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## BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Dílo Thomase Hughese *Školní dny Toma Browna* jako představitel žánru  
školních příběhů

Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days* as a Representative of The  
School Story Genre

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## **ABSTRAKT**

Cílem této bakalářské práce je zanalyzovat dílo *Školní dny Toma Browna* (1857) od Thomase Hughese jako prominentního představitele literárního žánru školních příběhů. Tento malý, avšak významný žánr se zaměřuje na pre-adolescentní a adolescentní studentský život v britských internátních školách. V teoretické části je důkladně rozebrán historický vývoj těchto škol od jejich vzniku ve 14. století, a následně i vývoj žánru školních příběhů, který s nimi úzce souvisel. Od 19. století se v žánru školních příběhů ustálily typické charakteristické prvky, jako je převážná část děje odehrávající se ve školním prostředí a s ním spojená témata přátelství, autority, sportu, šikany a osobního vývoje hlavní postavy. Za jedno z nejvýznamnějších děl tohoto žánru je považováno dílo Thomase Hughese *Školní dny Toma Browna*, které je pak v praktické části podrobně rozebráno v závislosti na zavedených charakteristikách. Je zde nejen ukázáno, jak a kde se tyto charakteristiky v díle objevují a jak je autor využil k sestrojení poutavého příběhu, ale i jak jejich nejružnější interpretace nabízí náhled do autorových názorů a dojmů, ať už je do knihy zakomponoval úmyslně či ne. Některé aspekty díla jsou potenciálně ovlivněné autorovou osobní zkušeností z internátní školy Rugby za dob slavného reformátora Thomase Arnolda, jiné zase všeobecně propagovanými hodnotami viktoriánské doby, během níž byla kniha napsána.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

*Školní dny Toma Browna*; Thomas Hughes; žánr školních příběhů; internátní školy; Thomas Arnold

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this bachelor's thesis is to analyse the work *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) by Thomas Hughes as a prominent representative of the school story literary genre. This small but significant genre focuses on pre-adolescent and adolescent student life in British public schools. The theoretical part thoroughly examines the historical development of these schools since their inception in the 14th century, followed by an analysis of the evolution of the school story genre, as these two are intertwined. Since the 19th century, typical characteristics of the school story genre have been established, such as the majority of the plot taking place in the school environment and the associated themes of friendship, authority, sports, bullying and the personal development of the main character. Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days* is considered one of the most important works of this genre, and it is analysed in detail in the practical part based on the established characteristics of the genre. It is not only shown here how and where these characteristics appear in the work and how the author used them to construct an engaging narrative, but also how their various interpretations offer an insight into the author's opinions and impressions, whether he incorporated them into the book intentionally or not. Some aspects of the work are potentially influenced by the author's personal experience at the public school of Rugby under the famous reformer Thomas Arnold. Other aspects serve as a reflection of the Victorian era during which the book was written.

## **KEYWORDS**

*Tom Brown's Schooldays*; Thomas Hughes; school story genre; public schools; Thomas Arnold

## Obsah

1	Introduction .....	8
2	Theoretical Part.....	10
2.1	Public Schools and The School Story Genre until the end of 19 <sup>th</sup> century .....	10
2.1.1	Evolution of the Public-School Movement .....	10
2.1.2	Characteristics of Public Schools .....	11
2.1.3	Girls' Public Schools .....	12
2.1.4	Early School Stories .....	12
2.2	Public Schools and The School Story in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century .....	13
2.2.1	Beginning of the Public Schools Reforms.....	13
2.2.2	Arnold's Educational Reforms .....	13
2.2.3	Tom Brown's Schooldays .....	15
2.2.4	Characteristics of the School Story Genre.....	16
2.2.5	Representatives of the School Story Genre .....	18
2.3	Public Schools and The School Story Genre from the 1890s until WWI .....	20
2.3.1	Criticism of the Public Schools .....	20
2.3.2	The School Story Genre .....	21
2.4	Public Schools and The School Story Between the Wars .....	22
2.4.1	Attack on Public Schools.....	22
2.4.2	The School Story Genre of the Interwar Period .....	23
2.5	Decline after the Second World War.....	25
2.5.1	Public Schools .....	25
2.5.2	The End of the School Story Genre? .....	26
3	Practical Part.....	28
3.1	The School Setting .....	28

3.2	The Authority .....	30
3.3	The Athleticism .....	34
3.4	The Theme of Friendship .....	35
3.5	Bullying .....	39
3.6	Evolution of the Hero .....	42
3.7	School as a Microcosm.....	45
4	Conclusion.....	48
	Work cited .....	50

## 1 Introduction

The school story genre is a popular British genre that has been developing alongside British public schools since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is often neglected by scholars and critics as it is considered to be a minor fiction genre whose fully fledged existence has been often denied and, instead, it has been often analysed as a part of children's literature rather than a genre of its own (Townsend 111). This is a pity since not only does it offer an insight into the institution of public schools, their structure, and the lives of their students, but it also provides a panorama of its students of different social positions and statuses. The school story genre thus presents a cross-section of society while highlighting its values and moral and didactic pre-occupations. What is more, the individual students' behaviour and interactions can be observed and classified as archetypal characters such as the school's bully, the outsider etc.

In order to examine the individual aspects of the genre, the theoretical part elaborates on the historical development of public schools as it is heavily intertwined with the evolution of the school story genre. Therefore, the individual chapters correlate with time periods based on the major changes that were occurring in the public school system during that time. These changes are depicted in detail by two monographs by Edward C. Mack - *Public Schools and British Opinion 1780-1860* (1939) and *Public Schools and British Opinion Since 1860* (1941), where he has not only traced the history of the British public schools, but he has demonstrated their connection with the social, intellectual, economic, and religious notions of the era. Each chapter of the theoretical part therefore presents how the school story genre relates to the particular historical period of the development of public schools and provides examples of the genre from notable contemporary authors. These are thoroughly explored by Isabel Quigly in her work *The Heirs of Tom Brown* (1982), in which she offers a compelling analysis of the social, cultural, and literary significance of this genre and examines various school stories, identifying recurring themes, which are dissected in more detail by this thesis, and, together with other works concerning this topic, used to define the principal characteristics of the school story genre.

The practical part of the thesis focuses on the analysis of the novel *Tom Brown Schooldays* (1857) by Thomas Hughes, which is generally regarded as the most famous school story ever



written (J. Richards, *Happiest Days* 23), My endeavour is to show in which manner the novel presents the individual, previously established characteristics of the school story genre. That includes examining Hughes's use of these characteristics to construct the narrative and to promote his personal opinions, and beliefs. Furthermore, the thesis explores how the novel reflects the Victorian era in which it was written, mainly its focus on patriarchal, class-based society, as well as its values and ideals of Christianity, duty, authority, and masculinity. Finally, *Tom Brown Schooldays* is presented also as a predecessor of popular works of contemporary children's literature.

## **2 Theoretical Part**

### **2.1 Public Schools and The School Story Genre until the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century**

As the school story genre concerns itself with British public schools and since its conception developed alongside these institutions, it is important to provide a brief overview of their history. Although the genre developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the public schools can be traced back to the late Middle Ages and since then have undergone many changes and developments.

#### **2.1.1 Evolution of the Public-School Movement**

The first public school in England was Winchester College, founded in 1382 by William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester, to help increase the number of clergymen after the Black Death hit England in 1348 and halved its population (Turner 40-41). It differed from the numerous grammar schools and tutorial facilities that were providing education at the time, as it was designed to educate those unable to afford these kinds of private education. Other public schools soon followed in the steps of Winchester's philanthropic purpose (Reed 3). Some of these schools, like Eton or Westminster, were endowed by kings and queens for religious purposes, other schools like Harrow, Rugby, and Charterhouse were established by rich businessmen to "bring to the poor and to the middle classes the benefits of the new classical culture of the Renaissance" (Mack, *1780-1860* 5).

However, as public schools had quickly become successful in producing able scholars and esteemed churchmen, many rich and powerful families also wanted their children to attend. And when the schools accommodated their wishes, it certainly changed their original intention to educate the poor and needy, and created schools "where members of England's elite were educated together, in large groups, with the aim of preparing a large portion of them, at least, for university education" (Turner 45).

This transformation of the character of the public schools was happening gradually throughout the following centuries. Moreover, the new upper class was rapidly becoming politically and socially equal to the older ruling class and they "laid claim to the title of gentleman by virtue of wealth and education" (Mack, *1780-1860* 21). As a result of this, by

the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, public schools had become primarily upper-class schools with the education altered to suit the desires of the ruling class gentleman (Reed 4).

### **2.1.2 Characteristics of Public Schools**

The public schools differed from one another in many aspects, however, due to their political and structural similarities, they did indeed form a system (Mack, *1780-1860* 3). Firstly, they were all boarding schools (Leach) or became one by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and they were only for boys, as girls were believed for many centuries to be less intellectually competent (Turner 61).

The second similarity was their arrangements regarding the admissions of pupils. The schools had "foundations on which the poor were to receive a free education" (Mack, *1780-1860* 8), yet they all permitted a certain number of paying students to attend. As mentioned before, this gradually led to these students becoming the prevailing group in public schools.

Another trait they shared was their pride in their independence (Reed 4). They had their own curious traditions, games, and slang; they aimed at building up a tightly integrated community which was independent from, and contrasted sharply with, the outside world (Wilson 14). Closely related to their independence was the schools' traditionalism. They preserved the same customs and models that were set by the founders and early generations and were proud of doing so. That was why scarcely any changes were made to the schools' structure in the following centuries and why they still adhered to some obsolete practices and traditions (Mack, *1780-1860* 8).

Their curricula also in many ways corresponded one to another. All schools, not just the public ones, were established primarily for the teaching of Latin grammar. Greek became part of the school curriculum by the beginning of the seventeenth century, but it was always learned after and through the medium of Latin (Turk). However, the way it was taught was not effective at all. Classrooms were overfilled with boys of different ages. It was due to the small number of teachers, called masters, who were against increasing their numbers, since the fewer of them there were, the more money each one received. To arrange the order within the huge numbers of students, boys were taught obedience and strict discipline through frequent floggings (Warner 16).

