



Breaking the Gender Barriers of Femininity and Masculinity: Developing a Trans/ Queer Identity in The Danish Girl through a New Historicist Lens

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Abstract

The Danish Girl, a novel written by American author David Ebershoff, was initially published in 2000 and adapted into an awarding film in 2015 starring Academy Award-winners Eddie Redmayne and Alicia Vikander. *The Danish Girl* is loosely inspired by the true story of the painter Einar Magnus Andreas Wegener who wrote a partial autobiography, *Man Into Woman* in 1933, which focuses on his transition to becoming the first person to receive the gender affirmation surgery. In 2017, *The Danish Girl* was named by the *New York Times* "one of the 25 books that have shaped LGBTQ Literature in the past twenty years" (Ebershoff, "Bio"). This novel has shaped LGBTQ Literature because it gives an identity to the first person that went through a gender affirmation surgery in the 1930s before it was previously thought that Christine Jorgensen was the first person to receive said surgery in 1952. *The Danish Girl* tells the story of Einar Wegener and his wife, Greta, a girl from Pasadena, California, and the journey of Einar discovering that he longs to become a woman, first sparked by being asked by his wife to pose for her in women's stockings and shoes. David Ebershoff is originally from Pasadena, California and uses his extensive knowledge of the Pasadena area to give the character of Greta Wegener a background story founded in America. The real-life wife of Einar, Gerda Wegener, was not from the United States at all; however, she was a woman born and raised in Denmark, where she met Einar Wegener, her then painting professor.

Keywords: The Danish Girl, Autobiography, LGBTQ Literature, Pasadena area, Painting

The Danish Girl, a novel written by American author David Ebershoff, was initially published in 2000 and adapted into an awarding film in 2015 starring Academy Award-winners Eddie Redmayne and Alicia Vikander. *The Danish Girl* is loosely inspired by the true story of the painter Einar Magnus Andreas Wegener who wrote a partial autobiography, *Man Into Woman* in 1933, which focuses on his transition to becoming the first person to receive the gender affirmation surgery. In 2017, *The Danish Girl* was named by the *New York Times* "one of the 25 books that have shaped LGBTQ Literature in the past twenty years" (Ebershoff, "Bio"). This novel has shaped LGBTQ Literature because it gives an identity to the first person that went through a gender affirmation surgery in the 1930s before it was previously thought that Christine Jorgensen was the first person to receive said surgery in 1952. *The Danish Girl* tells the story of Einar Wegener and his wife, Greta, a girl from Pasadena, California, and the journey of Einar discovering that he longs to become a woman, first sparked by being asked by his wife to pose for her in women's stockings and shoes. David Ebershoff is originally from Pasadena, California and uses his extensive knowledge of the Pasadena area to give the character of Greta Wegener a background story founded in America. The real-life wife of Einar, Gerda Wegener, was not from the United States at all; however, she was a woman born and raised in Denmark, where she met Einar Wegener, her then painting professor.

Einar Wegener is a painter by profession and trade, who paints landscapes from his childhood home in Bluetooth, Jutland, a time when he was developing as a person. Einar is described as "...small and not yet thirty-five, painting from memory a winter scene of the Kattegat Sea" (Ebershoff 3). The characterization of Einar being small at the novel's onset makes one believe that he must have been smaller than the men that had been living at the time of the real Einar Wegener that the novel depicts. "...somehow male and female at once" (Ebershoff 7). The quote from the novel's onset is foreshadowing that there will be a blending of gender and sexual orientation when Einar thinks about the voice of a friend, Anna Fonsmark, an opera singer whose voice sounds coppery. He is associating this too with his own identity, queering the lines between male and female at the same time. The character of Einar Wegener is complicated, he is grappling with his personality and is forced to face some unlikely

circumstances as he develops into the person he was always meant to become and that is his female identity, Lili Elbe.

Lili Elbe is the identity that Einar assumes and becomes when he is transitioning from male to female. Lili is described as "...her rural face with the tremblingly bold upper lip and her eyes so brown and watery that Greta couldn't tell whether or not they were on the verge of tears. About Lili's fleshy little nose, which somehow made her look like a girl still growing into a woman's body" (Ebershoff 23). Lili is described early in the novel by Greta as "a girl still growing into a woman's body," and this is true because the persona of Lili has only just started to emerge out into the world. Lili is still learning how to be a woman at this point when Greta describes her. Greta could always tell when Einar would dress as Lili when she wasn't home by the scent of how Lili smelt. Greta describes one day how she knows by "There, on his cheek and in his hair, was the ghost of Lili, the lingering scent of mint and milk" (Ebershoff 22). Lili smells different than Einar does and it is the "scent of mint and milk" that gives the indication that Lili had visited without Greta being present. The apartment of the Widow House is where Lili's identity is first born with Einar posing for Greta in Anna Fonsmark's stockings, shoes, and dress; it is the place of her metaphorical "birth."

