

Matador Mastery or Merciless Mutilation?

The So-Called "Art" of Bullfighting and its Barbaric Truths

Romero was taking [the bull] out with his cape. He took him out softly and smoothly, and then stopped and, standing squarely in front of the bull, offered him the cape. The bull's tail went up and he charged, and Romero moved his arms ahead of the bull, wheeling, his feet firmed. The dampened, mud-weighted cape swung open and full as a sail fills, and Romero pivoted with it just ahead of the bull. At the end of the pass they were facing each other again. Romero smiled. The bull wanted it again, and Romero's cape filled again, this time on the other side. Each time he let the bull pass so close that the man and the bull and the cape ... were all one sharply etched mass. It was all so slow and so controlled. It was as though he were rocking the bull to sleep. He made four veronicas like that, and finished with a half-veronica that turned his back on the bull and cape away toward the applause, his hand on his hip, his cape on his arm, and the bull watching his back going away.¹

This romanticized account of bullfighting exists only in Ernest Hemingway's novel "The Sun Also Rises," and in the minds of those who do not know the far less glorious truth.

Improperly termed, "bullfighting" is much less a fight than it is a bloodbath. Rather than the nostalgic notions of one man facing one beast in an ultimate test of survival, the typical bullfight involves up to eight men and only one "frightened and disoriented" bull.²

When the bull enters the ring, several men called toreros wave capes to entice the bull to charge back and forth, tiring the bull. Then men called picadors enter on horseback. They drive long spears into the bull's back to physically weaken its neck and shoulders, causing it to drop its head (and lose much blood in the process). Then banderilleros enter

¹ Hemingway, Ernest. The Sun Also Rises. New York: Scribner, 2003.

² World Society for the Protection of Animals. Bullfighting: a blood sport. 12 March 2010 <<http://www.wspa-international.org/wspaswork/bullfighting/bullfightingbloodsport.aspx>>.

the ring, using colorful short spears with harpoons on the end to repeatedly stab the top of the bull's back.³ All of this occurs before the matador even enters the ring—and by the time he does, the bull is physically exhausted from constant charging, running, being stabbed in the back, and sustaining much blood loss.

Upon the arrival of the matador, the bull makes several more charges as the matador teases him with the cape. Finally, the matador attempts to thrust a sword through the bull's back to sever its aorta. This often fails, however, and the bull's lungs are impaled instead—causing the bull to drown choking on its own blood.⁴ According to Alyx Dow, Programs Officer for Bullfighting for the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), bulls are often seen with blood pouring from their nose and mouth at the end, which is evidence of their death by drowning.⁵ If, however, the bull fails to die quickly enough after all this, its spine is severed with a small knife. When the crowd deems it a “good” kill, the matador is permitted to cut off the bull's ear and tail—oftentimes while the bull is still alive.⁶

Though this is already hardly a “fair fight,” as proponents of bullfighting claim, humans ensure the bull will lose before it even enters the ring by weakening the bull's mental capacities and depleting its strength. According to the Humane Society International (HSI), “prior to entering the ring, the bull suffers the stress of transport and may also endure branding”.⁷ Heavy sandbags are dropped on the bulls' backs or hung

³ The Dark Phantom Review. [Bullfighting: Culture or Cruelty?](http://thedarkphantom.wordpress.com/2008/09/03/bullfighting-culture-or-cruelty/) 3 September 2008. 12 March 2010 <<http://thedarkphantom.wordpress.com/2008/09/03/bullfighting-culture-or-cruelty/>>.

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Humane Society International. [Bullfighting](http://www.hsus.org/hsi/confronting_cruelty/bullfighting/). 2010. 14 March 2010 <http://www.hsus.org/hsi/confronting_cruelty/bullfighting/>.

around its neck weeks before the fight to weaken it.⁸ Scientists at Spain's Salamanca University found that 20 percent of the bulls used for fighting are drugged before they step into the ring.⁹ Illegally and appallingly, sometimes the bull's horns are shaved a few inches—which causes excruciating pain, loss of a sense of balance, and increased sensitivity.¹⁰ In 1987, bullfight veterinarian Dr. Manuel Sanz reported that more than 90 percent of bulls killed in fights had their horns shaved before the fight.¹¹ Many prominent former bullfighters have reported that the bull is often tranquilized, fed laxatives, and beaten in the kidney area to weaken it. Additionally, petroleum jelly is sometimes rubbed into its eyes to blur its vision.¹²

This is animal cruelty at its most deplorable.

But in Mexico, they take animal abuse to new heights. Mexico also features “novilladas,” or baby bull fights. Baby bulls, sometimes only a few weeks old, are penned into a small arena, where spectators stab them to death. Oftentimes the spectators are children. When the calves go down, their ears and tail are hacked off by the spectators while the baby calves are usually fully-conscious, lying in a pool of their own blood.¹³

So we see that the “art” of bullfighting, the notion of a fair fight between man and beast, is nothing more than an illusion. In reality, bullfighting is a disgusting abuse of living creatures.

⁸ Davison, Phil. "Matadors on Horns of a Dilemma." The Independent 12 February 1994.

