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BAD FAITH IN DAVID EBERSHOFF'S *THE DANISH GIRL*

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Abstract

Different people would have different perspectives on the meaning and purpose of life; some are scared to pursue it, while some are keen enough to explore. Anyhow, they all have to be responsible for the decision they choose. *The Danish Girl*, written by David Ebershoff, tells the story of a man and his journey to becoming a woman. As a man who has a feminine tendency, Einar Wegener lives his life as a man in bad faith to avoid unpleasant social interaction. As he gains the consciousness of his life's meaning, he uses his freedom to decide to attempt to be authentic. This research is conducted with a philosophical approach utilizing the existentialism theory of Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre believed that human existence precedes essence, which means human beings are born without any principle. Consequently, they have to find their meaning and purpose in life. The concept of bad faith is used to describe Einar's life as a man. His transition to becoming a woman is analyzed with the concepts of authenticity and freedom. This research found that Einar Wegener's life as a man is a form of bad faith. His authentic self is in the form of a woman named Lili. After containing his feminine side, Einar decided to transform fully into a woman in the act of fulfilling his meaning and purpose in life. Despite his failure at living authentically, he had the full consciousness to understand himself and had attempted to achieve it.

Keywords: existentialism, bad faith, authenticity, freedom

I. INTRODUCTION

There are many beliefs in life regarding the purpose and meaning of one's existence. In the philosophical study, every human being has the freedom to determine the purpose and meaning of their life. For example, some people want to be successful, and some want to be rich or acknowledged. All those goals are a way for someone to validate their existence. According to Sartre (1948: 568), freedom is existence, and in it, existence precedes essence. For him, humans have the freedom to choose among choices in their lives while having to bear the consequences of their decisions. Freedom and the lack of human essence permit people to define their purpose and meaning. Since there is no predetermined purpose set for human beings prior to their birth, Sartre conceptualizes freedom as a tool to have a definition of existence. The choices lead human's life to be authentic, as truly he is, or live in bad faith, where they deceive themselves to be accepted or to avoid uncomfortable circumstances.

Existentialism is a topic that will always be discussed as humanity continues. As every human being grows, humans will have to decide for their own lives. Even when people feel like they have no choice, they have decided to live in that situation. The issue regarding attempts to be authentic or living in bad faith is interesting because as life goes on, different standards have been set by

society to the point where some people might feel impossible to achieve. Trying to fit into the standards is seen as the way to continue life. One of the standards is how men and women should present themselves in public. The standards came from what people see commonly and seen as normal. From an existential point of view, everyone has the freedom to suit themselves to a standard or completely ignore it and present themselves as they like. Such existentialism issue also applies to issues regarding someone's gender.

This research will discuss bad faith and a man's attempt to free himself from living in bad faith found in the novel *The Danish Girl* using Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism theory with existence precedes essence, bad faith, authenticity, and freedom concepts.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Existentialism is a part of philosophy studies that research human existence and its purpose in the world. According to Panza and Gale (2008), existentialism is the philosophy that makes authentically human life possible in a meaningless and absurd world. Thus, the purpose of studies about existentialism is to explain how life is as a human born in an absurd world, where life has no sense, purpose, or explanation.

2.1 Existence precedes Essence

Sartre's central idea of existence is existence precedes essence. Sartre

believed that human was born without a predetermined purpose; therefore, man should find their purpose in life. Consequently, the construction of essence does not suit the image of a human being. To be called an object with essence, the creator of an object should set a specific purpose it should serve. Instead of living to serve the essence or purpose set by society, a human being has to live their own life first and find their purpose in life. In another way, existence precedes essence can be seen as “our actions define us.”

2.1 Freedom

Corresponding with Sartre’s belief that humans were born without essence, he also believed that humans were born free. Along with freedom, human beings have unlimited choices to choose. Although, in line with the freedom to choose between all the possible choices, humans should be ready with the responsibility of their choice.

