Introduction

Visual Pleasures and Medieval Manuscripts

The world spectator is . . . not just someone to whom the past returns, but someone who holds [her/]himself open to the new form it will take—who anticipates and affirms the transformative manifestation of what was in what is.

—Kaja Silverman, World Spectators

And meanwhile the Sphinx can only speak with a voice apart, a voice off.

—Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, “Riddles of the Sphinx, Script”

In a miniature in the Munich manuscript of her Mutacion de Fortune, Christine the poet stands in the Salle de Fortune, a room whose walls are densely covered with a visual record of history (fig. I.1).1 Separated by narrow bands of text, the images stretch in registers along the entire length of the hall. The unfolding narratives combine with the receding diagonals of the walls to create a volume of space. The three-dimensionality of the hall envelops Christine: the quiet intensity of her demeanor, her solitude, and her contemplative expression suggest that the texts and images of history on the walls are creating her as a spectator. This miniature introduces the section of the text that narrates how Christine arrives at the Salle de Fortune and studies the wall paintings there.2 The allegory
of the Mutacion (1403) proposes that Christine as author first sees history and then renders this visual experience in language through her ekphrastic writing. The miniature thus illustrates a central premise of the Mutacion, that cultural memory is primarily visual. This scene in the Salle de Fortune thereby encapsulates critical aspects of the relationship between the textual and the visual in late medieval manuscript cultures.

With the publication of the Mutacion in four simultaneously produced manuscripts with full-color miniatures late in 1403, Christine de Pizan enters a new phase in her literary career. Early-fifteenth-century Paris, specifically around the year 1403, saw a proliferation of luxury manuscripts whose luminous illuminations situate the reader as spectator: this aspect of late medieval Parisian manuscript culture creates a readerly subjectivity that qualifies as cinematic. For centuries, manuscript decoration had played with the properties of light in painting; indeed, the word illuminatio denoted the decoration in manuscripts as well as the concept of “light as color.” As Michael Camille observes, “Light was the inherent formal characteristic of external objects, giving them the ‘color’ of luminosity, and was a basic requirement for the optical theories of the perspectivists who theorized vision.”3 Ivan Illich comments on twelfth-century theories of light: “according to the spiritual optics of the early scholastics, the lumen oculorum, the light which emanates from the eye, was necessary to bring the luminous objects of the world into the onlooker’s sense perception.”4 In this theory, known as extramission, human eyes function rather like a movie projector in casting a beam of light that renders objects visible.

Manuscript painting, particularly in the deployment of colors alongside the reflective gold and silver backgrounds, places the light-emitting object before the eyes of the reader. In a discussion of the manipulation of luminosity in film, Maureen Turim comments, “Luminosity suggests a quality of light, light emanating from its source, as in a candle flame, an ember or a light bulb. . . . The actual light we see during the film projection is also reflected light, bounced off the screen.”5 Scholars such as Patrick de Winter, Charles Sterling, and Millard Meiss emphasize that manuscript painting reaches its zenith in the exploitation of luminosity in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.6 At the same time, as Paul Saenger has shown, reading had become an increasingly private experience. The luminous nature of the reading experience in a manuscript culture situates the reader as a spectator constructed by the luminous quality of the page.7 This aspect of the reading experience in late medieval manuscript culture is analogous to the modern cinematic experience.

In the manuscript culture of early-fifteenth-century Paris, one text in particular manipulated the luminosity of book illustration to create a cinematic experience for the reader—Christine de Pizan’s Epistre Othea or Letter of Othea
to Hector, composed in 1400 and dedicated initially to Louis of Orleans, heir to the French throne. Forty-seven complete manuscripts of the *Othea* survive from the fifteenth century. Two of these manuscript copies appear in early-fifteenth-century luxury editions of Christine’s collected works: the *Othea* in the Duke’s manuscript, named for the duke of Berry, is now in BnF, fr. 606, and the *Othea* in the Queen’s manuscript, named for the queen of France, Isabeau of Bavaria, is in BL, Harley 4431. The *Othea* was printed in at least five separate editions in France; of three English translations, two circulated in manuscript and one appeared in print. These different versions of the *Othea* are variously dedicated to the duke of Berry, Philip the Bold, and Henry IV, king of England.

