



Chapter 9

EKPHRASIS AND STASIS IN CHRISTINE DE PIZAN'S *LIVRE DE LA MUTACION DE FORTUNE*

Suzanne Conklin Akbari

Ekphrasis is a rhetorical mode of expression that is found in literature from antiquity to the present, appearing within a wide range of cultural and literary traditions, and most commonly expressed (in the influential formulation of James Heffernan) as “the verbal representation of visual representation.”¹ At the same time, ekphrasis takes significantly different forms in different periods and cultural matrices. Medieval ekphrasis has a number of features that separate it from the use of the trope in other periods: for example, as scholars such as Bruce Holsinger and Sarah Stanbury have shown, ekphrasis takes on a distinctive character when deployed in conjunction with iconoclastic literature, such as heterodox Lollard writing in late medieval England.² Other features of medieval ekphrasis specific

1. James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 3. The wavering tension between word and image is highlighted in W. J. T. Mitchell's three aspects of ekphrasis: “ekphrastic indifference,” which acknowledges the hopelessly impossible gap that separates the verbal and the visual; “ekphrastic hope,” which looks toward the bridging of that gap; and “ekphrastic fear,” which reflects an anxiety that the “verbal could displace or replace the visual” (*Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994], pp. 152–54).

2. On the distinctive features of ekphrasis in iconoclastic literature, see Bruce Holsinger, “Lollard Ekphrasis: Situated Aesthetics and Literary History,” *Journal of*

to the period include its alignment with the genre of allegory. It goes without saying that ekphrasis is commonly found in allegories written during in a wide range of time periods, not just during the Middle Ages; the specific forms of medieval allegory, however, inflect the use of ekphrasis in a number of ways, especially with regard to how the competing claims of word and image relate to the allegorical hierarchy of an alluring integumental surface that conceals a deeper, enigmatic meaning.³

Still other distinctive features can be observed in medieval ekphrasis when it is deployed in historical writing. Dramatic scenes of ekphrasis appear in Latin heroic epics such as the *Alexandreis* of Walter of Châtillon and the *Ylias* of Joseph of Exeter,⁴ romance adaptations of Latin national and imperial histories such as the *Roman de Troie* and the *Roman de Thebes*, and the early fifteenth-century French universal history of Christine de Pizan, which is my focus in this essay. In these texts, as I have argued elsewhere with regard to the *romans antiques*,⁵ ekphrasis serves a specifically temporal function, providing the reader with an apparently static view of history that departs from the linear form of narrative exposition in order to provide a contemplative, synoptic view of the past. In Christine's *Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*, this static ekphrastic moment provides not only insights into time gone by but also a template for self-improvement and spiritual reform. The first section of this essay, "Shaping the Past," describes the overall structure of Christine's universal history and the crucial role of the "sale merveilleuse" or "marvellous chamber" in organizing the narrative depiction of time upon its magnificently illustrated walls. The following section, "The

Medieval and Early Modern Studies 35 (2005): esp. 75–85 [67–90]; Sarah Stanbury, "The Vivacity of Images: St. Katherine, Knighton's Lollards, and the Breaking of Idols," in *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England: Textuality and the Visual Image*, eds. Jeremy Dimmick, James Simpson, and Nicolette Zeeman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 131–50.

3. On ekphrasis in medieval allegory, see Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Mediaeval Books and Their Renaissance Posterity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966); Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 3, 157–58, and 209–10.

4. On the commentary tradition concerning the tomb ekphrasis of Darius in the *Alexandreis*, see David Townsend, *An Epitome of Biblical History: Glosses on Walter of Châtillon's Alexandreis 4.176–274* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2008), pp. 3–14; on the tomb ekphrasis of Teuthras in the *Ylias*, and on the description of Adela's chamber in Baudri's *Carmen 134*, see Christine Ratkowitzsch, *Descriptio Picturae: Die literarische Funktion der Beschreibung von Kunstwerken in der lateinischen Grossdichtung des 12. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1991).

5. On tomb ekphrases in the *Roman de Troie* and the *Roman de Thebes*, see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "Erasing the Body: History and Memory in Medieval Siege Poetry," in *Remembering the Crusades: Myth, Image, and Identity*, eds. Nicholas Paul and Suzanne Yeager (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), esp. pp. 153–55 and 160–61 [146–73].

Consolation of History,” turns to Christine’s integration of Boethian ideas concerning the nature of change not just within her vision of history but also within the ekphrastic epitome itself, as Boethius’s personifications of Philosophy and related virtues are juxtaposed with historical events. Finally, “The Ekphrastic Mirror” describes how Christine de Pizan positions Alexander the Great at a climactic—though anachronistic—moment in the historical narrative in order to provide a point of identification and self-reflective reform for the reader. The essay closes with a brief account of the role of materiality in medieval ekphrasis, especially as seen in historical narratives.

SHAPING THE PAST: THE “SALE MERVEILLEUSE”

Although the *Mutacion de Fortune* is most often read for the strikingly original autobiographical allegory featured in its first book, in which Christine recounts how she was transformed from a woman into a man by the goddess Fortune, the vast majority of the work is made up of a versified universal history adapted largely from the expansive *Histoire ancienne jusqu’à César*, a universal history that grafts French national and imperial history onto the rootstock of Orosius’s early fifth-century *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII* (*Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*). In general terms, then, the *Mutacion de Fortune* confronts the intersection of poetics and history by transposing a universal history mainly in prose into verse; in addition, it deals with the intersection of poetics and history in a highly focused and specific way, as the elaborate “sale merveilleuse” or “marvellous chamber” housed within the Castle of Fortune serves as the point of junction between the allegorical opening books of the *Mutacion de Fortune* and the universal history that dominates the latter books.⁶

In structural terms, the *Mutacion de Fortune* is a fusion of Orosian historiography with a Boethian view of the role of Fortune in the life of the individual, and of Providence in the unfolding of time itself. Historiographical and philosophical models of change are integrated throughout the work, expressed through the figures of Fortune and Providence, which act as guiding principles within the effort to understand the nature of the changes that

