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PREVIEW

ON FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE AND THE BULLFIGHT

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PREVIEW

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Brian J. Sullivan

To "Tamal," "Pacorro," "Sayo," "Greñas," and "Angelillo," who  
have sculptured the air.

PREVIEW

ON FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE AND THE BULLFIGHT

by

BRIAN J. SULLIVAN, B.A.

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Brian J. Sullivan

July 5, 1985

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## INTRODUCTION

The best way to get to know the art of bullfighting 'el toreo' is to watch it; to perceptively capture that which is not only projected by light but through sounds, smells and even touch. To be sure, not all senses brought into play at a given taurine event will always be consciously perceived, much less articulated, but many of them have been. Slowly over the past centuries, companion to the creation of the physical bullfight has been the evolution of its own language, a taurine argot, both spoken and written (not included in this study is "caló," a dialect much used around bullfighting).

Unquestionably the most resounding trait of this taurine lexicon is its figurative nature<sup>1</sup>, and this study has limited itself to this topic. These are figures which startle, touch, caress, glow, darken and entertain because they are not worn out by the tedium of daily existence. Instead, they depict la fiesta brava, a celebration, a drama, a special event, which borrows from the objects, movements, men, beasts and the words surrounding them in that "real" world outside the bullring and throws them all together again, re-created, into a new physical and verbal world inside the arena. The verbal figures, both archaic and neologicistic, remain fresh; or they move around, trading places as they change their meanings, or borrow repeatedly from the world outside the bullring in the streets and on las ganaderías.

This study begins by taking a "high evaluation" of language: a faith in words as an effective way to capture physical reality--here,

the world of the bulls (Veritas in Dicto). In W. M. Urban's words, to take a "low evaluation of language" is to deny that any linguistic phenomenon outside the scope of empirical measurement can have meaning. Such a rule discounts automatically the "great majority of our experience: metaphysical, aesthetic, ethical, religious, and cannot account for some of the most fundamental concepts which science employs."<sup>2</sup> In accepting this statement by Urban, this study also takes heed of Geoffrey Leech's warning:

No linguistic warranty can be found for metaphor; instead, the compensatory connection is to be sought outside language, in some kind of psychological, emotional, perceptual<sub>3</sub> relation between the literal and figurative meanings of the items.

In this light, much of the theory on verbal figures exploited in this study to be applied to the taurine lexicon, will be done so to a great part subjectively. This study does not purport to be a scientific study but a humanistic one. To quote Leech again: "the most interesting and illuminating aspect of communication in literature"--here applied as well to spoken language--"is beyond the scope of linguistics."<sup>4</sup>

An instrument of literary language, "semantic deviance"(figurative language), is viewed by critics as something that occurs in natural speech. Urban sees "radical metaphor (not the conscious reflective type which the poet uses) as the root of all transfers of meaning and of natural speech constructions."<sup>5</sup> New words can be created out of "derivations and compositions, borrowings or translating from other languages or changing the existing meaning of a word."<sup>6</sup> The transfer of meaning through verbal figure fulfills the major role of word

motivation in order either to fill in the gaps of vocabulary created by societal innovation, and/or in order to enhance the expressiveness of the language<sup>7</sup> (e.g., catedral 'cathedral' for "bull" when he is enormous). Without verbal figure, much of the taurine experience could not be represented except by long descriptive passages and even then, with non-aurine language, much would be lost. It is said that "young languages still in the problematic process of development, expressing the searching function of language, are rich in metaphor."<sup>8</sup> Many verbal gaps later to be filled in by metaphor in the bullfight have been caused by the innovations in the cape maneuvers, brought on by its aesthetic and technical revolution beginning at the turn of this century. Such an artistic revolution in el toreo has forced its language into this "problematic process."

For Urban, natural language develops by passing through three stages: "the copy or adherent stage, the analogical or metaphorical stage, and the symbolic stage."<sup>9</sup> Most akin to the "copy stage" is onomatopoeia, where the very sounds represent an intrinsic element in the meaning of the referent. In the bullfight there is little onomatopoeia, probably because the essence of its art is both visual and temporal, not auditory as in music. Onomatopoeia, however, does exist: in the choral olé, which shows the crowd both participates and approves; another example includes abuchear < abucheo 'booing.' However, whether words, true to their literal meanings, are products of an onomatopoeic or copy stage is not of interest to this study. What is of interest is the evolution from the literal to the "metaphoric stage," and then, finally, to the "symbolic stage." There is, then, a

tendency in a word to become detached from its original meaning.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, there are fewer language signs (words) than the infinite number of "objects" which need to be represented.<sup>11</sup> To refer again to Urban: natural language finds itself in the polemic where "words must be indeterminate enough to be capable of being transferred analogically, but words must also be determinate enough to retain their reference to reality."<sup>12</sup> This study contends that the indeterminate character of the meanings of the words throughout the taurine lexicon (i.e., the figures) will not be an obstacle to understanding what the bullfight is all about. Instead, these transferences of meaning, in their ambivalence--in the polysemia they create--will reveal what the bullfight can be and what it can symbolize. Such a premise would agree with Urban's thesis of the evolution of the individual word from the "metaphoric stage" into the "symbolic."

