



*The Afterlife of Christina of  
Sweden: Gender and Sexuality in  
Heritage and Fiction*

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## The Afterlife of Christina of Sweden: Gender and Sexuality in Heritage and Fiction

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**Abstract:** From her reign until today, Christina of Sweden (1626-1689) has been the object of intrigue and scandal, appearing in seventeenth century political writings, commemorative prints, biographies, films, plays, and even a children's book. The monarch has been described at best as 'unconventional' and at worst as an impulsive, over-emotional murderer. Christina's sexuality and gender have been constantly reconstructed, re-examined, and re-interpreted. Christina's actions, full of political and religious significance for seventeenth century Europe, have been immortalised in writing, images, and objects now found in museum collections. Within heritage, however, Christina's sexuality and gender are largely ignored and LGBTQ+ histories in general restricted to specific events, limiting the reach of these narratives. This article examines how Christina's sexuality and gender is presented in film and literature. It compares these representations to museum interpretation text that accompanies objects related to Christina. Exploring Christina's presence in these different environments, this article argues that her royal status gives her a 'legitimate' space within fictional representations and heritage that can be used to integrate LGBTQ+ narratives into the general historic and popular environments.

**Keywords:** sexuality; gender; heritage; popular culture; interpretation

### The Life of Christina of Sweden

"He needed an heir to succeed him and become the next King. In fact—is this not hilarious?—at first my father believed I was a boy!

But others recognized the truth: I was undeniably FEMALE"<sup>1</sup>

Carolyn Meyer, *Kristina, The Girl King*, 2003

"Stop kidding yourself ... you raised her as a man and now you're surprised that she whistles at women."<sup>2</sup>

Mika Kaurismäki, *The Girl King*, 2016

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Meyer, *Kristina, The Girl King* (New York: Scholastic Inc, 2003), 5.

<sup>2</sup> *The Girl King*, dir. Mika Kaurismäki (Marianna Films and Triptych Media, 2015).

These quotations, both from recent fictional representations of Christina of Sweden (1626-1689) demonstrate the breadth of interpretation surrounding her.<sup>3</sup> Together they emphasise her gender and sexuality, themes that are central to both academic explorations and fictional representations of the Swedish queen. In contrast, representations of Christina within heritage interpretation texts do not directly explore her sexuality, rather this discussion is ignored, and narratives obscured. Margaret Kuntz has argued that Christina's fame was "continually fuelled by her unwillingness to conform to contemporary social conventions for women" highlighting that Christina's disregard for the seventeenth century feminine ideal has informed public opinion of her both during and after her lifetime.<sup>4</sup>

Since the 1930s, Christina has been the subject of three films, two of which were based on plays, and has been the protagonist of a children's book.<sup>5</sup> These, alongside reprints of Christina's own maxims, nineteenth century biographies by those such as Henry Woodhead, and recent popular and academic publications by authors such as Veronica Buckley and Elisabeth Wåghäll Nivre, highlight that after her death Christina has continued to be a source of interest and artistic inspiration.<sup>6</sup> Traces of Christina's legacy can be found in museums, art collections, and heritage sites across the world, from the Prado in Madrid, to the V&A in London, to displays of her royal regalia in her native Sweden, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.<sup>7</sup> Christina continues to be of interest to the media; online *Royal Central* shared a

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<sup>3</sup> This article has been developed from initial research undertaken as part of the author's undergraduate dissertation at the University of Winchester (2012), and has been shaped by professional experience gained within the heritage industry. The author would like to thank the *Royal Studies Journal*, the Kings and Queens 7 Conference team, Dr Ellie Woodacre, and Dr Simon Sandall for their continued encouragement and support. Further thanks are owed to Bryony Shepherd, Carolyn Meyer, Rosalind and Geoffrey Saunders, Caterina Lacueva Bisquert, and other past colleagues at the V&A. Finally, a special thanks to Frankie Arnold, who provided interpretation material from Sweden, and to Dr Joshua Green for his everlasting patience and support.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Kuntz, "Questions of Identity: Alexander VII, Carlo Rainaldi, and the Temporary Façade at Palazzo Farnese for Queen Christina of Sweden," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 58 (2013): 143.

<sup>5</sup> Meyer, *The Royal Dairies, Kristina, The Girl King; The Girl King*, dir. Kaurismäki; Michel Marc Bouchard, *Christina, The Girl King*. (Vancouver: Talon books, 2012); *Queen Christina*, dir. Rouben Mamoulian (Warner Brothers Studios, 1933); *The Abdication*, dir. Anthony Harvey (Warner Brother Studios, 1974); Ruth Wolff, *The Abdication* (Woodstock: Dramatic Publishing, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> Christina Vasa, *Maxims of a Queen, Christina of Sweden* (London: J. Lane, 1907); Henry Woodhead, *The Memoirs of Queen Christina, Volume One* (London, 1863); Henry Woodhead, *The Memoirs of Queen Christina, Volume Two* (London, 1863); Veronica Buckley, *Christina, Queen of Sweden* (New York: Harper, 2004); and Elisabeth Wåghäll Nivre, "Writing Life – Writing News: Representations of Queen Christina of Sweden in early modern literature," *Renaissance Studies* 23, no. 2 (2009): 221–239.

<sup>7</sup> Sébastien Bourdon, *Christine of Sweden on Horseback* (1653-1654), Oil on Canvas, 340.5cm x 303cm, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/christine-of-sweden-on-horseback/3060d326-6185-4cb4-b0cf-e1a225c19d7d?searchid=e2305e06-72a3-a322-bf29-2d6277db0aef>; Robert van Audenaerde, *Pompae Funebres habitae in Funere Christinae Alexandrae Reginae suecic* (Etching and engraving on laid paper, 45.5cm x 67.8cm), <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O649881/pompae-funebres-habitae-in-funere-print-audenaerde-robert-van/>; Laura Dekkers, "Crown Princess Victoria brings her children to work," *Royal Central*, 23 February 2018, <http://royalcentral.co.uk/europe/sweden/crown-princess-victoria-brings-her-children-to-work-96799>; Alberto Hamerani, *Conversion of Queen Christina of Sweden, 1654* (Bronze, Diameter 6cm, 17th Century), <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/191196?searchField=All&amp;amp%3BsortBy=relevance&amp;amp%3Bwhen=A.D.%2B1600-1800&amp;amp%3Bft=christina%2Bof%2Bsweden&amp;amp%3Boffset=0&amp;amp%3Brrp=80&amp;amp%3B>

story about the current Crown Princess, Victoria of Sweden, teaching her children about their past by taking them to visit the exhibition *Vivat Regina* at Stockholm Cathedral.<sup>8</sup> The exhibition displayed the jewels and coronation robe used at Christina's crowning in 1650.

Christina's most famous act is her conversion to Catholicism following her abdication from the Swedish throne in 1654. However, prior to her abdication, Christina's actions and personality had already come under the spotlight. This scrutiny is intrinsically linked to Christina's lack of conformity to seventeenth century ideals. Christina would have been expected to make a suitable marriage connecting Sweden's crown to another politically-strong family. Within this match she would have been expected to produce heirs and share power with her husband. In contrast her refusal to marry removed her from the possibility of forging this political connection, from sharing power, and from having legitimate children.

