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## Crises of Self and Succession

## Cambyses in the English Theatre 1560–1667

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## Herodotus' Cambyses and the Early English Theatre

This chapter addresses the theatrical reception of the strangest Persian king in classical Greek sources, Cambyses II. Mad, bad, and definitely dangerous to know, the Herodotean Cambyses was an important and familiar figure on the early modern English stage. Two popular plays, book-ending the evolution of drama from the accession of Elizabeth to soon before the Glorious Revolution, took different approaches to the Achaemenid conqueror of Egypt. But they were united in stressing that he marked a crisis in the Persian governmental succession. This rang especially true in the sometimes turbulent era between Elizabeth I and Charles II.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the Persian monarchs in Herodotus attracting most attention were the invaders of Greece in the early fifth century BCE, Darius and Xerxes, the protagonists of books V to IX.<sup>1</sup> These two characters both appear in the sole substantial Greek surviving text on the Persian Wars that antedated Herodotus' *Histories*, Aeschylus' tragedy *Persians* (472 BCE). Although *Persians* was available in Latin translation from 1555 onwards (Saint-Ravy), it was only with the first modern-language translations of Aeschylus in the eighteenth century that the battles of Marathon, Thermopylae, and Salamis came to dominate Western cultural responses to Herodotus.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of cultural responses to Herodotus' account of the Persian Wars see the essays in *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars*, edited by Emma Bridges, Edith Hall, and P. J. Rhodes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> On the importance of access to Greek tragedy through Renaissance Latin 'cribs', see Anne T. Doyle, *Elkanah Settle's 'The Empress of Morocco' and the Controversy Surrounding It* (New York, NY and London: Garland Publishing, 2005) and Edith Hall, *Adventures with Iphigenia in Tauris: A Cultural History of Euripides' Black Sea Tragedy* (New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), ch. 8. On Aeschylus' late arrival in modern languages, see *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre 1660–1914*, edited by Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), ch. 7; Fiona Macintosh, 'The "Rediscovery" of Aeschylus for the Modern Stage', in *Eschyle*, edited by J. Jouanna, F. Montanari, and A.-C. Hernández (Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 2008), pp. 435–59; and Edith Hall, 'The

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Both Sparta and Athens have subsequently functioned as models and inspirations from the Abolition debates to Waterloo, Parliamentary Reform to the Cold War, under Fascism and in responses to 9/11 and beyond.<sup>3</sup>

From Catherine the Great's conquest of the Crimea in the 1780s to the Crimean War, Herodotus' accounts of Scythians, Taurians, Amazons, and Colchians around the Black Sea in book IV also demanded attention.<sup>4</sup> But during the Renaissance, the overwhelming popularity of the portrait of the young Cyrus' maturation in Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* had always kept the readers of Herodotus' eyes on his first book. The *Cyropaedia* is also the source of the romance-unto-death of Panthea and Habrodates. This was staged in, for example, John Bankes's 1696 *Cyrus the Great, or the Tragedy of Love* at Lincoln's Inn Fields, but was already the subject of a musical drama by Richard Farrant, *The Wars of Cyrus*, performed at Windsor by the children of St George's Chapel in the early years of Elizabeth's reign.<sup>5</sup> Farrant seems to have been inspired by William Barker's English translation of the *Cyropaedia*, the complete edition of which was published in 1567.

Yet between the printing of Xenophon and Herodotus and the Glorious Revolution, in uncomfortable counterpoint to the exemplary Cyrus, there lurks Cyrus' troublesome son, the antihero of Herodotus' second and third books, Cambyses II. In early modern English theatre, this madman whose death without issue creates an acute succession crisis plays a noteworthy part as the 'star' of two highly successful theatre works of the eleven decades between 1560 and 1667. The first is Thomas Preston's *The Lamentable Tragedy Mixed Full of Pleasant Mirth Containing the Life of Cambises King of Persia* (1560 or 1561, the earliest surviving Elizabethan tragedy) (Figure 12.1).<sup>6</sup> The second is Elkanah Settle's Restoration drama *Cambyses* (1667). Neither could have been written without the circulation of the sensational Herodotean account of Cambyses' life in book III of his *Histories*.<sup>7</sup>

Herodotus introduces us to Cambyses as an adult, already on the throne, and invading Egypt. The body of the recently deceased Egyptian King Amasis is embalmed in the temple at Sais. Amasis' son Psammenitus now rules Egypt. Cambyses wins the first battle and the Egyptian army flees to Memphis. Cambyses mistreats Psammenitus'

Problem with Prometheus: Myth, Abolition, and Radicalism', in *Ancient Slavery and Abolition*, edited by Edith Hall, Richard Alston, and Justine McConnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 209–46.

<sup>3</sup> See Elizabeth Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), and the essays by Rood, Van Steen, Lianeri, Schulze, Levene, and Hall in *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars* (2011), as well as Hall, 'The Problem with Prometheus' and 'Herodotus, the Homer of European Prose', *TLS*, 13 November 2013.

<sup>4</sup> See Hall, *Adventures with Iphigenia in Tauris*, chs. 1 and 8 and Edmund Richardson, *Classical Victorians: Scholars, Scoundrels and Generals in Pursuit of Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), ch. 3.

<sup>5</sup> See the edition of Farrant's play by Brawner (1942).

<sup>6</sup> See Eugene Hill, 'The First Elizabethan Tragedy: A Contextual Reading of *Cambises*', *Studies in Philology* 89:4 (1992): 404–33 (407): it antedated *Gorboduc* by one year.

<sup>7</sup> See Don Cameron Allen, 'A Source for *Cambises*', *MLN* (1934): 384–7.



Figure 12.1 Monument to Thomas Preston, Trinity Hall, Cambridge. Reproduced by permission of Richard Poynder.

children and other noble Egyptians, then exhumes and insults Amasis' embalmed body. He fails to conquer the Carthaginians, the Ammonians, and the Ethiopians, losing one army and almost destroying another. He murders the civic officers of Memphis, slaughters the sacred calf whom the Egyptians believe to be their god Apis, and descends into insanity. He has his brother Smerdis assassinated, marries and kills his own full sister, shoots dead the son of his loyal henchman Prexaspes, executes

twelve Persian nobles by burying them up to the neck, arbitrarily kills slaves, opens up sepulchres to look at Egyptian cadavers, and mocks the images of gods in their temples (3.14–38). Back in Persia, the Magi plan a coup which involves one of them impersonating Smerdis. Cambyses tries to get back to Persia, but mortally injures himself in his thigh, with his own sword, while mounting his horse. This creates a constitutional crisis. After disposing of the Magi threat, seven nobles hold a debate on the future of the country, decide that monarchy is the best form of government, and decide to choose a king from amongst them. He will be the one whose horse neighs first at an equine assembly to be called in the morning. Darius' attendant invents the ruse of inciting his horse to neigh through excitement about a mare. The stratagem works, and a thunder-clap indicates divine approval (3.61–119, 126–41, 150–60).<sup>8</sup>

Yet however skilful Herodotus' storytelling, my interest in English plays about Cambyses was first aroused by a source for Jacobean theatre design. 'Cambyses' state' is a metaphor for the actual stage itself, near (or even upon) which upper-class youths liked to sit, displaying themselves to commoners. The evidence derives from Thomas Dekker's satire *The Gull's Hornbook* (1609):

Let our gallant... presently advance himself up to the throne of the stage. I mean not into the Lords' room (which is now but the stage's suburbs). Nor, those boxes, by the iniquity of custom, conspiracy of waiting women and gentlemen ushers, that there sweat together... But on the very rushes where the comedy is to dance, yea, and under the state of Cambyses himself, must our feathered ostrich, like a piece of ordnance be planted valiantly (because impudently) beating down the mews and hisses of the opposed rascality.<sup>9</sup>

The very platform 'where the comedy is to dance' is synonymous with 'Cambyses' state' because Preston's exciting play about the Persian monarch Cambyses was such a familiar work.<sup>10</sup> Its contents were dependent on the account of Cambyses' life in Herodotus, even though Preston drew them from intermediary treatises of the earlier sixteenth century.

Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part I*, first performed between 1597 and 1600, confirms the popularity of Preston's *Cambises*.<sup>11</sup> A celebrated scene alludes to *Cambises* explicitly. In Shakespeare's Act II scene 4, the heir to the throne and future Henry V, Henry IV's son 'Hal', is jeopardizing his reputation, having taken to drinking in London taverns with uncouth friends, including the decadent knight Falstaff. This particular night a national

<sup>8</sup> The studies of Herodotus' text from which I have learned most that is relevant here are I. Hofmann and A. Vorbichler, 'Das Kambysebild bei Herodot', *Archiv für Orientforschung* 27 (1980): 86–105, T. S. Brown, 'Herodotus' Portrait of Cambyses', *Historia* 31 (1982): 387–403, Christopher Pelling, 'Speech and Action: Herodotus' Debate on the Constitutions', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 48 (2002): 123–58, and the dazzling essay by Daniel Selden, 'Cambyses' Madness, or the Reason of History', *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 42 (1999): 33–63.

<sup>9</sup> Dekker, *The Gull's Hornbook* (London: for R. S., 1609), p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> D. A. Latta, 'Sight-Lines in a Conjectural Reconstruction of an Elizabethan Playhouse', *Shakespeare Survey* 28 (1975): 134.

<sup>11</sup> See also Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Matter of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), and Laurence Danson, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

crisis looms because the rebels, led by Edmund Mortimer (who claims to have been declared Richard II's rightful heir), are preparing for battle. After several drinks, Falstaff suggests that his fellow symposiasts perform 'a play extempore'. The theme is topical: 'Henry IV interrogates his son as to his fitness to succeed him.' Henry IV is to be played by the verbose drunkard Falstaff, and the Prince of Wales by himself.

Falstaff/Henry IV declares that the tavern stool is his chair of state, his leaden dagger his sceptre, and his bald head his crown. He says that unless Hal has lost all 'fire of grace', he will be moved by Falstaff's performance in the passionate manner of King Cambyses:

**Falstaff.** Well, an the fire of grace be not quite out of thee,  
now shalt thou be moved. Give me a cup of sack to  
make my eyes look red, that it may be thought I have  
wept; for I must speak in passion, and I will do it  
in King Cambyses' vein.

**Henry V.** Well, here is my leg.

The pun on 'vein', meaning both acting style and physiological item, reminds Shakespeare's audience of Cambyses' fatal leg wound, displayed in Preston's play and stemming from Herodotus. But it is Falstaff, sitting drunk on his bar stool with his dagger/sceptre, who triggers the memories of all who had seen the *Lamentable Tragedy* in performance.

Falstaff then parodies the old-fashioned style of Preston's play, eliciting the response from Mistress Quickly, 'O Jesu, he doth it as like one of these harlotry / players as ever I see!' She has herself been transformed, by Falstaff's parody of Preston's language, into the first cousin (not sister) whom Falstaff/Henry IV/Cambyses desires and subsequently kills. The same grandiloquent style is mocked in *Twelfth Night* (1600 or 1601), especially the solemn imperative 'perpend', meaning 'pay attention', which occurs in *Cambyses's* opening lines.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the title of *The Lamentable Tragedy Mixed Full of Pleasant Mirth Containing the Life of Cambyses King of Persia* is recalled in the title of the burlesque performed by the 'rude mechanicals' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1590–6), *The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby*. A passing allusion to Preston's *Cambyses*, in Shakespeare's plays of decades later, could signify bombastic language, an exaggerated acting idiom, a stereotypical tyrant, gore mingled with merriment, and imposing stage regalia. Since *Cambyses* held the stage for decades, it is plausible that Shakespeare saw it in performance, and the fluency of his allusions to its props suggests that he had studied it closely.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Preston, *Cambyses* (London: John Allde, 1570), sig. A2v; see also M. P. Tilley, 'Shakespeare and His Ridicule of *Cambyses*', *Modern Language Notes* 24 (1909): 244–7.

<sup>13</sup> Burton J. Fishman, 'Pride and Ire: Theatrical Iconography in Preston's *Cambyses*', *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 16:2 (1976): 201–11 (203).

## Preston's Early Elizabethan *Cambises* between Morality and History Play

Preston's *Cambises* is an exhausting read. In rhyming fourteen-syllable lines, a metre associated with popular ballads, which when spoken creates a stressed, orotund effect, the Prologue announces that the theme will be princely government. He then introduces us to Cambises:

He in his youth was trained vp, by trace of vertues lore:  
Yet (beeing king) did clene forget, his perfect race before.  
Then cleuing more vnto his wil such vice did immitate:  
As one of Icarus his kinde, forwarning then did hate.<sup>14</sup>

Whatever his subsequent crimes, Cambises did not enter moral decline until he had already become king, when he began to practise wickedness, and ignore advice, leading to a fall akin to that of Icarus. The first scene reveals Cambises, sitting in state to announce that he is about to invade Egypt. He appoints Sisamnes to administer Persia in his absence, but Shame appears to tell us that Cambises is drinking himself into moral turpitude.

Sisamnes sees the opportunity to profit by extracting payment for acquitting or condemning litigants. Cambises has him flayed in the presence of his son. When his courtier Prexaspes suggests that he stops drinking so much, Cambises demands the presence of Prexaspes' son, shoots him dead, and has the heart excised and presented to the father. The mother laments. Cambises leaves for Egypt, now appointing his brother Smerdis regent. But encouraged by the allegorical Vice *Ambidexter* or Double-Dealing,<sup>15</sup> Cambises has Smerdis murdered, suspecting him of planning a coup.

Now Cambises becomes besotted with his first cousin. There is a banquet, but she rejects him, and is taken off to execution, piously singing a psalm. This is quickly followed by Cambises' accident. He dies on stage, acknowledging that he has met his just deserts:

Who but I in such a wise his deaths wound could haue got?  
As I on horse back vp did leape, my sword from scabard shot.  
And ran me thus into the side, as you right wel may see:  
A meruels chauce vnfortunate, that in this wise should bee.  
I feele my self a dying now, of life bereft am I:  
And death hath caught me with his dart, for want of blood I spy.  
Thus gasping heer on ground I lye, for nothing I doo care:  
A iust rewad for my misdeeds, thy death dooth plain declare.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Cambises*, sig. A2.

<sup>15</sup> On Preston's choice of this unusual Vice, see the perceptive comments of Peter Happé, 'Tragic Themes in Three Tudor Moralities', *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 5 (1965): 207–27 (209–12) and Karl P. Wentersdorf, 'The Allegorical Role of the Vice in Preston's *Cambises*', *MLS* 2 (1981): 56.

