

LECTURE ON A MASTER MIND

PINDAR¹

BY HUGH LLOYD-JONES

Fellow of the Academy

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BY no means every good poet can be credited with a master mind. To deserve such a designation, a poet does not need to have a philosophy, or to have versified the philosophy of others; he does need to have produced a considerable body of verse which communicates a distinctive vision of the world, conveyed with great imaginative power. If this canon is applied with strictness, only great poets will be found to satisfy it.

The poet I have chosen to speak about has a name familiar to most educated people. Since the Renaissance several famous poets have imitated him, or have believed that they were doing so; for example Ronsard and Chiabrera, Cowley and Gray, the young Goethe and Hölderlin. There are many translations, including good modern ones² by Richmond Lattimore, Maurice Bowra, and recently Frank Nisetich, and much scholarly work has been devoted to Pindaric interpretation. But since the Renaissance comparatively few people with a working knowledge of the Greek language have studied Pindar with serious attention; and among these only a minority would have claimed, stating their honest opinion, that he deserved to be considered as a master mind in the sense that I have just described.

This is partly because Pindar has always had a reputation for being difficult. One cannot deny that he is difficult, but the difficulty has been exaggerated; his style and language, once superficial awkwardnesses have been overcome, are hardly as difficult as those of Sophocles. His text is better preserved than that of any of the great tragedians; and though some of his poems are written in complicated metres, about half are written in

¹ References are to the Teubner text edited by B. Snell and revised by H. Maehler (vol. i, 1971; vol. ii, 1975).

² Lattimore, *The Odes of Pindar* (1947; 2nd edn. 1976); Bowra, *The Odes of Pindar* (1969); Nisetich, *Pindar's Victory Odes* (1980) (with useful explanatory material).

dactylo-epitrite, whose main features can be set out in half a page.¹ The main difficulties in the way of literary appreciation lie in the conventions of the genre he writes in; the sometimes abrupt transitions from one topic to another are often hard to grasp and the unity of the poems has proved so hard to comprehend that many scholars have denied that they have any unity at all. We need to learn to read Pindar not only in the sense of how to construe him, but in that of how to view each poem and each part of each poem in the light of the tradition it belongs to; and it is only very lately that scholars have begun to give readers the assistance that they need.

Readers would not have been scared away by Pindar's difficulty if they had been convinced that the effort needed to understand him would be rewarded; but for many years the people best qualified to help them have not encouraged them to make that effort. The great period of German scholarship which ended, roughly speaking, with the fall of the empire did much for the editing of the text and of the extensive ancient commentaries, and for the philological and historical elucidation of Pindaric problems. But its principal figures complained that Pindar's world was strange to modern minds, and that he lacked sympathy with the new science and philosophy that in his time was active in the eastern part of the Greek world.² They did not regard him as the equal of the Attic tragedians, who in their view stood for progress while Pindar was the poet of an aristocratic world doomed to rapid extinction. Even Gilbert Murray, whose feeling for poetry strongly responded to Pindar's verse, complained that Pindar was 'a poet and nothing more';³ he would not have credited him with being a master mind. A living scholar who has done much for Pindar, Bruno Snell,⁴ writes that in Pindar's time Attic tragedy was requiring that justice should be done on earth, and in consequence was making many demands not only of men but of the gods, but that Pindar kept himself far from any such thoughts, which seemed to him presumptuous.

If a great poet belongs to a world remote from our own and

¹ See P. Maas, *Greek Metre* (1962), pp. 40-1.

² Representative opinions are quoted in my article 'Modern Interpretation of Pindar: the Second Pythian and Seventh Nemean', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* xciii (1973), 109f. I hope the reader of that piece will pardon a few repetitions in this, made necessary by my subject.

³ In *The Literature of Ancient Greece* (1897, repr. 1966), 112 (cited on p. 110 of the article referred to in preceding note).

⁴ *Die Entdeckung des Geistes* (4th edn., 1975), 94; cf. the English version by T. G. Rosenmeyer, *The Discovery of the Mind* (1953), 89.

gives expression to its outlook, that is no reason why we should not respond to the greatness of his poetry; it is enough to think of Homer, or of Dante. The notion that, because the world of Pindar's aristocratic patrons was visibly perishing before his death, therefore his poetry is somehow less valuable than that of poets belonging to communities whose prosperity was then beginning scarcely deserves respect. Neither does the complaint that a lyric poet shows no interest in science and philosophy; if Keats reproached Newton with having explained the mystery of the rainbow, shall we refuse to read Keats's poetry on that account? In fact the tragedians see life in terms of the traditional religion scarcely less than Pindar does, for all the play Euripides may make with the new rhetoric and with casual allusions to the new speculations.

Many people are prejudiced against Pindar for political and social reasons. He was an aristocrat,¹ belonging to one of the great clans whose members were spread over different civic communities. His own city, Thebes, belonged to the division of the Greek race called Aeolian, and like most Dorian and Aeolian communities was ruled by an aristocracy; at the time of the Persian invasion of 480, geography determined that Thebes had about as much chance of resisting the invader as Denmark in 1940 or Czechoslovakia in 1945. Many of those who commissioned Pindar to celebrate their victories in the great games were noblemen; some were even monarchs, like the rulers of the Greek colonies in Sicily or in Cyrene. In his poetry, Pindar often stresses the importance of breeding; learning is no use, he says, unless nature has made one apt to learn. A distinguished ancient historian, perhaps not especially skilful in linguistic or aesthetic matters, seems to think it morally wrong for anyone to admire Pindar's poetry.²

We should not now make the mistake of exaggerating the differences between the Dorian, Aeolian, and Ionian divisions of the Greeks. The poetry of the archaic period, like its art, cut across these barriers; thus Pindar's older contemporary Simonides and his nephew Bacchylides came from the Ionian island of Ceos, but this did not prevent them from investing their choral lyric poetry with the thin patina of West Greek dialect which was customary in a genre belonging traditionally to western Greece. Pindar did not write poems only for individuals; he was sometimes commissioned

¹ See M. R. Lefkowitz, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* lxxvii (1962), 230f.

² M. I. Finley, *Aspects of Antiquity* (1968), 43f.

by communities, including, on more than one occasion, democratic Athens. He often proclaims his sympathy with his patrons of the moment, and several times praises the Dorian institutions observed in Syracuse and Aegina; yet he nowhere, if his text is understood correctly, makes a declaration of political allegiance, as Yeats did when he wrote a poem for General O'Duffy and his Blueshirts. Indeed, W. S. Barrett has made it seem probable that in the Twelfth Olympian he saluted the new régime in Himera which had replaced one controlled by his former patrons, the rulers of Akragas.¹ The truth is that he was not a romantic individualist, like Yeats, but a poet operating within the terms of fixed religious and poetical conventions, and like the tragedians he is concerned less with what is temporary and accidental in human life than with what is permanent and fundamental.

