Name Replacement as a Stylistic Device in Pindar's Epinician Odes

Pindar's language is often described as complex and intentionally obscure. One of the principal features of his style – one which has not received its fair share of scholarly attention – is the substitution of proper names of persons and sites in favour of elaborate replacements. This is achieved by a variety of means: periphrasis, metonymy, metaphor and comparison, among others. Thus, to cite two clear examples, Pindar refers to the gods as Ὀλύμπου σκοποὶ (*Ol*. 1. 40) and to the Delphic oracle as μυχόν… μαντήϊον (*Pyth*. 5. 68-69). The objects of name replacements are sometimes not referred to by their actual name in the entire ode, while elsewhere the name does appear before or after, but not in the same sentence as the name replacement.

I argue that this stylistic feature plays a vital role in Pindar's poetics and that, far from constituting mere decoration and a vehicle for *variation* (cf. Dornseiff 1921, 29–32), it is structurally, stylistically and thematically effective. I shall argue my case by looking into:

1. The structure of the ode

2. Contrasts

3. The theme of ancestry and hereditary virtue

First, I argue that Pindar makes abundant use of name replacements to support the structure of his odes, concentrating particularly on how he uses name replacements to enhance ring composition, which is one of his favourite structural and organizational patterns (cf. Greengard 1980).

A good example of name replacement reinforcing ring composition is found in Pindar's "Little Oresteia" (*Pyth*. 11. 17–37), which recounts Agamemnon's death and Orestes' subsequent revenge. The first verse of the myth relates the death of Agamemnon by naming him through a

periphrasis as Orestes' "father" (17 φονευομένου πατρὸς, "when his father was killed"), while the last verse, which refers to Clytemnestra's murder, reports that Orestes killed his "mother" (37 ματέρα θῆκέ, "he murdered his mother"). Thus, these two name replacements, through their reference to family ("mother" and "father"), stress the parricidal nature of the crimes, and also create a ring composition which points to the circularity of crimes in the house of Atreus (cf. Finglass 2007).

Second, I argue that Pindar highlights the oppositions and the contrasts, that are very common in his work, by means of name replacements.

A familiar type of contrast in Pindar's poetry is the one between the fragile mortals and the powerful, immortal gods. For example, *Pyth.* 3 recounts how Cadmus and Peleus once seemed to have reached the pinnacle of human happiness, since they had married goddesses and gods attended their wedding – but their happiness is short-lived, as Pindar narrates, since the children of both met tragic ends. Cadmus and Peleus are referred to as βροτῶν ὄλβον ὑπέρτατον οἳ σχεῖν (88-89 "those who have attained the highest prosperity among mortals"), while, in opposition, the gods who attended their wedding are mentioned as θεοὶ (93 "gods") and Κρόνου παῖδας (94). Therefore, we see that name replacements, by introducing mortals and gods as such, reinforce the contrast which is the point of the narrative.

Finally, Pindar also uses name replacements to enhance some of the most important themes of his poetry, such as the theme of ancestry and the transmission of hereditary virtue. A remarkable example of this tendency are those instances where paternal and maternal periphrases are combined to give someone's complete parentage (we might call this a "full parentage motif"), usually in order to show noble ancestry on both sides. For instance, in *Pyth.* 4, Pindar

refers to Pelias as Τυροῦς ἐρασιπλοκάμου γενεά (136) in the scope of the narrative, while shortly thereafter Jason, in direct speech addresses him as παῖ Ποσειδᾶνος Πετραίου (138).

An interesting example is the centaur Chiron, son of Philyra and Cronos, for whom the full parentage motif is frequently employed. It was particularly important to stress Chiron's full lineage in order to separate him from other centaurs (who were descended from Ixion's impious relationship to Nephele), but also from that other son of Cronos, i.e. Zeus. This potentially confusing overlap is put to a humorous effect in an excursus in *Pyth*. 6. where Chiron is first referred to as Φιλύρας υἱὸν (22 "son of Philyra"), which is followed in the very next line by the mention of Κρονίδαν (23 "son of Cronos"), inducing the reader to think of Chiron and the full parentage motif – before the following line (24) brings the twist, revealing that in fact Zeus was meant by Κρονίδαν.

In conclusion, this presentation will show that name replacements are an important device in Pindar's poetic arsenal and that they are used for multiple purposes with great subtlety and variation.

Bibliography

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