

Wedding at Noon in Pindar's *Ninth Pythian*

Anne Carson

THERE IS NOTHING NEW in saying that Pindar's *Ninth Pythian* is full of love and marriage. Nor in wondering why. Many commentators have noted an erotic emphasis in the poem, many have speculated about its significance.¹ No consensus has been reached on what love and marriage are doing here. This is an epinician ode for a young Cyrenaean named Telesikrates, victor as *hoplitodromos* in 474 B.C. Yet its mythological *exempla* treat mainly of brides and weddings. We may explain this with biographical fantasies about the victor and his marriage-plans,² but considerations of economy incline us to look for sense within the poem first.

We may begin by observing how much of Pindar's imagery and conception in this poem derive directly from the ancient Greek wedding ceremony. Pindar makes deliberate and pointed reference to specific parts of the wedding rite, and his intention, I would argue, is encomiastic. He conveys a certain notion of the value of marriage in human life in order to reflect upon the value of athletic endeavour. He proceeds by setting up an analogy between the *telos* of marriage in a female life and the *telos* of athletic victory in a man's life. His use of the language, the imagery, and the action of the wedding ceremony furnish us with clues for interpreting this analogy and for understanding the erotic element in the *Ninth Pythian*. By examining three aspects of the wedding rite that he draws upon in this poem, we may consider what the analogy between marriage and victory means for Pindar.

The first stage of the ancient wedding ritual was the ceremony of betrothal, at which the bride's father and the bridegroom (or the bridegroom's father) initially contracted to unite their two houses and ownership of the bride was transferred from the one to the other. The betrothal was generally called the *ἐγγύη* or *ἐγγύησις* (the 'hand-

¹ For example, recently, H. Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy* (New York/London 1973) 441–50; N. Felson Rubin, "Narrative Structure in Pindar's Ninth Pythian," *CW* 71 (1978) 353–67; E. Robbins, "Cyrene and Cheiron: The Myth of Pindar's Ninth Pythian," *Phoenix* 32 (1978) 91–104; R. P. Winnington-Ingram, "Pindar's Ninth Pythian Ode," *BICS* 16 (1969) 9–15; L. Woodbury, "Apollo's First Love: Pindar, *Pyth.* 9.26ff.," *TAPA* 103 (1972) 561–73.

² A representative sample is described by Woodbury (*supra* n.1) 562.

ing-over') and the bridegroom was the *ἐγγνητής*, words cognate with *ἐγναλίζειν* ('to put into the hand').³ An alternate terminology was available, however. The action of the betrothal could be designated with the verb *ἀρμόζειν* ('to fit together') and the bridegroom could be called the *ἀρμοστής*.⁴ It is the latter terminology that Pindar uses to describe the union of Apollo and Kyrene which Aphrodite 'fits together' (*ἀρμόζουσα*, 13), and again of Antaios' daughter and her bridegroom whom Antaios 'fits together' (*ἀρμόζων*, 117). This technical sense of *ἀρμόζειν*, common already in Herodotus (*cf.* LSJ *s.v.*), here serves to evoke this formality of the wedding rite.

The central action of the wedding ceremony was the bridal procession in which the bride made her decisive transition from the house of her father and childhood to that of her husband and new married life. This procession was called the *ἀγωγή*, from *ἄγειν*.⁵ When Pindar describes Telesikrates "leading lovely fame" (*δόξαν ἱμερτὰν ἀγαγόντ'*, 75) from Delphi for Kyrene to receive, he implies that the victory which Telesikrates leads home to Kyrene is as lovely as a bride in her wedding procession.⁶ The same terminology appears twice in Pindar's account of the wedding of Alexidamos at the end of the poem, where *ἀπάγεσθαι* (119) and *ἄγειν* (123) are used to describe how the bridegroom leads his bride through the ranks of his kinsmen to the crowning moment of their marriage.

