



การแสดงเพศภาวะในนวนิยายเรื่องเดอะเดนิช เกิร์ลของเดวิด เอเบอร์ชอฟ
GENDER PERFORMATIVITY IN DAVID EBERSHOFF'S THE DANISH GIRL



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DANISH GIRL



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Gender performativity is one of the core concepts of the works of Judith Butler. Butler proposed that gender proves to be performative through her notable work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. When one performs femininity or masculinity, one then creates and defines their own gender through their performativity, which may not conform to normativity. The concept of gender performativity as established by Butler was applied in this study as a tool to analyze *The Danish Girl* by David Ebershoff, a novel based on a true story of the first transgendered person, was chosen for this study. Einar Wegener, later known as Lili Elbe, was the first person who underwent sex reassignment surgery from male to female in 1931. In that period, one had to be either male or female in relation to their biological variables. A person who was different from norms, including gender non-binary and LGBTQ people, would be considered unacceptable and alienated. The novel demonstrated that gender is performative and it is a series of behaviors and performances.

Keyword : Judith Butler, Gender Performativity, The Danish Girl

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	D
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	E
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	F
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS.....	14
1. Performing Gender.....	15
2. The Mask and Masquerade.....	21
3. Performing The Danish Girl.....	25
CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION.....	31
REFERENCES.....	34
VITA.....	36

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
(Shakespeare, 1994, 289)

Gender is currently one of the most controversial issues in our society. The notion of gender was once specified as being based on a binary system of male and female sexes. Heteronormativity and patriarchy play a crucial part in attributing gender identities, gender roles, and the concepts of femininity and masculinity. Men were therefore expected to only perform masculinity while women were expected to only perform femininity. However, it is presently acknowledged that biological variables do not confine people with their assigned sex, especially for non-binary genders who do not conform to traditional gender norms. As “one man in his time plays many parts” (Shakespeare, 1994), one therefore performs either masculinity or femininity which may not conform with normativity as well as one possibly performs both masculinity and femininity. Therefore, gender has become illusory because it is difficult to define.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were saw a significant period of changes under the chaos caused by the prosperity of industrialization, the catastrophe of World War I, and The Great Depression, a global economic depression, and then the rise of Nazism and fascism which resulted in World War II. At the same time, new scientific ideas and modern philosophy, such as Friedrich Nietzsche's proclamation that

God is dead, Sigmund Freud's concept of the unconscious, and Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, had an influence on the society's viewpoint. Gender perspectives in that period, especially the roles of women, began to change as they were moved into jobs such as police officers, farm laborers, and bank tellers due to the need for huge numbers of laborers as a result of World War I and its aftermath. However, demobilized soldiers requested their jobs back after the war's end. Women were therefore forced to come out of the workplace and gain temporary jobs, excluding conventional women's work such as nurses and salesladies. Due to the spread of modern consumer society and culture, the changes in women's lives were particularly highlighted by the arrival of the "modern girl", an independent female who could vote and worked behind the counters and shopped in department stores, spent her salary on the latest fashions, applied makeup and smoked cigarettes, and used her sex appeal to charm any number of young men, becoming a dominant global figure in the 1920s. Social equality was increasingly promoted as women had the right to vote immediately after the war, but women's rights movement faded in the 1920s and 1930s due to the Great Depression which caused mass unemployment and the rise of Nazism which in turn embodied the concept of racial purity (McKay et al., 2014, 840-887). Eugenics, in the meantime, "was popular throughout the Western world in the 1920s and 1930s and the Nazis pushed these ideas to the extreme" (McKay et al., 2014, 899). According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, eugenics refers to "The science of improving a population by controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics." By adopting a radical view of eugenics, the Nazis built up the idea of racial purity which led to the Holocaust as the Nazis persecuted a number of supposedly undesirable groups headed by the Jews, and "homosexuals also faced ostracism and brutal repression." Also, the Nazis stated

“strictly defined gender roles” for men and women. For example, women only had responsibility for domesticity (McKay et al., 2014, 913-915). In *50 Key Concepts of Gender Studies*, Pilcher & Whalehan (2004) explained that the interest in sexology (the scientific study of sexual practices, primarily interested in ‘deviance’) and psychoanalysis flourished during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in order to focus on individuals’ sexual desire and satisfaction and policing sexuality and expecting the personality types associated with gender norms. Heterosexuality was clearly related to normality, whereas homosexuality was expressed in terms of deviance.

The concept of gender has been used since the early 1970s as an analytical category to draw a line of separation between biological sex differences and the ways in which they are used to inform behaviors and competencies which were later assigned as masculine or feminine (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). The academic study of gender has been developed by second wave feminism to elaborate a critique of gender inequalities in both personal relationships and in social positioning. Society formerly specified gender based on a binary system which described social characteristics focusing on gender identities and gender roles. The gender-binary system pairs sex and gender within the confines of normative social performance in order to prescribe modes of self-expression ranging from lifestyle choices to occupations as well as to personality traits, private and public behaviors, clothing, sexual orientation, and names and pronouns. Society also attributed the conceptions of femininity and masculinity which were considered acceptable and appropriate for people based on their assigned sex. Femininity refers to the quality of being female or ‘womanly’ while masculinity refers to the quality of being male or ‘manly’. For example, a female was generally expected

to act in typically 'feminine' way: to be polite, accommodating, and nurturing, while a male was generally expected to be strong, brave, and aggressive.

