

1 *Koros in Performance*
APPEASING THE *PHTHONEROI*,
THE GODS, AND THE VICTOR

Break-Off, Excess, and the Epinician Audience

Break-off is a striking and frequent feature of the Pindaric epinician idiom.¹ Break-off is a rhetorical device whereby the poet interrupts himself with an exclamation like ἀφίσταμαι, “I stand aside!” or στάσομαι, “I will stop!” or a command like κώπαν σχάσον, “Hold the oar!” With some comment of this kind he abruptly breaks off the narrative or theme on which he was previously engaged, and changes the subject. He announces that it would not be right, for one reason or another, to pursue the original topic any further. Then he embarks on a new topic.²

A classic example of break-off occurs in *Pythian* 11. The poet has been telling the story of Orestes. But he suddenly abandons the myth with a pair of rhetorical questions: “Friends, did I go astray at the crossroads with its intersecting paths? . . . Or did some wind throw me off course like a skiff at sea?” (38–40). He suggests that further

1. Break-off is ubiquitous in Pindar. The break-off passages discussed in this chapter are *O.* 1.52–53; *O.* 2.95–100; *O.* 9.35–41; *O.* 13.91–97; *P.* 1.81–84; *P.* 4.246–58; *P.* 8.29–34; *P.* 10.51; *N.* 3.26–33; *N.* 4.33–35, 69–75; *N.* 5.16–20; *N.* 6.53–57; *N.* 8.21–22; *N.* 10.19–22; *I.* 1.60–63; and *I.* 5.51–54. Carey (1980, 143) notes that, while break-off also occurs in the epinician poetry of Bacchylides, it is much more frequent and developed in Pindar’s poetry. Carey suggests that Pindar has “created a stylized form of his own within the conventions of the epinician genre.”

2. A slight variation in the basic pattern is found at *O.* 2.95–98, where the break-off passage does not introduce a new theme, but instead brings the whole ode to a conclusion.

attention to the myth would detract from his duty to praise the victor: “It is your task, Muse . . . to rouse now one song, and now another, for Pythonikos, the father, or for Thrasydaios” (41–44). This is a common justification for break-off in Pindar. But Pindar’s epinician odes contain break-off passages of different types, and the poet gives different reasons for breaking off in different kinds of context. In this chapter, I shall compare the various types of break-off in Pindar to bring out how they differ and what they have in common. In this way I shall explore how this rhetorical device functions in epinician poetry and what it tells us about the poet’s task and the kind of environment in which he is working.

One simple and obvious function break-off performs is to facilitate a transition to another subject.³ But the device also achieves and conveys far more than that. Why are these transitions accompanied by so much metanarrative commentary?⁴ Why does the poet draw so much attention to the transition? And what does he say about it? By posing and answering questions like these, I seek to enhance our understanding of how the epinician poet relates to his audience.

Recent scholarship describes and interprets break-off as a rhetorical gesture that creates artificially the effect of a spontaneous, impromptu, oral narrative. William Race suggests that in Pindar’s odes the narrator, when he announces his attention to break off one theme in favor of another, “appears to react to his own statements, as if he were hearing

3. Although contemporary scholars recognize the rhetorical character of the device, this was not always the case in antiquity. As Kyriakou (1996, 17) notes, the Pindaric scholiasts took at face value the poet’s apologies for irrelevance on these occasions, and charged him with ineptitude (*ἀμηχανία*) sometimes put down to his alleged immaturity. Though Farnell (1930a, 188), like the scholiasts, called Pindar “wayward and capricious,” Bundy (1962, 40) observed that “the use of real or imaginary objections as foil” is a “common motive” in prose as well as choral rhetoric, and that it is “a frequent means of amplification in *enkomia* of all kinds.” Most contemporary scholars concur with Kyriakou’s observation that break-off “functions in a meaningful, elegant way” in Pindar. For full references, see Kyriakou 1996, 17 n. 2.

4. Pindar’s poetry in general is full of metanarrative commentary. Goldhill (1991, 129) notes the poet’s “self-reflexive concern with the construction, aims, and function of poetry.” Hamilton (1974, 16–17) identifies the Poet’s Task (“the poet introducing himself into the poem to talk about his obligations”) as one of the “parts” of the epinician ode.

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them—like a listener—for the first time.”⁵ Epinician poetry was performed orally and in public but was not, in Pindar’s time, actually composed in performance. But break-off mimics the process of spontaneous composition in performance.⁶ This enhances the poet’s praise of the victor. It suggests that to praise the victor is a spontaneous and natural gesture. In this respect, break-off functions in the same way as other features of epinician poetry that convey the impression of spontaneity and informality. One of these is the likening of the epinician ode to a *κῶμος*—an impromptu “revel” or “rout.”⁷ Another is the poet’s claim that he is a personal friend of the victor’s.⁸ More generally, many statements in Pindar’s epinician odes are designed to create the impression that the ode is performed on the spur of the moment. The passage at the beginning of *Olympian* 1 in which the narrator enjoins himself and his companions to “Take down the Dorian lyre from its peg” (*O.* 1.17–18) is an example of this. And the “encomiastic futures”—expressions like “I shall sing,” “I shall glorify,” and “I shall testify”—also contribute to an impression of impromptu spontaneity.⁹

5. Race 1990, 42. Race (1980) also aligns break-off in Pindar and Bacchylides with a similarly motivated convention in oratory: the speaker will “apologize” for “digressing” even in a prepared speech. Cf. Carey (1981, 5) on “oral subterfuge” and Miller (1993, 21), who suggests that break-off is motivated by a desire to convey psychological realism. Cf. also Pelliccia (1995, 305), who suggests that the poet “presents himself as . . . impulsive and wayward.”

6. Dickson (1990b, 124) observes that Pindar “assumes the status of an oral poet.” Descat (1990, 69–70) suggests that Pindar puts oral communication on a higher level than written.

7. Cf. *O.* 4.9; *O.* 5.1–3; *O.* 6.8; *O.* 8.10; *O.* 14.15–16; *P.* 12.1–5; *N.* 11.1–4. On the function and character of the *κῶμος*, which reputedly involved “disorderly and violent behavior,” see Heath and Lefkowitz 1988, 180; cf. Herington 1985, 30. Some scholars resist the idea that the epinician poetry performance itself is described as a *κῶμος* in these contexts. But as Morgan (1993, 1–2, 5) points out, epinician can compare itself rhetorically to a *κῶμος* without actually having taken this form, and epinician has much to gain from the comparison, which wins the genre the positive attributes of spontaneity and joy.

8. Cf. Pelliccia 1995, 305, on the function of passages in which the poet addresses his own *thumos*, “heart,” to create an impression of “uncomplicated sincerity,” and Svenbro 1975, 184–86, and Scodel 1996, 61, on the poet’s alleged friendship with the victor.

9. *κελαδήσω*, *ῥφρα αἰνέσω*, *ἐθέλω . . . γεγωνεῖν* and like expressions, as Bundy (1962, 20–21) first pointed out, refer reflexively to the performance already under way. On the “encomiastic future,” see also Slater 1969, 86.

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But break-off does more than simply create the effect of oral spontaneity. By looking at what is said in these passages that imitate spontaneous oral performance, we can learn a lot about the epinician poet's relationship with his audience, and about what he is required to say in order to please them. In fact, break-off reflects and illustrates the finely tuned balancing act the epinician poet must perform if he is to please his audience. Break-off is an interesting feature because of the way it represents an oral performer's anxiety about how his audience will react, from moment to moment, to what he is saying. It presents us with a performer who is constantly retracting what he has just said or revising it, altering the course of his narrative as if in response to the perceived or anticipated reactions of his audience.¹⁰ As Patricia Bulman writes: "In epideictic poetry and oratory, in general, the speaker must always be keenly aware of his audience's emotions, and so he must be constantly on the alert to anticipate and modulate their reactions."¹¹ Break-off showcases this aspect of the epinician poet's task.

The epinician poet's anxiety about his audience's response to what he says is sometimes made explicit. Sometimes the poet expresses concern that he might not win *κέρδος*, "credit," "advantage," or "profit" from his audience.¹² In *Nemean* 5, for example, the poet alludes to, but

10. On the interactive relationship between narrator and audience in oral storytelling situations, see Lord 1960, 14, and Dégh 1969, 227 and 240.

