Envy and the Invisible Roar: Pindar, *Pythian* 11.30

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MENTION OF SEXUAL IRREGULARITIES in the house of Atreus prompts Pindar to interrupt the narration of the Oresteia-myth in *Pyth.* 11 with a gnomic interlude on gossip and envy (lines 25–30):

> τὸ δὲ νέαις ἀλόχοις
> ἔχθιστον ἀμπλάκιον καλύψαι τ' ἀμάχανον
> ἀλλοτρίαισι γλώσσαις·
> κακολόγοι δὲ πολῖται.
> ἴσχει τε γὰρ ὄλβος οὐ μείονα φθόνον·
> ὁ δὲ χαμηλὰ πνέων ἄφαντον βρέμει.

The final verse of this passage remains a source of controversy on three counts: (1) Who or what is ὁ δὲ χαμηλὰ πνέων? (2) What is the meaning of the expression ἄφαντον βρέμει? (3) How does this line relate to the context? I wish to offer a new resolution of these three interrelated questions.

Past scholarship falls into two camps on the indentity of ὁ δὲ χαμηλὰ πνέων. The preponderant view is that he is the poor man with low ambitions or ineffective results, who in his obscurity escapes all envious notice and is thus an antithetical foil to the ὄλβος of line 29.[1] A minority of scholars, however,

[1] *Cf.* F. Mezger, *Pindars Siegeslieder* (Leipzig 1880) 296; B. L. Gildersleeve, *Pindar: The Olympian and Pythian Odes* (New York 1885) 360f; G. Fraccaroli, *Le Odi di Pindaro* (Verona 1894) 500 n.2; F. Dornseiff, *Pindars Stil* (Berlin 1921) 121; H. Bischoff, *Gnomen Pindars* (Würzburg 1938) 11f; G. Norwood, *Pindar* (Berkeley 1945) 121; J. H. Finley, Jr., *Pindar and Aeschylus* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1955) 161; R. W. B. Burton, *Pindar's Pythian Odes* (Oxford 1962) 67; D. C. Young, *Three Odes of Pindar: A Literary Study of Pythian 11, Pythian 3, and Olympian 7* (Leiden 1968) 4 n.2; G. Pini, "Osservazioni sulla Pitica XI," *StIt* 44 (1972) 206–10; J. Péron, "Le thème du φθόνος dans la XI[e] Pythique de Pindare," *REA* 78–79 (1976–77) 67–71 and "Pindare et la tyrannie d'après la XI[e] Pythique," *REG* 99 (1986) 2–7; W. J. Slater, "Pindar's Myths: Two Pragmatic Explanations," in G. W. Bowersock *et al.*,

have referred ὁ δὲ to φθόνον at the end of line 29,[2] and thus see 30 as one of Pindar's many reflections on the futility of cavil against the high and noble. I believe that both views accord poorly with the preceding context and err by attempting to treat 29f in isolation. Pindar cannot be saying in 30 that Envy is ineffective and unheard, since 25–29 assert just the opposite: adultery among the high and mighty cannot be hidden precisely due to the power of ἀλλοτρίαισι γλώσσαις and κακολόγοι δὲ πολῖται. Nor is there any point in declaring that the poor man goes unheard (and by implication unenvied), when the emphasis of lines 25–29 is on the power of common citizens' speech to harm princes like Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. Ordinary men are indeed heard—all too clearly for the comfort of those with ὄλβος.

