FAILURE BEFORE PRINT (THE CASE OF STEPHEN SCROPE)

Sonja Drimmer

Abstract: This article proposes that the responsibility for literary failure in a manuscript culture could lie with the manuscript itself. During the later Middle Ages, writers' acts of composition and presentation established goals by which a form of non-commercial success may be measured, and traces of manuscript owners' activities in books index the achievement of these goals. Tracking the evidence of three manuscripts of Stephen Scrope's Epistle of Othea, I examine episodes in which Scrope attempted—and ultimately failed—to shape identities or foster relationships between himself and prospective patrons. I argue that disjunctions between the text he composed and the reality of the manuscripts that mediated it moved audiences to respond in ways contrary to the ambitions Scrope inscribed into his work. Far from revealing manuscripts to have been inert objects, what we find is that they had as much generative power in their failures as in their successes.

Keywords: illuminated manuscripts, Stephen Scrope, Epistle of Othea, England, fifteenth century, illumination, Middle English, manuscripts, illustration.

If texts have targets, then it is incumbent on us to consider that the physical objects that mediate them may sometimes fail to hit the mark. A poem that strives to stimulate an affective response may stir little sentiment in its audience. A treatise centered on advocating certain ideals may turn the reader away from the very ethics it endorses. A chronicle that argues for the continuity of familial bonds may render the interruptions in such bonds evident. In all of these cases, the realization of the text in tangible, visible form contributes to the misalignment between the expectations it establishes and the actions and responses it provokes.¹

One figure whose career offers an opportunity to stake out the terms of failure is Stephen Scrope (d. 1472)—author, translator, and by his own and his peers' reckoning, chronic failure.² It was not until middle age that Scrope took to literary translation, composing two major works: Middle English versions of Christine de Pizan's Épitre Othea and Guillaume de Tignonville's Dits des Philosophes.³ Historians of literature have had little favorable to say about Scrope's efforts, referring to him as lacking in ability and to his compositions as at times "hardly intelligible."⁴ Art historians are, by and large, unaware that such a person ever

¹ For an excellent collection of manuscripts studies that emerge from an anthropological perspective and consider books as enacting social relationships, see The Social Life of Illumination: Manuscripts, Images, and Communities in the Late Middle Ages, ed. Joyce Coleman, Kathryn Smith, and Mark Cruse (Turnhout 2011).

² As I discuss below, Scrope's surviving correspondence elaborates on his personal travails and often assumes a self-pitying tone, an attitude that was noted by his peers, among whom was William Worcester (d. 1482). The most extensive biography of Scrope is in Margaret E. Schofield, "The Diets and Sayings of the Philosophers: A Middle English Version by Stephen Scrope" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania 1936) 1–22. However, the following sources are more accessible, though contain several errors and should be read with caution: Jonathan Hughes, "Stephen Scrope and the Circle of Sir John Fastolf: Moral and Intellectual Outlooks," Medieval Knighthood IV: Papers from the Fifth Strawberry Hill Conference 1990, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill and Ruth Harvey (Woodbridge 1992) 105-145; and idem, "Scrope, Stephen (1397–1472)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford 2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/66283.

³ Schofield, The Diets and Sayings of the Philosophers (n. 2 above).

⁴ The Epistle of Othea to Hector, or The Boke of Knyghthode, Translated from the French of Christine de Pisan with a Dedication to Sir John Fastolfe, K.G. by Stephen Scrope, Esquire, ed. George F. Warner (London 1904) xxxiii. And John William Sutton writes, "Scrope's translation of Diets and

existed, much less that he had illuminated manuscripts of his works produced. Yet the subjects of this essay—the three extant manuscripts of Scrope’s translation of the *Épître Othée*—restore to his text an enriched environment that encourages us to consider the significance of missing the mark.

Scrope’s case illustrates the shortcomings of current interpretative categories, which tend to overlook the ways the concrete reality of a customized manuscript could interfere with the reception imagined by the text and the social ramifications this disjunction could engender. Indeed, the manuscript—the visual, material, textual manuscript—could produce refusals, demurrals, rejections, any number of responses that obstruct the achievement of a work’s self-proclaimed ends. These responses have quite different ramifications from the commercial consequences of failure made possible in a print culture. I would like to propose here that a significant index of failure in manuscript culture is the inability of the physical object to actualize the social relations the text imagines; and, as a corollary, that traces of owners’ behaviors in the books themselves are what provide visible attestation to their disappointment. This evaluation argues for the generative effect produced by the sometimes querulous space between literary ambition and literary reality.

The *Epistle of Othea* is a particularly promising text for exploring these issues because of the explicitly goal-oriented nature of its content as well as the contortions required of its translator in tailoring his source’s content to suit his dedictees. Originally written by Christine de Pizan for Louis of Orléans at the turn of the fifteenth century, the *Épître Othée* is an extended epistle from the mythical


To be sure, there is ample literature on so-called mistakes made by illuminators in their inattention to or misunderstanding of the text at hand. For example, in an essay calling for serious attention to be given to illustrations in vernacular manuscripts, Derek Pearsall remarks, “illustrations may...come out of a richly indeterminate verbal culture of complete ignorance”; Pearsall, “Beyond Fidelity: The Illustration of Late Medieval Literary Texts,” *Tributes to Kathleen L. Scott: English Medieval Manuscripts and their Readers*, ed. Mariene Villalobos Hennessy (Turnhout 2009) 197–220, at 198. An anecdote recounted by Pearsall in this essay—and one that has been cited often by scholars after its report first by Millard Meiss, *The Bouicaut Master* (London 1968) 51—is an instance in which an illustrator, picturing the tale of Polycrates in a manuscript of *De cas des nobles hommes et femmes* (Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, M5 193, fol. 144r), depicts a fish disgorging a sheep rather than the intended ring (ostensibly a confusion arising from the similarity between the French anel (“harn”) and annel (“ring”)). This laughable episode may very well have arisen from the illustrator’s ignorance. But it has never, to my knowledge, been considered an intentional joke. I am in no position to judge the illuminator’s behavior here, but we do a disservice to his professional reputation by not at least considering alternative possibilities. However, I am uninterested here in adding to the debate on whether illuminators were literate.

Objections to this statement could be made easily on two fronts: first, the significance of the “bibliographic code” in informing the reception of a work. I do not deny this and affirm that the visual aspects of printed books have an indisputable impact on their reception. Second, there are a number of stages in the creation of a printed book that open it to variation and singularity (as the extensive work of Randall McLeod has shown). Still, the essential difference in the technologies and economies of manuscript and print culture is one that should not be effaced however rightfully we acknowledge the accidents of the printed object. William Kuskin offers a balanced analysis bearing in mind these considerations in *Symbolic Caxton: Literary Culture and Print Capitalism* (Notre Dame 2008).

