

# Icarus in the poem falling and flying by jack gilbert

[Literature](#), [Mythology](#)



Greek mythology is one of the most popular fields of study. Many works of artists and poets have been inspired by Greek myth. The myth of Daedalus and Icarus is one of the most studied Greek myths in English literature and many poets have reflected on it. The myth tells the story of a man, Daedalus, who tries to escape the island of Crete along with his son Icarus. Daedalus was a talented craftsman and was known for his famous work. Daedalus created wings from feathers and wax for Icarus to help him escape. He warned him not to fly too high to avoid close contact with the sun as it will melt the wax. But the young Icarus did not listen to his father's advice and flew too close to the sun where he fell into the sea. Although Icarus has been recognized for his failure to keep his father's promise in almost every literature work, the poem "Falling and Flying" by Jack Gilbert proposes a contrasting perspective that identifies him as an individual with big accomplishments. Gilbert's poem is distinguished amongst the other poems as it presents a different idea, Gilbert argues that Icarus did not fail but he's time just came to an end. Gilbert's use of examples has enforced the concept that everything comes to end, and the accomplishments should never be forgotten.

One of the biggest achievements that are usually overlooked is the freedom that Icarus felt as he flew. As Icarus flew in every direction he wanted to and every time he flew higher, he was enriched with the freedom that he was lacking. Most readers of the myth of Icarus and Daedalus focus more on the ending and forget how Icarus succeeded to escape and gain his liberty. Gilbert implies that what we don't forget is that Icarus fell "Everyone forgets that Icarus also flew". Gilbert stresses the fact that Icarus flew, and his

failure often obscures his success of flying in the retelling of the myth. His failure overshadows his glorious triumph. As Gilbert points out to the readers that Icarus “ also flew”, he affirms his rise and rejects his failure. We often underestimate the importance of something because we’re provided it. But it’s not like that in Icarus’s case, he lost his freedom and came to realize how valuable it was when he lost it. Once he was able to fly again and regain his freedom, he became aware of his accomplishments and nothing mattered to him after that. When Icarus was restored with the sense of release and discharge, he was not afraid of falling or failing. Falling was not a failure for him but a victory. Our memory tends to favor flaws and errors over victory. Flying from the prison with wings of feathers and wax was a triumph for Icarus but all that we remember first is less than what Icarus accomplished or what Daedalus has invented. Icarus was able to achieve his freedom in the form of flight.

The poet’s use of examples draws the reader’s attention to the accomplishments of Icarus and makes them focus less on his flaws. In the second line, Gilbert makes a comparison between an ending love and Icarus’s fall and shows the similarities associated with them: “ It’s the same when love comes to an end”. When a relationship comes to end, people immediately search for any reason that had caused it to end. Even if a relationship ends, the beautiful moments of the glory love will forever last and thus should be admired. The same principle applies to the myth of Icarus. He is constantly blamed for not listening to his father and the audience is attracted to his flaws more than his glories. Gilbert explains that if anything is worth doing, it doesn’t matter if it was done in the wrong way

but what's important is that it was done. Gilbert highlights this message in the line " but anything worth doing is worth doing badly" (lines 6-7). The poet discusses a failed marriage through imagery to validate that Icarus had just come to the end of his triumph. Gilbert describes the scenes in every detail to enhance the memories that the married couples shared together regardless of their failed marriage, the memories they shared together can never be wiped or removed: " like being there by that summer ocean on the other side of the island while love was fading out of her" (Gilbert 8-9).

Another accomplishment of Icarus that is often neglected is his ability to fly really high to reach the sun which demonstrates his strength and wisdom. Every time Icarus flew higher and higher, he was overjoyed with his ability to reach that point. Icarus flew really high and close to the sun knowing that he could lose the shape of wings and die. He was impressed by his capabilities and did not wish to stop flying higher even if it was going to cost his life. Icarus's desire to rise and fly higher remarks his glory and his falling is interpreted to be the end of his triumph " I believe Icarus was not failing as he fell, but just coming to the end of his triumph". (Gilbert 24-25). The image of the sun has a deeper meaning that we often don't notice, it's a symbol of a higher entity. Although Icarus fell to the sea as he got really close to the sun, he was still able to fly and reach a high position close to the sun. We are misled by the reasoning the most people refer to which is Icarus ignored his father's advice that is not to fly too close to the sun. Icarus's triumph has ended when he was close to the sun, but he has proven his accomplishments as he escaped the Crete and reached the sun with wings made of feathers and wax. Gilbert's use of Metaphoric devices constructs the concept, that

nothing beautiful will last forever and everything will eventually come to end. He compares Icarus's triumph to the stars, he shined brightly as he flew but couldn't sustain his brightness forever just like a star: "the stars burn so extravagantly those nights that anyone could tell you they would never last" (Gilbert 10-12). When we look at the stars, we are astonished by their brightness and therefore value its appearance. The poet suggests that we should see Icarus' accomplishments in the same way we observe the stars.

In conclusion, the Greek myth of Icarus and Daedalus is commonly examined with a negative view and mostly concerned with Icarus's mistake of getting nearby the sun when he was warned by his father not to. The poem "Falling and Flying" by Jack Gilbert presents a controversial idea about Icarus's ending through his writing about a lost relationship. He encourages the reader to focus on the good and not to look for flaws and errors that caused a particular thing to end. He engages the reader with the beautiful memories of the two couples that they had once shared together to reinforce that the glory of their love will always last and will never be forgotten. Although he's describing a broken relationship, he doesn't add any bitterness to the poem to eliminate any sense of negativity. Through the use of a real example, the poet is able to promote his message and that is, we should remember the rise of Icarus and not his fall. Icarus's accomplishments are greater than what we can see. Icarus was in prison and didn't know how it felt to be free but was able to restore his freedom and do what no one has ever done before. Icarus flew so high from wings made from feathers and wax; he triumphs end at a place nearby by the sun, this is valuable as he was able to reach a high place like the sun.