There were three main aspects of Christina's life and personality prior to her abdication that have allowed commentators from the seventeenth century to the twenty-first to question her gender and sexuality. Firstly, her unconventional birth, touched on in the opening of this article. Secondly her clothing, that is summed up by Sarah Waters as "sometimes ... men's, sometimes ... women's, often ... a careless mixture of the two—pulling on a short skirt over her breeches."<sup>9</sup> And finally her refusal to marry, and the possibility that she had romantic and/or sexual feelings towards women, including having a relationship with her maid of honour, the Countess Ebba Sparre.

The story of Christina's birth and its consequences are central to the understanding of her gender. All biographies, books, and articles about Christina discuss it to some extent, usually using it to set the scene, depicting a childhood that was confused, unusual or unfeminine. This is often included in a way that suggests that it ultimately impacted or dictated her future or undermined her potential success. It consistently forms an integral part of the narrative surrounding her in fictional representations. At her birth Christina was reportedly mistaken for a son as she was born covered in caul and had swollen genitals. Whilst everyone celebrated the birth of a male heir to the throne it was decided that the child was actually female and Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, was informed of the mistake.<sup>10</sup> It is often repeated that the king either was not angered by this turn of events or had the noble bearing not to show it, telling his sister: "Let us thank God, sister; I hope this girl will be as good as a boy."<sup>11</sup> In addition to this, it is documented that Gustavus Adolphus "desired that she should be educated in all respects like a prince."<sup>12</sup> This declaration has been linked to Christina's choice of activities and clothing throughout her life. Christina is known to have enjoyed traditionally masculine pastimes such as fencing, hunting and horse-riding, and has often been depicted in clothing or poses that do not reflect the feminine ideal. The narrative of her birth, combined with her subsequent cross-dressing and masculine endeavours, have led to suggestions that she may have been born intersex. This possibility has persisted as a matter of debate, which Veronica Biermann argues

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3Bpos=5.

<sup>8</sup> Dekkers, "Crown Princess Victoria brings her children to work."

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Waters, "A Girton Girl on a Throne: Queen Christina and Versions of Lesbianism, 1906–1933," *Feminist Review* (1994): 42.

<sup>10</sup> Buckley, *Christina, Queen of Sweden*, 19.

<sup>11</sup> See: Edward Cust, *Lives of the Warriors of The Thirty Years War: Warriors of the Seventeenth Century, Volume 1* (London, 1865), 221; Woodhead, *The Memoirs of Queen Christina, Volume One*, 11–12; and Buckley, *Christina, Queen of Sweden*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Woodhead, *The Memoirs of Queen Christina, Volume One*, 14.

“reached its biological culmination when her remains were exhumed in 1965.”<sup>13</sup> Although the results “concluded that her ‘true sexuality’ could no longer be definitively determined but that her skeleton showed typically feminine features,” it is another clear sign that Christina’s gender and biological sex are central to people’s interest and understanding of her.<sup>14</sup>

Christina’s refusal to marry, juxtaposed with the scandalous rumours of her relationships with both men and women, have caused a huge amount of interest. Within both film and fictional literature, authors have seized upon her possible relationship with Ebba Sparre as a point for creative inspiration. Ebba is often represented as having all the traditional feminine qualities that Christina lacked; she became maid of honour and was a celebrated court beauty.<sup>15</sup> Christina’s masculine tendencies have also been connected to her general dislike of women. Buckley suggests that the possible mental instabilities of Christina’s mother, Maria Eleanora, may have caused a negative reaction in Christina against perceived feminine sensitivities.<sup>16</sup> Questions around Christina’s sexuality were discussed by her contemporaries with a “series of slanderous pamphlets” claiming “that respectable women refused to take their daughters to visit Christina, because she’d been seen putting her hands up ladies’ skirts.”<sup>17</sup> In contrast, in the twentieth century, through her potentially romantic relationship with Ebba, Christina has become a symbol for the lesbian community.<sup>18</sup>

Although Christina was not the first female monarch to refuse matrimony, nor the only female royal of the seventeenth century to be seen cross-dressing, these actions combined with rumours surrounding her sexuality and the account of her birth have embedded Christina into a narrative of subversion, eccentricity and lesbianism.<sup>19</sup> It is impossible for Christina’s gender and/or sexuality to be identified today. Even if there was further evidence of the romantic or physical nature of Christina’s relationship with Ebba, it would be inaccurate to identify them as lesbians or bisexuals in modern terms. When examining gender and sexuality in the past, terms such as ‘homosexual,’ ‘heterosexual,’ ‘lesbian,’ ‘gay,’ and ‘intersex’ are all problematic, as these are recent terms and would not relate directly to how people in the past understood themselves and their relationships.<sup>20</sup> These terms can be useful however to explain possible relationships

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<sup>13</sup> Veronica Biermann, “The Virtue of a King and the Desire of a Woman? Mythological representations in the collection of Queen Christina,” *Art History* 24, no. 2 (April 2001): 222.

<sup>14</sup> Biermann, “The Virtue of a King and the Desire of a Woman,” 223.

<sup>15</sup> See: Meyer, *Kristina, The Girl King*; and *The Girl King*.

<sup>16</sup> Buckley, *Christina, Queen of Sweden*.

<sup>17</sup> Waters, “A Girton Girl on a Throne,” 43.

<sup>18</sup> “5 Facts about Queen Christina of Sweden,” *Lesbian News*, 31 December 2015, accessed 10 June 2019, <https://www.lesbiannews.com/5-facts-queen-christina-sweden/>.

<sup>19</sup> For another queen refusing to marry see Elizabeth I. For other seventeenth century cross dressing royal women, see: Simon Pieterz Verelst, *Mary of Modena (1658-1718), when Duchess of York, (c.1675)*, Oil on Canvas, 126.6 cm x 103.4 cm, Hillsborough Castle, Hillsborough. View online at: <https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/5/collection/404920/mary-of-modena-1658-1718-when-duchess-of-york>.

<sup>20</sup> For further discussion on seventeenth century terminology, see: Alan Bray, “Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England,” *History Workshop Journal* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 1–19; Claire Hayward, “No one was ‘gay’ in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: why we must not rewrite history with today’s terms,” *New Statesman America*, 2 March 2015, <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2015/03/no-one-was-gay-18th-century-why-we-must-not-rewrite-history-today-s-terms>; Amy K. Levin, ed. *Gender, Sexuality and Museums* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Matt Smith and Richard Sandell, “Bringing Queer Home,” in *Prejudice and Pride: LGBTQ Heritage and its Contemporary Implications*, ed. Richard Sandell, Racheal Lennon, and Matt Smith (Leicester: Research Centre

and situations to a broader audience, and to garner interest—for example, in the heritage industry in the case of LGBTQ+ tours. Throughout this article LGBTQ+ will be used, as the article largely examines modern interpretations of Christina, and explores current practice within film, fictional literature, and the heritage industry. Here LGBTQ+ histories and narratives refer to same-sex relationships, same-sex desire, and gender diversity in the past, or as the National Trust describes it to those “people who challenged conventional ideas of gender and sexuality” that were commonplace in their own contemporary societies.<sup>21</sup> Sexuality, gender, and same-sex relationships will also be used throughout this article, and specifically applied to seventeenth century commentary on Christina. Despite the problematic use of modern terminology or the realities of Christina’s gender and sexuality, her relationships and perceived masculine interests have acted as inspiration for filmmakers and playwrights, have given the lesbian community a historic symbol, and continue to interest and engage people.

