



Christina, Queen of Sweden: The Restless Life of a European Eccentric

By Veronica Buckley

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Christina, Queen of Sweden: The Restless Life of a European Eccentric By Veronica Buckley

She was born on a bitterly cold December night in 1626 and, in the candlelight, mistakenly declared a boy. On her father's death six years later, she inherited the Swedish throne. She was tutored by Descartes, yet could swear like the roughest soldier. She was painted a lesbian, a prostitute, a hermaphrodite, and an atheist; in that tumultuous age, it is hard to determine which was the most damning label. She was learned but restless, progressive yet self-indulgent; her leadership was erratic, her character unpredictable. Sweden was too narrow for her ambition. No sooner had she enjoyed the lavish celebrations of her official coronation at twenty-three than she abdicated, converting to Catholicism (an act of almost foolhardy independence and political challenge) and leaving her cold homeland behind for an extravagant new life in Rome. Christina, Queen of Sweden, longed fatally for adventure.

Freed from her crown, Christina cut a breath-taking path across Europe: spending madly, searching for a more prestigious throne to scale, stirring trouble wherever she went. Supported and encouraged in turn by the pope, the king of Spain, and France's powerful Cardinal Mazarin, Christina settled at the luxurious Palazzo Farnese, where she established a lavish salon for Rome's artists and intellectuals. More than once the cross-dressing queen was forced to leave town until a scandal died down. She loved to buckle on a sword and swagger like the men whose company she adored, but the greatest mystery in her life was the true nature of her elusive sexuality, which biographer Veronica Buckley explores with sensitivity and rigor. For a time it seemed there was nothing this extraordinary woman might fear attempting, until a bloody tragedy of her own making foreshadowed her downfall.

Pairing painstaking research with a sparkling narrative voice and unerring sense of the age, Veronica Buckley reclaims a protean life that had been preserved mostly as myth. Christina was a child of her time, and her time was one of great change: Europe stood at a crossroads where religion and science, antiquity and modernity, peace and war all met. Christina took what she wanted from each to create the life she most desired, and she dazzled all who met her.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Christina abdicated the throne of Lutheran Sweden in 1654, at age 28, presumably in order to convert to Catholicism. Buckley presents a wide-ranging, entertaining exploration of the dynamics of the queen's decision and unusual life. The author, in her debut, convincingly demonstrates that it wasn't religion that drew Christina to Rome, but a love of art and the ancients. Nor did a true love of philosophy encourage her fateful invitation to Descartes to come to Stockholm, but a restless, clever mind and a belief in her own great potential. Nor, says Buckley, did homosexuality lead her to decline marriage but a larger sexual ambivalence. Attracted to both men and women, yet disgusted by the idea of sex, Christina was most comfortable in masculine garb, critical of women and bitterly aware of the limitations society placed on women. Buckley weaves these threads together in a lively portrait, laying out the background to her story in fluid prose, from political and military aspects of the Thirty Years' War to machinations of the papal and French courts and the fragile state of the monarchy in Sweden. Against this background, Christina emerges as a complex and difficult character who transcends the attempts of others to mold her to their uses and expectations. Illus. not seen by PW.

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From [Booklist](#)

One of the standouts in a long line of self-indulgent European royals, Christina, with her eccentricities, merits Buckley's close attention. From the moment of her birth in 1626, when she was mistakenly identified as a boy, to the time of her death in 1689, she ardently pursued an extraordinarily extravagant life characterized by an emotionally contrary nature. Many have speculated about her seemingly ambiguous sexuality, but, as Buckley discerns, her refusal to even contemplate marriage evidences both an independent temperament and an essentially asexual orientation. Formally ascending the Swedish throne in 1644, she proved to be a lavish and fiscally irresponsible monarch, leading Sweden to the verge of bankruptcy in six short years. Restless and bored, she longed for intellectual and physical warmth, cultural enlightenment, and adventure. Abdicating in 1654, she converted to Catholicism, moved to Rome, and undertook a bold and ultimately disastrous plan to seize the throne of Naples. Proud, impulsive, and willful, Christina was convinced she had the divine right to lead her life by her own rules. *Margaret Flanagan*

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About the Author

Veronica Buckley was born in New Zealand. She studied in London and Oxford, where she did her postgraduate work on Christina Alexandra. She now lives in Paris with her husband, writer Philipp Blom. This is her first book.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kevin Ostby:

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