

## **Bluestockings to Bimbos**

We in The Field Theatre Group are delighted to be sharing this exhibition of the work produced for our community heritage project: *Bluestockings to Bimbos*. The project explored the many and various names, words and terms for women. The *Bluestockings to Bimbos* project spans 5000 years of human history from the Classical era ... right up to the present day.

*Strumpet, Harriden, Virago, Shrew, Chick, Bimbo, Dolly-bird, Cougar, Vamp, Virago, Vixen, Hag, Bunny-boiler* ... are just a few examples!

The Field Theatre Group was granted funding for this project from the National Heritage Lottery Fund in 2020. After a number of Covid-related delays the *Bluestockings to Bimbos* project got underway with a series of combined arts and heritage community workshops in Littleport and Haddenham.

We invited members of the public to join us in examining the history of these names ... and making our personal responses to them. We also explored how language relating to women has changed over time. And how female emancipation, the rise of feminism, and the subsequent drive for female equality has driven these changes.

We were expecting to find the project interesting from *linguistic and historical* perspectives, but we were surprised by the strong emotional responses our explorations provoked. There was plenty of lively discussion, lots of laughter (some anger) and much serious examination as to how these names have impacted on the lives of women, including our *own*.

### **Background to the project:**

In 2019 a leading feminist academic, Maria Beatrice Giovanardi, published an article calling for dictionaries to change some names (and definitions of) '*woman*' .... which she viewed as sexist and derogatory. Her article sparked considerable media and academic interest. The question began to be widely asked: what has led society to coin so many names, words, terms and definitions of women .... and why so are so many of them quite frankly insulting? In March 2020 leaders of *Women's Aid* and the *Women's Equality Party* wrote an open letter calling on *Oxford University Press* to change its 'sexist' definitions of '*woman*.'

Some campaigners have even called for these names to permanently removed from dictionaries and thesauruses

## ‘What’s in a name?’

We in The Field Theatre Group thought this controversy presented a wonderful opportunity to re-examine the heritage and history of these names.

Why was an educated woman called a ‘*Bluestocking*’ (especially when the original Bluestocking was actually a *man*?)

What is the difference between a *Doxie* and a *Popsie*, or a *Strumpet* and a *Shrew*?

And why do so many names for women focus on appearance (Crone, Hag, Frump, Dolly-bird, Babe); or sexual morality (Tart, Harlot, Slut)?

## The Bluestockings to Bimbos textile piece

Field Theatre artist Jennifer Stevens led participants in the creation of the textile work. Participants were guided in the creation of the individual panels that make up the textile work. These panels commemorate all kinds of women: from fearsome warrior queens, to prostitutes; social reformers to condemned felons.

We are extremely proud of the work created with our participants. The panels encompass a great variety of subjects with ingenuity and inventiveness. This work captures many different responses from our participants; from compassion and anger ... to humour and irony.

## Lexicana

Field Theatre writer Deborah Curtis led the written elements of the project. With our participants she has compiled a ‘lexicon’ of the extraordinary names we discovered in the course of this project.

She has also created a scripted piece, entitled ‘Lexicana.’ *Lexicana* is clothed in the many and various names that society has attached to women. The definitions and derivations of which can be found in the lexicon. Lexicana also functions as a key to the lexicon.

Our shared work will form a touring exhibition launching in November 2022.



## Some thoughts on women and textiles

Women have brought their skills and artistry to the creation of textiles for millennia. Throughout most of our history, textile work has been the principal creative medium through which women have expressed their thoughts, feelings and artistry. Why is this?

For generations, women's lives were centred on 'hearth-and-home.' We had few opportunities to develop our creative talents outside the domestic realm. Women were also prevented from seeking careers in the male-dominated spheres of art, music and literature.

So, we developed art forms that could be created with other *women*, often within the confines of our own homes. Throughout history, women of all ages and social classes have come together to produce textiles. In neolithic times they scraped hides with flint tools, and stitched them together with bone needles and sinews. First-Nation women wove brilliantly coloured rugs and blankets, with their stories expressed in patterns and symbols. New-world pioneers fashioned beautiful quilts from scraps and patches. While courtly and aristocratic women devoted much of their leisure time to the creation of exquisite works, embellished with jewels and precious metals. Even Queens were famed for their needlework skills, while their humbler subjects patched clothes and brightened their homes with rag rugs and lace work.

I wonder about the nuns who created the Bayeux tapestry. Did they labour in demur and prayerful silence? Were they piously dedicated to their extraordinary task? Or did they laugh and gossip as they worked? Did they whisper and grumble or indulge in a good old 'stitch and bitch'? I like to think they did.

Stitching, knitting, embroidering, are skills that run like a rich thread, binding our lives and stories together. And our work has enriched cathedrals and palaces, public spaces and cottages.

From school girls stitching their first samplers, to communal quilting bees, textile work provided social opportunities for women to gather together; to talk, to share news (and gossip) .... to express themselves. To 'knit and natter' or even ... while passing their skills down through the generations.

Generations of women even made a living with their skills with a needle, although the Industrial Revolution degraded these craft skills to the level of wage-slaved drudgery. Women faced danger and hardship in sweat-shops and textile mills, while home-based piece-workers wore out their eyes and fingers sewing button holes and shirt collars, for a pittance. There was nothing sociable (or creative) about this kind of work. With women's textiles skills harnessed to serve the march of mass industry, their creativity was crushed by poverty and drudgery.

We live in kinder times now. Our lives have space again for leisure activities, for craft and creativity, and social interaction. We have been privileged to have had the opportunity to join with others to create the *Bluestockings to Bimbos* textile art. We've shared ideas and stories, made new friends, learned and laughed together, confided our thoughts and feelings ... through the age-old medium of textile creation.

Our thanks go to the Haddenham Arts Centre and the Adams Heritage Centre, Littleport for hosting our workshops.



## Ladette

I have created two panels to represent the brash, boozy, energetic, hedonistic '*ladettes*': young women who in the 1990s and beyond were determined to show that anything the lads could do, they could do better.

Ladette was defined in The Concise Oxford Dictionary in 2001 as '*a young woman who behaves in a boisterously assertive or crude manner and engages in heavy drinking sessions.*'

I have no problem at all admitting to once being a ladette. '*Work hard, play hard*' was the motto we girls lived by during our teenage years. Working long hours in a factory we would spend our time laughing and joking about our weekend encounters, along with planning our next 'catch.'



We looked at celebrity party girls and women like Zoe Ball, Sara Cox, Gail Porter, Denise Van Outen, Charlotte Church, Sara Cawood, Donna Air, and Jayne Middlemiss, and loved how outspoken and uninhibited they were. They just did and said what they wanted, and never mind the consequences. Mind you, I wouldn't have dared say what Sara Cox did, live on Radio 1, about the Queen Mother!

Back then, I wouldn't have had a clue about sexism, so I didn't think twice about the word ladette being sexist. I can see it now, of course. It labels women as less than the lads, not a real bloke but a pale imitation. It was because we were invading their space - the pubs, clubs and (if you had money), wine bars - with the objective of getting thoroughly pissed, dancing for hours and then going home with someone we'd just met.

### Ladette 'Brown Ale Beer Mat'

This beer mat panel is inspired by the renowned 'tough gritty' beer from up North. The blue 5-pointed star is an actual representation of the 5 breweries owned by Newcastle Brown. Here it takes on new significance as a '1 star review' after a one-night-stand.

I got a degree in graphic design, so this beer mat has been designed with a graphics package on my tablet.

