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## **Praise Poetry in Distress? Melancholy and Criticism in Pindar's *Isthmian 7***

*I am revisiting the old interpretation of Isthmian 7 by A. Boeckh as a melancholy piece and its refutation by D. C. Young. Three passages of Isthmian 7 are analysed and it is found that there is good reason to hold on to Boeckh's idea of melancholy. In the following, I am asking what premises could give a unified picture of the ode that we have, and I offer two possibilities: either the ode was presented under conditions of crisis for a victory in sports – a personal crisis of Strepsiades and his family or of the nation of Thebes – and therefore had to be a vindication of the victor rather than praise, or the role of the victor's uncle has been misunderstood in the past and he is not only a fallen warrior but also a cult hero, like B. Currie has suggested, changing our understanding of the ode gravely.*

**Keywords:** A. Boeckh; B. G. F. Currie; hero cult; *Isthmian 7*; Pindar; Thebes; Tyrtaeus; D. C. Young.

### **1. Introduction**

When Pindar writes an epinicion on Strepsiades of Thebes for a victory in the pancratium at the Isthmian Games<sup>1</sup>, he praises the past but seems to have difficulties to say anything nice about the present. The poem begins with a long passage of memories long gone of earlier glories of the city of Thebes: What did Theba like best? The conception of Dionysus, or Zeus' other famous fling, or Tiresias' wisdom? Or rather the participation of the Theban Aegeids in Sparta's war against Amyclae?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pind. *I.* 7. The date is impossible to determine; David YOUNG refutes earlier efforts to determine the date of composition for the Isthmian Games after the battle at Oenophyta 457 at 454 (1971: 3–14), see also below.

<sup>2</sup> Pind. *I.* 7, 1–15.

Whichever one it is, even those precious memories of a better (mythical) past slowly fade away in the present, unless a poet reminds you of them.<sup>3</sup> A little later Pindar recalls Strepsiadēs' homonymous uncle, who recently died in battle, which prompts the chorus to exclaim their pain.<sup>4</sup> And even when the same chorus expresses their relief, it is in the face of the 'envy of the immortals' (φθόνοϲ ἀθανάτων) that they expect to lead a life in sincerity to its full measure, now that the battle is over.<sup>5</sup>

*Isthmian 7* is a strange victory ode. Even if this poem of praise can be understood as uplifting in its totality by showing the lustre of Strepsiadēs' victory in the tradition of the heroic deeds of the past, it is against the backdrop of a gloomy present reality. This has often led modern interpreters to perceive the piece as (also) fundamentally melancholic.<sup>6</sup> In this paper I will revisit the different readings the apparently gloomy reality in *Isthmian 7* has provoked in earlier scholarship, and also those interpretations that decide to ignore it. Starting from here, I will take another thorough look at the relevant passages and capture what exactly makes *Isthmian 7* appear melancholic or overly critical of its victor. In the end I will present two very different interpretations based on earlier scholarship that are both able to unite apparent incongruencies of the ode into a meaningful whole. In order to gain an overview over melancholy and criticism in *Isthmian 7*, a brief review of the relevant scholarship shall begin the study.

## 2. *Isthmian 7* under scrutiny

The latest monograph to study *Isthmian 7* as a whole is David C. Young's study in the Mnemosyne-series from 1971. Bruno Currie dedicates a chapter in his study on Pindar and hero cult to the ode,<sup>7</sup> but as his focus is primarily on the possible heroization of the elder Strepsia-

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<sup>3</sup> Pind. *I.* 7, 16–19.

<sup>4</sup> Pind. *I.* 7, 25; 37. The choral I in this passage does not seem to reflect Pindar's personal feeling and involvement but rather the one of the chorus, maybe representing the general public; cf. YOUNG (1971: 23–24) and also below.

<sup>5</sup> Pind. *I.* 7, 39–42.

<sup>6</sup> BOECKH (1821: 531), WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORFF (1922: 413), FARNELL (1930–1932: I 277–281), BOWRA (1964: 153–154).

<sup>7</sup> CURRIE (2005: 205–225).

des, it cannot replace Young's monograph as a coherent interpretation of the entire ode – I will come back to an interpretation of Currie at the end of the paper, though. Although Young seems to be curiously disinterested in the apparent melancholy of the piece, he acknowledges his forebears who had built their interpretation of *Isthmian 7* on the sombre impression they took from it. Young's comprehensive study is therefore also the latest overview over the earlier scholarship on melancholy in *Isthmian 7*.<sup>8</sup>

But to turn to the very beginning first, one has to look at August Boeckh's extensive interpretation also concerning melancholy that was published in his Latin commentaries to Pindar in 1821. Boeckh makes a complicated historical-logical argument that *Isthmian 7* must have been presented after the battle at Oenophyta in 457 between Thebes and Athens.<sup>9</sup> One of Boeckh's points is the *universae odae color*<sup>10</sup>, which he determines to be so gloomy that the ode can only have been presented in Thebes shortly after a Theban defeat. C. M. Bowra, as Young rightly observed,<sup>11</sup> follows Boeckh's historical interpretation in his influential introduction to Pindar from 1964.<sup>12</sup> Also Bowra detects a restrained feeling of desperation in the ode.<sup>13</sup> One would think that Bowra too found the ode to be surprisingly bleak, even though he sees its eventual function as uplifting.<sup>14</sup> More than forty years earlier, also Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff had shared this sentiment; he connected the

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<sup>8</sup> YOUNG (1971).

<sup>9</sup> BOECKH (1821: 530–534), cf. YOUNG (1971: 1–4).

<sup>10</sup> BOECKH (1821: 531).

<sup>11</sup> YOUNG (1971: 2).

<sup>12</sup> BOWRA (1964: 152–154). BOWRA makes little adjustments to BOECKH's view: the mention of the Aegeids, Pind. *I.* 7, 15, is to him a sign that Pindar still cherished Sparta, contra BOECKH (1821: 532).

<sup>13</sup> BOWRA (1964: 153–154): ‚Pindar's own feelings are expressed with restraint as befits what should be a feeling of rejoicing. [...] there was no reason for Pindar to introduce too dark a mood into a song of praise. He then shows that he has come to terms with himself and his circumstances. He accepts what the gods give and still has his rich consolations.’

<sup>14</sup> See particularly 350–351: ‚It is a message of courage and cheer.’ but also ‚the fierce facts of the present’ and ‚he must not hope for too much’; BOWRA concludes: ‚the variety of his moods is greater.’

gloominess he perceived like Boeckh with the Theban defeat and even compared the mood of the ode – of present sorrow but with hope for revenge and ultimate justice – with the mood of Germans after the First World War.<sup>15</sup> The perception of the dark mood of the ode is expressed most clearly in Lewis R. Farnell's 1932 annotations to *Isthmian 7*, where he speaks of 'the spirit of sorrow and resignation that breathes in parts of it'.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from hinting at the *color* of the ode, August Boeckh also interpreted several elements of the poem in close relationship to its supposed historical context: he saw the mention of the Aegeids and the battle of Amyclae (12–15), together with the following gnome about the forgetfulness of the mortals (16–17) as a comment on Sparta's recent lack of gratitude when it had abandoned the allied Theban armies to their Athenian foes.<sup>17</sup> This stretched interpretation forms the foundation of Boeckh's historical contextualisation while seeming at the same time highly dependent on it, like David Young remarks: 'He obviously cared more for Oenophyta than for simple logic', and later: 'Boeckh selected Oenophyta before coming to his conclusion [...]'<sup>18</sup> David Young refutes Boeckh's historical interpretation, which has been passed down in the older scholarship, also in other places: verse 36, which Boeckh and his followers had read as talking about defeat, must talk of successful fighting when compared with Tyrtaeus' Nr. 9;<sup>19</sup> πένθος in verse 37 does not need to refer to universal mourning like Boeckh had suggested, but can simply refer to the individual mourning of the death of Strepsiadēs,

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<sup>15</sup> WILAMOWITZ–MOELLENDORFF (1922: 413): [WILAMOWITZ–MOELLENDORFF is sketching the mood in lived speech:] „Theben, unser großes Theben, ist niedergeschlagen; [...] aber in tiefer Seele bergen wir den Glauben an Epigonen [...] und auf [sic!] den Glauben an Gerechtigkeit des Weltlaufes.“ An einem solchen Liede kann unsereins sich trösten.' (“Thebes, our great Thebes, is crushed; [...] but deep in our souls we conserve the belief in epigones [...] and the belief in justice of the course of the world.” In a song like this people like us can find consolation.)