Greta Wegener, the wife to Einar and the person that sparks the whole identity of Lili, is a native of Pasadena, California. Greta comes to Denmark with her family as a tribute to her grandmother before World War I. Greta is described, "Her hair was long and yellow, more Danish than his; she would push it behind her ears whenever she wanted to get busy on something new" (Ebershoff 5). Greta is described here with having hair "more Danish than his" and this comes from the fact that the character of Greta's family originated from Denmark. Her grandmother was the first in her family to travel to America to start a new life. Greta's height is described, "Greta was probably the tallest woman he'd 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" (Ebershoff 8). Here Einar is like a child in his height compared to his wife. This was likening him to the height of a child to his wife becomes essential in the transformation from Einar to Lili with Greta as the teacher of what is right and wrong for a woman to do.

The Danish Girl takes place over a span of six years in three different European towns ranging from Denmark to Paris. The first town, Copenhagen, Denmark, is the home of Einar Wegener and his wife Greta where they were both painters by profession in 1925. Copenhagen was the place that Greta first encouraged Einar to pose for her in woman's clothing so she could finish the painting of Anna Fonsmark, who was caught up in rehearsal for the up-coming opera opening *Carmen*. The second town was Paris, France in 1929. Paris was a location for the couple to vacation and to gain a reputation for Greta Wegener as an artist and a place that brought about the popularity of paintings by Greta of Lili Elbe. Paris became an area of finding medical help on what to do with the Lili persona that Einar had developed just four years earlier, after being asked by his wife to pose in women's clothing to finish a painting of Anna Fonsmark. The following year, in Dresden, Germany, held the surgical answers to turning Einar into Lili permanently. A surgical doctor, Alfred Bolk, had found a way to completely transform a man into a woman after studying for a year about removing parts of the male body to replace them with female parts and wanted to perform three surgeries on Einar Wegener. After they returned to Copenhagen, Denmark in 1931 the operations had been completed, but the professor wanted to do one more surgery to implant a set of functioning ovaries into the now body of Lili Elbe.

The characters of Greta, Einar, and Lili are shaped by the early twentieth-century society that surrounds them and changed by the many characters that are within their social circle. Greta, a woman who has power over her agency, has power in her married relationship with Einar and within society, stands by her husband throughout his transition and even encourages him to develop his trans-identity of Lili Elbe. The issues that Greta faces are feminist issues related to always being eclipsed by her husband's work and seen stuck in the shadow that she must overcome. Greta will develop a homosocial attraction to her husband's female identity, Lili, which would lead to a better career as an artist painting her. Einar Wegener, who develops his trans-identity of Lili Elbe, focuses on his same-sex desires of a man's touch starting when he was a young boy in Bluetooth, Jutland all the way up until the time he realizes that he wants to transition into a woman. The issues that Einar faces as a trans-man during the early part of the twentieth century will shed light for generations to come after the 1930s. Lili Elbe, in the latter half of the novel, becomes a reality for Einar with the development of the gender affirmation surgery and with the operation, Lili must overcome the shadow of her form self as a man and learn to live a separate life from Greta. Through a New Historicist lens, I am going to attempt to claim that through this novel is told as historical fiction with some information in facts from newspapers and journals of the time of the real-life people it depicts. The factually based information reshapes the history that it uncovers, giving an identity to a lost pioneer for the trans-movement. With the significant scope of this paper being under the lens of New Historicism, I will also attempt to combine the lenses of Queer Theory and Feminism as they apply to the fictional lives of the characters in the novel.

I must take a step back from the novel to address some definitions and terms I will be using for the rest of my article. Robert Dale Parker, theorist, and professor defines New Historicism as:

New Historicists thus see themselves as recovering history for literary studies... By studying history with the close attention to its multiplicity...rescuing literary study from its tendency to ignore history and rescuing historical study from its tendency to oversimplify, to see things as absolute and definite... (261)

David Ebershoff in his attempt to write this historical fiction used historical facts and figures that were erased from the history books due to the rise of Hitler in Germany during the 1930s and through World War II. Ebershoff is attempting to recover history for literary study with the attention to the multiple things that shaped the identity of the characters that he uncovered, just like what Parker is describing with the "recovering history for literary studies." For Ebershoff, however, he is creating a history loosely founded on fact and opening a door for further literary study.

