

---

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**GENDERED COUPLE AND MOVIE LAW: A TRANSVESTITE READING OF  
*THE DANISH GIRL***

---

**Prof. Charles Joseph**

Assistant Professor and Head  
Post-graduate Department of English  
Teresian College, Mysuru, India

---

**Abstract:**

Traversing through a list of hit movies always show the best ones. Movies represent many characters, societies, people etc., and document it for generations. The *Darstellen* and *Vertreten* of Characters in a movie are structuring a society for its own priority. The Simulation or Simulacra as a result of palimpsest is ideological. Gender is the most fluid/static identity of any living being. People accommodate the social stratagems according to their cultural, ideology, language, population and many more. My paper probes through the identity, a movie constructs or reconstructs through its stories. David Ebershoff's Oscar winning movie *Danish Girl* inspired by a novel written with the same title is the text for our discussion. Does a husband, who is popular, straight, loving, uxorious can have pent up feminine desires? Does the wife accept the husband though he becomes a she? What identity construction/destruction does the society do? Is gender conformity an essential reality? Please read through the paper to

find and savor the greatness of my social observation.

**Keywords:** Movies, Characters, Darstellen, Vertreten, Simulation, Simulacra, Gender, Fluid/Static, Oscar, Gender conformity.

**Introduction:**

Before you begin to construct your ideas through me about a man as hero and a woman as heroine, please take time to read a few lines, I composed marrying Gender difference and creating a unity of their sexes and not their representation.

*The general public the legends create  
The heroes or heroines we do celebrate  
And if you wish to know what constitutes  
a hero or heroine ask someone other  
than me  
For we all look at life one might say  
differently.*

*My heroes by the majority remain as*

RESEARCH ARTICLE

*unsung*

*And my heroes can be ageing, middle  
aged or young*

*My heroes or heroines not known in  
renown*

*They never do become the toast of the  
Town.*

*My heroes or heroines do good deeds  
every day*

*For to help others out they go out of  
their way*

*They do not do it for ego or honour or  
pay*

*Good karma awaits them one can only  
say.*

*My heroes or heroines of themselves  
never boast*

*And to them others never do drink a  
toast*

*For their acts of kindness they only are  
known*

*One might say they are in a class of their  
own.*

It's a simple poem about the differences we have constructed as society but we are unable to unite it despite the differences we develop. Society as it is, has a lot of construction deliberately in this world for many of them. Someone who is lesser performed in terms of gender does not have an identity. India is a republic. We are a country that gives freedom of speech,

expression, identity, worship, propagation of faith. We are also the same country which differentiates because people have different gender orientations. They are termed as Devdutt Patnaik terms it, "miniscule minorities". Doesn't this identity push you to a space much worse than untouchables. We have continuously followed divide and rule in this country, but the division every half a century has been different and varied. Clarity is that we have constructed when are reconstructing a new phase of divide and rule. Please spare your time to read my project on a movie that drew a lot of attention.

**The Danish Girl**

The French inspired Italian movie was the first movie and a novice attempt on Gender change which was precluded from a novel by Daniel Ebershoff of the same title. The post-war novel turned movie was inspired from a book by Lise Elbe called *Man into Woman*.

The film begins in Copenhagen in 1926 nominated and won for 32 awards within one year including Oscar nominations for the year 2015. Einar played by the famous Hollywood actor Eddie Redmayne is a successful artist and virile husband to fellow painter Gerda portrayed by Alicia Vikander. One day, a model is late. Gerda asks Einar to pose, wearing the silk stockings

RESEARCH ARTICLE

and glittery shoes of a dancer. This triggers a gender identity crisis, culminating in Einar becoming Lili. Can slipping on a pair of silk stockings make you transgender? No. The incident is drawn from *Man into Woman*, a memoir compiled from Lili's diaries after her death by an editor, "Niels Hoyer" (really Ernst Ludwig Jacobson). In the memoir, it's presented as part of a chain of events rather than the decisive moment in Einar's transition to Lili – though it was, as in the film, the moment she received her new name.

The story is an inspiration to many who have the gait to follow the identities of the subversive people. Lili Elbe, though is the actual person in the story, its the biography of Einar Wegener, an uxorious husband falls prey to the plight of the wife, who is a battling painter waiting to be recognised and showcase a masterpiece. The painting of a dance girl is an episteme for the springing of the entire cultural genitals going wrong and later the physical sense going awry. Portraits eschewed by Einar and his wife Gerda are similar but the rate of success is more efficient than any other. Characteristics of the other, which he finds it only with his wife makes him love her and her ability to conquest:

*"My life is my wife  
My wife is my life"*.

