

“An affair of great importance” – Queen Christina of Sweden (1626-1689)

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Women's lives seem to be made up of men's myths
(DUNCKER, 1999: 53)

In 1556, it was announced: “All Europe (not to speak of the other parts of the earth) has doubtless heard of the Resignation of CHRISTINA Queen of Sweden”. The text, a booklet entitled *A Relation of the Life of Christina of Sweden: With Her Resignation of the Crown, Voyage to Bruxels, and Journey to Rome. Whereunto is added Her Genius* (abb. *A Relation*, 1656: 1), was published in London two years after the much debated abdication of the Swedish Queen and is a translation “out of French” according to the title page. The volume is a product of its time – a tendentious contribution to seventeenth-century news, scandals and gossip (Williams, 2008; Williams & Layher, 2008). The author, as well as the translator, remains anonymous but this is only one of numerous texts depicting the Swedish Queen that published during the course of her lifetime. The introductory words, the capital letters I.H. for the translator, given on the title page, provide a clear reference to a name, and the title of the book gives the reader clues for understanding what he or she will encounter when reading *A Relation*: a story of the life of one of the most (in)famous European women of the seventeenth century, Queen Christina of Sweden. The use of “relation” in the title signals fictionality and indicates that the reader will not encounter the life of a historic person but rather be

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confronted with imagery. Christina's life had at this time, as stated in one of the texts in this book, become "an affair of great importance" (29) to her contemporaries all over Europe.¹

The interest in what Christina did or said, or rather what she was thought to have done or said, seems to have been immense. The name of the Swedish queen appears in early modern newspapers and journals, historiographical accounts, biographical and panegyric texts, pamphlets, and lampoons (Wåghäll Nivre, 2008 and 2009). The examples below are taken from two texts published in English. It should, however, be stressed that the texts published about the Queen in the second half of the seventeenth century were parts of a pan-European Christina discourse of a highly ambiguous character. Queen Christina quite simply is one of the most widely portrayed and discussed people of Swedish descent but also came to function as an icon of immorality, challenging a heterosexual and heteronormative gender order. It therefore seems presumptuous to dwell on the subject even while interest in narrating the life of a long dead queen, often in the pretense of telling the truth, sometimes while trying to relativize or to correct previous statements, is still strong. Almost all accounts of the Queen are closely tied to the personage of Christina but the frequent complaints about inaccurate portrayals of the queen rarely contemplate the problems necessarily occurring when a life is captured in writing. A biographical account is by necessity a representation of the person it is trying to depict as a selection of narratives presented by the writer. When published, maybe translated, circulated, read, and interpreted, this changes shape and becomes public – an image with little resemblance of the person originally portrayed.

High quality research has been carried out but the representation of the queen in written discourse remains surprisingly undifferentiated and frequently displaced – taken out of context – if considering the abundance of publications available. More often than not, one finds the queen used for ideological, political, or religious purposes, transformed into an amorphous figure that is made up of prejudice and stereotypes. In this article, I focus on Christina as a textual phenomenon – as mythography –, as a stylized figure far removed from the living person. I proceed to explore the ambivalence inherent in the so-called facts about her person that have come down to us in (mostly) fictional texts. Christina is a very good example of how the print medium is used for political and ideological purposes. Intertextual references are at times explicitly stated, at times devices of obscure insinuation comparable with tabloid press headlines. No single text telling the story of her life can be considered in isolation but only within its complex socio-political relationship to other texts. Most of the texts circulating in the seventeenth century

thus function as a response to actions taken by Christina herself or to claims made about her in other texts, but they go beyond their main topic in using the queen as a point of reference for delving into the marvels of human sexuality and safely playing with gender roles.

The circulation of those rumors put into print was regularly used to reinforce either a positive or a negative image of Christina. This is probably best illustrated in speculation over Christina's gender (male, female or both?), her sexual preferences (did she prefer men or women?), and the gender performances associated with her (why did she dress like a man if she were a woman?). The tension between a desire to determine *the* sex of the Queen and the interest in the functionality of gender in the figure of Christina shaped the narration of her life.² Thus, we also here take up the interesting challenge and investigate whether this pre-modern queen also fits into the fluidity of post-gender discussions. When J. David Hester, in a 2004 article, claims that "gender is dependent upon a stability of the sex" (Hester, 2004: 221) he seems to touch upon a problem that occurs when writing about the life of the Swedish queen – a need to define a (fixed) sex in order to facilitate the social construction of gender. Hester's post-gender thoughts in regard to the androgynous body (and androgynous births) are, of course, controversial and only partially applicable when investigating seventeenth-century texts, but he nevertheless raises important questions in suggesting "that the obligation of a body to have an identifiable sex is the most fundamental ethical obligation of our culture" (Hester, 2004: 222).³ Hester seems to make a point here that may explain the long-lived stereotypes and prejudices associated with Queen Christina.

