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Out of Time: Ekphrasis, Narration, and Temporal Experience in Twelfth-Century Romances of Antiquity

Abstract

This article considers the affective and conceptual work demanded in sophisticated moments of ekphrasis that abound in twelfth-century Old French romances, with particular attention to Alexandre de Paris's *Roman d'Alexandre* (1180s) and to two of the trio of *romans d'antiquité*, composed in French at the court of Henry II in England: the *Roman de Thebes* (*c.* 1150) and Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* (1165). Of concern is the description of mechanical artefacts or tents that are depicted with representations of temporal progression, in the light of Virgil, *Aeneid*, 8 and Homer, *Iliad*, 18, available to twelfth-century Latins via Baebius's abbreviated Latin epitome. Narrative time stops for these ekphrastic moments which describe the pictorial representation of time. Henri Bergson's concept of duration (durée) and Boethius's representation of human and divine time in *Consolation of Philosophy*, 4 are used to think through the productive tension between time as forward movement, as represented through narration, and time as juxtaposed stasis, by which events all happen simultaneously, as represented through pictorial representation. Beyond that, the cosmic implications of these temporal questions bring out the relationship between twelfth-century literary ekphrasis and the medieval reception of the cosmogony of Plato's *Timaeus*. Particular attention is paid to the marvellous tents of Adrastus in the *Thebes* and of Alexander the Great in the *Alexandre*; to the chariot of Amphiaraus in the *Thebes* with its depiction of Ovidian myth and Macrobian cosmos; and to the astonishing cosmogrammatical automaton in the *Troie*'s Chamber of Beauties. Ekphrases of artefacts representing time and the world clearly resonated with medieval audiences; rather than being superfluous to the action, they appear as fundamental to the composition and performance of historical narrative in French romance.

Twelfth-century narratives of antiquity obsessively stage aesthetic experiences that force listeners and readers to become conscious of their own relationship to time and to its mediation through narrative art. At certain moments, literature becomes a tool that can generate

a certain kind of aesthetic experience that is idiosyncratically philosophical in the specific sense that it gives its audiences the chance to grapple with or to sit with conceptual difficulties that are beyond philosophy's ability to resolve. Beyond these more specific moments, twelfth-century romance, set in a legendary past, produces a general phantasmatic suspension of time for its audiences. Just as historical novels or television period dramas do for modern audiences, they bring the past into a complex affective relation of similarity to and overlap with the present. Aimé Petit is right to say of anachronism in French *romans antiques* (romances of Antiquity) that it

> illustre l'impossibilité pour l'homme d'accomplir parfaitement la synthèse du passé et du présent, il représente en même temps une tentative pour échapper au(x) temps, mais c'est aussi l'objet d'une ingénieuse technique. (*L'Anachronisme* 285)

> (illustrates the impossibility for humans of perfectly accomplishing the synthesis between the past and the present; at the same time, it represents an attempt to escape from time/temporalities, but it is also the object of an ingenious technique.)

Anachronisms, such as allusions to Eleanor of Aquitaine's cultural centres of Poitiers and London in the *Roman de Thebes*, set in distant Antiquity but probably composed at her husband Henry II's Angevin court, draw attention to the work of the literary technician, and thus to how the audience's relationship to the distant events related is mediated through the poetic work in performance (Petit, *L'Anachronisme* 50–51). A different literary genre, the Latin prose histories of twelfth-century monastic writers such as William of Malmesbury, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Gerald of Wales, and Walter Map, show a particularly alert and sophisticated sensitivity to the ways that texts can use fiction to think about history (Otter). This essay, concerned both with literary history and literary theory, is less interested in fictionality itself than in a specific literary practice, strangely recurrent in twelfth-century poetic narrative, that generates very specific aesthetic experiences for audiences for thinking and feeling temporality. I am referring to breaks within narratives of antiquity in which narrative time stops to accommodate extended descriptions of marvellous artefacts, which themselves are decorated with visual representations of historical time.

It is not possible to give an inventory of all the various moments of ekphrasis in twelfth-century literature, a task which would demand a book-length study (Wandhoff). Instead, I want to consider a few ekphrastic moments, whose extreme self-consciousness in their own status as literary objects makes different kinds of time particularly visible. The moments of ekphrasis under discussion come from twelfth-century French-language romance composed in England and Northern France: the retellings of the exploits of Alexander the Great collated by Alexandre de Paris in his *Roman d'Alexandre* (1180s) and the mid-twelfth-century trio of so-called *romans d'antiquité*, composed in French at the Angevin court of Henry II in England: the *Roman de Thebes* (*c.* 1150), the *Roman d'Eneas* (*c.* 1160), and Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* (1165).[1] As we will see below, they entail representations of time through the changing of the seasons, through historical or mythical events, and even through the depiction of the whole cosmos, as represented on the inside panels of tents, on decorative automata, and on war machines. They draw on the seminal moments of ekphrasis of the shield of Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid*, 8 and of the shield of Achilles that medieval students of Latin would have read in Baebius's Latin epitome of Homer's *Iliad*. In all of these works the past is reanimated and repurposed. Moments of narrative or temporal suspension in the description of marvellous artefacts, themselves depicted with historical or even cosmic events, enact self-conscious reflection on the nature and value of the artful and uncertain work of historical narrative, in particular as it bridges past and present through acts of imagination (on which, see Karnes 28 and *passim*). Beyond the self-referentiality of narrative art thinking artfully about the art of narration, these moments also, in a manner of speaking, make different kinds of time visible.

The ontology and phenomenology of time are important themes for some medieval philosophers and theologians, whose influence on poets can at times be seen, but the thinking work of narrative art is quite different to the thinking work of other discursive regimes. Beyond accounting for the intellectual influences that philosophical texts might have exerted on literary production, a reckoning with these descriptions demands attention to the particularity of the literary: the specific potential of these ekphrastic moments for engineering aesthetic experiences of temporal breakdown. The experience of time is at stake more than the theory of time – although there is no experience without some kind of implicit theoretical framework and no one theorizes without feeling some kind of affect. West-

ern thought has a long tradition of representing time, imperfectly, in relation to place and, as we will discuss below, Henri Bergson's analysis of the phenomenology of time as *durée* (duration) reveals the limitations of the spatial metaphors of, for example, discrete juxtaposition. Where philosophical language comes short, there is space for the thinking work of narrative; Paul Ricoeur suggests the theoretical work on time done through the practice of storytelling, which is

> le moyen privilégié par lequel nous re-configurons notre expérience temporelle confuse, informe et, à la limite, muette. (Ricoeur 12)

> (the privileged means by which we reconfigure our confused, shapeless, and even speechless experience of time.)

So, following Ricoeur, within broader narratives that help to make sense of time, ekphrasis marks a certain breakdown in the temporal order, affording its reading or listening subjects the momentary chance to reconfigure their relationship to their present, to the past, even to the timelessness of eternity. This is not to say that such moments provide an escape from the present; like the anachronism that Petit discusses, these ekphrastic breaks are marked by a pronounced awareness, shared by author and audience, of the artifice and the present-ness, so to speak, of the literary experience. Such studied artificiality is a particular kind of fictionality, one of the "plural conventions of suspending referential truth claims and of commenting on that suspension in medieval writing," to cite Julie Orlemanski's generative articulation of the possibilities of medieval fiction (Orlemanski 147).

Ekphrasis and narration

Ekphrasis disrupts the regular workings of narrative time. By ekphrasis I mean the extended verbal description of a work of visual art, and I am particularly interested in what John Hollander calls "notional ekphrasis" (Hollander 4), the description not of real, physical, visible artefacts that could be compared with their verbal representation, but rather of imagined, invented objects. The objects described by our twelfth-century authors in prolific detail are decorated with images that represent events in the cyclical time of the world or in the linear telling of history, which adds a level of self-consciousness. In these moments the time of the story necessarily pauses so

that audiences and performers reading the work out become especially aware of different ways of understanding, of representing, or of experiencing the temporal order. It is not that these are moments "in which a poem aspires to the atemporal 'eternity' of the stopped-action" (Steiner 13–14). The aim is not to transcend time, but to reflect on our experience of it and the vexed relationship between present and past.

Ekphrasis, then, can be usefully understood as a moment of concentrated negotiation, a suspension that forces an awareness about the flow of narrative time, which has to stop to accommodate it. Regular narrative time involves the recounting of action of speech: Achilles spurred his horses on, Paris pulled his bow-string taut, etc. With an ekphrastic moment, however, the action must stop so that, like a camera panning in slow-motion, the details of the work of visual art are listed, before narrative time resumes for its action to continue. The visual artefact, though, has its own narrative with a different temporal logic; James Heffernan suggests that ekphrasis "typically represents the arrested moment of graphic art not only by re-creating its fixity in words but rather by releasing its embryonically narrative impulse" (Heffernan 307). In his study of ekphrasis in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Michael Putnam notes, "by its very act of disruption, ekphrasis forces itself on the reader as a generative moment, as two types of narrativity confront each other" (Putman 3). One kind of narrative time stops; another kind begins; in the tense suspension between the two of them, questions about time, teleology, and history are at stake, allowing a certain kind of experience of time, a temporary contemplation, affective and theoretical.

