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The Consolation of Tragedy: *A Mirror For Magistrates* and the Fall of the “Good Duke” of Somerset

by Scott Lucas

MOST studies of the Tudor *de casibus* collection *A Mirror for Magistrates* have characterized its historical verse narratives as designed to inculcate universally applicable philosophical and political truths.¹ Yet it is noteworthy that scholars who generally agree about the didactic purpose of the *Mirror* have found surprisingly little success in deciding just which truths this collection is supposed to teach. Students of the *Mirror* have identified numerous “lessons” in the collection, many of which stand in direct contradiction to one another. For instance, a number of critics cite evidence to suggest that the *Mirror* teaches the manifest power of divine providence over human affairs; yet others cite equally extensive evidence to claim that the collection in fact chiefly teaches the dominance of fortune in human life.² Similarly, numerous scholars argue that the *Mirror* embodies a conservative politics, one that instructs readers to venerate the monarch and to abhor

¹ For a survey of *Mirror* criticism up to 1979, see Jerry Leath Mills, “Recent Studies in *A Mirror for Magistrates*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 9 (1979): 343–52. The poet and printer William Baldwin served as editor for the earliest editions of the *Mirror*, those dated 1559 and 1563 (RSTC 1247 and 1248). The original poems of the first edition were written by a group of eight men, of whom only three are certainly known: William Baldwin, George Ferrers, and Sir Thomas Chaloner. Over an almost sixty-year span, the *Mirror* was constantly reedited and reissued, often with new poems attached to it by men unconnected with Baldwin or any of the original *Mirror* authors. Following critical custom, this article will use the phrase “*Mirror* poems” only to refer to the poems edited by (or thought to have been edited by) William Baldwin.

² *A Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 52–54; Frederick Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1983), 30–59; G. J. R. Parry, *A Protestant Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 256; Mills, “Recent Studies,” 345–46. All further references to *A Mirror for Magistrates* are to Campbell’s edition by page number.

rebellion; others, however, point to different sections of the collection to declare that the *Mirror* instead seeks to undercut the exalted status of the ruler and even to lead readers to accept the idea that rebellion against the king is at times not a sin but a duty.³ Faced with such seeming confusion in the text, it is not surprising that many have described the *Mirror* as, at best, fundamentally inconsistent in its teachings and, at worst, incoherent.⁴

In recent years, some *Mirror* critics have highlighted an approach to the collection different from that of traditional criticism, one that avoids the pitfalls of past studies by abandoning attempts to reduce the collection to a set of philosophical statements. Two scholars, Andrew Hadfield and Paul Budra, have returned critical attention to Eveline Feasey's decades-old argument that several of the early *Mirror* poems offer not abstract instruction but engaged topical commentary.⁵ Both Hadfield and Budra rehearse Feasey's arguments about the engaged purpose of three *Mirror* tragedies thought to have been included in the first, prohibited version of the *Mirror*, the Marian collection *A Memorial of suche Princes, as since the tyme of king Richard the seconde, haue been vnfortunate in the Realme of England* (1554).⁶ To discover reasons why Mary I's

³ Gary Waller, *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Longmans, 1986), 40; E. M. W. Tillyard, "A *Mirror for Magistrates* Revisited," in *Elizabethan and Jacobean Studies*, ed. Herbert Davies and Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 8; Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, Politics, and National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 81–107; R. S. White, *Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 76–77.

⁴ William Peery, "Tragic Retribution in the 1559 *Mirror for Magistrates*," *Studies in Philology* 46 (1949): 113–30; Paul Budra, "A *Mirror for Magistrates*" and the *De Casibus* Tradition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 57–59; F. J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library Press, 1967), 214–17; H. A. Kelly, *Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 164–65.

⁵ Paul Budra, "The *Mirror for Magistrates* and the Politics of Readership," *Studies in English Literature* 32 (1992): 1–13; Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, Politics, and National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 81–107. Further, Annabel Patterson has tied the first poem of the collection, spoken in the voice of the corrupt fourteenth-century Chief Justice Robert Tresilian, to the abuses in the treason trial of Sir Nicholas Throckmorton (Annabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994], 160–61). See also Scott Lucas, "Tragic Poetry as Political Resistance: A *Mirror for Magistrates*, 1554–1563," Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1997.

⁶ For the evidence that has led scholars to accept the 1559 *Mirror* as a lightly edited version of the 1554 *Memorial*, see Lucas, "Tragic Poetry as Political Resistance," 364–68. The *Memorial* was originally commissioned by the printer John Wayland as a specifically English continuation of John Lydgate's fifteenth-century *de casibus* collection *The Fall of Princes*. It was printed and appended to Wayland's new edition of Lydgate's work (RSTC 3177.5) but removed by government order before publication.

Lord Chancellor, Bishop Stephen Gardiner, ordered the destruction of the *Memorial of suche Princes* before its publication, Feasey studied three tragedies written by *Memorial-Mirror* author George Ferrers that deal with the life and death of Humfrey Plantagenet, duke of Gloucester, Protector of the Realm during the minority of King Henry VI. In the poems "Humfrey Duke of Gloucester," "Edmund Duke of Somerset," and "Eliador Cobham," Feasey found close parallels between Ferrers's Gloucester and one of the *Memorial* authors' best-known contemporaries, Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset (d. 1552), Protector of the Realm during the minority of King Edward VI.⁷ Noting that Ferrers had been closely connected to Edward Seymour during Edward VI's reign, Feasey identified many points of similarity between the two dukes: both Gloucester and Somerset had been Protectors of the Realm during the youth of their monarchs, both had been uncles to their kings, both were popular with the people and had been called "the good Duke," both had engaged in feuds with powerful noble opponents, and both were removed from office and brought to "untimely," violent ends as a result of those feuds.⁸ Feasey further construed Gloucester's chief enemy Cardinal Henry Beauford, Henry VI's Lord Chancellor, as a

⁷ Eveline Feasey, "The Licensing of the *Mirror for Magistrates*," *The Library*, 4th ser., 3 (1923): 177-93. The executors of Henry VIII's will nominated Seymour Protector in January 1547; his protectorate lasted until his deposition from office in October 1549. The full titles of these tragedies are "How Humfrey Plantagenet Duke of Gloucester Protector of England, during the minoritie of his Nephue kinge Henrye the sixt, (commonlye called the good Duke) by practise of enemies was brought to confusion"; "The tragedie of Edmund duke of Somerset, slayne at the first battayle at Saynct Albanes, in the tyme of Henrye the sixte"; and "How Dame Eliador Cobham Duchesse of Gloucester for practising of witchcraft and Sorcery, suffred open penance, and after was banished the realme into the yle of Man." None of these poems appeared in the 1559 *Mirror*; however, based on passages in the table of contents and in the text itself of that edition, critics have accepted that at least the first two of these poems had been written in the Marian period and had been intended for inclusion in some version of *A Memorial of suche Princes* and the 1559 *Mirror* (see *Mirror*, 181, 387, 523; Lucas, "Tragic Poetry as Political Resistance," 288-90). In Elizabeth's reign, "Somerset" appeared first in the 1563 edition of the *Mirror*. The other two poems did not appear until the two editions of 1578 (RSTC 1252, 1252.5).

⁸ During the Protectorate, George Ferrers had been a strong supporter of Edward Seymour, as had the other two known authors of *A Memorial of suche Princes*, William Baldwin and Thomas Chaloner. In his published account of Seymour's 1547 invasion of Scotland, William Patten described George Ferrers as "a gentleman of my Lord Protector's" and Thomas Chaloner as Seymour's "Chief Secretary" (William Patten, *The Expedition into Scotland of the most worthily fortunate Prince Edward, Duke of Somerset* [1547], in *Tudor Tracts, 1532-1588*, ed. A. F. Pollard [Westminster: Constable and Company, 1903], 97, 149). William Baldwin was not at court during the Protectorate, but he publicly lauded Seymour in *A Treatise of Morall Phylosophie* (London, 1547-8; RSTC 1253), sigs. A2v-A3r. For further connections between the *Memorial-Mirror* authors and Edward Seymour, see Lucas, "Tragic Poetry as Political Resistance," 66-127.

satiric and bitter portrait of Chancellor Gardiner (d. 1555). Chancellor Gardiner, Feasey concluded, suppressed the *Memorial of suche Princes* because its topically allusive poems attacked him through the character of the evil Lord Chancellor who brought about the “good Duke” Humphrey’s death.⁹