The preponderance in Pindar's extant work of odes written to celebrate athletic victories is due to accident. His poems were collected by the scholars of Alexandria in seventeen books. Only six of these consisted of poems written for men; these were the four books of victory odes for athletes, with one book of *enkomia* and one of dirges.² The remaining eleven books consisted of poems written for the service of the gods, most of them what we should call hymns of one sort or another. Of this large output only the victory odes have survived virtually entire. But we have enough fragments of Pindar's other poems, some from quotations by other authors and others from papyri discovered in the sands of Egypt, to have a very fair notion of their character. It is clear that the religious background, the use of myth, and the general outlook expressed in the victory odes were, like their language, style, and metre, similar to those found in the other poetry of Pindar.

The convention of the victory ode was already established well before the date of the Tenth Pythian, the earliest poem of Pindar whose date we know. The great poet Simonides, born in 556, more than thirty years before Pindar, must long before then have been an established writer in this genre. Almost all surviving victory odes were written to honour victories won in the four great games held in connection with Panhellenic religious festivals. The Olympic Games at Olympia in the western Peloponnese and the Pythian Games at Delphi were held every four years, and the

¹ See his article in *Journal of Hellenic Studies* xciii (1973), 23f.

² See Vita Ambrosiana in *Scholia vetera in Pindari carmina*, ed. A. B. Drachmann, i (1903), 3, 6f.; cf. P. Oxy. 2438, 35f.; for a discussion of the discrepancy between these authorities, see I. Gallo, *Una nuova biografia di Pindaro* (n.d., 1976?), 72f.

Nemean Games at Nemea in the Argolid and the Isthmian Games on the Isthmus of Corinth were held every two years. It is generally assumed that each victory ode was performed, with an accompaniment of dance and music created by the poet, by a chorus of men, trained if circumstances permitted by the poet himself; the performance took place either at the scene of the games soon after the victory, or later at the victor's home. Most remarkably, the poet speaks through the chorus in the first person singular, in his own person.¹ This is not the case in all of Pindar's poetry; in his poems for choirs of maidens, for example, the chorus speaks in its own character. The lost poems of which we know most are the paeans, a kind of lyric poem in honour of Apollo or Artemis or both, but occasionally extended to the service of other gods. In some paeans the chorus speaks in its own person, but in others the poet speaks. Was every victory ode performed by a chorus? Till lately it was believed that the lyric narrative poems on epic themes composed by the sixth-century Sicilian poet Stesichorus were performed chorally; but now that we know that several of them had many more than a thousand lines it seems likelier that the poet or another chanted them to the accompaniment of the lyre, as rhapsodes did the poetry of Homer.² One of Pindar's victory odes, the Fourth Pythian, is three hundred lines long, and largely consists of epic narrative; I wonder whether this, and perhaps also other victory odes, was not performed, as Pindar's *enkomia* must have been, by a single person.

A victory ode normally contains certain recurring elements. It praises a particular victor on a particular occasion, and usually his family and his city also; it usually contains a modicum of general reflection upon human life in relation to the gods, and often the narration of a myth judged to be appropriate to the occasion. But these elements occur in different orders, and are linked together by different methods of transition. Since August Boeckh³ early in the nineteenth century laid the foundations of modern Pindaric scholarship, the unity of the victory ode has been the subject of much controversy.

For the greater part of that century, most scholars believed in

¹ See M. R. Lefkowitz, art. cit. (p. 141, n. 1 above), 177f.

² See M. L. West, *Classical Quarterly* ns xxi (1971), 302f.; M. W. Haslam, *Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica* xvii (1974), 33, with n. 53.

³ *Pindari opera quae supersunt* (2 vols., each in 2 parts, 1811–21); the commentary on the Nemeans and Isthmians is by Ludolf Dissen, who later published his own commentary on the whole of Pindar (*Pindari carmina quae supersunt cum deperditorum fragmentis selectis* (1830; 2nd edn., with additions by F. G. Schneidewin, 1843)).

its essential unity. Boeckh himself distinguished between an objective unity determined by the occasion for which the ode was written and a subjective unity dictated by the poet's personal preoccupations. His collaborator Ludolf Dissen introduced the notion of a 'Grundgedanke', or central thought; he and many others did harm by trying to boil down the content of whole poems into painfully trite and jejune summaries. At the end of the century this produced a violent reaction, whose main proponent was Wilamowitz.¹ Sharply rejecting the idea that a victory ode had any unity, he and his followers concentrated on the philological exegesis of the text and on its historical aspect, taking comparatively little interest in the construction of the poems and the poet's art. In 1928 Wolfgang Schadewaldt² so far modified this trend as to offer a refined version of Boeckh's objective and subjective unity. Objective unity was determined by what Schadewaldt called the 'programme' of the ode, the praise of the victor and his home and family and other historical elements; to these were added the general reflection and the narration of the myth; and upon this material the poet imposed other matter derived from his own thoughts and feelings. A different kind of neo-unitarianism has been advocated by Hermann Fränkel,³ who found the main content of each ode to lie in its contribution to the general picture of the divine government of the world and the values which it generates that is built up by the poet's work as a whole. In his detailed exposition of Pindaric poems Fränkel has proved one of the best modern critics; but to say that the individual ode, composed for performance on a particular occasion, must be explained in terms of its relation to the entire corpus, like different pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that are given away in different packets of some product, is an odd way of dealing with the specific problem of the poem's unity. Other kinds of neo-unitarianism, based upon a more or less vaguely conceived symbolism, seem to me to have been a good deal less effective.

A new trend started in America during the early sixties, one not unconnected with Milman Parry's work on the Homeric formula, and indeed with the general movement towards 'structuralist'

¹ Especially in *Pindaros* (1922). On the Pindaric studies of Wilamowitz, see L. E. Rossi, *Annali della scuola normale di Pisa* ser. 3, iii (1973), 119f.

² *Der Aufbau des pindarischen Epinikions* (1928, repr. 1966).

³ *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums* (1950; 2nd edn. 1962); English translation by M. Hadas and J. Willis as *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy* (1973); see also his 'Pindar's Religion', *Die Antike* iii (1927), 39, reprinted in W. M. Calder III and J. Stern, *Pindar und Bakchylides* (Wege der Forschung 134) (1970), 232f.

analysis of poetry and other things. In 1962 Elroy R. Bundy¹ brought out detailed studies of two Pindaric victory odes, the Eleventh Olympian and the First Isthmian. He strongly insisted on the importance of understanding the conventions of the epinician genre, showing how often formal devices that conform to standard patterns are used at corresponding places in different poems in order to effect transitions. In several places he and his followers have been able to resolve in terms of such devices problems which earlier scholars had tried to explain by assuming the presence of personal or historical allusions for which there was no independent evidence. For this purpose Bundy invented a formidable technical terminology, oddly recalling the edition published at Wittenberg in 1616 by Erasmus Schmid, who analysed each ode in terms of the categories prescribed in the rhetorical handbooks of the early Roman Empire. As an Ariadne's clue to the unity of the victory ode, Bundy offered the principle that its main purpose is to praise the victor, and that all that it contains ultimately subserves that purpose.

