# *Family Values and the 'Republic of Boys': Tom Brown and Others*

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The rise of the public school from mid-century onwards presents us with some remarkable contradictions. Victorian middle-class discourse professed the sanctity of home and family, yet it also had to recognise the more worldly need to send a boy to school. This contradiction was all the greater for the fact that the boy must be sent to school precisely because it was a worldly and even depraved institution: it would test his virtue, and fit him to deal with the evils of the world at large. There was an unavoidable anxiety in all this which helps to explain the massive importance given to public school scandals in newspapers and journals. School might give a boy a useful sense of collective identity and class knowledge, but it might also cause him to forget his 'mother's last words'. Even if he were not corrupted, school might displace the family. Many boys did indeed come to feel 'homesick' for school. They joined 'old boys" societies, and looked back upon their schooldays not only as their most important formative experience, but as the 'happiest days of their lives'. And although schools were rarely 'pretend families', they were certainly the scene of many romances and quasi-marriages. The school was, notionally, in support of the normal models of heterosexual love and family life. But clearly it actually disrupted the normal process, taking the boy out of the heterosexual world, and placing him in a homosocial and even, it was feared, homosexual one.

The rifts between family values and worldly realities, between the affections of home and those of school, give tremendous power to the best school fiction. Locating themselves in the midst of conflicting intentions, these stories typically deal in a mixture of pragmatism and sentimental panic. This essay investigates more closely the ambivalent relationship of school to the usual management of desire and social value, looking in particular at Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) and Frederic W. Farrar's *Eric, Or Little By Little* (1858). Previous critical studies (including excellent books by Isabel Quigly and Jeffrey

Richards) have tended to accept the school story as an enclosed fictional world, 'self-contained, self-sufficient, concentrated, dramatic'.[1] My focus is at once broader and more specific, in that I concentrate on the relative values of family and school. I will show that the school story carries a residual sense of its own 'unnaturalness', and that this can be demonstrated by the symbolic importance of the sickroom. For all that school fiction celebrates the bravery of the sports field, the most important scenes nearly always take place in a sickroom. Boys are sent there to recover or to die. Why is the scene of healing and of death so important to the school story? There is an element of historical truth here, in that many boys did die in epidemics of influenza and scarlet fever. But we might also see this as symptomatic of the school story's lingering sense of being at odds with the social forms that it pretends to uphold. Each boy is a fragment of a family, and the school, by the very fact of its existence, bespeaks as many broken homes as there are boys. This fact of disrupted family life is soon covered over with the excitement of new experiences, but a subliminal sense of brokenness re-emerges in the genre's obsession with the sickroom. The sickroom becomes the scene, not so much of suffering, as of a resurgent familialism, both erotic and benevolent. It serves as a place of literal healing, but also as a metaphoric opportunity to mend or to simulate some of the patterns of love and desire that the fact of school disrupts. As Miriam Bailin observes:

> Scenes of illness intervene when narratives reach an impasse which cannot be overcome without the violation of accepted social and formal codes, and offer their particular solace, their plain and natural account of what would otherwise belie the progressive developmental theories of the Victorian social organism, and the concomitant aesthetics of continuity and closure.[2]

Focussing on Brontë, Dickens, and Eliot, Bailin's primary interest is at the level of form, in the oppositions that 'could neither be accommodated nor redressed within the moderating tonalities of realist discourse'.[3] More intimately relevant to my interest in childhood and gender is Claudia Nelson's important revisionary work, which reads moments of weakness or admissions of the feminine as part of a mid-Victorian androgynous ideal. She observes a didactic intention to encourage boys to approximate the 'Angel in the House': true manliness is seen to incorporate 'womanly' virtues of tenderness, spirituality, purity and submission. Although I think Nelson offers a useful reminder that the mid-nineteenth-century ideal was more complex than the unreflective imperial youth of later stereotype, I disagree with other aspects of her interpretation. As will be seen, I do not think that these

novels approve androgyny in an unambiguous way, and attempts to turn this ideal into a novelistic truth generate considerable narrative dis-ease. Where Nelson emphasizes a holistic incorporation of genders, I emphasize an incipient incoherence, fostered by contradictions and asymmetries within the ideology of gender. There is a presence of the 'unnatural' here that I relate to an endangered process of heterosexualisation. Whatever recuperative scenes our authors stage in the course of their fiction, the school story remains at odds with important contemporary ideals; this was and is a strong part of their attraction.[4]

## I

School was not seen as a home from home, but as a world in miniature. It was thought that a boy needed to learn how to manage in this 'republic of boys', while his sister stayed behind and learnt to become the 'monarch' of the hearth. It might be surprising, in view of the later regimentation of public school life, to realise how very free from adult authority public schoolboys were until mid-century. One historian has described the earlier schools as 'tribes of self-governing boys that waged irregular warfare, generation after generation, against titular adult overlords endeavouring to trench upon their independence'.[5] Attempts to regulate this world were often ritualistic, with a recognised decorum of flogging blocks, holders-down, and traditional instruments. But beyond such occasions, and beyond the classroom and the chapel, the boys' lives were almost completely determined by their interactions with other boys. One result of this is that the boys came to believe that their 'rights' were determined not by adults, but by their own traditions, as they were passed from one generation of boys to the next. The right to have particular days as holidays, to flog another boy, or the right not to be flogged by a master, were part of a tradition which came to be seen as inviolable. Conflict was inevitable when once the Victorians brought their moral earnestness and watchfulness to bear on these godless republics. One commentator observed as early as 1835: '[b]oys must not be allowed to form a distinct society of their own ... Boys are sent to school, among other purposes, to be instructed in the knowledge of social life, not a social life founded on their own notions, but one which shall be a fit introduction to the social state of manhood'.[6] The schools seemed increasingly to resemble residual enclaves of Regency fast-living in the midst of a reformist society.[7] Meanwhile, the bourgeois family had withdrawn from the world at large. With the emergence of 'separate spheres', home was governed less by an absolute patriarchal authority, and more by maternal affection; less by corporal violence,

and more by influence. As home became the site of nurturance and moral feeling, the schools remained notorious for drinking, swearing, gambling, and pugilism. Attempts to curb boys' privileges led to rebellions, but the new style of masculinity – chaste and religious – was in the ascendent, and led to the massive popularity of men such as Thomas Arnold of Rugby. His religiose authority assured middle-class parents that they could give their boys the advantages of an upper-class education without approving the licentious extravagance associated with the aristocracy.[8]

