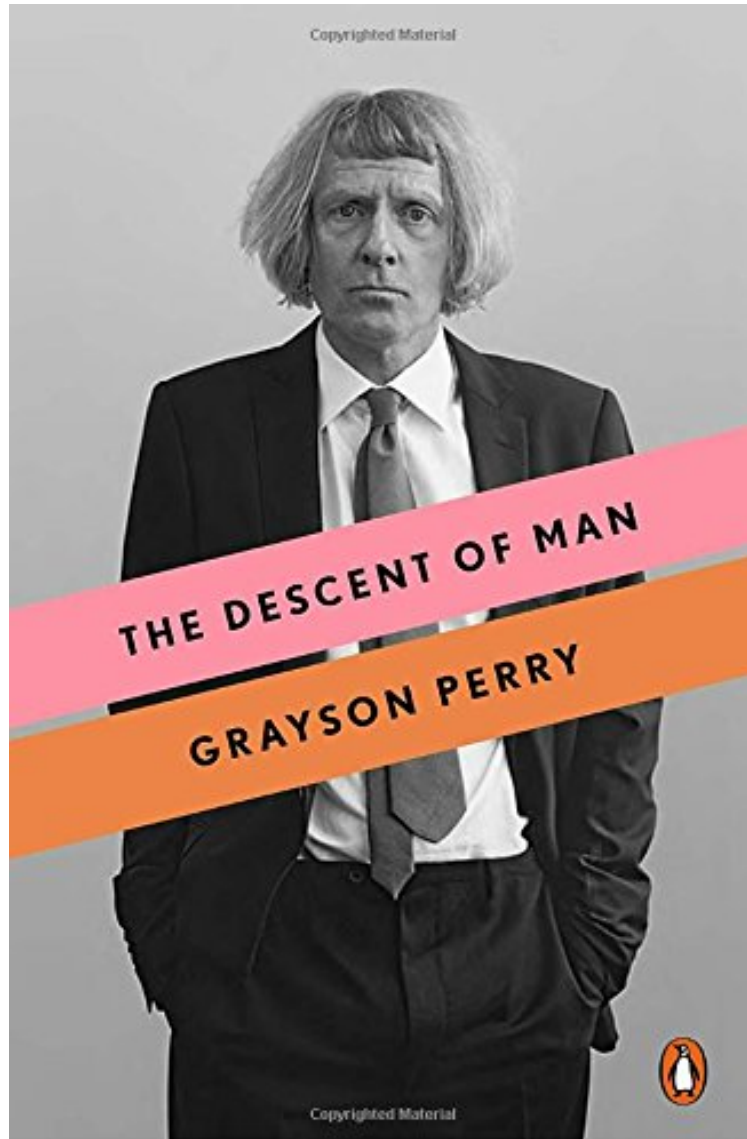


(Library ebook) The Descent of Man

The Descent of Man

Grayson Perry

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Grayson Perry : The Descent of Man before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Descent of Man:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The author has an uncommon perspective on masculinity which he ...By GeeboThe author has an uncommon perspective on masculinity which he uses to inform this witty and interesting dissection of it.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Masculinity is fragile afBy Jonathan A. FlikeGood read. Wasn't the huge indictment of masculinity I was expecting, but good nonetheless.2 of 2 people found the

following review helpful. Clear and humorous By Joyce British artist Perry deals with the subject of masculinity in a style that is friendly to men, humorous, and pulls no punches. He names the four components of traditional masculinity (or the male sex role) as No Sissy Stuff, The Big Wheel (the quest for success and status and to be looked up to), The Sturdy Oak (toughness, confidence and self-reliance), and Give Em Hell (the acceptance of violence, aggression and daring in mens behavior). He addresses the areas of power, performance, violence, and emotion. He says, Having been unaware of the myriad ways they are privileged, men feel feminism is an attack on their core identity rather than a call for equality. Even a taste of equality causes men to feel they are being hauled in front of the head-mistress and given a right good dressing-down and its not fair. Men are highly fearful of being ridiculed because the male role is much more heavily policed. Perry gives the example that a father would rather walk down the street with his daughter in dungarees waving a plastic sword than with his young son in a tutu waving a plastic fairy wand. It comes down to this stark fact: Globally, three-quarters of suicides are by men. Perry relates this dire consequence to an attempt to live up to an outdated image of masculinity. He suggests needed change in the way we bring up boys that increases the tolerance of a spectrum of masculinities. He closes with a list of mens rights: To be vulnerable, to be weak, to be wrong, to be intuitive. The right not to know, to be uncertain, to be flexible. And finally, the right not to be ashamed of any of these.

