# Vergil Sculptures by Daedalus

## Translated from Latin by Stephen Rojcewicz

aedalus, ut fama est, fugiens Minoia regna praepetibus pennis ausus se credere caelo insuetum per iter gelidas enavit ad Arctos,	15
Chalcidicaque levis tandem super astitit arce. redditus his primum terris tibi, Phoebe, sacravit	
remigium alarum posuitque immania templa.	20
in foribus letum Androgeo; tum pendere poenas Cecropidae iussi (miserum!) septena quotannis	20
corpora natorum;	
stat ductis sortibus urna.	
contra elata mari respondet Cnosia tellus:	
hic crudelis amor tauri suppostaque furto	
Pasiphae mixtumque genus prolesque biformis	25
Minotaurus inest, Veneris monimenta nefandae,	
hic labor ille domus et inextricabilis error;	
magnum reginae sed enim miseratus amorem	
Daedalus ipse dolos tecti ambagesque resolvit,	
caeca regens filo vestigia. tu quoque magnam	30
partem opere in tanto, sineret dolor, Icare, haberes.	
bis conatus erat casus effingere in auro,	
bis patriae cecidere manus.	

Vergil, Aeneid 6.14-33

Latin text from *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969). Where typesetting requires, some lines here and in the Ovid text have been editorially broken for the sake of alignment of the Latin with its translation.

aedalus, as the story goes, fleeing the kingdom of Minos, Entrusted himself with flying wings to the sky, Floating to the cold North through an unprecedented path, And at last stood lightly on the Chalcidian height.

Having returned first to these lands, he sacrificed to you, Apollo, The rowing equipment of his wings, establishing a huge temple.

On the doors is the death of Androgeos, then the Athenians (wretched!), Commanded to weigh out the penalties annually, seven bodies of their children:

The urn stands, the lots having been drawn.

The opposite side corresponds to the Knossian land, raised from the sea: Here are the cruel love for the bull, Pasiphae placed under it by stealth, And a mingled type, the two-formed offspring—
The Minotaur, memorials of unspeakable love;
Here is that labor imposed on the house, with its endless wrong turns. But even Daedalus himself, having pitied the great love of the queen, Unravels the schemes and the winding ways of the palace,
Directing blind footsteps with a thread. Icarus, you also should have

A large part in this great sculpture, if grief would allow it.

Twice Daedalus had attempted to fashion the misfortunes in gold,

Twice the hands of the father failed.

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The Vergilian account is an *ekphrasis*, a poetic description of a work of art, in this case the sculptures Daedalus carved on the doors of a temple. The passage begins with the flight of Daedalus into exile, continues with his landing in what would now be Italy, and the founding of a temple to Apollo. Vergil's Daedalus is simultaneously a successful artist in his sculptures of the events in Crete concerning Minos, Pasiphae, the Minotaur, and the Labyrinth, and a failed artist in that he cannot depict the death of Icarus.

When Aeneas finally lands in Italy in Vergil's Book 6, the hero goes to seek the Sibyl at Cumae, in order to journey to the Underworld. Finding a sacred temple, he notices the gold sculptures on the doors. While Vergil's ekphrasis of works of art in the temple of Juno in *Aeneid* Book 1 and found on the armor of Aeneas in Book 8 are justly famous, the description of the sculptures of Daedalus is less well-known.

### Ovid:

## **Daedalus and Icarus**

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Daedalus interea Creten longumque perosus exilium tactusque loci natalis amore clausus erat pelago. "terras licet" inquit "et undas obstruat: et caelum certe patet; ibimus illac: omnia possideat, non possidet aera Minos." dixit et ignotas animum dimittit in artes	185
naturamque novat. nam ponit in ordine pennas a minima coeptas, longam breviore sequenti, ut clivo crevisse putes: sic rustica quondam fistula disparibus paulatim surgit avenis; tum lino medias	190
et ceris alligat imas	
atque ita conpositas parvo curvamine flectit, ut veras imitetur aves. puer Icarus una stabat et, ignarus sua se tractare pericla, ore renidenti modo, quas vaga moverat aura, captabat plumas, flavam modo pollice ceram mollibat Iusuque suo mirabile patris impediebat opus.	195
postquam manus ultima coepto inposita est, geminas opifex libravit in alas ipse suum corpus motaque pependit in aura; instruit et natum "medio" que "ut limite curras, lcare," ait "moneo, ne, si demissior ibis,	200
unda gravet pennas, si celsior, ignis adurat: inter utrumque vola. nec te spectare Booten aut Helicen iubeo strictumque Orionis ensem: me duce carpe viam!" pariter praecepta volandi tradit et ignotas umeris accommodat alas.	205
inter opus monitusque genae maduere seniles, et patriae tremuere manus; dedit oscula nato non iterum repetenda suo pennisque levatus ante volat comitique timet, velut ales, ab alto quae teneram prolem produxit in aera nido,	210
hortaturque sequi damnosasque erudit artes et movet ipse suas et nati respicit alas.	215

Latin text from <a href="http://thelatinlibrary.com/">http://thelatinlibrary.com/</a>.

