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# Intratextual Echoes of Christine de Pizan's Rondeau LXII

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## Intratextual Echoes of Christine de Pizan's Rondeau LXII

*Abstract: The reception history of Rondeau LXII reveals divergent views as to whether this poem belongs to the corpus of Christine's poems on widowhood, or not. This article sheds light on these views by showing that Christine develops a distinctive type of imagery (imminent submersion, drowning) to engage with the experience of abandonment, either as fictional lover (Rondeau LXII) or as grieving widow (notably the Cent balades, Rondeaux, the Advision Cristine and the Mutacion de Fortune). Even though the manuscript tradition makes it clear that the poem does not belong to the widowhood corpus, the identical imagery linking Rondeau LXII to works of Christine specifically related to the handling of her husband's death blurs the distinction between lover and widow. It thus becomes easier to understand why some readers have read Rondeau LXII as though it were part of the widowhood corpus.*

*Résumé: L'histoire de la réception du Rondeau LXII présente des vues divergentes sur la question de savoir si ce poème appartient au corpus des écrits de Christine concernant le veuvage. Cet article entend jeter quelque lumière sur ces points de vue contradictoires, en montrant que Christine développe des images distinctives (submersion imminente, mort par noyade) dans son traitement de l'expérience de l'abandon, soit en tant qu'amante fictive (Rondeau LXII) soit en tant que veuve inconsolable (notamment les Cent balades, Rondeaux, l'Advision Cristine et la Mutacion de Fortune). Même si la tradition manuscrite démontre que le poème n'appartient pas au corpus sur le veuvage, les images identiques reliant le Rondeau LXII aux œuvres de Christine qui traitent spécifiquement de la mort de son mari estompent la distinction entre l'amante et la veuve. On comprend mieux donc les raisons pour lesquelles certain(e)s lecteurs/lectrices ont lu ce rondeau comme s'il appartenait aux poèmes sur le veuvage.*

Source de plour, riviere de tristece,  
Flun de doulour, mer d'amertume pleine  
M'avironnent et noyent en grant peine  
Mon pouvre cuer qui trop sent de destresce. 4

Si m'affondent et plungent en aspresce;  
Car parmi moy cuerent plus fort que Saine  
Source de plour, riviere de tristece. 7

Et leurs grans floz cheent a grant largece,  
Si com le vent de Fortune les meine,  
Tous dessus moy, dont si bas suis qu'a peine  
Releveray, tant durement m'opresse  
Source de plour, riviere de tristece.<sup>1</sup> 12

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<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres poétiques de Christine de Pisan*, ed. M. Roy, Paris, Firmin Didot, 1886-96, 3 vols, I, p. 182.

It is now well known that Christine de Pizan, for reasons of economy or for artistic and/or didactic purposes, re-uses material that seems to have specially appealed to her. Among the obvious examples of this one could cite the inclusion in the *Livre des trois vertus* of the Dame de la Tour's letter in the *Duc des vrais amans*, the rewriting of the first part of the *Mutacion* in the third part of the *Advision Cristine*, the incorporation in the *Livre des fais d'armes et de chevalerie* of borrowings from the *Stratagemms* of Frontinus already used in the *Livre du corps de policie*, or the re-use of quotations included in the *Advision Cristine* in the *Epistre de la prison de vie humaine*.<sup>2</sup> Of particular interest in these examples are the cases involving auto-citation, where Christine re-uses her own words rather than quotations from other authors: as K. Brownlee has shown,<sup>3</sup> auto-citation valorises Christine as author and indeed presents her on the same level as the *auctores*. What will be examined here is something rather different from this large-scale, highly conscious, deliberate repetition of her own material or that of other authors: the focus here will be on one example of a more unobtrusive type of repetition, partly conscious, partly instinctive, that can be detected (on a much smaller scale, often just at the level of a word or image) in a number of Christine's works. This paper will discuss Rondeau LXII (a poem that caters for a taste for melancholy that is part and parcel of this "aage en tristour"<sup>4</sup>), its intratextual echoes in the *Advision Cristine* and elsewhere (notably the *Cent balades*, the *Rondeaux* themselves, and the *Mutacion de Fortune*),<sup>5</sup> and the general conclusions that might be drawn from their

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<sup>2</sup> See C. C. Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*, New York, Persea Books, 1984, p. 100; K. Brownlee, "Rewriting Romance: Courtly Discourse and Auto-Citation in Christine de Pizan", *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. J. Chance, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1996, p. 172-94; J. Cerquiglini-Toulet, *La Couleur de la mélancolie: la fréquentation des livres au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle 1300-1415*, Paris, Hatier, 1993, p. 68, and "L'échappée belle: stratégies d'écriture et de lecture dans la littérature de la fin du Moyen Âge", *Littérature*, 99, 1995, p. 33-52; M. R. Grant, "Rewriting the Self in the French Middle Ages: Dreams, Memories and Other Visions", Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1997, Chapter 4; *Le Livre du corps de policie*, ed. A. J. Kennedy, Paris, Champion, 1998, p. 87-9 (and nn. p. 166); A. Paupert, "Christine et Boèce. De la lecture à l'écriture, de la réécriture à l'écriture du moi", *Contexts and Continuities: Proceedings of the IV<sup>th</sup> International Colloquium on Christine de Pizan (Glasgow 21-27 July 2000)*, published in honour of Liliane Dulac, ed. A. J. Kennedy, R. Brown-Grant, J. C. Laidlaw, and C. M. Müller, Glasgow, University of Glasgow Press, 2002, 3 vols, III, p. 645-62.

