WIND IMAGERY IN THE *ORESTEIA*

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The blowing of the wind vexed the house of Atreus—especially its most illustrious member, the leader of the Greek fleet, the general Agamemnon.[1] That day at Aulis when he learned the cause of the adverse winds and when he sent the fleet to Troy after paying the ransom price to Artemis was a critical day in his career. The winds from Strymon were winds of suffering; they caused evil leisure, starvation, harmful lingering in port, the wandering of men, a wasting of the equipment, and the withering of the flower of the Greek race (*Ag.* 192–98). These were winds of pain and grief, and they brought Agamemnon to the prideful decision that this suffering must be stopped by the ransom—Iphigenia. She was to be the *pausanemos thusia*, the sacrifice to stop the wind. When she was sacrificed, the winds did stop; or rather they shifted.

Such words as *antipnoous* (150), *pnoai apo Strymonos* (192), and *thusias pausanemou* (214–15) are not images; they are elements of the plot. However in the *Oresteia* words describing the winds occur with enough frequency to assert that Aeschylus used them as significant images.[2]

Aeschylus is flexible and subtle in his use of language, and often his translators betray their discomfort in attempting to render a colorful and complex Aeschylean phrase into similarly suggestive

[1] I wish to thank Professors L. A. Post, H. Comfort, and R. D. Murray, Jr., for reading the manuscript of this paper and offering valuable suggestions for its improvement.

[2] Many critics have discussed such image-patterns in the plays of Aeschylus. Such patterns consist of a series of related words used often throughout the drama, and they have a close connection to the basic themes. Cf. R. Lattimore's introduction to the *Oresteia* in the University of Chicago series of translations, or the analysis of the imagery in the *Suppliants* by R. D. Murray, Jr., in *The Motif of Io in Aeschylus' Suppliants* (Princeton 1958) esp. 18–45.

English. At *Ag.* 1309 Cassandra reels back from the door of the palace saying: "The house reeks with blood-dripping slaughter" (Smyth); or "That room within reeks with blood like a slaughter house" (Lattimore); or "The house is rank with death and dripping blood" (Arnott). All these translations stress the hideous smell of death coming from the palace, but in Greek the verb is *pneousin*—to blow or to breathe: "The house breathes out slaughter."

This example—and many others—contain the metaphor of breathing or blowing; both are involved in the wind imagery. For the Athenians who lived near the sea and made their living from ships and trade and for the farmers in the Attic countryside the wind and weather were a daily concern. Aeschylus often chose metaphors from weighing, common religious practices, and sailing because they were immediately meaningful to his audience. He chose the image of the wind for this reason; it was a common metaphor in the other plays of Aeschylus and in the plays of the other Greek playwrights.[3] They all used it because it expressed the meaning of an individual passage in familiar terms.

But Aeschylus not only used the image of the wind in individual passages; he chose it often and wove it into the cluster of images which surrounded the main themes of the play. He worked wind imagery into phrases where it sat somewhat uncomfortably and almost unintelligibly; he saw men as weather vanes turning with the wind and he personified inert and inanimate objects by giving them the power to breathe out and stir up winds. Some of these comparisons are hard to picture, but the metaphor stands out and makes an impression. I hope to show that the motif of the wind is an important image consciously employed by Aeschylus throughout the *Oresteia* and that an examination of the wind imagery in various troubled passages will resolve some of the difficulties in interpretation. Secondly I feel that this particular image has been chosen and developed in a way which reveals much about Aeschylus' poetic methods. Finally it seems to me that this image is not brought out with sufficient clarity in translations of the trilogy. As difficult as it is to translate some of the passages clearly, it is my hope that future translations will bring out

[3] Cf. D. van Nes, *Die Maritime Bildersprache des Aischylos* (Groningen 1963) 7–29.

the force of this image-pattern. Inevitably the subtleties of imagery are one of the hardest elements to convey from one language to another, but I am sure that awareness of this image need not remain hidden from those who do not read the play in the original language.