<sup>16</sup> *Cambises*, sig. F2.

The play's energy derives from the tension between three character types. The central narrative is enacted in palaces and tents by the Persian aristocracy. Alternating with these scenes are the open-air street antics of low-class characters who perform songs and knockabout routines: the ruffians Huf, Ruf, and Snuf, who make sport with a prostitute, and the peasants Hob, Lob, and Marian, invulnerable to Ambidexter's attempts to make trouble between them. The third group consists of allegorical figures, besides Ambidexter, called Shame, 'Comon's complaint', 'Proof', 'Triall', 'Diligence', 'Murder', 'Crueltie', Venus, and Cupid.

This famous work fuses the Herodotean account of Cambyses' misdemeanours with demotic comedy and the allegorical conventions of the morality play. Although Sisamnes is deplorably wicked, the cruel manner of his execution is the first sign of Cambyses' incipient depravity. Preston departs decisively from the Cambyses tradition that had prevailed prior to the irruption into the Renaissance consciousness of the unstable Herodotean tyrant. The medieval Cambyses had been, rather, an exemplar of justice, even if a brutal one: his commitment to impartial administration of law resulted in the flaying of the corrupt judge Sisamnes to deter all future judges from taking bribes. This tale was known, from as early as 1275,<sup>17</sup> through Latin versions including one contained in both the Christian compendium *Gesta Romanorum* and Valerius Maximus' *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*.<sup>18</sup> It is this medieval tradition, rather than Herodotus, that lies behind the pictorial displays of the story in courts of law. A fine example is the two panels depicting the judgement and flaying of Sisamnes by the Flemish painter Gerard David (1498), exhibited in the Bruges Palace of Justice.<sup>19</sup>

The punishment of Sisamnes, as an exemplum redounding to Cambyses' credit, had therefore circulated from the late thirteenth century onwards. It was not until 1474, twenty-one years after Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable type printing press and Constantinople fell to the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror, that the world first saw a printed edition of any book of Herodotus, the Latin translation of Lorenzo Valla.<sup>20</sup> And just forty-nine years after the fall of Constantinople, the first Greek edition of Herodotus was printed in 1502 at the Aldine Press in Venice. By 1535 Herodotus had been published in Italian and German translations, and was certainly being studied in England. In France, a translation of all nine books was available by 1556.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See Hugo van der Velden, 'Cambyses for Example: The Origins and Function of an *exemplum iustitiae* in Netherlandish Art of the Fifteenth, Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 23 (1995): 5–62 (11 with nn. 28–9).

<sup>18</sup> See the copious documentation in van der Velden, 'Cambyses for Example', especially 8–9 and the bibliography in n. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Note that the medieval Cambyses already sometimes functioned as an exemplum of ire on account of his brutal killing of a courtier's son, the story being derived from Seneca's *de Ira* 3.14.1–4, on which see Gerard B. Lavery, 'Sons and Rulers: Paradox in Seneca's *de Ira*', *L'Antiquité Classique* 56 (1987): 279–83. *The Riverside Chaucer* (2008), edited by L. D. Benson, also notes one early allusion to Cambyses' drunkenness and subsequent tyranny in Chaucer's 'Summoner's Tale'.

<sup>20</sup> *Historiae*, edited by Benedictus Brognolus (Venice: Jacobus Rubeus, 1474).

<sup>21</sup> Pierre Saliat (trans.), *Les Neuf Livres des Histoires de Herodote* (Paris: Estienne Groulleau, 1556).

Yet in England, which had to wait longer for a full translation, Cambyses arrived in the cultural repertoire as full-blown mad tyrant through the conduits of two volumes published in the fifth decade of the sixteenth century: the second book of Richard Taverner's *Garden of Wisdom* (1542) and the English translation of Johann Carion's *Chronicles* (1550). Carion was Professor of Mathematics at Frankfurt, but his *Chronicles* were designed to provide a universal history. The German text had been published earlier, in 1532. Taverner was an evangelical reformer, and his *Garden of Wisdom* mainly consists of versions of Erasmus' *Apophthegmata*. But Starnes has argued that Taverner was drawing for this non-Erasman part of his *Garden* (the third of book II dealing with the ancient Persians) on a 1537 Latin edition of Carion.<sup>22</sup>

So what Cambyses material did Preston find in Taverner, and/or Carion, both of whom include sections on Cambyses and Darius? For both Carion and Taverner, Cambyses has become the unambiguous tyrant of the Herodotean narrative, guilty of the serial atrocities which make Preston's play so gruesome. But under the heading 'Darius', they also both offer detailed versions of the episode including and following Cambyses' death, which contains perhaps the most politically incendiary materials in Herodotus. These are (a) the constitutional debate conducted by the seven conspirators who have killed the imposter Smerdis, which includes Otanes' proposal to introduce an egalitarian regime, and (b) the election of Darius, whose victory is assured by a combination of his corrupt desire to 'fix' the result, and the resourceful intelligence of a household servant.

Carion's version of Otanes' speech, in its English translation,<sup>23</sup> has him counselling 'to chose no more kynges, bit that the princes bounde by an aliaunce, shuld rule a lyke, libertye beyng retayned of ether syde'. Carion seems at a loss how to understand the constitution recommended by Othanes, in Herodotus' text (3.80) called 'rule by the *plēthos*' (mass, majority), which brings *isonomiē* (equality under the law). But Carion does zestfully reproduce Herodotus' detailed account of the accession of Darius, horses and all. Taverner follows Carion closely. His English version is slightly more expansive in advocating liberty, although he, too, fails to translate the full force of Herodotus' rule by the *plēthos*: 'by leage and sure confederacies made betwene them, all the lordes myght rule alyke, so shuld libertie be maynteyned and kept one euery syde and euery man at fredom'.<sup>24</sup> Both accounts nevertheless constitute strong political meat. No kings should be chosen, all lords should have the same degree of power, to maintain liberty, consensus, and freedom for every man. But Preston abruptly ends his drama with the providential death of Cambyses, ignoring the sequel which narrates the accession of Darius and raises uncomfortable questions.

<sup>22</sup> D. T. Starnes, 'Richard Taverner's *The Garden of Wisdom*, Carion's *Chronicles*, and the Cambyses Legend', *The University of Texas Studies in English* 35 (1956): 22–31. Preston, however, could have accessed the *Chronicles* in English via Walter Lynne's translation, published in 1550.

<sup>23</sup> Carion, *The thre bokes of cronicles* (London: for Gwalter Lynn, 1550), book II, xli.

<sup>24</sup> Taverner, *The second booke of the Garden of wysedome* (London: for Richard Bankes, 1542), sig. [C5]v.



When Preston's play was first performed, probably at court,<sup>25</sup> even Herodotus' election tale (let alone majority rule) would have seemed inappropriate and provocative. Elizabeth I was still in her twenties, and expected to marry and bear children. She had survived not only her two half-siblings, the monarchs Edward and Mary, but the 'nine days' queen' Jane Dudley (their first cousin once removed). Elizabeth had also been declared illegitimate, and therefore ineligible to be queen, more than once in that short life. The audiences of Preston's play, for several years after 1561, must have felt that the succession problem which had plagued England since Henry VIII's death might finally be solved. And in Preston's play, the death of Cambyses precedes no sign of constitutional crisis or rivalry between aspiring successors. It does not occur until the end, and the three lords who wrap up the action do no more than agree that he was a bad king who deserved a wretched demise. The *Epilogus* closes with a rousing prayer for Queen Elizabeth and those who counsel her.

