

and swings on a tree, dries seaweed, drives us mad, strips bones of their flesh, hones a razor against our nerves, ruffles hair, catches a beard and carries it away, wipes away a tear, brings a tear to the eye, turns aside the smoke, urges a wave, drains of and deposits a rain of sand, comes to meet them, rips off iron sheets flinging them over the roofs, scatters flower seeds, extinguishes resinous wood chips and burning oil, goes out of the sail and falters the ship to a halt, lashes faces with hard dry grains, whips a dress like a sail in the wind, sweeps branchy trees.

No, it is quite obvious that in all these various instances the writer does not bring the wind into service without a clear reason; there is work to be done. The wind is actively allotted an explicitly defined role within the framework of the narrative that will help the story along.

The wind as doer regularly plays a role too as a carrier, either conveying or delivering something. The items transported or distributed include: the smell of dew on flowers in the morning, the breath of snow from the mountains, the first buds to the valley, the smell of freezing seaweed, the smell of stale seawater, a good change to the air, heavy storm clouds, thoughts, smoke, a rain of sand, dust, clouds of red dust, dust white as salt, sand, hard dry grains, bits of confetti, flower seeds, leaves, a rolling sea of flame, the news, an atmosphere. We also encounter: salt-laden fresh sea breezes.

#### *The wind as source or carrier of sound*

Writers also tell us (in just under 10% of instances) that the wind produces a sound, or at least audibly expresses something or acts as a bearer of sound. Such observations frequently have an element of mystery, at times harbouring a portent of things to come. The wind: sighs through the lofty trees, accompanies a song, mingles with a moan, makes murmurous sounds, whistles, passes with a trembling, hums, rattles, carries the sound of approaching winter, carries a sound of peaceful music, is not to be listened to inattentively, makes voices and confessions heard, makes heard harsh utterances of hunger and vulgar greediness, makes heard the sound of gamblers' hands slapping bets upon the table, expresses sorrows and joys, pours a web of tones, strikes up a song, sighs sadly, drones and howls, roars and soughs, trembles, sobs. There is mention too of: the palpitation of the wind, a wind of brasses and the wind: a living sound.

#### *The wind in metaphor*

Writers obviously use metaphor frequently and the wind of course appeals to the imagination. We have already seen that the words wind or breeze are used metaphorically in one out of every five times they appear in this

anthology. I take metaphor to include the use of these words as part of an expression that is not meant to be taken too literally but in a more abstract sense. That occurs specifically in poetry. My initial ambition in fact was to compile this anthology primarily from prose works, but a number of Nobel laureates (11) have only published poetry; to my mind it would have been inappropriate not to include these authors in this volume.

As to metaphor, I submit the following selection: The wind sets fire to the hair of a horse. I want to live like the north wind. The wind breaks down the grain but not the breeze. The images of women he has known pass before him like leaves blown in the wind. A whirlwind of desire envelops her. Like eddies of dust raised by the wind the living turn upon themselves. Her body emits a tenuous ocean breeze. They fly into the teeth of the wind. I now tear apart the family crest and strew it to the winds. A whirlwind was blowing through his head. Abide a little and the wind will turn. There is something in the wind. In the shadow of the wind. The heath owes its spirit to a wind. She imbibes the wind's liquor. Wind: something beheld by the eyes but which never reaches the heart. A smile across the savanna of his face like a sudden rustle of wind. She comes in like a squall of wind. The people, like a wave urged by a whirlwind, rushed towards him. The fickle wind of fashion had deserted them. It's not through wind and clouds we've been driving. Eyes swift and motionless like the wind. A cool wind of dreaming began to blow upon his face. Her body exuded the breezes of summer. Can ten thousand willow boughs restrain the wandering wind?

Not just poets but writers of prose too would be doing themselves an injustice if they failed to make use of poetic licence at times. The wind too can be the object of their imagination and thus have to accept being expressed as, for example: a breath of absolute purity, child of heaven, a right good fellow, the scourge of any bathhouse, a strong drink to the lungs, a biting spray.

That kind of flowery but above all warm-hearted depiction shows us clearly how very well-disposed writers can be to the wind.

