The reception of Pindar’s *Epinicians* and nineteenth-century ‘poetic religion’: Hölderlin and Kalvos.* 

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Today, much work on ancient Greek poetry is driven by the question of performance, as scholars strive to integrate musical accompaniment and dance, as essential features of lyric, into their readings.¹ The idea of performance not only dominates contemporary accounts of Pindar’s epinicians, but the festive context of the odes is often considered both the main attraction and the main obstacle to a proper understanding of them.

I do not wish to underrate performance as a factor in understanding both Pindar and his reception, nor will I challenge the relationship between the poet’s performances and his poetics. In this paper, however, I will focus on Pindar’s songs as texts. I will discuss how two major two poets of the Romantic period, the German Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) and the Greek Andreas Kalvos (1792-1869), responded in their work to the textual aspect of Pindar’s poetry — a mode of reception which emerged, apparently, from their awareness, at once realistic and tragic, that the odes’ original contexts of performance had been irretrievably (and unavoidably) lost.

I will illustrate my case through a study of religion, a central motif in Pindar and in the poetry of Hölderlin and Kalvos. For these Romantic poets, Pindar was a source on which to draw in the struggle to re-establish poetry’s relation to the absolute: the transcendental dimension lost in the modern world. Hölderlin was keenly aware that the odes of Pindar offered the finest example of a religious sensibility in poetry: an attitude which in Hölderlin criticism is generally attributed to the appeal of the ‘enthusiasm’, the ‘rapture’, the ‘fine and powerful emotion’ of the

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¹ See for instance Herington 1985, p. 50. See on the other hand Fitzgerald 1987 for an exemplary approach focusing on text rather than performance. Writing on the choral nature of the Pindaric ode, Fitzgerald argues that it ‘need not involve us in reconstructing the inaccessible experience of the original audience’; instead, he draws attention instead to the ‘written and dialectical’ aspect of the choral in Pindar’s lyric (Fitzgerald 1987, p. 12).
Greek athletic contests themselves.² I, on the other hand, will argue that it was the discursive complexity of the epinicians which attracted Hölderlin, as an equivalent of the textual ‘coherence’ (Zusammenhang) to which his poetry aspired.

After briefly discussing the evidence for religion in the epinicians, I will argue that Hölderlin formulates the notion of ‘poetic religion’ central to his fragment ‘Über Religion’ precisely in response to the religious element as formally constructed within the Pindaric text, rather than, as is usually suggested, in reaction to the ‘real’ ritual contexts of Pindaric performance. The religious element in Pindar’s victory odes is enacted first of all as speech (hymn or prayer). It is one of several marked forms of utterance (discourses or speech genres) deployed by the Greek poet. This ‘interdiscursivity’ – a carefully constructed ‘blending’ or ‘dialogue’ of the genres of everyday speech and poetry that mixes ‘public’ and ‘private’, ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ – is, as has been lately recognised, a key feature of Pindar’s poetics, especially in the epinicians.³ Hölderlin’s ‘poetic religion’ appropriates and responds to just this feature of Pindar's texts. The religious meaning he attributes to Pindar’s complex and interdiscursive texts is rooted, as Louth indicates, in a feeling that the works of Pindar (like Sophocles) were in a very real sense sacred like the Bible. For Hölderlin, Pindar’s odes were worthy of attention as evidence for the presence of the divine on earth. They encapsulated in their structure ‘the fabric and workings of revelation’.⁴ As will shortly become clear, the translations by Hölderlin of certain Olympian and Pythian odes represent his style of reading Pindar, oriented as it was toward questions of diction and form, at its most extreme. With reference to some of Hölderlin's remarks in his critical writings about poetics, it will be suggested that the German poet’s tendency to literal translation was motivated not by a will to rediscover and resuscitate an original meaning lost behind the letter of Pindar’s text, but rather by his conviction that faithfulness to the irreducible foreignness of the Greek original would be the only way to translate it without injuring its sacredness. Apart from the general religious significance for Hölderlin of Pindar’s poems, I will focus on two concrete instances when Pindar contributed something essential to the poet’s view of religion and the sacred. First, I will look at how the boundary between men and the gods (an

² Benn 1962, p. 55.
³ See e.g. Currie 2005, p. 25, who describes the ‘generic indeterminacy’ of epinician; for ‘interdiscursivity’, see Yatromanolakis and Roilos 2004, pp. 61-3, 70 and below.
uncertain line in Pindar) was transformed in Hölderlin into what Walter Benjamin in an early essay on that poet, called a ‘law of identity’. Second, I will discuss Hölderlin’s poem ‘Friedensfeier’, where the figure of the ‘Prince of the Festival’ stands in some relation to Pindar’s athletes.

In the chapter’s final section, I will support my foregoing arguments about the importance of the sacred element as a constructive element of Pindar’s texts and as a locus of poetic engagement for nineteenth-century Romantics, with a brief account of a similar Pindarisant tendency in the Odes of Andreas Kalvos. Critical appraisals of modern Greek poets’ engagement with their ancient predecessors are often based on unjustified assumptions about their deep acquaintance with the ancient texts; or, alternatively, on a reductive tendency to interpret any reference to ancient literature ideologically, as a gesture of continuity with the ‘glorious’ past. Hölderlin’s example arguably offers a way to read Kalvos’ engagement with Pindar while avoiding both extremes. More particularly, I will focus on Kalvos’ response to Pindar at a stylistic and formal level. How does he engage with Pindar’s polytheism, and with the relationship of gods and men?

First, however, a few words on method. The interest of Hölderlin and Kalvos in form over contextualised meaning determined by factors of history and culture is best understood in the light of ‘aesthetic literalness’: a notion developed by the Frankfurt School in polemic response to the older, dialogue-based hermeneutic that relied on supposed agreement of meaning and form.\(^5\) The non-identity of form and meaning underlies Adorno’s ‘negative dialectic’, which, in the case of aesthetic experience, is precisely about the failure of the autonomous signifier to merge with the thing it signifies. This mutual autonomy of signifier and signified ‘is not mere unrelatedness but is rather only possible as an interminable countermovement against the effort at their intermeshing’.\(^6\) At the heart of Adorno’s account is the critical force of artworks and their relevance to society. The non-identity of form and content in literature (and lyric poetry in particular) resists society’s attempts to identify the two. It is thus an instance of ‘freedom’.

Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory defines the task of aesthetics in the contemporary

world not as comprehending works of art themselves; it is, rather, ‘their incomprehensibility that needs to be comprehended’. His opposition to hermeneutics is based on a sense that comprehension, in as much as it makes artworks conform to the concepts and intellectual structures that sustain the structures of society, would strip them of their power to resist these concepts and structures. Instead, he posits a tension between society and art, content and form, which enables and feeds art’s potential powers of critique. Adorno, it is true, refers mainly to modern poetry, an emphasis present also in his essay ‘Lyric poetry and society’ (1957). In the latter work, the inclination to the subjective which, for Adorno, defines lyric in its ‘purest form’ is analysed as a ‘form of reaction against the reification of the world.’ It is seen as an essentially modern phenomenon, from which ‘the great writers of early antiquity’, including Pindar, are ‘immensely distant’. But the ‘subjectivity’ which is the central characteristic of pure lyric is expressed, in formal or aesthetic terms, through what Adorno defines as ‘the quality of a break or rupture’: a subjective impulse that breaks with the social view of language and thought. It is this latter quality – the ‘break’, the ‘rupture’ – which ultimately defines ‘pure lyric’. Through its form lyric alienates itself from society as something inherently ‘incomprehensible’, or resistant to the logic which seeks to identify word and thing, sign and referent. The latter notion opens up points of contact between the modern poets who are the main targets of Adorno’s analysis, and Pindar. The ‘difficulty’ or ‘obscurity’ of Pindar’s odes, which has played a central role in their reception from Antiquity until the present day, arguably sets them off from society, albeit not, as is the case in modern poetry, on subjective grounds. From this point of view, the line of Pindaric reception, arguably culminating in Hölderlin, which emphasises the ‘incomprehensibility’ of the odes and presents Pindaric style as a rupture with all kinds of conventional logic, is illuminating.