About a decade after Feasey’s work, Lily B. Campbell examined these poems and offered even more evidence to back Feasey’s assertion of their allusive, topical form.¹⁰ Yet, at the same time, Campbell sharply attacked Feasey’s specific readings of the tragedies and dismissed her arguments about the poems’ meaning and purpose. Campbell exposed numerous historical inaccuracies in Feasey’s work; most damagingly, she pointed out that Bishop Gardiner had no hand in Edward Seymour’s downfall: Gardiner was in prison during Seymour’s troubles and could not have taken the guiding role against Seymour that Beauford takes against Gloucester.¹¹ Setting the tone for much future *Mirror* criticism, Campbell concluded that there was no controversial purpose underlying Ferrers’s covert references to Protector Somerset in his poems. Instead, Campbell asserted that the exemplary tragedies of the *Memorial* and *Mirror* were designed to inculcate only “orthodox,” universal truths. When Ferrers alluded to Edwardian events in his poems, Campbell argued, he did so solely to give a contemporary context for the timeless lessons he sought to teach (such as the danger of high office and the sin of overweening ambition) and to reinforce the notion that certain political problems tend to repeat themselves over the years.¹²

By reviving Feasey’s arguments, Hadfield and Budra have profitably returned attention to the topical nature of the “Gloucester” poems and to Feasey’s assertion of their controversial purpose. Yet, in repeating Feasey’s claims, those scholars have neither confronted the flaws in Feasey’s scholarship nor have they offered any account of why (in the absence of Feasey’s discredited claim that the poems are designed to

⁹ Feasey, “Licensing of the *Mirror*,” 184.

¹⁰ Lily Campbell, “Humphrey Duke of Gloucester and Elianor Cobham his Wife in *A Mirror for Magistrates*,” *Huntington Library Bulletin* 5 (1934): 119–55. Campbell argued a topical purpose for “Elianor Cobham” different from that identified by Feasey. Despite Campbell’s ingenious argument, “Elianor Cobham” appears to be chiefly a rewrite of the fifteenth-century ballad “The Lament of the Duchess of Gloucester” and thus probably not a topical tragedy at all (see *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. Rossell Hope Robbins [New York: Columbia University Press, 1959], 176–80).

¹¹ Campbell, “Humphrey Duke of Gloucester,” 140–41. Campbell correctly argued that the character of Cardinal Beauford evokes not Gardiner but Thomas Wriothesley, Edward VI’s first Lord Chancellor and one of Seymour’s bitterest enemies (141).

¹² *Ibid.*

“satirize” Chancellor Gardiner) the *Mirror* authors would have wanted to revisit Edward Seymour’s troubles in the first place.

The following pages will suggest that many of the early *Mirror* poems are indeed topical in form and designed to evoke memories of the career of Edward Seymour.¹³ The poems that touch on the life of Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset, are directed at a specific audience: those men and women who had once revered Edward Seymour and who had suffered from the tragic manner in which his career and life had ended. Rather than satire or philosophical instruction, *Mirror* poems such as “Edmund Duke of Somerset,” “Humfrey Duke of Gloucester,” “Thomas Earl of Salisbury,” and “Thomas of Woodstock” present exemplary guides for interpreting England’s recent, chaotic past. Through their topically applicable narratives, these poems seek to evoke in readers memories of the worst tragedies of Edward Seymour’s last years. Through their moralization of those narrated events (that is, in their causal and moral explanations of how and why those tragic events occurred), they provide models for interpreting the tragedies of Seymour’s last years in ways that could free the late protector from the widespread charges of sinfulness and divine disfavor that so pained his partisans.

To understand the need for such models, one must first understand both the depth of Seymour’s former adherents’ devotion to their hero and the impact his political failures and untimely death had upon them. The fierce admiration and hopeful expectations Seymour inspired in his supporters were perhaps unmatched in the Tudor era. Early on, the charismatic Seymour’s martial prowess had made him a national hero. By the end of Henry VIII’s reign, Seymour was the most important figure at court and, upon Henry’s death and the accession of Seymour’s nine-year-old nephew, Edward VI, Seymour gained preeminent power in English affairs by assuming the two high offices of Lord Protector of the Realm and Governor of the King’s Body. Without a regional power base or ancient title, the newly elevated Seymour—now the duke of Somerset—depended upon personal popularity to bolster his rule; he thus actively cultivated a public reputation as a paragon of wisdom, bravery, kindness, patriotism, and piety.¹⁴ Many knew him simply as

¹³ There are two types of topical *Memorial* and *Mirror* poems. The first evoke memories of Edward Seymour’s troubles; the second offer admonition or protest about current Marian (and, later, Elizabethan) policies: for the latter group, see Lucas, “Tragic Poetry as Political Resistance,” 128–249, 288–345.

¹⁴ Ethan Shagan, “Protector Somerset and the 1549 Rebellions: New Sources and New Perspectives,” *English Historical Review* 114 (February 1999): 36–37, 47–53.

"the good duke," a man zealous in religion, sympathetic to the poor, and strongly committed to the establishment of economic and social justice in England. During Edward's reign, Seymour enjoyed the support of several important constituencies: many among the common people looked to him as their champion and chief protector; reform-minded Protestants revered him as their secular leader; educated men sought him out as a patron of learning; and patriotic subjects celebrated his expansionist foreign policies and his "imperialistic" designs on Scotland and France.¹⁵

Seymour's most devoted followers were evangelical Protestants, men and women whose devotion to him and expectations for his rule were driven to great heights through the rhetoric of providential sanction that surrounded the protector's government. Seymour claimed to have been "caused by Providence to rule" and believed himself to be the "shepherd" of God's flock in England and the "sword-bearer" of divine justice on earth. Numerous of his supporters adopted such language and used it to justify not only Seymour's sweeping reforms in the English church but even such secular actions as his invasion of Scotland and his agrarian economic policies.¹⁶ Some called Seymour God's appointed "instrument" and "messenger" on earth. Others spoke of him as the new builder of the Holy Temple or even as the apostle Peter and characterized the English under Seymour's guidance in terms of the ancient Israelites.¹⁷ The common people, it was said, anticipated a new golden age under the Protectorate; educated men praised Seymour for encouraging a culture of learning in government; and men of all classes

¹⁵ See M. L. Bush, *The Government Policy of Protector Somerset* (London: Edward Arnold, 1975). As an educated Protestant who had held a position of responsibility in Seymour's assault on Scotland, *Mirror* author George Ferrers can fairly be said to have been a member of all but the first of these groups.

¹⁶ John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials* (Oxford, 1822), vol. 2, part 2, 311–12; Bush, *The Government Policy of Protector Somerset*, 41–126; *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Seymour, Edward (1506?–1552)"; Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset, *Edward, Duke of Somerset . . . : To all . . . of the Realme of Scotlande* (London, 1547); Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset, *An Epistle or Exhortacion, to Unitie and Peace, sent from the Lord Protector . . . to the Nobilitie . . . and al Others the Inhabitauntes of the Realme of Scotlande* (London, 1548), in *The Complaynt of Scotlande*, ed. James A. H. Murray (London, 1872), 237–47.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Bernardino Ochino, *A Tragoedie or Dialogue of the Vnjuste Primacie of the Bishop of Rome* (London, 1549; RSTC 18770), sig. Y1r; John Hooper, *A Declaracion of Christe* (Zurich, 1547; RSTC 13745), sigs. A4v–A5r; Heinrich Bullinger, *An Holsome Antidotus*, trans. Jean Veron (London, 1548; RSTC 4059), sigs. A7r–A8v; Thomas Becon, *Prayers and Other Devotional Writings*, ed. John Ayre (Cambridge, 1844), 4–9. In *A Tragoedie*, Ochino actually presents a heavenly dialogue in which Christ explains to the angel Gabriel his plan behind making Seymour England's "Christian protectour" (sig. Y1r).

expected him to raise England to a position of dominance in European affairs.¹⁸

The intense admiration that surrounded Seymour's rule made the impact of the political setbacks that ended it only that much more shocking. The series of sudden, seemingly inexplicable events that led quickly to Seymour's downfall began in early 1549 when, to the dismay of many of the "good duke's" followers, Seymour allowed his younger brother, Lord Admiral Thomas Seymour, to be executed for treason. Thomas's death in March 1549 horrified the nation, for many believed Thomas to have been innocent and suspected that his condemnation may have come not from impartial justice but from a fit of jealousy on the protector's part. Thomas's execution was followed by ferocious popular rebellions that inflamed the countryside—uprisings that spread so quickly that by July the central government itself seemed in danger of collapse.¹⁹ In dealing with these revolts, Seymour chose to negotiate and to offer pardons to the rebels rather than to suppress the uprisings militarily. While this approach preserved Seymour's popularity among the common people, it failed to quell the revolts and it outraged his fellow Privy Councilors, who came to believe that Seymour was sympathetic to the rebels' cause and hostile to the upper classes.²⁰ Soon after the rebellions were suppressed, the most important men of the Privy Council mounted a coup against Seymour (October 1549). Following an armed standoff, the Councilors seized Seymour, imprisoned him, and stripped him of his titles and offices. Although he eventually won release from