Classroom procedure was formal, strict, and dull: the master sat in glowering majesty, rod in hand, high above his students, and listened to their droning recitations of incompletely mastered rules of grammar or passages from Latin literature, ready to mete out punishment for the slightest error. (Mack, *1780-1860* 27)

Physical violence did not come just from the masters; it was also frequently utilized by prefects – older students who were appointed to supervise the behaviour of younger students and maintain discipline. The prefects had special privileges, such as the permission to physically punish others, or even use some of them as their own helpers. These helpers were called fags, and their duties were carefully prescribed by authority (Weinberg 99). However, prefects often did not follow these limitations and forced fags to serve them as slaves (Mack, *1780-1860* 41).

Because of all these circumstances, public school education became, by the eighteenth century, an exceedingly dreary process and if the students survived their younger years, they usually revolted against their masters, and encouraged others to do so (Warner 9). This made them loyal to their fellows, and, through that, loyal to their school.

### **2.1.3 Girls' Public Schools**

The characteristics mentioned before concern only boys' public schools, as girl's education has been severely neglected by the system. Until the 1540s, numerous girls from wealthy families were only taught in so-called nunneries. These boarding schools were not public schools in the slightest, but they certainly were highly influential when girls' public schools were founded many centuries later, especially regarding their curricula and educational aims. That included for example the emphasis on music-making, needlework, and French rather than the classical languages, as these were perceived as symbols of femininity and social achievement and as a way to shield girls from the corrupting influences of the world (Turner 60).

### **2.1.4 Early School Stories**

The genre of school story was largely defined and popularized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, there were many school stories, that had appeared earlier (Townsend 111-112) They were predominantly moralistic tales, that used fiction as a tool for shaping the minds of children

and for preparing them to enter the world of school. Even though girls' public schools have been neglected, it was Sarah Fielding's *The Governess or, Little Female Academy*, published in 1749, that is "generally credited with being the first boarding school story" (Foster and Simons 195). It follows the lives of nine girls and their governess, Mrs. Teachum, through their nine days at boarding school. Every day, they read a didactic tale or a fairy tale and then they talk about occurrences in their everyday lives, such as meeting strangers or receiving a letter. After that, the governess elucidates a lesson to be learned from each experience. The novel's aims to educate and delight were imitated and used as a formula by many of her contemporaries and other writers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Foster and Simons 197).

## **2.2 Public Schools and The School Story in the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of perhaps the most significant public school reforms. Thomas Arnold, a prominent reformer, and the headmaster of Rugby School implemented numerous innovations which gained nation-wide acclaim, partially because he and his reforms were extensively propagated by Thomas Hughes in his novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857). So, it is important to scrutinize these changes to be able to later analyse the novel.

### **2.2.1 Beginning of the Public Schools Reforms**

In the first four decades of the nineteenth century public schools were "the object of fierce attacks among an important section of public opinion" (Honey 1), but because of the Public-Schools' great emphasis on their individuality, any reform coming "through State agency was out of the question" (Mack, *1780-1860* 223). Thus, any possible change could be executed only by "a remarkable breed of headmasters taking the schools by the scruff of the neck and transforming them into respectable institutions" (J. Richards, "The School Story" 2). These headmasters had all the circumstances working in their favour including the relatively bad state of their respective schools, which made them even easier to reform (Mack, *1780-1860* 223). The most prominent reformer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Thomas Arnold.

### **2.2.2 Arnold's Educational Reforms**

Thomas Arnold became the headmaster of Rugby School in 1828 (Turner 5), and during his tenure, he implemented several revolutionary changes which corresponded with the two

most prevalent public opinions of the contemporary era regarding education (Mack, *1780-1860* 248). The first of these emphasized the tradition, virtuousness, and religiousness of the boys and wanted them to act according to the doctrines of Old Christianity (Mack, *1780-1860* 248). Arnold was a Christian moral reformer himself; his primary aim was to form boys' characters and elevate their maturity through cultivating moral thoughtfulness and Christian self-regulation (Findlay xx). He used sermons to diffuse his moral and religious teachings to the entirety of the school population. There was usually a chaplain who took care of the preaching, but Arnold considered preaching an important part of his duty (Whitridge 93). He made the sermons more digestible for the boys and he did not speak down to them. He profusely yet gently talked about everyday faults and common feelings that one has and related them to the laws of Christianity to instil the most important moral ideals – loyalty, self-sacrifice, and obedience (Mack, *1780-1860* 254, 271).

To maintain discipline, he retained flogging, but only for high offences such as lying or drinking and only for the younger part of his students (Findlay 61). For the older students Arnold himself said that he was “keeping punishment in the background and, as it were, out of sight, and putting forward encouragement and kindness, we should attract, as it were, the good and noble feelings of those, whom we are dealing” (Arnold Lecture X).

The other popular opinion regarding education was emphasising individualism and liberal humanism. These liberal ideals were reflected in Arnold's attitude towards the younger, little boys. He wanted to discipline them, but at the same time, he wished for them a happier life than they would have lead in the old Public Schools (Mack, *1780-1860* 257-258). As it was impossible for him to have personal contact with all of them, he used the prefects. For Arnold that meant the entire Sixth Form which were “those who having risen to the highest form in the school, will probably be at once the oldest and the strongest, and the cleverest; and if the school be well ordered, the most respectable in application and general” (Wykehamist 287). He taught the Sixth form himself and even established kind of informality in the classroom as he made some of the pupils “his friends and companions, often inviting them to go for walks with him or to dine at his house” (Mack, *1780-1860* 270).

Regarding the school's curriculum, he taught Latin and Greek for their moral lessons, training of the mind, and familiarization with the culture of a great civilization analogous to

that in which they lived (Arnold 212-213). But he changed how they were taught. He put emphasis on the content of the classics, he used them for their moral ideas and related them to modern literature and politics.

To summarize, during his time as headmaster of Rugby, Arnold retained most of the old organization and the general nature of a Public School, specifically the discipline, moral teachings, and the customs of boy life. What made him a great reformer was his remodelling of these old traditions and systems to serve a new purpose, refreshing them with new spirits and ideas. His reforms might even seem contradictory to one another, as he was influenced by the adverse public opinions regarding the aims of education, but Arnold was able to balance them in a manner that became instrumental in shaping the philosophy and structure of education in Britain, leaving a lasting impact that influenced subsequent generations of educators and education reformers.

### **2.2.3 Tom Brown's Schooldays**

*Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) is a novel by Thomas Hughes, where he presented a semi-autobiographical picture of his own experience at Rugby as a pupil of Thomas Arnold. It is generally regarded as "crucial in promoting Thomas Arnold and his Rugby schoolboy subjects as exemplary Victorian icons, and the Arnoldian ideal as a powerful, class specific Victorian ideology" (Weaver 455). This book is deeply analysed by this thesis as it is by many scholars considered the very first true example of the school story genre. Furthermore, as it largely concerns itself with the teachings of Thomas Arnold, it can be regarded as fundamental source for investigating his notions, although not always as an accurate one, as the ideals that the novel popularized were rather different from the reality of the Rugby School under Arnold. It uses the teachings of Arnold and his concept of 'Godliness and Good learning' but also combines them with Hughes' commitment to English Nationalism and Christian Manliness (J. Richards, *Happiest Days* 24).

Arnold's educational system aimed at cultivating maturity of the intellect, rather than focusing on physical development. He distinguished boyhood recreations from academic and religious activities, asserting that the mind held superiority over the body. Interestingly, in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the chapel and the football field converge in both purpose and proximity. Thus, contrary to Arnold's beliefs, muscularity and Christianity align in the

novel, emphasizing that true manliness is rooted in youthful courage and vitality (Haley 154).

This particular concept of manliness was satirically labelled 'muscular Christianity' but Hughes willingly embraced it and even elaborated on it in his work *The Manliness of Christ* (1880) (J. Richards, *Happiest Days* 32-34). He characterized manliness not merely as physical bravery or athletic skill, but as a combination of gentleness, consideration for others, willingness to endure suffering, unwavering commitment to truth, and the submission of one's will to a sense of duty (Hughes 17-22). Properly organized sports and games also played a vital role in creation of this muscular Christian. Hughes believed that their effect had been overall humanising and Christian in that they brought together people of all the classes and created an understanding between them (Winn 70). Although he focused on them a little too much in his novel and as he made Arnold "a sort of patron saint of games" (Winn 72), which he certainly was not.

Overall, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* had a big impact on the development of public school education, even though Hughes adjusted some of Arnold's teachings. It, however, had even bigger impact on the development of school story genre, which effectively began with its publication (J. Richards, *Happiest Days* 23-24).

#### **2.2.4 Characteristics of the School Story Genre**

While the school story tradition has roots in the eighteenth century, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that school stories began to establish common patterns and characteristics, and exhibit gender bias in terms of authorship. Men started to address narratives concerning boys' schools, whereas women concentrated on tales centred around girls' schools. However, it is unnecessary to separate these gender-specific narratives since they share a substantial resemblance (Leotescu 230, 234).

Before the publishing of Tom Browns Schooldays in 1857, literature for children had not predominantly adopted the novel format. Instead, it was presented in the form of moral teachings, or adventure stories (Musgrave 192). No matter the form, children literature was very didactic from the start which was also true for the genre of school story (Pesold Introducion).



The school story mirrors the lives of young adolescents, with the school playing a pivotal role in their growth. Writers frequently choose to depict public schools in their stories as it aligns with their objective of presenting schools as miniature representations of the broader society (Leotescu 233). Due to the fact that most public schools operate as boarding schools, family influence is completely removed, boys or girls have to actively engage as integral members of their community, assume personal responsibility, stand independently, and hold their own among peers (Townsend 111).

The story takes place during a school year or even whole school career, though focusing on specific periods of their heroes' time at school. It usually starts with the hero leaving home, arriving at school, socializing, making friends and meeting the authority figures. The dynamics of authority in public schools were extensively explored and emphasized. The roles of school and house captains, different types of prefects, the privileges associated with various school forms, and the authority and standing of the headmaster, housemasters, and form masters played crucial roles in the narratives. Typically, relationships between masters and boys, particularly among the younger boys, were not positive (Musgrave 194, 195).