In the wedding ritual, the bridal procession culminated at the bridegroom's house when the bridegroom took his bride by the hand and led her down from her chariot to his mother, who stood waiting at the doorway of the house to receive them.⁷ This ceremony of

³ Poll. *Onom.* 3.34–35; P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque II* (Paris 1968) 309; W. Erdmann, *Die Ehe im alten Griechenland* (Munich 1934) 225–46.

⁴ Poll. *Onom.* 3.39. Aphrodite's Spartan cult-title Ἄρηντα derives, according to Tzetzes, from her function as goddess of marriage: β' ξένους ἀρμόττει πρὸς μίαν συνάφειαν γαμικήν (*ad Lycoph.* 832 [266f Scheer]).

⁵ Poll. *Onom.* 3.40; Phot. *Lex.* I 246.6; Hesych. *s.v.* νυμφαγωγός, νυμφεύτρια; Hyper. *Pro Lycoph.* 5; Luc. *Symp.* 47; Eur. *Hel.* 722–25, *HF* 12; Erdmann (*supra* n.3) 250–61.

⁶ *Cf.* Sappho's use of this adjective to describe a bride's face suffused with *eros*, fr. 112.4 Lobel; of Aphrodite's face, *Hymn.Hom.* 10.2; of the bed of Zeus and Thyone, Pind. *Pyth.* 3.99.

⁷ Schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 344. The *ἀγωγή* is frequently depicted on vases: *e.g.* see Nicola Putorti, "La collezione di vasi antichi del poeta Diego Vitrioli," *Ausonia* 4 (1909) 129–36 fig. 1, 3; H. B. Walters, *Catalogue of the Greek and Etruscan Vases in the British Museum II* (London 1893) pl. 5; H. Thiersch, *Tyrrhenische Amphoren* (Leipzig 1899) pl. 5. The welcoming mother of the groom is particularly in evidence on a black-figure amphora by the Amasis painter reproduced by D. von Bothmer, "New Vases by the Amasis Painter," *AntK* 3 (1960) 73–74 pl. 7, and also on a pyxis-cover from the British Museum illustrated in A. S. Murray and A. H. Smith, *White Athenian Vases in the British Museum* (London 1896) pl. 20. See further A. Nawrath, *De graecorum ritibus*

reception, a popular subject of vase-painting, is pointedly evoked by Pindar in his *Ninth Pythian*. At 11 he represents Aphrodite welcoming the bride Kyrene from her bridegroom's chariot. At 55 it is Lady Libya who acts as mother-in-law and welcomes the bride into her new home. At 78 the land of Kyrene similarly welcomes Telesikrates when he leads home to her a victory as desirable as a bride. And in the final scene of the poem, the bridegroom Alexidamos wins his bride with a touch of the hand and leads her amidst his kinsmen to be received and crowned (122–24).

The third and final panel of the Greek wedding ritual was the ceremony called the *καταχύσματα*, at which the bride was ritually incorporated into her new household. After arrival at the bridegroom's house the bride, or the bridal couple, was led to the hearth of the house and there showered with figs, dates, nuts, cakes, and coins by the members of the household. The same ritual was performed, ancient sources inform us,⁸ when a new slave entered the household or when a person returned from visiting an oracle. Ancient accounts are unclear and modern opinion divided⁹ as to the import of the ritual but, whatever else it may have implied, for the bride the *καταχύσματα* surely symbolized acceptance into the wealth and felicity of her husband's house and of the married state: the household poured over her a rain of its riches to signify that it would enclose her in this wealth by enclosing her in a marriage.

Pindar calls upon the image of the *καταχύσματα* and its shower of wealth in the final scene of his poem. Here Alexidamos' kinsmen surround the bridal couple and shower over them the leaves and crowns of victory (123–24). Commentators generally describe this image as merely an instance of the ceremony called the *φυλλοβολία* or 'pelting with leaves' which was a standard token of applause for a victorious athlete (*cf.* Pind. *Pyth.* 4.239–40).¹⁰ But Pindar gives us

nuptialibus e vasculis demonstrandis (Diss. Breslau 1914) 12–16; W. K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (Ithaca 1968) 119 pl. 24.

