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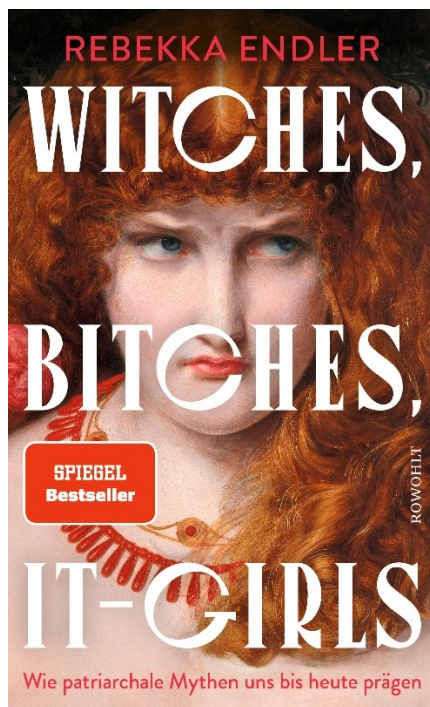
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WITCHES, BITCHES, IT-GIRLS

How patriarchal myths influence us to this day



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English sample translation

By Jamie Lee Searle

First and foremost: Unboxing Pandora

Let's start with the ancient Greeks; or more specifically, with the poet Hesiod and his didactic poem "Works and Days". And with a woman named Pandora, who is mentioned in this poem for the very first time. She's a young mortal, made out of clay by a male god at the behest of Zeus, the father of all gods, to exact revenge on Prometheus, who stole fire from the deities and gave it to the humans. This story also has a prologue, but that would require too much detail, because right now this is about Pandora. She's an absolute bombshell, and is given a stoneware jug to help her carry out her mission. Over the course of time, this became a jewellery box, but that doesn't really matter: what does is that the vessel isn't to be opened, not under any circumstances. Unfortunately, Pandora is extremely curious – and she has to be, remember, so the plan can come off (or rather, so the box can come open). *Born Sexy Yesterday*

¹ as she is, her charm catapults her straight into the arms of the naïve Titan Epimetheus, who has been missing his definitively smarter brother Prometheus since the latter joined the mortals. Disregarding his darling brother's cautions to never accept presents from gods, Epimetheus falls head over heels in love with Pandora. They marry, but the box comes between them, because Pandora is understandably obsessed with the question of how its contents could really be that terrible. Surely she can take just a quick peek? But because she's such an agent of chaos, the box immediately springs open, and all its contents bar one escape irrevocably into the world. The rest is history: Pandora, the stupid bitch, is blamed for all the evils of this world – and she's not alone; there's Eve too, and her biblical descendants Bathseba, Delilah, Drusilla, Jezebel and Salome, as well as all the femme fatales of ancient mythology, because the author is: the patriarchy.

¹ *Born Sexy Yesterday* women are defined by a naivety towards everything, especially to the male gaze and their own sexiness.

Let's skip several thousand years into the future. I began my research for this book in 2021, and since then I've kept a list of the patriarchal earthquakes that continue to shake us. I'll give just three examples here: on Saturday, 25 June 2022, a far-right terrorist opened fire in a queer bar in Oslo, killing two people and injuring twenty more. Violence against queer people, and the author is: the patriarchy.

The previous day, the German Bundestag decided to lift the ban on advertising for abortions, voting to remove Paragraph 219a from the criminal code: a small step forward. Simultaneously, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the landmark *Roe vs. Wade* decision, making the constitutional right to abortion a thing of the past, while in Germany, it's still not enshrined within the Basic Law. A lack of bodily autonomy, and the author is: the patriarchy.

It stretches even further into the present. On 5. November 2024, Donald Trump was once again elected U.S. President, this time by the majority of all Americans. Within just two weeks of taking office on 20. January 2025, he unleashed an entirely predictable swathe of destruction and devastation: an executive that claims absolute power and seemingly stands above the constitution and the law; deportation camps for undocumented migrants; travel restrictions for trans people through the revocation of their passports; and, since early February 2025, just two weeks after Trump's inauguration, scientific databases have been "cleansed", for example at NASA, where workers are erasing all mention of women in leadership positions; indigenous individuals; as well as any reference to climate change. A report on Wendy Bohon, a geologist and NASA employee who conducts earthquake research, was suddenly nowhere to be found from one moment to the next.² After similar decrees from the President, there have been attempts to delete from other academic databases research into topics including gender, inclusion, and discrimination of minorities. Today, in the digital age, knowledge and history can be erased with just a few clicks. With similar ease, these gaps can then be plugged with AI-generated patriarchal dystopias, and the author is: the patriarchy.

Many would have us believe that the patriarchy is ancient history, but it's anything but. It lives on in all of us, and defines how we see the world. During my work on this book, the situation has dramatically worsened. This is one of the reasons why I spent so long writing it: the tremors became ever more frequent, and seemed so unbelievably vast that I wanted to capture, analyse and dissect them, in the hope that the individual parts would allow me to draw

² Samantha Cole, «Workers at NASA Told to «Drop Everything» to Scrub Mentions of Indigenous People, Women from Its Websites», 404 Media, 4. February 2025 (<<https://www.404media.co/nasa-dei-drop-everything-executive-order/>, accessed on 5. February 2025).

conclusions about our current state of chaos. And what's happening right now is all too familiar, because the patriarchy and its spirit brother, right-wing conservative nationalism, always reach for the same poisonous ingredients in constructing their self-narrative: a biologicistic understanding of the sexes; racist claims of superiority (both of which go hand-in-hand with violently rendering entire groups of people invisible); and nostalgia for a past that never actually existed.

I'm not alone, of course, in my conviction that the answer to most of the challenges of our time can be found in intersectional feminism. Books by Annika Brockschmidt (*Amerikas Gotteskrieger (America's Holy Warriors – How The Christian Right Is Endangering Democracy)*, *Die Brandstifter (Arsonists – How Extremists Took Over the Republican Party)*, 2021 and 2024), Natascha Strobl (*Radikalisierte Konservatismus (Radicalised Conservatism)*, 2021) as well as Katharina Nocun and Pia Lamberty (*Fake Facts, Gefährlicher Glaube (Dangerous Belief)*, 2020 and 2022) address what happens when reactionary forces come to power and change society according to their own perceptions. Sophia Fritz (*Toxische Weiblichkeit (Toxic Femininity)*, 2024) and Sibel Schick (*Weissen Feminismus cancel (Cancel White Feminism)*, 2023) examine in their respective works the pitfalls of a misunderstood feminism that places its focus on individual self-actualisation rather than securing the wellbeing of society's most vulnerable. *Beklaute Frauen (Robbed Women)*, 2024) and Nicole Seifert (*Frauenliteratur (Women Writing)*, *Einige Herren sagten etwas dazu (Some Men Said Some Things)*, 2021 and 2024) have written about the mechanisms that are at work when the aim is to rob those who are read as female of their career and validity, and to erase them from history.