11. Bulman 1992, 2. Cf. Griffith 1990, 199, on Pindar's "overriding concern . . . for his audience's favor." Scodel (1996, 65) observes that "Self-correction . . . belongs to those forms in which the poet is a figure of authority and demonstrates his anxieties about doing his important job adequately." She contrasts (66) the Homeric situation, where the conceit is that "poetic skill and knowledge come from the individual and from the gods" exclusively, with the "pseudo-spontaneity" evinced by self-correction in choral lyric poets like Pindar—the latter caters to the audience's desire to feel that *they* are influencing the performance.

12. The Greek word *κέρδος* may be understood either in a literal or a metaphorical sense. The word is ambiguous between the basic material sense of "gain," and the metaphorical sense of "credit." On the interplay between these two senses of *κέρδος* in Pindar's poetry, see Kurke 1991, 166 and 228. Kurke (following Woodbury 1968) argues that the *κέρδος* the epinician poet professes to desire is not *κέρδος* in the sense of material gain, but in its secondary or metaphorical sense, the highest *κέρδος* being (cf. *I.* 1.51) a good reputation. Cf. Nagy 1990, 188: "For Pindaric song-making, the true *misthos* 'wage' of compensation for song is equated with *kharis*, the beauty and pleasure of reciprocity between the poet and the subject of his praise."

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declines to narrate, the story of the ancient hero Phokos's murder by his half brothers, Peleus and Telamon. The reason he gives is that it is more "profitable" or "advantageous" (κερδίων, 16) to keep silence on such matters (16–17). In *Olympian* 1, for the same reason, the poet refuses to tell a story that presents the gods in a bad light. Doing so would only bring him the "disadvantage" or "want of profit" [ἀκέρδεια, 53] earned by other "evil-speakers" [κακαγόρους, 53].

So what does an epinician poet need to do if he wants to win κέρδος, "profit," or "credit," from the people who hear him? Reading through the epinician odes, we may quickly conclude that nothing offends an audience like excess (κόρος). In the example from *Nemean* 5, the poet shrinks from saying something that is excessive in an ethical sense: something morally outrageous.¹³ He calls the murder of Phokos "an enormity [μέγα, 14], risked with no regard for justice" (14). In *Olympian* 1, the poet declines to recount a version of the Pelops myth that exceeds or goes "beyond [ὑπέρ, 28b] the true account." Elsewhere, the praise poet's opposite number or negative paradigm, the poet of blame, is described as suffering impoverishment as a result of his indulgence in excess. In *Pythian* 2, the epinician poet describes the blame poet Arkhilokhos in a state of ἀμαχανία, "helpless want of resources" (the equivalent of ἀκέρδεια at *O.* 1.53), presumably because of a negative reaction from his audience. The negative reaction was provoked by Arkhilokhos's excessive behavior: he "fattens" [πλαινόμενον, 56] himself on "heavy-worded hatreds" [βαρυσλόγοις ἔχθεισιν, 55].

William Race notes that "too much to tell" is a "common break-off motif."¹⁴ I suggest that avoiding κόρος, "excess," in one sense or another, is not just a common reason, but always the reason for break-off in Pindar's odes.¹⁵ This becomes clear once we realize that the concept

13. As Walsh (1984) notes.

14. Race 1990, 51 n. 13.

15. Race (1990, 41) finds that two important "indicators" regularly "signal" break off: "emphatically postponed words signifying death, suffering, or defeat" and "divine epiphanies or actions." I suggest that passages of the first category are "excessive" in the sense that they are so horrifying as to be "beyond the pale." Kyriakou (1996, 18) claims that break-off passages are not all uniform because some occur for religious or moral reasons, while others are introduced to effect shifts from mythic topics to the victor, or from one myth to another. I suggest that, regardless of the subject matter, break-off

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of excess has many different applications in Pindar, literal and metaphorical ones. The epinician poet makes many promises to remain within appropriate limits, in break-off passages and elsewhere.¹⁶ But break-off in particular calls attention to the way in which the poet fulfills these promises. Break-off represents the epinician poet as a performer who knows exactly when he is on the brink of going too far, and can quickly correct the error.¹⁷

Some break-off passages explicitly mention the need to avoid *κόρος*, “excess.” In *Pythian* 8, the poet has been praising the victor’s homeland, the island of Aigina. But he brings the topic to a close with the remark that he “is not at leisure” (29) to tell the “whole long story” [*πᾶσαν μακροαγορίαν*, 30] of Aigina and her local heroes, the *Aiakidai*, “lest *κόρος* come and grate [*χνίση*, 32] on us.” He does not want to be excessive in his praise. Moreover, excessive praise will provoke some kind of excessive reaction in an audience that is displeased with it.¹⁸ In *Nemean* 10, the poet leaves off enumerating the blessings of another victor’s homeland, Argos. The reason he gives is that “the *κόρος* of men is a heavy [*βαρύς*] thing to meet with” (20).¹⁹ Consistent with this habitual fear of excess, the epinician poet frequently extols “brevity” (*τὸ βραχύ*) in narrative.²⁰

In other passages, the poet is not quite so explicit about the need to avoid *κόρος*, “excess,” when he makes the transition from one theme to another. Sometimes he claims that a lack of time inclines him to be

constitutes a device whereby the narrator avoids the danger of *κόρος* of one or another kind; thus all break-off passages are uniform in function.

16. Cf. *P.* 1.44; *P.* 10.1–4; *N.* 6.26–28; *N.* 7.65–67; *N.* 9.52–55, etc.

17. Hubbard (1985, 27–32) suggests that the opposition between valuing what is *βραχύς*, “short,” and valuing what is *μακρός*, “long,” in Pindar is a matter of “mediating” the two. In general, the victory ode mediates a tension between the need to be satisfied with what is “near,” and the desire to strive for what is “far.” Hubbard thus suggests that all examples in Pindar of “the near/far polarity” are “dialectical.” But I suggest that this has less to do with an abstract scheme than with the immediate reactions of an audience in the context of a performance.

18. Cf. Bulman 1992, 13, and Kirkwood 1984, 172.

19. Other passages in which the poet is explicit about avoiding *κόρος* in his own speech occur at *O.* 2.95–98 and *N.* 7.50–53.

20. Cf., for example, *P.* 1.81–82.

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“brief” (βραχύς).²¹ At others, he claims as his reason a need to eschew impiety or some other kind of impropriety.²² Or he may, as in the example in *Pythian* 11, plead his obligation to resume the theme of the present victory.²³ But even though these reasons for breaking off may appear different, they may all in fact be reduced to an anxiety, on the poet’s part, about “excess” (κόρος) of one kind or another. An impious or unfitting subject is morally excessive, as in the example from *Nemean* 5. Too prolix a telling of a myth is excessive in a different way: it threatens to exceed temporal constraints; it may also cause the poet to praise heroes from the past too much in comparison with the present-day victor. On the other hand, praising the victor too much may be excessive in a different way again: it may be more than the rest of the audience wants to hear, and risk nauseating his fellow citizens. At the same time, praising the victor too much may also offend the gods: elevating him to godlike status would constitute the impious kind of κόρος, “excess,” that is known as ὕβρις, “hubris.”²⁴ The epinician poet has to negotiate many different kinds of κόρος. Even within the context of a single break-off passage, more than one type of κόρος may be at issue, making the poet’s task even more complicated.

How much is too much? At what point does a narrative border on κόρος? There is no simple answer to this question. It depends on the audience, and the epinician audience is not simple. Here, I differ from those scholars who assume that κόρος in Pindar is defined according to an objective ethical standard. Many scholars suggest that all references to “excess” in Pindar’s epinician odes are associated with anxiety about contravening a “divine plan.”²⁵ I suggest that, on the contrary, κόρος in Pindar is defined in performative terms. How much is “too much” depends upon the point of view of the audience. But the epinician audience is not a simple or homogeneous one, so it does not have a single point of view. It contains a variety of individuals and groups who are likely not to have the same opinion about what counts as “too much” in any given context. In this chapter, I analyze the epinician

21. Cf. *P.* 4.247–48; *N.* 4.33–35.

22. Cf. *O.* 1.52–53; *O.* 9.35–41; *N.* 5.14–18.

23. Cf. also *P.* 8.29–34.

24. Cf. *P.* 10.20–21.

25. See Walsh 1984, 43–44, and Goldhill 1991, 140–41.

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audience and divide it into three elements: the victor himself and his family, the victor's fellow citizens, and the gods. Inevitably, these groups will have different kinds of tolerance for hearing different types of material. Their notions of what is excessive will differ accordingly. The poet must nonetheless somehow negotiate these different limits and please them all. And it is critical that he do so successfully: social and also cosmic harmony depend on it. The various members of the epinician audience are all volatile, unpredictable, and potentially violent characters. If the poet fails to remain within the limits they can tolerate, they are likely to retaliate in kind—with *κόρος*: excessive behavior.

