

Interlude Yearning

This fourth and final interlude continues with the difference of gender as its theme.
What do the images and words provoke and evoke in you as you look and read?



White light table cloths napkins plates diffused light playing across the restaurant with no deep shadows and no bright reflections. The asparagus lays on my porcelain plate pure green and a drizzle of brown juice from burst cherry tomatoes. The waitress serves the food quickly before the performance begins. Over discreet loudspeakers I can hear the preparations for the performance humming in the background. The Thames flows by, cut through by the wake of pleasure cruisers and a distant sound of excited voices under amplified tour guides “to the right is Shakespeare's Globe...”

Breeze enters through the row of one leaded window after another and I am transported to the country rustle of apple blossom and fresh tree leaves rustling in some imagined bucolic landscape. “More wine?” the waitress says, tipped the bottle of Gewurtz slightly in my direction. I want some and temper this thought with the briefest of wonderings whether I'll be able to keep my full attention on the play with more wine inside me.

“Yes, please.”

She pours the wine with a flourish and it makes a satisfying gurgle and splash as it leaves the bottle and throws itself down into the glass. The waitress looks up again and smiles before moving on to Track, next to me. As she turns I see the parting down the centre of her blonde hair as it is taken off into two long plats and her trousered bottom, slimmer than mine, at the back of her linen waiter's apron. She wipes the bottle neck. “More wine?”

Oh, yes, please,” says Track, without hesitation, grabbing life by the balls, sucking the marrow out of life, living life to the full saying yes to life bright sunny game on, good sport, up for it, sexy, engaged, wine drinking coiffing life yes.

I pay the bill, “smile” my credit card says, with a pink smiley face on it. I sign after some kafuffle over who will pay - the waitress assumes one of the men, “oh no, we're not that old fashioned.” They laugh. I pay, I provide, I feel good and my signature comes out confident and increasingly similar to my Dad's with the end of the "Seeley" tailing off with an indiscriminate number of loops for “e”s and “l”s and “y”s.

Chairs scrape and we get up, me checking how much the champagne and wine has affected me, feeling a lush long way away from the days when choosing food in restaurants meant looking at the prices and not the different dishes on offer. I slide my chair back under the table easily. Good, not too bad on that front then.

We walk up the wooden stairs of “this wooden O” and perch up high ready for the play to begin. A young black woman strides onto the stage. She is wearing bronze brown doublet and hose and she removes her feathered hat with a flourishing bow to the audience. I love the colour of her dark skin against the fabric of her clothes and the loud, pure clarity of her voice, gently and cheekily reminding us in rhyme about switching mobile phone off. She replaces her hat and leaves the stage, which is now empty wooden floorboards. A trap door opens and a flurry of rambunctious flesh appears, a man and a woman tumbling kisses and coiffing tankards together. Both have long unruly hair and voluminous white cotton shirts and dresses. The woman drapes herself about the man, drunk and laughing – whilst he, who is really a she - slings his arm round her waist, takes a swig and plants another kiss on her laughing

face. He is tall with high brown boots and an upright stance, kissing life and swigging the woman. She looks up at him, more fluid in her disarray. Others appear on the stage and call his attention. He, who is she, Petrucchio, discards the woman, who continues to gaze at him, and he moves his attention towards the newcomers. He tucks his shirt in with much rearrangement of the trousers, does up his waistcoat and addresses the others in confident, loud, joyful tones. The woman goes to him and he brushes her off with his hand, his focus now diverted.

I see the curve of her body in his waistcoat and know there's nothing to be elaborately rearranged in those trousers. My eyes slide to his woman, now pushed to one side but still waiting for the sunshine of his attention. I think of my dog waiting for a scrap from the table at dinner time, with infinite patience and expectant gratitude in his liquid eyes. I want to be wearing his tall boots, I want to be the one the newcomers came to see, but I feel greater empathy with the woman in her nightie, now superfluous to requirements, moving out of the limelight, adding little more than texture to the action of the play.

