



UNLOCKING PASSAGES

HELEN BROMS SANDBERG

Kulturhuset

Sergels torg 111 57, Stockholm, Sweden

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CHRISTINA OF SWEDEN

BY JACQUELYN DAVIS

A dual video projection displaying the fantastical world of Queen Christina Alexandra (1626-1689) as imagined by a confined writer who suffers from amnesia is coupled with an unhindered view into this same writer's personal, imprisoned space. Helen Broms Sandberg's *Unlocking Passages* proves more gripping than the more standard photography exhibitions that the Kulturhuset often safely exhibits to placate both local and incoming masses. The convoluted life of this queen is a justifiable topic of historical investigation. Queen Christina was the only living legitimate offspring of King Gustav II Adolph and adopted the Swedish throne at the questionable age of six; when Christina was born, she was mistaken for a boy because of her loud cry. Leading an eccentric and scandalous life, she later relinquished her responsibilities as queen and fled to Rome where she proceeded to cultivate an alternative life protecting and supporting artists. A woman with unconventional ideals and masculine tendencies (during her era), she was later iconified by modern-day feminists and playwrights alike.

The queen (played by Agneta Ekman) is displayed in the first video to the left; in addition, she has an alter-ego played by the German actor Udo Kier, otherwise known for his roles in films directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Lars von Trier. The queen's world possesses a hyper-staged aura, reminiscent of the stage constructed for Samuel Becket's absurdist play *Waiting for Godot*, 1953, in that it is minimalistic in props and has adopted a netherworldly aesthetic. Further, the queen isolated in this world easily serves to complement the novella *Le Petit Prince*, 1943, by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry:

On ne voit bien qu'avec le cœur. L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux.

("One sees clearly only with the heart. What is essential is invisible to the eye.")

The video to the right shows the writer milling around “his” cell of white (the *real* writer in which this video piece is based upon is male, but the filmic role is *also* played by Agneta Ekman), sterile lighting, papers overflowing onto the floor from a work desk where the writer attempts to document the queen’s “actual” life, the bed being low and disheveled. Based upon a true story, the writer which this piece is based upon claimed to have multiple conversations with the queen whilst writing the book—one that was never finished, unpublished and by default: terminally up in the air.

An encapsulated dialogue unravels between the writer and queen; a conflict exists regarding the validity of the writer’s desire to unearth the queen’s previous life. The queen is not confident that it is in her best interest for her actual life to be revealed, yet the writer is fixated on the notion of unveiling her true historicity and essence. Also included in the video: text fragments and aphorisms appropriated from the queen’s archived letters. The writer’s sanity, in part, depends upon his rapport with this alternate universe created for the queen to both exist and confer with him. The quest for the queen-as-narrative is his last thread, giving his containment purpose. Ironically, the queen reminds him that she was considered by many to be evil, but the writer appears unwilling to accept her words, since so many adored her and were charmed by her. Similar to how love is blind, a writer’s agenda can be both forgiving and determined.

It is unclear which world proves most significant, which is primary vs. secondary: the writer’s confined one or the queen’s escapist one. There also exists the question of whether or not one world depends upon the other at all. If the writer’s sphere did not exist, what would become of the imagined queen in her wine-red, solo-universe? It is unwise to assume that the queen would not exist, but rather: her existence would no longer depend upon the writer’s inclination to keep her floating in the space which she occupies. Fiction and reality are tampered with, alongside gender roles, time and space. Perhaps, Christina’s persona—one overflowing with tenacity and will—cannot be easily extinguished.

—Jacquelyn Davis

Posted by Jacquelyn Davis on 1/10/12