

# TOP GIRLS



May 9-30, 2009

## PLAY GUIDE



**PLAYHOUSE**  
THEATRE COMPANY

MAX REIMER, ARTISTIC MANAGING DIRECTOR

# TOP GIRLS

By Caryl Churchill

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## WELCOME

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**This booklet was created to help audience members explore the play beyond the actual performance.** If you have any questions, comments or suggestions for the guide please contact Meredith Elliott, Outreach and Education, at 604 629 2097 or by email at [melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com](mailto:melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com).

### About the Company

The Playhouse Theatre Company is dedicated to producing live theatre of the highest quality – to presenting a stimulating and challenging repertoire of plays that speak to today’s audiences. This year the Playhouse presents a five-play mainstage subscription series running from September to May, as well as a bonus production in April 2009.

The Playhouse was founded in 1962 to provide the people of British Columbia with professional live theatre. Since then it has grown from a core of volunteers operating out of basement offices into one of the country’s leading regional theatre companies, presenting an outstanding selection of plays produced by the very best actors, directors, designers and craftspeople from across the country.

## THEATRE ETIQUETTE

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Theatre relies on the give and take between actor and audience. The actors can see and hear the audience just as the audience can see and hear them.

**Seating** is assigned. Please sit in your assigned seat and respect the fact that other seats have been reserved for other patrons.

**Latecomers** are seated at the discretion of the Playhouse Theatre staff; otherwise, they may take their seat at intermission.

**A note to student groups:** If you are unable to attend the dedicated Wednesday student matinee we are happy to book you into another matinee performance. If you are booking a Tea Matinee performance instead, please note that many of our senior patrons attend these events.

**Talking during a show** (even in a whisper), fidgeting, rustling papers or candy wrappers all disturb the actors’ concentration and disrupt the performance. On the other hand, audience responses can inspire the actors to do their best work. This interplay is the essence of live theatre.

As a courtesy to performers and patrons, **all pagers, phones, cameras and other recording and noise making devices should be turned off.** This regulation is strictly enforced.

No **outside food or drink** is permitted inside the theatre. Also, audience members should be aware that **heavy perfumes and colognes** may disturb others.

All performances are for patrons aged **6 years and up** (any exceptions will be announced).

## DID YOU KNOW? MORE ABOUT THE PLAYHOUSE'S EDUCATION INITIATIVES

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### Talkbacks

Following every student matinee and select evening performances, audience members are invited to remain in their seats to ask questions of the actors. *How does an actor prepare for a role? Do actors rehearse every day? How do the actors personally handle a play's difficult issues?*

***Top Girls* runs approximately two hours and thirty minutes with one 15-minute intermission. Please plan to stay for approximately twenty minutes after the end of the performance.**

### Production Centre Tours

As a group, you can book a complimentary tour of the 25,000 square foot Production Centre and explore scenery and prop shops, the wardrobe department and rehearsal halls. The Playhouse recently moved into a new facility on East 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, which will be the company's home until 2011.

### Salon Saturdays

The second Saturday matinee of each subscription series production features our Salon Saturday pre-show chat. Explore the issues and ideas at the heart of each production in this informative and fun series that presents in-depth topics about the play, the playwright or the design. Past speakers have included broadcasters, playwrights, (musical) directors, actors, journalists and professors.

The Salon Saturday for *Top Girls* will be held on Saturday, May 23 at 1pm. The guest speaker will be director Glynis Leyshon.

### Dedicated Student Matinees

Each year the Playhouse introduces thousands of school children to the magic of live theatre at deeply discounted prices. Every production has a dedicated student matinee on the first Wednesday afternoon of the run, which is followed by a talkback with the actors and director, as available. Our popular weekday tea matinees are also open to those student groups not able to attend the student matinee.

For information about any of our education programmes, including E-Stage: Playhouse Young Playwrights and show specific outreach initiatives, please contact Meredith Elliott, Outreach and Education Manager at 604 629 2097 or by email, [melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com](mailto:melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com).

For **group ticket bookings, discounts** and **Playhouse PERKS**, contact Stasa Andric, Sales Manager, at **604 637 3094** or by email, [groups@vancouverplayhouse.com](mailto:groups@vancouverplayhouse.com).

## TOP GIRLS AT A GLANCE

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### NUTS AND BOLTS

*Top Girls* was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre, London on August 28, 1982. This production transferred to Joe Papp's Public Theatre, New York, later the same year, and returned to the Royal Court early in 1983.

### Setting

#### Act 1

Scene 1 – A restaurant

Scene 2 – “Top Girls” Employment Agency, London

Scene 3 – Joyce’s backyard in Suffolk

#### Act 2

Scene 1 – “Top Girls” Employment Agency

Scene 2 – A year earlier, Joyce’s kitchen

### WHAT IT’S ABOUT

Marlene has just been promoted to managing director of the Top Girls Employment Agency. To celebrate, she throws a dinner party, inviting not her friends and family, but women from history and folklore. They share the stories of their lives and their extraordinary experiences, but gradually what emerges is the sacrifices they’ve made to achieve independence and success in a patriarchal society.

It becomes clear that Marlene, too, has made sacrifices to succeed in the business world, giving up the chance for a family. Her sister Joyce is limited in her own way by her life choices (or lack thereof). What lies in store for the next generation, Angie and her best friend Kit, remains to be seen.

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“There was nothing in my life except my studies. I was obsessed with the pursuit of the truth.” Joan

“I had to live for myself, and I did live.” Lady Nijo

“How can people live in this dim pale island and wear our hideous clothes? I cannot and will not live the life of a lady.” Isabella

“But of course a wife must obey her husband. And of course I must obey the Marquis.” Griselda

“You just keep running on and fighting, you didn’t stop for nothing. Oh we give them devils such a beating.” Gret

“We’ve come a long way. To our courage and the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements.” Marlene

## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

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Caryl Churchill was born on September 3, 1938 in London. Her father was a political cartoonist and her mother an actress/model. As a child, she would stage pantomimes for her parents, getting an early start as a playwright. In 1948, the family moved to Montreal, where Caryl attended the Trafalgar School for Girls. She returned to England for university, reading English at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. She wrote her first three plays at university, *Downstairs*, *You've No Need to be Frightened*, and *Having a Wonderful Time*. *Downstairs* was first staged in 1958 and won an award at the *Sunday Times* National Union of Students Drama Festival.