To understand the iterability and intertextuality of medieval romance ekphrasis, we have to start with Virgil's narrative art. The *Aeneid* was perhaps the most important text for the medieval study of Latin and for the very idea of what literature was in the Middle Ages (Wetherbee, "The study of classical authors" 100–06; Ziolkowski and Putnam), and its history of Troy and the wanderings of Aeneas were a direct inspiration for twelfth-century romance, far beyond its direct reworking as the *Roman d'Eneas*. The most important moment in the *Aeneid* for the historical ekphrases in medieval romance is its eighth book's description of the shield made by the god Vulcan and given to the hero Aeneas by Venus. Vulcan's smiths forge an "ingentem clipeum" (a giant shield) (Virgil, *Aeneid* 8, 447), welding seven circles together, and the shield is a huge circle that is metal but also impossibly depicted as indescribable textile in the image of "clipei non enarrabile textum" (the shield's unnarratable fabric) (8, 625,

translation emended). Its indescribability does not prevent Virgil's narrator from describing it, and it is important to stress the paradoxical breakdown in narrative sense occasioned by this impossible and perhaps mystical object. Such a breakdown marks the ekphrastic moment as a site outside of action that is proper for thinking about (and feeling) time, narrativity, and textuality.

On this shield, whose description runs for just over a hundred verses, Vulcan, "haud vatum ignarus venturique inscius aevi" (not unversed in prophecy or unknowing of the age to come) (8, 627), had fashioned images and deeds of the generations of Rome descended from Ascanius, Aeneas's son. The prophetic shield foretells events all the way to Virgil's patron Emperor Augustus's victory in the sea-battle of Actium and the triumphant entry into Rome that began his glorious reign. There is something nonsensical about this. It may be history to Virgil and his contemporaries but Aeneas himself does not understand what is happening; he is *ignarus* (the antinomy to Vulcan, the "haud vatum ignarus"): "miratur rerumque ignarus imagine gaudet" (though he knows not the events, he rejoices in their representation) (8, 730). If the future shown to him is a mystery for Aeneas, his shield serves as a map of events beyond the human experience of past, present, and future in which each is fixed in time-space: this moment of ekphrasis is outside of narrative time so that its studied extratemporality becomes a tool to think through the divine destiny that led to the ascent of Augustus Caesar. More than that, the shield's circularity and the patterned history that cycles round it convey a sense of the loops and repetitions that still mark the forward thrust of events (Putnam 119–88). The work of literature serves as a kind of bridging ritual, performed or enacted in an attempt to bring the legendary hero-time of Aeneas in contact with the time of Augustus, all the while bringing up its own questions about history, destiny, and free will.

It is this aspect of Virgil's ekphrasis that resonates most immediately for the twelfth-century authors who wrote their own time-bending narratives for courtly audiences, such as those in the milieu of Henry II of England and his queen Eleanor of Aquitaine. These narratives of antiquity are situated in a legendary historical time that is nonetheless brought into a kind of presence or present. In what follows, then, I will consider the specific temporal and historical ekphrases of French romance literature in the second half of the twelfth century as tools for particular kinds of affective, philosophical experience for thinking and feeling time. The ekphrastic moments I wish to dwell on differ from the Virgilian model in their concern for cos-

mography, bearing witness to the twelfth-century's Neoplatonist interest in human history in relation to the time of the cosmos. Beyond simply representing historical time and national destiny, they represent universal space-time in a way that partially closes (at least phantasmatically) the gulf between human and cosmic or divine time. In this they resonate with other cosmograms (Tresch) that proliferate in religious or clerical circles in the High Middle Ages, such as the representations of the cosmos as an egg (Dronke 79–99) or, especially, Hugh of Saint-Victor's spiritual painting of Noah's Ark, which is also allegorically the world, and on which he gave a series of lectures (Rudolph).[2] They also recall the descriptions of the cosmos that feature in the Neoplatonist philosophical tradition, from the cosmography of Plato's *Timaeus*, mediated via Chalcidius and Macrobius, to Bernard Sylvester, Thierry of Chartres, and other twelfth-century philosophers (Dronke; Hicks; Hicks and Morton; Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*). While the philosophical stakes of romance ekphrasis are brought out by considering their relation to Neoplatonist philosophy in particular, narrative, whether or not it is understood as fictional, works in its own particular way to help its audiences makes sense of their relationship to time and the world.

2. See Anya Burgon's contribution to this collection.

Le Roman de Thèbes, 1: The tent of Adrastus and the philosophy of time

The first example comes from the *Roman de Thèbes*, a French *mise en romanz* of Statius's first-century *Thebaid*, an epic poem in the mode of the *Aeneid*. The story is of the bloody war that took place before the battle of Troy between Oedipus's sons (and, through his incest, also his brothers) Eteocles and Polyneices. The audience are treated to two asides that describes the interior decoration of the tent of King Adrastus of Argos, who has taken Polyneices's side in the Theban civil war (Baumgartner, *De l'histoire de Troie* 179–87; Petit, "Les premières descriptions"). The second description mentions two panels, one decorated with a mappamundi, an encyclopaedic map of the whole world, and the other with the twelve months of the year represented. It also tells how the king has painted all of his judgements and the historic laws of his Greeks ancestors there, as well as the history of memorable Greek kings and their memorable battles and conquests (4217–84). Here we will focus, though, on the earlier passage, a different ekphrastic set-piece with a complex depiction of

the world in time (3175–3212). There the events represented on the tent's panels appear first to be a pale imitation of Virgil's virtuosic ekphrasis. As with the mappamundi described in the later passage, though, the shift of emphasis from a specific national history to a general picture of the world is illustrative of a characteristically twelfth-century concern for putting human history in a tension with a more universal perspective on time:

Devant la porte du donjon
tendent au roi son paveillon ;
touz fu de pailles de coulors,
tailliez a bestes et a flors.
Bien i sont peintes les estoires,
les vielles gestes, les memoires
et les justises et les plés,
les jugemenz et les forfés,
et les montaignes et li val,
et les quaroles et li bal,
les puceles et leur ami
et les dames et leur mari,
les larges prez et les rivieres
et les bestes de mil maneres,
les ostoirs et les epreviers
et les roncins et les destriers,
les vielz houmes et les chanus
et les chauz et les cheveluz,
les granz bois et les granz forez,
les embuchemenz, les aguez,
les cembiaux et les envaïes
que danzel font por lor amies,
et les chastiaux et les citez,
les forteresces, les fertez.
De trestoutes les creatures
sont el tref paintes les natures
(*Le roman de Thèbes* 3175–3200).

(In front of the keep's gate they set up the king's tent; it was all made from coloured silks, decorated with animals and flowers. On it were painted histories, old noble deeds, the chronicles [/memories?] and the courts and the pleas, the judgements and the penalties, and the mountains and the valleys, and the carols and the dances, the girls and their lovers and the ladies and their husbands, the wide meadows and the rivers and beasts of a thousand kinds, the goshawks and sparrowhawks, and the packhorses and the chargers, the old men and those with white hair, the bald and the hairy, the great woods and the great forests, the ambushes, the surprise attacks, the onslaughts and the assaults that young men carry out for the sake of their lovers, and the castles and walled cities, the strongholds and strong-places. The natures of all creatures are painted on the tent.)

The first things described are histories, great deeds perhaps to inspire imitation, but, as the description goes on, we move from war to the legal arena to love, presumably causes of strife and potentially of warfare. Here it is useful to remember Heffernan and Putnam's point that the representational art object has its own kind of narrative impulse.

This ekphrastic moment differs from the more ordered vision of history laid out on the shield of Aeneas in that its events are not displayed in temporal succession. All of these judgements, disputes, and struggles are taking place at the same time laid out on the tent, or in a temporality beyond that of lived human experience with no guiding through-line or obvious pattern. Instead of the forward thrust of destiny found in *Aeneid* 8, everything just happens without any obvious wider narrative. The apparent lack of narrative purpose is itself, though, a kind of narrative and reflects the Theban war, a fruitless, fratricidal, mutually destructive conflict, so different in outcome to the wandering of Aeneas, whose escape from Troy leads ultimately to the founding of Rome.

