Daedalus in the Labyrinth of Ovid's "Metamorphoses"
Author(s): Barbara Pavlock
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DAEDALUS IN THE LABYRINTH OF OVID’S

METAMORPHOSES

At the center of the Metamorphoses, Book 8 assumes a pivotal function, moving the poem into more overtly epic material, including the Calydonian boar hunt and the reception of Theseus and company by the river god Achelous. In the book’s first section, on the Cretan legends, Ovid gives special prominence to the archetypal artisan Daedalus. The extended narrative of Daedalus’ flight from Crete with his son Icarus culminates this section, after which the poet backtracks to the story of Daedalus’ murder of his nephew Perdix and then concludes with the inventor’s arrival in Sicily at the court of King Cocalus. As one of the most powerful artist figures in the Metamorphoses, Daedalus uses his inventive powers both for constraint, by constructing the labyrinth to contain the Minotaur, and for release, by fashioning wings to escape from Crete.

Ovid’s Daedalus is a complex figure, whose brilliance is marred most glaringly by his failure to control his jealousy of his talented nephew. Recent critical studies have elaborated on Daedalus’ limitations in his lack of real self-awareness and failure to sustain his Epicurean-style detachment in the face of his son’s tragic death. Although literary accounts of Daedalus prior to the Augustan age, including tragedies by Sophocles and Euripides, have not survived, contemporary Roman poets provided complex, sometimes negative, perspectives on Daedalus’ creativity. Horace in the Odes uses the flight of Daedalus and Icarus as an image of artistic hubris, in particular aspiring to the high genre of epic (1.3) or extending beyond the proper bounds of lyric (2.20 and 4.2). As a major antecedent

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1 M. H. T. Davison, “The Observers of Daedalus and Icarus in Ovid,” CW 90 (1997) 263–78, comparing the versions of the Daedalus myth in the Ars Amatoria and the Metamorphoses, considers the points of view of the rustics who view the flight and of the bird Perdix vis-à-vis Daedalus. She includes Daedalus among the artistic failures of the poem, in part because “his art can neither produce foolproof inventions nor control his son’s impulses,” and compares him to Orpheus, who reveals a similar pattern as he penetrates a sphere normally unavailable to humans, almost saves his wife, but finally fails in his effort. I am grateful to the author for permitting me to read a pre-publication copy of her article. M. Hoefmans, “Myth into Reality: The Metamorphosis of Daedalus and Icarus (Ovid, Metamorphoses, VIII, 183–235),” AC 63 (1994) 137–60, viewing Daedalus against the background of the homo faber and hubris theme, finds that traditional moral criticism referring to Daedalus’ boldness is counterbalanced by Lucretian resonances which suggest a more positive view of the artist, especially in the absence of divine elements in the episode and in the artist’s imitation of nature, though ultimately Daedalus loses his Epicurean ataraxia by his anxiety and grief over his son.

2 S. P. Morris, Daidalos and the Origins of Greek Art (Princeton 1992) 215–16, refers to dramas by Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Plato, and Euboulos, with Daedalus as the title character, as well as other plays related to Daedalus’s adventures in Sicily and Crete.

3 See A. Sharrock, Seduction and Repetition in Ovid’s Ars Amatoria II (Oxford 1994) 112–26, on the lyric poet’s use of the Daedalus and Icarus myth in all three Odes as a reflection of the necessity for breaking boundaries in artistic creativity. Whereas Icarus is at issue in 2.20 and 4.2, Daedalus is specifically named in 1.3, on
for Ovid, Vergil in Aeneid 6 summarizes Daedalus associations with Crete in his ekphrasis of the temple doors of Apollo. Like Ovid, Vergil incorporates his story of Daedalus in the middle of his poem. This position, mediating between old and new, past and future, lends itself to reflection not only on the heroic ethic but also on the poetics of the Aeneid. In a gesture that privileges Daedalus’ achievement, Vergil makes the labyrinth emblematic: it anticipates both the hero’s encounter with his past in his journey through the twisted paths of the underworld and the poet’s review of Rome’s own history, including its troubled recent past, through the Sibyl’s intricate account of Tartarus and Anchises’ roll call of heroes.

Ovid, I believe, responds to Vergil’s ekphrasis by enlarging on the significance of the labyrinth for his own poem and by perceiving a more problematic aspect in Daedalus’ invention of wings as a violation of boundaries. This study will consider Ovid’s vision of the labyrinth as a metaphor for the design of the Metamorphoses in contrast to Vergil’s maze, first by examining his poetic analogue for this structure. It will then analyze the strategies, including literary allusions, by which the poet implies a critical view of the archetypal artisan in contrast to the cultural values informing Vergil’s ekphrastic portrait.

Daedalus and the Labyrinth

The most elaborate of the descriptions of Daedalus’ signal invention in Book 8 takes the form of an extended simile. The poet illustrates the windings of the labyrinth through an analogy with the river Maeander:

non secus ac liquidis Phrygius Maeandrus in undis
ludit et ambiguo lapsu refluitque fluitque
occurrensque sibi venturas adspicit undas
et nunc ad fontes, nunc ad mare versus apertum
incertas exercet aquas, ita Daedalus inplet
innumerarum errore vias vixque ipse reverti
ad limen potuit: tanta est fallacia tecti. (162–68)

Just so the Phrygian Maeander sports in his clear waters and flows back and forth in an ambivalent course; rushing on, he sees the waves coming at him, and directs his uncertain waters now to the source, now to the open sea. Thus Daedalus fills the countless paths with windings and could himself barely return to the threshold: so great is the deceptiveness of the structure.


4 See R. D. Williams, “The Sixth Book of the Aeneid,” G & R, n.s. 11 (1964) 48–63, on aspects of the hero’s education in Book 6 for moving away from the Trojan and Homeric past and into a world reflecting the idealized values of Augustan Rome.
The use of an epic simile to compare the labyrinth with the river Maeander may be original with Ovid. But a virtuoso poetic description of the Maeander itself seems to have had a programmatically significant by the Augustan period. As W. S. Hollis notes, Seneca the Younger refers to the Maeander as the poeticum omnium exercitatio et ludus (Ep. 104.15). This form of “practice” and “play” seems to have involved literary competition, if one can judge by Seneca’s own version, which imitates the Metamorphoses. The simile of the Maeander in Propertius 2.34 may well have been Ovid’s model in Book 8: atque etiam ut Phrygio fallax Maeandria campo / errat et ipsa suas decipit unda vias (35–36), “and even how the deceptive river Maeander wanders over the Phrygian plain and its very waters confound its own course.”

