An Obsessed Onlooker:  
*The Dangerous Summer*

The last work published during Hemingway's life, *The Dangerous Summer* presents one of the more complicated textual problems in the Hemingway canon. According to Hotchner, Hemingway could not meet *Life* magazine's deadlines nor keep the contracted-for, 10,000-word account of the 1959 rivalry between matadors Antonio Ordóñez and Luis Miguel Dominguín from swelling to nearly 109,000 words.¹ For three solid weeks in June of 1960 Hemingway tried to prune the manuscript but managed to cut only 278 words (240). He finally called upon Hotchner for help. With Hemingway's approval Hotchner cut some 55,000 words in nine days (242). This done, Hemingway still felt compelled to return to Spain for photographs to accompany the text. While there, he continued to tinker away at text and galleys, never eliminating all the loose ends.²

Because the manuscripts have only recently become available to scholars, it may be some time before we can answer whether the half-text that *Life* published resembles the overall design of the completed draft, whether Hemingway's intention is still visible.³ Though contracted to report the Ordóñez-Dominguín rivalry, Hemingway presumably told Hotchner that he changed his mind and wanted “to make a real story which would be valuable in itself and worth publishing after there had been no deaths or dramatic endings to the season” (237). But he also confessed to Hotchner that “it started to be one thing and then became another and then another and I boxed myself into a corner” (245). To his fellow author and Spanish friend Jose Luis Castillo-Puche, Hemingway allegedly admitted, “very seriously,” that he was “‘writing a bunch
of crap’ ” (63). Not the least of the factors that complicate the text of Summer, of course, was the state of Hemingway’s health.

Notwithstanding these complications, the half-text published in Life is at least as solid a skeleton as Santiago’s marlin. And from this piece of quasi history we can reconstruct its father-son dynamics, its affiliative and filicidal obsessions, and Hemingway’s preoccupation with his guilt for neglecting his three sons and his father.

Even a quick reading of Dangerous Summer finds Hemingway deifying Antonio Ordóñez. The first time he sees him perform in the bullring is a vision of perfection: “I could tell he was great from the first slow pass he made with the cape. It was like seeing all the great cape handlers, and there were many, alive and fighting again except that he was better. Then, with the muleta, he was perfect. He killed well and without difficulty. Watching him closely and critically I knew he would be a very great matador if nothing happened to him. I did not know then he would be great no matter what happened to him and increase in courage and passion after every grave wound.” So able is Ordóñez that the second time Hemingway watches him he “invents” a bull, transforming a worthless bull “into a fighting bull before your eyes” (1:94). And when an aspirant bullfighter vaults the barrera to show his own skill with Ordóñez’s second bull at Aranjuez, he endangers Ordóñez by giving the bull time to learn quickly what he needs to know to gore the man with the deceptive cape. But Ordóñez, neither alarmed nor angered, “ran over to him with the cape, said something to him very quickly and put his arm around him and hugged him” (1:106). Turning to the bull, he proceeded to make the “most complete and classic faena with him that I had ever seen,” writes Hemingway, until Ordóñez began a series of trick passes and “the bull’s right hind foot slipped and he lurched and his right horn drove into Antonio’s left buttock” (1:109). Severely gored, Ordóñez operatically refused to leave the ring before killing the bull: “his brother, his manager and his sword handler grabbed him and tried to hold him and make him go to the infirmary. Antonio shook them all off in a rage saying to [his brother] Pepe, ‘And you call yourself an Ordóñez’ ” (1:109). Ordóñez is so good that Hemingway does not even have to have been present to declare that “Antonio fought twice in Mont-de-Marsan in France where he was wonderful” (2:75).