From the lens of Queer Theory, I am using three small factions within the broader scope to framework the understanding of the character development of Lili: compulsory heterosexuality, homoerotic desire, and homosocial desire. The term compulsory heterosexuality described by Literary Theory Professor, Lois Tyson is "...a heterosexist culture enforces compulsory heterosexuality a term used by Adrienne Rich...to describe the enormous pressure to be heterosexual placed on young people by their families, schools, the church, the medical professions, and all forms of the media" (305). The character of Einar will deal with how his culture enforces compulsory heterosexuality with the interactions with his father and the medical professionals he encounters to come up with a solution to his identity problem, deciding to be Einar or Lili towards the end of the novel. Homoerotic as described by Tyson "denotes erotic (though not necessarily overtly sexual) depictions that imply same-sex attraction or might appeal sexually to a same-sex reader..." (307). This quote will be an important concept to think about while Einar's becoming Lili, some of the things he experiences makes Lili a better woman. Another concept that I am going to be using is homosocial, and the definition comes again from Tyson "The word homosocial denotes same-sex friendship of the kind seen in female- or male-bonding activities" (307). For Einar, there are the scenes when growing up he has some homosocial experiences with his childhood friend Hans Axgil. Lili and Greta will develop a homosocial bond and Lili will be painted by Greta as she understands what it is to be a woman and develops into a woman. To define the terms of transsexual and transgender, I am using a form of the definitions of sex and gender from Ethnomethodologists, Candice West and Don H. Zimmerman. The difference between sex and gender as laid out by West and Zimmerman, "Sex, we told students, was what was ascribed by biology: anatomy, hormones, and physiology. Gender, we said, was an achieved status: that which is constructed through psychological, cultural, and social means" (125). With these definitions, the word transsexual is changing the anatomy, hormones, and psychology; then transgender is constructed through societal means. Lili Elbe will develop both as a transgendered woman first by her social construction under Greta's watch and then extending fully through gender affirmation surgery into a transsexual.

For the feminist theory, I focused on the fictional women in the novel rising in the male-dominated society of the twentieth century. Author Chris Baldick, in his work, writes the definition of feminist criticism as:

A mode of literary and cultural discussion and reassessment inspired by modern feminist thought...an arena of debate about the relations between literature and the socio-cultural subordination borne by women as writers, readers, or fictional characters within a male-dominated social order. (128)

Baldick describes the feminist criticism, but I will use the "relations between literature and the socio-cultural subordination borne by women...or fictional characters within male-dominated social order" piece. The two fictional characters of Greta and Lili will have to emerge as women caught between literary and socio-cultural subordination within the male-dominated societies in the early twentieth century to become their true selves.

An important question to ask is "Why is the life of Lili Elbe so important and for whom does the identity's emergence benefit?" Literary theorist, Hayden White says, "One must try to get behind or beneath the presuppositions which sustain a given type of inquiry and ask the questions that can be begged in its practice in the interest of determining why this type of inquiry has been designed to solve problems it characteristically tries to solve" (1536). The type of inquiry that was made was one about the identity of the first successful gender affirmation surgery and tries to set the record straight by solving the problem of who truly was the first to receive the surgery. David Ebershoff discusses his inquiry into the life of Lili "It described Lili as the first successful recipient of gender affirmation surgery...I had always thought that Christine Jorgensen, a World War II vet from the Bronx, was the first, and so I wondered who this was and why her name was not more widely known..." (Ebershoff, "Reader Guide" 6). For Ebershoff, his inquiry started by the briefest mention of Lili, when he came across an article and thought that it was Christine Jorgensen, who was the first. He also wondered why her name was not so well known.

The reason that this text is essential is that the historical figure it depicts has her personal history wiped away from the historical narrative of the LGBTQ community. The reason for the account being wiped away is

because this person lived in between the time of World War I and World War II, at which point the rise of Fascism and Nazism perpetuated fear of the LGBTQ community members. Movie critic Cael M. Keegan states, "The institute [Magnus Hirschfeld's world-renowned Institute for Sexual Research] treated and politically advocated for high numbers of patients like Lili, estimated minimally at 'dozens' before its destruction by the Third Reich in 1933" (55). Keegan is placing Lili in the historical period of World War II, a time where identities were wiped out of existence. David Ebershoff brings to life the history of Lili Elbe through research into the newspapers and a journal written by Lili during and after her sex reassignment surgery. *The Danish Girl* is about the romance that was missing in the original journal of Lili, and that journal would then be turned into the somewhat autobiography *Man into Woman* by Niels Hoyer. The memoir with its missing romance between Greda Wegener and Einar Wegener inspired David Ebershoff to create the passion in this historical fiction, but he also wanted to show this person's life to the world. Before this book emerged, people thought that Christine Jorgenson in 1945 was the first person to receive the gender affirmation surgery, but it was Lili Elbe in 1931.

