

"Biography of the Bulls" edited by Rex Smith
(Anthology) The Moment Of Truth [2/18/1958]

The man stands erect, with ^{classic} rigid grace. The sunlight sparkles from the gold embroidery of his tight fitting silken suit. In his left hand is a piece of cloth of brilliant red. In his right he holds a long, thin sword, slightly curved at the end.

His eyes are fixed on the bull, standing a few feet away. The bull's head is lowered, ^{the points of} his sweeping horns ~~are~~ aimed at the man. The bull's sides are heaving with ^{his} heavy breathing. Blood seeps down his shoulders where several small darts, gayly decorated, dangle from the wounds where they are caught in his ~~sides~~ ^{flesh}.

The man moved his red cloth, inviting the bull. The sword points forward, waist high and horizontal. The bull charges. The man, his feet together and standing still, awaits the charge and it seems the great horns must certainly pierce the frail defense of the silken suit.

But the red cloth moves a little to the right, now almost before the eyes of the bull. In a flash of graceful movement, the hand with the sword crosses over the hand with the cloth and the ^{blade} ~~point of the sword~~ is buried deep in the bull.

If the man has done his work well, the bull pauses, his front legs wobble, he sinks to the ground---dead. A team of ^{four} gayly caparisoned mules is swiftly hitched to the horns of the bull and he is dragged from the arena. ~~The crowd hears, the sand is smooth~~

~~That is~~ ^{It} the moment of truth, the ~~high~~ climax of a drama of courage and death, ~~that~~ has been enacted according to a rigid ritual dear to the hearts of Spanish aficionados of the corrida, or the ^{spectacle} ~~festival~~ of the bulls.

The character and the motives of the chief actors---the bull and the man---go back into dim history. The bull fight, as it is known today, has been eloquently praised and roundly criticized by generations of writers and spectators.

Is the bull fight simply a cruel sport that has been allowed to survive in some Spanish countries from medieval times? Or is it, as its defenders claim, an ^{noble} exemplification of man's dominance over savage forces?

Tauromaquia, as Spaniards call the art of fighting bulls, has been condoned and condemned by popes and ruling monarchs. ^{Queen} Isabel ^{the} Catholic tried to abolish ^{both} bathing and bull fighting ~~together~~. But the Spaniards of her day, willing perhaps to forego ^{bathing} their ablutions, stood stoutly by their bulls and the queen was baffled, ^{frustrated}.

Pope Pius V suppressed bull fighting on penalty of ex-communication. Pope Gregory lifted the ban. Pope Sixtus V, in 1586, prohibited the clergy from attending ~~fights~~ ^{the corrido}.

The famous Fray Luis de León of Salamanca University ~~had~~ protested. King Phillip II supported him and explained to the Pope: "The fiesta is in the Spanish blood, and we cannot take it away without serious repercussions." The Pope relented and repealed the prohibition.

The fighting bull of Spain is a far different animal ^{from} the pasture bulls of our country. He has been bred for his fighting quality through many generations..

He is a descendant of the aurochs, or wild ox ^{which} ~~roamed~~ Europe in Neolithic times. The bull has been a symbol of procreation and power since the beginning of recorded history. In ~~a~~ ancient Sumer, of 3000 BC, the bull was a god symbol, passed on by them to the Babylonians. Human-headed winged bulls carved in stone adorned the entrances ^{to} of Assyrian palaces. ^{In mythology,} Zeus took ~~the~~ the disguise of a white bull in the ^{abduction and} rape of Europa.

The role of man in the modern bull fight has ~~less~~ ^{almost as great} antiquity ^{ancient} than as the bull. The bull cult moved from ^{ancient} religious sacrifice, through the chase ~~in~~ in the fields, to public spectacle in the arena.

Spaniards were pitting their bravery against wild bulls before the Punic wars. Hamilcar Barca, father of Hannibal, founded Barcelona in 228 BC.