⁸ Harp. s.v.; Hesych. s.v.; Theopomp. fr. 14 (I 736 Kock, from schol. Ar. *Plut.* 768); Poll. *Onom.* 3.77, 6.56.

⁹ L. Deubner, "Καταχύσματα und Münzzauber," *RhM* 121 (1978) 240–54; N. D. Fustel de Coulanges, *La cité antique* (Paris 1882) 41–42, 54–56, 127; W. Mannhardt, *Mythologische Forschungen* (Strassburg 1884) 351–54; Nawrath (*supra* n.7) 21–22; E. Samter, *Familienfeste der Griechen und Römer* (Berlin 1901) 1–14.

¹⁰ *E.g.* R. B. Burton: "Pindar's description of the scene requires little comment. . . . The *φυλλοβολία* with which it ends comes to life in a vase-painting such as that by Oltus (Richter, *ARV* fig. 35) depicting this customary salutation of a victorious athlete" (*Pindar's Pythian Odes* [Oxford 1962] 59). Rubin refers, without citation, to the *φυλλοβολία* as "a rural custom common at marriages" (*supra* n.1) 366. I do not know of evidence for the 'custom'.

more than a standard *φυλλοβολία* at the end of his *Ninth Pythian*. The atypical ceremony that he describes takes on overtones from the nuptial motif already established in the poem so as to evoke the climactic moment of the wedding ritual. Alexidamos is not a victor standing alone in the splendour of victory receiving the crowns and applause of his audience. He is a bridegroom, with his bride beside him, accepting the congratulations of his kinsmen. Pindar allows Alexidamos' victory and his marriage to converge: upon the *φυλλοβολία* is projected a rite of *καταχύσματα* in the rich image that ends the poem.

Commentators who mark the nuptial references in *Pythian 9* generally read their implications in a comparison of Telesikrates with the bridegrooms of the poem, and of the brides with Telesikrates' victory.¹¹ But is Pindar's design so simple? Kyrene herself does not fit neatly into a parallel which aligns brides with victories, bridegrooms with victors. She is an atypical female¹² and, indeed, a kind of athlete: wrestling a lion alone and without weapons (27–28), engaging in *νείκος* (31), tasting *ἀλκά* (35). Pindar's representation of Kyrene and Telesikrates includes many facets, as it seems to me, which draw the nymph and the victor into significant comparison with each other. For example, Pindar stresses that fulfillment for both bride and athlete occurs by an act of 'mingling' (of Kyrene and Apollo at 13 and 69, of Telesikrates and victory at 72). This erotic metaphor is used of athletic victory in other odes,¹³ but the close pairing of literal and metaphorical senses in 68 and 72 of *Pythian 9* suggests a sharp and deliberate emphasis here. Moreover, as critics have noted,¹⁴ the young man and the girl both inspire erotic emotion in those who watch them contest: Kyrene moves Apollo to desire when he sees her wrestling a lion (26–37) and Telesikrates causes female spectators at the games to be struck dumb with longing (99–101). By marriage and by victory alike is won a condition of brilliant light, fame, and fecundity. Kyrene is translated to *kleos* and a brilliant future in Libya by means of her marriage (55–56, 69–70), as is Telesikrates in his Delphic victory (1–4, 71–75); Kyrene is conveyed from the shadowy concealment of Pelion (34) to the golden halls of her marriage (56), while Telesikrates makes his city shine out in victory at Delphi (73); Kyrene will bloom in childbirth and Libyan wealth (6–8, 58–59) as Telesikrates mingles with blooming victory (72). Finally, let us take

¹¹ E.g. J. Duchemin, *Pindare: Pythiques* (Paris 1967) 62 n.1; Rubin (*supra* n.1) 364; C. A. P. Ruck and W. H. Matheson, *Pindar: Selected Odes* (Ann Arbor 1968) 216.

¹² So 18–25; cf. Fränkel (*supra* n.1) 446 and n.10.