He/she ruffles his hand through his hair. Her hand through her hair. Here is a man layered over the base of a woman picked out with piquancy of womanish top note. Watching the play, I see this stomping, bullish, muscling in, strapping presence of a man delivered to me from an underlying female groundedness. It's like seeing double, or x-ray vision where I can see both things at once, one overlaid precisely over the other. Translucent criss-crossed papyrus overlaid and fused into a whole. How could this woman / man be getting away with such appalling behaviour on the stage - the rest of the characters are allowing him/her to stomp all over the place and are playing up to this. Can't they see that this is really a woman? How fantastic it must feel to stomp around, just for once, with approval and sucking up and not the critical gaze that says "you're not being thoughtful enough, haven't you considered others? That's not very nice, is it? Aren't you being a bit selfish?"

"Yes, I am being bloody selfish - do as I say or just get out of my way."

"Aren't you scared that no one will want to be with you if you carry on like this?" says the critical gaze.

"Carry on like what? I'm just asserting myself here, creating my individual path. For God's sake grow up and sort yourself out. Know what you want, like me. Now shove off while I get on with my life, you snivelling, self-pitying victim of a girl." And, what's the voice of the woman under this misogynistic bastard? What does the actress have to say?

I elbow Track, sat next to me, raptly, eyes wide. She looks around glowing in the reflected energy from the stage. "Bloody hell," I say.

"This is fantastic. What must that feel like?" she responds.

"You like her, don't you?" says G., on my other side.

"Not half. Who is she - give me the programme."

I leaf through and find her name - Janet McTeer. Been on TV. Cops and robbers stuff I don't recognise. My mind fills and empties with the briefest of lesbian fantasies. Of course, she's playing a part here and is probably as self-doubting as me. It's seeing the recognition of reflection, not inspiration; I look back at the play and wish I could capture the energy before me.

19 November 2003

... it was just so exciting and thrilling to see this translucent layering of this strapping woman playing that bastard man with such irony. It was such fun. It was so delicious. She was stomping all over the stage and was getting away with it. Again, it was a different energy. It was almost a combination of the flamenco dance and the female matador. I can't explicate it yet. Look at the expression on her face here – it's got something of that multi-layered... She was really rambunctious. Her energy was fantastic. What I was curious about, which was much clearer at the time, was this multi-layered woman playing man who, even by today's standards was appallingly behaved and doing it with irony. Just enough irony. In that role, she could get away with anything. People were accommodating this abysmal behaviour. The whole system accommodated this behaviour.

I'd seen this play before done by men and women and I really had to suspend my feelings of revulsion at it.

In the programme, McTeer talks about it. The question to her is: "How do you reconcile being a woman with playing one of the most famous misogynists in literature? Well, first it's a wonderfully well written and very funny play and it would be a shame to abandon it altogether. Then, there is the fabulous irony of doing it with a company of women, who might have been expected to choose an overtly feminist play. But as a group of women, we can gently satirise men by exaggerating male behaviour, especially in the world in which the play is set. We're presented with a macho, competitive society in which marriage is a mercantile transaction. Within that, Petrucchio is especially boysy, a lad. By keeping within the framework, we can have most fun in a feminist way by heightening male behaviour. There's a particular tension for me, of course, because in a way, I don't want him to be likeable, but he has to be. It would be easy to make him completely irredeemable, but then it would be a tragedy and not a comedy."

Ways to Silence a Woman

Say: We're saying the same thing, don't you see?

Say: Don't question, just have faith

Say: Don't defy my authority. If you want to pass, do it the way I tell you

Say: You're ideas are seductive

Say: You're ideas are dangerous

Say: It's too disgusting. It's not done. It's too immature. Not well thought out

Say: You're overreacting

Say: You're being too emotional

Say: You're not making any sense

Say: I can't understand you when you're upset

Say: I can't listen when you're so angry

Say: You've missed the point

Say: Well, really we're talking about something else

Say: That's a wild idea (and then talk about your own work)

Say: That's not practical

Say: That's grandiose

Say: No one will do it, believe it or follow you

Say: No one will want it

Say: No one wants to listen to that

Say: It's a closed system, you can't change it

Say: They'll ignore you. They'll forget it. It's already been done. It's not time. It's not the right year. Who do you think you are? No one can predict the future

Say: I didn't have it any better than you, so stop whining

Say: I put up with it so you'll have to, too

Say: I've suffered for a long time and can't stand to hear you

Say: You're not ready

Say: I'll help you (but then don't)

Say: I'll invite you (but then don't)

Say: I'll pave the way (but then destroy her message)

Say: I'll open the door (and then shut it in her face)

Say: I'll help you if you write it the way I want you to

Say: We'll include you (and then forget to)

Say: We'll talk about it (but never talk about it)

When you are confronted, make excuses.

