

The Danish Girl (2015)

Rated R. Running time: 2 hours.

Our content ratings (1-10); Violence 3; Language 4; Sex /Nudity 7.

Our star rating (1-5):5

(Love) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. 1 Corinthians 13:7-8

This remarkable love story will not be for everybody because one of the lovers is a pioneer transgender person. Based on the lives of artists Lili Elbe and Gerda Wegener, it takes place in Denmark from 1926 through 1931. The film is fascinating in the way it shows the process of the male Einar Wegener (Eddie Redmayne), a landscape artist, evolving into the woman, Lili, he feels himself to be inside, and the impact this has on his/her wife Gerda (Alicia Vikander. Einar has gained a measure of fame from his landscapes, but at their studio he keeps painting over and over the row of five trees jutting into the sky near a coastal inlet. Gerda), a portrait artist, is stymied in her career when an art dealer rejects her paintings, telling her that she has talent but needs to find the right subject.

Although no doubt actually beginning long before, it is Gerda who initiates the visible process of Einar's transformation when, her model not being available, she asks him to slip on some white silk stockings and ballet slippers so she can work on this portion of a large portrait she is painting of a ballerina. He then places over his clothing the dance costume. Both are pleased by the result, and when time comes to attend a ball, it is Gerda who suggests that Einar, preferring to stay home, accompany her dressed as a woman. She helps with

make-up, and with clothing and a wig borrowed from the ballet companies costume collection, Einar becomes Lili, Gerda also coaching him how a woman walks.

At the event, Lili draws a great deal of attention, including that of a young man who approaches her. How all this transpires, leading Einar to actually become a woman is fascinating. His journey takes him to the offices of various doctors, all of whom regard him as a deviant at best and a pervert at worst. During one fruitless consultation he barely escapes from the attendants, carrying a straight jacket, who have been summoned to lock him up.

As Einar lives more and more dressed as Lili, Gerda becomes troubled, uncertain of their relationship, especially when she spies a man kissing the one whom she still considers her husband. Lili, growing more certain that the transformation she feels inwardly must alter their relationship, still loves Gerda, but in a different way. When at last they come upon a physician, Dr. Kurt Warnekros (Sebastian Koch), who agrees that Lili is neither schizophrenic nor a degenerate, the latter feels she has discovered the one who can liberate her from the man's body she was born into but cannot accept. She agrees to submit to two operations, one to remove her male organs, and a second, after she heals from the first, to install a vagina. Thus she becomes the first person to undergo a sex change operation.

During these years of transformation Lili stops painting because she wants to become a new person. Gerda, however, begins to enjoy great success when Lili becomes her sole subject. The dealer and the public become fascinated with her series of portraits, many of them nude, of a femme fatale. At one exhibit a gushing admirer asks if the model is present, to which Gerda replies, "I'm afraid she's not here," despite the fact that Einar, in male clothes, is lurking in the background and enjoying all the hubbub over the works.

Complicating the story is Einar's boyhood friend Hans (Matthias Schoenaerts) whom Gerta contacts, bringing the two together after many years. He becomes not only a staunch supporter of Lili but also would like his relationship with Gerda to evolve beyond just friendship.

The film, directed by Tom Hooper from the literate script by Lucinda Coxon, delves far more into the unfamiliar territory of divergent gender than the recent [Stonewall](#). Eddie Redmayne and Alicia Vikander are outstanding, totally convincing in their portrayal of the tormented couple. Not to be lost in the exploration of sexual politics and relationships is the theme of devoted love. Although the apostle Paul was writing about agape and not erotic love, his words do apply to this couple striving to cope with their changing relationship, even though he would not have approved of them.

One has to go back to Duncan Tucker's 2005 film [Transamerica](#) to find a film that treats the subject of transgender so sensitively. Those who are quick to condemn people who are "different" need to realize how the Christian Scripture writers never understood how complex both the physical world is, as well as the world of the human psyche. Surely a loving God who always moves beyond boundaries set by humans will understand the torments of a Lili and Gerda Wegener, abused by those filled with hatred borne of their own insecurity. The question is, will we? This film can help us in the quest for a more inclusive, a more loving, society.