Richard Niccols's *A Mirour for Magistrates* (1610) and

the Politicization of the English *speculum principis* Literary Tradition.

by

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Abstract

The progenitive text of the English *speculum principis*, or mirror for princes,
literary tradition, John Lydgate's (1370-1451) *The Fall of Princes* (1438) was reprinted and
reinterpreted for new political purposes by Protestant printers and authors alike throughout
the sixteenth century. As the print history and reception of the numerous early modern
adaptations of Lydgate's *The Fall* reveal, the development of the English mirror tradition
was closely related to the evolution of nationalistic English literature from the 1550s to the
early seventeenth century. Following William Baldwin's influential *A Mirror for
Magistrates* (1559), the adaptations of Lydgate's *The Fall* provided a suitable platform
from which authors could communicate their displeasure, especially with the political
directions of Mary I's and later James I's regimes. The last early modern adaptation of
Lydgate's *The Fall* by the poet and editor Richard Niccols (1584-1616), *A Mirour for
Magistrates: Being a True Chronicle Historie of the Untimely falls of such unfortunate
Princes and men of* note…*Newly Enlarged with A Last part, called A Winter's Nights
Vision* (1610), exemplifies how authors tried to shape the responses of the reading public to
contemporary political and religious disputes through topically applicable historical
exempla. The 1610 edition of *A Mirour* with the addition of Niccols's own composition
entitled *A Winter's Night Vision* represents the mirror tradition as what it had come to
signify by the early seventeenth century: an archetypically Elizabethan monument of
imagined national history. Niccols's choice to concentrate solely on England's past reveals
his disdain for and criticism of the policies of the Scottish James I (1566-1625) and the
latter's concerted efforts to create the culturally unified kingdom of "Great Britain" under

his rule. Moreover, Niccols's insertion of the tragedies of King Arthur, Richard III, Edward II, and King John, and his lengthy laudatory poem of Elizabeth I were intended to offer covert, but pointed, princely instruction to James I. Reinforcing Niccols's oppositional political stand and promoting a certain type of English patriotism during a period of growing political and religious unrest, *A Mirour for Magistrates* can be aligned with the emerging anti-Jacobean literature of the early seventeenth century.

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Introduction

John Lydgate's (1370-1451) *The Fall of Princes* (1438) is the progenitive text of the English *de casibus* literary tradition, which details the tragic fall and calamities of powerful political figures and rulers. *The Fall* is comprised of a series of poems, each of which provides a first-person narrative intended for the reader's imitation or avoidance and described as a "tragedy" that relies on the medieval poetic style of "complaints" or lamentations with the intention of offering moral lessons. Lydgate's "tragedies" are politicized late medieval English reworkings of Giovanni Boccaccio's (1313-1375) *De casibus virorum illustrium* (1373) via the mediation of the French humanist Laurent de Premierfait's (1380-1418) *Du cas des nobles hommes et femmes* (1400), both of which include the tragic fates of individuals from the classical and medieval periods. Lydgate expanded Boccaccio's text with a series of *exempla* and extensive textual commentary, in which he glosses Boccaccio's text and offers additional moral anecdotes. Lydgate presents the tales in *The Fall* as being narrated by the "ghostly" figure of Boccaccio (or "Bochas"), and his text is both dependent on and deferential to other classical and medieval authors and texts, among them Ovid, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Chaucer (Barlow 275-276). Lydgate's approach to his source text, as Anthony Bale has pointed out, is typical of the medieval period, when the author was considered a craftsman, compiler, and translator of earlier authoritative works rather than "a visionary or virtuoso" (918). The mediation of the tales through the authority of Boccaccio allowed Lydgate to enter a complex fellowship of authors who shared equally in the literary inception of *The Fall*. Moreover, Lydgate's translation is a prime example of the *speculum principis*, or mirror for princes, genre and

was intended for the instruction of the young Henry VI, who would later be involved in the first series of English civil wars known as the Wars of the Roses. As a court poet of both Henry V (1386-1422) and Henry VI (1421-1471), Lydgate was closely associated with the politics of the Lancastrian court, where he was a producer and disseminator of pro-Lancastrian political ideology. Daniel Wakelin asserts that Lydgate's *The Fall* had great value as a "princely image," and the moral lessons presented in the work would have been deemed essential for the education of future rulers (26).

Lydgate's work enjoyed considerable popularity in late medieval and early modern England. Although *The Fall* made bold and deeply political claims concerning the Lancastrian dynasty, it was held up as a representative work of medieval moralism in pre-Reformation England and was reprinted by Richard Pynson in 1494. Despite the fact that, following the English Reformation, Lydgate was himself associated with the objectionable past of medieval monasticism (which was under increasing scrutiny during the reform movements of the 1530s), the popularity of *The Fall* persisted even after the political and ecclesiastical conversion of England into a Protestant nation in the late 1550s. The work was reprinted, reinterpreted, and adapted to new political purposes by Protestant printers and authors alike, who viewed *The Fall* as a suitable platform from which to communicate their displeasure with the political directions of Mary I's and later James I's regimes. Additionally, authors and printers were able to shape the responses of the reading public to contemporary political and religious disputes through topically applicable historical *exempla*, notwithstanding their claims of speaking only of England's past (Lucas, *A Mirror* 2).

Furthermore, as the print history and reception of the numerous versions of Lydgate's *The Fall* reveal, the development of the English *de casibus* tradition was closely related to the evolution of nationalistic English literature from the 1550s to the early seventeenth century. During this period, history was often taught in the *de casibus* style of instruction, as it was believed that "the chief criterion for historical truth was moral utility" (Levy 13-14). Consequently, as guidebooks, print adaptations of Lydgate's *The Fall* fostered popular discourse about English history and governance with a particular focus on the leadership of the state. Moreover, the enduring popularity of the *de casibus* style of didacticism played a significant role in the development of the English literary canon, and considerably influenced the historical, poetic, and dramatic literature of the Tudor and Stuart periods. As Paul Budra argues, not only did they exert considerable influence on Elizabeth and Jacobean tragedy but they also fundamentally shaped other authoritative English texts of the Elizabethan period, most notably Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Ireland, and Scotland* (1577) and John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563) (*A Mirror* xiii).

The earliest adaptation of Lydgate's tragedies, originally entitled *A Memorial of Suche Princes as Since the tyme of King Richard the Seconde, have been Unfortunate in the Realme of England* (1554-1559), was produced in the print shop of the fugitive Protestant printer Edward Whitchurch (d. 1561) by a relatively unknown printer named John Wayland (1508-1571). However, the publishing and print circulation of the first edition of *A Memorial*, authored by the Protestant humanist, translator, editor, and poet William Baldwin (1515-1563), was hindered on account of what Mary I's (1516-1558) Lord Chancellor Stephen Gardiner (1483-1555) deemed "Protestant sedition." It was eventually

published by Thomas Marsh under a new title, *A Mirror for Magistrates*, in 1559,

following Elizabeth I's accession to the throne. This latter version of the text was revised

and reprinted in 1571, and then again in 1574, 1575, 1578, and 1587 (Hadfield, *A Mirror*

3).

The success of Baldwin's *A Mirror* led to additional mirror texts: in 1574, after

years of reprinting Baldwin's original version, Thomas Marsh brought out a new mirror,

The First Part of the Mirror for Magistrates, composed by the editor, translator, poet, and

Somerset vicar John Higgins (1544-1620). Following Higgins's version of England's early

history, the poet Thomas Blenerhasset (1550-1624) provided a sequel to the *First Parte*

entitled *Seconde Part of the Mirrour for Magistrates* (1578), printed by Richard Webster.

Blenerhasset's version was superseded by the poet, printer, pamphleteer, and dramatist

Anthony Munday's (1560-1633) *The mirrour of mutabilitie; or principal part of the mirror*

for magistrates (1579), printed by John Allde. Finally, the last early modern adaptation of

Lydgate's *The Fall* was written by the author and poet Richard Niccols (1584-1616), who

attempted to summarize the entire Elizabethan mirror tradition in his edition, entitled *A*

Mirour for Magistrates: Being a True Chronicle Historie of the Untimely falls of such

unfortunate Princes and men of note…*Newly Enlarged with A Last part, called A Winter's*

Nights Vision…, and printed by Felix Kyngston in 1609-1610.

In his edition, Niccols created an independent text that metatextually acknowledges

the literary heritage of the mirror tradition from its Marian inception in Baldwin's *A Mirror*

to its literary origins with Lydgate and Boccaccio. Niccols's work relies heavily on

Baldwin's late medieval complaints and most of Higgins's and Blenerhasset's British,

Roman, and Anglo-Saxon material. His framing narrative draws on Higgins's and

Blenerhasset's interpolations into Baldwin's *Mirror*, conflating Higgins's dream narrative with Blenerhasset's personification of Memory, to create a coherent synthesis of the existing mirror tradition, thus bringing together negative and positive *exempla*, unfortunate and deserving falls, conquest and civil discord, providence and mutability. Exploiting the malleability of the tradition and reconfiguring the early modern corpus in support of his own politically charged project, Niccols remade Baldwin's *A Mirror*, expanding it with *A Winter's Night Vision*.

It is unclear why Niccols decided to produce a new edition of the *Mirror*. Nevertheless, by the early seventeenth century, he had established himself as a skilful poet working within a tradition of oppositional poetry that looked back to the reign of Elizabeth for inspiration. Some of Niccols's other political poetical works include an elegy written for Elizabeth after her death entitled *Expicedium: a Funeral Oration* (1603) that may have had official royal patronage (Sharpe 465). Another one of Niccols's more significant poetic works was *London's Artillery* (1616), a poem celebrating the artillery barracks in London that reveal Niccols's militant Protestant ideologies and approval of war as a means of maintaining England's hierarchy and established order (Hadfield, "Richard Niccols and Tudor Nostalgia"167). Niccols's emphasis on the importance of military preparedness and the promotion of war as a means to ensure peacetime and prosperity seem to gesture at a nostalgic longing for the staunch military values and armed peace of the Tudor period. Tudor nostalgia was a significant component of early Jacobean literary culture, which was often critical of the corruption of the Jacobean court, and praised the religious, social, and military values associated with the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, and particularly Elizabeth I, and promoted the heroic Protestant struggle against Catholic Europe. In many

ways, Niccols was a deeply nostalgic writer; it is this nostalgia for a bygone era that attracted him to the mirror tradition and led to his casting of the reign of Elizabeth I as a golden age of exemplary political, religious, and intellectual values.

The changes Niccols introduced to Baldwin's text have made it difficult for scholars to place his Jacobean edition into the established English mirror tradition. Scholars tend to regard the early modern mirror tradition as merely a vessel in which the medieval *de casibus* literature was transferred to Elizabethan poetry and drama. In his monograph *A Mirror for Magistrates and the de casibus Tradition* (2000) and his study "A Mirror for Magistrates and the Politics of Readership" (1992), Budra has situated Baldwin's *A Mirror* within the medieval tradition rather than within early modern political and historical discourse. Similarly, Mike Pincombe notes in his article, "William Baldwin and *A Mirror for Magistrates*" (2013), that Baldwin's narrative and the mirror genre, in general, is "late-mediaeval rather than early modern" and a literary product of "bastard feudalism rather than as harbinger of the modern public sphere" (198). This reading of the mirror tradition understands it as overly didactic—much like Lydgate's *The Fall*—rather than as something new, evolving, deeply political, and potentially radical. Yet, as Harriet Archer reminds us, Niccols's *Mirour* in particular engages with Elizabethan tropes from the perspective of a new regime and a new literary age (*Unperfect Histories* 146). Nevertheless, Niccols was faulted for "arbitrarily tampering" with Baldwin's work and giving "a misleading account of the nature and origin of the poem" (Campbell, *Parts Added* 10). To challenge this view, Archer has pointed out that "authors inevitably face problems when they attempt to recast a hugely popular work for a new era. For Niccols, these problems were largely caused by the *Mirror*'s own success" (*Unperfect Histories* 141). Archer has furthermore asserted that

tragedies and themes in Niccols's *A Mirour* reveal the "embeddedness of the collection within late sixteenth-century literature" (141).

While the kinds of changes that Niccols made to previous mirror texts alongside his addition of *A Winter's Night Vision* have been perceived as disruptive to the political potency of the tradition, it is possible to read Niccols's *A Mirour* not as a corruption but as the final expression of a literary tradition characterized by a series of revisions and adaptations in response to changed circumstances. Niccols's Jacobean additions drew heavily on the poetry, forms, and ideas that had themselves been inspired by the earlier mirror tradition (Archer, *Unperfect Histories* 141). In his chapter entitled "Richard Niccols and Tudor Nostalgia" (2016), Andrew Hadfield argues that Niccols looked "backwards into history and Tudor literature in order to move forward", "and his aim was to update and recast the *Mirror* for his generation of readers" (176). Niccols's *Mirror*, very much like Baldwin's project, "provided a useful and compendious guide predominantly to English history, pointing out lessons for anyone planning to take up public office, however humble" (Hadfield, "Richard Niccols…" 176). Furthermore, Michelle O'Callaghan has suggested that Niccols's additions to the mirror tradition encouraged a "critical public" and urged their involvement in contemporary politics and thereby widened the audience of the *speculum principis* tradition beyond merely princes and rulers (*"A Mirror"* 182).

As Archer has noted, Niccols did more than any other author to relate his work to Elizabethan history by narrowing the focus of his text to the greatness of England and the history of English kings and queens (*Unperfect Histories* 146). An analysis of Niccols's *A Winter's Night Vision* and other popular oppositional literature of the period can be particularly revealing, as Philip Schwyzer suggests, about the development of "a version of

Britishness that served English interests" (*Literature, Nationalism, and Memory* 6)

Jacobean oppositional literature, such as *A Winter's Night Vision*, reveals the manifold

factors influencing the formation of an English sense of national consciousness and the

employment of nationalistic Elizabethan Protestant values in early modern literature, traced

by such scholars as Archer (2016, 2017) David J. Baker (1997), Donald Beecher (2009),

Budra (1992, 2000), Alison Chapman (2001), Hadfield (1994, 2004, 2010, 2016), Ralf

Hertel (2014), John Kerrigan (2010), and Domenico Lovascio (2017). In his monograph

Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales (2004),

Schwyzer furthermore examines how the poetic figures featured in Niccols's work are

presented as an act of "patriotic commemoration" with an emphasis on the importance of

literary memory in the building of the English nation through national myths (111).

