Enos T. Montour. *Brown Tom's School Days*. Edited by Mary Jane Logan McCallum. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2024. 216 pages. ISBN 9781772840865. $24.95 paperback.

Brown Tom's School Days by Enos T. Montour is a needed contribution to the archive of literature about Residential Schools. This edition contains Montour's text, as well as a lengthy introduction by Mary Jane Logan McCallum, a renowned historian and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous People, History and Archives. The first question to be asked might be, how one ought to read this book. Do I start with the introduction, or do I jump to the text itself? Indeed, I suspect a reader would have very different reading experiences depending upon the approach. McCallum's introduction is thorough, expansive, and brilliant. The introduction provides a reader unfamiliar with the context with the much-needed understanding of what they are about to read, or, conversely, what the reader has already read. Truth be told, I've experienced it both ways, for I read this book and then forgot to accomplish my task of preparing a book review, and read it anew, and in the opposite order.

Reading *Brown Tom's School Days*, one is, of course, reminded of Thomas Hughes' 1857 novel *Tom Brown's School Days*, and this is explained by Montour in a funny anecdote before he arrives at the Institution:

> Funny how Brown Tom got that nickname. In the library one day he came across *Tom Brown's School Days*.
> "What you readin'?" asked Angus. Just to be contrary the younger lad answered: "Brown Tom's Schooldays." That became his nickname ever since. He was no browner than the other swarthy Indian lads.
> It is an Indian habit to consciously or unconsciously repeat English phrases backwards. (74)

In some ways, and maybe I'm wrong, but I couldn't help but think here also of Mark Twain's boys, notably, Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. For this book is *boyish* in the best sense of the word, the marvel of the boyhood and the shocking terror of what this boy experiences. The boy wonders,

> What were they trying to do anyway? Trying to make Whitemen out of the Indians. Well, they might make his body toe the mark and his mind grapple with their education. His Indian soul would go on dreaming as it had done on those warm April evenings on the Reserve. (87)

Brown Tom's School Days, then, becomes a kind of ironic meditation on *Tom Brown's School Days*, and perhaps more broadly on boys and educating or educating boys. Throughout, as readers, we must *learn* with Brown Tom: "The strangeness of Brown Tom's new world that night was aggravated by the mass of unfamiliar faces that surrounded him. Here were Indian

boys of all sizes, conditions and tribes. Among them were only two familiar faces—the Turtle Boys from his home Reserve" (92). We learn with him as he learns the culture and the ways of the Institute, at times leaving behind Tom Brown and Huck Finn and joining the world of *Lord of the Flies*, it seems, with one boy named "Big Pig."

As I read *Brown Tom's School Days*, emotions flutter, and mixed feelings abound. There is an inherent sadness to it, the fear of this new space, the unknown Institute. There is a desire to be with Brown Tom, as if to be his companion in an awful situation, such as when we read,

> What he refused to accept was being told that Santa Claus did not come to this School. This was a real uncushioned blow, since he had no-one to confide in. He simply could not think of a world without Santa. Somehow, somewhere, he would find the answer. (107)

Who among us could not be heartbroken at reading this? Here, a boy is told that Santa Claus did not come this year because he is at school. Resentment abounds, and Brown Tom insists there must be an answer. "Was this White man's School the one place that Santa never visited? Why?" (108) Boyhood is, it seems, always being taken away: "For, in that moment, in that Farm School pigpen, Brown Tom grew up. He was too big for Santa Claus" (112).

As a settler reader, how can one not be affected by Brown Tom's story? What does it mean to read a story like this and leave it behind? Instead, the story is one that demands that we listen and be affected. It is a powerful story that leaves an indelible impact on the reader and one that will likely affect the students who will read it in the course I teach on boyhood and masculinities. Another benefit of this work is how teachable it is, especially with the foregrounding essay provided by McCallum.

The Introduction by McCallum provides a history of the story itself and situates the text in its context. A section of the Introduction focuses on the author and the book, recognizing, contra Barthes, that indeed the author was very much alive and the story very much his story. We thus are provided a lengthy family history, a story of Enos Montour's life, including many photographs. The introduction then moves to consider "Autobiography, Fiction, and Evidence," wherein McCallum notes that its absence from mainstream CanLit has been that

> it did not fit expectations for First Nations life writing, being partly fictionalized and drawing so heavily on English literary devices and classic works. At the same time, it is based solidly in a real place and draws from lived First Nations experiences, not from expected and well-worn "Indian" tropes, but set in a nineteenth-century English school genre.

Indeed, this is one of its strengths today and one of the most captivating aspects of the text, even as it poses challenges for readers unfamiliar with the classics. Interestingly, another question is how we should read this text. Memoir? Fiction? History? For literary scholars, the answer is undoubtedly different from that of the historian, but what remains important for both is the value of storytelling as a way of sharing knowledge and experience.

Importantly, for McCallum it was essential to have this story in print, once more, and this reader is certainly thankful to see it in print, to become aware of the story. In the introduction, McCallum reminds readers (if reading after the fact) of one of the text's most impressive moments:

> In the last chapter of Brown Tom, Tom and his chums converse about what they want to do after they finish school. Tom states, "Listen you high aimers. Let me tell you about my ambition. I am staying with the books. Books have made me what I am. . . . I want to get my matriculation and 'follow knowledge like a sinking star.'" Enos Montour did just that, and as I followed a trail of his life through the various books, articles, and letters he left behind, I kept coming back to Brown Tom as a window into his love of knowledge and his love of books and writing. (9)

"Following knowledge like a sinking star," seems like the noblest of goals, an ambition to which many of us could assign ourselves. But more than this, here is the book's sentiment—perpetual learning. A meditation that braids together the historical, the biblical, and the literary. A very welcome contribution, one that should be included in all university libraries and is of value and interest to scholars of literature, history, Indigenous studies, gender and women's studies, religious studies and theology, and Canadian studies.

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