

ON THE RELEVANCE OF ORESTES IN PINDAR'S ELEVENTH PYTHIAN

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OVER THE CENTURIES Pindar's Eleventh Pythian Ode, and particularly the myth presented therein, have stimulated considerable controversy and confusion.¹ A common presumption has been that the poet himself, whether through contrivance or carelessness, is responsible for the obscurity. That sort of presumption was gently challenged almost a century ago by Gildersleeve, who made the eminently sensible observation that our imperfect understanding of the ode might be due to the loss of much of the information possessed by the poet and his original audience.² The state of our knowledge and appreciation of the poem has in fact progressed since Gildersleeve's day through the labours and insights of several critics,³ but this is hardly to suggest that the entire ode stands at last in a clear and unobstructed light, and the process of elucidation will perhaps never be satisfactorily completed. And so, in an attempt to make a contribution to a continuing enterprise rather than in any expectation of providing definitive solutions to all of the problems in the ode, I offer the following remarks on the significance of some of the mythic material in the Eleventh Pythian.

The poem begins with an invocation to various heroines of Theban cult, who are invited to assemble at the temple of Ismenian Apollo for the purpose of celebrating, *inter alia*, the Pythian victory of the Theban youth Thrasydaeus in the boys' foot-race (1-14). Since these verses have always been recognized as appropriate in their own right to the occasion and

¹G. Norwood, *Pindar* (Berkeley 1945) 119 ff., conveniently catalogues the views expressed by many scholars writing before him. A more recent survey of the problem, with bibliographical references, appears in D. C. Young, *Three Odes of Pindar: A Literary Study of Pythian 11, Pythian 3 and Olympian 7* (Leiden 1968) 1-26.

²B. L. Gildersleeve, *Pindar: The Olympian and Pythian Odes*² (London and New York 1899) 357. Cf. J. Defradas, *Les thèmes de la propagande delphique*² (Paris 1972) 178.

³Such as U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Pindaros* (Berlin 1922) 259-263; C. M. Bowra, "Pindar, Pythian XI," *CQ* 30 (1936) 129-141; Young (above, note 1) 1-26; J. Péron, *Les images maritimes de Pindare* (Paris 1974) *passim*; C. O. Pavese, "La decima e la undecima Pitica di Pindaro," in *Studi Triestini di Antichità in onore di L. A. Stella* (Trieste 1975) 245-253; B. Gentili, "Polemica antitirannica (Pind. *Pyth.* 11; Aesch. *Prom.*; Herodt. 3, 80-81; Thuc. 2, 65, 9)," *QUCC* n.s. 1 (1979) 153-156; F. S. Newman, "The Relevance of the Myth in Pindar's Eleventh Pythian," *Ἑλληνικά* 31 (1979) 44-64; W. J. Slater, "Pindar's Myths: Two Pragmatic Explanations," in G. W. Bowersock *et al.*, eds, *Arktouros: Hellenic Studies Presented to Bernard M. W. Knox* (Berlin and New York 1979) 63-68; W. H. Race, "Some Digressions and Returns in Greek Authors," *CJ* 76 (1980) 1-8.

location of the celebration and as having verbal and structural links with other parts of the poem, notably with the conclusion,⁴ I shall focus for the moment on that much more problematic section which immediately follows them.

Thrasydaeus is introduced as a victor in the contest at Cirrha, a location which the poet also refers to as the "fields of Pylades." Once having named Pylades, apparently *en passant*, he brings Orestes into the poem on the strength, it would seem, of the mere fact of his association with Pylades in Phocis:

χάριν ἀγωνί τε Κίρρας
 ἐν τῷ Θρασυδᾶος ἔμνασεν ἐστίαν
 τρίτον ἐπὶ στέφανον πατρώαν βαλὼν,
 ἐν ἀφνεαῖς ἀρούραισι Πυλάδα
 νικῶν ξένου Λάκωνος Ὀρέστα. (12–16)