Generally, it is difficult to understand the differences between sex and gender because they are closely related. In *Becoming a Visible Man*, Jamison Green (2004) explains that "sex is a system of classification that divides body types based on presumed reproductive capacity as typically determined by visual examination of the external genitalia" (4). He also defines sex as the physical activity that we engage in. When one was born, one was immediately identified as male or female in relation to one's reproductive organs. Therefore, sex is commonly defined in on the one hand as biological variables such as chromosomes, sex organs, hormones, and other physical features referring to the genetic constitution, external and internal reproductive organs which distinguish as male or female. On the other hand, gender is slightly different from sex. It is nurtured by social and cultural factors which socialize people into either 'masculine' or 'feminine'. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, gender refers to "either of the two sexes (male and female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. The term is also used more broadly to denote a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female." Gender, therefore, is fashioned from the characteristics that a society or culture delineates.

Biological variables do not confine people, especially gender non-binary or gender- fluid and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or LGBTQ people, to traditional gender norms. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, the term 'non-binary' refers to "donating or relating to a gender or sexual identity that is not defined in terms of traditional binary oppositions such as male and female or homosexual and

heterosexual”. Gender nowadays does not only refer to women and men, but also LGBTQ and non-binary genders. For example, QUARTZ Media LLC ("<https://qz.com/>," 2017) wrote a headline “Sweden’s gender-neutral preschools produce kids who are more likely to succeed” through the website <https://qz.com/> and reported that “These are Sweden’s gender-neutral kindergartens... children can dabble in all kinds of activities and are encouraged to explore their full range of emotions. Girls are not expected to suppress anger, and boys are not pressured to swallow their tears. All students are welcome to be as messy or tidy, rowdy, or passive as suits them”. Moreover, the teachers are trained to avoid mentioning sex (regarding the demarcation ‘boys’ and ‘girls’) and instead speaking of people, children, humans and friends. The report said that children who attended one gender-neutral preschool were more likely to play with unfamiliar children of the opposite gender, and less likely to be influenced by culturally-enforced gender stereotypes, compared to children enrolled at other preschools. Tests showed that the children from the gender-neutral school were as likely as other children to group people by gender but did not attach traditional associations to the concepts of “male” or “female” children to the same degree. Furthermore, BBC News ("<http://www.bbc.com/>," 2017) recently stated on the website that an eight-month old Canadian baby has been issued a health card without a gender marker, in what could be the first case in the world. The baby’s parent, a non-binary transgender person, aims to allow the child to discover their own gender. These news reports show that gender is not stable and fixed, but fluid.

Among LGBTQ-themed fiction, *The Danish Girl* by David Ebershoff, a novel published in recent decades based on a true story and memoir of the first transgendered person, has been chosen for this study. The memoir, comprising letters,

diaries, and other accounts was first published in 1933 entitled *Man Into Woman* by Niels Hoyer. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, transgender refers to “a person whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond with their birth sex.” *The Danish Girl* was set in Europe, mainly in Denmark, France, and Germany, during 1925 to 1931. Einar Wegener, the protagonist, is the first person who underwent sex-reassignment surgery from male to female. The procedure took place in Germany in 1931, which was the period that gender was specified by society as based on the binary system. Gender non-binary and LGBTQ people were discriminated against, severely restricted, and alienated. The news of Einar’s surgical and hormonal transformation into the woman known as ‘Lili Elbe’ became a sensation in 1931 when it was covered in the Danish and German presses. A team of doctors completed the surgery in several stages, though Einar/Lili died shortly after surgery to implant ovaries. This paper aims to study how gender performativity has been portrayed in the novel. Judith Butler’s concept of performativity is applied in this study to prove that gender is performative, and it is but a repetition of behaviors and performances. This study also aims to promote gender awareness and encourage people to develop more understanding of gender fluidity and people who are transgender.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In response to sexual and gender fluidity a radically changed use of the formerly derogatory word 'queer' developed in the mid-1980s. This grew out of the continuing development of the Gay Liberation movement in the 1970s, and became widespread in the early 1990s. Influenced by feminism, Queer Theory proliferated in the wake of growing theoretical interest in sexuality. Lois Tyson (2011) states in *Using Critical Theory: How To Read and Write About Literature* that "the term 'queer' is positively used to acknowledge the shared political and social experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and all people who consider themselves other than heterosexual" (172). Tamsin Spargo (2000) states in *Foucault and Queer Theory* that Queer Theory is a diverse range of critical practices and priorities as readings of the representation of same-sex desire in literary texts, films, music, and images as well as analysis of the social and political power relations of sexuality, critiques of the sex-gender system, studies of transsexual and transgender identification, studies of sadomasochism ,and studies of transgressive desires (9). According to *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, "queerness has come to be associated with all non-normative gendered and sexual experience, including bisexuality, polyamory, and transgenderism" (Cuddon, 2014, 580). Queer does not only refer to people who are attracted to others of the same sex, but also refers to a sexuality or a body that does not conform with normativity. It has also been associated with the comprehension of cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery (Jagose, 1996, 3).

Queer theory has moved beyond the politics of identity and refused to be fixed or categorized, echoing Michel Foucault, who stated in *The History of Sexuality* (1978) that categories of gender and sexuality are culturally and historically specific and constructed through particular discourses such as religion, law and medicine, and that gender is therefore unstable and fluid. Moreover, Annamarie Jagose (1996) in *Queer Theory: An Introduction* says that the use of queer theory, as a term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications, describes an initial theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies. She also argues that queer theory, by focusing on mismatches between sex, gender and desire, locates the incoherencies of those three terms which help to stabilize heterosexuality (1-3). Queer theory has further challenged the politics of identity by denying the need for fixed sexual identities, identifying 'queer' as the badge of the sexual radical. Queer is a way of denying the normalcy of heterosexuality by blurring the binary opposition and celebrating gender pluralism (Jagose, 1996, 75).

