LA TAUROMAQUES

JOSÉ MARÍA CANO



A Riflemaker EXHIBITION

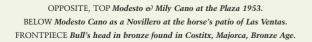
INTRODUCTION

"Since I was very small I always knew how to 'torear de salón'. In other words, I understood the principles of what should be done in front of a bull, having practiced with my father. Even then I was attracted by the contrasts within the act, or ceremony. The bullfighter as a feminine fact and the bull as a masculine fact. Intelligence and instinct. Manipulation against natural condition. Vertical and horizontal. The colours of the sacred pageant set against bull black. And of course, life versus death.

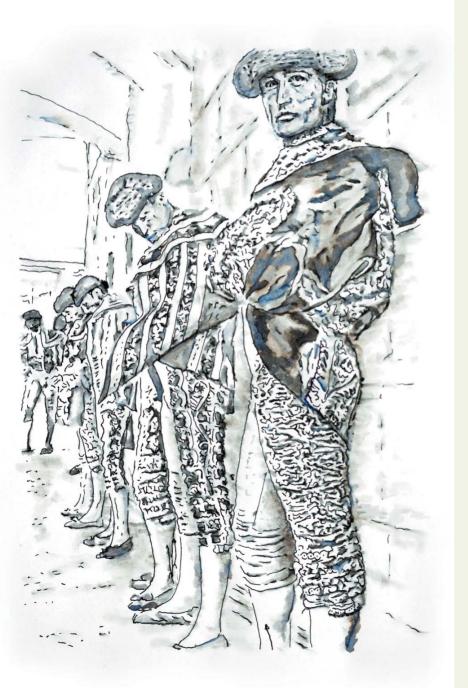
The recording of this elaborate procedure would be a daunting task for any Spanish artist, each of whom will have been inspired by the same irrisistible force while, in my case, deciding to use only the most traditional of materials, pen and ink with which to portray it. The bullfighting art, *La Tauromaquia*, is the most 'plastic' of all plastic arts. But the representations of it over the course of thousands of years have in general been the most formal.

Since Cretan and Roman times there have always been bulls and bullfighters willing to etch this relationship in the sand, and artists endeavouring to create a most expressive realisation of truth, or 'faith', if you like. In order to depict the bullfight, the artist must achieve a fine balance between technique and inspiration. One cannot draw without a degree of craftsmanship just as one cannot survive in the ring without technique, and one should never bullfight without the inherent element of art. The act of drawing is almost as reckless as that of bullfighting. Drawing is vanity itself, doomed to remain no more than a fraudulent mannerism if it does not manage to transport, transform and totally possess the personality of the one who draws. Just like the act of bullfighting."

José María Cano, Madrid, April 2009







THE ART OF BULLFIGHTING

The national sport of Spain, *La Tauromaquia* involves the ritualized taunting of a bull in a circular ring or 'corrida', leading to its eventual death at the hands of the matador. With its origins in Greece and Rome, the practice was introduced into Spain by the Moors in the 11th century.

Picadores on horseback first taunt the bull and wound it with lances before the banderilleros pierce the bull's neck with darts. Attacks by the bull are often at 50 mph. After these have been slowed by the picadors, the matador approaches the bull with only his red cape, the muleta, and a short sword. A matador tests the bravery of his bull with movements of the capote, a red and yellow cape. The final act, the kill, is performed by the matador, who is armed with a red cape and sword. He teases the bull further with the cape and then kills it by plunging the sword between its shoulder blades. There are three matadors in each bullfight, each facing two bulls. In parts of France and in Portugal it is illegal to kill the bulls. Opponents of the sport criticize its cruelty, and efforts have been made to outlaw it.

THE FIRST VICTIM OF A BULL-FIGHT

The first recorded death of a matador killed in the ring was that of the great José Candido. It took place in the Puerto de Santa Maria arena June 23, 1771, and profoundly impressed the increasing number of enthusiasts – *aficionados* – all over Spain.

