

Introducing Myself

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I am a man. Now you may think I've made some kind of silly mistake about gender, or maybe that I'm trying to fool you, because my first name ends in A, and I own three bras, and I've been pregnant five times, and other things like that that you might have noticed, little details. But details don't matter. If we have anything to learn from politicians it's that details don't matter. I am a man, and I want you to believe and accept this as a fact, just as I did for many years.

You see, when I was growing up at the time of the Wars of the Medes and Persians and when I went to college just after the Hundred Years War and when I was bringing up my children during the Korean, Cold, and Vietnam Wars, there were no women. Women are a very recent invention. I predate the invention of women by decades. Well, if you insist on pedantic accuracy, women have been invented several times in widely varying localities, but the inventors just didn't know how to sell the product. Their distribution techniques were rudimentary and their market research was nil, and so of course the concept just didn't get off the ground. Even with a genius behind it, an invention has to find its market, and it seemed like for a long time the idea of women just didn't make it to the bottom line. Models like the Austen and the Bronte were too complicated, and people just laughed at the Suffragette, and the Woolf was way too far ahead of its time.



So when I was born there actually were only men. People were men. They all had one pronoun, his pronoun; so that's who I am. I am him, as in "If anybody needs to throw up he will have to do it in his hat," or "A writer knows which side his bread is buttered on." That's me, the writer, him. I am a man.

Not maybe a first-rate man. I'm perfectly willing to admit that I may be in fact a kind of second-rate or imitation man, a Pretend-a-Him. As a him, I am to a genuine male him as a microwaved fishstick is to a whole grilled Chinook Salmon. I mean, after all, can I inseminate? Can I belong to the Bohemian Club? Can I run General Motors? Theoretically I can, but you know where theory gets us. Not to the top of General Motors, and on the day when a Radcliffe woman is the president of Harvard University you wake me up and tell me, will you? And then, I can't write my name with pee in the snow. I can't shoot my wife and children and some neighbors and then myself. Oh to tell you the truth I can't even drive. I never got my license. I chickened out. I take the bus. That is terrible. I admit it, I am actually a very poor imitation or substitute man, and you can see it when I try to wear those trendy army surplus clothes with ammunition pockets from the Banana Republic Company catalogues and I look like a hen in a pillowcase. I am shaped wrong. People are supposed to be lean, aren't they? You can't be too thin, everybody says so, specially anorectics. People are supposed to be lean, and taut, because that's how men generally are, lean and taut, or anyhow that's how a lot of men start out, and some of them even stay that way. And men are people, people are men, that has been well established; and so people, real people, the right kind of people, are lean. But I'm really lousy at being people, because I'm not lean at all but sort of podgy, with actual fat places. I am untaut. And then, people are supposed to be tough. Tough is good. But I've never been tough. I'm sort of soft and actually sort of tender. Like a good steak. Or like Chinook salmon, which isn't lean, or tough, but very rich and tender. But then salmon aren't people, or anyhow we have been told that they aren't, recently. We have been told that there is only one kind of people and they are men. And I think it is very important that we all believe that. It certainly is important to the men.

What it comes down to, I guess, is that I am just not manly. Like Ernest Hemingway was manly. The beard and the guns and the wives and the little short sentences. I do try. I have this sort of beardoid thing that keeps trying to grow, nine or ten hairs on my chin, sometimes even more; but what do I do with the hairs? I tweak them out. Would a man do that? Men don't tweak. Men shave. Anyhow white men shave, and I have even less choice about being white or not than I do about being a man or not. I am white whether I like being white or not. But I do my best not to be, I guess, under the circumstances, because I don't shave. I tweak. But it doesn't mean anything because I don't really have a real beard that amounts to anything. And I don't have a gun and I