9 For the responses of ancient and modern scholars to Pindar’s perceived obscurity, see Most 1985, pp. 11-59. John Hamilton’s book Soliciting Darkness, by addressing a whole tradition of reception of Pindar that exploited the ‘obscurity’, ‘ambiguity’, ‘difficulty’, and ‘incoherence’ of its model rather than trying to explain it away or being hindered by it, offers valuable insights in this direction (Hamilton 2004, p. 7). Also relevant to the disjunction between meaning and form in Pindar is William Fitzgerald’s illuminating analysis of the ‘poetic texture’ of the odes in terms of a ‘struggle of impulses’ and more particularly in terms of the tension between ‘overthought’ (the overt subject matter and logic of the poem) and ‘underthought’ (a parallel ‘thought’ which echoes the ‘overthought’ at the level of the vocabulary, but can also be independent from or even contradictory with the ‘overthought’) (Fitzgerald
It is true that Pindar’s poetry, unlike Adorno’s modern poems, cannot be seen as a gesture of resistance towards a society reified and commodified by industrial relations of labour and production. In ancient Greece, poetry did not have the same critical relationship to society, since social life itself enveloped large areas that we moderns would associate with individual subjectivity and freedom. However, it is possible that the Pindar we get from such a reading today reveals something of the critical potential of ‘lyric’.

Religion in Pindar is usually discussed in as much as it resembles or diverges from contemporary religious orthodoxy. Or it can be understood as the reflection in the text of an act of extra-textual ritual (if not cult) ongoing in the hic et nunc of performance. We must, however, be clear on the relationship of text and context. Our response, as readers, to the religious element in the epinicia is possible only because Pindar’s religiosity no longer depended exclusively on the external ritual context in which the odes, as performances, were embedded, but was already entrusted to poetic texture. In ancient Greece, the sacred was certainly not confined to particular, well-defined spheres of social activity, but was diffused through the whole life of society. But lyric poetry in general (and Pindar in particular) had come a long way since its beginnings in ritual and cult. With regard to the lyric texts of Pindar’s time, it is therefore less important to examine passages or explicit statements about religion, than to try to define the ways in which ritual enters into poetry: ways which necessarily must distinguish the literary utterance from speech acts performed in ordinary ritual contexts. Furley and Bremer draw attention to this distinction when

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1987, pp. 170, 173; see also his analysis of the opening of O.6 on p. 174). Hamilton’s analysis of Olympian 1 sheds light on such a case of subversive meanings enacted by diction in Pindar against the overt meaning of the ode. He focuses on those elements in the ‘corrected’ version of the myth about the partial eating of Pelops (l. 52) that hark back repeatedly to the cannibalism of the rejected one. For instance, in the revised version Tantalus is said not to be able to digest his bliss (ll. 55-6: κατατέψαι/μεγαὶς ὀλβῆς), which alludes to the uncanny meal of the censored version (Hamilton 2004, p. 91).

10 Pindar’s odes offer distinctive evidence, for example, that eros, as the genuine moment of subjective experience par excellence, was not banned from aspects of existence which later became strictly separated from it (P.9.75; P.10.60; P.11.506; N.3.29; N.85; N.10.29; N.11.48: see Carey 1981, p. 87).

11 For a brief account see Hornblower and Morgan 2007, pp. 19-30.

12 Calame 1998, p. 109 suggests that the interrelation of performance and ritual constitutes the distinctiveness of Greek lyric in general. Crotty discusses Pindaric epinicians as an ‘effective kind of poetry’ that can be paralleled with rituals of nostos in koinonia with other men (Crotty 1982, p. 121). More recently, Currie has offered an explicitly ‘historicism’ approach to Pindar in reaction to studies informed by Elroy Bundy’s focus on rhetoric: in his book Pindar and the Cult of Heroes he demonstrates the links between the presence of heroes in the odes and historically attested heroizations of illustrious men in fifth century Greece, while he often infers cultic practice from the odes (2005, p. 11, p. 6). Through a reading of Hölderlin and Kalvos here, my suggestion will be that a historicist point of view need not be the only alternative to Bundy’s reductive approach.
they observe that though a literary work may offer a heightened understanding of divinity, it does not necessarily ‘devote its resources to securing something from that divinity through its performance’.  

In Pindar, moreover, not all deities evoked were part of the Greek pantheon. Some striking examples: ἡσυχία (‘Peace’, P.8.1), Ἐλειοσύνη (‘Themis’, O.9.15), and Τύχα (‘Fortune’, O.12.2). As Silk argues with regard to Olympic 12, the presence of these divinities in their respective odes belongs within a larger strategy of ‘defamiliarization’ through which Pindar takes the traditional diction of theology and prayer and forges it into a tool that is able to express ‘fresh perceptions of perceived reality’. ‘For Pindar, the aesthetic is the experiential is the sacred: poetic theology or theological poetry’.  

From my point of view, these instances may arguably be approached, from a methodological point of view, not as exceptions, but as a paradigm for discussion of the rest.

The term ‘ritual poetics’ has recently been proposed by Yatromanolakis and Roilos to describe the simultaneous presence of multiple ritual discourses in literary texts. This multiplicity, which also involves the interaction of ritual discourses with other themes and modes of speech – whether conversational, aesthetic, cultural, social, or political – acts to distance the specifically poetic text from any ‘real’ cultic occasion. Choosing Sappho as his example, and expounding the diversity of ritual discourses (the cult hymn, the sympotic song, ritual songs of mourning, each of which is defined by its occasion and by a diction which is, in great measure, a response to that occasion) in her songs, Yatromanolakis warns against any rigid classification of those songs according to occasionally defined ‘genres’. He argues rather that we must recognise in her work the ‘polyphony of genre tropisms’ that is typical of poetry, irrespective of whether it is oral or written.

But perhaps Yatromanolakis’ ban on monolithic classification of lyric songs by genre can be inverted into a positive conclusion, whereby a text’s resistance to any single discourse would mark the distinctiveness of ancient lyric poetry, as opposed to more straightforwardly cultic songs. In his study ‘Die Identität des Gedichts – Hölderlin als Paradigma’, Karlheinz Stierle argued that ‘lyric transgression’

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(‘lyrische Transgression’), the subversion of preexisting schemes of discourse (‘Überschreitung zugrundeliegender Diskurs schemata’), constitutes the most distinctive feature of modern lyric.\(^{17}\) According to Stierle, lyric achieves ‘transgression’ by turning the ordered succession of discourses into a problematic simultaneity of contexts (‘die geordnete Sukzessivität des Diskurses in der Lyrik zu einer problematischen Simultaneität von Kontexten wird’).\(^{18}\) While bearing in mind the different cultural coordinates of ‘Modernity’, we can apply this suggestion to ancient lyric as well, given the distance that separates it from its ritual origins. Prominent in Sappho,\(^{19}\) the co-existence of various contexts is even more conspicuous in Pindar’s epinicians, which, contrary to normal assumptions, do not comply with rigid pre-existing rules of encomiastic speech, but incorporate multiple discourses of genre (homoerotic speech, symposium, cult).\(^{20}\) As Kurke argues for example with regard to Pythian 6, the realm of homoerotic discourse naturally enters that of praise. The discourse of sympotic and erotic poetry is pervasive in the epinicians, as the recurrence of the philotes theme demonstrates.\(^{21}\) In Pythian 6, both these fields or contexts are supported by an additional discourse: the parainetic genre of ὑποθηκή (Hesiodic proverbial wisdom).\(^{22}\)

Cultic discourse, which more directly interests us here, is another common element of the victory ode’s discursive network. There are in Pindar’s extant epinicians some sixty prayers. Twenty-three of the odes (just under half) begin with a hymnic address to one or more deities.\(^{23}\) These hymns and prayers which are embedded in the texture of Pindar’s victory odes differ them from real hymns and prayers uttered in unambiguous cultic contexts precisely because they are embedded. With their plurality of discourses, Pindaric texts transcend the ‘real’ cultic function of these speech acts – which is to obtain divine favour. In epinician, they are

\(^{17}\) Stierle 1979, p. 514.
\(^{18}\) Stierle 1979, p. 517.
\(^{19}\) An example from Sappho is fragment 2 Voigt, which Roilos and Yatromanolakis discuss as a field where diverse ritualized discourses, imagery and allusions cross, thus problematising the identification of any specific ritual occasion (2004, p. 53).
\(^{20}\) Yatromanolakis himself makes a Bundyite allusion to Pindar in his otherwise brilliant piece on Sappho: ‘But although it might be argued that Pindar followed unwritten laws relating to encomiastic poetry and tried to meet the horizons of expectations of his audiences with regard to epinician poetry, Sappho’s so-called ‘personal’ or ‘ritual’ songs do not suggest anything of the kind’ (2004, pp. 48-9).
\(^{21}\) Crotty 1982, pp. x, 83. See also Hubbard 2002, p. 264, n. 25.
\(^{22}\) Kurke 1990, pp. 85, 94-95.
\(^{23}\) Race 1990, pp. 85, 119. See chapters four and five in his book for an analysis of the stylistic and rhetorical features of Pindar’s hymns and prayers respectively.
recontextualised and relocated in a different poetic texture. The significance of these hymns and prayers is not exhausted either by the hymns’ prooemic and contextual function, or the transitional and closural position of the prayers.\(^{24}\) From this perspective, the various ways in which Hölderlin and Kalvos engage with Pindar’s religious motifs and speech-acts are illuminating. Despite their diversity, their responses share a common tendency. Both regard Pindar’s references to religion and its discourses, irrespective of their content, as a means to stage or enact religion as such.\(^{25}\)