6. On the highly visual presentation of history in the *Mutacion de Fortune*, placing it in the context of ancient and medieval scenes of ekphrasis that include Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the *Roman de la Rose*, the *Prose Lancelot*, and Dante’s *Commedia*, see Kevin Brownlee, “The Image of History in Christine de Pizan’s *Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*,” in *Contexts: Style and Values in Medieval Art and Literature*, eds. Daniel Poirion and Nancy Freeman Regalado, Yale French Studies, special issue (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 44–86.

take place both on the level of the individual life and on the level of kingdoms and empires.⁷ Book one is, as noted above, the allegorical autobiography, which integrates Ovidian and Boethian models of change;⁸ books two and three are ekphrastic accounts of the Castle of Fortune, its walls, gates, and pathways, and the inhabitants located in and around the castle. Book four is a transitional book, which will receive extended analysis below. Books five, six, and seven are a sustained exposition of universal history, moving from the empires of Assyria and Babylon to conclude with imperial Rome and rulers of European nations in Christine's own day.

Book four begins with an account of philosophy, the liberal arts, and the sciences, and then moves to a highly detailed ekphrastic account of the creation of the world and the very earliest stages of biblical history. As book four progresses, ekphrasis gradually gives way to historiography in a repetitive evocation of the past that emphasizes the repeated dispersal of peoples in the world. Through the integration of universal history and allegory, mediated by the poetic mode of ekphrasis, Christine unifies past, present, and future into a single moment, where individual virtue enables the subject—whether the author or the reader—to study the written records of the past, to engage in self-examination, and consequently to live a life of learning and rectitude. The autobiographical allegory of book one enacts the process of self-examination from the perspective of the narrator, positioning her as an authoritative figure whose own “mutacion” enables her to recount the “grandes mutacions” (l. 1460) of history. The counterpart of this authorial self-examination appears in the seventh, final book of the *Mutacion de Fortune*, which disrupts the conventional order of imperial succession by displacing the story of Alexander the Great's conquests from its usual place (in Orosian chronicles, just after the rule of Babylon), and then using the figure of Alexander as a model for rule—both the rule of others and the proper rule of one's own self. The reader is encouraged to read the figure of Alexander—and, by extension, all history—as a mirror reflecting the self. As Christine puts it in the closing passages of her Alexander narrative, “Mire toy, mire en ceste istoire” (l. 23274) [Look at yourself, look within this history].

7. On the personification of Fortune in the *Mutacion de Fortune*, see Catherine Attwood, *Fortune la contrefaite: Lenvers de l'écriture médiévale* (Paris: Champion, 2007).

8. On the integration of Boethian and Ovidian metamorphosis in book one of the *Mutacion de Fortune*, see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “Metaphor and Metamorphosis in the *Ovide moralisé* and Christine de Pizan's *Mutacion de Fortune*,” in *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Alison Keith and Stephen James Rupp (Toronto: Victoria University Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2007), pp. 77–90.

The *Mutacion de Fortune* has a symmetrical structure, with an opening focus (in book one) on the narrator's self-examination counterbalanced by a closing focus (in book seven) on the reader's self-examination, and the generally allegorical framework of the opening three books balanced by the generally historiographical framework of the closing three books. The junction or hinge that links the two halves of this symmetrical structure lies in book four of the *Mutacion*. While we can refer the work as being divided into "two halves," since this bipartite division accurately represents the number of books devoted to allegory and history writing, this division does not accurately represent the overall balance of the work: of its approximately 24,000 lines, more than two-thirds of the work is comprised of the historical chronicle. Allegory serves, therefore, as the preliminary stage or foundation for the exposition of history, with ekphrasis acting as the mediating principle that enables the movement between these two modes. We see this process unfold in book four of the *Mutacion*, as the ekphrasis of the "sale merveilleuse" located within the Castle of Fortune moves the reader from the external perspective of the architectural allegory to the intimate, internal perspective of the reader of narrative ekphrasis. This narrative ekphrasis begins with the Boethian ladder of Philosophy, ranging from theoretical to practical knowledge, through an engagement with all the various branches of knowledge including the Seven Liberal Arts, to an exposition of world history from Creation through the first age of mankind.

Book four opens with a retrospective look back at the architectural allegory of the Castle of Fortune that comprises the preceding two books. Christine states, "Or ay devise grant partie / De ce lieu . . . / Si me convient presentement / Au hault donjon tourner arriere, / Pour mieulx venir a ma matiere" (ll. 7053–62) [now I have described the greater part / Of this place . . . / so that it is now appropriate for me / To turn back to the high castle keep / In order to better approach my matter].⁹ This move at the opening of book four repeats the circling-around motion of the first three books of the *Mutacion de Fortune*, in which the phenomenon of change is approached obliquely or, one might say, cyclically: the opening book recounts a series of Ovidian metamorphoses before concluding with an account of the author's own, self-authorizing metamorphosis; the second book describes the architecture of the Castle of Fortune and the landscape surrounding it; the third book describes the figures positioned within the Castle of Fortune, moving

9. Quotations from the *Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune* are taken from the edition of Suzanne Solente and are cited in the text by line number; translations are my own (Christine de Pizan, *Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*, ed. Suzanne Solente, 4 vols. [Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1955–1961]).

around the internal spaces within the castle. It is significant that, instead of simply penetrating in a linear, direct fashion into ever more interior spaces within the Castle of Fortune, Christine's narrator instead repeatedly tours the same spaces, slowly circling in on the "sale merveilleuse" contained in the castle keep that will mark the final movement into the historiographical mode in book four. This circling progression models a pattern of intellectual progression for the narrator and the reader that proceeds indirectly and obliquely, yet ultimately comes to its destination—like the wandering trajectory of history itself.

