

## **“Each...according...to his intention”: Three Phases of Christine de Pizan’s Literary Influence Through the Ages**

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Many scholars participating in the current boom in Christine de Pizan studies tend to think of the “discovery of Christine” as a phenomenon limited to the past thirty—or even ten—years. In truth, however, Christine has been alive in the Western literary imagination—if not flamboyantly so—since the fifteenth century. Alongside her predictable presence among resurgent feminists, her courageously political-moral persona, whether in verse or in prose, has found welcome within the least likely writings, “embroidered” or “mortared” into the totality of the particular author’s message, as one of the author’s “strands” or “bricks,” *chascune où elle doit servir, selon la fin de l’intention où il tent* “each one where it should best serve, according to the needs of his intention,” to use Christine’s own metaphors for (especially didactic) literary composition.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for Christine’s enduring attraction are twofold: her heroic conversion from helpless victim to active participant in the major events of her era, and her talent for literary self-fashioning while evoking this real-life transformation. Both traits would be replicated among even the most improbable of her modern borrowers.

During her lifetime, her status as impoverished widow, constantly dependent on patronage to sustain herself and her family, scarcely impeded her insolence toward Parisian officialdom in the Debate of the *Roman de la Rose* (1401-1404). This was because the *Rose* Debate engaged royal notaries like Jean de Montreuil and the Col brothers only during their leisure, or *otium*: it was a spare-time diversion among highly literate bureaucrats. This more relaxed, off-the-record situation made it the perfect battleground for combating what Christine perceived to be the most insidious social

evils, particularly misogyny, since this was when powerful men revealed their true thoughts while writing amongst themselves about their favorite reading, such as the *Roman de la Rose*. Her decidedly for-the-record, full-bore rhetorical use of irreverence to counter their reverence for Meun's denigration, her verbal censure against their approval of defamation, to promote respect for women and humanity in general, would win her feminist admirers throughout the ensuing centuries.<sup>2</sup>

Yet despite what current critical trends and available translations would lead the non-specialist to believe, the bulk of Christine's works addressed *epicene* historical, political and moral issues. The only feminist aspect of these lay in the subjacent fact that they were good works composed by a woman. Such polemical and instructive treatises on government, education and military strategy, though only now regaining our critical attention, rivaled the *Cité des dames* in earning her recognition in late-medieval and Renaissance Europe.<sup>3</sup> Somewhat ironically then, her ability as a woman author to deal with masculine topics at least on a par with the best male authors was what made her an influential auteur, and not just a *femme-auteur*.

Equally captivating was her skill at self-portraiture. She managed to combine both Petrarchan-humanistic and lyrical-poetic first-person styles of *angst* to re-create the isolated struggle of any *engagé* or experimental author, regardless of gender or cause, who dared to differ from mass opinion and conventional forms of self-expression. In this respect too she has attracted readers from the most far-flung ranks of the anti-establishmentarian intelligentsia and literati. Thus, after Gustave Lanson, supreme literary doctrinaire for France's Third Republic of letters, virtually banished her from any future in the modern canon by putting her down in 1894 as an "insufferable bluestocking" (*exécrable bas-bleu*),<sup>4</sup> feminist and certain non-feminist authors persisted in alluding to her, directly or indirectly, as a key figure in delineating their own artistic and political philosophies.

Because they are the least predictable, it is the non-feminist male readers of Christine who will form the focal point of this study. This analysis consists of a diachronic sampling of three surprising cases of Christinian literary-political influence: one from her lifetime, the other two from the modern era; the first two from Europe, the last from Asia. These three instances are, specifically: a) the appropriation of her *Autres Balades* no. 42 by Thomas de Cerisy and Jean Petit, spokesmen for the opposing factions embroiled in the murder of Louis, duke of Orléans, by John the Fearless of Burgundy in 1407; b) her evocation by the great German poet, Rainer-Maria Rilke, in *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (*The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*)

in 1910; and c) her sibylline role in the Japanese anti-war novel, *Fugen (The Bodhisattva)*, by Ishikawa Jun, first published in 1936.

Although none of these male authors' works is in any way feminist, the woman's distinct voice nonetheless remains: *la dame est toujours là*. Christine, the solitary, widowed poet of professed *faible engin* will reveal herself to be at least as powerful in modern times as in her own era, as I hope to demonstrate.

## The World beyond Christine's Cell: Autres Balades 42

Christine made her way during one of the most violent periods in French history. In many instances, the relevant rhetoric was as brutal as the physical event. The assassination of Louis, duke of Orléans, by henchmen of John the Fearless, duke of Burgundy, on 23 November 1407 would profoundly alter the fate of France and its social fabric, as so many historians have analysed, most recently Bernard Guenée. At some time or other, almost all the major participants were patrons of Christine. Though debonair and brilliant, with an attractive wife from a great Milanese dynasty, Louis, brother to King Charles VI, was not universally popular. He especially irritated his cousins and chief rivals for control of France and neighboring regions, the two dukes of Burgundy: Philip the Bold and his son, John the Fearless. John in particular launched a pre-Gutenbergian galaxy of pseudo-populist propaganda against Louis, decrying him as an empire-building powermonger, practitioner of witchcraft, and adulterer, along with his reputed mistress Queen Isabel, wife of his brother King Charles VI of France. So certain was John of Burgundy of the effectiveness of this calumny that, after his henchmen had hacked Louis to death outside the latter's Parisian town house, John calmly remained in Paris, a city he controlled, and confessed within a few days. The resultant unexpected outcry caused him to flee after all.

