

The Movement from Verse to Prose in the Allegories of Christine de Pizan

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Christine de Pizan is remarkable in many ways, not least as an author who produced an extraordinarily large volume of writing in a comparatively short period. Among these works are several allegories, some in verse and some in prose. Readers have tended to interpret Christine's movement from verse to prose allegory as simply a choice motivated by convenience or, somewhat more subtly, as an early manifestation of the complex and ornate prose style that would become ubiquitous in the later fifteenth century. This chapter argues that Christine's movement from verse to prose can fruitfully be understood in two complementary ways. First, it participates in an effort to integrate some of the rational and argumentative structures found in late-fourteenth-century French translations of philosophical and scientific writings within the originally poetic forms of medieval allegory; and, second, it is in step with Christine's definition of 'poesie' as a form of allegorical language that can be expressed through prose as readily as through verse. I have argued elsewhere that Christine's allegory exhibits features that depart from earlier allegorical models, especially with regard to the use of personification.¹ Her novel approach to allegory is perhaps nowhere so fully expressed, however, as with her redefinition of the mode as less a genre than a manner of expression. Christine innovatively constructs a notion of 'poesie' that establishes a range of texts – mythographic, historical, even scientific – as the object of allegorical exposition and as the source of hidden knowledge whose acquisition unites the interpretive community of perceptive readers.

Christine's first allegory, the *Epistre Othea*, combines verse and prose. This combination differs, however, from the prosimetrum form familiar from a number of allegories influential during the Middle Ages, including Boethius's *De consolatione Philosophiae* and Alain de Lille's *De planctu Naturae*: unlike these texts, in which the regular alternation of prose and

verse reflects the dialogic interaction of narrator and personified interlocutor, the *Epistre Othea* features a four-part structure in which a short piece of verse is surrounded by an emblematic illustration and two distinct layers of prose commentary. This allegory differs substantially in form from Christine's subsequent works. The later works feature a linear narrative, in which Christine makes a journey or participates in the construction of a city, while the *Epistre Othea* is static and progress occurs only didactically, in the education of the reader. The work is organized according to formal and numerical principles, each chapter comprising three parts (or four, if we include the illustration),² and the work as a whole organized into one hundred chapters plus a prologue. Additional thematic groupings, including the seven virtues and vices, lists of deities, and so on, contribute to the rigidity of the numerical forms that organize the work.

It has been suggested that the page layout of the *Epistre Othea*, with the verse *texte* at the center and the glosses arranged about it, is meant to encourage a 'contemplative' reading of the work.³ Without necessarily defining the *Epistre Othea* as a devotional work, we doubtless see here a reading practice encouraged by the manuscript layout, one that can be sharply distinguished from the very different organizing principles of Christine's later allegories. The *Epistre Othea* encourages the reader to consume it in two ways: linearly, through sequential reading that takes place over a span of time; and reflectively, as patterns within individual chapters and within the work as a whole emerge like visible forms in the mind of the thoughtful reader.

The 'contemplative' form of the *Epistre Othea*, with its designation of enigmatic verse as the oracular heart of the allegory, and expounded through prose commentary, gives way in Christine's later allegories to the more conventional allegorical form of the epic journey. In the *Chemin de longue estude* and the *Mutacion de Fortune*, the epic journey is recounted in poetic verse, whether expressed in terms of the narrator's climbing the ladder of intellectual ascent, in the *Chemin*, or in the form of the fateful voyage undertaken by the narrator in the first book of the *Mutacion de Fortune*. Subsequently, in the *Cité des dames* and the *Advision Cristine*, however, Christine moves from poetry to prose. This transition – sometimes dismissed merely as conformity to the fifteenth-century taste for prose, or simply as a time-saving measure – is worthy of closer attention, especially in the context of the *Epistre Othea*'s clear assignation of different functions to poetry on the one hand, and prose on the other. In the *Epistre Othea*, verse is appropriate

² Although the earliest manuscript of the *Epistre Othea* (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 848) has just four illustrations, see Sandra Hindman's study of the lavishly illustrated presentation manuscript in *Christine de Pizan's 'Epistre Othéa': Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI* (Toronto, 1986).

