

ALLITERATION IN AESCHYLUS

Many years ago I heard a lecture on alliteration in, if I remember correctly, Tibullus, in which the speaker claimed to prove that Tibullus never used alliteration deliberately. He had counted the poet's total vocabulary, and had worked out that the actual instances of alliteration were fewer than you would expect to occur by statistical pure random chance. I had no quarrel with the figures, but it seemed to me that the conclusion was fundamentally flawed. A poet, at least in theory, might avoid alliteration for most of his work, if only to use it consciously on particular occasions to create particular effects that were all the more striking because of their rarity. One could therefore never prove by this method that any given instance of alliteration was not intentional. It is on this question of intentionality that most discussions of alliteration have turned. However, the distinction between deliberate and accidental alliteration is very much too crude. No doubt a poet sometimes, for whatever reason, set out, as he planned his verse or group of verses, to select words that would be bound together by the alliteration of p or some other letter. Perhaps he aimed to create a special effect. So, at *Pers.* 509, Θρήκην περάσαντες μόγις πολλῶ πόνῳ, one is entitled to feel that the three laborious p sounds, combined with the lack of caesura, were intended by Aeschylus to convey a sense of the exhausting and laborious nature of the Persians' journey through Thrace. On the other hand, an alliteration that was not originally planned by the poet may well have struck him, and pleased him, after he had written it down, and may have led him consciously to select additional words beginning with the same letter. The use of alliteration, therefore, may be unintentional yet conscious, or a mixture of both accident and deliberation. It is hard to believe that at *OT* 371, τυφλὸς τὰ τ' ὄτα τόν τε νοῦν τὰ τ' ὄμματ' εἶ, Sophocles, though he may not have *set out* to compose a line with so many t sounds, was not aware of what he had done. Certainly one must be cautious. By far the commonest alliteration involves the letter π, but this is to be explained, at least partly, by the fact that, on the estimate of D. Fehling¹, no fewer than 20% of all known Greek words begin with that letter. For Aeschylus *Italiae's* Lexicon requires more than 41 pages for π, almost double the space allotted to the next highest consonant, κ, with 22 pages, and exceeded only by the vowels α (44 pages) and ε (42 pages). So random chance may well have played a part here.

The most obvious, and perhaps most clearly intended, alliteration involves the binding together of (a) epithets and nouns, or (b) nouns depending on each other, or (c) pairs of balancing epithets, or (d) subject and verb. For (a) see, for example, *Pers.* 515 δυσπόνητε δαίμον, 907 πλαγαῖσι ποντίαισιν, *Supp.* 843-44 πολύ-ρυτον... πόρον, *Ag.* 223 παρακοπὰ πρωτοπήμων, 910 πορφυρόστρωτος πόρος, 1127 μελαγκέρῳ... μηχανήματι, *Cho.* 942 δεσποσύνων δόμων, 954

¹ D. Fehling, *Die Wiederholungsfiguren und ihr Gebrauch bei den Griechen vor Gorgias*, Berlin 1969, 78.

μέγαν... μυχόν, 974 πατροκτόνους... πορθήτορας, *Eum.* 77 περριρύτας πόλεις, 128 δεινῆς δρακαίνης, 180 μαντικῶν μυχῶν, 352 παλλεύκων πέπλων, 770 παρόρνιαθας πόρους, 832 κοίμα κελαινοῦ κύματος, 846 δυσπάλαμοι... δόλοι, *PV* 7 παντέχνου πυρός, 585 πολύπλανοι πλάναι. For (b) see *Pers.* 82 δέργμα δράκοντος, 599-600 κλύδων κάκων, *Supp.* 345 πρύμναν πόλεος, *Ag.* 490 πυρὸς παραλλαγᾶς, *PV* 89 ποταμῶν... πηγαί. For (c) see *Supp.* 89-90 δαυλοῖ... δάσκιόι τε... πόροι, 1000 πτεροῦντα καὶ πεδοσιβῆ, *Ag.* 1486 παναιτίου πανεργέτα. For (d) see *Sept.* 386 κλάζουσι κῶδωνες. *Ag.* 820, σποδοῦς προπέμπει πίονας πλούτου πνώας, combines (a), (b), and (d) (+ verb and object)². Proper names sometimes seem to attract alliteration, as at *Cho.* 563-65 ἄμφω... φωνῆν... Φωκίδος... φαιδρᾶ φρενί, 674-75 Φωκῆων... αὐτόφορτον, 678-79 σαφηνίσας... Στρόφιος ὁ Φωκεύς, *Eum.* 294-95 κατηρεφῆ... φίλοις... Φλεγραίαν. Cf. also the extensive π alliteration that revolves round Eraphus in the strophic pair at *Supp.* 40-57.