In 1961, she married David Harter. The couple had three sons, Joe, Paul and Rick, and for the next decade she juggled marriage and motherhood with a writing career. Because her free time was limited, she wrote a number of short plays for BBC radio including *The Ants* (1962), *Lovesick* (1967) and *Abortive* (1971). She wrote her first professional stage play, *Owners*, in 1972, which premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in London.

She became Resident Dramatist at the Royal Court (1974-5) and spent much of the 1970s and 1980s working with the theatre groups Joint Stock and Monstrous Regiment, developing collaborative creations through an extended workshop process. During this period she wrote *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), a historical epic about the failed English revolution in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and *Cloud Nine* (1979), her first major international success. Other plays of this period include *Fen* (1983), which won the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, and *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986), written with David Lan.

*Serious Money*, a satirical verse play about the London stock exchange, was first produced at the Royal Court in 1987 and won the *Evening Standard* Award for Best Comedy of the Year and the Laurence Olivier/BBC Award for Best New Play. Other plays – most of which have premiered at the Royal Court – include *Mad Forest* (1990), written after a visit to Romania, *The Skriker* (1994), *Far Away* (2000), *A Number* (2002), which addresses the subject of human cloning and identity. Her new version of August Strindberg's *A Dream Play* (2005), premiered at the National Theatre in 2005, while *Drunk Enough To Say I Love You?* (2006), premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in 2006. Most recently, Churchill created a ten-minute play, *Seven Jewish Children*, in response to the Israel-Gaza conflict that sparked controversy and charges of anti-semitism. Churchill denied that the work was anti-semitic, but called the play both a theatre event and a political event.

**In September 2008, the Royal Court held a series of staged readings of Churchill's plays, in honour of her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday and her long association with the theatre.**

## THEMES AND ALLUSIONS

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### Choices and Sacrifice

The dinner party in the first scene sets the stage for the themes that unfold throughout the rest of the play. As the five guests tell the stories of their lives, the choices that they made – or had made for them – are revealed, as well as the sacrifices and consequences those choices resulted in.

Isabella Bird, the most outspoken of the dinner guests, is adamant that she doesn't regret the choice she made to leave her beloved sister to go traveling, however, she clearly feels some guilt at not fulfilling the expected role of a clergyman's daughter. At the same time, she realizes that staying behind in Scotland would have killed her. Pope Joan's choices did, in fact, kill her. She disguised herself as a boy to study in Rome. She stayed disguised as a man and became Pope, because she sought ultimate knowledge. But because her knowledge was that of a man, she lacked the basic understanding of how to recognize signs of pregnancy and how to hide the consequences of it. In choosing to live and think as a man, she was ultimately destroyed by her true feminine self.

On the other hand, Lady Nijo and Griselda had many of their choices taken away from them. Nijo was given to the emperor as a child, while Griselda was chosen by the Marquis to be his wife without consideration of her wishes. While Nijo found ways to express some independence within the constraints of the Imperial Court and later chose a religious life on her own terms, Griselda was forced to sacrifice her children and her dignity to her husband's tests of obedience.

For her part, Marlene has sacrificed the personal in pursuit of the professional. She appears to have no close friends or family, leaving everyone behind in her desperate need to escape the life that her mother and sister lived. Joyce, however, has made choices of her own, refusing to accept money from Marlene and leaving an unhappy marriage.

### Gender Roles

Many of the above choices are made in the context of society's accepted roles for women. Griselda's situation was extreme, but women were expected to obey their husbands unconditionally. While Marlene is appalled by her story and has to leave the table, Lady Nijo thinks the Marquis's behaviour is excessive, but not unusual. On the other hand, Lady Nijo accepts that the Emperor has the right to beat his concubines, but objects when he allows others to do so. Joan achieves the education denied to women only by assuming the guise of a man. Gret becomes a general, battling through the gates of Hell, but only after her children are killed and she has lost her defined maternal role. Isabella, on the other hand, travels the world, rides astride rather than side-saddle, but was made physically ill by her attempts to live according to the feminine standards of her time.

Marlene is promoted to managing director, achieving career success in what is assumed to be a man's role. Certainly, one of the men passed over for the promotion is unable to deal with working under a woman. His wife asks Marlene to step aside on her husband's behalf, calls her "a ball-breaker" when she refuses to do so, and tells her she'll end up miserable and lonely. Louise, one of the clients at the employment agency, has achieved middle-management success, but hit the glass ceiling in her firm. She knows she's competent, and has watched younger men – and a younger woman – pass her by. Yet she defines her working style in male terms: "I don't care greatly for working with women," she says, "I think I pass as a man at work."

## THE DINNER GUESTS

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### **Isabella Bird**

(October 15, 1831–October 7, 1904)

Isabella Lucy Bird Bishop was an English traveller and writer, who made a series of extraordinary voyages at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Born in Boroughbridge, Yorkshire to a clergyman and the daughter of a clergyman, she suffered from ill health throughout her life. After she had a tumour removed from her spine in 1850, her doctor recommended a change of scenery, and in 1854, her father gave her 100£ to travel. She went to North America and journeyed through eastern Canada and the United States. The letters she wrote to her sister Henrietta formed the

basis of her first book, *The Englishwoman in America* (1856).

After her father's death in 1858, she moved with her mother and sister to Edinburgh, and over the next few years made several short trips. Her mother died in 1868, and to avoid settling for the domestic life her sister enjoyed on the Isle of Mull, she began increasing the length of her journeys. In 1872, she stopped off in Hawaii en route to New Zealand and stayed six months, learning to ride astride instead of sidesaddle, climbing Mauna Loa, and meeting Queen Emma, the widow of King Kamehameha IV. These experiences were recorded in *Six Months in the Sandwich Islands* (1875).

