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THE THEME OF VICTORY IN AESCHYLUS' ORESTEIA
AND AG. 314—316

Maarit Kaimio

Aeschylus' *Oresteia* is both a battle of human wills and a battle of superhuman powers. The question "who will win?" is thus crucial in the minds of the principal persons of the plays as well as in the minds of the spectators. In the first part of this article, I shall examine the use of the words denoting victory in the *Oresteia*. The most important word is νίκη, νικᾶν, but kindred expressions, such as κράτος, ἄλωσις etc. are also relevant to our theme.¹ In the second part, I shall discuss the passage Ag. 314—316 and suggest a new interpretation of the puzzling line 314, viewing it in the context of the victory theme.

I

A short look at the Aeschylean indices confirms that the words νίκη, νικᾶν (and a few derivatives, such as νικηφόρος, ἀντι-, παρανικᾶν) occur

¹ The theme of victory in the *Oresteia* is discussed by H. E. Moritz, *Refrain in Aeschylus: Literary adaptation of traditional form*, CIPh 74 (1979) 187ff. in connection with the refrain Ag. 121, 139, 159. The use of νίκη, νικᾶν is discussed esp. 199—204. I shall, however, concentrate mainly on different aspects in the usage of these words. See also the remarks by R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Clytemnestra and the vote of Athena*, JHS 88 (1949) 130—147 (reprinted in substantially the same form in *Studies in Aeschylus*, Cambridge 1983, to which the page numbers refer in the following). He remarks that the κράτος and νίκη themes are constantly intertwined (103 n. 9, 107 n. 35), without, however, examining the use of the words in more detail. For "victory" as a key word, cf. W. Schadewaldt, *Der Kommos in Aischylos' Choephoren, Hellas und Hesperien*², Zürich and Stuttgart 1960, 139, E. Petrounias, *Funktion und Thematik der Bilder bei Aischylos*, Göttingen 1976, 294 and n. 950.

much more often in the *Oresteia* than in the other Aeschylean dramas,² although one could assume that the victory in actual battle in *Pers.* and *Seven* and in the battle of wills in *Hik.* and *Prom.* could well be emphasized with the frequent use of *νίκη* in these plays, too. The frequency of *νίκη* in the *Oresteia*, combined with the distribution of its occurrences throughout the plays and its recurrence at the important moments of dramatic action, point to its thematic use by the author. Of course, the battle about the fulfilment of justice in the *Oresteia*, and, in *Ag.*, the guilt and defeat of the victorious general are central themes that form the core of almost every interpretation of the *Oresteia*.³ In the following, I shall mainly call attention to the significance of most of the occurrences of *νίκη*, *νικάω* in the *Oresteia* and their position in the structure of the scenes.

We hear for the first time the word meaning "win the victory" in the refrain of the *parodos Ag.* 121, 139, 159 *ἄλλινον ἄλλινον εἶπέ, τὸ δ' εὔ νικάτω*.⁴ Before this, we have heard of the capture of Troy by the Greeks (*Ag.* 29f.), but Aeschylus has not used the verb *νικάω*.⁵ The refrain sums up the mingling of fear and hope in the minds of the chorus and sets the tone for the disturbing uncertainty about the fulfilment of justice which permeates the whole trilogy.⁶ But in *Ag.*, after this opening, the victory theme appears in another light: from now on, when the words *νίκη*, *νικάω* are pregnantly used, they reflect the personal battle between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.

The first triumphant occurrence of the idea of victory is at the end of Clytemnestra's beacon speech *Ag.* 314. I shall return to the interpretation of this line, describing the arrival of the message of the beacons to

² *Ag.* 13 times, *Cho.* 12, *Eum.* 11 (= *Or.* 36), *Pers.* 1, *Seven* 2, *Hik.* 3, *Prom.* 0.

³ For the fallacy of Agamemnon's victory see especially E. Neustadt, *Hermes* 64 (1929) 262f., B. Daube, *Zu den Rechtsproblemen in Aischylos' Agamemnon*, Diss. Basel 1939, 125ff., K. Reinhardt, *Aischylos als Regisseur und Theologe*, Bern 1949, 83ff., Winnington-Ingram 79ff., 88ff., O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, Oxford 1977, 262f.

⁴ Citations according to the text by D. Page, Oxford 1972.

⁵ Cf. below p. 82.

⁶ The significance which the idea implied in the refrain attains in the course of the trilogy is well analyzed by Moritz; see esp. 188 with n. 10, 195, 209ff. See also H. Fraenkel, *Aeschylus' Agamemnon*, Oxford 1950, II 146f.

Argos as the victory in a relay race, in the second part of my article.⁷ Here I only note the use of the verb νικᾶν at the end of Clytemnestra's speech, at the culmination of her first triumph.⁸

In this scene and the following messenger scene, the words νίκη, νικᾶν appear four times without special emphasis in their context. In 290f., Clytemnestra tells how Makistos, that is to say the lookout on the mountain, "not dallying nor heedlessly overcome by sleep, did not neglect his share in the messenger's duty" (tr. Fraenkel). This is one of the several appearances of the participle νικώμενος, which, used with dative, genitive (especially of superior persons) and prepositional constructions, is a common idiom both in tragedy and in prose.⁹ So far it is of course significant here that the wakefulness of the lookouts underlines the excellency of the beacon system planned by Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.¹⁰ In Ag. 342, Clytemnestra expresses the fear that the Greek army may, "overcome by desire for gain", succumb to the temptation of plundering what they should not — again the participle is used, as in 583, too, where the chorus reacts to the herald's speech with "I am conquered by your words". In 571 (574) "the gain prevails and the suffering is no counterpoise" (tr. Fraenkel), the herald only stresses what is important to him, and the word νικᾶν has no direct connection with the central battle of the drama, the battle of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.¹¹

⁷ P. 91ff.