This book is, in a sense, a bridge between all these works. Not in the form of a comprehensive encyclopaedia of patriarchal myths and mechanisms, but as an anecdotal expedition through the history of the male claim to superiority, from the supposed Stone Age to contemporary political and popular culture.

Perhaps, while reading, you may occasionally draw different conclusions to me. That's okay, because different interpretations and the fair exchange of opinion are cornerstones of democratic cooperation. So too is the courage to differentiate, and the tolerance and endurance of ambiguities – this book addresses these topics too.

We'll have to go a long way back for the root cause analysis. It begins with what I would almost refer to as "the obvious", but the thing surrounding us – the "normal" – isn't obvious, quite the contrary: a hidden, often unquestioned power, and therefore one of the most effective evils that escaped Pandora's box. Who or what is "normal", and who or what is supposedly not?

On the day of his inauguration, Trump signed a decree stating that there are now only two genders in the U.S., thereby erasing the legal rights of trans, intersex and non-binary people. Questioning the concept of “normal” – and understanding that even our perceptions of normality cause suppression and violence – is therefore the first and perhaps most urgent step we can take to overcome the patriarchal patterns which define our thoughts and actions to this day.

Last but not least: due to the topics which come up in connection with the patriarchy and its myths and instruments, this is also a book about sexualised, physical, psychological and pedosexual violence. There are references to suicide, infanticide and femicide. Transphobia, racism and ableism are also frequently mentioned, as are eating disorders and other subjects that may be triggering for those affected. I have striven to handle sensitive topics in a responsible way throughout, but have decided not to include trigger warnings in the individual chapters, because everything is interconnected and no chapter would be spared.

[p. 15 - 22]

Chapter 1

Battlezone Normality

For the woman with the colourful scarf

Once, after a reading, a friendly older woman wearing a colourful scarf came over and engaged me in conversation. She'd enjoyed my (first) book, she told me, and had found herself chuckling repeatedly as she read it, having recognised in it many things that had irritated her throughout her life. So she was glad someone had finally written it all up. But – and when people take such a run-up with the compliments, there's always a *but* – there was one point where her opinion differed fundamentally from mine. Even before she'd finished her sentence, I could have bet the fee I'd received for the reading on what would follow, because this woman wasn't the only one to be bothered – or feel betrayed, even – by this element of the book: trans identities and the assertion that women's rights are also the rights of trans women.

Once again, I'd been drawn into a debate about the legitimacy of trans identities. She began with a story about a supposed man who had obtained a place on an electoral list by putting on a wig and claiming, from one day to the next, that he was a woman. This "man", she said, had then been elected via the woman's quota, and was an example of how doors are opened for men to abuse measures actually intended to boost gender parity in politics. On that evening, I didn't understand the story; my mind produced a kind of "Some Like it Hot" scenario, the film in which Tony Curtis breaks the rules by donning a poor disguise and joining an all-female band, simply because he can, eventually wooing Marilyn Monroe. It wasn't until a few months later, in spring 2022, when *Emma* magazine published a trans-phobic article about the Green party politician and Bundestag member Tessa Ganserer – intended to reagitate public debate shortly before the publication of Alice Schwarzer's polemic paper "*Transsexuality: What is a woman? What is a man?*"³ – that I was able to weave together the threads of the story and understand the probable background to the story told to me by the woman in the scarf.⁴

Our conversation after the reading didn't last long, but I've often thought back on it. If I'd understood what it was about that evening, might I have been able to change this woman's opinion on trans women? My impression was that her opposition was nothing more than the result of a lasting campaign of false information. Because this is another of the patriarchy's effective mechanisms: in the sense of the old saying "divide and conquer", every effort is made to create turf (and TERF!) wars within feminist dynamics, so that marginalised groups are fighting each other and consequently unable to use this energy to stand in solidarity and lift one another up.

In the hope that the woman with the colourful scarf and other people with similar opinions choose to once again reach for a book I've written, I dedicate this chapter to them.

³ Alice Schwarzer und Chantal Louis, *Transsexualität: Was ist eine Frau? Was ist ein Mann? – Eine Streitschrift* (KiWi-Taschenbuch, Köln 2022).

⁴ There are numerous possible backgrounds, all equally transphobic: one is the aforementioned article on Tessa Ganserer, claiming that she is "a man" who was elected "via the women's quota". Ganserer is a woman, a trans woman, whose transition is neither the start nor the end of her political career. It's also a frequent occurrence that cis men ridicule the women's quota and trans-inclusive political parties by provoking them with drag appearances – like in the case of Bijan Tavassoli (a malicious provocateur who once declared himself "a Muslim trans woman" and tried to campaign in Hamburg for a place on the Linke party list) or David Allison with The Greens, who in 2021 also dressed as a woman to run for a seat on the board of his district association (and lost, yet was thoroughly celebrated by *Emma* magazine for his transphobic performance).

Inventory of the Box

In the first *Last Week Tonight* talk show after Donald Trump was elected U.S. President in November 2016, the host John Oliver gave a blazing speech on how everything that had led to Trump moving into the White House was “not normal”. He called upon everyone who felt the same disturbing emotion to incorporate memory aids into their daily lives over the coming years; in the form of Post-it notes on the fridge, for example – anything to avoid familiarisation setting in and the shock fading away⁵. It was important, he said, that the rupture between how things should be and what had actually happened in late 2016 be continually felt, rather than become dulled; people needed to be actively upset in order to not give up. I too have been carrying this collectively-jarring emotional disturbance vis-à-vis normality around with me like a mental Post-it note ever since. And my collection of mental “not normal” Post-its has continued to grow. Recently, though, my relationship to normality – or what I regarded as such – has radically changed. Even if it’s presumably the least problematic of all the subsequent “normalities”, I can no longer make sense of John Oliver’s “normal” – in other words, the pre-Trump era. Because the social construction of “normal” is far too problematic.

Even though my first book *The Patriarchy of Things*⁶ is about the norm and normalisation of things, and I address androcentric design in it, it’s only over the last three years that I’ve become aware of the power emanating from the definition of “normality”. This is because we are currently experiencing a societal swing to the right, and “normality”, or rather its disappearance, has over the last few years been chosen by the right-wing, right-wing conservatives and right-wing extremists as a fertile ground for their culture wars. Let’s take the right-wing extremist party AfD as an example, whose slogan for the 2021 German national election was: “Germany. But normal.” In the midst of the pandemic, normality (whatever it was supposed to have been beforehand) seemed to be a nostalgic place of longing, and a retrogression in morals and politics was presented as a simple solution. But even beyond the AfD, discussions relating to immunisation, hygiene measures, closures of daycare centres and schools, systemically relevant jobs and the overloading of hospitals always took place under the auspicious promise of “returning to normality”. The fact that this return was often linked with

⁵ *President-Elect Trump: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (HBO)*, dir. by LastWeekTonight, 2016 (<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rSDUsMwakI>, accessed on 26. September 2023).

