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## **‘I Am a Widow Lone, in Authority Arrayed’: Tears of Authorship in Selected Works by Christine de Pizan**

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Christine de Pizan, widowed female author of poetry and prose at the late fourteenth and early fifteenth-century French court, embroiled herself in the debates about gender, morality, and politics of her day. The controversy surrounding her authorial persona and literary works did not end with her death in 1430. She continues to spark debate in modern scholarly conversations about the function of the tears that appear across her oeuvre. An exploration of weeping as memorialization, inspiration, and activism in *Cent balades* and *Rondeaux* (1394–1402), *Le Livre de l’Advison Cristine* (1405), *Une epistre a Eustace Morel* (1404), and *La Lamentacion sur les maux de la France* (1410), contributes to understanding Christine’s authorial identity as constructed through the manipulation of social norms on widowhood and emotion.<sup>1</sup> Christine assumes the duty of the intercessory widow in her ballades, and, by discarding her female

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<sup>1</sup> French titles are taken from Nadia Margolis’s *An Introduction to Christine de Pizan* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011). For cases of textual analysis, the original Middle French supplements the study of Christine’s works in English translation. I would like to thank Professor Anne Coldiron for her help with the Middle French. English translations come from Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski’s edition, *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), except for two works that do not appear in this version: ‘Rondeau III’ and Ballade 11. These two translations come from Charity Cannon Willard’s *The Writings of Christine de Pizan* (New York: Persea Books, 1994). Editions of the Middle French, chosen for their accessibility and availability, are taken from a variety of sources, detailed in the footnotes and in the bibliography. While there are limitations to studying Christine without a deep understanding of Middle or modern French, I believe Christine’s ideas and intentions transcend language differences.

sexuality, positions herself as a ‘clerkly female writing subject’ in her political works.<sup>2</sup> Her tears connect the private texts that establish her widowed authority with her political prose that admonishes and bemoans the French state. They are a lachrymal channel for empathy, Christine’s call for her readers to recognize the individual’s sorrow and the nation’s plight, the private and the public. Rather than passively accept paternalistic strictures on her behaviour, Christine uses tears to develop her persona as the widowed political adviser of a despairing state, thereby defying attempts to categorize her identity, body, works, or ideas.

Scholars of the Middle Ages have considered medieval tears within the context of multiple disciplines, including religion, visual art, literature, and politics. This article considers Christine de Pizan’s tears within the latter two contexts to tease out how her crying conforms to and defies medieval expectations of the weeping widow. My analysis launches from Lyn A. Blanchfield’s two approaches to medieval emotions—the examination of emotional language and ‘bodily gestures’ indicative of interiority—to study Christine’s word repetition and bodily responses to crying.<sup>3</sup> I will first look at Ballades 11 and 14 from *Cent balades* and Rondeau III, also the first works under discussion to be published (1394–1402), followed by *l’Advison* (1405) for Christine’s performance of private tears about widowhood. Christine’s publication and commemoration of the widow’s isolation, invitations to witness her sorrow, and flood imagery, reinforce her position as an upright widow perfectly situated to evoke empathy from her readers. I then turn to *Morel* (1404) and *Lamentacion* (1410), which I categorize as Christine’s public tears because of the political crises that inspire them. Published two years after the ballades but before *l’Advison*, *Morel* builds on Christine’s persona as the keeper of France’s morality. I extend the idea of tears as a lachrymal channel in *Morel* and *Lamentacion* to show how crying

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<sup>2</sup> Kevin Brownlee, ‘Widowhood, Sexuality, and Gender in Christine de Pizan’, *Romantic Review*, 86 (1995), 339–53 (p. 343).

<sup>3</sup> Lyn A. Blanchfield, ‘Prolegomenon: Considerations of Weeping and Sincerity in the Middle Ages’, in *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History*, ed. by Elina Gertsman (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. xxi–xxx (p. xxi).

continues to inspire Christine's writing through the years and seeks to unite all of France. Eric Hicks reminds readers that the classification of Christine's works into political and private is subject to the historical time and place of the categorizer.<sup>4</sup> Differentiation between the two categories is largely for organizational purposes, for the essay argues that tears are a connective stream between private and public.<sup>5</sup> Closing remarks consider how Christine's tears affect ideas about her progressiveness. While the essay's scope cannot fully address the categorization of Christine's ideas within feminist studies, her manipulations of social and gender expectations could inform such a discussion. Fluidity makes Christine's tears a compelling, if complex and slightly ambiguous, topic of study. The concluding analysis embraces that fluidity.

