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life (his working-class origins, his parents' marriage, his poor health) in the work without reducing, or seeking to explain away, the achievement. He communicates very well the vitality and directness with which Lawrence challenges his readers, including other novelists, and indicates how a number of them rose, or failed to rise, to the challenge. In this instance, Martin Amis appears to be quoted for his evident inadequacy as reader while Schmidt notes Lawrence's fruitful impact on a number of women and American black writers who shared his sense of outsiderdom. It is perhaps Schmidt's appreciation of the living historical context, and of the power of Lawrence's spirit even as he was dying, that leads him to accord a high value to *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as a vivid rejection of the inchoate, half repressed tragedy of the post-war. It is perhaps the book of Lawrence's about which responsible judgements now differ most extremely and, if it is due for reappraisal, Schmidt's sense of the relevant proportions, literary, historical and human, provides a suitable starting-point for such a discussion.

Patrick R. Query, *Ritual and the Idea of Europe in Interwar Writing*.

Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012.

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Reviewed by N. H. Reeve

This is an interesting, densely written and at times intriguingly suggestive book, which considers the uses made by a number of interwar writers, including D. H. Lawrence, of various forms of ritual, and the light this might shed on the concept of "Europe" during a period when that was subject to violent contestation. For Patrick R. Query, these writers address ritual not in its usual guise as a nostalgia for stability readily consorting with authoritarian

politics, but as a kind of dance of instabilities, whose ambiguous meanings are never finally smoothed out:

Ritual keeps, clarifies, illuminates, and disseminates the key characteristics of a society. But, in the hands of modern writers, it also scrutinizes, repositions, and at times subverts those characteristics ... The inherent dialecticism of ritual creates a framework in which some of the most pressing oppositions of the European idea interact and overlap in ways that challenge the usual sense of the rigid political dichotomy of the interwar period. (4)

Query chooses to focus on three particular ritual forms – verse drama, bullfighting, and the Catholic Mass – each in his view having “deep, though not unambiguous, roots in European history” and possessing “a complex appeal for writers from across the English Channel” (3). “In verse drama, the bullfight, and the Mass”, Query suggests, “chaos and formlessness is given shape, and writers interested in these rituals often turn to them as a means of ordering violence without banishing ambiguity” (7); moreover, borrowing an idea from Thomas Cousineau, he sees an “unpurged mythic residue” clinging to these three forms, augmenting the “symbolic power that they retain by virtue of their ritual structure” (19), whether or not they are employed to articulate particular beliefs.¹

This deliberately narrowed focus marks this study out somewhat from the vast body of previous commentary on modernism, myth and ritual. T. S. Eliot has always of course been central to such commentary, ever since he allegedly used his umbrella to belabour hecklers at the première of Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*, and Query has interesting things to say about the poet’s commitment, in the late 1920s and 1930s, to the revival of verse drama. *Murder in the Cathedral*, in particular, utilises “the resources of both poetic language and ritual action as the best means of restoring the mind of Europe to Britain” (55): a “mind” grounded in that tradition

which, for Eliot, is simultaneously awakened, adjusted and mourned by each new contribution to it. There are thoughtful readings of Yeats's verse-dramas as well, especially of the poet's insistence on having his plays staged and performed in everyday domestic settings, while the sections on David Jones, Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene productively develop the book's interest in the Celtic- and Hispanic-fringe rôle in the formation of a "European" imaginative identity.

Waugh's and Greene's encounters with Catholic Mexico, in which, for Query, "like Lawrence, they found Europe" (26), link back to his chapter on Lawrence and bullfighting. In a provocatively counterfactual move he presents bullfighting as the ritual that, had Lawrence appreciated it properly, would have spared him the need to invent a new one for the Quetzalcoatl cult. Query discusses the opening chapter of *The Plumed Serpent*, 'The Beginning of a Bullfight', at some length, in order to argue, essentially, that Kate should have stayed for the entire *corrida*, rather than leaving in disgust (as Lawrence himself did, in Mexico City in April 1923) after ten minutes. Had she managed to overcome her repulsion, Query suggests, Kate would have witnessed the "tragic climax" of the bullfight, complete with its cathartic "reconciliatory potential" (114), where symbolic antagonists are fused into one, in just the kind of transcendent exchange between light and dark forces that the novel subsequently and unsuccessfully seeks. This is an interesting line of thought, to say the least, even where it does not fully convince; it is hard to believe that Lawrence would ever have regarded the bullfighting he saw as anything other than a degenerate and debased version of ancient blood-sacrifice, mean and paltry and standing in the way of any truly revivable meaning. Query, curiously, makes nothing of the differences between the two versions of the novel, not mentioning *Quetzalcoatl* separately at all; I think it would have mattered to his argument to have acknowledged that, in the earlier work, General Viedma is just as contemptuous of the spectacle and the crowd's enthusiasm for it as Kate is, and that the spectacle itself

is more overtly regarded as a Spanish custom imposed upon a foreign country without really touching it.

Query is one of the few critics to pay some serious attention to Lawrence's story 'None of That!', written in Florence in 1927, a story many of Lawrence's admirers rather wish had been left unwritten. For Query, the ending (where Ethel Cane commits suicide after being gang-raped by her bullfighter-lover's assistants) remains "enormously unsettling" (135), but less on account of its misogynist brutality than because Lawrence, at a safe distance from the actuality of Mexico, has finally registered the ritual effects of the bullfight, in which, in the aficionado's view, sex, killing, white and dark, power, and implicit gender-exchanges find a momentary coalescence. A more straightforward reading might focus on Lawrence's fascination with homoerotic display, or on the angry cross-currents in his memories of Mabel Luhan, but Query certainly works hard to recover wider aspects of "symbolic resonance" in Lawrence's Mexican fiction, especially those he feels too many commentators have overlooked in their focus on overtly political questions. In spite of the rather fussy "interchapters", and of being at times weighed down by its masses of citation, the book contributes something unusual and stimulating to the debate, even while one's brow occasionally furrows.

¹ Thomas J. Cousineau, *Ritual Unbound: Reading Sacrifice in Modernist Fiction* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004).