'I think I have a right to speak about bullfighting, because I was, for a while, I don't quite know why, but I was, an aspiring bullfighter. For me a bullfighter is an actor facing real things. I spent a good deal of time around the ranches where fighting bulls are raised. But don't be worried, you don't have to approve of bullfights, I don't ask you to, and I certainly wouldn't dream of defending the spectacle. I was personally fascinated by the spectacle as a 'whole' but whatever your attitude may be, remember that you can plug for the bull and there will be no hard feelings about it.' ORSON WELLES

"The Bullfighter is a champion, a paragon" Ernest Hemingway

JOSÉ MARÍA CANO 'LA TAUROMAQUIA'

José María Cano (b.Madrid 1959) is internationally known for his series of wax paintings *The Wall Street 100,* a hundred lifesize portraits on canvas made from paraffin wax which depict their subject solely from an economic viewpoint.

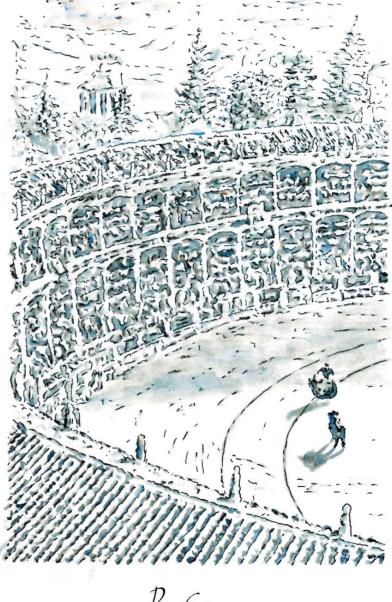
While the *Wall Street 100* tours the world, updating itself according to markets and fiscal ups and downs, Cano has his first solo exhibition at Riflemaker, with *La Tauromaquia* – the most polemical of all Spanish customs. The ritual of bullfighting in Spain is an integral part of society, approved of or not.

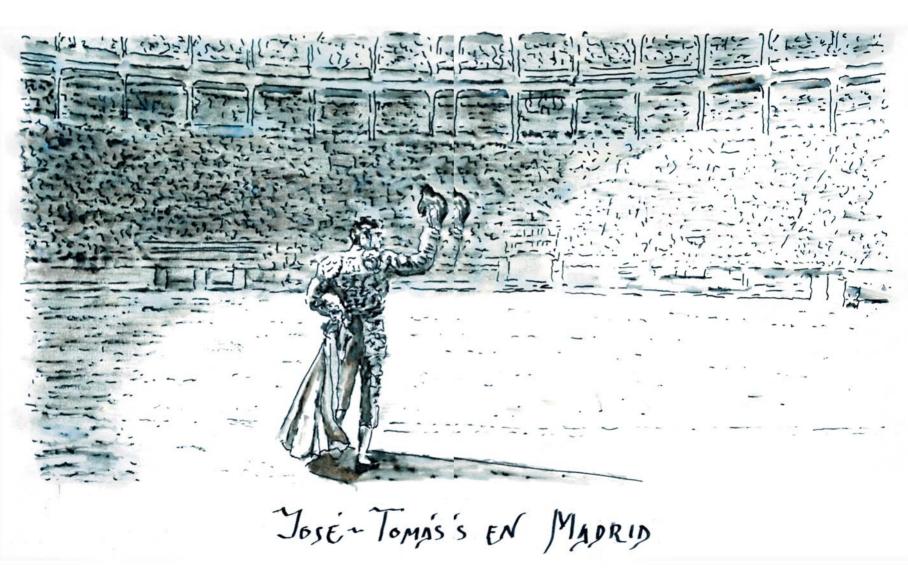
The set of drawings, ink on paper, made in the same signature style as the wax, depict the ceremony, the arena, the preparation, the backstage, the matadors and picadors, the bulls themselves. All of the pageantry which surrounds this Act of Faith, the only sport which has a very real chance of one of the two participants being killed during the short tournament.