Freedom is a great tool to fill the emptiness of a man’s essence. Because humans are born without essence, they have to determine the meaning of their existence through their decisions. There are various choices to be taken, including to choose or not to choose. Nevertheless, the impact of the choice taken should be the man’s responsibility.

2.2 Authenticity

Authenticity refers to being who you are and ignoring external aspects that

could affect you. To be authentic is to have the consciousness to embrace the unavoidable and take responsibility for our actions to follow our desire, no matter how bad it is. Being authentic is seen as the ideal state of existence.

2.3 Bad Faith

Bad faith is a term used to illustrate self-deception. Living in bad faith means that the person denies the fundamental nature of human freedom and responsibility. According to Sartre (1969), “I am in bad faith if I ignore either my facticity or I ignore my transcendence.” By living in bad faith, a person avoids limitations in his life and his chance to improve and be a better person. Bad faith is the exact opposite of authenticity. Instead of being authentic, some people choose to live in bad faith because it is easier to be accepted or fulfill our needs, avoid discomforts and avoid difficult life decisions.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

The qualitative method is used to obtain the data. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), qualitative research is descriptive. The data collected is in the form of words. The writer’s research results contain quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the representation. Therefore, the writer uses qualitative research to collect the data quotations to be analyzed and interpreted through this analysis. The problems discussed in this research are analyzed with

a philosophical theory regarding human existence by Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre's belief that humans were born with no essence and full of freedom is the foundation of this research.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This research discusses two issues seen in *The Danish Girl* novel. The first issue is Einar Wegener's life as a man in bad faith, and the second issue is the decisions Einar took in the attempt to free himself from living in bad faith. As a social being, social restrictions might affect how one thinks and behaves, making him unable to be what he wanted to be to avoid unpleasant interactions or conditions. However, in the philosophical study, human beings have the ultimate freedom to determine how their lives will be. The route people took to avoid unpleasant interactions and conditions is called bad faith.

4.1 Decision to Live in Bad Faith

Philosophically, human has the ultimate freedom to shape their own life and image. However, as social beings, social restrictions prevent people from expressing their true selves. For that reason, some people have to live not according to their liking and preference to avoid distress. This phenomenon goes along with Sartre's concept of bad faith, which means self-deception. Sartre stated, "The one whom the lie is told and the one who lies are the same people, which means that I must know in my capacity as

deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one being deceived." (2003) To deceive oneself, a person should know what he wants first, then builds an image in bad faith to be comfortable.

4.1.1 Social Standard of Men's Clothing and Preference

Once a child is born, he would be apart of a community; therefore, as a social being, he must follow society's rules because there are consequences if the rules are broken, whether written or unwritten. The most common consequence of breaking the rule is a judgmental look from other people. To avoid the discomfort of being judged, some people might choose to live in bad faith. According to Sartre (2003), the one who practices bad faith is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth. The one who practices bad faith must have known that the truth is something that people around him will not accept; thus, he lives in bad faith.

Einar Wegener, born as a man, had to live his life according to his birth-assigned gender. During his rough childhood, seeing a despicable image of a man from his father, he started to explore the other side of gender that he never got familiar with before due to her mother's death. The exploration turns into self-familiarization. However, being a member of society, Einar chose to appear how the society expects men would dress; wearing men's clothing, despite acknowledging his style

preference.

Einar, who became a professor at his alma mater, had to dress like a man like how he had been when he was a student. As Greta's, his wife, who was then his student, described him, Einar dressed entirely like a normal man. It can be seen from the quotation below:

Professor Wegener was wearing a brown suit with a white-collar tinged brown. He was carrying a small blank canvas the size of a book. "We're having a supper to celebrate my birthday," Greta said. "I'm going to be eighteen. My twin brother and me." And then, "I was wondering if you'd want to come along? (2015: 17)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Einar was wearing regular men's clothing for teaching. The phrase "brown suit with white collar tinged brown" shows that his fashion style leans toward male clothing. From the beginning, a suit was made intended to be worn by male users. Einar wore male clothing regularly to blend in the society even though he had always been more feminine. Einar, a man with a male body, and Einar, who is feminine and wants to be a woman, is one body. Einar wearing a suit is his way of protecting himself and the truth that can be seen as unpleasant. The phrase "white-collar tinged brown" shows that he chose to wear the shirt so often to make him presentable as a man, according to social

standards.

