Introduction
A Mirror for Magistrates *and early modern English culture*

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It is frequently acknowledged that the large, diverse, constantly evolving literary project *A Mirror for Magistrates* was a text that shaped the contours of Tudor and early Jacobean literature. Even so, beyond the enthusiasms of a few specialists eager to discuss the work with each other, the substance of the *Mirror* has largely been ignored. The assumption made is that, while it did exert a profound influence on readers and writers, it was the wrong sort of influence, one that is better ignored and left to a dark corner of academia. E. M. W. Tillyard, writing in the 1950s, could not understand why the *Mirror*'s 'execrable verse', 'however alien to modern taste and however poor as poetry by enduring standards', was so enthusiastically received by Elizabethan readers, while C. S. Lewis's judgement made over sixty years ago still stands for readers and non-readers alike:

> No one lays down the *Mirror* without a sense of relief. An immense amount of serious thought and honest work went into its composition and it remains, with Tottel, the chief poetical monument of the Drab Age. Like Tottel it did useful work in re-establishing metrical regularity, but in many other respects its influence on succeeding poets was mainly bad. It encouraged that taste for heavily doctrinal history in verse which is partly responsible for [Michael Drayton's] *Mortimeriados* and *Polyolbion*.[1]

The *Mirror* performs a bit of useful work in sorting out clumsy and flawed poetry, but it is hard to imagine a reader, even one hostile to Lewis, turning voluntarily to the *Mirror*, especially when there are so many other exciting and colourful works on offer in the period. After all, who, apart from specialists, really cares about metrical regularity?

The *Mirror* does not feature in many histories of sixteenth-century literature and, when it does, it is often a single poem, Thomas Sackville's 1563 'Induction', which is considered worthy of mention; nor does it appear on undergraduate or graduate courses in English departments.

Although its influence on Shakespeare is noted – albeit with reluctance – the edition which he actually would have read, John Higgins' compilation of 1587, is usually eclipsed by the editions recent scholars have thought best repay critical attention, those of 1559–63, and any references are generally relegated to the appendices of only the most extensively informative editions of Shakespeare's works. Despite the sustained popular interest in the Tudors, it is hard to imagine a television presenter explaining that the *Mirror* played a vital role in making Elizabethan literature as exciting and diverse as it is thought to be, or William Baldwin appearing in a costume drama or a Philippa Gregory novel. We should note, however, that with the rise of environmental concerns the historical poet Michael Drayton's verse chorography *Poly-Olbion* (1612) has generated far more interest as a poem that predicted many later disasters, in particular the destruction of Britain's forests.[2] Times do change.

The *Mirror* presents difficulties for contemporary readers not inclined to read narrative poetry after the rise of the novel transformed the literary landscape two centuries later. Comprising almost one hundred individual tragedies at its greatest extent, its sheer scale and tangled bibliographical history make getting to grips with the work a daunting undertaking. Nor do readers generally enjoy what they think of as its didactic judgements, monotonous tone and repetitive plot structure. However, as the chapters in this collection, especially those of Jennifer Richards and Mike Pincombe, demonstrate, it is not at all clear that we should always take the apparent judgements of the *Mirror*'s narrators at face value, nor should we assume that what looks like the truth is actually the truth. The *Mirror*, in all its various manifestations, is a far more challenging and complicated work than is generally assumed.

A brief overview of the *Mirror*'s publishing history provides some idea of its bewildering complexity and its role in establishing the literature of the English Renaissance.[3] The *Mirror* was, it seems, the brainchild of the printer John Wayland, who was keen to capitalise on the success of John Lydgate's *The Fall of Princes*, a fifteenth-century poem of 36,000 lines which detailed the tragic fate of a long list of virtuous and badly behaved monarchs, establishing the vogue in England for Boccaccian *de casibus* tragedy – stories of those who descend into misery and desperation after happiness and success, following the rotation of Fortune's wheel.[4] At some point in the mid-1550s Wayland asked William Baldwin, an assistant in the fugitive Edward Whitchurch's print shop, who had already built up a significant reputation as a writer at Edward VI's court, to oversee the project, planning to continue Lydgate's classical tragedies using subjects from

English history. Baldwin, a learned humanist and man of many roles, as Scott C. Lucas's chapter in this volume demonstrates, assembled a team of writers – although only the name of George Ferrers is recorded – who worked through the histories and chronicles they had to hand to produce a series of tragic poems depicting the falls of the great. Read aloud by the poets, it would be as if these historical figures appeared to the assembled writers as ghosts, warning others not to make their mistakes and so share their unpalatable fates. The innovative feature of the edition was the interconnecting prose prefaces which recorded dialogues between the writers about the content, style, and presentation of the orations they had just witnessed.