Before returning to the seventeenth century, I would like to point to some of these deep-rooted preconceptions that shape popular as well as scholarly texts on Christina. A random search will be used here to illustrate that the narration of a life is, in fact, the narration of many lives over several layers and that biographical accounts depend on literary, poetological, and historiographical conventions as much as socio-political factors such as gender and class.

A French web page from January 14, 2010 states: Christina "est élevée comme un garçon, féministe avant l'heure"⁴ without giving much further explanation for its claim. The brief quotation is a good point of departure for some of the most frequently mentioned but also most dichotomous characteristics of the queen that are published on web pages of various kind. While her "boyish" upbringing is already a topic of interest in early sources, one finds a peculiar addition in twentieth century texts: her role as a feminist before her time. The citation makes it sound as if the queen was brought up by her guardians to become a feminist tomboy, something that seems anything but plausible for a seventeenth-century girl who

inherited the throne at the age of six after her father Gustavus Adolphus II had died on the battlefield in Lützen in 1632. It is nevertheless written as a matter of fact in one of the most frequently used web encyclopedias, the French Wikipedia. Another web page tries to explain Christina to its reader in a more comprehensive way:

So, great expectations arose at Maria Eleonora's third pregnancy in 1626, and the castle filled with shouts of joy when on 8 December she delivered a child that was first taken for a boy – he was so hairy and screamed with a strong, hoarse voice. Christina writes in her autobiography, “Deep embarrassment spread among the women when they discovered their mistake”. The king however was lark happy, stating that “She'll be clever, she has made fools of us all!” Christina was born with what Scandinavians call a victory-shirt (meaning a more or less intact fetal membrane clinging to the newborn baby). This could explain the confusion about Christina's gender; but a victory-shirt was always regarded as a lucky omen.⁵

This quotation is taken from the English Wikipedia entry on Queen Christina. Irrespective of the poor language and style of the article, the reader is told that Christina was taken for a boy because of her looks (hairy, hoarse voice), that she has commented on this herself in an autobiography, that her father was happy (even though there was no male heir to the throne), and that the child was born with a caul (“victory-shirt” is a literal translation from Swedish into English, meaning a “caulbearer” or someone “born with a caul”). The text is clearly a summary of presumed “facts” found in other texts. Quotations are inserted in the text that also makes use of direct speech while lacking any complete source information. Christina is at first given a gender identity based on the false assumption that she was a boy. The text here recognizes her as a girl of a special kind. She is thought to be born under a lucky star, and her looks as well as her voice are interpreted as typically “male” by the women who have helped Maria Eleonora give birth to the new heir to the Swedish throne. The sex of the newborn is nevertheless quickly established – it is girl/woman. The text suggests confusion but does not question a sexual system made up of “man” and “woman”. Christina emerges as an androgynous figure but it is not suggested here that she was born a hermaphrodite – one of the most popular monstrous creatures of the early modern period (Gilbert, 2002; Grage, 2005: 48-50; Long, 2006).

Christina's own writing has certainly contributed to the preconceptions regarding her sex/gender. She left several drafts of her autobiography behind. The most frequently cited version was published by Johann Arckenholtz in his four-volume *Mémoires concernant Christine Reine de Suède*, [...] (1751-60), the first large-scale biographic project on Christina. The autobiography was written

in French, never finished, and mostly written towards the end of Christina's life.⁶ The comments on her birth are thus textual reconstructions of past events that she had heard and read about herself – put together to be made public in print (Haettner Aurelius, 1996, 1997a; Borgström, 2002). The Wikipedia text does not quote the original text but rather reproduces a translated citation that was originally made up of memories from Christina's early childhood. It further makes the claim that Christina was "a caulbearer", something that can be found in the autobiography. Here, the statement is not part of the quotation, and it is close to impossible to prove the truth or otherwise of that claim. Nonetheless, it is one of the most frequently cited passages of the autobiography and is often used to stress an inherent desire in Christina to become a man. It should, however, not be forgotten, that the authors of the early lampoons did not access Christina's own writings. It is more likely that she was responding to what she had read (Haettner Aurelius, 1996: 150-151, 180-181).

