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### The filmic legacy of 'Queen Christina'

Mika Kaurismäki's *Girl King* (2015) and Bertrand Tavernier's cinematic 'Amazons' in *D'Artagnan's Daughter* (1994) and *The Princess of Montpensier* (2010)

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**The filmic legacy of ‘Queen Christina’: Mika Kaurismäki’s *Girl King* (2015) and Bernard Tavernier’s cinematic ‘amazons’ in *D’Artagnan’s Daughter* (1994) and *The Princess of Monpensier* (2010)**

**Séverine Genieys-Kirk**

**University of Edinburgh**

When Hollywood star Greta Garbo chose to play Queen Christina of Sweden (1626-1689) in the puritan climate of the 1930s, she shocked her audience used to seeing her play vulnerable heroines: it was a personal statement which tainted her career at the time; yet it turned her into a new archetype of femininity and an icon of mystical beauty that was to have a far-reaching influence on the creative world of filmmakers.<sup>1</sup>

Queen Christina is a prime example of how historical truth has been compromised by patriarchal ideology in the portrayal of powerful women, but also of how the mainstream representation of women has been challenged since the advent of cinema. Bernard Tavernier and Mika Kaurismäki, as ‘*cinéastes engagés*’ (‘politicized filmmakers’) and ‘citizens of cinema’ in the respective landscapes of French and Finnish film-making culture,<sup>2</sup> seem to have ventured on a similar cinematic journey, as they delve into the early modern world of court intrigues, violence, and torture. Kaurismäki’s historical drama, *The Girl King* (2015)<sup>3</sup> and Tavernier’s two films, *D’Artagnan’s Daughter* (1994) and *The Princess of Montpensier* (2010), propose revisionist adaptations of women’s life-stories. Although Kaurismäki deals with a historical subject (Queen Christina of Sweden), and Tavernier with fictitious characters in screenplays adapted from Riccardo Freda’s film *The Son of D’Artagnan* (1950) and from Mme de Lafayette’s pseudo-historical novel *La Princesse de Montpensier* (1662), what is striking are the ways in which they negotiate with their cinematic heritage. While Kaurismäki’s biopic ingeniously dialogues with its predecessors, Rouben Mamoulian’s *Queen Christina* (1933) and Anthony Harvey’s *The Abdication* (1974),<sup>4</sup> Tavernier’s

cinematic amazons further attest to the impact of the legendary aura of the Garbo movie. Through the lens of feminist historiography, this essay examines the extent to which Kaurismäki and Tavernier exhibit a feminist take on their filmic representation of female agency as they revisit their classics. In other words, what does ‘feminism’ mean to postmodern filmmakers who set out to tell the lives of ‘unconventional’ women, and how does that guide their respective pygmalionesque quests in re-casting women’s life-stories, whether history- or novel-based?

### **From *Queen Christina* (1933) to *The Girl King* (2015)**

With a timeline stretching from 1933 to 2015, the cinematic life of Queen Christina carries with it the feminist seeds of ideological change: Mamoulian’s, Harvey’s, and Kaurismäki’s biopics on the Swedish queen highlight distinct shifts in the ways in which the film industry has engaged with the literary, historical, and ‘official’ narratives of women’s past.<sup>5</sup> There has been no shortage of documentary evidence on Queen Christina’s life. Contemporary testimonies emphasize her overtly masculine behavior, her unfeminine voice, often turning her into some burlesque character from a quixotic anti-novel. Jocular accounts of her hermaphroditic appearance as ‘a sort of half man, half woman,’<sup>6</sup> as well as the circumstances of her birth, have led to anatomical speculations on her biological sex. Her attraction for pastimes considered as the prerogative of men (military games, fencing, pistol-shooting), her ease in a male entourage and her erudition astonished the world. She was a curiosity, not least because she behaved, thought, and spoke like a man, but because she was a paradox—a queen who was ‘born’ a Prince, and educated like one, who called herself the ‘king’ of her people (*Rex Sueciae*)<sup>7</sup>, who was known for her misogynistic comments on women in her *Maxims*, and yet who loved women, formulated feminist statements on marriage, and positioned herself against the Establishment. She pushed the boundaries of

knowledge, she was revolutionary, and she welcomed innovative thinking, embraced modernity, and questioned the principles of Lutheranism, Sweden's state religion. She shocked the world when she abdicated. Soon after, she converted to Catholicism; but her intentions for converting and her impiety baffled those who crossed her path. Although none of the films venture beyond the episode of her abdication and conversion, they have crystallized the extraordinary 'politico-erotic fascination' she has exerted on her contemporaries and her biographers across time.<sup>8</sup>

Most notable is *Queen Christina*: Mamoulian's romanticized biopic of the Swedish queen portrayed by Garbo. Due to its then controversial lesbian theme, the original screenplay by Salka Viertel, a close friend of Garbo's, underwent significant revisions.<sup>9</sup> In the process the queen's life story was re-invented. Christina falls in love with the handsome Spanish envoy, Don Antonio—which provides a plausible narrative for her abdication. However, her dream to be united with the man she loves shatters into pieces. The denouement, which is shot 'in a purely visual climax unburdened by the falsity of words,'<sup>10</sup> highlights how fragile and untenable the Western woman's emancipation dream was in the traditionalist context of the 1930s.<sup>11</sup> The once outspoken Queen is now expressionless, as Antonio breathes his last in her arms. Yet, even in this statuesque final moment, her gaze is to be decoded as the exquisite embodiment of female fortitude. In Mamoulian's words, she was 'to make [her] face into a mask,' to 'let [the audience] write: sadness, inspiration, courage, whatever they choose, whatever they prefer'.<sup>12</sup> In 1974 Harvey followed the lead by revisiting the Hollywood classic in *The Abdication* starring Liv Ullmann. The film focuses on the months following her abdication and on the speculative anecdote of her romance with Cardinal Azzolini.<sup>13</sup> The latter is entrusted with the task of cross-examining her intention but gives in to her charm and wit. The film transforms the reputedly masculine queen into a stereotypical victim of social constraints, revealing 'the private woman' in her utmost frailty

and vulnerability.<sup>14</sup> How to deal with the subject of the Queen's sexuality and subversion of society's patriarchal rules constituted a more radical challenge in the conservative climate of Hollywood's cinema production in the 1930s than it did in the revolutionary, emancipatory atmosphere of the 1970s, which saw the advent of queer studies. The latter's impact on society has only begun to be more visible at the turn of the twenty-first century and, as we shall see, Kaurismäki's film, *The Girl King*, encapsulates this paradigm shift in popular culture.

