

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women Podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today I'm joined by Amy Saunders, a doctoral student in history and heritage at Winchester University in the UK, to talk about Christina of Sweden. So let's start with a general introduction to Christina and her place in history.

AS: So Christina was born to Eleonora of Brandenburg and Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, in December 1626. When Christina was born, the king and queen were initially told that they had a son, but this was quickly changed and the babe was instead recognised as a daughter, and I think we'll probably come back to that later. So Gustavus died not long afterwards in 1632 and that left Christina as the heir to the Swedish throne, and in Sweden there was nothing barring a daughter from becoming the monarch, but she would have been referred to as king, so we'll also come back to that later on. So although she could not officially start ruling until she reached 18, she did attend some council meetings from the age of 14, and due to conflict and religious divisions and disease, there's actually a lot of early modern monarchs who inherited the thrones at really young ages, and this means that a lot of countries were being governed by various regents and councils. So that also happened for James VI and I, who was King of Scotland and later England, Ireland and Wales, and also Louis XIII, King of France. So it's a very common situation, it's not unusual.

Gustavus had left instructions though that Christina should be educated as a prince, and while she was taught the traditional feminine virtues of modesty, she was doing a lot more kind of physical exercise than was kind of the norm. She was also educated with her two female cousins, so there's a bit of a question here of how far her education was different to what those other girls in her position were being taught. So Christina was clearly passionate about education though, so from a really young age, she became interested in religion and philosophy and maths and alchemy. And she used to write letters and basically say to her uncle that her cousins were being really bad in their classes and they weren't concentrating enough, so she was really keen on kind of a strict educational environment. She would wake up very early, read a lot of books. And her mother also loved architecture, and even though they had quite a difficult and strained personal relationship, we can see that those things later influenced Christina. So yes, she had a really physical education, was really interested in that. And she pursued like fencing and hunting, and they're quite often at the centre of modern representations that we see of her, but when Christina did become queen, she attracted and invited lots of famous philosophers and scientists to Stockholm, and part of this was because there was a French civil war going on, there was lots of turmoil and conflict happening elsewhere, and so people were coming to Stockholm as kind of a place of academic refuge. So one of those was René Descartes, so he came and he later died in Sweden. And Christina really wanted to establish the city of Stockholm as the Athens of the North, and she's sometimes referred to as the Athena of the North. But she was really determined not to marry, she didn't want to marry, and that was against kind of all expectations, so eventually she abdicated in 1654 and converted to Catholicism, which was a really big deal, and moved to Rome, which again we'll discuss in a little while, and although she did travel after her abdication. So she went to France and various other places, went to other places in Italy. She did eventually die in Rome in 1689, so that's a very whistle-stop tour of her birth to her death.

AT: And we're done! No, (laughter) so when she abdicated she was only 28, she had only ruled for 10 years - why did she do that? So you've mentioned that she didn't want to get married, you mentioned that she's got all of these other interests that don't really have anything to do with running a kingdom. My understanding is that there was also some decisions that she had made that were not super popular, so was it just sort of a combination of things, or some things more than others?

AS: Yeah, so this is a debate that people are still having, like what had more impact than other things, as I feel is always the answer in history. But yeah, so she was only ruling for 10 years, and when she abdicated, they'd actually been discussing it for a few years previously. And there'd been lots of discussion with her and her counsellors and different groups, and there'd been a lot of worry. They didn't want her to abdicate, and she was supposed to get married, they wanted her to get married. And one of the suggestions was her cousin Carl Gustav, and some people liked him and some people didn't like him, some people didn't think that he was going to be the right king for Sweden. And basically when she abdicated, he inherited the throne. She left it to him, and everyone else agreed except for the nobility who got a bit annoyed. So instead of marrying him she went, "well just have the throne without me anyway", and in terms of like a personal level, she didn't want to get married, and that was a big expectation on her. But she also, as we said she was really interested in philosophy and religion, and she'd started dabbling with the idea of converting to Catholicism, which at the time Sweden was Protestant. And so she couldn't have been a Catholic queen on a Swedish throne, and so that was a big personal reason for her, and she wasn't feeling very artistically fulfilled in Sweden, so what we were saying a second ago about all these artists and philosophers and academics turning up in Sweden, and it was all wonderful and great. Then the French Civil War had ended, and everything was fine, and all of those people kind of went back to other places where they could get patronage, which wasn't as cold, and she just felt a bit like "oh well I'm here on my own now, everyone is gone or has died," and she was looking for something else, and the kind of Italian Mediterranean kind of lifestyle really appealed to her. And she saw that if she did abdicate and go to Rome, she wouldn't have all those expectations placed on her as a queen, but hoped that she could continue living like one, which again I feel like we might come back to later. But she couldn't abdicate without a safety net, and I think this is a really interesting thing. She starts kind of appealing to different Catholic monarchs in other parts of Europe. So she sends a whole bunch of gifts to Spain, including a portrait where she is basically depicted in the same way as the Spanish king of the time, so she's very much saying like "oh look here I am reflecting Catholic artwork, I'd be a great Catholic convert," which is just really interesting. But yeah there'd also been plague, and people were kind of criticising her for her poor financial management and things like that, so there was all these other factors going on at the same time, but I just think she had enough, basically.