The ruthless duke then mustered his spin doctors, legally-trained rhetoricians, to justify his actions for him. These hired pens sought not only to explain away the duke's intrigues but also to promote his political agenda, professing reformist concern for the people, while slandering the remaining Orléanists and Queen Isabel into oblivion—all to gain control of the kingdom. But the duke needed to purge himself of blame for this crime before resuming his grand scheme. The ensuing complex process, in which Christine found herself participating apparently in spite of herself, would last from 1408 into 1414. It would comprise justification, juridical rebuttal, further justification, protracted theological as well as secular-political debate, and final ruling. Because it has been fully examined elsewhere, the entire affair need not be rehearsed here except

in its most pertinent phases (Coville, "Sur une ballade"; Coville, *Jean Petit*; Willard; Dequeker-Fergon; Guinée). On 8 March 1408, Jean Petit, Burgundy's apologist, gave a magniloquent oration before an assembly of nobles, burghers and university officials at the royal residence, the Hôtel Saint-Pol. This first *Justification* aimed at accomplishing more "damage control" among the pro-Burgundian power-elite. Petit the defender went on the offensive, extolling Louis' assassination as tyrannicide and thus a deed of civic virtue by John of Burgundy: one meriting remuneration, not punishment. Petit's *Justification* is regarded as "the most celebrated example of Burgundian political propaganda" (Willard 273). On the following day therefore, and also because he was mentally unstable, King Charles pardoned his brother's actual murderer, Burgundy's hired assassin, and seemed ready to forget the crime entirely.

But John himself was not yet off the hook. Over the summer, Louis' widow, Valentina Visconti, encouraged by several nobles including the queen, sought justice. To that end she delegated Thomas du Bourg, Abbot of Cerisy, to answer Jean Petit and demand punishment for the crime. Cerisy delivered his detailed *Proposition* during another majestic ceremony in September 1408. He equated Burgundy's act with that of Cain killing Abel, among other highly-charged precedents, and attacked the legitimacy of tyrannicide in general as well as in this particular case.

Here is where Christine de Pizan comes in, either knowingly or unwittingly, as Alfred Coville was first to point out in a forgotten article from 1901. One of the most effective sections of Cerisy's rebuttal includes a long lyric passage heavily indebted to a ballade by Christine de Pizan (*Autres balades* 42). Ironically, given the political context of Cerisy's borrowing, Christine had composed this ballade on the death of her patron, John the Fearless's father, Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, on 27 April 1404. Its first stanza provides an adequate idea of its rhetorical force.

Plourez, François! Tous, d'un commun vouloir,  
 Grans et petis, plourez ceste grant perte!  
 Plourez, bon Roy!—bien vous devez douloir—  
 Plourez devez vostre grevance apperte.  
 Plourez la mort de cil qui par desserte  
 Amer devez, et par droit de lignage,  
 Vostre loyal, noble oncle, le très sage,  
 Des Bourgognons prince et duc excellent:  
 Car je vous di, qu'en mainte grant besogne,  
 Encor dirés très fort à cuer dolent  
 "Affaire eussions du bon duc de Bourgogne."

[Weep, all you French, great and small, who share a common purpose, weep for this great loss! Weep, good king—well you might mourn—weep openly from under your burden of grief. Weep for the death of him who deserves the love you owe him, and by right of descent, your loyal, noble uncle most wise; most excellent prince and duke of the Burgundians. For I tell you, in many a weighty matter, you will say loudly, with heavy heart, “If only the good duke of Burgundy were here to lead us.”]<sup>5</sup>

As many readers familiar with Christine’s poetry will recall from an earlier, more familiar ballade by her, *Cent balades* 11, “Seulete suy,” she knew how to exploit anaphora to fullest emotional advantage. Just as repetition of “Seulete suy” evokes the numbing inward solitude and misery of widowhood, “Plourez Français” implores outward, via anaphoric apostrophe, along a descending hierarchy of key noble personages to mourn the death of her most generous protector and one of the kingdom’s greatest rulers. This technique of calling upon each and every social rank occurs even more deliberately in Cerisy’s rebuttal, which, although in prose, cites the murdered Louis of Orléans in place of Philip the Bold, and calls for justice as much as for grief, beginning with the king:

Plouréz le donc, très excellent Roy, plouréz le, vous avez perdu vostre seul frère germain, une des plus précieuses pierres de vostre couronne, de qui, se nul ne pourchasse la justice, vous seul la devriez faire pourchasser...

[Weep for him, then, most excellent King; weep for him. You have lost your sole blood brother, one of the most precious jewels in your crown, for whose sake, if no one else pursues justice, you alone must have it pursued... (Coville, *Jean Petit* 243-44)].

What pleasure Cerisy, chief speaker for the Orléans faction, must have derived from using an originally pro-Burgundian poem as a club against that same party!

This part of Cerisy’s *Proposition*, whose succeeding stanzas address the queen, the dauphin, then the dukes of Berry, Brittany and Bourbon and all other nobles, then all ranks of society both secular and ecclesiastical to a greater extent than Christine’s enumeration, must have stung the Burgundian side as sharply as the legal arguments. This we might deduce from Petit’s counter-rebuttal: again an appropriation of Christine’s ballade style, giving it an ironic, pro-Burgundian twist, while reiterating his previous calumnies. In the final analysis, Cerisy’s pastiche proved the more

successful, both artistically and judicially, than Jean Petit's commensurately crueler version (Coville, "Sur une ballade" 189): the verdict was reversed and John of Burgundy censured and fined in 1414.

Christine's original lament invokes the social hierarchy of the realm to underscore the need for unity and order especially after the loss of a great leader. Cerisy simply redirected its apostrophe, without sacrificing the aura of decorum and call for civic harmony. By contrast, Jean Petit's nasty mimicking of the hierarchical address is intended to promote dis-unity, reminding them that would-be kings like Louis of Orléans would rob them of their autonomy. Even prior to the assassination, such destructive Burgundian policies had kept Christine from entirely abandoning her first patron, Louis of Orléans. Because she still believed that France's salvation rested with Louis, despite his flaws, it was he—above the other nobles, and at the risk of offending them—whom she had directly tried to warn in various works on political and personal prudence. She refused to accept that this internecine feud dictated each man's identity, and destiny, like tragic theatrical masques, with Louis, the self-emblematised porcupine (*Je l'ennuie* "I annoy him"), brazenly provoking Burgundy, who countered with his own device of carpenter's plane (*rabot*) (*Je le rabote* "I'll whittle him down"). Christine's efforts, in the *Livre de prudence* and *Chemin de long estude*, worked to no avail: as we have seen, Burgundy's plane became a fratricidal axe.

