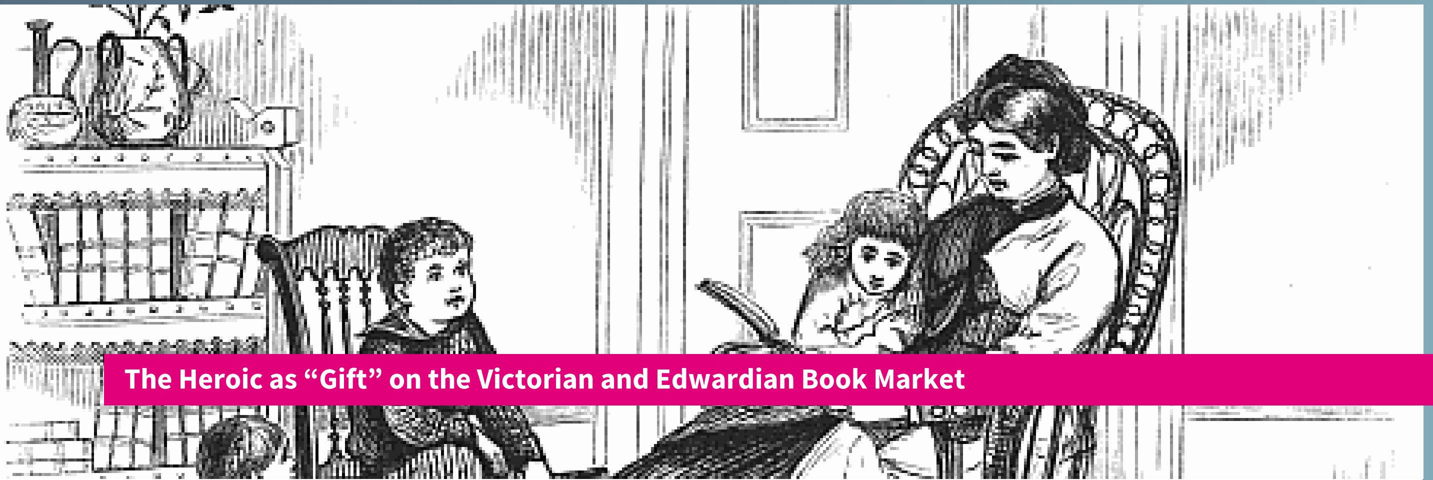

The Heroic as 'Gift' on the Victorian and Edwardian Book Market

A Commented Bibliography

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Introductory essay by Barbara Korte

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Introduction

Barbara Korte

This is the introduction to a text database with prefaces to Victorian and Edwardian gift books with a heroic theme.

The database can be accessed via https://www.sfb948.uni-freiburg.de/heroic-as-gift.

A concern with the heroic has been identified as a defining trait of Victorian culture, but its manifestations have been studied neither in detail nor systematically. As far as print culture is concerned, the focus of research has been on literature, and specifically literature in the more high-cultural and canonised corner of the literary field. With the exception of imperial adventure novels, popular literature has rarely been discussed. Even less attention has been paid to the wider field of the popular print market, although the heroic had a particularly prominent place in this field of cultural production and reached great numbers of readers in all parts of Victorian society. This collection is dedicated to a popular book genre that had a special affinity to the heroic. "Gift books" – also referred to as "reward books", "prize books" or "presentation books" – were produced in great numbers from early Victorian times to the First World War, and quite frequently as part of an entire series.[1] They were an important medium for disseminating ideas about the heroic in Victorian society, and they perpetuated Victorian concepts of the heroic into the twentieth century. The "hero books" compiled here are collections of narratives about heroes and heroic deeds. Most of them were produced as gift books in the narrow sense: books that were meant to be given as presents, usually to young readers. But hero books very similar to those targeted at children – in terms of content but also material appearance (binding, cover and inside illustrations) and marketing – were also produced for adult readers. And while these readers might not have received them as actual presents or rewards,

[1] The collection is a spin-off of the research project: "The Heroic in British Periodicals between 1850 and 1900: Competing Semantics and Modes of Presentation, <http://www.sfb948.uni-freiburg.de/projekte-en/pbc/tpc4/c4/page=1>. Periodicals had many intersections with the contemporary book market, not only in terms of ownership and publishing. Gift books were advertised and reviewed in periodicals, and they were sometimes compiled from material originally published in magazines.

they were meant to take them as cultural gifts in the sense outlined in section 2 below.