¹⁸ Patrick Tytler, *England under the Reigns of Edward VI and Mary*, 2 vols. (London, 1839), 1:114–15; W. K. Jordan, *Edward VI*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1968–71), 1:83–86, 386; W. S. Hudson, *The Cambridge Connection and the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980), 62, 76; Patten, *The Expedition into Scotland*; Dale Hoak, "The Iconography of the Crown Imperial," in *Tudor Political Culture*, ed. Dale Hoak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 54–103. The best study of Seymour's bases of support is Bush, *The Government Policy of Protector Somerset*; for the rhetoric of Somerset's supporters, see John King, "Protector Somerset, Patron of the English Renaissance," *Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America* 70 (1976): 307–31. As King notes, Seymour was a sophisticated propagandist who patronized many of those who wrote in praise of him. Nevertheless, most of the authors who lauded Seymour did not do so simply to gain financial support. Many had suffered persecution or censorship in Henry's reign for writing publicly in favor of the sort of policies Seymour vigorously pursued. Their admiration for Seymour and their eagerness to further his reforms was for the most part not born from desire for personal gain but from a conviction of the righteousness of his causes. See Bush, *The Government Policy of Protector Somerset*, 100–26.

¹⁹ Jordan, *Edward VI*, 1:441–43.

²⁰ Bush, *The Government Policy of Protector Somerset*, 47, 84–85; *Calendar of State Papers, Spanish*, ed. R. Tyler et al. (London, 1862–1964), 9:395.

prison (February 1550), Seymour was not allowed to resume his place as chief subject of the realm nor to continue his cherished social reforms and expansionist foreign policies. Instead, an increasingly frustrated Seymour soon fell under suspicion of plotting against the new government led by his former ally and now chief foe, John Dudley, earl of Warwick. In October 1551, Seymour was arrested once again and accused of seeking the deaths of England's chief Councilors. After a controversial trial, he was judged a felon in December 1551 and executed for his crimes two months later.²¹

Despite the boundless optimism and the rhetoric of divine sanction with which the Protectorate had begun, both Seymour and his policies ended in failure. The events that brought down Seymour stunned his admirers, many of whom to the very end expected Seymour to one day resume his place as England's leader, and they left his supporters wrestling with a host of disturbing questions. What role did Seymour play in his brother's death and why did he allow Thomas Seymour to die? Why did the common people, whom he loved and who loved him, rise against him? Why did England's chief nobles turn on him in 1549 and how could the heroic Seymour have fallen victim to their plots? If Seymour and his reformist policies had been as divinely favored as so many had believed, how could God have allowed them to be destroyed so tragically? To make matters worse for his Protestant adherents, Seymour's execution was followed by a series of further disasters: John Dudley's reversals of many of Seymour's programs and his alleged covert plundering of the English church; King Edward VI's early death in 1553 and the triumphant accession of his sister, the Catholic Queen Mary I, to the throne; the persecution or exile of Protestant leaders; and finally Mary's decision to take the hated Prince Philip of Spain as her husband—a move that Protestants feared would lead to the Inquisition in England and that nationalists believed would reduce England to the status of a satellite state of the Hapsburg Empire.²² By summer 1554 (when the *Memorial* poems were being composed), Seymour's followers had to acknowledge that the larger English Protestant community had been shattered and that the guiding ideals of England were now virtually the exact opposites of all those for which they and

²¹ For an analysis of Seymour's actions at this time, see Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 506–16.

²² Jennifer Loach, *Parliament and the Crown in the Reign of Mary Tudor* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 184–91.

the protector had striven. As Marian Catholics confidently proclaimed, the Lord himself seemed to have judged against Seymour and the ideals in which his supporters had placed their faith.²³

Seymour's admirers simply could not comprehend his baffling actions as protector and his tragic setbacks in terms of their ideal image of him. After each of Seymour's setbacks, the protector's followers were left with troubling, persistent doubts both about the man whom they had idolized and about the value of the religious, social, and political ideals that they had so confidently shared with him. The retrospectively topical poems of *A Mirror for Magistrates* are, this article suggests, designed to answer those doubts, to suggest comforting explanations for Seymour's baffling behavior and setbacks that could be reconciled with the beliefs of those whose very way of understanding God and the world had been shaken in the years after Seymour's death. Through a variety of consolatory interpretive strategies, these poems direct readers to revisit the worst moments of Seymour's last years and to reinterpret them in a way that could rehabilitate the "good duke's" tarnished reputation and reconfirm the rectitude of all for which he had stood.

To exemplify the function of these poems, this essay will examine closely one of them, "The Tragedie of Edmund Duke of Somerset."²⁴ This exemplary verse tragedy seeks to provide readers with a new, comforting way of understanding the first of the terrible events believed to have led to Seymour's demise: his bewildering and, it was feared, sinful decision to allow the execution of his own brother.

For many mid-Tudor subjects, the arrest, attainder, and execution of Lord Admiral Thomas Seymour (c. 1509–1549) were among the most deeply disturbing events of the Edwardian period. In the last years of

²³ For the Marian Catholic view of the "failed" English Reformation, see Tom Betteridge, *Tudor Histories of the English Reformations, 1530–1583* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 120–60.

²⁴ Unlike "Humfrey Duke of Gloucester" and "Elleanor Cobham," Feasey and Campbell could do little with "Edmund Duke of Somerset." Since it lamented the death of Humfrey of Gloucester, a character that in other poems she had identified with Edward Seymour, Feasey read the sections on Humfrey's fall as lamenting the execution of Edward Seymour. However, she was unable to explain the purpose of the bulk of the poem, which details Edmund of Somerset's life and his emotional state in the years after Humfrey's death. Campbell chose not to confront "Somerset" at all, concentrating instead solely on "Humfrey Duke of Gloucester" and "Elleanor Cobham" in her topical analyses. There has been no subsequent attempt to explain the purpose or meaning of "Edmund Duke of Somerset." To avoid confusion, this article will refer in the following pages to Ferrers's fifteenth-century duke of Somerset as "Somerset" and to the actual sixteenth-century Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset, as "Edward Seymour."

his life, Thomas Seymour was a charismatic, popular, but extremely ambitious and frustrated man. At the beginning of his nephew King Edward's reign (January 1547), Thomas had expected to receive the position of Governor of the King's Body, one of the two chief offices of a minor king's government. Instead, both that position and the office of Protector of the Realm were given to Edward Seymour. Envious of his elder brother's power, Thomas worked over the next two years to undermine Edward Seymour's authority and to strengthen his own. Matters came to a head in late 1548, when the Privy Council learned that Thomas was fortifying Holt Castle in what seemed to be preparation for a bid to wrest control of King Edward from the protector.²⁵ On 17 January 1549, Edward Seymour and the Council ordered Thomas's arrest on a charge of treason. In February, the House of Lords voted unanimously to attaint Thomas Seymour, while the House of Commons, less certain of Thomas's guilt, "very much debated and argued" the charges before they too, after instruction by the chief legal men of the realm, voted to condemn him. Thomas Seymour was executed less than a month after his attainder.²⁶

Modern studies have shown that Thomas Seymour was indeed plotting against his brother. However, the case brought against him was legally weak and many at the time found his condemnation by attainder rather than by trial to be highly suspicious.²⁷ Most mid-Tudor observers could not believe that Thomas, a military hero who had once been the husband of the pious Queen Catherine Parr and who was understood to be well-loved by King Edward, could ever come to contemplate the death of his "dear" nephew. Further, people were horrified by the penalty the lord admiral received. For many, Somerset's permitting of his own brother's execution was an act of profoundly troubling severity.²⁸

²⁵ G. W. Bernard, "The Downfall of Thomas Seymour," in *The Tudor Nobility*, ed. G. W. Bernard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 217–28.

²⁶ Jordan, *Edward VI*, 1:374–77; *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1509–1558*, ed. S. T. Bindoff, 3 vols. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1982), 3:301.

²⁷ Jordan, *Edward VI*, 1:377, 381; *Acts of the Privy Council*, n.s., ed. J. R. Dasent, 5 vols. (London, 1890–1907), 2:252. Judgment by bill of attainder rather than by open trial meant that Thomas Seymour was never heard in his own defense—a fact disturbing to many observers.