Judith Butler, a feminist theorist, introduces the idea that gender is performative and gives an explanation of how gender identity is formed through a set of acts in her notable work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (2010). She initially cited Simone de Beauvoir's statement in *The Second Sex* that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (14). Butler additionally explains that women need not to be the cultural construction of the female body, and men need not refer to the male body (142). She therefore indicates that "gender proves to be performative" (34) and also emphasizes that gender is something one does rather than one is. Gender is therefore not stable and fixed, but it has a tendency for fluidity. Butler also states that

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender (33).

In addition, Butler explains that gender is an ongoing and socially constructed process, which proceeds through a continuous series of performative acts. When one performs femininity or masculinity, one then creates and defines one's gender through performativity. To Butler, gender is "a modality of taking on or realizing possibilities, a process of interpreting the body, giving it cultural form"(40). It is a tacit project to renew one's cultural history in one's own terms rather than a radical act of creation. Thus, to choose a gender is to interpret received gender norms and reorganize them.

Butler also states that drag constitutes the way that gender is theatricalized, worn, and expressed. The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the body of the performer and the gender that is being performed. She points out that there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original(127-128). This form of imitation produces the notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself. Drag is not the act of transvestitism which is dressing into the clothes and acting in a manner of the opposite sex, but it is the way that that gender is repurposed and reenacted. Drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself. Drag performance is a way of negotiating one's gender identity. The drag identity is neither masculine nor feminine, but rather a complex collective of characteristics that challenges society's traditional

viewpoint of gender. Drag is another example of performativity emphasizing that gender is unfixed and unstable. Gender performativity is therefore the repetition of acts which are fluid, dependent on something we perform, and perpetually reproducing itself.

Drag performance provides a mask to put on a deceptive appearance and creates anonymity and liberation from restrictive social norms to facilitate expressions that are otherwise suppressed. Cross-dressing constitutes a challenge to a notion of binary and questions the categories of female and male whether they are considered biological or cultural. Joan Riviere explains in *Womanliness as Masquerade* (2010) that women who wish for masculinity may then put on a mask of womanliness as a defense, to prevent anxiety and the retribution feared from men. "Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it". Riviere compares woman subjects to three different sets of homosexuals: (1) gay men who exaggerate their heterosexuality as a 'defense' against their homosexuality, (2) homosexual women who, while taking no interest in other women, wish for 'recognition' of their masculinity from men and claim to be the equals of men, or in other words, to be men themselves, (3) a single gay man who finds sexual satisfaction by disguising himself as his sister, then looking at himself in a mirror. For Riviere, the performance of femininity hides an unconscious masculinity. The masquerading woman appears to be in possession of the phallus through her masculine success, but she is renouncing the wish to appropriate masculinity through active reversal as a display of receptivity and passivity to ward off masculine anxiety. Her mask of womanliness is a representation of her subjection to the male order. Masking is an extension of the notion of a

performance as it evokes an idea of gender identity which is hidden behind the mask or the performance. As Butler terms 'corporeal style' which is consisting of repeated and rehearsed public acts: bodily gestures, movements, and enactments(190), the mask shares elements with these models as it signals transformation not fixity like the performativity. Therefore, Riviere's concept of masquerade could be related to Butler's concept of gender performativity that gender is not fixed, but it is fluid.

In David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*(1929), the main character, Song Liling's sexual actions, imitated those of stereotypically oriental woman who is seen as delicate, passive and submissive. She undoubtedly shows her true feelings as a woman even her assigned sex is male. The story contains a deeper meaning to explicate the transformation of a male figure dressed as a female character to challenge the taboo of sexuality. Clothes are not only perceived as part of an individual but also function as extensions of oneself. Clothes therefore constitute symbolic expression of social attribute. The ambivalence of cross-dressing denotes two levels. One refers to covering up, the other seeking to reveal. Hwang's *M. Butterfly* emphasizes the difficulties of cross-dressing that Song keeps up the disguise and gradually exposes the cross-dressing man as a physical pseudo-woman, which corresponds to the position of Song in the beginning and that of Gallimard in the end. Song masquerades himself as a Chinese opera diva. The gender ambiguity and duality signified the Western stereotype of Oriental women and the issue of gender confusion. With an obvious intention, Song chooses to be a woman who defies the taboo of no homosexuality in China. He also represents rebellion against the Western hegemony, especially its discourse on gender and sexuality. Song denies the established gender role by portraying and arousing gender confusion through a masquerade. The character of Song in *M. Butterfly*

symbolizes that genders are not always truthful representations of their sexual identities. This proves that gender is something performative. Butler also explains that gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. Therefore, David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, seen through Butler's concept of gender performativity as well as Riviere's concept of the masquerade, proves that gender is fluid.

In Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, the idea of gender reassignment emerges through the protagonist's transformation at the age of thirty from a man to a woman. After several days of deep sleep, Orlando later woke up with an absolute sexual transformation from male to female. Orlando's change of sex constitutes a representation of a particular form of transgender. Furthermore, the presence of other types of sex and gender-crossing in *Orlando* mainly focuses on notions of drag to maintain a fluidity of gender which aligned the protagonist more obviously with the transgendered figure. *Orlando* enables a concept of identity over traditional models of sex and gender. In describing Orlando's numerous costume changes, Woolf wrote that "she had, it seems, no difficulty in sustaining the different parts, for her sex changed far more frequently than those who have worn only one set of clothing can conceive"(211). By means of infinite transformation, Orlando passed with equal success as both man and woman, fulfilling a fantasized ideal identity, in which sex is no more than an outfit to inhabit at will. Woolf's representation of gender-crossing suggests an association to Butler's definition of drag that

Drag is not the putting on of a gender that belongs properly to some other group, i.e. an act of expropriation or appropriation that assumes that gender is the

rightful property of sex, that “masculine” belongs to “male” and “feminine” belongs to “female”. There is no “proper” gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than on other, which is in some sense that sex’s cultural property.