Though the lines sound more profound and sensible but his attitude changes completely. His attitude of drinking alcohol combed with his wife's hobby to smoke cigarettes in pipes reverses when he finds his attitude being metamorphed into a new gender, though known to him brings the prevalence of it which is it in me or was it in me. Nurture the nature with naïve and it becomes your character. Qualities of his wife is slowly adopted by him as he begins to smoke when he is alone at home. Neither the art of painting nor the situation of greatness conquers his personality. Time and eye rolls for him to know, learn and justify that the night of the event, he is found wearing the satin camisole of his wife, Gerda then smoothens his nipples as though he were a woman and she puts him down while she claims the throne of gender ideology by making him feel different. There is a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in Einar also, but the crime is that it comes out through the painful attitude of his own wife, who is desperate for success and fame. A wife can make you anything is an adage, but the same wife can make you a wife for no husband is the real tragedy of uxoriousness.

Transgender is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity, expression or behaviour does not conform to the sex they were born with. India has a history of people with an

RESEARCH ARTICLE

extensive range of transgender related identities, cultures, and experiences. People with such identities are known in different names namely, Hijras, Aravanis, Kothis, Jogtas/Jogappas, and Shiv-Shakthis. These identities have always been part of the broader Indian culture and were treated with great respect. Ancient myths bestow them with special powers to bring luck and fertility. But, now despite this supposedly sanctioned place in Indian culture transgender face ruthless discrimination and harassment in all respects in contemporary India. The perpetrators of violence and discrimination against transgender mainly are their own family members and to some extent society. There are about 4.9 lakh transgender people in India. Despite progressive laws in the country to prevent such bias they continue to face multiple forms of discrimination. Further, in India there has not been much academic interest in studying, understanding, and researching the transgender issues, legal provisions and the role of State in protecting the rights of transgender from an historical perspective. David Ebershoff's *The Danish Girl* clearly depicts how the protagonist is torn between the two selves-one hopes for the female and the second disgust for the male. This article attempts to trace the problems of transgender through Einar's question of

identity, "That is not who I am. I was meant to be someone else."

In early 1920s Copenhagen, the illustrator and artist Gerda Wegener (Alicia Vikander) asks her husband, Einar Wegener (Eddie Redmayne), to stand in for a female model. The popularity of the portraits leads to Gerda painting her husband in further pictures as a woman. Einar develops an attraction for the female physical appearance and begins living as a woman named Lili Elbe. Ultimately Elbe becomes the first ever recipient of male to female sex reassignment surgery, and Gerda supports her decision, although their marriage becomes strained when Gerda comes to the realization that Lili is no longer the person she married. A childhood friend of Lili, Hans Axgil (Matthias Schoenaerts), shows up and forms a complex love triangle with the couple (Retrieved from TIFF 'The Danish Girl' — A Tale of Two Heroines - Biography.com on March 13, 2016).

Ebershoff's *The Danish Girl* immerses the readers in the physicality of identity, exploring the complex interplay between embodied gender and expressed gender roles. *The Danish Girl* is a novel of a fascinating real life story. It is a transformation story of Einar Wegener into Lili Elbe. Einar who is certified as a boy at the time of his birth

---

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

is expected to display masculine traits. As a male he is expected to have a muscular body and assertive male image. “Physically, Einar was an unusual man...when his shirt would split open further...everyone at the table could get peek of his chest which was as obscene as the breast of a girl a few days into puberty.” (91)

His physical appearance is confusing for a male as it conveys the feminine peculiarities. The doctor to transform Einar finds out that Einar has got underdeveloped ovaries. Through Einar’s life as Lili (or, as we are really brought to understand it over the course of the novel, Lili’s life as Einar), *The Danish Girl* rejects simple binaries, giving a character whose gender identity uncertain. Einar Wegener who wants to be transformed into a woman, believes in the sexual differentiation between man and woman. Einar 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 decides to transform his appearance. When Einar finally begins his transformation to Lili it is a dream come true to him. He can finally begin to live his life as he wants as a woman with the right parts. Gerda finds her husband wanted to ‘kill’ Einar and to become Lili.

Gerda, Einar Wegener’s wife is a daughter of a wealthy ambassador and also a struggling artist. She signs an agreement to paint a portrait of a famous opera singer, named Anna. However, when Anna sends word that she cannot come in to stand for the portrait, in a panic Gerda convinces her husband, Einar, to put on Anna’s dress and pose for her. He obeys her without complaining. Gerda finds it funny to see him standing there holding a bunch of lilies in his hand. As a joke she calls him Lili. Secretly, however, Einar finds that he loves wearing Anna’s dress, and loves even more, the name Lili. The paintings begin to bring recognition to Gerda, which she loves. She insists that Einar continue to dress as Lili. Einar and Gerda visit a doctor to examine mysterious bleeding (caused the changing of hormone, and it comes once a month).