From Hawaii, she returned to San Francisco and travelled alone by horse to Lake Tahoe and then on to Colorado. Her book *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* (1879) chronicles her adventures there, including her acquaintance with Jim Nugent, a one-eyed outlaw described by Isabella as "a man any woman might love but no sane woman would marry." She returned home, but left soon after to visit the Far East, travelling through Japan, China, Vietnam, Singapore and Malaysia. Not long after her return to Scotland, Henrietta died of typhoid. Grief-stricken, Isabella married Henrietta's doctor, John Bishop, but he died five years later in 1886.

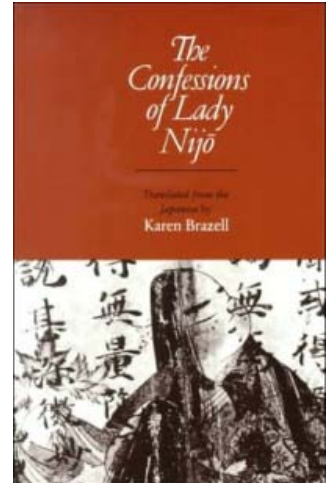
She set off travelling again, this time to India, where she established two hospitals in her sister and husband's names. She crossed through Tibet and travelled to Persia, Kurdistan and Turkey. Upon her return to England, she spoke out against the atrocities being committed against the Armenians, testifying before a Parliamentary committee. She was made a fellow of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, and in 1892 she became the first woman to be inducted into the Royal Geographic Society.

In 1894, Isabella went east again, travelling through Japan and Korea and observing the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War from Manchuria. She travelled up the Yangtze River and into the mountains bordering Tibet before returning to Scotland in 1897, where she wrote *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond* (1900). The next year, she journeyed to Morocco and travelled among the Berbers on a black stallion given to her by the Sultan. She died in Edinburgh in 1904, just days shy of her 73<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

## Lady Nijo

(b. 1258-after 1306)

Lady Nijo (a court name meaning “second ward” to indicate her rank) was raised in the Japanese imperial court from the age of four. Both her father, Nakano’in Masatada, an imperial counsellor, and her grandfather, Michimitsu, a chancellor, had poems collected in the imperial anthologies, and her mother, nicknamed Suke dai, is said to have initiated the Emperor Go-Fukakusa in the ways of love. At the age of 13, she became a concubine to Go-Fukakusa, and she excelled in those arts expected of a court lady – music, painting and poetry. Her father died when she was 15, however, and without family influence, she never received official status as a consort. She had one son by Go-Fukakusa, but he died in infancy. Nevertheless, she continued to enjoy high status for several years. She had several affairs and bore three other children to her lovers. These affairs were sanctioned, even encouraged by Go-Fukakusa, including ones with the regent Kanehira and the high priest Ariake. She lost favour with Go-Fukakusa, however, when he suspected her of having relations with his rival younger brother Kameyama. Additionally, she incurred the enmity of the former empress Higashi Nij’in, and was dismissed from the court with the tacit approval of the retired emperor in 1283.



After she was exiled from court, she became a Buddhist nun and made pilgrimages throughout Japan. She returned to court only once more, in 1285, for the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations of the honorary empress Lady Kitayama. After Go-Fukakusa’s death in 1304, she began writing her memoirs.

Her book, *Towazugatari*, translated as *The Confessions of Lady Nijo*, is one of the oldest books in print by a woman. Written in diary form, it chronicles her life at the Imperial court and her travels later in life. Nothing is known of her life after 1306.

**Dull Gret** is the subject of *Dulle Griet*, a 1562 painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. The painting depicts a peasant woman, Dull Gret (or Mad Meg), dressed in armour and an apron, who leads an army of women into hell, battling demons. The painting is in the Museum Mayer van den Bergh in Antwerp. In Flemish folklore, Dulle Griet was the personification of avarice, whose greed was so great that she stormed hell itself in search of spoils. She was often portrayed in slapstick comedies as a strong, aggressive and spiteful woman. Psychiatrists have identified Bruegel’s figure as a schizophrenic, disconnected from both the devils she is fighting and the women she is leading and existing in a threatening, phantasmagorical world. It can also be viewed as a statement by Bruegel about the persecution of “wise women” by Christianity in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Another legendary Meg, Saint Margaret of Antioch, also defeated the devil in the form of a dragon.



### Pope Joan

According to legend, Pope Joan was a German scholar of English descent, who travelled to Rome to continue her studies disguised as a man. There, she became known for her great learning and was made first a cardinal and then Pope. Her papacy is supposedly placed between Leo IV and Benedict III, some time during 853-858. Her two-year papacy came to an end when she became pregnant by a chamberlain and gave birth during a procession from St. Peter's to the Lateran. She was dragged out of Rome and stoned to death. It wasn't until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, however, that her story first appeared, though they were taken as fact until into the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the Catholic Church officially denied her existence. The timeline would seem to agree: Leo IV was buried in St. Peter's on July 17, 855, while coins exist bearing the faces of Benedict III and Emperor Lothair I, who died on September 28, 855.



Associated legends hold that the Pope now turns away from the street where Joan gave birth, a lane known as the “shunned street” between the Coliseum and St. Clement's Church. Newly elected Popes were also said to sit on a chair with a hole in the seat to allow a committee of cardinals to confirm their gender.



### Patient Griselda

Griselda is a figure from folklore, known for her unparalleled patience and obedience. She is a young woman of humble birth who marries a Marquis. He tests her obedience by declaring that her children – a girl and a boy – must be put to death, because they are of peasant stock. She agrees without protest and he tests her further by publicly denouncing her and sending her to her father's home with only the clothes on her back. Later, he demands that she prepare the wedding celebrations for his remarriage. He introduces her to his young bride-to-be and her page, and when she wishes them well, the Marquis reveals that they are really her children. Having passed her tests, she retakes her place as wife and mother.

