THE ESTHETIC PHASE
A Compleat Critique: *Death in the Afternoon*

Were we to search out a classic source for Hemingway’s best piece of didactic exposition, *Death in the Afternoon*, we would find no more likely candidate than Izaac Walton’s *The Compleat Angler.*

For one thing, each writer tries to change the low regard others have for his favorite pastime. Walton begins by politely disabusing a falconer and a hunter who disparage angling as “such a heavy, contemptible, dull recreation.” Hemingway begins by trying to disabuse bullfighting’s detractors of their prejudices, particularly those who find disgusting and inhumane the harm done to picadors’ horses. Walton structures his book upon a fictitious, five-day colloquy between himself, as Piscator, and Venator, a novice hunter whom Walton converts and uses as a sounding board for his monologues. Venator’s latter-day counterpart? The ingenue of Hemingway’s conversations, the Old Lady. Walton’s exposition has no greater order than Hemingway’s, marching from “observations of the Umber or Grayling, and directions how to fish for them” to subsequent “Observations and Directions” on salmon, pike, carp, bream, tench, pearch, eele, barbel, gudgion, roach, minnow, and so on. Hemingway’s observations comment on no fewer than seventy-five matadors as well as on different kinds of spectators, picadors, banderillos, functionaries, breeders, hangers-on, and, of course, bulls. He too gives directions—on how to watch a bullfight and to appreciate the matadors’ varying task of killing the bulls. Walton describes and evaluates “Several Rivers.” For them Hemingway substitutes Spanish cities and their bullrings. Both writers thereby show their familiarity with a nation. In his closing chapters Hemingway writes of the torero’s tools—cape, pic, banderilla, muleta, and sword (chaps. 15 through 19); this resembles Walton’s penultimate chapter, “Directions for making of a Line and for the coloring of the rod and line.”
Both writers' discourse on an outdoor pastime smells of the scholar's lamp. But both avoid pedantry, Walton by including poems on idyllic pleasures, Hemingway by including stories, anecdotes, and asides on death, decadence, and writing. With only slight alteration Hemingway could have prefaced his treatise with a paragraph from Walton's headnote, "To all Readers of this Discourse but especially to the HONEST ANGLER": "And I wish the Reader also to take notice, that in writing of [this discourse] I have made myself a recreation of a recreaton; and that it might prove so to him, and not read dull and tediously, I have in several places mixt (not any scurrility, but) some innocent, harmless mirth; of which, if thou be a severe sowre-complexion'd man, then I here disallow thee to be a competent judge: for Divines say, There are offences given, and offences not given but taken" (15). To "honest readers" who object to his digressions and interludes, Hemingway could also use Walton's self-defense: "And I am the willinger to justify the pleasant part of [my discourse] because, though it is known I can be serious at seasonable times, yet the whole Discourse is, or rather was, a picture of my own disposition" (15).

Walton is customarily praised for the simple humility of his disposition. And he shares a friend's conviction that "you will find angling to be like the vertue of Humility" (49). Yet throughout Angler Walton says things better expected of Hemingway. He commends himself for "the pains I have taken to recover the lost credit of the poor despised Chub" (60). He assures Venator that "I both can and will tell you more than any common Angler yet knows" (58). He esteems himself as "a Master that knows as much both of the nature and breeding of fish as any man" (75). Hemingway's "disposition," especially in Afternoon, has been criticized for similar vauntings, even more for outrageously admitting that "killing cleanly and in a way which gives you aesthetic pleasure and pride has always been one of the greatest enjoyments of a part of the human race" (232). Surprisingly, Walton shares that pleasure. Rather than declare his pleasure only in hooking, playing, netting, and eating fish, he also readily admits, "I am not of a cruel nature, I love to kill nothing but fish" (56).

The resemblance between the two works also shows up in both writers' insistence that their pastime is complex. Hemingway went to Spain to study the bullfight, believing that its "violent death" would speed his development as a writer by helping him focus upon one of the most simple and most fundamental of all
things, "violent death" (2). One page later he concludes that the bullfight was not simple, was, instead, very complicated. As the rest of Afternoon implies, there is even cause to question whether the bullfight's violent death excludes esthetic death. In Walton's opening chapter Venator similarly confesses his prejudice that anglers are "simple men." Walton's rejoinder defines much of the intent of his work: "If by simplicity you mean to express a general defect in those that profess and practice the excellent art of Angling, I hope in time to disabuse you, and make the contrary appear so evidently, that if you will but have patience to hear me, I shall remove all the Anticipations that discourse, or time, or prejudice have possèd you with against the laudable and ancient art; for I know it is worthy the knowledge and practice of a wise man" (30). Both Hemingway and Walton overwhelm a reader with the learning and lore of their respective pastimes, lead him through a labyrinth of discriminations on why, how, when, and where to appreciate best the complex activities of fishing and bullfighting.