Two years after Bundy's studies there appeared a survey of Pindaric criticism from the time of Boeckh, in which another American scholar, David Young,² forcefully argued for a not dissimilar approach; he later followed it with studies of four odes, contending that each is 'a unified, meaningful work of literary art'. Young objects that Bundy recognizes no unity in the epinician beyond mere linear continuity, and concentrates too narrowly upon the theme of praise. He himself uses his grasp of the traditional themes and the conventional rhetoric of the genre to explain the complex but coherent working-out of each poem's argument. Since then a number of scholars in Europe as well as in America have adopted a similar approach.

The new movement has done a great service to the understanding of Pindar by emphasizing the importance of convention in his art, and so helping to correct the vast damage done by the fatal conjunction of nineteenth-century historicism with nineteenth-century romanticism. The romantics held all poetry, and particularly lyric poetry, to be the spontaneous outpouring of the poet's sincerest feelings; a genuine poet felt an overmastering urge to

¹ *Studia Pindarica* I, II (*University of California Publications in Classical Philology* xviii (1962), 1-34 and 35-92).

² First published in *The Minnesota Review* iv (1964), 584f.; reprinted with some changes in Calder and Stern, op. cit. p. 143, n. 3, 1f.; cf. *Three Odes of Pindar: a Literary Study of Pythian 11, Pythian 3 and Olympian 7*, *Mnemosyne*, Suppl. 9, 1968; *Pindar, Isthmian 7, Myth and Exempla*, Suppl. 15, 1971.

express in verse his own most deeply held convictions. In many ways they appreciated the Greek tragic and lyric poets better than their eighteenth-century precursors, whose understanding of the poetry of archaic and classical Greece was limited by their preoccupation with the rules of their own classicism; and it was natural that they should assume that the Greek poets were like themselves, gravely underrating the importance of form and convention in their work. Wilamowitz in his famous book on Pindar, published in 1922, when he was 74 years of age, adopted a biographical approach; so did Maurice Bowra as late as 1964,¹ never doubting that Pindar was a lyric poet like Yeats, expressing his personal attitude to the world and to those with whom he might have dealings. Both relied upon the data furnished by the ancient lives of Pindar and the ancient commentaries upon his work, adding further matter based on modern inference from the actual poems. But as Mary Lefkowitz in particular has shown,² little reliance can be placed upon the biographical traditions about the early Greek poets; much of them has no securer basis than jokes from comedy later taken seriously by owlish grammarians or frivolous speculations based upon the poets' actual works. The most solid part of the ancient commentators' evidence for Pindar's life is chronological; lists of the victors at Olympia and Delphi were available, so that most Olympian and Pythian odes are dated. But the dates of Nemean and Isthmian odes are matter for conjecture; and the attempts made by stylometric methods to guess at the date of poems whose date we do not know have not, so far at least, had very much success.

Romanticism as well as historicism has derived encouragement from the ancient commentators, who seem to operate with a theory of poetic inspiration deriving, in the last resort, from Plato. The poet writes in frenzy, they assume, as though improvising; when he employs the traditional device of apologizing for a digression by saying that in his excitement he has been carried far out of his path, they innocently take his word for it. Since the Renaissance a vast amount of misunderstanding has been fostered by the second ode of Horace's fourth book, in which he warns a would-be imitator of Pindar of the hazards of the attempt, depicting Pindar's verse as a rushing torrent, 'bound by no laws'. In fact Pindar scrupulously obeys many laws, not only those of

¹ *Pindar* (1964).

² See *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (1981), 57 f.; also 'Pindar's Lives', *Classica et Iberica (Festschrift Marique)* (1975), 71 f., and other articles listed in *The Lives of the Greek Poets*, p. 179.

a strict form and metre, the same pattern of strophe, antistrophe, and epode being repeated many times in the same poem, but the conventions of the genre which it is the great merit of the new movement to have made us properly aware of. In doing so it has placed new weapons in the hands of those who would defend the essential unity of the victory ode, and since it started anti-unitarianism has been very much on the defensive.

But the new trend has its dangers, and we must guard against them. Bundy himself, as I know from talks with him in 1969, six years before his untimely death at only 51, regretted the forbidding dryness of his revolutionary studies, and was planning work which would do better justice to Pindar as a poet. Inevitably his approach has been adopted by a number of those humdrum scholars who are forever on the look-out for a mechanical recipe for getting results, and these have created a dreary scholasticism, treating an ode as a collection of commonplaces strung together by a few stock devices. In fact the commonplaces were originally chosen because of their relation to reality, and both they and the traditional devices are used as the context demands, and are skilfully adapted by the poet according to his needs, so that to talk of 'formulas' in this connection is out of place. The clue to understanding lies, indeed, in the knowledge that above all else the poet aims to praise the victor; but Pindar was a human being writing to please other human beings, and those who wish to understand him will neglect the historical dimension only at their peril. He does honour to the victor by placing the moment of felicity which his triumph gives him in the context of his historical situation against the background of the permanent situation of the world as the gods govern it.

This is not the only danger that confronts the new unitarianism. A second is that of exaggerating the significance, sometimes real enough, of the repetitions of words and ideas within a poem;¹ this is sometimes combined with an exaggerated notion of the importance of symbolism in Pindar's work.² A third danger is that of using excessive ingenuity³ to try to prove the myth narrated in

¹ It is a failing of the useful introduction to Pindar and Bacchylides by M. R. Lefkowitz, *The Victory Ode: an Introduction* (1976).

² This combination has spoiled the interpretation of the Seventh Olympian put forward by David Young, who has done much for Pindaric studies; see the review of his *Three Odes of Pindar* (cited at p. 145, n. 2 above) by H. Maehler, *Gnomon* xlii (1970), 441 f.

³ This fault is exemplified in what is in many ways a good and useful book, A. Köhnken's *Die Funktion des Mythos bei Pindar* (1971); see the somewhat too severe notice by S. Radt, *Gnomon* xlvi (1974), 113. For an instance of this kind

a given poem to be relevant to that poem's theme; in many cases we must be content to observe that the myth illustrates Pindar's view of heroism and its relation to the gods only in a general way. To have unity, a Pindaric ode does not need to have a streamlined unity.

In the light of these considerations, let us consider the recurrent elements of the epinician ode. First, there is the religious background. Pindar is above all else a religious poet, and much of the failure to understand him has been bound up with the failure to understand the Greek religion that pervades his poetry. That failure has encouraged the romantic error of taking Pindar's religion for a personal construction of his own. For a believer in the archaic Greek religion, to praise a mortal man was a hazardous enterprise. The gods are immortal, and alone enjoy true happiness; men are the creatures of a day, and are subject to all the misfortunes which the day may bring. The gods govern the universe, understandably enough, in their own interest, and with little regard for that of men; the various creation-myths make men an accidental or a casual element in the scheme of things. The gods in Pindar's poetry are most vividly realized as individual personalities, and something of the same concreteness invests even the personified abstractions which so often figure in his work. But these gods work through real forces in the world, so that to deny their existence would be pointless, since the reality of the forces which they stand for cannot be denied.