<sup>3</sup> Brownlee, "Rewriting Romance".

<sup>4</sup> See *Œuvres complètes d'Eustache Deschamps*, ed. le marquis de Queux de Saint-Hilaire and G. Raynaud, Paris, Firmin Didot, 1878-1904, 11 vols, I, p. 113-4 (Ballad XXXI, refrain line); M. Zimmermann, "La littérature française à la fin du Moyen Âge: une littérature de crise?", *Actes du VI<sup>e</sup> colloque international sur le Moyen Français*, ed. S. Cigada and A. Slerca, Milan, Vita e Pensiero, 1991, 3 vols, III, p. 207-19; Cerquiglini-Toulet, *La Couleur de la mélancolie*, p. 11-12.

<sup>5</sup> The editions used are as follows: *Œuvres poétiques de Christine de Pisan*, ed. M. Roy, Paris: Firmin Didot, 1886-96, 3 vols (for *Cent balades*, see I, p. 1-100; *Rondeaux*, I, p. 147-85; for Rondeau LXII, see I, p. 182); *Livre de l'Advision Cristine*, ed. C. Reno and L. Dulac, Paris, Champion, 2001 (it is to this edition that references will be made), and *L'Advison-Christine*, ed.

presence in Christine's work. Two preliminary points deserve a brief mention. Firstly, though I shall be touching on the date of composition of *Rondeau LXII*, it should be noted that exact chronology does not affect what I have to say: in other words, it does not matter whether the intratextual references are deemed to be prospective or retrospective within the group of texts under discussion. It is simply their presence that is judged to be significant. Secondly, though I shall be dealing with both the genesis and evaluation of the poem, at no point will I argue that aesthetic evaluation is dependent on a knowledge of genesis.

It is appropriate to begin with a brief discussion of *Rondeau LXII* itself, to give a brief reminder of its form and content, and of critical views on the poem to date. Although the poem has not attracted a great deal of critical comment,<sup>6</sup> what is there points to somewhat divergent interpretations. M. Roy distinguishes between, on the one hand, *Rondeaux I-VIII* and *XI*, poems of widowhood, and the rest of the collection, which, in his view, is made up simply of exercises in technical virtuosity on the theme of love: for Roy, after *Rondeau XI*, "...se succèdent en effet les peintures des sentiments multiples auxquels peuvent donner lieu les différentes formes de l'amour. Inutile d'insister à nouveau sur le mobile de ces compositions légères, nous savons depuis longtemps que nous ne devons y voir que des jeux d'esprit et de sentiment".<sup>7</sup> Like Roy, K. Varty associates *Rondeau LXII* with the theme of love, incorporating it, in his pioneering anthology of 1965, in "a group of poems in which women complain of being deceived, of having 'faulx amans'".<sup>8</sup> In contrast to both Roy and Varty, J. Moulin, in her 1962 modernised selection of Christine's poems, explicitly links "Source de plour" and *Cent balades VI* ("Dueil engoisieux, rage desmesurée") and discusses both of them as being inspired by the experience of Christine's widowhood.<sup>9</sup> Moulin appears in this respect to be a lone

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Sister M. L. Towner, Washington, DC, The Catholic University of America, 1932 (reprinted New York, AMS Press, 1969); *Le Livre de la mutacion de Fortune*, ed. S. Solente, Paris, Picard, 1959-66, 4 vols.

<sup>6</sup> See, in addition to works referred to in footnotes 7-9, D. Hook, "Fons curarum, fluvius lachrymarum": Variations upon a Petrarchan Theme", *Celestinesca*, 6, 1, 1982, p. 1-7; A. Planche, "Larmes du cœur, larmes du corps dans quelques textes français en vers des XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles", "*Et c'est la fin pour quoy sommes ensemble*": hommage à Jean Dufournet: littérature, histoire et langue du Moyen Âge, ed. J.-Cl. Aubailly, E. Baumgartner, F. Dubost, L. Dulac, and M. Faure, Paris, Champion, 1993, 3 vols (+ Supplement), III, p. 1133-42; R. Bettarini, *Lacrime e inchiostro nel "Canzoniere" di Petrarca*, Bologna, Clueb, 1998; P. V. Davies, "'Si bas suis qu'a peine/Releveray': Christine de Pizan's Use of Enjambement", *Christine de Pizan 2000: Studies in Honour of Angus J. Kennedy*, ed. J. Campbell and N. Margolis, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2000, p. 77-90 (and nn. p. 308-15); N. Margolis, *An Introduction to Christine de Pizan*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2011, p. 42-3.