⁸ For the view that this speech is, as well as information of the victory of the Greeks in Troy, an expression of Clytemnestra's personal triumph, see Reinhardt 89, J. J. Peradotto, *AJP* 85 (1964) 389.

⁹ Cf. *LSJ* s.v. νικάω II 3.

¹⁰ Or should we say — as Aeschylus almost makes us to understand (cf. Ag. 312) — planned by Clytemnestra and realized by Agamemnon? — For the possibility of a pun with μακιστήρ, μακύνω see J. H. Quincey, *JHS* 83 (1963) 123.

¹¹ It would be possible to enrich the interpretation of these expressions of victory with the pregnant meaning which the words νίκη, νικᾶν have in the course of the trilogy, and e.g. Moritz (201) sees in these instances ominous echoes between 290f., 341f. and 571. Although it is obvious that Aeschylean images and expressions develop in the course of the drama (on such "prolepsis", see especially A. Lebeck, *The Oresteia: A Study in language and structure*, Cambridge, Mass. 1971, 1f.), we should beware of too easily reading into certain passages more meaning than they apparently have by working backwards from the develop-

The noun *νίκη* occurs for the first time at the end of Agamemnon's first speech Ag. 854 *νίκη δ', ἐπείπερ ἔσπετ', ἐμπέδως μένοι*. This position is a sure sign of the importance with which Aeschylus invests the word, and in fact, this line has a fatal ring in its context: at the moment of the homecoming of the victor, his victory begins to crumble.¹² I would like to point out that this is the only passage in Ag. where Agamemnon's triumph over Troy is termed *νίκη* — and this comes from Agamemnon's own lips, at the moment of the beginning of his defeat. There would have been ample opportunity to emphasize the victory of Agamemnon with the actual word *νίκη* — in Clytemnestra's mouth the word could have had an ironic tone, but the watchman, the chorus and the herald could have used it quite sincerely. However, when they speak of Agamemnon's glorious achievement, they do not call it a victory, but use words emphasizing the fall and destruction of Troy and the overpowering force of the Greeks. The most usual words are those related to *αἰρέω* (14 times),¹³ beginning with the hopes of the watchman (10 *ἀλώσιμόν τε βάξιν*) and their fulfilment (29f. *εἶπερ Ἰλίου πόλις / ἐάλωκεν*). Next comes *πέρθω* with derivatives (5×),¹⁴ *ἀνάστασις / ἀναστάτης* (2×),¹⁵ and several different expressions occurring only once, all emphasizing

ments in the drama. When the actual context of the words in question in no way favours the pregnant meaning, this procedure may lead to over-interpretation. This applies especially to the idiomatic use of the participle *νικώμενος*. I think that the position in which the word is used in the speech may give a clue to its significance in the context (cf. p. 83). Cf. the remarks on the technique of significant repetition by O. Hiltbrunner, *Wiederholungs- und Motivtechnik bei Aischylos*, Bern 1950, 3.

¹² See Taplin 306ff., who emphasizes the association of the final prayer with exits as well as its special meaning and irony.

¹³ Ag. 10, 30, 126, 267, 324, 339, 340 bis, 473, 577, 589, 818, 1288, 1335. Lebeck (59) points out that the frequent use of the verb *αἰρέω* constitutes a significant verbal parallelism to the repeatedly occurring verbs of action (*δράω*, *πράττω*, *πάσχω*) which prepare for the gnome *παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα* (Ag. 1564).

¹⁴ Ag. 278, 472, 591, 783, 907.

¹⁵ Ag. 589, 1227.

the capture or sack of the city.¹⁶ Thus, the sinister quality of Agamemnon's victory is constantly kept to the fore by Aeschylus, even by the choice of the words used to proclaim his achievement.

Clytemnestra's entrance at 855 is necessary for the full dramatic force of the line 854.¹⁷ By her entrance, the audience understands that the victory of the Trojan war is not enough: the battle has moved to a personal level, it becomes a battle of power and will between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. At the end of Clytemnestra's answering speech there is a veiled hint at the victory she hopes: Ag. 912 τὰ δ' ἄλλα φροντὶς οὐχ ὕπνω νικωμένη / θήσει δικαίως σὺν θεοῖς εἰμαρμένα. The passive participle with dative, which is often used unemphatically, gains significance here from its use in the final lines of the speech, which are reminiscent of ritual closing prayer.¹⁸ To Agamemnon's ears the words may remind of her excellent qualities as a housekeeper and her over-eagerness to honour her returning husband and fulfil the thanksgiving rites to the gods, but to the audience, the words have a clearly sinister ring.¹⁹ The notion of victory, coming now for the fourth time at the end of a significant rhesis of a main character of the drama (cf. Ag. 314, 854 and, with κρατοίη, 349), has clearly risen to an important element in the relation of these characters. The ambiguousness of Clytemnestra's speech is forcibly brought out in the way she lays emphasis on justice (911 Δίκη, 913 δικαίως). In her battle against her husband, Clytemnestra believes that she has justice on her side, and in this sense, the victory which she covets is like a victory in a lawsuit. The idea of this kind of victory is, however, as yet only hovering in the background — it will take shape more clearly in Cho., to emerge fully in the Areopagus scene in Eum.

¹⁶ Ag. 320 ἔχω, 360 δουλεία, 525 κατασκάπτω, 526 κατεργάζομαι, 814 Ἰλιοφθόρος (Karsten's conjecture adopted by Page), 822 ἀρπαγή, 824 διαμαθύνω, not to speak of the more elaborate expressions and metaphors connected with the fall of Troy occurring especially in the choral parts. κρατέω, which comes nearest to νικάω as a verb of positive connotations, occurs as a reference to the capture of Troy only once, 324, and even there it forms a pair with αἰδέω.

¹⁷ In addition to Taplin 307 n. 1, cf. Neustadt 262, Reinhardt 93f., Winnington-Ingram 104.

¹⁸ See Taplin 306 with n. 2.