The information given within heritage spaces are often the first occasion where their audience has encountered a specific person or piece of history, and therefore it is important to explore how and why certain topics are approached. The reason this article will also explore representations of Christina in modern fiction is to draw a comparative line between her representation in different settings. It will be seen that in terms of heritage depictions, such as the label text that accompanies objects within permanent gallery spaces, discussions of gender and sexuality are muted in favour of explanations regarding the ‘type’ and ‘form’ of the piece on display. In comparison, within the most recent fictional representation there is a greater sense of exploration into Christina’s gender and sexuality, yet this is still restricted by factors such as the intended audience.

This article argues that Christina’s sexuality and gender have remained central to people’s understanding of her but that her royal career can attract attention regardless of these aspects. Her role as queen regnant, combined with her refusal to marry, and her abdication, makes her almost unique in Europe’s early modern period. It will call for sexuality and gender to be more boldly explored within the heritage industry, suggesting that it should be integrated into label text when relevant as standard procedure, and not exist only in the form of additional tours or events which can only be accessed by a limited number of visitors. It will highlight the ongoing dedication of particular groups who are exploring ways to reinterpret gender and sexuality within the heritage industry and discuss the difficulties that they face when presenting these previously hidden narratives.

## **Portrayals of Christina in Literature and Film**

The centrality of gender and sexuality within discussions of Christina is clear from the two fictional representations highlighted by the quotes at the start of this article; one from a children’s book, the other from a film. The former, *Kristina, The Girl King* (2003) by Carolyn Meyer, explores Christina’s lived experience as a child through the eyes of her twelve-year-old self. The book is aimed at a female audience of a similar age and demonstrates how audience is a vital area to explore to gain a deeper understanding of why and how Christina is represented within

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for Museums and Galleries, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 2018), 38–49.

<sup>21</sup> “Exploring LGBTQ history in Kent and East Sussex,” *National Trust*, accessed 11 June 2019, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lists/exploring-lgbtq-history-in-kent-and-east-sussex>.

modern popular culture. When asked in an interview in 2014 about how or why she avoids potentially complex questions surrounding Christina's gender and sexuality, Meyer replied: "I'm frankly relieved that in writing for 12-year-olds I didn't have to deal with those questions!"<sup>22</sup> She continued, explaining her own understanding of who Christina was:

my gut feeling is that she was probably a very normal woman under intense societal pressures to conform to a rigid idea of behaviour ... certainly dressing in men's clothes gave her some personal freedom—it's worked for a number of women (I'm thinking of George Sand).<sup>23</sup>

This anxiety around the expectation of conformity is expressed often by Christina within Meyer's book, sometimes manifesting as Christina belittling women and girls of her acquaintance. It could be interpreted that Meyer is presenting her young female audience with someone who is vehemently against their own sex. For example, her feelings towards her female cousins are made clear "I am happy to be rid of them and they are even happier to go."<sup>24</sup> However, another argument could be that it shows Christina lashing out against those who are celebrated for conforming to a feminine ideal that she neither can nor wishes to imitate.

Likewise, within the play by Michel Marc Bouchard, and the subsequent film, both entitled *Christina, The Girl King*, Christina's gender and the narrative of her birth is immediately addressed. Within the first scenes of the play Axel explains, "her first cry was so deep, her body so hairy that all of Sweden believed that the baby was a boy."<sup>25</sup> Within these depictions Christina is often seen wearing masculine clothing, she refuses expensive dresses, gifting them to Ebba, and is seen as engaging in the kind of activities traditionally associated with men. Christina's love for Ebba and her exploration of her own understanding of her sexuality is central to the plot. Although Christina understands that her feelings could have difficult consequences, she continues to romance Ebba who responds in kind.

Before the release of *Christina, The Girl King*, two other films depicting Christina had been produced. *Queen Christina* (1933) belongs to the age of Hollywood biopics of queens and focuses on Christina's heterosexual affair with the Spanish Ambassador. At the time of production homosexuality was still illegal; it was only decriminalised in England in 1967, and in some US states anti-sodomy laws remained in place until 2003. It is therefore clear that having been produced in 1933 the narrative could not have boldly explored Christina's sexuality whilst still appealing to a broad audience. In *Queen Christina*, she is seen in her characteristic masculine clothing until she falls in love with the Spanish Ambassador, which leads to her abdication.<sup>26</sup> In *The Abdication* (1974), Christina is shown as strong-willed and dresses unconventionally when she arrives at the Vatican; however, she falls in love with Cardinal Azzolino.<sup>27</sup> Both differing depictions realign Christina to the expected avenues of female behaviour and sexuality, mitigating the ambiguity surrounding her by making her love interest pointedly male and insinuating that her prior deviations were momentary. In contrast the ability of Mika Kaurismäki and Bouchard to explore Christina's sexuality and gender more explicitly can be seen to reflect the growing visibility and

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<sup>22</sup> Carolyn Meyer, "Kristina, The Girl King." E-mail interview by author. October 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Meyer, "Kristina, The Girl King."

<sup>24</sup> Meyer, *The Royal Dairies, Kristina, The Girl King*, 19.

<sup>25</sup> Bouchard, *Christina, The Girl King*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Queen Christina*.

<sup>27</sup> Harvey, *The Abdication*; Wolff, *The Abdication*.

understanding surrounding LGBTQ+ communities. Yet it could be seen that there is still anxiety surrounding presenting same-sex relationships within film. *Queen Christina* was a Hollywood classic, whereas in contrast Kaurismäki's adaptation was not released widely in UK cinemas; whilst this may simply reflect the intense growth cinema has undergone it could suggest that LGBTQ+ films are still considered a distinct genre not of interest to 'mainstream' audiences.

There is a clear link between three of these fictional representations. Meyer, Bouchard, and Kaurismäki, all used *Christina, The Girl King*, as the title of their depiction. This may reflect the narrative of Christina's princely upbringing, and it is likely that this is the case for Meyer's children's book. However, for Bouchard and Kaurismäki, it could imply that the narratives presented contain a deeper exploration of her own understanding of herself, as a woman, as a monarch, and as someone who naturally defies social conventions. The use of *girl* within Meyer's title could simply refer to the age of the character and audience the book is aimed at. For Bouchard and Kaurismäki the use of *girl* when presenting an adult Christina may refer to a certain amount of naivety or stubbornness when pursuing her own sexual, religious, or political desires. The title could also reflect the complexity of Christina's unusual position as a regnant queen; as she is both a woman and ruler. In contrast, the title *The Abdication*, gives nothing to an audience searching for an exploration of Christina's gender and sexuality.

### Portrayals of Christina in the Heritage Industry

Christina was a celebrity in her own time, both admired and condemned within printed media of the seventeenth century. Wåghäll Nivre argues that these varied depictions created by Christina's contemporaries made her a "fictional character during her own lifetime" implying that the recent popular representations of Christina are not so different.<sup>28</sup> Due to her royal position and notoriety, objects connected to her (including prints, paintings, statues, coins and silverware) have found their way into museums across the globe.