<sup>7</sup> *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Roy, I, p. xxxiii-xxxiv.

<sup>8</sup> *Christine de Pisan: Ballades, Rondeaux, and Virelais: An Anthology*, ed. K. Varty, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1965, p. xxvi, 85-92.

<sup>9</sup> *Christine de Pisan*, ed. J. Moulin, Paris, Seghers, 1962, p. 25: "D'innombrables poétesses ont été inspirées par l'amour, mais bien peu ont évoqué, comme Christine, un amour spécifiquement conjugal, fait d'entente morale et physique, d'un partage des plaisirs et des peines vécues au jour le jour.

voice, since Rondeau LXII has never been considered as a candidate for inclusion in the widowhood *corpus* by those critics who have addressed this particular issue: Roy, S. Solente, Varty, M.-D. Tabarlet-Schock, B. K. Altmann, or J.-Fr. Kosta-Théfaïne.<sup>10</sup> That said, I suspect that in practice many readers, as opposed to critics, armed with a minimum knowledge of Christine's life and work, may have been led to read Rondeau LXII, perfectly understandably, as a poem expressing Christine's sense of loss on the death of her husband, Étienne de Castel.<sup>11</sup> The obvious question to ask at this point is whether the manuscript tradition has any light to shed on these divergent views.

With regard to date of composition, the evidence provided by the manuscript tradition does not exclude the possibility that Rondeau LXII may have been inspired by the memory of Étienne's death.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, the specific location of the poem

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La sensation de manquer d'aide et de protection la plonge dans un état de panique. Ployant sous le joug des responsabilités, elle chemine, 'faiblette', taradée par une angoisse qui se révèle particulièrement oppressante dans le rondeau : *Source de pleurs* [...] et dans une ballade où explose une rageuse impuissance : 'Ainsi ne puis ni guérir ni mourir'. Poèmes-cris que fait éclater la hantise de l'irrémediable, emplis d'un désarroi dont le caractère obsédant est souligné par un rythme haché, durement martelé. La douleur y est si vraie qu'elle s'universalise et devient celle de toutes les Andromagues déchirées. En réalité, Christine ne s'est jamais remise de son malheur. Treize ans après la mort de son mari, elle est toujours 'la veuve, l'inconsolée' à qui échappe ce poignant aveu de *La Mutation de Fortune* : *Hé! Dieux!* [...]"

<sup>10</sup> *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Roy, I, p. xxxiii-xxxiv; *Mutacion*, ed. Solente, I, p. 159, n. on l. 1240-98 and 6983-7052; *Anthology*, ed. Varty, p. xix-xxvii; M.-D. Tabarlet-Schock, "La souffrance et la joie dans les *Cent ballades* et *Rondeaux* de Christine de Pisan: tradition littéraire et expérience personnelle", Ph.D. thesis, Houston, Texas, 1981; B. K. Altmann, "Les poèmes de veuvage de Christine de Pisan", *Scintilla* (Centre for Mediaeval Studies, University of Toronto), 1, 1984, p. 24-47; J.-F. Kosta-Théfaïne, "L'écriture du temps et de la douleur dans les poèmes de veuvage de Christine de Pisan", *Lendemains*, 95/96, 1999, p. 47-59. With regard to Christine's handling of the theme of widowhood in her non-lyric texts, see *Mutacion*, ed. Solente, I, l. 1240-98 and 6983-7052; *Le Chemin de longue étude*, ed. A. Tarnowski, Paris, Librairie Générale Française, 2000, l. 61-169; *Le Livre des trois vertus*, ed. C. C. Willard and E. Hicks, Paris, Champion, 1989, p. 86-90, 188-93; *Advision Cristine*, ed. Reno and Dulac, p. 98-117; *Corps de policie*, ed. Kennedy, p. 8, l. 6-10.

<sup>11</sup> This connection could very easily be made, for example, by readers of *The Penguin Book of French Verse I*, ed. B. Woledge, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1961, (reprinted 1966), where Rondeau LXII appears as the first poem in this editor's selection of Christine's verse, p. 247-64 (p. 247-8), and where Christine's widowhood is quite naturally signalled in the few lines of biographical details given on p. xv.

<sup>12</sup> On the whole manuscript tradition and dates of main collections, see *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Roy, I, p. v-xxv; J. C. Laidlaw's four articles: "Christine de Pizan – An Author's Progress", *Modern Language Review*, 78, 1983, p. 532-50; "Christine de Pizan – A Publisher's Progress", *Modern Language Review*, 82, 1987, p. 35-75; "Christine and the Manuscript Tradition", *Christine de Pizan: a Casebook*, ed. B. K. Altmann and D. L. McGrady, New York/London, Routledge, 2003, p. 231-49; "Christine de Pizan's *rondeaux*: a virtuoso performance", *L'Offrande du cœur: Medieval and Early Modern Studies in Honour of Glynnis Cropp*, ed. M. Burrell and J. Grant, Christchurch, Canterbury University

within the *Rondeaux*<sup>13</sup> in the manuscript tradition gives strong support to the traditional view that “Source de plour” does not belong to the widowhood *corpus* as such. Let us look now at these two points in turn, date of composition and location.

