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Meaning of Folklore

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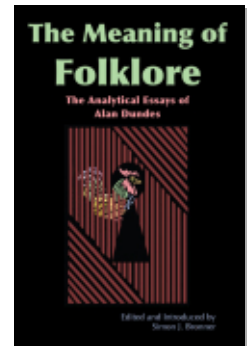
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GALLUS AS PHALLUS:
A PSYCHOANALYTIC
CROSS-CULTURAL CONSIDERATION
OF THE COCKFIGHT AS FOWL PLAY

Introduction

A year before Dundes died, he reflected on his tremendous output of essays in over forty years of publishing and told me that the present essay could be his “most important and significant,” although he noted that others probably have received more attention. His regard for this study, originally published in 1993, was due to the way it integrated several important positions he took through his career. First, it exemplified a folkloristic methodology of working with cross-cultural variants and identifying the structural underpinnings of texts, leading to a symbolist, psychoanalytic interpretation. Second, it provided explanations about gender identity, by postulating that men engaged in combat games to prove their manhood. The symbolic system in the text of the event was apparent—seeing the cockfight, in its various cultural contexts, as “mutual masturbation or a phallic brag duel.” A victor displayed his manhood by emasculating an opponent, in an all-male setting, through the threat of castration, or symbolically transforming him into a female. The participants might not have been aware of the symbolism, and that, in Dundes’s logic of explanation, demonstrated the function of folklore, as a frame of play or fantasy in order to deal with anxieties and conflicts. Dundes offered the general statement that “the whole point of folklore in general, and the cockfight as an instance of folklore, is to allow individuals to do or say things they could not otherwise do or say. If people actually knew what they were doing, e.g., in telling a joke, they could not participate in that activity, e.g., tell that joke” (1994, 241). Third, it illustrated the unconscious content of folklore, which allows it to function as it does, that is, as a socially sanctioned outlet for the expression of taboo thoughts and acts. Fourth, it set forth the implications such studies had regarding scholars’ cultural biases against psychoanalytic interpretation. A frequent theme for Dundes was that, because of these biases, scholars tended to negate his prevalent call for “depth” of analysis, and read cultural events as texts of social relations.

The motivation for writing “Gallus as Phallus” came from re-evaluating Clifford Geertz’s seminal essay “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” (1972), which later became the anchor for the widely used book *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). In light

of Dundes's essays such as "The Study of Folklore in Literature and Culture: Identification and Interpretation" (1965c, and chapter 2 in the present volume), one could understand his attraction to Geertz's analytical work on a folk custom, with its rhetorical emphasis on "interpretation." Geertz, like Dundes, also used the metaphor of depth to describe latent meanings, although Dundes referred to Freudian depth psychology, while Geertz's "deep play" had its roots in philosopher Jeremy Bentham's term, and in the sociological tradition of Max Weber. Dundes, like many other professors, assigned Geertz's essay in seminars as a prime example of the ethnographic analysis of events as "texts" that could be symbolically read. For Geertz, the cockfight was a text, because it constituted "a Balinese reading of Balinese experience; a story they tell themselves about themselves."

Yet Dundes became dissatisfied with Geertz's reductionist argument that cultural texts of "deep play" stood, ultimately, for relations of social status in a single culture, especially when Dundes recognized cross-cultural patterns and the hard-to-miss literalization of "cock" references, thereby suggesting homoerotic phallic symbolism. From this analysis, Dundes asked, could generalizations be made from the cockfight to other male competitive contests, shedding light on gender identity? In one of Dundes's last essays, in *Manly Traditions* (Bronner 2005), he located the cockfight in a continuum running from competitive games to actual warfare because in these activities males "demonstrate their masculinity at the expense of male opponents whom they feminize." Dundes speculated that there were a number of contributing factors to the concept that men had a greater need to prove their masculinity than women did to reaffirm their femininity. One was the infantile conditioning of boys growing up in a "strongly female-centered world." Therefore, boys later broke away from the world of women and joined the world of men, by engaging in all-male puberty rites. He also hypothesized that in adolescence, the time when male sexuality peaked, the only sexual objects immediately available were other males. As a result, Dundes surmised, all-male competitive sport teams, and the military, were organizations where sexual energies could be expended on other males within a group, or on males construed as opponents. Dundes also proposed a biological factor, the male phallic erection. Because an erection is a temporary state, he thought that males felt the need for proving, repeatedly, that they were able to achieve this "indisputable demonstration of masculinity." Dundes claimed that winning one match or one game probably was not enough: "One has to prove one's ability to feminize or emasculate one's opponent again and again" (2005a).

For other case studies by Dundes testing these hypotheses on gender identity, see 2002a, 1987h, and 1997b; and Dundes and Falassi 1975. For examples of folkloristic gender studies of ritual and festival that cite Dundes's ideas, see Mechling 2001; Bronner 2006a, 2005a, 2004; and Suárez-Orozco 1993.

Gallus as Phallus: A Psychoanalytic Cross-Cultural Consideration of the Cockfight as Fowl Play

THE COCKFIGHT IS ONE OF the oldest, most documented and most widely distributed traditional sports known to man.* It has been reported in ancient India (Sarma 1964; Bhide 1967; Chattopadhyay 1973), ancient China (Cutter 1989a, b), ancient Iran (Modi 1911), and ancient Greece (Witte 1868). From Greece, cockfighting moved to Rome, as mosaics attest (Magaldi 1929). The earliest recorded cockfight in China dates from 517 B.C. (Cutter 1989a, p. 632; 1989b, p. 10), which would make cockfighting at least 2500 years old. (See also Danaë 1989, p. 34, who suggests that cockfighting existed before 2000 B.C.) The antiquity of cockfighting in India is attested by a specific reference in the *Kama Sutra* (3d century A.D.), Chapter 2 of Part 1, where young women are advised to study some sixty-four arts, of which number 41 includes “The rules of cockfighting,” the clear implication being that a woman would be more pleasing to men who are vitally interested in such activities (Vatsyayana 1963, p. 14).

There is some consensus that the cock itself (and perhaps the cockfight) may have originated in southeast Asia (Peters 1913, p. 395; Tudela 1959, p. 14), where it diffused to China, India, and eventually Iran and on to classical Greece and Rome before moving to Western Europe and thence to the Caribbean. The cock may have come to the New World as early as the second voyage of Christopher Columbus in 1493 (Tudela 1959, p. 15). From Asia, the cockfight spread eventually nearly throughout the Americas. The cockfight, however, is by no means universal, as it seems never to have spread to any great extent to native North and South America or to sub-Saharan Africa.

Once popular in much of western Europe, including England (Pegge 1773; Egan 1832; Boulton 1901), Scotland (Beattie 1937); Ireland (Beacey 1945; O’Gormon 1983), and Wales (Peate 1970), cockfighting is still to be found in the north of France (Demulder 1934; Cegarra, 1987, 1988, 1989), in Belgium (Desrousseaux 1886, 1889, pp. 115–124; Delannoy 1948; Remouchamps and Remade 1949), and in Spain (Justo 1969; Marvin 1984). Nowhere is cockfighting enjoyed more than in southeast Asia, as is confirmed by reports from Borneo (Barclay 1980), Celebes (Kaudern 1929, pp. 337–348), and Java (Serièrè, 1873, pp. 92–100; Kreemer 1893; Soeroto 1916–1917), Malaysia (Wilkinson 1925), the Philippines (Bailey 1909; Lee 1921; Lansang 1966; Guggenheim 1982), Sarawak (Sandhi 1959), Sumatra (Scheltema 1919), and, of course, Bali (Eck 1879; Knight 1940; Bateson and Mead 1942; Geertz 1972; Picard 1983). Cockfighting is equally popular in the Caribbean (Challes 1972), for example, in Martinique (Champagnac 1970; Affergan 1986), in Haiti (Paul 1952; Marcelin 1955a, h), in Cuba (Wurdemann 1844, pp. 87–93; Hazard 1871, pp. 191–195), and in Puerto Rico (Alonso 1849, pp. 77–93; Dinwiddie 1899; Cadilla de Martinez 1941; Calderin 1970; Feijoo 1990). There are cockfight enthusiasts throughout Latin America, for example, in Argentina (Mantegazza 1916, pp. 69–71; Saubidet 1952, pp. 345–356), Brazil (Leal 1989), Colombia (León Rey 1953), Mexico (Mendoza 1943);

and Venezuela (Armas Chitty 1953–1954; Acosta Saignes 1954; Marquez 1954; Perez 1984; Cook 1991, pp. 79–94).

In the United States, cockfighting is technically banned in most states. Nevertheless, we have published accounts of cockfights from California (Beagle 1968), Connecticut (Liebling 1950), Florida (Vogeler 1942), Georgia (Hawley 1987), Louisiana (Del Sesto 1975; Hawley 1982; Donlon 1991), New York (Hyman 1950), North Carolina (Roberts 1965; Herzog 1985), Tennessee (Cobb 1978; Gunter 1978), Texas (Braddy 1961; Tippette 1978), Utah (Walker 1986), Vermont (Mosher 1989, pp. 96–102), and Virginia (Anderson 1933; Carson 1965, pp. 151–164), among others.

Some of the abundant literature devoted to cockfighting includes detailed discussions of the various “rules” that prevail in different locales (cf. Eck 1879; Nugent 1929; Saubidet 1952, pp. 354–356; Marquez 1954; Champagnac 1970, pp. 58–65; Herzog 1985; Harris 1987). Other writings are concerned with the elaborate intricacies of breeding and caring for fighting cocks—one source noted 253 different names of breeds and cross-breeds, and this list included only English-language designations (Nugent 1929, p. 79; see also Jull, 1927; Finsterbusch 1980). A number of how-to manuals are incredibly specific and include the minutiae of recommended regimen right down to the details of diet (see, e.g., Phillott 1910; Feijoo 1990).

The cockfight has been a source of inspiration for a host of poems and short stories (Fraser 1981; Cutter 1989h) as well as paintings (Tegetmeier 1896; Bryden 1931; Gilbey 1957; Marçal 1967, pp. 350–351; Cadet 1971, pp. 159–165). There is, for example, an entire Irish novel based on cockfighting (O’Gormon 1983; for an American novel, see Willeford 1972). Cockfighting has its own folk speech, which has led to the compilation of cockfight slang glossaries (Jaquemotte and Lejeune 1904; Mendoza 1943; Saubidet 1952, pp. 345–354; León Rey 1953; Marcelin 1955b; Perez 1984, pp. 17–78). In English, too, the cockfight has provided a rich set of metaphors for everyday life. The phrases “to turn tail,” “to raise one’s hackle(s),” and “to show the white feather” are some of the most familiar (Scott 1957, pp. 118–119). Similarly, to be “cocky” or “cocksure,” or to be “cock of the walk” (Gilbey 1957, p. 24), and perhaps “to pit” (someone against another) presumably derive ultimately from the lexicon of cockfighting. There is one etymology, possibly a folk etymology, for the word “cocktail,” that supposedly comes from “cock ale” or a liquid concoction designed to serve as a tonic to strengthen fighting cocks (Nugent 1929, p. 80). It is also tempting to ponder the possible metaphorical associations of the “cock” found in guns (as in “Don’t go off half-cocked”) or in pipes where cocks regulate the flow of liquids (or gases). Among the more esoteric cockfighting traditions that have been studied are the names of fighting cocks in Brazil (Teixeira 1992) and the folk art motifs used to decorate the carrying boxes used in northern Utah (Walker 1986, pp. 39–41).

