

**The Croning of Camilla: a Sexual Political
Analysis of Media Criticism of Camilla
Parker Bowles**

**Lauren Rosewarne
Department of Political Science, Centre for Public Policy
University of Melbourne**

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Abstract

In early 2005, Camilla Parker Bowles (CPB) married heir to the throne of England, Prince Charles. Since her long affair with Charles became public, CPB has been exposed to extensive media criticism that has continued through to her recent marriage. This paper proposes that while there are numerous potential reasons explaining this media contempt towards CPB, that a feminist analysis of the coverage would claim that negative commentary is based on the construction and perpetuation of her image as an unattractive older woman: i.e., a crone. This paper examines the construction of the crone in media and popular culture, using CPB Parker Bowles as a case study. This paper contends that media criticism of CPB is primarily shaped by her non compliance with contemporary understandings of 'beautiful', which are perpetually defined by youth and femininity. Charles' previous wife, Diana, provides a nice contrast to CPB, in that while Diana's personal indiscretions were as morally egregious as CPB's, Diana's beauty somehow exonerated her from the levels of condemnation CPB has been subject to.

Introduction

Camilla Parker Bowles (CPB) has been criticised by the media for everything from her hair style, to her dress sense to her status as 'the other woman'. This paper will draw from the bevy of negative media commentary about CPB, examining this commentary from a feminist perspective, and exploring how such criticism reflects general criticism of women in patriarchal society and the necessity for them to engage in practices associated with femininity in order to gain social acceptance.

Cultural obsession with the 'People's Princess'

On the surface, the most obvious explanation for media contempt for CPB is the Diana factor. To describe Princess Diana as a 'media darling' ("City mourns first queen of hearts" 2002, n.p.) is by no means an overstatement.

Peter Almond describes her as 'Britain's biggest world superstar, the fabulous fairy-tale princess who everyone felt they knew intimately' (Almond 1998, 65). It could therefore be argued, that the media obsession with Diana came as a result of the media simply understanding – and catering to – to public interests. In such a scenario, the antagonist in Diana's fairytale princess story would be CPB. CPB's relationship with Charles began long before his marriage to Diana. While Charles' reasons for not marrying CPB originally are not clear, explanations range from CPB being deemed an appropriate wife due to her insufficiently refined background (Gardiner 2005, n.p.), her not

being a virgin (and Britain arguably wanting a 'princess of Wales who'd never been to bed with anybody else' (in Kotb 2005, n.p.)) and Royal family hopes of Charles marrying a princess from another country to create a 'royal super dynasty' (in Kotb 2005, n.p.). Of course, despite the fact that Charles married Diana and not CPB, CPB was indeed involved in the 'selection' of Diana as an appropriate bride ("Camilla Parker Bowles" 2005b, n.p.) and she later became the proverbial 'other woman' in the 'fairytale' marriage. Diana encapsulated CPB's role in the marriage best when she famously remarked, '[t]here were three in the marriage, so it was a bit crowded' (Dodd 2005, n.p.). CPB's 'other woman' status was often repeated by the media with CPB routinely framed as 'Britain's most famous "other woman"' (Lang undated, n.p.). The media dubbed her a 'mistress' ("Prince Charles to marry longtime lover Camilla" 2005, n.p.; Puente 2005, n.p.) and a homewrecker (Liban 2005, n.p.; Smith 2005, n.p.) and shortly after she was named as Charles' lover, was pelted with breadrolls while grocery shopping (Walker 2001, n.p.). Camilla was seen as an adulterer in the eyes of the Church of England (Mason 2005, n.p.), not to mention the President of the United States, who banned her and Charles from a visit to the White House because they are divorcees (Gilfeather 2005, n.p.). It has even been argued that the Queen's non-attendance at their civil marriage ceremony was reflective of her alliance with the Church's condemnation of the nuptials of the divorcees (Alderson 2005, n.p.).