A significant shift occurs with the final couplet that changes the meaning of the painting (or of the description of the painting), as the perspective suddenly expands to represent the natures of absolutely all creatures in the world ("De trestoutes les creatures / sont el tref paintes les natures," 3199–3200). The medieval idea of a 'creature' is a broader category than the primary modern sense of animals and encompasses everything created by God. In one breath the perspective has gone cosmic, and the accumulation of human and animal interactions represented on the tent goes from a haphazard collection of events to a universal vision of the world against which human disputes in general and the war of the Seven against Thebes in particular should be understood. But what vision of human actions and the natural world does this notional painting represent?

The vision of time it portrays is superhuman: all of the carols and dances and love-affairs and birds flying are laid out together without any indication of anteriority and posteriority and thus in a spatial relation of simultaneity. Yet verbal narrative is durational and demands an order so that the unfolding that happens in time is the narrator's explication of the histories (*histoires*) and the events, people, and creatures that are laid out spatially in the painting. No explicit account is given here about the nature of time. Instead, with the interruption of narrative's progress to accommodate the representation of a different temporal disposition, audiences are fleetingly prompted to an awareness of the limited linearity of the lived human experience of time whose specificity becomes more clearly seen when contrasted with the simultaneity shown on the tent's panel. Reflections on time and the cosmos are very much part of the philosophical movement whose centre was the cathedral school of Chartres, and the key sources for such reflection are Boethius's sixth-century

Consolation of Philosophy, Plato's *Timaeus*, 38b–39e, as translated and commented on by Calcidius in 1, c. 23 of his fourth-century gloss *On Plato's "Timaeus"* (Calcidius 64–69; 154–57), and Macrobius's fifth-century *On the Dream of Scipio* 2, c. 10 (Macrobius 124–27), which itself drew heavily on Plato's account of time and the spheres. Beyond that, monastic institutions, especially the influential Abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris, saw the dissemination and teaching of Augustine's wrestling with questions of time in book 11 of his *Confessions* (late fourth century). The *Roman de Thèbes* does not replicate those discussions and teachings but offers lay audiences a brief aesthetic experience of some of the mind-bending pleasures and thinking about time that took place in the Schools.

It stands as a moment of temporal experience outside of normal time, one which, more than the *Aeneid*, recalls Homer's *Iliad*, the Greek model for Virgil's Latin epic, in which Hephaistos (*i.e.,* Vulcan) makes a huge, dazzling shield to whose complexity it is not possible here to do justice (18, 483–608).[3] Ringed round by "the mighty stream of Ocean" (Homer, *Iliad* 18, 607), the shield contains scenes of rural labour through the seasons and civil strife, but Homer begins his word-picture with details of the shield's cosmic aspect:

> On it he fashioned the earth, the sea, and the heavens,
> the unwearying sun, the moon on its increase to full,
> and every constellation with which the heavens are crowned
> (18, 483–85).

Homer's text may not have been accessible directly to medieval authors, but a Latin abridged version, the *Ilias latina* – also called the *Homerus latinus* – now attributed to a first-century Roman poet Baebius Italicus, was a key school-text for the learning of Latin (Green), extant in at least 140 manuscripts that testify to the extent of its circulation throughout England, France, Germany, and Italy (McKinley 3; Marshall 191–94; Scaffai; Wandhoff 43; Woods 53 and 93–94). Edmond Faral suggests the *Ilias latina* as a source while also noting that the author of the *Thebes* incorporates elements of the description of the palace of the Sun at the beginning of Book Two of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Faral 65–68; see also Petit, "Les premières descriptions" 307). Comprising just over a thousand verses, the *Ilias* is a hyper-condensed version of the Troy-story in relatively simple Latin. It contains a description of Achilles' shield, compressed to 30 verses, which starts with the following vision of the cosmos before proceeding to mention scenes of judgement and law, agriculture, and the playing of music:

3. Here I disagree with Donovan 227, who sees in these scenes the imitation of a *mappamundi*. More generally I agree with him on the influence of Neoplatonist thought on the ekphrastic scenes in the *Thèbes*.

Illic Ignipotens mundi caelaverat arcem
Sideraque et liquido redimitum lumine Olympum,
Omnes et terras et cinctum Nerea circum. (*Ilias latina*,
862–64)

(There the master of fire had engraved the arc of heaven and
the constellations and Olympus wreathed with shining light,
and all territories and Nereus [a sea-god] a girdle around
them.)

There is, I suggest, a philosophical aspect to the spatial-temporalekphrasis in Baebius's text as received in the twelfth century shared with the cosmic artefacts from the *Romans de Thèbes*, *d'Alexandre*, and *de Troie* under discussion in this piece. Before proceeding, then, I want to take a moment to think about the implications of using artefacts as images of or for time by drawing on one of the most influential philosophical accounts of time for twelfth-century thinkers, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* (Nauta; Wetherbee, "The *Consolation*"). The *Consolation* was a cornerstone of the curriculum at the influential cathedral school of Chartres, where William of Conches wrote a significant commentary on it, his *Glosae super Boethium*. William tutored the future King Henry II of England, whose court, the probable context for the *Roman de Thebes*, is widely acknowledged to have been deeply engaged with clerical learning (Burnett 31–60; Gaullier-Bougassas 2: 794–98 and 3: 1334–45; Mora-Lebrun 36–86; Ribémont 36–52), and it is hardly a stretch to suggest the relevance of the *Consolation of Philosophy* for the intellectual context of the *romans d'antiquité*. Boethius has the figure of Philosophy attempt to explain the difference between human experience of time and the extratemporal nature of the world as it is known by God and ordered by divine providence. Her aim is to explain that God's omniscience does not obviate human free will, and to explain this knotty problem she represents time itself as a work of art. Attention to this image will help us understand better the stakes of using narrative verse, which proceeds or unfolds through time, to describe cosmological artefacts that represent the world as static and laid out together in space.

Philosophy uses a series of metaphors to help the Prisoner get closer to understanding the problem of free will and the human experience of time. She draws a distinction between divine providence and fate that relies on an idea of time as a kind of space, so that events' succession in time is figured as a juxtaposition:

Providentia namque cuncta pariter quamvis diversa quamvis infinita complectitur; fatum vero singula digerit in motum locis formis ac temporibus distributa, ut haec temporalis ordinis explicatio in divinae mentis adunata prospectum providentia sit, eadem vero adunatio digesta atque explicata temporibus fatum vocetur. Quae licet diversa sint, alterum tamen pendet ex altero. Ordo namque fatalis ex providentiae simplicitate procedit. Sicut enim artifex faciendae rei formam mente praecipiens movet operis effectum, et quod simpliciter praesentarieque prospexe-rat, per temporales ordines ducit, ita deus providentia quidem singulariter stabiliterque facienda disponit, fato vero haec ipsa quae disposuit multipliciter ac temporaliter administrat. (Boethius, *Consolation* 4, pr. 6, 36–51)

(For providence embraces all things together, though they are different, though they are infinite; but fate arranges as to their motion separate things, distributed in place, form and time; so that this unfolding of temporal order being united in the foresight of the divine mind is providence, and the same unity when distributed and unfolded in time is called fate. Now although these are different, yet the one depends on the other; for the order of fate proceeds from the simplicity of providence. For in the same way as a craftsman first conceives in his mind the form of the thing he is to make and then puts the work into effect, and produces by stages in temporal order what he had previously envisaged in a simple and instantaneous manner, just so God by providence disposes what is to be done in a single and unchanging way, but by fate accomplishes those same things he has disposed in a manifold and temporal way.)

John Marenbon has noted both the sophistication of Boethius's solution to the problem of divine prescience and human freedom and Philosophy's ultimate failure to defend human freedom by not wishing to detract from God's agency (143–45). My concern here is less the success of Boethius's philosophical argument than the work done through the stylistic or rhetorical aspects of this part of it. The analogy of God to an *artifex* (craftsman), proceeding from the idea of the artwork to its manufacture, derives from the allegorical image for the creator used by Plato in *Timaeus* 32b: "mundi opifex" (craftsman of the world; Calcidius 50–51). Shortly after introducing the idea of a cosmic artisan, the *Timaeus* goes on to discuss the institution of time

in the image of eternity and the movement of the spheres and the constellations which were made so that time could be recorded and numbered (*Timaeus* 38c–e; Calcidius 64–67). The image of creation as a divine artefact informs the twelfth-century reception of the shield of Achilles decorated with celestial bodies and the sublunary world, as well as the proliferation of the marvellous artefacts of French romance that represent creation and even time. It is hard to overstate the importance of Plato and Calcidius for the Neoplatonists of the twelfth century, and in this intellectual context the image of the world as a cosmic artefact gives philosophical resonance to the cosmogrammatical works of art described in romance. According to Calcidius's commentary at 2, c. 26 (Calcidius 158–61), Plato deploys the fictional figure of the craftsman due to the difficulty of convincing an audience about the difficult philosophical truths around time, God, and creation. By definition, humans can never actually arrive at an understanding of time that is beyond humans, and any image or allegory of a Divine conception of the world, whether in Plato or in the *Roman de Thèbes*, will then be a stand-in for a full understanding. As with Plato's *mundi opifex*, that image will be something more like the symbol of a divine conception of time.