By way of an historical epilogue, John of Burgundy himself was killed in 1419 by vengeful supporters of Louis' family, the Armagnacs. As for the brilliant Jean Petit, he had fallen out of favor early in the game, dying almost forgotten in 1411, eight years before his patron's murder. His *Justification* was condemned by the magisterial theologian Jean Gerson at the Council of Constance in 1414. The Armagnac-Burgundian feud would continue on its destructive course for many years, tearing the kingdom apart from within. After John of Burgundy's slaying by the Armagnacs, and the death of her son, the respected notary Jean de Castel (c1425), Christine had all but renounced her efforts to solve France's political problems, and semi-retreated into devotional writings and consoling laments, awaiting the brief ray of hope that would emerge in the form of Joan of Arc a few years later.

By way of a *poetic*-historical epilogue—actually, a prequel: unbeknownst to Coville and others, the politically coveted, and subverted, style and structure of Christine's *Autres balades* 42 did not originate with her either. Further investigation reveals its earlier incarnation in Deschamps, her older friend and mentor, no. 495 in his own sequence entitled *Autres balades* (*Œuvres complètes* 3:320-21). Deschamps, for

his part, seems to have received inspiration from the first-century B.C.E. Latin poet Catullus' *Carmen III*. Within this continuity, from Catullus to Deschamps to Christine, in contexts ranging from the personal-lyrical to the political, only the female poet's ballade exemplifies the non-ironic usage of the recurrent poignant anaphoric, hierarchical-apostrophic form.<sup>6</sup>

Christine appears to have registered displeasure with the hijacking of her talents by her contemporaries,<sup>7</sup> and she would have even less control over her appropriation by Rilke and Ishikawa in later centuries. In each case, death, authorial selfhood, and history would figure heavily. Yet despite the inevitable anachronism of these new incarnations, Christine probably would have approved more of her modern ideological contexts—each of which, in its own way, strives for some sort of nobility of the soul—than of her opportunistic contemporary attempting to justify ruling-class criminality.

### **“The World through Christine’s Heart”:**

#### **Rilke, *Malte Laurids Brigge*, and the *Chemin de long estude***

By far the most familiar to the general reader of all the works treated in this study, Rainer Maria Rilke's sole novel, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, is structured as a sort of diary kept by the hero, a young Danish poet of noble descent, during his travels, primarily in Paris. Malte's entries intertwine reminiscences and minute observations on his own life and milieu, meditations on history and art, and metaphysical speculation during his Prodigal-Son style journey, in daringly modernist, even surrealistic, terms. His voice and perspective so closely resemble Rilke's that the work was once translated into English as *The Journal of My Other Self*, although there were, of course, pre-existing models, as in the much earlier Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (*Sorrows of Young Werther*) of 1787.

Though a profoundly lyrical novel in itself, Malte's reflections do not look to Christine's lyric poetry (then recently edited in France), nor to her equally autobiographical prose *Advision Cristine* (then unavailable), but rather to her long allegorical-political journey poem, owing much to Boethius and Dante, the *Chemin de long estude* (1402-1403, and thus only a year earlier than our *Autres balades* 42). Rilke most likely chose the *Chemin* simply because it was more accessible in complete form than her other works.<sup>8</sup>

Rilke's/Malte's evocation of Christine is highly significant, not only for this novel but also for the literary history of gendered authorial allusions. Occurring toward the

end of the novel, it forms part of the historical section—one comprising hagiography and medieval Danish and French history—in the section concerning the era of the mad king, Charles VI.<sup>9</sup> Rilke's detailed historical panorama even includes the very episode of Louis d'Orléans's murder and Jean Petit's justification discussed above, heightened with an echo of the biblical Cain and Abel narrative used by Bishop Cerisy against Jean Petit's defense:

And today a persistent, talkative lawyer had stood for hours and proved that the princely murderer was justified, until the crime became transparent and seemed as if it would rise, blazing, to heaven (Rilke, trans. Mitchell 216).

—to which the poet adds a more personalised, romantic glimpse of the veiled widow Valentina, who soon died of grief (216). Such touches, as well as the substance, come from Rilke's favorite source, Prosper de Barante's venerable *Histoire des Ducs de Bourgogne* (3:60-66, 123-24), for both text and illustrations, which will play a greater role later in this section.<sup>10</sup>

The presentiment of death, the “death voice”—as though extrapolated from the famous blood of Abel crying out (Gen 4:10)—is everywhere throughout Malte's meditations. More pervasive than in Christine's histories and laments, death functions quite distinctly from the notion of mortality in Jean Petit's justification of tyrannicide: in the latter instance, death, or its implementation, is an earthly political instrument; for Malte, death is beyond our control and inevitable, as it relentlessly defines our earthly lives. Malte only begins to change, to learn to see and write, upon realising the omnipresence of death (5-6). Yet unlike the *danse macabre* theme in Christine's time, in which death functions as the great social equaliser, Malte's vision accords a distinctive, individualised death for each person (16). Thus, in the episode involving the appropriation of Christine's lament on the death of Philip the Bold, this was an official death by which living people sought to profit immediately. By contrast, Malte's viewpoint is that of a living person thinking only of dying and how he might do so in the most glorious way—not for his fellow mortals' immediate admiration, but as a way (and it takes us a while to find this out) of attaining God's love in the hereafter.