In book two, the four gates of the four-sided castle are described, each in turn, before the narrator finally "returns" ("revendray," l. 2885) to describe the first gate. There, she discovers a four-sided courtyard ("court quarree," l. 2893) and four pathways that lead to the summit of the castle; after recounting the nature of these four pathways, the narrator once again "turns around," stating, "Or me convient tourner arriere" (l. 3329), to describe the second gate. After repeating this sequence of description and return for the third and fourth gates, the narrator turns to a fuller account of the various rooms and lodgings within the four parts of the castle before turning to the "plus hault lieu / Du chastel" [very highest place / Of the castle], that is, the "hault donjon" or castle keep (ll. 3696–98). Immediately, however, the narrator turns back outward again, this time to "return" (she states, "Retourner me faut" [l. 3741]) to the figures who are lodged in the various peripheral parts of the castle of Fortune. These figures, described at length in the third book of the *Mutacion de Fortune*, make up a kind of social microcosm, an overview of the various estates that foreshadows the fuller account of late medieval society provided by Christine a few years later in her *Livre du Corps de policie*, or *Book of the Body Politic*.¹⁰

The introduction of the "sale merveilleuse" (l. 7069) at the opening of book four, then, appears less as the introduction of a new, previously unseen space than as a return to a position previously inhabited. It is said to be in the "dongion dessus dit," the "castle keep described above"—that is, described back in book two, several thousand lines earlier. Yet this movement into an interior space will be quite different from the ekphrastic moves recounted

10. On the estates of society in Christine's *Livre du Corps de policie*, see Susan Dudash, "Christine de Pizan and the 'menu peuple,'" *Speculum* 78 (2003): 788–831; on the expression of "vertu" at all levels of society and its ability to unify the body politic ("corps de policie"), see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "Death as Metamorphosis in the Devotional and Political Allegory of Christine de Pizan," in *The Ends of the Body: Identity and Community in Medieval Culture*, eds. Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Jill Ross (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 283–313.

earlier in the *Mutacion de Fortune*, for we never leave the “sale merveilleuse,” which is the interior space inhabited by narrator and reader from this point through the very end of the entire work. Its “marvellous” quality resides not simply in its visual opulence and its ability to induce a sense of wonder but in its capaciousness: this space contains all of the universal history of mankind, from the creation of the world through the present day. Yet the space of the “sale merveilleuse” contains still more than this: it begins not, as one would expect, with the creation of the world but with yet another dilatory, cyclical turn, this one focused not on the complexly structured form of the Castle of Fortune but on what we might call the mental furniture of mankind—that is, the branches of knowledge, flowing outward from the central figure of Philosophy.

Christine’s opening description of the “sale merveilleuse” emphasizes its enormous scale and its geometrical form: it is “reonde” or round (l. 7090), its perfect circularity emphasizing its essentially microcosmic nature. It is “belle, clere, grande et haulte” (l. 7094), a “fort ouvrage” (l. 7095) [strong piece of work], in spite of the fact that it, like the whole of the Castle of Fortune, is constantly in motion (“toudis tremble,” l. 7095). The great chamber is “painte moult richement / D’or et d’azur” (ll. 7104–5) [painted richly with gold and azure], and illustrated with pictorial narratives of the history of the world: “Si sont escriptes les gestes / Des grans princes et les conquests / De tous les regnes, qu’ilz acquistrent” (ll. 7107–9) [And the ‘gestes’ are also written there, / Of the great princes and of the conquests / Of all the kingdoms that they acquired]. Here, the pictorial quality of the images that are said to be “painted” (cf. “pourtraict,” l. 7117) is intertwined with the narrative quality of the “gestes” that are said to be “written” or “escriptes” upon the walls: in other words, text and image are mutually constitutive, united in the ekphrastic writing.

The overwhelming magnificence of the great hall corresponds to the overwhelming abundance of historical materials included on its walls: the images inscribed there are so numerous that the narrator cannot even attempt to recount them all. Christine draws attention to the task of the narrator in selecting which stories to recount, which ones deserve to be translated from the pictorial cues upon the wall into the discursive language of history. This task is centered upon the role of memory, which appears both as a collective, universal quality presided over by the goddess Fortune, and as an individual, personal quality expressed by the narrator. This two-fold character of memory appears in connection with Christine’s account of the selective nature of her universal history. In her first reference to the selectivity of her task, Christine declares that she will not attempt to recount everything, “Lonc process

seroit a compter / Tout quanque je y vi avenir; / Je vous pourroie trop tenir. / Le plus necessaire diray / Et du seurplus je me tairay" (ll. 7082–86) [because it would be a long task to account for / All that I saw taking place there; / I would hold you back too long. / So I will speak of that which is most necessary / And I will keep quiet with regard to the surplus]. The same concern to explain the basis of her account's selectivity appears later in the same passage, but this time it is accompanied by a fuller account of the principles of selection, as Fortune chooses among the princes who have served her and preserves only those who are worthy of memory: "pour memoire, / Elle fait pourtraire l'istoire / D'eulz, s'ilz sont digne de renom" (ll. 7143–45) [for the sake of memory, / She had the history portrayed / Of those who were worthy of renown]. The narrator promises to "name" ("nommeray," l. 7153) those whose "portraits" ("pourtraitures," l. 7154) appear on the wall, but not all of them:

. . . car trop seroie
 Lonc, quant trestout deviseroye,
 Mais des principaulx grans seigneurs,
 Qui par elle furent greigneurs,
 Qui tindrent empire ou regné
 Et qui ont par elle regné,
 Et d'autres dignes de memoire,
 Si com vendra a ma memoire.
 (ll. 7155–62)

. . . for it would be too
 Long, if I were to describe all of them,
 But just the principal great lords
 Who were made greater through [Fortune],
 Who ruled empires or kingdoms
 And who were in turn ruled by her,
 And others worthy of being remembered
 Just as they occur to my memory.

Here, memory appears first with regard to the inscription of historical records upon the walls of Fortune's castle, as those who are worthy of being remembered are etched into the wall by the hand of Fortune; memory appears second with regard to the retrieval of the historical account in the mind of the narrator, as these are cued by the images appearing upon the wall. Memory is thus collective, common to human society and presided over by the goddess,

and also individual, filtering the historical knowledge preserved within the mind of the subject as she remembers the past.