Yet another web page – "Lesbian history" – gives only two examples of famous lesbian women of pre-modern times: Queen Christina of Sweden and Sappho.⁷ This presents the Queen only in visual images, thus not explaining the underlying reasons for the choice of the women presented. One picture has, however, been added to the pictures of Christina, that of Ebba Sparre, lady-in-waiting at Christina's court and a woman often pointed to as Christina's secret lover. The picture is accompanied by a brief text mentioning Sparre as an "intimate companion". Ambiguity in the choice of words not only gives the web page visitor freedom of choice in interpreting the text, but also shows hesitation. The web editors prefer careful phrasing and avoid clear statements, maybe realizing that there is no single or simple truth about Queen Christina, thereby avoiding claims that cannot be backed up by proof. An official Swedish web page is less careful in its comments on the Queen when stating: "Visitors poured in to see how Queen Christina used masculinity in her personal expression and her position of power".⁸ The sentence is taken out of its context; the article on the web page gives no details for the decision to one-sidedly stick to Christina's use of "masculinity". It simply summarizes the outcome of an exhibition held in Stockholm during the Stockholm Pride festival in 2008. It is nevertheless startling that a journalist focusing on participants in Stockholm Pride is no more innovative than the authors of seventeenth-century pamphlets. One would have expected greater interest in expressing the fluidity inherent in gender roles and gender performances (Duncker, 1999: 57), but Sarah Waters stresses the dependence on "recognition" and "assimilation" when shaping the Queen and remarks: "In what will become a familiar syndrome of the Queen's modern biographies, Carpenter here *recognizes* Christina, a recognition that

involves assimilating her into an established sexual paradigm which both explains her and demonstrates its own (trans-historical) authority” (Waters, 1994: 46).

If we return to the initially quoted seventeenth-century publication, we find remarks regarding Christina’s sex, gender, clothing, behavior, restlessness, and her “bad mouth”. She is said to be blasphemous, arrogant, irresponsible, unreliable, immoral, and deceitful. The anonymous author of the two-page foreword “To the Reader” goes so far as describing his main character in the two texts as a “prodigious monster” (A), thus insinuating that the Queen is neither man nor woman but rather a sexless beast – not quite human. One cannot but ask how this monster can be transformed into a positive example of feminism in the twenty-first century. It would, however, be an oversimplification to understand the text as pure misogyny. The genre demands overstatements and the transgression of borders in regard to style as well as to content. The reader is also told that Christina once was a “Lady of great women” (A) but that she has turned into a vagabond without a home – her court being “a Nursery of Vice” (A) – after having followed bad advice. This dichotomy inherent in the figure Christina shapes the text and builds up a tension between good and evil that leads the reader to quick conclusions.

The following texts do not go as far as explicitly calling the queen a monster but contribute to the dehumanization of Christina. Neither one of the two texts included in the volume, “A Brief Relation of the Life of Christina Queen of Sweden” (abb. “A Brief Relation”: 1-25), and “The Genius of Christina Queen of Sweden” (abb. “The Genius”: 25-42), provide anything but fragmentary images of the queen.⁹ The opening text, a political pamphlet, is first and foremost a verbal attack on some of the counselors surrounding Christina, the second is an account of her complex personality with clear satirical and ironical undertones. They belong to a group of texts published at the time of Christina’s abdication, her conversion to Catholicism, and travels through Europe before settling in Rome. These lampoons are all of French origin and were written as reactions to political and diplomatic liaisons and possible intrigues initiated by Christina as has been discussed by Curt Weibull (Weibull 1966: 100-106) and Eva Haettner Aurelius (Haettner Aurelius, 1997: 25-38; cf. Stolpe, 1959: 277). The texts do not respond directly to anything Christina has done or said but rather circumscribe past events; they are clear examples of defamation, intended to cause harm. They only have loose ties to the reality they claim to depict or reflect upon. Names of well-known courtiers are used to create the illusion of a factual report and to allude to events that must obviously have been known to a greater European public of readers. The sensational value of the texts was probably limited but the use of gossip for didactic purposes could have attracted otherwise less interested readers. By way of negative examples, a

catalogue of male and female vice, as can be found in the Chapbook narratives of the sixteenth century, is thus constructed, and the dangers of deviating from common notions of "correct behavior" made clear.

