

This paper seeks to bring attention to a tendency in poetic prosody to pose the question “what is man” in marked and revealing ways. Two poets who sing of man, Pindar and Sophocles, provide striking examples of syntax and prosody that mirrors their very poetic task. Pindar, in *Pythian* 8, asks “what is someone” in a double question composed of enclitics and proclitics. Leaning on the preceding or following word for their own accent, enclitics may also affect the accent of the preceding or following word. We might say that enclitics and proclitics are words that neither stand on their own nor allow their neighboring words to stand alone in pronunciation or enunciation. Enclitics and proclitics force communion and community among words.

Taking as its starting point Pindar’s double question in *Pythian* 8 (95), τί δέ τις; τί δ’οὔ τις; “what is a someone, what is a no one?” this paper explicates poetry’s peculiar way of posing the question of the nature and identity of man. Scholarly readers of this line have focused on the syntactic connection of οὔ τις to the indefinite pronoun instead of to the substantive copula (Giannini 1982; Lefkowitz 1977; Nisetich 1980), giving the reading “what is someone, what is no one” instead of “what is someone, what is he not.” Man, with the gods’ light, becomes “someone” or “more than someone” or “no-one” or “less than no one.” Instead of focusing on syntax, this paper’s focus is on prosody. By posing the question in a line composed of enclitics and proclitics, Pindar highlights the need for something else other than “someone” to answer the question. In this paper I will argue that the prosody of the line articulates and reinforces both the line’s syntax and the meaning of the poem, and will explore the questions posed by such reinforcement.

Oedipus in Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* asks the question of man with equally enigmatic prosody, yet fittingly for his situation in that play. Oedipus asks Ismene at line 393: ὅτ’ οὐκέτ’ εἰμί, τηνικαῦτ’ ἄρ’ εἴμ’ ἀνήρ; “when I am no longer, then am I a man?” All the words in his question save the first εἰμί, “I am”, and “a man” are elided in this phrase, highlighting the very problem of Oedipus in this last of Sophocles’ plays. Moreover, it is as if the two halves of the conditional question cannot stand alone. “I am a man” is hidden in the clippings of Oedipus’ question. Are we to read this hidden code as a question or a statement? Is Oedipus a man or is he not? And does Oedipus become more or less of a man when dead?

Finally, this paper will consider other instances of marked prosody in the poetic questioning of the nature of man, including Sophocles’ *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and will suggest their connection to that earliest of all assertions and negations of identity, Odysseus’ “outis” in *Odyssey* 9.