

JK Rowling & toxic gender identity activism

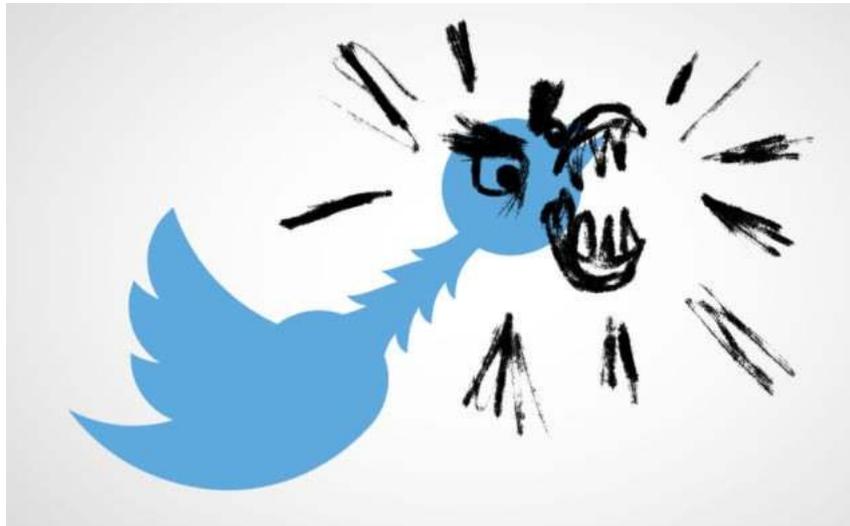


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Troubled Blood, the fifth novel in JK Rowling's Cormoran Strike series, has been released — infuriating activists online and leading to the burning of Rowling's books and the trending of the hashtag #RIPJKRowling.

This was the fifth, and not even the most recent, of a series of online clashes between Rowling and gender identity activists. The first she describes as an 'accidental 'like' crime': she liked something on Twitter that she'd been meaning to screenshot and archive for future research. Activists took this as evidence of 'wrongthink', and the harassment of JK Rowling began, as well as increased surveillance of her online activities. The second could be described as a deliberate 'follow' crime: activists discovered that she'd followed the gender critical feminist *YouTube* content-creator Magdalen Berns on Twitter. The third involved her tweeting support[1] for Maya Forstater, after a judge upheld Forstater's employer's decision not to issue her another contract on the grounds of her gender critical online speech. These all seemed like clues that JK Rowling might be gender critical; but gender identity activists seemed unable to quite believe that. Surely such a high-profile, obviously progressive, woman would take the side of gender identity activists, rather than women, in the ongoing culture wars over sex and gender?

The fourth clash was the biggest, because it said out loud what gender identity activists had been unable to accept from the previous clues. Rowling wrote an essay[2] setting out her position on sex and gender issues, in light of the ongoing debate in the UK about reforms to their Gender Recognition Act. Rowling is on the side of the gender critical feminists. She stated 'five reasons for being worried about the new trans activism', including the erosion of the legal definition of sex and the impacts of that on charitable trusts designed to help female people; the safeguarding of children; freedom of speech; the unnecessary medical/surgical transitioning of girls; and impacts on the female survivors of male violence. She wrote 'when you throw open the doors of bathrooms and changing rooms to any man who believes or feels he's a woman... then you open the door to any and all men who wish to come inside. That is

the simple truth'. If she hadn't already been 'cancelled' before, this essay certainly sealed her fate.

Conditions were ripe for further 'proof' of Rowling's alleged transphobia, so of course when an incendiary early review of *Troubled Blood* claimed that the moral of the book 'seems to be: never trust a man in a dress', those already enraged by Rowling's failure to deliver the progressive orthodoxy on trans issues were all too willing to believe this to be true. Many have denounced Rowling without themselves having read the book, including well-known gender identity activist Benjamin Butterworth[3], and recently on the BroadAgenda Blog, Hannah McCann[4]. In fact, there is one mention[5], in a 927-page book, of 'a male character who disguises himself in a woman's coat and hat to approach a victim'. There is no suggestion that this male character identifies as a woman. Men can wear women's clothes without being trans. When confronted with this obvious point, Butterworth said 'in a lot of people's minds, who are not familiar with the distinctions of trans people with these issues, and may have seen JK Rowling's other derogatory comments against trans people, this will be seen as a way to debase them, this will be seen as an insult to all trans people'.

