

*Virga magistralis, que timetur magis omnibus armis que fiunt ex ferro uel ex calibe, est que vrgebit pueros maliuolos cui nullo modo parceretur quia “qui parcit virge odit filium.”*<sup>1</sup>

— John Claveryng, C.1450

## Within These Walls: The Affects of Homosociality on Medieval Latin Teaching

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The medieval grammar school was structured to teach young boys exactly what the name would suggest: Latin grammar. It was the role of these schools to uphold the curriculum of the *trivium*, but frequently it was the larger schools that successfully taught rhetoric and logic to their students.<sup>2</sup> With much information missing from the history of the medieval schoolroom, it must be generally stated that these schools, and the subsequent teaching of Latin grammar, would be catered to boys.<sup>3</sup> This paper will explore the ways in which a homosocial environment would have impacted the learning of Latin in a medieval classroom, and how the lessons in Latin would have influenced the schoolboys. Through the examination of translation exercises and the general schoolroom environment, I will demonstrate how Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick concept of

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Orme, *English School Exercises: 1420-1530* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2013), 213. “The master’s rod, which is feared more than all the weapons that are made from iron or from steel, is what will urge ill-disposed boys, who shall in no way be spared, for “he who spares the rod hates [his] child.”

<sup>2</sup> John Lawson, *Mediaeval Education and the Reformation* (London: Routledge, 1967), 23. See also James J. Murphy, *Latin Rhetoric and Education in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), 230.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London: The Hambleton Press, 1989), 129.

homosociality would support the masculine gender roles in the male, single-sex medieval classroom.<sup>4</sup>

Latin in the medieval English schoolroom was taught as a second language through the translation of vernacular languages English and French.<sup>5</sup> It has been argued that the introduction of French, as well as the institution of a more highly structured and comprehensive education system, resulted directly from the Norman conquest and the royal and religious charters that were drafted in the remainder of the eleventh century.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Nicholas Orme argues that “schoolmasters of Latin must often have taught it [French] as well. This is shown by the presence of French glosses in many Latin school texts of the thirteenth century, by the similarity of the thirteenth-century tracts on French grammar and vocabulary to Latin ones, and by Higden’s and Trevisa’s assertions that French was used in grammar schools for teaching Latin up to the middle of the fourteenth century.”<sup>7</sup> Regardless of the languages with which Latin was taught—and

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<sup>4</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire,” in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010), 2466. For the purpose of this paper, I shall focus on the male bonding mentioned that accompanies the homosocial environment rather than the erotic desire that is inherent to an all-male setting. This is due to the lack of evidence of erotic desire in the schoolroom.

<sup>5</sup> David N. Bell, *What Nuns Read* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 57. Bell quotes Sir William Holdsworth, “in the thirteenth century learned clerks may have thought and spoken in Latin; ordinary persons of the upper class thought and spoke in French, while the lower classes spoke in various dialects of English.” For this paper, I will only examine late medieval exercises concerning English and Latin.

<sup>6</sup> Orme, *Education and Society*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 76. For more on Ranulph Higden and John Trevisa, see Andrew Galloway, “Latin England,” *Imagining a Medieval English Nation*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 41-95.

without expanding upon the switch from French to English after the fourteenth century—, schoolboys learned this essential second language over years of intense study.<sup>8</sup> Jan Ziolkowski curiously states that the acquisition of Latin “coincided with years of formation that sought to mould boys into educated men who shared not only a learned language but also a morality, a grasp of religion, a culture, and even what could be called a ‘way of life’.”<sup>9</sup> In this sense, Ziolkowski is positing that learning Latin was essential to the formation of the masculine fibre and identity that transformed schoolboys into men.

Expanding upon this concept of “the Latin makes the man,” Ruth Mazo Karras argues that Latin allowed for the bonding of men in the medieval university.<sup>10</sup> She states, “As an elite language, it set those who spoke it apart from members of lower social groups and from women. . . . Learning Latin was part of the rite of passage for learned men. It was a sign of social position as well as of gender . . . .”<sup>11</sup> Latin served in university, therefore, not only to bolster homosocial bonding, but to separate the learned men from the uneducated men, and equally as important, from the women. While this bonding occurred in the setting of higher education, it is clear that the groundwork for this masculinization was formulated during boys’ grammar school days.

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<sup>8</sup> Jan Ziolkowski, “Latin Learning and Latin Literature,” *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 230.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* For more on medieval classroom curriculum and texts, see Marjorie Curry Woods and Rita Copeland, “Classroom and Confession,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 376-406.