1. Victorians and the Exemplary Heroic

Literary and cultural studies have asserted the importance of the heroic for the formation of identities and as a source of cultural meaning. It has been claimed that "[t]he very image of man is bound up with that of the hero" and that the hero is "the poetic projection of man as he unavoidably faces the meaning or lack of meaning of life" (Brombert, 12). Heroism is considered "a vital aspect of human behaviour and human endeavour", and the idea of the hero has been found to be "at the centre of our cultural thinking" (Calder, ix). While such statements suggest a universal significance of the heroic, each society and culture produces its own inflections of heroic concepts and esteems certain types of heroes and heroic qualities more than others. Thomas Carlyle regretted in his lectures on Heroes and Hero Worship (1840; publ. 1841) that "in these days Hero-worship, the thing I call Hero-worship, professes to have gone out, and finally ceased" (Carlyle, 2). This is one of the most frequently cited opinions about the state of the Victorian heroic imagination, and while it expresses nostalgia and points to a certain scepticism towards the heroic, most Victorians would still have found the idea of the hero to be at the centre of their cultural thinking.

Walter F. Houghton (1957) counts the heroic among the defining features of the Victorian frame of mind and notes that the Victorians had "all the prerequisites for hero worship [...] the enthusiastic temper, the conception of the superior being, the revival of Homeric mythology and medieval ballad, the identification of great art with the grand style, the popularity of Scott and Byron, and the living presence of Napoleonic soldiers and sailors." (310) These prerequisites could thrive because the heroic appeared to respond to "some of the deepest needs and problems of the age" (ibid.). As Houghton's chapter on "Hero Worship" (305–340) elaborates, heroic figures – whether real, mythical or fictional – seemed to offer ersatz belief and moral inspiration in times of religious doubt, orientation in an age of rapid transformation and an antidote to the perception that society was increasingly orientated towards "mediocrity" and the mass. It is not surprising, therefore, that Victorian culture honoured heroism in both military and civil forms (cf. Smith and Price) and acknowledged heroes in all material, performative and textual media of

the time: paintings and monuments, the theatre, public lectures and, of course, the many products of the Victorian print market.

And yet Victorian ideas of the heroic were not unanimous. Many historians of Victorian culture have adopted a Carlylean "post-heroic" tone and diagnosed an attitude towards the heroic that was sceptical or at best ambivalent. George Levine writes that "heroism in these good old days had about it a very modern quality of desperation", and that "[e]ven the most overtly heroic literature of the Victorians tends to produce, at best, problematic heroes" (48, 50). Ian Ousby, who discusses Carlyle and Thackeray, finds that the Victorians abandoned "much of the traditional concept of heroism", if not "in a spirit of violent rebellion": "They do not set out to destroy the old ideals with the confidence of men who have a ready-made alternative in their pockets. Rather, they begin from the realization that social and cultural changes are estranging them from an ideal that served their forefathers long and faithfully, and they present their solutions to the dilemma as acts of repair or adaptation. As they see it, they are not rejecting heroism but redefining it; instead of dropping the word from their vocabulary, they use it with an almost obsessive frequency that no other age in English culture has ever come close to rivalling. They make heroism over to their own needs, with mixed feelings of complacency and disappointment" (152f.).