      Niccols's poetic subject and interests certainly fit within an early seventeenth-

century trend of what Louis Montrose has called the "Elizabethan political imaginary"

(907). Montrose has described this popular literary tradition as a "collective repertoire of

representational forms and figures—mythological, rhetorical, narrative, iconic—in which

the beliefs and practices of Tudor political culture were pervasively articulated" (907).

With widely varying degrees of conscious, deliberate, and suggestive wording and themes,

countless Elizabethan writers, editors, and printers worked and reworked politicized forms

and figures to formulate their experience, understanding, or judgment of those in power in

their contemporary society. This marshalling of formal elements in new literary

configurations within a broad spectrum of discourses and interpretive contexts meant that

the political imaginary of England was unstable. The imaginative political discourse of

early modern England was constantly growing and changing, and the inherent instability of

this imagined concept worked against attempts by the crown to restrict, regulate, and enforce uniformity in this developing literary political culture.

Following Archer's, Budra's, and Hadfield's lead, I will argue that Niccols's 1610 edition of *A Mirour* with his *A Winter's Night Vision* represent the mirror tradition as what it had later come to signify, an archetypically Elizabethan monument of imagined national history. Through an analysis of Niccols's editorial practices, I will demonstrate how he uses the tragedies of the earlier mirror tradition to present a conception of history according to which England's difficult and tragic past was a necessary passage that led to the golden era of Elizabeth I. I will explore how Niccols's representation of history is not intended to be a chronicle but rather a series of educational *exempla* dictated by historical memory and intended for the edification of James I. Indeed, Niccols's choice to concentrate purely on England reveals his disdain for and criticism of the policies of the Scottish James I (1566-1625) and the latter's concerted efforts to create the culturally unified kingdom of "Great Britain" under his rule. I will, furthermore, argue that Niccols's insertion of the tragedies of King Arthur, Richard III, Edward II, and King John reflect his interest in reviving *exempla* associated with Tudor propaganda to articulate his criticism of James I, including a repudiation of James's predilections for pacifism, his weakness as a ruler, and court favouritism. The inclusion of these selected tragedies alongside his appending "England's Eliza," a lengthy laudatory poem extolling Elizabeth I, align Niccols's work with anti-Jacobean literary tendencies and reinforce the author's oppositional political stand. The addition of the panegyric of "England's Eliza" in particular reveals Niccols's attempt to give the tragic history of England, as perceived by him, a happy resolution by relegating any political uncertainty during the reign of James I to the pre-Tudor period, prior to the

successful reign of Elizabeth. Niccols's contribution to the mirror tradition thus reflects his

own efforts to represent a patriotic triumph during a period of growing political and

religious unrest in the early seventeenth century.

Chapter I: Niccols's Editorial Practices

The editorial practices Niccols chose to implement in his edition of *A Mirour* reflect his interest in the oppositional political literary culture of the early seventeenth century, and his belief that the political, moral, and intellectual imperfection of his time could be remedied by the lessons of the past. Niccols responded to previous mirror editors' historiographical anxieties and scepticism by removing their commentary that comprised plot summary and indicated the source texts for each editor's tragedies, thus effectively eliminating any personal bias or uncertainty about transmission from the textual record. However, Niccols was keenly aware of the power, influence, and instability of the mirror tradition, which he reshaped to increase the political potency of his own text. Niccols purposely supressed the reservations of earlier editors concerning the accuracy of textual and historical transmission and emphasized his text's strength as a guidebook for rulers, relying on the versatility of the mirror tradition to redefine and repoliticize his Jacobean mirror as a *speculum principis* for contemporary politicians and rulers in order to support his anti-Jacobean agenda.

Niccols opens *A Mirour* with a general dedicatory verse epistle "to all the nobilitie and all other in office" (A3). The addition of this prefatory poem establishes Niccols's intentions for his text to be a *speculum principis* for contemporary rulers and political leaders, which, he hopes, will "grant increase of wisdom" (A3). In his letter "To the Reader," Niccols explains that his reasons for writing his additions to the mirror tradition were to correct the mistakes of previous writers and to revive a "worthie" work that offers advice on how to "shun vice and follow virtue":

I chanced in reading that worthie work, intituled, *The Mirour for Magistrates*, to

conjecture, if I should undertake that imperfect historie ... that I could not better

benefit others, by offering them a taste of the unsavourie fruits of my labours, then

by giving them paternes to shun vice and follow vertue (553).

Archer has noted that Niccols's act of modesty "lets slip the young poet's determination to

foist his verse onto an unworthy public, and the *Mirror*'s role as a convenient vehicle for

that imposition" (*Unperfect Histories* 150). Like his predecessors, Niccols foregrounds the

amateur nature of his project: he spent "some truant hours" studying poetry (553). Niccols

describes the mirror tradition as an unfinished undertaking that he would "have continued

through the whole worke, if time and mine owne affaires would have suffered me to

proceed" (553). Niccols's claims of inadequacy and emphasis on his many hours of study

that yield nothing more than his own meagre additions he refers to as "unsavory fruits"

demonstrates his employment of the conventional humility *topoi*. However, his gestures of

humility seem to hint at a subtle brag on Niccols's part as his achievements as an editor and

a writer in his expanded mirror text seem to infer that he is more successful than his

predecessors with his summary of the mirror tradition and contemporary additions that

serve the potent political purpose of criticizing the reign of James I.

  In "To the Reader," Niccols introduces himself as the editor and highlights his

editorial method, assuring his readers that the rhyme and meter of his predecessors' verses

have been amended, as well as "the storie in some places false and corrupted, made

historically true; the tragedies wrongly inserted, disposed in their proper places" (A4*v*).

Niccols stresses the accuracy of his tragedies but regrets that he was not able to hold the

entire text to the same standard as his own, "for the forme and frame of the whole historie I

did intend to haue reduced into the same order, which I haue obserued in my Additions; but

preuented by other occasions, I haue thus digested it" (A4*v*). Indeed, Niccols seems to

present *A Mirour* as the most accurate, uniform, and authoritative text in the mirror

tradition. He leaves little room for criticism, except to request, if necessary, a "gentle

censure" of his "imperfections" (A4*v*).

As a late editor to the mirror tradition, Niccols wanted to present a text that

encompassed the entire history of England, from its ancient foundation with Brutus to the

contemporary period. Apart from Baldwin's *A Mirror for Magistrates*, Niccols integrated

two other mirrors, Higgins's *The First Part of the Mirror for Magistrates* (1574) and

Blenerhasset's *Seconde Part of the Mirrour for Magistrates* (1578), in his version.

Appended to the 1554 reprint of Lydgate's *The Fall*, Baldwin's edition of tragedies was

primarily concerned with addressing the period of the Wars of the Roses (1455-1487),

beginning with the tragedy of Robert Tresilian (d. 1388) and ending with that of Edward IV

(1442-1483). When Baldwin's *A Mirror* was eventually printed in 1559, its publication

coincided with the beginning of a decade that would see the production and dissemination

of more historical texts than any other period of Elizabeth I's reign. Scholars have pointed

out that Baldwin and his literary contemporaries intended *A Mirror* to be a work with a

radical political agenda rooted in resistance against state repression during Mary I's

Catholic reign (Budra, *A Mirror* 25). However, Baldwin arranged the poems of his edition

into a prose narrative to divert attention from the political rhetoric of the text and the

possible interpretation of his work as a product of radical Protestant ideology. Baldwin's

depoliticization of the text was, therefore, itself a political act. In 1563, a second edition of

Baldwin's *A Mirror* was printed, again by Marsh, but it had been considerably expanded

compared to the 1559 edition and contained additional tales that had been borrowed from the 1554 suppressed edition. These include the tragedies of Edmund, Duke of Somerset (1406-1455), Humphrey Plantagenet (1390-1447), and perhaps most significantly, the tragedy of Edward Seymour (1506-1552), the Lord Protectorate of Edward VI. Seymour is depicted as a martyr-like figure who is punished for his virtue, while the virtues of the recently deceased Edward VI are enthusiastically praised by Baldwin. The promotion of Seymour as a "Protestant zealot" and the exaltation of Edward VI demonstrate Baldwin's advocacy for a radical Protestant policy for contemporary England, making it unsurprising that the tragedy would have been suppressed during Mary's Catholic reign (Budra, "*A Mirror*" 4). The 1563 expansion allowed Baldwin to focus on a more contemporary period starting from the unrest and civil war in the Wars of the Roses and moving towards the brink of the Reformation, discussing political failings, treason, rebellion, poor counsel, and tyranny (Budra, "*A Mirror*" 4). Baldwin believed that England's history could not be separated from contemporary politics and the *exempla* he presented could serve as a "mirror" to guide monarch, rulers, and politicians of his time.

Niccols, furthermore, included Higgins's *The First Part of the Mirror for Magistrates*, which extended the timeframe of the Baldwin's mirror by adding the legendary founding of Britain by the Trojan Brutus. By incorporating the myth of Brutus, Niccols had turned to a historical myth that was instrumental to the legitimization of the Tudor "empire" and also provided a convenient timeframe for ending *A Mirour* with the celebratory panegyric of the final Tudor monarch. Higgins's sources for his mirror also include Geoffrey of Monmouth's (1095-1155) *History of the Kings of Britain*, the antiquarian John Stowe's (1524-1605) *The Chronicles of England, from Brute unto this*

present yeare of Christ (1580), and the King's Printer Richard Grafton's (1506-1573)

Abridgment of the Chronicles of England (1563). Higgins expanded the scope of Baldwin's

A Mirror in order to emphasize England's antiquity and its ties to the ancient city of Troy.

Aside from supplying several new and revised British and medieval complaints, Higgins

also introduced twelve new ancient Roman characters into his collection. Indeed, Higgins

can be regarded as a literary trailblazer, as his mirror was one of the first Elizabethan

works, aside from Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton's Senecan tragedy *Gorboduc*

(1562), to revive the theme of ancient Britain. Higgins's text is also the first poetic

treatment of Roman history in Elizabeth's reign. His interest in corrupt Roman generals and

emperors, such as Julius Caesar, Claudius, and Caligula, in fact, contradicts the commonly

held view that Elizabethan writers were fixated on the end of the Roman republic instead of

the imperial period (Kewes 126). Higgins's importation of unsavory Romans and their

misfortunes reflects contemporary English anxieties about treason and foreign invasion

during the 1570s, as demonstrated by his retelling of the tragedy of seditious Britons in

Caesar's victorious invasion. Furthermore, in the vein of Protestant literature, Higgins's

depictions of several violent regime changes and his emphasis on the Christian subtext of

the tales suggest a warning to princes that pride and tyranny ultimately end in divine

retribution for their crimes (Kewes 127).

      To expend Higgins's focus on English history, Niccols also derived material from

Blenerhasset's *Seconde Part of the Mirrour for Magistrates* in order to provide histories

treating the themes of loss and isolation and highlighting how various difficult periods

throughout English history ended in a resolution and triumph during the reign of the

Tudors, in particular, Elizabeth. Blenerhasset's histories, covering the period from the

slaying of King Guidericus, to the rebellion against the Romans, to King Harold I, acts as a

chronological prequel to Baldwin's 1563 *Mirror* and a sequel to Higgins's *First Parte.*

Despite the historical distance of the narratives, Blenerhasset's edition can be understood as

politically neutral for the contemporary period, but still contains important didactic

exempla. In his prefatory letter entitled "The Printer to the Friendly Reader," Webster notes

that Blenerhasset's texts fill a gap in the mirror corpus as there is "a booke alredy in print,

Entituled The first and third part of the Mirour for Magistrates" (2*r*). Blenerhasset's mirror

is comprised of a fictive prose frame summarizing each of the twelve complaints. Archer

describes the figures of each complaint as "loosely" historical and previously excluded

from the English canon and doomed "to remain couered and hidden with those mistie

cloudes of fylthy forgetfulness" (1*r*) without Blenerhasset's help (Archer, "*Those*

chronicles" 147). Blenerhasset begins where Higgins's *First Parte* left off, with the

legendary British king Guidericus, the son of Kymbelinus (according to Geoffrey of

Monmouth), and closes with an account of the failed diplomatic negotiation between King

Harold and William I, culminating in the Norman Conquest. The series of laments

presented throughout his text includes autobiographical narratives spoken by figures such

as Uther Pendragon, the legendary king of Roman Britain and father of King Arthur, the

Anglo-Saxon King Alfred, and Helena, the mother of the Roman emperor Constantine the

Great. Depicted as a queen who would do everything in the best interests of her nation and

people, Helena functions as an allegory of Elizabeth I (Archer, "*Those chronicles"* 148).

Blenerhasset's complaints tend to follow the *de casibus* trajectory of their predecessors but

are framed by a dialogue between the personifications of Memory and Inquisition, a new

invention added to the mirror corpus (Archer, "*Those chronicles*" 149).

Archer argues that Blenerhasset's mirror relies heavily on the device of *paralipsis*, a rhetorical method that draws attention to something by seemingly ignoring it ("*Those chronicles*" 149). Blenerhasset's use of *paralipsis* emphasizes his originality and independence as a poet, while at the same time foregrounds his aspirations for his text (149). For example, throughout his *Seconde Part*, Blenerhasset refers to important contemporary Elizabethan poets Thomas Sackville, George Gascoigne, and Thomas Churchyard, effectively placing his work amongst popular and contemporary Protestant intellectual culture and reformist thought. Blenerhasset's use of the mirror tradition as a means of engagement with some of the most important poets of the Elizabethan period, well known for their Protestant beliefs, and his participation in the deification of Elizabeth demonstrate how literary networks could utilize the malleability of the mirror tradition to express concerns about royal succession, evil counsel, and civil war. Furthermore, by denying the influence of contemporary poetic and historical sources, both paratextually and through his "silent deviation from their narratives" and claiming that he must rely instead on his "Diligence and Memory" or the figures of "Memory and Invention," Blenerhasset expects his readers to "face up to the contingency of England's popular imagined historical truth" (Archer, "*Those chronicles*" 151). Blenerhasset's *The Seconde Part* thus engages with the ever-present historiographical anxiety of his time: the unreliability of the medieval chronicle tradition or absence of historical records (Archer, "*Those chronicles*" 151). It is an issue that Baldwin's and Higgins's mirrors also explicitly grapple with and Niccols's work intends to rectify.