The phenomenon may sometimes help to provide a solution to textual problems. At *Sept.* 619-20 the alliteration in φιλεῖ... φῶτα perhaps tells against the deletion of 619, while at *Cho.* 875 πεπληγμένου seems to be the most appropriate supplement after πάνοιμοι δεσπότη. At *Soph. Aj.* 714, where on other grounds I favour the retention of τε καὶ φλέγει, with a lacuna in the corresponding position in the strophe, I note that φλέγει provides alliteration with φατίσαιμι³ in the following line. On the other hand, at 841-42 and 856-57 it does not, I think, weigh heavily enough to justify retention of the suspect lines.

One reason for the appearance of alliteration in the lyric passages of tragedy, and more particularly of Aeschylus, is that the strophic pairs often form a self-contained unity, with strophe and antistrophe responding, not only in subject-matter, but also in repetitions of words, syllables, or even consonantal or vowel sounds. If, therefore, a strophe is marked by the alliteration of, for example, the letter π, it often, although by no means always, happens that the same alliteration is repeated in the corresponding antistrophe.

That the Greek (and Roman) ear was sensitive to the effect produced by patterns of vowel and consonantal sounds is indicated by the comments of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*de comp.* 173-9) on the opening lines of Sappho fr. 1, and by the tradition that Lasus of Hermione so disliked the sound of the letter σ that he composed whole poems that did not contain that letter. For this attitude to σ cf. Plato

² For a fuller classification of various structural functions see I. Opelt, *Alliteration in Griechischen? Untersuchungen zur Dichtersprache des Nonnos von Panopolis*, Glotta 37, 1958, 205-32. For alliterative linking of vehicle and tenor in poetic imagery see the fundamental work of M.S. Silk, *Interaction in poetic imagery*, Cambridge 1974, 173-93.

Com. fr. 30, Eubulus fr. 27, Dion. Hal. (*de comp.* 14). Cicero (*orat.* 63), and Quintilian (*inst. or.* 12. 10. 29) disliked the sound of *f*. I have already commented on the laborious effect that seems to be created by the *p* sounds at *Pers.* 509. Similarly, at Euripides' *Bacchae* 1084-85 it would be hard to deny that a sense of breathless hush is conveyed by the repetition of the letter σ - $\sigma\acute{\iota}\gamma\eta\sigma\epsilon$ δ' $\alpha\acute{\iota}\theta\acute{\eta}\rho$, $\sigma\acute{\iota}\gamma\alpha$ δ' $\acute{\upsilon}\lambda\iota\mu\omicron\varsigma$ $\nu\acute{\alpha}\pi\eta$ $\phi\acute{\upsilon}\lambda\lambda'$ $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\chi\epsilon$, $\theta\eta\rho\omega\acute{\nu}$ δ' $\omicron\acute{\upsilon}\kappa$ $\acute{\alpha}\nu$ $\eta\kappa\omicron\upsilon\sigma\alpha\varsigma$ $\beta\omicron\eta\acute{\nu}$. Very often, however, even when one is fairly confident that alliteration is intentional, it is very hard to say what particular effect the poet is aiming at. As Dawe remarks on *OT* 371, «there is nothing inherent in the letter τ to make it especially redolent of anger and contempt». One can understand why such scholars as O.J. Todd and J.D. Denniston have been sceptical about all such attempts to identify significant alliteration. See also W.B. Stanford's criticisms of W. Porzig³. Silk is rather less sceptical. A helpful and sensible article on alliteration in Aeschylus by M. Caterina Pogliani appeared in *Lexis* 12 (1994) 37-46. I am happy to accept her conclusion that alliteration often seems to draw attention to recurring or important motifs, and that it is found in intensely emotional passages. This would certainly apply to the stirring appeal to the Greek fleet at *Pers.* 401-05, with its plethora of π sounds. Moreover, the subject-matter itself is sometimes a determining factor, as in the 'beacon-speech' at *Ag.* 281-316, where the 17 ϕ sounds (combined with π) echo the description of the light, $\phi\acute{\alpha}\omicron\varsigma$, $\phi\rho\nu\kappa\tau\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$, $\phi\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega$, as it passes from one beacon to the next. The alliteration is prepared by the 11 ϕ sounds in the introductory dialogue at 264-80. Care, however, is required. It would not be hard to find many emotional passages in which there is no such obvious alliteration, or, conversely, striking alliteration in passages which do not seem to be emotional. If one maintains that these *must* be emotional because they are marked by alliteration, one is in danger of arguing in a circle.