In this sense, Orlando sometimes masqueraded as a man, sometimes as a woman, and at other times as a mixture of both. Orlando’s gender-crossing thus demonstrates a transcendence of gender boundaries.

In regard to *The Danish Girl*, Natalia Sisca Dessensia discussed a transsexual process of the main character, Einar Wegener in her research *Gender and Sexual Dilemma as Seen through the Character of Einar Wegener in David Ebershoff’s The Danish Girl*. She points out that Einar’s transsexual and his gender struggle do not conform to sexuality norms. Finally, this process brings about Einar’s decision on transgender operations (Butler, 2010). According to Indah Sari’s research on *Transgender in Tom Hooper’s Movie The Danish Girl*, she explains that Einar’s transgender phenomenon is caused by biological factors and self-perception of gender identity. Sari also indicates that transgender is deviant from general identity and that if transgender people want to be accepted, they should try to “come out”. She supports this statement by stating that she has found several coming out from the main character such as convincing his wife that God has made him to be somebody else which did not conform to gender norms (Hwang, 1989).

From the review of the related studies, it shows that gender performativity is related to gender fluid. Among various previous studies regarding gender performativity and *The Danish Girl*, the study on gender performativity in *The Danish Girl* has not found yet. The researcher therefore proposes to study how Butler’s concept of gender performativity has been portrayed in the novel.



CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS

Butler's concept of gender performativity is applied to prove that gender is performative through the characters: Einar, Greta, and Hans in *The Danish Girl* both the novel and the film adaptation. This chapter is categorized into 3 topics: performing gender, the mask and masquerade of transsexuality, and performing *The Danish Girl*.

1. Performing Gender

As Butler (2010) states that woman need not to be the cultural construction of the female body, and man need not refer to the male body (p. 142), therefore, biological sex does not determine gender. Einar Wegener, the protagonist of *The Danish Girl*, was born with male external genitalia. He was then certified as male immediately after birth because the first criterion of gender assignment is generally biological traits. He was therefore expected to display a muscular body and act in a typically masculine way. However, Einar, as a boy, was described as somebody “with his china-doll face and his pretty feet”(Virginia, 1933, 23). Although Einar’s gender identity was male with regard to social norms, his perception of himself was female because he thought that he was “a little girl born as a boy on the bog”(173). Although Einar became a professor of art at a university in Denmark, he was portrayed as “shy and easily embarrassed” (12) which also implied femininity, while he was supposed to be expected to display masculine traits and present himself as self-confident and brave. Additionally, Einar was described as “an unusual man with his pretty hair and his skin smooth as a teacup, he could be a confusing sight...his lips were pinker than any of the sticks of color”(25). Greta also thought that Einar was an unusual man when his shirt split open, and she saw “a peek of his chest, which was as obscene as the breast of a girl a few days into puberty”(25). His physical appearance did not conform to received norms of masculinity because it suggested femininity, contrary to those norms. Einar’s body breaks the frame of gender norms because Einar carries a feminine body. At the same time, Greta was seen as the tallest woman Einar had ever known. Her head high enough to glance over the half-lace curtains ground-floor residents hung in their street windows. Next to her Einar felt small, as if he were her son, looking up beyond her chin to her

eyes, reaching for a hanging hand(8). On the other hand, Greta saw Einar and thought that “his shoulders were no wider than a boy’s.” So slight a man he was that Greta sometimes felt she could wrap her arms twice around him (p. 21). It seemed that Greta overturned the physical appearance with Einar. As Butler (2000) states that woman need not to be the cultural construction of the female body, and man need not refer to the male body(142), therefore, biological sex does not determine gender.

By following social norms, a person is expected to dress, behave, and present themselves in accordance with heteronormativity. People who are different from the norms would be considered unacceptable and alienated. Einar, as a member of a society, was expected to portray masculinity based on his assigned sex because society had gender role expectations which are described as society’s shared beliefs in applying to individuals on the basis of their socially identified sex in relation to gender stereotype. Individuals are expected to dress and groom in ways that are stereotypical to their assigned sex. Men must wear pants and have short hairstyles and women must wear dress and have long hairstyles. One day, at the age of seven, Einar’s father found that he had dressed himself with “the amber beads twisted around his throat, a yellow deck-scarf on his head like long, beautiful hair”(28). His father was angry because Einar ‘does’ what “Little boys can’t do that!”(28). As a gender stereotype, ‘a long, beautiful hair’ represents a girl or a woman. This scene shows that Einar was performing gender he chose which did not conform gender role expectations.

Einar has a tendency to sexually attract to the same sex. When Einar was young, he had always stayed close to his father. Einar had always wanted his hair as golden curls like his father's hair. "Einar found his father beautiful" (27) and he “wanted his father to love him just the same”(28). Einar also experienced sexual intimacy with

his childhood friend, Hans. Although, he seemed to be socializing with his peer like a typical boy, Einar actually deviated from the prescriptions of sexual orientation, for example Einar and Hans played games like playing tennis as naked. While they played together in grandmother's house, Einar pretended to be a woman who was cooking for Hans. Hans "whispered, his voice hot and creamy on Einar's ear, his fingers with their gnawed-down nails on Einar's neck"(32). Einar then began to imagine being a little girl with Hans as her partner. When they were about to kiss, Einar's father saw them and reacted with aggression because Einar and Hans were labelled as males.