²⁸ See, for instance, Robert Crowley, *An Epitome of Cronicles* (London, 1559; RSTC 15217.5), sig. 4D4v; Jordan, *Edward VI*, 1:381. Most of the Protestants who had revered Edward Seymour for his religious reforms had also revered Thomas Seymour and his wife, Catherine Parr, for their important patronage of Protestant writers and preachers. See *Original Letters relative to the English Reformation*, ed. Hastings Robinson, 2 parts (Cambridge, 1846–47), 1:477.

In this climate of confusion and anger, many blamed not Thomas for his fall but his brother the protector. During and after Thomas's troubles, Edward Seymour was accused of "extreme hatred" for his brother, a hatred fanned by the several public instances of acrimony between the two men and their wives that flared during the Protectorate. People observed that it was Somerset's rule that Thomas had been accused of challenging, that the case against Thomas had been legally weak, and that it was only with the protector's full permission that Thomas could have been executed.²⁹ Despite Edward Seymour's attempts publicly to distance himself from the proceedings against his brother, Thomas's execution resulted in "grave, perhaps irreparable, damage to Somerset's reputation and position." Many of his contemporaries labeled the protector a fratricide, accusing him of one of the most horrible crimes in the Tudor imagination.³⁰ To the consternation of Somerset's followers, many people proclaimed Thomas Seymour's death a sin and Edward Seymour its perpetrator. Writing in Mary's reign, the Catholic poet George Cavendish described Thomas Seymour as an innocent man made martyr to his own brother's "ambycyous dayn." Out of "malice and dispight," Cavendish charged, Edward Seymour falsely accused the virtuous Thomas of a treasonous attempt to wrest control of the government, "hyme self well knowyng / it was not so."³¹ Similarly, John Foxe identified the former protector, otherwise one of his greatest heroes, as the man responsible for his brother's execution. In *Acts and Monuments*, Foxe declared that Edward Seymour had "blotted or darkened" his soul with a terrible "spot of vice" when he suffered his brother to be executed. Like many other Protestant observers, Foxe felt constrained to interpret Edward Seymour's own death three years later as divine punishment for Thomas's execution: "credible it is," wrote Foxe, "that the said duke, in suffering or procuring the death of his brother, not only endangered himself, and weakened his own power, but also provoked the chastisement of God's scourge and rod, which did so light upon him."³²

²⁹ Many writers noted the "extreme hatred" that flared between the brothers. See, among others, John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, ed. Stephen Cattley, 8 vols. (London, 1838), 6:283; John Stowe, *Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles* (London, 1565; RSTC 23319), fol. 210v; Thomas Cooper, *Coopers Chronicle* (London, 1560; RSTC 12148), fol. 344r; Richard Grafton, *An Abridgement of Chronicles* (London, 1562; RSTC 12151), sig. S8v.

³⁰ Jordan, *Edward VI*, 1:381; *Original Letters*, 2:735.

³¹ George Cavendish, *Metrical Visions*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980), 97, 107.

³² Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 6:296, 297; see also *Original Letters*, 2:735; and Cooper, *Coopers Chronicle*, fol. 353v.

As a man with ties of patronage and perhaps even friendship to both Seymour brothers, Ferrers was touched personally by Thomas's fall and Edward Seymour's role in it.³³ Further, as a member of the Parliament charged with voting on Thomas's attainder, Ferrers must have wrestled deeply with the same questions surrounding Thomas's execution that for long after haunted Edward Seymour's supporters. Both for his own and for others' psychological well-being, Ferrers needed to return to this traumatic time, to re-narrate and "remoralize" the recent past in order to find convincing, psychologically acceptable explanations both for Thomas's death and for Edward Seymour's baffling actions. In "The Tragedie of Edmund Duke of Somerset," Ferrers offers a fictionalized account of a long-dead nobleman's tragic relations with his near kinsman that is artfully constructed to serve as a psychologically therapeutic exemplary guide for understanding Edward Seymour's actions toward his brother, an exemplum that offers readers a model for interpreting Seymour's behavior during his brother's troubles that could acknowledge the protector's role in Thomas's fall yet exonerate him from all guilt in the matter.

"The Tragedie of Edmund Duke of Somerset" is an anguished soliloquy spoken by a man whose life was made up almost solely of tragic failures. In the poem, Edmund Beauford (or Beaufort), duke of Somerset, returns from the dead to explain his role in the series of disastrous events that occurred during the middle period of King Henry VI's reign (c. 1447–1456).³⁴ Somerset begins by ruefully acknowledging that during his life ill fortune dogged all his actions. Despite his best intentions, all that he attempted resulted in tragedy. His most costly decision, he laments, was his consent to the death of his cousin, Humfrey, duke of

³³ Ferrers became acquainted with Thomas Seymour at least as early as their time together in Henry VIII's privy chamber (*History of Parliament*, 3:297, 2:130). Ferrers seems to have been on good terms with Thomas Seymour in Edward's reign, for it was almost certainly through Thomas Seymour's assistance that Ferrers gained a seat in Edward VI's first Parliament (November 1547–April 1552). Ferrers represented the borough of Cirencester (Gloucestershire), a moribund franchise that had been revived specifically for Thomas Seymour, who was the most important landowner in the area. Cirencester had not sent representatives to Parliament since the fourteenth century and, after Thomas Seymour's death, was to send no more until Elizabeth's reign (*History of Parliament*, 1:95, 2:130, 3:300).

³⁴ Although they present the ghosts of their fallen protagonists as narrating their own stories, the authors make it clear to readers before each tragedy that these ghosts are but literary constructs. If they are to be imagined as existing beyond the minds of their authors at all, Baldwin would explain later in Elizabeth's reign, they are not to be thought of as inhabiting hell or Purgatory ("whiche the papistes haue digged thereout") but as lying in "the Graue, wherin the dead bodies of al sortes of people do rest till tyme of the resurrection" (*Mirror*, 346).

Gloucester, the King's uncle whose death was sought by a conspiracy of ambitious foes (1447). To gain Somerset's consent to Humfrey's death, the devious plotter William Delapole, duke of Suffolk, persuaded Somerset that the innocent Humfrey was a traitor. Only later did Somerset come to realize that his former "faythful frende" whose death he permitted had in fact been innocent of all crime, a realization that continues to torture him even in his ghostly state.

After Gloucester's fall, Somerset became Henry VI's chief officer. He was opposed, however, by the duke of York and several co-conspirators who sought chief power in the realm. The conspirators put into motion an elaborate plot designed to drive Somerset from his high place near the king. Claiming that Somerset had misgoverned the country, the Yorkists provoked a popular uprising (Jack Cade's rebellion) in order to weaken Somerset's rule. At the same time, York and his allies began to spread lies about Somerset's governance, painting his rule as corrupt and pernicious. Until the revolt, Somerset had been strong enough to counter the conspirators' opposition; yet, so strong did Cade's rebels prove to be that to appease them the king was forced to send Somerset to the Tower. After the rebellion was put down, Henry quickly freed Somerset, an act that provoked the Yorkists to use "open force" against the government. Joining with the powerful earl of Warwick, York assembled an army and engaged the king's supporters at the town of St. Albans. There, Somerset met the earl of Warwick "face to face" in battle and was cut down. Somerset's death spelled tragedy for King Henry and his loyal supporters. In the wake of St. Albans, Henry VI was "made a pray vnto his enemies handes." The duke of York obtained personal rule over the weak, "childysh" monarch and he and his fellow "tray-tours" eventually usurped all power in England, allowing them to pillage the country and oppress England's rightful leader (*Mirror*, 388–401).

