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## **Gender For Sale: The Advertising and Marketing of the Edwardian Prize Book**

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### **Abstract**

This article uses the prize book catalogues of six major British religious and secular publishers of the Edwardian era to explore the advertisement and marketing of gender in the early twentieth century. In particular, it is concerned with how boys and girls were framed by advertisements and whether differences existed according to the beliefs of each publishing house. It also investigates attitudes towards books and their context of use, as well as their strategy of appeal and the values invoked by phrasing. It demonstrates that through their linguistic choices, stereotyping and ideologies, both secular and religious publishers played a key role in the development of a distinct boys' culture and girls' culture in Edwardian Britain. While girls were cast into submissive roles based on righteousness and respectability, boys were marketed as the superior sex who had a moral responsibility to advocate Britishness, imperialism and heroism. The analysis shows how mail-order catalogues acted as a precursor to modern mass media, suggesting continuity rather than change in the world of advertising.

### **Keywords**

Edwardian; prize book; advertising; gender; marketing

In the mid-nineteenth century, Great Britain developed a new way of thinking and living increasingly based upon the possession of material goods. It was the Great Exhibition of 1851 that marked a pivotal moment in this change, acting as a catalyst that crystallised the transformation of the advertising industry and contributed to the formation of a new commodity culture in Victorian England. This set a precedent for the consumer economy in which we live today. While at the beginning, advertising was used as the self-definition of one class rather than the subjugation of another, by the Edwardian era this focus had altered and advertising became the coordinating frame within which very different forms of social life were grouped.

This article is concerned with a particular aspect of advertising that has its roots in the late nineteenth century: the prize book (a book given as an award by an educational or religious institution to disseminate approved fiction to children). It will use prize book catalogues from six major prize book publishing houses of the early twentieth century (Religious Tract Society, S.W. Partridge & Co., Thomas Nelson & Sons, Robert Culley, Frederick Warne & Co., and Blackie & Sons) to explore how prize books were marketed to educators in Edwardian Britain. In particular, it will examine how boys and girls were framed by the advertisements and whether differences existed between secular and religious publishers. It will also investigate attitudes towards books and their context of the use, particularly in terms of their strategy of appeal and the values invoked by phrasing.

While advertising has been explored in great depth within a range of disciplines from media studies and cultural studies to linguistics and history, most studies tend to focus on modern advertising practices, as well as the history of advertising throughout the twentieth century. With the exception of Richards and Curtis, scant attention has been paid to the origins of advertising in the United Kingdom, namely the 1851 Great Exhibition. The

Victorian era was essential in moving commodity from its trivial role in society to becoming the centrepiece of everyday life. Richards (1) argues that it is the one subject of mass culture that has remained a focal point of all representation and the dead centre of the modern world. The use of advertising in prize books, in particular, has not yet caught the attention of scholars. Thus, this study wishes to highlight the benefits of investigating this domain and what it can reveal about gender ideologies in the Edwardian period. The Edwardian era has been chosen, as it is said to be the 'golden age' of prize books. Following the First World War, less available disposable income, increased suspicion of institutions and growing scepticism of morality sparked a decrease in the popularity of prize books and publishers stopped focusing on specifically marketing them.

### **Towards a New Commodity Culture**

Until the Great Exhibition in 1851, commodity had not occupied the centre stage in British public life. Organised as a celebration of modern industrial technology and design, the Great Exhibition was a five-month event that contained 100,000 exhibits and attracted six million people (Auerbach, 1-2). Horne and Whannel argue that its prime motive was for Britain "to make clear to the world its role as industrial leader" (86). The exhibition inaugurated a new way of seeing things that indelibly marked the cultural and commercial life of Victorian England and fashioned a mythology of consumerism. Advertisers learnt that the best way to sell people commodities was to sell them the ideology of Britain: from the national identity embodied in the monarchy to the worth and success of imperial expansion. Advertisers became specialists in peddling an imaginary portrayal of the real world. They learnt that it was by the very nature of the knowledge they imparted to consumers that they exerted their greatest control over them. These advertisers were members of the middle and upper-

classes and they produced dominant representations that made experience of consumption all-encompassing and inseparable from the knowledge of the self.

After the Great Exhibition, text became a graphic visual commodity in the selling of advertising. Although advertising had existed before, textually-oriented adverts began to 'pop up' on a far broader scale for a more diversified range of products. All domains of everyday life were targeted, from food and cigarettes to cleaning and beauty products. One of the most notable changes was the beginning of mass advertisements for patent medicines. Many quacks invented 'medicines' that were said to cure all sorts of illnesses and they were advertised openly. In a bid to keep down the printing costs of books, every available piece of space became taken up with an advert. Curtis (105) argues that in the book, advertising came to exemplify a conflation of word and visual image that reflected a like conflation of the markets for literature and the fine arts. As books became cheaper to produce, a 'vanity trade' developed in which readers cared more about a book's outer appearance than its interior content. Publishers immediately exploited this idea through the repeated promotion of the book as a beautiful object.