Tom Lutz's history of tears demonstrates multiple and contradictory interpretations of crying: a pleasurable means of communication, gendered labour, intercessory prayer, dangerous bodily secretions, and acts of empathy.<sup>6</sup> As a woman writing within medieval social norms for female emotions, Christine de Pizan sheds tears that reflect all of these readings. According to Lisa Perfetti's study of medieval society's assumptions about women's emotions, women's bodies were considered moist and cold because of the imbalance of their four humours.<sup>7</sup> As a result of their bodily dispositions, society expected women to be emotionally unstable or 'volatile' and thus to be in need of men's guidance and control.<sup>8</sup> Since the widow existed outside the sexual shackles of marriage, her tears especially threatened patriarchal structures set up to

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<sup>4</sup> Eric Hicks, 'The Political Significance of Christine de Pizan', in *Politics, Gender, and Genre: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan*, ed. by Margaret Brabant (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 7–15 (p. 9).

<sup>5</sup> This categorization does not fall along strictly chronological lines, for *l'Advisio* was published a year after *Morel*, but *l'Advisio* is addressed first as indicative of Christine's more overtly private weeping. The article's scope cannot accommodate further examples of Christine's tears, in such works as *Rondeau 62*, *Le Livre du Chemin de Long Estude*, *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*, *L'Epistre de la Prison de Vie Humaine*, and *Le Livre des Trois Vertus*.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Lutz, *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), p. 52, p. 101, p. 154, pp. 244–45, and p. 247. For tears as intercession, see also Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley, 'Introduction', in *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination*, ed. by Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 1–24 (p. 2).

<sup>7</sup> Lisa Perfetti, 'Introduction', in *The Representations of Women's Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Lisa Perfetti (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), pp. 1–22 (pp. 4–5).

<sup>8</sup> Perfetti, pp. 4–5, and p. 11.

subordinate female sexuality and emotions. Under the shadow of such popularly cited literary figures as the unfaithful Widow of Ephesus, Christine weeps to memorialize her husband and France without attracting suitors with excessive crying.<sup>9</sup> Her tears counter the misogynistic tradition that considered weeping to contribute to women's evil and ineducable natures.<sup>10</sup> The pious widow with a mind far from addled by too much moisture, Christine plays off the constraints on widows' behaviour to construct her weeping-widow authority.

Christine's early forays into publication during the years 1394 to 1402 feature many ballades about widow's grief, which prove her fulfillment of the widow's duty to her husband. Poets of the fourteenth century used the ballade form to draw the reader or listener into the individual sentiments of the poem's speaker, which resulted in the 'collective expression of a singular emotion'.<sup>11</sup> Ballade 11 from *Cent Balades* characterizes the *seulete*'s loneliness: 'Alone am I, with tears which freely flow' and 'Alone am I, who such hot tears have cried'.<sup>12</sup> The repetition of *seulete*, especially the refrain ('Alone am I, friendless and so lonely', *seulete sanz ami demourée*) emphasizes the widow's solitude.<sup>13</sup> Ballade 14 opens with the same *seulete* to detail the widow's eternal weeping for her 'dear lover' (*mon ami*).<sup>14</sup> Rondeau III's first line

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<sup>9</sup> Leslie Abend Callahan, 'The Widow's Tears: The Pedagogy of Grief in Medieval France and the Image of the Grieving Widow', in *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 245–63 (p. 248); Katherine Clark, 'Purgatory, Punishment, and the Discourse of Holy Widowhood in the High and Later Middle Ages', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 16 (2007), 169–203 (p. 175).

<sup>10</sup> Elina Gertsman, 'Introduction: "Going They Went and Wept": Tears in Medieval Discourse', in *Crying in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Gertsman, pp. xi–xx (p. xii).

