

CHAPTER II

AUTHOR AND HIS WORK

This chapter will discuss the author of the object study which is *The Danish Girl* novel. It will also cover facts which become his motives to create this novel. Beside the novel author, this chapter will also cover the synopsis of the story.

2.1 The Author and His Work

David Ebershoff is currently a New Yorker who was born in Pasadena, California in 1969¹. He has written several books such as *Pasadena* and *The 19th Wife*. One of his notable works is *The Danish Girl* (2000) that is adapted into a movie directed by Tom Hooper. He won several awards for his works including the Rosenthal Foundation award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Lambda Literary Award, and his fiction has also been translated into more than ten different languages to critical acclaim². In his personal website, www.ebershoff.com, it is stated that *The Danish Girl* movie adapted from his novel under the similar title was nominated for a number of movie awards which are Academy Awards, Golden Globe, Actor Guild Awards, and BAFTAs. In addition, Ebershoff, who is also a teacher in the graduate writing program at Columbia University, also edited more than twenty *New York*

¹ <http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-fiction/744-19th-wife-ebershoff?start=1> (accessed in May, 4th 2016)

² https://www.bookbrowse.com/biographies/index.cfm/author_number/1601/david-ebershoff (accessed in May, 4th 2016)

Times bestsellers and three Pulitzer Prize winners and a winner of the National Book Award³.

In 2017, *The Danish Girl* is named as one of 25 books that are in the form of LGBTQ literature over the past 20 years. Besides several novels, Ebershoff also writes short stories. His short story collection entitled *The Rose City* won the Ferro-Grumley Award for its awesomeness in LGBT fiction. It also becomes one of the finalists of the Lambda Literary Award. As an LGBT person, Ebershoff has been an important person who is active in literary world. *Out Magazine* has named Ebershoff twice as one of 100 most influential LGBT people.

In an interview on *Signature-reads.com*, David Ebershoff reveals some points in regard to the background of writing this work. Unlike Christine Jorgensen who was known as the first person to have a gender reassignment surgery, the story of Lili Elbe was less known⁴. Ebershoff wondered why Lili Elbe was less popular, so he started to conduct a research about Lili Elbe. Ebershoff feels interested to know more about the story of Lili Elbe since it involves arts, artists, and marriage.

The reason why Lili Elbe was not so famous has to do with time and place issues. The story of Lili Elbe took place when the world was busy with the World War. It causes her story kept buried under the circumstance of the WW. Besides, Lili's surgery took place in Dresden, Germany, where the clinic she had the surgery had

³ <http://www.ebershoff.com/about/bio/> (accessed in May, 4th 2016)

⁴ <http://www.signature-reads.com/2015/11/the-heart-the-danish-girl-a-conversation-david-ebershoff/> (accessed in October, 18th 2016)

completely gone due to the damage caused by the WW. Lots of Lili's medical records are lost. Besides, the story is less popular because of the story itself. It is not a secret that most of the society does not embrace transgender issue even until recent time.

To write the story, Ebershoff carries out some researches, and it begins from *Man into Woman*, a semi-fictional biography taken from Lili's diary that was published in 1933, not long after her death. The diary has helped Ebershoff to depict Lili's life when she lived as Einar. For Ebershoff, Lili Elbe's living time gives him a great challenge because it precedes contemporary transgender rights movements. It is not easy to write *The Danish Girl* because Ebershoff has to present his readers as readable, understandable, and entertaining as possible, but still keep the story on the track based on Lili Elbe's real experience. Thus, he needs to conduct a deep research through at least five libraries in the United States. Besides, Ebershoff also takes advantages from news reports taken from the Danish and European press.

Basically, *The Danish Girl* is written based on facts. Important facts including Lili's dresses, Lili's mysterious bleeding, and Lili's staying in Dresden Municipal Women's Clinic are written according to Lili's diary. However, Ebershoff changes the character of Greta whose real name was Gerda due to his certain perspectives. Ebershoff thinks that he cannot really interrupt into Einar and Gerda marriage life. He decides to invent Greta as a new character that is inspired by real Gerda.