<sup>16</sup> FARNELL (1930–1932: I 277–281).

<sup>17</sup> BOECKH (1821: 531). This interpretation is said to go back to Aristarchus by the scholiast, *schol. vet. I*, 7, 23a.

<sup>18</sup> YOUNG (1971: 4; 8).

<sup>19</sup> Tyrt. 9, 20–22 (DIEHL), cf. YOUNG (1971: 5–7).

the homonymous uncle, who died in battle but possibly under otherwise favourable circumstances;<sup>20</sup> verses 37–42 do not have to be read as an autobiographical statement of the elderly poet like Boeckh does;<sup>21</sup> the I can be explained to refer to the addressee, Strepsiades the younger, not the poet;<sup>22</sup> even if one refers the I of the speaker to the poet himself, this does not need to point to the advanced age of the speaker, like Boeckh had assumed.<sup>23</sup>

Young concludes that nothing can be known about the dating of the ode and also not the ‘anti-Athenian point of view’ of the piece that Bowra had deducted from the dating and the localization of the battles.<sup>24</sup> In his refutation of the stretched historical interpretation, Young argues strongly against relying on the *color* of the ode, like Boeckh and Farnell do, and refers to Mezger who, to the contrary, perceived the ode as rather high-spirited.<sup>25</sup> Young takes Boeckh’s and Mezger’s opposing feelings about the ode as a hint that there is no objective melancholy present in the piece.<sup>26</sup> This relativization is, as I will show in the following, more obscuring than helpful for an understanding of the ode. Young’s refutation of the historical reading is undoubtably a great achievement of his thorough study. It is not based on a general refutation, though, of the

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<sup>20</sup> YOUNG (1971: 7–8).

<sup>21</sup> BOECKH (1821: 531).

<sup>22</sup> H. FRAENKEL shows also in general terms how the I in Pindar’s odes can be either personal, or choral, or in reference particularly to the addressee, FRAENKEL (1973: 475 n. 12), cf. YOUNG (1971: 9–12). This problem was later hotly debated by MARY LEFKOWITZ and CHRISTOPHER CAREY as an alternative between individual or choral performance of the victory odes, LEFKOWITZ (1988: 10–11), CAREY (1989: 562–565), LEFKOWITZ (1991), HEATH-LEFKOWITZ (1991: 191), CAREY (1991: 199); G. B. D’ALESSIO has offered a synthesis of this alternative that comes close to FRAENKEL’s earlier description, D’ALESSIO (1994: 121–122), see also LEFKOWITZ’s conciliatory reply to D’ALESSIO, LEFKOWITZ (1995: 148–149).

<sup>23</sup> YOUNG (1971: 12–14).

<sup>24</sup> BOWRA (1965: 104; 1964: 294), cf. YOUNG (1971: 15).

<sup>25</sup> MEZGER (1880: 301–302): ‚Das innige Behagen, mit dem der Dichter die an göttlichen Segnungen und Ruhm so reiche Urzeit seiner Vaterstadt [...] schildert [...] stimmt wenig zu einer trostlosen Gegenwart.‘ (‘The inner comfort with which the poet describes the ancient time of his home city, so rich with divine blessings and glory, does hardly fit with a desperate present.’), cf. YOUNG (1971: 8).

<sup>26</sup> YOUNG (1971: 8, n. 25): ‘too obscure to be adduced as evidence’.

*color* Boeckh had first observed, but on the uncovering of Boeckh's and his followers' mistakes in grammar and far-fetched historical equalizations. Young's overall conclusions are therefore one sided: as he argues against the melancholy of *Isthmian 7* where he should only argue against Boeckh's illogical historical interpretation, he throws the baby out with the bathwater. Boeckh and his many followers had rightly grasped that *Isthmian 7* is outstanding from other Pindaric odes for its apparent gloomy mood, Boeckh's *color*. While they misjudged it as a historical hint, it must be the task of a literary interpretation of the ode to show the mechanics and maybe the function of this mood in the text. To do this, I will now first follow Young's interpretation, reveal its problems and add the observations concerning melancholy and criticism that are, in my opinion, important for a proper understanding.

### 3. Melancholy and Criticism in *Isthmian 7*

#### a) *The List*

*Isthmian 7* begins with a list of events in the history of Thebes (1–15). The speaker asks the nymph of the City:<sup>27</sup>

By which one of the earlier beautiful events that happened in your area, blessed Theba, have you most rejoiced in your heart? (1–3)<sup>28</sup>

This question is then followed by the list of candidates for the prize of the 'most' (μάλιστα) suitable event to make the nymph rejoice: Dionysus' Theban origin (3–5), Zeus visit at Amphitryon's house to father Heracles (5–7), the judgement of the Theban seer Tiresias between Zeus and Hera (8)<sup>29</sup>, the Theban hero Iolaus (9), the sowing of the Spartoi by

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. CURRIE (2005: 205), WILLCOCK (1995: 62).

<sup>28</sup> For the Greek text and a complete translation see Appendix 1.

<sup>29</sup> Tiresias had lived both as a man and as a woman and could solve the quarrel, whether men or women experience greater joy during intercourse, judging that women enjoy it nine times as much; in return for this revealing judgement Hera punished him with blindness (Hes. *fr.* 275–276 [MERKELBACH/WEST]). Other feats of the seer in and around Thebes could also be described as πικναί βουλαί, but the judgement between Zeus and Hera is his most outstanding accomplishment and the origin-story for his defining character traits (prophetic wisdom – blindness).

the city's founder Cadmus (10), the flight of Adrastus and his army after the failed siege of the Seven (10–11), or the aid the Theban Aegaeids brought the Doric Spartans in their war against the Achaean city of Amyclae, which made the foundation of Sparta durable (12–15).<sup>30</sup> This List is followed by a gnome about mortal forgetfulness and the function of poetry:

But indeed, the ancient glory sleeps, and the mortals forget it, if it does not reach the highest refinement of wisdom joined with glorious streams of words. (16–19)

The next segment of the ode begins with the invitation to celebrate Strepsiades, the victor in the Pancratium at the Isthmian Games, which can also be seen as the newest Theban event on the list (20–22).

Young wants to turn his attention away from the historical to the poetic content of *Isthmian* 7.<sup>31</sup> He presents the first thirteen verses as an ingenious display of Pindar's historic consciousness, as the Theban events are given in chronological order from ancient to less ancient.<sup>32</sup> In this, Young wants to see the list as a historical list of Theban greatness that can simply be extended to Strepsiades most recent achievement. We are meant to see the victory of the young Strepsiades as an organic continuation: 'the most urgent of all these patriotic glories in which Theba delights.'<sup>33</sup> The significance of the list, however, need not be the connection of past and present alone. If the list is read with an unprejudiced mind, this interpretation might even appear questionable in two respects:

It overlooks, in my opinion, the significance of the gnome at the end of the list that questions the validity of all these past events in the present because they are usually forgotten. More fundamentally, it questions the ability of the present to remember these deeds. So, the past may be glorious but it is unreachable for 'the mortals' in the present.

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. BURY (1892: 126) on the Aegaeids and Amyclae, see also KIECHLE (1963: 61–62).

<sup>31</sup> YOUNG (1971: 15).

<sup>32</sup> YOUNG (1971: 16–17).

<sup>33</sup> YOUNG (1971: 18).

Young puts the focus of his interpretation on the importance of song:<sup>34</sup> the gnome prepares the importance of the victory ode because victories, like ancient glories, only matter if they are sung. This may be so, but it does not lift the burden that this argument for song is bought at the price of a pessimistic picture of present-day-mortals – all those who listen to the song. This pessimism is remarkable in so far as the list from verses 1 to 15 would only be understandable – and could only be a relevant part of the argument of the ode – if the audience remembered all of these ancient glories on their own as the glories are rather alluded to than presented. Bruno Currie tries to alleviate the problem and gives a new understanding to the passage: he understands γὰρ (16) as ‘forward looking’ and ‘picked up’ by ἔπειτεν (20) to mean ‘since... therefore’<sup>35</sup> to turn the content of the gnome (16–19) into an unreal condition. This goes against the structure of the sentence, though: ἀλλὰ and γὰρ belong together for confirmation ‘but indeed’;<sup>36</sup> ἔπειτεν marks a new beginning. Currie’s endeavour shows that the passage is hard to bear for those who want to find conventional sense.