Rondeau LXII does not figure in Christine's earliest collected works, the *Livre de Cristine*, compiled between 1399 and 23 June 1402, and extant in three copies: Paris BnF fr. 604 and 12779, and Chantilly, Musée Condé 492-93.<sup>14</sup> It makes its first appearance in BnF fr. 835, part of Christine's collected works acquired by the Duke of Berry in 1408, and then in the Queen's manuscript, London, B. L. Harley 4431, presented to Isabeau de Bavière in 1413 or 1414.<sup>15</sup> This would suggest that Rondeau LXII was written between June 1402 and 1408, at the very least some twelve years after Étienne died from an outbreak of plague in Beauvais in 1390, whilst he was engaged on a royal mission;<sup>16</sup> and given what we know of Christine's move away from lyric poetry to didactic prose, we can probably narrow down the date of composition to about 1402-1405.<sup>17</sup> These considerations make it virtually impossible therefore to read Rondeau LXII as being among Christine's early responses to the loss of her husband: it is surely difficult to imagine Christine excluding the poem from her first collection if it was already in existence prior to 1402. This does not also imply, however, that this work should be automatically excluded from the widowhood poems: we know from indications of chronology contained, for example, within other lyric poems, her verse *Mutacion* (1403), and the prose *Advision Cristine* (1405), that Christine was still writing on the pain of widowhood some five, seven, ten, fourteen or sixteen years after Étienne's death,<sup>18</sup> somewhat ignoring her own observation in the *Livre des trois vertus* that protracted grieving may be displeasing in God's sight (“Si pourroit bien pechier et courroucier Nostre Seigneur de tant estre adoulee, et par si long espace”<sup>19</sup>); it is worth remembering too that Christine must have lived through vicarious experiences of widowhood at much later stages of her career: after, for example, Agincourt in 1415,

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Press/Massey University, 2004, p. 30-44; G. Ouy, C. Reno, I. Villela-Petit, *Album Christine de Pizan*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2012, p. 190, 228, 319.

<sup>13</sup> *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Roy, I, p. xxxiii-xxxiv and p. 182-3; Laidlaw, “Author's Progress”, p. 536; Laidlaw, “Publisher's Progress”, p. 55, n. 49.

<sup>14</sup> Paris, Arsenal 3295 and Paris, BnF Moreau 1686 are late copies of BnF fr. 12799.

<sup>15</sup> See J. C. Laidlaw (<http://www.pizan.lib.ed.ac.uk/harley4431date.pdf>); Ouy, Reno, Villela-Petit, *Album Christine de Pizan*, p. 319.

<sup>16</sup> See *Advision Cristine*, ed. Reno and Dulac, p. 177-8 (n. VI/22-26).

<sup>17</sup> Even the *Cent balades d'amant et de dame* (traditionally dated 1410-11) has been redated to 1406-1413. See J. C. Laidlaw, “Les *Cent balades d'amant et de dame* de Christine de Pizan”, *Actes du I<sup>ème</sup> colloque international sur la littérature en moyen français (Milan, 8-10 mai 2000)*, ed. S. Cigada, A. Slerca, G. Bellati, M. Barsi, Milan, Vita e Pensiero, 2002, p. 49-63. See also *Advision Cristine*, ed. Reno and Dulac, p. 179, n. VII/21.

<sup>18</sup> *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Roy, I, p. 10 (*Cent balades IX*, l. 9); p. 115 (*Virelais XIV*, l. 7); p. 147 (*Rondeaux I*, l. 5); p. 21 (*Cent balades X*, l. 3); *Mutacion*, ed. Solente, I, l. 1240-98, and II, l. 6983-7052; *Advision Cristine*, ed. Reno and Dulac, p. 98-117.

<sup>19</sup> *Le Livre des trois vertus*, ed. Willard and Hicks, p. 83. Christine's observation is addressed, of course, to the princess.

which occasioned her *Epistre sur la prison de vie humaine*,<sup>20</sup> a consolatory treatise composed in 1416-18 and designed to comfort women afflicted by the calamities of war, or in 1425, when her son Jean de Castel died at the relatively early age of forty-two, leaving a widow and three small children. As C. C Willard observes, “the plight of her daughter-in-law and grandchildren could not have failed to remind her of her own early misfortunes”.<sup>21</sup> Christine herself of course refers on more than one occasion to the ever-present memory of her husband’s death: one recalls the refrain line in ballad XIV of Christine’s *Cent balades*: “[...] a toujours mais je pleureray sa mort”,<sup>22</sup> or her confession in the *Livre du chemin de long estude* that the passing of every day sees the renewal of her grief: “Mais mon grief dueil renouvelle/ Chacun jour...”.<sup>23</sup> Given all of that, a date of composition for Rondeau LXII of between 1402 and 1405, some twelve to fifteen years after Étienne’s death, cannot of itself disqualify this work from being considered for inclusion among the widowhood poems.

