

Gender Benders

by Theodore Dalrymple

My computer tries to improve my style by automatically underlining in blue what it believes to be clichés or redundant phrases. If I type *in order to*, for example, the blue wavy line appears unbidden under the three words. *In so far as* is another phrase that, schoolmarm-like, my computer underlines as if to correct me.

Now as it happens that I love *in so far as*, in so far as, in the days when my writing was paid by the word, I used to use it as often as possible. It delighted me to think that, merely by having typed 12 characters (if you include the spaces), I had earned... well, whatever the going rate per word was.

Of course, I was deluding myself slightly. I couldn't just send in the phrase *in so far as* and demand to be paid for them: they had to be included, more or less meaningfully, in the middle of an article. All the same, I never wrote *in so far as* as *insofar*, which would have been perfectly permissible but not so lucrative. (The phrase *more or less*, incidentally, comes under my computer's interdiction, or perhaps I should say anathema.)

Sometimes I try to write paragraphs more or less in order to have as much blue underlining in it as I possibly can, in as much as it is an amusing game to play. *For ever* is a useful standby in this game. Be that as it may (another standby) I have not yet managed an entire paragraph with blue underlining. Just as real meaning sometimes creeps inadvertently into politicians' speeches, so some words escape the blue pencil even in the best of my efforts.

There is also the red pencil, for words that are misspelled or

allegedly do not exist (often they do). It is interesting, then, that *genderqueer*, which I think is of very recent coinage, has now entered the vocabulary of my computer as a *bona fide* word. For those dinosaurs among you who do not know what it means, I will here provide its meaning, as per Wikipedia:

... denoting or relating to a person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions but identifies with neither, both, or a combination of male and female genders.

You can also be *trigender* or *pangender* without having your preference underlined in red, though not *quadridender*, *pentagender*, or *hexagender*, not even *agender*, which of course is an insult to the agender community.

No doubt it will be corrected in the next updates that so irritatingly interrupt work on my computer.

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