No man can be pronounced fortunate till he is dead; at any moment an unforeseen catastrophe may overwhelm the happiest among mankind. But men may enjoy moments of felicity; these are dependent on the favour of the gods, and come most of all to men descended from the unions with mortal women which the gods allowed themselves during the heroic age. Such men's heroic nature makes them capable of becoming rulers, warriors, athletes, or poets. Nature is vitally important, and without natural aptitude education is in vain. But natural gifts by themselves are not enough; hard labour and endurance are required, and the need for them is quite as strongly stressed as that for natural gifts. Not that even the conjunction of natural ability and strenuous effort can command success; in the last resort, all mortal triumph

of thing, one may note the treatment of Pyth. 12, 10 by Köhnken, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* xxv (1978), 92f.; in order to force the text into close conformity with the gnomic utterance at the end, he is even driven to argue that *δυσπενθείϊ cὸν καμάτῳ* must refer to the distress experienced by Perseus, and not to the Gorgons lamenting for their dead sister.

is dependent on the favour of the gods. The gods may grudge success to any mortal; the divine envy which may make them do so is conceived by Pindar not as mere spite, but as a facet of divine justice, whose workings mortals are not always able to perceive.

Any man who praises other men must remain always conscious of the danger of provoking envy, not only divine but human. Envy is a force which any man who strives after any kind of *areta*, excellence, must fight; of this the man who praises others must remain aware. Hesiod, the greatest Boeotian poet before Pindar, had stressed the community between kings and poets, both of whom derive authority from Zeus, kings directly, but poets through Apollo and the Muses.¹ Conscious of his own *areta* as an inspired poet, Pindar has a deep sense of community with the men of action, rulers, warriors, and athletic victors, whom he praises; like them he has to struggle against envy, not simply that of rivals, but that which any man who praises others has to strive to overcome. If the poet can contrive to vanquish envy and to place the victory in its setting in the world of gods as well as men, then the victor's brief moment of felicity can in a limited but real sense be made eternal.

To the modern mind it may seem strange, even ridiculous, that athletes should be coupled with rulers and warriors as bearers of *areta*. That is not how the archaic Greeks saw the matter. A victory in the games, with their strong religious associations, carried vast prestige; athletes endured arduous training of a kind that fitted them for war as well as triumph in the games. The Aeginetans, for whom Pindar wrote more odes of victory than for any other community, won the prize for valour awarded by the Greek army after Salamis; the Sicilian tyrants, whatever modern moralizers may say about their ideology, saved the Greeks of Sicily from the Carthaginians and Etruscans. Again, the conventional references to the customary fee should not lead us to suppose, as ancient comic poets did in jest and later grammarians in all seriousness, that Pindar and Simonides were especially mercenary.² One proof of the noble man's nobility, according to the poetic convention, was his readiness to spend his money generously in assuring that his fame would live.

Yeats lived at a time when there was no generally accepted picture of the world to serve as background for his poetry, so that he was compelled to construct one for himself out of very disparate materials. Pindar, like Dante, inherited the picture of the world

¹ *Theogony* 75–103.

² See Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets*, 50f.

fashioned by the religion of his people. The greatest error of romantic criticism has been to treat this as though it were a personal philosophy or religion of the poet's own making; we can see that it is common to him and to other writers in the genre, both to the older Simonides of whom we know little and to the younger Bacchylides of whom we possess large parts of fourteen victory odes. If we make allowances for the differences of genre and avoid the pervasive error of reading ideas into ancient tragedy that are not there, we can see that it is not very different from the religious outlook that we find in Aeschylus or Sophocles.¹

This romantic misconception has been fostered by the force and clarity of Pindar's many statements in the first person, which give the reader nurtured on romantic verse the irresistible impression of being in contact with a powerful and independent poetic personality. That is in a sense true; but we shall not appreciate Pindar's poetry correctly unless we are aware of how much he has in common with other writers in the same genre, with Greek archaic poetry in general, and with all believers in archaic Greek religion. Presented by a poet whose imagination has grasped its tragic truth with utter honesty and clarity, the austere world of early Greek religion comes across to us in all its beauty and with all its hardness.

Against this backcloth the poet must place the victory won by his client of the moment. The odes commonly start with an elaborate prelude, ultimately deriving, it would seem, from the invocation of deities with which cult-hymns began. Sometimes the poet invokes a god, but more often a personified abstraction, or the hero or heroine who personifies a place; he may address his own Muse, who is about to perform in honour of the victor; he may start with general reflection or with praise of the victory; or he may describe his ode by means of an elaborate simile, likening it to a cup or bowl ceremonially offered by one man to another or to one of the splendid treasures which wealthy communities built at the great religious centres to contain their dedications.

Nothing is more indicative of the distorting effect exercised by romanticism upon Pindaric criticism than the proneness of critics to assume that the mention of the victory and the enumeration of other victories won by the victor and by other members of his family must have been irksome duties which the poet resented and was eager to get out of the way as soon as possible in order to give expression to his personal preoccupations. In fact the victory is the starting-point and epicentre of the entire poem, and the other

¹ See in general my book *The Justice of Zeus* (1971).

victories of the family must be mentioned too, since they help to demonstrate that these men possess that nobility of nature which makes effort fruitful and wins the divine favour which alone can bring success. In the hands of an indifferent poet this part of the poem might indeed turn out monotonous, but Pindar displays the greatest virtuosity in the avoidance of this danger. With typical Greek realism he frequently remarks that not all the members even of the greatest athletic families possess equal gifts; talent often skips a generation or so. What counted for the Greeks was victory, and Pindar has no compunction in imagining the discomfiture of the defeated rivals of the winner. Not that the odes dwell at all frequently on the incidents of the games, despite the poet's fondness for athletic metaphors.

The character and history of the victors, their families, and the civic communities they belonged to stimulate the poet to recall history as well as legend; to the Greeks of his time the boundary between the two was vague and almost non-existent. Naturally the part of the poems dealing with the victors takes on a special interest when they are great personages like Arkesilas, king of Cyrene, Hieron, ruler of Syracuse, Theron, ruler of Akragas, and other members of his family. A poetic convention that is as old as Hesiod allows Pindar to address such people as an equal, and to advise them to persist in their noble ways, advice which the audience knows there is no possibility of their neglecting, any more than Britannia might reject the advice of those who in song urge her to rule the waves.

Most victory odes include the narration of a myth, sometimes short, but sometimes very long. Pindar's narrative technique is masterly; he knows what to leave out, and has a flair for the significant detail. Sometimes it is not easy to perceive the myth's special relevance to the situation; but at other times that relevance is so obvious that one cannot help asking why it is not obvious in every case.

In the Third Pythian, for instance, the myth has a peculiar aptness. This is not a true victory ode, but a poem of consolation addressed to Hieron, who was suffering from a painful illness. Pindar starts by expressing the wish that he could call back from the dead Chiron, the noble centaur, who taught the great healer Asklepios. He tells how Koronis, when pregnant with Asklepios by Apollo, broke the law of the gods by having intercourse with a mortal; Apollo destroyed her, but as the funeral pyre was about to consume her body, snatched the child from her womb and brought him to Chiron for his education. Some poets might have

found it wiser not to mention that in the end Asklepios was persuaded by a great fee to break, like his mother, the law of the gods by raising a man from the dead, so that Zeus destroyed him with the thunderbolt; but Pindar goes on to tell it, as a reminder of man's mortality and fallibility. Later, he recalls to Hieron words of Homer which he interprets to mean that the gods give men two parts of evil for one part of good;¹ even Peleus and Cadmus, the two heroes who married goddesses, met with grievous misfortunes. Human happiness never lasts for long, and a man must adapt himself to whatever fortune the gods send him. Pindar concludes the poem with a reminder that poetry can confer on human triumphs a kind of permanence.

