

“Having protected characteristics, including philosophical beliefs, does not prevent people from having to take care not to harass others...” These were the words of James Tayler, the judge presiding over the case of Maya Forstater. You may know her better as the woman JK Rowling publicly supported on social media after her employer chose not to renew her contract following a series of transphobic tweets. This prompted Rowling to espouse her own absolutist position on the subjects of gender and sex, beginning her fall from grace in the eyes of many life-long fans. Judge Tayler’s words resonate beyond this case though, raising critical questions about the space that intolerant or obdurate views should be taking up in an ever-changing conversation.

The *Harry Potter* writer’s legacy as a world-class world-crafter precedes her reputation as a political commentator. The household names that she and her creations have become is utterly unique, and the joy her writing brought to people across the world is unrivalled. Writers have been at the forefront of new ideas since literature was first recorded. From Socrates, to Shakespeare, to Simone de Beauvoir - for centuries creatives have forged the way to radical thinking, and we are better for it. Surely, then, it’s reasonable to hold Rowling and others to the standard that literary history has set over centuries; to be willing to incite change through their writing and encourage it in others. On a day-to-day level, the necessary dismantling of intolerance demands from us a more considerate approach to voicing our opinions so we can nurture constructive and inclusive conversation. But should literary legacy provide immunity from having to do this?

Although advocating for Forstater piqued Rowling’s interest in the topic, the issue she took with the phrase “people who menstruate” - chosen to include both trans men and non-binary individuals who may still experience menstruation - prompted the series of [defensive tweets](#) she made. It was the backlash from these which led to an [explanatory essay](#) from the author. To many, the piece read as a doubled-down litany of reductive aspersions on the existence and validity of trans people. Far from learning from the experience, the writer seems to have made no effort to remedy her wilful ignorance or change the minds of people who labelled her a [TERF](#) (trans exclusionary radical feminist). Her new novel, which includes a cis male serial killer dressing as a woman to get close to victims, is a case in point she never really valued the conversation and education she claimed to have undertaken. It was [noted](#) that, while her new book has been victim of presumptive condemnation, at best “it is an utterly tone-deaf decision to include an evil man who cross-dresses after months of pain among trans people and their allies”.

When creatives have been celebrated for so long for the products of their minds, what incentive is there for them to change them? JK Rowling’s fiction has always been popular, so why fix what isn’t broken? Germaine Greer, for example, was one of the most important voices in radical feminism of the 20th century and was rightly celebrated as such. So, it makes sense then, after a career of exponential growth, that the writer would feel she has paid her dues and earned her platform. But this platform was one that existed in line with the feelings of the times, during the second wave of feminism. We are now in the midst of the fourth wave, characterised by

intersectionality, empowering women and using social media as a tool for unity. If writers can't keep up with this, if they are actively resisting it, why should people listen? Why should sexual assault victims have to hear Germaine Greer [conflate rape](#) with passionless "bad sex", or trans women that they "aren't women"?

People losing interest in their previously beloved writers for not sharing - or even trying to understand - their views isn't tantamount to "cancelling" someone. It's simply no longer a mutually beneficial relationship between creator and consumer. This isn't an argument about censorship, cancel-culture, or free speech. It's a matter of supply and demand: if what people want out of entertainment is changing, shouldn't those making it change too?