AT: I mean it kind of sounds like she had a quarter-life crisis and abdicated.

AS: Yeah I mean that would be an accurate summary I think, and she'd grown up with, her father had died when she was six. And again you see this in the visual representations, which is

really interesting. Her father had died in battle, kind of great war hero, and I think she felt quite overshadowed by him in her early life, and then didn't necessarily feel like she was ticking all the boxes as a queen of Sweden, but knew what she wanted to be doing, and those things didn't really line up. And as I said earlier she had a bit of a difficult relationship with her mother. So when her father died it was tradition in Sweden for a little while to keep the body laid out and for people to go see the body and all those sorts of things. And he had left it in her in his will that she would automatically be cared for by a council and by her aunt and uncle, and her mother basically said no. And for the first few years after his death insisted on taking Christina to see the body every single day, left the body out for an extended period of time, embalmed her husband's heart and had it in the bedroom where her and Christina slept. And so I think you know as we said like quarter-life crisis, but in that time she'd had a very difficult beginning, and then she'd had this like great educational flourishing, and then that kind of disappears. And I think she just felt like she needed to be somewhere else, she needed to be doing something different, which I'm sure is more of an emotion that we can all connect with, even if we haven't had to sleep in a room with an embalmed heart.

AT: Well who hasn't had that experience? (laughter) It's actually making me think of like Queen Victoria's controlling mom as well.

AS: Yeah, so I think that's a really good parallel, and obviously that goes all the way up till Victoria's quite a bit older, so it was seen as quite a good thing that they got Christina out of there, after not too long, and placed her with her aunt and uncle.

AT: Okay, so that was a question of the people with political power, eventually just said "no, we're not doing this anymore, we need to actually be preparing this child to run the country, and this can't go on."

AS: Yes, yeah completely, and she also, so she kind of wrote a lot about her life, so we've got maxims that she wrote that are like just little short little kind of quotes about things you should do in life, and we've got other documents from her. And although she says that "I really loved my mother," it's quite clear that there was a lot of difficulties, and that it was seen as kind of a very toxic, difficult relationship to be in.

AT: Yeah. Yeah. I think we can all agree on that. From what I know of her, there doesn't seem to be as much sort of overt sexism that I've seen in other women ruling as queen regnants, where you know this woman is going to take the throne, and then all of the sort of sexist nonsense that comes with that, like Elizabeth I saying that, "oh, I have but the frail body of a woman, but the heart of a man," and like that sort of nonsense where you have to reassure them that "it's okay, I can do the job." Like it doesn't seem like she had to deal with as much of that.

AS: Yeah, I think part of that is that as we said, she wasn't on the throne for a really long time, it was 10 years, by the time she'd officially kind of taken it. She did take Elizabeth as a model, so Elizabeth would have been a living memory, not her living memory, but people around her's

living memory, and she did kind of see, “oh, here was a great Protestant queen who didn't get married and still like had a really long reign.” And so she did see Elizabeth as kind of like, “oh, I could be like that,” which is really interesting. But I think because she isn't there beyond that 10 years, we don't get as much of that, there's more kind of that initial hope, and then that initial hope that she's going to get married, and it would have been expected that she would have shared some of that power with whoever she had married. But she would have still been the queen, and there had been, so in when everyone talks about Elizabeth, our only kind of queens before that in England, are Mary and Matilda. Matilda doesn't get like a coronation or anything, and obviously, I know that there's going to be another podcast that picks apart all the kind of representations of Mary, whereas in Sweden, there had previously been female monarch who had been like deemed as fairly kind of successful, or was seen more neutrally than maybe people were seeing Mary I in Elizabeth's reign, so I think that's where there's kind of less need for Christina to qualify and quantify her abilities to do it.