The Envious and the Management of Rumor

One common reason for breaking off is anxiety lest the poet's praise of the victor seem excessive to his fellow citizens, who may feel envious and resentful. There are break-off passages in *Olympian* 2, *Pythian* 1, *Nemean* 8, and *Isthmian* 1 that mention a risk that too much praise of the victor may provoke "envious men" (*φθόνεστοι*), typically the victor's fellow citizens,²⁶ to talk maliciously about him and spread blame. As Kirkwood puts it, "Success engenders envy, envy blame."²⁷ In *Pythian* 1, the poet leaves off praise of Hieron and his family with the thought that it is better to keep this kind of talk short: "less blame [*μῶμος*, 82] from men" follows when "the threads of many things" [*πολλῶν πείρατα*, 81] are pulled together "in brief" [*ἐν βραχεῖ*, 82]. He continues with the observation that *κόρος* (82), which here may refer either to the poet's excessive attention to praising Hieron and his family, or to the feeling of surfeit this might arouse in his listeners, or to both, "blunts hasty ambitions" (82–83); hearing about the happiness of others "stealthily weighs down [*βαρύνει*, 84] the hearts of fellow citi-

26. Comparing *κόρος* in Thucydides, Xenophon, and Aristotle, Kirkwood (1984, 173) concludes: "We find *phthonos* defined as a neighborly reaction, one that is to be expected from those who regard themselves as in like circumstances to the one they envy." However, as both he (173–74) and Bulman (1992) point out, the *φθόνος* of the gods—which I shall discuss below—is different, at least in this respect.

27. Kirkwood 1984, 171.

zens.”²⁸ In *Olympian* 2, praise of the victor is brought to a close in a similar way. A break-off and warning follow a description of Theron’s abundant generosity (92–95). In this case, the poet warns that any listeners who experience the account of Theron’s abundant generosity as excessive are likely to become excessive in turn. These “greedy men” [μάργων . . . ἀνδρῶν, 96] are likely to retaliate by talking too much: “chattering” [λαλαγήσαι, 97] maliciously in an envious attempt to obscure the victor’s fame.²⁹

Another break-off passage of this type occurs in *Nemean* 8. The poet interrupts his praise of the victor and his family with the remark, “I stand on light feet and catch my breath before speaking” (19).³⁰ He explains his sudden hesitation by remarking that “many things have been spoken about in many ways” [πολλὰ γὰρ πολλῶ λέλεκται, 20]. The “many things” seem to refer to the victor’s and his family’s previous victories. (Like Kinyras in myth, this family has been “loaded” with blessings [18].) But, the poet continues, it is “all danger” [ἅπας κίνδυνος, 21] to “discover new things [presumably, the present victory or praise of the same] and try them at the touchstone” (20–21). Presumably, the risk in question is the same as in *Olympian* 1 and *Pythian* 2. The poet is afraid that praising the victor and his family for this most recent blessing will prove too much for the rest of the audience to bear, especially after hearing about their previous successes as well.

In the break-off passage in *Isthmian* 1, there is no explicit mention either of κόρος, “excess,” or of φθόνεροι, “envious men,” but the passage, like those in *Olympian* 1, *Pythian* 2, and *Nemean* 8, seems to evoke both themes, only in a more subtle way. A catalog of Herodotus’s previous victories precedes the break-off. Then comes a *recusatio*, or refusal; the poet says that his “hymn of brief measure” [βραχὺ μέτρον ἔχων /

28. For the same theme, cf. *P.* 9.76–79.

29. The closing remark that follows is a *recusatio* (rehtorical refusal) that takes up the theme of quantity and potential excess once more, but this time from a different, and more positive, perspective. The poet’s closing words are to the effect that Theron’s good deeds are in any case too many to number (98–100). Of course, his refusal to say all that he allegedly might is itself, like any *recusatio*, a means of exaggeration. As Hubbard (1985, 28) puts it: “The audience will assume that the ‘briefness’ of the praise has been effected only through the omission of numerous details.”

30. The language used here—ἵσταμαι—parallels that of other break-off passages (cf. ἀφίσταμαι, *O.* 1.52, and στάσομαι, *N.* 5.16).

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ὔμνος, 62–63] prohibits recounting all the victories granted Herodotus by Hermes.³¹ The reason seems to be the same as in the other odes I have discussed in this section, though in this case it is expressed less directly. A gnomic statement, “Often what is left unsaid brings greater happiness” (63) concludes the break-off passage. Gnostic statements are typically pithy, condensed, and brief in form, and perhaps this is one reason why break-off passages in Pindar, associated as they are with the desire to avoid excess, are frequently clinched with a gnome: a statement that provides an appropriately succinct reason for breaking off.³² A gnome is also by nature a general statement, designed to apply to any number of different situations. This means it makes its point indirectly, elliptically, and allusively. The passage in *Isthmian* 1 is one of several in which this feature of the style seems connected with the idea that, because of the inflammatory environment he is working in, the poet must take care with what he says.³³ When he declares, “Often what is left unsaid brings greater happiness,” this sounds like a tactfully indirect allusion to the danger of envy and blame, did he not decline to elaborate further on Herodotus’s victories.

Break-off passages of this type convey the impression that epinician praise is uttered in a volatile and hostile environment. They suggest a dangerously reactive audience whose natural propensity is to retaliate with malice and sharp tongues. “Fellow citizens are evil-speakers” [κακολόγοι δὲ πολῖται, *P.* 11.28]. The threat of envy and blame constantly “hangs over” [κρέματα] a victor and his family (*O.* 6.74), just as “envious ambitions [φθονεραὶ . . . ἐλπίδες] hang about [ἀμφικρέματα] the minds of mortals” (*I.* 2.43).

In the midst of this hostile environment, the poet’s most important advice to the victor is that—against all the odds—he foster the circulation of favorable rumors about himself. He must cherish εὐλογία or εὐκλεία—“fine reputation”—above all. Conversely, he must avoid at

31. Here, the contrast between πάντα δ’ ἐξειπεῖν (*I.* 1.60) and βραχὺ μέτρον is parallel to the sequence πολλῶν πείρατα . . . / ἐν βραχεῖ at *Pythian* 1.81–82.

32. I am grateful to Mark Edwards for pointing out this “closing gnome” pattern to me (personal communication). Other examples occur at *O.* 1.52–53; *O.* 2.95–96; *O.* 9.35–43; *P.* 1.82–83; *N.* 3.29–31; *N.* 5.16–18; *N.* 6.53–57; *N.* 8.20–22; *I.* 5.52–53; and *N.* 10.20.

33. Cf. also *O.* 2.95–96; *P.* 1.82–83; *N.* 8.20–22; and *N.* 10.20.

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all costs the fate of those figures from myth who have acquired evil reputations (*P.* 1.96). εὐλογία is often regarded in epinician poetry as the defining feature of ὄλβος, “happiness” or “prosperity” (*O.* 7.10; *O.* 5.23–24; *I.* 5.12–13).³⁴ The “highest profit” is to be spoken well of. The value of material wealth is its capacity to extend and increase the esteem in which one is held (*P.* 1.90).³⁵

Given this state of affairs, the poet is the victor’s best friend. The victor, the poet suggests, can only preserve his good reputation with the poet’s help. As an antidote to ill-tempered reports, the poet encourages the circulation of favorable rumors about the victor. Thanks to the poet, athletes are covered with “good rumors” [φᾶμαι . . . ἀγαθαί] (*O.* 7.10). The poet spreads “news” of the victory itself from place to place and “sends announcements [ἀγγελία] everywhere” (*O.* 9.24–25).³⁶ In epinician poetry, rumors and poetry are said to be endlessly productive of one another; poetry is said to give rise to rumors, while rumors in turn inspire more poetry.³⁷ “Sweet-sounding hymns give rise to stories at a later date [ὑστέρων . . . λόγων]” (*O.* 11.4–6). And thanks to the “resounding songs such as wise craftsmen have constructed,” Nestor and Sarpedon are “the talk of men” [ἀνθρώπων φάτις] (*P.* 3.112–14). λόγιοι, “chroniclers,” and ἀοιδοί, “bards,” rely upon the “posthumous boast of reputation,” which reveals the lives of the deceased to them (*P.* 1.92–94).³⁸

34. The poet, likewise, expresses the wish that he may hear good of himself. He wishes not to “bury wealth,” but “to be praised for helping friends” (*N.* 1.32), and he prays that he may “tread simple paths in life and when I die not taint my children with infamous fame” (*N.* 8.35–37). In *Pythian* 3, he says that, if the gods grant him wealth, he hopes to use it in acquiring fame (110–11).