Around the same time in the late nineteenth century, the prize book emerged as one of the ways in which publishers were able to exploit cannily market potential by inculcating the values of possessing ornate books into young readers. Publishers began to produce detailed catalogues aimed specifically at prize books, treating them as a separate book genre. Turner (11) notes that there is often little to distinguish why a book is considered a prize book instead of a normal children's book. He argues that it was simply down to clever marketing and how publishers chose to promote them. For example, most catalogues listed rewards in series according to price and never advertised them as single titles. Little attention was paid to the quality of the text itself, which publishers saw as disposable.

Instead, they concentrated on making the book as aesthetically appealing as possible through its colourful cloth covers, gilt edging, colour blocking and bevelled boards (see fig. 1). Catalogues specifically targeted middle-class buyers who wanted to use the prize book to thrust their own ideas of moral education and social acceptability onto working-class children. Publishers sent the catalogues to schools and Sunday schools, encouraging headteachers and superintendents to purchase books in bulk directly from them. These institutions were attracted by the book's compatibility with their values rather than their actual literary merit or the interests of the children who would receive them. Advertising was used to play up this need. Through their catalogues, publishers placed the prize book into a vacuum as an object with cause. This meant that it appeared so natural that what the publisher was saying could only be considered to be a pure and simple fact. The books that were selected as prize books became not just a set of conventions for governing the representation of things, but a series of procedures that regulated the presentation of self in everyday life. Prize book advertising became segmented, so that different methods were used depending on whether the target of the product was a boy or a girl or whether the publisher was religious or secular. McKitterick (52) argues that the places chosen by publishers to advertise and the contexts in which these advertisements appear help to locate reading socially as well as geographically.

### **(Figure 1 – Edwardian Prize Books)**

The first publishers to produce prize book catalogues were religious organisations, such as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, the Religious Tract Society and the Sunday School Union (Entwistle, 85). These publishers were interested in the idea of imparting working-class children with models of behaviour to appropriate. By the end of the nineteenth century, commercial publishers also began to recognise the benefits of tapping into the prize book market. These publishers tended to sell their titles at more standard prices, leaving the cheapest books (one penny or less) to religious publishers. Another key incentive was the number of potential customers. The fact that Sunday schools had large numbers of pupils well into the Edwardian era, coupled with the fact that education became compulsory in 1891, meant that the market was rich and worth exploiting. The first commercial publishers to get involved were the large London houses, such as Thomas Nelson & Sons, Cassell and Ward, Lock & Co. However, as the practice of prize-giving grew in popularity, the provincial publishing houses also began to take part, likely swayed by the fact that many non-conformist children lived in industrial cities in North England and South Wales. Prize books were bought by faith, board and Sunday schools, who all catered for the working-classes. Although children in grammar and boarding schools also received books, these were not selected from the standard list of publishers' prize books and instead were selected based on a child's ability or interest in a topic (O' Hagan, 511).

By the end of the First World War, the specific marketing of prize books came to an end. Publishers began to rebrand series that were previously marketed as 'prize books' by

changing their name or simply dropping the tagline 'gift and reward books'. Turner (10) gives an example from Ward, Lock & Co.'s 1919 catalogue in which the Lily Series, previously with the strapline 'Gift Books, Prizes and Rewards', is rebranded the New Lily Series. Furthermore, as there is nothing within a physical copy of a prize book to state that it is one, publishers were able to rearrange their stock according to trends in popularity and produce new lists to give people what they wanted. This demonstrates that prize book selling was essentially a colossal marketing exercise by publishers contrived to gain extra income.

Entwistle (personal correspondence) states that determining prize books was decided at an annual committee made up of staff members, superintendents, secretaries and helped by librarians and ministers. Salmon describes those who chose literature as responsible for providing "the mental food for the future chiefs of the race... and for the future wives and mothers of the race" (193). Sunday school records indicate that many books were bought directly from denominational book rooms or local bookshops. It is quite likely that it was these centres which dealt directly with publishers. *The Sunday School Chronicle*, an interdenominational magazine for Sunday school teachers, also contains publisher lists, book reviews and recommendations for prizes for children, while parish newsletters also contain local adverts for booksellers, office and general stationery shops that specialise in prize books.