<sup>11</sup> Tracy Adams, 'Love as Metaphor in Christine de Pizan's Ballade Cycles', in *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, ed. by Barbara K. Altmann and Deborah L. McGrady (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 149–65 (p. 149).

<sup>12</sup> Christine de Pizan, 'XI. Alone Am I', from *One Hundred Ballades*, in *The Writings of Christine de Pizan*, trans. by Charity Cannon Willard (New York: Persea Books, 1994), p. 41. *Seulete* has variant spellings in Middle French. This essay uses *seulete* when not quoting directly from a translation or article that uses *seulette*.

<sup>13</sup> Christine de Pizan, 'XI. Alone Am I', p. 41. For Middle French, see Christine de Pizan, 'XI', from *Cent Balades*, in *Oeuvres Poétiques de Christine de Pizan*, ed. by Maurice Roy, 3 vols (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1886), I (1886), p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Christine de Pizan, '14', from *One Hundred Ballads*, in *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan*, trans. by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), pp. 5–6 (p. 5). For Middle French, see Christine de Pizan, 'XIV', from *Cent Balades*, in *Oeuvres Poétiques*, ed. by Roy, p. 15.

also contains the *seulete*: ‘I am a widow lone’.<sup>15</sup> The publication of Christine’s lyrics proves to her readers that she behaves as the memorialist and primary mourner for her husband, the royal notary Etienne du Castel.<sup>16</sup> Lori J. Walters says readers create mental pictures when reading or listening to a text, ‘as if those actions were taking place in the present’.<sup>17</sup> Christine’s intercession for her husband’s soul, therefore, is renewed each time her lyrics are read and replayed on the mind’s stage. All who read her poetry participate in her grief. The first official works of her authorial career, these pieces introduce Christine’s complicated relationship between the public and private. She prepared the works for noble patrons in France and abroad.<sup>18</sup> By committing her sorrow to the page and capturing her private tears in writing, she shifts them into the public realm with the re-enactment of crying. The description of her black attire and mournful countenance (‘I am a widow lone, in black arrayed, | With sorrowful face and most simply clad’, *Je suis vesve, seulete et noir vestue, | A triste vis simplement affulée*) amplifies the performance by offering the audience a clear illustration of the actor.<sup>19</sup> Christine was conscious of the English and French nobility who would receive her tearful words. The authorial persona of the righteous widow, removed from society but alert to society’s rules of mourning, takes shape.

If crying is Christine’s performance, it demands an audience. Medievalist scholars underscore the importance of an audience to endorse a medieval weeper’s tears and emotions.<sup>20</sup> Christine uses invocations to invite witnesses to view her widow’s grief in her lyrics and in what

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<sup>15</sup> Christine de Pizan, ‘Rondeau III. I Am a Widow Lone’, from *More Ballades*, in *The Writings of Christine de Pizan*, trans. by Willard, p. 53. For Middle French, see Christine de Pizan, ‘III’, from *Rondeaux*, in *Oeuvres Poétiques*, ed. by Roy, pp. 148-49 (p. 148) <<https://archive.org/details/oeuvrespoetiqu01chri>> [accessed 23 October 2018].

<sup>16</sup> Clark, ‘Purgatory, Punishment, and the Discourse of Holy Widowhood in the High and Later Middle Ages’, p. 173.

<sup>17</sup> Lori J. Walters, ‘Christine de Pizan, France’s Memorialist: Persona, Performance, Memory’, *Journal of European Studies*, 35 (2005), 29–45 (p. 32).

<sup>18</sup> J. C. Laidlaw, ‘Christine de Pizan—A Publisher’s Progress’, *The Modern Language Review*, 82 (1987), 35–75 (p. 40).

<sup>19</sup> Christine de Pizan, ‘Rondeau III. I Am a Widow Lone’, p. 53. For Middle French, see Christine de Pizan, ‘III’, p. 148.