An equestrian portrait of Christina, painted by Sébastien Bourdon in 1653, now forms a part of the Prado's collection.<sup>29</sup> The online interpretation text does not comment on the masculine power that the image could be interpreted to display but highlights instead that it acted "as a reminder of the Swedish queen's reaffirmation on the Catholic side of the Thirty Years' War."<sup>30</sup> Nathan Alan Popp argues that Christina understood the difficulties of converting to Catholicism and "sought a protector to help pave the way to Catholicism after her abdication."<sup>31</sup> With this in mind, "she turned to portraiture as the means to secure such an alliance with Philip IV of Spain," for whom the painting was intended.<sup>32</sup> Despite these connections to Catholicism the difference in the presentation of Christina's gender in comparison to her female contemporaries is clear. Bourdon's Christina sits upon a rearing horse, a

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<sup>28</sup> Wåghäll Nivre, "Writing life," 222.

<sup>29</sup> Online object text, "Christine of Sweden on Horseback" (1653-1654); Bourdon, *Christine of Sweden on Horseback* (1653-1654), Oil on Canvas, 340.5cm x 303cm, 1653-1654, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/christine-of-sweden-on-horseback/3060d326-6185-4cb4-b0cf-e1a225c19d7d?searchid=e2305e06-72a3-a322-bf29-2d6277db0aef>.

<sup>30</sup> Online object text, "Christine of Sweden on Horseback" (1653-1654).

<sup>31</sup> Nathan Alan Popp, "Beneath the Surface: The Portraiture and Visual Rhetoric of Sweden's Queen Christina" (MA Thesis, Iowa University, 2010), 99.

<sup>32</sup> Popp, "Beneath the Surface," 100; Online object text, "Christine of Sweden on Horseback" (1653-1654).

reflection of a similar portrait of Philip IV.<sup>33</sup> In the portrait Christina is hunting, accompanied by a falconer and dogs. The Prado website highlights that their presence “alludes to her high station, as hunting was ... reserved for royalty and aristocracy.”<sup>34</sup> Although seventeenth century royal and aristocratic women formed part of hunting parties they are often depicted statically in comparison to their male counterparts. In contrast, although Christina sits side-saddle, she is an active participant. She holds a riding crop and the style of her outfit adds a certain ambiguity to her physical form and therefore her gender.<sup>35</sup> Although the Prado suggests that this depiction by Bourdon is unusual, stating it “stands out because it is an outdoor and equestrian portrait”, the online text does not explore why this could be or how this makes the painting different.<sup>36</sup> Equestrian portraits of Christina’s Spanish counterparts suggest that simply being an equestrian portrait is not enough to make the image unusual. What does make it unusual is its masculine nature, especially when compared to the portraits of the Spanish royal women also on display in the Prado.<sup>37</sup> Christina’s equestrian portrait is not in itself unusual; rather it is the combination of her position as a Swedish queen and the close proximity of the image to her male contemporaries’ that make it different.

The interpretation text that accompanies Bourdon’s portrait of Christina does not explore the themes of gender and sexuality. Likewise, the text accompanying a print of Christina’s funeral procession by Robert van Audenaerde on display in the V&A is interesting and explanatory but does not discuss Christina’s gender or sexuality.<sup>38</sup> Despite this criticism neither museum rejects the presence of LGBTQ+ histories. Between April and October 2017,

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<sup>33</sup> Bourdon, *Christine of Sweden on Horseback* (1653-1654). Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velazquez, *Philip IV on Horseback* (1635), Oil on Canvas, 303cm x 317 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/felipe-iv-on-horseback/6fc1d82d-d984-41b3-b227-af833cfd1240>.

<sup>34</sup> Online object text, “Christine of Sweden on Horseback” (1653-1654).

<sup>35</sup> In the painting, Christina’s clothing has a high neckline, is monotone in colour, and has very little embellishment. See footnote below on royal women in Spanish equestrian portraits for a comparison. Bourdon, *Christine of Sweden on Horseback* (1653-1654).

<sup>36</sup> Online object text, “Christine of Sweden on Horseback” (1653-1654).

<sup>37</sup> Equestrian portraits housed in the Prado of Christina’s Spanish female counterparts depict the women in static compositions and emphasise their positions as female royals. For example, in Luca Giordano’s portrait of Maria Anna of Neuburg, she is shown surrounded by symbols of love and fertility. Both Maria Anna and Queen Elizabeth of France are depicted on white horses that are traditionally associated with purity and women. Their clothing is more detailed than Christina’s and accentuates their female forms rather than adding an element of ambiguity as seen in the portrait of Christina by Bourdon. Although Maria Anna’s horse is in motion it does not have the same sense of movement. In contrast, even young male children, such as Prince Baltasar Carlos, are shown riding strong powerful horses. For these examples, see: Luca Giordano, *Maria Anna of Neuburg, Queen of Spain, on Horseback* (1693-1694), Oil on Canvas, 87.2cm x 61.4cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/maria-anna-of-neuburg-queen-of-spain-on-horseback/3a43ad08-1f1b-4fdb-9b4f-202374755d9d?searchMeta=maria%20anna>; Velazquez, *Queen Elizabeth of France on Horseback* (1635), Oil on Canvas, 301cm x 314cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/queen-elizabeth-of-france-on-horseback/81b760eb-f45d-4f9a-a6b7-cd7a8bf10df8?searchMeta=queen%20elizabeth%20of%20france>; Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velazquez, *Prince Baltasar Carlos on Horseback* (1634-1635), Oil on canvas, 211.5cm x 177cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/prince-baltasar-carlos-on-horseback/5d224aa8-4d2c-47e0-b3b2-3ea37229cdbc?searchid=42795490-0c0c-3e1b-6754-09a2f23791d8>.

<sup>38</sup> Label text, “Pompae Funebres habitae in Funere Christinae Alexandrae Reginae suecice,” European Galleries, V&A, London.

the Prado created “a new focus on its permanent collection through a specially devised thematic itinerary of works that encourages a reflection on the historical reality of same-sex relationships and non-normative sexual identities.”<sup>39</sup> The title of this redisplay of its pre-existing collection was *The Other’s Gaze, Spaces of difference* and was curated as part of World Pride Madrid 2017. The exhibition included depictions of Hadrian and Antinous from the second century CE, a bronze seventeenth century statue of Hermaphrodite, and a domestic scene by Lawrence Alma Tadema painted in 1868.<sup>40</sup> The range of the objects in terms of execution date, medium, and theme demonstrate that the Prado does not shy away from presenting LGBTQ+ narratives within its institution.

