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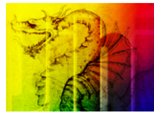

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Inner Beauty: Suffering Explained

Ovid, Bruegel, Auden, Dennett and the Fall of Icarus

by
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Inner Beauty: Suffering Explained
Ovid, Bruegel, Auden, Dennett and the Fall of Icarus

Peter B. Kussell *

This essay is an exploration of the intertextual peregrinations of the Icarus myth. My aim is to trace how the idea of human suffering was taken up in four distinct sub-fields in the history of ideas: its classical origin in Ovid's Metamorphoses*; its painterly expression and aesthetic of the Northern Renaissance in Bruegel's* Landscape with Fall of Icarus*; in W.H. Auden's poem* Musée des Beaux Arts*; and finally in Daniel Dennett's works* Consciousness Explained *and* Kinds of Minds*. As he articulates the need for an "enduring subject" for suffering to matter, Dennett's arguments are overlaid with ethical concerns. The phenomenon of "dissociation" in the presence of great pain, fear or abuse becomes a way to explain how the enduring subject can simply* leave*. How do each of the main protagonists of Bruegel's painting understand their own eventual disappearance? I conclude by setting Dennett in front of the Bruegel and asking how he will assess the chances of Icarus' survival as a work of art in the absence of a belief system provided by organized religion.*

Borrowing Gould and Vrba's concept of 'exaptation,' I trace the transformations from Ovid to Breughel to Auden and finally to Dennett's sense-making as each interpreter offers an admittedly idiosyncratic response to prior, available material. The deformations or decentering of the Icarus myth can be thought of as an example of how strong artists, poets and philosophers engaged in the transformation and the production of new works of art, poetry, and philosophy. Only by tracing this decentering process could the theme of suffering come into focus and become available as a lens—an iris—through which the act of interpretation can be understood: a form of bricolage*, a scavenging for meanings.*

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Future generations, I suppose, will wonder
why it took us so long in the twentieth century to see the centrality
of consciousness in the understanding of our very existence as
human beings. Why, for so long, did we think that consciousness did
not matter, that it was unimportant? The paradox is that consciousness
is the condition that makes it possible for anything at all to matter to
anybody. Only to conscious agents can there ever be a question of anything
mattering or having any importance at all.[1]

That is our world, and the suffering in it matters,
if anything else does.[2]

This essay emerged as a result of my stumbling over a poem entitled *Musée des Beaux Arts*[3] by W.H. Auden written in December 1938 and quoted in its entirety by Daniel C. Dennett in his own work, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, in 1995.[4] Dennett's only comment about it was a very brief single sentence, the enigmatic second epigraph, which I quote above. Only after two years did Dennett take up a discussion of suffering once again, in his *Kinds of Minds.*[5] In this later work, Dennett discusses the emergence of a sentient being, prior to consciousness, something resembling consciousness before it is conscious. He relates this moment of emergence to the human experience of suffering. For Dennett, the experience of suffering is not pain, but something which emerges out of pain, and turns away from it. And it is precisely the moment of turning away that defines suffering's and consciousness' emergence, as it flees pain, turns its back on it and ignores it. Suffering for Dennett is like thought for Descartes. It may be for him the 20th century's test that we are alive, and the world is real, beautifully real in its moments of transcendence and horrifically real in what Auden calls its 'untidy spots.' The dark side of that intuition is of

[1] John R. Searle, Daniel C. Dennett, and David John Chalmers, *The Mystery of Consciousness* (New York: New York Review Books, 1990), xiv.

[2] Dennett, Daniel C., *Darwin's Dangerous Idea. Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 518.

[3] W.H. Auden, *Collected Poems* (New York: Random House, 1940), 179.