And she was also, although she did love to like go off hunting and fencing at weird times of day and that sort of thing, she was a very early riser. She tells us this herself, that she'd get up, she'd like read for a couple of hours, then she'd go to council meetings, then she'd go off and go hunting and all those sorts of things. So I think she was probably trying quite hard, and so for those 10 years they were like, “oh it's okay,” and then obviously like the spanner in the works was her being like, “well I'm not going to have children, I'm not going to get married,” and they were like, “oh wait this is the problem.” And there was a lot of rumours about her kind of relationship status, despite not wanting to get married. And that wasn't that wasn't great, people didn't really approve of that. But apart from that I think she was just quite strong-willed and independent and quite forceful, so I don't think anybody at that point was necessarily, yeah, directing as much kind of gendered discrimination towards her.

AT: I do want to get into the relationship drama that you just hinted, but can you tell us, you mentioned a predecessor where it was a Swedish queen who had sort of set that precedent that “it's okay, a woman can rule Sweden and things aren't going to fall apart.”

AS: Yeah so there was a queen called Margaret who was a queen of Sweden, but also Denmark and Norway. It's a bit confusing at that time, they go through different stages of people ruling kind of all of them, some of them, parts of them, and yeah so she was kind of 1300s. So there had been a queen of Sweden, it's not completely unheard of, and unlike other places, so in France you couldn't inherit as a woman, whereas Sweden had no such rule. So there had been someone, there was another one after Christina, it wasn't kind of a big political issue in the same way. But the actual word when we translate from Swedish to English, the word for monarch is just “king,” so we would have still referred to them as I said earlier, as King Margaret and King Christina. So whenever you see there's quite a lot of popular culture depictions that pull on that because of Christina's kind of gender and sexuality narrative, and there's a lot of ones that pull out that, “oh King of Sweden,” which obviously works for that type of narrative, but is also legitimately she was king of Sweden. The king meant monarch, and the queen was the female like consort of the monarch, so that has been used a lot.

AT: And speaking of, she's been held up as a queer icon, so can you tell us a bit about why that is?

AS: So it's really important when we're talking about historical figures to recognise that kind of our modern terminology, our LGBTQIA+ terminology, they didn't use that, they didn't have that. None of these historical figures would have actually identified with a part of that label or an understanding of that acronym at all, but those lived experiences still existed. So when we're applying kind of that terminology to the past, we usually do it in a way to kind of attract people to that narrative and show them this is what we're talking about, so we also kind of refer to it as like, "oh we're going to talk about their gender and sexuality," or "we're going to talk about queer history," which is kind of seen as a more encompassing term, and one that doesn't necessarily assign people to the boxes that we have that they wouldn't have understood.

So from her birth, there was a lot of narrative around her gender and sexuality, and it's now also been depicted in a lot of films and fiction from as early as 1933 up to now, so that's really fascinating. So as I mentioned earlier, at birth, they thought she was a boy. Now she was born in December, and at the time Europe's going through a mini ice age. So it's really cold winter time, it's really dark, it's really horrible. It's December in Sweden, you've not got a lot of hours of daylight and when she's born, she's covered in a lot of extra goo, and it's the best way to describe it, and they just mistook her genitals essentially, or think they did. We're not sure, and basically this has led a lot of modern historians to wonder whether she was born intersex, and whether they just kind of made a decision, then changed their minds, and that was the life she then ended up living.

AT: So my understanding is that she was examined by medical personnel pretty much every year, because she's the future monarch, and we've got to make sure she's healthy, even if it's creepy and invasive.

AS: Yes, yeah, exactly, exactly correct, yeah. So if she'd had intersex genitalia, wouldn't somebody have flagged it, or is the theory that, like, if she was, maybe there was some sort of early operation. Because that seems like a big risk to take with your future monarch. Like the doctors would have known that her being able to produce an heir is going to be of utmost importance, especially if her mom had had trouble bearing kids. It just seems really unlikely. Like, I'm not opposed to wanting to believe that, like, important historical figures could have been intersex. It's just this one specifically doesn't seem likely, and I love that you're just like, it was really dark, and she was covered in gunk.

AS: Yeah.

AT: So the intersex claims are questionable at best, but there have also been questions about her sexuality as well. So we know that she had, in her own words, "an insurmountable distaste for marriage," and so that "it takes more courage to marry than to go to war," which, fair, I guess.

AS: Yeah, and I think, you know, we should definitely see that in the context of the time as well,

that if she's getting married, she's expected to have children. And if you're expected to have children, I mean, there's still a lot of danger, and I mean, one in five people in the UK have a miscarriage. So back in the 17th century in Sweden, you know, that's a legit fear.

