

Ryan Turner

THE MATADOR, 1970

His epaulets erupt behind him.  
He could extinguish volcanoes  
by turning his back on them.  
Noticing a burning cigar in his palm,  
he lifts it to his ear and scowls,  
inhales deeply through one nostril.  
Inhaling through one nostril with his palm at his ear,  
he notices in it a burning cigar.  
He has no idea where the lace  
at his wrist comes from.  
His glands are tattooed with coconut leaves,  
but don't tell him that.  
He dips his garlic braids  
in wax each morning.  
He wants to preserve or burn them,  
votive talismans to ward off superstition.  
He can tell six different lies at once  
without ever contradicting himself.  
His lies all contradict each other;  
he uses them to make up true stories  
about his life as a boy in Malaga.  
There, on the southern coast of Spain,  
among volcanoes,  
he grew up idolizing  
the great bullfighters Hernandez, Vallejo,  
de la Cruz. He would *surpass their splendor*.  
Don't look at his sombrero. He uses it to mesmerize  
victims. His victims,  
before he kills them, are mesmerized  
by looking at his sombrero.  
He has eyes on every side of his head.  
Don't look into them.

Like unbaked dough of the tortillas  
made by his formidable great-aunt,  
Doña Ignacia Maria Hernandez,  
his face  
stretches, twists, spreads flat.  
He can stretch, twist or spread flat  
his face as if it were made  
of unbaked dough,  
and doing so reminds him of his childhood.  
He labored for years in obscurity  
learning to tie exotic knots.  
Tying himself in exotic knots, he is  
able to entangle within himself his shadow.  
His picadores swear parts of the matador  
are missing. *Dios mio*, they cry,  
*el toro no puede tocarle!* *Cuando el toro quiere*  
*tocarle, no puede!* *Parts of him*  
are not there when the bull tries to maul him.  
In springtime, he is Barcelona.  
His economic base is tourism.  
In summer his braided hair smells of  
gasoline.  
He braids his hair in summer,  
when it smells *de gasolina*, his hair, and  
watches out for match-wielding enemies; he'll never  
confess to paranoia, not to anyone human,  
and in his other palm rests the dirt-caked  
blade of his sword. See,  
here it is.  
He holds it toward you for inspection.  
He pretends not to care what you think of it.