A telling argument against inclusion is provided, however, by the location of the poem within the *Rondeaux* in the manuscript tradition. There are signs that Christine hesitated over the exact contents of the *Rondeaux*: Laidlaw draws attention to the existence of two explicits in manuscripts of the *Livre*, one after poem LXI and a second after poem LXIX; he notes too that when the collection was prepared for the Duc de Berry, poems LIV and LXIX were deleted and LIX, LXII-LXIV added, and that there was a further slight reordering of poems in the Queen’s manuscript, poems XXVII and XXVIII being placed immediately after XLVI.<sup>24</sup> However, what is undoubtedly clear is that Christine did not make any attempt to add Rondeau LXII to the sequence of widowhood poems at the beginning of the collection. It should be recalled that in the *Cent balades*, *Virelais*, *Rondeaux* and *Autres balades*, Christine had placed the widowhood poems in the opening sections, perhaps to establish, as has been pointed out,<sup>25</sup> a deliberate link between her widowhood and the emergence of her vocation as a writer. In contrast, Rondeau LXII appears towards the end of the collection, in a sequence attributed to a female voice (LX-LXIV), framed by love poems attributed to a male (LIX and LXVII) or indeterminate voice (LXV-LXVI). It was no doubt for these reasons that Varty, in the anthology referred to earlier, very properly included Rondeau LXII as part of his selection of poems grouped under the title of “Femmes Fraudées and Faulz Amans”, and ascribed the voice to a female

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<sup>20</sup> *Epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, ed. A. J. Kennedy, Glasgow, French Department, University of Glasgow, 1984; *The Epistle of the Prison of Human Life with An Epistle to the Queen of France and Lament on the Evils of the Civil War*, ed. and trans. J. A. Wisman, New York/London, Garland, 1984.

<sup>21</sup> Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*, p. 203.

<sup>22</sup> *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Roy, I, p. 15, l. 7, 14, 21.

<sup>23</sup> *Le Chemin de longue étude*, ed. Tarnowski, l. 132-3.

<sup>24</sup> Laidlaw, “Author’s Progress”, p. 536; Laidlaw, “Publisher’s Progress”, p. 55, n. 49, p. 62, n. 59.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Kosta-Théfaine, “L’écriture du temps et de la douleur dans les poèmes de veuvage”, p. 53.

speaker.<sup>26</sup> This evidence, arising from the location of the poem within the collection, seems unanswerable, particularly the implication that Christine herself, when preparing the second collected version of her works, saw *Rondeau LXII* as an additional poem, written by a female subject, that would best fit in to a sequence involving unhappiness, disappointment or deception in love.

While there has been some divergence of views over the exact subject matter of the poem, there has been no such disagreement on its literary merits, though discussion of these has not been extensive.<sup>27</sup> There is clear evidence to suggest that *Rondeau LXII* has always been judged to stand out qualitatively not just in the collection to which it belongs but in Christine's lyric output as a whole. One can note in particular the privileged place it has been accorded in successive anthologies of Christine's works (or writings of medieval women generally) by, for example, B. Woledge (1961 and 1966), J. Moulin (1962 and 1966), K. Varty (1965), E. A. Petroff (1986), and M. Thiébaux (1987 and 1994).<sup>28</sup> It seems indeed to have been anthologised almost as frequently as Christine's more celebrated "Seulete suy". The reasons underlying the poem's popularity are not hard to find, since (as will be demonstrated here) the artistry deployed results in a perfect fusion of content and form.

All the technical devices used are harnessed to a single aim, namely, to convey the unbearable sense of ever-increasing stress, panic, oppression and helplessness felt by the speaking subject as successive waves of grief sweep over her, threatening to engulf her completely. The opening imagery, made up of a sequence of nouns in ascending order of the size of the natural element referred to and matching emotional intensity (*source / riviere / flun / mer: plour / tristece / doulour / amertume*) presents the "je" of the poem as sinking under the waves and weight of sorrow, quite literally drowning in a "bitter sea" of tears. These references may well have been particularly meaningful to a medieval reader, as they reinforce the speaker's sense of grief through the associations that they have with the presentation of sorrow within the Judeo-Christian tradition. "Source de plour" is a rendering of *fons lacrimarum*, a topos that has both patristic and biblical overtones;<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Anthology*, ed. Varty, p. 85-90, and p. 156 (where he refers to "the threatening insistence of the waves which break over the *woman's* head" – my italics). In the poem itself, there is no indication of the gender of the speaking voice.

<sup>27</sup> See works referred to *supra* in footnotes 6-9.