In the larger scheme beyond the text of *The Danish Girl*, the life of Lili Elbe was told in a partial autobiography entitled *Man Into Woman*, written by Niels Hoyer and published in 1933. Scholar Pamela Caughie in an article writes about the memoir:

The memoir, *Man into Woman*, published shortly after the last in the series of four surgeries Einar Wegener underwent and after the public disclosure of the sex change, begins in Paris 1930, shortly before Andreas Sparre...departs for Dresden to begin a series of operations that will bring Lili, his feminine persona, to life as Lili Elbe...the narrative based on [Niels Hoyer's] personal knowledge of Einar and his wife, Gerda Wegener...material dictated by Wegener and later Lili Elbe, and Lili's diaries and letters. (508-509)

Here the details of the semi-autobiographical novel, *Man Into Woman*, are released as the mixing of facts from Lili Elbe and a friend. Caughie also gives the number of surgeries that Einar had to endure to transition fully into his female identity, Lili Elbe. The identities of the real people were switched out by themselves to keep the identity a secret. Within the text of the autobiography, Lili tells her story of what life was like transitioning in the early years of the discussion of transgenderism and transsexualism since she is the first person to undergo a successful full-body transition from a male to a female. Though her surgeries were successful in making her a woman, she still died of infection because medical practices to preventing infections did not exist as they do in the Twenty-first century. Transgender Scholar, Patrick Califia, writes about the surgeries Einar underwent as "Wegener, convinced he was two people, a man, and a woman, underwent surgery in 1930 to have his male genitals removed. Synthetic hormones were not available then, and doctors tried to transplant ovaries into his body. Wegener died a year after the surgery and was buried as Lili Elbe" (32). Einar underwent these surgeries during a time when the medical profession did not have the advancement of today, not providing hormones that people who are transitioning have access to in the modern age of medicine. Einar underwent a surgery that provided the medical precedence for people to transition with the surgery of having the ovaries implanted. Lili's story will influence other MTF transsexuals to write autobiographies that will come in the 1950s and onward into the contemporary written sphere of literature, but these are strict Male- to- Female accounts. Sandy Stone, a Transgender scholar, in her chapter of *The Transgender Reader* writes:

All of these authors replicate the stereotypical male account of the constitution of woman: Dress, makeup, and delicate fainting at the sight of blood. Each of these adventurers passes directly from one pole of sexual experience to the other. If there is any intervening space in the continuum of sexuality, it is invisible. (227)

Stone is concerned that many accounts of trans identities come from only male accounts and that there is nothing in between. Stone is commenting on the fact that this is a man's definition of what makes a woman the "dress, makeup, and delicate fainting at the sight of blood," but there is no account of what a woman says constitutes as a true "woman." She is concerned that there is just switching from one side of the sexual continuum with no sexual experience in between, making the transitional experience invisible.

Shifting to the Queer Theory lens on *The Danish Girl*, with the New Historicism lens and the understanding that the novel was loosely based on real people's lives, we can see the emergence of the female identity that was locked inside of Einar, Lili Elbe. Talia Bettcher, a Transgender scholar, writes about understanding transphobia and sexual violence as "On the other hand, visibility puts an MTF at risk of accusation of 'pretending' or 'merely playing at womanhood' and the possibility of transphobic violence... If she is not taken as attractive, she may find that she is represented as a kind of grotesque joke" (207). Bettcher is describing what every trans person experiences when they dress as the opposite sex but gears her discussion towards men dressing as women. There are scenes in *The Danish Girl* where Einar is "pretending" and "merely playing at womanhood" and "a kind of grotesque joke" in the eyes of people he encounters when he is dressed as Lili. There is a scene when

