

Pindar, *Pythian* 11.30

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A PPROXIMATELY HALF WAY through the myth of *Pythian* 11 there is a gnomic passage which in general outline seems reasonably clear. The passage runs as follows (25–30):

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

Down to the last verse the sequence of thought is: (1) adultery is impossible to conceal from others; (2) citizens are prone to speak ill; and (3) prosperity entails a corresponding envy.¹ Logical progression suggests that the fourth stage (line 30) should convey the idea that poverty, unlike prosperity, does not entail envy.² The majority of

¹ There can be little doubt that 29 means literally: “For prosperity has in it an envy which is no less (than the prosperity),” *i.e.*, “For prosperity entails (involves, arouses) a corresponding envy.” The alternative view, adopted by a few, that ἴσχει means ‘restrains, holds in check’, is rightly rejected by J. Péron, “Le thème du Phthonos dans la XI^e Pythique de Pindare,” *REA* 78–79 (1976–77) 65–83. I have not thought it necessary to record in detail the views of others on *Pyth.* 11.30, since they are fully treated by Péron. His explanation, which I shall argue is wrong, can be seen from n.14 *infra*. I have also not discussed lines 50ff, for while there is a relationship between them and 29, this relationship does not extend to 30. For some comments on the sequence of thought in 25–30 and on ‘gnomic progression’ in general, see W. J. Slater in *Arktouros. Hellenic Studies Presented to B. M. W. Knox* (Berlin 1979) 66. I disagree, however, with his view that line 30 represents a “condemnation of the unadventurous.”

² From at least as early as F. Gedike, *Pindars Pythische Sieghymnen* (Berlin 1779) 240–41, a few have argued that ὁ χαμηλὰ πνέων refers back to φθόνος. Among these are L. Cerrato, *Le odi di Pindaro* (Sestri Ponente 1918) 446–47; Wilamowitz, *Pindaros* (Berlin 1922) 260; A. Luppino, “Esegesi Pindarica,” *ParPass* 14 (1959) 359–64; Douglas Young, “Gentler Medicines in the *Agamemnon*,” *CQ* n.s. 14 (1964) 14–15; and F. S. Newman, “The Relevance of the Myth in Pindar’s Eleventh *Pythian*,” *Hellenika* 31 (1979) 44–64 (47). In addition, P. Altenhoven, “Notes sur trois passages de Pindare,” *AIPhO* 5 (1937) 15 n.1, states that “si nous pouvons donner à χαμηλὰ son sens local, l’image gagnera encore en pittoresque: ‘L’opulence contient l’envie qui est aussi forte qu’elle: mais celle-ci, face contre terre, haletante, gronde sourdement!’” This interpretation seems to me to be extremely unlikely. 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. Furthermore, a contrast is indicated by the combination τε . . . δέ, as Dennis-

translators, however, render 30 in a manner similar to that found in the Loeb edition, “the man of humble aspirations murmureth unobserved.” I believe this contains both imprecision and outright error, as the following discussion will, I hope, illustrate.

The word *χαμηλός* appears only here before Xenophon, and except for *Anth.Pal.* 7.472.4, where it seems to mean ‘insignificant’, it is always used in the literal sense of ‘on/near the ground’. The adverb *χαμαί*, however, occurs several times in Pindar in a metaphorical sense, and in all instances there is a contrast, stated or implied, between that which is on high and that which is on the ground. Depending upon the context, the former signifies strength, success, lustre, increase, effectiveness, the latter weakness, failure, obscurity, loss, ineffectiveness. In *Pyth.* 8.92–94 we are told that τὸ *τερπνὸν αὔξεται* in a short space of time, but *πίτνει χαμαί, ἀποτρόπῳ γνώμα σεσεισμένον*, i.e., is lost. In *Nem.* 4.37–41 *σφόδρα δόξομεν δαΐων ὑπέρτεροι ἐν φάει καταβαίνειν· φθονερά δ’ ἄλλος ἀνὴρ βλέπων γνώμαν κενεὰν σκότῳ κυλίνδει χαμαὶ πετοῖσαν*, we find *σκότῳ* contrasting with *φάει* and *χαμαί* with *ὑπέρτεροι*. Obscurity and ineffectiveness attend the thoughts of the envious. In *Nem.* 9.6–7 Pindar says *ἔστι δέ τις λόγος ἀνθρώπων, τετελεσμένον ἔσλὸν μὴ χαμαὶ σιγᾷ καλύψαι· θεσπεσία δ’ ἐπέων καύχας ἀοιδὰ πρόσφορος*. A noble achievement must not be veiled in obscurity and silence, but deserves loud acclaim.³