³ Mary Ann Ignatius, 'Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Othea*: An Experiment in Literary Form', *Mediaevalia et Humanistica*, n.s. 9 (1979), 127–42.

¹ Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* (Toronto, 2004), pp. 236–42.

to the oracular, enigmatic pronouncements of the goddess to the young knight Hector; conversely, the learned prose expositions of *glose* and *alegorie* provide much-needed commentary, designed to aid the youthful ruler in his effort to interpret rightly the directives of the goddess. *Glose* draws upon philosophical authorities for its interpretive force, while *alegorie* draws upon scripture and the Fathers of the Church. A strong sense of sequence is thus generated in the mind of the reader, where enigmatic verse comes first, followed by philosophical and, ultimately, theological exposition. Finally, the miniature conveys visually the meaning of the sibylline verse, dispensing entirely with the obscuring veil of language.

In a study of Christine's use of verse and prose, Earl Jeffrey Richards notes that '[t]he modern effort to see prose as the opposite of verse posits an antithesis that did not exist in medieval rhetoric.' He goes too far, however, in suggesting that the combination of prose and verse on the manuscript page of the *Epistre Othea* 'clearly shows [...] that Christine viewed prose and verse as complementary in the most fundamental sense', even 'interchangeable'.⁴ On the contrary, while the manuscript layout of the *Epistre Othea* demonstrates a 'complementary' relationship of verse and prose, it also clearly positions the verse as *prior*, that is, as oracular pronouncement in need of allegorical exposition, first through the philosophical interpretation of the *glose*, second through the theological interpretation of the *alegorie*.⁵ Through figurative interpretation, the reader is led to a higher level of understanding. As Christine puts it, in the prologue to the first chapter of the *Epistre Othea* where she explains why the illustrations of the gods are obscured by clouds, 'deÿté est chose espirituelle et eslevee de terre [divinity is a spiritual thing, lifted above the earth]'.⁶ To perceive clearly the meaning of the goddess's words, to look up at what is hidden within the clouds, requires the aid of the allegorical gloss.

Ascent is conveyed very differently in the *Chemin de longue estude*, where the narrator describes her figurative journey upward into the heavens under the tutelage of the Sibyl. In this work, the concatenation of the verse (emphasized, in certain passages, by the rhyme scheme) mimics the ascent enabled

⁴ Earl Jeffrey Richards, 'Water without Salt and Ballades without Feeling, or Reintroducing History into the Text: Prose and Verse in the Works of Christine de Pizan', in *Christine de Pizan and Medieval French Lyric*, ed. Earl Jeffrey Richards (Gainesville, 1998), pp. 206–29, p. 210, p. 217.

⁵ Compare the intelligent reading of Rosalind Brown-Grant, who points out that the *Epistre Othea* 'works precisely on the basis of a hierarchical progression from the pictorial to the spiritual, where the Latin 'autorité' quoted at the end of the chapter should be read as the ultimate point of reference to which the reader should aspire'. See 'Illumination as Reception: Jean Miélot's Reworking of the *Epistre Othea*', in *The City of Scholars: New Approaches to Christine de Pizan*, ed. Margarete Zimmermann and Dina De Rentii (Berlin, 1994), pp. 260–72, p. 270.

⁶ Christine de Pizan, *Epistre Othea*, ed. Gabriella Parussa (Geneva, 1999), p. 197.

by the ladder that Christine climbs through the spheres. Subsequently, in the *Mutacion de Fortune*, Christine continues to use verse, lapsing into prose only once, in her well-known account of Jewish history. In the *Cité des dames*, however, Christine moves into prose allegory for the first time, a form she maintains in her last allegory, the *Advison Cristine*. In both of these later works, architectural allegory provides a structuring principle that lends form to the allegorical narrative, governing the interpretive process in a way that is similar to – though not identical with – the four-fold structure of each chapter of the *Epistre Othea*, thereby enabling a form of 'contemplative' reading similar to the one suggested by the manuscript layout of her first allegory.