Einar is dressed as Lili before he undergoes the gender affirmation surgery in Dresden "The smaller boy looked up and saw Einar and laughed again...Einar realized the boys were no longer laughing at the fat woman...They were laughing at Einar, whose face was hollow and whose topcoat was flapping against the poles of his legs" (Ebershoff 187). Einar is being made fun of as a "grotesque joke" like Bettcher describes, he was looking at a woman grocery shopping in a department store through a window when the boys see Einar they start to laugh. Einar also seems "grotesque" because he has drastically lost weight and is very skinny, making him further the joke in the eyes of the young boys staring at him as he is dressed as Lili. Transgender scholar, Nikki Sullivan, in her chapter from *The Transgender Studies Reader* writes "her development of "transmogrification," which is usually defined as a strange or grotesque transformation characterized by distortion, exaggeration, and 'unnatural combinations'" (Sullivan 552). Sullivan is discussing the "grotesque transformation" as "distorted, exaggerated, and unnatural combinations" just like Bettcher discusses earlier, but here there is this furthering to understand what exactly about the person who is going through the "transmogrification" is coming off as the "grotesque joke." When Einar goes to see several doctors before finding doctor Bolk, he is told that they need to keep him in a ward or try to give him a lobotomy to "fix" his ailment of thinking he is a man and a woman in the same body. Transgender scholar, Kelley Winters in her article from *Transgender People* writes:

The Gender Identity Disorder diagnosis in the DSM-IV-TR inflicts harm to the gender variant, and especially transsexual, people in the three ways: unfair social stigma, barriers to transition medical care for those who need it, and implicit promotion of gender-reparative psychiatric 'treatment.' (18)

The DSM-IV-TR is short for the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* a book put out by the Psychological Association to diagnose mental disorders in patients. The "Gender Identity Disorder" was part of the old methodology in science to say that someone was mentally ill because he or she thought that he or she had more than one gender identity. Einar was treated as mentally insane by four doctors, creating his social stigma, and was recommended for "gender-reparative psychiatric 'treatment'" when offered by the fourth doctor to remove part of his brain, which might have caused him to be fully dependent on Greta because of the possible loss in brain function. When these doctors tell Einar that he is mental, he starts to have thoughts about ending his life only giving himself a year to find a solution to the Einar/Lili transformation. Talia Bettcher also writes, "For, in addition to pressures to pass, efforts of trans people to claim authenticity in a world that denies it to us may involve the uptake of behavior that is itself oppressive" (209). Einar was dealing with the "pressures to pass" as normal and not mental or like he did not have a problem, but in his to "claim authenticity" he ultimately engaged in "behavior that is itself oppressive." By denying that he was feeling like both Einar and Lili together, he oppressed himself from showing Lili to the world for a while until doctor Bolk came around. New Historicism Theorist, Michel Foucault writes, "Without even having to pronounce the word, modern prudishness was able to ensure that one did not speak of sex, merely through the interplay of prohibitions that referred back to one another: instances of muteness which, by dint of saying nothing, imposed silence. Censorship" (Foucault 301). Here Foucault is describing the discussion of sex, but one could argue that the discussion of sex applies to the discussion of transsexual because no one talked about transsexuals or transitioning in the 1930s. By not discussing sexuality back then, there was this sense that individuals that were trying to transition had to censor themselves to keep from being treated as if they were crazy. Thus, Einar had to censor himself to keep medical authorities from locking him up and determining that he was insane.

Homosexual desire happens in two very distinct parts in the novel, often with effects of compulsory heterosexuality seeping in, as Einar develops into Lili starting in his early childhood with his friend Hans Axgil. David Ebershoff writes:

Hans found Einar's grandmother's apron with the cottongrass strings hanging limply next to the stovepipe. He brought it to Einar and cautiously tied it around his waist. Hans touched the nape of Einar's neck, as if there were a panel of hair he needed to lift aside. 'You never played this game?' Hans whispered, his voice hot and creamy in Einar's ear, his fingers with their gnawed-down nails on Einar's neck. Hans pulled the apron tighter until Einar had to lift his ribs with an astonished, grateful breath, his lungs filling just as Einar's father padded into the kitchen, his eyes wide and his mouth puckered into a large O. Einar felt the apron drop to his feet. 'Leave the boy alone!' His father's walking stick was raised at Hans. (32)