What does it mean to be male in the 21st Century? Award-winning artist Grayson Perry explores what masculinity is: from sex to power, from fashion to career prospects, and what it could become with illustrations throughout. In this witty and necessary new book, artist Grayson Perry trains his keen eye on the world of men to ask, what sort of man would make the world a better place? What would happen if we rethought the macho, outdated version of manhood, and embraced a different ideal? In the current atmosphere of bullying, intolerance and misogyny, demonstrated in the recent Trump versus Clinton presidential campaign, *The Descent of Man* is a timely and essential addition to current conversations around gender. Apart from gaining vast new wardrobe options, the real benefit might be that a newly fitted masculinity will allow men to have better relationships and that's happiness, right? Grayson Perry admits hes not immune from the stereotypes himself yet his thoughts on everything from power to physical appearance, from emotions to a brand new Manifesto for Men, are shot through with honesty, tenderness, and the belief that, for everyone to benefit, updating masculinity has to be something men decide to do themselves. They have nothing to lose but their hang-ups.

Perry is an eloquent and witty tour guide through the fun house that is modern masculinity. He wants us guys to be weirder, freer, less predictable. Hes just the man for the job. *The New York Times* Witty A funny, engaging, and at times penetrating trek through the tricky landscape of contemporary masculinity a slim book, but it packs plenty of surprises per page. NPR "Conversational and engaging... [Perry is] less concerned with apologizing for masculinity than he is in persuading men about all the ways in which its damaging their lives. *The Atlantic* "In a world where a man who talks openly about kissing and grabbing women without consent can be taken seriously as a candidate for leader of the 'free' world, you may wonder how toxic masculinity has spun out of control. As an antidote to all the bully posturing, perhaps the wisdom of a famous cross-dressing artist can help explain how we got here and how we can move forward, so it is time to pick up Grayson Perry's *The Descent of Man* and begin to unravel the mystery of toxic masculinity." *Huffington Post* Grayson Perry for King and Queen of England. Caitlin Moran, *New York Times* bestselling author of *How to Be a Woman* "With its non-macho slender girth and personal, engaging approach, [*The Descent of Man*] is a breeze of a read, and one that makes you see our male-manufactured world a little differently." Matt Haig, *The Guardian* About the Author Grayson Perrys first art prize was a large papier-mch head he awarded to himself as part of a performance art project at college in 1980. Since then he has won many other awards, including the Turner Prize in 2003. He is now one of Britains most celebrated artists and has had major solo exhibitions all over the world. His 2013 BBC Reith Lectures were the most popular lectures since the series began. He won a BAFTA for his Channel 4 documentary on the creation of six new tapestries entitled *The Vanity of Small Differences*, All in the Best Possible Taste, for which he was also awarded Best Presenter at the Grierson British Documentary Awards. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. ***This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected copy proof*** Copyright 2017 Grayson Perry If It Aint Broke, Dont Fix It I AM RIDING MY MOUNTAIN BIKE THROUGH THE forest up a long, steep track. Halfway up I see a young boy, maybe nine or ten years old. He is struggling; this track is a tough challenge for anyone not used to mountain biking, let alone a kid on a new bicycle. He cant work the gears, and wobbles and grinds to a halt. Tears run down his face. Dad, Dad! he yells, sobbing. He is crying for help, but he is also in a boiling rage. I offer to help him, but he is so angry, so ashamed, that he doesnt acknowledge me. As I pedal past up the hill, I see the father in the distance. He is standing silently next to his mountain bike, arms folded across his chest, staring at his son two hundred meters down the hill. He also looks angry. I have seen that fathers face on a thousand soccer sidelines, outside a thousand school gates. Its a face that says, Toughen up, dont whine, be a man! Its the face of someone who hands down the rage and pain of what it is to be a man. I feel incensed on the boys behalf. I cant help myself: I say to the father, I hope your son can afford a good