The act itself has its origins in Ancient Greece, Crete and Rome – the bullfight is depicted in cave paintings in Spain and Southern France. The series of Verónicas – the most often used cape 'manoeuvre' – is named after the saint who held out a cloth to Christ on his way to the crucifixion. Contrary to popular belief bulls are colourblind and they charge for the cape not because it is red but because it is moving.

Following in the footsteps of Goya, Picasso and others, the work concentrates on the ceremonial occasion itself rather than the controversy. There are 400 bullrings in Spain, the sport is also popular in Mexico, the USA and Portugal. As with all ancient acts, there are also customs and language which has seeped through into everyday life, the names Europe and Italy have Bovine roots.

In 1994 Cano composed an opera – *Luna* – on a Spanish theme with Placido Domingo, Renée Fleming and Theresa Berganza in leading roles.







"EMPIEZANA LAS SIETE"

ACTS OF FAITH

From On Bullfighting by A.L.Kennedy

I'm thinking a lot about faith today – the kind of faith that can lead a person out into their life, into their voice, their vocation, the kind that accompanies human beings as they come close to their deaths, to the plaza's sand, to the moment that lifts, that waits for God.

I've left the Plaza Mayor and come down to the Calle de la Fé, a cramped little street, currently as grey and rain-washed as the rest of Madrid. The calle cuts a thin path up past various bars, a hairdresser's, a cake shop and ends its climb before a bulbously large church. The street was the Calle Sinagoga – Synagogue Street – before Madrid's Jews were expelled in 1492. The synagogue was destroyed and has been replaced by a place of Christian worship ever since. Which is when the calle got its new name, the unconsciously ironic Street of

Faith. Moors and Jews who converted, so the story goes, were forced to walk barefoot here, to climb as far as the church and be baptised – willingness to undergo public humiliation and suffering being taken as a good indicator of conversion to Christianity.

To walk away from life as a refugee by walking away from your God – I can't guess what kind of faith that might involve, the very frail or impregnably certain.

I walk up the Street of Faith and back, find it only slightly depressing, the cold



gnawing my neck. If there's any blasphemy happening here today, it's my intrusion – a person who simply abandoned their faith under quite commonplace duress, a person who will look at anything.

Back in my hotel room I have a tiny plaster model I bought in Granada for good luck. It takes the form of a walking figure, hooded and robed in scarlet. Which is to say, a figure wearing the traditional costume of one of many socially influential lay 'brotherhoods' who parade – a torchlit reminder of the Inquisition's beauties – along with Catholic icons on holy days in a number of Spanish cities.

Across the bottom of the model is the word Rescate. I don't even know what this means, but suspect it may not be anything in my favour. I recall that Lorca, in a fit of piety, or guilt, petitioned to join one of these associations and almost undoubtedly marched with them once, perhaps looking for the benefits of penance, pilgrimage, the salvation in a walk of faith.

Which brings me to the matador and the adrenaline–scented morning of the corrida. While the bull is being brought to the plaza, examined, selected, left alone in a quiet pen, the killer of bulls also prepares. He takes his first steps on the path that can only take him to the sand of the ring, the plaza's test of his good fortune, his faith in himself, his skill.



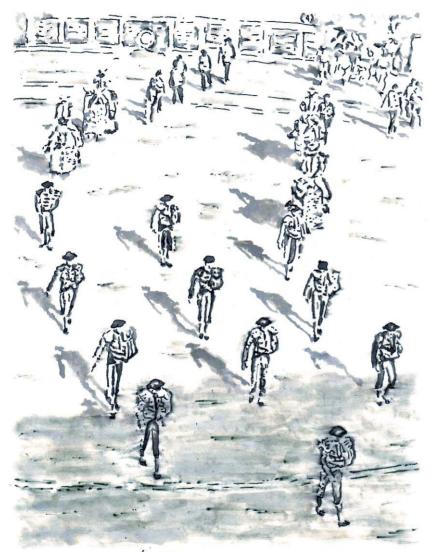
Outside the Las Ventas bull ring in Madrid there are a variety of statues. One shows a matador saluting Alexander Fleming for his achievements in antisepsis, and another features a simple wooden chair, over which is draped the traje de luces, the matador's traditional fighting costume. The chair makes an unfamiliar icon; both threatening and domestic. The chair is where it begins.