If, for medieval intellectuals, the Platonic legacy legitimates the idea of a cosmic work of art as philosophically meaningful, it is worth staying a bit longer with Boethius's very Platonic image of the world as an artefact, as it points to a particular tension between the representations of human and super-human understandings of time. The image of *explicatio* (unfolding) that Boethius uses to describe the progression of the temporal order (*ordo temporalis*) is a figure for the order of time that is experienced by humans, a forward-moving process of change; it is a coming-into-being of the divine artefact of creation that has been disposed – *i.e.* ordered into an arrangement – in the eternity of God's mind, which is beyond the unfolding of duration that is the human experience. This eternal disposition cannot be fully understood but is indicated gesturally through the allegorical image employed by Boethius's personification of Philosophy. In his essay in this collection, George Younge notes the importance of the same metaphors of unfolding (*explicare*) or rolling up (*volvere*) for Honorius Augustodunensis in representing the human encounter with time. The image of the world in the ekphrastic literary moments under discussion is that of a static work of art, such as that painted onto the tent of Adrastus in the *Roman de Thèbes* or depicted on the shield of Achilles. This image is a gesture towards the divine perspec-

tive beyond human time, but in the notional ekphrasis of medieval romance this static representation is only conveyed through its narrative description, which unfolds in time.

To help understand some of the contradictions inherent in representing time as we experience it, it is useful to turn, very briefly, to Henri Bergson's discussion of temporal metaphors in his late essays, published together as *La pensée et le mouvant*. As Bergson took pains to show, the structures of human language and the history of Western thought – from Zeno's paradoxes onwards – have produced an understanding of time as analogous to location and position. Moments are represented as closer or more distant in time, just as objects can be nearer or farther from each other; in this analytical mode, where place has juxtaposition, time has succession, so that moments in time are understood as spread out in a fixed order (Bergson 5–8). Bergson contrasts this analytical, quasi-spatial approach to time with the idea of *durée*, of a duration that is internal to the active and evolving subject and in which, through memory, moments of the past continue as part of the present. Ekphrasis puts these two versions of time into tension: the durational, related to narration, and the quasi-spatial, related to vision, in which events in time are both fully discrete and fixed in relation to each other. Bergson describes the continuing of consciousness in time as first an unrolling (*déroulement*) of a scroll and a simultaneous rolling up (*enroulement*), like a thread on a spool as our past follows us, expanding with the present that it picks up on its way and turns into memory (Bergson 183). He then rejects the image he has just used, along with other spatial metaphors, since

> ce qui est durée pure exclut toute idée de juxtaposition, d'extériorité réciproque et d'étendue. (Bergson 184)

> (that which is pure duration excludes every idea of juxtaposition, of reciprocal exteriority and of extension.)

What Bergson brings out is both the inevitability of thinking about time in relation to space and the insufficiency of using figures of space to think about time as we actually live it, *i.e.,* as duration. He is clear that no image will be able truly to convey the phenomenon of time that we experience. Attempts to picture time inevitably render it into a kind of space, which is something fixed and which is quite different to the phenomenology of time. Bergson's attention to the metaphors we live by in trying to grasp the human experience of time reveals their inherent inadequacy. The insufficiency of their figures

for grasping time point, also, towards their own status as insufficient artistic representations of phenomena beyond the capacity of complete human understanding. With this in mind, the stakes of the medieval representation of time come out more clearly. Where Plato, Boethius, and our twelfth-century writers differ from Bergson is that they are using these static figures not to represent the phenomenology of time but to represent time as it cannot be experienced by humans. And here the particular value of ekphrasis comes out in its bringing together of representational modes (the visual and the verbal): no image can represent our experience of time as duration; verbal narration comes far closer to representing it, even as narrative itself shapes how we make sense of our being in time (Ricoeur). With this in mind, the particular narrative moment of cosmogrammatical ekphrasis allows for the representation of and potentially the shaping of the human encounter with a superhuman vision of the world.[4]

Le Roman d'Alexandre: The tent of Alexander the Great

Having drawn out some of the theoretical considerations relevant to the representation of the world, I would like to go further in exploring other instances of cosmogrammatical ekphrasis, whose recurrence as a distinctive factor in historical romance is evidence of their appeal to and their value for their lay aristocratic audiences. Following the *Roman de Thèbes*'s first editor Léopold Constans (2: 339–40), Faral lists analogous ekphrastic moments in later works of the twelfth century: the decasyllabic *Roman d'Alexandre*, a fragment of *Doon de Nanteuil*, a crusade *chanson de geste* imitating Baudri of Bourgueil's *History of Jerusalem*, and the romance *Athis et Prophilias* (Faral 65). A particularly striking example is found in Alexandre de Paris's *Roman d'Alexandre*, which describes the Macedonian emperor's tent at great length (Alexandre de Paris 1, 1948–2064) in a passage whose debt to the *Thèbes* is clear. Among all sorts of marvellous features, its four interior panels are decorated in a way that also offers a cosmic vision outside of the normal temporal regime. Two have histories represented on them, one panel containing the story of Hercules and another that of the matter of Troy, both of which stand as exempla or models for Alexander. Hercules establishes his pillars to fix the limits of the explorable world that Alexander will later surpass (3, 2388ff.), while Alexander draws inspiration from the history of his Greek forbears' sacking of Troy, express-

4. While for the medieval people under discussion, this superhuman vision entails God, it certainly does not need to. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century philosophy and physics, for example, can think about the time of the universe without theological concepts (Gell 149–55).

ing his desire to do the same to the Persians (1, 2066–69).

This *mise-en-abyme* – narratives of the past appearing within narratives of the past – already points to a self-consciousness about the complicated relationship between narrative present and historical past. Alexandre de Paris's Alexander-romance was finished not long before the start of the Third Crusade (1189–92), and Aimé Petit forcefully argues for the relationship between *romans antiques* and twelfth-century Crusades (Petit, *L'Anachronisme* 46). Just as Alexander seems to emulate Hercules and the Greek war on Troy, so too Anglo-Norman aristocratic audiences, preoccupied with Crusade, would have held Alexander as an analogous exemplum whose successful Oriental campaign of conquest could have been read as a feat to be imitated in the twelfth century. The time-out-of-time of ekphrasis stages a meditation about the value of narrative for inciting military heroism; in the reflective space outside of narrative thrust, Alexandre de Paris's text, far more than that of Adrastus in the *Thebes*, reflects on the value of narrative itself for understanding political and historical destiny in the present or near future.

However, the description of these historical panels is preceded by that of the other two panels, each showing a concern for the representation of time shared with the first description of Adrastus' tent in the *Roman de Thèbes* and with similar cosmic implications. These other two panels in Alexander's tent are not written but painted, although the images nonetheless have textual annotation. One pictures the progression of time through the seasons:

> Or vos reconterai par dedens la biauté.
> El premier chief devant fu pains li mois d'esté,
> Tout si com li vergier verdoient et li pré
> Et tout si com les vignes florissent et li blé.
> Li douze mois de l'an i sont tuit devisé
> Ensi comme chascuns mostre sa poësté ;
> Les eures et li jor i sont tuit aconté ;
> Li cieus et les planetes, li signe, tuit nomé ;
> Li solaus et la lune i getent grant clarté
> Et li ans est desus pains en sa maiesté ;
> Par letres sor escrites i est tout devisé. (1, 2008–19)

> (Now I will tell you about the beauty of the [tent's] inside.
> First of all, the summer month was painted, represented
> precisely how the orchards and the meadows turn green and

the vines and the wheat ripen. The twelve months of the year are all represented so that each month shows its power[/dominion]; the hours and the days are all counted there; the heavens and the planets, the star-signs all named; the sun and the moon throw out great light and the year is painted on it in its majesty; it is all represented in text written above.)

The twelve months can be pictured by the changes in the natural world, as implied by the mention of the flourishing of vines and wheat in the first part of this passage, but after the months, we come to other units of time that are harder to represent. Evidently, the tent is a marvel and hard to picture in its complexity, but what this strange detail brings out is that the panel is a representation not just of the changing seasons but of time itself in its regulation and calculation. As we see through all of the ekphrastic examples under discussion in this article, the revealing details of these cosmogrammatical depictions indicate different temporal regimes. Months can be represented pictorially, but what kind of representation allows the narrator to say that "all the hours and the days are counted there" ("Les eures et li jor i sont tuit aconté")? An ungenerous reading by a modern scholar or the inattentive listening of medieval audience would allow this detail to be accepted as the banal hyperbole of romance literature's marvels, but, as with the previous example from the *Thèbes*, and as with all the examples in this piece, the details of the ekphrasis point towards reflections on the nature of time in the authoritative philosophical texts of the twelfth century. Alexandre de Paris proceeds directly from listing of units of time (hours and days) to discussing the rotating heavens, with their planets and constellations. According to the Neoplatonic model of the universe inspired by the *Timaeus*, 38c, time itself comes into being through the creation of the heavens and can be numbered and recorded thanks to the movements of the celestial bodies (Calcidius 64–65). This representation of recordable time from its smaller units (hours) to the rotation of the entire universe presents a different temporality to that of the panels representing the histories of Hercules and the Trojan War; it is time independent of human action and pointing towards the wholly inhuman temporal regime of the universe or even the timelessness of its Creator.