Still more perfect is the applicability of the myth of the First Pythian.² The poem honours a Pythian victory of Hieron's chariot, but also celebrates his foundation of the new city of Aitna, founded on the site of Katane, the modern Catania, as a kingdom for Hieron's son Deinomenes. Very near that city lies the mighty volcano from which it takes its name; beneath it, in the legend, but stretching all the way from Etna to Vesuvius, lies Typhos or Typhoeus, the mightiest of the giants who have challenged Zeus. The poem starts with a solemn invocation of the Apolline instrument, the lyre, and a description of the celestial music played to the gods upon Olympus by Apollo and the Muses. Even the savage war-god yields to that music's spell; but the enemies of Zeus are infuriated by its strains. One such is Typhos, and the poet memorably describes his fiery breath, which only a few years before the poem was written had burst forth in a devastating eruption. Pindar prays that he may never displease Zeus, interprets the Pythian victory of Hieron as a good omen for the new city, and prays to Apollo, lord of Delphi, for its prosperity. All human excellence depends upon the gods, and Pindar prays to them for Hieron's welfare, making allusion to his great achievements. Since Hieron is grievously sick, he is compared with Philoktetes, the hero whose poisoned foot did not prevent him from making a great contribution to the Greek victory over Troy. Now Pindar returns to Aitna and his hopes for it; he prays Zeus to keep off the ever present danger from the barbarous enemies of the Greeks, with an allusion to the glorious victory which Hieron had won at Cumae, near to Vesuvius, four years earlier, and coupling

¹ *Iliad* xxiv. 527f., misinterpreted, it would appear, by Pindar; see C. W. Macleod, *Iliad, Book XXIV* (1982), p. 133.

² See the excellent treatment of this poem by Eduard Fraenkel, *Horace* (1957), pp. 276f.

it with the earlier victory of Hieron's brother and predecessor, Gelon, over the Carthaginians and with those of the mainland Greeks over the Persians. So the poet comes to his final praise of Hieron, contrasting the fame won by his nobility and generosity with the ill repute of an earlier Sicilian tyrant, the cruel Phalaris. Happiness and fame are the two greatest things for mortals. In this great poem, the continuing presence of the giant, a natural enemy of the beauty and order which the Olympian gods stand for, brought low by Zeus but living and always to be reckoned with, mirrors the abiding threat to Sicily from the barbarians; the Greeks of Sicily lived a life as precarious as that of modern Israel. It mirrors also the threat to Hieron's dynasty from its enemies; a few years after the performance, Hieron was dead and the rule of his dynasty was at an end. The myth's significance is even wider, for it relates also to man's position in the world; by great exertions he may merit and enjoy the favour of the gods, but its continuance cannot be guaranteed, and nothing that is human lasts for ever.

But in other cases the relevance of a myth is far from obvious. In the First Nemean, for example, written for the Syracusan general Chromios, Pindar tells how the infant Herakles strangled the snakes sent by Hera to kill him and his brother, and in the Eleventh Pythian, written for the Theban boy Thrasydaïos, he tells the story of the murder of Agamemnon and the revenge of his son Orestes. A myth may be relevant in more than one way; so that any legend about Herakles is appropriate to a Nemean victory, because he founded the Nemean games, and any myth connected with Delphi, like the myth of Orestes, is relevant to a Pythian victory. But another reason why these myths are relevant is that both illustrate the strength that goes with true nobility, and the power and justice of the gods; Heracles and Orestes through their valour triumph against overwhelming odds.¹ Just so when Pindar honours an Aeginetan victor, he always recounts one of the many legends about the great heroes descended from the founder of Aegina, Aiakos; all such stories illustrate the fundamental principles that govern the universe of archaic Greek religion.

Already in the seventh-century Spartan choral poet Alcman we find mythic narrative closely linked with gnomic reflection; either a reflection prompted by the situation may be illustrated by a

¹ For good discussions of the First Nemean, see G. A. Privitera, *Giornale italiano di filologia* xxiv (1972), 28f. and P. W. Rose, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* lxxviii (1974), 145f.; on the Eleventh Pythian, see Young, *Three Odes* (p. 147, n. 2, above), 1f.

myth, or else a myth may prompt such a reflection. Taken out of context, Pindar's gnomic reflections might be made to appear as so many commonplaces, despite the striking manner in which they are expressed; but in their proper contexts they do not give that impression, unlike many of the similar reflections in the epinicians of Bacchylides.

Transition between the various elements of the poems is effected by means of various technical devices, most of which Bundy furnished with somewhat alarming technical names. It is important to recognize these and to understand the function they perform; but it is equally important to realize that they are never trotted out mechanically, but are cunningly disposed to suit the context and the requirements of the poet's art. There is absolutely no fixed order for the elements of the victory ode, each poem having not only its own metrical pattern but its own structure with its own particular shape; the claims of certain scholars to have 'created a generalized formal model' cannot be substantiated.

It is precisely when we have made full allowance for the element of convention both in Pindar's picture of the universe and in his literary technique that the power of his poetic genius makes the most profound impression. To grasp what is most distinctive in his art we may start by comparing him with his younger contemporary Bacchylides. Bacchylides has often been unfairly blamed for not having been a Pindar. He is an admirable poet, whose smoother and lighter style has its own special quality, one seen to less advantage in his victory odes than in the brief narrative lyric poems which are termed dithyrambs. One may say of Bacchylides what Eliot says of the early work of Yeats, that 'these are beautiful poems, but only craftsman's work, because one does not feel present in them that particularity which must provide the material for the general truth'.¹ What enables Pindar to seize on that particularity is his unusual power to select the detail that will most vividly bring home the scene he is describing or the truth on which he is insisting. His determination to describe such a detail with absolute precision sometimes results in the choice of a manner of expression so unusual as to seem bizarre. In the First Nemean, the infant Herakles grasps by the throat the twin serpents sent by Hera; 'and as they choked time breathed the lives out of their dread bodies'—*ἀγχομένοις δὲ χρόνος | ψυχὰς ἀπέπνευσε μελέων ἀφάτων* (46). In a poem in which he describes how Herakles dealt with the man-eating horses of the Thracian

¹ T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose*, ed. F. Kermode (1975), 251, from a lecture on Yeats originally delivered in 1940.

king Diomedes,¹ Pindar tells how the hero came to the stables and distracted the attention of the horses by tossing one of their grooms into the manger to be devoured; 'and swiftly a crunching sound rang out through the white bones as they splintered'—*ταχέως δ' ἀράβησε διὰ λευκῶν | ὀστέων δοῦπος ἐρεικομένων*.