On this logic, there is simply no way to make the point that Rowling and other gender critical feminists want to make, which is that some men *are* violent, and that self-identification as the model for legal sex allows no way to distinguish these men from others who are not. If *any* man can access women's spaces in virtue of merely declaring himself to be a woman, then there can be no real distinction between men who are 'trans' and men who are not. When men as a class are more violent on average than women as a class, and this is precisely why some spaces are sex-segregated, this distinction matters. Women are being asked to concede their own safety (and many other interests) in order to give gender identity activists what they want. Rowling, and many others, are not prepared to concede these interests without a fight. (A fight which gender critical feminists in the UK, at least, have just won)[6].

The sixth and most recent clash, which happened a couple of weeks ago, has been over Rowling's tweet[7] supporting a t-shirt reading 'This Witch Doesn't Burn', with the comment 'Sometimes a T-shirt just speaks to you...' and linking to a radical feminist online shop[8] with the hashtag #supportwomenrunbusiness. It's hardly surprising that such a message would appeal to Rowling, given the way she has been treated online. She describes[2] threats of violence, being called 'a cunt, a bitch, a TERF', told she 'deserved cancelling, punching and death'. She says 'Never have I seen women denigrated and dehumanised to the extent they are now. From the leader of the free world's long history of sexual assault accusations and his proud boast of 'grabbing them by the pussy', to the incel ('involuntary celibate') movement that rages against women who won't give them sex, to the trans activists who declare that TERFs need punching and re-educating, men across the political spectrum seem to agree: women are asking for trouble. Everywhere, women are being told to shut up and sit down, or else'.

(On Sunday, 58 British literati signed a letter published in The Sunday Times[9] saying Rowling is a victim of "an insidious, authoritarian and misogynistic trend in social media". Yesterday, a kind of counter-letter[10] with over 200 signatures was posted to a blog, proclaiming "non-binary lives are valid, trans women are women, trans men are men, and trans rights are human rights" — not that anyone had questions trans people's lives or human rights in the first place).

Gender critical feminism fights back against the trans activism that treats women this way, and the underlying gender identity ideology that erases biological sex in favour of ‘gender identity’. Biological sex is real, and being female has been the basis of a social hierarchy in which female people are subordinated. This has been happening for literally thousands of years, and has only begun changing in the last couple of hundred years. There are still very serious differences in life outcomes on the basis of sex, in countries all around the world, including but not limited to female genital mutilation, sex-selective abortion, child brides, acid attacks, rape and sexual harassment, trafficking into prostitution and pornography, domestic violence, and much, much more. The fact that some men feel uncomfortable with the expectations of masculinity does nothing to change this fact about sex and its political importance.

Those who seek to erase sex and replace it with gender identity are taking something objective that is crucial to the explanation and dismantling of women’s oppression, and replacing it with something entirely subjective and ephemeral that merely suits the interests of a tiny group of people. Women are half the population of the whole world, and their interests matter. This shouldn’t even need to be said; especially not to people who think of themselves as feminists. Some seem to think that talking about sex means remaining ‘locked into supporting a rigid gender binary’[4]. But it’s not *sex* that’s the problem, it’s the way people are treated on the basis of it. Rather than proclaiming that *anyone can be a woman*, we should be proclaiming that *women can do anything*. That is a feminism that works for women’s liberation.

Links:

[1] https://twitter.com/jk_rowling/status/1207646162813100033?s=20

[2] <https://www.jkrowling.com/opinions/j-k-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/>

[3] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDI6j0pH87k>

[4] <https://www.broadagenda.com.au/2020/jk-rowling-her-new-book-and-toxic-femininity/>

[5] <https://www.crikey.com.au/2020/09/21/jk-rowling-troubled-blood-transgender/>

[6] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/response-to-gender-recognition-act-2004-consultation>

[7] https://twitter.com/jk_rowling/status/1308417985753870336?s=20

[8] <https://wildwomynworkshop.com/>

[9] <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/literati-rally-to-jk-rowlings-defence-in-row-over-cormoran-strike-book-vk5frvvj0>