35. Here, the poet may be encouraging the victor in any or all of three types of spending that are likely to earn the spender fame (in the form of grateful praise): generosity to friends, liturgies that will win him favor with the citizens, and paying the poet a handsome fee for a poem that will celebrate him publicly. In *Pythian* 5, wealth is praised for its capacity to win friends (5–9).

36. Cf. *Nemean* 5, where he tells his own ode: “Go forth in every boat and spread the news [διαγγέλλοισα]” (3).

37. In this chapter, my concern is mainly with rumors based on present-day subjects. Pindaric poetry also includes rumors about the past—this is one way of referring to myth in epinician. I shall focus on rumors of this type in chapter 2.

38. Olson (1995, 1–23) argues that in the *Odyssey*, epic poetry is described as the culmination of rumor. Poetry is rumor in its most refined and evolved form. In Pindar’s

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The poet's intervention is crucial. Without poetry, the poet claims, deeds would not suffice to bring the victor the reputation he deserves.³⁹ Good deeds deserve good words but by no means guarantee them. Fame does not arise spontaneously from worthy deeds; "mighty deeds" remain in "darkness" if they are "deprived of hymns" [ῥυμῶν . . . δεόμενα, *N.* 7.12–13].⁴⁰ Aias, in *Nemean* 8, had the "heart" to perform deeds worthy of fame, but—unlike his enemy, Odysseus—not the "tongue" to ensure that they would be recognized (24–34).⁴¹ Once, and with especial cynicism, the poet suggests that fine deeds are not even necessary for fame, provided you have a competent poet at your service: "I suspect that the story of Odysseus has become greater than his actual experience, thanks to Homer's honeyed tones" (*N.* 7.20–21).

Of course, the epinician poet boasts that his work has more integrity than Homer's, "praising what is praiseworthy [αἰνέων αἰνήτᾳ], but scattering blame on evil-doers" (*N.* 8.39).⁴² He undertakes to assign both praise and blame appropriately, and to influence other people so

epinicians, a more complex and endlessly interactive relationship between the two is represented. Poetry is not the final form of rumor. Rather, the two give rise to one another in infinite succession.

39. Some passages seem to contradict this idea. On one occasion, the poet simply says that "many remember if something noble is achieved through toil" (*O.* 6.11). But more often the relationship between achievement and fame is more complicated.

40. Cf. *I.* 7.16–19; *O.* 10.91–93; and *I.* 6.10–12.

41. Aias lost out, the poet claims, to the "false shiftiness" [αἰόλω ψεύδει, 25] and "hateful deception" [ἐχθρά . . . πάροφασις, 32] of Odysseus, so that the Achaeans gave the arms of Achilles to him instead of Aias.

42. As Walsh (1984, 40) points out, this is a more complicated enterprise than simply telling the truth about deeds done. The praiseworthy and the blameworthy are identified not so much by considerations of truth and accuracy as by considerations of what is socially fitting. Crotty (1982, 105) makes the same point, although he identifies the "suitable" or "fitting" with "what Zeus loves." Just how the epinician poet construes his responsibility as far as the dissemination of blame goes is a more tricky matter than his account of his responsibilities regarding praise. Sometimes he says that it is his job to "blame the blameworthy"; at other times he seems to say that any blame is to be avoided, no matter what the circumstances. Cf. Pratt 1993, 120. However, Nagy (1979, 224) notes that "blame is inimical to praise in praise poetry only if it is the blame of the noble, since the conceit of praise poetry is that it praises the noble only, not the base," and Kirkwood (1984, 179) writes of *N.* 8.37–39 that "Pindar's claim here is the same as that expressed elsewhere in the epinicians, to be champion of what is morally right and to condemn what is wrong."

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that they will do the same in the face of the athlete's victory. In other words, the epinician poet purports to fulfill the function identified by Georges Dumézil as typical for the poet in traditional Indo-European societies: balancing praise and blame in the community.⁴³

But what does it mean for praise and blame to be “balanced”? The question brings us back to issues of performance and audience. The business of balancing praise and blame extends beyond the praise that the poet himself utters. It has to do with how he causes the rest of the community to behave. So, if the victor deserves praise, how does the poet spread favorable rumors about the victor, and cause others to praise him? Not by praising him as much as he deserves—we have already seen that. As much praise as the victor deserves is likely to seem like too much to the audience, and provoke the opposite effect: envious blame. And this will disrupt the community, causing disorder and harm instead of balancing it.

Again, I disagree here with those scholars who suggest that in epinician poetry the *καίριος* or *μέτρον*—the right or due measure of praise, blame, or anything else—is always quantifiable in terms of the “gods’ plan,” and that this coincides with an objective standard of ethical correctness.⁴⁴ If this were the case, it would mean that, where praise of the victor is concerned, the “right” amount is exactly the amount that the victor deserves. Scholars often interpret the poet's claims that he has a debt to pay his victors this way.⁴⁵ But this interpretation seems too simple. As we have seen, what the poet says when he breaks off praise of the victor and his family yields Bulman's conclusion: “a *phthonetic* audience . . . can feel *κόρος* even when a performance is not excessive”⁴⁶—that is, even when it does not exceed what the victor really merits. As the epinician poet himself says, it is hard for him to be truthful about the victor's achievements, since these are greater than a hostile audience wants to believe: “What I say is hard to believe, for the honor that brings fame is stolen away by greed” (*N.* 9.33–34).

43. Cf. Nagy 1979, 222.

44. Cf. Goldhill 1991, 140.

45. Cf. Bundy 1962, 57–58: ἀρετὰ creates a debt that must be paid “in the true coin of praise.”

46. Bulman 1992, 13.

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In short, when the poet breaks off on the grounds that he has too much to say about the victor, he does not mean that it is necessarily more than the victor deserves, only that it is too much to go down well with the victor's fellow citizens and will strike them as excessive. In this type of break-off passage and others, *κόρος*, or excess, is what the epinician poet says is in the eye (or the ears) of his audience. *κόρος* is defined by the poet with a view to the likely and anticipated reaction of the audience members, resulting from their subjective response to what he says.⁴⁷

There is one exception to this rule. When he has the reactions of his audience in mind, as opposed to what he himself has said or has to say, the poet does judge those reactions as excessive from an objective viewpoint: specifically, in relation to the standards of *δίκη*, "justice," or else in comparison with what is possible or practical. An example of the latter is found in *Pythian* 2. The ambitions of *φθόνεροι*, "envious men," are described as excessive in that they blindly transgress (go beyond) what these men can realistically achieve (90–92). The former is found in *Olympian* 2. As noted, the envious audience members who are likely to blame the much-praised victor are described as "greedy men" [*μάργων* . . . *ἀνδρῶν*, 95] who "chatter" [*λαλαγήσαι*, 96] about him in a hostile fashion (96–97). And in this case, the excessive reaction of these "greedy men" fails to observe the limits established by *δίκη*, "justice" (95–96).

Break-off, Koros, and the Gods

But the victor's fellow-citizens are not the only audience members the epinician poet has to worry about. He also has to think about the gods. The gods are listening in to the performance, and the poet must ac-

47. Cf. Pericles' observation at Thucydides 2.35: "Praise of other people is tolerable only up to a certain point, the point where one still believes that one could do oneself some of the things one is hearing about. Once you get beyond this point [*τῷ δὲ ὑπερβάλλοντι*] you will find people becoming jealous [*φθονοῦντες*] and incredulous" (trans. Warner 1972). Walsh (1984) generally endorses the idea that limit is determined according to the "gods' plan" (43–44) but notes a discrepancy between the actual value of certain things and what it is suitable for the epinician poet to say about them (40–41, 60–61).