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goddess Othéa to the young Trojan knight Hector, containing one hundred brief verse texts each of which refers to an exemplary (or counter-exemplary) mythological figure or event, followed by a gloss commentary and an allegory. The nominal purpose of the texts is to edify the adolescent knight in "the ethical conduct of warfare", but, as many of the glosses and all of the allegories have it, true knighthood arises from the artful execution of prudent and spiritually laudable behavior. Although the complexity of the Épître Othéa allows for a variety of readings, a consistent thread throughout is the allowance that the chivalrous man may be one of erudition (as opposed to brawn), sagacity (as opposed to martial acuity), and verbal (as opposed to military) command. Jennifer Summit has argued that this expanded definition of masculinity resonated with male, aristocratic circles of the mid-fifteenth century, whose exclusion from the field of battle in post-Hundred-Years-War Britain demanded an alternative venue for displays of virility. Scrope—the physically enfeebled step-son of the commanding, war-decorated Fastolf—may be considered the ideal audience for the Épître, with a vested interest in fostering its dissemination. Summit and a number of others have written extensively on Scrope's reworkings of the Épître, examining his appropriations, misappropriations, regenderings, and even perversions of a woman writer's work. By now, Scrope's Epistle has been thoroughly diagnosed, and to a degree institutionalized, as symptomatic of the English male reader's response to a French woman's text.

There are, however, oblique—but no less revealing—angles from which we might approach his work. These angles account for both Scrope's social position as well as the social gestures issued by the composition and presentation of his literary work. Born in 1397 to a family of rank, title, and wealth, Scrope had a promising start. His father, Sir Stephen, was the deputy in Ireland several times

6 Later dedicaries include Henry IV, Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy, and Jean, duke of Berry. For an edition, see Épître Othéa, ed. Gabriella Parussa (Geneva 1999). According to Parussa (basing her count on the numbers provided by Gianni Mombello), Christine de Pizan's text survives in 49 copies (Épître Othéa, ed. Parussa, 29 n. 53). Two significant studies are worth mentioning not only for their deeply engaged analyses but also because they bracket a twenty-five-year period that saw the production of an enormous amount of scholarship on Christine de Pizan: Sandra Hindman, Christine de Pizan's "Épître Othéa," Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI (Toronto 1986); and Marilyn Desmond and Pamela Shingorn, Myth, Montage, and Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture: Christine de Pizan's "Épître Othéa" (Ann Arbor 2003).

7 Desmond (n. 10 below) 97.

under Henry IV, but he died of plague in 1408, upsetting his son Stephen’s prospects. In the following year, Stephen’s mother Millicent (d. 1446) re-married, this time to John Fastolf (d. 1459), a member of a minor gentry family in Norfolk, who had served under the duke of Clarence in Ireland.\footnote{11} To him she signed away a life interest in her estates, and he in turn sold for 500 marks the wardship of his new step-son Stephen to Chief Justice William Gascoigne.\footnote{12} Unhappy in Gascoigne’s Yorkshire household, and having suffered an unknown illness that left him permanently disfigured, Stephen returned home to his family in 1413 at age sixteen. At this point he began his occasional service to his step-father Fastolf, a role that he assumed over numerous stints until Fastolf’s death.\footnote{13} It was around 1440 that Scrope penned his first extended translation, the \textit{Epistle of Othea}.\footnote{14} The original dedication of his \textit{Epistle} ascribes its genesis to a request from Fastolf, and this dedication survives now in one manuscript in Longleat House.\footnote{15} Scrope would go on to produce the \textit{Epistle} two more times. Each of these three manuscripts is rather a different sort of book. And each produced in a different way results contrary to the stated aims of Scrope’s own text or the social impact his presentation of it was designed to achieve. Depending on one’s point of view, this characterization of a figure’s own life and legacy represents either an ignorable accident on the road to the formation of England’s literary canon; or, it is a spectacular wreck, the causes and consequences of which offer a glimpse into the sometimes morbid mechanics of cultural production in late medieval England.

\textbf{THE EPISTLE, TAKE ONE}

The Longleat manuscript, containing the earliest version of Scrope’s text, represents a form of failure that can be read askance, through the behavior of its dedicatee, who supplemented both its linguistic and material deficiencies. Longleat is a modest volume written in a neat, through perhaps not professional hand, and containing one other text by the same scribe, which has been given the modern title of the \textit{Tree of Love}.\footnote{16} There are only spaces for illuminations in the volume, a fact which—along with the inclusion of the other text—has led scholars to con-

\footnotetext{11}{A tremendous amount has been written about John Fastolf, but the most comprehensive treatment (with extensive bibliography) can be found in Deborah Ellen Thorpe, “Writing and Reading in the Circle of Sir John Fastolf (d. 1459),” PhD thesis, University of York 2011.}

\footnotetext{12}{For a useful and brief explanation and historiography of wardship, see Noël Menuge, \textit{Medieval Wardship in Romance and Law} (Cambridge 2001) 1–9.}

\footnotetext{13}{Although it is unnecessary to recount the full array of Scrope’s misfortunes here, a few episodes do bear mention. In the early 1420s, Scrope sought refuge from his own subservience to Fastolf by appealing to Humphrey duke of Gloucester: Scrope sold a manor to pay for the horse and armor his entrance into Gloucester’s household required, a high price for what turned out to be a short stint. A few years later Scrope entered his first marriage of which he later lamented, “God knoweth what hynderance y hadde by that mariage ... the which hurte y cane welle tell”; George Poulet Scrope, \textit{History of the Manor and Ancient Barony of Castle Combe}, etc. (London 1852) 279. And on four occasions he drew up grievances against and rejoinders to his own step-father, accounts to which I return to below. Transcriptions have been published in \textit{Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century}, Part III, ed. Richard Beadle and Colin Richmond (EEETS 2005), nos. 1012, 1013, 1039, 1040.}

\footnotetext{14}{For the sake of clarity, I refer to Christine de Pisan’s work as the \textit{Épître Othea} (or \textit{Épître}) and to Stephen Scrope’s translation as the \textit{Epistle of Othea} (or \textit{Epistle}) throughout.}

\footnotetext{15}{Warminster, Longleat House, MS 253, fols. 2r–75v. For an edition of this copy, see \textit{The Epistle of Othea to Hector}, ed. Warner (n. 4 above).}

\footnotetext{16}{Warminster, Longleat House, MS 253, fols. 76r–95v. On this text, see Julia Boffey, “Writing English in a French Penumbra: The Middle English Tree of Love” in MS Longleat 253,” \textit{Language and Culture in Medieval Britain} (n. 10 above) 386–396. A brief description of the manuscript appears in \textit{The Epistle of Othea, Translated from the French Text of Christine de Pisan by Stephen Scrope}, ed. Curt Böhler (EEETS 1970) xvi–xviii.}
clude that this cannot possibly have been Scrope's dedication copy to his step-father (fig. 1).17 I would like to propose otherwise.