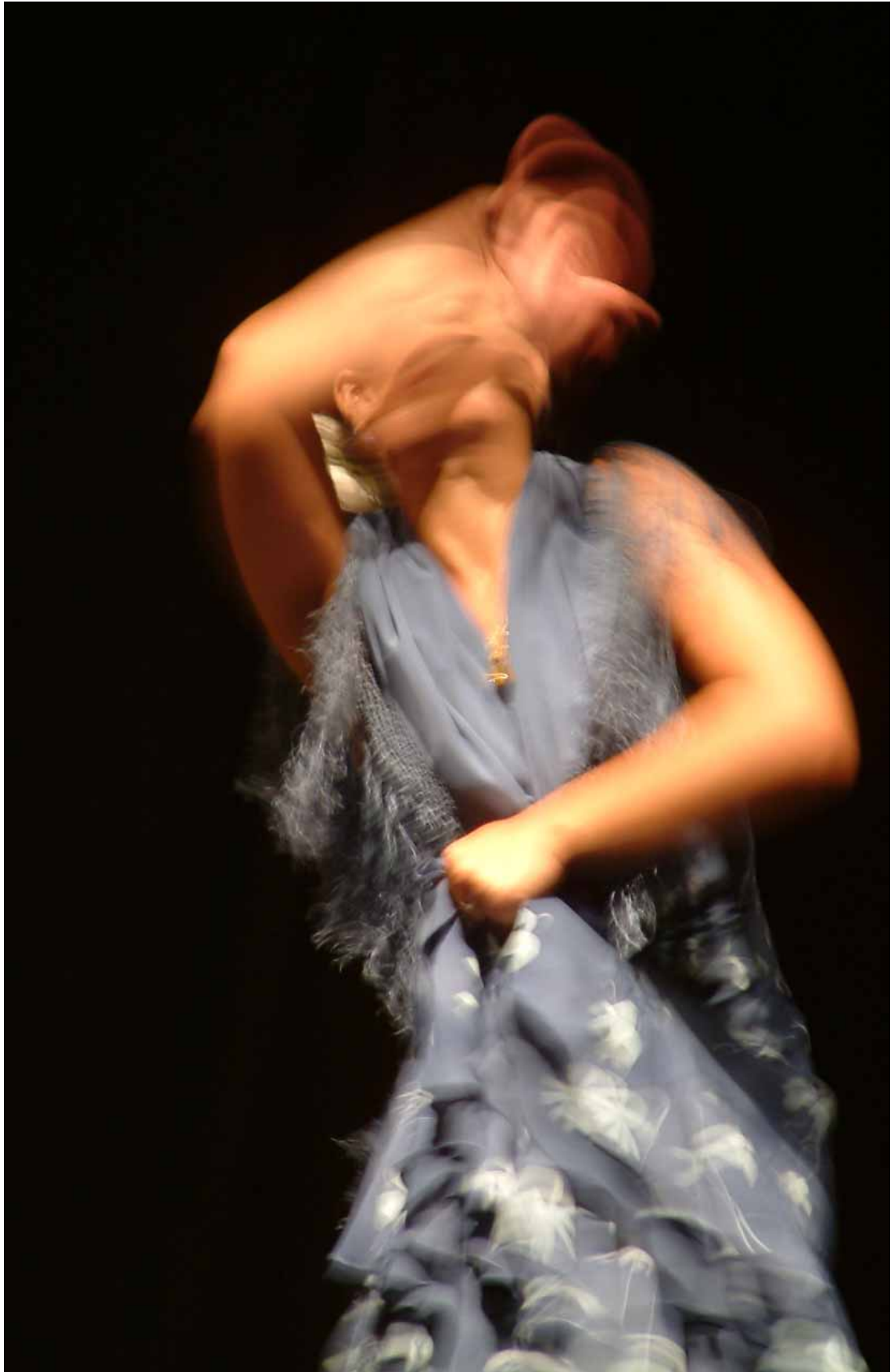
Say you are tired, you're busy, you are overwhelmed

To give her voice?

