‘Thyng that was maad of auctours hem beforne’:
Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*, its Literary Antecedents and Successors

by

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Abstract

Despite frequent predictions that a renaissance in Lydgate studies is imminent, there is still a significant lack of critical work on Lydgate’s massive oeuvre. The poet once accorded status equal to that of Chaucer and Gower now ranks a distant third in importance. My thesis aims to begin to remedy the critical neglect of Lydgate with a close study of his poem, *The Fall of Princes*; I particularly focus on Lydgate’s presentation of questions of Fortune and individual culpability for misfortune. I begin with a brief history of Lydgate’s critical reception. I then examine Lydgate’s *Fall* in relation to its literary predecessors—notably Boccaccio, Chaucer and Gower—and to Lydgate’s dual role as a Benedictine monk and propagandist for the Lancastrians. My third chapter shows how the competing influences that played upon Lydgate as he wrote the *Fall* result in a poem which is indisputably fragmented and inconsistent; however, I argue that Lydgate’s own solution to the problem of Fortune is present in the text, in the form of numerous Boethian-influenced musings on the mutability of earthly life and the necessity of focussing on the stability of the next life. I then conclude with a brief look at how later authors used the *Fall* as a encyclopaedic-like source that could be co-opted to support various divergent views and arguments; I pay special attention to Peter Idley’s *Instructions to his Son*, Wynkyn de Worde’s *The Proverbs of Lydgate*, George Cavendish’s *Metrical Visions*, and William Baldwin’s *Mirror for Magistrates*. Ultimately, I argue that it is the success of these daughter-texts, particularly the *Mirror for Magistrate*, that eliminates any need or desire for the *Fall* itself; after the publication of the *Mirror*, the *Fall* quickly disappeared from circulation.
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I. Introduction

John Lydgate's history is a curious one. On the surface, his life reads like a medieval rags-to-riches tale fit for Hollywood: the story of a young monk of humble origins, befriended by princes and kings, who becomes the most celebrated author since Chaucer. The truth may be less glamorous, but there can be little doubt that the Monk of Bury St. Edmunds had many roles to juggle.¹ Lydgate is perhaps best known for his role as a Lancastrian propagandist, and much of his oeuvre was commissioned to function, explicitly or implicitly, as apologia for England's ruling family. At the same time, he remained devoted to his Benedictine order; many of his poems reflect unwavering support for the Church, even over and above the secular rulers who were largely responsible for supporting him. Most remarkably, Lydgate's contribution to English literature was recognized as comparable to that of Chaucer and Gower; his work was wildly popular, and inspired both accolades and imitation for well over a century after his death. Yet unlike Chaucer, recognized both in his time and our own as a master of the language and as the founding father of England's rich literary tradition, Lydgate today is lucky if his name inspires recognition, let alone respect. It has been over two hundred years since Joseph Ritson famously dismissed Lydgate as a "voluminous, prosaic, and drivelng monk," but Lydgate's reputation has improved little.² Despite repeated calls for

a renaissance in Lydgate studies from respected names such as Derek Pearsall and A. S. G. Edwards, Lydgate continues to languish in academic neglect.

This lack of critical attention has been somewhat ameliorated in recent years by a few scholars who have begun the work of recuperating Lydgate’s status in modern literary studies. I touch on the major studies below, but what becomes particularly apparent in the overview I provide is the paucity of dialogue that is occurring within Lydgate studies. One critic may speak of Lydgate’s *Troy Book* and patronage, another may write on the *Lyf of our Lady* and the religious lyrics, while a third treats Lydgate’s use of Chaucer, and none need engage with the others’ arguments. This is doubtless a product of the vastness of Lydgate’s canon; given the wide variety of texts and topics which are available for discussion, it is hardly surprising that what work has been done seems preliminary and unconnected to any larger vision of Lydgate’s role in the tradition of English literature. In truth, it is hard to imagine how it could be otherwise at the outset of studying such a huge body of work. It is essential, however, if we are to fully appreciate Lydgate’s historical and literary importance, that scholarship move beyond this early narrow focus and develop an understanding of Lydgate which is both complex and nuanced.

Furthermore, the canon of criticism I outline below largely subscribes to the view, in Derek Pearsall’s words, of Lydgate as a "marvellously useful writer" [emphasis Pearsall’s], "in whom medieval preoccupations, themes, and conventions are represented in full without the complicating intermediary of genius, individuality, or even, 

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sometimes, of thought." This is the general view espoused by the majority of those who touch upon Lydgate in their work. It is true that Lydgate is in many ways typically medieval, but it is unfortunate that this view of him has resulted in a dearth of articles that treat Lydgate's poetry as worthy of close examination. Instead, Lydgate tends to be surveyed in various contexts—for what he can tell us about patronage, church history or his readers—rather than in order to advance a view of his poetry as complex and worth reading in and of itself. Authoritative critics such as Pearsall have described his work as dull, and most seem to be willing to take his word. Increasing the level of critical interaction around Lydgate must be the work of many scholars, but my aim is to demonstrate that close examination of Lydgate's canon can be a fruitful way of understanding Lydgate's poetry as the product both of his time and of his individual voice.

My own research takes Lydgate's gargantuan Fall of Princes as its subject. A. S. G. Edwards advanced the need for a comprehensive study of the Fall in 1977, but mine is the first attempt to understand the poem in relation to all its myriad

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5 It is uncommon, for instance, for critics to compare two or more of Lydgate's poems against each other; Lydgate's work generally is not seen as meriting that kind of attention. I suspect that the formidable size of Lydgate's oeuvre is again in part responsible for this; as author of some 145,000 lines of verse (twice as many as Shakespeare, and three times more than Chaucer), Lydgate is the most prolific (and perhaps most verbose) poet in the history of the English language. Cf. Pearsall, John Lydgate, 4.
6 Pearsall, as Lydgate's foremost scholar, must take some of the responsibility for at once moving Lydgate back into the public eye and obliquely suggesting that he really does not deserve to be there. It is similarly ironic that Lydgate's modern editor, Henry Bergen, the figure who might be considered to have begun the work of "rescuing" Lydgate from obscurity, describes Lydgate as "a writer who usually contrives to spoil even his most felicitous passages before he has done with them, who systematically pads out his lines with stock phrases and rhyme-tags, and pours out unending streams of verse apparently the whole of a very long life, [and who] cannot well be taken seriously as one of the great poets. We search his works in vain for evidence either of imagination or originality, of sympathetic insight into character, sensibility, delicacy of feeling or a fine instinct for form...": Lydgate's Fall of Princes, 4 vols., EETS e.s. 121-4 (London: Oxford UP, 1924-27) l:xxi. All my citations from the Fall refer to this edition and will be noted parenthetically.
7 David Lawton's exemplary article, "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century," English Literary History 54 (1987) 761-99, provides an excellent model for examining those medieval poets after Chaucer both in their historical context and as individual, imaginative authors.
8 At 36,365 lines, Fall of Princes may well be the longest poem in the English language, slightly longer than Spenser's Faerie Queene and Gower's Confessio Amantis.
entanglements: its sources, its testament to Lydgate's dual role as Lancastrian propagandist and monk, and its significance for later Medieval and Renaissance literature.\(^9\) I approach these matters primarily through a close reading of the poem which seeks to determine how these influences illuminate our understanding of the poem and how they interact with one another.\(^10\)

Some of my findings have been surprising, others less so: There are no gem-like passages hidden in the many lines of the *Fall*, no stanzas striking for their unusual beauty or insight that lift the reader out of what is, at times, an admittedly monotonous text. The *Fall* is not, if viewed through modern eyes, 'good' poetry; but if there are no arresting examples of artistry or wit, there is instead an unexpected internal dissonance that a reader might easily overlook if lulled by the apparent uniformity and repetitiousness of the text. David Lawton says of medieval didactic and exemplary poetry such as the *Fall*: "I wonder whether we have ever learned to read such a poetry with care. If one were to limit one's concern to the originality of a certain writer's treatments of these stock themes, one would in fact find it."\(^11\) This is certainly true in the case of Lydgate: appreciating the *Fall* necessitates suspending our notion of what makes poetry enjoyable and requires that we redefine what makes poetry worth reading—in the case of the *Fall*, it is the poem's testament to Lydgate's unique position and endeavour. The *Fall of Princes* embodies the tension that Lydgate must have experienced as he worked to reconcile the various demands—political, religious, and personal—incumbent upon him. The poem is marked by Lydgate's struggle to merge


\(^10\) As I was nearing the end of this project, it came to my attention that there is an earlier thesis written on the *Fall of Princes*. Nigel Mortimer's 1995 thesis, "A Study of John Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* in its Literary and Political Contexts," diss., Oxford University, takes a different focus than mine, but our arguments do converge at several points. I have noted where Mortimer's argument precedes my own.

\(^11\) Lawton, "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century," 773-34.
the traditions of *de casibus* literature, tragedy and the mirror for princes genre with the requirements placed upon him by his patron and his own religious convictions. Close examination of Lydgate’s various sources and influences reveals them to be inimical to one another: Lydgate’s quest was an impossible one. In trying to combine these disparate elements, Lydgate creates a text which is irrevocably splintered by the competing claims placed upon it: the *Fall* is often confused and contradictory, particularly when Lydgate approaches the question of the interrelation between God, Fortune and individual culpability. Nevertheless, it is still possible to detect Lydgate’s unique, perhaps personal, vision amidst the conflicting messages of the text; ultimately, the *Fall* manages to express both the difficulties Lydgate faced in crafting the text and the unique, Boethian attitude of its author towards questions of Fortune, joy and sorrow. This is an achievement worthy of our attention. The stories that Lydgate narrates may not be gripping for the modern reader, but a close reading of the *Fall* is fascinating when one considers what it can tell us of the challenges facing one of the most influential authors of the middle ages.

The inconsistencies that exist within the *Fall* speak volumes of Lydgate’s struggle (and failure) to reconcile the various facets of the poem to one another; his attempt to make the poem all things to everyone seems, to modern eyes, to have been unsuccessful. Yet that this was not the case for Lydgate’s sixteenth- and seventeenth-century audience is discernable in the enthusiastic response the poem received; if the readers, excerptors and imitators of the *Fall* were cognisant of the inconsistencies endemic in the text, this awareness does not seem to have affected their appreciation of the poem, nor their perception of Lydgate’s worth and authority. Tracing Lydgate’s influence on later generations of authors might easily comprise a thesis in and of itself, and so I have confined my discussion to those texts that were directly derived from or
heavily influenced by the *Fall*: the printer Wynkyn de Worde’s publication of the *Proverbs of Lydgate*, Peter Idley’s *Instructions to his Son*, George Cavendish’s *Metrical Visions*, and the multiple-author *Mirror for Magistrates*. In doing so I show how each author (or compiler) is able to co-opt Lydgate’s text to support very different ends. It is ironic that in thus increasing the circulation of Lydgate’s work, these same authors may have been responsible for displacing Lydgate from his position of fame and popularity.

**A Brief Chronology of Lydgate Reception**

In the following pages I briefly sketch the history of Lydgate’s reception, both in order to demonstrate Lydgate’s own ‘fall’ in stature and in order to situate my own work within the history of modern Lydgate criticism. Evidence of Lydgate’s popularity may be found both in the remarkable number of manuscripts and early printings of his work still extant, and in the tradition of Lydgate encomia which survived well into the sixteenth century.

The poet Benedict Burgh, who knew Lydgate and who finished his *Secrees of old*...

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Philisoffres after Lydgate's death, wrote a poem aptly called "In Praise of Lydgate," in which the monk is described as "the flowre and tresure of poise [sic], / the garland of Ive, and laure of victorye." The copyist John Shirley, another of Lydgate's contemporaries, was closely acquainted with Lydgate and acted both as his publisher and literary agent; he is the sole source for some thirty of the minor poems, and his miscellanies and anthologies are rich sources of information for how Lydgate's work was circulated and read. Shirley, amusingly, stresses that Lydgate deserves money, not praise or fame, in reward for his skill:

Lydegate þe Munk cloped in blacke
In his makyng / þer is no lacke
And thankeþe / daun Johan for his peyne
þat to plese gentyles / is right feyne
Boþe with his laboure / and his goode
God wolde of nobles / he hade ful his hoode.

George Ashby in his *Active Policy of a Prince* (c. 1427) esteems Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate equally:

Maisters Gower, Chauucer & Lydgate,
Primier poetes of this nacion,
Embelysshing our englishe tendure algate,
Firste finders to our consolacion
Off fresshe, douce engllisshe and formacion

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Of newe balades, not vsed before,
By whome we all may haue lernyng and lore.\textsuperscript{17}

In Stephen Hawes we find one of Lydgate's most effusive admirers; he is said to have
known Lydgate's verse by heart and recited it to King Henry VII.\textsuperscript{18} His \textit{Pastime of
Pleasure} devotes no less than sixty-three lines of praise to Lydgate, in comparison to
nineteen for Chaucer and two for Gower.\textsuperscript{19} He calls Lydgate the "floure of eloquence"
and "the most dulcet spryng / Of famous rethoryke" and laments

\begin{quote}
O what losse is it, of suche a one
It is to great truely, for me to tell
Sythen the tyme, that his life was gone
In all this realme did his pere did not dwell[.]\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

Other names might easily be added to this list of Lydgate devotees—Pearsall notes also
Osbern Bokenham, John Metham, Henry Bradshaw and the Scottish poets William
Dunbar, Gavin Douglas and David Lyndsay—but there is little change in the theme of
praise.\textsuperscript{21}

It is John Skelton who begins the tradition of criticizing Lydgate with his remarks
upon Lydgate's diffuse syntax and aureate vocabulary. He says of Lydgate:

\begin{quote}
Also Johnn Lydgate
Wryteth after an hyer rate;
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Active Policy of a Prince}, in \textit{George Ashby's Poems}, ed. Mary Bateson, EETS 76 (London,
1899), Prologue, 1-7; cf. Sián Echard, "Introduction: Gower's Reputation," in \textit{A Companion to
\textsuperscript{18} Cf. Hammond, \textit{English Verse}, 96.
\textsuperscript{19} Cf. Pearsall, \textit{John Lydgate}, 2.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Pastime of Pleasure}, in Hammond, \textit{English Verse}, lines 27; 1317-18; 1324-1328.
\textsuperscript{21} It is also well-documented that much of the early Lydgate encomia associate him with Chaucer
and Lydgate's role in the continuing development of English literature; see Caroline F. E.
Spurgeon, \textit{Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion (1357-1900)}, 3 vols. (New York:
It is dyffuse to fynde
The sentence of his mynde,
Yet wryteth he in his kynd,
No man that can amend
Those maters that he hath pende;
Yet some men fynde a faute,
And say he wryteth to haute.22

Lydgate’s fall from popularity does not coincide exactly with the reformation—the Fall of
Princes, for example, was printed in 1527 and twice around the year 1554—but the
encomia that had been so profuse begin to dwindle. It is unclear to me whether, as J. A.
Dane and J. B. Beesemyer argue, this is due to Lydgate’s status as a Catholic monk;
certainly I have not found any overwhelming evidence that would point towards
Lydgate’s clerical status as a factor in his decline.23 It is true that William Webbe in “A
Discourse of English Poetry” (1586) claims that Lydgate is “more occupyed in
supersticious and odde matters then was requesite in so good a wytte,” but I have found
little other evidence that Lydgate was negatively associated with Catholics or with
contemporary recusants.24 I am more inclined to agree with Pearsall that Lydgate’s
precipitous decline in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is owing to the
diffuseness and difficult vocabulary which characterizes Lydgate’s verse; Pearsall notes