This copy opens not with the Epistle itself, but rather with a gambit. In his dedication to Fastolf, Scrope first summarizes with noticeable concision the long career of his step-father's valorous defense of England.18 The value of this tribute is depreciated by the quantity of lines devoted to it, despite its effusive praise. Following an abrupt transition, Scrope relishes with prolixity his step-father's recent retirement from military service:

And now, seth it is soo that the naturel course off kynde, by reuolution and successyon of ly yeeres growyn vpon yowe at this tyrne of age and feblenesse, ys comen abatyng youre body labeours taking away yowre naturall streyght & power from all such labouris as concernyth the exercysing off dedis of cheuallerie, be it yowre noble courage and affecedion of such noble & worchipfull actis and desirys departhy not from yow, yet ryght necessarie [it] now were to occupie the tyrne of yowre agys and feblenes of bodie in gostly cheuallerie off dedes of armes spirituall, as in contemptacion of morall wysdome and exercysing gostly werks which that may enforce and caus yow to be callid to the ordire of knyghthode that schal perpetuallly endure and encrese in ioye and worship endezes.19

In contrast to the brevity of the opening encomium, the prologue continues in this vein for another two folios. What Scrope is doing here is dismissing preceding claims to the achievements of knighthood in order to redraft their terms: they are, in short, all that comprises the successful armament of the self with the weapons to fight vice, sin, all that is contrary to virtue. The aims of Scrope's rhetoric in this dedication—that is, its aspirations to redefine chivalry as the attainment of wisdom in service of the soul—are more ambitious even than the main text of the Epistle itself.

But rather than compare Scrope's text to Christine de Pizan's, it is worth examining the translator's work outside of his source's shadow as a composition with its own predicates and proposals. A modest body of documentary material survives Scrope, including letters of grievance and bills of charges that he drew up against his step-father.20 In one, Scrope complains

17 Curt Bühler wrote extensively on the relationships between the manuscripts of the Epistle of Othea and arrived at this conclusion. See Curt Bühler, "Sir John Fastolf's French Manuscripts of the Épitre d'Othea and Stephen Scrope's Translation of This Text," Scriptorium 3 (1949) 123–128; idem, "The Revisions and Dedications of the Epistle of Othea," Anglia 76 (1958) 266–270; and The Epistle of Othea, ed. Bühler (n. 16 above) xiv–xxv. Boffey provides the most crisp summary of Bühler's conclusions, worth quoting in full here: "Bühler's analysis of the manuscripts of the Epistle translation suggests the following chronology: (i) Scrope's hypothetical working copy (dated ca. 1440 because the preface to the translation, preserved in MS Longleat 253, talks of his carrying out the work when Fastolf was aged about 60); (ii) a copy presented to Fastolf, now lost, but represented in MS Longleat 253, the unfinished ornamentation of which would seem to indicate that it was not a presentation copy; (iii) a copy presented to Humphrey Stafford, duke of Buckingham (d. 1460), possibly St. John's, MS H 5; (iv) a copy (presumably now lost) presented to a 'bye princesse,' the preface to which accompanies the text in Morgan, MS M 775"; Boffey, "Writing English in the French Penumbra" (n. 16 above) 386 n. 2. See also Stephanie Viereck Gibbs Knauth, "Christine de Pizan's Epître Othea in England: The Manuscript Tradition of Stephen Scrope's Translation," Contexts and Continuities: Proceedings of the 17th International Colloquium on Christine de Pizan (Glasgow 21–27 July 2000), published in honour of Liliane Dulac, ed. Pater V Cavies et al. (Glasgow 2002) II.397–408.

18 Scrope, Epistle, ed. Warner (n. 4 above), 1.

19 Ibid. 1–2.

20 For papers and letters relating to the family of Scrope and the manors of Castlecombe, see London, British Library, Additional MSS 28205-13; and for deeds relating to the family of Scrope of Castlecombe, see London, British Library, Additional Charters 18207-556. This material served as the
Item the firste yere that my fader Fastolf was maried to my moder, he solde me for v" mark., with-oute any titill or right, thorugh which sale, as in this worlde, my persone was disfigured for euer; wherfor I clayme the seid some of v" mark, with-out the hurt of my disfiguryng. Item, he bought me ayene. So he bought me and solde me as a beste, ayens al ryght and lawe, to myn hurt more than m' mark.21

Although there is a temptation to use documents such as this one as the foundation for a psychoanalytic reading of Scrope’s literary output, that is not my purpose here. Instead, this passage documents the languages of commerce and value which colonize his and Fastolf’s surviving correspondence. More than mere pragmatics, the ubiquity of this language attests to a pecuniary habit of thought that created the conditions whereby writing was necessary. And yet within this para-litigious account, Scrope introduced a striking simile, comparing his treatment to that of cattle. As Martin Camargo has shown, the mid-fifteenth century marked a watershed when the boundaries between administrative letter-writing and rhetorically elevated forms of composition diminished.22 Written correspondence by the gentry was, in this period, a medium of exigency,23 but its emergence and ends cannot be isolated from literary composition. To segregate the preoccupations of Scrope’s letters from his more identifiably “literary” output would be to atomize into discrete units behaviors that intersect in their motivations and operations. Moreover, that the Epistle is itself a fictionalized letter written in a hand “more commonly found in correspondence and business documents of the period”24 authorizes a tracing of its genesis in a generalized financial anxiety, not the final cause of the work, but certainly its efficient one. Such considerations suggest an alternative alignment for Scrope’s Epistle in petitionary literature.25

basis for George Peulett Scrope, History of the Manor and Ancient Barony of Castle Combe, etc. (London 1852).

21 This particular letter was written after Fastolf’s death but recapitulates terms of two others written directly to Fastolf during his lifetime. Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, Part III, no. 1040. In this passage, as in others, Scrope assigned himself a fixed price, namely, 500 marks, or in today’s money, roughly £150 (The National Archives has a useful historical currency converter on their website: http://apps.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/); but read on a practical and perhaps ingenious level, these grievances communicate Scrope’s concern for his finances, even his poverty by the standards of his social peers.