Hamilcar besieged Ilici soon after. The desperate defenders rounded up wild bulls with the aid of tame oxen, ^{and} managed to fix rosin torches to their horns. Then they drove the bulls, lighting the torches as they ran, into the war chariots of the enemy. Hamilcar was killed and his army destroyed.

The Romans ruled ^SSpain for 600 years, 200^B to 400 AD. Then came the Goths an Arian people, and after another 300 years the Moors. They stayed from 700 until 1492.

Through all these centuries the bull was a part of Spanish life. Spanish bulls were taken to Rome for ^{arena}public spectacles. The Moors learned to fight bulls and took them to Africa. ~~But Spain~~

El Cid Campeador, the legendary Spanish hero, ^{of the 11th century,} ~~lanceador~~ is said to have lanced bulls in Madrid and Valencia. This was probably when bulls were killed in the hunt. It is significant that the Spanish term for bullfighting, la Corrida de toros, means ^{literally} the running of the bulls.

The first recorded bull fights were in the 12th century. The ^{annals} of the Catholic kings record a corrida held in 1133 in Logroño, at the time of the coronation of Alfonso VII. Another recorded in Leon in 1140 ^{celebrated} the marriage ^{of} Alfonso's daughter.

In the reign of Phillip III, the canonization ^{of} three ~~saints~~ saints, St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier and Santa ¹teresa, were celebrated by corridas.

Cervantes, the father of the novel, had his inimitable hero, Don Quijote, say: (Quote)

" A gaily caparisoned knight giving a fortunate lance thrust to a fierce bull in ^{the} middle of a great square makes a pleasing appearance in the eyes of the king. The same is true of a knight clad in ~~armor~~ shining armor as he paces the lists in front ^{front} of the ladies in some joyous tournament. It is true of all those knight ^s who, by means of

Their bitter history has stimulated their musical and artistic expression. They have been sustained by a profound religious faith. Their minority status has made ~~them~~ them sensitive to problems of government.

The wearing of the green-appearing "black tie" by your speaker this evening cannot represent his intellectual assent to any of the wild guesses of naive Bible readers of past generations. It does represent his respectful recognition of the spiritual kinship of all who love liberty and the sanctity of the individual.

or the other? Is he brave and fierce, intent on reaching and killing a foe, or is he excited, eccentric and unpredictable? These qualities will be important when ^{man and bull} both face the moment of truth, *together.*

Now, with bull and man introduced, ~~begins~~ the first act of the ritual of death, *begins.*

After several futile rushes at waving capes which seem to protect the men from his horns, the bull discovers a more solid adversary---a horse with a man on his back. He charges, and his horns meet solid, satisfying resistance. The horse is padded---a fairly recent concession to the sensibilities of ~~American~~ tourists---and the man's ~~foot~~ *leg* is ~~protected~~ *ed* in an iron stirrup and metal leggings. The horse is blindfolded on the side from which the bull approaches.

While the bull is worrying the padded horse with his horns, the picador sets the point of his lance against the heavy, straining shoulder muscles of the bull. The point enters about one inch. Usually the lance is set once on each side of the shoulder.

Sometimes the rush of the bull upsets the horse and picador. We have seen ^{na} bull raise the front quarter of the horse on his horns. In former times, the unprotected horses suffered cruel punishment from the horns which ripped upon their bellies. It was not uncommon for a bull to ~~kill~~ kill three or four horses before the picador could accomplish his role.

The purpose of this most unpleasant phase of the bull fight is to weaken the bull's neck ^{muscles}, so that he will hold his head lower. Without the pic it might take all afternoon to kill one bull, whereas twenty minutes is about all that can be allotted for each of six bulls.

Now the picador retires, and again the bull finds ~~xxxxxx~~ a man on foot claiming his attention. ~~xxxxxx~~

This is the second act. The man is the banderillero. It may be the matador himself, or it may be one of his cuadrilla who will place

the three pairs of darts.

The man holds up his arms, a banderilla in each hand. He summons the bull, "Hi, to^ro!" The man has no cape to ~~deflect~~ deflect the bull's charge.