The second and third installments in Life, each covering three
"duels" between Ordóñez and Dominguín, climax with Ordóñez performing great faenas. But Hemingway reserves Ordóñez's greatest achievement for the last installment, writing of his killing of the last bull at Bilbao recibiendo, on the third cite. Not only is this the rarest way to kill, receiving the bull's charge rather than charging him, but it is the riskiest way too: "No one in our time cites twice recibiendo. That belongs to the times of Pedro Romero, that other great torero of Rondo [Ordóñez's birthplace] who lived two hundred years ago" (3:90).

Outside the ring Ordóñez is equally superb. Only a week after his severe goring at Aranjuez he takes an early morning walk, without his cane, with Hemingway. And he ignores a slight goring during an encierro at Pamplona. But he is also fun-loving, helping Hemingway "kidnap" a pair of American beauties. And during the birthday festivities for Hemingway and Ordóñez's wife, seven times he recklessly lets marksman Hemingway shoot the ashes from the cigarette in his mouth: "Finally he said, 'Ernesto, we've gone about as far as we can go. The last one just brushed my lips' " (2:76). The embodiment of agility, this heroic merrymaker catches a tennis ball in each hand while diving into a swimming pool. And for a lark he even risks grave penalties by going along with the "absolutely illegal" ruse of letting his "double," Hotchner, enter the Ciudad Real bullring as his substitute matador. Watching "El Pecas" Hotchner and Ordóñez don their outfits, Hemingway writes, "it was the most carefree preparation for a bullfight I have ever seen" (3:81).

What demonstrates Ordóñez's genuine heroic qualities is his "duel" with Dominguín, his brother-in-law and chief competitor, to determine which of them is Spain's best matador. Hemingway implies that Dominguín comes out of retirement to show his superiority to Ordóñez and to hush the clamor for Ordóñez. But the older matador fails. Ordóñez outperforms him in all but one of their joint engagements and that, Hemingway implies, was because Dominguín "had two ideal and perfect bulls" while Ordóñez "had two worthless bulls" (2:73).

Despite Hemingway's obvious bias, he tries to show that he is impartial, that he has genuine regard for Dominguín. He helps him to the infirmary after his goring at Valencia (but gets back to the ring in time to see Ordóñez perform another superlative faena). And Hemingway ends Summer with his solicitous visit to Dominguín, recovering from a goring at Bilbao. The telegram-cable epilogue in Life, updating the rivalry in 1960, duly praises
Dominguín for having “fought himself into shape” and for “improving in confidence with each fight” after “a generally disastrous fair in early August” in Malaga. But compared with Ordóñez, his achievements are negligible. For even with a crippled right arm Ordóñez “made one of the finest and most truly valiant faenas I have ever seen” (3:96).

As Hemingway presents him, Ordóñez is too good to be true. And many discrepancies between fact and Summer show this to be the case. For one, the rivalry is more imagined than real, more a publicity stunt than “the duel of the century” that Hemingway makes it out to be. Castillo-Puche contends that Hemingway “was half convinced he was witnessing a genuine ‘civil war’ in the bullfight world, though I for my part thought the whole affair was a big laugh, and almost everyone else did too” (321–22, 82, 246). Reporting on Ordóñez and Dominguín’s first meeting in the ring at Zaragoza, Hemingway implies that Ordóñez gets higher marks. But Hotchner says that Hemingway told him unequivocally that “Miguel [Dominguín] had turned in the best performance that afternoon” (210). Summer ascribes no mundane or ignoble motives to Ordóñez. But Hemingway told Hotchner, “Antonio considers it an insult that Miguel does not treat him as an equal” (211), implying resentment. And Castillo-Puche suspects that Ordóñez’s regard for Hemingway has a root in self-advertisement (140, 247, 360). Hemingway ends Summer with his visit to, and conversation with, Dominguín just after his goring at Bilbao. But Hotchner reports that there was no exchange between the matador and the author: “Ernest talked to him for a short while in a low voice, and Dominguín nodded and smiled a little” (228). For the Spanish, Hemingway’s largest deviation from fact is his utter disregard for Manolete as matador. Dominguín’s predecessor as Spain’s number one matador, Manolete was widely acclaimed as the best among modern matadors. For Hemingway to dismiss him cavalierly as a practitioner of tricks, having seen him but once, and then on a windy day, and in Mexico, and with “the two worst bulls” (1:85), was outrageous.

