



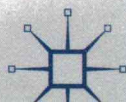
Femininity, Crime and Self-Defence in Victorian Literature and Society

From Dagger-Fans to Suffragettes

Emelyne Godfrey

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FILES**

General Editor: Clive Bloom



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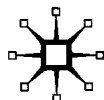
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First published 2012 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-0-230-30031-6

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

To Martin

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University and Independent Age for granting me permission to quote from Elizabeth Robins's work. Independent Age is a unique and growing charity, providing information, advice and support for thousands of older people across the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Angela V. John took the time to talk to me down a crackling telephone line and helped me decipher Elizabeth Robins's squiggly handwriting in the 'Memo' while Joanne E. Gates kindly told me about *Under the Southern Cross*.

It was a pleasure to work with the following people on related publications and projects in 2011 which influenced my book: Andy Hall from the BBC 4 Timeshift documentary, *Martial Arts*, Mark Curthoys and Lawrence Goldman of the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Simon James (editor of the *Wellsian*), Patrick Parrinder, Sylvia Hardy and John Hammond; the staff of *Latchkey: Journal of New Woman Studies*; Catherine Cooke (Sherlock Holmes Collection) and Lucy Dallas of the TLS and Andrew Steggall, who wrote and directed *The Door*.

Elizabeth Crawford, Mary Joannou and John Jackson gave me tips and their insight into certain topics. Thank you to Gareth Bellis of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich; The Museum of Brands, Packaging and Advertising; Yvonne Holmes of the Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and Nic Fulcher of the Dog Collar Museum, Leeds Castle; the Royal Association for Deaf People, and Jo-Ann Gloger, Keeper of Collections, Redditch Borough Council, Forge Mill Needle Museum, and Bordesley Abbey Visitor Centre; Margaret Roberts and June Firkins of the Hat Pin Society of Great Britain. It was a delight to visit the Museum of London and to meet Beverley Cook who took me to the store to see the suffragette belt and chain, an event which was presided over by a creepy stuffed cat. Thank you also to Mary Evans Picture Library (Jessica Talmage) and Punch Limited (Andre Gailani).

The Victoria List, an online discussion group run by Patrick Leary, is a useful resource. The following people answered my queries: Susan Hoyle, Jill Grey, Jenny Holt, Isabelle Enaud-Lechien, Lee O'Brien, John S. Gordon, Simon Poe, Kelly Sears-Smith, Judith Flanders, Tracey Rosenberg, Andrew King and David Rose. Jane S. Gabin put me in touch with Joanne E. Gates.

The expertise of Bartitsu historians has been invaluable: Kirk Lawson, Graham Noble and Harry Cook. Peter Hilton sent me a copy of his

play on Edith Garrud. Tony Wolf, who has been a star, linked me up with Edith Garrud's relatives – Jennifer Cooper and Martin Williams – who kindly shared with me their memories and the products of their research into Edith's life and background.

Royal Armouries Leeds: Over the years Stuart Ivinson has put me in contact with various people, including Thom Richardson and Jonathan Ferguson. Thank you to Mrs Alexander and Jacob Moss of The Fan Museum, Greenwich, who told me about the dagger-fan and the tanto and granted me permission to include images of these items in this book and thanks also to Phillip Barnes-Warden of the Met Police Historical Collection.

This book would not have been possible without support from The London Library and the Carlyle Trust, giving me access to the many online resources and enabling me to borrow first editions. The following libraries and collections were also consulted: The H.G. Wells Collection (London Metropolitan University – Denise Adams and Meagan Redmond), Richard Bowen Collection, University of Bath, The British Library Manuscripts Collection, The London School of Economics, The Women's Library (thanks in particular to Inderbir Bhullar) and Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives.

The following friends and family in London have been particularly supportive: Akmal Choudhury, my driving instructor, taught me how to navigate the one-way roads down Brick Lane and Whitechapel and the roundabouts in Loughton. I'm grateful to the examiner who passed me on my driving test (what a relief!). Like H.G. Wells's Lionel Wallace in 'The Door in the Wall', I'm sure I'll end up playing my own game of 'find the North-West Passage' in West London, albeit helped by the sat nav. Laurel Brake supervised my PhD at Birkbeck College and Deborah Parsons and Mark Turner kindly agreed to be my examiners. I'd also like to thank Myrto, Lola, Helmut Schmidt, Uncle Ian, Jake Middleton, Tom Packer, Henry Midgley and the Howards – Natasha, Steve and little Ellie – and Jonathan. My mother set this book afoot. The biggest thank yous go to Catherine Mitchell of Palgrave and Clive Bloom for patiently waiting for this manuscript during the last insanely busy year, to Linda Auld and Caroline McPherson for diligently and swiftly copyediting the text and to my husband, Martin, who has been sharing the sofa with all the lever-arch folders on Edith Garrud, Elizabeth Robins and Mona Caird. He proofread this manuscript and humoured me with emergency chocolate supplies ('all because the lady loves Milk Tray'...).