### Ladette 'Night Out on the Town'

We didn't have a clue that 'out there' was moral outrage about young women like us, coming from the Church, politicians, academics, social scientists, press... well, just about *everyone*. Doing some research for this project I found it incredible how much hypocrisy there was. The sight of young women binge-drinking, being sick, being abusive, getting into cat fights, blatantly pulling members of the opposite sex, maybe passing out in the street, was far, far worse than seeing men behaving exactly the same

way. Why did we want to behave like that, and not like ‘young ladies?’ We women were meant to stop lads behaving like that, not indulging in the same behaviour.

Truly, all of that passed us by.

This panel is a self-portrait of those hilarious days of my youth. Always dressed to kill, dancing the night away in a blisteringly hot and criminally noisy disco, beneath the glitter balls, we were often harmlessly labelled by our friends and even each other, as a *Chick, Diva* or someone’s *Bird* or *Babe*. For those few hours, we could forget real life, and just indulge in fun and freedom with our mates. It really was that simple.

Christine Weetman, October 2022

Originally from Cambridgeshire I moved to the fens in my early teens following the separation of my parents and found solace in creativity, always to be found in the art room during my lunch breaks. I left school at 16 and went on to study photography, but unfortunately this was cut short due to having to find my own accommodation and as a result I had to take on a full-time work position...*enter, my Ladette years*.

My daughter arrived in my late 20s and completely grounded my antics. It was during this time I rediscovered my passion for being creative. Joining a pottery class was my springboard back into education. I went on to study, gaining an A Level in 3D Ceramics along with PTTLs (preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector), and a certified Community Facilitator. For a few years I ran after-school pottery workshops for adults and children, and gained a placement as Artist in residence at a local primary school.

Images of work from those days can be found on (my somewhat aged) Flickr account: [www.flickr.com/photos/moonbow\\_makes/albums](http://www.flickr.com/photos/moonbow_makes/albums)

In 2005 my second child arrived and whilst I continued working with clay, I also dabbled in other mediums catering my lust for learning. In 2008 I gained a position as a Digital Project Manager for a company that built websites. This role initially took over my life, as I dedicated my time to progressing in my new-found career. This work became another stepping stone into study, and in 2008 I graduated with a BA in Graphic Design. You can see some samples of the work produced during that time on my website: [www.christineweetman.co.uk](http://www.christineweetman.co.uk)

Nowadays, still employed full-time as a DPM, in my spare time I can be found joining in creative workshops utilising my creative skills along with making some fab new friends...I'm simply enjoying life!

If you would like to catch up with me you can find me on Instagram: [www.instagram.com/christineweetman](http://www.instagram.com/christineweetman)

Christine Weetman BA (Graphic Design)

## Stone the Cronos

This panel commemorates Anne Whittle, known as Chattox. A destitute widow, Chattox was one of ten 'witches' condemned to death during the notorious Pendle Witch trial of 1611. How did Anne (who got her nickname from her habit of chattering and mumbling to herself) become caught up in the witch mania that swept through the isolated community of Pendle forest?

What possible threat could a frail old woman like Chattox pose to her community? She was a woman more likely to inspire pity, surely? But to her seventeenth-century neighbours Chattox was a woman to be feared.

Why? Well, might not an ugly, muttering, ragged crone .... be a *witch*?

With one exception, all those who were condemned to death with Chattox were social outcasts, living on the fringes of the community of Pendle. Today we'd call them *marginalised*. Others were marked out by physical deformities or disabilities, lameness or congenital birth defects. Chattox herself was widely regarded as senile.

But seventeenth-century sensibilities equated physical deformity with deformity of *character* ... and ugliness with malevolence. While mental affliction or disability was viewed as *divine punishment* or evidence of devilish deviance.

The wording on this panel is taken from Chattox's '*confession*.'

The Pendle witches certainly included 'problem' women; feckless mothers, women who cursed, brawled, drank, stole and spawned numerous bastard offspring. And their neighbours undoubtedly viewed them as nothing more than an unruly blight on the social landscape.

I try to imagine this happening today. An elderly person dragged from their home; imprisoned, tortured, tricked and bullied into confessing to the most bizarre and improbable crimes. I think of poor Anne Whittle, tormented, terrified and baffled by the charges against her. I believe she would have confessed to *anything* in the vain hope of being released.

Ten Pendle 'witches', including Anne, were executed at Lancaster on the 20th of August, 1612, for the crime of having bewitched to death 'by devilish practices and hellish means' no fewer than sixteen inhabitants of the Forest of Pendle.

Deborah Curtis, October 2022



## Harpy

Harpies and sirens are sometimes mixed up as both according to legend, and Greco-Roman literature are half bird, half woman, agents of punishment. Seen as destructive wind spirits, snatchers, robbers of food.

Ovid referred to them as *'human vultures.'*

Hesiod writes of them as the *'Harpyiai'* (harpies) *'of the lovely hair, Okypete and Aello, and these two in the speed of their wings keep pace with the blowing winds, or birds in flight, as they soar and swoop, high aloft.'* (Theogony 265-267)

Virgil records that they abducted people, called them, *'hounds of the mighty Zeus.'*



They are mentioned in the story of Jason and the Argonauts, and in Dante's *Inferno*.

Aeschylus, in the *Eumenides*, describes them *'as ugly creatures with wings.'* Later they were depicted as cruel, and terrifying monsters.

In Tate Britain there is a watercolour painting by William Blake, titled: *'The wood of self-murderers: Harpies and the suicides.'*

In the Middle Ages an image, *Jungfraunadler* (maiden eagle) was used in heraldry. She is a harpy-like figure, part-woman/part-bird.

The term *Harpy* is sometimes used as an insult for a woman thought to be shrewish, unbearable, and cruel. Quite often if these same characteristics were shown by a man they would be seen in a more positive light, a good leader, or business man perhaps?

Julieanne Long, October 2022

*Biography:* Since finishing her degree in Embroidered textiles Julieanne Long has worked to extend her repertoire of techniques. These include tapestry weaving, basketry, and wire construction. She has employed the latter, (basketry, and wire construction techniques) in a desire to make her work more *sculptural*.

Julieanne has exhibited widely in the U.K., and in galleries in Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands. Her work has been commissioned for several museums and sculpture gardens.

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## Harlot ... Whore .... Ho

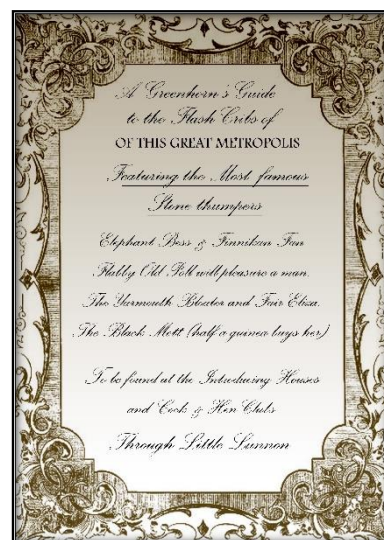
This panel was created by members of the project team. It commemorates the thousands of women sex-workers who lived and worked in London in the nineteenth century.

It is a reproduction of the title page of a 'Gentleman's Guide.' These publications listed the pleasures to be found in London's numerous brothels (*Cribs*, '*Houses of Resort*' and '*Introducing Houses*').

The women advertised on this title page were a cut-above the destitute women who plied a desperate trade as street-walkers. They, or their brothel-keeper, probably paid to have their names displayed so prominently. And they would have worked from the relative safety of a *House of Resort*.

We don't know what led 'Elephant Bess' or 'Black Mott' to ply their trade in one of London's teeming Cock & Hen Clubs. But we salute them.

But here's to all those Fair Elizas, Polls, Molls, Nells, Coras and Pearls who worked the streets, and tawdry 'Introducing Houses' of Victorian London.