Mamoulian's, Harvey's, and Kaurismäki's films return to the early childhood of Christina, who became queen of Sweden at the age of six upon the death of her father, King Gustav II of Sweden. A strong-willed child in Mamoulian's version, she is presented in Harvey's film through two contradictory flashbacks, as a perfectly groomed little princess, and then as a perfectly groomed little prince—thus highlighting Christina's troubled sense of her own identity. While in Mamoulian's film the plot swiftly progresses from her childhood to her adulthood, Harvey resorts to a long flashback to relate Christina's awakening sexual desires as a teenager. Kaurismäki, however, dwells much longer on the early stages of her life, such as the anecdotal confusion over her sex at her birth, her childhood with her neurotic, unloving mother forcing her to kiss her dead father whose corpse she keeps unburied in her chamber, and the routine medical checks until she comes of age. Through these sequences Kaurismäki convincingly suggests how the Queen as Malin Buska may have come to develop 'a sense of self' as she grew into an adult.

When compared with Ullmann and Buska, Garbo radiates a blend of *sprezzatura* and unsurpassed elegance even in her blatant manifestation of virility. The low pitch of her voice, of her laughter, and her brusque walk are all temporary, and most of the time are associated with light-hearted scenes, thus deflecting the potential threat to the conservative ideology of the 1930s which this cinematic model of female emancipation might have conveyed. No such

sense of light-heartedness prevails in either of the remakes. Ullmann and Buska undeniably offer a more realistic image of the reported roughness of their historical model: her language can be crude, even irreverent and impious. This contrast is further enhanced by the way Kaurismäki intellectualizes the portrait of the queen as a serious scholar. In Harvey's film, although the queen is shown to be excelling in the art of rhetoric, her scholarly personality is cursorily alluded to in a flashback scene set in a large study room with her books randomly scattered on a table. This scene, in which she sings a bawdy ballad on her mandolin about her monstrous, unbearable self, reaches a climax as she loses control of herself, smashes her instrument and throws her books. The sequence draws upon a misogynistic commonplace in early modern representations of femininity which stigmatized reading as demonizing and sullyng women's souls. In the process, the queen's extensive and eclectic knowledge is therefore instantly associated with her idiosyncratic behavior, madness, and self-hatred.

Conversely, the queen in the 1933 and 2015 biopics is primarily presented as an assertive, knowledgeable individual with a mind and 'room of her own'. Christina/Garbo is depicted as a bookworm who rises early to catch up with her reading. Interestingly, the screenplay emphasizes Christina's familiarity with one specific aspect of French culture: romance literature. The work she is seen reading is by this 'good Molière'; and from the conversation she has with her servant we can infer that the play is *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659). She jocularly admits to her servant Aage that she agrees with the titular characters. Molière's 'affected ladies' speak strongly against the institution of marriage, basing their worldview on their own readings of Madeleine de Scudéry's early feminist novels. This conversation with Aage creates a comical *mise en abyme* of a Molière play, evoking the well-trodden assumption that novel reading distracts women from their social and domestic duties—namely, being good wives and producing heirs. In the inn scene, when the cross-dressed Queen meets Antonio for the second time, she learns from him that in Spain she is

seen as a ‘Bluestocking’ who ‘cares more for running than for love’.<sup>15</sup> Christina laughs back and answers with a rhetorical question, thereby evading Antonio’s statement. When the enamored Antonio discovers her real identity, he realizes that Christina is anything but prudish and certainly not ridiculous.

Instead, the focal point of Kaurismäki’s biopic is the thorough rendering of Christina’s relationship with Descartes. He emphasizes her scholarly education, firstly as a young girl displaying a precocious inclination for philosophical and theological debates during her lessons with her male mentor. He shows her as actively building Sweden’s cultural heritage by bringing knowledge from all over Europe to Sweden and making plans for the finest library. Clearly, he projects a more forceful image of women as epistemic subjects in an androcentric domain of study, here philosophy and science. Free of the constraints that were imposed on the production of *Queen Christina*, Kaurismäki transforms Mamoulian’s screenplay: in the latter, the reference to Molière’s comedic portrayal of early feminism allows the viewers to engage humorously with the queen’s subversive ideas about the marriage institution, and prepares them for her critique of the hegemonic structure of society, as the scene swiftly moves to the subtle evocation of Christina’s homosexuality where she tenderly kisses her lady-in-waiting Ebba Sparre.<sup>16</sup>

In Kaurismäki’s version, Christina’s intellectual encounter with Cartesian precepts on love serves as a pivotal moment in the film in her legitimization of her feelings for Ebba. The subdued kiss scene in the Garbo movie, which is revisited by Harvey through the device of voyeuristic scenes,<sup>17</sup> is explored further by Kaurismäki through several instances of intensely intimate moments filled with the savoring of Descartes’s words. Throughout the 2015 biopic, Christina progresses on the ladder of love (sight, sound, touch, taste)<sup>18</sup>—as she furtively gazes at Ebba on their first encounter; as they hide on the porch of a townhouse, giggling over Descartes’s manuscript, *Les Passions de l’âme*, which the French ambassador Chanut

has just given her; when she teaches Ebba how to shoot; and then in the chalet scene where, against the rules of courtly etiquette, the Queen has dinner with Chanut and Ebba.