Most considerations of cockfighting invariably cite the classical instance of Themistocles, who was leading his Athenian army against the Persians in the fifth century B.C. when he chanced to see some cocks fighting. His alleged, but oft-quoted, remarks were: “These animals fight not for the gods of their country, nor for the monuments of their ancestors, nor for glory, nor for freedom, nor for their children, but for the sake of victory, and that one may not yield to the other” (Pegge 1773, p. 137). This impromptu speech supposedly inspired and rallied the troops of Themistocles. (The standard source is Aelian, *Varia Historia* 2: 28; cf. Bruneau 1965, p. 107.)

Particular techniques are found in specific local cockfighting traditions. Some of these seem to be quite ancient. For example, there is an arcane system of cockfighting lore in the

Philippines that suggests that there are definite times of the day that favor cocks of a particular color (Guggenheim 1982, p. 11). This set of associations of calendar and cock color is almost certainly related to a complex “cock almanac” reported in south India (Saltore 1926–1927, pp. 319–324).

The most common form of cockfight involves a one-on-one confrontation between two equally matched cocks, a battle that may be interspersed with standard periods of respite. Yet there is considerable variation within the one-to-one scenario. For example, a nineteenth-century account of cockfighting in Cuba summarizes some of the alternatives:

There are various modes of fighting: *Al cotejo*—that is, in measuring, at sight, the size or spurs of both chickens. *Al peso*—or by weight, and seeing if the spurs are equal. *Tapados*—where they settle the match without seeing the chickens, or, in fact, “go it blind.” *De cuchilla*—when they put on the artificial spurs, in order to make the fight sharper, quicker, and more fatal. *Al pico*—when they fight without any spurs. (Hazard 1871, pp. 192–193)

There were other, more elaborate forms of cockfighting. These include the battle royal and the Welsh main, once popular in England. We may cite an eighteenth-century description of these special forms of cockfighting:

What aggravates the reproach and the disgrace upon us Englishmen, is those species of fighting which are called the Battle-royal, and the Welsh-main, known nowhere in the world, as I think, but here; neither in China, nor in Persia, nor in Malacca, nor amongst the savage tribes of America. These are scenes so bloody as almost to be too shocking to relate; and yet, as many may not be acquainted with the horrible nature of them, it may be proper, for the excitement of our aversion and detestation, to describe them in a few words. In the former an unlimited number of fowls are pitted; and when they have slaughtered one another for the diversion, *dii boni!* of the otherwise generous and humane Englishman, the single surviving bird is to be esteemed the victor, and carries away the prize. The Welsh-main consists, we will suppose, of sixteen pair of cocks; of these the sixteen conquerors are pitted a second time; the eight conquerors of these are pitted a third time; so that, incredible barbarity! thirty one cocks are sure to be most inhumanly murdered for the sport and pleasure, the noise and nonsense, nay, I must say, the profane cursing and swearing, of those who have the effrontery to call themselves, with all these bloody doings, and with all this impiety about them, *Christians*. (Pegge 1773, pp. 148–149; see also Boulton 1901, pp. 189–190)

As the unmistakable tone of the preceding passage reminds us, a large part of the mass of writings devoted to the cockfight concerns the question of whether the sport should be banned on the grounds of excessive cruelty to animals. According to one source (Powel 1937, p. 191), the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals insists that the cockfight “is a blot on civilization’s fair escutcheon.” The typical strategy of the humane protest against cockfighting consists of simply describing cockfights in gory detail:

In almost every fight at least one cock is seriously mutilated or killed. In about half of the fights, more or less, both birds are maimed beyond further use if not killed. Eyes are gouged out, abdomens slit and slashed until the birds are

anguished monstrosities, legs and wings are broken. But so long as a bird can and will keep facing towards the opposing cock he is left in the pit and cheered for his "courage." (Anon. 1952, p. 11; cf. Hawley 1989)

Of course, the cockfighting community has fought back. One of their common arguments is that cockfighting is much less cruel than other sports, less cruel, for example, than boxing, in which men may be maimed or even killed. In England, cockfighting, which is illegal, is compared to foxhunting, which is legal, by one cocker as follows: "Cockfighting isn't as unfair as foxhunting, you see. One of my cocks has a 50–50 chance of winning. What chance has a fox got when there are fifty hounds chasing him? A million to one shot of getting away" (Penrose 1976, p. 236). Another standard argument is that cocks are naturally inclined to fight, and that man is only facilitating or expanding on what occurs by itself in nature. Even the use of gaffs or blades is defended on the grounds that they are "used solely to end a fight quickly, and the winner will then return to his harem to propagate his species whilst the loser will die the death he has chosen" (Jarvis 1939, p. 378). Incidentally, there are many different types of gaffs, for instance "brike special, skeleton, split socket, bayonet, jagger, regulation, and hoisters" (Jones 1980, p. 144; cf. Worden and Darden 1992).

Another argument put forth by cockfighters is "that it is impossible to make a cock fight an adversary if the bird does not wish to fight . . . if at the particular moment the joy of battle is not in him, neither skill by the 'setter' nor insult by the adversary will make him fight. The game-cock is never an unwilling gladiator" (James 1928, p. 140). Yet another popular argument is that people raise chickens to be slaughtered for food—think of all the fried chicken franchises in the United States alone. Is that more cruel to the species than cockfighting? Cockfighters are wont to point out that chickens raised for market may be slaughtered when they are anywhere from eight to ten weeks of age. In contrast, a gamecock

will not even be fought before he's one year old and during that one year, he will receive excellent care. . . . Many are retired to stud after only three or four wins. The question seems to be whether it is less cruel for the cock to be killed by a man rather than by another cock. (Tippette 1978, p. 274; see also Allred and Carver 1979, p. 59)

Despite continuing efforts to ban the cockfight, there are places where cockfighting is legalized. In the north of France near the Belgian border, there are thirty-two authorized "gallodromes" (Cegarra 1989, p. 671). In Puerto Rico, there are reportedly six hundred cockpits with 100,000 fights annually, attended by two million spectators. Promoted by the island's official Department of Recreation, cockfights are even broadcast on television (Bryant 1991, p. 20). Even in places where cockfighting is officially illegal, it thrives.

While the vast majority of the written reports of cockfighting tend to be purely descriptive and not the least bit analytic, there is a small body of literature that seeks to interpret the cockfight. Of these, unquestionably the most famous is Clifford Geertz's (1972) "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." This essay marks a turning point in the history of cockfight scholarship. All modern writing on the subject is directly or indirectly derived from Geertz's discussion of the Balinese material. Geertz argued in his interpretation of the cockfight "the general thesis is that the cockfight, and especially the deep cockfight, is fundamentally a dramatization of status concerns" (p. 18). According to Geertz,

What sets the cockfight apart from the ordinary course of life . . . [is] that it provides a metasocial commentary upon the whole matter of assorting human beings into fixed hierarchical ranks and then organizing the major part of collective existence around that assortment. (p. 26)

Geertz thus interpreted the cockfight exclusively in terms of Balinese social organization or social structure.

Geertz's reading of the Balinese cockfight has attained the status of a modern classic in anthropology (Watson 1989) although it has received some criticism (Roseberry 1982; Parker 1985; Schneider 1987). Anthropologist James A. Boon (1977), an expert on Balinese ethnography who is understandably reluctant to criticize one of his former mentors, remarked that "Geertz does not survey the range of Balinese cockfights; rather he telescopes repeated observations into an ideal-typical description of a choice elaboration of the form in one village area" (p. 33). More severe is Vincent Crapanzano (1986), who, although very admiring of Geertz's "interpretive virtuosity" (pp. 53, 75), contends that Geertz offered his own subjective interpretation of the Balinese cockfight. Moreover, Crapanzano argues, Geertz presented little or no empirical evidence in support of *his* interpretation (pp. 72–75). Crapanzano concludes there is "no understanding of the native from the native's point of view. There is only the constructed understanding of the constructed native's constructed point of view," and Geertz's "interpretation is simply not convincing" (p. 74; cf. Fine 1992, p. 248).

Crapanzano's critique is echoed by Jacobson (1991), who maintains that Geertz made assertions unsupported by ethnographic data.

Yet no evidence presented warrants conclusions about how Balinese think or feel about themselves or their society. Whereas the language and rules of the cockfight are described in detail, perceptions are simply attributed to Balinese. In short, Geertz develops his interpretation of the interpretive function of the Balinese cockfight by stating and restating his claims without providing data that substantiate them. He presents no evidence for accepting his reading of the "text." (pp. 52–53)

Unlike Crapanzano and Jacobson, anthropologist Scott Guggenheim (1982) has himself made an ethnographic study of a cockfight, in this case in the Philippines. Guggenheim agrees with Geertz that cockfighting is a "cultural performance" (p. 29), but he disagrees that the cockfight provides an indigenous or native model of social structure or status hierarchy. In some ways, Guggenheim argues, the cockfight in the Philippines is "strikingly blind to social reality" and the cockfight as folk model "skews social reality" (p. 29). In this context,

There is, for example, no mention of women, despite women's prominent role not only in household management, but in marketing agriculture, wage-earning labor, professional occupations, and politics. Nor does it say very much about what all those high ranking people do to deserve their positions, besides buying expensive chickens. (p. 29)

The theoretical issue here, with respect to the role and function of folklore in culture—and the cockfight is an example of folklore: it is a traditional game or sport—is that the old-fashioned Boasian notion of "folklore as culture reflector," which wrongly assumed a one-to-one relationship between folklore and culture, is inadequate. Folklore, to be sure,

does articulate and sometimes enforces the norms of a culture, but it also, often at the same time, offers a socially sanctioned *escape* from those norms. This is what Bascom (1954) called the paradoxical double function of folklore (p. 349). To the extent that folklore involves fantasy, and I believe that it does to a very great extent, the literal one-to-one relationship posited between folklore and culture automatically assumed by a majority of anthropologists and folklorists is doomed to failure as a methodological principle designed to illuminate the content of folkloristic phenomena. Just as anthropologists inevitably assume that myths provide a “charter” for belief in social organization, à la Malinowski’s literal, anti-symbolic theory of myth, so Geertz and others wrongly interpret the cockfight as a charter or articulation of social structure, status hierarchy in particular. Guggenheim (1982) is on the right track in pointing out that the cockfight in the Philippines hardly qualifies as a model of normal Filipino social structure—why are women left out of the cockfight, he asks? But like other anthropologists who have considered the cockfight, he fails to appreciate its obvious and overt symbolism.