Fully illustrated copies of the *Othea* consist of one hundred images accompanied by textual explanations, so that the *Othea* enacts a viewing of classical myth as a constitutive text for the late medieval humanist or chivalric subject. Othea, a supposedly classical goddess and personification of wisdom whom Christine invented, instructs the Trojan hero Hector in the codes of chivalric conduct by means of a letter addressed to him at the age of fifteen. The design of the book follows a pattern in which a chapter opens with a visual image of a mythological figure or event in a classical narrative (see figs. 2.17, 2.18, 3.15, 4.11, 4.12). After each miniature comes a passage of Othea’s letter: a short narrative verse, often of lapidary complexity, labeled *texte* and addressed to Hector in the second-person familiar. The *texte* instructs both Hector and the reader in the politics of viewing the miniature. A prose passage labeled *glose* follows the *texte*; the *glose* may expand the narrative but primarily functions to interpret the myth as a lesson in conduct for the good knight; each *glose* ends with a tag line from an ancient philosopher. Another short prose passage, the *allegorie*, concludes the unit and draws a lesson from the myth that is applicable to the “good spirit” or soul; each *allegorie* ends with a Latin quotation from a biblical text written in red. The *glose* and the *allegorie* do not always agree with each other or with the *texte*, and the narrative may remain incompletely told. The moralizing efforts do not always result in a unified reading, nor do they exhaust the interpretative possibilities of the image and the text. In the Duke’s and the Queen’s manuscripts in particular, the miniatures are often much more evocative than the *glose* and *allegorie* that follow. Indeed, the overall effect emphasizes the visuality of reading. In addition to the image—illuminated and framed in gold in the luxury manuscripts—the textual material is organized visually. The textual material not only juxtaposes verse and prose, but includes decorated initials and rubrics in a complex page design or *ordinatio* that combines the visual and verbal components of reading.

The *Othea* works to visualize the past in the present since the epistolary allegory of the *Othea* posits a male reader who might transform the past into
agency by adopting a conduct responsive to the demands of the present. Such agency, however, does not result from an imitation of the past: instead the mythic past offers the reader an opportunity to explore the relationship between ethics and temporality. Basic to the trajectory of the *Othea* is the knowledge that Hector dies defending Troy, and the inevitability of his death imparts an urgency to the lessons Othea offers throughout her epistle to him. In the first chapter, Othea imperatively alludes to his death: “Understand and do not grieve, because I will not say anything that will not come to pass” [Or entens et ne te soucie, / Car riens ne diray qui n’aviengne] (1.69–70). In mythic terms, Hector’s mortality defines the significance of his conduct for the reader. Mortality places temporal demands on ethics, as Kaja Silverman observes: “Our being must . . . be defined in terms of what, from the moment of death, we will have been; it inheres in the future perfect.” In the *Othea*, the future perfect of Hector’s death in the mythic past allows the reader to use that mythic past to negotiate the ethical demands of the present.

The mythical past was available to Christine and her readers in a variety of textual traditions; although Christine demonstrably read Latin texts, the Epistre *Othea* records her reception of the vernacular adaptations of classical texts central to late-fourteenth-century humanism. All of these vernacular retellings of classical narratives belong to manuscript traditions that are frequently illustrated. Much of the mythological material in the *Othea* comes from Ovid by way of the *Ovide moralisé*, a French translation and moralization of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* produced in the early fourteenth century. The *Roman de la rose* likewise negotiates Ovidian myths in a highly visual format; indeed, the visual component of several chapters of the *Othea* could be viewed as a “remake” of the Ovidian interpretations in the *Rose*. The historical material in the *Othea* comes from the French vernacular tradition of universal history that modern scholars have entitled the *Histoire ancienne jusqu’à César*, a prose compendium of biblical, Theban, and Trojan history drawing on Ovid, Virgil, and Statius. The *Othea* engages only sporadically with Boccaccio’s encyclopedic approach to mythical material, *De claris mulieribus*, which first appears in French adaptation in an illustrated format in 1402. Although Christine seems to have had some acquaintance with the Latin text of *De claris mulieribus* before it was available in French, it is her later work, the *Livre de la cité des dames*—composed in 1405—that engages specifically with the French Boccaccio, *Des cleres et nobles femmes*, and thereby undertakes a critique and revision of Boccaccio’s textual misogyny. However, the illustrations in *Othea* manuscripts made after 1402 sometimes respond to the alluring and often lurid illustrations to *Des cleres et nobles femmes*, which circulated widely after 1402.

In addition to the vernacular traditions of classical myth and history, astro-
logical manuscripts in Latin and French also offered a mythical iconography for the *Othea*. In Paris, knowledge of astrology pervaded both the court and the university: in 1368, Christine’s father, Tommaso da Pizzano, came to Paris from Italy, where he had been professor of astrology and astronomy at the University of Bologna, in response to Charles V’s invitation that he serve as court astrologer to the French king, whose library included a wealth of astrological materials.21 Charles’s brother, Jean, duke of Berry, also showed a keen interest in astrology, a fact exemplified by a Latin astrological manuscript he received as a gift. This manuscript, a set of images with introductory texts translated from Abū Ma‘ṣar’s *Introduction to Astrology*, depicts a series of planetary deities that form an interpictorial context for the *Othea*.22 In the *Othea*, the visual traditions of astrology intersect with the vernacular traditions of myth and history, particularly with the Ovidian narratives that offer explanations of how constellations came into being.