As the bull ~~rushes~~ rushes at him, the man moves slightly, so that ~~the~~ the oncoming bull describes an arc as he approaches.

The man must manage just to miss the passing horn, then reach over and plant the barbed darts, one in either side of the shoulder ~~mass~~ mass, as the bull ~~brushes~~ brushes by.

This is ~~the~~ a survival of the past, when only one ~~dart~~ harpoonlike dart was used by a man on foot to ~~arouse~~ arouse the animal for the fighters on horseback. ^{For} to the spectator, it is one of the most graceful and skillful maneuvers of the fight.

Now, with his shoulders wounded by the lance, and with at ~~least~~ ^{1/3} least a few of the ^{1/3} barbed banderillas dangling from his shoulder, the bull is ready for the third and final act of the ritual.

There is the bull, with his wounds, his rage and his passion to kill his tormenter. And there is the man, the matador, in his brilliant traje de luces, or suit of lights. And there is the muleta, a piece of red woolen serge, in the man's hand. And there is the espada, the sword, ready to be handed by the sword boy ~~when~~ ^{to the matador} when the moment has come.

This is the time when the man ^{must} dominates the bull, preparing him for the ^{final sword} ~~final~~ thrust. The movements of this phase, called passes, are as stylized as the movements of a ballet. With the muleta, the man leads the bull through the intricate ~~figures~~ figures of their dance. The man establishes his authority, ^{luring} ~~forcing~~ the bull to follow the enticement of the muleta, rushing, turning, rushing again, ~~in~~ in a bright swirl of color and ~~motion~~ motion.

The man does his part with studied nonchalance. ~~Every~~ His every move should be elegant, with an attitude of austere tranquillity. ~~The crowd~~

The crowd feels and responds to this moment of drama. The cheers

and ~~also~~ surge in rhythm with the movement in the arena. Perhaps, ~~the matador~~ when the bull pauses in frustration, ~~and~~ finding no solid flesh ~~meeting~~ ~~his~~ horns, the matador will ~~drop~~ ^{drop} to his knees and cite the bull from this position. Or when the bull hesitates in ~~amazed~~ baffled wonder, the matador may turn his back on him, only a few feet away, and bow gracefully to the crowd. This gesture, ~~which~~ which must be well considered, brings ~~what~~ great applause.

^{Finally,} Taking the sword in his right hand, the matador summons the bull. If the moment has truly arrived---if the bull is ready and the man is ready in courage and skill, the sword ~~sinks~~ ^{falls down} deep and the bull ~~dies~~ dead.

~~Depends~~ The applause and acclaim depend upon the courage, the grace and the skill of the performance. The matador may be awarded one ear, two ears, or---the final accolade---both ears and the tail. These are cut off and given him. Then he and the members of his cuadrilla circle the arena to receive the plaudits of the aficionados. Hats sail into the ring, along with bouquets of flowers. In Barcelona men toss down their leather brandy flasks. The ~~xxx~~ triumphant matador puts the flask to his lips for a polite sip and tosses it back. The flowers are gathered in the arms of the matador's assistants. The hats are tossed back ~~and~~ ^{the dead bull is dragged out, the sand is smoothed,} ~~get back~~ to their owners. And then it is time for the next bull.

While ^{most} Americans would vigorously reject any suggestion that we ~~should~~ allow bull fights here, Americans and many other non-Spanish people have long been ^{repelled or} fascinated by the bull fight. ¹⁸

James Russell Lowell, the American poet and first editor of the Atlantic Monthly, was ^{our} minister to Spain in 1878 when the young king Alfonso XII married his cousin, Princess ⁵ Mercedes. A bullfight was a part of the celebration and Lowell was an official guest. In his report to the State Department, he wrote:

"I attended ~~it~~ officially, as a matter of duty, and escaped early. It was my first bull fight and will be my last. To me it was a shocking

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and brutalizing spectacle in which all my sympathies were on the side of the bull. For the moment I almost wished myself the representative ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{to} Liberia."