Preston saw spectacular potential in the episodes from Cambyses' life he discovered in Carion or Taverner. The flaying of Smerdis, the shooting and mutilation of Prexaspes' child, and a stabbing scene which involves puncturing a bladder of vinegar to represent blood, along with the wounded tyrant's climactic demise, create a sensational violent realism which must have helped the play succeed.<sup>26</sup> But Hill reminds us that the violence would have spoken to a 1560 audience's direct experience 'of the recently ended terror in their own land'.<sup>27</sup> Besides the closing prayer for the new queen, the sole reference to a contemporary figure is the comparison of Cambyses to Edmund Bonner, the Bishop of London responsible for vicious persecutions of Protestants during Mary's reign. When Cambyses' cousin goes to her death, singing a psalm like a heretic at the stake, Ambidexter is choked with emotion, and rhetorically asks:

What a King was he that hath vsed such tyranny?  
He was a kin to Bishop Bonner, I think verely,  
For bothe their delights was to shed blood:  
But neuer intended to doo any good.

'Bloody Bonner' was imprisoned by Elizabeth in April 1560, and at the time of the first performance of *Cambyses* many Protestants were agitating for his execution, along with that of other imprisoned Catholic leaders.

It is possible that some in Preston's audiences recalled from Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* 6.2 that Cambyses had prevented the Jews from building the temple they had begun under Cyrus. As confirmed in the biblical book of Ezra, they were not able to recommence it until Darius took power; Luther himself had alluded to this part of

<sup>25</sup> E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), Vol. 4, esp. n. 6; see also Yoshiki Kawachi, *Calendar of English Renaissance Drama 1558–1642* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1986), pp. 4–5.

<sup>26</sup> Jean I. Marsden, 'Spectacle, Horror, and Pathos', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, edited by Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 176. See also Fishman, 'Pride and Ire'.

<sup>27</sup> Hill, 'The First Elizabethan Tragedy', p. 413.

the Cambyses tradition and there was a characteristic identification of Protestants with the exiled and persecuted ancient Jews.<sup>28</sup> But Preston, no subtle theologian, would probably have underlined this association more explicitly if he had intended it. The case for Preston's analogy between the Marian terror and the rule of Cambyses is more persuasive. Here the ancient Persians are used to define not a distant foreign foe somewhere in Asia, but one aspect of England's recent history and divided religious self, the aspect which had so recently been ascendant. Hill points to the oration made by John Hales in honour of the new queen in 1559, in which he bemoaned the recent persecutions:

O cruelty, cruelty! far exceeding all cruelties committed by those ancient and famous tyrants and cruel murderers, Pharaoh, Herod, Caligula, Nero, Domitian . . . whatsoever malice in mischief, covetousness in spoil, cruelty in punishing, tyranny in destruction could do, that all this poor English nation, this full five years, suffered already; or should have suffered, had not the great mercy of God prevented it.<sup>29</sup>

Hales elsewhere adds Holofernes and Sennacherib to this list,<sup>30</sup> and Preston adds, in the theatre, the more sensationally savage Cambyses.

Through Preston's *Cambyses*, Herodotus' narratives influenced not only this play's immediate audiences—whether they were watching performances by students at Cambridge, 'crude mechanicals', 'harlotry players', or the 'scaffold players' associated with enthusiastic Protestants like Preston in the mid-sixteenth century<sup>31</sup>—but, in a subterranean fashion, the entire evolution of drama in English. Pincombe has shown how the tragedies of the 1560s anticipated the direction in which Shakespeare's generation was to move the genre, revelling in Plutarch's *Lives* and other ancient Greek historiographical and biographical texts, 'towards the intermixture with the neo-classical base not only of vernacular elements, but also of frankly "comical" ones, as in Thomas Preston's *Cambyses* . . . Modern critics never miss the chance to laugh at this title, but it was in *Cambyses* rather than in *Gorboduc* that the future of English tragedy actually lay.<sup>32</sup> This future was also presaged by *Cambyses* rather than by the other classically themed play of the 1560s retaining elements of the morality play, John Pkeryng's *Horestes* (1567), which drew on a Greek tragic myth as mediated through Caxton's *Recuyell of the Histories of Troye*.<sup>33</sup> Preston's *Cambyses*, with its episodic temporality and admixture of comic episodes, held a pivotal diachronic position in the emergence

<sup>28</sup> From Martin Luther's 'Lectures on the Minor Prophets III', in *Works*, edited by Hilton C. Oswald, Vol. 20 (St. Louis, MI: Concordia Publishing, 1973), p. 83.

<sup>29</sup> Hales, cited by John Foxe in *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, edited by Josiah Pratt (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1854–68), p. 674; Hill, 'The First Elizabethan Tragedy', p. 414.

<sup>30</sup> Pratt (ed.), *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, pp. 675–6.

<sup>31</sup> Hill, 'The First Elizabethan Tragedy', p. 411.

<sup>32</sup> Mike Pincombe, 'English Renaissance Tragedy: Theories and Antecedents', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, edited by Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 8; see also Marsden, 'Spectacle, Horror, and Pathos', p. 176.

<sup>33</sup> On *Horestes*, see Hall, 'Sophocles' *Electra* in Britain', in *Sophocles Revisited: Studies in Honour of Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones*, edited by Jasper Griffin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 261–306, and

of history plays (such as *Henry IV Part I*). Its most ostensibly ‘medieval’ feature, the decline of the great man in the toils of sin, epitomized by Boccaccio’s fourteenth-century *De Casibus*,<sup>34</sup> runs all the way from the English medieval and Elizabethan writers, from Chaucer and Lydgate’s *A Mirror for Magistrates*, to *Macbeth* and *Richard III*.<sup>35</sup>

But we also need to recognize what *Cambises* shares, synchronically, with other plays deriving from ancient sources which were important in the early 1560s, the years when Shakespeare and Marlowe were born. *Appius and Virginia*, attributed to a man called R. B. (probably Richard Bower), draws on Livy III (via medieval intermediaries including Chaucer’s *Physician’s Tale*). Its powerful tale of tyranny and love, set in the Roman Republic, with Senecan rhetorical flourishes,<sup>36</sup> adds figures with homiletic functions from the morality tradition (Appius is tempted by the Vice Haphazard before yielding to temptation). It was performed at court soon after *Cambises*. *Damon and Pytheas* (a ‘tragical comedy’ based on the tale of Greek figures of the fourth century BCE, easily accessible in Cicero’s *De Officiis* 3.45<sup>37</sup>) was performed as early as 1564.<sup>38</sup> The *Octavia* attributed to Seneca, translated by Thomas Nuce when he was at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge in 1562–3, was published in 1566,<sup>39</sup> and performed at Oxford University, in Latin, at about the same time. As an authentic ancient tragedy on a historical theme, featuring an angry tyrant, it may well have influenced Preston’s *Cambises*. Between these four plays of the 1560s and Shakespeare lay yet other intermediary dramas such as Lyly’s 1584 *Alexander and Campaspe*, which draws on Livy and Diogenes Laertius as well as North’s Plutarch. This translation was itself about to become a game-changer and push Herodotean tales further towards the back of the Plutarch-obsessed Elizabethan dramatists’ bookshelf.