The *Aufzeichnungen's* historical section offers us less deliberately moral lessons than Christine's parades of historical exempla in the *Cité des dames*, *Mutacion de Fortune*, and others. Instead, Rilke's/Malte's procession of doomed personages provides us with ciphers for his hero's suffering. Nor is there, in Malte's re-creation,

really enough energy for Eros; the scent of overall desuetude overwhelms that of woman, or any other living creature, for that matter. The Christianian episode is found in that section in which Malte, the effete, highly sensitive and observant poet descended from courtiers, seems to have subsumed his own feelings of helplessness and fecklessness within the figure of Charles VI:

Zu solchen Tagen war der König voll milden Bewußtseins. Hätte ein Maler jener Zeit einen Anhalt gesucht für das Dasein im Paradiese, er hätte kein vollkommeneres Vorbild finden können als des Königs gestillte Figur, wie sie in einem der hohen Fenster des Louvre stand unter dem Sturz ihrer Schultern. Er blätterte in dem kleinen Buch der Christine de Pisan, das »Der Weg des langen Lernens« heißt und das ihm gewidmet war.<sup>11</sup> Er las nicht die gelehrten Streitreden jenes allegorischen Parlaments, das sich vorgesetzt hatte, den Fürsten ausfindig zu machen, der würdig sei, über die Welt zu herrschen. Das Buch schlug sich ihm immer an den einfachsten Stellen auf: wo von dem Herzen die Rede war, das dreizehn Jahre lang wie ein Kolben über dem Schmerzfeuer nur dazu gedient hatte, das Wasser der Bitternis für die Augen zu destillieren; er begriff, daß die wahre Konsolation erst begann, wenn das Glück vergangen genug und für immer vorüber war. Nichts war ihm näher, als dieser Trost. Und während sein Blick scheinbar die Brücke drüben umfaßte, liebte er es, durch dieses von der starken Cumäa zu großen Wegen *ergriffene Herz die Welt* zu sehen, die damalige: die gewagten Meere, fremdtürmige Städte, zu gehalten vom Andruck der Weiten; der gesammelten Gebirge ekstatische Einsamkeit und die in fürchtigem Zweifel erforschten Himmel, die sich erst schlossen wie eines Saugkinds Hirnschale (Rilke 607; emphasis mine).

[On such days the King was filled with benign awareness. Had a painter of that time been looking for some hint of what heaven was like, he couldn't have found a more perfect model than the calmed figure of the King, as it stood, in one of the high windows of the Louvre, under the cascade of its shoulders. He was turning the pages of a little book by Christine de Pisan, which is called the *Chemin de long estude* and was dedicated to him. Yet he wasn't reading the learned polemics of that allegorical parliament that had undertaken to find out what sort of prince would be most worthy of ruling the world. Instead the book always opened for him at the simplest passages: where it spoke of the heart which, for thirteen years, had stood like a retort over the fire of grief, its only function to distill the water of

bitterness for the eyes; he understood that true consolation only began when happiness had vanished and was gone forever. Nothing was more precious to him than this solace. And while his glance seemed to embrace the bridge beyond, he liked to see *the world through Christine's heart*, which had been caught up by the powerful Cumaean and led through the paths of heaven—he liked to see the world of those days: the dared-upon seas, the strange-towered cities held shut by the pressure of distances, the ecstatic solitude of the assembled mountains, and the skies that were explored in fearful doubt and were only now closing like an infant's skull (emphasis mine; Mitchell trans. 219-20)].

Skulls and heads figure both literally and symbolically throughout this section of the book, while Christine's heart, as well as her mind, repeatedly tries to make sense of political chaos. Rilke's image patterns reveal France to have been as gravely afflicted by the malady within King Charles's head as by Duke Louis' head cloven with assassin's axes, and so forth. Rilke also devises other containers—a crucible and other chemical-vessel imagery—to complement the psycho-allegorical topography characterising Christine's voyage through the terrestrial firmament in the *Chemin*.

Before pursuing further this analysis of Christine in Rilke, however, it is necessary to look at our sole critical precursor. This passage was first seriously examined in 1963 by literary historian Charles Dédéyan, who, in his *Rilke et la France*, convincingly identifies the illustration that served as the basis for Rilke's tableau (Dédéyan 194-96). It is one of several by the famous romantic-historical illustrator, Tony Johannot,<sup>12</sup> for Barante's history (1837; 2:276-7). Johannot shows the king playing cards with his jester, which Rilke transforms in the above passage into Charles perusing Christine's *Chemin*. The Johannot/Barante engraving contains not only a jester, a monkey clinging to his back, playing cards with the disheveled king, but also a lady standing over him—both figures illuminated by the light from the tall window of the Louvre palace. Johannot completes the room's sumptuous décor with a royal-escutcheoned fireplace, a mirror reflecting the otherwise invisible two shadowy figures conversing behind a half-drawn curtain, and an hourglass on a nearby table. The caption reads: "La petite Reine, scène d'intérieur."

Barante's relevant text, inspiring the engraving, describes the palace atmosphere of which the king is hopelessly unaware. The duke of Burgundy attempted to seize control while the demented king staggered on, comforted only by one humble woman and idiotic amusements, his mental state worsening by the day, and courtiers plotted

behind the scenes. Barante's prose is no less dramatic and sentimental than Johannot's iconography, yet without making the latter appear superfluous. On the contrary, upon reading it we appreciate the artist's graphic rendering all the more:

...il n'y avait plus parmi ceux qui l'environnaient une seule personne qui lui fût véritablement affectionnée et qui prît soin de lui. On se souciait peu de le voir retomber dans ses accès; on le laissait abuser de ses retours de santé, dans des divertissements et des débauches indignes de lui. La reine, qui craignait d'être exposée à son délire frénétique, l'avait abandonné. Sous ce prétexte, on lui amenait les soirs des femmes de basse condition. Il avait pour maîtresse habituelle la fille d'un marchand de chevaux, à qui l'on donna deux belles maisons à Créteil et à Bagnolet. Le peuple de Paris la nommait la petite reine. Telle était la vie qu'on faisait mener au roi de France (Barante 276-77).

[Among those who used to surround him, there remained no longer any but one single person who was genuinely affectionate toward him and took care of him. People could have cared less about his relapses; they let him abuse his saner moments by frivolous amusements and debauchery. The queen, who feared exposure to his frenetic delirium, had abandoned him. Under this pretext, at night they brought him women of lowly condition. He had as his most frequent mistress the daughter of a horse trader, to whom they gave two beautiful houses, in Créteil and in Bagnolet. The people of Paris called her the Little Queen. Such was the life they allowed the king of France.]

