Myth, Montage, & Visuality
in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture
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Christine de Pizan’s Epistre Othea

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The material properties of late medieval French manuscripts testify to the power of visual images to shape both the reading experience and the reader. As a multi-disciplinary study, *Myth, Montage, and Visuality* uses Christine de Pizan’s *Epistre Othea* to address broad cultural questions regarding the visual organization of knowledge. As a collaborative project, this book has incurred unusual kinds of debts. For instance, in the early summer of 1998, just after the British Library moved to its new quarters on Euston Road, we spent a month there working intensively on a portion of this book. Our work was greatly facilitated by the willingness of the staff of the Reading Room in Humanities I to allow us daily access to a small sound-proofed room where we could pursue our highly interactive and therefore vocal method of research and writing.

In the course of our research we have also found that many libraries were willing to give us joint access to manuscripts and early printed books, so that we could pursue our inquiry as a team. We are especially grateful to librarians and manuscript curators at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich; the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, Paris; the Bibliothèque municipale Jean Levy, Lille; the Bibliothèque municipale, Rouen; the Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, Brussels; the British Library; the Bodleian Library; Cambridge University Library; the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague; Newnham College and St. John’s College Libraries, Cambridge University; the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York; the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris; and Waddesdon Manor, Aylesbury. In addition to the access to original materials housed in these libraries, the photographic and slide collections at the Warburg Institute were critical to the direction of our research for this project. We began this project by viewing together a complete set of slides of the
*Othea* in BL, Harley 4431, a set that had been purchased through the efforts of Penelope Mayo for the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Binghamton University.

The status of the *Epistre Othea* as a highly visual text suggested how important the visuality of manuscript culture is to any study of textuality. *Myth, Montage, and Visuality* is an interdisciplinary study of the interrelationship of the visual and textual aspects of late medieval manuscript cultures; such a study demanded both multiple perspectives and a range of skills. Collaboration greatly enables multidisciplinary work, and from the start, we have pursued every aspect of this project as a joint endeavor, including its writing. We have worked together in drafting and revising every sentence. We individually brought to this project our separate training and skills in the textual and visual cultures of the Middle Ages, yet our aim has been to produce a seamless text in one voice.

Although we have benefited greatly from the long tradition of scholarship on the *Epistre Othea*, we must acknowledge the tremendous contribution of Sandra Hindman's *Christine de Pizan's “Epistre Othéa”: Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI* (1986). Hindman's recognition that the *Epistre Othea* deserves monographic treatment laid the foundation for our inquiry into late medieval visuality. In the process, we have drawn widely from feminist theory, particularly feminist film theory, out of our conviction that premodern and postmodern cultures share a predilection for a cinematic arrangement of knowledge in a montage format.

We have been fortunate to have generous and critical readings from a large number of colleagues. Deborah McGrady, Seth Lerer, and Diane Wolfthal all read and commented on the entire manuscript; Cristelle Baskins, Reinhard Bernbeck, Glenn Burger, Charles Burroughs, Esther Cohen, George Custen, Steven Kruger, Ingeborg Majer O’Sickey, Susan Pollock, Carol Weisbrod, and Jean Wilson all read one or more individual chapters. Drawing on his immense expertise, Robert L. A. Clark carefully and thoroughly answered many questions about translations of the *Epistre Othea*. Jonathan Alexander, Adelaide Bennett, Leslie Abend Callahan, Lois Drewer, James Laidlaw, Susan L’Engle, and Christine Reno all responded cheerfully to our queries about language, manuscripts, or codicology. Joseph Pappa generously shared his knowledge and research in cultural studies. Rhonda Knight provided all sorts of research assistance at the early stages of this project. Celia Braxton, Wendy Matlock, Jenna Soleo, and Jill Stevenson all helped with the final stages of acquiring photographs and permissions as well as compiling bibliographic materials.

Material from this project was presented several times at the annual meetings of the Modern Language Association and the College Art Association, in addition to conferences sponsored by the Center for Medieval and Early Renais-
sance Studies at Binghamton University and the Illinois Medieval Association, as well as the Queer Middle Ages conference sponsored by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at the Graduate Center, City University of New York in 1998. Many kind invitations to speak enabled us to present material during the evolution of this project. In this regard, we especially thank the following individuals and institutions for inviting one or both of us to deliver lectures based on this book: Esther Cohen and the Lafer Center on Gender Studies at the Hebrew University, Israel; Michael Curschmann, Medieval Studies, Princeton University; the graduate students in Medieval Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Carmella Franklin, the Medieval Seminar at Columbia University; Elisabeth Pastan, Emory University; Miri Rubin, Oxford University; William Burgwinkle, Medieval French Seminar at Cambridge University; Anna Davin, History Workshop Journal Seminar in London; E. Ann Matter, Medieval Studies, University of Pennsylvania; and Thérèse de Hemptinne, University of Ghent, Belgium.

Dean Mileur of Harpur College, Binghamton University, contributed to a subvention to cover publication of photographs; several Professional Staff Congress–City University of New York Research Awards supported travel and purchase of photographs. For his consistent commitment to the project, we thank our editor at University of Michigan Press, Collin Ganio.

A portion of chapter 3 appeared as “Queering Ovidian Myth: Bestiality and Desire in Christine de Pizan’s Epistre Othea,” in Queering the Middle Ages, edited by Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). For electronic troubleshooting that on one particular occasion saved our manuscript from oblivion, we thank Mark Sheingorn. Although collaborative work is highly stimulating and synergetic, it is more disruptive to one’s personal routine than the individual pursuit of scholarship. This has often been an exhilarating enterprise, but it has put unusual demands on Jerry Kutcher and Mark Sheingorn. During the course of this project, their understanding and support have been tremendous; they have cheerfully lived with this book much longer than they had anticipated.
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Abbreviations

Bibl. mun. Bibliothèque municipale
BL London, British Library
BnF Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France
BR Brussels, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique
BUV València, Universitat de València, Biblioteca Històrica
Othea Christine de Pizan, Epistre Othea
PML New York, Pierpont Morgan Library
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Fig. 1.1. Christine in the Salle de Fortune, *Livre de la mutation de Fortune*, Munich, Staatsbibliothek, Ms. Gall. 11, fol. 53r. (Foto Marburg/Art Resource, New York.)