<sup>28</sup> *The Penguin Book of French Verse I*, ed. Woledge, p. 247-8; *Christine de Pisan*, ed. Moulin, p. 69, and *La poésie féminine du XII<sup>e</sup> au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. J. Moulin, Paris, Seghers, 1966, 2 vols, I, p. 97; *Anthology*, ed. Varty, p. 90; *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, ed. E. A. Petroff, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 339-40 (translations by N. Margolis); *The Writings of Medieval Women*, ed. M. Thiébaux, New York, Garland, 1987 and 1994, p. 425-6.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Augustinus Hipponensis, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (commentary on Psalm 21), *PL*, 36, col. 0171; Ambrosius Autpertus, *Expositio in Apocalypsin*, *CCCM*, 27, lib. 1, versus 5c, linea 57; Anonymus, *In Matthaeum*, *CCCM*, 159, cap. 3, versus 12, p. 23, linea 49; Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Sermones de diversis* (sermo 94), *PL*, 183, cols. 0718B-C; Jeremias, IX, 1: *Quis dabit capiti meo aquam, et oculis meis fontem lacrymarum? Et plorabo die ac nocte interfectos filiae populi mei.*



“flun de doulour” and “riviere de tristee” evoke the archetypal “river of sadness” referred to in Psalm 137, verse 1: *super flumina Babylonis, illic sedimus et flevimus, cum recordaremur Sion*; and the culminating reference, the image of the “bitter sea”, evokes the intensity of Mary’s sorrows after the crucifixion, the designation of Mary as the *amarum mare* being almost as frequent in patristic writings as that of Mary as *stella maris*, “the star of the sea”.<sup>30</sup> The speaker’s sense of desperation and panic is suggested by the repeated superlative adverbial phrases (“qui trop sent de destresse...*si bas suis...tant durement m’opresse*”) and the awkward rhythm of “dout si bas suis qu’a peine / Releveray”, and her sense of tension by the inversions and delayed subjects in l. 6-7, 11-12; her helpless passivity is conveyed, firstly, by the prepositional phrases “parmi moy” (l. 6), “tous dessus moy”, suggesting her total submersion in the waves above and around her, and, secondly, by the preponderance of verbs with a subject other than “je” – there are in fact only two verbs with “je” as subject but in each of these two cases, the restrictions (“*si bas suis, a peine Releveray*”) serve to underline the lack of agency on the part of the speaker. The relentless surge of the waves is rendered admirably not just by the rondeau form itself, with its rapidly recurring refrain in initial, medial and end position and the frequent reappearance of its restricted number of rhymes, but also by the rising and falling rhythm of the lines (the fall being particularly noticeable when enjambement<sup>31</sup> is used for maximum effect, l. 3, 4, 7, 10, 11), by the repetition of a key word within the poem (*grant*, l. 3, 8) or within the same line (“Et leurs *grans* floz cheent a *grant* largece”, l. 8), by the exploitation of the expressive value of repeated sounds (e.g. *-ou*, l. 1, 2, 4, 7, 12, or *-s* in l. 1, 4-12), and by the accumulation in quick succession of active verbs suggesting the destructiveness of the sea (“*m’vironnent / noyent / m’affondent / plungent / cuerent / cheent / m’opresse*”), itself in the control of an even greater, more dynamic, more capricious force (“le vent de Fortune”, l. 9). What is particularly remarkable here is that Christine has infused the poem with an emotional intensity not normally associated with the rondeau form – one recalls J. Cerquiglini-Toulet’s observation

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<sup>30</sup> These designations go back at least to Jerome. For a discussion of this imagery and its ancestry, see A. J. Kennedy, “‘Marie est dite mer amere’ in Robert de Boron’s *Le Roman de l’Estoire dou Graal*”, *Bulletin Bibliographique de la Société Internationale Arthurienne*, 29, 1977, p. 185-90. The association of the “sea” and “bitterness” is indeed a patristic topos pertaining to grief, and sometimes also penitence. See, for example, Gregorius Magnus, *Moralia* (commentary on Job 14: 11-12): *Mare mens hominis, et quasi fluctus maris sunt cogitationes mentis, quae aliquando per iram tumescunt, per gratiam tranquillae fiunt, per odium cum amaritudine defluunt*. PL, 75, col. 0991B. Cf. also the word-play on *mer/amer* in Chrétien’s *Cligés*, ed. A. Micha, Paris, Champion, 1965, p. 17, l. 543, itself an echo of Thomas’s *Tristan*, on which see G. J. Brault, “L’amer, l’amer, la mer: la scène des aveux dans le *Tristan* de Thomas à la lumière du fragment de Carlisle”, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia: mélanges offerts à Philippe Ménard*, ed. J. C. Faucon, A. Labbé, and D. Quérueu, Paris, Champion, 1998, 2 vols, I, p. 215-26.

