Towards the mid-seventeenth century two different works bearing two distinctly similar titles appeared on the French literary scene. *L’École des filles*, the first of these two works, appeared in 1655, and purports to be a self-improvement sex manual. The second, *L’École des femmes*, is a theatrical comedy by Molière that satirizes devout society while commenting on the education of women. These two works, published only seven years apart, scandalized French society and unleashed a debate revolving around perceptions of propriety and standards in both textual media and theatrical arts.

*L’École des filles* is a short pornographic novel written in the style of popular self-improvement manuals of the day. ¹ The work is divided into two main dialogues preceded by a preface entitled “Épitre invitatoire aux filles” (Blessebois et al. 169). The dialogue is presented as taking place between two young women, Fanchon and Suzanne. In the first dialogue, Fanchon is portrayed as the younger, more naïve cousin of the older and more worldly Suzanne. Robinet, Fanchon’s aspiring lover, has convinced Suzanne to school her cousin in the art of lovemaking. Suzanne explains in explicit detail the sex act, as well as dispelling myths and superstitious beliefs her cousin holds regarding pre-marital sex, even suggesting that she might enjoy it. The text is interrupted by the arrival of the would-be lover, who has come to check on his project. During this intermission, the affair is consummated and the second dialogue details the sexual

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¹ The use of pornographic is meant to designate explicit material that is used for the express purpose of titillation. There is an important designation to be made between erotic, obscene and pornographic. In a 17ᵗʰ century French context, the word pornography (a nineteenth-century invention) would have been anachronistic – as the vocabulary for this type of obscenity had not been developed due to the relatively recent possibilities of mass publishing. See, for example, the entry for *pornographie* in *Le Trésor de la langue française* <http://atilf.atilf.fr/tlf.htm>.
exploits of Robinet and Fanchon, describing Fanchon’s blossoming knowledge, which comes as a result of her blossoming sexuality.

*L’École des filles* is generally believed to have been written in the summer of 1655 (Turner 1). Its authorship, however, remains uncertain. No evidence remains of the true identity of the author or authors, a fact that has inspired many contradictory readings of this text. However, as Joan de Jean remarks in her work *The Reinvention of Obscenity* regarding the notion of authorship in the seventeenth century, “[t]he author is the individual singled out for punishment when a work becomes the target of censorship” (65). With regards to *L’École des filles*, Michel Millot and Jean l’Ange, the two publishers of the text, were tried and punished as the authors of the text.

On December 22, 1662, not yet seven years after the publication and controversy surrounding *L’École des filles*, Molière staged the first production of *L’École des femmes* at the Théâtre Palais-Royal. This five-act comedy, which was hugely successful, thrust the playwright into a debate over not only the alleged indecency of his work, but also over the aesthetics of comedic theatre itself. The action centres on the antics of Arnolphe, a bourgeois gentleman who has just recently elevated his status through the purchase of a name: Monsieur de Souche. He has had the daughter of a peasant woman brought up in a convent to be completely naïve in order to ensure that she would be unable to cuckold him. However, the comedy relies on the confusion created when Horace, the young and impressionable son of Arnolphe’s old friend falls in love with the latter’s young protégée, Agnès. Unaware of Arnolphe’s newly acquired title, he recounts his developing love affair, unknowingly giving his rival the information needed to counteract his

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2 See for example, the arguments laid forth by Donneau de Visé and others regarding the apparent lack of aesthetic quality in Molière’s work in: Jean Donneau de Visé, Edme Boursault, Charles Robinet and Georges Mongrédién, *La Querelle De "L'école Des Femmes"*, Comédies Tome 1 (Paris: Marcel Didier, 1971).
own influence. Throughout his interactions with Agnès and Horace, Arnolphe’s mind is cynically predisposed, constantly inferring the worst about his protégée. Natural love prevails, however, despite all of Arnolphe’s schemes. In the end, in a fantastic *pater ex machina*, both Horace’s father and Agnes’ (hitherto unknown) father appear and reveal their plan for the marriage of their children. Finally, in spite of Arnolphe’s careful preparations, he is left utterly speechless and exits the stage.