The adjective *χαμαιπετής* appears twice in Pindar, in *Oi.* 9.12 *οὔτοι χαμαιπετέων λόγων ἐφάψαι* and *Pyth.* 6.37 *χαμαιπετὲς δ’ ἄρ’ ἔπος οὐκ ἀπέριψεν*. In both passages words that “fall to the ground” are clearly words that are ineffective, do not achieve the desired result. The idea of ineffectiveness also seems to be present in the four examples of *χαμαιγενής* before Nonnus, although it is the implied contrast with *διογενής* which is the primary reason for this derogatory connotation.⁴

It is clear from these examples that ‘on the ground’ can denote ineffectiveness in a general sense, the precise significance being de-

ton, *Greek Particles*² (Oxford 1954) 513, points out: “The explanation of the irregularity probably is that the idea of contrast is added to the original idea of addition.”

³ Young (*supra* n.2) 15 states that in this passage “*χαμαί* must mean ‘underground’” (so also LSJ) and he therefore argues that in *Pyth.* 11.30 “*χαμηλά* can be taken in the sense of *χθόνια*, ‘subterranean.’” He translates “and it [envy] rumbles invisibly with ground winds” and says that “the allusion may well be to the political underground movement of the citizens’ envy rumbling like an earthquake.” I see no justification, however, for giving an abnormal meaning to *χαμαί* in *Nem.* 9.7. It is surely possible to speak of concealing “on the ground” what is *ἔσλόν* as opposed to the implied contrast of raising it aloft.

⁴ See G. Méautis, *Pindare le Dorien* (Neuchâtel/Paris 1962) 233–34.

terminated by the context. In the context of our passage, where there is obviously a contrast with *olbos*, ineffectiveness will signify poverty.⁵ In terms of imagery, poverty cannot rise above the ground, whereas prosperity can (*cf.* ὄλβον ὑψηλόν, *Ol.* 2.22). Theognis makes the same point as Pindar does, though more explicitly and with different imagery, when he contrasts ὄλβον (383) with πενίην μητέρ' ἀμηχανίης (384–85; *cf.* also Alc. fr.364 L-P and Hdt. 8.111.3), since ἀμηχανίη and χαμηλά convey essentially the same idea.

The verb πνέω is found twice elsewhere in Pindar with the neuter plural of an adjective, *Ol.* 10.93 κενεὰ πνεύσαις and *Nem.* 3.41 ἄλλοτ' ἄλλα πνέων, while πνέοντες μεγάλα occurs in Eur. *Andr.* 189. The neuter singular is also used, as in Eur. *Bacch.* 640 πνέων . . . μέγα and Ar. *Lys.* 276 Λακωνικὸν πνέων, and there are many examples from Homer on of πνέω with the accusative of a noun. Van der Valk,⁶ whose treatment of πνέω is the most detailed that I am aware of, explains our passage as the opposite of the example cited above from *Lysistrata*, which he translates as “notwithstanding his Spartan arrogance”; but at the same time he connects it with phrases such as κότον πνέων, “for Pindar no doubt also has in mind ‘the person who breathes low and obnoxious things.’” Nothing in the context, however, nor in the apparent meaning of χαμηλά suggests the idea of obnoxiousness. Van der Valk argues that the examples cited above from Pindar are not exact parallels because in *Ol.* 10.93 πνεύσαις conveys the idea of “one who ‘pants’ after strenuous exertions,” in this case in vain, and in *Nem.* 3.41 Pindar is alluding both “to the panting and the exertions of the participants in athletic contests” and “to the unsteadfastness of the winds.” But even if van der Valk is right in his explanation of these two passages, and I am not convinced that he is, I see no reason why “breathing breaths which are on the ground,” *i.e.*, are ineffective, cannot be Pindar’s colourful way of describing one who is poor.⁷