[4] Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea.*

[5] Daniel C. Dennett, *Kinds of Minds: Towards an Understanding of Consciousness* (New York: BasicBooks 1996).

course, a tragic sense that I find in Dennett at a critical moment in his work. It is marked by his silence. The voluble and self-confident, even arrogant explainer of consciousness falls virtually silent when he faces the issue of suffering raised in Auden's poem. It is that silence that I heard, and wanted to know why all he could do was to stammer that if anything in the world mattered, suffering mattered, and perhaps that it was the only thing in the end that mattered. We find that moment exemplified in Bruegel's 'Landscape with the Fall of Icarus,'[1] and in Auden's equally strange perception that Bruegel was documenting a moment in the history of human suffering. The story of the turning away of the subject from itself, its *décalage*, the splitting in two, the peeling off and birth of consciousness exemplified by the experience of suffering is an interpretation of the painting implicit in Dennett's life-long attraction to the Auden poem. My aim is to unpack the connections and trace the lineage of an idea through its sources in Ovid and Bruegel into the Auden poem and finally through to Dennett's work. In doing so, I will be relying on and employing a critical concept in neo-Darwinist thought: exaptation.[2] The use of this concept stood as a sore point of contention between Dennett and Steven Gould, the well-known neo-Darwinist paleontologist. The specific manner in which ideas, works, stories, etc. migrate, transform, or metamorphose into some other form, how they are picked up and retransmitted I use here by applying the notion of exaptation. In a sense, I am merely "exapting" the concept of exaptation from its neo-Darwinist roots to the domains of art history, literary criticism, poetry, and philosophy, in much the same manner as a physical artifact is reused for other purposes.[3]

[1] Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, Bruxelles. Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgique. Unless otherwise noted, *Bruegel* will refer to Pieter Bruegel the Elder, the artist; *the Royal Museum painting* will refer to the copy of the Icarus hanging in the Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgique in Brussels. Finally, *the Van Buuren* refers to the painting of the Icarus in the Van Buuren Museum, also in Brussels.

[2] Stephen Jay Gould and Elisabeth S. Vrba "Exaptation—A Missing Term in the Science of Form," *Paleobiology*, 8: 1 (Winter 1982), 4-15.

[3] See Dennett's use of the term in *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 427: "We can exapt [Roger Penrose]'s artifact to our own purposes."

More to the point, the history of an idea, specifically in our instance, the story of the fall of Icarus, follows much the same trajectory as a machine originally meant to handle quarters, which is then unconsciously exapted to Guatemala and used to accept peso coins, for which it was never intended:

> The original designers of the two-bitser may have been entirely oblivious of some later use to which it was opportunistically exapted, so their intentions count for nothing. And the new selectors may also fail to formulate any specific intentions — they may just fall into the habit of relying on the two-bitser for some handy function, unaware of the act of unconscious exaptation they are jointly executing. Recall that Darwin, in Origin, already drew attention to unconscious selection of traits in domestic animals, unconscious selection of traits in artifacts is no stretch at all; it is a rather frequent event, one might suppose.[1]

The underlying principle of that theory is the following: exaptation involves the re-utilization of an idea, artifact, or genetic material, but for a purpose never before intended by the original creator. It assumes that original "intentions" of authors, creators, inventors (God…) are, if they exist at all, not relevant to an understanding of the dynamics in play. "Influence," whether conscious or unconscious, is not a useful concept, because it assumes that the artist is a passive recipient of the influence. In this sense, exaptation is a neo-Darwinian, materialist refutation of the concept of strong poets and influence found in Harold Bloom's work.[2] Bloom's influence theory carries with it an overtly hostile, destructive bent: as if the author must 'murder' the father, and 'overcome' the strong poet before he can find his or her own voice, this movement is also to be found in the text of aesthetics and Bruegel's life history and his heirs can and are covered with the crushing indebtedness of a son who is forced to be a copyist of his father's beloved works.[3] But the theory of exaptation is much

[1] Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 518.

[2] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985).

[3] In April 1998, the Kunsthistoriches Museum in Vienna held an international exhibition on this very theme, dedicated to bringing together major works of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Pieter Bruegel the Younger, his son and primary copyist, and Jan Bruegel, to examine the central question of influence in Bruegel's own family. See the 2-volume boxed set: Wilfred Seipel (ed.), *Pieter Bruegel the Elder at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna*, 1998; *BREUGHEL —BRUEGHEL. Pieter Breughel der Jüngere—Jan Brueghel der Ältere Austellungskatalog des Kunsthistorischen Museum Wien*, 1997.

simpler, and does not use the 'skyhooks'[1] of Freud and psychoanalysis. It says in a word: I couldn't care less. No emotion, no anger, no consciousness, no mind: pure mechanism.