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knowledge them too as members of the audience. Many break-off passages seem to reflect the poet's anxiety that he might say something about the victor that will seem excessive to the gods. The thought here is that the gods are no less liable to feelings of φθόνος, "envy" or "resentment," than the mortal members of the epinician audience.⁴⁸ In Pindar and elsewhere in Greek thought, divine φθόνος is inspired by mortal encroachment on divine territory; this is the type of excess that is conventionally known as hubris.⁴⁹

Greek literature frequently mentions the fear that mortal success will provoke divine displeasure. At Herodotus 1.32.1, Solon tells Croesus that he knows divinity (τὸ θεῖον) to be "jealous" or "grudging" (φθονερός). In book 3, likewise, Amasis describes divinity as φθονερός (40.2). In *Odyssey* 5, Calypso complains to Hermes, "You are hard-hearted, you gods, and jealous [ζηλήμονες] beyond all creatures beside" (118).⁵⁰ In Hesiod's *Works and Days*, Zeus is said easily to "lower the noble and raise the lowly" (6).⁵¹

Magnifying the victor as it does, the epinician celebration is an event that—in and of itself—threatens to provoke the φθόνος, "grudging resentment," of the gods. There is a danger that the gods, if provoked by the celebration and magnification of the victor, may even

48. Kirkwood (1984, 179) does not regard fear of divine φθόνος as a serious epinician concern: "One part of it [the twofold concept of φθόνος in Pindar] raises a man momentarily to superhuman, heroic heights, such that there is danger of divine envy of his success. I take this to be rhetorical hyperbole rather than an intimation that victory in the Games is, in Pindar's religious view, an event to stir divine displeasure." I see no particular reason to regard the poet's concern regarding divine φθόνος as either more or less "hyperbolic" than his concern regarding its human counterpart.

49. As Bulman (1992, 1) points out, the φθόνος of the gods cannot rightly be described as "envy" but "is better understood as equivalent to νέμεσις and translated as the gods' 'retribution' or even as their 'right to veto.'" Vallozza (1989) applies generally Chantraine's definition of the word as "chagrin causé par le bonheur mérité d'autrui," and this emotional reaction seems equally applicable to gods and humans. Bulman also writes (1992, 11) that the poet condemns human φθόνος but acquiesces in divine φθόνος. For my concerns in this chapter, the similarities are more relevant than the differences; both types of φθόνος prompt the poet to reform and abbreviate his talk at certain junctures.

50. Trans. Lattimore 1967.

51. Trans. Athanassakis 1983. These and other similar passages are discussed by How and Wells (1964) at Herodotus 1.32.1.

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out the balance and reverse the victor's success by inflicting a bout of ill-fortune. This is why epinician poetry is full of prayers in which the poet asks the gods to grant that the victor's current success not be blighted by subsequent disaster. In *Pythian* 10, the poet expresses a wish that the victor's family, since they have received "no mean share" [οὐκ ὀλίγαν δόσιν, 20] of successes—which could seem excessive in the eyes of the gods—may not encounter "grudging [φθονεραῖς, 20] reversals of fortune" (20–21). In *Pythian* 8, the poet requests the gods' "ungrudging" [ἄφθονον, 72] regard for the victor's family (71–72). In *Isthmian* 7, the poet refers to Poseidon's gift to the victor's family of "calm weather [εὐδίαν, 37] after the storm" (38–39). He is describing the new victory as a consolation for the victor's uncle's death. But this might be presuming too much, so the poet adds the prayer: "May the φθόνος [grudging resentment] of the immortals not ruin them" (39). In *Olympian* 13, the poet, who has named the many blessings and inventions of Corinth, the victor's hometown, appends a plea that Zeus be "ungrudging of" [ἄφθόνητος, 25] his words "for the whole of time" and preserve the Corinthians unharmed (25–26).

As Bulman notes, it is the epinician poet's task to forestall the kind of catastrophe to which these prayers allude. The poet sets about this task, first, by humbly acknowledging the possibility that the victor will not always be as happy as he is right now, and, second, by emphasizing the athlete's dependence on the gods; without the help of the gods, the victor could never have won in the first place.⁵² It is divine power (δαίμων) that makes success and good fortune possible (*P.* 8.76–77).

One type of break-off passage, then, is one in which the poet interrupts himself on the grounds that his praise of the victor, or the victor's homeland, or his family, may seem excessive to the gods and provoke divine punishment. An example occurs in *Isthmian* 5. First, the poet praises the victor's hometown, Aigina. As usual, the diction stresses the quantity and magnitude of things that might be said of the city and its ὑψηλαῖς ἀρεταῖς, "lofty virtues" (45); the poet's tongue has "many arrows" [πολλὰ . . . / . . . τοξεύματα, 46–47] to ring out praise for the Aiginetans. The city's most recent glory is her role in the battle of Salamis (48–50). But at this point the poet breaks off: "But all the same,

52. Cf. Bulman (1992, 32) on *I.* 7.39–42.

quench your boast with silence” (51). Since the gods are also members of the audience, one should not presume too much on current success, for “Zeus gives out now this, now that [τά τε καὶ τὰ]” (52).⁵³

Break-off passages in *Olympians* 1 and 9 also address the need to avoid saying what may seem excessive to the gods, but in a different way. These arise from an anxiety about blurring the distinction between gods and mortals. The poet recoils from tales that “exceed” the boundary between gods and men by ignoring it. In both these odes, the poet refuses to repeat myths that attribute mortal behavior to gods. In *Olympian* 1, the poet refuses to repeat a version of the Pelops myth that attributes gluttony (cf. γαστρομάργον, 52) to the gods. He turns away (ἀφίσταμαι) from versions of the myth that describe the gods boiling Pelops in a cauldron and feasting on him. Instead, it was Pelops’s father, Tantalos, who displayed excessive greed (κόρω, 56).⁵⁴ In fact, the poet describes the story as excessive in various ways. It goes “above” or “beyond” the “true account” [ὑπὲρ τὸν ἀλαθῆ λόγον, 28b] and is one of the “many wonders” [θαύματα πολλά, 27] of which mortals’ inaccurate talk is full.⁵⁵ The story, in other words, is “over the top.”

A similar anxiety prompts the break-off passage in *Olympian* 9. The poet chastises himself for failing to distinguish gods from men when, listing the various occasions upon which the hero Herakles fought the gods, he neglected to “keep war and battles separate [χωρίζ]” from the immortals (41).⁵⁶ The poet seems to accuse himself here of hubris

53. The idea that the poet has represented the victor as challenging the will of Zeus may also be present. The poet has said that the victory was won in the face of “Zeus’s much-destroying rain [πολυφθόρω . . . ὄμβρω]” (49).

54. Cf. also Hubbard 1987, 6, on the way in which Pindar “cleanses” the Pelops myth by “inserting illicit human consumption of the gods’ food for the gods’ consumption of illicit human food [in other versions].”

55. The language of line 29 (δεδαυδαμένοι, ποιήλοισ) also suggests intricacy and multiplicity, and presents this kind of complexity in a negative light.

56. The poet’s attitude toward this myth is discussed by Molyneux 1972. Two main ways of interpreting the passage are attested. Does the poet throughout the passage take the view that Herakles did not act κατὰ δαίμονα, “in accordance with divine will” (27), when he battled with gods? Or does the poet start out with the thought that Herakles was in fact acting κατὰ δαίμονα, and then change his mind? Molyneux suggests that the poet is genuinely ambivalent about Herakles’ achievement, and therefore grants the hero “neither whole-hearted acceptance nor complete critical rejection.” Once again, I

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parallel to Herakles' own.⁵⁷ "Boasting" [τὸ καυχᾶσθαι, 38] like this exceeds the καιρός (38),⁵⁸ and he tells himself to "stop chattering [μὴ λαλάγει] of such things" (40). The idea of "chatter" suggests a superfluity of disorderly talk that needs to be curbed. (As noted above, the verb λαλάγειν is also used of the κόρος-induced malice of the φθόνεροι in *Olympian* 2 [97].)

The epinician poet refuses to risk offending the gods by describing them behaving like mortals; he similarly declines to repeat tales about heroes who exceeded or transgressed this same boundary by trying to act like gods.⁵⁹ In *Olympian* 13, Bellerophon's story is told. Bellerophon presumed on the special treatment he received from the immortals (65–86). Athena helped him to bridle and mount the winged horse Pegasus, and Bellerophon presumptuously tried to ride Pegasus to Olympos. But this hubristic attempt and its consequences are not directly narrated. At that point in the story, the poet breaks off with the words: "I shall keep quiet [διασωπάσομαι] about his fate" (91).

