however I want to examine the correlation between religion, and ritual as a form of play. To my way of thinking play and religious rituals (or even religion per se) are not a far cry from each other. Play is a more modern repetition, or an enactment of past rituals and rites of passage. They both entail a level of make-believe and a mental framework that requires a suspension of disbelief. Furthermore, Johan Huizinga summarizes the concept of play in a way that also serves as a definition of religion, for the scholar writes:

Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious,” but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.¹⁵

It would be justified to employ Huizinga’s perspective when examining religion. To substantiate the link between religion and play I return to Roger Caillois’s six core characteristics of play:

1. Play is not obligatory—it is free.
2. It is separate from everyday life with its own space and time-frame.
3. It is uncertain—none of the participants are able to predict or determine the outcome or the score.
4. It is unproductive—in terms of material gain.
5. It is regulated by its own rules that do not have to be in line with the “ordinary” law.
6. It is founded upon a make-believe and general agreement upon an existence of an imagined realm that participants enter.

¹⁵ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 9.

Having examined these six attributes, it is tempting to confront them with religious dogmas. In my view, the two seemingly opposing phenomena bear striking similarity. Clearly, nowadays there is no obligation to join any religion and, as is the case with play, one needs to want to become a member of a church, and, at the same time, to leave it. Religion is also separate from the daily routine: various religious holidays and services mark a different timeframe (or even a calendar) from what is used to administer a non-festive reality. Moreover, it remains uncertain whether any deities exist or it cannot be verified, and a prospective after-life may turn out to be an illusion. Correspondingly, religion as a concept should not be profit-oriented and thus, it is unproductive the same way play is—neither produce any goods nor can be capitalized upon. Still, both are organized by means of arbitrary rules that need to be followed in order for the concept to function. The last quality of play that Caillois names—the make-believe—is noticeably the one that is the very kernel of religion.

Worshippers need not only to acknowledge the impossibility of acquiring tangible evidence but recognize that the very lack of it constitutes their faith. Both play and religion are non-rational. Caillois does however manage to detect a difference between the two. To his opinion, the difference lies in the question of control. Caillois claims individual power is limited if not altogether eliminated, when faced with religion whereas, in the field of play, the power is granted to people:

Confronted by the sacred, he [a man] is defenseless and completely at its mercy. In play, the opposite is the case. All is human, invented by man the creator. For this reason, play rests, relaxes, distracts, and causes the dangers, cares, and travails of life to be forgotten. The sacred, on the contrary, is the domain of internal tension from which it is precisely profane existence that relaxes, rests and distracts. The situation is reversed.¹⁶

¹⁶ Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred*, trans. Meyer Barash (Chicago: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1959), 158.

Still, play requires its players to submit to it and in this way, it also wields power. By removing control and positioning it outside oneself comes the feeling of satisfaction, the *jouissance*. Caillois recaps it the following way: "Through the sacred, the source of omnipotence, the worshiper is fulfilled,"¹⁷ therefore, the powerlessness that is crucial for both phenomena is the source of one's elation and satisfaction.

As stated prior, bullfighting is a highly ritualized practice and in this manner it resembles a Catholic service: it is a well-organized and structured ritual that revolves around a transformation based on a sacrifice. These various points of tangency are noticed and contemplated in the presented depictions of corrido. Kennedy detects the parallels between bullfighting and a religious service and states: "This [a bullfight] makes for a potentially anarchic, atheistic ritual"¹⁸ as both ceremonies are staged and ask for focus on details. The latter are of significance for they are a tool used in the process of the symbolic transformation of the participants into their festive selves. Another scholar, Michel Leiris, draws his readers' attention to the literal fabric of corrido: "Then there is the use of special brilliantly decorated costumes, called 'suits of light' [*traje de luces*] which figure as sacerdotal ornaments and transform the protagonists into a kind of clergy. Even the *coleta*, a small (now artificial) braid the toreros wear as a sign of their profession, suggests the tonsure of priests."¹⁹ This observation deepens the affinities between a ceremony and a celebration and makes a matador an anointed minister helping the gathered to achieve, if only temporarily, a feeling of immortality, a continuity of being. Each ludic and festive gathering is a temporal rupture from the familiar reality.