Dr.Hexler explains that Einar has a delusion of being a woman. Einar really realizes that the half of himself is Lili. His imagination about female organs also becomes his will. Gerda supports Lili and sets Einar free to choose his identity. Einar’s confusion about his identity is also hard to be faced. He often tries to be a man, and tries to forget about Lili, but he cannot hide Lili. Finally, he determines to undergo a surgery to give a true identity

---

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

to his form but it ends tragically. Though the surgery was a success his body rejected the foreign body and he succumbed to death. The traditional idea of gender and sexuality involve the idea of 'heteronormativity' which refers to a view of heterosexuality as normalized behaviour in a society. This is characterized by two binary notions of sex or gender as male and female, where heterosexuality is the natural and normal accepted view of sexuality.

According to, Glover and Kapla define gender identity in *Genders*; Gender identity starts with the knowledge and awareness, whether conscious or unconscious, that one belongs to one sex and not to other, though over one develops, gender identity becomes much more complicated so that, for example, one may sense himself as not only a male, but a masculine man of an effeminate man or even as a man who fantasies being a woman (21). Although the efforts by some State governments in terms of protecting the rights of transgender and introducing welfare policies and the Supreme Court of India's recent declaration of transgender as 'socially and economically backward class' with entitlement to reservation in education and job are remarkable steps towards transgender equality and social justice, the transgender continue to face multiple forms of discrimination.

**Biography of David Ebershoff**

David Ebershoff (born 1969) is an American writer, editor, and teacher. His debut novel, *The Danish Girl*, was adapted into an Oscar-winning film starring Academy Award winner Eddie Redmayne and Academy Award winner Alicia Vikander and directed by Academy Award winner Tom Hooper. Ebershoff's most recent novel is the #1 bestseller, *The 19th Wife*, which was made into a television movie that has aired around the globe. His books have been translated into twenty-five languages to critical acclaim. Ebershoff has appeared twice on Out Magazine's annual Out 100 list of influential LGBT people. He teaches in the graduate writing program at Columbia University and worked for many years as an editor at Random House. Originally from California, he lives in New York City (Donna, 2010).

Ebershoff worked at Random House for twenty years, starting as a summer intern and rising to Vice President and Executive Editor. He became known as an editor of prize-winning fiction and nonfiction who could turn literary writers into major bestsellers, including David Mitchell, Gary Shteyngart, Adam Johnson, Billy Collins, and Teju Cole. He edited three Pulitzer Prize winners, one National

---

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Book Award winner, four Booker Prize nominees, and four National Book Critics Circle Award finalists. In 2013 Ebershoff became the first editor to edit the winners of the Pulitzer Prize in fiction and history in the same year ("The Orphan Master's Son" by Adam Johnson for fiction and "Embers of War" by Fredrik Logevall for history). He was formerly the publishing director of Random House's classics imprint, the Modern Library. Ebershoff retired from Random House in November 2015 to focus on his writing. Ebershoff has taught writing at NYU and Princeton, and currently teaches literature in the MFA program at Columbia University (John Burnham, 2000).

Trans cultural awareness is spreading like wildfire across media, including the entertainment landscape. But as everyone from Hollywood directors to television executives races to cash in on the growing interest in the trans community, the results aren't always good. Redmayne's role in "The Danish Girl" represented a tiresome old trope: Casting a cis man in the role of a trans woman as transparent Oscarbait. The tactic does work: Jared Leto won Best Supporting Actor for his role in 2013's "Dallas Buyers Club," and Redmayne clearly hoped to do the same with "The Danish Girl." And it's not just cis men. Hillary Swank also took home

an Oscar for her depiction of Brandon Teena — another real-world person — in 1999's "Boys Don't Cry."

The stream of positive media and awards, such as Robbie Collin's assessment of the film as "beautiful, humane and moving" in the Telegraph, could be viewed as a slap in the face to transgender women, who are tired of seeing themselves represented by cis men. Casting a cis man as a trans woman is akin to casting a white person in a role written for a person of color or a nondisabled person in a disabled role — both of which happen routinely in Hollywood.

Gender, like race and disability, is a lived experience. Daniel Radcliffe can play a wizard in a film, but perhaps he shouldn't play a black wizard. Or a female wizard. Or a disabled wizard. Treating lived experience as something that can be acted undermines minorities who are already struggling for both respect and roles. Their lives are devalued when they're treated as something that a person in a position of power can take on and off like a hat. "Method acting" is often used to excuse these kinds of roles, but it doesn't fly. No research can possibly replace the experience of centuries of oppression.