The negative paradigm Bellerophon instantiates—the mortal who acts as if he were a god—is found in many Pindaric myths. Tantalos in *Olympian* 1, Ixion in *Pythian* 2, and Koronis in *Pythian* 3 also fit the pattern. Tantalos's fate is described in *Olympian* 1. He disregarded the difference between gods and men when he passed on to his mortal companions the nectar and ambrosia with which the gods had made

opt for a performance-based interpretation: ambivalence creeps into the poet's account, not because of a lack of resolution in his own mind, but because of a tension between his impulse to describe things as they are and his desire or need to describe them in a way that will appease his audience.

57. The poet accuses himself here of "madness" [μανίασιν, 39]. As Dickie (1984) points out, hubris—refusing to recognize the limitations that differentiate men from the gods—is regularly represented as a kind of insanity.

58. The concept of καιρός is, throughout Pindar's epinician odes, used to express the idea of remaining appropriately within limits. For "due measure" as the basic meaning of καιρός in Pindar and other archaic Greek authors, see Wilson 1980.

59. Molyneux (1972, 325–26) distinguishes *Olympian* 1 and *Olympian* 9 from these other "hush-passages" (to use Norwood's [1945, 80–82] term) on the strength of their "vehement language." He suggests (n. 65) that "objectionable tales about heroes do not prompt such strong revulsion as those about the gods." I would describe the distinction slightly differently: it is even more outrageous (excessive) for a poet or other storyteller to attribute *mortal* behavior to a *god* than it is to tell stories about mortals who made outrageous (excessive) attempts to behave like gods.

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him immortal. He “could not digest his fortune, and thanks to his excess [κόρω, 56] he received an extreme [ὑπέροπλον, 57] punishment” (56–57). Ixion, in *Pythian* 2, also presumed on the special privilege that was granted him of associating with the immortals. He “could not sustain his great fortune [μακρὸν . . . ὄλβον, 26],” but “in the madness of his mind” [μαινομέναις φρασίν, 26] fell in love with Hera (26–27). In *Pythian* 3, Koronis slights the gifts of the gods, and tries to go too far in a slightly different way. “In her folly [ἀμπλακίαισι φρενῶν, 13] she fell in love with far off things [τῶν ἀπεόντων, 20]”: while carrying Apollo’s child (Asklepios), she slept with a “stranger from Arkadia.” Like many people, the poet says, she could not restrain herself from “chasing inaccessible things” [μεταμώνια θηρεύων, 23].

This kind of excess appears in many Pindaric myths, and is often the reason for break-off, because athletic victory cannot be attained apart from behavior that at least borders on excess of this particular type. Athletic victory is viewed, and is described by epinician poetry, as an endeavor that does in fact allow mortals to approximate to the divine, if only momentarily. Would-be winners must aspire to the divine. They must avoid taking this idea too far, but the line is a very fine one.⁶⁰

The poet must be as wary of offending the gods with excess as he is of offending the victor’s fellow citizens. Again, the truth or otherwise of what the poet has to say is not the issue. Herakles may really have fought the gods. The victor may truly be godlike in the moment of success. The problem is that the gods may not want to hear this. It may, like the victory itself, strike them as excessive even if it is the truth. And if it does, they may react with an excessively violent punishment that will disrupt and unbalance the whole community.

Koros and the Victor

In addition to the gods and the victor’s fellow citizens, the poet must also worry about how the victor will react to what he has to say. There are a number of passages in which the poet breaks off a mythic narrative with an apology for having dwelt too much on the myth and

60. On this paradox, see Segal 1964 and 1967.

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neglected his duty to praise the victor. At a juncture of this kind, the poet will recall the “debt” of praise that he owes the victor (*P.* 8.33; *P.* 11.41–42), or say that he has undertaken to come “as a herald” (*N.* 4.74) or “messenger” (*N.* 6.58) for the victor’s family, or that he has an obligation to fulfill as the victor’s “guest friend” [ξείνος] (*N.* 7.61). In one way or another, he recalls his obligation to celebrate the victor and describes it as one from which the mythic narrative has distracted him. He apologizes for having dwelt excessively on the past, at the expense of dealing with these present-day concerns. Break-off passages of this type occur at *P.* 8.29–34; *P.* 10.4–6; *P.* 11.38–45; *N.* 4.69–75; *N.* 6.53–61; *N.* 7.50–60; *N.* 10.19–24; *I.* 6.57–58.

In these break-off passages, the usual theme of avoiding “excess” comes into play in various ways. Sometimes the poet simply says that there is too much that he might say about the past for him to say it all. His mouth is “too small” [βραχύ, 19] to recount all (πάντα, 19) the blessings of the precinct of Argos, so he tells himself to “wake the well-strung lyre and turn your thoughts to wrestling” (22)—to make a transition from the mythical glories of Argos to the victory of the day. In *Pythian* 8, the “whole long story” [πᾶσαν μακρογορίαν, 30] of the Aiakidai, “large and lofty heroes” [ὑπερτάτους ἥρωας, 27] with their “many victorious contests [πολλοῖσι . . . / νικαφόροις . . . ἀέθλοις, 25–26] and rushing battles” might seem excessive (cf. κόρος, 32) if told in full. In *Isthmian* 6, it would take “too long” [μακρόν, 56] for him to go through “all” [πάσας, 56] the deeds of the Aiakidai; instead, he will state the victories of Phylakidas, Pytheas, and Euthymenes, “in Argive fashion . . . in the briefest terms [κἄν βραχίστοις, 59].” In *Nemean* 7, the poet once again avoids the temptation to detail Aigina’s ancient accomplishments in an “excessive” manner (cf. κόρον, 53).

Sometimes the poet criticizes himself for dwelling disproportionately on the past. At the beginning of *Pythian* 10, he has been talking about Lakedaimon, Thessaly, and the descendants of Herakles, but then he checks himself for “vaunting [κομπέω, 4] beyond the καιρός” and abandons the mythical background to this victory on the grounds that Pytho (the site of the victory), Pelinna (the victor’s city), and the “sons of Aleuas” (a prominent family in the victor’s native Thessaly) are “calling” him (4). In *Nemean* 4, the poet realizes that his account of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis has led him to stray too far along the mythic path: “The realm west of Gadeira is not to be traversed [οὐ

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περατόν, 69]; turn the ship's rigging back [ἀπότερεπε, 69] to the mainland of Europe" (69–70). Mythic material can also confront the poet with a confusing number of poetic "paths" or topics. In *Pythian* 11, the poet leaves the myth of Orestes aside in favor of present-day themes with the thought that the "straight path" [ὀρθὸν κέλευθον, 39] he had been taking has divided, or intersected with others at a crossroads (38), and this has led him astray (ἐδινάθη, 38).⁶¹

Another way in which mythic material may seem excessive is in its remoteness from the present. In *Pythian* 8, the fame the Aiakidai enjoyed "from the beginning" [ἀπ' ἀρχᾶς, 25] is contrasted with the victory, which is described as the "newest of noble things" [νεώτατον καλῶν, 33]. The mythic material is distant in time compared to the poet's "debt" to the victor, which is described as a matter of immediate concern, something that "runs" at the poet's "feet" (32).⁶² Similarly in *Nemean* 6, the theme of the new victory, the current concern, which is described as the "wave in the path of the ship" [παρ ποδὶ ναὸς ἔλισσόμενον, 55], is taken up in favor of the far-flung exploits of the Aiakidai over land and sea (48–49) and the "wide avenues" [πλατεῖαι . . . πρόσοδοι, 45] of their fame, avenues that extend in every direction (πάντοθεν, 45).

Often, the project of abandoning traditional mythic themes in order to focus on the present and praise the victor is represented as the epinician poet's choice to take a "road less traveled"—a smaller, less conspicuous, and shorter path. In *Nemean* 6, again, the poet announces

61. At this point in *Pythian* 11 the poet is also, as so often, avoiding the temptation to tell a story that would be morally excessive. He is leaving aside the myth of Orestes, whose bloody murder of his mother Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus is one of those subjects that epinician poetry regards as beyond the pale. In Young's (1968) reading of this ode, it is also associated with the overbearing—excessive—behavior of tyrants. Young reads the myth of Orestes and the break-off from it as an illustration of "the hatreds and woes which beset the lives of the politically high and mighty" (19–20). Young compares the rejection of tyranny that follows the break-off from the myth and concludes of the return to the theme of the victor: "Thrasydaios, like Orestes, came home from Delphi, but the differences in their returns provide positive illustration of the differences between the two ways of life examined in the poem" (20).