24 Scrope, The Epistle of Othea, ed. Warner (n. 4 above) ix.

25 The parallels with Hoccleve continue here, insofar as his Regiment is at once a Fürstenspiegel and a petition.
Basic assumptions about decorum underlie the common understanding of manuscript presentation, but these assumptions have obscured the range of social meanings such acts might have had beyond deference, approbation, and the imposing of obligation. As I mentioned above, scholars have rejected outright the identity as presentation copy of the only witness that attests to the Fastolf dedication. The reasoning, again, is its absent illumination and the presence of another text the themes of which are ostensibly irrelevant to the preoccupations of the Epistle. This characterization of the other text was challenged by Julia Boffey who maintains that the Tree of Love is “of a piece with the flavour of the Epistle of Othea.” It was not unusual for writers to combine several of their own compositions in a single manuscript as a gift or for a prospective patron, and both the Epistle and the Tree of Love share similar aspirations to divert the reader from his worldly ways.

But are the empty spaces for illumination sufficient grounds for rejecting Longleat as the presentation copy? Perhaps we might not underestimate Scrope too much. Perhaps Scrope saw potential in failure’s coercions. Perhaps, dissatisfied with the mere gambit of his prologue, Scrope hazarded that the affront of incompleteness would provoke his step-father to recognize his step-son’s straits. In a later copy of the Epistle to which I will turn below, a tally of its illumination survives on a flyleaf and is a reminder that commissioning an illuminated manuscript was a financial transaction that could entail an appreciable outlay. What better way to prove his insolveney than to present to his step-father physical evidence of it? There is no proof that the Longleat manuscript was the book destined for Fastolf’s hands, but neither is there proof that it was not. In the absence of evidence it is no less incautious to suggest that this is the presentation manuscript than it is to postulate the existence of an apocryphal manuscript that was. Scrope’s dedication of this work to Fastolf has largely been accepted as a mollifying gesture, but

26 The one book presentation that has been considered as a more complex act is the famous presentation in 1411 of a trompe l’oeil book carved of wood from the Limbourg Brothers to the duke of Berry; Michael Camille, “For Our Devotion and Pleasure: The Sexual Objects of Jean, Duc de Berry,” Art History 24 (2001) 169–194, at 181.
27 Boffey, “Writing English in a French Penumbra” (n. 16 above) 390.
31 Or at the very least as one designed to please: “Such evidence as there is might further be interpreted to suggest that Scrope’s dedication of his English Othea to Fastolf was intended as a conscious reflex of a French ducal style of patronage, which he could hardly have failed to become aware of while he too served in France, at times with his stepfather, in the 1430s”; Peter Beadle, “Sir John Fastolf’s French Books,” Medieval Texts in Context, ed. Graham D. Cale & Denis Renevey (New York 2008) 96–112, at 98.
the rhetoric of the dedication and its material bankruptcy strike me as nothing if not provocative.

Even if Scrope himself might never have acknowledged his own failure, his step-father’s later decision to commission the French original from a different group of producers either issued an outright rebuke to Scrope’s efforts, or staged an indirect form of one-upmanship. Ten years after Scrope dedicated the Epistle to his step-father, Fastolf commissioned a sumptuous manuscript of Christine de Pizan’s French text, what remains the most luxurious copy of the Épitre to have been produced in England. The manuscript, now in the Bodleian Library, was copied by Ricardus Franciscus, a rising star in London’s manuscript trade, a scribe employed by royals for numerous commissions. Among his hallmarks is not only the elegant spikiness of his hand, but also his penchant for including the mottoes of patrons within his letter forms. In this case, garnishing the manuscript are Fastolf’s motto, “me fault faire,” as well as the motto of the Order of the Garter to which he belonged (fig. 2). And among its folios are precisely what his stepson may not have provided, but which Fastolf had the power and means to command: numerous, luscious illuminations. The book, as a result, is not simply a dazzling presentation of Christine de Pizan’s texts; it is also a flamboyant assertion of Fastolf’s identity and, consequently, a rebuttal to Scrope’s invitation to recast himself in his dotage. For two men who traded so much acrimony in letters of their own, the passive channeling of aggression through Othea’s Epistle and the Épitre Othéa is, if not intentional, then poetic.

THE EPISTLE, TAKE TWO

Although, in the previous instance, Scrope’s lack of success was read refractively, through the behavior of Fastolf, the subsequent copy of the Epistle of Othea registers Scrope’s own acknowledgments of his failure to win the favor of a patron. At some point between the late 1440s and 1459, he commissioned another copy of his Epistle, this time with a dedication to Humphrey Stafford, first Duke of Buckingham (d. 1460), a man who—like Fastolf—was an aging knight whose mettle had been tested in combat. And where the Longleat copy of the Épitre contains only spaces for illumination, here in the Cambridge copy, six miniatures are present. As Curt Bühler has shown, the manuscript for Buckingham shares an exemplar with the French copy of the Épitre made for Fastolf, a possible indi-

32 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 570. The manuscript also contains Christine de Pizan’s Livre des Quatre Vertus. For a listing and discussion of Fastolf’s French manuscripts, see Beadle, “Sir John Fastolf’s French Books” (n. 31 above).


35 Cambridge, St John’s College MS H. 5. For a description of this manuscript, see Kathleen L. Scott, Later Gothic Manuscripts:1390–1490, A Survey of Manuscripts Illustrated in the British Isles, 2 vols. (London 1996) II, no. 94. The subjects of all six illustrations are: the presentation of the book (fol. 1r), the presentation of the letter from Othea to Hector (fol. 2r); Temperance pointing to a clock before a company of men and women (fol. 5r); Hercules battling Cerberus, and Theseus and Pirothes battling demons (fol. 6r); King Minos as a judge in Hell (fol. 8r); “Perceval” battling a sea monster, with Andromeda on an island beside (fol. 9r). These six illustrations follow closely the iconography of Christine’s earliest manuscript of the Épitre Othéa.

36 See n. 17 above.
cation that Scrope recognized Fastolf’s rebuke and that he took the implicit criticism it leveled under advisement in producing a new manuscript.