Giovanni Boccaccio was the first to record her story in literature, in the final tale of *The Decameron*. Petrarch later translated this story into Latin in 1374. Many scholars believe that Chaucer used the Petrarch's version and a later French translation as the text for “The Clerk's Tale” in *The Canterbury Tales*.

## GLOSSARY

### Acacias

A genus of trees and shrubs in the mimosa family, native to tropical and subtropical regions of the world, acacias are noted for their finely divided leaflets that give them a feathery appearance. Acacias are also known as thorn trees or wattles.



### Anaemia

A condition in which the amount of red blood cells or haemoglobin is abnormally low, anaemia reduces blood's capacity to carry oxygen to the body. Symptoms include pallor, fatigue, weakness, and in extreme cases can result in respiratory difficulties and heart abnormalities.

### Anorexic

Anorexia is the decrease or lack of appetite, which can be caused by any number of medical conditions, drugs or situations. Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder characterized by self-starvation due to a distorted sense of self-image and an unrealistic fear of weight gain.

### Antichrist

In Christian mythology, the Antichrist is the arch-enemy of Christ, who will appear at the end of time, reigning over the earth until defeated by the second coming of Christ.

### Berber

A member of a Caucasoid North African people speaking one of a group of Afro-Asiatic languages, Berbers inhabit the Maghreb, primarily in Libya, Morocco and Algeria. The original inhabitants of North Africa, they were colonized by the Romans and later conquered during the Islamic expansion. Most converted to Islam and now speak Arabic in addition to the Berber languages.

### Blanquette de veau

A veal dish prepared with a rich, creamy white sauce, blanquette de veau is a ragout of veal meat, mushrooms and onions, often accompanied by rice or potatoes.

### Boccaccio

(1313–Dec. 21, 1375)

Giovanni Boccaccio was an Italian author and scholar, best known for writing the *Decameron*, a collection of 100 stories, told by ten young men and women taking refuge at a country estate from the Black Death in Florence. The tenth story of the tenth day was the story of Griselda. After completing the *Decameron*, he concentrated on scholarly work, reintroducing classical Greek and Latin texts, which helped lay the foundations for Renaissance humanism.



### Bruegel

(c. 1525–Sept. 9, 1569)

Pieter Bruegel the Elder was a Dutch painter and engraver, best known for his paintings of Flemish folklore, landscapes and scenes of peasant life. He joined the Antwerp painters' guild in 1551 and was heavily influenced by Hieronymus Bosch, though he also studied in Italy at the beginning of his career. His painting *Dulle Griet* (c. 1562) depicts a peasant woman (Mad Meg or Dull Gret), who leads an army of women to pillage Hell.

### Buddhism

A major world religion and philosophy founded in north-eastern India in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, Buddhism is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, also called the Buddha. The goal of Buddhism is the attainment of nirvana, the final escape from suffering and a cycle of rebirth. There are now over 300 million followers of Buddhism in the world, though it has largely disappeared from India, the country of its origin.

### Canelloni

Thin sheets of pasta that are cut into rectangles and then stuffed with meat, vegetables or cheese to form a cylindrical or tubular shape.



### Carbuncles

An inflammation or abscess on the skin caused by a bacterial infection, carbuncles are made up of several boils filled with fluid, puss and dead tissue.

### Cardinal

A high church official, ranking just below the pope, in the Catholic Church, cardinals are appointed by the pope to the Sacred College of Cardinals. Only cardinals are eligible to be elected pope and popes can only be elected by the cardinals.

### Chamberlain

A high-ranking official in a household or court. In the Catholic Church, papal chamberlains were personal attendants to the pope, an honour bestowed upon members of noble families. The office was abolished by Pope Paul VI.

### Chaucer

(c. 1340-1400)

Geoffrey Chaucer was a medieval English writer, considered to be the father of English literature. He was the first poet to write in English, as opposed to the court languages of French and Latin.



He is best known for *The Canterbury Tales*, a collection of stories told by a group of travellers on pilgrimage to Canterbury.

### Church of England

The English national church and the mother church of the Anglican Communion. Christianity in England dates back to the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century, but the Anglo-Saxon invasions drove it into isolation until St. Augustine of Canterbury arrived to reconvert the island. It remained under papal authority until the Act of Supremacy of 1534 declared Henry VIII head of the Church of England.

### Colosseum

An amphitheatre in Rome erected in the first century AD by the emperors Vespasian and Titus. It was given the name



Colosseum due to its size, with the capacity to hold 50,000 people. It was used for gladiator fights and could be flooded to stage mock naval battles. Although the structure has sustained significant damage over the centuries from earthquakes and vandals, it remains a major tourist and one of the finest examples of Roman architecture and engineering.

### Concorde

The first supersonic commercial airplane, the Concorde had its maiden flight on March 2, 1969, but it didn't



enter regular service until 1976, flying between Heathrow (London) and Charles de Gaulle (Paris) airports to JFK in New York and Dulles in Washington, DC. The line was retired in November 2003.

### Concubine

A woman contracted to a man of high status as a secondary wife, often with little legal protection or benefits.

### John Conteh

(May 27, 1951- )

A former world light-heavyweight boxer, John Conteh was one of Britain's most successful prizefighters. At 19, he won the middleweight gold medal at the Commonwealth Games and held the WBC Light Heavyweight crown from 1974-1978.

### Denys the Areopagite

An anonymous theologian and philosopher of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, who wrote under the pseudonym Dionysius the Areopagite, the Athenian converted by St. Paul in Acts 17:34. The pseudo-Dionysius's treatises blended Neoplatonic philosophy with Christian theology and mysticism.

### Dymchurch

A village in Kent, England, Dymchurch is located on the Romney Marsh. It was a hotbed of smuggling in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and the setting of Russell Thorndike's "Doctor Syn" novels.

### Erysipelas

A contagious skin infection, also known as St. Anthony's fire, that is caused by Group A Streptococci. It is characterized by inflammation, high fever and can lead to pneumonia and nephritis.