Even under the Arnoldian model, a boy's moral welfare was not assumed to be the master's responsibility, and nor was school life modelled on the bourgeois family. Arnold and his followers saw the best boys as apostles rather than children, and they often deplored the attitudes and activities of their charges from a spectatorly distance. Arnold especially tended to see boys as sinful by nature, which meant that he could claim the converts as his successes, and the failures as scarcely his fault. But if he did not take ultimate responsibility in his battle with evil, he was strenuous in his attempt to structure and control the boys' intimate living conditions. He introduced separate beds for every boy, and formalised a prefect system, trying to create lines of moral authority from master to prefect to boy. This led to accusations of spying and prudery, but Arnold's stratification of school life was to prove merely an early phase in the widespread attempt to govern behaviour outside the classroom.[9] These structures remind us once again that, above all, the public school was not a copy of the home. It was supposed that a boy would enter school with strong moral values, and that the lessons learnt at his mother's knee would preserve him from the evils that he would encounter. Boys were constantly exhorted to think of home in the midst of temptation: they were urged never to do anything that would make them ashamed in front of their mother or sisters. It was hoped that they would be protected by the 'spell of home', which would serve as 'an amulet against temptation'; in common with children at large, they were brought up with the thought of 'mother's last words'.[10] However, it was implicitly acknowledged that memories of home were not enough to keep boys 'pure', so the school began to occupy a boy's every waking moment with activity of some kind or other. The obsession with sport was a result of the typically Victorian fear of the perils of masturbation: it was thought best to send the boys to bed too tired to 'sin'.[11]

The schools were transformed in the course of the nineteenth century, from rough and ready societies founded on boys' traditions, to structured societies which consciously sought to impose particular values on the boys. The sense of the role of the school changed with the

arrival of large numbers of boys from wealthy trading backgrounds, who were sent to school to be gentrified, but whose parents had an active concern for moral earnestness. As Honey points out, the schools' function was in part to 'dignify a process of upward social mobility which had already taken place'.[12] A school might impart the style and dynasticism of the old school tie to boys who would otherwise seem gauche and out of place in upper-class society. As the founder of one of the many new Victorian public schools put it, the task was to 'confer aristocracy on boys who do not inherit it'.[13]

Although the growth of the public schools was remarkable, and was oriented toward class conformism, we should not assume that these shifts occurred in a smooth and unquestioned way. The schools were often caught up in very public controversies, leading to weeks of debate in the newspapers, and to questions in Parliament. Whenever a pupil was maimed or killed by a flogging, or a master was forced to resign under mysterious circumstances, or scarlet fever ravaged the school population, or the boys rebelled against the incursions of a reforming headmaster, the discussion among the upper and middle classes was prolonged and intense. Another frequent cause of tremendous public anxiety was the question of the boys' sexual morality. Many parents, understandably worried by beatings, epidemics, bullying, drinking, swearing and sex, were very reluctant to send their boys away to public school, and only did so for fear that their sons' prospects would be irreparably damaged if they were educated at home.

Amidst this controversial but massive expansion, the public school became, above all, a topic for fiction. Writers addressed their own and their readers' fears, but they also conjured with the equally apparent allure of school life. In gaining a significant boy readership, they could hope to influence the boys' experience of school, laying out for them the ideal progress of a hero in the face of various temptations and dangers. In spite of what might happen in a real school, the school story could depict what was supposed to happen, lending a coherence and a glamour to the whole enterprise. The fiction could serve as a means of assuring ideological success, transmitting to boys and to the public at large a sense of the thrill and the value of a public school education. It could affirm the insider, and create a respectful sense of inferiority in the outsider. In this instance, as in others, popular fiction celebrated a social process, while acknowledging some of the anxieties that that process generated. It was a moment in which a culture precipitated a sense of its own contradictions, but in a way that could guarantee a happy ending. But, given the tensions that the topic incorporated, this happy ending was not easily achieved.

## II

Thomas Hughes, the greatest celebrant and co-creator of the public school ethos, was so anxious about sending his own sons off to Rugby that he wrote a novel to prepare them. Writing against the moral chaos in which he feared they might be lost, he tried to explain the ideals and the logic of the world that they were about to enter. He began by making a connection between private family and public duty, in his description of the archetypal Brown family:

> Wherever the fleets and armies of England have won renown, there stalwart sons of the Browns have done yeoman's work. With the yew bow and the cloth-yard shaft at Cressy and Agincourt – with the brown pill and the pike under the brave Lord Willoughby – with culverin and demi-culverin against Spaniards and Dutchmen – with hand-grenade and sabre, and musket and bayonet, under Rodney and St. Vincent, Wolfe and Moore, Nelson and Wellington, they have carried their lives in their hands; getting hard knocks and hard work in plenty, which was on the whole what they looked for, and the best thing for them; and little praise or pudding, which indeed they and most of us are better without.[14]

Hughes urges his sons, as middle-ranking English men, to seek fulfilment in a world of action outside the home; and school, as a small world of boys, is the ideal preparation for this. Yet the family and the world, private and public, are seen to shade into each other, with the 'Brown family' and England becoming virtually interchangeable. This essay as a whole shows how fraught such an interchange could become. But for the moment, the mood is one of exuberant simplicity: the problems that Browns encounter are all external to the self, in the form of 'hard knocks'. These unreflective and narrowly-derived men are ideal for maintaining English imperial rule, while their Englishness is seen as being as natural and self-evident as their maleness. Hughes seeks to create a vision of social coherence, and his favourite technique, here and elsewhere, is that of implied continuities. As Squire Brown reflects of his son: '"[i]f only he'll turn out a brave, helpful, truth-telling Englishman, and a gentleman, and a Christian, that's all I want"' (74). We might take each of these categories – brave, helpful, truth-telling, English – as separate qualities that he hopes his son will attain. But there is also a cumulative resonance here, encouraging the sense that to be English is also to be brave, helpful, and truthful. This is equally clear in the recurrence of such phrases as 'good English boys', and also in contrasting examples such as 'as full of tricks as monkeys, and of excuses as Irish women' (162). But Hughes's assertion of patent truths with regard to individual and national identity involves the suppression

of the scandals – political, racial, sexual, religious – which might undermine them. If we look at Hughes' Englishness more closely, it starts to seem full of contradictions and sleights of hand. His image of the Englishman as a yeoman-farmer, the same man in the nineteenth century as his distant relative who fought at Cressy and Agincourt, serves as a euphoric evasion of the fact of change. At the time of his writing the novel, England had undergone a rapid process of industrialization which had created apparently insuperable problems of rural displacement and urban poverty. Similarly, in celebrating the Protestant Englishness of the Browns, Hughes is wishfully escaping the controversies of the 'Jew Bill' and the Oxford Movement.[15] The uniform populace of Protestant Browns was already as much of a nostalgic myth as that of a pastoral nation of yeoman-farmers.[16]

Hughes yearns for coherence and uniformity, and he achieves it with the mention of clearly identifiable outsiders. In history there are the French, the Dutch, and the Spanish. In the immediate world of the novel, there is the large, transient population of Irish, who appear as proverbially deceitful servants, and as the road-building 'Pats' whom the boys bait with their pea-shooters.[17] The celebration of national, religious and class identity is fragile. Hughes seeks to maintain the coherence of his world with reference to the definitive markers of foreignness, and to the English as the Brown family. But this blending of public and private that Hughes places at the heart of his social vision, ultimately proves its weak point. Hughes has increasing difficulty in reconciling his celebration of manhood, homosociality and empire with the supposedly complementary values of femininity, heterosexuality and domesticity. This becomes clear in the way that his novel is at once diffident about, and nostalgically drawn to the world of feeling. It begins by pretending that 'hard knocks' do not actually hurt, but it ends in remorseful tears.