There are further problems for those wishing to reduce line 30 merely to antithetical padding for line 29. This view has been reasserted recently by D. E. Gerber, who in criticizing the minority view of ὁ δὲ as φθόνος, states (21 n.2) that "It is far more natural, not only in this context but also in view of the Greek love of polarity, to assume that Pindar would draw attention to the contrasting levels of envy aroused by those of high and low station." Of course, line 30 says nothing about the amount of envy which ὁ δὲ χαμηλὰ πνέων arouses; the line simply refers to the amount of noise that he makes, and it is only by inference that one can conclude that the amount of

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edd., *Arktouros: Hellenic Studies Presented to Bernard M. W. Knox* (Berlin 1979) 66; D. E. Gerber, "Pindar, *Pythian* 11.30," *GRBS* 24 (1983: hereafter 'Gerber') 21–26; S. Instone, "*Pythian* 11: Did Pindar Err?" *CQ* N.S. 36 (1986) 89. The passage is also clearly taken in this sense by all the modern translations that I have consulted (Sandys, Farnell, Bowra, Lattimore, Swanson, Conway, Nisetich).

[2] *Cf.* F. Gedike, *Pindars Pythische Siegshymnen* (Berlin 1779) 240f; R. Rauchenstein, "Ueber die tendenz und die zeit der elften pythischen Ode Pindars," *Philologus* 2 (1847) 205f; L. Cerrato, *Le odi di Pindaro* II (Sestri Ponente 1916 [=*Atti della R. Università di Genova* 23 (1917)]) 446f; U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Pindaros* (Berlin 1922) 260; A. Luppino, "Esegesi Pindarica," *PP* 68 (1959) 364; D. C. C. Young, "Gentler Medicines in the *Agamemnon*," *CQ* N.S. 14 (1964) 15; F. S. Newman, "The Relevance of the Myth in Pindar's *Eleventh Pythian*," *Hellenika* 31 (1979) 47 n.2. A serious difficulty with this view is that line 30 would personify Envy, whereas it is introduced in line 29 (οὐ μείονα φθόνον) in a way that is clearly not personified. As Pini notes (*supra* n.1: 206f), Envy is not elsewhere a personified concept in Pindar.

noise may result in a corresponding amount of envy. Elsewhere (*Pyth.* 11.50–54), however, Pindar quite explicitly discusses the degree of envy that a man may experience:

> θεόθεν ἐραίμαν καλῶν,
> δυνατὰ μαιόμενος ἐν ἁλικίᾳ.
> τῶν γὰρ ἀνὰ πόλιν εὑρίσκων τὰ μέσα μακροτέρῳ
> ὄλβῳ τεθαλότα, μέμφομ' αἶσαν τυραννίδων·
> ξυναῖσι δ' ἀμφ' ἀρεταῖς τέταμαι· φθονεροὶ δ' ἀμύνονται.[3]

I would submit that it is in this passage, not in line 30, that we have the antithetical complement that critics have sought for line 29. The antithesis is not between the rich man who is envied and the poor man who is not, but between the rich man and the man of medium station (εὑρίσκων τὰ μέσα), who by pursuing ξυναῖσι ἀρεταῖς escapes the affliction of having φθονεροί. This antithesis between lines 25–29 and 50–54 is not at all compatible with that which critics have imagined between lines 29 and 30.[4] If we were to accept an antithesis between lines 29 and 30, its tendency would be analogous to *Pyth.* 1.85f, *Nem.* 8.22, or *Parth.* 1.8ff[5]—dismissing envy as the inevitable result of good fortune by treating with contempt anyone who is not envied. But 50–54 convey the altogether different idea that envy can and should be avoided by prudent and reasonable men who behave in a modest and public-spirited way, unlike the Atreidae, whose arrogant behavior quite properly provoked the envy and outcry of κακολόγοι πολῖται in the poem's myth.[6] We cannot have both antitheses in the same poem without

[3] For purposes of this paper, I shall avoid taking a position on the textual crux of line 55, which may, depending on what we read, continue line 54. Péron (1976–77 [*supra* n.1] 72–78) has made an interesting case for ἅται as the subject of ἀμύνονται.

[4] Pini (*supra* n.1: 208f) and Péron (1976–77 [*supra* n.1] 69ff, 80; 1986 [*supra* n.1] 5ff) try to avoid the problem by giving line 30 a positive sense ("la sécurité relative des gens de condition modeste"). But I think that Gerber 22f shows convincingly that terms such as χαμηλός and χαμαί always have a pejorative sense in Pindar.

