



Germaine Greer: Untamed Shrew

Christine Wallace

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The story of one of the most intriguing people in a generation.

Germaine Greer is one of the opinion-formers of our age, her challenging views constantly provoking us in print and on the small screen. *The Female Eunuch*, her first book published in 1970, was hailed by the women's liberation movement and influenced an entire generation. Yet two years earlier Greer had argued that "there is hardly a woman alive who is not deeply attracted to the notion of a husband of the kind extolled by Kate", the rebellious wife subdued in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Over 30 years later, as Germaine Greer revises what one reviewer called "one of the most eloquent pieces of anarchist propaganda that have appeared in this century", it is fitting to assess the life and work of this complex, compelling intellect. Christine Wallace, an Australian academic familiar with the background in which Germaine Greer grew up, has drawn extensively from candid interviews with Greer's family, friends and former colleagues as well as from her many autobiographical writings. She reveals a courageous, contradictory, often tormented woman, variously (and often simultaneously) scholar, rock stars' groupie, bohemian, lover of cats and gardening, and a feminist who spurned and then yearned for motherhood.

An icon of women's liberation yet fiercely competitive and scathing of other women; a swashbuckling adventuress yet often vulnerable and surprisingly passive in her dealings with men; an inveterate self-dramatist yet incorrigibly honest, Greer has always lived by extremes – and the risks she took have allowed shoals of moderate feminists to swim in her wake. Many followers have been rebuffed by her reckless inconsistency – a quality she shares with Byron, her first literary love, stemming from a rare determination to be true to the moment. This biography puts into context the unhappy childhood, the convent schooling and promiscuous but rigorous university years that shaped Greer's powerful personality and restless intelligence. Child of the beat generation, leader (and victim) of the 60s sexual revolution, she continues to assail our complacency.

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