Ebershoff pays attention to Lili's originality remembering that she did not have various role models and this made her acted just the way she was instead of imitating other figures. Ebershoff believes that Lili Elbe has been the pioneer of transgender

rights movements. Lili Elbe's courage and self-acceptance deserve to be celebrated as a tremendous effort in seeking human rights. Ebershoff also believes that Lili Elbe deserves to be remembered as one of the first recipients of sex affirmation surgery who struggles to seek human dignity for all transgender people. Ebershoff wants to spread the spirit of Lili Elbe in freeing her identity to every person who has identity crisis issue. These reasons have become Ebershoff's motives to create this beautiful literary work.

2.2 Synopsis of *The Danish Girl*

This story began in 1925 in Copenhagen. Einar Wegener was a painter from Denmark. His specialization was painting landscapes. Einar was married to Greta Wegener who was also a painter with different specialization; portrait painting. One day, Greta and Einar were working in their house. Greta was trying to finish her painting, but she did not manage to finish it soon because Anna, her model, was absent. Thus, she asked Einar to put on Anna's shoes and dress so that she could make visualization. At first, Einar was doubtful at doing it, but Greta kept begging so he finally could not resist. Einar also brought a bouquet of lily. It led an idea for Greta to call him Lili. Einar could feel the dress and he knew that he liked it. It triggered his femininity which he actually had had since he was a child to come out, yet he kept it in secret.

One day, Einar and Greta were about to attend an artist ball, but Einar refused to go. Greta then had an insane idea. She suggested Einar to come as someone else.

She thought about inviting Lili, the girl in Greta's painting who was personified by Einar. Einar thought her idea was crazy, but he would like to try it. Greta chose the dress and shoes for Lili and put make up on her. Lili finally appeared publicly for the first time pretending as Einar's cousin from Jutland. At the ball, Lili met Henrik Sandahl first time. Henrik Sandahl was also a paint artist. Henrik saw Lili as an attractive girl, so he then tried to get closer to Lili. They had a talk and at the end Henrik kissed her lips. This happening triggered Einar to reveal his femininity and made him enjoy appearing as Lili who represented his woman side.

After the artist ball night, Lili, as the transformation of Einar, visited Einar and Greta's house uninvitedly, and she appeared more frequently afterwards. Lili and Henrik went out for a walk several times and they fell in love with one another. On the other hand, Greta's portrait painting with Lili as the model was finally accepted by Greta's art dealer. The art dealer helped her to carry out an exhibition in Paris. Greta saw Paris as a nice city where she expected to develop her carrier. She finally decided to move to Paris with Einar. Therefore, Einar must live separately from Henrik which means that Lili, as the woman figure of Einar, must also separate from her lover.

In 1929, Einar and Greta moved to Paris. Lili had become an inspiration for Greta's painting, and she finally achieved her success through it. Before moving to Paris, Greta asked her art dealer to find Hans Axcil's contact so that she could contact him. Hans Axcil was a Baron. He was an art dealer living in Paris. He was also Einar's friend in the past whose name was familiar for Greta. Greta felt that Einar

might need to see Hans because he meant a lot to Einar since Hans was one of few friends Einar had in the past. In Paris, Hans met Einar once in a while. Meanwhile, he met Lili (woman figure of Einar) more often instead. He walked Lili through Paris streets. Einar thought that Hans did not know if Einar and Lili was the same person. Yet, Hans had actually known it. Once, Lili said to Hans if there might any chance for them to live together, but Hans told her that they could not. Instead, Hans was falling in love with Greta and started to get closer to Greta.

