

MARCELLO BARBANERA

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Essay on the Artist as Murderer

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*Essay on the artist
as murderer*

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1. DAEDALUS AS OBJECT OF MYTH-MAKING

Daedalus is the *protos eureses*¹, the heroic embodiment of the craftsman in the Greek world, the earthly double of the divine Hephaestus.²

In the numerous studies dedicated to Daedalus there have been several attempts to attribute him the features of a real person, an artist that can be placed in Crete in the seventh century B.C.E.,³ to whom ascribe the first examples of sculpture that appear on Greek soil after the long interval following the collapse of the Mycenaean kingdoms.⁴ Others have proposed to consider Daedalus both as a mythical and historical figure,⁵ this at a time when the current research would have already allowed scholars to assert, as it was recently reiterated, that the historical Dae-

1 For a broad analysis of this topic see Kleingünther 1933, 9–11.

2 On the figure of Hephaestus in this context see two recent contributions that focus on the ambivalent character of the God in the Greek pantheon: Bremmer 2010; Barbanera forthcoming.

3 Henceforth all dates are B.C.E. unless otherwise stated.

4 I will cite some examples, not systematically: Rumpf 1930; Hanfmann 1935; Picard 1935; Kaulen 1967. Hanna Philipps on the contrary does not consider Daedalus as a historical figure in her book on the origins of Greek sculpture: Philipps 1968, 10–11.

5 Among the recent manuals I cite only Giuliano 1986, 142–3: the author, though based on Schweitzer 1932, comes to different conclusions as regards the German scholar: “The sources seem to confirm a Cretan Daedalus, in the second half of the eighth century B.C.E.: a precise historical personality”; then, leaving everything uncertain, adds “However the real existence of a Daedalus may not be crucial ... It is interesting instead above all the awareness that the sources show the existence of an exceptional personality, in Crete, around 700 B.C.E., who had given new canons to the sculpture—canons taken by his pupils who perhaps, from the mid seventh century B.C.E., were then transmitted to the Peloponnese (then, by pupils of his pupils, in the Cyclades)”; Daedalus as a real figure also in Corso 1988, 641.

dalus has never existed.⁶ The fact that Daedalus was the result of a myth-making was already a consolidated opinion in many studies on the subject published in the nineteenth century. In his essay on *Les artistes homériques* (1861), Jean Pierre Rossignol clearly defined Daedalus an “ideal figure [...] a pure abstraction”.⁷ That thesis was shared and brilliantly supported by Carl Robert in his *Archäologische Märchen* (1886).⁸ The theme of the legendary artist came back in vogue at the beginning of the twentieth century when Emanuel Löwy developed a thesis on the origins of Greek sculpture,⁹ making Crete the center of its irradiation. That was a wrong point of view, because the new vision of sculpture is equally spread out on the Cyclades, in the Peloponnese and Attica. Among the most significant contributions on the subject one has to cite *La leggenda di Dedalo* by Giovanni Becatti,¹⁰ published in the middle of the last century, an insightful essay. The circle closes with the *Dédale* of Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux¹¹—a unsurpassed book in its level of mythical interpretation, though not always convincing—and the more recent *Daidalos and the Origins of Greek Art* by Sarah Morris,¹² in which the American scholar

has proposed to trace the putative links of Daedalus with other cultures, especially those of the Middle East.

All the written information on Daedalus known to us comes almost exclusively from sources of much later dating to that of the formation of the myth.¹³ The oldest figurative testimonies date back to the seventh century.¹⁴ The most complete narration of the different episodes of this figure’s life can be reconstructed according to passages of Diodorus of Sicily (4, 76), the Pseudo-Apollodorus (Bibl. 3, 15,8; Epit. 1, 12,15) and Pausanias (9, 3,2 e 7, 4,5). In particular, from the testimony of the Periegetes¹⁵ we can assume that around the mid second century A.D. there was a long-standing tradition going back over half a millennium, that referred to a protos eures, identified with Daedalus inventor of plastic art.¹⁶

The intention of this essay is obviously not the reconstruction of the mythical stratification of Daedalus to which, as has been said, have been devoted fundamental scholarly contributions. Instead I will focus on a marginal episode in the Daedalic mythography, rare in literature, and virtually absent in the figurative repertoire of the ancient world. That is the killing of Perdix

6 Willers 1996, 1294.

7 Rossignol 1885, 181.

8 Robert 1886: the author aims to identify the mythical stratification of Daedalus. The results of his research then came together in the entry for the Pauly-Wissowa lexicon: Robert 1901.

9 Löwy 1900.

10 Becatti 1953–54.

11 Frontisi-Ducroux 1975 and 2000: the work remains unsurpassed in her ability to establish links at anthropological and mythical level between Daedalus and the historical and cultural Greek context, even after the release of other engaging books on the subject as that of Sarah Morris (1992). However it is weird that the researcher has not taken into account—so it seems judging from the quoted bibliography—some fundamental contributions such as Robert 1886 (however she considers the entry of the Pauly-Wissowa), Schweitzer 1932 and Preisshofen 1974. The complex of the iconographic tradition was collected in LIMC III: Nyenhuis 1986; for a more recent summary see Willers 1996, with whom I disagree in considering Daedalus belonging to the world of human beings (1296), rather than heroic.

12 Morris 1992.

13 For the collection of all related sources see Overbeck 1868, nn. 74–142, cf. also Frontisi-Ducroux 2000, 85–87 and 89–90. The oldest source which connects the family of Daedalus with Athens is Pherecydes of Athens, who considers Daedalus son of Metion, in turn son of Erechtheus, therefore connects him to the mythical dynasty of Athens; Daedalus’s mother is Ifinoe (FGrHist 3 F 146). This tradition was also accepted by Plato (Ion. 533 a). The connection between Daedalus and the dynasty of Erechtheids, elaborated in the first half of the fifth century, at the time of Pherecydes, is framed in the emphasizing attitude of the myths about techne that occurs during this period, as noted by Becatti 1953–54; cf. also Barbanera forthcoming; Haug 2011 for a recent interpretation of scenes of handicraft on Greek vases in the sixth and fifth century.

14 The whole tradition of Daedalus is discussed in Prinz 1979, 143–149.

15 Pausanias probably bases his narration on two sources of different character, a periegetic one and the other artistic-historical; for a discussion of the sources of Pausanias relatively to Daedalus see Robert 1886, 15.

16 See the following observations on the passage of the Luciano’s *Dream*, cf. infra 30.

or Talos, according to some variants,¹⁷ by Daedalus. Talos-Perdix was entrusted to Daedalus by his sister so as to introduce the young to craftsmanship.¹⁸ The nephew showed a special talent by inventing some professional tools: saw, compass and lathe.¹⁹ According to an Atticized version, the uncle felt such envy that in a fit of anger threw him out of the Acropolis, causing his death (Fig. 1).²⁰ After condemnation by the Areopagus Daedalus fled from Athens to Crete. The narrative structure of the story takes into consideration three components: flight, fall, both closely related, and jealousy-envy.

2. VARIATIONS ON THE MYTH OF DAEDALUS IN OVID'S METAMORPHOSES: THE FALL OF ICARUS AND THE KILLING OF PERDIX

In the *Metamorphoses* Ovid reshapes a narrative corpus inherited from centuries of literary tradition, with a dizzying cadence of images and meanings. Among them the myth of Daedalus could not be missing. We are in the eighth book of the *Metamorphoses*: Ovid

17 On the myth see: Gerhard 1850; Gerland 1871; Robert 1901; Holland 1902; Höfer 1902–1909; Bisi 1965; Leventi 1994; Leventi 1994b; Leventi 1994a. Just for bibliographic completeness we should mention Frontisi-Ducroux 1970: I am not going to discuss some bizarre hypotheses here presented (for instance “the fall ... memory of ancient rituals of initiation”, 281) because the author shows more caution in her argumentations in her final essay on Daedalus published years later.

18 For general considerations on the importance of the maternal uncle in Greek society, see Bremmer 1976 and Bremmer 1983.

19 Diod. 4, 76, Pseudo-Apoll. Bibl. 3, 15.8, Ovid Met. 8, 236–259, Isidore 19, 19, 9, the scholium to Ovid Ib 498, Servius ad Georg. 1, 143 and Hyginus Fab. 39 agree in attributing to the young apprentice the invention of saw based on the observation of a fish bone or the chin of a snake. The compass is mentioned in Diodorus, Ovid, Hyginus (274), Servius ad Aen. 6, 14; ad Georg. 1, 143; Diodorus also mentions the lathe (cf. Mercklin 1854, 77). For the murder: Tzetze, Chil. 1, 490–492; Apostol. Cent. 14, 17.

20 FHG 1.56, frg. FG rHist 4 F 82 = 169.

has just sung one of the fatal loves of the poem, that aroused for Minos in the heart of Scylla, who belongs to the group of women who sacrifice everything most sacred—family and home—to an insane love, therefore ruinous. Clinging to the ship of Minos who rejected her, she is about to become the prey of her father Nisus, transformed into a sea eagle, ready to tear her body to pieces with his hooked beak, so as to punish the treachery of her people (Fig. 2). As happens so often in Ovid's poetry, image and word become one (Ov. Met. 8, 148–50):

*Illa metu puppim dimisit, et aura cadentem
sustinuisse levis, ne tangeret aequora, visa est*

Terrified she let go [of the boat], and as she fell, a light breeze seemed to catch her and to keep her from touching the water.²¹

Then follow dazzling verses for their lightness:

pluma fuit: plumis in avem mutata

It was plumage: Scylla had sprouted feathers and changed into a bird.