By casting cis men in trans roles — like Leto as Rayon in "Dallas Buyers

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Club" or Jeffrey Tambor as Maura Pfefferman in "Transparent" — studios, producers and directors engage in active transphobia, dredge up stereotypes about “real women,” and support the notion that trans women are just men in dresses. To say that cis men understand the trans experience is grossly inaccurate and hurtful. The justifications used to support the notion that it’s acceptable to cast cis actors in trans roles are abhorrent and wildly incorrect.

For "Dallas Buyers Club," director Jean-Mark Vallée said he cast Leto because he hadn’t heard of a transgender actor. "The Danish Girl" director, Tom Hooper, echoed a similar sentiment when he acknowledged the shortage of trans actors but said he cast Redmayne because of his “gender fluidity,” implying that a trans actress suited to the job simply didn’t exist. Casting decisions like these deprive talented women like Candis Cayne, Stephanie Michélini, Jamie Clayton, and Michelle Hendley—among many others—of opportunities. Trans actors do exist, and the way to address a shortage is to hire some and create space for them in Hollywood. British actress Rebecca Root appeared in the film, as did Jake Graf, another transgender performer: Hooper was evidently comfortable casting trans people, but only in fleeting roles.

Hollywood has often said that it’s impossible to cast trans people in roles about their own community because scripts typically document transition, so people need to see what trans people look like “pre-hormones.” This is a dangerous reflection of social attitudes about trans people—not every trans woman opts to use hormones, and some use very low doses. More to the point, any trans actress is perfectly capable of modifying her appearance, just as Redmayne did, to reflect what she looked like at varying stages of her evolution. Media storylines created about trans people by cis people usually focus on these types of “transition narratives,” though transition itself is only a small component of most trans lives.

The real-life Lili Elbe lived and worked at a time when transition or ‘transness’ was largely unknown. She was a pioneer for surgical transition, with viable hormones not entering the market until decades later. Had she opted out of surgical transition, she would have been a woman nonetheless because ‘transness’ and gender aren’t about what your body looks like.

*The Danish Girl* reduced Elbe’s life to a series of surgeries, ending in tragedy. At *Vogue*, Nathan Heller focused, as did many cis viewers, on the



RESEARCH ARTICLE

transition from “awkward, goose-necked man to swanlike woman,” lingering over the details of the surgical procedures that ultimately killed Elbe. Tragic trans stories are the norm, and they shouldn’t be. When trans people create their own media, like *Tangerine*, *Her Story*, and *Sens8*, stories can begin to reveal the whole of trans experiences, dating and loving and living while trans. In all three cases, trans characters are played by trans actors telling these stories.

Although cis reviewers raved about the film, the trans community was not enthusiastic. Writer Sally Jane Black noted that *The Danish Girl* relied heavily on cis stereotypes about what it means to be trans, commenting in particular on the exaggerated femininity and the repeated focus on Elbe’s genitals, further feeding cis fascination with trans anatomy. Writing for *Indiewire*, Carol Grant raised the same concerns, focusing in particular on a painful scene in which Elbe mimics the movements of a cisgender stripper “as if learning how to sensually caress the back of your hand against your cheek will teach him how to be a ‘real woman.’” This, too, is a common trend in media, with cis people fixating on the notion that trans women need to perform femininity to be authentic and believable.

For some trans viewers, seeing “The Danish Girl” rake in accolades was a painful reminder that the cis

community prefers nonthreatening narratives of transness rather than being pushed by stories created by and for trans people.

The film proudly took credit for publicizing Elbe’s story and increasing trans awareness, while it silenced a seething trans community that was well aware of Elbe’s existence and complex, multifaceted life. Trans director and commentator Dominick Evans likened the whole ordeal to scraps thrown to a community that is supposed to be pathetically grateful for them.

On Oscar Sunday, some cis viewers didn’t understand why Redmayne “lost,” but the trans community just smiled. Trans women won that day, and hopefully it will be the first of many victories.

