

Social Media and The Process of Deplatforming.

Germaine Greer

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The flexibility of English, and thriving sign that it is not a dead language, permits repeated atrocities to be committed in the name of new terms. We are told that what is new is supposedly good, a sign of evolution. More accurately, such terms simply describe an old phenomenon, giving the false impression that the novel has appeared before the old.

The term “deplatforming” is de rigueur at the moment, a creature of the social media age and lecture circuit. Invitations to writers’ festivals can be withdrawn at a moment’s notice because the invitee has either not observed the current fashion, or has done something distinctly against it. Users of social media have their carpet, or platform, as it were, taken from under them.

The star recipient of that treatment was Alex Jones, who has found himself, and his Infowars, expelled beyond the city gates of social media babble. Social media giants, pressured by the very individuals who believe that free speech is vital oxygen to the body politic, have taken it upon themselves to police expression.

“It’s implausible to imagine a future,” [observed](#) a bleak David Harsanyi, “in which liberal activists don’t demand that Republican groups be de-platformed.”

A creature of argumentation and debate very different to Jones is Germaine Greer, a permanent voice of insurrection whose *The Female Eunuch* still retains, even after a half-century, the sense of being both iconoclastic and holy. When your book becomes a household weapon of feminist liberation, an item to be found on reading lists to perturb, you know you have made it. While she has never quite emulated the initial triumph of that deliciously confronting text, she has always managed to take stage and floor, to back into the limelight. Her enemies are many, and there are as many amongst the fractious sisterhood as they are outside it. Having never been a full card carrying ideologue, Greer has never, thankfully, belonged.

On the ABC’s Q&A program, Greer was again found showing how her opinions and essays can still strike appropriate chords, ruffle the occasional, fixed feather and disrupt the nonchalant with a discomforting start. On this occasion, it was rape, that tool of power, appropriation and control that has preoccupied analysts of sexuality since cognition was discovered. Greer’s [reaction](#) was hardly surprising, a no-nonsense slap down on how victimhood should be treated.

“Trauma is something that is dictated really by the sufferer. You know, I can’t

bear huntsman spiders. It is not their fault. It's my fault... I decided to be frightened of them."

The program merely saw a reiteration of Greer's views outlined in her latest essay [On Rape](#), which does not disparage victims but provides a trenchant critique of the justice system that reduces such victims to the minutiae of "evidence".

"Rape," she contends, "is a jagged outcrop in the vast monotonous landscape of bad sex; we can only understand its prevalence and our inability to deal with it if we position it correctly within the psychopathology of daily life."

It is "banal rape" that poses the greatest problem, wrapped, as it were, in the dilemmas of the incommunicable, the gulf between sexual participants. To that end, and here, Greer supplies the kindling for her critics, a different sentencing regime is required, one that focuses on convicting "on the assault charges while leaving the rape issue moot".

It is such views that have seen Greer disinvented to the Brisbane Writers' festival, a move which has been couched in the lingo of organisational guff. Melbourne University Press publisher Louise Adler was far from impressed by the decision of the organisers, [claiming](#) that it "seems counter to the ethos of freedom of speech".

The [response](#) from the festival was resoundingly cowardly:

"Brisbane writers' festival does not shy away from controversy or challenging ideas, but as all festival organisers know, it's invariably difficult to choose between the many authors currently promoting books and the need to provide engaging choices for our audience along a curatorial theme."

There will always be fashions and tyrannies of thought, attempts to close off argumentation if not ignore it altogether. Liz Duck-Chong [reflects](#) this tendency, and finds it necessary to preface any views with the identity descriptor "trans" (because identities are mysterious, self-justifying ideas rather than markers). Having accepted with a heavy reluctance that there is a "market place of ideas", she proceeds to dictate, akin to a book banning commissar, what constitutes that market. "Greer and her ilk" are not "worth listening to" and have nothing to add to the "on going conversation". Talk about tolerance is "tired", an old excuse best left by the wayside. What such opinions do is remind us that the oldest of ideas, intolerance, remains ever threatening, the censor, a dangerous reality. The market place is enjoyable, till you encounter ideas you do not like.

It is important to note that Australia had, at one point, a censorship record of such astounding ferocity it rivalled that of Ireland. Books of interest were not published for fear of stirring scurrilous thoughts or fostering wayward behaviour. Banning as an instinct of paternal control came first. To remove Greer, a well read, tutored figure strides ahead of many of her critics, is to deny audiences not merely an intellectual draught of consequence but a poking sense of fun. Disliking her ideas is hardly an excuse to avoid entertaining them.

As for Greer herself, some humour prevails.

“The Brisbane writers’ festival is very hard work. So, to be uninvited to what is possibly the dreariest literary festival in the world, with zero hospitality and no fun at all, is a great relief.”

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