This chalet scene provides us with a significant instance of dialogic creativity as the inn scene alluded to earlier in Mamoulian's biopic is re-explored by Harvey. In the 1933 and 1974 biopics, the upper and lower floors serve as metaphors for the divide between the private and the public, the sensual and the rough, the sublime and the grotesque. In Mamoulian's celebrated yet controversial sequence in which the cross-dressed queen and Antonio are forced to sleep together, due to a shortage of accommodation, the bedroom scene turns into a bower of bliss.<sup>19</sup> In Harvey's version, the bedroom is a secret retreat where Christina comes and confesses her lustful sins to a Catholic priest in hiding. As Christina/Ullmann recalls her regular visits and goes into a trance, the past and the present collide: the dark mantle of the priest which she is holding on to in her vision morphs into the crimson robe of the Cardinal whom she is about to kiss. As he abruptly stops her from doing so, she comes back to her senses. This brutal return to reality is heightened by the overwhelmingly inquisitive presence of the Cardinal's peers: the nascent romance between the queen and the Cardinal is under constant watch, and at once the inner space of their shared emotions recedes.

Quite distinctly, the memory of Mamoulian's beautifully shot scene with its erotic undertones through the presence of exotic fruits 'warmed and ripened in the Spanish sun',<sup>20</sup> and with its suggestive atmosphere of amorous embraces, lingers in Kaurismäki's chalet scene. The latter too is suffused with erotic exoticism, as Christina marvels over a bowl of cherry tomatoes, and flirtatiously gives one to Ebba for her to taste. Thus, the scene displaces the conventional narrative of heterosexual love, as we find it in Mamoulian's and Harvey's romanticized versions, to that of homoeroticism in Kaurismäki's. Likewise, just as the idyllic retreat of Christina/Garbo is unsustainable, and just as Christina/Ullmann's earthly desire for

the Cardinal is illusory, so this moment of happiness between Christina/Buskin and Ebba is disrupted by the arrival of the stern chancellor, Axel Oxenstierna, reminding the Queen of her duty and rank. The chalet scene is a sensual prelude to one of the bedroom scenes which recasts Harvey's love-making scene from a different vantage point.<sup>21</sup> As Christina/Buskin asks Ebba to unclothe herself to try on the 'luminous' dress she has given her, she wants her lady-in-waiting to tell her how her fiancé looks at her and touches her:

CHRISTINA. How does he look at you?

EBBA. Sometimes he touches his chest like you right now, and he places his hands on his chin, like you.<sup>22</sup>

In her sensual description of her fiancé's gaze and love-making, Ebba semantically plays with subject positioning whereby the queen acts as a mirror of the desiring male. Crucially, the scene sparks off an intensely intimate relationship between the two women. The doomed destiny of Christina's love for Ebba reaches a climax when they are taken by surprise, half-naked, in the castle's crypt where newly arrived books, including the *Codex Giga*, have been stored. The lavishly illuminated bible of the devil is the focal point of this love-making scene. We witness a queen who is enraptured by her recent acquisition, revealing the other side of her protean, impious personality: just as the book embodies the forbidden fruit of knowledge, so does her physical possession of Ebba. There is no limit to her love; propriety is forgotten. Kaurismäki has explicitly expanded on the elliptical subtext of the bawdy song in Harvey's flashback of the queen's hysterical fit. Both versions visually link female learning to lust and perdition: Christina's ostentatious subversion of ascribed gender roles leads to her isolation, madness, and alienation. In Mamoulian's film, Christina is more controlled and dignified; yet the climactic scenes in which her confidant Axel Oxensternia reminds her of her royal duties

provide her cinematic successors with a powerful template for the expression of their frustration at their lack of agency. Christina/Garbo repeatedly dismantles the fallacy of patriarchal ideology and public state discourse: 'I am to have no voice. It is intolerable! There is a freedom which is mine, and which the state cannot take away. For the unreasonable tyranny of the mob and to the malicious tyranny of palace intrigue, I shall not submit!'.<sup>23</sup> Although a symbol of power, she realizes the limits of her prerogatives: she is a woman. Objecting to the commodification of women's future, she universalizes women's call for freedom, for owning a voice of their own. Her 'lack of voice', a predicament with which female viewers of the 1930s would have possibly identified, is a recurring theme in the film, and is associated with a world of shadows, self-doubt, and inner struggle, as the queen reaches her final decision to abdicate: 'I have grown up in a great man's shadow. All my life I have been assumable..., an abstraction. A human being is mortal and changeable... I am tired of being assumable, Chancellor, I long to be a human being. This longing I cannot suppress.'<sup>24</sup> Certainly, even though Garbo 'present[s] an airbrushed, romanticized portrait of the real woman,'<sup>25</sup> her formulation of her character's rebellion against the patriarchal codification of her emotional life paved the way for Harvey's and Kaurismäki's explorations of the psychological dilemmas with which the independent-minded queen is faced.

With their emphasis on the complex issue of gender conventions, Harvey's and Kaurismäki's films can be read as extended metaphors for that very 'long[ing] to be a human being'.<sup>26</sup> This is evidenced from Kaurismäki's negotiation with both Mamoulian's and Harvey's screenplays. Strikingly, *The Girl King* ends where *The Abdication* begins—that is with Christina/Ullmann, walking away from the stage of politics, leaving behind a world of constraints. The movement of her feet is smoothly captured through a tracking shot, casting off the soft shades of the silky creamy fabric of her dainty shoes as she takes each step forward. This tracking shot works as a metonymy for Christina's newly acquired freedom,

guiding the viewer's gaze into a luminous, translucent space with a dream-like quality to it. Christina twirls round in a green field, her long hair loose in the wind. Finally, she can renounce the societal codes of femininity artificially imposed on her. The next scene, which stages her arrival in Rome, shows the queen in her male garment. The somber colors of her outfit and the low-key light foreshadow her inner fight with her past into and out of which she steps seamlessly through flashbacks. In the abdication scene Kaurismäki uses similar backlighting effects to those employed by Harvey, which soften the sharp edges of her masculine silhouette slowly disappearing into the distance with Descartes's voice filling the space of the screen: 'To attain the truth in life, we must discard all the ideas we work on and reconstruct the entire system of our knowledge.'<sup>27</sup> Ending with the oft-cited Cartesian motto of wisdom paraphrased from Descartes's opening statement in *Metaphysical Meditations*, the film brings a holistic sense of closure to the queen's chaotic world. Although the second part of her eventful life remains untold in this film the voice-over points to the next milestone in the queen's quest for self-fulfillment, as portrayed in Harvey's film.<sup>28</sup> However, even for those who have not seen Harvey's film, Kaurismäki's citation has us reflect on our own ontological make-up and question our preconceived ideas about selfhood. Kaurismäki's voice-over is therefore an evocative reminder of the existential quest that lies ahead of us all, namely, in Garbo's words, of that 'longing' that is within us 'to be a human being'.

