

TORERO

Incarnadine dawn came before Santos slept.
Day of the corrida!
A dark mountain sprouting stiff red and yellow flowers
and reverberating thunder waited behind his lids.
He must strike lightning into a certain crater
between the damp ridges before thunder passed him through.

Early to the rites of preparation, steeping
in the vow to avenge his brother Miguel.
Long prayer before the Virgin. Hot laughter
with his comrades, fear encased in brocade,
superstition covered with colors of scorn.
He had even looked at his bulls and learned
one was twin to the hooking horn-wise engine
that routed Miguel's soul with a splintered thrust.

Last notes of La Virgen de la Macarena flared from trumpets,
edded through the heat in his head. Shrill corkscrews
pulled the cuadrillas into the circle of ferret eyes.
A thousand prisms paving his shoulders ignited in dusty sun.
The circle hailed his name, caressed it, intimate
as a lover with the sound of it. Something else--
treble breeze perhaps, pitched to the trumpets--
hissed his name, paced his march step, clung
to the afterbeat. The two flashing semaphores beside him
were silent, fierce-smiling their aficionado faces.
His name wound back in the bell of a horn or the wind's mouth.
The musicians played with too much pathos today.
It was better when they blasted, pompous and bawdy,
like ponderous heralds of Caesar.

"Dios, we have a gale," growled an assistant.
"We will have to drown the capes!" The wind
examined the folded colors, the hair of men and horses.
"Don't work so close, Santos," his banderillero pleaded.
"You don't have to paint your belly with the bull's blood.
You're here. It is enough."
Layers of eyes probed Santos's pores;
the wind stuttered his name. He made no reply.