

Pindar's Wound

The body in Pindar is traversed by multiple vectors and influences. Since the odes celebrate victory and consign loss to the hidden path down which the loser skulks (*Ol.* 8.67-69, *Pyth.* 8.83-87), those influences are generally represented as positive. They inhere first and foremost in the vitalism that endows the body with physical and moral qualities (ἀρετά) that predetermine its success; next in the strength and skills that result from the augmentation and honing of that genetic gift through *askesis*; and finally in the possibility, rare but stellar, of direct infusion of power by the hand of God.

The sheer *éclat* of all such influences obscures more than illuminates the body's true nature, which emerges more clearly to the degree to which the body verges on failure rather than success. Given Pindar's agenda, failure is rarely and at best only indirectly addressed in the odes. The terms that frame its discourse, however — πόνος, μόχθος, κάματος, δαπάνα (effort, toil, expenditure) — show the body in its affective register, namely as the site of felt struggle against resistance that is both worldly and, far more importantly, internal and reflexive. The latter instance exposes a deep constitutional flaw to which the human body is subject, namely the rift between desire (ἐλπίς) and power (δύναμις) that divides it simultaneously from the body of gods and from itself (cf. *Nem.* 6.1-4). That division between desire and power, will and flesh is experienced both affectively and also as the distance between human agency and its object or project in the world at large.

The emblem of this problem and what passes for a cure is Pindar's version of the myth of Philoktetes in *Pythian* 1 (52-57). There the hero's wound — reshaped by the poet to reflect the

affliction suffered by Hieron of Syracuse, the ode's addressee — undergoes a therapy that at one and the same time heals and yet confirms the infirmity it embodies.

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