



# *The Big Question*

A LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE.

*VOLUME TWO*

*Cover art by Kevin Hoult.*

Copyright 2026. All rights reserved. All individual works published within this issue remain the copyright of their respective authors. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form without prior written permission from the publisher.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                             |    |
|---------------------------------------------|----|
| A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR.....               | 4  |
| KEVIN HOULT, COVER ARTIST.....              | 5  |
| POETRY.....                                 | 6  |
| A Bang From Kobani.....                     | 7  |
| Fire Marshal.....                           | 9  |
| Mythic Triptych.....                        | 10 |
| TEACUP WITH A BLACK HOLE AT THE BOTTOM..... | 11 |
| CAT PRAYER / DOG LAUGHTER.....              | 12 |
| EVERYONE DRANK FROM THE WELL.....           | 13 |
| to renovate is to suffocate.....            | 15 |
| WHERE DID I PUT THAT ROSE GARDEN?.....      | 16 |
| POEM FOR A MAÎTRE D'.....                   | 18 |
| Fuel for the fire.....                      | 20 |
| On Any Sunday.....                          | 21 |
| Ars Poetica.....                            | 22 |
| Café Intermezzo.....                        | 24 |
| Untitled.....                               | 26 |
| A Kiss Beneath the Stars.....               | 27 |
| Do You Remember?.....                       | 28 |
| Must We Fall?.....                          | 29 |
| FICTION.....                                | 30 |
| Terms of Service.....                       | 31 |
| The Bubble.....                             | 33 |
| Who Do You Think You Are?.....              | 35 |
| Becoming.....                               | 37 |
| Death in the Bullring.....                  | 42 |
| Painkillers.....                            | 46 |
| Denounce.....                               | 53 |
| DON'T FINISH THIS STORY.....                | 57 |
| CONTRIBUTORS.....                           | 61 |

# Death in the Bullring

By Matias Traveiso-Diaz

*Bulls can do nothing to demand justice. They can only defend themselves as best they can in a fight with a pre-determined ending and die never knowing why they were forced to endure such a painful and prolonged death.*

Ingrid Newkirk

The famous matador Pepe Cubero lay on the sand in the oval arena of La Maestranza, Seville's renowned bullring. He had been gored in the stomach by Estrago, a fierce thousand-pound Miura fighting bull that had been his second bull of the day. The incident had taken place at the end of the series of passes in which he had used his muleta (small red cape) to lure the bull into a position that would allow him to stab the beast between the shoulder blades and down to the heart.

Pepe had become tired, as Estrago had advanced and retreated randomly, making him go through numerous passes, sometimes ending up dangerously close to the animal's sharp horns. At the end, Pepe was about to perform the estocada (sword thrust) to slay the bull and had placed himself directly in front of Estrago's horns to deliver the killing thrust. At the moment the sword entered its flesh, the bull had lifted its head and punctured Pepe's stomach, in a motion that Pepe had been too slow to elude.

Pepe's ornate traje de luces outfit had immediately turned from shining gold and silver to scarlet as the bull's horns ripped through the toreador's waistcoat and jacket and exposed his bleeding stomach and intestines. Pepe's body was raised above the ground and fell with a thud that was heard throughout the bullring's tiers filled with

shocked spectators; his montera (black two-lobed hat) had flown in the air and landed away from Pepe's convulsing body.

Immediately, all members of Pepe's cuadrilla (the team of picadores (lancers), banderilleros (flagmen), and the mozo de espada (porter of the sword)) that were waiting in the wings rushed in towards the spot where the matador lay. They were joined by numerous other attendants, including a pair bringing a litter that would lift Pepe's inert body and rush him to the infirmary.

Pepe was oblivious to the motions of those approaching him or the outcries of the distressed audience. In this sunny April afternoon, most of his thoughts were directed at the terrible pain that emanated from his pierced midriff and his laborious attempts to catch short breaths of air.

In a corner of his mind, however, he was recounting the main events of his life: a childhood spent in a rundown, rat-infested cottage in his native city of Tudela; his fervent desire to become a matador; his running away from home at the age of twelve and, after many mishaps, gaining employment as a farm hand in a dehesa (ranch) in Southern Spain, where he became familiar with the fighting bulls being raised in the property; his entering an escuela taurina (bullfighting school) thanks to the sponsorship of his boss at the dehesa; decades of relentless training, competing in amateur festivals, seeking sponsors among the cattle breeders, and finally meeting his mentor, an experienced matador who had arranged for Pepe's first appearance in a bullfight ten years earlier. And then, the fame that rose quickly like sea foam and seemed to be vanishing just as fast.

Then another train of reminiscences, of a more personal nature, intruded themselves in his agony: meeting and marrying Sara, the lovemaking, their frequent fights and reconciliations, the three children, the

great summer they all spent vacationing in Mallorca...

And then all flashbacks faded, to be replaced by unsettling questions: “Had it been all worthwhile? Should he have chosen to lead a long, untroubled life perhaps as a cobbler like his father? Was the slaying of brutish animals for sport a good way to make a living?”

He had no clear answers and death overtook him, leaving his final doubts unresolved.

\*\*\*

Only a few meters away from the heaving body of the matador, Estrago also lay in agony. He had no words; his mental impressions were a jumble of primitive feelings:

[PAIN][ANGER]

[confusion][PAIN][ANGER]

[cold][confusion][fear][ANGER]

[PAIN][disorientation][bad smell of blood]

[cold][cold][PAIN][ANGER] [bad smell of blood]  
[confusion]

[PAIN][pasture][grass][grazing][bright sunlight]  
[away][ANGER]

[PAIN][heifer][cows][run][good smell]  
[pleasure][away][ANGER]

[PAIN][PAIN] [cold][humans][fear] [bad smell of blood]  
[ANGER]

[PAIN][PAIN][PAIN][cold][humans] [bad smell of blood]  
[ANGER]

[PAIN][PAIN][PAIN][cold][cold] [cold] [humans]  
[ANGER][confusion]

[PAIN][PAIN][COLD][COLD][cold][cold] [confusion]  
[cold]

END