Human beings, who are metamorphosed in birds are recurring themes throughout the poem. Examples are: Philomela, Procne and Tereus who become respectively swallow, nightingale and hoopoe (6, 421–674), the Meleagrides turned into guinea fowls (8, 270–546, 9, 149), and Daedalion into a hawk (11, 291–345). They are transformations that follow an unbearable pain,²² unhappy people are changed into flowers or birds, the severity of the condition left is compensated by the lightness of the new state.

The eighth book in particular is populated by winged creatures, beings who consider their status as a prison and attempt to escape. Scylla, longing for love, seeks escape from her father's house. Daedalus, a prisoner of Minos, taken from nostalgia of the

21 Translation of this and the following verses after Simpson 2001.

22 On the theme see Gentilcore 2010.



1 Daedalus and Perdix transformed into a partridge. Copper engraving, english, 18th cent., after Charles Eisen



2 Scylla clinging to the ship of Minos. Engraving by J. U. Kraus for Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 1690

homeland—Athens—sees in the sky the only way out (Plate 1).²³ The latter, however, is not a miraculous metamorphosis, rather a mechanical one, as befits one who is master of *techne* (Ov. Met. 8, 188–89):

Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes naturamque novat

He now turns his mind to arts unknown and makes nature anew.

The wings construction is not a wonderful occurrence. Ovid wants to explain everything, so meticulously describes the technique and ingredients: pens, string, wax. (Fig. 3)

Here he repeats the narrative structure of Scylla's story, with the relationship father and child. But whilst Nisus in his new nature of bird of prey rushes to punish his wicked daughter, Daedalus wants to bring his offspring to freedom and transmit to him his skills, because young Icarus is destined to continue the family tradition. Before attaching to him the wings, he kisses Icarus lovingly. Ovid, anticipating what will happen, says: (Ov. Met. 8, 212),

Not iterum repetenda

not to be repeated.

When Daedalus after picking up the body of his fallen son, entombs him on the island that will take the name of Icaria from him, Ovid brings up another winged being, a partridge. Let us read the verse in full (Ov. Met. 8, 236–259):

*Hunc miseri tumulo ponentem corpora nati garrula limoso
prospexit ab elice perdix et plausit pennis testataque gaudia
cantu est, unica tunc volucris nec visa prioribus annis, fac-
taque nuper avis longum tibi, Daedale, crimen. namque huic
tradiderat, fatorum ignara, docendam progeniem germana*

²³ See Anderson 1972, 350; for a specific investigation of the parallels between the two stories Crabbe 1981.



3 Rome, Villa Albani. Daedalus and Icarus. Marble relief, I-II cent. A.D.

suam, natalibus actis bis puerum senis, animi ad praecepta capax; ille etiam medio spinas in pisce notat as traxit in exemplum ferroque incidit acuto perpetuos dentes et serrae repperit usum; primus et ex uno duo ferrea brachia nodo vinxit, ut aequali spatio distantibus illis altera pars staret, pars altera duceret orbem. Daedalus invidit sacraque ex arce Minervae praecipitem misit, lapsus mentitus; at illum, quae favet ingeniis, excepit Pallas avemque reddidit et medio velavit in aere pennis, sed vigor ingenii quondam velocis in alas inque pedes abiit; nomen, quod et ante, remansit. non tamen haec alte volucris sua corpora tollit, nec facit in ramis altoque cacumine nidos: propter humum volitat ponitque in saepibus ova antiquique memor metuit sublimia casus.

As Daedalus put his poor son in his final resting place, a garrulous partridge looked up from a muddy ditch, clapped its wings, and expressed its glee by warbling a song. A singular creature then, not seen in former years and only recently became a bird, it was a lasting reproach to you, Daedalus. For the artist's sister, not knowing the fate in store for her son, had entrusted him to Daedalus to be taught. A boy of twelve with a bright and eager mind, he had once observed the backbone in a fish, used it as model, cut a continuous row of teeth in a iron blade, and so invented the saw. He was also the first to tie two iron legs together, fix one in place, and describe a circle around it with the other, while keeping them the same distance apart. Daedalus was envious, and threw him headlong from Minerva's sacred citadel, claiming that he had fallen. But Pallas, who favours ingenuity, caught him, and turned him into a bird, masking him with feathers in mid-air. His in-born energy was transferred to swift wings and feet, his name, too, remained the same as before. But the bird does not perch above the ground, and does not make its nest on branches or on high points, but flies low on whirring wings over the soil, and lays its eggs in a sheltered place and, mindful of its former fall, it dreads the higher regions.

According to one of the structural constants of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid here also works within a system of multiplicity.²⁴ It simplifies, expands the story with details that evoke wonder and therefore make it light. He works on tradition, does not deform it, but rather adds some plausible elements. In front of the despair of Daedalus for the loss of his son, Ovid extracts from the cylinder a talkative partridge²⁵, that wickedly enjoys the sight of this man whom fate has given a punishment to by the law of retaliation (Plate 2): has Daedalus not killed Perdix, the son of her sister, blood of his blood, entrusted to him to teach him his craft? I leave aside the question of variations:²⁶ Perdix, name of mother and son,²⁷ Perdix or even Τάλως²⁸, Κάλως²⁹ ο Αττάλως³⁰, not to be confused with the Cretan giant Τάλος.³¹ The plot of the versions in the end would not change the value of myth.³²

24 Illuminating on this Ščeglov 1969 (the essay was published in Russian in 1962).

25 For the knowledge about the partridge in ancient time see Keller 1913, 156–160; cf. also Toynbee 1983, 248.

26 See observations of Mercklin 1854, 55–56.

27 Suidas (sv Perdikos ieron) reports the version that, her too named Perdix, has hanged herself, after having heard the death of her son; then the Athenians honored her with a sanctuary.

28 Diod. 4, 74, Apoll. Bibl. 3, 15.9, sch. Eur. Or. 1643, Tzet. Chil. 1, 490–493. A fragment of Hellanikos (FHG 1, 56, frg. FGrHist 4 F 82 = 169) provides the details of the conviction of Daedalus by the Areopagus. The Athenian Talos is clearly a duplication of the Cretan Talos, for a recent summary on this figure see Papadopoulos 1994.

29 Paus. 1, 21, 6: mentions the tomb at the place where Perdix would have fallen, see also I, 25, 5.

30 Tzet. Chil. I, 493, cf. also Mercklin 1854, 55–56.

31 Papadopoulos 1994, with previous bibliography.

32 Only incidentally I remind that this myth has interested Johann Jakob Bachofen and James Frazer: The first one thought that the murder of Talos by his maternal uncle embodies a reminiscence of an attempt to renounce and abolish the ancient matriarchal system in favor of the patriarchal type (Meuli-Dorman 1966, 306); Frazer rejects this hypothesis, indeed untenable, with another also quite bizarre, that there is a connection with the Cretan Talos (so far we can agree), and then a connection to the cult of Ball-Phoenician Moloch; Frazer 1911, III, 73 ff.

2.1 THE FALL AND THE FLIGHT

What is the position of Ovid compared to previous versions of the myth? He makes a clear choice, ignoring the most common variants that bear the name of Talos as nephew of Daedalus.³³ In addition to his preference for the variant Perdix — already present in Hyginus' *Fabulae*³⁴, followed only by Servius³⁵ and Isidore³⁶, he introduces new narrative elements found in no previous tradition. For example, he mentions the intervention of Athena who causes the metamorphosis. The poet adds details on the age of Perdix, stating that the young man was twelve years old. That information should reflect the reality known to him, in which apprentices began an activity no later than 14 years old, for all we know.³⁷ That Ovid may have drawn a rare version of the myth is not surprising. Perhaps it seems rare to us, given the loss of so many sources. In fact, the oldest evidence — albeit fleeting — of the myth of Perdix is in a fragment of the *Kamikoi* by Sophocles, a work that formed a trilogy with *Minos* and *Daedalus*, most likely composed around 430.³⁸ Other traces of Perdix date to the end of the fifth century. At this time it was proverbial to assimilate the partridge that stands on one leg to a cripple. Aristophanes in the *Birds* makes fun of the Athenians who are prey of real birdmania (Arist. Av. 1290–1298):

33 Cf. supra 15.

34 Ig. Fab. 39 (see also 244, 277): It is interesting that Iginus resume the main tradition but introduces a significant (almost unconscious) change: Perdix was thrown out of the Acropolis, but not from the roof of a house (of Daedalus?); Iginus considers Perdix also the inventor of saw and compass (274). What matters is not so much the place of action, but the action itself with its structural elements: construction activity, high rise, fall and death.

35 Ad Aen. 6, 14; ad Georg. 1, 143.

36 Is. Orig. 19, 19, 9.

37 Schulz-Falkenthal 1972; incidentally we may remember that the same happened in the Renaissance, though in same case, as of Mantegna, even earlier: cf. Wackernagel 1996, 381.