It is significant that it is only with the flowering of her prose allegories that Christine embarks upon an explicit definition of the nature of allegorical language. Peculiarly, Christine reserves the term 'alegorie' to refer specifically to allegorical exposition, what we would call 'allegoresis', and refers to allegorical language as 'poesie'. Significantly, the term 'poesie' designates a species of language, not a genre, and denotes a mode of expression found in a surprisingly wide range of works. 'Poesie', for Christine, does not correspond to our modern term 'poetry', for it can be as readily expounded through the medium of prose as of verse. Christine explicates the meaning of 'poesie' in several locations, including her biography of Charles V and the *Advison Cristine*. In the third and last part of her biography of the late king, Christine includes a digression 'de l'entendement et des sciences [concerning understanding and ways of knowing]'. The digression begins with an account of the senses and ends with a description of 'poesie', which, she says, uses figurative language to convey meanings that 'clerement ne se pevent enseigner [cannot be expressed clearly]'.⁷

Although Christine refers to this kind of language as 'poesie', her description of it closely resembles typical medieval characterizations of allegory. She writes that 'poesie' is generally taken to be any 'narracion ou introduction apparaument signifiant un senz, et occultement en segnefie un aultre ou plusieurs [narration or introduction openly signifying one sense, and covertly signifying another or many others]'. More properly, Christine continues, 'poesie' is a mode 'dont la fin est verité, et le proces doctrine revestue en paroles d'ornemens delictables et par propres couleurs, lesquelz revestemens soient d'estranges guises au propos dont on veult (3.68) [whose end is truth, and the process of which is teaching, clothed in words of delightful ornament and in the appropriate colors of rhetoric; with these clothes being of unusual styles in keeping with the purpose that one desires]'. In this definition, Christine uses several terms that are conventional to descriptions of allegory: the text signifies one thing openly, another covertly; it may have several levels of meaning; its purpose is to convey truth; and it clothes meaning

⁷ *Le Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*, ed. Suzanne Solente, 2 vols (Paris, 1936/1940), section 3.68. Translations of this work are mine.

with pleasant words, an allusion to the *integument* which is literally a veil or covering. Finally, among writers of 'poesie' Christine lists several allegorists, including Boethius, Martianus Capella, and Alain de Lille.

After offering this description of 'poesie', however, Christine abruptly withdraws from this mode of writing, stating 'pour cause que a maint pourroit le lengage sembler estrange, qui apris ne l'ont, et par consequent tourner a anui, retournerons a nostre premier objet (3.69) [because, to the many who have not learned it, this language may seem strange, and consequently bore them, let us return to our first objective]' – in other words, to the biography's narrative thread, currently at the account of Charles's death. Overtly, then, Christine indicates that a political biography is not the place for language that veils its meaning in order to restrict interpretation to a few. Covertly, however, she signals that, for those few who do understand such 'strange language', it may be possible to find a veiled significance in the biography of the former king. Put another way, the historical narrative of Charles's life is the ground for figurative explication, in the same way that sacred histories of the Bible are subject to exegesis, or the historical narratives evoked in Dante's *Commedia* are unfolded within the hermeneutics of the 'allegory of theologians'. The fact that Christine identifies this form of figurative language as 'poesie' suggests, moreover, that 'poesie' can refer to veiled language that does not necessarily have a fiction as its literal level. On the contrary, we can read historical narrative – such as the life of Charles V – as 'poesie' just as we can more conventionally read the *narratio fabulosa*, or 'fabulous narrative'.⁸

In her preface to Book One of the *Advison Cristine*, we find another exposition of the allegorical function of 'poesie'. Christine says that she, following the 'style of the poets', writes 'under the figure of metaphor or veiled speech':

[S]ouventesfois soubz figure de methaphore, c'est a dire de parole couverte, sont muciees maintes secretes sciences et pures veritez. Et en telle parole dicte par poisie puet avoir mains entendemens, et lors est la poisie belle et subtile quant elle puet servir a plusieurs ententes et que on la puet prendre a divers propos.⁹

[[O]ften, under the figure of metaphor or veiled speech, are hidden much secret knowledge and many pure truths. What is put in poetic language can have several meanings, and poetry becomes beautiful and subtle when it can be understood in different ways.]

