
THE AMBIVALENT HEROISM OF AJAX IN THE ODES OF PINDAR

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Contents

Contents	2
Acknowledgements	3
Abbreviations	3
Introduction	4
Literature Review	7
Chapter One: Ajax in the Epic Cycle	15
Chapter Two: Motive and ambiguity in <i>Nemean 7</i> and <i>Isthmian 4</i>	25
Chapter Three: <i>Nemean 8</i> and the infecting of φθόνος	39
Chapter Four: Themes and characterisation in narratives of the <i>hoplōn krisis</i>	58
Chapter Five: Ajax as hero-athlete representative	71
Conclusion	87
List of Figures	91
Bibliography	92

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Abbreviations

LSJ H. G. Liddell and R. Scott (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. H. S. Jones, 9th ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

LIMC *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*. WebLIMC, 2019.

Introduction

Ajax appears throughout Greek literature as a hero whose downfall is at odds with his heroic credibility. Ajax is celebrated among the best of the Homeric heroes, but the narratives of his suicide in the lost parts of the Epic Cycle suggest that his heroism was sharply scrutinised even in early literature. Pindar and Sophocles take up these lost narratives of the Epic Cycle and present Ajax in a state of failure, in the aftermath of the *hoplōn krisis* (the judgement for the arms of Achilles). Sophocles' *Ajax* explores the complexities of Ajax's heroism and characterises him with blindness, φθόνος (envy) and disease. These tropes, alongside ineloquence, appear as major shortfalls in Ajax's character throughout the Epic Cycle, possibly in Aeschylus' lost play *Hoplōn Krisis* and in later speech narratives of Antisthenes, Ovid and Quintus Smyrnaeus. Pindar's three major Ajax narratives in *Nemean 7*, *Isthmian 4* and *Nemean 8* also address blindness, φθόνος and ineloquence, but scholars have largely associated blindness and φθόνος in particular with the antagonists of Ajax's downfall such as Odysseus and the Greek army. Instead I argue that these tropes identify character weaknesses in Ajax himself and thus present him as a more ambivalent hero than just the good and truthful antithesis of his enemies. Pindar's use of blindness, φθόνος and ineloquence therefore answer to and anticipate Ajax's ambivalent heroism in surrounding literature. In addition, I compare Ajax to athletes such as Kleomedes of Astypalaia and Dioxippus of Athens, who exhibited similar character weaknesses, succumbed to dishonour and failed to reintegrate into their social communities. In doing so I suggest that Pindar uses the ambivalence and downfall of Ajax in the epinician context to represent the archetype of the mytho-historical hero-athlete.¹

Current scholarship on Pindar's Ajax narratives tends to focus on the external factors that drive Ajax's downfall such as Odysseus, the Greeks, φθόνος and πάρφασις (deceptive speech). I outline the extent of this focus in my literature review below. Emphasis on the antagonism of Odysseus in particular has led to widespread dismissal of Ajax's

¹ I use the term "mytho-historical" to acknowledge the uncertainty of whether these hero-athletes were mythical or historical.

characterisation, who is merely perceived as the good, dishonoured victim of Odysseus' actions. Scholars have viewed Pindar's desire to correct Ajax's dishonour as evidence for his personal favouritism towards Ajax.² This lasting idea of favouritism in Pindaric scholarship is particularly significant for its counter-intuitiveness to Elroy Bundy's pivotal thesis in 1962, which states that Pindar's primary motive in each of his odes was to praise the athletic victor above any "personal preoccupations" that he may have had towards his historic or mythical subjects.³ Scholars' lack of interest in the characterisation of Ajax specifically is problematic firstly because the narratives are primarily about Ajax's fate. Secondly, Ajax's weaknesses that lead to his downfall in Pindar's narratives – namely his own blindness, for which I suggest is apparent in *Nemean* 7, and his ineloquence in *Nemean* 8 – can tell us a great deal about the way wider ancient literature characterised Ajax and the way audiences perceived him.

Φθόνοϛ is a major theme in Pindar's odes and it is widely discussed in Pindaric scholarship. It is a dangerous force for athletic victors whose remarkable achievements are particularly prone to attracting the φθόνοϛ of others. Scholars have thus viewed it as one of Pindar's most pressing concerns.⁴ As part of my argument I explore the extent to which Ajax's weaknesses allow φθόνοϛ to infect him within the *Nemean* 8 narrative. Up to this point, the connection between Ajax and φθόνοϛ remains under-explored, as scholars have largely associated φθόνοϛ in *Nemean* 8 only with Odysseus and the Greeks. But Pindar heavily relies on Ajax's weakness, being ἄλωσσοϛ (ineloquent, speechless), to warn athletes about the dangerous nature of φθόνοϛ. The similarities between Ajax and Dioxiπpus of Athens, who likewise succumbs to the dangers of φθόνοϛ through his own weaknesses and resorts to suicide, suggest that Ajax's ambivalences may have had a lasting effect on later stories of hero-athletes.⁵ But there are no in-depth studies on the similarities between Ajax and such stories. I see this as a major oversight considering the extent of the similarities, especially since Pindar was active

² See, for example, Norwood (1945) 52, Nisetich (1989) 9 and Haviarius (1993) 11.

³ Bundy (1961) 2.

⁴ See comments by Bulman (1992) 3 and Hubbard (2000) 320 in my literature review.

⁵ For Dioxiπpus' account, see Diodorus Siculus 17.100.8-101.6 and Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander*, 9.7.16-26.

around the same time as many of these athletes, and so the hero-athlete archetype would have been prominent in fifth century BCE athletic culture.⁶

There is an opportunity, therefore, to carry out a comprehensive study on the characterisation of Ajax in the odes in order to decipher Pindar's purpose for Ajax as an ambivalent hero. My predominant aim for this thesis is to bring to light the character weaknesses such as φθόνοϛ, blindness, ineloquence and disease that support Ajax's ambivalent heroism in Pindar's narratives, and consequently show how these weaknesses feed into the major character shortfalls that other ancient authors associate with Ajax. In turn, comparisons between Ajax's ambivalence and that of mytho-historical hero-athletes can provide insight into Pindar's exact purpose for Ajax in the epinician context.

In order to achieve my aim, I provide my own readings of the three main odes of Pindar that address the Ajax narrative: *Nemean 7*, *Isthmian 4* and *Nemean 8*. I then apply these readings to the wider scope of Greek literature and particular narratives of hero-athletes in order to identify similar thematic tropes. I focus specifically on the characterisation of Ajax, as opposed to his constant rival Odysseus, in an attempt to counterbalance the amount of scholarship that has previously been weighted towards Odysseus' role and characterisation. At times I also read Pindar's Ajax narratives collectively, in the sense that there can only be so much differentiation in a poet's view and treatment of a single myth or mythical figure. Pindar is far from consistent in his meaning and use of myths and figures, as shall be made apparent in this thesis, but I shall argue that the concept of Ajax as an ambivalent hero remains consistent throughout the odes.

In chapter one of this thesis I introduce early characterisations of Ajax within the Epic Cycle, especially in Homer's *Iliad*, which provides the most extant material on the character and achievements of Ajax prior to the *hoplōn krisis*. These early characterisations shall support the points that I then make in chapters two and three in my readings of Pindar's three major Ajax narratives. In chapter two I explore the narrative ambiguities in *Nemean 7* and *Isthmian 4*

⁶ Some of the athletes that I discuss include Oibotas of Dyme (active before Pindar's time in the eighth century BCE), Kleomedes of Astypalaia and Theagenes of Thasos (both active during Pindar's time in the early fifth century BCE).

that allude to blindness in Ajax and the Greeks' blame towards him. These weaknesses support my points in chapter three, in which φθόνοϛ can be seen to infect Ajax by way of his detrimental weakness of being ἄγλωσσοϛ. In chapter four I explore the Ajax narrative in Aeschylus' *Hoplōn Krisis* and Sophocles' *Ajax*, reviewing the presentations of disease and potential allusions to φθόνοϛ. I conclude chapter four with a vital review of Antisthenes' statement that φθόνοϛ is the specific disease of Ajax. I explore how this may be the explicit point that proves Pindar, Sophocles and Aeschylus' earlier implications about φθόνοϛ as a disease-like quality. Finally in chapter five I explore the narratives of hero-athletes and scholars' athletic journey models such as the *nostos* loop in order to suggest that Pindar uses Ajax to represent a hero of social reintegration failure, comparable to the failure of hero-athletes.⁷ I begin first though with a review of the major problems and gaps in current scholarship, which will allow me to outline the extent of my opportunity to fill the lack of in-depth analysis on the character and significance of Ajax within Pindar's narratives.

Literature Review

I first review the existing scholarship on Pindar's Ajax narratives. As I have stated above, this focuses mostly on the external factors that affect Ajax's downfall. These external factors are Odysseus as antagonist and perpetrator of *πάρφρασιϛ*, the idea of Homer as untruthful poet and the Greeks' φθόνοϛ towards Ajax. Secondly, scholarship around Ajax's characterisation in Sophocles' *Ajax* shall assist in my direction towards Ajax's characterisation within Pindar's odes. Finally, I review the discussions around hero-athletes and social reintegration that will inform my approach when suggesting the comparison between these hero athletes and Ajax.

Glenn Most provides an extensive study on Pindar's *Nemean 7* and suggests that, while Odysseus and Homer collectively act as mouthpieces for the deceptive nature of poetry, Pindar is careful not to explicitly state Odysseus' deception as the cause of the *hoplōn krisis* outcome.⁸ Instead, Most claims that Pindar wished to emphasise the obviousness of the Greeks'

⁷ I refer to Greek terms in their transliterated form such as *nostos* and *kleos* when I discuss them as a wider concept from within secondary scholarship, as opposed to their appearance in primary texts.

⁸ Most (1985) 151-2.

“extraordinary blindness” and stupidity in overseeing Ajax’s superiority and awarding Achilles’ armour to Odysseus.⁹ Frank Nisetich similarly attributes the blindness of men at *Nemean* 7.23-4 to Ajax’s “fellows”.¹⁰ According to Most, Pindar’s message is that if Homeric heroes can be so foolhardy, then the common audience must be especially careful not to make similar mistakes. Most’s discussion therefore limits itself to the roles of both Odysseus and the Greeks within the narrative and the specific lessons that the characterisation of these figures may provide the audience, as opposed to any implications that Ajax’s characterisation may present.

Nisetich is also concerned with the way that Ajax’s role as mere victim proves Odysseus’ antagonism across Pindar’s narratives. Nisetich closely associates Pindar’s references to Homer with Ajax and Odysseus’ respective characterisations. In *Isthmian* 4, when Pindar praises Homer for honouring Ajax, Nisetich claims that Odysseus is left out of the narrative so as not to invoke Homer’s *Odyssey*, which of course gives significant praise to Odysseus.¹¹ In *Nemean* 8, however, Nisetich suggests that Pindar’s condemnation of Homer unifies him with Odysseus as a dual unit of “poet and hero”.¹² Nisetich views this contradiction of Homer between *Isthmian* 4 and *Nemean* 8 as Pindar “trying to separate the genuinely from the speciously heroic in the great mass of epic poetry”. Nisetich further notes that while Homer avoids mentioning Ajax’s suicide in the *Odyssey*, Pindar “renders it in graphic detail” so as to deny Odysseus any sympathy, especially in *Nemean* 8, since Pindar’s harsher treatment of Odysseus would have appealed to the ode’s Aeginetan audience.¹³ While Nisetich’s discussion adds valuable commentary on Homer and Odysseus’ roles in Pindar’s narratives, Nisetich misses the same opportunity as Most in exploring Ajax beyond the general sympathy that Pindar gives him over Odysseus.

⁹ Most (1985) 153-4.

¹⁰ Nisetich (1989) 16.

¹¹ Nisetich (1989) 10-11.

¹² Nisetich (1989) 13.

¹³ Nisetich (1989) 10, 14. Ajax would have been favoured on the island of Aegina as a member of the Aeacid dynasty whose mythical origins were situated on Aegina.

Nicholaos Haviarus, Louise Pratt and Thomas Hubbard all present similar conventional views on the dichotomous representations of Ajax and Odysseus in Pindar's odes. In his extensive doctoral dissertation on the suicide of Ajax, Haviarus merely reiterates the plot points of *Nemean 7* and *Nemean 8*: the blindness of men puts one's fame at risk and Ajax becomes the victim of Odysseus' eloquence against his own silence.¹⁴ Pratt simply characterises Ajax as the "noble" contrast to the slanderous Odysseus, the trait with which Pratt considers Pindar to view as "exemplary" of Odysseus' character.¹⁵ In his article on Sophocles' responses to Pindar in the *Ajax*, Hubbard presents a more detailed character breakdown of the Sophoclean Ajax with important reference to the Pindaric Ajax, which I explore more fully in chapters three and four. But in response to Pindar Hubbard reads Ajax as the representative of *phusis* (nature) and Odysseus as the representative of *technê* (craft) within *Nemean 7* and *Nemean 8*.¹⁶ Hubbard's observations once again follow the conventional moral-versus-immoral trend between Ajax and Odysseus. I do not disagree with this in regard to the odes' primary assertions; however, the stark absence of scholars' exploration into Ajax's characterisation within the odes leaves an opportunity to rethink the Ajax narratives from the direct point of view of their main subject.

The φθόνοϋς theme in Pindar's *Nemean 8* presents a valuable starting point for such explorations, since φθόνοϋς directly impacts Ajax. Throughout my thesis I mostly consider the meaning of φθόνοϋς to be in the sense of "envy", especially in my discussions of φθόνοϋς in Pindar's *Nemean 8* and Sophocles' *Ajax*. However, it is important to note the multifaceted meanings that φθόνοϋς carried throughout ancient literature. For example, the form φθονέω in Homeric Epic mostly conveyed "spite" or "begrudging", such as Penelope's begrudging towards Phemius' song in *Odyssey* 1.346 or Hera's comment that she shall not spite Zeus by favouring the Greek cities in *Iliad* 4.51-6. For my arguments on φθόνοϋς in *Nemean 8* and the *Ajax*, however, I maintain the meaning of φθόνοϋς to be envy. I particularly see this meaning in the way that Glenn Most defines envy in comparison to "jealousy". Most considers jealousy to

¹⁴ Haviarus (1993) 103-4, 114.

¹⁵ Pratt (1993) 121-2.

¹⁶ Hubbard (2000) 315-6.

be more “heroic” than envy and often associated with one’s longing for another person.¹⁷ Envy, on the other hand, carries a greater sense of shame and is less likely to be paraded by those that are afflicted by it.¹⁸ I therefore adhere to Most’s definition by inferring the meaning of φθόνος as envy throughout this thesis, unless otherwise stated.

Scholarship on the φθόνος theme within Pindar’s odes is extensive. Patricia Bulman considers φθόνος to be the “supreme negative emotion” within Pindar’s odes.¹⁹ Hubbard views φθόνος to be of “central concern” to Pindar more than to any other poet.²⁰ Most makes this particularly apparent in observing the “remarkable” absence of φθόνος in Homeric epic, citing the detriment of its negative characteristic qualities in association with heroes of such elevated prestige.²¹ As for Ajax, both C. Carey and Bulman characterise Ajax as the victim of others’ φθόνος, as Bulman cites Carey in agreement that φθόνος “murdered” Ajax.²² But other scholars argue that *πάρφασις* (misrepresentation)²³ is an equally important component that follows φθόνος in the downfall of Ajax. In his article on φθόνος and *πάρφασις* in *Nemean 8*, Andrew Miller cites Aristotle’s definition of φθόνος in *Rhetoric 2.10*: we feel envy for those whom we consider to be equal to us in place, age, values, social distinction and wealth, hence the φθόνος that Odysseus and the Greeks feel towards their comrade Ajax.²⁴ However, as Miller remarks, the Ajax narrative shifts from benign φθόνος to malicious *πάρφασις* as Odysseus steps forward from the ordinary φθονεροῖ to deliver his “destructive” *πάρφασις*.²⁵ George Walsh similarly explores how Pindar places *πάρφασις* into the mouth of Odysseus in order to have him represent the “harmful technique” that is the “poet’s antitype”, which brings into view the less deserving and obscures the more deserving, as opposed to Pindar’s intention to deliver more truthful praise.²⁶ Arum Park, however, acknowledges the implication of Odysseus as the purveyor of

¹⁷ Most (2003) 127-8.

¹⁸ Most (2003) 127-8.

¹⁹ Bulman (1992) 3.

²⁰ Hubbard (2000) 320.

²¹ Most (2003) 128.

²² Carey (1976) 31; Bulman (1992) 45.

²³ W. J. Slater’s translation. Slater (1969) 416.

²⁴ Miller (1982) 114.

²⁵ Miller (1982) 118.

²⁶ Walsh (1984) 38-9.

πάρφασις, but argues that Pindar does not explicitly name Odysseus as its agent so that the focus is brought onto the deception itself.²⁷ The effect of this is that the audience itself becomes responsible for determining the subject of praise based on whether the audience will succumb or not to the manipulation of *πάρφασις*.

Φθόνος and *πάρφασις*, therefore, are of central interest in the scholarship around Ajax's downfall within Pindar's narratives. But again scholars' arguments focus on the imposition of *φθόνος* and *πάρφασις* upon Ajax as a passive victim, especially at the hands of Odysseus, as opposed to Ajax's active reception of these afflictions. Miller, for example, does not consider Ajax's characterisation beyond his place as the "good" antithesis of Odysseus.²⁸ Instead there is a significant opportunity to explore Ajax's reception of *φθόνος* by means of Odysseus' *πάρφασις* in Pindar's *Nemean* 8. Relevant themes and characterisations of Ajax in the wider body of Greek literature, particularly Sophocles' *Ajax* and Antisthenes' *Odysseus* and *Ajax* speeches, can shed light here.

There is an array of scholarship on Ajax's characterisation and relationships within Sophocles' *Ajax*.²⁹ In my thesis I am primarily concerned with the concept of disease in the *Ajax*. In her study on the disease theme in Sophocles, Penelope Biggs describes Ajax's deliberate isolation in Sophocles' *Ajax* as a "heroic self-sufficiency" that becomes meaningless since Ajax can no longer communicate with his peers or act in a way that deems him as heroic as he once was.³⁰ Biggs states that it is Ajax's loss of *eukleia* (good repute) in the *hoplōn krisis* that diseases him. Since his community no longer recognises his excellence as best of the Greeks after Achilles, then Ajax himself cannot recognise his excellence. George Gellie agrees that Ajax's murderous intentions derive from his loss in the *hoplōn krisis*, but it is Athena's infiltration of madness that in fact appears like the cruel disease victimising Ajax.³¹ This

²⁷ Park (2013) 33-4.

²⁸ Miller (1982) 115.

²⁹ See, for example, Segal (1981), Blundell (1989) and Hesk (2003).

³⁰ Biggs (1966) 225-6.

³¹ Gellie (1972) 7.

possible sense of victimisation could therefore be an important indicator of general ancient perceptions of Ajax, which in turn would have informed Pindar's own Ajax narratives.

My final argument in this thesis explores the potential for Pindar's Ajax to be representative of mytho-historical hero-athletes through Ajax and the hero-athletes' shared experiences of social reintegration failure. Hubbard touches upon the comparison between Ajax and hero-athletes such as Kleomedes of Astypalaia as heroes who cannot be reintegrated back into their respective communities, but Hubbard does not explore this comparison to its full extent.³² Kevin Crotty compares Neoptolemus within Pindar's *Nemean 7* to the narratives of hero-athletes, but he does not explore the comparison with Ajax.³³ Beyond Hubbard and Crotty, there are no apparent studies of the comparisons between Ajax's characterisation and the hero-athlete theme, which is a gap that I shall attempt to partially fill. Despite this specific gap, however, there is plenty of relevant scholarship on the theme of social reintegration in the epinician context, which shall form the basis of my arguments. Joseph Fontenrose's early catalogue of hero-athletes provides invaluable accounts of the comparable hero-athletes that I shall discuss.

Crotty, Leslie Kurke and Gregory Nagy all discuss the concept of the return home, or the "*nostos* loop". Crotty discusses the return home as a major epinician theme and its use for poem structure, such as the loop structure of *Nemean 9*, with which Kurke agrees.³⁴ Crotty also introduces the idea of the return home both as a rebirth and as a time of uncertainty and ongoing challenge.³⁵ But Crotty asserts that the ode itself should provide a sense of inclusion for the victor who must reintegrate, now that he is reborn, into his society. Kurke, however, emphasises the οἶκος (household) as central to the victor's return.³⁶ Kurke advances Crotty's argument of the rebirth and return home by placing its effects onto the entire *oikos*, rather than the individual

³² Hubbard (2000) 324.

³³ Crotty (1982) 122-4.

³⁴ Crotty (1982) 109, Kurke (1991) 49.

³⁵ Crotty (1982) 110-20.

³⁶ Kurke (1991) 71.

alone. The victor's return brings glory to those in the household who were initially left behind when the athlete first set out. The return brings vitality to the household, as would a new birth.³⁷

Nagy echoes Crotty and Kurke's comments on the athlete's ritual segregation and subsequent reintegration. According to Nagy the ode operates as a formal reintegration and a final stage in the ritual process of the athlete's ordeal.³⁸ While Crotty speaks of on-going challenges for the athlete upon his return, both Kurke and Nagy advocate for a sense of safety upon the athlete's return. But Nagy, however, considers how an athlete's return to his polis represents an expansion of his community from his immediate family to his entire polis. In this sense, the responsibility and representation of that athlete grows and becomes more challenging for the individual. Nagy, Crotty and Kurke's discussions around the athlete's return are important for my argument because they highlight crucial areas of challenge for the athlete – both the journey and the return. These translate to the challenges that Ajax faces in his heroic journey and return to his community.

Kurke and Nagy's discussions of remembrance and honour for the dead will also be of significance in my discussion of Pindar's honouring of Ajax in death despite his social reintegration failure. Kurke notes the "intimate connection" for remembrance of the dead, especially in a familial sense, which drives a family's obligations to procreate and a continuing will to live on.³⁹ Kurke emphasises that the immortality that song gives to the athlete is primarily for the benefit of the family, rather than the individual himself. Nagy views ritual athletic competition in general to be about honouring the dead, which alludes to a kind of cyclical effect that athletic competition, victory rituals and subsequent immortality through song formulate. This will be of relevance when considering Pindar's honouring of Ajax in the Aeginetan context.

Explorations of Ajax's character, therefore, remain limited in Pindaric scholarship and in discussions of hero-athletes and social reintegration. While there has been a closer focus on

³⁷ Kurke (1991) 64-5.

³⁸ Nagy (1990) 144.

³⁹ Kurke (1991) 62-3.

Odysseus' role in Pindar's Ajax narratives of the *hoplōn krisis*, Ajax's role and characterisation have remained largely under-defined as simply the nobler antithesis of Odysseus. I therefore hope that my study of Ajax as an ambivalent hero in Pindar's odes shall provide considerable alternative readings to the significance of Ajax's character and heroism in the ancient tradition. In my aim to present the ambivalent heroism of Ajax, I intend to show how a closer inspection of Ajax's characterisation throughout ancient literature might reveal underlying purposes for Pindar's Ajax as representative of a particular archetype of athlete in fifth century BCE athletic culture.

It might seem that my suggestions of Ajax's ambivalent heroism across Pindar's odes through a series of characteristic weaknesses are counter to Bundy's argument for each of the odes as stand-alone units. However, rather than viewing Pindar's three Ajax narratives as an intentionally linked series, I prefer to consider these similarities in the characterisation of Ajax as reflective of Pindar's understanding of Ajax within the wider ancient tradition. Ajax's ambivalence in Pindar's odes is what I imagine stems largely from Pindar's understanding of Ajax from the Epic Cycle. Therefore, before I begin my analysis of Ajax as an ambivalent hero in Pindar's odes, I present chapter one as a review of Ajax's appearances within Homer's *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and the wider Epic Cycle in order to understand the tradition from which Pindar found his source material.