The question that Dangerous Summer invites is why Hemingway sought to mythify Ordóñez, why, in Castillo-Puche’s words, “Ernesto looked upon him as the resurrection of a torero god, the living image of all the mythical matadors who had ever lived” (157). To answer this question requires asking another: Why is Hemingway so concerned about Ordóñez? Is this just one more
instance of Hemingway’s affiliative needs? He is at Ordóñez’s bedside after the severe Aranjuez goring, he oversees his convalescence and changes the dressing on his wound, he visits him before almost every fight, and he takes care of the wound Ordóñez gets in the calf from an encierro at Pamplona. His commitment to follow Ordóñez tirelessly across Spain from bullfight to bullfight is not simply to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of his report on the Ordóñez-Dominguín rivalry. To do that he did not need to go to even a half-dozen bullfights before Dominguín was severely gored at Bilbao.

Castillo-Puche amplifies the conclusion that Hemingway’s relationship with Ordóñez was excessive: “There was something almost religious about Ernesto’s devotion to his idol. He not only prayed for him; he made promises and vows whenever he thought Antonio was in particular danger. Before a corrida he would tiptoe into his room very quietly, as though overcome with awe. If he allowed himself to crack a joke, he made sure that it was a really funny one that would cheer Antonio up, and never one that would remind him that he was about to enter the ring for yet another fearful and dangerous corrida” (158). Recalling Hemingway’s behavior while Ordóñez was being operated upon after the Aranjuez goring, Castillo-Puche adds:

He was absolutely crushed, and kept wandering in and out of the operating room and pacing up and down, unable to sit still. It wasn’t simply nervousness, it was more like a very peculiar sort of hysteria. As we waited there for news of how the operation was going, I saw an Ernesto I had never seen before: a hesitant, terrified, almost desperate man. . . . Ernesto kept asking [Dr. Tamames, the surgeon] over and over: ‘What about his femoral artery? Is his femoral artery okay?’ Ernesto was so paternal he seemed childish. He would exaggerate the danger to Antonio’s life one minute and play it down the next. . . . Ernest was so concerned about the wound in Antonio’s leg you would have thought he was waiting outside a delivery room for news that he was the father of a bouncing baby boy. [164–65]

Such exaggerated behavior easily leads to Castillo-Puche’s conclusion that Hemingway found in Ordóñez great material for fiction, the “perfect protagonist,” “the hero of an epic he would write” that would “crown not only Ernesto’s work of art, but the legend, the myth of Antonio” (204, 205). Hemingway’s exaggerated behavior also leads to the conclusion that, as no previous matador had done, Ordóñez incarnated the values Hemingway had first identified with as far back as 1922, when he first saw a bullfight. Ordóñez, then, represented Hemingway’s idealized vi-
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sion of himself as valor-artist and enabled him to conceal his narcisism with paternalism. Yet another conclusion is that in his exaggerated regard for Ordóñez Hemingway expresses the awe and admiration he had for youth in general, epitomized as it is in this son of sons. An embodiment of beauty, courage, intelligence, and artistry, Ordóñez is Santiago writ young, the representative son whom all fathers can idolize, the son deserving of every man’s affiliative—if not homeric—wish. Castillo-Puche records that Hemingway declared, “I’m so fond of him—he means more to me than a son” (154).

Beneath Hemingway’s regard for Ordóñez, marked as it is by inordinate paternalism, is still another conclusion, that Hemingway mythifies him partly to assuage his guilt for having shortchanged his own three sons. His behavior toward Ordóñez shows how paternal he can indeed be when he chooses. The nasty edge to this, of course, is that he reserves such fatherly fondness for only a deserving son. Likewise, because his uncritical acceptance of everything Ordóñez does is out of character, Hemingway permits a glimpse of his wish that his sons (and readers) will be as tolerant of him as he is of their exemplar.