<sup>20</sup> Blanchfield cites Jean-Claude Schmitt’s study of the twelfth-century Hugh of St Victor’s *De institutione novitiorum* to validate this claim (‘Prolegomenon’, pp. xxii–xxiii).

scholars consider the autobiographical sections of *l'Advisio* (1405). Ballade 11 invokes a Prince ('Prince, I can do little more than sigh').<sup>21</sup> Although this envoy is conventional for certain ballade forms and might reference a noble patron, the invocation still does the work of bringing those with political power into dialogue with Christine's private sorrow. Years later in *l'Advisio*, Christine invokes Lady Philosophy: 'Oh sweet mistress, how many tears, sighs, complaints, and lamentations do you think I sent forth'.<sup>22</sup> These invocations elevate Christine's tears as worthy of both royal and celestial attention. Christine's dissemination of her writing to patrons also proves that she thought her plight deserved attention. Otherwise, she would have never presented her situation to the public. Crying was not an unusual feature in women's complaints, but the fact that Christine writes her complaint in her own text heightens the dramatic performance.<sup>23</sup> The fourteenth-century ballade form asked readers to invest in the subjectivity of the speaker.<sup>24</sup> In Christine's ballade, the speaker is not the conventional mourning man of love ballades and complaints, but a weeping woman. By situating her readers as the lyrics' 'I', the forlorn griever, Christine forces her audience to cry the tears with her, a woman. Her tears are tools for empathy as she copes with her grief over Etienne's death. Faced with isolation in the lyrics and indifferent court officials in *l'Advisio*, she turns to the imagined audience of her writings to build consolation and sympathy.

In these private writings the image of tears as a flood compels Christine to author her grief. The symbolism of flowing water appears in close proximity to Christine's tears in *l'Advisio*. A 'flood of tribulations rush[es] upon' her and 'floods [of misfortunes] had so deeply submerged' her.<sup>25</sup> Medieval theories about emotions often involved the concept of an emotion's

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<sup>21</sup> Christine de Pizan, 'XI. Alone Am I', p. 41.

<sup>22</sup> Christine de Pizan, *Christine's Vision*, in *Selected Writings*, trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, pp. 173–201 (p. 189).

<sup>23</sup> Mary McKinley, 'The Subversive "Seulette"', in *Politics, Gender, and Genre*, ed. by Brabant, pp. 157–69 (p. 159).

<sup>24</sup> Adams, p. 149.

<sup>25</sup> Christine de Pizan, *Christine's Vision*, pp. 188–89.

‘force of movement’ on the body.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps Christine’s floods actualize the overwhelming despair her tribulations occasion. Yet Christine does not let the floods drown her. Rather, she channels her floods into inspiration, writing her complaints ‘in tears’ (*en plourant*).<sup>27</sup> Because grief hampers her tongue (‘Full of hot tears and with tongue of lead’), she relies on her pen to voice her feelings.<sup>28</sup> If tears can ‘redirect our emotions’, Christine’s weeping redirects her grief and frustration into her written words.<sup>29</sup> Her tears are at once ‘the stuff of self-absorption and a crying out, a call’, a private act of healing and a public appeal for sympathy.<sup>30</sup> The empathy she invites from the Prince, Lady Philosophy, and patrons is channeled through streams of tears. The widowed author who mourns for her husband symbolizes strength against adversity for her addressees and readers. Her flowing lachrymal waters prove more powerful than the flooding tribulations that threaten her.

The persona of the weeping widow that Christine develops in her lyrics and *l’Advisio* emerges to serve her political agenda in her more public works, *Une epistre a Eustace Morel* and *La Lamentacion sur les maux de la France*. Before an analysis of tears in these two specific works, however, this article pauses to consider Christine’s tearful persona within its medieval political context. Walters considers the *seulete* or lonely widow persona as Christine’s vehicle for initiating political change.<sup>31</sup> As a ‘solitary individual soul’, Christine has the opportunity for contemplation and reflection, practices she believed could instigate political change.<sup>32</sup> In the lyrics and *l’Advisio*, the widow is lonely and pitiful. As the political adviser, Christine assumes

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<sup>26</sup> Perfetti, ‘Introduction’, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Christine de Pizan, *Christine’s Vision*, p. 191. For Middle French, see Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de l’Advisio Cristine*, ed. by Liliane Dulac and Christine Reno (Paris: H. Champion, 2001), p. 105.

<sup>28</sup> Christine de Pizan, ‘Rondeau III: I Am a Widow Lone’, p. 53.