psycho-therapist when he grows up. The father doesn't respond. I hope that in picking up this book you have already acknowledged that masculinity needs to be questioned, that gender inequality is a huge issue for all of us and that the world would be a better place without it. What I hope this small book might do is bring awareness of masculinity to more people—awareness being a step toward change, because many forms of masculinity can be very destructive. If this is the first book you have bought about gender, I am joyful. We need to examine masculinity, not just to prevent small boys from crying with rage at their impassive fathers on a mountain-bike ride, but to change the whole world for the better. Examining masculinity can seem like a luxury problem, a pastime for a wealthy, well-educated, peaceful society, but I would argue the opposite: the poorer, the more undeveloped, the more uneducated a society is, the more masculinity needs realigning with the modern world, because masculinity is probably holding back that society. All over the globe, crimes are committed, wars are started, women are being held back and economies are disastrously distorted by men, because of their outdated version of masculinity. We need to get a philosophical fingernail under the edge of the firmly stuck-down masculinity sticker so we can get hold of it and rip it off. Beneath the sticker, men are naked and vulnerable—human even. It is a newsroom cliché that masculinity is always somehow "in crisis," under threat from pollutants such as shifting gender roles, but to me many aspects of masculinity seem such a blight on society that to say it is "in crisis" is like saying racism was "in crisis" in civil-rights-era America. Masculinity needs to change. Some may question this, but they are often white middle-class men with nice jobs and nice families: the current state of masculinity works for them. What about all the teenagers who think the only manly way out of poverty and dysfunction is to become a criminal? What about all the lonely men who can't get a partner, have trouble making friends and end up killing themselves? What about all the angry men who inflict their masculine baggage onto the rest of us? All of us males need to look at ourselves with a clear eye and ask what sort of men would make the world a better place, for everyone. When we think about masculinity and men, the issues can quickly become scarily global and serious. A discussion about hipster fashions or who does the washing-up can rapidly spiral into a debate about rape, war, terrorism, religious oppression and predatory capitalism. I sometimes watch the evening news on television and think all the world's problems can be boiled down to one thing: the behavior of people with a Y chromosome. Men seem to be the ones with the power, the money, the guns and the criminal records. The consequences of rogue masculinity are, I think, one of the biggest issues, if not the biggest issue, facing the world today. Some forms of masculinity—particularly if starkly brutal or covertly domineering—are toxic to an equal, free and tolerant society. Understandably, women have led the discussion about gender. They are the ones who have been most oppressed by its constraints, after all. On the subject of gender, the feelings of many men can be summed up as "If it ain't broke, don't fix it"; the status quo seems to work for them. But I am asking, "Does it? Really?" What if half the victims of masculinity are men? Masculinity might be a straitjacket that is keeping men from "being themselves," whatever that might mean. In their drive for domination, men may have neglected to prioritize vital aspects of being wholly human, particularly issues around mental health. In their drive to be successfully masculine, men may be preventing their greater self from being successfully happy. I want to unpack what the American feminist Peggy McIntosh calls the "invisible weightless knapsack" of male privilege, full of "special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks," to see if it is as much a burden to some men as a boon. I feel I need to say here that in no way am I setting myself against men in general, not least because I am one. Nor am I against all masculinity: I can be as masculine as the next guy. This book is about what I think masculinity is, and questioning it. One of the problems when talking about masculinity is the confusion between sex (male) and gender (man). The physical, definite, pretty much unchanging fact of the male body can make us think that all the behaviors, feelings and culture associated with that body (masculinity) are also immutably written in flesh. For many males, being masculine, acting in a manly way, is as unquestionably a biological part of them as their penis and testicles and deep voice. But masculinity is mainly a set of habits, traditions and beliefs historically associated with being a man. Our bodies take tens of millennia to evolve even slightly, but behaviors seen as masculine can be as transient as a teenage fad, a coal mine or a forgotten deity. We need to shift away from seeing masculinity as a closed set of behaviors and from seeing change as threatening, unnatural and feminizing. I see masculinity as being how men behave at present. I think it needs to change to include behaviors that are at present regarded by many as feminine, behaviors that are sensible, life-enhancing and planet-saving. I can't remember the first time I realized I was male, I doubt many men can, but that is at the nub of masculinity; it is there at the very basement level of our identity. Before we learn to speak or understand language, we are being indoctrinated in gender. The first question most people ask when they hear of a birth is "Is it a boy or a girl?" Once we know the sex of a baby, we often coo over it in gendered ways: "Isn't she beautiful?"; "Look at him kick, he's going to be a soccer player." So masculinity is a deeply woven component of the male psyche. But I am a transvestite; I am turned on by dressing up in clothes that are heavily associated with being female. This is perhaps some unconscious renunciation of being a man, or at least a fantasy flight toward femininity. I sometimes like to pretend I am a woman, so from a young age I have felt that masculinity is optional for someone with a penis. Because I am a transvestite, people often assume that this gives me a special insight into the opposite gender. But this is rubbish. How can I, brought up as a man, know anything about the experience of being a woman? It would be insulting to women if I thought I did. If anything, it gives me a sharper insight into what it is to be a man, since from

