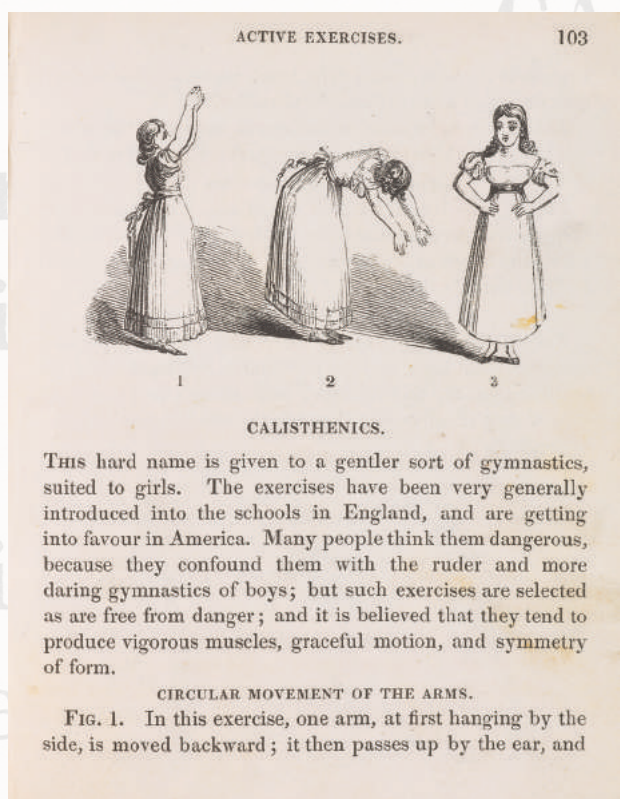


# Good Girls & Bad Boys

Fairy tales have always been adapted to suit the culture and customs of the teller. Heroines of older fairy tales became more passive, less intelligent, and more reliant on a hero to rescue them. Newer children's stories also reinforced a rigid gender divide, where tomboyish girls or cowardly boys bring misfortune upon themselves.

This reflected the prevailing opinion that women were naturally inferior to men. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel *Emile, or On Education* (1762) reasserted that women only needed a basic domestic education because they were "made specially to please man".



Lydia Child, *The girl's own book*  
(London, 1835)

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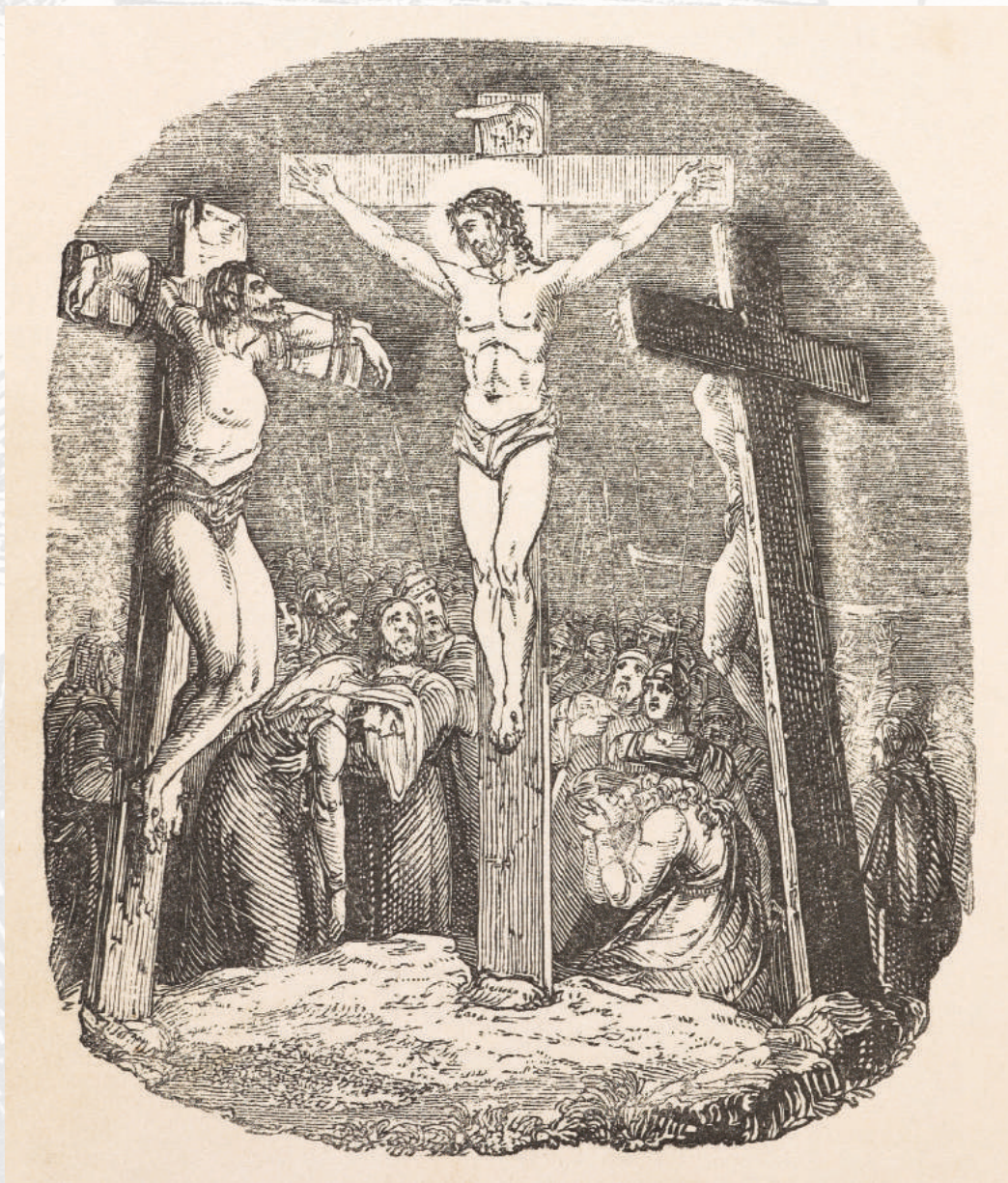
The boys' own book includes physical sports like ball games, swimming and fencing, whereas Child anticipated fears that her recommended exercises may make girls 'rude and disorderly', and reassured guardians that they were not as vigorous as those for boys.