*A pretie new enterlude both pithie & pleasaunt of the story of Kyng Daryus* (1565) is anonymous, sub-biblical, and anti-Catholic. It associated the Maryan persecution of Protestants with the persecution of Jews, who were prevented from completing their temple until Cambyses was replaced by Darius I. This piece probably capitalized on *Cambises*’ popularity: ‘by assigning an ancient Persian context to the play in the wake of *Cambises*’s success; Elizabethan audiences seem to have been looking forward

Allyna Ward, ‘Whosoever Resisteth Shall Get to Themselves Dampnacioun’: Tyranny and Resistance in *Cambises* and *Horestes*, *Yearbook of English Studies* 38 (2008): 150–67.

<sup>34</sup> This is consonant in itself with the medieval view of tragedy found in Boccaccio, Chaucer, Lydgate, and many other writers, who centred it on a great man’s fall, precipitated by moral failure.

<sup>35</sup> Happé, ‘Tragic Themes in Three Tudor Moralities’, pp. 212, 220.

<sup>36</sup> Happé, ‘Tragic Themes in Three Tudor Moralities’, p. 221.

<sup>37</sup> See Robert Stretter, ‘Cicero on Stage: Damon and Pythias and the Fate of Classical Friendship in English Renaissance Drama’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 47 (2005): 345–65.

<sup>38</sup> G. E. P. Arkwright, ‘Elizabethan Choirboy Plays and Their Music’, *Proceedings of the Musical Association* 40 (1913–14): 117–38 (119–20).

<sup>39</sup> Howard B. Norland, *Neoclassical Tragedy in Elizabethan England* (Cranbury, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2009), pp. 19–20, although see also Jessica Winston, ‘Seneca in Early Elizabethan England’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 59 (2006): 29–59 (31 n. 6), who believes that Nuce’s translation was written as early as 1562.

to more ancient Persian plays.<sup>40</sup> They were not disappointed. Besides Farrant's Xenophontic romance *The Wars of Cyrus*, mentioned earlier, there were at least eight further significant plays connected with ancient Persian history over the subsequent seven decades.

They included two of the much-read closet *Monarchick Tragedies* of the Scottish courtier Sir William Alexander, *Darius* (Darius III, the Darius conquered by Alexander the Great) and *Croesus* (1603–4), as well as his *Alexandrian Tragedy* (1607), which dramatized the breakdown of relationships between Alexander's successors in Babylon after his death.<sup>41</sup> Samuel Daniel's *Philotas* drew on Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* to stage an episode from the easternmost part of the Macedonian army's exploits in Bactria (1605). *The Prophetess* by John Fletcher and Philip Massinger was a romance set in Persia during the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian (1622). John Suckling's preposterous *Aglaura*, performed at Blackfriar's by the King's Men in 1637, set a love heptagon in a fantastical fairyland-like 'Persia' identifiable with no single historical period whatsoever.<sup>42</sup>

The final play in this category of pre-Civil War 'Persian plays' is one to which we shall return at the end of the next section, William Cartwright's *The Royall Slaue*, published in 1639 as *A tragi-comedy. Presented to the King and Queene by the students of Christ-Church in Oxford. August 30. 1636*. The Epilogue, addressed to these Majesties, coyly equates Cratander, the Greek hero, with the author, and Charles I/Henrietta as the magnanimous and magnificent Persian royal couple Arsamnes/Atossa. The version of Persian 'king for a day' theme from which the action of *The Royall Slave* springs was found in *On Kingship* by Dio Chrysostom, the sophist of Prusa, who describes the ancient Persian custom of liberating a captive taken in the wars in order to elevate him to a temporary kingship before his execution.<sup>43</sup> Cartwright's gaoler Molops translates a parallel Greek/Latin edition of Dio's text, published in 1604, in order to offer his Caroline aristocratic audience a learned mini-lecture on the tradition: 'For you must know, that 'tis the custome of the Persian Kings after a Conquest, to take one of the Captives, and adorne him with all the Robes of Majesty, giving him all Priviledges for three full dayes, that hee may doe what hee will and then be certainly led to death.'<sup>44</sup> For Cartwright was fascinated by Persian ethnography, and had even specified that the costumes—'habits', designed by Inigo Jones—in *The Royal Slave* should be Persian.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Hafiz Abid Masood, *From Cyrus to Abbas: Staging Persia in Early Modern England*, DPhil thesis, Sussex (2011), p. 31.

<sup>41</sup> See Gary F. Waller, 'Sir William Alexander and Renaissance Court Culture', *Aevum* 51 (1977): 505–15.

<sup>42</sup> Linda McJannet, 'Bringing in a Persian', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 12 (1999): 236–67 (240).

<sup>43</sup> On Cartwright's use of this text see Chloe Houston, 'Persia and Kingship in William Cartwright's *The Royall Slave* (1636)', *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 54 (2014): 455–73.

<sup>44</sup> Cartwright, Act I scene 1, uses Dio in the Latin translation of Naogeorgus, *Dionis Chrysostomi Orationes LXXX* (Paris: F. Morel, 1604), pp. 69–70.

<sup>45</sup> See John Freehafer, "'The Italian Night Piece' and Suckling's 'Aglaura'", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 67 (1968): 249–65.

## The Evasive Diplomacy of Settle's Restoration *Cambyses*

Preston's *Cambyses* has less in common with any of these plays—most of which were either high-minded Plutarchan closet dramas or preposterous romances—than with the rather later Restoration *Cambyses* drama of Elkanah Settle, it seems to me. Preston wrote *Cambyses* in his early or mid-twenties, when he was attached to King's College, Cambridge; Settle, who had certainly read Preston's text, wrote his own play during his few months as a student at Trinity College, Oxford just over a century later, in 1666 (he did not graduate) The published text includes Settle's postscript, which repudiates charges of depending on Preston's play:

And 'tis the pleasure of others, to accuse me of stealing out of an Old obsolete Tragi-Comedy, called, *Cambyses, King of Persia*; a Play which I had never heard of till this had been Acted: but however, those that have seen that may find that I might have borrow'd better language from Sternbold and Hopkins.<sup>46</sup>

Both *Cambyses* plays were public stage hits, making the reputations of their youthful authors and leading to further success. Settle subsequently penned *The Empress of Morocco*, staged in 1669–70, 'perhaps the greatest blockbuster theatre event of the period'.<sup>47</sup> Both use spectacle and embedded performances of masque or dance. Both have been almost universally deplored by scholars of English literature. In 1929 Dobrée explained in his *Restoration Tragedy* why he was *not* going to discuss Settle any more than the Restoration playwrights John Banks (who wrote plays about Cyrus the Great and Alexander the Great) and John Crowne (who wrote a *Darius King of Persia*, a *Caligula*, and a play about the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus Vespasian):

it must be pleaded that there is a level below which it is waste of time for the mere lover of literature, as opposed to the scholar or thesis-writer, to go; and indeed, grubbing in the mud in the hopes of making mud look like crystal, or finding some isolated, and even then doubtful, gem in the slime, is much to be deplored.<sup>48</sup>

Yet with alleged mediocrity the similarities cease. Preston's *Cambyses* is a drunkard who suffers from pride and ire and dies as a result; Settle's *Cambyses* is more psychologically complicated, but takes a less prominent role. Three other characters compete for the audience's attention.