The most common words for wind in the trilogy are those from the *pn-* base: *pneuma*, *pneô*, *pnoê*, *empneô*, *sympneô*, and *ekpneô*. In addition there are other nouns: *anemos*, *thuella*, *aêma*, *aura*, *atmos*; and verbs: *ourizô*, *aêmi*, and *ekphusiaô*.[4] By far the most numerous are the words related to *pneô*. These words are not clustered in any one passage; the explanation for this preference is important for understanding the development of the image and is instructive in Aeschylus' method of choosing words. In Greek literature, *ourizô*, *thuella*, and *aêma* are always used of the wind. *Anemos* almost always refers to the wind; but in the corpus of Hippocrates *anemos* does mean breath. *Ekphusiaô* in this time denotes breath, not wind. Some of the words which Aeschylus employed in this series of images are exclusive in their meaning: some refer to the blowing of the wind and others refer specifically to the breath. *Pneô* and its related words allow both meanings—wind and breath. It is a handy word for a poet who wants to make extended use of the idea of the wind. Aeschylus spoke of men "breathing out life" and gods "breathing their grace upon mortals"; and "turbulent storm winds" and "gentle breezes"; he used the same word each time. All these various kinds of winds occurred at different places and in different situations, but Aeschylus used the *pn-* words in every case and indicated that the same metaphor and the same forces were working in all situations. These words serve as adaptable key words in an image-pattern because they can be used of live beings who breathe forth or inanimate objects which cause a wind to rise. With this double meaning these words can take a direct object—i.e. to blow a leaf or to breathe out war—or they can stand alone. The potential of the *pn-* words for varied usage makes them suitable as the central words in the series. They are words that can be repeated often in enough varied situations to establish the image as a working motif; then the other words for wind or

[4] There are also words which are related to the idea of the wind. Three words for storm occur in the trilogy: *cheimôn*, *cheima*, and *typhôn*; there are two words for windlessness: *nênemos* and *galênê*.

breath can be assimilated into the pattern. Aeschylus set up the basic pattern of the wind, and then played poetically on the various extensions of the metaphor. The other words for breath or wind serve to develop the image; the words from the *pn-* base establish the motif and keep repeating it. Without this basic repetition of the imagery of the wind, the opportunity to develop and expand the metaphor would be lessened. Consequently Aeschylus used the *pn-* words many times more than any others.[5]

There is a problem in finding adequate reason for Agamemnon's situation at Aulis. The omen of the eagles devouring the hare and its young has been interpreted in various ways. Somehow it is sufficient cause for Artemis to demand that Agamemnon sacrifice his daughter. The hare and her young may represent the people of Troy who are to be destroyed by the Greeks.[6] H. D. F. Kitto feels that Agamemnon

[5] The following chart shows the distribution of the words for wind in the plays of Aeschylus. The classifications are divided into words with a *pn-* base, other words meaning "wind" or "blow" in the trilogy, and words related to the idea of wind (see above, note 4).

	Pn- Base	Other Words	Related Words	Total
Agam.	14	5	14	33
Cho.	4	6	3	13
Eum.	6	7	0	13
P.V.	7	3	5	15
Pers.	2	2	1	5
Suppl.	7	2	4	13
Sept.	6	2	1	9

This chart shows that the number of words meaning "wind" in the fully preserved plays of Aeschylus is far greater in the *Agamemnon* than in any other play. Also that the number of these words in the *Oresteia* is greater than all occurrences in the other four plays. Such statistics are meaningless without proper interpretation of the text; however they show that there is a greater than usual interest in such words in the *Oresteia* and especially in the *Agamemnon*—the play in which most of the images used in the rest of the trilogy are introduced and established. This is an important point because images of wind are very common in Greek tragedy; but in the *Oresteia* there seems to be a more deliberate employment of this image. Critics have noted that Aeschylus seldom uses a word which does not give increased meaning to a passage. Cf. F. R. Earp, *The Style of Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1948) esp. 72–83, where he compares the complexity of Aeschylus' choice of words to the simplicity found in Euripides' dramas.