Chapter One: Ajax in the Epic Cycle

The characterisation of Ajax throughout ancient literature from the Epic Cycle to Quintus Smyrnaeus can be, at times, thematically inconsistent. The influence of the Epic Cycle's Ajax on the Pindaric Ajax can be especially difficult to define collectively. Aspects of Ajax's characterisation in different parts of the Epic Cycle appear to inform Pindar's approach, such as Ajax's anger and silence, which appear especially in the *Odyssey*. This makes the *Odyssey* crucial for my investigation; however, the *Iliad* is also important, not least because it is the most abundant source for the characterisations of Homeric heroes collectively and it remains the only substantial source depicting Ajax before the *hoplōn krisis*. But it also raises important questions about Ajax's relationship with the gods, his heroic rank and individuality and his preference for action over speech. Below I explore these tropes in the *Iliad* as well as Ajax's fulfilment of the Homeric heroic code and his role as a defence fighter. I also address Ajax's anger and silence in the *Odyssey* and the speculations that survive around the Ajax narratives in the lost parts of the Epic Cycle. An understanding of Ajax's characterisation throughout the Epic Cycle shall provide critical scope for my understanding of Pindar's source material at the time that he composed his own Ajax narratives in the odes.

There is no doubt that Ajax is one of the most significant fighters throughout the *Iliad*. He does not shy away from the prospect of death on the battlefield and in *Iliad 2* Homer himself calls Ajax the best of all the men (ἀνδρῶν...ἄριστος) while Achilles is not fighting (*Il.* 2.768). In *Iliad 3* Priam identifies Ajax as being a head and shoulders taller than the rest of the Greeks (3.227) and Helen labels him "wall of the Achaians" (ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν) (3.229). It is often in moments of defence that Ajax proves most powerful with his ultimate defence weapon, his shield. In *Iliad 7*, the poet introduces Ajax's worth when the Greeks pray that Ajax will be drawn by lots to fight against Hector (7.179). Ajax is happy to be drawn, and he fights convincingly over Hector with a consistent upper hand until the heralds call off the fighting (7.244-82). At this point Hector also hails Ajax as the best of the Greeks (Ἀχαιῶν φέρτατος)

(7.289).⁴⁰ Amidst these passages, too, Ajax’s appearance incites τρόμος, “trembling”, in the Trojan fighters (7.214-5). The poet also provides a brief description of Ajax’s shield, the layers of which are more effective against Hector’s spear than Hector’s shield is against Ajax’s spear (7.221-4). In *Iliad* 11, Hector appears to actively avoid Ajax on the battlefield (11.541-2), while Ajax, who is compared to a “stubborn donkey” (νωθῆς ὄνος), keeps the Trojans back with his shield (11.556-73). Even when Ajax is driven back by the Trojans, like a donkey he is driven slowly and with great difficulty. Later in *Iliad* 14, Ajax wounds Hector with a rock, an act of seemingly impressive warfare improvisation (14.409-20). Glaukos then taunts Hector at *Iliad* 17.166-8 for being an inferior fighter to Ajax, while Ajax appears in *Iliad* 17 slaying many Trojans in order to protect the body of Patroclus (17.235; 285; 293-8).

Ajax’s shield is introduced in *Iliad* 7 and is described as a wall (πύργος) (7.219), which provides the basis for Ajax’s epithet as ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν. In *Iliad* 8, Ajax fights as a unit with his half-brother Teucer, who takes shelter intermittently behind Ajax’s shield between moments of combat (8.266-72). In *Iliad* 18, Achilles singles out Ajax’s shield as the only piece of armour that he would consider worthy of wearing himself (18.192-3). And in *Iliad* 15, Ajax performs an *aristeia*-worthy battle sequence to defend the Greek ships from the Trojan forces. At *Iliad* 15.728, Ajax anticipates his own death in the fight but he spurs on the Greeks with a speech, finishing with the line, “salvation’s light is in our hands’ work, not the mercy of battle” (τῷ ἐν χερσὶ φόως, οὐ μελιχίη πολέμοιο) (15.741).⁴¹ I would say that μελιχίος here is meant more in the sense of “winning”, since Ajax perceives the gods to be on the Trojans’ side at this moment. Therefore, Ajax encourages his comrades with their own physical abilities over divine help. Ajax’s *aristeia* here is predominantly defensive, which the absence of the gods emphasises, since Zeus encourages the Trojans’ attack (see, for example, Zeus’ help to Hector, 15.610). In contrast to this, Diomedes performs his *aristeia* in *Iliad* 5 with Athena’s encouragement

⁴⁰ Nagy (1979), 31, notes how Hector calls Ajax the best of the Greeks for his might and artifice, but he will ultimately be bested by the might of Achilles and, later in the *hoplōn krisis*, the artifice of Odysseus.

⁴¹ All of my quoted Greek texts for Homer, *Odyssey*, are derived from Merry, vol. 1 (1870) and vol. 2 (1898). All Greek texts for Homer, *Iliad*, are derived from Monro and Allen, vol.1 (1951) and vol. 2 (1956). All translations for Homer, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, are derived from Lattimore (1951 and 1967).

throughout, during a battle sequence that is more evenly matched between the Greeks and Trojans. Diomedes even wounds Ares with the help of Athena, proving his battle prowess (5.855-61). Ajax, on the other hand, is more limited in movement because of his wall-like shield. In *Iliad* 17 Ajax similarly fights defensively again, fending the Trojans off Patroclus' body, during which he takes many Trojans' lives (17.236). Earlier in *Iliad* 17, Ajax is compared to a lion standing over his cubs, thus emphasising Ajax's defensive protectiveness over his Greek comrades (17.133-6). In these instances, Ajax fights in a more stationary fashion rather than slaying large numbers of Trojans in an active attack like that of Diomedes in *Iliad* 5. The shield and the epithet therefore emphasise Ajax's predominant role as a defence fighter, which suggests that Ajax serves his comrades in a particularly restrictive role. But despite these restrictions, Ajax's effectiveness in his role as defence fighter remains the most outstanding aspect of his heroism.

Ajax also determines his value as an effective speaker throughout the *Iliad*, thus fulfilling Nestor's definition of the heroic code as being a speaker of words and a doer of deeds (*Iliad* 9.443). During the embassy to Achilles in *Iliad* 9, Achilles responds more favourably to Ajax's speech than Odysseus or Nestor's speeches, praising it as "spoken after my own mind" (πάντα τί μοι κατὰ θυμὸν εἰσαο μῦθ' ἴσασθαι) (9.645).⁴² We have seen above, too, that in *Iliad* 15 Ajax encourages his comrades to fight on in defence of the Greek ships, despite his own concerns for his mortality. Ajax delivers his encouragement in his distinctive "terrible below" (σμερδὸν βοόων) (15.687, 732), which is described several lines earlier as a "voice [that] went always up to the bright sky" (φωνὴ δέ οἱ αἰθέρ' ἵκανε) (15.686). In his master's thesis, Scott Barnard notes how Ajax's booming voice represents a different mode of heroic speech to the persuasive methods of Odysseus. But Ajax's method remains effective for its battlefield purposes, in the "brute force of its impact".⁴³ While Odysseus' persuasion suits his cunning,

⁴² See also Trapp (1961) 272. In his article, "Ajax in the *Iliad*", Richard Trapp debunks the series of earlier views in scholarship of Ajax as dim-witted and clumsy by emphasising key moments when Ajax shows remarkable intelligence and fighting prowess.

⁴³ Barnard (2011) 60. Compare, for example, Odysseus' speech in *Iliad* 3, in which his words "came drifting down like the winter snows" (νιφάδεσσιν εἰκότα χειμερήϊσιν) (*Il.* 3.222).

Ajax's booming voice complements his physical size and foremost effectiveness in the midst of battle. Another interesting point to consider here is when Hector calls Ajax an "inarticulate ox" (ἀμαρτοεπές, βουλάϊε) at *Iliad* 13.824. This is Homer's only use of ἀμαρτοεπης and it is the only explicit suggestion in the *Iliad* that Ajax may have been an inarticulate speaker, since his speeches by and large achieve their desired effects. In fact, these instances show that Ajax predominantly employs his speaking ability in moments that require drastic action – Achilles' return to the battlefield, the Greeks' defence in *Iliad* 15 and, as I discuss below, Ajax's desperate prayer to Zeus to bring vision back to his eyes in *Iliad* 17. This utilisation of speech emphasises Ajax's foremost effectiveness as a man of action, perhaps favouring action over articulate speech.

Just as Ajax anticipates his likely death in *Iliad* 15, he does so again in *Iliad* 17 in a speech to Menelaus while protecting Patroclus' body from the incoming Trojans (17.240-2). Ajax's acceptance of impending death at this moment comes after Menelaus' own deliberation earlier in *Iliad* 17 over whether to flee or remain on the battlefield, asking himself, "Yet still, why does the heart within me debate these things?" (ἀλλὰ τίη μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θυμός), and ultimately choosing to flee (*Il.* 17.97). Odysseus, earlier at *Iliad* 11.407, asks himself the same question, in identical verse to the line at 17.97. But unlike Menelaus, Odysseus chooses to remain on the battlefield. Thus, Homer explicitly contrasts the heroes' values in order to highlight their varying worthiness for *kleos*, among which Ajax scores highly.⁴⁴ Later in *Iliad* 17 Ajax speaks to himself thoughtfully, recognising Zeus' assistance on the Trojan side, and also showing concern for Achilles who is not yet aware of Patroclus' death. Ajax is then proactive in his concern, having Menelaus send Antilochus to inform Achilles of the news (17.652-5).

Finally, Ajax appears throughout Patroclus' funeral games in *Iliad* 23, most notably in the wrestling contest against Odysseus and the armoured fighting contest against Diomedes. In both instances, Ajax draws with his opponents: Achilles calls a draw between the wrestling

⁴⁴ For a more detailed discussion of Menelaus' comparative lack of heroism, see Renehan (1987) 111.

(23.734-7), and the Greeks collectively call off the armoured fighting when they fear for Ajax's safety (23.822-3). Again there is a lacking sense of dynamism in Ajax's one-on-one combats with Diomedes and Odysseus in the funeral games as there is in his combats with Hector on the battlefield. These one-on-one combats seem similarly static to Ajax's shield-bearing combat, which might suggest that Ajax's limited fighting style extends beyond the battlefield.

Compared to other Homeric heroes, Ajax receives little divine assistance on the battlefield. Unlike the mortal-divine relationships between Odysseus and Athena, Diomedes and Athena, Achilles and Thetis and various Trojans and Apollo, Ajax seems to have had a fraught relationship with the gods. He comments on several occasions that the gods have deserted him and were rather assisting his opponents. At *Iliad* 15.735, Ajax rhetorically asks the Greeks if they have any help from behind, meaning divine help, and at 17.629-33, Ajax bitterly remarks that Zeus is clearly on the Trojans' side. Two instances in which Ajax does appeal to Zeus, however, are first in nonchalance and then in desperation. In *Iliad* 7 Ajax suggests that his Greek comrades might want to pray to Zeus for him, but his own self-endorsement to follow shows that he backs himself more with the "self-confidence" – as Richard Trapp calls it – in his own strength and skill (7.194-9).⁴⁵ In *Iliad* 17, however, Ajax desperately prays to Zeus to return clear vision to the Greeks, after Ajax recognises Zeus' help on the Trojan side (17.645-7). His prayer comes across as somewhat hopeless when he acknowledges that Zeus might prefer to destroy them, but Ajax's weeping seems to be what moves Zeus to pity, at which point he gives the Greeks some respite by clearing the mist from their eyes (7.648-50).⁴⁶ Ajax also receives divine assistance in *Iliad* 13 when Poseidon fills the two Ajaxes with "powerful valour" (μένεος κρατεροῖο) (13.60). Poseidon, therefore, does not personally favour Telamonian Ajax; in fact, he moves on to assist the Greeks collectively (13.83). Furthermore, Oelian Ajax is the first to recognise Poseidon's help and Telamonian Ajax only seems to recognise the assistance after Oelian Ajax has spoken of it aloud (13.66-

⁴⁵ Trapp (1961) 274.

⁴⁶ Stanford (1978), 189, quotes 'Longinus' from *De Sublimitate*, who read Ajax's prayer to Zeus as "the true passionate feeling of an Ajax", praying for light rather than life, accepting of death but merely wanting to be able to see what he is doing. I refer to Stanford's article on the light and darkness theme in Sophocles in chapter four.

80). Ajax is therefore not completely devoid of divine aid throughout the *Iliad*, but his view of the gods seems somewhat reserved in his preference to rely on personal strength.

Ajax's limitations as a defence fighter and his perceived isolation from the gods perhaps foreshadows his susceptibility to the downfall that he experiences later in the Epic Cycle. Ajax's uniqueness in physical size, the strength of his shield and his ability to fight convincingly over Hector make him stand out from his comrades, but these tropes also isolate him from some of his comrades who fight in a more conventional heroic style. For example, Achilles and Diomedes' *aristeiai* are on the attack, during which they slaughter large numbers of Trojans. Ajax's defensiveness presents him as a hero whose skillset becomes somewhat more limited than others by nature of his specific defence role. This setting apart of Ajax from his comrades perhaps looks forward to Ajax's extreme self-isolation after the *hoplōn krisis* in Sophocles' *Ajax*, which I discuss in chapter four. While there is no explicit reference to Ajax's downfall throughout the *Iliad*, these presentations of Ajax as an isolated figure may help to contextualise his eventual pathway towards his downfall.

While Ajax can be seen as a figure of isolation, his role as defence fighter in conjunction with his comrades' attacking style of fighting emphasises his specific role within the overall Greek army. This makes Ajax appear, for want of a better expression, as just "one of the many". That is, Ajax must rely on his comrades in attack as much as they rely on his defence. While his role is crucial to the war effort, his position below Achilles at *Iliad* 2.768 leaves him to fall among the rest of his comrades as a member of the many. Even though Homer awards Ajax the title of best of the men after Achilles here, the position moves around between Agamemnon, Ajax, Diomedes and Patroclus while Achilles is not fighting.⁴⁷ As Nagy puts it, the title is "hotly contested", and so Ajax's position as second after Achilles is not steadfast.⁴⁸ Ajax's physical size and defence prowess make him worthy for the title, but his restrictiveness leaves the title open for others.

⁴⁷ Agamemnon proclaims himself to be best of the Greeks at *Iliad* 1.91 and 2.82, Pandaros refers to Diomedes as best of the Greeks at 5.103 and Menelaus hails Patroclus as best of the Greeks at 17.689.

⁴⁸ Nagy (1979) 26.

A final aspect that gives the impression of Ajax as one of the many is that he shares his name with Oelian Ajax, who holds similar heroic status. Lewis Richard Farnell acknowledges the possibility that the two Ajaxes emerge from what was originally a single Ajax, whose narrative inconsistencies called for a formation of two separate characters.⁴⁹ But Farnell notes the foolishness of presenting two characters with the same name. Instead he believes that Homer was in fact following a tradition that two significant warriors coming from completely different regions just happened to share the same name. Nevertheless, even though Oelian Ajax carries the rather less dignified epithet of μείων, the lesser (2.528), the sharing of their names brings the two Ajaxes closer together as ordinary comrades. Homer certainly takes advantage of this, as both Ajaxes regularly appear as a dual unit, the “Aiantes”, complementing one another in battle and council.⁵⁰ But this does affect their individuality, as the two become fused together in a similar way that Ajax and Teucer fight together as a dual unit. This idea of Ajax as just one of the many probably made his eventual downfall all the more uncomfortable, since his representation as just one of the many Homeric heroes would have proved the random allotment of such a downfall. Audiences would surely have been discomfited to see Ajax’s transgressive behaviour following the *hoplōn krisis*, knowing that such behaviour could have possessed any one of the Homeric heroes.

Ajax’s singular appearance in the *Odyssey* during Odysseus’ visit to the Underworld in *Odyssey* 11 presents Ajax as angry and speechless, which are key character tropes that Pindar later employs in his presentation of Ajax in the odes. The *Odyssey* provides no explicit mention of Ajax’s attempted murder of the Greek generals before his suicide; instead Odysseus directs the blame for Ajax’s death towards Zeus (*Od.* 11.558-60):

...οὐδέ τις ἄλλος
 αἴτιος ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς Δαναῶν στρατὸν αἰχμητῶν
 ἐκπάγλως ἔχθαιρε, τεῖν δ’ ἐπὶ μοῖραν ἔθηκεν.

...and there is no other / to blame, but Zeus; he, in his terrible hate for the
 army / of Danaan spearmen, visited this destruction upon you.

⁴⁹ Farnell (1921) 305-6.

⁵⁰ See, for example, *Iliad* 2.406, 4.273 and 12.265. Farnell (1921), 306, agrees that Homer presents the two Ajaxes fighting together because “the identity of name [had] an attractive force”.

Odysseus' blame of Zeus here could possibly allude to the madness that is divinely bestowed upon Ajax in other accounts of Ajax's downfall. In the *Ajax*, however, Sophocles presents Athena as the only one responsible for casting the madness upon Ajax and diverting his murderous rampage towards livestock.⁵¹ In *Odyssey* 11, the poet refers to Ajax's anger three times: at 11.544 and 11.565 Ajax is κεχολωμένος, angry still over the outcome of the *hoplōn krisis*, and at 11.562, Odysseus pleads for Ajax to suppress his μένος. Ajax's motive for his suicide, therefore, is familiar to us as it is the same χόλος over the outcome of the *hoplōn krisis* that drives him to suicide in Pindar's *Nemean* 7. The fact that Ajax's χόλος is mentioned twice and is supplemented by Odysseus' alternative use of μένος brings to the fore a seeming sense of hopelessness in having Ajax remembered for anything other than his ill fate.

Furthermore, Ajax's stubborn silence throughout his encounter with Odysseus – retreating into shadow without responding to Odysseus (11.563-4) – undoubtedly provoked later authors' tendencies to characterise Ajax as less eloquent or versatile than Odysseus. Ajax's silence against Odysseus translates well to Pindar's characterisation of Ajax as ἄγλωσσος (ineloquent, speechless) at *Nemean* 8.24. Just as being ἄγλωσσος is Ajax's detrimental weakness against the more eloquent Odysseus in *Nemean* 8, perhaps Homer here is following a tradition from elsewhere in the Epic Cycle, in which Ajax's poorer speech or lack of speech led to his downfall. Now, in death, it seems that Ajax would remain perpetually silent and fall into the oblivion that Pindar mentions in *Nemean* 8. But Barnard views Ajax's silence in *Odyssey* 11 as “a speech act in its own right”.⁵² Ajax's refusal to engage with Odysseus seems to strip Odysseus of his combative rhetorical skill, especially with the absence of an invested audience. It is important to remember as well that it is Odysseus himself who is retelling the encounter, which may limit the audience's believability in the presence of Odysseus' own bias. In this sense, perhaps it would be wrong for Odysseus to give a voice to Ajax, since, as Pindar's *Nemean* 8 suggests, Odysseus so emphatically took Ajax's voice away in the *hoplōn krisis*.

⁵¹ This is a tradition that Quintus Smyrnaeus adopts in later centuries too.

⁵² Barnard (2011) 66.

Therefore, I would view Ajax's silence in *Odyssey* 11 both as a reminder of his poorer speech in the *hoplōn krisis* and as an act of effective defiance that refuses to condone Odysseus' attempt to shift the blame towards the gods.

The *Aethiopsis* and the *Little Iliad* both address the *hoplōn krisis*, the subsequent suicide of Ajax and his funeral to follow, and so these two epics would have been Pindar's greater influence from within the Epic Cycle. Martin West says as much, stating that the *Aethiopsis* in particular "clearly impressed" both Pindar and Sophocles.⁵³ In the *Chrestomathy*, Proclus provides a summary of the *Little Iliad* (the summary itself is attributed to Lesches of Mytilene), which merely states that Ajax becomes mad, slaughters the livestock and commits suicide.⁵⁴ Proclus' summary of the events in the *Aethiopsis* is even more brief, only mentioning the quarrel between Ajax and Odysseus over Achilles' armour.⁵⁵ West assumes though that Proclus' summary of the *Little Iliad* also informs the events of the *Aethiopsis*, considering their similarity in plot outline.⁵⁶ Ajax's motive for suicide in the *Odyssey* may also be similar in the *Aethiopsis* and *Little Iliad* if his anger remains his predominant emotion in response to the loss of the *hoplōn krisis*.

No specific characterisation of Ajax survives from the *Aethiopsis* or the *Little Iliad*. The only fragment of note is from the Scholiast on Aristophanes' comic play *Knights*, which tells of some Greek warriors who overhear two Trojan girls debating whether Ajax or Odysseus should win Achilles' armour. The first Trojan girl makes the claim for Ajax's superiority for carrying Achilles' body from battle, whereas the second Trojan girl argues that anyone could carry a body while Odysseus' continued fighting was more heroic.⁵⁷ The Trojan girls' role is important here, not least for this plot point's long afterlife, reappearing in Quintus Smyrnaeus' speech narratives in the fourth century CE. The purpose of the Trojan girls as judges may suggest that Odysseus' superiority over Ajax is so obvious that even the enemy could identify

⁵³ West (2013) 135.

⁵⁴ West (2003) 120-1.

⁵⁵ West (2003) 112-3.

⁵⁶ West (2013) 161; See also 159-60 for further reasoning for the inclusion of Ajax's madness in the *Aethiopsis*. See also *Aethiopsis* Frag. 6 'Scholiast on Pindar,' which alludes to Ajax having suicided at dawn, West (2003) 116-7.

⁵⁷ West (2003) 124-7.

as much. It could also suggest that, in having the girls choose Odysseus, the poet is deliberately discrediting Ajax. These possibilities cannot be determined without knowing more about Ajax and Odysseus' characterisations within the *Little Iliad*, but the remark by Porphyry of the second century CE that Ajax does not receive a proper burial in the *Little Iliad* might suggest that Ajax's characterisation was less favourable than that of Odysseus.⁵⁸ West suggests that the *Little Iliad* has often been noted for its humour and that this version of the *hoplōn krisis* is the "silliest and most far-fetched".⁵⁹ As far as the influence of the *Little Iliad* on Pindar's narratives goes, I would think that Pindar did not respond as favourably to the trivialisation of the Greek heroes, least of all in dishonouring Ajax.

Ajax is therefore conventionally heroic in his fighting prowess and speaking ability throughout the *Iliad*. But he is also restricted in his fighting style, and his speeches tend to be reserved for moments of drastic action. These restrictions make Ajax susceptible to an isolation that likely informed his characterisation and actions in the *Aethiopis* and *Little Iliad*. We can take further hints of Ajax's characterisation in these lost epics from his anger and speechlessness in the *Odyssey*, which become key character tropes in Pindar's Ajax narratives. I therefore take the general ambivalence of Ajax's heroism in epic as a foundation for discussing his ambivalence in Pindar's narratives in chapters two and three. However, it is important to note that I would not necessarily consider Ajax to be any more or less ambivalent than Achilles, Odysseus, Agamemnon or other lesser known Homeric heroes. Achilles' refusal to fight, Odysseus' consistent use of trickery and Agamemnon's behaviour in taking Briseis from Achilles all raise important questions about the complex nature of heroism. Transgressions, it seems, are par for the course of being heroic in the tradition of ancient Greek literature. This, I argue below, is an aspect of Ajax's heroism that Pindar acknowledges in his presentation of Ajax in the odes.

⁵⁸ See *Fragment 3* by Porphyry in West (2013) 178.

⁵⁹ West (2013) 170; 176.

Chapter Two: Motive and ambiguity in *Nemean 7* and *Isthmian 4*

Pindar makes direct reference to Ajax in seven of his extant odes. *Nemean 2* mentions Ajax as a convincing fighter against Hector, and *Nemean 4* and *Isthmian 5* make passing reference to Ajax as an Aeacid. In *Isthmian 6*, Heracles prophesies Ajax's momentous birth. *Nemean 7*, *Isthmian 4* and *Nemean 8* all address the suicide of Ajax in greater detail. These three odes are of primary importance to my discussion because they each present themes and narrative ambiguities that allude to Ajax's character ambivalence.