Taken together, these materials provided Christine with a vast repertoire of classical materials in highly visual formats. The intertextual and intervisual references restructure these received traditions so that the *Othea* confronts the spectator with a series of individually framed scenes that refuse the imposition of narrative continuity from chapter to chapter. The *Othea*, moreover, displays selected moments from classical myth and history with an almost total disregard for the narrative sequence received from tradition. Nor does the *Othea* offer any sustained narrative thread of its own; each chapter presents a fragment of an authoritative pre-text, redeployed within the context of Othea’s instructions to Hector, so that the *Othea* operates as an exercise in *bricolage* on Christine’s part. Claude Lévi-Strauss considered mythology to be an inherently *bricolage* project because it collects and uses elements “which are ‘pre-constrained’ like the constitutive elements of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from a language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre.”23 Lévi-Strauss’s concept of *bricolage* has been appropriated into a variety of discourses and it has been employed to analyze both material and intellectual culture.24

As *bricolage*, the formal structure of the *Othea* enabled Christine to revise myths without reinscribing them as master narratives.25 Indeed, the lack of a perceptible overall structure in the *Othea* has often been remarked upon. Some scholars emphasize the initial series of textual clues provided at the allegorical level: the four cardinal virtues (chaps. 1–4), the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (chaps. 6–12), the theological virtues (chaps. 13–15), the seven deadly sins (chaps. 16–22), the articles of the Creed (chaps. 23–34), and the Ten Commandments (chaps. 35–44).26 Such approaches, however, have no purchase on the *Othea* after chapter 44, and they even fail to account for every chapter
before 44; for example, the allegorical message of chapter 5, that the chivalric soul should desire fame or a good reputation (“bonne renommee”) among the saints in heaven, fits none of these schemes. The bricolage arrangement of the Othea ultimately works against any overall formal structure. Specific figures, such as Helen, Diana, Circe, Midas, Ino, Venus, Saturn, Mars, and Hector are treated in two or more widely separated chapters; occasionally, as in the two chapters that treat the abduction of Helen by Paris, the textual material from one chapter would seem to illustrate the miniature from another. The reader/viewer of the Othea experiences this visual bricolage as montage, a visual arrangement in which meaning is derived from unexpected juxtapositions.

In his synthetic and wide-ranging analysis of the formal properties of montage, S. M. Eisenstein considers cinema to be a modern extension of a “general principle of montage,” a principle that he sees operating throughout the history of painting and that is particularly evident in medieval painting. Eisenstein’s theory that the montage properties of cinema make it “part of the mainstream of the development and history of painting” renders montage a particularly efficacious category for the analysis of a text such as the Othea. In filmic terms, montage has a specific value for revisionary cinema, as exemplified in two avant-garde feminist films from the 1970s made by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen: Penthesilea (1974) and Riddles of the Sphinx (1976). Each film invokes a traditional narrative of a particular myth, but in each case the actual appropriation of that myth depends on the fragmentation made possible through montage. Section 3 of Riddles of the Sphinx presents a montage of photographs of the Sphinx: this montage is framed by Mulvey’s introduction in section 2, in which she explains how the myth of the Sphinx will be appropriated in the film, an appropriation that includes reading the Egyptian Sphinx as female, since the film itself depends on the premise that “the Sphinx as woman is a threat and a riddle.” Only through the subversion made possible by montage can the Sphinx claim cultural authority, and even then “the Sphinx can only speak with a voice apart, a voice off.” In a similar fashion, the middle section of Penthesilea screens a montage on the theme of the Amazons. The filmmakers’ description of this portion of the film reads: “A complex arrangement of images of paintings, sculptures, bas-reliefs, comic strips, etc. on the theme of the Amazons. The transitions are effected with animated wipes and maskings. The sound track presents the ‘birth’ of a new form of language.” Both films depend on the reader’s existing knowledge of classical myth and the conventions of narrative and nonnarrative cinema. The redeployment of these mythic materials in a
montage destroys the potential for voyeuristic pleasure and instead enables what Mulvey calls the viewer’s “passionate detachment.”

Mulvey’s practice as a feminist filmmaker reflects her theoretical concerns with the categories of visual pleasure as she originally articulated them in her 1972 polemic, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” In this classic formulation of the voyeuristic mastery available in the “male gaze,” Mulvey articulated a theory of spectatorship that has been highly productive in feminist film theory. According to Mulvey, the visual pleasure available in classic Hollywood cinema depends on a scopophilic structure of heterosexual desire, a voyeuristic economy in which men possess the gaze and women are the objects of erotic desire. Though her initial formulation of the male gaze has been extensively critiqued, even by Mulvey herself, her interrogation of visual pleasure initiated an inquiry into the gendered nature of spectatorship that remains part of the silent inheritance of film theory as well as literary studies.

