

Daedalus and Perdix

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Apropos

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

1 The story

ORIGINAL TEXT (SMITH, 1853)

ΔΑΙΔΑΛΟΣ (Δαίδαλος). 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 Dædalus as an Athenian, of the royal race of the Erechthida. Others called him a Cretan, on account of the long time he lived in Crete. He is said to have been the son of Metion, the son of Eupalamus, the son of Erechtheus. Others make him the son of Eupalamus or of Palamaon. His mother is called Aleippe, or Iphinoë, or Phrasimede. He devoted himself to sculpture, and made great improvements in the art. He instructed his sister's son, Calos, Talos, or Perdix, who soon came to surpass him in skill and ingenuity, and Dædalus killed him through envy. *Vid.* PERDIX.

PERDIX (Πέρδιξ), the sister of Dædalus, and mother of Talos, or, according to others, the sister's son of Dædalus, figu 43 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 Dædalus. The inventions ascribed to him are, the saw, the idea of which is said to have been suggested to him by the back-bone of a fish, or the teeth of a serpent; the chisel; the compasses; the potter's wheel. His skill excited the jealousy of Dædalus, who threw him headlong from the temple of Minerva (Athena) 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.

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.

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 ζήλος [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.

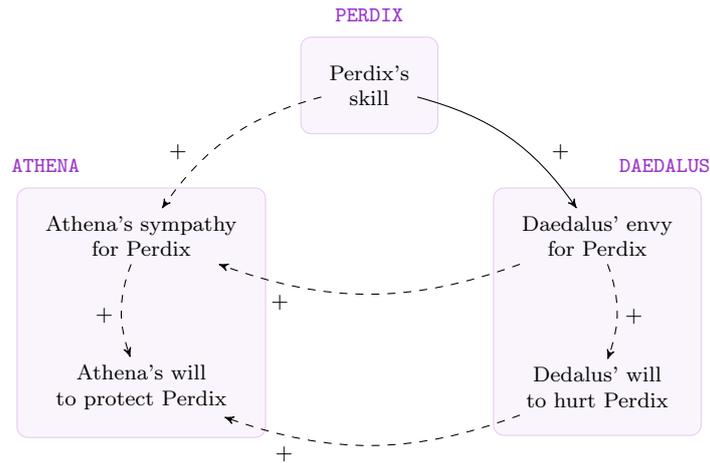


FIGURE 1 A single fact provokes a network of emotions (stated: —→; inferred: - - ->)

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’.

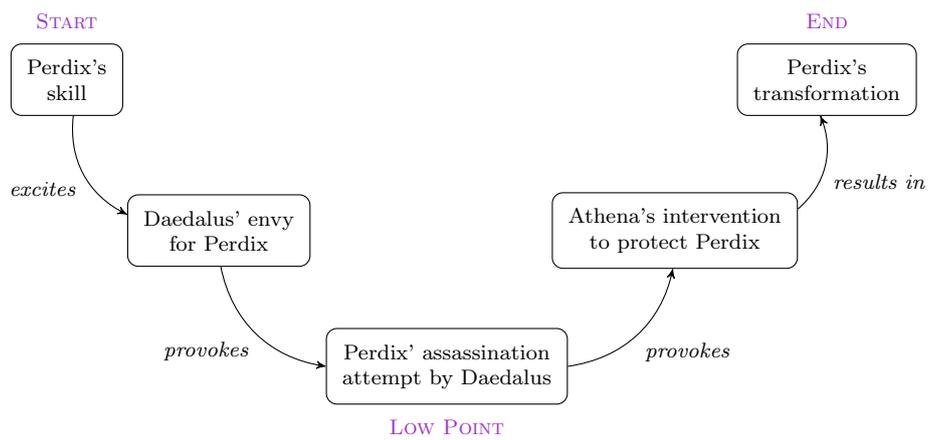


FIGURE 2 A simple storyline with moral ‘high’ and ‘low’ points

4 Plan view

Perdix's resolutions³ 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).

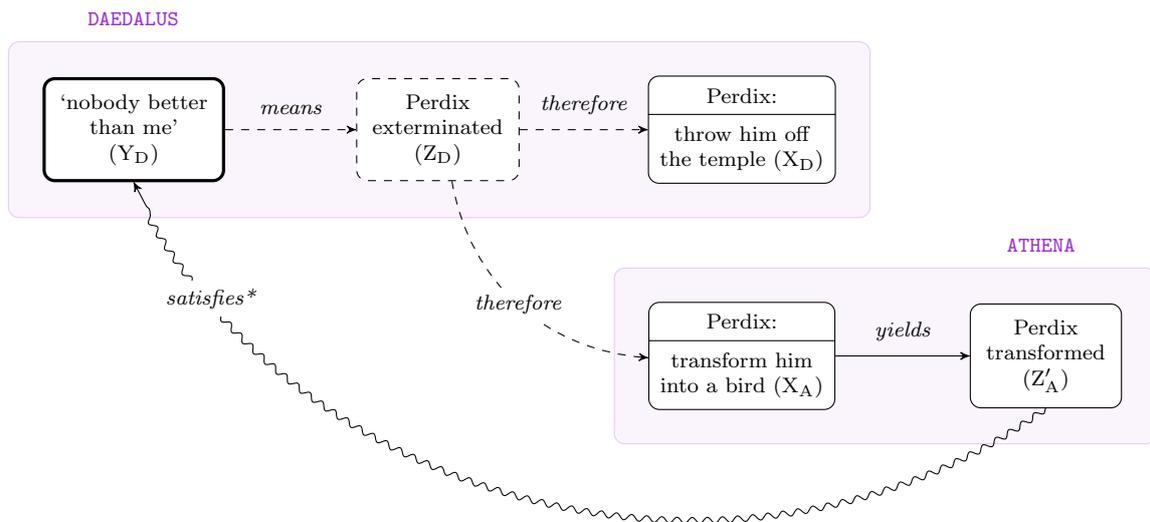


FIGURE 3 Athena's intervention is a double win: satisfies Daedalus' concern and also saves Perdix's life

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

Smith, W. (1853) *A New Classical Dictionary of Biography, Mythology, and Geography* (2nd ed). London: John Murray.

³e.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)'.