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EUROPE

Cardiff University Rejects Bid to Bar Germaine Greer

By KIMIKO DE FREYTAS-TAMURA OCT. 24, 2015

LONDON — Students at Cardiff University have begun an online petition trying to bar Germaine Greer, the Australian feminist author, from speaking there next month because of her views on transgender women.

Ms. Greer’s views are well known, but the campaign to bar her from giving a lecture has raised the issue of academic censorship, and the university swiftly rejected the petition in the name of free speech.

Ms. Greer, 76, who is best known for her best seller, “The Female Eunuch,” has prompted outrage and protests in the past because of her comments. In a column in 2009 she wrote that transgender women seem like ghastly parodies and that a transgender woman was essentially “a man’s delusion that he is female.” According to Varsity, Cambridge University’s student newspaper, she suggested in January that transgender women do not know what it is like to have a vagina.

The petition was initiated on Friday by Rachael Melhuish, women’s officer at the Cardiff University Students’ Union. The petition states that Ms. 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.” The petition had received about 880 signatures by noon on Saturday.

The campaign appeared to take Ms. Greer by surprise. “I don’t really know what I think of it,” she told The Guardian. “What they are saying is that because I don’t think surgery will turn a man into a woman I should not be allowed to speak anywhere.”

She called the petition “a bit of a put-up job” because she was not even going to talk about the issue in her lecture on Nov. 18, titled “Women & Power: The Lessons of the 20th Century.” The issue is broader, she said: “I do not know why universities cannot hear unpopular views and think about what they mean.”

Cardiff University said it had no plans to cancel Ms. Greer’s lecture. In a statement, the university’s vice chancellor, Colin Riordan, said, “Our events include speakers with a range of views, all of which are rigorously challenged and debated.”

Ms. Greer defended her position on the BBC’s Newsnight program on Friday. She said she had no issue with people having sex reassignment surgery.

“What I’m saying is, it doesn’t make them a woman,” she said, visibly frustrated. “That happens to be an opinion,” she added. “It’s not a prohibition, carry on if that’s what you think it is you want to do. I’ve been accused of inciting violence against transgender people. It’s absolute nonsense.”

She also said that “a great many” women did not dare to say that transgender people “don’t look like, sound like, or behave like women.”

But she scoffed when asked by the presenter whether she understood that

her views could hurt the feelings of transgender women. “People are hurtful to me all the time,” she said. “Try being an old woman, for goodness sake. I’m not about to walk on eggshells.”

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