

Herald and News Book Reviews

Literary Highlights

By BILL DECKER

BIOGRAPHY OF THE BULLS: An Anthology of Spanish Bullfighting. Edited by Rex Smith. Rinehart & Company.

For a long time Ernest Hemingway's "Death in the Afternoon" was the only thing written in English on Spanish bullfighting. It stood as a monument to an American's appreciation of a completely foreign art. For those of us who would probably never witness the spectacle first hand it served as our only possible understanding of the "festival of the bulls."

Recently other Americans have written on the subject from the points of view of spectators and participants, but those of us who cherished the experience of having read Hemingway years ago were not impressed. After all, we argued, these "Johnnies-come-lately" to the bullfighting field have nothing to say that "the master" did not say long ago and he said it better. We read the new books as they came out and grudgingly conceded that this or that one was not without certain merits, but none of them grasped the complex subject totally as Hemingway had. When a particularly powerful novel impressed us we went back and reread "Death in the Afternoon" and were reassured that it was all there and still for the best.

Now we find our pedantic dogmatism disturbed by an impressive collection of writing on the subject. Rex Smith has gathered together a vast amount of material and added his own editorial comments and explanations including some excellent illustrations in one handsome volume. To be sure, Hemingway is well represented, but only as one of many contributors. This means of presentation serves to point up the fact that there is more than one way to approach the subject.

First he offers us the results of what must have been lengthy and thorough research on the bull in history and his symbolic significance. Since the beginning of time the bull has stood as the embodiment of virility, he has been worshiped as a god and sacrificed as an offering to other gods. Smith does not say so, but it appears that man has identified himself more closely with the bull than with any other animal. He goes on to recount the gradual development of the ceremony of bullfighting as we know it today citing the various historical stages and the styles of famous masters of the art.

Any American discussing the subject is faced with the task of justifying the inherent cruelty and seeming barbarity of this foreign custom. Smith sees up to the challenge by quoting many excellent summations made by Anglo-Saxons with varying degrees of experience connected with the bull ring. It profits but little to quote these without first explaining the fundamentals of the ceremony, its traditions and the Spanish attitude toward it. One must be aware of

the fact that wanton slaughter or torture have no part in the event. To be sure, the bull is killed; but with as much mercy (and certainly more dignity) than we Americans show in slaughtering game, fowl and livestock.

The bullfight is a ritual. It is performed much after the fashion of a Greek tragedy. The audience knows the ending before the curtain rises, but they respond to the emotions evoked by the participants as the ceremony unfolds step by step. The actors have their parts and are judged by their individual interpretations and conformity to the highly disciplined formalism which controls their actions as rigidly as any script. Grace is esteemed beyond bravery and a pure, classical performance is regarded far above any exhibition of foolhardy brutality. The true devotee of the festival of the bulls does not go to watch a bull be killed or a man gored; he goes to see a drama of courage, grace and dignity portrayed in three acts which might be called birth, life and death.

The play opens when the bull enters the arena. His courage is tested by the picadors who meet his charges with their lances. These lances are guarded so that they cannot inflict more than a prick to the enraged bull because the object is not to wound or weaken him but simply to test his bravery. If the bull turns away from the pic he is a failure, if he charges repeatedly he is deemed a success and worthy of representing man as he moves on toward the predestined fate which awaits us all. In the second act he comes into his first contact with unmounted men and his skill and agility are displayed, but the men are careful not to tire him because he must come into the final act with all his power intact. It is then that he meets the matador and the drama builds to its climax when man and bull face death with dignity.

This oversimplified account is a poor explanation of the ceremony and is offered only in the hope that it may whet the reader's appetite to read such passages as this one from the works of John Steinbeck:

"A great bullfight brings the exaltation great music does and great poetry. One carries for a time afterwards the satisfaction and the knowledge that man is no weakling in a dreadful world—that by his bravery, his versatility and his merits he has and can survive anything the world can bring against him."

"That small, unshielded, soft-fleshed, inferior-muscled figure, clad in penetrable silk, armed only with a triangle of woolen cloth and a tooth pick of steel can and does face and dominate and kill the ever reborn force of evil, and fear is the greatest and most poisonous evil we know."

"No, I do not love the bullfight, but I love the bull, and I love the man who reassures us that we are of the race of men."

A lack of organization may detract somewhat from the overall effectiveness of "Biography of the Bulls," but the material contained will compensate for this small weakness. It is a beautifully bound book on fine paper with clear type which would make a worthwhile addition to any library shelf. But although this book certainly deserves to be read, if your budget limits your purchases, the book to buy is Hemingway's "Death in the Afternoon." He still said all that there is to say and he said it better.