### The Exterminator

A 1980 film about a Vietnam veteran who declares a one-man war on crime after the comrade who saved his life is paralyzed in a mugging.

### Frascati

A white wine made from Trebbiano, Greco and Malvasia grapes from the hills outside Rome. It can be made either with a sweet or dry style and as a still or sparkling wine.

### Gout

A rheumatic disease caused by high levels of uric acid in the blood. It results in the deposit of uric acid crystals in the joints or connective tissues, which causes painful inflammation and swelling. It primarily affects men between the ages of 40-55 and is exacerbated by protein rich foods and alcohol intake.

### Grand Canyon

The Grand Canyon is an extensive canyon system cut by the Colorado River that runs through northwest Arizona. It was made a national monument in 1908.



The Grand Canyon National Park was created in 1919, which is visited by 5 million visitors annually.

### Gynaecology

The branch of medicine dealing with the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the female reproductive system.

### Heresy

A doctrine that has been rejected as false by religious authorities or any belief contrary to official religious teaching. The Inquisition was a department of the Roman Catholic Church charged with investigating heresies.

### Adolf Hitler

(April 20, 1889–April 30, 1945)

Adolf Hitler was leader of the National Socialist German Workers Party (Nazi Party), Chancellor of Germany from 1933, and Führer (leader) of Germany from 1934 until his suicide in 1945. He gained power over a Germany that was in economic and political turmoil and established an authoritarian regime built on nationalism and racism. His aggressively expansionist foreign policy triggered World War II and his racial policies resulted in the deaths of 11 million people, including 6 million Jews.



### Influenza

An infectious disease affecting the respiratory system, caused by various strains of the influenza virus. Typical flu symptoms include fever, fatigue, chills, severe cough, and body ache. Highly contagious, influenza is transmitted by airborne droplets and in extreme cases become pandemics affecting millions of people. The Spanish Flu pandemic resulted in at least 20 million deaths worldwide between 1918-1920.

### Ipswich

A city and district in Suffolk, England, near the North Sea, Ipswich was known for pottery making in the 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries and an important ecclesiastical city in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as well as a centre for the woollen trade.

### Jaeger

A British fashion house founded in 1884, Jaeger clothing was made solely from animal fibres. Known for their durability, Jaeger clothing was used by explorers such as Robert Scott and Ernest Shackleton on their expeditions and was favoured by Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw.

### John the Scot

(c. 1266–Nov. 8, 1308)

A medieval theologian and philosopher, John Duns Scotus was a member of Franciscan order who studied and taught at Oxford and held teaching posts at the Universities of Paris and Cologne. He was best known for his defence



of the Immaculate Conception and was the founder of a school of scholasticism called Scotism. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, his followers opposed the revival of classical studies, and the word “dunce” was coined to refer to anyone incapable of learning.

### Emperor Kameyama

(July 9, 1249–Oct. 4, 1305)

The 90<sup>th</sup> Emperor of Japan, Kameyama reigned from 1259 through 1274. He became crown prince in 1258 and emperor the next year when his older brother, Go-Fukakusa abdicated. He abdicated to his son Go-Uda in 1274, becoming a cloistered emperor. His rule was suspended in 1287 when Go-Fukakusa’s son became emperor. In 1289, he became a Buddhist priest and introduced Zen Buddhism into the Imperial Court.

### Laker (airline)

An independent British airline founded by Freddy Laker in 1966, Laker Airways became the first long-haul “no frills” airline in 1977, operating between London Gatwick and JFK in New York. It went out of business in 1982.

### Lapwing

The common name for a group of birds in the Charadriidae family, lapwings (Vanellinae) are inland birds found in temperate and tropical regions outside North America. The Eurasian lapwing is also known as the green plover or pewit.



## M1

The major north-south motorway in England, the M1 connects London to Leeds and is 311 km long. The first section was opened in 1959.

## Madame Tussauds

A wax museum located on Marylebone Road in London, Madame Tussauds is home to a collection of wax effigies of famous people. It was first established in Baker Street set up by wax sculptor Marie Tussaud in 1835 and moved to the Marylebone location in 1884. The museum has branches in seven cities.

## Mahayana sutras

A broad genre of Buddhist scriptures claimed to be the original teachings of Buddha. Scholars agree, however, that they were most likely composed five centuries after Gautama Buddha. The Mahayana school of thought is widely followed in China, Tibet, Korea, and Japan.

## Marquis

A European title of nobility, a marquis (or marquess) ranks below a duke, but above an earl or count. The first marquis was Robert de Vere, who was made marquis of Dublin by Richard II in 1385.

## Mercedes

A German automotive manufacturer, now a division of Daimler AG. The first Mercedes automobile was marketed in 1901; the Mercedes-Benz brand was introduced in 1926 after Benz and Daimler merged.

## Metaphysical poets

A group of 17<sup>th</sup> century English poets who combined intellectual and theological concepts with wit, unusual imagery, and metaphysical conceits. The most important metaphysical poets included John Donne, Andrew Marvell, George Herbert, and Abraham Cowley.

## Monetarism

An economic theory that maintains that money supply determines production, employment and price levels. It was introduced by Milton Friedman and others as an alternative to Keynesian economics, dismissing government policy as insignificant in affecting economic cycles.

## Neo-Platonic ideas

Neo-Platonism is a philosophy developed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century by Plotinus and derived from the fusion of religious and classical doctrines with the teachings of Plato and Pythagoras. One of the last pagan philosophies, the Academy of Athens was shut down in 529 AD by Justinian, but enjoyed a revival in the Renaissance.

## Os and As

The first two levels of qualification in subjects conferred through the General Certificate of Education in the United Kingdom and many of its former colonies. O-Level stands for Ordinary Level, while A-Level is the more academically rigorous Advanced Level. O-levels were replaced with GCSE exams in the UK in 1988.