Note on the Text

All references to the Sherlock Holmes stories are taken from the *Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes* (London: Penguin, 1981). In English alone, 'jujitsu' has a variety of spellings, including 'jiu-jitsu' and 'ju-jutsu'. I have used the Japanese spelling of 'jujitsu' instead of the Westernized form, 'ju-jitsu'. Japanese names are anglicized, with forenames first, followed by the surname, as this is how they were often referred to in the Edwardian texts I have examined.

Abbreviations

Please see the bibliography for full citation details.

Azrael: The Wing of Azrael (Caird) Volume numbers are indicated within the brackets

Banishing the Beast (Bland)

Bleak Houses (Surridge)

Character (Smiles)

City of Dreadful Delight (Walkowitz)

'The Cause of Women' (Pykett)

Crimes of Outrage (D'Cruze)

Curios (Marsh)

Danaus (Caird)

Dear Girl (Tierl Thompson)

'Dear Mrs Garrud' (Winn)

'Defence of Wild Women' (Caird)

Elizabeth Robins, 1862–1952: Actress, Novelist, Feminist (Gates)

Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life, 1862–1952 (John)

Essays on Physiognomy (Lavater)

Fine Art of Jujutsu (Watts)

Fox and the Flies (van Onselen)

Glimpses into the Abyss (Higgs)

Grain or Chaff? (Plowden)

The Heavenly Twins (Grand)

In Our Infancy (Corke)

Judith Lee: Some Pages from Her Life (Marsh), including the following stories:

——, 'Hair': 'The Man Who Cut off My Hair'

——, 'Interlaken': 'Eavesdropping at Interlaken'

——, 'Conscience'

——, 'Matched'

——, 'Auld Lang Syne'

——, 'Isolda'

——, 'Uncle Jack'

——, 'Mandragora'

——, 'Napolitain': 'The Restaurant Napolitain'

'Maiden Tribute' (Stead)

Manliness and the Male Novelist (Dowling)
Marriage as a Trade (Hamilton)
The Militant Suffragettes (Raeburn)
The Morality of Marriage (Caird)
'Mrs Garrud Replies to Her Critics' (Garrud)
The New Girl (Mitchell)
The New Woman at the Fin de Siècle (Ledger)
NUWSS: National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
Odd Women: The Odd Women (Gissing)
PMG: *Pall Mall Gazette*
'Of Queen's Gardens' (Ruskin)
'Self Protection on a Cycle' (Tindal)
Queen Christabel (Mitchell)
How to Read Character in Features, Forms and Faces (Frith)
'Richard Marsh: Novelist Extraordinaire' (Dalby)
Sherlock's Sisters (Kestner)
Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870–1914
(McCrone)
Suffragette Escapes (Marshall)
Tenant of Wildfell Hall (Brontë)
Tess (Hardy)
Vignettes of a Memory (Greville)
Walking the Victorian Streets (Epstein-Nord)
WAYGT?: *Where Are You Going To...?* (Robins)
'The Woman with the Whip' (Billington-Greig)
The White Slave Market (Malvery)
'Women and Young Girls Dare not Travel Alone' (Stevenson)
WWSL: Women Writers' Suffrage League
WFL: Women's Freedom League
WSPU: Women's Social and Political Union

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Introduction

When the young actress, Elizabeth Robins, came to London in late 1888, her father was concerned for her safety during her 'wanderings about the modern Babylon' and considered that in London the 'hours and places of danger' were more numerous 'than in New York'.¹ Over a hundred years later, my own mother expressed similar concerns when I told her I wanted to study in London. She suggested I enrol in a women's self-defence class she had seen advertised on television.

Instead of hand-to-hand combat, the course emphasized crime prevention. In Britain, the use of mace spray for civilian self-defence is illegal so improvisation, based on the dictates of 'reasonable self-defence', is necessary. Say 'no' with confidence, never give telephone callers the impression you live on your own, do not listen to your iPod with both ears deaf to the world, never wear clothing bearing your name and carry the number of a taxi company. To stall an assailant in their tracks ask them a ridiculous question to baffle them to buy time for escape or use a personal attack alarm which will 'scream' for you. We did learn palm-heel strikes and successfully defaced a number of polystyrene heads whilst experimenting in ways of gouging out an attacker's eyes. Some of the activities raised intriguing points. We trembled at the thought of biting an attacker or piercing their eyes. How would we respond in a real-life situation, in darkness, amidst surges of adrenaline? Were we too civilized to injure, too nice to defend our own lives? Why, as one participant put it, were we suddenly behaving like 'prim, Victorian ladies'? It seemed natural to ask, therefore, if ladies living during the Victorian era and pre-war years really were so unable or too squeamish to protect themselves.