The elegist sets his own version of the tortuous river in a context of poetry, for he advises his addressee Lyceus to follow the example of Philetas and Callimachus. In place of the buskin of Aeschylus, Propertius urges Lyceus to relax his limbs ad molles choros (42): the reference to mollis privileges the lower style of elegy over the grander—and, by implication, more pompous—mode of tragedy. The image of the Maeander here seems to symbolize expansive forms of literature, especially epic, the high genre that Propertius dismisses along with tragedy in favor of elegy. Yet at the same time the poet’s description illustrates his own Callimachean principles. The chiasmus of Phrygio fallax Maeandria campo neatly conveys the sense of a winding course, and the elisions of the first two words of the hexameter lend a sense of abruptness analogous to the uncertain flow of the river. In the pentameter, the personification implied as the unda “confounds” (decipit) the river’s course adds a playfully humorous note to the impression of nature’s power.

In the Maeander simile here in the Metamorphoses, Ovid may have Propertius’ passage in the background in order to show his relation to the elegist’s poetics. Ovid’s description wittily collapses the distinction between Maeander as river and as river god. By the clever shifting of point of view or focus, his Maeander simile conveys the repetitiveness of the labyrinth’s twistings without being repetitious itself. The poet provides three different ways of envisioning the Maeander’s

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6 Hollis (above, n.5) also notes ad 162 that Seneca imitates Ovid by having the river god play in his stream: “qualis incertis vagus/ Maeander undis ludit et cedit sibi,/ instatque dubius litus an fontem petat.” Like Ovid, Seneca extends the personification, as the god here ponders whether his stream should flow towards the coast or back to the source.

7 H. E. Butler and E. A. Barber, eds., The Elegies of Propertius (Oxford 1933) ad 29, note that, while it is clear that Lyceus wrote tragedy, details in lines 33–40 suggest epic, as does the mention in 45 of Homer and Antimachus, who were associated with epics on Thebes. W. A. Camps, ed., Propertius, Elegies, Book II (rpt. Bristol 1985), in postscript notes ad 25–54, also assumes epic as part of the poetic output of Lyceus.
errant course. The first, containing a prominent liquid "l" sound and employing the compound verb *refluo* and its root form joined with a double connective *-que*, mimics the sense of a back-and-forth flowing movement. The second personifies the river as the tutelary god and projects the divinity's surprise over the waves coming at him even as he rushes on. The river as anthropomorphic being plays (*ludit*) and watches (*adspicit*). The heavily spondaic meter in these lines nicely counters the predominantly dactylic pattern in the first part of the simile. The third contrasts direction as movement towards the source versus the open sea and, while giving control to the god (*exercet*, "drives"), personifies the waters as *incertas* ("uncertain"). The simile encapsulates Ovid's skill, on the level of poetic imagination, at blurring the boundaries between natural phenomena and the anthropomorphic in the *Metamorphoses*. In his epic, Ovid thus surpasses the elegist through his mimetic devices and more expanded personification of this natural force.

Ovid further calls attention to his own poetics by differentiating himself from Vergil in this simile. The phrase *ambiguo lapsu* succinctly captures the essence of the river with its circuitous flow. By using the word *lapsus* in the Maeander simile, his analogue for the labyrinth, Ovid associates the winding structure closely with the verb *labor*, "to glide" or "to flow." Ovid shows, I believe, that he was aware of Vergil's wordplay with the labyrinth sculpted by Daedalus on the doors of Apollo's temple in *Aeneid* 6. The ekphrasis of the temple doors is a kind of emblem of Vergil's epic, for the poet had prophesied in the *Georgics* that he would in the future construct a temple to honor the achievements of Augustus (3.10–39). Here, the poet refers to the labyrinth periphrastically: *hic labor ille domus et inextricabilis error* (6.27). It is well known that Vergil makes a striking etymological play by deriving the word "labyrinth" from the noun *labor* and thus associates the structure with toil and struggle, concepts closely linked with his hero and the ultimate foundation of Rome. Vergil's etymology for Daedalus' supreme creation is especially appropriate at this point in Book 6. The hero himself views this representation of the labyrinth while on his way to consult the Sibyl about descending to the underworld to reunite with his father. Illuminating Vergil's extensive wordplay in the ekphrasis, Frederick Ahl has commented on his punning with the word *pater*, which rein-

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9 On Vergil's etymology for the labyrinth, W. Fitzgerald, "Aeneas, Daedalus, and the Labyrinth," *Aretusa* 17 (1984) 55 and n.13, citing Norden's edition of *Aeneid* 6, also connects 1.27 with the underworld as a maze from which it is difficult to return and notes the Sibyl's comment on the journey: "Hoc opus, hic labor est" (6.29). The noun *labor*, of course, is not related etymologically to the verb *labor*, the quantity of the stem vowel "a" constituting a primary difference in each case. But, I believe, as Vergil had created a fanciful etymological pun, so Ovid responded with an analogous wordplay.
forces the thematic significance of paternity in this section of the *Aeneid*. Furthermore, as the hero embarks on his arduous journey through the winding paths of Hades, Vergil’s etymology for the labyrinth points up Aeneas’s relation to Theseus, another hero of many labors, who not only re-emerged from the labyrinth after defeating the Minotaur but also penetrated the underworld.