⁶ Rebekka Endler, *Das Patriarchat der Dinge. Warum die Welt den Frauen nicht passt* (Dumont Verlag, Cologne 2021).

ableist demands that meant (and still mean) higher risks for vulnerable people was generally brushed under the carpet. Because normality only functions for the normalos. Normality is a privilege.

There is a particular focus on gender within these constructed “normal” debates, as seen, for example, in the discontinued *Bild TV* programme *Viertel nach Acht* (A Quarter Past Eight). In the episode that aired on 24 May 2023, Caroline Bosbach, the daughter of Wolfgang Bosbach and chairwoman of a regional, new economic advisory council of the CDU, longed for “more normality”, and also worried about the “classical role models of man and woman”, because she prides herself on being a “completely normal woman”. She linked all this to the children’s book *Daddy, do you have a baby in your tummy?*⁷, a recent publication at the time, which she had discovered while looking for a present for her nephew. Bosbach felt that the book was an example of “efforts to dispense with orderliness and values”.

In the background, the programme showed a collage of photographs of the Greens politician Tessa Ganserer, the American influencer Dylan Mulvaney⁸, and journalist Georgine Kellermann; followed by children at a drag queen reading. According to Bosbach, it was incredibly “alarming” that children were being forcibly reprogrammed, and that they would now be celebrating Pride Month instead of Easter⁹. In her view, the world was “no longer okay, but had gone mad, even though we normal people are still in the absolute majority. It’s maybe just one percent of people who don’t find this [presumably the book, or what she considers it to represent; author’s note] mad.” The source of this sweeping statistic is still unclear to me even after considerable research, but personal opinion reigned on this particular TV programme; if you were looking to it for expertise, you would be searching in vain.

The children’s book in question is about a queer couple and a surrogate mother, so the content actually has nothing to do with trans people. Rather, the selection of the book poses the question: to what extent does Mrs Bosbach consider homosexuality to be “normal”? The right-

⁷ Marcel Kahl and Lisa Rammensee, *Papi, hast du ein Baby im Bauch?* (klein & gro. Verlag, Nurnberg 2023) (<<https://www.isbn.de/buch/9783946360643/papi-hast-du-ein-baby-imbauch>>, accessed on 21. September 2023).

⁸ Dylan Mulvaney became known beyond social media when, in March 2023, she published a post sponsored by the beer company Bud Light, which led to the brand being boycotted as “gone woke” (their sales sunk by 30 percent). The beer producer subsequently threw Mulvaney to the trolls by virtually apologizing to its consumers for having advertised with a trans woman: “We never intended to be part of a discussion that divides people. We are in the business of bringing people together over a beer.” But: it’s not trans people who divide society, but transphobic people. Mulvaney never received an apology from Bud Light.

⁹ Well, glitter, vivaciousness, unconditional tolerance and human rights, the Holy Ghost would have to really go all out in order to compete with that much empowerment.

wing publicist Birgit Kelle agreed that the book is a symptom of the “indoctrination of little ones” and that the self-determination law, which at this point of time hadn’t yet been passed¹⁰, was proof that “politics had dispensed with the facts and were now driven by ideology”. Kelle said that she herself was “a woman, not a cis woman” and that she didn’t need any additional description; she was “a woman by nature” and didn’t need to prove that. The rapper Ben Salomo concurred that “this kind of thing” doesn’t belong in kindergartens or primary schools, that it’s too confusing, and that he himself had two children whom he hadn’t forced into any stereotypes. Then Caroline Bosbach got in a sliding tackle, “it’s completely normal, but completely normal is out”, at which Salomo once again advanced with his “fear for the children”: “Okay, so these people exist [he probably means non-binary, inter and trans people] but why do we need to confront children with it at such a young age?”

At the end of the programme came the declaration, devoid of any expertise, that people who aren’t cis-gendered are a dangerous trend who put normal people at risk, because their existence suggests “to young women in particular” – according to the German politician Sahra Wagenknecht, who of course had to be part of this group – that they “are of the wrong gender”. This in turn leads to operations which cause “brutal bodily injury and mutilation among very young people”¹¹.

In the same week in May 2023, Tweets went viral in which a young woman named Jessica Pin, an activist for educating people on the anatomy of the vulva, shared a vulva plaster imprint by the artist Lydia Reeves¹² and circled in red all the vulvas which, in her opinion, didn’t show “normal”, ie cis female, vulvas.¹³ Pin also asked the artist whether all the vulvas were “intact”, because some looked “mutilated”. Reeves responded that some were “post-trans-op surgery”, that is, neo-vulvas, the result of gender-affirming surgery. Pin reacted with trans-phobic statements, declaring that these kinds of vulvas didn’t belong in a “vulva diversity video”,

¹⁰ The law wasn’t passed by the Federal Government until a few months later, in August 2023, naturally amid loud protests from Kelle and Co.

¹¹ *Viertel Nach Acht – 24. Mai 2023 | LIVE u. a. Mit Sahra Wagenknecht, Birgit Kelle*, dir. by BILD, 2023 (<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQaEsToE4as>>, accessed on 21. September 2023).

¹² (<<https://www.lydiareeves.com/vulva-casting>>, accessed on 10. September 2023).

¹³ I had already stumbled across Pin during my research back in 2019, and had briefly contemplated interviewing her for *The Patriarchy of Things* on account of her personal experiences; after all, she had also been featured in the *New York Times*. As an eighteen-year-old, Pin underwent cosmetic labiaplasty, because, by her own account, she had been convinced her labia were too big. The operation was a disaster; the doctor committed severe errors by injuring nerves on the clitoris, meaning that Pin was left with barely any sensation. This experience turned her into an activist against labiaplasty and an advocate for education on vulval anatomy. However, even back then I had noticed some statements on social media that seemed problematic, and I therefore decided not to interview her for my book.

because they weren't "normal". When people with congenital vulvas pointed out that they also occur in all shapes, sizes and configurations "in nature", Pin demanded photographic evidence. A woman who originally strove to genuinely educate, to call out the considerable knowledge gap in the medicinal understanding of vulvas, had become someone who claims the right to decide what's normal what isn't. Or rather, *who* is normal and who isn't. After all, even in this context it's not about the vulva, but rather the person who has one between their legs.