Einar and Hans violated the gender distinctions created by a society and overturned the gender roles. They became closer while floating kites at the age of thirteen. Einar's face was so close to Hans's that Einar could feel Hans's breath. The more they became adolescent, the more they felt intimate with each other. Einar wanted to "lie so close to Hans that their knees would touch, and at that moment Hans seemed open to anything at all"(31). Their relationship stood against the cultural expectations because Einar and Hans, in gender-stereotyped activities as male, were sexually attracted to each other. Einar and Hans were performing gender they chose which did not conform to heteronormativity.

Gender performativity is habitually and continually acted and performed on a daily basis. Gender norms was shattered when Einar began cross-dressing as a model for a portrait on a request by his wife, Greta. Einar was requested to take on woman's shoes and wear the woman's dress. To dress up in a woman's clothes persuaded Einar to "enter a shadowy world of dreams where Anna's dress could belong to anyone, even to him" (12)and Lili began to emerge from thirty-five years of Einar's uncomfortable male existence. Greta then named crossed-dressed Einar as Lili. Although it seemed

that Lili emerged accidentally, she was residing inside Einar. Although the woman portrait was completed, Lili still intentionally appeared. Einar has been thinking about Lili and wanted Lili to emerge again. One day Greta came home and found Lili sitting in the rope-bottom chair and reading book(18-19). Moreover, the next day when Greta returned to the apartment, “she found Lili crocheting a hair net”(53). Therefore, it seemed that was Lili’s regular practice in everyday life.

Cross-dressing then became a routine for Einar, and Lili transformed him into another person at home and in public. Lili attended concerts, went to cafes and worked as a saleslady in a shop with Greta’s encouragement. Greta invited Lili to attend the Artists Ball at Rådhuset, Einar then replied that Lili "wants to go to the ball"(23). Lili’s attending was the first time that Einar sensed how he was turning the world on its head by dressing as Lili as he could eliminate himself by pulling the camisole with the scallop-lace hem over his head(47). At the ball, Lili met Henrik whom Lili thought that “he looks like Einar’s father as a young man”(45). Henrik’s physical appearance reminded Lili to think of Einar’s father because Henrik’s “legs long and swift, his spiraled hair swaying at the tips, the handsome slap of his foot on the cobble eerily similar to the flat punch of Einar’s father’s hand”(51). They start acquainted upon continue talking and Lili felt happy. Henrik kissed Lili after the ball and Lili felt “what surprised her most about a man’s kiss was the scratch of the whiskers, and the dense hot weight of a young man’s arm”(49). Then, Lili was in relationship with Henrik. They met more frequently as they were dating several times. In this sense, two gender roles were played by Einar, as Einar to be a man and as Lili to be a woman. When Einar was becoming Lili, he would dress and acted like a woman.

In addition, *The Danish Girl* highlights gender performativity through personal reflections of the main character by performing double identity. As Butler (2010) states that

“Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative” (p. 34).

Einar seems to have male gender identity because he apparently carries the roles and traits to be demonstrated to the public. He portrayed a decent life since he was an art professor and famous painter, and married to a female artist. Einar believed that he has wrong gender identity which was prescribed as male. Feeling Lili in Einar's body, Einar/Lili was squeezed as well as feeling free when Einar was socializing as Lili. Einar/Lili was in a complicated state of mind that he sometimes thought that Einar and Lili were two separate persons. “It wasn't me,” Einar said. “It was Lili”(98). Having duality inside, Einar experienced unbalanced psychic changes about his gender identity. Einar found Lili inside him. He was also hurt while talking about his shared body. Holding two gender identities in one body, Einar felt that there was something wrong with him. Einar was constricted between fulfilling the gendered role expectations and his desire to become Lili. The complicated stage of his gender “made him feel as if his soul were trapped in a wrought-iron cage: his heart nudging its nose against his ribs, Lili stirring from within, shaking herself awake, rubbing her side against the bars of Einar's body”(72-73). Einar/Lili suffered from this complicated situation. The confusion results from the institutionalized heterosexuality which creates the

naturalized binarism, and “constitutes the limit of gendered possibilities within an oppositional binary gender system”(Ebershoff, 2000, 30). Einar was then required to leave only one stable coherent gender. His transformation led to both identity crisis and deconstructed the gender binarism.

After having double identity as Einar and Lili and performing two gender roles as a man and as a woman, Einar clearly showed his sexual orientation that he chose to be a woman. Resonating Butler’s *Gender Trouble* that gender is “a modality of taking on or realizing possibilities, a process of interpreting the body, giving it cultural form”(40), Einar explored and fulfilled his desire by cross-dressing. Upon the experiences of being Lili, “little Lili had filled up inside Einar, like a hand filling a puppet”(44). Einar performs femininity as Lili and he then creates and defines his gender as female through a continuous series of performative acts.

Gender performativity, an act which has been rehearsed, reproduced, and reenacted, is presented through the transformation from Einar to Lili. As Butler (2000) states that

“As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself. In the place of an original identification which serves as a determining cause, gender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction”(188).

Einar, moreover, tries to enhance his performance as a woman and gain mastery over the gestures. For almost six months, he visited Madame Jasmin-Carton's place, a house of prostitutes, for a peep-show to "examine women, to see how their bodies attached limb to trunk and produced a female"(105). Einar imitated and tried to rehearse the gesture of a woman. Einar was again repetitively acting-out stereotypically feminine gender mannerisms by cross-dressing and performing as Lili. Lili then became the stereotypical female, emphasizing her femininity by wearing dresses, doing her hair, putting on makeup, kissing a man, and engaging in other feminine activities.