<sup>10</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 94.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

In order to explore the male-male socialization that occurred in a medieval grammar school or university, it is necessary to examine the relationship between the pupils and the schoolmaster. With the formation of discrete school districts in the twelfth century came the emergence of a group of schoolteachers who replaced—for the most part—monks, friars, and other parish clergy, as specialized instructors and educators.<sup>12</sup> These men, more often than not, were alone in their tutelage, although they occasionally had an assistant or a senior pupil who aided them in their lessons.<sup>13</sup> The master's salary was meagre thus restricting his economic importance, he inhabited numerically insignificant social and political positions, and his overall impact on the English nation was, to be kind, tenuous.<sup>14</sup> However, Nicholas Orme affirms that “the first and most basic function of schoolmasters, and their greatest contribution to medieval civilization, was their teaching,” and that they taught a wide curriculum, particularly Latin grammar and composition.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, these seemingly insignificant social players deserve more credit than they have received, considering that they influenced and instructed the “scholars and poets of medieval England, the clergy of the parishes and the religious orders, many of the male aristocracy, the common lawyers . . . .”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England*, 49.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 50. For the purpose of this paper, I will refer to schoolmasters as “men” because of the overwhelming absence of female teachers. Orme states that “specialised women instructors were uncommon, and there are not enough to be included in our discussion.” The lack of women teachers is crucial for understanding the homosocial schoolroom paradigm in which my argument takes a foothold.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 62-63.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

However, within the confines of the schoolroom walls, pupils' points of view regarding the demeanor of the master vary greatly. In several classroom translation exercises, the master is depicted as "pleasant to learn from and caring for his pupils like a bird for its chicks, or as 'unspeakable,' 'intractable,' and 'so dangerous in manners that I had liefer serve any many in the world than him.'"<sup>17</sup> This latter characterization of the schoolmaster might have been the result of the common corporal punishments that accompanied lessons. Nicholas Orme presents his reader with a vivid portrayal of a medieval classroom:

Pictures of schools at work show the master in his chair, never walking about. He sits grasping the birch—a bundle of twigs—that formed his badge of office, and once or twice a boy is shown standing before him to be examined. Boys came to him, not he to them, just as the lord of a household sat and was approached by his retainers. The master gave a lesson or issued commands from his chair, and periodically called out boys to be questioned or examined, the process known as 'apposing'. The birch was used to punish indiscipline and inability to answer. It was the favoured tool of English school masters. . . . We also hear of the ferule, a wooden rod employed for hitting the hand; its striking end was pierced with a hole that raised a blister. . . . Some masters tried to control indiscipline on the benches by appointing one or more boys to the post of *custos*. They had the duty of reporting their colleagues for speaking English or other misdemeanours.<sup>18</sup>

This description is rife with details of quotidian goings on in a classroom. Firstly, one is able to identify the master not only because of his phallogocentric—to use Derrida's term—birch, but

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<sup>17</sup>Orme, *English School Exercises: 1420-1530*, 29.

<sup>18</sup> Orme, *Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England*, 144-145.

because of the hierarchical rapport between his student and himself; Orme has drawn a connection between the classroom dynamic and a lord and his servants. Secondly, Orme reveals that the inability to answer questions, disobedience, and, more generally, a lack of classroom decorum was met with corporal discipline.<sup>19</sup> From a pedagogical perspective, it seems clear that teachers held the expectation that beating students for incorrect answers would ensure proper learning or memorization.

This tradition of punishment-based learning is echoed in a late fifteenth-century *vulgaria* from Magdalen College:

But now the worlde rennyth upon another whele. For nowe at fyve of the clocke by the monelyght I most go to my booke and lete slepe and slouthe alon, and yff oure maister hape to awake us, he bryngeth a rode stede of a candle. Now I leve pleasurs that I hade sumtyme; here is nought els preferryde but monyshygne and strypys. . . . I sech all the ways I can to lyve ons at myn ease, that I myght rise and go to bede when me liste oute of the fere of betynge.<sup>20</sup>

This passage demonstrates a shift, similar to what Ziolkowski mentioned in the formation of manhood as school, from the naïveté of childhood to the hard work and responsibility of

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<sup>19</sup> Orme later writes, “corporal punishment in schools needs to be placed in context. Masters who bitched their pupils were doing nothing unusual by contemporary standards. Parents bear their children, husbands their wives, and employers their servants, while officers of the law did so to beggars and criminals.” Orme, *Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England*, 146.