### **Prize Book Catalogues as a Historical Source of Gender**

In light of all of these issues, it follows that publishers' prize book catalogues have been chosen for analysis in this study. Additionally, as they come directly from the source, the link between the catalogues and the awarding institution is easy to explore. They act as a microcosm of the general concerns that existed about working-class children in Edwardian



society. Nonetheless, there are a range of other sources that are also useful when investigating this theme, such as popular journals of the time (e.g. *The Boys' Own Paper* and *The Girls' Own Paper*), as well as national newspapers and bookshop circulars.

Six prize book catalogues from six major prize book publishing houses of the early twentieth century will be used to investigate how advertising was used to market prize books to educators in Edwardian Britain. The chosen catalogues come from the Religious Tract Society (RTS), Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), Sunday School Union (SSU), Thomas Nelson & Sons (TN&S), S.W. Partridge & Co. (SWP & Co.), and Blackie & Sons (B&S). RTS, SPCK and SSU are all religious publishers and were the first to become involved in the specific marketing of prize books, while TN&S, SWP & Co. and B&S were the first secular publishers to focus on prize books, as well as the largest producers of prize books for board schools. Prize book catalogues were typically updated once a year and were roughly twenty-five pages in length. While they were often sent directly to schools and Sunday schools, they also appeared as pull-out sections at the back of each prize book. To ensure consistency, the 1906 catalogue for all six publishing houses has been chosen for this study. These catalogues were available in prize books from the Janet Powney Collection at Cardiff University's Special Collections and Archives (SCOLAR). The findings below will be presented primarily based on the catalogues of these six publishers. At times, they will also be supported by the catalogues of other prominent Edwardian prize book publishers, such as Frederick Warne & Co (FW & Co.) and Andrew Crombie (AC).

Despite their multimodal potential, all six catalogues make sole use of the written word and do not contain any pictures despite the fact that lithography had dramatically decreased the price of printing images by 1906. Although prize advertisements are a very useful way of exploring Edwardian mentalities in terms of religion and gender, it is not

possible to ascertain from them which books were actually bought by schools and Sunday schools. In order to find this out, surviving copies of prize books and traces of their prize stickers and inscriptions must be investigated. O' Hagan offers a small-scale study of this practice.

### **The Marketing of Prize Books**

Prize books were complex objects, as they oscillated between the role of commercialised commodities in publishers' catalogues and institutionalised items in awarding institutions. This led to a conflicting blend of goals and purposes, as the prize book simultaneously promoted a sense of belonging and allegiance, as well as a form of advertisement, which fused the importance of the institution with the success of the scholars (Reynolds, 190).

In all six prize book catalogues, books are advertised with a product-oriented approach that uses written text to explain the product and its utility. Leiss, Kline and Jhally (330) describe the cultural frame as "idolatry" in that the prize book advertisements are saturated with descriptive narratives that are anchored in the book itself and its image. All six publishers classify books according to price from highest to lowest, price being one of the major components of a product-oriented approach. While books can be as expensive as 7s in some secular catalogues (e.g. SWP & Co. and TN&S), for all publishers, the majority of books fall into the 1s or 2s category. In the case of the three religious publishing companies, no books are more expensive than 2s. These low prices were likely to be more attractive to the limited budgets of awarding institutions and ensured that RTS, SPCK and SSU were able to spread religious messages to as many children as possible. Typically, the lower the price of the book, the more elaborately decorated were its covers, while its internal paper and print quality were poor. Furthermore, denominational magazines of the time admitted that most prize books were "second-rate tales", "innocent rubbish in the shape of wishy-washy

stories” with a “namby pampy elements.” Thus, both secular and religious publisher catalogues gave priority to the aesthetic properties of these books over their content, emphasising the fact that they are “printed on art paper”, “tastefully bound” with “cover daintily printed” and “coloured frontispieces.” “Well-bulking” is a term that reoccurs throughout the catalogues of all six publishers, demonstrating a lack of interest in the book’s content in favour of being aesthetically pleasing. Leiss, Kline and Jhally (266) note aesthetic appeal as an effective persuasive technique in advertising that projects both the material and symbolic qualities of the object. In relation to prize books, the aesthetic appeal has a ritualistic purpose, their visibility from a distance emphasising the importance of their materiality. The phrase “excellently adapted for all prize purposes” is also frequently employed in all catalogues to suggest that a book is suitable for religious and secular institutions alike. It is quite surprising that religious publishers considered the external properties of the book to be more important than its internal properties, given their ultimate aim of presenting acceptable models of behaviour to working-class children. SPCK is perhaps the only exception to this rule, as its catalogue begins with a stark warning (see fig. 2) that educators must think very carefully about the content of the book that they select as a prize.