¹³ E.g. *Nem.* 1.18, 2.22; W. J. Slater, *Lexicon to Pindar* (Berlin 1969) s.v. *μείγνυμι*.

¹⁴ Burton (*supra* n.10) 59; Fränkel (*supra* n.1) 449 and n.20; Rubin (*supra* n.1) 365.

note of this image of blooming that links athlete and bride. The metaphor of vegetation, so frequently used by the Greek poets in erotic contexts,¹⁵ is strikingly coupled by Pindar here (72) with his epinician subject, Telesikrates' victory. From that coupling emerges the most telling of the correspondences between bride and victor, namely a certain urgent relationship with time. Implicit in the metaphor of plants and blooming, explicit in the conditions of a race, the time-factor is at the heart of Pindar's analogy between brides and victors. By means of this factor the various marriages and victories of the poem are bound into one design, the various brides and victors are seen to contest on analogous terms for a similar kind of *telos*. Time is of the essence. Let us consider how.

The *Ninth Pythian* shows itself unusually concerned with the hours of the day and the timing of action, as it moves from the pre-dawn forays of Kyrene (20–25) to the noon-day heat of the Danaids (111–14), framing Apollo's swift action in love (67–68).¹⁶ Apollo and Kyrene alike are time-conscious; Kyrene disdains to 'waste' (*ἀναλίσκοισα*, 25) the hours before dawn on sleep, and Apollo realizes his marriage in one swift day (66–69). Swiftmess itself is the means to marriage in the final two myths of the poem where, for Alexidamos and for the Danaids, a footrace is also a bride-race and is called *gamos* (111, 114). Note that time is of concern not only to bridegrooms straining towards the *τέλος ἄκρον* (118). Brides too are under some pressure: Danaos would see his daughters wed *πρὶν μέσον ἄμαρ ἐλεῖν* (113), Pindar says, as if there were some time-limit on the maidenhood of the Danaids. Why should Pindar wish to imply this?

Pindar's phrasing may refer to an actual condition of Olympian competition requiring the footrace to end before midday (Paus.6.24.1).¹⁷ Whether or not that is the case, his insertion of a time-element in the brides' situation here has as its effect, I would argue, to put the Danaids in contest with time, and to signal an analogy between bride and athlete in their respective races. Kyrene is the only bride in the poem who acts like an athlete (26–33), but she is not the only one

¹⁵ This metaphor of female life, pervasive in the poem (7, 8, 33, 53, 55, 58, 109–10, 111) is examined by Burton (*supra* n.10) 44; Rubin (*supra* n.1) 359; on more general use of the metaphor in Greek literature see A. Motte, *Prairies et jardins de la Grèce antique* (Brussels 1973), esp. 192–232.

¹⁶ F. Mezger usefully drew attention to the recurrence of *ἀντίκα* (29, 57, 114) and, following L. Schmidt, located the unity of the ode in its emphasis on determined and timely action; in his view, however, this emphasis has biographical relevance for Telesikrates, an injunction to cash in, for wife-hunting purposes, on his current glamour as a victor: *Pindars Siegeslieder* (Leipzig 1880) 239.

¹⁷ Fränkel (*supra* n.1) 445 n.8.

who reflects an athlete's critical relationship with time. The other brides compete standing still (ἔστασεν 113, στᾶσε 118).