THE CONSOLATION OF HISTORY

This equilibrium of the universal and the particular, the collective and the individual, is in keeping with the Boethian principles introduced in the opening books of the *Mutacion de Fortune*. Just as in Boethius's *Consolation*, Philosophy appears both as a transcendent abstraction and as a property within the narrator's own mind, so in the *Mutacion de Fortune*, the function of memory in the generation of historical chronicle appears both on the universal level, in the formation of the historical record, and on the level of the individual, in the writing of Christine's own account of the history of the world. The Boethian substrate of the opening books of the *Mutacion de Fortune* comes most fully into view with the account of the branches of knowledge described in the "sale merueilleuse." Philosophy is the capacious mother of all species of learning, including—remarkably—Theology, which appears as a subset nested within the branches springing from Philosophy. This long exposition of the branches of knowledge appears, again, as yet another cyclical turn preliminary to the final immersion in the universal history that forms the majority of the text. Christine highlights the abrupt, disruptive quality of this account of the branches of knowledge, stating that she must introduce "autre chose," some "other thing," before moving into the historical account itself:

Pour ma matiere plus complecte
 Faire, ainçois que plus oultre exploite,
 Le propos devant commencié
 Sera cy un pou delaissié,
 Pour d'autre chose racompter,
 Que je volz moult ou lieu notter;
 Bien revendray a mon propos
 Après, ainsi com je suppos.
 (ll. 7173–80)

In order to make my matter more fully complete,
 Before any other undertaking,
 The topic that was begun earlier
 Must now be delayed a little bit
 In order to speak of another thing

Which I would very much like to take note of in this place;
 I will then return to my topic
 Afterward, just as I have put it forth.

Once again, Christine circles around before “returning” to her central topic in a movement that is characteristic of the mode of exposition of the opening books of the *Mutacion de Fortune* and that perpetuates the earlier books’ emphasis on symmetry and order. In books two and three, symmetry appeared repeatedly as an essential feature of formal structures: there were four facades of Fortune’s castle, four gates, four porters, and four roads leading to the summit. Here, the principle of symmetry is again shown to be essential to the ordering of abstractions as they are described sequentially, like a series of nested boxes. Philosophy is divided into two parts, practical and theoretical, recalling the two emblematic letters on Philosophy’s robe in Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*. Because the letters pi and theta on Philosophy’s robe anchor the ladder that, in Christine’s earlier allegory the *Chemin de long estude*, links heaven and earth, each of the areas of inquiry detailed on the walls of Fortune’s “marvellous” room is dedicated, each in a different way, toward facilitating that link: for example, geometry does so in a very practical way, allowing man to measure the “espace / Entre souleil et lune” (ll. 7645–46) [space / Between sun and moon].

The theoretical aspect of philosophy is divided into three: theology, physics, and mathematics; mathematics, representing the quadrivium, is divided into four, the last of which is astronomy. The second aspect of philosophy, “Pratique” or practical knowledge, is divided like theoretical knowledge into three parts: ethics, economics, and politics. Politics is expressed through both words and deeds, Christine explains, and that verbal form is expressed through the “sciences parfaites” or “perfect sciences” of the trivium, made up of grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric. In this account, Christine orders all human knowledge spatially, each area of knowledge containing others within it, just as Fortune’s castle contains symmetrically arranged courtyards and rooms. In this sense, Fortune’s “sale merveilleuse” is a microcosm of the entire castle, where architectural allegory serves to provide order to memory, and thus to provide an underlying mnemonic structure for Christine’s stated purpose in the *Mutacion de Fortune*, the writing of history.¹¹ Within the highly concentrated space of the “sale merveilleuse,” moreover, ekphrasis provides a

11. On medieval architectural allegory, see Christiania Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind: A Study of Medieval Architectural Allegory* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003). On classical precursors particularly important to the medieval tradition, see Alison M. Keith, “Imperial Building Projects and Architectural Ekphrases in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Statius’ *Thebaid*,” *Mouseion*, 3rd series, 7 (2007): 1–26.

jumping-off point for the movement into the historical mode, as the sequence of the various branches of knowledge returns once again to its point of departure in a final turn of the Boethian cycle of exposition. Once again, Christine calls attention to the narrative return to the point of departure. Having recounted the division of Philosophy into its various branches, she writes, “Mais de or suivray ma matiere, / Tirant a la cause premiere” (ll. 8069–70) [From now on I will follow my matter, / Holding to the original topic].

In order to understand the function of this apparently digressive account of the branches of knowledge and their relationship to Philosophy, it is helpful to compare this ekphrastic passage in the *Mutacion de Fortune* with other ekphrastic accounts of the Seven Liberal Arts, especially the very elaborate version that appears in Alan of Lille’s *Anticlaudianus*. The expansive account of the Seven Liberal Arts found in this very widely read twelfth-century philosophical allegory is among the most heavily annotated portions of the *Anticlaudianus* in its remarkably rich commentary tradition.¹² Moreover, Alan’s account of the Seven Liberal Arts is merely the most fully developed example of a widespread tendency in literature of the twelfth century to focus ekphrases on the depiction of the trivium and the quadrivium: these include the magnificently decorated robe that appears near the close of Chrétien de Troyes’ *Erec et Enide*, the chariot of Amphiaraus that appears in the *Roman de Thebes*, and the richly decorated chamber of the Countess Adela of Blois described in the poetry of Baudri of Bourgueil.¹³ In these works, the Seven Liberal Arts appear as the epitome of human “science,” that is, the highest summit of learning that is available to human beings outside of the revelatory knowledge that is provided directly by God. For the purposes of a specific comparison with Christine de Pizan’s *Mutacion de Fortune*, the most useful point of comparison with the *Anticlaudianus* lies in the nature of the mediating role of the Seven Liberal Arts as depicted in these ekphrases: in Alan’s allegorical epic, the Seven Liberal Arts participate in the construction of a magnificent chariot to convey Prudence from earth to heaven. Each of

12. An edition of the most substantial commentary on the *Anticlaudianus* can be found in Radulphus de Longo Campo, *In Anticlaudianum Alani commentum*, ed. Jan Sulowski (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolinskich, 1972).