Molière’s success came at the price of a scandal. Much of what we know about the critiques aimed at his work has been preserved through Molière’s rebuttal: the one-act *La critique de L’École des femmes*. This counter-critique portrays a satirical debate mocking his critics through a clever use of his enemies’ empty rhetorical strategies. It is indeed through the mouth of one of Molière’s invented critics, Climène, that we learn that his play was judged as obscene. Moreover, Molière was positioned at a historic juncture. Being present at court in the 1660’s, the author would have been witness to the assumption of full control of the state by Louis XIV after the death of Cardinal Mazarin in 1661 (Hollier and Bloch 312). At the same time, Louis’ more libertine court began to replace his mother’s pious court, a fact that can be read in Molière’s theatre. Indeed, in his counter-critique of *L’École des femmes*, Molière discloses his plan for a new aesthetic of comedy:

Je voudrais bien savoir si la grande règle de toutes les règles n'est pas de plaire, et si une pièce de théâtre qui a attrapé son but n'a pas suivi un bon chemin. Veut-on que tout un public s'abuse sur ces sortes de choses, et que chacun n'y soit pas juge du plaisir qu'il y prend? (Critique [IV] 132)

Molière establishes his comedy in the necessity to ‘plaire’ – denoting both pleasure and entertainment, in the same way that the pedagogical treatises of the day focus on a desire to be

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3 With regard to an infamous use of the quid pro quo, the “le” of the “ruban”, Climène declares, “Il a une obscénité qui n’est pas supportable.” Scene III, *La Critique de L’École des femmes.*
pleasing. By taking up the problem of education, sexuality and female social status, Molière firmly places his comedy into the realm of societal criticism.

Even after nearly three centuries of critical work, the debate rages on, centering on whether these oeuvres belong to an objectifying and misogynistic genre or whether they can be claimed at proto-feminist. Joan de Jean, for example, claims *L’École des filles* provides women with a modern voice by describing and allowing for a female right to pleasure in the text (Reinvention 74-8). The work, however pornographic, does not contain any “hint of blasphemy” or any unorthodox political views (Politics 116). Other critics however do not share this view. Ruth Larson claims *L’École des femmes* as “an erotic satire” and develops a theory of feminine empowerment through a satirization of the popular devotional and behavioral ‘how-to’ manuals revolutionized by one Nicolas Faret (501). Her analysis concludes with a provocative conjecture that perhaps the wife of Faret had a hand in the writing of *L’École des filles*, suggesting a powerful link between subversive social action, pornographic literature and female empowerment.

Like *L’École des filles*, *L’École des femmes* has also been appropriated as a feminist work. Barbara Johnson suggests that the competing notions of pedagogical authority represented by Horace and Arnolphe in *L’École des femmes* in fact provide the ideal situation for learning (181). She continues by claiming that “[t]o retain the plurality of forces and desires within a structure that would displace the One-ness of individual mastery could perhaps be labeled a feminization of authority” (ibid.). Roxanne Lalande, however, notes the subtle linguistic transformations that occur in the work, underlining the fact that the feminine concept of fortune is gradually replaced by a paternalistic notion of destiny (173). Indeed, as the author goes on to explain, “Act V is a staged demonstration of the laws of fate: ultimately an underlying and
preordained structuring principle was in operation from the outset...” (ibid.). Ultimately, despite Arnolphe’s failure, paternal authority is re-established in the figure of the father and the new husband.

In light of this cursory presentation of these two Écoles, it seems rather clear that both the anonymous author or authors of *L’École des filles* and Molière could be said to be questioning the systems of authority in their day. However, much of the critical discussion surrounding these two works centers on either the subversive libertine and, therefore, liberating aspects of these works or their misogynistic and objectifying nature. My goal is not to rehash the debate, but instead to reframe it. *L’École des filles* and *École des femmes*, while being subversive and indeed libertine, do not serve as proto-feminist works. The sexual and societal situations presented in these works, while indeed being revolutionary, do not attempt to re-envision or even balance the unequal relations between men and women, however subtly. Instead, these works demonstrate a revolutionary shift from one source of authority to another – in essence, giving up one paternalistic master for another.

Throughout *L’École des filles* and *L’École des femmes* the reader can witness the representation of a transformation of authority, from what might be termed an “old order” to what could be argued is a “new order.” That is to say, this imagined shift of power goes from a source of authority that is ancient and well founded, to a newer alternative and rival source of power. Yet, this transformation, negotiated among men, is depicted through the process of female education. Indeed, in these two works the knowledge conferred and withheld by the competing sources of authority reveals itself as obscene and pornographic.