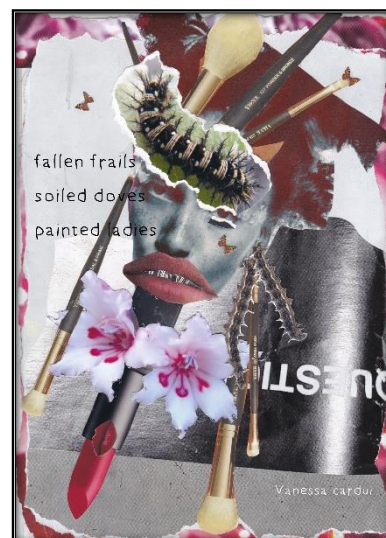


The Bluestockings to Bimbos project group, October 2022

## Vanessa cardui: Painted Lady and Fallen Frails

Collage by Jennifer Stevens. Inspiration for Vanessa cardui came in the first place from looking at the collage work of the German artist Hannah Hoch 1889-1978, and her exploration of gender and identity. In Indian Dancer from an Ethnographic Museum, she combines the face of silent film star, topped with a headdress comprised of kitchen utensils along with an African mask. Indian Dancer is now regarded as a feminist response to the objectification of the female body in a male-dominated world.

The Vanessa cardui collage shows a 'painted lady' created from fragments of adverts from magazines for cosmetics. She has a bar code for teeth. She is for sale.



Her body reduced to a phallic lipstick, glossy lip-sticked lips for genitalia, her breasts painted lady flowers, her hair, brows, earrings and tattoos a combination of the Vanessa cardui butterfly and its caterpillars. A headdress of cosmetic make-up brushes. It was important to create however a woman of strength she has an air of menace, of defiance and power, perhaps not so easily attainable.

### Definition of *painted lady*

1: A migratory nymphalid butterfly (*Vanessa cardui*) with wings mottled in brown, orange, black, and white.

2: *Gladiolus carneus* (*Painted Lady*) - Native to southern Africa, *Gladiolus carneus* is a graceful cormous perennial boasting loose spikes of 3-12 widely funnel-shaped, soft pink flowers in late spring.

3: *Painted Lady*. Noun. Old-fashioned, derogatory a woman whose appearance suggests she is promiscuous. A woman wearing cosmetics; specifically a disreputable woman; a prostitute.

*Synonyms include:* Concubine, courtesan, floozy, hooker, hussy, nymphomaniac, slut, ho streetwalker, strumpet, tramp, whore, ho, lady of the night.

Other early nineteenth-century terms for 'fallen women' include:

Soiled doves, fallen frail, fallen angels and daughters of sin, frail sisters and painted cats.

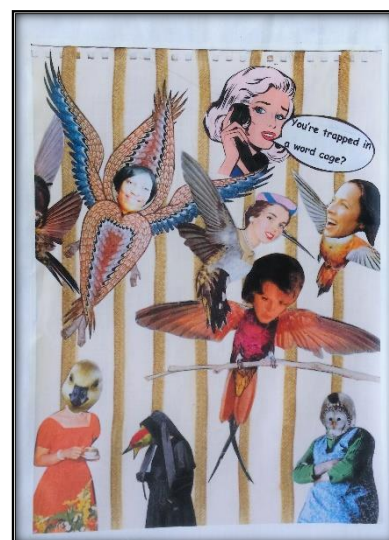
Jennifer Stevens, October 2022

## Word Cage

This panel was inspired by the idea that you can let words dictate your feelings, actions and limit your life if you allow those words to have power over you.

The saying that 'words can never hurt me' is both a myth and a truism at the same time. Words *can* hurt your feelings and hurt women generally. But women have the power to rise above misogynistic terms and the negative thoughts they engender, and challenge their use.

'Birds' and 'chicks' are both belittling and dismissive words for girls and women. The message in this piece is: *'don't let words cage you in and limit your aspirations'* .... like birds in a cage. You can choose to fly if you want to.



## What I have learnt from this project

I had never really sat down in such a focused way before and thought about just how many derogatory terms there are for women and how they feed into misogyny.

At first, I found it quite depressing but then I thought: *'Knickers! I don't give these words the power to drag me down,'* and neither should any other woman or girl.

I realised while working on my pieces of art that in the face of misogyny or lack of equality, I have already put this ethos into practice throughout my whole life. I feel proud of myself for doing that, even though until this project, that feeling had been a subconscious one.

I have powered through all those negative words for women even though I shouldn't have had to, and I hope that other women can find the strength to rise above these terms and call them out as unacceptable.

Lorna Watkins, October 2022

## (The Ultimate) Queen Bee

Wu Zetian (624–705), was the only female Emperor in China's history). She ruled the Tang Dynasty as Empress, then as Emperor. During her fifty-year reign the empire was relatively stable, peaceful, powerful, and prosperous. Empress Wu Zetian was one of the most effective and controversial monarchs in China's history.



She first entered imperial court circles as one of the 'little lotus blossoms' (child concubines) of Li Yuan (later the first Tang Emperor.) Offering a daughter as a concubine was a way of gaining favour with the Emperor, although today we would regard this nothing more than child-prostitution. It was at court that the young Wu Zetian learned at first-hand the subtle arts of 'diplomacy and deception' that stood her in such good stead in later life.

I like to think of that little girl: watching, listening, quietly observing, while preserving the decorous and obedient demeanour expected of women of all ranks in Chinese society. But the imperial palace was nurturing a little killer-Queen in the making!

Wu Zetian grew to be so beautiful and intelligent, that the second emperor of the Tang Empire (Emperor Taizong) selected her as his chief concubine. She proved so useful in this role that he promoted her to the status of 'wife of the third class'. She also acted as his personal secretary. In doing so she became familiar with imperial affairs, and the business of governing the empire.

She went on to eliminate anyone who posed an obstacle to her, or who posed a threat to her reign. She killed and tortured many close to her, and was greatly feared.

I have chosen Wu Zetian to represent a *Queen Bee* because her actions mimic those of actual Queens in a hive. Every hive will contain five or six special larvae. These are destined to become Queens. The first to hatch will immediately kill the others. This remaining female is attended by a dedicated group of worker bees whose only task is to pamper, protect and nurture this precious grub. She is fed on special food (royal jelly) she will grow rapidly, far outstripping all others in size. By her ruthless elimination of her rivals, she has earned her place .... and title of *Queen Bee*.

Deborah Curtis, October 2022

## Siren/mermaid

*Mermaid* - from the Old English *Mere* (sea) and *maid* (a girl or young woman).

Sirens and or mermaids in mythology are often seen as dangerous creatures who, with their beautiful singing and enchanting music lure sailors to sail onto the rocks to be shipwrecked, and drown.

The earliest mermaid legends appeared in Syria around 1000 BCE, when the goddess *Atargatis* leaped into a lake and turned into a fish.

Many cultures have stories of mermaids. In some places they symbolise fertility and life in the oceans, whereas in other cultures they depict the destructive nature of water, storms and disaster, luring sailors to their deaths.

In a story told by the Greeks, Alexander The Great's sister, Thessalonike was transformed into a mermaid when she died in 295 BCE.

*Rusalki* in Eastern Europe are 'water nymphs' .... ghosts of drowned women who seek revenge by drowning unwary men.

Mermaids were often used as figureheads on ships. Sailors seemed to have a fascination with mermaids, some gruesome exhibits can be seen in a few museums of 'mermaids' which were made by sailors to sell when they returned home. These were fashioned by stitching the top half of a monkey to the bottom half of a fish.

Mermaids were also a popular design on stitched and lace samplers, and other textile items, from Elizabethan times onwards until about the mid- to late-17th Century. These mermaids were usually shown holding mirrors and combs. Designs for these could be found in books of fabulous beasts. One such was a horn book of engravings published in 1662 by Peter Stent, '*A new book of all sorts of beasts; or a pleasant way to teach children to read.*'

Women would have transferred these designs onto fabric ready to stitch. The Fitzwilliam museum in Cambridge hold several spot and open work band samplers with mermaid designs on them.

