

NATIONAL WINNER
WOMEN'S HISTORY



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GERMAINE GREER: LOUD AND PROUD

Germaine Greer: Loud and Proud

Germaine Greer is a name most Australians can recognise within an instant. Provocative and gutsy, Greer is still a powerful and influential second-wave feminist icon. She was the key inspiration for many women to make the world a better place through galvanising women to protest against the patriarchal society during her time as a second-wave feminist author in the 1970s through to the 90s. It was Greer's youth and the scent of social and political change in the 1960s and 70s air that skyrocketed her to international stardom, establishing her legacy as a powerful liberation feminist, as well as a feminist with theoretical agency¹. Her penning of *The Female Eunuch* in 1970, whilst not yielding practical change, inspired symbolic changes that made the world a better place for women frustrated by the lack of opportunity. Greer, as a woman, has always been misrepresented, especially by men. However, in more recent times Greer's seeming transphobia have caused a generational clash between new wave and earlier wave feminists. Despite all this, Greer will be what she has always been; loud and proud, and still fighting to make the world a better place for women who felt they've been oppressed by the patriarchal society.

Germaine Greer's background and the cultural context of the 1970s influenced her popularity. Greer was born on the 19th January 1939, in a war-panicked Australia, to Peggy and Reg Greer.² Greer was influenced heavily by the absence of her father at a young age, as shared by Christine Wallace, an Australian political journalist and biographer, "Germaine remembers nothing... before Reg, 'Daddy', went away to war. Her earliest memory of her father, she says, is that he was not there."³ Through Wallace's source, it can be inferred that Greer's 'hatred' of men could have possibly stemmed from her paternal issues. The absence of her father took a large toll on Greer, eventually spurring her to write *Daddy, we hardly knew you* in 1989. But more than Greer's background, the palpable changes of the 1960s and 70s bestowed upon Greer a chance to get her voice heard. This is visible in a secondary source by the ABC "The 1970s saw large numbers of Australian women demanding social change and an end to discrimination."⁴ Therefore it is clear that the cultural context of the 1970s and Germaine Greer's upbringing presented Greer with an opportunity to make the world a better place.

The motivation of women by Germaine Greer resulted in little practical change that can be directly attributed to Greer personally. However, the symbolic change that resulted from Greer's achievements made the world a better place for oppressed women. Australian women in the 1970s were mostly controlled by their husbands, as per the status quo. Greer sought to change this, by establishing her legacy to call women to arms to release themselves from their oppression. This in itself was her historical agency, purely theoretical, as Greer wrote books, but didn't lobby on the streets like other feminists. Zohra Moosa's piece in *The Guardian* shares this implicit meaning: "Germaine Greer is a frustrating icon to write about. Her insights... while not always strictly accurate, do [share in a message] so searing it galvanises us to reflect more deeply on the status of women and the nature of gender relations. But like lightning... she has also been painful and damaging to feminist movements even as she forced them to turn towards her and react to her flash."⁵ The assertions of Moosa can be read through the lens that she is a modern-day feminist, and thus highly

¹ A person with agency is viable to solve a problem directly by petitioning, whilst a person with theoretical agency has some kind of agency but instead of campaigning they pen the novels/write articles to inspire other people to lobby for a cause.

² Encyclopedia.com (2017) "Germaine Greer" <http://www.encyclopedia.com/people/social-sciences-and-law/social-reformers/germaine-greer>

³ Wallace, C. (1997) "Greer Untamed Shrew" Macmillan: Pan Macmillan Australia Pty Limited, p. 4

⁴ ABC (2010) "Reactions to women's liberation, 1970s" <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/makingaustralia/educationextras/episode-one/clip-four.htm>

⁵ Moosa, Z. in *The Guardian* (2014) "What Germaine Greer and *The Female Eunuch* mean to me" <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/26/germaine-greer-female-eunuch-feminists-influence>

biased towards the feminist movement. Although Greer made no physical changes to the daily lives of women, she was still very significant, both to the feminist movement and overall as a woman. Partington's model (see Figure 1) can be utilised to show Greer's significance. The criteria of profundity provides information on Greer's lack of practical change – her writing was her biggest asset to inspire masses of women. This is proven through the orthodox perspective of Eva Cox, an Austrian-born Australian writer, feminist, sociologist, social commentator and activist, "*The Female Eunuch* had a huge impact. I have spoken to so many women who said the lights went off in their head. It was a very powerful book then, it is still a powerful book."⁶ The weight of the factual evidence on balance suggests that Greer herself did not create up any definite changes, but rather her significance enticed women to make the world a better place themselves. Thus, Germaine Greer's part in galvanising women did not yield practical change, rather symbolic changes that helped make the world a better place for women who had been oppressed.

The overall changes from the second-wave of feminism, furthered by Germaine Greer, helped advance into the eventual fourth wave of feminism. An example of this is the Equal Pay Act of 1972, which although it seemed like a step in the right direction, it was more like being at a standstill. A primary quote from Greer proves these assertions: "The Equal Pay idea got terribly confused with another... idea, which was... [a] fixed rate for work... the unions actually connived an evaluation scheme which meant that women's work was permanently undervalued, and they could do nothing about it because the union was keen on differentiation."⁷ The patterns of evidence provided here and by another source by Greer indicate that although changes did occur, due to the nature of the 1960s and 70s, they were more of a mixed blessing to both Greer and the feminists of the 1970s in Australia as these changes were often detrimental to the feminist cause by providing the illusion that the feminist fight was won. Greer's significance can be proven by looking at Partington's model – this time at the criteria on relevance. Greer credits herself as a writer of the second-wave, which, as history dictates, set up the background for the third (1990s-2000s) and eventual fourth-wave (2000s onwards). This is implicitly explained in an excerpt from Martha Rampton's source:

*"[I was] asked if the second and third waves may have 'failed or dialled down' because the social and economic gains had been mostly sparkle, little substance, and whether at some point women substituted equal rights for career and the atomic self... Quite the contrary; many goals of the second wave were met: more women in positions of leadership in higher education, business and politics; abortion rights; access to the pill that increased women's control over their bodies, [etc]."*⁸

This quote is representative of most second-wave feminists, as there were clear successes in the second-wave movement. It is clear that the overall changes from the second-wave of feminism, continued by Greer, helped advance into the eventual fourth wave of feminism, although the changes that did occur were detrimental to the feminist cause and prevented Greer from making the world a better place.