In my discussion of the three odes in chapters two and three I follow the chronological order suggested by Richard Stoneman: *Nemean 7* (c.485), *Isthmian 4* (c.477) and *Nemean 8* (c.459).⁶⁰ Chronology matters since I suggest that *Nemean 8* appears more conclusive in its narrative than the narratives of *Nemean 7* and *Isthmian 4*. Ajax appears in *Nemean 7* and *Isthmian 4* mostly to establish the theme of misplaced dishonour, which Pindar then applies to other more central mythic figures and the victors and their families in the odes. While this helps us to understand Pindar's overall characterisation of Ajax as the more truthful and honourable hero in comparison to his counterpart Odysseus, narrative ambiguities in *Nemean 7* and *Isthmian 4* suggest that Pindar's Ajax is more complicated than a mere representative of goodness and truth. The first ambiguity is that Ajax can be considered as one of the majority of men who are blind to the truth in *Nemean 7*. The second ambiguity appears in *Isthmian 4* and possibly suggests that Ajax blames the Greeks and is also blamed by the Greeks at the same time. My understanding of these ambiguities is that Pindar presents characteristic weaknesses in Ajax, so that Ajax appears more ambivalent than just the good up against the inferior enemy. In doing this Pindar would remind his audiences that Ajax's weaknesses were a part of his undoing, but also that Ajax's misfortune could have happened to any of his comrades, since all heroes tend to exhibit elements of ambivalence. *Nemean 8*, on the other hand, places Ajax at the centre of its mythic narrative and overall message about φθόνοϛ. I shall argue in chapter three that φθόνοϛ is a disease-like quality that infects Ajax in *Nemean 8* by way of his weakness

⁶⁰ Stoneman (1997) xi-xiii.

of being ἄγλωσσος (ineloquent, speechless), thus maintaining his ambivalence. But now I explore the narrative ambiguities in *Nemean 7* and *Isthmian 4* that present Ajax as a flawed but unfairly dishonoured hero, which shall later support my thesis for *Nemean 8*.

If Pindar composed *Nemean 7* around 485BCE, he will have been an established poet by this time, based on the suggested date for the first ode, *Pythian 10*, around 498.⁶¹ *Nemean 7* celebrates Sogenes of Aegina, victor in the boys' pentathlon.⁶² The Ajax narrative establishes the theme of misplaced dishonour, which Pindar then applies to Neoptolemus as the central figure of the main mythic narrative, to whom Pindar offers corrected praise. Both Ajax and Neoptolemus are examples of unsung heroes whose honour is threatened by “deep darkness” (σκότος πολύς) (7.12-13). In other words, their honour is at threat of being forgotten. The theme of death is consistent throughout the ode as well: neither Ajax nor Neoptolemus survive in their respective stories, but since death comes to all anyway, (19-20, 30-2), it is important for Pindar to offer the appropriate level of praise to those who deserve it, so that they are not cast into darkness. Pindar then follows through with what he believes to be an appropriate level of praise for Sogenes and his family, which he prefaces with the assurance that he shall not overpraise them (70-76).

Ajax, then, although addressed briefly, is the nobler, more truthful and underpraised side of the dichotomy between the underpraised and the overpraised. Pindar introduces the brief Ajax narrative following a reminder that rich and poor all face death equally (17-20). Pindar then directs his blame towards Homer and Odysseus for their respective roles in Ajax's dishonouring. Homer's poetry overpraises Odysseus, while Odysseus deceives the Greeks into believing that he is most worthy for the armour of Achilles (*Nemean 7.20-23*):

...ἐγὼ δὲ πλέον' ἔλομαι
λόγον Ὀδυσσεός ἢ πάθαν διὰ τὸν ἄδυεπῆ γενέσθ' Ὅμηρον·
ἐπεὶ ψεύδεσ' οἱ ποτανᾶ <τε> μαχανᾶ
σεμνὸν ἔπεστί τι·
σοφία δὲ κλέπτει παράγοισα μύθοις.

⁶¹ Stoneman (1997) xi.

⁶² Race (2012), 70, describes *Nemean 7* as the “most difficult ode to understand” of Pindar's extant odes for its narrative flow and narrative ambiguity as well as a number of textual problems (such as lines 33-4).

...I believe that Odysseus' story / has become greater than his actual
suffering because of Homer's sweet verse,
for upon his fictions and soaring craft / rests great majesty, and his skill
deceives with misleading tales.⁶³

Discussion over the ambiguity of οἱ in line 22 has been well covered in scholarship. Gretchen Kromer suggests that the οἱ is intentionally ambiguous as a pronoun for either Homer or Odysseus, and that this intentional ambiguity exemplifies the deception of poetry that Pindar wishes to condemn in this passage.⁶⁴ Glenn Most argues that the οἱ indeed refers to both Homer and Odysseus, since Homer tells Odysseus' story of his wanderings in *Odyssey* 9-12 through Odysseus' own words, thus blurring the lines between poet and hero.⁶⁵ This would be fitting if viewing Odysseus' "story" (λόγος) as synonymous with Homer's "sweet verse" (ἀδυεπιῆ) in the same line. But another way of reading λόγον Ὀδυσσεύος (21) might be in the subjective genitive rather than the objective genitive, therefore as "the story told by Odysseus" as opposed to "the story about Odysseus (told by Homer)". In this case Odysseus' λόγος here may be referring to his speech in the *hoplōn krisis*. This would be more fitting in the context of the narrative, since the passage follows with Ajax's suicide as the outcome of men's blindness to truth and belief in fictions. If my interpretation is correct, Homer's *Odyssey* would then be the ἀδυεπιῆ that eventually gives strength to Odysseus' credibility elsewhere in the Epic Cycle – in this case the *hoplōn krisis* as told in the *Aethiopsis* and *Little Iliad*. If the οἱ refers to Odysseus alone, the mention of Homer may just reflect Pindar's discontent over the amount of promotion that Homer gave Odysseus in composing the *Odyssey*, the popularity and poetic nuance of which gives it a greater illusion of truth.

Ambiguity remains, however, when comparing the use of λόγος in the passage above with its reappearance in the following stanza (*Nemean* 7.31-2):

... τιμὰ δὲ γίνεται
ὧν θεὸς ἀβρὸν αὔξει λόγον τεθνακότων.⁶⁶

⁶³ All Greek texts and translations for Pindar are derived from Race, vol. 1 and 2 (1997).

⁶⁴ Kromer (1975) 437-8. See also Mann (1994) 327.

⁶⁵ Most (1985) 150.

⁶⁶ See Kurke (1992), 106-12, for the argument that the associations between ἀβρός (fair, splendid) and divine praise, κλέος (glory) and κῦδος (prestige) emphasise immortality as the "highest form of luxury" (111) over any material

...yet honour belongs to those / whose fair story a god exults after they die.

The use of λόγος here clearly refers to λόγοι told about people, rather than λόγοι told by people, as in the subjective genitive argument that I have presented for Odysseus above. If Pindar had wanted to differentiate stories from speech, he could have used μῦθος, which Homer uses as a term for speech throughout the *Iliad*.⁶⁷ But μῦθος appears only as a negative form of lying in Pindar, both at *Nemean* 7.23 and *Nemean* 8.33 in reference to Odysseus, and also at *Olympian* 1.28b where elaborate μῦθοι can stretch the truth of λόγος itself. This use of λόγος in *Olympian* 1 shows that λόγος has a broader meaning for Pindar and that it can be manipulated by tropes such as μῦθοι. Therefore, perhaps Pindar's comparison between Odysseus' λόγος and the λόγοι of others that gods exalt in *Nemean* 8 emphasises Odysseus' need to rely on his own deceptive μῦθος to present a convincing λόγος of himself. This ultimately would prove Pindar's intention of contrasting the lying Odysseus with the truthful Ajax who has been unfairly dishonoured. Furthermore, reading the οἱ as referring to Odysseus would discount the confusion between Pindar's perceived criticism of Homer here in *Nemean* 7 and his praise of Homer in *Isthmian* 4, which I address later in this chapter.

With Odysseus established as the antagonist in *Nemean* 7, it would make sense to view Ajax as the blameless protagonist. But another key narrative ambiguity that immediately follows the Homer-Odysseus quandary may suggest a critical character ambivalence in Ajax: that he is one of the majority of men whose hearts are blind to the truth. Pindar asserts that Ajax's χόλος, his anger, is the primary motive for his suicide, a χόλος that stems from men's blindness to truth (*Nemean* 7.23-7):

...τυφλὸν δ' ἔχει
ἦτορ ὄμιλος ἀνδρῶν ὁ πλεῖστος. εἰ γὰρ ἦν
ἔ τὰν ἀλάθειαν ιδέμεν, οὐ κεν ὄλπων χολωθεῖς

worth. Kurke defines ἀβρότης (splendid) specifically as an aristocratic lifestyle, which is appropriate to Pindar's old-fashioned appeal to the "obsolete aristocratic ideal" (106).

⁶⁷ See, for example, Odysseus' speech described as a μῦθος in *Iliad* 2.199. Richard Martin (1989), 22, differentiates μῦθος, which he describes as an "authoritative speech-act" given by a figure of power implying authority, from an ἔπος (word), which denotes no such values. Rachel Knudsen (2014), 9, also identifies that in *Iliad* 2 Odysseus employs ἔπος when speaking to other figures of power but uses μῦθος to command those below him.

ὁ καρτερός Αἴας ἔπαξε διὰ φρενῶν
λευρόν ξίφος· ὄν κράτιστον Ἀχιλλέος ἄτερ μάχα...

The great majority / of men have a blind heart, for if they could have seen
/ the truth, mighty Ajax, in anger over the arms, / would not have planted
in his chest / the smooth sword. Except for Achilles, in battle he was the
best...

We can assume that the “men” refer to the Greeks who cast the vote in favour of Odysseus in the *hoplōn krisis*, if Pindar is following the same narrative details as he does for the *Nemean 8* narrative, in which the Greeks vote on the outcome (*Nemean 8.26*).⁶⁸ It can also be assumed that the men’s blindness refers to their delusion into believing Odysseus’ fictions that he is more deserving of Achilles’ armour. Pindar’s only other use of the adjective τυφλός occurs in *Paeon 7B* and carries a similar sense of delusion of mind (17B.18). This is opposed to physical blindness, which is the meaning of its only appearance in Homer (*Il.* 6.139).⁶⁹ Out of the men’s blindness then comes Ajax’s χόλος at the result of the *hoplōn krisis*. The χόλος motive aligns closely with Ajax’s appearance in the *Odyssey*, where his soul was still angry (κεχολωμένη) at the outcome of the contest (*Od.* 11.544). In both Pindar and Homer’s accounts it is specifically the loss of Achilles’ armour that angers Ajax; there is no explicit allusion to Ajax’s anger at having failed to slaughter his Greek comrades in retaliation, as is the case in Sophocles’ *Ajax*. Glenn Most claims that it was the “extraordinary blindness” of the Greeks in *Nemean 7* that led to their stupidity in not recognising the heroic superiority of Ajax over Odysseus in the *hoplōn krisis*.⁷⁰ I agree with Most that Ajax’s fate is both “a challenge and a warning” for the ode’s audience, that they must be more careful than the Greeks at recognising deception – a challenge indeed if even the revered Homeric heroes fail to recognise such deception.⁷¹

Where I challenge Most is in the assumption that the blindness of men refers to the Greek voters alone. Instead I wish to suggest that Ajax himself may be one of these men who is blind to the truth. It is unclear whether this blindness in Ajax would be that he too, alongside

⁶⁸ This differs from the *Little Iliad*, in which captive Trojan girls cast the vote. See chapter one.

⁶⁹ In Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*, in which blindness is a major theme, τυφλός appears both in a physical sense (434) and in a metaphorical sense (blindness of mind at line 371, blindness in skill at 389).

⁷⁰ Most (1985) 153.

⁷¹ Most (1985) 154.

the Greek voters, becomes blind to the truth of his rightful position as best of the Greeks, or that he is blind to another kind of crucial truth that leads him to his downfall. Either way, it is worth entertaining the idea of Ajax's blindness because it would provide interesting connections to two key discussion points: the randomness of Ajax's misfortune within the Greek cohort and the concepts of blindness and misconception in Sophocles' *Ajax*.

If Pindar is representing Ajax as just one of the majority of men who are blind to the truth, this would support the idea that Ajax's downfall occurred at random and could have struck any of his Greek comrades. This is a point that both Ajax and Odysseus make clear in Sophocles' *Ajax*. Odysseus pities Ajax, for he can see that the delusion (ἄτη) that has befallen Ajax could strike any mortal (121-6). Ajax, more self-assuredly, prays that his son Eurysaces may have better luck than his father, but be like him in every other sense (550-51). This proves that in Sophocles' narrative, Ajax does not see his downfall as the result of any personal character fault. In fact, he continues to see himself as unequalled by any of the other Greeks (424-6). The randomness of Ajax's misfortune would also be fitting alongside the idea of the Iliadic Ajax as belonging among his comrades and serving a specific purpose within the army. Pindar certainly believes that Ajax was the best of the Greeks in battle after Achilles, of which he reminds his audience (*Nemean* 7.27). But the truth remains that even in death Achilles cannot be replaced by a hero of equal standard in all areas of heroism. Perhaps this is the truth to which Ajax is blind, the truth that his superiority in battle does not automatically place him in the position as best of the Greeks. This could mean that Pindar places Ajax among the majority of men as a reminder that all those who fall below Achilles in heroic status cannot be guaranteed ultimate superiority over their peers.

The second reason why Ajax could be considered blind to the truth is its anticipation for his blindness and misconceptions throughout Sophocles' *Ajax*. I explore these themes briefly here, because I give them more room for discussion in chapter four. But the first crucial point to be made is that there are several instances in Sophocles' narrative where Ajax suffers from a sense of blindness. Firstly, Athena explains to Odysseus how she obscured Ajax's vision

with maddening thoughts (51-2) and will darken his vision again so that Odysseus may safely observe the maddened Ajax under the cover of obscurity (83-5). Secondly, after Ajax has come out of his madness, he appears in a kind of blind state, unsure where to turn (403-4):

ποῖ τις οὖν φύγη ;
ποῖ μολῶν μενῶ ;

Where shall a man flee? / Where shall I turn for refuge?⁷²

This floundering sense of blindness is exacerbated by Ajax's oxymoronic appeal to darkness as his only light at the beginning of the strophe (394-5). Lastly, and most significantly, Ajax does not directly interact with any of the key figures that have the potential to change his mind away from suicide.⁷³ This last point results in Ajax's disastrous misconceptions about his predicament. If he had interacted with Teucer and his sailors (the chorus), he may have been swayed by his community's need for him. Seeing Odysseus' pity might also have dissuaded Ajax from his assumption that the Greeks were laughing at him.⁷⁴ These misconceptions, coupled with the light and darkness imagery throughout, present a picture of blindness in Ajax that is strikingly reminiscent of the blindness motif in Pindar's *Nemean 7* narrative. As I have made clear, it is not certain whether Pindar intended for Ajax to be implied as one of the many who are blind to the truth. But Sophocles' use of blindness and misconception might suggest that he consciously made explicit what had only appeared implicit in Pindar.

The Ajax narrative concludes in the first quarter of *Nemean 7*, but its misplaced dishonour theme remains current throughout. Immediately following, Pindar appeals to death as an equaliser to all – this time to “the obscure” (ἀδόκητον) and “the famous” (δοκέοντα) in possible allusion to Odysseus and Ajax (7.31). William Race provides an alternative translation: the “unexpected and expecting”, which may more simply represent the inevitability of death upon all.⁷⁵ Then follows the narrative of Neoptolemus: Pindar has come

⁷² The Greek text for Sophocles, *Ajax*, is derived from Jebb (1907). Translations for *Ajax* are derived from Moore (1957).

⁷³ I explore this point in more depth in chapter four.

⁷⁴ See *Aj.* 382 and 454. I return to the motif of laughter in Sophocles' *Ajax* in chapter four.

⁷⁵ Race (2012) 77.

to Delphi to help in honouring Neoptolemus accordingly; Neoptolemus had journeyed to Delphi via Molossia and was eventually killed. But there in Delphi Neoptolemus remains, honoured in death as a representative of the Aeacids, overseeing hero celebrations (45-7). It is Pindar himself who has come to offer praise and honour to Neoptolemus (*Nemean* 7.33-4):

βοαθοῶν τοι παρὰ μέγαν ὀμφαλὸν εὐρυκόλπου
μόλον χθονός.

As a helper, then, I have come to the great navel / of the broad-bosomed
earth.

As one βοαθοῶν, helping, Pindar actively seeks to provide Neoptolemus with the praise that he deserves.⁷⁶ We can recognise that the narrative of Neoptolemus is the primary mythic focus of this ode because Neoptolemus is the mythical figure more closely connected to the honouring of the victor, Sogenes. Praise for Aegina and for the victor's father Thearion directly follow the Neoptolemus narrative with another maxim, this time that by "nature" (φύα), fortune is fickle and randomly allotted (54-8). Thearion, however, is an eminent example of one who balances both success and modesty, and Μοῖρα, Fate, has awarded him for it (58-60). Pindar then asserts his place as ξεῖνος (guest friend) to the victor's family (*Nemean* 7.61-3):

ξεῖνος εἰμι· σκοτεινὸν ἀπέχων ψόγον,
ὔδατος ὅτε ῥοὰς φίλον ἐς ἄνδρ' ἄγων
κλέος ἐτήτυμον αἰνέσω· ποτίφορος δ' ἀγαθοῖσι μισθὸς οὗτος.

I am a guest-friend. Keeping away dark blame, / like streams of water I
shall bring genuine fame / with praises to the man who is my friend, for
that is the proper reward for good men.

This is immediately comparable to Pindar's arrival at Delphi at 33-4, "helping" (βοαθοῶν) to honour Neoptolemus accordingly. In the passage above, Pindar has now arrived at the victor's home to honour Sogenes and his family in the same way. Pindar makes further reference to

⁷⁶ Scholarship for *Nemean* 7 discusses the ode's defensive tone and the comments of the Pindaric scholia that Pindar's sympathetic treatment of Neoptolemus in the ode is in fact an apology to the Aeginetans for his negative narration of Neoptolemus in his Paean 6. See Carne-Ross (1985) 141, Race (2012) 70, Stoneman (2014) 158. Richard Stoneman goes as far as saying that the Neoptolemus narrative is the "most notorious alteration of a myth" in Pindar's extant works. Race cites lines 33-4 as a major "textual problem". Bundy (2012), 77, however, in alignment with his overall thesis that each ode's narrative stands alone, disregards the connection between *Nemean* 7 and *Paean* 6 and deems it a "canonisation" of thought based on mere guesswork from the scholia. This is not so much a concern for me, though, since the theme of misplaced dishonour remains concurrent no matter Pindar's motive for favouring Neoptolemus.

Neoptolemus in calling upon those descended from Neoptolemus beyond the Ionian Sea (64-65). Pindar then returns to the concern of excessive praise and ensures that he has been measured in his honouring of Neoptolemus (66-7):

...οὐχ ὑπερβαλὼν,
βίαια πάντ' ἐκ ποδὸς ἐρύσαις·

...since I have not been excessive, / but have removed everything forced
from my path.

Pindar ensures here that he will not make the same mistake as Homer did in overpraising Odysseus. Race interprets Pindar's claim at 66-7 here to refer both to the victor's father Thearion and to Neoptolemus. Therefore, the victor's family and the mythical hero are spoken of together and their stories become thematically unified.

The Ajax narrative, when viewed as part of the ode's wider scope, merely remains a way of establishing the theme of misplaced dishonour, so that Pindar may emphasise his accurate placement of honour upon Neoptolemus and Sogenes' family. Without the Ajax narrative as the central myth of the ode, it is difficult to sense any resolve for the myth itself, especially in comparison to the kind of resolution that Pindar offers Neoptolemus. But the Ajax narrative remains important as theme-establishment and one that Pindar sees as an obvious example of misplaced dishonour, not least for his Aeginetan audience. But even though the Ajax narrative is brief in the overall scope of the ode, the ambiguity of blindness complicates Ajax's general goodness. If Ajax can be considered as one of the many who are blind to the truth, his ambivalence may have represented a critical weakness that athletes should avoid in their quest for honour.

Familiar aspects of Ajax's characterisation from *Nemean 7* can be found in *Isthmian 4*. Firstly, the Ajax narrative in *Isthmian 4* establishes the theme of misplaced dishonour, this time for the purposes of the central mythical narrative of Heracles. Pindar composed *Isthmian 4* around 477BCE for Melissos of Thebes in the pancratium (the only ode referencing Ajax that is not dedicated to an Aeginetan victor). This time, Ajax primarily exemplifies the stronger man brought down by an inferior man's skill. Where *χόλος* is the primary motive for Ajax's suicide

in *Nemean 7*, Pindar does not provide such an explicit motive for Ajax in *Isthmian 4* (4.31-36b):

ἔστιν δ' ἀφάνεια τύχας καὶ μαρναμένων,
πρὶν τέλος ἄκρον ἰκέσθαι·
τῶν τε γὰρ καὶ τῶν διδοῖ·
καὶ κρέσσον' ἀνδρῶν χειρόνων
ἔσφαλε τέχνα καταμάρψαισ'· ἴστε μάν
Αἴαντος ἀλκὰν φοῖνον, τὰν ὀψία
ἐν νυκτὶ ταμῶν περὶ ᾧ φασγάνῳ μομφὰν ἔχει
παίδεσσιν Ἑλλάνων ὅσοι Τροίανδ' ἔβαν.

But even when men strive, fortune remains hidden / before they reach the final goal, / for she gives some of this and some of that, / and the skill of inferior men can overtake / and bring down a stronger man. Surely you know of / Ajax's bloodstained valor, which he pierced late at night / on his own sword, and thereby casts blame / upon all the sons of the Hellenes who went to Troy.

Familiar hallmarks of the narrative of *Nemean 7* appear here. Firstly, the passage establishes a sense of random allotment from invisible fortune (τύχα). This is reflective of my suggestion that Ajax is presented as one of the majority of men who are blind at heart in *Nemean 7*. Then, as with the overpraised and the underpraised in *Nemean 7*, *Isthmian 4* reintroduces a dichotomy between “good” and “bad”: the skilful yet inferior man wins over the stronger superior man. Race then notes a discrepancy in line 36, providing an alternative translation for μομφὰν ἔχει as “incurs the blame of”.⁷⁷ This completely inverts the meaning of the line, but perhaps both possible meanings are true at once: on the one hand, Ajax would clearly blame the Greeks for voting against him in the *hoplōn krisis*, since he considers himself to be the superior man. The Greeks, on the other hand, might blame Ajax either for choosing to suicide and thus abandoning his comrades, or for attempting to murder the Greek generals in response to the *hoplōn krisis*, as is told in Sophocles' *Ajax*. If the latter were the case, it might be the only implicit allusion to Ajax's attempted murder of the Greek generals across Pindar's narratives. Furthermore, if Pindar is intentionally ambiguous here, it places Ajax more closely within his cohort of Greek comrades, whom he blames as well as being blamed by them. Thus, Pindar would be emphasising the reliance of each upon the other, that Ajax relies upon his comrades to recognise

⁷⁷ Race (2012) 169.

his honour, while the Greeks rely upon Ajax's heroism for the war effort. Again the notion of randomness arises, as Ajax is presented as just one of the many, but the one nonetheless who suffers at the hand of τύχα, fortune.