## Ovaltine

A powdered mixture of malt extract, milk, eggs, cocoa, and soy fortified with thiamine, niacin and Vitamin D that can be added to warm or cold milk. It was invented in 1863 by Swiss scientist George Wander and originally called Ovomaltine. The formula has changed over the years and now includes sugar outside of Switzerland.

## Petrarch

(July 20, 1304-July 9, 1374)

Francesco Petrarca was one of the greatest love poets in history and a founder of humanism. His sonnets and odes were collected in the *Canzoniere*. As a scholar, he advocated the combination of Christian and classical scholarship, making him one of the earliest figures of the Italian Renaissance.

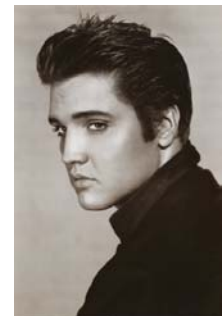
## Porsche

A German automobile manufacturer, known for luxury sports cars, Porsche was founded in 1931 by Austro-Hungarian engineer Ferdinand Porsche, who also designed the first Volkswagen. The company currently produces sports cars, a sport SUV and is launching a sedan in 2009.

## Elvis Presley

(Jan. 8, 1935-Aug. 16, 1977)

The "King of Rock 'n' Roll," Elvis Aaron Presley was born on January 8, 1935 in Tupelo, Mississippi, in a two-room shotgun shack built by his father and uncle. Throughout the course of his career, Elvis had 18 number one singles and 131 gold, platinum or multi-platinum albums, selling more than 1 billion albums worldwide. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1986, the Rockabilly Hall of Fame in 1997, the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1998, and Gospel Music Hall of Fame in 2001.





### Profiterole

A small round cream puff made from choux pastry and served with chocolate sauce. They can be filled with either sweet or savoury mixtures as an

appetizer or dessert.

### Ronald Reagan

(Feb. 6, 1911-June 5, 2004)

The 40<sup>th</sup> President of the United States (1981-1989), Ronald Reagan was a staunch conservative and fierce opponent of the Soviet Union. He began his career as a sports announcer and later became a B-movie star before entering politics. He served as Governor of California (1967-1975) and defeated Jimmy Carter in 1980 to become President of the United States.



### Rogation Day

In western Christendom, four days designated for prayer and fasting, usually the Monday to Wednesday before Ascension Day, as well as April 25, the Major Rogation.

### Rolls-Royce

A British car and aeronautical manufacturer founded by Henry Royce and Charles Stewart Rolls in 1906. Although



known for its elegant luxury cars, the focus of the business shifted to aircraft engines, but the development of the RB211 turbofan engine forced the company into bankruptcy and nationalization. The automotive division was sold off by the government and Rolls-Royce Motor Cars is currently a subsidiary of the BMW Group.

### Sake

A sweet golden wine made from fermenting steamed glutinous rice. Sake can be served chilled, at room temperature or heated, depending on the quality of the sake (heating the sake destroys the aroma and flavours of high-grade sake).

### Sandwich Islands

The name given to the Hawaiian Islands by Captain James Cook in 1778, named in honour of John Montague, the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Sandwich, who was First Lord of the Admiralty at the time. The name fell out of usage in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### Siberia

A region of central and eastern Russian, extending from the Ural Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, Siberia was annexed by Russian in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and used as a place of political exile and later settled and developed for its mineral resources after the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway.

### St. Augustine

(Nov. 13, 354-Aug. 28, 430)

Aurelius Augustinus was born in North Africa and educated in Carthage. He studied and rejected Platonic philosophy and Manichaeism before converting to Christianity in 386. He became Bishop of Hippo in 391, holding the post until his death. His writings such as the *Confessions* and *City of God* profoundly influenced Christianity and helped establish the doctrine of original sin.



### St. Clement's

The Basilica di San Clemente is a 12<sup>th</sup> century church dedicated to Pope Clement I and located in Rome. The original church was built in the fourth century; the current basilica was rebuilt on the site in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century after the original structure was burned down by the Normans in 1084.

### St. John's

The Basilica of St. John Lateran is the cathedral of the Church of Rome and the official ecclesiastical seat of the Bishop of Rome (the Pope). It is the oldest of the four major basilicas in Rome and is the ecumenical mother church for Roman Catholics. It is located outside of Vatican City in Rome, but has special extraterritorial status as a property of the Holy See.



### St. Peter's

St. Peter's Basilica is the present church of St. Peter in Rome. It was begun by Pope Julius II in 1506 and completed in



1615. It replaced Old St. Peter's Basilica, which was built by Constantine I c. 326 on the traditional site of St. Peter's tomb.

### Staffordshire

A county in west-central England, it was the centre of the Kingdom of Mercia in the 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries until being overrun by the Danes. It is a primarily industrial county, especially known for the manufacture of Wedgewood and Spode fine china, coal mining, and iron works.

### Sussex

A county in England divided into East Sussex and West Sussex for administrative purposes. It is located in the southeast of England on the English Channel and is noted for its seaside resorts such as Brighton and Eastbourne. The Kingdom of Sussex (South Saxons) was founded in the 5<sup>th</sup> century by King Aelle.

### Tesco

The fourth-largest retailer in the world, Tesco is a British-based grocery and general merchandise chain founded in 1919 by Jack Cohen. Originally specializing in food and drink, Tesco now sells a variety of consumer goods, financial and Internet services,

### Margaret Thatcher

(Oct. 13, 1925- )

Known as “The Iron Lady,” Margaret Thatcher was the first female Prime Minister of Great Britain, serving from 1979-1990, the longest to hold that office in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A staunch conservative, she was first elected to Parliament in 1959

and was a member of the Conservative Party’s right wing. She led Britain through the Falklands War, privatized national industries and utilities, and pursued a monetarist economic policy.



### Theodora of Alexandria

Theodora lived in Alexandria in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and was led into adultery by devil. Repenting, she dressed as a man and entered a monastery as Theodore of Alexandria, atoning through abstinence and mortifications. It was only discovered that she was a woman after her death.

### Tobermory

The capital of the Isle of Mull, located in the northeastern part of the island, one of the Scottish Inner Hebrides. It was founded as a fishing port in 1788.