**(Figure 2 – SPCK Advertisement)**

The wider variation in prices amongst the three secular publishers reflects their aim of appealing to a broad spectrum of customers across the entire prize book market from the

humble non-denominational Sunday schools to the affluent grammar schools. TN&S, in particular, attempt to focus on particular segments of the prize book market through targeted advertising: 'Prize Temperance Tales' is one example of a series that they aimed specifically at temperance societies and ran yearly competitions with cash prizes of £100 and £50 to the best writer of temperance stories. Despite their secularity, publishers such as SWP & Co. and B&S also targeted the religious market with series linked to the Band of Hope and the Christian Service. SWP & Co. even state that free specimen copies of their books can be sent to any address in the world. This supports the view of Leiss, Kline and Jhally (72) that catalogues projected a vision of a consumption universe of products to satisfy all wants.

In both the religious and secular catalogues, most titles come from well-established prize book authors of the mid-Victorian era, which suggests that awarding institutions liked to select well-established material that consolidated the traditional societal roles of boys and girls (O' Hagan, 513). Entwistle (326) suggests that publishers only employed authors who promoted their beliefs. The continual rebranding of books by publishers (by adding them to a new series or slightly adapting their focus in advertisements) also meant that certain titles (such as Ballantyne's *Ungava*, Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth* and Yonge's *The Daisy Chain*) remained in print for up to seventy years after initial publication. Entwistle (1990:143) notes that this rebranding also involved revising or reformulating content to reflect changed societal views or the requirements of the publisher (i.e. *Manco, the Peruvian Chief* by W.H.G. Kingston moves from glorifying war to justifying it only in cases of self-defence).

The catalogues also indicate that both religious and secular publishers often published the same book in a variety of formats to suit the budgets of each awarding

institution. SWP & Co., for example, place *Westward Ho!* into the 1s *Everyone's Library* ("cheap form"), 2s *Library of Standard Works by Famous Authors* ("bound in handsome cloth boards") and the 2s 6d *Girls' Imperial Library* ("cloth boards with gilt top"), while RTS categorise *Pilgrim's Progress* in *Half Penny Story Books*, *Two Penny Books* and *The Girls' Own Bookshelf*. Additionally, most catalogues allowed customers to choose what colour boards they wanted on their book. The *Reward Book* series in the B&S catalogue are said to be available "in a choice of coloured boards." Again, this highlights the importance given to appearance over content.

### **The Marketing of Gender**

Bodmer argues that all books for children constitute a gesture somewhere "between a bribe and a demand" (136), as they represent a bridge between our perception of childhood as a world of play and the adult world of work. Although they establish a bond between two people, they also reinforce the power structure of old and young in our society. This is particularly relevant to prize books, as their presentation created a relationship of mutual responsibility and keyed the child into the value system of the awarding institution. In decoding the meaning of the prize, the child was inevitably also compelled to try and understand their culture and the standards of the community in which they found themselves. Being the physical representation of a child's good behaviour, the book acquired value from its giver and carried the responsibility that it be preserved (Bodmer, 139).

In her 2004 study on prize books, Entwistle grouped books for boys and girls into fourteen categories: feminine role, masculine role, character training, vices, family, social concern and philanthropy, self-improvement, relevant to lower classes, emigration, denominational bias, occupational life, nature, Russia and reviews with adverse criticism.

She argued that these themes demonstrated that prize books were used by teachers acting *in loco parentis* to convey moral messages as a form of protection against undesirable models in working-class children's lives and reading matter.

From all six catalogues, it is apparent that all book titles fall into similar categories to those identified by Entwistle. However, the way in which books are actually organised and marketed within the catalogues is according to gender. This suggests that publishers regarded their books as vehicles that organised audiences into clearly identifiable target groups rather than as products to be sold to potential readers. Thus, the audiences themselves became the products generated by the publishers' catalogues. This marketing of gender is carried out in various ways, both explicitly and implicitly. For both religious and secular publishing houses, the most apparent method was to use the name of the series to state openly whether the books were aimed at boys or girls (i.e. RTS's *Every Boy's Bookshelf*; SWP & Co.'s *British Girls' Library*). Both publishers also used male and female Christian names to indicate the target gender of books (i.e. RTS's *Little Dot* series and TN&S's *Little Hazel* series). On a subtler level, the target audience could be inferred by the use of a noun with specific gender-based "semantic prosody" (Sinclair, 70), such as RTS's *Snowdrop* series for girls and *Pioneer* series for boys, and Robert Culley's *Conquering* series for boys and *Golden Deeds* series for girls.