<sup>20</sup> Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England*, 70.

manhood. The Magdalen *vulgaria*, while a translation exercise, deals with real-life situations with which schoolchildren would be familiar.<sup>21</sup>

This tradition of schoolroom translation exercises as the reflection of events that happened in a schoolboy's life is arguably quite common. The above Magdalen *vulgaria* is only one example of this representation. It is necessary to examine several shorter translation exercises that deal with the topic of beatings and punishment; through these classroom exercise exempla, it will be clear that such assignments were indeed used by students to represent—in addition to the various other topics—the physical component of teaching Latin.<sup>22</sup> The first examples come from a compilation of exercises from a grammar school in Bristol and Wiltshire around 1427:

19 “Hyt befallyth þe mayster to bete Roberd and me 3yf we fayle wan we beþ aposyd yn a lyzt matyr.”

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<sup>21</sup> Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 81. Here, Enterline argues that the *vulgaria* were tied closely to the real events in a grammar school, town, or household. She states that “these exercises turned familiar situations into mise-en-scènes of dramatic personation, appealing to a child's familiar experience while at the same time estranging that experience, filling the social coordinates of every life with characters *qua* characters—voices to assume, or not, as need arises.”

<sup>22</sup> In the index of Nicholas Orme's *English School Exercises: 1420-1530*, there are fifty-seven instances of beatings and punishments. This number is shocking considering it exceeds the number of times God (including Christ, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit) by fourteen. The ubiquitousness of punishment in these exercises is problematic when considering modern scholarship on the corporal punishment of students, but it is revelatory of a common pedagogical method in the medieval and early modern classroom, particularly concerning students' motivation and the master/pupil relationship. For more on contemporary classroom discipline see: Meryl E. Englander, *Strategies for Classroom Discipline* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

*Interest a magistro vapulare mea et Roberti si deficiamus cu in materia facili nobis apponatur.*<sup>23</sup>

This exercise clearly demonstrates the punishment that would result from a failed apposing, even when the examination was for something simple. The next exemplum also shows the correlation between learning and physical punishment:

**30** “Jon y-bete hyt befallyt to study yn a hard lessyn, þe whyche y-studyd *and* y-kan, he schal haue myche þonke.

*Johannus vapulantis est studere in lectione difficili, qua per studium capta et bene scita, multipharis graciaram acciones reportabit.*<sup>24</sup>

In this exercise, Jon will study harder because he has been beaten and will therefore be thankful for having learned the lesson, which is a direct result of having been beaten. The final example exercise from the Bristol and Wiltshire compilation was not translated into or From English, but is written only in Latin:

**81** *Nisi melius et perfeccius meo monitori in materia mihi ab illo proposita respondero antequam hinc recedam, tieo mihi acriter verberari.*

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<sup>23</sup> Orme, *English School Exercises: 1420-1530*, 53. For editorial clarification, Orme writes that the / sign indicates where alternative words or phrases occur frequently, the letters ȝ and þ are retained, and the angled brackets contain expanded glosses. He also states that letters in italics represent expanded abbreviations (Orme, *English School Exercises: 1420-1530*, 43). For the purposes of my paper, I have omitted Orme’s italicized letters and, for the sake of readability and differentiation, I have italicized all Latin translations. Knowing that words were abbreviated is not relevant for the task at hand.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

[Unless I reply better and more perfectly to my master on the matter set by him before I leave here, I fear I shall be severely beaten.]<sup>25</sup>

Again, the failure and inability to successfully complete an apposing is met with corporal punishment.

The second set of examples has its origins in the grammar school of Beccles in Suffolk, England, and was compiled in the early 1430s.<sup>26</sup> In this compilation the trope of beating-cum-discipline continues:

**57** “Myn ars comyng to scole xal be betyn.”

*Anus meus venientis ad scolam verberabitur.*<sup>27</sup>

This English to Latin translation, while making no explicit reference to learning Latin, suggests that there is certain inevitability of beating simply by being present at school. Another example demonstrates the schoolmaster punishing a pupil for “recklessness” and “misbehaviour:”

**86** “It is nedful scoleris to absteyne fro ragyng, hois reklysheed zeuit oftyn þe hyster cause to beyten, for it is weel fovnden þat hosumeuere he fynde cvlpabil he payit hem trewely on þe toote.”