During their marriage with Greta, both Einar and Greta worked as painters. For a project, Greta asked Einar to wear her model's dress to paint the dress more realistically. Seeing the beautiful dress, Greta asked Einar's opinion of the dress. It can be seen from the quotation below.

Now Einar saw that the door to the pickled-ash wardrobe was open, and hanging inside was Anna's dress. It was white, with drop beads along the knee-hem and the cuff. ... There was something about the dress—about the dull sheen of its silk, about the bib of lace in the bodice, about the hook-buttons on the cuffs, unlatched and split apart like little mouths—that made Einar want to touch it.

"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. (2015: 9)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Einar is fascinated by the dress. Yet, being the man he is, he tried to feel unimpressed with the dress, but he knew that it would be a lie. The dress was made with lace and beads according to Anna's feminine taste, Greta's friend who was supposed to be the model. By liking Anna's dress Einar has shown that he has a similar taste to Anna; a feminine

character in the novel. The sentence “He thought about saying no, but that would have been a lie. He liked the dress” shows that Einar was trying to lie to Greta; however, he realized that it is a lie. Einar’s thought about lying is a form of bad faith. Einar’s liking of the dress is different from the statements that men made when their women asked their opinion about a dress. The phrase “he could nearly feel the flesh beneath his skin ripening” shows the depth of his liking of the feminine dress.

4.1.2 Social Standard of Marriage

While living his life as a man, Einar got into a relationship with a woman named Greta. To be seen as normal, a man should have a relationship with a woman, and so does the other way. According to Sartre (2003), bad faith does not come from outside to human reality. The reality is males are expected to have a relationship with the opposite gender, females because being a heterosexual couple is the standard. Einar deceiving himself into believing his feelings for Greta is romantic is bad faith because he needs to alter himself to fit in reality. Despite the feelings he had for Hans, his male childhood friend, Einar married Greta. It can be seen from the quotation below.

She especially forgave Einar, her first art professor and her second husband. By the spring of 1925 they had been married for more than six years: on certain

mornings it felt to Greta like six weeks; on others, six well-lived lives. (2015: 12)

The quotation above describes Einar’s marriage with Greta from Greta’s point of view. The phrase “her second husband” shows that they both indeed got married. The marriage lasted for six years. On some days, the six years felt so short for Greta as if she only got married for “six weeks.” On the other days, she felt like the marriage was like “six well-lived years,” which means the marriage was good, but her life during the marriage needed to be supported by other people, but she was alone in the marriage. Einar’s absence causes the feeling she had as if she was alone in the marriage because his marriage with Greta is his altered feelings and forced upon marriage, which is bad faith.

During their marriage as a man and woman, Greta supported Einar, who had become fully conscious of his true self, a woman. Greta even occasionally asked Einar to change into Lili to be the model of her painting. Einar’s first time dressing up fully as a woman was when Greta suggested Einar come to a party as a woman. It can be seen from the quotation below:

Just then, something told Greta to cup Einar’s face in her hands. He jumped slightly as her fingers fell on his cheeks, but then he was still. She held her professor’s narrow head, his warm temples

between her palms. Greta continued to hold Einar, and he let her. Then she kissed him, the small canvas tucked between them. It was then that Greta knew Einar Wegener was not only the man she wanted to escort her to her eighteenth birthday party but also the man she would marry. "Aren't you a pretty man," she said. "May I go?" Einar asked, pulling away. "You mean to the party?" "Well, that's not—" "Of course you can go to the party. That's why I asked you." Then, to both their surprise, Einar turned his face to Greta's for a second kiss. (2015: 17)