¹⁹ Cf. Fraenkel ad v. 911.

The battle culminates in the following stichomythia between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. Although scholars have interpreted this dialogue leading to the carpet scene in very different ways respecting the motivation and character of Agamemnon, it has often been clearly stated that this dialogue embodies the victory of Clytemnestra, and that Aeschylus emphasizes this by referring to their altercation with words belonging to the sphere of battle.²⁰ Again we find the victory words at a crucial point of the dramatic action, and again they occur at the end of a structural unit of speech, this time the stichomythia. We should note, moreover, the two different words used: after 941f. (Clyt.) τοῖς δ' ὀλβίοις γε καὶ τὸ νικᾶσθαι πρόπει. — (Ag.) ἧ καὶ σὺ νίκην τῆσδε δήριος τίεις; Clytemnestra changes the word:²¹ πιθοῦ, κρατεῖς μέντοι παρεῖς ἐκὼν ἐμοί. For a while, she allows Agamemnon to believe that he is superior, has κράτος in Argos and in his home; νίκη she reserves for herself.²²

The last mention of victory in Ag.²³ is in 1423, where Clytemnestra at the end of her first epirrhema, in answer to the chorus' threats, forcefully retorts: χειρὶ νικήσαντ' ἐμοῦ / ἄρχειν. Here, the victory is no longer connected with the battle between husband and wife — she has already won that battle — but victory in an actual physical battle is presented as the prerequisite for the ruling position. These are wild words in the mouth of Clytemnestra. Later in her retorts to the chorus she refers to Aegisthus as her aid and protection (Ag. 1434ff.) and Aegisthus represents

²⁰ Cf. Neustadt 262f., Winnington-Ingram 106f., Lebeck 40, Taplin 312f., Moritz 201, C. Macleod, JHS 102 (1982) 143.

²¹ She surely uses some form related to the word κράτος, which the MSS. have; I cite the verse in the form mentioned in the app. crit. of Page, with the conjectures by Weil, Bothe and Wecklein.

²² As Winnington-Ingram remarks (107 n. 35), κρατεῖς is heavily ironical and recalls lines 10 and 258. For κράτος, see below.

²³ I omit Ag. 1378, where most editors read νείκης (Heath: νίκης MSS.) παλαιᾶς, although many of them wish they could read something else. Fraenkel e.g. is partial to δίκης (Pauw) παλαιᾶς, Denniston and Page to this or νίκης τελείας (Karsten). Winnington-Ingram remarks (108 n. 41) that "if there are two themes which we might expect to find somewhere in this speech, they are νικᾶν and τελεῖν". Karsten's conjecture would illustrate admirably my theme, but that is, of course, no reason to accept it. For reasons not to accept it, see Fraenkel II 647.

himself as the ruler (1638f.), but here, in her first reaction after her victory, she is ready to rout every opposing force single-handed.

I return to the words κράτος, κρατεῖν, which are very near the notion of victory expressed by νίκη, νικᾶν.²⁴ Daube has analyzed the development of κράτος from mere superiority of force to a notion of legitimate political power — a meaning which becomes established in the political terms formed during the 6th and 5th centuries.²⁵ It is characteristic of Aeschylus to develop his themes and images by using different words associated with the idea in question.²⁶ This feature greatly enriches his expressions in this instance, too. The notions of νίκη and κράτος, which are constantly intertwined, are not identical, but their use — like that of the related notions of ἄλωσις etc.²⁷ — illustrates the fundamental battle between the characters of the plays — Agamemnon and Clytemnestra in *Ag.*, Orestes and Clytemnestra in *Cho.*, Apollo, Athene and the Furies in *Eum.* — and the ultimate triumph of justice and the Good. In *Ag.*, we may note that κράτος is not mainly associated with Agamemnon, but with Clytemnestra. It is firmly linked with her from the start in the attitude of the watchman (*Ag.* 10) and the chorus (258),²⁸ it returns in Agamemnon's exhortation to his wife to accept Cassandra into the house (*Ag.* 951 τὸν κρατοῦντα μαλθακῶς),²⁹ the chorus uses it of the similar power of the two women, Helen and Clytemnestra, who brought destruction on their husbands (*Ag.* 1470),³⁰ and at the end of the play, it is forcibly established

²⁴ Winnington-Ingram emphasizes on several occasions the importance of the word κράτος in the *Oresteia* and its close association with νίκη, cf. 102f., 107 n. 35, 111f., 114. See also the survey of the use of κράτος in the *Oresteia* by A. F. Garvie, *BICS* 17 (1970) 81, who remarks that the meaning almost everywhere in the trilogy is the royal power and authority. — Simon Goldhill's book *Language, sexuality, narrative: The Oresteia*, Cambridge 1984, came out as this paper was in print; he discusses κράτος pp. 33, 77, 103f., 151f.

²⁵ δημοκρατία, ἀριστοκρατία, see Daube 39ff.

²⁶ This is a fundamental thought in Lebeck, expressed at the beginning of her book (1); see also W. C. Scott, *TAPA* 97 (1966) 460ff.

²⁷ See above p. 82.

²⁸ Cf. Winnington-Ingram 102f., 114.

²⁹ A general maxim, but used in this case in relation with Clytemnestra (cf. Fraenkel ad loc.).