Throughout her cinematic journey from Mamoulian's to Kaurismäki's biopics, the protean treatment of the Swedish queen reflects the modern woman's battle for carving out a space and voice of her own in a traditionalist society. Each interpretation of the queen has its own psychological depth. While Garbo's impersonation is aestheticized, Ullmann and Buskin create an earthlier version of the Swedish queen—under their lead she is no more an 'abstraction'; her speech is not as poeticized, she is all body and flesh. Yet, over their impersonation of Christina hovers the memory of the iconic Garbo: her performance offered

a script teeming with new possibilities for others to seize upon. Undeniably, *Queen Christina* has left a durable imprint on our cinematic female imaginary, showing the way forward not solely to actresses like Ullmann and Buskin but also beyond the generic confines of biopics. As we shall see in the following discussion, Mamoulian's 'Queen Christina' serves as a blueprint for Tavernier's enhanced and modernized characterization of his sixteenth- and seventeenth-century heroines.

### ***Queen Christina* (1933) and Bertrand Tavernier's cinematic amazons**

On the surface *D'Artagnan's Daughter* (1994) and *The Princess of Montpensier* (2010) offer antithetic images of cinematic amazons. Here the term 'amazon' is to be understood in its seventeenth-century sense in the context of French politics and salon culture, when a new cultural trend emerged, heralding examples of female fortitude and female wit under the banner of *femmes fortes*.<sup>29</sup> Female-authored fiction of that period teems with examples of women as intellectualized metaphors of 'triumphant women,' speaking their mind, outwitting their male counterparts, and voicing an early feminist discourse.<sup>30</sup> It was in this context that Mme de Lafayette created her more domesticated, but nonetheless strong-minded, female characters in her pseudo-historical novels. As we shall see, with his 'Proustian sensibility' and own touch as a 'cinéaste de l'émotion,'<sup>31</sup> Tavernier transforms these once iconic images of female heroism into a postmodern script that suggestively dialogues with its literary and cinematic pasts.

As an adaptation of Riccardo Freda's film *The Son of D'Artagnan* (1950) *D'Artagnan's Daughter* is a perfect example of Tavernier's dialogic creativity paired with a sense of subversion.<sup>32</sup> As Tavernier's title indicates, he proceeds to a reversal of gender roles. The two characters, Raoul in Freda's film and Eloïse in Tavernier's version, live in a religious retreat, but not for the same reasons. Raoul, son of D'Artagnan, has decided not to

follow into the heroic and flamboyant steps of his father; instead he has taken up a monastic lifestyle. As for Eloïse, upon her mother's death, she was entrusted to the good care of nuns in a remote convent. However, after witnessing a carnage in their respective retreats, they are both animated by a law-spirited urge to punish the murderers of the king's courier in Freda's film and of the Mother superior in Tavernier's film. Eloïse's sense of righteousness is also nurtured by the strong desire to meet her father after many years of separation.<sup>33</sup>

Tavernier's cinematic interplay with Mamoulian's *Queen Christina* is striking in *D'Artagnan's Daughter*, starring the dashing and iconic French star Sophie Marceau as Eloïse. Both films have a spectacular and violent start. Mamoulian's film begins with a battle scene in which Christina's father dies, and Tavernier's with the chase of a slave finding refuge in the convent where Eloïse lives, followed by the murder of a nun. While these two *in-media-res* openings are characteristic of period dramas, they do not merely function as the backdrop for the plot but also symbolically mark Christina's and Eloïse's entry into the public sphere, the male-owned dominion of politics. Like Christina, who rebukes her opportunistic and despicable suitor, Count Magnus, as she declares 'I am not an idle woman, Magnus, I have a world in my hands,'<sup>34</sup> Eloïse takes on the moral and political mission to restore order in the seventeenth-century world of intrigues and conspiracies. She refuses the 'passiveness' prescribed to women of her station. Tavernier creates a heroine with the bravura of a seventeenth-century *Frondeuse*: not born 'a prince' like Christina, Eloïse comes close to the Amazonian panache of the Swedish queen: as the daughter of the celebrated musketeer, she spent her early childhood in a male environment. Her education at the convent hardly smothered her tomboy taste for fighting and fencing. She did not receive the princely education of her female contemporary, and is not explicitly shown to be harboring intellectual aspirations the way Christina does. However, like her, she nurtures pacifist ideals.

Common to both films is the theme of cross-dressing as a means to escape from a world of constraints in the case of Christina, and for Eloïse as a means to find her way into the rough world of ruffians in order to find her aged father and bring the criminals to justice. As Eloïse dons her male garment, helped by two nuns, the three women feel hilarious at her extravagant idea:

ELOISE. It feels nice. We should start a new fashion!

NUN 1. Women in trousers! In public! [How shocking!]

NUN 2. God [will never stand such an indecent sight!]

ELOISE. Leave God out of this! Did he give us legs to hide them? I rather like mine!

NUN 1. And mine!

NUN 2. I can show mine too!<sup>35</sup>

Seventeenth-century tales of cross-dressed women are the sites of burlesque situations, giving rise to comical misunderstandings, which both Mamoulian and Tavernier explore in the scene where the two women meet their lover-to-be. Tavernier has chosen a similar setting for this first encounter: the inn, a predominantly male environment characterized by its roughness and rowdiness, and therefore an unlikely place for a young lady or queen to stop at. Tavernier has created a pastiche of Mamoulian's famous scene, where the cross-dressed queen puts a stop to the quarrel of her peasants over her numerous love affairs: as they disagree on the number of lovers she has accumulated over the years, she jumps onto a table, shoots her pistols in the air and declares that 'the queen has had twelve lovers this past year!'<sup>36</sup> The matter being settled, Christina and Antonio (still thinking he is speaking to a young courtier) resume their gallant conversation.