Though Niccols states in his "Letter to the Reader" that he has reordered the tales of Baldwin, Higgins, and Blenerhasset chronologically, he actually breaks chronological

order. This break is obvious when readers encounter Blenerhasset's tragedies that cover the period to the Norman Conquest. Despite Niccols's drawing attention to the Norman Conquest as a dividing line between Blenerhasset's and Baldwin's tragedies, as Elizabeth Human has pointed out, there are no additional tragedies placed in Niccols's edition between King Harold and the beginning of Baldwin's tragedy of Robert Tresilian, leaving a more than three-hundred-year gap between the two tragedies. These alterations undermine Niccols's attempt to correct the chronological order of previous mirror authors (Human 781). Furthermore, although Niccols argues that he had left the previously written material as it was, he neglects to mention his removal of Baldwin's tragedy of Richard III and the subsequent replacement of his own version of the tragedy later in the text (Human 781).

The most notable aspect of Niccols's mirror edition is his removal of the explanatory prose links between the tragedies, effectively effacing all textual evidence of previous mirror editors' interpretive glosses. Nonetheless, despite his removal of the conventional framing commentary, he goes to great lengths to identify the works of each author. This purposeful authentication invokes a sense of collaborative authorship: "lest anyone thinke me enuious of others deserts, I haue subscribed the names of all such as I could heare of, vnder such Tragedies as each one particularly hath written" (253-4). For example, Niccols utilized Blenerhasset's tragedies and affixed the latter's signature to most of his tragedies, an editorial choice that inevitably downgraded Blenerhasset's role in the mirror tradition from author to contributor. Scholars have suggested that Niccols's choice to remove the prose links between tragedies have led to an unintentional devaluing of the politicized message of the mirror tradition (Budra, Hadfield, Human). Human has, furthermore, argued that as a result Niccols's texts read more like a chronicle than a *de*

casibus guidebook (781). Archer likewise proposes that Niccols's decision to remove the commentary suggests that he is as "alert as his predecessors to the potent agency of a volatile textual past" (139). However, Niccols's erasure of earlier mirror authors' glosses and commentary between tragedies allows for a freer interpretation of the text and facilitates its adaptability to contemporary political and religious issues, thus enhancing and strengthening the text's ties to the *speculum principis* tradition.

Judging from the paratexts of Niccols's *A Mirour*, it seems likely that Niccols was attempting to set himself apart from the Elizabethan mirror tradition. He reproduces Higgins's, Blenerhasset's, and Baldwin's texts ultimately to emphasize the superiority of his own production. Each successive editor presented Baldwin's *Mirror* as imperfect and one that needs to be updated and expanded. Yet, Niccols's expressions of modesty are more emphatic than Blenerhasset's, who was supposedly uninformed about the printing of his additions (Archer, "*Those chronicles*" 148). Niccols's emphasis on his own inadequacy as a poet seems disingenuous, given that he adds an entirely new mirror of his own selection. It thus suggests that his editorial decision to leave Higgins's, Blenerhasset's, and Baldwin's editions "uncorrected" stemmed from a desire to have the previous texts as witnesses of the flawed past that he was perfecting with his additions.

To rectify the tradition, Niccols also appended his own composition *A Winter Night's Vision* to Baldwin's, Higgins's, and Blenerhasset's texts. Niccols's additions include eleven "new" tragedies: King Arthur, Edmund Ironside, Prince Alfred, Godwin, Earlie of Kent, Robert Curthose, Richard Coeur de Lion, King John, King Edward II, The Princes in the Tower (sons of Edward IV), a revised version of the tragedy of Richard III, and the patriotic panegyric, "England's Eliza." He dedicated his edition to Lord Charles

Howard, the Earl of Nottingham (1536-1624), with whom he had sailed to Spain as part of

the fleet of Robert Devereaux, second Earl of Essex, (1565-1601) during the English raid

on Cadiz in 1597 (Hadfield, *ODNB*). Howard served in numerous important positions

under Elizabeth I, including Lord High Admiral and commander of the English navy during

the Spanish Armada and the Cadiz expedition. In contrast, under James I, Howard played

the role of peacemaker with Spain to end the Anglo-Spanish war in 1604. Additionally,

Howard was tasked with the project of the possible unification of England and Scotland.

However, Niccols chooses not to engage with any of Howard's achievements under James,

and instead focuses explicitly on his dedicatee's successes under Elizabeth. Niccols opens

his dedication to Howard with an introductory verse that Budra describes as a "banal and

sycophantic plea for patronage" (32). Niccols compliments Howard on his military

achievements in Cadiz, which Niccols personally witnessed and took part in:

> Most humblie craues your lordly Lions aid
>
> Gainst monster Enuie, while she tels her storie
>
> Of Britaine Princes, and that royall Maid,
>
> In whose chaste hymne her *Clio* sings your glorie. (551)

Budra asserts that instead of displaying "a critical mirror to a flawed magistrate, Niccols

begs his favour" (33), as he promises Howard, "my Muse shall frame, Mirrours more

worthie your renowned name" (551). Budra maintains that Howard was not a magistrate to

be swayed by the weight of "*exempla*"; rather, he was a nobleman who desired to be

entertained with "a collection of reassuringly familiar biographies that culminated in a

vision of the reign of Elizabeth" (33). Although Budra has argued that Niccols's dedication

depoliticizes the text (*A Mirror* 33); in effect, it increases the oppositional tone of *A Winter*

Night's Vision. Niccols's choice to dedicate the text to one of Elizabethan England's most important and successful statesmen infers that the reign of Elizabeth was the culmination of the progress of the English nation.

In Human's view, Niccols is not simply correcting rhyme and meter and supplying necessary filler as he claims in his "To the Reader" but "his republication begins to rewrite the *Mirror* in his own image" (782). His presentation of Baldwin's, Higgins's, and Blenerhasset's tragedies encapsulate the Elizabethan mirror tradition's interests by bringing together politically sensitive *exempla* that depict unfortunate and sometimes deserving falls. Yet, through his addition of *A Winter's Night Vision*, Niccols supplies what he considers missing from England's imagined past. The additional tragedies and panegyric on Elizabeth I serve a nostalgic purpose; with the revival of "the vertuous and the vicious princes," Niccols means to reinstate lost moral, political, and aesthetic values for the benefit of his contemporaries. Niccols, in fact, calls attention to the severe lack of "learned wits" and "worthy men" under the reign of James I, suggesting that the cultural poverty of the Stuart period can be improved by the influence of poets, authors, and playwrights who revive the ideals of the Elizabethan period. With his *A Mirour*, Niccols expresses his belief that the death of Elizabeth and succession of James had led to a gradual cultural, political, and ideological decline, while maintaining that his tragedies offer a remedy to the waning Stuart era.

Chapter II: The Authority of Memory and the Wisdom of Ghosts: Niccols's

Conception of England's Imagined History

Niccol's tragedies offer a portrait gallery of the mind or a memory palace, through which the reader is led under the guidance of the Greek goddess Mnemosyne, or Memory and the spectres of England's famous deceased who return to lament and narrate their tragedies. Niccols's choice to present explicitly English tragedies, particularly kings he deems to be "worthie" (560) and who provide advice for imitation or avoidance as historical *exempla*, sets up the oppositional tone of the work. Niccols's emphasis on English historical figures reinforce the Tudor propaganda according to which rulers of the kingdom should be "native born" to rule their "natural subjects, whose natural obligations sustained the body politic" (Richards 518). James I's accession proclamation was insistent about his right to rule, but filled with the uncertainty and anxiety surrounding the accession of a "mysterious and foreign prince" (Richards 518). Moreover, unlike his predecessor Elizabeth I, James was an overt pacifist who did not seem to have the same strength or values as the previous monarch. The royal proclamation reaffirmed in several ways James's lineal descent from Mary Tudor, the eldest daughter of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York. The union of the House of York and the House of Lancaster was essential to the Tudor myth, as it had brought peace to England, "to the ioy unspeakable of the Kingdome," so James, as the new king, believed it was best to depict himself as another such peace bringer (518). Not only was James's "undoubted right" stressed at the beginning of his reign, but also his kingly qualities: he was "adorned with all the rarest gifts of minde and bodie, to the infinite comfort of all his people and subjects that shall live under him" (Richards 518). As

opposed to the official declaration, Niccols believed that England's dynastic greatness

started to crumble under James and a revival of England's tragic historical past could be

used to call attention, however indirectly, to James's "unnatural" reign and his

disconcerting pacifism, alleged Catholic sympathies, and favouritism at court.

However, in order to use England's past as an example in the *speculum principis*

mode, Niccols had to devise a method to tackle the issue of the contemporary separation of

history and fiction. History had been promoted as an honorable institution and utilized

primarily as a source of practical wisdom and moral edification, rather than a chronicle of

actual events. However, between 1587 and 1610 distinctions between imaginative literature

and historiography had become further solidified (Archer, *Unperfect Histories* 147).

Claims, such as Thomas Dekker's in the preface to the *Whore of Babylon* (1607),

unthinkable in the early years of Elizabeth's reign, had gradually become commonplace:

> whereas I may . . . be Critically taxed, that I falsifie the account of time, and set not
>
> down Occurrents, according to their true succession, let such (that are so nice of
>
> stomach) know, that I write as a Poet, not as an Historian, and that these two do not
>
> live under one law … (cited in Archer 147).

Baldwin's *Mirror* and especially Higgins's and Blenerhasset's *First* and *Second Part*s

contributed to this division, and the anxiety and scepticism these mirror texts voiced about

the validity of poetic invention as a substitute for historiographical records was brought to

prominence by Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser in later decades (Archer, *Unperfect

Histories* 147). As Donald Beecher has reminded us, the early modern period was rich with

"emergent notions of mirrors, anatomies, commonplace books, treasuries, chronicles, and

personal memoirs," in which documentation of past experiences were "repackaged for

present consumption" ("Recollection, Cognition, and Culture…" 387). Beecher has

asserted that history is "socially conditioned," as it functions as a "collective memory," and

certain groups select what they found "memorable" to serve ideas of nationalism,

patriotism, and cultural identity (388). Historical memory advances the purpose of political

groups who want to shape memory according to their views, as often the historical record

"speaks for a political entity" (389). However, as Beecher has noted, history also provides

an example of successful and unsuccessful strategies, turns experience into *exempla*, and

checks the "excess both of peoples and princes, thereby constituting an episodic conduct

book concerning the political story of a nation" (389). Niccols felt obliged to protect

England's historical records from decay; therefore, his tragedies are particularly

preoccupied with the form, expression, and transmission of historical accounts (Archer,

Unperfect Histories 170). Moreover, Niccols's accounts engaged with their own

historiography and were deployed to reflect contemporary anxieties (Archer, *Unperfect*

Histories 170). In doing so, Niccols made the constructed nature of imagined historical

truth the subject of his work and suggested its vulnerability to the contingencies of time and

cultural transmission. Historical memory thus holds the power to instruct; it is exactly this

quality of memory that Niccols intends to apply to his text, following the conventions of

the *de casibus* tradition. Consequently, Niccols's *A Mirour* straddles the line between

imaginative literature and historiographical inquiry:

> it is unequivocally historical poetry. However, rather than negotiating that dividing
>
> line sceptically, fretfully, and irreverently, as Baldwin, Higgins, and Blenerhasset
>
> had done, Niccols nails his colours to the historical mast, hammering textual
>
> uncertainty out of his new publication (Archer, *Unperfect Histories* 147).

In his letter to the readers, Niccols states that his revisions have "the storie in some places false and corrupted, made historically true" (A4*v*). Niccols's emphatic assertion that he is presenting a work free from falsehoods and corruption enhances the propagandistic nature of his work. Both Budra and Human have criticized Niccols for presenting himself as a chronicler and keeper of historical truth, while Niccols put the blame for historical inaccuracy on earlier writers, choosing to refer to his additions as "poems" and "hymns" dictated to him through memory and fame rather than historiographical truth (A4*v*).

In his introduction, or "induction," to *A Winter's Night Vision*, Niccols explains that his additional tragedies were at the behest of Mnemosyne, who granted him the authority to present his forgotten tragedies of England's past. *A Winter's Night Vision* relies on the tradition of vision literature, according to which Niccols is approached by forgotten, and sometimes misunderstood, historical figures in a dream. However, in reference to Jehan Du Pre's *Les Palais des nobles Dames* (1534), Brenda Dunn-Lardeau describes the sixteenth-century dream vision motif as essential to the construction and legitimization of a text that relies on historical memory, especially when the author claims the dream to be truly autobiographical and a justification of the dreamer's pursuit and compilation of *exempla* (29). J. Stephen Russell has argued that the dream vision tradition serves an allegorical purpose through its form. Because vision narratives are usually quite long, they encourage the reader to forget that what they are reading is in fact a purported dream, in an attempt to make readers think of the depicted narrative "independent of the dream nature of the events" (130). Julia Boffey has furthermore stated that the dream vision framework was used by late medieval English authors such as Lydgate as a means to "convey social or political commentary which might have seemed inflammatory if communicated in any

more direct way" (4). Through the course of his dream, Niccols (as well as the reader) is guided by Memory to engage with various ghosts of England's forgotten past, who provide potential resolutions to contemporary issues.

> As in amazement at such sight I in my bed did lie,
>
> She thus bespake: 'I am', quoth she, 'the Lady Memory,
>
> Jove's well beloved Mnemosyne, that keeps the wealthy store
>
> Of time's rich treasure, where the deeds that have been done of yore
>
> I do record… (559).

Although Niccols's reinterpretation of English history drew on contemporary aesthetic and ideological tendencies, Archer argues that *A Mirour* was unlikely to attract a wide range of readers due primarily to the immense scope of the text (*Unperfect Histories* 151). However, Niccols blames this lack of interest on the decline of modern values rather than his refusal to move with the times, using Memory and Clio, the Muse of history, to level criticism against contemporary literary culture, which has frivolously allowed for the decay of the record of "worthy Britain's dead":

> … when in books I chance to find the fame
>
> Of any after death decayed, I do revive the same.
>
> Turning the volume large of late, in which my Clio sings
>
> The deeds of worthy Britain's dead, I find that many kings exempt (559).

Memory's divine call urging Niccols to memorialize the forgotten figures of the past is worthy of note. Though Niccols's title suggests that the text was derived from Lydgate's *The Fall*, Memory and Clio enjoin Niccols to remedy the faults of the earlier mirror

tradition by adding the stories of the "noble acts" of kings, thus altering the sequence of

tragic vices. However, Niccols argues that he is not worthy for the momentous task:

> O goddess great, the task thou dost impose
>
> Exceeds the compass of my skill, 'tis fitter far for those,
>
> Whose pens sweet nectar do distill
>
> to whom the power is given
>
> Upon their winged verse to rap their readers up to heaven (559).