Now we come to ἄφαντον βρέμει. The verb is usually translated here by ‘murmur, mutter, grumble’, but as we shall see, that would

⁵ So essentially schol. 46a: ὁ δὲ ταπεινὰ καὶ οἰκτρὰ πνέων, τουτέστιν ὁ εὐτελής καὶ πένης ἀφώνως ἤχει. I do not see how it can possibly denote “la modestie des ambitions,” as Péron (*supra* n.1) 71 claims, or τὰ μέσα (*Pyth.* 11.52), as Pini (*infra* n.9) 208 implies.

⁶ M. van der Valk, “Observations in connection with Aristophanes,” ΚΩΜΩΙΔΟΤΡΑΓΗΜΑΤΑ. *Studia Aristophanea viri Aristophanei W. J. W. Koster in honorem* (Amsterdam 1967) 131–43.

⁷ LSJ translate χαμηλά πνέων by “one of a low spirit” and Newman (*supra* n.2) by “mean spirited,” neither of which seems justified in view of the contrast with *olbos*. A few argue that πνέων here means simply ‘living’; but while the verb can have this significance, it never seems to be so used with an accompanying accusative.

be an abnormal meaning. Basically the word denotes a loud sound, as of waves breaking on the shore (e.g. *Il.* 2.210, 4.425), the clash of armies (e.g. Aesch. *Sept.* 85, *PV.* 423–24), the shouting of warriors (e.g. *Sept.* 378), or the wailing of infants (*Sept.* 350). In the only other example of its use in Pindar, *Nem.* 11.7 *λύρα δέ σφι βρέμεται καὶ ἀοιδά*, I suspect that the verb means something like ‘peals out’ or ‘rings forth’, especially in view of *Nem.* 9.8 *βρομίαν φόρμιγγα*. Loud sound is also clearly present in the cognates *βρόμος* and *ὑψιβρεμέτης*, and in Xen. *Cyn.* 7.5 a hunting-dog is presumably called *Βρέμων* because of its loud or deep baying. In Aesch. *Eum.* 976–78 *τὰν δ’ ἄπληστον κακῶν μήποτ’ ἐν πόλει στάσιν τᾶδ’ ἐπέυχομαι βρέμειν*, it is much more appropriate to assume that the prayer is that the semi-personified *stasis* never raise its loud voice or make an uproar in the city than that it never mutter. In Ar. *Ran.* 679–80 *ἐφ’ οὗ δὴ χεῖλεσιν ἀμφιλάοις δεινὸν ἐπιβρέμεται Θρηκία χελιδῶν*, Stanford correctly translates “on whose lips of mongrel speech a Thracian swallow makes horrible din.”

More difficult is Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1025–34:

εἰ δὲ μὴ τεταγμένα
μοῖρα μοῖραν ἐκ θεῶν
εἶργε μὴ πλέον φέρειν,
προφθάσασα καρδία
γλώσσαν ἂν τὰδ’ ἐξέχει·
νῦν δ’ ὑπὸ σκότῳ βρέμει
θυμαλγῆς τε καὶ οὐδὲν ἐπελπομέ-
να ποτὲ καίριον ἐκτολυπεύσειν,
ζωπυρουμένας φρενός.