[5] Pini (*supra* n.1: 208f), Péron (1986 [*supra* n.1] 6), and Instone (*supra* n.1: 89) lay particular stress on the parallel with *Parth.* 1.8ff. But this passage may be ambiguous, also implying that the poor man *is* the envious man.

[6] On the myth of this poem as a paradigm for the rejection of τυραννίς, see the discussion of Young (*supra* n.1) 4–20.

accusing Pindar of serious disregard for poetic—and ethical—consistency.[7]

Since the traditional interpretations of line 30 fit neither the immediate context nor the poem as a whole, a different approach is clearly needed. What has seldom been noted in the debate over ὁ δὲ χαμηλὰ πνέων is that the poor man and the envious man are in fact the same.[8] One need only think of "reproachful Archilochus, in his poverty fattening himself on heavy-worded hatred" (*Pyth.* 2.54ff: ἐν ἀμαχανίᾳ ψογερὸν Ἀρχίλοχον βαρυλόγοις ἔχθεσιν πιαινόμενον).[9] Perhaps the closest analogue to this nebulous ὁ δὲ is the equally insubstantial ἄλλος ἀνήρ of *Nem.* 4.39ff: φθονερὰ ... βλέπων γνώμαν κενεὰν σκότῳ κυλίνδει χαμαὶ πετοῖσαν. Here we see the same association of envy, darkness, and falling to the ground as in *Pyth.* 11.30.[10] The idea of low ambition, sticking to the ground, is also conveyed vividly by Pindar's image of the screeching daws who ταπεινὰ νέμονται (*Nem.* 3.82) in constrast to the high-flying eagle; in *Ol.* 2.87f they are represented as crows chattering ἄκραντα against the eagle. Pindar posits that those with low ambition and low accomplishments are by definition hostile to high-achievers. It is thus wrong to see ὁ δὲ χαμηλὰ πνέων either as Envy itself or as the poor man who escapes envy; he is rather the poor *and* envious man.[11]

[7] For a study of Pindar's care in the logical coordination of antitheses throughout a poem see T. K. Hubbard, *The Pindaric Mind: A Study of Logical Structure in Early Greek Poetry* (Leiden 1985). Slater (*supra* n.1: 66) so much as admits the logical confusion engendered by his interpretation when labelling it an "archaic form of 'gnomic progression', whereby every sentiment is related only to the one after it and the one before." In my view, Pindar's artistry was not so one-dimensional or tunnel-visioned.

[8] That envy proceeds from a sense of inferiority is suggested by passages such as *Pyth.* 1.84, 2.88ff; Soph. *Ajax* 157; Eur. fr. 294 Nauck.

[9] That Archilochus' poverty was traditional is suggested by fr. 295b West².

[10] *Nem.* 4.36ff makes it quite clear that the ἄλλος ἀνήρ is not just an antithetical foil, but an active enemy whom the poet must overcome. On this passage see the remarks of A. Köhnken, *Die Funktion des Mythos bei Pindar* (Berlin 1971) 208–12, with whose views I am in substantial accord.

[11] This seems to have been recognized by some very early Pindaric commentators but has been ignored in modern times. A. Boeckh, *Pindari Opera quae supersunt* (Leipzig 1821) II 2, 341, follows C. G. Heyne in paraphrasing line 30 as *humiles et plebeii homines clam potentium obtrectent laudibus. Cf.* L. Dissen, *Pindari Carmina quae supersunt* (Gotha 1847) II 365.

