

## Reciprocity, Poetry, and Truth in Pindar's *Nemean 5*

Early in his ode for the Aeginetan victor, Pytheas, Pindar abruptly breaks off his introduction of the island's heroic ancestors, the Aiakidai, to voice his hesitation "to tell something great and not ventured justly" (μέγα εἰπεῖν ἐν δίκῃ τε μὴ κεκινδυνευμένον, 13). He subsequently resolves to go no further and provides a justificatory *gnome* on the occasional value of silence over truth (ἀλάθεια, 16-18). However, as all commentators note, Pindar has already made it perfectly clear in the preceding lines *which* story he is not telling: the killing of one brother (Phokos) by the others (Peleus and Telamon). The problem of this particularly present absence has prompted a variety of interpretive solutions, from suggestions that Pindar for some reason actually was obliged to mention the murder (Bowra 1964, Gärtner 1978) to the idea that Pindar's *praeteritio* contains a veiled political message (Cole 1992, Pfeijffer 1999).

In this paper, I argue that the break-off should be read within the context of the programmatic concern with praise poetry established in the ode's famous opening (in which the poet distinguishes his dynamic song from the "idle statues," of sculptors, 1-2). Additionally, drawing on Kurke 1991, I illustrate how Pindar locates this praise program within a broader network of reciprocal exchange, so that Pytheas's victory is not just compensated by Pindar's song but itself represents a recompense paid to his ancestors, the Aiakidai. Ultimately, it is this interwoven reciprocal bond that the crime of Peleus and Telamon violates. At the same time, Pindar's break-off highlights not just this violation but the tension between the praise poet's generic obligation and the demands of truth. Consequently, my reading of *Nemean 5* challenges the argument of Park 2013 that Pindar harmonizes the reciprocal obligation of praise with truth. Instead, I argue that both the ode's greatest wrongdoings and their resolution are not matters of falsity or truth but of fidelity (or lack thereof) to reciprocal obligation. So Peleus's brutal

violation of fraternal obligation is answered in the second myth by his upholding of ξενία. There, although he triumphs over the lying Hippolyta, it is not telling the truth that saves him from her machinations but Zeus *Xenios*, who recognizes Peleus's resistance to the sexual advances of his host's wife. What's more, as Hubbard 1985 notes, the poetic means that Pindar employs throughout do not resemble the "unswerving" directness of truth but the agile, intricately constructed deceits of Hippolyta. Thus the true brother, wife, and ξένοσ, not the true account, represent the ode's ideal. The fact that Pindar should highlight, rather than conceal, this disconnect between reciprocity and truth, while simultaneously accomplishing his praise of Pytheas, provides a compelling illustration of the unparalleled agility he claims for his poetry in the poem's opening image.

#### Bibliography

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