Hemingway’s excessive protectiveness toward Ordóñez intends to show that he feels no hostility for him nor, by extension, for his own sons. But because every exaggerated behavior signals the presence of a repressed, antithetical wish, his protectiveness reveals several counterintentions. Half consciously Hemingway wishes that his solicitude will protect himself from filial discontent and aggression, that neither Ordóñez nor his own sons will try to harm him. And unconsciously he wishes that harm will strike them. For different reasons, Castillo-Puche shares this conclusion, saying that it was

the exhausting struggle between his needs as an artist and his feelings about his beloved friend that in the end finally unbalanced Ernesto’s mind. He dreamed of writing a great epic about his idol, but would he be capable of writing it? Such a work almost demanded that Antonio die in the ring, and Ernesto had a premonition and a very great fear that that was how Antonio would die (what part did Ernesto’s unconscious, unavowable wishes play in this fear that came close to being abject terror?). .

I do not believe it would be straying too far from the truth to maintain that this strange psychic ambivalence was the cause of the guilt complex that so clouded his mind in the last months of his life. I am sure that Ernesto had already unconsciously imagined Antonio’s death in the ring a thousand times in his tortured mind, and could almost have set it down on paper. And that was why he was obliged to
Hemingway’s “psychic ambivalence” is stronger and wider than Castillo-Puche senses; for the unconscious wish beneath the paternal devotion, pride, and protectiveness in *Summer* is the same one beneath the previous two novels of this phase—filicide.\(^7\)

Foremost among my reasons for this conclusion is the fact that Ordóñez’s father was the matador Hemingway had idolized and then heaped abuse upon. In *Death in the Afternoon* Hemingway owns that Cayetano Ordóñez inspired his creation of Pedro Romero, the hero of *The Sun Also Rises* (89). As Niño de la Palma, Cayetano had begun his career brilliantly, performing great faenas that enamored Hemingway esthetically and Hadley personally (*Afternoon*, 270). But after a severe goring at the end of his first season, Cayetano spoiled. The next year, according to Hemingway, he turned in “the most shameful season any matador had ever had up until that year in bullfighting” (*Afternoon*, 89–90). As if that were not defamatory enough, Hemingway pronounced that “if you see Niño de la Palma the chances are you will see cowardice in its least attractive form; its fat-rumped, prematurely bald from using hair fixatives, prematurely senile form” (*Afternoon*, 87–88).

Even if Ordóñez disliked his own father and shared Hemingway’s criticism of his bullfighting, it is hard to imagine that he would have grown up with any fondness for a man who, with impudence, had publicly assailed his father. As fellow-Spaniard Castillo-Puche asks—properly alluding to a Spaniard’s fierce pride of family, which Hemingway was not ignorant of—“How could Antonio have forgiven Ernesto for writing such harsh words about his father?” (165). It is even harder to imagine Hemingway not regarding Ordóñez a genuine threat. After all, Hemingway was superstitious and believed in omens. Even a facial resemblance could “spook” him. (One of the better instances of this was when, still legally married to Pauline Pfeiffer, he arrived in Sun Valley with Martha Gellhorn in 1939. The first woman he met, Tillie Arnold, all but unmanned him because she was Pauline’s look-alike.)\(^8\) There is no mention in *Summer* that Hemingway was apprehensive about his first meeting with Ordóñez in 1953. (Perhaps it was cut from the manuscript?) But surely he felt some anxiety when, having seen Ordóñez in the bullring and having then found out who he was, Hemingway was told that Ordóñez would like him “to come up to the hotel Yoldi to see him” (1:86).
And surely Ordóñez must have seemed to Hemingway like an apparition rising out of the past, a son fit to avenge the treachery and mortification his father and his own pride had suffered by Hemingway's criticism. Although Hemingway declares only that Ordóñez "had everything his father had in his great days" (1:86), then, his solicitousness overtly shows that he does everything he can to please Ordóñez, trying to placate whatever hostility Ordóñez may have for Hemingway. Covertly his solicitousness shows his wish that Ordóñez be killed before he takes vengeance on his old foe. Indeed, the persecutory mania that afflicted Hemingway's last year reflects his fear of vindictive sons, genetic or surrogate.