There is a kind of preliminary conflict of the spheres of gender before the novel has even begun. Although the epigraph is a quotation from *Rugby Magazine* about how the boys in themselves form 'a complete social body', Hughes seems to feel that this social body cannot do without a mother. He dedicates his novel to Mrs Arnold, who thereby casts a maternal shadow over the novel itself and over all the boys in it. Furthermore, her home life at Rugby is described twice. On both occasions it is in terms blurred by reverence, as the scene of bright candles and the 'ruddy glow' of a fire. But introducing the Arnold home is only one instance of Hughes' tendency to drop the rule of 'hard knocks' in favour of the impalpable, feminine effects of light and warmth. There are other instances of an exchange between the private world of

motherly comfort and the republic of boys, though this exchange is always extremely ambivalent, at once longed for and resented. Mrs. Arnold, and mothers generally, are veiled in the mysteries of sentiment, partly because they are sacred, and partly because they do not belong. As Tom tells a new boy: '"don't you ever talk about home, or your mother and sisters"'. The penalty for doing so is to be called '"home-sick, or mamma's darling, or some such stuff"' (223).

Both Tom and the novelist try to say goodbye to mother and family life when Tom goes off to preparatory school. The author declares that '[i]t is not within the scope of my book, however, to speak of family relations', and dismisses Tom's relationship with his mother with a formulaic abstraction: '[t]heir love was as fair and whole as human love can be, perfect self-sacrifice on the one side meeting with a young and true heart on the other' (62). Although Mrs Arnold appears from time to time, the first half of the book does forswear home more or less, as Tom seeks to establish his place in the 'complete social body' of boys. After Flashman has tortured him by holding him close to the fire, Tom cries out in his delirium: '"[m]other ... it's very cold tonight"' (185). But in the next chapter, Tom and his friend defeat Flashman, proving that they have moved beyond a need for their mothers. Once this has been done, Tom becomes something of a parent himself, and something of a husband.

Having successfully left his mother behind, Tom finds himself paired up with a girlish and sensitive boy, a 'queer chum' called George Arthur. Tom has become reckless, getting into various 'scrapes'. If some way cannot be found to make him reform, he will have to be withdrawn from the school. Tom's master suggests to Arnold that if Tom or his friend, East, 'had some little boy to take care of, it would steady them' (212). Tom is aggrieved to discover at the beginning of the next term that he is not to share a study with East as he had planned, but with a 'slight pale boy, with large blue eyes and light fair hair, who seemed ready to shrink through the floor' (217). Tom instantly recognizes that he has been landed with the kind of boy who 'would most likely never go out of the close, and would be afraid of wet feet, and always getting laughed at and called Molly, or Jenny, or some derogatory feminine nickname' (218). Arthur is not at all suitable for the hard knocks that are elsewhere assumed to be the best thing for us. As Tom reflects: '"[h]e ain't a bit like anything I've ever seen or heard of – he seems all over nerves; anything you say seems to hurt him like a cut or a blow"' (232). His new partner is an uncomfortable reminder of the feminine modes and values that Tom has only just managed to put behind him, and that the novel is not supposed to be about. Arthur is the undead

femininity that Tom has recently buried, and as such he has an uncanny power to unsettle the uniformity of the world of school. But rather than dismissing him as an inconvenience, Tom secretly shares in Arthur's inappropriateness. He tells Arthur not to talk about home in front of the other boys, but encourages him to talk about it privately, as Tom himself likes it. Tom uses Arthur to create a private, feminine space within the world of school. When Arthur prays before getting into bed, Tom protects him from the violent derision of older boys. In the ways of masculinity, Tom takes the lead. But when it comes to feminine matters such as spiritual humility, Arthur has a courage that Tom himself has lacked: '[i]t was a trying moment for the poor little lonely boy; however, this time he didn't ask Tom what he might or might not do, but dropped on his knees by his bedside, as he had done every day from his childhood, to open his heart to Him who heareth the cry and beareth the sorrows of the tender child, and the strong man in agony' (225). Tom cannot sleep for the strength of feeling that Arthur's action brings:

> His head throbbed, his heart leapt, and he could hardly keep himself from springing out of bed and rushing about the room. Then the thought of his own mother came across to him, and the promise he had made at her knee, years ago, never to forget to kneel by his bedside, and give himself up to his Father, before he laid his head on the pillow, from which it might never rise; and he lay down gently and cried as if his heart would break (226).

Tom is forced to admit that Arthur has different virtues, and from then on, he follows the odd boy's example and keeps the promise he had made to his own mother. To this extent (and in confirmation of Claudia Nelson's argument) he attempts to conform to the androgynous ideal that Hughes would delineate more explicitly in *The Manliness of Christ* (1879).

The intrusion of the feminine in the relationship of Tom and Arthur has caused readers much anxiety. Several disaffected commentators have interpreted it as symptomatic of the unnaturalness of school life. Hugh Kingsmill derided it for having the coy self-congratulation of a Victorian marriage, and Kenneth Allsop sees it as evidence of the novel's sub-conscious homosexuality.[18] Others such as Andrew Sanders, who have more respect for Hughes' moral earnestness and for his skill as a writer, are equally adamant that Hughes 'neither sentimentalizes nor eroticizes the relationship'.[19] Writing on the public school and the public school story often breaks down into this kind of debate, a 'one of those' versus 'not like that' argument, in which detractors find the material 'guilty' of homosexuality, while defenders maintain its 'purity'.

It seems to me that Tom and Arthur's friendship takes on the guise of various types of relationship, sometimes quasi-parental, sometimes quasi-marital. Tom acts as a kind of surrogate father to Arthur, who reminds Tom of his mother's words. Arthur also reads himself and Tom into a scene from Homer's *Iliad*: Helen's speech over Hector's dead body causes Arthur to remember how Tom had protected him and treated him gently, leading Arthur to burst into tears in the middle of a translation class. But as if in anticipation of the imputation that the friendship is rather more than it should be, Hughes takes pre-emptive action. He introduces with disgust the figure of a 'miserable little pretty white-handed curly-headed' boy, who has been 'petted and pampered by some of the big fellows'. This type of friendship, we are told, could only spoil a boy 'for everything in this world and the next' (233). Although Arthur may be a bit of a girl, Hughes is anxious to make it clear that his friendship with Tom is 'not like that'. Given that Arthur is little and pretty and miserable, and has been 'taken up' by Tom, we can understand why Hughes should feel the need to distance their friendship from anything corrupt. Indeed, we may feel that he complains rather too much.[20]