Important though knowledge is to the angler or the aficionado, both writers subordinate it to art. The most repeated idea in Angler, expressed twice in the above quotation, is that "Angling is an Art" (13). And not, as Venator thinks, "an easie art." Piscator instructs him, for example, in the nature, breeding, kinds, and habits of trout as well as how to bait hook with worm, minnow, or artificial minnow when fishing for them. Yet Venator fails to catch one trout, even when he uses Piscator's own rod. Having caught "three brace of Trouts" during this interval, Piscator tells a brief allegory about a scholar who preached a borrowed sermon. Strongly commended when preached by its composer, "yet it was utterly disliked as it was preached by the borrower: which the sermon-borrower complained of to the lender of it, and was thus answered; I lent you indeed my Fiddle, but not my Fiddlestick; for you are to know, that every one cannot make musick with my words, which are fitted for my own mouth" (87). Hemingway similarly insists that if a bullfighter has skill, knowledge, bravery, and competence but lacks genius or inspiration; and if that bullfighter draws a brave, straight-charging, responsive, and noble bull but lacks magic wrists and an esthetic sensibility; then the result will not be sculpture but merely an undistinguished performance (13). Hemingway repeats his idea, writing that only if a matador's domination of a bull by knowledge and science is graceful will it also be beautiful to behold (21). The fundamental
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subject, then, for both Hemingway and Walton is the art of an angler’s fishing and a matador’s suertes, not how to catch fish and kill bulls.

Could I verify that Hemingway’s work is consciously indebted to Walton’s, I would still have to conclude that Death in the Afternoon is a critique rather than an imitation of Walton’s study. Instead of discoursing on The Contemplative Man’s Recreation, Angler’s subtitle, Hemingway discourses on The Active and Contemplative Man’s Recreation, thereby faulting Walton’s work. On stream and pond fishermen Walton rhapsodizes: “The hearts of such men by nature [are] fitted for contemplation and quietness; men of mild, and sweet, and peaceable spirits” (46). The men Hemingway writes of are of a different nature, matadors like Juan Belmonte whose “cold, passionate wolf-courage” has a “beautiful, unhealthy mystery” (212, 70); like Fortuna, who is “brave and stupid” but a “great killer of the butcher-boy type” (259); like Maera, who was “generous, humorous, proud, bitter, foul-mouthed and a great drinker” (82). But Hemingway sees in their activity a lofty subject that he contemplates to extract its esthetic and even spiritual burden, as I shall discuss shortly.