The reason I'm dedicating so much space to this populist take is: for people who neither read *Bild* nor watch *Bild TV*, who don't consume *Nius* from the portal of the fired ex-*Bild* chief editor Julian Reichelt, or spend time on X (fka Twitter) and Co., it's hard to imagine how far this "normal" has been shifted to the right in recent years. And yet we're now seeing the impact of these thoroughly successful efforts even on talkshows on channels regulated by public law, and in German politics.¹⁴ Views which, just a few years ago, would have been designated as emphatically right-wing to right-wing extremist, are now taking hold in the so-called political centre. In 2023, the annual *Mitte Studie* by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation documented a noticeable rise in the dismissal of topics relating to transgender or homosexuality. 16% of people surveyed stated that they find kissing between same-gendered individuals "disgusting", while two years before it was 9%. 17% agreed with trans-phobic statements¹⁵; here too, a rise of 6% compared with two years previously.¹⁶ Racist and xenophobic attitudes are also on the increase (a rise of 4 and a half points to 16%). This makes sense if we regard minorities as a diversion from the so-called "norm"; because in this context these attitudes are directed against people who are perceived as a threat to the construction of one's own normality.

Against the backdrop of a deliberately-stirred fear over society changing too quickly and too progressively – particularly in terms of gender – a backwards-looking, authoritarian promise of stability becomes more popular; the famous "return to the tried and tested". Large sections of the political centre are moving towards a right-wing conservative ideal, with a 1950s-esque

¹⁴ The long-awaited Violence Protection Act was finally adopted by the Bundesrat at the end of January 2025, not long after "Ampel-Aus" (the collapse of the federal government coalition in late 2024), albeit with the adjunct requested by the CDU/CSU that it explicitly excludes trans-, intersex and non-binary people (all three of whom are particularly affected by sexualised violence). Malicious! Luisa Faust, "*Gewalthilfegesetz im Bundestag: Kompromiss gefunden*", *Die Tageszeitung: taz*, 29. January 2025, (<<https://taz.de/Gewalthilfegesetz-im-Bundestag!/6062298/>, accessed on 4. February 2025).

¹⁵ An example from the stufy: "I think it's ridiculous if a man wants to be a woman, or vice versa, that a woman wants to be a man."

¹⁶ Andreas Zick, Beate Kupper, Nico Mokros, *Mitte-Studie 2023 zu rechtsextremen Einstellungen* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung) (<<https://www.fes.de/referat-demokratie-gesellschaft-undinnovation/gegen-rechtsextremismus/mitte-studie-2023/>>, accessed on 22. September 2023).

conception of humanity and societal roles: the nuclear family comprised of mother, father, child(ren), housewife and breadwinner, supposed Christian values, white, cis, German – in other words, “normal”. But: careful! A closer look is required, because although most of us have an image of “the 50s” in our minds, it’s important to clarify that this play with nostalgia is ideological windowdressing by individuals and parties with authoritarian aspirations. Judith Butler, in their 2024 book *Who’s Afraid of Gender*, puts it like this¹⁷: “The weaponization of this fearsome phantasm of “gender” is authoritarian at its core. Rolling back progressive legislation is surely fuelled by backlash, but backlash describes only the reactive moment in this scene. The project of restoring the world to a time before “gender” promises a return to a patriarchal dream-order that may never have existed but that occupies the place of “history” or “nature” — an order that only a strong state can restore.”¹⁸ Reactionary forces want a future that’s modelled on a past that never existed. And this – let’s just call it ‘sloppy’ – ruse of the invented past as a blueprint for an authoritarian future plays a significant role in patriarchal myth formation, and will therefore come up again and again in this book.

[pp. 51 -60]

Chapter 2

An Unromantic Backwards Roll

A young woman, her skin white and flawless like ivory, with jade-coloured eyes and flowing cascades of red hair, is rescued from the clutches of wild barbarians by a powerful warrior. She collapses into her saviour’s arms. By intervening, he has taken responsibility for her life and will heal her body step-by-step by penetrating her with his penis. She, in turn, will use her boundless love and the vacuum she can create with her vagina to absorb and heal his broken soul.

The first two sentences describe the painting *The Knight Errant* by Sir John Everett Millais (1870), while the third and fourth are the continuation of this very scene in the American romance novel *Resisting Temptation* by K.C. Lynn¹⁹, which I discussed with my friend and colleague Annika Brockschmidt on our podcast *Feminist Shelf Control*. For almost every motif in

¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Who’s Afraid of Gender?* (Allen Lane, 2024), p. 7

¹⁸ Judith Butler, *Who’s Afraid of Gender?* (Allen Lane, 2024), p. 7

¹⁹ K. C. Lynn, *Resisting Temptation* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014)

the contemporary romance novels we analysed, we found a corresponding painting from the Romantic period depicting the same image hundred and fifty years before. Rather than being proof that romance novelists are particularly interested in the Romantic period, this shows how universal and successful these narratives are to this day. It also shows how much damage they cause, because violence against bodies read as female – from the surprise kiss all the way to femicide – is still a popular plot point in romance, thriller and horror genres, and in journalism too.

The bodies of those read as female have long served as the cause, trigger and excuse for behaviour that we should collectively condemn as fully unacceptable. Regardless of which direction I took in researching the origin of this understanding of gender, I repeatedly ended up in the Romantic period.

Not of this world

In June 2022, *New York Magazine* headlined the story “Cancelled at 17”, in which journalist Elizabeth Weil recounts the fate of a group of male teenagers who have allegedly become the victims of “cancel culture”.²⁰ It’s another of those articles which would have us believe #MeToo has gone too far and turned into a “witchhunt”²¹ on boys and men, naming and shaming them for “trivialities” and robbing them of their glittering futures. The incidents portrayed as “mistakes” are in reality criminal acts: for example, circulating naked images of an underage girl. The entire article drips with apologetics and himpathy²². So far, nothing out of the ordinary, unfortunately, just another example of reportage from the quills of women who allow themselves to be used by the patriarchy in the hope of making their careers more profitable²³. The text only drew my attention for its depiction of the victim in the story: a young woman named Fiona. Several sentences are dedicated to her physical appearance, as though the aim were

²⁰ Elizabeth Weil, ‘Canceled at 17’, *The Cut*, 21 Juni 2022 (<<https://www.thecut.com/article/cancel-culture-high-schoolteens.html>>, accessed on 18. September 2023).

²¹ A term that was successfully hijacked by Donald Trump in 2020 during his first term in office for criticism against his person and the attempted coup, and which has been used since – devoid of any meaning or historical context – when people, mostly men, can’t be bothered to engage with criticism.