<sup>29</sup> Lutz, *Crying*, p. 23.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>31</sup> Lori J. Walters, ‘The *Vieil Solitaire* and the *Seulete*: Contemplative Solitude’, in *Philippe de Mézières and His Age: Piety and Politics in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Kiril Petkov (Lieden: Brill, 2012), pp. 119–44 (p. 119). McKinley, among other Christine scholars, also considers the *seulete* Christine’s ‘authorial signature’ (‘The Subversive “Seulete”’, p. 158).

<sup>32</sup> Walters, ‘The *Vieil Solitaire* and the *Seulete*’, p. 119.



the authoritative position; France is the object that inspires her ‘great pity’ and subsequent writing.<sup>33</sup> She performs the same role but in a different kind of play and so to different effect. If Christine’s writing is an extension of her weeping, her widow’s tears are a means of influencing society. This empowering move strengthens Christine’s *auctoritas* not only in her political works that include crying but also in her private works with tears. Roberta Krueger considers Christine’s focus to be the edification of individuals as opposed to a total reformation of France’s social and political structures, a minority opinion among Christine scholars.<sup>34</sup> This individualized approach aligns with the tears that Christine addresses to individuals in her private and public texts: to the Prince in Ballade 11, to Lady Philosophy in *l’Avision*, to Eustache Morel in *Morel*, to the Duke of Berry in *Lamentacion*. Yet Christine centres her works not only on individuals but also on larger social conditions in France, as the following exploration of her tears in *Morel* and *Lamentacion* will evince. Christine embodies the idea that the ‘microcosm of the individual mirrors the macrocosm of the state’ because she draws on her widow persona and her personal sorrows to validate her judgement of France’s morality.<sup>35</sup> By using tears as a conduit of empathy for her readers and the French people, Christine fashions herself as a moral and political adviser and intercessor.

Christine cries in *Morel* to censure and lament France’s political upheaval in 1404. Two Christine de Pizan scholars bolster this interpretation. Margarete Zimmerman believes Christine is a female political writer, while Louise D’Arcens writes about Christine’s ‘ethico-political’ *auctoritas*.<sup>36</sup> D’Arcens argues that literary *auctoritas*, or influence through alternative means like

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<sup>33</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Lamentation on the Evils That Have Befallen France*, p. 227.

<sup>34</sup> Roberta Krueger, ‘Christine’s Anxious Lessons: Gender, Morality, and the Social Order from the *Enseignemens* to the *Avision*’, in *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, ed. by Marilyn Desmond (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 16–40 (p. 18).

<sup>35</sup> Rosalind Brown-Grant, ‘The *Avision-Christine*: a female exemplar for the princely reader’, in *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading Beyond Gender*, ed. by Rosalind Brown-Grant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 89–127 (p. 115).

<sup>36</sup> Margarete Zimmerman, ‘Vox Femina, Vox Politica: The *Lamentacion sur les maux de la France*’, in *Politics, Gender, and Genre*, ed. by Brabant, pp. 113–27; Louise D’Arcens, “‘Petit Estat Vesval’: Christine de Pizan’s

literature, was a genuine avenue of political authority in the Middle Ages, albeit more of an ideological than a formal or administrative power.<sup>37</sup> As a woman, and thus restricted from formal bureaucratic power, Christine capitalizes on writing as a mode of communicating political ideals. ‘Sad and in tears,’ she shares her judgement that the world is ‘badly governed’ in her letter to Morel.<sup>38</sup> She writes to the famous French poet and diplomat, also known as Eustache Deschamps (1346–1406/7), to present her ideas on a wider public scale and associate herself with a respected intellectual. Within this epistolary frame, she highlights the link she has witnessed between France’s glorious past and grim present, which establishes her as a ‘memory-keeper’.<sup>39</sup> A common aspect of ritual lament remarks on the disparities between the past when the object of mourning lived and the present state of its demise.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, Christine’s ritual lament portrays France’s morality as a thing once alive, but now dead and mourned. In addition to the ill treatment of widows to which she alludes in *Morel*, she bemoans the state of taxes, lying diplomats, the king’s madness, and many other crises across her works. By noting France’s failing government, she presents herself as France’s mourner and political conscience. She shifts her authority as a widow into the realm of political moralist.