The narrative typically follows a protagonist with moderate intellectual capabilities, yet possessing a kind disposition and physical prowess, as they progress through the school year. This progression is accompanied by the development of their character as they encounter various troubles, stemming both from transgressions against the school regulations and from character flaws that must be addressed and resolved during their time at school. Eventually, the protagonist matures, learns from their experiences, and is recognized for their newfound sensibility, often being rewarded with positions such as prefect or captain of a sports team upon reaching the sixth form. This mutual development of the story and character can be determined as one of the principle themes of the genre (Pesold 39).

Friendship is a common theme. The concept of "pairing" was even promoted by the schools through various school structures such as shared studies and the necessity of having a consistent companion for walks. Having a designated "best friend" was seen as not only socially and emotionally beneficial but also practically necessary (Quigly 81-82).

Beyond the theme of friendship, sportsmanship is another prevalent motif in school stories. The authors consistently highlight the importance of sports, be it the boys' football or the

girls' hockey, for both the school and the main character. The challenges of competition are encountered not only in team sports, known as games in England, but also in various aspects of school life such as houses, dormitories, and even contests with other schools. In traditional school stories, conflicts often feature a bully and their friends. Whether the bully takes the form of an older boy, a schoolmaster, or a prefect, acts of persecution typically reflect underlying issues like jealousy, vengefulness, snobbery, or bigotry. In the school story genre, it's not just the heroes and heroines who face harassment; in addition to looking out for themselves, they must also protect weaker companions from abusers (Leotescu 233).

The narrative subtly depicts Victorian Britain's attitudes towards society and class. Despite the contrasting nature of the school environment and the world outside, they were inherently connected, akin to pieces of a unified jigsaw puzzle. Public schools, thriving notably during the Victorian era, constituted a somewhat distorted but important part of the outside world (Quigly 45).

### **2.2.5 Representatives of the School Story Genre**

*Tom Brown's Schooldays* did not remain the sole book of its kind for long. A year later after its publication, *Eric, or Little by Little* emerged, written by Frederick William Farrar, one of the most influential churchmen of his day (J. Richards, "The School Story" 4). These two books shared the objective of imparting moral lessons to boys, but they were distinct in tone and expression of Christianity. While Hughes's Christianity was practical and aligned with the everyday beliefs of a sensible person, Farrar embraced a fervent and intense form of Christianity. In his narrative, Farrar passionately recounts the struggles of Eric Williams, a boy with noble qualities, handsome appearance, and great potential, as he engages in a continuous and often unsuccessful struggle against the allure of wrongdoing. The phrase "little by little" encapsulates the gradual decline in Eric's character. The novel, despite being considered preposterous in its morality, manners, and sentimentality, is noteworthy for its reflection of a perspective on life where every aspect holds significance. The author presents a passionate Puritan worldview where moral choices are constant, transforming even minor actions into potential crises (Townsend 114, 115).

Hughes and Farrar established themes, characters, and archetypes that later authors built upon. However, after the works of *Tom Brown* and *Eric*, there was a gap of approximately

thirty years before the emergence of the next significant literary milestone. Although writers like T. S. Millington, H. C. Adams, and Ethel Kenyon produced school stories during this period, their primary influence leaned more towards Farrar than Hughes. Despite their contributions, none of them had the same impact as *Tom Brown* and *Eric* (J. Richards, “The School Story” 4).

The great leap forward came with the arrival of *The Boy's Own Paper* and the stories of Talbot Baines Reed. *The Boy's Own Paper* was launched in 1879 by The Religious Tract Society, with the goal of encouraging wholesome reading that would provide entertainment for young boys, as they held the belief that the prevalence of crime among the youth was fuelled by the widespread availability of what they deemed 'pernicious' reading material. Reed had a strong association with the magazine from the beginning, contributing numerous stories, including 'sketches' depicting specific occasions or types of boys, a couple of historical novels, and predominantly school stories. Notable works, such as *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's* (1887) which quickly became the favourite and most renowned after its publishing, as well as *The Willoughby Captains* (1887), *The Cock House at Fellsgarth* (1893), and *The Master of the Shell* (1901) were all engaging and readable (Quigly 79).

The last decades of the nineteenth century saw the zenith of school stories in volume but nadir in quality. Harold Avery, a prolific children's author, wrote a number of jolly but lengthy novels very much in the style of Reed, for example *The Triple Alliance* (1897) and *The Dormitory Flag* (1899). Among a host of other less renowned authors were Walter Rhoades and his *The Boy of Cuba* (1900), or G. Forsyth Grant and her *The Boys of Penrohm* (1893) (Lovelock).

Some school stories were popular at the time, but they deviated from the traditional form. Typically, school fiction is lively, albeit intense. The overall tone of most school stories implies that, in general, the school experience is considered valuable, or at least appreciated in hindsight. F. Anstey's *Vice Versa: or A Lesson to Fathers* (1882) stands out as a notable departure from the cheerful and light-hearted school story genre with its entirely unrealistic framework. The narrative revolves around a father and a son who magically switch bodies for a week, providing a unique perspective on an adult's nightmarish encounter with the school environment (Quigly 100-101).

## **2.3 Public Schools and The School Story Genre from the 1890s until WWI**

The 25 years leading up to the First World War marked a period of significant reorientation and the acknowledgment that the old world had ceased to exist, and new forces had emerged, demanding fresh perspectives and responses. The most significant development in the 1890s, widely recognized today, was the substantial decline of England's economic and political influence in comparison to its major competitors. The ascendance of Germany and America, which had been brewing since the 1870s, was becoming increasingly tangible by 1890, laying the groundwork for the global conflict that erupted in 1914 (Mack, *Since 1860* 177). These historical changes of the late Victorian era and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century also marked another shift in the development of the public schools, and therefore in the school story genre, as these two are inherently interconnected.

### **2.3.1 Criticism of the Public Schools**

Before 1902, critiques of public schools were relatively mild and limited in their objectives. Almost nobody sought to dismantle or fundamentally reshape either the British Empire or the public school system during that time (Mack, *Since 1860* 209). However, the Boer War of 1902, marked by military failures, inefficiency, corruption, and mismanagement, intensified discussions about public schools, revealing three distinct perspectives: the conservatives who endorsed the status quo without any alterations, the progressives, and the reactionaries (J. Richards, *Happiest Days* 143,145).

The progressives were great advocates for the reforms, they asserted that the schools' downfall was a result of excessive focus on athletics and the classics. They argued that the headmasters and teachers were extremely conservative and therefore only individuals from outside the system, not committed to the traditional approach, could put an end to this overemphasis and allocate more space in the curriculum to the subjects of science and modern languages, which they believed were essential to teach for the preservation of the British Empire (Mack, *Since 1860* 218-220).

On the other hand, reactionaries wanted to return to the ideals of Thomas Arnold of Rugby (J. Richards, *Happiest Days* 145). Arnoldians were reactionaries with respect to the curriculum. They sought to diminish the emphasis on modern subjects, subordinating them

to the classics, which were deemed essential for basic education. Some fervently advocated for Greek, viewing it as the gateway to intellect, taste, manners, and beauty—an effective countermeasure to commercial ideals. They placed greater importance on morality than on intellectual pursuits. While satisfied that public schools cultivated manliness, the Arnoldians argued that moral virtue, a quality they believed the schools failed to instil, held equal significance. Similar to the progressives, the Arnoldians concentrated their criticism on public school athletics. They contended that achievements in athletics had little connection to morals or good citizenship. Therefore, they asserted that the prevailing emphasis on athletic prowess was detrimental to virtue. (Mack, *Since 1860* 213-215, 230).

Criticism of public schools during the First World War was softened by the appreciation for the courage displayed by the "old public school boys" in their willingness to sacrifice their lives (Turner 232). But the three different stances towards public schools could still be seen in the contemporary literature (J. Richards, "The School Story" 7).

### **2.3.2 The School Story Genre**

The boys' school story, in general, was written primarily by conservatives who embraced and celebrated the existing system in their narratives. (J. Richards, "The School Story" 7). However, possibly the most renowned and skilled author to focus on this genre was Rudyard Kipling, who was certainly not an adherent of conservative views (J. Richards, *Happiest Days* 143). Characteristically, he did not align entirely with any specific group, although each of them could identify aspects of his views to support, as well as elements they might want to disapprove. Kipling saw himself actively participating in the ongoing debate about public education (J. Richards, *Happiest Days* 146). In his school novel *Stalky and Co.* (1897), he provided his perspective on the educational requirements essential for the emerging British Empire. He argued against the prevailing anti-intellectual mindset in private education, advocating for a bold, imaginative, and adventurous type of individual to rejuvenate the Empire and restore vitality to England (Reed 32-33). He presented a somewhat different set of lessons from those in previous school stories (Musgrave 198). The protagonists in *Stalky and Co.* dismiss the notions of house spirit, school spirit, team spirit, or organized games. They willingly defy rules, smoke, and collaborate on their assignments. However, Kipling, by portraying them engaging in guerrilla warfare against the teachers and

other students, illustrates their development of initiative, courage, resourcefulness, and self-discipline—qualities essential for defending the Empire's frontiers (J. Richards, “The School Story” 8). Kipling remained independent, responding to events, challenging established beliefs, and articulating his unique and unapologetic worldview (J. Richards *Happiest Days* 152).

In general, discernible shifts were occurring in the characteristics of the school story genre, particularly in how certain aspects of school organization were depicted and the lessons deemed significant in the narratives. Didactic elements, particularly those of a religious nature, became less explicit, and the novels started to reflect a more inquisitive spirit, gradually altering the genre as a whole (Musgrave 197-198).

## **2.4 Public Schools and The School Story Between the Wars**

In the aftermath of the war, a feverish disillusionment swept through Britain, marked by a deliberate sense of despair. This stemmed from the sudden decline of Britain from a leading to a secondary world power and the belief that the incompetence of the previous leadership was to blame. The post-war period witnessed a rejection of Victorian values, particularly evident in the newfound freedom of English youth, who openly defied Victorian taboos on sex, alcohol, and other forms of self-indulgence (Reed 94). As the years passed, the traditional society faced increasing challenges and found itself under growing criticism. The public schools bore a significant portion of this criticism as they symbolized everything that young intellectuals sought to break free from (Reed 117).