13. For ekphrastic depictions of the trivium and the quadrivium in Chrétien’s *Erec et Enide*, the *Roman de Thebes*, and Baudri of Bourgueil, see the following: Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, ed. Mario Roques (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1970), ll. 6682–728; commentary in Haiko Wandhoff, *Ekphrasis. Kunstbeschreibungen und virtuelle Räume in der Literatur des Mittelalters* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), ch. 3; Guy Raynaud de Lage, ed., *Roman de Thèbes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1966–71), ll. 4986–5000 (corresponds to ll. 4749–62 in the edition of Constans); Monica Otter, “Baudri of Bourgueil, ‘To Countess Adela,’” *Journal of Medieval Latin* 11 (2001): 61–142, and the essay by Valerie Allen in this volume, pp. XXX.

the seven crafts one portion of the chariot: Grammar devises its central pole, Dialectic forms the axle, and Rhetoric carries out the overall decoration.¹⁴ Unlike the trivium, however, the parts of the quadrivium—Mathematics, Music, Geometry, and Astronomy—carry out a slightly different aspect of the chariot's construction: they forge the wheels that will carry the chariot upward.

Here, the powers of the quadrivium are seen to be motive and generative in a way that differs significantly from the powers of the trivium. They are what drive the pursuit of knowledge, moving upward from earth to heaven. In the *Mutacion de Fortune*, by contrast, this motive quality of the quadrivium has been effaced. Christine does not highlight the dynamic powers of the numerical arts; moreover, the descriptions of the Seven Liberal Arts in Christine's text, while lengthy and detailed, lack the elaborately vivid quality of the corresponding ekphrases found in the *Anticlaudianus*. We recognize these passages as ekphrastic only because they have been identified explicitly by Christine as containing "figures estranges" (l. 7183) and "scriptures" (l. 7203), not because of any self-evidently visual quality in the descriptions themselves. To note this disparity does not imply that the account in the *Mutacion de Fortune* is somehow impoverished compared to the *Anticlaudianus*: on the contrary, it illuminates the essential role of structure and hierarchy in Christine's ekphrastic descriptions of the parts of knowledge that together form the bridge that links the architectural allegory of the earlier parts of the work with the historiography of the latter parts. Further, the comparison of these passages in the *Anticlaudianus* and the *Mutacion de Fortune* may also allow us to begin to sketch out the contours of a broader shift from representational to gestural ekphrasis in the later Middle Ages. This shift may also correspond to an increasing emphasis on what Jas Elsner has called the "pedagogic" function of ekphrasis, insightfully discussed by Katherine Starkey in her essay in this volume.¹⁵

One of the most striking innovations in Christine's account of the branches of knowledge comprised within Philosophy pertains to the ordering of the Seven Liberal Arts: not only does Christine separate the trivium from the quadrivium, but she also—very unusually—places the quadrivium *prior* to the trivium. For Alan of Lille, writing in the twelfth century, the placement of the trivium preceding the quadrivium was a way to represent the natural sequence of the acquisition of knowledge. As is made explicit in the ubiqui-

14. Robert Bossuet, ed., *Anticlaudianus* (Paris: Vrin, 1955); trans. James J. Sheridan, *Anticlaudianus, or The Good and Perfect Man* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1973).

15. See Starkey in this volume, pp. XXX.

tous school text of Martianus Capella, the student learns the three parts of the trivium in the first stages of education, then moves on to master the four parts of the quadrivium.¹⁶ In the *Anticlaudianus*, therefore, the movement upward into the celestial regions that Prudence will undertake is foreshadowed in the construction of the chariot: the trivium participates in forming the necessary but less dynamic parts of the chariot's carriage, while the quadrivium participates in forming the wheels that will actually generate motion. In the *Mutacion de Fortune*, the inverted order of the trivium and quadrivium does not undercut the higher nature of the knowledge represented within the four numerical arts; instead, it reflects the inverted nature of the hierarchy of knowledge as presented in Christine's work. Rather than beginning with lower things and moving to higher, as in Alan's allegory, we begin with the highest of all—namely, Philosophy—and then move downward into the more mundane levels of knowing, descending from the theoretical to the practical. Here, Philosophy's ladder is inverted; or, more precisely, we regard the ladder from the top rather than from the bottom—from theta to pi, rather from pi to theta—applying what we have learned in the realm of the theoretical to the real, lived experiences of the practical world.

Having made a final circle through the branches of knowledge, Christine moves at last to the historical mode with an account of the beginning, that is, Genesis. Picking up just after her account of the parts of Philosophy, Christine states that

En la sale, dont j'ay parlé,
 Qui fu grande en lonc et en lé,
 Avoit tout au commencement
 Figuré et paint richement
 Comment Dieu forma ciel et terre

16. On the use of Martianus Capella's work as a school text, see William Harris Stahl, *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts: Vol. 1: The Quadrivium of Martianus Capella, Latin Traditions in the Mathematical Sciences, 50 BC–AD 1250* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971); the text of the *De nuptiis* appears in William Harris Stahl and R. Johnson with E. L. Burge, trans., *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts: Vol. 2: The Marriage of Philology and Mercury* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). For a complete edition of the Latin text, see James Willis, ed., *Martianus Capella* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1983). A new edition of the *De nuptiis* is in progress, with books 4, 6, 7, and 9 published so far: Michel Ferré, ed., *Martianus Capella: Les noces de Philologie et de Mercure. Livre IV: La dialectique* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2007); Barbara Ferré, ed., *Martianus Capella: Les noces de Philologie et de Mercure: Livre VI: La géométrie* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2007); Jean-Yves Guillaumin, ed., *Martianus Capella: Les noces de Philologie et de Mercure: Livre VII: L'arithmétique* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2003); Jean-Baptiste Guillaumin, ed., *Martianus Capella: Les noces de Philologie et de Mercure: Livre IX: L'harmonie* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2011).

