



Film Society of Lincoln Center

Chiara Mastroianni in "Carnage," a film in the Rendez-Vous series.

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Bodies Imperfect, Images Ideal

By STEPHEN HOLDEN

The image that haunts "Carnage," a viscerally unsettling comedy written and directed by Delphine Gleize, a 29-year-old French filmmaker of astonishing originality, is the rippling body of a 1,000-pound black Andalusian bull. In an early scene of the movie, which is the find of this year's Rendez-Vous With French Cinema series at Lincoln Center, the beast gores a young matador at the climax of one of the most suspenseful bullfighting sequences ever filmed.

The animal in the ring is photographed so that you feel menaced by the crushing power massed in its glistening body and tremble before the blind fury driving its charges.

The film conveys such a palpable sense of flesh-and-blood vitality and vulnerability (in both animals and people) that the mystique of Spain's national sport as a ritual life-and-death test of courage remains etched

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in your mind.

Watching the bullfight on television is a wide-eyed little girl accompanied by the family pet, a sleek black attack dog that suggests a canine cousin of the bull. Later in the film, the dog consumes a portion of that bull and experiences a shattering seizure.

The bulk of "Carnage" follows the history of the bull's body, once it has been killed and its remains dispersed. Its horns are purchased as a gift by a gnarled old woman for her son, a taxidermist who lives with her in a cramped trailer. Its insides wind up at a high-end restaurant on diners' plates, smothered in a rich red wine sauce.

Its eyes, one of which turns out to be blind, become valuable specimens for laboratory analysis. When a child dis-

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