The presentation of Orestes by what seems to be an awkwardly contrived concatenation of incidentals has always been difficult for critics to justify. Be that as it may, the poet, having been led from Thrasydaeus to Orestes by way of Pylades, proceeds with a rendition of what is, on the strength of extant Greek literature, the best known of the myths pertaining to Orestes and his family. He touches upon the rescue of the young Orestes at the time of the death of Agamemnon and Cassandra, the exile and return of Orestes, and the ensuing death of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus at his hands (17–37). Pindar then abruptly breaks off his concise and allusive account of the myth and confesses to having wandered in confusion from his proper course:

ἦρ', ὦ φίλοι, κατ' ἀμευσίπορον τρίοδον ἐδινάθην,
 ὀρθὰν κέλευθον ἰὼν
 τὸ πρὶν· ἢ μέ τις ἄνεμος ἔξω πλόου
 ἔβαλεν, ὥς ὅτ' ἄκατον ἐνναλίαν; (38–40)

While it is true that Pindar "abruptly" ends his story, it is obvious from the careful ring-composition of the myth-section, which he begins and ends with a reference to Orestes' sojourn in Phocis, that he has completed saying something that he deliberately intended to say.⁵ While his admission of confusion has, from the time of his scholiast on down, been taken at face value by many readers there have been those less literal-minded who have correctly acknowledged that he is actually resorting to a commonplace literary or rhetorical device here.⁶

⁴So, e.g., Bowra (above, note 3) 133 f.; Newman (above, note 3) 49 f.

⁵On the composition see Newman (above, note 3) 50 f.; Slater (above, note 3) 63–65.

⁶So Gildersleeve (above, note 2) 357; Young (above, note 1) 5; Newman (above, note 3) 55; Race (above, note 3) 5.

Bowra is among those who have attempted to uncover the rationale for the introduction of Orestes and his myth. To that end he adduces a fragment of the "Orestas" by the Theban poetess Corinna.⁷ It is a reasonable deduction that Orestes would have had some prominent role in a work bearing such a title, even though he does not figure in any of the few part-verses which survive. Since it is known, moreover, that Corinna had a predilection for treating Theban mythical themes in her poetry it is not implausible to conclude, as Bowra does, that Orestes had some role in Theban myth and, further, that it was such a role, well known to Thebans, which formed the main subject matter of the "Orestas." The same Theban affinities of Orestes would also have given Pindar justification for associating that hero with the other figures of Theban cult and for introducing him into the victory ode for a citizen of Thebes. Bowra also points out some definite, or possible, circumstantial similarities between the occasions for which Pindar's and Corinna's poems were composed. He further supports his theory by the fact that there is a strong Laconian flavor to this Theban poem as exemplified in the closing lines where the Theban hero Iolaus is juxtaposed with the Laconians Castor and Polydeuces. The Theban-Laconian axis so prominent in the poem could only be strengthened by the realization that the main mythical personage in the poem is both a Laconian and a Theban hero.

Bowra's suggestion seems to have won little favour, doubtless because it depends on something which Corinna *might* have written and on the reasons she *might* have had for doing so.⁸ But Pindar himself actually provides evidence, which Bowra did not acknowledge, to show that Orestes did have some place in the myth and cult of Thebes. In the following lines from the Eleventh Nemean Pindar refers to the ancestry of Aristagoras of Tenedos:

συμβαλεῖν μὰν εὐμαρές ἦν τό τε Πεισάνδρου πάλαι
αἶμ' ἀπὸ Σπάρτας,—'Αμύκλαθεν γὰρ ἔβα σὺν 'Ορέστᾳ,
Αἰολέων στρατιὰν χαλκευτέα δεῦρ' ἀνάγων,—
καὶ παρ' 'Ισμηνοῦ ῥοὰν κεκραμένον
ἐκ Μελανίπποιο μάτρωος·

(33–37)

The information in these lines can be supplemented by a fragment of Hellanicus' *Aeolica* which comes from a scholiast's comment on the Pindaric passage: οὗτος δέ, φησί, σὺν 'Ορέστῃ ἀπώικησεν ἐκ Σπάρτης καὶ τὴν Τένεδον κατώικησε· Τενέδιος γὰρ ὁ 'Αρισταγόρας. περὶ δέ τῆς 'Ορέστου εἰς τὴν Αἰολίδα ἀποικίας 'Ελλάνικος ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ περὶ Αἰολικῶν ἱστορήκεν. (*FGrHist* 4 F 32). This establishes the existence of a tradition according to which Orestes from Amyclae (precisely the same Laconian town with

⁷Bowra (above, note 3) 130–132; cf. his *Pindar* (Oxford 1964) 285.