At the center of this debate is the question of whether or not pornographic and obscene works have the capacity to liberate their objects. Pornography is in many ways a modern
phenomenon; despite the fact that sexually explicit descriptions of sexual acts meant to arouse have existed since pre-modern times, the means to mass distribute them, and therefore the need to suppress them, is a decidedly early-modern phenomenon. Lynn Hunt, in her introduction to *The Invention of Pornography* points to this very modern, and dialectical, relationship pornography has with authority in the seventeenth century by explaining how these writers employ “the shock of sex to criticize religious and political authorities” (10). Thus, the revolutionary nature of the text relies on a literary performance enacted by the author in the face of the authority being questioned. Yet, while it is clear that literary obscenity can act as a subversive agent for the subject (author), it remains a question whether or not it can serve the same role for its object, in this case, women. I would argue that these two works demonstrate a reimagining of the power structure – paternal authority; however, this re-conceptualization excludes women precisely through its depiction of women as the object. More precisely, throughout these two works, the representation of female education is employed as a means of upending societal or familial mores, with a specific emphasis on an obscene or pornographic sexual representation of women.

Although seemingly removed from each other, an investigation into the relation of male power structures to obscenity and pornography can be quite fruitful. Indeed, a feminist reading of pornographic representations highlights the role these depictions play in the construction of not only sexual relations but nonsexual relations as well. In the *Pornography of Representation*, Susan Kappeler argues that pornography is not sexuality; it is but a form of representation, and indeed, the examination of the means of representation is crucial (1). She then underlines the dialectical relationship between how sex is portrayed and how it is enacted between couples, each one informing the other. In the context of the two works in question, the sudden availability
of these works on a mass scale helped to naturalize their content, with the goal of blurring the lines between the representation and the real.

Furthermore, this mechanism of reimagining power structures through a common desire and objectification of women is the express goal of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s exploration of male homosocial desire. This concept of homosocial desire is derived from the social sciences, being employed to describe social bonds between persons of the same-sex. Any basic explanation of male homosocial desire relies on its performative aspects: one critic explains that male practices of gender function primarily through “enactment[s]” which occur predominantly in front of other men and are done essentially for their approval (Kimmel 128-9). This practice involves leveraging their positions by using ‘markers’ of masculinity (ibid). These markers can be “wealth, power, and status, physical prowess, and sexual achievement” (Flood 2).

In her study of homosocial desire in literature, *Between Men*, Sedgwick takes this notion of homosociality and attempts to draw it back into what she terms “the orbit of ‘desire’ of the potentially erotic.” Sedgwick argues that one cannot understand the overarching structures of society without examining and engaging the links between these structures and the homosocial continuum. Sedgwick concisely expounds her theory of homosocial desire and its relation to power structures by stating:

> [in] any male-dominated society there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence. For historical reasons, this special relationship may take the form of ideological homophobia, ideological homosexuality, or some highly conflicted but intensively structured combination of the two. (25)

Sedgwick continues in this vein, ultimately remarking (including in her analysis concepts borrowed from Lévi-Strauss) that patriarchal heterosexuality would be better served by
discussing the objects (women) in terms of their exchange or symbolic value. Women are viewed as property in this system, and their primary purpose is to be exchanged not between men and women, but between men.

Sedgwick’s theory concludes that heterosexual marriage, essentially the possession of the woman, and particularly the woman as property, is the conduit by which men engage in a relationship where the real partner is another man (26). Sedgwick seamlessly transfers this concept to her examination of literature, in her attempt to decipher the power structure inherent in the triangular desire found so often in western literature. With a strong reference to the theories of René Girard, Sedgwick examines the power relationships of the erotic triangle, examining literary texts to reveal relatively obscured gendered power inequalities. The two Écoles also fit neatly into this theoretical framework: both L’École des filles and L’École des femmes negotiate desire and power inequalities through their depiction of women.