In addition to using the series name to indicate gender, both religious and secular publishers marked gender through the choice of book title. The name of the story's protagonist, 'masculine' or 'feminine' adjectives and traditional gendered activities were all used to signal the imagined boy or girl reader. The girls' titles in both religious and secular publishing catalogues typically adhere to one of the following formats:

1. Girl's name + noun - i.e. *Rhoda's Reward, Susan Pascoe's Temptation*
2. Family member + noun - i.e. *Grannie's Wardrobe, Uncle Henry's Present*
3. 'Female' activities - i.e. *Story of a Needle, Sowing and Sewing*
4. Plight of working-class child – i.e. *The Runaway, Story of a Short Life*

Although boys' titles generally follow a similar format, the types of words used are very different:

1. Boy's name + noun – i.e. *John's Adventures, Will's Voyages*
2. Material verb + action – i.e. *Lost in the Backwoods, Winning his Spurs*
3. 'Boy' activities – i.e. *The Lost Trail, Follow the Leader, Pirates Creak*
4. The X of X – i.e. *The Fortunes of Hassan, The Treasure of the Incas*

The lists above show that stereotyped views of boys and girls were often employed in book advertisement. As Brierley (150) notes, stereotyping is a common advertising technique used as a convenient way of understanding a particular concept. Although both boys' and girls' books were marketed in prize book catalogues with a name + noun, the type of noun varied considerably according to gender. Girls' names are typically followed by a noun referring to moral behaviour (i.e. reward, temptation, diligence), while the nouns that follow boys' names are generally related to adventure and travel. Another gender difference lies in the fact that girls' books often centre around a close social circle and everyday incidents that involve family members (i.e. Grannie, Uncle Henry, Grandma Crosby), while this type of book title is notably absent from the boys' list. This may suggest that advertising was used to encourage boys to move beyond their local neighbourhood, while girls were advised to stay within this close-knit community. Any time that a girl does move into a wider social circle, it was for the purposes of village nursing, founding of hospitals and orphanages, or for missionary ardour (Entwistle, 135). This idea is further supported by the difference in

'boy' and 'girl' activities advocated in prize book titles: the female actions are related to the domestic setting, whereas the male actions are linked to the great outdoors and physical activity. Furthermore, the female activities are generally passive and sedentary, whereas the male activities are active and draw upon a range of action verbs (i.e. lose, win, run). These tendencies were likely informed by views expressed by Coventry Patmore in *Angel in the House* and John Ruskin in *Of Queen's Gardens* on the roles of men and women:

The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever was is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle, — and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision (...) By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. (Ruskin, 68)

Another type of book title that is exclusive to girls is the plight of the working-class. These titles draw attention to the comeuppances of morally lacking children who do not change their ways. Rather than focus on the problems of the working-class, boys' titles, on the other hand, are more concerned with the global picture, reflected in the 'X of X' title format that focuses primarily on historical events and tribes. Both religious and secular publishers also mark gender through the use of a dash or line after the book title with a brief description of the story — i.e. *an adventure, a self-sacrifice*. These key words act as deliberate implicit markers to institutions of which books were acceptable for which gender.

While the findings above show that both religious and secular publishers adopted similar advertising techniques, the RTS catalogue does show one major difference in its marketing approach: advertisements for boys' books contain extensive details of the plot,



while advertisements for girls' books show recommendations and quotes from newspapers or organisations about their acceptability (see fig. 3). This supports Flint's (13) view that books were not only frequently directed towards notional female readers, but were also classified by both publishers and critics within a context of what women should and should not be reading. In the Edwardian era, it was generally believed that certain texts were morally debilitating and would corrupt a female's innocent mind, therefore diminishing her value as a woman. Thus, publishers used prize book catalogues to promote what 'good' girls were supposed to read. Including recommendations from reputable sources would signal approval of the social values and standards of behaviour and innocence appropriate for young women, and would have held considerable weight in the decision of awarding institutions over whether to purchase a book or not. In the RTS catalogue, such quotes come from the *School Guardian* (the mouthpiece for the National Society for Promoting Religious Education), *The Life of Faith* (a religious journal) and *The Publisher's Circular* (a trade journal for the publishing industry). Although the RTS boys' books focus on plot over recommendations, they also have a strong focus on the moral appropriacy of the book ("a clean, healthy tale") as well as an assumption of what boys like ("of the sort that British lads like"). When the spotlight is on the plot, great attention is paid to chivalry, bravery and adventure ("captured by a pagan tribe who intend to burn them"; "by real knightly deeds"). Thus, boys are constructed within a frame that balances manliness with gentlemanliness.