In 1995 a transgender youth network, *Mermaids U.K.* was set up to support children and young people.



When a woman is called a *Siren* it means she is a charming woman who beguiles men in a similar way to mermaids. In the past female film stars were often referred to as *Sirens*.

### *Bluestockings to Bimbos*

I have liked taking part in the Bluestockings to Bimbos project. The physical aspect was enjoyable and reflecting on the many different terms for women has been thought provoking.

Julieanne Long, October 2022

*Biography:* Since finishing her degree in Embroidered textiles Julieanne Long has worked to extend her repertoire of techniques. These include tapestry weaving, basketry, and wire construction. She has employed the latter, (basketry, and wire construction techniques) in a desire to make her work more *sculptural*.

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**Ada Lovelace Augusta Ada King, Countess of Lovelace (*née* Byron)**

Born December 1815, d. November 1852).

Ada Byron was the product of the short-lived marriage of Lord Byron and his wife, Anne Isabella Milbanke. The first words Byron reputedly spoke to his newly born daughter were:

*'Oh! What an implement of torture  
have I acquired in you!'*

The pair separated a month after Ada was born, and Byron left England forever.

Four months later, he commemorated the parting in a poem that begins:

*Is thy face like thy mother's my fair child!  
Ada! sole daughter of my house and heart?'*

Ada was Byron's only *legitimate* child. Her mother a gifted mathematician, believed that a rigorous course of study, rooted in logic and reason, would prevent her daughter from inheriting her father's erratic and unstable nature. From the age of four, Ada was tutored in mathematics and science ... an unusual course of study for a girl in the nineteenth-century.

Ada never saw her father again. He died in Greece when she was eight. Despite this, she had a life-long fascination with him, naming her two sons, Byron and Gordon after him.

Ada developed into an outstanding mathematician, but ... in spite of her mother's influence, she seems to have inherited something of her father's reckless character. She developed a serious gambling habit that devastated her finances.

Charles Dickens and Lovelace were long-term friends. When she lay dying from uterine cancer, in August 1852 Dickens visited his bed-ridden friend and read passages from his popular novel, *Dombey & Son*.

Ada Lovelace died three months Later, and was buried (at her own request) alongside her father. Both father and daughter died at the age of thirty-six.



Deborah Curtis, October 2022

## Suffragette: 'Sassy Rosette'

The term 'suffragette' was coined by the *Daily Mail* in 1906 as a belittling epithet. It was then adopted as a badge of honour by the women it sought to demean.

In this way it shows that negative words and labels for women can sometimes morph and transform into *positives*, usually when the objects of derision take ownership of the words and take the offensive power out of them.

One suffragette, Jessie Stephenson, has left a description of how *'my milliner and dressmaker took endless pains with my attire.'* They handmade for her: *'A white lacy muslin dress ... and a broad band in purple, white and green emblazoned with 'Votes for Women.'*



Although suffragette merchandise was produced for their campaign quite early on, including badges and even 'Suffragette jewellery' by Mappin & Webb in 1909, it seems those at the vanguard and with the resources, had handmade items to spread the 'Votes for Women' message.

This has led me to hand make a rosette that combines a demure vintage, old fashioned style (vintage flower transfers on the ribbons and white lace), with a contemporary almost Hen Party /Bride to Be vibe on the main part of the rosette.

The idea being that women are able to be 'sassy', upfront, spirited and have fun on a celebratory pub crawl in a way their great grandmothers were not allowed.

However, the word 'sassy', defined as meaning 'lively, bold, full of spirit and cheek' is still an ambivalent term. From its mainly negative origins, 'sassy' has grown to include the description of something on the whole positive, while still carrying the whiff of the negative – loud, rude and belligerent.

Many in society must have viewed the Suffragettes as impertinent and definitely belligerent, so this was the concept behind my rosette.

Lorna Watkins, October 2022



## Housewife, *hus-wif*..... Hussy

I've always been intrigued by the name '*housewife*.' It seems to imply that a woman literally 'marries the house' when she marries a husband. Does it literally mean the 'wife of a *house*'? '*Do you take this house .... to have and to hold ..... in sickness and in health.*' Can anyone actually marry a house?

Perhaps while dusting, cleaning, washing and wiping, polishing and rubbing, our housewife develops a sense of pleasurable satisfaction, a deep sensual connection with her house ... and the things within it.

The good housewife fills the house with *herself*. She *is* the house, and the house is her. It reflects her taste and style.

The house is always there, waiting for her, when she gets home. It is hers and *her*. Her hands wipe and polish it. Her feet patter busily all over it. She folds and strokes and smooths her linen. She shops for her house, filling it with little domestic treasures; pictures and mirrors, vases and knick-knacks, candles and cushions. Lovingly chosen adornments: love-gifts for the house to which she has wedded herself.

Our housewife is sometimes disparaged by her sisters. She's just a '*little hausfrau*' ... a 'stay-at-home Mom' ..... a 'home-maker.'

This woman is veiled behind a net curtain. Her features are obscured and it's hard to gauge her thoughts. She stares out blankly out at us from behind her net curtain. Net curtains, the epitome of domestic respectability. Is she isolated, lonely, literally trapped and tangled in her '*curtain nets*.' Or maybe she's a '*curtain twitcher*'? A suburban snoop, spying, watching ... standing in silent judgement on us.

## Hussy

Because our housewife is veiled, she's also rather mysterious. What does she *do* all day? What might she get up to? Could she perhaps be one of those '*bored housewives*' so popular in erotic myth? Is she relieving the domestic monotony of her days with illicit liaisons?

Could she be a *Belle de Jour* .... a suburban *horizontale*, plying a discreet trade among the lace curtains and potted palms?

**Note:** The name '*hussy*' is derived from housewife (*hus-wif*).



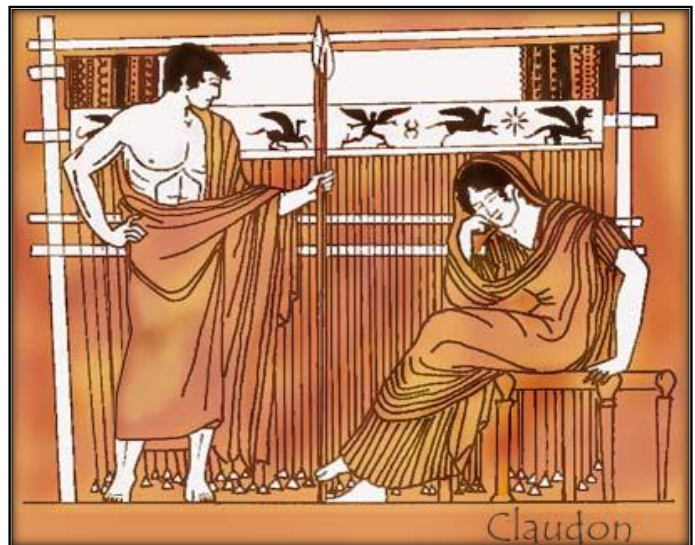
Deborah Curtis, October 2022

## Mother, housewife

This panel is taken from a 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Athenian pot, showing Telemachus and his mother Penelope, seated at her loom. Weaving was the mark of a good (Greek housewife.)

At the beginning of Homer's *Odyssey*, written 3,000 years ago, Penelope, wife of Odysseus, is loyally waiting for her husband to return from the Trojan war.

Penelope came down from her private quarters into the great hall of the palace to find a bard performing to throngs of her suitors. The bard sings of the difficulties the Greek heroes are having in reaching home. Penelope isn't amused, and in front of everyone she asked him to choose a happier song. At which point young Telemachus intervenes: *'Mother'* he says *'go back into your quarters, and take up your own work, the loom and the distaff ... speech will be the business of men, all men, and of me most of all; for mine is the power in this household.'* And off she goes back upstairs.