# Religion

In an era when child mortality was high, Heaven and Hell accepted as literal places, and children believed to be inherently sinful, books with a strong religious message were extremely common. Whilst many focussed on the gentler aspects of faith and the love of God, some popular and enduring books were full of fire and brimstone intended to scare salvation into children. Children's author Mary Martha Sherwood believed that 'all children are by nature evil'. James Janeway reminded parents that their children "are not

too little to die...not too little to go to hell". Fortunately, there were plenty of books worried parents could buy to help save their children's souls.



Favell Lee Mortimer, *Peep of Day: A series of the earliest religious instruction the infant mind is capable of receiving* (London, 1844)  
Briggs Collection LT210.BS/  
M6 barcode 6001924828





# Moral, Moral on the Page

The first children's stories designed to teach ethical lessons, social conduct and morality were published from the mid-1700s, expanding from the purely factual textbooks or conduct guides. This was the birth of the moral tale as a separate genre. There was a growing realisation that instruction through entertainment was more effective, and although some of these books seem dry to modern readers, contemporary children responded positively.

The divide between fairy tale/fantasy and moral tales is less sharp than has been suggested. For example many moral tales feature talking animals, the choice of which was symbolic, and various Victorian authors amended fairy tales to suit the era's societal mores.

Some adopted so relentlessly heavy-handed an approach that it is almost a merciful certainty they would be forgotten, but more skilful authors like Maria Edgeworth crafted engaging, complex tales. Most notable morality tale authors were women. Men published them too, but the fact that the genre is strongly associated with women may partially account for its low status.





# Race

Representations of race and Empire in children's literature range from problematic to offensive. Empire is portrayed as a positive. This was not unusual in the context of British Imperialism of the time, but to a modern reader even the most racially sensitive books are infused with stereotypes. Even minor differences between European nations were considered weaknesses, especially those not with a majority Protestant population.

Slavery was a recurring theme from the eighteenth century, reflecting the increasing political debates. Pro-slavery tales emphasised paternalistic racism whereas anti-slavery stories focussed on the cruelties inflicted on slaves.