The quotation above shows Greta's attempt to flirt with Einar became the early stage of their relationship. The sentence "Aren't you a pretty man" refers to the reason for Greta's interest in Einar. Due to her attraction, Greta invited Einar to her birthday party. Greta's attempt to flirt with Einar is shown through the sentence, "Then she kissed him, the small canvas tucked between them. It was then that Greta knew Einar Wegener was not only the man she wanted to escort her to her eighteenth birthday party but also the man she would marry." because, at that time, Greta had already set her mind to be with Einar. The sentence "Then, to both their surprise, Einar turned his face to Greta's for a second kiss" shows Einar's reaction towards Greta's attempt to reach him; he

kissed her back. The phrase "to both their surprise" refers to both of them did not expect that Einar would kiss Greta, which means that Einar moved his body without the intention to flirt back. The habit Einar adopted while living in bad faith as a man created the spontaneous response towards Greta.

4.2 Attempts to Free Himself from Bad Faith

In the philosophical study, humans are born free without essence; therefore, they should find the meaning of existing by using their freedom. According to Sartre (1948), "you are free, therefore choose, that is to say, invent. No rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do: no signs are vouchsafed in this world." As free beings, human should create their definition of themselves because Sartre believed that humans are free and have no guide or instruction to follow when it comes to life. As free as Sartre believed humans are, he also believed that the freedom people have to make decisions comes with responsibility. As Sartre mentioned (1948), "existentialism puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his shoulders." Whether people are going to live authentically or not all depends on the decisions they took. One of the decisions available is to be authentic, to have the consciousness of what a person is and the will to reach that

point. In *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1948), Sartre wrote, “I can neither seek within myself for an authentic impulse to action nor can I expect, from some ethic, formulae that will enable me to act.” The option in life is to find a person’s meaning of living authentically or live according to general norms and regulations.

4.2.1 Decision to Look and Behave more Woman-like

Being served with all the possibilities to choose from in the world, humans can choose between all the possibilities. Einar had taken the chance to transition as a woman. As Sartre said (2003), “anguish before death and resolute decision or flight into unauthenticity cannot be considered as fundamental projects of our being.” To live in bad faith is not the purpose of living from a philosophical point of view. Keep living in bad faith equals always having anguish. Consequently, Einar had slowly taken steps to be more woman-like.

A week after Greta brought Einar as Lili to the Artists Ball, Einar snuck out of the house to meet Henrik, a guy he met at the ball. Suspecting Henrik did not know who Lili was, Lili went out to meet Henrik at a place they promised after they kissed on their first meeting. Therefore, Einar had to dress up as Lili again, but this time, without Greta knowing. It can be seen from the quotation below:

Each night as she dressed, pulling a skirt from the wardrobe, preparing for her assignation, she

would become heavy with guilt. 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. ... She felt sorry about leaving Greta to her newspaper and the cone of light from her reading lamp—but not sorry enough to fail to meet Henrik at the proposed iron streetlamp. (2015: 59)

The quotation above refers to Einar’s own decision to be more woman-like by dressing as a woman. The pronoun “her” indicates that the one who went out to meet Henrik is Einar’s real self, a woman named Lili. The sentence “she applied the powder and the lipstick and filled her camisole with rolled socks” shows that Einar uses makeup to make himself look fair like a woman and uses rolled socks inside his inner clothes to imitate a pair of breasts. Swiencicki (1998) found in his research that feminine men in the twentieth century were rejected because of the “real men do not use cosmetics” culture. The culture has made it uncommon for men to wear make-up, except for stage performances. In a different case, Einar used makeup for a normal occasion; to meet a man he possibly had an interest in. Both of the actions are the attempts

Einar took to look more woman-like.

The phrase “She felt sorry about leaving Greta” and “but not sorry enough to fail to meet Henrik” shows the contradiction of his feeling; he felt bad for leaving Greta because he was Greta’s husband at the time, but he wanted to meet the man he’s interested in. According to Sartre (2003), anguish, abandonment, and responsibility, whether muted or full strength, constitute the quality of our consciousness in so far as this is pure and simple freedom.” The simplicity of freedom is a part of human consciousness, even if it brings anguish, abandonment, and responsibility. Einar’s decision at the end to leave Greta at their house to meet Henrik as a woman is Einar’s decision in his fully conscious state.