This book investigates the everyday dangers facing British, middle-class women from the mid-Victorian era until the outbreak of World

War I. In the age of self-help, novels were a form of self-instruction. A study devoted to women's self-defence in Victorian and Edwardian literature and history is long overdue in the light of the number of classic books which have raised important issues in this area: Judith's Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (1992), Lucy Bland's *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885–1914* (1995), Lynda Nead's *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (2000), *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Literature* (2005) by Lisa Surridge and Antonia Raeburn's *The Militant Suffragettes* (1973). Shani D'Cruze's *Crimes of Outrage: Sex, Violence and Victorian Working Women* (1998) considers how working women defended themselves with pokers, clogs, rolling pins and chairs, against intruders who 'assaulted' them and how they used the court to reclaim their reputations. I will, in the main, be considering civilian women of the middling classes in this book as I focused on bourgeois manliness in my last volume. Literature – both fiction and nonfiction – is a contemporary source of public opinion and describes the little incidents in women's lives which would not have found their way into courts but nonetheless affected how they felt about themselves and their surroundings. While a novel might be widely studied for its trenchant critique of marriage laws or sex trafficking, it is the smaller events which are also of interest here. One of the few works to look at a specific self-defence scenario in women's literature is Stevie Davies's introduction to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), in which she argues that Helen Huntingdon defends herself against her odious husband's houseguest and would-be rapist by pointing her palette knife at him.² The palette knife is a symbol of Helen's profession, and represents her industrious, creative nature as opposed to the broken clasp knives and split razors she finds lying around, the products of misdirected, self-destructive masculine anger.

My book is a sister volume to *Masculinity, Crime and Self-Defence in Victorian Literature* (2010) where I argued that methods of minimally aggressive forms of protection were explored and more widely adopted as a response to the increasing severity with which interpersonal violence was regarded. As one mid-Victorian commentator announced: 'The fist *has* expelled the sword and pistol'.³ A gentleman was generally expected to be able to defend himself or to protect the weaker sex. *The Gentleman's Book of Manners* (c. 1881), stated that '[w]omen are not endowed with the power of defending themselves, like men. They must not resort to violence, either in word or deed. They are compelled to use a certain delicacy of manner'.⁴ The use of the knife was widely

considered to be unpatriotic, sly and underhand. In Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) the boy, Diavolo, uses a penknife to defend his twin sister from attack from make-believe monsters but he accidentally stabs himself. While pistols were still carried it was physical and mental self-defence that tested manliness. A man was particularly lauded if he could box well, adhere to principles of fair play and not shout 'take that!' at his assailant. Self-control was key. Understatement became a performance in itself. By venturing out into the world, the archetypal man tested himself, his mental and physical strength and sought to harness the aggressive side of his nature to positive effect. Could the reverse be claimed of women who were expected to be domesticated?

Hot-House Flowers

Ruskin's seminal daydream, 'Of Queen's Gardens' (1865), was a feelgood text for the middle-class wife, glorifying her role as her husband's assistant as 'the centre of order, the balm of distress, and the mirror of beauty' ('Of Queen's Gardens', p. 120). The essay extolled the separate spheres, advocating that wives be educated only so far as necessary to assist their husbands, that they should look after their homes and let their husbands fight in the dusty city for the trophies of commerce. Consequently, according to Andrew Dowling, a woman who was 'protected in her domestic sphere had less depth as a person' and 'was more of a child, or a saint, because she had not battled the dark forces of desire and pain that the representative man battled, and overcame, everyday'.⁵ Ruskin argued that '[t]he man's power is active, progressive, defensive' and he is 'eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender' ('Of Queen's Gardens', p. 99). Women should do more to quell men's need to fight. As he said, a 'woman's power is for rule, not for battle' ('Of Queen's Gardens', p. 99). However, her work in the home has ramifications for public life, namely she is responsible for 'the beautiful adornment of the state' ('Of Queen's Gardens', p. 120). Of course, the idea that all middle-class women never ventured forth alone is a myth. Even Ruskin's essay admits that women might step outside the house gates, 'where order is more difficult, distress more imminent, loveliness more rare' ('Of Queen's Gardens', pp. 120–121) and that perhaps they might wish to: '[U]nless she herself has sought it [a woman] need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence' ('Of Queen's Gardens', p. 100). But the ideal of the 'separate spheres' nevertheless pervaded late-Victorian culture; it was widely believed that only men should venture into the fog and murky city to earn money while wives sweetened the home.