It is logical therefore, to assume that CPB 's 'involvement' in the marriage of Charles and Diana provides the basis for media condemnation of her. As earlier quotes allude, Diana was popular and revered and it could be argued that the media cast CPB in a negative light simply because she was the 'villain' in a veritable fairytale. Media commentary aptly illustrates this idea, where CPB was often cast as a villain: CPB is the 'the wicked witch who killed snow white' (in "Should Charles remarry?" 2001, n.p.); CPB is 'the Wicked Witch of the West who turned the fairy-tale royal wedding into the marriage from hell' ("Bride And Prejudice" 2005, n.p.) and CPB is 'the wicked witch charged with destroying a fairytale marriage' (Wade 2005, 61). This paper however, will contend that despite obvious reasons for media criticism, an alternate way of examining the negative coverage is to analyse it through a gender lens and examine the parts that factors such as CPB's appearance, age and lack of involvement in feminine performance have played in her criticism.

Unpacking 'The Horse'

Many of the criticisms of CPB have been grounded in her appearance, with comparisons to animals a routine feature of commentary: as noted by Rashmee Lall in *The Times Of India*, 'Camilla was routinely described with heavy allusion to all things equine' (Lall 2005, n.p.). A story that well captures

these equine references was included in Piers Mirror's book *The Insider*, where he discusses a thirteen-year-old Prince William recounting a sketch from a television program titled *Have I Got News For You*, to his mother, Princess Diana:

'Oh, Mummy, it was hilarious,' laughed William. 'They had a photo of Mrs Parker Bowles and a horse's head and asked what the difference was - and the answer was that there wasn't any (in Preston 2005, n.p.).

Linking commentary about her to references to horses is a prominent theme in media criticism of CPB. In a recent *Guardian* article, specific mention was made of the popular understanding that she '[l]ooks like a horse' (Bindel 2005, n.p.). In a *salon.com* article, CPB is described as 'a wee bit horsey' (Reiter 1999, n.p.) and in another she is referred to as 'the horsey best gal' (Reiter 1999, n.p.). An *Evening Standard* article claims '[w]e've known since Camillagate that she's a dark horse now we think she's a clothes horse, too' ("Camilla Parker Bowles" 2004, n.p.). CPB's biographer, describes her as 'a hearty and horsey girl with big breasts' (in Lawson 2005, n.p.), while a *Times of India* article dubs her a 'horsey bag-lady' (Ahmed 2001, n.p.). An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* claims she 'has cornered the market in horse-faced blondes' ("Nearly in their prime" 2005, n.p.) and another particularly cruelly suggests that 'she had the face of a mare and the rump of a stallion' (Lawson

2005, n.p.). *The McGill Daily* refers to her as Charles' 'horse-faced concubine' (Gorky 2005, n.p.) and perhaps a little more obliquely the *Washington Post* refers to her as having 'sensibly shod feet' (Givhan 2005, D01) while *The Evening's Standard* claims she's 'great in the saddle' (Pearson 2005, 13). It should be noted of course, that while equine references have predominated, taunts have incorporated other animal references: i.e., a cow through her renaming as 'Cowmilla' in press commentary (Honigsbaum 2005, 3; Leeman 2005, A13; Wilson 2005, 17). She was also notably referred to as 'The Rottweiler' by Princess Diana (Varin 2005); dubbed an 'old trout' in a *Weekend Post* article (Lee 2005, WP4) and even described as an untidy 'puppy' (Tyrell 2005, n.p.).

The most obvious explanation for why animal – particularly equine – references are the insults of choice is because of CPB's well-documented love of horses and riding. While – as this paper will shortly articulate – her love of horses cannot fully explain the politics behind the barbs she is subjected to, CPB's interest in the outdoors is often used to flesh out such insults and provide them with context. This is well illustrated by a media description of her appearance:

Camilla Parker Bowles, despite her recent appearance at a Paris catwalk show, spends most of her time in true Englishcountry fashion,

caked in mud or plastered with dog hairs. Her hair is often tousled and tangled as though only just relieved of her riding hat (McCartney 1999, n.p.).