⁸An additional objection might stem from the possibility of a Hellenistic dating for Corinna although Bowra does not posit her as Pindar's source and merely uses her as evidence of Orestes' Theban connections.

which he is associated in *Pyth.* 11) had been a leader of an expedition of Aeolians, an expedition which had connections with both Laconia and Thebes—specifically, in fact, with the Ismenos. Tzetzes, moreover, in his comments on Lycophron (1374), refers to a colonizing expedition to the same general area of Greece (to Lesbos) and says that Orestes, in response to an oracle which he received after the death of Aegisthus, led out the expedition after assembling Aeolians from a variety of places. Strabo (9.2.3) tells of Boeotians, originally from Thebes, participating in an Aeolian expedition which departed from Aulis under the leadership of the sons of Orestes.⁹ Since there was, then, a Theban episode of some sort in the career of Orestes, and since that episode formed a sequel to the last event in his career to be mentioned in the Eleventh Pythian (i.e., the death of Aegisthus), Bowra's hypothesis about the status of Orestes in Thebes can be substantiated without invoking Corinna at all.

Where the Theban-Laconian connections are concerned, Bowra's case might actually be strengthened further by several indications of a more complex web of reciprocal associations. Throughout the poem the prophetic role of Apollo and his favorites and associates on the heroic level (e.g., Melia, Cassandra) is prominent.¹⁰ It was at Apollo's festival that Thrasydaeus won his victory and it is Delphi that is to be praised in the ode (9 f.). When the poet summons the heroines to the prophetic shrine at Thebes—that is to the local shrine of the Delphic god¹¹—one of those whom he names is Ino. That Theban heroine also had Laconian associations, for she possessed an oracular shrine at a place called Thalamae where she was identified, or confused, with a divinity named Pasiphae. This Pasiphae was in turn identified with Cassandra, the daughter of Priam, who was said to possess that same shrine whence, after her death, she dispensed prophecies.¹² The prophetess Cassandra is of course prominent in the myth of the Eleventh Pythian and Pindar, as Newman has pointed out, while singing of the prophetess (μάντιν, 33) has planted a verbal reminiscence of his own earlier reference to the Ismenion as a seat of prophecy (μαντίων, 6).¹³ By evoking an association of the Ismenion and the Theban heroine Ino with the Laconian Ino-Pasiphae-Cassandra Pindar forges yet another link

⁹On these and other passages dealing with Orestes' participation in Aeolian colonization see F. Cassola, *La Ionia nel mondo miceneo* (Naples 1957) 79 f., 119 f. On the Aeolians as Thebans see also schol. Dion. Perieg. 820.

¹⁰Newman, (above, note 3) 51, points out verbal echoes that connect Cassandra with the heroines of the invocation.

¹¹On the nature of the relationship between Delphi and the Theban Ismenion see Defradas (above, note 2) 61.

¹²See Plut. *Agis* 9; Paus. 3.26.1 with the note *ad loc.* in J. G. Frazer, *Pausanias's Description of Greece* 3 (London 1913) 400 f.; J. Davreux, *La légende de la prophétesse Cassandre d'après les textes et les monuments* (Paris 1942) 93.

¹³Newman (above, note 3) 51.

between Thebes and Laconia through Delphi. Now the modern reader can best become aware of such mythic links and associations by poring over philological reference works, while the process was direct and instantaneous for a poet and audience conversant with a full range of the traditional material pertaining to the cults and legends of their heroes and heroines. And so the Theban figures of the first part of the poem are counterpoised against, and thereby compared or identified with, Laconian figures who are introduced subsequently. Some, notably the protagonist of the myth, belong to both locations. Thus, in introducing Laconian Orestes right after the catalogue of Theban heroines, the poet is using him as a salient feature of a general pattern of associations which he sustains throughout the ode. All of this, however, is not to suggest that the Theban-Laconian connection provides the sole basis for the relevance of Orestes in the poem.

