The Story of Dedalus and Icarus

Ovid, *Metamorphsis* VIII, 183 ff.

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,

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 quils in gradual order plac’d,

Rise by degrees in length from first to last;

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

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.

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,

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:

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,

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.

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 chears him on, and oft, with fatal art,

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,

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,

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.

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,

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;

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

Daedalus interea Creten longumque perosus

exilium tactusque loci natalis amore

clausus erat pelago. 'terras licet' inquit 'et undas               185

obstruat: et caelum certe patet; ibimus illac:

omnia possideat, non possidet aera Minos.'

dixit et ignotas animum dimittit in artes

naturamque novat. nam ponit in ordine pennas

a minima coeptas, longam breviore sequenti,               190

ut clivo crevisse putes: sic rustica quondam

fistula disparibus paulatim surgit avenis;

tum lino medias et ceris alligat imas

atque ita conpositas parvo curvamine flectit,

ut veras imitetur aves. puer Icarus una               195

stabat et, ignarus sua se tractare pericla,

ore renidenti modo, quas vaga moverat aura,

captabat plumas, flavam modo pollice ceram

mollibat lusuque suo mirabile patris

impediebat opus. postquam manus ultima coepto               200

inposita est, geminas opifex libravit in alas

ipse suum corpus motaque pependit in aura;

instruit et natum 'medio' que 'ut limite curras,

Icare,' ait 'moneo, ne, si demissior ibis,

unda gravet pennas, si celsior, ignis adurat:               205

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.

inter opus monitusque genae maduere seniles,               210

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,

hortaturque sequi damnosasque erudit artes               215

et movet ipse suas et nati respicit alas.

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 Iunonia 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.