Rilke has not omitted the elements present in Barante/Johannot and Christine, but merely reprioritised, rescheduled and re-assimilated them to a greater extent than Dédéyan and other scholars of Rilke's sources have evidently realised. A bit farther along, Rilke depicts the numbly serene Charles now becoming frustrated as he turns the pages of Christine's *Chemin*, poring over the illustrations. He wished to have several images in front of him simultaneously instead of sequentially, as dictated by the bound book's format. "Then someone remembered a deck of cards that had been forgotten...pieces of cardboard, which were painted with bright colors and separable and full of images"(220). For these the King was most grateful, and then sat playing cards—as colourful events, moveable at will—not sociably with his courtiers, but in his library, alone. Rilke goes on to describe the King's reaction to the various card combinations as he played patience/solitaire; they seemed to predict royal history and

perhaps his own destiny, while at the same time he realised them to be only bits of paper, yet “he had a growing certainty that he too was a definite card” (221).

Such reworking has thus far passed unnoticed because Dédéyan and other recent specialists know less than Rilke of Christine's life and work, especially her successful experimentation with many literary genres. Furthermore, Rilke has integrated Christine's technique with Barante's theory of historiography, based on Quintilian's principle of narration over argumentative proof. The German poet has condensed and intermingled time, space, objects or figures, and genres in much the same protean way he obliquely attributes to Christine's *Chemin*, though on a larger scale: “The fatal thing about these drama poems was that they continually enlarged and extended themselves, growing to tens of thousands of verses so that the time in them ultimately became real time... For this century had in fact brought both heaven and hell to earth: it lived on the powers of both, in order to survive itself” (221-22). Malte's/Rilke's seemingly calculated ambiguity in referring to “this century” (Christine's early fifteenth or Malte's early twentieth?) again points up the similarity between two *époques pourries*: two rich, dynamic, yet decadent eras. Not only has Rilke added the metaphor of the boiling flask or retort to Christine's prefatory evocation of thirteen years of bitter tears between her husband's death and her writing of the *Chemin*, but he has also separated Charles from his concubine, the Petite Reine portrayed in Barante, along with other figures of mindless solace and amusement: the jester and monkey. Rilke had earlier alluded to the Petite Reine as the King's only source of true happiness and sensual pleasure, before killing her off prematurely.

With death's voice humming in the background, Rilke's Malte wishes us to see the tragic disjunction between Charles' mental fragility and Burgundy's strength, intensified by the contrast between Charles' weakness and Christine's didactic assertiveness in her Cassandra-like attempts to instruct him and the other warring nobles. Like the Petite Reine (Odette de Champdivers), the poor widowed Christine, through her writing, does not abandon her king, but instead seeks to help him and all of France, like her own “powerful Cumaean” (219) sibyl, her guide through the heavens in the *Chemin* and Æneas' in his trip to the Underworld. In keeping with his vision of life's—and human history's—paralysing paradoxes, Malte portrays the mad king as willing to learn, but incapable of recognising, much less implementing, Christine's, and the real world's, lessons. The king overlooks the *Chemin*'s main message, conveyed by Christine in both text and image, in favour of the simpler passages and pretty colours of the illumination, almost as if they were comic books.<sup>13</sup>

But he is “reading” the playing cards—not the *Chemin*’s text and images—as exempla. In other words, Malte, in desiring to “learn to see” has not settled for the verkehrte Welt “world upside-down” so typical of late medieval satire (Curtius 94-98). He has chosen instead a multidimensional, simultaneous quantum-leap in physical, allegorical and literary-generic time-travel, often only to find the same sociopolitical decay as his medieval counterparts. This discovery, which provoked a didactic impulse in Christine, seems to reinforce the elegantly morbid lassitude of Malte: not so much in the vein of “what’s the use?” but rather “that’s how it is.”

Literary-generic shifts are also at work in the *Aufzeichnungen*. If Rilke’s relationship to Christine has resulted in a de-moralisation of a medieval allegorical poem by a modern poet, his borrowing from Barante constitutes a similar generic circularity between historiography and the novel. Barante attempted to revitalise history-writing by interpreting the chronicled lives and deeds of Burgundy’s Valois dukes as a series of lifelike tableaux, together with Jehannot’s romantic engravings. By carrying these traits to surrealistic extremes, Rilke has returned novelistic history back to historical novel. There is also a wry irony to his use of such phrases (in our earlier quotation 219) as “had a painter of that time been looking...” given Rilke’s own painterly technique. In sum, Barante, Jehannot and Rilke were made for each other. The more than sixty years separating Barante from Rilke’s novel yielded some of France’s finest historians, both scientifically and stylistically, yet the German poet preferred the old sentimental royalist Barante—even to Michelet.<sup>14</sup> Yet this same predilection probably contributed to his choice of Christine. For just as in Christine’s *Chemin* and her other didactic narratives, the history is one of the hero’s self set against world events, not merely the events themselves.

That Rilke selected a political dream vision by a woman author over those by more famous male authors recalls his apotheosis (albeit in rather sexist terms by today’s standards) of women as superior to men because of their far greater capacity to love (and comprehend): “[t]he woman who loves always surpasses the man she loves, because life is larger than fate” (207). It is a pity that, given his poetic vision, Rilke could not have known Christine’s *Advision*, with its memorable scene of the narrator swallowed by a giant through whose entrails she travels, and the *Mutacion de Fortune*, a 24,000-verse moralised universal history revolving around the allegory of fate—“drama-poems” to fulfill Malte’s most extravagant dreams.<sup>15</sup>