*Necessarium est scholaribus / uel scolares abstinere se rabiacionis / rabiacione / uel a rabiacione quorum negligenc[i]am prebet sepe magistro causam <pugnandi / uel ad pugnandum — deleted> verberandi / uel verberandum quia*

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>26</sup> Orme, *English School Exercises: 1420-1530*, 70-72. Orme states that the collection was edited by John Hardgrave in his mid-teens because he had a particular interest in Latin grammar.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 83.

*repertum est quoscunque comperit culpabiles recompensabit illis firmiter super nudo.*<sup>28</sup>

While all of the examples given date from the early fifteenth century, it is necessary at this point to consider this practice of punishment in the classroom from earlier centuries.

Augustine, in his *Confessions*, writes that it seemed worse to make a grammatical mistake in the classroom than to hate a fellow man.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, he reaffirms that lessons in school were taught through forcing, memorizing, and petty discipline.<sup>30</sup> Moving forward several centuries, A. F. Leach comments on a scene in the *Colloquy*, a book of dialogue that accompanied Ælfric's *Grammar* in the tenth century, as it happened in Winchester school:

“after asking what the boys want to learn to talk about, to which the boys reply that they do not care, the next question of the master is highly characteristic, ‘Are you willing to be flogged (*flagellari*, *beswungen*, or *swinged*) while learning’; at which the boys at once express their preference for flogging to ignorance, though they craftily profess to think that he will be kind and not ‘swinge’ them unless obliged. So inseparable was the connexion of education and corporal chastisement!”<sup>31</sup>

This passage sheds a different light on the relationship between the schoolboys and the beatings. Whereas the school translation exercises demonstrated a fear of and remonstrance against the resultant punishments of a failed opposing, Leach's example places corporal punishment as

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>29</sup> Murphy, *Latin Rhetoric and Education in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 161.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> A. F. Leach, *The Schools of Medieval England* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1969), 89.

preferred over ignorance. However, Nicholas Orme paints a rather grim portrait of beatings that contradict Leach's more optimistic example. In 1283 a student named Robert Buck is said to have left his school in Clitheroe because he was so badly beaten by his master.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, one student, Robert Eliot, sued his master for a sum of £20 in Harnhill in 1390.<sup>33</sup> While there are extreme cases, they serve to show that corporal punishment was a commonplace occurrence in the medieval classroom. Spanning from the fifth century well into the fifteenth, one could argue that the tradition of punishment-cum-lesson was omnipresent in classrooms of medieval Europe for a millennium.

It is crucial now to examine the ways in which these beatings may have served to reinforce certain gender roles or resultant same-sex bonds from the homosocial environment in the classroom. If, as Ziolkowski posits, the Latin lessons and subsequent beatings moulded boys and prepared them for a certain way of life, what might these beatings say about the masculo-scholastic context? Ruth Mazo Karras argues that three types of masculinity existed in the Middle Ages: the university model, the court model, and the workshop model.<sup>34</sup> Whereas the courtly man must prove his physical prowess through demonstrating his strength in acts of violence, the artisan man must prove that he is not child through his independence, and the university man roots his masculinity in self-control and rationality; the scholar is a man and not a

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<sup>32</sup> Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England*, 61.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*, 151.

beast.<sup>35</sup> Not a beast, indeed. Arguably, the Latin lessons and the correlating punishments in grammar school would have adequately prepared young men for continuing their studies in university. Perhaps it was the role of the schoolmaster, in reinforcing correct grammar and also in preparing the boys for advanced study, to tame the beastly boys.<sup>36</sup>

After having examined the homosocial relationship between the master and his pupils, it is important to also explore the relationships between the schoolboys themselves. In the same vein as the beating and punishment exempla, it is beneficial to look at representations of friendship and camaraderie in the translation exercises.<sup>37</sup> In the Bristol and Wiltshire, there is a reference to a gambling game, which may serve as evidence for friendly competition between the schoolboys:

**18** Pu sclalt haue a kast afore for a botyn of pypoyent.

*Tu habebis iactum preambulum pro nodulo manicelle tue.*<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. I would argue here, however, that Karras' position is limited. As we have seen, the schoolmaster is asserting his dominance over the schoolboys through physical oppression. Indeed, the schoolmaster fits into the scholar model as presented by Karras, and also the courtly model. His acts of violence against the boys demonstrate his physical prowess.