The V&A has also championed these narratives, especially since the creation of its staff-led LGBTQ working group that has “an interest in using the V&A’s collections to explore issues of gender, sexuality and identity.”<sup>41</sup> The group has started adding the term “Gender and Sexuality” to the museum’s online catalogue. This process, known as tagging, allows visitors to search “Gender and Sexuality” when exploring online which will instantly direct them to objects that are linked to these narratives. Unfortunately, the project only adds tags, which does not necessarily mean that the online text reflects the object’s connection to gender and sexuality, thus meaning that further research by the interested party is needed when using this tool. The V&A’s LGBTQ working group has also created the *Out on Display* trail which is downloadable from the V&A’s website and “highlights thirty objects currently on display which possess a variety of LGBTQ connections and narratives.”<sup>42</sup> *Out on Display* can be seen as being similar to the Prado’s *The Other’s Gaze, Spaces of difference*, with the difference being that the V&A’s trail can be downloaded at any time by interested audiences, including those who are not visiting the museum physically. However, the trail’s impact is limited, as it is only available online and therefore not accessible to those without internet access. There is also no signposting within the V&A to direct visitors to search for it, restricting its reach. Although the print of Christina is not included in this list of thirty objects the publication covers a variety of media including sculpture, posters, fashion, and ceramics. *Out on Display* and the British Museum’s LGBTQ+ project *Desire, Love, Identity*, both direct visitors to depictions of the Emperor Hadrian and a statue of Antinous.<sup>43</sup> This suggests that there are set objects or people represented within museum collections that are commonly identified as belonging to LGBTQ+ narratives and are therefore accepted for representation as such in museums and heritage sites. I define these historical figures and narratives as the ‘prescribed set’, and their use requires further study. The V&A also holds an award-winning monthly LGBTQ Tour.<sup>44</sup> This tour is provided by the museum’s specially trained volunteers who

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<sup>39</sup> “The Others Gaze Spaces of Difference,” Museo Del Prado, Madrid, accessed 16 November 2018, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/whats-on/exhibition/the-others-gaze-spaces-of-difference/e3ec04f9-d76d-4cdd-a331-246f192bcaf0>.

<sup>40</sup> In Greek mythology, Hermaphrodite was the son of Hermes and Aphrodite who possessed both genders. See: “The Others Gaze Spaces of Difference.”

<sup>41</sup> “LGBTQ,” V&A, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/LGBTQ>.

<sup>42</sup> “Out on Display,” V&A, accessed 16 November 2018, [https://vanda-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/2017/07/06/14/45/58/a73d5774-a1dc-4f1d-bfdc-6625a65a1fbc/Out%20on%20Display\\_%20LGBTQ\\_V7\\_web.pdf](https://vanda-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/2017/07/06/14/45/58/a73d5774-a1dc-4f1d-bfdc-6625a65a1fbc/Out%20on%20Display_%20LGBTQ_V7_web.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> “Desire, love, identity, exploring LGBTQ histories,” *British Museum*, accessed 14 December 2018, [https://britishmuseum.org/about\\_us/past\\_exhibitions/2017/desire\\_love\\_identity.aspx](https://britishmuseum.org/about_us/past_exhibitions/2017/desire_love_identity.aspx).

<sup>44</sup> “V&A Annual Review 2016-17,” *V&A*, accessed 10 June 2019, <https://vanda-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/2017/09/06/12/11/21/b2c70059-fdbd-49ed-900f-9b04e194bc58/VAAR-0906->

guide visitors around the museum highlighting various objects connected to LGBTQ+ histories.<sup>45</sup>

To explore other reasons why the V&A and the Prado may have excluded LGBTQ+ narratives in their general, permanent collections, it is important to look at the guidelines, given to and created by heritage institutions, to aid them and others in the construction of interpretation text. The V&A is one of a few museums that run professional courses to teach others about interpretation in museums and therefore produced and published guidelines in 2013. These are designed for use in-house, but also on the museum's professional courses, to instruct and aid museum professionals from beyond the V&A. The guidelines have ten main points, including "Write for your audience," and "Admit uncertainty."<sup>46</sup> Elsewhere, the Museums Association website offers similar advice from Lucy Harland, with points such as "Keep writing and let it flow" and "Share with others."<sup>47</sup> There are similarities between the advice from the Museums Association and the Guidelines from the V&A. For example, "edit"<sup>48</sup> from Lucy Harland, can be seen as parallel to "stick to the text hierarchy and word count"<sup>49</sup> as recommended by the V&A. This implies that character limits are key to the decisions made about interpretive text accompanying objects in museums.

A picture tells a thousand words, but a label can only contain so much. In an interview conducted in 2018, Bryony Shepherd, Head of Interpretation at the V&A, states that the word limit for general labels is fifty to sixty words, which she admits is optimistic.<sup>50</sup> Sixty words is not a huge amount of space in which to explore the complexities of Christina's gender and sexuality. Yet, as Shepherd highlights, concise word counts are vital to keeping audiences engaged, as too much information will rapidly discourage reading further, or fully.<sup>51</sup> Labels that are too detailed can detract from the main narrative. The main narratives are those reflecting a museum's focus; at the V&A this is to explore the history of art and design.

In comparison, online text is less restrained by word limits, this flexibility is enabled by the greater capacity of its online medium. Shepherd highlights that those searching the online collections may already be more engaged with the museum, and that it is likely that they are looking for a deeper explanation of an object, creating the demand for longer object descriptions.<sup>52</sup> It is important to understand the difference between online text and label text, and the differing aims and audiences of each. People viewing online text may be using it for research, or to identify areas of the museum they may want to explore based on pre-existing

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[onlineLR.PDF](#), 7; Dawn Hoskin, "Brining Innovation," V&A, accessed 10 June 2019, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/museum-life/bringing-innovation>.

<sup>45</sup> "LGBTQ Tour," V&A, accessed 10 June 2019, [https://www.vam.ac.uk/event/96W7yE6o/LGBTQ-tour-2019?gclid=CjwKCAjw\\_fnBRANEiwAuFxEt5WXf1IfV3vdsSBh1bXC1PhDAEs0xH2gHDemqJwaxJn7LWUBLikmKBoCz04QAvD\\_BwE](https://www.vam.ac.uk/event/96W7yE6o/LGBTQ-tour-2019?gclid=CjwKCAjw_fnBRANEiwAuFxEt5WXf1IfV3vdsSBh1bXC1PhDAEs0xH2gHDemqJwaxJn7LWUBLikmKBoCz04QAvD_BwE).

<sup>46</sup> Lucy Trench, "Gallery Text at the V&A, A Ten Point Guide," V&A, accessed 16 November 2018, [http://www.vam.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/238077/Gallery-Text-at-the-V-and-A-Ten-Point-Guide-Aug-2013.pdf](http://www.vam.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/238077/Gallery-Text-at-the-V-and-A-Ten-Point-Guide-Aug-2013.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> Lucy Harland, "Writing Museum Text," *Museums Association*, accessed 16 November 2018, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/guides/16112015-writing-museum-text>.

<sup>48</sup> Harland, "Writing Museum Text."

<sup>49</sup> Trench, "Gallery Text at the V&A, A Ten Point Guide."

<sup>50</sup> Bryony Shepherd, "Interpretation at the V&A," interview by author, 2 November 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Shepherd, "Interpretation at the V&A."

<sup>52</sup> Shepherd, "Interpretation at the V&A."

interests. This is reflected in the V&A's online text for Audenaerde's print of Christina's funeral. The online text is more expansive than the label text, and introduces the reader to people Christina met and highlights some interesting events within her life in greater detail.<sup>53</sup> Despite the ability to be more flexible and explore topics more deeply within a search of the collections catalogue there is still limited information about Christina herself. What the online summary does achieve however is to describe the object, both in its widest significance and as a physical piece of art. Part of the online text details the funeral procession; describing what many modern visitors cannot understand from the image due to the Latin language barrier, which itself is very valuable in making the object more accessible.

