

3 *Wishes and Prayers for the Future* THE POET AS PROPHET

In chapter 1, I looked at some ways in which the rhetoric, style, and placement of themes in the epinician ode are influenced by the concerns of the present moment—the immediate circumstances of the performance. In chapter 2, I explored the role played by the past in the epinician celebration, and brought out some ways in which the epinician perspective on the past, its function, and its significance are reflected in the performance conventions of the genre. In this third and final chapter, I turn to the topic of the future. I consider how the future functions as a theme in epinician poetry, and I explore the ways in which the future is relevant to the epinician performance and celebration. One general function of the epinician ode is to situate the new athletic victory within a broader temporal framework. The epinician poet undertakes, among other things, to locate and interpret the significance of the victory not only in relation to present-day concerns and events of long ago, but also in the light of the future time that is to come. Consequently, wishes and prayers for the future are a prominent convention of the genre.

The wishes and prayers for the future we find in Pindar's epinician odes contain many allusions to the future's uncertainty. They express the hope that the victor's, his family's, and his city's happiness will continue into the future, but warn that present success guarantees nothing about the future. This is why Bundy identified epinician wishes and prayers as "dark foil" for the rest of the ode. He thought that their pessimistic outlook on the future was designed to create a contrast with the illustrious present, making the latter seem all the

Graceful **ERRORS**

more glorious.¹ In my view, wishes and prayers for the future have a more integral role to play in the epinician celebration than Bundy's interpretation suggests. Their wording as well as their placement within the ode imply that the poet actually does have some influence over the victor's happiness, and can help to make it secure and enduring. Wishes and prayers are constructed and positioned within the rhetoric of the epinician ode in such a way as to make a favorable response from the gods likely. Although the overt message of these prayers concerns the future's uncertainty, the underlying message is one of confidence and optimism, thanks to the poet's evident ability to mediate successfully between the victor and the gods.

His ability to do this derives in part from the ways in which he is like a prophet. Like a prophet, the epinician poet has a long-range perspective on time. He can "see" events that took place too long ago to be within the normal mortal purview, and he also has better insight into the future than ordinary mortals. I shall begin by discussing the epinician poet's broad-ranging perspective on time in general before turning to focus more closely on the future as such.

The Poet as Prophet in Pindar

When the epinician poet undertakes to situate the victory within a broad temporal framework, this is one feature that aligns him with the prophet. In archaic Greek thought generally, poet and prophet belong to the same cultural paradigm. Their vision is superior to that of ordinary mortals in the sense that their temporal purview has a greater range. In addition to knowing the present, both poet and prophet can see far back into the past and look forward into the future. In the *Iliad*, the seer Kalkhas knows "the things that are and will be and were" [ὄς ἤδη τά τ' ἔόντα τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἔόντα, 1.70]; in Hesiod's *Theogony*, the Muses inspire the poet with knowledge of these same things (38). Albert Lord observes that, traditionally, oral epic singers were seers,² and Ford notes that the archaic Greek ἀοιδός,

1. Bundy 1962, 49, 77, 83.

2. Lord 1960, 220.

Wishes and Prayers for the Future

“singer,” “bard,” was thought—like the prophet—to have “hidden knowledge” and to “know paths we do not.”³

Turning to epinician poetry specifically, this conception of the poet as prophet is very clearly evoked in *Olympian* 6. In the prelude to a mythic narrative describing the birth of Iamos, founding hero of the victor’s clan, the Iamidai, the poet describes himself as embarking on a “journey” to another time, by means of a road accessible to few (24–28). The poet wants to drive his chariot on a “clear path” [κελεύθω . . . ἐν καθαροῖς, 23] so that he may “come [ἴκωμαι, 24] to the very source of these men’s lineage” (24–25). He is led by mules who “know how to lead the way on that road, since they received crowns at Olympia” (25–27). He and his companions must “throw open the gates of song” [πύλας ὕμνων, 27] for the mules. The metaphor of the previously untrodden poetic path, on which the poet is a “leader,” is also found in *Pythian* 4: “But it is too far for me to travel on the highway, for the hour presses and I know a short path—and for many others I lead the way in poetic wisdom [πολλοῖσι δ’ ἄγημαι σοφίας ἐτέροισι]” (247–48).

Some scholars have made much of fragments of Pindar’s non-epinician poetry in which the poet explicitly styles himself the “prophet of the Muses,”⁴ and professes to “interpret” the Muses’ mantic utterances.⁵ But the prophetic character of the epinician poet is most evident when he represents himself as privy to what Paolo Vivante calls the “mythic design” of (Pindaric) time.⁶ Vivante refers here to the fact that, in Pindar’s epinician poetry, events are always described as coming to pass in accordance with a previously ordained pattern.

Events narrated in Pindaric myths are frequently said to have fulfilled prophecies or portents from even farther back in mythic time.

3. Ford 1992, 48.

4. Cf. μαντεύεο, Μοῖσα, προφατεύσω δ’ ἐγώ (frag. 150 Snell); ἐν ζαθέω με δέξαι χρόνω / ἀοίδιμον Πιερίδων προφάταν (Paean 6.5–6 = frag. 52f. Snell).

5. Duchemin (1955, 24; 30; 250–52; 29–41) reads these allusions to prophecy literally, noting that Apollo, as represented in the odes, embodies the twin gifts of poetry and prophecy. Young (1964, 619–20) suggests that Duchemin’s observations owe too much to comparative religion and anthropology, and too little to the poems themselves.

6. Vivante 1972.

Graceful **ERRORS**

Pythian 4 represents the colonization of Cyrene as the fulfillment of two oracles: one made to Cyrene's founder, Battos, and one from a much earlier time. When Battos left home to colonize Libya, he not only made good the words of the Pythian priestess he consulted but also fulfilled, "in the seventeenth generation" (10), Medea's prophecy to the Argonauts on Thera.

Almost everything that happens in a Pindaric epinician ode is construed as the fulfillment of a previous sign or prediction. This idea is reflected even in the style in which epinician myths are narrated. Events tend to be presented proleptically—in a forward-looking, anticipatory manner—rather than being narrated in chronological order. In *Pythian* 9, the marriage of Apollo and Cyrene is foreseen and foretold in detail by the centaur Cheiron (51–65) before the poet wraps up the myth by stating, a good deal more succinctly (67–70), that the predicted events did indeed come to pass. In *Olympian* 8, Apollo, god of prophecy, interprets an omen to the effect that Troy will eventually be destroyed by Aiakos's descendants. These events, although they lie in the future from the standpoint of the myth, are, of course, well known to the poet and his audience and, from their perspective, already long past. In the same ode, the poet assures the victor's brother that "fate [πότμος] allotted your family to Zeus, its ancestor" (15) and also declares that "some ordinance of the immortals [θεμὸς . . . τις ἀθανάτων, 25] established this sea-girt land as a divine pillar for strangers from all places" (25–27).

Prophecy receives particularly elaborate treatment in *Olympian* 6. This is in keeping with the occasion. The victor, Hagesias, belongs to the clan of the Iamidai, stewards of Zeus's mantic altar at Pisa (cf. line 5). The myth of *Olympian* 6 describes Iamos, founding hero of the family, coming of age and receiving the gift of prophecy from his father Apollo. Prophetic themes are also everywhere to be found in the earlier part of the myth. Aipyros, guardian of Evadne, and irate at the pregnancy she can no longer conceal, travels to consult the oracle about her child. He returns and predicts (cf. μάνυε, 52) that Evadne's son will be "foremost among mortals as a seer [μάντιν, 50] for men on earth" (50–51), and that "his lineage will never fail" (51). Evadne too makes a far-ranging prediction about her child's future: "His mother announced [κατεφάμιξεν, 56] that for the whole of time [χρόνω σύμπαντι, 57] he

Wishes and Prayers for the Future

would be called by that immortal name [ὄνυμι'ἄθάνατον, 57].”⁷ In fact, much of the direct speech, not only in *Olympian* 6 but also in the myths found in other Pindaric odes, is prophetic in character.⁸

In short, as Vivante puts it, in Pindar’s epinician poetry, “Even past events are visualized with retroactive anticipation.”⁹ Given this style of narration, it is natural that prophets, and other figures who make prophetic utterances, should abound in epinician myth.¹⁰ But what is the reason for this style of narration? I suggest that its purpose is to give the impression that the epinician poet, too, enjoys a long-term perspective on events. Like a prophet, the poet can discern the connections between, and the patterns in, events that are remote from one another in time.¹¹ Charles Segal brings out dictional and thematic parallels between the myth and the outer frame of *Nemean* 1 that align the prophet Teiresias in the myth with the epinician poet in the frame. Segal notes that the poet is the prophet’s “analogue in the ‘real’ world.”¹² Both poet and prophet have a “breadth of view” and “command of truth” that exceed the capability of ordinary mortals. Both “look beyond the *chronos* of the moment . . . to the *chronos* which is the

7. Notice also how the pattern of events leading up to Iamos’s birth suggests an overall design: Evadne is Pitana’s child by Poseidon, just as Iamos is Evadne’s by Apollo (29–34, 35–36); both women are obliged to “hide” their pregnancies (κρύψει, 31; cf. οὐδ’ ἔλαθ’, 36) and leave or hand over the child to be tended by others.

