

Gender Dysphoria in David Ebershoff's

The Danish Girl

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Abstract - Love ponders the cost of mainstream embrace of Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender culture, tolerance, gender dysphoria, gay assimilation and the push for state, community and commercial approval for same sex marriage. Queer history has been remembered with all its tragedy, loneliness, despair, loss and shame. Past can be found in the present days, so to strive for political agency and a progressive future means betraying the historical continuity of negative feelings. One may enter the mainstream on the condition that one break ties with all those who cannot make it, the non-white, the poor, the fat, the unwaged, the diseased and a host of unutterable others. Social negativity clings not only to these figures but also to those who lived before the common era of Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender liberation. For individuals who are contemplated as others with gender trepidation between the divergent of their assigned sex at birth and the identity they desire to construct, indicate emotional desolation and sex. This paper deals with the trauma faced by the people with Gender Dysphoria and the struggle to fit in the society's framework in the novel *The Danish Girl* by David Ebershoff.

Keywords – Unmentionable others, Gender dysphoria, Mainstream, trauma.

Gender dysphoria is a conflict between biological or the gender that is assigned at birth versus the gender that a person identify with later on. It is not really defined by how someone looks like, how their body looks like, it is who they are inside. Gender dysphoria is the perception that there is some distress related to the fact that how a person see themselves is not how the rest of the world see them, which can lead to anxiety and depression. So dysphoria arises

when they understand that they does not match with how the rest of the world see them. Sometimes people do not feel that they are the same gender what their sex at birth was, these people can generally be considered transgender. If they are considering themselves the opposite gender of what they were born just mean they are not meeting society's understanding in norms of what gender is. The mainstream community considers Gender dysphoria a mental disorder, if humanity has hardly less stern and uncompromising divisions transsexual people will endure less agony. Transgender identity is not really like atoms, we do not question the existence of atoms in the world in fact they are kind of fundamental to the way that we look at the world and yet we question the existence and legitimacy of transgender identity every day.

Growing up with different feelings of gender identity they do not know how to explain their feelings or express them out. Their gender creates a big impact on their mental health, and they are in a position to face many problems. They experience deep emotional and psychological problems. It is an issue about the truth and authenticity of one's identity having no room to exist in other people's framework. This paper focuses on one such character with gender trouble , the protagonist of the novel 'Lili Elbe' who was born as Einar Wegener a nineteenth century famous painter. The novel *The Danish Girl* by David Ebershoff describes the first cross-sex and transgender surgery in history, the story of Lili Elbe. Einer realizes without a shadow of doubt that he is a woman inside. He changes his name and undergoes the first gender reassignment surgery. The novel is a fictionalized form of an autobiography, *Man into Woman* which was originally written by Lili Elbe.

One may have their own past incidents that could have a great impact in the future. Some for varying reason or distress in histories of their own are more dissected than others. Due to immense abuse, torments, judgements and rejection from the society and family, people who possess gender non-confirming issues choose to hide who they actually are and what they actually feel. For Einar Wegener, we see the exact reasons, the struggle for identity, and rejection in the society failure of treatments, surgeries, and misunderstanding of the issues by the doctors. Though Einar resist to pose in female dress, he agrees eventually. He feels safe, warm and submerged in the dress, like a little girl.

A strange watery feeling was filling Einar as he stood on the lacquer trunk, the sunlight moving across him, the scent of hearing in the air. The dress was loose everywhere except in the sleeves, and he felt warm and submerged, as if dipping into a summer sea. The fox was chasing the mouse and there was a distant voice in his head the soft cry of a scared little girl. (Ebershoff 11-12)

It describes the significant point of Butler in her essay '*Performative Acts*' as she says that "the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts"(Butler 521). Although he hesitates to wear women clothes he enjoys wearing them and feels content rather being in man's clothes. The scared little girl's voice is the voice of Lili Elbe, the opposite gender of Einar Wegener. The voice of the little child symbolizes Einar's past. When Einar was a little boy, he wears his Grandmother's amber necklace and was caught red-handed by his father who comments on his feminine attitude and to stop doing so. Lacan says that "this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction" (Lacan 503).