**(Figure 3 - Marketing Gender in Prize Book Advertisements)**

The prize catalogue of RTS also shows a considerable bias towards girls in its number of series. Of the thirteen different series of books that it advertises, three are boy-aimed (*Every Boy's Bookshelf; Advance; Pioneer*), while the other ten are focused on girls (including *Young Girls' Library; Snowdrop; Favourite Gift*). This bias in their marketing strategy clearly highlights RTS's concern with guiding girls and ensuring that they received appropriate direction, as opposed to boys who were freer to make their own choices. Similar observations can be made in the SSU and SPCK catalogues.

In contrast, the secular publishing catalogues were generally more focused on boys than girls, with a heavy preference for adventure novels. The B&S catalogue dedicated eight pages to the books of G.A. Henty and three to Captain Brereton. Entwistle (145) describes Henty as an appropriate prize book choice, as his books married manliness with military history, and confined ideas on race and gender to a simple 'them and us' philosophy. Most significantly, Henty was aware of a social limit above which his protagonists could not climb (Dunae, 134). In the secular prize catalogues, girls were given slighter more freedom in their construction of self. For example, the SWP & Co. series *Girls' Imperial Library* is advertised as being "written to suit the tastes of all classes of reader, from the stimulating story of school life to the romance which attracts the elder girl." This description recognises that girls are able to move outside of their religious box and think about other things, such as school and romance. Unlike the religious publishers, some secular publishers also had series that were deemed appropriate for both boys and girls. SWP & Co.'s *Library of Standard*

*Works by Famous Authors*, for example, contained approved classics, such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and *Pilgrim's Progress*, all of which are quasi-religious, instructional and emphasise reading within their plots.

Another difference between religious and secular publishers is that secular publishers often featured non-fiction books in their catalogues. SWP & Co.'s *Great Deeds* series, for example, is dedicated to biographies of explorers and heroic men, such as David Livingstone, General Gordon and Warren Hastings. Its girls' equivalents with the titles *Popular Missionary Biographies* and *Onwards Temperance* show considerably more bias. As the names suggest, the former looked at the lives of noble women, such as Florence Nightingale, Lady Henry Somerset and Sister Dora, whereas the latter was specifically aimed at true tales of the perils of alcohol. In her *What Books to Lend and What to Give*, Yonge states that the best prize book biographies were those that concerned women who exhibited "purity of purpose" and "God-fearing zeal" (6). The FW & Co. catalogue contains the *Handy Information* series, which focuses on books on manners and rules of good society, the management of servants and society small talk, which suggests a slightly different target audience of aspiring working-class or lower-middle class recipients. While these books would have been aimed at religious institutions, other non-fiction series were specifically aimed at board schools. The FW & Co. catalogue, for example, focuses on such varied themes as heraldry, practical gardening and whist, while SWP & Co.'s *World's Wonders* (a series on scientific advancement) and *British Boys Library/British Girls Library* (true tales of 'Britishness') foregrounded important secular values of the early twentieth century.

## **Selling Girlhood**

Mitchell has identified the years 1880-1915 as a key period in the development of a distinctive girls' culture. She suggests that 'girl' was used in advertising inclusively to describe the "workgirl, servant girl, factory girl, college girl or girl graduate, shop-girl, bachelor girl, girl journalist, and office girl" (25). This sense of inclusivity can be noted particularly in prize book catalogues, which make frequent generalisations about the types of books that girls will enjoy. A TN&S advertisement for *Stepping Heavenward*, for example, states that "every girl should read this remarkably truthful and fascinating tale", while SSU assumes that *Eveline's Keynote* is "a book that should be placed in the hands of all girls." This choice of words promoted community amongst potential readers as a key signifier of girlhood and helped construct a particular view of girlhood that favoured the awarding institutions' own beliefs. Avery (110) believes that the influence of prize books was so strong that they became equated with law and order.

In both the religious and secular prize book catalogues, religious fiction is the predominant genre of book aimed at girls. These books encouraged girls to uphold the traditional female role that had been pre-established for them in society, live a life of sacrifice and obedience, and be "true English girls". Entwistle (14) notes that if a culture approves of and extol a particular value, such as 'piousness', a publisher is more likely to choose a book with a hero that possesses such characteristics. While no major differences are apparent in terms of marketing techniques for religious fiction between religious and secular publishers, interesting findings can be noted from the catalogues on how religious publishers adjusted the notion of femininity according to the beliefs of the target awarding institution. Avery (81) explains that SPCK and RTS were aimed at Anglican institutions, and as such, prize books were used to suggest that moving out of one's social station was against God's will. This belief is reflected in the choice of books in RTS advertisements,