Bowra, like many before him and several after him, taking note of the poet's deprecatory remarks on tyranny, attempts to establish the further relevance of Orestes and his family by means of facts or suppositions regarding the political sympathies, personal attitudes, and recent experiences of the poet in relation to tyrants or tyranny.¹⁴ The antidote to such heavy reliance on personal biographical matters appeared in 1968 in the form of D. C. Young's essay, which must be viewed as a watershed in the critical literature on the ode. Young argues, largely on the basis of *topoi* that appear only in allusive or partial form in the Eleventh Pythian itself, but in greater detail elsewhere in Greek poetry, that the myth of the family of Orestes as recounted here is in fact paradigmatic to the sentiments expressed later in the poem (53 ff.) on the evils of tyranny as opposed to the virtues and advantages of the middle estate.¹⁵ In Young's view Orestes and his family represent the former (i.e., the evils of tyranny) in contrast to Thrasydaeus and his family who represent the latter (i.e., the middle estate). Even so, the apparently awkward manner in which Orestes is introduced in the first place—through the use of what Young, after Méautis, refers to as the "geographical subterfuge"¹⁶—remains problematic. By means of this "subterfuge" Pylades' homeland becomes an artificial link between Orestes and Thrasydaeus. Young speaks of the myth as being "formally somewhat inconvenient," and elsewhere, conceding the basic irrelevance of Orestes himself to Thrasydaeus' immediate circumstances as Pythian victor, he suggests that Pindar "adamantly" used the reference anyway as an expedient means of making the transition to that part of the myth which really was appropriate to his purposes.¹⁷

¹⁴Bowra (above, note 3) 135–139.

¹⁵Young (above, note 1) 10–24. On this point cf. now Pavese (above, note 3) 249.

¹⁶Young (above, note 1) 4: G. Méautis, *Pindare le dorien* (Paris and Neuchâtel 1962) 264.

¹⁷Young (above, note 1) 4, 17.

I would suggest, however, that the introduction of Orestes is not really as abrupt as it has always been assumed to be, and that it does not depend solely on the geographical references, nor even on the Theban associations of Orestes noted above. The poet makes it clear in his invocation to the heroines of Thebes that they are to sing the praises of Delphi when they assemble in the Ismenion:

ὄφρα θέμιν ἱερὰν Πυθῶνά τε καὶ ὀρθοδίκαν
γὰς ὀμφαλὸν κελαδήσεται' (9–10)

Only then, only after he has used the rare adjective *ὀρθοδίκας* to describe Delphi, does he mention Thrasydaeus and his accomplishments there. Since he has in fact described Delphi in such terms, and since the assemblage is to sing the praises of Delphi, the audience could reasonably expect some reference to a specific deed or event exemplifying Delphi's function as an arbiter of justice. It is difficult to think of an example of this function more celebrated and significant than Pythian Apollo's involvement in the slaying of Clytemnestra by Orestes. The adjective *ὀρθοδίκας*, then, anticipates the myth that comes a few verses later and renders the progression to that myth smooth and natural.¹⁸ This view of course depends on the conviction that the actions of Orestes in the myth are to be viewed as just,¹⁹ contrary to Young *et al.* who view the myth of Orestes as a *contrarium paradigma*.²⁰ It would, however, defy reason to have the poet refer to Delphi as *ὀρθοδίκας* (a variant, be it noted, of the very adjective used by Aeschylus at *Eumenides* 994 to describe the city of Athens, whose citizens have just acquitted Orestes) and to proceed to relate a myth demonstrating reprehensible conduct on the part of one of Delphi's most favored protégés.²¹ The literary and mythographical tradition outside of Pindar, moreover, is consistent in presenting Orestes' slaying of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra as honourable and just, or at worst as morally ambiguous, having both a good and bad aspect. One inevitably concludes, therefore, that Pindar is being true to his own expressed assessment of Delphi and to prevailing tradition in presenting Orestes' case as an illustration of the justice of Delphi. Pindar does deplore the lot of the tyrant later on in the poem, but it hardly follows from this that Orestes is meant as a representative of the class of tyrants. Certainly his mother and Aegisthus are, and

¹⁸Cf. Bowra (above, note 3) 134; *Pindar* 154.