The so-called Longinus says of Ion of Chios and Bacchylides that they are 'impeccable, uniformly beautiful writers in the polished manner', but of Pindar and Sophocles that they 'sometimes set the world on fire with their vehemence, for all that their flame sometimes goes out without reason and they collapse dismally'.² These two passages, I suspect, are examples of the kind of thing in Pindar that distressed the gifted rhetorician of the early imperial period; his style, like those of Aeschylus and Sophocles, conserves an element of archaic roughness, displeasing to the taste of periods like the eighteenth century, when 'the polished manner' is in fashion, but seeming to a different kind of criticism to give these authors strength and to preserve them from the facile smoothness which is the excellence of writers of the other kind, but is also the quality that prevents their rising to the greatest heights.

Very often in Pindar the significant detail is beautifully expressed, besides being hit off with an aptitude that contributes to its beauty. The holy island of Apollo in the Aegean, Pindar wrote in his hymn to Zeus,³ 'mortals call Delos, but the blessed ones on Olympus call the star that shines far off in the dark earth'—*ἄν τε βροτοὶ | Δᾶλον κικλήσκουσιν, μάκαρες δ' ἐν Ὀλύμπῳ | τηλέφαντον κυανέας χθονὸς ἄστρον*. Bacchylides could never have imagined how Delos must appear to the gods looking down on earth from heaven. The birth of Athena is a favourite subject of art as well as literature; it was memorably depicted on the eastern pediment of the Parthenon. Pindar in the Seventh Olympian describes how Hephaistos split his father's skull with his brazen axe and how Athena leapt up, uttering her warcry, 'and Heaven shuddered at her, and Mother Earth'—*ἀνίχ' Ἀφαίστου τέχναισιν | χαλκελάτῳ πελέκει πατέρος Ἀθαναία κορυφὰν κατ' ἄκραν | ἀνορούσαις ἀλάλαξεν ὑπερμάκει βοᾷ, | Οὐρανὸς δ' ἔφριξέ νιν καὶ Γαῖα μάτηρ* (35f.).

In the Thirteenth Olympian Pindar tells the Corinthian story of Bellerophon, who made many vain attempts to catch the winged horse Pegasus, 'till Pallas brought him a golden bridle, and his

¹ Fr. 169, 24; on this poem, see my article in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* lxxvi (1972), 45f.

² 33, 5; see D. A. Russell, *'Longinus' on the Sublime* (1964), p. 159.

³ Fr. 33c.

dream was changed to waking, and she said, "Are you asleep, prince, son of Aiolos? Come, take this to make horses love you! Sacrifice a white bull to the Tamer, and show him this!" So much as he dozed he heard the maiden say, with her blue aegis in the dark.' After duly sacrificing to Poseidon Bellerophon succeeds; once mounted, he cannot resist showing off in typically Greek fashion, and does a war-dance in the sky—*ἀναβαίς δ' εὐθὺς ἐνόπλια χαλκωθεὶς ἔπαιζεν*.¹ Effects of this kind are not easily appreciated in translation.

Arnold wrote of Homer 'that he is eminently rapid; that he is eminently plain and direct, both in the evolution of his thought and in the expression of it, that is both in his syntax and in his words; that he is eminently plain and direct in the substance of his thought, that is in the matter and ideas; and finally, that he is eminently noble.'² When one first reads that famous judgement, it seems somewhat paradoxical; how can the notably grand style of Homer, carrying so great a weight of ornament and prone to such elaborate verbal effects, be called rapid, plain, direct? But when one has considered Homer's style with care, distinguishing, so to speak, the flesh from the bones of his poetry, one must acknowledge the justness of the description. Pindar even more obviously carries a great weight of ornament, and has in addition the quality imposed by his resolute search for precision that makes him at times seem almost baroque; yet I contend that Arnold's words are just as true of Pindar as of Homer, as the longer passages I shall now examine are designed to show.

At the end of the Fourteenth Olympian, an exquisite short poem for a boy victor from Orchomenos, where the Graces had their cult, Pindar remembers the boy's dead father. 'Go, Echo', he writes, 'to the black-walled house of Persephone to bring the glorious news to his father; see Kleodamos and tell him that in Pisa's famous valley his son has crowned his locks with the feathers of splendid prizes.'

μελαντειχέα νῦν δόμον
Φερσεφόνας ἔλθ', Ἀχοῖ, πατρὶ κλυτὰν φέροις ἀγγελίαν
Κλεόδαμον ὄφρ' ἰδοῖς υἱὸν εἴπηις ὅτι οἱ νέαν
κόλποις παρ' εὐδόξοις Πίσας
ἔστεφάνωσε κυδίμων ἀέθλων πτεροῖσι χαίταν (20 f.)

In the Tenth Nemean, for the Argive wrestler Theaios, the myth

¹ Ol. 13, 65 f.; the last line quoted is l. 86.

² Matthew Arnold, *On the Classical Tradition*, ed. R. H. Super (1980), p. 102. The quotation is from the lectures *On Translating Homer*, given at Oxford in 1861.

is placed, unusually, at the end. From a catalogue of Argive legends—Pindar uses the device of *praeteritio*, making a series of brief mentions of stories he does not intend to tell—he comes to the victor and his long list of victories. It is not surprising that this family should produce great athletes, for the victor's ancestor Pamphaes once had the privilege of entertaining the Dioskouroi, Kastor and Polydeukes. In Sparta they share with Hermes and with Herakles the direction of the games, and they take good care of righteous men; the sons of gods may be relied on. Now follows the story of the last battle of the Dioskouroi against their cousins and enemies, the sons of Aphareus, Idas and Lynkeus (55f.):

Turn and turn about, they spend one day with their father Zeus, and one beneath the caverns of the earth, in the hollows of Therapna, each fulfilling a fate like the other's; for it was that which Polydeukes chose, rather than to be altogether a god and live in heaven, after Kastor had been slain in battle. Idas, angry over some affair of cattle, had gashed him with the point of his brazen spear. Looking down from Taygetos, Lynkeus saw them seated inside the trunk of an oak; for his was the most piercing eye of all men upon earth. With swift feet they came up at once, and in a moment did the dreadful deed. And the Apharetids suffered sorely at the hands of Zeus; for at once Leda's son came in pursuit; and they took their stand near their father's tomb. From it they seized a funeral monument, a wrought stone, and hurled it at the chest of Polydeukes. But they failed to crush him or to drive him back; and darting forward with his swift javelin he drove the bronze into the ribs of Lynkeus. And Zeus hurled upon Idas the sooty thunderbolt, and alone they were burned together; it is hard for men to contend with those whose power is greater.

And quickly back to his mighty brother came the son of Tyndareus, and he found him not yet dead, but breathing in great gasps. Shedding hot tears he groaned, and cried aloud, 'Father, son of Kronos, what release shall there be from sorrow? Grant me too death together with him, lord! A man's honour is gone when he has lost those who belong to him; few among mortals can be trusted in hard times to take a share of labour!' So he spoke, and Zeus came to meet him, and uttered these words, 'You are my son; but this man is mortal seed, sown when the hero came after to your mother. Come, I give you the choice; if you wish to escape death and hated old age, and live on Olympus with me and with Athena and with Ares of the black spear, you have a right to. But if you fight for your brother, and have a mind to share alike in all things, you may live half the time below the earth, and half in the golden halls of heaven.' After that speech he did not hesitate in his decision, but opened the eye of Kastor of the brazen corselet, and made him speak again.