This essay does not propose to analyze the vast differences between Dennett's and Searle's approach to a theory of consciousness. Some of this discussion has been documented in Searle's *Mystery of Consciousness*. My interest in Dennett is that, unlike other philosophers of consciousness, he does not valorize the experience of consciousness, or circumscribe his inquiry within the boundaries of a philosophy of mind. Of interest in this paper is the following issue: for most philosophers engaged in the study of consciousness such as Searle, the question of consciousness itself—its ontological status, its origin, genesis, and evolution is the central, the be-all and end-all question, and thus only these issues 'matter,'—while for Dennett, these issues are only a prelude to questions of ethics and religious belief, explored via the question of suffering, the questioning of human behavior, of final causes and meanings. Thus, while his contribution to a theory of consciousness in *Consciousness Explained*[2] had not even broached the specific issue of suffering, and while his presentation of a strictly neo-Darwinian theory of evolution in *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* ends in a silent tribute to the poetics and aesthetics of (the representation of) suffering, his next work picks up the loose end, and ends with a *theory* of suffering: a description of its etiology in the minds of abused children. It is as if consciousness is no longer the central problem, as if suffering were the origin of the ethical problem, and that, in some curious way, its origin and genesis are key to an explanation of consciousness itself—a theory that children quite literally propose! To my knowledge, no other major contributor to the study of consciousness is engaged in an exploration of the existential questions which a theory of consciousness poses and the possibility of an ethics deriving from it. Like Searle, they all stop short, content to keep the question of ontology and the 'how' of the emergence of consciousness in the center of the late twentieth century's

Alan Riding reviewed the exhibits in: "Peter Bruegel & Sons, Painters; A Rare Chance to Compare Three Members of a Flemish Dynasty." NY Times, March 31, 1998.

[1] Dennett initially defines the term *skyhook* in *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 76: "Let us understand that *skyhook* is a 'mind-first' force or power or process, an exception to the principle that all design, and apparent design, is ultimately the result of mindless, motiveless mechanicity."

[2] Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1991).

intellectual radar screen. In this sense, Dennett is engaged in a probing continuation of the humanist tradition like those pursued by Bruegel and other artists of the Northern Renaissance.

The ultimate paradox in Dennett's writing may be the following: while he proposes a theory of consciousness which situates him as the most materialist neo-Darwinian philosophers of consciousness, uncovering everyone else's lapses into non-materialist explanations ('skyhooks') of evolution and consciousness, he ends his essay on Darwin and evolutionary theory with an aesthetician's gaze at creation, standing at awe at its external beauty:

> The Tree of Life is neither perfect nor infinite in space or time, but it is actual, and if it is not Anselm's 'Being greater than anything any of us can be conceived,' it is surely a being that is greater than any of us will ever conceive of in detail worthy of its detail. Is something sacred? Yes, say I with Nietzsche. I could not pray to it, but I can stand in affirmation of its magnificence. This world is sacred.[1]

That is the place I wished to engage him,[2] pulling him back into a meditation on inner beauty.[3]

[1] Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea,* 520.

[2] Alas, this essay's publication comes only a few months after the death of Daniel Dennett on April 19, 2024. He had in his possession a very early draft, and I wish to dedicate it to his memory.