²² “Himpathy” describes reporting that addresses the sensitivities of men – in this case, the perpetrators – and empathises with them instead of directing focus towards the women – in this case, the victims. The British philosopher Kate Manne coined the term in 2017 in her book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

²³ We’ll take a look at the mechanisms which are at work when women allow themselves to be roped into patriarchal deeds in Chapter 6.

to have readers see the girl through the perpetrator's eyes and thereby understand why his molesting behaviour is excusable: "She possessed an almost psychedelic beauty: pale, ethereal skin, a galaxy of freckles and a supernova of red hair." By way of comparison: Faith, the protagonist of the aforementioned romance novel *Resisting Temptation*, had "cream-coloured, immaculate skin, apart from a thin dusting of freckles across her perfectly-formed nose. Her turquoise green eyes were striking, framed by her dark red hair that fell in cascades over her slender shoulders."²⁴ Because I was deeply immersed in reading this romance novel at the time, further parallels became obvious which, although of course unintentional, weren't coincidental. Fiona and Faith are both "not of this world", cosmic twins, even though Fiona, in contrast to Faith, is very real. When they are subtly dehumanised and made into mythical beings, this justifies and excuses male behaviour towards them. The author, Weil, places Fiona's "unearthly" beauty before the perpetrator as a protective shield and demands: "Please set aside your judgement for a moment, he (the perpetrator) is passing around a naked photo of his beautiful girlfriend." A problematic request, but fine, if we put aside for a moment our judgement regarding abusive behaviour – what we're left with is an unbiased view through the cultural lens of the *male gaze*: the "irresistible" girlfriend as trophy²⁵. The man is the acting subject; and the woman, or rather the female body, the object. The object of observation, of desire, of molestation, and ultimately of violence – the victim.

The staging of the woman as the victim and sacrifice is stubbornly persistent; this attribution, after all, simultaneously and very conveniently fulfills many functions which a patriarchal societal structure relies upon to survive. The "damsel in distress"²⁶, for example. And the counterpart to the damsel is the "femme fatale"²⁷, who may appear to be the other extreme,

²⁴ This vulgar cliché can easily be found in German-language literature too: "How beautiful she was. And so tall. With her long red hair that hung low over her delicate shoulders – her body of a noble pallor, harmonising delicately with the ripe blush of her breasts." Wolfram Eilenberger *Finnen von Sinnen: Von einem, der auszog, eine finnische Frau zu heiraten* (Blanvalet, Munich 2010).

²⁵ Yes, I know: the cover of this book! It depicts neither Faith nor Fiona, but Helen of Troy, in reality Mary Emma Jones, immortalised by the artist Frederick Sandys in 1868. And yet it could just as easily be Faith or Fiona, for Helen of Troy is the mythological original in matters of the "irresistible, ethereal girlfriend as trophy", and the others are merely copies. One of these copies is Mary Emma Jones, who was once Sandy's lover and, according to Wikipedia, later became his wife and the mother to "a large number" of his children. We don't know any more about her, because beyond the fact that she modelled for his interpretation of mythological women, nothing more has been recorded.

²⁶ The Damsel in Distress is generally a young, beautiful woman who has gotten into a difficult predicament due to evil forces (monsters, Satan, barbarians, etc), from which she can only be rescued by a strong man and – importantly – without any of her own agency.

²⁷ She is dangerous, disreputable, unfathomable, but also irresistibly sexy, meaning that everything men do because of her is attributed to unsoundness of mind. The femme fatale is often a sex-obsessed daemon incarnate,

but whose origin lies in the same misogynous dichotomy of the “history of women”: good women are pure and virginal and need to be rescued by men, bad women are sexual beings and wreak havoc upon men²⁸. And both damsel and femme are invented by men, and therefore not of this world.

Au nom de l’amour

Also definitively not of this world, but instead part of a fictitious world that arose long ago in the minds of Hollywood men, is the canon of classical Disney princesses I grew up with. As a child born in the mid-1980s, these included Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Ariel, Belle and co – they were all beautiful first and foremost, and in some kind of peril from which they could only be rescued by the genuine, heteronormative love of a prince. In view of the history of humanity, it’s hardly surprising that these princes, in some of the fairy tale models, were anything but gentlemen.²⁹ In early versions of Sleeping Beauty, such as the Italian story by Gaimbattista Basile (1575-1632) entitled *Sun, Moon and Talia*, the royal daughter doesn’t awaken from her hundred-year sleep after an intrusive ‘the-end-justifies-the-means’ surprise kiss, but by her fingers being hungrily sucked by the twins Sun and Moon, who she gave birth to during her coma after

and feminine lust an evil danger, in stark contrast to the chaste “feminine nature”. Pandora too, who seduced Epimetheus and thereby brought disaster upon us all, is a femme fatale on account of her appearance and seductive ways.

²⁸ Psychologically speaking, this dichotomy is also closely associated with Freud’s Madonna-whore complex, which states that men divide women into two categories and are unable to feel lasting sexual arousal toward a nice, gentle woman, but instead only toward women around whom they can weave a narrative of degradation and perversion. But here we swiftly re-encounter the “chicken and egg” paradox, in other words: has culture trained men to think in this dichotomy, or is culture merely the visible manifestation of the categories that these men have been carrying inside them since early childhood? Measured against how women are spoken about by pickup artists and masculinists, I consider the influence of culture to be far more probable here than – grossly simplified – Freud’s explanation of a wound that was inflicted on the son by the mother.

²⁹ Even in the Disney versions we see non-consensual kisses, like in the case of Snow White and Sleeping Beauty. To this day, Disney films are a pillar of Western child-rearing, through which children learn “doing gender” from an early age; that is, to make binary distinctions of gender and perform it accordingly. This is why the influence of these stories is so immense. According to the American sociologist Patricia Paulsen, who conducted research into Disney film princesses, until *Frozen* was released in 2013 they were filled by gender-specific violence which is normalised through the plot. She distinguished between different forms of violence, like unsolicited advances, molestation and threats, but also isolation and psychological violence, which, when you see them itemised in a table by film, are shockingly ubiquitous. More recent films like *Frozen 2*, *Moana*, or *Brave*, in which the “princesses” have little romantic interest and instead go on adventures, are to some extent a positive cultural shift. (Patricia Paulson, ‘Rape Culture in Disney Animated Princess Movies’, *All Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects*, 2018, <<https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds/805>>, accessed on 24. May 2024)

being raped by Prince Charming, or rather, King Charming. The evil and older queen is furious at Sleeping Beauty – still named Talia here – because the stupid bitch supposedly seduced her husband in her sleep. In her attempt to murder Talia, she shuffles off her own mortal coil, thereby clearing the way for the classic happy ending between Talia and her rapist, who marries his victim, making Sun and Moon the rightful heirs to his throne.

Compared with this seventeenth century storytelling disaster, the cultural Disney Princess canon is a fabric-softened feelgood version of the old material. And yet the gender clichés and classical playbook of romantic love are actually linked to ideals which weren't established until the nineteenth century; in other words, two hundred years later. The idealisation of hetero-romantic love, the love marriage and numerous other stereotypes are so omnipresent in our culture that they seem ancient. This is probably because they've been served up to us since the Romantic period as "natural", and therefore somehow dating to pre-civilisation, though ideas about the natures of woman and man of course already existed before that.