I hope that even that bald rendering, which can give no notion

of the greatness of the poetry, can make the reader who does not know the language aware that Pindar, often censured for grandiloquence, is capable of great simplicity and directness. Arnold's words about Homer apply in every detail to this passage.

Pindar's last dated poem is the Eighth Pythian, performed in 446 BC, when he will have been well over seventy. It was written for a wrestler called Aristomenes from the small island of Aegina, visible from Athens, inhabited by Dorians under aristocratic leadership. Its people had been notably active in trade, in sea voyaging and in war; Pindar seems to have had a special link with them, for he wrote more victory odes for them than for any other people, no less than fourteen out of the fifty whose recipients are known to us. Since Aiakos, son of Zeus by the nymph Aegina, was father both of Peleus, father of Achilles, and of Telamon, father of Ajax, the island could claim some of the greatest fighting heroes of Greek legend; before the battle of Salamis, not far from Aegina, and in legend ruled over by Telamon, their statues were carried round the fleet, and gave great encouragement to the men about to fight.¹ Telamon helped Herakles to conquer Troy in the time of Priam's father, king Laomedon; Achilles, his son Neoptolemos, and Ajax all took part in the siege of Troy described in the *Iliad*; and both wars are depicted in the sculptures from the temple of Aphaia, on Aegina, now in Munich. These sculptures illustrate Pindar's odes for Aeginetan victors, just as those from the temple of Zeus at Olympia illustrate the myth of Pelops narrated in the First Olympian, for in poem after poem Pindar dwells on the rewarding themes supplied by the glorious deeds of Aiakos' descendants.

At the start of the Eighth Pythian, Pindar invokes Hesychia, 'Tranquillity'. It is a commonplace of the epinician genre that the victor wins peace, repose, tranquillity as the reward of his mighty labours, so that this choice is natural enough. But that may not be the only reason for it; tranquillity is the opposite of *polypragmosyne*, that readiness to interfere in other people's business that was thought characteristic of the imperialist democracy of Athens.² In 446, the year of this poem, Aegina had been for twelve years under Athenian domination; later, after the Peloponnesian War had broken out in 431, the Athenians would expel its entire population.

¹ Herodotus viii. 64, 2; cf. 83-4.

² See H. T. Wade-Gery, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* lii (1932), 224-5 = *Essays in Greek History* (1958), pp. 265-6; cf. V. Ehrenberg, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* lxvii (1947), 46f.

Gentle Tranquillity, daughter of Justice who makes cities great, you who hold the keys supreme of counsels and of wars, receive for Aristomenes the honour due to his Pythian victory. For you know how to give and how to take a gentle touch with flawless instinct. But when someone has welded ungentle rancour into his heart, you strike back hard against the power of your enemies, and put their insolence in the bilge. Porphyryon was one who did not realize the folly of provoking you. What one gains is most precious when he from whose house one carries it is willing.

In time violence has been the ruin even of the mighty boaster; Typhos of Cilicia did not escape its consequence, neither did the king of the giants; but they were brought low by the thunder and by the arrows of Apollo, he who received the son of Xenarkes with kindness when he came from Kirrha garlanded with the leaves of Parnassus and with Dorian revelry.

Porphyryon and the king of the giants are the same person;¹ the allusion is to the battle in which the giants challenged the might of the Olympians and were overwhelmed by them, a favourite theme of archaic art and of much poetry, now mostly lost. In the First Pythian we have found the presence under Etna of Typhos, the most formidable enemy of Zeus, not to be unrelated to the ever-present danger to the Greeks of Sicily from their barbarian enemies. The strong stress laid on the power of self-defence possessed by Tranquillity 'who holds the keys supreme of counsels and of wars' must cause us to wonder whether here too the poet may be glancing at the present situation of the community to which his client belongs; it may be significant that here also Typhos finds a mention.

Not far from the Graces has fallen the lot of the island of the righteous city, which has a part in the far-famed deeds of glory of the sons of Aiakos; solid has been her fame from the beginning; she is sung of as the nurse of heroes supreme in many victorious contests and in many fierce battles; and the same quality is manifest in her men.

Now Pindar uses a standard device to move from the praise of the victor's city to that of the victor.

But I have no leisure to dedicate the whole long story with the lyre and with sweet singing, lest satiety should come and irk us. Let my art give wings to the matter now in hand, the debt I owe you, boy, the newest of noble things. In your wrestling you follow in the tracks of your mother's brothers; at Olympia you do not shame Theognetos, nor at the Isthmus the victory of Kleitomachos, brave and strong. By bringing glory to the

¹ So O. Schroeder, *Pindars Pythien* (1922), p. 70; cf. F. Vian, *La guerre des géants: le mythe avant l'époque hellénistique* (1952), p. 197.

Meidylidai you earn the praise which once the son of Oikles spoke in riddles, when he saw his son and his friends' sons standing fast in battle at seven-gated Thebes, when the Epigonoi came from Argos on that second march.

The son of Oikles is the warrior and prophet Amphiaraos, one of the seven champions who accompanied Adrastos, king of Argos, in his famous and disastrous attempt to restore Polyneikes to the throne of Thebes; and the allusion leads up to the brief myth of the poem. In the next generation Adrastos and the sons of the Seven, known as the Epigonoi, launched a new attack; among them were such heroes as Diomedes and Sthenelos, known from the *Iliad*, and this time the attack met with success.

Thus he spoke as they fought: 'By nature a valiant spirit from the fathers shines upon the sons. Clearly I see Alkman plying his shield with its sinuous snakes, foremost in the gates of Cadmus. He who suffered in the disaster long ago now enjoys a better omen, the hero Adrastos. But in his own family his fortune will be the opposite; he alone of the Danaan army shall gather the bones of his son, and by a fortune sent from the gods shall return to the broad streets of Abas with his host unscathed.' So spoke Amphiaraos; and I myself rejoice to crown Alkman with flowers and to sprinkle him with song; for he is my neighbour and the guardian of my possessions, and on my way to earth's navel, famed in song, he met me and prophesied by the art belonging to his house.

Amphiaraos belonged to one of the great prophetic families of heroic Greece; he had not been killed, but had been swallowed up by the earth, and in his shrine at Oropos, on the borders of Boeotia and Attica, continued to prophesy. It would seem that Alkman or Alkmaion, like his father, was the object of a hero-cult, that Pindar lived near his shrine and had deposited property there for safe-keeping, in accordance with a common practice, and that he believed himself to have received a prophecy from the hero. Perhaps he had a waking vision, but it seems likelier that he dreamed a dream, for at the shrine of Amphiaraos inquirers slept in the sanctuary in the hope of a dream in which they would receive their answers. The simple significance of the myth is made explicit by the poet; it lies in the commonplace, often expressed in victory odes, that nature implants nobility in the sons of noble fathers. In the earlier battle the Seven had all perished, but Adrastos survived, carried to safety by the wonder-horse Arion; in the attack of the Epigonoi all the sons of the Seven survived, but Aigialeus, son of Adrastos, was killed by the defending commander Laodamas, son of Eteokles, who was himself killed by Alkman. As so often, the myth carries

a reminder that even the greatest human triumphs are seldom undiluted by an element of sadness.