38 Pearson 1952, frg. 323; Suidas s. v. Perdikos ieron; cf. Athen. 9, 41, 388.

And they are so blatantly bird-barmy that many of them actually had the names of birds given to them. There was one, a lame tavern-keeper, who was called ‘Partridge’;³⁹ Menippus had the name ‘Swallow’; Opuntius, ‘Raven minus an eye’; Philocles, ‘Lark’, Theogenes, ‘Sheldrake’, Lycurgus, ‘Tbis’; Chaerephon, ‘Bat’; and Syracosius, ‘Jay’. And Meidias, he was called ‘Quail’.⁴⁰

Adrian S. Hollis in his essay on the sources of the eighth book of the *Metamorphoses*,⁴¹ argued plausibly that the intervention of Athena in the myth of Perdix—an ovidian peculiarity—and the verse ‘nomen, quod et ante, remansit’ (255), may refer to a Greek source. The formula would echo the Greek κατὰ καὶ πρὶν ὀνομάζωντο, a common expression in etymologizing works. On these considerations the scholar hypothesizes as a possible source for Ovid Boios’ *Ornithogonia*. It is a work where are narrated stories of men changed into birds, the echo of which is preserved for us in passages of the *Metamorphoses* by Antoninus Liberalis.⁴² Author of an *Ornithogonia* was Aemilius Macer, known for adaptations of the *Theriaca* and the *Alexipharmaka* of Nicander. Macer was an older contemporary of Ovid. He sufficiently appreciated his poetry, so as to be present at his recitations.⁴³ It is very possible that the poet of the *Metamorphoses* was able to draw on the myth of Perdix from Macer, nor can we exclude the Iginus’ *Fabulae* as a source of inspiration, whose author was Ovid’s friend. It remains, however, that the details of the burial of Icarus in the presence of partridge looks like an ovidian invention.

39 Perhaps he is the Peisias associated with a partridge at the verses 766–768: “And if the son of Peisias wants to betray the gates to the exiles, let him become a partridge, a chick of the old cock; because with us there’s nothing disgraceful in playing partridge tricks!” Cf. commentary in Dunbar 1995, 474 and infra footnote 56.

40 Translation after Sommerstein 1987.

41 Hollis, 1970, 236–59; on this, fundamental Vollgraf 1901.

42 Martini 1927, 165, and for the classic edition of Antoninus Liberalis, Martini 1896; on the *Ornithogonia*, Powell 1925, 24.

43 Ov. *Tristia*, 4, 10, 43–44. For the combination of the myths of Daedalus and Perdix before Ovid see Bömer 1977, 57–58, 66 and 72.

The singularity of the episode seems to be confirmed also by the absence of iconographic evidence of the myth of Perdix in the Greek and Roman figurative culture. On a red-figure lekythos of the second quarter of the fifth century—in the Metropolitan Museum in New York—attributed to the Painter of Icarus, it is shown Icarus and a bird (Plate 3). The bird is painted in fall as it was flying down. H. J. Rose interpreted the scene as a representation of the myth of Perdix.⁴⁴ John Beazley, in contrast, argued that the falling bird is only an indication of the precipitation of Icarus.⁴⁵ Although there is not sufficient evidence that may firmly orientate the debate towards one or the other hypothesis, I believe that the idea of Beazley is much more reasonable.



4 Parthenon, south metope, n. 14, after a drawing by Carrey

Also worth mentioning is the assumption of Martin Robertson in identifying Perdix/Talos in the south metope 14 of the Parthenon, known from a drawing by Carrey (Fig. 4).⁴⁶ The young, remembered as the inventor of the wheel, would show here terracotta pots, results of his genius. The hypothesis is suggestive, but the argumentations on which it is based too uncertain.

44 Rose 1928.

45 Beazley 1927, 231.

46 Robertson 1979, 83.



5 Verona, Museum Maffeiano. Fight of two male figures: marble relief, I-II cent. A.D.



6 Naples, Archaeological Museum. Procession of carpenters, I cent. A.D.

Turning to the Roman figurative repertoire, I believe implausible the suggestive but unprovable hypothesis of Theodor Panofka to interpret the battle between two anonymous figures in the background of a turreted city on a hill kept in the Museum Maffeiano in Verona (Fig. 5), as referred to the episode of Daedalus and Perdix.⁴⁷ Apart from the absence of specific evidence to support the hypothesis, an explicit fight among the two figures on the same level is never considered in the narration. The scene, that according to some scholars most likely may represent the myth of Daedalus and Perdix is on the wall decoration of a pillar of the so called workshop of the perfumer at Pompeii (Fig. 6, Plate 4): Some carriers bear a *ferculum*, above which on the left one can see the fragmentary image of Minerva, with a shield on the ground. In the center there are apprentices working with a saw. In the foreground is presented a figure with a compass in hand, musing on a male body lying under his feet. Some scholars want to identify him as Daedalus observing, contrite, the corpse of Perdix. It would seem, however, unusual to carry in procession the *primus artifex*, patron of carpenters, portraying him in little uplifting circumstances before the evidence of his crime. Moreover, none of the sources mentions Daedalus in front of the corpse of his nephew, who, however, before falling, morphs into a partridge. It should also be noted that the body is lying naked, while all other figures are dressed, clue that more plausibly identifies a sculpture.⁴⁸

Let's suspend for a moment the question of the formation of the myth in order to analyze further the already mentioned three key elements, beginning with flight-fall. It is undeniable that the myths of Icarus and Perdix-Talos are built on a comparable narrative structure.⁴⁹

Both Icarus and Perdix are presented in a relation of kinship and discipleship with Daedalus, although of a different degree. Icarus is the son, the student par excellence, to whom his father lovingly teaches the secrets of his craft. He reveals the technique

⁴⁷ Leventi 1994.

⁴⁸ PPM 1993, 391.

⁴⁹ Of the same opinion Faber 1998, 80.



7 Rome, Villa Borghese. G. L. Bernini, Apollon and Daphne, 1622-25

of flight, but advises him not to overdo it, not to fly too high. Implicitly exhorts him to follow the precepts of the master without discussing them and exceeding him. Perdix is also part of the family, the son of Perdix, sister of Daedalus, both sons of Eupalamos (speaking name: good palm of hand, so skilful in creating), a descendant of none other than the royal and native offspring of Athens, the Erechtheids.⁵⁰ The nephew should have humbly

⁵⁰ The connection had to be drawn up in Athens with ennobling purposes, cf. here 4.1.

followed the rules of apprenticeship, follow the provisions of the uncle-workshopmaster.⁵¹ Instead he dares to go further, dares to fly too high: inventing new tools, saw and compass, the student stands out and surpasses the master, provoking his jealousy-envy and the subsequent angry reaction that precipitates him from the Acropolis. Everything revolves around the concept of balance, the wise use of metis. Excess is punished.⁵² Daedalus imitates nature but does not challenge the gods. He succeeds. Icarus dares too much, ventures too far, so he is punished as the victim of its own foolishness. The young Perdix is a victim of his own naivety and Athena, ever sensitive to talent, must intervene to save him.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are not just a figment of the poet's imagination, but follow constant rules. Beings do not turn into something else by magic, but always through a smooth transition. The sudden transformation is monstrous. In Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, key narrative of modernity, a human being becomes a cockroach from evening to morning, so arouses disgust: it is a reversal of the evolutionary path from humanity to bestiality. In Ovid it is as if we observe a series of frames in slow motion: there is a time in which a being is no longer what it was before and it is not yet what it will be, but we can see the properties of the one which move in one's else, such as Bernini brilliantly expresses in the group of Apollo and Daphne (Fig. 7). In addition, the new being generally preserves the special character or behavior of a time. Therefore it is not necessary, in my opinion, to follow Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux who seeks the peculiar properties of birds according to the old mythography.⁵³ There is no complicated symbolism, but just a gradual shift, a flow from the human to

⁵¹ Of different opinion Faber, 1998, 86: "There is a contrast, however, between Daedalus' complicated inventions and the simplicity of Perdix's discoveries, this contrast serves to oppose the innocence of Perdix to the blameworthiness of Daedalus which was only intimated in the first episode. Whereas Daedalus is depicted as an inventor who transgresses the laws of nature and so attempts to emulate the gods, Perdix is a discoverer who remains within the bounds of human ability".

⁵² See comments of Pavlock 1998, 154-157.

⁵³ Ael., *De nat. anim.* 3 5; 4.1, recalls that the partridge is salacious and warlike, cf. Frontisi Ducroux 2000, 162-163.



8 Standing partridges

the animal according to the principle that everything is moving, nothing is lost, everything is transformed. So the aggressiveness of Daedalion moves to the character of the hawk,⁵⁴ the voluble Pierides become magpies⁵⁵ and so on. Even the transformation in partridge follows this pattern. It is not so much the fact that the partridge is a talkative bird that we should pay attention to, as to the properties of the animal as Ovid points out: the readiness of the intelligence of Perdix passes into the wings and legs of the bird. The flight is an allegory of the transposition of the intelligence of the young man, the *metis*, the invention that allows him to fly in a metaphorical sense. The legs are the embodiment of *techne*, the ability to work, but also of cunning, because the partridge runs fast, however, by standing on one leg, deceives the hunter (Fig. 8).⁵⁶ The wings were symbolically clipped. Talent

54 Ov. Met. 11, 291–345: Ovid often uses these metamorphoses, as in the case of the king of Trachis Daedalion, who does not fit in the saga of Daedalus but literally means son of Daedalus. Crazed by grief at the death of his daughter, he rushes from Parnassus from which he is rescued by Apollo who transforms him into sparrowhawk (11, 290–365). This recalls the integral elements of the saga of Daedalus: death, fall and transformation into a bird.