2. The Mask and Masquerade

Besides the overarching portrayal of lesbianism throughout literary and artistic works, Greta unconventionally used Einar as her female model in many of her works which eventually influenced his sexual transition. As a hint of gender role-switching between Einar and Greta, Greta was more complex than standard showcases of female-female sex, partly as using Einar as her female model introduces ambiguity into gender identity. Resonating Riviere's "Womanliness as Masquerade" (1929), the concept of masking both reveals and obscures the other underneath, who is freed to explore their inner self in the unconventional environment of the ball. Greta included a black mask, borrowed from costumes worn at the fashionable masked balls she and Lili attended. As Einar's cross-dressing and mask-wearing at the ball, Lili felt "as if she was carrying the greatest secret in the world, she was about to fool all of Copenhagen"(44). This motif functions as a declaration and disguise for alternative gender and sexual identities and practices. Therefore, the ball is an occasion for sociable exploration of gender and sexual identity.

As Lili was used as the model throughout Greta's works, masking is a process used by cross-dressers or transgender people to pass in society or disguise their true sexes to deflect suspicion and avoid punitive societal consequences. The prevalent imagery of a black mask may symbolize Greta's signature in addition to the mask that Einar wore when modeling for Greta's artworks, disguised as a woman in women's clothing. When Greta helped Einar to wear the dress, Einar felt as if she'd caught him "doing something he had promised he would avoid"(10). Einar refused to wear Anna's shoes, but he looked at them and imagined that the shoes might in fact fit his feet. He also "imagined the wrinkled roll of stocking gliding over the white bone of ankle"(9). It is clear that Einar actually feels thrilled to wear feminine clothes, stocking, and shoes. Einar's cross-dressing made him experience a surge of anxiety at first as he had tried to protect himself by putting on a mask as a defense against the judgment of others. At the same time, while Einar crossed dress as Lili, he heard "a distance voice in his head: the soft cry of a scared little girl"(10). In this sense, the ambivalence of cross-dressing therefore denotes both covering up and seeking to reveal. Riviere's concept of masquerade highlights the mechanism of Einar disguising himself under the persona of a woman. Greta supported and helped cultivate this new 'mask' of Einar, especially by finding a willing doctor to guide him through his transition and prevent Einar from committing suicide. At that period, support for a crossdresser/transsexual from a spouse was extremely rare. Greta encouraged Einar to explore his feminine side and proclaimed Lili as her playmate. Einar felt comfortable enough to be who he really was with Greta, as she helped foster his true self into Lili. The mask and the masquerade highlighted the concept and issues of identity, cross-dressing and transsexuality as well as lesbianism. Since the times of carnivals and masquerades, especially during the

eighteenth century, masks cultivated an atmosphere of freedom from sexual, social, and psychological constraints. In this setting, identities were concealed while new ones were created through masks and costumes to escape the realities of society regarding sexual, social, private, and political statuses, developing a liberating ambience.

The motif of a mask is common throughout the narrative of Einar, symbolizing the disguises worn by both lesbians and cross-dressers due to their non-traditional sexuality and the gender norms of a heteronormative, patriarchal society. While Greta asked Einar to wear Anna's dress as he modeled for a portrait, the word "dress" caused his stomach filled with heat, followed by a clot of shame rising in his chest(9). Einar resisted at first but he finally wore the dress. When Greta asked Einar whether he liked the dress and he automatically thought about saying no, but that would have been a lie. "He liked the dress, and he could nearly feel the flesh beneath his skin ripening"(9). This scene shows that Einar put on a mask as a defense to prevent anxiety because the concepts of gender and sexuality during the early twentieth century maintain society's traditional and acceptable idea of sexual desire, heterosexuality.

As a hint of gender role switching between Einar and Greta, Greta was more complex than the standard showcase of female-female sex partly through her use of Einar as her female model, thereby introducing ambiguity into the scenario. Greta often remarked to Einar that he was beautiful. When Greta saw Einar dressing as Lili for attending the ball, Greta said that "you're so beautiful I want to kiss you"(43). Greta was so excited that she took Lili in her arms and waltzed her around the apartment. Moreover, Greta woke up one day and found that Einar came to bed dressed as Lili. Greta saw Lili and wondered "Should she kiss Lili as she might kiss her husband?" (68). Upon the completion of two surgical operations in Dresden, Einar gave Lili the surname

as Elbe. Einar later divorced Greta, but Greta affirmatively accompanied and took care of Lili. It seems that Lili was more attracted to Greta than Einar was. Resonating Riviere's concept, womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it.

Once again echoing Riviere's concept, masking is an extension of the notion of a performance as it evokes an idea of gender identity which is hidden behind the mask or the performance. Greta and Einar first met at the Academy of Art and married in 1904. While Einar specialized in landscape paintings, Greta was successful in fashion magazine illustration. Greta's marriage to Einar was presented as a traditional heterosexual pairing. They lived happily as a marriage couple until Lili appeared when Greta implored Einar to female cross-dressing. After Einar was renamed "Lili" which began the cross-dressing pattern, Einar/Lili made regular public appearances with the success of passing as a woman with his feminine exterior. Lili was a persona who had developed from Einar's childhood onwards. The appearance of Lili in the marriage life of Greta and Einar changed nothing toward their marriage relationship. The more frequently Lili emerged, the more Greta painted the portrait of Lili which brought good reviews and incomes. They then moved to Paris in 1912 to gain more social and artistic freedom, primarily for Greta. Both partners greatly supported one another in their careers, especially by moving to Paris to advance Greta's career in a less repressive environment, both socially and culturally. The popularity of Greta's artworks spread and she gained more and more success with Lili as her model. This became Greta's considerable role: supporting Lili's development, formulating an artistic creation on canvas as well as in the reality of their lives. Living a double-life made Einar ultimately

wanted to make Lili permanent. After consulting numerous doctors and through the help of Greta and a friend, Einar eventually found a doctor in Berlin at Magnus Hirschfield's Institute, who would willingly operate on him. The German surgeon did three effective surgeries in Dresden. However, the fourth surgery implanting female organs for Lili to be a mother ended in her death in 1931.