The water imagery present in the private work *l’Advison* (1405) develops further in another of Christine’s public texts, *Lamentacion* (1410), as a conduit of emotion in her writing. As Christine considers France’s plight, tears ‘obscure [her] vision and run like a fountain over

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Grieving Body Politic’, in *Healing the Body Politic: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan*, ed. by Karen Green and C. J. Mews (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 201–26 (p. 203).

<sup>37</sup> D’Arcens, “‘Petit Estat Vesval’”, pp. 202–03.

<sup>38</sup> Christine de Pizan, *A Letter to Eustache Morel*, in *Selected Writings*, trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, pp. 109–11 (p. 111).

<sup>39</sup> Walters, ‘Christine de Pizan, France’s Memorialist’, p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> Nancy A. Jones, ‘By Woman’s Tears Redeemed: Female Lament in St Augustine’s *Confessions* and the Correspondence of Abelard and Heloise’, in *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts: The Latin Tradition*, ed. by Barbara K. Gold, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp. 15–39 (p. 28).

[her] face'.<sup>41</sup> She cries so hard that the 'most bitter and endless of tears run like a stream onto [her] paper, so that there is no dry place left where [she] could continue to write'.<sup>42</sup> Whereas the lachrymal fluid of *l'Advision* brings authorial inspiration, the tearful streams (*ruisseaux*) in *Lamentacion* threaten her writing.<sup>43</sup> Tears and writing are two performative means by which Christine speaks to her audience. The page becomes an extension of her 'bitter drops' as it absorbs and serves as a vessel for her weeping rivers.<sup>44</sup> Her tears mingle with her words on the page. As Tonja van den Ende describes in her exploration of Luce Irigaray, the body 'does not end at the borders or the skin of an anatomical body. The pen with which I write [...] becomes part of my body image'.<sup>45</sup> Whereas male-authored medieval literature circumscribed women's emotions and excessive grief, Christine's writing holds her tearful emotions in a way that continues and perpetuates her cries.<sup>46</sup> The instruments of her narration receive the bodily products of her emotions. Her body extends into the text. While her tears could endanger Christine's words and her *auctoritas*, they instead drive her to heartfelt laments on France's political situation. The publication of *Lamentacion* proves that Christine channeled her passion into fruitful inspiration. Similar to her production of ballades for noble patrons, she writes *Lamentacion* for those French nobles who found themselves on the brink of civil war in 1410.<sup>47</sup> While she addresses her early works to specific patrons or intellectuals, *Lamentacion* demands a wider public audience. As in *Morel*, she assumes the role of mourner. Her tears contribute to her

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<sup>41</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Lamentation on the Evils That Have Befallen France*, in *Selected Writings*, trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, pp. 224–29 (p. 225).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>43</sup> Christine de Pizan, *La Lamentacion sur les maux de la France*, ed. by Angus J. Kennedy, in *Mélanges: De Langue et Littérature Françaises du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance*, ed. by Université de Haute-Bretagne (Rennes: Institut de Français, 1980), I (1980), pp. 177–85 (p. 181).

<sup>44</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Lamentation on the Evils That Have Befallen France*, p. 225.

<sup>45</sup> Tonja van den Ende, 'In Search of the Body in the Cave: Luce Irigaray's Ethics of Embodiment', in *Belief, Bodies, and Being: Feminist Reflections on Embodiment*, ed. by Deborah Orr and others (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), pp. 141–50 (p. 144).

<sup>46</sup> Heather M. Arden, 'Grief, Widowhood, and Women's Sexuality in Medieval French Literature', in *Upon My Husband's Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe*, ed. by Louise Mirrer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 305–19 (p. 307).

<sup>47</sup> Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), p. 224.

performance as the *seulete* who judges France's morality with her moist gaze. Christine shares this moment of private despair over France to attest to the sincerity of her lament.