Just two words:

"Tell me"

Clarissa Pinkola Estés

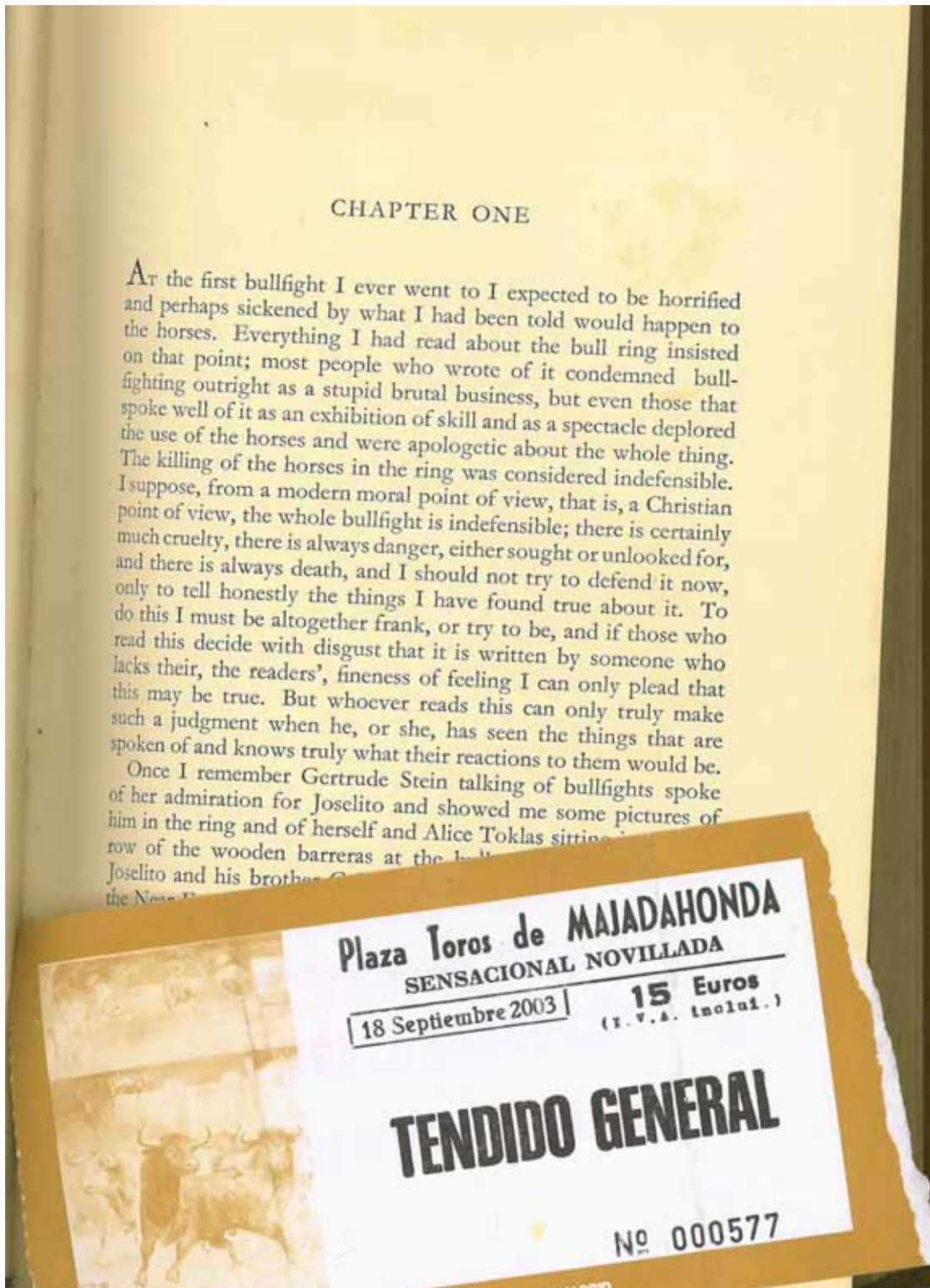


Flamenco is an attitude of refusing to be vanquished

CHAPTER ONE

At the first bullfight I ever went to I expected to be horrified and perhaps sickened by what I had been told would happen to the horses. Everything I had read about the bull ring insisted on that point; most people who wrote of it condemned bullfighting outright as a stupid brutal business, but even those that spoke well of it as an exhibition of skill and as a spectacle deplored the use of the horses and were apologetic about the whole thing. The killing of the horses in the ring was considered indefensible. I suppose, from a modern moral point of view, that is, a Christian point of view, the whole bullfight is indefensible; there is certainly much cruelty, there is always danger, either sought or unlooked for, and there is always death, and I should not try to defend it now, only to tell honestly the things I have found true about it. To do this I must be altogether frank, or try to be, and if those who read this decide with disgust that it is written by someone who lacks their, the readers', fineness of feeling I can only plead that this may be true. But whoever reads this can only truly make such a judgment when he, or she, has seen the things that are spoken of and knows truly what their reactions to them would be.

Once I remember Gertrude Stein talking of bullfights spoke of her admiration for Joselito and showed me some pictures of him in the ring and of herself and Alice Toklas sitting in a row of the wooden barreras at the bullfight. I remember Joselito and his brother Cagancho and the other bullfighters of the Near East.



"...whoever reads this can only truly make such a judgement when he, or she, has seen the things that are spoken of and knows truly what their reactions to them would be..."

Ernest Hemmingway, Death in the Afternoon

19 November 2003

How do I know what I think until I have experienced it in my body?

After much discussion about bullfight, no bullfight, G. and I decided that we would go to a bullfight if serendipity made it easy for us to do so. And, if barriers kept coming down, then we wouldn't do it. Barriers kept coming down for the first two thirds of the holiday and then it opened up. And the sealing factor was the fact that one of the three matadors was a woman. I thought, actually, I'm really interested in this and I was terribly northern and cried all the way through and hid behind the camera and was completely horrified by... there was no sense of surrendering to the death, I mean, the bull was fighting to the last. It was hideous. And, if we cover up the bull, the movements and the skill of the people were amazing as