Although Guggenheim pays the usual social anthropological lip service to symbolism, his conclusions show that he too has missed the basic underlying significance of the cockfight: “Taken as a symbolic system, cockfighting successfully couples individual self-identity and self-esteem, social and political loyalties, and even aesthetic satisfaction to an elegant and exciting event” (p. 30). How do Geertz’s and Guggenheim’s interpretations of the cockfight compare with other anthropological analyses of the same event? Del Sesto (1980) sees the cockfight as “a symbolic representation of man’s continual struggle for survival, as displays of courage and bravado in the face of adversity, and as attempts to understand the meaning and suffering of death” (p. 275). Parker (1986) claims that “the cockfight can be seen as a contest that is totally concerned with violence, competition, and aggression” (p. 26). Several ethnographers have sensed the importance of the masculine elements inherent in the cockfight. Marvin (1984), in his study of the Andalusian cockfight, sees it as a confirmation of male values:

In all conversations concerning the cockfight those involved with the event emphasized that it was *una cosa de hombres* (a men’s thing). It is a totally male-oriented event, the audience is almost totally male, the birds which fight are male and the virtues which are extolled are male virtues. (p. 641)

Marvin concludes, “The cockfight, though, is a celebration in that it is an event which extols certain aspects of masculinity” (p. 68).

This view is echoed by Leal (1989), one of the few women to analyze the cockfight. In a superb ethnographic account, she also suggests that “cockfighting is a celebration of masculinity where men, through their cocks, dispute, win, lose, and reinforce certain attributes chosen as male essence” (p. 210). This report from Brazil reaches conclusions similar to those of another female ethnographer who investigated cockfighting in northern France near the Belgian border. The latter confirms the masculinity aspect: “cockfights represent only one exclusive part of human society, that of the virile element” (Cegarra 1988, p. 55). Similarly, Danaë, in his magisterial survey of cockfighting worldwide, concludes with a discussion of cockfighters as an esoteric masculine society (1989, pp. 227–247). Affergan, in his study of cockfighting in Martinique, claims it is an outlet for male identity and aggression by male members of an oppressed group (1986, p. 120), while Kimberley Cook, in her analysis of cockfighting in Venezuela, sees it as a “ritualistic firm of aggression” where men vie to gain public recognition of their virility (1991, pp. 89–90).

All these interpretations of the cockfight, in my opinion, are flawed to some extent. Perhaps the most obvious methodological weakness is the failure to employ a comparative, cross-cultural perspective. The quintessential anthropological credo of cultural relativism notwithstanding, it is always a mistake to study data from one particular culture as if it were peculiar to that culture if comparable, if not cognate, data exist in other cultures. The cockfight is found outside of Bali, the Philippines, Louisiana, Tennessee, Brazil, northern France, Martinique, and Venezuela. Hence any would-be interpretation of the cockfight based on data from just one of these locations is bound to be inadequate. Let us assume, strictly for the sake of argument, that Geertz's interpretation of the Balinese cockfight as a "native" representation of Balinese status concerns is correct. If so, what, if anything, does this tell us about the possible significance of the cockfight in all of the other many cultures in which the cockfight occurs? Balinese social structure is not to be found in Puerto Rico or Belgium. The point is that if an item of folklore has cross-cultural distribution, it must be studied from a cross-cultural perspective, especially if one is interested in possible symbolic aspects. This does not mean that the cockfight necessarily means the same thing in all of its cultural contexts—although this cannot be ruled out a priori. The study of a cross-cultural phenomenon in just one cultural context is clearly a limited, partial one. In that sense, all previous studies of the cockfight have been limited and partial.

Along with the plea for a larger comparative perspective to view the cockfight, I suggest that the cockfight itself cannot be understood without being seen as an exemplar of a more comprehensive paradigm involving male gladiatorial combat. There are many forms of male battle, running the gamut from simple children's games to all-out war. It is my contention that the cockfight can best be analyzed as part and parcel of that paradigm.

Accordingly, let us begin our consideration of the cockfight as an instance of the broad category of male competitive games and sports. I believe one can discern a common underlying symbolic structure shared by most if not all such activities. It might be useful to distinguish three basic variants with respect to the nature of the participants. The first would be human male versus human male. This category includes fencing, boxing, wrestling, tennis, badminton, ping-pong, and such board games as chess and checkers. By extension, it could also subsume male team sports such as football, soccer, hockey, lacrosse, basketball, and so on. The second category would be human male versus male animal. Perhaps the classic illustration of this category is the bullfight. The third category would be male animal versus male animal. Here the obvious example is the cockfight.

It is my contention that all of those games and sports are essentially variations on one theme. The theme involves an all-male preserve in which one male demonstrates his virility, his masculinity, *at the expense of a male opponent*. One proves one's maleness by feminizing one's opponent. Typically, the victory entails (no pun intended!) penetration. In American football, the winning group of males get into their opponents' "end zones" more times than their opponents get into their end zones (see Dundes 1987, pp. 178–194). In the bullfight, the battle of man against bull is to determine whether the matador penetrates the bull or whether the bull's horns penetrate the matador. The penetrator comes away triumphant and with his masculinity intact; the one *penetrated* loses his masculinity. In the case of the bullfight, the expertise and skill of the matador can be rewarded with different degrees of symbolic castration of the bull. The bull, if penetrated cleanly and dextrously, may have his hooves, ears, or tail cut off to be "presented" to the successful matador.

The cockfight, despite its great antiquity and its continued popularity into the twentieth century, has never been properly understood as male phallic combat. Despite an enormous

literature devoted to the cockfight ranging from vivid descriptions to purported analyses, there is to my knowledge no single discussion that takes adequate account of the symbolic nature of the contest. I should like to test my hypothesis that the cockfight is a thinly disguised symbolic homoerotic masturbatory phallic duel, with the winner emasculating the loser through castration or feminization. I believe that the evidence for this interpretation is overwhelmingly abundant and cross-cultural in nature. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the symbolic meaning of the cockfight is not consciously recognized either by those who participate in the event or those who have written about it. The sole exception occurs in Cook's chapter on cockfighting on the island of Margarita off the coast of Venezuela in her 1991 doctoral dissertation, when she remarks "that when two individual men fight cocks and one loses, the loser assumes a feminine role" (1991, p. 98; see also Affergan 1986, p. 119). Baird (1981–1982, p. 83) claims that among the ancient Greeks the cockfight symbolized homosexual rape.

Let us first consider the gallus as phallus. In all of the many essays and monographs devoted to cockfighting, only a few actually comment on the phallic nature of the cocks. Scott (1941) in a paragraph in his survey volume *Phallic Worship* does mention the phallic significance of the cock (p. 262), but in his full-length history of cockfighting (Scott 1957), he drew no inferences from this. In Geertz's (1972) essay, which was first presented at a conference held in Paris in October of 1970, we are told:

To anyone who has been in Bali any length of time, the deep psychological identification of Balinese men with their cocks is unmistakable. The double entendre here is deliberate. It works in exactly the same way in Balinese as it does in English, even to producing the same tired jokes, strained puns, and uninventive obscenities. (p. 5)

It is a pity that Geertz was not a bit more ethnographically specific here, inasmuch as he failed to give even a single example of the "tired jokes" and "uninventive obscenities." Tired jokes and uninventive obscenities constitute valuable folkloric data that any journeyman folklorist fluent in the language would have almost certainly recorded. Geertz (1972) does cite Bateson and Mead's (1942) contention that the Balinese conception of the body "as a set of separately animated parts" allows them to view cocks as "detachable, self-operating penises, ambulant genitals with a life of their own" (p. 5), but then claims that he does "not have the kind of unconscious material either to confirm or disconfirm this intriguing notion." Again, one regrets his failure to collect the jokes, puns, and obscenities available to him. So, although Geertz did nominally acknowledge that cocks "are masculine symbols *par excellence*" among the Balinese, this fact did not play a major part in his interpretation of the cockfight as a whole.

The English word "cock," meaning both rooster and phallus, is the subject of wit among cockfighters in the United States. According to Hawley (1982), "One Florida informant was heard to say 'My cock may not be the biggest, but it's the best in this county.'" Apparently such double meanings were so common as to make older cockers use the term "rooster" in mixed company (p. 105; see also Baird 1981).

Among the various surveys of the folklore of cocks (e.g., Gittée 1891; Fehrlé 1912; Raseh 1930; and Coluccio 1970), only a few bother to mention the cock as a symbol of virility (Castillo de Lucas 1970, pp. 363–364; Cadet 1971, p. 109). The phallic associations of the rooster, even apart from its apparent potential for magical resuscitation in cockfighting, explains why the cock was a logical, if not psychologically obvious, choice

as a symbol for resurrection (Modi 1911, p. 112). Resurrection, if understood as reerection, or even in the narrow Christian sense of rising miraculously from the dead, is perfectly understandable in cockfight terms. There are numerous reports in the cockfight literature of a cock, apparently totally vanquished and lying motionless, somehow managing to recover sufficiently to arise and earn a victory over its opponent. This phallic symbolism would help explain why the cock is so often found atop penile Christian architectural constructions such as church towers, often in the form of weather vanes which pointedly mark wind direction (see Callisen 1939; Kretzenbacher 1958; Cadet 1971, pp. 166–168, 199–204; see also Forsyth 1978 and Baird, 1981–1982). The same rationale would illuminate the occurrence of a cockfight motif on sarcophagi and other funerary monuments (Bruneau 1965, p. 115; Forsyth 1978, pp. 262–264). It would also elucidate the frequent occurrence of the “Coq gaulois” as an emblem mounted on the prows of French warships (Vichot 1970).

Occasional comments indicate that cockfighting is analogous to sexuality. In a Filipino cockfighting manual we are told, “An ideal cock must be able to top a hen several times before letting her get up, because sex and gameness complement each other. . . . Indeed, no other sport has as much connection with sex as cockfighting” (Lansang 1966, pp. 41, 59, 139). The explicit anthropomorphic projection upon roosters and chickens in the Philippines is such that a strict double standard is maintained. Cocks are expected to indulge themselves, but hens are considered to be “sexually promiscuous” (p. 151), and breeders must keep watch over hens in the barnyard “because the hen is a natural whore” (p. 140).

Similar male chauvinism is found in other descriptions of chickens and roosters:

Females are strongly sexual and thus impulsive. Their actions are instinctively generated by feelings, and they need the presence of a male. They are amorous. Nature made them so and provided that their actions be governed by their sexual impulses. Males are cooler in disposition and have developed a different brain. They act according to logic. Females act impulsively. (Finsterbusch 1980, p. 166)

Hard to believe that these are descriptions of chickens and roosters, and not humans!