Other journalists have painted similar 'outdoorsy' pictures of CPB: Victoria Mather argues that she 'looks as if she's used the dog brush because she's lost her own and has honest dirt under her fingernails from the herbaceous border' (Mather 1999, n.p.). While CPB may harbour genuinely strong interest in the outdoors, so too does Charles: as noted by journalist Audrey Woods, both Camilla *and* Charles 'have a passion for the peace of rural life, riding after the hounds and taking long walks' (Woods 2005, n.p.). Prince Charles of course, isn't called a cow, or a horse, or a trout because of his weekend pursuits. This paper therefore, proposes that there is something particularly gendered about the animal-based criticisms, and that insulting a woman by labelling her a 'horse' is a far more complicated issue than simply 'ribbing' her about her pastimes.

On the most obvious level, the gendered nature of animal insults is illustrated when thinking of the kinds of animal insults directed at women – bitch and cow as obvious examples – as opposed to those directed at men – i.e., stallion, stud. The nature of insults such as bitch and cow are far more offensive to women than stallion or stud are to men, and both have very different

connotations: while bitch and cow are often negative references to promiscuity or unattractiveness, stallion or stud bear more celebratory connotations regarding male virility and sexual prowess. Fontecha and Jimenez-Catalan, in their research on the use of animal metaphors in English and Spanish, studied word pairs i.e., fox/vixen and bull/cow, and their Spanish equivalents. One of their central findings was that the main metaphorical meanings of the female terms connote worse qualities than those denoted by the metaphors of the male terms (Fontecha & Jimenez-Catalan 2003). This kind of linguistic double standard is reinforced by research undertaken by Grossman and Tucker which involved undergraduate students reporting all the slang terms they knew to describe either 'woman' or 'man'. The authors detailed that the most commonly listed slang terms for men were generally less offensive and more socially acceptable than the terms describing women, i.e., the authors compared the use of words like 'bitch', 'chick' and 'babe' and their relevant connotations, as opposed to 'stud', 'guy' and 'dude', with the latter set's comparatively innocuous connotations (Grossman & Tucker 1997). These ideas also tie in with work undertaken by Flexner on slang, where he notes that 'most American slang is created and used by males. Many types of slang words . . . refer primarily to male endeavor and interest' (Flexner 1975, xii). Flexner's work reflects much research which discusses the gendered nature of insults, more specifically that there tends to be more insulting words – particularly sexually insulting words

– that exist in the popular lexicon, describing women than men (Miller & Swift 1976), and that the existence of the extensive sexual and derogatory slang directed at women suggests that women continue to be defined by their sexuality more so than men (Adams & Ware 1979). As research by Unger and Crawford suggests, such language double standards reflect societal biases against women and may also lead both sexes to view women more negatively (Unger and Crawford 1992). The fact that, for example, Charles is not ridiculed to the extent that CPB is for his outdoor pursuits, illustrates this double standard.

Of course, the animal references to CPB are very specific, and thus provide scope for more specific probes into the gendered selection of the horse metaphor. Unlike words like vixen which are more readily associated with female sexuality, calling a woman a horse is a description grounded in aesthetics. Hines, in her research on animal metaphors in language, argues that traditionally when women are referred to with animal names, they tend to be animals that are small and cute, and ones that are able to be hunted or possessed: i.e., 'chick', 'pussy' or 'bunny'. Two explanations Hines offers for the rationale behind these animal names include that the women in question become simply objects for sexual desire, or that they are being degraded through their likening to animals that are possessed or eaten. (Hines 1999). Horses of course, are not animals to be hunted or possessed, on the contrary,

horses are actually animals routinely associated with masculinity (a point which will be elaborated on shortly). Presumably, to be described as horse-like, the assumption is that you bear physical attributes similar to the animal, or that you possess other attributes which associate your appearance with horses. The fact that CPB is routinely referred to as a horse rather than a mare bolsters this idea. While generally the press have left the equine references to speak for themselves, Victoria Mather in *The Evening Standard*, elaborates on this metaphor, claiming:

Prince Charles may think she has the face that launched a thousand ships but in photographs it looks as if she'd pushed them down the slipway with her nose (Mather 1999, n.p.).