well, so I just had to separate those two things. Once I was in, I had to stay in and watch the whole thing. It was bad enough watching six bulls go from being in their prime of life, fantastic, gorgeous wonderful beasts to dead in 15 minutes, 20 minutes (and, apparently, if you leave it longer than that they suss out that there's a person behind the cape and go for the person instead). It all felt very real and at least it was transparent and wasn't hidden away in an abattoir. It's a bit like doing the ILO work, really, sitting there in the face of something that's very real, forcing myself to stay there and allowing myself to get disturbed by it.

I was quite shaky as well and found myself very disturbed when, on two occasions, the bull got the person on the floor. The two men. And that was more disturbing, even, than seeing the bull. And I thought, oh gosh, I belong to this other species.

Watching her, it was fantastic to see her, when she'd killed her bull, she did a round of the bull ring with the men trailing behind her and I thought, yeah, I like that, that's good. I enjoyed that bit. But, of course, she was displaying exactly the same behaviour as the male bullfighters. I was interested that she was doing it at all. I was interested in seeing that very different kind of energy and it being OK for a woman to be displaying that energy. She needed to, she couldn't have done the job otherwise. She had to do that otherwise the bull would have just made mincemeat of her. I was curious about that. I was sitting there accusing her of "how could you?", much more than accusing him, the other one of "how could you?". There was some of that going on with huge admiration for all of them for going anywhere near the bull. And huge admiration in another way for these magnificent beasts and the life being taken out of them. So a bit of a life/death thing there.



I'm the mother of all whores
I can invite the whole world in
And still not be satisfied

Men die for my tits
My arse is like a ripe peach
You could sink your teeth into
If I let you

I can out-paint Picasso
I taught Rembrandt everything he knew
Galleries compete to show my work

I can cook to make the gods weep
I can eat until I'm gorged
I'll feed you with the tastiest of morsels
And then make you beg for more

My garden is Eden
My home like a palace
My bed is the most inviting heaven
And my bookshelves an intellectual glory

My dog is magnificent
Loving like no other dog has ever been

I love like you'll never experience again
My enthusiasm for life gushes like a geyser
My brain is limitless
And my body's a work of art

I swim like a dolphin
I flex like a bitch
I fuck like a whore
And make love like a goddess

My voice is honey
My words are the truth

19 April 2002

