

Pi25 What once was said by valiant Tomyris

Notes. This poem ranges widely in its allusions, beginning with a scene from Herodotus and ending with the refrain to a popular anti-Buckingham song from 1627.

“On the duke of Buckingham”

What once was said by valiant Tomyris

to mightie Cirus haveing lost his head¹

applied to thee will not bee thought amisse

for thou more worthie blood then hee hast shedd²

The witch thy mother³ that old rotten drabb⁴

5

with hir inchantments & her conjuring tricks

could not defend thy bodie from the stabb

nor keepe thy soule from Acharon & Stix⁵

Thanks to our God for thou art well dispatcht

I trust that shee thy ghost shall shortly follow

10

more plotts by damme⁶ and sonne weere never hatcht

pretending faire but haveing hart most hollow

And now that thou art dead wee will rejoyce

and meerly spend the time both night and daie

the fiders boy that hath the lowdest voyce

15

shall sing thy song the cleane contrary waie⁷

Source. Bodleian MS Dodsworth 79, fol. 158r

Pi25

¹ *What once was said...lost his head:* Herodotus reports the speech of the Massagetae Queen Tomyris over the corpse of Cyrus, King of the Persians, killed in battle c.530 BC. “After the battle Tomyris ordered a search to be made amongst the Persian dead for the body of Cyrus; and when it was found she pushed his head into a skin which she had filled with human blood, and cried out as she committed this outrage: “Though I have conquered you and live, yet you have ruined me by treacherously taking my

son. See now—I fulfil my threat: you have your fill of blood” (1.214).

² *more worthie blood...hast shedd*: the worthy blood here is that of James I and several court nobles allegedly poisoned by Buckingham in the mid-1620s. The poisoning allegations were first levelled in George Eglisham’s 1626 *Forerunner of Revenge*, and later circulated in libels and other underground media.

³ *The witch thy mother*: Buckingham’s mother, Mary Compton, Countess of Buckingham, was a known Catholic and rumoured witch.

⁴ *drabb*: whore.

⁵ *Acharon & Stix*: Acheron and Styx, two of the rivers of Hades, the classical realm of the dead.

⁶ *damme*: mother.

⁷ *the fiddlers boy...cleane contrary waie*: the notorious libellous ballad against Buckingham, “Come heare, Lady Muses, and help mee to sing”, performed by fiddlers at Ware and at Staines in the spring of 1627, includes the refrain, “The clean contrary way”.
