

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of The Study

Heroes, who represent the ideals of bravery, generosity, and integrity, have played a significant role in mythology, literature, and society throughout history. Heroes are used as a window through which cultures examine ideals, face difficulties, and establish goals in everything from classical epics to contemporary stories. With a focus on the cultural, psychological, and social aspects of heroes, this study explores their development, importance, and depiction. The characters in classical epics and folklore were superhuman and extraordinary. On the other hand, contemporary works frequently highlight imperfect, likable characters who capture the complexity of the human condition. This combination of outstanding abilities and emotional challenges is best illustrated in literary work such as novel *Percy Jackson & The Olympians* by Rick Riordan, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, and the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling. This hero portrayal is also illustrated in movies such as *Spider-Man*, *Batman*, and *Wonder Woman*.

This change in how characters are portrayed reflects the concept of a hero that has been explored by theorists like Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell. Jung's theory of archetype identifies the "hero" as a symbol of the journey of self-discovery and transformation. Campbell further elaborated on this through his "Hero's Journey," is known as Monomyth a narrative framework describing the stages a hero undergoes, including the call to adventure, trials, and ultimate return from his seminal book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* that was published in 1949 and re-released in 2004. He states that the hero has the stories or adventures or journeys to become a hero (2004).

Campbell states that hero's journey is a metaphor for the process of self-discovery and transformation, demonstrating the universal human potential to rise above adversity and achieve greatness. This timeless archetype, found across myths and cultures, reveals the enduring power of storytelling to inspire and guide humanity. He concludes that the hero's journey is not just an external adventure but an inner process of growth and transformation, illustrating the universal potential of individuals to rise above their limits and make a significant change to society (2004).

This process of self-discovery and transformation is illustrated in one of the well-known literary works by Virginia Woolf entitled *Orlando: A Biography* written by Virginia Woolf, an English modernist writer, which was published in 1928. This novel is inspired by Woolf's relationship with Vita Sackville-West, Woolf's lover and close friend. The story follows Orlando's life, a young nobleman born in Elizabethan England. Orlando mysteriously never ages despite going through political change, love, and adventure for over three centuries of history. The novel has become known for its examination of issues such as gender, identity, and time, as well as its combination of fantasy and history.

Another related literary work to this issue is also illustrated in a novel by David Ebershoff entitled *The Danish Girl*. It is a novel written by David Ebershoff, an American author, which was published in 2000 by the Viking Press in the United States and Allen & Unwin in Australia that explores transgender issue. This novel was adapted into an Oscar-winning film starring Academy Award-winner Eddie Redmayne and Alicia Vikander. It was also nominated for four Academy Awards, three Golden Globes, two Screen Actors Guild awards, and five BAFTAs. Another literary work written by David Ebershoff, *The 19th Wife*, is the number one best-seller and was adapted into a television

movie that has been airing globally. Both *The Danish Girl* and *The 19th Wife* are about identity stories, each telling the story of a character whose true self struggles with the society they live in and who feels forced to break social norms in order to become who they are. He was an editor for over twenty New York Times best-sellers, three Pulitzer Prize winners, and a National Book Award winner.

*The Danish Girl* is a biographical novel that draws inspiration from the story of a married couple from Denmark, focusing on the main character, Einar Wegener (later recognized as Lili Elbe) and his wife, Greta Wegener. The main character became the first individual to undergo surgical procedures aimed at transitioning into a woman during the late 1920s and 1930s. The turning point began when a famous opera singer needed a portrait, but Greta's model was unavailable. Greta then asked her husband to dress as the opera singer, and he agreed. Remarkably, his appearance was perceived as graceful and strikingly beautiful, so Greta decided to name him Lili. From that moment, the main character sometimes appeared in public as Lili. Fortunately, Greta and her brother, Cartisle, supported him and encouraged him to seek help from Professor Bolk, a surgeon who developed procedures to physically transform a man into a woman at the Municipal Women's Clinic in Dresden, Germany.

Beyond portraying the main character's transformation into Lili Elbe, this life-changing journey provides a meaningful framework for analysis through Campbell's theory of the hero's journey. The writer applies Campbell's framework to identify the stages experienced by the main character and to explain how he faces and overcomes various challenges. Through this perspective, *The Danish Girl* presents the main character not only as a pioneer in exploring gender identity but also as a hero who struggles with

both self-discovery and social acceptance. This highlights the universal themes of courage and determination in facing hardship.

Analyzing *The Danish Girl* through the lens of the Hero's Journey framework is valuable because it illuminates the deeply personal transformation of the main character, Einar Wegener, into Lili Elbe as a narrative of inner courage, self-discovery, and embracing identity. This mythic framework helps readers understand Lili's gender transformation as a heroic journey, including trials, allies, sacrifice, and ultimate rebirth, rather than simply a medical or psychological process. Although feminist and psychoanalytic theories often provide valuable insights, such as examining subconscious identity conflicts or societal gender standards, the Hero's Journey highlights power and defines gender identity as an essential act of becoming rather than as pathology or rebellion.