The narrator of "A Brief Relation" quickly comes to his object of interest: Christina, "that is, a Lady without Religion, Piety, Vertue, and Fidelity; dissolute in her life, and libertine in her speeches; a cheat, slanderer, and jeerer; and of whom one might truly say, She had nothing Royal, but the Kingdom" ("A Brief Relation": 4). At this point he does not question her sex – the statement that the *queen* has nothing royal but a *kingdom* is not further construed – but he later remarks that she was "dressed like a Cavalier" (10) and travelled "without being accompanied with any Women, or Maid-servant" (11). Towards the end of the text, this becomes more clearly tied to the lack of morals when the narrator mentions Christina's "night-practices with Pigmentelli" and indignantly comments: "A brave fashion, surely, of acknowledging her servants!" (29), then only to conclude that he has chosen to not tell everything: "I omit many others" (24). The recurrent play on sexual allusions and insults in this text does not lead to any doubts about the sex of the queen. Christina remains a woman – but of the wrong kind and character. Her minions Bourdelot, Pigmentelli, and du Piquet have all contributed to her transformation. Bourdelot is said to have "used Charms to bewitch her Minde" (16) and Pigmentelli to have "possessed her" (11), while du Piquet is called "the most infamous Pimp in the world" (19). The use of "pimp" as the agent of a prostitute is traced back to the seventeenth century and clearly indicates criminal actions in the text since du Piquet and his wife are said to have spent time in prison.¹⁰ Christina is thus made an active part in a web of illicit sex affairs but the transformation of her character does not seem to be a conscious choice of hers. It is instigated by means of possession and the use of witchcraft performed by men. As a result, the Queen suffers from "inconstant Humor" and impatience (9), is restless, and even shows up as the "Woman-Fool" or "Prattling-Housewife" (12) at a ball, according to the narrator. The Swedish Queen becomes what she is playing and acting at a masquerade – a fool, just like the fools in the late sixteenth-century *Lalebuch* (1597). "This wretched Queen" (23) turns out to be inhuman, disrespects the Church (8), uses foul language (6-7), maltreats her servants, and is incapable of running her household properly, thus wasting her money and her wealth. The narrator asks rhetorically: "But what Justice can be expected from that person, that doth not right to herself?" (18).

The second text in the volume, "The Genious", is structured quite differently and related to "a Brief Relation" mainly by the name of the protagonist, Christina. Instead of referring to historic events, it makes use of Roman mythology in its

attempt to explain the complex character of Christina. Mars, “the Crafts-Master of Gallant Spirits” and the one who “Astrologians openly proclaim to preside at the births of great men” (25) is said to have adopted Gustavus Adolphus “for his son”. What follows is a discussion between the gods on how to create a worthy successor to the Swedish king. Four gods are selected to shape the new monarch, since only one, they conclude, would not be able to achieve this difficult task on his or her own. Venus, Minerva, Mars, and Mercury are put forward to provide the new monarch with (his/her) special characteristics – a mixture of their own personalities and interests. First of all, they need to decide “what sex the successor [...] should be” (29), an assignment given to the goddesses Venus and Minerva. The bickering gods agree on creating a woman but this is done “rather by a benevolent concession of the two gods, than by strength of reason” (29-30). The motive for letting the goddesses choose the sex of the new monarch is not given explicitly in the text, which talks only vaguely about “some pleasures” that Minerva had offered Mercury and “a secret favor” Venus had done Mars (30). Christina is thus “made up” (30) by the gods in a fashion that resembles puffery more than negotiations about a serious matter: a worthy heir to Gustavus Adolphus. The ancient gods look more to their internal disputes and the factionalism among them than to considerations of a serious nature. A frivolous tone underlies the conversation that is meant to give the reader a plausible explanation for the dichotomies inherent in Christina. This, in turn, provides a way for the narrator to speak “both evil and good” (42) of the queen. The principal theme of the narration, the complexity of shaping the new monarch, makes this text more sophisticated than some of the lampoons that only dwell on Christina’s frivolous lifestyle. The narrating “I” keeps stressing Christina’s genius, her intelligence, knowledge, and bright mind (32), but the image of a queen who is claimed to be the “most extraordinary person of the world” (37) is constantly shifting and taking on new shapes and dimensions. The gods may have given her a mind of unusual capacity, but they are also responsible for having failed utterly when “making” a body so ill-suited for a woman:

Behold, what the Genius of the Great Christina hath been, under the Empire of Minerva! to whom Venus succeeded. This gentle Goddess, that had but sorrily acted her part in the formation of the body of this Princess, she being but poorly furnished with those accommodations requisite to the beauty of a woman, (for she is little, and crooked, having a hollow bending on one side, that spoils the grace of her walking) would yet have it to be seen, that this body, so poorly fashioned, was sufficiently capable of the highest sort of Gallantries: and after Christina had abandoned the Muses, she was observed to delight herself in Dancing and Balls, wherein she had always the better. Such discourses were most dissolute, pleased her best; and wanton postures liked her better by far, than a modest behaviour. (32)

The body depicted here does not match Christina's interest in "dancing and balls," "gallantries" that require beauty and bodily perfection – attributes suiting a queen. The 'poorly fashioned' Christina in the quotation above is the opposite to the ideal of female beauty as described in literature since Antiquity, and she acts in a way that suits neither a queen nor a woman. It is as if the role of the monarch is tied to the role Christina plays as a woman. When unable to perform any of her duties in a way the narrator would find suitable for a queen, she emerges as a perversion. It is impossible, so the reader is told, not only to determine what religion Christina belongs to – a matter of great importance in post-Reformation Europe – but also her sex, "because sometimes they ["the *Venerable Fathers* of the *Society of Iesu*"] see her in man's apparel, and sometimes in woman's; and for the most part, they see her in such a fashion as partakes in both, as if she were an Hermaphrodite" (36-37). In opposition to the panegyrics written in honor of Christina, masculine traits do not in any way contribute positively to the appearance of the queen in this text (Wåghäll Nivre, 2009). They rather make her more threatening and almost grotesque, as indicated by the word "Hermaphrodite" (Long, 2006: 2-3; Gilbert, 2002: chapters 1 and 5).

Mans apparel that she now wears, and which she had before used sometime in Sweden, where she went cloathed almost like a Cavalier, are the tokens of an inclination that she hath, to change her sex into a more perfect: and although she be in truth a woman, and so known to the world; yet she useth the postures and fashions of men, and will be fingering her Mustaches, as though she had some, when indeed she hath none: thus desiring to express her strong ambition to be what she is not, and to be believed to be indeed so. [...] But Great Christina raising her self above her female condition, puts her self into such postures and garbs, as may imitate and resemble such actions as are proper to men. (41)

The text talks about "an inclination" and a need "to be what she is not". Christina emerges as a woman aspiring to become a man, a woman adopting male attributes and desiring male preeminence. She is thus depicted as actively performing her gender, transgressing thresholds and moving into a sphere reserved for those whose bodily shape and mental condition is considered truly male – "although she be in truth a woman". But it still does not seem possible to fully fit the sex/gender system described here into either a one-sex or a two-sex model as has been discussed by Thomas Laqueur (1990). I would suggest the use here of Waters' concept of "liminality" when talking about Christina, but I would reserve it (as a figure-defying categorization) for the *representation* of the Queen (Waters, 1994: 43). The text remains ambiguous and the introduction of the English translation further stresses this lack of clarity.

Christina's conversion to Catholicism, her abdication, and political controversies are used only as a point of departure for telling the story of an exorbitant monarch whose true nature cannot be detected. The changes that she initiated in her life and the travels she undertook are here regarded as biologically explicable. Since deeply desiring the body and mind of a man, the queen takes on typically male characteristics. Her dichotomous personality makes the comparison to a hermaphrodite quite logical in the seventeenth century, and one cannot but ask if the somewhat bold statement is a reason for the narrator to claim his admiration for the Queen. It is as if he who claims to know the genius of Christina (37) has to stress her good sides in order to accuse her of that which must be very serious, namely, her lack of true faith and refusal to accept a gender order based on male supremacy. Christina is blamed for wanting to "change her sex into a more perfect [one]" (41), "because that sex is much raised above the other, and more proper for brave undertakings" (41). When the narrator claims that the queen has a "strong ambition to be what she is not, and to be believed to be indeed so", he not only evokes the impression that she is lying, but that she is wittingly transgressing a border she has no right to cross. Furthermore, when Christina is said to "imitate and resemble such actions as are proper to men" (41), it is implied that this is a performance no woman is allowed to be involved in, not even an extraordinary queen proven to have outclassed many men.