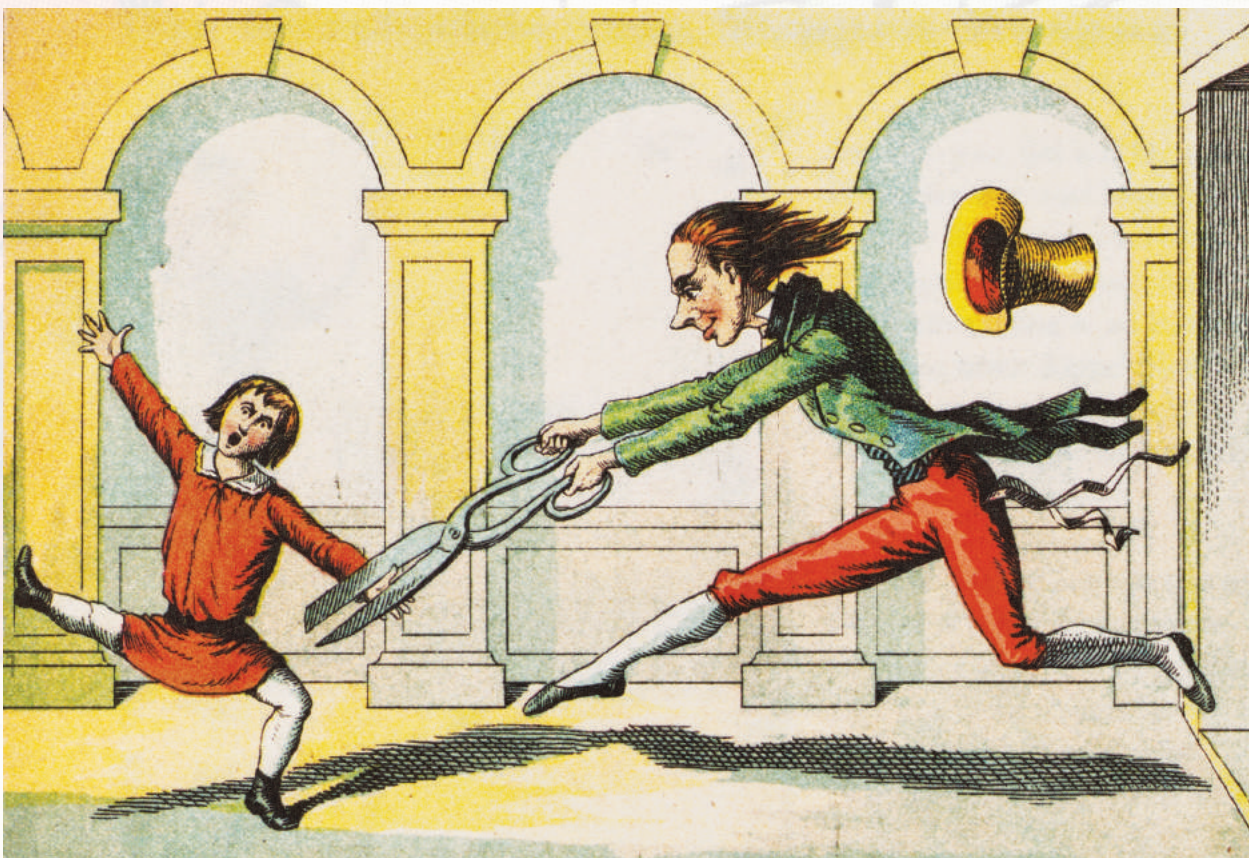
Image of colonial soldiers from  
W T Stead, *The Jubilee story book of things seen and not seen in Jubilee week* (London, 1897)

Briggs Collection Pamphlet PZ7.S7 barcode  
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# Words of Warning

Cautionary tales are short stories, often told in verse, warning of the perils of bad behaviour or unwise actions. Traditional fairy tales like Bluebeard or Little Red Riding Hood can be considered cautionary tales, but as children's literature developed, it became a separate genre. Like urban legends, their folklore counterpart, they follow a set structure and have a complete lack of subtlety: a warning is given and ignored, dire consequences result. There are improving verses praising middle class values and good, honest and obedient behaviours, which usually result in gifts of toys or sins forgiven without punishment. Children, however, tended to prefer the gruesome tales and these are the ones remembered most vividly, which is exactly what the authors intended.



Heinrich Hoffman,  
'Die Geschichte vom  
Daumenlutscher',  
*Struwwelpeter*  
(Augsburg, 1999)  
Private collection





# For richer for poorer

Fairy tales were portrayed as peasant lore (despite Perrault's and Grimms' sources having decidedly aristocratic backgrounds) which was part of their appeal to early collectors. From the eighteenth century new children's literature was aimed at the emerging middle class. Values of honesty, faith and hard work were ascribed to the middle class as a reason for their comfortable life. Stories were set in familiar middle class environments to maximise the child's empathy with the situations. The poor were to be pitied and charity encouraged, but were also held partially responsible for their poverty.

This divide was deliberate: bestselling author Sarah Trimmer made great efforts to differentiate her work from that intended for the working class. Publishers did not pursue the working class, who lacked the disposable income to build up a library even if they were literate. If they purchased reading materials at all, it was likely to be cheap chapbooks of fairy tales, folklore, and the more graphic true crimes.