Hemingway's fascination with the rivalry of the mano a mano also shows his unconscious wish for his sons' deaths. The term, literally meaning hand to hand, refers to a bullfight in which only two matadors, rather than the customary three, kill the six bulls of the fight. The ostensible purpose is to let the spectators decide who is the superior matador, as determined by which of them harvests more bulls' tails or ears. But as Santiago's young helper's name, Manolin, suggests, a mano is also a hand, a brother. Mano a mano, then, figuratively means brother against brother, a translation particularly apt in this case because Ordóñez and Dominguín are brothers-in-law. That the mano a mano is fratricidal may seem farfetched. But recall the biblical patriarchs. Anxious about their dwindling power and jealous of the threat of their potent sons, Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—behind a mask of innocence—shrewdly engineered or unconsciously created situations that pitted son against son, usually to the death of one and the disgrace of the other. The strife between Abel and Cain, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers recurs too predictably to conclude otherwise. And it nearly recurred at the end of the 1959 season, Dominguín severely gored in Bilbao and Ordóñez "debarred for a month after a dispute with bullfight officials" over improper use of his picadors. Admittedly, though Ordóñez and Dominguín stayed briefly with the Hemingways en route to "winter engagements in Central and South America" in 1955, nothing indicates that Hemingway either masterminded or encouraged their 1959 mano a mano. But neither does anything show that he tried to keep them from such fratricidal competition.

Adding to the view that the mano a mano pits son against son is Hemingway's paternal regard for Dominguín. Familiarity with Death in the Afternoon or even with Hemingway's remarks upon
Manolete, Chicuelo II, and other matadors in *Summer* teaches that Hemingway never balks at criticizing a deficient matador. But he holds back on Dominguín. Repeatedly he tries to find something to applaud him for, whether for his disciplined training (1:87), his hospitality (1:88), his work with the banderillos (2:66), or his quiet valor after being gored (2:82). And though he faults Dominguín’s abilities, he quickly offers reparation by comparing him to the great Joselito (2:68), by praising his mastery of tricks (2:76), and by commending his domination of the fifth bull at Malaga after it had tossed him (3:76). So anxious is Hemingway to treat Dominguín fairly that when the second installment of *Summer* was issued, he was horrified at the picture of Dominguín executing *pase ayudado*, telling Hotchner, “‘hell, that’s the kind of picture photographers use to blackmail bullfighters. . . . that picture is malicious’” (253). Not even Ordóñez’s reassurances were enough, reports Hotchner, to convince Hemingway that Dominguín would not resent the picture as a treacherous act (261).

Setting aside their six-year-old friendship, Hemingway’s solicitude for Dominguín is unusual, especially given his judgment that at Bilbao Dominguín “had been eliminated in a stupid way” (3:87). An obvious explanation for his regard is that he knows he must have in *Summer* that ingredient vital to all fiction, conflict. Hemingway establishes the relative equality of the matadors, then, to ensure that the rivalry is neither hoax nor melodrama. And he compounds conflict by insisting upon the internal conflict caused him because of his regard for both matadors. But this internal conflict exposes also his ambivalence about the fratricidal struggle between these surrogate sons: he dreads but desires it. An irrational persecution mania may explain Hemingway’s anxiety over the photograph of Dominguín, but so does genuine guilt. Consciously or not, Hemingway sent the photograph so that its “malicious” intent would show Dominguín’s inferiority to Ordóñez.11