The second point, that does not contradict Young but renders his interpretation somewhat problematic is the question of the order. Young found the historical accuracy of the list – from older to newer – remarkable and stated that the events of the list and Strepesades’ victory ‘compared in nature but contrasted in immediacy’.<sup>37</sup> I find this doubtful. Though being historically accurate, the list is also extremely anticlimactic: from the conception of the god Dionysus to the one of the hero Heracles to the deeds of the lesser and more local heroes Tiresias, Iolaus and Cadmus to the accomplishments of Theban warfare against the Seven and in aid of the Dorians, the events in the list change from more divine, more universal and, simply put, more important to only concerned with the human realm, more local, and therefore less important. Pindar’s list

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<sup>34</sup> YOUNG (1971: 18): ‘Even the venerable glories of old would be forgotten if they were unsung. [...] Like those ancient events, it needs poetic celebration if it is to be appreciated and remembered.’

<sup>35</sup> CURRIE (2005: 220); Diane SVARLIEN translated the passage like this already in her 1990 translations for the Perseus project, SVARLIEN (1990).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. SCHADEWALDT (1928: 268) ‚reguläre Abbruchsformel‘.

<sup>37</sup> YOUNG (1971: 18).



follows the development of the different ages in the ancient Greek cosmology from gold to iron. An unprejudiced (Greek) recipient cannot other but see Strepsiades' victory at the Isthmian Games as a continuation of this list and therefore not only as the newest but also as the least of Thebes's glories. One could argue that in any ancient Greek context every list of events from past to present due to the inherent pessimism of ancient Greek cosmology could only be a downward path. I concede this without exception, but it does not change the fact that putting Strepsiades' victory at the end of such a list must make it appear rather small in comparison with the weight of history and religion. Bruno Currie seems to have realized this problem, when he suggests to see the heroization of the elder Strepsiades, not the victory of the young Strepsiades, as the fitting final link at the end of the chain.<sup>38</sup> We must ask what made the author, who must have been aware of the effect, choose to present Strepsiades' victory in this apparently unfavourable context – a choice he could have easily avoided.

Again, one might be tempted to say that the entire genre of the epinicion is based on the generic convention that victories in sports can be seen as equal with feats of the order named above,<sup>39</sup> but the comparisons in Pindar's other victory odes are of a different nature. Whenever Pindar tells the stories of Gods, heroes and the ancients, he avoids comparisons along the lines of X performed this or that feat in the past, like you now achieved a victory at this or that sports event. This is the case because such direct comparisons would be awkward as the victories could never in fact equal such deeds – especially not for members of a culture who would acknowledge the mythical events as constitutive goods. Pindar, on the contrary, usually tries very hard to find more elegant solutions to enter his *partes mythicae* in the equation of praise without direct comparisons. In Olympian one, for example, the story of Pelops's victory in a chariot race is told, not in direct comparison with Hiero's victory but because, according to the poem and other sources,<sup>40</sup> Pelops ran the first Olympian horse race. Pelops is entered into the po-

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<sup>38</sup> CURRIE (2005: 216–218).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. CURRIE (2005: 218–219), also SCHADEWALDT (1928: 268).

<sup>40</sup> Paus. 5, 13, 1–3, cf. GERBER (1982: 141–142), BURKERT (1997: 108–119).

em as a natural model for Hiero but without an awkward direct comparison. In similar ways Pindar usually seeks a connection between gods, heroes or ancients with his winners, their families or their patrons via some other shared feature but not through direct comparison.<sup>41</sup>

So, how can Pindar's choice in *Isthmian 7* be accounted for? One might assume that the inferiority of the present in comparison to the past was so much a natural fact for Pindar and his contemporaries at the time of the presentation that it would have felt unnatural not to address it in any poem of the day. This seems to have been the thinking that underlies August Boeckh's *color*-observations; he then concludes that the ode was written at a time when Thebes' political situation made such choices a necessity. While this interpretation can account for both the anticlimactic list of events and the pessimistic view on the validity of the past in the present, it is not the only possible explanation. In my final chapter, other possibilities will be explored.

*b) The Death of the Elder Strepsiades*

In the following verses, the second part of the ode begins with the mention of Strepsiades' victory that works as a hinge between the prior list and the following story of the elder Strepsiades (20–22). The young Strepsiades' maternal uncle has fallen in battle. The ode makes the connection between nephew and uncle as it presents young Strepsiades' victory as a gift of honour to the dead elder relative (23–26). This first introduction leads to a detailed description of Strepsiades the elder's deeds in war: he endured battle for his fatherland, brought ruin to his enemies, and followed the example of the ancient heroes Meleager, Hector and Amphiaraus by holding his position even until his death (27–36). The sorrow of the chorus for the loss of Strepsiades' life marks the transition to the next part (37).

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<sup>41</sup> Other such examples are: the mention of Peleus, Cadmus and Achilles in *O. 2*, 78–79 after the discourse on the fragility of mortal lives, especially 33–37, that gives an implicit parallel for Theron's striving for immortality through a virtuous life, cf. NISSETICH (1988); the long episode of the Argonauts' in *P. 4*, 4–246, who are connected to Arcesilaus and Cyrene via the lesser Argonaut Euphemus; and many more.

Young's second achievement in his poetic re-evaluation of *Isthmian* 7 after the turn from a historical to a poetical reading concerns this passage. He discovered the close intertextual relationship between the depiction of the elder Strepsiades' death in battle (24–30) and similar passages of Callinus and Tyrtaeus.<sup>42</sup> Over the course of his observations, Young also addresses the question of the significance of the three ancient heroes who are compared with the elder Strepsiades (32–33); in contrast to the earlier scholarship, he sees the particular commonality between the three in their patriotic fight to death without flight; also, Amphiaraus, an enemy of Thebes in ancient time and therefore the object of scholarly debate in this poem, fits in this category.<sup>43</sup>

Young later concludes his interpretation of *Isthmian* 7 with the extended argument to read the digression on the elder Strepsiades as a non-mythical *pars mythica* that serves to illustrate the praise of the younger Strepsiades.<sup>44</sup> As the elder Strepsiades is otherwise unknown (and as Pindar does nothing to change this by placing his death politically or geographically), this illustration works mainly through the picture of patriotic self-sacrifice per se recalled via Tyrtaeus and Callinus – Young calls this motif *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*.<sup>45</sup> According to Young the victor Strepsiades is praised by bringing his victory in a close relationship with a patriotic feat of war of the highest order.<sup>46</sup> Young's elegiac reading of the *pars mythica* was later revisited by Bruno Currie and Christopher Brown. Both agree with Young's judgement; Currie adds that Strepsiades the elder, who is in Currie's view a hero with a cult, fits in a classical *pars mythica*;<sup>47</sup> Brown stresses the point that while Tyrtaean elegy is general and unspecific, Pindar, mentioning the epic heroes Meleager, Hector and Amphiaraus, adds conspicuously epic elements to his praise of a warrior to fit both frames, the Tyrtaean discovered by Young and the more conventional one of an epic *pars mythica*.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> YOUNG (1971: 20).

<sup>43</sup> YOUNG (1971: 21–23).

<sup>44</sup> YOUNG (1971: 34–46).

<sup>45</sup> YOUNG (1971: 20).

<sup>46</sup> YOUNG (1971: 40).

<sup>47</sup> CURRIE (2005: 224).

<sup>48</sup> BROWN (2016: 285).