55 Ov. Met. 5, 294–332, 333–661.

56 Cf. Arist. Av. 766–768, where he associates two Athenian citizens, father and son, feigning injury to avoid fighting in war, associated with the cunning shown by partridges standing on one leg and feigning injury

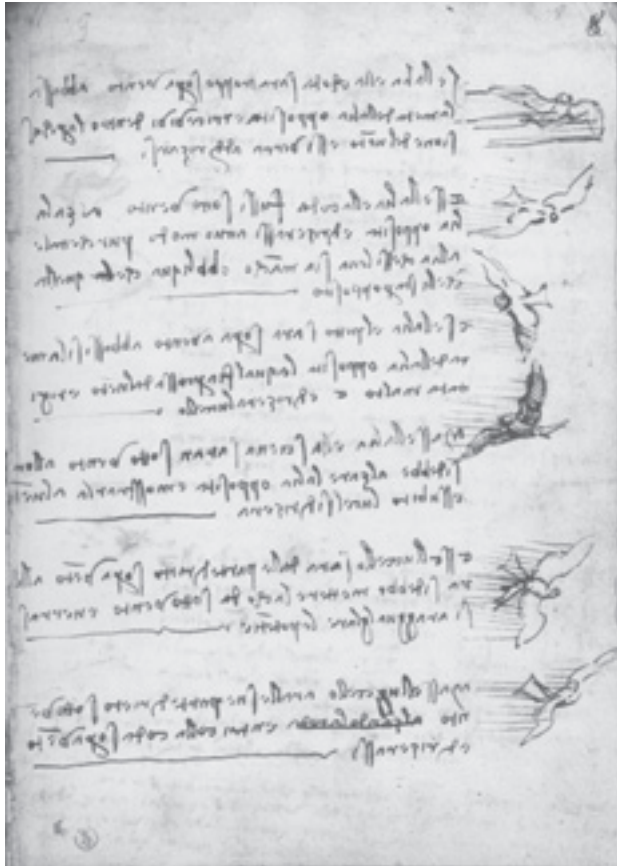
has been blocked, so that the partridge cannot fly up, as Perdix wanted to do. It flutters and mindful of the ancient fall is afraid to go up. Height, flight and fall are the two poles between which these myths are designed. Daedalus has exceeded the limits of human power through his creativity, going up and succeeded in not pushing too far. The craftsman, thanks to its *metis* becomes a bird-man and hovers in space. The young apprentice at the beginning of his activity, would also fly high, create, but someone clips his wings.

What is the meaning of the flight for Ovid in the broadest sense, there is just need to remember it. The closing verses of the poem are an explicit seal (Ov. Met. 15, 873–876).⁵⁷

I have now completed a work that neither Jupiter's wrath,
nor fire, nor sword, nor time's corruption can ever de-
stroy. Let that day has dominion over nothing but this
body and my life on earth whenever it may choose to.
The better part of me will be carried up and fixed beyond
the stars forever, and my name will never die. Wherever
Roman might extends, in all the lands beneath its rule,
I shall be the one whom people hear and read. And if
poets truly can foretell, in all ceremonies to come, I shall
live.

as well. It seems that pretending to be lame attracts the hunter and takes him away from children. The code Coislinianus (see Gaisford 1836) 1, 406, refers to an Athenian lame innkeeper, probably a known figure in Athens (the same mentioned by Aristophanes, Av. 1292?), so as to be cited proverbially.

57 Once exiled to the shores of the Black Sea, Ovid saw himself as an Icarus, fallen from Parnassus; he consciously describes his condition in the *Tristia* 1, 1, 89; 3, 4, 21; cf. also Hinz 1995, 176. In this regard, we can mention the verses of Bacchylides (5, 16–30) in which he compares himself to an eagle flying high above the earth; the flight in connection with the survival of the poet's name thanks to his work appears also in the famous Ennius' fragment reported by Cicero (Cic. *Tuscul.* 1, 117); similar examples in which flight and immortality are associated are found in Horace's poetry (Car. 2.20), cf. Luck-Huyse 1997, 179–180 and 193–194.



9 Leonardo da Vinci. Notes on *Volo degli Uccelli*

I believe that if one would research the relationship between flight and creativity in classical and post-classical time would found countless examples.⁵⁸ I remember and mention only for stimulus sake, a modern age case concerning Leonardo da Vinci. Among his notes on the *Volo degli uccelli* (Flight of Birds), some

58 For an analysis of the meaning of the flight in antiquity see Luck-Huyse 1997, 149–150 (desire to fly for escaping), 177–178 (flying as a synonym of freedom). See also Massenzio 1985, 161–174.

are a little obscure, bearing witness to the passion with which the artist wished to imitate the art of flying (Fig. 9):

It will take the first flight the great bird above the top of his great Cecero, filling the universe with awe, filling of his fame all the scriptures, and eternal glory to the nest where it was born.⁵⁹

It is no coincidence that in 1910 Sigmund Freud devoted an important essay to Leonardo da Vinci, interpreting his childhood dream, in which a kite comes to kidnap him in the cradle. Freud wonders why so many men have dreamt of being able to fly. The psychoanalytic answer is that the transformation into a bird, is nothing more than a hidden desire, the capability of a sexual act.

What about sex and children? The desire for sex is precocious. It seems that children are haunted by the desire to grow up and act like adults. Freud writes:⁶⁰ “This desire is the spring of all their games. If in the course of their sexual exploration they feel that the adult can do something great in that area mysterious yet so important, something that to them is not allowed to know or do, awakens in them an impetuous desire to know how to do the same thing, and they dream in the form of flying or predispose this travesty of desire, that they will use in their subsequent dreams of flying”. The flight is a possible disguise of the desire to become an adult, of ‘doing’: the story of Perdix seems to be a pre-psychoanalytical equivalent of that condition.

59 Marinoni 1952, 171; the Cecero is a mount near Florence: “Piglierà il primo volo il grande uccello sopra del dosso del suo magno Cecero, empiendo l’universo di stupore, empiendo di sua fama tutte le scritture, e gloria eterna al nido dove nacque”.

60 Freud 1991, 136–137.

2.2 PARTHENIUM SIVE PERDICIUM: STORIES OF PARTRIDGES AFTER OVID

The story of the partridge does not end here, but it seems to go on both on a naturalistic and historical level, showing remarkable parallels with the Ovidian verses. In book 22 of the *Naturalis Historia*, Pliny considers the name and properties of some plants. Among them he mentions *perdicium* (Plin. Nat. Hist. 22, 19–20):

Helxine, called by some *perdicium* (partridge plant) because partridges are particularly fond of eating it, by others *sideritis*, and by a few people *parthenium* ... The characteristics, however, of the genuine *helxine* I have described in the preceding book.⁶¹

In the following states:

Perdicium or *parthenium* or, to give it yet another name, *sideritis*, is another plant, called by some of our countrymen *urceolaris*, by other *astercum* ... it grows on tiles and among ruins. Pounded and sprinkled with a pinch of salt it cures the same diseases as *dead-nettle*, all of them, and is administered in the same way. The juice too taken hot is good for abscesses, and is remarkably good for convulsions, ruptures, bruises caused by slipping of by falling from a height, for instance, when vehicles overturn.

At this point Pliny, seeking to support his argumentations with concrete examples tells us that:

A household slave, a favorite of Pericles, first citizen of Athens, when engaged in building the temple on the

Acropolis, crawled on the top of the high roof and fell. He is said to have been cured by this plant, Which was prescribed in a dream to Pericles by Minerva; Therefore it began to be called *parthenium* and was consecrated to that goddess.

It is striking that in the story told by Pliny are present the same ingredients as in the myth of *Perdix*. They include the place, the Acropolis; the fall, the slave precipitates from high, the intervention of Athena, though in a dream, not by chance suggesting as remedy a herb that is called *parthenium*, from the goddess herself, or also *perdicium*. The latter, according to Pliny, is related to the fact that it is an herb that partridges feed on, birds which he believes to be present on the Acropolis. Pliny, a man with scientific interests, attempts to rationalize the myth. Since the bird had become a metaphor for salvation from high falling, it was thought that also the plant fed was helpful in case of falls. Pliny does not mention the episode of *Perdix*, a history of ‘artists’ not really admirable and even with criminal implications. He rather introduces an uplifting tale connected with the main enterprise on the Acropolis: the building of Parthenon. The version of Pliny seems to have established later on, because it is taken up by Plutarch in his *Life of Pericles* (13.7):

The Propylaea of the acropolis were brought to completion in the space of five years, Mnesicles being their architect. A wonderful thing happened in the course of their building, which indicated that the goddess was not holding herself aloof, but was a helper both in the inception and in the completion of the work. One of its artificers, the most active and zealous of them all, lost his footing and fell from a great height, and lay in a sorry plight, despaired of by the physicians. Pericles was much cast down at this, but the goddess appeared to him in a dream and prescribed a course of treatment for him to use, so that he speedily and easily healed the man. It was in commemoration of this that he set up the bronze

⁶¹ Translation after Jones 1969. Cf. what Pliny says in Book 21, 104: “*Parthenium* is called *leucanthes* by some, and *amaracum* by others. Celsus, among the Latin writers calls it *perdicium* and *muralis*”.

statue of Athena Hygieia on the acropolis near the altar of that goddess, which was there before, as they say.⁶²

Apart from the emphasis given to participation in the construction of the Acropolis of Athens and the direct action of Pericles in the rescue of the worker—no longer a slave, Plutarch accepts a version almost identical to that of Pliny. Either both are derived from a earlier source, or it is likely that Plutarch depends on Pliny. These citations prove that the myth of Daedalus had already consolidated literature. Although Ovid's version is not explicitly used in the accounts of Pliny and Plutarch, it seems to catch an echo of it in these authors making a marginal episode of the Daedalic mythography, that of Perdix, as widely known and treated as possible.