Before leaving the author, Memory once again emphasizes to Niccols the importance of his

task to offer mirrors of the forgotten "noble" figures who deserve to be remembered for

"eternity":

> Exempted are, whose noble acts deserve eternity,
>
> And 'mongst our Mirrors challenge place for all posterity
>
> For which, my station I have left, and now am come to thee … (559).

In contrast to the *de casibus* tradition, Memory and Clio completely replace the figure of

Fortune to assist Niccols in correcting the faults of *The Fall* and earlier versions of *A

Mirror.* By relaying the stories of the "noble" acts of "kings," Niccol's edition signals a

transition from medieval moralism displayed in the *de casibus* tradition to the more

inclusive English *speculum principis* tradition that deals with both the vices and virtues of

England's past.

The presentation of tragic figures in the Elizabethan mirror tradition relied heavily

upon the early English *de casibus* complaint form with a renewed reliance on the dream

vision tradition and ghost complaint. Complaint literature, a popular medieval poetic genre

that features poetic lamentations of misfortune, flourished during the last decades of the fifteenth century, but continued to be revived throughout the sixteenth century, and at the turn of the century these historical subjects began to be depicted more specifically as ghosts (Archer, *Unperfect Histories* 142). The use of the dream vision tradition combined with the ghost narrative and complaint allowed for the imagined invocation of famous mythic and historical figures to offer different perspectives and a critique of contemporary problems and offer solutions in the form of moral advice and direction, all under the pretence of a dream to avoid accusations of political sedition. Indeed, Niccols's *A Mirour* seems to be one of the first texts in the mirror tradition to refer explicitly to the speakers of the complaints as ghosts: "Then do not thou thy help deny, I will conduct thy pen, / And Fame shall summon up the ghosts of all those worthy men" (560). Niccols's use of the rhetorical device *prosopopoeia* alongside the *visio* tradition allowed authors like Niccols to distance themselves from the controversial topics about which they were writing. Thus, the ghost device became, in Archer's words, the "natural ally" of the satirists, who used ghosts to critique contemporary political issues in the final decades of the sixteenth century, and by 1610 "literary ghosts" frequently carried satirical or oppositional weight in popular culture (142). The popularity of the ghost complaint tradition increased significantly in the early part of James I's reign, "when the ghosts of the Elizabethan dead returned to lament the demise of a political ethos" (Archer, *Unperfect Histories* 143). Niccols's *A Mirour* arguably presents a coherent fusion of the existing, but outdated, mirror tradition with contemporary literary tendencies and political concerns, successfully resurrecting the politically oppositional stance that Baldwin originally envisaged in the tradition (Archer, *Unperfect Histories* 143). Furthermore, public appetite for the "salacious details" of England's

imagined past could be satisfied within an established mode of morally educative stories

(Archer, *Unperfect Histories* 164).

Niccols's lasting interest in ghost complaints is also manifested in his final work,

Sir Thomas Overburies Vision (1616), in which he again used the ghost complaint, this

time of a recently deceased person, to disseminate his dissatisfaction with his own time,

which he found tawdry and corrupt. *Overburies Vision* was based on the notorious murder

of Sir Thomas Overbury (1581-1613), a poet who, like Niccols, desired to write morally

instructive and educational poetry. In *Overburies Vision*, Niccols depicts the tragic death of

Overbury and his poisoning in the Tower of London ordered by Lady Somerset. *Overburies*

Vision was written at the height of the "Overbury scandal," when James I was rumoured to

have been complicit in Overbury's murder after Overbury refused an offer from James to

be an ambassador to the court of Tsar Michael of Russia (1596-1645), a refusal that

allegedly drew James's ire (Considine *ODNB*). Additionally, James was also rumoured to

have been jealous of the friendship between Overbury and his favourite courtier, Rober

Carr (Considine). Overbury was highly critical of the affair between James I's favourite

courtier, Robert Carr, 1st Earl of Somerset (1587-1645), and Frances Howard, Lady

Somerset (1590-1632), and expressed his disapproval in his poem entitled "A Wife*"* (c.

1612). The poem became immensely popular and was reprinted sixteen times and later

attached to his posthumously published collection of poems, *Characters* (1614) (Beecher,

"Eyebeams" 6). Engaging with the popular tradition of guidebook literature, Overbury's

poem depicted the perfect female spouse who embodied characteristics such as "a lofty

mind, modesty, and flawless virtue, child-bearing, household duties, the absence of an idle

curiosity, and a capacity to spiritualize a hot mutual sexuality," in Beecher's words, a

"fantasy wish-list" ("Eyebeams" 6). Due to the wide circulation of Overbury's poem, it is unsurprising that Lady Somerset would believe that Overbury's object in writing this poem was to open the eyes of Robert Carr to her problematic behaviour by highlighting the essential virtues every woman should have.

Perhaps fearing his own demise due to political sedition, Niccols felt a special connection to Overbury. Like Overbury, Niccols attacks the contemporary vices of political corruption by using a literary mode from the past to suggest that contemporary society was losing its way and needed to remember its core values. Moreover, *Overburies Vision* is closely related to the poems in Niccols's *A Mirour* and is presented as a continuation of *A Winter's Night Vision*. Both texts rely on the *visio* tradition, but instead of using figures from the recent past, Niccols engages with a contemporary situation in *Overburies Vision*. In the induction to *Overburies Vision*, Niccols announces himself to the reader as the editor of *A Mirour* in an attempt to integrate his Overbury tragedy into his additions in *A Winter's Night Vision* with the intention of presenting a tragedy that is more immediately relatable to a contemporary audience. *Overburies Vision* also shares other characteristics with Niccols's *A Mirour*. For example, in *A Winter's Night Vision*, Memory pleads with Niccols to "pick up thy pen" (559) and relate the stories she dictates to him; and in *Overburies Vision*, the ghost of Sir Thomas Overbury echoes Memory, appearing to Niccols, and craving "Thy pens assistance." Overbury approaches Niccols because he is the author of the "true" *A Mirour*, and therefore possesses the authority to speak for the deceased Overbury and give an accurate portrayal of the events leading up to his murder. Comparing the figure of Memory with the contemporary poet, Overbury further increases the contemporary relevance of the mirror tradition. Michelle O'Callaghan has pointed out that tragic history

as "domesticated" in *Overburies Vision* is "speaking" directly to the interests of an urban citizenry ("A Mirror" 181). The ghosts of the condemned who are given "voice" in the text belong to the class of individuals immediately below that of the political elite, and most directly in the service of the general population, rendering their characters and behaviours more relatable (O'Callaghan, "A Mirror*"* 181). Through the ghost complaint, *Overburies Vision* depicts an alternative imaginary historical and political space for England; however, O'Callaghan cautions that the type of "idealized citizen" in Niccols's text does not simply reflect and give voice to actual contemporary popular public opinion ("A Mirror" 181). Nonetheless, in *Overburies Vision*, Niccols offers the public body an opportunity to engage within a political matter that would be normally inaccessible to them.

Niccols's ghostly testimonials in *A Winter's Night Vision* and his later tragedy *Overburies Vision* allow the reading public to engage with the *speculum principis* tradition through the historical as well as contemporary *exempla*. With his tragedies, Niccols offers his readers a glimpse of an alternative depiction of England's imagined history and educates his readers in modes of "historical apprehension" (O'Callaghan, "A Mirror" 182), while offering them an interpretive toolkit to better assess their contemporary cultural and political concerns (Budra, *A Mirror* 182). The quasi-historical tragedies of *A Winter's Night Vision* and *Overburies Visions* enable each ghost to provide their own interpretations of and reactions to their misfortunes, downfall, and unfortunate deaths. This perceived "direct" engagement between the reader and the ghostly figures in Niccols's *A Mirour* and *Overburies Vision* aims to teach readers how to respond to and comprehend the various scandals that continued to engulf the Jacobean court.

Chapter III: Niccols's Reinterpretation of Tragedies of Richard III, Edward II, and King John and the Revival of the Tudor Myth

Niccols stamped his own poetic authority and oppositional vision as editor on the tragedies that he chose to include in his editions. Many scholars have suggested that out of all the mirror editors, Niccols is best at arranging the tragedies into a coherent whole (Hadfield, "Richard Niccols…" 170). Niccols's additions to the mirror genre show that he can be understood as a dedicated reader of the literature and history he incorporated into his projects. However, Hadfield notes in his article "Richard Niccols and Tudor Nostalgia" (2016) that it is important to consider to what extent Niccols was aware of his project's influence with respect to the imagined history of England and how much control he had over each part (170). Hadfield questions whether Niccols was an astute writer who knew exactly how he wanted to use the sources and authorities at his disposal or, rather, a "magpie selecting useful bits and pieces that attracted him and which he could then recycle" (170). Regardless, Niccols understood that in order to articulate his opposition to James I, he needed to present the tragedies of specific historical individuals who encompassed what Niccols believed were some of James's most problematic characteristics that confirmed his incompetency to rule. In contrast to the strong, nationalistic, and militaristic reign of Elizabeth I, James was often critiqued for his seeming lack of interest in militaristic pursuits, hence his self-styled title of *rex pacificus*. In addition to his pacifism, he was also rebuked for his alleged Catholic sympathies, his desire for Scottish and English unification, and his obvious favouritism amongst his nobles and courtiers. The tragedies of Richard III, Edward II, and King John that Niccols added to his version of the mirror

tradition all exemplify the negative elements associated with James's kingship and serve as a condemnation of and opposition to James's rule. Moreover, it was meant to offer a *speculum principis* to James himself, so that, as Niccols wishes in his dedicatory epistle, through his mirror God would grant both the king and the nobility "increase of wisdom" (A2).

Niccols's new histories in *A Winter's Night Vision* are headed by portrait-woodcuts of their subjects, which are modelled on the style of classical medallion, depicting their subjects in profile and in armour with the symbols of their office, typically the sword or sceptre and orb. However, in the woodcut of Richard III (1452-1485), the last king of the House of York and the last of the Plantagenet dynasty, Niccols chose to emphasize instead Richard's crimes rather than his cunning and boldness as a king. The woodcut of Richard is featured at the beginning of his tragedy, where he is portrayed as a usurping tyrant, holding a dagger in a posture that denotes treachery, with the phrase "Through nights darke shadowes, from the house of bale, The tyrants ghost comes up to tell his tale" (750) written above it. These images supplement and reinforce the mode of "lively apprehension," and with their classical and military design, they define the status of Niccols's tragic figures as historical *exempla* (O'Callaghan, "A Mirror" 91). The popularity of the accounts of Richard III's reign and usurpation in the sixteenth century led to his story being used for allegorical purposes, as he served as a suitable figure for arguments against tyranny and usurpation. The historical image of Richard was featured prominently in England's cultural imagination long before Shakespeare presented his character of the "crooke-backe" Richard III on stage, in his tetralogy of English history plays, *Henry VI Part I*, *II, III* (c.1591), and *Richard III* (c.1592). Hadfield suggests that Niccols's interpretation of Richard was most

strongly influenced by Shakespeare's play, which he could have read in the quarto edition first published in 1597. Shakespeare's *Richard III* was still performed regularly in the early seventeenth century, a sign of the play's popularity as well as the re-emergence of Tudor nostalgia in the seventeenth century in response to dissatisfaction with the Jacobean regime (Hadfield, "Richard Niccols…" 170).

Shakespeare derived his influential portrayal of the historical Richard's reputation as a Machiavellian villain from Thomas More's *History of King Richard the Thirde* (1513). The depravity of Richard's moral character is manifested in More's deeply biased and politicized description of Richard that stresses the king's moral reprehensibility. Consequently, when viewed through the lens of the medieval metaphor of the body politic, Richard's Yorkist regime was seen as the embodiment of evil, sin, and sickness:

> malicious, wrathful, envious … little of stature, ill featured of limbs, crook
>
> back…he was malicious, wrathful, envious, and from before his birth, ever
>
> forward…He was close and secret, a deep dissimulator, lowly of countence,
>
> arrogant of heart, outwardly companionable where he inwardly hated, not letting to
>
> kiss whom he thought to kill; dispitious and cruel, not for evil will always, but often
>
> for ambition, and either for the surety or increase of his estate. Friend and foe was
>
> much what indifferent, where his advantage grew; he spared no man's death whose
>
> life withstood his purpose (More 9-10).

More's history of Richard was integral to the formation and dissemination of the "Tudor myth" in the sixteenth century, which painted the reign of the Tudors as not only legitimate but also the cure to all of England's political ills. According to this pervasive myth, the rule of the Tudors ended the anarchy and bloodshed of the Wars of the Roses and brought forth

the golden ages of peace, prosperity, and panache. Niccols's tragedy echoes not only

Shakespeare's but also More's depiction, and by perpetuating the propagandistic use of

Richard's reputation as an ugly, scheming, murderous tyrant, Niccols shows how a

powerful historical character from the late medieval period can be repurposed for personal

attack and political commentary in the early seventeenth century.

Niccols rewrote the already written past, as every edition of *A Mirror* since 1563

contained the tragedy of Richard III. Instead of reprinting Baldwin's version of the Richard

tragedy, Niccols removed it from the chronological order and inserted a revised version into

A Winter's Night Vision. This choice is not merely editorial, as he had done with the rest of

the tragedies, but also political. Niccols is laying claim to an important part of the mirror

tradition by making the tragedy his own and by reviving the figure of Richard for an

allegorical purpose. Furthermore, Niccols was convinced that he could produce a finer

reinterpretation of the tragedy than his predecessors to provide readers with the most up to

date "historical" writing, having seen Shakespeare's play, and so being informed by more

recent historical work. Indeed, following the classical *de casibus* pattern, Niccols presents

Richard as an example of a villain for avoidance, imploring princes to learn the lesson of

his misdeeds and subsequent punishment:

> Horror pursues the homicides sad soule,
>
> Feare hunts his conscience with an hue and crie,
>
> That drinkes the blood of men in murders bowle,
>
> Suspitious thoughts do rest in life denie,
>
> By heav'ns inviolate doom it is decreed,
>
> Whose hand shed blood, his heart in death should bleed (750).

Despite Richard's idolatry, corruption, and ambition precipitating his fall, he is portrayed as more unfortunate than villainous. For example, Niccols demonstrates how, despite Richard's "accomplishments" and rise to power, he is completely isolated from the court and his subjects, rendering him virtually powerless:

> To whom I might give trust, I did not know,
>
> Since seeming friends from me do daylie flie,
>
> In court each one doth wish my overthrow,
>
> In towne and citie everie one doth crie
>
> Shame on my deedes of death and tyrannie:
>
> Thus in my rule I live belov'd of none,
>
> Dread of man, hated of everie one (761).