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History,” English Studies 81.2 (2000) 117-26. It is not that Dane and Beesemyer’s argument is
not worth pursuing further—on the contrary, I think the implications of Lydgate’s printing history
and the tradition of Lydgate encomia merit further investigation—but that the case as it stands
seems circumstantial. They note, as others have done, that the decline in printed editions of
Lydgate in the middle of the sixteenth century coincides with a rise in the number of Chaucer
anthologies which include works by Lydgate; however, there is no clear evidence to suggest that
this was a way of ‘hiding Lydgate’s monkishness’ (126). Most of the criticism they provide that
makes note of Lydgate’s Catholicism is eighteenth-century, and thus written many years after
Lydgate had ceased to be popular.
Lydgate,” 119.
that even Chaucer suffered a similar decline in reputation during these years (as did other major medieval voices, such as Gower)—the difference, of course, is that Chaucer's reputation eventually recovered.\(^{25}\) There are a few supportive words written about Lydgate by Thomas Warton in his *History of English Poetry* (1774-81) and by George Ellis in his *Specimens of the Early English Poets* (1801), but Joseph Ritson's 1802 attack, as noted above, seems easily to have drowned out these other voices.\(^{26}\)

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw much of Lydgate's poetry come into print for the first time since the sixteenth century.\(^ {27}\) Notable among these is J. Schick's edition of *The Temple of Glas*, which is the first to deem Lydgate's life and work worthy of serious study, and to outline the transmission of some of Lydgate's writing.\(^ {28}\) Eleanor P. Hammond's *English Verse Between Chaucer and Surrey* also deserves mention for her overview of Lydgate reception, and for her inclusion of several of his poems. It was not until 1952, however, that the first major full-length examination of Lydgate appeared.\(^ {29}\) Walter F. Schirmer's *John Lydgate: Ein Kulturbild aus dem 15. Jahrhundert* is, as the title suggests, an attempt to understand Lydgate and his poetry in the context of the fifteenth century. Schirmer fails, however, to see Lydgate's poetry as the product of an individual; naturally, Lydgate's poetry is influenced by the political and cultural milieu in which he wrote, but it is also the creation of a man who occupied a very unique position within that milieu. At the same time, Schirmer is to be commended for


\(^{29}\) I am indebted to A. S. G. Edwards' "Lydgate Scholarship: Progress and Prospects" for his concise summary of much of the major twentieth-century Lydgate criticism. My own chronology is naturally influenced by his; Edwards' overview is also much fuller than mine, and the interested reader is directed to him for more information.
his thoroughness and earnest discussion of Lydgate's works; it may not always be possible to agree with his arguments, but he treats Lydgate seriously. Most problematic is his insistence on viewing Lydgate as a "proto-humanist." Although it is true that Lydgate at times praises the classics and occasionally writes a line that might be construed as vaguely humanistic, the bulk of his work shows little evidence that Lydgate was concerned with the emerging humanism of continental Europe.\(^{30}\) Alain Renoir's *John Lydgate: Poet of the Transition* adds little to Schirmer's work that is of use. Like Schirmer, he argues for Lydgate's proto-humanism and sees Lydgate as representative of the transition between medieval and Renaissance England, but his work really only treats the *Siege of Thebes* seriously.\(^{31}\) J. Norton Smith's book of selections, *Lydgate's Poems*, is a small but insightful text which deserves recognition for insisting that Lydgate's stylistic tendencies are worthy of closer examination than they had previously been accorded, and the matter is taken up with more seriousness in Pearsall's book-length study.\(^{32}\)

Pearsall's *John Lydgate* remains the most important and influential work on Lydgate in existence. Pearsall's study is notable for several reasons: he asserts the essentially medieval nature of Lydgate's verse, he examines Lydgate's poem in their political and religious contexts (although his readings are largely descriptive, rather than analytical) and, perhaps most importantly, he provides a careful examination of Lydgate's use of and relation to Chaucer. As I indicate above (p.3n.6), Pearsall is overly categorical in his treatment of Lydgate; broadly speaking, his work establishes Lydgate

\(^{30}\) Schirmer, *Study in the XVth Century*, 214-15. Schirmer sees Lydgate's use of classical authors as presaging Renaissance authors' recourse to the classics; however, the fact that Lydgate makes use of classical authors such as Ovid, as do many other medieval authors, does not mean that his view of the universe is the same as the typical Renaissance humanist—in fact, Lydgate's view is quite emphatically different. Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 14-15, provides a strong argument for viewing Lydgate as typically medieval in his worldview.


as useful both for what he can tell us of how Chaucer's writing came to be transmitted to later generations and as a prime example of a 'standard' medieval poet, but he does not portray Lydgate as interesting in and of himself.

The major studies of Lydgate, then, are complete by 1970, and there has been little progress in Lydgate studies since. Derek Pearsall's other studies are either absorbed into his book or, in the case of the *Bio-bibliography*, primarily summations of his earlier work. There are, however, other scholars who specialize in fields to which Lydgate is naturally adjoined, and their discussion of Lydgate is worth touching upon briefly. Chaucer studies often include some discussion of Lydgate, and Lydgate finds mention in, notably, Seth Lerer's *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late Medieval England*, and Larry Scanlon's *Narrative, authority, and power: the medieval exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition*. These are trenchant assessments of Lydgate's use of and relation to Chaucer, and I have found that each provides some insight into the *Fall of Princes* (for example, Lerer's reading of Lydgate's connection to Lancastrian politics and Scanlon's discussion of the use of exempla), but they do not do much to advance the state of Lydgate studies. Lois A. Ebin has provided the most thorough examination since Pearsall of Lydgate's style in *Illuminator, Makar, Vates: Visions of Poetry in the Fifteen Century*, although I disagree with her assessment of the theme of the *Fall*.

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Lydgate's relationship with his royal patrons is treated in several studies of medieval patronage, the most useful of which is Richard Firth Green's *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Later Middle Ages*. Stephen R. Reimer's online *Canon of John Lydgate Project* promises to perform important work in establishing a new canon of Lydgate's work (Henry Noble MacCracken's 1911 list has long been recognized as generally unsatisfactory), although the sluggishness with which the project is proceeding is somewhat dismaying. There is also some emerging interest in Lydgate's relation to book and print history, but other than that most remaining articles and chapters are narrowly-focussed treatments of minutiae in Lydgate's individual poems. I hope that the above outline has demonstrated the fragmentary and incomplete nature of most Lydgate criticism; the studies which touch upon Lydgate do so in the pursuit of worthy avenues of exploration, but what we lack are studies which take into account all the aspects of Lydgate's multifaceted work and all the different perspectives in which that work may be viewed. This is the type of study I hope to initiate with my reading of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*. I begin by examining Lydgate's sources and the influences that acted upon him as he wrote the poem: Duke Humphrey's patronage and expectations, Lydgate's responsibilities as a member of a religious order, the influence of Boccaccio, Chaucer and Boethius, the generic demands of the *de casibus* tradition and the mirror for princes form, and Lydgate's personal beliefs.

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regarding life's vicissitudes. I continue with a close reading of the Fall which demonstrates that the incompatibility of Lydgate's sources results in a text which is fragmentary and contradictory, although not without its own convictions. Finally, I conclude by examining the ways in which the Fall was read and recycled in later medieval and early Renaissance literature. Above all, I hope that my reading of the Fall of Princes demonstrates that the poem is worthy of modern attention, and that other works in Lydgate's oeuvre might benefit from similar treatment.
II. Framing the *Fall*: Sources, Genre, and Lancastrian Propaganda

The literary antecedents of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*—Boccaccio, *de casibus* literature, Chaucer, the developing genre of tragedy and the mirror for princes form—have garnered far more interest and critical attention than the poem itself. While perhaps less important in the grand scheme of English literature, Lydgate's relationship with his Lancastrian patrons has similarly incited interest and examination; the unusual nature of the life-long connection allows a tantalizing glimpse into the dynamics of medieval patronage, nationalism and the increasing literary status of the vernacular. As I note above, all of these topics have been studied individually in relation to Lydgate; what is absent is a comprehensive examination of how these multifarious influences work together and in opposition, and how their interaction has shaped the *Fall* as a discrete text. In what follows I examine these influences and sources in order to demonstrate how the inherent characteristics and demands of one are often antithetical to another. They combine to create a text which is often fragmented, often contradictory, and held together against the odds by Lydgate's ability to overlook continuity and logic in his effort to be inclusive.  

Chronologically, it makes sense to initiate any discussion of the sources of the *Fall* with Boccaccio and the literary influence of fourteenth-century Italy. However, the impetus for Lydgate's translation of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium* (or, more accurately, Premierfait's translation: *Des cas des Nobles Hommes et Femmes*) came from Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, brother to Henry V and uncle to Henry VI, and a man of considerable influence during the regency for his young nephew. So it is with Humphrey that I will begin. Stories of mere men associating with royalty hold a curious

39 Pearsall has stated that Lydgate was "driven by a daemon of inclusiveness" which undermines the quality of his work: "The English Chaucerians," 217. I am more interested in how Lydgate manages to function despite his personal demon.
appeal for the imagination, and Lydgate’s familiarity with the elite and powerful of his day has understandably been a source of fascination for his readers.\textsuperscript{40} It is possible that Lydgate met the future Henry V, then Prince of Wales, while at Oxford; an extant letter reveals that Henry wrote to support Lydgate’s continued study at the university beyond the number of years a monk was normally allowed at school. Pearsall suggests that Henry may have recognized Lydgate’s talent as a versifier and possibly supported the young monk at university, with an eye to commissioning him, in the future, to write the kind of poetry which would at once promote the English language and foster nationalism.\textsuperscript{41} What is certain is that Lydgate has come to be thought of as “poet-propagandist” to the Lancastrian dynasty, and that this role had a significant impact on most, if not all, of his writing.\textsuperscript{42} In 1412 Henry V commissioned Lydgate’s translation of the \textit{Historia Destructionis Troiae} by the thirteenth-century Italian author Guido della Colonna, called the \textit{Troy Book}, a year prior to his ascension to the throne. Lydgate writes that Henry desired that the great epic of chivalry should be known in English, as it was already in Latin and French:

\begin{quote}
Be-cause he wolde that to hy3e and lowe
The noble story openly wer knowe
In oure tonge, aboute in every age,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{40} Frank Grady makes a similar comment about the general appeal of such stories in “Gower’s Boat, Richard’s Barge, and the True Story of the \textit{Confessio Amantis}: Text and Gloss,” \textit{Texas Studies in Literature and Language} 44:1 (2002) 1-15. Lydgate’s list of commissioners reads like a who’s who of the fifteenth century; see Hammond, \textit{English Verse}, 78, for a complete list.
\textsuperscript{41} Pearsall, \textit{Bio-bibliography}, 17. Henry would commission Lydgate’s \textit{Troy Book} only a few years later, which lends credence to the idea that he may have had the idea in mind while Lydgate was still at school. Henry’s interest in supporting the English language was in part due to his desire to sever the association between use of the vernacular and the Lollards; see Patrick J. Horner, “The King taught us the Lesson’: Benedictine Support for Henry V’s Suppression of the Lollards,” \textit{Mediaeval Studies} 52 (1990) 190-220.
And y-writen as wel in oure langage
As in latyn and frensche it is.  

Pearsall notes that "[t]he work is thus a status-symbol, an attempt to define and consolidate the new status of English by tackling the greatest epic story of antiquity."  

Clearly a significant motivation for Henry V's commission was the desire to elevate English's status as a language of literature, and to begin to build a canon which would rival those which were already in existence in Latin and French.

Humphrey's aims were at least in part comparable to his (by then) late brother's when he commissioned Lydgate to write the *Fall of Princes* circa 1431. At the time, Humphrey was the highest authority in England (the King's Lieutenant) while Henry VI fought in France (1430-32). Humphrey's history has been detailed at length elsewhere, but the salient details of his life, for my purposes, are his overweening (and usually frustrated) ambition, and his reputation as a scholar and patron of the arts. His status as a man of letters and early Humanist has been exaggerated, but it is difficult to overstate the man's ambition. Humphrey's struggle to attain power seems to have been a life-long obsession; upon the death of his brother, he demanded that he be declared the infant Henry VI's Tutor and Protector, but was refused by a council of lords.

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47 While earlier writers such as Schirmer, Renoir and Herbert G. Wright, *Boccaccio in England from Chaucer to Tennyson* (London: Athlone Press, 1957) portray Humphrey as a visionary and precursor to the Humanists of the English Renaissance, later authors, beginning with Pearsall, have noted that instead of a "dedicated lover of classical learning" he was in fact "an erratic, unprincipled and attractively unsuccessful politician who dabbled in letters partly because he saw in them a way to prestige and profit. His reputation as a humanist patron only looks strong for lack of contenders": *John Lydgate*, 224.
who were careful to deny him any power that would give him effectual governance of
England. There was no single regent during Henry VI’s minority; instead a
protectorate—one that was generally opposed to Humphrey’s propositions for the realm
and the young king—ruled.

Although it seems likely, as I noted above, that Humphrey was not quite the
exemplary patron some have suggested he was, it is indisputable that his library was
extraordinary. His donation of it to Oxford forced the university to establish an
organized library, which in time had considerable impact on the development of
Humanism in England. To what extent Humphrey’s association with Lydgate shaped
English literature is more difficult to assess. The relationship between Lydgate and
Humphrey cannot be characterized with exactitude; the most provocative account is
Hammond’s reconstruction of the dynamic, literary and economic, that existed between
poet and prince. It was she who first suggested that the relationship between the two
men was highly interactive, a view that is now taken by the majority. That Humphrey
supervised and guided the progress of the work is clear from Lydgate’s comments in the
envoys (indeed, the envoys exist because Humphrey insisted that Lydgate write them),
just as it is equally evident that he lost interest in the translation around the time that

48 Henry V’s eldest surviving brother, John, duke of Bedford, assumed the regency of France
shortly after Henry’s death; everything indicates that Henry V had indeed intended that Humphrey
should have the wardship of the infant king and power over England, but the lords who would
eventually form the protectorate, concerned about Humphrey’s youth (he was thirty-two) and
unsteady reputation, went against the late king’s wishes and were careful to limit Humphrey’s
power. Humphrey was given the title ‘Defensor of this Reme and chief counseiller of the kyng’
but even this he had to surrender when his elder brother John was in England. See Ralph A.
Griffiths, The Reign of Henry VI: The Exercise of Royal Authority, 1422-61 (Berkeley: U of
49 For the power struggle that occurred between Humphrey and the council, see ibid, 69-88.
50 For a list of some of his titles, see Vickers, Humphrey, 426-38. It is also pertinent to remember
Green’s caution about the folly of accepting the contents of a man’s library as evidence of what
he has read: Princepleasers, 91.
51 Hammond, “Poet and Patron in the Fall of Princes,” Anglia 38 (1914) 121-36.
Lydgate was writing Book Four.\textsuperscript{52} I will discuss the impact of the envoys at greater length below, as they are essential to my reading of the Fall. Here, however, I wish to address the lesser-noted matter of the trial that Lydgate faced in working to satisfy a highly-partisan and opinionated patron without compromising his religious convictions.

