Stuart Carroll. *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. xii + 370 pp. index. illus. tbls. map. bibl. $110. ISBN: 0–19–929045–8.

Twice winner of the Nancy Roelker Prize and author of the remarkable *Noble Power during the French Wars of Religion*, Stuart Carroll has produced a comprehensive reconsideration of violence and politics in early modern France. This ambitious and eagerly awaited study thus culminates a sustained body of accomplished scholarship. The work transforms the field of study by reexamining classic theories about the nature of early modern violence through detailed examination of both specific incidents and collective indications of violence across four centuries. Both erudition and scholarly creativity are masterfully deployed in looking to the work of William Miller on medieval Icelandic feuds for a model of analysis with which to challenge Huizinga's classic characterization of the violent medieval world being supplanted by the less violent Renaissance-Reformation world and Norbert Elias's notion of a "civilizing process" centered on early modern France.

Carroll posits the existence of what he calls "vindicatory violence," a term encompassing acts of violence, such as feuds, revenge killings, and duels, that repair an honor or injury suggestive of a reciprocal relationship between the parties. These, he insists are distinct from either atomized acts of aimless violence or from state violence, particularly war, or violence against the state in the form of revolt. The blood feud, we are told, escalated in importance as contingent political circumstances overturned mechanisms of control and mediation that had previously maintained social peace. Limited and self-interested, noble violence was integral to the politics of early modern France beginning with the Armagnac-Burgundian Wars and dueling, so brilliantly studied by Billacois, also fits well into this model for it often constituted an extension of collective kin struggles and a reinvigoration of the feud. Long after the legality of such practices was eroded the legitimacy of private violence remained widely accepted and the crown was compelled to confirm many such practices as the price of political support.

Perhaps Carroll's most significant achievement is less in imagining such a

nebulous concept as vindicatory violence than in documenting it in an era when there were good contemporary legal reasons to conceal it. Carroll's commanding exploitation of trial records, pardon papers, and family records as well as traditional narrative sources is astonishing, and his assembly of the materials into databases allowing reconstruction of narratives of dispute is a tour de force. What results is a picture of a world in which dispute, litigation, and violence was a way of life both within and between kinship groups, with religion further complicating matters in the sixteenth century. In this world, law was not an alternative to violence but a parallel option in vindicatory exchanges. Vindicatory violence offered the rationale through which private armed force accommodated to the myth of state monopoly of violence. It was a means to protect or even elevate status and might be employed not merely in proprietary disputes but also struggles over social standing while hunting or even in church. Pitched battle became ever rarer as war became the domain of sovereign princes and even the appearance of private warfare was to be avoided with the duel gradually emerging as a preferable alternative. Regardless, to paraphrase Carroll's remarkable chapter on combat and arms, behind the courtier's rapier lurked the erstwhile feudatory's broadsword and underneath his silken doublet remained the warlord's chain mail. From Carroll's perspective high politics, aristocratic rebellion, and civil war were but "specks of foam" riding on the backs of these deeper provincial and local seas.

It is extremely difficult to convey the full complexity of such a nuanced argument, but be assured this is an argument that demands attention and a book that must be read. Not all readers will be wholly persuaded that such an elusive concept as vindicatory violence is a satisfactory diagnostic device. Nonetheless the approach is illuminating even when the analysis is not compelling, and the challenge posed to traditional interpretations that elite violence retreated ineluctably in the face of royal repression and enhanced civility is undeniable. Carroll has revitalized the study of the linkage of high and low politics in a world where private armed force constituted not so much a defiance of the state monopoly of violence as a constituent element in it.

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