

Chapter 8 – Les arènes

(The Arena)

This time in Béziers, the sky is sad and grey like granite. The celestial vault pales the Spanish architecture of the arena made of stones and bricks. Flies annoy spectators. It's a heavy day. As Georges Bizet's anthem rings out on the battlefield's bleachers, Julio, the matador, emerges from the chapel under pressure. He enters the ring, his face tenses and proud like an English lord. With his azure blue and gold suit of lights, he is alone with the sky and the sun, curiously absents on this day. The real wealth of this man, originally a modest peasant from Salamanca, was acquired with patience and hard work during his long career as a bullfighter. Like a scientist, he knows ground and distances. With courage and will, he understands how to control and slow down the bull's charge by bewitching it in his cape. So far, this mastery has allowed him to fight and stay alive. Kill or be killed! That could be his epitaph. On this dull and gloomy day, his career is coming to an end. Yet he wants to end this last encounter in glory and become a legend.

It's time for the paseo now. The alguacils come for Julio in a martial choreography, as he is the lidia leader. He parades in front, and everyone salutes the presidency. He stops for a moment. A tic, a rite, familiar to him, surprises the non-aficionado. He loosens the collar of his shirt slightly with two fingers, moves his chin forward and extends his neck like a turtle. Then Julio unfurls his cape and to Carmen's rhythm, he makes a few passes to smooth it out. A peon takes position in the centre, sign in hand, where the ganaderia, weight, age, colours, motto, bull number and matador's name are written. The first adversary was ready to come out. Julio, who with his cuadrilla joined the burladero, waiting with a tense face.

For as long as I've been waiting

in this dark room
I hear cheers and songs
At the end of the corridor¹;

"The humiliating name I was given is Timador. To be pronounced while shouting. I am despised and distrusted. All this to make me more aggressive. I am still young. Despite my build, I am only four years old. The peaceful meadows of Andalusia where I grew up were a grazing paradise. They didn't make me a beast, nor a fighting animal. All this is man's invention. It is he who has built my destiny and that of my ancestors through successive inbreeding. Just now I suffered during the afeitado. They held me in a narrow straitjacket, the cajon. My head was pulled out of the bars by ropes, so I couldn't move it, and they filed down my horns with a saw about five or six centimetres. Horns for us are like teeth for humans. They then polished, coloured and varnished them so that nothing was visible. If the horns bleed, they plug them up with wooden splinters. Now I'm reluctant to use them. The slightest touch is painful. My direction of steering is distorted because of this shortening. They made me swallow drugs. Since then, I have diarrhoea and feel dazed. I can't escape the trap anymore. My fate is set. Unless..."

Someone touched the lock
And I dived into the light of day
...
I will end up getting it
This ridiculous ballet

The clarines sounded and with a glance Julio assessed Timador, this negro, blanco and bragado opponent. His coat confirms his caste. He has relatively short horns. The ground is a bit wet. He stands a good distance away. The

¹ Francis Cabrel, Famous French artist, Samedi soir sur la Terre, La corrida

matador presents his cape and gives a first veronica of which he has the secret, on the left horn.

Is this world serious?

...

I'm not going to shake in front of

That puppet, that lightweight!

I'm going to catch him, him and his hat

Make him spin like the sun

Under the applause, Julio gives him a second veronica, and it seems that Timador does not lower his head enough. It is only half lowered. This bull lacks nobility but his bravery is there. He charges at the slightest request. Finally, Julio gives his cape a breather and gives him a third veronica again on the left horn.

They'd hit me hard in my neck

For me to give in

I prayed for all this to stop

I remember Andalusia

Timador enters the game and seems to lower his head appropriately. However, halfway through the game, he straightens up and weighs in on Julio with a full charge. The impact is violent. Julio is propelled very high and topples over the horns. The maestro falls back on his head. Once on the ground, Timador charges him and pushes him against the barriers.

The bull is pushed aside, and Julio is raised, stunned. He stammers a few words. He can't move. Everyone understands that we are witnessing a tragedy.

I hear them laugh like I gasp

I see them dance like he succumbs

I did not know one could have so much
Fun around a tomb
Is this world serious?



Julio remained hemiplegic. One day, his friends organised a private bullfight for him, where he faced a brava cow in a wheelchair, with a muleta tied to his hand by a tie. He later died of peritonitis at the age of 49.

The same evening of the bullfight, Timador ended up in the butcher's shop.



In the legend of Timador and Julio, they still face each other in other lives and dance!

Si, si hombre, hombre
Baila
Hay que bailar de nuevo
Y mataremos otros
Otras vidas, y otros toros
Y mataremos otros
Venga, venga
Venga, venga a bailar



Bullfighting vocabulary

feitado: Shaving of the horns

Alguacils: Arena policeman, responsible for enforcing the bullfighting rules

Burladero: Plank shelter located in front of an opening in the fence and forming a chicane

Clarines: Bullhorns

Ganaderia: The stud farm

Lidia: A fight in three acts and 15 minutes only

Paseo: the opening parade

Quadrilla: group of matador's assistants, banderilleros and picadors

Timador : swindler, trickster

Veronica: Bullfighter's cape pass