Odysseus is not mentioned in *Isthmian* 4, but it can be assumed that he is the inferior man to whom Pindar alludes. Perhaps it is to emphasise this inferiority that Odysseus does not deserve to be named in the ode. Haviarus, on the other hand, remarks that it is Melissos' apparent similarities with Odysseus that may be the reason why Odysseus' name is intentionally left out of the ode.⁷⁸ I tend to agree with Haviarus in this point. For example, Pindar, chooses to compare Melissos' short stature to the shortness of Heracles (4.49, 53), instead of the famously short Odysseus (see *Iliad* 3.193, where Odysseus is identified as shorter by a head than Agamemnon, who himself had been described as shorter by a head than other comrades earlier at 3.168). Furthermore, the ode refers to the possible trickery that Melissos employed to win the pancratium, which is suggested when he is compared to a fox executing a tricky manoeuvre (*Isthmian* 4.45-8):

...τόλμα γὰρ εἰκῶς
θυμὸν ἐριβρεμετᾶν θηρῶν λεόντων
ἐν πόνῳ, μῆτιν δ' ἀλώπηξ, αἰετοῦ ἅ τ' ἀναπιτναμένα ρόμβον ἴσχει·
χρῆ δὲ πᾶν ἔρδοντ' ἀμαυρῶσαι τὸν ἐχθρόν.

...For he resembles the boldness / of loudly roaring wild lions in his heart
/ during the struggle, but in skill he is a fox, which rolls on its back to
check the eagle's swoop. / One must do everything to diminish one's
opponent.

This is an interesting combination of skills for Melissos to possess. His lion-like boldness might evoke the heroic nature of Ajax or Heracles, but his μῆτις, "cunning", is of course reminiscent of the foremost quality of πολύμητις Odysseus.⁷⁹ And the use of trickery in the pancratium would most certainly recall Odysseus' trickery in tripping up Ajax in the wrestling contest at *Iliad* 23.725-8.⁸⁰ Line 48 is particularly striking for its lack of moral tone, as well – something

⁷⁸ Haviarus (1993) 94.

⁷⁹ Ajax is compared to a lion at *Iliad* 17.133-6 and Heracles is of course famous for his labour against the Nemean lion and lion-skin attire. For Odysseus' πολύμητις epithet, see, for example, *Il.* 1.311, *Od.* 2.173.

⁸⁰ Race (2012), 170-1, indicates that *Isthmian* 4.47 possibly refers to a specific move used in the pancratium.

that again might be connected to the wily nature of Odysseus throughout the Greek mythic tradition. Again we reach a possible invocation of Odysseus in close proximity to an Ajax narrative, albeit indirectly. Perhaps Pindar himself was aware of this accidental comparison and therefore chose not to mention Odysseus in the ode so that his audiences would be less inclined to draw parallels between Odysseus and Melissos, both for their use of trickery and for their small stature. Pindar's invocation of Heracles as one of short stature may be purposeful here for the very reason of eliminating Odysseus from audiences' minds.

It is in fact Heracles' presence as another mythic association in the ode that confirms, again, that Ajax is not the central mythic figure of the ode. While Ajax and Heracles have a reasonably equal share of the narrative, it is Melissos' family that are mythologised and given the most narrative focus throughout. Heracles though, like Neoptolemus in *Nemean 7*, shares a closer connection to the victor than Ajax does. Melissos and Heracles are both Thebans and so it is natural for Pindar to appeal to his Theban audience through Heracles.⁸¹ As mentioned above, Melissos' short build is the initial connector to Heracles in the ode. Pindar presents Heracles as now happy and honoured (58-9), as Melissos will be when Pindar honours him, too (72a-b).

It seems, then, that Ajax plays a similar role in *Isthmian 4* to that in *Nemean 7*, merely used to establish the theme of misplaced dishonour. Contrary to the doubt over Homer's honouring of Ajax in *Nemean 7*, however, is Pindar's explicit praise for Homer in *Isthmian 4* as one who did appropriately honour Ajax and award him perpetual celebration (*Isthmian 4.37-9*):

ἀλλ' Ὅμηρός τοι τετίμακεν δι' ἀνθρώπων, ὃς αὐτοῦ
 πᾶσαν ὀρθώσας ἀρετὰν κατὰ ῥάβδον ἔφρασεν
 θεσπεσίων ἐπέων λοιποῖς ἀθύρειν.

But Homer, to be sure, has made him honored among mankind, who set
 straight / his entire achievement and declared it with his staff / of divine
 verses for future men to enjoy.

⁸¹ Pindar himself was Theban and Heracles is Pindar's most utilised mythic figure throughout the odes, receiving mention in 18 of the 40 extant odes. But there is not necessarily a point to be made about Pindar favouring Heracles for his Theban association since Heracles is perhaps the most dynamic and quintessential ancient Greek hero.

Homer, in this case, possibly refers to the Epic Cycle in general and so Pindar may be referring to lost celebration of Ajax in the *Aethiopsis* or elsewhere.⁸² If Kromer's suggestion of ambiguity over the *oi* at *Nemean* 7.22 is correct and there is a discrepancy in Pindar's praise for Homer between *Nemean* 7 and *Isthmian* 4, then it would make it difficult to fathom a sense of resolve over the Ajax myth here without understanding the Pindaric identity of Homer in either ode. Nisetich uses the Theban context to frame Ajax's purpose in *Isthmian* 4 and sees him as merely representing to Thebans a victim whose recognition and honour was eventually provided by a poet; that is, Homer.⁸³ Theban audiences may not identify with Ajax's heroism in the way that Aeginetans do through their Aeacid ancestry, but there may have been a general acceptance of Ajax as an unfairly dishonoured hero. This at least strengthens for us the general characterisation of Pindar's Ajax, without Aeginetan bias. It is appropriate, then, for Theban audiences to wish for Melissos' honour to be sung as Homer sang of Ajax's honour.⁸⁴ Ajax and Melissos are therefore reminiscent of Pindar's combined praise for Neoptolemus and Sogenes' family in *Nemean* 7.

But perhaps there are more important similarities between Ajax and Melissos at play in *Isthmian* 4. The example of Ajax as the stronger losing to the inferior man follows Pindar's elaboration on Melissos' family – the Cleonymidae's – past successes in chariot racing. The example of Ajax as the superior losing to the inferior follows as though the Cleonymidae had faced a defeat to charioteers who were perceived to be inferior. Furthermore, Ajax, like Melissos' clan, was famous for his deeds in life, as are the Cleonymidae (8-9), but he, like them, lost to the weaker. In order to assimilate the Cleonymidae and Ajax's fates, Pindar presents the maxim about fortune and death: Ajax and the Cleonymidae did great things, but they still met unsavoury ends (see the passage above, *Isthmian* 4.31-36b). Melissos' victory,

⁸² Nisetich (1989) 11, for example, suggests that Arctinus might be Pindar's Homer on the basis that Pindar expects his audiences to be familiar with the narrative of Ajax's suicide (evident in the phrase ἴστε μὲν – "surely" in *Isthmian* 4.35), and this familiarity would most likely have come from the narrative of Arctinus' *Aethiopsis*.

⁸³ Nisetich (1989) 14.

⁸⁴ As Race (2012), 163, states in his preface to the ode, Pindar wishes to sing the deeds of Melissos as Homer did for Ajax.

however, is the opportunity for the rebirth of his family's honour. He is the spring blossom following a gloomy winter (18a-19). Just as Homer saved Ajax's honour, Melissos' victory is Pindar's opportunity to revitalise the entire family's honour.

Despite these connections between Ajax and the Cleonymidae, Ajax largely remains an impersonal, thematic exemplar in *Isthmian* 4. Heracles is rather the heroic Theban ancestor whose honour informs Melissos' future honour. And so, like *Nemean* 7, Ajax merely establishes the presence of misplaced dishonour in the victor's family history. But both *Nemean* 7 and *Isthmian* 4 present critical ambiguities that challenge the audience's response to the Ajax narratives. Ajax's possible blindness to truth in *Nemean* 7 and the possible reference in *Isthmian* 4 to his attempted murder of the Greek generals challenge how Ajax should be honoured in his heroic capacity. The ambiguities' associations with truth particularly come into play when examining the central theme of φθόνος in *Nemean* 8 and the ways that it interacts with truth and mortality. In the following chapter I compare Ajax's major weakness of being ἄγλωσσος (ineloquent, speechless), which I suggest leads to the infecting of φθόνος, to his characteristic weaknesses in *Nemean* 7 and *Isthmian* 4. In culmination, Pindar's characterisations of Ajax as a flawed hero throughout the odes opens up the possibility of viewing Ajax's overall cultural representation in a new light, which shall become important later in chapters four and five.

Chapter Three: *Nemean 8* and the infecting of φθόνοϛ

Nemean 8 gives the Ajax narrative fuller central attention than *Nemean 7* and *Isthmian 4*. Φθόνοϛ, the major theme in *Nemean 8*, contextualises the Ajax narrative within the epinician sphere, as Ajax becomes a warning figure for athletic victors about the dangers of being envied. Similar to the narrative ambiguities of *Nemean 7* and *Isthmian 4*, *Nemean 8* presents its own layered narrative of Ajax, whose association with φθόνοϛ is complicated. Here I argue that Ajax is not only the victim of others' φθόνοϛ, as Carey and Bulman have argued, but also that the infecting of φθόνοϛ as a disease-like quality within Ajax himself becomes the cause of his downfall.⁸⁵ The negativity with which Pindar approaches φθόνοϛ throughout his odes proves the magnitude of the effect of φθόνοϛ upon Ajax. But conjecturally, the constant reminders of mortality throughout the ode soften the serious φθόνοϛ tone and remind the common audience to avoid feelings of φθόνοϛ towards others. Pindar therefore addresses φθόνοϛ from the perspectives of both perpetrators and receivers and by doing so implicates Ajax as the ambivalent figure caught between the roles of perpetrator and receiver through the notion of disease. Before I begin my analysis of *Nemean 8*, I provide a brief review of Pindar's use of φθόνοϛ throughout his odes.

Φθόνοϛ appears in a variety of forms in 16 of the 40 extant odes and it is a major concern for athletes because of the likelihood of others' φθόνοϛ towards the athlete's success. Pindar's various uses of φθόνοϛ throughout the odes are φθόνοϛ towards success, φθόνοϛ directed at the poet, envy held by the gods, the nature of φθόνοϛ and why mortals should not be envious. Φθόνοϛ towards success is inevitable, and Pindar states this across his odes.⁸⁶ Pindar makes a variety of blunt statements about its inevitable presence: for example, men secretly grieve others' success and therefore it is better to be envied than to be pitied (*Pythian* 1.84-85; see also Herodotus, *Histories* 3.52.5); envious men are not comforted by the pendulum of fortune (*Pythian* 2.89-90); and, while honest competition dwells in the light, φθόνοϛ dwells

⁸⁵ Carey (1976) 31, Bulman (1992) 45.

⁸⁶ See *Olympian* 6.74, *Pythian* 1.85, *Pythian* 11.29, *Nemean* 8.21 and *Isthmian* 2.43.

in the dark (*Nemean* 4.37-41). Pindar particularly stresses the theme of φθόνος towards the good and he reminds his audiences not to be envious of others' success. In *Pythian* 3, the poet emphasises Hieron's goodness, as a man who is "not begrudging (φθονέων) to good men" (*Pythian* 3.71). And in *Isthmian* 2, the poet suggests that a son should not be silent over his father's success, since φθόνος is always present in mortals' minds (*Isthmian* 2.43-4). In this sense we are reminded of mortality as an equaliser to all; φθόνος is fruitless because mortals' greatest shared truth is mortality, no matter one's success, fortune and goodness. Hubbard notes that φθόνος is an issue of "central concern" to Pindar's poetics more so than for other poets.⁸⁷ Similarly to Hubbard, Bulman describes φθόνος as "the supreme negative emotion in Pindar", subsequently providing an extensive catalogue of the negative uses of φθόνος in his work.⁸⁸ Park assesses that being good (ἐσλός) is dangerous because of others' φθόνος, but this also proves the goodness of the individual who is envied.⁸⁹ Therefore, the Greeks' φθόνος towards Ajax is part of an important theme at the same time as it is used to prove Ajax's relative goodness in *Nemean* 8.

Pindar composed *Nemean* 8 around 459BCE for Deinias of Aegina, supposedly in the Diaulos. As the ode is only 51 lines long – under half the length of *Nemean* 7 and over 20 lines shorter than *Isthmian* 4 – it includes only one mythic narrative. Following a brief invocation of Aeacus as a figure of worship on Aegina, Pindar introduces the story of Ajax following the maxim that many things can be told in many ways (not least, in terms of the Ajax narrative, by Pindar himself), but such things can be given a fresh review, as dangerous as this may be (*Nemean* 8.20-5):

πολλὰ γὰρ πολλᾶ λέλεκται, νεαρὰ δ' ἐξευρόντα δόμεν βασάνῳ
 ἐς ἔλεγχον, ἅπας κίνδυνος· ὄψον δὲ λόγοι φθονεροῖσιν,
 ἄπτεται δ' ἐσλῶν ἀεὶ, χειρόνεσσι δ' οὐκ ἐρίζει.
 κείνος καὶ Τελαμῶνος δάψεν υἱόν, φασγάνῳ ἀμφικυλίσαις.
 ἦ τιν' ἄγλωσσον μὲν, ἦτορ δ' ἄλκιμον, λάθα κατέχει
 ἐν λυγρῷ νέικει· μέγιστον δ' αἰόλω ψεύδει γέρας ἀντέταται.

⁸⁷ Hubbard (2000) 320.

⁸⁸ Bulman (1992) 3. The catalogue of the uses of φθόνος are on pages 17-19 of Bulman (1992).

⁸⁹ Park (2013) 31.

For many things have been said in many ways, but to discover new ones and put them to the touchstone / for testing is sheer danger, since words are dessert to the envious, and envy fastens / always on the good, but has no quarrel with lesser men.

It was that which feasted on the son of Telamon when it rolled him onto his sword. / Truly, oblivion overwhelms many a man whose tongue is speechless, but heart is bold, / in a grievous quarrel; and the greatest prize has been offered up to shifty falsehood.

Here Pindar introduces φθόνοϲ, the ode’s main theme, which has the ability to overpower true greatness. The conflicting roles that play out in the narrative are similar to what we find in *Nemean 7* and *Isthmian 4*: the lesser man, whom one can assume to be Odysseus, has “shifty falsehood” (αιόλω ψεύδει), whereas Ajax, the better man, is bold in his heart but is detrimentally ἄγλωσσος (ineloquent, speechless). Pindar does not explicitly vilify Odysseus as the lesser man, but rather he names him as the one whom the Greeks favoured over Ajax in the *hoplōn krisis*. But the strength with which Pindar carries the φθόνοϲ theme through the narrative as one powered power by “hateful deception” (ἐχθρὰ...πάρφασις) (32) and “flattering tales” (αιμύλων μύθων) (33) is enough to imply that it is an eloquent Odysseus, much like the story-telling Odysseus in *Nemean 7*, who defeats an ἄγλωσσος Ajax.

Bulman asserts that, in regard to line 23 in the *Nemean 8* passage above, “φθόνοϲ is so repugnant that Pindar at this point cannot even utter the word; he must use the demonstrative instead.”⁹⁰ But in an effort to develop Bulman’s point, I argue that this repugnance is not just that Ajax was the target of others’ φθόνοϲ, but rather that φθόνοϲ fully infected Ajax as a disease-like quality that dictated Ajax’s actions to follow. While Carey and Bulman conclude that φθόνοϲ in fact “murdered” Ajax, I suggest that φθόνοϲ murdered Ajax from within Ajax himself, rather than as an external attack alone.⁹¹ The actions of φθόνοϲ in the passage above are key to my argument: φθόνοϲ has the ability to fasten upon (ἄπτω) and devour (δάπτω) its victim. Pindar’s only other use of δάπτω carries a strong notion of infestation through the imagery of insects (*Fragment 222.1-2*):

⁹⁰ Bulman (1992) 44.

⁹¹ Carey (1976) 31, Bulman (1992) 45.

Διὸς παῖς ὁ χρυσός·
κεῖνον οὐ σῆς οὐδὲ κίς δάπτει...

Gold is the child of Zeus;
Neither moth nor weevil eats it...

In this fragment, the insects do not have the power to devour gold (χρυσός) in the way that φθόνος shall eat away at Ajax. Thus, φθόνος can be reduced to something as small and filthy but as potentially destructive as an insect.⁹² Similarly, Heracles views the poison of the cloak that Deianeira gives him in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* as fastening upon and devouring him (*Tr.* 987, 1010):

ἦ δ' αὖ μαιρὰ βρύκει. φεῦ.
Oh, that accursed pest gnaws me once more!

ἤπταί μου, τοτοτοῖ, ἦδ' αὖθ' ἔρπει.
It has seized me,—oh, the pest comes again!

Sophocles' uses of βρύκω (bite, devour) and ἄπτω to describe the poison's effect on Heracles is strikingly similar to the actions of φθόνος in *Nemean* 8. The poisonous cloak takes control of Heracles by fastening upon and eating away at him. In *Nemean* 8, the uses of ἄπτω and δάπτω operate closely together as an infecting process, giving φθόνος a sense of movement as it passes from perpetrator to victim and infiltrates step by step. In the first step φθόνος attaches upon (ἄπτω) its target, in this case the good, and the good must try to shake it off.⁹³ If the targeted person fails to do this, φθόνος then has the ability to completely devour (δάπτω) its victim. Pindar is therefore careful to present Ajax's ἄγλωσσος weakness and relative goodness together as the detrimental combination that invites the disease of φθόνος. Pindar does so logically, stating first that φθόνος fastens upon (ἄπτεται) the good. Ἄπτω then makes way for

⁹² Nagy (1979), 225-6, remarks how the language of devouring and eating flesh often correlates with unjustified blame (Nagy defines φθόνος as a form of blame). This is evident in Pindar's *Pythian* 2 where the poet seeks to avoid the "biting" blame of Archilochus, who "fed on dire words of hatred" (βαρυλόγοις ἔχθεσιν παινιόμενον) (53, 55). In Pindar's narrative, Ajax fits the same profile as one whose goodness is unjustifiably fed upon by φθόνος.

⁹³ Sophocles also addresses the concept of φθόνος "creeping upon" (ἔρπω) the powerful in *Ajax* 157, which I discuss in chapter four in conjunction with the significant theme of disease throughout the *Ajax*.

the more destructive δάπτω, as φθόνος feasts upon Ajax. Finally, Pindar states that oblivion (λάθα) is the outcome of an ἄγλωσσος man, and therefore we can understand ἄγλωσσος to be Ajax's defining trait that allows φθόνος to devour him and result in his oblivion.

Comments elsewhere on the nature of φθόνος can help to shed light on Pindar's interpretation of φθόνος in *Nemean 8*. For example, in the *Timaeus*, Plato ensures the following (29e):

ἀγαθῷ δὲ οὐδεὶς περὶ οὐδενὸς οὐδέποτε ἐγγίγνεται φθόνος.

And in him that is good no envy ariseth ever concerning anything.⁹⁴

This view of φθόνος is an interesting comparison to Pindar's assurance of Ajax's relative goodness in *Nemean 8*. However, if I am correct in suggesting that Ajax becomes infected with φθόνος, then Ajax himself would become a perpetrator of φθόνος directed back towards Odysseus for claiming victory in the *hoplōn krisis*. The difference between Ajax and the common φθονεροί though is that φθόνος did not develop (γίγνομαι) freely in Ajax. Rather, it was forced upon him by other carriers of φθόνος. Just like a disease, Ajax contracts the full effects of φθόνος due to his susceptibility as a man of relative goodness and through his weakness of being ἄγλωσσος.

Aristotle's outline of the nature of φθόνος in the *Rhetoric* helps us to understand Ajax's exact position as one infected with φθόνος. Aristotle states that we are likely to envy those closest to us in factors such as age and status. Aristotle then claims the following (*Rh.* 2.10.9):

καὶ τοῖς ἢ ἔχουσι ταῦτα ἢ κεκτημένοις ὅσα αὐτοῖς προσῆκεν ἢ κέκτηντο ποτέ·

And [one envies] those who either have or have acquired what was naturally theirs or what they had once acquired...⁹⁵

It is important to note here that Ajax does not see himself as equal to his rival Odysseus. This is clear in the tradition of Ajax in general: if he had considered himself to be on an equal heroic

⁹⁴ Text and translation derived from Bury (1929; republished in 2005 by Loeb Classical Library).

⁹⁵ Text and translation derived from Freese (1926). Square-bracketed additions to the translation are my own and are provided for context.

footing to Odysseus, the outcome of the *hoplōn krisis* would surely not have angered him so.⁹⁶ But the reality is that Ajax does indeed compare to his comrades in heroic status (alongside Aristotle's other categories of similarity – place, age, values and wealth), since he and all the other Greeks fall below the supreme abilities of Achilles. Pindar even admits this at *Nemean* 7.27. Furthermore, as I have argued in chapter one, Ajax's role as a defence fighter in the Greek army is vital but also restrictive, which destabilises his guaranteed position as best of the Greeks after Achilles. What is most important to remember, then, is that Ajax considers his preference for action to be superior to Odysseus' preference for cunning and eloquence. Ajax therefore fits Aristotle's definition as he would expectedly feel φθόνος towards Odysseus for acquiring Achilles' armour and the title of Best of the Greeks, since he valued action over eloquence and therefore believed himself to be more deserving. Aristotle's definition therefore shows that Ajax's feelings of φθόνος can only be expected. Pindar's approach thus appears Aristotelian in the sense that he specifically presents φθόνος as originally belonging to others who then force it upon Ajax by turning the tables of fortune; that is, Ajax loses what he previously had or deserved to have to the formerly envious. This approach again presents Ajax as the better man victimised by the φθονεροί, but Ajax's key trait in *Nemean* 8, being ἄγλωσσος, is the crucial characteristic pitfall that allows the φθονεροί, the carriers of φθόνος, to succeed in passing it onto Ajax.

Ajax's weakness, being ἄγλωσσος, therefore brings into question his overall nobility within the ode. Ajax should have been able to speak up for himself in his heroic capacity, since the Homeric code of heroes is ultimately to be a speaker of words and a doer of deeds (*Iliad* 9.443). Pindar may have taken the theme of Ajax being speechless or less eloquent from the lost *Aethiopsis* or *Little Iliad*, which both provided accounts of the *hoplōn krisis*.⁹⁷ But Ajax was unlikely to be totally speechless in the *hoplōn krisis* narratives of the lost epics if they were similar to the later speech narratives of Antisthenes, Ovid and Quintus Smyrnaeus. It is also

⁹⁶ See Ajax's self-acclamation in Sophocles' *Ajax* 421-6: "You shall no longer see this man, / Such a man (let me now speak my boast) / As Troy ne'er saw the like of, not in all / The warlike host that hither came to Greece" (οὐκέτ' ἄνδρα μὴ / τόνδ' ἴδῃτ', ἔπος / ἔξερω μέγ', οἷον οὐτίνα / Τροία στρατοῦ δέρχθη χθονὸς μολόντ' ἀπὸ / Ἑλλανίδος.)

⁹⁷ Montiglio (2000), 84, sees "ἄγλωσσος Ajax" as "a novelty to Pindar."

important to remember that Ajax appearing ἄγλωσσος is only relative to the rhetorical skill of his more eloquent opponent, Odysseus. In this case, ἄγλωσσος is probably better defined as “lack of speech” or “lack of eloquence” (as given in the *LSJ*). Silvia Montiglio identifies that the opposite of ἄγλωσσος – literally meaning “without tongue” – appears in *Pythian* 1.42 as περίγλωσσος, meaning “eloquent speaker”, which emphasises the meaning of ἄγλωσσος as “ineloquent” over being entirely speechless.⁹⁸

As I have outlined in chapter one, Ajax’s method of speech differs to Odysseus’ method, which may have influenced Pindar’s use of ἄγλωσσος to mean “less eloquent”. But Ajax is far from entirely speechless in the *Iliad* tend to encourage vital action. In saying this, “speechlessness” reminds us of Ajax’s silence towards Odysseus when they meet in the Underworld in *Odyssey* 11.⁹⁹ Ajax’s silence in *Odyssey* 11 is also a possible heroic ambivalence, as he chooses to leave his animosity with Odysseus unresolved and retreats in a state of perpetual anger. Ajax’s silence in *Odyssey* 11 is comparable to Agamemnon’s silence towards Achilles at the end of *Iliad* 23 when Achilles gifts Agamemnon the golden bowl as an act of reconciliation (*Il.* 23.895-7). Agamemnon’s lack of verbal response leaves the passage up for interpretation as to whether a mutual reconciliation has been achieved. Both Ajax and Agamemnon’s silences present them as the pettier ones against their respective rivals, as both Odysseus and Achilles attempt to reconcile. Therefore, Ajax’s silence in the *Odyssey* could be seen as a characteristic fault that damages his heroic credibility. Perhaps Pindar took Ajax’s silence in *Odyssey* 11 as an inability to speak and then utilised it as Ajax’s major weakness that allows φθόνοϛ to infect him in *Nemean* 8. Odysseus then, aware of Ajax’s weakness, takes advantage of the general φθόνοϛ felt towards Ajax and uses his own speaking abilities to expose Ajax’s weakness.