⁹ Reuters. "One-Fifth of Spain's Fighting Bulls Drugged." 28 November 2000.

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Willis, Bill. The Bullfight. 2001. 14 March 2010

<<http://www.worsleyschool.net/socialarts/bull/fighting.html>>.

¹² Id.

¹³ Id.

Unfortunately, this barbaric “sport” occurs not only in Spain and Mexico, but in Portugal, France, Columbia, Venezuela, Peru, Guatemala, and even recently, in the USA. China is now considering introducing bullfighting.¹⁴ And every year, approximately 250,000 bulls are killed through this savage method of slaughter.¹⁵

Many countries and individual cities have outlawed bullfighting.¹⁶ In fact, in the countries in which it occurs, an overwhelming majority of the people do not support bullfighting. According to the 2008 Gallup Poll, 67% of Spaniards are not interested in bullfighting,¹⁷ while a 2003 survey showed that 73% of the French population is against bullfighting.¹⁸

A 2003 poll found that 93% of Germans, 81% of Belgians, and 82% of Swiss were against bullfighting, and 89% of the British public would not visit a bullfight when on a holiday.¹⁹

If most Europeans don’t agree with the practice of bullfighting, why is it still legal?

Proponents of bullfighting argue that it is a historic element of the culture.²⁰ The first recorded instance of bullfighting occurred at the Parliament of 815 and has continued throughout history, especially in Spain, where it did develop as a cultural tradition.²¹ However, that hardly seems a valid argument for continuing the practice. After all,

¹⁴ League Against Cruel Sports. Bullfighting Campaign. 2009. 14 March 2010
<<http://www.league.org.uk/content.aspx?CategoryID=312&ArticleID=281>>.

¹⁵ Humane Society International. Bullfighting. 2010. 14 March 2010

¹⁶ League Against Cruel Sports, *supra* n.13

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Bullfighting-Free Europe. For a Bullfighting-Free Europe. 2008. 17 March 2010
<<http://www.bullfightingfreeeurope.org/>>.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ The Dark Phantom Review. Bullfighting: Culture or Cruelty? 3 September 2008. 12 March 2010
<<http://thedarkphantom.wordpress.com/2008/09/03/bullfighting-culture-or-cruelty/>>.

²¹ Fight Against Animal Cruelty in Europe. A Brief History of Bullfighting. 2001. 16 March 2010
<<http://www.faace.co.uk/bfighting.htm>>.

crucifixion occurred since ancient times—much earlier than the 815 bull slaughter—and yet we in modern society have dispensed with that practice. Slavery has been a crucial factor in most of the world’s history; Egyptian dynasties were built on the backs of slaves, America utilized African slaves from 1619 to 1865, Russian serfdom allowed the aristocracy to thrive. Just because an institution has been a part of a society’s culture does not mean it is a humane practice—nor does it mean that it has a place in modern society.

Proponents of bullfighting claim bullfighting is “necessary” because the bulls are eaten afterwards. It is true that shortly after a bull is killed, its body is dragged out of the stadium to the nearest butcher shop.²² But the sale of the bull’s meat cannot justify a slow, agonizing death preceded by weeks of physical and mental abuse.

The bullfighting industry claims that bullfighting is vital to Spain’s economy. By their own admission, bullfighting provides less than 400 full-time jobs per year. While the bullfighting industry does generate money, only the top of the industry receives a substantial paycheck.²³ Due to decline in interest, these rich members of the industry ask for public money to cover a large portion of their expenses—rather than cut their own profits. The Spanish government heavily subsidizes bullfighting activities, allocating an estimated 530 million Euros of taxpayers’ money to the bullfighting industry every year.²⁴ Disturbingly, though the European Union claims to support the protection of sentient animals, it awards fighting bull breeders 220 Euros per bull per year.²⁵

²² Willis, Bill. The Bullfight. 2001. 14 March 2010
<<http://www.worsleyschool.net/socialarts/bull/fighting.html>>.

²³ BullFighting-Free Europe. For a BullFighting-Free Europe. 2008. 17 March 2010
<<http://www.bullfightingfreeeurope.org/>>.

²⁴ Id.

²⁵ Id.

Clearly, the governments of countries that still allow and support bullfighting, along with the European Union, are not listening to the people they serve. Something must be done about this.

To personally campaign for the abolition of bullfighting, I signed the World Society for the Protection of Animals' petition to end bullfighting in Catalonia. I have written the Spanish, French, and Portuguese Embassies, asking them to stop this abhorred practice, and I pledged to not enter their countries until it is abolished. I registered with the League Against Cruel Sports to show my support of bullfighting's abolition, and I pledged to never visit a bullfight for any reason.

However, these personal measures against bullfighting are not enough. I am speaking to several of the Spanish classes at my school to share my findings and encourage them to join the anti-bullfighting campaign. By spreading awareness of the atrocities of bullfighting, perhaps it will be eradicated from America, prevented from occurring in China—and finally outlawed worldwide. A gross display of outdated “culture,” bullfighting is truly nothing more than cruelty, the merciless mutilation of helpless bulls.

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