Even the application of the term alliteration is not as simple as it might seem. Some scholars would confine the term to pairs of words that begin with the same letter, perhaps extending it to the first letter of the second element of a nominal or verbal compound. In what follows I shall go further. My concern is with whole passages in which the same letter occurs more often than one would expect, irrespective of its position in the word, so that one has 'clusters' of π or κ or θ , etc. From this point of view I have examined both the lyric and the non-lyric sections of all the plays of Aeschylus, plus *Prometheus*, and, for purposes of comparison, one probably early play of Sophocles (*Ajax*) and one late play of Euripides (*Bacchae*). I have confined this study to consonants. To do the job properly one would have to examine also the pattern of vowel sounds, but this would exceed the limits of a short paper. To decide how often one might expect a letter to occur involves inevitably a subjective judgement.

³ O. J. Todd, *Sense and Sound in Classical Poetry*, CQ 36, 1942, 29-39; J. D. Denniston, *Greek prose style*, Oxford 1952, 126-27; W.B. Stanford, *Aeschylus in his style*, Dublin 1942, 82-3; W. Porzig, *Die attische Tragödie des Aischylos*, Leipzig 1926, 73-94.

And to determine where a cluster begins and ends is not a straightforward matter. In general I have ignored anaphora and simple repetition of words (φεῦ φεῦ, etc.), and insignificant words like δέ and τε. My usual practice has been to mark the end of a cluster where the next line contains no occurrence of the letter in question. But I have allowed exceptions, for example where after that line the pattern of alliteration immediately resumes. Clusters, therefore, may vary in length from a single line to a passage of a dozen or more lines (e.g. *Ag.* 49-63, 543-54, *PV* 267-83). In lyric passages I have tended, particularly in the case of a short stanza, to mark as a cluster a whole strophe or antistrophe which is dominated by a single letter. I fear, however, that I have not been entirely consistent, and that I must also have missed passages that others may have spotted. For these reasons the statistics which I present should be treated only as approximations. I hope, however, that the overall picture will be reasonably close to the truth.

Because of these uncertainties I present no figures for the total number of clusters which I have identified. I merely record my impression that the figures for the three earlier plays of Aeschylus are very similar, while in the first two plays of the *Oresteia* trilogy there is a marked increase. *Agamemnon*, of course, is much longer than the other plays, but *Choepori* too has a strikingly greater number than the earlier plays. On the other hand *Eumenides* seems to have the fewest of all the six plays of Aeschylus, while *Prometheus* has even fewer. The two Sophoclean and Euripidean plays come somewhere in the middle. In Table I you will find the figures for clusters of the individual letters δ, θ, κ, π, and φ, which together account for the largest number of the occurrences. For some reason clusters involving γ are rarely to be found.