Meanwhile Daedalus, having detested Crete and his long exile, Filled with longing to stand on his native soil, Was imprisoned by the sea. "Although he may obstruct by land or waves, The sky is surely open to us: we will go that way: Minos has control over everything, but does not possess the air," He spoke, and sent forth his mind to unknown arts And gave a new form to nature. For he lays down lines of feathers, Beginning with the smallest, following the shorter with longer ones, So that you would think them to have grown on a slope. In this way, long ago, The shepherd's pan-pipes sprang up, little by little, from unequal reeds. Then he fastens them together with string at the middle,

with wax at the bottom;

Arranging them, he bends them in a little curve,
So that they imitate real birds. The boy Icarus was standing by one,
And, ignorant that he was handling his own disaster,
Now with laughing face was catching the down wandering in the breeze,
Now was softening the yellow wax with his thumb, and in his play,
Hindered the marvelous work of his father.

to what his hand began,

The craftsman balanced his own body between the two wings And hovered in the moving air.

He taught his son, "Run the middle route, Icarus, I warn you:

If you go too low, moisture burdens the wings,

After the finishing touches had been applied

If too high, the sun scorches them.

Fly between the extremes. I bid you not to look towards Boötes Or Helice or the drawn sword of Orion.

Seize the way I lead!" At the same time as he hands over the rules of flight, Fastening the unfamiliar wings on the boy's shoulders.

Between the work and the warning, the old man's cheeks became wet, The father's hands trembled. He gave kisses to his son, Never to be repeated, and lifting his wings, Fearing for his companion, he flew ahead like a bird Who has led her fledglings out of a nest above, into the empty air. He urges the boy to follow, and teaches him the dangerous arts, Moving his own wings and looking back on the wings of his son.

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hos aliquis tremula dum captat harundine pisces, aut pastor baculo stivave innixus arator vidit et obstipuit, quique aethera carpere possent, credidit esse deos. et iam lunonia laeva 220 parte Samos (fuerant Delosque Parosque relictae) dextra Lebinthos erat fecundaque melle Calymne, cum puer audaci coepit gaudere volatu deseruitque ducem caelique cupidine tractus altius egit iter. rapidi vicinia solis 225 mollit odoratas, pennarum vincula, ceras; tabuerant cerae: nudos quatit ille lacertos, remigioque carens non ullas percipit auras, oraque caerulea patrium clamantia nomen excipiuntur aqua, quae nomen traxit ab illo. 230 at pater infelix, nec iam pater, "Icare," dixit,

"Icare," dixit "ubi es? qua te regione requiram?"

"Icare" dicebat: pennas aspexit in undis devovitque suas artes corpusque sepulcro condidit, et tellus a nomine dicta sepulti.

Ovid, Metamorphoses 8.183-235

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Someone catching fish with a guivering rod,

Or a shepherd leaning on his staff,

Or a ploughman resting on a handle, sees them, perhaps, and is stunned,

Believing them to be gods able to press on through the air.

And now Samos, sacred to Juno, was on the left

(Delos and Paros left behind),

Lebinthos and Calymne, rich in honey, on the right,

When the boy, delighting in his daring flight,

Abandoned his leader, and drawn by a desire for even greater heavens,

Drove a higher path. His nearness to the scorching sun

Softened the fragrant wax, the bond of the wings.

The wax melted, he shakes with bare arms,

And lacking his oars, cannot catch any breeze.

Even as his mouth was crying out the name of his father,

He is taken out by the sky-blue sea, whose name derives from him.

The unhappy father, no longer a father, shouted,

"Icarus, Icarus where are you? Where should I look for you?"

He kept calling, "Icarus." He saw the feathers on the waves,

And cursed his arts. He buried the body in a tomb:

The land is called Icaria after the name of the buried child.

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While Ovid's story of Daedalus and Icarus stands out as a brilliant poetic creation in its own right, the narrative is also important for its impact on James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and as a model for the dilemmas of the translator's art. Joyce begins *Portrait* with an epigraph from this Ovidian passage: "Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes" (Met. 8.188), "and he [Daedalus] sent forth his mind to unknown arts." Joyce, a superb Latin scholar, knew the phrase Ovid placed immediately following artes, and would assume that many of his readers would make the connection. Ovid continues: "naturamque novat" (*Met.* 8.189), "and he gave a new form to nature/changed the constitution of nature/invented a new nature." The essay, "James Joyce's Dedalus: Transformations of Ovid, Vergil and Plato," explores how the Irish writer incorporated and transformed his classical sources to "gave a new form to the nature" of fiction.

The advice of Daedalus to his son is also an exploration of the art of the translator. If the translator is excessively faithful to the literal text, she/he runs the risk of writing "too low" (*Met.* 8.204), so that the syntax and non-essential aspects of the original text "burdens the wings" (Met. 8.205). At its worst, such a version

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demonstrates that the translator certainly knows Latin, but cannot write English. At times, however, a literal translation is needed to bring out significant aspects of the original that would otherwise be missed. Since the Latin verb tenses of *Metamorphoses* 8.183-235, for example, vary among present, imperfect, and perfect, the current translation tries to represent these original forms, even at the expense of occasional awkwardness.

If the translator strives for poetic effects absent in the original, she/he may certainly achieve brilliance, but, if the effect is "too high, the sun scorches" the result (Met. 8.205). Daedalus' advice to his son in 8.208 points to a possible resolution: *carpe viam* ("seize the way!"). The imperative *carpe viam* echoes one of the most famous lines from Horace, *carpe diem* ("seize the day!") (Ode 1.11.8; originally published 23 BCE). Ovid writes *me duce carpe viam*, "with me leading, seize the way" or "seize the way I lead." We can understand Ovid as enjoining the translator to avoid slavish imitation or excessively loose paraphrasing, and, instead, to follow the broad path created by the original.

S.R.