In Tavernier's scene, young poet Quentin de la Misère is seen observing Eloïse who is eating roast lamb. He notices straight away she is a woman, and writes a love message which he asks the inn-keeper to bring over to her. The message is intercepted and read aloud; bawdy jokes about the poet's love for boys are made, and a fight breaks out. Eloïse heroically joins in, but her pretender is a poor fighter mesmerized by his intrepid damsel in distress. The young pair eventually escape. In this comical pastiche of Mamoulian's inn scene, gender roles are further reversed: the timorous young man, who is filled with ecstatic love, is afraid of horse-riding and stunned by his lady's equestrian skills.

Throughout the scene, Tavernier further emphasizes his dialogic interplay by modelling Eloïse's apparel and demeanor on that of Christina: her hat, her amused gaze and her mocking laughter are all reminiscent of Garbo's portrayal of the cross-dressed queen. Although Eloïse is not presented as an intellectual and is mainly shown as a fearless swashbuckler, Eloïse's witty remarks on the superficiality of prescribed gender roles recall Christina's own audacity and readiness to challenge the official ideology of seventeenth-century patriarchal society.

Significantly, however, the two films give weight to father-daughter relationships. Although Christina's father is dead, he plays an important role as a driving force in Christina's desire to achieve 'princely' knowledge and ensure stability, justice and peace in her kingdom, until the shadow of the dead man, in the form of duty, weighs too much on her shoulders, and she decides to abdicate. Yet, the memory she has of him is one of tenderness and love—a positive depiction of fatherhood. Tavernier too proceeds to explore the father-daughter relationship in a tender light, while tracing the journey of a father's deep emotions for his daughter and of his laborious acceptance of her brashness and masculine ways, especially in a society that requires women to behave demurely, and be 'chaste, silent and obedient'. In Tavernier's film, the reunion between a daughter and a father who are nearly

strangers to each other thus generates several scenes suffused with both emotion and amusement.

The film is as much about saving the King from a conspiracy as about D'Artagnan's progressive acknowledgement of his daughter's physical and strategic abilities. Lynn Anthony Higgins argues that once the conspirators are defeated and brought to justice, patriarchal order is restored, meaning that Eloïse must re-integrate the domestic space society has carved out for women.<sup>37</sup> However, the final scene implies otherwise; as D'Artagnan nostalgically reminisces on her heroic act of prowess, he tenderly rebukes her for her masculine fashion: 'You were so lovely against the light, so dazzling, so alive! You know what? I'd like to see you in a dress.'<sup>38</sup> But Eloïse's facial expression shows surprise and disapproval; and with her usual humor, she subtly overturns her father's plea for her donning feminine apparel by announcing she is planning to be enrolled as the King's spy. The film ends with a fencing match of jovial ripostes between father and daughter:

ELOISE. [Only I can foil plots better than anyone else.]

D'ARTAGNAN. You invent them!

ELOISE. [I don't invent them]; I uncover them!

D'ARTAGNAN. You hatch them!

ELOISE. [I don't hatch them], I find them!

D'ARTAGNAN. You imagine them!

ELOISE. I unmask them!

D'ARTAGNAN. You dream them!

ELOISE. I spy them, I subdue them, I smother them!<sup>39</sup>

Eloïse has the last word in this highly humoristic final counter-parry: she may not be able to ‘sew, cook, embroider’ or ‘make jam in the old way,’ but ‘[she] can fight’ both with her sword and wit, as it turns out.<sup>40</sup> Just as her cinematic predecessor, Queen Christina, embodies the ‘new woman’ of the 1930s, Eloïse embodies in the 1990s the vibrancy of a new generation of Western women, who do not just aspire to break away from conventional standards of femininity, but actively seek to fulfil their aspirations.

Her father’s rhetorical attempts to bring her back to a more domesticated life-style suggests there still is a long way before the deeply ingrained perceptions of what femininity and masculinity entail start fading away. Ironically, however, as with Queen Christina in Mamoulian’s film, the juvenal beauty of Eloïse, despite her ‘masculine ways,’ is for us spectators to marvel at: subtly eroticized, her body, once divested of its male apparel, first figuratively in her fiancé’s poetry, and then literally in a scene where she undresses in front of her lover who is fast asleep, is a reminder that visual representations of iconic women, even in their most war-like demeanor, are guided by the artistic principle of aesthetic enjoyment. However, Tavernier does not dwell on the scene. The bedroom scene is kept short, suggestively erotic. Eloïse’s fiancé does not wake up! Eloïse takes it humorously; and the next day the Venusian beauty who has slipped back into her Minervan outfit tells him he has missed some ‘spectacle’. A far cry from the highly sexualized body of Queen Margot in Patrick Chéreau’s film released in the same year,<sup>41</sup> Eloïse provides a prototype of femininity that has the appeal of ‘the ink-stained amazons and cinematic warriors’ of the modern constellation of superhero girls.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Queen Christina (1933) and The Princess of Montpensier (2010)***

*The Princess of Montpensier*, starring Mélanie Thierry, deeply contrasts with Tavernier’s earlier foray into the world of female heroism: swashbuckling remains the

prerogative of men; and the doomed, carnage-like atmosphere of the sixteenth-century religious wars takes us away from the lighter, comedic tones that suffuse *D'Artagnan's Daughter* (despite its violent beginning).<sup>43</sup> In this adventure film, the exploration of the father-daughter relationship allowed Tavernier to inject molièresque humor whereby the precepts of patriarchal ideology are shown to be flawed, excessive, and illegitimate. The result is amusement, laughter, and for the female viewer, a certain enjoyment at Eloïse's physical prowess and verbal jousts. On the contrary, in *The Princess of Montpensier* tragedy predominates, although some instances lighten up the oppressive environment into which the heroine is propelled.