Patrick J. Horner has written that “one might, understandably of course, regard Lydgate more as a spokesman of the Lancastrian court than as a representative Benedictine voice,” but while this may be true in general of Lydgate’s role (although I would argue that the Lyf of our Lady and other religious poems are notable exceptions), the Fall of Princes is witness to the struggle that Lydgate experienced in reconciling the wishes of his royal patron and his own religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{53}

At times the alterations and insertions that Lydgate makes in order to please Humphrey are effortless; Herbert G. Wright notes that Lydgate alters Boccaccio and Premierfait’s anti-English sentiments, in particular when he defends the valour of the English and Edward, the Black Prince.\textsuperscript{54} Similarly, when Lydgate encounters Boccaccio’s fulsome praise of the French Kings—Boccaccio claims that the kings of

\textsuperscript{52} Lydgate says in Book One that he will work “with support off his magnificence, / Vndir the wyngis off his correccioun” (I.435-36) and that Humphrey shall find him “Lowli submyttyng eueri hour & space / Mi reud language to my lordis grace” (I.440-41). That Humphrey ceased to be involved with the project around the time Lydgate was writing Book Four is also asserted by Pearsall, John Lydgate, 228-30. Humphrey’s hand is also evident in Lydgate’s inclusion of Coluccio Salutati’s version of the Lucrece story, which Humphrey owned and instructed Lydgate to insert, despite the fact that Lydgate did not wish to compete with Chaucer’s Lucrece; see Hammond, “Lydgate and Coluccio Salutati,” Modern Philology 25 (1927) 49-57, for more on Lydgate, Salutati and Humphrey. Lydgate’s inclusion of poems of praise and pleading (see II.9-16, III.64-70, III.78-81, IX.3345-51) also illuminates the extent to which the text forms a dialogue between the two men.

\textsuperscript{53} Horner, “The king taught us the lesson,” 217.

\textsuperscript{54} Wright, Boccaccio in England, 6. The passage to which Wright refers is IX.3154-3203. Lydgate is quite harsh here in his approbation of ‘his author Bochas’; usually he is quite reverent in his discussion of Boccaccio. In this case, however, Lydgate claims “His fantasie nor his oppynioun / Stood in that caas of non auctorite: / Ther kyng was take; ther knihtis dide flee; / Wher was Bochas to helpe at such a neede? / Sauff with his penne he made no man to bleede” (IX.3178-82.) See also Joseph L. Grossi, Jr., Uncommon Fatherland: Medieval English Perceptions of Rome and Italy, diss., Ohio State U, 1999, esp. Ch. 2: “Medievalizing Italy in Lydgate’s Fall of Princes,” 152-218, for a thorough examination of the places in which Lydgate chastises Boccaccio for his Italian origins and asserts the supremacy of England over all other nations.
France outshone the princes of the West as the sun outshines the stars, and Premierfait duly copied it into his translation—he writes that it is a view originating in Premierfait, a French national, and is therefore unfairly biased. The same logic does not seem to apply when Lydgate adds an accolade for his own native land, in the form of a Book Eight eulogy celebrating England (VII.2685-95). Lydgate’s own beliefs are evident in the poem when the issue of the Church is raised; he will brook no criticism of it. Wright comments that Premierfait, on the other hand, happily points out the flaws of the church: “in his picture of the golden world he declares that he is living in an age of pride, avarice and lust, when the morals of churchmen from the highest to the lowest are corrupt.” Lydgate rejects such criticism, going so far as to alter the text when faced with a corrupt clergyman or when any of the English kings he idealizes behaves in un-Christian ways. It is simple, however, for him to marry praise for the Lancastrians with his religious convictions, particularly his opposition to Lollardy: he makes a point of celebrating Henry V and Humphrey specifically because they do not tolerate Lollardy in England.

However, there are places in the text where Lydgate’s insistence on the authority of the Church on earth, over and above secular rulers, might easily have put him on dangerous footing with his patron—although as it stands there is no indication that Humphrey noted or objected to these sections. The passages to which I refer are those in which the authority enjoyed by princes is clearly granted to them by the Church. It may be useful here to recall that the monastery of Bury St. Edmunds enjoyed special privileges and influence. One of the richest abbeys in England, and possessed of vast tracts of land in Suffolk and the surrounding countries, Bury St. Edmunds wielded considerable power. The abbot during Lydgate’s lifetime, William Curteys, fiercely defended Bury’s privileges, particularly that of exemption from Episcopal jurisdiction and

55 I am indebted to Wright, *Boccaccio in England*, 7, for this point.
56 Ibid., 10.
visitation. In effect, then, Bury was independent and essentially governed itself, with scant reference to royal or other ecclesiastical power; it also had close ties with the Lancastrian court—Henry VI wrote to Curteys frequently with requests for advice, help, and above all, money. That Lydgate understood the Church as the location not just of considerable, but of ultimate authority is evident in the *Fall*.

There are several places in the *Fall* where Lydgate emphasizes the subordination of earthly rulers to the Church, but I will draw attention to only one, Lydgate's Book Eight treatment of the emperor Theodosius, as all the examples are comparable in theme and flavour. Lydgate divides his treatment of Theodosius into three sections, the first and second of which emphasize Theodosius' piety and obedience to God: When Theodosius acquires the rule of Rome, he

 Destroied templis as in that partie  
 Of false goddis; thei haue also don rent  
 The grete idoles & al suich maumetrye,  
 And ful deuoutli gan chirchis edefye. (Vlll.1807-1811)

The victory of Theodosius, against the odds, on the field of battle is attributed to Theodosius' night-long prayer for God's aid; God chooses the pious Theodosius for his knight and gives him the victory in reward for his faith (Vlll.1996-2000). In these examples Theodosius' faith is clearly the root of his victory—God rewards those who serve him—but it is in the final episode that the power of the Church over secular kings is most apparent. When the people of Thessalonica slay a group of judges, Theodosius is so enraged that he orders his knights to commit a massacre in the city, and five thousand people are killed. St. Ambrose is horrified and outraged to hear of this, and in

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59 Mortimer notes the same example, in addition to numerous others which I have not noted. Although Theodosius' story stands out as one in which the freedom of the Church is clearly emphasized, this part of the text is first drawn attention to by Mortimer, 100-03.
consequence refuses Theodosius entry to the cathedral in Milan and bans him from Church for eight months until he has fulfilled his penance. The emperor meekly—and rather pathetically—accedes to Ambrose's demand:

With hed enclyned he spak no woord ageyn
Brast on weepyng with sobbyng vnstaunchable,
His purpil weede bedewed a with reyn,
Returnyng hom with cheer most lamentable[.]

(VIII.2066-69)

Lydgate explicitly shows that Theodosius' position is below that of the ecclesiastical authority; when his penance is ended, Lydgate writes: "To the cherche he meekli did obeye, / [Lik] Goddis kniht did lowli his penaunce" (VIII.2080-81). Lydgate stresses that Theodosius redeems himself only by subordinating himself to Ambrose:

He nat froward amendis for to make,
His sceptre, his suerd, his purpre, his diadeeme
Soget to Ambrose, what hym list to deeme,
Obeied al thyng[.] (VIII.2096-99)

Such narratives may not have been popular with the power-hungry Humphrey, and Lydgate's depiction of Humphrey's puissance now appears in another light. Humphrey must use "his prudence and . . . his manheed" to maintain the "hooli chirch[e]" (I.400, 401). He is:

manli and eek wis,
Chose off God to been his owyn knyht,
And off o thyng he hath a synguler pris,
That heretik dar noon come in his siht[.]

(I.407-10)
Humphrey may be a powerful prince, but he is still a servant of the Church.\textsuperscript{60} There is little doubt that in Lydgate's view, the Lancastrians may have the rule of England, but their authority is second to that of the Church.

I will return to Humphrey's impact on the structure of the \textit{Fall of Princes} below when I discuss the poem as a mirror for princes, but first it is necessary to trace the literary antecedents of Lydgate's poem, and to pause for a moment in order to define them.\textsuperscript{61} Lydgate's greatest debt is, of course, to Boccaccio and his \textit{De casibus virorum illustrium}.\textsuperscript{62} The \textit{De casibus} is a collection of brief biographies which tell of the downfalls of great men and women in order to demonstrate a pattern of falls recurring throughout history. Chaucer links the \textit{de casibus} tradition with the genre of tragedy, which he defines as a fall from prosperity, but without the historical implications of the \textit{de casibus} tradition; instead, his Boethian-influenced understanding of the genre is simply that sometimes bad things happen, to both good people and bad (this definition is complicated somewhat by the stories included in the "Monk's Tale," but I will return to this at greater length below). These two forms might be combined comfortably enough,

\textsuperscript{60} Lydgate's treatment of Henry V in the \textit{Fall} is comparable.
\textsuperscript{61} It is necessary at this point to insert a brief note on Laurent de Premierfait, the French translator of Boccaccio's \textit{De casibus} whose text \textit{Des cas des Nobles Hommes et Femmes} Lydgate translates in writing the \textit{Fall}. I have not accorded Premierfait's text the same treatment as that I give to Boccaccio and Chaucer; I have little doubt a close comparison of Lydgate and Premierfait would be edifying, but it is unfortunately beyond the scope of this project. Premierfait does not radically alter Boccaccio's text, and so my decision not to discuss him at length does not change the argument of my thesis, but it is still important to keep in mind that Lydgate's translation of Boccaccio is a mediated one. When important to my argument, I have identified the sections where Premierfait alters Boccaccio with the assistance of my superlative translator and friend, Cristy McLennan, who has helped to supplement and correct my own readings of the French, and with the critical studies of Patricia May Gathercole. Gathercole is the editor of the only modern edition of the \textit{Des cas} (although only Book One), and her publications on the same are a useful—if at times contradictory—resource on the subject; see her edition of the \textit{Des cas} (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1968) and her "Laurent de Premierfait: the translator of Boccacio's \textit{De casibus virorum illustrium}," \textit{The French Review} 27 (1954) 245-52 and "The Manuscripts of Laurent de Premierfait's \textit{Des cas des nobles}," \textit{Italica} 32 (1955) 14-21.
\textsuperscript{62} While today Boccaccio is probably most famous for his \textit{Decameron}, the \textit{De casibus} and his other Latin treatises were the basis for his fame in his own lifetime and circulated extremely widely. Cf. Louis Brewer Hall, trans. and ed., \textit{The Fates of Illustrious Men} (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1965) xiv-xv.
but Humphrey's insistence that Lydgate frame Boccaccio's stories (which Lydgate understood in the light of Chaucer's tragedies) as a mirror for princes forestalled the possibility of Lydgate constructing a coherent poem. Mirrors for princes were essentially instruction manuals for princes on how to be a good ruler; the texts generally expounded morals for the ruler to live by and matched them with exempla from classical stories to illustrate the lessons—in the Fall, the envoys serve this didactic purpose. Lydgate faces the impossible task of deriving a lesson from stories that were initially used to demonstrate the inevitability of princes' falls and combining them with his own Chaucerian understanding of tragedy as an unfortunate change of circumstances (completely unpredictable, unlike the de casibus narratives). The structure of the Fall simply cannot accommodate the mirror for princes frame without becoming hopelessly conflicted and ambiguous.

I have found Paul Budra's discussion of the de casibus tradition useful in attempting to understand its development and its later association with medieval tragedy. It is important to note that the de casibus tradition as Boccaccio understood it was not associated with tragedy, but with history; Lydgate too sees himself as retelling the narratives of real-life men and women, and not exempla crafted simply for didactic or emotional impact. Budra defines the de casibus form in this way:

The de casibus form, then, if we define it by its original, is a type of history writing that brings together large numbers of biographies, all of which depict a life that moved from a good situation to a bad, with the purpose of demonstrating
by the weight of accumulated examples that a falling
pattern is typical of the lives of great persons.\textsuperscript{63}

It is also important to note that Boccaccio's \textit{De casibus} is not of the mirror for princes
genre; while he makes clear that he is disgusted with the behaviour of the princes of his
age, and it is implicit that many princes could benefit from reading Boccaccio's text, the
\textit{De casibus} is plainly directed at a lower class of citizen.\textsuperscript{64} Articulating his reasons for
writing the \textit{De casibus}, Boccaccio says:

\begin{quote}
In asking myself what I might perhaps add from my
scholarly exertions that might be of use to the state, many
things beyond what I believed occurred to me; but my mind
was struck with particular force by the obscene lusts of
princes and rulers, their savage acts of violence, time lost
to indolence, insatiable greed, bloody feuds, sudden
vendettas, and a great many more wicked crimes.
\end{quote}

Boccaccio's fury at the state of affairs he perceives has no mirror in Lydgate. Boccaccio
is clearly more concerned with teaching the masses to recognize the vicissitudes of
fortune than with instructing princes.\textsuperscript{65}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{63}] Paul Budra, \textit{A Mirror for Magistrates and the de casibus Tradition} (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000) 18.
\item[\textsuperscript{64}] Boccaccio was so appalled by the behavior of the princes he saw around him that he declined
to dedicate his text to any of them, and pointedly gave the dedication to Mainardo dei Cavalcanti
instead.
\item[\textsuperscript{65}] Boccaccio first wrote the \textit{De casibus} c. 1355-60, but revised it again c. 1374. The translation
that follows is from the later text, although Premierfait translated the earlier (and hence it is the
first text with which Lydgate, through Premierfait, would have been familiar). My reasons for
citing the second text is that I suspect the revision reflects Boccaccio's beliefs and aims more
accurately, and as I am concerned with him here, I wish to do justice to what I express as his
views. The text which Premierfait encountered reads:

\begin{quote}
As I was casting about for a means of doing some service to public government
with my scholarly labors, I was particularly struck by the way in which great men
conducted themselves. I saw how immoral they were and how vile they had
become through filthy lust; they carried on without check, acting as if they had
drugged Fortune into lasting sleep by herbs or incantations, and as if they had
\end{quote}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
When I saw these things set in motion by the wicked, 
briddled by no rein and flying about everywhere, and the 
probity of the state thereby befouled, the most sacred laws 
of justice unknit, all virtues undermined, and—what is 
unspeakable—impious habits inculcated in the minds of 
ignorant multitudes by their detestable examples, I realized 
that fortune had led me where my desire intended, and 
immediately seized my pen to write against such men.66

Boccaccio hopes to warn his countrymen of the folly of behaving as princes do; he 
proposes to relate examples of what God—although he says that he will 'use their 
language' and refer to God as Fortune—can teach his countrymen about those whom 
she raises up and casts down. This explicit connection between God and Fortune is 
important, particularly in comparison with Lydgate's confused presentation of the relation 
between the two.

anchored their princedoms with iron supports to an adamantine rock. I saw that 
their attitude not only caused them to oppress other men with all their might, but 
also led them to rise up with a foolish kind of temerity even against the very 
Creator of all things. When I beheld all this I was stupefied. 
I borrow the translation from Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Chaucerian Tragedy* (Cambridge: 
Michigan P, 2002) 191, for a brief discussion of the differences between the two texts. 
66 The translation is from Ginsberg, *Chaucer's Italian Tradition*, 191. I have used Hall's 
translation of *De casibus* to shape my understanding of Boccaccio's text, but as Hall abridges 
certain sections of the text, I use Ginsberg's translation for the sake of accuracy. The Latin text 
reads:

Exquirenti michi quid ex labore studiorum meorum possem forsan rei publice 
utilitatis addere, occurrere preter creditum multa; maiori tamen conatu in mentem 
sexe ingessere principum atque presidentium quorumcunque obscene libidines, 
violetie truces, perdita ocia, avaritie inexplebiles, cruenta odia, ultiones armate 
precipitesque et longe plura scelestia facinora. Que cum ductu scelestium 
viderem nullo coercita freno evolantia undique, et inde honestatem omnem fedari 
publicam iustitie sacrastissimas leges solvi labefactari virtutes omnes, et—quod 
infandum est—detesteadis exemplis in mores impios ignore multitudinis ingenia 
trahi, ratus eo me a fortuna deductum quo appetebat intentio, festinus arripui 
calamum scripturus in tales.

