



Masculine Power and Disempowered Female Body in the Play *Queen Christina* by Pam Gems

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ABSTRACT:

Pam Gems presents Christina as a kind of Renaissance woman, brought up as a boy in order to be groomed for the Swedish throne in the absence of a male heir. She does the activities like those of hunting, fighting, and taking active part in military and political decisions. Her first catastrophe occurs when the court begins to put pressure on her to marry and produce a male heir. From being brought up to behave like a man, she is suddenly being forced to behave like a woman. Her second major crisis is when she realizes that her lover has been using her for her status. As she ages, she finds a passionate love for female things like baking and the "smell of babies". Christina's last major act is to help young Italian republicans escape from their persecutors. During her life span, she has experienced the decisive advantages of ruling-class privilege, having experienced political and sexual power as both a man and a woman. However, she felt a grief of being left the choice of motherhood until it got too late. Finally, Christina finds herself entrapped clutched the manly qualities of a king and the productiveness of woman.

Key-words: Queen Christina- patriarchy, femininity, masculine-power, motherhood, succession, fertility

Pam Gems, in a prefatory note to the play *Queen Christina*, has asserted that "all plays are metaphors" and goes on to say that "the dilemma of the real Christina, reared and educated as a man for the Swedish throne, and asked to marry and breed for the succession, is perhaps not irrelevant today"¹. Her most popular play *Queen Christina* is based on historical facts. Christina realized that being brought up to rule has deprived her of the pleasures of life and most importantly of motherhood which is a vital for feminine identity. She, all her life, has been denied her femininity, the birth-right, to behave, act and feel as a woman. Christina's story is also a tragedy because she was given femaleness by nature but she lost it to society. When she tried to regain a kingdom, it was denied to her.

Her plays range across a wide range of themes varying from the complexity of interpersonal relationships between private individuals to historical and literary women. The problem of the real Christina is that she is reared and educated as a man for the Swedish throne. She is asked to get married and bear children for the succession. In fact, the use of historical facts gives a fresh viewpoint on current 20th century women's issue. The historical facts make us understand how the individuality of women has been trained to serve the precise social purpose. When the play opens Christina, the child is placed in the world of men as the king and Chancellor discusses the issue of succession Gems representation of Christina, the Swedish queen is of a woman caught between the trappings of masculine power and the disempowered body of a woman.

In *Queen Christina*, Pam Gems defines femaleness as the process of discovery of what it is to be a woman. It is really the discovery of womanhood. The best way to describe this discovery is the gynecologist who has just delivered a baby stepping out of the delivery and conveying the news to the father in these words: "A girl". And that girl has a fate to become an heir of the king. As the mother Queen is too weak now and can't give birth to another child. But her "wrong sex" is a hurdle and the King tries to "make a man of her".

"Axel: But the wrong sex! With a weak succession it'll be anybody's game, we can't have a woman.

King: Make a man of her then

Axel: How!

King: Training"²

Still not quite a teenager, Christina is forced to sign off on death warrants of spies and other soldiers who are not aligned completely with the Swedish cause, but her inner self, her femaleness always questions the genuineness of this act. The womanly feelings and longings are prohibited as she has been vested with the responsibility of ruling the country and as such she cannot exhibit her nature. It reveals her mental agony at being forced to suppress her own innate nature and also her resentment at being dictated as to what has to be done by her. When she signs death warrants, it is the first signs that her

process of indoctrination into maleness is complete. It bears repeating maleness equal to violence and war, being a female means peace. But the inner fight with maleness and femaleness shows signs of depression in Christina.

While being trained with males she is also taught to believe that males are comrades at arms and any romantic notions with them were quashed. She also probably learned the male ritual of pursuing females to sell their lust. Completely influenced thus, she is seen in the company of femaleness for sexual pleasure. One can debate whether Christina is truly bisexual or even lesbian or is merely acting out her maleness as she has been taught to do over most of her childhood. From the aspect of her sexuality, one might suspect the latter. She displays signs of affection for Belle, but no overt sexuality can be inferred from her actions. She is in love with Magnus. When Axel asks her consent to marry of Ebba and Magnus she becomes hysterical. One of the problems that Christina suffered from is the fact that she is not the most feminine looking person. So many persons have commented on her looks and her femininity. As Father Manderscheyt has said that there was nothing feminine about her except her sex.