8. Cf. *O.* 8.41–46; *P.* 9.51–65; and *I.* 6.52–54, where Herakles “speaks out like a seer” [ἄτε μάντις ἀνήρ, 51].

9. Vivante 1972, 116.

10. Cf. *I.* 6.51–56; *I.* 8.31–46; and *O.* 13.74–82. When Cheiron makes his prophetic speech in *Pythian* 9, he is described as ζαμενής, “raging” (38). Woodbury (1972, 563) notes that this is “by virtue of his prophetic wisdom” and notes that Medea is also described as ζαμενής when she makes her prophetic speech in *Pythian* 4 (10). On Cheiron as “a type of the poet” insofar as he represents healer, prophet, and teacher, see Robbins 1978, 93.

11. This broad comprehension of time is also exhibited in what Hurst (1983) calls the “sinuous” character of epinician narrative. Hurst remarks (158) that in Pindar and Bacchylides the narrative tends to move back and forth between mythic events and the present day, while the myths themselves are not always narrated in chronological order. Cf. also Hurst 1986: 194 for the suggestion that the poet’s ability, in a sense, to manage and control time through his style of narration makes him parallel to the gods.

12. Segal 1974, 38.

link between great moments . . . the junctures of a large design.”¹³ This assessment of the epinician poet’s perspective need not be confined to *Nemean* 1; this representation of the poet’s ability can be found in many of Pindar’s epinician odes.

Narrating myths and explaining events in this fashion also enables the epinician poet to suggest some implications for the future. Prophecies made long since, if already fulfilled and thus proven true, are the more likely to sustain their truth into the future beyond the ode’s performance as well. The oracle in *Olympian* 6, which states that the lineage of the Iamidai “will never fail” [οὐδέ ποτ’ ἐκλείψειν γενέαν, 51] is recalled by the poet’s words at the end of the myth: “from which time [ἔξ οὗ] the descendants of Iamos are much famed among Greeks” (71). The implication is that, since the oracle has evidently proved valid up until the present, the poet and his audience should expect the Iamidai to continue to flourish in the future also.

As I mentioned in chapter 2, epinician poetry frequently talks of an inherent tendency toward repetition and continuity in human affairs. This idea is conveyed through the regularly used—we might even say formulaic—expressions *καί νυν*, “even now,” “now too,” “also now,” *καὶ πρότερον*, “even formerly,” and *καὶ πάλαι*, “also of old,” “even long ago.” For example, we are told that “now too” [*καί νυν*] good men are celebrated in song after death (*I.* 8.61), and that “even of old [*πάλαι καὶ πρόιν*], before the strife of Adrastos and the people of Kadmos” (*N.* 8.51), the ἐπικώμιος ὕμνος, “festal hymn,” was sung. In *Olympian* 10, after a mythic narrative describing the origin of the Olympic games, the poet says that, in performing a victory song, he and his companions are following “even now” [*καί νυν*] the “earlier beginnings” [ἀρχαῖς δὲ προτέρας] of the games (78), just as, in *Olympian* 3, the “Aitolian judge” at the Olympian games is said to “fulfill” [*χοαίνων*] Herakles’ “ancient mandates” [ἔφετμάς . . . προτέρας] when he adorns the athletic victor with an olive wreath (11). Persistence through time is also sometimes attributed to negative things: “Hateful slander,” the poet says, was rife “even in former times” [*καὶ πάλαι*, 32].

When he points out these repeated patterns, the epinician poet is, among other things, demonstrating his ability to take the long-range

13. Segal 1974, 39.

Wishes and Prayers for the Future

view, in the manner of a prophet. This is also seen when he identifies a potential for excellence as something that is inherent in the φύα, “nature,” of a family. This inherent potential, according to the poet, accounts for the way success will recur in generation after generation of the same family. He sometimes calls this potential τὸ συγγενές, or “inherited ability.” It is this “inherited ability,” according to the poet, that enables the victor to exhibit “even now” [καί νυν] a glory equal to his ancestors’ (P. 4.64; N. 6.8; N. 5.43; P. 5.20). τὸ συγγενές is also aligned with destiny: “Inherited destiny [πότημος . . . συγγενής] determines the outcome in all deeds” (N. 5.40–41). Furthermore, certain men are “born for excellence” [φύντ’ ἀρετῆ] (O. 10.20), and “one with inborn glory [συγγενεῖ . . . εὐδοξία] carries great weight” (N. 3.40).

The epinician poet further demonstrates his skill and extraordinary vision by tracing such patterns even in the most unlikely seeming sequences of events. He identifies regular, repeated patterns in events that, on the face of it—and presumably to the ordinary mortals in his audience—seem disordered and disastrous. The poet applies this technique, or outlook, both to mythic material and present-day situations. Identifying order and regularity in these contexts makes it possible for the poet to interpret them more positively. In *Olympian 2*, for example, he celebrates Theron of Akragas, who claims descent from the house of Laios through Polyneikos’s son Thersandros. In this ode, the poet retells the gory and horrific myths of Thebes from a perspective that is unusually optimistic. In the epinician poet’s retelling, these myths are shown to illustrate a gnomic principle announced early on in the ode—that in human experience, suffering alternates with and is regularly compensated by joy: “With a fortunate destiny, there may be forgetfulness; with the help of noble joys malignant pain is subdued and dies” (18–20).¹⁴ Each one of the Theban myths, as narrated in *Olympian 2*, is made to conform to a pattern according to which pain is in time followed by compensatory pleasure. For example, the daughters of Kadmos, Semele and Ino, initially “suffered much” [ἔπαθον . . . μεγάλα, 23]. Now, however, Semele lives among the Olympians, much beloved of Zeus, Athena, and Dionysos (26–27). Ino, likewise, enjoys βίον ἀφθιτον, “unwithering life,” amid the Nereids (29). Theron’s victory is

14. Cf. Nisetich 1989, 48.

Graceful **ERRORS**

itself identified as participating in this same pattern of alternating sorrow and joy. In lines 35–40, the poet declares: “Thus Fate, who manages the gentle destiny of this family, along with their god-given fortune adds some griefs also, to be reversed at some other time [παλιντρόπελον ἄλλῳ χρόνῳ, 37]—from the time when his fated son met Laios in the road and killed him, fulfilling the oracle spoken long ago at Pytho.” Theron’s victory exemplifies a “reversal of griefs at some other time.” Patricide, fratricide, and the other horrors of the house of Laios are “reversed” or compensated by such joyful events as his success, just as in the past they were reversed by the honor Thersandros won in “youthful contests and in battle and war” (43–45).

In *Olympian* 12, the poet reinterprets contemporary events after the same fashion: from a perspective that enables him to find order and meaning in what may look to others like disaster. Here, the poet’s aim is to explain the earlier misfortunes of the ode’s victor, Ergoteles, in an optimistic way. Earlier in his life, Ergoteles was ostracized from his homeland, Knossos. But this seemingly catastrophic event turns out, when viewed from the poet’s long-term, quasi-prophetic perspective, to have been fortunate and beneficial. Had Ergoteles not been forced to leave home, he would never have won the κλέος, “fame,” abroad that he now has gained: “The honor of your feet would have shed its leaves without fame [ἀκλείης, 15], like a cock fighting by its native hearth, had not hostile faction deprived you of your fatherland at Knossos” (13–16). As the poet reminds his audience, “Many things fall out for men contrary to their expectation” (10). The ode also opens with the gnomic observation, “No man on earth has ever yet discovered a trustworthy sign from the gods concerning an intended action; men’s understanding is blind when it comes to future events” (7–9). Even if the poet himself shares in this mortal “blindness” regarding the future, he can still, with hindsight, trace an apparent plan that gives the events of Ergoteles’s life order and positive purpose.

In *Olympian* 7, three myths about the history of Rhodes are retold in a similar way. The gnomic idea that echoes throughout this ode is that “countless errors [ἀμπλακίαι / ἀναρίθμητοι, 24–25] hang about the minds of men, and this is hopeless to discover, what both now and in the end [νῦν ἐν καὶ τελευτᾷ, 26] is the best thing to befall a man” (24–26). The three myths all illustrate the principle that human error may lead to an unforeseen good result. The first relates the affairs of

Wishes and Prayers for the Future

Tlapolemos, son of Herakles and founder of Rhodes, the native city of the victor, Diagoras. Tlapolemos, in a fit of anger, struck his great-uncle Likymnios with an olive staff and killed him. As the poet comments, “Disturbances of the mind [φρενῶν ταραχαί] strike even a wise man off course” (30). Seeking purification from the oracle, Tlapolemos was told by Apollo to sail to the island of Rhodes, of which he becomes the founder and colonizer. This constitutes an unexpectedly happy result from his earlier “error” (31–33).

