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| Paper 18(Western Mythology)  ICARUS :  Icarus was son of Daedalus, the master craftsman. Daedalus invented and built the Labyrinth for King Minos of Crete who on wings of feathers and wax dared to fly near the sun. He was imprisomed by King Minos of Crete but shortly after finishing it King Minos had him imprisoned within the Labyrinth. He and his son Icarus devised the plan to escape by using wings made of wax that Daedalus had invented. Ivvasrus became willing to fly near sthe ssun by having a pair of wings fixed with wax. Daedalus cautioned his son against it saying that the sun would cause the wax to melt. Ivarus was becoming so excstatic about the possibility to fly near the sun that he did not yield to his father’s warning. Finally, the feathers came loose and Icarus plunged to his death in the sea. |
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There are two lessons that the story of Icarus was no doubt used to communicate. The first would have to be the importance of listening to the wisdom of one's elder. Icarus ignoring his father's warnings resulted in his death. Therefore, there was no room for disobedience and disrespect of one's elders in the ancient Greek society.

The second lesson to be drawn from the story of Icarus is the imperative about understanding one's limitations or the limitations of one's situation. Icarus was so much yielded to the exhilaration of his feelings over the possibility of flying as far near the sun that he ignored the limitations of his wax wings. Icarus was only focused on the pleasure of the experience and lost sight of its purpose, his gateway to freedom.

However, behind the incriminating actions of Icarus there is also another dimension. Man retains in his heart the instinct or desire of venturing into hitherto forbidden territory and acquiring the knowledge of experiences. To consider oneself equivalent to the gods is, of course, a cardinal sin and such ‘hubris’ leads to disastrous consequences. No wonder then that all that remains of Icarus are the scattered feathers that floated on the surface of the sea. Homer’s ‘Odysseus’, Dante’s ‘Ulysses’ and Christopher Marlowe’s ‘Faustus’ are unified by Icarian characteristics, particularly his towering ambition, the palpable pleasure he experiences while fulfilling these singular aspirations, the fatal consequences he suffers due to his refusal to succumb to the powers-that-be and his adherence to his own will.

In all the texts of  ‘Odyssey’, ‘Inferno’s Canto XXVI’ and ‘Doctor Faustus’, one reads about the yearning of the protagonists for more than what is allotted to them and the subsequent suffering. All these protagonists seem to be highly ambitious. They struggle against the restrictions imposed upon them. They seem to ride on their natural impulses even to the extent of disobeying the will of the gods. Nevertheless, the three characters are Icarus-like figures. Of course, Odysseus largely suppresses his aspirations; Ulysses decides to act on them. Faustus too more or less behaves like Ulysses (He explicitly denounces divinity). The three protagonists show Icarus-like traits as they commonly display overwhelming curiosity and ambition.

HERACLES /HERCULES:

Hercules is a legendary hero of ancient Greece and Rome. He was Known for his great strength. he was the son of Zeus and Alcmeme, the granddaughter of Perseus. Zeus’ jealous wife Hera sent two serpents to kill Heracles in his cradle, but the infant strangled them. He grew up to marry a princess, then killed her in a fit of madness sent by Hera and was obliged to become the servant of Eurystheus, ruler of Greece. It was Eurystheus who imposed upon Heracles the famous twelve labours: (1) the slaying of the Nemean lion, whose skin he thereafter wore; (2) the slaying of the nine-headed [Hydra](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hydra-Greek-mythology) of Lerna; (3) the capture of the [elusive](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/elusive) hind (or stag) of Arcadia; (4) the capture of the wild boar of Mount Erymanthus; (5) the cleansing, in a single day, of the cattle stables of King [Augeas](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Augeas) of Elis; (6) the shooting of the monstrous man-eating birds of the Stymphalian marshes; (7) the capture of the mad bull that terrorized the island of Crete; (8) the capture of the man-eating mares of King Diomedes of the Bistones; (9) the taking of the girdle of [Hippolyte](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hippolyte-Greek-mythology), queen of the Amazons; (10) the seizing of the cattle of the three-bodied giant Geryon, who ruled the island Erytheia (meaning red) in the far west; (11) the bringing back of the golden apples kept at the world’s end by the [Hesperides](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hesperides-Greek-mythology); and (12) the fetching up from the underworld of the triple-headed dog [Cerberus](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cerberus), guardian of its gates. He married Deianeira, who later sent him a shirt smeared with poison, which she mistakenly believed was a loved potion. In agony, Heracles burned himself to death on a pyre, and his spirit ascended to heaven. Thus he became immortal and in Heaven. In Heaven, he reconciled to Hera and married [Hebe](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hebe-Greek-goddess).

In art and literature, Heracles is represented as an enormously strong man, a huge eater and drinker, very amorous, and generally kindly but with occasional outbursts of brutal rage. His characteristic weapon is the bow but frequently also the club. In [Italy](https://www.britannica.com/place/Italy) he was worshipped as a god of merchants and traders, although others also prayed to him for his characteristic gifts of good luck or rescue from danger. The Greek myths transformed him into the son of Zeus and exemplar of strength and patience. His legends and his cults spread all over the Greek world.