A previously unnoticed feature of this manuscript is an indication that Scrope’s endeavor was doomed before it began. On the first folio are four lines that record the text’s dedication to Humphrey Stafford. These four lines—and these four lines alone—have been written over an erasure, in a hand that attempts to imitate the main scribe’s own (fig. 3). The logical explanation for this erasure and re-inscription is that Scrope had originally intended to present this manuscript to someone other than Buckingham. When, for reasons we will probably never know, the presentation proved impossible or unlikely to transpire, the manuscript was—after Scrope could request the services of the same professional scribe—rededicated. This rededication might help to explain the confusion of Scrope’s modern editor, Curt Bühler, who remarked “there seems to be nothing to connect Scrope with [Humphrey Stafford]!”37 It seems there was nothing to connect them, and this change in dedicatee was a last ditch effort to salvage the product of a sunk cost.38

Perhaps its original intended recipient might have been receptive to the society of men that this copy of the work envisions. In particular, the prefatory complex of images and text reconstruct the history of the work’s genesis as the formation of a learned fraternity at whose center is Scrope himself. On the first folio of the manuscript is a vibrantly-colored, half-page miniature, displaying what appears to be a stereotypical image of book presentation (fig. 4).39 Aligned with and embraced by the frame’s lunette are the scene’s protagonists: a young man kneeling in homage, as he extends a clasped, red book in his hands out towards an elegant man on a draped chair. We can reasonably take these figures to represent Stephen and Humphrey Stafford. The narrative arc of this scene from left to right lends this scene its aspiration, prompting the viewer to imagine the donor’s induction into the circle of his patron, a common understanding of such scenes.

Likewise, the subsequent miniature portrays a presentation—in this case Hector receiving the letter from Othea—but the common understanding of this scene does not entirely fit its unique placement and appearance in this copy (fig. 5). The vivid colors of the previous image are here faded, leaving behind a statue-like assemblage in grisaille tones. The bust of a wimpled woman emerges from a crinoline cloud on the upper right, a sealed leaf in her extended hand. Just below, a youth accepts the leaf, watched over by an old man with a posture of paternal approval. Hector, as the recipient written into the text of the Epistle, would seem, logically, to hold a place analogous to that of the manuscript’s actual recipient, in this case, Humphrey Stafford. Certainly, this is the open pretense of medieval epistolary poetics.40 However, as figured in this vignette, I do not think that Hec-

37 Bühler, “The Revisions and Dedications,” (n. 17 above) 270 n. 1.
38 To my mind, the erasure and re-dedication all but prove that this was indeed the presentation copy for Humphrey Stafford: why rewrite the name of the dedicatee unless the book was the one destined for his hands?
40 And this is particularly so in the *Speculum principis* genre to which the Épître and the Epistle owe a debt. See Hindman, *Christine de Pizan’s “Epistre Othea”* (n. 8 above) 21–60; Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia...
tor's analogue is the dedicatee of this translation. It is, I argue, its translator, Scrope.

Because the manuscript for Humphrey Stafford shared an exemplar with the lavish Othus manuscript commissioned by Fastolf, it is possible to detect the strategic alterations made by the artist, alterations which establish this analogy between Hector and Scrope. So tightly knit is the network of people involved in the production of this and the Oxford manuscript of the Épitre that it is worth rehearsing the connections here.\(^1\) The Oxford manuscript was copied by the scribe Ricardus Francisicus, who is believed to have been responsible as well for copying the Cambridge volume.\(^2\) The artist of Fastolf's manuscript, named for his work in this manuscript, the Fastolf Master, has been associated with at least ten manuscripts.\(^3\) One of the two artists involved in the production of the Cambridge manuscript is William Abell, a figure who partnered with both the Fastolf Master and Ricardus Francisicus in numerous other commissions.\(^4\) Through the evidence of their prolific collaborations, it is apparent that these three figures—the Fastolf Master, Ricardus Francisicus, and William Abell—cultivated enduring relationships with an impressive clientele of English aristocracy.\(^5\) I dwell here on the intricacies of these professional networks in order to illustrate the point that the creation of a new class of lettered men was dependent for the dissemination and display of their work upon a circle of scribes and illustrators. It was this, a group, which shared the responsibility of ensuring that any goals were met cooperatively by all components of the book.

In this case, the interventions of scribe and illustrator shift the parallels forged between the protagonists of the Epistle and those of its exchange. In the Oxford manuscript, pictorial devices build an analogy between certain players in each scene. In the frontispiece, Christine de Pizan presents her book to Jean, duke of Berry in his own milieu, both in his reception chamber, and amongst his all-male...

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1. See n. 17 above.
2. I am not entirely convinced that St John's MS H.5 was copied by Ricardus Francisicus, as features of the hand here are more rounded, less spiky, and certainly less calligraphic than is typically found in Ricardus's work, and there is a complete absence of mottos. On the other hand, the absence of a patron's motto is certainly in line with what appears to have been the speculative nature of Stephen's production of this manuscript in the first place. While the jury remains out, I defer to the common ascription of the manuscript to Ricardus. It is worth commenting that the ascription to Ricardus may derive from a misreading of A. I. Doyle's comment that the script in this manuscript is "very much in the same style as the writing of Ldua misc. 570, the copy of the French original that was made in 1450 for Sir John Fastolf, and of several other English manuscripts of the third quarter of the century." A. I. Doyle, "Appendix B," The Epistle of Othea, ed. Bühl (n. 16 above) 125.
4. William Abell has the distinction of being one of only a handful of fifteenth-century illuminators in England whom positive evidence ties to extant works. He has been known to art historians since 1947, when an exhibition at Eton College featured the College's foundation charter for which a record of payment to its illuminator survives, and in 1971, Jonathan Alexander published the first list of works attributed to Abell, a list which amounted to twenty-one items; J. J. G. Alexander, "William Abell 'l'Mour' and 15th Century English Illumination," Kunsthistorische Forschungen: Otto Pächt zu seinem 70. Geburtstag, ed. A. Rosenauer and G. Weber (Salzburg 1972) 166-172. It was only with the 1996 publication of Scott's, Later Gothic Manuscripts (n. 35 above) 1.264, that this list of Abell attributions was pared down to ten. For the most recent biographical sketch of Abell with relevant bibliography, see Helen Comb. "William Abell: Parishioner, Churchwarden, Linmourn, Stationer in the Parish of St. Nicholas Shambles in the City of London," The Ricardian 12 (2000) 120-132.
5. These professional networks are discussed in Martha Driver, 'Me fault faire': French Makers of Manuscripts for English Patron,' Language and Culture in Medieval Britain (n. 10 above) 420-443.
coterie (fig. 6). The subsequent image, of Othéa presenting her epistle to Hector, offers a fantasy of tempered optimism, a leveling of the social order, though by no means a reversal of its categories (fig. 7). Here, the goddess, on the same side of the composition as was Christine in the previous image, is an ethereal figure, her eye level just between that of the youth and his male counselors. And whereas the woman in the previous image appears in severe bicolor attire, the bright raiment of the woman here matches the dazzling colors of the male company in attendance. This visual parallel between Christine and Othéa is fully realized by their placement with respect to the text. Significantly, each miniature stands as the frontispiece to its own textual unit: Christine before her prologue, Othéa before her letter. These vignettes recall one another without inducing déjà vu. In other words, just as Othéa sends her epistle to Hector, so Christine presents her book to Jean. Transitorily, Jean is associated with the actual, physical chivalry of Hector.