This rupture, paradoxically, establishes continuity that is required for, as Bataille writes,

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 91.

¹⁹ Michel Leiris, *Manhood: A Journey from Childhood into the Fierce Order of Virility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 39.

we are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our continuity. We find the state of affairs that binds us to our random and ephemeral individuality hard to bear. Along with our tormenting desire that this evanescent thing should last, there stands our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is.²⁰

This link of which Bataille speaks, may take up the form of a matador/priest who serves as a bridge between an individual and cosmos. He, by taking part in an absurd combat with an animal, unites all beings of the world. A concept of union is seen also in Bakhtin's writings:

We shall conclude by stressing that the carnival awareness of the people's immortality is intimately related to the immortality of the becoming of being and is merged with it. In his body and his life man is deeply aware of the earth and of the other elements, of the sun and of the star-filled sky.²¹

The loss of control guarantees harmony with the external elements of reality. Nevertheless, the communion is merely a point of departure for a further, more universal metamorphosis. In Bakhtin's view, what is offered to the world as a consequence of carnival is "its remodeling, its transfer from the old to the new, from the past to the future. It is the world passing through the phase of death on the way to birth,"²² the same way a symbolic rebirth is an indispensable component of each bullfight.

Initially, corrido, in its earlier form, was indeed a ritual: *taurobolium*, as defined by Encyclopedia Britannica (although its definition was inspired by Sir James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*) was most likely to be a sacred drama that was perceived as a symbol for the relationship between Attis and the Mother. A sacrificial

²⁰ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. Mary Dalwood (London: Penguin Press, 1986), 15.

²¹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 256–257.

²² *Ibid.*, 412.

loss that takes place stood for Attis's death and through the death and blood that was shed, the rebirth may emerge. There still exists a strong connection between the contemporary depictions of corrida and the past traditions. Kennedy observes how the former practices shape the corrida she attends: "They can make a life of saintly sacrifice seem beautifully unavoidable"²³ and she seems to comprehend the need for the loss. A loss, a rupture, a hole, a gap, a wound, a decline, a fall, and a collapse all are constituents of carnival, bullfighting, and rituals. Moreover, such degradation, as well as diminishing and degrading the human body and condition triggers its apotheosis and allows the profane to merge with the sacred. To borrow York's thought, a "suspension of the teleological"²⁴ takes place. This sanctified experience becomes, as Kennedy calls it, a "a ritualized escape"²⁵ that consecrates a multidimensional transgression. Corrida, as a ritual contains an element of carnival buoyancy that confronts and subsequently takes over the mundane responsibilities and restrictions allegedly guarding the reality. For Bakhtin, it is a mechanism that alleviates the burden of everyday life:

The liberating process is applied to the seriousness of petty human preoccupations, to cupidity and practical life, to the didactic gloom of moralists and bigots; it is applied to that great seriousness of fear that is reflected in the dark picture of the end of the world, the last judgment and hell, as well as in the images of heaven and beatitude.²⁶

Showing that the social, historic, and religious factors of reality cannot appear *ex nihilo* but emerge together with the biological and the instinctive. Corrida therefore creates an opportunity for an apotheosis of physicality for no other purpose than itself. It

²³ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 85.

²⁴ Jonathan David York, "Flesh and Consciousness: Georges Bataille and the Dionysian," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2003): 51.

²⁵ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 12.

²⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 380.

allows to glorify the experiences physicality entails and assumes such a mindset that renders a milieu in which a desire, lust, excitement, ecstasy, primal fears and drives are essential and in the center of one's existence. Desires and drives implicit in an individual become one's compass and, for a limited period of time, lead the way.