Such a reference is drawing attention to CPB's nose, which is likely a link back to the equine descriptor: being horse-like presumably means that you are possessing horse-like physical attributes, i.e., a long face with a prominent nose. Of course, the idea of CPB being truly horse-like seems an insultingly long bow to draw, as noted in an editorial in *salon.com*: 'in fact, Parker-Bowles, whatever her faults or her morals, looks to be a rather pleasant, athletic-looking representative of her age and class' (Fischer 1997, n.p.). Instead, this paper suggests that rather than Camilla's *physical* features being the

explanation for equine references, such references refer to Camilla's general presentation, notably her lack of traditional femininity.

Research undertaken by Lambdin *et al* discuss the beliefs of adults and children regarding non-sex specific stuffed animals. Their research refers to animals including polar bears, lizards, frogs, dragonflies, fireflies and horses as each being presumed male (Lambdin *et al* 2003). This of course, is just the tip of the iceberg. As mentioned earlier, stallion and stud are equine words that denote male virility and prowess. The horse has long existed as a phallic reference in literature and mythology (Adkins 2003) and expressions such as 'hung like a horse' are often used to describe the penis. There are numerous potential explanations for why CPB insults are so routinely based on equine references, however, popular perception of a horse as masculine helps illustrate one contention that this paper proposes: that through being likened to a horse, CPB is being dubbed masculine. One article that seems relatively complimentary – compared to many profiles on CPB – draws specific attention to her unladylikeness; purporting that 'Camilla is not a woman's woman. She is a tomboy who likes being one of the lads' (Tyrell 2005, n.p.). David Smith makes a similar point in the *Guardian*, claiming that "'Milla', as she was known, was a regular tomboy with an extrovert personality' (Smith 2005, n.p.). The 'tomboy' moniker draws specific attention to the fact that the female in question is not engaging in pursuits associated with femininity,

rather, is acting more like a boy. This point is explained well by the traditional definition provided by Safir *et al* in their discussion of tomboys in Israel, explaining the tomboy as:

a girl who shows distinct preferences for boylike characteristics while completely rejecting feminine gender roles, or even feminine identification (Safir *et al* 2003, 401).

Safir *et al*'s definition of the tomboy helps provide context for Camille Paglia's description of CPB: she is a 'woman without any conventionally appealing female attributes' (in Ross 1997, n.p.). The fact that a word like 'tomboy' exists, is indicative of a behavioural aberration. As noted by Suzanne Moore in her article about Manolo Blahnik stilettos, '[i]n most cultures, powerful women are encouraged to hide their masculinity' (Moore 2003, n.p.). This comment reflects the social expectation that women are meant to hide the attributes of themselves that may be more commonly associated with masculinity, instead, masking their non-feminine interests and attributes with a preoccupation with all things feminine. The kind of behaviour that renders Camilla unfeminine is grounded in her apparent disinterest in fashion and grooming, i.e., as claimed by a *Sunday Times* columnist, 'Camilla is one of those women who don't make an effort' ("Camilla Parker Bowles" 2005). Criticism of Camilla's unfeminine attitude towards fashion and grooming is

typified by media commentary. A *Washington Post* article illustrates this well, claiming that CPB:

has abstained from fashion, keeping her sensibly shod feet firmly on the side of unremarkable tweeds, Sunday service hats and silhouettes that are more rectangular than hourglass.... She chooses suits and dresses that are generally shapeless. Her clothes steer clear of any curves that might be lurking beneath all of that tweed and silk' (Givhan 2005, D01).

