

# *Leading Ladies*

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By Nancy Honey

*Interviews by Hattie Garlick*

**GERMAINE GREER:** *Theorist, academic and journalist*

**1939:** Born, Melbourne

**1967:** Took a doctorate in literature at the University of Cambridge

**1970:** Following some TV acting, writing and university lecturing, her first book *The Female Eunuch* is published

**1989:** Appointed special lecturer and fellow at Newnham College, Cambridge

**2003:** Published *The Boy*, an examination of young men

**2005:** Appeared on reality TV show *Celebrity Big Brother*

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**I've never been an equality feminist.** Equality Feminism means that you take the present condition of men as the aim that you strive for. Well men are not free. The corporate world is a nightmare and cruel, it has no place for older people, it's only for the big swinging dicks. It's corrupt to the core.

**Do you really want women to learn this vicious and dishonest way of life?** To become corporate creatures, a one dimensional person that is the corporation man? He doesn't have a moral compassion, he doesn't have a notion of nobility or virtue at all, just the bottom line which is profit.

**People who come to power need not simply to be women, they need to be feminists** and they need to have an agenda, which is the defeat of masculinism, of chauvinism, of competition as a way of life. I don't think we've got a prayer, frankly, at this point.

**But I don't think women have equality today in any event.** They still work a lot harder than men, they work all the time. They don't have any right to leisure.

**If they work outside the house its not because they want to in many cases** because the work they do is pointless, dead-end and badly paid, but they need to service the family debts and so they go to work.

**They are very seldom ambitious at work.** Younger women are more likely to be ambitious but they'll have that beaten out of them before too long when they realise what the cost of ambition actually is, in terms of exhaustion and also closing down your life chances.

**I've always described myself as an escapee.** But I had to work probably twice as hard as any man would work to make my escape first of all. I had to pay for my own education. My family wouldn't do it, they were certain that I would be married and any education would be wasted, I would be better off doing a secretarial course. They would say things like, "look, you've got no nice clothes and you don't go out and it's all because you're a student and you'll never meet Mr Right." Which wasn't just because we were in Australia, we are talking about the 1950s.

**It would be hard for a country to be worse than Britain [in its treatment of women].** On any of the indicators, Britain comes off pretty badly. Childcare provision, for example, is very grim, very expensive and also unprofessionalised and under regulated so you can't be sure that children are safe. We know that Scandinavia is better on all these indicators, Holland is probably better. Even Spain, the inventor of machismo, is better.

**The really curious thing about Britain is that British men really don't like women.** And that's very, very apparent. They love situations where there are no women, for that simple reason. The only reason that a man would sit on a muddy, cold river bank with a rod in his hand is that there's no woman there.

**It's terribly easy to shock people.** You only have to speak directly and they panic...

And people pretend to be shocked all the time. When I said that I wished the Prime Minister of Australia didn't have to wear her stupid jackets, because they make her look like an organ grinder's monkey, everybody pretended to be scandalised that I, as a feminist, had mentioned somebody's clothes. Oh get over it...

**Men have a very strong protocol which operates in most situations and it's something that women are not learning.** If you ask a man for the dirt on another man, his first instinct is not to give it to you. He may know something fantastic, something truly newsworthy and utterly shameful, but he won't give it to you, because his first instinct is solidarity. He may then realise, that it's in his interest to leak this fact. But he won't just do it because he can't resist it. And women just haven't learnt solidarity at all.

**Heterosexual relationships have become an inferior substitute for masturbation.** I'm still such an old fashioned woman that if the man I was living with enjoyed masturbating more than he enjoyed making love to me, I wouldn't be there, I'd be gone.

**The greatest danger to women today?** It depends where you are, but I think it's probably Islam. The women who've been active in the Arab Spring are now discovering what the future holds and it's pretty nasty. In Egypt, women were forcefully internally examined because they were out in public without a man. Can you imagine? Because Sharia says that a woman who is wandering the streets without a man is a prostitute. In *Egypt*, which is one of the more cosmopolitan of the Islamic nations. We're talking life and death here, not lifestyle choices. We're talking being whipped, being stoned, being imprisoned, being exiled.

**I've just been asked by some young women in Syria if they can produce an Arabic version of *The Female Eunuch*.** Of course I said, "yes, yes" but I'm very worried for them. Because it will be absolutely dangerous for them. I don't know why it's *The Female Eunuch*, it should be a different book, but that's the one they want and I suppose it must be done.