The ambivalence that Hughes shows in his treatment of his novel's central relationship is apparent in the larger patterns of the plot. Sentiment is interspersed with bouts of football and fighting. Immediately after the scene in which Arthur has translated himself and Tom into Helen and Hector, Tom has a fight with Slogger Williams. Arthur is left agonizing on the fringes: '"I can't bear to think it was all for me"'. But Tom, in a sort of reassurance, tells him not to '"flatter himself"', as he and Slogger '"were sure to have had it out sooner or later"' (300). It is as though Hughes is relieved to escape from his own sentiment, or rather, to escape from a sentiment that has no obvious goal or release of its own. Tom 'has it out' with Slogger Williams because he cannot 'have it out' with Arthur. More generally, perhaps fighting and football gain a special energy and importance because they are the only legitimate interest the boys may have in their own and others' bodies. Even so, Hughes does manage to produce a kind of climax for Tom and Arthur, towards the end of their school careers. By this time, Tom is in his late teens, and has become one of the '[g]reat strapping boys' that he so admired when he first arrived at the school. Arthur is still typical of the Victorian feminine ideal, 'frail and delicate, with more spirit than body' (304). A fever sweeps the school, and Arthur falls sick and is taken to the sickroom. Tom anxiously awaits reports of Arthur's health, and cries at the familiar sight of Arthur's cricket cap and blazer, wondering if he can bear to lose him (306). Eventually Tom is told he may visit his

friend. It is evening, and in the dying sunlight, Arthur looks to Tom's eyes like an angel; he realises in that moment 'how his little chum had twined himself round his heart-strings'. We are told of how Tom put his arm round Arthur's head where it lay on the pillow. Tom is slightly nervous, but his author insists on drawing out the moment:

> Arthur laid his own thin white hand, on which the blue veins stood out so plainly, on Tom's great brown fist, and smiled at him; and then looked out the window again, as if he couldn't bear to lose a moment of the sunset, into the tops of the great feathery elms, round which the rooks were circling and clanging, returning in flocks from their evening foraging parties (308).

To the sound of cricket being played, and of sparrows quarrelling and making it up again, Arthur tells Tom of a glorious vision of resurrection he had when he was ill, in which he sees his dead father and all his current friends and relations engaged in a great work, having put aside all weariness and pain. Tom listens, spellbound. Hughes usually likes to be about the 'business' of life, with football matches, poaching, fights and other 'scrapes'. But here he begins to luxuriate in images of stasis, prolongation, and restfulness, as the birds settle, the shadows lengthen, and for the first time, it is not football that is being played, but the slower and more aesthetic game of cricket. The scene is unusually lengthy, and unusually contemplative. Hughes frequently tries to lead us to believe that healthiness is getting on with things, and that feeling is a sickness. This scene of clasping and emotion does take place in the sickroom. Yet the scene of sickness is beautified, with its 'golden and spirit-like' angel, set within a visual elegy. Hughes seems divided, in that he wants to have a climax made of feeling, not fighting; but he is equally keen to enclose such feeling within the privacy of a special place.[21]

This scene has generated a lot of discussion: spiritual or erotic, heterosexual or homosexual, 'pure' or 'guilty'? Perhaps it draws its controversial power from the fact that it actually confuses all these things. It features two boys, but is modelled on an adult heterosexual binary, with the manly Tom and the feminine Arthur. It is spiritual, but for a spiritual exchange it is also insistent in its close physical detail. As if in fear of the subversive potential of such combinations, Hughes is quick to re-order the characters' emotional affiliations, with the appearance of Arthur's mother: '[t]all and slight and fair, with masses of golden hair drawn back from the broad white forehead, and the calm blue eye meeting his so deep and open – the eye that he knew so well, for it was his friend's all over again, and the lovely tender mouth that trembled

while he looked ... he thought he had never seen anything so beautiful. He couldn't help wondering if Arthur's sisters were like her'. Tom instantly shifts his sights away from Arthur to Arthur's sisters. Also, from being confusingly close to a married pair, he and Arthur are returned to children again, chatting away 'as the mother sat on quiet and loving, rejoicing in their life' (320-1).

The final chapter of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* begins with a stanza from the most famous Victorian poem of friendship, Tennyson's *In Memoriam*:

> Strange friend, past, present, and to be;
> Loved deeplier, darkly understood;
> Behold, I dreamed a dream of good,
> And mingle all the world with thee (368).

The 'strange friend' has a suggestion of Christ, both in the poem and in Hughes' deployment of it. In the world of the novel the 'strange friend' is also Arnold, whose death is announced in the last chapter. But Tennyson's actual friend was Arthur Hallam, and certainly George Arthur is the most obvious 'strange friend' in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. Arthur is inappropriate to the scene, being oddly feminine, and feeling too much. In his manner and his temperament he mingles separate modes of behaviour, a fact that makes him both a threat and an embarrassment.[22] But in the course of the book, he does indeed come to be loved deeplier than the others, not least because he puts Tom in mind of the home he has left, and of the home he may one day make for himself. He breaks down the exclusivity of the 'school of hard knocks' with which we began, and enables Hughes to introduce a continuity of feeling that he has, for the most part, sought to deny. Arthur reintroduces family and home with connotations of the maternal and the wifely. We end with a blending of the two worlds under the aegis of another 'strange friend', as Tom kneels, crying, in the school chapel, whilst over his head the author discourses on Christ and the family:

> For it is only through our mysterious human relationships, though the love and tenderness and purity of mothers, and sisters, and wives, through the strength and courage and wisdom of fathers, brothers and teachers, that we can come to the knowledge of Him, in whom alone the love, and the tenderness, and the purity, and the strength, and the courage, and the wisdom of all these dwell for ever and ever in perfect fulness (376).

Hughes seeks, at the end of his novel, to infuse each different familial role with the qualities and values of the others, and to consecrate the whole under Christ. Finally, the novel admits that it is not about what it

had claimed to be about: unable to remain for another term at the school of hard knocks, it returns to the loving family. But this return had already been signalled by the scene in the sickroom, in which Tom and Arthur had, so normatively and yet so subversively, worked out a consecration of their own.

## III

Although Hughes used his novel to address some of the dangers of the public school, such as bullying and lack of religious feeling, he could scarcely bring himself to admit other problems. He did not take a tragic or even a complex view of human nature, and was usually quick to assure his readers that those evils he does describe have since been overcome. Of bullying and gambling, he writes: 'I trust and believe that such things are not possible now at school' (186). Of the irreligious cynicism, he again trusts that 'the old heathen state of things has gone out for ever' (229). Hughes' 'trust' is perhaps a nervous, wishful thing, and it is characteristic in him to treat some difficulties optimistically, and to pretend that others do not exist. At the end of his schooldays, Tom is nineteen years old, does not wish to leave school, and, so far as we know, has scarcely experienced any sexual feeling whatsoever. Hughes does allude to sexuality with disgust, with the spoilt boy, but as Tom's scene in the sickroom might suggest, given the choice between sickness and sex among adolescents, Hughes would choose ill health.[23]

Another popular school story, Frederic William Farrar's *Eric, Or Little By Little* (1858) presents a very different view. For Hughes, Rugby was an increasingly distant memory, so perhaps it was easy for him to forget some things and to misremember others. Furthermore, Hughes was brought up within the relative privilege of the squirearchy, whereas Farrar's father was a humble curate. Farrar's ambition had to be paid for out of his own efforts in the way of scholarships and prizes. In contrast with Hughes' citing of such starry heroes as Wolfe, Wellington, and Nelson, Farrar took Milton as his model. For many years he kept a portrait of the poet in his dressing-room, under which were inscribed lines on boyhood from *Paradise Regained*:

> When yet I was a child no childish play
> To me was pleasing, all my life was spent
> Serious to learn and know, and thence to do
> What might be public good ...[24]

Farrar was younger, more earnestly religious, and a practicing schoolmaster. Whereas Hughes was generally optimistic, Farrar tended to take

a tragic view of school life.[25] In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the threat of license is made safe by the Christian romance of Tom and Arthur's friendship: Hughes accentuates the boys' potential for spiritual purity. In what follows, it will become clear that, although Farrar is often remorsefully sentimental, he is more sternly evangelical and less romantic. As I demonstrate, his novel relates more directly to contemporary fears over masturbation and the 'contagion' of vice. This discussion of *Eric* will reveal a continuity of preoccupation with *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, especially with the tension between school values and family values; but in Farrar's novel, the problem of sex is much more pressing. This makes clearer a dynamic implicit in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*: although school may be dangerously sexual, it does at least make home seem commensurately asexual, and doubly sacred. What was true of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* is more luridly the case in *Eric*: to loosen the hold of home is also to preserve its sanctity.

At the start of the novel, Eric Williams' parents are in civilian life in India. Eric is sent home to an aunt and a cousin at the age of four, and goes to a local grammar school. His parents return to England, and the whole family moves to the Isle of Man, where Eric begins as a day boy at Roslyn School.[26] He soon becomes friends with another Roslyn boy, an orphan named Edwin Russell. Their friendship, in its romantic intensity, resembles that of Tom and Arthur and many others. Fairly soon we see them seated on the beach as the sun goes down, clasping hands, having decided to call each other by their first names, and silently resolving that 'they would be loving friends for ever' (49). In distinct contrast with some of the other friendships Eric is to make, Farrar describes this one approvingly, setting it within a specifically familial framework: Eric and Edwin are like brothers, and Mrs. Williams becomes a kind of replacement mother for the orphaned Edwin. This sentimental friendship is seen as a reproduction or extension of the family, in contrast to those friendships in which sexual activity between boys leads to a 'blunting' of the 'home affections'. Eric's tragedy is to move from the familialist type of friendship to the sexualized. Once his parents have returned to India, Eric is 'taken up' by a much older boy:

> Upton was a fine sturdy fellow of eighteen, immensely popular in the school for his prowess and good looks. He hated bullying, and often interfered to protect little boys, who idolized him, and did anything he told them very willingly. He meant to do no harm, but he did great harm (83).

Farrar seems to lead here to the sexual corruption of the 'taking up' system as hinted at by Hughes. But for the moment he is content to raise the possibility, while making it clear that Eric himself is 'too manly

a little fellow' to sink to the 'effeminate condition' of degradation that befalls other 'young delectables' (86). Farrar has other plans for Eric, intending to draw out his degradation to an agonizing four hundred pages.

The school's rules and its interior design are judged in terms of their effectiveness in preventing sex. Very early in Eric's career at Roslyn, the narrator worries that there are dormitories where there 'were only two ways by which the masters could get at [the boys]', and in which the boys therefore 'felt perfectly secure from any interruption' (76). Such comments may seem the strange obsession of an eccentric schoolmaster, but Farrar is merely typical of the age, and some of *Eric*'s passing peculiarities are in fact germane to a whole culture of repression. In many schools at this time, there was a preoccupation with combining ease of surveillance over the boys, with making it difficult for them to get into each others' beds. E.W. Benson, who was appointed headmaster at Wellington in 1859 and who later became Archbishop of Canterbury, came up with a variety of architectural ideas which would impede solitary and collective sex, including a complicated system of wires and grills over and between beds.[27] Of course, the profession was not uniform in its response to sex: some masters were drawn to teaching because it gave opportunity to their pederastic tendencies; others affected to believe that schoolboy sex only existed in the minds of the depraved. The official interest in the boys' sexual activities was justified by religious prejudice, and partly by the belief propagated by doctors and moralists that self-abuse and any non-procreative sex would lead to ill health. Innumerable tracts, advice books and medical essays described the limp figure and tormented mind of the youth who wasted his manhood in vice and folly. Farrar uses *Eric* to make the same argument, describing the pale shadows of boys who have perished for want of self-control:

> From the sea and the sod, from foreign graves and English churchyards, they start up and throng around us in the paleness of their fall. May every schoolboy who reads this page be warned by the waving of their wasted hands, from that burning marle of passion, where they found nothing but shame and ruin, polluted affections, and an early grave (102).[28]

Such passages in fiction and other texts led to a degree of confusion among boys, whose experience often told them that their most sexually active fellows did not waste away and die in shame, but played for the cricket eleven and the rugby fifteen.[29] As Quigly observes with sardonic neatness: '[r]ugger leads to it more surely than Swinburne, and the Pride of the School is likely to get the pick of the boys' (209).

*Eric* represents a powerful dramatization of this discourse of forbidden sexuality, and it is typical in its view of sex as a form of contagion. Before the notion of homosexuality was firmly fixed in the late-Victorian mind, boys who were found to have had sex with each other were only deemed more sinful than those who had sinned alone because, in mutual or collective acts, the vice was being passed on. Later, as the sexological discourse became more refined, it was thought that sinning with others was a 'more aggravated form' altogether, and was therefore much more likely to result in expulsion. Generally, it seems likely that levels of sexual activity have always varied, so that in some schools in some eras, it was as 'rife' as Farrar feared, but at other times boys were scarcely aware of such things. It is equally certain that the nature of such activity has varied, from the virtual rape that was experienced or witnessed by Thackeray, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, John Addington Symonds, and many others, to consensual occasions that old boys remember either with fondness or embarrassment.[30] Farrar is reluctant to be explicit in his reference, but he does describe such activity as a contagion. He also imparts a marvellous glow of anguish to the whole business, as Eric enters deeper into a sexual realm, leaving the values of home ever further behind him.

*Eric* has been likened to an earlier novel of frail virtue, Richardson's *Clarissa* (1749), in which the pure heroine is menaced by a handsome but licentious aristocrat. Each novel, it is claimed, thrives by 'denouncing the very sins whose portrayal gives it piquancy'.[31] Having been left at school by his parents, and drawn away from their values by the aristocratic seducer as represented by Upton, Eric does indeed embark upon a career of recklessness and vice. His more virtuous friends, such as Edwin, realise that they must '"keep the body under, and bring [it] into subjection"' (85). When Edwin is confronted with indecency, he fights against it: '"[w]hat I said I don't know, but I felt as if I was trampling on a slimy poisonous adder, and, at any rate, I showed such pain and distress that the fellows dropped it at the time"' (100). Eric, however, is disposed to be contaminated, and this soon happens in a chapter ominously titled '"Dead Flies", or "Ye Shall Be As Gods"'. He has been placed in a dormitory that contains an already-corrupted boy named Ball. Eric knows that he must speak out to prevent Ball's 'indecent words' from corrupting the whole dormitory. Farrar exhorts his hero to do his duty:

> Now, Eric, now or never! Life and death, ruin and salvation, corruption and purity, are perhaps in the balance together, and the scale of your destiny may hang on a single word of yours. Speak out, boy! (194).