<sup>31</sup> See the very perceptive discussion by Davies, “Christine de Pizan’s Use of Enjambement”, p. 77-90 (and nn. p. 308-15).

that “le rondeau est une activité ludique [...] facile et gracieuse”.<sup>32</sup> It seems to me that *Rondeau LXII* transcends the traditional emotional parameters of the genre, perfectly capturing as it does that sense of bleak disorientation that all of us experience at moments when the world seems out of joint, out of line with all our aspirations towards happiness, what Camus called “ce divorce entre l’homme et sa vie, l’acteur et son décor...le sentiment de l’absurdité”.<sup>33</sup>

Let us turn now to the text which first alerted me to echoes of *Rondeau LXII* elsewhere in Christine’s work, particularly echoes of imagery associated with water, waves and drowning. Their presence was made clear to me in the course of a rereading of the *Advisio Cristine* in the excellent edition published by C. Reno and L. Dulac, which of course allows the reader to concentrate on precise textual detail in a way that was not easily possible when only the Towner edition was available, the minimal distribution of punctuation and capitalisation making the text very difficult to use.<sup>34</sup> I have printed below much-abridged extracts from the autobiographical section of the *Advisio* devoted to the story of Christine’s adversities, in particular her husband’s untimely death:

la ruine de mon espoir rué jus par les soufflemens de Fortune (p. 95, l. 29-30). [...] Si fu a bon droit plaine d’amertume, regraittant sa douce compaignie et la joie passee, qui ne mes .X. ans avoit duré. Voiant venir le flot de tribulacion qui sur moy acouroit, fus plus desirant mourir que vivre (p. 100, l. 13-6). [...] la nef demoree en orage et sanz patron (p. 100, l. 34-5). [...] Adonc me sourdirent angoisses de toutes pars et comme ce soient les metz des vesves, plais et procès m’avironnerent de tous lez’ (p. 100, l. 36-8). [...] consideroie le temps passé et les infortunes presentes dont les flots si bas m’affondoient et remedier n’y pouoie (p. 102, l. 96-7). [...] Ains te diray, en poursuivant ceste matiere jusques au jour d’ui comment ses floz [*scil.* of Fortune] m’ont governee et encore ne cessent (p. 107, l. 7-9). [...] les floz infortunez souvent courans sur moy (p. 115, l. 9-10).

It will be seen first of all that this passage contains quite a number of verbal echoes of the poem – indeed when one confronts the prose extract and *Rondeau LXII*, the one looks like a versification or prosification of the other: one could link “les soufflemens de Fortune” and “le vent de Fortune”, in l. 9; “plaine d’amertume” and the “mer d’amertume pleine”, in l. 2; “si bas m’affondoient” and “si bas suis”, l. 10 and “Si m’affondent”, l. 5; “plais et procès m’avironnerent de tous lez” and “m’avironnent et noyent en grant peine”, l. 3, and “tous dessus moy”, l. 10. These linguistic echoes certainly deserve mention, though I do not wish to make too much of them, as some may be purely coincidental. What is really striking, in Part III of the *Advisio*, is the use of the same kind of imagery as one finds in *Rondeau LXII*. In the section of the *Advisio* devoted to her husband’s death, the imagery to which Christine has recourse is the imagery of drowning, of imminent submersion, of

<sup>32</sup> J. Cerquiglini-Toulet, “Le Rondeau”, *Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters (La littérature française aux XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, VIII/I, ed. D. Poirion, A. Biermann, D. Tillmann-Bartylla, Heidelberg, Carl Winter, 1988, p. 45-58 (p. 55).

<sup>33</sup> *Le Mythe de Sisyphé*, Paris, Gallimard, 1942, p. 18.

<sup>34</sup> For details of editions, see footnote 5 *supra*.

relentless and successive waves, whipped up by the wind of Fortune to threaten and engulf the victim, who is seen here as either struggling in the water or cast adrift on a ship that has lost its captain. With the exception of the reference to the captainless ship, all of these elements are to be found in the imagery of Rondeau LXII: and the captainless ship evokes in any case the same kind of threatening seascape that one finds in the poem.

That the imagery of imminent death by drowning is something that Christine associates with her experience of widowhood can be additionally confirmed by reference, firstly, to the celebrated passage in the *Mutacion*<sup>35</sup> on which this part of the *Advision Cristine* is based, and, secondly, to poems that are generally agreed to belong to the widowhood lyric *corpus*: *Cent balades* I, and V-XX; *Virelais* I, XIV and XV; *Rondeaux* I-VIII, and XI; *Autres balades* VI (which recurs also in the section of the *Advision Cristine* already discussed).<sup>36</sup> The passage in the *Mutacion* is too familiar to require close analysis here: suffice to say that in the text the metaphor of shipwreck is developed in quite elaborate detail, with the evocation of the ship setting off in calm waters, the sudden change in the weather wrought by Fortune, darkening skies, brooding clouds, rising wind and tempest, the master's death by drowning, and Christine's desire to plunge to her death alongside him in the angry waters. Ballad XIV of the *Cent balades* anticipates much of the scenario of the *Mutacion* passage, with its references to the captainless ship and the dangers it faces on its journey across perilous seas: "Si est elle [*scil.* la nef] pourtant en grant barelle / De soudain vent ou d'encontre encombreuse; / Car trop griefment est la mer perilleuse".<sup>37</sup> In line 10 of Rondeau IV ("Puis qu'ainsi est qu'il fault vivre en dueil") Christine exploits a very expressive verb, used transitively here, to convey her (quite literal) submersion in affliction: "Car tant est grant le mal qui me *suronde*" (my italics).<sup>38</sup> The effectiveness of the verb here is due in large measure to the transparency of its etymology,<sup>39</sup> not quite so evident in its Modern English equivalent "surround". What Christine so economically conveys here is that grief washes over her in waves, *suronder* deriving from the Late Latin form *superundare*, originally meaning "to overflow". Finally, in ballad VI of the *Autres balades* (l. 3, 10),<sup>40</sup> which (as I have just indicated) Christine chose to include in the section of the *Advision Cristine* devoted to the loss of her husband, the two references to the fact that widows are unable to find a safe haven in France ("qui sieult estre le port/ de leur salu", l. 3-4) evoke once more, at least implicitly, the image of the widow cast adrift on a sea of troubles.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Mutacion*, ed. Solente, I, l. 1240-98.