The transformations of this pair for Scope’s translation deconstruct this visual analogy and reassemble it as a sequential visual narrative. Rather than establishing parallels between Othéa/Christine and Hector/Jean, the Cambridge manuscript stages Stephen Scope as the central character of the text’s long history of transmission. For one, whereas in the Oxford manuscript each image headed respectively the prologue and text proper, here the two presentation tableaux bracket the prologue, suggesting a stronger continuity between the central figures they depict. And by reversing the composition of the dedication ceremony, the artist has placed Stephen in the space occupied by Hector in the following image. Moreover, the matching placement of these two figures suggests that the first-person narration of the prologue issues from the same source. Even the identities of Hector and Othéa are fictionalized, as the prologue states in vague language: “As I can, this book translate haue I / Othea-is Pistell callid verily / Feymyng that to Hector sent and schewid / it was.” These verses, together with the grisaille tones in the second miniature, underscore the fictitious nature of this scene, availing it to the hermeneutics of a present trained to co-opt the past in the light of itself. In addition, the actions described in the lines just above the second miniature affirm this appropriative relationship, as they admit: “I may not werke but such stuf as I take / Who-so hath litell breed smale schive most make / Please you ryght hi3 prince to take of this thyng / the poure efecte of my litell connynge.”

46 My emphasis.

47 Brigitte Buechner expands upon the term “actualization,” for this practice, in an important article that was the first to engage critically with illuminations as they demonstrate a “historiographic conception whereby the scenery of past events was equated with contemporary ones and, by extension, with the world of the onlooker”; Brigitte Buechner, "Profane Illuminations, Secular Illusions: Manuscripts in Late Medieval Courtly Society," *Art Bulletin* 74 (1992) 75–90, at 82. For “medievalization,” another term used to describe the same phenomenon, see Martha W. Driver, “Medievalizing the Classical Past in Pierpont Morgan MS M 876,” *Middle English Poetry: Texts and Traditions. Essays in Honour of Derek Pearsall*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Rochester 2001) 211–239. Claire Richter Sherman, *Imaging Aristotle: Verbal and Visual Representation in Fourteenth-century France* (Berkeley 1995), uses the phrase “visual translation,” which has also been taken up by Anne Hedeman in a series of articles and, most recently, in the first monograph to tackle this topic in medieval illumination: Anne Hedeman, *Translating the Past: Laurent de Premierfait and Boccaccio’s De casibus* (Los Angeles 2008). Hedeman defines the phrase "visual translation" as, "a visualization that displaces or projects present concerns onto the past"; Anne Hedeman, “Making the Past Present: Visual Translation in Jean Lebègue’s Twin Manuscripts of Sallust,” *Patrons, Artists and Workshops: Books and Book Production in Paris circa 1400*, ed. G. Croesen and P. Ainsworth (Louvain 2006) 173–196, at 182. See, also, the excellent essays in *Imagining the Past in France: History in Manuscript Painting, 1250–1500*, ed. Elizabeth Morrison and Anne D. Hedeman (Los Angeles 2011).

48 My emphasis.
Scrope has recycled the motifs from and reconfigured Christine’s account of her acquisition of knowledge from her learned father; but the manual transmission (“take ... take”) is Scrope’s own. Reading that Scrope must make do with what poor material he has to hand, the viewer is cued to see the thin sheaf passed from Othea to Hector as a mythical re-imagining of a youthful Stephen accepting what meager relics remain of the great literature of yore. Turning back from the end of the prologue to its beginning, the viewer then finds that not only has Stephen matured, but so has his epistle, its pages multiplied and its red seal expanded to form the rich, crimson binding of a complete book. Taken together, the prefatory ensemble of text and images proclaims, he who was once a young knight has, through the refinements of education, become a man of a letters. Chivalry, so redefined, is fully amenable to the attainments of men like Scrope.

Arguably the most provocative adjustment the illuminator made in his reprisal of the presentation scene appears in the two subsidiary figures who gaze at the reader-viewer and transform the closed, third-person pictorial event to an appeal, tantamount to the apostrophic qualities of the epistolary form. On the left of the presentation miniature, an enigmatic pair lingers behind the retaining wall, engaged in a clandestine conversation. Separated from the main action by this internal border, they correlate with the reader-viewer’s position beyond the frame and occupy a privileged vantage point divorced from the depicted narrative. To the right, a man in profile grasps the wall with both hands and looks absenthly to the right. He shifts the viewer’s attention to his companion, who confronts the viewer’s gaze. Who are they? And why are their aged successors mimicking them on the subsequent folio? Why do they address the viewer here when their doubles in the Oxford manuscript of the Épitre engage exclusively with their pictorial surroundings? Although these men cannot be identified, the fact of the picture is that they address the viewer and that they entreat his cooperation by their shared looks. He has turned to this page of the book and is invited to accept his own participation in its performance. This confrontational gaze, above all else, lends Scrope’s rededication its unsettling effects, is its most artless, even vulgar contrivance. And not only did Stafford refuse the book’s invitations—there’s no record of his ever having had anything to do with Scrope—but he also appears never to have taken the exhortations of its prefatory complex to heart. Far from retiring to a life devoted to scholarly pursuits, Stafford was a combatant right to the end, dying in the Battle of Northampton in July 1460.

While Stafford appears to have been unmoved by Scrope’s advances, they did not go unnoticed. On the once-blank flyleaves that lie at the end of this manuscript, a man named Bremshett drafted his own membership into the class of gentlemen scholars Stephen Scrope hoped to found (fig. 8). At the top of one of these folios, he opens by invoking the genesis of his own composition: “I ffynde and rede by holy mennes wrytyng ...” Following this is an account of the Vir-

49 In Christine’s original: “Pour ce entrez ay, d’indigne memoire, / Presentement ceste oeuvre a rimoyer, / Mon redoubt, pour la vous envoyer / Le premier jour que l’an se resouelle; / Car moult en est la matiere nouvellle, / Tout soit elle de rude entendement; Pourpensee, ca je n’ay sentement / En sens fondé, n’en ce cas ne ressemble / Mon bon pere, fors ains comb l’en emble / Espis de béé en glechant en noyssons / Par mi ces champs et coste le buissons, / Ou mites cheaus de haute table / Que l’en conquexult quant li mes sont notable.” Épitre Othea, ed. Gabriella Parussa (n. 8 above) 196, lines 30–43.