It is at this point that the tone seems to indicate that Niccols intends his poem to be understood as both a moral guidebook and a scathing political commentary. Niccols uses his representation of the historical Richard as an allegorical representation of James's contemporary regime. John Jowett has pointed out, in reference to Shakespeare's *Richard III*, that the imagined historical figure of Richard and the events of his rise to power and reign touched some of the most sensitive issues in early modern political thinking: "the basis and nature of the power invested in a monarch" (17). As perhaps one of the most infamous monarchs in English history, the "home grown" example of a tyrant bears with him a "preformed historical being," or notorious identity (32). Early Tudor authors such as More transformed Richard into a mythic and readily available character who could embody the Richard of Tudor historical memory.

Niccols's choice to emphasize the negative aspects of weakness, pacifism, and favouritism associated with James's kingship, through the figure of Richard, aligns his work with the belief shared by Protestant writers who attributed the gradual degeneration of English identity, nationalism, and political ethos after the death of Elizabeth to the Stuart succession to the English throne (Archer, *Unperfect Histories* 143).

The purpose of the *de casibus* and *speculum principis* traditions was to provide monarchs, rulers, and nobles with advice through a series of *exampla* in the absence of wise counselors, and Niccols uses Richard as a mouthpiece to implore rulers to avoid getting caught in the pleasures of courtly life, arguing that listening to the counsel of favoured courtiers can be politically damaging:

> The King who swims in streames of court delights,
>
> Plaies like the fish so long with pleasures bait,
>
> That on her deadly bane he often bites,
>
> Or like the Mariner infortunate,
>
> Sayling in seas where syrens lie in wait:
>
> To please the sense he lends his eare so long,
>
> Till he be charm'd with their inchanting song (754).

Richard's recommendations fall in line with the popular criticism of the Jacobean court and its morals, as it is almost without a doubt that Niccols is referring to the very public favouritism that took place in James's court. In particular, James was scrutinized for his widely known romantic relationships with his male courtiers: Esmé Stewart, 1st Duke of Lennox (1542-1538); Robert Carr, 1st Earl of Somerset (1587-1645); and George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham (1592-1628). Michael B. Young and David M. Bergeron have

written extensively on James's controversial relationships with his courtiers, which crossed the boundaries between personal and political and were viewed with great scrutiny by other members of the court. James's relationship with Robert Carr is a fine example of how a ruler, who "swims in streames of court delights," can be caught in a significant political storm. Bergeron describes how the king's relationship with Carr caused problems within the royal family and that Prince Henry, the heir apparent, seemed to have developed a particular aversion to Carr; "of course, many people saw Henry as a shining light of militaristic rectitude in opposition to his pacifist father" (71). Moreover, James's children regularly struggled to gain their father's affections; thus the royal family began to resent Carr's mounting power, both personally and politically (72). In 1615, James truly became the "Mariner infortunate" who, in Niccols's words, had been "charm'd" by the "syrens," who "lie in wait." Niccols's allusion to Carr became particularly topical when the latter was found to have poisoned his best friend Sir Thomas Overbury and inadvertently implicating the king in an unfortunate scandal.

Apart from covert allusions to James's problematic conduct as king, the figure of Richard III was explicitly associated with Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury (1563-1612), who was remembered for his openly Machiavellian tactics during the reign of Elizabeth and for his involvement in the succession of James I, which led to his rise to power (Aune 26). Son of William Cecil, Secretary of State and Treasurer to Queen Elizabeth, Robert first came to the queen's attention as propagandist of the execution of James I's mother, Mary Queen of Scots, in 1586. Cecil benefitted from his father's appointment as Elizabeth's Secretary of State ten years later and remained influential until his death in 1612, facilitating James's ascension by means of a secret correspondence prior to Elizabeth's

death, continuing in his office as Secretary of State, becoming Treasurer, and receiving numerous titles and honors, including the earldom of Salisbury (Aune 27). Both Richard and Cecil were described in popular literature as hunchbacked and deformed. In a letter dated 1603, describing Cecil's journey to Flanders fifteen years earlier, the Venetian Ambassador to London Zorzi Giustinian called Cecil "a little hunchback … but wise" (Handover 55). Similar to Cecil, Richard's crooked back inspired curses evoked by Shakespeare's Margaret, who called Richard a "rooting hog" (I.III.228), a sentiment echoed in Niccols's description of the Yorkist king as "hog-like" (796). As numerous contemporary authors pointed out, including Cecil's cousin, Sir Francis Bacon, physical deformity at the time was regarded as a sign of moral deformity. "Deformed persons are commonly euen with nature: for as Nature hath done ill by them, so doe they by nature; being for the most [part] . . . void of naturall affection; . . . it is good to consider of deformity, not as a signe, which is more deceiueable, but as a cause . . ." (Bacon 146-47). Niccols rehearses this belief when quoting Richard's ghost: "And hard it was to judge, if that my soule or limbes ill-fashion'd feature were more foule" (751). To Niccols and his contemporaries, Richard's crooked back indicated a moral crookedness, his withered arm the perversion of his actions. The animalistic metaphors suggest an ugly deformity and a lower, bestial form of life (Aune 27).

M.G. Aune has suggested that the moral deformity that the crooked back symbolized in both Cecil's and Richard's case, was ruthless ambition (27). It was ambition that drove Richard to murder and betrayal and it was ambition that brought wealth and power, as well as opprobrium and animosity to Robert Cecil, especially when he was scheming to undermine courtly favorites such as the Earl of Essex, Bacon, and later, even

James. In so doing, he was perceived to have brought undeserved honors to himself, his family, and the country, which led to the popularity of portraying Cecil as a scheming Machiavellian figure. Cecil's plot to gain power and overthrow the legitimate rulers is revealed by his contorted body, just as Richard's deformities represent his corrupt character. Thus, Niccols's Richard served a two-fold purpose: a "mirror for magistrates" and a contemporary political commentary on corruption in the Jacobean court. Niccols saw it as his duty to remind readers that peace was a fragile achievement and that one could not believe that James, the self-styled *rex pacifcus*, could preserve peace if he did not begin to prepare for the possibilities of political upheaval due to his own poor decision-making (Hadfield, "Richard Niccols…" 176).

Niccols's representation of the tragedy of Edward II (1284-1387) further elaborated Richard III's warning that a king can be "charm'd" by the "syrens" of his court, thus precipitating his own downfall. The tragic tale of Edward proved to be an effective allegory and warning for James, as Edward was depicted as a king who came to a tragic end because he allowed his friend and alleged lover Piers Gaveston, 1st Earl of Cornwall, (1284-1312) to dominate the court. Gaveston's arbitrary appointing of his own associates eventually undermined Edward's power and the strength of his reign, as he was left to preside over a group of selfish and incompetent nobles with no interest in the welfare of the nation, only in their own pleasure and success. The military backbone of the country built by Edward's stern and powerful father, "the Hammer of the Scots," Edward I (1239-1307), dissipated as the royal coffers were used for frivolous pursuits, which provided nothing of substance for the people of England. Edward was taken in by Gaveston's flattery and this led exactly to

the same sort of discord between ruler and advisers that Niccols feared to have started to

dominate the court of James I:

> My Gaveston in maiesties great armes
>
> Being safely hug'd, no change of fortune feares;
>
> He wantons with the King, soothes his harmes,
>
> He playes the Buffons part, he outs and ieers
>
> The courtly actions of the honour'd Peers:
>
> The great in counsell and the noble bourne,
>
> Are made the subiect of his hatefull scorne (708).

Edward is not a wise enough king to recognize that his problematic relationship with his

nobles would lead to his eventual deposition from the throne. After the peaceful years that

England enjoyed under the rule of Edward I, the son betrayed the father's strong legacy

(Hadfield, "Richard Niccols…" 173).

Niccols presents a form of tyranny in which the frivolous desires of the monarch

and his inner circle are satisfied at the expense of the nation, and those who are able to

provide Edward with wise counsel are silenced. If Edward had listened to the advice of

wise counsel and read his history properly, he could have avoided the rebellion against him,

his subsequent deposition, and his infamous, horrific murder that cemented his posthumous

reputation. For his representation of Edward, Niccols may have been inspired by the

disturbing and gruesome alleged murder of Edward II in Christopher Marlowe's play *The*

Troublesome Reign and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second, King of England (1594).

Niccols could well have seen Marlowe's play performed in the early 1590s, which was

revived on a number of occasions in various theatres in the early 1600s, making this

another play, apart from Shakespeare's *Richard III* that Niccols may have consulted to enhance his own historical poetry. Nearly three hundred years later, James certainly seemed to be making some of the same mistakes Edward made, as by 1610 James was known to be enraptured by Robert Carr, raising him above his station and so causing discontent and discord at court. Niccols surely expected his readers to recognize the parallels between Edward's and James's situations and worry that the king may be going the way of Edward II and even potentially do something that would lead him to have the same tragic end.

While James was harshly criticized for his personal relationships and alleged favouritism, his proclivity towards pacifism was perhaps the most condemned aspect of his reign. Despite the fact that the chivalric revival that occurred at the court of Elizabeth I continued into the succeeding reign of James I, the renewed celebration of martial valour and honour centred not on King James but on his eldest son and heir to the throne, Henry Prince of Wales (Badenhausen 20). Upon James's royal entry in 1604, Henry was already being portrayed as the natural heir to Elizabeth, "an aggressive, consciously militant, Protestant leader who would restore England to the glorious days of his godmother" (Badenhausen 22). This movement forced James to wage a vigorous campaign to halt the growth of a potentially dangerous myth and to assert his royal authority and negate the myth by urging peaceful behaviour and disallowing martial displays at court (Badenhausen 20). Niccols, however, aligns himself with the militant Protestant supporters of Henry by suggesting that a "peaceful" indolent monarch is a catalyst for weakness, effeminacy, and civil instability.

This concern is already present in Niccols's portrayal of Richard, which draws heavily on Shakespeare's "Now is the winter of our discontent" speech from Act I, Scene I,

in which Richard manipulates the horror of war into a grotesque rejection of peace, leaving the audience in no doubt of Richard's villainy (Archer, *Unperfect Histories* 168). Richard's portrayal of his brother Edward IV in Shakespeare's play as an effeminate, mincing figure, debased and corrupted just to preserve peace, marks the transition between his sarcastic acceptance of a coming "summer" upon the ascension of the "sun of York" (I.I.2) that he despises. Richard discloses to the audience that in fact he is "determined to prove a villain, And hate the pleasure of these idle days" (I.I.30-31), this "weak piping time of peace" (I.I.24). By contrast, the poetics of peace Shakespeare's Richard uses to express his disdain for Edward IV's supposed weakness are reversed in Niccols's tragedy and the language of weakness used to describe Edward IV is instead attributed to the ascension of Richard:

> The battels fought in field before,
>
> Were turn'd to meeting of sweet amitie …
>
> And sweet perfumes instead of smoakes were burn'd
>
> God Mars laid by his launce and tooke his lute,
>
> And turn'd his rugged frownes to smiling looks,
>
> Instead of crimson fields, warre's fatall fruits
>
> He bath's his limbes in Cypris' warbling brookes,
>
> And set his thoughts upon her wanton looks,
>
> All noise of warre was hust upon our coast,
>
> Pletie each where in easefull pride did boast (753).

The time of peace emphasized during Richard's reign promotes Niccols's militant Protestant oppositional stance. Perhaps Niccols's line "God Mars laid by his launce and tooke his lute" is a reference to James's triumphal arch, which featured the figure of Peace

with an olive wreath on her head and silver dove on her shoulder, standing over the figure

of Mars who lay grovelling on the ground with his armour scattered around him

(Badenhausen 21). Overtly militant features are one of the characteristics of Niccols's

poetry, and many of his poems reflect an obsessive need to contrast the "soft, effeminate

life of the court with the lusty nationalism of war" (Hadfield, "Richard Niccols…" 167).

According to Hadfield, Niccols approves of war as a means of testing the nation's "mettle"

and "expunging the indolence and self-interest which corrode England's political ethos,

culture, and established order" (167).

Niccols's lines follow the standard *de casibus* mode of warning rulers that they

cannot escape their misdeeds, and so, haunted by the atrocities he committed, the ghostly

Richard, presented to the reader by Memory, bemoans the ghosts who haunt him in an

almost parody-like, metatextual image, suggesting that one cannot escape wrongdoings,

even in death.

> I thought that all those murthered ghosts, whom I
>
> By death had sent to their yntimely graue,
>
> With balefull noise about my tent did crie,
>
> And of the heau'ns with sad complaint did craue,
>
> That they on guiltie wretch might vengeance haue:
>
> To whom I thought the Iudge of heau'n gaue eare,
>
> And gainst me gaue a iudgement full of feare … (764).

Archer notes that Niccols chooses to omit Shakespeare's depiction of Richard's awful night

of torment, which describes Richard's eagerness for battle. Perhaps one can infer that this

too is an allusion to James's pacifist nature. Furthermore, in Niccols's version of the

tragedy, there is none of the complexity of Richard's speech in Shakespeare's play in which the doomed king imagines that he is already on the battlefield calling for another horse. Where Shakespeare's Richard grapples with a growing sense of panic and realization of his guilt and the following retribution, Niccols presents Richard as far less dramatic and much more accepting of his fate:

> My storie told, I may no longer stay,
>
> My grieued ghost doth smell the morning's aire:
>
> The night on sable wings flies fast away,
>
> The houres in east expecting daies repaire,
>
> On cloudie hill sets vp her siluer chaire?
>
> My guiltie ghost her light may not behold,
>
> Adew, remember well what I haue told … (769).

Memory returns at the close of Richard's tragedy, reminding readers that what they had witnessed was a historical memory of Richard, not an accurate chronicle of events:

> Our night is at an end, quoth Memorie,
>
> With which we hoere will end our historie:
>
> After this tyrant's fall, that dismall night,
>
> Which did obscure this kingdome's faire daylight,
>
> Did take an end: heere some auspitious star
>
> Twixt Yorke and Lancaster did end the war,
>
> Appointing Richmond that Lancastrian knight,
>
> T'inoculate his Red Rose with the White:
>
> Heere therefore with this blissefull vnitie,

We will shut vp our tragicke historie (769).