⁸ For a fuller exposition of the polysemous allegory of the 'end' of Charles V in Christine's biography of the French ruler, see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, 'Death as Metamorphosis in the Devotional Allegory of Christine de Pizan', forthcoming.

⁹ Quotations are taken from the edition and translation of Christine Reno, 'The Preface to the *Advison Cristine* in ex-Phillipps 128', in *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, ed. Earl Jeffrey Richards (Athens and London, 1992), pp. 207–27, pp. 208–9.

In this passage, 'poetic language' – 'parole dicte par poisie' – is polysemous, open to interpretation on a number of figurative levels, each of which is intellectually fertile and regenerative. 'Poesie' thus becomes, for Christine, a way to describe both allegory and myth, that is, all texts that can be subjected to allegorical interpretation. This conflation of allegory and myth as manifestations of 'poesie' is even more explicit in Christine's allusion to the 'poetic manner of speaking' in the *glose* to the first chapter of the *Epistre Othea*. There, she states that 'a ceste premiere [i.e., Prudence] avons donné nom et pris maniere de parler aucunement poetique et acordant a la vraye histoire [...] et a nostre propos prendrons aucunes auctoritez des ancians philosophes [to this first [virtue of Prudence] we have given a name and taken up a manner of speaking which is somewhat poetic and in keeping with the true history [...] and to aid this purpose we will take up some authorities among the ancient philosophers].'¹⁰ Mythography, understood euhemeristically as being derived from actual historical events and personages, thus becomes material to be processed through the interpretive machine of allegory.¹¹ Moreover, as we saw in the account of 'poesie' in the biography of Charles V, historical narrative also can be allegorically expounded – that is, read as 'poesie'.

In view of the accommodation of allegory, myth and even history under the capacious definition of 'poesie' it comes as no surprise that, in the *Advison Cristine*, the term is further extended to comprise the *integumenta* of the philosophers. In book two of Christine's last allegory, in which the narrator interacts with the great shadow of the personification 'Opinion', the earliest poets' descriptions of natural phenomena are explicated in terms of allegory:

Ces .III. pouetes dis [...] disoient que Ocean, c'est a dire la mer ou l'abisme ou a tres grant inundacion d'yaues, et Thetis, qu'ilz disoient la deesse d'umeur, sont parens de generacion. Et par ce, dist il, comme par singuliere similitude ilz donnoient entendre que eaue fust le principe de la generacion des choses. Encore ceste sentence par autre fabuleuse narracion ilz covroient, disant que le sacrement et le serment des dieux estoit par l'eaue qu'ilz appellent Stix, laquelle est ung fleuve d'enfer.¹²

[These three said poets [Orpheus, Musaeus, and Linus] [...] said that the Ocean [*sc.* Oceanus], or the sea or the abyss wherein exists a great flood

¹⁰ *Epistre Othea*, ed. Parussa, p. 200.

¹¹ On mythography and allegory in Christine, see Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Reading Myth: Classical Mythology and its Interpretations in Medieval French Literature* (Stanford, 1997).

¹² *Le Livre de l'Advison Cristine*, 2.7. Quotations are taken from *Le Livre de l'Advison Cristine*, ed. Christine Reno and Liliane Dulac (Paris, 2001), and translations from *The Vision of Christine de Pizan*, trans. Glenda McLeod and Charity Cannon Willard (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 63–4 and p. 64 respectively. In this instance I have altered the translation slightly to render the text more literally.

of waters, and Thetis, whom they called the goddess of liquids, were the parents of generation. By this, he said, as by a particular metaphor, they made it understood that water was the principle for generation for things. Moreover, this meaning they hid by another fabulous story, saying that the gods' sacrament or oath was by the water that they called the Styx, which is the river of hell.]

