

## Ventriloquizing Ixion: Myth and Authoritative Speech in Pythian 2

This paper considers how the myth of Ixion is used in Pindar's second *Pythian Ode* to highlight the significance of authoritative speech alongside the warnings against hubris and arguments for moderation that the poet presents to his audience. It builds upon earlier arguments about the role of this myth in the poem (e.g., Morgan 2015) to argue that the crime of Ixion is not only an example of hubris that all members of the performative audience – tyrant and citizen alike – should avoid, but also comments on the importance of authoritative speech. Ixion's punishment draws attention to the poet's own ability to speak correctly and efficaciously, which is fundamental to his success and credibility. By using Ixion as the mythic exemplum in this poem, the poet points to the dangers of speech that is not authoritative, and the potential for social ill that comes from this deficiency.

In the first part of the paper, I examine the punishment of Ixion and argue that the poet highlights the mortal's loss of an authoritative voice to demonstrate the importance of speech and the danger of losing it. The mythic sequence begins not with the crime of Ixion, but his punishment, part of which forces Ixion to make gnomic statements to his fellow mortals (Pythian 2.20-24). In these lines, the voice of Ixion is not only ventriloquized by the speaker of the poem (Pythian 2.23-24), but his ability to speak authoritatively is also questioned (Pythian 2.20-22). By placing the reported speech of the tortured mortal into the realm of rumor, the poet emphasizes that Ixion's words are the object of general speculation, and, by extension, the subject of myth. The more he is discussed, and his words reported, the greater his fame becomes and the more entrenched he is as a model of and warning against impiety. This reputation,

however, is out of his control. Ixion is discussed by others but is no longer capable of authoritative speech.

In part two, I consider the implications of this punishment from the point of view of an audience with a shared cultural understanding of the importance of being able to speak freely and effectively. I argue that the punishment Ixion suffers is both physical torment and the loss of an authoritative voice. By losing the latter, Ixion is stripped of a mark of the Greek citizen and man (Martin 1989, Heath 2005). By controlling the myth of Ixion, however, the poet proves that he can speak authoritatively. Unlike Ixion spinning on the wheel, when the speaker of the poem addresses mortals, he does so intentionally and with the authority of someone who can interpret the paradigms of the mythic past, demonstrating his credibility and cultural knowledge (Frankfurter 2017). This both sets the poet apart from Ixion and also suggests that the praise of Hieron presented at the beginning and the end of the ode is credible because it comes from a poet with command of mythic narrative and who has the ability to speak them freely.

In part three, I refocus the role of authoritative speech away from Ixion and onto another figure in Pythian 2 who cannot speak effectively. Whereas the speech of Ixion ultimately serves the poem as a mythic paradigm offering instruction on the danger of hubris to both Hieron and the wider community, this later discussion of men who are ineffective speakers serves the theme of civil harmony that recurs throughout Pindar's epinician odes. It also defends the role of the poet in achieving this harmony by distinguishing between a man who can speak authoritatively, and the untrustworthy citizen who is not able to do so (Pythian 2.81-85). Notably, this ineffective speaker he is not simply inept, he is also a threat to society. His inability to speak effectively is a failing that leads him to flatter everyone and weave ruin everywhere. The poet, however, like other effective speakers, is discerning. He can recognize friends and he is authorized to pursue

those who might be a danger to himself or the social fabric (Bulman 1992). Hieron, of course, is not such a danger, as the poet has demonstrated throughout the ode (Morgan 2015). Furthermore, the poet has argued for his own credibility by showcasing his ability to harness mythic narratives, speak effectively, and perform a social good through the composition and performance of his poems.

#### Literature Cited

Bulman, P. 1992. *Phthonos in Pindar*. Berkley.

Frankfurter, D. 2017. "Narratives That Do Things." In S. I. Johnston, ed., *Religion: Narrating Religion*. Farmington Hills, Mich.: 95-106.

Heath, J. 2005. *The Talking Greeks*. Cambridge.

Martin, R. 1989. *The Language of Heroes*. Ithaca.

Morgan, K. 2015. *Pindar and the Construction of Syracusan Monarchy in the Fifth Century*. Oxford.