Many have argued that the passage is parallel to *Pythian* 11.30, *ὑπὸ σκότῳ* corresponding to *ἄφαντον*, and that as *βρέμει* is assumed to mean ‘mutter’ here, the same meaning is present in Pindar. But I do not see why *βρέμει* cannot signify something like ‘makes loud protest’, with *ὑπὸ σκότῳ* denoting that this loud protest is not put into words but kept within the breast. The first part of the passage is syntactically obscure, but seems to mean that if the members of the chorus had had a prominent or prosperous position in life, *i.e.* had been *ὄλβιοι* (cf. Fraenkel’s translation: “And did not established destiny prevent my portion from winning more from the gods”), they would not have had to conceal their loud protests, but would have been able to make them public, make them known and heeded.⁸

⁸ Fraenkel *ad loc.* says, “*βρέμειν* frequently of seditious (cf. *Eum.* 978) or indignant murmuring,” and he then cites *Pyth.* 11.30 as a further illustration. It will be clear from my analysis that I do not believe that the verb ever signifies ‘murmuring’. I should add

Finally, there is a passage which is of considerable importance for our understanding of *Pythian* 11.30, but which has not received sufficient attention from Pindaric scholars. The Samian begging-song recorded in Pseudo-Herodotus 33 begins as follows:⁹

δῶμα προσετραπόμεσθ' ἀνδρὸς μέγα δυναμένιοιο,
ὅς μέγα μὲν δύναται, μέγα δὲ βρέμει, ὄλβιος αἰεὶ.

The second verse must mean literally, “one who is very powerful and who makes a very loud sound, ever prosperous.”¹⁰ More problematic is the question whether this is complimentary or derogatory. The association of *δύναται*, *βρέμει*, and *ὄλβιος* might suggest that a man who has *olbos* is assumed to have a very loud voice in the sense of a voice that carries weight, a voice of authority, a voice listened to and heeded. In contrast, *ὁ χαμηλὰ πνέων*, the man without *olbos*, has a loud voice that does not carry weight, is ignored, passes unnoticed (*ἄφαντον*). A second possibility is that one who is powerful and prosperous is characterized as indulging in loud, blustering talk. This explanation seems preferable. Schmidt¹¹ draws attention to Rhianus fr.1 Powell, where the person who is prosperous and powerful (*ὄς δὲ κεν εὐοχθήσι, θεὸς δ' ἐπὶ ὄλβον ὀπάζη καὶ πολυκοιρανίην*, the equivalent of *ὄλβιος* and *δύναται* in the begging-song) is said to forget that he is mortal and as a consequence *ἴσα Διὶ βρομέει, κεφαλὴν δ' ὑπέρανχον ἀνίσχει* (13). If that is the force of *βρέμει* in the begging-song and in *Pythian* 11.30, Pindar is representing the poor man as engaging in the same kind of loud, blustering talk as the prosperous person, the only difference being that the poor man's loud talk is unheeded.

What may seem somewhat surprising about *Pythian* 11.30 is that Pindar should have mentioned that a poor man could actually engage in loud, blustering talk, whether heeded or not, since poverty tends to be associated with lack of speech, as we see from passages such as Theognis 177–78, *καὶ γὰρ ἀνὴρ πενίη δεδμημένος οὔτε τι εἰπεῖν οὔτ' ἔρξαι δύναται, γλῶσσα δὲ οἱ δέδεται*, and 669–70, *εἰμὶ δ' ἄφωνος χρημοσύνη*. Note also that earlier in the same fragment of Rhianus

that Douglas Young (*supra* n.2) defends a variant reading of the manuscripts in *Ag.* 1030, namely *βλέπει*. I doubt that this is right.

⁹ Allen, *Homeri opera* V p.214. In the last half-century only two, as far as I know, have even mentioned the parallel, H. Bischoff, *Gnomon Pindars* (Würzburg 1938) 12 n.18, and G. Pini, “Osservazioni sulla *Pitica* XI,” *StItal* 44 (1972) 197–220 (207 n.1).