### “The World through Christine’s Head”: Ishikawa Jun’s *Fugen*

Moving from Rilke’s highly individual, post-Romantic concerns to more generalised political ones, we find that, twenty-six years later, Christine would also serve an important cause for at least one Japanese male intellectual. This occurs in a time when gender identity and national-political identity were undergoing considerable upheaval as the country sought a meaningful place in the modern world after two centuries of being literally closed off. Christine makes her appearance in the novella *Fugen* (*The Merciful Bodhisattva*), published by Ishikawa Jun in 1936. One of the most renowned and cultivated Japanese men of letters of his generation, Ishikawa (1899-1987) had steeped himself in French and other European literatures, translating some novels, including those by Anatole France and André Gide, into his native language. He later joined a group of intellectuals who opposed the rising militarism in his country, which fueled the 1936 invasion of China, and led also to Japan’s infamous role in World War II.<sup>16</sup>

The novel’s hero is writing a life of Christine de Pizan, with an additional reflexive layer: that of the hero-author identifying himself with the cloistered feminist poet, in the act of writing her biography—more precisely a laudatory poem—of Joan of Arc. Historically, Christine was Joan’s first literary admirer and, more profoundly, Joan’s literary doppelganger. Christine’s *Ditié de Jehanne d’Arc* celebrates the new heroine’s deliverance of France from the English at Orléans toward the end of the poet’s life in 1429. *Fugen*’s hero-narrator, referred to simply as *watashi* (“I-narrator,” in Japanese) writes, like Rilke’s Malte, in the first person singular. We recall that Christine herself had written in the first person, but in the plural. *Watashi*’s first-person style more closely resembles Malte’s, though a bit more prone to wry humor and even self-mockery than his melancholy Danish counterpart. The novella’s entire plot describes *watashi*’s struggles to write coherent history amidst abject poverty—making him more akin to Christine than to the Danish aristocrat—and the constant interruptions by bothersome visitors, most of them as quirky as he, the “bookish intellectual” of the group, despite their varied occupations.

Perhaps only by coincidence, the scene in which we are first introduced to *watashi*’s work on Christine and Joan, like Rilke’s, contains a window, a weary hero-narrator, a compassionate female presence, and cranial emphasis, as *watashi* confides to us:

Shaking the weariness from my head and throwing open the window to contemplate the broad expanse of blue that comes on an early day in summer, I let my thoughts fly off to France in the fifteenth century, there to circle about the wizened head of the poetess of the Abbey of Poissy, the indomitable Christine de Pizan who, though exhausted by the advance of age and the havoc of war, her spirit nearly spent, perceived its final quickening, and in the last great beating of her wings of song, burst forth to sing *Le Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*, her magnificat in praise of Joan of Arc (trans. Tyler 10).

Ishikawa is here clearly and deliberately connecting France and the Hundred Years War with pre-World War II Japan through his allusion to Christine and Joan. Since he was composing this on the eve of his country's near-decade of war with the world, his choice of Christine and Joan, over all the male military and cultural heroes of that era, as symbols of hope for humanity, and the role of intellectuals along with soldiers in its salvation, further astounds us. How could this novelist have known that his country would become engaged in as many years of war (given the technological edge, ten modern years arguably equal one hundred medieval ones)? Such certitude in a darkly uncertain moment rivals Christine's conviction that Joan's presence, whether active or coincidental, divinely-inspired or secular, would signal the weakening of English domination in France.

Ishikawa's prophetic allure is augmented both by his evocation of Christine as some sort of Sibyl—we recall Malte's "powerful Cumaean" (*starke Cumäa*) (Rilke, trans. Mitchell 219; ed. Stahl 607) from her *Chemin de long estude*—and by his surrealistic stream-of-consciousness. *Watashi's* dreamlike quest is laced with learned citations, rocked by real-world intrusions, and permeated by a premonition of futility or doom—additional traits shared with Rilke. But the tonal difference between the two male narrators lies in the fact that Malte most often sees himself in Charles VI, the mad, helpless monarch, while *watashi* identifies himself, or at least tries to, with the "indomitable" Christine. In keeping with his self-association with the brave, learned poetess of troubled times, *watashi* compares Joan of Arc to the Bodhisattva, the Buddha figure who rejects Nirvana (Paradise) in favor of remaining on earth to save humanity. As he details his vision of the interrelationship between the two women, the mythological and discursive layering grows in complexity:

My illumination of the tale of these two women is a palimpsest of my own devising, and as if this were not enough, let me erase the text and write of

them in still larger terms. Albeit a slightly lame metaphor, the story of Joan and Christine has also become for me an analog version of the tale of that legendary pair of T'ang Buddhism, the long-haired, laughing jackals of Zen iconography—the besotted poet of Cold Mountain, Han-shan, and his sidekick, the broom-sweep, Shih-te (14).

We perceive particularly in this bicultural correlation the unfettered exchange of gender. The two women, whom *watashi* knows to have been sexually transformed by their achievements (12), easily commingle symbolically with two male figures.

Diverse religious symbolism merges with this trans-gendering. Fortunately for less esoteric Western readers, Ishikawa draws as much upon Christian symbolism as upon Buddhism, thus mirroring the increasingly hybrid nature of modern Japan beyond the usual cliché of “East-meets-West.” Concomitant to what we might construe as re-Christianisation and re-Westernisation of Christine's and Joan's significance, there arises a more feminised semiology:

It has never been my wont to look upon Joan's manifestation in the life of Christine de Pizan as the sudden entrance of some wraith, floating footless across the stage in an easily dismissed bit of Kabuki or grand guignol. No, to the contrary, I have envisioned a scene far more complex and symbolic: an eye-arresting tableau of womankind as a garland of flowers, a wreath suspended in midair and formed from the powder of Christine's crushed bones, her dust commingling with all the other dust of the earth...At the same time, I have sought to pluck from this garland the single blossom that is Joan of Arc in order to behold her as the embodiment of the beauty of all the diverse flowers (13).