Which "ans" (year) is "desus pains en sa maiesté" (painted on it in its majesty)? There are two kinds of years in Neoplatonist cosmology and while most readers would probably interpret this line as referring to the solar year (the 365 or so days it took the sun to circle round the medieval Earth), the perspectival shift to discuss the rota-

tion of the heavens and their planets can also suggest the other kind of year, as discussed in medieval cosmology: the *annus mundanus* or the cosmic year (*In somnium Scipionis*, 2, c. 11, par. 8; Macrobius 128), which Plato calls the *perfectus annus*, the perfect year (*Timaeus* 39c; Calcidius 68) and which takes fifteen thousand years (*In somnium Scipionis*, 2, c. 11, par. 11; Macrobius 129).[5] The *annus mundanus* is the time taken for all of the planets and constellations to fully circle the earth to all return to the same configuration. The first part of the *Timaeus* concludes with the assertion that the perfect year by which all eight spheres will have rotated was created

> ut quam simillimum esset omne hoc perfecto illi quod mente perspicitur animali aevoque exaequatae naturae temporis socia natura nancisceretur imaginem. (*Timaeus* 39d–e; Calcidius 68–69)

> (so that this All might resemble in the highest possible degree that perfect living being which is visible to the mind, and so that the associated nature of time might obtain a likeness of the nature that equals eternity.)

Is this to say that a Neoplatonist cosmos in all its philosophical complexity is represented on Alexander's tent and that it necessarily demands attention to the relationship of humans to God and of time to eternity? Of course not. Rather, by sketching out some philosophical commonplaces on the relationship of the spheres to time and time to eternity, it is possible for us to see in this panel more than simply a depiction of the changing seasons. Instead, in the stopped narrative of ekphrasis we encounter (the verbal description of) a visual representation of time at a cosmic degree, from the variable hours of the day through to the perfect and changeless rotation of the *aplanes*, the outermost sphere of the fixed stars. The first two panels of the tent represent a temporal regime of history, the ordering of human action into a meaningful story in time, into which Alexander can write himself as world-historical figure. In tension with the temporal regime of history, this panel displays an alternative form of divinely ordered time against which individual actions become insignificant.

On the remaining panel we find a representation of geography:

> En l'autre pan aprés, se volïés garder,
> Veïssiés mapamonde enseignier et mostrer.
> (Alexandre de Paris 1, 2020–21)

5. William of Conches repeats this figure in the twelfth century in his *Glosae super Platonem* 1, c. 103 (182).

(On the other panel, if you wished to look, you would have seen a mappamundi depicted and shown).

A mappamundi is both a map and a story of the relationship between its viewers and their world in time (Edson; Terkla). It contains place-names and representations and brief descriptions of geographical details, local animals or monsters, and cities, with Jerusalem at the centre, all of which have the potential to trigger associations, memories, and stories, not least the peoples of Gog and Magog, who connect Alexander's history to salvation history and the Apocalypse. Drawing on a cartographical tradition going back at least as far as Isidore, mappaemundi flourished especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Here is not the place to dwell on the intellectual and affective work convoked by these artefacts but let it suffice to say for the moment that the map provides a God's-eye view of the world, or at least a superhuman perspective – similar to the view of the world that Alexander famously achieves with his flying machine, powered by griffins (Maus de Rolley; Morton, "Engin;" Schmidt; Settis-Frugoni). Similarly, the vision represented on the tent of all times of the year and of the whole world at once is a superhuman perspective. Petit draws links between Alexander's tent and the images of the months of the year found in some medieval church art, suggesting a broader concern with visualizing time (Petit, "Les premières description" 307–08). The situation of this tent in the middle of a historical story, however, cannot help but bring in more specific questions about narration and destiny. The lesson that the extreme, inimitable, and morally ambiguous Alexander draws is basic, and it self-consciously stages the monarch's failure to reflect on the philosophical implications of the tent that is also a text and his refusal to submit to the limitations of being a time-bound mortal. For him the world has been made too small for his extreme drive for empire and conquest (Alexandre de Paris 1, 2031–34). But this representation of place on one panel is juxtaposed (*i.e.*, situated in place) on the tent alongside the visual depiction of time just discussed and immediately followed by the aforementioned histories of Hercules and Troy that involve both distance in time and locomotion through the world in search of conquest and adventure. If they are read together, all sorts of questions and tensions can emerge that go to the heart of historical romance and its exploration of the individual in its relationship to history and to time.

It is striking that the images on these two panels of the tent are painted not woven; when combined with the writing on the other two,

they resemble not so much woven textile as the multimodality of a medieval written text: Alexander's tent is a double of an illuminated medieval book, inside which Alexander lives and, like a medieval book, it is portable and can be transported and reopened anywhere. Wherever Alexander goes, he sleeps inside the colonizing narrative of Oriental exploration that he also represents for his European readers, who could potentially bring their manuscripts with them on their missions out East, to Cyprus, Acre, and, ideally, Jerusalem. My aim is not to iron out the difficulties and tensions in how this tent can signify but to suggest that the textual artefacts at stake are, to borrow the phrase that Claude Lévi-Strauss uses to describe mythologies, "des machines à supprimer le temps" ("machines for the suppression of time") (Lévi-Strauss 22). In the ritual-time of literary performance, the past and the present, the dead and the living are brought into a complex temporal relationship, a kind of spectral simultaneity that can be used to reinforce, undermine, or complicate prevailing narratives of conquest.

Le Roman de Thèbes 2: The chariot of Amphiaraus

The tents of Adrastus and Alexander are woven texts and are ways of thinking about the work of the written and painted books of medieval romance, but the final section of this piece considers the particular temporal thinking that comes from the ekphrasis of the machines, partially or fully automatic, that feature in the *Roman de Thèbes* and in the *Roman de Troie*. Even more than the image of a painted tent or a book, the idea of the *machina* or the machine, not unrelated to that of the *ingenium* or *engin*, brings the mechanical in relation to the cosmic.[6] The *machina mundi* – the machine of the world – is the mechanism, in Neoplatonist accounts of the universe, by which the elements – earth, air, fire, water – are held together in cosmic harmony and proportion (*musica mundana*), which allows the world to endure. This principle is expressed in the *Consolation of Philosophy* 2, m. 8, and features repeatedly in the works of twelfth-century Neoplatonists such as Hisdosus, William of Conches, and Bernard Sylvester. Without the order and concord imposed by love or by the *anima mundi* (the soul of the world), the *machina mundi* would be wrecked by the warring elements (Boethius, *Consolation* 2, m. 8, 16–21; see also Hicks 17–20, 41–42, 277, and *passim*). In his authoritative discussion of the Neoplatonist world-machine, Andrew Hicks notes that the mathematically proportioned concord that holds the

6. The definition of a machine given by Huguccio of Pisa in the very late twelfth century in his *Derivationes* is "omne quod ingenio paratur" ("everything made with ingenuity"). He lists war machines first and then goes on to say that "quelibet artificiosa compositio vel constructio dicatur quandoque machina" ("any artful composition or construction at all can be called a machine") (Huguccio 717).

world together governs the structures of the world around us, "for instance, in the elements, the movements of the planets, the seasonal round, and the bodies of animals and plants, as well as, of course, in vibrating strings and other resonant musical instruments" (Hicks 19).

In the twelfth century, the description of machines constructed with engineering's mathematical proportions entails questions of harmony whose mathematical proportions obtain within performed music, as well as the human body and the ordering of the cosmos; this is especially true of machines that produce music, as we shall see. Ekphrastic descriptions of machines in the text – through the machine of the text – bring human history and temporality even more clearly in relation to a superhuman cosmic time than for other artefacts, such as shields or tents.