In Mulvey’s words, feminist films such as Riddles of the Sphinx and Penthesilea succeed by “foregrounding the cinematic process privileging the signifier, [which] disrupts aesthetic unity and forces the spectator’s attention on the means of production of meaning.” These films anxiously acknowledge their own formal structures, at times in a highly didactic framework. Such an interrogation of aesthetic possibilities is a standard rhetorical strategy in the revisionary discourses of feminisms. The Othea displays a similar anxiety about the aesthetic values of myth, an anxiety evident in the foregrounding of its formal epistolary structure, derived from the ars dictaminis. As an epistle, the texte of the Othea opens with the rhetorical flourish of the captatio benevolentiae, the attempt to win the recipient’s attentive goodwill. In each of the short textes, the goddess Othea addresses Hector in an exhortatory mode; she employs the familiar form of the second-person direct address appropriate in a letter from an older, wiser interlocutor. In cinematic terms, the voice of Othea functions as a voice-off, that is, the voice of a character who is part of the filmic diegesis but not on screen when speaking. The other two textual elements, the glose and allegorie, are presented in the authorial voice of Christine, who explains Othea’s meaning to the reader. This authorial voice functions as a “voice-over.” As Kaja Silverman defines it, voice-over is “a voice which speaks from a position of superior knowledge, and which superimposes itself on top of the diegesis.” The shifts in voice within each chapter demand that the reader negotiate competing levels of meaning as part of the process of interpretation.

The visual level likewise intervenes intrusively in this process. Kaja Silverman has recently argued that the visual functions as the primary arena for all psychic processes. The visual program of the Othea depicts the psychic drama of conduct as cultural capital and rehearses the possibility that Hector might
learn to perform as a good knight. The assumption that conduct could be understood as performance was central to Nicole Oresme’s French version of Aristotle’s *Ethics*, produced under the patronage of Charles V in 1370–72. Several illustrated manuscripts of Oresme’s translation were made in Parisian workshops in the last quarter of the fourteenth century; indeed, one was made for Louis of Orleans in 1397–98.38 At the start of chapter 2 on moral virtue, Oresme offers an explanatory gloss on the theory of conduct in the *Ethics* that emphasizes the role of habit in the acquisition of virtue.39 In a similar way, the visual hermeneutics of the *Othea* work to elicit a habit of looking that will shape conduct, what Pierre Bourdieu would call a *habitus*.40 The initial miniature stages Hector’s acceptance of Othea’s authority, a visual sign of his receptivity to the mythic lessons of her letter (fig. I.2). Othea leans down from the clouds and hands her letter to Hector, who reaches up eagerly to receive it. A group of nobles who have a stake in his education as a knight look on approvingly. In each subsequent chapter, Othea prescribes a specific physical, psychic, and moral stance and directs Hector to react to her prescription in a performative mode.

Performance theory and film theory come together in the emphasis both place on the centrality of the spectator, whether corporealized, perverse, gendered, embodied, or disembodied.41 The current critical emphasis on spectatorship offers a theoretical paradigm for reading medieval manuscripts for their performativity. A hybrid culture flourished in early-fifteenth-century Paris in which various oral performances, what Bernard J. Hibbitts calls “the vitally communicative roles of gesture, touch, smell and taste,” coexisted with exuberantly literate productions such as the *Othea*. Hibbitts draws on contemporary performance studies, especially in anthropological literature, to develop the concept of “performance culture.” With its “distinctly theatric connotation,” “performance culture” refers to a society in which individuals are “performers” in the sense of being culturally fluent in speech, gesture, touch, smell, and taste.42 It is this cultural fluency that the *Othea* communicates in its images; the visual culture of the *Othea* is rich in represented gestures that could neither be communicated verbally nor effectively described in the text. Thus manuscript painting is the apparatus by which the Othea presents performativity, and since these images depict classical myth, the visual component of the *Othea* offers what Catherine Soussloff identifies as a feature of performance, that “iteration carries with it the past into the present.”43 According to the rhetoric of the *Othea*, the body, character, and soul of the spectator will all have been formed as a result of simultaneously reading the text and viewing the images of the *Othea*. As repeated performances, or iterations, these acts will constitute out of the young male an ideal knight: throughout the *Othea*, though, this iteration is subject to an interrogation along the lines of gender.
Fig. I.2. Othea giving her letter to Hector, *Epistre Othea*, BnF, fr. 606, fol. 1v. (Photo Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.)
Christine’s chapter on Medea illustrates the concepts of gendered performativity at work in the *Othea*. The miniature represents Medea seated on the edge of a bed and opening a strongbox before the kneeling Jason (fig. I.3). In the brief verse *texte* Othea advises:

Do not allow your judgment to be destroyed by illicit pleasure; do not allow your possessions to be taken away, and if they are asked for, then see yourself in Medea.