50 For a deeply engaging and erudite study of openings (though focused on Piers Plowman), see D. Vance Smith, The Book of the Incipit: Beginnings in the Fourteenth Century (Minneapolis 2001).
gin's sorrows. But, passing over the content, what is of interest here is the premeditated act of authorship it records, begun at the top of a blank folio, written neatly, evenly and with care, and even complemented with loose, cruciform hatches for line filler. At its conclusion, in bold letters and broadcast within its own marquis is announced, "Bremschett Scripct." Little about Bremschett is known, but what evidence exists points to someone from a landed family with elite social contacts.51 There is even a Bremschett listed as an administrative employee in the Stafford household, someone who appears to have occupied a social position similar to Scrope's.52 What we have, then, in this manuscript, is not only evidence of Scrope's failure to convert the group that would not have him as a member, but rather his success in recruiting someone already like himself.

**THE EPISTLE, TAKE THREE**

So, Scrope's translation of the Épître into the Epistle was superseded by Fastolf, his invitation to form a society of scholarly knights declined by Stafford. One would hope that the third and final copy of his text found a sympathetic audience. Again, no. Unlike the previous two volumes discussed, the Epistle in New York, Morgan Library MS M.775 was incorporated into a thicker book, compiling a coherent set of texts, almost all of which take a view of knighthood opposed to the ideals promoted by the glossed and allegorized readings of the Épître.53

The character of the manuscript's opening illustration gives a fair idea as to its ultimate preoccupations (fig. 9). The scene features a joust observed by a noblewoman, the main attraction at its compositional center, where splinters fly from the shivered jousts of two men who collide into one another from atop their caparisoned steeds. The rider at the left has been identified as the manuscript's owner, Sir John Astley (d. 1486), whose arms appear several times throughout the manuscript and who, here, wears his crest of a crowned harpy.54 Astley was a

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51 The evidence internal to the manuscript includes a list of births, all of which except the last appear to be in the same hand. The first entry records, "Jone Bremschet was borne att Aylton castelli, on sencion day the yere & rayne of kyng hary the vii the secunde yere of his ayne (1486/7)" and lists the godparents as, "my lady grey and mastres roo and the abbate of boxley" (Cambridge, St John's College MS H.3, fol. 61r). The latest birth recorded is for 15 Henry VII (1500). Because two of the entries locate births at Merstone, it is probable that the Bremschets recorded here are of the Bramshott family of Gatlcombe, Isle of Wight; Douglas Richardson, *Magna Carta Ancestry: A Study in Colonial and Medieval Families, *2nd ed. (Salt Lake City 2011) 1.294–296.

52 Arthur Bremschet is recorded among the senior household and estate staff for the Staffords, as a Receiver of Newport; Rawcliffe, *The Staffords: Earls of Stafford and Lutres of Buckingham* (n. 34 above) 213. Such a position (i.e., at Newport, on the Isle of Wight) indicates strongly that this Arthur is of the Bramshotts of Gatlcombe (see n. 51 above).

53 The most extensive codicology of this manuscript can be found in G. A. Lester, "Sir John Paston's Grete Boke: A Bespoke Book or Mass-produced?" *English Studies* 66 (1985) 93–104, esp. 99–101. Lester argues that the manuscript originally contained the following items: Vegetius, *De re miliari*; Arms and armor for foot combat; regulations for trial by battle; Sailing instructions; Table of expenses; Assize of bread and ale; Poem on the coronation of Henry VI; Verses for the coronation banquet of Henry VI; Order of service for the coronation; Book of Governance; Creation of Knights of the Bath; Epistle of Othea. Some time thereafter, Astley added into the beginning and end of the codex a treatise on jousting, as well as commemorations of his feats of arms. See also, Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts* (n. 35 above) II, no. 105. Ten of the items in this manuscript also appear in British Library, Lansdowne MS 285, known as Sir John Paston's "Grete Boke," copied by William Ebesham between ca. 1468 and 1469.

54 It is too fascinating not to mention here the imbrication in the image commissioned by Astley that allows him to gaze upon an image of himself being gazed upon by a woman, and to reassert his supremacy in the scopic regime by gazing upon her.
knight in Humphrey Stafford’s retinue, famed for his successful jousting career. What follows are—among others—a series of texts and treatises on jousting protocol, an English translation of De re militari, instructions for how a man should be armed for foot combat, an English translation of the Secretum secretorum, and even nautical directions. It is here, in the final extant copy of the Epistle, that Scrope’s prescription for the ethical, lettered, or spiritual knight is given a decidedly off-label use: namely as a complement to Astley’s construction of a virile self.

Codicology suggests Astley’s diligence in coercing an accord between the Epistle and the compilation that originally preceded it. The core of the manuscript was assembled in the middle of the fifteenth century, either including the Epistle or with its addition at some point prior to 1461, and both its script and its illustrations were carried out by a scribe and artist whose work appears nowhere else in the manuscript. This version of the Epistle differs from the other two extant copies in three respects: first, the dedication is to a “high princess” whose identity remains unknown; second, due to missing folios, this version only contains three illustrations; finally, the arms of Sir John Astley were added to the final folio of the text. There is something in the probable character of the missing illustrations that suggests their incoherence with the martial preoccupations of the manuscript’s other texts. Present in this copy are miniatures showing the presentation of the letter to Hector (fig. 10), Hercules battling demons (fig. 11), and King Minos presiding over prisoners (fig. 12). Not shown, but which we can extrapolate from the other illustrated copy in Cambridge, are: the presentation scene to the “high princess,” the goddess Temperance with her society of women, and finally Andromeda rescued by Percival, as he is called here.

Folios and miniatures go missing from manuscripts for various reasons and at different stages in their lives, but there is reason to believe that these were extracted in order to smooth the Epistle’s incorporation into Astley’s book. For one, only one other folio appears to have been removed from the book, despite its possession of many attractive illuminations. Second, the presence of Astley’s

55 Between 1442 and 1447, Astley was awarded an annuity of 20 marks by Duke Humphrey; Rawcliffe, The Staffords: Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham (n. 34 above) 232. Little else about Astley is known, and Lester, “Sir John Paston’s Grete Boke” (n. 53 above) 102–103, provides the most extensive published biography.

56 In that year Astley received the Garter, which presumably would have been included amongst his arms had the manuscript been produced subsequently. There are also two complimentary references to Henry VI, which have been erased, one would assume following his deposition in 1461; Lester, “Sir John Paston’s Grete Boke” (n. 53 above) 101. Although Lester, ibid. 100, remarks that, at this stage in the manuscript’s composition, it “had no overriding preoccupation with knighthood and chivalry,” he later concedes the military nature of its original content is indeed reflected in the Vegetus and short treatises that succeed it; ibid. 101.