Critics have also misinterpreted the phrase ἄφαντον βρέμει. Young and Gerber are right to insist that βρέμει should be given its full force as 'make a loud noise' or 'roar', rather than being watered down to something like 'mutter' or 'grumble' (a sense nowhere else clearly attested for the verb).[12] But they are wrong in inferring that the phrase must therefore pertain to the poor man's strenuous efforts to be heard, which go unnoticed no matter how loudly he behaves. The idea of strenuous efforts to be heard contradicts the idea of low ambition clearly conveyed by χαμηλὰ πνέων,[13] and Gerber admits that the gnomic parallels do not support the association of poverty with loud speech calling attention to itself.[14] We would do better to reconsider the meaning of the term ἄφαντον: derived from φαίνω (and the verbal root φαν-),[15] its associations are properly with the realm of vision, not of hearing.[16] The sense of ἄφαντον βρέμει is not 'roars unnoticed', but 'roars unseen'. The loud noise denoted by βρέμει is indeed heard, even though the humble people making the noise may be invisible, hidden by the anonymity of the crowd and the obscurity of their low station. While Norwood (*supra* n.1: 124ff) may exaggerate in imagining a reference to the bumble-bee, the insect analogy nevertheless seems appropriate, particularly in view of χαμηλὰ πνέων. What better expression for the effect of κακολόγοι πολῖται and their envious gossip against the powerful than to call it loud but unseen: literally a buzz rising up from the ground?

[12] Young (*supra* n.1) 4 n.2; Gerber 23–26. This had earlier been argued by J. S. T. Hanssen, "A Note on Pindar, Pyth. XI 38ff.," *Aevum* 24 (1950) 163.

[13] Gerber 22f tries to avoid this problem by rendering χαμηλά as "ineffectively," but the word's basic sense is locative ('on the ground'), and Gerber extracts 'ineffective' only from parallels with χαμαί or χαμαιπετής, where that meaning is clearly drawn from the metaphor by the context. Parallels such as *Nem.* 3.82 (ταπεινὰ νέμονται) suggest low ambition and ability.

[14] Gerber 25f, wrongly suggesting *Nem.* 3.82 and *Ol.* 2.87f as counterexamples. The daws and crows have nothing to do with poverty, but are poets of inferior ability: they make noise not because inferior people necessarily make noise, but because they are poets, whose business is to make sound.

[15] On this root's unambiguous associations with vision and light see H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* II (Heidelberg 1961) 982ff; P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* IV.2 (Paris 1980) 1170ff.

[16] The associations of ἄφαντος are clearly visual in Pindar's two other uses of the word (*Ol.* 1.46, *Nem.* 8.34). I have been unable to find an example of its being associated with sound (='unheard') anywhere in Greek literature, nor even of its meaning 'unnoticed'.

Pindar elsewhere alludes to common citizens' unseen envy of the great and its harmful effects, as in *Pyth.* 1.84 (ἀστῶν δ' ἀκοὰ κρύφιον θυμὸν βαρύνει μάλιστ' ἐσλοῖσιν ἐπ' ἀλλοτρίοις) or with the envious neighbor who secretly started the rumor about Pelops being eaten by the gods (*Ol.* 1.47: ἔννεπε κρυφᾷ τις αὐτίκα φθονερῶν γειτόνων). This theme seems to have found particular favor in Pindar's odes for the ever-suspicious Hieron, and is especially prominent with the unseen slanderous 'whisperings' of *Pyth.* 2.75–96, to which Pindar contrasts his own forthrightness of speech. Indeed, unseen envy is commonplace in Greek literature: Xenophon (*Cyr.* 4.6.4) speaks of restraining ὑπὸ σκότου τὸν φθόνον, as Herodotus (8.74.2) says that ἀνὴρ ἀνδρὶ παραστὰς σιγῇ λόγον ἐποιέετο in criticizing their leader's folly. The first example, like *Pyth.* 11.30, uses a metaphor of darkness and invisibility shrouding envy, while the second uses oxymoron. Both devices are employed in Sophocles *Ant.* 690–700, where Haemon tells Creon that he is able to hear critical mutterings of the citizens invisible to the ruler's eye:

> τὸ γὰρ σὸν ὄμμα δεινὸν ἀνδρὶ δημότῃ ...
> λόγοις τοιούτοις οἷς σὺ μὴ τέρψῃ κλύων·
> ἐμοὶ δ' ἀκούειν ἔσθ' ὑπὸ σκότου τάδε ...
> τοιάδ' ἐρεμνὴ σῖγ' ὑπέρχεται φάτις.

