

## Notes

### THE CHARIOT IN 'II TAMBURLAINE', 'THE WOUNDS OF CIVIL WAR', AND 'THE REIGN OF KING EDWARD III'

Four references to a full-sized chariot property on the Elizabethan stage have been identified thus far. Explicit stage directions in George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmershe's Gray's Inn drama *Jocasta* (1566), Christopher Marlowe's *II Tamburlaine* (c. 1588), Thomas Lodge's *The Wounds of Civil War, or Marius and Scilla* (c. 1587–92), and a property description in Philip Henslowe's *Diary* each call for a spectacular prop harnessed to either two or four players. Not to be confused with a litter suspended between poles nor draw-and-quartering punishments, the torture chariot of early English theatre seems to have had a very different historical precedent and may have been a more frequent feature of the Lord Admiral's Men repertory than hitherto supposed.

The ancient Greek historian Siculus Diodorus (c. 60–30 BCE) refers to the particular use of war chariots closely associated with the rule of early Egyptian king, Sesosösis, in his *Bibliotheca historica*. The story goes that whenever Sesosösis conquered a new city or paid a visit to a venerable temple:

he would remove the horses from his four-horse chariot and in their place yoke the kings and other potentates, taking them four at a time, in this way showing to all men, as he thought, that, having conquered the mightiest of other kings and those most renowned for their excellence, he now had no one who could compete with him for the prize of excellence.<sup>1</sup>

An English translation of the *Bibliotheca* was circulating in London at least by 1569. The dumb shows from *Jocasta* suggests that the 'hystorie of Sesostres' was possibly part of the regular law curriculum, calling for 'in like maner cause those Kinges whom he had so overcome, to draw in his Chariote like

Beastes and Oxen, thereby to content his unbrideled ambitious desire'.<sup>2</sup> Allyna Ward argues that the dumb show worked to establish audience expectations of a 'spectacle of unbridled ambition in the first act', reinforced by the fact that Servus describes Jocasta's warring son's 'thunbridled mindes of ambitious men'.<sup>3</sup> Ward concurs with earlier critics, including Charles W. Whitworth, J. Churton Collins, and N. Burton Paradise, that this is likely the torture chariot's first use on the English stage.

The conversation surrounding the chariot on the English stage has been largely in service of dating Marlowe's primacy and innovation over Lodge rather than the semiotic work of the object itself.<sup>4</sup> The infamous moment takes place in *II Tamburlaine*, when the title character calls for the yoking of two conquered kings to his chariot, to be replaced by two other kings later in the play once the initial pair has died in their harnesses:

[Enter] TAMBURLAINE drawn in his chariot by TREBIZON and SORIA with bits in their mouths, reins in his left hand, in his right hand a whip, with which he scourgeth them. TECHELLES, THERIDAMAS, UMUCASANE, AMYRAS, CELEBINUS; [ORCANES, King of] Natolia, and JERUSALEM, led by five or six common soldiers. (IV.iii.0. 1–6)<sup>5</sup>

Tamburlaine mocks Trebizon and Soria, calling them 'pampered jades of Asia' for only being able to carry their great 'coachman' a mere 'twenty miles day' (IV.iii.1–4) despite being 'fed with flesh as raw as blood' (IV.iii.17). Marlowe follows Diodorus, Gascoigne, and Kinwelmershe only insofar as the titled status of the two made to draw the chariot. Lodge, on the other hand, calls for the full four men, like

<sup>2</sup> George Gascoigne, *Jocasta*, ed. John W. Cunliffe (New York, 1969), 246, quoted in Allyna E. Ward, "'If the Head Be Evill the Body Cannot Be Good': Legitimate Rebellion in Gascoigne and Kinwelmershe's *Jocasta*", *Early Modern Literary Studies*, xiv.1 (May 2008), 3.15.

<sup>3</sup> Ward, "'If the Head Be Evill'", 3.15.

<sup>4</sup> See William A. Armstrong, '*Tamburlaine* and *The Wounds of Civil War*', *N&Q*, v (1958), 381–3; and N. B. Paradise, *Thomas Lodge: The History of an Elizabethan* (New Haven, CT, 1931), 129–34.