Surely, religion and play seem to occupy two opposing sides of a sublime spectrum. The way this clash is represented in describing a bullfight initially supports the view that the two are divided by an impenetrable gap. For the young heiress the ritualistic aura of corrido she has been told to expect falls flat: "Alyssa thought the whole ritual came across as some kind of primitive initiation,"²⁷ and it was especially so as Adriano, her beloved matador, feels he has to go and perform in order to prove he is truly a man. The morning of the fight Alyssa contemplates:

African tribes who had to have its male members individually go forth and kill a lion with a spear before officially considered ushered into adulthood. If the notion was absurd that Adriano had to kill six bulls before he could become his own man, it was no more absurd than so many of life's other many foibles.²⁸

Her perspective, that of an outsider, makes her perceive the link between risking her lover's life and his feeling masculine as questionable and unjustified. This deeply emotive event proves to be controversial for those who are not able to employ an internal, Spanish perspective. In *Two Matadors* the American who is told a story of an old matador's past glory, also fails to grasp the affinity between what he sees as a display of human athleticism and a liturgy of sorts: "'A sacrifice, Senor?' I sighed along while writing down his words. 'I thought it was a bullfight!'"²⁹ undermining any sacred undertones that the teller suggests.

²⁷ William Maltese, *Matador, Mi Amor. A Novel of Romance* (Rockville: Wildside Press LCC, 2012), 155.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 155–156.

²⁹ McGee, *Two Matadors*, 12.

This disparity does not remain unnoticed by Bataille who expresses his doubts as to how carnival may combine the low with the lofty. He is of the opinion that the main problem lies in the “ostensible cleft between spirit and matter, between consciousness and flesh, a devirilizing polarity Bataille rejected in favor of the ‘tumultuous effervescence’ of what he called universal existence”³⁰ and, in so doing, he already manages to align the opposing notions. The initial apprehensiveness stems from the overlooked fact that it is precisely during such festivals which allow levity and encourage sexual expression that one is granted a closer access to the divine. Corrida initiates a framework that triggers ritualistic behavior. Travis LaFrance in *The Making of Toro* notices a procession: “Believers hoisted statues of Jesus and Mary onto their shoulders and marched in from the outlying churches, setting the tone of holy carnival that would carry over to the artistry in the ring.”³¹ His observation directly links religious rituals with bullfighting. The “holy carnival” of which he speaks acutely reflects corrido’s essence, which is an experience of sublime caused by a carnivalesque event. A French essayist, Henry de Montherlant saw corrido in a similar perspective: “it was no longer a fight, it was a religious incantation performed by these pure gestures, more beautiful than the gestures of love”³²—violence ought to be carried out in order for the peaceful unity with the sacred to arise. Violence is not only inherent to corrido; it is yet another affinity connecting it to rituals. It is a useful trigger that provokes a difference in a thus far balanced reality administered by a given social order inside a homogeneous collective.

This disruption is not lost on Kennedy who notices a change in the spectators as they watch the corrido unfold: “I watched them as they were werewolves, something not human at all, concerned only with power and bloodshed, the usual elements

³⁰ York, “Flesh and Consciousness,” 44.

³¹ Mark Sundeen, *The Making of Toro* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 137.

³² Henry de Montherlant, *The Matador* (London: Elek Books, 1957), 200.

of fascist ritual.”³³ A noticeable rupture of a community brings about a positive outcome as “violence, excess, delirium, madness characterize heterogeneous elements to varying degrees: active, as persons or mobs, they result from breaking the laws of social homogeneity.”³⁴ To weaken a monolithic social fabric in an act of violence means to transform vices into values. Defilement, sexuality, and brutality that are present within sacrificial acts liberate those who participate in a given ritual or corrida. The latter requires a façade of an institutionalized event the same way as the church does.

Both corrida and ritual embody a complex system of meanings, symbols, and codes of conduct but these are simply tools to be used in order to realize the potential levity. Huizinga analyzes this method in the following way: “the rites may be bloody, the probations of the young men awaiting initiation may be cruel, the masks may be terrifying, but the whole thing has a festal nature”³⁵ and shows violence is not the focal point of a bullfight or a ritual yet, in both cases, serves the same purpose of triggering something more than itself. Such a principle of having a purpose beyond the tangible stratum of certain activities and moves is, as stated previously in the work, a formula intrinsic to the phenomenon of play. For Huizinga, play was initially a part of what he called “play-festival-rite complex”³⁶ which is a combination of official, public events that fuses together sacred rituals with facetious activities. Still, Huizinga stresses that “the ritual act, or an important part of it, will always remain within the play category, but in this seeming subordination the recognition of its holiness is not lost,”³⁷ which means that none of the two elements, nor the sacred nor the profane, is superior to the other. They coexist in a singular, egalitarian event such as corrida and are experi-

³³ Kennedy, *On Bullfighting*, 33.