The text highlights, with a few examples, a hierarchical sexual system mainly based on biological difference: the bodies of men and women should have distinguishing marks that make them exclusive (given here by the example of a moustache). Man and woman should be easily recognizable and non-interchangeable (not intersexed). The sex of a person should further be accentuated by correct (gendered) behavior and clothing. The clothes of a person ought to make it clearly distinguishable whether it is a man or woman one is talking to and the gestures of a person, the "postures, and garbs" should be fitting for the person using them. The sex of a person thus becomes inscribed on the body by cultural artifacts of different kinds. Also gendered are further activities expressing movement and action, such as horseback riding, travelling, and warfare, even though it is well known that women have been riding horses, travelling long distances, and carrying arms (as well as men's clothes) throughout history. It is, however, not a problem in the text that Christina is an erudite woman who engages in learned discussions with men. The problem thus does not seem to be what she does, but what she tries to be and cannot fulfill because of conventional thresholds. A clear distinction is made between gendering as prescribed by law (here the legal right to rule that Christina was given in the year she turned eighteen) and a play with gender roles as initiated by a woman

(Baumgärtel, 1997: 152-153). This touches upon the difficult topic of the two bodies of the queen, alluding to the theories of Ernst H. Kantorowicz (Kantorowicz, 1957) and the gender research that has been carried out as a result of his work on the king's two bodies (Wåghäll Nivre, 2009: 229-230, especially notes 24-25). The narrator, who claims to tell nothing but the truth, seems to have forgotten that the queen is a mixed human being from the very beginning, a result of the agreement between ancient gods who experimented in the hope of creating a worthy successor to Gustavus Adolphus. This makes the text stand out among biographical accounts of Christina. Truth is relativized right from the very outset; the text is a pure construction, inventing the life of the queen with the help of pagan gods. "The wavering minde" and her interest in "novelty and change" (35) that are characteristic for the figure described in the text seem to determine *her* sex. Someone who "changes her Affections as often as she changes her Smock, and loves and hates almost both at one instant" (36) must be a woman, a person of less dignity than a man and a person who does not have the mental and physical strength to withstand temptations.

Both seventeenth-century texts allude to the Bible when discussing Christina, thus placing her firmly in the tradition of salvation history. The narrator, in "A Brief Relation", asks: "Who will not say, That Queen is fallen from an eminent stare to a lowe condition?"(4) while "The Genius" stresses an excessive lifestyle "since her fall" (36). Christina is ascribed a similar fate to that of Eve, incapable of escaping the fall because of her possession of typically female traits. Both texts draw on the conventional rhetoric of the libel and make use of dichotomous images of women known to the reader since Antiquity. They further endow Christina with witchlike features by blaming her for being "bewitched" and "possessed", but they refrain from calling her monstrous. This is a conclusion already anticipated by the reader in the foreword. Without having any knowledge about postmodern theory, the authors of the early modern lampoons seem to be very consciously making a distinction between a socially constructed gender and a biologically determined sex. Even though the narrator plays with the notion, through his use of the subjunctive, that Christina could be a hermaphrodite, it is made clear to the reader that she is, beyond any doubt, a woman. It is as if she could be made a woman by mere virtue of her strongly emphasized desire to be a man. Is it perhaps the strong need to define the sex of the Queen that enables the authors of these texts to play with the notion of gender and shape a figure characterized by "liminality". The gods in "The Genius" begin the conception of a monarch by naming it female. They do not stress the virtues necessary for ruling a country but rather playfully create a woman – and thus utterly fail in their task of finding a worthy successor for the great (masculine) king Gustavus Adolphus.¹¹