Harrison regards the embeddedness of Pindar’s odes in a contemporary cultic frame, and more particularly their privileged relationship with Zeus and Apollo, as the very cause of Hölderlin’s interest in them.\(^{26}\) In Benn’s view, the sheer impossibility of recreating the original festive contexts of Pindar’s odes, and the communities those contexts once presupposed, was Hölderlin's main problem. He ‘had to be content with makeshifts’.\(^{27}\) An awareness of the actual occasion of the epinicians was unquestionably important for Hölderlin. As Seifert demonstrates, he reworked the relationship of song and action (or occasion) in his own poetry by replacing athletics with history. While most of Pindar’s odes were inspired by athletic victory, Hölderlin’s songs respond equally elaborately to important occasions of contemporary history, most notably the French Revolution.\(^{28}\) Moreover, the modern characterisation of Hölderlin’s later poems as Gesänge is a fair reflection of the poet’s own usage, which resonates with the communal connotations of Pindar’s melos.\(^{29}\) Here I will ignore the much-studied question of Hölderlin’s songs in relation to their historical moments and occasions, concentrating instead on his response to aspects of Pindar’s text which transcend context. Hölderlin’s reading of Pindar was not unconnected to the aspirations he felt toward the ‘absolute’, on which the epinicia provided a kind of window.

Central to my argument is Philipsen’s remark that the poet’s intense preoccupation with Pindar around 1800 is largely connected with the demand he felt

\(^{24}\) For these functions see Race 1990, pp. 87, 119.
\(^{25}\) For the notion of ‘enactment’ in poetry, see Silk 1995.
\(^{26}\) Harrison 1975, pp. 281-2.
\(^{27}\) Benn 1962, p. 108.
\(^{28}\) Seifert 1982, pp. 96-99.
\(^{29}\) For the choral, Pindaric connotations of the word Gesang, see Philipsen 2002, p. 370. Certainly, an awareness of the fictional and utopian character of the community envisioned in Gesang is pervasive in Hölderlin’s poetry.
for ‘objectivity’ in lyric. For Hölderlin, objectivity could be achieved by means of complexity, in which ‘poetic, mythical-religious and philosophic discourses condense (verdichten) in an interdiscursive network, constituting a coherence (Zusammenhang) conceived not as subjective, but rather divine (göttlich)’. Hölderlin refers to this Zusammenhang in his fragmentary essay ‘On Religion’ (c. 1797), which addresses the central issue of poetry’s relationship to religion. He grounds this relationship of poetry and the sacred in the concept of ‘myth’. The notion of ‘a higher, more infinite coherence (Zusammenhang)’ defined in this essay refers to the absolute, which transcends the mechanical determination of life by physical and intellectual necessities. The notion of ‘myth’, on the other hand, provides Hölderlin’s answer to the question how this absolute might be represented in poetry. ‘Myth’ is the medium by which an all-unifying experience of infinite being can be represented in poetry, so that people remember it (erinnern) and are grateful for it. Religion, remembrance (Erinnerung), poetic myth, and community are therefore inextricably linked. Religion is what results when ‘those infinite, more than necessary relations of life’ are experienced in poetic myth. Memory of this experience functions as a unifying power for individuals who, each in isolation, share it. As Hölderlin famously put it: ‘Thus all religion would be poetic in its essence’.

Hölderlin’s translations (the Grosse Pindarübertragung), made in a brief span of time between 1800 and 1801, of seventeen of Pindar’s forty-five odes, are the first token of his engagement with Pindar as a model for the textual Zusammenhang to which he aspired. Scholars have always emphasised the literalness of these translations, whose word-for-word technique aimed to preserve both the poems’ Greek syntax and (as much as possible) their metre. As I see it, Hölderlin’s literal translation from the Greek was motivated by a desire to maintain, in German, the

30 Philipsen 2002, p. 348. It is important to note here that the emphasis on the Zusammenhang of the text should not be confused with the idealist notion of unity. It is closer to the ‘articulation’ of an artwork, a term used by Adorno in the Aesthetic Theory to refer to unity which does not subsume the particulars within it: ‘the whole in truth exists only for the sake of its parts – that is, its kairos, the instant – and not the reverse’ (Adorno 1997, pp. 246, 250).
31 For ‘myth’ in Hölderlin as a multilayered construction, composed out of remembrance of the past, meditation on the present and anticipatory imagination about the future, see Gaier 2002, p. 172.
32 Hölderlin 1988: 91 (StA IV: 276).
33 Hölderlin 1988: 94 (StA IV: 280).
35 Benn 1962, p. 26; Harrison 1975, p. 280; Louth 1998, p. 104; Hamilton 2004, p. 291. The focus on the dominant tendency to literal translation here should certainly not lead to over-generalisations, since as Louth observes, Hölderlin is not always equally consistent to it and it is therefore dangerous to make inflexible statements about the character of the translation as a whole (Louth 1998, p. 108).
religious significance that he thought was invested in Pindar’s constellations of words.

It is noteworthy that Hölderlin used the first volume of Heyne’s *Pindari Carmina cum Lectionis Varietate et Annotationibus* (1798), an edition which was still based on a metrically erroneous division of Pindar’s periods into short lines or *cola* that often ended in the middle of a word. This misunderstanding of Pindaric colometry had informed the work of every editor from Aristophanes of Byzantium in the second century B.C., who first divided Pindar’s texts into verses, down to Heyne, and persisted down to the monumental edition of Boeckh (1811-21). It had a real effect on how Pindar was read. Until Boeckh, he was a master of irregular composition and the abrupt transition.36

Like his Greek text, Hölderlin’s translations give an impression of extreme syntactical irregularity. As Louth writes, they present for the reader a ‘sense of impersonal encounter between the two languages’.37 The following passage of *Olympian* 2 – itself deeply imbued with the ‘obscurity’ that dominated contemporary and even later ideas of Pindar – may serve as an example (*O*.2.83-5):

\[
\begin{align*}
\pi\lambda\lambda\lambda \mu\omicron \epsilon' \\
\acute{\alpha}g\kappa\acute{\omicron}νος \acute{\omega}κ\acute{\epsilon}α \beta\acute{\epsilon}λη \\
\acute{\epsilon}ι\variant{\upsilon}d\upsilon \acute{\epsilon}ι\nu \varphiα\variant{\epsilon}τρας \\
\phi\omega\nu\acute{\alpha}ντα \sigmaυ\nu\epsilon\tau\omicron\acute{o}σιν, \acute{\epsilon}ς \delta' \tau' \ \pi\acute{\alpha}ν \ \acute{\epsilon}ρ\mu\alpha\nu\acute{\epsilon}ων \\
\chiα\tau\acute{\iota}\acute{\epsilon}ι.
\end{align*}
\]

Hölderlin renders it thus in a compressed passage:

Viele mir unter dem Arme  
Schnelle Pfeile  
Innen im Köcher  
Tönend beisammen sind; durchaus  
Aber das Ausleger  
Bedarf. 38

As Bernovsky observes, the syntactical distortion of the German in these lines

38 I cite here Bernofsky’s translation: ‘To me many beneath my arm/ Swift arrows/ Inside the quiver /Are resonantly together; absolutely/ Though that which interpreters requires’ (2005, p. 126).
is attributable not only to its fidelity in the first four lines to the syntax of the Greek original, but also to a postponement of the verb *sind* (ἐντί, ‘are’ in the Greek text) which is even more radical than Pindar’s original.\(^{39}\) When Hölderlin diverges from his model, this, again, is to come as close as possible to a mimesis of the irregularity associated with the original itself. The irregularity of the Greek as experienced by him moreover largely shaped what Adorno has described as Hölderlin’s paratactic style.\(^{40}\) Adorno sets Hölderlin’s response to Pindar within the frame of the ‘negative dialectics’ alluded to at the beginning of this article. The poetic text resists identification of the signifier with the signified. In his essay dedicated to Hölderlin – ‘Parataxis: on Hölderlin’s late poetry’ (1963) – Adorno conferred on the disruptive character of paratactic syntax precisely this function of preventing the subordination of the object to the concept: or, in other words, of the particular to the universal.\(^{41}\) The reason why this is significant lies in the resulting ‘emancipation’ of language from the identity logic that is dominant in society. For Adorno, it thus represents an implied critique of this logic.\(^{42}\) Here is an example of how Hölderlin’s own paratactic style was forged through a literal transposition of Pindar’s constellation of words into the German language (*P*.1.35-8):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{o de lógos} \\
\tauαυταίς ἐπὶ συντυχίας δόξαν φέρει \\
λαπτὸν ἐπεσθαί στεφάνοισι νῦν ἵπποις τε \\
κλύταν \\
καὶ σὺν εὐφώνοις θαλάσσαι ὀνυμαστάν.
\end{align*}
\]

Die Rede
In diesem Falle die Hofnung trägt,  
Noch künftig werde sie seyn, mit Kronen  
Und Rossen berühmt,  
Und mit wohllautenden Gastmahlen genannt.\(^{43}\)

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\(^{39}\) Bernofsky 2005, p. 127.