The conflicting representations of Germaine Greer have heavily affected society's views upon her and her capacity to continue contributing to making a better world for oppressed women. Men could not help but belittle her as they were threatened by her intelligence and temperament. Richard Neville proves this in a primary quote, "[Greer is] both breasty and brainy, a scorching

⁶ Cox, E. in Coslovich, G. (2010) "Clarion call to a new generation" <http://www.smh.com.au/national/clarion-call-to-a-new-generation-20100305-poph.html>

⁷ Greer, G. (1979) in Temple, J. (2011) "Profile: Germaine Greer – 1 Sep 1979" (video file) <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2011/08/08/3288476.htm>

⁸ Rampton, M. (2015) "Four Waves of Feminism" <https://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/four-waves-feminism>

combination of Dorothy Parker and Raquel Welch”⁹ The context of the source’s production indicate that many men were more concerned with Greer’s looks than her aptitude as an activist. This is a continuity as men can still find ways to attack Greer, as she is a woman who challenges the dominant discourse of society, as illustrated in the following overtly anti-Greer quote by Louis Nowra, “There is no doubt that fame and celebrity have seduced Greer. She is a TV producer’s and newspaper editor’s dream. She will say and do anything to get noticed, even if this means whingeing and moaning her way through shows...”¹⁰ The accuracy of this quote can be argued as he is overtly biased against Greer and the feminism movement. Recently, it has been Greer’s transphobia which has caused controversy within the feminist community. The dispute started in 2015. Greer was due to speak at Cardiff University, however some university students heard of Greer’s opposition of male-to-female transgender women being classed as ‘real women’. According to Rachael Melhuish, the Women’s Officer at Cardiff University Students’ Union, who initiated the petition on Greer, “Greer has demonstrated time and time again her misogynistic views towards trans women, including continually misgendering trans women and denying the existence of transphobia altogether.”¹¹ The motives behind Melhuish’s petition were to reveal Greer’s debateable opinion. Melhuish’s petition was supported by many fourth-wave feminists, seemingly creating what could be described as a generational clash between older feminists and new feminists. The fourth-wave has both simplified the definition of feminism by reducing it to equality, a completely different concept from Greer’s practice of radical feminism, and redefined gender. Instead of imposing specific gender roles on males and females, fourth-wave feminists inspire self-expression; no matter sex or race. Ironically, this is somewhat similar to what Greer was trying to accomplish during her time – she aimed to empower housewives to redefine what it was to be a woman. Greer justified her opinion by stating, “There are men who have been married and who have had children and who’ve believed they’ve been women all along – I don’t believe them. Sorry. You can hold a knife to my throat, I don’t believe you.”¹² Greer’s opinion is unsurprising, considering the time period in which she grew up. Nonetheless, this goes against the current wave of feminism, and it’s predictable that fourth-wave feminists like Melhuish oppose her actions. All in all, the conflicting representations of Germaine Greer, as well as her controversial opinions of transgender people, have heavily affected society’s view upon her, and thus affected her ability to make the world a better place.

In conclusion, it is clear that Germaine Greer is still a powerful and influential second-wave feminist icon. She was the key inspiration for many women to make the world a better place through galvanising women to protest against the patriarchal society. The social and political change in the 1960s and 70s air presented Greer with an opportunity to have her voice heard, establishing her legacy as a powerful liberation feminist. Her theoretical agency did not yield practical change, but instead inspired symbolic changes that transformed the feminist society eventually into the current wave, the fourth-wave. Throughout her career, Greer has always been misrepresented, especially by men. In more recent times, however, Greer’s transphobia has caused a generational clash between new wave and earlier wave feminists. Despite all this, Greer will be what she has always been; loud and proud, and still fighting to make the world a better place for women who felt they’ve been oppressed by the patriarchal society.

⁹ Neville, R. (1993) in Coslovich, G. (2010) Op-cit

¹⁰ Nowra, L. (2010) “The Better Self?” <http://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2010/february/1329283585/louis-nowra/better-self>

¹¹ Melhuish, R. in Edwards, R. (2015) “Silenced by feminazis: The disturbing (and bitterly ironic) story of how Germaine Greer is having her voice snatched away by feminist students” <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3289366/Silenced-feminazis-disturbing-bitterly-ironic-story-Germaine-Greer-having-voice-snatched-away-feminist-students.html>

¹² Greer, G. in The Update (2015) “Germaine Greer on anti-feminists, transgender and how equality feminism is not enough” (video file) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1WFOoOGKaU>

Figure 1: Partington's 5 criteria for historical significance

- Importance – to the people in the past
- Profundity – how deeply people's lives have been affected
- Quantity – how many lives have been affected
- Durability – for how long have people's lives been affected
- Relevance – in terms of the increased understanding of present life

Partington, G. (1980) The idea of an historical education, Slough, NFER: 112-116.