³⁰ Cf. Winnington-Ingram 111f., Macleod 127.

by the reference to the superiority of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (Ag. 1618, 1632, 1664, 1673 — the last line of the tragedy).³¹ Daube maintains that κράτος in Aeschylus has the sense of rightful superiority, lawful power, and that it is in the *Oresteia* used of the legitimate kings.³² It is true that in some instances the lawful claims to κράτος are emphasized by Aeschylus, as in Ag. 108, 258, 1585, which Daube cites, but in his discussion he omits the obvious fact that κράτος in Ag. is used mainly of rulers whose legitimacy — like Aegisthus' — or at least the lawfulness of whose acts — like Clytemnestra's — is very soon seen to be questionable. This increasingly negative sense of κράτος gives a peculiar richness to the use of the word in Ag.³³

Aeschylus does not associate much κράτος with the Atridae. They are referred to as Ἀχαιῶν δῖθρονον κράτος at the beginning of the lyric parodos (Ag. 109),³⁴ but there, too, the context is ominously negative — they are sent away from Greece and thus from the sphere of their rule by the divine omen.³⁵ In Ag. 619, the chorus remembers Menelaos as τῆσδε γῆς φίλον κράτος. But in Aeschylus' way of putting it, Agamemnon is

³¹ Cf. Winnington-Ingram 114.

³² Daube 40f.

³³ The falsity often implied by the word in this play comes out well in Clytemnestra's deceitful subordination to Agamemnon in 943, see above p. 84. In this light it is perhaps possible to see the use of this word in Clytemnestra's quasi-pious prayer Ag. 349 τὸ δ' εὖ κρατοίη μὴ διχορρόπως ἰδεῖν — which formally is a traditional speech-closing prayer (it also marks her exit, see Taplin 290, 306) and the contents of which correspond to the choral refrain Ag. 121, 139, 159 (cf. Moritz 204f.) — not as a mere variation of the word for victory but as a significant variation, which connects Clytemnestra's prayer with the ominous sphere of her κράτος. Fraenkel rightly emphasizes the dreadful ambiguity of the prayer (II 178).

³⁴ The sense of κράτος in the passage 104f. is much disputed. I am inclined to understand the passage along the lines of Lebeck (10ff.), who sees in the expression a deliberate ambiguity, 104 anticipating κράτος in 109 but meaning more than that and comprising an allusion to the bird omen. J. Bollack's interpretation, *Agamemnon* 1, première partie, *Cahiers de philologie* 6, Lille 1981, 122ff., who translates "Je peux clamer, bien que je sois à la limite du pouvoir de faire route propice aux hommes" (117), I find unconvincing.

³⁵ They are going off from Greece in Ag. 43f., too, where their ruling position is expressed with the words διθρόνου Διόθεν καὶ δισκήπτρου τιμῆς.

left without his own lawful κράτος, as he is left without the honour brought by his νίκη over Troy — Clytemnestra and Aegisthus usurp these words. Only his ἄλωσις, his quality as πτολιπόρθης is emphatically remembered.

In Cho., the character of νίκη as a key-word comes out very clearly.³⁶ The victory is emphasized in three different phases of action, where the nature of the victory changes considerably. For the most part of the play, victory appears as the goal of Orestes and Electra in their purpose of restituting κράτος to Orestes, the legal heir of Agamemnon.³⁷ The victory words occur markedly in the final prayers of speeches or songs. In Electra's prayer to her father Cho. 147f. ἡμῖν δὲ πομπὸς ἴσθι τῶν ἐσθλῶν ἄνω / σὺν θεοῖσι καὶ γῆ καὶ δίκη νικηφόρω, the concepts of δίκη and νίκη are for the first time in the course of the trilogy expressly brought together.³⁸ The great kommos ends with the chorus' prayer for victory (478) and the chorus' anapaests after the short scene with Aegisthus end

³⁶ See Schadewaldt 139.

³⁷ The opening of the play with Cho. 1 πατρῷ' ... κράτη is in clear connection with the strong emphasis laid on the power of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus at the end of the foregoing play (see above p. 86); cf. Winnington-Ingram 114. For the sense of πατρῷα κράτη, see Garvie, BICS 17 (1970) 79—91.

³⁸ Cf. the hint at Ag. 911ff., see p. 83, and later Cho. 497ff. — In Electra's prayer concluding her first speech to Orestes after she has recognized him, Κράτος and Δίκη stand personified as associates of Zeus (Cho. 244). Here, Κράτος appears rather as Power (cf. Hes. Theog. 385ff.). In the iambic lines following the kommos, the κράτος aspect is emphasized in the prayers of the sisters to their father (cf. Winnington-Ingram 143). When Orestes asks his father to give him κράτος τῶν σῶν δόμων (Cho. 480), he means domestic and political power; in Electra's prayer Cho. 490 ὦ Περσέφασσα, δὸς δέ γ' εὖμορφον κράτος, the word is often translated "victory" (e.g. "la brillante victoire" by P. Mazon, Eschyle 2, Paris 1953, "fair victory", "the fair form of victory" by H. J. Rose, A commentary on the surviving plays of Aeschylus, Amsterdam 1958), which is naturally prompted by the word "battle" in the foregoing verse. However, as these lines are addressed to the chthonic deities, I think that κράτος is here used in the same sense as in Cho. 1 πατρῷα κράτη (see n. 37). Naturally, κράτος and νίκη and their derivatives can be used without notable distinction, but I think that even in Cho. 499 εἶπερ κρατηθεῖς γ' ἀντινικῆσαι θέλεις there is some difference in the verbs, κρατέω emphasizing the rude force of the wrestling match implied in Orestes' lines (cf. Petrounias 169).

very similarly with the prayer εἴη δ' ἐπὶ νίκη (868).³⁹ Here the word "victory" is the cue for Aegisthus' death cry from behind the scenes.

The following phase of action⁴⁰ contains the meeting of Orestes and Clytemnestra. In a flash of insight (ξυνῆκα 887) Clytemnestra understands that this is the decisive moment in her battle. It is now question of the victory of either the mother or the son: Cho. 890 εἰδῶμεν εἰ νικῶμεν ἢ νικώμεθα. Orestes' reply to Pylades' encouragement Cho. 903 κρίνω σε νικᾶν is in this context much more than a mere statement "your opinion prevails".⁴¹ The use of the word νικᾶν, with all the associations of decisive moments it has drawn to itself during the plays, underlines the meaning that this is the decisive moment in the battle of wills between mother and son; the deed is decreed, in Orestes' eyes Clytemnestra is as much as dead, whatever she tries to say in the following stichomythia.