The matador may spend his morning as he wishes, trying to idle anonymously in the streets outside his hotel, perhaps

managing to eat, perhaps attempting to doze as he's driven from yesterday's plaza and heads for today's. But, perhaps while the matador snatches a last half-sleep before the business of the day takes hold, there will always come a point when the sword boy or mozo de espada sets out the traje de luces, draped in strict order over a chair. The ritual of the corrida opens with the traje de luces, with the putting on of vestments, if you like. The tight, uncomfortable, complicated and deeply symbolic matador's costume can only be donned with assistance (usually from at least the mozo) in a process which takes something like an hour.

In one of a succession of hotel rooms, a man strips off his everyday self and slowly clothes himself in the corrida. Which may sound overly dramatic, but this is the moment when the matador can no





FILLO

longer avoid consideration of the coming afternoon's trial. Whatever the matador's level of conventionally religious faith, he will have his own accretion of good luck charms, holy images and tokens. Often a small, portable altar sits in the room, witness to each preparation, each internal and external transformation.

It is, naturally, a great honour to be invited to the dressing of a matador, to see the start of his transition from one world to another. In the corrida's world where love and respect are so often tinged with an appetite for celebrity, a voyeur's desire for possession, journalists, aficionados and friends may all jostle about the matador as he becomes himself, the self he only finds in the plaza. It is quite acceptable to watch a man rendered speechless by the closing of his

concentration on an unseen, but anticipated object, the heat of an unknown life, energy without intelligence, instinct pursued and pursuing without compassion, the bull.

Although the traje de luces is little changed since the sixteenth century, its current form is said to owe much to Goya, the eighteenth-century painter and sometime torero. Goya, the artist who portrayed four Spanish kings, dramatic corridas and baroque obscenities. Goya, the man questioned by the Inquisition whose later work shows blurring landscapes of madness



and torture, desolate faces and eyes filled with animal pain, or an utter emptiness. Goyescos, quaintly historical corridas, are still held in his honour – they seek to re-create his constumes rather than his later paintings, of course. But I can't help seeing the twist of helplessly displayed sacrifice in both.

So the matador puts on his trade's history with his traje, the uniform of his calling, a sheath of superstition over his skin. He begins with pink (no one quite knows why pink) silk stockings, two pairs, each smoothed up and over the calf and secured with elastic garters. It seems suitably absurd that in this stylishly dangerous world, stocking wrinkles should be a legitimate concern. Like military men, matadors are meant to die in good order.















"ENRIQUE PONCE"



'Flag-work': the pase en redondo, the pase natural, the pase de pecho and the bull collapses after the death-stab.

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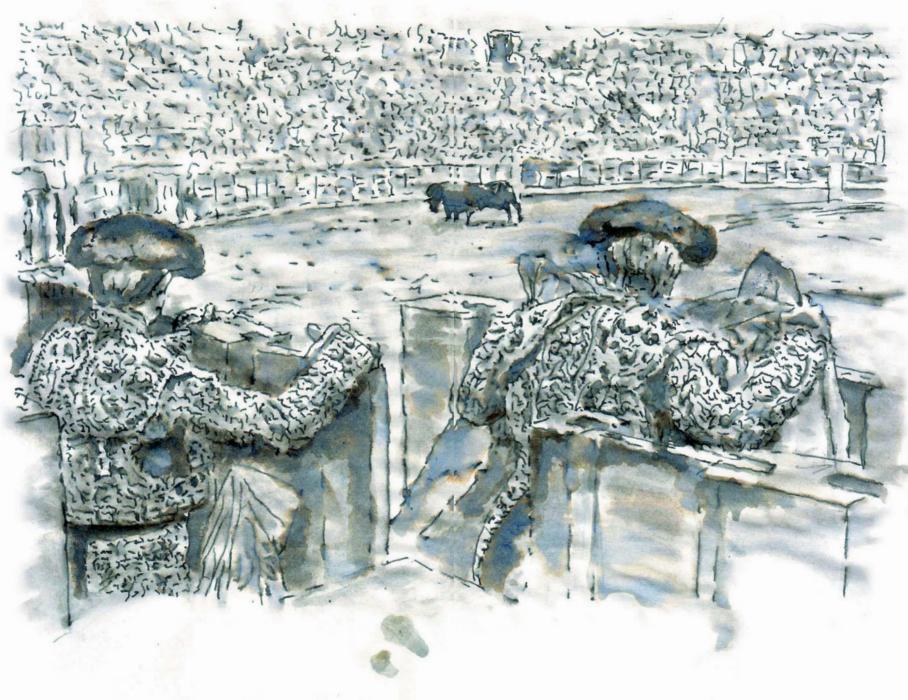
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THE BULLFIGHT AND THE ENGLISH NOVEL...