¹⁹Cf. J. D. Denniston, ed., *Euripides Electra* (Oxford 1939) xi; Wilamowitz (above, note 3) 261; L. Illig, *Zur Form der Pindarischen Erzählung* (Berlin 1932) 96.

²⁰The term is from one of the earliest proponents of the view: L. Dissen, *Pindari carmina quae supersunt* (Gotha and Erford 1830) 348. Cf. Young (above, note 3) 19 f.; Newman (above, note 3) *passim*; Race (above, note 3) 5; F. J. Nisetich, trans., *Pindar's Victory Songs* (Baltimore & London 1980) 47 ff.

²¹On the close associations between Orestes and Delphic Apollo see Defradas (above, note 2) 160 ff.

Agamemnon probably is too. All three of these had a hand in the death of the prophetess Cassandra (19 ff. and 33). Orestes, by contrast, is the one who puts an end to tyranny in his homeland by disposing of those who had been a threat to him as an infant. He does so after coming back from Phocis and with the approbation of Delphi which, while explicit elsewhere, must be implicit in the Eleventh Pythian. The myth of the Eleventh Pythian, in presenting both laudable and reprehensible members of successive generations of the same family, is in a way analogous to the myth of the First Olympian, which features both Tantalus and Pelops. In that poem the victor is praised by association with the righteous favorite of the gods, Pelops, in contrast to the impious Tantalus, while here in the Eleventh Pythian the victor is honored by association with the righteous Orestes in contrast to Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus, all of whom are described in pejorative terms by Pindar. In the First Olympian of course Pelops, as the heroic counterpart of the victor, has a very specific connection with him inasmuch as the hero was himself a victor at Olympia in the distant past. An analogous connection between victor and mythic hero, I shall argue below, may also be present in the Pythian ode under discussion here.²²

William Slater has also addressed the issue of Orestes' relevance from another perspective. Noting the occurrence of *ξένος* at line 16 and again at line 34, i.e., at the beginning and end of the myth-section of the ode, he concludes that the significant positioning of the word in the structure of the myth-section and the poem as a whole indicates the importance of the concept of *xenia* in the poem and that it is on this that the relevance of the myth largely depends. Slater argues that Thrasydaeus, in accordance with the traditional ceremonies involving Pythian victors, was received formally as a *xenos* at Delphi. In this he would correspond to Orestes who had been received as a *xenos* by Strophios.²³ While this provides a partial solution to the problem of relevance it still leaves some questions unanswered. If indeed Pindar's myth is so suitable an example of Delphic justice and an appropriate paradigm for a contemporary recipient of Delphic favor, why must the poet protest at 38 ff. that he has strayed from his course? Could his patron and audience have perceived both the relevance of what he has said and the point of his protest unless there really was an alternative course that he might have followed? Was there, in other words, something which he did not write but which was at least equally pertinent to the occasion and perhaps more consistent with the expectations of those who had come to hear a victory ode for Thrasydaeus? Certainly our knowledge of the total

²²For other analogies between *Olymp.* 1 and *Pyth.* 11 see Slater (above, note 3) 63–65; Newman (above, note 3) 63.

²³Slater (above, note 3) 66–68. Cf. Newman (above, note 3) 51.

corpus of traditions pertaining to Orestes is imperfect²⁴ and, as we have already observed in connection with the Eleventh Nemean, Pindar is himself quite capable of making a reference to an incident in Orestes' career which must have been of considerable significance to the patron and audience even though it would, save for its presence in that one poem, be altogether unknown to us. We also know that Pindar, being a lyric poet, habitually leaves much unstated in his presentation of a myth, and so his fleeting allusions are often at least as significant as his full statements. Hence it is entirely probable that some of the relevance of Orestes lies in part of his myth which Pindar does not actually narrate but which he could expect his audience to know and, under the circumstances, to associate with the character and occasion of his poem. Now the occasion of the poem involves a Pythian victory-celebration and the main mythological figure in the poem is Orestes. As it happens, there is a passage in which Orestes has a definite connection with Pythian athletic victories.