The third phase of victory in this play comes in the final scene. In his rhesis over the corpses of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus Orestes sees as yet only the horror of Clytemnestra's deed; in his lines after the short choral strophe, he sees the horror of his own deed and the quality of this victory: Cho. 1017 ἄζηλα νίκης τῆσδ' ἔχων μιάσματα.⁴² Most effectively, Aeschylus has linked Orestes' growing madness with the verb νικᾶν: Cho. 1023 (Or.) φέρουσι γὰρ νικώμενον / φρένες δύσαρκτοι, 1052 (chorus) ἴσχε, μὴ φοβοῦ, νικῶν πολὺ. With these words, we see his victory turning to dust, and with that, every victory thus far won or thought to have been won in this trilogy.

The first time the victory theme appears in Eum., it is in clear connection with the end of the foregoing play.⁴³ Apollo says to Orestes Eum. 88 μέμνησο, μὴ φόβος σε νικάτω φρένας. The other concerned

³⁹ Cf. Schadewaldt 139.

⁴⁰ Taplin comments excellently on the extraordinary rapidness of action in this scene and its significance, 351ff.

⁴¹ As the words in themselves, in quite a normal idiom, mean, cf. LSJ s.v. νικάω I 3. — We cannot say, as Moritz suggests (202), that "Orestes . . . is so obsessed with victory that he fashions favorable omens from events leading up to the stroke of retribution" and therefore uses the verb νικᾶν. Cho. 683 is, in my opinion, similarly overinterpreted by Moritz (202).

⁴² Cf. Schadewaldt 39, Taplin 359f., Moritz 202.

⁴³ Cf. the link formed by κράτος between the end of Ag. and the beginning of Cho.

party, the Furies, is similarly encouraged to perseverance by the ghost of Clytemnestra, with very similar sounding words: Cho. 133 τί δοῦς; ἀνίστω· μή σε νικάτω πόνος.⁴⁴

Then the aspect of victory peculiar to this drama begins to emerge. The drama is to culminate in the trial scene and the following persuasion scene, but already before the actual trial there are strong elements of seeking justice in front of an arbitrator — first the Furies present their cause to Apollo (Eum. 198ff.), who, of course, is a partial judge in this case, then both the Furies and Orestes speak before Athene (397ff.). Here already (Eum. 432, 477) the victory begins to have the meaning of winning a case in court, a sense which is common in Attic speech as a law term.⁴⁵ This sense is clear when the parties are propagating their own cause whilst waiting for the jury's verdict: Eum. 722 (Ap.) νικήσω δ' ἐγώ, 741 (Ath.) νικᾷ δ' Ὀρέστης κἄν ἰσόψηφος δίκη / ἐξῆλθ'. Seemingly in contradiction to this, Athene says a little later to the Furies: Eum. 795 οὐ γὰρ νενίκησθ', ἀλλ' ἰσόψηφος δίκη / ἐξῆλθ'. This is, of course, part of her persuasion act; it is, however, not merely a trick of persuasion, but an indication of the turn which the main thought of the trilogy is now taking.⁴⁶ As concerns the victory theme, it is no longer relevant who wins, which has been the crucial question in Ag., Cho. and most of Eum. It is no more a question of a νίκη in a δίκη, but of the νίκη of the Δίκη, and the final battle to ensure the victory of justice is to ensure the victory of Good over the rage and threats of the Furies. In her answer to the Furies' question (Eum. 902), Athene at the same time gives the answer to the question as to the final winner in the Oresteia and the answer to the chorus' prayer in their refrain in the opening of the trilogy — Eum. 903 ὅποια νίκης μὴ κακῆς ἐπίσκοπα. In the end, it is "the good victory" that wins the battle. Zeus, the protector of councils,

⁴⁴ Taplin (368) calls attention to the extraordinarily disconnected structure of the first part of Eum. (1—139) and the way in which the abrupt juxtapositions of the scenes help to bring out the different sides of the coming conflict, without as yet bringing them together. I think that the similarity of the two lines I quote above is an example of this technique, too.

⁴⁵ Cf. LSJ s.v. νικάω I 5.

⁴⁶ See again Taplin's remarks on the dependence between the structure of the play and the new concentration of attention at Eum. 778ff. (402, 407ff.).

has won for her and Peitho this battle with the Furies. The winner in the whole sequence of disastrous deeds of the house of Atreus is neither a man nor a personal god, but the Good: Eum. 973 ἀλλ' ἐκράτησε Ζεὺς ἀγοραῖος, / νικᾷ δ' ἀγαθῶν / ἔρις ἡμετέρα διὰ παντός.⁴⁷ In the human sphere, the final winner is the city state of Athens: Eum. 1008 τὸ δὲ κερδαλέον / πέμπειν πόλεως ἐπὶ νίκη. Thus, in connection with the words νίκη, νικᾶν we see the tendency observed in many other aspects of Aeschylean motifs and images in the Oresteia: after often being only false promises, with sinister implications, they become unequivocally positive in the end.⁴⁸

It would be nice to say, in these days of the peace movement, that in the Oresteia, victory in the end means the victory of peace and its blessings, but I must point out that there exists, though rather latently, yet another kind of victory, which is by no means underestimated nor abhorred by Aeschylus, namely the victoriousness of Athens in future wars. This is seen in Orestes' farewell words Eum. 776 πάλαισμ' ἄφυκτον τοῖς ἐναντίοις ἔχοις, / σωτήριόν τε καὶ δορὸς νικηφόρον, as well as in Athene's promise Eum. 913 τῶν ἀρειφάτων δ' ἐγὼ / προπτῶν ἀγώνων ἐν βροτοῖς τιμᾶν πόλιν.