¹⁰ O. Schönberger, *Griechische Heischelieder* (Meisenheim am Glan 1980) 18, translates: “Schwerreich ist er. Und brummt alleweil. Sein Mittel erlauben's.” But *βρέμει* is not ‘brummt’ and *αἰεὶ* cannot be detached from *ὄλβιος*.

¹¹ M. Schmidt in *LexFrgrEp* 10 (1982) 93–94 correctly translates *βρέμει* in the begging-song as “übergrossen Lärm macht” and gives “tosen, donnern” as the general meaning of *βρέμω* in early epic.

the person who is βιώτοιο . . . ἐπιδευής is described as οὐδέ τι θαρσαλέος νοέειν ἔπος οὐδέ τι ρέξαι (6). Partially parallel, however, are *Ol.* 2.86–87, μαθόντες δὲ λάβροι παγγλωσσία κόρακες ὡς ἄκραντα γαρύετον,¹² and *Nem.* 3.82, κραγέται δὲ κολοιοὶ ταπεινὰ νέμονται. Although in both passages the loud sound is represented in the form of bird-imagery and although there is no contrast between the prosperous and the poor, there *is* a contrast between those who are deemed inferior and superior. If Pindar could describe inferior poets as using a loud, blustering language that accomplishes nothing (ἄκραντα), it seems reasonable to suppose he could describe those of inferior status in terms of prosperity as using a loud, blustering language that is unnoticed (ἄφαντον).¹³

If my interpretation of *Pythian* 11.30 is correct, βρέμει should not “be added to the list of what Dornseiff calls *Farbloser* [*sic*] *Zeitwörter*, pompous synonyms for the verb ‘to be,’” as Burton suggests,¹⁴ and the contrast is not between the prosperous person who arouses envy and the person of humble aspirations who mutters unnoticed, as the passage is so often explained, but between the prosperous person who arouses envy and the poor man who, for all his loud, blustering talk (for all the loud racket he makes, to use a colloquial expression), is unnoticed, *i.e.*, arouses no envy.¹⁵

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¹² I fully concur with Gordon Kirkwood’s defence of the dual γαρύετον, *CQ* n.s. 31 (1981) 240–43.

¹³ One is reminded of Thersites in *Iliad* 2. He is described as μακρὰ βοῶν (224), but his status is inferior and as a result his railings accomplish nothing. He is silenced by Odysseus and ends up ἀχρεῖον ἰδῶν (269).

¹⁴ R. W. B. Burton, *Pindar’s Pythian Odes* (Oxford 1962) 67. Péron (*supra* n.1) 70 also deems it necessary to tone down the normal force of βρέμειν, translating: “Alors que la prospérité s’attire une envie tout aussi considérable, celui qui sait borner ses ambitions peut parler sans qu’on le remarque.” Burton draws attention to fr.94a.8–10 S-M, παντὶ δ’ ἐπὶ φθόνος ἀνδρὶ κέεται ἀρετᾶς, ὁ δὲ μηδὲν ἔχων ὑπὸ σιγᾷ μελαίνα κᾶρα κέκρυνται, but the parallel is only partial. ὁ μηδὲν ἔχων is a more prosaic equivalent of ὁ χαμηλὰ πνέων, but there is nothing in the passage that is even remotely similar to βρέμει.

¹⁵ A few others have also commented on the need to give βρέμει its full force, but they have not done so with detailed arguments nor have they integrated this fully into the passage as a whole. So J. S. T. Hanssen, “A Note on Pindar, *Pyth.* XI 38ff.,” *Aevum* 24 (1950) 162–65, “the man of humble condition of life will remain unnoticed even if he roars (or: rages),” and David Young, *Three Odes of Pindar* (Leiden 1968) 4, “whereas intense public interest attends the sayings, personal lives, and even the thoughts of the lofty, the most blatant activity or talk of the humble and unpretentious arouses little notice.”