For the first example we return to the *Roman de Thèbes*, in particular its description of a chariot ridden into battle by the prophet Amphiaraus, on the side of Polyneices. Amphiaraus, like Vulcan in the *Aeneid*, can see into the future, and such clairvoyance necessarily brings up familiar questions of free will, destiny, and the temporal order. Knowing from his auguries that he will die that day (5053–60), he goes on a suicide mission in his amazing chariot, which, like Aeneas's shield, is made by the god Vulcan. Pulled around by magnificent zebras that leave no footprints and that run faster than birds can fly (5013–16), Amphiaraus rampages, killing as many enemies as he can before the earth swallows him up. Like Alexander, he is a figure who transgresses the natural order and his death is explicitly compared to the punishment meted out to the Biblical figures Abiram and Dathan (*Num* 16), the sons of Korach who rebelled against Moses' divinely granted authority (5053–56; 5070–76).[7] The description of his chariot is astonishing and our considerations of ekphrasis up to this point will help illuminate the temporal nature of this strange machine. It is decorated with marvellous sculptures and paintings, which, like the panels on Alexander's tent, each situate the romance's master-narrative in relation to a different vision of time. The shield of Aeneas that Vulcan fashions in the *Aeneid* is a conscious meditation on temporal progression and the thrust of history, and here, in the twelfth century, is a self-consciously intertextual machine, that contains on it a version of the cosmos, which, given the intellectual context, necessarily entails a relationship to time.

> Par estuide et par grant conseil
> i mist la lune et le soleill
> et tresgita le firmament

7. In one manuscript version Amphiaraus descends to hell where he is tormented by Pluto. See London, British Library, Additional 34114, f. 188r–v; *Roman de Thèbes*, ed. Constans, 2: 16–17.

> par art et par enchantement.
> Neuf esperes par ordre i fist,
> en la greingnor les signes mist
> et es autres qui sont menors
> mist les plannetes et les cors.
> La neume mist en mi le monde,
> ce est la terre et mer parfonde.
> En terre paint houmes et bestes,
> en mer, poissons, venz et tempestes.
> Qui des set arz set rien entendre,
> iluec em puet assez aprendre. (4955–68)

(With great effort and great care he [Vulcan] put the moon and the sun there and cast the firmament through art and enchantment. He put nine spheres there in order, and he put the constellations in the biggest and in the others which are smaller he put the planets and heavenly bodies. In the middle of the universe he put the ninth sphere, which is the earth and the deep sea. On earth he paints men and beasts and in the sea fish, winds, and storms. Whoever knows how to understand anything of the seven arts can learn plenty from it.)

As on Alexander's tent, the depiction of the wandering stars (planets) and fixed stars (constellations), as well as the representation of the nine spheres of the cosmos as a sculpture, necessarily recalls Neoplatonist accounts of the ontology and origin of time; this model of the heavens and their movements draws on Macrobius's account of the planets in *In somnium Scipionis* 1, c. 18–19 (Macrobius 70–78), which itself draws significantly from Plato's *Timaeus*. I want to stress the importance here of harmony as a principle underlying this fantastic orrery. The Pythagorean and Neoplatonist idea of the harmony of the spheres was far from uniform in Antiquity and the Middle Ages (Hicks 189–245) and here is not the place to discuss the nuances of the concept's history, but a couple of influential viewpoints are worth bringing out to demonstrate some of the philosophical possibilities of this ekphrasis. First is that of Calcidius who notes in 1, c. 95 of his commentary on Plato that the spheres are spaced out "intervallis musicis, ut iuxta Pythagoram motu harmonico stellae rotatae musicos in vertigine modos edant" (by musical intervals such that the stars, as according to Pythagoras, in harmonized movement produce musical modes as they rotate in their spinning) (Calcidius 284–85). These harmonious proportions are the same as the proportions

by which the World Soul (*anima mundi*) and the human soul are composed, and can be mapped onto the proportions of the musical scale (1, c. 44; Calcidius 188–93; cf. *In somnium Scipionis* 1, c. 6, par. 43; Macrobius 26). The description of the universal model mounted on Amphiaraus's chariot has stopped the narrative temporality of the Theban civil war to allow a moment for the contemplation of the harmonious and perfect balance of the time of the cosmos.

The musical aspect of this machine is emphasized by other details on this strange chariot, whose decoration insistently points to its own curious relationship to the ordering and acquisition of learning and knowledge. Its frontal, made of jewels and enamel, is decorated with personifications of the seven Liberal Arts as part of the allegorical tradition instituted by Martianus Capella's fifth-century *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* ("The Marriage of Philology and Mercury"), another of the key texts for the twelfth-century Latin Neoplatonists. The personified art of Music or Harmony is represented singing her scale and the three key intervals of Greek musical theory – the fourth, the fifth, and the octave – are represented alongside her, "dÿathesaron, / dÿapainté, dÿapason" ("diatessaron, diapente, diapason;" 4995–96). These musical intervals determine the harmonious mathematical proportions of the *anima mundi* which is described at some length in Plato's cosmogony in the *Timaeus* (35b–37c; Calcidius 40–50), immediately preceding its account of the creation of the heavenly bodies that institute time and which, as we have seen, are represented on Amphiaraus's chariot. Even more obvious musical representation appears after the representation of the Liberal Arts, as we learn that there are two *ymages* (sculptures) mounted on the chariot, automata who play *musica instrumentalis*:

> Une ymage y ot tresgitee
> qui vet cornant a la menee,
> une autre qui toz tens fretele
> plus cler que rote ne vïele. (5003–06)

> (There was a cast statue there which went along trumpeting the charge and a second one playing the flute more sweetly than a rote or a viol.)

These ingenious machines confirm the musical nature of this chariot. To use the terminology of Boethius's influential *De institutione musica*, 1, c. 2, the model of the spheres is a representation of cosmic harmony – *musica mundana* – by which the universe holds together

and moves, and the statues are playing *musica instrumentalis* or sonic music as heard by human ears (Boethius, "De institutione" 187–89). It is tempting to suggest that this chariot presents a vision of harmony in its various forms, with *musica mundana* and *musica instrumentalis* reflecting each other and implicitly gesturing towards the third kind of harmony identified by Boethius, *musica humana*, the proportions of the human soul, which can be brought to greater understanding through the experience of the other two kinds of harmony. In this reading, the ekphrastic moment opens up a break in the narrative of fratricidal civil strife to give a vision of cosmic and musical harmony, a different temporal perspective that situates the discords of historical human struggles against the more perfect concord of the universe. The notional artefact that is Amphiaraus's chariot is too complex, however, to allow it to stand simply as an ennobling, harmonious vision. Beyond the fact that the vehicle is a war machine, the two statues mounted on it play different kinds of instrumental music that themselves are in opposition or disharmony with each other: the first summons troops to action with a horn and the other plays the sweetest music conceivable on a wind instrument. These two kinds of organized sound, martial summons and sweet fluting, cannot work together musically or thematically, and this incompatible juxtaposition mimics in its structure the tension of the ekphrastic moment, the narrative oxymoron of having a stopped-time moment within a timebound narrative. That narrative may have paused but in the *durée* of the text (to repurpose Bergson's term) it nonetheless continues to resonate and signify in that pause. The chariot, like Alexander the Great's tent, does not allow an escape from one way of conceiving of time and the world into another as much as, nested within the larger context of the narrative of the whole *Roman de Thèbes*, it brings two incompatible conceptions together. As Petit suggests and as discussed above, the *Thèbes* allows a certain break from the time of lived experience to experience the time of narrative, which it nonetheless disrupts periodically with anachronisms that bring distant past into tension with the present of the twelfth century. The ekphrasis does analogous work creating a different temporal logic that can never be completely separate from its narrative context. The harmony it may represent remains tantalizingly out of reach.

The final aspect of decoration on the chariot complicates it still further. After the cosmogrammatical vision of the universe with the earth at its centre, painted with creatures and weather events, we have the depiction of a different kind of temporal narrative, one that like that of the

Roman d'Alexandre entails the representation of a mythic history. On the other side of the chariot we have the Titans ("[L]i Jaiant"), who "les diex veulent desheriter / et par force des cieus giter" ("who want to dispossess the gods and to cast them down from heavens") (*Roman de Thèbes* 4969; 4971–72). While medieval French narrative often switches between past and present tenses in narration, here the switch in tense is striking and particularly significant. The verbs that govern Vulcan's making of the chariot are in the past tense (*fist*, *mist*, *tresgita*, etc.), while the eighteen-verse description of the struggle between titans and gods, taken from *Metamorphoses*, 1, 151–62 (Ovid 12–13), is all recounted in the present tense. In this complex, impossible artefact, different temporal and narratological regimes play out and interfere with each other, not least in a fourteenth-century manuscript of the *Thèbes* that almost certainly draws on an earlier now-lost version (*Roman de Thèbes*, ed. Petit 8–9). This manuscript sees an addition to the scene of the gods fighting the giants, so that the characters become animated. The image on the chariot turns into a sixty-five-verse romance-style narrative of the giants' assault on Olympus, including a verbal altercation between a giant who calls Phebus the son of a prostitute before the latter kills him with a spear (London, British Library, MS Additional 34114, fol. 187v; *Roman de Thèbes*, ed. Constans 2, 14–16). The narration of the *Thèbes* describes a visual object that pictures another narration whose time-bound speech is brought to life by the paradox of self-conscious ekphrasis.