The style is clearly mirroresque in tone, with the dead returning to warn the living to avoid their fate, and further supports an argument that Niccols was revising the fifteenth-century figure for a new political era in the early seventeenth century. Niccols's recollection of Memory and her emphasis on the union of the "Red Rose with the White" clearly aligns his tragedy with the Tudor myth, suggesting that the "blissfull" reign of the Tudors marked the greatest triumph in England's history following the darkness and tragedy of Richard's reign. It might seem contradictory that Niccols would celebrate Tudor peace, while at the same time showing disdain for James's pacifism, but peacetime in the Tudor era was achieved and maintained through a persistent dedication to military values and patriotism. Niccols thus suggests that James's emphasis on pacifism rather than the militant Protestantism of his predecessors indicates that the reign of the Stuarts can never hope to be as successful as the Tudor dynasty.

Niccols's tragedy of King John presents a sympathetic casting of the historically despicable king which mirrors the reign James I and serves as warning to monarchs against foreign powers, Catholic sympathies, and poor relationships with their nobles. Just as in the case of Richard III and Edward II, Niccols's tragedy of King John seems to have been inspired by contemporary history plays which depicted John's demise at the hands of the evil monks of Swineford Abbey, who poisoned him because he dared to stand up to the church and the papacy, a familiar Protestant explanation of the king's end. John's negative reputation began after his death in 1216, when medieval chroniclers depicted him as a young prince habitually plotting against his brother Richard and as an authoritative king whose behaviour incensed his nobles and led to civil war. In the chronicle tradition, he was

remembered for his notorious propensity for spells of rage and excessive cruelty, and his alleged sins, including sloth, gluttony, and lechery so befuddling that he once lay in bed all morning with his young new wife while his army floundered to a defeat in the field (Levin, "A Good Prince…" 23). This view of John as a coward, a bully, and a voluptuary would last for centuries. Indeed, John was portrayed as the worst monarch to rule England, until the advent of the English Reformation, when he was recast by evangelical writers such as John Bale (1495-1563) and John Foxe (1516-1587) as a proto-Protestant icon.

During the advent of the English Reformation and for some years afterward, John's reputation underwent a complete rehabilitation: the medieval villain became a hero of English liberty, a kind of anticipant Protestant, a lonely pioneer in resisting the tyrannies of Rome (Levin, "A Good Prince…" 23). Indeed, John's principal benefactor in this project was Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's chief minister and the coordinator of a propaganda campaign designed to reconcile Englishmen to new evangelical beliefs, practices, and way of life. As a propagandist, Cromwell was well aware of the malleability of historical memory and took full advantage of it by recreating the lives of famous historical figures to suit the ever-evolving political and religious needs under Henry VIII (Levin, "A Good Prince…" 24). He believed that King John's struggle with Pope Innocent III could serve as a useful precedent to Henry's own struggle with the Catholic Church (Levin, "A Good Prince…" 24). Cromwell's propagandists cast, therefore, John as a figure betrayed by the people of England who chose to side with Pope Innocent, a foreigner who manipulated the nation into believing he was concerned with their salvation. Cromwell's narrative was part of a popular tradition of depicting popes as the "Anti-Christs of Rome," who were only interested in England for political reasons (Levin, "A Good Prince…" 28).

This representation of King John was first popularized in the English antiquarian and playwright John Bale's (1495-1563) play *Kynge Johan*, performed in 1538 at the house of one of England's foremost leaders of the English Reformation, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cramner (1489-1556). Bale's play was the first English history play with overtly nationalistic overtones to depict an English king on stage (Levin, "A Good Prince…" 30). The play glorifies a "good" king who is valiantly fighting an evil foreign meddler, in this case the Catholic Church. Though John is named early on in the work, he remains an anonymous English king, represented as a "victim of the villainy of Rome" (Kastan 269). The "anonymity" of the character allowed the audience to relate their contemporary political issues to the depictions on stage (Levin, "A Good Prince…" 30). Indeed, Bale chose to refer to Pope Innocent III as "Usurpyd Powr," making his character more topically applicable for allegorical purposes. As David Kastan has pointed out, King John was typically portrayed as a cruel ruler, but Bale's King Johan is a sincere king devoted to liberating the English population from papal tyranny. Despite failing to free England from Rome, King John is meant to be respected for his efforts. Moreover, the introduction of the figure of "Imperial Majesty" is analogous to Henry VIII's Reformation in England and represents a promise that Henry will succeed in liberating England, where John had failed. Despite John's valiant fight against the evil Catholics, betrayal by his own ministers, and his eventual death at the hands of malicious monks, the play ends on a positive note; "Imperial Majesty," representing the Tudors appears on the stage and accomplishes what John had started but failed to do: the salvation of England.

Recent scholarship has shown the influence of John's narrative in the literature of the Elizabethan succession crisis (Eppich-Harris, Hopkins, Lane) from pamphlets to plays.

Following James's accession, it was the Protestant rhetoric of early Tudor revisionist accounts like Bale's that informed Niccols's retelling, echoing the Reformation rereading of John's identity which enacted "a complete rehabilitation" of his character amid centuries of antipathy; for that short period, the medieval villain became a hero of English liberty resisting the tyrannies of Rome. Niccols's John, too, rewrites himself as an incipient enemy of Catholicism, and Catholic "forgeries," set against "blood-built Rome, our Albion's ancient foe" (688). This anti-Catholic sentiment became even more pronounced among more militant Protestants after Elizabeth's death. When James became king, many feared he would have Catholic sympathies because of his mother, Mary Queen of Scots; in 1609, these fears were realized when James ended the nineteen-year-long war with Spain. By comparing Pope Innocent's Rome with Julius Caesar's assassination, Niccols delineated a picture of political instability and religious corruption which resonated with the continued contemporary opposition to Catholic Spain. It was further intensified by James's intent to unite England with Catholic Spain through a proposed marriage between Prince Henry and a Catholic princess, betraying all hopes that Henry would become the Protestant military leader that Niccols and other oppositional writers and myth makers had hoped (Badenhausen 23).

Although the popularity of the Protestant narrative of King John as part of the "Tudor Myth" continued well into the seventeenth century, during the Elizabethan period the heroic image of King John began to decline, and he was instead understood to be a good but not necessarily a strong king. Prominent Elizabethan writers incorporated this reinterpretation of the historical John figure into their works. John Foxe's influential *Actes and Monuments* (1563), Richard Grafton's (1511-1573) *Chronicle at Large* (1563),

Raphael Holinshed's (1529-1580) *Chronicles of England (1577)*, and an anonymous play

attributed to the dramatist George Peele (1556-1596), *The Troublesome Reign of King John*

(1591), are all believed to have influenced Shakespeare's historical play *The Life and Death*

of King John (c.1590). Hadfield argues that Niccols could have seen either Shakespeare's

version of King John or *Troublesome Reign* while he was in London in the late 1590s.

Niccols's revival of this Tudor reinterpretation of the historical John in 1610

demonstrates not only his nostalgic support for the militant English Protestantism under

Elizabeth I but also serves as a warning to James I that no monarch is perfect, and even

"good princes" can be led astray. Following his Elizabethan predecessors, Niccols

portrayed John as a good but weak king. John is a victim of misunderstanding, "a mirror of

the evils of dissension between a well-meaning prince and a vicious nation" (Nearing 49).

Niccols's figure of Memory claims that John's tragic mirror must appear because "many

writers in his daies, / Of very malice writ in his dispraise" (681), referencing the early

medieval chroniclers. John himself believes he might have been an exemplary mirror for

princes:

> If to this age my storie truth had told:
>
> But th'unkind age presents to judgement's eye
>
> My shame at large, but lets my praise go by …
>
> To whom shall I my many wrongs complaine?
>
> Since false traditions of those enuious times,
>
> Inuented by my foes, do yet remaine,
>
> Liuing to euery eye in forged rimes … (682).

By emphasizing the past "false traditions" and "forged rimes" "Inuented by foes," in John's

tragedy, Niccols forcefully interrogates historical transmission of the John's tragedy, and

these lines assert that Niccols's contemporary retelling of the John legend is legitimate and

true. However, the mention of the influence of foes could also be a covert allusion to

Elizabeth I's poem "The Doubt of Future Foes," which addresses her relationship with her

Catholic enemy and cousin Mary Queen of Scots, James I's mother. Like Niccols's King

John, Elizabeth's character, image, and reign were threatened by the presence of her

Scottish cousin and her Catholic supporters: "The doubt of future foes/ Exiles my present

joy, / And wit me warns to shun such snares/ As threaten mine annoy (13).

Unlike the historical John, Elizabeth succeeded in eradicating the threats of her foes.

Elizabeth's successor James must be cautious, as like John, he has many "foes," including

the oppositional literary community who will continue to "forged rimes" and "false

traditions" if he does not strengthen his reign and rule the nation properly.

Niccols's tragedy of John works as a warning not only for monarchs but also

subjects of a nation. Indeed, there is a continued emphasis in John's tragedy on the

importance of monarchs' maintaining positive relationships with their ministers, courtiers,

and subjects. The pathetic, simpering figure of John that meant to turn English people from

the influence of foreign meddlers also serves as a nostalgic allusion to Elizabeth's fight

against evil Catholics on the Continent. It also expressed and encouraged a nostalgic

longing for and allegiance to the Tudor monarchy. Indeed, if we are to understand John as a

representative of Elizabeth, Niccols's use of this legend can be interpreted as an

encouragement for readers to be wary of James, the arrival of a new foreign prince in the

wake of Elizabeth's successful regime:

No power on earth in my despight shall place

A stranger in my realme to my disgrace (689).

Niccols highlighted the infamous civil dissention that occurred during John's reign:

Let times blacke hand blot out the memorie

Of that vile age, and let it not be said

The John did ever guide this Emperie,

That future time with shame may not upbraid

This nations name, by whome I was betraid (688).

While it seems as though Niccols is suggesting that John's subjects are at fault for the civil unrest, it could also be argued that John's weakness and pacifism led to the uprising with his defiant and disobedient nobles. Elizabeth I, by way of contrast, is frequently depicted as a military ruler eager to guide her nation and growing empire and a protector of her people from foreign invasion, who was astute enough to identify the threat to her rule and to eliminate her enemies (Hadfield, "Richard Niccols…" 172). The concluding moral of Niccols's poem is very much in the tradition of mirror epitaphs:

Behold the effects of Henries curse

On his last sonne, for his rebellious prise:

Let Princes learne, that wheare debate, the nurse

Of discord, doth the Prince and Peeres diuide,

Nothing but destruction can that State betide:

Of which let that sad time of my short reigne,

A Mirrour unto future time remaine (701).

In the tragedy of John, Niccols delineates a marked contrast between a powerful central authority based on austere military values, exemplified by Elizabeth, and a weak rule that leads to disaster. John's weak rule serves as a warning to James and advises him that pacifism and court favouritism may guide him towards "discord" where "prince and peeres" are divided. At the beginning of her reign, Elizabeth was seen as a popular ruler. In contrast to James had started to have conflicts with many of his English nobles partly because of his favouritism and partly because royal finances were in a terrible state and consequently he was dependent on the goodwill of courtiers he had to tax heavily and reward sparsely (Hadfield, "Richard Niccols…" 173). Niccols's King John, like his historical counterpart, was not a strong enough king or military leader to establish his authority when threatened by determined enemies. The dying John could therefore only offer advice to his son, the future Henry III, later to become one of England's most successful military rulers, that he must not tolerate division between the crown and the nobles: "Contend not thou with thy nobilitie; / So thy state and kingdome long endure" (700), a lesson that applied as much to James in 1610 as it did to John in 1216 (Hadfield, "Richard Niccols…" 173). The presentation of the additional tragedies of Richard III, Edward II, and King John function not only as a criticism of the weakness, pacifism, and favouritism associated with James's reign but also a *speculum principis* for the Stuart monarch. If James had read Niccols's additions within the context of the mirror tradition and considered the counsel offered to him in selected *exempla*, James may have been able to save his reign from potential disaster and avoid the tragic fates of England's historical kings depicted in *A Winter's Night Vision*.

Chapter IV: Tudor Triumph and Elizabethan Nostalgia: The Tragedy of King Arthur and "England's Eliza"

When James I was crowned king of England in 1603, he faced the challenging task of legitimizing a new dynasty in the wake of Elizabeth's successful reign. "On the one hand, he had to assert the Stuart claim to the kingdom of England, while, on the other, he had to demonstrate continuity with the Tudor monarchs" (Sherlock 263). This raised a major dilemma, as only two decades earlier James's English predecessor Elizabeth had executed his mother, the deposed queen of Scotland, Mary Stuart (1542-1587). The king's dilemma was further complicated by his immediate family history, especially his occupation of his mother's Scottish throne in her lifetime and her alleged role in his father's murder. James and his subjects grappled with these problems in a variety of ways, including the king's promotion of himself as a peacemaker, an emphasis on the return to male rule, and the promotion of the new reign as a cultural renaissance (Sherlock 264). However, many of James's early attempts were obfuscated by loyal Elizabethan courtiers and writers such as Niccols, who represented Elizabeth, as she is often seen today in popular imagery as the queen who was able to rule because she had adopted masculine values, a choice that led to a golden age of peace and plenty supported by her militant Protestantism.

The Jacobean magnification of Elizabeth's memory was a common phenomenon. In his memoir *The Court of King James the First* (posthumously published in 1839), the bishop of Gloucester, Godfrey Goodman (1583-1656), described growing nostalgia for the

golden reign of Elizabeth during the early seventeenth century as a response to what was interpreted as "Jacobean failures of government" (Perry 153):

> For the Queen, she was ever hard of access, and grew to be very covetous I her old days … the court was very much neglected, and in effect the people were very generally weary of an old woman's government … after a few years, when we had experience of the Scottish government, then in disparagement of the Scots, and in hate and detestation of the Queen did seem to revive; then was her memory much magnified—such ringing of bells, such public joy and sermons in commemoration of her, the picture of her tomb painted in many churches, and in effect more solemnity and joy in memory of her coronation than was for the coming in of King James (Goodman 98).