Eric does not speak out. The boys only have a very indistinct sense of what it is that they are supposed to be resisting, but the consequences of acquiescence are rapid and irreversible: '[i]niquity of this kind was utterly new to him; his curiosity was awakened; he no longer feigned indifference, and the poison flowed deep into his veins. Before that evening was over, Eric Williams was "a god, knowing good and evil"' (101-2).

Eric's downward course is momentarily arrested by Edwin's illness and death. In another sickroom scene, Edwin's delirium reveals his purity, as he speaks to his dead mother and prays for Eric, while 'not one evil word or bad thought, or wicked thing, ever escapes him'. His delirium proves that he has never moved outside the 'spell of home affection', even though he has been orphaned. As Upton remarks to Eric: '"I'm afraid, Eric, it would hardly be so with you or me"' (172-3). As the summer waxes, Edwin approaches death. Similarly to *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, there are lengthy scenes of clasping of hands, declarations of brotherly love, of giving flowers, of reading the Bible, of a 'long brotherly kiss', and of 'sorrowful forebodings'. Eventually Edwin dies in a blaze of light, and goes to stand in the light of the 'rainbow-circled throne' (182-3). The boys scatter flowers over his grave, and Eric resolves to lead a better life.

For a time, Eric does reform, but at sixteen he 'takes up' a good-looking and mischievous younger boy who leads him off on carouses at a local pub. Meanwhile, he neglects his younger brother, Vernon, who has recently come to the school. In the absence of appropriate protection and guidance from his older brother, Vernon Williams is himself taken up by a 'burly and strong boy' who has already been expelled from 'one of the most ill-managed schools in Ireland' (200).[32] Vernon falls from a cliff while birds-nesting, and is killed. There follows an extraordinary example of Farrar's favourite technique of pictorialism. In his religious histories, Farrar equated wickedness with an aesthetic luxuriance of colour, so that at Nero's orgies fish are boiled alive so that the guests might watch the 'dying gleams of ruby and emerald', and rafts are 'decorated with gilding, and vermilion, and silken streamers, and rowed by boy-slaves from Britain, Greece and Asia, with long curled hair and bracelets of gold on their bare arms and ankles'. Farrar could not bring himself to mention the actual activities of the 'gilded youth of Roman effeminacy' and 'Greeklings skilled in all refinements of evil'.[33] Instead, the normally ephemeral signifiers come to have a primary importance, so that there is a promiscuity of colour and light, with unusual and spectacular unions. 'Painterliness' is made to stand in for explicit description. At the opposite end of the moral scale, but making

use of the same painterly technique, is Edwin's death, and Vernon's. But the pictorialism signifies a different kind of ecstasy, as the body is left behind:

> Meanwhile the tide rolled in calmly and quietly in the rosy evening, radiant with the diamond and gold of reflected sunlight and transparent wave. Gradually, gently it crept up to the place where Vernon lay; and the little ripples fell over him wonderingly, with the low murmur of their musical laughter, and blurred and dimmed the vivid splashes and crimson streaks upon the white stone on which his head had fallen, and washed away some of the purple bells and green sprigs of heather round which his fingers were closed in the grasp of death, and played softly with his fair hair as it rose, and fell, and floated on their undulations like a leaf of golden-coloured weed, until they were faintly discoloured by his blood (326).

In common with many other nineteenth-century depictions, the gilded and diamond-studded scene of Vernon's death is emblematic. The waves mimic his own childishness in their playing with him; his death is a 'fall', but also a transcendence, as the waves begin to lift him up once more. The immanence of gold to the picture reassures us that this is not a mere accident, but the resurgence of Providence within the earthly. In the gentle, playful nurturance of the waves, this scene also signals the return of the maternal, both for Vernon himself, and for his traumatised brother. In this scene, as in the scenes of Neronian license, there is what we might call a visual excrescence, whereby the excess of effect serves either as a euphemism for the unspeakable, or a sign of the ineffable. In both cases such a visual excrescence acknowledges and obscures the fact that the climax of the narrative is the point at which it has reached the limit of its own powers of representation. The pictorial climax masks – and lends a mystique to – the actual climaxes of hedonistic abandon or the return to mother.[34]

Eric's destiny lies between transgressive and ruinous desires, or a return to the maternal (the latter does itself contain a potential for Oedipal transgression, which is covered over by sentiment). In the event, Eric is so struck by the scene of his brother's death, as Farrar doubtless hoped his boy-readers would be, that he reforms completely. However, he is pursued by past sins and runs away to sea. His mother is killed by the news of Vernon's death and of Eric's disappearance. Eric is badly treated by the sailors on ship, and his health is soon wrecked. His running away to sea might, in other boys' stories, have had romantic potential, but Farrar punishes his character with a prurient thoroughness. Eric is made to wear coarse, dirty sailor's clothes, and must endure 'dirty men sleeping round him at night'. Farrar does not give

details of the behaviour of these 'gross-minded' men, but he seems to allude to the legendary depredations of shipboard life, as Eric must put up with 'intolerable patronage'. This is soon followed by a gruesomely explicit description of Eric being stripped and beaten. Although we are supposed to deplore this brutal treatment and its overturning of the hierarchy of class, Eric is also 'improved' by it, in that his earthly form is beaten into subjugation. As with other literary scenes of whipping, there is considerable ambivalence here. With an admiring and excitable pity, Farrar has the sailors expose Eric's 'white and tender skin'. One might say that Farrar legitimates his desire to reveal and to celebrate the flesh by punishing it in the same instant. In the same way, he uses the 'gross' sailors to lend a moralised thrill to his narrative.

At the very end of the novel, however, Farrar returns Eric to the unworldly, asexual realm of home. Eric returns to his aunt's to die. In the sickroom, he becomes delirious as he too approaches death, and in his delirium he has conversations with his mother and with Vernon; he then 'goes home' to join them. At the end his school life and his sexual energy are left behind: '[e]very trace of recklessness and arrogance had passed away; every stain of passion had been removed; every particle of hardness had been calcined in the flame of trial' (384). He is beaten indeed, and fit to rejoin 'those he dearliest loved, in the land where there is no more curse' (389). As was also the case with Edwin, in imagination Eric is restored once more to the unbroken circle of home.