Finally, the theme of the partridge seems to emerge again in modern Greek folk songs, where often appears a partridge, a pheasant or a similar bird, that sits on trees or rocks and sings the songs of lament for a fallen hero.⁶³

3. ZELOTUPIA O PHTHONOS? INSTRUMENTS TO DEFINE A PASSION IN GREEK SOCIETY

We come now to the subject of the crime, the killing of the pupil by the teacher. I shall start with an episode narrated by Lucian in the *Dream* (1–4). After school, the father of Lucian wants him take a job, so he relies on an uncle who is a sculptor, not by chance a brother of his mother:

When I had just stopped attending school and was now close to manhood, my father began discussing my further education with his friends. Most of them thought higher

⁶² Translation by the author.

⁶³ Ross 1913, 2, 121, footnote 9: Greek folk songs (then collected by C. Fauriel, 1825).

education required much hard work, a great deal of time ... but if I learned one of the artisan crafts, I would from the very start have sufficient income from my craft ... When each praised a different craft according to his personal opinion or experience, my father looked at my uncle—for my uncle on my mother's side was present, a man considered an excellent sculptor—and said 'It is wrong for any other craft to prevail in your presence'. He then pointed at me and continued 'You take him and teach him to be a good stone-cutter, mason and sculptor; for he is capable of that, since, as you know, he has natural talent'... So no sooner had a day come that seemed suitable for me to start in a craft than I had been handed over to my uncle, and, upon my word, I was not all displeased but thought it provides me with pleasant sport ... Then the first thing that usually happens to beginners happened to me. For my uncle gave me a chisel and told me to give a gentle tap to a slab that lay to hand, adding the proverbial 'Well begun half done'. But in my inexperience I struck too hard and the slab broke, whereupon my uncle lost his temper and grabbed a stick that lay near and performed an initiation ceremony on me that was neither gentle nor encouraging, so that my first steps in the craft brought me tears.

So I ran off from there and arrived home sobbing without stop with my eyes full of tears and told them about the stick and kept showing my weals and accusing my uncle of great cruelty, adding that he had acted out of jealousy for fear that I would surpass him in his own craft. After my mother had consoled me and said many hard things about her brother, I fell asleep after nightfall still tearful and thinking of the stick.⁶⁴

Lucian was too well educated and ironic to not intentionally make a reference to the myth of Daedalus and his nephew which

⁶⁴ Translation after Macleod 1990.

had to be proverbial in his time. As noted earlier, in mythological and iconographic terms the saga of Perdix is practically irrelevant: the literary testimonies are very few and the iconographic ones non-existent for the Greek world, practically null in the figurative culture of the Roman time. What interests us, then, is why and when it has been developed a mythical variation on the theme of artist's *phthonos* (envy). By the time of Lucian the story of a young apprentice and his envious uncle was anecdotal and had become part of a cultural heritage known in educated environments.

I prefer to define the passion of Daedalus towards his nephew as *phthonos*, because I believe that corresponds more to this feeling rather than *zelotupia*, which is ascribable to the sphere of jealousy. Ovid uses *invidit* and all Latin sources agree either in using the noun *invidiam* or the verb, occasionally with a reinforcement as in the case of Isidore, who uses the expression *invidiae livore*.⁶⁵ Similarly, the Greek sources employ the similar binomial *phthonos/phthoneo*. Now as far as the emotional categories in classical Greece and Rome do not correspond completely to modern ones,⁶⁶ we see a coherence in the definition of the passion felt by Daedalus.

Paul Ekman⁶⁷ in the afterword to the recent edition of Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* observes that jealousy is not a passion of distinctive character, rather a complete set of emotions which the person feels a number of other emotions: anger at the man whose has lost the attention or at the rival; sadness for the loss, fear in advance for any loss which may be suffered, contempt for himself for being jealous. Jealousy is a triadic emotion, that involves three people, while envy two. Jealousy also differs from envy because it refers to a particular individual, not any person. We can envy someone, who has something that we do not have; we are jealous when we are in love with that person.

65 Isid. Orig. 19, 19, 9.

66 Konstan 2003, 7–27.

67 Ekman 2002.

Unfortunately the only written evidence which inform us about the characteristics of envy and jealousy in Greece do not go back beyond the fourth century. One is found in the *Symposium* (213c 8),⁶⁸ when Socrates complains with Agathon about Alcibiades's nuisances:

I must ask you to protect me, Agathon; for the passion of this man has grown quite a serious matter to me. Since I became his admirer I have never been allowed to speak to any other fair one, or so much as to look at them. If I do, he goes wild with envy (*phthonon*) and jealousy (*zelotupia*), and not only abuses me but can hardly keep his hands off me, and at this moment he may do me some harm.⁶⁹

Alcibiades wants Socrates all for himself, not for fear of being rejected, but because he will not share the company of his *erastes* with others. In the Greek world it seems that the *zelotupia* is usually associated with women, or a feeling considered barbarian, as evidenced by Plutarch, who attributes it to Persians. The word *zelotupia* appears in the fifth century, in public or political domain with sense of competitiveness, in contexts in which someone tries to prevent the success of others, either to promote his own or with simple evil intentions.

In Platonic and much of Hellenistic philosophy emotions of rivalry are considered misleading and flawed. So at least from the IV century onwards criticism of rivalry and competition was recognized, at least in intellectual circles, as a suitable alternative to the prevalent ethos in the Greek ancient culture, which was based on competition.

However those philosophical speculations do not tell us much about the general view of *phthonos* within the society at the time of Plato. Paradoxically, we obtain more precise information on that from Aristotle's thoughts on the word and passion in

68 See Fantham 1986, 47–50.

69 Translation by the author.

his ethical works. This is not surprising because both the *Rhetoric* and the *Politics* reflect the common opinion much more than aristocratic Platonic thought.⁷⁰ Both in fifth and fourth centuries the concept of envy was related to the notion of honor. In the *Rhetoric* (2, 9–11) the philosopher treats the emotions of rivalry, caused by the sorrow provoked by the possession of something good by others. The three emotions connected with the rivalry are *phthonos*, *zelos* and *nemesis*: envy, emulation and disdain-anger. Envy springs from sorrow felt toward those who are like us for status and character, but who we believe to have something which we do not. Emulation always begins from a regret for a fault condition in relation to somebody else but is really focused on our lack rather than the possessions of others. Nemesis is caused by the affliction we feel when we think that other people possess something undeservedly. In the *Rhetoric* emotions of rivalry are not necessarily considered negative, but can be virtuous or bad depending on the circumstances and the person who feels them.⁷¹

4. THE ARTIST AS A MURDERER, THREE VARIATIONS ON A THEME: COMPETITION, MIMESIS AND CRIME

4.1 COMPETITION

If we try to piece together the fragmentary evidence collected so far, we can attempt to hypothesize the time and place of formation of the topos of the rivalry between artists. The myth of Daedalus and Perdix has all Athenian elements: the connection of the legendary artist with the offspring of Erechtheids, the Acropolis as the crime scene, the intervention of Athena, the judgment of the Aeropagus, even the partridge and the evidence of a heroic cult devoted to Perdix on the slopes of the Acropolis,

which existed from the Archaic period.⁷² To determine when the formation of the myth dates back to we have ephemeral clues which point to the fifth century, when—even taking into account the fragmentation of sources—there is an emphasis on the role of creativity in Athenian society.⁷³ Sophocles seems to know the myth of Perdix, judging from the presence by the dramatist in the episode in the *Kamikoi*. The lame innkeeper Perdix was a well known figure in Athens at the time of the Peloponnesian War, as recorded in Aristophanes' *Birds* (414). Pherecydes of Athens, who lived in the first half of the fifth century, preserves the oldest evidence on Daedalus. The context for the development of the myth of Perdix, alias Talos, may be the industrious Athens of the first half of the fifth century, or even the end of the Archaic period. The sense of competition seems to be an essential component of creative activity. The sense of competition seems to be an essential component of creative activity, as to become crystallized in the artistic literature of the late fourth century B.C. (Duris of Samos in the first place) in the anecdotes based on competition-contrast of famous artists like Parrasios and Zeuxis, Apelles and Protogenes, Alcamenes and Agoracritos. The challenge between Phidias and his alleged student Alcamenes, reported by Tzetzes⁷⁴, it is just a variation of the formula we are dealing with: to a common basic structure are added ex post characteristic elements derived from artists' biographies, making the whole thing plausible even if is not true. In this canonized form by now paradigmatic in the Hellenistic art, criticism will be incorporated in the Roman ambit and will re-emerge in Byzantine times.⁷⁵

The killing of the young Perdix reveals the theme of rivalry in the creative sphere: the reluctant teacher, once it appears that the apprentice wants to overcome or exceeds him, behaves with open or secret violence towards him. The doom of the latter seems to show a moralistic attitude, as if his attempt to grow and overcome

⁷² Beschi 1967–68, 392–396, however he has not convincingly proposed an identification of the sanctuary.