The second mistake takes the poet and his audience farther back in time. The earliest inhabitants of Rhodes, the children of the sun god Helios, are told by their father to build an altar and sacrifice to the new goddess, Athena. But their minds, like Tlapolemos’s, are “disturbed”: “An unforeseen cloud of forgetfulness comes upon them, and drags the right course for their deeds from their minds [παρέλκει πραγμάτων ὀρθὰν ὁδὸν / ἔξω φρενῶν, 46–47]” (45–47). Forgetting to take fire to the acropolis, the children of Helios are obliged to make “fireless sacrifices” [ἀπύροις ἱεροῖς, 48]. Once again, however, events unexpectedly turn out for the best. Zeus rains down gold on them, and Athena grants them surpassing skill in arts and crafts (50–53).

The third and final myth told about Rhodes in *Olympian* 7 goes right back to the time of the island’s birth. This time it is the gods who go astray, but once again the error leads to an unforeseen positive outcome. When the gods were dividing up the earth among themselves (χθόνα δατέοντο, 55), they neglected to assign the absent Helios a portion of land. Recognizing the mistake, Zeus was on the point of recasting the lots. But Helios declined. He said that he could see “within the gray sea a land growing from the seafloor, nurturing for men and kindly to flocks” (61–63). He takes Rhodes as his prize (γέρας, 68), and all turns out for the best.

The three myths about Rhodes in *Olympian* 7 once again, I suggest, involve an implicit boast on the poet’s part that his vision and understanding of events over time are superior to those of other mortals. His long-term perspective enables him to discern a meaningful and positive pattern in events. He is able to look beyond the individual events to their τέλος, “end” or “outcome.” His special task—like that of a prophet—is to communicate his superior understanding to the ordinary mortals in his audience. And when he identifies this particular pattern as one that all three Rhodian myths share,

he seems to bring out yet another principle of regularity or repetition in human events. There is an implicit suggestion that a particular place, such as Rhodes, is likely to give rise repeatedly to similar sequences of events.

Passages in which the epinician poet likens a victor's family to "crop-bearing fields" [καρποφόροις ἀρούραισιν, *N.* 6.9] also display this aspect of his ability (*N.* 6.8–11; *N.* 11.37–43). The comparison enables the poet to interpret even the failures of a particular family in a positive light, insofar as they can be seen as part of a pattern that is positive and productive overall. The poet points out that "crop-bearing fields" bear fruit only in some years, while in others they lie fallow. In the same way, he suggests, a family's lack of success in a "fallow" generation does not contradict the notion that the family's inherent φύά, "nature," is overall disposed toward success. As the poet puts it in *Nemean* 11, "The ancient virtues bear strength in alternating generations of men; the black earth of the fields does not give crops continuously, and the trees are not willing in all the rotations of years to bring forth fragrant blossom, equal in richness, but they alternate. In this way too fate leads our mortal race" (37–43).

Finally, it is not just what he has to say, but also the way in which he says it that aligns the epinician poet with the prophet. The epinician poet's diction is often reminiscent of prophetic speech. Some examples of the latter are to be found in Pindar's epinician odes themselves. Although Teiresias's prophecy about Herakles in *Nemean* 1 is presented in reported rather than direct form, it is worth noting that the Theban prophet is said to have listed, or quantified, the hero's future exploits—"how many [ὄσσους] wild beasts ignorant of right and wrong he would slay on land, and how many [ὄσσους] in the sea" (62–63). This quantifying style is also seen in Cheiron's speech in *Pythian* 9, in which he describes Apollo's prophetic knowledge; he says that Apollo, god of prophecy, knows "how many" [ὄσσα] leaves the earth puts forth in spring, "and how many" [χὠπόσαι] grains of sand are in the sea and rivers (46–48). The quantifying style seems to be typical of prophetic speech in ancient Greek literature generally. The language of the Delphic Oracle as quoted by Herodotus is similar: οἶδα δ' ἐγὼ ψάμμου τ' ἀριθμὸν καὶ μέτρα θαλάσσης, "I know the number of grains of sand and the measures of the sea" (1.47.3).

Wishes and Prayers for the Future

The epinician poet himself employs diction of this type when he enumerates the victories previously won by an individual victor or his family. In *Nemean* 2, he lists the victories of the victor's family, saying, "And in all that concerns athletic games [ὅσσα δ' ἄμφ' ἀέθλοις, 17] the Timodemidai are proclaimed foremost of all" (17–18). The same language, as well as the prophetic theme of the "countless grains of sand," are also found in the poet's *recusatio* "refusal" at the end of *Olympian* 2. Here, the poet announces that he is unable to reiterate all the good things Theron, the victor, has done for others (ὅσα χάριματ' ἄλλοις ἔθηκεν, 99). By way of comparison, he remarks that "grains of sand escape numbering" [ψάμμος ἀριθμὸν περιπέφευγεν, 98]. He uses a similar image in *Olympian* 13. When he announces his wish to enumerate the victories of the Oligaihidai, the poet says that he "could not state clearly a number for the pebbles of the sea [ποντιᾶν ψάφων ἀριθμὸν, 46]" (45–46). Use of this quantifying language is one more feature that contributes to the construction of the epinician poet as a figure who is like a prophet.

The Epinician Poet and the Future

Sometimes the epinician poet talks like a prophet; and, as we have seen, he often describes past events in such a way as to demonstrate his ability, like a prophet, to take an exceptionally long-range perspective on time. But what is the epinician poet's point of view regarding the future specifically? Does he or does he not make a claim to have superior vision in this area also? When he speaks of the victor's future, he usually expresses himself in wishes, prayers, or—at best—statements as to what he expects or hopes, rather than knows, will happen. Unlike the prophetic speakers in epinician myth (such as Teiresias in *Nemean* 1), the poet cannot be so bold as to make definite assertions about what the future may hold for his athletic victors. Nevertheless, the epinician poet and the prophet may be more alike than this discrepancy initially suggests. John Peradotto observes that "what the prophet is represented as knowing is not so much the future as the fact that there is a measure of order and regularity in events, that characters and actions issue in definite or usual—and therefore predictable—results. He does not *see* future events; he reads their seeds or sign. It is not a matter of

revealing a mystery, but of stating conditional probabilities.”¹⁵ In other words, the prophet understands the way the cosmos works. He knows what actions performed by mortals are likely to cause what kinds of response from the gods. The signs he interprets often indicate that events may turn out in either one of two ways, depending on human activity. In his prophetic speeches, the prophet advises his fellow mortals accordingly. This overlaps with certain aspects of the epinician poet’s task—in particular the gnomic warnings he issues to his present-day mortals on the basis of the myths he tells about the past.

There is an enormous emphasis in Pindar’s odes on the inability of any mortal to know the future. The theme recurs repeatedly in the poetry’s gnomic passages. Ignorance of the future is often stated to be the defining characteristic that essentially separates the gods from us. Although gods and men both “draw breath from one mother” (*N.* 6.1–2), we mortals nevertheless “do not know by day or by night toward what goal destiny has described that we run” (*N.* 6.6–7). We have never had “a clear sign” [σαφές . . . τέκμαρ] from the gods (*N.* 11.43–44).¹⁶ Time and experience alone reveal matters to mortals: “The days to come [ἄμέραι . . . ἐπίλοιποι] are the wisest witnesses” (*O.* 1.33–34). This difference explains the gods’ safety, in contrast to our insecurity. Not knowing the τέλος, “outcome,” of events, we are victims of our own ἐλπίς—“hope,” “expectation,” or “ambition.” Sometimes ἐλπίς makes us embark on projects that are too ambitious, “for our limbs are bound to shameless hope [ἄναιδεῖ / ἐλπίδι]” (*N.* 11.45–46), and “the streams of foreknowledge [προμαθείας . . . ῥοαί] lie elsewhere” (*N.* 11.46).¹⁷

On the one hand, the epinician poet seems not to exempt himself from this quintessentially mortal blindness regarding the future. At

15. Peradotto 1990, 67–68. We might think about this account of prophetic knowledge and prophetic speech in connection with Searle’s (1976, 3–4) distinction between utterances that reflect the way the world is (“words-to-world fit”) and speech acts that affect the way the world is (“world-to-words fit”). In the end, the latter kind of utterance is more typical of prophetic speech. Prophets advise other people as to how to act if they want to bring about particular results (affect the world).

16. Cf. *P.* 10.63; *O.* 12.7–9; and *O.* 7.25–26.

17. On the relationship between τύχα, “chance,” ἐλπίς, and mortal blindness in *Olympian* 12, see Nisetich 1977. The ἐλπίς of the gods is a different matter: the god “accomplishes every end in accordance with his wishes [ἐπὶ ἐλπίδεσσι]” (*P.* 2.49).