Hemingway’s repressed filicidal wish is also evident in his endorsement of the prank of letting “El Pecas” Hotchner be Ordóñez’s *sobresaliente*, his substitute matador, in the Ciudad Real mano a mano. Hotchner’s book hopes to convey the impression of his favored status among Hemingway intimates. But he was just another of the many surrogate sons Hemingway liked to gather about himself. As surrogate son and Ordóñez’s stand-in, then, Hotchner would have had to enter the ring with the remaining bull or bulls had both Ordóñez and Dominguín been injured at
Ciudad Real. The outcome would surely have spelled disaster. Short of that, exposure of the prank could have levied upon Ordóñez heavy penalties and accompanying disgrace. For a writer who let the narrator of his first novel about bullfighting express anxiety over possibly ruining a young matador, who castigated the decadence of modern bullfighting, who criticized even a matador’s looks if they detracted from the integral esthetic experience of the corrida, it is strange that Hemingway would approve of the travesty of permitting the pock-scarred, unhandsome Hotchner to enter the sacrosanct bullring—unless there were an ulterior motive or unconscious wish, such as displaced filicide.

That same lethal wish, drawing Hemingway to the mano a mano, also surfaces in the father-son relationship between Dominguín and Ordóñez. Hemingway—or, more correctly, the text of Summer that Life was given to publish—does not tell that when only twenty, Dominguín had engaged in a mano a mano with the aging, Spanish-acclaimed but Hemingway-defamed Manolete. Nor does Hemingway tell, but Hotchner does, that “in that punishing duel the veteran Manolete, no longer as quick as he once was, was pushed by the young, reckless Dominguín beyond where he should have gone, and in one such moment he was severely gored and died before dawn the next day” (208). But we do not need to be told that, legendized though that rivalry has been, the scenario of the young Dominguín driving his older rival to death is Oedipal, casting Dominguín into the role of the parricide. Nor do we need to be told that by the time Hemingway first sees Ordóñez fight in 1951, Dominguín is now cast as father. Two years away from his first retirement, he has already become sufficiently legendary to allure the likes of Ava Gardner and has a “bronze life-size statue of [himself], a rare thing for a man to have around his own finca in his own lifetime” (1:87). When we also consider that Ordóñez had taken on Dominguín’s father, Domingo, as his manager and had married Dominguín’s younger sister, Carmen, it is hard not to see that the mano a mano between Dominguín and Ordóñez fascinated Hemingway because it acted out the parricidal-filicidal contest that he was now obsessed with. Actually Dominguín was only a half-dozen years older than Ordóñez. But by the time of the 1959 rivalry, Dominguín had to play the father to Ordóñez the son. And to side with the son would manifestly deny any filicidal wishes in Hemingway. At least it would have, if Hemingway’s solicitousness and protectiveness of the son had been less exaggerated.
Near the beginning of The Dangerous Summer, Hemingway states that he “had resolved never to have a bullfighter for a friend again because I suffered too much for them and with them when they could not cope with the bull from fear or the incapacity that fear brings” (1:85). Hemingway’s irrepressible affiliative wish would be one reason to cancel that resolution. Another would be that in his paternal relationship to Ordóñez, Hemingway could portray the role he wishes his own father had taken during the twenties, when Hemingway was competing against his rivals to establish himself as numero uno. Still another reason to cancel that resolution would be that his behavior would give the lie to what Hemingway felt was his father’s strongest accusation, the charge that haunted Hemingway all his life, that he was irresponsible. But among the reasons would also be that the rivalry between these brothers-in-law allowed him, like a biblical patriarch, to be an interested, involved, but innocent observer of the fratricidal struggle of his “sons,” a struggle that invariably reveals those sons’ hostility against their fathers, that conceals from them the onlooker’s filicidal obsession.