

“The Story of Daedalus and Icarus” from *Metamorphoses*

Ovid

In tedious exile now too long detain'd,
Daedalus languish'd for his native land:
The sea foreclos'd his flight; yet thus he said:
Tho' Earth and water in subjection laid,
O cruel Minos, thy dominion be, 5
We'll go thro' air; for sure the air is free.
Then to new arts his cunning thought applies,
And to improve the work of Nature tries.
A row of quills in gradual order plac'd,
Rise by degrees in length from first to last; 10
As on a cliff th' ascending thicket grows,
Or, different reeds the rural pipe compose.
Along the middle runs a twine of flax,
The bottom stems are joyn'd by pliant wax.
Thus, well compact, a hollow bending brings 15
The fine composure into real wings.

His boy, young Icarus, that near him stood,
Unthinking of his fate, with smiles pursu'd
The floating feathers, which the moving air
Bore loosely from the ground, and wasted here and there. 20
Or with the wax impertinently play'd,

And with his childish tricks the great design delay'd.

The final master-stroke at last impos'd,
And now, the neat machine compleatly clos'd;
Fitting his pinions on, a flight he tries, 25
And hung self-ballanc'd in the beaten skies.
Then thus instructs his child: My boy, take care
To wing your course along the middle air;
If low, the surges wet your flagging plumes;
If high, the sun the melting wax consumes: 30
Steer between both: nor to the northern skies,
Nor south Orion turn your giddy eyes;
But follow me: let me before you lay
Rules for the flight, and mark the pathless way.
Then teaching, with a fond concern, his son, 35
He took the untry'd wings, and fix'd 'em on;
But fix'd with trembling hands; and as he speaks,
The tears roul gently down his aged cheeks.
Then kiss'd, and in his arms embrac'd him fast,
But knew not this embrace must be the last. 40
And mounting upward, as he wings his flight,
Back on his charge he turns his aking sight;
As parent birds, when first their callow care
Leave the high nest to tempt the liquid air.
Then cheers him on, and oft, with fatal art, 45
Reminds the stripling to perform his part.

These, as the angler at the silent brook,
Or mountain-shepherd leaning on his crook,
Or gaping plowman, from the vale descries,
They stare, and view 'em with religious eyes, 50
And strait conclude 'em Gods; since none, but they,
Thro' their own azure skies cou'd find a way.

Now Delos, Paros on the left are seen,
And Samos, favour'd by Jove's haughty queen;
Upon the right, the isle Lebynthos nam'd, 55
And fair Calymne for its honey fam'd.

When now the boy, whose childish thoughts aspire
To loftier aims, and make him ramble high'r,
Grown wild, and wanton, more embolden'd flies
Far from his guide, and soars among the skies. 60

The soft'ning wax, that felt a nearer sun,
Dissolv'd apace, and soon began to run.
The youth in vain his melting pinions shakes,
His feathers gone, no longer air he takes:
Oh! Father, father, as he strove to cry, 65
Down to the sea he tumbled from on high,
And found his Fate; yet still subsists by fame,
Among those waters that retain his name.

The father, now no more a father, cries,

Ho Icarus! where are you? as he flies;

70

Where shall I seek my boy? he cries again,

And saw his feathers scatter'd on the main.

Then curs'd his art; and fun'ral rites confer'd,

Naming the country from the youth interr'd.