The modern bullfight, then, offers a capsulized world in which to view a phenomenon natural to universal language. This study takes inspiration from Spanish anthologist José María de Cossío's monumental taurine work, Los toros, tratado técnico e histórico. In the preface he states, here in translation: "A study of the way in which figurative language"--in el toreo--is formulated merits an attention which at the present time I cannot lend to it". (to the knowledge of the author of this study, no such inquiry has ever been undertaken). Cossío again: "Such a study would throw light on invaluable data concerning the inventiveness and imagination of the Spanish people, a key to the character of"--their--"literature".<sup>13</sup>

Admission must be made that any treatment of the taurine

figurative language focusing on the individual words alone and not on the whole sentence structure would have to fall short of being a complete observation of the language of el toreo. Yet if this present study can make a foundation out of these "building blocks" of individual words (some phrases will be looked at) from which to facilitate such later study, then it has served a part of its purpose.

The first task of this study is to review briefly the historical roots of the modern bullfight. In this way the bullfight's archetypal nature will be clarified. Chapter I of this study will establish a criterion to interpret the meaning of the individual verbal figures. Chapter II will describe the bullfight in technical as well as aesthetic terms using the verbal figures as "windows" revealing this focus. Chapter III will apply a structural semantic methodology to the verbal figures whereby their individual meanings will be shown relevant to a greater structure either socially and/or morphologically motivated. Chapter IV will develop this verbal structure to interpret the symbolic character of the bullfight. In order to make these verbal structures more palpable and to establish their relevance to the universal Spanish language, examples of literary verbal figures will be cited, for the most part, from the taurine poems of Spain's Generation of 1927, a generation contemporaneous with an innovative time in the modern bullfight. Says Cossío in reference to the poems in his taurine poetic anthology: "The spectacle"--of the bullfight--"reflects itself in verse just as it was at the time of the composing of the poems."<sup>14</sup> A trust in the effectiveness of language to capture the physical world is given some precedence in los toros 'the world of the bulls' when an

eighteenth century poet describes matador José Delgado Hillo's treatise on taurine precepts, La tauromaquia o arte de torear. He writes:

Delgado la tauromaquia  
escribió con tanto acierto  
que a propósito parece  
usó de pluma el acero

tinta de sangre de toro  
tintero y cendal de cuerno<sup>15</sup>

Delgado in his Tauromaquia  
wrote with such flair  
that his intention it seems  
was to use the "plume" for the  
sword,  
ink for the bull's blood,  
barbs and inkwell for the horn

This study will attempt to continue the "high evaluation of language" seen in the above poem and, in so doing, bring about a better understanding of the nature of verbal figure in both natural as well as in literary language, in addition to bringing about a clearer knowledge of the physical world of los toros.

The author of this study has performed the task of translating the Spanish poetry into English, and he has consulted the respective bi-lingual dictionaries to translate the taurine lexicon. Some readers may consider any attempt at translating the bullfight's language into a foreign tongue as an ill-fated one. While for the case of the translation of taurine poetry the author makes no defense, he does suggest that in the translation of taurine words per se the task has been beneficial. For the translation of these words must first demand an understanding of their literal meaning--something which the distance between two languages can foster; only then, can the figurative sense later be discovered.

Although today bullfighting is practiced in the Iberian Peninsula,



parts of meridional France and then across the Atlantic in the "new world" of México, Colombia, Venezuela, Perú, and on a minor scale in Ecuador and Central America, the art is still Spanish, as much as is the language (excepting in France and Portugal) of those who practice and view it. This is not to underestimate the enhancement el toreo has received from "non-Spanish" influences--in particular, its Gypsy character via Andalucía and its "Indian" essence in the monolithic Mexican bullfight of today. Nevertheless, this study must first return to Iberia.