The transvestite was seen as highly sexualized because it was one of the great mysteries and disguise. The occurrence of the mask in every illustration by Greta relates to this cultural phenomenon of transvestites/cross-dressers at masquerades. Both Greta and Lili often frequented masquerades, particularly when Einar began dressing as Lili because this public space provided a safe haven for gender expression and identity. The use of the mask represents a mediation and exploration of self and others, which Einar was experiencing when he dressed in women's clothing to model for Greta's works. Throughout masquerades, women changed into men, and men into women, as well as people dressing up as devils, demons and animals. Masks and costumes created this realm of ambiguity, not knowing who or what was behind the exterior. However, ambiguity dominates because no genitals was depicted in either illustration, emphasizing a play on gender. Dress and costume spoke symbolically of human beneath in diverse facets and representations.

3. Performing The Danish Girl

Hollywood has made a number of films regarding the topic of non-normative identities, for example *Boys Don't Cry* which is based on a true story of a young transman of Nebraska, Brandon Teena who was beaten, raped and murdered by two men when they discovered that he belonged to the trans community. The film highlights a public awareness about trans phobia and violence against trans people. As

a film adaptation, *The Danish Girl* was screened with the same title in 2015. The film was directed by Tom Hooper, the screenplay by Lucinda Coxon, and starred by Oscar winner Eddie Redmayne and Alicia Vikander. The film explores gender, sexuality, and cultural expectations as well as highlights a portrayal of non-normative identities. If we recall Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity: she asserts that gender is performative and is the repeated stylization of acts in a discourse which precedes the subject. Gender in such a framework is a performance constituting the subject that one is made to be. The film, likewise, elaborates on this idea of gender performativity and how the concepts of masculinity and femininity can be challenged and redefined through the character of Greta and hybridity of the bodies of Einar/Lili. The film depicts how transgender people were medically treated in the modern age. They were submitted to various treatments including radiation exposure to the genital area for long periods of times which could cause cancer, deformities and radiation burns. Through the film, Einar/Lili endures social pressure, emotional and psychological pain.

In the opening scene, set in Copenhagen during the 1920s, normative gendered roles as to what a man looks like must be defined by that which is not feminine. Two characters were presented, Einar was portrayed by Eddie Redmayne and Greta was portrayed by Alicia Vikander. Greta asked Einar, her husband, to dress up in women's clothes as a woman model for a portrait she was going to paint. Einar submitted with embarrassing, then requested that Greta not tell anyone. After some further occasions of Greta helping Einar to dress up in women's clothes, Einar himself begins to visit a theatre backstage to pick up women's clothes and wigs, which we can regard as the starting point of his gender transformation on the way to becoming Lili. Gender performativity is presented through the transformation from Einar to Lili. Lili became

the stereotypical female, emphasizing her femininity by wearing dresses, doing her hair, putting on makeup, kissing a man, and engaging in other feminine activities like joining a party. In this way, the transformation partially eclipses the fact that one is oriented into the masculine/feminine order upon birth and acquires the practices as one grows up. *The Danish Girl* shows how gender could be transient, free flowing and fluid.

The scene in which Einar tries to enhance his performance as a woman and gain mastery over the gestures is captured closely by the camera focusing on Einar's body movements whenever he touches the fabric of his dress or tries to rehearse the gestures of a woman. Einar visited a prostitute house for a peep-show, he seated in a dark room which had two small windows, the shades of them were drawn. As Einar lifted one shade, he saw a corset-wearing girl sitting on a chair and making seductive gestures to arouse the men viewing her through the windows. Einar studied the woman attentively, his body mirroring her movements. The details of the woman are blurred as the camera shifts the focus from the woman to Einar. The blurring of these shots can be seen as suggestive of the blurring of gender roles in society. Each of these transformative activities was elaborately depicted in the film with the camera focusing on the dress, makeup and the stylization of Einar into a pretty woman whom men gazed at. The way that the film showed the transformation of Einar promoted the concept of a passive woman as an object to be looked at. His visit to the prostitute house to learn the seductive moves of the woman reflected that women needed to please men. On the other hand, Greta's character did not reflect any of these tendencies. She was forthright about her needs, commanding, and supervising Einar. While Einar was shy and easily embarrassed and performed femininity as Lili, Greta's character did not show any shyness. Einar and Greta then seemed to overturn their gender roles. The film showed

Greta the power to transform Einar and gave her an authority to mock the stereotypical notions of womanhood by styling the man, Einar, into 'wearing' a kind of femininity which she herself never overtly carries. In France, Greta brought Lili with her to show her paintings to a famous art dealer. They came across with a childhood friend of Einar, Hans, who turned out to have had a sexual relationship with Einar when they were children and Einar wore his grandmother's apron. The way that the film displays the transformation of Einar and the switching of gender roles between Einar and Greta exhibits that gender performativity underlying which Butler states there is no original or primary gender being imitated. As what Butler (2000) states that "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being"(45), the film therefore presented Lili's continuity of imitation by copycatting Greta and mimicking a prostitute. Through Einar's transformation process, it could be indicated that gender is not stable identity, rather one that is constituted over time.

Butler concurs by stating that gender is only performative and is the repeated stylization of acts in a discourse which precedes the subject. She claims that gender in such a framework is a performance in constituting the subject one is made to be. While Butler clarifies on the discursive formation of the gendered subject, the film elaborates on this perspective of performativity and how gendered ideas of the masculine and the feminine can be challenged. She instead focuses on hybridity or ambiguity of the body by drawing up two contrasting sketches of Greta and Lili by focusing on the idea of performativity and creating a space for redefining the idea of the feminine. It also commits to the screen the redundancy of the limited perspectives of gender performance in society and the need to re-order our sexual identities. Apart from cross-dressing and

performing as Lili, Einar also transcended the gender binary through the sex reassignment. He challenged the fixed status of maleness and femaleness constructed by society. Einar's sex reassignment surgery implies the fact that gender is not a fixed category while at the same time, the sex reassignment surgery is an effort in trying to fit the norm that only two sexes exist.