62. Cf. Hubbard 1985: 11–70 on the constant "dialectic," in Pindar's epinician odes, between "relations of measure" such as long/short, near/far, etc. Hubbard suggests that these all instantiate the same paradigm of "due proportion."

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that former poets (παλαιότεροι, 53) found a “highway” [ὁδὸν ἀμάξιτόν, 54] of song in the deeds of the Aiakidai, but at this point he ceases to follow this highway himself. Similarly in *Pythian* 4, the epinician poet abandons the poetic “highway” [ἀμάξιτόν, 247] in favor of a “short path” [οἴμιον . . . βραχύν, 248] when he brings the mythic section to a close and returns to thoughts of the present.

Why does the epinician poet repeatedly describe mythic topics as “excessive” in quantity, or as matters that lead him too far from his proper theme? To whom might the deeds of the Aiakidai, or other kinds of mythic material, seem excessive? In *Pythian* 8, the poet abandons the myth of Aigina with the words “lest κόρος come and grate on us” (32). To whom is he referring here? Who might find such an account “excessive,” or react excessively to it? I suggest that, in a context like this, the poet’s anxiety has to do with what the victor might consider excessive. I suggest that in a break-off passage of this general type, in which the poet apologizes for or avoids an allegedly excessive focus on the past, and changes the emphasis to the present, he is really afraid that he might offend the victor by eclipsing his recent success with talk about the achievements of others long past.⁶³ But the epinician poet is nothing if not tactful. The victor is the last person he wants to offend. So he does not state openly that he thinks the victor might experience this kind of envy and resentment.

In some ways, this interpretation might seem counterintuitive. After all, the well-known epinician convention of “praise of the victor’s homeland” is an aspect of praising the victor. Identifying the local heroes as the victor’s ancestors is part of the same project. On the other hand, a victor might well be proud of his heroic ancestors, yet also retain competitive feelings toward them.⁶⁴ There is no real inconsistency here. Diomedes’ words in the *Iliad*—“We two claim we are better men by far than our fathers” (4.405)⁶⁵—suggest that heroic

63. This theme and its repercussions for epinician rhetoric will be fully investigated in chapter 2.

64. In other words, I disagree with Kyriakou (1996, 29 n. 40): “There is no discrepancy between ancestral glories and family history and personal victories because they all form an uninterrupted continuum.” From the point of view of the victor, an important member of the poet’s audience, there may well be a difference.

65. Trans. Lattimore 1951.

achievement might even depend upon a hero's having conflicted feelings about his ancestors and their success. In the same way, up to a point, Pindar's victors are likely to accept praise of their heroic ancestors as praise of themselves, but only up to a point.⁶⁶ Beyond that point, focusing on the past instead of the present will strike them as excessive and offend them.⁶⁷

In other words, in *Isthmian* 5 the poet may well be addressing the victor directly when he asks the audience not to "begrudge" (φθονεῖν) his including praise of the Aiakidai in the ode, as well as praise of the victor himself: "Do not grudge [μὴ φθόνοι, 24] me the right to blend in song the boast she [the city of Aigina] deserves in return for toils. For among the heroes too, brave warriors earned praise; and they are celebrated on lyres and in the broad harmonies of pipes through time unending" (24–28).

In connection with the idea that there is a risk of the poet's offending the victor by seeming to detract from his praise, we may note a series of myths recorded by Pausanias. These describe the actions of athletes, real and legendary, who reacted with violence when they did not receive the appropriate or expected rewards for their victories.⁶⁸ For instance, Kleomedes of Astypalaia was denied an Olympic victory because he killed his opponent. Grief and anger drove him to insanity. In a fit of violence, he broke down the pillar of the schoolhouse roof in his home town, killing all the pupils who were inside. Oibotas of Dyme did not receive a reward for his victory from his fellow citizens. He punished them by putting a curse on them. Small wonder then, that in *Olympian* 7 the poet says it is his task to "appease," "propitiate," or

66. In some cases, this may depend on the way the myth is interpreted. Cf. Egan's (1983, 200) reading of the break-off from the myth of Orestes in *Pythian* 11. Egan argues that the relevance of the Orestes myth to the concerns of the ode is "plurivalent." The break-off passage indicates a transition from one type of relevance to another, where the latter is more flattering to the victor and his family.

67. Interestingly, some scholars have thought that the poet really does overshadow praise of the victor with praise of his homeland, Corinth, in *Olympian* 13; see Hubbard 1986, 27 n. 1 for references.

68. These myths told about athletes (both real and legendary) are recorded in Pausanias VI. Fontenrose (1968) discusses them and identifies a common pattern: an initial injury or disappointment brought grief or anger to the athlete, who, in revenge, brings destruction upon his fellow-citizens (77).

“soothe” his athletes with his poetry (ἰλάσκομαι, 9). Surely the epinician poet has in mind stories like the ones Pausanias records. Like the φθόνεγοι, “envious men,” and like the gods, the athletic victor is a powerful and temperamental figure whose emotions run high and whose capacity for violence is great. His athletic performance alone is proof of that. The poet’s patron is potentially a very dangerous character. There is a real risk of catastrophe and harm to the community if the poet says something that might strike him as excessive. “Excessive” in this context means something that might seem to diminish the victor’s own achievement by comparison.

The passages that follow a breaking off from mythic material often make a point of listing the victor’s achievements—for example, enumerating the many victories, past and present, he has won—as if to stress their number in compensation for the mass of mythical material previously dealt with. In *Nemean* 10, for instance, the “countless” [μυρίας, 3] virtues of Argos are rejected in favor of a catalog in which the poet gives the actual numbers of the victor’s many victories to date (24–28). Sometimes, at a juncture of this kind, the quantity or extent of the victor’s achievement will be brought out in other ways. In *Isthmian* 6, the poet says he will show “what a portion [οἶαν μοῖραν, 62] of hymns” the victor and his family “have brought to light.” In *Isthmian* 5, he speaks of the “long toil” [μακρός / μόχθος, 56–57] engaged in by Kleonikos’s family, and “all they have spent” [ὅποσαι δαπάναι, 57].⁶⁹ In *Nemean* 6, the poet says that he comes bearing a “double burden” [δίδυμον ἄχθος, 57] of praise for the present-day victor.

But sometimes, when the epinician poet breaks off from a mythic narrative in order to revert to the topic of the victor, something slightly different seems to be going on. Sometimes, the transition from mythic to current material seems to reflect the thought that the victor must not “go too far” himself, and mistakenly think himself the equal either of a god or of the heroes described in the myths. These break-off passages seem to contain a warning for the victor. The poet’s sudden return from the myth to the subject of the victor is accompanied by a reminder to think mortal thoughts.

69. In this case the description of a historical event takes the place normally assigned to a mythic narrative.

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Matthew Dickie has identified the business of advising the victor to remain within the appropriate mortal limits as an important aspect of the epinician poet's task, even though the occasion of his victory makes him "godlike."⁷⁰ Hubris is a kind of insanity; when the poet says of a victor that "his mind's understanding is not harmed" (*N.* 7.60), he is asserting that, in spite of his success, the victor maintains a fitting moderation of thought and attitude. In many passages the poet advocates the moderation of ambition.⁷¹ Many epinician myths, as Dickie points out, are negative paradigms illustrating the disaster that befalls heroes who forgot their mortal limitations and tried to transcend them. This is a special risk when a hero has been given special gifts by the gods—as were Tantalos, Ixion, Koronis, and Bellerophon. The victor's situation is exactly parallel, since his victory too is a divine gift.

I wish to add to Dickie's account the observation that several break-off passages that prompt a transition from mythic to present-day themes contain a similarly cautionary message for the victor. Often the break-off brings out differences between the victor and the hero of the myth, in contrast to the similarities between the two that are typically suggested in the myth itself. In *Pythian* 10, the hero Perseus visits the land of the Hyperboreans. The Hyperboreans live at the northern extreme of the world. Perseus was able to travel to their land both because he was a hero and also because he had a goddess, Athena, to help him.⁷² The athlete's journey from home to compete in the games reenacts this kind of heroic quest,⁷³ but on a strictly mortal plane. Before narrating the myth of Perseus's journey, the poet makes just this distinction. The athlete "completes the furthest voyage" [ἔσχατον / πλόον, 28–29], as far as the glories attained by the mortal race are concerned (28), but "the bronze sky is out of bounds [οὐ ποτ' ἀμβρατός]" (27). Hence, you cannot get to the land of the Hyperboreans, either by ship or on foot. No sooner is this thought expressed

70. Dickie 1984. Dickie argues that this notion of restraint is one of the qualities denoted by *hēsychia* in Pindar.

71. Cf. the closing gnome in *Nemean* 11 and the advice to the victor in *Pythian* 8: "Enter the contest with moderation" [μέτρω κατάβαινε, 78].