### **2.4.1 Attack on Public Schools**

A consistent stream of criticism had always existed towards the public school system and its outcomes, but it peaked after World War I. Many writers, starting from the War onward, vehemently condemned public schools, portraying them as breeding grounds for homosexuality, brutality, snobbery, and conformity. The system was viewed as emblematic and indicative of the mentality that had contributed to the war (J. Richards, “The School Story” 8). Despite the mass criticism in the early postwar period, there is a notable consistency of perspective that surpasses what has been observed in almost any similar body of opinion in the past. This unanimity is evident even in casual and incomplete critiques,

where a fully developed viewpoint is lacking. It is manifested in a focus on specific shortcomings of the schools, such as the stifling of individuality, inordinate class feeling, and the absence of spiritual values. Other flaws, such as excessive athleticism, anti-intellectualism, the dominance of classical studies, brutality, and immorality, are occasionally mentioned but are relegated to a secondary position (Mack, *Since 1860* 332-333).

As the thirties moved on, the revolutionary spirit even increased (Reed 113), and together with the Great Depression and the still growing competition of state-funded education forced public schools to change and improve (Turner 250). By 1938, “critics were in general agreement that the worst faults of the late Victorian school had been at least partially eradicated and that the public school ideal had been modified and expanded to include new aims” (Mack, *Since 1860* 365).

#### **2.4.2 The School Story Genre of the Interwar Period**

Alec Waugh's *The Loom of Youth* (1917) marked the first public school novel that deliberately aimed its critique not solely at the schools as individual institutions but as symbols of a flawed societal structure. While the novel didn't prominently feature political and social implications, it encapsulated most of the criticisms that would later emerge in discussions about the shortcomings of public schools (Reed 43). *The Loom* ignited a massive controversy, set the tone and the scope of the debate that was taken up in fiction and non-fiction. There was a rash of public school novels by young men fresh from school, providing thinly fictionalised accounts of their own schools. For example, Beverley Nichols's *Prelude* (1920), John Connell's *Lyndesay* (1930) (J. Richards, *Happiest Days* 246), or John Heygate's interesting look at Eton around the end of the First World War and the early twenties in *Decent Fellows* (1930) (Quigly 145).

However, the critical view of public schools was only prevalent with the high culture. Books that were read by the masses, not just the intellectual elite, strongly endorsed the prevailing ideology of the pre-war era. The public schools remained portrayed positively, not in the critically acclaimed yet short-lived anti-public school novels, but in best-selling middle-brow novels and in the widely popular boys' papers such as *The Magnet* (1908-1940) and

*The Gem* (1907-1939), which were eagerly bought and consumed weekly by a new generation of boys (J. Richards, *Happiest Days* 216).

Perhaps the most remarkable of the middle-brow novels was Ernest Raymond's *Tell England* (1922). The narrative describes the war in a tone reminiscent of the pre-war era. It exudes a sunny, youthful, and idealistic atmosphere, marked by an extraordinary sense of innocence and optimism. With its ideas about patriotism, valour, necessity for sacrifice, and the noble nature of the cause still intact, the story likely transported people to an earlier perspective, rekindling a sentiment that many might have lost—the belief that, ultimately, the war was worthwhile. It lacks the bitterness, fatigue, harshness, and even cynicism often found in post-war literature. Instead, it adheres to the traditional pattern of beliefs and emotions that felt particularly fitting in 1914 (Quigly 243).

The most successful of the public stories in the weekly boys' papers *The Magnet* and *The Gem* were from Charles Hamilton using the pen name Frank Richards. He embodied the pinnacle of public school mythification. He was a direct successor in the lineage of Thomas Hughes, F. W. Farrar, and Talbot Baines Reed. Between 1907 and 1939, he contributed a weekly 30,000-word story in *The Gem*, and from 1908 to 1940, he maintained a similar commitment in *The Magnet*, in addition to meeting obligations for other publications (J. Richards "The School Story" 9). These stories, however, did not portray the reality of public schools. They were fantasies with vividly recognizable setting, and even to those who had never experienced it, they offered a generalized, outsider's perspective on what such a place should be like (Quigly 253). The enduring appeal of these stories captures the essence of the entire genre. It emanates from a timeless atmosphere, offering a sense of comforting familiarity, reassuring order, and innocence. The world depicted is a one of unchanging patterns and eternal truths. *The Magnet* meticulously followed the school year's progression, it even included Christmas vacation narratives and adventures during the summer holidays, sometimes taking place in exotic places. The elements of rituals and repetition were important as well as the characters, friendships, and idealization of the school life (J. Richards "The School Story" 10).

Frank Richards created over one hundred fictional schools, of which the most famous and closest to his heart were Greyfriars (J. Richards "The School Story" 9). And it was in stories



set in Greyfriars, where the character of Billy Bunter appeared, whom George Orwell called “one of the best-known figures in English fiction”. However, Bunter in the early days was “the butt and buffoon of Greyfriars, nothing more” (Quigly 259). The central figures were 'The Famous Five', comprising Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, Bob Cherry, and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh—each an aspiring officer and gentleman, dedicated to upholding the public school code. Billy Bunter was their comic counterpart. (J. Richards “The School Story” 9). He is introduced as “a somewhat stout junior, with a broad, pleasant face and an enormous pair of spectacle” (F. Richards). He is greedy, dishonest, disrespectful, and disobedient. He is the classic figure of menace in inter-war fiction, rootless idler, loner, and criminal, symbolizing the complete opposite of the established structure of labour, leisure, discipline, hierarchy, and camaraderie found within the school (J. Richards, *Happiest Days* 272). From the 1920s, Richards started to develop Bunter's character and comic potential, and Billy evolved into more sympathetic and characterful creation that was popular for many more decades (Lofts and Adley).

## **2.5 Decline after the Second World War**

### **2.5.1 Public Schools**

Following the Second World War, a broader overhaul of public education was introduced through The Butler Act of 1944. While enhancements were made in public education, the existing systematization in private institutions remained largely unchanged. These institutions experienced only minimal modifications, primarily in terms of modernization. Nonetheless, there was a notable improvement in state education (Reed 261,263), as the state significantly increased the funding of the state schools. This improvement increased the pressure on public schools to do better and improve their facilities. In addition to this indirect pressure, there was a considerable direct pressure. Starting in 1957, all public schools were mandated to register with the government, which dispatched inspectors to ensure compliance with minimum standards regarding facility quality. Many public schools went down because of these pressures (Turner 272), and many had to accept government's financial aid and partially conform to the state education program. The public school system, although slightly altered to fit modern conditions, continued to produce men who represented a privileged elite (Reed 260, 264). The biggest change came in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when

co-education arrived in public schools. Even though there were some problems in the beginning, it was revealed that over the course of time, girls improved the public schools (Turner 276).

### **2.5.2 The End of the School Story Genre?**

Several authors, who wrote about the topic of the school story genre, have felt that traditional school story was dwindling in significance by the mid-twentieth century (Grenby 90). Isabel Quigly even named the final chapter of her study of the genre, *The Heirs of Tom Brown* (1982), “The decline and fall of the school story” and wrote:

The genre was finished. It had relied on readers with ideas in common, shared experiences, above all a coherent attitude to the world around it; and schools now differed, writers differed, above all — readers differed — from one another, and from what they had been before. In the genre of school story, what counted was certainty and self-confidence, insularity, cheerfulness, and acceptance of the accepted; and in a world grown so much more self-conscious and uncertain, so much more international, gloomy, and self-questioning, with schools that were changing almost out of all recognition, it was impossible to keep it going. (Quigly 276)

But other authors have felt differently about it. They have held the opinion that traditional school stories continued to be published, although sometimes with a twist (Grenby 90). There were stories that were unconventional for their setting, like William Mayne’s school stories set in a cathedral choir school (Townsend 265). Or school stories which purposefully challenged the genre’s perceived elitism, like Geoffrey Trease’s *No Boats on Bannermere* (1949) and its sequels (Grenby 104-105). Or those that blended with other genres, like the internationally successful J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, where she reused the conventions of the classic school story and combined them with adventure and fantasy, setting the action at Hogwarts, a school for magicians but in all other respects a reiteration of the traditional British public school with its boarding aspect, hierarchical structure, focus on sports events, and other characteristics (Grenby 90).

Some authors, like Quigly, would not consider these examples as classic school stories, those that flourished in their nineteenth-century form together with the public schools. But they are similar in the most important characteristics that constitute the genre. And it was largely due to the genre's successful combination with other genres, and absorption and response to changing social conditions, that the school story has remained relevant to this day (Grenby 113).

### 3 Practical Part

This part of the thesis aims to analyse Tom Hughes's novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays* as a representative of the school story genre. To achieve this, the book is examined in order to recognise which aspects of this genre are present and how Hughes utilizes them not only to create a believable and engaging narrative for his story, but also how he potentially adjusts them to incorporate some of his own beliefs and notions into his work. The story, although fictional, is set in the public school of Rugby during the time in which Hughes attended its real-world counterpart and therefore, it is also the aim to find out whether and how his personal experience is reflected in the novel and how the novel presents values of the Victorian society through its setting, narrative, and themes.

#### 3.1 The School Setting

From the name of the genre, it can be easily deduced that the stories are set in and the plot revolves around some type of school. In *Tom Brown's School Days*, Hughes presents two different types of schools. The first one, our hero Tom attends, is a private school, characterized by bullying, gossiping, insufficient supervision, and a flawed educational ideology. Hughes uses Tom's experiences at his first school to highlight the challenges and shortcomings of certain educational environments and uses it as a stepping stone in Tom's educational journey, where he learns valuable lessons about resilience, friendship, and standing up to injustice. When the private school closes on account of fever, Tom is sent to the public school of Rugby. It has a relatively new headmaster, Thomas Arnold, generally called "Doctor", who was modelled partially after the real Thomas Arnold<sup>1</sup>. And just like his real-life counterpart, he is trying to improve the character of the school, as it still has many brutish practices of the old public schools<sup>2</sup>. For example, corporal punishment and physical violence were prevalent in many public schools of the time and Doctor Arnold implemented disciplinary measures that emphasized guidance and correction rather than harsh punishment, aiming to create a more nurturing and supportive environment for the students. This can be seen when Tom and his friends get lost at and return to the school late,

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<sup>1</sup> For the differences between the real Arnold and Hughes's Arnold, see chapter 2.2.3 of the Theoretical part.