Scholars such as Susan Stryker in *Transgender History* and Jack Halberstam in *The Queer Art of Failure* have highlighted how trans narratives challenge traditional frameworks while still using archetypal storytelling to affirm gender experiences. By viewing Lili's journey as a heroic adventure, we can better understand how her transformation connects to larger gender issues, especially the importance of being able to define one's own identity and the emotional challenges that come with living authentically in a society that strictly enforces traditional gender roles.

The novel unfolds against a historical backdrop where transgender experiences were largely misunderstood, adding a layer of complexity to Einar's internal and external conflicts. Furthermore, the reason for choosing this topic is because *The Danish Girl* offers a powerful and unique portrayal of personal transformation that closely aligns with

Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey framework, allowing an exploration of how a transgender narrative can be understood as a heroic quest of self-discovery, courage, authenticity, and the trials that is experienced by the main character while also filling a gap in literary studies where this theory has rarely been applied to a transgender novel. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the main character's transformation into Lili Elbe in David Ebershoff's *The Danish Girl* through the lens of Campbell's Hero's Journey, outlining the stages of his major transformation and the challenges faced by the main character in the novel.

## 1.2 Identification of the Problems

The Hero's Journey (Monomyth), as outlined by Joseph Campbell, is often associated with epic quests and fantastical adventures. However, this framework is not limited to fantasy or adventure stories. Its stages can also be applied to deeply personal narratives, particularly those involving transformation, identity, and self-discovery (Campbell, 2004). Rather than focusing simply on physical trials or external conquests, the Hero's Journey framework can highlight the internal, emotional, and psychological challenges faced by individuals seeking their true selves.

David Ebershoff's *The Danish Girl* offers an intriguing example of this alternative form of heroism. The novel follows the main character, Einar Wegener, an artist who experiences a profound inner conflict between his assigned male identity and his true identity as Lili Elbe, a woman. Through this lens, the "journey" is not about slaying monsters or crossing oceans, but about confronting deep-seated fears, enduring societal rejection, overcoming medical misunderstanding, and making profound sacrifices in the pursuit of authenticity. By applying the Hero's Journey theory in this novel, the study

seeks to explore the stages that are experienced by the main character and the challenges he faced in the novel.

### 1.3 The Review of Previous Studies

In conducting this research, the writer uses the novel written by David Ebershoff entitled *The Danish Girl* as the object of the research. The writer found some previous studies that are related to this research.

First, in Assawapanichwong (2019), the study focuses on how Einar Wegener's transformation into Lili Elbe is analyzed through Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Joan Riviere's idea of "womanliness as masquerade.". Drawing on Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), she argues that gender is performative, constructed through repeated acts such as cross-dressing and the adoption of femininity, which allow Einar to express his true desires as a woman. This study has also used Joan Riviere's idea of "womanliness as masquerade" to examine how femininity might be portrayed as a disguise or a coping mechanism (Assawapanichwong, 2019). While previous studies on *The Danish Girl* have explored themes of gender identity, transformation, and societal norms, the writer uses Campbell's framework by revealing how Einar's journey reflects the universal pattern of self-discovery and development in order to fill the gap in this study. It also provides a unique perspective on the narrative structure and its relationship to identity and social problems.

Second, in Ananda's (2021) thesis, she describes the change in the mindset of the main character from before and after being transgender in responding to the patriarchal values by using the queer theory of J.J Giesecking and the radical feminist theory of Judith Butler. Ananda argues that there are significant changes in habits and behavior experienced by the main characters in; habits at work, at home, behaviors being among



society, and family (Ananda, 2021). While the novel depicts Einar's journey to becoming Lili Elbe, the weakness of this study is that the writer does not go into great detail about the key supporting characters, such as Greta and Henrik, which might limit the understanding of their motivations and contributions to Lili's transition.

Third, in Zahra's (2016) thesis, she analyzes the transitional phases of a transgender person through Einar's character in *The Danish Girl*. She applies Sally Hines' transgender theory and Judith Butler's performativity theory to show how Einar's gender identity develops. Zahra identifies four key phases: Pre-Transition Identity, where Einar shows early signs of gender nonconformity but represses them due to social norms; The Desire to Come Out, where he begins to embrace Lili with Gerda's support; Significant Moments in Transition, which include his encounters with surgeons and experiences at Madame Jasmin-Carton's peep show; and Bodily Transformation, which covers Lili's surgeries that ultimately lead to her death (Zahra, 2016). Zahra's study highlights the struggles of transgender people in gaining acceptance and medical support, as well as the risks of early sex reassignment procedures. Overall, her work contributes to transgender literary studies by connecting identity, cultural expectations, and medical discourse.

Fourth, Ethridge's (2014) study explores how Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* uses Gothic and queer elements to challenge Joseph Campbell's classic hero's journey. While Campbell suggests the hero begins in ignorance and grows through transformation, Dorian's journey instead reflects moral corruption, secrecy, and eventual self-destruction. Ethridge argues that Dorian is not a conventional hero but a queer Gothic figure whose failure represents resistance to Victorian gender and moral ideals (Ethridge, 2014). Drawing on Judith Halberstam's idea of "the queer art of failure," the study shows how the novel redefines heroism as refusal rather than redemption. By queering

Campbell's stages through a corrupt mentor, moral decay, and a destructive ending, the novel resists traditional closure and critiques heteronormative expectations. Ethridge concludes that this disruption offers a new way to understand how queer narratives reshape classical heroic structures.