I had worked out that female suppression began a long, long time ago but reading this clear example from 5 BC on a plane journey tested my metal to remain calm – and quiet!

The traditionally accepted and expected view of the role of mother and housewife is so deeply entrenched. Yes, you can be a housewife and not a mother, or a mother without being married – but the expectations of subservience remain the same.

Both terms can be used in an affirmative way, as long as the female remains within the desired parameters, similarly, their tone can be derogatory when a housewife is too opinionated, disagreeing vehemently with her husband, and possibly older children. Mother, the most venerated of women, as long as she is a paragon of virtue, kind, supportive, uncomplaining but being too young, and in some communities, unmarried, it remains a stigma.

Apart from the enduring nature of tradition the other potentially most damaging element of these terms is their lack of status as they are forms of unpaid employment. Position, status, and esteemed worth are commonly calculated by the financial reward received for the service you perform. Add up the wages for a nursery nurse, cook, cleaner, gardener, counsellor, nurse, escort, window cleaner, laundress, seamstress .... And the best twist of Fate is bestowed on emancipated women who can have a paid job too!

The position of women has changed dramatically in the past 150 years, since Mary Wollstonecraft, albeit more for some, and less for others, depending on which communities and countries you live. Not all men are evil oppressors, and some people are managing to arrange joint conjugal roles within households. Attitudes are slowly changing. But therein lies the rub, s-l-o-w-l-y.

This is why I chose this exemplification of just how nomenclature to show how enduring ideas, implications and indignity precede bluestockings and bimbos and warn how long that these may endure; educated or poorly educated it seems that the woman is unacceptable, or a figure for derision.

I am not a radical feminist, but I am a human being. All I ask of the society in which I reside is to be treated as an equal to any other human, applauded for any achievements and skills, and supported through trials and tribulations, worth acknowledged and help offered where needed and a voice that can be heard.

Helen Smith, October 2022.



## Pussy

I have created two panels for the Bluestockings to Bimbos textile work. The first is *Pussy*. I called our cat Jezzabell because she looks as though she'd dusted her face with her mum's powder and then wiped half of it off with her right paw.

I chose this picture of my cat because the names 'Catty', 'Minx', 'Queen', 'Pussy', and 'Fleabag' apply to both cats and women. I have embroidered these names in thread to match Jezzzy's colouring.

The name '*pussy*' is interesting because it can refer to both a cat, and to a woman's private parts

*Pussy (as refers to a cat)*

Pussy was first recorded in 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and probably derived from the way of attracting a cat's attention by calling '*Pss, pss, pss*', or '*puss, puss, puss*.' The sibilant 'S' contains high notes that only cats can hear. A variant of *Puss*' occurs in Dutch, German, Swedish, Lithuanian, and Irish.

Woman and children were affectionally called '*Puss*' at this time, and this may have been the origin of '*Pussy*' as female genitalia, although there are other more likely origins.

*Pussy (as refers to female genitalia)*

This name is generally regarded as demeaning reducing woman to sexual objects. It can also be used to mean sexual intercourse e.g. 'I'm getting some pussy tonight.'

It was first appeared in the nineteenth century, and although it may have derived from pussy as in cat, it most likely derived from Low German for '*purse*' or Old Norse '*pūss*' or old English '*pusa*' for female genitals.

*Pussy as refers to cowardly men, comes from the Latin 'pusillanimous.'*

*Pussy can also mean containing pus.*



Fiona Lidgley-Robinson, October 2022



## Glamour model

This name implies a woman who is nothing but a sexual plaything for men, which is demeaning, particularly as sex is a basic animal instinct, and does not necessarily involve the thinking brain.

Glamour models tend to be women who are filmed or photographed to turn men on. They use '*supernormal stimuli*' (see note below) to be more sexually attractive than the real thing.

My woman has silicon enlarged lips and boobs. Her lipstick-coloured lips are parted, showing her teeth in an expression to suggest that she is '*gagging for it.*'

Her crotch area is emphasised by a tiny tight bikini, resulting in a '*Camel toe.*'



The message she gives to young woman is:

*'You'll never find a partner unless you look like me.'*

### **Technical notes**

Camel toe (Noun: slang, idiomatic) the visible cleft of the outer labia under tight clothing. This produces what vaguely resembles the toes of a camel.

Gagging-for-it (verb: UK, slang, idiomatic) having a strong desire for sex.

A supernormal stimulus an exaggerated version of a stimulus to which there is an existing response tendency, or any stimulus that elicits a response more strongly than the stimulus for which it evolved. *Wiktionary*

## The Nude

Although Nudes can be both sexes, it is usually assumed to be a woman. For example, if you Google '*The nude*' You will get responses such as:

'The Nude, sexy babes, naked art, erotic models, nude covers.'

Or: 'Sexy Naked Women, Beautiful Erotic Nudes, Beauty of Nude.'

The nude is assumed to be a woman.

In art a nude woman is considered to be beautiful, but not necessarily erotic.

In photography and according to Google, *the nude is erotic*. In either case the name is objectifying woman.

*Nude on red silk*

This is an original solarised silver print using liquid emulsion on red silk.



*Nude in charcoal and chalk*

This is a digital copy of a life drawing on coloured paper using pink and white chalk and charcoal



*Nude as prey*

This is a digitally altered composite of photos depicting a nude wrapped in silk like a spider's prey.



## Mirror, Mirror

This is a digital composite of several photographs.

The queen in the fairy story *'Snow White'* used to say to her mirror:

*'Mirror, mirror, on the wall who is the fairest of them all?'* The mirror always replied that that she was, but one day when she asked the mirror the same question; the mirror showed that it was now Snow White.



There is a huge pressure on woman today to conform to fashionable ideals of beauty. If she can do this in her youth, as she ages, this will no longer be possible.

Many women fear that they can never quite measure up to this ideal and therefore lack self-confidence.

The woman in my image is composed of several photographs picked out of fashion magazines. I chose the eyes from the woman with the most beautiful eyes, and did the same for lips nose and hair. In this way she was perfect in my eyes.

On the right is the image she hopes will appear in the mirror, but on the left, is the faint burnt-out reflection she fears she will see.

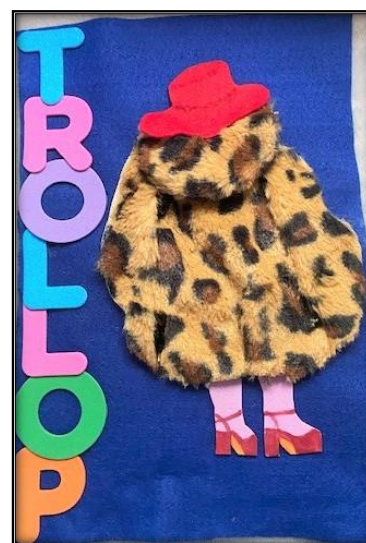
Sukie, October 2022



## Trollop

'Mum was my father's eldest sister. Not as deviant as it sounds, my mother died when I was 13 months old, and after a period of adjustment Grandmother deemed my godparents accept their duty and raise me, although my Father would not allow official adoption.

I had chicken pox for my eleventh Christmas and so we did not visit family, but one evening I was told that my father was coming, with a 'friend.' Fine, I know what a friend is.... I have some! They arrive, Father with flushed cheeks (it was cold outside) and her, sprayed solid perm, face powder, scarlet lipstick, and big fur coat (I did not notice the shoes, but doubt that they were red).