The *Aeneid* in its entirety has strong structural and motival links to the labyrinth. Because of Brooks Otis’ work, readers of Vergil can appreciate more fully the complex patterning of the *Aeneid* through temporal shifts, both in narrative sequence and in the repetition of historical prophecies and of past events, ring composition, and the interlacement of images and motifs. In her recent study of labyrinths in ancient and medieval literature, Penelope Doob elaborates on the specifically labyrinthine design of Vergil’s epic, achieved through the pronounced *labores* and *errores* in the first half of the poem and through individual episodes with intricate patterning, such as the fate of Laocoon, the wooden horse penetrating Troy, and Aeneas’s return to Troy for Creusa in Book 2; the ship race and Trojan games in Book 5; the temple doors and the whole complex of Apollo’s temple, the Sibyl’s cave, and the hero’s journey through Hades in Book 6; the cave of Cacus and the shield of Aeneas in Book 8; the flight of Nisus and Euryalus into the woods in Book 9; the forest where Turnus plans to ambush the Trojans in Book 11; and the final combat between Aeneas and Turnus in Book 12. Even the quintessentially labyrinthine Book 3, with its highly circuitous plot, focuses on the hero’s effort to fulfill divine prophecy by searching for a new homeland for the survivors of Troy.

Ovid dissociates his labyrinth from the grueling labors of the Vergilian hero. His etymological play connecting the verb *labor* with the labyrinth perfectly characterizes the form of his own poem, its fluid movement from tale to tale and the clever, if tenuous, transitions from one book to another. The adjective *ambiguaus* furthermore points to the unexpected twists and turns in this poem. Like the

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10 F. Ahl, *Metaformations: Wordplay in Ovid and Other Latin Poets* (Ithaca 1986) 253–54. In his study of the numerous forms of wordplay that Ovid exploits throughout the *Metamorphoses*, Ahl shows that a keen interest in etymologizing puns was part of a longstanding Roman tradition, documented by Varro in his *Lingua Latina*. The prevalence of such punning would suggest that Ovid might well respond to a pun on a single word that Vergil had etymologized, as a variation on a literary allusion or echo.

11 J. W. Zarker, “Aeneas and Theseus in *Aeneid* 6,” *CJ* 62 (1972) 220–26, discusses Theseus as a potential model for Aeneas in the ekphrasis, but one who is ultimately rejected because of his failure of *pietas*.

12 B. Otis, *Vergil: A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford 1963), analyzed some of the most essential forms of symmetrical design in both the “Odyssean” and “Iliadic” halves of the *Aeneid*; see esp. 217, 228, 247, and 242 for useful schematic charts.

13 P. R. Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages* (Ithaca 1990) 229–45, provides sound analyses of the primary passages that contribute to the labyrinthine nature of Vergil’s narrative, both structurally and thematically, especially on the interrelation of *labores* and *errores*. 
Maeander as labyrinth, Ovid’s poem is ever-changing, shifting in direction. This labyrinthine movement derives in part from the interlace-
ment created by the interruption of a tale with an intervening story
and from the recollection of a myth already recounted through simi-
larities of theme or plot line. But a\(mbiguus\) also suggests the shifts
in appearance that take place so frequently within Ovid’s poem, not
least by the shape changing of divinities as well as by the metamor-
phoses inflicted upon so many of its characters.\(^14\) While Vergil’s
epic has a maze-like symmetry, Ovid’s poem is labyrinthine in its
emphasis on fluid process rather than intricate structure.

Ovid further defines his poetics by contrast to Vergil in his de-
scription of the playfulness of the Maeander (\textit{liquidis . . . in undis /
ludit}). \textit{Lusus} is an important Augustan literary concept, which charac-
terizes Ovid’s elegiac poetry.\(^15\) Here, Ovid extends this poetic “play”
to epic, as he incorporates light subjects not normally included in
traditional epic and often parodies more serious subject matter.\(^16\) The
adjective \textit{liquidus} describing the waves of the Maeander further
connects the simile to poetics, for the word occurs among Roman writers
to characterize a fluid, smooth style.\(^17\) Here, \textit{liquidus} may be a Latin
equivalent of the Greek \textit{καθαρός}, used by Callimachus at the end of
the “Hymn to Apollo” (2.111) to contrast the clear stream from a
sacred fountain with the garbage-laden Euphrates, a symbol of the
antithesis between the elegance of his own small-scale poems and the
lack of polish of the more traditional longer works preferred by his
detractors.\(^18\) Later in Book 8, Ovid represents the river Achelous as
both a swollen stream and a divinity, who boasts of sweeping away

\(^{14}\) See, for example, \textit{Metamorphoses} 2.9, where \textit{ambiguus} is applied to the sea
god Proteus as represented on the doors of the palace of the Sun; 4.280, where it
describes Sithon’s sex change from female to male; and 7.271, where it refers to a
werewolf whose innards Medea mixes into her potion to rejuvenate Aeson, prior to
deceiving the daughters of Pelias about the same drug. This adjective thus de-
scribes much of the content of the \textit{Metamorphoses} itself, from the marvelous and
bizarre to the tragic.

\(^{15}\) See G. Williams, \textit{Banished Voices: Readings in Ovid’s Exile Poetry} (Cam-
bridge 1994) 204–5, on Ovid’s own retrospective views in the \textit{Tristia} on his poetic
\textit{lusus} in the \textit{Ars Amatoria}.

\(^{16}\) On Ovid’s relation to Hellenistic poetics, see recently R. O. A. M. Lyne,
suppl. 11 (Cambridge 1986) 55–98; and H. Hofmann, “Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses}: Carmen
Perpetuum. Carmen Deductum,” in \textit{Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar V} (Liverpool

\(^{17}\) The word \textit{liquidus} as a stylistic term is used, for example, by Cicero, \textit{Brutus} 274, to describe the smooth and charming oratorical style of Marcus Callidius: “\textit{quaе}
primum \textit{ita pura erat ut nihil liquidus, ita libere fluebat ut nusquam adhaeresceret};
\textit{cf.} Horace, \textit{Ep.} 2.2.120.