From the very beginning of L’École des filles, the text establishes itself as a rival source of authority. The text mimics and transgresses the popular self-improvement treatise, presenting itself as a female educational manual, carrying a strikingly similar name to many other works of the day. Nicolas Faret’s L’Honneste-Homme ou, l’art de plaire à la court was published in 1630, already signaling the shift from devotional manuals that taught one how to please God, to an etiquette manual designed to instruct the reader in Honnêté – the art of socially virtuous behavior. Contrasted with Corneille’s verse translation of Thomas à Kempis’ De Imitatione Christi, L’Imitation de Jésus-Christe, Faret’s treatise clearly places the behavioral practice in the exterior temporal realm – while simultaneously grounding it in an interior eternal and religious context.
L’École des filles, however, attempts to locate its pedagogical mission strictly in the physical and corporeal domain. Mimicking the table des matières found in these devotional and self-improvement manuals, the text lays out, in a “Table mystique et allégorique” the subjects of the dialogues (Blessebois et al. 173). Where one might find in Faret’s manual an entry regarding “Maximes que doit observer celui qui n’a jamais vu la cour, pour y aborder” (Sommaire des matières III), the corrupted manual describes, “46. De l’éjaculation de la liqueur d’amour et comment elle se fait” (176). Religious and state authority is further challenged by a mock Papal bull where the king’s privilège would normally be found,

Notre auguste père Priape fulmine anathème contre tous ceux de l’un et de l’autre sexe qui liront ou entendront lire les préceptes d’amour, expliqués moralement en la célèbre École des Filles, sans spermatiser ou être stimulés de quelque émotion spirituelle ou corporelle. (183)

The text presents itself thus as explicitly pornographic – indeed, pronouncing an anathema for those who do not ejaculate or are not stimulated – while it also reveals its gendered subject. Not only is it designed to titillate and stimulate, it is meant to ‘faire spermatiser’ – to cause a male ejaculation. The focus on male sexual pleasure forms the basis of the novel from the start.

L’École des filles thus reappropriates this common seventeenth-century topos of the treatise, and subverts its purpose. From being pleasing to God, then pleasing to the king and high society, this new manual claims to instruct the reader in the practices of sexual pleasure. However, the tone of the work establishes clearly the priorities in sexual instruction. “Voici l’École de votre sagesse et le recueil des principales choses que vous devez savoir pour contenter vos maris quand vous en aurez” (169). While later on in the dialogue it is revealed that women are indeed able to derive pleasure from sexual intercourse, it is but an afterthought. Furthermore, despite the fact that mutual pleasure is preferred in L’École des filles, male genitalia and indeed
every part of the male body are described, whereas there is silence and ignorance regarding the female genitalia and body.

The supplementary role of women in this school of sexual enlightenment demonstrates neatly the true axis of power relations in the novel between men and women. It is only through the sex act, and that through Robinet, that Fanchon is able to be educated and empowered. After her sexual awakening with her lover, Fanchon declares to her cousin, “Ma cousine, cela est étrange : depuis que Robinet a couché avec moi et que j’ai vu et senti les choses… Je n’étais bonne auparavant qu’à filer et me taire, et à présent je suis bonne a tout ce que l’on voudra” (224). The illicit sexual knowledge therefore brings confidence and authority to an otherwise silenced Fanchon, yet, it is only through the opening of the hymen (and only then through heterosexual male-centered sexual activity) that the mind can be opened for women in *L’École des filles*. The physical loss of virginity and innocence leads to a metaphysical enlightenment. This new knowledge does not, however, lead Fanchon into higher knowledge. This carnal knowledge is instead the extent of her knowledge while also constituting a new and unprecedented desire. Fanchon, newly enlightened, explains to her cousin, “il semble que l’on ne soit garçon et fille que pour cela, et l’on ne commence à vivre au monde que depuis que l’on sait ce que c’est…” (224).

While sexual practice represented in *L'École des filles* purportedly opens the mind of the ingénue, it is love that claims to make the naïve wise in Molière’s *L'École des femmes*. Arnolphe’s unassuming rival, Horace, demonstrates this natural sentiment in stating, “l’amour est un grand maître” (III IV). Our introduction to Arnolphe reveals his surprising comprehension of the ways of the world. James Turner, in *Schooling Sex*, describes Arnolphe’s character precisely by expounding on the fact that he is not a puritanical man or a businessman, but “a
specialist in libertine literature, a quoter of Rabelais, and a collector of ‘contes gaillards’” (Turner 255). All of his study has led him to believe that he can succeed where all the other husbands have failed. His aim has been to keep a woman pure, in order to protect her honor and love her fully, knowing that she could never betray him. Arnolphe’s plans can thus be read as a homosocial enactment founded in his desire to trump the other husbands.