How the heroic might be made over to suit new social realities was pointed out by Samuel Smiles. In Self-Help: With Illustrations of Character, Conduct, and Perseverance (1859, expanded 1866) and in his many biographies of engineers and men of business, Smiles offered a democratic interpretation of the heroic concept for an increasingly egalitarian society. The great men he called "heroes" were individuals who embodied Victorian middle-class values and virtues such as industry, a sense of duty, piety, endurance and perseverance, and they could come from all ranks of society: "Rising above the heads of the mass, there were always to be found a series of individuals distinguished beyond others, who commanded the public homage. [...] Though only the generals' names may be remembered in the history of any great campaign, it has been in a great measure through the individual valour and heroism of the privates that victories have been won. And life, too, is 'a soldiers' battle', – men in the ranks having in all times been amongst the greatest of workers. Many are the lives of men unwritten, which have nevertheless as powerfully influenced civilization and progress as the more fortunate Great whose names are recorded in biography. Even the humblest person, who sets before his fellows an example of industry, sobriety, and upright

honesty of purpose in life, has a present as well as a future influence upon the well-being of his country; for his life and character pass unconsciously into the lives of others, and propagate good example for all time to come" (Smiles, 20).

Carlyle saw heroes as a "natural elite of humanity" that was "there to be worshipped and followed rather than to be emulated" (Cubitt/Warren, 17). Smiles promoted heroes as role models that could be admired and imitated. His heroes rose above the head of the mass, but they were still close and similar to their fellow-men and so could be emulated by them, quite in the sense in which Cubitt and Warren understand exemplary heroes: "Exemplarity involves a perception not just of excellence, but also of relevance – and thus, in a sense, of similarity. Those whom we take as exemplars may be better than we are, but not than we might in principle become – not better in some absolute way that implies a difference of kind, but better relative to some common standard against which we hope to improve." (11) And it is this concept of exemplary heroism that significantly defines the heroic in Victorian and Edwardian gift books.

2. The Book as Gift

Gift books were a clearly defined sector of the Victorian and Edwardian juvenile book markets.[2] They were produced across the entire price range and available in cheap (but sturdy) as well as expensive bindings.[3] They were affordable to libraries of "improving" institutions, and less affluent families could buy them at least on special occasions. They were advertised by their publishers as books suitable to be given as presents on special occasions such as Christmas,[4] as rewards in school and Sunday school, or as prizes at competitions. Such advertisements have been preserved in periodicals and at the end of many books, for instance those deposited in the British Library (while they are often deleted from digitised editions). For example, the advertisement section in Hazard and Heroism (1904) [1.2.30] includes a comprehensive list under the heading "Chambers's Books Suitable for Prizes and Presentations". Plates and personal inscriptions in many

[2] On the development of this book genre, see Faxon (1973 [1912]).
[3] 1s6d was the price for many books in the lower segment during the nineteenth century.
[4] Several items in the collection refer explicitly to Christmas, either in the dating of their prefaces or in frame stories (e.g., Keary, Heroes of Asgard, no. 1.1.2).

surviving books prove that they were indeed awarded as gifts.[5] While novels, annual editions of magazines or poetry anthologies were also given as presents or rewards, the typical gift book was the collection of short narratives either newly written or compiled from other sources.

Gift books, and most of the "hero books" compiled in this collection, were typically addressed to young readers. But the same type of collection was offered to adult readers deemed in special educational and inspirational need, notably readers from the working classes. In some cases young and older readerships overlapped. The preface to Charlotte Yonge's Book of Golden Deeds (1864) [1.2.7] refers to boys as the book's main intended audience but expresses the hope that its stories might also "be found useful for short readings to the intelligent, though uneducated classes".

The "hero books" in this collection were meant to provide pleasure (even cheap ones often offered the extra visual pleasure of illustrations), but even the most entertaining ones were published with educational or inspirational intent: They aimed to initiate their readers into, or assure them of, dominant value systems and ideals of their society. However, in contrast to school readers (some of which also had an explicit heroic theme[6]), gift books were meant to be read privately in the domestic setting (to which some frame narratives also explicitly refer; see nos. 1.2.2 and 1.1.2). In contrast to school books and more ephemeral products of the print market, they were meant to stay on their readers' shelves as reservoirs or treasuries to which they might later wish to return.[7] They belong in the category which Charlotte Mary Yonge, in What Books to Lend and What to Give (1887), recommends as "improving books" that are "specially suited for prizes, as they will be read again in after life" (88).