³⁴ Georges Bataille, Fred Botting, and Scott Wilson, *The Bataille Reader* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell), 128.

³⁵ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 21.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

enced by a collective who, through the sacrifice are offered Bergsonian continuity or Bakhtinian rebirth. The Dionysian universe that Bakhtin analyzes welcomes carnival and revolves precisely around self-creating, self-destroying, and the constant renewal of the space. The Dionysian aspect of reality is characterized by excess, lax regulations, and a focus on the physical. Additionally, one needs to yield to the inner experience of losing oneself in the external event and only then does one immerse in sheer, pure existence. It also needs to take place in a communal experience that is inclusive. It is interesting to see how such welcoming and heterogeneous reality that is an outcome of a degradation may be paralleled to Nietzsche's contemplation on the space "beyond good and evil" which is "without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself—do you want a name for this world?"³⁸ His question does not remain unanswered and an adequate reply could be derived from Bataille's work as he concluded:

For universal existence is unlimited and thus restless: it does not close life in on itself, but instead opens it up and throws it back into the uneasiness of the infinite. Universal existence, eternally unfinished and acephalic, a world like a bleeding wound, endlessly creating and destroying particular finite beings³⁹

claiming the universal existence as the core purpose of one's life. The worlds of corrido, carnival, and ritual are all based on the promise of immortality. These universes uncover particular condition a revival and this, according to Bakhtin, is the essence of carnival and it is "vividly felt by all its participants."⁴⁰ In sharing the victory of death, they celebrate what is to come. Bakhtin observes the direction of the collective experience of carnival. The author gathers:

³⁸ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1967), 550.

³⁹ Georges Bataille and Allan Stoekl, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 201.

⁴⁰ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 7.

Popular-festive forms look into the future. They present the victory of this future, of the golden age, over the past. This is the victory of all the people's material abundance, freedom, equality, brotherhood. The victory of the future is ensured by the people's immortality. The birth of the new, of the greater and the better, is as indispensable and as inevitable as the death of the old. The one is transferred to the other, the better turns the worse into ridicule and kills it. In the whole of the world and of the people there is no room for fear. For fear can only enter a part that has been separated from the whole, the dying link torn from the link that is born. The whole of the people and of the world is triumphantly gay and fearless. This whole speaks in all carnival images; it reigns in the very atmosphere of this feast, making everyone participate in this awareness.⁴¹

As it can be deduced from the passage above, rituals are not the only warrants of immortality, carnival also bestows salvation onto those who practice it. And, even though redemption and ecstasy are all promises offered predominantly by religion and its rituals, they all are realized in carnival for it merges the elation of living and levity and the fear of dying. It also sparks a transformation of the thus far known milieu into an altered one that facilitates people's growth and symbolic renewal. It produces what has been already defined as "other side" of birth.⁴²

Between the two opposing sides of the spectrum—the sacred and the profane the realm of the symbolic and ritualistic emerges. Within it, a constant confrontation between the rational and the irrational takes places, and such combat is reflected in the bullring in the encounter between the man and the animal. The depths corrido contains reach immortality and rebirth as well as ecstasy that can compare to greatest religious bliss. What is more, because it is a collective experience, all the people in the arena enhance the emotional load each bullfight is able to elicit. The emotive nature of a bullfight touches upon imminent death but,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 407.

it is death that can be overcome and disregarded by means of a man who offers a bull's life to prolong, on a symbolic level, the remaining participants of the spectacle. This mechanism of a sacrificial animal that exists in rituals carries a heavy emotional load that is a consequence of the struggle between the high and the low that is only so vividly seen in a bullfight. In *The Last Matador*, the protagonist, Mark, observes how one of his friends holds a rosary before a bullfight begins and he reflects: "I realized how very intertwined the state, people, institutions, rituals, doctrine, and psyche were dependent on Catholicism."⁴³

⁴³ Marc Newman, *The Last Matador* (North Charleston, SC: Erev Press, 2013), 95.