We will now reconsider the passage with a view to its peculiarities in relationship to the melancholy of the ode. First of all, the passage treats the death of the victor's uncle where the listeners expect something that would be fit to illustrate the victor's glory and the glory of the day. Young's interpretation of the passage shows how this serves the positive characterization of the victor and his family in the end, but it stands in a harsh contrast to the idea of a young man's victory in sports when it is first introduced. The first sentence of the passage asks the Muses to celebrate the victory, giving positive attributes of the victor on the way.<sup>49</sup> The change is abrupt when Strepsiades' uncle is introduced:

[Young Strepsiades] is made famous by the Muses with dark locks (23), and has given his homonymous uncle a shared crown (24), [his uncle] whom Ares with brazen spear has mixed his destiny (25), and esteem is held out to good people as a fitting reward (26).<sup>50</sup>

While the first part of the second sentence keeps up the praise of young Strepsiades, adding fame through song to the good attributes Strepsiades had been given before, the introduction of his dead uncle in only two verses (24–25) comes unprepared with the surprise and change of subject from gay present praise to death condensed in verse 25. Strepsiades' death is almost sneaked into the narrative as the phrase used to express death, 'to mix sb. their fate' (πότημον μίγνυμι τινι) is conventional to express death but also extremely euphemistic. The following verse (26) turns back to the subject of fame in a general gnome (τιμὰ, 26 → φλέγεται, 23), abandoning the subject of death immediately. There can be no doubt that the poet works hard to minimize the impact of the death of the elder Strepsiades by his choice of words and the quick and brief nature of the information, but it still comes as a surprise.

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<sup>49</sup> Pind. *I.* 7, 20–22: 'Praise then with sweet-sounding song also Strepsiades, because he carries away with him a victory in the pancratium at the Isthmian Games, marvellous in his strength and well-shaped, and he holds a virtue not more reproachful than his physical appearance.'

<sup>50</sup> I have given a translation here that follows the order of words in the Greek more closely; see in the appendix for the proper English translation.

In the following sentences, the economy of death and other subjects is very similar: in the third sentence (27–30), we hear about the heroism of the elder Strepsiades in three verses (27–29) to learn in the fourth (30) that he ‘lives on even being himself among the dead’ with the mention of death again in the last word alone (θανών), counterweighted by the idea of eternal life in the rest of the verse and not directed at Strepsiades, but at the general group of the dead. We find the same pattern in the following sentence (31–36): again, the concept of death is only expressed in an obscuring euphemism that carries all the colours of life when Strepsiades is said to ‘have exhaled a blooming life’ (εὐανθέ’ ἀπέπνευσας ἀλικίαν, 34); again, the short mention of death in one verse is flanked by an extended story of heroism in five verses. Euphemistic treatment of death is not uncommon in many genres of literature as it is usually hard to bear for humans in most contexts. While this is hardly worth observing, it is important to record that this is also, or maybe especially true for Pindar’s praise poetry, which belongs by convention in a gay, festive context. Pindar’s treatment of Strepsiades’ death in the ode shows what scholars have felt all along: the mention of personal, historical, real-life death in a victory ode, no matter how much it is stylized to serve the praise of the victor’s family in the end, goes against the grain of the genre and has to be accommodated with great care. It renders *Isthmian* 7 bleak where victory odes are supposed to be triumphant.

In our evaluation of the passage about the elder Strepsiades’ death, we must also revisit Young’s discovery of the intertextuality with the elegists and ask, what function Pindar’s depiction of *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* can have when we reconsider the ode’s pessimistic stance. To do so, we have to look back at the beginning of the passage. In the description of young Strepsiades’ virtue, the young victor is described with these remarkable words: ‘he holds a virtue not more reproachful than his physical appearance’ (ἄγει τ’ ἀρετὰν οὐκ αἴσχιον φῶς, 22). This phrase follows a lengthy description of Strepsiades’ physical beauty and strength and must therefore mean that Strepsiades is no less virtuous than he is strong and beautiful. Pindar often describes positive

attributes through negative expressions.<sup>51</sup> In this case, though, the negative expression seems to not only serve for ποικιλία, but works as an ungrammaticality in the sense of Riffaterre<sup>52</sup> that hints at one of the elegiac intertexts Young discovered. The negative expression οὐκ αἴσχιον – ‘not more reproachful than’ – makes the recipient ask: What could be reproachful about Strepsiades’ virtue? The answer to this question is given in Tyrtaeus’ elegy Nr. 9 that, like Young discovered, is also referenced in the following verses. Tyrtaeus begins his elegy with a list of the people he does not deem worthy of being sung about, if they were not also mighty in war. The first place in this list is reserved for sportspeople:

Οὐτ’ ἄν μνησαίμην οὔτ’ ἐν λόγῳ ἀνδρα τιθείην  
οὔτε ποδῶν ἀρετῆς οὔτε παλαιμοσύνης,  
οὐδ’ εἰ Κυκλώπων μὲν ἔχοι μέγεθος τε βίην τε,  
νικώη δὲ θεῶν Θρηάκιον Βορέην, 4  
[...]  
οὐδ’ εἰ πᾶσαν ἔχοι δόξαν πλήν θούριδος ἀλκῆς; 9

And I would neither remember nor praise with my speech a man, not for the virtue of his feet and not for his ability in wrestling, and not if he had the stature of the cyclopes and their strength, and not if he won against the Thracian Boreas from the gods,  
[...]  
and not if he had every glory except warlike valour.

This is, of course, an ordinary *priamel* and would not, in the context of elegy Nr. 9 alone, give reason to suspect that Tyrtaeus wanted his readers to think badly of sportspeople in particular. It is Pindar’s taking up of this passage in a victory ode – for a victory in sports – that makes for a conspicuous choice: the recipients who know Tyrtaeus’ Nr. 9 will recall Tyrtaeus’ reproach against people who excel in sports but cannot boast with deeds in war. The parallel between *Isthmian* 7 and Tyrtaeus’

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<sup>51</sup> RACE (1983).

<sup>52</sup> RIFFATERRE (1978: 5).

Nr. 9 becomes obvious when we compare the praise of Strepsiades' the elders deeds in the continuation of the ode with Tyrtaeus' next verses:

οὐ γὰρ ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς γίγνεται ἐν πολέμῳ 10  
 εἰ μὴ τετλαίῃ μὲν ὄρῳν φόνον αἱματόεντα  
 καὶ δῆϊων ὀρέγοιτ' ἐγγύθεν ἰστάμενος.  
 ἦδ' ἀρετῆ, τόδ' ἄεθλον ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἄριστον  
 κάλλιστον τε φέρειν γίγνεται ἀνδρὶ νέῳ.

Because no man becomes worthy in war if he did not suffer to see bloody death and did not reach to the enemies standing next to him in his direct vicinity. This is virtue, this is the best prize among men and the most beautiful thing that there is for a young man to carry away with him!

Tyrtaeus' description of the ideal warrior includes the same elements that also Pindar's praise of the elder Strepsiades includes: 'the hailstorm of blood' (χάλαζαν αἵματος [...] ἀμύνεται, 27) and the necessary closeness of battle 'to inflict ruin on the enemy army' (λοιγὸν ἀμφιβαλὼν ἐναντίῳ στρατῷ, 28). But this does not only mark Pindar's Strepsiades as a patriotic war hero in the style of the elegy, like Young had found, but it also carries the antithesis between the sportspeople and the war heroes that is thematized in Tyrtaeus' elegy Nr. 9 into Pindar's ode. It is hardly possible to recall Tyrtaeus in the praise of the war hero and then not also recall his explicit criticism of young men who do sports but do not excel in war.

The reference to Tyrtaeus' elegy, which is intricately prepared already by the negative expression οὐκ αἴσχιον in verse 22, is surprising because it does not seem to serve the praise of young Strepsiades at all. To the contrary, it introduces an implicit criticism into the ode that would not otherwise be present: valiant young men excel in war like your uncle did. Why did you waste time with sports instead?<sup>53</sup> This criticism in the victory ode can be explained only if it was actually not a

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<sup>53</sup> This is the more surprising as it contradicts the common analogy of warfare and sports in Pindar (e.g. *I.* 5, 4–10; *O.* 6, 10), cf. ADORJÁNI (2014: 133), and would thus posit *I.* 7 as a real exception in the Pindaric corpus.

creative act of criticism from the poet to the victor but a criticism that was in the air in Thebes anyway at the time of the presentation and could therefore not be avoided. If the poet took up an already present criticism, the strong connection between the homonymous nephew and uncle could then help to vindicate the nephew in the way Young has described.<sup>54</sup> This can appear only likely if *Isthmian* 7 was performed under circumstances that were different from the ordinary purely festive occasions of victory odes. A likely situation would be a politico-military crisis like the one matched to the ode by Boeckh and his followers, within which success at the games would have fallen behind after patriotic acts of military defence.