Hans is playing the man and having Einar play the woman wearing "the cottongrass apron." Hans comes up behind Einar and "cautiously tied it around his waist" and "touched the nape of [his] neck" to "lift aside" his hair, almost like a traditional heterosexual romance novel. Heterosexual romance novels where the man comes up behind the woman to move her hair out of the way to kiss her on the neck as she does some form of domestic work in the kitchen. Hans thinks that what he is playing is a "game," but for Einar, it's the beginning of his repressed

transgenderism. He whispered in his ear with his "gnawed- down fingers on his neck." As Hans drew the strings tighter Einar's father walks in, shocked and "raised his cane toward Hans," reinforcing the idea that anything that is not heterosexual is repulsive and should not be happening. Sociologist, Ruth Hubbard writes about the sexual expression "To fulfill the Christian mandate, sexuality must be intended for procreation, and thus all forms of sexual expression and enjoyment other than heterosexuality are invalidated" (65). The idea here is that sexuality is only meant to produce children, thus because two men cannot possibly reproduce, their sexuality is invalid. Einar's father sees the interaction between Hans and Einar as invalidated because they are both boys and the show of homosexuality goes against compulsory heterosexuality. Theorist Eve Sedgwick in the chapter from her book *Between Men*, "...the structure of the continuum of male 'homosocial desire' were tightly, often casually bound up with other more visible changes; that the emerging pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry and hetero- and homosexuality...outside of its relation to women" (2466). Sedgwick is describing the triangle that is presented in a text to avoid speculated homosexuality, the way that it is achieved is by the presence of a woman. "Homosocial desire" is present between Einar and Hans in the "emergence of male friendship" and "outside the relation to women" during the early years of their development. Later in the novel, Einar goes to a viewing house to observe males getting naked at Madame Jasmin-Carton's where he has a sexual encounter with another viewer. David Ebershoff writes:

He stepped toward Einar...The head of his penis was peaking from beyond the foreskin. It smelled salty, and Einar began to think of... Hans lifting [his] imaginary hair to tie the apron. Einar's mouth opened. He could almost taste something bitter and warm, and just Einar's tongue emerged from his mouth and the man took one final step closer, just when Einar knew for sure that Lili was here to stay and very soon Einar would have to disappear. (126-127)

In this scene in the novel, both Einar and the other man were watching a male figure undress in Madame Jasmin-Carton's parlors, and Einar had stripped in his viewing room so the other man could get a view of his petite body. The man came into the room and then this scene began where the homoerotic emerges more prevalently. The man "stepped closer toward Einar... the head of his penis sticking out of the foreskin," clearly Einar is close to giving the man oral sex but is stopped by the Madame for inappropriate behavior in her parlors, enforcing the compulsory heterosexuality mentality. In this scene too, Einar realizes that these actions are not normal for a heterosexual man by thinking "Lili was here to stay and very soon Einar would have to disappear," Einar thinks that he must find a way to transition into Lili.

Moving into the feminist lens of the argument under the scope of New Historicism, feminist theorist Monique Wittig writes, "no biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine" (1907). Wittig is positing that nothing in "biology, psychology, or in economics determine the figure of woman" and that "civilization as a whole...produces this creature...described as feminine." This is something interesting to think about regarding the characters of Lili and Greta because Greta was born biologically a female and Lili will be changed from her male identity into a female; thus, both are shaped into women by the society that birthed them. In keeping in line with this line of thinking feminist theories Simon De Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* writes, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (267) keeping in mind that Lili will not be born a woman, "rather becomes, a woman" physically as well as figuratively earlier in *The Danish Girl*. Greta as well will "become a woman" away from the massive shadow of her painter husband, Einar Wegener.

The making of Lili in the text gets sparked by Greta needing a pair of legs to finish a painting and Ebershoff writes, "'Anna's cancelled again,' Greta said. 'She has an extra rehearsal of Carmen. I need a pair of legs to finish her portrait, or I'll never get it done. And then I thought to myself, yours might do'" (4). This scene sparks the questioning of why Einar needed to do it but also starts the memories of the kitchen scene with Hans again. The fact that Einar is described early on as a small man lends to this discussion of legs when Greta says, "And then I thought to myself, yours might do" setting Einar in the feminine role. A few pages away from this first being asked to wear shoes Einar is asked:

'Does that mean you don't want to try on the dress?' When she said the word 'dress' his stomach filled with heat, followed by a clot of shame rising in his chest. 'No, I don't think so,' Einar said... 'Do you like it?' Greta asked. He 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. (Ebershoff 9)

