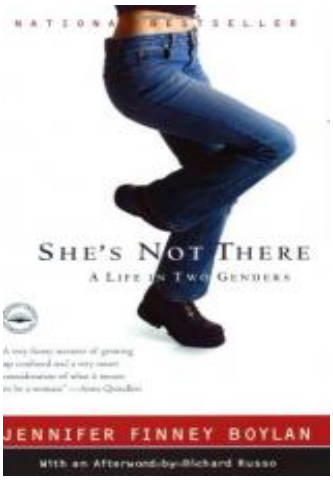
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She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders

by Jennifer Finney Boylan



About the Book

The provocative bestseller **She's Not There** is the winning, utterly surprising story of a person changing genders. By turns hilarious and deeply moving, Jennifer Finney Boylan explores the territory that lies between men and women, examines changing friendships, and rejoices in the redeeming power of family. Told in Boylan's fresh voice, **She's Not There** is about a person bearing and finally revealing a complex secret. Through her clear eyes, **She's Not There** provides a new window on the confounding process of accepting our true selves.

Discussion Guide

1. Do you feel that Boylan had a choice in becoming a woman to the world?

2. What responsibility does Jenny have for Grace and their children? What responsibility do they have to her?

3. Have you ever known someone who made a gender transition? How did the change affect people who knew the person before?

4. How central a role do you believe gender plays in our identity? How much different and in what ways do you believe you'd be if you were a member of the opposite sex? Do you think that some traits are inherent in one gender?

5. Discuss Boylan's experiences buying a car and buying a pair of jeans. Have you witnessed or experienced similar situations? Do you notice the differences in expectations and attitudes in the ways people of other sexes are portrayed?

6. What role does humor play in Boylan's life and in this book?

7. The title of the book, "She's Not There," is the title of a song that Boylan sings. What do you think the title means in

this case? Who is not there, and when?

8. What is revealed about Boylan in her friendship with Richard Russo?

9. As a teenager, Boylan believes that love will cure him from his feelings. In what ways is Boylan saved by love? In what ways do people usually expect to be saved by love? How often is it successful?

10. Discuss the concept of "normal" as it relates to Boylan's narrative, and to your expectations.

11. On her web site, Boylan remarks, "As I look back at the story of my own life, I occasionally feel that being born transgendered was the best thing that could have happened to me. While dealing with this condition made life difficult for me, as well as for my family, it's also true that I have been given a rare gift in life, the gift of being able to see into the worlds of both men and women with clear eyes." Do you feel that you know more about these worlds as a result of reading Boylan's book?

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Author Bio

Jennifer Finney Boylan is the author of 19 books, including MAD HONEY, coauthored with Jodi Picoult. Her memoir, SHE'S NOT THERE, was the first bestselling work by a transgender American.

Since 2014, she has been the inaugural Anna Quindlen Writer in Residence at Barnard College of Columbia University. She is also on the faculty of the Bread Loaf Writers? Conference of Middlebury College and the Sirenland Writers Conference in Positano, Italy. She is the President of PEN America, and from 2011 to 2018 she was a member of the Board of Directors of GLAAD, including four years as national cochair. In 2022-23, she was a Fellow at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. She graduated from Wesleyan University and Johns Hopkins, and she holds doctorates *honoris causa* from Sarah Lawrence College, the New School and Wesleyan University.

For many years she was a contributing opinion writer for the opinion section of the *New York Time*s. Her work has also appeared in the *New Yorker*, the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe*, *Literary Hub*, *Down East*, and many other publications. She lives in Maine and New York with her wife, Deirdre. They have two children: a daughter, Zai, and a son, Sean.

Critical Praise

"Beautifully crafted, fearless, painfully honest, inspiring and extremely witty. Jennifer Finney Boylan is an exquisite writer with a fascinating story and this combination has resulted in one of the most remarkable, moving and unforgettable memoirs in recent history."

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