

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?