Although it may at first glance seem far-fetched, the history of the English novel offers some precise parallels to the development of toreo. Modern toreo appeared at the same time and for the same reasons; each art, in its way, satisfied similar, if not identical, orders of social reality.

Samuel Richardson's Pamela which we regard as the first modern novel in English for its attempts at psychological realism, was published in 1740. Francisco Romero invented the muleta, which made possible the entire art of toreo on foot, at some point between 1720 and 1740.

John Masters & Mario Sevilla Mascarenas.

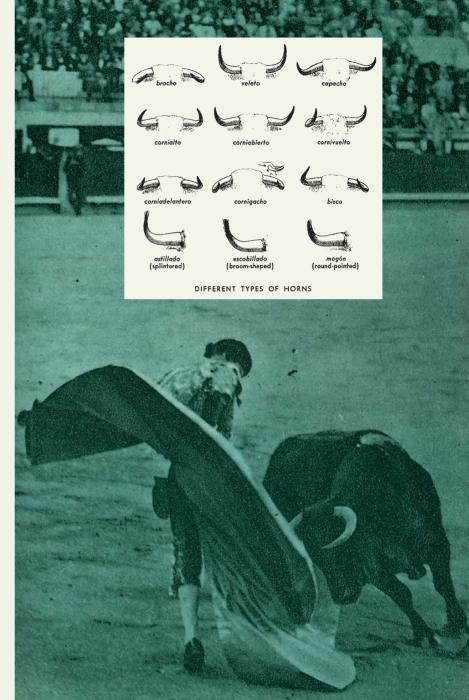
"There is no way of explaining what a bullfight will mean to you. It is there only in the eyes, the ears, the nose, on the blood and the dust of the bullring" John Masters