Another aspect of the description of Strepsiades the elder deserves attention. The fallen warrior is compared with three ancient heroes, Meleagrus, Hector and Amphiaraus. The third hero, Amphiaraus, was able to cause some confusion in the older scholarship as the commander of the armies of the Seven against Thebes appeared to be a bad match with Strepsiades, the Theban warrior.<sup>55</sup> David Young tries to solve this problem by reading the three heroes simply as particularly outstanding examples of fight to the last 'because they all fell valiantly in the front line of battle; they knew not the shame of flight'.<sup>56</sup> Bruno Currie, who wants to see Strepsiades the elder as a hero with a cult, sees the commonality of the three heroes and Strepsiades in their heroization as saving heroes after death.<sup>57</sup> Both might be the case, but Amphiaraus, as a third and therefore climactically most significant example for patriotic fighting, might be meaningful also in the characterization of the relationship of the two Strepsiades: Amphiaraus, who dies in the battle of the Seven against Thebes, appeals to his children Alcmaeon and Amphilocheus to revenge him, which they do in the war of the Epigones. Amphiaraus in the myth thus has his honour and glory renewed by the following generation. In the context of the two Strepsiades, the example of Amphiaraus and his sons indicates that also the younger Strepsiades,

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<sup>54</sup> YOUNG (1971: 40).

<sup>55</sup> YOUNG (1971: 21–22, n. 72) with a characterization of the older scholarship.

<sup>56</sup> YOUNG (1971: 22).

<sup>57</sup> CURRIE (2005: 215–216).



like the ode states already in verse 24, will renew the glory of his uncle. It is left open, though, whether this renewal is limited to glory through the victory at the Isthmian Games or whether Strepsiades the younger will follow in the footsteps of Alcmaeon and Amphilocheus and revenge his uncle on the battlefield.<sup>58</sup> The comparison between the older Strepsiades and Amphiarus therefore helps to vindicate the younger Strepsiades against the reproach of lacking military valour as it opens up the possibility for future military achievements, and thus deflects the criticism mentioned above.

Overall, the passage circling around the death of Strepsiades serves the purposes of an ordinary *pars mythica* in a Pindaric victory ode only most broadly.<sup>59</sup> While still fitting somehow in the framework of a victory ode, like Young wants to show, it adds remarkable evidence that *Isthmian 7* is an extraordinary victory ode because of its continuing gloom: the death of the elder Strepsiades is only made to fit in the ode with great rhetoric effort; the Tyrtæan intertext throws an unfavourable light on the victor that can only be explained with an extraordinary context, which might also explain the otherwise problematic choice of Amphiarus as a model for the elder Strepsiades.

### c) *The Perspective of the Speaker*

In the last passage that shall be treated in this paper, the perspective of the speaking I and the determination of who this I represents are a question of the scholars. After the description of Strepsiades the elder's deeds (27–36), the speaker of the ode expresses their sorrow (*πένθος*, 37) and at the same time sees themselves placed at a better place of 'fair weather out of a storm' (38–39). This general evaluation is continued with the description of the festival: 'I will sing binding my hair with garlands' (39). The following sentences, again, bring general observations on the human condition in the world: first a *carpe diem*-like posture is expressed (39–42) with the speaker professing to be untroubled by 'the

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<sup>58</sup> This connection is already referred to by WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORFF (1922: 412). Young brushes WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORFF's observation aside too offhandedly, YOUNG (1971: 22, n. 72).

<sup>59</sup> Cf. YOUNG (1971: 34–35; 46).

envy of the immortals' (ἀθανάτων [...] φθόνος, 39) while they plan to make the best of their allotted time 'because equally we all die' (42); this is followed by a statement that humans are incapable to reach beyond the human realm (43–44) and a warning (ὄ τοι, 44) (44–49) that whoever might still try is likely to end like Bellerophon, 'who wanted to walk the abodes of heaven among the assembly of Zeus' (45–47), thrown off the winged horse Pegasus, 'and the sweetness that goes against what is right awaits the most bitter end!' (47–48). The passage and the ode end with a prayer to Apollo Loxias to grant the 'we' of the speaker(s) also 'the garland in Pytho' – a victory at the Pythian Games of Apollo (49–51).

The various questions that pertain to the passage are all somehow related to the question of who the speaker is. I will again base my observations on the interpretations of David Young, who begins with the significance of the sorrow (πένθος) of the speaker in verse 37. In a further re-evaluation of earlier scholarship, he identifies it as a general expression of grief by the community through the choral I, which according to him is a necessary part of the praise of a fallen warrior.<sup>60</sup> This interpretation is well attuned to Young's discovery of Tyrtaeus' elegy Nr. 9 as an important intertext, which maybe led him to view all parts of the ode through a singularly Tyrtaean lens. Similarly, Young understands all markers of apparent negativity as well attuned to the generic parts of the poem: the storm (χειμῶνος, 39) that the speaker comes out of marks 'a family's change from bad to good fortune', which is in line with a similar metaphor in *Isthmian* 4;<sup>61</sup> the apprehension of the speaker towards the envy of the gods (φθόνος) is, according to Young, a topical statement that does not 'require a specific justification';<sup>62</sup> the same applies to the references to old age. Young's final argument concerns the I of the speaker in verses 40–42 and the following: he refutes the older interpretation that Pindar, the poet, is making a biographical statement and ascribes this and the following to an I that would reflect the position of the younger Strepsiades, the addressee. In this, Young agrees with the

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<sup>60</sup> YOUNG (1971: 24–25).

<sup>61</sup> YOUNG (1971: 26).

<sup>62</sup> YOUNG (1971: 27–28).

scholiast of *schol.* 55 b.<sup>63</sup> Not only is Strepsiades the younger relieved and lives a life in peace but he can also aspire to a pious life, minding the dangers of hubris counter to the model of Bellerophon and focus on achievable goals like another victory at the Pythian Games.

Young's argument that the third antistrophe and epode are spoken by an I that represents the younger Strepsiades is clearly more convincing than the older interpretation that ascribed these lines to a biographical I of the poet. Young's interpretation is not without difficulty, though. He ascribes verses 37 and 39 to be 'of general application' representing the community;<sup>64</sup> without really pointing to it, he then suggests a change of the speaker's representation from verse 39 to verse 40, the later verses representing young Strepsiades.<sup>65</sup> This is not convincing. Whoever is the speaker of verses 40 to the end must also be in all likelihood the speaker of 37 to 39. Before resorting to an interpretation that depends on an incomprehensible change of speaker, we must try to find an interpretation that makes sense without such a device. But if one tries to ascribe also verses 37 to 39 to an I that represents young Strepsiades, one encounters insurmountable problems. To ascribe the grief about the elder Strepsiades to the young Strepsiades alone does not convince, when the expression of grief follows the description of the elder Strepsiades' deeds by the chorus (24–36). It would be even more problematic to ascribe the stance of a singer (*ἀείσομαι*, 39) to the young Strepsiades alone, when it is objectively the chorus that sings. If it cannot hold for verses 37 to 39 it is hard, though, to allow for a change of speaker for the later verses alone. This is also unnecessary: it is completely satisfactory to assume the (natural) choral I as the speaker for the entire passage.

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<sup>63</sup> See above n. 22.

<sup>64</sup> YOUNG (1971: 24) makes an argument about the difference of 'choral I' and 'general application' (n. 81): 'I am not agreeing with the scholiast [...] that the verb is an example of a "choral I," but merely noting its general application.' YOUNG's differentiation between 'choral I' and 'general application' appears to be of little relevance: things that the chorus say are usually of 'general application'; things said in choral odes can be 'of general application' because they are objectively said by the chorus. I am skipping this, in my opinion, meritless distinction and take 'choral I' and 'general I' to be the same thing, which I call choral I.

<sup>65</sup> YOUNG (1971: 30–33).

For this interpretation, it is important to understand that the choral I does not so much localize the content of the ode in the outside world but rather the different parts of the ode to each other and in the entire ode – the chorus gives listening directions to the recipients. From this understanding, the I-statements in verses 37 to 39 make the most sense: the choral I has suffered under the warlike Tyrtaean song and the resulting grief (27–36); it can move on to an easier part in the following song of present praise that is expressed through metaphors of a life without worries (37–39). This statement of the chorus makes sense because the Tyrtaean passage, as much as it fills the place of a *pars mythica*, is an unusual and foreign element in the ode. Its presence that goes against the norms of the genre has to be accounted for; the ode does this through a self-referential speech of the chorus – the chorus tells the recipients what it felt like to sing the unusual warlike passage:

I have borne unspeakable sorrow, but now the Mover of the Earth has granted me fair weather out of a storm. I will sing binding my hair with garlands.