\(^{40}\) Bernofsky 2005, p. 125.

\(^{41}\) Adorno 1992, p. 112. In terms of style this parataxis refers to what Hellingrath characterised as Hölderlin’s ‘austere style’ (harte Fügung); it has been compared to Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ term for Pindar’s ‘austere style’ (ἀρμοία αὐστηρεῖ) (see Benn 1962, p. 138).


\(^{43}\) The example is from Louth’s analysis of Hölderlin’s translation of Pindar’s *Pythian* 1. Louth also cites the translation: ‘Speech/ In this case carries the hope, / And in the future it will be, with crowns/ And horses famous,/ And named with well-sounding feasts’ (Louth 1998, pp. 146-7).
It remains to set the significance of examples such as this, which abound in his Pindar translations, in the frame of Hölderlin’s poetics and, more particularly, his thoughts about the modern poet’s relationship to his ancient sources. Central to any discussion of Hölderlin’s reception of ancient texts is the famous letter he sent to Böhlendorff on the fourth of December 1801 before his departure for France. In this letter, Hölderlin suggests that *nature* for the Greeks was a ‘sacred pathos’ or a ‘fire from heaven’, which they managed, however, to master in their ‘art’, transforming it into ‘clarity of presentation’ or ‘Junonian sobriety’. (Hölderlin’s major example here is Homer). For the moderns, the converse is true. *Culture* is the ‘fire from heaven’, while *nature* is ‘sobriety’. The following passage from the letter is suggestive of this inversion in the relationship between *culture* and *nature* in Greek and modern thought:\textsuperscript{44}

And I believe that it is precisely the clarity of the presentation that is as natural to us as the fire from heaven was for the Greeks.

It sounds paradoxical […]: in the process of education the truly national will ever become the less attractive. Hence the Greeks are less masters of the sacred pathos, because to them it was inborn, whereas they excel in their talent for presentation, beginning with Homer, because this exceptional man was sufficiently sensitive to conquer Western Junonian sobriety for his Apollonian empire and verily thus to appropriate what is foreign.

With us it is the reverse.\textsuperscript{45}

Some of Hölderlin’s letters to his editor Friedrich Wilmans seem to encourage the view that his engagement with Pindar aimed at reviving ‘nature’ in the form of the ‘fire from heaven’. On the eighth of December 1803 he wrote, for example, that translation should make the ancient text more alive (‘*lebendiger*’).\textsuperscript{46} And again on the 28 December 1803 he wrote that translation restores ‘the original qualities that [Greek art] has denied or disowned’, releasing more of the original, Oriental force hidden

\textsuperscript{44} On this inversion in the relationship between culture and nature as the condition of a non-mimetic relationship of the modern poet with the ancients, see Szondi 1983, p 262: in Greek art, the modern poet finds what is his own (*das Eigene*, meaning ‘clarity of representation’, ‘Junonian sobriety’) represented as foreign. He is thus able to seize, study and master it in a way similar to the one the Greeks mastered their own ‘nature’, the ‘fire from heaven’.

\textsuperscript{45} Hölderlin 1988: 149-50.

\textsuperscript{46} On the recurrence of the term ‘*das Lebendige*’ throughout Hölderlin’s theoretical writings, see especially Louth’s discussion: Louth 1998, p. 75.
behind the clarity of the received text.47 ‘Oriental’ is a recurring term throughout Hölderlin’s writings and indicates the ‘more original, more free, more foreign, non-classical, non-conventional, immediate, dionysiac’.48 Pindar’s text would therefore have reflected the representational character of Greek art, and Hölderlin’s translations would strip this away (paradoxically through extreme faithfulness to the original), restoring the ‘fire’ of Greek ‘nature’.

Hamilton’s analysis of the ‘etymologising thrust’ behind Hölderlin’s translation methods attributes to the poet just this will to uncover the ‘fire’ hidden behind Pindar’s superimposed representational sobriety. His translation of the closing lines of Pythian 8 provides an example: ‘Leuchtend Licht ist bei den Männern. / Und liebliches Leben. Aegina, liebe Mutter…’.49 Hamilton comments on these lines that ‘the alliteration is striking and immediately refers to a meltdown: that which was soberly distinguished in the Greek text, now appears in an uncanny homogeneity, built on the Germanic consonantal groups /l-k/ and /l-b/’.50 Notwithstanding the superficial plausibility of this reading, talk of a ‘meltdown’ in these lines unnecessarily dresses Hölderlin’s ‘material’ language in the garb of metaphor. For Hölderlin preserving the sacred nature of the Pindaric text depended on ‘a concentration on the words themselves, an insistence on their substance as text, as scripture, as something infinitely rich’.51

This revelation of the ‘fiery’ depths of Pindar’s text seems hard to reconcile with Hölderlin’s faithfulness to its ‘foreignness’. More pertinent to Hölderlin’s translation technique seems to be Warminski’s discussion of Hölderlin’s 1801 letter to Böhlendorff in his essay ‘Hölderlin in France’. Warminski rejects any ‘dialectical mediation of Greeks and Hesperians, that which is proper and that which is foreign, das Eigene and das Fremde’.52 He understands das Eigene of the Hesperian poet (himself shaped by the spirit initiated by ancient Greek civilisation) as meaning, precisely, ‘Greek’ (‘Junonian sobriety’ as the only thing that is accessible in Greek

47 Both cited by Hamilton 2004, p. 293.
48 Dastur 2000, p. 171.
49 ‘Illuminating light is with men/ And loving life. / Aegina, loving Mother […]’ (the translation is quoted in Hamilton 2004, p. 294), for P.8.97-8: λαμπρόν φέγγος ἐπιστὶν ἀνδρὸν καὶ μείλιχος αἰὼν / Αἴγινα φίλα μάτερ…
52 Warminski 1987, p. 30. This reading by Warminski is directed against Szondi’s interpretation of the letter in his article ‘Hölderlin’s Overcoming of Classicism’ (1983). For a discussion of Warminski’s position, see Coltman 1998, p. 78.
art). On the other hand, for Warminski ‘foreign’ (das Fremde) does not mean ‘our foreign’, foreign for us. Instead, he suggests that das Fremde means ‘radically foreign’, ‘Oriental’, or, as Hölderlin elsewhere writes, ‘Egyptian’. ‘Oriental’ and ‘Egyptian’ have the sense of the ‘allegorical’, as opposed to ‘symbolic’ art. ‘Symbolic’ art aspires to restoration of unity, while ‘allegory’ refers to a re-collection of the texts of the past as fragments which do not amount to a coherent whole. According to this view, Hölderlin’s own mode of relating to ancient texts takes the form of a ‘translation’, in the sense of a ‘transposition’ or ‘carrying-over’ which transcends signification, since it does not aspire to a ‘symbolic’ recovery of what is suppressed in the text – the ‘fire of heaven’, for example – but instead reproduces the linguistic surface of this text as a surface of ‘death’. ‘Death’, because the original meaning cannot be revived: the ‘translated’ text cannot revert to its lost contexts of extratextual reference. The ‘translation’ necessarily emphasises the textuality of its source. This supports our initial choice of a non-hermeneutic model as a frame in which to discuss Hölderlin’s reception of Pindar.