HERD PERSUASION

By frequently moving areas in which cattle can get salt, modern ranches persuade their herds to graze where the grass is lushest and thus assure proper feeding.



THE EMBLEM SHOWN ABOVE has been selected for use during National Library Week from March 16-22. "Wake Up and Read" will be the slogan of the campaign which is designed to encourage everyone to take advantage of the library facilities available in every community. Have you read any good books lately?

A New Novel Of World War II

ANGRY HARVEST. By Hermann Field and Stanislaw Mierzewski. Crowell, \$5.

In an isolated village in Poland—the Germans had bypassed it as they swept into Russia and the cowed town could only hope they would do the same when Stalin's massed armies hurled them back westward—a well-to-do peasant named Leon was carrying on his farm as best he could.

He had two employees, whom we meet on the first page of this remarkable novel, Kasper and Anna. He had friends and acquaintances in the countryside: Cybulkowski, with his knack for earning money and his wife with the knack for wasting it; the priest, with his sister, the widow Paulina; the destitute Lady Kaminska; the pretty, and flighty, Irena.

But above all, just as the Germans' merciless persecution of the Jews was brought home to him most menacingly, he acquired a roomer-and-boarder and, eventually, a mistress, Rosa.

He was out in his woods when he noticed this bedraggled young woman staggering toward him, a starved, soaked and freezing fugitive from the death-dealing conquerors. Her parents and relatives had been liquidated, for they were Jews. If she was to be hidden, it

must be in a secure place, and not even Kasper and Anna, faithful as they were, must suspect her presence. So Leon opened up the trap door to his cellar and sent her down into the damp and dark.

Now there began a most subtle and devastating change in middle-aged Leon. Good at heart, he gave food to the impoverished former rulers of the estate where he had prospered, he was generous with Anna, he intended to be a Christian in all his treatment of Rosa. But as their intimacy grew, as he felt the appetites and urges of the spring stirring in him, he wanted finally to do more than save her. While he built up a desire for her, she labored to overcome an aversion for him, until in the end their situations were tragically reversed.

There are absorbing scenes on the farm during the roll of the seasons, as fateful and momentous in its way as in Reymont's "The Peasants." The cows eating the peas, the dogs warning off strangers, the hoeing, the killing of the pig, the shearing of the sheep, the sturdy swigs of vodka.

But against this earthy background there is the gripping drama of a man well meaning but weak, with noble impulses sometimes meanly thwarted. As well as any-

one, Leon could screw up his courage, but never to the sticking point. The good in him petered out. If there was some of the saint in him, there was none of the martyr. He lived through this awesome story in the black shadow of wartime; but it has sobering truths for us in peace as well.

The co-authors, American and Polish, with German as their common language, worked out this book when a wretched fate threw them together in the cell of a prison near Warsaw. However they managed to write it, it is among the most memorable novels produced by World War II.

For Young Adults

PARK ROW. By Allen Churchill. Rinehart, \$3.95.

From 1883, when Joseph Pulitzer entered Park Row and the New York newspaper word—indeed the World itself—on through the first decades of this century and the "end of the World," according to a chapter head, this tells stories of some spectacular figures in and around newspaper offices.

Pulitzer hypersensitive to noise and going blind, Hearst turning pages with the flip of his foot, Bennett drinking himself into a fury—these men certainly assisted in founding the modern press, and with the help of name writers like Richard Harding Davis, Irvin Cobb and Stephen Crane, among others, made their lurid most of the Slocum disaster, the shooting of Stanford White, the murder of a couple of their own colleagues, such as David Graham Phillips.

This is no history of the press, however, or of yellow journalism, but rather of a few yellow-journalists; and the open-sesame to these pages was not necessarily to own or run a paper but to shoot your life, whip up a war, live on a palatial yacht, or act like an idiot—not, you understand, that does not make very spicy reading.

Current Best Sellers

FICTION

BY LOVE POSSESSED. Cozzens. ANATOMY OF A MURDER. Traver.

RALLY ROUND THE FLAG, BOYS! Shulman.

SOME CAME RUNNING, Jones. BELOW THE SALT, Costain.

NONFICTION

PLEASE DON'T EAT THE DAISIES, Kerr.

KIDS SAY THE DARDEST THINGS, Linkletter.

WHERE DID YOU GO? OUT Smith.

BARUCH: MY OWN STORY. THE HIDDEN PERSUADERS, Packard.