72. Brown 1992, 100, observes that even the hero Perseus can only get to the land of the Hyperboreans with a god's help. Cf. Alden 1982, 131–32.

73. See Kurke 1991, 22–25, for a detailed account of the implicit comparison.

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than the poet breaks off the myth with the exclamation that he has strayed too far geographically: “hold the oar [κώπαν σχάσον, 51], quickly fix the anchor in the land from the prow” (51–52). The implication, I suggest, is that to dwell any longer on Perseus’s heroic journey might suggest too close an equation of the victor’s achievements with those of Perseus. The break-off draws the appropriate distinction between hero and athlete.

The end of *Olympian* 3 seems to follow the same pattern. The poet observes, first, that Theron has “reached the furthest point [ἐσχάτιάν, 43] with his virtuous deeds, and touches the pillars of Herakles” (43–44). (The pillars of Herakles are one of the limits of the world that Herakles established for mortal men.) But then, at the end of the ode, the poet implies an important dissimilarity between Herakles and Theron, qualifying the similarity he had previously suggested. Theron is unlike Herakles in two respects. First, he only reaches the limits of the world in a metaphorical sense. Second, he abides within limits previously set up by someone else. Herakles traveled far and freely enough to determine the limits. At the end of the ode the poet notes that it would be “vain” [κεινός, 45]—read hubristic—for a mortal to try to get beyond them. It would be a journey “not to be trodden by wise people or the unwise [σοφοῖς ἄβητον / κἄσόφοις, 44–45].”⁷⁴

A break-off passage in *Nemean* 4 also belongs in this category.⁷⁵ At lines 69–72 the poet, as noted earlier, breaks off the myth and returns to praise of the Theandridai. The myth he breaks off is the marriage of Peleus and Thetis—the story of a mortal who (with the gods’ approval) married a goddess. Peleus was privileged to “see the circled seats on which the kings of sky and sea sat and revealed gifts and the might of his race to him” (66–68). But at this point the poet brings the

74. The notion of geographical limits is also used to draw the line between heroes and present-day athletic victors in *Nemean* 3. After mentioning Herakles’ journeys to the limits of the world and back again, the poet exclaims, “My heart, to what foreign headland are you turning my ship’s course aside?” (26–27). The need is to avoid “foreign themes” and “search at home,” which is presented here as a matter of praising the Aiakidai, the victor’s local heroes. The basic point here too seems to be to advise the victor not to go “too far.” Cf. Instone 1993, 19–20.

75. This ode contains several break-off passages that give rise to various problems of interpretation. For discussion and references, see Kyriakou 1996.

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myth to a close. He would not want to draw an unequivocal likeness between the victor and Peleus, or to encourage the victor to think that such a likeness exists. Peleus saw things this victor can never hope to see. In some ways, it is true, the athlete is like Peleus. He has been helped by the gods, and he does, in the moment of his victory, become like a god. Hence the poet does not reject the comparison altogether. But he abandons the myth at a moment when he might seem to have implied too close a comparison, too exact a fit between heroic paradigm and present occasion. It is probably significant that, a little later in the ode, the poet announces that hymns make a man “equal in fortune to kings” [βασιλεῦσιν ἰσοδαίμονα, 84]—not, notably, to gods or heroes.⁷⁶

In short, a break-off passage that brings a mythic passage to a close and turns to praise of the victor sometimes has the function of reminding the victor of his mortal limitations. It cuts him back down to mortal size by contrasting him with the hero to whom he was formerly compared.

Break-off passages of the type I have been considering in this section, then, are directed at the victor, and designed to avoid excess in one of two different ways. Some of them are designed to assuage any resentment that might be provoked in the victor by what he sees as excessive praise of his ancestors and other heroes. Others are intended to curb the dangerously excessive behavior he might manifest should he make the mistake of thinking himself a hero or a god. And at the same time, passages of the latter type may also contain a message for the gods. For these passages also function like the ones I discussed in the previous section, assuring the gods that neither the victor nor the poet has forgotten the victor’s proper mortal place, not even in the glorious, but potentially misleading, crisis of victory.

I suggested earlier that the poet often lists or enumerates the athlete’s achievements after leaving aside mythic material in an attempt to “compensate” him for the alleged mythic excesses that have been abandoned in his favor. But even these catalogs seem to evoke the ideas of

76. Similarly in *Nemean* 10, we find the poet coming back down to the mortal concerns of the present-day celebration after breaking off the theme of Herakles’ marriage on Olympos.

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moderation and the kind of limit that is appropriate to mortal gains. The very fact that the poet numbers the victories in such a catalog seems to reflect this. The athlete's successes may be many, but they are not "countless." In *Nemean* 10, the "countless virtues" (2–3) of Argos are contrasted with the specifically quantifiable achievements of the victor, who was "twice" victorious at the Argive Heraia (22–23), once at the Pythian games (25), thrice at the Isthmian games (25–26), and thrice at the Nemean (25–28). Similarly, in *Nemean* 7, the poet qualifies his description of Thearion's happiness, which is neither boundless nor immoderate. No mortal has won "complete happiness" [εὐδαιμονίαν ἅπασαν, 56], but the present-day victor, Thearion, has won a "fitting measure of prosperity" [ἔοικότα καιρὸν ὄλβου, 58].

Conclusion

In conclusion, break-off calls attention to a critical aspect of the epinician poet's task: his need to "soothe" or "appease" the various elements within his audience—not just the φθόνεροι, the victor's envious fellow citizens, but also the gods, and even the victor himself. In *Pythian* 1 and *Olympian* 2, the poet prays that he may "please" and "soothe" Zeus with his song (ἀνδάνειν, *P.* 1.29; ἰανθείς ἀοιδᾶϊς, *O.* 2.13). In *Olympian* 3, he says that he must "please" [ἀδεῖν, 1] the Tyndaridai, the heroes responsible for the victory, with his song. Elsewhere, as noted, he talks of a need to "appease" the victors he celebrates (ἰλάσκομαι, *O.* 7.9).

I have also suggested that the way in which the poet appeases each of these groups is to avoid κόρος, "excess," in his talk—the point at which they are likely to find what he says too much to bear, and react to his words in a violent way. By moderating his own talk, the epinician poet wards off the corresponding and ever-present threat of κόρος (an excessive reaction) on his audience's part.

The limit—the point at which the poet's words will seem excessive—need not be the same for each of these groups. Indeed, it is likely not to be. At times, it is true, the poet may be able to kill two birds with one stone. As seen in the previous section, a single statement may simultaneously appease the gods and encourage the victor to moderate his ambitions. More often, however, the wishes of different audience members are likely to contradict each other. The victor, for instance, is likely

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to want to hear more about himself than his fellow citizens and the gods will tolerate.

The contradictory impulses of the epinician poet's audience make his task a difficult one. It is also a dangerous one: it is crucial that he get the balance right. The poet works in an environment of "danger" and "risk." He constantly professes that his task requires "daring" (τόλμα) and "boldness" (θάρασος), and involves risk (κίνδυνος). In *Olympians* 9 and 13 the poet wishes for τόλμα, "daring," and δύναμις, "power," when driving forward in the chariot of the Muses to praise the victor (*O.* 9.82–83), and he says that τόλμα urges his tongue to utter καλά, "noble things" (*O.* 13.11). He talks of "boldly shouting out" [ὄρθιον ὄρυσαι θαρσέων] praise of the victor (*O.* 9.109), and says that his voice "grows bold [θαρσαλέα] beside the wine-bowl" (*N.* 9.49).⁷⁷ He talks elliptically of "risk" (κίνδυνος, *N.* 8.21]. Avoiding κόρος, "excess," is represented as a matter of judgment and skill in the heat of the moment of a spontaneous performance. The rhetorical convention of break-off is highly developed in Pindaric epinician poetry, I suggest, because it portrays the poet as a figure who demonstrates the highest skill in maintaining this complicated balancing act, and also brings out how critical it is that he maintain it.

77. Cf. also θαρσύ μοι τόδ' εἶπεῖν (*N.* 7.50).