This nesting effect of narrative self-consciously points to the relationship between the romance itself and the extratextual real-world context that encloses its composition and performance. The recounting of the Titans' attack (4969–86) adds a mythical narrative of rebellious war to the model of universal time and harmony, pointing both to the narrative framework of the Theban civil war and to the interfamilial conflicts that ravaged the polities of twelfth-century Normandy and Great Britain (Petit, *L'Anachronisme*, 54–60). While all ekphrasis reckons with temporality, this specific, self-consciously temporal ekphrasis is an even more extreme withdrawal from the forward thrust of time in the middle of political confusion. We can be sure that this desire to reanimate and reckon with a more immediate past had great appeal for the court of Henry II of England and his court. The king commissioned Wace's slightly later, unfinished verse chronicle of his Norman forebears in the *Roman de Rou* (*c.* 1160–70) going up to the 1106 Battle of Tinchebray between Henry I of England and his brother Robert Duke of Normandy, with which the fratricidal plot of the Theban

8. Henry would later commission a second lengthy work on the same theme by Wace's rival Benoît de Sainte-Maure, the 44,500-verse *Chroniques de Ducs de Normandie* (*c.* 1180).

War so resonates.[8] The ekphrasis of the chariot – animating the distant past of the Titans' rebellion and pointing towards the Theban War whose progression it interrupts – is a microcosmic analogy for the *Roman de Thèbes*, whose courtly performance or reading is a break from the political life of twelfth-century Britain to which it self-consciously points. What this passage in the *Thèbes* brings out is the potential for such literature to be tools to reflect in an idiosyncratically philosophical way on the nature of conflict and of history, rather than just to celebrate it or to recount it.

The middle of a battle may not be the most appropriate time to have a little think about the meaning of time and the pleasures and pains of history. And yet the juxtaposed representation of the pleasures of pagan myth alongside both a particularly philosophical version of cosmic time presented on the chariot and an allegory of clerical learning in the form of the Liberal Arts offers an alternative to the immediacy of the conflict. The chariot serves as an invitation or invocation to read, to study, and to think. It deliberately brings different temporalities into relation with each other in order to unsettle each of them: how useful can visions of cosmic harmony be in the middle of a war? How can civil war make sense in the light of the glorious harmony of the universe? While thinking about eternity and the world might seem absurd in a time of conflict, the nihilistic savagery of war can appear insignificant against the grander picture of the cosmos and eternity. Amphiaraus's chariot is both philosophical and ridiculous, cosmic and pointless, and its details offer its audiences opportunities to reflect on which makes more sense to them: the universe or the battlefield, eternity or the instant of war, and by extension, the study of philosophy or the preoccupations of internecine political strife.

Le Roman de Troie: The Chamber of Hector

This article is particularly interested in the question of what thinking, experience, or even knowledge can come from these moments of ekphrasis and, by extension, from the romances within which they are nested. For the final example I wish to touch on one of the most famous machines of the twelfth-century romances of antiquity, whose relationship to the tents and chariot of the *Romans de Thèbes* and *d'Alexandre* is unmistakeable. Within a decade of the appearance of the *Roman de Thèbes*, Benoît de Sainte-Maure wrote his enormous *Roman de Troie* (1160s), a narrative account of the Trojan War of

more than 30,000 verses. During a break in hostilities, the injured Hector is recovering in a marvellous room decorated with Arabian gold. There, four automaton-figures play music or offer advice about appropriate dress and behaviour (Baumgartner, "Le temps" 17–21; Franklin-Brown 70–73; Hicks and Morton; Kay 111–21; Morton "Automates;" Rollo 87–88; Truitt, "'Trei poetes';" Ead., *Medieval Robots* 55–60). The chamber in which the automata work is its own discrete space cut off from the civilizational struggle of the Trojan War (Kay 112). Each machine, ordered by the same harmonious principles as the *machina mundi*, works to ensure that harmony obtains in the court, through advice on correct behaviour to the disbursal of incense, which removes quarrelsome thoughts, and through playing music more pleasurable to hear even than "l'armonie esperital" ("spiritual harmony;" 14, 788) and "li coron celestial" ("heavenly chorus;" 14, 789). One of the machines in particular is an epistemological spectacle that offers its fictional viewers – and, even more so, its real readers and listeners – a suspension of narrative in which to meditate on the mechanical world and its relationship to time or, to be more specific, to different kinds of time. Mounted on her pillar, a female automaton tumbles and juggles knives and she operates a wonderful cosmogrammatical machine:

> Cent gieus divers riches e beaus
> I fait le set feiz o uit. (Benoît de Sainte-Maure lines 14, 718–19)

> (Seven or eight times a day she makes a hundred different rich and beautiful games play out there.)

These *gieus* are moving statues which represent ferocious animals fighting, every kind of bird, ladies' games, parliaments, ambushes, battles, all the ships in the sea, every reason to hate or love, snakes, and monsters (14, 724–38). The relationship of this ordered machine to harmony is not immediately apparent, but comes out when read against the source for the figure of Music painted on Amphiaraus's chariot in the *Thèbes*: the allegorical representation of Harmonia (Harmony/Music) in Martianus Capella's fifth-century encyclopaedic *De nuptiis*, so influential both in the Carolingian period and for twelfth-century thought. As we have seen, these ekphrastic moments introduce learned Latin literature into the ostensibly lay, aristocratic frame of Francophone romances of antiquity and this moment in the *Troie* is no exception. In the *De nuptiis*, Harmonia claims, "numeros cogitabilium motionum totiusque voluntatis impulsus ipsa rerum dispensans congruentiam temperabam" ("I designated the nu-

merical ratios of perceptible motions and the impulses of perfect will, introducing restraint and harmony into all things") (*De nuptiis* 9, pars. 922–23; Willis 354). She appears at the marriage of Mercury and Philology carrying two amazing artefacts:

> dextra autem quoddam gyris multiplicibus circulatum et miris ductibus intertextum velut clipeum gestitabat, quod quidem suis invicem complexibus modulatum ex illis fidibus circulatis omnium modorum concinentiam personabat. laeva autem virginis quamplures ex auro assimulatae parvaeque effigies theatralium voluptatum religatae aeque pendebant. (*De nuptiis* 9, par. 909; *Martianus Capella* 347)

> ([Harmonia] bore in her right hand a kind of circular object like a shield [*clipeum*], interwoven with many rings and strange lines; well tuned according to its mutual interrelations, from the encircled strings it sounded out a harmony of all the musical modes [*omnium modorum concinentiam*]. In the girl's left hand a multitude of golden little reproductions, figures [*effigies*] of theatrical shows, were fastened and suspended in equal balance.)

If Harmonia's *clipeus* recalls Aeneas's *clipeus* in *Aeneid* 8, and by extension Achilles' shield in *Iliad* 18, the influence of miniature *effigies* can be seen in the automatic moving figures in the *Roman de Troie*, especially since, as we have seen throughout this piece, the romance tradition of ekphrasis consistently invokes key texts of twelfth-century Latin Neoplatonism, such as the *De nuptiis*. This representation of a mechanical world is somehow harmonious and accords with the social and political harmony effected by the other three automata in the courtly scene of Hector's chamber. Where it differs from them is in being a cosmogram, a picture of the whole world, and, as with the *Thèbes*, this cosmic perspective is made possible through the Neoplatonist idea of music or harmony as an organizing principle that connects *musica instrumentalis*, *musica humana*, and *musica mundana*, the music of the universe. The machine, like music itself, makes possible a certain superhuman experience of the world and, accordingly, of time that would not otherwise be possible.

The marvellous moving images of all the creatures in the world are ambivalently epistemic, however. The magical statue makes them

> […] le jor joier
> E lur nature demonstrer.

> Conoistre fet bien e apert
> De quei chascune vit e sert (14, 737–40).

> (play through the day and demonstrate their nature[s]. She
> makes it known clearly and openly what each thing lives by
> and what its purpose is.)

This artefact comprises images of creatures so true to life that their observation produces knowledge about their causality and purpose, leading Emanuèle Baumgartner to categorize it as a "veritable encyclopédie animée" (veritable animated encyclopaedia; Baumgartner, "Le temps" 18). If the machine is a kind of moving text that serves as a catalogue of knowledge of the created world, it does not simply produce knowledge in its audience. As it educates, it also stupefies:

> Grant merveille est ce que puet estre,
> Qu'ainc ne fist Dex cel home nestre
> Quis esgarde, ne s'entroblit
> De son pensé o de son dit,
> E cui entendre n'i coveigne,
> E cui l'image ne detiegne (14, 749–54).

> (Its existence is a great marvel, for the man has not yet been
> born who could behold it and not lose himself, incapable of
> thought or speech, and who would not be incapable of
> understanding and whom the image would not captivate.)