At least one French author had already associated Joan with the popular Franciscan motif of little flowers (*fioretti*).<sup>17</sup> The image of Christine's ossified dust commingling with the earth conjures forth the Bible, and even hagiography, as her bones assume the significance of relics. The garlands and wreaths mentioned here are also featured in Christine's works—in contrast to the single rose representing her adversary, the impious *Roman de la Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. They also exist in accounts of Joan's childhood celebrations in local festivals. The East-West oscillation reflected in “Kabuki or grand guignol” encapsulates the theatricality of Ishikawa's two cultures, his own and the French. This cultural dualism also suggests puppetry as against live actors in both styles of drama emerging with each country's rising merchant

class, with the Grand Guignol, though rooted in children's comic shows, becoming especially violent. The repeated references to theatre of all kinds throughout his novel might lead us to surmise that Ishikawa seeks to incorporate all of these theatrical elements into his fictional technique, as an artistic experiment intended to awaken his outwardly respectable bourgeois readers to the monster within—one capable of the unjust aggression portending World War II. Despite many tonal, symbolic and thematic similarities, Rilke's romantic parade of history, by contrast, adumbrates a novel seeking truth in nostalgic dreams rather than in wakefulness, through the more passive genre of exemplum, of one man's self-redemption through love.

In introducing her as a credible figure, Ishikawa may have realised that Christine, the woman who openly acknowledges her having become a man (12), would be a difficult female figure for his relatively conservative compatriots, male or female, to accept, just as Joan had been for her contemporaries. Indeed, perhaps treating any real-life (as opposed to mythical) female figure as a serious intellectual inspiration would be suspect in Ishikawa's milieu, as he implies in his defence: "In fact, my vision of womankind is not so farfetched as it may seem" (13). Ever since Meiji Japan, the era following the country's re-connection with the world, Joan had become well known to the Japanese reading public, while Christine remained obscure.<sup>18</sup> We have seen how Rilke casts Christine in a fleeting, yet potent, role, one enhanced by her arcane, sibylline nature, in a single episode. By comparison, because Ishikawa uses her repeatedly and to more profound purpose throughout his novel, he must dispel her strangeness, or at least ally it to the already accepted mystique of Joan of Arc. He accordingly introduces Christine in small doses, syntactically as well as thematically, each recapitulating from the preceding one, while adding a bit more information on her, by way of a variety of registers (learned-discursive, popular, poetic). This fragmentary, repetitive style not only realistically mimes the constantly punctured concentration of the impoverished scholar attempting to work while assailed by real-life necessities, but also gradually facilitates his readers' acceptance of his enthusiasm for Christine.

Such audience understanding in turn enables the author to assimilate her with Joan, as we have witnessed in the above-cited passage. In introducing the passage, he plays upon his conservative readers' initial misgivings:

Because I am an old-fashioned type who is forever inquiring into the elements essential to the perfection of the larger design, I have found that, by introducing Joan of Arc into my account of the life of Christine de Pizan, by drawing an analogy between these women and touching upon the

essence of their personalities—one, elevated to the divine, the other, brought low by the passage of time and near death yet still conversant with the spirit of the first—I have chanced upon an unexpectedly felicitous opportunity to speak of all womankind (13).

Watashi's opening lines here seem to imitate Christine's own polemical techniques: her self-effacement at the outset as a type of *captatio*, together with her divulging her theory of composition. In the succeeding lines, the narrator-protagonist invites us, as he has previously, to associate Joan and Christine with T'ang Buddhist mythical figures (the Bodhisattva, revered by Han-shan and Shih-te) and also to crystallise how he perceives his own role, as one "brought low yet still conversant" with higher beings: Joan and the elusive woman of his dreams, Yukari (= "affinity"). *Watashi* repeatedly stresses the "karmic connection" between Yukari and Christine's Joan in a manner reminiscent of the Romantic School's faith in affinities.<sup>19</sup> Like Joan, Yukari is young and charismatic—an erotic-spiritual flashpoint within the narrator's mind. She too acts as counterpoint to the retiring "wrinkled old woman" (27, 39, 118-19), and to *watashi's* own pathological languor, very similar to Malte's and closest to how Christine describes herself as "weeping within a closed abbey," prior to Joan's advent, in the *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*.<sup>20</sup>

Like Rilke/Malte/Charles VI elevating the lowborn Petite Reine, Ishikawa also revalues traditional hierarchies. Despite his contrapuntally (to passages cited above) irreverent versions of himself picking out Christine's "carcass" from the "trash heap of history" with the tip of his pen (118), Ishikawa/*watashi* has in effect "canonised" Christine via her relics, that is, her writings. He envisages her career as being reborn by her celebration of Joan, demonstrably just as he has been galvanised, and elevated, by his adoration of the goddess-like Yukari and his intellectual passion for Joan and Christine (15, 119; Tyler 146-48). In the end, *watashi*, like Christine, flees the doldrums of his book-lined cell for the sake of his beloved Yukari, a political-underground member, to save her from entrapment by the police. Yet once he grasps her corporeally, Yukari loses her hold over him and is supplanted by another female figure in *watashi's* erotic-spiritual imagination (133). The novel, like Joan's life, ends in a vision of conflagration, leaving relics that forever disconcert the narrator and reader about the interrelated, oscillating reality and delusion of myths, fiction, and the talismanic value of words.

In conclusion, these three cases of Christianian allusion contain certain significant resemblances. The feminist thrust is nil. Against the velvet backdrop of death and

futility, the masculine quest for redemption, whether purely official and rhetorical (Jean Petit/ Cerisy), or purely personal (Rilke), manifests itself by way of some form of theatre, as keenly before readers (Rilke, Ishikawa) as before actual judges (Cerisy/ Petit). In this theatre, however interiorised, words speak as loudly as actions; dreams and myths function to show the truth as often as to conceal it; like historical chronologies, moral-social hierarchies are rearranged and corporeality redefined. Christine's example as heroic, learned author helps to foster Malte's and *watashi's* quest for redemption, while in the Jean Petit case, her purloined poem eventually leads to the sinking of her patron's adversaries, thus enabling another type of redemption. Finally, it is the de-sexualised woman who elicits the most lasting admiration from the male protagonists: Christine the sibylline widow and Joan the warrior maiden.<sup>21</sup>

## **Leverett, Massachusetts**

### **Notes**

1 *Fais et bonnes meurs* 191; Christine's excursus defending her right to write the biography of King Charles V, coming midway (pt. 2, ch. 21) through the book, has now become well-known as a firsthand manifesto for the art of compilation with its attendant refutation of the notion of originality, not only for Christine but for the later Middle Ages.