What kind of picture emerges from the above catalogue and classification? We have established that in the majority of cases where the wind appears on the scene it is a wind in one of the many varieties referred to above: of source, strength, stability, temperature and so on. We have furthermore taken note of the 'doing' nature of these various winds: they make something happen that is defined and concrete: we have seen that the wind browns faces, throws things around, blows out lamps, makes eyes water, billows sails and skirts, propels ships, summons up feelings ... too many to mention. As variants of such activities we might see the wind acting as a carrier of matter,

scents and sound, and the wind itself can at times be its own source of sound. And we have seen, lastly, that in more than a few instances writers have given the wind a useful metaphorical role. In sum, we have established that writers make use above all of the active dynamic nature of the wind by employing it to create effects that add to the mood, structure and progression of their narrative. Here too the wind is very often accorded one or other distinguishing feature. That, as I have confirmed empirically, is broadly speaking the wind about which authors write.

#### *In conclusion*

Returning now briefly to the notion which wafted into my head on that morning in Beirut I recall my thought back then: *the wind is not done sufficient justice in literature; writers take too little account of it.* My concern here - as I pointed out above - is the quite ordinary, daily phenomenon of moderate displacement of air of which people are often not consciously aware and to which their reaction is a more or less thoughtless physical or emotional reflex. Do writers chronicle that cursory wind which - without their being aware of it - is an intrinsic attribute of the empirical sensibility of the characters whose dispositions and drives they are seeking to describe? Or is that wind - when it seems to be doing nothing more than simply exist - perhaps also escaping the awareness of writers because that 'just existing' wind - unremarkable as it is - does not intrude upon them and they also - engaged as they are in their writing - do not envisage the inherent impact of that wind on the acts, thoughts, dreams and feelings not just of the characters they are writing about but also those of their readers?

Does this study produce any clarity with respect to this thesis?

If my calculation is unprejudiced - and that I cannot guarantee - there are only 7 out of 215 instances where the wind is mentioned for no other reason or concomitant reason than that the writer (or someone figuring in the narrative) simply notices that 'a wind' is blowing (or not blowing).

Here then are all 7 of these individual instances (whereby it is perhaps worth noting that five take place either on board or near to a ship, locations where the writer - like anyone else - will perceive the wind almost as a matter of course): No wind blew in the narrow streets. Does he remain bowed over the rail, his hair in the wind? The wind fresh upon his shaven skin. The wind sprang up at four o'clock. They steal a boat and find themselves in the middle of the gulf, when a wind gets up. That morning in the wind, I saw something by the waterline. He stood at the window while the nightly winds were blowing across

the canal. Wind wafts now and then. All winds stilled. The wind rose, enlivening, keen. The heath is no longer a barren, unhappy place when the wind arrives there. A cloud covered the moon and the wind fell. It wasn't raining and the wind had died. Three of the ships are moored along the quay, as calm as can be in the breeze. Oh, it'd be cruel there today: twenty-seven degrees of frost, and windy. I have heard all that passed in the valley, in the sunshine of a windless day. He was diving conches on a breezy morning. This man, digging, with ragged hair blown in the wind.

It is striking that eight out of these 7 instances (in addition to the five already cited above) relate not so much to the fact that the wind is blowing but specifically to it being absent, springing up or dying down. Authors apparently assume that their readers - even without being given previous information on the matter - will likely have had their own ideas about whether or not there was a wind right up to the instant they are informed that the wind springs up or dies down. That is what I mean: writers seem to regard the presence of any unremarkable form of wind as so self-evident that it is not worth the bother of mentioning; readers can be left to find that out for themselves. The inescapable impression is that writers treat the 'just there' wind as if it were no more than 'air'. Not until - as we saw above - it's a case of a specific kind of wind or a wind that makes something happen, carries something with it or makes a noise or a wind that is not present, is about to blow or is dying down, do writers think it worthwhile to bring it into play. Whereas what is so extraordinary is precisely that the wind, even when it is doing nothing more than simply exist, is of significance in the lives, thoughts, dreams and feelings of the people writers write about and of their readers, and can make all sorts of things happen to them and in that sense, at times, is also worthy of mention.

To my mind I was not far wrong that morning: no place has been accorded within the literary tradition to the incessant day-to-day wind of which people are probably not always consciously aware but which may be full of implicit significance for them. Writers in their literary kitchens have apparently not hit upon this potentially valuable ingredient and, more or less collectively, give it a miss.