Einar has a friend named Hans. They used to play kitchen and Hans will dress Einar in Hans's mother's apron, but unfortunately Einar was again caught in the act by his father which still remains a scar for Einar. These incidents manifest Einar has the urge to become a woman since his childhood. This stage is called as 'Mirror Stage' in Lacan's essay 'Mirror Stage'. This stage is a significant phase in a child's mental development. Einar as a little boy could not distinguish that there was a problem with his gender. He just know that he want to become a woman and unaware of the phase he is going through. He was not seeing other people talking about it around him in books, in magazines and newspapers, so he would not find a way to talk about the problems he think he has with himself. It was confusing for him as a child.

Einar's paintings predominantly consists of landscapes mostly bogs, a very little portrayal of happy trees. The melancholy in the paintings can be interpreted from Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis. An allegory of what is permanently lost, leaving restricted traces that the subject hound. This monotonous paintings of trees represents Lili Elbe's strong desire to become a woman. From a psychoanalytic point of view paintings serve as a tool to bring out the inner desire into another form without being judged by others. They are the door to the unconscious mind. The unconscious desire lying under the conscious mind which is more aware of the social construct and its constant abuse. The doors could be used to hypothesize the woman imprisoned in his or her unconscious mind. The unconscious mind was a warehouse for socially impermissible ideas, want or desires, grief struck memories and throbbing emotions that were thrown or suppressed in mind by the psychological repression.

Greta Wegener's delineation are somewhat problematic. Her paintings habitually illustrated unambiguous sexual scenes of woman with woman. They epitomizes the potentiality of art to arbitrate subconscious memorandum of sexuality and erotism. These hidden exhortations suggest that Great Wegener may herself be a lesbian, as she made use of her husband as a muse to her paintings. This question the hidden mind of Greta, because no wife would want

her husband to be their wife. Even if that happens it is not sure they would be as supportive as Greta was for Einar in the process of his transformation. There is a kind of selfish motive in spite of all the unconditional love. Greta needs Lili's inspiration for painting. Greta is a true artist, she sees the prospective for Lili within Einar even before Einar could know. Greta is the true creator of Lili herself. It is she who starts with the favour to dress him like a woman to complete her canvas. It is she who names Einar Lili.

But Greta had another idea; she had come to see in Einar's eyes a longing he wasn't prepared to admit. One night at the theatre, she gently asked, 'would you like to go as Lili?' She asked because she guessed it was what Einar wanted. He would never confess such a desire, he rarely confessed anything to her, unless she prodded in which case his true feelings would pour out, and she would listen patiently, sinking her chin to her fist (25).

It is Greta who constantly stands with Einar to come out as Lili. She finds Professor Bolk, who can perform the very complicated surgery on Einar, helping to alter the body as he wished for. The sole reason Einar begins to live as Lili without much hesitation and hardship is with the support of Greta. It is a utopia of reinforcement.

Even though there were people to support Einar his journey to live as Lili was long and traumatic. He actually had ovaries inside which were immature and he disclosed mysterious bleeding which no one had knowledge to explain. It was 1930 and not 2019, a surgery without modern equipment's and anaesthetics. Doctors treated Einar like a lunatic person and when he took up surgery to legalize him to more profoundly become Lili, it was intense, extreme and tormenting. But the surgery was literally a medical miracle as Einar accomplishes the physical transformation from man to undergo male to female sex reassignment surgery. Lili's strong desire was to be a mother and not just the appearance of a woman. This desire of Lili is fascinating because Einar and Greta never discussed about having children and extend their family, Greta is of no support for this crucial idea. It is now Lili who suggests for the surgery. Unfortunately the final surgery leads to infection, taking the life of Lili before she could enjoy the phase of motherhood.

When woman in the world were expected to get married and have children which was considered their purpose of life, Greta stands out of the boundary by helping in Einar's transformation into woman. Greta being a liberated, free-spirited and untrammelled woman goes beyond limits to help Einar, Whereas Einar begins to search his need to become a woman. Einar and Greta's life was a failure yet, Einar's transformation from Einar Wegener to Lili Elbe fortified the community of the transgender ever since. What makes Lili Elbe stand out is her courage to emerge from

the body she was trapped in during the early 20th century. The time when there was not even a term 'transgender' was made to use. It is a sublime for the mankind to realize that being a transgender is not a mistake rather a course of nature.

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