As Einar is being asked to try on the dress his first reaction is "No, I don't think so," but this is because he has been told from an early age by his father that boys are not supposed to dress in women's attire, so he feels ashamed to think about it. When he is asked about liking it his first thought is to say no, but "that would have been a lie. He

liked the dress, and he could nearly feel the flesh beneath his skin ripening" his skin is ripening with embarrassment for liking the dress and the same is starting to show in this particular scene in front of his wife, even though he is doing this as a favor so she can finish the painting of Anna. When Einar finally gets to wear the dress Ebershoff writes, "Einar could concentrate only on the silk dressing his skin, as if it were a bandage...Even the embarrassment of standing before his wife began to no longer matter...Einar was beginning to enter a shadowy world of dreams where Anna's dress could belong to anyone, even him" (10-11). Einar is thinking about how the dress fits him "as if it were a bandage," nice and fitting, clinging to his flesh like it was meant to be there. Einar's "embarrassment of standing before his wife began to no longer matter" due to his being lost in how the dress clung to his body. Einar while lost in the moment of the dress clinging to him feels as though he is "beginning to enter a shadowy world of dreams where Anna's dress could belong to anyone, even him," is where the idea of him being comfortable in women's clothing begins to come back to him after that first apron scene with Hans in the kitchen of his father's house in Bluetooth, Jutland. De Beauvoir writes speaking to the idea of boys wishing to be girls, "Many boys, frightened by the hard independence they are condemned to, wish they were girls... Certain of them held obstinately to the choice of femininity—one form of orientation toward homosexuality" (271). For Einar, he was hard pressed by his father to not dress like a girl because his father was enforcing the compulsory heterosexuality mentality. When Einar dresses as Lili for Greta to finish her painting, he is making the "choice of femininity—one form of orientation toward homosexuality." The final creation of the beginning identity of Lili is started when Einar is fully dressed in women's attire. Einar is wearing the dress, stockings, and shoes to help Greta finish the painting of Anna and Ebershoff writes, "...Greta said, her voice soft and careful and unfamiliar, 'Why don't we call you Lili?'" (11). Greta creates the first name that the readers of *The Danish Girl* come to know as Einar's female identity by "call you Lili." Greta starts Einar's thinking about cross-dressing like a woman with the posing but further creates an identity that Einar can assume when dressing as a woman. Queer Theorist, Judith Butler writes in *Performative Acts* about conforming to an idea of woman as:

... to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project. (522)

To be Lili, a woman, "is to have become a woman" and conforming "to an historical idea of 'woman,' which for Einar is to dress as a woman in a dress, stockings, and heels. For Einar to dress as a woman is for him to "induce the body to become a cultural sign" like that of a triangle on the stick-figure for the bathroom sign, he is wearing the dress that one would associate with being a female form of dressing. Einar is "obedient to an historical delimited possibility... [something to be] sustained and repeated" throughout the novel creating the identity of Lili.

Within the scope of feminist criticism both female characters, Lili and Greta, create their independence away from Einar and his role in their own lives. Lili first starts gaining her independence by going to a department store without Greta. Ebershoff writes the interaction, "'What did [Lili] do?/' 'She went over to Fonnesbach's and bought herself a few things./ 'All alone?/' Greta said" (23). Greta asked Einar what Lili did without her being home. He responds that she went to Fonnesbach's, a female department store in Denmark. Greta is surprised that she, Lili, went all by herself. Greta could have been worried about her husband's safety because he was dressing as a woman out in public. When Einar first makes a public appearance outside of the Widow House that Greta and he live in is at an artists' ball. The ball is where dressed as Lili he meets another male artist that is a homosexual, Henrick. They start a love affair before Einar knows that Henrick knows that he is a man. Ebershoff writes about their love affair, "And so Lili and Henrick began to meet secretly, at the end of the afternoon, before it was time for Lili to return home for supper" (60). Here Lili as a person developing inside of Einar is gaining her sense of independence away from the place of her metaphorical birth inside the Widow House. Einar starts to develop a separation of identity from Lili and cannot remember what is happening while he is Lili. Ebershoff towards the end of the novel gives the sense that memories that Lili has are not hers:

[Lili] had a memory, although it wasn't her own, of following Hans down a trail, the muck sucking her boots as she stepped. She remembered throwing things stolen from her grandmother's kitchen into the bog and watching them sink forever: a dinner plate, a pewter bowl, an apron with cottongrass strings. (252-253)

Lili has these memories that rush to her from Einar's past, a time when he was a child in Jutland. The memory "although it wasn't her own, of following Hans down the trail, the muck sucking her boots as she stepped" is Lili remembering memories from the personality of Einar and is watching as an observer in this scene. Lili is taking control over Einar's childhood memories giving the appearance that the identity of Lili was always present in Einar, even from his childhood. Sociologist and theorist Anne Fausto-Sterling writes about the phenomena of memory, "...memory is unreliable. It is not an objective arbiter of past truths but rather a reconciler of past and present.