Lafayette's novel is the story of a young woman, Mlle de Mézières, whose hopes to marry her childhood lover, Henri (the historical Duke of Guise, Henry I), are dashed all at once when her father marries her off to the young Prince of Montpensier, who is then sent to war, leaving his former mentor, Count of Chabannes, to take care of his wife's education.<sup>44</sup> Chabannes becomes her confidant but falls in love with her, as does the Duke of Anjou, the future king of France, who is enthralled by her beauty. In an elliptical and concise style, the narrative goes on to explore the princess's inner fight between her duty and her love for Henri, causing her to be led astray, and to be subject to her jealous husband's accusations, eventually resulting in their separation. The pace of the novel quickens: news of Henri's marriage reaches the princess; distraught and weakened by her melancholia, she dies. The novel ends abruptly and conventionally with a warning against the dangers of passions.

Tavernier's film adaptation is faithful. Fleshing out the 'silences' and 'ellipses' of the text, he 'consistently add[s] elements that elucidate historical facets and factors... mak[ing] them more realistically plausible' for his modern audience.<sup>45</sup> His 'explicating' approach reveals the audacity of Lafayette's text beneath its euphemistic depiction of primal emotions and adulterous passions.

As critics have remarked, Tavernier's 2010 film conjures up striking parallels with the macabre atmosphere of Chéreau's biopic, *Queen Margot*, based on Alexandre Dumas's 1845 novel and starring another iconic actress Isabelle Adjani.<sup>46</sup> With the religious wars in the background, the film's texture recalls the somber and tragic destiny of Queen Margot molested by the vagaries of fate. Set in the same period, the two films share their most infamous characters, Catherine de Medici, the Duke of Guise, and Queen Margot herself. Like Queen Margot in Chéreau's film, the princess is idolized for her rare beauty, but unlike Dumas's eponymous heroine who embodies lust, Lafayette's female protagonist is presented as an unattainable object of desire and symbolizes purity. This is enhanced through Tavernier's christening of the princess as Marie and as Mariette in the more intimate scenes. Thereby Tavernier makes Lafayette's heroine more tangible, as her Christian name is used by the male characters to express their closeness to her.

Tavernier's adaptation puts emphasis on the education of the princess by elaborating Lafayette's short statement: 'He quickly made her into one of the most accomplished ladies of her time.'<sup>47</sup> Although Marie strikes us as naive and has a childishness about her (features which are absent from Lafayette's text), she comes across as determined and witty. Her rhetoric is simple, and yet incisive, often disarming her mentor, Chabannes, who gradually falls in love with her. She is unafraid of calling into question the validity of societal diktats. For example, while Chabannes insists on her reading Latin, she insists on learning how to write. She argues that through her practicing writing she will then be able to improve her Latin. First showing some resistance, Chabannes gives in, and soon the art of calligraphy becomes Marie's favored activity. She excels to such an extent that her husband mistakes her handwriting for Chabannes's own. Although the film does not dwell on her achievements, her repartees indicate she has intellectually matured and developed critical sharpness when she comments on the teachings of Chabannes who has carefully selected the subjects of study in

accordance with gender rules. She teases him for not introducing her to ‘military’ talk, which precludes her from joining in at the impromptu dinner table with the Duke of Anjou and his men.<sup>48</sup> This is only an aside, but it serves nonetheless as a forceful statement whereby the rationality of the epistemic divide between the two sexes is challenged. To be sure, when imagining this scene, Tavernier must have had his own cinematic creation in mind, namely Eloïse—if not historical examples of queens and noblewomen who distinguished themselves as well versed in the rhetoric of warfare, such as the historical and cinematic Queen Christina.

A major twist to Lafayette’s novel is his revision of the denouement. Lafayette’s novel reaches its climax when her husband discovers his wife lying nearly lifeless on her bedroom floor in the presence of Chabannes, who has facilitated an encounter between her and Henri. The latter has a narrow escape; Chabannes is banished by the prince and must leave; and the ill princess is left in the care of her lady-in-waiting. In his adaptation, Tavernier opts for a theatrical *mise-en-scene*: when the prince discovers Chabannes in his wife’s bedroom, and threatens him with his sword, she is standing at the far end, looking pale and terrified. Chabannes calmly leaves the castle, and the next screenshot takes the viewer back to Henri who re-emerges from his hiding place. Marie initiates their love-making. Tavernier’s authorial intention to create an image of female emancipation is clearly indicated in his screenplay: ‘Marie knows intuitively that by giving herself to him she loses herself.’<sup>49</sup> This marks a new turning point in Marie’s emotional life.

Henri disappears at the break of dawn. The film could have ended here, leaving it up to the viewers to draw their own conclusions, but it does not. There remain a few climactic scenes before the final resolution of the plot. The first of these scenes shows Marie in ‘her riding habit, full of energy and determined not to change her mind’.<sup>50</sup> We learn that the

couple has been discussing their marital future, and Marie has arrived to announce her decision to ‘inaugurate the liberty which [he] impose[s] upon her. To live alone’.<sup>51</sup>

The camera then shifts back and forth between the galloping princess towards her place of exile and Chabannes who is writing a farewell letter to her. Her newly acquired liberty has a transformative effect on her. Although it is not all that obvious from the long panoramic shot in the film, which shows the princess galloping into the distance at breakneck speed, the screenplay indicates that she ‘has changed her horse and saddle, and is now riding like a man’<sup>52</sup>— an image within which her newly found liberty is metaphorically encapsulated. The camera returns to Chabannes who is trapped in the middle of a fierce crowd animated by their hatred of Huguenots. The next morning, Montpensier arrives on the carnage scene and finds his old friend lying dead. He discovers Chabannes’s farewell letter. This ignites his jealousy; and he decides to bring the letter over to Marie, only to tell her that Henri is about to sign a marriage contract in Blois. Upon hearing this, she is determined to prevent Henri from it, despite her husband’s threat that if she does so, this means ‘divorce’.<sup>53</sup>