Table I

	<i>Pers.</i>	<i>Sept.</i>	<i>Supp.</i>	<i>Ag.</i>	<i>Cho.</i>	<i>Eum.</i>	<i>PV</i>	<i>Aj.</i>	<i>Ba.</i>	Total
δ	18	26	23	26	30	17	6	11	23	180
θ	8	9	6	26	23	6	14	9	22	123
κ	27	27	39	38	33	21	24	23	28	260
π	72	81	73	87	73	52	49	56	50	593
φ	62	41	41	115	71	59	63	99	84	635
	187	184	182	292	230	155	156	198	207	1791

On the whole the figures for the three earlier plays of Aeschylus are very similar, except that *Supp.* has a larger number of instances with κ, and *Pers.* with φ. I might add (what I have not included in Table I) that *Supp.* has by far the largest number of clusters involving β, 6 out of a total of 25 for the 9 plays. The three plays of the trilogy diverge considerably from one another. Only with θ and φ does *Ag.* display the greater number that one would expect in this longer play. For all five letters *Eum.* has by far

the lowest total of the trilogy. Except for δ , *PV* is not significantly out of line. *Aj.* and *Ba.* show some discrepancies between each other, particularly in the case of θ , where the former is closer to the earlier plays of Aeschylus, the latter to *Ag.* and *Cho.* What stands out more than anything from Table I is the predominance of π and ϕ . The former is perhaps not surprising, given the warning of Fehling, which I mentioned earlier, that far more words begin with that letter than with any other consonant. In many instances, therefore, random chance is almost certainly involved. On the other hand, if this were the only factor, one might expect the occurrences to be spread more evenly throughout each play. But there are in fact long stretches in which this particular alliteration is rare. Harder to explain is the frequency of alliteration involving ϕ . It is this which interests me particularly, and I shall return to it later.

First, however, I want to look in more detail at one passage, the lyric section of the parodos of *Persae*, which contains a sequence of π clusters, so that the whole composition is indeed dominated by that sound. The main theme is the pride of the Persians in their warlike achievements and their invincibility by both land and sea, and more particularly the Chorus's pride in the latest achievement of crossing the Hellespont by means of Xerxes' bridge of boats. But combined with that theme is the fear that such success cannot last, and that the Persian women left at home are anxious and may yet have to mourn for the men whom they have lost. In strophe 1 (65-72) we find the sequence: *πεπέρακεν... περσέπολις... αντίπορον... πορθμόν... πολύγομφον... πόντου*. The first and last words both begin with p , so that the stanza is framed, in sound as well as in sense, by the key idea of the crossing of the sea. *περσέπολις*, with its play on *Πέρσαι*, suggests that the very destiny of the Persians is to conquer cities, while *ἀντίπορον* and *πορθμόν* stress the nature of this particular sea-crossing. Finally Xerxes' achievement in building the vital bridge of boats is emphasised in *πολύγομφον*, a compound which picks up all the *πολυ*-words which have been used in the opening anapaests. Out of 23 words 6 begin with, or contain, π (*πεπέρακεν* with reduplication), and every one of them is a key word in its context. It is hard to imagine a more effective beginning to this ode.

In Aeschylus, as we have seen, antistrophe and strophe often correspond in sound as well as in sense. So it is not surprising that here antistrophe 1 (73-80) continues the pattern: *πολυάνδρου... πᾶσαν... ποιμανόριον... πεζονόμος (or -οις) ... πεποιθώς*. The first word, at the beginning of the stanza, another *πολυ*-compound, is in direct resposion with the first π word of the strophe, while the others are in different positions. The emphasis is on the great size of the Persian host, the whole world that Xerxes' *ποιμανόριον* is intent on conquering, the double nature of the expedition, both military and naval, and on the king's trust in his commanders, a trust that will turn out to be so misplaced. Strophe 2 (81-86) has, apart from *ἐπάγει*, only two π words, *πολύχειρ* καὶ *πολυναύτας*, which form a pair of balancing