Of course, Robin Givhan's description is just one example of a bevy of insults: other articles draw attention to her 'unplucked eyebrows' (Mather 1999, n.p.) and 'static-flying, hedgerow hair and bulky tweed coat' (Brown 2005, n.p.). CPB has been described as an 'older woman with no dress sense and birds-nest hair' (Summerskill 2002, n.p.), as though 'she has just tumbled out of bed' (Bindel 2005), and as a 'frumpy, dumpy dowager' (Malone 2000, n.p.).

The idea of beauty and femininity being prescriptive and inflexible constructs, is well illustrated by criticism of CPB. Sheila Jeffreys' book *Beauty and Misogyny* outlines well the necessity for women to participate in beauty practices that have come to define femininity in contemporary society and which have also contributed to female subordination (Jeffreys 2005). CPB's

non-compliance with the activities of femininity and beauty render her less than a woman, hence providing an explanation for the equine insults she is routinely subjected to. A preoccupation with fashion and grooming – and of course, the actual feminine outcome – is an important way for a woman to illustrate that she is actually female. The fact that CPB is not the ‘fashion plate’ (Anderson 2005, n.p.) or ‘fashion icon’ (Leicester 2005, n.p.) that Princess Diana was means that CPB is never going to demonstrate her femaleness adequately because she will always be compared to a woman whose interest in the performance of femininity was a cornerstone of her identity (see Butler 1990 for a more detailed discussion of the performance of gender). Similarly, the fact that CPB is not making the ‘effort’ expected of her in order for her to demonstrate her femininity renders her masculine.

The role of fashion and grooming in the construction of female identity is an issue that continues to divide feminists. The notion of grooming and beautifying as a means to be thought of as attractive by men and to be accepted by society at large (Dworkin 1974), has long been interpreted as something oppressive by feminists who have criticised such pursuits as dictating restrictive and prescriptive images of femininity which limit the ways women use their bodies and the activities they engage in (Bartky 1988; de Beauvoir 1989; Young 1989; Bordo 1993; Steele 1997). Such practices have also been criticised for objectifying women, limiting their worth and value to

being attractive to men (Bartky 1990) and ultimately controlling – and wasting - their time (Bartky 1988; Jeffreys 2005). Of course, feminist works similarly exist condemning ‘feminism’s antibeauty stance’ (Scott 2005, 13) and lauding a preoccupation with fashion and grooming as empowering and as a way for women to advance and achieve equality (Lehrman 1997; Scott 2005). While the feminist/fashion debate is covered extensively in the references cited above, and while this paper does not intend to mount a case either way about the positive or negatives of fashion, the fact that CPB has been criticised – repeatedly – for her disinterest in it reflects that at a macro, societal level, a strong interest in fashion and grooming is deemed a normal, feminine pursuit and perhaps more importantly, a pursuit essential for social acceptance (Dworkin 1974; Jeffreys 2005). For a woman *not* to possess such an interest – and for her not to make an effort - is an aberration. Thompson and Hirschman argue that understandings of attractiveness are based upon a general understanding of how we ‘should’ look and that this message is reinforced by a culture that encourages efforts to ‘normalise’ one’s body (Thompson & Hirschman 1995). This paper contends that the normalisation of fashion and grooming into the constitution of appropriate feminine behaviour has been successful in reducing women who do not engage in such pursuits to being unfeminine, thus asexual or masculine. The fact that CPB has not been overtly interested in attempts at body ‘normalisation’ have rendered her unfeminine, thus masculine, and equine-like.

