

TORERO

Great images. Lots of them.
I underlined some of the
ones I liked best.

Incarnadine dawn came before Santos slept.
Day of the corrida!
A dark mountain sprouting stiff yellow flowers
and reverberating thunder waited behind his eyelids.
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 secretly looked at his bulls. The breeder
told him 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, eddied through the heat
in Santos's 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 bright 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.

Santos did not hear hoofs pulverizing sand,
sounds of the watered cape, the olés. His first bull
was a mountain, an armed freight train,
the blood-mate to Miguel's damaged and devious one.
But this bull was honest, boldly magnificent, like one
his grandfather once spoke of, spared by the wishes
of an admiring crowd. Never to happen again.
Santos heard only wind instruments deciding his dance,
humming his mind like wires, then the racking force
of his will arcing the ring, entering the pic,
bracing it against the picador's old sin
of twisting, and stealing the best of his bull.

A trilling time jam, a man unhorsed,
and finally the God-lonely bugle
retiring the picadors, trailing the man/animal cry
of all who live awhile in the center of the centrifuge.

Santos placed his own banderillas, planted them close,
claimed only shallow blood and hide enough to hold.
He watched the adorned idol carved from legend,
raised from a Minoan frieze, watched him assess
the arena, yellow and red bouquets bobbing against
his blackness. Saw his talent without latent flaws,
already certain this bull would not covet the quarter
where he quenched his horn in a picador's horse.
Saw him suddenly a handsome pander, parading,
saw himself the same, the two of them
in irresistible collusion, peddlers
of a nebulous puzzle, together a dark matching piece
for the niche behind the ferret eyes.

Santos took the sword and muleta for the last act,
the faena. Wind snatched aside the cardinal cloth.
But this toro chose greatness. Waited. Shared.
Santos designed a new pass:
Slow ballet of cerise wing and silver pivot,
a celebration-- a black mass of muscle, turning,
winding wide to spare his partner's spine.
The pimping wind, bared Santos again, boring
into a brief shimmering hate for Miguel
and his curving tricks to crimp his bulls' backs.
The pase de la muerte fed the rising circle of fever,
flared the ferret eyes. The wind gasped,
held its breath, puffed away thought, gusted
between passes, reeled across the circle gone hoarse.

Santos saluted the animal with the killing sword.
Let no ears or tail be taken from this bull.
If the other ubiquitous beast wished to bestow trophies,
nothing less than a trident of horns
and the point of his maleness would do. Once more
Santos heard his name as the bull smeared by,
redding his spangles, honing his senses on horn
and the memory of it stored in his scars.
Certain as stench and bone-rattling sideswipe,
he heard his name. Rolling off the bull's tongue,
it registered orange and green in the dark
behind his eyes. The voice of another avenger
repeating his name.

Through all his years of bulls only Santos spoke,
his fluent muleta commanding the charges, punishing
the pale-hearted quickly, persuading the worthy ones
of their chances to plunge their eagerness,
telling them at length to bow their heads
for the offering, the ritual communion.
Veronicas ago Santos would have laughed
or called it a prank of weariness or wind.
Did Miguel's bull announce his name aloud?

Santos spat dust from his mouth. He mulled the rarity of bovine twins, far more novel than multiple mortals. He must not succumb to overawe. This was el toro de bandera every true bullfighter hoped for-- measuring the man, rationing his rage, keeping his courage and form to the end. The matador could do no less. Nostrils and eyes streaming grit, he sculpted the short cape, made it vault, caress, made it flow. Ads and signs tore off the walls; Santos defied the blowing, moved to the brass song in his brain. Perfect parones, spinning, people thunder, levitating. Pase de pecho. Perfect. Bull dancer and minotaur. Time reverted. Raced back. Stumbled. Coiled. Santos sighted down his sword.

A bull to take recibiendo-- the ultimate tribute and risk-- waiting like a figurine, committed to that stand, waiting for the dint of the deified charge to sink the espada. Holding down the triangle head with serge on a stick, leading it past his sledging chest, trying to remember the kill would be for his own twin, Miguel.

The cardinal cloth swung forward, beckoned. The bull came. Santos leaned over the horn with a name cry, rescued his lungs by a sequin, feet still as stones. A flawless execution ~~except steel and bone~~ collided; the blade bowed and sprang out of its hot sheath, out of crazed thunder. The withered flower patch bloomed with new crimson; the bull mastered desperate legs, flailing his tongue on the taint in his mouth. Santos refused to heed his wrist, the wind, the shrieked advice from his retinue and the stands. He retrieved his sword, cursing.

The centrifuge screamed and silenced unheard. He calmed himself in his bowl of sweat and whiplash chill. A bugle played in his head, an aviso. "We will have total perfection, si, Diablo?"

The bull summoned him, poised like his bronze kind on the parapet, posing his invitation low and ready. Sun flashed along the sword edge, blazing images, icons of the Virgin, faces of his brother, el toro, his brother. Santos moved to the blossoming spot, light with new speed. A piece of last Sunday's poster of Miguel spiraled toward the matador's eyes. Triumphant horn lifted as steel drove down, a compound arch. Santos heard his name, heard the wind inside him, heard them fall together.

LAKEFRONT PLAYERS HOST BAUDELAIRE BACKSTAGE

That's how the headline would read if the Tribune got wind of this. This was probably our last poetry presentation. It's just as well you can't stay for an interview with the arts critic. He's already fingering words like passé.

You need a docent if you want to see Chicago. You always liked big cities by dark. I own a copy of Les Fleurs du Mal in French, ripe with urban musk. Our smileless cast party is breaking up. Come, I'm drunk enough to show you The Loop, monsieur.

Lake breezes flutter the curtain of Diesel fumes, not a smell you would know. The phallic towers of the powerful probe the high smoke, challenging low-flying angels. You can see the aura of millions of souls for miles offshore--part light, part heat and motion. A searchlight's bias swath sweeps your crimped mouth. Your grimace deepened tonight. You saw how your poems played the house. Out of sync with immortality. Killing the audience is what we try to do but not that way. At least they died politely.

Now we're in the outback, still in sight of magnificence--magnanimity--maggots. The lower level is pocked with puddled reflections, shimmering shades of lust and logic and obligatory beauty. The trumpet upstairs is tonguing out blues-- a color, a condition. You almost, but don't quite, fit here either, Mr. B.

The metal traffic never stops; the motorized moving from somewhere to elsewhere scores the night, never out of reach of hands that open, caress, point, make a fist. Glass clinks, machines gritch, whine and mostly close hard on your money. Heated grease sounds like rain, neon viscera surround the collage-- red circles of beef, squares of frozen fish, potato pyramids. The man sleeping in the cardboard box is waiting to eat from Chicago's garbage.

You nod at parallels to 19th century Paris. But tell me, how did you bend the edgy shards of yourself inside dodecasyllable margins and rhymes you called "lanterns that light the pathway of the idea?"

(cont.)