[3] A word on the title: 'Suffering Explained' is, for any Dennett reader self-explanatory: a tongue-in-cheek exaptation of his own playful, hubristic title: *Consciousness Explained.* 'Inner Beauty' however, is not so clear: the title is also the name of a hot sauce once manufactured and distributed by the East Coast Grill in Cambridge, MA. When I asked about the origin of the name, Chris Schlesinger, the owner, told me curious story along the following lines: Inner Beauty is actually a painkiller, but one in which the physical pain the sauce produces in the mouth is thought to match and cancel out other internal pain a person may be experiencing. It grants the person a way to "get ahead of the wave of pain he is experiencing." Self-induced pain acting as a painkiller. Thus its 'beauty' is an inner experience, an effect and, paradoxically, a by-product of the pain it induces and counteracts. Was it like the effect loud music has on distracting the mind from the physical pain of dental work, or was it like white noise earphones used by pilots that cancel out the external noise in airplanes, perfectly mirroring sound waves' modulation and thus cancelling out their effect? I didn't ask. The name attracts me because pain is experienced as something aesthetically pleasing. Pain as a source of both aesthetic and physical pleasure. Pain as a (temporary) relief from suffering.

Figure 1. *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, by or after Pieter Bruegel the Elder (Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Bruxelles, `https://artsandculture.google.com/story/ewUxXpmuNdcLJg`).

Figure 2. Woodcut illustration by Georg Wickram (*P. Ouidij Nasonis deß aller sinnreichsten Poeten Metamorphosis*, Mainz, Ivo Schöffer 1545, f. y2r). Two phases of the action portrayed in a single illustration: Daedalus watching as Icarus falls from the sky (top central); and Daedalus stuffing Icarus' body parts in a bin to be buried in a grave he will dig (central foreground and shovel on left).

1. Ovid's Metamorphosis: Daedalus and Icarus

Daedalus, tired of Crete and his long exile, felt nostalgic for the land of his birth. But the sea prevented him from reaching it. "Minos can, he said, forbid me the earth and the water, but the sky remains free to me. It is by the sky that we will travel." When everything belongs to Minos, the sky is not his. On the spot he begins inventing a previously unknown technique: from nature he begins demanding something new.

Here is what he invents: He takes feathers, lays them out in increasing order of size, from the shortest to the longest, forming a graded slope (this is how the unequal pipes of Pan's flute were arranged). Then he attaches these feathers, at the middle, with thread, fixing them at the base with wax, and curves the entire assembly so that it imitates the real wings of birds. His son Icarus was near him. Without realizing that he was preparing his own doom, all smiles, he enjoys holding the feathers blowing in the wind, or else softening the yellow wax with his fingers—which is to say that, in playing, he delayed the admirable work of his father.

Finally, when the inventor had put the last touches on his work, he tries out the balance of his body on his two wings, and balances himself leaning into the air. To his son he gives these instructions: "Take note, Icarus, to keep yourself at mid-height; if you descend too low, the humidity will weigh down your wings; if you rise too high, the heat will burn them. Fly between the two. And try not to look at the Bull, nor at the Helix, nor at the naked sword of Orion. I lead, follow my route."

Then he teaches him how to fly, with these artificial wings which he (the father) has attached to his (the son's) shoulders. While the old man showers upon him his attention and advice, his cheeks become damp with his tears, his fatherly hands tremble. He kisses his son (this will be for the last time), unfurls his wings and sets sail in front. Worried, like the bird who, from the top of the nest, guides his young chickling in the air, he encourages him to follow him, he teaches him the dangerous exercise. While beating his wings, he has his eyes fixed on the wings of his son.

A fisherman who is loading fish at the end of his bark, a shepherd leaning on his staff, a laborer at the helm of his plow see them both pass overhead. Stupefied, they take them for gods, these men capable of holding the air. Already, on their left, Samos has flown by, dear to Juno; they have passed Delos and Paros; on their right was Lebinthos and Calymnia, known for its honey, when the child, having fun with the audacious nature of flight, abandons his guide. Ceding to the attraction of the sky, he rises. It is there that at the approach of the hot sun, the odorous wax which held together the feathers begins to soften. It melts. Icarus flaps his naked arms: bereft of wings, he can no longer support himself in space. He calls out to his father, he drowns in the blue

> waves, which are since then named the Icarien sea. And his unfortunate father—a father who is no longer—cries out: "Icarus, Icarus, where are you Icarus? Where shall I find you?" "Icarus", he cries out again, when he sees the feathers on the waters. Then he curses his invention, he buries the body of his son in a tomb, and the banks of this place have kept the name of he who is buried there.[1]