26
The abundance of stories included in the *De casibus* may appear redundant to modern eyes, but to Boccaccio it would have been essential to proving that history repeats itself along the same pattern; as Budra states, "It is not for the sake of prolixity that Boccaccio's work stretches from Adam to the immediate past of the author . . . One tragedy, or a few, would not demonstrate that *metabasis* [the reversal of a situation from good to bad] is the active principle in the history of man." The same belief would have influenced Premierfait's and Lydgate's decision to expand upon the stories offered by Boccaccio and to add their own; it explains why Lydgate finds it necessary to include biographies of people who lived in his immediate past. The recitation of exempla was perceived as an effective means of instruction, for princes and laymen alike. It is important to note, however, that a *de casibus* narrative is not necessarily the same thing as a mirror for princes text; while a mirror for princes also makes use of exempla, the defining feature of the *de casibus* is that it presents a view of history.

The collapse between the terms 'de casibus' and 'tragedy' has been attributed to Chaucer and his "Monk's Tale." The close association between the "Monk's Tale" and Boccaccio's *de casibus* is most apparent in the fact that nearly one third of manuscripts containing the Tale refer to it as *de casibus virorum illustrium*, although it is clearly

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missing Boccaccio's moralistic elements and dream frame. Chaucer's relation and contribution to the genre of tragedy has been the subject of numerous books and articles over the past several decades, and while there is little need to go into detail on the topic here, it is imperative to understand Chaucer's influence on Lydgate. That Lydgate considered himself deeply indebted to Chaucer is unequivocal; like many medieval authors, Lydgate frequently takes the time to own his debt to Chaucer and denigrate his own poetry in relation to that of his 'maister.' Much of Lydgate scholarship has devoted itself to understanding how Chaucer's literature and innovations were passed down through the work of later authors such as Lydgate. The idea that Lydgate did little more than expand upon and, indeed, weaken and dilute Chaucer's tragic impulses, is a common accusation. Current claims may not be as strongly worded as Norton-Smith's 1996 assertion that "Whatever Lydgate's additions and abridgements, the Fall lacks formal shape. It is Chaucer's Monk's collection of tragedies considerably filled out," but recent criticism has focussed much on Chaucer as innovator, Lydgate as transmitter.

It is not novel to argue that Lydgate draws his understanding of tragedy from Chaucer, but it is seldom noted how incompatible Chaucer's tragedy is with the mirror for princes genre within which Lydgate also had to work. Chaucer is not writing a mirror for princes; he is not obliged to attach moral explanations for his stories or to suggest that tragedy has its roots in justice or some divine order. Lydgate, in contrast, is burdened with doing just this. Chaucer's Monk's opening definition of tragedy seems to preclude any association of suffering with just punishment. The Monk begins:

I wol biwaille in manere of tragedie

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72 See 1.274-357.
73 Pearsall is the earliest and arguably the loudest proponent of this view; see especially his "Lydgate and Chaucer," "Lydgate as Innovator," and "English Chaucerians."
74 Norton-Smith, Poems, 127.
The harm of hem that stoode in heigh degree,
And fillen so that ther nas no remedie
To brynge hem out of hir adversitee.
For certain, whan that Fortune list to flee,
Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde.
Lat no man truste on blynd prosperitee;
Be war by thise ensamples trewe and olde.\textsuperscript{75}

At first, then, Chaucer's presentation of Fortune seems to conform with Boethius' description of a capricious Fortune in \textit{De Consolatione Philosophiae} who, to quote Chaucer's own translation of the text, likes to "torne the whirlynge wheel with the turnynge serecle" and who is "glad to chaungen the loweste to the heyeste, and the heyeste to the loweste."\textsuperscript{76} Chaucer's gloss on the definition of tragedy in his \textit{Boece} reads "Tragedye is to seyn a dite of a prosperite for a tyme, that endeth in wrecchidnesse."\textsuperscript{77} That the Monk's tales will not conform to this description is perceptible immediately in the first two stories which appear: those of Lucifer and Adam, who clearly fall for their sins against God—the random turning of Fortune's wheel has no role here. As Renate Haas succinctly puts it, "In [presenting Lucifer and Adam's stories], [Chaucer] more or less presses those \textit{casus} which in the Christian view have determined the history of mankind and which are the 'classic' examples of free will God permits his creatures, into the heathen, deterministic pattern presented just before."\textsuperscript{78}

The Monk, then, presents an inconsistent view of what, precisely, tragedy is; stories are

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., II, prosa 2, 70-72. I will return to Boethius' remedy for the vicissitudes of Fortune in my discussion of the \textit{Fall} below.
given the appellation of tragedy which, variously, show men falling not only for
transgressing God's will, but also for no apparent reason at all. Whether or not Lydgate
noticed this inconsistency is indeterminable, but his own stories certainly follow
Chaucer's Monk's in that they too fail to support a single theme of tragedy.

Wright has pointed to Lydgate's main achievement as being that of turning the *de
casibus* tradition into an instruction manual for rule. It was Humphrey who demanded
that Lydgate insert the envoys which provide the educational frame for Boccaccio's *de
casibus* narratives: they are what make the *Fall of Princes* truly a mirror for princes.
Humphrey requested that Lydgate:

\begin{verbatim}
Sholde in eueri tragedie,
Aftr the processe made mencioun,
At the eende sette a remedie,
With a lenvoie conueied be resoun,
And aftir that, with humble affeccioun,
To noble pryncis lowli it directe,
Bi othres fallyng [thei myht] themsilff correcte. (II.148-54)
\end{verbatim}

That said, although Premierfait's translation lacks Lydgate's envoys, Premierfait too
intended that his work should form a guide for princes; although Boccaccio's concern in
writing, as I indicate above, was for the health of the state, Premierfait's and Lydgate's
focus shifts to an emphasis upon educating a ruler—or at least the pretence of providing
advice to princes. 

Pearsall argues convincingly (if perhaps over-simplistically) of mirrors for princes
that,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{80} Gathercole, "Laurent de Premierfait," 246.
\end{flushleft}
Princes welcomed them and on occasion commissioned them, not because they specially desired to have instruction in the business of government from clerks, nor because they would much appreciate being told things they did not wish to hear, but because it was important that they should represent themselves as receptive to sage counsel. They are not simply political public relations exercises but, equally, they are not 'books of instruction.'

It is this mirror for princes frame in which I am most interested, as it is at once where Lydgate’s own voice might be expected to come through most clearly (as the envoys are the part of the poem for which Lydgate never has a source) and the part to which he was most bound by Humphrey’s specific generic requirements. Richard Aczel points out that structural elements such as "organization and arrangement" (rather than explicit linguistic markers) are "integral to the act of narrating itself." It is in the act of interacting with this frame, in bending and trying to fit himself within it, that Lydgate becomes most interesting.

As I note above, the only person with whom Lydgate is frequently and directly associated is Chaucer. However, I have found it useful to compare Lydgate to the other member of the once-famous medieval triumvirate: John Gower. Although Chaucer’s discordant presentation of ‘tragedy’ has a serious impact on Lydgate’s text, in many ways Gower is the better choice for comparison—particularly in relation to the question

81 Derek Pearsall, "Hoccleve's Regement of Princes," 386. It is ironic that in both the cases of the Duke of Berry, who commissioned Premierfait to translate the Des cas, and of Humphrey, two men very much in need of advice on how to be good rulers clearly were not commissioning the books for their own edification. Cf. Bergen, "Introduction," xvi.
of frame narratives. The mirror for princes genre is clearly part of the ancestry of Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. Like Lydgate, Gower came to be a vocal supporter of the Lancastrian kings (after switching his allegiance from Richard II), and like Lydgate his reputation for being ‘moral’ has resulted, until quite recently, in a lack of critical attention. Most importantly, he places a didactic frame around stories that often do not seem to support a clear thesis of any kind. He even goes so far as to insert a mirror for princes into the *Confessio*—a description of Aristotle’s education of Alexander the Great comprises Book Seven—although it is unclear how this section will aid Amans in his difficulties with love. A. J. Minnis points out that many readers have struggled with the moral frame Gower imposes on Genius’ stories of love and classical personae. The frame is troubling: try as he might, Amans does not seem to make any real progress under Genius’ tutelage. Perhaps the most telling example of this is the fact that although Genius has been sent to Amans to teach him how to be a lover, when the story concludes the reader (and Amans) discover that Amans has grown too old to love, and so the whole purpose of his education is undermined. Elizabeth Allen also examines the ways in which Amans’ understanding of the poem is consistently inadequate; as earnestly as Amans tries to examine and confess his sins, his vision is simply too limited. For example, at the conclusion of Genius’ lengthy (over five thousand lines) description of the education of Alexander, Amans says:

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85 See Frank Grady, “The Lancastrian Gower and the Limits of Exemplarity,” *Speculum* 70 (1995) 552-75, for a discussion of Gower’s change of allegiance from Richard II to Henry IV.
Of that ye have unto me told
I thonke you a thousandfold.
The tales sounen in myn Ere,
Bot yit min herte is elleswhere,
I mai miselve noght restreigne,
That I nam evere in loves peine[

Amans' response, essentially, is that he has been too distracted by the pain of being in love to really pay attention to what Genius has been saying. This undermining of the story's frame is a phenomenon that also occurs in Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*.

The responses of Gower's Amans to his confessor's narratives are often strikingly inappropriate to the story which has been told, and the fact that Amans and Genius speak in different voices allows the reader to note the place where opinions diverge with relative ease. In contrast, Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* has, with a few minor exceptions, one speaker and narrator throughout; perhaps for this reason, it has not been commonly treated as a frame story. However, the didactic envoys clearly form a discursive device intended to frame the poem's exempla, and so it is interesting that the analyses typically applied to frame stories such as Gower's and Chaucer's have not been applied to Lydgate's mirror for princes. Examining Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* as a frame story has the benefit of prompting the reader to look for different voices within the text, and the fact that there are very different sources and influences speaking through the text becomes salient.

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89 Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, 326-27, similarly points out that the Fall's envoys make it a frame story; Gillespie's "Framing Lydgate's Fall," also notes the frame narrative in passing, but as I note above, she is more interested in the material circumstances of literary production than in close-reading.
In writing the *Fall of Princes* Lydgate found himself facing a mammoth task, and the demands of his various allegiances and sources precluded the possibility of writing a coherent, logical text. The result of these competing influences is a fragmentary and confused understanding of the workings of God and Fortune and of the definition of tragedy, and correspondingly, a very conflicted guide to life and rulership. It is remarkable, as I shall show below, that out of this Lydgate's own, individual voice still manages to emerge to advocate a Boethian-like renunciation of Fortune as the key to a happy and prosperous life.
III. Competing Voices in Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*

It is fascinating that such a fragmented and conflicted poem could, for so many years, have been dismissed as dull. Other critics have noted the inconsistencies in the poem, but have not sought to explain them nor, apparently, found them a source of interest; the references one finds to the text of the *Fall* tend simply to repeat and concur with other studies, perhaps silently agreeing that little profit can come from closer examination. It is true that the *Fall* is a long text and that Lydgate is, at times, prone to redundancy; it is also true though that mapping out the poem’s incongruities can be productive, particularly when they are traced back to their antecedents in Boccaccio, Chaucer, and elsewhere. Most notable are the conflicting presentations of the role of Fortune and her relation to God, and the discrepancies that exist in many of the pairings of exemplum and envoy. Yet despite the multiplicity of views that appear in the *Fall*, it is possible, I believe, to sketch cautiously Lydgate’s own Boethian solution to the problem of life’s vicissitudes.

Lydgate describes Fortune, variously, as a capricious and wholly unstable force, a malevolent entity, the guardian of a natural cycle of rises and falls, a manifestation of the judgment of God, and occasionally as an instrument of justice independent of God. None of these portraits takes precedence over the others; a reader might be forgiven for

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90 Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 241; Norton-Smith, *Poems*, 127. It should be noted that Lawton’s “Dullness and the Fifteenth Century” takes the opposite view in insisting that we must examine closer those texts that label themselves, and which we dismiss as, “dull.”

91 One of the foremost obstacles that one encounters when engaging in a close reading of the *Fall of Princes* is the text’s prodigious length. Although my first impulse was to treat the poem in its entirety, it fast became apparent that such an undertaking was, firstly, beyond the scope of this project and, secondly, probably of little use. My own reading has indicated that the poem, while highly inconsistent, is at least uniformly so throughout all nine books. I have decided to limit the majority of my analyses to Book One, with some references to pertinent passages outside the first book, as I believe that it will both offer a good representative sample of the text, and because it is by far the most energetic of Lydgate’s books. It is also the most varied of the *Fall*’s books, with stories from the Bible, classical mythology and the ‘histories’ of Troy and Thebes; not only does this make it somewhat more interesting than later books, it shows that Lydgate does not react differently to stories because of their origins in myth, history or religion. The biblical stories, for example, are no more likely than the mythical ones to support the idea of a just God.
thinking that Lydgate was intentionally trying to confound. My own sense, however, is
that Lydgate is not contrary by design; I think he is honestly puzzled by, and trying to do
justice to, the many different depictions of Fortune he encounters in his own sources.
Lydgate’s ambivalence towards Fortune may best be explained by the incompatibility of
the mirror for princes genre with the de casibus tradition and, to confuse matters further,
with Chaucer’s “Monk’s Tale.” Recall that the de casibus narrative consists of
encyclopaedic collections of exempla, in which a multiplicity of examples demonstrate
the fact that people tend to fall from positions of power. In contrast, the mirror for
princes form demands that the author draw lessons from the exempla that he provides,
at least in part to teach princes how to avoid such falls. It is clear, then, why the two are
mutually exclusive. Humphrey’s insistence on the mirror for princes frame for
Boccaccio’s text requires Lydgate to construct an uncomfortable marriage between the
two.92

Lydgate’s lengthier discussions of Fortune do seem, at first, to set out a singular
definition for her. At the outset of the Fall Lydgate claims the purpose of the poem is to
tell:

The fall of nobles, with eueri circumstaunce,
From ther lordshippes, dreadful and vnstable,
How that thei fill to putte in remembraunce,
Therin to shewe Fortunys variaunce,
That other myhte as in a merour see

92 Ebin, Illuminator, Makar, Vates, 36, accepts Lydgate’s Book One assertion that he will extend
and amplify the stories he finds in “Bochas” only when the story’s theme is virtuous as proof that
he does just that. She fails, however, to offer examples of exempla which support her argument
that Lydgate is concerned with emphasizing moral tales over amoral ones, and a close reading of
the Fall demonstrates that Lydgate amplified almost everywhere, without reference to a story’s
‘virtue’ or lack thereof. The similar argument found in her John Lydgate, 64-75, is supported with
very selective references to the text, which ignore the vast body of material in the Fall which
contradicts her stance.
In worldly worshepe may be no surete. (I.51-56)

Initially, it seems possible that the *Fall* will teach princes that all men fall, and not to trust their happy state to last. It is also clear, however, that Fortune acts upon men of low estate as well:

That thynges all, wher Fortune may atteyne,
Be transitory of condiciour;
For she off kynde is hasti & sodeyne,
Contrarious of hir cours for to restreyne,
Off wilfulness she is so variable,
When men most truste, than is she most chaungable. (I.107-12)

The key characteristic of Fortune in this opening passage is her capriciousness. Lydgate also makes reference to God in this first Prologue; he devotes several stanzas to his claim that God will punish those princes who do not recognize his might and conduct themselves humbly and piously; but there is not yet any explicit connection between the actions of Fortune and those of God. In this earliest portrait then, Lydgate’s Fortune is changeable, but not necessarily malicious in her intent.

I skip briefly to Lydgate’s Book Six drawing of Fortune, because it works to emphasize the above description. In Book Six Boccaccio encounters Fortune, who appears to him very tall and with an extraordinary appearance; the author is afraid, for Fortune’s eyes burn, her hair is twisted, and she has a hundred hands and arms, a dress of many colours, and a voice like rough iron. She speaks seriously and, for the most part, civilly to Boccaccio on his theme; upon hearing that he hopes to teach men of the vicissitudes of life, she softens, and says: “Because the understanding of man is not able to penetrate into our designs, you think Fortune is inexorable, indiscreet, and blind.”