AT: Even in the US today, like our maternal mortality rate in the US is insanely high compared to other developed countries. So, and that's more a reflection of our healthcare rather than modern medicine. It's just our broken system.

AS: Just terrifying, isn't it?

AT: Like, it is horrific that that's still a concern that people have, and like rightfully so. But apart from just not wanting to get married, which, there are many reasons that a woman, particularly a woman who had everything as she did, would not want to get married. But there's also the question of passionate letters to her friend, Ebba Sparre, and I'm not sure if we should be using "friend" in quotation marks there. What do you think?

AS: So I very much think that they were having a kind of romantic and/or sexual relationship. Again, people differ, and there's a whole load of scholarship around the language of letters in the 17th century, and how, it didn't necessarily mean that you're attracted to a person in that way. It was just kind of convention, blah, blah, blah, blah. But for Ebba, particularly, she was a lady-in-waiting in Christina's court. They were very close. They spent a lot of time together, and they did continue these letters after Christina's abdication. And she was kind of whisked off and married before Christina's abdication, when things were getting a bit too gossipy for the liking of her male counselors, basically. And so, yeah, I really would say that they probably did share some kind of romantic and/or sexual relationship. And again, they wouldn't have used our terminology that we use today for that. But they were very, very close. And yeah, there was a lot of kind of rumors and discussion at court about it. So I would definitely say, yes, I think in my mind, and I know people disagree with me, but in my mind, I think that, they weren't just friends. But Christina did, there's also lots of rumors that she was kind of off having sexual relationships, other people, including men. And I think this is really interesting, because she does become this queer icon, but she becomes a queer icon for lesbians from the 1930s onwards. And so we have this whole kind of bi erasure going on, that if we take it, all these relationships that are happening, then she would not fit into our modern term of being a lesbian. So it's kind of, you know, something that we could talk a lot about, I'm sure. But yeah, I definitely think for the two of them, there was there was more than friendship going on.

AT: One of the facts that people used to try to denounce that theory is that she would use the same style when she was writing to women that she had never met, but whose writing, she admired. And I look at that and think about all the crushes that people have had on celebrities, because she loved learning, she loved knowledge. And I feel like that's exactly the kind of person that she would have developed one of those, like, "I've never met this person, but their writing is so amazing" crushes.

AS: Yeah, you could definitely imagine her at like, Comic-Con or on Tumblr, can't you? Like, you can imagine it so clearly, if she was living now. I think she was just so excited to write those people. And again, to be in the position that she'd had that education, but that she could also write to those people and expect a reply and be able to offer them some kind of patronage or offer them something, you know, that she was a massive fan, you know. We've all seen people write letters that you look at, and you think, oh, you look back at things you've grown and gone, "oh, that was a bit unhinged when I was 15." So, you know, I don't think that's a disapproval for her other relationships with women.

AT: All right, now I really want to see fan fiction about Christina of Sweden writing fan fiction, but that's a whole other, that's my wish list now. We haven't gotten into her post-queen life because she abdicates at 28, she lives to be 62. And people don't really seem to talk about the second half of her life. And so as you mentioned, she'd become interested in Catholicism, that was likely part of why she abdicated so that she could convert to Catholicism, which she did. She became a symbol of the counter-reformation and all of this. So she's a lot of symbols to a lot of people is what we're saying. And people that wouldn't necessarily be hanging out together.

AS: No. (laughter)

AT: So she abdicates, she leaves the country, she has a bit of money that they've given her and she quickly runs out of money because, like we mentioned, her financial management at the kingdom level wasn't that great. And it seems like her personal financial management also wasn't that great. But she opened an academy in Italy at the Palazzo Farnese on 24th of January 1656. So this was relatively soon after she abdicated in 1654. And it was the Academy of Arcadia, which just sounds just like the kind of person we've been talking about.

AS: Yes, it does. Yeah, I think so to start with, I just think post-queenship is a super interesting word to use when we're talking about Christina, because, yep, she's given up her throne. She is no longer queen. You know, so she is post-queenship after that abdication. But by converting to Catholicism and going to Rome, she's going to a city that is dominated by the Vatican and which is completely men. And so the Pope as kind of the kind of "king" of that area, she can then go in and fulfill a female space that no one else can fulfill in the same way. Because she is coming in and they are very excited. As you said, she becomes a symbol of the counter-Reformation. She's super important as a kind of political asset as a convert to Catholicism. So it's a big deal. It's massive. And this is one of the things that I think why we kind of end up stopping at her abdication and her getting into Rome when we think about how much we know about her from history or films and stuff like that. Because that scene is the point that kind of rocked a lot of people in Europe at the time. And we've got loads of prints of this, of her entry into Rome and stuff like this in collections all over Europe, which would have been collected by those people because it was such a massive deal. It was so important. It's really hard to understate how insane that was at the time, how high-profile that conversion was. So she can go in and she can fill this space that isn't filled by anyone else. So it's not like she's going to the Spanish court and competing with a Spanish queen consort or anything like that.