Considering the special social and cultural value which these books were meant to have, the term "gift book" seems very appropriate if one understands "gift" not as a mere present but in the more ritualistic sense which the anthropologist Marcel Mauss described for "archaic societies" in his essay "The Gift" (originally

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[5] See the British Library catalogue's note for John G. Edgar's The Heroes of England on an 1887 edition of the book: Ownership: Prize book presented to John H. C. Evelyn for industry and good conduct. Castlemount School, Dover. July 31, 1889.

[6] See, for example, "The Heroic Readers", published by Jarrold and Son (1897); they printed stories to be read, and poems to be learnt by heart and recited, in class.

[7] It is for this reason that most hero books, while sometimes including recent examples of heroic behaviour, are not topical in the narrow sense. Books that responded immediately to recent events, such as George Ryan's Our Heroes of the Crimea: Being Biographical Sketches of our Military Officers, from the General Commanding-in-Chief to the Subaltern (London: Routledge & Co., 1855), seem to be an exception rather than the rule.

published in 1925). Victorian gift books were presented with an expectation of reciprocity: Their readers were called upon not only to enjoy them, but to return the "gift" by absorbing the values they transported and following them in their day-to-day lives. That many gift books were dedicated to the heroic, and that many hero books were published as gift books, is therefore not surprising. As Cubitt and Warren write, heroes reflect "the values and ideologies of the societies in which they are produced", and heroic reputations are "products of the imaginative labour through which societies and groups define and articulate their values and assumptions, and through which individuals within those societies or groups establish their participation in larger social or cultural identities." (3) Cubitt and Warren define the hero as "any man or woman whose existence [...] is endowed by others, not just with a high degree of fame and honour, but with a special allocation of imputed meaning and symbolic significance – that not only raises them above others in public esteem but makes them the object of some kind of collective emotional investment." (ibid.) Such investment was what the books in this collection were supposed to promote, as many of their prefaces and introductory chapters explicitly reveal. They emphasise that heroes are "well worthy of admiration and imitation" [no. 1.2.2] and that "they stimulate others into imitation" [no. 1.2.17].

3. Hero Books and the Heroic Imaginary

While the books in this collection have a common bias towards exemplary heroes and heroism and display an overall stability in the values with which the heroic was associated, they also illustrate the wide range, and a certain dynamic, of ideas about the heroic and the figures in whom they were embodied during the Victorian and Edwardian periods. Variation is, first of all, explained by the fact that the Victorian imagination of the heroic, like the Edwardian that perpetuated it, drew from many sources: mythology and history as well as their own present, which struck the author Hodder [no. 1.2.17] as having "produced more great men than any in the world's history". Many hero books present heroic figures from several periods, sometimes even from antiquity to the present. This suggests a universal validity of the heroic and supports the sense that the present is rooted in, and authorised by, a heroic memory that promises stability and orientation in times of change. As Charles Kingsley notes in The Heroes [no. 1.1.1], his narratives

for children about the heroes of classical antiquity, such stories continued to resonate in "this modern world in which we now live".

Even if filtered through the criterion of exemplarity, the panorama of heroic figures and deeds in hero books is impressive. That certain famous exemplars are cited again and again lends them a special prominence in the Victorian and Edwardian heroic universe: the Chevalier Bayard and Sir Philip Sidney as representatives of chivalric behaviour; heroes of the sea (a special interest in Britain as an island nation) from Drake and Raleigh to Nelson and Collingwood; military leaders from the Duke of Marlborough to the Duke of Wellington and, more recently, Sir Henry Havelock; discoverers and explorers from Elizabethan days to Sir John Franklin and Robert Edmund Peary. By highlighting such men, the gift books affirmed and nourished an understanding of the heroic in terms of masculine prowess and agency. At the same time, however, and sometimes within one and the same book, such prototypical notions were also transcended, qualified and complemented. In particular, there was a notable esteem for "moral heroism" that could be exemplified by all members of Victorian society, irrespective of gender or class, and that could therefore permeate society as a whole. Hero books of the 1840s to 1860s, the period preceding high imperialism, show a marked tendency to profile moral against military heroism, declaring it superior to mere "physical courage", "pluck" or "bravado" (see, for programmatic examples, the prefaces in nos. 1.2.2, 1.2.7 and 1.2.8. Later in the nineteenth century, when the spread of the Empire made military heroism more popular, moral heroism was incorporated into the conception of military behaviour (cf. Mangan). However, even if moral heroism was also displayed in the behaviour of soldiers, sailors and explorers, it was most essentially perceived, as many prefaces attest, as a heroism practicable in all walks of life and independent from gender, age or class. Women could be named as exemplars alongside men since this kind of heroism exhibits "a mental quality not depending on bodily strength", as Balfour emphasises in her preface [no. 1.2.2]. Men and women were praised for the same qualities and actions, such as John Howard and Elizabeth Fry, who were both engaged in prison reform. Apart from philanthropists and carer figures, representatives of moral heroism were found in the Christian mission (like Moffat, Livingstone), the promotion of liberty and justice (such as Wilberforce and other abolitionists of the slave trade) or areas like science and engineering which signified the progress of mankind and the advancement of civilisation (Linnaeus, Humphrey Davy, George Stephenson).