The conflict between Christina's forced maleness and natural femaleness has made her a philosopher. She thinks about life and existence. She thinks that most people struggle for mere existence. However, she, in her privilege, is able to derive contentment solely from the nourishment of others. At the same time, she can't accept Karl's love. She can understand that his love is not the true love. After his love there is a desire for the throne. She also understands that in this male-dominant society there is no space for her intelligence, wisdom or learning. Christina boldly tells Karl that their feelings of course, are irrelevant. There is only one plus point that he is from the royal family and a man that's enough for him. Now this society wants an heir from Royal family and for that Christina has to marry Karl because of his class and background. She has to marry him just to produce an heir and nothing else. She cannot marry a person whom she actually loves. But to give an heir to this society, she has to marry a person whom she can't accept. It is a real mismatch.

All her life, Christina has been trained in martial arts and hunting. She is trained to do everything a male king would be trained to do. She is trained to be violent. She is trained to kill. She is well aware of her maleness which has been imposed on her and her natural femaleness. She complains about the double standard. Axel had in bringing up her daughters and Queen Christina. She denies marrying and tells him to "secure the succession". Christina's femaleness lies in her inner beauty, in her intelligence, in her learning, in her wisdom and most of all to tackle her conflict of maleness and femaleness within her. She thinks of Magnus, her first love, with that aggressive maleness. When she meets Ebba after her marriage her maleness rejects Ebba's pregnancy. But her femininity becomes curious and wanted to know "Can you feel it, does it move?"³

Christina's femaleness lies in the refusal to live her life by following the Catholicism without thinking. She questions Pope. She is eager to meet him. She believes that Catholicism has new air of freedom for both man and woman but when she finds that it is the same old conditions in a new way, she becomes desperate. She is very happy to fly across Europe to meet Pope and wants to share her thoughts. Christina's inner femaleness blossoms full when she suddenly realizes her inner quality of motherhood. When Angelica, Lucia's daughter pushes sweet into Christina's mouth, she slaps on Christina's hand and tells her to "stop crying", she feels cared by someone. It is her first interaction with a child and it affects her inner-self. Now, she wants the missing quality of her life she wants recognition of being a woman emotionally and physically at a visceral level. She now seeks to have a child. She admits to the Cardinal that, while the act of saving, Angelica was unimportant that she became enamored of some of the simplicities that accompany a child's life: the linen, the food and the smell of babies'. Now her womanhood comes into existence, she is not ashamed of her womanhood.

Christina realizes that being brought up to rule has deprived her of the pleasures of life that are uniquely feminine. She believes that being brought up as a male has betrayed her feminine side. She slaps her stomach to demonstrate that her womb is betrayed by all those that sought to make her into a man. The despair that Christina feels is ultimate and she becomes hysterical. And laments that there is none weep for. When Azzolino says that she will have a whole country, she angrily bursts out saying that they were not her children. She further asks her to look at her and her eyes are dry. She has nothing left in her life. She feels that by acting as a man, she has betrayed the cause of womanhood. She indirectly has participated in the violation on woman perpetrated by warriors. Christina ultimately seeks redemption from guilt. She believes that she has been "denied her birth right" to behave, act and feel as a woman. She hysterically begs to have a child. She pleads the cardinal if he could give her a child.

Conclusion

Christina's life has been one of the continued frustrations. She has tried to find out who she was and when she did, it was too late. Perhaps for all their weakness Christina's mother and Belle knew their identities even though they compromised themselves. Christina's life was all a tragedy. She was frustrated with Protestantism and therefore, she sought Catholicism. With Catholicism came the argument about sex -"procreation versus recreation". Christina was not convinced that the latter ought not to be ruled out because it simply felt good and who was she to deny what nature had given to her-the ability to find pleasure in sexual relations. Christina's story is also a tragedy because she was given femaleness by nature but she lost it to society. Society gave her Kingdom but she gave it up. She looked for her femaleness in learning, physical acts and philosophy but she found it in making love to a weak, ineffectual and a wastrel of a man. Then, her life came full circle. She tried to regain her Kingdom but it was denied to her because when she wanted her femaleness to bear the fruit of having a child, it was too late. But Christina has been undefeated; we are moved by her spirit and her courage to accept her life's ups and downs valiantly.

References:

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1. Pam Gems *Queen Christina*(London:St. Luke's Press, 1982)
 2. *Queen Christina*, Act1, Sc.1, P. 2
 - 3 *Queen Christina*, Act I, Sc.5, P. 32