Et trestout quanque on y peut querre,
 Et comme ou firmament assist,
 Lune et souleil.
 (ll. 8071–78)

In the great chamber, which I've spoken of,
 Which was great and long and wide,
 There was, right at the beginning,
 Figured and richly painted
 How God formed the heavens and the earth
 And everything else one might seek out there,
 And how He established the firmament,
 The moon and the sun.

Yet even after moving into the historiographical mode, the circling motion of exposition found repeatedly earlier in the *Mutacion de Fortune* continues to appear, marking the point of transition between the first age of the world and the second. After an account of the Great Flood, Christine describes how the earth was repopulated by Noah and his sons through the “Maintes grans generations / Dont vindrent toutes nacions” (ll. 8341–42) [many great generations / From which come all nations]. Once again, Christine knits together the parts of her work through a promise to “return” to her “matter”:

Vous diray, si com j'ay appris
 En la sale, dont je raconte,
 De trestous les aages le compte,
 Affin que vous sachiés le voir,
 Car a maint plaist moult a savoir,
 Combien que je ysse du propos,
 De dire ce qu'ay en propos,
 Mais je y retourneray de pres
 Et suivray ma matiere après.
 (ll. 8346–54)

I will tell you about it, just as I perceived it
 In the chamber, which I am describing to you,
 The account of all the ages of mankind,
 In order to let you know the truth,
 For it pleases most people to know a great deal;
 For which reason I have departed from the main topic,

To speak of what I have purposed,
 But I will return to it shortly
 And follow my matter afterwards.

In its emphasis on the fecundity of the sons of Noah, who repopulate the earth after the devastation of the Flood in “maintes grans generacions” [many great generations], this passage recalls the fecundity of Philosophy described in the preceding digressive movement in the *Mutacion de Fortune*.

Immediately prior to her description of the creation of the world, as noted above, Christine places the figure of Philosophy. She is not just the greatest and most capacious of all the aspects of knowledge but their very fountain-head and source:

Or ay devise, en partie,
 Com Philosophie est partie
 En plusieurs branches et sciences,
 Par moult diverses apparences,
 Et, a brief parler, d'elle naiscent
 Toutes sciences et engraisent;
 C'est leur mere, c'est leur nourrice,
 N'y a celle qui d'elle n'isse,
 C'en est la fonteine et la source,
 Dont les autres prennent leur source.
 (ll. 8059–68)

Now I have devised, in parts,
 How Philosophy is divided
 Into several branches and sciences
 By many diverse appearances,
 And, to speak in brief, from her are born
 All sciences, and they grow from her;
 She is their mother, she is their nurse,
 There is nothing that does not issue from her,
 To them, she is the fountain and the source
 From which all others derive their being.

This description of Philosophy as “fountain” and “source” of all knowledge sets out a pattern of fecund dissemination that is echoed in the subsequent historiographical account of the ages of man. In other words, the plentitude of Philosophy expressed in the Boethian perspective of the *Mutacion de*

Fortune is the template for the plenitude of successive generations of mankind expressed in the work's Orosian historiography. The initial movement into history in book four takes the form of a synoptic overview of the ages of history that emphasizes the repeated dispersal of peoples in the world: outward from Eden during the first age; outward into the three known continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa with the migration of the sons of Noah after the Flood marking the second age; outward from Babel following the transgressions of Nimrod and the confusion of languages marking the third age; and so on. The fifth age, for Christine as for Orosius, ends with the Incarnation (*Mutacion de Fortune*, l. 8390) marking the intersection of secular and sacred history. At this point, Christine again halts the forward movement of the progression of history, abruptly shifting from verse to prose to provide an account of diasporic Jewish history after the Crucifixion.¹⁷ She justifies this departure by stating that the "matter" of Jewish history is fundamentally different from that of other nations because the Jews stand outside the economy of Fortune—their fate, Christine states, is determined intentionally by God, not capriciously by Fortune. After this interruption, Christine begins book five of the *Mutacion* with a return to verse and moves into the sequence of world history as presented in the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*.

THE EKPHRASTIC MIRROR

This historiographical mode persists through books five, six, and seven, almost until the end of the entire work; it is halted only in the final book when an abrupt return to the ekphrastic framework serves to punctuate the annals of world history and to introduce a concluding section on Alexander the Great that is at once historiographical and prescriptive, a mirror for princes that seeks to provide guidance to the reader, whatever rank of society he (or she) comes from. In this story of Alexander, as in all narratives recounted in the *Mutacion de Fortune*, the reader can see himself in the mirror of history.¹⁸ Like everyone living in the sublunary realm, Alexander lives at the whim of Fortune, who is sometimes his beloved "amie," sometimes his hateful "ennemye." It is this very mutability that makes Alexander an appro-

17. On Christine's use of verse and prose, see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "The Movement from Verse to Prose in the Allegories of Christine de Pizan," in *Poetry, Knowledge, and Community in Late Medieval France*, eds. Rebecca Dixon and Finn E. Sinclair (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 136–48.

18. On other exemplary heroic narratives in the *Mutacion de Fortune*, see Liliane Dulac, "Le chevalier Hercule de l'*Ovide moralisé* au *Livre de la mutacion de fortune* de Christine de Pizan," *Cahiers de recherches médiévales* 9 (2002): 115–30.

priate focus for the reader, a point made explicitly in the lines that conclude the Alexander narrative of the *Mutacion de Fortune*:

O tout homme, ou maint vaine gloire,
Mire toy, mire en ceste istoire,
Vois se Fortune la perverse,
En peu d'eure, de moult hault verse!
(ll. 23273–76)

Oh, every man, in whom there is so much vainglory,
Look at yourself, look within this history,
See how Fortune, the perverse one,
In short time, from high above, throws down!