⁹⁸ Montiglio (2000) 84.

⁹⁹ For Ajax’s speaking abilities in the *Iliad*, see Ajax’s short but affecting speech during the Embassy in *Iliad* 9, for which Achilles praises Ajax for speaking in a way closest to his own θύμοϛ (mind) (*Il.* 9.645). Ajax also gives a rallying speech to his fighting men at the end of *Iliad* 15 while managing to fend off the attacking Trojans (15.726-46).

Being ἄγλωσσος is therefore a remarkable trait for Pindar to apply to Ajax, for whom he otherwise shows great sympathy. It is a shortfall that cannot go unnoticed, considering Ajax's potentially ambivalent characterisation in the Epic Cycle. Furthermore, the fact that Ajax might appear ἄγλωσσος in a speech contest, the very last place where one would want to be so, seems to be severely problematic indeed. This shows that Pindar's use for Ajax in *Nemean 8* goes beyond merely exemplifying a wrongfully dishonoured hero. Pindar's message for athletic victors is to be aware of their own weaknesses as they may invite the dangers of φθόνος.

As I have stated above, the resulting consequence of letting φθόνος take hold is the λάθα, oblivion or forgetting, that obscures Ajax's glory. The term λάθα encapsulates the "deep darkness" (σκοτός πολύς) that threatens the remembrance of Ajax and Neoptolemus' deeds as told in the narratives of *Nemean 7*. In the *Nemean 8* passage above, ἔρις (strife, quarrelling) in its verb form ἐρίζω associates itself specifically with the good. This close association between ἔρις and λάθα recalls Hesiod's definition of Ἔρις, strife personified, in the *Theogony* as the father of Λήθη, forgetfulness or oblivion personified (*Theogony* 225-6). In *Nemean 8*, the ἔρις that φθόνος brings to Ajax in conjunction with his ineloquence shall therefore give birth to Ajax's eventual λάθα. Furthermore, ἔρις and νέκος in relation to φθόνος also allude to the opening verses of Hesiod's *Works and Days*, in which Hesiod presents two types of ἔρις (*WD* 11-26):

οὐκ ἄρα μοῦνον ἔην Ἐρίδων γένος, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ γαῖαν
 εἰσι δύο· τὴν μὲν ἐπαινήσειε νοήσας,
 ἢ δ' ἐπιμωμητὴ· διὰ δ' ἄνδιχα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν.
 ἢ μὲν γὰρ πόλεμόν τε κακὸν καὶ δῆριν ὀφέλλει,
 σχετλίη· οὐ τις τὴν γε φιλεῖ βροτός, ἀλλ' ὑπ' ἀνάγκης
 ἀθανάτων βουλήσιν Ἔριν τιμῶσι βαρεῖαν.
 τὴν δ' ἐτέρην προτέριον μὲν ἐγείνατο Νυξ ἔρεβεννή,
 θῆκε δέ μιν Κρονίδης ὑψίζυγος, αἰθέρι ναίων
 γαίης τ' ἐν ῥίζησι καὶ ἀνδράσι πολλὸν ἀμείνω·
 ἢ τε καὶ ἀπάλαμόν περ ὁμῶς ἐπὶ ἔργον ἔγειρον.
 εἰς ἕτερον γὰρ τίς τε ἰδὼν ἔργοιο χατίζων
 πλούσιον, ὃς σπεύδει μὲν ἀρώμεναι ἢ δὲ φυτεύει
 οἶκόν τ' εὖ θέσθαι, ζηλοῖ δὲ τε γείτονα γείτων
 εἰς ἄφενος σπεύδοντ'· ἀγαθὴ δ' Ἔρις ἦδε βροτοῖσιν.
 καὶ κεραμεὺς κεραμεῖ κοτέει καὶ τέκτονι τέκτων,
 καὶ πτωχὸς πτωχῷ φθονέει καὶ ἀοιδὸς ἀοιδῷ.

So there was not just one birth of Strifes after all, but upon the earth there are two Strifes. One of these a man would praise once he got to know it, but the other is blameworthy; and they have thoroughly opposed spirits. For one fosters evil war and conflict – cruel one, no mortals loves that one, but it is by necessity that they honor the oppressive Strife, by the plans of the immortals. But the other one gloomy Night bore first; and Cronus’ high-throned son, who dwells in the aether, set it in the roots of the earth, and it is much better for men. It rouses even the helpless man to work. For a man who is not working but who looks at some other man, a rich one who is hastening to plow and plant and set his house in order, he envies him, one neighbor envying his neighbor who is hastening toward wealth: and this Strife is good for mortals. And potter is angry at potter, and builder with builder, and beggar begrudges beggar, and poet poet.

Hesiod’s view of good ἔρις anticipates Aristotle’s definition of φθόνος as something that we feel towards those who are close to us in place, age, values, social distinction and wealth (*Rh.* 2.10). For Hesiod, good ἔρις promotes healthy competition between mortals who are envious of others’ lots. In this case, φθόνος can be healthy in that it encourages hard work. Bad ἔρις, on the other hand, comes from attempting to take others’ goods and thus fosters evil war (κάκος πόλεμος) and fighting (δῆρις). This is the role of Odysseus in *Nemean* 8, whose tactics in attempting to take Ajax’s rightful prize are characterised as ἐχθρὰ πάρφασις, hateful deception, operating through clever contrivances and disgraceful lies (8.32-4):

ἐχθρὰ δ’ ἄρα πάρφασις ἦν καὶ πάλαι,
αἰμύλων μύθων ὀμόλοιτος, δολοφραδῆς, κακοποιὸν ὄνειδος·
ἃ τὸ μὲν λαμπρὸν βιάται, τῶν δ’ ἀφάντων κῦδος ἀντείνει σαθρόν.

Yes, hateful deception existed even long ago, / the companion on
flattering tales, guileful contriver, evil-working disgrace, / which represses
what is illustrious, but holds up for obscure men a glory that is rotten.

Miller and Walsh argue that πάρφασις is Odysseus’ destructive action that differentiates him from the ordinary φθονεροί. In extension to this argument, I identify Odysseus’ ἐχθρὰ πάρφασις as a method of Hesiodic bad ἔρις.¹⁰⁰ Despite Pindar’s use of πάρφασις in this context, its use is not strictly negative in wider literature. For example, Nestor employs its alternative, παραίφασις, alongside the adjective ἄγαθος, “good”, in the sense of benevolent persuasion,

¹⁰⁰ See Miller (1982) 118 and Walsh (1984) 38-9.

when advising Patroclus in *Iliad* 11.793. Likewise, in Hesiod's hymn to the Muses in the *Theogony*, sensible kings (βασιλῆες ἐχέφρονες) are described as having the ability to persuade (παραιφάμενοι) their people with "mild words" (μαλακοῖσι...ἐπέεσιν) (*Th.* 88-90). Pindar only negates πάρφασις with its adjective ἐχθρός in the way that Hesiod negates bad ἔρις. But Hesiod's healthy version of φθόνος contrasts with Pindar's apparent view that φθόνος is wholly bad. According to Hesiod, φθόνος can remain benign if not acted upon with bad ἔρις. Glenn Most even remarks upon the positivity of the experience of φθόνος, since it represents "something which is extraordinarily good".¹⁰¹ What can be deduced from this is that, since the epinician genre deals solely with athletic victors in a high-stakes environment, Pindar cannot afford to be flippant about the nature of φθόνος. The likelihood of bad ἔρις towards athletic victors' remarkable achievements is so much greater than between commoner people such as craftsmen or beggars who, as Hesiod suggests, tend to practise good ἔρις (*WD* 24-6).

With such moral focus on φθόνος it makes sense that Pindar should include his secondary message to a wider audience, that is, not to be like Odysseus and pursue bad ἔρις (appearing, in the case of *Nemean* 8, as ἐχθρὰ πάρφασις). Hesiod's definitions above tell us that simply being envious is not the crime, but rather it is what Pindar condemns as Odysseus' tactic of bad ἔρις. This is apparent when Pindar prays to Zeus for his own goodness following the Ajax narrative and the description of hateful deception (*Nemean* 8.35-9):

εἴη μή ποτέ μοι τοιοῦτον ἦθος, Ζεῦ πάτερ, ἀλλὰ κελεύθοις
ἀπλόαις ζωᾷς ἐφαπτοίμαν, θανὼν ὡς παισὶ κλέος
μὴ τὸ δύσφαμον προσάψω. χρυσὸν εὐχονται, πεδίον δ' ἕτεροι
ἀπέραντον, ἐγὼ δ' ἀστοῖς ἀδὼν καὶ χθονὶ γυῖα καλύψαι,
αἰνέων αἰνητά, μομφὰν δ' ἐπισπείων ἀλιτροῖς.

May I never have such a disposition, father Zeus, but let me travel / the straightforward paths of life, so that when I die I may leave my children / no such disreputable fame. Some pray for gold, others for land / without end, but I pray to find favour with my townsmen until I cover my limbs with earth, / praising things praiseworthy, but casting blame on evildoers.

¹⁰¹ Most (2003) 139. This also recalls Park's point about others' φθόνος acting as the proof of one's goodness.

Here Pindar challenges himself to abandon his own φθόνοϋς so that he will not be tempted to pursue bad ἔρις. With this he implicitly places himself at the same level as his common audience who may also experience φθόνοϋς and therefore challenges others, in turn, to cast away their own φθόνοϋς. The Ajax narrative therefore develops beyond its limits and delivers a message to its common audience: φθόνοϋς may lead to the loss of great men like Ajax.

Pindar's lowering of himself to the level of his common audience below his athletic subjects in a prayer to Zeus suggests an effort, as poet, to avoid being subject to others' φθόνοϋς, namely the φθόνοϋς of the gods. Pindar uses φθόνοϋς in direct relation to the gods sparingly since φθόνοϋς is such a negative quality with which to be associated. But gods are still able to possess φθόνοϋς, as at both *Pythian* 10.20 and *Isthmian* 7.39 Pindar prays that the athletic victors may not incur the φθόνοϋς of the gods. Pindar's allusion to his own death in his prayer to Zeus might be enough to appease the gods in their divinity over mortals, but his self-lowering acknowledges his acceptance of his own mortality. While Pindar does compare himself to a javelin-throwing athlete at both *Pythian* 1.43-5 and *Nemean* 7.70-73, in both cases his analogies stay purposefully within the realms of mortal achievement, as he hopes aloud that he has not overshot his desired targets for praise. The analogy of the javelin thrower in *Pythian* 1 even follows Pindar's explicit statement (*Pythian* 1.41):

ἐκ θεῶν γὰρ μάχαναι πᾶσαι βροτέαις ἀρεταῖς...

For from the gods come all the means for human achievements...

This ultimately serves as a reminder to the athletic victors that their achievements do indeed remain within mortal realms. This is in fact the purpose behind all of Pindar's maxims about death that appear throughout his odes, not least in the three odes addressing the Ajax narrative. The most well-known death maxim is arguably *Pythian* 8's "creature of a day" sentiment (8.95-6), which Bulman remarks as proving the centrality of "the gods' regulation of men's fortune".¹⁰² Such death maxims in Pindar's odes act as a reminder of the gods' superiority over

¹⁰² Bulman (1992) 34.

mortals. They may also serve more broadly as a way to remind the athlete that the physical intensity of the athletic lifestyle is temporary and so it must be relished. Stephen Miller makes this point in relation to Patroclus' funeral games in *Iliad* 23, going so far as to say that these funeral games may have sparked the beginning of Greek athletics: "The funeral games of Patroklos celebrate life in the face of death, but more than anything else they express a basic joy of living. As the individual athlete exerts himself physically, mentally and emotionally in competition, a statement is made: "I am alive!"¹⁰³ While I cannot debate the origins of Greek athletics here, the *Iliad's* expression of life in the face of death may well be a part of Pindar's inspiration for his death maxims. Furthermore, while the prospect of φθόνος is real and dangerous for athletic victors and also tempting for commoners, Pindar's death maxims remind his audience to maintain perspective through the ultimate truth of mortality.

Truth as a theme is an integral part of discussions around φθόνος, since φθόνος can obscure the truth, as Odysseus achieves through his bad ἔρις with Ajax. Truth broadly appears throughout the odes as ἀλαθεία (truth), ἀλαθής (true) and ἀψευδής (true), the latter appearing just once in *Pythian* 1.86. All three terms are alpha-privatives: ἀλαθεία and ἀλαθής are negations of λάθω, forgetting or forgetfulness, while ἀψευδής is clearly the negation of ψευδής, false or unreal. Pindar's apparent concept of truth follows that truth is synonymous with the divine. Pindar's most definitive embodiments of truth are all divine, such as Olympia, "mistress of truth" at *Olympian* 8.2, Chronos (Time) at *Olympian* 10.54, Zeus' daughter Alatheia, the embodiment of truth itself at *Olympian* 10.4, and the "ever-true Horae" (hours) at *Fragment* 30.6.¹⁰⁴ The Muses in Hesiod's *Theogony* express their divine power over mortals through truth-telling (*Theogony* 24-9):

τόνδε δέ με πρότιστα θεαὶ πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπον,
 Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο·
 "ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι, κάκ' ἐλέγχεα, γαστέρες οἶον,
 ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
 ἴδμεν δ' εὔτ' ἐθέλωμεν ἀληθέα γηρῦσασθαι."
 ὧς ἔφασαν κοῦραι μεγάλου Διὸς ἀρτιπέπαι...

¹⁰³ Miller (2004) 30.

¹⁰⁴ See also Zeus' "true and fulfilled" prayer at *Olympian* 7.69, Terpsichore singing "closest to the truth" at *Isthmian* 2.10 and the Herald as purveyor of truth at *Olympian* 13.98.

And this speech the goddesses spoke first of all to me, the Olympian Muses, the daughters of aegis-holding Zeus: “Field-dwelling shepherds, ignoble disgraces, mere bellies: we know how to say many false things similar to genuine ones, but we know, when we wish, how to proclaim true things.” So spoke great Zeus’ ready-speaking daughters...¹⁰⁵

If the divine then, in this case the Muses, are all-knowing of the truth, then the divine can choose to manipulate or speak the truth as they please, thus holding sway over ignorant mortals. In Pindar, divinity rules over the interrelated ways that truth manifests itself for mortals: mortality itself, time and a mortal’s relationship to truth itself; that is, the ways that a mortal understands and uses truth.

Mortality and time are most easily connected. Time reveals truth; as I have referred to above, time is the “sole assayer of genuine truth” (*Olympian* 10.54) and the Horae are “ever-true” (*Fragment* 30.6). The most inevitable truth for all mortals is death, as Pindar so consistently expresses through his death maxims. We are reminded particularly of *Nemean* 7.17-18: wise men have learnt (ἔμαθον) that death comes to all, so no one must hoard one’s riches. Pindar presents the same message in *Pythian* 3.103: if man understands truth, he must accept life’s allotment; and at *Nemean* 4.41-3: death comes to all, no matter what excellence (ἀρετά) one possesses. *Pythian* 3’s major theme, in fact, is the relationship between truth and mortality and how the ode’s victor, Hieron, must come to terms with his impending mortality. The victor’s father at *Isthmian* 6.10-16, Lampon, understands such truths: he may accept old age knowing that his mortal achievements are divinely recognised.

It is mortality itself that complicates a mortal’s relationship with truth, as opposed to the static synonymy between truth and the divine. Mortals may not be able to escape divine truth, but they can manipulate others’ perceptions of truth and use it against them, especially when motivated by their own φθόνος. This is what Odysseus does in his tactic of bad ἔρις against Ajax in *Nemean* 8. At *Olympian* 1.28, Pindar remarks that stories can be embellished beyond their true account. Odysseus is guilty of this in *Nemean* 7, which leads to the Greeks’

¹⁰⁵ Text and translations for Hesiod are derived from Most (2006).

motivations to vote against Ajax. Thus, Pindar promotes the pursuit of truth in his campaign against φθόνοϋ. In *Pythian* 1, Pindar offers advice on man's relationship with truth to the ode's victor Hieron of Syracuse (*Pythian* 1.86):

ἄψευδεῖ δὲ πρὸς ἄκμονι χάλκευε γλῶσσαν.
On an anvil of truth forge your tongue.

Unlike the all-knowing divine, men need to learn the relationship between truth and justice. This is particularly pertinent for Hieron as the ruler of Syracuse, whose military glory and good governance Pindar celebrates throughout *Pythian* 1 and *Pythian* 2. Pindar himself endeavours to learn to live by truth, evident again at *Pythian* 3.103, which was composed for Hieron in ill-health. We can also see the poet's appeal to truth at *Nemean* 8.35-9, where Pindar prays to Zeus for an honest life.

But Pindar ensures that man's relationship with truth remains tricky beyond mere misuse and manipulation. As we have seen in the Ajax narratives of *Nemean* 7, *Nemean* 8 and *Isthmian* 4, Pindar chooses not to disclose the mythically traditional events of Ajax's suicide in their entirety. Instead, some truths remain unspoken. In *Nemean* 5, Pindar explicitly remarks that it is not always best to speak the entire truth, as in the case of Telamon and Peleus' murder of their half-brother Phocus (*Nemean* 5.16-18):

...στάσομαι· οὐ τοι ἅπαντα κερδίων
φαίνοισα προσωπον ἀλάθει' ἀτρεκῆς·
καὶ τὸ σιγᾶν πολλάκις ἐστὶ σοφώτατον ἀνθρώπῳ νοῆσαι.
...I will halt, for not every exact truth / is better for showing its face, / and
silence is often the wisest thing for a man to observe.

When truth is tied up with mortality, as in the death of Phocus, then one truth sullies other more celebratory truths about Phocus' killers, Telamon and Peleus. The same applies to Ajax: the truth of his attempted murder of the Greek generals complicates Pindar's attempt to celebrate or redeem Ajax as a hero worthy of honour. Mortality, therefore, complicates truth. It makes truth painful as it is a reminder of life's fragility. But the pain of truth strengthens those that accept it, as Pindar's death maxims assert.

If Pindar consciously chooses not to disclose the entire truth in the Ajax narratives, it might seem that he is placing himself at a position of superior knowledge of truth than that of his audience and thus representing the all-knowing divine. Park and Pratt both assert that in *Fragment 205* and *Olympian 10* Alatheia resides over Pindar's poetic obligation to the truth.¹⁰⁶ Pindar as poet would therefore be aligning himself with the divine in terms of one's relationship with the truth. But audiences would have known the parts of the narratives that Pindar chooses to leave out in the stories of Ajax and the story of Telamon and Peleus' murder of Phocus. Therefore, Pindar's deliberate avoidance of those parts of the narrative is less about his efforts to align himself with divine truth (since this might invoke the gods' φθόνος towards him) and more about drawing the audience's attention to the absent narrative points in order to emphasise the complexity of truth within mortal realms. Pindar is careful not to tell lies (ψεύδεα), as the Muses say they do, but he behaves like the Muses in that he speaks the truth only when he wishes to do so. While Pindar does not tell lies, he is aware that his audience, being mortal, are susceptible to λάθα, forgetting, which is just another opposite of ἀλάθεια, truth. It is more opposite than ψεύδεα, since, again, ἀλάθεια is the alpha-privative of λάθα. Therefore, Pindar presents certain truths in a way that makes them appear like the entire truth, because he knows that his audiences will likely forget the truths that remain untold.

This is where Pindar's Ajax narrative in *Nemean 8* teaches his audiences a lesson. Ajax was unable to effectively show the truth; despite his bold heart he remains ἄγλωσσος, which turns ἀλαθεία into λάθα, in this context meaning oblivion (*Nemean 8.24-5*). The truth of Ajax's valour will be forgotten and he will be cast into oblivion. This of course follows Odysseus' manipulation of the truth through bad ἔρις and persuasive skill and, in the case of *Nemean 7*, Homer's overpraising of Odysseus. Arum Park notes that Pindar treats truth and praise synonymously, hence Pindar's grievance with Homer in *Nemean 7*, that Homer cannot be creative and reflect truth at the same time.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Park (2013) 21, 24; Pratt (1993) 119.

¹⁰⁷ Park (2013) 17.

Nemean 8 overall offers a more conclusive approach to the Ajax narrative. It may be that there is simply more emphasis on the theme of φθόνοϲ, and that the short length of the ode and appropriateness of the Ajax myth in relation to φθόνοϲ makes for a tidy and more concise thematically unified ode. Even Pindar’s prayer to Zeus that he may live honestly seems conclusive to the death maxims throughout the odes. But, considering Pindar’s previous approaches to the Ajax myth, we can recognise the more conclusive manner of the mythic narrative this time. Homer is not mentioned so there is not the concern – or confusion – over different mythic accounts. The story just appears as a factual retelling, perhaps because Pindar recognised the potential confusion over the role of Homer between *Nemean* 7 and *Isthmian* 4. Furthermore, and I am in agreement with Haviarus on this point, there is a sense of hopefulness throughout the ode.¹⁰⁸ Pindar comes to Aegina, praying to Aeacus, with hopes of praising Deinias without the consequences of envy (13-18); Pindar hopes for his own good moral character (35-9); and again there is hope for the victor’s family and homeland (40-50). *Nemean* 8.40, especially, invokes the concept of natural growth:

αὔξεται δ’ ἀρετά, γλωραῖς ἐέρσαις ὡς ὅτε δένδρεον ἄ(ι)σσει...
 Excellence grows like a tree that springs up to fresh dew...

This perhaps reflects the concept of φύα (inborn nature), an unshakeable good quality for Deinias’ family to possess. Φύα becomes relevant when considering the Ajax narrative in *Isthmian* 6, as Pindar applies the term φύα directly to Ajax himself. The main mythic narrative in *Isthmian* 6 introduces Telamon, the father of Ajax, and likewise an esteemed Aeacid. The narrative follows an interaction between Telamon and Heracles during Heracles’ recruitment of Telamon to Troy. Heracles prays to Zeus for a son for Telamon, one with a “body impenetrable” (ἄρρηκτον φύάν) as Heracles’ own lion skin (47). The meaning of φύα may be complex here. *Isthmian* 6 follows *Nemean* 7 by only a few years if the dating is reasonably accurate. And if audiences of *Isthmian* 6 were familiar with *Nemean* 7, they would recall Pindar’s representation of Ajax as the hero stripped of truth. According to the narrative in

¹⁰⁸ Haviarus (1993) 118.

Nemean 7, Ajax deserves the truth based on his fairer, straighter character, in contrast to the deceptive nature of his counterpart Odysseus. Φύα, therefore, is an apt term to apply to Ajax, who possesses inborn qualities beyond impenetrable physical strength. As an Aeacid, no less, Ajax possesses nobility and goodness that forms the basis of the φθόνος, or bad feeling at least, that Odysseus and the Greeks have towards Ajax in *Nemean 7*, *Isthmian 4* and *Nemean 8*. For the sake of my argument, *Isthmian 6* provides an allegory for Ajax’s goodness as a hero of φύα, which supports the “good versus bad” nexus in the Ajax narratives of these three odes.