*The writer sat at his writing table; a wind blew in through the open window. Why not?*

**Tanti, Argentina**  
**Autumn 2010**

# THE *Justification* WIND *for* IN *Nobel Winds* LITERATURE *Breezes*

### ***Introduction***

Let me say for a start that the wind never had any special place in my life. I have experienced the wind as I have rain and sunshine, the seasons of the year, night and day; simply as a natural element. So it has been, and so it still is. Therefore no one should expect me to arrive at any interesting clarification or profound phenomenological disquisitions on the origin, nature or characteristics of wind. Splendid books have been written by people who know about or are obsessed by these matters. To name only a few: Lyall Watson (*A Natural History of the Wind*), Dorothy Scarborough (*The Wind*) and Jan DeBlieu (*Wind*). Writing anything of such scale and significance on this subject would never have been within my power. The singular preoccupation with wind evidenced by this volume is of a different order, the provenance of which was for me, too, completely unexpected. Here is what happened.

### ***A thesis***

One morning, just awake and gazing out to sea from the balcony of a hotel in Beirut, the following notion occurred to me: *after all I have ever read I have a clear feeling that the wind is overlooked in literature. The wind is not done sufficient justice; writers take too little account of it.* This thesis, which had come to me as a complete surprise, has held me ever since in its grasp. The trigger that eventually led me to compile this anthology was thus the putative observation that the wind is given less consideration and space in literature than may be deemed consistent with its place and significance as a natural phenomenon in the lives of the people described by writers in their books.

Books tell us what men, women and children do, think, dream and feel. In reality we are always conscious of whether or not the wind is blowing and we experience it as something positive, negative or neutral, according to circumstances. More often than not we expressly adapt our behaviour to the feeling that this wind-experience arouses, or could arouse, in us. Depending on the wind, we will opt to take a seat at a pavement café, and will select either a table that is exposed to the wind or precisely the opposite, a sheltered spot. Depending on the wind, we will feel inclined to go for a walk, or not, whether in the shelter of the woods or in open country, and may also deliberately choose between having the wind behind us on the outward or homeward leg (perhaps taking account of the fact that the wind often dies down towards sunset). At home we will either close our windows against the wind or open them to the breeze (some of us like to give our houses a good blast of fresh air while others panic at the very thought). An evening of absolute calm is regarded in some parts of the world as heavenly, and in others as hell. The wind can

transform a day at the beach, a mountain walk, not to mention a boat trip, into a joy or an affliction.

We most certainly read about all such things in books as well. And that is indubitably the case when the wind brings down trees or sinks ships, drives hailstorms, or whines and roars. But the thing that concerns me in particular is the perfectly ordinary day-to-day phenomenon of which we may not always be consciously aware: the modest displacements of air to which people respond as it were with a physical or emotional reflex, in the way fishes react to eddies in a stream. The hero of the story loosens his scarf a little, turns to face a cooling breeze, suddenly recollects a lovely spring day in the past when everything smelled equally delicious and his love was still alive. Or suddenly thinks about another part of the world he once visited. A gentle breeze in summer prompts him to visit the hairdresser. All this without having to notice or consider the fact that it is the wind that has provoked his activity. That wind too, that gentle breeze, is undeniably inherent to all individual experience. The question for me is whether writers duly acknowledge this phenomenon. Writing is by definition a deliberate cerebral activity whereas people often live at one with the wind without giving it a passing thought. But writers? Do they allow it a passing thought? Do they chronicle that cursory wind which is an intrinsic attribute of the empirical sensibility of the characters whose dispositions and drives they are seeking to describe? Or is that wind - when it seems to be doing nothing more than simply exist - perhaps also escaping the awareness of writers because that 'just existing' wind - unremarkable as it is - does not intrude upon them and they also, engaged as they are in their writing, do not envisage its inherent potential impact? Ever since that morning I had my doubts.

### ***Reading exercise***

When I realized I was still gripped by the notion that the wind is overlooked 'in literature', which had struck me on that particular morning, I decided to look more closely at this question - which I had never yet given any conscious thought. The action I took on that resolve was to read one book selected randomly from the works of each author awarded the Nobel prize for literature since 1901 (up to and including 2008), paying special heed to this rather eccentric facet of authorship. Opting for books by Nobel laureates gave me the certainty - that goes without saying - of dealing with what, by common consent, can be called 'literature'. In the event it was not always simple to track down a book translated into English; some of these Nobel laureates seem to have more or less disappeared off the radar. But for most, of course, that is not the case. Anyway I had enough to read for the present, and that read-

ing was a great surprise as well as most gratifying because it made one thing absolutely clear to me: every Nobel laureate, whichever you choose, can write like the best!