Conclusions

The selected representations of bullfighting in Anglophone literature do not refrain from including such confrontations but, at the same time, they expand its implications and symbolism. They offer rejuvenation of the traditional depictions and interpretations of tauromachy expanding the perhaps simplified readings of the bull and the matador. They cease to be a mere binary opposition but acquire more mystique and possibilities. In a way, the very depictions themselves offer the renewal *corrida* can deliver. It reconnects its audiences with the most primitive drives and impulses that need to be contained outside *corrida*/carnival. Through the emotive intensity that accompanies the fight in the ring such primal instincts resurface and temporarily fracture socially constructed boundaries and moral perspectives superimposed by the church. It is also the church which, by means of carnival, administers one's access to the divine. In view of this fact, the institution of the Catholic Church may be seen as parallel to the phenomenon of bullfighting. The affinities they share are to be found in the highly structuralized performances given by either a *torero* or a priest, a symbolic sacrifice of an innocent victim (the bull or Jesus), the collective nature of the spectacle, and the taming of fears. The structure of them both is also similar: they are executed in a specific order in a beforehand prepared place and at a given time, they are periodic and seasonal, and,

what is especially interesting, neither of them is necessary for survival. Since death is the only warrant of resurrection, every *corrida* becomes a story of salvation and, in so doing, it proves its symbolic, spiritual significance.

Bullfighting, a vital element of Spanish culture is surrounded by various misconceptions; it is neither sport, nor a game. The contemporary Anglophone books depicting this theme present it as a ceremony, a highly symbolic combat, and a rite.

My work considers an arena in which various representations of bullfighting are examined. The tropes analyzed demonstrate various twists and complex metaphors the representations offer. The study brings together different theoretical frameworks that, when combined, reveal an interesting conclusion, for example, *corrida* is a perfect epitome of the concept of carnival. Arriving at this conclusion required a revision of traditionally applied theories of exploring bullfighting. Thus far, the perspective was that it is a cruel sport deprived of any substance and my aim for this work was to broaden the interpretive field of that phenomenon and, in order to do that, I have provided a historically lined introduction that showed how prevalent the figure of the bull proved to be over centuries. What is especially significant is the fact that a bull has been an element of rituals and has served as a sacrifice to gods; the second important connotation with this animal is that of virility and prowess that is envied and endeavored by men. This part of my book presents also the relationships between the man and this animal. These bonds emerge from hunting, farming, sports, and rituals. In Chapter One, the link between bullfighting and sport is scrutinized. Bullfighting, as the axis of my work, requires a definition which I tried to create at the very beginning.

In my view, it is neither a sport, nor an art, though certain elements of both could be detected. Clearly, one needs physical strength and vigor to be able to enter the arena and some artistic qualities accompanying the event cannot be denied. Furthermore, I contemplate whether *corrida* may be seen as a game. With its constraints and rules, it could seemingly reflect the char-

acteristics *corrida* has: it is limited in time and space, it requires a certain suspension of regular rules and social mechanism and yet still, it does not include the vast spectrum of rhetoric that could be applied when analyzing bullfighting. Moving forward then, I confront the latter with the concept of play that is fully integrated into social life. As it turns out, the distinction between play and work gradually cease to exist and elements of play permeate everyday reality. Play aims at creating a new social order that might be thought to be less rigid and deeply ritualistic, as well as frivolous. Even though its purpose is to establish a new order, play predominantly constitutes a site of transformation, a state of flux, and a subversion of principles. It allows its participants to shed their regular codes of conduct and permits them to be “more”: more masculine, more feminine, more alluring, more human, and freer. Progressing and development are the central points of play. It could be said that what play mostly offers is a negation, or a reversal of already present order but, in my opinion, it serves a greater purpose, which is to establish a collective that is also “more”: more heterogeneous. It multiplies worldviews and makes them equal. A mosaic of perspectives does not introduce chaos and anarchy; quite conversely, *corrida* as play manages to accommodate conflicting elements and binary oppositions.

Chapter Two revolves around taboo, transgression, and eroticism. I study the ways *corrida* diminishes or altogether renders invalid societal and moral constraints. It is particularly alluring when considering gender roles. On the one hand, *corrida* serves as a platform that allows the matador to showcase his absolute masculinity and enforce his superior position among men but, on the other, as some examples show, it is an opportunity for a woman to subdue a man and elevate her traditional social standing by fighting bulls.