The religious import of Hölderlin’s literal translation of Pindar’s verbal constellations is addressed in Walter Benjamin’s essay ‘The Task of the Translator’ (1921). The essay is illuminating with regard to our central concern: the place of Pindar in the establishment of a relationship between poetry and the absolute in later poets. Benjamin establishes a link between literalness and theology, based on his mystical assumption of a ‘pure language’ to which all language symbolically aspires, independent of historical connections or similarities. Only a literal translation, which would not resemble the meaning of the original but would ‘lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification’, can let ‘pure language […] shine upon the original all the more fully’. In ‘The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism’ (1919) Benjamin had already recognised the same connection with the

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53 Warminski 1987, p. 36.
54 Warminski 1987, p. 43.
55 On the notion of ‘allegory’, see Benjamin 1998, pp. 159-235. Benjamin famously parallels allegory with ruins: as opposed to the symbolic way of reading the past, allegory does not enable the integration of its fragments into a meaningful narrative; it testifies to the impossibility of resurrecting the past (Benjamin 1998, p. 178).
56 Warminski 1987, p. 36.
transcendental in Hölderlin’s (literal) transposition of the Zusammenhang of Pindar's texts from one language to another. Hölderlin’s gloss on his Pindar translation (unendlich (genau) zusammenhängen, ‘to hang together infinitely (exactly)’) is there read in reference to the possibility of a language which has the potential to let the Absolute shine through.69 Indeed, it may be argued that, consistently with the Romantic conception of the dependence of the absolute on the self-reflexive language of the work, Hölderlin locates religion mainly at the nexus of the various discourses or contexts which contribute to the complicated constellations of Pindar’s poetic texts. He is not in fact alone in this: for Friedrich Schlegel too, Pindar becomes an example of the self-reflexive quality of the work, a feature central to his conception of modern transcendental poetry.60 But for Hölderlin, as already mentioned, Pindar is properly speaking a holy text. The structural complexity of his odes is evidence of the presence of the divine in ancient Greece – and the only way in which Hölderlin’s own poetry can correspond to the experience of the absolute is by mimetically modelling itself on this complexity.

Not only is the textual Zusammenhang itself seen as a means of lending concrete poetic form to the transcendental; it also becomes the realm where Hölderlin responds to a major aspect of Pindaric religion. This is the problematic boundary between men and gods. According to Fitzgerald’s suggestion, to which I shall return below with regard to Kalvos, the accommodation of the relationship of divinity to humanity is a central concern in the odes. It is essential to the ‘Pindaric mode’, modelled on the agon, which Fitzgerald defines as gathering produced by separation — at the liminal moment of the victory, the athlete is separated from his fellow citizens, and the odes assume the task of re-integrating him into the community.61 The odes’ ‘enactment’ of the idea of community or togetherness between hero, victor and poet is symptomatic.62 Several odes in their conclusions deploy a vocabulary of togetherness that enacts the idea of community, even if it does not formulate it explicitly. ‘Pindar’, Silk writes, ‘like no other Greek poet, is the poet of associative co-presence’.63 The word ὄμηλετς and the whole idea of togetherness of poet and

69 See Hölderlin ‘The Infinite’ (Das Unendliche), FA 15. 359 and Benjamin 1996, p. 126.
60 See the Athenaeum fragment 238 (Schlegel 1958-2006, vol. II, p. 204).
61 Fitzgerald 1987, pp. 7; 1.
62 See Fitzgerald 1987, pp. 60-1 on the subtle way this association is established in Olympian 3 (42-5). On ‘enactment’ in poetry, see Silk 1995.
63 Silk, ‘Reading Pindar’ (forthcoming).
victor at the close of *Olympian* 1, as well as the words *βαστάζεις, θυμήων, οἰκέιας* at the end of *Olympian* 12 are only a few examples:

*O.1.115-6:*

εἰ ἂ τε τοῦτον ὑψοῦ χρόνον πατεῖν,
ἐμὲ τε τοσσάδε υκαφόρας
ὄμλειν πρόφαντον σοφία καθ’ Ἂλλα
λανας ἐόντα παντά.

May it be for you to walk on high for your time,
and for me to consort with victors whenever they win
being foremost in wisdom among Greeks everywhere

*O.12.17-9:*

νῦν δ’ Ὀλυμπίᾳ στεφανωσάμενος
καὶ δίς ἐκ Πυθώνος Ἰσθμοί τ’, Ἑργότελες,
θερμά Νυμφάν λουτρά βαστάζεις ὀμλε
λέων παρ’ οἰκείας ἀρούραις.

Now being crowned at Olympia,
and twice from Pytho and at the Isthmus, Ergoteles,
you raise up the warm baths of the Nymphs,
sharing in your own ploughlands.

It remains to be considered whether this association extends to the gods themselves. Although Pindar’s *gnomai* wisely repeat the admonition not to seek equality with the gods: *μὴ μάτευε Ζεὺς γενέσθαι* (‘Do not seek to become Zeus’, *I.5.14*), in many places the borderline becomes ambiguous. A striking example is the controversial opening of *Nemean* 6: ἑν ἄνδρῳ, ἑν θεῷ γένος (‘there is one race of men, one of gods’, *N.6.1*), which could mean that the race of gods and men are different, separate, but also that they are one and the same. The ambiguity only makes the latter implication more interesting, since it saves it from the explicitness of a positive argument. *Olympian* 2 offers another suggestive instance: τίνα θεόν, τίν’ ἥρωα, τίνα δ’ ἄνδρα κελαδήσομεν; (‘what god, what hero and what man shall we celebrate?’, *O.2.2*). On these lines Finley comments: ‘this chain of participation whereby heroes [...] share something of gods, and men something of heroes, runs through the odes and is the most characteristic thing about them’.65

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64 For a discussion of the issue and arguments in support of the former view, see Gerber 1999, pp. 43-5.
65 Finley 1955, p. 57.
We may follow the transformation of this idea of an uncertain limit between gods and humans in Hölderlin’s poetry, where, as in Pindar, it is distinctively realised not so much at the thematic level as through associations at the level of the poetic text’s Zusammenhang.\(^66\) It is precisely at this level that the idea is discussed in Benjamin’s early essay ‘Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin – “The Poet’s Courage” and “Timidity”’ (1914/1915), where the oneness of gods and men is described as a result of the ‘law of identity’ (Identitätsgesetz) which pertains between the perceptual order (men) and the spiritual order (gods). In Benjamin’s view, the ‘law of identity’ between these two orders presides in Hölderlin’s poetry over a world of absolute connections and relations (Beziehungen) among the various elements of the poem.\(^67\) This in turn grounds the ‘truth of the poem’, its ‘ideal sphere’: that which, for Benjamin, is the ‘poetized’ in the poem (das Gedichtete).\(^68\) We are led again to the – by now familiar – idea of the theological import of the textual Zusammenhang: the uncompromising, ‘true’ and ‘ideal’ unity of its elements. The poem ‘Timidness’, which is the main focus of Benjamin’s essay, may serve as an example of the ultimate connection between textual Zusammenhang and transcendence in poetry.

In Benjamin’s reading, the poem is suggestive on the one hand of a link between a perfect, non-hierarchical community or ‘equalisation’ (Ausgleichung) of the perceptual (the ‘living’) and the intellectual (the gods), and on the other of a process of ‘objectification’ or ‘materialisation’ (Versachlichung) of each of these two orders on the surface of the text.\(^69\) The following stanza is indicative of this identity (gleich) between gods and men, and provides a first hint of the mediating role of the poet between the two. The song (Gesang) brings the gods in person back to earth (die Himmlische selbst führet, der Einkehr zu):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Denn, seit Himmlischen gleich Menschen, ein einsam Wild} \\
\text{Und die Himmlische selbst führet, der Einkehr zu,} \\
\text{Der Gesang und der Fürsten} \\
\text{Chor, nach Arten, so waren auch}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{66}\) Explicit instances of this idea at the thematic level are the ‘nuptials’ (Brautfest) of men and gods in the 13\(^{th}\) stanza of ‘The Rhine’. See also the unison of men and gods in love in ‘Celebration of Peace’, ll. 100-109.

\(^{67}\) Benjamin 1996, pp. 20-1 (page references are to this edition).

\(^{68}\) Benjamin 1996, p. 18. For a detailed analysis of the complex notion of das Gedichtete in Benjamin, see Wellbery’s fivefold definition of it (Wellbery 1988, pp. 43-46).

\(^{69}\) For a discussion of this term in Benjamin’s essay, see Wellbery 1988, pp. 53-4. My discussion here also draws on Hanssen’s account of Benjamin’s essay (Hanssen 1997, p. 800).
In the last stanza of the poem, this identity is complicated by the idea of Versachlichung, which transforms it into an identity in death: the gods – who for Benjamin represent a form-giving spiritual principle in the poem – become themselves dead form: they are, as it were, objectified when they are ‘brought’ (bringen) by the poet into his objective constellation of words (‘the surface of the text’). Similarly, the people are de-personalised, undergoing a radical process of abstraction and separation in the phrase ‘einem zu etwas’ (‘someone, some way’). Finally, in the last line the poet himself is also objectified, giving himself over to death at the surface of the text: the poet ‘brings’ the gods and his own hands:

Gut auch sind und geschickt einem zu etwas wir,
Wenn wir kommen, mit Kunst, und von den Himmlischen
Einen bringen. Doch selber
Bringen schickliche Hände wir.