<sup>2</sup> For the brutish nature of old public schools, see chapter 2.1.2 of the Theoretical Part.

bedraggled and anticipating punishment, however, Arnold greets them kindly and concernedly, and does not punish them (*TB* 110).

The public-school setting is the most distinguished characteristic of both the genre and the novel respectively, and arguably the most important, as the school environment sets a base upon which all the other characteristics can be built. The school grounds are not described in great detail, leaving much to the imagination, although the few provided descriptions can further be expanded through the various activities the students take part in. This, for example, implicates the presence of wide, green spaces where they can play sports, or the general location and appearance of the main buildings, such as the school-house, or the chapel.

These help shape the overall atmosphere and environment of Rugby. Although welcoming to some, such as can be seen with Tom's arrival, it might be daunting to others. Tom is easily assimilated to this new environment, partially because of the help that is provided to him by East, but mainly because of his general innate ability to adapt as well as his decent performance in the aforementioned activities endorsed by this environment. However, for those less capable of assimilation, who lack physical prowess or social skills to connect with others for help, this new environment seems quite demanding, and they might struggle to integrate into the established social order.

The school seclusion from home and family, for example, stresses the importance of establishing friendly relationships with fellow pupils, not only to help each other with the various duties and problems but to fulfil emotional needs as well. This can be seen in the novel, when Tom offers comfort and listening ear to his new friend, Arthur, who just arrived at school and is homesick and scared (*TB* 152).

The school year cycle gives a natural flow to the progression of the story, and the numerous events and activities that take place during this time provide authors with many opportunities to focus on different themes. For example, Hughes uses sports not only as a part of the school life but also to stress the importance of athleticism, an important constituent of his concept of muscular Christianity as can be seen in the rugby match where Tom displays the positive values of this concept.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> see chapter 3.3 of the Practical Part

Similarly to his application of athleticism, he uses the hierarchical structure of the institution and authority to highlight and develop some relationships and characters on the surface level, but upon deeper analysis, one could also correlate this to the Christian hierarchy and approximate the function of headmaster Arnold to that of God. All of these characteristics and how they are utilized by Hughes will be more closely analysed in their respective chapters of the Practical Part. It could be argued that none of these would be possible had the school setting not provided the environment necessary to develop these themes and ideas, therefore marking it as the most overarching characteristic of the genre.

### **3.2 The Authority**

Based on the characteristics of the genre, the dynamics of authority are usually extensively explored throughout the narrative. The hierarchical structure of authority mirrors that of traditional public schools, featuring the headmaster at the pinnacle of authority, followed by the masters who wield authority primarily within classrooms. Prefects, also known as præpostors, and other senior students are granted varying degrees of authority over younger peers, largely based on seniority. This authority structure still exists in some British public schools, and it is also the structure presented in the Rugby school of *Tom Brown Schooldays*.

The magnitude of the authority of the headmaster of Rugby, Thomas Arnold, can be strongly felt through the author's descriptions of him, which sometimes border on hero worship. Even when he is describing Arnold's beginnings, where he had been deeply unpopular and repressive, as he was setting up order with a strong hand, it seems like he is excusing all his actions as necessary and his unpopularity as boys' fault, as they "hadn't yet learned that he was a wise and loving man also" (*TB* 93). Throughout the book, the worshiping of Arnold seems to be escalating, as it is present not just through the author's own comments but also through the support of other characters like Old Brooke or later even our hero, Tom Brown. In the end, Arnold's school and moral authority reaches such a high level, that it could be even compared to the scale of authority of Christian God:

The Doctor's victory was complete from that moment over Tom Brown at any rate. He gave way at all points, and the enemy marched right over him, cavalry, infantry, and artillery, and the land transport corps, and the camp followers. It had taken eight

long years to do it, but now it was done thoroughly, and there wasn't a corner of him left which didn't believe in the Doctor. (*TB* 241)

It can be argued that the author just wanted to make Arnold a prime example of a Christian Gentleman, for the public-school children to look up to, however, one can find quite a lot of other parallels between Arnold and Christian God that do not concern this didactic aspect. Arnold detaches himself from the school's day-to-day affairs and uses the school structure of prefects and masters to monitor and spread his teachings just like God in heaven uses his prophets and apostles. Just as God is omnipresent and omniscient, Arnold also seems to know and care about every little boy in his school, which Tom realizes at the end of his career:

It was a new light to him to find, that, besides teaching the sixth, and governing and guiding the whole School, editing classics, and writing histories, the great Headmaster had found time in those busy years to watch over the career, even of him, Tom Brown, and his particular friends, and, no doubt, of fifty other boys at the same time. (*TB* 241)

It is possible that Hughes created Arnold like this intentionally and used his passing away to support his claim that relying solely on human support, no matter how strong, wise, or good, is unsustainable. Instead, one learns through loss to rely on God, who, in His wisdom and mercy, removes all other supports until only He remains as the ultimate foundation (*TB* 243). It is one of the many instances in the story, where one can observe the Christian values held by the author and the majority of Victorian Britons at the time. The godlike qualities of the headmaster might not be as apparent to the modern reader as they are to the Victorian one, because Christianity and its values are not as esteemed in our society as they used to be. However, these qualities might have been one of the reasons the character of Arnold enjoyed such popularity at the time of the novel's publishing which subsequently fostered the popularity of the real Thomas Arnold who became "unquestionably the most celebrated headmaster of the nineteenth century" (J. Richards *Happiest Days* 41).

It is noticeable that the character of Arnold, just like his real-life counterpart, sees that the preservation of the school authority is necessary for his educational aim to shape boys into Christian gentlemen. As he realistically cannot be everywhere at the same time, he

distributes his moral teachings through the lower authority forms, such as prefects. Masters are not used for this purpose in the story, as Hughes sticks to the tradition of the genre and presents masters more as enemies than authority figures, especially when Tom is young. It is only during Tom's last cricket match that we get a glimpse at a dynamic between our heroes and masters that is not negative:

All three [Tom, Arthur, and young master] are watching the game eagerly, and joining in the cheering which follows every good hit. It is pleasing to see the easy friendly footing which the pupils are on with their master, perfectly respectful, yet with no reserve and nothing forced in their intercourse. Tom has clearly abandoned the old theory of "natural enemies" in this case at any rate. (*TB* 232)

But one can argue that it is because of the heroes' seniority and the master's relative inexperience than because of some new-acquired authority of the masters.

The next in the hierarchical structure of the school are præpostors, who are the oldest students in the school, closest to the headmaster and he uses them for monitoring and spreading his teachings. The greatest of them during Tom Brown's early school days is Old Brooke. He and his fellow sixth-form students efficiently manage the School-house strongly yet fairly and therefore their authority is firmly embedded and well-respected by the majority of the boys. However, this system crashes as soon as Brooke and his sort leave, and the new præpostors are either small boys, whose "cleverness had carried them up to the top of the school, while in the strength of body and character they were not yet fit for a share in the government" (*TB* 116-117) or big irresponsible fellows of the wrong sort. And because the new præpostors lack either physical prowess or intellectual maturity, they lose the authority and the power associated with their position and are practically overthrown by the younger fifth-form boys, who usurp their power and privileges without the responsibilities. This disruption of the authority structure of the school leads to bad times in the School-house and later even rebellion against this injustice. This might be Hughes's way of endorsing the concept of 'muscular Christianity' and showing to his readers that it is necessary for boys to be mature and moral as well as physically strong in order to become proper leaders and proper Christian gentlemen. If they lack these attributes, not only is their leadership unjust, but also weak and susceptible to revolts.



The importance of authority is not just shown through the structural hierarchy of the school, but it also seems like Hughes uses it for character development. This can be seen for example when Tom is given authority over the fragile new boy named George Arthur, which makes Tom blossom into a new sense of responsibility and maturity, or when East responds to his newly acquired prefectorial status by disposing of his cigar cases, distributing his pistols, and consequently becoming the most exemplary præpostors of his form. Interestingly, this is a diversion, a reverse even, from how authority is typically utilized by the school story genre, in that the newly acquired authority is the catalyst for the characters' development, not its consequence and reward.

Furthermore, the author highlights the importance of respecting and obeying authorities in order to be successful in the outside world through the development of Tom and East. Before their own acquisition of authority, they seemed to be revolting against nearly every body of authority both in the school and outside of it, which stagnated their development "and so, partly by their own faults, partly from circumstances, partly from the faults of others, they found themselves outlaws, ticket-of-leave men, or what you will in that line: in short, dangerous parties, and lived the sort of hand-to-mouth, wild, reckless life which such parties generally have to put up with" (*TB* 136). Only when Tom and East submitted themselves to Doctor were their character progression resumed which allowed them to blossom into successful individuals capable of achieving their desired careers after school, with Tom studying at Oxford and East serving in a regiment in India (*TB* 238-239).

In conclusion, the theme of authority, which is one of the primary characteristics of the school story genre, can be examined on several layers in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. The most noticeable case is the standard hierarchical school structure mirroring real-world public schools, with the headmaster at the top, followed by the masters and prefects. However, it could be argued that Hughes also utilizes authority as a means to highlight some of his personal attitudes, or to fulfil his didactic aims. The undisputed authority of Rugby's headmaster might not be depicted accurately, but quite subverted by the author's admiration for the headmaster's real-life counterpart, and the tendency for hero-worship throughout the novel. Arnold's approximation of the omnipotent Christian God not only supports this claim but possibly also reflects Hughes's belief in the importance of faith and Christian values.

The relevance of authority is also arguably reinforced with the author often using its loss or acquisition, or even the defiance against it, as a device to spark a change within his characters and further their character development.

### **3.3 The Athleticism**

Another important characteristic of the School story genre is the focus on athleticism, which manifests in the stories as consistent highlighting of the importance of games for both the school and the main character. In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the significance of games is emphasized from the very day of Tom's arrival to Rugby through his immediate participation in the football match between the School-house and the rest of the school. One could contend that the importance of the games is accentuated by Hughes's description of the match itself, which is very focused, detailed, and presented as "the whole sum of school-boy existence gathered up into one straining, struggling half hour, a half-hour worth a year of common life" (*TB* 83). Also, the fact that Hughes allocated a whole chapter for this match, and another one after it just for the celebration further highlights his high regard for these activities.