Now the poet directly addresses Apollo, lord of Delphi:

You, Far-Darter, lord of the glorious temple that welcomes all in the hollows of Pytho, granted him there the greatest of delights, but first at home in your festival you brought him a gift eagerly to be snatched up, that of the pentathlon. King, I pray you to deign to look upon all my goings according to a harmony! The band of revellers with sweet song has justice standing near; and I pray that the gods grant unstinted favour to your fortunes.

As often, gnomic reflection follows the prayer for divine favour; that prayer is necessary, because without such favour, no success is possible for men.

For if a man possesses good things that have come without long effort, many think that he is clever among fools and builds up his success by schemes based on right judgements. But such things do not lie within the power of men; it is the god who gives them, now putting one on top and bringing down the other, now the reverse. Enter the contest with right measure in your heart!¹ You have the honours you won at Megara, and in the lowland of Marathon, and with three victories you have prevailed in Hera's games in your own country.

Thus the victor's wins in local games are rapidly dispatched. The Greeks of Pindar's time did not share English notions of sportsmanship.

Upon four bodies you came down with fierce intent; for them no equally delightful homecoming was decreed in the Pythiad, nor did sweet laughter arouse joy when they returned to their mothers; in dark passages they cower, avoiding their enemies, stung by their disaster.

From the gloom of the defeated Pindar passes to the happiness of the victorious; but he is constantly aware of the dangers that attend all praise of human effort, and comes back immediately to the fragility of human happiness.

He who has some new glory for his lot, revelling in great luxury, flies on wings given to his mighty deeds by hope. In a moment delight flowers for men, and in a moment it falls to the ground, shaken by a stern decree. Humans are creatures of a day;² what is one of them? what is he not? The dream of a shadow. But when the Zeus-given glory comes, a bright

¹ In l. 78 I have followed A. Turyn, *Pindari carmina cum fragmentis* (1944, 1948; 2nd edn. 1952), in accepting Bergk's conjecture; cf. *Paeon* 2, 34, and also *Ol.* 3, 48 and *Pyth.* 2, 34.

² The manuscripts are surely right in reading *ἄνθρωποι* in l. 96; everything that lies between *ἐπάμεροι* and *ἄνθρωποι* is a parenthesis; otherwise *ἐπάμεροι* can hardly be construed.

radiance lies on men, and life is sweet. Aegina, dear mother, convey this city in freedom with the aid of Zeus and mighty Aiakos and Peleus and valiant Telamon and with Achilles.

Aegina, the eponymous heroine, mother of Aiakos by Zeus, is begged 'to convey this city in freedom'; with her are joined Zeus himself and three of the five mighty heroes of the family. In the light of this we must surely acknowledge that the invocation of Tranquillity and the reminder of the fate met by the barbarous giants who challenged the Olympians, though fitting perfectly the ordinary requirements of an epinician ode to honour the victory of Aristomenes, cannot have been felt by the audience to be irrelevant to the dangerous situation in which Aegina at that time found herself. But the poem is infinitely remote from the political pamphlet against democracy and imperialism which a certain kind of criticism would make of it; it ends with reflections that have the widest possible relevance to the conditions of human life.

- 'Ο δὲ καλόν τι νέον λαχών
 ἀβρότατος ἐπὶ μεγάλας
 90 ἔξ ἐλπίδος πέταται
 ὑποπτέροις ἀνορέαις, ἔχων
 κρέσσονα πλούτου μέριμναν. ἐν δ' ὀλίγῳ βροτῶν
 τὸ τερπνὸν αὔξεται· οὕτω δὲ καὶ πίτνει χαμαί,
 ἀποτρόπῳ γινώμαι σεσεισμένον.
 95 ἐπάμεροι· τί δέ τις; τί δ' οὐ τις; σκιᾶς ὄναρ.
 ἄνθρωποι. ἀλλ' ὅταν αἶγλα διόσδοτος ἔλθῃ,
 λαμπρὸν φέγγος ἔπεστιν ἀνδρῶν καὶ μείλιχος αἰών.
 Αἶγινα φίλα μᾶτερ, ἐλευθέρῳι στόλῳ
 πόλιν τάνδε κόμιζε Διὶ καὶ κρέοντι σὺν Αἰακῶι
 100 Πηλεΐ τε Κἀγαθῶι Τελαμῶνι σὺν τ' Ἀχιλλεΐ.

Despite the loss of about three-quarters of Pindar's work, the victory odes together with the fragments are enough to justify the claim that he has produced a body of poems that communicate a distinctive vision of the world, conveyed with great imaginative power. Since the victory odes constantly show gods and men in close relation to each other, it may be fortunate that we possess them, rather than, say, four books of hymns of various kinds; for their subject-matter is well calculated to display Pindar's tragic view of human life.¹ Seeing the victor and his circumstances

¹ In the *Times Literary Supplement* for 26 February 1982, p. 207, Sir Stuart Hampshire defends state subsidies for the arts. 'Glory', he writes, 'unlike mere success or fame, lives on in the individual's mind and in national consciousness; it is the natural reward of athletes and heroic soldiers in battle, and, most of all, of artists and of poets and of composers. A nation that is unwilling to give solid

always against the background of archaic Greek religion, and being always aware of the difficulty which a believer in it must find in praising any mortal, Pindar, by using the dark colour of the greater part of men's existence to bring out the brightness of that small part of it which is lit up by what he calls 'the Zeus-given glory', achieves a magnificent chiaroscuro. He is grateful to the gods for all the splendour of the world, and for the occasional favours that they show to men; but he never forgets the precariousness of human life, and knows that men have no right to count on the continuance of such favours. He shows himself aware of one client's sickness, another's exile, the losses in battle suffered by the family of another, the threat to Sicily from the barbarians and to Aegina from the Athenians; he reminds the victors that not even the greatest heroes of the past were exempt from misfortune. In the Second Olympian and in several of his dirges, Pindar speaks of a happy life in the afterworld granted to certain souls who have lived out three lifetimes without committing an injustice; Peleus, Cadmus, and Achilles are among them. Here the Homeric notion of Elysium as the haven of a fortunate few seems to be combined with beliefs of the sort which Pindar's contemporaries associated with the name of Orpheus; and yet he faces up to a realistic view of the limitations of human life, with complete freedom from illusion and complete absence of false comfort. In the last resort, what makes his poetry so powerful is his power to present, to use Eliot's words once more, 'that particularity which must provide the material for the general truth'; in that respect, and not in that alone, Pindar resembles Dante.

material support and encouragement to the probable sources of its glory will have a dispirited, nameless history, a dim existence on the margin of things. It still seems to me odd that almost any Frenchman is willing to acknowledge this truism, and very few Englishmen; perhaps it is because puritan ethics, which originally included hostility to the Court and its ways, survives as hostility to all rewards that are not earned through merchandise sold in the market.' Pindar would have agreed.