Settle's parents owned a tavern in Dunstable, where he was born on 1 February 1648,<sup>49</sup> during the Civil War. The taverner's son must have had some education,

<sup>46</sup> These names belong to the authors of mid-sixteenth-century metrical psalms much derided by Settle's day.

<sup>47</sup> William J. Bulman, 'Publicity and Popery on the Restoration Stage: Elkanah Settle's *The Empress of Morocco* in Context', *Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012): 308–39 (309).

<sup>48</sup> Bonamy Dobrée, *Restoration Tragedy 1660–1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> F. C. Brown, *Elkanah Settle: His Life and Works* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1910), pp. 6–7.

because he was elected a King's Scholar at Westminster by 1663. Having written a political poem criticizing the Dutch, against whom the English had declared war, he left school in 1666 and entered Trinity College, Oxford.<sup>50</sup> Along with a fellow student called William Butler Fyfe he wrote his first play, *Cambyses*. Fyfe died, but Settle completed it before Christmas 1666 when it was accepted for D'Avenant's company, then playing at the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. It was 'the first new Play that was acted' by this company after the Great Fire of London, and proved successful, running 'six full days with a full audience.'<sup>51</sup> It was anything but the 'damn'd dull serious play' of which its own prologue, tongue-in-cheek, forewarned.

*Cambyses* ran to four editions before the century's close. It possessed every formulaic element required to produce a popular heroic play, including 'the outlandish country and names', like the Incas in Dryden's *The Indian Queen*.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, even the meagre spattering of oriental exotica distinguishes it from Preston's *Cambises*, in which not a single explicit ethnographic feature differentiates the tyrant from an English monarch, regardless of Masood's argument that it consolidates the sixteenth-century English association of ancient Persia with wine-drinking, skill in shooting, and incest.<sup>53</sup> The success of his Persian play allowed Settle to leave university. He gained the favour of influential courtiers, especially Anne, Duchess of Buccleugh and Monmouth, on whom more shortly.

The action begins with Cambyses returning from his conquests of Syria and Egypt, bringing with him the Egyptian captives Osiris and the Princess Mandana, whom he loves. The kingdom has been taken over by a usurper, the false Smerdis, at the instigation of Theramnes, son of the late king of Syria. Extra love interest is supplied by the two daughters of the Persian noble Otanes, Phedima and Orinda. While Cambyses prepares to reclaim his country, the action shifts between Cambyses' camp and the palace at Susa where the usurper is entrenched.

Prexaspes, the arch-plotter and confidant of Cambyses, having been promised the throne of Syria by the usurper, stabs Cambyses to death in Act IV, laying the blame on Mandana the Egyptian princess. Prexaspes now behaves ever more tyrannically. Having been made commanding officer by the usurper, he imprisons the generals Otanes and Darius, and plans to have himself proclaimed king. But when the day arrives for the execution of the generals, Theramnes appears disguised as executioner, refuses to obey Prexaspes, whom he ties up, before releasing the prisoners.

A substantial section of the play, however—the second half of the fourth and all of the long fifth Act—dramatizes events which *follow* the death of Cambyses, slain by his

<sup>50</sup> Brown, *Elkanah Settle*, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> See John Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus: or, An historical review of the stage* (London: J. W. Jarvis & son, 1708), p. 36; John Dennis's 'Preface' to *Remarks upon Mr Pope's translation of Homer* (London: for E. Curll, 1717) noted that the piece 'was Acted for Three Weeks together.'

<sup>52</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of Restoration Drama 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), p. 107.

<sup>53</sup> Masood, *From Cyrus to Abbas*, p. 34.

treacherous former henchman Prexaspes. Prexaspes tries to play everyone off against one another in order to accumulate power himself, while the imposter makes him general of the entire army. The seven nobles plot to intervene. Darius suggests that they proclaim Otanes ‘the Persian Heir, and King’:<sup>54</sup> Otanes’ exact relationship to the royal family is never specified (he is some kind of uncle), but the assumption prevails that since Cyrus’ sons are childless, Otanes is by blood the rightful successor. Prexaspes has the nobles arrested, but with Theramnes’ help they are freed and prevail.

In the final scene, the imposter is forcing Phedima to marry him in a temple. The nobles enter and kill the imposter. The remainder of the play is spent trying to sort out the succession problem created by the regicide of Cambyses. Darius proposes Otanes; Otanes declines, on the ground of old age, but accepts the crown just long enough to place it on Darius’ head. Darius demurs, saying that Otanes is superior to him in both ‘birth’ and ‘merit’. Otanes responds that he must take it if he is not to betray his ‘allegiance’ to the throne; again Darius refuses. Finally, Otanes offers him Phedima, and commands him take the throne as his son. Darius now accepts. Everyone shouts ‘Long live Darius, King of Persia’. Tapers on the altar burst spontaneously into flames. It merely remains to prove that Mandana is innocent of killing Cambyses, for Prexaspes to commit suicide, and for the international monarchical order to be reaffirmed. Darius will rule Persia with Phedima, Theramnes gets Orinda and Syria, and Mandana is finally allowed to marry and rule Egypt.

It is easy to see why the play was as popular as Preston’s had been. It is both spectacular and suspenseful; there is no certainty until late in Act V that the ending will be celebratory. Yet Settle’s recognition of the unsuitability for his audience of Herodotus’ depiction of the succession crisis is more obvious than Preston’s. Otanes inherits the throne by sanguinity just long enough to pass it on, via marriage, to Darius, who has shown himself the most impressive of the conspirators. There is no constitutional debate, no election, no rigged omen, no neighing, and no clever groom.

In 1667 Settle could not openly question the principle of inherited monarchy. When Edward Howard’s Italian political tragedy *The Change of Crowns* was acted before Charles II on 15 April of that year, the king became enraged and ordered it to be restrained, although changing his mind and permitting its revival a few days later.<sup>55</sup> The issue of the future succession was also sensitive. Charles’s queen had suffered at least two stillbirths or miscarriages. Despite his numerous healthy illegitimate children, people already feared that Charles would be succeeded by his unpopular Rome-leaning brother James, Duke of York, who had married the commoner Anne Hyde and only produced daughters.

As early as 1662, some Parliamentarians were discussing the possibility of breaking the line of succession. The Duke of Monmouth, Charles’ oldest bastard, perceived as a supporter of Protestantism and Parliament, was an attractive proposition. Rumours

<sup>54</sup> Settle, *Cambyses* (London: for William Cademan, 1671), p. 71.

<sup>55</sup> Nicoll, *A History of Restoration Drama*, p. 10.

spread, probably fuelled by James, that Monmouth was not actually a son of Charles II after all. And Settle's court patron was none other than Monmouth's young and impeccably aristocratic Scottish wife, Anne Scott, Countess of Buccleuch. Settle may have avoided patent references to the contemporary political scene in *Cambyses*, but the 'Epistle' in which he dedicates it to the Duchess of Monmouth shows him steering a careful course between flattery of his patrons by comparing their stature with the rulers of the ancient Persian empire, and discouragement of specific connections between his dramatized action and contemporary reality:

Since the great Characters, and Subjects of serious Plays, are representations of the past Glories of the World, the arrogance of an Epistle Dedicatory may pretend to some Justice, in offering the Heroick Stories of past Ages to their Hands who are the Ornaments of the present... [T]he Eastern Monarch Cambyses can pretend to no greatness of his own, but comes to borrow Glories from the Western World, in seeking a Patronage from your favourable goodness.