### Tower of London

Located east of the City of London on the north bank of the Thames, the Tower of London was built as a fortress for the British royal family.



The central keep was built during the reign of William the Conqueror and expanded under later kings. Traditionally, the King of England would spend the night in the Tower before the coronation, though it is better known as a prison for highborn prisoners. The Crown Jewels are on display in the Waterloo Block

### Waldorf salad

A salad made from diced apples, celery and walnuts mixed with mayonnaise and served on a bed of lettuce. It was created by Chef Oscar Tschirsky at the Waldorf Hotel in the 1890s.



### Yorkshire

Located in northern England and extending westward from the North Sea to the Pennines, Yorkshire was the largest county in the England until the divided into Humberside, Cleveland, North Yorkshire and West Yorkshire in 1974. Its major cities include Leeds, Sheffield, Bradford and Wakefield.

### Young Women’s Christian Association

The YWCA, created separately from the YMCA, grew out of homes for young women and female prayer unions, the first of which was a London boarding-house founded by Lady Kinnaird in 1855. Today, the YWCA provides child-care, shelter, and fitness facilities, and advocates for social justice for women.

### Zabaglione

A frothy dessert or sauce made from egg yolks, sugar, and wine, whisked over heat until it becomes foamy custard.



## ON THE NATURE OF THINGS/DE RERUM NATURA

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At the end of the dinner scene, Pope Joan quotes extensively from Lucretius's epic philosophical poem on Epicureanism, *De rerum natura*. The selection she quotes is from the proem to the second of the six books of the poem, here in the original Latin and an English translation. According to the *Standard Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "The proem to book 2 extols the Epicurean life of detached tranquillity, portrayed as maintaining modest and easily satisfied appetites while shunning lofty ambitions and the disquiet these inevitably bring in their wake."

Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis,  
e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;  
non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas,  
sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est.  
Suave etiam belli certamina magna tueri  
per campos instructa tua sine parte pericli.  
Sed nil dulcius est, bene quam munita tenere  
edita doctrina sapientum templa serena,  
despicere unde queas alios passimque videre  
errare atque viam palantis quaerere vitae  
certare ingenio, contendere nobilitate,  
noctes atque dies niti praestante labore  
ad summas emergere opes retumque potiri.  
O miseris hominum mentis, o pectora caeca!  
Qualibus in tenebris vitae quantisque periclis  
degitur hoc aevi quodcumque! nonne videre  
nil aliud sibi naturam latrare, nisi utqui  
corpore seiunctus dolor absit, mente fruatur  
(iucundo sensu cura semota metuque?)

'Tis sweet, when, down the mighty main, the winds  
Roll up its waste of waters, from the land  
To watch another's labouring anguish far,  
Not that we joyously delight that man  
Should thus be smitten, but because 'tis sweet  
To mark what evils we ourselves be spared;  
'Tis sweet, again, to view the mighty strife  
Of armies embattled yonder o'er the plains,  
Ourselves no sharers in the peril; but naught  
There is more goodly than to hold the high  
Serene plateaus, well fortified by the wise,  
Whence thou may'st look below on other men  
And see them ev'rywhere wand'ring, all dispersed  
In their lone seeking for the road of life;  
Rivals in genius, or emulous in rank,  
Pressing through days and nights with hugest toil  
For summits of power and mastery of the world.  
O wretched minds of men! O blinded hearts!  
In how great perils, in what darks of life  
Are spent the human years, however brief!-  
O not to see that Nature for herself  
Barks after nothing, save that pain keep off,  
Disjoined from the body, and that mind enjoy  
Delightful feeling, far from care and fear!

## IDEAS AND EXPLORATIONS

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### Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

In order to celebrate her promotion, Marlene throws a dinner party for herself. But instead of inviting family and friends, she chooses to share her good fortune with strangers – strangers outside her time and place. What does her choice of companions tell the audience about Marlene and how she sees her own life? How does it set up her interactions with the real people in her world?

If you were throwing a similar dinner party, who would you invite (not including family and friends)? Would they be people you admire or people who interest you? Write a short biography of each one, paying particular attention to those aspects of their character or personal history that attract you the most. What famous figures reflect the way you see the world? Alternately, which ones reflect the way that you want the world to see you? Is there a difference?

### You're the Top

Who are the “top girls” in the play? Discuss the different characters in the play in terms of how they achieved – or didn't achieve – their life's goals. How do the dinner guests view each other and how does the perceptions of their specific time and place colour how they interpret each other's choices?

How are the potential “top girls” evaluated at the employment agency? What kinds of judgments do Marlene and her colleagues make based on a brief interview and their own perceptions? Are those judgments fair and accurate? How do these assumptions about their clients differ from historical assumptions made about women's capabilities in general?

Neither Marlene nor Joyce, in their own terms, considers Angie to be top girl material. What kind of future does she have when her family underestimates and dismisses her? Is there a path she can take that would allow her to succeed Joyce or Marlene's particular definitions?

### Equality and Beyond

Select a topic or figure from the women's movement and write a short research paper outlining your subject's contextual place in feminism. What have the goals of the women's movement been at different times in history and how has success or failure been measured?

*Top Girls* was written in 1982 and addressed some of the specific feminist concerns of the time – in particular, the example of Margaret Thatcher, who is both admired and despised by characters in the play, possibly for the same reasons. Have things changed in 27 years? Taking into account recent history, how do figures like Sarah Palin and Hilary Clinton fit into feminist and feminine viewpoints? How do they, and other “top girls” of today, fulfill or transcend gender roles? Have these roles changed in the past quarter century? Would Marlene's story be any different if it were told today?