Exploring 'The Crone'

Just as equine references are popular insults directed at CPB, so too have been those drawing attention to her age: she has been called a 'hard-faced harridan' (Feltz 2003, 11), 'cast as the evil crone' (Lyall 1997, 4) and dubbed 'the 'aristocracy's (ageing) answer to Mata Hari' (Malone 2000, n.p.). CPB has been described as an 'old bag' (Neely 2005, n.p.), as an 'older, frumpy blonde' (Darrow 1996, n.p.), as Charles' 'older paramour' (Crabb 2005, n.p.), as 'an older woman with no dress sense' (Summerskill 2002, n.p.), as a 'worn-out 57-year-old hag' (Lall 2005, n.p.) and as 'very much the older model' in comparison to Princess Diana (Williams 2005, n.p.). As Pearson aptly notes, '[n]o insult was good enough for her: old boiler, old trout, old bag, prune, hatcheface, horse-face, housewife, fat, gaunt, weather-beaten, witch, vampire, frump' (Pearson 2005, 13). Victoria Mather details just how distanced CPB is from traditional underpinnings of beauty, drawing attention to a number of age-defying procedures she would need to have done before being considered beautiful:

have to lose two stone, have a facelift (she'll surely be meeting Hillary Clinton shortly for a wobbly chinwag about that), Botox injections to

smooth her forehead and collagens for those lip lines that look like ploughed furrows (Mather 1999, n.p.).

Drawing attention to Camilla's age – and by inference – her perceived unattractiveness (a point that will be returned to later) helps illustrate the perception of the older woman in society; more specifically, the perception of the older woman as a crone. Historically, the older woman was a figure held in high esteem, valued as a source of wisdom, as a teacher, healer and sage and as a source of considerable power (Walker 1985; Ruffing-Rahal 1998). Of course nowadays, the older woman is by no means so revered. Brett Harvey in his discussion of older women notes the change over time in their public perception:

In the intervening centuries, however, the image of female elder has been degraded into that of a pathetic and superfluous figure, whose wrinkles and gray hair render her virtually invisible in our culture (Harvey 1986, 78).

The invisibility of older women is particularly well illustrated in popular culture, with their absence from advertising (McConatha *et al* 1999) and cinema (Markson & Taylor 2000). The idea of the devalued older woman of course, is not a newly articulated concept, in fact, it was a problem identified

in de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* as early as 1949 (and was an idea that was later built upon in her *The Coming of Age*). In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir claims:

From the day a woman consents to growing old, her situation changes.

Up to that time she was still a young woman... now she becomes a different being, unsexed but complete: an old woman (de Beauvoir 1989, 649).

These are points similarly made by Erica Jong who claims 'it's hard enough to be a good girl and a pretty woman - but try being old and female in a culture that hates the latter even more than the former' (Jong 1991, 236). Numerous ideas are presented about the origins of contempt for the crone: one possible explanation is the loss of fertility through menopause. When so much of the constitution of femininity comes from biological understandings of femininity, maybe it is an older woman's inability to produce children which contributes to her loathsomeness. Rachael Romano makes this point in her article about women and sexuality, claiming that younger women are revered as 'sexually available for reproduction' whereas there is a perceived 'cessation of sexual identity for older women' (Romano 1996, n.p.). Luhrmann in a discussion of the crone in mythology draws specific attention to the fact that the older woman has 'passed menopause' (Luhrmann 2001, 121). While

perhaps not as common as the more general references to her age, the media have indeed made mention of the likely cessation of Camilla's fecundity: best illustrated by her being dubbed the 'post-menopausal princess' in a Canadian newspaper ("Post-menopausal princess" 2005, n.p.). Karen Hall in the *Windsor Star* exults '[t]hank God for menopause, or Camilla could be producing little royal babies' (Hall 2005, B1); Kate Zernike notes, 'one day you will get your prince (even if you are post-menopausal)' (Zernike 2005, 1) and Joan Smith draws specific attention to CPB's 'equine, post-menopausal features' (Smith 1997, n.p.). It is Smith's latter remarks that draw attention to the real crime of the older woman: the perception of her unattractiveness. Perlini *et al* undertook a study in 1999 where photographs of young and old women, at varying degrees of attractiveness, were shown to a variety of different gendered and aged people. Their research indicated that the prevailing attractiveness stereotype suggested that to be attractive is to be youthful in appearance (Perlini *et al* 1999). The all importance of beauty to a woman's value is a long-lamented reality for feminists, and this is something well reflected by popular understandings that an older woman has 'lost' attributes deemed attractive enough to grant her social acceptance (Dworkin 1974; Jeffreys 2005). This is something well demonstrated in criticisms of CPB. Interestingly however, this situation also illustrates another feminist issue, and that is the gender double standard apparent regarding women and ageing: just as Charles is not called a horse because he likes riding, older men

in general are not subject to the same level of criticism for an aged appearance as older women. This point is well illustrated by comments made by a respondent to Halliwell and Dittmar's questionnaire about perceptions on ageing:

The whole idea that men as they get older they look distinguished, whereas women as they get older, there's not a nice word of it is there, you don't say, oh she looks distinguished at 60, whereas for a man, Sean Connery, you say, oh doesn't he look distinguished or handsome or whatever, it's not the same for women (in Halliwell and Dittmar 2003, 680).

While men – generally speaking – continue to be revered as they age, it is an anomaly for women to be granted the same kudos. In fact, specific attention is drawn to a woman looking 'good for her age', where a silent footnote exists reminding us that an older woman can never be as beautiful as a younger woman. This point is very well illustrated with comments about CPB 'scrubbing up really well' ("Fashionistas praise Camilla style" 2005, n.p.) or 'the woman better known for looking unkempt scrubs up very well indeed' (Wark 2005, n.p.). What's most extraordinary is that these quotes appeared in *complimentary* articles about CPB, indicating that even when an article is attempting to be favourable, a passive aggression still infiltrates the language.

The 'Other Woman'

Of course, Princess Diana, who made the infamous crowded marriage comment, was an adulteress too. While there is much speculation on the number of lovers Diana had, her riding instructor James Hewitt was a man she admitted to have an extra-marital liaison with (Walker 2003, n.p.).

Princess Diana however, never experienced the kind of criticism over her affairs as CPB. As noted by Michelle Green, 'it was Camilla - not Diana - who was portrayed as the predator who snared a married man' (Green 1995, 92).

While Diana was hounded to her death by the paparazzi, she was never tormented about her affairs to the extent that CPB was. This situation again begs the question, why such double standards? *BBC* reporter, Barnaby Mason, alludes to a possible explanation:

Diana was beautiful and immensely popular. When her marriage to the heir to the throne broke down, she was the one who attracted most of the sympathy (Mason 2005).

Diana was adored because she was conventionally beautiful; the media gave her extensive and favourable treatment because she was popular. Being Charles' wife – and the perceived aggrieved party in the marriage breakdown

– Diana will perpetually be the woman that the public sympathises with and the woman to whom CPB is compared. Of course, CPB can never fair well in comparison: as illustrated well by Pearson, ‘Mrs Parker Bowles was clearly the woman you dumped, not the one you ran to’ (Pearson 2005, 13). While it may be suggested that the 1997 death of Diana meant that the press were forced to retreat from further probes into Diana’s life, this paper suggests that it was Diana’s beauty that was the primary explanation for the double standards illustrated above, and which explain differing media reactions over the two women’s adultery. As Cooke notes in the *New Statesman* ‘beauty, after all, is the currency of our time’ (Cooke 2004, 13). The statement encapsulates an explanation of this double standard: Diana’s beauty was able to buy her out of responsibility for her adultery while CPB’s unattractiveness amplified hers. Whereas Diana’s infidelity was deemed at the very least ‘understandable’ given her husband’s indiscretions, CPB doing the same painted her as a villain, and a witch, quite literally. Journalist Sarah Lyall illustrates this well, claiming that CPB has often been cast as the ‘wicked stepmother’ (Lyall 2005, 4). Camille Paglia’s claims ‘[t]here’s something kind of witchy and harridan-like about her’ (in Ross 1997, n.p.). Rebecca Tyrell described her as ‘the wicked witch of the West Country’ (Tyrell 2005, n.p.) and Katie Evarian dubbed her an ‘ugly witch wearing a horrendous hat’ (Evarian 2005, n.p.). Evidently, CPB’s acts were far more witch-like than Diana’s, highlighting yet another double standard. Marcia Ann Gillespie in a