The snappily titled *Memorial of Suche Princes as Since the Tyme of King Richard the Seconde, have been Unfortunate in the Realme of England*, which was to be printed alongside Wayland's latest imprint of *The Fall of Princes*, was suppressed at the instigation of the Lord Chancellor, Bishop Stephen Gardiner, a sign of its seditious potential in light of the changes inaugurated by Mary I's Catholic regime. After Mary's death in November 1558 a new, revised version was printed in 1559 by the prolific and canny Thomas Marshe, but this did not contain the full text of the 1555 *Memorial*. In 1563 a second edition of the sanitised *Mirror* was produced, which contained more tragedies almost certainly derived from the suppressed *Memorial*, although Baldwin's supposed death from the plague in 1563 prevented him from overseeing the collection's publication any further. It is an indication of its popularity that a third revised edition appeared in 1571, followed by versions under the title *The Last Part of the Mirror for Magistrates* in 1574, 1575, and 1578. This last iteration contained two new tragedies (one mentioned in the 1559 edition's table of contents); a further edition of 1587 added yet more. Alongside the main collection, a series of spin-offs appeared: written by the poet, editor, translator, and Somerset vicar John Higgins, *The First Part of the Mirror for Magistrates* (1574) used material from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, and the chronicles of Grafton and Stow, to extend the *Mirror*'s narrative back to the foundation of Britain by the Trojan, Brutus. The soldier-poet Thomas Blenerhasset, discussed in Harriet Archer's chapter, produced *The Second Part of the Mirror for Magistrates* (1578) while he was stationed on Guernsey, containing twelve tragedies also derived from British/English history from the conquest of Caesar to the Norman Conquest, an anomalous addition to the *Mirror* canon ostensibly composed as a private exercise, and printed in Blenerhasset's absence. The 1587 edition, printed by Thomas Marshe's son Henry, and edited by Higgins,

added a series of histories of Roman figures, a significant development in the collection's historical and geographical scope which inaugurated a new phase in the reception of Roman history in England, as Paulina Kewes argues in her chapter. In 1610 Richard Niccols, the subject of the chapters by Andrew Hadfield and Michelle O'Callaghan, brought together almost all the tragedies published so far, omitting the prefaces so that the work became a poetry anthology, perhaps with encouragement from his printer, Felix Kingston, who had inherited the rights to the *Mirror* franchise.

Evidently the product of an efficient and opportunistic succession of Renaissance printers, who navigated the rough political terrain of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to extend and exploit the collection's huge commercial success, the *Mirror*'s knotty bibliography has not fared so well at the hands of modern editors. Last printed more or less in full in 1815, edited by the antiquary, Joseph Haslewood, who also produced early scholarly versions of Thomas Tusser's *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* (1810), George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1811), and William Painter's *The Palace of Pleasure* (1813), the *Mirror*'s modern reception has been dominated by Lily B. Campbell's edition of Baldwin's *Mirror* (1938), and the so-called *Parts Added to the* Mirror for Magistrates (1946). Campbell pre-empted much of the New Critical antipathy towards the *Mirror*'s verse, and her particular bias against the later additions (and complete exclusion of Niccols' additions from the canon) has persisted into the twenty-first century. Sherri Geller was one of the first scholars to draw attention to the deficiencies of Campbell and her predecessors' bibliographical approaches, including in particular the gradual downgrading of Baldwin's prose frame, both in terms of readerly appreciation and typographical appearance, over the course of repeated editorial resettings.[5] As Geller observed, the framing narrative had been transformed over the centuries from the main substance of the work to a paratext, subordinate to the inset tragedies. The recalibration of the relationship between these two aspects of the *Mirror*, its verse histories and prose links, has provided much of the critical interest for modern readers, as the historiographical and aesthetic doubts of the poets are restored as a central focus.[6] It also allows us to begin to interrogate more sensitively the evolution of the *Mirror* corpus as Higgins and Niccols co-opted, adapted, and excised Baldwin's narrative of composition. A work that has a history this involved and complex clearly absorbed the imagination of a large number of readers and writers over a significant period of time. Shakespeare, Spenser, and Sidney (who singled out the *Mirror* as 'meetly furnished of beautiful parts') are only the most obvious examples of writers who learned from and engaged with the

Mirror.[7] If we want to understand Tudor and Stuart literature we have to face up to the *Mirror*'s pervasive influence, as the chapters by Bart van Es and Philip Schywzer demonstrate.