In the course of the poem Pindar shows us a sequence of people who do not waste time and sets in the midst of them, and of the poem, a disquisition on *kairos* (76–80). Not exclusively a temporal notion, *kairos* defines an intersection of time, situation, and deed: “‘opportunitas’ et temporis et rerum.”¹⁸ Although Pindar does not use the word *kairos* of his victor, nor of the chief mythical figures in the poem, the gnomic formulation at 79–80 has pertinence for both the athletic and nuptial contexts that surround it. In the case of the athlete, as for a hero like Iolaos, *kairos* may be described as the set of conditions that open out around him and make victory possible, at a certain moment, by means of a certain action. Analogous to this is the moment charged with opportunity in a woman's life, when her sexual desirability reaches its peak and the conditions for marriage open around her.¹⁹ For an athlete, to seize the *kairos* means athletic victory, to miss it, failure and ignominy. A parallel risk attends the female, but in her case the *kairos* comes once a lifetime, its *telos* is *gamos* (114, 118), and to miss it is to consign herself to the long, barren afternoon of spinsterhood. Imagery of vegetation throughout the poem makes vivid and unmistakable the implications of this relationship between the female and time, sentencing her to bloom and be plucked once for all at a certain moment, by means of the timely agency of men. Pindar's deployment of this imagery, however, proves to have more than one aspect: the pathos which the metaphor of vegetation sheds on the female condition should not distract us from seeing that men are comparably pressed. *Victory also blooms* (εὐθαλεῖ τύχα, 72). The dilemma of timing in which human chances are set presents one face to men (a demand to act) and another to women (a requirement to wait), but the pressure and the stakes are commensu-

¹⁸ I. Rumpel, *Lexicon Pindaricum* (Leipzig 1883) 231. “Mezger happily calls the ode *das Hohelied vom kairos*,” Gildersleeve approves, but is impatient with the “rather German than Greek” biographical rationale: *Pindar: The Olympian and Pythian Odes* (New York 1885) 338. On *kairos* see W. S. Barrett, *Euripides Hippolytos* (Oxford 1964) 231; E. L. Bundy, *Studia Pindarica* I (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1962) 18; Burton (*supra* n.10) 46, 171, 179; Fränkel (*supra* n.1) 447–48 and n.14; L. R. Palmer, “The Indo-European Origins of Greek Justice,” *TPhS* 1950, 149–68. Pausanias saw an altar to *Kairos* fronting the Olympian stadium (5.14.7).

¹⁹ Lysistrata remarks ruefully upon this traditional Greek view of female chances (Ar. *Lys.* 596–97):

τῆς δὲ γυναικὸς μικρὸς ὁ καιρὸς, κἄν τούτου μὴ ᾿πιλάβηται
οὐδεὶς ἐθέλει γῆμαι ταύτην, ὄττενομένη δὲ κάθηται.

An epigram of Honestus measures female marriageability against the bloom of a grape: *Anth.Pal.* 5.20 (Gow and Page, *Garland of Philip* I 268).

nable. Pindar's analogy between bride and athlete allows us to gauge that pressure. The fulfillment of an individual life within community is at stake and is defined in each case by necessities as harsh as nature. Athletes must race; women must age. Is the *telos* worth the effort?

Pindar addresses this question by shaping his analogy after the pattern of the wedding ritual. We have noted that he focuses on three particular aspects of that ritual: the betrothal, the bridal procession, and the showering of the *καταχύσματα*. Pindar's focus points his meaning here, which is, I believe, to represent marriage as a civilizing thing, as a ceremony and an activity which incorporates into the productive life of the community an individual who would otherwise remain solitary, savage, sterile. He accordingly focuses on features of the wedding concerned with incorporation of the individual into a social group. The betrothal was important in Greek society because it made of the married union a social act, an act going beyond individuals and joining their two houses.²⁰ The bridal procession provided a public dramatization of this conjunction. The closing rites of the *καταχύσματα* formally and publicly made the strange bride part of her new house by mingling her with its fruits.²¹ In evoking these aspects of the wedding, Pindar argues for marriage as a socializing mechanism.

He argues mythically, that is, by means of mythical *exempla* which show solitary excellence to be a doomed, wild, and sterile thing. To reach fruition Kyrene must be rooted in earth (7–8, *cf.* 111), for she has been ripped from her original growth (33); she must be housed in Libya (56), for she is savage (6); she must be completed in marriage (66), for her might is unbounded (35).²² Marriage is the means prescribed by Pindar's society for bounding, civilizing, and fulfilling a woman. To deny it is to miss the only *telos* appropriate for her.²³

²⁰ O. Damsté, "De matrimonio atheniensi," in *Strena Petro Helberto Damsté a discipulis oblata* (Leyden 1927) 31–35; L. Gernet, "Observations sur le mariage en Grèce," *RD* 32 (1954) 472–73; A. R. W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens I* (Oxford 1968) 1–60; J. P. Vernant, "Le mariage en Grèce archaïque," *ParPass* 28 (1973) 51–74; H. J. Wolff, "Marriage Law and Family Organization in Ancient Athens," *Traditio* 2 (1944) 40–53.