It could be argued that the principal reason why Hughes stresses their importance in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* is that the values team games promote correspond to those endorsed by his distinctive interpretation of muscular Christianity<sup>4</sup>. The team organisation of football and cricket, the book's most prominent sports, arguably encourages team spirit and fellowship, and one's willingness to self-sacrifice for the good of their team. Fellowship can be seen in the after-game celebration, where the whole School-house is gathered together, eating, drinking, singing, and cheering. The celebration culminates in the speech of the team leader, Old Brooke, in which he accentuates that their strong fellowship and mutual reliance were the key factors leading to their victory in the match (*TB* 90). Self-sacrifice is described at the end of the match, where small Tom lunges himself for the ball and is buried under a pile of much older and bigger boys than he is. This bold act made by Tom stops the opposing team from scoring last minute point and ensures the victory of his team (*TB* 84). These values mirror some of the defining qualities of Hughe's muscular Christianity – the unification of people, physical bravery, and willingness to endure suffering. Gentleness and consideration

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<sup>4</sup> See chapter 2.2.3 of the Theoretical Part.

for others are also connected to games, as seen during Tom's last match, where he includes Arthur not on his merit as a player but because it will do him good (*TB* 236).

Muscular Christianity might not have been Hughes's only reason for the use of athleticism in the story. Other can be observed through his use of old country sports for reflecting and reinforcing his own English Nationalism. Right in the first chapter of the story, Hughes depicts his affection for the English countryside, and rural folklore, and laments for the changes and their consequences. But there is more than mere nostalgia here. Hughes sings the praises of backswording and wrestling, old country pursuits, which are falling into desuetude but which he wants to preserve as bulwarks of manliness, to "try the muscles of men's bodies and the endurance of their hearts, to make them rejoice in their strength" (*TB* 33-4). Furthermore, given that he arguably also endorses violence as a valid means resolving conflict<sup>5</sup>, the aims of these fights are not only the preservation of tradition, but also a valuable training for life. Tom himself uses his prior experience from wrestling with the village boys to gain an advantage over Slogger Williams in their fight at Rugby (*TB* 196).

### **3.4 The Theme of Friendship**

Another characteristic of the school story genre is the theme of friendship that develops in the course of the book. *Tom Brown's Schooldays* is no exception to this, and one can analyse the many unique friendships present in the book and the different roles those friendships fulfil.

To start with, there is an element that often sets these friendships in motion, that being the public schools' concept of pairing. Each student gets paired with another one of the same age to share a study. That means, practically speaking, getting a designated "best friend" if the boy does not have one already. The most prominent friendship of the first part of the story is the one between Tom Brown and Harry East. It did not start as a pairing made by the school as Tom arrived at Rugby long after the beginning of the school year and all the boys had been paired already. But their friendship was set in motion by Miss East, Tom's acquaintance, and Harry's aunt, who designated her nephew to help Tom round the school. Even though Tom does not like East's bumptiousness at first, he feels friends with him at

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<sup>5</sup> See chapter 3.5 of the Practical Part.

once as East helps him realize his new social position as a public schoolboy. He takes Tom around the school, explaining rules and practices, dress regulations, and mores, which he would need to know in order to fit in with the others (*TB* 71). Tom's friendship with East is powerful but lawless. They devote most of their energies to getting into trouble: fishing out of bounds, poaching, attending the prohibited town fair, or carving their names on the minute hand of the school clock. However, their friendship undergoes quite a change when Doctor entrusts Tom with the responsibility of looking after a new student, George Arthur, a frail, bookish, earnest orphan of an Evangelical minister, as a strategy to better their rebellious behaviour.

Tom's pairing with Arthur is the focal point of the whole second part of the novel. Despite Tom's initial unfriendly reaction to Arthur, he eventually decides to become friends with him after learning "his father's dead, and he's got no brothers...and... one of his sisters [is] like to die of decline" (*TB* 149). And he is even willing to engage in conversations with Arthur regarding his home and family, which was something that other boys would relentlessly tease him for. At first, Tom sees himself as a guide to the younger, less knowledgeable boy, imparting the essential "survival skills" required to navigate life at Rugby. Nevertheless, he is unable to persuade Arthur of the suitability of the customary expectations among schoolboys. Instead, Arthur manages to make Tom question his own conformity to it. For example, right the first night, Arthur kneels at his bedside to pray, which was no light act of courage in those days, he is laughed at, called a "snivelling young shaver" and even hit by a slipper (*TB* 153). Tom not only stands up for him, but the bravery of his little friend leads him to a sort of spiritual crisis:

The first and bitterest feeling which was like to break his heart was the sense of his own cowardice. The vice of all others which he loathed was brought in and burned in on his own soul. He had lied to his mother, to his conscience, to his God. How could he bear it? And then the poor little weak boy, whom he had pitied and almost scorned for his weakness, had done that which he, braggart as he was, dared not do. (*TB* 154)

Some scholars describe Tom's and Arthur's relationship as symbiotic; Tom shields Arthur from the physical torment typically inflicted by the boys who often bully delicate and

bookish orphans, Arthur, in turn, offers Tom spiritual refuge from the corrupting influences exerted by these peers. Arthur's presence prompts a transformation in Tom: his emotional reserve yields to sincere openness, his youthful wildness transitions into mature responsibility, and his raw physical strength matures into Christian virtues of manliness (Puccio 60).

It can be argued that Arthur's influence on Tom is also reflected and extended in Tom's influence on East, a hearty and frivolous boy with particular inborn sense of right and wrong, whose levity is only superficial. Even though East firstly teases Tom for coddling Arthur; labelling him Arthur's "dry-nurse" and insisting "[Arthur will] never be worth a button if you go on keeping him under your skirts" (*TB* 157), he comes to accept and respect Tom's determination to help Arthur. Slowly then East starts to join them in reading of Bible, and at one point even admits that only Tom and Arthur have made the effort to understand him deeply, recognizing that no one else in the house attempted to truly connect with him or uncover his true nature (*TB* 221). Hughes himself greatly emphasizes the importance of this kind of intimacy in friendships, how friends must delve into the depths of each other's hearts, find what lies there and if they are connected at the core, then nothing in this world should, or indeed, can tear them apart (*TB* 221).

In the novel, he potentially highlights this intimacy through using the characters' first names. Only East and Arthur address the protagonist as "Tom", and Tom encourages Arthur to do so as a sign of closeness and reassurance during a difficult time. Allowing a friend to use one's first name essentially welcomes them into the intimate sphere, and because of the boarding character of the majority of public schools, these intimate friendships are to some extent the closest thing to a family the boys have when away from home. They symbolize an effort to lessen the rigors of school life by infusing it with the familiarity and closeness typical of home life, as well as providing support and companionship during hard times.

Friendship can also be interpreted as a bridge towards deeper a understanding of the odd, outcast characters present at Rugby – Diggs and Martin. They are both loners, pursuing their own interests outside the usual schoolboy range, and are left alone. Diggs, also called "The Mucker", is a poor older boy, who has to auction off all of his possessions every year to pay off his debts. He shows equal disregard for the mockery of older boys and the sympathy of

younger ones, contentedly living his unique life seemingly without concern for others' opinions (*TB* 122). However, Tom and East's war against their bully excites Diggs's sympathy and he counsels the pair on how to conquer the bully. The boys repay him by redeeming his paper case that he sold at one of his auctions and that officially establishes their friendship. Martin, also called "The Madman" is an eccentric boy who collects animals in his study and is a frequent target of East's sieges and torments before they become friends. Arthur is greatly intrigued by Martin, which leads to their close acquaintance. Although Arthur's connection with Martin has garnered less scrutiny compared to his bond with Tom, it could be contended that Martin plays a significant role in Arthur's growth, possibly even more so than Tom. Martin contributes to Arthur's well-being by coaching him in tree climbing and encouraging outdoor activities. Overall, Hughes may have utilized the relationships with Diggs and Martin to impart the lesson of not judging individuals based on initial impressions. Both of these characters initially appear peculiar, yet they ultimately prove to be valuable allies and companions when given the chance.

In conclusion, the theme of friendship which is characteristic of the school story genre is not forgotten by Hughes in his *Tom Browns Schooldays* and its development can be examined along the development of the story. Differences between the two most prominent friendships, those of Tom and East and later Tom and Arthur, are striking and each influences Tom's character in a different manner. However, the manner of their inception is arguably similar, as they both stem from the concept of pairing, although each pairing had a different catalyst. The intimacy of these friendships provides the characters with a family-like sense of safety, which allows for a deeper understanding of their innate traits. Furthermore, this intimacy could potentially hint at the inner relationships of men in the patriarchal Victorian society, as the presumed inferiority of women and their exclusion from many spheres of society might have deprived men of establishing deep relationships with them, leading to a suppression of any intimate feelings, or alternatively to establishing these connections with other men.

### 3.5 Bullying

Bullying led by an older boy or even a teacher is another prominent feature of the genre, together with the hero protecting weaker friends from it<sup>6</sup>. Although it can be interpreted as the opposite of friendship, it could also be argued that as a narrative device used by the genre, they both serve similar purpose of sparking character development, or one being a catalyst for the emergence of the other.

In the novel, it can be observed how Hughes shines a light on the dark side of institutionalized violence and oppression within the educational system of his time. The Rugby school seems to be primarily governed by instances of aggression, with the intensity and form of such aggression determined by the individual characteristics of the senior students. Initially, this system works fine, as the School-house is governed strongly and fairly by the exemplary Old Brooke and his classmates. During this time bullying was mild and even suggested to form part of the educational curriculum, as Old Brooke in his farewell speech admits that “there's a deal of bullying going on” but reassures the younger boys that “you'll be better football players for learning to stand it, and to take your own parts, and fight it through” (*TB* 90-91). A potential interpretation of this speech hints at a belief that although negative, the presence of bullying is an important and beneficial part of the school experience, providing students the necessity of strengthening themselves and bonding together in order to resist oppression, accelerating the growth of traits desired by Hughes.