Understanding of the period has moved on and developed since Lewis rather unkindly labelled the *Mirror* the very epitome of the Drab Age. Critics and scholars are now able to debate the significance of the *Mirror* and are taking different positions and emphasising different aspects of the work in their evaluation of its undoubted significance, hardly surprising given its complex and varied nature. Much criticism of the *Mirror* has developed out of the recognition that the work exists as an interesting qualification of the ubiquitous genre, *Speculum Principis*, a mirror for princes, which advised aspiring and actual kings and rulers how they should govern, providing them with a series of ideal cases and examples to inspire them and disastrous actions and attitudes to warn them. A part of the sixteenth-century tradition derived from the Erasmian model of the education of princes, internalised to such a degree by the end of the century that the fates of contemporary figures were recycled as moral *exempla*, James VI of Scotland was tutored in the late 1560s and early 1570s by the great French-schooled Scottish humanist, George Buchanan (1506–82), who terrified the young prince with interminable stories about the awful fates of bad kings, which haunted him into old age.[8] The title, *A Mirror for Magistrates*, signals a significant shift in emphasis, with the focus moving from the prince to the governing class, 'magistrate' being a wide-ranging term in early modern England, including all governors from lowly Justices of the Peace in shires, to powerful first ministers advising the monarch. The work, therefore, as has long been recognised, targets a substantial readership, which would not only have helped its sales, but also hints at an attempt to spread the language of politics more widely. For many readers the *Mirror*, certainly in its early editions under the guidance of William Baldwin, was a radical work, eager to tap into the contemporary inclinations of political discourse by placing heavy emphasis on the need for governors to govern fairly and wisely and stressing their responsibility to the people just as the republican Buchanan argued was the duty of a future king like Prince James. It is a moot point whether the *Mirror* is a work inspired by humanist teaching that sought to train governors to rule well; a republican – or republicanesque – work, emphasising the rights and duties of active citizens who need to govern wisely; a commonwealth work which emphasised the same virtues as integral to a unified and interconnected body politic; or an old-fashioned treatise based on the conciliarist tradition, most famously expressed by Marsilius of Padua,

placing emphasis on the interconnectedness of society and the need for councils to achieve consensus between rulers and people. The *Mirror* was manipulated in different directions by its various editors, each responding to a particular aspect of the text, such that its stance is constantly shifting.

Scholarly interest in the *Mirror* was reinvigorated in the 1980s and 1990s by the text's promise as a site of oppositional political engagement. Lawrence D. Green and Paul Budra recognised a polyphony of dissenting voices, destabilising the work's reputation as a repository for conservative moral teaching in line with recent revisionist studies of other monumental Tudor texts.[9] In addition to the hubbub of authorial voices who put forward the *Mirror* tragedies and argue over questions from the true sequence of historical events to the decorous matching of aesthetics to subject matter, including, according to various editions of the text, Baldwin and Ferrers along with key literary names of the period Thomas Chaloner, Thomas Churchyard, Thomas Phaer, Thomas Sackville, John Dolman, and other anonymous collaborators, the historical figures themselves do not agree on the political stance of the complaint collection. Neither do they offer a satisfactory consensus on historical causation, or the role of divine retributive justice.[10]

In contrast to Budra's emphasis on the text's polyvocality, Scott C. Lucas outlines a structured case made cumulatively by the *Mirror*'s tragedies which, he argues, consistently reinforces the key role of resistance theory in Elizabethan political counsel.[11] Contributors to this volume disagree about the extent to which the *Mirror*'s transgressive potential has been overplayed, and elsewhere Pincombe has called for readers to reject the seductive narrative of resistance which stems from the *Mirror*'s early suppression for, we can only suppose, political reasons.[12] What is radical about Baldwin's *Mirror*, though, is its scepticism regarding the historical claims which underpin the political *status quo*, and its acknowledgement of oral and written texts' vulnerability to misuse – examined by Vine and Richards's chapters in this volume, and elsewhere.[13] As Lucas demonstrates in his monograph on the *Mirror*'s reformist politics, Baldwin and Ferrers consult and then repeatedly deviate from historical accounts provided by historians of late medieval England who populated the Edwardian intellectual landscape, such as Edward Hall.[14] Hall's *Union of the Two Noble and Illustrate Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548) provided the *Mirror* authors with a recent chronological template for their selection of tragedies, and the treatment of a discrete dynastic conflict, while the popular abridgements of Grafton and Stow offered models for bite-sized heteroglossia, within a tense and heavily ideologically inflected historical battleground.[15]