There are innumerable references to Heracles throughout Greek and Roman literature. In Vergil’s ‘*Aeneid’* (Book 8): a Roman epic, Heracles is an important figure. Ovid in his ‘*Metamorphoses’* describes the apotheosis of Hercules. Heracles was popular throughout the middle ages in the west, and he even appears in Persian astronomical manuscripts. Seneca wrote a tragedy on the madness of Heracles *(‘Hercules Furens’)* and he may have been the author of a second extant tragedy *(‘Hercules Oetaeus’)* that deals with Hercules’ suffering and death. The Sixteenth century French poet Ronsard likened him to Christ, as did the English poet John Milton in the seventeenth century, who used the legend of Antaeus as a simile for Christ’s victory over the Tempter (‘*Paradise Regained’*). Earlier Edmund Spenser (1552–99) frequently used Heracles in the ‘*Faerie Queene’* as an example of justice and virtue, most of all in the first and tenth cantos of Book 5. Heracles appears frequently in German poetry, notably in the poems of Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), who saw in Heracles the symbol of the human struggle against adversity. Later in the nineteenth century Robert Browning used the Alcestis myth in ‘*Balaustion’s Adventure’* (1871). Heracles is a Christ-like figure in T. S. Eliot’s ‘*The Cocktail Party’* (1939).

PERSEUS:

In Greek mythology, Perseus was the slayer of the Gorgon Medusa. He was the son of Zeus and Danae. His grandfather had him thrown into the sea in a chest with his mother as an infant because of a prophecy that Perseus would kill him. Perseus and his mother survived, and as a young man Perseus set out to gain the head of Medusa. On his way home he rescued the Ethiopian princess Andromeda from a sea monster, and she became his wife. When he took his mother to her native Argos, he threw a discus that accidentally killed his grandfather, thus fulfilling the prophecy.

Being the son of [**Zeus**](https://www.greekmythology.com/Olympians/Zeus/zeus.html) and **[Danae](https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Mortals/Danae/danae.html" \o "Danae)** – Perseus was a half-god by birth. Beheading [**Gorgon**](https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Creatures/Gorgons/gorgons.html), [**Medusa**](https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Creatures/Medusa/medusa.html), he used her severed head (capable of turning onlookers into stone) as a mighty weapon in his subsequent adventures. These adventures include the slaying of the sea monster **[Cetus](https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Monsters/Cetus/cetus.html" \o "Cetus)** -which led to the rescuing of the Aethiopian princess [**Andromeda**](https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Mortals/Andromeda/andromeda.html), who would eventually become **[Perseus](https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Heroes/Perseus/perseus.html" \o "Perseus)**’ wife. Perseus had come upon Andromeda, embedded into a rock on the shore on his way home after all the adventures. He was enamoured by the beauty of Andromeda. The Cetus - the sea monster in the water was ready to eat Andromeda and Perseus slew the monster and rescued Andromeda from the rock. Perseus desired to marry Andromeda though he had promised to marry Phineus. As Perseus and Andromeda were to be married, Phineus attempted to fight Perseus. Perseus used the head of Medusa to turn Phineus into stone. Perseus and Andromeda returned to see King Polydectes and set his mother free. Perseus used the head of Medusa to turn Polydectes into stone.

The story of Perseus is a story of perseverance, bravery, and dignity. Perseus personifies the length one would go to in order to save the ones he/she loves. In 5th century BCE, the tragedies of [**Sophocles**](https://www.ancient.eu/sophocles/) and [**Euripides**](https://www.ancient.eu/Euripides/) also touched upon Perseus’ story. The story was elaborately explored by the Roman poet Ovid, in the ‘*Metamorphoses’* incirca 8 A.D.

The character of Medusa associated with the story of Perseus has been able to impress upon the writers of all ages. Originally a beautiful maiden, she was raped by Neptune in the temple of Minerva. Outraged, Medusa changed her hair into a nest of serpents and decreed that anyone looking on her would be transformed to stone. Medusa was then banished to a place in the west, where Perseus later went to slay her with the help and encouragement of Minerva especially. Perseus gained immortality from Minerva and the other grateful gods for killing the Medusa while she was sleeping. Ovid in his ‘Metamorphosis’ narrates the story of transformation of Medusa in  details. According to Ovid, Medusa was once a beautiful young maiden, the only mortal of three sisters known as the Gorgons. Goethe describes Medusa as a wonderful work which, expressing the discord between death and life, between pain and pleasure, exerts an inexplicable fascination over us as no other ambiguous figure does. Poet P.B  Shelley also felt Medusa was misunderstood. In his poem-‘On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci’ Shelley describes the beautiful and terrifying gaze of Medusa with his own perception of her life. In her 1975 [manifesto](https://artandobjecthood.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/cixous_the_laugh_of_the_medusa.pdf): ‘*The Laugh of the Medusa’,*the feminist theorist Hélène Cixous blames man for creating the character of Medusa with a prejudiced perception. Instead of looking upon her from the monstrous legacy if they dared to “look at the Medusa straight on,” they would see that “she is not deadly, she’s beautiful and she’s laughing.”- argues Cixous.  However, in literature throughout history the power of Medusa has been interpreted in many different ways. To the feminists of our age, she is a [symbol](https://poemanalysis.com/glossary/symbolism/) of female power, someone who is unwilling to submit to the male gaze.