<sup>5</sup> I refer to Anthony B. Dawson's edition of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine, Parts One and Two*, New Mermaids (New York, 2014).

<sup>1</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, vol. 1, 12 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 1978), 204.

Diodorus, Gascoigne, and Kinwelmershe, but changes the status of the subjected:

*Enter Scilla in triumph in his chare triumphant of gold, drawn by foure Moores, before the chariot: his colours, his crest, his captaines, his prisoners: Arcathius Mithridates son, Ariston, Archelaus, bearing crownes of gold, and manaced. After the chariot, his souldiers bands, Basillus, Lucretius, Lucullus: besides prisoners of diuers Nations, and sundry disguises.* (ll. 1003. 1–4)<sup>6</sup>

Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson point to a number of Jacobean and Caroline stage plays that also may have made use of a chariot stage property.<sup>7</sup> John Fletcher's masque *Four Plays in One* (c. 1608–13) includes four dumbshows including chariots, one of which is specifically drawn by Moors like Lodge's play. Other plays calling for a chariot in their stage directions include Fletcher's masque, *A Wife for a Month* (1624), Thomas Heywood's *The Silver Age* (1613), as well as Philip Massinger's *The Roman Actor* (1626) and *The Bashful Lover* (1636). For all of these but Fletcher's first masque it is unclear as to how many players would have been required.

While Jacobean and Caroline stage chariots were used at Court as well as by more than one playing company, the Elizabethan references to this property are contained to that of Admiral's and their close associate, playhouse landlord Henslowe. Included in an appended inventory of 'properties for my Lord Admeralles men' kept in the Rose's tiring house and recorded in Henslowe's *Diary* are several props including a 'charete' for a 1598 Thomas Dekker play, no longer extant, called *Phaeton*.<sup>8</sup> The appendix (whose 35 entries comprise 139 items) also includes 'j cage', 'Tamberlyne[']s brydell', 'iij Imperial crownes; j playne crowne', and something labelled 'Sittie of Rome', which, being grouped together, strongly suggest as having

been used from both *Tamburlaine* plays and *Wounds*.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the inventory includes several properties ('j helmet with a dragon; j shelde, with iij Lyons', 'j greve armer', and 'viij lances'<sup>10</sup>) required for a unique stage direction in the anonymous Admiral's play *The Reign of King Edward III*: 'Foure Heraldes bringing in a coate of armour, a helmet, a lance, and a shield' (l. 2426. 1)<sup>11</sup>. By taking a repertory approach to these plays, *II Tamburlaine*, *Wounds*, and *Phaeton* together alongside Henslowe's prop inventories suggest that the spectacular display of a tyrant's torture chariot was a distinctive feature of the Admiral's house style.

Furthermore, as implied by Henslowe's inventory, other plays may have made use of a chariot prop within the Admiral's repertory. I would like to posit that the anonymous *Edward III* also made use of a chariot prop as a sign of global conquest and tyranny overthrown. The dearth of scholarship and poor printing history of the play—likely because it is anonymous in authorship and does not treat a historical subject with which William Shakespeare was interested—means the editions that do survive are inconsistent. The first edition from 1590 is particularly poor in that there are several instances of missing stage directions for entrances and exits, as well as many extraneous speech prefixes for characters already speaking. (Nor are scene and act divisions overtly marked, although this was in fact normal for drama printed before the mid-1590s.) Stage directions embedded in dialogue become increasingly important to envision the necessary stage actions called for in order to make sense of, in particular, battle and conquest scenes. Because of the lack of easily searchable stage directions and the nature of these publication conditions, the inclusion of a chariot has yet to be acknowledged. At this moment in question, the English forces assume their Prince Edward has been killed in battle against the French when a herald interrupts:

After a flourish sounded within, enter an herald.

<sup>6</sup> I refer to Thomas Lodge's *The Wounds of Civill War, Lively Set Forth in the True Tragedies of Marius and Scilla*, Text Creation Partnership digital edition, *Early English Books Online* (London: John Danter, 1594).