However, Arnolphe’s masterplan is fatally flawed from the start. While gloating about his eventual triumph in securing a faithful wife who will sew, pray and love him, Arnolphe describes what he truly desires in a wife, “Même ne sache pas ce que c’est qu’une rime ; / Et s’il faut qu’avec elle on joue au corbillon / Et qu’on vienne à lui dire à son tour : ‘Qu’y met-on?’ / Je veux qu’elle réponde : ‘une tarte à la crème’” (I I 96-9). Through the word game, Molière is manipulating the audience with the impropriety of the suggested word (e.g. con). In so doing, he relieves himself of the obligation of naming the obscene, and through the referential process of language relies on the audience to supply the comedic elements. Throughout his interactions with Agnès, he is constantly the victim of his own cynical worldview.

Agnès, on the other hand, is portrayed as innocent, naïve and pure – her uneducated remarks about sexuality underline the impossibility of educating an ignorance of natural knowledge. While with Arnolphe, Agnès exclaimes, “La douceur me chatouille et là dedans remue / Certain je ne sais quoi dont je suis toute émue” (II. V. 563-4). Although she is not yet in possession of the vocabulary to express her sexual desire, this desire manifests itself all the same. Thus the repressive system of the enforced innocence of the female subject is criticized; the silencing of the rhetoric of sexual language does not actually stifle desire. Simultaneously revealing her naivety as well as suggesting another obscene quid pro quo to the audience, these lines nevertheless reveal an important theme in L’École des femmes. While the sophisticated,
educated schemer eventually fails, the ingénue, who was educated in order to be a fool, finds an innate logic to her sexuality that reveals itself through a natural romantic love for Horace. Ultimately, however, Molière’s *L’École des femmes* depends on a standard patriarchal denouement that negates the possibility of any genuine feminine empowerment.

In the final scene of *L’École des femmes* – as triumphant as this love is – the traffic in women is perpetuated. It is eventually revealed that Agnès really has no real choice, despite the fortuitous outcome. The triangle of desire centered on Agnès dissolves in the final scene, when Arnolphe exits silently, defeated by his own cynicism and scheming in the face of natural desire. The desire for the object is not lessened with his departure; rather, the source of authority has shifted out of his favor. Paternal authority, however, is reinstated after being wrested out of the hands of Arnolphe, when Chrysalde and Oronte – the father of Horace, reveal the truth parentage of Agnès. Chrysalde cheerfully declares to a silent Arnolphe, “Je devine à peu près quel est votre supplice ; / Mais le sort en cela ne vous est que propice : Si n’être point cocu vous semble un si grand bien, / Ne vous point marier en est le vrai moyen.” The pleasure the audience derives from the unexpected realization that Agnès and Horace will be married, reveals the extent to which Agnès has simply functioned as a piece of property between two males enacting a performative gesture of appropriation around male desire.

Pornography, by definition, does not simply function inside the text. In *L’École des filles* and *L’École des femmes* a metatextual and participatory structure plays a significant role in the development of homosocial desire. It is also this participatory structure that imparts to these texts their pornographic nature. In *L’École des filles*, the reader is invited into the sexually explicit text, encouraged and commanded to participate with the girls as they explore their sexual desire. With Molière however, the participatory nature of his text is subtler. His use of the quid pro quo
throughout the text utilizes the power suggestion in the mind of the spectator or reader. Not simply a misunderstanding, Molière’s quid pro quo literally replaces an innocent thought with the obscene. In the same scene where Agnès confesses her unnameable desires to Arnolphe, Molière’s most infamous quid pro quo, the ‘le’ underlines this point. In an effort to hide the fact that Horace took her ruban, Agnès hesitates to finish her sentence, leading Arnolphe to imagine the worst:

Arnolphe: Ne vous a-t-il point pris, Agnès, quelque autre chose?...
Agnès: Hé! il m’a…
Arnolphe : Quoi ?
Agnès : Pris…
Arnolphe : Euh !
Agnès : Le…
Arnolphe : Plaît-il ?

……………………
Agnès : Il m’a pris le ruban que vous m’avez donné… (II V 571-8)

Through this protracted quid pro quo, the reader is left to his or her own imaginings about what it is that Arnolphe could be assuming. The spectator, however, was likely privy to a gestural rhetoric that might have given a hint as to what Arnolphe suspected, but to which Agnès would have still been naïve. The physical and mental participation in the obscenity of these two works marks them as pornographic. Subversive for this reason, they were subject to the repressive machinery of censorship.