It is likely that the symbolic equation of cock and human phallus exists regardless of whether or not the term for “rooster” in a given culture refers explicitly to the male organ. In Spanish and Portuguese, for example, we are told that this verbal equation does not exist. However, in Brazil, a “tea of cock’s spurs is recommended for sexual potency” (Leal 1989, p. 241). In an Arabic tract from the thirteenth century we learn, “If you take a cock’s blood and mix it with honey, and place it on the fire, and apply the mixture to the penis of a man, it will increase his virile power as well as his sexual enjoyment” (Phillott 1910, p. 91). Moreover, if a woman ate a cock’s testicles after intercourse, she greatly increased her chances of becoming pregnant (Smith and Daniel 1975, p. 54; Hawley 1982, p. 106). In other words, customs and belief systems make the connection between rooster and phallus perfectly clear. There are also numerous winged phallic amulets in the shape of cocks (Baird 1981–1982, p. 84).

The sexual component is alluded to only en passant by most writers on cockfights, if it is mentioned at all. In an essay in *Esquire*, Crews (1977) remarked that when a man’s cock quits in the pit, he suffers profound humiliation. *When a man’s cock quits!* Yes, that’s part of the ritual, too. Perhaps the biggest part. A capon—a rooster that has been castrated to improve the taste of the meat—seldom crows, never notices hens, and will hit nothing with spur or beak. But a game fowl is the ultimate blend of balls and skill, all of which is

inextricably bound up with the man who bred it and fed it and handles it in the pit (p. 8). Attributing “balls” to cocks is not all that unusual. In Andalusia, for example, according to Marvin (1984, p. 66), men may say admiringly of an especially aggressive cock “*tienes los cojones de ganar bien*” (“it has the balls to win well”) (p. 65). The same idiom is found in Nathanael West’s account of a cockfight in *The Day of the Locust*, when the Mexican cocker Miguel praises a red rooster: “That’s a bird with lots of cojones” (West 1950, p. 123). One difficulty in “proving” the sexual component of the cockfight lies in the fact that such a component is largely unconscious. Consequently, it is not easy to obtain informant confirmation of the symbolism through interviews. Wollan (1980) phrased the problem as follows:

How much of this symbolism is present in modern cockfighting, and how much of it would be understood by cockers themselves, is difficult to say. How to research the topic is equally puzzling. Conversation promises to yield little information about cockfighting as a symbol, and certainly nothing about its sexual dimensions. Hence, interpretation of a sort not commonly done, certainly not in fashion in the social sciences, would seem indispensable. (p. 28)

Hawley, whose 1982 Florida State doctoral dissertation in criminology sought to define cockfighters as a deviant subculture, claimed that in his field experience “sexual entendre was encountered infrequently. . . . However, the implicit sexual nature of the activity was omnipresent” (p. 104). Still, he admitted, “Sexual animism was definitely the most difficult cultural theme to study in any fashion systematically or haphazardly . . . [and] a ticklish subject to study in the field under the best of conditions” (pp. 107, 147). Hawley himself does not doubt “the significance of the cock as a symbol of aggressive, male-oriented sexual behavior.” In his words, “The cock is, to all appearances, a walking unselfconscious set of eager genitals . . . the cock represents male sexuality raised (or lowered) to the most primitive extremity.” But, Hawley remarks, “the obvious sexual significance of the cock is characteristically ignored by the cocking fraternity in all but the most casual and relaxed settings” (p. 121). Hawley might have added the anthropological and folkloristic fraternities as well. A far too typical comment contained in one of several essays devoted to a twenty-year retrospective view of Geertz’s 1972 essay exemplifies the “meaningless” school of interpretation. One of the co-authors, a Louisiana native who wrote his Master’s thesis on Louisiana cockfights, claimed he “found many, if not most, of the same metaphors in cockfights in southern Louisiana that Geertz observed in Bali,” but his “reading was that cockfights there had no deep meaning but were just for fun” (Chick and Donlon 1992, p. 239).

Yet the sexual symbolic significance of the “cock” is attested by countless bawdy jokes. One exemplar can stand for many: Q. What is the difference between a rooster and Marilyn Monroe? A. A rooster says “Cock-a-doodle-do.” Marilyn Monroe says “Any cock’ll do.” It may or may not be relevant that St. Augustine in his interesting fourth-century discussion of cockfights discusses them in a paragraph that begins with a consideration of the sexual organs of animals which one cannot bear to look at (Russell 1942, p. 95).

If we accept the premise that the gallus can symbolically be a phallus, and if we provisionally accept the possibility that there is an underlying sexual component in the cockfight, we must next emphasize that the cockfight is an all-male event. Women do not usually attend cockfights. An early eighteenth-century account of cockfighting in England specifically remarks that “ladies never assist at these sports” (Saussure 1902, p. 282). Geertz (1972) even bothers to comment that “the cockfight is unusual within Balinese culture in being a single-sex public activity from which the other sex is totally and expressly excluded”

(p. 30*m*). Even in those cultures where women are permitted to observe cockfights, they are not active participants and do not handle the cocks. Some women resent their virtual exclusion from the world of cockfighting, and they resent as well the extraordinary amount of time their male companions devote to that world. From northern France we have a report of a female reproach that carries an overt sexual connotation: "He holds his cocks more often than he holds me" (Cegarra 1988, p. 58). Also from northern France, we find a distinction between women who may kill chickens as part of preparing food and men who are involved in cockfights. The fighting cock is a wild animal whose death, necessarily violent, is symbolic. The arming of cocks for battle is an affair of men, not women, and should not be confused with the domestic household requirement of killing chickens for food (p. 59).

The separation from women in cockfights is also signaled by the fact that the roosters themselves are not permitted access to hens during the period immediately preceding a cockfight. This form of quarantine is surely analogous to the modern-day football coach's forbidding his players to spend the night before a game with their wives or girlfriends, or to a bullfighter's sexual abstinence the night before a bullfight. Here is an account of the training of roosters in the Texas-Mexico area:

The most important experience of the young stag commences when his trainer moves him from his solitary cage and places him in a henry. There he bosses his harem of hens, living and learning the meaning of his cockhood. Later, when the trainer takes him away from the pullets, the cockerel turns into a bird of Mars. Now he has a lust to fight, his lust arising from his strong sex drive. (Braddy 1961, p. 103)

In another account from Texas, we are informed, "They have had no food this morning, and for two weeks have been penned up and deprived of female company" (Gard, 1936, p. 66).

In the Philippines, "it is a mistake to release your stag in a place where too many hens are kept, for so many hens make him tread often, and much treading greatly debilitates a bird and makes him feeble when he comes to fight" (Lansang 1966, p. 61). We learn that in Martinique sexual abstinence during the cocks' training is strict and that one makes a concerted effort to keep hens away from the cages in which the cocks are contained the evening before or the day of the cockfight for fear the cocks will dissipate their energies (Affergan 1986, p. 114). In the north of France, too, keeping the cock in isolation away from females is supposed to increase his aggressivity tenfold (Cegarra 1989, p. 673).

In Brazil, cocks

are not permitted sexual intercourse for long periods before fighting. . . . It is believed that sexual abstinence will give [them] the strength and will to fight, and that decreased sexual activity will create better quality semen. The underlying assumption is that sexual intercourse or even contact with a female will turn the male into a weaker being. (Leal 1989, p. 238)

In some traditions, the handler as well as the cock must abstain from heterosexual intercourse. In the Philippines, "sex should be avoided before going to the cockpit; the man stupid enough to have sex before a match will be ignominiously humiliated when his bird runs away." However, "Sex is heartily recommended for after the fight, when men no longer need conserve their vital energies" (Guggenheim 1982, p. 10).

The renunciation of heterosexuality in conjunction with the cockfight seems to support the idea that the cockfight is an all-male, or homosexual, affair. Thus, if the gallus

is a phallus and if there is a sexual component to the cockfight, it is a matter played out between two sets of males: roosters and men. In this sexual battle, one begins with *two* males, but ends with *one* male and *one* female. Is there any evidence to support this contention? In Malaysia, the term used for matching two roosters for a forthcoming fight may be relevant. "The stakes are all deposited with a stake-holder (who receives a percentage for his good services); and the cocks are plighted or 'betrothed' to one another by the simple ceremony of allowing each bird one single peck at its rival" (Wilkinson 1925, p. 65). The curious idiomatic usage of the word "betrothal"—the author does not provide the Malay native term—for the matching of two male cocks is significant. They are mates, analogous to heterosexual humans, but the fight is to determine which one will be the male and which the "female." In Bali, according to Bateson and Mead (1942), "In speaking of real courtship, the Balinese liken the behavior of boy and girl to that of two cocks straining toward each other with their heads down and their hackle feathers up" (p. 172). That the Malay term and Balinese image are not flukes is corroborated by a parallel custom in Martinique in which the two cocks to be paired in combat are said to be joined in "marriage" (Champagnac 1970, p. 72; Affergan 1986, p. 115). Of possible relevance to the matrimonial metaphor is the Anglo-American usage of the term "flirt" to refer to the initial contact of the two cocks (Egan 1832, p. 152; Worden and Darden 1992, p. 277).

In one of the finest ethnographic accounts of the cockfight to date, Leal (1989) describes the crowd's cheers during a typical Brazilian bout.

During a fight every movement of the cock is followed by the crowd's cheers of "go ahead! Mount him! (*monta nele! trepa nele!*)" Inasmuch as "to mount" or "to climb" (*trepar*) are also expressions commonly used to refer to sexual intercourse, usually implying the man's position in the sexual act, the crowd's cheers are not only metaphorical. (pp. 217–218)

Here is certainly incontrovertible evidence supporting the equation of "gallus as phallus." Leal even recorded a folk poem that confirms the already explicit erotic significance of "mounting":

Quien tuviera la suerte
que tiene el gallo
clue en medio de la juria
monta a caballo.

Who would have the luck
that the cock has,
that in the middle of the fight
to be mounted on a horse. (p. 218)

The allusions to courtship, marriage, and mounting do underscore the sexual nuances of the cockfight, but what evidence is there to support the proposition that the loser in a cockfight is deemed a female?

In a cockfight, sometimes a cock will freeze in the face of a feared opponent. This so-called tonic immobility (Herzog 1978) might simply be a desperate defense mechanism, that is, playing dead to prevent the dominant cock from attacking further. More commonly, a cock that loses its nerve may choose to flee. In an account from Texas, we are told:

When a beaten gamebird decides to withdraw from the battle, he lifts his hackle, showing to the spectators the white feathers underlying his ruff. This act gave rise to the famous expression "showing the white feather," which symbolizes cowardice. (Braddy 1961, pp. 103–104)

In the north of France, a cock that flees, crying, is immediately declared to have lost if his opponent is standing (Demulder 1934, p. 13). Such flight and such crying are deemed cowardly acts. In Belgium, too, a cock that starts crying is declared vanquished (Jaquemotte and Lejeune 1904, p. 226). In the mid-nineteenth century, the pioneering Italian anthropologist and sexologist Paulo Mantegazza, perhaps best known for his Frazerian survey, *The Sexual Relations of Mankind* (1916), visited Argentina, where he described a cockfight. He remarked on the different ways the fight could end. One way involved an exit from the arena "siempre abierta para los cobardes" (always open for cowards) in which a bloody and beaten rooster might sing, calling for aid from the hens of his harem (p. 69).