It is precisely the female gender's supposed love of nature and the rupture of the male gender from nature that conveniently enables men to take possession of the ratio (such a coincidence). This not only pervades the anthroposophical nonsense of Rudolf Steiner (1861 - 1925), but is also the reason why the classic Disney princesses get so much help from sweet little animals, who assist with the housework, dress them and make music with them. These enchanting images cement the intimate bond between women and nature, and perhaps I wouldn't object to it if I could get help with my housework from urban animals.³⁰

In the early nineteenth century, the French Revolution (1789 - 1799) was followed by a backwards roll, the kind of reactionary backlash which unfortunately is a common uncorrence after major societal change. Progress in human rights resulted in growing opposition among the still-powerful patriarchs, who actively sought to not only restrict but also eliminate the influence of women and other undesirables. In France, in addition to the Code Civil, the civilians' law book introduced in 1804 by Napoleon Bonaparte – still renowned today for his separation of state and church (which is all well and good) –, the patriarchal nuclear family was consolidated and a massive revocation of women's rights legally approved. Article 213, for example, stated

³⁰ As a young woman, I felt no longing to be close to nature, but now I do. This is partly due to Marlene Haushofer's novel *Die Wand* (1963; current edition List Taschenbuch, Berlin 2003), in which the author – intentionally or otherwise – cites one of the key sentences from Simone De Beauvoir's famous essay *Le deuxième sexe* (English: *The Second Sex*): "You are not born as a woman, you become one" – and expands upon this with the theory that a woman can unlearn "being a woman in nature" in favour of "being a human". Very appealing, I have to admit.

that, after marriage, a girl or woman transferred from her father's authority to her husband's, and that she was obligated to be obedient to him.³¹ This brought an end to female autonomy and political participation. The only remaining option for girls and young women was to retreat from the public to the private sphere, especially among the upper classes, who'd had more leeway before the introduction of the Code Civil.³² Fascinatingly, many conservative publicists in Europe at the time seemed to agree that the loathsome French Revolution had been the direct result of gender roles softening among the bourgeoisie of the *ancien régime*. In other words: the uninhibited fucking around that had spread from the Ludwigs XIV-XVI and their entourage to court and the upper classes had disintegrated the strict categorisation between man and woman, thereby opening the floodgates for dangerous ideas. Not only the men had mistresses; privileged women, too, had sex at whim, threw parties and hung out at salons with Enlightenment philosophers, and the publicists considered this particularly scandalous; they therefore made the women responsible for having prompted the fall of the French monarchy.³³

The lessons from the Revolution for the reactionary right-wing seem to have become entrenched from this point onwards: 1. It's the women's fault. 2. If you lose control over women, you lose control over gender relations and social order as a whole, giving rise to chaos and anarchy. Even though all of this happened more than 200 years ago, to this day the Right's automatic reaction to any progressive development is to increase control over women and their bodies by curtailing their rights.

³¹ The historian Carole Pateman points to links between the French Revolution and the consolidation of the patriarchy in the lawmaking of the Western world. After the beheading of the king and the abolition of the monarchy in France, a power shift took place among the male bourgeoisie. Because from then on all citizens were equal in the eyes of the Code Civil, and their public life (predominantly) egalitarian, claims of superiority shifted from the public to the private sphere. The home and nuclear family became the last bastion of absolutism: the man was king in his own home; his claim to power absolute. He now had at his sole command the assets that the woman had brought into the marriage and/or earned (previously women could partially control their own inheritance, possess their own assets and also independently bequeath them). The children too were now the man's property, and the mother lost any right of co-decision. It also became impossible to divorce a husband, unless he were to give his consent. (Damien Simonin, 'Carole Pateman, Le contrat sexuel', Lectures, 2011, <<https://doi.org/10.4000/lectures.1256>>, accessed on 23. August 2024)

³² Bonaparte also had a whole load of other thrilling ideas about marriage: because ill or pregnant wives weren't fully at their husbands' (sexual) disposal, whereas the man, in Bonaparte's view, wasn't sexually limited by either age or illness (as if), he concluded that having multiple wives was the only logical and "natural" consequence. "The woman belongs to the man like the fruit tree belongs to the gardener." His misogynist gardening tips are probably the result of a wounded ego – his own wife Josephine took fidelity with a pinch of salt, and he therefore wanted to punish all the women in the land, even though he had a lover himself.

³³ Moira Donegan and Adrian Daub, 'In Bed With The Right, Pro-Natalism' (<<https://open.spotify.com/show/7JirL3UVKjyy5MTy8PouHh>>, accessed on 30. August 2024).

Woman's forced retreat into the private can also be seen in art from that era. New depictions of the gender roles exerted such powerful imagery that they suppressed and ultimately erased from the public eye the presence of numerous contemporary journalists, authors and artists. They remain invisible to this day. The general disquiet of the post-revolution years created a societal see-sawing; reactionary values suddenly increased again all across Europe, and with them, regional and national matters came to the fore. Beautiful women – like those depicted by the Pre-Raphaelites, sitting in in their loosely-draped nightgowns and longingly awaiting rescue by the folkloric, sword-swinging knights in shining armour – are all the vessel for the invisible ingredient: romantic love. Heterosexual love, of course. This shining light amid the dense fog of everyday life, the be-all-and-end-all of human existence, thereby assumed an important place in art, music and literary history; one it has retained unchallenged to this day.³⁴

Love isn't an invention of the Romantic period, naturally. The anthropologist Anna Machin says it's an evolutionary trick to ensure we "stick by one another"; that is, a kind of social adhesive which favours staying with the group.³⁵ This means that love is primarily a neurochemical process that has always been there, though the composition of signalling substances changes over the course of a partnership. But the Romantic period conjured something from this neurochemical cocktail that not only makes our brains swiftly addicted, but also permeates the whole of western culture: love became a symbol of freedom, and the more important the individual and an independently-led life became, the more space romantic love took up as the sole purpose of human existence. The novel, which had already long existed as a literary genre, suddenly went stratospheric thanks to technical advances in production; a broad variety of stylistic approaches and fictional stories about love entered the market; and parallel to this, the number of readers grew at a breathtaking pace.

Religion and romantic love competed for pole position, not only as a motif in art and as a pastime or sense of purpose in everyday life, but also as the structure- and form-giving motif of society – love marriages began to supersede marriages of convenience. And it was from this very rivalry between religion and love that the ideal of unrequited, unhappy romantic love arose, the

³⁴ The leitmotif of "love" was nothing new, of course, but nor was it a mass phenomenon, because love marriages were still more the exception than the rule. The works of William Shakespeare were barely known outside of Great Britain by this point, because there weren't any translations into German or French. It was the Romantics, namely August Wilhelm Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck, who discovered *Romeo and Juliet*, more than two hundred years after the tragedy's creation.