Paris gave Einar as well as Lili as his woman side a different life. Lili had plenty of chances to do many things. She bought dresses and scarves her own, she had coffee in several café, she wandered through Paris' city park, and sometimes she went swimming. When she returned to the apartment, she would sit for Greta. On the other hand, Einar often visited *Salle de Plaisir* or House of Pleasure to watch women strip. He did that not for sexual reason but more for learning how to move like a woman.

Carlisle Waud was Greta's brother. He visited his sister in Paris and met Einar. Greta was frequently writing Carlisle lots of letters, telling him that she was sad because her marriage life was complicated due to Einar's change. Carlisle knew that Greta needed his help. He knew that what made Greta happy was to see Einar and Lili happy. So, Carlisle was always there to help Einar (and Lili). He accompanied Einar to visit some doctors so that those doctors examined Einar. He and Einar wished the doctors could explain Einar's confusion on his gender identity. Sadly, those doctors accused him as a homosexual, as a danger to society, and

committed him schizophrenia. Einar became stressful and depressed because what he wanted was to leave his identity and transform himself as a new identity and live as Lili entirely.

Fortunately, Einar had so many friends who supported him to renew and reconstruct his gender identity. There was Anna Fonsmark who was a caring friend to Greta and Einar. She introduced Professor Bolk to Greta. She told her that Professor Bolk might be able to help Einar to become Lili entirely. Professor Bolk said that he had many experiences in examining people like Einar. He told Greta that he once had a patient who was about to have a sex surgery, yet unfortunately the patient ran away. Professor Bolk told Greta that he could change Einar physically and helped him to become a complete woman through sex surgery.

In 1930, Einar went to Dresden to meet Professor Bolk in his work place. Before going to Municipal Woman's Clinic, Einar visited the Bruhlesche Terrace. He looked at the Elbe and admired its beauty. Eventually, he was inspired by the river to give Lili as his transformation a last name after the river; Lili Elbe.

In the Municipal Woman's Clinic, Professor Bolk performed a surgery to remove Einar's male trait and replace them with female one. It made the male trait in Einar totally disappeared while substituted by female trait. Hence, Einar could perfectly leave his male identity behind, and lived a new life with a new gender identity as Lili Elbe. After the surgery was completed, Lili returned to Copenhagen.

In 1931, Lili, as Einar transformation was back living together with Greta in their old house in Copenhagen. Lili met Henrik unexpectedly and they reunited after

a long separation when Lili (who was previously Einar) moved to Paris. Henrik proposed Lili for marriage and asked her to live with him in New York. Lili indeed wanted to be Henrik's wife but she told him that she needed to take one last surgery in Dresden. Previously, Professor Bolk wrote Lili that he could develop ovarian transplant so that Lili could be a mother of her own children. Lili could not be happier because she thought that Professor Bolk could make the impossible thing happen. Afterwards, Lili told Greta that they were not supposed to live together anymore because she would move to New York and get married to Henrik after performing the surgery.

Lili returned to Dresden to have the last surgery. She asked Greta if she would go with her, but Greta refused because she thought the surgery was too dangerous for Lili. While Lili was in Dresden, Hans proposed Greta and asked her to live with him in California, and found out if they could marry there. Before they left Denmark, they visited Jutland where Einar lived his childhood.

In Dresden, Lili was accompanied by Carlisle during the surgery process. Unfortunately, something fatal happened with Lili's body. The surgery was actually done well, yet Professor Bolk told Carlisle that Lili's condition was very bad. Professor Bolk knew, and Carlisle knew as well that Lili could not recover. Carlisle and Anna Fonsmark who came to visit took Lili out for a walk which was actually a forbidden thing. Lili told Carlisle that Professor Bolk might not allow her to go outside if he found out because her body was still weak. However, Carlisle told her that it was okay. He took Lili to Bruhlesche Terrace and let her enjoy the natural

beauty of the Elbe just like what she always did during her stay in Woman's Municipal Clinic. At last, it was the last time Lili could feel the calming atmosphere of the Elbe. The story is over, and it leads readers discover that Lili Elbe could no longer survive.