⁴⁷ Moritz aptly reminds (204) that in this statement, we come full circle from Ag. 174f. Ζῆνα δὲ τις προφρόνως ἐπινίκια κλάζων / τεύξεται φρενῶν τὸ πᾶν.

⁴⁸ Cf. e.g. Winnington-Ingram 166, Goheen AJP 76 (1955) 122—32, Peradotto 388ff., F. I. Zeitlin, TAPA 96 (1965) 499ff., 506ff., Lebeck 131, T. N. Gantz, JHS 97 (1977) 28, 38, Moritz 195, 209ff., Macleod 137. — This holds true of the word κράτος, too. We have seen how it is in Ag. mainly associated with the usurpers and how, in Cho., the children fight to restore their father's power to Orestes. In Eum., the chorus use the verb κρατέω in 163 and 491 when they express their indignation over the possible victory of the opponents: there, the tone is still negative. But in the end, κράτος is restituted as the power given by the highest god, and the words of the Furies Eum. 526 παντὶ μέσφ τὸ κράτος θεὸς / ὠπασεν come true: 918 Ζεὺς ὁ παγκρατής, 973 ἀλλ' ἐκράτησε Ζεὺς ἀγοραῖος (cf. Garvie 81).

II

We have seen that the idea of victory clothed in the words *νίκη*, *νικᾶν* is evidently used at crucial moments of action throughout the trilogy, even if it changes its field of application and its tone. Moreover, it is clearly a word underlining the structure of the dialogue and the "acts" of the play. This feature is a development from the traditional wish for good or victory occurring at the end of a speech or a prayer. The important thematic part to be played by the word "victory" in the trilogy is very clearly pointed out at the start by Aeschylus in that he uses it three times in succession in the formally traditional refrain of the *parodos*. Naturally, the actual events of the drama, beginning with the signal of victory over Troy, together with the audience's expectations of the murder of Agamemnon, clearly emphasize the theme of victory as well.

To return to Ag. 314 against this background, is it not natural to expect that this occurrence of *νικᾶν*, coming as it does at a poignant point, at the end of Clytemnestra's first speech, is linked with the victory theme of the trilogy and, in this phase, to the coming battle of husband and wife? Yet this is a sense that, as far as I have noted, is not seen in the interpretations of this line. Of course, it has been said that the idea of victory is central to the end of Clytemnestra's speech. It is seen as the triumph of communicating the victory by beacons, or as the triumph of the capture of Troy, not as the first — and as yet, veiled — indication of the personal triumph of Clytemnestra, which means defeat for Agamemnon.⁴⁹

In spite of the fact that line 314 is not corrupt and that it represents apparently perfectly normal Greek diction, there are three points of possible ambiguity in the expression, which have resulted in different interpretations. Fraenkel sums these up:⁵⁰ *δέ* may be copulative or adversative; *ὁ πρῶτος δραμών* may be the one who starts first or the one who comes first to the finish; *ὁ πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος* may refer to the same person or not. A further difficulty is the relation meant by Aeschylus between the fire signal and the metaphor of a torch race. If we leave out the particle

⁴⁹ The possibility is shortly referred to by W. B. Stanford, *Ambiguity in Greek literature*, Oxford 1939, 145.

⁵⁰ Fraenkel II 166.

δέ, the interpretation of which depends on the sense of the other two points, it is, purely mathematically, possible to produce eight combinations of the ambiguous expressions in question. Of these combinations, five are meaningless both as references to a real relay race (such as the lampadodromia) and as references to the advance of the fire signal.⁵¹ The remaining three are the following: "The one who finishes first and runs the last leg, wins."⁵² This is logical in regard to a real relay race (if we take his victory to represent that of the whole team), but it does not suit the context of the fire signals, because there is no reason to emphasize the significance of the last stage the signal had to cover; in fact, Clytemnestra stresses in her speech just the opposite, the effectiveness of the signal and the eagerness of the watchmen at every stage.⁵³

The meaning "the one who runs the first leg and the one who runs the last leg, both win"⁵⁴ is logical in regard to both situations and is the interpretation which many scholars, e.g. Denniston and Page, accept. The meaning "the one who comes to the finish first and last wins"⁵⁵ is impossible in regard to a real relay race; in regard to the fire signals it could be thought possible along the lines of Fraenkel, i.e. as a paradox emphasizing the special sense of this relay race: unlike in real races, here there is no competition, and yet there is a winner, the one who finishes first and last.

⁵¹ If we mark the meanings "first~last in the finish" (i.e. the winner~loser) with A and the meanings "the runner of the first~last leg" with B, the possibility of reference to one and the same person with + and the reference to two different persons with /, the five impossible combinations are B+A, B+B, A/A, A/B and B/A. I think that the meaning must be found somewhere in the senses of "first" and "last" described above, and that the sense required in Hdt. 9,28,6, where the Athenians are first seen from one end of the line of the army and last seen from the other end, cannot be relevant here, although it appears here and there in the numerous paraphrases of l. 314 invented by scholars.

⁵² In the schema adopted in n. 51, A+B.

⁵³ The only reason to stress the achievement of the runner of the last leg in this context would be to see here a hidden reference to Clytemnestra herself as the final victor. This is, as I argue below, very near the truth; however, for the reasons stated above and later pp. 95f. I do not think this interpretation of ὁ πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος probable.

⁵⁴ Type B/B.

⁵⁵ Type A+A.

On the nature of this victory, Fraenkel writes: "She speaks of a victory because her people, the watchman on the Arachnaion and also the chain of watchers behind him — — — because all these have played their part surpassingly well and achieved far more than was demanded of them."⁵⁶ In fact, this explanation of the nature of the victory comes very near to that of Denniston and Page, although that relies on another interpretation of the words in question: "The safe arrival of the beacon at its destination is naturally described as a 'victory'. — Clytemnestra says in effect: 'This was a kind of λαμπαδηδρομία in which one received the torch from another in relays — a race in which all contribute equally toward ultimate success, as much service being done by the first runner as by the last.'"⁵⁷ The sense emphasized in a way by both interpretations — that the success of the fire signal is due to all — is naturally the superficial sense of Clytemnestra's speech, the one she wants the chorus to understand, just like at the end of her next speech, she wishes that the good would prevail (Ag. 349), using almost exactly the chorus' words.