[Ne laisses ton sens avorter
A fol delit, ne emporter
Ta chevance, se demandee
T’est, et te mires en Medee.]

(58.2–5)

The *glose* describes Medea as “one of the wisest women of prophecy who ever lived” [une des plus savans femmes de sors qui oncques fust] (58.7–8), who nonetheless “let her judgment be destroyed by her desire” [laissa son sens avorter a sa propre voulenté] (58.9–10) when she gave herself and her goods to Jason, for which he repaid her with evil. The moral lesson in the *glose* states that the good knight should not permit reason to be overcome by foolish pleasure, and the *allegorie* offers the lesson for the soul that one’s desire must never have mastery. In her *Epistre au dieu d’Amours*, a text she wrote before the *Othea*, Christine describes Medea:

How did Medea act toward the false Jason? She was very loyal, and through her subtle cleverness, she enabled him to win the Golden Fleece, for which he was more famous than a hundred thousand other men. Because of her, his renown was greater than anyone else’s, and he promised her that he would be her sweet, loyal love, belonging only to her; but he broke his word, left her for someone else, and departed.44

[Que fut jadis Medée au faulz Jason?
Trés loialle, et lui fist la toison
D’or conquerir par son engin soubtil,
Dont il acquist loz plus qu’autres cent mil.
Par elle fu renommé dessus tous,
Si lui promist que loial ami doulz
Seroit tout sien, mais sa foy lui menti
Et la laissa pour autre et s’en parti.]45

(437–44)
Fig. I.3. Medea, *Epistre Othea*, BL, Harley 4431, fol. 122r. (By permission of the British Library.)
Though the textual characterization in the *Othea* corresponds closely to this description from the *Epistre*, the visual component in illustrated manuscripts of the *Othea* offers a performative level of commentary on Medea’s conduct as a mythic woman.

Christine clearly knew the myth according to which Medea assisted Jason in winning the Golden Fleece, bore him two children, and murdered those children to retaliate for his betrayal and abandonment of her; in addition, she knew the visual tradition that constructed Medea as a wielder of powerful magic and a terrifying murderess.\(^{46}\) Both textual and visual versions of this narrative of infanticide occur in Boccaccio’s *Des cleres et nobles femmes* (chap. 16; see fig. I.4) and the *Histoire ancienne* (fig. I.5), as well as the *Roman de la rose* (ll. 13199–234; see fig. I.6). None of this narrative content of Medea as a murderess appears in the image or text of the *Othea*. As Sandra Hindman has
Fig. 1.5. Medea, *Histoire ancienne*, BL, Royal 20 D. I, fol. 37v. (By permission of the British Library.)

Fig. 1.6. Medea, *Roman de la rose*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 371, fol. 87v. (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.)
demonstrated, the *Othea* miniature refers to an early moment in the *Histoire ancienne* narrative when Jason attends Medea in her room, and she offers him a charm and a ring from her jewelry box. In this case, a textual tradition provides the authority to rewrite a gruesome visual tradition of infanticide. The image in the *Othea* offers a moment in the story when Medea confronts a conventional ethical dilemma: whether to resist or yield to transgressive desire. Her gestures—of opening and openness—perform her availability to Jason. The courtly context signaled by her garland and the lover bending his knee before her brings this scene into focus as a chivalric performance. Yet *Othea* tells Hector to identify across genders: “If this is asked of you, then see yourself [literally, “mirror yourself,” *te mires*] in Medea.” This invitation to think through Medea’s decision is remarkable for both the implied empathy and the lack of anxiety about the female power and sexuality that the figure of Medea traditionally encodes. Christine’s Medea is a wise woman who made a foolish mistake, a woman with the authority to bestow her own body and goods—to be the subject of desire—but who made a bad decision when she did so and suffered as a result. The mnemonic potential of images works to substitute Christine’s revision of Medea for the vicious Medea in the visual memory of her readers; such a revision suggests that Christine the poet saw the visual component of the *Othea* as a critical shaper of ethical meanings for the reader/viewer.