In constructing this account of Somerset's life, Ferrers extensively altered his historical source, Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Houses*, in order to provoke in readers memories of Edward Seymour and his travails. Hall relates that the fifteenth-century Edmund of Somerset spent much of his adult life fighting in France; Ferrers, by contrast, barely acknowledges his protagonist's foreign career and mentions only in passing the most politically consequential event in the historical Somerset's life, his loss of English-held Normandy.³⁵

³⁵ Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Houses* (London, 1548; rpt. Menston, UK: Scolar Press, 1970), "Henry VI," fol. 74r; *Mirror*, 389. Since Hall begins new folia-

Instead, Ferrers exaggerates the importance of Somerset's domestic career, completely omitting Queen Margaret's and the duke of Suffolk's period of ascendancy in English politics (1447–1450) in order to suggest falsely that Somerset held and lost supreme power in Henry's government almost immediately after Gloucester's death (*Mirror*, 394).³⁶ Elsewhere, Ferrers asserts that King Henry sent Somerset to the Tower during Cade's rebellion, when, in fact, the historical Somerset was not even in England during Cade's revolt (June and July 1450).³⁷ Likewise, Ferrers refers to the middle years of Henry VI's reign (when King Henry was in his mid-twenties) as if they were a period of a king's minority and as if the duke of Somerset and not King Henry had been England's chief leader.³⁸ Finally, Ferrers compresses and alters the chronology of the political setbacks Somerset experienced between 1447 and 1455. He presents the death of the King's uncle, the popular rebellion, the dissemination of slanderous complaints against Beauford's government, Beauford's removal from power, his imprisonment, and, after his release, his death brought about by his enemy Richard Neville, the earl of Warwick, as if they occurred successively over a brief period of time and not over a period of several years.

In its highly altered details, Ferrers's "historical" narrative evokes for mid-Tudor readers not the middle years of Henry VI's reign but the period of King Edward VI's minority when the sixteenth-century duke of Somerset (Edward Seymour), like Ferrers's fifteenth-century duke of Somerset (Edmund Beauford), faced a popular rebellion, the opposition of powerful nobles, charges of corruption and misrule, imprisonment in the Tower, and, finally, death at the hands—so it was believed—of the earl of Warwick (John Dudley).

Similarly, Ferrers adapts the Gloucester of Hall's chronicle to evoke

tion in his chronicle at the beginning of each new king's reign, passages in Hall's work will be cited both by section name (e.g. "Henry VI") and by folio number.

³⁶ In fact, Somerset spent almost all of the first three years after Gloucester's death fighting in France.

³⁷ Hall, "Henry VI," fols. 77r–79r (Cade's rebellion), fols. 85v–86r (Somerset sent to the Tower; his release provokes York to assemble an army). Ferrers also draws on Hall, "Henry VI," fol. 81r–v, for events that he unhistorically ascribes to the time of Cade's revolt. See also Bertram Wolffe, *Henry VI* (London: Methuen, 1981), 240, 276. Furthermore, as Hall notes, Henry VI was "sicke" (i.e., insane) at the time of Somerset's crucial arrest and thus had no hand in it (Hall, "Henry VI," fol. 85v; Wolffe, *Henry VI*, 276).

³⁸ Ferrers misapplies the biblical text *Ve terrae illi cuius rex est puer* ("Woe to the land whereof a chylde is head") to this time and describes Henry as "childysh" in order to speak of this period of Henry's reign as if it were that of a minor (*Mirror*, 391). Ferrers further downplays the importance of Queen Margaret's continuing influence in the ruling of the country during Somerset's ascendancy in order to make Somerset appear more powerful.

strong memories of the last years of Edward Seymour's brother, Thomas. In "Somerset," Humfrey of Gloucester (who, like Thomas Seymour, was the king's uncle and a near kinsman of the duke of Somerset) is accused of treason, a charge unprecedented in Ferrers's sources but the very accusation brought against Thomas Seymour in 1549.³⁹ Further, Ferrers insists in the poem on an unhistorical friendship between Gloucester and Somerset and falsely claims that Somerset took no active part in bringing Humphrey to his death. In fact, the historical Somerset was a member of the Beauford (or Beaufort) family, the clan whose members were among Gloucester's most ferocious enemies. Far from taking no active hand in Gloucester's downfall, Somerset was one of those who arrested Gloucester at Bury and brought him to the confinement in which he was shortly after found dead.⁴⁰ Rather than the historical Humfrey, Ferrers's Gloucester is designed to recall the popular image of Thomas Seymour, who had been a close ally of his brother in Henry VIII's reign and whose attainder and execution was arranged (at least overtly) by men other than Protector Somerset. Likewise, Ferrers's claim that Gloucester's death had an immediate and decisive impact on Somerset's career is inapplicable to the historical Somerset; however, it does suggest the widely held mid-Tudor belief of a causal relation between Thomas's troubles and those suffered shortly thereafter by Edward Seymour.⁴¹

Just as Ferrers shapes the narrative details of "Somerset" to suggest Edward Seymour's last years, so he shapes the moral commentary on his protagonist's career to offer psychologically comforting explanations for Edward Seymour's troubling actions and setbacks in the *annus horribilis* of 1549. The questions the ghostly Edmund Beauford seeks to answer about his own life are those Edward Seymour's former fol-

³⁹ According to Hall, Gloucester's enemies accused him of enriching himself at the king's expense and of showing too much leniency to condemned criminals—but not of treason (Hall, "Henry VI," fol. 69r). Further, Hall makes it clear that Gloucester died under suspicious circumstances during the time he was held a prisoner by his enemies. However, to better suggest Thomas Seymour's execution, Ferrers speaks of Gloucester's death almost as if it were an official government action, one to which Somerset gave his consent not as a co-conspirator but as a government official who needed to be consulted (*Mirror*, 401).

⁴⁰ Wolffe, *Henry VI*, 131. In fact, Ferrers identifies Edmund Beauford as one of Humphrey's *enemies* in the poem "Humfrey Duke of Gloucester" (identifying him by his earlier title of marquess of Dorset), since it suited no allusive purpose in that poem to alter the historical record (*Mirror*, 456, l. 352).

⁴¹ Stowe, *Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles*, fol. 210v; Cooper, *Coopers Chronicle*, fol. 344r; Richard Grafton, *Grafton's Chronicle* [also known as *A Chronicle at Large*] (1569), 2 vols. (London, 1809), 2:506; Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 6:283.

lowers wished to answer about their hero's: How could such a good man have permitted the death of his innocent, virtuous kinsman? Why did his government collapse so quickly and why, despite all his efforts, was his king "conquered" by his worst enemy (in Beauford's case, the duke of York; in Edward Seymour's case, John Dudley)? Why did his well-intentioned political actions end only in failure? Ferrers's exemplary poem allows Seymour's pained followers to return to the time of Seymour's first troubles, to confront them in displaced form, and to begin to lay to rest the doubts and questions that had plagued them for so long.

To begin, it is instructive to note what Ferrers's poem does *not* suggest. In offering reasons for Somerset's role in Gloucester's death, Ferrers excludes any explanation that might evoke the dominant Marian explanations of the cause of Thomas Seymour's execution, those widely circulated accounts that identified either Thomas's attempted treason or his brother's "extreme hatred" as the cause of Thomas's death. Ferrers's poem makes it clear that the executed Duke Humfrey was never a traitor: Gloucester was all along, the poem relates, "the duke innocent" and the very "prop" of, not enemy to, Henry VI's government. Likewise, "Somerset" excludes "extreme hatred" between Somerset and Gloucester as a cause for Gloucester's death. Far from hostile to his kinsman, Somerset speaks of Gloucester in loving terms, calling him "my cosyn my refuge and staye" and a "faythful frende" whose loss still tortures his memory.⁴²

Instead, Ferrers's poem exemplifies how Edward Seymour's admirers might acknowledge Seymour's undeniable hand in Thomas's demise, yet still preserve their hero's reputation for rectitude. In the poem, the grieving duke of Somerset admits that he played a role in Gloucester's death; yet, he ascribes all guilt for that role to another, the crafty and ambitious duke of Suffolk, who falsely accused Gloucester of treason and who led Somerset, through a series of lies, tragically to permit Gloucester's death:

And so I was abusde and other moe
By Suffolkes sleyghtes, who sought to please the quene,

⁴² A single line about Somerset possibly being "held" at one time by "priuie spite" is the only suggestion of the animosity the two brothers had felt towards one another, and Ferrers phrases this reference to dismiss it as a motivating force in Somerset's consent (*Mirror*, 401). The conditional clause "If priuie spyte at any time me helde" permits readers neither to fix a particular time when Somerset was supposedly filled with spite nor even to be certain that Somerset was ever in that condition at all.

Forecasting not the misery and woe
 Whych thereof came, and soone was after sene:
 With glosing tonge he made vs fooles to weene,
 That Humfrey dyd to Englandes crowne aspyre,
 Which to prevent, his death they dyd conspyre.
 (*Mirror*, 400–1)

No matter what events might otherwise have suggested, Somerset insists, he was ever an innocent party in the moves against Gloucester. Somerset never acted with malice toward his cousin; instead, he ascribes all evil intentions to Suffolk and declares himself to have been in fact one of Suffolk's chief *victims*, a man preyed upon by that devious villain just as Gloucester was.