Fraenkel is surely quite right in expecting that the line 314 is intended as the grand conclusion of the metaphor⁵⁸ and, I would add, to give brilliance to the end of the whole magnificent speech. In view of this, even Fraenkel's own interpretation with its paradox of a winner where there is no competition seems both complicated and flat. Equally flat is the view of Denniston and Page of a Clytemnestra politely congratulating everybody for a job well done in the spirit of co-operation. I think that even as Clytemnestra's words in 349 have a sinister undertone, referring to the success of her own plan,⁵⁹ so the victory meant here is, in fact, a foretaste of her own final victory. This is insinuated in the emphasis given to herself in the planning of the fire signal system (μοι 312, ἐμοί 316), in the tone of triumph which permeates the whole

⁵⁶ Fraenkel II 169.

⁵⁷ Denniston and Page 98.

⁵⁸ Fraenkel II 167.

⁵⁹ This is well expressed by Fraenkel II 178.

speech, so well described by Reinhardt,⁶⁰ by the ominous use of σκήπτω to refer to the signal as it comes nearer to Argos (302, 308, 310) and the connection of this thunderbolt (cf. σκηπτός) with Troy (311).⁶¹ The idea of a sinister undertone would give extra meaningfulness to the end of the speech; it would be in concordance with the end of Clytemnestra's next speech and the use of victory words throughout the play. Such a sense could, in fact, be combined both with the basic interpretation of l. 314 by Fraenkel and that by Denniston and Page.⁶² However, I am inclined to accept the latter interpretation (by no means propagated by these scholars alone) on the grounds of the following observations.

I think that the difference of opinions reigning for centuries over the meaning of this line is due partly to conscious ambiguity on the part of Aeschylus.⁶³ There is the ambiguity of Clytemnestra's tone described above.⁶⁴ There is the ambiguity over whether πρώτος and τελευταῖος refer to the same person or not, and over the meaning of these words. The first of these two ambiguities, taken alone, really allows two interpretations,⁶⁵ but the second one may not have been ambiguous to the

⁶⁰ Reinhardt 89. Cf. Goheen 124 n. 26: "Her enthusiasm for the racing beacons is part of her exultation in coming revenge." — The whole speech is seen in the light of subconscious sexual symbols by P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, PP 28 (1973) 445—452, who compares Clytemnestra's excitement to the morbid interest of an incendiary.

⁶¹ These connotations of σκήπτειν are pointed out by Petrounias, 247. Cf. H. Lloyd-Jones, *Agamemnon by Aeschylus*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1970, 33f.: "It is hard not to suppose that the fire . . . stands for the avenging power of Zeus, which having punished Priam and his city for their crime against Zeus's law, will now punish the conqueror of Priam, Agamemnon."

⁶² And, if one wishes, with the interpretation of the type A+B, see n. 53.

⁶³ I say partly, because one part of the truth may always be our limited knowledge of Greek idioms. For ambiguity in Aeschylus, see particularly the remarks by Lebeck (3): "When argument arises over meaning, the statement that claims to be exclusively right is categorically wrong." Petrounias calls the ambiguity of the metaphors their "vielfache Funktion" (XIX). Cf. Stanford 137ff.

⁶⁴ This explains the ambiguity of δέ: if one takes the surface meaning (in the sense of Denniston and Page etc.), it is copulative; if one takes the deeper meaning of Clytemnestra, it is adversative.

⁶⁵ On the omission of the article from the second of a pair of contrasted things cf. Ag. 324 and the remarks of Fraenkel II 168, Denniston and Page 97f.

Greeks. I think the evidence points in the opposite direction to Fraenkel's. The statement νικᾷ δ' ὁ πρῶτος δραμών is not "in form and matter parallel to the ὁ πρῶτος ἄψας ἐνίκα of the Demosthenes scholion".⁶⁶ In the latter, the word ἄψας clearly implies the goal which is reached; in the former, the participle as such denotes only the running, not the running to the goal. The passage from Pindar generally cited to aid at this moment, Ol. 6,75 πρῶτοις περὶ δωδέκατον δρόμον ἐλαυνόντεσσιν points rather to the interpretation that ὁ πρῶτος δραμών alone does not mean "the one who finishes first", because there, too, as in πρῶτος ἄψας, something referring to the finish is added: the twelfth course is the last one.

On the other hand, we have clear evidence that ὁ πρῶτος δραμών could mean "the one who runs the first leg" — in Hdt. 8,98,2 it is used to refer to the fast Persian couriers, ἄγγαροι, to which Aeschylus has compared the fire signal in Ag. 282. This sense is also well suited to the idea of διαδοχαί mentioned in the previous line (313). We should further note the scholion to Ar.Ran. 131 ὅταν οἱ πρῶτοι λαμπαδίζοντες ἀφεθῶσιν, where certainly those who run the first leg of a relay race are meant.⁶⁷

Of course, we have plenty of evidence that the ordinals were used in connection with races and other competitions and referred to the places of the winners.⁶⁸ But what was the loser, the last one to finish, called? As the opposite of πρῶτος, both τελευταῖος and ὕστατος are frequently

⁶⁶ Fraenkel II 168. Schol. οἱ ἔφηβοι, ἀλειψάμενοι παρὰ τοῦ γυμνασιάρχου, κατὰ διαδοχὴν τρέχοντες ἤπτον τὸν βῶμον· καὶ ὁ πρῶτος ἄψας ἐνίκα καὶ ἡ τούτου φυλή (Bull.Corr.Hell. I, 177, 11).

