Not All Dead White Men: Classics and Misogyny in the Digital Age by Donna Zuckerberg (review)

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them. The sections on Australia and the United States also raise the issue of introduced species and the impact they have on native ecosystems, as well as the ethics surrounding their treatment as feral populations.

The final chapter (“The Donkey’s Tale”) summarizes the main arguments that run throughout the book. Mitchell explains how we can use donkeys to study human history, as well as the potential risks of such study. One risk is anthropocentrism, which results in viewing the donkey as simply an agent that benefited humans. This does not allow researchers to fully study the human-donkey relationship, as it makes the donkey a human tool rather than a being capable of influencing actions through its own decision-making process. Finally, the author presents the reader with avenues for future research, indicating that this text is not meant to be the final word on donkeys in history, but rather the beginning of a dialogue on the topic.

This book is a valuable addition to the fields of animal studies, zooarchaeology, history, and anthropology. Mitchell’s writing is clear and succinct, and the language used appealing to both specialists and newcomers to the topic. The text is lavishly illustrated with black-and-white images as well as colour plates. One puts this book down with a new perspective not just on the donkey in human history, but rather on how much of human history was possible because of the donkey.

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**Not All Dead White Men: Classics and Misogyny in the Digital Age.** By Donna Zuckerberg. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2018. Pp. 270.

In this book, Donna Zuckerberg tackles head-on the relationship between some contemporary forms of misogyny and the classical world. It is a short, readable work combining scholarly approaches, analyses, and citational habits with an accessible narrative, tone, and style. It explains both the ancient and the social media world where necessary, while giving a nuanced and thoughtful account of the intersections between them that will be enlightening to classical scholars and savvy social media users alike. Zuckerberg clearly lays out the various groups connected to the most virulent expressions of online misogyny, where they have come from, what their views are, and how they use classical texts as justification, support, and inspiration for those views and their dissemination. Her aim is to uncover the mechanisms by which antiquity is used and mythologized to perpetuate patriarchal and white supremacist ideology; she hopes both to combat that ideology and to point towards a “vibrant, radical, intersectional feminist classics—one that uses the ancient world to enrich conversations about race, gender, and social justice” (188).

The book is divided into four chapters, with a brief Introduction and Conclusion. It has extensive endnotes, a glossary, and a detailed bibliography. The first chapter, “Arms and the Manosphere,” outlines the online world of toxic masculinity, with terms and definitions and a sketch of what she often refers to as the “Red Pill community,” a collective term for a number of online groups whose membership is primarily or exclusively male and mostly white, and whose views centre around misogyny and opposition to feminism. Even those readers with some familiarity with the terms “Red Pill,” “MGTOW” (“Men Going Their Own Way”), “pickup artists,” and so forth will find this section clarifying, as the aims, ideologies, and memberships of these groups intersect in complicated ways,
while for many readers this chapter will serve as an essential introduction to an important subset of the online world. Zuckerberg delineates how the actual misogyny of the ancient world provides resources for modern misogyny, bolstered by the social and cultural capital of classics. This chapter demonstrates how easily some ancient texts, and the traditional approach to studying them, can be used to support extreme positions today. Zuckerberg also points out some similarities between the manosphere’s use of antiquity and attitude toward classics and feminism and the views and attitudes of some classical scholars—not only in the past, but also in the present.

In the second chapter, “The Angriest Stoics,” the main topic is the appeal of Stoic philosophy and ancient Stoic writers for the Red Pill community. Zuckerberg outlines the history and central views of ancient Stoicism, focusing on its ethical teachings since those are the main concern of the manosphere. She corrects some of the basic misapprehensions about the philosophy that are circulating in online discussions, and argues that Stoicism is employed to validate and give authority to the rhetoric of the Red Pill community, but is not often studied in depth or actually followed. However, she also points out aspects of ancient Stoicism that allow for, or even support, sexist and misogynistic interpretations of the philosophy, such as the basic gender essentialism that underlies Stoic views of “gender equality” and the ways men and women can exhibit virtue. Zuckerberg’s discussion shows that it is not sufficient to dismiss alt-right readings of the philosophy as incorrect—scholars must also grapple with how the philosophy can reflect and perpetuate the misogyny of its society. She also urges neo-Stoics who are not aligned with the alt-right to be aware of these uses of Stoicism and to not allow their own discourses to be appropriated as support for those views. Zuckerberg’s demonstration of how Stoicism is divorced from its context, repackaged, and cherry-picked by these online communities should be instructive for classicists, since this is how much of antiquity is used in modern contexts and for modern purposes, including to signal exclusivity or intellectual superiority. Zuckerberg discusses different approaches to handling the problem, but she does not provide any simple solutions.