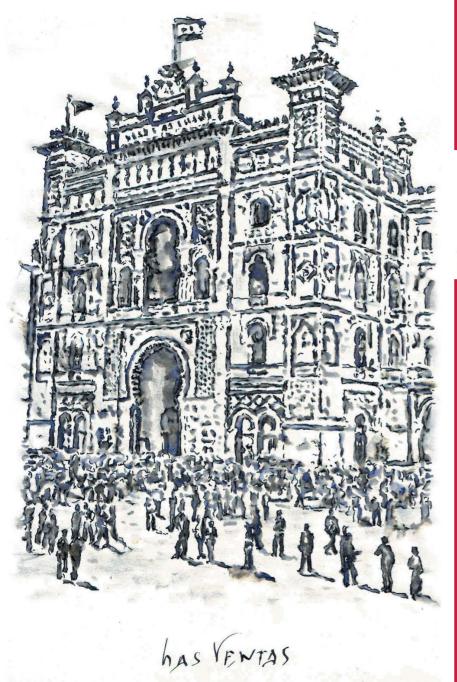
THE FIRST MATADOR

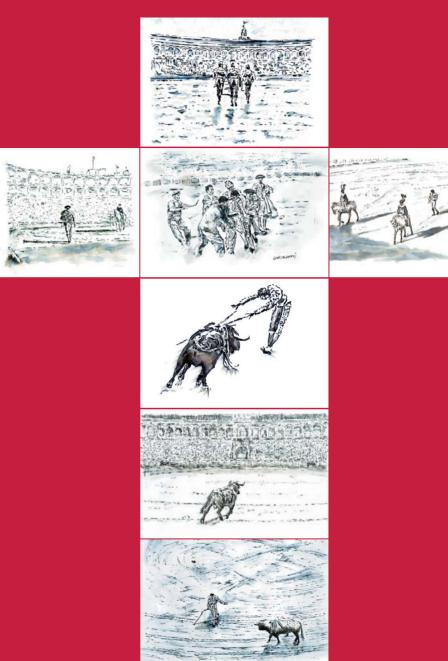
The first 'torero' to attain fame and credit was Francisco Romero, born in Rondo in 1700. His success spurred on others such as Melchor Calderon, the 'wonder of Andalusia', the brothers Martincho, Lorencillo and Marcos Combarro. The greatest of all was Joachim Rodrigues, Costillares, who invented the manoeuvre, suerte del volapié, the idea of walking toward the bull to challenge it, instead of waiting for it to charge the matador.

"The hard-boiled are compensated for their silence; they fly planes or fight bulls or catch tarpon, whereas I rarely leave my room" Saul Bellow, 'Dangling Man', 1944

"Who would go to see this posturing bully, the Matador, if he were dressed in workman's clothes and cap!" George Bernard Shaw

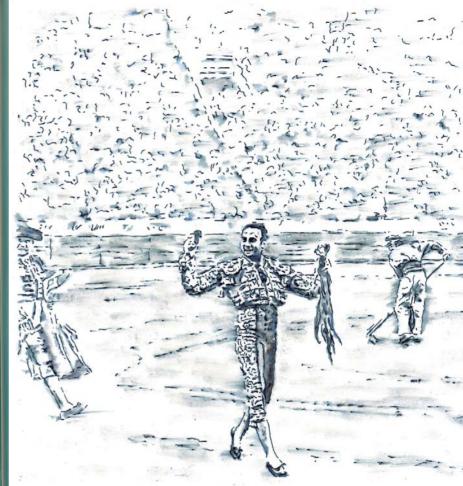








Portada de la revista taurina *Sol y Sombra* de los hermanos Carrión con Vicente Pastor «Chico de la Blusa», muy al principio de su carrera y muy lejos aún de ser figura (17 de julio de 1902).



&FEBRERO-2009 ha Mézico "PATAS ARRIBA"

FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA

At a time when other intellectuals were talking of the abolition of bullfights in Spain, Lorca proclaimed "I think it is the most cultured festival that exists anywhere in the world. The only place where one can go in complete safety to contemplate death surrounded by the most dazzling beauty. What would happen to the Spanish springtime, to Spanish blood, even to the Spanish language if the trumpets of the bullring should ever cease to sound?"

LLANTO POR IGNACIO SÁNCHEZ MEJÍAS

A coffin on wheels is the bed At five in the afternoon Bones and flutes sound in his ears At five in the afternoon The bull was bellowing through his forehead At five in the afternoon The room was rainbowed with agony At five in the afternoon From far away the gangrene comes already At five in the afternoon The trumpet of the lily through green groins At five in the afternoon Like suns his wounds were burning At five in the afternoon And the crowd was breaking the windows At five in the afternoon At five in the afternoon Ay, what a terrible five in the afternoon It was five by all the clocks It was five in the shade of the afternoon

Federico García LORCA

An Appreciation, with Selected

Translations of His Poetry

by ROY CAMPBELL



ciosos resortes de magia, y

ue se adivina una

natural v una cuentos infantiles;

tinado a la tragedia,

AFICIA

LA AFICIÓN DE MANOLETE

saca fuerza:



PREPARATIONS

From On Bullfighting by A.L. Kennedy

And good order is in the details. Matadors usually tape the penis in place against the root and side of the thigh. Any padding added at this point is, naturally, of more psychological than actual benefit, although it may help to make the extremely tight fit of the traje's britches rather more bearable. This snug fit, of course, has the effect of displaying the matador's gender more than eloquently, at which point the padding may provide a certain ego-boost. Aficionados joke about 'one-handkerchief' and 'two-handkerchief' matadors. Very occasionally, a horn rip to the matador's clothing may be more than usually revealing. Morenito de Maracay was informally elected by some aficionados as Torero's *Most Outstanding Man* after one such incident a few years ago. Beyond the obvious innuendo and machismo, Maracay's embarrassment serves as a reminder of how prevalent inner–thigh injuries are in the corrida. It's by no means unheard of for matadors to lose testicles as a result of such wounds.

Over whatever personal arrangements the matador favours, come the underwear: traditionally anachronistic knee-length underpants. Occasionally these have been replaced by full length leotards, in which case the stockings are fastened over them.

Next, the talleguilla – the miraculously tight embroidered silk britches of the traje. These may be in almost any colour, although almost every shade – if not every traje – has its good and bad luck stories. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that yellow, the colour of the sanbenito, still has a particularly evil reputation, particularly among gypsy toreros. Some matadors will even replace the yellow lining of the capote de brega with blue. Loaned suits may bring death to the borrower, red (if it is wrongly suggested) may lead the bull to confuse the man with the red muleta. Characteristically, Julián López López – 'El Juli' – the young phenomenon astonishing Spanish aficionados at the moment, favours a red suit.

The talleguilla is tight, in the manner of fencer's britches, and for much the same reasons. There must be no possibility of the bull's horns snagging a loose piece of cloth and so catching and wounding the matador. Fear, exertion and, in summer, the concentrated heat of a ring will sweat pounds off the matador during the corrida and leave the suit relatively, but still not dangerously, loose. It takes a great deal of time and assistance to ease the man into his talleguilla – some even straddle a rolled towel and are jogged into their britches in tiny jolts. Many toreros say that it takes years for a man to get over the sense of absolute exposure that the talleguilla can inspire in the wearer. From roughly nipple height to just below the knee, they seem to both trap and reveal his body.



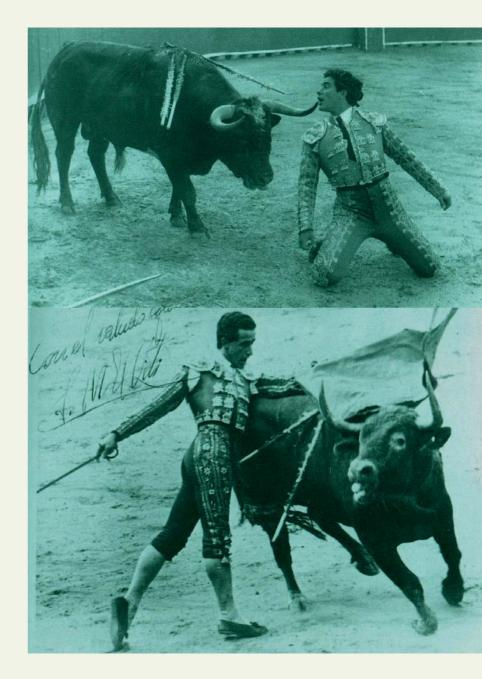
The talleguilla is fastened below the knee, either with drawstrings or, less traditionally, with elastic, and tassels called – of course – machos are precisely positioned at the edge of the talleguilla on the outside of the leg.

Next, the matador's zapatillas – the flat, black slippers which give all but the most graceful a characteristic slightly flat-footed gait. The slippers appear an illogically insubstantial choice of footwear, even in a tradition where self-protection is often synonymous with dishonour. The soles of the zapatillas are, in fact, more

resilient than appearances might suggest and are ribbed for grip. Even so, when fighting in the rain (almost all rings are open-air) matadors may choose to proceed in stocking feet, to prevent potentially fatal slipping, and can then make a sorry spectacle, wet-headed, their suit blurred with blood and water, their stockings in shreds at the feet.