Both writers share the conviction that the art they endorse embodies a mode of conduct congruent with their view of the nature of existence. But again Hemingway’s critique faults Walton. The latter believes in a providentially ordered existence and finds one of angling’s basic values in its heritage. It descends, Walton claims, from Christ and the first four among His disciples—Peter, Andrew, James, and John—fisherman all (46). To emulate best the pacific virtues of a Christian life one should become an angler and learn its art, traditions, and science. And so Walton retreats to a stream, “a rest to his mind, a cheerer of his spirits, a diverter of sadness, a calmer of unquiet thoughts, a moderator of passions, a procurer of contentedness” (40). Hemingway faults such a retreat by buying a barrera seat at the plaza de toros. There he can observe at close hand the dangerous ritual that excites his mind and spirits, that guarantees sadness when it is over (4), that stirs up “unquiet thoughts,” that intensifies passions, that procures stimulation. Seeing existence as dynamic and irrational, Hemingway finds one of the corrida de toros’s basic values in the matador’s attempt to dominate esthetically the unpredictable and life-threatening energy that confronts man. To best emulate the matador’s esthetic valor, Hemingway urges one to become an aficionado and to internalize the matador’s conduct in one’s private and public behavior.
If Hemingway wrote *Afternoon* as a twentieth-century critique of Walton’s seventeenth-century discourse, he also faults its antique limitations. Though no longer the case, in Walton’s time angling was an activity that only men of leisure could afford. The bullfight, in contrast, draws peasant and don, spectacle-seeker and esthete, tourist and aficionado. No isolationist activity like angling, it is a communal experience, shared vicariously to varying degrees by a public. Traditionally tied to a *feria* or religious festival, its claim to spiritual significance, however pagan, seems more tenable than Walton’s claim of kinship to those “fishers of men,” Jesus and four of his apostles. The angler can independently amble along, choosing his pastoral way, or find in his activity the therapy that Jake Barnes and Nick Adams of the war and postwar stories find in it. (I consciously ignore the hazardous fishing in *Old Man and the Sea* and *Islands in the Stream*; after all, Gulf Stream fishing is not “angling.”) But the structure of the bullfight predetermines many of the matador’s movements and demands interdependence among picador, banderillo, and matador. Walton’s advocacy of withdrawing to purling streams and still ponds to practice the “harmless art” (41) reveals angling as a retreat from a world of conflict and the inevitable result of conflict, death. The bullfight insists upon confronting conflict, coping with hazards, fatal though they may be. Finally, Walton’s assertions notwithstanding, angling requires skill, not art. Unwittingly he tells Venator, “You yet have not skill to know how to carry your hand and line, nor how to guide it to a right place: and this must be taught you (for you are to remember I told you, Angling is an Art) either by practice, or a long observation, or both” (88). Hemingway rightfully calls bullfighting a legitimate, though impermanent, art form, a performance judged by spectators: “A bullfighter can never see the work of art that he is making. He has no chance to correct it as a painter or writer has. He cannot hear it as a musician can. He can only feel it and hear the crowd’s reaction to it.”

Although *Afternoon* may be a critique of *Angler*, Hemingway may have learned from *Angler* how a handbook can conceal a critique of one’s era. Behind the 1653 publication of *Angler* was, to Walton, the senseless and evil war in which the loathsome Puritan cause triumphed. The secular monkishness of angling, Walton implies, is a way to retreat from a distasteful social and political scene. Angling is also an antidote to an era preoccupied with “businesse.” And so Walton contrasts a frenzied episode of otter
hunting against the sedentary peace of angling, and he pities lawyers “swallowed up with business,” statesmen who must al­ways be “preventing or contriving plots” (95), and landowners who have no “leisure to take the sweet content” (154) of their own fields. Virtually an anthology of pastoral poetry and song, Angler underscores Walton’s critique of his era, more than two dozen poems shrewdly harking back nostalgically to an edenic Eliza­than age.

Hemingway’s study is an undeclared critique of his era, too. One principal target is its attitude toward that “unescapable real­ity,” death.

Rather than discourse upon the bullfight because he was per­sonally obsessed with death and violence, Hemingway uses it as a momento mori, a healthy reminder of death and mortality. To this end he praises Spanish common sense, which he defines as “taking an intelligent interest in death” (266). An idiosyncratic defini­tion, to be sure. But it challenges the term’s conventional defini­tion and the customary approval of it as “sound practical judgment.” Inheritors of “Yankee ingenuity,” Americans, Hem­ingway implies, are particularly commonsensical and adept problem-solvers, ingenious enough to “solve” the problem of death by exercising “sound practical judgment”: classify it as a taboo topic. Anyone foolish or arrogant enough to violate that taboo, if Hemingway’s case is symptomatic, deserves to be scoffed at or declared pathological. Yet Hemingway studies that ritual death in the afternoon “to explain that spectacle both emotionally and practically” and, thereby, to write a critique of the “civilized” world’s horror of death. What the twenties did to the taboo of sex Hemingway tries single-handedly to do to the taboo of death: to revolutionize our thinking about and attitudes toward it. Needless to say, he failed.

Hemingway summarizes Spanish values largely, it seems, to contrast the Spanish with the French and the English, both of whom, he maintains, live for life. Although the French respect the dead, more important to them is enjoying such things as family, security, position, and money. Likewise the English dislike con­sidering, mentioning, seeking, or risking death except for sport, reward, or patriotism. Both the French and the English, he says, avoid death as an unsavory topic, something to moralize about but never to study (265).