57 A. I. Doyle, in an appendix to Böhler’s edition, surmises her identity as either Stafford’s daughter Anne, widow of Aubrey de Vere, or his wife, Anne Neville; A. I. Doyle, “Appendix B,” Epistle of Othea, ed. Böhler (n. 16 above) 126.


59 The first leaf of the Secrets of the Old Philosophers (New York, Morgan Library MS M775, fol. 25).
arms at the end of the Epistle (fig. 13) indicates that the first folio with the dedication of the Epistle—presumably depicting the book being given to a “high princess”—was removed prior to its inclusion. Why else would Astley have had his arms placed on the final folio? Surely if the first folio had been in the manuscript, then his arms would have been added there, just as was done in two other places in the manuscript (fig. 14).60

What I am getting at here is that it looks like Astley got his hands on a copy of the Epistle originally made for someone else (possibly the “high princess” herself) and removed images that were not as congenial to a militarized construal of its content. Granted, an image of the knight Perceval defending Andromeda from the sea monster might cooperate with a chivalrous reading, and the gloss to the text demands that “alle knyghtis should socoure wommen.”61 In contrast to such urgent demands, the opening illumination to the manuscript displays Astley fighting for frivolous purposes and for the entertainment, not “socoure,” of a woman. The sight of such practical applications of a knight’s prowess unmasks the ceremonial sublimation of violence that the joust and foot combat represent. There is something a little embarrassing about seeing the valiant uses to which one’s affectations have never been put—that is, the tournament’s “dramatization and valuation of risk for its own sake.”62 Marilynn Desmond recently remarked that, “the inclusion of Scrope’s Epistle of Othea among the treatises on arming and jousting in Morgan M.775 exemplifies the potential of the Othea to be read as a script for chivalric performance, whether on the battlefield or in a tournament.”63 Agreed. But the allegories and many of the glosses open up a space for the chivalrous man to define himself in less and even non-combative terms. That Scrope’s manuscripts have any images at all featuring content that could be seen by the casual reader-viewer as endorsements for bellicosity diminishes the chances that his Othea might be read otherwise. And, if we accept Astley’s priorities in curating of his anthology as evidence of his reading practices, it appears that Scrope’s Epistle failed to channel the knight’s energies in a studious, spiritual, or even usefully martial direction. Subsequent to the addition of the Epistle, several more texts were bound into the manuscript, containing illustrations of hastilude in which Astley participated.64 Nested within a virtual pageant of Astley’s knightly recrea-

60 New York, Morgan Library, MS M775, fol. 25r and 131r. In his reconstruction of the history of the manuscript’s compilation, Lester (n. 53 above) 101, argues that the original make-up of the volume included the Othea as its final item and adduces this as the reason for Astley’s arms appearing on the final folio.
61 Scrope, Epistle of Othea, ed. Döbler (n. 16 above) 15.
62 Louise Fradenburg, City, Marriage, Tournament: Arts of Rule in Late Medieval Scotland (Madison 1991) 200. The fifteenth century has long been described as a period of decadence in hastilude, the putative cause of which was the increased presence of women. Note, for example Juliet Barker’s comment that “the attendance of ladies and the desire to imitate romance combined to produce an increase in pageantry and ceremonial,” a slight softening of Huizinga’s account; Juliet R. V. Barker, The Tournament in England 1100–1400 (Woodbridge 1986) 110. Fradenburg contested the causality written into similar opinions by other historians, proposing that “it may be the alienation from violence...being lamented in these histories is in part the result of the scholar’s own voyeuristic exclusions, his own ‘feminization’ as spectator”; Fradenburg, City, Marriage, Tournament 196. Fradenburg goes on to provide an engaging account of the empty risk described above, not as precipitated but rather mediated by the “ground” of the lady’s spectating body; ibid. 210–212. Whatever one’s opinion on the impact of women’s presence on the joust, the contrast between the missing miniature of Perceval and Andromeda and the miniature showing Astley jousting before the noblewoman’s placid gaze is especially stark.
63 Desmond, “Reading and Visuality in Stephen Scrope’s Translatio” (n. 10 above) 113.
64 The first is the jousting scene described above (fol. 2v); the second features a tournament that occurred in Paris in 1438, and, among other things, shows Astley and Piers de Masse jousting before
tions, Stephen Scrope’s *Epistle* emerges as little more than an empty gesture towards gentility, and even, in the fragmented form in which it appears, evidence of Astley’s conquest over Scrope’s appeals.

Perhaps it was the potential for this reading that lay dormant in the content and structure of the *Epistle* but was only awakened by its physicalization in Scrope’s manuscripts and its issuance from Scrope himself. It is this potential reading that invites us to circle back to the stakes of failure in a manuscript culture. If manuscripts of Scrope’s *Epistle* had been successful might his work have obviated Fastolf’s commissioning of Christine de Pizan’s original? Coaxed him to provide further support for his stepson? Encouraged Humphrey Stafford to sponsor his own coterie of learned men? Revised Astley’s ideas about knighthood and himself? These counterfactuals are not idle speculation. They are informed by the very expectations that Scrope wrote into the *Epistle* and inscribed into the performance of its presentation, whether actual or imagined. And they press the occasional inefficacy of the book in triangulating social relationships and redefining identities. Although it is reassuring to believe in the power of the unique and customized book in achieving the impact desired by its producers on its audience, the case of Stephen Scrope disabuses us of such notions. But far from revealing manuscripts to have been inert objects, what we find instead is that they had as much generative power in their failures as in their successes.
Fig. 3. Rededication. Stephen Scrope, Epistle of Othea, Cambridge, St. John's College, MS H. 5, fol. 1r (detail of Fig. 4). Photo by permission of the Master and Fellows of St. John's College, Cambridge.
Fig. 9. Sir John Astley Jousting. Photo: the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. MS M.775, fol. 2v. Purchased in 1931.
Is that to power strenue wurde entire
Selfishness is not to your love lose
Show dispraise be not the falsehood
Of my small wise the wishe this not see take
Wherefore the can be given to my doke
And of you're good ladisips take at worstes
Confreyng that will purch me faire the
More than effect be ought the can appear
In me fear without you never er this are
Though I have here first many a wise tale
I gedred but trouble and this be small
For you kenynge herat send me to this
And unde the ather I am y lashe
I may not beke but firste sake as a sake
Who so dark drink drede sone make myne trine wash
Pole your hie pinheit to take of this thing
The pope effect of my lack kenynge

Fig. 10. Presentation of the Letter from Othea to Hector. Stephen Scrope, Epistle of Othea. Photo: the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. MS M.775, fol. 200r. Purchased in 1931.
Fig. 11. Hercules Battling Demons. Stephen Scrope, Epistle of Othea. Photo: the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. MS M.775, fol. 202r. Purchased in 1931.