These lines evoke two crucial moments in Guillaume de Lorris's *Roman de la Rose*: the narrator's identification of the fountain of Narcissus and his lament concerning Fortune. In the first of these two moments in Guillaume's *Rose*, the narrator recognizes the dangerous nature of the mirroring fountain in the garden: "C'est li miroërs perilleus / ou Narcisus, li orgueilleus, / mira sa face et ses ieuz vers, / dont il jut puis morz toz envers" (ll. 1569–72) [It is the perilous mirror / where Narcissus, the proud one, / looked at his face and his gray eyes, / for which reason he then fell down dead]. Don't gaze at the fountain of Narcissus, Christine warns; instead, "Mire toy, mire en ceste istoire." Look at this, she says, and see yourself as you might become. The Narcissus passage has its counterpart, in Guillaume's *Rose*, in the narrator's closing lament regarding Fortune:

Ele a une roe qui torne
et, quant ele veut, ele met
le plus bas amont ou somet,
et celui qui est sor la roe
reverse a un tor en la boue.
Et je sui cil qui est versez!
(*Rose*, ll. 3960–65)¹⁹

She has a wheel that turns
and, when she wishes, she places
he who is the lowest high up at the top,

19. Quotations from the *Roman de la Rose* are from the edition of Félix Lecoy, 3 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1965–70); translations are my own.

and he who is on top of the wheel
 she throws in one turn into the mud.
 And I am he who is turned!

In this passage, as David Hult has persuasively argued, “versez” means both to be turned on the wheel of Fortune and to be immured within poetic verse, to become exemplary for those who will come afterward. A similar pun appears in the earlier passage from the *Rose*, where Narcissus is said to fall down dead (“envers”) or, alternatively, “in verse” (“en vers”).²⁰ In the *Mutacion de Fortune*, Fortune similarly “de moult hault verse,” throws people down from on high. They fall, but they too become immured in verse, transformed into examples for the one who can learn from them. The historical mirror of the *Mutacion de Fortune* is, we might say, the *good* mirror of Narcissus: by gazing at the “vrayes histoires” recounted in Christine’s verse, it is possible for the reader to make out how he might similarly be tossed on the tides of change.

The concluding turn to Alexander, as a mirror for the reader, is introduced by a return to the ekphrastic mode, a final retrogressive return to the general form of history as seen in the opening historiographical passages of book four. In the earlier book, the ages of mankind served as a kind of epitome or temporal overview of the shape of time; in this final book of the *Mutacion de Fortune*, the parts of the world serve a similar ordering purpose, here providing a geographical overview that corresponds to the temporal overview that opened the initial move into the historiographical mode in book four. At the end of her adaptation of the *Histoire ancienne* and just before her expansive account of Alexander, Christine inserts an epitome of Orosian *translatio imperii*. She writes:

Et, pour revenir a mon conte,
 Or avisons des signeuries,
 Com commenciees et peries
 Furent par espace de temps,
 Si com, par ystoires, j’entens.
 .IIII. principaulx j’en y treuve. . . .
 (ll. 22067–71)

And, to return to my account,
 Now we can see the kingdoms,
 How they began and they perished

20. David F. Hult, *Self-Fulfilling Prophecies: Readership and Authority in the First Roman de la Rose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 297.

In the passage of time,
 Just as I understand it, through histories.
 I find four principal ones here . . .

Here, Christine returns to the ekphrastic framework of the *Mutacion*, noting the portrayal of “true histories” or “ystoires . . . voires” (ll. 22059–60) upon the walls of Fortune’s castle. The empires depicted there include Assyria in the East; Carthage or Africa in the South; Macedonia in the North; and Rome in the West. This is the Orosian sequence, in which the four cardinal directions align with the four anchoring points of *translatio imperii*.²¹ While the passage is adapted from a prose section in the *Histoire ancienne*, Christine displaces it from early in the prose work to a very late point in her own work, just before the climactic account of Alexander. This Orosian epitome corresponds to the sequence of the ages of mankind that begin the move into historiography, one introducing (in book four) and one concluding (in book seven) Christine’s adaptation of the *Histoire ancienne*. In each case, the overview of history—whether temporal or geographical—serves to suspend the sequence of chronology, providing the reader with a synoptic glance that represents historical change in a nonlinear form.

These moments of interruption correspond to the ekphrastic moments of interruption described in detail earlier in this essay, suspending the forward movement of the exposition in a temporary state of stasis. In book four, at the opening of her account of Philosophy and the branches of knowledge, Christine describes this state of being in terms of “abstraction”:

Par les escriptures, qu’y vy,
 Mon esperit y fu ravy
 Et astract, si que supposay
 D’elle, ainsi qu’icy le posay.
 Si vous en diray mon rapport,
 Ainsi qu’ay de l’escript recort.
 (ll. 7203–8)
 By the engravings that I saw there
 My spirit was ravished from that place

21. On the cardinal directions in Orosius’ *translatio imperii*, see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “Alexander in the Orient: Bodies and Boundaries in the *Roman de toute chevalerie*,” in *Post-colonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*, eds. Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp. pp. 105–15 [105–26]; Fabrizio Fabbrini, *Paolo Orosio: Uno storico* (Rome: Edizione di Storia e Letteratura, 1979), pp. 364–65.

And abstracted, so that I imagined these things concerning
 Her, just as I present them here.
 So I will tell you my report
 Just as I recorded it from the engravings.

This state of being lifted outward from the present moment in a movement of abstraction (the narrator's spirit is "abstract") is the temporal pause that we have seen repeatedly enacted in the *Mutacion de Fortune*. This takes place initially in the repeated pauses and then movements of return in the ekphrastic descriptions that make up books two and three and much of book four.²² Once the move to historiography takes place in the latter parts of book four, however, the movement of abstraction is transposed from the state of marvel induced by ekphrasis into synoptic moments in which great patterns of history are made visible as if they were contained within a single glimpse. These include the synoptic view of the ages of mankind, in a temporal moment of stasis, and the synoptic view of the empires of the world, in a geographical moment of stasis.