the age of twelve I have been intensely questioning my own masculinity. I have had to step slightly outside myself, a doubter at the gates of the crumbling superdome of masculinity. This does not mean that I have stepped into femininity, but it is no surprise that I am thoroughly fascinated by masculinity, the lumbering beast within me that I have tried to suppress and negotiate with my entire life. I have been forced by my sexuality to become aware of what it is to be a "man." As a twelve-year-old rummaging in my mother's wardrobe, I felt dangerously weird and alone. I didn't even know that such a thing as transvestism existed or that other men felt the same. This feeling prompted the thought that masculinity is an act played out blindly by many men who have had no reason or impulse to question what it is they are doing. One thing I discovered in investigating the nature of identity for my TV series and London exhibition *Who Are You?* was that identity is an ongoing performance, not a static state. The philosopher Julian Baggini wrote that "Tis a verb masquerading as a noun." I can't remember a time when I embraced being a man fully, unquestioningly. I am a white man, a rather tarnished badge to wear these days, weighted with guilt and shame at the behavior of one's fellows. Manliness for my young self was problematic. Somewhere there was always a nagging suspicion that masculinity was inherently wrong and needed to be controlled. My mother used me, her eldest son, as a sounding board to vent all her rage against men. By the age of fifteen, I had taken on board a heap of anti-male propaganda. Even today I often catch myself observing and commenting on men as if I were not one of them. Most men are nice, reasonable fellows. But most violent people, rapists, criminals, killers, tax avoiders, corrupt politicians, planet despoilers, sex abusers and dinner-party bores do tend to be, well ... men. I did not have good role models. My father left when I was just four years old, and I didn't really have any meaningful contact with him until I was fifteen, by which time I was pretty well hardwired with my own version of masculinity and its attendant sexuality, something that I still have forty years later. My stepfather, with whom I lived for the majority of my childhood, was a volatile and violent man of whom I was terrified. So men were unreliable, brutish, distant and uninterested in me. I have suffered at the hands of individual men and with the constraints of gender itself. I am a male person, and I have learned to have some compassion for my self and hope to have compassion for males in general. I write this book with goodwill and in the hope that men will learn to flourish in a changing world. This is not about writing men off: one thing that writing this book has made me realize is that, despite my gender dysphoria, I can be a very traditionally masculine man. There is a corny saying in therapy circles, "If you spot it, you've got it," which means that if you notice behavior in others, it's probably because you behave in the same way. I have been masculinity-spotting for quite a while now, and note I display quite acutely some of the traits we associate with men. I am very competitive and territorial, particularly toward other men. I often ask other men about this and they usually deny bristling at rivals or having any other such man moments, which leaves me feeling like I am a macho monster for admitting to wanting to get one over on other guys in petty ways. Maybe my circumstances, being a transvestite and an artist, mean that I am less invested in society's ideals of masculinity than many men and that therefore I am willing to pick them out and question them, even in myself. I feel I have nothing to lose but some anti-social habits. When I was growing up, my unconscious dealt with the issue of masculinity in a very particular way: it handed the role over to my teddy bear. Maybe at some level I sensed that being fully the man I could be was dangerous in a house with my stepfather. Overt masculinity on my part might have challenged the Minotaur in my home and provoked his thunderous rage. The glorious workings of the unconscious had a way of dealing with this: I parked my dominant masculine qualities with my best friend Alan Measles, my teddy. Also, given my lack of decent male role models, maybe my unconscious thought it best just to bloody invent one, and a really perfect one at that. One that I think I may still be trying to live up to. I had been given my teddy for my first Christmas and had really bonded with him by the time I contracted measles at the age of three, hence his surname. His Christian name came from my next-door neighbor's son, Alan, who was my best friend. Ironically, though, it was also my stepfather's middle name, and the name my mother used to address him, so in my head the role of alpha masculinity was a battle of the two Alans. Alan Measles featured in all my childhood games—physically at first, hence his well-worn appearance, but, as I grew up, Alan became an imagined character in the rambling, looping narratives of battles and races that I played out with Lego and Airfix models in my bedroom. My unconscious playful imagination allocated Alan the role of benign dictator, and I was given the role of his bodyguard. A strange, unglamorous role for a child's fantasy, you may think, but perhaps vital if we think what freight Alan had unwittingly inherited. To a great extent, Alan Measles had become my masculinity. He represented for me an idealized manhood, and symbolized qualities that in my young life I felt were those of a good man. Alan also had strong connections with the mysterious organization I now call the Department of Masculinity. This is something like the Stasi, an organization that makes sure no one dissents from the dominant man script. Alan was a rebel leader; our territory had been invaded by the Germans (this was only twenty years after the Second World War), and the Germans were of course my stepfather, so we fought a guerrilla war, from a secret valley base (my bedroom), which continued until I was fifteen. The synaptic artillery of that psychic war still echoes in my head. Recently I saw a picture of a new model of Jaguar car featured in a magazine. It was a red F-Type, all snarling snout and bulging flanks. I have never owned a car, but I felt a strong urge to buy one, a red one. I could afford it, and I fantasized about it ticking as it cooled in the yard of my studio after a furious run around the East Anglian countryside with the top down. I talked to my wife about it; she humored me. Then the psychic penny dropped. Despite all my achievements, I was still trying to