Two other American diplomats had easier views. Washington Irving, whose writings on Spain are famous, admitted (quote) "I did not know what a bloodthirsty man I was till I saw them (bullfights) at Madrid on my first visit. The first was very spirited, the second dull, and the third spirited again, and afterward I hardly ever missed." (end quote.)

Claude G. Bowers, another professional writer, was Franklin D. Roosevelt's ambassador to Spain. In his book, "My Mission to Spain," he wrote:

"I had seen my first fight under a burning Madrid sky one day in June. The scene itself was thrilling---the bluest of skies, the scorching sun rays accentuating the green, blue, red and yellow dresses and parasols of the women in the stands. Twenty thousand people, tense and expectant. From the moment the ~~light~~ two horsemen in the garb of the time of Philip II rode, to the sound of bugles, into the arena for the key to the bull ring, my emotions were acutely aroused, but confused. The color, gusto ^{and} bravado of the procession led by the strutting matadores in gorgeous uniforms, the first breath-taking charge of the bull, the grace and daring of the cape work, the skill and valor of the matador, the brilliance and audacity of the banderilleros, the knowledge that death hovered in the air close to the blood-stained sand, would quicken the pulse of a statue. And out of it all, ~~emerge~~ in the end, emerged one dominant feeling---a profound admiration and pity for the courageous, magnificent fighting bull."

Not in his book, but to a newspaperman, Bowers said: "It is uniquely Spanish and a most thrilling spectacle. It is the only ceremony left from the color and display of ancient times. The corrida is a spectacular contribution of Spain to living history."

This statement had consequences. The Spaniards hailed him as a most

who went to Spain, learned to fight bulls, became a man of the world and wrote about bull fighting. He ^{later ed} ~~now own~~ a restaurant in San Francisco, called El Matador. His story of the death of Manolete turns a certain light on the ^{"moment of truth"} ~~ways of bull fighting~~. I will read some excerpts from Conrad's story:

"It's hard for Americans to understand why all this fuss about one bullfighter. But Manolete wasn't just a bullfighter to the Spaniards. He was their only national and international hero. Yet when he was killed, he died such a beautiful death that I swear, in spite of the great funeral, the week of national mourning, the odes, the dirges, the posthumous decorations by the government, that in his heart of hearts every Spaniard was glad that Manolete ~~was dead~~ had died. They, the Spaniards themselves, murdered him....

"Ugly in photos, cold and hard in the bull ring, he had tremendous magnetism, warmth and gentle humor among his friends. Once, in Peru, I took a blasé American college girl to watch Manolete in the ceremony of preparing for a fight, though she protested she had no interest in 'A joker who hurts little bulls.'

"Excuse me, senorita, if I don't talk much," he said with his shy smile, as they worried ~~his~~ his thin frame into the skin tight uniform, "but I am very scared."

After that he didn't say more than 10 words to her. But she walked out of the room dazed. 'That,' she announced, 'is the most attractive man in the world.'

An hour later he had her weeping with emotion as he calmly ~~let~~ let the horns of a giant Fernandini bull graze the gold braid on his costume time after time. The fear he spoke of was nowhere in evidence:

"To fight a bull when you are not scared is nothing," another bullfighter once said, "and to ^{NOT} ~~not~~ fight a bull when you are scared is nothing. But to fight a bull when you are scared---that is something."

Manolette told me, "my knees start to quake when I first see my name on the posters and they don't stop until the end of the season."

But there was never any real end of the season for him. In 1945, for example, he fought 93 fights in Spain in six months, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ ~~ath...~~ Then followed Mexico's season, and Peru's season, and when he got through with those it was March again and time for the first fights in Valencia. It would be gruelling for a strong man, and Manolette was frail to the point of appearing tubercular. Yet he kept driving, driving.

What, then, made him run? What made him the best?

"Money was the obvious thing. In his eight years as a senior matador he made approximately \$4 million in American dollars. In his last years he was getting as high as \$25,000 per fight, about \$400 for every minute he performed. ...