In one respect, this passage is simply a manifestation of the 'manner of fictions' characteristic of 'poets', who conventionally deploy 'fabuleuse narracion' (the glossator's *narratio fabulosa*). The fact that their topic, however, is the 'things of nature' opens the way for a wider poetic understanding of natural philosophy. Further on in the same chapter, Christine describes how the philosophers of ancient times, like the poets, also expressed themselves through integumental language, that is, through the allegorical veil of 'poesie':

Et puet estre ad ce ilz se mouvoient cuidans les vieux pouetes acorder avec eulx, ou puet estre pour les dis des philosophes nomans en plusieurs lieux les yaues sur le ciel. Toutesfois tant yceulx philosophes que aussi les pouetes, en tant comme a bon sens se puissent ramener au moins le plus des choses, en envelopement et soubz ombre parlerent: non les nouveaulx mais iceulx anciens, en tant que des sciences les portes vous ouvrissent, vous les devez excuser, amer et supporter. (*Advision* 2.7, p. 64)

[And perhaps they were moved to this [i.e., to the belief that the first sphere is of water] believing that the ancient poets agreed with them or perhaps because the books of the philosophers mention in several places that the waters are above the heavens. Yet these philosophers as much as these poets, inasmuch as they might have been led by good sense to at least most of these things, spoke covertly and obscurely: not the new ones but these ancient ones, inasmuch as they opened the gates of knowledge for you, you must excuse, love and support. (*Vision*, p. 64)]

Here, Christine identifies philosophical discourse as being on a plane with poetic discourse, both of which communicate 'covertly and obscurely'. Such description of how philosophy should rightly be interpreted – that is, allegorically – is not common in early-fifteenth-century discourse. It is extremely common, however, in the twelfth-century discourse of neoplatonizing philosophers such as William of Conches, who in his glosses on Plato's *Timaeus* identifies the 'anima mundi', or world soul, as itself an *integument*, an allegorical veil deployed by the philosopher to refer to matters that are so high and lofty that – to use Christine's words in her biography of Charles V – they 'clerement ne se pevent enseigner (3.68) [cannot be expressed clearly]'.¹³

Limitations of space prevent me from describing in detail how twelfth-century neoplatonizing philosophers deployed the notion of *integument* in order to describe how one might allegorically interpret not only the fables

and myths of the ancient poets, but also the natural philosophy of Plato and his followers.¹³ It is worth briefly pointing out, however, the extent to which many of the characteristic phrases that appear within Christine's definitions of 'poesie' – the 'fabuleuse narracion', the dichotomy of light and darkness, 'coverte' and 'ouverte' meaning – overlap significantly with definitions common in twelfth-century philosophical commentaries. There must certainly be intermediary sources for these discussions, which might profitably be sought in Nicholas Trevet's unpublished commentary on Boethius, which draws extensively on the twelfth-century commentary of William of Conches.¹⁴ William's commentary includes several passages that correspond quite closely to certain sections of Christine's account in the second book of the *Advision Cristine* of how philosophy is coterminous with 'poesie', passages which are not drawn from the main source for this section, Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

Based on this brief account, it is clear that Christine's broad definition of 'poesie' as a figurative mode of discourse that accommodates not just 'fabulous narration' and 'fiction' but also myth, history, and natural philosophy, corresponds significantly to the equally capacious definitions of *integument* produced in the late twelfth century. To note this correspondence is emphatically not to reduce Christine's use of allegory to twelfth-century forms of the mode. On the contrary, Christine's integration of 'poesie' with philosophical inquiry is very much in keeping with late medieval tendencies to bring together allegory and philosophical enquiry which we can see manifested, for example, in the work of Nicole Oresme.¹⁵ As Claire Sherman has shown in her study of the manuscripts of Oresme's translations of, and commentaries on, Aristotle, Oresme lavishly deployed not just personification but also more substantial allegorical forms, such as what Sherman identifies as 'decision allegories', in order to facilitate his readers' efforts to understand and memorize salient details of the Aristotelian text.¹⁶ Oresme's integration of allegorical modes into philosophical discourse might be seen

¹³ On twelfth-century uses of *integumentum*, see Edouard Jeuneau, 'L'Usage de la notion d'*integumentum* à travers les gloses de Guillaume de Conches', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*, 24 (1957), 35–100. On its thirteenth-century vernacular uses, see Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil*, pp. 57–63.

¹⁴ Trevet's commentary remains unedited, except for a typescript transcription by Edmund T. Silk. On Trevet's work, see Margaret T. Gibson, *Boethius, His Life, Thought and Influence* (Oxford, 1981) and Maarten J. F. M. Hoenen and Lodi Nauta, *Boethius in the Middle Ages: Latin and Vernacular Traditions of the Consolatio Philosophiae* (Leiden, 1997).