Let us for the moment hold in abeyance the continuation of Ovid's story as well as Derrida's prodigious and productive misreading of that story as emblematic of all stories, and perhaps just as emblematic of all misreadings. For its continuation in the Partridge story (see below) is the part which is never remembered by popular memory. Daedalus' absence has become Icarus' curse: he seems to be left alone to interpretations of hubris and overreaching, when Ovid was careful to lay all the blame and pathos at the feet of the father, his misdeeds, treachery, jealousy, and murderous intentions. Icarus' suffering is explicitly and unforgivingly the act of Daedalus in every way, and not only in his abandonment of his son to his own devices. The historical repression is total: the sins of the father are visited upon the son, Icarus, and then those sins are forgotten by the commentators, painters, artists, all searching for the failure and culpability in the son's behavior, all teaching young generations about the sins of over-reaching and passion, along with the virtues of middleness, balance and the golden mean. History omits the sins of Daedalus, never reads Ovid, or only reads the part it wants to read. It forgets Daedalus is a murderer, and his son's death is a direct punishment for his murder. His murdered victim is the partridge, who is permitted to witness Icarus' literal execution, and crow his joy at the cruelest retribution the gods could have visited on Daedalus. Icarus is the purest of spirits, the most guileless of sons, the innocent sent to the slaughter because the gods knew he was the most precious creation of Daedalus, the inventor.

Why is the story perverted and transformed into a morality play about Icarus' over-reaching? Why do we blame the victim instead of the guilty party, the son instead of the father? Why do we feel more comfortable in finding passion guilty? Why is it easier to misinterpret childlike playfulness and curiosity as overreaching hubris than to accuse Daedalus of the hubris and his intolerance of a child's genius? Why is the jealousy and competitiveness that led Daedalus

[1] Ovid, *The Metamorphoses,* Book VIII, 209-235: "Daedalus and Icarus".

to attempt to kill Perdix, his much more talented apprentice and inheritor, blotted out of our collective memory? Why does Daedalus deserve a place of honor at all in the pantheon of history, and Icarus the innocent son, become remembered as a transgressor of boundaries and conventional limits? Why do we forget that it was Daedalus who set out to outwit Minos, that it was the father who transgressed the boundaries of his own imprisonment, using rationalizations which only a Talmudic mind could appreciate? Why is Daedalus the icon of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, of academia in general, and not Icarus? Why do we first forget that Daedalus alone created the inevitable conditions of his own son's death, and then pity the father who has to pick up the pieces? I am not proposing some 'return to Ovid' or return to the classical sources of myth to explain these lapses of understanding. One need do no more than read literally what is written there to understand how Icarus is simply a pawn, a sacrificial object in a larger story of Athena's revenge for Daedalus' murder. The real metamorphosis of the Icarus story is not set out in order to glorify Daedalus' inventive principle of *imitatio naturae*: how wings and feathers can cleverly imitate the motions of a bird. It is about the transformation of another boy, Daedalus' nephew, into a bird, Perdix, falling off the Parthenon. Daedalus has pushed him to his death out of jealousy of Perdix's native genius for invention. That boy is 'saved' by his protector, Athena, who catches him in a bed of feathers and transforms him into a partridge, the first of its species. Thus it is also a teleological narrative, seeking to explain the origins of the partridge, and its fear of heights. It is as if the god Athena was repeating the words of Yahweh to Abraham regarding the sacrifice of Isaac: 'Take your son, your only son, your loved one, Icarus, and I will show you well what to expect if your wisdom is not tempered with humility.' The role of specular contact (Daedalus' eyes in constant contact with his son as they began the journey) and blindness (Icarus, Icarus, where are you?); the sudden shift from complete intimacy to complete loss in the blink of an eye: both are Ovid's poetic heightening of the tragic loss of innocence.