Wishes and Prayers for the Future

least, he speaks frequently of his own ἐλπίς in relation to the future. Of his aspirations for a particular family, he will say, cautiously, “At this point I have [only] hopes; the outcome lies with god [νῦν δ’ ἔλπομαι μὲν, ἐν θεῷ γε μάν / τέλος, [O. 13.104–5]. In this case, the poet’s acknowledgment that he does not know what is to come has also been clearly stated in the previous lines, where he declares, “Their victories so far at Olympia have, it seems, been mentioned earlier; of those to come [τά . . . ἐσόμενα] I would speak clearly at that time [τότε]” (O. 13.101–3). In the same way, in *Olympian* 1 the poet says only that he “hopes” [ἔλπομαι, 109] to celebrate more of Hieron’s successes in the future.¹⁸ And, given that the poet is subject to the same ἐλπίς as other mortals, it is no surprise that he is also occasionally subject to the same kinds of fallibility that generally attend ἐλπίς, and at times he speaks of this. In *Pythian* 3, for example, he effectively chides himself for wishing, like other mortals, for “absent” or “unattainable” things (61–62; cf. 20). His opening wish to bring Cheiron back from the dead seems to exemplify the tendency to “chase windborne hopes with expectations not to be fulfilled [ἀκράντοις ἐλπίσιν]” (23) for which he chastises other mortals later in the ode.

Even with regard to his ἐλπίς, however, the poet’s attitude to the future is revealed as different from and more clear-sighted than that of his audience, or of other mortals generally. As Joseph Day points out, the epinician poet’s ἐλπίς is an uncharacteristically “good” ἐλπίς.¹⁹ It is good because it is morally correct. ἐλπίς in archaic Greek poetry is more often negatively construed because it connotes hubristic ambitions: “Early Greek poets did not trust hopeful *elpis*. They felt its dangerous combination of thought about the future and intense desire engendered the sort of false confidence that leads people into self-destructive behavior.”²⁰ But the epinician poet’s ἐλπίς is different. It is consistent with an awareness of mortal limitations, and observes the proper distinctions between mortals and gods and what each kind of being can achieve. Koronis, in the myth of *Pythian* 3, comes to grief because she is the kind of person who “scorns things close to her and

18. Cf. *N.* 6.26 (“I hope [ἔλπομαι] in making a great claim, to hit the mark head on”); *P.* 10.55; and Bacchylides 13.220–24.

19. Day 1991.

20. Day 1991, 48.

peers at distant ones” [αἰσχύνων ἐπιχώρια παπταίνει τὰ πόρσω, 22]. Above all, she instantiates the negative paradigm of the person who “chases wind-borne hopes with expectations not to be fulfilled” (23). But in epinician poetry “the *elpis* of athletic victors, warriors, and heroes,” as well as the ἐλπίς of the poet, is a good kind of ἐλπίς. Good ἐλπίς is focused on things that are lofty but attainable. It is “a particular kind of hope, one that motivates a noble competitor bent on achieving some great feat of *areté*.”²¹

So the epinician poet is like his fellow mortals in that he does not have certain knowledge of the future and has to rely instead on ἐλπίς, but is unlike the majority of them in that his is a clear-sighted ἐλπίς, inspired by an understanding of what is likely, possible, or reasonable. In this connection, we should also note that a number of passages in Pindar’s epinician odes suggest that there is after all a sense in which some mortals can “know the future.” Other passages suggest that the epinician poet himself knows the future in this sense. In *Nemean* 1, the poet says that “wisdom achieves its result through the counsels of those with inborn ability to foresee what will happen [ἔσσομενον προῖδειν, 27]” (27–28). There is also a reference to a type of person who “knows the future” [οἶδεν τὸ μέλλον] in *Olympian* 2 (56). Compare, in *Olympian* 7: “Respect for one who has foresight [προμαθέος, 44] casts virtue and happiness in humans” (43–44). Another reference to προμαθεία, “foresight,” “foreknowledge,” occurs in *Isthmian* 1: “One who has toiled also wins foreknowledge [προμάθειαν] in his mind” (40). In *Olympian* 8, we find the observation that “to teach . . . is easier for one who knows, and it is thoughtless not to have learned in advance [προμαθεῖν, 60], for the minds of men without experience are more lightweight” (59–61). The trainer Melesias is said to have the type of knowledge of the future that comes from experience—he “could say . . . what move will advance a man bent on winning from the sacred contests the fame he most desires” (62–64).²²

Some mortals, then, have the ability to predict what is likely to hap-

21. Day 1991, 48. Hence the poet’s ἀγαθὰν ἐλπίδ’, “good *elpis*,” in *Isthmian* 8 (15a).

22. On Pindaric προμαθεία, “foreknowledge,” as something that derives from experience, see also Bulman 1992, 10: “Knowledge of what time has approved will indeed give us both ‘insight’ into the present and ‘foresight’ into the future because such knowledge must grasp, in its essential features, History, as we have learned it.”

Wishes and Prayers for the Future

pen. In the example from *Olympian 2*, the person who “knows the future” is the person who knows that after death mortals will be rewarded in kind for their good and evil deeds during life. Bulman suggests that the mortal who acquires προμαθεία through toil, “the seer whose mantic power gives him an absolute knowledge of history,” and the gods, who “possess προμαθεία by their inherent nature,” all exist on a continuum.²³ They differ, however, in the means to, and the degree of, their insight. προμαθεία for mortals seems to involve a general understanding of how the cosmos operates, so that one knows what kinds of actions are likely to bring about what kinds of future events. The epinician poet himself could claim to have this kind of προμαθεία, thanks to his understanding of the cause-and-effect relationships between human actions and events in the past. The myths that he tells illustrate his understanding of what kinds of mortal actions bring about divine φθόνος, “resentment,” and catastrophe, and which ones prompt favorable responses from the gods. His comprehension of the patterns that are to be discerned in events over time, discussed above, also suggests that he understands the workings of the cosmos in a way that enables him to have προμαθεία. Once again, the epinician poet is shown to resemble the seer “whose mantic power gives him an absolute knowledge of history.”

Wishes and Prayers for the Future

So defined, the poet’s προμάθεια makes him a fit intermediary between the mortals in his audience and the gods. His understanding of how mortal actions prompt divine responses, both in the past and now, makes him a suitable figure to oversee exchanges between these two groups within his audience. This task of mediating or interceding between the gods and his fellow mortals is one more feature that aligns the epinician poet with the prophet. Like poets in the other archaic Greek genres, the epinician poet is portrayed as a figure who facilitates communication between gods and men.

In keeping with this, sometimes the poet describes himself and his actions in language that suggests religious ritual, and that he himself is

23. Bulman 1992, 80 n. 54, and 81 n. 61.

some kind of religious official. He “drenches” the city of the Western Lokrians with honey (μέλιτι / . . . καταβρέχων, *O.* 10.98–99); he “sheds grace” on the victor and his trainer (ἐπιστάζων χάριν, *I.* 3/4.90b); and he comes to the island of Aigina to “shower” the Aiakidai with praises (ῥαινέμεν εὐλογίαις, *I.* 6.21). In *Nemean* 4, the τεθμός, “law of song,” and the ὥραι . . . ἐπειγόμεναι, “pressing hours” (33–34), put constraints on his saying what he has to say at length. In *Olympian* 10, the θέμυτες Διός, “ordinances of Zeus” (24), prompt him to sing of the Olympic contest and its founding by Herakles. And, as we have noted, it is conventional for him to utter wishes and prayers for the victor’s future, typically toward the end of the ode. The epinician ode praises the victor, but its complex array of functions extends well beyond that basic task. One function of the epinician ode is to negotiate with the gods on behalf of the victor, his family, and his city. The wishes and prayers for the future play an important role here.

The typical content of these prayers and wishes for the future is a hope that the athletic victor’s present good fortune will continue in the future. In *Pythian* 5, the poet declares, “A god kindly fulfills his potential for him now; in the future too, blessed children of Kronos, may you grant him like success in deeds and counsels, so that no stormy blast of autumn winds overwhelms his life” [θεός τέ οἱ τὸ νῦν τε πρόφρων τελεῖ δύνασιν, / καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν ὁμοῖα, Κρονίδαι μάκαρες, / διδοῖτ’ ἐπ’ ἔργοισιν ἀμφὶ τε βουλαῖς / ἔχειν, μὴ φθινοπωρὶς ἀνέμων / χειμερία κατὰ πνοὰ δαμαλίζοι χρόνον, 117–21]. *Olympian* 1 also contains the wish that Hieron, the victor, may meet with “more of the same” in the future: “A god watching over you takes thought for your concerns, having this care, Hieron; and unless he suddenly leaves you, I hope to celebrate a still sweeter victory with a racing chariot” [θεὸς ἐπίτροπος ἐὼν τεαῖσι μῆδετα / ἔχων τοῦτο κᾶδος, Ἴερον, / μέρμναισιν· εἰ δὲ μὴ ταχὺ λίποι, / ἔτι γλυκυτέραν κεν ἔλπομαι / σὺν ἄρματι θεῶ κλειῖξεν, 106–10]. In *Pythian* 10, the poet prays that the victor’s family may “not come upon resentful reversals from the gods” [μὴ φθονεραῖς ἐκ θεῶν / μετατροπῆις ἐπικύρσαιεν, 20–21].²⁴

Sometimes, as in the example just quoted from *Olympian* 1, the prayer is for future victories specifically (*P.* 5.124; *I.* 7.49–51; *I.* 1.64–67; *I.* 6.1–

24. Cf. also *O.* 4.12–13 and *P.* 1.46.

9).²⁵ But epinician wishes and prayers for the future also regularly contain general requests for health and happiness. In *Olympian* 8, we find the following prayer, “May he [Zeus] be willing to add blessings to blessings, and shield him from painful diseases. . . . May he bring them a lifetime free from pain, and strengthen both them and their city” [ἐσλὰ δ’ ἐπ’ ἐσλοῖς / ἔργα θέλοι δόμεν, ὀξεΐας δὲ νόσους ἀπαλάλκοι. / . . . / ἀλλ’ ἀπήμαντον ἄγων βίον / αὐτοὺς τ’ ἀέξοι καὶ πόλιν, 84–88].