[6] Various opinions on this matter are summarized by E. Fraenkel, *Agamemnon* (Oxford 1950) 2.96 ff.

is put into this uncomfortable position to show him the true cost of what he is doing and to reveal his true character:

> He is nearly committed to this war which will destroy countless innocent lives; very well: if he must do this, let him first destroy an innocent of his own—and take the consequences. Let him brand himself as a man of blood; let it be manifest what he has been doing.[7]

My own opinion is that Agamemnon is compelled to make this choice because of the curse on his house which puts its members in situations where they must choose between two evils and then pay the penalty for their unfortunate choice.[8] Orestes is forced to make a similar choice (*Ch.* 269 ff.). Choice is an essential ingredient if a character is to bear responsibility for his actions; this is the essence of tragedy. For Aeschylus, man was not helpless and could eventually learn. In the inaugural omen for this expedition Aeschylus has the family difficulties in mind—the curse. He often alludes to something which is growing in this house or something which is innate in its members. When Cassandra appears late in the play it is clear that the sins of Atreus are being brought against Agamemnon. The chorus sings of the *daimôn* which inhabits this house (1468 ff.). This is the curse which plagues the family and which ceases only when a member of the house is judged innocent of his crime.[9]

Agamemnon is the victim of the curse on his family. His choice to kill Iphigenia is free; but his bad luck—the curse—has driven him to the position where a choice is inevitable. In line 187 Agamemnon has come to Aulis *empaiois tychaisi sympneôn*. This is the first extant use of the word *sympneô* in Greek; it is next found in Plato's *Laws* 708D3. There Plato is prescribing new laws for a city and asserts that the citizenry should achieve unity and pull together like a team of horses. The meaning is similar in the *Agamemnon*. Agamemnon complying with the will of Zeus and organizing the expedition does

[7] *Form and Meaning in Drama* (London 1956) 4–5.

[8] C. H. Reeves, "The Parodos of the *Agamemnon*," *CJ* 55 (1960) 165–71, stresses the dilemma of Agamemnon in choosing between two evil courses, but he does not connect the need for choice to the curse.

[9] W. Whallon, "Why is Artemis Angry?" *AJP* 82 (1961) 78–88, suggests that there is a pattern of teknophagy in this family represented by the eagles and the hare. H. Lloyd-Jones, "The Guilt of Agamemnon," *CQ* 12 (1962) 187–99, supports the family curse as a cause of misfortune in the trilogy.

not resist the wind of fortune—he co-operates with it. He is not driven by it; he and the wind are partners. But when the fleet is ready to sail, the wind changes; it blows against the Greeks. As long as the king was working to bring himself to Aulis, the location of his crucial decision, the wind aided his course. Then when he was at the critical point, the winds from Strymon checked his progress. Held in port by the winds, Agamemnon was compelled to choose between two evil courses—end the expedition and become a deserter, or sacrifice his daughter. The expedition seemed more important and Iphigenia was sacrificed as the *pausanemos*.

But the wind does not stop. Rather in 218 ff. Agamemnon puts on the yoke strap of necessity and then "breathing out from his own mind the unholy, impure, and irreligious change of the wind," he becomes the driving force of the fleet, of the curse, and of the necessary consequences of the murder. The interconnection of symbol and narrative fact in this passage is perhaps too close to be unraveled fully. The curse brings Agamemnon to Aulis, requires his choice, and sends him on his way to plunder Troy. The companion of the curse and its destructive force is the wind. It is Agamemnon's partner as he comes to Aulis, he makes his choice under its compulsion, and finally the general himself becomes the incarnation of its ruinous might as he breathes out from his own mind the change of the wind. He is now fully in the grasp of the curse; he bears responsibility for the crime, and he directs the wind as he sails away to Troy.

After Clytemnestra tells the chorus of the fall of Troy, the old men sing praise to Zeus, the King. They see in the fall of Troy the stroke of Zeus. All men who "breathe out Ares more than is just" incur the gods' wrath (374–76). This is a troubled passage, but, in spite of the textual difficulty, at least *pneontôn* seems to lie outside of the corrupt section. Although this ode is a general statement of the will of the gods, the echo to those men who were crying Ares in the parodos is clear (48). The chorus calls for justice on those who breathe out Ares and trample under foot inviolable sanctities; Agamemnon is now the man who guides the wind of destruction, and he has just thrown down the altars and shrines of Troy.

When Agamemnon returns to his home, he reports the vote of the gods against Troy. At 819 he says:

> The gusts of ruin live on, and the embers
> dying send forth rich breezes of wealth.