Ironically, the attempts to suppress the dissemination of this pornographic literature are linked with its production through the desire for power. Male homosocial bonds serve to create and preserve power; therefore censorship can be viewed as a homosocial institution, with the expressed goal of repressing materials that would subvert the authority of the dominant group. When that dominant group’s interests thus revolve around the suppression of sexually obscene materials for religious reasons, the title of ‘obscene’ and the consequences of censorship fall
upon the work; however, when the work is judged indecent or obscene on religious grounds (e.g. protestant pamphlets) the work also is censored in the same way. Indeed, what becomes evident is that the line that separated politically or religiously subversive tracts was often articulated by and with sexually subversive works. Of the multiple examples in the history of obscenity, a prime example lies in the fact that many times sodomy was linked with Protestantism; both were harshly suppressed (DeJean 31). In this way, *L’École des filles* and *L’École des femmes* can be read in their historically subversive context.

By examining the ways in which these works maintain the status quo, particularly in terms of the maintenance of masculine structures of domination over women and other non-hetero-normative male figures *L’École des filles* and *L’École des femmes* appear rather modern; perhaps this is only to say that these male structures of domination have not substantially altered in the course of the last 350 years. Although, as Ruth Larson and others claim, this work can be seen as revolutionary, it remains that while these works may indeed be emancipatory in one sense, it can remain repressive in another. That is to say that while they do suggest a less repressive attitude towards sexual education, they do not indeed attempt to revolutionize the status of women. They instead undermine the authority of devout society, calling into question the continued supremacy of the church, and suggest an alternative but still masculine source of power.

Perhaps it might be suggested that these works can be read as evolutionary steps toward the transformation of power structures that René Girard discusses in his work *Deciet, Desire and the Novel*. He traces, through the nineteenth century, the replacement of the King and the Church with the middle class and bourgeois culture. This important work, drawn on heavily for Sedgwick’s theory of homosocial desire, underlines the replacement of overarching structures,
and the mimesis that results from this exchange. The modern representational form of sexual intercourse had democratized pornography, creating, maintaining and reinforcing the desired object of men, as learned through the performatives of other men.

If indeed the homosocial is tied to the erotic, as Sedgwick proposes, it is also mitigated through the obligatory heterosexuality inherent in male-dominated kinship systems like that of seventeenth-century French culture. Homosociality, thus, might be viewed as a way to dispel the violent self-loathing that could possibly arise from the paradox of living in a patriarchal-dominated society and being attracted to men. Homosociality can similarly be used to provide an outlet to perhaps unexplored homosexual desire. The homosocial then gives this homosexual desire a place in society where it would be otherwise unacceptable. In this way then, pornography and overt erotic literature can be situated in a suppressed homosexual or homosocial desire. Ultimately Sedgwick’s discussion of erotic triangles concludes by saying that what has changed over time in western culture and has varied across cultures is the way homosexual practices are perceived by the dominant community (26). Unfortunately, the role of women as well as their treatment is inextricably linked with the perception of homosexuality; where gender and class inequalities are significant for homosexuals, so too does the fate of women follow a similar trajectory. An unanswered, and perhaps unanswerable, question remains: is it possible that obscenity or pornography can portray egalitarian relations, and truly provide freedom and personal sexual expression? In the case of these two works, it appears not.

The obscene has a complex place in modern society, much as it did in the early modern period. In many ways the seventeenth century shines a light on our modern society and our views on obscenity and pornography. Today, as in the seventeenth century, the obscene often pushes boundaries and affords a sense of freedom and experimentation that might not be otherwise
possible. Furthermore, our definitions of the obscene, the erotic, and the pornographic have shifted to accommodate new and different forms, while the formerly obscene becomes absorbed into our culture. So, too, the dialectical relationship between the censored (or forbidden) and the coveted mirrors that of the seventeenth century. Today, male homosocial desire continues to function as a useful way to decode our modern world. For seventeenth century texts, L'École des filles and L'École des femmes are extraordinarily modern, revealing many modern sensibilities and gendered power biases. However, it is only through an understanding of male desire – and the bonding it creates – that the modern reader can truly begin to grasp that the radical and revolutionary natures of these works derive from their utter banality.
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