She is going into Rome and can carve out this new position for herself where really she is still queen. So that's still so important to everybody still to recognize that she has been a queen and she has given that up to be a Catholic. So she still gets referred as queen a lot because of that. And she also takes on a kind of second middle name of Alexandra, which is a reflection of the kind of current Pope's name to again like fully bring her into the fold of Catholicism. So you see her whole name right now with Queen of Sweden following it in these dedications because it's such a political thing. So she has moved beyond her queenship, but she's just moved into a different sort of queenship, I would say, which I think is really interesting.

But yes, she goes there, she opens this academy, like you could go there and like enjoy music and theatre and art and literature and all of these things. I mentioned her commissioning artwork earlier on, but she continues doing that. She acts as a patron to Bernini. So if anyone has ever been to Rome, like 50% of the sculptures you will see in Rome are by Bernini. So there's an amazing fountain in the Piazza Navona. And he created that. And he created a lot for her and was under her patronage.

And as we said earlier, she was really interested in architecture. And at the time that was very much based in like classical architecture. And just before this is when we're starting to, I don't really want to call them like archeology because it's not great, but they started to do excavations. And she finances some of those. And she also collects a, they're not a complete set, but a set of the statue of the Muses that they find in Hadrian's Villa that's in Tivoli, which is literally just outside Rome. You can get a train to it today. It's amazing. And she purchased these and set them up in a room where she could sit as the spare seat in the room of the Muses. So, you know, massively fulfilling her artistic and intellectual dream by moving to Rome. And in terms of her legacy, another colleague, Aoife Cosgrove from Trinity College Dublin went to a conference and things in Madrid recently. And Aoife has been examining the collection of Elizabeth Farnese, who's a Spanish queen 100 years later. And she purchased those statues and recreated Christina's room of the Muses because of how big Christina was as a female monarch, how popular and interested people were in her at that time. So even though we stopped talking about Christina at that abdication point, other people were still thinking about her after that point for a long time, which is a very long way.

AT: And so this is where things get a little weird for me because she's like hanging out with popes and royals in France and Italy. But within two years of abdicating her throne, she's trying to get a new throne because, so again, she abdicated in 1654 and within two years, she is trying to become a mediator between France and Spain because they're fighting over who's going to get to control Naples. And she literally had this plan that she was going to lead French troops to take Naples. And then she would rule it until bequeathing the crown to France after she died. And this didn't work out because a plague killed almost half the population within like two years. So that didn't work out.

And then in 1660, so again, only like six years after she abdicated, she was told that Charles X Gustav had died and his son was only five years old. So she goes to Sweden and is like, "Hey, I left the throne to him and his descendant. So if the kid dies, I'll just have to be queen again." And they're like, "uh, no, you're Catholic, also you gave up the throne. But more importantly, you're Catholic now. No."



And then in, in 1668, so again, still less than like 20 years out, the Polish Lithuanian throne is up for grabs because John II Casimir abdicated and went off to France. Good for him. And so because the Polish monarchy was elective, Christina, who was a member of the house of Vasa. So she put herself forward and was like, "Hey, I could run this country. And you don't mind that I'm Catholic and an old maid." And even though she had the Pope's support on this, she still didn't get it. And I'm just like, what, what happened there? Because the, the Academy of Arcadia that we mentioned earlier, that seems like that should have been her dream retirement. So why is someone who gave up a throne wanting, over and over again, either her old throne back or a new throne. What is going on there?

AS: I think really she liked being in the center of things. And she liked being influential. She liked being involved in politics. She just didn't like the situation the first time around. And so it was like, "Oh, let's see if I can find a new situation." And I was just thinking with Naples, I wonder how much of that would have been influenced by, "Oh, there's a lot of history around here. Oh, there's a lot that I could claim as mine if I became queen of Naples." And I think she'd also probably hope that even though she's not that old, she is older than they would have expected. So she's probably thinking, "well, they're not going to ask me to get married. They're not going to ask me to have children." Like that ticks that box out the way. As you said, "they're not going to worry that I'm Catholic in two of those situations." And also, she did write to Sweden a couple of times. And I think with the trip to Sweden as well, it would have also been a bit like, "please give me some money. I'll go away if you pay me off." So she did want to be at the center of things. She did like having the power. Just don't think she likes the restrictions that came with that power that first time round. And she loved, before her abdication, she'd never left Sweden. And then she gets to see all these really cool places. And I think that would have also appealed to her that idea of, "oh, I could pop off to Poland for a bit and become monarch of there." Because yeah, as you mentioned earlier, when she's traveling down to Rome, she stops in France and things like that.