The third chapter, “The Ovid Method,” turns to the central place of Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* in the “Seduction” community. Zuckerberg lays out the ways that community treats Ovid’s didactic poem as a serious guide to relationships between men and women. Here we can see how her book can be helpful for classicists concerned primarily with the ancient texts: reading Ovid’s work through the pickup artists’ seduction manuals gives us a new approach to Ovid, by asking if the text’s original audience would have uniformly understood it as humorous. Zuckerberg’s reading also suggests ways to re-examine the text’s underlying assumptions about women, sex, and gender relations.

In the fourth chapter, “How to Save Western Civilization,” Zuckerberg turns to the story of Phaedra and her false rape accusation as a case study of how the manosphere does—and does not—use antiquity. After providing a fairly detailed analysis of the versions of Phaedra’s story in Euripides, Ovid, and Seneca she discusses the complexity of defining and conceptualizing “rape” in the ancient world and the parallels to debates over concepts of consent, marriage, and “gynocentrism” in contemporary society. She points out that there is an extreme segment of the manosphere that argues for a “return” to Athenian laws around women and marriage, with guardianship of women placed entirely in the hands of their male relatives. While she acknowledges that these views are unlikely to become mainstream, it is sobering to see such arguments being made
openly and to realize how the valorization of the classical world helps give these views whatever credibility they might have.

Zuckerberg does not spend time arguing for her basic view that misogyny is wrong, and that the views espoused by the groups she describes are misogynistic. Although not all classicists may agree with Zuckerberg’s vision of the discipline and her application of feminist theory to classical texts, the information she provides about these online groups should be valuable to everyone. She takes seriously the ideologies she criticizes, using the participants’ own words to explain their positions, but does not disguise her complete disagreement with their views. I find this to be one of the strengths of the book. Another strength is the depth and breadth of her research; her sources range from blogs, posts in online communities, articles, interviews, and podcasts to ancient texts, classical scholarship, and blogs and articles by classical scholars responding publicly to alt-right appropriation of their subject. The few weaknesses I see in the book are mostly a result of the necessity to be concise and digestible for a popular audience: in particular, I would have liked a more extensive engagement with the role of racism in these ideologies. Zuckerberg does explicitly address her decision to focus on misogyny rather than race while acknowledging how intertwined the two issues are, and mentions race repeatedly, but I am left wishing for a comparable treatment of racism and classics.

While this book is clearly written to be accessible to a wide readership, its primary value for classics scholars and students lies in its lucid delineation of how ancient texts and the traditional admiration for classical culture can be, and are, used to develop and promote hateful ideologies. Zuckerberg makes a strong case for teachers to be aware of these currents in contemporary thought so that they can teach about core texts, and the ancient world in general, in a manner that counters, or at least does not provide fodder for, misogynistic and racist appropriations of antiquity. Excerpts from the book such as her explanation of the “Red Pill toolbox” in the first chapter may be useful reading for some classes, though the material will need careful handling. The book also provides a challenge to some traditional interpretations of ancient texts, especially the Stoics and Ovid, by taking seriously the ways the Red Pill community understands them. Overall, however, I believe that this book is essential reading for everyone who wants our discipline to be a positive force in the world; while the topic is often ugly and disturbing, its ultimate message is one of hope. Zuckerberg points out that the manosphere’s reaction to her work shows that they fear a “sophisticated, liberal version of classical studies will undermine their self-presentation as the inheritors and protectors of the classical tradition” (188), and if we are going to work toward that version of our field, we need to look clearly and carefully at the paths we want to avoid.

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