What is more, a bullfight, on a symbolic level, opens up for an interpretation that is filled with eroticism: the tension and passion needed in the arena echo that of a sexual encounter and both the processes evoke *jouissance* and, additionally, the phenom-

ena end in a literal or metaphorical, death. Corrida guards the gates of the taboo that is constituted by death. It bridges the audience's existence with the afterlife and its aim is to tame it and familiarize people with it. This process of familiarizing the audiences with it takes place within a specially created mind- and framework of a bullring.

Placing corrido within certain spatiotemporal bounds is a departure point for a comparison between corrido and carnival that I make in Chapter Three. Both occurrences require an audience to exist and produce meaning: they need to be experienced in a collective in order to fulfill their role. Corrida and carnival allow people to sublimate their desires, drives, and fears. The alleged disorder and topsy-turvy ascribed to the time of carnival carries a profound harmony inside. Undoubtedly, carnival, as well as corrido, introduces a dynamic change into the community but it is done to reinforce the cyclical and otherwise stable systems and hierarchies. All members of a society are believed to possess their own proper place and function. Traditionally, a man's designated role is to be the macho who conquers a woman and a woman's meaning is defined by her looks and fragility. Carnival provides a means of escaping rigid social roles and a bullfight may be a trigger for such carnivalesque escapism. Such a realm of freedom from authorities and restraints resemble the concept of the magic circle that is evaluated in Chapter Four. This idea of a separate sphere in which norms are suspended is present in both carnival and corrido. In case of corrido, the magic circle can be noticed on both strata: it is a tangible, concrete arena that gathers the spectators, and a metaphorical space that is created by the very participation of the audience. It allows them to experience a violent combat and feel cathartic. Such a departure from regulations can only happen temporarily. The seasonal nature of corrido is parallel to the periodic quality of religious rituals. I have dedicated the final chapter of my work to the comparison between corrido and rituals. In various societies rites of passage mark a transformation of an individual and his or her relationships with the environment. Rituals happen with, for, and

because of a collective and it is the audience that are those who warrant and accept the symbolism of the form in which a ritual is conducted and the symbolic meaning it carries. What is important, rituals are inherently connected with performativity; this is also a quality that corrida demonstrates in order to facilitate the suspension of disbelief and social order. Rituals have historically aimed at thanking gods, giving thanks, and the transitioning into a new phase of one's life. Frequently that involved sacrificing an animal to avert sickness or death and this notion of overcoming death is an intrinsic element of bullfighting.

The objective of my work was to explore the connections of bullfighting as depicted in with different theoretical frameworks that of sport, games, play, carnival, and ritual. What these concepts have in common is the reverse logic, the apotheosis of the bizarre, and the loosening certain social norms. They all introduce, though to a diversified degree, the unnatural, the uncanny, and the feeling of elation. Bullfighting is a highly symbolic cultural phenomenon with various designations that merges all of these elements and, unlike, for example, religion, is inclusive.

It provokes a relaxation of societal restrictions and, at the same time, an intensification of individual experience of facing one's fears and desires. When the thus far valid order is reestablished, the collective is stronger, and the individuals more aware of their selves, their drives are sublimated, and angst is overcome.

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Images

Photo. 1. Goya, Francisco (1815–1816). *The Speed and Daring of Juanito Apiñani in the Ring of Madrid*. Accessed December 20, 2017. <https://www.wikiart.org/en/francisco-goya/the-speed-and-daring-of-juan-ito-api%c3%blani-in-the-ring-of-madrid-1816>.

Photo. 2. Goya, Francisco (1816). [*Boldness of Martincho in the Bullring at Saragossa*] *Another Madness of His in the Same Bullring*. Accessed December 20, 2017. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/333828>.