Reconciliation is a lifelong process, and it matters both when in the life cycle a memory is elicited as well as in what culture and historical period" (Fausto-Sterling 54). Fausto- Sterling mentions that "memory is unreliable" and for Lili in the scene of imagining life in Jutland is the part that is unreliable for her. She can't remember it, but the small part of her that is Einar can. The memories of the past and present are reconciled in the form of Lili because she is the present and Einar is the past reconciling in the same body the memories of childhood. Fausto-Sterling says that "Reconciliation is a lifelong process, and it matters both when in the life cycle a memory is elicited as well as in what culture and historical period," for Lili the memories are part of this lifelong process to become who she is at the end of the novel, a woman who remembers her male identity past.

For Greta, her identity separates from being "The painter Einar Wegener's Wife" to just Greta Wegener. Greta gets her first art show after Einar encouraged his art dealer to throw a show for her. After the show ends, Greta gets a newspaper clip in the mail, and the scene is described as:

'Her painting of a young girl named Lili would be frightening if it wasn't so beautiful.' The review said nothing else. It was a cursory as surveys tend to be. Rasmussen had forwarded the clipping to Greta, who read it with a mixture of feeling she couldn't articulate to anyone: to her, even more startling than the praise was the absence of Einar's name. Danish art was summed up, and Einar hovered nowhere. (Ebershoff 56)

The art critic describes Greta's paintings of Lili as "frightening if it wasn't so beautiful," this is because Greta is painting Einar dressed as a woman and goes back to the idea of the "grotesque joke," but is painted beautifully. Greta read the article with " a mixture of feeling she couldn't articulate to anyone" this is because these were the first words of praise about her work and like everyone who receives praise for the first time is caught speechless. The other thing is the separation of identity from her husband's shadow "to her, even more startling than the praise was the absence of Einar's name...Einar hovered nowhere." Greta is now a female artist no longer associated with a male presence; she is herself now an artist of her creation. To further the development of her own identity separate from Einar Ebershoff writes, "Greta would never hand the article to Einar. It was hers; the words of praise were hers. Again, she didn't feel the need to share" (57). Here Greta feels that if she shares the article with Einar, then she will be eclipsed by him again as the center of attention. The comments from the critic "the words of praise were hers" and these words she did not want to see disappear from her work. Greta's art shows start to sell out of all her paintings, creating a successful career as an artist on her own. The scene is, "The paintings—there were only eight—sold in an afternoon, to people whose chauffeurs were waiting in the open doors of Nürnberg convertible limousines on the street below..." (Ebershoff 158). All eight painting of Lili "sold in an afternoon" apparently too rich people who had employees waiting for them outside of the art gallery. Greta had developed her own feminist identity because of the push of her husband into getting an art show.

When Einar dresses more and more as Lili and eventually goes through the surgeries to fully become a woman, a homosocial bond develops between him as Lili and Greta. The first episode in the homosocial development happens at the beginning of the novel, "Greta would be reading the newspaper in the front room, and Lili could nearly feel Greta's eye on her as she applied the powder and the lipstick and filled her camisole with rolled socks" (Ebershoff 58). Greta is observing Lili getting ready as a teacher observes a student practicing a musical instrument or painting an art piece, to Greta Lili is her art piece in actual art and as a young girl developing into a woman as she watches as Lili "applied the powder and the lipstick" and "filled her camisole with rolled socks." This episode of watching as she gets ready is also like a mother watching her daughter get ready and conforming to what a woman is. When Einar goes through the surgeries to become Lili permanently Hans asks Greta, "'Has she ever thought about living on her own?' he asked one day, and Greta, startled, replied, 'What? Without me?'" (Ebershoff 224). Greta sees herself as a friend and responsible for Lili almost like a mother figure for her. Greta is caught off guard by Hans's question about them living apart never thinking about a time when Lili would want to live on her own. Greta thought of letting Lili live on her own, away from her and the life her and Einar once lived, but the thought was unbearable.

Although *The Danish Girl* is written as historical fiction, it depicts the real lives of individuals long since forgotten. Lili Elbe was a forgotten identity in the historical record of the LGBTQIA+ movement, but Ebershoff tried to give some information in his depictions of Lili, Einar, and Greta, creating a new historical record. The new record both saves historical record from being lost and creates a new history for the study of literature under the umbrella of New Historicism with the weaving in of Queer Theory and Feminist Theory tackling the struggle of finding an identity in a world plagued by erasure for LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially those who transform into women. The characters of Einar, Lili, and Greta are shaped and changed by the society that they are living in by external forces that surround them in the form of other characters.

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