Daedalus and Perdix

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Apropos
Skill and ingenuity attract human envy and/or jealousy, but merit divine attention

1 The story

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**Original Text (Smith, 1853)**

**Perdix** (Περδίκη), the sister of Daedalus, and mother of Talos, and, according to others, the sister's son of Daedalus, figur e in the mythological period of Greek art, as the inventor of various implements, chiefly for working in wood. Perdix is sometimes confounded with Talos or Calos, and it is best to regard the various legends respecting Perdix, Talos, and Calos as referring to one and the same person, namely, according to the mythographers, a nephew of Daedalus. The inventions assigned to him are, the saw, the idea of which is said to have been suggested to him by the backbone of a fish, or the teeth of a serpent; the chisel; the compasses; the potter's wheel. His skill excited the jealousy of Daedalus, who threw him headlong from the temple of Minerva (Atena) on the Acropolis, but the goddess caught him in his fall and changed him into the bird which was named after him, *perdix*, the partridge.

Daedalos (Δαιδάλος). 1. A mythical personage, under whose name the Greek writers personified the earliest development of the arts of sculpture and architecture, especially among the Athenians and Cretans. The ancient writers generally represent Daedalus as an Athenian, of the royal race of the Erechtheis. Others called him a Cretan, on account of the long time he lived in Crete. He is said to have been the son of Motios, the son of Eupalamus, the son of Erechtheus. Others make him a son of Eupalamus or of Palaimon. His mother is called Aleippe, or Iphinoe, or Parasimela. He devoted himself to sculpture, and made great improvements in the art. He instructed his sister's son, Calos, Talus, or Perdix, who soon came to surpass him in skill and ingenuity, and Daedalus killed him through envy. *Vid. Phaen."

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Two entries from W. Smith's mid-19th C. dictionary relate a very famous uncle and his up-and-coming nephew in a story where skill and ingenuity arouse envy1 and/or jealousy2. Malice is subdued through divine intervention, which gives an unexpected end to an otherwise common narrative of human weakness.

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1Being discontent, resentful, or feeling desire for another person’s possessions, qualities, or situation — from *invidere* [L], to regard maliciously, grudge; from *in-* [L], into + *videre* [L], to see.

2Being fiercely protective of one’s rights or possessions; feeling threatened by others or their achievements, possessions, or perceived advantages — from *zelus* [L], zeal, jealousy; from *ζῆλος* [Gk], zeal, energy, enthusiasm.
2 Systems view

The systems view of the story (Figure 1) reveals how emotions develop from a single fact — i.e. the skill or ingenuity of Perdix, who keeps emotionally neutral.

![Diagram of emotions](image)

**Figure 1** A single fact provokes a network of emotions (stated: ---; inferred: - - - -)

3 Process view

The process view of the story (Figure 2) reveals a linear plot (storyline) with two ‘high points’ and one ‘low point’ — i.e. with reference to global ‘right/ wrong’ or ‘good/ bad’.

![Diagram of storyline](image)

**Figure 2** A simple storyline with moral ‘high’ and ‘low’ points
4 Plan view

Perdix’s resolutions\(^3\) are not detailed enough to appear in the plan view of the story (Figure 3), but Daedalus’ scheme is formed in reaction to Perdix’s standing, and Athena’s intervention in reaction to Daedalus’ intent (\(Z_D\)).

\[\text{DAEDALUS}\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{‘nobody better than me’} \\
(\text{Y}_D)
\end{array}
\]

\[\text{Perdix exterminated} \quad (\text{Z}_D)\]

\[\text{Perdix:} \quad \text{throw him off the temple} \quad (\text{X}_D)\]

\[\text{DAEDALUS}\]

\[\text{DAEDALUS}\]

\[\text{Perdix:} \quad \text{transform him into a bird} \quad (\text{X}_A)\]

\[\text{Perdix transformed} \quad (\text{Z}'_A)\]

\[\text{ATHENA}\]

\[\text{Perdix:} \quad \text{exterminated} \quad (\text{Z}_D)\]

\[\text{Perdix:} \quad \text{means} \quad \text{therefore} \quad \text{therefore} \quad \text{yields} \quad \text{satisfies}^*\]

Figure 3  Athena’s intervention is a double win: satisfies Daedalus’ concern and also saves Perdix’s life

5 Commentary

Through scheme and counter-scheme, Daedalus’ action failed but his concern was satisfied; Perdix escaped alive, although in a different life form. All things considered, Athena was an effective life-saver but a weak moraliser: Daedalus missed an opportunity to learn to accept that others may be as good or better than him.

References


\(^3\) e.g. to ‘mind his own business’, be ‘good at what he does and enjoy it’, and perhaps ambition to ‘be a master (and be recognised for it)’. 

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