Ferrers designs his description of the "glosing" Suffolk to lead readers to identify an Edwardian figure other than Seymour as the guilty party in Thomas's execution: John Dudley, earl of Warwick, the mid-Tudor leader who had been thought to have been Edward Seymour's closest ally during Thomas's troubles but who was later understood to have been all along the protector's worst enemy. During Edward's reign (and for centuries afterward), Dudley was understood to be, like Ferrers's Suffolk, a subtle, ambitious, and devious villain.⁴³ Like Suffolk, Dudley was particularly noted for his "glosing" tongue and his ability to manipulate those around him. After Edward Seymour's deposition in 1549, Dudley had become known as the chief enemy of the Seymour brothers. By the time of the *Memorial*, Protestants and Catholics alike had already blamed Dudley for numerous disasters, including the economic distress of the early 1550s, the failure of the Edwardian Reformation, and even the deaths of Edward Seymour and King Edward. Edward Seymour's former supporters could readily accept Dudley as the true malefactor in the Thomas Seymour affair, since many already believed that it was Dudley's lies that had first provoked the Seymour brothers' long-

⁴³ The testaments to his perceived malevolence and duplicity are legion: to John Ponet, Dudley was "thambicious and subtil Alcibiades of England"; to George Cavendish, he was a man of "cankard malice" and "Couetous[ness] and pride"; to his own daughter-in-law, Lady Jane Grey, his character was tainted by "exceeding ambition" and his life was ever "wicked and full of dissimulation" (John Ponet, *A Shorte Treatise of Politike Power* [Strasburg, 1556], sig. 13r; Cavendish, *Metrical Visions*, 121; Lady Jane Grey, quoted in Dale Hoak, "Rehabilitating the Duke of Northumberland," in *The Mid-Tudor Polity, c. 1540–1560*, ed. Robert Titler and Jennifer Loach [Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980], 32). Further, readers already would have connected Dudley with Suffolk in the tragedy "How Lorde William Delapole Duke of Suffolke was worthily punyshed for abusing his Kyng and causing the destruction of good duke Humfrey," another topical poem of *A Memorial of suche Princes* (Campbell, "Humphrey Duke of Gloucester," 150).

running quarrels and that Dudley was one of the driving forces behind Edward Seymour's 1549 decision to bring Thomas Seymour to execution.⁴⁴

In evoking existing English beliefs about Dudley's "conspiracies," Ferrers does not merely endorse them but builds upon and refines them. Most mid-Tudor accounts that cast blame on Dudley for Thomas's death did not exonerate Edward Seymour, whom they execrated for acting upon the fraternal jealousy that Dudley supposedly had helped to inflame.⁴⁵ By contrast, Ferrers's narrative shows readers how to shift blame entirely onto Dudley and to construe Edward Seymour as a passive bystander to his brother's death. According to the poem, Somerset held no malice toward Gloucester nor ever raised a hand against him. Instead, Somerset's "fault consisted only in consent": a deceived Somerset permitted Suffolk to pursue Gloucester's life but he took no active part in that pursuit himself (*Mirror*, 400).⁴⁶ Further, the poem suggests, this fault was born not from malice but from Somerset's laudable, characteristic *virtue*. According to "Somerset," Somerset made his decision to permit Gloucester's death only with the most admirable of intentions. Somerset honestly feared that "Humfrey dyd to Englandes crowne aspyre," and for that reason alone he consented not to stand in Suffolk's way. Somerset's chief concern during his life was ever the safety of Henry VI: "Constant I was in my Prynces quarell," Somerset recalls, "To dye or lyve and [I] spared for no parell" (*Mirror*, 401). In permitting Gloucester's death, Somerset believed he was pursuing his highest duty, the protection of his king. Such was his dedication that he pursued that duty even at the personal cost of losing a kinsman and former "faythful frende."

In applying this account to the similar events of Edward Seymour's

⁴⁴ For the widespread scapegoating of Dudley in the mid-Tudor period and after, see Hoak, "Rehabilitating the Duke of Northumberland," 29–51. For Dudley's supposed plot to turn the Seymour brothers against one another, see the anonymous "Certayne brife notes of the controversy betwene the dukes [sic] of Somerset and the duke of Nor[t]humberland," BL Add. MS 48126, fols. 6r–16r; and the historical narrative found in BL Add. MS 48023, fols. 350–53. For the belief during Mary's reign that Dudley played a role in bringing Thomas Seymour to his death, see Dale Hoak, *The King's Council in the Reign of Edward VI* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 239–40. See also Cavendish, *Metrical Visions*, 100, 204–5; Bernard, "The Downfall of Thomas Seymour," 232; D. M. Loades, *John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, 1504–1553* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 115; Campbell, "Humphrey Duke of Gloucester and Elianor Cobham his Wife," 134.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, Cavendish, *Metrical Visions*, 99, 107; "Certayne Brife Notes"; and BL Add. MS 48023, fols. 350–53.

⁴⁶ Cf. Grafton, *Grafton's Chronicle*, 2:529.

last year in office, readers are directed to construe Seymour's part in Thomas's death too as mere "consent" to the actions of others. Further, they are to construe the ethical nature of Seymour's decision as they do Somerset's: as an expression of Seymour's loyalty to his nephew King Edward and thus as more evidence of the virtue that his followers so fervently believed composed the core of his character. In fact, this interpretation would be particularly attractive to Seymour's followers precisely because it would present itself to them not as speculative rationalization but as recent memory. Somerset's rhetoric of passive consent, many would have recalled, was Edward Seymour's own during Thomas's travails. Privately, the protector had played a major role in arranging Thomas's attainder; publicly, however, Seymour presented himself as a passive, grieving man who had been driven reluctantly to assent to the fatal decisions of others. Thus, when he appeared before King Edward with the Privy Council to ask for the bill of attainder against Thomas, Seymour claimed he came to King Edward with the other Councilors only because he "coulede not resist nor wolde not be against the Lordes [of the Privy Council's] request."⁴⁷ He had played no role in the decision to request an attainder bill, his rhetoric implied; rather, it was other Privy Councilors who had decided Thomas's fate. Likewise, Somerset's virtuous placing of duty over familial affection in the poem too recalls Seymour's rhetoric in 1549. When justifying why he allowed the bill of attainder to be brought against his brother, Seymour declared he permitted it only because he did "rather regarde his bounden dewtie to the Kinges majestie and the Crowne of Englande than his owne sonne or brother, and did wey more his allegiaunce then his bloode."⁴⁸ At that time, so strong were the imputations of jealousy between the two brothers that few were able to accept these explanations for Edward Seymour's role in Thomas's fate. However, revisited five years later and inserted into a believable conspiracy narrative, Seymour's words during Thomas's troubles could be recalled, reevaluated, and accepted by his former partisans as the most "reasonable" explanations for Seymour's heretofore disturbingly inexplicable behavior.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Acts of the Privy Council*, 2:257. Seymour similarly managed to avoid taking an overt part in Parliamentary deliberations over Thomas's fate by playing the role of the reluctant, grieving brother: see *Acts of the Privy Council*, 2:260, 261.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:257.

⁴⁹ Even the poem's admissions that Somerset suffered from "overlight credence" and "want of foresight," flaws that led him into his fatal consent, can be construed by readers

"Somerset" provokes Edward Seymour's former followers to confront their memories of Seymour's role in Thomas's death and to believe that, despite appearances, "the good duke" was ever as his followers had wished to remember him: a man of virtue, not of malice—a good man whose memory had been unjustly harmed by the world's "misunderstanding" of his actions during his brother's travails. By applying the poem's model, readers are to come to understand Seymour as in fact the greatest victim of the whole Thomas Seymour affair. After all, in the poem it is Somerset who suffers still over the events surrounding Gloucester's loss, even beyond his own death, and it is he whose reputation has been unjustly stained by the false imputations that he was anything less than upright and morally pure during his time in power. Ferrers's exemplum thus asks readers to revisit and to rewrite the events of early 1549, to return to the time of Thomas's death not to castigate a fratricide but to bear witness to crimes against both of the Seymour brothers: to the crime of Thomas Seymour's unjust death and to the crime of Edward Seymour's cruel deception, that which led "the good duke" into his fatal mistake of consent that still pains his followers. While it fails as objective history, Ferrers's exemplary guide succeeds as psychological therapy, allowing its intended audience a model by which to interpret the events of early 1549 in a manner that could lay those events' troubling implications about Edward Seymour to rest. Readers' confidence in Seymour's image as a man of virtue and innocence may be restored as Seymour's role in Thomas's death—the "one spot of vice" that plagued his followers' memories of him—is con-

in a positive light. In the poem, Somerset castigates his "overlight credence"; yet, he also castigates the "noughty time" of Henry's reign that made this single character trait into a deadly liability. When Somerset describes himself as a "simple" man prone to be too easily deceived, his words recall the explanation for Seymour's "deception" by his political enemies later taken up by admirers such as John Foxe. Somerset's character here evokes Seymour's reputation as a man of simple goodness, a man, in Foxe's characterization, so good-hearted and innocent that he was "utterly ignorant of all craft and deceit." To his admirers, Seymour's supposedly unworldly piety and sympathetic heart led him to his godly reforms in the church and his solicitous care for the poor; yet, these same qualities were said to have made him ever "more apt and ready to be deceived than to deceive." In the matter of Thomas's death, Foxe laments that Seymour had not been worldly enough to reject the lies of those "certain whosoever they were" who led him eventually to hate his brother (Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 6:295, 297). For Foxe, Seymour was neither malicious nor incompetent, but too purely innocent for this fallen world. Readers of Somerset's "simple" nature and his tragic deception are to apply this poem's lessons to the fallen Edward Seymour. They are to construe Seymour's alleged gulling by Dudley as they do the Somerset's "overlight credence": as a sign of the protector's famous simple purity, a sign not of incompetence but of praiseworthy moral virtue.