These comments on Anglo-Gallic values apply also to American attitudes toward death; this is evidenced by noting the audience to
whom Hemingway directs his critique. In the chapter “Some Reactions of a Few Individuals to the Integral Spanish Bull-fight,” twelve of the seventeen “reactions” belong to Americans. Hemingway’s remarks upon Galicia and Catalonia also show that he addresses an American audience. New Englanders should be affronted by his statement that in Galicia, a poor seaside country whose men either emigrate or take to the sea, Spaniards do not seek and meditate upon the mystery of death but avoid its daily peril, showing, thereby, their practicality, cunning, stupidity, and avariciousness (265). As well should a midwesterner feel the barb in Hemingway’s analysis of the good farmers, businessmen, and salesmen of the rich country of Catalonia: life is much too practical for them to feel the “hardest kind of common sense” about death (266).

As these comments suggest, Hemingway links death and practicality to note that any culture unduly preoccupied with the latter will ignore or repress the former. Not only, of course, is America the birthplace of pragmatism, but it lacks the three Spanish traits he commends—common sense, impracticality, and, foremost, pride: “Because they have pride they do not mind killing, feeling that they are worthy to give this gift” (264).

Hemingway commends these Spanish traits to revitalize the atrophied emotions of Americans, sheltered from “an intelligent interest in death.” To clarify I could do little better than cite Max Eastman, whose notorious review of *Afternoon*, despite Hemingway’s reaction to it, was not, however, inspired by malice. He sincerely faults Hemingway for not sharing the confession of those “poets and artists and sensitive young men” who witnessed “the insensate butchery of the World War.” The confession was “that they were devastated and quite utterly shattered by that forced discipline in the art of wholesale killing[,] the confession in language of blood and tears of the horror unendurable to vividly living nerves of the combination of civilized life with barbaric slaughter.” Eastman’s attitude is characteristically American: Hemingway should regard any and all killing with horror, he should repress the many and ambivalent emotional responses that death makes accessible, and he should, thereby, seal off an entire area of human experience. I do not rule out voyeurism in Hemingway’s sustained study of bullring performances, in his having seen at least two hundred fifty bullfights before publishing *Afternoon*, each of which ends in at least six dead bulls and frequent gorings of picadors’ horses and toreros. But Eastman’s
repressively parental attitude is precisely what Hemingway addresses, for it shows atrophied emotions in need of exercise.

Hemingway knows that killing and death ignite more than a single or simple emotional response. Hunting with his father taught him early to find killing pleasurable because it conferred a feeling of power and intensified his senses. To deny that pleasure would be hypocritical, although sober Clarence Hemingway would have subdued it, shooting “for pot or sport.” And Hemingway’s war experiences as ambulance driver, cantinier, and correspondent also taught him diverse emotional responses to killing and watching others being killed. For instance, one of the functions of many of the vignette interchapters in *In Our Time* is precisely to acquaint readers with such responses. We may feel the horror Eastman asks for while reading of the retreat along the Karagatch road (chap. 2). We may also feel the sense of shock recorded by the narrator who tells of “potting” heavily equipped German soldiers as they climb over a garden wall at Mons (chap. 3). But Hemingway also gives us the delight of a British soldier who had set up an “absolutely topping” barricade for shooting Germans as they tried to cross a bridge (chap. 4), with the fear of a bombarded soldier in a trench (chap. 7), with the callousness of an Irish policeman mercilessly killing two Hungarian “wops” (chap. 8), with the respect an anonymous narrator has for a young matador who has to kill all six bulls during a bullfight (chap. 9), with the ecstasy of watching Villalta dominate and then kill, riciendo, a good bull (chap. 12), with the dignity of Maera’s death (chap. 14), and with the disgust and wonder at Sam Cardinella’s cowardice when hanged (chap. 15). To obey Eastman and respond with only horror to these vignettes betrays the reality of the situations with cruder labels than the ones my italics have assigned. As Hemingway declares at the outset of *Afternoon*, part of his difficulty as a young writer was “knowing truly what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel” (2). For him no experiences were more emotionally proscribed, no experiences more ripe for his critique, than death and killing.

