

NERO

BOOK AWARDS

Reading Guides

Non-Fiction Shortlist

Hags by Victoria Smith



Victoria Smith is a regular contributor to the *New Statesman* and the *Independent*, focusing on women's issues, parenting and mental health. Her newsletter, *The OK Karen*, about midlife women's experiences of feminism, was launched last year, and she tweets @glosswitch. She lives in Cheltenham with her family.

'Funny and furious, whip-smart and eye-opening, Hags is a brave and important book that could hardly be more timely and necessary.' - **Non-Fiction judges, 2023 Nero Book Awards**

'At a time when the very meaning of 'woman' is being openly debated, older women are well and truly screwing things up. Neither reproductively useful enough for conservative definitions, nor feminine enough for social or pornified ones, here we are, still insisting on both our humanity and our womanhood.'

In *Hags: The Demonisation of Middle-Aged Women*, Victoria Smith confronts the ugly space in our culture where ageism and misogyny collide. While older women have been scorned and disparaged for centuries, today middle-aged women, Gen Xers who came of age in the 1990s, are also dismissed as intolerant, entitled and bigoted.

In chapters including 'Ugly Hag', 'Frigid Hag' and 'Privileged Hag', Smith takes a thematic approach to a wide range of subjects from care work to beauty, violence to sex, exploring each in relation to middle-aged women's beliefs, bodies and choices in a quest to uncover what exactly it is about women in their forties and beyond that seems to enrage almost everyone. Drawing comparisons throughout the book between today's hatred of women past their reproductive peak and the witch hunts that took place between the 15th and 18th centuries, Smith argues that much of the blame lies with the popularity of identity-based

politics, which pits different generations against each other, as well as with social media, which, in providing anonymous outlets for angry vitriol, has resulted in an all-pervasive demonisation. Reclaiming 'hag' as a badge of pride, in *Hags: The Demonisation of Middle-Aged Women*, Victoria Smith makes an unapologetic appeal for women who have earned their stripes to be noticed, celebrated and heard.

Discussion points:

- Identity-based politics and the anonymity of social media and the internet are largely responsible for the demonisation of middle-age women today. Discuss.
- Do you agree with Victoria Smith that ageist misogyny enables regressive beliefs to be recast as progressive?
- Is ageism often considered a more acceptable form of discrimination in our society? What examples can you think of?