<sup>36</sup> *Advision Cristine*, ed. Reno and Dulac, p. 105-06; for discussions of the widowhood poems, see footnote 10 *supra*; for the widowhood poems, see *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Roy, I, p. 1-21, 100-02, 115-7, 147-54, 213-4.

<sup>37</sup> *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Roy, I, p. 14, l. 12-14.

<sup>38</sup> *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Roy, I, p. 149.

<sup>39</sup> Compare Christine's equally expressive use of *affonder* in Rondeau LXII, l. 5, and in the extracts from the *Advision Cristine* quoted *supra*.

<sup>40</sup> *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Roy, I, p. 213-4.

<sup>41</sup> For a different use of sea imagery, see *La Città delle dame*, ed. P. Caraffi and E. J. Richards, Milan, Luni Editrice, 1998, chapter LX, p. 404, where reference is made to "celle

Let us turn now to consider what general conclusions might be drawn from this discussion, and in particular, from the presence of this recurring imagery in Christine's work. It may be useful for our purposes to distinguish between the viewpoints of writer and reader.

From the viewpoint of the writer, and on the basis of all the textual and manuscript evidence that has been examined, one has first of all to concede that it would be going too far to argue that *Rondeau LXII* deserves to be considered as part of the widowhood lyric *corpus* as such: what we know of Christine's location of the poem within the collection seems to rule that out.

However, from the point of view of the reader, this situation is not at all so clear-cut. In *Rondeau LXII* and the other texts referred to, Christine has very subtly exploited auto-citation, developing a distinctive type of imagery or metaphor to engage with the experience of abandonment and loss, either as fictional lover or as grieving widow. In other words, in *Rondeau LXII* she has used the unique imagery of submersion and drowning that is so characteristic of other material in her verse and prose related specifically to her handling of Étienne's loss. For these reasons, it is easy for even the most attentive reader to lose sight of the increasingly blurred distinction between grieving lover and grieving widow. Paradoxically, Christine may have unintentionally encouraged such confusion on the part of the reader by her own celebrated distinction between the "je" of the widowhood poems and the "je" in the rest of the *corpus*, particularly in those poems expressing happiness or desire. It will be recalled that, as a way of forestalling criticism and any undermining of her respectability, Christine herself had been at pains to claim that expressions of joy or desire on her part had nothing to do with her own experience, which was focused solely on the theme of sorrow: "je chante par couverture"... "Et me convient, pour celer mon affaire,/ De triste cuer chanter joyeusement".<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, however, we are left with the implication that Christine seems willing to let her readers interpret any expression of grief as potentially her own.

These considerations have important light to shed on the divergent views that have surfaced in the reception history of the poem. Roy, Varty and others (who took account of the location of the poem within the manuscript tradition) were right to see *Rondeau LXII* as a poem on the theme of love's sorrows (though one might like to take issue now with Roy's view of the poem as belonging to the category of "ces compositions légères...des jeux d'esprit et de sentiment"<sup>43</sup>). That said, the detailed analysis of the poem's aesthetic qualities helps us better to understand J. Moulin's instinctive conviction that a poem of such emotional intensity simply *ought* to belong to the widowhood sequence. The preceding paragraphs have uncovered additional reasons that may lead readers (erroneously) to link *Rondeau LXII* and Christine's writings specifically related to her husband's death. As we have shown,

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mer tres perilleuse et dampnable de fole amour". On this, see Margot Brink, "La mer dangereuse de l'amour-passion : Christine de Pizan, Madeleine et Catherine de Gournay, Madeleine de Scudéry et le discours amoureux", *Contexts and Continuities*, ed. Kennedy, *et. al.*, I, p. 141-54.

<sup>42</sup> *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Roy, I, p. 101, 153-4.

<sup>43</sup> *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Roy, I, p. xxxiii-xxxiv.

these reasons concern the way in which the identical imagery used in Rondeau LXII and elsewhere blurs the distinction between fictional lover and real widow. All of this does much to explain why Rondeau LXII has been read, and no doubt will continue to be read, as though it were part of Christine's poems on widowhood. *Habent sua fata libelli*; and readers tend to make of these books what they will.<sup>44</sup>

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