epithets, and which reinforce the key idea of the double character of the expedition which will be defeated by both sea and land. The corresponding antistrophe 2 (87-92) also has, apart from ὑποστάς two π words, ἀπρόσοιστος... ὁ Περσᾶν στρατὸς, where the epithet that qualifies the Persians' army shares their *p* sound, and not only stresses the idea of invincibility, but also prepares for the effect of the more striking alliteration in strophe 3 (102-07): παλαιόν, ἐπέσκηψε... Πέρσαις πολέμους πυργοδαϊκτοὺς διέπειν ἰππιοχάρμας τε... πόλεων (8 words out of 19, and 5 of them in immediate succession). Alliteration formed by an attributive adjective and its noun is, as I said earlier, one of the commonest ways of providing a formal, as well as semantic, link between the two words, and so here πολέμους has very naturally been provided with such an epithet. But the more extensive use of π serves again to bind together all the key ideas in this phrase and in this sentence, which describes how from ancient times (τὸ παλαιόν) Destiny enjoined (ἐπέσκηψε) on the Persians (Πέρσαις) the winning of wars by land and the sacking of cities. Antistrophe 3 (108-13), which as you have heard me argue on a previous occasion, is parallel, not in antithesis, with its strophe, has the following sequence: εὐρυπόροιο... πολιοινομένας πνεύματι... πόντιον... πίσυνοι λεπτοδόμοις πείσμασι λαοπόροις (8 words out of 16, 4 in immediate succession). The Persians' destiny has been to win wars by both land and sea, and the parallelism is marked by the alliteration of π (and also of λ) which links the two forms of warfare. Again we note the Persians' misplaced trust, this time in what is probably a description of the bridge with its flimsy cables, rather than the open sea.

The epode (93-101), which O. Müller rightly transposed to this point, introduces, for the first time in the lyric section of the parodos, the fear that this success is unlikely to last for ever. Although the mood is different, the π sound continues: ἀπάταν... κραιπνῶ ποδι πηδήματος εὐπετέος... <ποτι>σαίνουσα τὸ πρῶτον παράγει... ὑπέρ (9 words out of 32). Epithets and their nouns are again bound together by the alliteration, as are the two key ideas of deceit and the impossibility of jumping out of its net. There is also τ alliteration, and Porzig (78) pointed out that π and τ are the consonants of the key word ἀπάταν. In strophe 4 (114-19), as the Chorus goes on to apply the generalisations of the epode to its specific fears, the π alliteration becomes less striking, with only Περσικοῦ... πόλις πύθηται. Note, however the φ alliteration in φρῆν... φόβῳ, to which I shall turn later. π is more prominent in antistrophe 4 (120-5): πόλισμ'... ἔπος γυναικοπληθῆς ὄμιλος ἀπύων... πέπλοις πέση λακίς. The whole female population will lament and tear their clothes. In strophe 5 (126-31) we find πᾶς... ἰππηλάτας καὶ πεδοστιβῆς... ἐκλέλοιπεν, as the whole (πᾶς) departed host is divided into its component cavalry and infantry by means of the two balancing alliterative epithets (cf. πτεροῦντα καὶ πεδοστιβῆ at *Supp.* 1000). πρῶνα in the last phrase of the stanza brings us back to the bridging of the Hellespont with which the whole

composition began. In the final antistrophe (132-39) π expresses the grief and yearning of the Persian women for the men whom they have sent away: $\pi\acute{o}\theta\omega$ $\pi\acute{\iota}\mu\pi\lambda\alpha\tau\alpha\iota$ $\delta\alpha\kappa\rho\acute{\upsilon}\mu\alpha\sigma\iota\nu$ Περσίδες δ' $\acute{\alpha}\beta\rho\omicron\pi\epsilon\nu\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma$... $\pi\acute{o}\theta\omega$... $\acute{\alpha}\pi\omicron\pi\epsilon\mu\psi\alpha$ - $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\alpha$ $\lambda\epsilon\acute{\iota}\pi\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ (7 words out of 19).