As we shall see, Bruegel never overlooked, forgot or was ignorant of Daedalus' part in the myth. By a stroke of genius, he eliminated him from view in this masterpiece *Landscape with Fall of Icarus* at the Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts (Figure 1), while an earlier, signed version of the Icarus includes Daedalus in

the Musée Van Buuren painting.[1] Daedalus and son are also prominent together in flight in engravings and woodcuts by Bruegel and his contemporaries.[2] But it is this oil painting at the Musées Royaux and not the Van Buuren copy, nor the sketches, engravings or woodcuts that Auden would have seen and to which he is referring in his poem written contemporaneous to his visit to Brussels in December, 1938. If Ovid's account of Daedalus and Icarus were the only classical source for the story of the fall of Icarus, and if we could be sure that he had readers such as Pieter Bruegel the Elder, W.H. Auden and Daniel C. Dennett, I would most likely have quite a different story to tell. As this essay will unfold, each of these names is more than a subsequent reader of the story: each could be more aptly described in Darwinian terms as a very eager 'exapter:' someone who is not above plundering raw material, and in this first instance, plundering a story that became available to Ovid and which he transformed into Latin verses. Each has perceived and transformed the story for his own purposes in order to produce another cultural artifact. None was perhaps as familiar with the actual story, here in English translation, than you or I are now, since you have just read it. There is no documented evidence that any one of these authors, except for Bruegel perhaps, ever read the original Ovid in Latin,[3] although

[1] Karl Kilinski II discusses at length the versions of the Icarus in the Royal Museum painting as well as at the Musée Van Buuren, and cites other instances of the fall of Icarus both with and without Daedalus in Northern Renaissance art. See his "Bruegel on Icarus: Inversions of the Fall", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 67 (2004), 93-94.

[2] See Figures 2-4 for examples.

[3] Kilinski, "Bruegel on Icarus", 91-92, states "Bruegel's education and background are uncertain, but he presumably could read and write Latin, which often served as captions for his prints, and the sophistication of his patrons would seem to reflect on the intellectual caliber of the artist." He then asserts that "[i]n the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts painting in Brussels Bruegel clearly demonstrates his familiarity with Ovid." Of the more recent commentators on Bruegel's Icarus painting, Kilinski describes how Bruegel's work subverts a literal reading of the Ovid story: "Although Bruegel adheres to Ovid's inclusion of the three menial characters, his treatment of them in regard to Icarus is radically different from that of the poet. (...) Furthermore, what was utterly peripheral for Ovid has been recast as prominent by Bruegel, whose would be 'spectators' dominate the scene, while the young flyer splashes into the sea in an obscure corner of the painting." Kilinski's comes closest to interpreting Bruegel's work as a virtual exaptation of the Ovid story: "Demonstrably an artist of purpose with a vigorously imaginative spirit, Bruegel adheres to the well-known Ovidian lines but with a twist, precisely to underscore *his creative metamorphosis of the myth in remodeling it to his own design* [my emphasis]. In this magnificent painting, all of the Ovidian elements are present save Daedalus" (Kilinski "Bruegel on Icarus", 93).

we do know that it would be source material readily available to Bruegel in the original.[1] In Auden's English traditional and exclusive public-school education, Latin was a standard requirement, so perhaps Auden too would have read it. (Ovid is relatively easy Latin, even for a first-year student.) As for Dennett, his classical background is unknown, and there is no reason to expect that either Auden or Dennett would have had any interest in or need to consult the source material in Ovid. One cannot even assume that, if asked, they would probably know the story's origin. Perhaps we would give Auden, the poet, the benefit of the doubt. Without a classical education, Dennett could be excused from such familiarity with primary classical sources. However, their lasting impressions of the story would be charitably characterized as a mixture of what they knew from their culture (hearsay) and what they might have learned from secondary sources, such as children's story books, other paintings, sketches and drawings. Perhaps Bruegel would have the closest contact with the source material, but even that supposition is just that: a hunch, an assumption. While there is a fairly well-established chronology, there is very little known directly known about Bruegel's life.[2] Bruegel documenters seem instead apt to rely on the general characteristics of Bruegel's interpretative community of fellow travelers.