prove myself a man, but in the terms of my stepfather, who drove an E-Type Jaguar. Some where in my psyche I wanted to rock up at my mother's house and wave my big, shiny roseate-metal dick in his face. Some people might argue that there is no point in discussing masculinity, as we can't do anything about the way men and women behave, they are just "born that way." Well, I'm happy to believe genetics do play some part in gender, but not much. Many feminists and advocates of gender equality don't like the idea that biology may play even a small part in gender differences. They believe that male and female brains are exactly alike, that all gender is conditioning, and what's more, conditioning by a male-dominated environment (therefore evil). I'm tempted to agree with them: it's certainly healthier if we see gender as conditioned and therefore more fluid. Even if biology does play some part in gender differences, though, it does not change the arguments for gender equality. It just means we have to watch that those innate biases are not used as an excuse for unfair practices, and ensure that everybody has equal opportunities, even if some groups will want to do some things more than others. We should not deny males the opportunity to nurture and care, just as we should not deny females the opportunity to kill and maim in the name of Western democracy, if they fancy it. In 1976, social psychologists Robert Brannon and Deborah David outlined four basic components of traditional masculinity, or the male sex role. Number one was "No Sissy Stuff." The other three were "the Big Wheel," which describes men's quest for success and status as well as their need to be looked up to; "the Sturdy Oak," which describes men's air of toughness, confidence and self-reliance, especially in a crisis; and "Give 'Em Hell," which reflects the acceptability of violence, aggression and daring in men's behavior. Of course, women also demonstrate these traits, but they are not seen as traditionally feminine. These components or rules of masculinity are strictly enforced: every man senses that his masculinity is under scrutiny and being policed, mainly by other men, just as he checks up on theirs. Every man knows that he has to behave in a certain way, dress in certain clothes, believe he has certain rights and even feel a particular way. But the world is changing, and masculinity needs to change too. In this book I have focused on four areas of masculinity that I think need examining: power (how men dominate our world), performance (how men dress and act the part), violence (how men resort to crime and violence) and emotion (how men feel). This is not a book about sexism, but inevitably, as I am writing about masculinity, I have found it very hard to avoid mentioning the myriad ways that men can be sexist, knowingly or unknowingly. This is a book, I hope, that suggests ways that our definitions of masculinity may expand. Somewhere in every man's head there is a governor, an unconscious inner voice sending instructions through the intercom. This governor is the boss of every man's personal branch of the Department of Masculinity. This Department wants to maintain standards. Every man's personal governor has picked up instructions from a variety of sources—parents, teachers, friends, films, TV, books—on what it is to be masculine. He takes ideas and images from these sources and assembles them into a model of a perfect man. The governor then sits there, constantly checking that his man is living up to this ideal. If the man fails, he is made to feel unworthy, he may hate himself, he may take it out on others. A man may not be aware of this governor—he may think that he is his governor or that men are free to behave how they like—but until he is aware of and understands the Department of Masculinity, he will be totally under its command. I want men to be holding this book when they enter the governor's office. I want them to ask brave questions and look to the future, for we must negotiate a new deal on masculinity.