In Sophocles' *Electra* the pedagogue relates a detailed account of the athletic achievements of Orestes in the Pythian games (680–783). According to this report, Orestes won every one of the foot-racing events in the games before meeting his death while excelling in the chariot race. Orestes, like Thrasydaeus, was a youth at the time; he was victorious in the same event as Thrasydaeus and at the same festival. All of this took place, moreover, while he was a guest in the homeland of Pylades, precisely the location which Pindar uses to introduce Orestes into his ode for Thrasydaeus. What more suitable mythic paradigm could we hope to find, then, for the historical Pythian victor? Although the story's presentation as a deliberate fabrication in the *Electra* suggests that it might have been an *ad hoc* invention of the tragedian's, the account is elaborated in greater detail than necessary for its dramatic function in the particular context. Furthermore, the story would hardly have had much dramatic plausibility if Orestes the athlete had been newly created for this specific episode. For such reasons as these, and with no reference to our Pindaric passage, I. M. Linforth argued that Sophocles adapted an existing tradition of Orestes the great Pythian athlete.²⁵ Others, again without any consideration of the Eleventh Pythian, have shown that Orestes, as we have come to know him from surviving Greek literature, is the composite of several figures with the same name. Prominent among them are the Argive (or, for the present purposes, the Argive-Laconian) Orestes and the Phocian Orestes, many of whose

²⁴On parts of the Orestes legend which, once prominent and well known, have survived only vestigially in our documents, see M. I. Davies, "Thoughts on the *Oresteia* before Aeschylus," *BCH* 93 (1969) 214–260.

²⁵I. M. Linforth, "Electra's Day in the Tragedy of Sophocles," *Cal. Publ. Cl. Phil.* 19 (1963) 99.

attributes and exploits have been merged by the fifth century. One consequence of the amalgamation is that the story of the Argive hero's exile in Phocis (as opposed to the Athens of the *Odyssey*) provides the formal means of reconciling and merging two distinct traditions regarding Orestes' homeland.²⁶ Feats of prowess in the Pythian games are decidedly appropriate to a Phocian hero,²⁷ particularly since some events in the Pythian games were always held in the Crisaeian plain and Delphi itself was part of Phocian territory until the First Sacred War.²⁸ Indeed Apollo himself was said to have first established his shrine in Crisaeian territory (*Hom. Hymn* 1.282). The association of Orestes with Phocis was preserved by virtue of becoming part of the legend of the Argive Orestes although many elements of the Phocian Orestes legend, like most of the earlier local lore,²⁹ did not find a place in the mainstream of literary tradition after the First Sacred War.

It does appear, though, that there is another reminiscence of Orestes as an athlete in Phocis in a passage of Seneca's *Agamemnon*. There Strophius, in the course of his homeward journey after winning the chariot race in the Olympic games, receives the infant Orestes from Electra and, with the following words, gives him the emblems of Olympic victory as an omen of his own future success.

*Cape hoc decorum ludicri certaminis,
insigne frontis: laeva victricem tenens
frondem virenti protegat ramo caput,
et ista donum palma Pisaei Iovis
velamen eadem praestet atque omen tibi.* (935-939)

Why does Seneca introduce these particular details here? It is improbable that both Seneca and Sophocles, independently and for different purposes, should give the hero athletic/agonistic attributes without having any authority for this in the received tradition. What is more likely is that in presenting the story of Strophius' Olympic victory and his passing the trophies on to Orestes Seneca is the sole witness for a part of the legend of Strophius, Pylades, and Orestes which had to do with the athletic career of Orestes, an aspect of which career Sophocles has also attested to. By his gesture of good will, then, Strophius presages the future athletic successes of Orestes.

I suggest, accordingly, that a tradition related to the Sophoclean pedagogue's account of Orestes' Pythian victories is one thing that Pindar had in mind

²⁶See J. Fontenrose, *The Cult and Myth of Pyrrhos at Delphi* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1960) 227 f. and 248, with earlier literature cited there.

²⁷Cf. Wilamowitz (above, note 3) 260.

²⁸See G. Forrest, "The First Sacred War," *BCH* 80 (1956) 51. Cf. Fontenrose (above, note 26) 222.