In a finely sustained comparison to learning about bullfighting as an art, Hemingway notes that to appreciate wine takes an educated palate (10–12). In like fashion, it takes educated emotions to overcome a distaste for bullfights and an inclination to dismiss anything to do with death, pain, suffering, and violence. And so Hemingway’s opening chapter cautions against the prejudices of
humanitarians and animal lovers who feel that the goring of the horses is categorically cruel and disgusting. Hemingway shared these feelings before he saw a bullfight. But he implies that such feelings are sentimental because they are myopic and uninformed. An attitude toward horses from some earlier experience with them in one context, he says, should not preclude a different attitude toward individual horses in another context. He also points out that the parodic-looking gored horse, legs akimbo or galloping off in "a stiff old-maidish fashion," augments by incongruity the dignity of the bull, a noble animal. And the goring of the horses is a necessary, minor part of a larger, integral experience, not a gratuitous act of sadism. Since a severely gored horse feels no immediate pain, pity for its suffering is without cause. Tolerant of differences in taste, Hemingway admits that an informed spectator may still find the spectacle repugnant. He insists, however, that to reject bullfighting and so to suppress emotions that accompany its representative encounter with death should be responses based only on the criterion of taste. That subjective criterion is personally defensible. To base responses on moral grounds, in contrast, is an act of collective rationalization, disguised as objectivity and rationality.

Because Hemingway is concerned with exploring and sharing the range of emotions that bullfighting generates, he carefully discriminates between many opposing pairs: between humanitarians and "animalarians" (5–6); between the apprehension a picador and a matador feel (56–57); between bravery that is the temporary ability to ignore potential consequences and bravery that is the ability to despise potential consequences (58); between showing one's nervousness, which is not shameful, and admitting it, which is (20); between the cowardly, rule-violating Cagancho who lacks the integrity expected of a matador and the same Cagancho who is capable of doing things in a way that other bullfighters have never done before (13); between such bullfighters as Cagancho (13–14) and Hernandezorena (17–20), Granero and Chaves (45–46), Belmonte and Joselito (e.g., 68–70, 161, 167), Nicanor Villalta and Niño de la Palma (85–90), and Zurito and Aguero (256–59); between Aranjuez's many streets, lined with brown-skinned girls selling strawberries and asparagus, and its street to the ring, "a dirty gauntlet between two rows of horrors. The town is Velasquez to the edge and then straight Goya to the bullring" (40); between Aranjuez and Ronda (40–43), Bilbao (38–39) and Valencia (44–46); between decadence and health (66–70); between
wild and domestic (105–6), brave and cowardly (112–14), young and mature (126–29), bullfighter-bred and breeder-bred bulls (119–21); between natural and accidental querencias (150–53); between inflicting pain or weakening a bull and properly tiring him (189); between matadors (i.e., killers) and toreros ("highly developed, sensitive manipulators of cape and muleta") (178); between El Greco and other homosexuals (205); between killing volapie and ricibiendo (236–39); between architecture and interior decoration, characters and living people (191); between the feeling of immortality conveyed by the bullfight (213) and the godlike enjoyment of administering death (233).

That is an epic-sized catalogue, to be sure. But such discriminated comparisons, bulking so large and so fine in Afternoon, add to my conviction that just as, when still young, Hemingway sawed away on his cello's open strings with his right hand while he held a book to read in his left, so too could he write with one hand a study of bullfighting while his other hand writes a critique of one more opposing pair: American and Spanish attitudes toward death.

Hemingway demonstrates his ability to do two things at once in the "story" he includes in Afternoon, his much-maligned "A Natural History of the Dead." This story discomforts most readers, if not because it parodies a Christian naturalist in the essay portion, then because Hemingway joins that essay to a sketch. The sketch itself is vintage Hemingway. Its brief drama observes two men's humane concern for a dying soldier. A wounded artillery officer feels that his duty is to perform an act of euthanasia, declaring that he is a humane man (142). A doctor feels that his duty is to obey his humane oath, to care for, not to kill, a wounded man (142). Their clashing humanitarianism ironically ends in their being inhumane to each other.