I conclude this chapter with a note on Pindar’s contemporary fellow praise poet Bacchylides, whose *Ode 13* features Ajax fighting alongside Achilles. It addresses the familiar theme of φθόνος that is prevalent in Pindar’s odes, but actual characterisation of Ajax in the ode is minimal. D. L. Cairns says that Bacchylides’ *Ode 13* likely celebrates the same victory for Pytheas of Aegina as Pindar’s *Nemean 5*.¹⁰⁹ It is not surprising then that Bacchylides incorporates Achilles and Ajax, who are mythically associated with Aegina, into an ode celebrating an Aeginetan athlete. The mythic narrative, however, is an active battle narrative composed in a conventionally epic style (and therefore unique for an ode, according to Cairns), with the majority of the characterisation falling upon Achilles as a raging spearman.¹¹⁰ Ajax is defined as the “super-spirited...shield-bearing hero” (ὑπέρθυμον...σακεσφόρον ἥρω) as back-up for Achilles (13.103-4). Of interest, though, is Bacchylides’ emphasis on φθόνος near the ode’s end (13.199-210):

εἰ μή τινα θερσιεπιῆς,
φθόνος βιάται,
αἰνεῖτω σοφὸν ἄνδρα
σὺν δίκαι. βροτῶν δὲ μῶμος
πάντεσσι μὲν ἐστὶν ἐπ’ ἔργοις·
ἀ δ’ ἀλαθεία φιλεῖ
νικᾶν, ὃ τε πανδ[α]μάτωρ
χρόνος τὸ καλῶς
ἐ]ργμένον αἰὲν ἀ[νίσχει·
δυσμενέων δὲ μα[ταία
γλῶσσ’] ἀἰδῆς μιν[ύθει
[...]

¹⁰⁹ Cairns (2010) 131.

¹¹⁰ Cairns (2010) 52.

Whoever Envy, bold in word, does not coerce, let him praise a skilful man with justice. Mortals' scorn hangs over all actions; but Truth loves to win, and Time, the subduer of all, always maintains fine deed. The [tongue] of hostile men is without effort and shrinks away unseen [...]¹¹¹

This of course is similar to Pindar's themes surrounding φθόνοϋ throughout his own odes, not least in *Nemean* 8. In Bacchylides' *Ode* 13, ἀλαθεία and χρόνος (time) act as divinities, winning out over the actions of mortals. This is similar to Pindar's notions of divine Truth's rule over mortals, as I have discussed above. Cairns identifies a similar antithesis between truth and envy in Pindar's *Nemean* 5 as well (187-90), that expresses the notion that, while praise for the victor's achievement is the right thing to do, envy towards the victor is natural.¹¹² Cairns sees φθόνοϋ then as "rhetorically useful", because it proves the victor's goodness – as one to be envied – and advocates for the right thing to do: praising over envying.¹¹³ As I have argued above, Pindar uses φθόνοϋ as a similar rhetorical construct to prove the relative goodness of Ajax, since his goodness is susceptible to the φθόνοϋ of others who are inferior. Both Pindar and Bacchylides therefore present the challenge to their common audiences to avoid carrying φθόνοϋ and to offer praise to the praiseworthy instead.

Pindar's *Nemean* 8 is a significant checkpoint in the study of the Ajax narrative throughout Greek literature, since it presents the idea that φθόνοϋ infects Ajax and therefore carries him to his suicide. Pindar's approaches to φθόνοϋ throughout the odes and his campaign against the pursuit of bad ἔρις, as Hesiod depicted it, support the idea that Ajax was a flawed hero whose weakness, being ἄγλωσσος, allowed φθόνοϋ to infect him and dictate his downfall. While Pindar presents Ajax as relatively good in comparison to his rival Odysseus, who practises bad ἔρις, Ajax's weakness complicates his adherence with the Homeric heroic code. Pindar, therefore, does not ignore Ajax's heroic flaws but rather implicates Ajax in a wider context of problematic heroism. This idea will be instrumental to my discussion of Ajax as representative of hero-athletes in chapter five. But first in the following chapter, I explore the

¹¹¹ Text and translations for Bacchylides are derived from Cairns (2010).

¹¹² Cairns (2010) 326.

¹¹³ Cairns (2010) 23.

Ajax narratives in the wider scope of Greek literature following the Epic Cycle. In particular I focus on the characterisation and themes surrounding Ajax in Sophoclean and Aeschylean tragedy and the speech narratives of Antisthenes, Ovid and Quintus Smyrnaeus. It shall become clear how Pindar's application of φθόρος as an infection within Ajax anticipates more explicit associations between φθόρος and disease in these later Ajax narratives.

Chapter Four: Themes and characterisation in narratives of the *hoplōn krisis*

Pindar's Ajax narratives, by nature of the epinician genre, provide limited plot scope for the event that is central to Ajax's downfall, the *hoplōn krisis*. However, the *hoplōn krisis* became a popular narrative in literature, not least because of the source material that poets and writers could garner from the lost parts of the Epic Cycle. In this chapter I explore the greater heroic shortfalls that emerge more explicitly in Ajax's character in later narratives that address the *hoplōn krisis* and its aftermath. Firstly, themes and characterisations in Aeschylus and Sophocles' narratives support my interpretations of Ajax as an ambivalent hero in Pindar's Ajax narratives. While φθόνοϛ and disease are not so identifiable in relation to the Epic Cycle's Ajax, φθόνοϛ and disease begin to appear in tragedy, first possibly in the remaining fragments of Aeschylus' *Hoplōn Krisis (The Judgement of the Arms)*. Sophocles uses more explicit language of disease and blindness in the *Ajax*, which become major indicators of Ajax's fate. The themes of φθόνοϛ and χόλοϛ also survive in the later speech narratives of Antisthenes and Quintus Smyrnaeus, whose works, along with Ovid, stage the *hoplōn krisis* as a speech contest between Ajax and Odysseus. Antisthenes particularly revisits φθόνοϛ and disease and suggests that Ajax is diseased specifically with φθόνοϛ. This is crucial to our understanding of the uses and implications of φθόνοϛ and disease in Pindar and Sophocles' earlier narratives before Antisthenes. These narratives of the *hoplōn krisis* in both tragedy and speech narratives further develop the ambivalent heroism of Ajax, particularly in their freedom from the restrictions of Pindar's epinician genre.

Only a few fragments remain of Aeschylus' *Hoplōn Krisis* and, while it is difficult to know the exact plot outline, the play doubtlessly covered the events of the *hoplōn krisis* itself and probably Ajax's suicide to follow. *Fragments* 175, 176 and 177 were probably lines spoken by Ajax and, if so, they present familiar characteristic elements. *Fragment* 175 can at least suggest that Aeschylus follows the tradition of the animosity between Ajax and Odysseus in the contest (*Fr.* 175):

ἀλλ' Ἀντικλείας ἄσσον ἦλθε Σίσυφος,
τῆς σῆς λέγω τοι μητρός, ἣ σ' ἐγένετο

But Sisyphus came close to Anticleia – to your mother, I tell you, to her
who gave birth to you!¹¹⁴

As Andrew Wong asserts in his doctoral thesis on Antisthenes' Odysseus, the reference to Odysseus as the son of Sisyphus is intended as an insult elsewhere in Greek literature in, for example, Sophocles' *Ajax* 189, Sophocles' *Philoctetes* 417 and Euripides' *Cyclops* 104.¹¹⁵ Ajax's speech tactic of insulting Odysseus comes later in the accounts of Antisthenes, Ovid and Quintus Smyrnaeus, and so Aeschylus' account may have been of significant influence over these later authors. Sommerstein at least considers Aeschylus' play to be a major source for Ovid and Quintus.¹¹⁶ *Fragment 176*, if spoken by Ajax, assimilates to Pindar's characterisation of Ajax as one with a more straightforward nature and closeness to truth relative to his rival Odysseus (*Fr.* 176):

ἀπλᾶ γὰρ ἐστὶ τῆς ἀληθείας ἔπη
The words of truth are simple.

Fragment 177, finally, is particularly important as it probably indicates Ajax's subsequent suicide (*Fr.* 177):

τί γὰρ καλὸν ζῆν βίον ὃς λύπας φέρει;
For what honour is there in living a life that brings only pain?

If *Fragment 177* is in fact spoken by Ajax, Ajax's pain (λύπη) here is likely caused by the same anger that he experiences in Pindar's narratives and the Epic Cycle, but it is unclear whether this anger is the result of Ajax's loss in the contest alone or having failed to murder the Greek generals as well. Either way, Ajax's λύπη may be a symptom of the overarching disease with which Ajax is plagued in other narratives. The fragment suggests an ongoing λύπη that cannot be cured in life, as if it is indeed a part of an ongoing incurable disease. If this were the case,

¹¹⁴ Text and translations for Aeschylus, *Fragments*, are derived from Sommerstein (2008).

¹¹⁵ Wong (2017) 215.

¹¹⁶ Sommerstein (2008) 175.

Aeschylus' play may have been the forerunner in establishing such themes as φθόνοϛ and disease in the wider Ajax narrative.

Aeschylus would have been of significant influence to Sophocles, whose play *Ajax* is the most extensive surviving source on the Ajax narrative. The likelihood of Aeschylus' influence suggests that the themes of φθόνοϛ and disease in Sophocles' *Ajax* may have come from Aeschylus' narrative. The major narrative events in the *Ajax* are the immediate aftermath of Ajax's madness and slaughter of livestock following the *hoplōn krisis*, his subsequent suicide and the indecision over his burial. Sophocles presents Ajax as a diseased hero whose illness can predominantly be defined as an uncontrollable concern for his own image. Ajax's disease develops out of several culminating factors: the φθόνοϛ that is perceived to be creeping upon him, his assumptions about the Greeks' and the gods' hatred towards him, his blindness to other key characters' feelings and his anger over his unjust dishonouring. Ajax's disease in Sophocles, therefore, is more complex than his disease of φθόνοϛ in Pindar's *Nemean* 8. But his disease in Sophocles is made up of several familiar characteristics from within Pindar's narratives, blindness, anger and φθόνοϛ, which suggests that Pindar certainly influenced Sophocles' narrative, or that such themes were present in the lost parts of the Epic Cycle and Aeschylus' *Hoplōn Krisis*. As a more narrative than the epinician ode, Sophocles' play has more space and means to explore Ajax's ambivalent heroism by fully unpacking the components that make up his diseased mind. Sophocles is therefore able to address problematic aspects of heroism by presenting a hero whose transgressions can be overlooked when his community needs him, but whose excessive concern for his own heroic image blinds him to his community's need for him.

The appearance of φθόνοϛ in Sophocles' *Ajax* is brief, but it was possibly crucial in establishing the factors to follow that make up Ajax's diseased mind. In the chorus' first song, they assume that Ajax's slaughter of the livestock are whispering slanders (λόγοι ψιθύροι) from Odysseus himself (148). Here the chorus initially take the same position as Pindar in blaming

Odysseus for his unfair λόγος. The chorus follow with φθόνος as the inferior man's weapon against the superior (*Ajax* 157):

πρὸς γὰρ τὸν ἔχονθ' ὁ φθόνος ἔρπει.

Envy stalks / after magnates of wealth and power.

I would think that this is a clear allusion to Pindar's repeated use of φθόνος as an epinician theme. The way that φθόνος appears here as a "stalking" (ἔρπω) notion is comparable to the "fastening upon" (ἄπτω) notion of φθόνος in *Nemean* 8.¹¹⁷ Since Sophocles proves that the supposed λόγοι ψιθύροι about Ajax slaughtering the livestock are in fact true, he may be discrediting Pindar's position in *Nemean* 8 as overly slanderous itself. Hubbard argues that Sophocles clearly responds to Pindar and the anti-Odysseus trend by establishing Odysseus as a more philosophical figure for whom Sophocles provides a platform to redeem himself from his negative reputation that Pindar exacerbates.¹¹⁸ The chorus are indeed proved wrong about Odysseus' supposed slanders, but the fact that Ajax would believe that he is being subject to others' φθόνος towards him would be a contributing factor in his blindness to the truth and his excessive concern for his heroic image. If Sophocles is in fact responding to Pindar in the way that Hubbard suggests, I would add to Hubbard's argument then that Sophocles deliberately acknowledges Pindar's themes of φθόνος and the inferior man winning over the superior man in the chorus' first song in order to differentiate his stance on the role of φθόνος from that of Pindar. The difference between Pindar and Sophocles' accounts is that Pindar presents Ajax's disease by φθόνος as the result of Odysseus' bad ἔρις, whereas Sophocles presents Ajax's mere perception of others' φθόνος towards him to be one culminating factor in his overall diseased mind.

Ajax shares similar predicaments to Achilles and Agamemnon in the *Iliad* when they respectively lose their prize women, Briseis and Chryseis. The only thing these heroes expect

¹¹⁷ I tend to prefer Jebb's translation of ἔρπω as "creep", which makes it more comparable to the nuances of ἄπτω and δάπτω (devour) in *Nemean* 8.

¹¹⁸ Hubbard (2000) 317-318. See also 326-7, in which Hubbard remarks how Sophocles deliberately gives Odysseus the comparable line about mortals "living as dream images or weightless shadows" at *Ajax* 125-6 that recalls Pindar's famous line at *Pythian* 8.95-6: σκιᾶς ὄναρ ἄνθρωπος, "Man is the dream of a shadow."

to lose are their own lives, for which they would receive *kleos* in return, and so each of these heroes cannot cope when they lose a tangible symbol of their honour (Achilles' armour; the prize women) and they are expected to continue living without it. Ajax then has the added dimension of also having failed in his attempt to rectify his loss, that is by murdering the Greek generals, and so he is left with a perpetual frustration, like the ongoing λύπη in Aeschylus' *Hoplōn Krisis*.

Ajax therefore becomes obsessed with his heroic image when he realises that he cannot rectify the wrongful assassination of his honour. He is preoccupied with the gods' and the Greeks' perceptions of him and assumes that Odysseus and the Greeks are laughing (γελᾶω) at him (382 and 454). This follows Athena's earlier invitation to Odysseus to laugh over Ajax's misfortune: "But to laugh at your enemies – what sweeter laughter can there be than that?" (οὐκουν γέλως ἥδιστος εἰς ἐχθροὺς γελᾶν;) (79). In Ajax's first lengthy speech, he identifies himself as the superior man over the inferior Odysseus, but he perceives this as hopeless against the collective hatred towards him (*Ajax* 455-9):

...εἰ δέ τις θεῶν
βλάβηται, φύγοι τᾶν χῶ κακὸς τὸν κρείσσονα.
καὶ νῦν τί χρὴ δρᾶν; ὅστις ἐμφανῶς θεοῖς
ἐχθαίρομαι, μισεῖ δέ μ' Ἑλλήνων στρατός,
ἐχθρεῖ δὲ Τροία πᾶσα καὶ πεδία τάδε.

...But when God / Strikes harm, a worse man often foils his better. / And
now, Ajax – what is to be done now? I am hated by the gods, that's plain;
the Greek camp hates me: Troy and the ground I stand upon detest me.

Here Ajax claims that the gods were on Odysseus' side in the *hoplōn krisis*. In an earlier short speech, Ajax had recognised that he no longer had the gods on his side and that he must ask the Underworld to receive him instead (394-6). As I have stated in chapter one, Ajax's fraught relationship with the gods is evident in his lack of divine assistance and his comments on the gods' desertion of the Greeks throughout the *Iliad*. Ajax's discontent with the gods is therefore not new, which makes his perceptions of the gods more plausible to Sophocles' audience. Odysseus' expression of pity for Ajax (121-4), however, worsens the audience's concern for

Ajax because it becomes clear that it is Ajax's perception of the situation rather than the truth of it that drives his downfall henceforth.

As I have discussed briefly in chapter two, Sophocles maintains a sense of blindness in Ajax by ensuring that his interactions with other characters in the play are minimal. This way, Ajax's personal perceptions of his predicament remain unchallenged. The isolation of Ajax from his peers drives him deeper into his obsession with his own image so that he is unable to provide the support that his family and comrades need. Ajax does not personally exchange dialogue with the chorus, Teucer, or Odysseus; he only speaks directly with Tecmessa, whose speech he discounts on the basis that she is a woman (see, for example, 293, 586). Even though Tecmessa tries her best to calm Ajax down in her lengthy speech to him (485-524), she has already recognised that Ajax's φίλοι, his sailors and friends, will have a better chance of getting through to him (328-330). We can also assume that if Ajax were to interact with his half-brother Teucer, he may have been dissuaded from suicide, but Sophocles conveniently places Teucer out of reach and on a raid (342-3). Even Odysseus, Ajax's greatest foe, may have softened his anger if he were to see Odysseus' pity. Biggs additionally notes that, although Ajax appreciates the chorus, his sailors, (349-50), he "cannot talk to them" in his state.¹¹⁹ More so, Sophocles cannot have Ajax talk to the chorus for the sake of his plot because he must maintain Ajax's isolation and misconceptions so that he indeed faces the inability to reintegrate back into his social community.

Athena's obscuring and darkening of Ajax's vision in the opening scene of the play are the only types of physical blindness that Ajax suffers. Richard Buxton notes, "after the first scene in *Ajax* blindness hardly recurs as a prominent theme, and it would be misleading to exaggerate its significance in the play."¹²⁰ I agree that, compared to light and darkness, blindness is not as explicit a motif. Most significantly, death becomes Ajax's only light in escaping the darkness of living, which scholars have recognised contrasts with Ajax's prayer

¹¹⁹ Biggs (1966) 225.

¹²⁰ Buxton (1980) 23.

for vision and light in the face of death in *Iliad* 17.¹²¹ But I would argue that blindness clearly continues to be present, and remains significant, in Ajax's isolation from everyone. Buxton goes on to say that Athena's physical blinding of Ajax emphasises "the true feeling that human sight and insight are *limited* when compared with the sight and insight of the gods." This is certainly the case for Ajax, whose lack of insight to the truth of his situation and the feelings of his comrades infiltrates darkness and blindness and lead him to an exclusively mortal act – death. I have argued in chapter two that the very association of blindness with Ajax in Pindar's *Nemean* 7 seems to anticipate Sophocles' implication of blindness in his play. The fact that Sophocles has Athena produce Ajax's physical blindness seems to allude even more to Pindar's contrast in *Nemean* 7 between mortals' blindness to truth (*Nemean* 7.23-4) and the gods' ultimate power to control mortality (30-31).

Ajax's concern for his image and blindness of the other goings on in the play culminate in his enduring anger towards the Greeks, especially towards Odysseus. When Ajax emerges from the madness induced by Athena, he rages over his failure to murder the Greek generals and he continues to consider how he might yet achieve this and then bring death to himself (*Ajax* 389-91):

πὼς ἂν τὸν αἰμυλώτατον, ἐχθρὸν ἄλημα,
 τοὺς τε δισσάρχους ὀλέσσας βασιλῆς
 τέλος θάνοιμι καὐτός ;

How can I strike them down, / That devious, hateful rogue and the two
 joined kings, / And last find death myself?

Here Ajax refers to Odysseus, Agamemnon and Menelaus, whom he considers to be the main perpetrators of the dishonour (ἄτιμος) that the Greeks have forced upon him (426, 440). Ajax asserts that, like his father Telamon, he is indeed worthy of praise (436-40), but he claims that he cannot return home to his father without the glory (ἄριστος) that he should rightly possess

¹²¹ See Stanford (1978) 190 and Hesk (2003) 58-9. See also *Ajax* 394-5: "O / Darkness that is my light, / Murk of the underworld, my only brightness..." (ὠ / σκοτός, ἐμὸν φῶς, / ἔρεβος ὃ φαιεννότατον, ὡς ἐμοί...)

(462-4). Ajax therefore views his ἄτιμος as a miscarriage of justice and ultimate assassination of his character, which confirms his anger towards the Greeks.

Ajax then marks his own fate when he recognises his over-concern for his heroic image as a disease, for which he sees death as the only cure (581-2), hence his intention to take his own life after murdering the Greek generals (391 above). The chorus have the same realisation in their following song, labelling Ajax as δυσθεράπευτος (“ill to cure”) (609). Sophocles then has Ajax question the honour of living if life only brings trouble (473-80), therefore echoing the ongoing λύπη in Aeschylus’ *Hoplōn Krisis Fragment* 177. Ajax resolves that it is better to bring death to oneself more quickly instead of carrying the perpetual grief in life due to his loss of honour. Ajax then considers what “notable exploit” (τι χρηστόν) he should do to redeem himself (468), such as rushing the walls of Troy, after which he decides that a nobler “enterprise” (πεῖρα) is required (470). Ajax feels that he can reclaim his honour, Gellie states, “only by some spectacular demonstration of personal courage, like falling on a sword.”¹²² Ajax’s perception of personal courage therefore continues to remain inward, discounting any way that his courage might benefit his community beyond the glory that he might bring himself. Gellie further asserts how Athena’s madness upon Ajax makes him appear like a victim, even though he continues to wish death upon his comrades after Athena’s madness has lifted: “The ‘sickness’ which frustrated the deeds of violence comes to seem responsible for those deeds.”¹²³ This sense of victimisation of Ajax therefore softens the sense of villainy that might otherwise have irreparably stained his character. As in Pindar’s narratives, Ajax is the central sufferer in the aftermath of the *hoplōn krisis*. Both the language of disease and the concept of madness (μανιάσιν νόσοις (diseased madness) 61; μανία (madness) 216) signifies Ajax’s incurability, that he cannot cope with the wrongs done to him and is therefore unable to reintegrate back into his social community and practise normal social behaviours.

¹²² Gellie (1972) 11.

¹²³ Gellie (1972) 7.

By characterising Ajax's over-concern with this heroic image as a disease, Sophocles makes explicit the problematic nature of heroism: Ajax does not possess the strategies to cope with the failures that he experiences, making him susceptible to anger, blindness to truth and perceptions of others' φθόνοϛ. Because he, like Achilles and Agamemnon at the beginning of the *Iliad*, is so desperate to maintain his honour, he does not know how to live or how to die without that honour. Ajax's death is therefore symbolic of his inner torment as he dies by the hand of himself, who, through his obsession with his own image, has become his greatest enemy. Ajax recognises the irony of falling upon the sword given to him in guest friendship by Hector who became "most hateful" (ἐχθιστοϛ) to him (818), but this seems also to be a metaphor for Ajax's own hand becoming hateful and eventually turning on himself. It takes a situation like the complicated downfall of Ajax for heroes to recognise their own precariousness when it comes to maintaining their honour, which is why Odysseus (who is clever enough to recognise this) feels pity for Ajax when it catches him out.

My review of Ajax's characterisation in Sophocles' *Ajax* has been brief, but my intention has been to provide enough evidence from Sophocles' *Ajax* to support my arguments in chapters two and three for Pindar's earlier characterisations of Ajax as an ambivalent hero weakened by blindness and φθόνοϛ. Sophocles' *Ajax* remains the most extensive surviving source on the suicide of Ajax and with more time and space there would be an opportunity to explore Ajax's disease in the *Ajax* in greater depth.¹²⁴ But for the purposes of my study I have focussed on the comparable themes between Pindar and Sophocles' accounts in order to understand Ajax's heroism and the ambiguities in the Pindaric context.

In later centuries, Antisthenes, Ovid and Quintus Smyrnaeus each present the *hoplōn krisis* between Ajax and Odysseus in speech format. The *Odysseus* speech of Antisthenes, who was active in the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE, is vitally important because Odysseus directly accuses Ajax of being diseased with φθόνοϛ (*Odysseus* 13):

¹²⁴ See, for example, Biggs (1966) 224-7.

φθόνον δὲ καὶ ἀμαθίαν νοσεῖς, κακῶν ἐναντιώτατα αὐτοῖς· καὶ ὁ μὲν σε ἐπιθυμεῖν ποιεῖ τῶν καλῶν, ἡ δὲ ἀποτρέπει.