<sup>7</sup> Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580–1642* (New York, 1999), 47–8.

<sup>8</sup> Phillip Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes (New York, 2002), 319.

<sup>9</sup> Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, 320–1.

<sup>10</sup> Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, 319–21.

<sup>11</sup> I refer to the anonymous *The Raigne of King Edward the Third as It Hath Bin Sundrie Times Plaied about the Citie of London*, Text Creation Partnership digital edition, *Early English Books Online* (London: Cuthbert Burby, 1596).

HERALD: Reioyce my Lord, ascend the imperial throne  
 The mightie and redoubted prince of Wales,  
 Great seruitor to bloudie Mars in armes,  
 The French mans terror and his countries fame,  
 Triumphant rideth like a Romane peere,  
 and lowly at his stirop comes a foot  
 King Iohn of France, together with his sonne,  
 In captiue bonds, whose diadem he brings  
 To crowne thee with, and to proclaime thee king.  
 KING EDWARD: Away with mourning Phillip, wipe thine eyes  
 Sound Trumpets, welcome in Plantaginet.  
 Enter Prince Edward, king Iohn, Phillip, Audley, Artoys.  
 KING EDWARD: As things long lost when they are found  
 again,  
 So doth my son reioyce his fathers heart,  
 For whom even now my soul was much perplex  
 QUEEN PHILLIPA: Be this a token to expresses my ioy,  
 Kisse him.  
 For inward passions will not let me speak.  
 PRINCE EDWARD: My gracious father, here receiue the  
 gift,  
 This wreath of conquest, and reward of ware,  
 Got with as mickle perill of our liues,  
 As ere was thing of price before this daie,  
 Install your highnes in your proper right,  
 And heere withall I render to your hands  
 These prisoners, chiefe occasion of our strife.  
 (ll. 2409. 1–2432)

It is the herald's announcement that is most telling. Prince Edward, thought dead, enters 'triumphant'. It is not suggested that he metaphorically 'rideth' but rather that he literally uses a 'stirop' as a 'captiue bond' over the French King and Dauphin. Prince Edward implies that he gives the reigns of this conqueror's chariot to his father: 'receiue the gift'; 'I render to your hands / These prisoners'. The prop and its manner of use as a device of conquest and torture—albeit less extreme than in *II Tamburlaine's* case where bridles are called for—suggest that *Edward III* may likely have been part of the dramaturgical milieu that drew audiences to Admiral's performances before 1594.

Being sensitive to the textual cues of both explicit and implicit stage directions reveals a total of ten entertainments that made use of a

large chariot property drawn not by animals but by players during the Renaissance. Half of these took place during the Elizabethan period, four of which were part of the Admiral's repertory. The aim of this essay has been to update the staging history of this prop with the allusion to the Egyptian king, Sesosösis, as well as to add a hitherto unacknowledged play, *The Reign of Edward III*, to the list of those employing this property on the early modern stage. What remains unclear is whether the Admiral's retrofitted the same chariot prop in all four plays, if they had two-person and four-person chariots, or commissioned the prop anew each time. The last option seems the least likely considering Andrew Sofer's astute observation that 'theatre itself is a vast, self-reflexive recycling project', wherein the 'same elements—stories, texts, actors, props, scenery, styles, even spectators—appear over and over again' in order to capitalize upon our 'pleasure in seeing the relic revived, the dead metaphor made to speak again'.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in analyses of the playhouse inventories, S. P. Cerasano has uncovered the fact that the contents of a theatre's tiring house 'seem to have been worth *as much, or slightly more* than the cost of the playhouse itself'.<sup>13</sup> If props and costumes were more valuable as commodities than the actual playing space, then the more likely scenario would be that the same Admiral's chariot made appearances in these four plays (and perhaps others), and was upcycled as needed to fulfil new dramaturgical requirements.

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<sup>12</sup> Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props*, Theatre: Theory/Text/Performance (Ann Arbor, MI, 2003), 3.

<sup>13</sup> S. P. Cerasano, "'Borrowed Robes,'" Costume Prices, and the Drawing of *Titus Andronicus*, *Shakespeare Studies*, xxii (1994), 51.