The earlier connection between Fortune and God is implicitly reasserted here, as

93 *The Fates of Illustrious Men*, 140.

37
Fortune essentially states that she works in mysterious ways, and that human eyes are simply unable to understand the overarching grand plan within which she operates.  

In contrast, Lydgate’s description of Fortune emphasizes her cruelty and ungoverned, mercurial character. Lydgate’s Fortune is a monstrous ymage, Partid on twyne of colour & corage, Hir riht[e] side ful of somer flours, The tothir oppressid with wyntris stormy shours. (VI.18-21).

Her face is "cruel & terrible" (VI.30), and she continually changes into different forms—a mermaid with a serpent’s tail, a lamb, and then a wolf (VI.61-68). She comes to tell ‘Bochas’ not that her workings are simply unfathomable to the mind of man, but that they truly are inscrutable:

This hour I can shewe me merciable, And sodeni I can be despitous: Now weelwillid, hastili vengable, Now sobre of cheer, now wood & furious. My play vnkouth, my maners merueilous Braid on the wynd; now glad & now I mourne; Lik a wedircok my face ech day I tourne. (VI.141-47)

Note that in Lydgate’s text, as in Premierfait’s, the meeting that takes place is between Boccaccio and Fortune.

Premierfait’s description does not emphasize the terribleness of Fortune as Lydgate does; see Bergen, IV:181-185 for Premierfait’s story of the contest between Fortune and Poverty.
Fortune is entirely perfidious and unrelated to God, which leads to problems for Lydgate when he is faced with the task of summarizing the workings of Fortune in a way that renders them logical and educational.

The fact that Lydgate realizes this problem is evident in the Prologue for Book Two, where his description of Fortune radically departs from the earlier one (although the fact that by Book Six he has returned to the model of a wholly irrational Fortune demonstrates he was unable to maintain the solution he crafts in Book Two). It is in Book Two that Lydgate makes reference to Humphrey's demand for sententious envoys, and this may explain the shift in Lydgate's tone. It is clear from the earliest lines of the book that a change in theme has occurred: Lydgate writes, "As men disserue such guerdoun ther mut sewe; / In vice nor vertu no many may God deceyyue, / Lik ther desertis ther meede thei [shal] receyyue" (II.33-35). Lydgate has changed his argument to a model in which princes deserve their falls, and in which it is God who rules man's changes in fortune. Lydgate continues,

For fals Fortune, which turneth as a ball,

Off vnwar chaunges thouh men hir wheel atwite,

It is nat she that pryncis gaff the fall,

But vicious lyuyng, pleynli to endite[.] (II.43-46)

So it is entirely the fault of princes if they live in ungodly ways and come to disastrous ends. It further follows that those who heed God's ordinances and live virtuously will have long and fruitful lives:

Good liff and vertu maketh hem to be stronge,

And hem assureth in long perseuaunce,

Vertu on Fortune makes a diffiaunce;

That Fortune hath no domynacioun,

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These passages are clearly in response to Humphrey's demands that Lydgate's stories teach princes to avoid the falls of their predecessors, but this new understanding of Fortune also blatantly contradicts the vast majority of the exempla that Lydgate includes (not to mention the evidence to the contrary which any living man cannot help but see around him). Lydgate does discuss virtue as a weapon against Fortune in Book Three (I will discuss this at length below), but poverty is an equally necessary part of his equation: it is clear from most of Lydgate's stories that princes possessed of their thrones, even if endowed with virtue, have no security against Fortune.98

While Lydgate's longer dialogues on Fortune are sufficient to demonstrate the lack of integrity that exists in Lydgate's presentation of her, it is worth noting that the stories themselves reveal the same fragmentation. In the following paragraphs I provide a brief overview of the contradictions that exist in the exempla of Book One's depiction of Fortune; I have divided the stories into categories depending on whether they present a vengeful and changeable Fortune, a Fortune that seems to work as an agent of justice but without reference to God (although such examples are never explicit), or a Fortune that works in tandem with God.99 Subsequently I turn to the envoys to examine how the same disparity often exists between the stories and the moral frame in which they are set.

98 Gathercole notes that Premierfait's version of De casibus, in contrast, is based much more on a retributive model of Fortune. Premierfait's additions to Boccaccio all point towards the idea that tragedy is the product of human wickedness: "Laurent de Premierfait," 252.

99 Lydgate's stories are in chronological order, and so the competing visions of Fortune are frequently set next to one another, which further emphasizes the juxtaposition between them. There are also a few early exempla—those of Vixoses, Thanaus, Zoroaster and Ninus (I.1463-1561)—which I do not treat, as they have no clear relation to any of the above categories. Lydgate tells us little about their lives except that they were once-famous conquerors who have been forgotten; if there is any lesson in their story, it is that everyone dies and their fame passes away, which I suppose may be construed as a sort of fall, but the princes themselves suffer very little for it.
Stories of Fortune’s variability outnumber those in which Fortune and God work together by a significant margin.\textsuperscript{100} The stories of Moides, king of Assyria, Ogygus, king of Thebes, and Cecrops, ruler of Athens, are brief and largely undeveloped narratives in which all three kings suffer at Fortune’s whim.\textsuperscript{101} The story of Cadmus, however, is the most striking example of a man who lives virtuously and wisely, and whose life is ultimately shattered by the vagaries of Fortune. Cadmus is an obedient son, whose father commands him either to rescue his sister from the arms of the God Jupiter, or to accept exile. Unable to find her, he founds the city of Thebes and establishes a new home for himself, for which “he was gretli magnefied / For his manhod and magnanymyte” (I.1949-50). He rules justly and establishes order as a good prince should:

\begin{quote}
He tauhte figures & lettirs for to write,
And made lawes off ful gret ordynance
A-mong [sic] the Grekis, and sette gouernance
Ther vicious liff bi vertu to restreyne;
And who outraied was punshid with the peyne. \textsuperscript{(I.1956-60)}
\end{quote}

Cadmus would appear to stand for the type of retributive justice that the mirror for princes genre would support: good princes are rewarded, and those who do not support virtue and order are justly castigated. Through no fault of his own, however, Cadmus’ prosperity and happiness are dashed: “Fortune his noblesse gan to vndermyne, / And thouhte she wold his glory disuaunce” (I.2047-48). The extent to which Fortune works to cast down Cadmus is excessive; his children and grandchildren are variously burned to death, torn apart by hounds, murdered by their parents, driven mad, beaten to death, or

\textsuperscript{100} I count ten exempla in which Fortune’s mutability is the subject, nine in which Fortune’s mutability is the primary factor but in which the victims are accorded some responsibility for their fall, nine in which Fortune and God punish the guilty, and one in which God rewards the just.

\textsuperscript{101} See I.1562-1568, 1611-31, 1646-59.
drowned. Cadmus and his wife are then exiled and die in miserable poverty. His story, effectively, shows that no matter how hard a prince tries to be a good ruler, his kingdom is not secure—there is no justice here, and hardly any inspiration for erring princes to change their ways.

The stories of Minos, Jocasta and Oedipus and Priam are similar but less lengthy renditions of Cadmus' theme. However, despite the fact that Lydgate's text proposes to tell the 'Fall of Princes,' there are a few stories in which characters who clearly deserve to be cast down by Fortune instead endure their misfortunes and live out their lives in prosperity. Isis and Medea's stories read much the same: both are women of power, covetousness and spite whose fortunes go up and down, but who ultimately find themselves in positions of power and prestige. The story of Isis runs opposite to that of Cadmus. Jupiter becomes enamoured of her and makes her queen of the Argives, but Isis is not content with her position because “she was smet in couetise” (I.1684) and decides to make war on King Argus, who seems to have little chance of defending himself. Unfortunately for Isis, “Fortune gan vp[on] hir frowne” (I.1688), and she is defeated and taken prisoner by Argus. Thus far the story is a warning against covetousness and warmongering, but Isis’ luck shifts again, and she is rescued from prison by her son Mercury, who slays Argus. She marries Apis, a prince of Egypt, teaches the Egyptians how to write and till the soil, and, consequently, is worshipped as a goddess. Her fortunes seem to falter when her husband is killed, but fortunately she has the skill to collect the scattered pieces of his dismembered body, reassemble them, and deify him. Thus ends the exemplum, which reads more like a 'how to' manual for

102 See I.2409-2786, 3158-3815, 5902-6041.
103 The first such example is worth little time: Lydgate states that when Amphion ruled Thessaly a great flood threatened to drown the people, but they found refuge on the mountain of Parnassus and were saved (I.1632-45). There is no indication whether or not the people deserved to be saved, or whether Amphion’s rule had any bearing on his people’s salvation. It simply seems a short example of the fact that sometimes Fortune turns in people’s favour.
raising oneself and one's spouses to godhead than a warning against pride and ambition. Medea's story is a meditation upon the same theme: by making use of magic and ignoring the laws of right and wrong she becomes a queen, avenges herself upon those who wrong her, gets away with murder, and ends her life reconciled to her first husband Jason. Much as Cadmus' story implied that to live well is pointless, Isis and Medea's suggest that being devious may well profit a prince; again, this hardly seems the sort of moral with which Humphrey instructed Lydgate to inculcate his stories.

A curious middle ground is occupied by a few stories in which Fortune, acting independently of God, behaves as an instrument of justice and punishes those who deserve to fall. These are the stories of Erysichthon (whose ravenous hunger prompts him to sell his daughter into prostitution), Theseus (whose hasty judgment prompts Fortune to turn against him), Byblis (who desires her father incestuously), Myrrha (who kills her father for intemperate lust), the Amazon Marpessa (who incites war), and Pyrrhus (who is an adulterer). Fortune casts all these people down, but the moral implications of her action are ambiguous: it is not clear if she is acting in accordance with God or not. Certainly God is not explicitly or implicitly mentioned. The stories do warn men how not to act, but the warning is mild; there is little emphasis on these stories. Lydgate provides little actual useful advice in this section, and it is not clear whether these stories are examples of why princes should behave well or the fact that sometimes even Fortune will chance to punish those who deserve it.

I have chosen to include the stories of Hercules, Orpheus and Samson in the category of exempla which support a vision of a just, independent Fortune. To be

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104 See lines 1.2171-2408. It is curious that the two examples of people profiting by Fortune's volatile nature are women who are possessed of magical powers, and who are hence 'unnatural.' I am not entirely sure what to make of this, but the implication seems to be that women sometimes escape the fate they deserve (a theme reinforced by the other stories Lydgate tells of women who betray their husbands), which seems vaguely misogynistic, but not particularly edifying.

105 See 1751-64, 4243-4718, 5678-5705, 5706-5775, 5853-73, 6735-6832.
honest, they are a poor fit for any of the views of Fortune I have suggested; Lydgate makes it very clear that all three men fall not through the power of Fortune or God, but because they make the mistake of trusting women. It is possible to stretch the point and argue that Lydgate constructs women as 'gifts' of Fortune, and that his general point is that none of the gifts of Fortune are trustworthy, but the fact remains that there is no explicit mention of Fortune's power in these exempla—Lydgate has sympathy for the heroes, but he is also clear on that they get what they deserve for putting their faith in the constancy of women. For example, Lydgate attributes Hercules' fall to the vicious and unstable nature not of Fortune, but of his wife Deianeira:

Allas, allas! Al noblesse & prudence,
Prowesse off armys, force and cheualrie,
Forsihte off wisdam, discrecioun & science,
Vertuous studie, profytyng in clergie,
And the cleer shynyng off philosophie,
Hath thoruh fals lustis been heeraftorn manacid,
Be sleihte off women dirkid and diffacid. (1.5510-16)

Similarly, of Samson’s confession of the source of his strength to his wife Delilah, Lydgate says:

To keepe ther tunges wommen can nat spare.
Such wepyng wyues, euel mut thei faire!
And all husbondis, I pray God giue hem sorwe,
That to hem tell ther counsell eue or morwe. (1.6374-6377)

It does seem odd that the only consistent advice the Fall offers is not to trust women. I have no ready explanation to offer for this, except to suggest that perhaps Lydgate means his readers to elide women with Fortune because both are capricious and untrustworthy. It is certainly possible to argue that here we get a glimpse of Lydgate's
own views about women; indeed, this may be the most logical way to make sense of the passage. ¹⁰⁶

The stories in which Fortune and God work together to punish the guilty are in some ways the less interesting, as they conform to the type of pattern one might reasonably expect to find in a mirror for princes. Lydgate begins, appropriately enough, with the story of Adam and Eve. The story appears to be a formulaic rendition of Adam and Eve’s early happiness and subsequent misery, with a lengthy description given to the paradise lost with the bite of the apple. The exemplum includes the expected warning:

O worldi folk, aduertisith off entent,
What vengaunce and what punycioun
God shal taken in his iugement
For your trespas and your transgressioun,
Which breke his preceptis a-geyn al resoun! (I.806-10)

Lydgate does temper this warning, however, with a reminder of God’s love and the promise of reunion with God, in a passage that seems to foreshadow the idea of the felix *culpa* and which is therefore rather unusual, but for the most part the story is as one would expect.

Similarly, the other stories of those who resist God conform to idea that those who trespass against God’s will be cast down by Fortune. Nimrod is punished for his pride and presumption in attempting to build a tower to heaven, and Pharaoh for denying Moses the right to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt. ¹⁰⁷ The tale of Sisera is a prime example of God’s and Fortune’s cooperation. Sisera, a tyrant and a sadist, is sent by

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¹⁰⁷ See I.5169-1609.
God to punish the Jewish people: “ther synnes to chastise, / Ther olde offences to
punshen & to pourge” (l.2907-08). They pray to God for forgiveness, however, and he
relents and both sends Deborah to defend them and “took a-way the sperit and the myht
/ Fro Zizara” (l.2970-71). The story concludes, moralistically, that princes should

Seeth heer be sodeyn chaunce

Off tirantis that trusten on Fortune,

Which wil nat suffre hem longe to contune

In ther fals vsurped tirannye

To holde peeplis in long subieccioun. (l.2987-91)

Here Fortune is not at all capricious, but an agent of justice, and furthermore a force that
will not allow the tyrannous to prosper: she is a very different figure than the one who
punishes Cadmus for a life of honour, intelligence and justice. The story of Sisera is
thematically well-suited to the tale of Gideon immediately following. Gideon, although he
possesses but a small army of men, is able to defeat the larger force of the Midianites
because God gives victory “[n]at to gret noumbr[e] nor to gret multitude, / But to that parti
where he seeth the riht” (l.3039-40). The stories of Jabin, the brothers Thyestes and
Atreus, Althea and Narcissus all equally fit the model of retributive fortune which is best
suited to the mirror for princes form.¹⁰⁸

Lydgate’s envoys, inserted with the purpose of drawing out the moral warnings of the
Fall of Princes, only work to confuse the text further. The envoys have attracted more
attention than the poem as a whole, both in Lydgate’s time and ours. Humphrey’s taste
for envoys appears to have been representative of that of his countrymen; the envoys
were the parts of the poem most often decorated and accompanied by marginal notes in

¹⁰⁸ See l.3130-3157, 3853-4214, 4852-5037, 5552-5677.
manuscripts, and most often excerpted in later printings. However, as I note above, they are also the part of the poem where Lydgate was most indentured to Humphrey's vision of the poem, and the problems which I find in Lydgate's contradictory depictions of Fortune reappear in the envoys. Close examination of the ways that the envoys shape and summarize the stories reveal that they frequently contradict, or have little or no bearing, on the stories they accompany. They may appear to be useful moral distillations of wisdom, but in fact they are only so when they are allowed to stand alone.

