

## Ernest Hemingway *Aficionado Flâneur*: Bullfighting and Modern Spectatorship

The present volume, *Death in the Afternoon*, is not intended to be either historical or exhaustive. It is intended as an introduction to the **modern** Spanish bullfight and attempts to explain that **spectacle** both emotionally and practically. It was written because there was no book which did this in Spanish or in English. The writer asks the indulgence of competent **aficionados** for his technical explanation. (Hemingway 487; emphasis added).

In the “Biographical Note” that appears at the end of *Death in the Afternoon*, Ernest Hemingway explains his motive for writing such a book. While purporting to offer an introduction to the Spanish bullfight, a claim that hinges on ironic understatement, *Death in the Afternoon* is a hybrid text that combines description, history, allusions to art and literature, a glossary containing vocabulary and definitions, map-like directions to bullfights in various Spanish provinces, biographical profiles of famous bulls and bullfighters, manual-like technical details and instructions, fictionalized conversations with imaginary readers, and both personal and detached observation of all aspects of an event he describes as **modern** and a **spectacle** of local, yet national significance. In short, *Death in the Afternoon* does not fit neatly into any particular genre category. This hybrid, multi-genred, interdisciplinary text bears Hemingway’s authorial mark as an *aficionado* spectator well versed in the historical and cultural significance of Spanish bullfighting; however the book is also, at times, a work of art and cultural criticism, a historiography, an informative users manual, and, most importantly for this paper, part Baedeker in its presentation of the world of the *corrida*.

*Death in the Afternoon* is one of the many texts in Hemingway’s oeuvre that support my argument that he is one of several modernist authors we can understand as post-war *flâneurs*. Whereas many critics will argue that the *flâneur* continuum ends with Walter Benjamin, we would be remiss not to include writers who continued observing, walking and writing after 1940, who stepped outside of nineteenth-century European cities—or back into them as modern observers—to record observations of places marked and changed by war as a person marked and changed by war. Much like Benjamin wrote about the city as both a “physical place and an imagined or symbolic space that was reflective of the dominant culture of its time,” Hemingway wrote about the *corrida* as a central, symbolic, physical place/space reflective of the history and culture of Spain (Poynter 59). Also like the *flâneur*, Hemingway “was always trying to keep his eyes trained on the thing in itself and the effect of the thing in himself (Baker, 58).

Hemingway’s observation of the *corrida* as **modern spectacle** parallels the *flâneur*’s detached observation of modern urban spectacle. Like the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, Hemingway observes with an outward-looking, appraising, and critical eye, yet is also participant-consumer of the spectacle he observes; at the *corrida* he becomes a modern “man of the crowd.” His meditations on bullfighting are also characteristically modernist in their references to primitivism, surrealism, cubism, and the avant-garde. *Death in the Afternoon*, much like his war reporting and many novels about experiences of war and post-war life, represent Hemingway’s understanding of “the writer-citizen’s responsibility to the true portrayal of violent experience” (Cirino 115).

In other of Hemingway’s works, the peripatetic nature and spectatorial eye of both author/narrator and fictional protagonists—whether as journalists, war reporters, soldiers, war veterans, European or colonial travelers, Safari hunters become game wardens, or writers—provide evidence that the *flâneur* figure continues to exist post-war, having been marked, changed, and damaged by war. Reading Hemingway as *corrida aficionado* uncovers yet another trace of the existence of the *flâneur* in post-war modernism.

\*This paper is part of a book project titled *Modern “Man of the Crowd”*: Ernest Hemingway and the Evolution of Post-War *Flâneur*.

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