



## Before Tom Brown

### The Origins of the School Story

by Robert Kirkpatrick

#### DESCRIPTION:

The use of school life as a closed narrative environment is well documented, and modern examples such as Malory Towers and Harry Potter show the genre's continued appeal. While there have been several histories of the school story, especially in children's literature, almost all of them take as their starting point Tom Brown's Schooldays. Although occasionally acknowledged in passing, there has never been a complete study of earlier school stories, or of other fictional portrayals of school life before the middle of the eighteenth century.

In *Before Tom Brown*, Robert Kirkpatrick traces the roots of the school story back to 2500BC, when school life was a feature of Sumerian, Egyptian and Graeco-Roman texts written as teaching aids for children. From Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to Shakesperean comedies, he explores for the first time the use of school dialogues in the classroom, in print and on stage, and presents new evidence that the first school novel appeared in 1607. Finally, he examines the role of the school story in the broader development of the novel as the genre became established through the eighteenth century. Readers will be rewarded with a whole new perspective on the history of children's literature.

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Robert J. Kirkpatrick is the author of several books on children's literature, including *The Encyclopaedia of Boys' School Stories* (2000), *From the Penny Dreadful to the Ha'penny Dreadfuller: A Bibliographic History of the Boys' Periodical in Britain 1752-1950* (2013) and *The Men Who Drew for Boys (and Girls): 101 Forgotten Illustrators of Children's Books 1844-1970* (2019). He is a long-standing member of the Children's Books History Society (and the Society's Secretary since 2010), and has twice won the Society's Harvey Darton Award.

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