And she, really brilliantly at one point when she's traveling through France, she actually meets another queen who has been kicked off her throne, rather than abdicated. Because she meets Henrietta Maria, who's queen of England. And so she's Charles I's queen consort. So Charles I has his head chopped off. And Henrietta Maria has gone back to France where she's from and is living with her brother and his family and all that sort of thing. So Christina and Henrietta Maria meet each other in that moment as an abdicated queen and as a deposed queen. And it's one of those things I don't think we have a document of and I would love. It's the thing I definitely want to be the fly on the wall for. I want to hear their conversation, because they are both very similar and very different people. So I think that would be fascinating. But yeah, I just think she thought, "Oh, just give it a go. Why not?"

AT: More fan fiction!

AS: Yeah, more of a genuinely so much fan fiction!

AT: Being being a native English speaker, I probably haven't seen as many media

representations as a Swede has when it comes to Christina. But even I've seen her mentioned enough that I knew who she was before we had this conversation. So can you tell us a bit about the different depictions that we see of her and how different people's, again, going back to biases and agendas, how different people are presenting her for different reasons.

AS: Yeah. So I will also do a shameless little plug before I start this one. I have actually written [an article on how she's represented in fiction and in heritage](#). So if anyone wants to go check that out, it's online, it's free. It's open access on the Royal Studies Journal. So it's really interesting actually that you started there with, "oh, I'm not Swedish. Maybe I haven't seen all the representations of her." Really interestingly, the first one comes from Hollywood. So in the 1930s, we have this kind of moment in Hollywood where they're really interested in portraying queens on screen. It's huge. There are so many representations of Cleopatra, of Henrietta Maria, of Christina Sweden. There are so many in that kind of 1920s and 1930s point in time. And the very first person to play her in one of those films is Greta Garbo. And I think that just says it all straight away. So for anyone who doesn't know, Greta Garbo was a massively famous actress at the time, and there's lots of questions around her own queer history. So I really think that for Greta, playing Christina would have really appealed to her, which I think is wonderful. But it's so interesting because in that film, we get this initial moment where she kisses, um, Ebba Sparre, and there's this like whole moment where you're like, "wow, what is going on?" Because this is 1933. And then very, very quickly, the narrative is still sexual, but she is realigned to our heteronormative expectations. So she falls in love with a Spanish ambassador. She's out, because she's also known for cross-dressing, which I should have said earlier, but she's out dressed in men's clothing. She's at a tavern. Everybody is talking about the Queen, and there's this kind of hilarious moment where they're all sharing opinions about the monarch and the monarch is sat there. And this Spanish ambassador who's on his way to Christina's court, he comes in, they end up having a chat. And there's a very Twelfth Night moment. If anyone has read or watched a version of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, where the female character again is in disguise as a man. And there's this moment where this duke in that is thinking, "why am I attracted to this young man? This is a bit weird." And then he gets really kind of, "oh, thank goodness" when he finds out she's a woman. And there's very much the same vibe in that film. So her and the Spanish ambassador end up going and sleeping together. There's only one room left at the inn. And then she starts getting undressed and he's like, "whoa, okay," and then she just leaves in the morning. She just goes, they say goodbye. She leaves. He doesn't know that she's Queen of Sweden. And you then get the scene where he arrives at the court. He's all ready to present himself and he's like, "oh dear." And in the end, she abdicates because she's going to run away with him, but he dies. And so it's very much realigning us to these heteronormative expectations of this kind of like kind of princessy vibe.

AT: Not just at heteronormative, but the idea that a woman who is literally running a country gives it up for love. And it seems like, what? like, really guy? It's not for all the reasons that we talked about with, like all the many reasons that she wouldn't want to do this and all the crap she went through and all. No, no, it's because of a man.