Fifth, Amalia's (2020) thesis analyzes Jason's adventure using Joseph Campbell's hero's journey theory. She divides the analysis into three main stages: departure, where Jason is teleported to Lyrian and struggles with his desire to return home; initiation, where he grows through challenges and alliances with characters like Rachel and the Blind King; and return, where he masters both Lyrian and his ordinary world, showing maturity and acceptance of responsibility. Amalia concludes that Jason completes all 17 stages of Campbell's hero's journey (Amalia, 2020). Her study emphasizes personal growth, adaptability, and transformation, an approach that can also be applied to Einar's journey into becoming Lili, highlighting both internal and external struggles in the process of self-discovery.

Sixth, in Hajrah, Siti et al. (2022) article, they analyze the Monster's journey in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: Or Modern Prometheus* through Joseph Campbell's hero's journey theory. They identify eleven stages, including the call to adventure, road of trials, apotheosis, and freedom to live. The study concludes that the main character, the Monster, can be seen as a hero, as his persistence, personal growth, and ultimate sacrifice redefine heroism and challenge the view of him as merely an evil character (Hajrah et al., 2022). This research is very interesting by portraying the Monster, a typically evil character as a hero through his persistence, mental growth, and final sacrifice, the study reinterprets what it means to be a hero.



Seventh, in Ma'ruf's (2023) study, she examines Percy Jackson's psychological traits using Scott Allison and George Goethals' Eight Traits of Heroes theory: caring, charismatic, inspiring, reliable, resilient, selfless, intelligent, and strong. The study shows how Percy demonstrates these qualities while also displaying flaws such as impulsiveness and a desire for revenge, making him a more complex and relatable hero. Ma'ruf connects this to Campbell's hero's journey, emphasizing Percy's growth while avoiding the idea of a "perfect hero." (Ma'ruf, 2023). By applying a psychological approach and strong textual evidence, the study deepens the understanding of Riordan's character and situates him within broader discussions of heroism and mythology.

Eight, in Nosirovna's (2022) article, she compares the two protagonists and their moral growth between *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Oliver Twist*. She argues that their different social backgrounds shape their personalities and experiences: Huck, though rebellious, can escape his troubled home, while Oliver, an orphan, suffers abuse in workhouses and the criminal underworld. Nosirovna highlights how *Huckleberry Finn* critiques American rural life, its cruelty, racism, and materialism, while *Oliver Twist* exposes the inhumanity of capitalist society (Nosirovna, 2022). A strength of the study is its focus on moral development: Oliver is innocent and honest, while Huck is adaptive and sometimes deceptive, though both show kindness in key moments, such as Huck helping Jim escape slavery and Oliver's loyalty to Mr. Brownlow. Huck's transformation, especially his changing views on race and morality, is emphasized as a central part of his character growth.

Last, Nazihah's (2023) article examines how heroism is portrayed from a literary sociological perspective in J.S. Khairen's *Melangkah*. The novel follows four economics students in Sumba, focusing on societal issues and women's struggles. The protagonist,

Aura, along with other female characters, demonstrates bravery, resilience, sacrifice, and a strong sense of responsibility, challenging traditional gender roles in Indonesian literature. Nazihah concludes that *Melangkah* represents heroic traits such as courage, confidence, honesty, patience, and generosity (Nazihah, 2023). Patience is the ability to remain calm and unhurried in the face of challenges. Sacrifice; unyielding and desperate, willing to make sacrifices for the good of the country, and a reformer.

Based on the previous studies reviewed above, it appears that no scholar has specifically applied Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey theory to the novel *The Danish Girl*. While existing research has explored themes such as gender identity, transformation, and the historical context of transgender experiences in the novel, there is a noticeable gap in examining Einar Wegener's journey through the lens of Campbell's narrative structure. Therefore, the writer is interested in exploring how the stages of the Hero's Journey can be identified and reinterpreted in *The Danish Girl*, particularly as a means to understand Einar's transformation into Lili Elbe as a form of both personal and heroic self-discovery. This approach not only fills a gap in literary analysis but also highlights how traditional narrative frameworks can be expanded or challenged by transgender narratives.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the stages of hero's journey experienced by the main character in the novel *The Danish Girl*?
2. What are the challenges that the main character faced in *The Danish Girl*?

### 1.5 The Scope of the Research

This research will be focused on the main character using Campbell's theory of the hero's journey, which highlights the stages of the hero's journey that are experienced by the main character in the novel. Furthermore, the writer will also discuss the challenges faced by the main character in the novel.

### 1.6 The Objective of the Research

1. To examine the stages of hero's journey experienced by the main character in the novel *The Danish Girl*.
2. To explain the challenges faced by the main character in the novel *The Danish Girl*.