⁶⁷ Cf. also the inscription L. Moretti, *Iscrizioni agonistiche greche*, Roma 1953, No. 50 = Syll.³ 1067 (2nd cent. A.D.) 14f., where Onasiteles from Kedreai is said to have won in Rhodes [λαμπ]άδι ἀπὸ πρώτας ἄνδρας / [Ἄ]λεια τὰ μεγάλα καὶ τὰ μακρὰ δῖς. Here, a victory as the runner of the first leg of the victorious team may be meant; Moretti (129) offers a further interpretation.

⁶⁸ In a horse race, e.g. Il. 23, 262ff. of the prizes reserved for the five competitors, where the winner is "the first", Thuc. 6,16,2, Isocr. 6,34, Plut. Alc. 11; in the torch race, Paus. 1,30,2; in dramatic competitions, e.g. the Didaskaliai IG II² 2319—23, where the winner is mentioned with ἐνίκα, the other places with ordinals. Usually in inscriptions honouring the victor the verb "to win" is used, not the ordinal, cf. e.g. the evidence in Moretti, *op. cit.*

used in many senses.⁶⁹ Perhaps the loser was called *τελευταῖος*, but we have no evidence for that except: Ag. 314.⁷⁰ On the other hand, we have evidence that he was called *ὔστατος* — Il. 23,532 *υἷος δ' Ἀδμήτιο πανύστατος ἤλυθεν ἄλλων*, Pl.Pl. 266c *οὐκ εἰκὸς ὔστατα ἀφικνεῖσθαι τὰ βραδύτατα; οἱ λοῖσθος* — Il. 23,536 *λοῖσθος ἀνὴρ ὄριστος*.⁷¹

I suggested above that l. 314 may be consciously ambiguous. If we accept that *τελευταῖος* probably means "the runner of the last leg", part of the ambiguity vanishes, because then *πρῶτος* must mean "the runner of the first leg", and further, *πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος* must refer to different persons.⁷² The ambiguity of the true nature of the victory remains, however, and besides, there is a new ambiguity concerning *πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος*. Who are the runners of the first and the last legs who both win?

Line 314 is generally considered as the culmination of the torch race metaphor, as the real end of the whole beacon speech, as if the two finishing lines 315—316 were a mere closing formula, irrelevant to the sense of the preceding lines. Of course, they form a clausula to the speech with the summing up with *τοιούτος, τοιόσδε, τοσοῦτος* etc. often found in the concluding lines of a rhesis.⁷³ And of course they repeat the chorus' words from the question Ag. 272 *ἔστι τῶνδέ σοι τέκμαρ;*, emphasizing that a convincing answer has been given. But that does not mean that the lines should be read in isolation from what precedes; on the contrary, the *τέκμαρ* and *σύμβολον* are very closely connected with

⁶⁹ See LSJ s.v. *πρότερος* B I 3.

⁷⁰ In Aeschylus, the word *τελευταῖος* occurs elsewhere only once, Seven 953 *τελευταῖαι δ' ἐπηλάλαξαν / Ἄραϊ τὸν ὄξυν νόμον (τελευταῖαι Hermann: the text is uncertain)*, where it means "in the end, finally", emphasizing the final victory of the family curse. Cf. U. Fischer, *Der Telosgedanke in den Dramen des Aischylos*, Hildesheim 1965, 140, who remarks that in addition to the temporal meaning "mag die Anspielung auf den Tod der Brüder mit vorhanden sein". On the other hand, he sees *τελευταῖος* in Ag. 314 as purely temporal (140 with n. 10). Cf., however, below p. 97 n. 78.

⁷¹ Orestes in the race in Delphi was for a moment *ἔσχατος* (Soph.El. 734), but that was not at the finish.

⁷² Against the meaning "winner" in this connection and against reference to the same person see above p. 92 and nn. 51—55.

⁷³ Cf. e.g. Ag. 348, 580, 613, 680.

Ἴδαϊον πῦρ and λαμπαδηφόροι of the preceding lines — the fire signal has been the longed for σύμβολον from the start.⁷⁴ If we read the last two lines in connection with the preceding lines, we can see that they form an asyndetically following explanation⁷⁵ to line 314, as in Aeschylus an explanation often follows a metaphor or an ambiguous expression.⁷⁶ The expression ὁ πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος of l. 314 is explained by 316 ἀνδρὸς παραγγείλαντος ἐκ Τροίας ἐμοί — with the two persons framing most effectively the last line of the speech. This line, in its turn, picks up the thought already expressed in ll. 310—311, where the final term of the message, the house of the Atridae,⁷⁷ and the starting point, Mt. Ida, are brought together with a link of direct descent. Now, these two points are mentioned again, personified in the pair of husband and wife, and the metaphor lying in between is made clear. Agamemnon, who sends the fire signal from Troy, is "the one who runs the first leg" — he is a winner because he has captured Troy and sends the signal telling of the success to Argos. Clytemnestra, who receives the signal at the palace, is "the one who runs the last leg" — she is a winner because everything has so far gone as she planned. Agamemnon is coming, she knows where she stands; she is nearing the τέλος⁷⁸ of her hopes and she is confident that in the long run she will be the winner.

⁷⁴ Cf. Ag. 8f., 21, 22f., 30.

⁷⁵ For asyndetic explanations in Aeschylus, see Fraenkel II 597 (ad v. 1284). Generally, Kühner-Gerth II 2,344.

⁷⁶ Termed γριφος by Fraenkel, who notes that already Casaubon noticed this Aeschylean technique (I 37; cf. II 9, 81f., 136, 251, 691; see also Lebeck 2, 15f.).

⁷⁷ The central meaning of the house in the Oresteia e.g. in connection with this line is well seen by Taplin (277, 459).

⁷⁸ τελευταῖος could be linked with this fundamental concept of the Oresteia (see Fischer, op. cit.), the main occurrences of which are listed by Petrounias 411 n. 889, 415 n. 947.