AS: Yeah, pretty much. It's just mad when you watch it, and so frustrating, but there is kind of this great bit where they're talking and he's telling her all about. because he's from Spain. He's telling her all about the wonderful artwork and architecture and stuff. So there is like a very short bit where he's saying all these wonderful things "you could experience if you came to Spain" and she's a bit like, "but I'm a queen. I can't go to Spain, like on a whim." And then she's like, "Oh, actually, what if I abdicated?" So there, there is a very tiny bit that is a bit like, "Oh, here's the real Christina," but a bit. like the bit at the beginning, it's very quickly, like off we go. I do see the ambassador in the film as kind of this symbol of Catholicism and of the outside world, kind of pulling her away from Sweden. But as you say, like your immediate reaction is just like, "so you fell in love with a man, you gave up all your power and your wealth and all these other great things and just went off with him." Okay. Um, so yeah, that's the 1933 version. Like you have this moment where you're excited. "My gosh, what's about to happen?" And then you're back in 1933, really, aren't you? So there's that version.

And then there's in 1974, Ruth Wolff writes a play called *The Abdication* and then it got made into film, and you can really see the psychological interests of the '70s influencing this depiction of her. It literally takes place in like a couple of days, because before she officially goes into Rome, she secretly goes in and has a chat with a cardinal who later becomes pope in the film. But she goes in and has a chat with this cardinal just to check that she's really Catholic before they spend loads of money welcoming her to Rome and whatever. And again, she basically falls in love with this guy, and then he's elevated to Pope, and she is officially welcomed into Rome, and so they cannot be together. But when he's talking to her about why she wants to be there, she has all these flashbacks about this childhood with her mother. And there's a lot of psychology and a lot of kind of trauma really being unpicked in that. So you can really see when that was made and why they made it like that.

AT: So, when you said '70s and what was going on at the time and everything, I assumed that we were going to have like a more feminist version, because that's when you did have a lot of feminists reclaiming historical figures and really like bringing women artists and stuff back out into public recognition. But no, we've still got her falling in love, this time with the frickin' pope.

AS: Yeah, I mean, again, there is these moments where you're seeing what she was interested in, seeing that she was kind of rebelling against expectations, and that's a big part of the issue for her. So you do still get that kind of like feminist reclaiming of like, "well, look how interesting she was," but also like "look at all this horrible stuff that happened to her, like no wonder like she's feeling quite unstable." So yeah, it's quite a strange mix that one, because I think it is very much kind of influenced by that feminist movement, and she doesn't marry him in the end. And it's not because he dies. It's because they go off on their own paths. There's this really weird scene where he like walks into the distance into the light. It's very odd. But again, massive, the cast at the time, like really, really big. So Liv Ullmann plays Christina. So really, really big again. It's not a backwater production somewhere.

AT: Nobody's saying that the future pope should give up his cardinalship for a lady.

AS: Yeah, we then have the most recent version, which is again based on a play by Michel Marc Bouchard. And this is one of the ones where we get a title that incorporates that king aspect. So it's Christina: The Girl King, which again, really interesting, because several of them refer to her as the girl king. And at this point, you're like, but she's an adult now. So again, there's things we could unpick about that. But being kind of a 21st-century version, so the film came out in 2017, her and Ebba's relationship is like massive in it. So it like basically constructs their whole relationship. And then there's one of her other household members is seeing that they're having an intimate relationship and basically tells all the men, which is just awful, goes and tells all the men. And then, Ebba's removed, married, blah, blah, blah. And basically, then there's this kind of big intervention about Christina's sexuality and her activities in terms of like her fencing and all those sorts things. And you get the unrest in Sweden being depicted, and then she abdicates. So basically, all the films either about her abdication or end in her abdication. So I think this is where we were saying earlier that there isn't a, we don't think of her past that. And even though there was a lot of drama after that, a lot of that drama didn't have kind of a set conclusion. So by using her abdication as kind of the conclusion, that's where a lot of the kind of films end.

And there is also a children's book that is called Christina the Girl King. And it's by Carolyn Meyer, who did a lot of the, I don't know, I think they're from the US, aren't they? And they're like children's historical fiction about different women. We had a different writer and a different version here in the UK, and we didn't have a Christina Sweden one. But the children's version of Christina the Girl King is just a diary set from a young age. And she does, again, she does meet Ebba, but it's not obviously sexual at that point, because they're 10.

AT: So yeah, that's the Royal Diary series, which I absolutely loved when I was a kid. I highly recommend them. They were published from 1999 to 2005. Middle school me highly recommends them is what I'm saying.