#### ARCHETYPES

Over and over again, the taurine verbal figures repeat the themes of "war," "religion," "sex," and "rurality" so that the bullfight proves itself verbally to be what it is physically: the symbolic vestige of these themes in the Spanish civilization through time. These themes here cited contain the basic archetypes at the heart of bullfighting. Just as Iberia is unique in soil, climate, location--neither integrated with northern Europe, nor with Africa, and is both west and east at once--in its races and in its history, so are its toros unique. The unique quality of "the bulls" takes in both the bulls in their literal sense, of the flesh, blood and bone, and los toros in the figurative sense--the ritual of the modern bullfight, its art, la fiesta brava. All of Europe had seen the savage bulls roam its plains at one time or another in history, but it was through the device of man, warring man, that the strain of the "fighting bull" was



preserved on Iberian soil<sup>16</sup> (el toro ibérico). The rest of Europe domesticated him. The shifting armies of the Christian reconquest of Spain left wide tracts of Iberian land uninhabited—but for the savage bull that is. This sporadic war was to endure for over seven hundred years. Since the horse played a decisive role in these battles, it was imperative that the condition of the stock and the equestrian skills of man be kept honed.<sup>17</sup> What better representative of the enemy to train with than the savage bull! And so, el toreo al caballo 'toreo on horseback' with man armed by lance, evolved out of a functional necessity of warring Spanish society.

Little by little, the ancient simulated battle, the bullfight, evolved into a sport—the sport of the only social class equipped with horses: los caballeros, the noblemen. Eventually the lance was replaced by the rejón, a barbed stick, ancestor of the banderilla of today. In that way the "playing" life of the bull was prolonged and a new aesthetic of grace began to characterize the event. Sometime during the 18th century, el toreo, the art of the noblemen, took a radical step, both technically and eventually sociologically: it dismounted from the horse. From that day on, the prestige that had been attached to the horsemen became associated with the commoner on foot. The nobleman's footman thus became the prime performer by way of distracting the bull's charge with a cape. These chulos, from the peasantry, now made the bullfight into el toreo a pie 'toreo on foot.'<sup>18</sup> The delicacy and grace of their capework replaced robust horsemanship and opened the bullfight to the lower social ranks of men.

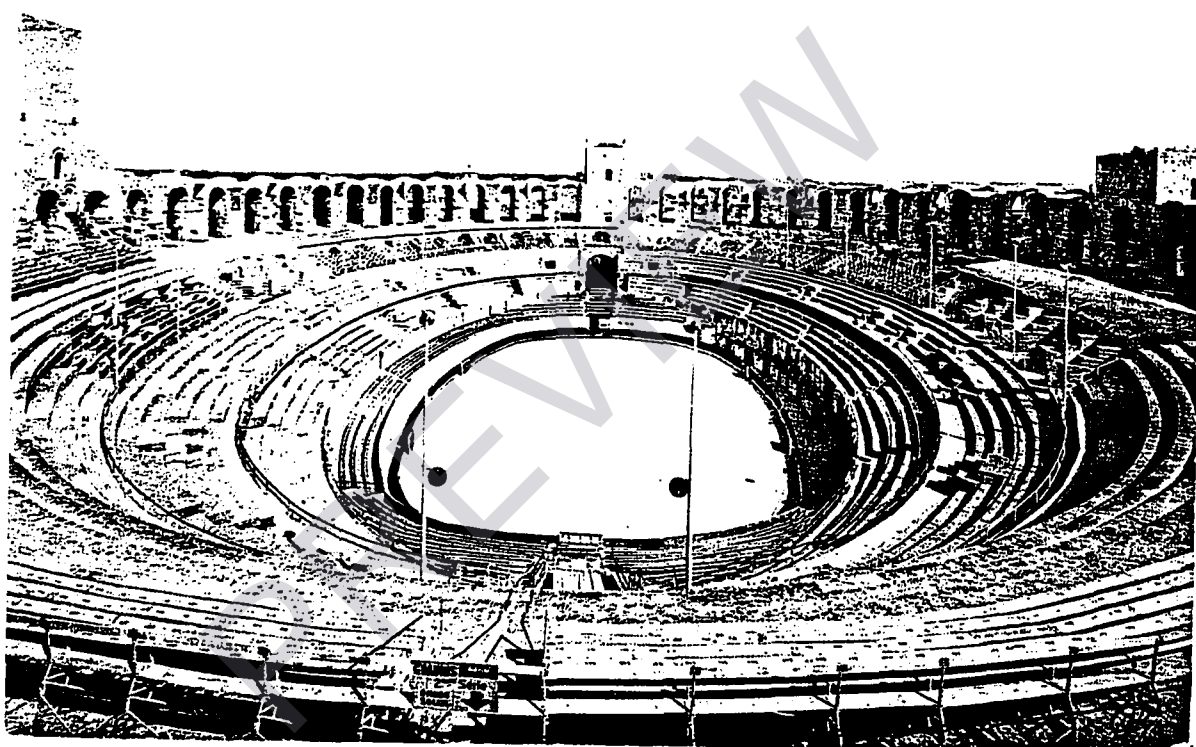
Undeniably, the bullfight, or corrida de toros (a la usanza

