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Happiest Days: The Public Schools in English Fiction, by Jeffrey
Richards

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are Robert Applegarth, Joseph Arch, John Burns, George Howell, Tom Mann, George Odger. Neither Engels nor Marx is given an entry. Other examples of hit and miss: Florence Nightingale in, John Simon out; Charles Stewart Parnell in, Michael Davitt out; Arthur Sullivan in, W. S. Gilbert out. Most of those named in this paragraph, it is true, turn up in topical entries, and are therefore not completely ignored. But if there is method to the selection process as applied to entries on individuals, it has eluded this reviewer (who is also bemused by the omission from the bibliographical section of "Research Materials for Victorian Studies" of the two massive bibliographies of British history published by Clarendon Press in the mid-1970s that cover the nineteenth century). *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia* is almost as idiosyncratic as it is invaluable.

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Jeffrey Richards. *Happiest Days: The Public Schools in English Fiction*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; distributed by St. Martin's Press, New York, N.Y. 1988. Pp. 319. \$49.95.

In 1929, Jeffrey Richards recounts, the Conservative Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin (an Old Harrovian), discovered a common bond with the Labour Party opposition leader, Ramsay MacDonald (son of a Scottish crofter): in youth, both had been enthusiastic readers of the *Boy's Own Paper* (p. 105). Nor, of course, were the two politicians unique, for the *B.O.P.*'s readership in the early nineties was estimated at well over a million boys. It is hard to repress the subversive thought that the British transition from the party politics of the 1920s to the national government of 1931 reproduced the plot from one of the *B.O.P.*'s most famous school stories, Talbot Baines Reed's *The Cock House at Fellsgarth* (1893), in which fierce but largely-symbolic conflicts between the Classic and Modern Sides were ultimately resolved for the Good of the School.

Richards, disappointingly but revealingly, offers no such speculation, yet his inclusion of the Baldwin anecdote neatly encapsulates the differences between his book and most previous studies of school fiction. The standard study remains E. C. Mack's two volumes on *The Public Schools and British Opinion* (1938, 1941), which considered the novels primarily as contributions to educational debate. John R. Reed's *Old School Ties* (1964) focussed on twentieth-century adult novels, largely hostile to the public school ethos. Isobel Quigly's sprightly survey, *The Heirs of Tom Brown* (1982), and P. W. Musgrave's more sober *From Brown to Bunter* (1985), offered, respectively, literary evaluations and sociological analyses of the school novel from its Victorian roots onwards.

Though there is much, perhaps unavoidable, overlap, Richards differs from his predecessors in two ways. First, he has shifted emphasis from school novels as reflecting adult educational opinion to school stories as a popular cultural genre, and in so doing he has provided much more sympathetic analyses of popular pro-public-school fiction than his predecessors. Second, he is as much concerned with production and reception as with the novels themselves. Only E. S. Turner, in his more lightweight but broader-ranging *Boys will be boys* (1948), has treated popular school stories as enthusiastically as Richards. The result is a book well worth reading for anyone concerned with British society and culture in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.

After a brief general introduction, the eleven substantive chapters of Richards' book are each devoted to a single major novel or novelist. They fall into four broad groups. The first (and longest) chapters, on *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) and Farrar's *Eric or Little by Little* (1858), are scrupulous and fairminded in their discussion, but inevitably go over fairly well-trodden ground. The second section, on the flowering of the school story in Reed's *Fifth Form at St. Dominic's* (1887), P. G. Wodehouse's *Mike* (1909), and Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* (1899), is the heart of the book, where Richards' sympathy for the popular genre pays off, though for my taste there was too much plot summary for the amount of structural analysis. The third section, on early twentieth-century romances of schoolboy friendship, seemed to me the least satisfactory, diffuse and defensive; two of the chapters, on E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey* (1907) and Alec Waugh's *The Loom of Youth* (1917), are in many ways elite anti-school novels, while in the other two, on Vachell's Harrow novel *The Hill* (1904) and Ernest Raymond's *Tell England* (1922), Richards finds it difficult to hold his focus — the Vachell chapter reprints most of an earlier Richards' essay on male friendship, including discussions of Farrar, Robert Graves, Cyril Connolly, and J. E. C. Welldon's *Gerald Eversley's Friendship* (1895), and the Raymond chapter is partly about Barrie's *Peter Pan*. I didn't like the nonchronological sequence here, either. The final two chapters, on Hilton's *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (1933) and Charles Hamilton's Billy Bunter saga, get back to Richards' main focus; the Hilton chapter is brief and padded out with discussion of other schoolmaster novels, but his affectionate account of Hamilton himself, of the Bunter publication history, and Hamilton's readers, is thought-provoking, bringing into mainstream scholarship the researches of Hamilton fans like W. O. G. Lofts and D. J. Adley and rebutting the earlier negative judgments by George Orwell in his well-known *Horizon* essay on "Boys' Weeklies."

This is a book with many good points to make, often almost incidentally. There's a fascinating summary of three different surveys of boys' favorite books, from 1888, 1908, and 1940 (pp. 59–61, and cf. p. 116). Following up his previous books on interwar and wartime British films, Richards interestingly discusses the film and television versions of each novel (pp. 17, 61, 227, 255–62, 264). And there are clever connections made from the school novels to other popular works, like the comparisons between *Tell England* and the Australian film *Gallipoli* (pp. 227–28), or between *Gerald Eversley's Friendship* and Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (p. 206). Where the book is weakest, it seems to me, is in its general assumption that school novels are most important for their attitudes to school, rather than for their refiguring of other or wider social themes (cf. pp. 288–300). Richards is a diligent and scrupulous scholar, and he occasionally incorporates ideas from more sophisticated analyses, but, rather oddly for an aficionado of the fantastic Psmith and Bunter, his own basic model for the literature-history connection remains predominantly literal and reflectionist. Literary scholars, including those from the British-based cultural studies movement, would nowadays make much more use of post-structuralist critical methods to tackle a topic of this historical complexity; Richards' well-documented case for the school novel's wide influence would have been strengthened if Richards had had better theoretical models through which to explain its attraction for non-public-school boys and its relation to non-school social values. In spite of its stubborn British methodological amateurism, however, *Happiest Days* can be recommended as a thoughtful and well-researched contribution on a topic of seemingly perennial interest.