As David Womersley notes, 'Protestant religion and Elizabethan historiography cannot be pulled apart', and the collection's ambivalence and irreverence towards temporal rulers and their chroniclers is part and parcel of Baldwin and Ferrers' serious religious faith, which shaped their rewriting of English foundational stories.[16] Far from the worthy 'doctrinal history' Lewis postulates, historical narrative and moral guidance are now commonly understood as only two of a broad selection of their concerns, in amongst legal reform, political opposition, literary experimentation, affect, and the instigation of learned debate, while providential history is only one model promulgated by the capacious and intellectually active compendium.[17]

Spanning the reigns of three live English monarchs, in addition to the deceased rulers who populate its pages, the *Mirror*'s development offers us a window onto a tumultuous period of early modern history as well as its authors' perspectives on the nation's past. Jim Ellis saw the text as perfectly placed to interrogate the early modern transition from feudal to capitalist property relations, manifested in its poetry's violent mutilation of physical bodies – a view Pincombe re-evaluates below.[18] Elsewhere, Philip Schwyzer has read the *Mirror*, and in particular the early collections of orations compiled by Baldwin and Higgins, as a product of the closing off of dialogue with the dead inflicted by the Chantries Acts – a loss of which both the radical evangelical Baldwin, and the conformist clergyman Higgins would have approved, but which nonetheless radically reconfigured contemporaries' access to their island's ghosts.[19] Schwyzer suggests that where souls in purgatory had been served by the prayers of the living until the practice was legally done away with, the *Mirror*'s speakers served their listeners by offering moral advice. As the *Mirror*'s complex evolution progressed up to the end of the sixteenth century and beyond, this dynamic was reversed once again as successive editors placed ever greater emphasis on the collection's commemorative role. It is possible to contextualise the work's expansion among the other monumental historiographic enterprises of the age, like John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1570) and Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande* (1577), texts which also reached back – during the 1570s and in multiple subsequent iterations – into the nation's prehistory. Like the *Mirror*, Foxe and Holinshed's composite histories elided a sweeping chronological approach with intensifying shades of didacticism, and exerted new, sceptical methodological pressure on text extracted from medieval source material. Like the *Mirror*, too, these volumes were quickly pushed to the brink of obsolescence by imminent changes in antiquarian and interpretative

techniques, print technologies, and cultural taste, but represented a brief but thoroughly striking Elizabethan efflorescence.[20] To dismiss the *Mirror*'s historiographical function is to sideline a huge part of its early modern appeal, and the seemingly limitless appetite of Elizabethan and Jacobean readers for epitomes and verse retellings of chronicle history on and off the stage.[21] The chapters which follow hold this facet of the compilation's purpose in tension with the diverse additional motivations which directed the *Mirror*'s development.

It is not just the *Mirror*'s historical content, of course, instantly recognisable from canonical late Elizabethan historical drama, but more significantly its modes of historiography which were so hugely influential in the second half of the sixteenth century. Where criticism has focused predominantly on the *Mirror*'s adaptation of Lydgate's vernacular *de casibus* format in this regard, as Winston, van Es, and Schwyzer demonstrate in Part III of this volume its literary impact was far more wide-ranging. The *Mirror* itself was produced in its own cultural crucible, drawing not only on Lydgate's model but also on vibrant new forays into satire, tragedy, and prose fiction, to say nothing of the anthology culture instigated by Tottel's *Miscellany* and promoted in large part by the *Mirror* itself. Instead of the 'metrical regularity' Lewis claims these works encouraged, the *Mirror* and its various recensions saw all kinds of formal experimentation ranging far beyond the rhyme royal stanza with which it has come to be so closely associated. As Archer's chapter notes, Thomas Blenerhasset's *Second Part of the Mirror* (1578) was hardly a reiteration of a tired aesthetic product with a 'medieval' flavour, but instead a bold statement of poetic innovation, which hitched Blenerhasset's mischievous interpolation to the mid-century metrical experiments of George Gascoigne, Thomas Phaer, and George Turberville. Sackville's contributions to the 1563 edition were held up into subsequent centuries as examples of surpassing literary skill, and Spenser and Shakespeare drew not just on the *Mirror*'s historical subject matter and verse chronicle structure but also its idiom and imagery, its forensic focalisation and interiority. The female complaint form may have been the *Mirror*'s most commercially successful export, as Churchyard's Jane Shore spawned rivals by Daniel, Drayton, and numerous others.[22] But the construction of Martin Marprelate, and the volatile horde of imitative prose satirists who followed in the 1580s and 1590s, can also trace their heritage back to the playful personae and irreverent humour that Pincombe identifies from the earliest editions of the *Mirror*, itself inherited, he suggests, from the classical Menippean tradition. Meredith Skura has also identified the *Mirror* as one of the most significant but unrecognised contributors to 'the prehistory of autobiography', as well

as drawing on a rich tradition of fictions in prose and verse, from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to More's *Utopia*.[23]