²¹ See *supra* n.8 and also A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago 1960) 141, on marriage as the incorporation of a stranger into a group.

²² According to the usual Greek prejudice the unbounded must be bounded or it remains *ἀτελής* (Arist. *Gen.An.* 1.1 715b15–16); so Apollo bestows on Kyrene *τερπιάν γάμου τελευτάν* (66). Rubin comments on the significance of Telesikrates' name in this connection (*supra* n.1) 365. With Kyrene we may compare Theognis' Atalanta, who pursues *ἔργ' ἀτέλεστα* when she flees wedlock (1290); see Fränkel (*supra* n.1) 442 n.4.

²³ Kekrops' invention of the institution of marriage traditionally qualified him as a culture-hero who led the Athenians *ἀπὸ ἀγριότητος εἰς ἡμερότητα* (schol. Ar. *Plut.* 773). On the general notion that marriage fits the 'wild' bride into civilization see M.

There is, then, more to the myth of Kyrene than the rescue of a tomboy for civilization and motherhood. It is through Kyrene that we see what is demanded of Telesikrates. He too should be regarded as an individual performing a rite of incorporation into community, for his athletic excellence cannot flourish in private. It must be cultivated out in the full light of the games and the proclamation of a poet (*cf. καθαρὸν φέγγος*, 90). If the victor's personal value is not mingled with that of his community, it has no life. Correspondingly, however brave and beautiful Kyrene is in lonely contests with lions, nothing can come of this ἀλλά until it is planted and housed in the city of her own name.

In summary, the point of the analogy between bride and victor is, at least in part, to remind us that excellence is a public thing, only properly realized in a communal effort. The moment when a bride is plucked in marriage is a *kairos* analogous to that moment when victory flowers around the athlete. In each case the *kairos* represents an intersection of public and private, occurring when an individual reaches out beyond himself to perform an action that mingles him with his community. Underlying the action is a necessity as harsh and as rich as that whereby plants bloom. Through the analogy with the bride we see that this is so; through the image of the wedding we may judge it to be good. It does not seem that a biographical reference is required to explain the metaphor of marriage in the *Ninth Pythian*. Pindar uses weddings and brides to show us what *kairos* means for an athlete and with what urgency it must be seized. For Pindar's brides the terms of things are as in the verses of John Donne:

Love is a growing, or full constant light;
and his first minute, after noone, is night.²⁴

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
March, 1982

Detienne, *Les Jardins d'Adonis* (Paris 1972); on the specific application of this notion to Kyrene in Pindar's *Ninth Pythian* see Robbins (*supra* n.1). This view of marriage informed the wedding ritual itself, at least at Athens where, at one point in the ceremony, a child crowned with thorns distributed bread to the company with the words ἐφυγον κακόν, εὔρον ἄμεινον (Page, *PMG* 855 with references). This formula signified, Zenobius confides, ὡς ἀπώσαντο μὲν τὴν ἀγρίαν καὶ παλαιάν δίαιταν, εὐρήκασιν δὲ τὴν ἡμέραν τροφήν. The formula is first met in the context of the mystery-rituals (Dem. 18.259) where its meaning has been much controverted: see H. Wankel, *Demosithenes Rede für Ktesiphon über den Kranz II* (Heidelberg 1976) 1138; F. Graf, *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung* (Berlin 1974) 106 n.54.

²⁴ "A Lecture upon the Shadow" 25f. I would like to express gratitude to Professors L. Woodbury and E. Robbins for help with this paper.