To him the smoke rising from the fallen city is a sign of victory—a vision of the gods' will fulfilled. But he has violated the very temples that Clytemnestra warned against; he has caused grief to many Greek families who now find cold comfort in the ashes of their dead; he has caused great hardship on his own men (338 ff. vs. 524 ff.; 427 ff.; 551 ff.). A battle won; but the cost was great and the prize small. The "gusts of ruin" which rise from Troy are indeed alive. They are gusts of wind from the destroyed victim which are still blowing as the conquering general returns home to Argos.

There are two notable events previous to the homecoming of Agamemnon. The first is the voyage of Helen and Paris. The Greeks finally left Aulis after great difficulty because of the adverse wind; but Helen was taken to Troy from behind her delicate hangings by the mighty Zephyr (692). She was the cause of a chain of events culminating in Agamemnon's death and was consequently carried to her destiny by the helpful blowing of the winds. Helen arrived at Troy like a "spirit of windless calm" (740). At this point she had completed her role in the unhappy story of the house. The wind died down in Troy only to begin blowing—metaphorically—when Agamemnon set out for Aulis (187). Helen's arrival is a calm, luxuriant picture, but at the end of the strophe this incarnation of seductive *Peithô* is recognized as an Erinys. The windlessness of her arrival was deceptive. In fact the wind did blow in Troy again.

Secondly, during the return from Troy the wind and Typhon—a god of the wind—devastated the fleet of Agamemnon and caused even more loss to the Greeks (646 ff.). In the process the wind stripped Agamemnon of his possible protectors. The herald admits that this storm could not have occurred without the aid of wrathful gods. In both cases the doom of the house of Atreus is working to its conclusion and is driven by the wind.

Clytemnestra, the murderess, is described by Cassandra as a Scylla for sailors, a raging mother, and "one who breathes unceasing Ares on her loved ones" (1233 ff.). Cassandra is choked when she approaches the palace; it breathes blood-dripping murder (1309). Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon who, as he dies, breathes out the swift

gushing of his blood (1389). He lies in unholy death, caught in the web, breathing out his life (1493 and 1517).

The *thuellai* of *atê* which were living at Troy and which have guided the murderous Agamemnon back home become the breath of destruction in Clytemnestra. The palace is filled with horrible breezes. But once again the sacrifice does not stop the wind; Agamemnon—breathing out his last—renews it.

Orestes and Pylades in the opening of the *Choephoroi* wonder why the women come bearing their libations. The answer is partly in lines 32 ff.; Apollo, the prophet in dreams, breathes anger. The anger is from the unavenged dead, Agamemnon. At 201 ff. Electra plans to call on the gods who know in what kinds of storms they are being spun around. In 317 Orestes says that he wishes to use the wind to waft a light to his father to replace the darkness in which Agamemnon sleeps so fitfully.[10] Later the chorus says that wrath and hatred blow from before the prow (390 ff.); a strong headwind will not let the chorus sail in any other direction than that in which justifiable murder lies.[11] They also are in the grip of the wind. They sing of storm winds as one of the horrors of creation (591–92). At 812 ff. the chorus invokes the son of Maia because he is the god who can waft a deed fairly on its way. They hope at some future time to sing a woman's song of fair winds (821). Later Orestes' hand is said to have been guided by the daughter of Zeus, Dikê, "breathing her destructive wrath on her enemies" (948 ff.). After the murder Orestes is pursued by the Furies. This is the suffering caused by the curse; the chorus sings that the third storm is now blowing against the royal house (1066–67). It is noticeable that never in this play do Orestes or Electra themselves "breathe out"; this was a common expression in the *Agamemnon*. However in the *Choephoroi* something new has been added. Orestes is an unwilling member of this unhappy house. The gods are compelling him against his will to commit the murders. The winds which blow here take their source from the original causes of the events—Apollo, the unavenged Agamemnon, Hermes, and Dikê.

[10] Cf. H. J. Rose, *A Commentary on the Surviving Plays of Aeschylus* (Amsterdam 1958) 148.

[11] Cf. T. G. Tucker, *The Choephoroi of Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1901) 94, and Rose (above, note 10) 155.

As the responsibility for the deed of violence shifts, so do the images. Orestes, his sister, and the chorus are the ones caught in the whirlwind.