It is, I think, only from the epode onwards, and especially in this final stanza, that we can really explain the alliteration in terms of its emotional effect. In the composition as a whole it seems to be used to mark key words, and to bind together phrases and related ideas. The simplest form of this is the attributive adjective and its noun. On a wider scale it helps to provide a unity for the whole ode. If one were to ask why π , rather than some other letter, is chosen by Aeschylus for this purpose, the answer may be simply that, as we have seen, so many words in Greek begin with π . But in this particular ode it so happens that many of the key ideas naturally lend themselves to words which begin with π : sea, straits, crossing, war, city, sacking, Persians, multitude; $\pi\acute{o}\nu\tau\omicron\varsigma$, $\pi\omicron\rho\theta\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$, $\pi\epsilon\rho\acute{\alpha}\omega$, $\pi\acute{o}\lambda\epsilon\mu\omicron\varsigma$, $\pi\acute{o}\lambda\iota\varsigma$, $\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\theta\omega$, Πέρσαι , $\pi\omicron\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\varsigma$. At 249-55, when the Messenger arrives to announce the failure of the expedition, it is perhaps no coincidence that we find another π cluster, again combined with λ . The same technique is used, though less extensively, in the first and third stasima of *Persae*, and in some of the lyrics of *Septem*, *Supplices*, *Agamemnon*, and *Choephoroi*, but not much in *Eumenides*, *Prometheus*, *Ajax*, or *Bacchae*. In the final kommos of *Persae* κ plays an important role, while at *Ag.* 975-1000 a complex web is formed by π , τ , κ and δ . In iambs the first messenger-speech of *Bacchae* provides five θ clusters.

While ϕ occupies only about a quarter of the space allocated to π in Italic's Lexicon, it scores higher in Table I for the number of clusters that involve it. One reason is that I have been less strict in allocating ϕ words than π words to clusters, counting almost every passage in which two ϕ sounds appear in close proximity, and excluding only such words as $\acute{\epsilon}\phi'$, $\acute{\alpha}\phi'$, $\sigma\phi\epsilon$. It does, however, seem that of the total occurrences of π and ϕ words an even higher proportion of the latter attract alliteration. The smaller size of the ϕ vocabulary has enabled me to look more closely at the ratio between isolated ϕ occurrences (i.e. without alliteration) and those which form clusters. Table II shows the overall ratio for ϕ words:

Table II

	<i>Pers.</i>	<i>Sept.</i>	<i>Supp.</i>	<i>Ag.</i>	<i>Cho.</i>	<i>Eum.</i>	<i>PV</i>	<i>Aj.</i>	<i>Ba.</i>
Isolated ϕ	95	46	76	121	107	83	90	120	122
Alliterative ϕ	62	41	41	115	72	59	63	99	84

The figure for isolated ϕ is always the higher one, in some cases much higher. If, however, we look at the figures for the six most commonly occurring ϕ words in Tables III and IV, the picture is rather different. Table III shows the totals for their

clusters, Table IV the figures for isolated occurrences. φρήν includes φρον-, -φρων, φροο-, etc., φέρω includes -φορ-, etc., φημί includes φήμη, -φατ-, φάσκω, etc., and φάος includes both φῶς ('light') and φῶς ('man'); at *Ba.* 425 and 429 a single cluster embraces both φάος and φῶς. Note that, if, for example, φόβος and φρήν are combined in a cluster, that cluster will appear twice in Table III.

Table III

	<i>Pers.</i>	<i>Sept.</i>	<i>Supp.</i>	<i>Ag.</i>	<i>Cho.</i>	<i>Eum.</i>	<i>PV</i>	<i>Aj.</i>	<i>Ba.</i>	Total
φρήν	13	11	12	23	16	21	15	22	19	152
φιλ-	10	10	5	15	13	9	4	22	4	92
φέρω	4	5	3	15	9	7	5	7	16	71
φοβ-	6	12	6	8	7	3	10	3	1	56
φημί	7	1	2	12	8	4	1	8	9	52
φάος	2	5	0	13	5	1	5	7	3	41
	42	44	28	86	58	45	40	69	52	464

Table IV

	<i>Pers.</i>	<i>Sept.</i>	<i>Supp.</i>	<i>Ag.</i>	<i>Cho.</i>	<i>Eum.</i>	<i>PV</i>	<i>Aj.</i>	<i>Ba.</i>	Total
φρήν	7	8	14	17	17	7	10	14	6	100
φιλ-	11	10	7	14	16	5	7	11	1	82
φέρω	7	4	2	6	8	7	6	8	17	65
φοβ-	3	4	3	2	2	0	2	2	3	21
φημί	1	2	1	7	5	2	2	4	3	27
φάος	1	0	1	6	2	3	0	2	2	17
	30	28	28	52	50	24	27	41	32	312

