

Who is the *Persona Loquens* at Pythian 9. 89-96?

The identity of the *persona loquens* at lines 89-96 of Pindar's Ninth Pythian ode has remained a vexed question in Pindaric studies. Ancient scholiasts attribute the lines to the victor himself; however, this interpretation has failed to gain favor in modern scholarship (Drachmann 1910:236). For the last half century Mary Lefkowitz' view (1991:43-71) which succinctly sets out the position that the only 1st person persona in Pindaric epinicia is the fictionalized poetic persona, has remained the dominant scholarly orthodoxy. Attempts to save the Pindaric persona have been posed by the biographical and generic schools (See Nash 1982, Hubbard 1991, and D'Alessio 1994).

Recently, Bruno Currie (2013) has argued that while the Pindaric poetic persona is the most common first person in the epinicia there is no reason to preclude the possibility that non-poetic 1st persons, or choral personae, are found in epinician, and in fact choral personae best explain several problematic features of several other Pindaric odes. This view yields important insight on our passage. Accepting that the chorus can assume other personae, or speak in its own voice, the ancient scholiastic view that the victor is speaking is worth re-examining.

A closer examination of the lines is warranted.

τοῖσι τέλειον ἐπ' εὐχῆ κωμάσομαι τι παθῶν

ἔσλόν. Χαρίτων κελαδενῶν

μή με λίποι καθαρὸν φέγγος. Αἰγίνα τε γάρ

φαιμί Νίσου τ' ἐν λόφῳ τρίς

δὴ πόλιν τάνδ' εὐκλειῖσαι

σιγαλὸν ἀμαχανίαν ἔργῳ φυγῶν·

The first person voice states that it “celebrates the fulfilment of a prayer to [Heracles and Iolaus”], since it had experienced considerable good fortune. The following lines undoubtedly refer to song, “may the pure blaze of the Graces not abandon me.” The reason for the request is then provided, “for I say that in Aegina and three times on the ridge of Nisos I have glorified this city, fleeing from irresistible silence through my craft.” Considering the possibilities for the persona’s identity, unless the poet were to issue an extensive description of his prior poetic activity before performing the ode in Cyrene, it is unlikely that such an oddly specific biographical detail would be included. (For a similar problem see Slater 1971.) Secondly, if the chorus were speaking these lines in their own person, it would be similarly unclear how they fled irresistible silence.

In the persona of the victor, however, the lines make best sense when seen as a dramatization of his fulfilled prayer (Cf. Bundy 1961:21-3). The leading lines suggests that the newest victory is the accomplished prayer to Heracles and Iolaus “τοῖσι τέλειον ἐπ' εὐχᾶ κωμάσομαι τι παθῶν.” On this reading, the next lines offer an exact quote of the prayer and fulfill the promise of the performative future of line 89 (κωμάσομαι) to celebrate the prayer’s success. From the perspective of the victor’s persona, the former successes justify the request to the Graces that begin the prayer “Χαρίτων κελαδεννᾶν μὴ με λίποι καθαρὸν φέγγος.” Having experienced athletic success and glorified his city of Cyrene on earlier occasions, the victor prays that he continue his run of victories and glorification of his home. The final lines of the passage offer a final significance in the persona of the victor, “σιγαλὸν ἀμαχανίαν ἔργῳ φυγῶν.” Considering that the victor was successful in the Hoplitodromos, or armored race, spoken in the victor’s persona the lines carry additional resonance by playfully referencing how the victor managed to glorify the city, namely through his prowess in running.

By reexamining our assumptions about speaking personae in Greek lyric new possibilities unfold which proffer exciting new views on the original performance of the ode and new tools for exploring old problems.

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