

An invitation to the palace makes Greer just another loyal subject



Republican, Ma'am? Germaine Greer, left, holds forth to Queen Elizabeth at a Buckingham Palace reception for prominent Australians yesterday. Main picture: AP

LONDON: Even the most hardboiled republicans can transform into loyal servants when invited to a reception with the Queen. By her own admission, it would have been something for Germaine Greer to tell the grandkids — if she had any.

And it would be too. As there she was, a critic of British imperialism, honorary Aborigine and proponent of an Aboriginal republic, seemingly currying to the Queen along with 200 prominent Australian guests at Buckingham Palace yesterday.

The *Female Eunuch* author and republican dropped her whatever-it-is-I'm-against-it attitude just long enough to stick to official royal protocol, even if she later claimed to be underwhelmed by the palace.

Australian guests included professional expat Clive James, Melbourne Grand Prix boss Ron Walker, arts supremo Robyn Archer, former Wallaby Matt Burke and London bombing survivor Gillian Hicks.

The republicans among them proved they love a lord and adore royalty. They were entertained lavishly in the palace's throne room, complete with 6m mirrors, red carpets and, of course, a throne.

It was the first time such a gathering had been held exclusively for Australians. It aimed to help the



Formality: Greer shakes Her Majesty's hand . . .

Queen get to know her far-flung subjects in the run-up to the Melbourne Commonwealth Games.

And the Queen said she was looking forward to her visit to Australia next month.

"I normally dose these events, but I'll be opening this one," the Queen said as she mingled with guests.

Greer did appear to be impressed with Her Majesty's art smarts.

"She has got good taste in art and she knows the value of every single painting down to the last fiver," she said. "I've come, I've done it — been

there, done that. You've got to tell the grandchildren something — but I don't have any."

But the building's original owner did not make the grade with Greer, who said "the Duke of Buckingham's horribleness is expressed in every single cornice of this ugly building".

Writer and TV presenter James was better behaved. He claimed to have amused the Queen by saying "There's lots of us here, we're starting a colony. She liked that."

He added: "What can I say? Nice house." Ms Hicks, who is adapting

well to the prosthetic legs fitted to replace those amputated after the London Tube bombings last July, also had a conversation with the Queen.

"We talked about how she presented MBEs (Member of the British Empire honours) last week to police officers who helped me," Ms Hicks said. "I just said to the Queen that it's such an honour to count these men as some of my very good friends now."

Rolf Harris, who painted a portrait of the Queen in her 80th year, had to leave early as he had the flu.

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