I read each of these one hundred or so books in turn with - plainly - renewed curiosity. How often will this book contain the word wind? Will the wind sometimes be mentioned for no other reason than the simple fact that the writer (or someone who figures in the narrative) has noticed its existence? And if so, is it sufficient for the author - for that is what concerns me - to write about the presence of that wind? Or does he do so only because he sees the wind fulfilling a significant role as an atmospheric or functional determinant of the course of the narrative? Will my reading of this book reinforce or invalidate my judgment that in literature, generally speaking, too little heed is paid to transient wind? Is that judgment ultimately a matter of unwarranted prejudice, or not?

Only once did I read an entire book without coming across any mention of the wind whatsoever; I then switched - with greater success - to another book by the same author. In the course of my reading I decided to include the word 'breeze' in my search; some authors apparently have a marked preference for that word. I also noted references to the wind in metaphorical sense.

I read and read - as you might imagine - meticulously and unrelentingly hunting down these four or six letters, line for line. And when I found them, I turned down the corner of the page. At times I read for hours on end without encountering either wind or breeze, and then all at once the one or the other would quite unexpectedly jump out at me from a page. The frequency varied hugely. Some authors appeared to have a heartfelt affinity with the wind; others seemed scarcely to recognise its existence and then, however bulky the book, I had to make do with the odd rare encounter.

### ***Why Nobel Winds & breezes?***

After reading all these books I could of course have just put the thing down to personal experience and kept my thoughts to myself on the matter. All things considered, I had two reasons for not wanting to stop at the reading exercise I had set myself. First, there was the fact that reading all these - on the whole masterly - works had been so pleasant and satisfying that I wanted to let other lovers of literature share that experience in one way or another. Secondly, my reading had done nothing to remove my feeling that there was some underlying shortcoming in the way writers deal with the wind; that feeling had rather become stronger. I felt a decided need to explore things further. With both these motives in mind I went back to the books I had read and selected from each a short and reasonably coherent passage of

five pages containing at least one mention of the word wind or breeze, referring back to those I had located during my reading. All these excerpts are now gathered together in this volume; the wind has become the thread, as it were, on which - expecting thus to please any reader - I have strung some literary pearls shaped with masterful hand by over a hundred Nobel laureates. Compared with a whole book, of course, a five-page excerpt is a very minimal introduction to its author's entire oeuvre, but it is at any rate a momentary encounter; as if you have shaken the famous writer's hand and looked him just briefly in the eye.

For me, as I said, the selected passages served yet another purpose; these references to the wind provide the material with which I went on to examine more closely whether there is any truth in the notion I had hit upon: that the wind is not given its rightful place in literature. That is my concern in what follows.

### ***The wind writers write about***

Spurred by the fact that I had been so meticulous in identifying references to the wind, I decided to examine the literary treatment of this phenomenon in somewhat greater depth. How do authors deal with the wind? What do they tell us about it? How do they make use of the wind in the structure and progression of their narrative? What kind of manifestations and experiences of wind do they share with us?

Taken together, the words 'wind' and 'breeze' occur 215 times in the 106 excerpts (530 pages of text) contained in this volume. The word wind obviously occurs more often (189 times) than the more specific term breeze (26 times). 'Breeze' occurs notably more frequently when signifying a wind manifesting itself from or on water - lake, sea or ocean. The word breeze seems also to denote some degree of cultivated moderation on the part of both the writer and the specific current of air in question. Generally speaking, wind and breeze cannot be clearly distinguished from each other in terms of their intrinsic connotation; they are therefore lumped together in what follows. Nor need anyone be surprised, it seems to me, that the words wind and breeze are used more often in a literal than a metaphorical sense; the ratio here is 180 to 35. The wind appears to play a not insignificant figurative role for writers; whirlwinds especially are popular as metaphor.

With a view to gaining a clearer picture of how authors deal with the wind and the role they assign to it, I began by listing all the occasions on which the wind is mentioned in my selected excerpts. I then tried to identify any pattern in that arbitrary summary that might provide a basis for differentiating them and creating some kind of order. The first thing I noticed was that the word wind is very often accompanied by an adjective that is seemingly meant to make that wind distinctive

in some way. It furthermore became clear that the wind's intrinsic energy and dynamism often led to the wind being said to cause something to happen, get a job done, have a specific effect. That is similarly the case when the wind - as commonly occurs - acts as a means of transport or as a carrier of sound, and the wind makes a sound of its own at times. Let's now explore these observations further.