There is even better evidence that winning in a cockfight is associated with masculinity, whereas losing is considered to belong to the realm of the feminine. In Venezuela, one may hear a spectator yell, "Vamos, como tu padre!" ("Let's go, like your father!") to exhort a cock to do better (Marquez 1954, p. 45); in Brazil, during a cockfight, one may hear comments referring to the losing cock along the lines of "the mother's blood is showing" (Leal 1989, p. 216).

In Colombia, a cock that runs away is thought to cry like a chicken (León Rey 1953, p. 93). In Mexico, to be a "gallo-gallina," a rooster-hen, is to be a coward or homosexual (Mendoza 1943, p. 123). In Venezuela, there is a general folk belief that a rooster who "clucks" like a chicken is a sure sign of an imminent disgrace (Acosta Saignes 1954, p. 39). In Andalusia, too, a cock may lose a fight by fleeing from its opponent while making a low clucking sound. This is called "canta la gallina," which may be translated as "the hen sings" (Marvin 1984). Anthropologist Marvin astutely observes, "What should be noted here is not only does the bird flee but it also makes what is perceived to be the sound of a hen, a female. This behavior is regarded as reprehensible, for the cock is not acting as a true male" (p. 64). Here is *prima facie* evidence that the loser in the Andalusian cockfight is considered to be a chicken rather than a rooster, a female rather than a male. In Borneo, we find a possible parallel; we are told that "occasionally the bird was "chicken," and ran after the first scuffle (Barclay 1980, p. 18), although it is not altogether certain whether "chicken" is a native-language term in Borneo or not. The placing of it in single quotes suggests, however, that it might be. Of course, in American folk speech, to be "chicken" is to be cowardly, especially among a group of male peers.

The feminization of the loser in a cockfight cannot really be disputed. In Martinique, there is a proverb "Kavalie vol a dam," which presumably has a literal meaning of "a cavalier flies to a lady [dame]." The proverb refers to the fact that there must always be an adversary for a cock, but, more important in the present context, that a good cock never hesitates to fly toward his opponent (as does a man toward a woman). The winning cock affirms his maleness, his virility, while the loser is forced to take the female role with a strongly negative connotation. It is clearly preferable to be a true female than a false (effeminate) male (Affergan 1986, p. 119). Also in Martinique we find the idiom "faire la poule" (to be chicken) applied to a cock who cowers in front of an opponent, refusing to fight (Champagnac 1970, p. 35). Leal (1989) reports that in Brazil, if a losing rooster attempts to run from the pit "crying like a chicken" (cacarejando feito galinha), this would constitute the worst kind of dishonor to the cock's owner and supporters since "symbolically at that moment the cock and the men become females." "Chicken" is a slang term for both "loose woman" and coward (p. 211). Such data support our contention that the losing cock in a cockfight becomes feminized, becomes a chicken.

Other details of the cockfight take on new significance in the light of the argument here proposed. These details include specific techniques designed to stimulate or revive a wounded cock. Prefight preparation sometimes involved inserting stimulants in prescribed orifices. For example, in Bali, according to Geertz (1972), red pepper might be stuffed down a cock's beak or up its anus to give it spirit (p. 6). Guggenheim (1982) reported that in the Philippines "sticking chili up the anus" (p. 10) was thought to increase the cock's "natural ferocity." In Belgium, just before a fight a cock might be given a piece of sugar soaked in cognac (Remouchamps and Remacle 1949, p. 65).

Another preflight ritual is reported from Haiti. There, in order to convince the judge that no poison has been placed on a particular cock's spurs—poison that would unfairly eliminate the opposing cock if it entered its bloodstream—the cock's handler will suck the spurs of his cock and perhaps also the beak and neck of his bird as well (Marcelin 1955b, p. 59). For the same practice in the Philippines, see Roces (1959, pp. 65–66); for Martinique, see Affergan (1986, p. 115). There also the cock is forced to drink the water in which he is bathed. This is similar to a technique in southern Louisiana where an official uses a wet cotton ball to wipe the metal gaffs after which he squeezes water drops into the cock's mouth (Donlon 1990, 282; 1991, p. 106). In Venezuela, Cook (1991, p. 92) notes the poison is applied at the last minute, right before the fight starts because otherwise the cock with the poisoned spur might accidentally scratch itself.

This practice is reasonable enough, but a similar one used to resuscitate wounded cocks during a fight requires a different rationale. In Bali, during breaks in the fight, handlers are permitted to touch their birds to revive them. The handler "blows in its mouth, putting the whole chicken head in his own mouth and sucking and blowing, fluffs it, stuffs its wounds with various sorts of medicines, and generally tries anything he can think of to arouse the last ounce or spirit which may be hidden somewhere within it" (Geertz 1972, p. 9). An earlier account of cockfighting in Bali confirms that the handlers try to revive their cocks' "ardour by petting, massage or by blowing into their beaks" (Knight 1940, p. 81). This means of "sucking the wounds of an injured cock is one of the oldest prescriptions for healing a bird" (Smith and Daniel 1975, p. 86). A physician traveling in Cuba in the mid-nineteenth century confirmed the practice as he reported seeing owners "sucking the whole bleeding head repeatedly" (Wurdemann 1844, p. 92). The technique continues to be popular and is reported from Tennessee (Gunter 1978, p. 166; Cobb 1978, p. 92) and Texas (Braddy 1961, p. 105) among other places. Literary critic Stanley Edgar Hyman (1950), describing a cockfight he attended in Saratoga Springs, New York, in the summer of 1949, noted the following:

For centuries, it has been the custom for the handler during the breaks in the fighting, to wipe the blood out of his chicken's eyes on his mouth—a procedure that undoubtedly goes back to the ancient ritualistic origins of the sport, which are to be found in cock sacrifice and blood-drinking. (p. 101)

Hyman, of course, presented not one shred of documentary evidence for his hypothetical ritual origin of the practice. He was well known for his ardent advocacy of "myth-ritual" theory, according to which all folklore was supposedly a survival from an original ritual of some kind (see Bascom 1957). In some versions of the practice, the handlers blow water on the wounded cock, but some cockfighters preferred the licking system "because of the supposed healing power of human saliva" (Cobb 1978, p. 92). An informant at a New York state cockfight claimed that cold water is dangerous for the birds' systems but that "human

saliva not only is just the right temperature but is well known to have effective germicidal properties (Hyman 1950, p. 101).

After a fight is over, a handler may attempt to apply a more conventional disinfectant to the cock's wounds such as tincture of iodine, but one old tradition (in Belgium and in England) insists that it is preferable to urinate on the wounds immediately after the combat on the grounds that urine is the best of disinfectants (Remouchamps and Remacle 1949, pp. 75–76; Scott 1957, p. 49). There are also reports that a cock should be fed urine. Scott (1957) remarked, "I well remember a famous exhibitor telling me some thirty years ago that the secret of getting birds into perfect show condition was to feed them on wheat which had been steeped in urine" (p. 42). In Brazil a handler "will put the cock's entire head inside his mouth in a desperate attempt to revive the cock for the coming round" (Leal 1989, pp. 237–238). Leal has offered an ingenious interpretation of the exchange of bodily fluids between man and cock (p. 244). The man gives his body fluids saliva and urine to the cock while the cock gives his blood to the man: "Man's fluids (food, saliva, urine) become cock's fluids (semen and blood)" (p. 246). Still, the act of sucking the cock's whole head seems to require further explanation. In Venezuela, for instance, the practice is called "mamar el gallo" (Olivares Figueroa 1949, p. 186), which might be translated as "sucking the cock"—"mamar" being the same word used for babies' nursing; mamar as in mammary gland, and ultimately the term "mama."

Hawley (1987), in his description of cockfights in the southern United States writes, "The handlers try to revive the weakened birds by various seemingly bizarre methods: taking the bleeding bird's head into his mouth to warm it and drain blood from its lungs" (pp. 22–23). Hawley (1982) mused about this practice in his unpublished doctoral dissertation, not in print.

Occasionally the seemingly bizarre resuscitative behavior in which handlers indulge during cockfighting has been observed to be the source of some coarse, jocular, and sometimes disapproving commentary from spectators and informants. As one might expect, when a handler puts a wounded cock's head in his mouth to suck out the blood, he is indeed engaging in behavior that some would find highly fraught with sexual implications. Since, according to informants, this maneuver is highly efficacious in reviving fatigued birds, perhaps the sexual entendre is unwarranted. It is, nonetheless, a disconcerting sight for the uninitiated to behold. (p. 106)

There is another curious technique sometimes employed to revive a wounded cock. A Georgia informant, for example, after remarking, "I've seen guys put a whole chicken's head in their mouth," went on to describe another practice, "And one trick I've seen . . . they will blow that chicken in his vent, you know, if he's about dead or about cut down or something. They'll blow him back there to try to help him get a little air and get him cooled off" (Anon. 1984, p. 483). A striking parallel to this practice is reported from south India. Among the people of Tuluva, we learn that

sometimes, the beaten cock will again be encouraged to fight, by its owner, who, after taking it to a place near by, will pour cold water over its head or will air it through the anus. . . . The method of airing through the anus is a very curious one, and they say cocks, once beaten, if they survive this process of resuscitation, generally strike down cock after cock in the combat, much to the pride of their owners. (Saltore 1926–1927, p. 326)

According to anthropologist Peter Claus (1992, personal communication), who has carried out extensive fieldwork among the Tulu, the Tulu handlers still engage in this technique of reviving an injured or fatigued cock. In fact, blowing in the cock's anus is even used jokingly as a metaphor in everyday life. For example, if a student were tired and nervous about a forthcoming examination, a friend might facetiously volunteer to blow in his anus to inspire him to put forth greater effort in studying for the exam. There is apparently an analogous procedure employed with cattle in India. Gandhi (1929) in his autobiography spoke against "the wicked processes . . . adopted to extract the last drop of milk from . . . cows and buffaloes" and even went so far as to claim that it was this very process of "phooka" ("blowing") that had led him to give up drinking milk altogether (pp. 245, 474).

In our attempt to demonstrate that the cockfight is a homoerotic male battle with masturbatory nuances, another important facet of the event must be considered. As Guggenheim (1982) put it, "Whatever the social, psychological, or political reasons why people attend cockfights, any cocker will say the main reason he goes is to bet" (p. 19). In the Celebes, "Cock-fights are always connected with betting" (Kaudern 1929, p. 340). Geertz (1972), after an initial overview of the generic Balinese cockfight, gave considerable detail of the intricate betting system employed by the participants and observers of the cockfight. Geertz failed to note that betting accompanies cockfights in almost all parts of the world where cockfighting occurs. This omission is one consequence of his failure to consult other ethnographic reports of the cockfight, even those concerned with the phenomenon in Bali (Eck 1879; Knight 1940) or nearby Java (Kreemer 1893; Soeroto 1916–1917), another area studied by Geertz. Usually the betting is one-to-one, that is, one person will call out a bet and another person will accept it (Parker 1986, p. 24). In this way, the betting scenario mirrors the one-on-one action of the fighting cocks. A cocker turned academic describes betting in his thesis as follows: "Betting at cockfights is an overt expression of machismo. The larger the bet the bigger the man. . . . In a cockfight the betting opponents are in a face-to-face confrontation, a man-against-man contest so to speak" (Walker 1986, p. 49).

