



The oracular response offers a blunt answer to the first question, τί δέ τις—σκιᾶς ὄναρ ἄνθρωπος. Yet Pindar offers a more optimistic, albeit opaque, view to the second question: no one is inevitably doomed to remain *only* a dream of shadow. Some can transcend the darkness of their evanescence through the blazing glory of achievement: ἀλλ' ὅταν αἶγλα διόσδοτος ἔλθῃ, λαμπρὸν φέγγος ἔπεστιν ἀνδρῶν καὶ μείλιχος αἰὼν.

The thought is well paralleled in the Pindaric corpus. Proclaiming his motivations for undertaking the chariot race against Oenomaos, Pelops declares (*O.1.81-4*):

ὁ μέγας δὲ κίν-  
δυνος ἄναλκιν οὐ φῶτα λαμβάνει.  
θανεῖν δ' οἷσιν ἀνάγκα, τὰ κέ τις ἀνώνυμον  
γῆρας ἐν σκότῳ καθήμενος ἔψοι μάταν,  
ἀπάντων καλῶν ἄμμορος;

For the hero, the darkness of anonymity from playing it safe is to be rejected: those who feel the blaze of glory shun no danger.

But if, as I suggest, *Pythian* 8.95-7 is a prophetic engagement, we may wonder who speaks the lines. Significantly, *Pythian* 8 has already mentioned an encounter with a prophetic figure (*P.8.56-60*):

χαίρων δὲ καὶ αὐτός  
Ἀλκμᾶνα στεφάνοισι βάλλω, ραίνω δὲ καὶ ὕμνω,  
γείτων ὅτι μοι καὶ κτεάνων φύλαξ ἐμῶν  
ὑπάντασεν ἰόντι γᾶς ὀμφαλὸν παρ' ἀοίδιμον,  
μαντευμάτων τ' ἐφάψατο συγγόνοισι τέχναις.

While the identity of the passage's first-person voice has remained controversial, Bruno Currie has convincingly argued for the persona of the victor speaking the lines (Currie 2013). Yet, if we see them as spoken by the victor, the conclusion to the passage seems less satisfactory: what did the hero say to the young athlete?

Reading *P.8.95-7* as a dramatized epiphany of the prophetic hero suggests a possibility. Significantly, the response in lines 96-7 makes perfect sense as a prophetic exhortation to an anxious athlete on his way to the Pythian games. Indeed, situated in this context, the parallels with the passage above from *O.1* run deeper. Pelops' speech is set on the eve of his contest with Oenomaos and directed at an epiphany of Poseidon. Moreover, the speech emphasizes a similar point: fortune favors the brave. In *P.8*, however, the logic is inverted. Instead of a bold pronouncement cajoling a god to grant a favor, the athlete's questions are anxious and uncertain. The answer in the Argive hero's prophecy highlights the default obscurity of the human condition and encourages the athlete to transcend it through brave deeds.

Since the passage concludes a section highlighting Aristomenes' success in Delphi, the audience is encouraged to realize that the young boxer successfully understood the mantic rhetoric and fulfilled the prophecy. While still an undeniably powerful statement on the human condition, in the context I have developed, I suggest the passage is less a melancholic reflection than a demonstration of an important—and often underappreciated—aspect of Pindaric lyric: its dramatic power.

## Bibliography

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