

### Gobryas' Unreliable Speech; *Cyropaedia* 4.6.1-10

In this paper I argue that the autobiographical speech given by Gobryas, a high-ranking Assyrian general, in order to justify his defection to Cyrus' army, is fundamentally unreliable. Upon his defection to the Persian army, Gobryas tells a detailed and tragic story of how his (unnamed) son was murdered in cold-blood by the Assyrian king who became jealous of Gobryas' son's success on a hunt. This story, which serves to prove the Assyrian king's treachery and cruelty, provides to both Cyrus and the reader an important justification for the Persians' punitive invasion of Assyria and the eventual assassination of the Assyrian king. A man as evil as the Assyrian king is unfit to rule anything, much less the most powerful nation on earth. Yet if Gobryas' story proves unreliable, it becomes difficult to view the violence Cyrus directs against the Assyrian king, which comprises the bulk of the *Cyropaedia*, as just.

Gobryas' account has rarely been examined in depth and his reliability has never been questioned by modern scholars. For Due (1989), Gobryas' story proves the cruelty of the Assyrian king (84). Gera (1993) says of Gobryas (and other Assyrian defectors) that they "join [Cyrus] because they are innocent victims of their cruel ruler: in the black-and-white world of the *Cyropaedia* all those identified with the Persian cause must be of unblemished character and cannot simply betray their country (249)." Tatum (1989) argues that Gobryas' account, among others, shows that the Assyrian leaders "are supremely bad [... and] evil rulers from whose example everyone may happily flee (93)." This speech is so important both within the text—it helps justify the assassination of a man and the overthrow of a nation—and without—it helps justify the interpretation of Cyrus as an ideal leader—that it deserves a new analysis.

When Gera discusses the eventual assassination of the Assyrian king by Gobryas, among others, she comments that "We should also remember that their actions are motivated to a large extent by a desire for revenge (205)." In this paper I expand upon Gera's point, that Gobryas' actions are informed by his emotional state, and examine the ramifications of this on our interpretation of Gobryas' words.

Through the application of modern theoretical approaches to unreliable narrators, including Booth (1961), Phelan (2005), and Hansen (2007), I argue that Gobryas' narrative presents all the traditional indications of the unreliable narrator. His story repeatedly contradicts itself, describes events in impossible ways, and shapes the ambiguous events to be hostile to the Assyrian king. I end by arguing that Gobryas is not a liar but that his unreliability stems from his obvious, although understandable, grief, along with his resultant political desires.

This argument is one part of a larger project that argues that not all is as it seems in the *Cyropaedia*. So much of Cyrus', and the narrator's, justification for Cyrus' aggression against the Assyrians is based on Gobryas' account of his son's death, along with several other politically or personally biased accounts of the alleged evil of the Assyrian dynasty. In questioning the reliability of Gobryas' autobiography, I begin to lay the groundwork for questioning the traditional interpretation of the *Cyropaedia* as a whole.

## Bibliography

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