The miniature to the Medea chapter poses important questions about authorial involvement in image making and manuscript production. Hindman cites this miniature and its relationship to the text of the *Histoire ancienne* as evidence that Christine herself must have determined the contents of the visual material throughout the *Othea*. Certainly the nature of workshop production in late medieval Paris allowed for authorial supervision of manuscript design and illustration, as Claire Richter Sherman has demonstrated in the case of Nicole Oresme’s translations of Aristotle. Since the early illustrated manuscripts of the *Othea* all show similar visual programs, they ultimately must derive from one vision. At times the iconography in these early manuscripts appears to be highly idiosyncratic, and at times it is original to the *Othea*. The originality of these visual programs and their engagement with the textual material suggest a collaborative artistic partnership that would certainly include the author but should not be characterized as “authorial”; consequently the text-image relationship should not be considered the product of authorial intention so much as the result of workshop practice. Much like the Hollywood studio system, manuscripts emerge from multiple artistic efforts in response to some overriding vision. Throughout our analysis of the *Othea* we take up the invitation it offers the reader/viewer to consider the visual material as the primary focus of readerly interpretive activity.
Scholars have long been aware of the illuminations in many of Christine’s manuscripts,52 and some have posited Christine’s central role in the production of the two extensively illustrated manuscripts of her collected works, the Duke’s and the Queen’s manuscripts.53 Fundamental work on the miniatures of the *Othea* has been done by Lucie Schaefer, Rosemond Tuve,54 Millard Meiss,55 and Sandra L. Hindman.56 From the earliest exemplars, the *Othea* is presented in an *ordinatio*—or layout—that directs the reader’s attention to the visual organization of meaning. The images are one component of the visuality of the *Othea* manuscripts and their construction of a reading subject. The earliest surviving manuscript of Christine’s *Epistre Othea* (BnF, fr. 848), which was dedicated to Louis, duke of Orleans, and presented to him in 1400 or 1401, is a small manuscript of twenty leaves.57 The page design signals at a glance a set of relationships integral to the meaning of the text. Folio 2r, the opening of the text proper, centers on the *texte* of chapters 1 and 2, which is written in a larger script than the flanking prose passages of the *glose* on the left and the *allegorie* on the right. Above the first line of the *texte* with its decorated initial is a two-part miniature, executed in grisaille, whose subjects correspond to the topics of the first two chapters: Othea and Temperance (fig. I.7). In this clear visual separation of different kinds of representation, the poetic text in the center is framed by various supplementary materials—the image at the top of the page forms the upper segment of the frame; the prose *glose* and *allegorie* are adjusted to fill in the space at the bottom below the *texte*. The deliberate restriction of the image to grisaille facilitates the integrated exchange between text and image. The visual presentations of poetry, prose, and image work to create a harmonious effect.

In this earliest text of the *Othea*, the visual program is limited to the first four folios, a situation that James Laidlaw attributes to Christine’s limited means at this early stage of her career.58 These initial images are not neatly matched on the same page with the textual material, and in one case, that of folio 2v, the image for chapter 4 (Minos) is on the left in a double miniature in which the image for chapter 3 (Hercules) is on the right. This double miniature nonetheless presents a pleasing composition and illustrates the extent to which visual design is privileged over a tight relationship between text and image in this manuscript.59 Even in the absence of miniatures after chapter 5, the purposeful *ordinatio* of these first few folios persists throughout the manuscript. Such an effectively balanced page visually replicates the layout of biblical, theological, and legal manuscripts and thereby evokes the authoritative status of commentary.60 Mary Ann Ignatius observes, “The disposition of the text of the *Othea* in ms. fr. 848 . . . invites a non-linear, contemplative style of reading.”61 The *ordinatio* of fr. 848 may have been the model for two surviving single-text
manuscripts of the *Othea* that arrange the three textual portions of each chapter around a centrally placed miniature: Cambridge, Newnham College Library, MS 900 (5) and Beauvais, Bibl. mun., MS 9, both of which have been dated to the third decade of the fifteenth century. These three manuscripts demonstrate the potential of *ordinatio* to highlight the inherent visuality of the *Othea*.

The *Othea* takes on a different *ordinatio* when it is included in larger manuscript compilations. The earliest version of Christine’s collected works, designated by Laidlaw the “Livre de Christine,” now lost, included the *Othea*. In addition, two early manuscripts were copied from the “Livre de Christine”: Chantilly, MS 492–93 and BnF, fr. 12779. In order to fit the *Othea* into the *ordinatio* of these collections, both of these versions employ a double-column format and single-column miniatures. The miniatures cease early in both manuscripts, but the text continues with the same format. Such *ordinatio* points to the interpretive juxtaposition of texts—verse and prose, *glose* and *allegorie*—as well as a purposeful arrangement of text and image.

Just after the middle of the first decade of the fifteenth century, Christine
began what would eventually become two luxury editions of her collected works. The *Othea* in each collection contains one hundred miniatures that form a new, elaborate cycle of illustration, a complete program of one image per chapter. One collection, known today as the Duke’s manuscript (BnF, fr. 606, 835, 836, and 605), was begun for Louis of Orleans and acquired by the duke of Berry after Orleans’s assassination in 1407. The other collection, known today as the Queen’s manuscript (BL, Harley 4431), was presented to Isabeau of Bavaria after its compilation in 1410–11. Harley 4431 and fr. 606 emerge from a patronage system that allowed Christine as author to retain some control of her work. As Deborah McGrady has shown, “Christine undertakes concurrent projects intended for individual patrons and then disseminates copies of these same works to multiple members of the nobility.” Having several noble patrons made possible a lavish scale of illumination in these two manuscripts. Patronage stimulated illumination but left some control in the hands of the poet, since the patron owned an illuminated exemplar, not the text itself.