**Conclusions and Suggestions:**

After finding forms of transgender and analyzing transgender presents in the movie by using theory of Butler about transgender phenomenon, the writer proposes some conclusions and suggestions to the readers:

1. In Ebershoff’s —*The Danish Girl* movie the writer found several factors that cause transgender which are implicitly delivered by the author in the storyline. There are four factors related to the reason for someone become

RESEARCH ARTICLE

transgender that occur in the movie, they are:

a. Biological sex of transgender people is the factor where the transgender felt they have unbalanced hormone which sometimes resulting pain in his body.

b. Gender role is also the factor where the role of woman interested for Einar and he wants to follow woman's way of life.

c. Gender identity pulls transgender fantasies being a woman.

d. A job can also be the factor of being transgender. Einar realized that he was a woman after be the model for his wife painting. It proves that even from the jobs, such as model, work in a salon, or etc., people can change their minds.

2. In Hooper's —*The Danish Girl* movie the writer found four stages of transgender transition which are implicitly delivered by the author in the storyline.

There are four stages for someone become transgender that occur in the movie, they are:

e. Evolution. In this stage, someone feel their identity has changed and they seek for new identity that will satisfy them such as when they are ordered to wear woman's dress, they feel comfortable. They also interested to always do woman's activity. It related to the feelings of oneself when they fantasy

being a woman and their perfect desires to be transgender.

f. Revolution. It is a proof that they have deviance from their general identity as a man. They started to wear women dress, doing make-up, and do certain activity that woman always do

g. Involution. This stage called reinforcing social identity or coming out. When transgender wants to be accepted, they try to coming out. In this movie, the writer has found several coming out from the main character such as convincing his wife that God has made him to be somebody else.

h. Resolution. The last stage is the revealing their identity to the public. Reviewing again social identity can be described as the resolution of transgender after several stages they have faced. If the response is good, transgender people will proudly do their wants such as join certain communities of the same-sex, or even do sex-reassignment surgery. A transgender end of journey of seeking identity depends on how society responds their act. If the responds were bad, some of them tried to suicide or isolated themselves.

However, the good responds of their coming out will support their desire to do sex-reassignment surgery. In the end, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of transgender in the movie is the reflection of the social

RESEARCH ARTICLE

environment of David Ebershoff as the author of the story. Transgender is social phenomenon that existed since many years ago and people mark transgender in LGBT studies. However, not all people received the act, but still some people respect them. As one of LGBT supporter who noticed phenomenon of transgender in his social environment, Ebershoff observed transgender people and presented it through his story in movie.

B. Suggestions

1. For the next researchers, the writer suggests them to learn more about transgender in order to do more specific research about transgender.

2. For the readers, the writer suggests to find and to know more about transgender because it has been a part of social phenomenon that occurs around us.

3. The writer believes that the movie can be explored deeper. Moreover - *The Danish Girl* is a great movie containing many aspects that can be analyzed from various points of view.

The character has met morphed from a non-dependent gender to an independent and dependent gender. The choice of ideas, positions reflexes social segregation have made them to choose the poignancy of uxorious husband to a receiving wife whose gentleness is within him. The personality and the

changing needs of the society tests the potential future of the character. Being innocent of the act and duration is a ceremonious indication to several socialistic and political scenario. The Protagonist's effeminate features are hidden into one's untapped self; a reading also makes it possible, because it was a result of loneliness motherlessness and a huge gamut of personal and untold sufferings. The infringements of masculinity and femininity have difference in the movie with reference to its portrayal and practice. Getting into the garb of another stream, beam, occasion for a vocation breaks the tendency into shambles of race and culture but breaking barriers into the potential for self-satisfaction is a currency of one's genitalization. Formulation of opinion is not in terms of disguise or cross-dressing but habituation and servile introduction to the regimented framework. Primary landscapes of gender pervade into a picture of sophistication and estimation. Characters and plot generates no catharsis, but gendered feeling in an engendered society develops presents the round feature of a catharsis.

The painters of signs are the emolument for every discarded vapor but effimation in the presence of social representation is a favour for one's old and periodical self. Characters in the

---

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

movie depict a social sphere which is continuously changing but reflecting on the social and political strata of the society. Sociological superficiality has announced the streams of segregation into the play. The action reminds me of the moving ideas expressed by Jacques Derrida in his essay 'Structure, sign and Play in the discourse of human sciences'. The rapture of the word, differentiates itself within the meaning and the word. Context of the gender have been rejuvenating at every form but the absence of it at every notion is a social form in itself. Reflecting oneself to be a part of the other is a matter of social acceptance. Einar becoming Lil or Lil coming and staying struggling inside

Einar is a matter of social deliberation. Society reduces the space of everyone but gender increases and the proportion of increase cause trouble and the trouble tolerated over a period of time makes you transfer.

**References:**

- Cooper, Tom, director. *The Danish Girl*: Focus Features, 2015.
- Smith, S.E. *Why the Danish Girl's Oscar loss is a satisfying win for trans Women*. Yes!Magazine. March 12, 2016.