²⁹Cf. W. G. Forrest, "Colonisation and the Rise of Delphi," *Historia* 6 (1957) 171.

when he introduced Orestes into the Eleventh Pythian.³⁰ Since, as Sophocles tells us, Orestes' prowess was shown both in the foot races and in the chariot race he would have had an even closer correspondence with Thrasydaeus and his family who, as Pindar tells us (46 ff.), were also victorious in those events at one time or another. In view of the Senecan passage, which presents both Strophius and his foster son in an athletic context, it might also be germane to note that the victories of Thrasydaeus and his family which are referred to in this ode belong to two or three generations and were won in both Olympic and Pythian games. Like the victories won by Orestes and his foster-father, moreover, those won by Thrasydaeus and his forebears involved two separate events: chariot-racing and foot-racing. The correspondences between Orestes as athlete and Thrasydaeus thus become more precise and detailed.

On the strength of the foregoing I now offer the following summary reading of lines 1–40 of the Eleventh Pythian. The opening lines, with the invocation of the local heroines, are not only appropriate for a Theban victor and his celebration, they also serve as an introduction to a set of verbal and thematic correspondences which link the various parts of the poem together. These correspondences will establish the importance of such things as the theme of Apolline prophecy and guidance and the mythic-cultic links between Thebes and Laconia with their mutual Delphic associations. Since it is to a prophetic shrine of Ismenian Apollo that the heroines are summoned, there is a strong connection with Delphi and Apollo established in lines 6–10. Delphi is in fact to be honored itself on the occasion (9 f.), and so the connection is rendered clear and unambiguous by this early reference. The adjective used to describe Delphi (i.e., *ὀρθοδίκας*) anticipates the myth which follows and which in turn lends substance to the adjective. Once having mentioned the local Apolline shrine in Thebes and having followed with the reference to Delphi, the poet strengthens the link between the two places by means of the person of Thrasydaeus, who is on

³⁰Cf. Bowra, *Pindar* 165, who seems to have something like this in mind when he says that Pindar "connects the Pythian Games with Pylades and Orestes." These could not of course be the historical Pythian games which were inaugurated in the early 6th century, and so Orestes' relationship to those games would be analogous to that of Heracles or Pelops to the historical Olympic games. There are indications of games prior to the first Sacred War (testimonia conveniently assembled and discussed by T. J. Cadoux, "The Athenian Archons from Kreon to Hysichides," *JHS* 68 [1948] 71 ff. and 99 f.). The earliest witnesses (Demetrius Phalereus, *FGrHist* 228 F 32; *Marm. Par.* ep. 38) refer simply to an *agon*, whereas others specify that the original contest was only citharodic (Strabo 9.3.10; schol. Pind., *hyp. Pyth.*, 1 ff. Drachmann; Paus. 10.7.2). Orestes' associations would not have been with the citharodic competition at Delphi proper but with early athletic contests held in the plain of Crisa—Pindar's "rich fields of Pylades"—where the athletic events of the later Pythian games were still being held in the time of Pindar and Thrasydaeus, as witness *Pyth.* 8.19 and 10.15. Cf. J. G. Frazer, *Pausanias' Description of Greece* 5 (London 1913) 458 (on Paus. 10.37.4).

the one hand a native and resident of Thebes about to be fêted at the local shrine, and on the other hand a victor in the games at Delphi. The reference to his Pythian victory naturally involves naming its location. The victory and its locale in turn lead to the mention of Orestes, a famous victor at the same location in the heroic past. This hero also has mythic and cultic associations with Thebes and Laconia as well as with Delphi. The mention of his name under the particular circumstances is calculated to evoke in the minds of the Theban audience thoughts of Orestes' local affinities and his Pythian athletic victories.³¹ Having aroused such thoughts, however, the poet pursues another course and sings of the tyrannical, adulterous, homicidal, and ruinous family of Orestes. He tells too of how Orestes returned from Phocis (which then included Delphi) and brought to an end the tyranny and the cycle of retributive murders. The poet does not say as much, but the adjective *ὀρθοδίκας* carries the inference that Orestes was acting with Delphic approbation and guidance and is thus an exemplar of Delphic justice.