The online text describes Christina as leading "an independent and unconventional life" without exploring what this means. Her lack of convention and the "root of her fame" could be exemplified through many narratives that do not involve her sexuality or gender.<sup>54</sup> These could include her famous abdication, her image as 'Minerva of the North,' or her desire for peace that contrasts with the scandalous execution of Marchese Gian Rinaldo Monaldeschi. Interestingly her abdication, friendships, and dedication to the arts are all mentioned within the summary, suggesting that it is through her patronage of the arts that she finds a place within "the world's leading museum of art and design."<sup>55</sup> However, these events leave little room for what could be contained within her "unconventional life," implying that this is where her ambiguous birth, cross-dressing, and sexuality belong.<sup>56</sup> Restrictions placed on interpretation text limit the ability to explore gender and sexuality within these spaces. Although the print is displayed in one of the museum's recently-renovated galleries, gender and sexuality are still recent themes to explore in museums; therefore, the interpretation text will often feel outdated and ambiguous in this way.

Both guidelines also prioritise audience.<sup>57</sup> Museums will have differences in their audience depending on their location, collections, and the label that they give themselves. Whilst the V&A claims the title "the world's leading museum of art and design" the Prado simply brands itself as "Museo del Prado" relying on its place as Spain's most prominent museum to attract visitors.<sup>58</sup> In contrast the V&A is surrounded by competitors and its very name has been the root of confusion in the past as to what exactly the space contains. The name suggests a biographical museum of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, which results in the need for the museum to have a more descriptive tagline. In 2019 the Prado celebrated its bicentenary, stating a clear inclusive objective on their website:

On this special occasion, we wish to reflect on the future and the forthcoming challenges for this and the other great Museums of ancient painting: the need to attract social groups that traditionally are not attracted by the collections, to encourage gender and minority research studies or the challenges caused by overcrowding.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Online object text, "Pompae Funebres habitae."

<sup>54</sup> Waters, "A Girton Girl on a Throne," 42.

<sup>55</sup> "V&A," V&A, accessed 16 November 2018, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/>.

<sup>56</sup> Online object text, "Pompae Funebres habitae."

<sup>57</sup> Trench, "Gallery Text at the V&A, A Ten Point Guide"; Harland, "Writing Museum Text."

<sup>58</sup> "V&A," V&A; "Museo Del Prado," Museo Del Prado, accessed 9 June 2019, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en>.

<sup>59</sup> "The Bicentenary of the Museo del Prado," Museo Del Prado, accessed 9 June 2019, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/bicentenary>.

The Prado here recognises the current issues shared by many internationally-renowned museums and galleries. The statement refers not only to visitors, but also highlights the needs of researchers and implies a desire to encourage growth in less common areas of study. Likewise, the V&A's mission includes the aim "to enrich people's lives by promoting research, knowledge and enjoyment of the designed world to the widest possible audience."<sup>60</sup> It can be hoped that mission statements such as these will widen the variety of narratives included in the permanent displays at museums and heritage sites. Both international museums can be seen to be embracing the historical narratives of minority groups, celebrating them, and hosting a range of events to support these communities. Yet their interpretative text does not explore these histories, as seen in the texts related to Christina of Sweden. Although this could be because of the focus of the museums themselves on art and design, Stuart Frost argues that "biographical or contextual details that would often be included for heterosexual artists have, until recently, been omitted when the artist has identified as LGBTQ."<sup>61</sup> The examples explored above could be seen as reflecting this argument, with museums either ignoring or anxiously tip toeing around the subject of Christina's gender and sexuality.

However, it must also be remembered that museum funding is constantly under threat and that exploring LGBTQ+ histories within these spaces is a relatively recent concept. In many cases whilst the museum staff themselves may wish to widen the interpretation on display there is often little financial support to instigate such projects. Institutions such as the Prado and the V&A have vast collections, often with complex and sometimes obscured histories. As highlighted in a recent report evaluating the success of the National Trust's *Prejudice and Pride* events (2017), "over the past decade or so, stories of same-sex love and desire have been slowly gaining increased ... visibility" but these representations can be far from unproblematic.<sup>62</sup> This suggests that objects and narratives can also be innocently or unintentionally omitted, either due to a lack of space, research, knowledge, funding, or general public interest in the themes related to the object. As funding is reduced and the competition from the leisure industry increases, museums and heritage sites must continually recognise themselves as businesses and focus on the ensuring the financial stability of their sites. Introducing new narratives and interpretation can lead to a further increase in spending that institutions under financial pressure may not be able to undertake. This can be seen in action when considering the V&A's 'gender and sexuality' tagging project. It is a project that is small enough not to impact on museum resources whilst increasing the functionality of the collections search tool. To rewrite the online interpretation text to match the tag, however, would put considerable strain on several departments within the museum.

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<sup>60</sup> "About Us," V&A, accessed 9 June 2019, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/about-us>.

<sup>61</sup> Stuart Frost, "The Warren Cup: Secret Museums, Sexuality and Society," in *Gender, Sexuality and Museums*, ed. Amy K. Levin (New York: Routledge, 2010), 138.

<sup>62</sup> Richard Sandell, Rachael Lennon, and Matt Smith, "Forward," in *Prejudice and Pride: LGBTQ Heritage and its Contemporary Implications*, ed. Richard Sandell, Rachael Lennon, Matt Smith (Leicester: Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 2018), 4.

## Christina as a Monarch

Christina's place and image as a monarch, and one who was rare in her decision to abdicate and remain unmarried, provides her with an almost unique appeal for those looking for a historical figure to reinterpret and present in the various mediums discussed above. The combination of these factors makes Christina a matter of interest, regardless of her gender and sexuality. It can also be seen that the continued existence of a monarchy in Sweden increases the likelihood of displays and depictions of Christina in her native land.

In 2018, objects related to Christina's coronation went on display in Stockholm Cathedral in the exhibition *Vivat Regina* (Long Live the Queen). The label text that accompanied the four objects displayed, including Christina's coronation robes, focused on her role as a monarch, celebrating her as a ruler who "wanted to show that Sweden had taken its place among Europe's cultural elite" and stating that "the foundations of today's Sweden were laid in the 17th century."<sup>63</sup> This description automatically implies that the objects are relevant to a modern audience and sparks curiosity about the events of the seventeenth century that continue to affect modern Sweden. The interpretation within the exhibition also celebrated Sweden's ability to display these items.<sup>64</sup> This reflects the impressive age of the textiles on display, as well as hinting at the religious and political turmoil that removed traces of the monarchical past in other European countries.

Christina's royal status means there are more opportunities for explorations of her to take place. Objects produced in the seventeenth century, including paintings, pamphlets, letters, and sculptures, can be examined when analysing her politics, religion, sexuality, and gender. They can help to partially reconstruct the complexities of Christina's life and character and highlight that Christina was a celebrity, standing large on the European stage, as someone whose image could be manipulated by her contemporaries for their own cause. Christina can be viewed as a huge success for the Catholic Church, as a champion of the arts, and as the instigator of scandal in her personal life.