## NOTABLE QUOTABLES

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“It is easier to live through someone else than to become complete yourself.” Betty Friedan

“Women do not have to sacrifice personhood if they are mothers. They do not have to sacrifice motherhood in order to be persons. Liberation was meant to expand women's opportunities, not to limit them. The self-esteem that has been found in new pursuits can also be found in mothering.” Elaine Heffner

“We've got a generation now who were born with semiequality. They don't know how it was before, so they think, this isn't too bad. We're working. We have our attache' cases and our three piece suits. I get very disgusted with the younger generation of women. We had a torch to pass, and they are just sitting there. They don't realize it can be taken away. Things are going to have to get worse before they join in fighting the battle.” Erma Bombeck

“Women are systematically degraded by receiving the trivial attentions which men think it manly to pay to the sex, when, in fact, men are insultingly supporting their own superiority.” Mary Wollstonecraft

“Because I am a woman, I must make unusual efforts to succeed. If I fail, no one will say, ‘She doesn't have what it takes.’ They will say, ‘Women don't have what it takes.’” Clare Boothe Luce

“I'm tough, I'm ambitious, and I know exactly what I want. If that makes me a bitch, okay.” Madonna Ciccone

“There is a special place in hell for women who do not help other women.” Madeleine K. Albright

“I've yet to be on a campus where most women weren't worrying about some aspect of combining marriage, children, and a career. I've yet to find one where many men were worrying about the same thing.” Gloria Steinem

“Give a woman a job and she grows balls.” Jack Gelber

O noble wives, full of a high prudence,  
Let not humility your free tongue nail,  
Nor let some clerk have cause for diligence  
To write of you, so marvelous detail  
As of Griselda, patient and so kind;  
Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Clerk's Tale” *The Canterbury Tales*

“Griselda,” said he, “'tis now time that thou see the reward of thy long patience, and that those, who have deemed me cruel and unjust and insensate, should know that what I did was done of purpose aforethought, for that I was minded to give both thee and them a lesson, that thou mightst learn to be a wife, and they in like manner might learn how to take and keep a wife, and that I might beget me perpetual peace with thee for the rest of my life;” Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*

## RECOMMENDED READING & VIEWING

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*Cloud 9, Serious Money, The Number*, by Caryl Churchill

Three plays by Caryl Churchill that push the boundaries of theatricality and realism.

*A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains, The Yangtze Valley and Beyond*, by Isabella Bird

Two books by Isabella Bird, chronicling her extensive travels.

*The Confessions of Lady Nijo*, translated by Karen Brazell

The translation of Lady Nijo's life story, written in diary form.

*The Canterbury Tales*, by Geoffrey Chaucer

A compilation of tales told by pilgrims en route to Canterbury. "The Clerk's Tale" contains the story of Griselda.

*The Decameron*, by Giovanni Boccaccio

A collection of 100 novellas framed as stories told by a group of 10 young nobles spending time in a country villa to escape plague-ridden Florence.

*The Feminine Mystique*, by Betty Friedan

The book that launched the Second Wave of the feminist movement through its discussion of the lack of fulfillment in women's lives.

*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, by Mary Wollstonecraft

One of the earliest works of feminist philosophy, written as a response to educational and political theorists who wanted to deny women education.

*A Room of One's Own*, by Virginia Woolf

An extended essay addressing the status of women, particularly the status of women authors, concluding that great minds are androgynous.

*The Second Sex*, by Simone de Beauvoir

An investigation into the treatment of women throughout history, arguing that women have been historically defined as an aberration from the "normal" male sex.

*The Handmaid's Tale*, by Margaret Atwood

A dystopian novel exploring themes of women in subjugation.

*The Women's Room*, by Marilyn French

One of the most influential novels of the modern feminist movement, it follows the fortunes of a 1950s housewife through her marriage and gradual feminist awakening.

## INTERNET SITES OF NOTE

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### **Playhouse Theatre Company**

[www.vancouverplayhouse.com](http://www.vancouverplayhouse.com)

Visit the Playhouse website for more information about *Top Girls* and the upcoming 2009/10 Playhouse season.

### **The Language of Caryl Churchill**

<http://www.womenwriters.net/editorials/PriceEd1.htm>

An article about Caryl Churchill's plays in terms of feminist theory.

### **"Top Girls"**

<http://www.wsu.edu/~cmaier/TopGirls/index.htm>

Information about the play *Top Girls* hosted on the Washington State University website.

### **Google Book – The Confessions of Lady Nijo**

[http://books.google.com/books?id=0CWh9gCkvugC&dq=lady+nijo&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=cnHeO-Vw5B&sig=fB\\_jgwu00afesH-AHPUVTxuUQWk&hl=en&ei=X-ftScquNovhtgfzuen7DA&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=14#PPR7,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=0CWh9gCkvugC&dq=lady+nijo&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=cnHeO-Vw5B&sig=fB_jgwu00afesH-AHPUVTxuUQWk&hl=en&ei=X-ftScquNovhtgfzuen7DA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=14#PPR7,M1)

The translation of Lady Nijo's memoirs.

### **Google Book – A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains**

<http://books.google.com/books?id=2uQUAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=inauthor:Isabella+inauthor:Lucy+inauthor:Bird&ei=RMnjSfOPJ4S2yASg47T8Aw#PPP1,M1>

An account of Isabella Bird's travels in North America, published in 1882.

### **The Decameron**

<http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/decameron/engDecShowText.php?myID=nov1010&expand=day10>

A link to Day 10, Tale 10, the story of Griselda

### **Dulle Griet, Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1564)**

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2002/dec/14/art>

An article about the painting by Bruegel, including a link to a digital image.

### **Pope Joan**

[http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/hoax/Hoaxipedia/Pope\\_Joan/](http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/hoax/Hoaxipedia/Pope_Joan/)

The legend of a woman who briefly served as Pope in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

<http://www.dreamscape.com/morgana/popejoan.htm>

An excerpt from the Author's Notes of *Pope Joan: A Novel* by Donna Woolfolk Cross, arguing for the historical existence of Pope Joan.

### **Feminist.com**

<http://www.feminist.com/>

An online community designed to foster awareness, education and activism for women.

### **Gender Roles**

<http://www.faqs.org/health/topics/8/Gender-roles.html>

An article about gender roles in the workplace and home.