Part of the value of the whole story is its union of essay and sketch, both dealing with perspectives toward dying and death. By implication Hemingway once again shows his studied disregard of narrative conventions. Here he rejects the Jamesian requirement of maintaining a single narrative perspective. The essay's parodic perspective glibly and ironically debunks Christian humanists and naturalists, presumably revealing Hemingway's perspective. But the sketch's omniscient perspective detaches Hemingway, for it objectively takes sides with neither the doctor's cynical humanism nor the officer's humanistic heroics. This switch of perspectives facilitates what I think is Hemingway's
point: it is stupid, when confronted with dying or dead human beings, to expect only one perspective, one feeling, one solution of how to respond humanely. The providential perspective of Mungo Park and Bishop Stanley may deserve Hemingway’s narrator’s mockery because it subordinates fact to faith and, thereby, evades the reality of death. And the romantic idealism of the humanists may deserve his mockery too because it sentimentally focuses on decorum, evading the indecorousness of many deaths. Yet Hemingway may mock the perspective of the mocker. The parodist’s excessive contempt for men of faith and humanists, as well as his interest in sensationalizing grotesque deaths, reveals his immaturity. (A quick rereading of the opening of “A Way You’ll Never Be” is enough to reassure me of Hemingway’s intent to look askance at the parodist.) To these perspectives Hemingway adds, not only the doctor’s and the wounded officer’s but also the stretcher-bearers’. They are spooked by the breathing of a dying man who lies in the dark cave into which they have been carrying dead soldiers for two days. Their perspective is selfish. They want him moved to the area for the badly wounded, even though they know that moving him will surely kill him. Having presented these half-dozen perspectives, Hemingway dares us to choose only one as the correct one.

Hemingway refuses to give his story traditional form or conventional structure, hoping, I think, to prod readers tolerant of experiment to acknowledge the complicated feelings they truly have toward death. And the object upon whom the sketch focuses so much concern? He is a man whose head, broken like a flowerpot, was “held together by membranes and a skillfully applied bandage now soaked and hardened” (141). In this image Hemingway again nicely departs from convention. However damaged, the still pulsating head better transmits its message than the clichéd image of the bone-white skull: memento mori.

Hemingway’s iceberg image, first used in this book, indicates that only one-eighth of a work’s identity is readily visible. Unquestionably the identifiable tip of this iceberg, Death in the Afternoon, is, in Carlos Baker’s felicitous phrase, a “Baedecker of the bullfight.” One of its not-submerged-enough eighths may be Hemingway’s exhibitionism (even though I find him missing many chances to strut, mocking his own conduct in the arena and focusing carefully upon the many facets of bullfighting, not the facets of his personality). Another eighth may testify to his con-
version to Hispanic attitudes and values.\textsuperscript{16} (Yet for a convert to censure so many aspects of bullfighting and to call the modern corrida "decadent" shows more blasphemy than worship.) Surely another eighth of the iceberg is a paean to matadors, embodying as they do prototypal Hemingway heroes.\textsuperscript{17} (But Hemingway is highly critical of most of the matadors he writes of. The Old Lady remarks that he seems to criticize them "very meanly" [171].)

Somewhere among Afternoon's submerged seven-eights is Hemingway's critique of traditional spectator arts and so a case for bullfighting's preeminence as an art form.\textsuperscript{18} Hemingway lets any who wish to save the world go on with their task (278). If he must save anything, it will perhaps be spectator arts. He will save them by pulling them from the Prado's gallery walls and setting them on the sand of Madrid's arena. He will move them from the acoustically designed and ornamented concert hall into the afternoon sun and air and sound of the plaza de toros. He will swap their plush theater seat for a plank at the bullfight ring. Pygmalion-like, he will seek to animate petrified form. Part of Hemingway's critique of traditional spectator arts, then, faults their preciousness, their artificial surrounding, their limited audiences, their effenness.

A larger part of Hemingway's critique faults traditional spectator arts for splintering rather than integrating experience. Much of his concern in writing Afternoon is to write about the bullfight "integrally" (7), to convey its meaning as a "whole thing" (8), to emphasize minor aspects only in their relationship "to the whole" (9), to have a reader "see the entire spectacle" (15; my italics in these and the following quotations). Advising prospective spectators where to sit, he says that if the bullfight is not an "artistic spectacle," then "for lack of a whole to appreciate," a ringside seat will be best for seeing details, for learning whys and wherefores (31–32). Rather than save the world, he declares that he wants to "see it clear and as a whole. Then any part you make will represent the whole if it's made truly" (278). These remarks, particularly the synecdoche of the last one, obliquely inveigh against other art forms that, however permanent, civilized, and clean, do not represent a whole experience.

