

My research has focused on two topics—tobacco and a legendary transvestite female pope--that involve transgressing boundaries and intersect in the career of Mary Frith, a cross-dressing pickpocket, fence and underworld celebrity in early 17th-century London, who, according to a 1662 biography, was a “she-politick . . . not much inferior to Pope Joan.”

Of Pipes and a Popess

Craig Rustici
English Department

I often seek to recover earlier generations’ cultural literacy, assumptions and narratives widely known in the past but likely unfamiliar to 21st-century readers, and to use that knowledge to enrich our understanding of early modern texts.

The Story Behind a Cover

Arguing about Tobacco: Did “Good Girls” Smoke?

Claim: “It is doubtful that we will ever know if there was any gender or age prohibition about smoking before the nineteenth century. . . .

Though we may find the image of a pipe-smoking woman uncomfortable because of our own gender assumptions and constructions, there is little evidence of this in the seventeenth century.

(Jordon Goodman, *Tobacco in History*, 1993).

Some Visual Counter-Evidence: Tobacco and transgressive cross-dressing converge in illustrations of Mary Frith and other 17th-century female smokers.



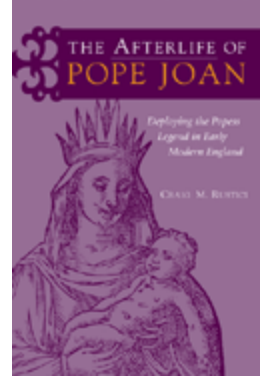
This sense is NON SENSE. Though it Please my Mind Yet Tis not Proper for this Sex and Kind.

Some Verbal Counter-Evidence:

- The caption on another illustration portrays female smokers as mannish: *To none of our Viragoes she'll give place, For Healthing Sack, and Smoking with a Grace.*
- Women in Jacobean plays often declare their aversion to tobacco, asserting, for example, “I’ll rather love a man that takes a purse, than him that takes tobacco.”
- A 1626 medical treatise warns, “if the snuff of a candle hath caused abortion in great bellied women, the breath of our common Tobacconists, being tainted with that smokish damp, cannot but annoy such tender natures.”
- Writing in 1651, Henry Neville looks back nostalgically to “a time in England, when men wore the breeches and debar’d women . . . [from] the mode of Drink, Dice, and Tobacco.”

Reaching a Wider Audience:

I have presented my research to a general audience in the Hofstra’s Fall 2001 Distinguished Faculty Lecture, WAMC’s *Academic Minute*, and National Geographic’s *Mystery Files*.



The illustration on the cover of my book first appeared on the title page of *Johanna papissa* (1619) and implies a visual analogy between the popess—crowned and gazing lovingly upon an infant cradled in her arms--and the Virgin Mary, as depicted, for example, in this 1517 woodcut. That image thus participates in a critique of the hyperbolic veneration of Mary as a divine “salvatric” exercising maternal authority over Christ. As if anticipating this image of popess and child, one 1613 writer caricatured that Protestant critique as giving Catholics “a Pope Mary to be Antichrist, as they have done a Pope Joan.”