Christine faced medieval society's fears of women's tears—from the expectation of women's unbalanced humours to the example of the faithless Widow of Ephesus. She needed to incorporate tears into her public works without presenting herself as a threat. To maintain her authority in the face of prejudice against women's emotions, she portrayed France as a weeping widow like herself. In *Lamentacion*, Christine demands readers' pity as she begins her lamentation on France: 'Whoever possesses any pity should put it to work now'.<sup>48</sup> The plea connects the widow's loss of a protector with the instability of the French state. Indeed, much scholarship notes Christine's identification with France, such as Brown-Grant's '*L'Avision Christine: Autographical Narrative or Mirror for the Prince?*' and Blumenfeld-Kosinski's 'Christine de Pizan and the Political Life in Late Medieval France'. Given the connection between the widow Christine and the widowed France, D'Arcens's view of France as a 'feminized state' in Christine's *L'Epistre de la Prison de Vie Humaine* can translate to Christine's other works, including *Lamentacion*.<sup>49</sup> With *Lamentacion*'s opening 'Alone and apart', *seulette à part*, she brings the despairing widow of her lyrics into her political lament.<sup>50</sup> Just as the widow weeps for her departed husband, so too does France 'cr[y] out to [the Duke of Berry] with tears, sighs, and weeping' on the loss of political stability and protection.<sup>51</sup> Christine's triumph over Fortune's tribulations reinforces for her noble readers that she is a worthy adviser in the face of France's trials.<sup>52</sup> The more amplified Christine's weeping is at the fate of her husband and adopted country, the more powerful her subsequent steadfast resolve and

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<sup>48</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Lamentation on the Evils That Have Befallen France*, p. 225.

<sup>49</sup> D'Arcens, "'Petit Estat Vesval'", p. 220.

<sup>50</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Lamentation on the Evils That Have Befallen France*, p. 225. For Middle French, see Christine de Pizan, *La Lamentation sur les maux de la France*, p. 180.

<sup>51</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Lamentation on the Evils That Have Befallen France*, p. 228.

<sup>52</sup> Walters, 'Christine de Pizan, France's Memorialist', p. 39. Also, Walters, 'The *Vieil Solitaire* and the *Seulette*', p. 129.

composure appear to be. She makes for herself a powerful and complementary ally in the widowed nation of France.

Christine builds on the empowerment of female identification through mourning in her call for unification among the women of France. Christine does not advocate for complete social upheaval, but her weeping does attempt to bring French women together in political action. In *Lamentacion* she writes, ‘Cry therefore, cry, ladies, maidens, and women of the French realm’.<sup>53</sup> For Christine’s women, tears are not a passive activity, but an active move to highlight their political plight.<sup>54</sup> In Ballade 11, *l’Advision*, and *Morel*, Christine’s invocations call witnesses to establish empathy. Her invocation to French women goes a step further. She does not merely ask women to emote. She asks them to use their cries, as she does throughout her works, to rouse the populace to empathetic action. She bestows upon them the ‘critical duty of group-formation’.<sup>55</sup> Considering the role of women’s tears in autobiographical conversion narratives of the period, Christine’s communal female lament implies an attempt to convert France to peace, especially given her movement for peace in *Livre de la Paix* (1412–1414).<sup>56</sup> In this appeal to unity, women’s tears are at the centre of change, just as Christine’s comparison to the widowed nation of France bolsters the *auctoritas* of her *seulete* persona. Christine’s tears, which flow between her, her audience, and her addressees, try to join the state in a bond of mutual sympathy and, ultimately, action.

Christine’s tears show that she understood that the categories of public and private are fluid, just as interpretations of her weeping are changeable. She manipulates private and public spaces to her advantage: the private performance of the widow’s grief in the lyrics is put on public display through publication and dedication; her private court appeals become examples

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<sup>53</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Lamentation on the Evils That Have Befallen France*, p. 226.

<sup>54</sup> McKinley, ‘The Subversive “Seulette”’, p. 161.

<sup>55</sup> Helen Solterer, ‘Flaming Words: Free Speech, Fiction, and the *Querelle des Femmes*’, *Romantic Review*, 86 (1995), 355–78 (p. 374).