española), has links to classical Greece and, later, Rome. Before the modern bullfight evolved its capework, it was called los juegos de toros y cañas 'the games of bulls and canes' (canes referring to the posts which fenced in the first primitive arenas). Jugar a los toros 'to play the bulls,' or correr a los toros 'to run the bulls,' are antecedent terms for today's torear, literally 'to bull.' Correr 'to run' and corrida 'the running event,' indeed are antiquated figures for the modern bullfight where capework is intended to 'slow down,' or moderate' templar, the charge of the bull. Today, in the Mexican bullfight correr is most often used with mano 'hand' (i.e., correr la mano) to refer to "extending" the hand--and hence, the cape--in as long an arc as possible while passing the bull. It is curious Spain names the bullfight, the event with the least running, la corrida, and calls men running with bulls in Pamplona el encierro 'the enclosing,' referring to the enclosure of the barricaded streets, modern substitute for the 'enclosure' once produced by horsemen, cows and oxen.

El toreo is the only art of civilized man today where the participants try to kill one another: man bull; bull man. It is the Roman amphitheater revived and, indeed, the bullfight at times gets named el circo 'the circus.' In meridional France today, bullfights are staged in the ancient Roman amphitheaters of Arles and Nimes (see photo 1). The Latin circus 'circle,' the oval shape of the amphitheater is analogous to taurine Spanish el ruedo 'the ring,' or redondel 'the round place.' The world of el toreo names the surface of the bullring in the same way as Rome: la arena 'the sand,' the soil that it consists of. At times bullfighters are named gladicántanos 'gladiators.' Members

1

ROMAN ARENA OF ARLES, FRANCE



of the crowd attending the bullfight signal premiation by waving their white 'handkerchiefs' los pañuelos and disapproval by booing and throwing epithets, fruit, and seat cushions. Los avisos 'the warnings' and la multa 'the penalty' fall on the unsuccessful matador. El indulto 'the pardon' graces the noblest of bulls. Even as the Roman Circus has acheived a lighter tone in its modern descendant of "Barnum and Bailey" where clowns entertain, the formal bullfight enjoys a modern cousin where clowns "play" the bulls. These events are called payasadas clownings,' or charlotadas < charlot: the Latin world's name for Charlie Chaplin. The acrobatic feats performed at such events call to mind the similar feats depicted in the ancient Cretan frescos of the Knossian Palace.<sup>19</sup>

#### WAR

Although el toreo is the rite of provincial towns and of great urban centers and although it is performed on foot for the most part, militaristic archetypes still endure in the modern bullfight. Starting with the verbal figure of el lance 'the lance,' now a generic term for a successful cape pass, the symbolism of battle is relived in the arena. Even a political archetype could also participate with that which is militaristic, for a hierarchy of commands governs the taurine experience. Besides la presidencia 'the presidency,' los jueces 'the judges' oversee the fight; el clarinero 'the bugler' signals commencement; los alguaciles 'the sheriffs' unlock the toril gate, el portón de los sustos 'the gate of fears.' The bull enters the ring

carrying la divisa 'the distinguisher' or emblem representing his ranch of origen; his brand is called el escudo 'the shield'; if he is a noble bull, he is toro de bandera 'flag bull.' There , awaits el matador 'the killer,' managed by un apoderado 'one who has power over'; his cuadrilla 'team or band of peones' are his infantry (el toreo a pie 'on foot'); los picadores or lanceros 'the lancers' on horseback are his cavalry. It is the semblance of an army brought into the confines of la barrera 'the barrier,' sometimes called las vallas 'the obstacles.'