The death of Elizabeth in 1603, and subsequent appointment of her Scottish cousin led to a large-scale national dissatisfaction with the new king, forcing Englishmen to retroactively re-evaluate their departed queen, and consider her reign in a much more positive light. Perry maintains that Goodman's account of Elizabethan nostalgia in Jacobean England reflects the interests of both of the neglected Elizabethan courtiers in James's court and of "the people," and the emergence of Jacobean dissatisfaction was a collectively shared experience: "after a few years when we had experience of the Scottish government ..." However, there is an odd juxtaposition in Goodman's account according to which the dissatisfactions of Elizabethan courtiers are replaced by public ceremonies of bell ringing, sermons, and other displays of much wider joy in the nostalgia of Elizabeth's reign. The negative perceptions of James as a weak pacifist and accusations of court favouritism compared to the memories of Elizabeth are twofold: while the dissatisfaction with James no

doubt contributed to the emergence of nostalgia for the late queen, idealized images of the

recent past also helped shape England's apprehension of James (Perry 154-155).

Kevin Sharpe has pointed out that Elizabeth's powerful image is deeply

paradoxical, as her image was never entirely stable (320). The power of Elizabeth's image

lies in its instability and malleability by those who both loved and loathed her. During her

reign and after her death, Elizabeth became a validating symbol, someone whose name,

image, and memory carried authority, leading to many invoking her for their cause (320).

Oftentimes, Elizabeth's memory was cited for political or religious causes she would not

have wanted to be affiliated with, including being used as the champion for continental

European Protestantism (320):

> For all her forceful personality and, in some cases, clear convictions, Elizabeth did
>
> not write the script of her reign or draw the template of her image which others
>
> followed. Rather she became the subject and site of a "competition of
>
> representation," as various interest groups sought to claim the queen as their patron
>
> (Sharpe 320).

Part of the reason the image of Elizabeth was open to such appropriation and various

deployments after her death was due to her constantly changing image. This image for all

its authority was the product of many agents and was constructed, refined, and refashioned

in dialogue with contending interests, circumstances, and subjects (Sharpe 320). Elizabeth's

powerful image was devised by many, including Niccols and his contemporaries Edmund

Spenser, Michael Drayton, and other popular figures of the time who sought to call upon

the queen or members of her court as their patron. In popular literature, such as Spenser's

Faerie Queene, Elizabeth was heralded as a godly champion, defender of the nation,

founder of the English empire, and as a virtuous ethereal virgin queen. The steadfastness of Elizabeth's image is emblematized in her motto "semper eadem," or always the same (Akermann 155). Niccols recognized the power of Elizabeth's image and realized that in times of political uncertainty and chaos one can always look back to the reign of Elizabeth for inspiration and guidance, as her image continued to be the same symbol of peace, plenty, and panache.

Significantly, in *A Winter's Night Vision*, Niccols connected his panegyric of Elizabeth with the tragedy of King Arthur, which opens the sequences of tragedies. Although Higgins and Blenerhasset incorporated ancient Britons and Romans in their mirrors, the figure of Arthur first appeared in Niccols's *A Mirour*. Niccols revived the mythic figure of Arthur with the intention of exploring Elizabethan nostalgia and the Tudor myth by presenting a circular narrative that began with Arthur's myth and ended with the panegyric "England's Eliza." Throughout her reign, Elizabeth made explicit connections between herself and Arthur, and Sharpe cites examples of entertainments devised for Elizabeth that were based upon the Arthurian myth and pointedly drew parallels between Elizabeth and Arthur. One of these emblematic events was a poetic performance in Greenwich in 1581 which featured poems dedicated to "a queen who would restore Arthur's golden age: 'that virtuous virgo borne for Britain's blessing'" (Sharpe 426). Niccols's tragedy of King Arthur is written from the perspective of Arthur's ghost, which has been brought forth by "Fame." In the opening lines of the tragedy, Arthur extols Niccols's talents as a writer and deems him worthy to tell his tale: "Loe, I am come on earth to find a friend, / who his assistance unto me he may lend, / and with his pen paint out my history / a perfect mirror of pure majesty" (562).

By the time Niccols wrote his rendition of the Arthur legend, there was renewed controversy over the historicity and legitimacy of the Arthur myth and the alleged prophecy. Budra argues that the addition of Arthur's legend to Niccols's *A Winter's Night Vision* marks a retreat into "Tudor myth and propaganda" (*A Mirror* 28). Despite the prevalence and popularity of the Arthurian legend, by the fifteenth century its legitimacy came under attack by various historians and writers, starting with the humanist scholar Polydore Vergil, who rejected the claim that Arthur was the ruler of the post-Roman empire (*A Mirror* 28). The questioning of the Arthurian myth continued throughout the sixteenth century and, upon the arrival of the new Stuart dynasty, the questioning of the myth took on a political dimension. James reinterpreted Arthur's myth for his royal propaganda to justify the unification of England and Scotland, insisting that, according to the prophecy of the mythic wizard Merlin, Arthur's descendants would unite Great Britain by wearing the crowns of both Scotland and England. Indeed, while Elizabeth may have used Arthur as an exemplar of Britain's patriotism and military might, James used him as a symbol of national unity (Perry 158). The early years of James's reign were the cause of much genealogical research supporting the lineage with an end to ensuring that James's claims to the throne remain undisputed (Budra, "The Mirror" 6). To justify James I and VI of Scotland's claims to Elizabeth's throne, a popular anagram was used "Claimes Arthur's Seat," which translates into James I's baptismal name, Charles James Stuart. "Arthur's seat" is a hill in Edinburgh, Scotland, which made the anagram and connection to the legend more credible (Gossedge and Knight 104).

Niccols's version of the life and death of Arthur purports to be primarily historical and reasserts the popular Tudor version of the Arthur story, giving a sentimental and

patriotic rendering of the tale, thus dismissing any questions surrounding the historical legitimacy of the Arthurian legend. Niccols's Arthur addresses issues of historical scepticism directly, ensuring readers that Niccols will provide a truthful and accurate version of his tragedy:

> In which the truth of my corrupted storie,
>
> Defac'd by fleeting time's inconstant pen,
>
> I will declare, nor to advance my glorie
>
> Will I present unto the view of men
>
> Ought, but the scope of what the truth hath ben (562).

Niccols's Arthur acknowledges his contested history but dispels the historiographical anxieties present in Higgins's and Blenerhasset's earlier mirrors, promising that he will declare "the truth of my corrupted storie, Defac'd by fleeting times inconstant pen."

Niccols drew inspiration for his various literary pursuits from the works of Edmund Spenser, including Spenser's 1590 epic romance poem *The Faerie Queene*, which included the figure of Arthur in every book. However, Niccols's figure of Arthur seems to recall Spenser's *The Ruines of Time*, a poetic lament for the fallen Roman colony of Verlamium rather than *The Faerie Queene*. In *The Ruines*, an unnamed narrator (presumably Spenser) is encountered by Verlame, a feminine representative of the ancient Roman colony of Verulamium, who eulogizes the fallen colony through a commentary on the transitory nature of human affairs. Niccols's Arthur meets this same woman in a dream and directly quotes from *The Ruines of Time*, "a Ladie faire . . . making pitious mone, Tearing the tresses of her golden haire" (565). Thus, instead of encountering the sensual, ethereal vision

of Gloriana/Elizabeth in the *Faerie Queene*, Niccols's Arthur encounters a representative of what Carl J. Rasmussen describes as an unreliable figure, who has affinities with the Whore of Babylon (159), a symbolic figure of the Catholic Church, in the view of reformers. If Niccols's Arthur is indeed retreating into Tudor propaganda, as Budra argues, then Verlame could be a representative of England prior to the Henrician reformation.

Niccols's lamenting Verlame echoes Spenser almost word for word as she tells Arthur, "forlorne Ladie of this noble Ile", "Of Saxon yoke now made a subject vile", "scorne of Fortune and the Britons shame" (566). Archer argues that Niccols's allusion to Spenser is intended to engage with concerns about the loss of historical memory and transmission over time (*Unperfect Histories* 159). Spenser's method of recollection, which Niccols adopts, reflects the central matter of the poem: "the paradoxical notion that poetry survives not as an immortal monument but rather as 'the ruines of time'" (Helfer 137). For Spenser (and Niccols), the "ruines" of poetry are metaphoric in a concrete sense, as vehicles for cultural transmission that translate the past for the present (Helfer 137). The immortality of the past lies in the ruines of poetry, where the tragedy and triumph of the past exist to educate the future. This allusion locates Niccols's poem not in the chivalric medieval romance tradition evoked by the dream of the Faerie Queene/Gloriana, but, instead, it alludes to Henry VIII's conflicts with Rome and later Elizabeth I's fight to reinstate Protestantism as the national religion after the reign of her Catholic sister Mary I as well as her fight against foreign invasion from Catholic enemies.

It is Arthur's duty to preserve the genius of Britain's "antient glory" (as after her successful rout of the Saxons, Verlame is overrun again and all but obliterated), and Arthur's patriotic optimism motivates his defeat of the Saxon Colgrim, the German

Cheldrick, and their allies, the Picts at the Battle of Baddon (c.500 CE) (Archer, *Unperfect Histories* 159). Niccols invokes the mythic Arthur, presenting him in a practical manner, free from pomp and ceremony to function as an ideal *speculum principis* for imitation. Furthermore, the lack of magic and mysticism in Niccols's legend makes the history seem more legitimate. It contests the alleged mythic ties James claimed to have with Arthur, suggesting that if James chooses to maintain his pacifist stance, he will never be able to live up to the legendary Arthur.

Arthur's military success is driven by the potency of patriotic speech: he exhorts his troops with threats to "Brutus farre spread name, whose shame will flie / Throughout this world whole round" (567). If his soldiers betray him and do not heed "those same glorious words, / With which of late your tongues did oft abound," they will certainly lose the battle, but they are driven to succeed, thanks to the inspiration of the "deepe impression of my words" (568). It can be suggested that Niccols's emphasis on Arthur's ability to craft patriotic speeches that result in the defeat of the foreign invading Saxons at the Battle of Baddon could be seen an allusion to Elizabeth I's famous "Speech to the Troops at Tilbury." Elizabeth allegedly delivered this speech to her land troops at Tilbury in Essex on August 9, 1588, in preparation for the expected invasion of the Catholic Spanish Armada. Prior to the speech, Spanish forces had been driven by a storm from the Strait of Dover, but troops were still held at ready on land (Levin, "Elizabeth as King and Queen" 144). Elizabeth intended her speech to be an inspirational rallying cry that emphasized her love and faith in her people, as well as highlighting her unwillingness to give up in battle (Levin, "Elizabeth as King and Queen" 144). Through her choice of words in the Tilibury speech, Elizabeth presents herself as equal to her subjects in war: she came "to live and die amongst

you all, to lay down for my God and for my kingdom and my people mine honour and my blood even in the dust" (326). She urges them to resist foreign invaders, assuring them that she will not let them cross the "borders of my realm," and that she herself will take up arms: "I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of your virtues in the field" (326). She closes her brief speech:

> I know that already for your forwardness you have deserved rewards and crowns, and I assure you in the word of a prince you shall not fail of them … your obedience to myself and my general we shall shortly have a famous victory over these enemies of my God and of my kingdom (326).

Arthur echoes Elizabeth when he claims that his words alone spurred his troops into battle: "All th'host applauding my high valiancie, / With the deepe impression of my words begin driven, / Did break into the mids't of th' enemie" (568). Like Arthur's defeat of the invading Saxons at the Battle of Baddon, Elizabeth's defeat of the Spanish Armada brought England great fame, as much of Europe was stunned that a small nation was able to defend itself from such a powerful aggressor as Philip II of Spain.

Furthermore, Niccols's Arthur alludes to the English poet Robert Chester's (*fl.* 1601) poem "Loves Martyr," a myth of the phoenix and the turtle dove, two symbols of self-sacrifice and love. Little information is known about Chester except for his name and the poem to which it has been attributed. "Loves Martyr" is a long allegorical poem about the reign of Queen Elizabeth that incorporates the legend of King Arthur. Archer argues that the allusion to Chester's poem occurs in Niccols's tragedy when Arthur suggests that "Phoenix-like, in this death shall live my future grace" (584). Arthur's allusion recalls his famous epitaph, "*rex quondam rexque futuris*" (the once and future king), and Niccols's

tragedy functions as a memorial of his great deeds and a *speculum principis* for all future

rulers (Archer, *Unperfect Histories* 160):

> Grieue not, said I, to see your wounded king
>
> Wrapt in the ruine of his life now done;
>
> For Pheonix-like from death new life shall spring,
>
> Which in this life I by my death haue wonne,
>
> I dead, that left to liue, when I am gone,
>
> Yea this in death shall liue my future grace,
>
> I did a conquerer in cold deaths embrace (584).

Niccols also follows Chester in his use of the figure of Arthur for the militant Protestant

cause, asking with lacerating topical resonance, "shall our thoughts be then so baselie bent,

/ As with subjection servilie t'imbrace / The yoke of loftie Rome the worlds disgrace?"

(575). Niccols's Arthur seems to resonate with a Protestant interpretation of the legend,

associating it closely with the ideals of nationalism and self-sacrificing and militant

Protestantism seen under Elizabeth I. It is no surprise then that Elizabeth and her supporters

would continue to make comparisons between her and a mythic king from England's

ancient past even after her death. Like Arthur, Elizabeth was remembered for her military

prowess and success, while also being associated with the symbol of the phoenix, which

was often depicted in her portraiture, including the "Pelican Portrait" (1575) painted by

Nicholas Hilliard (1547-1619). The phoenix represented self-sacrifice, rebirth, endurance,

and eternal life. Niccols's choice to invoke the symbol of the phoenix in his tragedy of

Arthur directly aligns the legendary king with Elizabeth, suggesting that she is the direct

descendent and reincarnation of the "once and future king."

The theme of Elizabethan nostalgias introduced at the beginning of Niccols's *A Winter's Night Vision* with the tragedy of King Arthur appears again at the end of the tragedies and culminates in Niccols's panegyric of her reign entitled "England's Eliza." Unlike the earlier tragedies of King John, Edward II, and Richard III, Niccols's Queen Elizabeth in "England's Eliza" is depicted as immune to the deceitful arts of the court by avoiding poor counsel that could lead to moral, religious, and political controversy. Furthermore, when problems occur during her reign, Niccols's Elizabeth perseveres through the strength of her rule and character, as well as divine intervention. The mythic reign of Eliza is, as depicted by Niccols, characterized by English nationalism, military values, and endless struggle with Catholic rebels and traitors, whom she and her loyal chief subjects successfully defeat, resulting in a unified, patriotic nation. Sharpe argues that, almost immediately after the death of Elizabeth I, nostalgic evocations of her glorious reign became a familiar refrain of the discourse of politics (319). Niccols's work embodies nearly all these characteristics. In fact, Budra has pointed out, through its subscription to "the cult of Elizabeth," Niccols's poem breaks the exemplary mode of the *de casibus* tradition by offering a story with a happy ending, which does not fit the dominant idea of the tradition by being a comedy rather than a tragedy (*A Mirror* 36). Furthermore, the way in which Niccols depicts Elizabeth and her triumphs ensures that "no magistrate or nobleman could presume to put himself in the position of Elizabeth I" (36). Niccols's poetic ode to Elizabeth is for the education of "the future times": "what a Mirrour she might be, / Vunto all future times posterite" (779). Elizabeth's position in Niccols's text as a representation of England's history was a position enforced by the Jacobean nostalgia for the Elizabethan

age, and Niccols's panegyric represents an attempt at transporting Elizabethan strength, values, and panache into the world of Jacobean political praxis (Budra, *A Mirror* 36).