I overheard some of the conversation between mum and dad after they left – all '*fur coat and no knickers*' .... '*Sixteen years his junior*' .... '*Obviously, a gold digger, looking for a meal ticket.*'

Mum and dad were much influenced by Victorian and religious views, both were born in 1908 and so their opinions may be of their time. It was some time (18 months or so) later that I learnt that my father had married, this was necessary as I also had to be told that a sibling was due in September.

At fourteen, I was returned from leafy Essex to the East End of London, without warning, to my father and his wife, Kathleen, because I had become an agnostic and this was *untenable*. Kath took me out and about as if I were on holiday, introducing me to people as '*Pat's daughter, who is slumming it.*' So, I learnt that prejudice is not just a middle-class prerogative.

*Trollop* or not, she stayed with my father until his death, performing her wifely duties, though never fully accepted by his birth family. Living with them it was clear to see that her original appearance was all for show. At best her style was nondescript, and worse would be dowdy. Winding down her stockings indoors so as not to snag them. Dressing to impress had backfired, and added to other social *faux pas* (like being the wrong religion) meant that she remained ostracised.

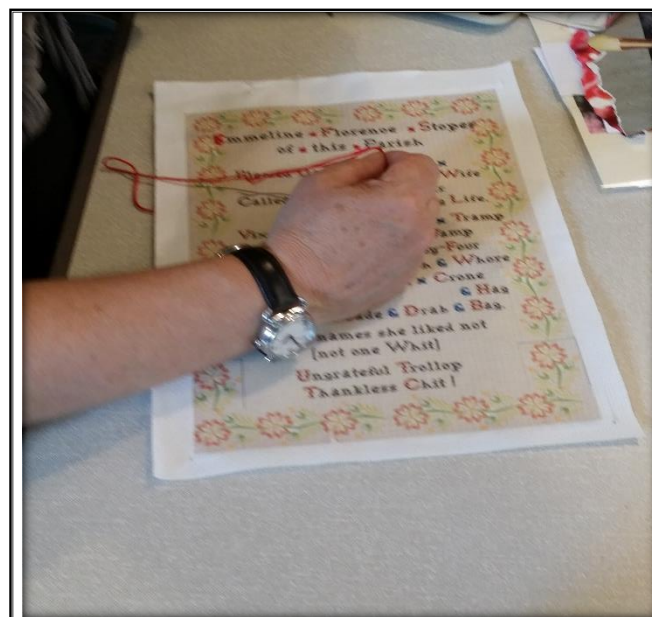
Oscar Wilde said it was unfortunate to lose one parent but careless to lose two; what would he say of me? I lost *five*.

*Trollop* is an abusive term, alluding to sexual immorality, which seems to have matched my godparents view of my stepmother. Maybe she did set her cap at him, and after many years my father succumbed to her feminine wiles. Does it even matter, if they fulfilled the needs of the other?

We use visual assessment to provide an almost instant appraisal of a person, and the key terms we use to define them each bring expectations of morals, character and worth. *Trollop* doesn't even sound like a nice word. But stereotyping provides us with a mental shorthand for summing up new people that we encounter, and as such is undoubtedly a useful tool for social intercourse. But then we become enmeshed in labelling ..... and these can be very sticky!

Trollop or not, I chose this picture as a reminder of my stepmother – and all the other *trollops* out there!

Helen Smith, October 2022



## Tart

*The Queen of Hearts,  
She made some tarts  
all on a summer's day.  
The knave of hearts,  
he stole the tarts  
and took them clean away.  
The King of hearts  
called for the tarts  
and beat the knave full sore.  
The knave of hearts  
brought back the tarts  
and vowed he'd steal no more.*



This English poem and nursery rhyme dates from the eighteenth century. So, when did the simple pastry tart become a derogatory word to describe a woman.

In the early nineteenth century the word tart became slang for a pretty woman. Some believe it's rhyming slang for jam tart, so sweetheart.

It was used as a term of endearment, a tart is a sweet pastry and a woman is sweet. So tart was used in the same way as we might call someone honey or sugar today. By the end of the nineteenth century the word was used to describe a prostitute.

The dictionary definition states that a 'tart' is a woman who dresses in a way that is considered tasteless and sexually provocative.

This word, *tart* led me into ways in which I could combine the different meanings of tart. Sweet jam tarts but with pretty women as their filling held by the Queen of hearts sprang into my mind.

The Queen of hearts is a woman who has gained the adoration of the public. So, this woman who is much adored is linked to tarts in more ways than one!

Rosa Castellina, October 2022.

## A for Adultery

This panel represents a sinning woman: an Adulteress, Trollop, Scarlet Woman, a Strumpet. The scarlet letter 'A', marks her as an adulteress. This badge of her sin and a symbol of shame is based on the novel *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Adultery has been regarded as *sinful* since Roman times. a sin. It is a '*mortal sin*' for Catholics; and is forbidden in the Ten Commandments.

*The Scarlet Letter* in the Puritan community of New England. The New England Puritans prosecuted sex crimes more vigorously than any any other types of crime.

Adultery was often euphemistically called '*insinuating or wanton dalliance*', '*unlawful familiarity*' or '*committing folly*'. Public whipping was a frequent punishment. Women unable to bear the shame of wearing the letter 'A' could choose to be whipped instead. (Never more than 40 strokes, as specified in the Bible). A repeat offender, eighteen-year-old Mary Latham, was even executed in 1631.

Hawthorne's central character, Hester refuses to name the father of her daughter, Pearl. So, she has to wear the scarlet 'A' on her bodice and is banished to the town's outskirts.

Hester learns from her disgrace, despair and solitude and, as the novel progresses the significance of the letter 'A' changes from its original meaning of '*Adulteress*' to '*Able*.' She even achieves '*Absolution*' through her sacrifice and goodness. For some readers Hester comes to represent an '*Angel*' ... an interpretation fully in line with the novel's supernatural elements.

The pearl earring on the panel represents Hester's daughter. Hawthorne describes her as '*the scarlet letter in another form; the scarlet letter endowed in life*,' the constant reminder of sin. She is also a vital spark of life that reminds Hester of her shared passion with the girl's father, and gives her the will to live and to fight against subservience, oppression and a rigid male-dominated society.



Barbara Grafton, October 2022

## A 'Stitch Out Of Time'

This panel was the first piece created for this project. It is a collaborative work created by the project group as a whole. It is inspired by the samplers stitched by young girls. These samplers were often the first textile works created by girls to demonstrate their competence in basic stitching techniques. Such samplers were often made at school (or Sunday school) where needlework was viewed as one of the highest educational objectives for female pupils. A prettily-worked sampler could also stand a girl in good stead in later life, when shown to a potential employer as evidence of her needlecraft skills.



Sampler texts were traditionally prayers or bible verses, simple rhymes or moralising homilies. Such samplers can be visually charming, with highly-worked details and delicately-patterned borders. They are much sought-after today and can fetch high prices.

The group decided to take the traditional sampler and give it a twist of our own. The name at the top: Elizabeth Florence Stopes, commemorates three notable women: Elizabeth Montagu (founder of the Bluestocking Society); Florence Nightingale and Marie Stopes.)

The text for our sampler incorporates derogatory names for women in doggerel verse, embellished with traditional stitching and borders.

The Bluestockings to Bimbos project group, October 2022.

## Feminists and 'Feminazis'

The Feminist and 'women's liberation' movements were founded in America in the 1960s, to campaign for equality with men. In 1968, the New York Radical Women group, placed a 'Freedom Trash Can' outside the Miss America pageant in the Convention Center in Atlantic City, New Jersey. It contained items that represented unrealistic expectations of female beauty, or which turned women into sex objects. These included: bras, corsets, wigs, high-heeled shoes, stockings, false eyelashes, cosmetics, hairspray, curlers, and magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Playboy*.



The plan had been to set it alight, but a permit to do this was refused. So, there was no fire. *No bras were burned* as a symbol of liberation. But the camera shutters clicked, and one image stood out ... that of a bra being dropped into the trash.

The Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s made a massive positive difference to women's lives. But despite this, the words *feminism* and *feminist* have been successfully demeaned. The bra-burning myth was part of that, associated either with trivial and 'silly' gestures, or with extremism.

The most extreme anti-feminist word is *feminazi*. This labels feminists as 'militant man-haters' and characterises them as angry, puritanical and intolerant. Women who campaign for equal rights become labelled as *vile*; even *evil*, according to misogynist commentators.

Feminist attempts to reclaim the name by ironically self-identifying as *feminazis* to diffuse its stigma, has made few inroads.

In the last two years, 2021 to 2022, women have suffered further erosions of their rights. The Covid-19 pandemic, wars, climate change, legal changes, decline in economies... all of these have affected women and girls disproportionately.

So here we have a sorry-looking bra, burnt (or, rather, melted and scorched as happens to modern synthetic fabrics) studded with feminist badges and hung about with women's lib slogans and iconography. It is set against a background of *that* 1960s photograph of the 'Freedom Trash Can.' It illustrates two terms that have been applied disparagingly to women (and men) who want to see equality between the sexes.

Barbara Grafton, October 2022

## Fishwife

This is a much easier term to understand, as it literally does refer to a female who sold fish. The wives and daughters of fishermen needed to sell their wares quickly or they would perish, so they shouted loudly to attract buyers. *Wife* in this old sense meant *woman*.

These women could be seen at Billingsgate for instance: *'[T]hey dressed in strong gowns and quilted petticoats, their hair, caps and bonnets were flattened into one indistinguishable mass upon their heads. They smoked small pipes of tobacco, took snuff, drank gin and were known for their colourful language.'*

The dictionary definition is: *'a coarse-mannered woman who is prone to shouting.'*

This led me into thinking about the fishwives of old, with their worn and hardened appearance. So, I collected some old photos and over-layered them with fish and megaphones, to create a whimsical look at the word *'fishwife.'*



Rosa Castellina, October 2022.



## Cougar and Puma

Oh, those wicked Cougars and Pumas! Single women looking for relationships with younger men. How dare they? Surely, it's only men who can have a younger specimen of the opposite sex dangling from their arm?

Here come the *Cougars*, slinky older women, 40+, prowling for men ten or more years their junior. In 2005, relationships columnist Valerie Gibson claimed the term originated in Vancouver as a put-down for older women who would pick up young men in bars. It all sounded so sordid... experienced, predatory felines hunting innocent 'prey.'

However, as a plot device in literature, the concept has been around forever. In 428 BC Greece Euripides premiered the play *Hippolytos* in which Phaedra, wife of Theseus, mythical king and founder of Athens, falls ardently in love with Hippolytus, her young stepson. The unnamed wife of Potiphar in the Old Testament Book of Genesis is another Cougar, failing to seduce her slave boy Joseph (he of the Technicolour dream-coat).

Wealth and status allowed certain women to free themselves from social conventions. Catherine the Great described her last lover, Prince Platon Alexandrovich Zubov as:

*'Our baby [who] weeps when denied the entry into my room.'*

Catherine was over sixty and Zubov was just twenty-two, and their relationship lasted until her death.

Jennie Spencer-Churchill, the mother of Winston Churchill, was believed to have had 200 lovers, including the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII. Her second husband, George Cornwallis-West, was only 26 days older than Winston; and her third husband, Montagu Phippen Porch, was three years younger than Winston.

The arts are infamous for producing Cougars. Lillie Langtry (1853-1929) the gorgeous socialite and actress, had many scandalous affairs. In 1899, aged forty-six, she married the twenty-seven-year-old Hugo Gerald de Bathe. Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), unconventional dancer, outspoken atheist, openly took male and female lovers, many considerably younger than herself. In 1922, aged forty-five, having fled to Moscow after the tragic deaths of her three children, she married the celebrated poet Sergei Yesenin, eighteen years her junior.

Mae West (1893-1980) oozed lasciviousness, sauciness, and sexual wantonness, becoming Hollywood's ultimate sexy harlot in her late 30s. In the 1933 film *She Done*



*Him Wrong*, she purrs the famous (and always misquoted) line, 'Why don't you come up sometime, see me, I'll tell your fortune.' She and the bisexual Cary Grant, nine years her junior, were lovers. At the age of sixty-one she began a relationship with wrestler and former Mr California, Chester Rybinski, thirty years younger than her. They were inseparable until Mae's death at eighty-seven.

*Cougars* are always prime tabloid fodder. Many are celebrated actresses, singers and artists including Cher (labelled 'the original *cougar*' by *Vanity Fair*). Others include Kim Cattrall, Joan Collins, and Madonna to Amanda Redman, Susan Sarandon, Elizabeth Taylor, Vivienne Westwood, and Barbara Windsor...

But not all *Cougars* are household names. Any woman may be one. Ilona Paris, author of *Hot Cougar Sex*, says many are financially independent, confident, empowered, educated, beautiful and chic, while others are quiet and demure ... on the outside. They all want to feel desired, to have 'fun without strings' and to share their sexual experience with young men keen to learn.

## **Pumas**

*Pumas* are young *Cougars*, women in their thirties who prefer dating younger men. Their relationships, if they're lucky, may attract less attention and censure than those of *Cougars*. However, if unlucky, there will be cradle-snatching 'jokes' implying a lack of maturity in a woman needing a relationship with a 'boy.' The *Pumas* know better, of course. At best, these relationships are low maintenance, with no worries about commitment, based on sex for pleasure, and often with large helpings of mutual adoration or admiration.

Ladies, life is short! Those kitten heels at the back of the closet need taking for a prowl!  
!

Barbara Grafton, October 2022

## Which?

Which do you see? A bewitching young woman, or an old hag/witch? Psychologists would have you believe that the face you first see depends on the age of the people with whom you usually see most, which seems reasonable enough. But it is the attendant descriptive words you might bestow on each woman that might be more telling, because in reality both are the same woman.

It is fair to say that I am now long past that first flush of youth with which the young woman seems to exude, pretty, confident and going out in the world. Whereas the older woman is more smothered in the fur, under a headscarf and sad eyed which is perhaps where I am as I gradually become an 'invisible' older lady. The transition between the two is what drew me to this illusion.

The bright young thing with the plume in her hair might well be thought a bimbo, interested in looking good and having fun (and why not?), but in due course becomes the older woman, withdrawn from society and weighed down by experience (or is that wisdom?).

The transition from smooth face and chiselled jaw to large, hooked nose and narrow lips denote the aging process and exemplify the desirability of certain features over others. Obviously from an evolutionary point of view, younger women are to be valued for their fecundity and the furtherance of the human race. So why do women not die soon after their fertility ceases to be viable? (Men retain an ability to father children from puberty onwards). Older women can be substitute or temporary mothers, but it is their accrued knowledge that gives them most value as in the wisdom referenced in the Wicker word witch.

I have no idea whether this picture was a simple optical illusion, whereby the brain being faced with two images has to choose one, but may flip to the other, or whether it was a subtle attempt to show the aging of one woman. Or there again a cautionary visual narrative warning young men that they may marry a winsome beauty, but in time she will decline in beauty as the years take their toll.



Helen Smith, October 2022

## The Beauty and the Crone

Helen Smith and I were both inspired to create panels based on the famous optical illusion: *The Beauty and the Crone*. The picture was first published in 1888. Also known as *'My Wife and My Mother-in-Law'* it became widely popular after it was published in the American magazine *Puck*.

The *illusion* is that you first see either the face of a young and beautiful *'wife'* or that of an elderly and ugly *'mother-in-law.'* Some people find it difficult to switch from seeing one image to the other.