As this example also illustrates, epinician prayers are usually not confined to the fortunes of the victor himself. They typically include thought for the prosperity of the victor’s whole family, including descendants yet unborn. *Olympian* 2 contains the prayer, “O child of Kronos and Rhea . . . kindly preserve their ancestral land for the generations yet to come [λοιπῶ γένει]” (12–15). In *Olympian* 7, the poet prays, on behalf of the victor’s family, “Do not bury the lineage they share from the time of Kallianax” [μὴ κρύπτε κοινόν / σπέρμ’ ἀπὸ Καλλιάνακτος, 92–93]. In *Olympian* 13, he hopes that “the family’s guardian spirit” [δαίμων γενέθλιος] may persist (105–6).

Prayers for the success and prosperity of the victor’s city and fellow citizens are also typical. In *Olympian* 5, the poet says that he comes as suppliant to Zeus, “to ask that you decorate this city with famous feats of manhood” [αἰτήσων πόλιν εὐανορίαῖσι τάνδε κλυταῖς / δαιδάλλειν, 20–21]. In *Olympian* 8, as already noted, he prays that the god may “strengthen” [ἀέξοι, 88] the victor’s city as well as his family. In *Pythian* 1, he asks Apollo to make Aetna “a land of brave men” [εὐανδρόν τε χῶρον, 40], and then asks “Zeus the accomplisher” [Ζεῦ τέλειε, 67] to grant continuing good fortune, good government, and “harmonious peace” [σύμφωνον . . . ἡσυχίαν, 70] to the citizens of Aetna.²⁶ Prayers for political stability in the victor’s homeland are typical. *Pythian* 8 opens with a prayer to Hesychia, “Peace,” and concludes with a prayer to Aigina (the eponymous nymph of the victor’s homeland), together with Zeus and the Aiakidai, to “convey this city safely on her voyage of freedom” [ἔλευθέρω στόλῳ / πόλιν τάνδε κόμιζε, 98–99].²⁷

25. On other possible references to hoped for future victories, see Instone 1989; Miller 1989, 1991; Hubbard 1995; and Cole 1987, 567–68.

26. Cf. also *O.* 12.2.

27. There are also some epinician prayers for the future that concern the poet himself and his praise poetry (*O.* 6.105; *O.* 9.80–81; *P.* 1.29; *P.* 2.96; *P.* 3.110–11; *P.*

Epinician wishes and prayers regularly acknowledge the future's uncertainty. They regularly allude to the familiar epinician theme of vicissitude, though this is also found in many other places in the odes. The gods have "the bronze heaven" [χάλκεος . . . / . . . οὐρανός] as "a secure seat forever" [ἀσφαλές αἰὲν ἔδος] (*N.* 6.3–4), but mortals have no such safety. Fate has given to no mortal the "fixed prize" [τέλος ἔμπεδον] of "complete happiness" [εὐδαιμονίαν ἅπασαν] (*N.* 7.56–57). We do not know when we shall "complete a tranquil day [ἡσύχιμον ἄμέραν] with our blessings unharmed" (*O.* 2.32–33). Even heroes like Peleus and Kadmos, who "attained the highest happiness of any mortals" [βροτῶν / ὄλβον ὑπέρτατον] were debarred from a "secure life" [αἰῶν . . . ἀσφαλῆς] (*P.* 3.86–89). "Men's happiness [ὄλβος] does not come for long [ἔς μακρόν] safe [σάος]" (*P.* 3.105–6). Human happiness is not only short-lived, but also precarious and fragile: "In a little while mortal joy blossoms, but so too does it fall to the ground / when shaken by hostile intention" [ἐν δ' ὀλίγῳ βροτῶν / τὸ τεργνὸν αὖξεται· οὕτω δὲ καὶ πίτνει χαμαὶ ἀποτρόπῳ γνώμα σεσεισμένον, *P.* 8.92–94]. Further, mortal blessings are never unmixed; fortune gives "some of this and some of that" [τῶν τε γὰρ καὶ τῶν διδοῖ, *I.* 3/4.51].²⁸

As in the example from *Pythian* 5, the essential instability of mortal existence is often evoked through meteorological metaphors. "In a single space of time the winds blow one way first, and then another" [ἐν δὲ μιᾷ μοίρᾳ χρόνου / ἄλλοτ' ἄλλοῖαι διαθύσσοισιν αὔραι, *O.* 7.94–95]; "Now here, now there blow the blasts of the high-flown winds" [ἄλλοτε δ' ἄλλοῖαι πνοαί / ὑψιπετᾶν ἀνέμων, *P.* 3.104–5]; "At different times different kinds of winds rush upon all humans, driving them along" [ἄλλοτε δ' ἄλλοῖος οὗρος / πάντας ἀνθρώπους ἐπαΐσσω ἐλαύνει, *I.* 3/4.5–6]. A change of fortune for the better is described as "fair weather" [εὐδίαν] after a "winter rainstorm" [χειμέριον ὄμβρον] (*P.* 5.10), or as "fair weather after the storm" [εὐδίαν . . . / ἐκ χειμῶνος, *I.* 7.38–39].²⁹

9.89a–90; *P.* 11.50–51; *N.* 7.65–67; *N.* 8.38–39; *N.* 9.53–55), but these have less relevance for my concerns in this chapter.

28. Cf. also *P.* 12.30–32.

29. Cf. *I.* 3/4.36–37 and *I.* 1.39–40. On other examples of the image of the "calm day" in Greek lyric poetry, see Peron 1974, 290f. On mortals' need to invoke the aid of the gods, who alone may calm the winds, see Nisbet and Hubbard 1970 at Horace *Odes* 1.12.31.

Wishes and Prayers for the Future

In short, success in the present is no guarantee of success in the future. However, while mortal happiness is never truly permanent, the epinician poet goes to some lengths to suggest that the happiness of some is more stable than that of others. Plant imagery is typical in these contexts. In *Nemean* 8, he tells his audience that “when planted [φυτευθείς] with the help of a god, happiness [ὄλβος] remains longer [παρμονώτερος] for men” (17). Similarly in *Isthmian* 3/4, he says that “the happiness [ὄλβος] of reverent men lives longer [ζώει δὲ μάσσων], but when it dwells with shifty minds does not flourish [θάλλων] as well for all time [πάντα χρόνον]” (*I.* 3/4.5–6). The concluding gnome in *Pythian* 7 acknowledges that, even in a mortal context, there is a sense in which abiding happiness is possible, even if it is somewhat subject to fluctuation and change: “They say that happiness [εὐδαιμονίαν] that remains [παρμονίμην] and flourishes [θάλλοισαν] brings a man now this, now that [τὰ καὶ τὰ]” (19–21).

Examples of happiness “abiding” in this qualified, relative, and thus quintessentially mortal sense are repeated success, progeny who will continue to maintain the κλέος, “fame,” of the family in some generations if not in others, and freedom from painful disease even though one cannot escape death. In a similar way, a family’s prosperity may be stable over the long haul, in spite of intermittent setbacks (cf. *P.* 5.54–55). Mortals are always “at sea” (cf. *O.* 12.3–7); nevertheless, we can hope for calm weather rather than storms (cf. *P.* 5.118). We can also hope for ἡσυχία, “peace,” in the sense of political stability. A prayer in *Pythian* 1 contains the thought that, with the help of Zeus, “a man who is a leader and instructs his son can turn his people to harmonious peace [σύμφωνον . . . ἡσυχίαν] by honoring them” (70). On the victor’s behalf, the epinician poet prays for stability in this qualified sense. In other words, he prays for as much permanence and security as any mortal can reasonably hope for.

