



Germaine Greer: Untamed Shrew

By Christine Wallace

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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". Nearly 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 as she approaches her 60th year.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Germaine Greer didn't want this book to be written. Indeed, she described its author, an Australian journalist with a background in parliamentary reporting, as an "amoeba," a "dung-beetle," and a "brain-dead hack." Greer's loss, however, is a reader's gain. This profile of the nonfeminist's feminist is an admirable attempt to analyze Greer's celebrity, and the sales of *The Female Eunuch*, as a paradigm of postwar media success: "Take a great title, arresting cover artwork, a promotable, quotable author, add sex...." Greer's life makes a compelling story because, like so many professional polemicists, she has never been inhibited by fact, logic, or consistency. Christine Wallace's efforts to unearth the successive layers of Greer's myth reveal her as a young nonfeminist who initially dismissed her agent's suggestion for a book on the status of women; a sexual libertarian who attacked her Cambridge women's college for hiring a transsexual; and a trained scholar who subsequently declared all women academics hopelessly neurotic--only to return to the ivory tower at financially expedient intervals.

Yet in one respect Greer has remained constant: as this biography demonstrates, the media's favorite feminist has been a lifelong misogynist, singling out women (painters, poets, other feminists, her mother, the female eunuch) for opprobrium. Wallace's analysis of this extraordinary career is careful, well-informed (particularly on the Australian intellectual traditions that contributed to Greer's bizarre combination of moral certainty, libertarianism, and political pessimism), and--given her subject's threats and libels--surprisingly fair. As she stresses, *The Female Eunuch* may have made little impact on organized feminism, but its "vision of assertive women in hot pursuit of pleasure, independence, and spontaneity" empowered the women who read it far beyond the realms of activism. Whether Greer's subsequent writings ever contributed to anything other than her bank account is a different question. In a final irony, the biography she didn't want was published in Britain to coincide with a new book of her own. --Mandy Merck, *Amazon.co.uk*

From Publishers Weekly

In this unauthorized biography, Australian journalist Wallace relentlessly stalks Germaine Greer, ultimately finding few redeeming intellectual, creative or social attributes in her subject. Wallace starts out with an apparently even-tempered investigation of Greer's upbringing in 1950s Australia, her early career as actress-cum-journalist and her completion of a doctorate in English literature at Cambridge, leading to Greer's explosion into celebrity in 1970 with *The Female Eunuch*, a book Wallace calls a testament to "hegemonic heterosexuality." Although the bestseller made Greer synonymous with women's liberation, Wallace argues that Greer was an opportunist who took advantage of a historical moment to feather her own nest. She quotes scholars and participants in the feminist movement who saw Greer as a quisling to both the women's movement and the sexual revolution. Wallace often gets in a quick left-right, as when she concludes that Greer derived her premise for *The Female Eunuch* from Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver's "Allegory of the Black Eunuch," in *Soul on Ice*, and then charges that Greer's book was "politically naive." She also contends that Greer capitulated to men by blaming women for the male violence inflicted on them in language that "relied on traditional rhetorical ploys," such as Greer's Marxist allusion to women as "sexual proletariats." Greer's disenchantment with Catholicism, her problematic relationship with her parents and husband (a man whom Wallace casts as the "culmination of her heterosexual rough trade fantasy") and her role as a bomb thrower against the women's movement are all covered. But all these issues are raised as part of a one-sided treatment of Greer and her writings. Photos not seen by PW.

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From Library Journal

Feminist Germaine Greer became a controversial star of the women's movement with the 1970 publication of *The Female Eunuch*. Exercising her propensity for polemic, Greer vehemently objected to this unauthorized biography by journalist and fellow Australian Wallace. (*Untamed Shrew* was published in Australia in 1997 and ignited an invasion-of-privacy debate.) Wallace persevered and has produced a reasonable and convincing account of a major 20th-century figure and the movement she epitomizes. Wallace focuses not on a detailed account of Greer's life but on the formative experiences (especially her relationship with her parents) and intellectual influences that made Greer's contributions so contradictory and so influential. Wallace uses articles, interviews, speeches, and Greer's writings judiciously. She gives considerable attention to Greer's historic milieu and reviews the content and impact of Greer's major works. Whether this four-year undertaking was as "honest" and "well intentioned" as Wallace claims, readers will have to decide for themselves. Recommended for public and academic libraries.

ACarol Ann McAllister, Coll. of William & Mary Lib., Williamsburg, VA

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Nicole Oneal:

Book is to be different for each grade. Book for children till adult are different content. As it is known to us that book is very important for all of us. The book Germaine Greer: Untamed Shrew was making you to know about other understanding and of course you can take more information. It doesn't matter what advantages for you. The book Germaine Greer: Untamed Shrew is not only giving you a lot more new information but also to be your friend when you experience bored. You can spend your own spend time to read your book. Try to make relationship using the book Germaine Greer: Untamed Shrew. You never feel lose out for everything should you read some books.

Sharon Self:

As people who live in typically the modest era should be revise about what going on or data even knowledge to make them keep up with the era which can be always change and move forward. Some of you maybe may update themselves by examining books. It is a good choice for you personally but the problems coming to you actually is you don't know what kind you should start with. This Germaine Greer: Untamed Shrew is our recommendation to cause you to keep up with the world. Why, as this book serves what you want and want in this era.

Jill White:

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