In the *Eumenides* the Furies first appear "snorting out their repulsive breath" (53). The enraged spirit of Clytemnestra orders them to blow forth bloody gusts upon Orestes and wither him with their breath (137–38). They twice say that their wind is wrath and hate (840 and 873). When they are softened and become favoring divinities, the wind does not disappear; it also changes its nature. Athena in her request for a productive spell on the land asks them to send gusts of wind to blow over the land in full sunlight (905–6). Finally at 938 the Erinyes—now Eumenides—promise Athena that no evil wind will blow:

> May no harmful breeze blow which will spoil the trees—
> That is my grace—
> No searing heat which kills the buds on the plants.
> May there be no crossing of sacred lines.
> May no sterile lingering sickness come upon us.
> May Earth nourish the flourishing flocks
> with twin young at birth time.

In this passage at the end of the trilogy the image of the wind is connected with many other images which have been employed in the course of the drama. Now all of them lose their sinister sense and become indications of the prosperous times ahead. The fertility which was perverse before is now productive increase for animals and crops.[12] The heat and searing flame which betokened death now

[12] The idea of a fertility which is perverse or which simply fails to foster growth is often expressed in the first two plays of the *Oresteia*. A few examples will suffice: (1) The play begins with a father killing his child and later a child murders his mother. This is scarcely efficient propagation. (2) Agamemnon is called the gardener of Troy (524–28):

> Greet him well, for it is fitting:
> he has dug Troy into the ground
> with the hoe of Zeus—who protects justice—
> with a hoe he has worked the ground;
> the altars and shrines of the gods have disappeared
> and the seed of the earth has perished.

(3) Words of fertility take on a sinister meaning in the *Agamemnon*. The words *anthos* and *anthizô*, which should be words of springlike re-creation, connote death. At Aulis the winds wear down the flower of the Greeks (197); Agamemnon kills Iphigenia to

disappear.[13] Sickness which had been so common in this house is now permanently cured.[14] Among all these images is the rather prosaic message: "May there be no crossing of sacred lines." This learning is the result of all the suffering of the house of Atreus. If the people of this play have learned their lesson well, there will be a moral and balanced universe. The images become the physical signs of the new dispensation. The wind of the Furies which brought so much destruction and unhappiness has now become the health-giving wind of fertility.

The imagery of wind is used often in the three plays. The wind is not merely an image; it is inextricably involved with the dramatic events. It follows each person in reaching the point at which he commits his unfortunate act; and once he has committed it, it turns to accompany and even aid the avenger of this act. In the course of this trilogy the wind blows favorably upon Agamemnon, Orestes, and finally the city of Athens. As a gust of doom it blows against Agamemnon and Orestes after they have committed their crimes. Since the images of the wind accompany the crime and vengeance of the various members of the house of Atreus, I suggest that it is meant to mark the long chain of destruction. Avenger destroys and is himself avenged—and the wind joins in each step. The house breathes out a vile odor.

halt the wasting of this fertility. Cassandra has come to Argos as the flower picked for Agamemnon (955). Helen is a flower which gnaws at the heart; she will destroy marriages as a "*nymphoklautos Erinys*" (743 ff.). Finally the herald describes the storm at sea and the following day when the sea flowered in the morning sun—with corpses (658 ff.). These are a few examples of the use of words and ideas of fertility in the *Agamemnon*. This is an inverted fertility—in reality, sterility. At the end of the play the Eumenides foster true productivity. For a full discussion of the development of this theme see J. J. Peradotto, "Some Patterns of Nature Imagery in the *Oresteia*," *AJP* 85 (1964) 379–83.

[13] In the *Agamemnon* warmth and fire are causes of suffering. The torch seen at the beginning of the play is supposed to herald the end of suffering for the whole town and more particularly for the watchman. For Clytemnestra this torch and the whole line of beacons are merely a beginning. Heat is a torture to the Greeks on the expedition (565), and Agamemnon is greeted by his eager wife as "heat coming in the winter" (969). At the end of the trilogy fiery heat will disappear from the earth in the new prosperity. The final procession of torches leads the new goddesses to their home where they will bestow benefits on Athens.

[14] The presence of sickness is evident in such words as *nosos*, *paian*, and *pharmakon*—which are repeated often. In the *Eumenides* this sickness is cured and banished from the city. Cf. B. L. Hughes, *The Dramatic Use of Imagery in Aeschylus* (Diss. Bryn Mawr 1955); and see also B. H. Fowler in *AJP* 78 (1957) 173–84.