The chorus will move on to its usual business, gay festive praise, and so can we.

The apparent change of tone in verse 37 is no indication for a change of speaker or representation but a marker of a different kind: it marks the change of genre from the Tyrtaean passage before to the following festive passage and shows a consciousness for the effect of the other genre in the ode.<sup>66</sup> A new beginning of some kind in the third verse of the strophe like here in Γ (37) is recurring in the entire ode: in A, the third verse of the strophe (3) separates the initial question from the adjoined list of glorious events.<sup>67</sup> In B, it separates the passage of the list of past events from the present celebration of young Strepsiades' victory (20). These changes seem to always take a turn towards the uplifting: in A, the initial question (1–3) gives way to the list of glorious events (3–15); in B, the gloomy acknowledgement that the past is forgotten unless

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. YOUNG (1971: 25) “change of subject”.

<sup>67</sup> In A the new beginning would be between the iambic and the hagesichorean.

remembered in song (16–19) changes to the summons to celebrate young Strepsiades in the present (20–21); this is also the case in  $\Gamma$ , where the new beginning of the third verse (37) separates the gloomy end of the description of the elder Strepsiades' death in the style of Tyrtaeus (25–36) from the final return to the present festivities (37–51). This uplifting change occurs three times in the ode, every time around the third verse of the strophe (3; 20; 37). It is thus very likely that it would also be represented somehow at this point in the musical performance of the ode. A change is thus very present, but it is not a change in speakers or representations.

Other than Young felt, the choral I appears to be an unproblematic choice for the speaker of the final verses of the ode (40–51). The *carpe diem*-like passage (39–42) needs not point neither to a general *carpe diem*-like mood in Thebes after a lost war nor to such a feeling on the side of the young Strepsiades but simply to the feeling of unbothered joy natural to all festivities. Young is right to remind us that the phrase about old age ('I will come into old age up until my destined time') does not mean that whoever says it is actually old,<sup>68</sup> but this is true as much of the chorus as it would be of young Strepsiades. Moreover, as I said of verses 37 to 39, the chorus speaking this can be understood again as a reference to the change of mood towards a gayer finish of the ode. In the festive setting, the chorus live as if there was no care in the world. The reference to old age and also the following gnome ('Because equally we all die,' 42) can plausibly refer to this change of mood alone if spoken by the chorus. The same holds true for the general observations on the limitations of mortal existence (43–44), the example of Bellerophon (44–47) and the gnome that figures as a moral to the example (47–48). All of these can be plausibly spoken by the chorus out of the same change of mood that was described above. The line of thinking that the recipients are meant to imagine for the chorus is: we indulge in ephemeral festive joys as mortals and this is justified because this is the only thing mortals can achieve, and if mortals try to achieve more it is dangerous and even a sacrilegious case of hubris! Finally, it makes perfect sense for the chorus to pray to Apollon for a future victory in the Pythian Games (49–51).

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<sup>68</sup> YOUNG (1971: 12–14; 28; 41).

The *we* (ἄμμι) does not need to refer to young Strepsiades as a nosism but can also refer to the chorus as a natural plural. This is plausible as a victory of Strepsiades at the Pythian Games would have been a reason for celebration for the entire community, here represented in its festive garb by the chorus; the phrase *πόρε στέφανον* ('grant a wreath') can be understood *pars pro toto* for the whole community – if Strepsiades wins, all of Thebes wins. While Strepsiades is the most likely candidate for future champion at other Games,<sup>69</sup> on the primary level of meaning the chorus can also pray for any future Theban victory at the Pythian Games – we celebrated a sports victory today, we hope for more victories in the future!

It has been shown that there is no need to switch the representation of the speaker from the natural choral I that represents the festive community of Thebes. The chorus is the speaker of the entire ode.<sup>70</sup> The scholion that suggests to take young Strepsiades as the actual voice behind the I can be ignored without consequence.<sup>71</sup> Having said this, it must be clear that the content also of the third passage is particularly attuned to the young Strepsiades, the addressee of the ode, in a way that relates to his characterization in the earlier passages. This does not warrant, though, to make him the represented speaker – the chorus is very fit to talk about these matters as I will show in the following. In the first two passages of the poem, like shown above, the ode seems to raise criticism against young Strepsiades: his achievements were shown to be the least of Thebes' glories and he is implicitly criticized for being a sportsman and not a soldier. This criticism I ascribed to some general set of mind at the time of the presentation – it had to be addressed. The statements of the chorus in the final passage seem to be designed to alleviate the former criticism. When the chorus turns from the description of the

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<sup>69</sup> The Isthmian Games took place every two years in April. The Pythian Games took place every four years in August in the same year of every second Isthmian Game. They were most likely simply the next Panhellenic Crown Game to take place later in that same year and therefore the logical point of reference for the next possible future victory. Cf. KYLE (2014: 31). This would allow for the year 454 BC as the year of the presentation or any other year with Pythian Games. Cf. WILLCOCK (1995: 61).

<sup>70</sup> This is the position first taken by THIERSCH (1820: II 196), cf. YOUNG (1971: 10).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. YOUNG (1971: 29–30).

elder Strepsiades' heroic deeds, they exclaim their pain (37) and profess to be leading a life without worry – there was war, now we celebrate (39–42)! This stance of the chorus ameliorates the position of the criticized sportsman. It shows that for the chorus, the imagined public of the ode, there is not only the necessities of war but also a brighter every day with a set of values of its own. During the gay festivities after the war that the chorus creates, there is room again for celebrating a winner in sports. But the chorus goes even further than that. In the following verses (43–48) they make a case for keeping to simple, worldly activities. Humans who reach out beyond their own sphere, like Bellerophon, are criticized as sacrilegious. Cobbler, stick to your last! The consequence of these observations is the prayer of the chorus to Apollon for a future victory in sports (49–51), most likely by Strepsiades. The chorus's criticism of those who outstretch their own capabilities serves again to vindicate young Strepsiades: he is a sportsman, it would be presumptuous of him to aim for higher glories, like the heroic deeds of his uncle. Strepsiades and Thebes shall content themselves with victories in sports. The precarious situation of Strepsiades at the beginning of the ode as the author of Thebes least glorious deed and a sportsman, who is not worthy of praise in the world of Tyrtaeus, is turned into a pious example of humble self-consciousness. Strepsiades will not outstretch himself like a Bellerophon but content himself with the possible, another victory at the Games.

To summarize, it can be said that complicated shifts in the speaker or their representation are not necessary to make good sense of *Isthmian* 7. To the contrary, the ode is continuously spoken by the choral I. Where this identification was unclear before, I have shown that the chorus as a speaker can speak the ode in such a way that a congruous picture of the ode emerges. Strepsiades is introduced with implicit criticism in the first to triads of the ode. He is vindicated by the chorus in the end. The ode thus serves the prestige of its addressee under the seemingly special conditions that it was presented in.

#### 4. Instead of a Conclusion: Two Alternative Interpretations of *Isthmian 7*

Based on the observations made so far, two alternative interpretations can be offered that make sense of *Isthmian 7*. The ode cannot be understood as a typical victory ode because it does not seem to praise the victor efficiently and carries too dark a mood for festivities. The first interpretation will be based on chapter 3 and summarizes an interpretation of *Isthmian 7* as an ode that vindicates rather than praises. The second interpretation will briefly summarize Bruno Currie's interpretation of *Isthmian 7* as focused not so much on the younger Strepsiades, but on the cult hero Strepsiades the elder.