\(^{18}\) Callimachus preserves the purity of his stream by combining with \textit{καθαρός}
the adjective \textit{άρπαγανος}. F. Williams, ed., \textit{Callimachus. Hymn to Apollo: A Comment-
ary} (Oxford 1978) ad 2.111, comments on the cleverness of the latter word, convey-
ing the meaning “unsullied,” since it is a neologism formed on the model of the Homeric
\textit{άρπαγανος}; it thus simultaneously reflects the poet’s originality and his facility
with Homeric scholarship.
trees and boulders, riverside stables with their flocks, cattle and horses, and even strong men in his torrent (552–57). As the narrator of the tale of Erysichthon and in Book 9 of his own contest with Hercules, Achelous is a long-winded, overly dramatic speaker whose tumid style matches his swollen flood (imbre tumens, 250). The allusions to the Aeneid in both stories suggest the speaker’s preference for Vergilian high style. In a playfully parodic manner, Ovid exposes the potentially ludicrous consequences of trying to re-create Vergilian epic. Ovid’s liquidus lusus, characterized by an easy flow and light wit, is the antithesis of Achelous’ pompous “Vergilian” style.

The Flight of Daedalus and Icarus

The remainder of Ovid’s narrative on Daedalus illuminates the contrast with Vergil’s etymology for the labyrinth with its emphasis on difficult labors contained within the maze-like structure of his epic. The center of the Daedalus episode is the inventor’s flight from Crete with his son Icarus (183–235). Ovid picks up where the ekphrasis in the Aeneid leaves off, for Vergil concludes his account of Daedalus’ sculptures by noting what is absent: tu quoque magnam / partem opere in tanto, sineret dolor, Icare, haberes (30–31). Whereas Vergil stresses that the artist’s pain over his son’s death was too great to enable him to portray the flight with Icarus, Ovid elaborates on that adventure. He begins by providing a picture of Daedalus at work:

... nam ponit in ordine pennas,
a minima coeptas, longam breviore sequenti,
ut clivo crevisse putes. sic rustica quondam
fistula disparibus paulatim surgit avenis. (189–92)

For he arranged the feathers in order, beginning with the smallest, short following upon long, so that you would think it had acquired a sloping shape naturally. Thus the rustic Pan pipes sometimes gradually rise with unequal reeds.

By comparing the carefully gradated arrangement of the feathers to the Pan pipes, Ovid seems to associate Daedalus’ work with the activity of a poet. But the literary background for this reference to the rustic pipes may qualify the analogy. Marjorie Hoefmans has recently suggested that Ovid alludes to Lucretius’ account of the invention of music, where nature provides the model for humans to produce music technically (5.1379–83). From that perspective, Daedalus wisely follows Epicurean precepts. But in his discussion of technology, Lucretius views the role of nature as a suggestive model: the

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20 Hollis (above, n.5), who deletes the problematic l.190 because of the confusion of perspective created by longam, interprets clivo (usually a “hill”) to mean that the feathers grow “in order of ascending length,” since the image of the Pan pipes follows immediately after. My translation reflects Hollis’ interpretation.

21 Hoefmans (above, n.1) 152–53.
chirping of birds first gave men melodies to imitate, and the sound of wind blowing upon reeds gave rise to the idea of constructing musical instruments. By contrast, although they may look real, the wings constructed by Daedalus are only a close copy of an anatomical feature belonging to another species. As a mere imitation of nature, they deceive the eye and create the appearance, but not the reality, of a metamorphosis.

The Epicurean poet furthermore elaborates on the usefulness of the rustic instruments by providing delight and alleviating cares (1384–411). Ovid himself has already made the reader aware of the function of Pan pipes in a narrative that exemplifies his light, witty style. His aetiology of the syrinx (1.689–712), interlaced with the story of Jupiter and Io, illustrates the benefit of this instrument in the form of consolation and pleasure: Pan loses his object of sexual desire but gains the reeds that produce delightful music. In this narrative example of the light poetic mode characteristic of the Pan pipes, Ovid humorously makes the story itself, as deftly told by Mercury, a sleep-inducing narcotic for its uncouth audience.

In contrast to Vergil’s apostrophe explaining Icarus’ absence from the temple doors, Ovid gives considerable attention to the young boy in this episode. As Daedalus concentrates on constructing the wings, Icarus plays with the materials. The poet offers a highly visual description of the boy’s amusement:

... puer Icarus una
stabat et, ignarus sua se tractare pericla,
ore residenti modo quas vaga moverat aura
captabat plumas, flavam modo pollice ceram
mollibat, lususque suo mirabile patris
impediebat opus. (195–200)

The boy Icarus stood around, and unaware that he was handling a source of danger to himself, now snatched at the feathers which the wandering breeze had wafted, with his face beaming, now softened the yellow wax with his thumb, and he hindered his father’s marvelous work with his play.

By juxtaposing the lusus of Icarus with the labor of Daedalus, Ovid includes a quotidian vignette in a typically Alexandrian manner, yet adds a somber foreshadowing of death to this seemingly frivolous detail. The narrator’s remark about the boy’s ignorance of the danger in his playthings highlights the irony of Icarus softening the wax. The wax, of course, will soon be softened naturally by

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22 L. Barkan, The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism (New Haven 1986) 75, comments that Daedalus’ “creations tend to embrace all the flaws of proteanism without achieving its glories” and that Daedalus “attains neither the accurate imitation of nature nor the artistic transcendence of nature.”

proximity to the sun, at the cost of Icarus’ life. Ovid’s ostensibly positive comment here that Daedalus “changes nature” (naturamque novat, 189) takes on added meaning that the inventor would not have assumed: his alteration of nature will at best be only temporary and will turn his son into a ludicrous sight, something “strange” rather than “new,” as Icarus desperately flails his bare arms (nudos quotit ille lacertos, 227).