Initially as the reigning monarch of Sweden and then as an abdicated queen living under papal protection, Christina's attitudes and actions affected others, they affected not only her Swedish subjects but the shape of conflict in Europe, the establishment of educational practice in Sweden, and art through her patronage of those such as Bernini. Christina's place in modern museums is often related to the art she left behind and her role as a patron; yet her ability to act as a patron relates directly to her royal position. Christina's royalty and the materials left behind provide a plethora of sources for modern scholars, curators, and creatives to take advantage of in the twenty-first century.

The ability to reinterpret Christina in the modern day not only stems from her own royal situation but the current existence of a monarchy in Sweden. Interest in Sweden's Royal family, especially those of the younger generation such as the Crown Princess Victoria (who is next in line for the throne), can be found on websites including BBC News, Royal Central, and

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<sup>63</sup> Label text, "Vivat Regina, National treasures return to the Cathedral," Stockholm Cathedral, Sweden, accessed 31 March 2018.

<sup>64</sup> Label text, "Vivat Regina, National treasures return to the Cathedral."

HELLO!<sup>65</sup> These stories cover everything from serious issues such as sexual assault, to celebrations such as royal weddings, and satisfy the public's interest in the royals' private life by exploring personal relationships within the Swedish royal household.<sup>66</sup> This demonstrates that interest in the Swedish monarchy is exhibited through various forms of media and discussed internationally by various audiences. The article from Royal Central, which focuses on Princess Victoria showing her children *Vivat Regina*, demonstrates how the existence of a monarchy itself generates interest in the royal past.<sup>67</sup> It highlights that Sweden's current monarchy engages with Sweden's past and actively shares it with the country's future monarchs.

Although the exhibition did not cover Christina's sexuality, which may be due to the religious context within which the exhibition was situated, it did explore her decision not to marry, discuss Karl Gustav's appointment as successor prior to her coronation, and mention her abdication.<sup>68</sup> Through Christina's unique position there is a natural space in the heritage industry, film, fictional literature, and modern media for Christina to be explored. She can be placed alongside fellow royals, both those who were her contemporaries and her modern Swedish counterparts, compared to other female queens who defied certain conventions such as Elizabeth I, and celebrated as a figure who initiated cultural changes in Sweden that are still visible in the twenty first century. Through these channels Christina finds a 'legitimate' space to be interpreted, into which themes of gender and sexuality can be inserted, helping to explore the more complex image of Christina as person and as a monarch.

## Conclusion

Christina's gender, sexuality, position as a regnant queen, refusal to marry, and abdication make her a unique figure to explore within heritage and fiction. As discussed above, Christina's royal position gives her narrative a space within the heritage industry, which could be utilised to integrate themes of gender and sexuality into the general representations of Christina and the seventeenth century. Christina's depiction in film is also linked to her royal title and abdication, but as shown within this article twenty-first century film allows greater exploration of the themes of gender and sexuality. In contrast to the curation of permanent museum collections that can be expected to last several decades, films have a relatively fast production turn around and often have a shorter lifespan. This is a contributing factor towards why films can more readily explore Christina's sexuality and gender. If a new interpretation of a historical event becomes popular another film or fictional book can be created. In contrast once a permanent gallery space has been curated it is difficult to make changes to it without spending money or interrupting the overall theme of the space or institution. Although money is spent to create new interpretations in film

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<sup>65</sup> "Photographer 'groped' princess at Swedish Academy event," *BBC News*, 29 April 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-43942106>; Ainhoa Barcelona, "Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden makes rare comment about bond with sister Princess Madeleine," *HELLO!*, 28 September 2018, accessed 14 December 2018, <https://www.hellomagazine.com/royalty/2018092862856/princess-victoria-misses-princess-madeleine-sweden/>; Dekkers, "Crown Princess Victoria Brings her children to work."

<sup>66</sup> "Photographer 'groped' princess at Swedish Academy event"; Barcelona, "Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden makes rare comment about bond with sister Princess Madeleine"; and Dekkers, "Crown Princess Victoria bring her children to work."

<sup>67</sup> Dekkers, "Crown Princess Victoria brings her children to work."

<sup>68</sup> Label text, "Vivat Regina, The Hat of the Successor," Stockholm Cathedral, Sweden.

and fiction it is more difficult for a museum to recuperate the cost of reinterpreting a space. As new information comes to light or new interpretations are called for by the public, it is often easier and more financially viable to utilise existing teams and volunteers to present these narratives within the gallery spaces that may not be updated physically for several decades.

The connection between popular fiction both in the form of literature and film explored within this article and heritage are clear. Each avenue approaches themes of gender and sexuality in very specific ways, tailored to their specific audiences. These interpretations can also be seen to have a limited overall reach. The Prado, the V&A, and the British Museum, have all been seen to celebrate the history of the LGBTQ+ community within specific events, as the major or minor themes within temporary exhibitions, in the temporary re-display of objects, and as the focus of specialised tours. In contrast, alterations to permanent interpretation text have not taken place, for a variety of reasons discussed above.<sup>69</sup> Likewise, explorations of LGBTQ+ historical narratives within film, stage, and novels are generally confined within their own specific genre rather than being integrated into ‘mainstream’ media.

It has also been suggested in this article that there is a ‘prescribed set’ of LGBTQ+ characters and historical narratives that heritage institutions, films and fictional literature automatically seize upon to explore. Although Christina is a recognisable symbol to the lesbian community, she seems to be less explored within the heritage industry in relation to her gender and sexuality than her male LGBTQ+ counterparts and does not appear to be a member of this ‘prescribed set’. Christina, and her sexuality and gender, may be excluded from some heritage depictions based on this ‘prescribed set’ and the engagement of the visitors themselves. The ‘prescribed set’ contains historical, mythological, and religious figures that visitors may already be familiar with. Although this approach could be criticised, it is important to recognise the context. As previously discussed, museums’ financial stability rests on their ability to attract visitors; visitors who are more likely to initially engage with narratives that they are already somewhat familiar with. Therefore, it is important that museums use recognisable figures in events such as LGBTQ+ tours to draw in visitors whilst using the platform to also introduce them to more obscure topics and lesser known narratives. This is also the case for film and fictional literature, with the same historical figures, such as Mary Queen of Scots, and Elizabeth I, dominating the historical film genre.<sup>70</sup> This is to ensure that the production is widely appealing to a general audience, something that can be achieved by using already familiar figures. Within all these contexts there is also the limitation of language and national identity. Whilst Mary Queen of Scots may be a subject of interest to English speaking audiences, she may hold less appeal for a

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<sup>69</sup> This can be seen reflected in other museums and heritage sites across the world including The British Museum and the Arab American National Museum, in Dearborn, Michigan. See: “Desire, love, identity, exploring LGBTQ histories”; “American Landscape, An exploration of art and humanity by Nabil Mousa,” *Arab American Museum*, accessed 14 December 2018, <http://www.arabamericanmuseum.org/american-landscape>.