Throughout the film, Marie is often reminded of her station as a princess by her husband—that is, of her social duty. Her title fashions how she must act and think in public. But like Queen Christina, she too is animated by an inner voice. In relinquishing her title lies her belief that this will allow her to fulfil her dream of happiness. To some extent, Marie’s determination reminds us of Christina/Garbo’s reason for abdicating: ‘There is a voice in our soul that tells us what to do, and we obey, and I have no choice.’<sup>54</sup> As with Mamoulian’s Christina, nothing holds Marie back: she rides to Blois but discovers Henri is unfaithful to her, as her old friend Chabannes had predicted.<sup>55</sup> She rides away with Chabannes’s voice in her head. Each word of Chabannes’s farewell letter rhythmically punctuates the sound of her horse-hooves, until she suddenly gallops off into a snowscape. She arrives at the chapel where Chabannes is buried. She has come to recollect on the tomb of the man whose

unvalued friendship and dedication to her have shaped her own sense of selfhood, and will guide her final steps towards a life of exile. The film ends with a poignant voice-over: the princess does not die as in Lafayette's denouement, but her words have the wintry whiteness of the snowy landscape that surrounds her. In an eloquently suggestive close-up, Tavernier's craft as a *cinéaste* revives the forlorn memory of a cinematic icon: 'the face of Garbo' which, as famously captured in Roland Barthes's words, 'participates in that same realm of courtly love, when the flesh develops certain mystical sentiments of perdition'.<sup>56</sup> As the camera closes in on Marie's face, her aborted dream radiates the distilled essence of Garbo as Christina, 'reveal[ing] the same countenance of snow and solitude'.<sup>57</sup>

To conclude, Kaurismäki's and Tavernier's creative negotiations with their cinematic models of the seventeenth-century *femme forte* reveals how powerful an art form cinema has been in shaping a multifaceted female genealogy. Their films act as conscious 'feminist interventions' in the landscape of international cinema, in that 'they are important in creating awareness of the socially constructed nature of representations of women in films, and in offering an impetus towards the creation of alternative representations'.<sup>58</sup> Most evidently, through the postmodernist prism of gender and feminist politics, Kaurismäki's biopic epitomizes cultural change in a way that engages twenty-first century viewers as agents in the gender revolution.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, Tavernier's authorial agenda is inflected by a feminist impulse to raise important issues on gender, domestic violence, and women's right to self-fulfillment.<sup>60</sup> In both cases, the result is a gripping tale of love, passion and friendship which, against the Caravaggesque backdrop of political and religious tensions, reflects twenty-first century preoccupations with women's 'assumed' roles in society. Thus, from their own vantage point, Tavernier's and Kaurismäki's 'retelling' of the past signals a new turn in the pluralistic histories of cinema and feminism.

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1. See Mark A. Vieira, *Greta Garbo: A Cinematic Legacy* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2005), 171-191; Elizabeth A. Ford and Deborah C. Mitchell, *Royal Portraits in Hollywood: Filming the Lives of Queens* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 8-33; David Luhrssen, *Mamoulian Life on Stage and Screen* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press), 67-75.
  2. On these two cinéastes, see Lynn Anthony Higgins, *Bertrand Tavernier* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), and Pietari Kämpää, *The Cinema of Mika Kaurismäki: transvergent cinescapes, Emerging Identities* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011).
  3. The screenplay is by Michel Marc Bouchard, and adapted from his play, *Christine, La Reine-Garçon* (2012) translated into English by Linda Gaboriau.
  4. The screenplay is based on Ruth Wolff's 1972 play. On how Harvey engages with the play, see Ford and Mitchell, *Royal Portraits*, 23-33.
  5. References to these films will be to the following versions: H. M Harwood and Salka Viertel, *Queen Christina*, directed by Rouben Mamoulian (1933, Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD; Ruth Wolff, *The Abdication*, directed by Anthony Harvey (1974, Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2002, 2009), DVD; Michel Marc Bouchard, *The Girl King*, translated by Linda Gaboriau, and directed by Mika Kaurismäki (New Almaden, CA: Wolfe Video, 2015), DVD.
  6. See Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, "Masculinité et libertinage dans la figure et les écrits de Christine de Suède," *Les Dossiers du Grihl* 6 (2010), doi: 10.4000/dossiersgrihl.3965.

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7. See Jean-François Raymond, *Christine de Suède: Apologies* (Paris: Cerf Editions, 1994), 136, fn.16 quoted in Cavaillé.
  8. Cavaillé, “Masculinité et libertinage,” 1.
  9. See Vieira, *Greta Garbo*, 171-190.
  10. Lührssen, *Mamoulian*, 72.
  11. Lührssen, *Mamoulian*, 74.
  12. James Silke, *Rouben Mamoulian: Style is the man* (New York: American Film Institute, 1971), quoted in Lührssen, *Mamoulian*, 24.
  13. On her relationship with Azzolini, which is likely to have remained platonic, see Veronica Buckley, *Queen of Sweden, The Restless Life of a European Eccentric* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 192-8.
  14. Ford and Mitchell, *Royal Portraits*, 23.
  15. The term ‘Bluestocking’ is anachronistic, since it was coined in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, Antonio’s definition of the term implying such a woman is some type of muscular athlete that is deprived of feminine attributes reveals the long-lasting misogynistic misconception of the female intellectual. As a concept, the bluestockings’ movement was inspired by seventeenth-century French salon culture, and the so-called constellation of the *Précieuses*. The *Précieuses* did not actually exist and are the progenies of a fictional construct, which was used to mock women writers as pedantic. On this aspect, see Faith Beasley, *Salons, History and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).
  16. On the recommendation of head producer Irving Thalberg, the scene had to be ‘handled with taste.’ Vieira, *Greta Garbo*, 176.
  17. See Ford and Mitchell, *Royal Portraits*, 29-30.