## IV

We might dismiss *Eric* as overstated in its piety and its sentiment, or we might think what a thing it is to read these popular Victorian public school novels: as with *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, though in a slightly different register, in *Eric* there is a wealth of strong emotion, from temptation, dread, and longing, to powerful affection, remorse and nostalgia. Such a repertoire of feeling is generated around the lives of schoolboys, and as reading for schoolboys. In both novels school is seen as necessary, on the grounds that tried and tested virtue is better than the virtue of mere ignorance. But it is also dangerous, introducing a knowledge of desire which would otherwise have remained latent. School excites a homoerotic desire, whereas at home desire is both nurtured and repressed in the form of a sublimated attachment to mother. To place this in a Foucaldian context, homosexuality replaces incest as the pivotal desire, the desire through which the subject can be disciplined.[35] School both encourages and denies same-sex attraction, inciting the transgression and the guilt which will form the basis of the boys'

sexual conscience. In later school fiction, this process of heterosexualizing aversion is ever more starkly drawn. In E.F. Benson's *David Blaize* (1916), for instance, Maddox achieves his 'pure' relationship with David only after admitting to himself his sexual feelings: '"[y]ou damned beast ... You deserve to be shot"'.[36] To use anachronistic parlance, the figure of the 'recovering homosexual' has emerged fully and unmistakably. In *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and *Eric* there had been blurred moments of sexual possibility, sentiment and piety, which were relayed into a renewed familialism. Anything more directly sexual was rendered as external to the self, with the temptation of 'pretty boys' and the attentions of older ones appearing as other kinds of 'hard knock'. In the later fiction, there is an interiorisation of homosexual desire, an admission into the narrative consciousness of what had previously been repulsed hurriedly and without further comment.[37]

In *Tom Brown's Schooldays* the values of home prove strong enough to keep Tom from the depredations of others. Home and football keep him from discovering his body as a means or cause of sexual pleasure. As an extra assurance, the family re-emerges within the confines of the school, with the rosy images of the Arnold family, with Tom's 'marriage' to Arthur, and with the appearance of Arthur's mother. In *Eric*, sexual feeling is acknowledged as a reality, and as a problem. In common with *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, it assumes the opposition of family and school in which sexual desire belongs to the school. The sickroom signals a sublimation of desire, as do death and the return to the family. Perhaps, for all that many Victorians found the sexual potential of school disturbing, it was nonetheless easier for them to think of school as the locale of sexual discovery. Regardless of how much anguish schoolboy morality may have caused them, it did allow them to see school as the place of nascent sexuality, rather than home. Sex is seen to belong to the world, and not the family. So in handing over some of its responsibility to the school, the family makes itself appear more, not less sacred. Such, at least, is the lesson of the fiction.

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**Endnotes**

1. Isabel Quigly, *The Heirs of Tom Brown: The English School Story* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982), 43, and Jeffrey Richards, *Happiest Days: The Public Schools in English Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988). My objection to Richards, who does emphasise context, is that he tends to present homosexual feeling and activity as a schoolboy aberration, whereas I see it as a crucial structuring device.
2. Miriam Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 15.

3. Ibid., 137.
4. Nelson's argument is to be found in 'Sex and the Single Boy: Ideals of Manliness and Sexuality in Victorian Literature for Boys', *Victorian Studies* 32.4 (Summer 1989): 525-50. She develops her discussion in *Boys Will Be Girls: The Feminine Ethic and British Children's Fiction, 1857-1917* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991).
5. John Chandos, *Boys Together: English Public Schools, 1800-1864* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), 12.
6. *Journal of Education* 10 (1835): 102-3; quoted in Chandos, *Boys Together*, 172.
7. For mention of this competition between Regency and Victorian masculinities, see Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
8. See J.F. Stephen's review of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* in the *Edinburgh Review*, 107.217 (January-April 1858), and quoted in Chandos, *Boys Together*, 260. For an excellent pedagogical assessment of Arnold's work, see J.R. de S. Honey's *Tom Brown's Universe: The Development of the Victorian Public School* (London: Millington, 1977). A more recent, and peculiarly defensive account is Michael McCrum's *Thomas Arnold, Headmaster: A Reassessment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
9. It is usually supposed that Arnold, in keeping with the early part of the century, was not so attuned to the possibility of sexual vice as later masters. Certainly he spoke about indiscipline, swearing and bullying rather than sex, but it is always hard to know when the 'speakable' vices are being made to stand in for the 'unspeakable' ones. Norman Wymer, at least, in *Dr. Arnold of Rugby* (London: Robert Hale, 1953), links Arnold's introduction of separate beds to an attempt to reduce sexual immorality (117). Also, here and throughout I homogenise terms, so that monitors, praepostors and so forth are all rendered as prefects, and all teaching staff become masters and headmaster. Perhaps less acceptably, for the sake of convenience and to avoid undue repetition, I sometimes refer to 'the schools', when I am invariably referring to the public schools in particular.
10. Frederic W. Farrar, *Eric, Or Little By Little* (Edinburgh: Adam and Clarles Black, 1858), 198, and *Julian Home; A Tale of College Life* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1859), 33. It is *Mother's Last Words* (1860) that keep two orphan boys from evil in the well-known ballad by Anna Sewell's mother, Mary Sewell. Similarly, Julian Home's 'amulet against temptation' at school is a letter written to him by his dying father. Honey gives a careful delineation of the relationship between school and home, and also points out that, at the other end of the social scale, Nathaniel Woodard's reformist schools for the lower middle class were in part designed to remove poorer children from the 'noxious influence of home' (55).
11. The obsession with games is generally understood to have emerged in the 1870s. Both Hughes and Farrar exhibit an interest in games (a strong interest in the case of Hughes), but it is as well to point out that their particular intention is to equate the physicality of games with a moral strenuousness. Neither betrays the later obsession with games for their own sake.
12. Honey, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, 124.
13. This is the founder of Radley, as quoted in Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe*, 228-9.
14. Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, ed. Andrew Sanders (1857; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 2. Sanders reproduces the first illustrated edition, published by Macmillan in 1869.
15. For Arnold's concern over the 'Jew Bill', see Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, *The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold, D.D.*, 2 vols (London: B. Fellowes, 1844); for Hughes, Kingsley and the Oxford Movement, see Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit.*