While one may well applaud Geertz's (1972) poetic insight that the cockfight's "function, if you want to call it that, is interpretive: It is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience; a story they tell themselves about themselves" (p. 26), one may not agree with Geertz about what that story is. Is the Balinese cockfight simply an extended metaphor for the Balinese social status hierarchy? And what is the connection between the gambling behavior of the Balinese (and others) and the cockfight proper? Had Geertz or other anthropologists been at all familiar with the psychoanalytic theory of gambling, he might have been better able to relate the two sections of his essay: the cockfight and the betting on the cockfight.

Ever since Freud's brilliant (1928) paper on "Dostoevsky and Parricide," the psychoanalytic community has been aware of the possibility that gambling is a symbolic substitute for masturbation. "The passion for play is an equivalent of the old compulsion to masturbate; 'playing' is the actual word used in the nursery to describe the activity of the hands upon the genitals" (p. 193). Actually, Ernst Simmel (1920) had previously suggested that "the passion for gambling thus serves auto-erotic gratification, whereby the playing is fore-pleasure, the gaining orgasm, and the loss ejaculation, defecation and castration" (p. 353). Lindner (1953) discussed the gambling-masturbation equation with clarity:

Now gambling and masturbation present a wide variety of parallels—Both are repetitive acts, both are compulsively driven, and the nervous and mental states

accompanying the crucial stages in the performance of each are almost impossible to differentiate. (p. 212)

A characteristic of gambling that is perhaps most reminiscent of masturbatory activity is the “inability of the gambler to stop” (Fuller 1977, p. 28), even when winning. Here we cannot help but be reminded of the Filipino manual on cockfighting that warns against “holding-handling” the cock in public, as “handling is habit-forming and once acquired, it is hard to get rid of” (pp. 97–98). As we shall seek to demonstrate, both the cockfight itself and the gambling that accompanies it are symbolic expressions of masturbatory behavior.

It should be noted that not all psychiatrists agree with the Freudian hypothesis of a masturbatory underpinning to compulsive gambling. However, for every psychiatrist who says, “In my experience with compulsive gamblers I find no support for Freud’s formulation that compulsive gambling is a replacement for compulsive masturbation” there is one who reports, “What I had found, in my one patient (a gambler), to be the core of the psychopathology—the struggle against masturbation the content of his unconscious masturbation fantasies” (Niederland et al. 1967, pp. 180, 182). Fuller (1977), in the most extensive survey of the psychoanalytic study of gambling to date, concurs that masturbation may underlie it, but he argues that there is an anal component as well (to the extent that gamblers play with money—a fecal symbolic substitute).

The somewhat eccentric Wilhelm Stekel (1924) regarded sexuality as the most important component of gambling, and he used a bit of folkloristic evidence, a proverb, to support his contention. The proverb “Glück in Spiel, Unglück in der Liebe” (p. 240; see also Greenson 1947, p. 74), unquestionably a cognate of the English proverb “Lucky at cards, unlucky in love,” does suggest a kind of limited good. There is only so much luck (= sexual energy). If one uses it up in gambling, for example, playing cards, then there will be insufficient for heterosexual lovemaking. There is some clinical evidence to support this conclusion. It involves a compulsive gambler who fell in love. “He had abandoned gambling during the 18 months of his involvement, and resumed it when “the love” was discarded (Galdston 1960, p. 555). This view that there is a finite amount of sexual capacity, or perhaps of sexual fluid, is reminiscent of old-fashioned views of masturbation. The idea was that all the ejaculations resulting from masturbation decreased the amount of sexual fluids available for heterosexual acts. The connotations of the German word “Spiel” in the proverb, analogous to the English word “play,” do include explicit allusions to masturbation (see Borneman 1971). The proverb might then be rendered, “Lucky in masturbation, unlucky in (heterosexual) love.” (This discussion of the proverb is mine, not Stekel’s.) The proverbial equation might also be relevant to the alleged connection between gambling and impotence. The argument is essentially that the “excitement of gambling and the symbolic equivalents for sexual release built into many games serve as a substitute for sexual relationships” (Olmsted 1962, pp. 104–105, 120).

According to Bolen and Boyd (1968), “Latent homosexual manifestations are present in the antifeminine aspect of the gambling hall where there is relative exclusion of women and ‘antifeminine vocabulary’ (i.e., queens [in card games] are referred to as ‘whores’)” (p. 622; see also Greenson 1947, pp. 64–65). Greenson (1947) had this to say about the homosexual component of gambling:

The fellow gamblers are cohorts in homosexual activities. Gambling with other men was equivalent, in the unconscious, to comparing penises with other men;

winning meant having the largest penis or being the most potent. Excitement together often represented masturbation. (p. 74)

Greenson was speaking in general about gambling and not with reference to the cockfight, but his comments do seem applicable to the cockfight. The allusion to penis comparison cannot help but remind us of the care with which cocks are weighed—in the United States, the cocks are matched on the basis of weight down to ounce distinctions. Bateson and Mead (1942) note that in Bali “before the fight each man holds the other man’s cock so that he can feel the enemy cock’s strength and make sure that it is not much stronger than his own (p. 140). In this context, the cockfight might be construed as a metaphorical performance of a phallic brag session: “My cock is stronger than yours” or “My cock can outlast yours.” This view is confirmed by a statement made by a cocker who wrote a thesis on cockfighting in Utah: “As a man’s own penis or cock is the staff of his manhood so by extension is his fighting cock an extension of himself. The man whose cock lasts the longest and thus wins the fight is judged the better man. A man’s own sexual prowess is largely judged by how long he can maintain an erection. The obverse helps prove this statement. A man who is plagued with premature ejaculation is someone to be pitied and given professional counseling. Thus by association a man who has a battle cock with staying power [and] pride and [which] fights to the end is macho indeed” (Walker 1986, pp. 59–60).

Bergler (1957), expanding on Freud’s analysis of gambling, argued that “the unconscious wish to lose becomes . . . an integral part of the gambler’s inner motivation” (p. 24; see also 1943, pp. 379, 381; Fuller 1977, p. 88). The logic, in part, is that if gambling is really symbolic masturbation, then the participant should feel guilt for this act and should expect to be punished by a parent or parental surrogate. Bergler (1943) even goes so far as to speak of the gambler as a “naughty” child who expects punishment after performing his forbidden act (p. 386). According to this logic, the gambler is obliged to play until he loses because losing constitutes a form of punishment by an external authority, that is, fate.

The question is: to what extent, if any, is it legitimate to interpret the cockfight (and the gambling that accompanies it) as a symbolic form of male masturbation? Here we may turn to the relevant ethnography to find an answer to this question. Time and time again, we read reports of how much time a cock handler devoted to grooming and stroking his bird. In the Philippines, we learn, “the cock is handled and petted daily by his master” (Lansang 1966, p. 140). Bailey (1909) described a cock tied on a wagon in the Philippines as being “unremittingly fondled” (p. 253). Again from the Philippines, a how-to primer for cock handlers warns against excessive handling or stroking of the cock, especially in public: “You can do the holding-handling at home as much as you desire.” But the prospective cock handler is told in no uncertain terms that “handling” is habit-forming and, once acquired, hard to get rid of (Lansang 1966, pp. 97–98). The grooming behavior found in the Philippines is by no means unique. In Martinique, “the cock is the object of a veritable loving passion on the part of its master, who caresses, fondles, kisses it and tells it sweet words” (Affergan 1986, p. 119).

What about Bali? Knight (1940) reported, “You may be sure to find any [male] member of the village community from the age of fifteen up to eighty using any leisure moments toying with and fondling their birds” (p. 77). Bateson and Mead (1942) described Balinese behavior in similar detail:

The average Balinese man can find no pleasanter way to pass the time than to walk about with a cock, testing it out against the cocks of other men whom he

meets on the road. . . . Ruffling it up, smoothing it down, ruffling it up again, sitting among other men who are engaged in similar toying with their cocks—this passes many hours of the long hot afternoons. (pp. 24–25)

Long before Geertz (1972) described the Balinese cockfight, Bateson and Mead (1942) had remarked, “The evidence for regarding the fighting cock as a genital symbol comes from the postures of men holding cocks, the sex slang and sex jingles, and from Balinese carvings of men with fighting cocks” (p. 140). Yet, despite this insight and such commentaries accompanying photographs as “Many men spend hours sitting, playing with their cocks” (p. 140), Bateson and Mead stop short of calling the cockfight itself a form of mutual symbolic masturbation. On the other hand, according to Olmsted (1962), “Bateson and Mead have remarked on the fact that in Bali, cocks are first taken to, and held and petted and fondled at just about the time that masturbation must be given up as ‘babyish’ . . .” (p. 181). This observation (which unfortunately is not documented by Olmsted) clearly suggests that cock grooming is a direct substitute for masturbation. In a fascinating gestural comparison, Bateson and Mead (1942) claim that a mother “may ruffle the penis [of a baby] upward with repeated little flicks, using almost the exact gesture that a man uses when he ruffles up the hackle feathers of his fighting cock to make it angry” (p. 131).

Even Geertz (1972) could hardly avoid the overt behavior of the Balinese:

Whenever you see a group of Balinese men squatting idly in the council shed or along the road in their hips down, shoulders forward, knees up fashion, half or more of them will have a rooster in his hands, holding it between his thighs, bouncing it gently up and down to strengthen its legs, ruffling its feathers with abstract sensuality, pushing it out against a neighbor’s rooster to rouse its spirit, withdrawing it towards his loins to calm it again. (p. 6)

Geertz never once mentioned the word “masturbation,” nor do any of the other post-Geertzian analysts of the cockfight except for Cook, in her 1991 doctoral dissertation, who calls “the careful cleaning, stroking, bouncing and constant handling that fighting cocks receive from their owners” a form of “symbolic masturbation” (1991, p. 98).

For those skeptics who may not be able to see the possible symbolic meaning of a handler’s massaging the neck of his cock, I call their attention to the fact that in American slang “to choke the chicken” is a standard euphemism for masturbation and that a “chicken-choker” is a male masturbator (Spears 1990, p. 33).

Once the masturbatory underpinnings of the cockfight are recognized, many of the details of the cockfight can be much better understood. For example, there is a common rule that the handler can touch his own bird, but should at no time touch the opponent bird. In Tennessee, for example, “when a cock hangs a gaff in its opponent, the informant stated ‘never touch another guy’s bird’” (Cobb 1978, p. 93). Ostensibly the rule is to prevent someone unethical from harming the opponent bird, but symbolically it suggests that one is expected to handle only one’s own phallus. The same rule is reported in the Philippines. When cocks are being matched, we are told, “don’t let anyone hold your cock to avoid regrets later” (Lansang 1966, pp. 96, 179). Filipinos in California adhered to the same code: “You never do that, touch someone else’s bird” (Beagle 1968, p. 29).