fronted and assimilated to previously held, psychologically important beliefs about the rectitude of the fallen "good duke."

If Ferrers's exemplary account of Somerset's role in Gloucester's death could comfort readers by guiding them to a new, exculpatory understanding of Edward Seymour's part in his brother's demise, it still left many troubling questions about the protector unanswered. For instance, if he had not sinned against his brother, why had Seymour been plagued by so many disasters in his last months in office? Why didn't God protect his devout "sword bearer" from the rebellion, deposition from office, imprisonment, and execution that marked the last years of his life? In his followers' providentialist worldview, which habitually expected God's justice to be manifest in earthly affairs, Seymour should have been rewarded, not plagued, for his deeds as protector.

No matter how "illogical" Seymour's tragedies were in terms of his followers' providentialist rhetoric, they did occur. To attempt to reconcile these events to the sort of providentialist worldview with which they had greeted Seymour's successes as evidence of divine favor would, of course, run counter to the very project of exoneration that Ferrers sought to pursue, for it would suggest an image of Seymour as a man worthily struck down by God. Therefore, in its account of the Somerset's fall, the poem seeks to provide readers with a new explanation of worldly events applicable to Seymour's tragic career, one that could acknowledge the reality of Seymour's disasters without denying the rectitude of the protector or those ideals he and his followers had shared.

To guide readers in such a course, Ferrers portrays his protagonist as himself an afflicted sufferer seeking to come to terms with the reality of his unmerited suffering. Ferrers's Somerset appears before readers as a psychologically devastated victim, one with whom anguished readers could empathize in his search to understand how a good man could fall victim to earthly tragedy. Ferrers imbues Somerset with classic signs of psychological trauma. First, Somerset is haunted by intrusive memories that force him repeatedly and unexpectedly to return to the most psychologically painful moments of his life. Throughout the poem, Gloucester's death and Somerset's mistaken consent to it, the duke of York's machinations, and Henry's suffering at York's hands often return to Somerset, seemingly with the emotional force of their first occurrence. One of the most striking instances of these returns comes in the middle of an account of the duke of York's triumphs over Henry VI after the battle of St. Albans. While narrating events that oc-

curred after his death, Somerset suddenly breaks off from his chronological narrative to exclaim:

Thou lookest Baldwyn I should my selfe accuse,
 Of some subtyl dryft or other lyke thyng,
 Wherein I should my prynces eares abuse,
 To the Duke's foes overmuch adhering,
 Though some mens practise did me therto bryng,
 My fault only consisted in consent,
 Forgeve it me, for sore I dyd repent.

(*Mirror*, 400)

It is only by reading the next stanza that readers understand that Somerset has turned here from later events to dwell once again upon Duke Humfrey's loss. Memories of Gloucester's death have intruded upon him, disrupting his narrative and returning him to the moment of his greatest anguish. So powerful are these and other memories that Somerset finds no relief from them even in the afterlife.

Second, Ferrers portrays Somerset as afflicted by what we would today call survivor guilt, the experience of irrational feelings of responsibility and guilt for events for which a sufferer was neither responsible nor guilty. In the poem, Somerset dwells almost solely on the failures of Henry VI's reign, including Gloucester's death, York's triumphs, and the Yorkists' persecution of King Henry. Somerset holds himself responsible for all these disasters, even as he insists that he had worked only to prevent them. Despite demonstrating his innocence in Gloucester's death, Somerset nevertheless castigates himself for "want of foresight" and "overlight credence" in not seeing through lies that he and "other moe" could not have known were untrue. In his disturbed state, he blames his inability to see Suffolk's plots on his own "folly" and even goes so far as to construe his opposition to the duke of York as the chief cause of York's victories (*Mirror*, 390, 389). So low has his self-esteem become and so guilty does he feel that he "repent[s]" a crime of which he was innocent and even begs a commoner, *Memorial* compiler William Baldwin, personally to forgive him for his unwitting act.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ On survivor guilt, see I. Lisa McCann and Laurie Pearlman, *Psychological Trauma and the Adult Survivor* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1990), 165–66. Somerset's "survivor guilt" may be a displaced manifestation of Ferrers's own, since Ferrers was a member of the Parliament that attainted Thomas Seymour. There is no record of how Ferrers voted in this matter; however, it may well be that Ferrers too "consented" to Thomas's death and thus experienced the same sort of guilt feelings and the desire to blame lack of true knowledge, not "vice," for his decision that Somerset shows in the poem.

Most troubling for Somerset is the incongruence between his expectations of worldly justice (earthly reward for doing good) and the undeniable fact of the tragic occurrences that shaped his career. Somerset expected his good intentions to find success; yet, despite his uniformly virtuous intent, Somerset found only failure and tragedy: he fell victim to plots by the evil dukes of Suffolk and York, lost English Normandy to the French, allowed his innocent cousin Gloucester to die, left his prince at the mercy of his most cruel enemy, and lost first his high position and then his own life. No supernatural agent stopped these disasters or came to his aid. Rather, despite Somerset's best efforts, "traitors triumphed and true men lay in the dust," including all of those whom Somerset sought to protect (*Mirror*, 399).

Ferrers presents Somerset as a victim who struggles to comprehend these seeming contradictions. More important, Ferrers dramatizes this struggle, presenting through his protagonist's anguished search for understanding a blueprint for readers to use in answering their own, similar questions about why good men such as Somerset or Edward Seymour might fall. Ferrers begins his poem by having Somerset haltingly examine several different causal explanations for the numerous tragedies of his life:

Some I suppose are borne vnfortunate,
 Els good endeauours could not yll succede,
 What shal I call it? yll Fortune or fate,
 That some mens attemptes have never good speede,
 Theyr trauayle thankeles, all bootles theyr hede:
 Where other vnlyke in workyng or skylle,
 Outwrestle the world, and wyeld it at wyll,

.

For I of Somerset which duke Edmund hight,
 Extract by discent from Lancaster line,
 Were it by folly or Fortunes fell desptye,
 Or by yll aspecte of some crooked sygne,
 Of my workes never could see a good fine:
 What so I began dyd seldome wel ende:
 God from such Fortune all good men defend.

(*Mirror*, 388–89)

After considering various causes for the tragedies of his life, Somerset can settle upon only one conclusion: that he was born unlucky and "to all mishap . . . predestinate." God did not directly intervene in worldly affairs to cause his suffering; rather, Somerset was "borne vnfortunate"

and tragically fated to live in a time when evil men preyed upon the virtuous for their own political gain (*Mirror*, 388).

In presenting Somerset's tragedies as born from the effects of fortune and fate, Ferrers draws upon the pattern of his literary model, John Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* (c. 1439), the work to which the *Memo-rial of suche Princes* was originally appended. Lydgate's work displays in voluminous example the dangerous unpredictability of human life and warns of the sudden, inexplicable reversals of fortune to which even the best of men and women are subject. It teaches that fortune and worldly mutability often exert a malign influence on human endeavors and, since God only selectively intervenes in worldly affairs, no man, even the most pious, should count on receiving justice in this transitory life. Instead, the virtuous should look for reward not in this world but in heaven.