2 For the various dimensions of defamation, particularly that of women, in medieval French literature, see both works by Solterer; for the fascinating array of later readers of Christine, see the essays in McLeod.

3 Such works include her treatise on government indebted both to the first-century Roman historian and moralist, Valerius Maximus, and the twelfth-century humanist John of Salisbury, the *Livre du Corps de Policie*; a military manual, based on the late fourth-century Roman tactician Vegetius, and French sources, the *Fais d'armes*; as well as her exempla for princes, the Epistre Othea, all of which were translated into English and other languages by the sixteenth century. See notes to recent editions and translations of these works and also Willard, *Christine de Pizan*, esp. ch. 11.

4 Lanson 167; for his role in the "Troisième république des lettres," see Compagnon 20-220.

5 This text cited from Varty 120-21 rather than from Roy 1:255-57 because Varty used the more authoritative BL Harley MS 4431 as his base manuscript.

6 The evolution of *Autres balades* 42 from Catullus through Deschamps to Christine is more fully explored in Margolis esp. 260-62.

7 This would explain the bitter tone and certain allusions present in her *Autres balades* 49, in Varty 122-23 and Roy 1:263-64 (see Margolis 259-60). For an analysis of the socio-political background in certain others and of the *Autres balades* sequence as a whole, see Laidlaw, "L'Actualité."

8 Püschel's edition of the *Chemin*, which had recently been published in Germany, may also have served Rilke, contrary to Dédéyan's contention (Dédéyan 194) that the poet knew only the summary of the poem given in Buchon's biographical preface to his *Panthéon littéraire* (Buchon xii-xiv). Rilke's depth of understanding of the *Chemin*, as evidenced in frequent subtle allusions throughout the *Aufzeichnungen*, certainly derives from more than the few lines in Buchon's two-page biographical note. Püschel's possible influence finds only passive confirmation in Witzleben's bibliography (303). The first modern complete edition of any of Christine's works in any country, Püschel's *Chemin* was one of many German philological accomplishments during the late nineteenth century that would shame French scholars into better promotion of their own literary patrimony.

9 Ed. Stahl 604-10; Trans. Mitchell 214-22. All future references in this article from Mitchell's translation, except for the longer citations mentioning Christine, for which the original is first provided.

10 Barante's very full account of the entire episode of Orléans' murder and its immediate aftermath, including the main points of Cerisy's and Petit's speeches, actually fills 2:418-30 and 3:3-124. Full-page engravings, by various noted early nineteenth-century artists, depict most of the major dramatic moments and figures within these pages. Barante (1782-1866), former prefect under Napoleon, had translated Schiller and was a youthful admirer of Mme de Staël. For Barante's background and influence, and that of medieval chroniclers, on Rilke's medievalism in the *Aufzeichnungen* and other works, see Dédéyan 171-253.

11 Actually, though Rilke could not have known this, it was dedicated to Charles and other dukes: Berry, Burgundy, Orléans; see Laidlaw, "How long" 84. Ouy and Reno convincingly argue that Christine had originally intended the *Chemin* for Louis d'Orléans, her earlier patron, only to dedicate it in final form to Charles VI, perhaps because Louis overlooked Christine's son for a position at his court. Such shifts and complexities unconsciously underscore Rilke's/Malte's view of this milieu.

12 The most prolific illustrator in a family of noted French Protestant painters, engravers, and pioneering lithographers, the German-born Tony Johannot (1803-52) flourished in a period of French publishing marked by abundantly-imaged histories and novels, with even non-fiction works characterised by a taste for imaginative scenes with rich décor emphasising high drama and emotionalism. Johannot, first influenced by Watteau, succumbed to Romanticism. A member of Charles Nodier's coveted salon, he garnered commissions to illustrate authors ranging from Barante and Byron to James Fenimore Cooper, Molière, Rousseau and Walter Scott. See *Bryan's*, Bénézit, Melot, and Thieme & Becker. For Johannot and Barante, see Bann 47.

13 Nine known manuscripts of the *Chemin* exist; for Charles VP's possible copy, see Laidlaw, "How long."

14 For a brief, incisive comparison of Barante, Michelet and other historians, see Bann 32-53.

15 These poems were not edited in full until 1932 (Advision) and 1966 (Mutation); in Rilke's time they were only available in extracts.

16 For Ishikawa's background and Japan's pre-war ideological crises, see the excellent commentary and bibliography provided by Tyler in both of his translations of Ishikawa.

17 This was Jean-Jacques Brousson, treacherous secretary and research assistant to Anatole France for the latter's famously skeptical biography of Joan (1908), who later embraced religion and recounts the life of Joan using the *fioretti* motif structuring the life of St. Francis. Because of its date (1932) and well-known publisher (Flammarion), Ishikawa may well have known this book.

18 For Joan of Arc in literary and historical studies in Meiji Japan, particularly as a model for obedient, loyal young women, see Takayama.

19 One thinks most immediately of Goethe's 1809 novel, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (*The Elective Affinities*); though Rilke's direct knowledge of such founding fathers of romanticism was surprisingly limited, despite striking parallels in their lives and sensibilities. See Leppmann, p. 25 and *passim*.

20 *Ditié*, vv. 1-3. This resemblance furnishes yet another example of Ishikawa's impressive knowledge of Christine's work.

21 Such has not always been the case in the reception history of Christine and Joan. For romantic and even erotic evocations of these heroines by modern authors, see Mombello's study of the nineteenth-century myth of Christine's love affair with the Earl of Salisbury, and Delteil's highly sensual ode to Joan in his surrealist "passionate biography." For Christine's surprising self-portrayal as lover on her wedding night, see *Autres Balades* no. 26 in *Ballades; Œuvres poétiques* 1:237.

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