"God and Posterity Will Show Me Favor": A Search for the Historical Lady Jane Dudley in Light of Her Later Portrayals

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Abstract
The sixteen-year-old Lady Jane Dudley, born Grey, was pushed onto the throne for nine days in July 1553, a last-minute effort in retaining a Protestant monarch. She was quickly toppled by the rightful heir, the Catholic Queen Mary I, giving Jane the shortest reign in English history. Shortly thereafter, Jane was beheaded for treason. For the next four and a half centuries, Jane’s story would be told over and over again—vastly more often than her relative insignificance in history would suggest—casting her as a saint, a martyr, a child prodigy, an airheaded girl with little interest in religious or academic matters, an innocent young victim, a heroine of romantic legend, a Victorian role model of meek womanhood, or a religious fanatic. Some of these portrayals are outlandish; nearly all at least stretch the truth. Generally, fictional and “historical” accounts of Jane have said more about the era in which they were written than they have about Jane.

This thesis attempts to reach a better understanding of Jane, examining how she saw and presented herself, how she was later portrayed, and how she might be most accurately seen. It argues that Jane should be portrayed first and foremost in light of her religion—not as a martyr, but as a faithful Protestant very much consumed with spiritual matters. She had a remarkably strong faith for someone so young, and she meant to be remembered as someone whose faith strengthened her at the end and who relied continually on her God. Her story does not have much meaning outside of its religious context. Jane can also be accurately seen as an exceptionally strong woman who was exceptionally bold, especially in light of her youth. Jane, this thesis concludes, is best viewed as an excessively outspoken girl and a faithful Protestant.

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Advisor/Committee Chair
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Comments
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Any likelihood that Jane – through her mother Frances she was Mary’s granddaughter – would ever wear the crown must have seemed remote. But curious events unfold in English history, particularly when it’s royal. Bradgate House, Leicestershire © Alamy. Firstly, he arranged for Jane to marry his son, Lord Guildford Dudley, in May 1553. The king was then encouraged to set aside both his sisters’ claims to the throne and nominate Jane as his heir. Edward complied, just a few weeks before his death at Greenwich Palace on 6 July 1553.
Jane was reluctant but was eventually persuaded it was right for her to be queen, and she was conveyed with Guildford to take formal possession of the Tower of London on 10 July.