In a comparison between the novel and the film adaptation of *The Danish Girl*, there are slightly differences. First, the lack of an inner monologue in the film adaptation makes a recurring sense of abruptness very apparent to the viewers. In the novel, Einar can express his emotions towards his ever-present scene of femininity directly to the readers, but the actual transition appears rather abrupt in the film adaptation. Although the film adaptation displays Einar's appreciation for cross-dressing, the limited time of screening and the brief narrative might not clearly show the intense desire of Einar to be Lili. Different from the film adaptation, deep desire of Einar to be a female is hinted at from the childhood sequences onwards. Secondly, the name and nationality of Einar's wife which Ebershoff wrote as 'Greta', who in the novel is American-born, screenwriter Coxon restores her Danish-born as 'Gerda'. Thirdly it seems in the film adaptation that Einar's first cross-dressing experience was by way of Greta's requesting him to model for the portrait (min. 11.00). On the other hand, in the novel we find that Einar first cross-dressed when he was 7 years old by dressing himself with "the amber beads twisted around his throat, a yellow deck-scarf on his head like long, beautiful hair"(28).

The story of the Danish painter, Einar Wegener highlights the cultural construction of maleness and femaleness by becoming Lili Elbe. Although the naturalized concept of gender assumes that people can only be male or female in terms

of binary oppositions, the main character holds both of them by cross-dressing and undergoing sex reassignment surgery. Einar demonstrates that body does not determine gender and gender roles. Therefore, concept of gender becomes fluid. As a result, the story of Einar/Lili portrays the state of a nonconformist who is the first person to switch his/her gender.



CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The Danish Girl immerses the readers in the physicality of identity, exploring the complex interplay between embodied gender and expressed gender roles. It is a novel of a fascinating real life story and a transformation story of Einar Wegener into Lili Elbe. Through Einar's life as Lili, the novel rejects simple binaries by giving a character whose gender identity uncertain. Einar, who wants to be transformed into a woman, believes that he is not a man simply desires to turn into a woman, he is a woman born into a man's body that he wishes to be rid of. He is already Lili Elbe but has the body of Einar Wegener so he ultimately decides to transform his sexual appearance. The sexual transformation is a dream come true to Einar. He thinks that he can begin to live his life as he wants to with the actual physical parts as a woman.

Through the novel, Lili's transgender progression from male to female can be seen, including changes to her external appearance and internal revealing of her mind and the reason why Einar decides to choose female gender as Lili instead of his original sex, all of which finally culminate in the sex reassignment surgery. Moreover, how Einar dresses up as a woman seems a kind of a cosplay at that moment, but through continuously and repeatedly performs as Lili, Einar gradually explores his true gender. The eventual appearance of a fully-formed Lili is the result of repeated play. The 'play' here is not only when Einar dresses up as a woman, but also refers to when he wears men's clothes. As Butler says, gender identity is not a prior existence, it is an identification process which develops through repeated performativity. Therefore,

gender identity can be an open and flowing field which is constantly being revised and shaped.

Butler's theory of gender performativity explores how gender is performative through the characters, especially Einar, in David Ebershoff's *The Danish Girl*. All characters mentioned in the discussion show that gender is performative. Einar initially performs masculinity in order to hide his homosexuality, though he finally chooses the female gender after he experiences the process of transition to become a woman as Lili. At first, Einar does not have the courage to reveal his desire because his cultivated belief is that this desire to be a woman is morally wrong. Therefore, Einar abandons his desire as Lili by wearing a mask as a defence against his homosexuality becoming visible. However, Einar gradually reveals Lili through his gender performativity. By cross-dressing and performing 'femininity', Einar explores his real desire as a woman. While tracing the gradual growth of Einar's desire to become Lili as much as fictionalizing the consequences arising out of it, *The Danish Girl* is construing Einar/Lili with a fissured self by performing double identity and sexual transformation at the end.

Experiences of not conforming to the gender binary emerge in disjointed but prominent instances. The novel begins with the moment when Einar experienced the undeniable presence of Lili. The imageries created through how Einar felt "warm and dizzy" or his "feet felt natural arched up" are all comparable with Song's satisfaction of dressing up in women's clothes. Einar/Lili's experiences as moments of revelation presents a heightening tension. Cross-dressing becomes an object of temptation to Einar as it is the bodily sensations and the alternating between shame and pleasure. Einar tries to conceal Lili due to societal pressure, on the other hand, Lili has resentment towards the bodily features that are deemed male. Also, Lili is not satisfied with having the body

that felt like Einar's. There was a distinctive sense of anxiety in relation to how her body felt. Einar's situation was problematic because, firstly, the discomfort with having to embody masculinity and suppress the urge for femininity and secondly, the continuous need to be acknowledged as a woman and the anxiety of not being one.

The characters in *The Danish Girl* demonstrates that genders are not always truthful representations of their sexual identities. *The Danish Girl* by David Ebershoff proves the existence of different forms of gender along with gender binary. Definitions of being male and female are destructed by non-heterosexual character that cross the boundaries of masculinity and femininity as well as holding multiple gender identities in one body. *The Danish Girl* is not just the autobiography of the first trans-person, but it also raises important questions of human subjectivity and encourages people to be aware of the value of human beings, regardless of sex.

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