which focus on a paternalistic parish in which females are seen as a flock of devoted helpers at the bottom of the hierarchy (*Stepping Heavenward, Melissa's Victory*). This image is further conveyed through explicit value-laden words used in the book descriptions ("this story is intended to enforce on the mind of youthful girls the full meaning of the scripture; "the aim of this tale is to inculcate the duty of cultivating and cheerful and contented spirit"). RTS and SPCK also used 'the power of suggestion' in their advertisements to encourage working-class girls to remain in their social station. For example, an advert for *Lily Gordon, the Young Housekeeper* states that "this volume supplies a great want felt by young ladies of first leaving schools," which takes as given that girls reading this book are destined to become housekeepers. Entwistle (125) argues that board schools, in particular, were expected to present domestic service as the most fitting and natural occupation for working-class girls. Publishers such as Andrew Crombie and Epworth Press, on the other hand, were aimed at evangelical institutions, and used their prize catalogues to promote universal messages of women helping the urban poor rather than their lowliness and the need to stay in their place (Avery,81). Books by Silas Hocking, a Methodist preacher, and Pansy, an American Presbyterian, heavily dominate the pages of their catalogues. This is supported by Entwistle (239) who found in her dataset that Hocking and Pansy were only awarded to non-denominational Sunday schools. SSU, in particular, also uses anti-Catholic rhetoric in its advertisements to warn girls of straying from the path of good. Its description for *Caught in the Toils* states "A French convent school attempts to pervert two English Protestant girls" but that they "show their faith and trust in their heavenly Father to overcome these trials and difficulties." This issue reoccurs throughout literature at the time: Chancellor's study of Victorian and Edwardian history books found a recurrence of Catholics defined as identifying "with the forces of social and political reaction, moral decadence and

foreign treachery (90). This same device is not so explicit in advertisements for boys' books. Perhaps as the 'weaker' sex, girls were deemed more likely to switch religious allegiances.

In addition to religious fiction, RTS and SPCK promoted evangelical romances in their catalogues as a counter-attraction to the 'harmful' influence of secular romances. Bratton (87) asserts that these books were framed to portray the heroines as the victims of male dominance instead of fulfilling the conventional role of duty. The word 'self-restraint' reoccurs frequently in all advertisements for evangelical romances. Entwistle (149) suggests that self-restraint for girls was expressed through refinement, which was interpreted by sensitivity, decorum, Christian bearing and the rejection of evil and vulgarity. The promotion of these novels offered limited models to girls: the choice between marriage and spinsterhood, the former advertised as the 'natural' choice and the latter associated with a life of dedication to the church so as to avoid the 'temptation' of men. In direct opposition to this notion of self-restraint, secular publishers' catalogues, such as TN&S and SWP & Co., advertised the books of L.T. Meade, who Entwistle (155) argues challenged refinement through her use of wild, wilful and frivolous girl protagonists. Although Meade was seen as a female equivalent of Henty, she was not met with the same favour as Henty by religious publishers, as she promoted an unfavourable idea of girlhood. Throughout her novels, the girl protagonists are described as having a "daring and wild manner" and being "very outspoken and very fierce" and "naughty and rebellious."

### **Selling Boyhood**

The promotion of a distinct 'boys' culture' was also a central theme of the early twentieth century. Advertising was a key way in which this culture was promoted through its depictions of cultural expectations of masculinity. Boyd (68-72) notes that the

characteristics of manliness were always considered in binary oppositions – imperialism vs. isolationism, masculinity vs. femininity and heroism vs. cowardice. Furthermore, she argues that the ideal of what it is to be male changed remarkably from the Victorian to the Edwardian period: while the Victorian man was upper-class, skilful in physically challenging pursuits and possessed an arrogant belief in his own superiority, the Edwardian man was lower-class and put the needs of his community before himself, believing in patriotism, comradeship and love of homeland. The Sunday School Union call this the promotion of “knights of the twentieth century” (653). These beliefs are reflected in the prize books that are marketed specifically for boys: while religious fiction is also aimed at boys, adventure fiction is the primary genre of choice. As the six prize book catalogues demonstrate, one word remains constant throughout both religious and secular advertisements: ‘honour’. Avery (110) argues that in Edwardian Britain, honour was related more to Englishness than religion. Prize book catalogues used book titles and book descriptions to promote the idea that a proper Englishman followed a specific code of behaviour based on nobility of soul and respectability – “the hero of this story is an Etonian who is possessed of a moral nature remarkable for its strength and power” (*Follow the Right* by G.E. Wyatt). Furthermore, they advocated that a man was only assigned worth and stature based on the harmony of his actions within the moral code of society – “the aim of this book is to show how character is formed, faults cured and virtues attained by God’s discipline of daily life”.