Yet it wasn't the money; people seldom risk their necks ~~for~~ just for money. It was that he needed desperately to be someone---something great.

He was born Manuel Rodríguez in Córdoba, Spain, in 1917, in the heart of the bullfighting country....The family was always hungry-poor. ...His two sisters stood the hunger as long as possible, and then they started making money in a profession even older than bullfighting. This was the secret of the driving force behind Manuel. He never got over it. He resolved to ~~get~~ ^{make} enough money somehow so that his family would never have to worry again, and to become an important enough person so that his sisters' shame would be blurred. Bullfighting is the only way in Spain for a poor boy to become great. "Matadors and royalty are the only ones who live well," they say. Manuel decided to become the greatest bullfighter who ever lived.

He was 12 and working as a plasterer's assistant on the Sotomayor ranch...Little Manuel begged so persistently to be allowed to fight that finally the Sotomayors put him in a corral with a cape and a calf...He

was knocked down every time he went near the little animal. If the calf had had sharp horns instead of stubs, he would have been killed 20 times. In the next few years the bullfighters around the ranch told him some of the mistakes he was making. He finally persuaded them to give him a fight with small bulls in Córdoba's plaza, under the name of Manolete, a diminutive of Manuel. He and two other boys set out to make their fortune. Manolete was almost the comic relief...The crowd would laugh at his skinny frame, made more awkward by the fancy passes he was trying. But they couldn't laugh at the way he killed. When it came time to dispatch his enemy, he would hurl himself straight over the ~~horns~~ lowered head, the horn missing his body by ^{a hair,} ~~inches,~~ to sink the sword up to the hilt between the shoulder. "He's going to get killed that way some day," the experts said.

But then he was spotted by José Flores Camerá, a man who might have been the greatest bullfighter of all time except for one thing---he was a coward.

Camerá remade Manolete. He made him concentrate on the austere ~~passes~~ classic passes...He showed him how to do beautiful, slow veronicas. It was the only pass, ~~xxx~~ of the dozens that exist, that Manolete would ever do with the cape. With the small muleta, used with the sword, Camerá let him do only four passes. He showed him how to hold himself regally, how to give the classic passes with a dignity never before seen in the ring. ...

"No one laughed at him now. Camerá had made a tragic genius out of a clown...His first year was successful, his second ^{sensational!} ~~successful~~, Spain had been waiting for this kind of fighting....By 1946 he was the king of the matadors and Mexico beckoned with astronomical contracts. Spectators thought they were lucky to get a seat for \$100 for his first fight in Mexico City...He gave them their money's worth, although he was carried out badly wounded before the fight was over. He came to as they were ~~convinced~~

carrying him to the ring infirmary, shook off those who tried to stop him, and lurched back into the ring to finish the bull, before collapsing.

He recovered and went on to fight all over Mexico and South America. ~~He~~ To preserve his fabulous reputation he had to fight every fight as though it were his first time in the Madrid plaza.

But the machine was wearing down. Though he was only 29, he looked 40. He was drinking a lot. His timing was beginning to go off. Once, in Peru, he took nine sword thrusts to kill a bull. He left the ring with tears running down his cheeks.

Quit, said Canara. Quit said his friends. The people were saying he dared fight only smaller bulls, and that a new bullfighter, Dominguín, was better and braver.

Manolete had too much pride to quit under fire. He would have one last season, with the largest bulls in Spain. He wanted to retire untied and undefeated.

In Barcelona the critics said he never had been greater. In Pamplona he was even better. Then, on July 16, he was wounded in Madrid, and he left the hospital too soon, to go on a vacation in the mountains with Antonia, his mistress.

The next fights were not good. He was drinking, staying up all night with a bottle and trying to fight the next afternoon. They say he drank because of Antonia, because he knew she was a ^{bad} girl of ~~bad style~~, and a gold digger, but he loved her and couldn't break off with her and hated himself for loving her.