The epinician poet prays, then, that the athletic victor may enjoy “fair weather” or a “calm” and “peaceful” existence—both now and in the future. But, in a sense, the victor has already earned this through his victory. His athletic ordeal is the analogue of heroic labor. If athletic endeavor is a ritual re-enactment of heroic achievement,³⁰ the heroes

30. Nagy 1990, 192 and 136–45.

Graceful **ERRORS**

whose myths are told in the epinician ode are heroic exempla for the athletic victor. And these heroes regularly receive some kind of “tranquillity” or “peace” (ἡσυχία) as “compensation” (ποινή, ἄποινα, λύσις, λύτρον, etc.) for their “toil” (ἄεθλα, πόνος, μόχθος, κάματος, etc.). Among these heroes, Herakles especially represents the ideal prototype for the athlete. His myth is told in *Nemean* 1, at the end of which Herakles is said to have won “tranquillity [ἡσυχίαν] in unbroken peace [ἐν εἰρήνῃ . . . <ἐν> σχερῶ] for the whole of time [τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον], as the choicest compensation for his great labors [καμάτων μεγάλων / ποιάν], in a prosperous home [ὀλβίοις ἐν δώμασι]” (69–71). (This description refers to Herakles’ deification; the “prosperous home” was on Olympos.) The metaphorical “fair weather” and “calm” for which the epinician poet prays on the victor’s behalf are the mortal analogue, the athlete’s version of this heroic compensatory tranquillity.³¹

Sometimes the athlete’s compensatory tranquillity is construed as peace of mind. In *Olympian* 2, the poet says that “winning frees [παράλυσιν] the man who makes an attempt in competition from anxieties [δυσφορονᾶν]” (51–52). Victory brings forgetfulness of suffering. In the myth in *Nemean* 10, the hero Polydeukes asks, “What release [λύσις] will there be from grief [πενθέων]?” (76–77). Theaios, the victor, demonstrates the answer to Polydeukes’ question; he is said to have won, through his victory, “forgetfulness [λάθαν] of his bravely borne labors [πόνων]” (24). In *Pythian* 1, the poet adapts the same paradigm to a slightly different context; he suggests that remembering (ἀμνάσειεν, 47) his past achievements in war might bring Hieron “forgetfulness” [ἐπίλασιν] of his present “hardships” [καμάτων] (46).

At other times, the athletic victor’s compensatory tranquillity is construed as physical rather than mental relief. Victory “heals” the physical suffering the athlete undergoes in order to win. In *Nemean* 3, victory is described as a “healing remedy” [ἄκος ὑγιερῶν] for “fatiguing blows” [καματωδέων . . . πλαγᾶν] (17). The epinician celebration, and in particular the ode itself, also soothes the athlete’s physical ills. In *Nemean* 4,

31. Cf. Dickson 1989, 28–29: “The evidence of effort stands in direct opposition to the peacefulness (ἡσυχία, εὐφροσύνη, εὐδία) that comes with (and mostly as a result of) success . . . affective calmness and tranquillity—like fair weather after storm . . . figures as compensation for the disruptive strain of athletic competition.” Cf. also Burton 1962, 175–76.

Wishes and Prayers for the Future

εὐφροσύνα, the festive joy Odysseus associates with the χάρις, “grace,” of the banquet in the *Odyssey* (9.6), is said to be the “best healer [ἰατρός] for toils judged and won” (1–2). In the same passage, songs, “wise daughters of the Muses,” are said to “charm” [θέλξαν] the victor’s pain with their touch; “praise” [εὐλογία, 5] soothes his limbs (cf. μαλθακά, 4) more effectively than does warm water. In *Nemean* 8, the poet notes that “healing songs” [ἐπαιδαῖς, 49] can make even “hard labor” [γάματον, 50] “painless” [νώδυνον, 50]. The epinician poet is, among other things, the analogue of the doctor who, like Asklepios, “releases” [λύσαις] mortals from their various “pains” [ἄχέων] (*P.* 3.50).

Whether the relief or “release” is mental, physical, or both, the tranquillity with which victory and its celebration compensate the athlete constitutes a partial antidote to mortality. It is a qualification of the insecurity and impermanence that distinguish mortal from divine existence. The opening passage of *Olympian* 12 mentions the way in which the physical uncertainties of our existence lead to mental unease (5–9). The rewards of athletic toil, like those of truly heroic endeavor, offer a limited degree of permanence, security, and peace in the midst of this unease and uncertainty.

The enduring fame that is won by the athlete and embodied in the epinician ode is one more example of this. Epinician song is referred to as “compensation” for the athlete’s toil in *Isthmian* 8 (λύτρον εὐδοξον . . . καμάτων, “a glorious compensation for his labors,” [1]; νίκας ἄποινα, “compensation for victory” [4] and in *Olympian* 7 (πυγμαῖς ἄποινα, “recompense for boxing” [16]). In *Pythian* 5, where the poet has the victor’s financial outlay rather than his physical efforts in mind, the victory song is described as a λυτήριον δαπανᾶν, “recompense for expenditures,” granted to the victor by Apollo (106).³² Like other kinds of poetic commemoration, epinician poetry compensates for the literal or physical mortality of the person it celebrates by granting him immortal fame: “Excellence endures through time [χρονία τελέθει] in famous songs [κλειναῖς ἀοιδαῖς]” (*P.* 3.114–15).³³ The images used to describe

32. Cf. Nagy 1990, 140–42 on this language and the theme of “compensation” for “ordeals” in epinician poetry.

33. Cf. Robbins 1990, 317, on *Pythian* 3: “Hieron’s god-given πλοῦτος (110) can give his εὐδαιμονία permanent form despite the winds of change . . . for it enables him to engage a poet.” Nisetich (1988, 1) suggests that the vision of the afterlife in *Olympian* 2

song in *Pythian* 6 align poetic fame with the other kinds of “calm” with which the athletic victor deserves to be compensated; they represent the epinician ode as a safe haven unshaken by storms. The “treasure house of hymns” [ῥῆμων θησαυρός, 6] is secure, permanent, and enduring in spite of the stormy weather that assails it. It is something that “neither wintry rain [χειμέριος ὄμβρος, 11] . . . from a thundercloud [ἐριβρόμου νεφέλας, 11] nor wind [ἄνεμος, 12] shall buffet and carry into the depths of the sea with a deluge of silt” (10–14). Here as elsewhere in Pindar, “wintry storms” may be read as a metaphor for the unexpected disturbances that make mortal existence unsafe.

The basic thought, then, is that the athletic victor, like Herakles and the other heroes who are the athlete’s prototypes or models, strives to win some kind of security and permanence. The prominent epinician theme of the “whole of time” [ὅ πᾶς χρόνος] as it extends into the future is associated with this quest. The heroes and heroines in epinician myths are compensated with immortality for “the whole of time.” Herakles, as we have seen, has a peaceful existence “for the whole of time” [τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον] (*N.* 1.69). Ino, in *Olympian* 2, has won in return for her earlier sufferings “unwithering life for the whole of time” [βίσιον ἀφθιτον / . . . τὸν ὅλον ἀμφὶ χρόνον] among the Nereids at the bottom of the sea (29–30). The poet prays for a kind of stability that is analogous to these when he asks that “all time to come” [ὅ πᾶς χρόνος] may preserve Hieron’s prosperity (*P.* 1.46).³⁴ In *Olympian* 13, when the poet prays to Zeus to continue the victor Xenophon’s prosperity and preserve his people from harm, he adds the request, “Be ungrudging of my words for all time to come [χρόνον ἅπαντα]” (25–26). Were it attainable by mortals, the ultimate goal would be happiness that “flourishes for all time” [πάντα χρόνον θάλλων, *I.* 3/4.5–6]. “Approaching time” [χρόνος ἔρπων] threatens to disrupt present prosperity, but the epinician poet attempts to avert this threat. He asks that “approaching time” [χρόνος . . . ἐφέρπων] not

has “as much to do with immortal fame as with immortal life,” (cf. 4–7) and that this is one of the ways in which this ode illustrates the principle that suffering is rewarded with joy.

34. Compare Chiasson’s (1999–2000, 155) suggestion that the theme of the “whole of time” is applied to the Athenians in Aeschylus’s *Eumenides* to indicate their “conditional elevation to heroic status.”

Wishes and Prayers for the Future

disrupt Hieron's happiness (*O.* 6.97), and that "time to come [ὁ δὲ λοιπὸς . . . / . . . χρόνος] approach kindly [εὐφρων / . . . ἔρποι]" (*N.* 7.67–68). In *Pythian* 1, he asks that a god may uphold Hieron "in the time that comes" [τὸν προσέρποντα χρόνον, 56–57].