The burning Troy sends up its fumes. Helen is aided in her joyful journey by the favoring wind. A storm takes away the companions of Agamemnon while a *daimôn* guides him home. In all these details the preparation for the act of violence is completed. The winds blow and favor—or die down and check—the individual who is involved in the destructive pattern of the accursed family. As the responsibility for revenge is passed from generation to generation, the wind sets the stage and guides the actors. When the curse is finally abolished from the house, the wind becomes a benign force fertilizing the city of Athens, the guardian of the new justice.

The fall of a king is never a purely personal event. The existence of states and the lives of citizens depend upon the royal family. The wind that wrecks the palace also blows ill against the subjects. And the wind in the *Oresteia* trilogy leaves behind a wide wake of suffering and destruction. When the soldiers are on the battlefield at Troy, they suffer in the noonday heat when there is no breeze over the still sea (*Ag.* 566). Cassandra was taken by Apollo, a wrestler who breathed his grace upon her (*Ag.* 1206). This is a profitless *charis*: she sees the future but is never believed and is carried off to be slaughtered in the palace at Argos. She is a secondary victim of the curse; her troubles began when the wind first blew against her. Now she knows that her prophecy of disaster "shining rushes like a wind toward the sunrise" (1180–81).

The wind is an image fraught with consequences of pain, anguish, or destruction. It brings suffering to the cursed line of Atreus. This curse is really borne by two people, Agamemnon and Orestes, but in the course of their misery they leave a wide path of ruin behind. Many involved in the working of the curse are involved in the winds of destruction: those causing situations in which the curse will be effective—Troy and Helen; those affected by proximity to it—Clytemnestra, Electra, the sailors, and Cassandra; and those who are direct agents—Agamemnon and Orestes.

This image is not totally consistent throughout the trilogy. To be developed fully it should be applied to the anguish of the children of Thyestes or the present suffering of the chorus. There is a logical lack here, but the wind is in force at every other step in the path of the curse. Clearly the winds from Strymon or the winds that destroy

the fleet are not images—they are facts and physical forces. Also clearly the gusts of *atê* and the wind of Cassandra's oracle rushing toward the light are images, not facts and forces. But the impressive coincidence of the wind with the person driving the action of destruction or with the thing just destroyed suggests that Aeschylus conceived of this as a thread in the development of the play. It is all the more integrated with the action because it can operate both as an occurrence of nature and as pure metaphor. And finally the image seems to be used with full consciousness because of the care in resolving it at the end of the trilogy—the winds of fertility are breathed out by the Kindly Ones for the benefit and prosperity of Athens.

This study of the wind imagery in the *Oresteia* illustrates three main features of Aeschylus' methods in choosing and developing his imagery. First it is important to notice the care with which Aeschylus chooses his words. He picks images which can be used widely in various contexts. Aeschylus uses words for the wind to refer to blowing or breathing, persons or places, storms or calm. This protects the poet against being boringly repetitious in insisting on his metaphors. It also allows him to place his main images in many different kinds of scenes—a necessity for a poet who develops his basic themes in the varied careers of successive generations. Secondly it is revealing to see how Aeschylus organizes his images around a flexible type of basic word. This is the word which establishes the image. Once the image is firmly set in the minds of the audience, the poet can extend and elaborate his image by using other words for the wind. Aeschylus was always aware of his audience, and he is careful to see that the image is set clearly before he begins to play on the variations. Finally it is significant that Aeschylus chooses images which are closely related to the plot and which can at times cross the line between image and narrative. The winds in this play are an important factor in the narrative; but once the fleet leaves Aulis, they become mainly images. They impart a tone of impending destruction to otherwise innocent descriptions. Then at the end of the play Aeschylus incorporates the wind into the new picture of order and harmony; at this point the image loses its perverse implications.

Imagery for Aeschylus is not external decoration; it is an integral part of the play. The words for the wind in this trilogy demonstrate

Aeschylus' methods in handling images—he chose colorful but flexible images, he established them firmly, and then he wove them into the essential fabric of the play. The wind in the *Oresteia* rises naturally from the details of the story and is given an appropriate new role when this story has been told.