The poem is written in the first person, with the old *'hag'* or *'crone'* reminiscing about the exquisite beauty she was in her youth. She has led a privileged life, and is now a century old. In that context applying those names to herself is humorous. In a different context, particularly where an elderly impoverished woman was being called names such as hag, crone, witch, biddy, old bag, or old bat, it would be abuse and devaluation of her worth, regardless of any previous positive role she had played in the community.

The narrator keeps her portrait close to her, a reminder of the days when she would almost stop the traffic with her looks. She imagines it coming to life in her room, but realises it is far more likely to be her great-granddaughter who has inherited her beauty and who needs wise counsel on how to use it without damaging others.

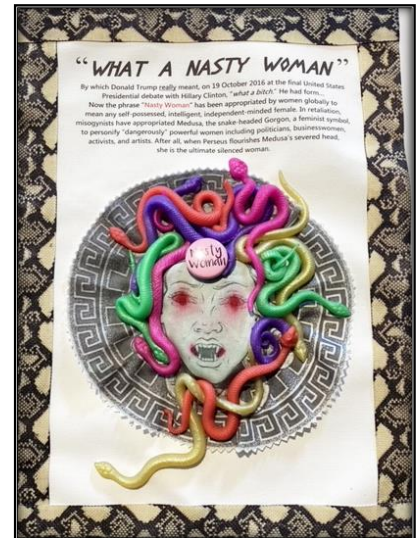


Barbara Grafton, October 2022

## Nasty Woman

The phrase *'such a nasty woman'* was employed by Donald Trump during the 2016 US election campaign. He was referring to his political rival Hillary Clinton. He clearly meant *'what a bitch.'* This was echoed by Trump's supporters in slogans such as *'Life's a bitch, don't vote for one.'*

Having learned lessons from the attack on the word *'feminist'* by conservatives and white supremacists in the 1990s, feminists adopted *'nasty woman'* as their own rallying cry. It has now entered the international lexicon as a phrase denoting confident, intelligent, independent females.



Elizabeth Johnston, in a 2016 essay in *The Atlantic* called Medusa, the mythological snake-headed Gorgon the original *'nasty woman.'* Medusa haunts the Western imagination; manifesting *'whenever male authority feels threatened by female agency.'* Marie Antoinette was depicted as a hyena with the head of a Medusa in the 1791 print *Les deux ne font qu'un*. Margaret Thatcher is the subject of UB40's hit song *'Madam Medusa'*; and Theresa May was dubbed the *'Medusa of Maidenhead'* and *'Maydusa.'* The implication was that they were ugly, monstrous, unfeminine; and deserved to be vilified for daring to challenge in roles traditionally preserved for men.

Hillary as the *Medusa* featured in the *'nasty woman'* merchandise sold by Republican opponents. This image, reproduced on Tee-shirts, mugs and other items, featured Trump holding up the screaming severed head of Hillary as *Medusa*, in a variety of campaign materials.

Medusa may be a powerful and threatening female monster, but she is also the ultimate silenced woman ... beheaded while asleep by the demi-God Perseus.

To my mind, all the strong, independent-thinking women who have ever lived are *'Nasty Women'* - and I salute them all for what they endured, and still endure .... to teach men that *women's rights are human rights.*

Barbara Grafton, October 2022

## Not Your Babe

This panel and the poem include many of the names used to describe young women that can be regarded as highly insulting and misogynistic. Some of them have been around for centuries, while one - pram face - is fairly freshly-minted.



The use of some of these words can be entirely innocent, or sexist and degrading. Much depends on the context and the manner in which they are used. 'Babe' is a tricky one, a term of endearment for many, but infantilising and even creepy for others.

What about bunny, chick, dolly bird, and pussy? Harmless? Or words describing creatures needing delicate handling and caresses? Creatures that, in humanoid form would be unable to change a tyre. Let alone run a country.

Then there's the long list of naughty, saucy words: baggage, bimbo, chit, coquette, hussy, Lolita, minx, piece of skirt, pram face, tomboy and wench. All girls and women that are likely to be 'up for it', either because they are prostitutes or because they are likely to be sexually active or even promiscuous.

The narrator is both intelligent and feisty, but you can sense that underneath, jabbing away at her sense of self there's vulnerability. She's young, but on the cusp of womanhood. She doesn't need this barrage of words inferring male attention and control; they make her uneasy - so she chooses to fight back.

Barbara Grafton, October 2022

## **The Bluestockings to Bimbos project team**

*Jennifer Stevens* is a founder member of The Field Theatre Group under whose auspices she wears many hats, including chair and creative producer. With the Field she has been involved in film production, costume and set design as well as hands on making of props for stage and film. Trained originally as a fine artist majoring in sculpture she is a highly experienced community practitioner. Jennifer is also a Trustee of the Adams Heritage Centre in Littleport and is currently working towards developing the centre into a thriving arts, heritage and cultural hub.

**Deborah Curtis** is a professional writer and theatre-maker. She has worked professionally in theatre and TV, and is Artistic Director of the Field Theatre Group. She has written plays, filmscripts and books for The Field.

Deborah takes her inspiration from the people, places and landscapes of the Fens. She is also an enthusiastic writer (and reader) of ghost stories! She also writes and performs her own work.

*Land Lines: Voices of the Fens* (2014). Book.

*Isle of Ghosts* (2015). Book.

*Myth Magic and the Supernatural in a Fenland town* (reissued 2016). Book.

*Holding Hands*, one-woman touring production (2018) Play.

## **The Field Theatre Group**

The Field Theatre Group was founded in 2004 with the aim of bringing professional-quality arts, performance, heritage and cultural experiences to the community of Littleport and surrounding areas. Community inclusion is the cornerstone of our work, and community involvement is vital to the ongoing success of our projects. In the 18 years since the Field was founded, our community participants in Littleport alone number in excess of 1,000 people. By learning and working together The Field enables participants to learn new skills in a friendly and supportive environment. This community engagement also strengthens social bonds.

Participation in our projects is open to *all*; regardless of age, experience and background. Our projects have included children with special educational needs, disabled residents, those who are socially isolated, young people, and marginalised people and families.

The Field is wholly grant-funded, and we have received funding from The Heritage Lottery Fund, Littleport Parish Council, Arts Development in East Cambridgeshire (AdeC), Cambridgeshire Grassroots, and the Co-operative Community Fund.

**Jennifer Stevens and Deborah Curtis** form the core of the Field Theatre Group. Under their directorship, The Field has received grant funding from many national and regional funding agencies, including: The National Lottery Fund, The National Heritage Lottery Fund, East Cambs Community Fund, Co-operative Community Fund, The Cambs Community Safety Partnership, and Cambs Grassroots.

The Field has produced a wide range of community projects, including large scale performances, community films, art installations, multi-media touring productions, schools programmes, community art and writing projects, exhibitions and books.

For details of all our past, current and future projects please visit our website. [www.fieldtheatregroup.co.uk](http://www.fieldtheatregroup.co.uk)

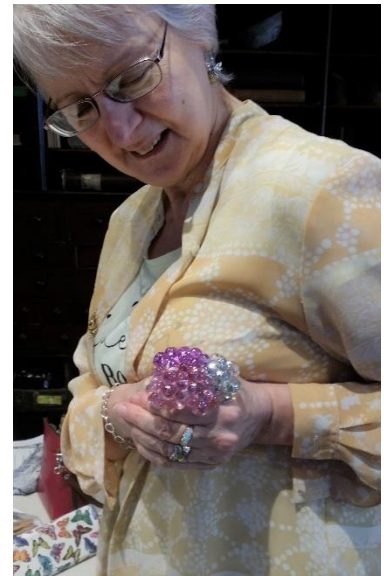
### **Further information**

For further information, images and interviews please contact Deborah Curtis or Jennifer Stevens 01353 863595/862042

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