There is certainly a difference in degree between the unqualified immortality with which some mythic heroes and heroines are compensated, and the relative stability that is the athletic victor's reward. The athlete is neither a god nor a hero, but an ordinary mortal, so the peaceful "compensation" he wins is lesser in degree. In *Olympian* 1, the victor is said to win "honey-sweet calm" [μελιτόεσσαν εὐδίαν, 98] "for the sake of his ordeals" [ἀέθλων γ' ἔνεκεν, 99]. This is the analogue of Herakles' ἡσυχία in *Nemean* 1. But it is a mortal analogue. The victor does not win calm "for the whole of time," but only "for the rest of his life" [λοιπὸν ἀμφὶ βίον, 97].³⁵ In *Nemean* 9, we learn that labors (πόνων) in youth make life "gentle" [ἡμέρα] in old age (44); again, the way this is couched reminds us of mortality. Ino can win "unwithering life" [βίον ἀφθιτον, *O.* 2.29], but the poet prays only for a "lifetime free from pain" [ἀπήμαντον βίον] on the victor's behalf (*O.* 8.87). Nevertheless, the tranquillity won by the athlete still resembles that of the hero in kind.

In some epinician myths the hero, just like the athlete, occupies a space between the hopelessly unstable existence of ordinary mortals and the perfect tranquillity and immortality of the gods. This middle ground is exemplified by Kastor and Polydeukes in the myth of *Nemean* 10. Kastor and Polydeukes in the end neither remain fully mortal nor become completely immortal. Thanks to Polydeukes' decision to save his brother, their condition alternates between death and immortality, "changing by turns [μεταμεμβόμενοι ἐναλλάξ, 55] . . . because Polydeukes chose that life rather than to be fully divine and inhabit heaven [οἰκεῖν τ' οὐρανῶ, 58]."³⁶ Polydeukes declines the

35. Segal (1964, 227) notes that the phrase τὸ δ' αἰεὶ παράμερον ἐσλόν (*O.* 1.99) implies "a qualification even of the 'honeyed calm' of an Olympian victory." Cf. Instone 1993, 19–20, on *Nemean* 3, and Brown 1992, 104–7, Alden 1982, 133–34, and Carne-Ross 1975, 172, on the myth of Perseus's visit to the Hyperboreans in *Pythian* 10. Hoey (1965, 255) writes of the "this-worldly immortality conferred by poetry."

36. Young 1993 discusses the myth of the Dioskouroi in *Nemean* 10 from this point of view. As Carne-Ross (1985, 80ff.) puts it, the Dioskouroi are an appropriate model for

Graceful **ERRORS**

blissful Olympian home won by Herakles (cf. ὀλβίους ἐν δόμασι, *N.* 1.71). Like the athletic victor's, his is a qualified immortality. While some heroes and heroines, like Herakles and Ino, may actually win true immortality and become gods, others, like Kastor and Polydeukes, pattern the athlete's trajectory in the sense that they occupy a plane halfway between mortality and immortality.³⁷

But what does the idea of "tranquillity" as compensation for a heroic or athletic ordeal add to our understanding of epinician wishes and prayers and their outlook on the future? Reading their references to the uncertainty of χρόνος ἔρχων, "approaching time," within this framework, I think we can conclude that these wishes and prayers are less pessimistic about the future than they at first appear to be. From one perspective, they simply serve to distinguish the perfect security of the gods from the limited security and permanence the athlete wins as compensation for his labor. There are no guarantees; the epinician poet still has to negotiate with the gods on the victor's behalf. Nevertheless, when he prays for the athlete to be blessed with "calm weather," he is requesting that the gods grant the victor something that in a sense he has already earned. Epinician wishes and prayers for the future seek to confirm the essentially stabilizing effect of victory itself.

Gifts and Thanks to the Gods

The placement of wishes and prayers for the future within the epinician ode also, I suggest, contributes to the likelihood of a favorable outcome. The poet has contextualized his prayers to the gods in such a way within the rhetoric of the ode that he and his audience may reasonably expect them to be answered. In order to understand how this works, we need to remember that an important function of the

the victor because they are "half-mortal for ever." Young 1993, 125, suggests that, in Pindar's retelling, Polydeukes' choice between "permanent immortality or dying millions of deaths" is the whole point of the myth.

37. Heroes also win compensatory stability in another way: they are commemorated in the cultic places where they "now"—as compensation for their labors—"dwell," continuously and for all time, much as the gods "dwell" in the cultic "seats" that are sacred to them. Cf. *O.* 1.90–93; *O.* 14.2; *P.* 12.2–3; *I.* 8.20; and *I.* 3/4.76–77.

Wishes and Prayers for the Future

victory ode is to reintegrate the athletic victor into the community or communities he left behind to compete in the games.³⁸ This involves not only reconciling the victor with his friends, family, and fellow citizens, but also restoring him to the right relationship with the gods. This is critical, since, as we saw in chapter 1, athletic victory incurs the risk of divine φθόνος, “grudging resentment.” The epinician ode aims to assuage the φθόνος of the gods by gratefully acknowledging their role in the victory, and the debt the victor thereby owes them.³⁹ Consequently, thanking the gods for the victory is an important and prominent convention of the genre.⁴⁰

Over and over again, the poet reminds his audience that victory is god-given.⁴¹ Sometimes the athlete is explicitly reminded to credit the gods for his victory.⁴² Sometimes the epinician performance itself is represented as a thank-offering to the gods. This is suggested by those odes that begin with an invocation to a particular deity, asking him or her to “accept” [δέξαι] the κῶμος, “celebratory revel” (*O.* 4.8–9; *O.* 5.1–3; *O.* 8.10; *O.* 13.29; *P.* 8.5; *P.* 12.1–5).⁴³ The κῶμος is a gift designed to appease the divinity in question. *Olympian* 5 opens with an appeal to the victor’s homeland, Kamarina, to be gladdened by the ode and the celebration in which it plays a part: “Daughter of Ocean, with a glad heart [χαρδία γελανεῖ, 2] receive [δέξου, 3] this finest sweet reward for lofty deeds and crowns won at Olympia” (1–3). In *Pythian*

38. Cf. Crotty 1982, 121; Goldhill 1991, 135; Kurke 1991, 6.

39. Cf. Slater 1977, 201–2, on the “*theón didontón* motif” as the idea that “prosperity without the gods is no prosperity.”

40. Irene Polinskaya emphasizes this aspect of epinician poetry and suggests that herein lies the origin of the epinician ode (personal communication).

41. Cf. *O.* 1.106–7; *P.* 1.48; *P.* 2.7–8; *P.* 5.103–4; *P.* 8.61–65; *P.* 10.10–11; *N.* 1.8–9; *N.* 6.24–26; *N.* 7.6–8; *N.* 10.38; *I.* 1.52–54; and *I.* 6.3–4.

42. Cf. *P.* 5.23–25.

43. Cf. also *O.* 7.87–88, where Zeus is asked to “honor” [τίμα] the epinician hymn, and *O.* 14.16–17, where Thalia, one of the Graces, is asked to “look favorably” (ἰδοῖσα τόνδε κῶμον ἐπ’ εὐμενεῖ τύχῃ) upon the κῶμος. Sometimes, as at *P.* 5.22, the victor himself is said to have “accepted” [δέδεξαι] the κῶμος. The epinician ode is multifunctional; it involves a whole network of exchanges governed by the idea of χάρις, “gracious reciprocity” (cf. Kurke 1991, 85–107). In other words, in addition to thanking the gods, the epinician ode also contains thanks for the victor himself—on behalf of his fellow citizens—for the victory.

12, in a similar way, the eponymous nymph of Akragas is asked to be “gracious” [ἴλαος] and “accept” [δέξαι] the wreath from Pytho “with kindness” [σὺν εὐμενίᾳ] (4).

I suggest that we should read the future-oriented wishes and prayers in conjunction with this other epinician convention of crediting the gods for the victory. The latter sheds light on the spirit in which the former are uttered. My thought is that we should interpret both in the light of the idea of χάρις, or “reciprocal exchange,” as it pertains to relations between the victor and the gods. As Kurke points out, human-divine exchanges are represented in Pindar’s epinician odes as conforming to the pattern of aristocratic gift exchange.⁴⁴ The athletic victor is frequently said to have received his victory as a gift from the gods in return for gifts he previously gave to them (or sometimes, to particular heroes).⁴⁵ Here, we can compare Hans Versnel’s analysis of archaic prayer in terms of a “commercial” or *do ut des* model.⁴⁶ Jan Bremer traces the “arguments” of archaic Greek prayer along the same lines.⁴⁷ It is typical for the person praying to justify his or her request by mentioning a χάρις—a “favor” or “service”—that he or she has either previously rendered the god, or promises to render subsequently if the prayer is granted.