Typically, cocks are kept in covered baskets right up until the time they are scheduled to enter the pit. The cock is *exposed* at the last minute for everyone to admire (and to encourage betting). After the exposure, the opposing cocks are juxtaposed so that they are in

striking or pecking distance of one another (so as to stimulate them to want to fight). We can now more fully appreciate the possibly symbolic significance of the particular means handlers use to resuscitate flaccid cocks. By taking the cock's head into their mouths and sucking on it and blowing on it, we would seemingly have an obvious case of fellatio. Normally, it is considered demeaning for a male to indulge in such behavior—at least in public. It is worth recalling that the term of choice in Anglo-American slang for someone who performs such an act is “cock sucker.” (The reference to “blowing” may carry a similar symbolic association. It is interesting that an Irish description refers to a handler who “put his bird's head into his own mouth to revive it. It used to work all right but whether he was sucking or blowing, I could not decide” (Crannlaighe 1945, p. 512). Also relevant may be the gambler's custom of “blowing” on dice before throwing them.)

Additional ethnographic evidence alludes to oral-genital acts. In Brazil, the cockpit may have a bar or restaurant adjacent where drinks and barbecued beef are available. Leal (1989) reports that men may joke along the lines of “We are eating your cock,” even though chicken is not served there (p. 232). Such specifics of joking behavior (of the sort Geertz, 1972, mentioned but failed to record) is absolutely critical for a full understanding of the symbolic significance of the cockfight. According to Leal (1989), “Jokes are made about ‘mounting’ (*trepapar*) or ‘eating’ (*comer*) ‘someone's cock’ (that is to say, the cock's owner) in the cockfight situation. Both words, *trepapar* and *comer*, in Brazilian Portuguese are used for coitus while *cock* can stand for man, although not for a man's genitals” (p. 241).

Another piece of ethnographic data from Brazil bears on the connection between cockfighting and masturbation.

When a good quality cock leaves the pit badly hurt there is a general commotion and his owner or handler carefully examines his wounds. As soon as the cock is better, the handler checks the cock's sexual organs to see if they have been affected: with the cock supine the man gently rubs behind the cock's leg in the direction of its testicles. If the cock ejaculates and the sperm contains blood, it is considered that the cock is seriously hurt and will not be able to fight again. (Leal 1989, pp. 239–240; see also Finsterbusch 1980, p. 245)

In a novelistic account of a cockfight set in northern Florida, massaging a cock's testicles is deemed a foul disqualifying that cock. The explanation: “You rub a cock's balls and you take every speck of fight right out of him. It's a deliberate way of throwing a fight” (Willeford 1972, pp. 180–181).

Usually, the masturbatory aspects of the cockfight are not quite so overt. An 1832 account of a cockfight in England describes one individual attending a cockfight:

He was trying to look demure and unmoved . . . but I was told that he was a clergyman, and that he would be “quite up in the stirrups” when the cocks were brought in. He forced himself to be at ease; but I saw his small, hungry, hazel eyes quite in a fever—and his hot, thin, vein-embossed hand, rubbing the unconscious nob of his umbrella in a way to awaken it from the dead—and yet all the time he was affecting the uninterested, incurious man! (Egan 1832, p. 151)

Fuller (1977) remarked that sometimes, especially in fictional accounts of gambling, “the masturbatory element erupts through its defenses” (p. 101), which seems to apply to the abstemious clergyman attending a cockfight and rubbing the nob of his umbrella.

The present argument also illuminates the fact that cockfights are illegal in many countries. No doubt being outside the law makes cockfights more exciting for those participating. In other words, it is illegal to play with cocks in public; hence, one must do it *sub rosa*, in secret. That authorities ban cockfighting but then allow it to take place in secret locations seems to confirm its symbolic value. Masturbation is typically proscribed by parents, but masturbation occurs nonetheless. We can now better appreciate Geertz's description of a Balinese cockfight. "This process . . . is conducted in a very subdued, oblique, and even dissembling manner. Those not immediately involved give it at best but disguised, sidelong attention; those who, *embarrassedly*, are involved, attempt to pretend somehow that the whole thing is not really happening (Geertz 1972, p. 8, my emphasis).

Other symbolic inferences can be drawn from the notion that the cockfight may be a sublimated form of public masturbation. Harris (1964, p. 515) quoted earlier psychoanalysts who suggested that orgasm and death might be symbolically equivalent. We know that even in Shakespeare's day not only did "cock" mean "penis" (Partridge, 1960, p. 88), but "to die" meant to experience orgasm (p. 101). So, metaphorically speaking, if one's cock dies, one achieves orgasm. In the cockfight, if one's cock dies and the opponent's does not, one loses money as well; that is, one is punished for reaching orgasm in an all-male environment in a mutual-masturbation duel. The bleeding of the losing cock further strengthens the image insofar as there is a visually empirical loss of fluid for all the world to see. Of course, the winning cock may bleed as well. Presumably both masturbators lose fluid at the end of the cockfight, the difference being that the winner is not punished, but rather is rewarded for outlasting his opponent, the loser. He has masturbated but remains alive perhaps to masturbate on another occasion. That a particularly strong cock may fight again and again demonstrates the "repetition compulsion" aspect of cockfighting (and masturbation).

If the cockfight does represent symbolic masturbation with grown men playing with their cocks in public, all the details from the grooming behavior to the gambling make sense. The grooming, involving the heavy use of the *hands* is analogous to shaking dice, shuffling cards, or pulling the handles on slot machines (one-armed bandits). Although Geertz (1972) made passing reference to "a large number of mindless, sheer-chance type gambling games (roulette, dice throw, coin-spin, pea-under-the-shell)" (p. 17), it was actually Bateson and Mead (1942) who reminded us that the dice thrown at a cockfight are "spun with the hand" (p. 143). The cockfight involves not only the risk of injury to or the loss of one's cock, but also the loss of money wagered on the fight. Losing would constitute "punishment" for indulging in symbolic masturbation while winning would permit great elation as having masturbated and gotten away with it. The Balinese say "Fighting cocks . . . is like playing with fire only not getting burned" (Geertz, 1972, p. 21). As Lindner (1953) put it, winning confirms the gambler-masturbator's feelings of omnipotence (p. 216). To be rewarded for masturbating is surely flying in the face of convention. In most cockfights, however, there are more losers than winners.

If a gambler's losing is a form of symbolic castration, as Freudians suggest (Fuller 1977, p. 102), then betting in a cockfight would exactly parallel the symbolic infrastructure of the cockfight itself. If one's cock loses by being put out of commission or by being killed, this would be a symbolic instance of castration. (One is reminded of Cicero's quip in *Pro Murena* when, in trying to ridicule Zeno's Stoic teachings such as the idea that all misdeeds are equal, he remarked "'The casual killing of a cock is no less a crime than strangling one's father" [Cicero 1977, p. 263].) If one had bet on one's cock and lost, the castration would

be corroborated and confirmed. If, on the other hand, one's cock prevails, one avoids the immediate threat of castration, and if one wins the bet on one's cock, one does the same thing symbolically speaking.

From the foregoing analysis, one can see that the link between the cockfight and the betting associated with it is much less obscure. *Both* the cockfight *and* the betting are related to male masturbation. We can, then, also better understand why women are not welcome at cockfights. Geertz (1972) noted that the cockfight was unusual in Balinese culture "in being a single-sex public activity from which the other sex is totally and expressly excluded" (p. 30*n*). But he offered no explanation whatsoever for this. If men are competing in public with their cocks, one can easily appreciate why they prefer to do so without women present. In terms of the thesis of this essay, the whole point of the phallic competition is to "feminize" one's opponent. "This symbolic feminization becomes less meaningful in the presence of actual women.

We may now have insight into some of the first reports of cockfighting in England and western Europe. According to most histories of cockfighting, the sport seems to have emerged among adolescent schoolboys, a custom that goes back to the middle ages (Anon. 1888, p. 812; Demulder 1934, p. 13; Vandereuse 1951). This schoolboy tradition of cockfighting continued into the early twentieth century (Cegarra 1988, p. 56). Often there would be a series of elimination bouts, with the schoolboy owner of the winning cock called "Roi du Coq" ("King of the Cocks") (Vandereuse 1951, p. 183). There were related customs in which a rooster was beheaded (Vandereuse 1951, p. 197; see also Coluccio 1970, pp. 75–76) or a group of boys threw sticks at a rooster suspended between two trees. The boy whose stick delivered the death blow was proclaimed king (Vandereuse 1951, p. 199). Given the symbolic analysis of the cockfight proposed here, it seems perfectly reasonable for it to be popular in all-male secondary schools.

One more element in the totality of cockfighting is, I believe, worthy of mention. It concerns the breeding of roosters. Many of the treatises on cockfighting offer advice about how best to produce a "game" cock. One old Georgia informant reported:

Those chickens were raised—most of 'em came from one hen and one rooster. They single mated 'em. They'd take the offspring from that and test 'em in the pit to see whether they suited them or not. If they did, then they'd take six full sisters and the sisters' father or grandfather and they'd breed all those hens. That's what they call inbreeding and line breeding. (Allred and Carver, 1979, p. 52)

In one of the many books devoted to cockfighting, we find an alternative term: "Full blood" mating. "Full blood' mating was approved; father with daughter, mother with son, brother with sister" (Gilbey 1912, p. 8). The oedipal implications of such breeding practices are obvious enough. "You can only try your hens single breeding them and keeping exact records of their sons' performances, and when you come across a true-blooded hen, do not hesitate to breed the choicest son back to his mother" (Finsterbusch 1980, p. 165). According to this same source, "when fowls are bred in, it can be done in two forms: (1) in a vertical sense, i.e., from parents to offspring and grandparents to grandchildren; or (2) in a horizontal sense, i.e., from sister to brother or inter-cousins" (p. 140).

In a cockfighting novel, we are told that a cock bred from a father and a daughter "usually runs every time," whereas "those bred from mother and son have the biggest heart for fighting to the death" (Willeford 1972, p. 39). Breeders may well argue for the genetic efficacy of such inbreeding, but from a psychoanalytic perspective—in which breeders might

be said to identify with their cocks (and their behavior), such breeding might constitute wishful thinking as well as fantastic acting out. The point is that such fantasies would not be at all inconsistent with masturbation.

With all of the rich ethnographic detail available in print concerning the cockfight, it is surprising to read what anthropologists have written about it. The refusal to acknowledge the existence of clear-cut symbolic data can only be attributed to what might generally be characterized as an anti-symbolic stance among social and cultural anthropologists. So-called symbolic anthropologists are among the chief examples of those espousing what I would term an anti-symbolic stance. Symbolic anthropologists unfortunately define symbolism very narrowly, typically limiting it to matters of social structure.