The most striking instances of Lydgate thus challenging the mirror for princes occur when the exemplum (or set of exempla) matched with an envoy are blatantly oppositional. For example, the stories of Vixoses, Thanaus, Zoroaster, Ninus, Moides, Pharoah, Ogygus, Isis and Erysichthon are all grouped together; a cursory glance at the categories which I have constructed above reveals that these stories support radically different conceptions of Fortune and God. However, they share an envoy which briefly advises princes and princesses to "[s]eeth off this world the chaung, the doubilnesse, / The gret onseurnesse, the variacioun" (l.1837-38). In fairness, this is perhaps the only conclusion that one could draw from such a collection of exempla, but it does not serve to resolve the issues of divine retribution and the relation between Fortune and God which are raised by the various stories. Indeed, while this view seems closely related to the portrayal of Fortune found in the prologues of the First and Sixth books, it does little to offer any real guidance or moral insight to the stories.

The stories of Sisera and Gideon, as I note above, are among the most logical and well-thought out in the entire poem: their stories show men justly punished or rewarded by Fortune in accordance with God's law and will. The envoy for these two

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109 This is similarly noted by A. S. G. Edwards, "Influence of Lydgate's Fall," 431. My own experience examining Fall manuscripts has certainly confirmed this; see p. 53-54 below.
exempla, however, works to undermine this cogent picture; in it, the reader is advised that the lives of Sisera and Gideon show that:

*Whan that Fortune is fairest off hir cheer*
*Bi apparence, and most blandisshyng,*
*Thanne is [she] falsest ech sesoun of the yeer,*
*Hir sodeyn chaungis now vp now doun turnyng.* (I.3116-19)

Lydgate emphasizes further that even those who are just are set to fall, and instructs his readers to conceive:

*How that estatis by ful vnwar chaungyng,*
*Whilom ful worthi, ther lyues dede fyne,*
*Whan fro ther noblesse thei wer maad to declyne.* (I.3127-29)

The envoy to the stories of Jabin, "[r]ebel to God" (I.3135), and the innocent Jocasta and Oedipus again attempts to bring together stories which simply have no relation to one another with a conclusion that has no obvious bearing on the tales. The advice which Lydgate takes from these stories is that "Kyngdamys deuyded may no while endure" (I.3822) and that rulers should "Cherisshith [their] subiectis, doth noon extorsiouin" (I.3840). It is not at all clear to me how Lydgate could possibly draw this moral from these tales, but nevertheless, this is his conclusion.

In fairness, Lydgate does sometimes construct envoys which match the exempla they accompany—the envoy to Nimrod's story, appropriately, warns against pride, while the envoy that accompanies the exemplum of Cadmus stresses the fickleness of Fortune. However, because the exempla support such radically different visions, it is impossible that some of the exempla should not be antithetical to each other. Taken as a whole the *Fall of Princes* is inescapably fragmented and illogical; the text only makes sense if accepted as the product of intrinsically opposed sources and influences—in Lydgate's own words, as a "Thyng that was maad of auctors hem beforne." I believe,
however, that Lydgate recognized the ultimate incompatibility of the texts and aims he was attempting to reconcile, and inserts his own solution to the problems of Fortune and how a man should live—although not how a prince should rule—in the Prologue of Book Three.\(^{110}\) It is here we find the story of Andalus, the dispute between Fortune and Glad Poverty, and Lydgate's own Boethian solution to the vicissitudes of Fortune.\(^{111}\)

The narrative of Andalus is not one of Lydgate's additions to the text. Boccaccio includes the story in the *De casibus* (although, as usual, with considerably more brevity than Lydgate), but Lydgate expands the dispute between Fortune and Glad Poverty with themes strikingly close to those found in Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*: the transience of Fortune and earthly possessions and titles, and the value of reason, philosophy and love for God over and above these. The questions that trouble Lydgate in the *Fall*—how to reconcile the fact that good people suffer misfortune with the belief in a benevolent and just God, for example—are also topics found in *De Consolatione*, a text Lydgate would have been familiar with, if not in the original Latin, certainly in Chaucer's *Boece*.\(^{112}\) At the start of Book Three, Andalus promises to tell a tale of how the stars are never to be blamed for man's misfortune, as every man brings adversity upon himself. He tells of the confrontation between Fortune and Poverty, in which Poverty roundly defeats Fortune because she is wholly independent of her. The story is a lesson very similar to that which is found in Boethius' Book Two: those who renounce

\(^{110}\) In this my opinion diverges from Tim William Machan's in "Textual Authority and the Works of Hoccleve, Lydgate, and Henryson," *Viotar* (1992) 281-97, who also comments upon the fact that various demands converge upon Lydgate as he writes the *Fall* (he sees Lydgate, Humphrey and Boccaccio as the three 'authors' of the poem), but who also argues that "implicit in the *Fall* is a belief in the transparency and consistency of authorial texts and truths" (294). He also argues that Lydgate does not acknowledge his own role in the production of the *Fall*—that he tries to be as 'silent' an author as possible (292)—which I think is clearly not the case in Book Three, nor in the other sections where Lydgate urges the reader to renounce the gifts of Fortune. Cf. Budra, "Shape of *De Casibus* Tragedy," who also notes that in the face of a changeable Fortune Lydgate advocates "monkish asceticism" (309).

\(^{111}\) Mortimer, "Study of John Lydgate," discusses the Andalus narrative and contest at length, particularly in relation to its antecedents in Boccaccio and Premierfait, but does not focus, as I do, on Boethius.

\(^{112}\) Lydgate indicates familiarity with Chaucer's *Boece* in the opening lines of the *Fall*: 1.288-92.
Fortune’s gifts cannot be cast down by her and are truly free. Lydgate’s Glad Poverty says to Fortune,

Thi manacyng doth me no duress,
Which worldli pryncis dredyn euerichon.
Thei may weel quake for losse off gret richesse;
But I, Glad Pouert, therof desire non. (III.351-54)

This is strikingly similar to Fortune’s statement to Boethius that,

riches have often harmed those who possessed them . . .
and so you, who are now so anxious and fear the spear
and the sword, would whistle your way past the robber if
you had set out on the path of this life as an empty-handed
traveler. How magnificent is the true happiness found in
mortal wealth and resources!”

Lydgate’s story concludes that, in recompense for her victory, Poverty demands that Fortune tie up Unhappy Adventure (Misfortune in Boccaccio’s De casibus), so that only those who choose to embrace Fortune’s power and, in doing so, unleash Unhappy Adventure are subject to her caprices.

Boccaccio’s story ends there, but Lydgate continues to link the story to the benevolence of God and his gift of free will. Much as Boethius accepts Philosophy as a way to free oneself from the trials of this world, Lydgate rejoices “How God aboue put vnder mannys cure / Fre choiun off good, his resoun to assure” (III.664-65). Man is given the power to recognize the false promises of fortune, and to recognize that Fortune is not the true cause of happiness. This is a striking passage in Lydgate’s Fall especially because of the mirror for princes frame in which he writes; what Lydgate essentially

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114 Cf. Philosophy’s similar lecture to Boethius, Book II, prosa 4, 22-29.
says, here, is that the only way to avoid the pitfalls and sorrows of Fortune is to reject all her gifts. Only by giving up wealth, power and fame, Lydgate suggests, will the princes he seeks to advise ever truly be free and happy; essentially he advises princes to live the monk's life. This theme is not limited to Book Three, but recurs throughout the rest of the text; in Book One, for instance, Lydgate writes "A mene estat is best, who koude it knowe, / Tween hih presumyng & bowyng doun to lowe" (1.3436-37).\footnote{Cf. I.4796-4802, 6126-6188, III.1275-88, 2591-97, 3718-80, 4236-480 (a particularly notable chapter because it makes use of Boethius' description of the rich man who lives in fear of thieves, while the poor man goes free), VI.2514-50.} The implicit warning is that those who choose to live as princes knowingly take their chances with Fortune, and do not have the right to complain when she withdraws her favours. It is a lesson, certainly, but I very much doubt the one that Humphrey expected or wished to hear; far from being a guide to life as a ruler, the \textit{Fall of Princes} advocates renouncing Fortune's gifts—including that of the crown.
IV. To 'Make and vnmake in many sondry wyse': Literary Metamorphoses of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*

In writing the *Fall of Princes* Lydgate could not have known that his own fall from celebrity would occur a little over one hundred years after his death. The problem of Lydgate's decline is one that has baffled critics for years, but which has found little resolution. Various suggestions have been offered—Lydgate's writing is too long-winded, too boring, or simply too bad (or perhaps readers' palates no longer run towards these characteristics)—but the question truly is a difficult one to resolve, particularly as the answer must come down to ineluctable questions of style and taste (what makes a writer good?). I suspect, however, that the roots to Lydgate's eventual decline may lie in his medieval and early Renaissance popularity; as I shall show, Lydgate's circulation and influence at the height of his popularity reveal him to have been "a marvellously useful poet" (to appropriate Pearsall's terms) not for us, but for his near-contemporaries readers. Eventually, the many successful adaptations of Lydgate displace the original Lydgatean text.

The rampant contradictions of Lydgate's *Fall* do not seem to attract the notice of Lydgate's later medieval and Renaissance readers, although perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the inconsistencies of the *Fall* do not seem to perturb Lydgate's audience. The extent to which Lydgate's poem was circulated and extracted makes it seem likely that at least some readers observed the struggle occurring within the *Fall*. Although Lydgate's envoys do not act as a true corollary to the text he translates, nor support a unified theme, they are the source of much of the fascination with the *Fall*; in this chapter I explore this matter further, as I examine how the *Fall* was read and

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117 Indeed, it may be that some of the extracting and adapting to which Lydgate is subject may be the result of readers' attempts to deal with these contradictions.
circulated, and in particular how the envoys came to be seen as veritable pearls of wisdom which enjoyed a life separate from the Fall in works such as Wynkyn de Worde's Proverbs of Lydgate and Peter Idley's Instructions to his Son. I then appraise the reincarnation of the Fall in texts such as George Cavendish's Metrical Visions and the Mirror for Magistrates, in an effort to understand how, even as the medieval Monk of Bury was shaping Renaissance literature, his own popularity was beginning to fail. I suspect the answer lies in the willingness of all of the above authors to improve their predecessor's work, and to:

Change and turne bi good discrecioun
Shappis, formys and newli hem deuyse,
Make and vnmake in many sondry wyse,
As potteres, which to that crafte entende,
Breke and renewe ther vesselis to a-mende. (I.9-14)

Lydgate's text is used for a variety of purposes to support a number of themes, and ultimately generates enough new material that there is little need or desire for his original work.

Surviving manuscripts of the Fall tell us much about how the text was read. There are thirty-six manuscripts and independent fragments of manuscripts extant, and the poem seems to have appealed to all classes and groups alike. Edwards points out that the surprisingly small number of editions of the Fall which contain miniatures and the relative paucity of de luxe editions signal the fact that the poem was valued for its content rather than for decorative purposes. Nearly forty more manuscripts survive which contain selections from the Fall, providing clear evidence that it was Lydgate's

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118 A. S. G. Edwards is the most important source of codicological work on Lydgate's manuscripts, and I am indebted to him for both information on surviving manuscripts and for the suggestion that further examination of Lydgate's influence on de Worde, Idley, Cavendish and the Mirror authors would be profitable: "Influence of Lydgate's Fall," 428.

119 Ibid., 430.
sententious and didactic passages—notably the envoys—which found favour with his readers. The marginal annotations which I observed in examining the British Library’s collection of Fall manuscripts reveals that, although my sample was small, it is the envoys which are most often noted with pointing hands, flourishes, underlining and rubrication. This is particularly notable in Harley 1766 (1450-60?), an abridged and lavishly illustrated version of the Fall which contains 21,865 lines (or about three-fifths of the poem), and which contains over two dozen hands which point, almost invariably, to the envoys or similarly sententious passages. Furthermore, every envoy is decorated with intricate rubricated flourishes, which demonstrate that the scribe thought those sections of the poem most worthy of the reader’s attention. Less dramatically, Royal B.xxxi (1465?), a complete manuscript, annotates the poem with the word ‘lenvoye’ in red ink in the margins alongside the envoys; this is a similar, if less elaborate way, of drawing notice to the envoys. Royal 18D.iv (c. mid-15th century), a manuscript missing several quires, accords essentially the same treatment to the envoys as does Royal B.xxxi. Harley 4197 (late-15th century) is complete and also has an abundance of hands drawing the eye to the envoys and other similarly moralistic passages. The other manuscripts which I examined tended to be cleaner copies of the text, but nevertheless they too often contain instances of underlining or hands used to highlight the envoys.

Moreover, many of the manuscripts which are collections of Lydgate’s poems, often supplemented by the poems of other authors (especially Chaucer), reveal the high degree of familiarity that compilers had with the Fall; many scribes use extracts from the Fall to support a single, unified theme. In the case of Trinity College, Cambridge MS.R.3.19, a copy of Chaucer’s “Monk’s Tale” is supplemented with various passages

120 The manuscripts I looked at are: Harley 1766, 1245, 3486, 4197, 4203, Royal 18B.xxxi, 18D.iv, 18D.v, Sloane 4031, Additional 21410 and 39659.
from Lydgate.\textsuperscript{121} Just prior to the Monk’s stories, Lydgate’s version of the fall of Adam and Eve is inserted (1.469-1001), and the Monk’s tragedies are followed by various envoys taken from Books One through Three. The result is that the Monk’s morally-irrelevant tales are ‘corrected’ through the insertion of Lydgate’s explicatory passages, which outline human folly and provide suggestions for the reasons that people fall—in sharp contrast to the arbitrary Fortune painted by Chaucer.\textsuperscript{122} However, the envoys which the scribe pulls from the \textit{Fall} are, in their original context, poorly matched with the exempla they accompany, although this does not seem to have impeded the compiler’s sense of their worth. Instead, the scribe of MS.R.3.19 seems to have had no qualms in pillaging the \textit{Fall}, with its irregular and fragmented depiction of Fortune, to produce a view of a just Fortune guided by the will of God.

Lydgate’s \textit{Fall} is put to use in similar manner in MS. Harley 2251, but for very different purposes. Edwards has recorded the scribe’s complex extractions and reorganization of material, which was clearly done with an aim to emphasizing the text’s moral precepts.\textsuperscript{123} It is clear from the selections chosen that the scribe favoured the envoys and was careful to include them even where he removed their accompanying exempla. However, what is most remarkable about MS. Harley 2251 is the collection of material the scribe places at the end of Book One so as to end the book with a deeply misogynistic diatribe against women. The scribe clearly views the \textit{Fall} as a “document capable of being adapted by selection to propagandize a particular point of view.”\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{122} Cf. Edwards, “Influence of Lydgate’s \textit{Fall},” 436.
\textsuperscript{124} Edwards, “Medieval Antifeminism and Harley 2251,” 33. The scribe collects all the sections in Book One where Lydgate criticizes women—extracts from the stories of Hercules, Orpheus and Samson are all present—and places them at the end, so that it appears Lydgate wrote a diatribe against women. Lydgate’s positive portrayals of women—such as is found in his story of
Essentially, medieval scribes' level of comfort and familiarity with Lydgate's *Fall* is a product of the view of the poem as an encyclopaedic collection of passages, which could be plundered and reorganized to support whatever view the scribe (or his commissioner) happened to support. Nor was it only scribes who could make such use of the *Fall*; Peter Idley's extractions from the poem reveal that he too saw the poem as a source to be mined for his individual aims.