As exemplars, the copies of the *Othea* in the Duke’s and the Queen’s manuscripts, so similar in *ordinatio* and roughly contemporary in date, are closely related, but the nature of that relationship is difficult to determine with any specificity. A folio-by-folio comparison of the six quires in each copy shows that each closely resembles the other in layout and page design until the final quire. The first three quires of eight folios each begin and end identically in both manuscripts; the quires display slight internal variations in text layout, although the images are always placed in the same position on the page. The fourth quire of fr. 606 lacks one folio, resulting in a total of forty-seven folios rather than the forty-eight found in 4431. In fr. 606 the text covers forty-six folios; in 4431 it covers forty-seven. From the fourth quire on, 4431 and fr. 606 are not identical in terms of collation, yet the miniatures fall in the same places on the page and the text breaks at the same point at the end of every eight leaves. In 4431, the *ordinatio* of the sixth quire shows a self-conscious sprawl; in comparison to the earlier quires, larger blank spaces are left between portions of the text, and these spaces are visually claimed by unusually long ascenders and descenders. After the first folio of this sixth quire, the placement of miniatures in 4431 no longer corresponds to that in fr. 606. This last quire also contains more and longer strikeouts than the earlier quires, and the size of the script grows noticeably larger, as if the scribe had determined to spread the text and layout over one more folio.

The identical breaks between folios at the end of every eight leaves suggest that each manuscript was copied from an exemplar with regular quires of eight leaves each. Had Harley 4431 been copied from fr. 606, following the usual practice of disbinding a manuscript before copying it, then the irregular quire
in the middle of fr. 606 would have been copied as an irregular quire lacking one folio. The sixth quire of Harley 4431 would then be identical to fr. 606. On the other hand, fr. 606 is too regular in the last quire to have been copied from the sprawling sixth quire of Harley 4431. A more likely hypothesis is that the design of both manuscripts follows a maquette. As Jonathan Alexander observes, “[F]or more complex, lengthy, and financially burdensome projects, such as making an illuminated manuscript with new or different cycles of illustrations, which might number tens or even hundreds of miniatures, there had to be a plan. This may very often have consisted of a ‘maquette,’ a rough copy, perhaps on paper not parchment, which functioned as guide to both scribe and illuminator.”67 The striking similarities in page design despite the divergence in the final quire suggest that, though neither manuscript may be a copy of the other, the two are twin manuscripts.68

The visual program of the Othea in the Duke’s manuscript is the work of three artists whom Millard Meiss identifies as the Epitre Master, the Saffron Master, and the Egerton Master.69 Meiss attributes the Othea miniatures in the Queen’s manuscript to the Cité des dames Master and his workshop.70 Both of these manuscripts follow the double-column format found in versions of the Othea produced for collections, and within this double-column format most of the miniatures are emphatically higher than they are wide. Such verticality may be exploited in different ways. Some miniatures feature a god or goddess enthroned in the sky of the upper portion and humans on earth below, resulting in a hieratically ordered composition; other miniatures treat the lower portion of the miniature as foreground and the upper part as background, thereby creating the illusion of spatial depth; and yet others create a continuously receding space and situate the figures within it.71 Although the visual programs of the Othea in both the Duke’s and the Queen’s manuscripts closely resemble one another both compositionally and iconographically, they are quite distinct in style and palette. Fr. 606 exhibits a rather limited palette that includes few greens and depends on neutral colors but displays a wide tonal range that emphasizes the lighter shades. Though the skies in fr. 606 are illusionistic, the architectural settings betray the artists’ lack of facility in creating the perspective illusion of the third dimension. Individual figures in a composition tend not to overlap; placed side by side, they spread across the surface rather than occupy the space. As a result, interactions among the figures sometimes appear forced or awkward, as though the artist had not transcended the sketches in the maquette. In general, the delicate use of line results in finely detailed faces and hands, richly decorative surfaces, and patterned draperies. By contrast to fr. 606, almost all of the backgrounds in Harley 4431 are diapered in a variety of patterns dominated by blue, pink, and gold. The colors in this manuscript tend to
be highly saturated, and consequently the images seem bold, so that gestures read very clearly, in part due to the strong line. Intuitive understanding of perspective results in convincingly three-dimensional boxes of space, within which figures interact dynamically. The bright reflections of the diaped backgrounds create an optical effect; against such background the illusionistic groups of figures almost appear to move.