Whereas Vergil ends his ekphrasis by mentioning Daedalus’ inability to portray Icarus on the temple doors, Ovid elaborates on Icarus’ participation in the flight, as the two progress over the Aegean and the boy, eagerly flying too high, meets his doom. Ovid’s account echoes Vergil’s ekphrasis at the crucial moment of departure. When Daedalus finishes his warnings to Icarus, the phrase et patriae tremuere manus (211), as Hollis notes, recalls Vergil’s description of Daedalus’ inability to complete his pictures: bis patriae cecidere manus (6.33).24 Vergil achieves an effect of pathos in part through metrics, for this expression of the artist’s inability to proceed follows a heavily spondaic line, and the caesura of this verse falls emphatically after three tripping dactyls on the final syllable of manus. The anaphora of bis at the beginning of the two consecutive lines (33–34) suggests Daedalus’ effort as well as his inability to complete his work. By his apostrophe to Icarus, whose pitiful death caused his father so much grief, Vergil seems to share the father’s pain and calls attention to the father-son bond, which is not only a defining value for the hero of the Aeneid but also informs Vergil’s narrative of the young men such as Pallas and Lausus, whose fathers are unable to protect them from death in the war in Latium.25

Ovid, on the other hand, resists an empathetic identification with the artist. As the father and son set out, he compares them to a mother bird teaching her fledgling how to fly: velut ales, ab alto / quae teneram prolem produxit in aera nido (213–14). Yet he immediately follows this description with a negative phrase that foreshadows Icarus’s tragedy: damnosasque erudit artes (215). The poet’s critical detachment from the inventor here is evident in the strong adjective damnosus (“destructive”) applied to his skill. The negative implications of that word are reinforced immediately after Icarus’ fall, when Daedalus, failing to get a response to his calls for Icarus, sees the feathers floating on the water. The father then curses his own skill: devovitque suas artes (234). As Hoefmans observes, the verb devoveo here al-

24 Hollis (above, n.5) ad 211 observes that Ovid echoes Vergil’s “poignant line” but does not elaborate on the effect of the borrowing.

25 M. C. J. Putnam, “Daedalus, Virgil, and the End of Art,” AJP 108 (1987) 182, observes that in his empathetic expression of grief for Icarus, the narrator substitutes for Daedalus and assumes a Daedalian nature, as he eternalizes the father’s grief in his own artwork. Putnam applies this notion to Vergil’s effort in the Aeneid more generally by discerning Daedalian qualities in the deceit of the wooden horse, in such “hybrid” creatures as Polyphemus in the hero’s adventures, and in the illicit love of Dido, pitied by the poet.
ludes to Vergil’s ekphrasis in *Aeneid* 6. In an act of piety, Daedalus there, by contrast, “consecrated the orage of his wings” (*sacratum / remigium alarum*, 18–19) to Apollo even though it was the sun, Apollo’s divine image, that caused Icarus’ wings to decompose. The irony is increased as the two verbs, *devoveo* and *sacro*, can be synonyms for “devote,” but their antithetical meanings in these two accounts reflect the wide gap between Ovid’s artist and Vergil’s.

The Flight of Daedalus and Icarus in the *Ars Amatoria*

Ovid not only alludes to Vergil and Lucretius but even turns to his own earlier version of the flight at *Ars Amatoria* 2.22–98. In a highly self-referential gesture, the poet even repeats several lines verbatim from the *Ars* passage. Although scholars in general have not considered this repetition problematic, Alison Sharrock has recently argued that Ovid in the Daedalus episode alludes to the *Ars* as the cause of Augustus’ anger and the poet’s exile. While it is tempting to consider that Ovid may have inserted this episode, or revised it, after receiving the notice of his *relegatio*, the echoes of the *Ars* bear more on the nature of Ovid’s poem than on his autobiography. Much as the Maeander looks back at his own course, so Ovid returns to his earlier work and reveals the complex turns of his poem as a literary labyrinth.

As an indication of the difference in perspective with his earlier version, Ovid changes his description of the island Calymne over which Daedalus and Icarus fly from *silvisque umbrosa* (2.81) to *fecundaque melle* (222). Sharrock notes the etymological play on the meaning of Calymne (from the Greek κάλυμμα, “veil”) with the description “shaded by trees” in the *Ars*. But the phrase “fertile with honey” in the *Metamorphoses* is likewise a significant etymological gloss, which “corrects” the *Ars*, for the word κάλυμμα also refers to the cover of a honeycomb. The image of honey suggests the transformative nature of the bees’ activity, highly appropriate to the complex art of this epic. As if to point up its importance, Ovid recalls this image later in Book 8. The centerpiece of the humble,

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26 Hoefmans (above, n. 1) 147.

27 M. Janan, “The Labyrinth and the Mirror: Incest and Influence in *Metamorphoses* 9,” *Arethusa* 24 (1991) 240-48, discusses the problem of self-reference in the Byblis and Caunis episode. She finds that Maeander, grandfather of Byblis, is the paradigm for the young woman’s erotic and poetic self-referentiality, for Byblis “turns back” to her own brother as the object of desire and, as a skewed version of the poet, repeats Ovid’s own earlier works, the *Amores, Ars Amatoria*, and *Heroides*.

28 Sharrock (above, n.3) 168–73 points to a number of references to the Daedalus and Icarus myth in Ovid’s exile poetry that associate it closely with the *Ars* as a source of the poet’s downfall; Ovid’s insistence on the incompleteness of the *Metamorphoses* at the time of his exile would then allow for the possibility that he revised the Daedalus and Icarus story there (or added it later) and gave it self-referential significance.

29 Sharrock (above, n.3) 176.

30 See *LSJ*, s.v. κάλυμμα 6: “covering of a honeycomb.”
DAEDALUS IN OVID’S *METAMORPHOSES* 151

yet amusingly varied, banquet that Baucis and Philemon provide for Jupiter and Mercury is a honeycomb (*candidus in medio favus est*, 677). There, the playful irony throughout Laelex’s narrative of the simple couple who entertain the two divinities is fitting to Ovid’s variation on a Callimachean theme, in contrast to Achelous’ inflated, “high” epic version of the story of Erysichthon.31

In several references to his earlier version of Daedalus’ flight, Ovid reflects negatively on the artisan’s relation to the gods. The *praecceptor* of the *Ars* depicts Daedalus in a positive light, even as an exemplar of piety. When the artisan contemplates his daring flight, he piously prays to Jupiter for pardon and assures the god that he does not seek to challenge the heavenly abodes:

> “da veniam coepto, luppiter alte, meo. 
> non ego sidereas adfecto tangere sedes; 
> qua fugiam dominum, nulla nisi ista via est.” (2.38–40)

> “Pardon my enterprise, lofty Jupiter. I do not attempt to touch the abodes of the stars. There is no way except that one for me to escape my master.”