##### *a) Isthmian 7 as vindication*

In the afore chapter, it has been shown that melancholy and criticism play an important role in *Isthmian 7*. The present glory, the victory thematized in the ode, is shown to be inferior to the ancient events in Thebes, the present to be detached from the past. The value of victory in sports is questioned in comparison with valour in war. The victor is vindicated rather than celebrated from criticism that the ode itself, it seems, had to bring up. *Isthmian 7* therefore must be recognized as an atypical victory ode, like August Boeckh and his followers already maintained in the older scholarship, because of its melancholy and its inherent criticism of the victor. David Young's alternative interpretation, for all its merits in showing the logical mistakes in the historical over-interpretations of the past, is as misleading as helpful. Just as August Boeckh in Young's own words had "selected Oenophyta before coming to his conclusion", also Young seems to have decided that *Isthmian 7* is a Pindaric victory ode like all others, while a less prejudiced reader must come to the conclusion of Boeckh, Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Farnell and many others, i.e. that it is outstanding from Pindar's other odes because of its gloomy mood. I will have to ask what could be the reasons or the inner motivation for this peculiar stance of the ode.

The melancholy and the criticism of the victor in the ode are difficult to explain from the point of view that is put forward within the ode itself and with reference to the genre of victory odes. It is therefore rea-



sonable to assume, like Boeckh and his followers did, that there must have been some outer circumstance that prescribed the particular stance expressed in the ode. Pindar's victory odes are inseparably connected with the occasions they were composed for.<sup>72</sup> The festivities after victories in the Panhellenic Crown Games and the epinicians that were given in these contexts had a degree of institutionalization, which implied that no important victory could be celebrated without festivities and without a song.<sup>73</sup> This means that at rare occurrences it could happen that festivities and a victory ode had to be presented in a polis also when the general social climate or only the particular constellation between the audience and the victor and his family would have made it more desirable to drop the event. This paper is written under the fresh impression of the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics 2020 in July 2021, which was remarkable for the fact that it was had, even though the usual spirit of solemnity given to Olympic openings by the attentive awe of ten-thousands of spectators in a stadium could not inspire this event – many athletes decided not to join or left early, and the whole affair was later described as 'forced drama'.<sup>74</sup> The opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics 2020 and the festivities in honour of young Strepsiades may have had in common that they had to take place because they were ceremonies. Other than in Tokyo 2021, the Theban director of odes had and used the freedom to adapt his artistic program to the special circumstances.

What these circumstances looked like in Thebes at the time of the presentation of the ode is impossible to know. It is tempting to follow August Boeckh's Oenophyta hypothesis, not because of his far-fetched interpretations concerning Spartan ingratitude and Athenian arrogance, which David Young rightly dismissed, but because Oenophyta 457 likely led to the kind of publicly felt politico-military crisis in Thebes that would have left the people unwilling to celebrate the winner of a sports event, when they would have wanted a hero in war – the year 454 with

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. KRUMMEN (1990: 1–5) with the older scholarship.

<sup>73</sup> This is the social reality behind the frequent *Sieg-Lied-Motiv* in Pindar's odes, cf. SCHADEWALDT (1928: 294–296).

<sup>74</sup> SVRLUGA (2021), HEIDRICH (2021).

both Isthmian Games in April and Pythian Games in August would then be fitting.<sup>75</sup> But we must not overvalue the little accidental information we have about Thebes' history in the face of the infinity of things we do not know. The nitty-gritty of polis politics would give infinite occasions for a young πολίτης or his entire family to fall from grace in the public eye. Maybe young Strepsiades was a proven coward, or, more likely, he or somebody in his family had been accused of some dishonourable action in the military realm. Any such event might have been grave enough to bring the victor of the pancratium at the Isthmian Games and his family in a difficult situation, and small enough to fly under the radar of big history. It can be gleaned from the ode that the circumstance must have been such that it delegitimized sports in comparison with the military, either in Strepsiades' individual situation or in the situation of the entire community.

David Young's judgement that we cannot know the date of *Isthmian 7* is valid. What we can know, though, and must acknowledge is the following: *Isthmian 7* is an atypical ode because it places the victory it treats at the least position in a list of Theban glories and shows the victor as one who is deficient in military achievements, which has to be mended by the connection to his maternal uncle, a dead warrior, and a re-evaluation of his ambition in sports as sober worldly action in comparison to hubris.<sup>76</sup> *Isthmian 7* is not an ode that praises but an ode that vindicates. This trait separates it from the other victory odes but forms an internal unity. This unity can best be grasped in the antithesis of foul and calm weather in verses 37–39. The ode juxtaposes the storm of life (χειμῶνος) – the earlier passage of Tyrtaean praise of a warrior – to the present calm (εὐδία) – the festivities for young Strepsiades.<sup>77</sup> εὐδία has rightly been called 'the happiest state of mind' in the world of Pindar's odes.<sup>78</sup> This is the ideal that *Isthmian 7* ascribes to the young Strepsiades

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. WILLCOCK (1995: 61).

<sup>76</sup> Self-knowledge and limitation are ideals often expressed in Pindar's odes, cf. ŠĆEPANOVIĆ (2016: 18–21).

<sup>77</sup> Cf. YOUNG (1971: 26).

<sup>78</sup> BOWRA (1964: 26).

and tries to establish as a credible alternative to the heroism of a Tyrtaean warrior.

*b) Isthmian 7 as an Ode about a Cult Hero*

In his monograph on Pindar and hero cult, Bruno Currie has proposed a radical interpretation of the elder Strepesades in *Isthmian 7* as a cult hero.<sup>79</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to validate whether or not Currie's interpretation is acceptable from a cultural-religious point of view. It shall be stressed, though, that also his interpretation solves the problems internal to *Isthmian 7* that have led me to propose interpretation 4a). I will now briefly summarize Currie's main points and show how they can also lead to a congruent understanding of the entire ode.

Currie argues that various sources point to the fact that Thebans in the 5<sup>th</sup> century were predisposed to heroize their recently fallen dead.<sup>80</sup> This is documented most convincingly by the fact that Plato the Comedian pokes fun on the Thebans for doing so. If the elder Strepesades is indeed a cult hero, this moves the weight inside the ode significantly from the younger to the elder Strepesades. The victor Strepesades profits from this and receives his due praise mainly through the reminder that he is the nephew of a newly established cult hero. The single changes in the tectonics of the ode are the following: if Strepesades the elder is a present day cult hero, the list of Theban glories (1–15) does not end on a low with Strepesades the younger's victory (20–22) but on a high with the heroization of Strepesades the elder (25–36), the only Theban glory that is described in some detail and, in Young's words, truly 'the most urgent of all these patriotic glories in which Theba delights'. It is then consequent to follow also Currie's creative new translation of verses 16–21 which takes the sting out of ἀλλὰ παλαιὰ γὰρ εὔδει χάρις and turns the whole sentence from a preparation of the following gloom into a mere affirmation of the importance of song.<sup>81</sup> Currie's interpretation makes very good sense of the introduction of Meleager, Hector and Amphiaras (32–33), who are according to him all heroes with a saving

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<sup>79</sup> CURRIE (2005: 205–210).

<sup>80</sup> CURRIE (2005: 210–211), cf. KRUMMEN (1990: 72, n. 42).

<sup>81</sup> CURRIE (2005: 219–220), see also above chapter 3a).

cult in the Theban context and therefore more ancient equals of the newly established cult hero Strepsiades, who most likely had a saving cult as well.<sup>82</sup>

In this interpretation, like in 4a), Strepsiades the younger cannot stand on a par with his heroic uncle. But this is not an obstruction for his praise as the mere fact that he is of the same family as the cult hero, whose name he also bears, serves his prestige. The vindication of young Strepsiades the sportsman therefore stays basically the same I have described above, only that it does not ultimately serve to vindicate the victor from criticism but to give him a distinct place in an overall positive family story. The virtue of sobriety that is ascribed to him towards the end of the ode (42–51) receives a new, and even more positive meaning. In 4a) I described the function of the sobriety as the final effort of vindication for young Strepsiades: he is no great warrior but at least he is humble! If Strepsiades the elder is a cult hero, young Strepsiades' sobriety becomes a major virtue: it would be overly tempting for the nephew of a hero to see himself as a member of the class of higher beings himself, like Bellerophon did, but young Strepsiades does not. He is a great sportsman, the nephew of a hero and does not think too much of himself because of it!

The two interpretations show that additional effort had to be made to show whether praise poetry is in distress in *Isthmian* 7 like I proposed in chapter 4a) or whether an ingenious addition from the cultural-religious sphere can mend the ode like in chapter 4b). If Bruno Currie's assumptions about Theban hero cult can stand, his interpretation of the elder Strepsiades' role and the consequences of this interpretation given above in chapter 4b) are to be given preference. In both cases, this paper hopefully has shone a new light on the complications of *Isthmian* 7.