¹⁵ On Christine's knowledge of Oresme's works, see Sylvie Lefèvre, 'Christine de Pizan et l'Aristote Oresmien', in *Au champ des escriptures: IIIe Colloque international sur Christine de Pizan*, ed. Eric Hicks (Paris, 2000), pp. 231–43.

¹⁶ See 'Personifications and Allegories as Cognitive and Mnemonic Subject Guides' in Claire Richter Sherman, *Imaging Aristotle: Verbal and Visual Representation in Fourteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 35–174.

s a counterpart of Christine's own definition of 'poesie' as comprising not only fictional forms of language, but also scientific and philosophical ones.¹⁷ More profoundly, we might wish to assess the extent to which Christine's exploration of Aristotelian metaphysics in the *Advisio Cristine* informs the overall allegorical structure of the work. Christine's account of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, adapted (with substantial additions) from Aquinas's commentary, appears in the second part of the *Advisio*, and has been called the first rendition of the *Metaphysics* to appear in the vernacular.¹⁸ Christine's presentation of the *Metaphysics* contributes to her assimilation of philosophical inquiry within the definition of 'poesie', leading to her use of the dichotomy of form and matter (highlighted in her précis of the *Metaphysics*) as the foundation of the philosophical allegory of the *Advisio Cristine*.

Each of the three books of the *Advisio* features a personification whose identity is constructed in terms of the dichotomy of form and matter. In book one, the opening scene features a great shadowy female, identifiable as Nature, who feeds a shadow in the form of a man, named Chaos. By replacing the standard feminine personification of matter, Silva, with an innovative masculine personification, Chaos, Christine implies that matter is (or can be) masculine. If matter can be either masculine (Chaos) or feminine (Silva), then form too presumably can be either masculine or feminine. This variability of gender assignation flies in the face of the conventional association of form and matter in popular assimilations of Aristotelian theory, epitomized in the philosopher's description of conception in terms of the stamp of the masculine form on the passive matter provided by the female. The popular spurious etymology of 'mater, id est, materia' only lent force to this gendered view of the relationship of form and matter.¹⁹

The second book of the *Advisio*, comprising a discussion between the narrator and Opinion, also centers on the relationship of form and matter. This preoccupation appears throughout Opinion's learned discourse, most importantly perhaps in her account of Aristotle's view of the primacy of

¹⁷ On scientific works using prose and verse, see Bernard Ribémont, 'Vers et prose dans l'écriture à caractère scientifique médiévale: L'exemple de l'encyclopédisme', in *Actes du XXe Congrès International de Linguistique et Philologie Romanes*, ed. G. Hilty (Tübingen, 1993), vol. 5, section 8 ('L'art narratif aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles'), pp. 341–52.

¹⁸ On Christine's use of Aquinas, see Liliane Dulac and Christine Reno, 'L'humanisme vers 1400: essai d'exploration à partir d'un cas marginal: Christine de Pizan, traductrice de Thomas d'Aquin', in *Pratiques de la culture écrite en France au XV^e siècle*, ed. Monique Ornato and Nicole Pons (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1995), pp. 161–78.

¹⁹ On the feminine nature of matter, see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, 'Nature's Forge Recast in the *Roman de Silence*', in *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 39–46, esp. pp. 39 and 43. On the feminine nature of personified matter ('Silva') in medieval neoplatonism, see Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2003), pp. 55–64.