The poet emphasizes Daedalus’ piety here, as he himself makes a point of seeking divine favor in the *Ars.*32 In Book 8, Daedalus shows hubris by failing to invoke the gods at all before beginning his bold flight or at any time in the episode.

In contrast to his earlier version, Ovid here suggests that Daedalus’ invention of wings is a hubristic violation of the realm belonging to the gods and to birds. In the *Ars*, the *praecceptor* shows a simple fisherman responding to the sight of the two winged creatures on high: *hos aliquid tremula dum captat harundine pisces / vidit, et inceptum dextra relinquit opus* (77–78). In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid incorporates the first line of this description and then expands upon it:

> *hos aliquid tremula dum captat harundine pisces, 
> aut pastor baculo stivave innixus arator 
> vidit et obstipuit, quiique aethera carpere possent 
> credidit esse deos.* (217–20)

Someone while he was catching fish with his quivering pole or a shepherd leaning on his staff or a plowman on his plow handle saw them and was stunned, and he believed that they who could occupy the skies were gods.

By adding the examples of the shepherd and the plowman, Ovid goes beyond the sense of astonishment in the *Ars* passage, for he

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31 M.-K. Gamel, “Baucis and Philemon: Paradigm or Paradox?” *Helios* 11 (1984) 117–31, comments on the narrator Laelex’s inability to appreciate the rustic simplicity of Philemon and Baucis because of his “social superiority.” Thus, his language reflects ambiguity and even sarcasm, as when Laelex refers to the wine bowl “engraved with the same silver” as the plates, which are in fact earthenware (668).

reveals that to ordinary people such anthropomorphic beings in flight could be nothing other than divinities. Their traditional beliefs are put in strong antithesis to Daedalus’ apparent indifference to the gods. Yet the poet goes even further here by describing Icarus ascending higher: caelique cupidine tactus (224). Although Daedalus in the Ars may not have wished to “touch” (tanger, 2.39) the heavenly realms, his son does here, with a passion (cupido). Daedalus’ invention, it would seem, has an inevitably transgressive effect on Icarus. The language suggests a kind of challenge to the divine realm similar to the Giants’ attempt to scale Olympus.

Ovid’s incorporation of the concept of the “middle way” is more complex in the epic than in the didactic poem as it contrasts Daedalus with divine powers. Daedalus’ lecture to Icarus on flying a middle course repeats the artisan’s general strictures about the dangers of flying too low or too high in the Ars. In both versions, Daedalus explains that the wings will be damaged by the sun’s heat if they fly too high or by dampness from the sea if they fly too low (203–5; Ars 2.59–62). Ovid even repeats verbatim the essential injunction: inter utrumque vola (206; Ars 2.63), along with the emphasis on Daedalus’ own leadership (me duce, 208; Ars 2.58). But the poet compounds the allusion to the middle way by looking back to the flight myth of Phaethon in Metamorphoses 2. There, the god Phoebus is unable to persuade the youth to reconsider his request to drive the chariot of the sun. To make the best of a bad situation, Phoebus warns his son that flying too high will burn the heavenly abodes and too low, the earth; a middle path is therefore the safest: medio tutissimus ibis (2.137). Daedalus similarly admonishes his own son: “Medio que ut limite curras” (204).

If Ovid makes Daedalus a kind of Phoebus figure, he shows the artisan falling far short of the divine model. Phoebus is much more detailed in his advice and gives his son guidelines about navigating the constellations. Initially hoping to discourage Phaethon’s foolhardy desire, the sun god explains that the awesome appearance of the heavenly bodies may cause him to lose control of the chariot. He reinforces the substance of his warnings, for instance, with alliterative cacophony to impress upon the boy the menacing aspect of Scorpio: saevaque circuitu curvament brachia longo (2.82). But after failing to dissuade his son from undertaking the journey, the god advises him to stay between the twisting Serpent on the right and the oppressive

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11 Sharrock (above, n.3) 180–81 observes that this type of expansion itself and the attribution of a marvelous event to the gods can be explained as typical of epic.
14 V. M. Wise, “Flight Myths in Ovid’s Metamorphoses,” Ramus 6 (1977) 44–59, discusses the episodes of Phaethon and Daedalus and Icarus as parallel myths involving flight as a metaphor for the creative process. In her view, Phaethon is destroyed by his obsession with a material vision of reality in contrast to the metamorphic imagination implied by the designs on doors of Phoebus’ palace. With Daedalus and Icarus, she finds that the wings compared to Pan pipes suggest the ambiguity of art imitating art and that, while Icarus lacks the self-discipline to attain a higher vision, Daedalus’ murder of Perdix implies an inability of the artist to accept anyone else’s inventiveness.
Alters on the left (2.138–40). Daedalus assumes that Icarus should pay no attention whatsoever to the constellations: nec te spectare Booten / aut Helicen iubeo strictumque Orionisensem (206–7). Instead, he instructs the boy to proceed simply by following him (me duce carpe viam!, 208). Phoebus’ point that Phaethon seeks what even the other gods cannot perform (60–61) is lost on his eager son. Daedalus does not even contemplate such limitations on mortals.

Ovid also puts Daedalus’ relation to higher powers in a negative light by echoing the Ars when he advises Icarus not to fly with the aid of the constellations. In the earlier poem, the artisan dismisses the same three prominent constellations as guides for the boy: sed tibi non virgo Tegaeae comesque Bootae, / ensiger Orion, aspiciendus erit (55–56), “but you should not look at the maiden of Tegea and the companion of Bootes, sword-bearing Orion.” The archetype for both Ovidian passages is important background, for the poet has Daedalus contradict a classic literary passage on navigation in Odyssey 5, Odysseus’ departure from Calypso’s island on a boat that he himself built. As J. E. Sharwood Smith points out, Odysseus wisely chooses to watch the Pleiades, Bootes, Arctus, and Orion (272–77) as the means of maintaining an easterly course towards Ithaca, since such a grouping would be easier to follow than one star.15 Perhaps, as Sharwood Smith believes, Ovid has Daedalus imply that Icarus knows Homer’s text but should not follow it because, unlike Odysseus, they are proceeding in a northwest direction. Yet the brightness of these particular constellations in itself made them the most useful source of guidance for navigators sailing the seas in antiquity.