This necessity emerges when old Brooke and his classmates leave the school and Flashman, the school bully, and his friends from the fifth form, known for their focus on sports and drinking, and who possess age and experience but not yet the authority, collaborate with irresponsible præpostors to oppress the younger boys. Tom and East lead the resistance to this abuse, and together with other younger students they follow the advice of Diggs: “Don't you go to anybody at all—you just stand out; say you won't fag—they'll soon get tired of licking you. I've tried it on years ago with their forerunners” (*TB* 121). This does not stand

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<sup>6</sup> See chapter 2.2.4 of the Theoretical part.

well with the aggressors and they attempt “bringing the young vagabonds to their senses” (*TB* 122) by constant chasings and lickings of all sorts. Although subjected to brutal treatment, the young opposition remains steadfast in their resolve. This feud escalates on the day of the Derby sweepstake when Tom refuses to give up his ticket for the favourite horse of the derby and is punished by getting burned.

‘I won't [sell the ticket],’ said Tom, flushing up to his hair, and lumping them all in his mind with his sworn enemy. ‘Very well then, let’s roast him,’ cried Flashman, and catches hold of Tom by the collar: one or two boys hesitate, but the rest join in. East seizes Tom’s arm and tries to pull him away, but is knocked back by one of the boys, and Tom is dragged along struggling. His shoulders are pushed against the mantelpiece, and he is held by main force before the fire, Flashman drawing his trousers tight by way of extra torture. (*TB* 127)

This resistance is yet another clear display of willingness to endure suffering, one of the traits of muscular Christianity. As this is a desirable goal of education in Hughes’s eyes, the author rewards Tom for his sacrifice - his conduct in the face of this gross ill-treatment, his acceptance, and his silence about it, help shame some of the bullies and make the matters in School-house change for the better.

Another account of bullying can be found in the various treatment of the new boys. Tom only experienced it during the house singing, when each new boy was placed on the table and made to sing a song on a penalty of drinking a large mug of salt and water if he resisted or broke down (*TB* 88) and when he was tossed in a blanket by Flashman on his first night at Rugby. But for other new boys who were small, timid, and not as brave and able to quickly integrate into the collective as Tom, bullying was a much bigger problem. Arthur would be counted among these boys if not for Tom, who protects him from most of the accounts of bullying. Tom’s protection of Arthur not only serves to further develop Tom’s character, but it also introduces one of the most controversial chapters of the book. This particular chapter presents a graphic account of the fight between Tom and Arthur’s bully, Slogger Williams, and a long disquisition on the value of fighting. As the confrontation unfolds, Hughes vividly describes the physicality of the encounter, emphasizing the raw energy and intensity of the



combatants as they grapple with one another in a contest of strength and endurance. He then continues with his commentary on the importance of fighting:

After all, what would life be without fighting, I should like to know? From the cradle to the grave, fighting, rightly understood, is the business, the real, highest, honestest business of every son of Man. ...

Boys will quarrel and when they quarrel, they will sometimes fight. Fighting with fists is the natural and English way for English boys to settle their quarrels. What substitute for it is there, amongst any nation under the sun? (*TB* 189, 200)

It is these comments, that stirred a controversy among critics in that they could make one think that Hughes was endorsing excessive brutishness (*J. Richards Happiest Days* 33). However, one cannot omit Hughes's further elaboration in the chapter on the use of violence. He suggests that when faced with a challenge to fight, one should decline, ideally from a standpoint of courage and Christian principles, which emphasize that declining a fight out of a genuine aversion to harm and danger is justified. But he also states that if one merely uses the 'fear of God' as an ungentle excuse to avoid a licking, it is "neither Christian nor honest" (*TB* 201).

The interpretation of this chapter and his final elaboration hint at a potential conflict within Hughes as well as his image of muscular Christianity. Although he wants to promote peaceful Christian values, he also cannot deny his personal enjoyment and thrill of fighting. It could be argued that the final line "if you do fight, fight it out; and don't give in while you can stand and see" (*TB* 201) can be almost humorously paraphrased as 'if you fail to resist the sin of fighting, just fully commit to it'. The fact that there is virtually no instance of the boys resolving their conflict peacefully in the story further reinforces Hughes's endorsement of using violence as a solution to conflict and questions the honesty of his statement that one should strive to avoid it. It also partially subverts his ideal of the Christian gentleman which he hopes to instil upon both the students, and the book's readers.

In conclusion, through all the accounts presented in this chapter, it is clear that bullying is one of the main themes in the book. It serves as a sobering reminder of the challenges faced by students in Victorian-era public schools. Through vivid descriptions, nuanced characterizations, and insightful social commentary, Hughes sheds light on the damaging

impact of bullying while also emphasizing the importance of courage, strength, and moral resilience in confronting injustice and oppression. By exploring this timeless theme, Hughes offers readers a compelling exploration of the complexities of human nature and the enduring struggle for dignity and decency in the face of adversity.

### **3.6 Evolution of the Hero**

Another notable aspect of the school story genre is how the protagonists develop alongside the progression of the story. The story and personal traits usually work in tandem, with one often being a catalyst for changing the other.

*Tom Brown's Schooldays* is no different from these standardised norms, and by careful observation of the story's unfolding, one can analyse the hero's character and its shifts through the many events that affect them. The first peek at Tom, the book's protagonist, is from his childhood before he attended Rugby. "He was a hearty, strong boy from the first, given to fighting with and escaping from his nurse, and fraternizing with all the village boys, with whom he made expeditions all round the neighbourhood" (TB 27). A very prominent characteristic during his childhood was his rejection of women, be it his nurse, whom he began to struggle against at the age of four, or later his nanny Charity, from whom he ran away constantly to his "two abettors in the shape of a couple of old boys, Noah and Benjamin by name, who defended him from Charity and expended much time upon his education" (TB 31). Different interpretations of this rejection of women could be constructed. A plausible one would be that it merely sets the stage for the story taking place in a purely boy's world. However, it could also reflect the patriarchal environment of the 19<sup>th</sup> century England, which "viewed women as weak and naïve creatures who should submit to the dictates of men" (Kollar), and potentially align Hughes with these beliefs.

As he gets older, "none of the women now, not even his mother's maid, dared offer to help him in dressing or washing" (TB 50) and he makes acquaintance with many of the village boys of his own age. And he looks up to them, strongly admiring "the quickest and best boy in the parish" (TB 48), Harry Winburn. "He could wrestle and climb and run faster than all the rest, and learned all that the schoolmaster could teach him faster than that worthy at all liked. He was a boy to be proud of, with his curly brown hair, keen grey eye, straight active figure" (TB 48), says Tom about him, and dedicates himself to being able to match him in

everything. These early pages were not set in Rugby yet, and so rather than sparking Tom's development, they serve more as his introduction, notably hinting at his future tendency for hero-worship, as well as his physical prowess.

The first step in his development was his starting at Rugby school. His character is prominent by his quick assimilation to the public-school life and embodying the role of the public-school boy. He has not even gotten out of the carriage yet and he already begins "to be proud of being a Rugby boy" (*TB* 69), then he continues "sucking in all his [East's] ways and prejudices, as fast as he could understand them" (*TB* 71) and joins the new collective practically without an issue. His worship of Old Brooke and other sixth-formers is similar to his childhood admiration of the older village boys, and he respects them and serves them voluntarily like an ordinary lower-school boy is supposed to. When they leave and Flashman and his friends begin their oppressive tyranny, Tom is forced to fight back and rebel against them in order to survive, thus sparking the first shift within his character, from worship to rebellion, displaying positive values that inspire his peers to join him and overthrow their bullies. However, the rebellious spirit does not leave Tom and others even long after Flashman and his bullying are gone, and soon becomes a flaw rather than an enhancement.

So East and Tom, the Tadpole, and one or two more, became a sort of young Ishmaelites, their hands against every one, and every one's hand against them. It has been already told how they got to war with the masters and the fifth-form, and with the sixth it was much the same. They saw the præpostors cowed by or joining with the fifth and shirking their own duties; so they didn't respect them, and rendered no willing obedience. (*TB* 134)

They do not just rebel against the authority of præpostors and masters but they also completely disregard the school rules. They do it "for no earthly pleasure except that of doing what they are told not to do" (*TB* 143). They break the rules so frequently and no punishment is making them stop that Doctor sends for them and warns them, that they are in danger of expulsion (*TB* 143). The headmaster's scolding, together with assigning Tom to take care of the new boy Arthur is a catalyst for the next phase in Tom's character development. Leaving his rebellious attitude behind begins with him assuming this responsibility. This sensible act of agreeing to the headmaster's assignment is rewarded by an invitation to tea with Mrs.

Arnold the following night, where usually only boys of importance in the school world were invited. “He felt himself lifted on to a higher social and moral platform at once” (*TB* 149). He is there met by the Doctor himself, who is “seemingly oblivious of all the late scrapes which he had been getting into” (*TB* 150) and treats Tom with such kindness and nobility that almost makes Tom give up his rule-breaking. He is made to feel like he was of some use in the little School world, and had work to do there (*TB* 151), and so with the frail and timid Arthur under his care, he begins to blossom into a new sense of responsibility, recognizing his own potential of mentorship and influence. Interestingly, this change once again leads to Tom’s hero-worship, with the Doctor as his figure of admiration this time. The fact that this tendency is usually present within the protagonist when he is in a good, safe, and prospering state hints at Hughes highlighting the importance of positive role models and influence, or even correlate to his personal admiration of Thomas Arnold.

The relationship with young Arthur is the catalyst for the final progression of both their characters. As much as he influences Arthur as his elder, he is to the same extent influenced by him and his moral and spiritual virtuousness. Arthur reads his Bible daily, and Tom starts to do so too. When Arthur is recovering from a near-fatal bout of fever, he convinces Tom not to cheat in his lessons in favour of displaying honesty (*TB* 207). The younger boy achieves this by appealing to Tom’s desire for Arnold’s approval and fulfilment of the Doctor’s expectations of him. “Now, do you want to please him by what he thinks you do, or by what you really do?” (*TB* 208). This conversation also has Tom finally exclaim his true goals, which marks the full realization of his character development.

I want to be A1 at cricket and football, and all the other games, and to make my hands keep my head against any fellow, lout or gentleman. I want to get into the sixth before I leave, and to please the Doctor; and I want to carry away just as much Latin and Greek as will take me through Oxford respectably. There now, young ’un, I never thought of it before, but that’s pretty much about my figure. Ain’t it all on the square? What have you got to say to that? (*TB* 207)

In conclusion, through a combination of the initial necessity to rebel against oppression, followed by the positive influence of Doctor and Arthur, Tom’s family background, and his own innate decency, the protagonist is transformed into an ideal Christian gentleman, and

he ends up as captain of the cricket team, pillar of the school and exponent of all the virtues and values of the public school system.