Ewa Wyleżek

Tropes of Tauromachy: Representations of Bullfighting in Selected Works of Anglophone Literature

Summary

The present book examines various representations of bullfighting in the contemporary American and British literature. It also depicts the phenomenon of *corrida*, controversial as it undoubtedly is, as point of departure for interpretations that go beyond a traditional reading of *corrida* that is usually limited to an act of animal cruelty. The contemporary works on this subject differ from romanticized and somewhat pompous imagery known from works by, for instance, Ernest Hemingway. Some of the analyzed works introduce irony or even question the very reasons for *corrida*'s existence in the contemporary society. In other examples, the reader will notice a reversal of the traditional convention of writing about *corrida* by portraying a woman-matador. Such treatment of material invites new methods and methodologies while interpreting *corrida*; ones that allow for a suspension of order and traditional perspective. For this reason, I employ the theoretical frameworks of game, play, carnival, and ritual whose aim is (even if only temporarily) a topsy-turvy world.

In the introduction, I provide a historical background which shows the pivotal role that the figure of bull has played in culture and art. The animal performed a key role during rituals and rites and was the basis for various forms of entertainment. In this part I also present the recent state of publications on the subject in question.

The first chapter is an attempt to define *corrida*. Using sport studies, as well as the theories of game and play, I try to confront features of *corrida* with the said ludic activities in hope to offer a methodological framework that would allow further analysis of bullfighting. Ludicity, which, in my view, is *corrida*'s background, permits to transgress rigid social norms and encourages to celebrate this transgression. The latter is, to my way of thinking, a pivotal element of *corrida* and this relation between the two is examined in chapter two. There, the works I have selected are confronted with theoretical standings offered by Sigmund Freud and George Bataille, who accentuate freedom in

expressing one's desire. Moreover, in this part of I show the importance of *corrida* for performativity of gender, especially, masculinity. Matadors, wanting to manifest and strengthen their position in a given collective, are willing to die in the arena.

Death, a necessary final of every bullfight, is an end to the spectacle but, at the same time, a beginning of a symbolic rebirth of the torero and the audience. Both *corrida* and carnival offer a symbolic triumph over death and a rebirth. Both phenomena also take place during a bullfight. Furthermore, in the analyzed works the death of both, the bull and the matador, is at times, presented in a grotesque manner. Grotesque is a relatively new aspect that is present in depicting *corrida*. As an inherent element of Bakhtin's carnival, it allows for a fuller and richer portrayal of eroticism and violence in the arena. The grotesque undertone of *corrida* is studied in chapter three.

Hyperbolization, absurd, irony, and grotesque create a separate sphere called, following Johan Huizinga's theory, the magic circle. Within it, all norms and social hierarchy are reversed, and the collective becomes more inclusive—these processes are discussed in chapter four. The fifth chapter is a comparison between bullfighting and a ritual. Rituals are based on and connected to a collective and mark a significant transfers and transformations in one's life. They invite behaviors that in every-day life would be considered inappropriate or immoral. However, when rules are suspended, violent or sexual gestures carry more meaning than in the ordinary, carnival-free, circumstances. The literary representations of *corrida* I have selected prove that this phenomenon goes beyond a bloody show for tourists. It could be read within the framework of carnival and ritual, which allow, and even encourage, a new, liberated social order and offer a celebration of life and also, on a symbolic level, a victory over death.

Keywords: *corrida*, carnival, ritual, macho, eroticism

Ewa Wylężek

Tropy tauromachii: reprezentacje corridy w wybranych utworach anglojęzycznych

Streszczenie

W niniejszej monografii omówiono różne ujęcia zjawiska corridy we współczesnej literaturze brytyjskiej i amerykańskiej oraz udowodniono, że fenomen corridy, choć bez wątplenia kontrowersyjny, stanowi punkt wyjścia do interpretacji wykraczających poza traktowanie tego zjawiska kulturowego jedynie jako przejawu okrucieństwa wobec zwierząt. Współczesne ujęcia tematu różnią się od romantycznych i nieco patetycznych reprezentacji znanych z twórczości choćby Ernesta Hemingwaya. Niektóre z wybranych utworów anglojęzycznych XX oraz XXI wieku wprowadzają ironię, a nawet kwestionują zasadność tego zjawiska. W innych z kolei zauważalne jest pewne odwrócenie konwencji pisania o corridzie, na przykład poprzez przedstawienie kobiety-matadora. Te zabiegi zachęcają do odczytania corridy przy użyciu takich narzędzi, które pozwalają na zawieszenie tradycyjnego porządku i perspektywy. Z tego powodu w książce autorka sięga po teoretyczne ramy gry, zabaw, karnawału i rytuału, których celem wszak jest (co prawda chwilowy) „świat na opak”.