The text of the Odyssey furthermore provides information about these constellations that is relevant to the issue of divine influence. The third one mentioned by Homer, “Arktos, which they also call by name Amaksa” (273), is the same constellation which Ovid calls Helice. While using the name most common in extant Hellenistic literature,16 Ovid may wish to tease the reader into recalling the variety of names given to the most familiar of constellations, since he himself recounted in Book 2 the etiological tale of the nymph known as Callisto, who was metamorphosed into Ursa Major, the Great Bear. Although he narrates the tale at considerable length (400–568), the poet never actually names the young object of Jupiter’s desire, who is driven out of Diana’s circle when she is discovered to be pregnant. After giving birth to a son named Arcas, the nymph is transformed into a bear by a jealous Juno and later narrowly misses being killed by her own son in a hunting expedition. Although Jupiter intervenes by metamorphosing both mother and son into constellations, Juno further seeks revenge by prevailing upon the sea goddess Tethys to

16 See Aratus, Phaenomena 37–41, on Helice as the constellation by which Greek sailors guide their ships because of its brightness and appearance early in the evening. In setting the scene to Medea’s sleeplessness over Jason’s plight, Apollonius, Argonautica 3.744–46, mentions Helice along with Orion as the constellation sailors watch at night.
prevent the Bears from ever setting in the ocean. Homer refers to this specific prohibition by describing Arctos as the one that “alone has no portion of the baths of the ocean” (5.275). This constellation furthermore is threatened by the neighboring Orion, the hunter who was killed by Artemis for his hubris and then catastrophically, as Homer indicates that it “watches Orion” (274). Ovid alludes to this etiological myth about Helice and Orion when Daedalus mentions “strictumque Orionis ensem” (207). Although Daedalus appears uninterested in the interaction between humans and mortals in the background to these constellations, Ovid subtly reminds his reader of the power of divine influence on human life, especially in the form of punishment. He also implies the irony of the reference to Helice vis-à-vis Icarus: while the constellation is permanently kept from the ocean waters, Daedalus’ son will forfeit his life in the deep and give his name to the sea.

Ovid’s allusion to Homer, furthermore, recalls the Greek hero’s rescue by divine help. Although his craft is shattered by Poseidon, Odysseus is able to redeem himself and is not, like Icarus, fatally immersed in the sea. He is saved by his characteristic ability to adapt to unforeseen circumstances: although hesitant, he puts on the magic veil given to him by the sea goddess Leucothea and is then able to swim to land (351–463). Odysseus understands that skill alone is not enough; divine assistance is sometimes essential. Ovid makes Daedalus’ desire to control events and to rely on his own authority highly problematic. Even with his most impressive invention, the artisan almost destroyed himself when he nearly failed to get out of the labyrinth (167–68). In the flight from Crete, Daedalus does not perceive the deeper significance to the constellations that he dismisses. He himself is not able to rescue his son, and no god intervenes to save him.

Daedalus and Perdix

In the narrative following the death of Icarus, Ovid adds to the labyrinthine nature of his poem as a process of unexpectedly turning back and exposes Daedalus’ negative repetitions. For he relates the story of Perdix, which is not found in the other extant literary accounts of Daedalus, out of chronological sequence. As a parody, seeing Daedalus place his son’s body in a tomb, applauds vigorously with its wings and sings joyfully (236–38), the poet provides the reason for Daedalus’ longum exilium (183–84): the artisan pushed his nephew off the Acropolis but then lied about the boy’s fall (lapsum mentitus, 251). Ovid here sustains the etymology for his labyrinth from the verb labor with his use of the word lapsus. As the term here denotes a “falling” rather than the “gliding” of the Maeander, Daedalus is now clearly associated with a moral flaw.

With the Perdix story, Ovid emphasizes that the artisan repeats himself with destructive results. The poet makes the relationship between Daedalus and Perdix virtually that of father and son, since the artisan’s sister, called not by her name but only as germana (“twin,” 242),
had handed her child over to her brother as his ward so that Daedalus could serve as his mentor. Daedalus became envious of (invidit, 250) the boy when he produced two very significant inventions, the saw and the draftsman's compass. Ovid implies Daedalus' obsession with his own role as supreme artisan since these inventions, essential tools for the work of architects and artisans, in effect reversed the relation of master and pupil.

The poet's account of Perdix's inventions evokes the true genius of the boy. Recalling his earlier description of Daedalus in the phrase naturamque novat (189), Ovid suggests that Perdix is the one who truly transformed nature. The young boy saw patterns in nature from which he was able to extract designs; the creations completely superseded the originals and became something entirely new. Thus, he invented the saw by using the backbone of a fish as a model. In the construction of his verse, Ovid captures some of the essential qualities of these inventions. He conveys the bound arms of the compass, for instance, by a framing technique that encloses the words for the two iron arms within the phrase for the single knot: ex uno duo ferrea brachia nodo (247). Similarly, he gives the impression of the way by which one arm always remains stable as the other moves by intricate word patterning: altera pars staret, pars altera duceret orbem (249). The anaphora in a chiastic pattern here neatly suggests the opposite, but complementary, functions of the scribe and point of the compass. By giving the reader a sense of the great ingenuity of Perdix's inventions, Ovid places Daedalus in an even more negative light for his inability to tolerate any competition from the boy.