Again, the malicious talk of the common people takes place in darkness (ὑπὸ σκότου), obscure (ἐρεμνὴ), both spoken (φάτις) and seemingly silent (σῖγ').[17]

But closer to *Pyth.* 11 is the prominence of this theme in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, where the concealed grumblings of the common people, as represented by the chorus in the *Agamemnon*, are a leifmotif.[18] In commenting on families' resentment of the many who have fallen at Troy in service of the Atreidae, the chorus declares (Aesch. *Ag.* 449ff, 456–62, 468–74):

[17] Haemon's remarks here pick up on Creon's suspicions of secret and seditious popular mumblings against him (*Ant.* 189–92); the motif is clearly thematic in this play, as in the *Oresteia* (see *infra*).

[18] For the theme of the common people being afraid to say openly what they think of their rulers see *Ag.* 36–39, 546–50, 788–98, 1025–34; *Cho.* 46f, 75–83, 102–05, 264–68; *Eum.* 379f, in addition to the passage below. See also W. G. Thalmann, "Speech and Silence in the *Oresteia* 2," *Phoenix* 39 (1985) 228; and on popular *stasis* generally, C. W. Macleod, "Politics and the *Oresteia*," *JHS* 102 (1982) 130f.

τάδε σῖγά τις βαύζει,
φθονερὸν δ' ὑπ' ἄλγος ἕρπει
προδίκοις 'Ατρείδαις ....
βαρεῖα δ' ἀστῶν φάτις σὺν κότῳ·
δημοκράντου δ' ἀρᾶς τίνει χρέος.
μένει δ' ἀκοῦσαι τί μοι
μέριμνα νυκτηρεφές.
τῶν πολυκτόνων γὰρ οὐκ ἄσκοποι
θεοί ....
τὸ δ' ὑπερκόπως κλύειν εὖ
βαρύ· βάλλεται γὰρ ὅσσοις
Διόθεν κεραυνός.
κρίνω δ' ἄφθονον ὄλβον·
μήτ' εἴην πτολιπόρθης,
μήτ' οὖν αὐτὸς ἁλοὺς ὑπ' ἄλ-
λων βίον κατίδοιμι.

Again, we see the oxymoron of people's speech, which is both loud (βαύζει means 'bark', and is no less emphatic than βρέμει)[19] and unheard by the powerful (σῖγα). The association of the common man's curses (ἀστῶν φάτις ... δημοκράντου δ' ἀρᾶς) with envy is made explicit not only by the φθονερὸν ἄλγος that slowly creeps against the Atreidae, but also by the invocation of divine vengeance on the famous and martially victorious heroes in lines 460–70.[20] In contrast to the Atreidae, the chorus prefers a medium estate with just enough wealth to avoid envy (ἄφθονον ὄλβον), neither a conqueror nor conquered; this last statement constitutes a resonant parallel to Pindar's announced preference for the middle estate (*Pyth.* 52f: τὰ μέσα μακροτέρῳ ὄλβῳ τεθαλότα) that avoids envy (*Pyth.* 11.54: φθονεροὶ δ' ἀμύνονται), also in contrast to the Atreidae. In a later ode, the

[19] E. Fraenkel, *Aeschylus: Agamemnon* (Oxford 1950) I 119, translates βαύζει here as 'mutter', watering the verb down as commentators have tended to do with βρέμει. Aeschylus expresses the people's emotional conflict through sharp oxymoron.