matter. Opinion cites Aristotle's statement that 'aurebours il appert que la terre soit tres proprement principe (2.12, p. 73) [however much it seems to go against the grain, the earth must be very appropriately the principle (p. 72)].' By making Aristotle the authority for Opinion's subsequent assertion that the earth is the origin of all things, characterized by 'souveraine simplicité [et] souveraine perfection (2.12, p. 74) [absolute simplicity [and] absolute perfection (p. 73)]', Christine continues to call into question the negative effect of the conventional association of woman with matter. The relationship of form and matter is central to book two of the *Advisio* on the level not just of the philosophical discourse but also in the poetic form of personification, as Opinion is characterized as being made up of pure form, yet form that can be broken down into constituent parts. Opinion is 'une grant ombre femmine sans corps [a great feminine shadow without body]' (2.1), who soon reveals herself to be made up of innumerable smaller shadows, each of a different color and form: 'une grant tourbe en y avoit de toutes blanches, une autre de toutes vermeilles, les autres yndes, autres de couleur de feu, autres d'eaue, et ainsi de toutes les couleurs (2.1, pp. 51–2) [There was one mass of all the white, others of all the reds, others blue, others the color of fire, others of water, and so on with all the colors (p. 53)].' By describing the colors that constitute Opinion as being like fire or like water, Christine suggests that, in Opinion, compounded matter is broken down into its elements. The imposition of form upon matter highlighted in the opening passage of the *Advisio* is reversed in the opening of the second book, as synthesis is countered by dissolution.

In the third book, the varied colors of Opinion are replaced by the brilliant white light of Philosophy, who appears as 'une telle tres luisant espere qui toute la chambre emplissoit de tres grant resplendeur (3.1, p. 93) [a sphere shining so brightly that filled the whole room with great light (p. 89)].'²⁰ This represents a third stage in a progression of synthesis and dissolution that structures the allegory: the elements compounded within the body of Chaos are dissociated in the fragmented body of Opinion, whose multi-hued parts are subsequently reintegrated in the pure light of Philosophy. This progression also moves from matter (the body of Chaos) to form (the body of Philosophy), and has at its center a sophisticated commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* focusing precisely on the relationship of matter and form. I would therefore argue that, in the *Advisio Cristine*, we find a novel mode of structuring allegorical interpretation, one which represents a new twist on earlier efforts to perform the same task, such as the distinctive page layout of the *Epistre Othea* and the architectural allegory of the *Mutacion de Fortune* and the

²⁰ On the relationship of Opinion and Philosophy in *Advisio*, see Benjamin Semple, 'The Critique of Knowledge as Power: The Limits of Philosophy and Theology in Christine de Pizan', in *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, ed. Marilynn Desmond (Minneapolis and London, 1998), pp. 108–27.

Cité des dames. While the *Advison Cristine* also includes architectural allegory, in the form of the linked university and cloister of the third book, it is unique in drawing upon philosophy (specifically, Aristotelian metaphysics) to provide a structuring principle that guides the act of allegorical reading. Sarah Kay has recently argued, in her brilliant analysis of the *Chemin de longue estude*, that several of Christine's works exhibit a concern with the nature of form as defined in the Aristotelian tradition and question the extent to which general knowledge can be abstracted from the particular.²¹ In the *Advison Cristine*, however, the dichotomy of form and matter is not merely the object of philosophical inquiry, but the narrative structuring principle itself. This dichotomy provides a continuum along which metaphorical tropes and figures are arranged to facilitate the reader's linear progression and intellectual ascent: here, poetic knowledge *is* philosophical knowledge.

In the last lines of the *Advison*, Christine retrospectively provides emblems to facilitate the reader's understanding and memory of the allegory: 'Ainsi me depars de mon advison, laquelle je ay partie si comme en trois differences de trois pierres precieuses en leurs proprietes (3.27, p. 142) [Thus I take leave of my vision, which I have divided as if by the three different properties of three precious stones (p. 134)].' Each book, she writes, can be represented by a precious stone: diamond, cameo, and ruby. The diamond is 'dur et poignant [hard and sharp]', like the swords used by the knights in the current civil strife reviled in the first book by the crowned lady who personifies France. 'Ha!', she exclaims, 'La generacione perverse qui en lieu de dens usent de glaives, non mie pour mordre mais pour tout trenchier (1.21, p. 38) [Oh! Perverse generation that uses swords in the place of teeth, not to bite but to cut in pieces (p. 42)].' Just as the knight in the service of justice epitomizes virtue, so the diamond emits shining light whose 'virtu ... est moult grande [virtue ... is very great]'. When his strength is placed in the service of Avarice, however, who continually hoards wealth, like the diamond set in gold he becomes 'obscur et brun [obscure and brown]', propagating the figurative darkness of an unjust state. Like the diamond, the cameo is characterized by both light and darkness. Unlike the diamond, however, it displays both light and darkness simultaneously, just as human learning – opinion – generates both wisdom and deception. Unlike other stones, the cameo bears an 'emprainte [imprint]', reinforcing the importance of the discussion of form and matter in the second book as well as the importance of this dichotomy as the foundation of all intellectual inquiry. Finally, the ruby emblemizes Philosophy, which refines the understanding the more one contemplates it: 'cler et resplendissant et sans nue obscure, qui a proprieté de tant plus plaie comme plus on le regarde (3.27, p. 142) [clear and shining and without any