16. Hughes could not keep a contemporary, 'condition-of-England' aspect out entirely; it appears later in the form of the father of Tom's friend, George Arthur, who has died whilst serving in an urban parish during a period of economic recession.
17. For discussion of 'Irishness' and English identity at mid-century and after, see L. Perry Curtis Jr.'s *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England* (Bridgeport, Conn.: University of Bridgeport, 1968) and *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Culture* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1971). Sheridan Gilley provides a persuasive counterpoint to Curtis in his essay, 'English Attitudes to the Irish in England, 1789-1900', in Colin Holmes, ed., *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978), 81-110. Gilley argues that Curtis offers a very one-sided view of the English tendency to 'simianise' the Irish, given that 'many English patriots' acknowledged and even celebrated their Celtic blood. Further nuances have been traced by R.F. Foster in *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Allen Press, 1993), and by Gerry Smyth in 'Matthew Arnold, Celticism and the English Poetic Tradition', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 1.1 (Spring 1996): 35-53.
18. Hugh Kingsmill is quoted by Isabel Quigly as likening Tom's sickroom visit to Arthur to a husband's tiptoe visit to his wife after childbirth; see *The Heirs of Tom Brown*, 67. Kenneth Allsop's argument is to be found in his essay, 'A Coupon for Instant Tradition: On "Tom Brown's Schooldays"', in *Encounter* XXV (November 1965): 61-3.
19. See Sanders, 'Introduction', xv.
20. Without wishing to be diverted too far by the complexities of psychological process, we might say that Hughes is affronted by – but must negotiate – the double bind observed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Tom's need to accommodate the feminine in order to be manly (in other words, to heterosexualise himself), will inevitably lead him into a 'homosexual panic': his normalising affection for Arthur bears a resemblance to its 'unnatural' other, and makes him open to the possibility of homophobic blackmail. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990; London: Penguin, 1994), 184-6.
21. With Tom's 'great brown fist' and the angelic Arthur's 'thin white hand', we are also perhaps revisiting the classic nineteenth-century scene of feminine power, that between Little Eva and Uncle Tom.
22. *In Memoriam* itself was the cause of much anxious commentary on how close close male friendship ought to be. Tennyson was criticised for his 'fancy loves, better than is manly or beseeming'. Another reader, unaware of Tennyson's authorship, happily supposed that 'these touching lines evidently come from the full heart of the widow of a military man'. For a carefully nuanced discussion of Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, same-sex love, and the critical response, see Alan Sinfield, *Alfred Tennyson* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). Christopher Craft takes up similar issues in '"Descend, and Touch, and Enter": Tennyson's Strange Manner of Address', *Genders* 1 (Spring 1988): 83-101. Craft's reading is particularly interesting for its emphasis on the way in which the figure of Christ safely absorbs, relays, and completes a fierce homoerotic cathexis' (89).
23. This is clear in his biographical history of *Alfred the Great* (1871), in which the young Alfred finds himself threatened by 'carnal thoughts'. He prays that God might give him some sickness, such as would be of use to him in the subduing of his body, but would not show itself outwardly or render him powerless or contemptible in worldly duties, or less able to benefit his people'. God is pleased to 'afflict him with a very painful disease', which stays with him until his marriage. See Thomas Hughes, *Alfred*

*the Great* (1871; London: Macmillan, 1891), 47-8. Similarly, in *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861) Tom and his new friend Hardy agree that their difficulty is to 'keep the devils out'. At Oxford rowing serves in the place of Tom's football and Alfred's 'very painful disease'. See Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861; London: Macmillan, 1965), 45-6. I would have liked to have included a more extensive discussion of this book, especially because it shows Hughes attempting to resolve some of the social problems that are scarcely allowed to disrupt the jingoistic surface of its precursor.

24. Reginald Farrar, *The Life of Frederic William Farrar* (London: James Nisbet, 1904), 21. Farrar was master at Harrow from 1855 to 1871, and headmaster at Marlborough from 1871 to 1876. With regard to the popularity of *Eric*, it had gone through thirty-one editions by 1903, though Kipling suggests in *Stalky & Co.* (1899) that this was because the book was approved of by elders and betters, rather than as a result of popularity with boys themselves.
25. In fairness one should point out that, following much adverse criticism of *Eric*, Farrar's subsequent fiction for boys and young men was rather lighter. *St. Winifred's; or, the World of School* (1862) has many brighter moments, although it is ultimately governed by the same suffering and earnest piety of its predecessor.
26. Although he issued the usual disclaimers, Farrar's own parents lived in India during Farrar's early childhood; Farrar was sent to live with maiden aunts at the age of three, before going to King William's College on the Isle of Man. In private letters, however, Farrar identified some of the characters in *Eric* as Harrow boys; see Reginald Farrar, *Life*, 75-6.
27. Such fears manifested themselves in a variety of forms thoughout the rest of the century. At Haileybury in 1886, the fear of sex led to making the boys play football in long trousers rather than shorts, out of a concern that they would be aroused by the sight of each other's bare legs. Rugby soon brought in the same rule. Other schools, such as Lancing, introduced voluntary confession, believing that it helped the boys to overcome their desires. See Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe*, 182, 175, and Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *The Public School Phenomenon, 597-1977* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 90.
28. For studies of this type of discourse in Britain and America, see Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), and John S. and Robin M. Haller, *The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974).
29. In 1881, the *Journal of Education* carried a long debate of the issue, leading one old Etonian to write pseudonymously, noting that in his experience boys who had been corrupt in this way had gone on to become cabinet ministers, statesmen, officers, clergymen, and 'fathers of thriving families'. 'Olim Etonensis' is quoted in Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe*, 179. Similarly, in Alec Waugh's once-scandalous fictional account of life at Sherborne, it is the athletes or 'bloods' who prove to be 'a bit of a rip', which is to say that they lead the most spectacular sex lives. See Alec Waugh, *The Loom of Youth* (1917; London: Methuen, 1984), 21, 245.
30. For contagion, see Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe*, 172, 175; a more recent example is to be found in Guy Kendall's *A Headmaster Reflects* (London: William Hodge, 1937): '[t]he housemaster in a boarding school is mainly anxious to got rid of "offenders" at any cost, for fear of their contaminating the rest' (54). For a discursive approach to the topic of sex in schools, see Gathorne-Hardy, Chandos, and Alisdare Hickson, *The Poisoned Bowl: Sex, Repression and the Public School System* (London: Duckworth, 1995); John Addington Symonds' description of the boys' dormitory life at nineteenth-century Harrow is to be found in *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds*, ed.

Phyllis Grosskurth (London: Hutchinson, 1984). Robin Maugham's gruesome and sad record of masters at preparatory school in the early part of this century is to be found in *Escape from the Shadows* (1972; London: Robin Clark, 1981).

31. Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body in Victorian Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 178.
32. Here and elsewhere Farrar, as with Hughes, uses 'Irishness' to confirm Englishness, in that it is a wildness which is nearly domestic, which is very close to home, and must be worked against. Likewise, in his other well-known novel of school life, we are told of 'the freaks of a mad Irish boy'. See *St. Winifred's; or the World of School* (1862; London: A. and C. Black, 1927), 11.
33. Frederic W. Farrar, *Darkness and Dawn; or, Scenes in the Days of Nero*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1891), I: 152, II: 158-9.
34. I am adapting an argument of Linda Zwinger here. In *Daughters, Fathers, and the Novel: The Sentimental Romance of Heterosexuality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), she discusses the 'sentimental excrescences' of American women's writing as a 'textual hysteria' which at once expresses and dispels the 'narrative messiness of desire', putting it into 'coherent, stable, predetermined forms', 134.
35. For a discussion of incest as an incitement around which bourgeois repression is structured, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (1976; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1981).
36. E.F. Benson, *David Blaize* (1916; London: The Hogarth Press, 1989), 149. Similarly, Horace Annesley Vachell's heroes in *The Hill: A Romance of Friendship* (London: John Murray, 1905) have their love frequently and explicitly desexualised as 'unfettered by the flesh', although the narrative dwells at length on the characters' fleshly attractions (94, 130).
37. There are now many excellent studies of the general emergence or crystallisation of homosexual identity towards the end of the century, and especially in the wake of the Wilde trials. See, for instance, Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996); Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Toward a Genealogy of Discourse on Male Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *op. cit.*; Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde, and the Queer Moment* (London: Cassell, 1994); and Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths, and Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).