#### SEX

Yet the archetypes do not end with the theme of war, for the bull down through the ages of Western civilization has also symbolized fertility.<sup>20</sup> Physiologically, the bull is one of the most imposing creatures of earth. His testicles are disproportionately large compared to other animals, including man; yet curiously for want of a visible phallus, the bull's protruding erect horns are hyperbolic representatives. El toreo al caballo 'by horseback' in medieval times often was companion to a wedding ceremony celebration as in El Cid<sup>21</sup>; the groom demonstrating his virility by spilling the blood of such a potent adversary. Unequivocally, the ultimate feat of the modern bullfight, the sword thrust, el acto supremo 'the supreme act,' or la hora de verdad 'the hour of truth'--or simply, la suprema or la verdad, suggests the sexual act. It begins symbolically as a phallic pursuit, with the horn directed toward the elusive feminine organ: the capes and the man himself, exquisitely dressed, risking emasculation with every

pass when the lowered horn threatens his thighs and genitals. The contest ends with the sword buried up to the hilt, enough to mojarse los dedos 'until fingers are wet' in the warm blood, a symbolic substitute for the lubricant of the sex organs.

#### RELIGION

At the other pole of sexuality is virginity. The patron saint of the bullfighting world (as seen in the icons of bullrings chapels; at times in the images on the capa de paseo 'the dress cape of the bullfighters') is Roman Catholicism's Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, as "la Virgen de la Soledad" 'the Virgin of Solitude.' Spain's bullfighters, in particular, look to "la Virgen de la Macarena" as Mexico's to their "Guadalupe." Unavoidable, as already suggested in this leap from sexuality to virginity are the religious archetypes pervading the taurine experience. For indeed blood and death in the bullring, whether of bull or man, ultimately represents the solemn sacrificial offering. The bullfight has been labeled Spain's true native religion.<sup>22</sup> But, surely, just as Roman Catholicism converted Iberia, bullfighting acculturated itself to Catholicism. In Roman Catholicism it is bread and wine which are transfigured into the body and blood of Christ. 'Blood' sangre paints the taurine experience as it progresses: on the bull's lanced pelt, on the capes, on the very suit of the matador, and then onto the sands. Wine, too, is part of the spectacle. The public drinks from the ubiquitous wineskins, which, as rewards, are thrown to the triumphant matador. Prayer in the capillas



which adjoin all the major bullrings precedes the formal ceremony of the cuadrilla's entrance to the ring: el paseo 'the walk.' Upon entering the ranks of full matador, the newly initiated fighter (novillero named by virtue of the novillos 'steers' he fights a priori) is dubbed el ahijado 'the godson' confirmed by the full matador at his side, el padrino 'the godfather.'

#### RURALITY

A treatment of rural archetypes would trace the bullfight back through its agrarian links to its prehistory in hunting. Spain's history--if not European history--begins where the cave walls of Altamira show pictographs of horned bison.<sup>23</sup> The blood of the slain animal was sometimes the ink--or call it paint--of these primeval drawings, the first known "verbal" figures perhaps: a vague distinction between being art and language. Were such figures, scribed with the very blood of the mammoths they depicted, the unmistakable identification of life in the language of the pictograph? Were these drawings authored by the same killers of these painted beasts? And if so, would not the modern bullfight's synthesis of life and art begin back with the Iberian cavemen? Perhaps the role of hunter and beast is best observed today in the modern bullfight by the portrayal of the bull to la fiera 'the fierce one,' and the man to el diestro 'the adroit one.' Such natural elements as basic as the already mentioned la arena 'the sand,' la sangre 'the blood' and sol y sombra 'sun and shade,' el aire 'the air,' meaning "wind" (i.e., el aire es el peor

enemigo 'the wind is the worst enemy' when it is so strong that it unshields the cape from the man), are all active participants in the bullfight. Short is the distance from the bullring to the reality of the bull ranches where the toros bravos are bred. And much terminology taken from those ranches is applied directly to the feats within the art of el toreo. The generic figure to describe a well executed cape performance is la faena 'the farm tasks as a whole.'

Of course, ultimately the archetypal genesis of the rite of the modern bullfight grows out of natural foundations upon which were grafted man-centered ones. Remnants from the past persist in the bullfight today, symbolically, and at times, in their very substance. To trace back with exactness the real physical links behind every taurine experience in the modern fight would be difficult if not impossible due to the wide gaps in time and space. Nevertheless, some links can be historically traced. Although ritualized today, el toreo demonstrates its intimate touch with past reality in that segment of the Fiestas de San Fermin in Pamplona called el encierro, already translated to 'the enclosure.' Every morning of Pamplona's festive week in July opens with the running of the bulls which are destined for the corral of the bullring.<sup>24</sup> The running of the bulls originated in the early practice of surrounding them with cows and oxen to form a herd which horsemen could safely drive to market in town or to a corrida (see photo 2). Sixteenth-century writer Don Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra makes use of the customary encierro in one passage of his Don Quijote de La Mancha. In it the hero Quijote valiantly, although idiotically, stands steadfast to be flattened by a charging encierro of