As before, one notices in Table III a considerable variance between the three earlier plays of Aeschylus and the first two plays of the trilogy. And again *Eum.* behaves differently. The high figure for φάος etc. in *Ag.* is partly due, as I have noted, to the beacons, while the high figure for φοβ- in *Sept.* reflects the constant atmosphere of fear in that play. There are some striking discrepancies between *Aj.* and *Ba.* It is the comparison between Tables III and IV that is interesting. Here, unlike Table II, the figures for non-alliterative φ words exceed the figures for clusters in only 17 out of the 54 individual totals. It would seem that the commoner the word the more likely it is to attract alliteration. The commonest of all is φρήν, with its cognates, which is not surprising given the subject-matter of tragedy

Most remarkable of all is the behaviour of φόβος, φοβέω, φοβερός, etc., which in every play except *Ajax* and *Bacchae* occur in clusters at least twice as often as they do

in isolation. It was indeed the occurrence of both φόβος and φρήν at *Pers.* 115, φρήν ἀμύσσεται φόβω, that started me off on this investigation. I had a feeling that, whenever a φόβος word occurred in Aeschylus, there was often another φ word in the immediate vicinity. The following clusters are the most remarkable:

Persae 165-68 ἄφραστος... φρεσίν... φῶς... ἀμεμφής, ἀμφὶ δ' ὀφθαλμῶ φόβος, 205-08 φεύγοντ'... Φοίβου· φόβω δ' ἄφθογγος... φίλοι... ἐφορμαίνοντα, 387-95 εὐφεγγής... ἠυφήμησεν... φόβος... ἀποσφαλεῖσιν... φυγή... ἐφύμουν... ἐπέφλεγεν; cf. also 115, 603-04, 606.

Septem 43-6 ταυροσφαγοῦντες... φόνου... φιλαίματον Φόβον... κατασκαφάς (+ 48, 50, 52), 135-38 φόβων... φεῦ φεῦ... φύλαξον (cf. 121-24 in the strophe), 386-90 φόβον... ὑπέρφρον... φλέγονθ' ... ὀφθαλμός (+ 384), 475-80 φρυγαμάτων... φοβηθεῖς... τροφεῖα... λαφύροις... φθόνει, 498-500 φόβον... φωτὸς... φυλακτέον, Φόβος, 806-09 παραφρονῶ φόβω... ἀμφιλέκτως; cf. also 213-14, 259-60, 262, 270, 286-87;

Supplices 378-79 εὐφρον... φόβος... φρένας, 498-99 τρέφει. φύλαξαι... φόβον... φίλον (+ 495-96), 511-13 δυσφρόνων... εὐφημον... εὐφημουμένη... φόβω φρενός (+ 515), 734-37 φοβοῦμαι... περίφοβον... φυγᾶς ὄφελος, 891-95 φοβερὸν... φοβοῦμαι... τροφή... ὄφις; cf. also 1043-44.

Agamemnon 1150-52 θεοφόρους... ἐπίφοβα δυσφάτω, 1306-11 φόβος... φεῦ φεῦ... ἔφευξας... φρενῶν... φόνον... ἐφεστίων... τάφου; cf. also 14-15, 151-54, 921-24, 1135 + 1130-32, 1243, 1433-36.

Choephoroi 56-59 φρενός... ἀφίσταται, φοβεῖται (+ 62; cf. 46-52 in the strophe), 1022-24 ἠνιοστροφῶ... φέρουσι... φρένες... φόβος (+ 1026-27); cf. also 32-35, 167-68, 928-29 (+ 931 and 934), 1051-52 (+ 1049 and 1054).

Eumenides 87-90 φερέγγυον... φόβος... φρένας... φύλασσε, 988-92 φρονούσιν... φοβερῶν... εὐφρονας εὐφρονες; cf. also 691-92.