‘Pluck’ is another word that commonly reoccurs in both religious and secular prize advertisements for boys. ‘Pluck’ has a similar meaning to the modern ‘guts’ and is described by Avery (151) as a new version of manliness that was promoted at the end of the nineteenth century. ‘Pluck’ is frequently linked to adventure novels, which Butts (151) argues used agencies of plot, such as exotic settings and frenzied action, to hide the morals

of conformity to a Christian boyhood. This made the books “an acceptable compromise” (Entwistle, 89) for awarding institutions and provided ‘healthy’ boy literature to counteract the circulation of ‘morally unsuitable’ books. In contrast, the religious prize book advertisements that are directed at boys focus on the importance of soberness in maintaining physical, mental and moral health. As drinking was assumed to be a male activity, books on temperance were particularly aimed at a male audience. The SSU catalogue, for example, placed great importance on the elevation of home life over the public house (*Danesbury House, Lionel Franklin’s Victory, Owen’s Hobby*). In addition to temperance, religious catalogues also focus on the criticism of other vices in the form of smoking, gambling, pleasure-seeking and love of money. RTS, SSU and SSPK also place great attention on the importance of chastity and the concept of chivalry as a means of self-control. These issues were highlighted, as educators feared a supposedly causal link between boys’ crimes and reading matter than influenced them. Only in boys’ prize book advertisements are the importance of saving money and owning a house highlighted. Entwistle (273) suggests that this is due to the traditional view of ‘man as economic provider’ and shows definite connections to middle-class values.

Just as prize book advertising was used to encourage girls towards domestic service, it dissuaded boys from accepting jobs as clerks – an occupation of the emerging lower-middle classes. *Clerk or Carpenter* states that clerks are “ten-a-penny on stools, with nothing to do, waiting for jobs.” This aimed to deflect working-class boys away from white-collar aspirations, and to remain in manual occupations. It argued that working-class boys would encounter financial problems in an attempt to keep up appearances with office swells.

## **Conclusion**



This article has outlined the benefits of using publishers' prize book catalogues as primary resources in historical research. It has demonstrated how they can be used as multi-layered documents to explore religious and secular advertising practices and to provide an insight into how gender identity was constructed in early twentieth century advertisements. In all six publishing catalogues, primary attention is given to price and the aesthetic appeal of the book, most books are religious in nature and most titles come from well-established Victorian authors. Furthermore, catalogues use the names of book series and book titles to segment books into stereotypical gender-specific categories. Religious publishers, in particular, show a bias towards the moral guidance of girls through their use of quotes from reputable sources, promotion of self-restraint and heavy preference for girls' book series, while secular publishers concentrate on boys and the concepts of Englishness, honour and imperialism. These advertising techniques helped to consolidate the idea of a distinct boys' culture and girls' culture that was advocated at the beginning of the twentieth century. Furthermore, they represent a continuation of nineteenth century middle-class philosophy towards working-class children.

In the Edwardian era, mail-order catalogues were a precursor of modern mass media. They acted as a "unified and ordered mediation" (Leiss, Kline and Jhally, 79) between people and their social environment. Prize book catalogues, specifically, used a product-oriented and text-based approach based on persuasive language, claims, stereotyping, style, appeal and values to transmit an ideology that perpetuated traditional gender roles and presented a world view that was synchronous with that of the target awarding institution. Through an astute blend of all of these factors, publishing houses were able to target specific educators and encourage them to invest in their books as opposed to others available on the market.

The years leading up to the First World War were the last of the prize book movement. Although church attendance did temporarily increase after 1918, the vast devastation and bloodshed of the war meant that people no longer had the stomach to be told what to read. This collapse in hierarchy and burgeoning need for escapism led children and adults alike to read for pleasure rather than to stimulate them in their Christian lives. As such, the prize book catalogue no longer had a place in post-Edwardian society. Instead, publishers remarketed catalogues to reflect new societal themes, such as the breakdown of social norms and disillusionment with the modern world. Using a contemporary perspective to explore the final years of the prize book catalogue embeds it with an additional layer of communicative event, imbuing it with an emotional immediacy that suggests not change but continuity in the world of advertising.

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## **Appendix 1**

The table below shows a list of prices from 1906 compared to their modern-day equivalent.

Adapted from [www.measuringworth.com](http://www.measuringworth.com)

<b>Price in s.d.</b>	<b>Price in p</b>	<b>Modern Day Equivalent</b>
3d	1¼ p	£1.27
4d	1½p	£1.66
6d	2½ p	£2.44
9d	3¾ p	£3.71
1s	5p	£4.88
1s 6d	7½p	£7.81
2s	10p	£9.76
2s 6d	12½p	£12.69
3s	15p	£14.64
3s 6d	17½p	£17.56
4s	20p	£19.52
5s	25p	£24.39
6s	30p	£29.27