Lili had promised Hans to meet him again on an afternoon after meeting him together with Greta. The next day, Greta reminded Einar about the promise, but Einar did not remember anything. She asked Einar to become Lili again to paint her, then Einar showered and prepared his transformation to be painted and for the appointment with Hans. It can be seen in the quotation below.

Now Einar removed his clothes, turning his back to the mirror. In the drawer of the bedstand was a roll of white medical tape and scissors. The tape was gooey and textured like a canvas, and Einar pulled out a length and cut it into five pieces. Each piece he stuck to the edge of the

bedpost. Then, shutting his eyes and feeling himself slide down through the tunnel of his soul, Einar pulled his penis back and taped it up in the blank space just beneath his groin. (2015: 73)

The quotation shows a step of Einar’s preparation to transform into Lili. The sentence “Einar pulled his penis back and taped it up in the blank space just beneath his groin” shows that Einar tried to hide his penis. By making it out of his sight, he feels more like a woman. Despite no one other than him seeing his private area, he still taped his penis back for his satisfaction and self-acknowledgment of himself as a woman.

4.2.1 Gender Confirmation Surgery

Gender confirmation surgery is a medical procedure to help people who feel their gender does not match their birth-assigned gender. The terminology used to refer to sex transition surgery ranges from sex reassignment surgery, gender confirmation surgery, genital reconstruction surgery, gender-affirming surgery, etc. According to Marta R. Bizic and Miroslav L. Djordjevic (2020), gender reassignment surgery (GRS) refers to all surgical procedures that a patient wishes to undergo to become similar to the opposite gender. The procedures in gender reassignment surgery vary depending on the patient’s needs. It can be applied to a male who wants to become a woman and

vice versa. Different communities have their preferred term to use to address gender reassignment surgery.

Being lost in not knowing what is wrong with him, who wanted to be a woman, Einar went to several doctors to find out. Some had diagnosed him as being a pervert or having schizophrenia. One doctor even told him to pick either to become a man or a woman and bring out the unselected gender through lobotomy. Greta finally found Professor Alfred Bolk, a Municipal Women's Clinic doctor who's interested in people like Einar. Einar then decided to go to meet Professor Bolk; it can be seen in the quotation below:

Before Einar left Paris, Carlisle had asked him if he knew what he was getting into. "Do you really know what Bolk wants to do to you?" In fact Einar didn't know the details. He knew Bolk would transform him, but even Einar had a hard time imagining just how. A series of surgeries, he knew. The removal of his sex, which more and more had come to feel parasitically worthless, the color of a wart. (2015: 172-173)

The quotation above shows that Greta had briefly told Einar about Professor Bolk, who can physically turn him into a woman. The phrase "Before Einar left Paris" shows that Einar is meeting with Professor Bolk because he is interested in the procedure to change his gender.

Einar's decision to meet Professor Bolk due to his interest in getting the surgery proves him using his freedom to be authentic. According to Sartre (1948), "those who hide from this total freedom, in a guise of solemnity or with deterministic excuses, I shall call cowards". Sartre addressed people who are afraid to use their freedom as cowardly. Being free beings with unlimited freedom, humans have already been equipped to fight for their existence. If Einar stayed and kept living in bad faith, Sartre would have called him a coward because he wasted freedom's purposefulness. The sentence "The removal of his sex, which more and more had come to feel parasitically worthless, the color of a wart." refers to Einar's feeling about his own genital that he hates because it does not suit his authentic being, Lili. Thus, Professor Bolk's procedure is intended to help Einar feel better about his body.

Upon his arrival, he consulted with Professor Bolk about the procedures and agreed to do so. Einar had to stay for a week before the surgery to gain some weight and strength to avoid infections. One day, Professor Bolk came and said that the procedure is happening. The quotation below shows that the surgery went well.