This ‘identity’ of gods and men in poetry is reminiscent of Pindar’s ἡμῶν, ἡμῶν γένος (‘One race of men, one of gods’). It is an idea Hölderlin must have seen ‘enacted’ in Pindar’s odes, and it provides a clear instance of how Pindar’s text contributes to the religious in later poetry, beyond any attempt to resurrect the original ritual context of the epinicians and, even, beyond any lament for its loss. The deathly connotations of Versachlichung (‘objectification’ or ‘materialisation’) as a process inherent in poetic creation are arguably, for Hölderlin, already part of the Pindaric text itself, which, in the irredeemable disappearance of its

70 ‘For since gods grew like men, lonely as woodland beasts, / And since, each in its way, song and the princely choir/ Brought the Heavenly in person/ Back to earth, so we too, the tongues/ Of the people have liked living men’s company’.

71 ‘The structuring, the inwardly plastic principle, is so intensified that the fate of the dead form breaks over the god, so that […] the plastic dimension is turned inside out, and now the god becomes wholly an object. The temporal form is broken from the inside out as something animated. The heavenly one is brought. Here before us is the ultimate expression of identity’ (Benjamin 1996, p. 32).

72 Wellbery 1996, p. 52.

73 In a manner strikingly close to Benjamin’s notion of the gods’ death in the inscription of the poem, Hölderlin in the ‘Notes’ to his translation of Sophocles writes about God, who ‘in the form of death, is present’. See Adler 1983, pp. 238, 240. For a detailed comparative reading of some passages of Hölderlin on tragedy with Benjamin’s text, see McCall 1992, pp. 489-91.

74 ‘Someone, some way, we too serve, are of use, are sent / When we come, with our art, and of the heavenly powers bring one with us. But fitting, / skilful hands we ourselves provide’.
original meaning and reference is and can be ‘only’ a text: a work of art. This in turn blocks the way to interpretation, leaving space only for the transference or ‘translation’ of associative combinations of words where the religious has been solidified and objectified.

Before leaving Hölderlin’s poetry, I wish to discuss yet another instance where Pindar’s text is central to the ‘poetic religion’ to which his poetry and poetics constantly aspires. I refer to the enigmatic figure of the ‘Prince of the Feast-day’, who appears in the second stanza of the poem ‘Celebration of Peace’. What differentiates this case from the ones already discussed is that here the sacred in Hölderlin is achieved in response to the very human bodies of Pindar’s athletes – not the religious as such. These are the lines that introduce the prince:

Und dämmernden Auges denk’ich schon
Vom ersten Tagwerk lächelnd
Ihn selbst zu sehen, den Fürsten des Fests.
Doch wenn du schon dein Ausland gern verlaugnest,
Und als vom langen Heldenzuge müd
Dein Auge senkst, vergessen, leichtbeschattet,
Und Freundesgestalt annimst, du Allbeknnter, doch,
Beugt fast die Knie das Hohe. Nichts vor dir,
Nur Eines weiss ich, Sterbliches bist du nicht.
Ein Weiser mag mir manches erhellen; wo aber
Ein Gott noch auch erscheint,
Da ist doch andere Klarheit.

And already with eyes dusk-dim,
With solemn day-labour smiling,
I think that I see him in person, the prince of the feast-day.
But though you like to disavow your foreign land,
And weary, it seems, with long heroic war
Cast down your eyes, oblivious, lightly shaded,
Assuming the shape of a friend, you known to all men, yet
Almost it bends our knees, such loftiness. Nothing in
Your presence I know; but one thing: mortal you are not.
A wise man could elucidate much for me; but where
A God as well appears, a different clarity shines (ll. 13-24).

It is useful to place these lines in the general context of the poem. The
historical occasion of ‘Friedensfeier’ was the treaty of Lunéville (February 1801), signed between the French Republic and the Holy Roman Empire. In the poem, this occasion is transformed into a vision of a completely different order – in a manner parallel, it may be noted, to Pindar’s transformation of athletic victory into something of a much wider significance.\(^{75}\) In ‘Friedensfeier’, the vision inspired by the treaty concerns not only peace, but also the return of the gods. This will end the cosmic night of their absence.\(^{76}\) It is fully developed in the third triad of the poem, where the celebration turns into an all-unifying Gesang: ‘Viel hat von Morgen an,/ Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören voneinander,/ Erfahren der Mensch bald sind wir aber Gesang’ (ll. 91-3).\(^{77}\) As ever in Hölderlin, the vision of the return of the gods which is celebrated in the Gesang remains utopian, in the sense that it is a figuration of something not yet realised. As Philipsen explains, the fundamental rhetorical gesture in the poem is that of promise, which is withdrawn and yields in the second and especially the fourth triad to an awareness that we still have to wait for the gods’ return.\(^{78}\)

The figure of the prince – the emblem of the returning god in the poem – is suggestive of Hölderlin’s projection of his whole vision into the future: the prince is a figure both real and non-real who appears where he is not. The mode of his evocation in stanza 2 is symptomatic: as Gaier notes, it covers ‘the whole range from uncertain identification to a purely imaginary encounter’.\(^{79}\) The identity of the prince is a controversial issue in scholarship, with many speculative identities (Christ, Napoleon, Dionysos, Herakles) proposed.\(^{80}\) In fact, as Philipsen interestingly argues, the figure seems to encompass all these identities. He is an ‘epitome of difference which fundamentally negates its coming-to-itself or in any case turns it into an ideal which is simultaneously evoked and put into doubt’.\(^{81}\) The fact that divine corporeality here is not asserted as a positive presence, but is, rather, manifested between being and non-being means that the passage lends itself to a reading in the light of Hölderlin’s

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\(^{75}\) For the replacement of athletic victory by history in the ‘act-song’ relation in Hölderlin’s work, see Seifert 1982, pp. 96-99.

\(^{76}\) For the idea of ‘cosmic night’ as the basic myth of Hölderlin’s poetic mythology, see Constantine 1988, p. 163.

\(^{77}\) ‘Much, from the morning onwards,/ Since we have been a discourse and have heard from one another, / Has human kind learnt; but soon we shall be song.’

\(^{78}\) Philipsen 2002, p. 367.

\(^{79}\) Gaier 2002, p. 171.

\(^{80}\) Philipsen 2002, p. 369.

\(^{81}\) Philipsen 2002, p. 369.
As in ‘On Religion’, the main question of this fragment is that of the relationship of the absolute – or, as it is called in the fragment, the ‘all in all’, ‘the world of all worlds’ – to history and poetry. Hölderlin suggests that the infinite is manifested at the moment of transition between the decay of an old world and before the emergence of a new one, by means of what has been described as a shift of modalities and temporal levels:\(^{82}\)

In the state between being and not-being, however, the possible (das Mögliche) everywhere becomes real (real) and the real (wirkliche) becomes ideal (ideal), and in the free imitation of art (freie Kunstnachahmung) this is a terrible but divine dream.\(^{83}\)

Two mutually dependent movements are described here as taking place at the moment of decay: the old declining world (wirkliche) becomes ideal and re-emerges as a mental form at the same time that infinite life (das Mögliche) becomes real (real). This shift, as Hölderlin goes on to say, is realised by means of the thread of Memory (Erinnerung) which the ‘free imitation of art’ waves over the gap between being and non-being. Erinnerung guarantees that infinite possibility, designated in the fragment as ‘infinitely-real’, can manifest itself. This in turn makes the old, declining entity appear in the ideality of a figure in memory, designated as ‘individually-ideal’ (171). ‘Artistic imitation’ is ‘free’ because it does not render what already exists, but mythopoetically gives form to what is not before the eyes.\(^{84}\)

In the fragment ‘On the process of becoming in passing away’, the old world is designated as the ‘fatherland’, but if we are to read the figure of the prince in ‘Friedensfeier’ through the lenses of the poetics here described we should link it rather to the gods who fled. For Hölderlin, the period of daylight was linked with the corporeal presence of the gods on earth (from the ancient Greek gods to Christ). The death of Christ brought in the era of cosmic night, but in the future, Hölderlin believed, there will be daylight again. In their corporeality, the gods can thus be said to belong to a past era: as such, they represent the real (wirklich) that has declined but in remembrance acquires the ideality of a mental form, while at the same time it

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\(^{82}\) On the shift of modalities, see Hühn 1997, p. 134 and Lypp 1991, p. 103.

\(^{83}\) Translated by Adler 1985, p. 169. Page references are to this translation.

\(^{84}\) Hühn 1997, p. 155.
becomes the body in which the abstract possibility of the infinite becomes reality. As
an incarnation of the infinite, the body of the prince is traversed both by reality and
possibility, past and future (the return of the gods anticipated in ‘Celebration of
peace’). Created by poetry through Erinnerung, this figure occupies the space
between being and non-being, where all religion in the modern world necessarily is.