The luminous visual programs of the Duke’s and the Queen’s manuscripts emerge from a world system of production and trade. Europe’s location as a central node in global trade networks underlies the ideologies of medieval colonialisms, and manuscript illumination in a text such as Christine’s *Othea* exemplifies the fetishlike products of western European imperialisms. New applications of pigment account for the palettes of Parisian manuscripts from 1380 onwards. The generous use of gold and the intensity of blues and reds in particular mark a departure from earlier practice. Since France—and western Europe in general—is poor in mineral deposits, the raw materials required to produce these pigments were imported, often from great distances, as part of a precolonizing network of economic relationships. Lapis lazuli, the mineral that was processed to produce ultramarine blue—a dominant color in some sections of the Duke’s and the Queen’s manuscripts—was mined in Asia, specifically in the part of Asia that is today Afghanistan. Since there were no operative gold mines in Europe during the Middle Ages, gold was imported from sub-Saharan Africa. The Marxist notion of the fetish characterizes such a displacement of the commodity from the means of production: the commodity becomes a fetish precisely because it appears to be disconnected from labor. Although manuscript painting in this period depends entirely on extensive European trade with Asia and Africa, the final commodity completely disavows the global interdependence behind its mode of production. As commodity-fetishes, the Duke’s and the Queen’s manuscripts testify to Europe’s location at the core of a world system of trade relations that prefigure the power relations of European expansionism in the early modern era.

As compellingly beautiful collections of images, the copies of the *Othea* in the Duke’s and the Queen’s manuscripts also display the qualities of the fetish as understood in psychoanalytic terms. These manuscripts offer rich scenarios for an analysis of sexuality and desire, identity and emotion, violence and subjectivity. As a beautiful object upon which to gaze, the illustrated *Othea* offers a range of aesthetic experiences, yet the text throughout attempts to render the aesthetic claims of the image in an ethical context. It is this intersection between ethics and aesthetics that provides the focus for our study of the *Othea*. In our initial chapter we explore the cinematic structures of early art historical inquiry in order to suggest how modern scholars might realign their theoretical
gaze in order to appreciate a text such as the \textit{Othea}, a text that defies the voyeuristic mastery of the iconographic method made popular by Erwin Panofsky. In chapter 2 we demonstrate how the \textit{Othea} works to discipline the gaze of the knightly male reader, whether Hector the addressee or his implied counterpart. As such it specifically intervenes in the text-image economy of the \textit{Roman de la rose} and purposely deploys images to construct an alternative to the masculine subject positions created by the \textit{Rose}. In the mid-fifteenth century the \textit{Othea} was repeatedly copied for the Burgundian court, where the visual program underwent revision and the conception of masculinity becomes more normative in response to Burgundian court. Chapter 3 considers how the \textit{Othea} visually recasts mythical material drawn from the \textit{Ovide moralisé} in order to queer the contemporary construction of sexualities. In its engagement with Ovidian myth, the \textit{Othea} evokes knowledge about the past to critique contemporary constructions of sexuality. Chapter 4 addresses the representation of violence in historical traditions. The unfolding of history in the tradition of historical texts known as the \textit{Histoire ancienne} was central to the royal identity of the Valois court. The \textit{Othea} screens this history as a lesson in knightly conduct and military strategy through a visual critique of the engendering of violence. Chapter 5 examines how the eloquence of gesture in the visual program enhances the rhetorical efficacy of the \textit{Othea}, especially in response to the visual programs of \textit{Des cleres et nobles femmes}, the early-fifteenth-century French translation of Boccaccio’s \textit{De claris mulieribus}. In an afterword, we briefly trace the reception of the \textit{Othea} in Burgundian court culture of the second half of the fifteenth century and in the printing houses of early-sixteenth-century Paris.

With few notable exceptions, the visuality of the \textit{Othea} has long eluded the gaze of scholars\textsuperscript{76} and the complex performance of its visual and textual culture has been largely illegible. This is partly due to what Leo Steinberg would call the “textism” of literary and manuscript studies\textsuperscript{77} but it is also a consequence of the relation of art history to the visual regimes of the twentieth century. In order to develop a methodology responsive to the visual qualities of the \textit{Othea}, our first chapter examines the visual regimes of the early twentieth century. Throughout the century, the production of knowledge in art historical discourse was shaped by various visual technologies such as slide projection, photographs, microfilm, microfiche, and even photocopying. The dominant visual technology of the century, however, was cinema, although the role of the cinematic experience in the formation of art history is seldom acknowledged. Yet the various methodologies of early-twentieth-century art history—particularly Aby Warburg’s iconology and Erwin Panofsky’s iconography—result directly from the cinematic structuring of knowledge in twentieth-century scholarship. The \textit{Othea} demands that the reader respond to the contingent quality of images,
always reading them against other images. The montage arrangement of the Othea refuses voyeurism and constructs a spectator who must forgo visual mastery. As we shall see, it is Warburg’s Mnemosyne, not Panofsky’s iconography, that offers the most productive methodology for an analysis of the montage structure of the Othea.