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<sup>82</sup> CURRIE (2005: 211–216).

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## Appendix: *Isthmian 7*, text and translation

ΣΤΡΕΨΙΑΔΗΙ. ΘΗΒΑΙΩΙ. ΠΑΓΚΡΑΤΙΩΙ.<sup>83</sup>

τίνι τῶν πάρος, ᾧ μάκαιρα Θήβα,	A
καλῶν ἐπιχωρίων μάλιστα θυμὸν τεδὸν	
εὐφρανας; ἦρα χαλκοκρότου πάρεδρον	
Δαμάτερος ἀνίκ' εὐρυχαίταν	
ἄντειλας Διόνυσον; ἢ χρυσῶ μεσονύκτιον νείφοντα δεξαμένα τὸν	
φέρτατον θεῶν,	5
ὀπότ' Ἀμφιτρώωνος ἐν θυρέτροις	
σταθεῖς ἄλοχον μετῆλθεν Ἡρακλείοις γοναῖς;	
ἢ ὅτ' ἀμφὶ πυκναῖς Τειρεσίαο βουλαῖς;	
ἢ ὅτ' ἀμφ' Ἰόλαον ἰππόμητιν;	
ἢ Σπαρτῶν ἀκαμαντολογχᾶν; ἢ ὅτε καρτερᾶς Ἄδραστον ἐξ ἀλαλᾶς	
ἄμπεμψας ὄρφανὸν	10
μυρίων ἐτάρων ἐς Ἄργος ἵππιον;	
ἢ Δωρίδ' ἀποικίαν οὐνεκεν ὄρθῶ	
ἔστασας ἐπὶ σφυρῶ	
Λακεδαιμονίων, ἔλον δ' Ἀμύκλας	
Αἰγείδαι σέθεν ἔκγονοι, μαντεύμασι Πυθίοις;	15
ἀλλὰ παλαιὰ γὰρ	
εὐδὲι χάρις, ἀμνάμονες δὲ βροτοί,	
ὅ τι μὴ σοφίας ἄωτον ἄκρον	B
κλυταῖς ἐπέων ῥοαῖσιν ἐξίκηται ζυγέν.	
κώμαζ' ἔπειτεν ἀδυμελεῖ σὺν ὕμνῳ	20
καὶ Στρεψιάδα: φέρει γὰρ Ἴσθμοῖ	
νίκαν παγκρατίου, σθένει τ' ἔκπαγλος ἰδεῖν τε μορφάεις: ἄγει τ'	
ἀρετὰν οὐκ αἴσχιον φυᾶς.	
φλέγεται δὲ ἰοπλόκοισι Μοίσοις,	
μάτρωϊ θ' ὁμωνύμῳ δέδωκε κοινὸν θάλος,	
χάλκασπις ᾧ πότμον μὲν Ἄρης ἔμειξεν,	25
τιμὰ δ' ἀγαθοῖσιν ἀντίκειται.	

<sup>83</sup> The Greek text follows SNELL/MAEHLER ed. (1980) unless otherwise marked.



## To Strepsiades the Theban for his victory in the pancratium

By which one of the earlier beautiful events that happened in your area, blessed Theba, have you most rejoiced in your heart? Surely when you brought forth your Dionysus with wide-streaming hair as a companion of Demeter, rattling with bronze? Or when you received the best of the gods as he snowed down in Gold at midnight, when after having positioned himself at the doors of Amphitryon he then had intercourse with his wife for the fathering of Heracles? Or rather about the clever judgment of Tiresias? Or rather about Iolaus, skilled with horses? Or about the Spartoi, unwearied at the spear? Or because you sent back from a mighty battle Adrastus, bereaved of countless companions, to Argos, place of horses? Or the fact that you made the Dorian colony of the Lacedaemonians stand with a fully straightened ankle, and the Aegeids, your offspring, took Amyclae following the Pythian oracles? But indeed, the ancient glory sleeps, and the mortals forget it, if it does not reach the highest refinement of wisdom joined with glorious streams of words. Praise then with sweet-sounding song also Strepsiades, because he carries away with him a victory in the pancratium at the Isthmian Games, marvellous in his strength and well-shaped, and he holds a virtue not more reproachful than his physical appearance. He is made famous by the Muses with dark locks, and has given his homonymous uncle, whom Ares with brazen spear has mixed his destiny, a shared crown, and esteem is held out to good people as a fitting reward.

ἴστω γὰρ σαφὲς ὅστις ἐν ταῦτα νεφέλα χάλαζαν αἵματος πρὸ φίλας  
 πάτρας ἀμύνεται,  
 λοιγὸν ἀμφιβαλῶν<sup>84</sup> ἐναντίῳ στρατῶ,  
 ἀστῶν γενεᾶ μέγιστον κλέος αὖξων  
 ζῶων τ' ἀπὸ καὶ θανῶν. 30  
 τὺ δέ, Διοδότιο παῖ, μαχατὰν  
 αἰνέων Μελέαγρον, αἰνέων δὲ καὶ Ἑκτορα  
 Ἀμφιάραόν τε,  
 εὐανθέ' ἀπέπνευσας ἀλικίαν  
 προμάχων ἀν' ὄμιλον, ἔνθ' ἄριστοι 35  
 ἔσχον πολέμοιο νεῖκος ἐσχάταις ἐλπίσιν.  
 ἔτλαν δὲ πένθος οὐ φατόν: ἀλλὰ νῦν μοι  
 Γαῖαοχος εὐδίαν ὄπασσεν  
 ἐκ χειμῶνος. ἀείσομαι χαίταν στεφάνοισιν ἀρμόζων. ὁ δ' ἀθανάτων  
 μὴ θρασσέτω φθόνος,  
 ὅτι τερπνὸν ἐφάμερον διώκων 40  
 ἔκαλος ἔπειμι γῆρας ἔς τε τὸν μόρσιμον  
 αἰῶνα. θνάσκομεν γὰρ ὁμῶς ἅπαντες:  
 δαίμων δ' ἄϊσος: τὰ μακρὰ δ' εἴ τις  
 παπταίνει, βραχὺς ἐξικέσθαι χαλκόπεδον θεῶν ἔδραν: ὁ τοι πτερόεις  
 ἔρριψε Πάγασος  
 δεσπότην ἐθέλοντ' ἐς οὐρανοῦ σταθμοὺς 45  
 ἐλθεῖν μεθ' ὀμάγυριν Βελλεροφόνταν  
 Ζηνός: τὸ δὲ παρ δίκαν  
 γλυκὺ πικροτάτα μένει τελευτά.  
 ἄμμι δ' ὦ χρυσέα κόμα θάλλων, πόρε, Λοξία,  
 τεαῖσιν ἀμίλλαισιν 50  
 εὐανθέα καὶ Πυθοῖ στέφανον.

<sup>84</sup> SNELL/MAEHLER have †λοιγὸν ἀμύνων†; ἀμφιβαλῶν is A. W. MAIR's emendation to repair the meter and the sense, which I prefer over J. SANDYS's ἄντα φέρων.

Indeed, he shall know as a clear fact who in this storm cloud wards off the hailstorm of blood from the beloved fatherland to inflict ruin on the enemy army, that he increases the glory of the race of city-dwellers to the greatest and lives on, even being himself among the dead. And you, child of Diodotus, praising the warrior Meleager, praising also Hector and Amphiaraus, have exhaled a blooming life fighting in the forefront through the throng of men, where the best held out the quarrel of war with their last hopes. I have borne unspeakable sorrow, but now the Mover of the Earth has granted me fair weather out of a storm. I will sing binding my hair with garlands. And the envy of the immortals shall not trouble me, so that seeking for short-lived delight at my ease I will come into old age up until my destined time. Because equally we all die, but our fate is unequal. Even if one looks out for far-away things, he is too puny to reach the abode of the gods with a floor of bronze. But listen! Winged Pegasus threw off his master Bellerophon, who wanted to walk the abodes of heaven among the assembly of Zeus. And the sweetness that goes against what is right awaits the most bitter end! But us, oh you, who thrives with golden hair, give, Loxias, flourishing success in your contests and the garland in Pytho!