

# Beyond Tom Brown: The Broader Literary Contributions of Thomas Hughes to Modern Sporting Ideology

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At a time when the ethical and moral standards associated with sport in the United States and abroad are undergoing seemingly constant scrutiny, it is wholly appropriate to examine those individuals and institutions that were instrumental in formulating and promoting the doctrine of fairplay and sportsmanship in the nineteenth century. This study explores the role played by one of those individuals, Thomas Hughes.

Born in rural England in 1822, his life as student, barrister, author, Christian Socialist, politician and philanthropist has been well-documented. Often hailed as the foremost literary proponent of muscular Christianity, Hughes is perhaps best known as the creator of Tom Brown whose young life he chronicles in his two best-selling novels. *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) and *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861) have become, by far, the most oft-quoted sources by historians tracing the ideological roots of the games-playing phenomenon in nineteenth century Britain. Surprisingly, none has explored the potential significance of Hughes' many other full-length fictional and non-fictional works to the emerging gospel of muscular Christianity.

From *The Scouring of the White Horse...* (1859) to *Notes for Boys (and Their Fathers), on Morals, Mind and Manners* (1885), the author initiates, develops and subsequently questions his own ideas regarding manliness and the cult of athleticism. This study critically examines these and other full-length works which constitute a prolific literary career. The researcher clearly demonstrates that although Tom Brown may have represented a simple and realistic hero of the Carlylean ilk to generations of juvenile readers, Hughes' very hopes and doubts for moral development on the playing field were much more complex and abstract in nature. Indeed, while frequently heralded as a pioneer of muscular Christianity Hughes must equally be lauded as a prophet one who in later years wrote, in a sceptical vein, of the modernization of sport.