

English 307
February 23, 2015

Anne Winters uses "East Fifth Street: A Poster for the Oresteia," as a personal reflection. By manipulating the competing voices of her own perspective, a metaphorical narrator, and her father, Winters draws connections between the environment and her father. I will argue in this paper that Winters' language and variation in the sestet of her poem, specifically, creates an ambiguous connection between these two forces. Ultimately, her lack of resolution about her father mimics her continuation of a metaphor that describes her father as a haunting resentment reminiscent in the tangible world.

"East Fifth Street: A Poster for the Oresteia," follows the general form of a sonnet with some clear deviations. Winters introduces her premise in a story like reality. In the first line she describes seeing a "life-size" (1) poster on the wall of a building. "Inside" (1) the building, she begins describing the metaphor that will extend throughout. She says that her father is acting "in the role" (2) of "Agamemnon," (3) a central character to "The Oresteia" trilogy. From line 3 to 6 Winters quotes a character speaking in this metaphorical play, describing the "archaic anger" that follows the "House" (4). With regard to "The Oresteia," this references the curse that in Greek tradition haunts the House of Atreus and in its relevance here is associated with the multiple familial murders through the course of the trilogy. Winters then transitions to describe her father (implicitly, though it is never specified) and her language here is seemingly literal. She says "He took the subway home at two a.m." (7) and she then quotes him, in a piece



of seeming advice, that if she is “empty” (8) she will be “invisible / to muggers.” (8-9) And she says she believes this. Lines 9 through 14 are seemingly connected, taking the form of two tercets. In the first she describes the “audience” (9) walking in the “street” (10) and seeing “three hovering shapes” (12). The last tercet is an extended physical description of these “shapes,” (12) and their attire before finally identifying them as “the Furies.”(14). In the context of “The Oresteia,” the Furies sought recompense from Agamemnon’s son for the murder of Agamemnon’s wife but were corrected by Athena and turned into the Eumenides.

The poem focuses on “The Oresteia” trilogy which Winters turns into a metaphor. She places her father “...in the role / of Agamemnon died.” (lines 2-3) and highlights the “child burnt down to soot-marks” (4) at his hand. In doing this Winters portrays her father as an actor, taking the identity of Agamemnon and his actions. The association here also implies that as his daughter, Winters is cast as Iphigenia, the daughter he sacrificed, which identifies a tension between them. The metaphor allows Winters to suggest that her father has committed harmful acts against her, and while the details of this can only be speculative, the reader imagines them as comparable to filicide. Winters choices here are important. While her associations are derived from “The Oresteia,” the quotation she uses is not taken directly from the play, and focuses on the aspect of filicide and neglects the many other murders that take place. So while the quotation that describes this story appears to come from a “thin-browed bronze mask,” (3) or third-party narrator, they are ultimately reflective of Winters’ choices and experience. Winters has constructed three identities, her own, that of her narrator, and her father, all of whom will take turns speaking. The alternating quotations, each of them in a “role,” (2) and the



seeming descriptive actions such as in “the audience / tiptoeing” (9-10) creates the illusion of a dramatic scene reflective of its metaphor’s foundation.

“East Fifth Street: A Poster for the Oresteia,” loosely follows the format of a Petrarchan sonnet with some clear deviations. These deviations are intentional and aid the appearance of a dramatic scene with competing voices. [...]

[End of sample excerpt.]



Works Cited

Winters, Anne. "East Fifth Street: A Poster for the Oresteia." *The Displaced of Capital*. Chicago:

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