For example, when Chryses prays to Apollo in *Iliad* 1, he sets about persuading the god to accede to what he asks with a reminder: “If ever [εἴ ποτε] it pleased your heart that I built your temple, / if ever [εἴ . . . ποτε] it pleased you that I burned all the rich thigh pieces / of bulls, of goats, then bring to pass this wish I pray for” (39–41).⁴⁸ Alternatively, the person praying may acknowledge some assistance or benefit the god has previously conferred upon him or her and use that as an argument for the god’s helping him or her again now. When Sappho prays to Aphrodite for help, she says, “But hither come, if ever [αἶ ποτα] in the past you heard my cry from afar, and marked it, and came” (frag. 1.5–7).⁴⁹ In both types of case, the person praying has in fact now

44. Kurke 1991, 150–54.

45. Cf., for example, *O.* 3.38–40; 6.77–81.

46. Versnel 1981a.

47. Bremer 1981.

48. Trans. Lattimore 1951.

49. Trans. Page 1955.

Wishes and Prayers for the Future

rendered the god a χάρις, “favor,” because even to acknowledge the god’s past assistance is to confer on him or her the χάρις of praise. It is a gesture of thanks in the literal sense of to “thank”: to commemorate someone for something he or she has done in the past.⁵⁰

A notable feature of the gift exchange system is that debts are never canceled out—the balance is never zero. Each favor that is returned demands a new counter-χάρις, or return favor, from the recipient. And so on without limit. I suggest that we keep this feature of gift exchange in mind when we interpret the epinician poet’s prayers for the athletic victor’s future. Insofar as it praises the gods and thanks them for the victory, the epinician ode repays the athlete’s debt to the gods. According to the gift exchange model, this should then put the gods in the victor’s debt. And if this is the case, it implies that the victor is actually entitled to the blessings the poet requests on his behalf. In other words, the gods, thanks to the poet’s intervention, now owe it to the victor to fulfill the poet’s wishes and prayers for the future. The passages I quoted above, in which the poet seeks to persuade the relevant deity to “accept” the κῶμος, seem to be generated by the same thought. Once again, the thought is that the deity, having “accepted” the κῶμος as a gift or thank-offering, will be obliged to be beneficent in the future.

As part of the rhetoric of persuasion in these passages, the deity is typically honored with praise epithets or brief anecdotes that confer praise. For example, in *Olympian* 8 the sanctuary of Olympia itself, the site of the victory, is addressed and requested to “receive [δέξαι] this revel band and its wearing of wreaths” (10). In the first stanza, preceding the request, Olympia has been honored with the appellations “mother of golden-wreathed games” [μᾶτερ ὦ χρυσοστεφάνων ἀέθλων, 1] and “mistress of truth” [δέσποιν’ ἀλαθείας, 2]. The request proper opens with more praise: “O sanctuary of Pisa with

50. See Versnel 1981a. Versnel suggests that the concept closest in Greek thought to our “thanks” is that of “praise” or “honor.” A standard way to return a favor is to commemorate the person (or god) who bestowed it. A praise poem commemorates its subject and thus may repay a debt. Calame (1995) analyzes the poet’s promise in the *Homeric Hymns* to “remember” the deity “in another song” along these lines. When the poet praises a deity by relating an anecdote about him or her, he is repaying a χρέος, “debt” he owes the divinity by conferring a χάρις on him or her.

Graceful **ERRORS**

lovely trees on the Alpheos” [ἀλλ’ ὦ Πίσας εὐδενδρον ἐπ’ Ἀλφεῶ
ἄλσος, 9], and concludes in a similar vein: “Great fame always be-
longs to the one whom your glorious prize attends” [μέγα τοι κλέος
αἰεὶ, / ὅπινι σὸν γέρας ἔσπετ’ ἀγλαόν, 10–11].

Later on in *Olympian* 8, the wording of the prayer for the future seems to suggest an especially clear connection between the poet’s gratitude to Zeus on this occasion, and the request that he provide additional goods in the future. The request is directly juxtaposed to the grateful acknowledgment of the “brilliant adornment” [λιπαρόν / κόσμον, 82–83] that Zeus has already granted the victor’s family at Olympia. In other odes, the implicit argument is marginally more subtle. In *Olympian* 6, there is a prayer for the future addressed to Poseidon. The prayer occurs at the end of the ode, but Poseidon’s beneficent interest in the victor’s clan, the Iamidai, has already been acknowledged much earlier, in the ode’s myth. The myth identifies Poseidon as the grandfather of the clan’s founding hero, Iamos, upon whom Iamos himself once called for help, with successful issue (58–63). Overall, the ode contains the same argument as Sappho’s prayer to Aphrodite: help us now again, if ever you helped in the past.

In this context as in others, however, it is essential for the epinician poet to use the right language, and in his prayers he displays an exemplary propriety. Whether or not the gods owe the victor the future of untroubled calm the poet requests, the poet must emphasize that in the end the τέλος, or “outcome,” always lies with them. As noted earlier, in *Olympian* 13, when he alludes to the possibility of more victories in the future, he emphasizes ἐλπίς, “hope,” rather than certainty, saying, “I am hopeful [ἔλπομαι, 104], but truly the outcome lies with god.” But this acknowledgment of the future’s uncertainty is, paradoxically, one more feature that is designed to make a favorable response from the gods more certain.⁵¹

In the myth of *Olympian* 1, the hero Pelops utters a prayer to Posei-

51. As Miller (1991, 170) notes, “The athlete can entertain hopes and ambitions and the poet can articulate them on his client’s behalf, but neither athlete nor poet has the power to ensure that these hopes and ambitions will be successfully translated into action, for that power belongs to divinity alone.” However, in my view the epinician poet’s acknowledgment that he does not have ultimate control over the outcome is actually one of the rhetorical moves he makes in order to influence the outcome.

Wishes and Prayers for the Future

don that might be viewed as a model for the athlete's prayers, or for the ones the poet utters on his behalf (70–87). Pelops walks alone along the shore of the sea, where he addresses the god and asks him for help in winning the chariot race against Oinomaos so that he can win his daughter, Hippodameia, in marriage. In making this request, Pelops appeals to the sexual favors he himself has granted Poseidon in the past. He urges the god, "If the loving gifts [φίλια δῶρα] of Aphrodite count at all toward gratitude [ἐς χάριν], Poseidon, stay the bronze spear of Oinomaos, convey me to Elis in the swiftest of chariots, and bring me to victory!" (75–78). Pelops's words are "not unfulfilled" [οὐδ' ἀκράντοις, 86–86b]; Poseidon gives him a golden chariot and winged horses, and Pelops wins the race and Hippodameia.⁵²

Pelops represents an ideal model for the athlete who would successfully manage his exchanges with the gods. In this respect, he is the exact opposite of his father, Tantalos, whose disorderly exchanges with the gods, and especially his abuse of their gifts of nectar and ambrosia, led to catastrophe (*O.* 1.54–66). Since the epinician poet utters prayers on behalf of the athletic victor, Pelops is also a model for him. Pelops, like the epinician poet, acknowledges his own dependence on the gods, and makes this dependence part of his rhetorical strategy. Risk will be his own (mortal) part of the endeavor (81–84), but he also needs the input of the god: "This contest shall be mine to undertake; but you grant the success dear to my heart [τὸ δὲ προὔξιν φίλαν δίδου!]" (85). In short, Pelops uses the two main ideas to which the epinician poet also appeals: the notion that the god owes him a χάρις, "favor," in conjunction with the acknowledgment that he himself is only mortal and must credit the gods for every success.

Conclusion

One way to look at the various ideas contained in epinician wishes and prayers is to say that they contain one message for the gods, and

52. On the relationship between the myth and the poet's prayer in *Olympian* 1, see Koehnken 1974, 205: "The Pelops story, like a mirror, shows what Hieron has so far got and what he still hopes to get. For Pindar does not present the success of Pelops in its development, but only mentions the preceding request of the hero to Poseidon and then states its fulfillment."

Graceful **ERRORS**

another for the mortal members of the poet's audience. They are calculated to appease the gods with their tactful acknowledgments of mortal limitations. But the poet's careful construction of these utterances and their placement within the rhetorical structure of the ode is simultaneously calculated to assure the victor and his friends, indirectly, that they may expect the outcome to be favorable.

To use the language traditionally used of poets, prophets, and other "ideal speakers" in Homeric poetry, the epinician poet is constructed as a character who "looks both forward and backward."⁵³ His long-range temporal purview puts him in a position to advise his audience about what to expect in the future, and also informs the poet himself as to how to address the gods on the victor's behalf.⁵⁴ His wishes and prayers suggest that the epinician poet has some agency in relation even to the future's uncharted uncertainties. They demonstrate his ability to negotiate, on the victor's behalf, for the stable, "tranquil" outcome the latter has earned through his efforts.

53. Cf. Dickson 1990a, 39–40, on the type of the "Elder" in Homer, whose "circum-spection" is formulaically described in the expression, "who alone looked both ahead and behind" [ὁ γὰρ οἶος ὄρα πρόσω καὶ ὀπίσω]. This is analogous to the archaic Greek poet's knowledge, thanks to the Muses, of τὰ τ' ἐόντα τὰ τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα, "the things that are, the things that will be, and the things that were formerly" (*Theogony* 38). The seer Kalkhas is described as having this kind of knowledge in *Iliad* 1 (70).

54. Cf. Rubin 1980, 86: "By setting up analogies between the mythic and the epinician portions of his odes, he can suggest a favorable future destiny for his work, for himself, and for the victor."