³⁵ Paul Hoffman, <Sag mir, wo die Liebe ist!>, *fluter.*, 20 Dezember 2023 (<<https://www.fluter.de/anthropologin-anna-machinliebe>>, accessed on 11. April 2024).

kind that, from the Sturm und Drang era (around 1765 - 1785) onwards, was worth suffering and dying for, and which posed no threat to God and Jesus. And because contemporary art and literature forms influenced one another, paintings with this kind of subject matter appeared alongside the books. In the novel, women written by men became role models for future generations, similarly to how we get many of our social cues from social media influencers today.³⁶ Gustave Flaubert's *Emma Bovary* in the eponymous 1856 novel – that masterpiece of French realism – is, for example, a victim of the Romantic period. Her life is destroyed by her perception of romantic love. From a young age, she reads countless works of romantic fiction, and rather than merely empathising with the heroines' lives, loves and suffering, she also demands this romantic love in her own life, no matter the cost. Until, eventually – spoiler alert! – the financial and emotional pressure become too great and she pays with her life, by committing suicide.³⁷

Years after publication, it was revealed that *Madame Bovary* was likely based on a real-life, unhappily-married woman who came unstuck while juggling numerous love affairs, and who, at the age of 27, tragically saw suicide as the only way out. This also made Flaubert's book into a social commentary on the flipside of the romantic love so fashionable at the time. Suicide as an escape from the trials and tribulations of love; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe had led the way with *The Sorrows of Young Werther* just 80 years before, triggering an unprecedented wave of suicides in Europe.³⁸

Tragic love, the more tragic the better, has been incredibly trendy since the late eighteenth century, and it still is, especially because stories with all those ups and downs are more gripping than “they lived neither happily nor contentedly but nonetheless together ever after”.

³⁶ I mean that completely without judgement; there are both positive and negative “guiding principles” in this, and there's certainly a great deal to address in capitalism-critical viewpoints. But at least the authorship of influencers, in contrast to those of novels, is somewhat more diverse.

³⁷ The message that reading could impact negatively on women isn't new neither. Even in ancient times, Menander, a writer of comedies, allegedly claimed that “teaching a woman to read and write was like having a poisonous snake and feeding it even more poison”. Apart from the fact that this isn't a particularly clever metaphor (the poison wouldn't make the snake more dangerous, because if it were its own kind of poison, it would be immune to it, and if it were the poison of another species, it would make it very ill), the warning about women reading wasn't disseminated until the publication of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's bestselling epistolary novel *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (*Julie or the new Heloise*). Any woman who even dared to read one page of a novel was apparently a “fallen woman” – a warning that was echoed by women's magazines of the time, because the consumption of novels was a feared pastime.

³⁸ These statistical anomalies will have settled down again by the “Discovery of the Average” (see Chapter One) and Adolphe Quetelet's calculation of the average suicide rate. Nonetheless, the mathematical calculation of average suicide rates led to the demystification of a phenomenon previously seen as the most individual, and therefore most unpredictable, decision a human being could make.

Plot rollercoasters³⁹ driven by tragic love offer more creative potential, but because this kind of tragedy is more fitting to those with sensitive, vulnerable natures (with the exception of young Werther), it's generally ascribed to women. And for them, it always ends tragically; they are sacrificed for love, whether by their own hand or a lover's, or they die a social death before the actual one eventually claims them through illness. Like Theodore Fontaine's unhappy Effi Briest, who, similarly to Emma Bovary, is inspired by a real-life individual. Seen from today's perspective, both Effi and Emma were still children when they were married off to significantly older men they weren't in love with. Shakespeare's Juliet, too, who was rescued from obscurity by the Romantics and swiftly brought to the stage, is a child of fourteen when the older Romeo begins to court her and they fall madly in love. This "undying love" eventually leads to them dying for one another, in quick succession.⁴⁰ The moment when Romeo holds the passive and floppy (and never fully-dressed) Juliet in his arms, believing her to be dead, was considered the pinnacle of tragic love and therefore a beloved motif among Romantic artists.

Chapter 8

On Bro-, Rape- and Cancel Culture

[pp. 338 – 342]

Those left radically behind

As part of the political swing to the right currently sweeping through the West, we're seeing intensified efforts to style young, white men as the demographic group truly being suppressed. And this narrative is no longer only being circulated by edgelord-esque, men's rights' types; no, the sowing of doubt in the existence of the patriarchy is now producing strange shoots in the

³⁹ Fittingly, the first rollercoasters outside of Russia (where they previously existed as slides, hence why in many languages they are also referred to as "Russian mountains") also opened in the early nineteenth century (in Paris) and quickly became a hit across Europe. Hurtling up and down, feeling nauseous and no longer knowing which way is up – this is therefore an invention of romanticism and one of its pillars, both then and now. Amusingly, the ubiquity of the "rollercoaster of love" metaphor struck me on the evening when I wrote this note, having heard it from the mouth of Emelia Shepard in an episode of *Grey's Anatomy* (season 18, episode 20) as well as in an episode of *Love is Blind* (season 5, episode 16). (Please don't judge my media consumption, it's always just research!)

⁴⁰ It's interesting that love is only undying when the lovers actually die. Every other love ends, and people survive.

mainstream media too – or rather, *again*, given that this strategy is tried and tested⁴¹. And it's working, because more and more people are asking themselves: how can it be that feminists are claiming to be victims of a patriarchy, when all we hear about are disadvantaged, forgotten, unhappy men?

In the Western hemisphere, and therefore Germany too, word is going around that the young men aren't okay. In the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Rainer Hank published in his column – tellingly named "Hank's World"⁴² – an article entitled "Poor Men". In it, he claimed that young men "feel overwhelmed in competition with the young women who are overtaking them, and don't feel challenged to do better. Instead, they are tending towards despair."⁴³ But what are they exactly, these "left-behind young men"? Merely a "feeling"? Or the "flipside" of feminist progress (which he also claims)?

Here it is again, the old ruse of playing interest groups off one another; making out, for example, that the reduction of the gender income gap is a victory that feminists have achieved on the backs of the poor men – according to the logic: "Every additional euro a woman gets is a euro a man loses out on." And the voting behaviour of the aforementioned young men (who, according to Hank, tend to vote for "populist and extremist (both right- and left-wing) parties") was of course somehow the feminists' idea, because the promise of their own dominance based on hesitant societal advances has turned out to be outdated and partly empty. And yet Hank himself writes: "All the 'gaps' in the home and workplace still come at women's expense in this part of the world, though they are shrinking." The statistics he cites as showing progress towards equality are correct; the gap really is slowly closing in some areas, and yet Hank cheaply draws bizarre conclusions from this: "The inequalities between the sexes in the workplace are changing dramatically"⁴⁴. And yet the old narratives – that women are always victims – are still being told,

⁴¹ I would also count the Neukirch text from Chapter 4 as an example of this.