The Erinnerung involved in the creation of the peculiar corporeality of the
prince is arguably doubled and supported by a more specific remembrance, which
does not refer to gods, but to the masculine young bodies of Pindar’s athletes.
According to Albrecht Seifert the prince is literally the metamorphosis of a Pindaric
victor. In the stanza introducing the prince, he reads the Pindaric motif of the return
of the victor to his home city after the games: the moment of celebration addressed in
the victory ode. The ‘day-labour’ the prince is said to leave behind (l. 14) stands for
history as the work that God has accomplished and now leaves behind: it is seen as
parallel to Pindaric ἔργον or πόνος (‘task’ or ‘toil’) in the sense of athletic travail
and accomplishment. The motif of ‘tiredness’ (müd, l.17) alludes to relevant
Pindaric loci like N.3.17-8 or the opening lines of Nemean 4. The characterisation of
the prince as ‘oblivious’ (vergessen, l.18) is an allusion to the sweet forgetfulness of
labours following the victory. To this network of parallels, we can add the
ambiguous, liminal status of the prince and the victor. As Crotty observes, the
returning victor in Pindar is neither a stranger nor a member of the community, since
he has been significantly changed by the experience of victory at the games. The
very ambivalence of human and divine, central in the figure of the prince, is not
absent from the figure of the returning Pindaric victor, since as Crotty observes, we
may compare the beneficial reintegration of the victor into the community to Greek
initiation practices, or to myths about gods like Demeter, who – in her quest for
Persephone – ‘departed’ but eventually ‘returned’ to Olympus.

Because of the parallels which so forcefully suggest themselves between the
prince and the victor, Seifert gives special weight to the lines ‘Doch wenn du schon

88 Seifert 1992, p. 399. For a Pindaric parallel here, see the opening of N.4.
89 In this, the victor resembles any heroic figure, joining the community of other mortals: the figure of
Jason returning to Iolcos from his childhood in the mountains offers the model of this ambiguity: ‘like
a stranger (Εἰκόνα) although a townsman (ἄστρος)’ (P.4.79) (Crotty 1982, pp. 111-12).
90 Crotty 1982, p. 111.
dein Ausland gern verlaugnest / […] Und Freundsieggestalt annimst […]/ Beugt fast die Knie das Hohe’. (‘But though you like to disavow your foreign land/ […] assuming the shape of a friend […] almost it bends our knees, such loftiness’). He reads these lines, in fact, as a representation of the actual return of the divine modeled on the ‘triumphal poetry’ (Triumphaldichtung) of Pindar.91 But although the prince in ‘Celebration of peace’ is modeled on Pindar’s athletes, the thematics of triumphal return have been greatly modified.92 Instead of celebration, Hölderlin’s epinician allusion paradoxically introduces an elegiac element into the poem, since the desiring gaze directed towards athletes in the homoerotic culture of Greece has been transferred to the bodies of the gods, which are seen ‘with eyes dusk-dim’, imagined almost ‘in person’, resurrected in remembrance, but never real.

Let us now turn to Kalvos’ odes, published in two collections, Η Λύρα and Λυρικά, in 1824 and 1826 respectively.93 Together with Dionysios Solomos, Kalvos was a major figure in the first steps towards the creation, in the early nineteenth century, of a ‘national’ Greek literature. The collections Η Λύρα and Λυρικά were published in response to the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence (1821). Among Kalvos’ contemporaries, the term ode had the vague sense of an emotionally charged poem composed in a rather elaborate verse form. Kalvos, however, prefaces the collection Η Λύρα with an epigraph from Pindar’s Pythian 1, which gives the term a special meaning. The contemporary war in Greece is compared with the athletic contests celebrated by the ancient lyricist: as an occasion for song and a political cause, it is much more serious than these.94 The presence of Pindar at the very opening of the collection proves that Kalvos’ myriad allusions to the lyre, the laurel crown, and to mythology, his invocation of abstract, deified qualities and values, and his use of archaism are more than just neoclassical ornaments.95 Here too, Pindar’s presence transcends the purely ideological purpose of establishing continuity with the ancient past, indicating, among other things, behind what is often reductively

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92 Even in Pindar, as Slater observes, we find surprisingly little detail on the actual context of triumph on the occasion of the victor’s return. Not only is triumph described in Pindar against a background of pessimism and meditation on mortality, but its description often turns out to be symbolic and metaphorical (this is the case, for example of the δέξια-motif in O.8.10, and in O.5.3, P.2.5 and N.4.11 the komos and crown are dedicated to a personified city (Slater 1984, pp. 246-7).
93 On Kalvos and Pindar, see also the essay by Pontani in this collection.
95 Beaton 1999, p. 39.
interpreted as ‘archaism’ in the *Odes* Kalvos’ aspirations to a revival of literary language. His occasional use of archaic words is symptomatic of Kalvos’ desire to bring the Muses back to Greece, after they had first fled to Rome and then to Occidental Europe.⁹⁶

As with Hölderlin, Kalvos’ engagement with the textual and stylistic features of Pindar’s victory odes presents itself as an alternative to the hermeneutic process of recovering a meaning lost behind surface of the poet’s words. Kalvos’ most obvious Pindaric trait is the boldness of his transitions, which can account for the seeming untidiness that has made many scholars complain of a lack of unity in these poems. This is certainly consistent with the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century association of Pindar with disjunction and disunity.⁹⁷ In *H Λίρα* above all, Kalvos’ esoteric and associative transitions preclude any linear reading of the odes. It is true that he drew on Neoclassical Italian poets in particular to form his own stanzas of pairs of seven syllable verses.⁹⁸ But the larger stanzaic form of Pindar is a disruptive model for the more conventionally structured odes of Kalvos, shaped under Neoclassical influence. Moreover, the allusion to ancient metres⁹⁹ in Kalvos’ ‘Afterword’ (Ἐπισημείωσις) to Λυρικά – together with the free alternation of verse endings without rhyme,¹⁰⁰ and variation of stress patterns – all serve to ground what Garantoudis has called the odes’ πολύτροπος ἀρμονία (‘variable rhythm’), a quality that differentiates Kalvos from the easy, song-like musicality both of the Anacreontic poems of his predecessor Athanasios Christopoulos, and from the musicality, based on the iambic fifteen-syllable verse, of folk song.¹⁰¹ Apart from his abrupt transitions, the subtle interconnections established through the vocabulary in the odes of Kalvos is another interesting response to Pindar as text, and may be seen as the equivalent of

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⁹⁶ Ricks 1996b, pp. 112-4; on this issue, see also Mackridge 1994, pp. 47-71.
⁹⁷ Maclean 1952, p. 430. Certainly, in Kalvos and his contemporaries features like freedom of form, boldness of imagery, and elusive transitions have a double provenance: they stem both from the highly revered Pindaric model and from the Biblical tradition of the Psalms (Maclean 1952, p. 430).
⁹⁸ See on this issue Garantoudis 1995, pp. 4-16, 32-34, 47-53. Garantoudis’ emphasis on the Italian Neoclassical influence refutes previous views that Kalvos attempted to renew the Greek national fifteen-syllable verse.
⁹⁹ See paragraph Α of the Επισημείωσις: γνωστὴ εἰς τοὺς παλαιοὺς μόνον (‘known only to the ancients’).
¹⁰⁰ Garantoudis 1995, p. 65. As has been rightly suggested, Kalvos’ attack on rhyme should be traced back to Milton. The relevant passage of the Επισημείωσις (‘Afterword’) shares with Milton’s attack against rhyme in the Preface to *Paradise Lost* not only the phrasal formulation, but also the attribution of political significance to the absence of rhyme (see Ricks’ review of Garantoudis’ book: Ricks 1997, p. 267).
¹⁰¹ Garantoudis 1995, pp. 94-5; p. 236, n. 72.
Hölderlin’s ‘translation’ of the Greek text’s formal features. A poem like the ode Ἔις Μοῦσας [V], for example, depends on the interplay between different temporal levels and the associative connection of the mythological references in the ode.