### **3.7 School as a Microcosm**

As can be observed from the previous chapters, public schools make a remarkably convenient setting for fiction. Authors often adeptly present schools as miniature representations of broader society by mirroring societal structures, values, and challenges within the microcosm of the educational facility. The enclosed environment of the school, seemingly independent of outside influence, concentrates any aspects of broader society it wishes to explore into a manageable dimension. Unlike private schools, which constitute primarily of higher class students, the public setting provides a cross-section of society, offering insight into the personal lives and struggles of all classes and how they interact with each other.

In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Thomas Hughes's portrayal of Rugby's environment and its inhabitants illustrates the dynamics of power, class, morality, and social order that characterized contemporary Victorian England. One way Hughes accomplishes this is through the use of the aforementioned authority<sup>7</sup> by depicting the hierarchical structure of Rugby School, which arguably parallels the stratified nature of Victorian society. Within the school, students are divided into different social classes based on factors such as wealth, family background, and academic achievement. It is not difficult to imagine this as a reflection of the contemporary class division on the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution. The prefect system, for instance, stands as a microcosm of the hierarchical authority and privilege present in broader society, with older students exerting their power and influence over their younger peers in a manner reminiscent of societal elites doing the same over the working class. It could be argued that Hughes uses characters like Flashman, who abuse their authority and exploit their peers for personal gain, to criticize this social structure, and to represent the darker aspects of human nature and the moral decay present in both school and society. Flashman's brutality, cowardice, and selfishness, as well as his indulgence in alcoholism and other vices are archetypical of those members of high Victorian society who

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<sup>7</sup> See chapter 3.2 of the Practical Part.

focused on personal gains and status rather than morality and duty, which undermined the Christian values propagated by this era.

In the novel, Hughes explores the theme of rebellion to combat this oppression and decline. This is apparent through the characters of Tom and East, who challenge the status quo and question the prevailing norms and values of the school community. This potentially paints Hughes as an advocate of revolution in his contemporary society, one led by an individual displaying positive Christian values, such as can be seen in Tom's unwavering integrity, courage, and sense of justice, which serve as a beacon of hope amidst the moral ambiguity and conformity that pervade the school environment. However, one can also observe how he highlights that this revolution may not lead to a desired end. Though Tom and East emerge victorious in the conflict, their rebellious nature remains, revolting against any body of authority, oppressive or not, until they are given other purpose. A conclusion can be drawn from this that although rebellion is necessary to resist tyranny, one must also have a clear and virtuous vision of how the newly established structure would function. It could be argued that the values promoted by Hughes are not only meant to prepare Rugby's students to potentially rebel against the class structure of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but also to guide their future when tasked with rebuilding of the system, as its absence would only allow new oppressive forces to abuse this power vacuum, much like Flashman initially did after Old Brook left the school and his leadership ended.

Despite this interpretation of *Tom Brown's* theme of rebellion, it would be a false claim that Hughes strives to establish an egalitarian society. When interpreting the book's power dynamics as analogous to the class structure of Victorian England, one can find many endorsements of this system, such as can be seen with the initial leadership of Old Brook. Despite representing the upper class, his rule is just and fair, resulting in a positive experience for all Rugby students regardless of their class. Headmaster Arnold's authority can be similarly approximated either to the Christian God<sup>8</sup>, or to Queen Victoria, as in the constitutional monarchy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century she shared much of her authority with the government, much like Arnold did with other masters and prefects. As a result of this, it is plausible that rather than rejecting class-based society, Hughes rejects merely its oppressive

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<sup>8</sup> See chapter 3.2 the of Practical Part.

tendencies which arise when the upper classes abuse their power over the lower ones. To resist this, he advocates the readiness to rebel and subsequently establish new leadership that can provide widespread prosperity.

Much like the aforementioned class system, Hughes shares and promotes other Victorian ideals and explores them in the book, notably the role of tradition and conformity in shaping the behaviour and attitudes of students within the school community. The adherence to established customs and rituals, such as the “fagging” system or the celebration of traditional sporting events like cricket matches, as well as the expectation that students comply with these established norms and activities, reflects the conservative values and emphasis on social order prevalent in Victorian society. This conformity also reinforces the Victorian emphasis on duty, another prevalent theme of the book, as virtually everyone must perform their respective duties to Rugby and its system – the younger must serve the præpostors who in turn have a responsibility to maintain order. Even Arnold, the head of Rugby, has obligations to fulfil to his students. This is reminiscent of the real-world duty citizens have to the Crown, as well as the Crow’s duty to its citizens.

In conclusion, much like other works of this genre, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* can be analysed as a microcosm of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. The most apparent notions to be utilised in this analysis are the reflections of the class society in the social order at Rugby and the shared emphasis on conservatism. By means of this microcosm and selected themes of the book, one can examine the potential thoughts and opinions of Thomas Hughes on his contemporary society, the dangers of its composition as well as the prevention of these dangers.

## 4 Conclusion

Though the school story genre is mostly perceived as an old-fashioned subgenre of children's literature of minor importance and relevance, its exploration on the example of one of its key representatives proves that its contribution to both contemporary literature and our perception of the past should not be underestimated. Concerning itself with the lives and experiences of young students during their time spent at public boarding schools, the stories not only serve to provide insight into how these institutions functioned and affected their attendees, but also offer a unique reflection of their contemporary societies and notions. Although the original form of this genre has lost much of its past popularity, it is sometimes utilized as a basis for works of other widespread fiction genres. A prime example of this is the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling, which combines the traditional school story trajectory with a fantastical world of magic and is arguably one of the most successful book series of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In order to contemplate on the genre's historical authenticity, the theoretical part of this thesis first established a general overview of the history of British boarding schools, whose tradition can be traced back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, during which they were primarily religious institutions for educating new clergymen and bolstering their numbers. Since then, they have undergone profound changes regarding their structure, didactic aims, curricula, and more. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, though retaining much of their Christian influence, the public schools had become institutions that not only strived to educate their students, but also to shape them into the ideal gentlemen through the endorsement of widely accepted values of that era. This shift can be largely attributed to revolutionary headmasters and reformers, who sought to innovate public schools and their curricula. Those successful ones, like Thomas Arnold, often lifted their respective schools to a national esteem. However, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the quality of public schools was starting to decline, and they were heavily criticized for their brutality and snobbery. This decay forced them to undergo significant changes, making them seemingly unrecognizable from their original form and exclusive for the social elite.

Then the theoretical part elaborated on the genre of stories set in these schools, which was evolving alongside the institutions, although it emerged much later than the 14<sup>th</sup> century, with first stories appearing at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These early school stories were still



only mildly similar to other works of the genre, not yet sharing all of its distinguishing features. The main characteristics were outlined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the school story genre experienced rapid growth and some of the most significant works of this genre were written, such as *Tom Brown's Schooldays* by Thomas Hughes, *Eric, or Little by Little* by Frederick William Farrar, and *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's* by Talbot Baines Reed. The key qualities of these works are introduced in the theoretical part to help establish the chief aspects of the genre. The practical part exemplifies their use, presence and significance through the novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays*.

The most straightforward characteristic is the school setting of the story. The progression of the school year is a convenient means to naturally advance the story, and the public school provides a unique enclosed environment for its students, removing any outside influence, which allows the book to fully devote itself to the deep exploration of the characters, their ability to coexist with others, and to adapt to this strange, secluded, often hostile environment, which is clearly oppressive to those who stand out even just a little bit. In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Hughes's depiction of Rugby School presents a classic portrayal of a British public school typical of the genre.

Another prominent theme is the focus on friendship, an integral part of life at public schools. At Rugby, it is introduced through the concept of pairing, which is necessary for integrating new students into the school community. However, establishing friendly relationships is also important for providing closeness and intimacy for pupils. These feelings are otherwise absent during their time away from home. Last but not least, friendships are important to combat bullying, a frequent occurrence at public schools and another major theme of the genre. In the novel, Tom Brown and his friends are able to defeat their bullies through unified resistance, and thus, through the use of friendship and bullying, Hughes shares his virtuous ideals, including his concept of muscular Christianity.

This concept is closely connected to yet another aspect of school stories, that being the focus on athleticism. It is highlighted through the various sports activities the students take part in, which are often the centre focus of several chapters. Hughes not only stresses the importance of athleticism through these school-sanctioned sport events or as a defence against bullies, but also through his depiction of brawling, which reflects his endorsement of this English

country tradition. Interestingly, fighting provides a contradiction between the author's personal passions and the values he seeks to promote.

A characteristic of the genre, which Hughes arguably stresses more than other authors, is the use of authority. It is an aspect which is rooted in the hierarchical structure of schools, therefore omnipresent in the genre, but in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* it receives special emphasis. This is due to the author's admiration for the teachings of Thomas Arnold, whose depiction in the book almost approximates him to the status of God. The respect for authority is further reflected in the protagonist's tendency to hero-worship, and his reverence of the headmaster is analogous to Hughes's reverence of the real Thomas Arnold.

The potentially most vital aspect of the genre is that the world of the school story acts as a microcosm of its contemporary society. The school setting provides a wide range of different characters concentrated into a small space with an authority structure similar to that of Victorian England. The headmaster, the masters, even the bullies, and the outcasts can be perceived as reflections of real personas of Victorian society and their interactions and problems as caricatures of issues concerning the general public. Other Victorian notions, such as its patriarchal structure and the importance of duty, morality, and virtuousness, are not only implied through the microcosm but also through all of the aforementioned themes. The ability of this genre to portray its contemporary society through the microcosm adds greatly to the genre's popularity and literary value, as it can serve as a window to the past, providing a detailed look at selected realities of that time. It is important to note that as a fiction genre, it should not be regarded as an accurate historical depiction, as it is subject to the author's personal attitudes and ideas. However, in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the author's notions very much align with the notions of Victorian England, making the novel not only a prime example of the school story genre, but also an accurate reflection of the Victorian era.

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