⁷³ See Barbanera forthcoming.

⁷⁴ Tzet. Chil. 8, 340, 352.

⁷⁵ On this topic see also Donohue 2003.

⁷⁰ Hermann 2003, 53–83.

⁷¹ Gill 2003, 29–51.

the teacher made him a victim of his own desire. Wanting to go further, we must assume that behind all this we have to hypothesize a time when the artist's craft was almost a initiatory practice, governed by rules secretly learned. The Homeric tradition depicts Hephaestus—the embodiment of creativity at divine level—as a god who has the ability to bind and to loose, to create admirable spells, that only he can solve.⁷⁶ In the *Odyssey* (9, 393–4) is used the term 'pharmasso' in reference to the action of the blacksmith in tempering the metal. That seems to emphasize the process of transformation of matter as in the more modern alchemical process. The verb also takes on the meaning of change with the help of drug action and practice of magic. In essence, the blacksmith tempers iron using a pharmacon or a secret remedy, i. e. immersing it in cold water. In that sense he works in a magic sphere, in which the control of the secret forces of nature—like fire—it is the prerogative only of initiates. The original sphere in which moved the craftsman in the Greek world is marked by magic, whose secrets are learned after a long apprenticeships. For the craftsman the necessity for eliminating possible rivals could be understood by considering the special relationship with his work, the crucial importance of creativeness in his inner life. The passion with which he confronts himself with rivals is motivated by ensuring the uniqueness of the outcome.

To this mythical and religious layer can be added the literary emphasis on agon, such as that established between Homer and Hesiod believed to have been developed at the end of the fifth century in the context of sophistry.⁷⁷ Moreover, the literature of the Augustan and subsequent age assimilated the theme of rivalry expressed in the killing of Perdix, reflecting the anecdotal antagonism between artisans, as just discussed. Of course, if on one hand there is the broad context of rivalry and competition in Greek society, on the other the practice of rhetoric opposing two exemplary figures in their field takes over, often praising one and

criticizing the other, a practice already theorized by Theon of Gadara.⁷⁸ The rivalry is not always ennobled as in the cases just cited, but often serves to untie the passions of the artists in the competition. The anecdotal flourishing in artistic literature from the fourth century B.C. on does nothing but fix—in my opinion, the memories of a distant era to which the transmission of artisanal knowledge was linked, as mentioned above, with precise magical practice rituals. Although these practices had been obsolete for many centuries, at the dawn of art history, written artists' biographies were processed according to a scheme whose model can be found in the domain of sophistry at the end of the fifth century.

That image of the artist as a murderer survived in the postantique age in the anecdotal literature, not only in Europe but also in other cultures. It coincided with the revival of the arts. In the Middle Ages there were countless stories of builders who are supposed to have killed their pupils or about some masons guilty of having overcome the architects in the realization of a spire or a vault.⁷⁹ At Bittau during the construction of the church of the Trinity, among the builders there was an apprentice who made a bet with his foreman that he would finish first the first pillar of the church. They started together, but the apprentice, as alleged, finished first, so the foreman decided to kill him. In a pillar of the church would be represented both the knife with which he killed the young man and the sword with which he was later executed. In the Church of the cloister of Königslutter—built around 1100—there is a row of columns built alternatively by the student and the teacher; those completed by the first being found to be the most beautiful, made the master stab the pupil out of envy. In a chapel of the abbey church of Rouen there is a tombstone with the name of the architect of the church Merander von Bernevol, who died in 1440. Next to it is the tomb of a young man who, according to legend, was a collaborator of the architect, and

⁷⁶ For a summary of this subject see Barbanera forthcoming.

⁷⁷ The papyrus Michigan 2754 attributes its authorship to the sophist Alcidamas (about 400), cf. Pack 1965, 21, n. 76.

⁷⁸ Heath 2002–2003, 137–147

⁷⁹ A variation on the theme is that of the craftsman who is killed by his client to rank high after doing a magnificent work, so that he could not perform work of equal beauty for no other, cf. Crooke, 1918, 220–224.

creator of the window above the side door. Overridden by jealousy the master killed the student and then himself. The list of similar episodes could go on, without the variants changing the value of the narrative's core.⁸⁰

It is not my intention to systematically research the artistic literature from the Renaissance on, but some clues are sufficient to suggest that the topos of the jealous and murderer artist has continued to thrive: Michelangelo is said to have destroyed paintings by Dürer out of envy, act to be interpreted as the murder *in absentia* of the artist himself.⁸¹ Another well-known and extreme example is the story told by Giorgio Vasari of Andrea del Castagno that he would have killed his partner Domenico Veneziano, who actually survived him for years.⁸² Stories have been handed down about others, such as the Pordenone, Baldassarre Peruzzi, Federico Barocci and Simone Cantarini, who were supposed to had been poisoned by rivals who could not endure their success.⁸³ In the Chinese artistic tradition there is the story of one of the greatest Chinese painters, Wu Tao-tzu, who was accused of having eliminated a rival.⁸⁴

Such anecdotes created during the creative process, with the opposition teacher and pupil, up to the time of the perpetration of the crime are not tied to a specific activity: Painters, sculptors in wood or stone, clay moulders, architects are all united by competition and jealousy which results in the physical elimination of a young apprentice, considered a possible rival. It has evidenced a state that is not only peculiar to the sphere of creativity, but it reveals an irreconcilable conflict between generations. The topos of the mature artist who murders his student (with the aggravating circumstance in the case of Daedalus that crime is committed by a maternal uncle, a figure of great importance in Greek society),⁸⁵ seems the anachronistic residue, by now anecdotal, of a time

⁸⁰ Ilg 1871, 148; Kinkel 1876, 189–190; Coulton 1912, 336; Talos 1969, 200.

⁸¹ Fuhse 1895, 66–75.

⁸² Vasari 1878–85, 678.

⁸³ Kris–Kurz, 1979, 122, 118–124 in general.

⁸⁴ Giles 1905, 48.

⁸⁵ See Bremmer 1983.

when craft learning was a secret to keep. Besides anecdotes about the artist as murderer there is a version in which the murder does not take place as a result of a fit of uncontrolled anger, but it is planned as a precise objective, defying nature with the art of making the artifice more true than nature itself: for this purpose the artist does not hesitate to become a torturer, as we shall see in the next section.

4.2 NATURA IMITANDA EST

In 1905, the aristocratic Corfiot scholar Konstantin Théotokis (1872–1923) published a story entitled *Apelles*.⁸⁶ This is one of the first literary attempts of the author, in a symbolist and decadent accent, to be followed by a change in the realist sense.⁸⁷ Theotokis, a great connoisseur of ancient Greek literature, recollects some anecdotes passed on of the painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius combining them and bending them to his narrative needs: Apelles is in Ephesus, intent in painting a crouching Venus, when he meets with the future ruler of the world, Alexander who is taken by Apelles' talent as to give him his concubine the Theban Campaste. Campaste has a brother, Dionysodorus. Both are of noble origins, descending from the lineage of Cadmus. The girl begs Apelles to gain freedom for Dionysodorus. The artist agrees, but when the noble Theban is brought before him, the appearance of the man triggers in Apelles an unspeakable thought that is hidden to the reader:

He had the stature of a tragic hero. His precious cloak fell to shreds with his broad shoulders and showed a sculptural body: a chest swelled and a belly that was growing with every movement of respiration, muscular and shapely thighs, which imposed an impression of

⁸⁶ Théotokis 1993

⁸⁷ Bouchet 1993, 7–13.

unprecedented strength, firm legs, feet marked by irons, but loose, and that gave him a gait full of nobility.⁸⁸

Dionysodorus impressed the painter with the pride and nobility of his bearing, traits that survived even after slavery. Apelles has in his shop a painting of Prometheus, which remained unfinished, because so far he had failed to find an adequate model for the Titan condemned by Zeus to eternal torment. Suddenly, the appearance of Dionysodorus provides him the model needed to complete the picture.

However, the ending was tragic: Dionysodorus was tied to a rock and tortured to death by servants who used a mechanical vulture. In a tension between remorse and ambition, creativity and cruelty, Apelles was taken up with a kind of creative ecstasy that did not hesitate to sacrifice the life of the Theban.⁸⁹

Theotokis mixes with ease anecdotal elements which have at their origin the relationship between art and nature. The story is based on two sources, the paragraphs that Pliny dedicated in his *Naturalis Historia* (35, 79–97) to Apelles and a passage of Seneca the Elder's *Controversiae* (10, 5) referred to Parrhasius. We are mostly interested in the second:⁹⁰

The Athenian painter Parrhasius purchased an old man from among the captives from Olynthus put up for sale by Philip, and took him to Athens. He tortured him, and using him as a model painted a Prometheus. The Olyn-

88 Théotokis 1993, 61: "Il avait la prestance d'un héros de tragédie. Sa précieuse chlamyde tombait en lambeaux de ses larges épaules et laissait voir un corps sculptural: une poitrine qui se gonflait et un ventre qui se creusait à chaque mouvement de respiration, des cuisses galbées et musclées qui imposaient une impression de force inouïe, des jambes fermes, des pieds marqués par les fers, mais déliés, et qui lui donnaient une démarche pleine de noblesse".