Only hours before, in the black of morning, at the hands of Professor Alfred Bolk, Einar Wegener had passed from man into woman, two

testicles scooped from the pruned hammock of his scrotum, and now Lili Elbe slipped into unconsciousness for three days and nights. (2015: 200)

The quotation above shows that Einar indeed proceeds with the surgery. The sentence “Einar Wegener had passed from man into a woman” refers to the surgery that has transitioned Einar from man into a woman. Sartre (2003) said that in being born I take a place, but I am responsible for the place which I take.” Being born, humans have facticity where they should accept the fate where they are being placed in this world, but being free beings, they can determine where they are going to go and stay; they can decide their place. Einar was born as a man, but with his consciousness that he is a woman, he can use his freedom to choose to be a woman.

After a series of surgery, Einar wanted to go back to Dresden to get the last surgery; to plant a uterus in Einar’s body. However, Greta was against the idea to plant a uterus because she thinks that it is impossible. Einar insisted on getting the surgery and went alone without Greta’s approval. However, the aftermath of the surgery was bad. It can be seen in the quotation below.

“Only yesterday did he admit that the infection should have cleared up by now.”
 “What can we do?” “I’ve been asking that myself. Bolck says there’s nothing

to do.” “Is she taking anything?” Then in the hall there was a crash of two carts, and Lili couldn’t hear the voices, just Frau Krebs telling a nurse to be more careful. “The transplant isn’t working,” Carlisle said. “He’s going to have to remove the uterus.” (2015: 265)

The quotation above shows the conversation between Carlisle and Anna about Einar’s condition. The sentence “the infection should have cleared up by now” shows that Einar’s body kept having an infection that was not good for him. He needed to be on morphine constantly to settle the pain. The sentence “He’s going to have to remove the uterus” shows that Einar’s infection was caused by his body rejecting the uterus. As Sartre said (1948), “Man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world, he is responsible for everything he does.” The freedom human has that human should use to prove their existence, can be a boomerang when it comes to responsibility. The greater the decision a person makes, the greater responsibility has to be borne by the person. In this case, Einar has decided to get the risky surgery to plant a uterus; then he should be responsible for the risks; the extreme pain and possible risks coming, like mental breakdown or death. Even though his

transformation could not be perfect, or he had to pass away from the infection, at least he had shown that he is a free being that attempted to reach authenticity. According to Sartre (2003: 483), "to be free" does not mean "to obtain what one has wished" but rather "by oneself to determine oneself to wish". In other words, success is not important to freedom." Success does not measure a person's freedom. Instead, just acknowledging what he wants has shown that he is a free being.

V. CONCLUSION

Human existence means more than just existing in the world. From a philosophical point of view, humans were born without essence and had the freedom to find their meaning and purpose in living. The freedom is unlimited; the choices are plentiful. However, some consequences come with all the decisions taken. A person can choose to behave according to the rules; he has the freedom to choose to obey others. The other person chooses to fight because the rules do not suit him; he also has the freedom to choose so. On different paths with different levels of satisfaction, there is one thing in common; the consequences. Whatever path they choose, those people should be willing to take responsibility for what they had chosen. Einar's choices, utilizing his freedom, have slowly made him closer to being a real woman; through surgery. An occasion when Greta wanted to paint a dress with the help of Einar to become a

model has escalated into a dress-up game between the two of them that leads to Einar having a feeling for another man, which requires Einar to dress up as a woman more often, and this time, on his own will as he has the consciousness of what he is and what he wanted to be. In the end, he decided to have the surgery to transform completely into a woman.

At the end of the story, Lili, Einar post-surgery, was in bad condition, but Einar had shown that his existence is meaningful because he had used his freedom to attempt to be authentic. Instead of taking his life for granted, he fought for himself and his right. Through the series of dangerous procedures, he took the chance to finally be comfortable in his skin as a woman inside and outside, although for a short time.

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