You are sick with jealousy and ignorance, the evils most opposite to each other. For jealousy makes you want fine things, but ignorance turns you away from them.¹²⁵

Susan Prince suggests in her commentary that “the diseases diagnosed seem to be Antisthenes’ contribution to the myth: Ajax is not otherwise known as especially jealous or ignorant.”¹²⁶

Before I address the accuracy of Prince’s claim here, a brief note needs to be made on the multifaceted meanings of φθόνος. Prince translates φθόνος as “jealousy” and provides no in-depth discussion on her use of the term. Glenn Most would probably take issue with Prince’s use of “jealousy” here, since Most differentiates jealousy from envy as a term more associated with one’s desire for another person, whom they would likely fight for in an unashamed manner.¹²⁷ Another possibility is the meaning of “spite” or “begrudging” in the sense that the verb φθονέω tends to carry in Homeric Epic (*Il.* 4.55 and *Od.* 1.346). Φθόνος is therefore difficult to define in Antisthenes’ passage, considering the significance of φθόνος in association with Pindar and Sophocles’ Ajax narratives, but I would not doubt that Antisthenes employed φθόνος as a traditional association with the character of Ajax.

Prince’s claim for Antisthenes making up Ajax’s disease of φθόνος would not be correct if applying my arguments about φθόνος as the disease or as a contributing factor to disease in Pindar’s *Nemean* 8 and Sophocles’ *Ajax* respectively. Prince would be correct in stating that Antisthenes is the first to explicitly define Ajax’s disease as φθόνος. But following my arguments above, it cannot be ignored that both Pindar and Sophocles make heavy allusions to the synonymy between φθόνος and the disease with which Ajax becomes plagued. It seems clear then that Antisthenes’ definition of Ajax’s disease as φθόνος follows the themes implicit in the preceding Greek literature. Where Antisthenes differs from his predecessors, however, is that Odysseus accuses Ajax of being diseased with φθόνος before the outcome of the *hoplōn*

¹²⁵ Text and translation for Antisthenes is derived from Prince (2015).

¹²⁶ Prince (2015) 229.

¹²⁷ Most (2003) 127-8.

krisis, whereas in Pindar and Sophocles' narratives, Ajax's disease seems to develop after the contest. This raises an interesting question over Odysseus' accusation of φθόνοϛ towards Ajax here. Perhaps Antisthenes' intention was for Odysseus to tactfully accuse Ajax of the very thing that has traditionally been held by others towards Ajax, so that Antisthenes' audiences could recognise the fluidity of φθόνοϛ between its perpetrators and its victims. This would align with Aristotle's conception of φθόνοϛ as an emotion held between rivals of close rank. Whether or not my suggestions may be accurate, it is difficult to decipher Antisthenes' exact meaning of φθόνοϛ as disease here without other sources that also name Ajax as diseased with φθόνοϛ before the outcome of the *hoplōn krisis*. What seems to be clear, however, is that Antisthenes' definition of Ajax's disease as φθόνοϛ itself strengthens the likelihood that Pindar and Sophocles also treating φθόνοϛ and the concept of disease with a level of synonymity.

Ovid, writing much later in the late first century BCE and early first century CE, also composed a similar speech narrative between Ajax and Odysseus. In Ovid's narrative, Ajax appears angry even before he gives his own speech. The speeches are thematically similar to those of Antisthenes: Ajax's speech is short and criticises Odysseus for his lack of fighting and excessive speech (*Metamorphoses* 13.106-7; 136-8). Odysseus' speech is much longer and more eloquent (13.147) and he criticises Ajax for being useful only in battle but not in wit (13.266-8; 442-7). In Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica* 5, composed in the fourth century CE, it is the Trojan captives that make the judgement in the *hoplōn krisis*. The Trojan captives are men, as opposed to the Trojan girls providing judgement in the *Little Iliad*, but that they are captives nonetheless proves the plot point's endurance, as I have mentioned above. Nestor suggests this on the basis that the Trojan captives are unbiased in their hatred towards all the Greeks, to which Agamemnon agrees, supposing that the loser's anger will be directed towards the Trojans for judging against them (5.157-74). Ajax and Odysseus then both give their speeches, in which Ajax attacks Odysseus' character and Odysseus defends himself in a similar fashion to Antisthenes and Ovid's narratives. The outcome fills Ajax with χόλοϛ (324) and he looks to take revenge on the Greeks, despite Nestor and Agamemnon's earlier assumptions that

this would not happen (352-8). Quintus gives no reason for this discrepancy and instead Nestor and Agamemnon's decision to give the judgement to the Trojans seems to have been pointless.

Antisthenes, Ovid and Quintus' narratives in speech format were probably mostly influenced by lost parts of the Epic Cycle and Aeschylus' *Hoplōn Krisis*, but the enduring popularity of the *hoplōn krisis* in speech format suggests that audiences viewed the *hoplōn krisis* as a fascinating contest of reason. Both Ajax and Odysseus' standpoints are rational, allowing for reasonably balanced characterisation. All three speech narratives show Ajax speaking first and largely in attack of Odysseus' character and actions, with Odysseus following Ajax in self-defence. For the sake of my arguments on Pindar's Ajax narratives, the authors' respective uses of φθόνοϲ and anger to characterise Ajax support the likelihood of earlier characterisations of Ajax in this way.

The themes of φθόνοϲ and disease become more explicit in characterisations of Ajax from the Epic Cycle through to Antisthenes' speech narratives in the later Classical period. Pindar and Sophocles' relative implicitness and ambiguities around the theme of φθόνοϲ and disease might suggest the discomfort of associating such negative concepts with the illustrious lives of heroes. This is most crucial for Pindar whose genre of poetry must primarily praise individual subjects. Pindar carefully presents Ajax as an example of the precariousness of one's heroic status in the face of φθόνοϲ. While Pindar explicitly maintains Ajax's heroism by marking him as the nobler hero against Odysseus in the "good versus bad" nexus, Pindar also implies Ajax's weaknesses of blindness and being ἄλωστος in *Nemean 7* and *Nemean 8* respectively to challenge his victors not to succumb to other's φθόνοϲ through their own weaknesses. This is opposed to epic and tragedy's freedom to explore aspects of heroism more fully, as I have demonstrated in the case of Sophocles' *Ajax* above. Sophocles more broadly defines Ajax's disease as a series of culminating and interweaving factors that raise significant questions about the treatment of heroic transgressions and the ambivalent nature of heroes.

In this sense, Ajax's ongoing association with φθόνοϲ throughout Greek literature comes to represent an unfavourable prospect of ambivalent heroism. As I have addressed in

this thesis so far, φθόνος, χόλος, blindness and being ἄγλωσσος make Ajax an ambivalent hero, both for his outstanding nobility and for the commonality of his weaknesses with his fellow Greek comrades. Ajax's downfall presents him as a kind of antithesis of both Achilles and Odysseus together since, unlike Achilles, he loses his honour and, unlike Odysseus, he loses his life. And since he falls from the heroic heights that he shared with both Achilles and Odysseus, it is inevitable that he must suffer from great φθόνος and disease in order to be brought down.

Pindar's employment of Ajax as an ambivalent hero in the epinician context would surely make Ajax a representative of a particularly ambivalent type of athlete. Ajax shares significant character traits with a range of problematic hero-athletes with mytho-historical status, several of whom were said to exist before, or were roughly contemporary with, Pindar. In the following chapter I explore how themes specific to athletic culture might have influenced Pindar's approach to the Ajax narrative. Firstly, the *nostos* loop, which athletic victors must complete as part of their heroic athletic journey, proves the complexity and importance of social reintegration in athletic culture. Secondly, a series of mytho-historical hero-athletes and their inability to reintegrate back into their social communities exemplify the difficulty of completing the *nostos* loop. I use these issues of social reintegration to explore whether Pindar's Ajax may have represented the hero-athlete and whether Pindar chose Ajax to suggest the complexity of both the hero-athletes' stories and thus the complexity of the athletic identity in general.

Chapter Five: Ajax as hero-athlete representative

The first identifiable connection between Ajax and fifth century BCE athletes is the concept of social reintegration and its challenges for the hero or athlete. Thomas Hubbard plainly states, “Ajax is a hero who cannot be reintegrated into society, whether that of the Greek camp, the Salaminian troops, or even his immediate family.”¹²⁸ As I mentioned in chapter four, Sophocles shows this in the *Ajax* by purposefully isolating Ajax from everyone who may otherwise have dissuaded him from suicide. But the reasons for Ajax’s isolation and inability to socially reintegrate are the transgressive actions that follow his loss of honour in the *hoplōn krisis*. As I have argued in my thesis so far, Ajax’s weaknesses and transgressions make him an ambivalent hero. Therefore, in the scope of hero representing athlete and athlete representing hero, I argue that Ajax’s ambivalence may be compared to a significant cohort of mytho-historical hero-athletes whose transgressions present a similar kind of heroic ambivalence. Stories of hero-athletes share a range of comparable tropes such as experiencing unfair dishonouring, committing violent actions, facing involuntary downfalls and being unable to reintegrate back into their social communities and then receiving cult worship in death. In this chapter I explore the comparisons between the hero-athlete narratives and the Ajax narratives, particularly within Pindar, and I suggest that Ajax, through his ambivalent heroism, may have represented the archetypal hero-athlete for Pindar’s audiences.

The concept of hero as athlete derives most significantly from the funeral games for Patroclus in *Iliad* 23. Ajax is a worthy competitor in the armoured combat and wrestling, but he does not win anything outright. Achilles and Odysseus are more closely associated with athletic success throughout Homeric epic. Achilles’ “swift-footed” epithet proves his athleticism from the outset and he announces that if he were to compete in the funeral games then his immortal horses would clearly win (*Il.* 23.274-7). Odysseus, on the other hand, claims actual victory more so than any other hero, winning the footrace in *Iliad* 23, astonishing the Phaeacians with his discus throw in *Odyssey* 8 and successfully stringing and shooting the bow

¹²⁸ Hubbard (2000) 324.

in *Odyssey* 21. Odysseus' general athletic success is therefore in keeping with his success over Ajax in the *hoplōn krisis*, in which Ajax represents the defeated athlete. Ajax's inability to cope makes him particularly comparable to the mytho-historical hero-athletes who were unable to cope with their respective ordeals and reintegrate back into their social communities. The best way to understand the hero-athletes' inability to cope is through the concept of the *nostos* loop ritual, which I outline first before comparing Ajax to specific hero-athletes.

The *nostos* loop is central to the athlete's journey in fifth century BCE culture. According to the studies on the *nostos* loop by Crotty, Nagy and Kurke, an athlete or hero must successfully reintegrate back into their social community upon returning home from their athletic or heroic ordeal.¹²⁹ It is a kind of testing phase to see if the hero or athlete has coped with his ordeal.¹³⁰ Crotty states that the return home is one of the most common themes throughout Pindar's odes and, furthermore, the theme is used in a number of odes as a loop structure.¹³¹ An example of this is the loop structure of *Nemean* 9, which begins and finishes in the home of Chromius, the victor, whose athletic and heroic achievements are told throughout the ode. Crotty's main point of discussion is that the journey of the athlete is a strenuous ordeal. Crotty quotes Mary Douglas: "Danger lies in transitional states...to enter the margins is to be exposed to power that is enough to kill them or make their manhood."¹³² For the athlete, then, the athletic competition has the potential to kill the athlete (which happened to the opponent of Kleomedes of Astypalaia) or to define the athlete as a man. This transitional phase was present in Olympic tradition as athletes spent a compulsory month in Elis training for their events before the festival itself.¹³³ As Crotty explains, "life outside the community overthrows the familiar ways" and the athlete must survive in an unfamiliar environment.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Crotty (1982) 109-10, Nagy (1990) 142, Kurke (1991) 18-19.

¹³⁰ Nagy (2013—web article) has argued that ritual ordeals of athletes "were not distinguished from the corresponding mythical ordeals of heroes."

¹³¹ Crotty (1982) 108-9.

¹³² Crotty (1982) 112.

¹³³ Miller (2004) 115.

¹³⁴ Crotty (1982) 113.

Crotty then places particular emphasis on the return of the athlete to his home town or original community and the ongoing ordeal that follows. There is uncertainty in the athlete's return, in so far that the athlete's new strength threatens to overpower his community.¹³⁵ This moment of return, Crotty claims, is when the epinician ode plays its role as an "act of inclusion" for the athlete back into his community.¹³⁶ The athlete's return then acts as a rebirth, following the death of his former self through the athletic ordeal. The epinician praise for the athlete not only validates the athlete's victory but also includes the athlete back into his community by way of familial reference such as mention of the victor's father.¹³⁷ Crotty compares the reintegrating method of epinician praise to Athena's praise for Odysseus in *Odyssey* 8, which has the effect of initiating Odysseus into the Phaeacian community (*Od.* 8.193-200).

Unlike Crotty, Kurke does not enforce the concept of the athlete's ongoing ordeal after the return, going so far as to say that the victor's return home makes the audience of the victory ode feel that the athlete is "home safe".¹³⁸ Kurke rather expands upon the concept of the athlete's rebirth as a positive force for the athlete's entire *oikos*, "household", and the family-wide *kleos* that the athlete's victory brings. Kurke explores why the epinician poet so emphatically endorses *nostos*: "what is at risk if a victory is won but not "brought home"?"¹³⁹ The answer, for Kurke, is in the "familial quality" of *kleos*: the individual athlete's *kleos* belongs to their family or household. In regard to Pindar's odes, Kurke provides examples in *Pythian* 11 and *Nemean* 6 where these odes appeal to the fame and grace (*charis*) of the victors' ancestors and future generations, enforcing the far-reaching nature of one's personal achievements on their family and community.¹⁴⁰ Pindar's emphasis on the victor's ancestry proves for Kurke the family's ownership over the victor's *kleos*.

¹³⁵ Crotty (1982) 110.

¹³⁶ Crotty (1982) 121; Crotty borrows the phrase "act of inclusion" from M. E. Cooke, *Acts of Inclusion: Studies Bearing on an Elementary Theory of Romanticism* (New Haven, 1979).

¹³⁷ Nagy (1990), 142, also reflects on the athlete's return home, describing the return as the "ritual phase of reintegration" following the "ritual phase of segregation".¹³⁷ Nagy describes the need for a joyous celebration upon the athlete's reintegration, to signify new life after ritual death. The method for this joyous celebration is the epinician ode itself

¹³⁸ Kurke (1991) 34.

¹³⁹ Kurke (1991) 35.

¹⁴⁰ Kurke (1991) 35-9.

Kurke therefore extends Crotty's view of the individual's rebirth to a rebirth of the entire *oikos*. Ancestry and cults of the dead, as well as offspring, were central to the identity of the *oikos*; that is, the family could claim *kleos* for themselves through the achievements of their ancestors, thus celebrating these ancestors as immortal. Therefore, immortality that the epinician poet speaks of is not personal to the victor, but rather familial, as it reaches the victor's entire *oikos*.¹⁴¹ The victory, Kurke emphasises, is like a liberation or a new birth for a household, as the promise of immortality through athletic victory and epinician praise "renew the vitality of the [*oikos*]".¹⁴² Kurke notes how Odysseus' *kleos* centres around his *oikos* in the narrative of the *Odyssey*.¹⁴³ Telemachus directly associates the state of the household with his father's absence from the beginning of the *Odyssey*, when he imagines that the return of his father will disband the suitors (*Od.* 1.113-17). As Telemachus sets out towards Sparta and Odysseus returns to Ithaca, together they form an integrated *nostos* loop within the narrative. By doing so Homer proves the familial quality of *nostos*, that Telemachus attempts to assist in his father's homecoming, since he, as family, is reliant on the homecoming of Odysseus, the *kleos*-bringer.

Central to Odysseus' ability to return home, however, is his famed *πολύτλας* quality, being "much enduring".¹⁴⁴ This contrasts with Ajax and the hero-athletes' inability to cope with their ordeals and return to their *oikoi*. In Ajax's case, his inability to return stems from the series of weaknesses that he exhibits in Pindar and Sophocles' narratives: his blindness to the truth in *Nemean* 7, his isolation and blindness to his community's need for him in the *Ajax* and the infecting of *φθόνοσ* in *Nemean* 8. In a way, Ajax has two *oikoi* – his family at war comprising of his wife Tecmessa, his son Eurysaces, his half-brother Teucer and his comrades, and his ancestral family comprising most importantly of his father Telamon. Ajax states in Sophocles' *Ajax* that he cannot return to his ancestral home without honour (462-4), but this inability to return to his ancestral home is also physically represented by his inability to return

¹⁴¹ Kurke (1991) 63.

¹⁴² Kurke (1991) 64-5.

¹⁴³ Kurke (1991) 17-19.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, *Iliad* 9.676, *Odyssey* 5.171 and 8.446.

to his immediate *oikos* at war. Ajax sees his loss of honour following the *hoplōn krisis* as enough to affect the quality of his *nostos* when the time comes to return to his ancestral *oikos*. Ajax therefore exemplifies the challenge of the *nostos* loop, as his loss of honour drives him towards the belief that there is no point in achieving *nostos*.

Despite Crotty, Nagy and Kurke's extensive studies on the *nostos* loop ritual, these authors have missed an opportunity to explore how Ajax represents its failure. My study of the comparisons between Ajax and the hero-athletes who also fail in the *nostos* loop shall provide the possibility for considering Ajax to be representative of the failed hero-athlete archetype. For this reason, The *nostos* loop is the concept around which I base my comparisons between Ajax and the archetype of the hero-athlete. This archetype had particular prominence in the athletic culture of the fifth century BCE. Oibotas of Dyme, Milo of Croton, Kleomedes of Astypalaia, Theagenes of Thasos, Polydamas of Skotoussa and Dioxippus of Athens can all be understood as hero-athletes, and each of these figures' narratives showcases one or more motifs that are comparable to Ajax's own narrative.

Fontenrose first catalogued a vast record of athletes that he considered to be hero-athletes. In short, Fontenrose categorises plot points and motifs from each hero-athlete story and identifies continuities between them. These include the athlete's superhuman strength, the community's refusal to honour the athlete, the athlete's grief or madness following the refusal, the athlete's revenge and subsequent disappearance and so forth.¹⁴⁵ I focus particularly on the denial of honour, the committing of a violent act, the involuntary downfall and cult worship following death. Oibotas of Dyme, the first apparent hero-athlete recorded by Pausanias, was denied honours that were owed to him and he therefore cursed his fellow Achaians in revenge, who were said not to win an Olympic victory for the following 300 years (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 7.17.6).¹⁴⁶ For the sake of my argument I consider Oibotas' curse to be a kind of violent act. Kleomedes of Astypalaia was stripped of his honours after killing his

¹⁴⁵ Fontenrose (1968) 76-8. Fontenrose provides 14 categories in all. All references from Pausanias are derived from Jones (trans.), *Description of Greece* vol. 3 (1933) and vol. 4 (1935).

¹⁴⁶ See also Crotty (1982) 122-3.

opponent in a boxing match and in retaliation was said to commit what is perhaps the most violent of offences of all the hero-athletes by pulling down the roof of a school and killing sixty children inside (Pausanias 6.9.6-8). Dioxippus of Athens is the most significant comparison to Ajax, as he was dishonoured by those who felt φθόρος towards him, which led to his suicide (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 17.100.8-17.101.6). I explore Dioxippus' story in greater depth below. I include Theagenes of Thasos as a hero whose posthumous dishonouring also led to a kind of violent act, in so far as an enemy flogged Theagenes' statue until the statue eventually fell and killed its enemy (Pausanias 6.11.6-9). Milo of Croton and Polydamas of Skotoussa did not experience dishonouring, but they are both examples of hero-athletes who misjudge their own strength and lose their life as a result. Milo famously tore a tree trunk in half, became stuck inside, and was then eaten alive by wolves, while Polydamas attempted to hold up a cave that was collapsing around him but he was crushed instead.¹⁴⁷

The primary significance of each of the six hero-athletes that I have introduced above is that they all faced an involuntary downfall following their violent acts or misjudgements of strength. These involuntary downfalls then resulted in the hero-athletes' death, except in the case of Oibotas. I include Theagenes here as one who experienced a kind of second death, in so far as his fallen statue was exiled for murder and cast into the sea. The failures of these heroes therefore show that they could not complete the *nostos* loop of athletes and heroes that Crotty, Nagy and Kurke have claimed is central to the athlete's journey. Kleomedes and Dioxippus were not able to appropriately reintegrate into their communities following their dishonouring. Milo and Polydamas, although not dishonoured, were unable to control or judge their own athletic strength and therefore could not adapt to life in normal society.

Of the hero-athletes that I have introduced, Ajax is most comparable to Dioxippus of Athens, with whom he shares several remarkable similarities. Like Ajax, Dioxippus suicided after being dishonoured by those who felt φθόρος towards him. According to Diodorus Siculus,

¹⁴⁷ For evidence on the account of Milo, see Pausanias 6.14.8 and Strabo, *Geography* 6.1.12. For evidence on the account of Polydamas, see Pausanias, 6.5.1-9.

Dioxippus defeated a Macedonian, Coragus, in an impromptu wrestling match put on by King Alexander. The Macedonians then conspired against Dioxippus in envy for his success (17.101.3):

...οἱ τε φίλοι τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ πάντες οἱ περὶ τὴν αὐλὴν Μακεδόνες, φθονοῦντες αὐτοῦ τῇ ἀρετῇ, ἔπεισαν μὲν τὸν ἐπὶ τῆς διακονίας τεταγμένον ὑποβαλεῖν ὑπὸ τὸ προσκεφάλαιον χρυσοῦν ποτήριον, αὐτοὶ δὲ κατὰ τὸν ἐξῆς πότον καταιτιασάμενοι κλοπὴν...

...and Alexander's friends and all the other Macedonians about the court, jealous of the accomplishment, persuaded one of the butlers to secrete a golden cup under his pillow; then in the course of the next symposium they accused him of theft...¹⁴⁸

Dioxippus recognised the Macedonians' conspiracy and chose to suicide in response. But first he wrote a letter to King Alexander explaining the trick, and Alexander reacted thus (17.101.6):

Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς ἀναγνοὺς ἐπιστολὴν χαλεπῶς μὲν ἤνεγκεν ἐπὶ τῇ τάνδρῳς τελευτῇ καὶ πολλάκις ἐπεζήτησε τὴν ἀρετὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ παρόντι μὲν οὐ χρησάμενος, ἀπόντα δὲ ἐπιποθήσας ὅτε οὐδὲν ὄφελος ἔγνω τὴν καλοκάγαθίαν τάνδρῳς ἐκ τῆς τῶν διαβαλόντων κακίας.

The king read the letter and was very angry at the man's death. He often mourned of his good qualities, and the man whom he had neglected when he was alive, he regretted when he was dead. After it was no longer of use, he discovered the excellence of Dioxippus by contrast with the vileness of his accusers.

Dioxippus therefore loses his honour by means of others' dishonesty, but his true excellence (καλοκάγαθία) is eventually recognised by Alexander. Dioxippus' story differs from Ajax in that he did not commit a violent act before his suicide, beyond his letter to Alexander condemning his accusers. But the vileness (κακία) that Alexander sees in the accusers recalls Pindar's animosity towards Odysseus as the untruthful antithesis of Ajax.

The most significant similarity between Ajax and Dioxippus' stories is the φθόνος that their respective enemies act upon. The Macedonians' framing of Dioxippus could be characterised as an example of Hesiodic bad ἔρις, which I have applied to Odysseus' ἐχθρός

¹⁴⁸ Text and translation for Diodorus Siculus is derived from Welles (1963). See Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander* 9.7.16-26, for a similar account.