This volume seeks to open out debate on the *Mirror* at all stages of its history, and to read its various iterations in their contexts. The following chapters do not intend to explore each of these contexts exhaustively, but rather to showcase the ways in which the *Mirror for Magistrates* may illuminate, and be illuminated by, current scholarly debates. Part I investigates the significance of the first edition of the *Mirror*, overseen by William Baldwin and – probably – George Ferrers, and printed by Thomas Marshe in 1559. This is the edition which has received most critical attention, and against which the *Mirror*'s later expressions have been judged, but these chapters seek to approach 'Baldwin's *Mirror*' from a series of new angles. For Richards, it is the debate within the *Mirror* that we have been neglecting, failing to listen to the text and imagine it existing within a primarily oral culture where sound was a more important sense than sight. For Richards, the *Mirror* does not simply acknowledge debate but actively encourages it, providing the reader with a series of open-ended stories that mean different things to different readers. Her argument places great emphasis on the prefaces to the tales and the material that links the poems – all of which was removed in 1610, signalling an end to this dimension of the project. The poems are often based on commonplaces – pieces of easily extractable wisdom which Baldwin had collected elsewhere in his enormously popular *Treatise of Moral Philosophy*, first printed in 1547 – which are then challenged, refigured, rethought, and questioned in the debates they inspire within and beyond the boundaries of the text. Pincombe also wonders whether we have misread the *Mirror* and taken it far too seriously, missing its humour, and therefore its literary qualities, in the process of transforming it into a serious political work of counsel. Like Richards he places great emphasis on the connecting material as well as the tragedies, and wonders whether the *Mirror* should be thought of in terms of the history of satire rather than just the advice-to-princes tradition. When both chapters are read alongside Scott C. Lucas's reminder of the range and variety of William Baldwin's achievement as the most significant writer at the court of Edward VI, it becomes clear that our understanding of the *Mirror*'s position within a so-called Drab Age of English literary achievement needs to be revised.

Angus Vine makes a similar claim but pursues a different route, asking readers to think more about the significance of the bibliographical nature of the early editions of the *Mirror*. For Vine, the *Mirror*'s bookishness signals a dialogic character, a tension between 'a confidence in the historical

authority of the written and printed word' and an anxiety that 'histories are themselves subject to the same quirks, unreliability, and doubtfulness as oral testimony' (p.102). While Richards hears a noisy work full of uncontrollable sound, Vine reads a confusing text that can never convince the reader of its own authority.

Paul Budra is also eager to reorient the ways in which we read the *Mirror*. His chapter argues that we have not paid enough attention to the affect of the work, the ways in which it emotionally engages readers who witness the terrible downfall of so many unfortunate figures. Budra, too, is sceptical of arguments that the work had a coherent agenda given the number of writers involved in its production. He argues that, rather than imagining that their readers should understand a particular political message, the authors of the tragedies wanted them to feel the cruel and unstable nature of life on earth and concentrate on the afterlife.

The next section of chapters explores the Elizabethan and Jacobean adaptations of the work, finding much more to admire in these versions than many earlier critics have discovered. Cathy Shrank, in a dense and historically informed reading of George Ferrers' 'Elianor Cobham's lament', finally added to Baldwin's set of medieval tragedies as late as 1578, wonders whether readings that have seen the work as unified have missed its challenging variety and diversity. In a chapter which complements Vine's in Part I, she argues that the poem brings together different versions of the truth and deliberately does not provide an overall judgement, a symptom of Ferrers' 'fascination with conflicting or disputed versions of history' (p.123). Harriet Archer's chapter, in an argument which parallels Pincombe's new reading of Baldwin, argues that the much maligned Thomas Blenerhasset was a far more interesting – and less serious – poet than his detractors have claimed. Archer suggests that we have overlooked the subtlety and playfulness of Blenerhasset's writing and not been alive to his particular use of the trope of *paralipsis* – claiming to want to skate over an unimportant issue and so drawing attention to it – a potent use of irony, most famously exploited by Mark Antony in his oration over the body of Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's play. Like Baldwin, Blenerhasset was keen to exploit the ironic possibilities of the form's metatextual framing narrative, and unwilling to tie up the loose ends of historiographical uncertainty, instead requiring the reader to understand his writing and so draw his or her own conclusions. Paulina Kewes offers a similarly revisionist reading of John Higgins' *Mirour* of 1587, and his earlier *First Parte* (1574/5). Kewes argues that Higgins is another undervalued author and editor, drawing on the political resonances of the Galfridian legend and Roman history to adapt