**Peter Idley's *Instructions to His Son* (c.1445-50)**

Peter Idley's *Instructions*, a didactic poem spread over two books, consists of secular and religious advice for Idley's son on how best to live his life. Charlotte D'Evelyn's 1935 edition of the poem points out that the text's merit lies in its expression of the culture and values of Idley's time: the material Idley selects, the fact that he took the time to write it, and the way he wrote it are all significant. The content of Idley's *Instructions*, in Idley's own words, came to him "Som by experience and som by writinge." However, the sections where Idley borrows from other writers are easy to detect as he follows his sources very closely. Book I of the *Instructions* is based on two of Albertanus of Brescia's Latin treatises: *Liber de Amore et Dilectione Dei et Proximi* (1238) and *Liber Consolationis et Consilii* (1246); Book II finds its roots in Robert Mannying's *Handlyng Synne* (1303) a poem that combines exempla and religious instruction, and Lydgate's *Fall*. Albertanus' works had been widely copied and circulated throughout Europe, and in recycling him Idley marks his involvement in a tradition dating

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Canace—are absent. The scribe, then, performs the same work of which academics are sometimes guilty: selecting sections from a text which suit their purposes, and presenting those selections as representative of the view of the author.  

125 Charlotte D'Evelyn, ed., *Peter Idley's Instructions to His Son*, The Modern Language Association of America Monograph Series VI (London: Oxford UP, 1935) v. All citations refer to this edition. D'Evelyn further notes, in criticism which is still trenchant today, that "to find [Idley's] moral treatise linking up as it does with his practical interests and private hopes is a corrective of that point of view which dismisses too easily much of the didactic verse of this period as outworn commonplace, dead even in its own day" (v).  

126 Idley, *Instructions*, A.II.31

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back to the thirteenth century. Idley's first book is a compendium of secular advice. The Liber de Amore et Dilectione Dei et Proximi contains instructions on how one should best love one's God, family, friends, worldly possessions and intangible things, such as art. Liber Consolationis et Consilii consists of a dialogue between Melibeus and his wife Prudence on the topic of whether grievances are best settled by vengeance and war or by a reliance on justice and reconciliation. Idley's use of the Latin texts is eclectic at best; there is no clear order to his first book, which is merely a collection of miscellaneous instructions on how Idley's son should morally and ethically deal with himself and others. He took what he wanted from the texts, adding his own commentary and directions for his son (for instance, that he should study law) in order to add a personal touch to the scrapbook-like collection of advice.

The second book of Idley's Instructions retains the same patchwork construction of the first, but it focuses on religious instruction and the precepts of the Church instead of secular topics. Idley's plan for Book II was to follow Mannyng's Handlyng Synne and cover the ten commandments, the seven deadly sins, sacrilege, the seven sacraments, the twelve points of shrift and the twelve points of grace, supplemented by parts of the Fall of Princes. Mannyng's text is a didactic poem of religious instruction intended for lay readers; it is interesting to note, then, that as early as the mid-fifteenth century Lydgate's Fall was beginning to enjoy some circulation with readers not part of the court culture for which Lydgate had written. Furthermore, it reveals that Idley saw Mannyng's text and Lydgate's as compatible, despite the fact that Lydgate's is clearly not a religious

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128 The same treatise was the source for Chaucer's translation of The Tale of Melibee in Canterbury Tales. Idley does not seem to have been aware of Chaucer's translation; certainly, his own translation is not indebted to Chaucer's earlier work (D'Evelyn, p.38n.7).
129 It is not clear whether Idley ever completed his reworking of Handlyng Synne; no manuscript survives that contains all this material. As he did with Albertanus' work, Idley cuts and pastes as he sees fit, leaving behind significant chunks as he re-writes the text; by the time Idley's translation breaks off, he is some three thousand lines behind Mannyng: D'Evelyn, "Instructions," 46.
poem; this is testament to the flexibility with which Idley read the poem and the extent to
which he was able to see the poem in the light that he desired.\(^ {130}\) Idley subjects
Lydgate’s *Fall* to the same treatment he accords to Albertanus and Mannyng; he
borrows forty-six stanzas from Lydgate, with only minimal changes throughout.\(^ {131}\) All of
his borrowings come from the first three books of the *Fall* and deal with commentary and
advice, never narrative; the passages which Idley prefers tend to cover the subject of
women, the virtue of humble origins and status, and the importance of obedience.\(^ {132}\)
His easy familiarity with the *Fall* is evident in the way he combines different samples of
the poem into sections that, although composed of disparate parts of the original text,
nonetheless fit together quite well. For example, when discussing the Seventh
Commandment, II.A.2344-85 (“Thou shalt not steal”), Idley constructs his text thus:

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\begin{align*}
\text{*Instructions*} & \quad \text{II.A.2344-50} = \quad \text{*Fall*} \quad \text{I.2150-56} \\
& \quad \text{II.A.2351-57} = \quad \text{I.6280-86} \\
& \quad \text{II.A.2358-64} = \quad \text{I.6287-93} \\
& \quad \text{II.A.2365-71} = \quad \text{II.15-71} \\
& \quad \text{II.A.2372-78} = \quad \text{I.3445-51} \\
& \quad \text{II.A.2379-85} = \quad \text{I.3452-58}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{130}\) For a further discussion of Mannyng and lay religious instruction see Eamon Duffy, *The
Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven; London: Yale
\(^{131}\) D’Evelyn lists the borrowed stanzas as II, A. 1791-95, 1798-1818, 2344-85, 2392-99, 2421-34,
2624-37, 2638-44, 2645-51; B. 78-119, 365-71, 582-602, 1261-67, 1562-1610, 2535-2604, 2661-
2674, 2682-2716. On the slightness of Idley’s changes, D’Evelyn notes that, for instance, “one
stanza in *Instructions* (II, A.2365-71) reproduces *Fall* II.15-21 with only two real changes in
wording, i.e., ‘such unkouth’ omitted, ‘hem’ substituted for ‘in pryncis’ and ‘tofore’ for ‘aforn.”’ (49).
It is also interesting to note that Idley consistently takes out references to princes and princesses
and replaces them with more general references to men, which makes sense given that the work
was directed at his son. On a few occasions Idley borrows just a line from Lydgate and
improvises the rest, but this is the exception to the rule.
\(^{132}\) See Bergen, IV: 105
This reveals an extraordinary—although not unusual for Idley—awareness of Lydgate’s text and the different ways it may be taken apart and reconstructed.  

Edwards has addressed the Instructions briefly and notes that Idley shows a preference for Lydgate’s moralizing passages. It is interesting that Idley does not focus on the envoys (as so many who borrowed from Lydgate’s Fall did), but the sections he chooses have the same flavour of the envoys: they are general and didactic. At the same time, he is also capable of ignoring the sections of the Fall that do not fit with his belief in the moral culpability of individuals for their downfalls; Lydgate’s ambivalence about the role of Fortune is entirely excised. For example, although Lydgate’s Book Two description of Fortune as a force that works to pull down the guilty and support the virtuous is by no means typical of the rest of the poem, this is the section that Idley chooses to copy into his text (II.A.2631-44). However, the Fall itself does not consistently support this reading, and it seems hardly possible to me that someone capable of the amalgamation which I demonstrated above would be unaware of the sections that directly contradict his own theme; clearly the sections in the Fall which do not support Idley’s views do not detract from the authority of the Fall in his eyes. It seems, then, that we are dealing with a different definition of authority than what a modern reader might expect; Lydgate seems to have been more useful for the wealth of material and learning he brings to his audience, rather than for providing a consistent viewpoint or lesson.

Wynkyn de Worde’s Proverbs of Lydgate (c. 1510)

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133 I borrow this example from D’Evelyn, 49.
135 Similarly, Edwards notes that Idley omits any materials from particular historical narratives; he is clearly uninterested in Lydgate’s attempt to be historical: “Influence of Lydgate’s Fall,” 435. Mortimer, “Study of John Lydgate,” 240, similarly notes that Idley focuses on passages which emphasize moral culpability.
The first excerpts of the *Fall of Princes* to appear in print were a selection of envoys and a few other unrelated miscellaneous poems, which appeared in Wynkyn de Worde’s c. 1510 publication of *The Proverbs of Lydgate* (reprinted c. 1519). De Worde’s text is closely tied to manuscript compilations and to important questions about the value of miscellanies in medieval book production, and how they came to be read as a ‘whole book.’ The copy-text for de Worde’s *Proverbs* is lost, but it was likely a miscellany similar to Harley 2255, which was an anthology of short poems on religious and moral subjects that seems to have been copied for William Curteys. The text borrows from the *Fall* the envoy to Adam and Eve (l.967-1001), the envoy to Theseus (l.4530-57), the Commendation of Patience (IX.2371-2433), ten stanzas from the story of Tullius (VI.2948-54, 3151-57, 3214-76) and the envoy on Ingratitude (V.2509-36). It also includes two of Lydgate’s short poems, “Loke in Thy Merour and Deme None other Wight” and *Consulo Quisquis Eris*, and two of Chaucer’s, “Fortune” and “Truth.” In other words, the *Proverbs* is much like the manuscript collections of poems by Lydgate and other authors that I discuss above—a collection that combines different texts for its own ends. De Worde selects stanzas that generally advise the reader to behave virtuously, prudently, honestly and to distrust Fortune; it further reveals that *Fall’s*

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139 Cf. Bergen, IV.123.
generalizing sententiae had, to paraphrase Edwards, achieved a status separate from the complete poem.\textsuperscript{140}

There is, however, a considerable difference in the presentation of the material; Gillespie notes, following Ralph Hanna, that scribal copies typically carry no explanation of their production or direction for readerly interpretation.\textsuperscript{141} Gillespie’s analysis of the proverbs’ paratext is persuasive; she argues that a clear paratextual account of a miscellaneous text such as the \textit{Proverbs} would work to define the place and function of the text. In the case of \textit{Proverbs}, the title of the book explicitly suggests that the work is comprised of the wisdom of Lydgate. The woodcut which accompanies the text shows a scholar, perhaps Lydgate himself, at work in his study surrounded by books: he at once points to the text he is reading, and considers a fragment in his other hands. The picture is one of a man pulling together pieces of sententiae from different texts. The opening three stanzas advertise the aim of the \textit{Proverbs}; the book begins with an injunction to “Go kyffe ye flespes of them ye were forthyer ye g (?)/ Laureate poêtes which ye had foueraynte / Of eloquence to fupporthe thy makynge.”\textsuperscript{142} At the outset, then, de Worde confirms the worth of the text the reader (and perhaps buyer) holds in his hands, as he emphasizes that it was written by the finest poets. He then proceeds to inform the reader that by reading these proverbs, the reader may learn to avoid the same falls that are described within the book; the text is clearly testament to the medieval appetite for moral instruction, and the publisher openly addresses the book to that desire. In part, I suspect, this is due to the somewhat lower status of the book-buyer to whom de Worde directed his texts. Early printed books, although still out of the reach of most, were directed not just to an elite court culture, but also to an upper middle class; part of the work that de Worde’s paratext performs is that of assuring the buyer of the book’s

\textsuperscript{140} Edwards, “Influence of Lydgate’s \textit{Fall},” 435.
\textsuperscript{141} Gillespie, “These proverbs yet do last,” 223.
\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Proverbs}. 61
value. It is also in de Worde’s Proverbs that it becomes incontrovertible that Lydgate’s words held appeal and currency for an audience of lower status than the elite, courtly one he originally wrote for; the Proverbs, like a mirror for princes, is an instruction manual (if a rather vague one), but its advice is presented as useful to every class.

Cavendish’s Metrical Visions (c.1552-54)

Idley and de Worde’s respective texts are useful examples of how the Fall of Princes could be put to work for genres outside the de casibus and mirror for princes genres (although remaining within a didactic tradition). There is little doubt, however, that Lydgate is most important to sixteenth-century literature for the effect he had on authors who sought to continue his work in the de casibus genre, particularly George Cavendish and the authors of the Mirror for Magistrates. Cavendish undertook to write Metrical Visions in the 1550s as an appendix to his great biography, The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey. That Cavendish borrows some two hundred lines from the Fall is not, in the context of Idley and de Worde’s extractions, particularly noteworthy; what is remarkable is that Cavendish is clearly trying to imitate the whole structure of the Fall. Edwards sums up the matter concisely:

Metrical Visions seems to attempt to reproduce the whole apparatus and ethos of the Fall of Princes. Cavendish introduced exhortations on Fortune and admonitions on

144 Edwards has argued, convincingly in my view, that Cavendish wrote the poem between 1552-54. For details see Edwards, “The Date of George Cavendish’s Metrical Visions,” Philological Quarterly 52 (1974) 388-91. The importance of this argument is that it places the composition of Metrical Visions prior to Mirror for Magistrates, and thus credits Cavendish as an innovator rather than an imitator of the sixteenth-century de casibus tradition in England.
145 Until Edwards’ “Some Borrowings by Cavendish from Lydgate’s Fall of Princes,” Notes and Queries 216 (1971) 207-9, Cavendish’s debt to Lydgate went largely unnoticed (although Hammond notes that Cavendish borrows eleven lines in her English Verse, 368, 528). I have used Edwards’ comparison of Metrical Visions and the Fall as my guide in this section.
the mutability of human affairs. He added formal envoys, made interpolations in his narrative, and varied the length of his tragedies. In all these respects he followed the example of Lydgate.\footnote{Edwards, "Introduction," 10-11. Budra notes that Cavendish makes two innovations to the Fall: Cavendish's speakers are his near-contemporaries, some of whom are personal acquaintances (e.g., Cardinal Wolsey, Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn) and his ghosts speak in the first person (although Boccaccio also sometimes allows his subjects to speak for themselves): Mirror for Magistrates, 7.}

Edwards has shown that Cavendish enjoyed the same intimacy with the Fall that Idley did, and that he similarly shows himself capable of taking stanzas from widely-spaced parts of the Fall and combining them to make a new, logical whole.\footnote{See Edwards, "Influence of Lydgate's Fall, 238.} However, what is really significant about Cavendish's use of the Fall is that he truly tries to engage with Lydgate. Although in a sense any conscription of a text for one's own purposes constitutes a 'response' to that text, it seems to me misleading to speak of Idley and de Worde as truly responding to the Fall of Princes. Both authors react to it, certainly, and respond favourably to some parts and not to others, but neither are truly trying to engage with Lydgate—they simply select and dismiss parts of the poem. Cavendish, in contrast, is grappling with Lydgate's conception of Fortune, and with carving a space for England within the de casibus tradition that Lydgate introduces.

Unlike Idley, who simply chooses those of Lydgate's passages about Fortune with which he agrees, Cavendish truly tries to understand how Fortune operates, and how the seeming vagaries of Fortune may be explained. However, whereas I believe that Lydgate's ultimate 'resolution' of this problem was the renunciation of Fortune, I am unable to reach such a conclusion in the case of Cavendish. Some of his confusion, I think, is apparent in his prologue where he ponders the perversity of Fortune:

How some are by fortune / exalted to Riches
And ofte suche / as most vnworthy be
And some oppressed / in langor and syknes
Some wayling lakkyng welthe / by wretched pouertie
Some in bayle and bondage / and some at libertie
With other moo gyftes / of ffortune Varyable
Some pleasanta / Somme mean / and some onprofitable.\textsuperscript{148}

Cavendish seems earnestly troubled by the unfairness of Fortune, who is willing to reward the bad and render miserable the good. He continues though:

But after dewew serche / and better avisement
I knewe by Reason / that oonly God above . . [sic]
Rewlithe thos thynges / as is most convenyent
The same devydyng / to many for his behove.
Wherefore dame Reason / did me perswade and move /
To be content / with this my small estate.\textsuperscript{149}

It would appear then, having rejected the notion of a powerful and capricious Fortune in favour of a good (if at times inscrutable) God, Cavendish’s poem should favour a vision of moral order and just reciprocity.