These circumstances illuminate how Settle dramatizes the accession of Darius. He plays it as safe as he can: the Monmouths would have been pleased by the portrayal of young and meritorious aristocrats with a biological relationship to the king stepping up—if reluctantly—to the responsibilities of power when a succession crisis loomed; the former exile Charles, equally, will not have taken exception to the story of good royals like Theramnes and Mandana being restored to their thrones after years of oppression by men with no legitimate claim on the crown—an imposter and a non-aristocrat.

Settle prudently supplements his edited Herodotus with a convenient additional ancient text, Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* 11.1–3; he may have been prompted by the first English translation, by Thomas Lodge, which had appeared in 1602.<sup>56</sup> Josephus offers a cursory history of Cyrus (a good king), Cambyses (a bad one), and Darius. For Josephus, Darius is a good king chosen rationally by the noble families of Persia. By drastically rewriting the colourful election in Herodotus along Josephus' lines, Settle is choosing shrewdly, since the information about Herodotus' constitutional debate and bizarre election was available. Walter Raleigh's world history, for example, includes a section 'Of the inter-regnum betweene CAMBYSES and DARIVS', which names and closely follows Herodotus.<sup>57</sup> Raleigh's version of Otanes' speech runs like this:

Otanes one of the seuen did not fancie any election of Kings, but that the Nobilitie and Cities should confederate, and by iust lawes defend their liberty in equality, giuing diuers reasons for his opinion, being as it seemed greatly terrified by the cruelties of Cambyses.

Not only was this text, with its inspiring suggestion 'that the Nobilitie and Cities should confederate, and by iust lawes defend their liberty in equality', well known through the 'Universal History' tradition, but its radical potential had evoked reactions such as

<sup>56</sup> This was a translation of the first 1544 version of the standard Greek text, edited by the Dutch humanist Arnoldus Arlenius.

<sup>57</sup> Raleigh, *Historie of the World in Five Books* (London: William Stansby, 1614), Part I, book 3, pp. 46–7.



those of the Puritan Anne Bradstreet. This English poet, who had arrived in the New World in 1630, supported Parliament in the 1640s. In 1650 she became the first woman poet to be published in both England and on the other side of the Atlantic with the appearance of *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America*. Our expectation of Bradstreet's reaction to Cambyses should be high, especially since, as Susan Wiseman has written, '*The Tenth Muse* positively invites interpretation as an intervention in Civil War poetics and as a volume which initiates an Atlantic (rather than "English" or "American") perspective on the conflict.'<sup>58</sup>

In her longest poem, 'the Four Monarchies of the World,'<sup>59</sup> Bradstreet follows Raleigh on the four ancient empires of Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Ending with the story of Lucretia, the death of Tarquin the last king of Rome, and the foundation of the Roman Republic, the poem 'was inescapably suggestive in relation to mid seventeenth century English politics,' and implicitly 'builds an indictment of monarchy.'<sup>60</sup> Wiseman's reading recognizes the importance of Bradstreet's inclusion of a reference to Herodotus' constitutional debate, where it was asked 'What forme of Government now to erect?,' but does not realize the extent to which Bradstreet has doctored this section.

The old, or new, which best, in what respect,  
The greater part, declin'd a Monarchy.  
So late crusht by their Princes Tyranny;  
And thought the people would more happy be,  
If governed by an Aristocracy.  
But others thought (none of the dullest braine,)   
But better one, then many Tyrants reigne.  
What arguments they us'd, I know not well,  
Too politicke (tis like) for me to tell.<sup>61</sup>

Without mentioning Otanes' proposal, and reducing the debate to that between an aristocracy and a monarchy, Bradstreet backs off from detailing the arguments used by any of Herodotus' debaters, applying a disclaimer of feminine self-deprecation. Yet this *recusatio*, to any reader who knows Herodotus, will actually *emphasize* the missing material.

If Settle, like others including Bradstreet before him, evaded the radical implications of the end of Herodotus' Cambyses tale, perhaps his play is political in a different way. Its Prologue raises the question of whether the audience would have associated the ancient Persian court with the contemporary Ottoman or any other regime much different from that of Restoration England. Frustratingly, we do not know whether acting styles differentiated either ancient Persians or contemporary Turks: the leading

<sup>58</sup> Wiseman, 'Women's Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to Writing of the English Revolution*, edited by N. H. Keeble (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 127–47 (p. 134).

<sup>59</sup> Bradstreet, *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*, edited by Jeanine Hensley (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010), pp. 65–179.

<sup>60</sup> Wiseman, 'Women's Poetry', pp. 135, 137.

<sup>61</sup> Bradstreet, *Works*, p. 73; Wiseman, 'Women's Poetry', p. 137.

actor Betterton, who played Settle's Cambyses, had recently taken the role of Soliman in Orrery's *Mustapha* at Lincoln's Inn Fields (1665). The possibility that the ancient Persians are thinly disguised Turks is raised in the Prologue. Settle references stereotypically cruel Turkish punishments in expressing the conventional fears of the young playwright that his work will be damned before he has established his career:

Thus you have learnt the Turkish Cruelty,  
When Elder Brothers Reign, the Younger dye.  
But as those Turks, when they're for Death design'd,  
This favour from their Cruel Brothers find,  
Strangled by Mutes, who fitted for the Fact,  
Want Tongues to speak the Cruelty they Act.  
Knowing the dangers of a publick shame,  
Our Rhimer hopes his Fate may be the same:  
He humbly begs, if you must cruel be,  
You'd make no noise when you his doom decree,  
But if you damn him, damn him silently.<sup>62</sup>

Early in the play, the imposter orders an instant beheading when he thinks he has been betrayed.<sup>63</sup> When Prexaspes orders the execution of the nobles, the text specifies that the Executioner wield a 'scymitar'.<sup>64</sup> Settle's portrayal of the Persian treatment of women may be inflected by contemporary English beliefs about Ottoman customs: Phedima objects to being forcibly unveiled, there is one apparent reference to harems, and the impossibility of a woman sitting on the Persian throne may owe more to comparisons with the Ottoman empire than the Achaemenid.<sup>65</sup>

Identifiably Turkish/Muslim colouring goes no further. The Persians' religion, not Islamic, is certainly presented as strange—gods in the plural are routinely invoked, and these Persians may have been reading Herodotus' take on Zoroastrianism when they say that they are unique in worshipping the Sun.<sup>66</sup> The first play-within-a-play features captive princes performing a martial dance in chains, with a 'Prince Triumphant' sitting on their necks, amidst spoils taken by both Cyrus and Cambyses. There *may* be a vaguely 'oriental' flavour to the detail that the (supposed) head of Osiris is displayed in a blood-filled vessel. In the second embedded performance, in which spirits and a menacing armed woman enact Cambyses' dream, provided an opportunity for exoticism of an ethnically non-specific kind. When Cambyses is murdered with Mandane's dagger (although not by her hand), Otanes recognizes the weapon as an Egyptian monarchical totem bestowed by the god Ammon.<sup>67</sup> The final scene is barbarically spectacular: 'a Temple of the Sun, uncover'd according to the Antient Custome, with an Altar in the middle, bearing two large burning Tapers; and on each side a Priest standing'. Three spirits appear, followed by a bloody cloud which disperses to reveal the

<sup>62</sup> Settle, *Cambyses*, 'Prologue' (sig. [A4]v). <sup>63</sup> Settle, *Cambyses*, p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> Settle, *Cambyses*, p. 68. <sup>65</sup> Settle, *Cambyses*, pp. 11, 13, 19.