[20] The relevence of this passage to the interpretation of *Pyth.* 11.30 has been noted by several critics: *cf.* L. R. Farnell, *The Works of Pindar* (London 1932) II 224; P. Altenhoven, "Notes sur trois passages de Pindare," *AnnPhilHist* 5 (1937) 15f; I. Düring, "Klutaimestra—νηλὴς γυνά," *Eranos* 41 (1943) 112f. Even critics who do not favor seeing Envy (or the envious man) as the subject of *Pyth.* 11.30, such as Burton (*supra* n.1: 67f) and Péron (1976–77 [*supra* n.1]: 67f), admit that this passage provides a strong argument in favor of doing so.

chorus complains that its low station prevents it from expressing its anxieties outright, but instead it "roars in darkness, pained in the heart" (*Ag.* 1029f: νῦν δ' ὑπὸ σκότῳ βρέμει θυμαλγής); again, there is loud sound (*i.e.*, this very choral ode), but it is invisible.[21] In the final reconciliation of the *Eumenides,* the chorus prays that Faction should never 'roar' (*Eum.* 978: βρέμειν) in Athens.

Given the likelihood, on independent grounds,[22] that *Pyth.* 11 dates to 454—as well as the strong arguments that have been made for the influence of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*[23] on Pindar's telling of the myth—I regard it as probable that the choral ode of *Ag.* 449–74 and the theme of lurking popular discontent motivated Pindar's digression on the κακολόγοι πολῖται in *Pyth.* 11.25–30, as well as his comments on the mean estate in

[21] I do not think that the chorus is saying in this passage that they cannot utter their thoughts (as Gerber 24 implies—"this loud protest is not put into words but kept within the breast"), but that they must keep their thoughts among themselves, as in this ode, rather than voicing their discontent at first impulse (*Ag.* 1027f) in the face of the powerful. Again, the emphasis is on popular criticism that is loud, but invisible to its victims.

[22] Σ *Pyth.* 11.Inscr.a (Drachmann) gives two possible dates for the ode, when Thrasydaeus was recorded as having Pythian victories in the footrace—474 or 454. I am impressed by the political arguments in favor of the latter date, as articulated by C. M. Bowra, "Pindar, *Pythian* XI," *CQ* 30 (1936) 133–39, which remain unrefuted. Probably the most serious argument in favor of the earlier date has been that of P. Von der Mühll, "Wurde der elfte Pythie Pindars 474 oder 454 gedichtet?" *MusHelv* 15 (1958) 143f, arguing that the reference to this as the "third crown" brought to the paternal hearth (*Pyth.* 11.13f) must designate the earlier victory, since Thrasydaeus' father had an Olympic chariot victory and his name Pythonicus suggests a Pythian victory by his own father (*Pyth.* 11.43–48). But the "third crown" must refer only to a third Pythian victory, as suggested by the way it is introduced (ἀγῶνί τε Κίρρας, ἐν τῷ Θρασυδᾶος ἔμνασεν ἑστίαν τρίτον ἔπι στέφανον πατρῴαν βαλών, ἐν ἀφνειαῖς ἀρούραισι Πυλάδα νικῶν). In this case, we are indeed dealing with Thrasydaeus' later Pythian victory, which together with his childhood victory (lines 49f) and his grandfather's victory would be the third for the family. It is most unlikely that a family with Olympic and Pythian victories to its credit would not also have many crowns from minor contests; this cannot be meant as the third athletic victory in all contests.

[23] On this question I regard the work of Düring (*supra* n.20) 92f, 109–16 as definitive. The recent article of J. Herington, "Pindar's Eleventh Pythian Ode and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*," in D. E. Gerber, ed., *Greek Poetry and Philosophy: Studies in Honour of Leonard Woodbury* (Chico 1984) 137–46, adds little, save for a questionable generalization about motivation never being at issue except in Tragedy (or through the influence of Tragedy). Motivations are certainly an issue in Homeric epic.

11.50–54. If this is correct, it provides us with one more reason for reading *Pyth.* 11.30 not as a statement about the poor man's futility and consequent freedom from the envy of others, nor as a statement about Envy's futility, but as a reflection of the ever-present envy that lowly men feel toward the rich, and which seethes just beneath the surface of social relations, audible but not fully visible.

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