obscuring cloud, [and] which has the property of being more pleasing the more one gazes upon it (p. 134)]'.

In the *Cité des dames*, Christine describes the sibyls as 'pierres precieuses' because of their gift of prophecy. Similarly, in the *Advison Cristine*, the precious stones emblemizing the three books highlight the gift of foresight offered in them through the medium of prophecy. The prophecies of the first book concern the future of France, as the crowned lady declares 'O amie chiere, note la prophecie du temps de ma gloire! (1.20, p. 37) [Oh dear friend, take note of the prophecy of the time of my glory! (p. 40)].' Those of the second book concern Christine's own intellectual efforts, as Opinion tells Christine that

ceste lecture sera de plusieurs tesmoignee diversement [...] Maiz, après ta mort, venra le prince plain de valeur et sagesce qui par la relation de tes volumes desirera tes jours avoir esté de son temps et par grant desir souhaidera t'avoir veue. (2.22, pp. 89–90)

[several people will bear witness to this commentary in different ways [...] But after your death, there will come a prince, full of valor and wisdom, who – because of the content of your books – will wish you had lived in his time and will greatly long to have known you. (p. 86)]

The prophecies of the third book concern the fate of the soul, as Philosophy tells what steps one must take in order finally to see God face to face. Philosophy's final command to 'veoir la benoite Trinité ainsi que elle est (3.26, p. 140) [see the blessed Trinity just as it is (p. 131)]'²² is echoed in Christine's final display to the reader, the trinity of precious stones that represent the three books of the *Advison Cristine*, and which she invites the reader to gaze upon. Contemplation of that lesser trinity implicitly leads to the contemplation of the greater.

The metaphor of 'pierres precieuses' used in the *Cité des dames* to describe the sibylline stones upon which the City is founded is reworked in the closing lines of the *Advison*, in the hierarchy of three stones that emblemizes the three books of the allegory. An earlier description of knowledge in the form of precious stones, however, specifically reinforces the conflation of poetic and philosophical knowledge: Opinion pauses in her philosophical discourse, and refers the interested reader to the fuller account to be found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. While most readers will be satisfied with what Opinion has offered thus far, others will need to search more widely in the bountiful treasury of knowledge:

²¹ See *The Place of Thought: The Complexity of One in Late Medieval French Didactic Poetry* (Philadelphia, 2007), pp. 150–76.

²² I have revised McLeod and Willard's translation, reading 'veoir' here as a verb ('to see').

Et ainsi comme en une riche marcerie ou tresor sont avec perles diverses pierres precieuses de plusieurs vertus, couleurs, et pris, lesquelles au goust et plaisirs de divers bargigneurs sont requises, soient ycestes choses ou tresor de ton volume reservees aux hommes scienceux de soubtil entendement, et passent oultre les moins experts aux choses plus legieres et communes. (2.13, pp. 74–5)

[Just as in a rich shop or treasure chest there are with the pearls precious stones of particular virtues, colors, and prices, which at the pleasure and taste of sundry bargaining clients are sought, so these things in the treasure trove of your volume must be reserved for learned men of subtle understanding, and let the less expert proceed to lighter and more commonplace matters. (pp. 71–2)]

These figurative gems are at once the creation of the poetic sensibility of the author and a timeless, unaltered repository of ancient 'vertu', available to the reader who is 'de soubtil entendement'. Through the preservation and production of these 'pierres precieuses', Christine positions herself together with the ancient philosophers and her present (and future) readers as members of a single interpretive community, united by their common recognition of 'vertu' and their ability to see past the veil of 'poesie'.