

## Background

Minos was the king of the island of Crete. On the island was a monster called the Minotaur which was half bull and half man. Minos asked Daedalus, a craftsman of the highest skills from Athens, to build a labyrinth for the monster. Daedalus did this and the Minotaur was placed inside. One day when a young man named Theseus was condemned to enter the labyrinth from which no one escaped alive, Ariadne, the king's daughter, asked Daedalus to help her save Theseus. For, she had fallen in love with him. Daedalus told Ariadne to tell Theseus to take a ball of string and unwind it as he moved into the labyrinth. In this way, Theseus was able to go into the labyrinth and kill the Minotaur and then leave the labyrinth again. For his part in helping Theseus Daedalus was locked in his house.

### **Bk VIII:183-235 Ovid's Metamorphoses: Daedalus and Icarus**

Daedalus, hating Crete, and his long exile, and filled with a desire to stand on his native soil, thought to himself 'Minos, the king of Crete, may thwart our escape by land or sea, but the sky is surely open to us: we will go that way: Minos rules everything but he does not rule the heavens'. So saying he applied his thought to new invention and altered the natural order of things. He laid down lines of feathers, beginning with the smallest, following shorter with longer ones, so you might think they had grown like that, on a slant. Then he fastened them together with thread at the middle, and bees'-wax at the base, and, when he had arranged them, he flexed each one into a gentle curve, so that they imitated real bird's wings. His son, Icarus, stood next to him, and, not knowing that he was handling things that would be his downfall, he stood by and watched his father and raised his shiny face to let a feather fall on it or stuck his thumb into the yellow bees'-wax, fooling around the way a boy always will whenever a father tries to get some work done.

When he had put the last touches to what he had begun, then Daedalus balanced his own body between the two wings and hovered in the moving air. He instructed the boy as well, saying 'Let me warn you, Icarus, fly a middle course, don't go too low, or water will weigh down your wings. Don't fly too high, or the sun's fire will burn them. Keep to the middle way. And one more thing. no fancy steering by the stars. Aim towards Bootes, the Herdsman, or Helice, the Great Bear, or towards the drawn sword of Orion: take the course I show you!' At the same time as he laid down the rules of flight, he fitted the newly created wings on the boy's shoulders. While he worked and issued his warnings the ageing man's cheeks were wet with tears: the father's hands trembled.

He gave a never to be repeated kiss to his son, and lifting upwards on his wings, flew ahead, anxious for his son, like a bird, leading her fledglings out of a nest, into the empty air. He urged the boy to follow, and showed him the dangerous art of flying, moving his own wings, and then looking back at his son. Some fisherman catching fish with a quivering rod, or a shepherd leaning on his staff, or a ploughman resting on the handles of his plough, saw them, perhaps, and stood there amazed, believing them to be gods able to travel the sky.

And now the island of Samos, sacred to Juno, lay ahead to the left (Delos and Paros were behind them), Lebinthos, and Calymne, rich in honey, to the right, when the boy began to delight in his daring flight, and thought "this is wonderful". Abandoning his father and drawn by desire for the heavens, he soared higher. His nearness to the devouring sun softened the fragrant wax that held the wings: and the wax melted: and his arms, bare of feathers, flapped up and down in the air, but losing his oar-like wings, he could not ride the air. Even as his mouth was crying his father's name, it vanished into the dark blue sea, the Icarian Sea, which henceforth was named after him. The unhappy father, now no longer a father, shouted 'Icarus, Icarus where are you? Which way should I look, to see you?' 'Icarus' he called again. Then he caught sight of the feathers on the waves, and cursed his inventions. He laid the body to rest, in a tomb, and the island was named Icaria after his buried child.

Adapted from:

[http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Metamorph8.htm#anchor\\_Toc64106497](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Metamorph8.htm#anchor_Toc64106497)

and

*Ovid Metamorphoses*, translated by Rolfe Humphries