It is certainly of no concern here to ascribe a fixed gender identity to, or to identify *the* sex of, the Swedish monarch.¹² The seventeenth century texts, as well as the brief passages from various web pages, clearly show that the interest in Christina is less an interest in a person than an interest in defining gender and sex, in telling the “true story”, in finding ways to create sexually defined boundaries, and in shaping identity. Christina has thus given writers of popular, literary, and scholarly works the opportunity to use her as an example when trying to define historical and cultural criteria for the identification of sex and gender. The brief examples that can be found on various contemporary web pages indicate that the recurrent images of Christina are not only genre-bound and due to an unusual, strong interest in her person but to a curiosity in sex/gender constructions that transcend conventional concepts of “man” and “woman”, “male” and “female”. It is, thus, not Queen Christina we should refer to as post-gender but rather the notion of inquisitiveness displayed in the texts. What is truly surprising is that so little has changed over the past 350 years. The same ambiguity found in the 1656 texts appears time and time again, which illustrates that it is not so much “Christina” that is the problem biographers seem to struggle with, but rather the search for definitions that force us to look beyond the hierarchical bias of man – woman.

NOTES

- ¹ This article is part of a larger research project on Queen Christina and biographical writing, which I work on together with Maren Eckart, Högskolan Dalarna. The conclusions drawn below are thus as much the result of discussions and teamwork as they are of my own thoughts. Some of the research carried out for this article was also presented in Wäghäll Nivre, 2009.
- ² The majority of scholarship on Christina is carried out by historians and thus focuses on the historical person. Joachim Grage's 2005 article in German on gender aspects in the biographical texts on Queen Christina is, however, a very important contribution to literary scholarship in its recognition of the narrative strategies of the texts.
Cf. Dunckar, 1999: 60: "We can only do that [deconstruct the gender system, EWN] by ending the categories men/women." Both Hester and Dunckar refer to "postgender" as a concept in Donna Haraway's groundbreaking essay "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" (Haraway, 1991: 149-181), even though Haraway has disagreed with a use of the term "in a utopian, beyond-masculine-and feminine sense" and rather understands it "as a kind of intensified critical understanding of these many threads of production of inequality" (Haraway, 2003: 329). More controversial, especially in its belief in modern technology, is a recent article by George Dvorsky and James Hughes (2008), "Postgenderism: Beyond the Gender Binary", *IJET-03*, Hartford CT: Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies.
- ³ Cf. Dunckar, 1999: 60: "We can only do that [deconstruct the gender system, EWN] by ending the categories men/ women." Both Hester and Dunckar refer to Donna Haraway's groundbreaking 1991 publication *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*.
- ⁴ http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christine_de_Su%C3%A8de, 14th January 2010.
- ⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christina_of_Sweden, 14th January 2010.
- ⁶ Christina was encouraged to write her autobiography by the Deputy of France in Sweden, Pierre Chanut. He was one of few early French Christina biographers who wrote positively about the queen. *Mémoires de ce qui s'est passé en Suède, et aux provinces voisines, depuis l'année 1645 jusques en l'année 1655. Ensemble le demêlé de la Suède avec la Pologne. Tirez des depesches de monsieur Chanut [...]*, Paris, 1675.
- ⁷ http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Lesbian_history, 6th January 2010.
- ⁸ http://www.riksutställningar.se/Templates/ExtNews___35045.aspx, 19th August 2009.
- ⁹ A 1655 text titled "Brieve relation de la vie de Christine, Reine de Suède, jusques à la démission de sa couronne et son arrivement à Bruxelles" can be found in the holdings of the National Library of France, but I have so far been unable to locate the original text for comparison with the translation. The copy used here was accessed via Early English Books Online (EBBO: <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>)
- ¹⁰ Cf. Oxford English Dictionary Online, draft revision Sept. 2009. <http://dictionary.oed.com>, keyword "pimp".
- ¹¹ Cf. Baumgärtel, 1997: 153: "Insofern figuriert der Körper der Regentin nie das Eigentliche, er ist immer nur Signifikant männlicher Macht, niemals Ausdruck seiner selbst, d.h. Ausdruck legitimer weiblicher Macht".
- ¹² The latter was last tried in 1965 when Christina's casket in St. Peter's cathedral in Rome was opened and her remains re-examined by Carl-Herman Hjortsjö, a Swedish anatomist ([1965] *Drottning Christina – Gravöppningen i Rom*, Lund: Svenska Expeditionen för Arkeologisk Antropologi),

refuting Elis Essen-Möller's 1937 hypothesis that the queen had been a pseudo-hermaphrodite (*Drottning Christina: en människostudie ur läkaresynpunkt*, Lund: Gleerups). Christina's remains offered no new answers, no deviations that would give new life to prior assumptions. Cf. Grage, 2005: 54-55.

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