

No Bull

In 1958 I spent 6 weeks wandering around Spain. On Sunday, April 6 of that year I was in Madrid and went to my first bullfight. The procession that began the day's events was quite impressive. The 3 matadors performing that day marched into the ring followed by their assistants. They are followed by the other participants for the match, all parading in time to a marching tune. The matadors are wearing silk jackets that are heavily embroidered and skin tight trousers.

When the bull first enters the ring it is greeted with a series of passes from the matador's cape. The bull charges for the cape, not because of the colour, but because it is a large moving target. Bulls are colour blind. The picadors come next on horseback and they are carrying long lances. Bulls hate horses and charge at them and when the bull is close enough the picador drives a lance into the bull's back. They do this over several charges of the bull to weaken him. Fortunately for the horse he is heavily padded to save from being gored.

The banderillas are now used. They are brightly decorated sticks about 3' long with sharp harpoon hooks on one end. They are stuck into the bull's shoulder to make him lower his head for the kill. After these procedures have been completed it is the time for the "moment of truth". The matador takes his sword and lines up the bull for the kill. The blade must go between the shoulder blades, straight over the bull's horns and into the aorta region. If it is a good kill the bull will go down after the first plunge. Otherwise it could take several tries before the bull is finished.

Bullfighting has just been banned in Catalonia, the north-east region of Spain where Barcelona is the largest city. In spite the Catalonia ban, there is little movement elsewhere in Spain to follow with bans of their own. Bullfighting is permitted in all other regions of Spain except in the Canary Islands, which banned it in 1991. About 13,500 fighting bulls die in Spain every year.

I have now been rifling through some old papers and found a handwritten note that I had written on a scrap of paper just after the end the bullfight that I attended on that sunny day in 1958. It reads like this...

With a sword plunged deep into his back the mighty bull made another gallant drive at the red cape. The matador, with back erect and feet planted firmly on the ground, plunges a sword into the thousand pounds of muscle that thundered past him. The bull turned, faced the matador, and slowly sank to his knees. After a few choking attempts to breathe the mighty animal collapsed to the ground and was dragged from the arena by a team of three horses.

It was a hot Sunday afternoon in Madrid and the last bull of the day had just been killed. As the people filed out of the arena I remained seated and thought about the exhibition that had just been put on for 50,000 spectators. Was this an act of cruelty or was it only that the slaughterhouse had been cheated out of customers who were to die a more glorious death?

Leadley

Brad McInnes
YMASC President 1970 - 1971