89 Théotokis 1993, 73.

90 The story is widely known: Specifically for the matter here see Morales 1996, 182–209, a well-argued essay even if the conclusions are not entirely acceptable; the theme is mentioned but not developed by Rouveret 2002, 184–193.

thian died under the torture. Parrhasius put the picture in the temple of Minerva; he is accused of harming the state.⁹¹

Seneca the Rhetorician doesn't mention a Theban nor a noble, as in the story of Theotokis, although in the novel, the narrative function of the original is guaranteed by the fact that in both cases there were two Greek enslaved citizens. Already Heinrich Brunn⁹² and later Mary Hamilton Swindler⁹³ had drawn attention to the chronological difficulties of the testimony of Seneca: Parrhasios was active in the age of Pericles and associated with Socrates, as was evidenced by Xenophon in the *Memorabilia* (3, 10, 1 ff.). Olynthus was conquered by Philip the II in 348. If the account of the Rhetorician is accepted, the painter would have lived fifty-two years after the death of Socrates. It is clear that the story is conceived anecdotally and symbolically with its relationship of art to reality. I will not discuss here the ethical limits of art that is also a theme stressed by the passage of Seneca on Parrhasius, because as Helen Morales rightly observes, this refers to 'the Roman ideas on art and its role in society, not the epoch of Parrhasios'.⁹⁴ The core of the anecdote focuses instead on the relationship between art as artifice and truth in nature, that is, on mimesis. It is not my intention to even touch the debate on this issue, although crucial in ancient art. It would be naive and completely out of place in this context.⁹⁵ I will track the topos of the artist as torturer from the ancient world to the Renaissance when it resurfaces.

Thus, as pointed out by Pliny, the more the painted image is close to reality, i. e. the higher is its degree of artifice and, therefore, of deception, the more it has to be considered successful.

91 Translation after Winterbottom 1974.

92 Brunn 1889, 67.

93 Swindler 1929, 234.

94 Morales 1996,

95 Among the first studies on the subject Schweitzer, 1925; also Sörbom 1966, 19–28 and 2008; De Angeli, 1988, 27–45; Mansfield 2007, above all part I; Elsner 2007; Morales 1996, 191.

The issue is easily solved in front of the reproduction of a real object, becomes more complicated when passions come into play or the representation of a divine figure for which there are no examples. Xenophon (*Mem.* 3, 10.1) makes Parrhasius himself say that it is unlikely to use the mimesis in representation of the invisible. In this case the artist must resort to phantasia.⁹⁶ As correctly noted by Helen Morales, the sacrifice of the Olinthian slave, tortured to death to paint Prometheus in the most realistic manner, contains the conditions for a failure of mimesis.⁹⁷ A realistic representation of an old man is an old man and Parrhasius also exceeds the limits of the myth, because Prometheus does not die—in that consists his endless torture—while the hapless citizen of Olynthus perishes as the result of tortures inflicted on him. From this comes the question of the role and degree of mimesis in ancient painting, that as I said, is not a theme summarizable here, but to which have been devoted numerous essays, as outlined above.

The story of the artist who does not hesitate to commit a crime for the realization of his work is repeated in legendary biographies of artists in the Renaissance. Perhaps the most graphic example is the Michelangelo one. It is said that this latter would have tied a young man on a cross, to better capture the agony of Christ in his picture. It is the English prelate Richard Carpenter who tells it:⁹⁸

96 On the subject recently Abbondanza 2001, 111–134; Koch 2006; Perry 2005; Koortbojian 2005, 285–306.

97 Morales 1996, 191.

98 Carpenter 1641, 234–235. The theme is largely treated by Delon 1991, 57–60. According to him the source of the anecdote concerning Michelangelo is kept in a collection of anecdotes due to P. J. B. Nougaret, *Anecdotes des Beaux Arts* (Paris 1776) I, 308–9, but as we have seen already appears more than a century before, so there must be a source originally probably coeval or slightly posterior to Michelangelo; however Delon correctly reports the original source in a more recent essay dedicated to the story of Michelangelo as murderer: Delon 1999, 79; there are slight mistakes in the transcription of the English original text.

Michael Angelo, a Painter of Rome, having enticed a young man into his house, under the smooth pretence of drawing a picture by the sight of him: bound him to a great wooden Crosse, and having stabbed him to the hearth with a Pen-knife, in imitation of Parrhasius that had tortured and old captive in the like cause; drew Christ hanging, and dying upon the Crosse, after his resemblance, and yet escaped without punishment. And this picture, because it sets forth Christ dying, as if the picture it selfe were dying, and with a shew of motion in every part; and because it gives the death of Christ to the life; is had in great veneration among them.

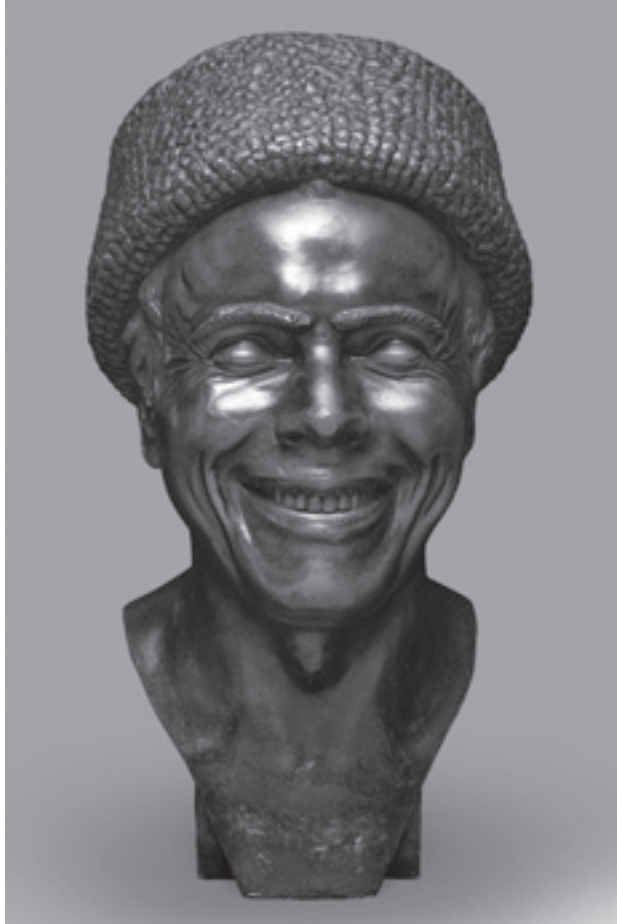
It is not a coincidence that the story of Michelangelo was likened to that of Parrhasius even in a fairly marginal scholarly publication,⁹⁹ nor were missing naive attempts to identify the true crucifix the story refers to.¹⁰⁰ Similar stories are then remembered about the Viennese artist Franz Xaver Messerschmidt, whose famous sculptures of heads were connected to a mental disorder of the sculptor (Fig. 10). Ernst Kris, in his studies dedicated to the artist, noted that “felt persecuted by the Demon of Proportion because of the perfection he had obtained in his art. In view of all that is known about the mechanism of paranoid delusion, we may assume that this delusion was based on a ‘projection’—that in fact the artist himself felt the ‘Promethean urge’ to compete with the deity”.¹⁰¹

I wonder if at the end of this path where the mimesis required a bloody human sacrifice, we must also place the Blood Heads of Marc Quinn, one of the British artists of the new generation (Plate 5). They consist in frozen sculptures, called *Self*, casts of the artist’s head containing 4.5 liters of his own blood extracted from his body over five months. The artist aims to achieve a head every five years to document the aging process and his purpose,

99 See also Steinmann–Wittkower 1927, n. 419; Sandrart 1925, 270, 413.

100 Kris–Kurz 1979, 118.

101 Kris–Kurz 1979, 89; cf. also Kris 1933, 411; Kris 1952, 127, 150.



10 Belgium, private collection. F. X. Messerschmidt, The Artist as He imagined Himself Laughing, 1777-1781

it is clear, is to create a sort of absolute self that not only is his appearance but is also made of his blood. It is a portrait that goes far beyond the limits of plausibility, because it is made by and of the artist himself. In fact, what matters here is not to what degree the picture is true to the real features of the artist (actually little, he seems older than he really is), but the fact that mimesis is almost complete because the creation of the artist is made of his

own blood. Perhaps there would be even a more extreme step: the ultimate act of mimesis may be the artist's body that becomes a work of art, in part realized in transitional bodies of artists such as Orlan (Plate 6).

We end where we started, that is, with modern literature. The *Apelles* of Theotokis is just an example, and not of the best known, of the treatment of the subject of the assassination in search of the limits of art. It was preceded by much more famous works. A few years before it *L'homme de pourpre* (1901) by Pierre Louÿs had been published, here the French writer takes up the story about Parrhasius as narrated by Seneca the Elder. The same year was published *Monsieur de Phocas* by Jean Lorrain, where the protagonist, the painter Ethal, does not hesitate to use a young Italian picked up from the sidewalk, to paint the bust of a teenager, regardless of health conditions of the young man, who eventually dies. We are only at the end of a genre in which include works such as *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* of Balzac (1831), *The Oval Portrait* by Edgar Allan Poe (1842), Oscar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, *L'Oeuvre* of Zola (1886), in which life always ends up being sacrificed to art. The story of a sculptor, his crime and his punishment is employed also in Adalbert von Chamisso's poem *Das Crucifix: Eine Künstler-Legende*.

