Violent Masculinities: Male Aggression in Early Modern Texts and Culture. Jennifer Feather and Catherine E. Thomas, eds.
New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. xi + 272 pp. $90.

This volume of essays examines fighting among men — whether in war, in duels, or in the streets. The contributors address a specific set of historical questions. Was Western masculinity traditionally rooted in the capacity to physically dominate another man? How did male-male relationships help constitute masculinity? And did the rise of humanism, mercantilism, or governmentality shift definitions of masculine achievement away from a personal capacity for male-on-male bodily assault to a facility, instead, for corporeal or aesthetic self-discipline?

In her afterword, Coppélia Kahn generously admits that the volume relegates her own groundbreaking 1981 monograph, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare*, "to critical history": "I have since realized that men are co-creators of masculine identity along with women: homosocial relations, whether in the form of friendship and camaraderie, competition, or shunned and dreaded sodomy, are at least as important as heterosexual ones" (232). Several fine chapters explore the odd continuum that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick called "male homosocial desire." Jennifer Forsyth takes on the difficult task of reconciling the extreme poles of male rivalry and love, making the surprising claim that even murdering a friend could be an expression of ideal *amicitia*. Amanda Bailey's essay, "Occupy Macbeth," addresses further paradoxes of masculinity in considering the role of masochism in male subjectivity and political subjecthood. Violence could challenge rather than reinforce masculine norms, as Laurie Nussdorfer shows in her chapter on street brawls in papal Rome. She astutely observes, "The fact that patriarchy authorized the use of force only by certain men means that illicit violence can sometimes be read as a rejection or complication of patriarchal values" (110). Nussdorfer's contribution is a valuable reminder of how class difference constitutes and resists masculine power.

Other essays in the collection question the premise that masculine violence began to wane at the dawn of modernity. By examining the British Civil War, Catherine Gray counters the view that by the sixteenth century martial manliness had become anachronistic. Gray shows that, in Royalist poetry, not the modern closed body (theorized by Norbert Elias and Mikhail Bakhtin), but the passionate and penetrable

body is masculine and bellicose. Katharine Cleland's piece attests to the continuing allure of martial masculinity in Milton's *Paradise Lost.* In his role as Eve's domestic partner in Eden, Adam has a marital rather than martial calling. Yet in Milton's Christian epic, God's militarized angels remain a seductive ideal even for the first and only man in paradise.

This volume grew out of two conference panels for the Modern Language Association and Shakespeare Association of America. The makeup of the collection reflects these origins: seven of the ten essays are on the drama of Shakespeare's era, and two more concern British seventeenth-century poetry. Nussdorfer's lone piece of Italian social history fits oddly in the mix. The volume's division into three sections — "Militant Masculinities," "Religion and Masculine Aggression," and "Male Violence and Suffering" — makes some sense, although the chapters in the religion section do not take religion as a central theme. Overall, the focus of the volume needed clarification: the title, which purports to consider "male aggression," does not indicate the specific topic that unites the book's chapters, which examine ritualized violence among men and do not significantly address violence against women, servants, slaves, or political subjects. The editors in their introduction usefully define violence as "any act that willfully inflicts bodily damage" (9), but they could have said more about the essays' even narrower focus on male-on-male combat, especially as it relates — or fails to relate — to other types of masculine violence, such as rape and colonization. Some productive conversations on these and other topics emerge among the chapters themselves. As Kahn's helpful afterword points out, the scholarship in this collection is indicative of the current state of feminist and queer studies and demonstrates how far and deep the conversation on gender has moved in the last thirty years.

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