LIQUID MATTER

These moments of stasis, both ekphrastic and historiographical, share an additional common ground: that is, their common reliance on the language of materiality, which is consistently invoked within the moments of synoptic vision we have observed in the *Mutacion de Fortune*.²³ In the opening passage of book four that introduces the "sale merveilleuse," the term "matiere" is used to refer not just to the materials of history but to the material of ekphrastic description. Christine makes her characteristic movement of return ("tourner arriere"), "Pour mieulx venir a ma matiere" [in order to better approach my matter]. This oblique, cyclical approach to her topic also involves a process of sifting out the most important historical materials, "Car de matieres y a moult / Et ne puis tout dire en un moult" (ll. 7053, 7065–66) [because there are many matters / and I cannot speak of all of them]. In her account of the parts of Philosophy, Christine uses similar terminology to describe her approach

22. In a thoughtful survey of ekphrasis from antiquity to the present, Valentine Cunningham describes ekphrases as "pausings for thought," in which "the linear flow of narrative slows or even stops" ("Why Ekphrasis?" *Classical Philology: Special Issue on Ekphrasis* 102.1 [2007]: 61 [57–71]).

23. On materiality in ekphrasis, see Stephen G. Nichols, "Seeing Food: An Anthropology of Ekphrasis, and Still Life in Classical and Medieval Examples," *Modern Language Notes* 106 (1991): 818–51.

to her topic: “In order to make my material (“matiere”) more complete,” she says, “I will delay speaking of what I had intended in order to recount another thing” (ll. 7173–80). As in the oblique approach to her “matiere” described in the earlier passage, here Christine circles around her topic in order to better approach it, to make it “complete.” The same kind of language reappears in each transitional passage, including the one that immediately follows the description of the parts of Philosophy and the one that is sandwiched between the account of the first age, from Creation to the Flood, and the account of the second age. In each case, an account of plenitude and abundance—whether of the “fountain” of Philosophy or the multiple “generations” of the sons of Noah—is immediately followed by a circling return to the narrator’s original “matiere.” In the last lines of her account of Philosophy’s fecundity, Christine promises “from now on I will follow my matter, / Holding to the first cause” (ll. 8069–70); in the last lines of her account of mankind’s fecundity, she promises to “return again shortly / And follow after my matter” (ll. 8353–54).

In the simplest sense, these allusions to “matter” simply refer to the stuff of history, as in the common descriptive phrases “Matter of Troy” or “Matter of Rome.” On another level, however, in the context of ekphrasis, the repeated allusions to matter touch upon the peculiar quality of poetic language: that is, its ability to express narrative content in static form, to represent the linear movement of time in imagistic nonlinear terms. This quality of ekphrasis is apparent, for example, in the remarkable intaglio image described in canto 10 of Dante’s *Purgatorio*, which features an image of the Annunciation in which “visibile parlare,” “visible speech,” makes manifest the mystery of Incarnation.²⁴ For Dante, this ekphrastic moment epitomizes the fusion of form and matter, in which the words of the Annunciation are “impressa . . . come figura in cera si suggella” [imprinted . . . as expressly as a figure is stamped in wax],²⁵ a moment that marks not only the union of God and man but also the temporal hinge of salvation history.

We can find other comparable moments throughout the medieval ekphrastic tradition: for example, in the *Roman de Troie*, the ekphrastic tomb monuments of the fallen heroes are made of the purest, most refined materials imaginable. The super-pure material of these ekphrastic monuments, even more than their beautiful form, causes them to inspire wonder in all those who look at them. For example, the remains of Achilles’ body are placed in a

24. On Dante’s ekphrasis in the *Purgatorio* as a source for the *Mutacion de Fortune*, see Brownlee, “The Image of History,” pp. 51–54.

25. *Purgatorio* 10: 43–45, in Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, ed. and trans. Charles S. Singleton, 3 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970–75); on this passage, see Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil*, pp. 157–58.

“cher vaisel” (l. 22470)²⁶ [costly vessel] made of a single ruby, which is held in the hands of a golden image. This figure is then placed at the summit of a wonderful monument, surmounting “a little sphere made of a single topaz, clear and beautiful.” As the poet puts it, “A merveille fu esgardee” (l. 22426) [it was seen as a marvel]. The tomb of Paris is even more precious: instead of being made of gold, his “chier sarquel” (l. 23038) [costly sarcophagus] is made of “un vert jaspe goté: / Ainc en cest siecle trespasé / Ne fu veüz plus cher vaisel” (ll. 23039–41) [a single jasper touched with green: / Never in all the history of the world / Was there a richer vessel].²⁷

In contrast to the elaborate ekphrases of twelfth-century literature, including the chariot of Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus* and the rich tombs of the *Roman de Troie*, late medieval ekphrasis has a rather different character. The intense focus on monumental ekphrasis common in twelfth-century literature gives way to an interest in the ways in which extended ekphrases can provide structures for the ordering of narrative, and particularly for the orderly presentation of history. This can be seen, for example, in Chaucer's engagement with history in the first book of the *House of Fame*, in which the story of the fall of Troy and foundation of Rome is interwoven from two very different perspectives on Aeneas's journey—Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Heroides*—with word and image balanced in an uneasy state of equilibrium. Such use of ekphrasis is also evident in Chaucer's “Knight's Tale,” in the descriptions of the amphitheatre and its “oratories” dedicated to the gods, as well as in the monumental “sepulture” of Arcite.²⁸ In these works, as in the universal history recounted in Christine de Pizan's *Mutacion de Fortune*, ekphrasis provides a way to give order to time—precisely by providing a way to stand outside of it, if only for a moment.

26. Quotations are from Léopold Constans, ed., *Le Roman de Troie publié d'après tous les manuscrits connus*, Société des anciens textes français, 6 vols. (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1904–1912) and are cited in the text by line number; translations are my own.

27. For a fuller explication of these tomb ekphrases, see Akbari, “Erasing the Body,” pp. 153–55 and 160–61.

28. On ekphrasis in the “Knight's Tale,” see Sarah Stanbury, “Visualizing,” in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 459–79; see also the essay of John Bowers in this volume, pp. XXX.