Part of the bullfight's wholeness, and so an element that in Hemingway's eyes lifts it above other art forms, is its inclusion of the arts of painting, sculpture, dance, and drama. And Hemingway superbly guides us among those coalesced arts. Sitting us down at the barrera, he analyzes a gallery of matadors, observing closely
their artistic or inartistic suertes. He shows a scene in slow motion so that spectator-readers will not be so visually confused by the swarm of things they see that they cannot absorb them with their eyes (14). Hemingway's own eye fondles the precise image of a bull rising to anger, raising the solid-looking, wide horns of its head, swelling the hump of its neck and shoulder muscle, flaring its nostrils, and jerking the smooth points of its horns (30). Hemingway's attentiveness to the movements in the arena's sol y sombre also shows his appreciation of the chiaroscuro of the bullfight's choreography. And he lectures upon its theatrics to discern histrionic tricks from necessary capework, cowardly from courageous killing, spectacle from substance. As drama, the bullfight is analogous to classical tragedy, he would have us see. Its three phases constitute an entire action with a beginning, middle, and end; its majestic bull and prescribed ritual allow for the magnitude and order necessary to tragedy's beauty; its simple catastrophe is inevitable and emotionally purging. Hemingway's inclusion of photographs adds to the sense that he regards bullfighting as a whole art. Imitating its wholeness, he assembles a book complete with photographs, calendar, glossary, bibliographical note, sampler of reactions, and an estimate of America's matador from Brooklyn, Sidney Franklin.

A still larger part of Hemingway's critique of traditional spectator arts faults their Platonism. Had he been inclined to articulate his argument, it might have gone—in Afternoon's style—something like this:

Now what is wrong with traditional spectator arts, I believe, is that they only imitate reality. Naturally the bullfight, like them, is artificial. It's an organized and manmade thing, not a spontaneous, natural event. Still it is real; the inevitable death of the bull and that ever-present danger which a brave bull's crescent intelligence increases and which the matador who is artist confronts, those two things make it, keep it, real. Now with the traditional spectator arts the element of death is missing, only imaginary, or attenuated (another bastard word) beyond immediate recognition; and they are without the dignity which death alone can give them. There is, after all, something which is common to all arts, as well as to life; and that something is conflict. All the arts commence in it, give expression to it, and work toward its resolution. But the conflicts may be abstract, as in music. Or they may be static, which is the case in painting and sculpture. And the conflicts in literature, and drama, and that new art, motion pictures, are imaginary; sometimes so much so that they disguise what that conflict is all about. For remember, all conflicts are just variations on the one big conflict: life against death. And this too remember: the more an art
disguises that conflict, the more your awareness of the ultimate reality, death, will be diminished. Bullfighting is the one art that truly allows no escaping from reality; when you see death being given, avoided, refused and accepted six times in an afternoon for a nominal price of admission, you know that even if you have been artistically disappointed and emotionally defrauded, you are not going to have an easy time translating away your experience into some culturally elevating entertainment, into some pleasant experience that has no honest connection with your own existence. There is no pretending in the face of death. And it is that fact which makes bullfighting the only art that deals with truth.

Still another part of Hemingway’s critique of traditional arts faults their overemphasis on technique. In this regard his definition of decadence as “the decay of a complete art through a magnification of certain of its aspects” (7) applies both to bullfighting and to other arts. He objects to decadent bullfighting because it emphasizes the way that various passes with cape and muleta are made, rather than the effect of those passes (66). This modern emphasis upon “manner” or technique results in some “pretty tricks” that seem “gay and lighthearted” but that “smell of the theatre” (167). Hemingway appreciates the “grace, picturesqueness and true beauty of movement” as a matador plays a big gray bull as “delicately as a spinet,” but he criticizes him because the bull’s horn does not brush the matador’s belly, and so reduces or avoids “the dangerous classicism of the bullfight” (212). Hemingway objects, then, to “flowery work,” “interior decoration,” and “picturesqueness” because of his conviction that technique, even at its best, can only produce “pure spectacle” that lacks tragedy (213).

The final part of Hemingway’s critique of traditional arts faults their tacit subscription to an Aquinian definition of beauty: that is beautiful the apprehension of which pleases. As my next chapter argues, Hemingway modifies that definition in Green Hills. But here he takes direct issue with it. To accept Aquinas’s definition leads, he implies, to valuing arts whose pursuit of beauty abstracts, minimizes, or attenuates reality by attending to preeminently pleasant experiences. That Hemingway scorns such experiences is clear, not only in his own fiction and the artists he values, but also in his focus here on so many “unpleasant” experiences: the “unbearable clean whiteness” of Hernandorena’s thigh bone, visible through his gored-open thigh (20), vindictive, testicle-eating totemism (25), Aranjeuz’s “dusty gauntlet” of horrors (40), Chaves’s “big-stomached pinwheel around” a bull’s
horn (45), and, in compressed form, "A Natural History of the Dead" (133-44).