⁴² Suggesting, perhaps, that it's his world, and his alone.

⁴³ Rainer Hank, 'Arme Männer', *FAZ.NET*, 2024 (<<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/hanks-welt/gleichberechtigungsfrauen-auf-der-ueberholspur-maenner-pennen-110040672.html>>, accessed on 23. October 2024).

⁴⁴ "Dramatic" is an interesting word choice in this context.

despite the fact that, as time passes, women are becoming the true victors of growing equality.⁴⁵ This is progress that women and men should celebrate, instead of repeating old laments.”⁴⁶

At a time when overt misogyny is becoming more and more socially acceptable, when violence toward women, including femicide, is on the rise, are we – the women – supposed to stop complaining and pop champagne corks because we’re making minor progress in some areas? My impression is this: the danger comes not from the actual, lived equality of the sexes (which still lies in the distant future), but rather the mere thought that things could head in this direction – this is enough for some men to use their cumulative journalistic force to slam on the brakes and cry “Enough!”⁴⁷

The perfidious element is: there are good reasons to worry about disillusioned young men drifting into right-wing extremism or Islamism, but they are barely part of the debate, and not even mentioned in these kinds of articles. The social decline of young white men is itself a symptom of the patriarchy, and not the result of feminist progress. In 2020, a representative US study discovered a significant difference in male attitudes towards feminism according to political affiliation. It will come as no great surprise that the assertion “feminist progress is occurring at the expense of men” finds more approval among Republican voters, with around 38%, than with Democratic voters, at around 19%.⁴⁸ Three years later, a study conducted by the Southern Poverty Law Center found out that the disapproval has significantly increased within recent years: The statement “Feminism has done more harm than good” was supported by 62% of young Republicans and 46% of young Democrats. The fact that there’s such a high dismissal

⁴⁵ This sentence makes it clear that Hank was taken in by the delusion that equality and rights are like cookies, and that the more crumbs of equality women are given to eat, the smaller the cookie pieces left for the men become. This poses the question of whether Hank even understood the word “EQUALity”? And whether anyone at the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* edited the text?

⁴⁶ Rainer Hank, «Arme Männer», FAZ.NET, 14. October 2024 (<<https://rainer-hank.de/faz-kolumne/hanks-welt/armemaenner/>>, accessed on 23. October 2024).

⁴⁷ A study conducted by the Pew Research Center has been very revealing in connection with both questions: why any minor feminist progress feels to some men like a curtailment of their own rights, and why it leads to a decline in the education of boys and men. The researchers looked at U.S. universities and colleges and discovered that as soon as an educational institution becomes less than 40% male, heterosexual men tend to avoid it for being “too woke”. And “avoid” in this context means that they abandon their studies and place the blame on women. Sociologists call this phenomenon *male flight*, and it’s the flight from no longer being the norm. (Kim Parker, «What’s behind the Growing Gap between Men and Women in College Completion?», Pew Research Center, 2021 (<<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/11/08/whatsbehind-the-growing-gap-between-men-and-women-in-collegecompletion/>>, accessed on 4. January 2025).)

⁴⁸ Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Ruth Igielnik, «A Century After Women Gained the Right To Vote, Majority of Americans See Work To Do on Gender Equality», *Pew Research Center’s Social & Demographic Trends Project*, 2020 (<<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/07/07/a-century-afterwomen-gained-the-right-to-vote-majority-of-americans-seework-to-do-on-gender-equality/>>, accessed on 19. March 2024).

of the feminist cause in a demographic group which has traditionally been more open to left-wing and progressive themes, and that almost every second young Democrat rejects feminism, shows very clearly the sheer force of the backlash wave rolling over us.⁴⁹

From mid 2024, when forecasts showed that the gender gap in voting behaviour was assuming unprecedented proportions, articles on this began to appear everywhere.⁵⁰ Young women have admittedly long held a tendency to vote for Democratic candidates at national level, but their rejection of Republican candidates⁵¹ and their policies increased further still after the revocation of abortion rights (*Roe vs. Wade*) by the Supreme Court in 2022. In turn, it's clear that predominantly young but not exclusively white men see Donald Trump as a (ring)leader who is luring them in with the promise of "bringing back" a form of masculinity that reestablishes the "natural order of the sexes".⁵² Headings like "They Used to Be Ahead in the American Economy. Now They've Fallen Behind"⁵³ and graphs comparing the incomes of white "men without a degree" to the incomes of "women with a degree" over the course of the last forty years give the impression that the social and financial decline of the educationally alienated White Man is the result of a competition between the sexes, in which the tide has now turned and men are, one by one and through no fault of their own, drawing the short straw.

⁴⁹ «SPLC Poll Finds Substantial Support for «Great Replacement» Theory and Other Hard-Right Ideas», *Southern Poverty Law Center* (<<https://www.splcenter.org/news/2022/06/01/pollfinds-support-great-replacement-hard-right-ideas>>, accessed on 19. March 2024).

⁵⁰ Lisa Lerer and Katie Glueck, «Why Gender May Be the Defining Issue of the Election», *The New York Times*, 23 October 2024, section U. S. (<<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/23/us/politics/harris-trump-election-gender.html>>, accessed on 28. October 2024).

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⁵² In concrete terms, this means that the young men interviewed by the *New York Times* claimed they felt left behind even in school, and that due to their bumpy paths through education, they didn't get the jobs which would have enabled them to provide for a wife and/or a family. Now adults, they are confronted with being unable to fulfil the traditional role expectation that the patriarchy has drummed into them from an early age, namely being both head of the family and sole provider as husband and father (a role that was often still possible for their own fathers). They attribute part of the blame for this to Democrat policies, which they hold responsible (rightfully so, in some respects) for the disappearance of well-paid skilled manual labour jobs. In their view, though, the main responsibility for their plight lies with feminism, women and foreign migrants, as well as diversity, equality and inclusion in the workplace, which they see as the reasons why they can't get the well-paid jobs that do still exist. (*The Gender Election*, dir. By New York Times Podcasts, 2024 (<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nzCSeVlwjc>>, accessed on 28. October 2024).)

⁵³ Emily Badger, Robert Gebeloff, and Aatish Bhatia, «They Used to Be Ahead in the American Economy. Now They've Fallen Behind.», *The New York Times*, 26 October 2024, section The Upshot (<<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/10/26/upshot/census-relative-income.html>>, accessed on 28. October 2024).

In other words: the fact that well-educated women (regardless of ethnicity) earn more than uneducated White Men, this will inevitably plunge society into chaos, or rather, in this specific case, into the arms of fascism!