Ms article claims that '[c]alling a woman a witch was once a way to justify terrorizing, torturing and executing women who dared to fall outside social norms in early US history' (Gillespie 1999, 1). CPB has quite possibly been cast as the witch because of her adultery. More interestingly however, as Gillespie notes, witches are dubbed as such because they 'dared to fall outside of social norms'. CPB falls outside of social normal for her adultery and her appearance, but also quite possibly for her sexual behaviour.

Another possible explanation behind the perceived loathsomeness of CPB's infidelity is that it forces us to think about the sexuality of older women: it is acceptable – perhaps even sexy - for a young and beautiful woman like Diana to have extra-marital sex, but it is grotesque for an older, less attractive woman to do the same. Research often notes that older women are presented as asexual (Seccombe & Ishii-Kuntz 1991; Fullmer *et al* 1999; Gott & Hinchliff 2003). This idea reflects cultural assumptions about older women: i.e., that they don't have sex and that they are not sexually attractive. CPB is particularly loathsome because not only is she unattractive by conventional beauty standards, but her age makes her sexually undesirable also.

Realistically, the story of CPB and Charles' love affair is quite a romantic one; as Mary Fischer notes in a *salon.com* article, '[t]hese are two people who have gone from youth to middle age, and are now approaching their older age, and their affection for each other has never flagged' (Fischer 1997, n.p.). As noted

by royal reporter Jennie Bond, CPB is Charles' 'soul mate' and that '[a]fter so many years of friendship and love, they are like a pair of comfy old slippers together' (Bond 2005, n.p.). This is the kind of love story that would do a roaring trade in the Hollywood box office (Puente 2004). Of course, CPB is not a Hollywood leading lady, and it appears that the idea of CPB and Charles being sexual is unpalatable. Their intimate 1989 phone conversation - which became known as the Camillagate scandal - typifies this issue: the thought of two older people talking about sexual desire was popularly perceived as distasteful. Barbara Amiel in her article about the involvement of the media in the relationship of Charles and Diana, claims:

The awful "Camillagate" tapes indeed had Charles wishing he might be a ladies' sanitary device in the next world so he could be close to his beloved, and even though this was a throwaway line between two lovers in a private call - the sort of lunatic thing any of us might say as we rummaged around to express how much we care - I couldn't ever take a monarch who thinks like that seriously (Amiel 1993, 13).

Perhaps the reference to the tampon *was* particularly distasteful for Amiel. This paper however, suggests that it is Charles' affection for Camilla in general and the fact that he was so willing to express his feelings so graphically that underpins Amiel's real objections. Despite the longevity of

the CPB and Charles' love affair, genuine love for a woman who is 'unattractive' is less appealing than the 'fairytale' marriage of Charles to 'his radiant virgin bride' Diana ("Media barred from royal wedding" 2005), even when Charles' marriage to Diana was known to have been pre-arranged (Bindel 2005) and fraught with unhappiness.

Conclusion

This paper suggests that it is naïve to think that media criticism of Camilla Parker Bowles was simply about her status as the other woman. CPB is a figure of criticism because unlike Diana, she is not feminine according to popular understandings of the word, nor can she be understood as beautiful. Unlike Diana, CPB was not a virgin when she married Charles, and unlike Diana, she will not have beauty preserved in perpetuity with her death. The media have taken CPB's apparent unattractiveness, her age and her disinterest in the feminine pursuits that marked Diana as the People's Princess, and have likened her to the ultimate masculine, phallic animal: the horse. CPB aptly illustrates the cultural necessity for women to conform to certain feminine aesthetics in order to achieve social acceptance and she highlights well the problems presented for women when they are not bestowed with conventional attractiveness and when involvement in traditional feminine pursuits is shunned.

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