By reciting this particular myth with its culmination in Orestes' tyrannicide Pindar accommodates the requirements of a celebration in which Delphi is to be praised. The same celebration involved the praise of Thrasydaeus, and any myth demonstrating the guiding justice of the institution which had awarded him his victory must have some encomiastic value for the victor as well. Still, the audience, with Thrasydaeus' athletic victory in mind, could reasonably expect to hear something else about Orestes; specifically something about his prowess in the Pythian games or about his part in the religious and political pre-history of Thebes. As if suddenly realizing that he has inadvertently failed to honour those expectations, the poet interrupts himself and apologizes for having strayed from the course. This apology is a rhetorical ploy such as is frequently used by Greek poets and orators to provide an ostensible excuse for an excursus that is really quite deliberate and calculated.³² When he says that he was set awirl at the fork of the interchanging roads (38) he means something to the effect that, having introduced Orestes at the beginning of the myth-

³¹R. Hamilton, *Epinikion: General Form in the Odes of Pindar* (The Hague 1974) 63 says that the linking of Pylades with Orestes would probably "suggest to the audience that the matricide will be the subject of the myth." That of course is the subject actually presented, but I would argue that it need not be the first or only subject to occur to an audience hearing the names of Pylades and Orestes in a Phocian context and in an epinician ode.

³²For other examples and discussion see Race (above, note 3) esp. 5 f. where he cites as another Pindaric instance the first 6 lines of the Tenth Pythian. Also, Professor Emmet Robbins points out to me that there is a parallel at the end of the Tenth Pythian (51 ff.) where Pindar, again using a nautical metaphor as he does at *Pyth.* 11.39 f., abruptly breaks off a mythic passage to get back to the praise of the victor. For one expression of the view that Pindar's protest in the Eleventh Pythian is to be taken literally see J. H. Finley, *Pindar and Aeschylus* (Cambridge, Mass. 1955) 164.

section, he switched on to the path dealing with the matricide, etc., and away from the one dealing with his athletic accomplishments. Despite the real purpose and relevance which we have recognized in the story he has just told, it is the latter path which would have been appropriate to the praise of the victories of Thrasydaeus and his father, the subject to which he now reverts (43–50). Thus the myth and figure of Orestes in this poem are plurivalent, as might be expected in an ode which itself has more than one purpose.

(1) As the slayer of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and the protégé of Delphic Apollo he exemplifies Delphic justice.

(2) As a Theban and a Laconian hero with Delphic associations he is the central figure in a major theme of the poem, i.e., the mythic and cultic (mainly Apolline) affinities of Thebes with Laconia.³³

(3) As a heroic victor in the Pythian games and as a member of a family with athletic successes in both equestrian and foot-racing events at both Delphi and Olympia he is a fitting encomiastic paradigm for Thrasydaeus.

(4) As the just anti-tyrant he might have had some paradigmatic function relevant to contemporary politics affecting the poet, his patron, and/or his city.³⁴

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

³³One of the anonymous readers of this article, noting the traditional opposition of the Laconian descendants of Orestes to the Heraclids and Theban Aegeids (cf. *Pyth.* 1.62–66 and *Isth.* 7.12 ff.), suggests that the Theban-Laconian link might have had some special significance for the family of Thrasydaeus as opposed to Thebans in general. I would here record my gratitude for this and many other helpful suggestions and stimulating criticisms from the *Phoenix* referees.

³⁴I would not claim to have recognized or explored all the points of reference which the myth had. It is nowadays out of vogue to interpret the poem by means of personal or political circumstances affecting the poet. While, on balance, this is the healthy result of reaction against the excesses of earlier critical speculation I would not like to preclude the possibility that current or recent events bearing upon Thebes, Thrasydaeus, or Pindar might have lent further significance to the myth. On the problem in general as it affects Pindaric criticism cf. the remarks of H. Lloyd-Jones, "Modern Interpretation of Pindar: the Second Pythian and Seventh Nemean Odes," *JHS* 93 (1973) 117. For suggestions as to how the content of *Pyth.* 11 relates to contemporary events in Thebes see now Gentili (above, note 3) 154; J. K. Newman, "Pindar, Solon and Jealousy: Political Vocabulary in the Eleventh Pythian," *Illinois Classical Studies* 7 (1982) 189–195.