<sup>66</sup> Settle, *Cambyses*, pp. 21–2. <sup>67</sup> Settle, *Cambyses*, p. 57.

menacing ghosts of both Cambyses and the real Smerdis. There is also a sequence exploring the Persian law that anyone who kills the king must themselves die, with the priest stating: ‘The Persian Laws, like to their god, the Sun, / In one unalterable course must run.’<sup>68</sup>

Settle returns to the theme of Persian laws in his Epilogue, in which he again begs his audience to favour his play. He archly compares their absolute power over his career with Persian autocracy. After comparing the factions in the playhouse to the disputing parties in ‘the late Civil War’, he then begs his audience to approve of *Cambyses*, allowing it further performances, like a play which had been successful *before* the Civil War, ‘the fam’d Royal Slave’—Cartwright’s production for Charles I and Henrietta Maria which we discussed at the end the previous section.

Here Settle indisputably urges a nostalgic revival of the kind of ‘Persian play’ in honour of the monarch which some of his court audience will have remembered from the 1630s. In Cartwright’s text, imagining the sumptuousness of ancient Persian attire had sat alongside what Barbour, in his study of London’s ‘theatres of the East’, has called the particular ‘method of cross-cultural engagement’ which ultimately amounted to ‘narcissistic projection’,<sup>69</sup> a plausible account of the collective psychological function of the earlier Stuart Persia plays.<sup>70</sup> Compared with the lavish orientaling stage effects favoured by Cartwright, in Settle’s *Cambyses* the ethnographic colour is underwhelming: the Restoration playwright is known to have rejected ethnographic realism as a principle.<sup>71</sup> Yet the resounding and explicit parallel he draws between his *Cambyses* under Charles II, and Cartwright’s flattering picture of the serene, magnanimous Persian monarchy for Charles I, illustrates the theatrical genealogy which he wants his audience to bestow on his new production.

## Conclusion: Cambyses and the Divided English Self

What, therefore, was *Cambyses* to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English audience? There was an evident perception that his story was not strictly tragic, but

<sup>68</sup> Settle, *Cambyses*, p. 81.

<sup>69</sup> Richmond Barbour, *Before Orientalism: London’s Theatre of the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 56.

<sup>70</sup> Yet neither Barbour nor any other study I have encountered of eastern characters, contents, and contexts on the early English stage (e.g. Katie Sisneros, ‘Fearing the “Turban’d Turk”: Socio-Economic Access to Genre and the “Turks” of Early Modern English Dramas and Broadside Ballads’, PhD thesis, University of Nebraska (2010), and Masood, *From Cyrus to Abbas*) grapples with the impact of Herodotus and Xenophon on stage representations of English orientalised ‘others’ of any historical period, including Ottoman Turks. In Barbour’s case this is particularly frustrating, since he certainly could have been describing Herodotus’ Persian empire when he says in relation to Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* that Part I acts as English *self*-definition in that it ‘appeals to English concerns by constructing Asia as a world of ongoing imperial contest . . . fissured by indecision at the top, Persia is a place of ready armies, fraternal rivalry, paranoia, and Machiavellian plotting’ (p. 44). The degree to which ancient Greek authors informed the role played by the Persians and other non-Greeks in the early English dramas about the East awaits a cultural historian capable of a detailed assessment.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Doyle, *Elkanah Settle’s ‘The Empress of Morocco’*, p. xxi.

occupied ambiguous generic terrain, which could encompass comedy as well as uplifting providential drama about good people defeating bad ones. Moreover, Herodotus' Cambyses narrative supplied the earliest mad king in the historiographical and literary tradition. This helped to establish the dynasty of lunatic stage monarchs which included Lear, and Lear in turn affected the choices of protagonist made by Restoration playwrights.<sup>72</sup> Yet Cambyses' madness is curiously played down in the English theatre, being interpreted by Preston as out-of-control behaviour resulting from alcoholic excess, and only slightly implied by Settle; his Cambyses eventually becomes irrational, megalomaniac, and paranoid, but neither manic or psychotically deluded.

In Preston, there are class politics implied in the disparity between the mutually supportive and sensible peasants of the comic interludes and the mutually suspicious nobility. In Settle, however, the overwhelming concern is with the succession problem and the legitimacy of power. I hope to have illuminated the contrast between the optimistic role that Herodotus' Cambyses narrative played in the English theatre of the early years of Elizabeth's reign, and the underlying darkness of the implausibly glib solutions to the Persian constitutional crisis to which Settle had to resort. He was writing as the clouds gathered on the political horizon of the 1660s, presaging the struggle between monarchical absolutism and parliamentary values in the next decade.

But our most important finding has been the absolute rejection by our Elizabethan and Restoration dramatists alike of the part of Herodotus' Cambyses narrative dealing with his death's aftermath, the constitutional debate with its radical proposal by Otanes, and the absurd, even carnivalesque process by which Cambyses' successor was selected. I like to think that Shakespeare was aware of this omitted Herodotean co-text when his Hal deposes Falstaff, substituting a demotic bar stool for the throne of Persia.

Those attracted to the political ideas of the *plethocrat* Otanes were likely to have been Puritans, and thus unlikely to have approved of theatrical performances. But we still need to stress the deselection by both Preston and Settle of Herodotus' most penetrating chapters on the topic of succession, and therefore on the divine right of kings. This does not mean, however, that the presence of Herodotus' Cambyses on the early modern stage in England was apolitical. Those who knew Herodotus will have been able mentally to supply the succession crisis after Cambyses' sudden death in Preston's drama: they will have noticed the divergence between the facile closure of Settle's play and the appointment of Darius in Herodotus. For spectators who did *not* know Herodotus, their own experiences and fears may have compromised both plays' gleeful endings.

Finally, the same Persian king, who for Preston had represented the now hated Catholic precursor of the new Elizabethan Protestant regime, could represent the restored monarchical Stuart self, rejecting the fanaticism of the Interregnum. The Herodotean Cambyses, the deviant king of a basically good monarchy, is thus a projection of the

<sup>72</sup> Nicoll believes that Lear lies behind the choice of Cambyses by Settle. Nicoll, *A History of Restoration Drama*, p. 84.

conflicted early modern English self and its fractured religious and political psyche. Settle's play looks backwards to the Persia of Charles I's court drama, exploiting Herodotean narrative for heroic and exotic effect while imposing an impossibly happy ending. But the sense of evil is strong in Settle's Cambyses and his henchman/murderer Prexaspes, while Theramnes, whose love of Phedima conquers all, is a correspondingly potent exemplar of uxorious Virtue. With Theramnes we get a presentiment of the future of English theatre after the Glorious Revolution. We can even glimpse a prototype of the emergent eighteenth-century 'She-Tragedy' and 'Sentimental Drama', in which the fantasy of familial domestic harmony, and honourable love, were to become the theatre's ideological counterpart of the British bourgeois settlement.