Prometheus 126-27 φοβερὸν... φοβηθῆς· φιλία (cf. 143-44 in the antistrophe), 354-55 Τυφῶνα... γαμφηλήσι... φόβον, 878-84 σφάκελος... φρενοπλήγες... φόβω φρένα... φέρομαι, 1090-92 φόβον... φανερώς... φάος; cf. also 181-82, 695-96, 881-83, 902-03, 931-33. See also Aesch. fr. 57. 9-11.

Of all these occurrences the most striking is *Ag.* 1306-11 with 8 φ sounds, but on the whole the trilogy is no richer than the earlier plays. *Aj.* has only two noteworthy occurrences, 229-31 φοβοῦμαι... περίφαντος... ξίφειν, and 1074-76 φέροιντ'... σωφρόνως... φόβου; cf. also 529-31. Dr Demos Spatharas has kindly examined for me the other plays of Sophocles, and his conclusion is that alliterative φοβ-, while present in every play (8 times in *OT*, 5 in *Trach*; see especially 548-50, φθίνουσιν... ἀφαρπάζειν φιλεῖ ὀφθαλμὸς... φοβοῦμαι) is less widespread than in Aeschylus. It is curious, however, that at *OC* 1462-71 a whole stanza is dominated by φ alliteration, which oddly includes φοβάν ('hair'). The sole instance in *Ba.* is at

868-69 φοβερὰν φυγή... φυλακᾶς. The technique seems to be more characteristic of Aeschylus than of Sophocles and Euripides.

Is it intentional or unconscious or something in between? It is well-known that Greek poets will often repeat a word a few lines later simply because that word has remained in their minds. I wonder if this can sometimes be true also of consonantal sounds. If, for example, a poet has used a word or words with the sound of π, other words containing that sound may come almost unconsciously into his mind. That, however, does not explain the much greater frequency of φόβος alliteration than of φ in general. Given the natural association of φόβος and φρήν, and given also the frequency of φρήν in clusters, it is not surprising that these two words appear together 18 times in the 56 φοβ- clusters (cf. also Pind. *Nem.* 3. 39), and this may be a partial answer to our question. The alliteration is demanded by the sense. But I would like to believe also that with φόβος onomatopoeia has a part to play. In English the *f* sound in *fear, afraid, frighten* seems to convey a sense of shivering or chattering teeth, and in English poetry it often lends itself to alliteration: for example Shakespeare, «Fear no more the frown o' the great ... Fear no more the lightning flash» (*Cymbeline*), or «What! Frightened with false fire» (*Hamlet*); Milton, «So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear» (*Paradise Lost*); Elizabeth Barrett Browning, «Lest I should fear and fall» (*Comfort*); Kipling, «By fear or favour of the crowd» (*The children's song*). I do not know whether the same is true of *Furcht* in German or *effrayer, effrayant* in French. The parallel of course may not be exact. W. Sidney Allen⁴ tells us that in Classical, unlike Byzantine and Modern, Greek φ was pronounced not as a fricative (*f*), but as an aspirated plosive (*ph*). But Allen himself recognises some sort of onomatopoeic effect in the description of the volcano at Pind. *Pyth.* 1. 23-24, ἀλλ' ἐν ὄρφναισιν πέτρας φοίνισσα κυλινδομένα φλῶξ ἐς βαθεῖαν φέρει πόντου πλάκα σὺν πατάγῳ, where π and φ are interestingly combined. Perhaps its combination of sound and sense led Aeschylus to treat φόβος almost automatically as a word which demanded alliteration. We might call it 'formulaic alliteration'. Silk (225-27) points out that at least from Theognis 213-16 onwards the πολύπους ('poulp') is associated with π alliteration, and that Aeschylus' κλύδων κακῶν (*Pers.* 599-600; cf. *Sept.* 758 κακῶν... κύμα, PV 1015) gave rise to «an almost formulaic structure consisting of κ- κακῶν, where κ- is a metaphorical noun and κακῶν its dependent genitive». Aeschylus' treatment of φόβος seems not so very different. However, in at least the more striking of the passages, it is hard to believe that he did not know what he was doing, or that the technique is not highly effective.

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⁴ W. Sidney Allen, *Vox Graeca*, Cambridge 1987³, 18-29.