In light of such variety in personnel, the qualities associated with "exemplary" heroism were also mixed. Some hero books present military and civil heroism side by side [such as no. 1.2.16]. Frequently, the heroic qualities and values which a book was meant to illustrate were explicitly named in its preface or introductory chapter. Taken together, the prefatory materials of the books in this collection illustrate the wide range of qualities which the Victorians, and the Edwardians in their footsteps, defined as heroic: leadership, nobility of character, chivalry, self-reliance, magnanimity, a sense of honour, honesty, patriotism; bravery (or courage, daring, fortitude, valour, fearlessness, intrepidity, gallantry); a sense of duty, industry, perseverance, endurance, self-denial (or forgetfulness of self), a willingness to bear suffering; charity, benevolence, tenderness of heart, mercy, loving-kindness, attention to the common good. When and how these qualities could be performed was dependent on circumstance, social position and gender. In general, men of the upper and educated classes had the widest opportunities for displaying heroic qualities from military to moral heroism, while women and the working classes were predominantly noted for demonstrations of moral heroism.

Since moral heroism could bridge divisions of gender and class, the books in this collection attest an increasing attention to, and appreciation of, "everyday heroism" – a civil parallel to the appreciation for common soldiers that began to emerge in the aftermath of the Crimean War. Such books focus on real deeds performed by real people and so had a special potential to serve as models for their readers' own behaviour. As John Price observes: "Books such as these, particularly the introductions and prefaces, provide valuable insights into how everyday heroism was viewed and the qualities that it was thought to exemplify" (25). The idea of heroism in everyday life widened the social scope of the heroic, and acts of everyday heroism became a staple of hero books during the final decades of the nineteenth century, especially in books addressed at working-class readers. Books targeted at adult readers of the working classes (which do not seem to have been produced until after the Education Reform of the 1870s) also reveal how carefully attributions of the heroic were channelled. In times when the working classes and their increasing political agency caused significant anxiety among the middle classes, hero books for the working classes (which were usually written or collected by members of the middle classes) show a strict limitation to selfless acts of civil heroism and seem to avoid any idea that heroism can involve transgressive violent behaviour. Lane's preface to Heroes of Every-Day Life [no. 2.4] is telling in this respect when it expresses her belief or hope that working men

"will not allow themselves to be misled by the passion and prejudice of the hour. [...] We live in a transition period. [...] But in all the changes that are surely coming (political and social), let us not forget one broad principle – namely, that it is 'Righteousness' (and righteousness alone) 'that exalteth a nation' [Proverbs 14:34]."