If these moving statues simultaneously constitute and prevent knowledge in the subject, they cannot be meaningfully paralleled to an encyclopaedia in function; they are strange, resistant objects that evoke a kind of knowledge that is never quite accessible. In the light of the Neoplatonist philosophy towards which they gesture, these harmonious images, existing in ageless repetition, stand not just for the natural creatures of the world, but also serve as images of the more perfect Forms or Ideas of those creatures, the ideal exemplars that exist beyond human time and experience. To draw on Calcidius's commentary on the *Timaeus* 1, c. 25, the time-bound visible world that we experience is a "simulacrum" ("image;" Calcidius 158–59) of the eternal, intelligible world of divine Forms. This machine offers a vision of mediation between the two spheres, but the fact that it perversely renders understanding impossible points to the human incapacity to truly understand divine, eternal truths. It is the gulf between human understanding and eternal divine principles that led Plato to

convey his account of universal principles allegorically as the story of the creation of the world by a craftsman deity, an "opifex genitorquem universtatis" ("a maker and parent of the universe;" *Timaeus* 28c; Calcidius 42–43.) Plato's creation myth of a demiurge who fashions the world soul and the material world is a "ratio" (explanation) that is only "imagines imaginaria" ("the image of an image;" *Timaeus* 29c; Calcidius 44–45). The mechanical cosmogram in the *Roman de Troie*, with the perpetual movement of its deathless forms, is a likeness of the perpetual invisible Forms of the Platonic cosmos, which cannot be seen directly but only, as Paul wrote, through the dark glass of the visible things of the world (*Rom* 1.19–20; 1 *Cor* 13.12). This dazzling artefact simultaneously promises and withholds knowledge that surpasses human understanding and so this machine can be understood to convey some of the mysticism that underlies twelfth-century cosmology.

The use of a crafted artefact such as this cosmogrammatical automaton to represent the world resonates with the Neoplatonic idea of the cosmos made, at least figuratively, by an *opifex* ("craftsman"), while also echoing the crafted representational object that is written narrative. This machine, while pointing to philosophy, as we have just seen, also reflects the romance within which its ekphrasis occurs. The three makers of the wonderful automata are described as "[t]rei poëte, sages dotors, / Qui mout sorent de nigromance" ("three priests, doctors of wisdom, who knew much about necromancy/ black magic") (14, 668–69), and the individual magician who made this statue maker, "[d]es arz e des secrez des cieus / Sot […]assez" ("knew much of the arts and the secrets of the heavens") (14, 744–45). In constructing a representation of the world, informed by science as much as by skill, he is a double for the *deus opifex* (craftsman god) and for Timaeus who, in Plato's text, recounts the creation-narrative which is the image of an image of reality. What is more, he is another version of the poet whose own narrative forms an image of the world, and David Rollo aptly notes that Benoît de Sainte-Maure is "an author who systematically conflates the necromantic and literary arts" (72–73).[9] The dubious morality and efficacy of necromancy (Truitt, *Medieval Robots* 86–87) contribute to the ambiguity of the literary artefact as a means to convey knowledge, which can be seen in the mechanical marvel (*merveille*). The automaton offers knowledge in making the hidden causes and natures of things clearly visible, but at the same time it so captivates the mind that the moving statues turn humans static, rendering thinking impossible. This of-

9. Cf. Truitt, "'Trei poëte'" 188: "The language used to describe the human automata and their makers suggests that the authors of the romances themselves were concerned with the intellectual and moral validity of their own work."

fers a model both for the epistemological value of literature or fiction in general – does it illuminate or obfuscate? – and for the more concentrated dazzling moments of cosmological ekphrasis. Do they really provide knowledge, do they offer ta poetically engineered bewildering, or do they enable or gesture towards a temporal experience beyond rationality?

Attention to the Neoplatonist cosmology that so animated twelfth-century European intellectual culture brings out the potential for these machines to offer philosophical reflections on the world, on time, and on the work of art to mediate between worlds and times. Baumgartner considers these automata as figures of an artificial paradise, a sterile eternity, not divine yet outside of lived human time (Baumgartner, "Le temps" 19), and she is right that the repetition that they enact opens up a space outside of lived experience in which thinking about time can happen. The relationship to time is very particular in this machine, compared to the more static representations of the world on the tents in the *Roman d'Alexandre* and the *Roman de Thebes*. For all its motion it certainly entails questions about the relationship between change and stasis. The fact that the machine repeats the movements continually every day suggests a kind of circularity, an endless repeatability according to which the past is never really past, as well as the impossibility of alteration. The creatures acting out in this cosmogram do not have free will and the machine is a vision of timelessness that endlessly repeats. Baumgartner closes her account of romance automata by concluding that the perpetual repetition conjured up by the automata presents a sterile eternity, an artificial paradise which had to be destroyed for Troy to become part of history and of narration or "récit" (Baumgartner, "Le temps" 20–21). I disagree: the time of the automata is bound up with the time of the *récit* and points to the machine of narrative poetry that is animated in its infinitely repeatable performance. The "parlement," "repostauz," "bataille," "traïsons," and "asauz" ("parliaments," "ambushes," "battles," "betrayals," and "assaults;" 14729–30) represented by the automaton are also events of the war of Troy, which run according to a secret narrative logic not visible to the participants. As for the ekphrases of the tents of Adrastus and Alexandre and of the chariot of Amphiaraus, the descriptions of these machines bring with them the entanglement of different, incompatible temporal regimes that frustrates attempts to give a neat account of each of them.

Conclusions

Such ekphrases of artefacts representing time and the world clearly resonated with medieval audiences; rather than being superfluous to the action, they appear as fundamental to the composition and performance of historical narrative in French romance, so that a key element of narratives of antiquity, implicitly concerned with narration's capacity to mediate between past and present, is the recurrence of these fleeting ekphrastic moments in which time beyond human time is experienced and, phantasmatically, brought into contact with the *durée* of time as we live it.

As we saw above in the discussion of the *Consolation of Philosophy* 4, pr. 6, Boethius used the image of the work of art to represent the world in time according to two different temporal regimes: the first is the eternal and simultaneous present of God's and the is that of time experienced by humans as sequential and impermanent. These artful tents, chariots, automata with their visions of time and timelessness are also doubly positioned in time. As literary artefacts, they exist in the permanence of the suspended animation of narrative art and can be reanimated each time the text is reread. Their real or hypothetical existence, though, is subject to the historical events that cause their destruction. Another of Benoît's four automata in the *Troie* carries a permanent flame that heats a topaz censer. It caused such a harmonious smell, the narrator tells us, that it would have endured until Judgement Day had Troy not been destroyed (14, 917–18). As shown by the narratively inconsequential appearance and the almost immediate swallowing up of Amphiaraus's cosmic chariot, these textual machines only offer fleeting moments of timelessness that do not provide a way forward or much of a way out of the human condition. They are not allowed to endure any more than the forward thrust of historical or romance poetry can tolerate anything other than a brief interruption to its task of durational narrative. And, beyond that, life itself can only be put on hold temporarily to accommodate the suspension of time that comes with the reading of a romance or with any other artistic performance.

Such objects point to the specific potential of the aesthetic experience as a mode of thinking. The automata of Hector's bed-chamber in the *Roman de Troie* are situated in a particularly courtly environment, as are the tents of Adrastus and Alexander, so that their wonderful images are reflections of the narrative art of the *récit*, composed for and performed in medieval courtly settings in England and

France. As with the *Consolation of Philosophy*, the depiction of an artefact that represents the world both in and out of time is an invocation to readers and audiences to situate themselves outside of events as they are commonly experienced and to contemplate different temporalities. This goes both for the characters within the texts, whose narrated lives must pause to enable the ekphrasis, and for the historical actors in the twelfth century when they pause their political, military, or other activity to contemplate the narration of romance. In the ekphrasis of temporal artefacts, different kinds of time are brought into contention. The result is not a resolution, but the opportunity for an experience of time, narrative or historical, not possible without the tool of poetry. Beyond simply thinking about time, they offer an experience of it that both is and is not theoretical.

Narrative art does not aspire to rival natural philosophy or metaphysics in offering accounts of theoretical questions, such as the nature of time or history. Instead, it offers experiences of thought that draw on mental images conjured up in the mind of each individual listener or reader. These images, unlike philosophical claims, are fleeting, wholly contingent, and do not necessarily lead to insights or new knowledge. They can simply dazzle (or even bore) their audiences. And yet all the authors at stake demonstrate their own self-consciousness about the potential of representative art to effect particular experiences that generate new understandings of history, time, and the self, without necessarily being able to determine precisely what those understandings may be. In this, the ekphrases of objects representing time are a microcosm, concentrated and revelatory versions of the sophisticated temporal tool of narration that they prompt their audiences to contemplate.

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