We wstępie zaprezentowano rys historyczny, który pokazuje, jak istotną rolę w kulturze i sztuce odgrywa postać byka. Zwierzę to pełniło kluczową funkcję w trakcie rytuałów i obrządków oraz stanowiło fundament akrobatycznych rozrywk. W tej części pokazano również stan badań nad corridą oraz najnowsze publikacje związane z tym tematem.

Rozdział pierwszy stanowi próbę stworzenia definicji corridy. Posiłkując się studiami nad sportem, grami i zabawą, autorka stara się, poprzez zestawienie cech corridy i wyżej wspomnianych zjawisk ludycznych, zaproponować ramy metodologiczne pozwalające na analizowanie walki człowieka z bykiem. Ludyczność, która zdaniem autorki tworzy tło dla corridy, pozwala na wyjście poza sztywne normy społeczne i zachęca do celebrowania transgresji. Ta ostatnia jest piwotalnym elementem corridy i tę relację autorka bada w rozdziale drugim. Wybrane ujęcia corridy skonfrontowane zostały z teoriami mię-

dzy innymi Zygmunta Freuda i George'a Bataille'a; zaakcentowano tu swobodę w wyrażaniu pożądania, którą corrida w wybranych pracach inspirowa. W tej części pokazano także, jak istotna jest corrida dla manifestowania płci kulturowej, zwłaszcza męskości. Matadorzy, chcąc umocnić swoją pozycję w społeczności, są gotowi umrzeć na arenie.

Śmierć, nieodłączny finał corridy, stanowi koniec spektaklu, ale początek symbolicznego odrodzenia publiczności i matadora. Fizyczne spełnienie, jak i karnawał, oferują symboliczne przekroczenie śmierci i nowe życie – oba te zjawiska mają miejsce w trakcie corridy. Ponadto w analizowanych dziełach, śmierć, zarówno matadora, jak i byka, niejednokrotnie przedstawiona jest w sposób groteskowy. Groteska jest relatywnie nowym aspektem ubogającym literackie reprezentacje corridy. Jako inherentny element bachtinowskiego karnawału pozwala na wyraźniejsze i pełniejsze ukazywanie erotyzmu i przemocy w corridzie. Groteskowy wymiar corridy badany jest w rozdziale trzecim. Hiperbolizacja, absurd i ironia tworzą przestrzeń odrębną od codzienności – budują one, podążając za Johanem Huizingą „magiczny krąg”, w którym hierarchia społeczna jest odwrócona, a kolektyw staje się bardziej inkluzyjny, o czym piszę w rozdziale czwartym. Rozdział piąty jest próbą przyrównania corridy do rytuału. Rytuały opierają się na wierzeniach społeczności i zaznaczają istotne przejścia między etapami w życiu jednostki oraz zezwalają na zachowania, które w codziennej narracji są odrzucone, jak rozlew krwi lub okrucieństwo. Gdy normy jednak są zawieszane ze względu na rytuał, gesty te nabierają nowego znaczenia i niosą ze sobą więcej niż tylko brutalność.

Literackie reprezentacje corridy w utworach anglojęzycznych XX oraz XXI wieku pokazują, że corrida nie tylko stanowi krwawą rozrywkę dla spragnionych wrażeń turystów, lecz można ją także traktować w kategoriach karnawału i rytuału, które zezwalają na zawieszenie hierarchii oraz norm społecznych i celebrowania życia, jak również na symboliczne przekroczenie śmierci, a nawet tego zachęcają.

Słowa klucze: corrida, karnawał, rytuał, macho, erotyzm

Copy editing
Gabriela Marszolek, Krystian Wojcieszuk

Proofreading
Joanna Zwierzyńska

Cover design
Anna Krasnodębska-Okreglicka

Typesetting
Alicja Załęcka

Editorial assistant
Przemysław Pieniążek

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