### ***The wind in sorts and sizes***

Particularly striking is the relatively high number of instances (130 times or 60%) where the writer does not simply refer to the wind as such but goes on to qualify it - for a reason that may or may not be obvious in the given context. It is as if authors find a straightforward mention of 'wind' is not enough - not flowery or informative enough, who's to say - and think a wind needs to be 'dressed up' a bit to earn a rightful place in their narrative. An adjective or attributive clause makes the wind somewhat more interesting, gives it more body as it were. Whatever the truth of the matter, in almost two out of every three references to wind the author says it is not just wind, but wind of a specific defined sort. Among the 'winds' I encountered I distinguish nine categories of sorts and sizes; some of these qualifications like 'sea' wind, 'north' wind, 'hard' wind and so on occur more than once.

We come across: *Wind distinguished by source* (33): sea wind, ocean wind, Atlantic wind, from the mountains, of the steppes, from the desert, of Asia, from that quarter, from various points of the compass, from heaven's sixteen quarters, from another sphere, the way it blows, in the face, against, at the back, the side where the wind blows, the free winds of heaven, north wind, from the northeast, west-northwest, south wind, trade wind; *by strength* (24): quiet, light, fair, strong, great, stiff, tenuous, piercing, keen, fiery, fierce, sharp, beating, cutting, at a level of six to seven falling to five, blowing for weeks, still blowing; *by stability* (23): puffing, caressing, passing, wafting, restless, fickle, wandering, sweeping, stray, gusty, never ageing, drunken, and: a breath of wind, a squall of wind; *by fluctuation* (14): gets up, enlivens, springs up, arises, gets stronger, tires, falls, arrives, wanders, shifts, stills, turns, veers, the way it blows; *by temperature* (12): warm, fresh, cool, chilly, icy, frozen, wind of snow; *by time of day or season* (8): afternoon, nightly, summer, autumn; *favourable or unfavourable wind* (7): bald, fair, peevish, ill, evil, unfavourable, treacherous; *whirlwind* (4); *no wind* (4): no wind, is down, windless, has died. All these illustrate the range of differentiation writers assign to the wind before inserting it into their narrative. I also encountered (notably among poets) famous winds like the Sirocco: 'I saw, I remember girls of the sirocco with tender buttocks unfolding heads of clover hair' (Elytis), the Boreas: 'our northland Apollo, Boreas' (Karlfeldt)

and the Mediterranean Etesian: 'A fair Etesian wind brought tender thoughts to my mind' (Seferis).

### ***The wind as doer***

In a significant number of references to the wind (114 times or some 55%) the writer relates that the wind sets something in motion or brings something into being that helps the story along or adds clarity to something occurring in the narrative. Here then the wind fulfils a dynamic and creative role. There are about double the number of references to the wind causing something negative as something positive to happen. An impact that can be considered neutral occurs as frequently as negative and positive effects taken together. There is an almost endless diversity of subject matter for which the wind, with its clearly unbridled energy, is brought into play. The impact of its action often relates to material matters but the wind may also evoke feelings or thoughts. In the following summary I adhere to the sequence presented in the anthology; I can think of no better.

The wind: moves a gaily-coloured shawl, strums women's hair, blows up sheets like balloons, cuts lumps of snow from twigs, raises eddies of dust, breaks down the grain, colours someone's face, moves a creaking window, pours down - like leaves - a stream of images, breaks bells, chills roses, ripples a sandy shore, swells out a veil, sweeps a dust white as salt, soothes a dreamless night, shakes an aspen's leaves, raises the sand on the further horizon, makes the plain undulate, makes the drivers take shelter beside their camels, bereaves everything of life and soul alike, makes an end to a slowly fading life, makes papers billow and crackle like sails, colours a boy brown, sweeps a meadow, keeps the ship skimming ahead, tilts a boat, rustles grass and thistles, beats a tree to exhaustion, overturns the ringing to mass, caresses, reddens hands, sets away columbines, burns people's faces, makes people talk of the chimneys, causes the flame of a lamp to flicker, wraps her shirt around her belly and against her chest, drives a rain of dust through the house, kills magic buds, bends tall firs, turns all thoughts of prudence and self-restraint to dust, makes one wish the winter was over and spring returning, tangles grass, brings comfort to burning eyes, wants to free the land of its weight, expresses entirely the sorrows and joys of this world, unleashes all that it touches, overpowers a sheepdog, saves the fleet, renders it impossible for the fleet to land, compels the fleet to steer to the north, drives the galleys back into the sea, beats down on the arid earth, drives the ship on steady, swells sails, mounts the ramparts, blows out lamps, brings leaves to the trees, freezes the ground, whitens the black skeletons of trees, stirs the branches, loves me, hangs