What is of interest for us here is that this attention to Pindar as a poetic text outside his historical coordinates in time and space offers a key to an understanding of what may, to borrow Hölderlin’s phrase, be called Kalvos’ own ‘poetic religion’. I argued above that in Hölderlin the ambivalent relationship of gods and men in Pindar (a dialectic of similarity and difference) is transformed into textual equivalence or ‘identity’ (Benjamin). I suggest that this aspect of the Pindaric is central to Kalvos as well, albeit in a different manner. One way to address this question is to read his odes through the glass of Fitzgerald’s ‘agonistic’ mode. This serves to shed light on an aspect of Kalvos’ ‘Pindarism’ which is not discussed in the critical literature on this poet, and also to reveal that his engagement with Pindar may be both more indirect and more substantial than is often assumed.\(^\text{102}\)

Inherent in Fitzgerald’s definition of the ‘agon’ is a re-gathering or a reintegration of the victor in the community after his separation from it in the divine moment and supreme achievement of victory. In other words, the ‘agon’ may be seen as a relinquishing of the divine absolute, in order to reinstate it within the community of mortals.\(^\text{103}\) One way of enacting this in terms of style is the diffusion of the deities invoked at the beginning of the epinicia into other deities or into the forms of human experience they stand for: forms which, for Fitzgerald, ‘are woven into the fabric of human action and implicated in a continuum of deities’.\(^\text{104}\) As a result, the poet of praise nowhere enters into a relationship with a single, transcendental divinity.\(^\text{105}\) The polytheistic diffusion of divinity that I will find in the Odes of Kalvos is evidence of their participation in a Pindaric agonistic modality.

The divine, with all its polytheistic ramifications, its diffusion in the human

\(^\text{102}\) Dallas’ important study of the issue is an example of a tendency in Greek scholarship to attribute to Kalvos a deeper knowledge of Pindar than was actually the case and to assume a close correspondence between his Odes and the odes of Pindar in terms of structure: in this light it is argued that Kalvos’ poems are built on a cluster of basic ingredients of the epinician ode: the mythic, hymnic, and gnomic elements (Dallas 1994, pp. 265-73). Rather, the interconnection of the given elements is for Kalvos a gesture towards a Pindaric quality of style.

\(^\text{103}\) Fitzgerald 1987, p. 7.

\(^\text{104}\) Fitzgerald mentions the example of Ν.8.1-6a, and describes the metamorphoses of Hora, who finally becomes ‘the loves’ (ἐρωτεύων) which attended the bed of Zeus and Aigina (Fitzgerald 1987, p. 14).

\(^\text{105}\) The relationship with a single deity is seen as temptation by Hölderlin in his poem ‘Der Einziger’, where the poet regrets that, because of his love for Christ, his song ‘Ist vom eigenem Herzen/ Zu sehr gagangen’ (ll.69-70) (cited at Fitzgerald 1987, p. 16).
plane, and its intersection with the human community, defines Kalvos’ lyricism. In his *Odes* we find just the same movement of diffusion, the same ramification of the divine, as in Pindar. The Christian God, present for example in the ode Ἐἰς Ὁθάνατον [II], coexists with the pagan Olympians and with personified abstract ideas. These are almost deified by their presence in titles, all of which refer to the patriotic values the Greeks were fighting for in the War of Independence (glory in Ἐἰς Δόξαν [II], liberty in Ἐἰς Ἐλευθερίαν [IX], victory in Ἐἰς τὴν Νίκην [XVIII]), but are also explicitly deified elsewhere (Ἐλευθερία [Liberty] as a goddess in Ὁ Ὀκεανός [X], l.91-92). These ‘divinities’ are nowhere real transcendental entities, which could inspire, as with the Christian God, a desire in the poet for unity with a single god. On the contrary, they all engage in interaction with humans and participate in their efforts. In Ὁ Ὀκεανός [X] the victory of the Greek fleet comes immediately after the intervention of Ἐλευθερία, daughter of Zeus, with Okeanos (᾽η-κγ). In Ἐἰς Σοῦλι [XV] the Greeks are not alone in the battle-celebration. The angel of war (stanza γ) is with them, who at stanza λ is said to bring σταυρὸν καὶ βάια (‘the cross and laurel leaves’); there are also other guardian angels (ἀγγελοὶ φύλακες τῶν δικαιῶν, κε); and there is Night (ιζ-κ). In Ἐἰς τὴν Νίκην [XVIII] the goddess invoked in stanza β (δ Ἕκη) is visible at the level of the human action: before her new invocation in γ, stanzas δ-ιβ have shown what a human victory looks like.

In Kalvos’ poems, the involvement of gods in human action is also often apparent where scenes of national struggle are anachronistically described in epithets drawn from ancient Greek texts. Whether these come from Pindar or not, this gesture clearly aspires to a view of the Pindaric linked in Kalvos’ time to the dithyrambic style. In Ἐἰς Δόξαν [II] the expression ὄφραν ἄρειμανίων (‘weapons of Ares’ l. 101) describes the guns, and a little later it is said that τὸ ἔφος κεραυνοῖ (‘the sword brings forth thunder’, 112). In Ἐἰς Μοῦσας [V] the hands of the fighters with their muskets are χεῖρες κεραυνοφόροι (‘hands holding thunderbolts’, l.46). In Ἐἰς Ψαρὰ [XII] it is no mere Neoclassical convention that turns the War into σιδηροχάρμης Ἄρης (‘bellicose Ares’, ll. 84-85) – an epithet which Pindar uses of horses at P.2.2. – or the grave of the fallen into a τύμβον ὑψηνορά (‘lofty tomb’, l. 114). Even in Ἐἰς Σοῦλι [XV], the ode in which Kalvos comes closest to the style of kleftic song, the
description of the battle involves poetic correlation rather than realism. In stanza γ, war is parallel to a communal festival (λαμπρᾶ πανήγυρις ‘public feast’), and is personified as a dancing angel, an image repeated in stanza λ. In these cases, an impression of Neoclassical convention actually represents a genuine attempt by Kalvos to find an agonistic language which will amplify the significance of the present battles and at the same time make his contemporary patriotic themes compatible with high lyric. In the examples just quoted, the community of gods and men is amplified by a second community that brings together men of the present and past ages of Greece, so that lyric again becomes a sphere where the divine and the communal intersect.

We have read the early nineteenth-century reception of the epinicians as engaging only marginally with their original celebratory centre, the performance, and focusing instead on textual aspects of religion. For Hölderlin and Kalvos, this tendency led to a reconceptualisation of the relationship of poetry and religion, even when poetry could no longer be a place for actual religion – as it was for Pindar. From this perspective, their reading of Pindar is illuminating for our reading of Pindar’s poetry and religion today. It offers a perspective from which to regard Pindar’s ‘poetic theology or theological poetry’. We can, as Hölderlin and Kalvos did, study the construction of the religious as a Pindaric motif in the Pindaric text by observing the intertwining of various discourses and contexts (its ‘ritual poetics’), the associative co-presence of gods and men, or the ramifications of deities and their transformations into each other. We may also explore various aspects of the religious in Pindar which fall outside the contemporary cultic frame of the epinicians. As an example, we can refer to the fusion of the aesthetic, the erotic, and the religious in Hölderlin’s re-creation of Pindar’s athletes in ‘Friedensfeier’, which retrospectively sheds light on the secularization of the religious and the spiritualization of the erotic, an idea latent in the Greek text itself. Above all, emphasising the text rather than the context of the odes is the only conceivable way in which their transcendence might be relevant to us today. For us, the structure of the Pindaric odes has no documentary

106 See for example the winter setting in stanza ζ, as against the fact that the battle at Karpenisi, which was the occasion of the ode, took place in summer.
107 Certainly the community of men and gods derived from the Pindaric model is disrupted in the case of Kalvos at the political level, where he insists on the absolute separation of Greeks and Ottomans. Here the Old Testament Psalms (the other great influence on his Odes) rather than Pindar must have offered him a structural model.
108 For the expression, see Silk 2007, p. 183.
value in the real sense that it has for Hölderlin – as a revelation of the workings of divinity on earth. We can however also experience the epinicians as poetic texts, whose participation in transcendence has nothing to do with references to contemporary cult, but involves, as all art does, a ‘moment when form is experienced for itself’, a ‘pure instance of suspension’. ¹⁰⁹

Reading Pindar through the example set by the nineteenth-century poets, without interpreting his texts in the terms imposed by his own cultural context, is a legitimate activity because, to hark back to Benjamin’s essay on translation, the odes are a ‘translatable’ text par excellence. With their highly elevated language and non-informative character, the victory odes represent the opposite of the kind of text that Benjamin describes here: ‘The lower the quality and distinction of its language, the larger the extent to which it is information, the less fertile a field is it for translation, until the utter preponderance of content […] renders it impossible’. ¹¹⁰ If Pindar’s epinicians are readable and relevant today, this is because their elaborate style amounts to a preponderance of language over occasion, whether athletic or ritual. In other words, it is because the text has already undone the ephemeral arrogance of any subjective connections between meanings, and has replaced them with objective interconnections between words, that it can take over and pre-empt the destructive work of time, and thus survive time itself.

¹⁰⁹ The expression is taken from Rancière 2004, p. 24.
¹¹⁰ Benjamin 1968, p. 81.