On the Shores of Acheron (*N.* 4.85): The Power of Pindaric Song

Pindaric studies give ample evidence of the performative turn that marked the late twentieth century. Budelmann (2009, 15) concludes his introduction to Greek lyric by emphasizing this striking scholarly *volte-face*:

> The perspective, therefore, has shifted from authors to performers and audiences, and from a lyric of individuality and subjective self-expression to a lyric that has a function in the lives of archaic and classical communities and the various groups that make up those communities.

In other words, scholars have increasingly read Greek lyric with an "extrapoetic" eye for its "occasional nature" (Sigelman 2016, 8). Pindar seemed particularly ripe for this kind of performative focus. After all, Wilamowitz long ago called into question the real poetic value of the odes. His reading of *Nemean* 7, for example, sounds a familiar refrain: *Wir werden in dem Gedichte nicht eben viel Poesie finden* (1922, 166). Instead, readers have often found in Pindar's odes an obscure poetic language that "is legendarily hard to follow" (Pelliccia 2009, 254). With great facility and fruitfulness, then, scholars have turned toward the Pindaric audience, exploring the genre's sociological context, religious significance, and economic market.

Yet signs suggest that this first wave of Pindaric performance studies has run its course. For instance, after decades of debate scholars still cannot agree on a rather fundamental question of performance: "who sang Pindar's victory odes?" (Lefkowitz 1988). This debate—with its "choral" and "anti-choral" adherents (Burnett 1989, 289)—inevitably raises the "first-person problem in Pindar," where the literature is equally vast and vexed (D'Alessio 1994). Some commentators have further problematized the performance question by defining the genre's

"immediate context" as sympotic (Clay 1999, 25-26). The reader who follows where this bibliography leads might rightly wonder: just who performed what, when, and where?

In the face of this performative impasse, Sigelman (2016) signals a timely interpretative shift. She parts methodological ways with the extrapoetic readings associated with Wilamowitz and the New Historicism. Instead, her "intrapoetic" approach explores the "odes *as poetry*" (8). In particular, Sigelman underscores the poetic self-consciousness of the odes, which betray an acute awareness of their ongoing construction and future (re)performance. Pindar fashions his song in such a way that each ode "consciously views itself as perpetually in the state of composition and as perpetually moving toward its own performance" (85). This inner dynamism manifests itself in a recurrent "song-journey" motif (60-85), in which the ode sets out on an intrapoetic voyage to its epinician addressee and beyond.

Thus impelled, Pindaric song can even journey to the *Au-delà.* In four of his epinicians (*N*. 4, *O*. 8 and 14, *P*. 5), "Pindar imagines his song having the power to cross the border into the netherworld and be heard by the dead" (Nisetich 1980, 245). *Prima facie,* this bold, postmortem journey seems to dovetail well with Sigelman's reading. Surprisingly, though, she deals only briefly with one (*O*. 14) of these Underworld passages (59). The eschatological journey of Pindaric song remains largely unexplored. Segal (1985, 200) concedes this very point in his own brief study of the poet's "Underworld messages." I aim to fill in this lacuna—and build upon Sigelman's work—with a close reading *Nemean* 4. I hope to show how the ode's penultimate stanza (vv.81-88) penetrates the netherworld in a way that illustrates the immortalizing power of song. Such a project will inevitably deal with the old Pindaric problems of voicing and performance. I hope that this research will also contribute to a new kind of "postmortem poetics" for Pindaric epinician.

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