The traditional Christian concepts of fickle fortune and worldly instability that informed Lydgate's work exerted an important influence on the emergent Reformation culture of mid-Tudor England, particularly on its *de contemptu mundi* literature and its works of spiritual consolation.⁵¹ Protestant theologians reconciled the phenomenon of fortune to the Reformation doctrine of a universal providence by declaring acts of seeming randomness and injustice on earth to be in fact aspects of a larger divine plan inscrutable to humans, one whose justice would be revealed to mankind only in the afterlife. While such was not the interpretation of worldly events preferred by most zealous Protestants, who habitually looked for manifest evidence of divine justice on earth, it was nevertheless one to which many had recourse in response to occurrences that could not comfortably be reconciled to their notion of divine ethics.⁵²

⁵¹ John N. King, *English Reformation Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 113–17; A. S. G. Edwards, "The Influence of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, c. 1440–1559: A Survey," *Mediaeval Studies* 39 (1977): 425–39.

⁵² Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, 20–23; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 105–7, 110–11. While guided in their writings by such a "reformed" view of fortune, Protestant English writers nevertheless often left fortune's relation to providence implicit rather than explicit in their works. Many continued to portray fortune as it had been portrayed in Christian literature since at least the time of Boethius, as an irrational phenomenon (often personified as a woman or goddess) that operated chiefly independent of direct providential control. For the persistence of the traditional language of fortune and fate in Tudor Protestant culture, see Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*; Leslie Thomson, ed., *Fortune, All is But Fortune* (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 2000); and Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 283–385.

"Somerset" asks readers to embrace just such a concept of fortune as the cause of its protagonist's suffering. While never denying God's ability to intervene directly in mundane affairs, Ferrers's exemplum warns that the Lord does not always protect the virtuous from the ever-present dangers of misfortune or human malice. It forces readers to acknowledge that good men often do fall and evil often does triumph on earth, no matter how unjust those outcomes might seem. As a causal agent, fortune demands no moral judgment about its victim to explain its effects; rather, observers must only acknowledge its power and its radical inscrutability. By asserting fortune as the cause of his protagonist's unmerited suffering, Ferrers urges readers to interpret Seymour's troubles in the same way they do Somerset's: not as divine punishment for an alleged "spot of vice," as so many observers would have it, but as the lamentable effects of bad luck and the "noughty time" that turned Seymour's character of simple innocence into a terrible liability.⁵³ As they do Somerset, readers are to recall Seymour as a figure not of scorn

⁵³ Ferrers was not the first Protestant observer to suggest that Seymour's miseries had arisen from ill fortune and fate. In a letter from England, the Oxford reformer John ab Ulmis informed Swiss theologian Heinrich Bullinger that in Seymour's miseries "you may hence perceive how various and changing is the condition of human life, how fickle and inconstant is fortune, . . . how wretched and miserable is the life of courtiers!" In relating Seymour's execution to Bullinger, Ulmis declared that "it seemed indeed to have been destined long before, that such a death should some time or other, be the harbour of [Seymour's] unhappy and long harassed fortunes" (*Original Letters*, 2:444, 449).

Scholars who approach the *Mirror* as a work of philosophical instruction often condemn the collection as "incoherent" for presenting in its pages tragedies both of fortune and of direct providential judgment. Following Lily B. Campbell, many critics assume the *Mirror* to have been designed to exemplify God's manifest ordering of human affairs, and thus they suggest that the *Mirror* authors' decision to include tragedies of fortune in their work must have arisen from their inability to comprehend fully the very doctrine of providence they had supposedly set out to teach. Frederick Kiefer suggests, for instance, that "the soundest generalizations about the narratives [in the *Mirror*] acknowledge that the relationship of providence and Fortune varies from poem to poem, reflecting the author's attitude. When the poet is most confident that he understands the justice of God's ways, he denies the phenomenon of chance and implicitly rejects Fortune by restricting her role or excluding her from the narrative. However, when injustice seems to prevail and when a character's death lends itself to no easy explanation, the poet foregoes a too strident assertion of providential design and allows Fortune to become the presiding deity of the narrative" ("*A Mirror for Magistrates*," *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 167 [Detroit: Gale Research, 1996], 121). While Kiefer argues that the variation of providence and fortune in the tragedies arises from the *Mirror* authors' intellectual difficulties in analyzing historical subjects, this article, by contrast, suggests that that variation is most often born from the authors' need for psychological comfort. When "mirroring" the troubles of mid-Tudor figures whom the authors held to be good men or women, the poets make their exempla tragedies of fickle fortune. When suggesting in their work contemporary persons or actions they oppose, the authors moralize their protagonists' miserable end as instances of divine justice.

but of pity, as a virtuous but unlucky and unfairly maligned man for whom, save for “yll fortune,” “glory might have growen where as en-sewed gryefe” (*Mirror*, 401).

Such an understanding offers to readers not only the comfort of rejecting accounts that cast Seymour’s fall as proof of his sinfulness but even the means to celebrate the protector in the midst of his failures. By emphasizing the effects of chance and worldly influences on human endeavors, Ferrers urges readers to look away from Seymour’s disappointing achievements—whose success or failure, his poem reminds, were ever in the hands of wayward fortune—and toward Seymour’s ever laudable intentions.⁵⁴ Despite dwelling in the poem on his feelings of guilt and the failures of his life, Somerset nevertheless insists that his intentions were ever noble and that he never wavered from his highest duty, the protection of his prince: “Yet one thing to me is comfort and relyefe, / Constant I was in my Prynces quarell, / To dye or lyve and spared for no parell” (*Mirror*, 401).⁵⁵ Readers of these lines are to consider Edward Seymour’s career and to remember not the failures of his “godly” Protectorate but the good intentions for king and country with which, they believed, it had been established. Such a focus on intention moves readers’ thoughts from the events of this world to the absolute moral calculus of heaven that judges by the heart and not by the deed. With this new emphasis, Somerset can even conclude his monologue on a hopeful note, suggesting that God will forgive any mistakes he made during his life due to the ever virtuous nature of his dutiful, moral soul:

What though Fortune enuious was my foe,
A noble hart ought not the sooner yelde
Nor shrynke abacke for any weale or woe,
But for his Prynce lye bleeding in the feelde:
If priuie spyte at any time me helde,
The pryce is payed: and grevous is my guerdon,
As for the rest God I trust wyll pardon.

(*Mirror*, 401)

The reward for the good—whether for Edward Seymour or for his Protestant followers who suffered in Mary’s reign from his loss and the loss of Protestant England—need not be on earth but in heaven. Divine jus-

⁵⁴ Such a strategy is a common theme in *Mirror* poems on the falls of innocent men. See, for instance, the opening of “Thomas Earl of Salisbury” (*Mirror*, 143–44).

⁵⁵ These lines may recall to readers Edward Seymour’s own insistent declaration of loyalty made during his influential scaffold speech (see Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 6:293–94; *Original Letters*, 2:732).

tice for the virtuous exists, even if it comes only in the afterlife. One should thus strive in life for right and justice (have good intentions), “Somerset” suggests, but also look for a “good fine” not on earth but in heaven. It is not always a just world; however, one must “trust” that it is always a just cosmos.

By leading readers to revalidate faith in the rectitude of Edward Seymour and to quell their doubts that providence had judged against the protector and all for which he stood, Ferrers seeks to restore the lost confidence of Seymour’s former followers. The rehabilitation of Seymour’s memory, coupled with the general support all the early *Mirror* poems give to ideals popularly associated with his government policies, including protection of the poor, strong English nationalism, commitment to social and economic justice, and the duty of English governors (including monarchs themselves) to all those under them, reestablishes these principles for readers as firm bases for political intervention. Freed from their doubts about the protector, Seymour’s scattered former followers might once again rebuild themselves as a like-minded, principled community and confidently employ the ideals they associated with Seymour as measures by which to weigh current government policies and as firm foundations from which to protest any government actions that deviate from them.⁵⁶ It is likely, in fact, that their encapsulation and validation of this set of idealistic “commonwealth” principles was one of the chief reasons the Marian poems of *A Mirror for Magistrates* continued for over sixty years to hold the fascination of English readers. Long after the initial moment of their therapeutic and often politically contentious projects, these poems still spoke eloquently to those who revered the ideals of social justice, English nationalism, and magisterial rectitude associated with the once-tarnished but now rehabilitated legacy of the “good duke of Somerset.”⁵⁷

The Citadel

⁵⁶ The *Memorial-Mirror* authors, of course, undertake just such a political project in their poems designed to admonish English magistrates against actions that violate the principles the authors endorse. For those poems, see Lucas, “Tragic Poetry as Political Resistance,” 128–248.

⁵⁷ The author would like to thank Donna Hamilton and Scott Jermyn for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.