πάρφασις in Pindar’s *Nemean* 8. Like Ajax, Dioxiippus then suicides in a foreign land away from his ancestral *oikos* and thus fails the *nostos* loop. Most importantly, just as Ajax succumbs to φθόνος because of his weaknesses, Dioxiippus’ own weaknesses seem to have had a hand in his undoing. His own accusers describe him as having “great strength of body but little sense” (δύναμιν μὲν σώματος ἔχειν μεγάλην, νοῦν δὲ μικρόν) (17.101.5). Even though this sentiment comes from his enemies, it can be compared to Aelian’s account of Dioxiippus becoming enamoured with a girl in the crowd while driving into Athens (*Historical Miscellany* 12.58). In this account Diogenes of Sinope was the first to remark upon Dioxiippus’ weakness of feelings. Plutarch tells the same story, using Dioxiippus’ glances at the girl as an example of “shameful” (αἰσχρὸς) behaviour that weakens the mind (ψυχὴ) (*Moralia* 521B). Dioxiippus’ weakness of mind is reminiscent of the way that Odysseus describes Ajax in the final lines of his speech by Antisthenes, in which Odysseus compares Ajax to a “dull ass or grazing oxen”.¹⁴⁹ (Antisthenes, *Odysseus* 14). Similarly, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Odysseus advocates for intellect over strength (13.368-9) and accuses Ajax as ignorant and speechless (13.231-2, 306-8). It must be remembered that only in the narratives of the *hoplōn krisis*, in contrast to Odysseus, is Ajax subject to an oafish reputation, since throughout the *Iliad* at least Ajax shows as much intelligence and speaking ability as the other major heroes.¹⁵⁰ But the brain-versus-brawn nexus between Ajax and Odysseus still presents a notable similarity to Dioxiippus’ own weakness. Even though there is no explicit connection to Ajax in Dioxiippus’ story, I see the multitude of thematic similarities between Dioxiippus and Ajax to be the strongest argument for Ajax’s representation of the hero-athlete archetype. I hasten to admit that Dioxiippus was not said to be victorious at Olympia until 336 BCE, but it could be possible that Diodorus Siculus and other potential authors were influenced by the themes of the Ajax narratives, since they so closely align with the narrative of Dioxiippus.

¹⁴⁹ This recalls Homer’s simile of Ajax as a “stubborn donkey” (νοθήσ ὄνος) (*Iliad* 11.558-9) and Hector’s insult towards Ajax as an “inarticulate ox” (ἀμαρτοεπές, βουλάιε) (13.824).

¹⁵⁰ See my discussion in chapter one.

Cult worship in death, however, is what sets Dioxiippus and Pindar's Ajax apart from other hero-athletes. Oibotas, Kleomedes and Theagenes all received cult worship as a direct result of the problems that their violent acts had caused for their communities. In the case of Oibotas, the Achaian people eventually erected a statue of him to lift the curse; Kleomedes' community were advised by the Delphic Oracle to worship him as an immortal hero; the Delphic Oracle similarly advised Theagenes' community to retrieve his statue, which then became an object of worship. Polydamas' statue was also said to have become an object of cult worship following his death.¹⁵¹ The common thread here is that, despite their transgressive and violent reactions to their loss of honour, they became objects of cult worship. The establishment of cult worship through divine consultation seems to have been the eventual remedy to the hero-athletes' original loss of honour.

Kurke's concept of the hero-athletes' possession of *kudos* provides some useful context for the disparity between the hero-athletes' destructive violent acts and their eventual cult worship. Kurke compares *kudos* to the Polynesian term "mana", meaning an inherited or transmitted supernatural power. Kurke agrees with Emile Benveniste and Hermann Fränkel's differentiations between *kudos* and *kleos*, that, rather than *kudos* meaning fame in both life and death (as defines *kleos*), *kudos* is a divinely given quality bestowed exclusively upon the living.¹⁵² Hero-athletes, therefore, possess a "superabundance" of *kudos*, which, when not coupled with appropriate honours, become problematic both in life and in death. This is particularly recognisable in the stories of Oibotas and Theagenes, whose dishonouring lead respectively to a curse on future local athletes and famine on the local community. The recompense of the dishonoured athlete and his *kudos*, then, must often be as "extreme" as the institution of a cult for that athlete.¹⁵³ The local community must establish a cult as a way to harness or control the dead victor's powerful *kudos*.

¹⁵¹ For this final point on Polydamas see Miller (2004) 161.

¹⁵² Kurke (1998) 132.

¹⁵³ Kurke (1998) 151.

Even though Pindar believes that Ajax deserved to be honoured as well, the reality of Ajax's story is that he died in a way that meant he did not have to be honoured in order to control any problematic *kudos* that he has left behind. That is, Ajax's dishonouring seems to have been divinely acceptable since there is no apparent evidence that Ajax required cult worship in order for his honour to be redeemed, as was the case for Oibotas, Kleomedes and Theagenes. This suggests that Pindar may have been following the suggested tradition of the *Little Iliad* that Ajax was unheroically buried rather than cremated due to his ignoble suicide.¹⁵⁴ The same may be said for Dioxiippus, who likewise dies by suicide, not having left anything problematic for his community to overturn by means of cult worship.

A way to understand Ajax and Dioxiippus' differentiation from the hero-athletes who receive cult worship is to make a closer comparison with Kleomedes of Astypalaia. Kleomedes' cult worship is perhaps the most difficult to comprehend owing to the scale of his terroristic violent act. Hubbard draws a fleeting parallel between Ajax and Kleomedes for their shared failure to reintegrate back into their respective societies.¹⁵⁵ Kleomedes' violent act has a major effect on his local community, of which the community must then make sense through divine consultation. The Delphic Oracle then acts as divine vindication for Kleomedes' violence, acting, as Kurke would say, as proof of Kleomedes' "superabundance" of *kudos*, which leads to his eventual cult worship. Ajax's violent act, however, fails in Sophocles' narrative due to Athena's divine intervention, which means that the Greeks do not have to seek divine answers about an act that would have left them as destitute as Kleomedes' community. In Pindar's narratives, Ajax's weaknesses are perhaps enough to stop him from regaining the honour that he loses to Odysseus in the *hoplōn krisis*. Dioxiippus' own weaknesses restrict his demand for honour since his enemies viewed his suicide to be a result of his weak mind (Diodorus Siculus 17.101.4). Having failed to demand honour from the gods through extreme acts of violence, Ajax and Dioxiippus are left to suicide without it. A reprieve for Dioxiippus in death, at least, is

¹⁵⁴ West (2013) 178-9.

¹⁵⁵ Hubbard (2000) 324.

that Alexander eventually recognised Dioxiippus' καλοκάγαθία in contrast to the κακία of his accusers.

One complication around Ajax's death and post-mortem honour lies in his problematic relationship with the gods, which, as I have suggested throughout, is evident especially in Homer and Sophocles. Bruno Currie makes the interesting point that "the elevation of a tragic hero to a cult hero is a matter between the hero and the gods before it is a matter between the hero and (human) society".¹⁵⁶ This concept is evident particularly in the cases of Kleomedes and Theagenes, whose honour is reinstated following the advice of the divine Delphic Oracle. According to Currie, Sophocles' heroes particularly progress from being hated by the gods to being dear to the gods. Crotty makes a similar point about Oelian Ajax, who appears in the final lines of Pindar's *Olympian* 9 as a hero of cult (9.111-12). Crotty notes that Oelian Ajax became closer to the gods and received a hero cult after actually condemning the gods and being destroyed by them (see, for example, *Odyssey* 4.499-511).¹⁵⁷ It seems that the same point could be made for Telamonian Ajax, as his inability to reintegrate into his own mortal community is emphasised by his own complicated relationship with the gods in Sophocles' *Ajax* (457-8 and 589-90). This is also supported by Ajax's scepticism towards the gods in Homer's *Iliad* at 15.735 and 17.629-33. In Sophocles, Ajax must look away from the Olympian gods and instead look to the Underworld for acceptance, thus reconciling himself with the gods through Hades (394-6).

The extent to which Ajax can be considered to receive the love of the gods in death varies between ancient narratives. Ajax's ongoing anger and silent retreat into shadow in Homer's *Odyssey* 11 lacks conviction for such honour, but then none of the Homeric heroes seem content with their existence in the Underworld, or aware of the happenings of the living.¹⁵⁸ In Sophocles' *Ajax*, the fact that Odysseus, the one favoured most by the play's central deity

¹⁵⁶ Currie (2012) 333.

¹⁵⁷ Crotty (1982) 129.

¹⁵⁸ Achilles most famously declares that he would rather be the slave of a lowly farmer than be lord of all the dead, and subsequently asks Odysseus for information on his son Neoptolemus (*Odyssey* 11.489-93).

Athena, advocates for Ajax's burial and wins might suggest that Ajax does receive divine honour. In Pindar's Ajax narratives, Pindar does not so much set out to actively redeem Ajax's honour as he does simply state that Ajax deserves to be honoured. Pindar's maxim at *Nemean* 7.31-2, about divine honour belonging to those with a "fair story" (ἄβρός λόγος), presents the strongest implication that Ajax deserves divine honour even if he has not received it. It is unclear whether this maxim applies to both Ajax and Neoptolemus or just Neoptolemus, whose divine favour Pindar proves in the lines to follow. Elsewhere in the odes, Pindar emphasises the importance of living well so that one may be honoured in death, not least Pindar's own prayer to Zeus at *Nemean* 8.35-7, that he may live well for the sake of his children's honour. Nevertheless, it would seem that Pindar's ἄβρός λόγος maxim is what Pindar uses to connect Ajax's narrative with that of Neoptolemus. As I have stated in chapter two, Glenn Most appropriately points out that the ἄβρός λόγος here contrasts with Odysseus' mere λόγος at *Nemean* 7.21, which contrarily does not deserve divine honour and, perhaps in Pindar's mind, did not historically receive the same level of hero cult that Ajax received.¹⁵⁹ This then might mean that Pindar concludes his point on Odysseus and Ajax with the notion that Ajax, the deserving winner, could be pulled from obscurity with divine honour, which leads Pindar into the topic of Neoptolemus, who did receive divine honour after a contentious life.

Despite the absence of apparent hero cult in Pindar's Ajax narratives, there is evidence enough that hero cults existed for Ajax in the ancient world. Pausanias states that on Salamis there was a temple of Ajax and an ebony statue and that Athenians still paid honours to both Ajax and Eurysaces, the latter also having his own alter in Athens (Pausanias 1.35.3). Sir Richard Jebb and Farnell also provide adequate summaries of the evidence of hero cult for Ajax.¹⁶⁰ Currie additionally provides evidence for the existence of an "Aianteia" and a "precinct for Ajax" on Salamis.¹⁶¹ Moreover, Sophocles clearly implies the complexities of heroism in relation to hero cult and post-mortem honour in *Ajax* by emphasising the contention over Ajax's

¹⁵⁹ Most (1985) 157-8.

¹⁶⁰ Jebb (1986) xxx-xxxiii and Farnell (1921) 307-10.

¹⁶¹ Currie (2005) 93.

burial. Jebb states, “the true climax of the play is not [Ajax’s] death, but the decision that he shall be buried.”¹⁶² Scholars have since seen hero cult to be a central issue in Sophocles’ *Ajax*. Peter Burian addresses the concept of hero cult in the *Ajax*, noting that Teucer and Eurysaces’ supplication to the body of Ajax symbolises Ajax’s transition from a mortal to a “sacred hero”...“through its very anomaly of ritual”.¹⁶³ Albert Henrichs echoes Burian, stating that the supplication and ritual in the *Ajax* is a step towards hero cult.¹⁶⁴ But Currie, on the contrary, suggests that the emphasis is rather on memorialisation as opposed to hero cult. He cites *Ajax* 1167, when the chorus speaks of Ajax’s tomb being remembered by mortals forever onwards, as an example of the fact that “having one’s grave remembered is not the same as receiving cult.”¹⁶⁵ Either way, Sophocles’ intimation of hero cult might extend beyond Pindar’s narratives and allude to the comparison between Ajax and hero-athletes who received cult-worship in death.

My suggestion for a deliberate comparison between Ajax and hero-athletes can only remain speculative. There is no mention of Milo or Oibotas in Pindar’s works despite these athletes’ respective legacies and their supposed existence prior to Pindar’s time. Neither is there any explicit connection to the Ajax narrative in Kleomedes, Theagenes, Polydamas and Dioxippus’ narratives in extant Greek literature, all of whom besides Dioxippus were roughly contemporary with Pindar. But despite this lack of reference, the similarities between Ajax and the hero-athletes show that together they forge a specific path on the heroic-athletic journey.

If Pindar were indeed implicating Ajax as a representative of the hero-athlete archetype, then this would support my argument for Ajax as an ambivalent hero in the odes. Ajax’s nobility and heroic qualities are comparable to the hero-athletes’ athletic qualities and superabundance of *kudos*, as Kurke coins it. but both Ajax and the hero-athletes become embroiled in events that derail them from the *nostos* loop, leading to their inability to reintegrate

¹⁶² Jebb (1896) xxxii.

¹⁶³ Burian (1972) 155.

¹⁶⁴ Henrichs (1993) 165-8.

¹⁶⁵ Currie (2012) 335.

into their social communities. This diversion from the *nostos* loop depicts Ajax and the hero-athletes' often violent transgressions and downfalls in a discordant light, but the cult worship that several of the hero-athletes achieved seemed to redeem their transgressions in favour of the honour that they originally deserved. This too could be the nature of the honourable outcome that Pindar advocated for Ajax. Perhaps Pindar's sympathy towards Ajax stems from the fact that Ajax's death does not demand cult worship since his violent transgressive act fails and he is left to recognise his failure and inability to reintegrate into his social community. Ajax's suicide is therefore the recognition of his failure to demand back his honour through a transgressive act. Exekias captures the subdued nature of Ajax's recognition for his loss of honour in a late sixth century BCE amphora, which depicts Ajax quietly planting his sword into the earth in preparation for his suicide, his armour retired to the side of the image (Fig. 1).¹⁶⁶ If Ajax's acceptance for his loss of honour and choice to suicide made him more heroic to Pindar, then perhaps Pindar recognised the possibility that Ajax's memory would fall into oblivion on the basis that Ajax's death did not demand the reclaiming of his honour. Pindar may therefore be equating Ajax's worthiness for honour with the cult worship of certain hero-athletes.

I conclude this chapter with a brief discussion over whether ancient audiences harboured a kind of admiration for figures like Ajax and hero-athletes for their ability to escape the ordeal of the *nostos* loop and yet still receive honour in death. Kurke proposes the "home safe" element of the *nostos* loop, but how can one define a safe end to the *nostos* loop, if, as Crotty suggests, the athlete's ordeal continues beyond the return home? Here we may think of the challenges that Odysseus faces upon his return to Ithaca: first, he needs to overcome the suitors and re-establish his kingship, and secondly, Tiresias prophesies in *Odyssey* 11 that Odysseus must leave Ithaca again and journey to a land where its local people mistake a ship's oar for a winnow-fan and he must sacrifice to Poseidon before returning (*Od.* 11.119-37). The ordeal might just be representative of the hardships of life, but from a hero or athlete's

¹⁶⁶ Despite the apparent calmness of the scene, there are signs of disorder, such as Ajax's enlarged eye. For a detailed overview of Ajax in the works of Exekias, see Moore (1980) and for a brief analysis of the Death of Ajax amphora, see 431-2.

perspective, *kleos* or hero cult in death may be preferable to the challenge of *nostos* or the *nostos* loop. Odysseus expresses as much in *Odyssey* 5.308-11 while enduring his hardships at sea, wishing that he had died and received his *kleos* on the battlefield of Troy.

We must take note, though, of the developments in the *kleos-nostos* relationship from Homeric epic to fifth century BCE athletic culture. In the *Iliad* especially *kleos* and *nostos* are largely treated as mutually exclusive, most symbolically in the case of Achilles, whose future is defined by prophecy as either everlasting *kleos* without a *nostos*, or a happy *nostos* with no *kleos* (*Iliad* 9.411-16). Menelaus' choice to flee the battlefield in *Iliad* 17 also represents a hero's choice of *nostos* over *kleos*. The *nostos* loop in athletic culture, on the other hand, is a part of the athlete's overall *kleos* and heroic identity. The challenge of *nostos* and the ongoing ordeal itself for the athlete deserves *kleos*. It could be argued that this was first established in the *Odyssey* by Odysseus' own ordeal of achieving his *nostos* and the *kleos* that he was awarded in doing so. Furthermore, the *Odyssey* is also perhaps the first establishment of familial *kleos*, where Telemachus and Odysseus form a *nostos* loop together, as Kurke points out.¹⁶⁷ Epinician poetry was perhaps influenced by this, but it is interesting that Pindar does not utilise Telemachus and Odysseus' shared *nostos* loop for mythic or structural content. Perhaps this offers more evidence for Pindar's apparent discontent over Odysseus being a hero worthy of honour.

It seems clear that the cult worship for hero-athletes and Pindar's advocacy for the deserving honour of Ajax represent a conscious effort on the communities and the poets' parts to remember the hero-athletes and Ajax as they were in their great achievements before their equally great downfalls. Heroes that are living must remain noble in order to maintain their heroic identity, thus prolonging the ordeal beyond their return home, as Crotty suggests. Hero-athletes who derail themselves from the *nostos* loop, however, tend to do so in a way that demands honour by way of hero cult, thus being elevated in death to a special status beyond the conventional athlete's achievement of the *nostos* loop. It is true that hero cult is not a major

¹⁶⁷ Kurke (1991) 17.

part of Pindar's Ajax narratives. But Pindar's advocacy for Ajax to be honoured despite his ambivalent heroism suggests that ancient audiences might have desired a similar level of vindication for Ajax as the cult worship of hero-athletes. As I have made clear, Ajax's placement within the realms of hero-athlete representation can only be speculative, but his thematic associations with a number of hero-athletes and the varying treatment of honour and hero cult across the Ajax narratives presents a starting point to explore this possibility further.

Conclusion

I initially began this thesis with the intention of understanding Pindar's apparent favouritism for Ajax, which might be one's first impression when exploring Pindar's Ajax narratives. However, my thesis opens up the possibility of viewing Pindar's Ajax as an ambivalent figure whose character weaknesses within the odes anticipate significant ambivalences in later Ajax narratives, which may additionally suggest Ajax's representation of the cultural archetype of the hero-athlete.

I have therefore attempted to demonstrate the ways in which Pindar's Ajax narratives both reflect certain character weaknesses and also allude to events from the wider Ajax tradition. I have thus argued that Pindar uses these methods to present Ajax as an ambivalent hero whose characterisation extends beyond the too simplistic definition of the Pindaric Ajax as the nobler antithesis of his rival Odysseus. The possibility of considering Ajax as one of the many who are blind to the truth in *Nemean 7* would support Sophocles' implication of blindness in Ajax as well as the notion that Ajax's downfall was an unlucky occurrence that could have happened to any of the Homeric heroes. The ambiguity over the blaming of either Ajax or the Greeks in *Isthmian 4* may reference Ajax's transgressive act of attempting to murder the Greek generals, told most prominently in Sophocles' *Ajax*. In this case Pindar would be allowing for Ajax's less savoury biographical details to be exposed, albeit implicitly. *Nemean 8* presents Ajax's most noteworthy ambivalence, as being ἄγλωσσος is the weakness that allows φθόνοϛ to infect its target. My argument for φθόνοϛ as an infection within Ajax supports the disease-like nuances that φθόνοϛ carries in both Sophocles' *Ajax* and Antisthenes' *Odysseus* speech. The idea of φθόνοϛ as something that infects Ajax also supports my argument for Ajax's heroic ambivalence since φθόνοϛ is so consistently detestable in the epinician context because of its threat towards the victorious athlete's honour.

This close connection between Ajax's ambivalent heroism and the particular epinician theme of φθόνοϛ has supported my attempt to present the possibility that Pindar's characterisation of Ajax reflects the intention for Ajax to be a representative of the hero-athlete

archetype that had emerged in fifth century BCE athletic culture. The presence of themes such as social reintegration, honouring and hero cult in both the Ajax narratives and in the narratives of a selection of hero-athletes might suggest that Pindar's exploration of social reintegration and honouring in relation to Ajax mimicked the issues with which communities may have grappled when coming to terms with certain athletes' transgressive acts and their later celebration through hero cult. But it remains important to admit that the possibility of Pindar's Ajax as representative of the hero-athlete archetype must remain speculative, since Pindar does not explicitly mention any such hero-athlete or refer to the archetype in any apparent way.

Despite these ambivalences in Ajax's character, it cannot be denied that Pindar presents Ajax in a sympathetic light, which suggests, if not a personal favouring on Pindar's part, then perhaps a general liking towards Ajax from ancient audiences. If an ambivalent figure such as Ajax can accord his audience's sympathy, then a similar level of sympathy, or at least allure, could perhaps be assumed for the characteristically similar mytho-historical hero-athletes who oftentimes received cult worship despite their transgressions.

But the question remains over why Pindar chose Ajax to represent a hero's downfall, over other heroes whose legacies are likewise defined largely by their downfalls. Agamemnon and Oedipus, for instance, fulfil similar heroic qualities and commit similar transgressions as Ajax. But whereas these heroes commit such transgressions early on in their chronicles – for example, Agamemnon taking Briseis from Achilles in *Iliad* 1 and Oedipus murdering his father and marrying his mother long before his downfall – Ajax remains relatively conventionally heroic until the *hoplōn krisis*. Before that, Ajax fulfils the heroic code of being a doer of deeds and a speaker of words. He is an outstanding hero especially for his fighting ability, but he can also be seen as just one warrior of many among his comrades at Troy. I have suggested that this is reflected in the blindness of men, including that of Ajax, in Pindar's *Nemean* 7, and that it is also evident in Sophocles' *Ajax* in which Odysseus views Ajax's situation as something that could likely have happened to any of the Greeks at Troy. The significance of Ajax's place as

an outstanding fighter among a large cohort of comrades is that it effectively translates to the victorious athlete's place as an outstanding athlete among many competing athletes.

I have tried to avoid discussing Odysseus in great depth throughout my thesis in an attempt to counterbalance the vast amount of scholarship that has focussed heavily on Odysseus' role to play within the Ajax and *hoplōn krisis* narratives. My intention has been to magnify the aspects of Ajax's character, such as his adherence to the Homeric heroic code and his blindness to truth, that do not directly contrast with Odysseus in the *hoplōn krisis* narratives. The outline of Ajax's character in the *Iliad* in chapter one was therefore an important exercise, since the *Iliad* remains the only major source to survive that tells of events before the *hoplōn krisis*. Nevertheless, inevitable comparisons between Ajax and Odysseus have had to be made throughout, in my discussions of athletics in Homeric epic, the theme of *nostos* and of course the theme of φθόνος in the context of the rivalrous *hoplōn krisis*. These comparisons stem not only from the two heroes' rivalry, but also from their closeness in heroic status and shared heroic values. I therefore agree with Haviarus that it is impossible to think of Ajax's suicide in particular without thinking of Odysseus too.¹⁶⁸ But it is important to emphasise that Ajax's characterisation stands out on its own. As much as Ajax may represent the antithesis of Odysseus in a way that helps us to understand Odysseus' characterisation, the opposite is true as well. Odysseus is at times vital for bringing to light Ajax's antithetical behaviour and characteristics. In terms of the *hoplōn krisis* and the crucial character weaknesses that Pindar presents, Ajax's weaknesses come to the fore in direct response to Odysseus' contestation.

I concede that my comparative study between Ajax and the hero-athlete archetypes has merely scratched the surface of Pindaric interpretation in its cultural and historical contexts. There is a significant opportunity to develop this idea by expanding analysis beyond the Ajax narratives alone, starting with the odes themselves. Crucial evidence may come to light, for instance, if a closer investigation is made into the biographical and ancestral backgrounds of the odes' victors, who may be associated in some way with the hero-athlete archetype. I

¹⁶⁸ Haviarus (1993) 8.

therefore intend my study on Pindar's Ajax narratives to be a firm springboard from which future interrogations on the characterisation of Ajax and the contexts of the odes may launch.

List of Figures



Figure 1. Death of Ajax.

Athenian Black Figure Amphora B, Exekias, c.575-525BCE.

Boulogne-Sur-Mer, Château-Musée 558; *ABV* 145, 18.

LIMC Aias I 104 (*) ().

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