This assumption is confirmed by later lines which sketch out his understanding of the de casibus tradition and the meaning of tragedy: in his vision, tragedy is the fall of people from high to low, but he argues that those in high positions are not simply more likely to fall because Fortune is an ever-turning wheel, but because of “Ther disdaynous dispyghtes. / and onnaturall debattes” which are the reason that “highe estates are always in most dreade.”\textsuperscript{150} This at once suggests that princes who fall get their just

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 15-20.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 1989.
deserts, but it also indicates that to be a prince puts one, through no fault of one's own, more in the way of sin ("disdaynous dispyghtes"). This idea is supported by the majority of Cavendish's ghostly speakers, most of whom, even while bewailing their fall, admit their guilt. Most remarkably, in *Metrical Visions*' treatment of Cardinal Wolsey, Cavendish has Wolsey admit, "ambysion had puffedvppe my hart / With vaynglory . honor . and vsurped dignyte. / Forgettyng cleane my naturall mendycitie."

Cavendish weeps to hear Wolsey speak, but it is important to note that Cavendish laments the sin, not the fall—he may sorrow for Wolsey's misfortune, but he does not view it as unjust.

However, to complicate matters, a few of Cavendish's ghosts are true innocents, and he is unable to provide a clear explanation for their falls beside the existence of a malicious Fortune. After Lady Jane Grey protests her innocence and recognizes her death as the responsibility of those who wrongly set her upon the throne, Cavendish's response is simply, "To answere hir complaynt / I wyst not what to say." Jane Grey's story seems to link back to Cavendish's confusion in the prologue, but here no faith in the mysterious workings of God follows his admission of puzzlement. Indeed, Cavendish follows Jane Grey's story with the information that he plans to stop writing and take a break, as he reasons his forewarned readers must now be safe from the guiles of Fortune. How this envoy links to Jane Grey's story is completely unclear; surely her tale is not a warning to those whose "wyttes be oppressed / so with vice." Similarly, in the story of Margaret, Countess of Salisbury, the lady protests her innocence and moral rectitude, and can blame her fall on only Fortune, whom she

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151 Ibid., 89-91. Edwards notes that the striking difference between Cavendish's treatment of Wolsey in his autobiography of the man and in *Metrical Visions* is both extraordinary and inexplicable, p. 152n.85-259.
152 Ibid., 2272.
153 Ibid., 2280.
describes as, "Disposying as she wyll / to fauor or to myschaunce." Why Jane and the other innocents should fall is completely unclear and at odds with Cavendish's primary definition of Fortune. He does attempt to narrow and simplify the definition of Fortune he finds in Lydgate's Fall, but ultimately his depiction of Fortune is scarcely more coherent than Lydgate's.

Mirror for Magistrates (c. 1554-1587)

The popularity of Lydgate's Fall endured for over a century. There is no point in the Fall's history when it was not also being co-opted to serve the purposes of another, but neither did the plethora of manuscript extractions and printed compendiums, and the texts of Idley and Cavendish, detract from Lydgate's celebrity. The reputation of the Monk of Bury survived the first part of the Reformation intact. Only when the Mirror for Magistrates appears in print does Lydgate suffer his abrupt decline; it is not chance, in my view, that the striking downturn in Lydgate publication at mid-century coincides with the emergence of the Mirror and all its subsequent editions and enlargements. The Mirror, written as a continuation of and companion to Lydgate's Fall, essentially becomes the replacement of the Fall and successor to its progenitor's acclaimed position in the canon.

The question of how a text originally intended simply to supplement Lydgate's Fall should come instead to replace it is an interesting one, and the simplest answer seems to be that the re-workings and re-interpretations to which the Fall had continually been subject finally produced a text more in tune with the demands of its time, with which the more dated Fall could simply not compete. The troubled history of the Mirror

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154 Ibid., 1046. Cf. the stories of Thomas Seymour (whose speedy marriage to Catherine Parr after Henry VIII's death renders him perhaps less innocent than he claims, but nevertheless, Cavendish allows him to protest his innocence (1488-1627), Michael Stanhope (1810-30), and Ralph Vane and Miles Partridge (1831-37). Vane and Partridge's very short story is particularly noteworthy, for in it Cavendish basically says that Fortune granted them privileges, and then took them all away—there is no mention of any their actions at all.
for Magistrates has been recounted at length elsewhere, but it is worth touching upon the Mirror’s early publication history and its relation to and use of the Fall.\textsuperscript{155} The credit for the conception of the Mirror must go to John Wayland, a printer who undertook to print Lydgate’s Fall around 1554, and who determined the success of his edition would be better assured if he added an extension of de casibus narratives relating recent English history.\textsuperscript{156} The man Wayland selected for the task of writing this text was William Baldwin, who agreed to do so on the condition that he be aided by a group of other writers.\textsuperscript{157} However, Wayland would never print the Mirror: the text did not make it past Mary’s Lord Chancellor, and it was not until after Elizabeth I’s accession to the throne that the Mirror would be published, not by Wayland, but by Thomas Marshe. This 1559 edition contained nineteen tragedies, bound together with prose links that although reminiscent of Lydgate’s envoys in that they serve as segues from one tragedy to the next, attempt to a much lesser extent to reduce the story to a simple moral.\textsuperscript{158}

It is tempting to speculate that the process of replacing the Fall with the Mirror began when Wayland was unsuccessful in publishing the Mirror with the Fall. As a result, when the Mirror did come to be published, it did not accompany another edition of the Fall (for which, given the two editions published circa. 1554, there would presumably have been no need), but stood on its own as an independent text. However, other more convincing evidence suggests that the Mirror ultimately took the place of the

\textsuperscript{155} See the Introduction to Campbell’s edition, 3-60.

\textsuperscript{156} Budra notes that, as Tottel’s edition of the Fall came out at the same time as Wayland’s, Wayland’s decision to add what would become the Mirror to the poem may have been driven by a desire to promote the sale of his book over Tottel’s: Mirror for Magistrates, 8-9.

\textsuperscript{157} The Mirror is named in Wayland’s text as “A memorial of suche princes, as since the tyme of King Richard the seconde, haue been unfortunate in the Realme of England”: Campbell, “Introduction,” Figure 3 (between pages 6 and 7). For details on each of the authors, see Campbell, “Introduction,” 21-48.

\textsuperscript{158} It is also a very curious coincidence that two tragedies are omitted from this edition: those of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester and his wife, Eleanor Cobham, who was tried for witchcraft. For speculation on why this might be see Scott Lucas, “The Consolation of Tragedy: A Mirror for Magistrates and the fall of the ‘Good Duke’ of Somerset,” Studies in Philology 100:1 (2003) 44-70. The two tragedies eventually appeared in the 1578 edition.
Fall both because it continued the process begun by Lydgate of elevating the status of English literature and history, and because the authors of the *Mirror* edited Lydgate’s confused presentation of Fortune, much as Idley and Cavendish did, in order to present a much more providential view of the world. When Humphrey commissioned Lydgate to translate the *Fall*, he did it in part so that the work already known in Latin and French might enter into the relatively impoverished canon of English literature; in a sense, Lydgate’s text is performing the work of ‘catching up’ with Latin and French literature. By the time Baldwin et al. write the *Mirror*, English literature is considerably more mature and less apologetic. This is reflected in Baldwin’s “Address to the Reader”:

I meruaile what Bochas meaneth to forget among his myserable princes, such as wer of our nacion, whose numbre is great, as their adventures wunderful: For to let passe all, both Britons, Danes and Saxons, and to cum to the last Conquest, what a sorte are they, and sum euen in his own tyme? As for example, king Rycharde the fyrste, slayne with a quarlle in his chiefe prosperitie, also king lohn his brother as sum saye, poysoned: are not their histories rufull and of rare example?\(^\text{159}\)

The history of England is fit subject now for poetry; Baldwin argues that the stories of England rival those of Italy and Rome which Boccaccio told, and he ‘maruailes’ that Boccaccio did not think so. He follows Lydgate in attributing to Boccaccio anti-English sentiments, suggesting that Boccaccio neglects English history because he, “beynge an *Italien*, mynded most the *Roman* and *Italike* story, or els perhaps he wanted our countrey chronicles.”\(^\text{160}\) What is certain is that Baldwin takes the emerging interest in

\(^{159}\) *Mirror*, 1.69-70.
\(^{160}\) Ibid., 1.70.
English history and literature found in Lydgate's poem and makes it the subject of his entire text, suggesting that England has outgrown its need to put the histories of other nations ahead of its own.

Baldwin's "Address to the Reader" also demonstrates that the *Mirror* proposes to unite the workings of Fortune with a belief in just punishment for sins. He says that the *Mirror* will:

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haue the storye contynewed from where as Bochas lefte,
vnto this presente time, chiefly of suche as Fortune had
dalyd with here in this ylande: whiche might be as a
myrrour for al men as well noble as others, to shewe the
slypperie deceytes of the waueryng lady, and the due
rewarde of all kinde of vices.161
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Lydgate’s confused presentation of Fortune is corrected by Baldwin and his co-authors, as it was in various manuscripts and Idley’s and Cavendish’s books. Indeed, it is possible that it was through the efforts of Idley, Cavendish and the various compilers that there was a growing perception of Lydgate as an author who subscribed to a view of the world in which virtue was rewarded. William Farnham points out that Pynson’s 1494 and 1527 editions of the *Fall* do not anywhere suggest that the reader take the poem as examples of vice duly punished. However, by the time Tottel publishes his 1554 edition, he advertises: “A Treatise excellent and compedious, shewing and declaring, in maner of Tragedye, the falles of sondry most notable Princes and Princesses with other Nobles, through y”s mutabilitie and change of vnstedfast Fortune together with their most detestable & wicked vices.” Similarly, Wayland’s edition promises a text: “wherin may be seen what vices bring menne to destruccion, wyth notable warninges howe the like may

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161 “Address to the Reader,” *Mirror*, I.68.
be auoyded." The suggestion is that Fortune only punishes those who deserve it, and that those who live virtuously will not be subject to her powers. This is the theme of the
Mirror, in which Baldwin argues:

As in a looking glas, you shall see (if any vice be in you)
howe the like hath bene punished in other heretofore,
whereby admonished, I trust it will be a good occasion to
move you to the soner amendment. This is the chiefest
end, whye it is set furthe, which God graunt it may
attayne.\(^{163}\)

The text is more explicitly one of correction; the authors of the Mirror, free to choose and
write their own de casibus narratives, have little trouble combining their historical
narratives with the mirror for princes form—the endeavour that Lydgate, bound as he
was by Boccaccio’s text, struggled so hard to accomplish.

Whether or not the Mirror succeeds in producing a vision of Fortune which
successfully meshes with a retributive model of sin and punishment has been a subject
of some debate for many years.\(^{164}\) My own reading of the Mirror inclines me to take the
position that the Mirror is mostly, although not entirely, coherent in its presentation of a
providential God and in its emphasis on the complicity of its speakers in their falls.\(^{165}\)
Lydgate’s struggle to reconcile the actions of a capricious Fortune is subsumed under
the Mirror’s emphasis on providence and retribution. The popularity of the Mirror
testifies to the fact that this solution to Lydgate’s incoherence met with the approval of

\(^{162}\) William Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Berkeley: U of California P,
\(^{163}\) “Baldwin’s Dedication,” Mirror, 1.65-67.
\(^{164}\) William Farnham insists that the Mirror is successfully, while William Peery, “Tragic Retribution
in the 1559 Mirror for Magistrates,” Studies in Philology 46 (1949) 113-30, maintains that they do
not.
\(^{165}\) Cf. Budra, “Shape of De Casibus Tragedy,” 308.
The Mirror's readers. The Mirror enjoyed several reprints and expansions in 1563 (which saw the addition of eight new tragedies), 1571, 1574, 1578 (which contains the tragedy of Humphrey and his wife Eleanor) and 1578; in addition, John Higgins wrote a 'prequel' to the Mirror in 1574 which covers the period between Brutus and Caesar, and Thomas Blenerhasset similarly treated the time between Caesar and William the Conqueror in 1578. The success of the various Mirror texts is much indebted to Lydgate's Fall, but it also results in the Fall disappearing from print for over three hundred years. The authors of the Mirror borrow and build upon what they find useful in Lydgate, but their own text being eminently more suited to the taste of the day, it seems entirely natural that the popularity of the Mirror should cause the Fall of Princes to drop out of favour.

The Mirror's success alone cannot explain why all the poems of Lydgate disappeared from publication by the end of the sixteenth century, nor why academia's rediscovery of him has been so slow and reluctant. I suspect that there is no clear-cut answer; modern criticism has its fads and favourites today as did Lydgate's medieval readers, and, as Lydgate's Fall demonstrates, no one stays on top of Fortune's wheel forever. That said, I believe that today's scholars have not given Lydgate his due attention; whatever the reason for this—whether it is the expectation that Lydgate's poems are too long, too boring, or too barren for the interests of scholarship—close examination of Lydgate's Fall reveals that it is not justified. If the question I must answer here is 'Why read Lydgate?' the simplest answer I can offer is because we have barely

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166 It is worthwhile also to consider the different audiences for which Lydgate and the Mirror's authors were writing: Lydgate had the onerous demands of Humphrey to satisfy, while the Mirror had to fulfill the desires of the book-buying public. The same desire for a logical Fortune which guided many compilers of Lydgate's poem, Idley, and Cavendish, seems ultimately to result in the view of the Mirror and that text's replacement of the Fall.
167 It is also worth noting, following Budra, that the later editions of the Mirror only became more concerned with providence: Mirror for Magistrates, 22.
168 Much, indeed, as the Mirror itself would do; the Mirror today is more often lauded as a stepping-stone to the great Renaissance tragedies than it is as an independent piece of literature.
begun to try to understand him. Lydgate and his poetry have come to be so accepted as ‘typical,’ a medieval yardstick against one may measure so many other topics and authors, that we have lost sight of all that is individual and innovative in the Monk of Bury. We cannot know what Lydgate has to offer our understanding of medieval England and the history of English literature until we take him seriously as a complex individual and poet.

I have demonstrated the tension that Lydgate’s task of juggling his relation to the Lancastrians, his religious convictions and his duties as a poet engenders, and I have shown how this same tension is manifest in his poetry as Lydgate struggles to reconcile his many roles with his various source texts. It should be evident at this point that it is impossible to understand the Fall—its incoherence, its intricacies, its meanings—unless it is viewed through the lens of all the topics (patronage, religion, Chaucer, etc) to which discussion of Lydgate is so often appended. Moreover, it is fascinating to observe how later scribes and authors respond to the Fall: each begins the task of narrowing Lydgate’s poem, bending and extracting it to fit his theme. I have noted above the popularity of Lydgate as a source for miscellanies and anthologies, but in a sense, Lydgate’s Fall is itself a miscellany, a text made up of different units which nevertheless, somehow, comes to form a whole book.

My work on the Fall is only the beginning of the project of understanding Lydgate’s oeuvre and evaluating his importance in the canon. The kind of reading to which I have subjected the Fall must be performed on Lydgate’s other poems, and an attempt must be made, further, to understand the poems in relation to each other as well. There is also much more work to be done on the Fall itself: the need for a study which compares Boccaccio, Premierfait and Lydgate particularly springs to mind, in addition to one that has the scope to pay close attention to all the Fall’s nine books. My attempt to remedy what I identified as the preliminary nature of Lydgate scholarship is
hardly more than exploratory itself, but I hope that I have shown that such a reading can be productive and perhaps—truly counter to the current critical understanding of Lydgate—interesting.
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