Although some authors (e.g., Hawley 1989) have observed a “sexual subtext” in the cockfight, they are quick to say that “sometimes a cockfight is just a cockfight or a gaining opportunity, and not an implicit homoerotic struggle” (p. 131). Hawley, for example, differs with “animal rights activists, who see cockfighters (and hunters and gun owners) as ‘insecure about their masculinity’” (p. 131). (For attempts to disprove the negative stereotypes of cockfighters see Bryant [1991]; and Bryant and Li [1991].) A cocker who temporarily turned academic to write a thesis about cockfighting in northern Utah remarked: “Most leave a cockfight as emotionally and physically spent as if they had engaged in extreme sexual activity. I am not saying the release is sexual, but the physical and emotional release is very similar” (Walker 1986, p. 28). Geertz (1972), after dutifully noting phallic elements, totally ignored them in his analysis of the Balinese cockfight as being a metaphor for concerns about status and hierarchy.

Leal (1989), notwithstanding her splendid ethnographic documentation of the phallic nature of the Brazilian cockfight, declines to interpret it along such lines. Says Leal:

We can see the cockfight as a play of images where ultimately what is at stake is masculinity, not cocks, not even “ambulant penises” as Bateson, Mead or Geertz suggested. . . . I wonder if the equation cocks = penises is not an oversimplification, specific to English-speaking people. . . . In my understanding, phallus itself is a sign invested with the meaning of manliness and power: androcentric cultures ascribe power to the ones who have penises. In contrast to Bateson and Mead, Geertz does not limit his analysis to the cock as a phallic symbol; masculinity and status concern are his main points. (p. 220)

Thus Leal falls back to a nonphallic reading when she says, “Without doubt cockfighting is a dramatization of male identity” (p. 227). Her position is stated clearly enough:

The association men/cocks, which seems to be self-evident in cultures that have the word cock as a signifier for penis, is not an obvious one in gaucho culture. I am not denying the semantical association man/cock; rather I am suggesting that in cockfighting situations, the meaning of cock imagery cannot be reduced to the notion of male genitals. . . . (p. 240)

For Leal, if a man is able to “perform the tasks and rites which assure masculinity he becomes a man; he acquires the phallus, which means he gains prestige and power” (p. 240). It should be noted that in northeast Brazil far from where Leal carried out her fieldwork—little boys’ genitals can be called “pintinho” (“little chick”), in contrast to adult men’s, which are often called “galo” (“rooster”) (Linda-Anne Rebhun 1992, personal communication). Still, Leal’s view is echoed by Marvin (1984), who in his ethnographic

account of cockfights in Andalusia noted, "Unlike Bali, in Spain there is no identification of men as individuals with their cocks" (p. 63). Certainly the data from English is more explicit. One thinks of the slang term "pecker" for penis, for example. In a cockfight where both cocks are wounded, it is the one who is still able to "peck" his opponent who is declared the winner. The pecker wins!

My own view is that it is not an oversimplification found exclusively among English-speaking people to equate cocks and penises, especially in view of the ample evidence of that equation available wherever cockfighting exists. The data from Bali and from Brazil are exceptionally explicit, even though both Geertz (1972) and Leal (1989) tend to dismiss the obvious phallic implications of their data in favor of interpretations that favor emphases on "status" and "prestige and power." Indeed, it is my opinion that it is an oversimplification of the cockfight to claim that it is only about status hierarchy and prestige.

The predictable tendency of social anthropologists to interpret virtually all aspects of culture solely in terms of social structure and social organization is easily discernible in previous readings of the cockfight. The combination of the bias toward social structure and the bias against psychoanalytic symbolic interpretation has prevented anthropologists from understanding the explicit implications of their own ethnographic data. It is ironic and paradoxical that social anthropologists—as well as conventional folklorists—invariably condemn Freudian interpretations as *reductionistic*, whereas in fact it is social anthropologists who are reductionists. They reduce all folkloristic phenomena (such as myths and cockfights) to reflections of social structure.

Geertz (1972) and those anthropologists who have followed his basic approach to the cockfight have erred in not being comparative in perspective, in failing to see the cockfight as a form of mutual masturbation or a phallic brag duel, in not offering a plausible explanation as to why women are unwelcome at cockfights, and, above all, in misreading the overall symbolic import of the cockfight with its paradigmatic aim of feminizing a male opponent either through the threat of castration (via the gaff or spur) or by making the losing cock turn tail to be labeled a female "chicken."

Psychoanalysts, to my knowledge, have not considered the cockfight. Ferenczi (1913) did discuss the case of a five-year-old boy who very much identified with roosters (to the extent of crowing and cackling) but who was also at the same time very much afraid of roosters. Ferenczi suggested that the boys morbid dread of cocks "was ultimately to be traced to the threat of castration for onanism" (p. 212).

Is there any evidence of symbolic castration in the traditional cockfight? I argue that all those versions of the cockfight which involve the attachment of sharp metal spurs (also called "heels" or "slashers") to the cock's feet add a castrative element to the sport. Some cultures forbid the use of such armor, in which case the natural spurs of the rooster may serve a similar purpose. Placing spurs on one's cock essentially entails arming a phallus. It is, in my view, symbolically equivalent to competitive kite-fighting in southeast Asia and elsewhere, where a young man will attach pieces of broken glass to his kite string. He does so with the hope that his kite-string will sever that of his opponent. In kite-fighting, the initial action is get one's kite up (a symbolic erection), but this is quickly followed by the battle to cut one's opponent's kite off. Bateson and Mead (1942, p. 135) noted that kite-fighting is a form of "vicarious conflict" analogous to cockfighting, but did not explicitly mention castration. In cockfighting, one puts sharp blades on one's cocks to cut down one's opponents' cocks. If the gallus is a phallus, then cutting a cock could properly be construed as symbolic castration. There is an anecdote about a Javanese official who was

employed by the Dutch government which lends credence to this interpretation. When asked by the Dutch authorities to take action against illegal cockfights, he did not want to betray his own people and refused to do so. Instead, he proposed to castrate the cocks so that they would not wish to fight. No one paid any attention to the new rule because the men felt that if they castrated their cocks, they themselves would be castrated as well (Serière 1873, p. 101).

If my analysis of the cockfight as a symbolic, public masturbatory, phallic duel is sound, one should be able to understand why participants might be reluctant or unable to articulate consciously this symbolic structure. In effect, the cockfight is like most folklore fantasy: its content is largely unconscious. If the participants consciously realized what they were doing, they would in all probability not be willing to participate. It is precisely the symbolic facade that makes it possible for people to participate in an activity without consciously understanding the significance of that participation.

Less forgivable and understandable is the utter failure of anthropologists and folklorists to decipher the symbolic significance of the cockfight. Anthropologists can presumptuously label their superficial ethnographic descriptions of the cockfight as “deep,” but calling “shallow” deep does not make it so. Perhaps psychoanalytic anthropologists and folklorists should not really complain. If conventional anthropologists and folklorists actually understood the unconscious symbolic dimensions of human behavior—such as that consistently demonstrated in the cockfight—there would be far fewer challenges for psychoanalytic anthropologists and folklorists to take up.

Note

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THE SYMBOLIC EQUIVALENCE OF ALLOMOTIFS: TOWARDS A METHOD OF ANALYZING FOLKTALES

Introduction

Having argued for changing the units of folk narrative analysis from etic elements of motifs and types to emic ones of motifemes and allomotifs, Dundes contemplated how to integrate these units into a consistent method (see “From Etic to Emic Units in the Structural Study of Folktales” [1962g], chapter 4 in this volume). He was aware of the criticism that his interpretations were speculative and could not be proven empirically. Indeed, Dundes disarmed critics by rebuking Freudian theory, with which he was associated, for universalistic assumptions. His contribution as a folklorist, he announced, was to make interpretation culturally situated and relative. He thus elaborated on an objective method that could provide reproducible results, take into account contextual concerns, and still incorporate psychoanalytic principles of the mind’s symbol-making capacity.

Dundes used the outline of “identification and interpretation,” which he had earlier established as a framework for folkloristic investigation (see “The Study of Folklore in Literature and Culture” [1965c], chapter 2 in this volume), and focused particularly on establishing “symbolic equivalence” as the key analytical outcome leading to interpretation. After all, most of the questions in his interpretations of folklore revolved around various symbolic readings of folkloric texts within their cultural contexts (e.g., the hook in hookman parking legends as a phallus, money in gambling activities related to cockfights as masturbation, fudge in children’s jump-rope rhymes as feces). “Where did he come up with that?” skeptics asked. Besides doubting the theoretical premise of symbols in folklore disguising wishes and desires in response to repressed anxieties, they objected on procedural grounds: “How could these symbolic equivalencies possibly be confirmed and validated as anything but the analyst’s perception, unrelated to the meaning intended by the tradition-bearer?”

As an answer, Dundes proposed a way to “decipher” the symbolic code in folktales, but he also suggested that the method could be applied to all folklore genres. Folktales were a focus because of the issue of units of analysis. Since the emic units were based on the “syntagmatic” structural model of narration proposed by Russian formalist Vladimir Propp (involving the positioning of narrative functions in their sequence within a plot, as

opposed to the paradigmatic approach of Claude Lévi-Strauss, arranging thematic binary relations in a story), they facilitated an identification step, geared toward the interpretation of meaning (see chapter 6, “Structuralism and Folklore,” in this volume). Dundes argued that emic structural units empirically represented stories as they are told. The motifs or functions within the narrative sequence are predictably stable, but different allomorphs or symbols could be inserted into those functional slots. Dundes surmised that those symbols consistently placed in the same motifemic slot are equivalent, and this could be verified by a comparison of many field-collected texts. He found this especially convincing when a single teller used different allomotifs in the composition of the story, suggesting their congruence mentally. Dundes represented the logic of explanation mathematically, as “If $A = B$ and $B = C$, then $A = C$.” Having established a symbolic equivalence (e.g., money/feces, womb/tomb, decapitation/castration), then psychoanalytic and cross-cultural analyses could determine the signification of the expression in a social context. He was careful to note that symbols can have multiple meanings, depending on the situation or culture in which they are used, such as his discussion of the equivalencies, in different traditions, of eyes to testicles, breasts, or buttocks.

Dundes applied this method to the story of the “Rabbit-Herd” (AT 570), in which he sought to prove the symbolic equivalence of head and phallus, evident in the congruent actions of decapitation and castration (see chapter 6 of *Parsing Through Customs* [1987h]). In one of his last publications, he used this equivalence to explain the ritual beheadings of American civilians by Iraqi captors, which had shocked American viewers. In answer to the question of why the civilians were decapitated rather than shot, strangled, or beaten, Dundes answered that capturing the head of a male opponent was symbolically possessing his masculinity, and simultaneously acquiring a trophy of victory, much as bullfighters claim an extremity of a conquered bull (2005a). For other applications of Dundes’s method, see Carroll 1992a, 1992b; Holbek 1993; and S. S. Jones 1990.