AS: Yes. I, one of the best experiences I ever had, I used to work in a really kind of small independent museum. And I had just finished my Christina Sweden dissertation. And I had this tiny little visitor, you know, not tiny. She was like eight or nine. And she came in and she got really excited because I was telling her all the history of the building that had nothing to do with Sweden whatsoever. And then her parents were like, "oh, she really loves these books. She really loves history and historical fiction." And this little girl is like, "yeah, I've just read the Christina Sweden one." And I was just like, "this is amazing." And so I ended up having this conversation with this nine-year-old about Christina Sweden for like a full hour whilst her parents just sat there like, "how is this happening?" They'd come from the US to England, had come to a tiny little town to discover their family history. And so that was wonderful. So those books are still making an impact, which is really, really nice. And I did actually have a chat with the author about it. And she said the thing that really inspired her was she went to an exhibition in Sweden that kind of depicted the court at that time, including like a banquet that was laid out and all that sort of thing. And it basically, just came home with the book in her head like, "yes, this is what I'm going to do." And it does touch on Christina's kind of, this is the education side and like, "I feel different to other girls." But it doesn't kind of deal with kind of the sexuality and

gender in more detail, being aimed at nine-year-olds in the '90s.

AT: Well, but also the girls themselves, like this is when like, you know, we're talking about Cleopatra and Nzingha and Marie Antoinette - this is all before they became who they were as adults. So it's also not necessarily a time in Christina's life that she would have necessarily been thinking about those kinds of things.

AS: Yeah, exactly. And so it's very appropriate both to how Christina would have felt and whoever is reading it. But it is really interesting that there is a children's book of hers. And again, Carolyn, the author said that that's her least sold one of the books that she wrote about historic royal women, because everybody automatically went for the Mary ones, went for the Anne ones, all our Tudor ones, basically, and wasn't as interested. So when I emailed her, I was like, "Oh!" she was quite surprised.

AT: Fandom! Okay, see, now I'm just picturing you sending her a letter the way we were talking about Christina earlier fan girling.

AS: Yeah, literally. "I love that you did this!" Yes. Yeah, that's definitely what happened.

AT: All right. So with everything that you know about Christina and her life and how she's been depicted, what do you want to see her legacy being? Like, if you could create a novel or a play or a movie or a TV show, what are the things that you would want people to take away from that about Christina?

AS: One of the things that I find really frustrating kind of when we talk about history in general, there is always this kind of tendency to put people into a binary of being good or bad and us having to uphold them to either kind of narrative. And what really frustrates me with all of the people that I study is that they either get kind of pushed into one side or the other. And that completely takes away a lot of their agency. It takes away a lot of the narrative. We kind of miss out conversations about patronage and about conflict and involvement in those sorts of things in a more meaningful way. So for me, I would love either a TV series or because I'm a kind of heritage museums person, I would love an exhibition that went through her whole life, but included all the bad bits. So there's a lot of other things that happen that are not good. Do not paint Christina in a good light. There are a couple of kind of murders and assassinations and things like that. They just end up being a footnote in things. And I would really like to see kind of a full TV series that went from kind of birth to death and included those things and included all of her different relationships. And as I said, there's a lot of bi erasure, so I'd love to see all of her possible romantic relationships dealt with in a nuanced way rather than just being, "let's make sure we've depicted her as being a lesbian" or "let's make sure we've realigned her to some heteronormative ideas." I want to see kind of a fully fleshed-out version of what was going on and include the things that we talk about less.

And certainly if we were doing an exhibition, I would love to see more on her patronage because we always mention it and it's always upheld as this like thing she did in Rome, but it's not put

into its wider context. It's not discussed as this is the legacy she left for other people. This is where her art collection went afterwards. So because Elizabeth Farnese collected those statues of the Muses, they're now in the Prado in Madrid and you can actually go see them there in a room all on their own. It makes me very excited that they're there. And the painting that she sent to Philip the king of Spain is also in the Prado, but it's not on display because they're currently restoring it. And I really want that to hang in a room with all of the paintings that she was speaking to when that painting was commissioned.

So quite a complicated answer, but basically I just want us to talk about all of the things rather than getting kind of hung up on her application. I'd like more information.

AT: It sounds like you want context and nuance.

AS: Yeah, context and nuance is exactly what I'd like in all of the depictions, please.

AT: Unfortunately, that's not media's specialty. I don't know if you're aware of this.

AS: Yeah. So obviously that is a balance between kind of audience and appeal and all of those sorts of things. But I think like we were saying earlier, the Tudors particularly get so much airtime, specific Tudors get so much airtime that you think, "well, where is my three-series-long about Christina of Sweden? Where is my better depiction of all of these other queens and queen consorts?" Yeah, I just think it's time to look at someone else.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast and remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.