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18. On the neo-Platonic interpretations and shifting definitions of the ladder of love, see Jill Kraye, “Ficino in the Firing Line: A Renaissance Neoplatonist and his Critics,” in *Marsilio Ficino 1433–1499: His Sources, His Circle, His Legacy*, (Leiden: Brill, 2001), ed. M.J.B. Allen and V. Rees, 377–97 and “The Transformation of Platonic Love in the Italian Renaissance,” in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, ed. A. Baldwin and S. Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 76–85.
19. On the controversy over this scene, see Vieira, 171-190.
20. Antonio in Harwood and Viertel, *Queen Christina*, scene 13.
21. See Ford and Mitchell, *Royal Portraits*, 29-30.
22. Bouchard, *The Girl King*, chapter 3.
23. Harwood and Viertel, *Queen Christina*, scene 19.
24. Harwood and Viertel, *Queen Christina*, scene 22 (my ellipses).
25. Ford and Mitchell, *Royal Portraits*, 23.
26. Harwood and Viertel, *Queen Christina*, scene 22 (my ellipses).
27. Bouchard, *The Girl King*, chapter 9. Descartes’s statement in the original French translation of “Méditation I” in his *Méditations Métaphysiques* reads as follows : ‘il me fallait entreprendre serieusement une fois en ma vie de me defaire de toutes les opinions que j’avois recuës jusques alors en ma creance et commencer de nouveau dés les fondemens, si je voulois establir quelque chose de ferme, & de constant dans les sciences’ (Paris : Vve Jean Camusat and Jean Petit, 1647), 8. Descartes’s famous incipit as we know it today was popularised in nineteenth-century sources, most notably in Pierre-François Tissot’s textbook, *Leçons et modèles de littérature ancienne et moderne depuis Ville-Hardouin jusqu’à M. de Chateaubriand* : ‘pour atteindre la vérité: il faut, une fois dans sa vie, se défaire de toutes les

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opinions que l'on a reçues et reconstruire de nouveau, et dès le fondement, tout le système de ses connaissances'(Paris: J. L'Henry,1835), 309.

28. For an in-depth analysis of Harvey's psychological portrait of the queen, see Ford and Mitchell, *Royal Portraits*, 23-33.

33. Ian Maclean, *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature (1610-1652)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

30. See Joan De Jean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York, University of Columbia Press, 1991).

31. Higgins, *Bertrand Tavernier*, 21 and 119. This characterization of Tavernier as "cinéaste de l'émotion" became a set phrase to describe the French filmmaker after the publication of Danièle Bion's monograph: *Bernard Tavernier: cinéaste de l'émotion* (Paris: Hatier, 1984); the concept is used in French to emphasize a filmmaker's valorization of the visual production of emotion.

32. Jean Cosmos, and Michel Leviant, *La Fille de D'Artagnan d'après une idée originale de Riccardo Freda et Eric Poindron* (UK: *D'Artagnan's Daughter from an original idea by Riccardo Freda and Eric Poindron*). Directed by Bertrand Tavernier. Subtitles by Lenny Borger and Nina Bogin (1994, Second Sight Films, 2010). DVD. Unless otherwise stated, English citations are from the UK DVD version; where brackets are used, the translation is mine.

33. On the sources and for an analytical summary of the film, see Higgins, *Bertrand Tavernier*, 134-137.

34. Harwood and Viertel, *Queen Christina*, scene 3.

35. Cosmos and Leviant, "Journey in disguise", scene 3; where brackets are used, the translation is mine.

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36. Harwood and Viertel, *Queen Christina*, scene 10.
37. Higgins, *Bertrand Tavernier*, 137.
38. D'ARTAGNAN. Tu étais si belle contre le soleil, si éclatante, si vivante. Tu sais ce qui me ferait plaisir ? [...] Si tu mettais une robe... (Cosmos and Leviant, "The bell tolls", scene 20.)
39. Cosmos and Leviant, "The bell tolls"; where brackets are used, the translation is mine.
40. Cosmos and Leviant, "The bell tolls."
41. On this film see Julianne Pidduck, *La Reine Margot* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005).
42. The phrase is borrowed from Jennifer K. Stuller's monograph *Ink-stained and cinematic warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010).
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45. Joan M. West, "The Princess of Monpensier," *Cinéaste* 36, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 44-45, 44.
46. See Pidduck, *La Reine Margot*. Also see Higgins, *Bertrand Tavernier*, 257-9.
47. 'Il la rendit en peu de temps une des personnes du monde la plus achevée.' Lafayette, *Histoire*, 174 (my translation).

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48. Cosmos and Rousseau, *La Princesse*, scene 9; Tavernier, “Salle à manger”, scene 79, 109.
49. ‘Marie sent instinctivement qu’en se donnant elle se perd.’ Tavernier, “Chambre Marie”, scene 128, 162.
50. ‘En tenue d’amazone, énergique et butée’ Tavernier, “Hôtel Montpensier/Galerie Cour,” scene 130, 163.
51. ‘J’inaugure la liberté que vous m’imposez. Seule de mon côté’ Tavernier, “Hôtel Montpensier/Galerie Cour,” scene 130, 163.
52. ‘Elle a changé de monture et de selle et chevauche à califourchon comme un homme.’ Tavernier, “Rivière”, scene 133, 165.
53. Tavernier, “Salle à manger,” Scene 155, 176-9.
54. Harwood and Viertel, *Queen Christina*, scene 22.
55. Tavernier, “Château de Blois,” scene 161, 182-185.
56. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 73.
57. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 74.
58. Annette Kuhn, *Women’s Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1982, 1994), 6.
59. See his interview with the Cinephiliac <http://movieboozer.com/featured/interview-girl-king-2015-director-mika-kaurismaki>, December 15, 2015.
60. See his preface to the screenplay: 7-22, 21; he reiterates this view in an interview with Philippe Rouyer and Yann Tobin, “Entretien avec Bertrand Tavernier: Un film ‘biologique’, pas numérique”, *Positif: Revue Mensuelle* 597 (November 2010), 9-13. See also John Esther,

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“Cinema can open windows: an interview with Bertrand Tavernier,” *Cinéaste* 36, no. 3  
(Summer 2011): 46.