Then came ~~was~~ August 28 and the fight in Linares. It was important, because it was near his home town and his rival, Dominguín, was on the same program. And the bulls were Miuras, the famous bulls of death that have killed more men than any other breed in existence.

The second bull was Manolete's. It was dangerous and unpredictable, but Manolete was out to cut an ear. He made the ^{animal} charge back and forth

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in front of him so closely and gracefully that even his detractors were up out of their seats, yelling. But when it came time to kill, he missed with the first thrust. The second ^{thrust} dropped the bull cleanly and the crowd applauded. But he had lost the ear. They were demanding perfection today.

The next bull was Dominguín's and he played it handsomely. He put in his own banderilla, unfurled all his crowd-pleasing tricks, and dropping to his knees for two passes and even kissed the bull's forehead at one moment. He killed it cleanly and was presented an ear.

Another bull, and a mediocre performance by the third bullfighter, and it was Manolete's turn again. The last bull came skidding out into the ring. It was named Iñero. The moment Camará saw it hooking around the ring, he told Manolete: "Maño--bad, bad. It hooks terribly to the right." That is a dread thing, for a matador must go over the right horn to kill.

But Manolete was determined to give the best performance of his life. "Toro, hah, torooo!" He called in his deep voice, holding ^{the} cape out in front of him and shaking it. The animal wheeled at the voice, its tail shot up, and it charged across the ring. As it reached the cloth, the man did not spin or ~~whirl~~ ^{swirl} the cape around him, or dance about, the way that Dominguín had done. He merely planted his feet and swung the cape slowly in front of the bull's nose, guiding the great head with the tantalizing xx cloth so that the left horn went by his leg ^{inches} away...Five more perfect classic veronicas, each closer than the other, finishing with a half veronica so close that the bull's neck hit him and almost knocked him off balance. He turned his back on the bewildered animal and looked up at the crowd that was cheering deliriously.

Later, with the muleta, he worked in closer than ever. He did the Pass of Death, and 15 suicidal natural passes, where the sword is taken out of the cape and only the limp bit of rag is used to divert the bull's charge away from the body. Then he did his famous trade-mark--the fantastic pass where he looked disdainfully away from the bull up into the stands as the

animal thundered by. It seemed as though the bull couldn't miss, but it did. By now the crowd was hoarse from cheering ^{man's} the domination ~~that~~ ^{over} ~~the~~ ~~man had acquired~~ ~~over~~ the beast.

It was time for the kill. His own men were yelling for him to stay as far away as possible and get it over quickly.

But Manolete had to finish this one right. He stood in front of the bull, sighted ^{along} ~~down~~ the blade, rose on the toes of one foot, and as the bull lunged forward, hurled himself straight over the lowered right horn. The sword was ~~sinking~~ ^{passing} in, the horn ^{cutting} ~~passing~~ safely by. But suddenly the bull wrenched its head to the right and drove the horn deep into Manolete's groin. He was flung high into the air, trying to fight the horn out of his body, and then was slammed to the sand. The bull spiked him twice on the ground and then staggered, choked and ~~flopped~~ ^{dropped} ~~over~~ dead, the sword ^{sunk} ~~up~~ to the hilt between its shoulder blades.

Camará and the banderilleros picked up the unconscious form and rushed him down the passageway to the ring infirmary. He ~~re~~gained consciousness on the operating table and asked weakly, "Did it die?"

"Si, chico, si," said Camará, tears raining down his cheeks.

"It died and they didn't give me anything?" Manolete said, trying to raise himself from the table. "They gave you everything, matador, everything, both ears and tail."

Manolete smiled ^{and} lay back. At five in the morning he moaned, "Doctor, I can't feel anything in my right leg." A little later he gave a cry and ~~said~~ said, "I can't see!" and he was dead.

An old ~~banderillero~~ banderillero, staring at the corpse, said dully, "They kept demanding more and more of him, and more was his life, so he gave it to them."

Such was the moment of truth for Manolete.