<sup>36</sup> I find Ziolkowski's statement about moulding boys into their way of life through the learning of Latin too mild. It seems as though he is avoiding the more sensitive subject of corporal punishment that I have laid out in the preceding paragraphs. Were the boys' shared lessons perhaps not inculcated in them largely because of the physical abuse they endured?

<sup>37</sup> Orme, *English School Exercises: 1420-1530*, 32. Orme claims that what little information we have on the subject of friendship is filtered through the school exercises. Most of the examples are from the early sixteenth century, and therefore I will use what few there are from the fifteenth century.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 53.

There is an example of gameplay and camaraderie that is more pertinent to the homosocial aspect of our Latin lessons. This Latin writing exercise exercise from the Beccles compilation gives insight into sport as a well as friendship:

**89** *Hominibus ludentibus ad pilam pedalem super glaciem et mersis [mi]seret opido amicos suos mortis illorum, qui proponunt tenere exequias suas proxima septimana.*

[The men who played football on the ice and sank through have caused great misery by their deaths to their friends, who propose to hold their funeral rites next week.]<sup>39</sup>

This exercise shows that the schoolboys would have had some concept of friendship, and the bonds that come with such emotional ties. However, the social statuses between pupils in a medieval classroom varied greatly.<sup>40</sup> Thus, it is difficult to say with certainty—in addition to the few translation exercises that deal with this topic—who would have been friends with whom. Undoubtedly, the numerous examples of the bond between schoolmaster and pupil provide a stronger case for the effect of homosociality in the classroom.

Finally, in continuing with the homosocial tradition of Eve Sedgwick, it is necessary to explore the Latin educational paradigm of girls in order to better understand that of boys.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>40</sup> Orme, *Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England*, 131.

<sup>41</sup> Sedgwick, “Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire,” in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch, 2466. She writes, “I will be arguing that concomitant changes in the structure of the continuum of male ‘homosocial desire’ were tightly, of causally bound up with the other more visible changes; that the emerging pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero- and homosexuality in an intimate and shifting relation to class; and that no element of that pattern can be understood outside of its relation to women and the gender system as a whole.”

Nicholas Orme writes that “girls were not catered for, to any great extent. Their literary education remained informal and inferior, confined to the home or at best to an elementary school. Most of them who learnt to read did so in s vernacular language, English or later French, and only rarely Latin.<sup>42</sup>” This restricted education for girls is echoed by David Bell who states:

“Less than noble women had even fewer opportunities. A small number might have been able to join their male colleagues in one of the public grammar schools and receive instruction from a school-master or, in rare cases, school-mistress; but for the majority of women in the middle and upper-middle classes, their only schooling was that provided by the English nunneries. Opportunities for women of the lower classes were effectively non-existent.”<sup>43</sup>

Both Orme and Bell’s arguments support Ruth Mazo Karras’ statement that the learning and speaking of Latin would have set schoolboys on an elevated echelon apart from the lower classes and from women.<sup>44</sup> Karras definitively states that, at the university level, a man had “already proved himself not a woman; his task was now to use intellect to dominate other men. He proved his manhood by his rationality, which distinguished him not only from women but also from beasts.”<sup>45</sup> In this sense, learning Latin masculinized boys so that they may continue on to university and dominate over the already-restricted girls.

The schoolroom translation exercises from the fifteenth century have given ample evidence that the learning of Latin was a submissive endeavour that resulted in the transmission

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<sup>42</sup> Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England*, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Bell, *What Nuns Read*, 59.

<sup>44</sup> Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*, 94.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

of knowledge through a violent relationship between master and pupil. The initial intent of this paper was to demonstrate how the homosociality of the schoolroom cadre impacted Latin grammar lessons, and to an extent, it did. However, the majority of the evidence lies in the dominance of the schoolmaster over his pupils. This proved problematic for the initial scope of my paper, but I would now argue that the masculinity that schoolboys attained from their grammar school education was formed by placing them in a subjugated, violated position in relation to their dominant, masculine teacher. The absence of girls—rendering the schoolroom a male single-sex environment—places these boys in an effeminate role until they have learned their grammar, have become properly educated, and consequently have become men. It is here that the homosociality of Sedgwick has proven to be a useful tool in dissecting the “way of life” that Ziolkowski claims is instilled into the minds of the schoolboys during their grammar school days. However, with the broad generalizations that I have been required to make, one can only speculate as to what type of trauma these boys were left with. Even Augustine, years after his schooling, remembered the threats and punishments he received as a pupil.

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