<sup>70</sup> For films and television productions exploring Mary Queens of Scots and Elizabeth I, see: *Mary Queen of Scots*, dir. Josie Rourke (Focus Features, Perfect World Pictures, and Working Title Films, 2018); *Mary, Queen of Scots*, dir. Charles Jarrott (Universal Pictures and Hal Wallis Productions, 1971); *Elizabeth I*, dir. Tom Hooper (HBO Films and Channel 4 Television Corporation, 2005-2006); *Elizabeth*, dir. Shekhar Kapur (PolyGram and Working Title Films, 1998); and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, dir. Shekhar Kapur (Universal Pictures and StudioCanal, 2007). For a discussion on queenship in film, including Christina of Sweden, Elizabeth I, and Mary Queen of Scots, see: Elizabeth Ford and Deborah Mitchell, *Royal Portraits in Hollywood: Filming the Lives of Queens* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009).

Swedish audience who have no historical connection to her. In the same way Christina may be less likely to appeal to an English or Spanish speaking audience, who have not engaged with her narrative in the same way that they have with the historical leaders of their own nations.

Interpretation within heritage can be seen as being constrained by its 'type' of setting, for example an art gallery or a national history museum. It is also affected by the 'form' of the art itself, for example an engraving, painting, or silver beaker. As Shepherd explains, museums will create guidelines for what they aim to present to their audiences and these guidelines can lead to a loss of personality.<sup>71</sup> This can be seen in the label text that accompanies the engraving of Christina's funeral at the V&A. It feels lacking in exciting detail when Christina's varied life and status is considered, although this is necessary and to some extent improved upon within the extended online text, it can still be seen as problematic. Although LGBTQ+ narratives tend to be further restrained and often only explored within temporary exhibitions, this may not reflect the attitudes of museum professionals themselves. The V&A has over seven miles of galleries yet the V&A's Interpretation Department only numbers five people. The Prado has over 8,000 paintings in its permanent collection including those by Rubens and Velazquez, whose physical upkeep alone will take up a significant proportion of the museum's resources. Therefore, it is clear that the lack of or limitations on funding in some institutions cause the absence of alternative narratives within permanent gallery spaces. This leaves the championing of these narratives to gallery staff, volunteers and to temporary exhibitions specifically constructed to encourage and engage certain audiences.

Money and staff time, whilst factors that act against regeneration of old galleries with outdated object labels, cannot fully remove the possibility of remaining institutional anxieties or elitist theories regarding the purpose of museums. Museums, as defined by the Museums Association in 1998, exist to "enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society."<sup>72</sup> At the heart of this description is people and objects; and how people interact with these objects and the narrative they receive is largely the responsibility of the museum or heritage site. Expanding on this definition, museums are important public community spaces, and as such they should reflect the community and provide a safe environment for self-expression and exploration.

The work of museums and heritage sites presenting hitherto hidden narratives is vital in including communities who have previously been denied expression within these spaces. Museums and heritage sites through their very nature can be seen as providing the 'approved' narrative and are often cited as the space where the sparks of inspiration were first ignited. Meyer herself was inspired to write *Kristina, the Girl King*, after visiting an exhibition on life in seventeenth century Sweden.<sup>73</sup> Exploring LGBTQ+ narratives, as well as those of BAME communities, disabled people and women, gives all audiences a space to explore these histories that have been present throughout time but rarely discussed within the 'legitimate', formal environments of museums and heritage sites. Presenting these narratives provides a space for discussion and learning, and most importantly can act as a vital tool in recognising historical

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<sup>71</sup> Shepherd, "Interpretation at the V&A."

<sup>72</sup> "Museums Association, FAQs," *Museums Association*, accessed 14 December 2018, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/about/frequently-asked-questions>.

<sup>73</sup> Meyer, "Kristina, The Girl King."

realities and challenging people's prejudices. By highlighting that these narratives existed, heritage sites draw people's histories and lived experiences together. As discussed above, the Prado and the V&A are not the only institutions to have created projects aimed at presenting these narratives and encouraging new audiences to engage with the heritage sector. However, they do show what can be achieved with the dedication of staff and volunteers who feel strongly about developing change. It can be hoped that as the need for these narratives begins to be included in the mission statements and operating plans of museums budgets will be allocated to match, allowing heritage sites to use their funding differently, which will include the presentation and integration of these narratives becoming by a higher priority.

Historical figures such as Christina offer an ideal opportunity to integrate themes of gender and sexuality into all forms of representation, from film to interpretation text in museums and heritage sites. Through other aspects of Christina's life, including her royal status and patronage of the arts, she can already be seen to have a 'legitimate' space within these environments. Celebrating communities in specific special events is important, especially in making an initial argument for inclusion. However, as Richard Sandell, Rachael Lennon, and Matt Smith remind us, while events celebrating queer histories at heritage sites are increasing, "it would be inaccurate to assume from this increased cultural activity, an onward progression of ever-growing openness."<sup>74</sup> Despite its success, *Prejudice and Pride* received several complaints in the media arguing that this re-interpretation of the Trust's historic sites was unneeded and inappropriate.<sup>75</sup> This highlights the possibility for negative reactions, and contributes to the debates around being political within heritage spaces.<sup>76</sup> The aim should be to integrate all narratives, including gender, sexuality, and race, into these representations without causing it to appear 'other' or 'extra' within the discussion.<sup>77</sup> Film, fictional literature, and the heritage industry all have their role to play in creating representations that are inclusive in nature, helping to 'normalise' these narratives that were present in the past but have often been obscured or

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<sup>74</sup> Sandell, Lennon, and Smith, "Forward," 4.

<sup>75</sup> Sandell, Lennon, and Smith, "Forward," 12.

<sup>76</sup> For more on the debate around museums and heritage sites as political spaces, see: Jillian Steinhauer, "Museums have a duty to be political," *The Art Newspaper*, 20 March 2018, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/comment/museums-have-a-duty-to-be-political>; Sharon Heal. "This is not a neutral space," *Museums Association*, 29 October 2012, accessed 12 June 2019, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/museums-journal-blog/29102012-this-is-not-a-neutral-space>; Sotiria Grek, "In and against the museum: The contested spaces of museums education for adults" (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2008), 195-211; Rachel Cooke. "Tristram Hunt: 'In the era of fake news, museums allow a better understanding of truth and history,'" *The Observer*, 18 November 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2018/nov/18/tristram-hunt-museums-v-and-a-interview-fake-news-labour>; Tristram Hunt, "Museums must confront the big issues," *The Art Newspaper*, 20 December 2018, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/comment/museums-must-confront-the-big-issues>; David Fleming, "Why Tristram Hunt is wrong about museums and social justice," *Museums Association*, 13 June 2018, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/comment/12062018-museums-cant-avoid-reality>; and Richard Sandell, Rachael Lennon, and Matt Smith, eds. *Prejudice and Pride: LGBTQ Heritage and its Contemporary Implications* (Leicester: Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 2018).

<sup>77</sup> *Prejudice and Pride* was an excellent example of making LGBTQ+ narratives a part of the standard interpretation within some National Trust sites. See, for example, Knole House, where the personal history of its former resident Eddy Sackville-West is now part of the permanent exploration of LGBTQ+ narratives and the history of the site. "The Gatehouse Tower at Knole," *National Trust*, accessed 12 June 2019, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/knole/features/discover-the-gatehouse-tower-at-knole>.

ignored. It is often through the environments discussed in this article that people are first introduced to previously unrepresented concepts, which can shape their opinions and attitudes. Therefore, by integrating LGBTQ+ history into these environments and treating them in the same way as ‘conventional’ narratives these discussions can be ‘normalised’ and social change can be achieved.