4.3 CRIME WITHOUT PUNISHMENT

So far we have dealt with myths, anecdotes and stories that bear witness to the birth of a topos of the artist as a murderer out of envy or to challenge the limits of art in competition with nature. In both cases of Daedalus and Parrhasius, the crime is not forgiven. Daedalus, sentenced by the Aeropagos, must flee to Crete to escape the penalty. In Crete, however, does not await him a destiny of glory: he is the court artist, but he has lost his freedom and is forced to create for the royal family. There is no escape, except towards the sky and we know what price he paid. Parrhasius was prosecuted for causing harm to the polis.

Daedalus is the first of fugitive artists but certainly not the last one. His merits as a creator, however, did not save him from conviction by the supreme court of Athens. Centuries would pass until the merits of creativity could be invoked to mitigate or nullify the conviction of an artist or an intellectual. The great French scholar Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc in 1634 came to the defense of his friend Galileo Galilei in a letter to Cardinal Francesco Barberini. With it he aimed to spur the cardinal nephew to intercede with Pope Urban the VIII, in order to forgive Galileo for his ideas. In favor of forgiveness led, among other things, these arguments:

I perceive that to painters excelling in their art have been forgiven serious sins whose enormity was considered a supreme horror, not to leave useless the previous merit.¹⁰²

The words of Peiresc deal with a theme that is foreign to the figure of the artist in Greek society, as evidenced by the recurrent processes in which are involved prominent creative figures (it is irrelevant whether real or not), as Pheidias in addition to those mentioned above. Evidently Peiresc was referring to a way of thinking and acting which in his time was justified by at least some cases. One of them is well known: two days after the death of Clement VII, Benvenuto Cellini stabbed to death his rival in the post of papal medals engraver Pompeo de' Capitaneis. Cellini not only was not sentenced for the murder, but the new Pope Paul III gave him the post.¹⁰³ It is not true that crime does not pay. If one gives credence to what the artist says in his autobiography, the pope, in front of some friends of the deceased who warned him about the impropriety of such a gesture at the beginning of his pontificate, justified his behavior with these words:

102 Cited in Bredekamp 2005, 10, footnote 8: "Io veggo che a pittori eccellenti nell'arte loro si sonno condonati peccati gravissimi, et l'enormità de' quali era a sommo horrore, per non lasciare inutile il precedente merito".

103 A thorough examination of this episode in Bredekamp 2003, 337–348.

You have to know that men like Benvenuto, unique in their profession, don't have to obey the law.¹⁰⁴

The figure of the artist then has already entered into a dimension that puts him in a state of exceptionality, above the law. When Peiresc sends its plaidoyer in favor of Galileo, using the same argumentations, he knows he can rely on precedents. The artist has become a foreign body in society and to the rules that govern it.¹⁰⁵ This situation of uniqueness reflects the awareness of raising social rank thanks to his talent, to become equal to the sovereign he works for. It is still the life of Cellini which offers us an example. Francis I, at whose court the Florentine artist worked, ordered to provide this latter with everything he needed. Then, according to the story of Cellini:

He put his hand over my shoulder saying: — Mon ami ... I do not know what causes more pleasure, that of a prince to have found a man according to his heart, or that of that virtuous having found a prince who gives him so much comfort, that he can express his great virtuous concepts -. I answered him that if I were the one who said His Majesty, it was much more my fortune. He said laughing: Let's say that is the same.¹⁰⁶

The artist poses apparently a condition of modesty, but in reality the gestures and words of Francis I emphasize the status of equality. Stretching out his hand to touch the shoulders of the artist the King abolishes any distance between him and his

104 Gorra 1954, 153.

105 On these issues, see Bredekamp 2005, footnote 98, 12.

106 Gorra 1954, 320: "Poi a me dette in su la spalla con la mana, dicendomi: — Mon ami (che vuol dire *amico mio*), io non so qual s'è maggior piacere, o quello d'un principe l'aver trovato un uomo sicondo il suo cuore, o quello di quel virtuoso l'aver trovato un principe che gli dia tanta comodità, che lui possa esprimere i suoi gran virtuosi concetti-. Io risposi, che se io ero quello che diceva sua Maestà, gli era stato molto maggior ventura la mia. Rispose ridendo: — Diciamo che la sia eguale -. Partimmi con grande allegrezza, e tornai alle mie opere."

person, reinforcing the concept with “say that it is the same”. Here we should open a discussion, that of the artist and the ruler that from Alexander with Lysippus and Apelles, passes through Charles V and Titian, to come over.¹⁰⁷ The origin of this topos in Hellenistic age must have taken shape not only in the context of art criticism, if one remember the famous “if I were not Alexander, I would like to be Diogenes” which reproduces the asymmetry between the sovereign and the philosopher.¹⁰⁸ What is at stake is always the power of the sovereign, which vanishes in front of the superiority of mind or creative talent. At the time of Cellini and Michelangelo, the artist seems to have reached a status that places him above the law: that this corresponds to a real vagueness of the law in papal Rome¹⁰⁹ or to the projection of awareness of the role that artists have in society, or both, is irrelevant for the understanding of the mentality. I am interested in marking the profound difference with the context from which we started: Daedalus and Parrhasius do not work for a ruler who can do everything, even giving mercy for a crime. Their work takes place within the polis: that is the archaic polis of Daedalus or the Periclean Athens of Parrhasius, the ‘artist’ cannot redeem himself through his work. Not yet.

¹⁰⁷ For an introduction to the subject see Bredekamp 2005.

¹⁰⁸ Sluiter 2005.

¹⁰⁹ Bredekamp 2005, 12 with bibliography.

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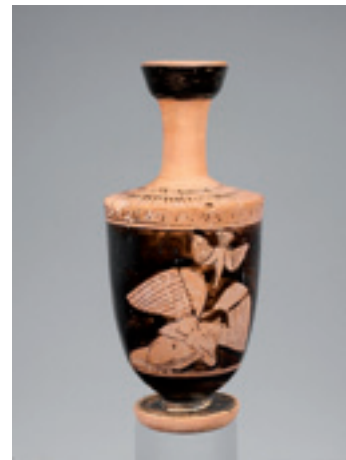
PLATES



1 Private collection. Frederic Leighton, *Icarus and Daedalus*, 1869



2 Bruxelles, Musée des Beaux Arts. Pieter Bruegel (once attributed), *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, ca. 1560 (detail)

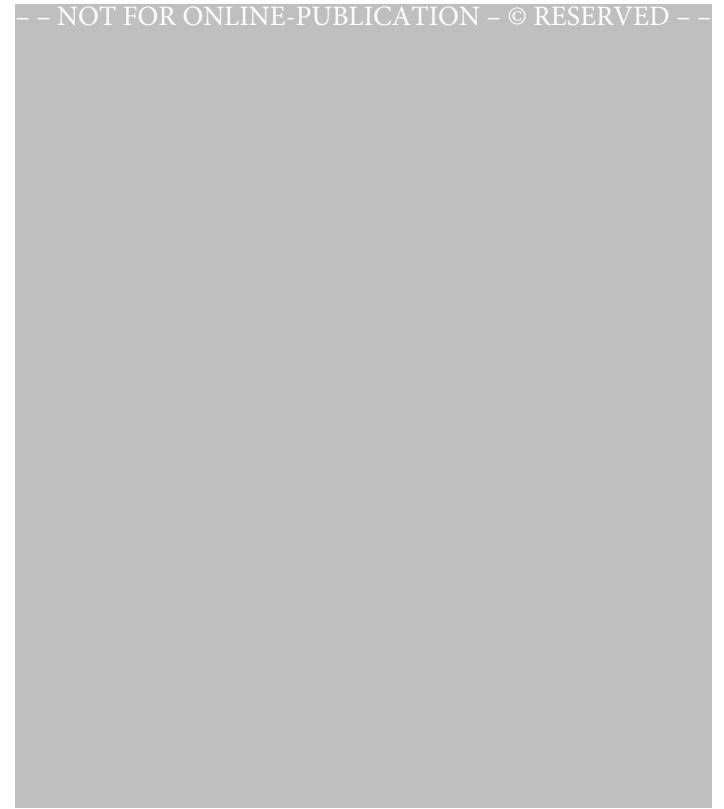


3 New York, Metropolitan Museum 24.97.37. *Fall of Icarus* on a red-figure Lekythos (475-450 cent. B.C.)



4 Naples, Archaeological Museum. Procession of carpenters: drawing by G. Marsigli, 1827

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5 London, National Gallery. Marc Quinn, Bloody Heads

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6 Orlan, Portrait of the artist



Why the myth of Daedalus, the protos eures, is connected with envy and murder? The author takes as his starting point Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where Daedalus' envy drives him to murder his pupil and nephew Perdix. He also considers the passage of Seneca the Elder, about the painter Parrhasius and the citizen from Olynthus, that he had tortured in order to paint the agony of Prometheus. The first case is a topos of the artist's biography which implies, that the craft of the artisan was held as a guarded secret; the second is related to mimesis. The author questions what role the topos of the artist as murderer plays in text and imagery, from the Middle Ages to modern literature.



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