Ovid reveals the negative nature of Daedalus' labyrinthine repetitions more fully as the story of Perdix unfolds, for his actions with his nephew have disturbing parallels with the flight from Crete, so disastrous for Icarus. Perdix was only twelve years old when sent to live with Daedalus (242–43). His age approximates Icarus' at the time of the flight, since the poet describes the boy interfering with his father's work of constructing the wings by snatching at the feathers blowing in the breeze and by pressing the soft wax with his thumb (197–200). When Daedalus thrust his nephew off the Acropolis, he intended to murder the boy. But Pallas, the protector of genius, saved him from utter extinction by transforming him into a bird while still in the air (252–53). Daedalus is thus indirectly responsible for the metamorphosis of Perdix into a bird. He is, of course, the actual cause of his own son's attempt to fly, which Ovid describes in the

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17 A. Crabbe, "Structure and Content in Ovid's Metamorphoses," *ANRW* 11.31.4 (1981) 2277–84, cites various motif links among the Scylla, Daedalus and Icarus, and Perdix episodes in an analysis of the larger structure of Book 8. She notes the similarity of age between Icarus and Perdix, but mainly finds differences between the two, such as the boldness of the former in his flight and the latter's fear of high places. On the other hand, she sees several close points of contact between Scylla and Perdix, such as the transformation into a bird in mid-air and the fall from a tower, which Scylla fantasizes as a way into Minos' camp and which the unfortunate Perdix actually experiences.
simile comparing the two to real birds as they begin their flight: velut ales, ab alto / quae teneram prolem produxit in aera nido (213–14). Ovid leaves implicit in the Metamorphoses what he expresses directly in the Ars, that Daedalus and Icarus took off by leaping from a cliff (2.71–72), much as the mother bird pushes her fledgling out of the nest to teach it to fly. Here, moreover, the poet calls attention to the special nature of the place from which Daedalus thrust the boy, sacraque ex arce Minervae (250). The artisan thus violated the sacred precinct of the very goddess to whom he should have shown the utmost piety.

In associating Perdix with Icarus through the concept of the “middle way,” Ovid sustains a negative view of Daedalus. By hurling his nephew off the Acropolis, Daedalus causes the boy in his metamorphosed state to be forever afraid of high places. Ovid elaborates on the partridge’s fear of heights as he concludes the story of Daedalus and Perdix:

non tamen haec alte volucris sua corpora tollit
nec facit in ramis altoque cacumine nidos;
propter humum volunt ponitque in saepibus ova
antique memet metuit sublimia casus. (256–59)

Nevertheless, this bird does not raise its body on high, nor does it make its nests on the branches of the very top. It flits near the ground and places its eggs in hedges, and mindful of its prior fall, it fears the heights.

The hendiadys of the phrase in ramis altoque cacumine, which makes the words alto cacumine grammatically equivalent to ramis instead of subordinate to it, calls attention to the problem of height. By his murderous act, Daedalus keeps his nephew from ever flying too high (non tamen haec alte volucris sua corpora tollit, 256). The perdix does not remain too close to the ground, either, for at the beginning of this story, the poet locates the bird on an ilex tree: Hunc miseris tumulo ponentem corpora nati / garrula ramosa prospexit ab ilice perdix (236–37). Thus, the perdix perches on the branches of trees, though not on the highest ones. While flitting above the ground (propter humum volitat), it builds its nests in hedges to protect its young (ponitque in saepibus ova, 258). The perdix would therefore seem instinctively to represent the principle of mediocratas. Ironically, Daedalus tried unsuccessfully to enforce a middle path for Icarus so as to avoid dampening the wings in the sea or melting the wax by proximity to the sun. As Perdix is now compelled to

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38 This line has continued to vex scholars. I accept the manuscript reading, which Hollis (above, n.5) prints, though admittedly after some reluctance. But he sensibly notes that Ovid implies only that this bird does not nest in the topmost branches (I. 257). He also dismisses the objection that the partridge generally does not perch, by noting that Ovid may have in mind the red-legged partridge and was probably influenced by the Hellenistic topos of a watching bird speaking from a tree. And he considers aesthetically unacceptable the image represented by the common emendation, “garrula limoso prospexit ab ilice perdix,” which W. S. Anderson, P. Ovidii Nasonis Metamorphoses (Leipzig 1993), prints.
follow Daedalus’ prescriptive “middle way” in a manner that heightens the discrepancy between his present limitation as a bird and his earlier brilliance as a youth, Ovid implies that the middle way is not inherently ideal.

According to Sharrock, Daedalus in the *Ars* and the *Metamorphoses* is a figure for the Callimachean poet, who like Ovid, maintains a stylistic middle ground, whereas Icarus represents the type of poet who aspires to the high genre of Homeric-style epic.39 In the *Metamorphoses*, however, Ovid incorporates multiple levels of style, reflecting a deliberate break with traditional stylistic boundaries. Although he achieves this variety in part through characters such as Achelous, who temporarily assume the narrative voice, Ovid’s epic narrator himself rises to more elevated levels of style in a number of sustained passages. The account of Phaethon’s flight, for instance, contains a topographical survey of the universe scorched by the young boy’s mishandling of the sun god’s chariot. The poet includes two examples of the catalogue, a hallmark of high epic, in this passage, one for mountains and the other for rivers. If Daedalus symbolizes a stylistic middle ground, Ovid rejects such consistency.

While Ovid indicates an affinity with Daedalus in the labyrinthine intricacy of his poem, as a poet he reveals his superiority to the archetypal artisan in the nature of his own material. His numerous forms of repetition in the *Metamorphoses*, unlike the windings of the Cretan labyrinth, are inherently linked to a concept of play. Their aim is ultimately not to confuse the reader but to take him through an experience that will make him perceive the manifold paradoxes of the human condition more fully. That process in the *Metamorphoses* requires a different design from the maze-like structure of the *Aeneid*, with its emphasis on the constructive, if painful, labor necessary to achieve a lasting goal. Ovid’s contrast with Vergil in the artisan’s indifference to traditional piety and in his problematic paternal role challenges the very core of his predecessor’s epic. With his own version of the Maeander simile as an analogue for the labyrinth, Ovid has truly done Propertius one better: his use of that seminal image illustrates his ability to incorporate into the *Metamorphoses* the light, playful mode that the elegist could only contrast with the works of “Lyceus” or even the *Aeneid* of Vergil without losing the power and grandeur of epic itself.

*Lehigh University*  
*CW 92.2* (1998)  
*BARBARA PAVLOCK*  
bp01@lehigh.edu

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39 Sharrock (above, n.3) 133–46 and 155–68.