Next, the coleta. This is the false pigtail worn by all toreros, except the picador, as a mark of their profession. Until Belmonte cut his coleta in an attempt to render himself less recognisable in the street, these pigtails were simply a permanent part of any given torero's coiffeur. Since Belmonte, false coletas – or añadidos – often made of sweetheart's or mother's hair – have been fixed to the head under a plain, rounded button so that they just show below the matador's hat, the montera. The official retirement ritual of the matador is still the 'cutting' of the coleta.

Next, the matador puts on a ruffle-fronted linen shirt and fastens his braces. He puts on his narrow black tie – the corbatín – which is secured to his shirt with a stitch of thread. The tie gives an incongruously schoolboy effect, a reminder that matadors begin





their careers as very young men and that their dreams are even younger. Once a sash has been fastened very securely around the talleguilla, the matador is ready for his jacket.

The chaquetilla, or jacket, is a stiff, heavy affair, once again of silk and embroidery which will only reach to something like the depth of the man's shoulder blades. Its colour will match that of the talleguilla. Traditionally, only matadors have the right to wear gold embroidery on their whole traje. Picadors may have gold on their jackets, but their trousers are of buckskin. The banderilleros may wear black velour reminiscent of animal fur. It has changed in shape over the centuries from a type of topknot, to an unwieldy–looking pyramidical structure burdened with black frogging, to the deep, winged skull–cap of today. The montera is worn during the initial

cape passes in the ring. It is removed for the kill and sometimes used to dedicate the death of the bull, either to a particular, forewarned audience member or to the crowd as a whole. Only a promising bull will be dedicated in a brindis, or toast, the best type of animal being reserved for the audience. The audience may then reciprocate by rewarding a good performance with requests that the matador be granted either one or two of the bull's ears – matadors are ranked by the number of ears – and, more vulgarly and recently, tails – that they cut in a season.

Sol y Sombra Castor Cocherito

If the brindis is for the crowd, the matador will swivel round, holding the

montera above his head in salute; he will then throw it over his shoulder to land, either right–side–up or not, on the sand. There are, naturally, superstitions regarding this point. If the montera lands upside–down it is most often said to lie open and waiting to hold the matador's blood. To allay this anxiety, a quieter rival tradition states that, had the montera landed the opposite way, it could have been considered to be spilling his luck. Some matadors will tip the montera over if its gape disturbs them, or simply place it as they would like. The montera is removed for the kill as a sign of respect, primarily to the bull. Very occasionally a senior matador who feels he is facing an inadequate bull will signal his displeasure by killing it without removing his montera.

The matador will also carry a lavishly embroidered parade cape – the capote de paseo – as he first processes into the ring. This will be wrapped around him, sling–fashion in the time–honoured manner, and may bear images of the matador's patron saint.

The traje de luces itself costs something approaching three thousand dollars and can weigh a little in excess of a stone. The jacket, in particular, is exceptionally stiff, partly with embroidery and partly



because of the rather rudimentary care to which it is subjected. During the corrida, the traje will be spattered, if not daubed, with bull's blood and impregnated with sweat. It can only be cleaned by holding it under running water and scrubbing with soap and a hard brush.

Once in his traje, the matador will set his mind, perform his private acts of faith. Then he will start his journey to the ring. A burning, glistening image in silk and metal thread, he will appear walking quietly, perhaps slipping between admirers and autograph-hunters, into the toreros' entrance to the plaza.

This is where the comfort and the delight of his vocation have led. This is where he's on his own. Back in the hotel room there may well be a candle, left burning for his sake.



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LITERATURE

Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Majias by Frederico García Lorca 1935, published by kind permission of Meiol. Historical texts are taken fom Manuel Lozano Sevilla's All About Bullfighting (Planeta). A. L. Kennedy texts are from On Bullfighting Yellow Jersey Press, London 1999 (Random House, New York) © A.L. Kennedy 1999.

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