<sup>56</sup> Jones, ‘By Woman’s Tears Redeemed’, p. 17.

for the public reform of widow's treatment; the public dilemma of governing France is a matter for a widow's private pain. Having built an authorial identity on the intersection of private and public, Christine manages her platform to evoke empathy. Although written across nearly twenty years and to a range of audiences, *Cent balades*, *Rondeaux*, *Le Livre de l'Advison Cristine*, *Une epistre a Eustace Morel*, and *La Lamentacion sur les maux de la France* present a woman in charge of her own image and voice.<sup>57</sup>

This article has not directly engaged with recent and current debates on whether Christine was socially progressive or conservative or whether feminism is an appropriate term to use in relation to her politics. Beatrice Gottlieb argues that feminism is an anachronistic idea to measure against medieval writers.<sup>58</sup> To reduce or constrain Christine's writings to a twentieth or twenty-first-century label risks losing the nuance and power of her work, although feminism does offer a lens through which scholars can approach Christine to produce new and engaging scholarship. An exploration of Christine's tears blurs the binaries of progressive and conservative, proto-feminist and antifeminist. Fluidity, a characteristic of her works, also concerns many contemporary feminist thinkers. While Christine's weeping as a widow for her husband and France falls into socially sanctioned expectations of women's tears, the construction of her authority as widowed political moralist allows her to volley a woman's voice into the chaotic chorus of male intellectuals. She uses the platform she builds for herself as the *seulete* to

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<sup>57</sup> Christine was in charge of her public image in a very literal sense, as she was involved in the production of the works and illustrations that accompanied her texts. Many of the illustrations in the British Library manuscript copy feature her (London, British Library, Harley MS 4431). The digitized manuscript may be accessed at <[http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley\\_MS\\_4431](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_4431)>. Christine's involvement in the copying and illustration of manuscripts has become a popular topic of scholarship. See, for example, Charlotte E. Cooper's 'Ambiguous Author Portraits in Christine de Pizan's Compilation Manuscript, British Library, Harley MS 4431' in *Performing Medieval Text* (2017); James Laidlaw's 'Christine de Pizan: The Making of the Queen's Manuscript (London, British Library, Harley 4431)' in *Patrons, Authors and Workshops: Books and Book Production in Paris Around 1400* (2006); or Christine Reno's 'Autobiography and Authorship in Christine's Manuscripts', *Romance Languages Annual* (1997).

<sup>58</sup> Beatrice Gottlieb, 'The Problem of Feminism in the Fifteenth Century', in *Women of the Medieval World: Essays in Honor of John H. Mundy*, ed. by Julius Kirshner and Suzanne F. Wemple (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 337–64.

push social and political agendas. The fact of her publication and divulgence of personal, passionate grief speaks to a level of self-confidence that belies any dismissal of her *seulete* persona as the internalization of paternalistic notions of women's defects. Perhaps we should take Christine at her word: she was a woman '[a]lone and apart', *seulette à part*.<sup>59</sup> Alone among her authorial peers and apart from binary distinctions, her singularity resists classification and invites sympathetic identification.

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<sup>59</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Lamentation on the Evils That Have Befallen France*, p. 225. For Middle French, see Christine de Pizan, *La Lamentacion sur les maux de la France*, p. 180.

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## First Response

As this article carefully demonstrates, Christine de Pizan's self-construction as tearful mourner develops the tropes of private grief into more public forms of commentary. The 'publication' of her works is invoked from time to time in the discussion, and it would be interesting to explore this further in relation to the notion of 'private' and 'public' voices. Were the works of more personal mourning conceived for circulation in forms any different from those expressing more public lamentation about the state of France?

Traditional misogynistic constructions of women's weeping are mentioned here, in the context of a lightly sketched frame of reference to feminist readings of Christine's work. The lonely weeping voice of the widow invites comparison to the voices of grieving lovers in male-voiced complaints (the kinds of lyrics whose constructions of subjectivity are briefly invoked in the discussion here). Are there circumstances in which these open themselves to the same private/public turn that the article maps in Christine's writings? The poems of Charles d'Orleans come to mind as a potentially interesting test case.

The article brings to bear on Christine's writings the kinds of insights refined in recent work on the history of emotions, without however making any specific reference to this approach/field of study. I would be interested to learn more about the author's views of this critical framework, and about how work on Christine's tears might or might not sit within it.