OLYMPIAN 2

Theron of Akragas, chariot race, 476 B.C.

Olympian 2 contains Pindar’s longest and most explicit reflections on the fate of the soul after death. The passage, which describes the soul’s reincarnations, begins in the third stand and occupies the whole fourth triad. The sentence introducing it is left incomplete. Pindar seems about to draw the conventional conclusion that a man of wealth and success who understands human fate will invest in poetry (see the Introduction, Pindar’s Genre), but instead the thought of death leads him in another direction.

A man forgets the strain of contending when he triumphs.

And wealth, uplifted by nobility,
gives scope for actions of every kind,
kindling the heart with zeal for achievement,
a star far-seen, a man’s true beacon-light.
And if, possessing it, one knows what must befall—
that of those who die here, the arrogant
are punished without delay,
for someone under the earth
weighs transgressions in this realm of Zeus,
and there is iron compulsion in his word.

(55-60)

But with equal nights
and equal days,
possessing the sun forever,
the noble enjoy an easy existence, troubling
neither earth nor the sea’s waters
in might of hand
for an empty living,
but with the gods they honored, all
who delighted in oath-keeping
abide free of affliction, while the others
go through pain not to be looked at.

(61-67)

And those who have endured
three times in either realm
to keep their souls untainted
by any injustice, travel
Zeus’ road to the tower of Kronos,
where ocean-born breezes blow around
the island of the blest
and sprays of gold flower
from the earth and from the sea—
with these they wreath their hands
and crown their heads,

(68-74)

obeying the high decrees of Rhadamanthys,
who sits, a ready companion, beside
the great Father, consort of Rhea throned on high.
Among them dwell the heroes Peleus and Kadmos
and Achilleus, whom Thetis, moving Zeus’ heart with prayer,
brought to their company, her son

(75-80)

who smote Hektor to the ground, Troy’s
invincible, unyielding bastion,
and consigned to death
Kyknos and Memnon, child of the Dawn.