Unlike the inductions at the beginning of each tragedy in Niccols's edition, which begin with Mnemosyne, the Goddess of Memory, "England's Eliza" opens with one of the nine muses Clio, Goddess of History. This is perhaps due in part to the fact that Elizabeth is a contemporary rather than a historical figure, to be remembered though historical memory. Emphasizing that the poem is going to be rooted in historical fact legitimizes its content, and the invocation of recent history corresponds with the *de casibus* belief that the solution for contemporary problems lies in the past. "England's Eliza" opens with a prospective view of contemporary London ravaged by death and plague, which is undoubtedly an allusion to James's reign. Niccols describes himself as wandering around London "terror-sicke with dread / Of heav'ns hot plague" (775). While reminiscing, Niccols is struck by a magnificent and nostalgic site:

> That ancient castle-crowned hill to scale,
>
> Which proudly overlookes the lowly vale,
>
> Where great Elizaes birth-blest palace stands (776).

Niccols remembers it as the place where Elizabeth once stood and ruled with divine, heavenly grace, "That heav'nly Queene, Plantagenets great blood, / The farie Elizaes selfe hath often stood" (776). He mentions her Plantagenet bloodline to further her legitimacy and divine right as an English ruler, as opposed to her successor, the Scottish James I. He bemoans the recent decline of Eliza's memory, wondering "To great Elizaes worth: for who doth bring, / Her deeds to light, or who her worth doth singe?" (779). Niccols pays homage to Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* by directly referring to the author in his induction: "that

Fairie Queene sweet singer" (779). Niccols invokes his "Muse," Spenser, and his ode to

Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene* but acknowledges that too is fading with time: "But my sad

Muse, though willing; yet too weak." Repeatedly throughout the poem, he borrows from

The Faerie Queene, placing himself within an early seventeenth-century trend of what

Lousie Montrose calls the "Elizabethan political imaginary" (907), a literary tradition in

which the beliefs and practices of Tudor political culture were utilized by writers to

formulate their experience, understanding, or judgment of those in power in their

contemporary society.

The choice to adapt aspects of Spenser's earlier works opens a textual dialogue of

Elizabethan nostalgia and Jacobean opposition between the two authors, as well as Niccols

and the reader. The reader is encouraged by Niccols to engage within the imagined political

history of England's past and understand how the memory of Elizabeth can remedy the

dissatisfaction with the reigning Stuart monarch and relieve the resulting "enuie" caused by

James's rule:

> I only arme my selfe with this confidence, that
>
> the fame of her royalties mounting aloft like the
>
> sun verticall, shall in the height of all true
>
> borne English estimation, abate the
>
> shadows of their enuie (774).

However, this engagement is not intended to render the allegorical aspects of the text

transparent but rather to invite reader's speculation. Inviting general speculation can easily

lead to the politicization of this intertextual community between Spenser and Niccols

(O'Callaghan, *The "Shepheards Nation"* 9). The imagined literary friendships among

authors, editors, printers, and readers in political oppositional literature gives representation to a semi-private space in a very public sphere in which likeminded individuals could share ideas under the cover of cleverly crafted metaphors to avoid censorship (O'Callaghan, *The "Shepheards Nation"* 9). It is unsurprising, therefore, that when viewed through the lens of Elizabethan intertextuality, much of Niccols's "England's Eliza" appropriates Spenser's work. For example, in the opening paragraph of the poem, after a brief eulogy of Edward VI, Niccols depicts Englishmen as being trapped within Error's den, most likely a reference to the reign of Mary I, where even Fidessa cannot help them:

> When Englands Phoebus, Henries hopfull sonne
>
> The worlds rare phoenix, princely Edward hight,
>
> To death did yield, his glasse of life outrun,
>
> And Phoebus-like no more could lend his light;
>
> Then men did walk in shades of darkesome night,
>
> Whose feeble fight with errors blacke strooke blind,
>
> Could in no place Times faire Fidessa find (783).

Niccols is clearly referring to the future reign of Elizabeth when he references Spenser's Fidessa, a symbol of the true faith, English Protestantism. In *The Faerie Queene*, Duessa represents Falsehood and the Roman Catholic Church, disguises herself as Fidessa to mislead the Redcrosse Knight, who represents England. Significantly, in the early seventeenth century, Fidessa and Duessa could have been applied to Elizabeth, who revives the light of Edward's reign when she transforms England to a strong Protestant country. By contrast, like Fidessa leading Redcrosse Knight astray, James's pacificism is leading

England away from the "true faith" and glory established by Elizabeth during her reign and returning them to the "shades of darksome night" (783).

Similarly, Niccols alludes to Spenser's work when he describes the early years of Elizabeth's reign as similar to Redcrosse Knight's accidental entrapment in the monster Error's den: "Yea, let Eliza's woes in that blind age, / A witnesse bee of Error's rage" (783). Spenser's Error embodies poor decision making, ignorance, and illusion and assaults Redcrosse Knight with vomit "full of bookes and papers" (Spenser 6), or Roman Catholic doctrine. In the battle in Error's den, Spenser alludes to the religious struggle Elizabeth had to endure after succeeding her Catholic sister Mary and having to convert the country back to Protestantism, or the "true faith." In Book V of *The Faeirie Queene*, Astrea, the Goddess of Justice, flees the earth in disgust at mankind's behaviour, but in "England's Eliza" Niccols has Astrea return to earth to support Elizabeth in her quest to "save" England:

> No sooner did this Empires royall crowne
>
> Begirt the temples of her princelie hed;
>
> But that *Ioue*-born *Astrea* straight came downe
>
> From highest heauen againe, to which in dread
>
> Of earths impietie before shee fled (784).

Niccols adapts Spenser so that the gods of justice, kingship, and serenity work together to support the queen of England during difficult periods of religious upheaval, deposition plots, and conspiracies, the Anglo-Spanish War and the Nine Years War with Ireland. Jove looks down "from his celestial throne, with eies of pitie on poore Englands woes," and, sorry for England's current plight, he provides the country with a mighty sovereign, Elizabeth:

> Well did shee know, *Elizaes* happie reigne
>
> Would then renew the golden age againe.
>
> The heau'ns did smile on her with sweet delight,
>
> And thundering *Ioue* did laugh her foes to scorne,
>
> The god of warre did cease from bloodie ghost,
>
> And fruitfull Plentie did her land adorne
>
> With richest gifts, powr'd from her plenteous horne,
>
> The happie feeds, which th'hands of peace did sow
>
> In euerie place with goodlie fruit did grow (784).

Hadfield argues that Niccols is either adapting his source with a clear understanding of how his text works or, more likely, simply bulldozing his way through literary history and forcing more complicated works to dance to his tune ("Richard Niccols…" 175). However, by aligning himself with Spenser, Niccols places himself within a popular literary tradition of nostalgic political paradigms. The verses cited balance images of peace and war. We are reminded of Jove's part in defeating Elizabeth's enemies militarily; with his protection, she is also able to produce the cornucopia, "her plenteous horne," as the land is blessed with the abundant "goodlie" fruits of peacetime. Furthermore, Niccols's choice to invoke the images of peace, plenty, and renewal of the "golden age" recalls the myth of the "golden age," which was introduced during Anne Boleyn's (1501-1536) coronation procession in June 1533. Anne's coronation as the new queen of England and second wife of Henry VII presented her as "classical heroine, saint, and fertile mother," who heralded forth for England a golden age of harmony (Sharpe 167). Heralded underneath a canopy of golden cloth, Anne was presented by the figures of the muses in praise of her virtue, beauty, and

fertility, as well as the Graces who expressed the coming bounty and abundance to come England with Anne's ascension and subsequent birth of an heir (Sharpe 167). By recalling the public spectacle and ceremony of Elizabeth's ill-fated mother's coronation, Niccols demonstrates a nostalgic longing for the mythic Tudor age.

Niccols's depiction of Elizabeth's golden era of peace stands in marked contrast to the idle and luxurious peace of the reigns of John and Edward II (and, by implication, James). Jove laughs at Elizabeth's foreign enemies, a warning that they are only temporarily defeated and will surely return to threaten England's golden age and time of abundance. Elizabeth is ruling peacefully because she understands the need to be prepared for battle, protecting her subjects and enabling them to flourish in a well-ordered society. The God of War has ceased "from bloodie fight," but he has not forgotten his military arts and he makes sure that England's enemies know whose side he is on. His vigilance is vital because he knows that the main threat to Elizabeth will not come from a foreign enemy but from within. Niccols describes the traitorous English who turn against the queen as having "Romanized hearts," which alludes to the many Catholic-led conspiracies to depose her and instill a Catholic in her place, such as James's mother, the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots, onto the throne. Further, Niccols could also be condemning the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, in which a group of English recusant Catholics attempted to assassinate James and restore a Catholic monarch to the throne:

>Yet, if your English Romanized hearts,
>
>Gainst natures custome swell with foule defame,
>
>Brandish your stings, and cast your vtmost darts

> Against the greatnesse of her glorious name,
>
> Yet shall it liue to your eternall shame;
>
> Yea, though Rome, Spaine, and hell it selfe repine,
>
> Her fame on earth with sun-bright light shall shine (787).

Nonetheless, Elizabeth's glory was such that no combination of hostile conspiracies was able to threaten her throne. Niccols suggests that her example needs to be copied by future generations of monarchs if they wish to shine "sun-bright" and protect Protestant England against the massed forces of darkness assembled by Rome, Spain, and their Catholic cohorts. Perhaps Niccols was reminding readers not only of the Catholic forces that had threatened James in 1605, but the origin of the mirror tradition and the publication of Baldwin's first edition supressed because of a sudden regime change and the accession of Catholic Mary I, depriving readers of its powerful insights into English history and politics (Archer, *Unperfect Histories* 175).

Niccols recreated authority in "England's Eliza" by unquestioningly "enshrining the prerogatives of political absolutism" in his panegyric to Elizabeth I (Budra, *A Mirror* 37). The ghost of Elizabeth is given a few words of dialogue, and she tells the poet,

> Yet to the world, that I a Mirrour bee
>
> Amongst those many Mirrours writ by thee;
>
> Feare neither bite of dogged *Theons* tooth,
>
> Nor soone-shot bolts of giddie headed youth;
>
> For th'awfull power of my sole dreaded name,
>
> Shall from thy verse auert all foule defame (781).

Her reputation sanctifies authority in the poem, making it invulnerable to criticism, especially, historical criticism. In this last edition of the mirror tradition, the voices of criticism are silenced by the authority of Elizabeth's divine regality. *A Mirour* may have taken on the function of a nationalist panegyric with Niccols's additions, as Budra claims, but it was a panegyric with a critical oppositional intent. Indeed, despite the criticism of its excessive exultation of Elizabeth, "England's Eliza" is perhaps the most damning *de casibus* narrative of all, suggesting that after an upwards arc during Elizabeth's reign, England's dynastic greatness had crumbled under James's rule, turning the English into "mongrils" (774). Niccols believes that recalling the "fame of her royalties," like the "sun … in the height of all true bourne English estimation," will remedy their "enuie" (774). As Archer has asserted, "the object of Niccols's adulation, Elizabeth I, was dead, and his beloved nation was, in his view, poorly served by her replacement" (*Unperfect Histories* 162). Indeed, Niccols's work fits well within Elizabethan nostalgia, which occurred in successive phases throughout the early seventeenth century, in response to James's controversial behaviour and perceived weakness, the beloved queen stood as an idealized, mythic figure within the grimmer context of Jacobean reality.

Conclusion

As I have argued above, by depicting England's tragic history of war and struggle, Niccols celebrates what he believes to be the pinnacle of England's history—the last twenty years of Elizabeth I's rule. Indeed, Niccols highlights some of the most exciting events of Elizabeth's reign, including her success against two major Catholic threats: Spain, and James I's mother, Mary Stuart. His choice to dedicate *A Winter's Night Vision* to Lord Charles Howard also fixes his focus on those later years, as Howard was instrumental not only in preparing the fleet that defeated the Spanish Armada but also played a role in the final decision to execute Mary Stuart. However, while Howard continued to serve under James, his close political association with Elizabeth evokes the previous era, and particularly the triumphs described in "England's Eliza." With his selection of carefully chosen tragedies in *A Winter's Night Vision*, Niccols suggests that in order to move forward with a successful future, it is imperative to be aware of the past. As demonstrated in his tragedies of Richard III, Edward II, and King John Niccols believed James's negotiated peace was a product of idle decadence, and in order for James to ensure the strength of the nation against foreign powers, he must enact an armed peace reminiscent of his Tudor predecessors. Moreover, Niccols strongly advocates against favouritism and corruption in the Jacobean court, believing that the eradication of these political problems would ensure the reinstatement of a government whose only interests were protecting the sovereignty and strength of the nation.

Through his chosen *exempla*, Niccols echoes the contemporary criticisms of the Jacobean court and its morals. By including reminders of Elizabeth I's success alongside a

review of England's imagined past as presented in Higgins's, Blenerhasset's, and Baldwin's mirrors, Niccols makes a damning political point: England's history culminated in the immeasurable success of Elizabeth's reign. In contrast, James, the *rex pacificus,* who engaged in peace negotiations with Catholic Spain and frivolous relationships with his courtiers will never be able to live up to the success of Elizabeth I's reign. Niccols released his edition of *A Mirour* at a time when popular literature was becoming more politically conscious. With his additions to the mirror tradition Niccols repoliticizes the *speculum principis* tradition to condemn the reign of James I, while also offering moral sentiment and practical political lessons to help aid the king in redirecting the course of his reign for success. As the final editor of the mirror tradition, Niccols reinterpreted ideas from the past and combined them with contemporary ideologies, thus effectively prolonging one of the most influential literary traditions of the sixteenth century.

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