The threat of violent heroism was less likely to emanate from members of the female sex, but heroic behaviour of women was also negotiated with special care. The concept of moral heroism made it possible to incorporate women into contemporary definitions of the heroic. Accordingly, books promoting female heroism for female readers, and even occasional chapters in books intended for a male readership, were published even during the early Victorian decades. They acknowledged the humane moral heroism of an Elizabeth Fry or Florence Nightingale, but also the political heroism of Madame Roland, and even more physically courageous women such as Anna Garibaldi, who supported her husband with a weapon in her hand, or Grace Darling, the girl who had demonstrated significant pluck and strength when she rescued shipwrecked people off the coast of her home in Northumberland in 1838. At the same time, such acts of female valour were almost always marked as exceptional and as departures from feminine norms that were acceptable because they were absolutely necessary. Under more normal circumstances, the Tales of Female Heroism (1846) [no. 1.3.1] emphasise, the heroism of women manifests itself "rather in a feminine and domestic aspect than a brilliant one" and is distinguished by a "conscientious fulfilment of the quiet unobtrusive duties of every-day life". This basic attitude did not change even when a feminist awareness established itself in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century and helped to boost the number of books published about heroic girls and women. Marie Trevelyan's Brave Little Women (1888) [no. 1.3.5] voices regret that female heroism still went largely unnoticed, and the books about feminine heroism that Frank Mundell [nos. 1.3.6–11] published for the Sunday School Union during the 1890s tie this heroism to the "common daily life of women" and mark it as an expression of self-sacrifice and duty rather than a love of adventure. As late as 1900, Charles D. Michael's Deeds of Daring in Every Day Life [no. 1.2.29] notes that women's "comparative seclusion of home" narrowed down their opportunities of heroism and predestined them to a "heroism prompted by love."

The books assembled in this collection were thus used not only to spread but also to channel contemporary ideas about the heroic: They ascertained that certain

kinds of heroes and heroic qualities were still valued and should be sought after. They seem to counter the diagnosis of post-heroism one finds, for instance, in Carlyle. However, it is conspicuous how often even these affirmative books find it necessary to define the heroic explicitly and to discuss its qualities and social usefulness in their prefaces and introductory chapters, thus responding to times in which the heroic had come under critical scrutiny (see especially the prefatory material in nos. 1.2.2, 1.2.7, and 1.2.17). Such metaheroic reflections reveal the ideological positions behind Victorian and Edwardian concepts of the heroic. They also indicate an awareness of how ideas of the heroic became more democratised in the course of the period covered in this collection.

4. The Bibliography and Text Collection

For the student of heroism as well as of Victorianism and Edwardianism, the books assembled here provide access to the qualities and values that were associated with the heroic in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They indicate what values and virtues these societies promoted as exemplary and strove to inspire in their members, with certain inflections for age groups, genders and classes.

The bibliography is far from complete, since the genre of the gift book seems almost inexhaustible for the period under discussion. It will be continually expanded, and suggestions for further entries are invited. Even as it stands, however, the bibliography gives a fair impression of the kinds of heroism that were sanctioned and promoted as socially useful, and of the ways in which the subgenre of the hero book developed on the British book market from the mid-Victorian years to the eve of the First World War.

The bibliography is divided into four sections, the first of which is subdivided into various books intended for juvenile readers, who would be the most likely to receive these books as actual gifts. Section two lists books with a special interest in working-class heroes that were targeted at adult readers, but they have a strong similarity to books for juvenile readers from the working classes. Section three has significant intersections with the preceding ones but groups together books with a distinct religious bias, both from the dominant evangelical position and a Roman Catholic one, that reflects the defensive and vindictive attitude of a faith that had only recently (1829) been fully emancipated. While the bibliography focuses primarily on collections of prose narratives, the final section of poetry collections

with a heroic theme has been added because the heroic was still frequently evoked in poetry, and poems are sometimes alluded to or cited in the story books.

The entries in this bibliography fall into the following groups:

1 Books for Young Readers

1.1 Collections of Mythological Stories

1.2 Gift Books for Boys

1.3 Gift Books for Girls

2 Books for (Adult) Readers of the Working Classes

3 Books of Christian Heroes

4 Poetry Collections

The entry for each book provides the main bibliographical data. Excerpts from the prefatory material (prefaces or introductions) that indicate the understandings of the heroic and the intentions with which the respective book was compiled or written, and the table of contents are included when available. Key words related to the heroic and its social function are highlighted in the prefatory material and together provide a map of the "semantics" of popular heroism and the attitudes it was meant to inspire in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. The names of heroes mentioned in the prefatory materials are highlighted and permit one to trace the leading actors in the Victorian heroic imaginary.

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