To accept Aquinas's definition of beauty, Hemingway again implies, also leads to valuing only the "proper" arts, those which, as Joyce's Stephen Dedalus translates, generate a static esthetic emotion, arrest the mind, and raise it above desire and loathing (Joyce, 205). To Hemingway such restrictiveness must diminish art by granting higher status to permanent arts that, frozen temporally or spatially in language or images, allow esthetic contemplation, intellectual analysis, and emotionally detached reconstruction. Aquinas's exclusion of improper art from his sanctuary of beauty implicitly asks one to accept the role of a patient spectator, awaiting but not judging "the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure," "the instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony (Joyce, 213).

As Hemingway repeatedly shows, the bullfight, like a "proper" art, can be an esthetic experience. It permits contemplating a moment of beauty, say an esthetically executed veronica. And it can afford a patient, informed spectator with a complete faena that will make that spectator feel immortal, that will give him or her an ecstasy that will be "as profound as any religious ecstasy" (206).

The bullfight, though, like "improper" arts that lean toward pornography or propaganda, also excites desire and loathing, approval and disapproval, awe and ridicule. To the extent that Hemingway is utilitarian, he rejects cerebrally static and esthetic emotions. Beauty not only should "be" but should be responded to. Those who apprehend beauty should not become rapt in a "luminous silent stasis," he implies, but should express their rapture, articulate their appreciation. In this regard, the appeal of the bullfight—and to a similar extent sporting events in general—lies, not in its display of aggressive competitiveness, decadent technique, or violent death, but in the opportunity and obligation it gives a spectator to judge the performers as artists. At a low level, of course, he may participate crudely, booing contempt or whistling approval. At a high level he carefully analyzes the antagonists' behavior and technique, functioning as Hemingway does all through Afternoon, as an art critic. Hemingway declares that regardless of his criticism of the state of bullfighting, he continues to attend to know the good from the bad, to appreciate new
techniques without confusing his standards (162). An art experience, in short, should be like all other experiences, an occasion for active judgment, not arrested rapture.

Finally, Hemingway’s critique of spectator arts commends the bullfight because it is alive. Its true beauty lies in actions, images of humans and animals in movement rather than in luminous static instants. But the matador, unlike two of his counterparts, the Olympic gymnast or the ballerina, does not offer a well-rehearsed choreographic display of varying bodily attitudes—exquisite though they may be. Instead his display is a strategy for confronting the unpredictable advances and threat of an individual bull, a strategy that he can never adequately rehearse for every exigency. The crisis precipitating his movements is real then, not simulated. And each passing moment can draw from his frame sublime or ridiculous postures. But above all, for the matador the “moment of beauty” is also a “moment of truth.”

Hemingway’s discourse on bullfighting is partly self-serving. By writing it he vaunts the catholicity of his views and his disinclination to retreat from a dynamic and violent world. He may also hope that in his own interests and esthetic we will see his resemblance to—and so accord him the tribute he writes for—Goya, an artist who believed “in blacks and in grays, in dust and in light, in high places rising from plains, in the country around Madrid, in movement, in his own cojones, in painting, in etching, and in what he had seen, felt, touched, handled, smelled, enjoyed, drunk, mounted, suffered, spewed-up, lain with, suspected, observed, loved, hated, lustèd, feared, detested, admired, loathed and destroyed” (205). But ultimately Hemingway tries sincerely to make the case for seeing the esthetics of athletics, realizing, as he must have, that his earlier fictions on the bullfight and sporting events failed to make his point cogently enough. Reacting to the emotional and artistic parochialism of his day, here, then, he tries to merge his father’s out-of-doors activities and his mother’s thirty-by-thirty music room. And though the “Paris years” were enormously valuable to his artistic development, clearly they spoke to only one-half of it. For the other half he had to go south to Spain. Its dominant cultural event gave him the integrating experience necessary to keep his own art vital.