So let us turn to the story's source in English translation[3] and begin with some general observations. I would hope that the remarks I am about to make are self-evident, since I have tried to keep to a fairly literal reading of the text. I hope that I am merely underscoring points and observations which I believe any educated person could make or accept from a careful reading of Ovid's text.

[1] Phillipe Roberts-Jones notes the popularity of several printings of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* starting in the mid-15th century in his *Breughel: la chute d'Icare* (Fribourg: Office du Livre, 1974). For source material of printed editions of the *Metamorphoses,* see Grundy Steiner "Source-Editions of Ovid's Metamorphoses (1471-1500)," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 82 (1951): 219-231, `https://www.jstor.org/stable/283435`.

[2] Bruegel's biography on the Flemish Art Collection website states: "Despite his fame as an artist, we know precious little about the man himself. A great deal of factual information is lacking for us, such as his precise year of birth, place of birth, information about his education and his residence until 1563. Did he have substantial means and what was his place in society? How was he established in life? These are essential questions that remain unanswered." `https://bruegel.vlaamsekunstcollectie.be/en/biography/biography`. Last accessed 3-25-2024.

[3] Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, Book VIII, "Daedalus and Icarus", Loeb Classical Library.

Figure 3. Frans Huys and Theodoor Galle, after Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Man-of-War with the Fall of Icarus*, about 1560 (Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, `https://collections.discovernewfields.org/art/artwork/28439`). A naval warship courses through choppy coastal waters, while Daedalus flies below Icarus. Icarus without wings, is no longer able to fly, and falls to earth.

Figure 4. Joris Hoefnagel or Simon Novellanus, after Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *River Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, c. 1595 (National Gallery of Art, Rosenwald Collection, `https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.47622.html`). "Though dwarfed in the panorama, Icarus can be seen tumbling through the sky in front of and somewhat below Daedalus who glides along on his steady course" (Kilinski, 92). The Latin inscription *Inter utrumque vola, medio tutissimus ibis* ('Fly between the two; in the middle you will go most safely') combine two hemistichs from Ovid (*Metam.* II, 137; VIII, 206). See further discussion in Kilinski, 95-96.

First, it is a matter of Daedalus, not Icarus. Then it is a matter of what one can take, what is free and what is forbidden, thus not available for the taking. There is also the matter of escaping from a prison, and the method of escape, which illustrates both Daedalus' imaginative genius and that genius' undoing. In essence, Daedalus is stuck in Crete, and decides to enact a prison breakout from Minos' confinement. This is the first transgression of which we are aware, but not the only one, as we will later see. In the matter of Daedalus and Icarus, it is also a question of the father and the relationship to his son. Finally, it is a question of a man who is known as an inventor, someone with enormous resources of imagination and craft the patron saint of technology. "While everything belongs to Minos, the sky is not his." So in the narrow, legalistic sense, using the sky as a medium of transportation would neither be a theft nor a trespass, as sailing through his territorial waters would require the approval of Minos. The first perception is that air rights to property do not yet exist. However, it is also quite clear from the trickster tone of hubris, that Daedalus walks a fine line between what is forbidden and what is permitted: "Minos can, he said, forbid me the earth and the water, but the sky remains free to me. On the spot he begins inventing a previously unknown technique." Metamorphosis comes in two moments: the first is a perception of new knowledge; the second moment is the use that knowledge is put when it is transformed into a machine. Yet its telling feels as if this is a ruse in which his consummate skills as a trickster/inventor are brought into play. On the spot, and instantly, Daedalus creates his escape plan: not *ex nihilis*, but in relation to nature from which he "demands something new." Like Leonardo after Daedalus, it is through observation that the inventor finds his inspiration, which relies on an imitation of nature for his source material and inspiration. Invention by way of *imitatio naturae*, in the way Daedalus uses bird feathers, is an application of a tool by humans for a purpose it was not originally intended. A man is metamorphosed into a bird: a first exaptation.[1]

[1] Gould and many other evolutionary biologists use feathers as a specific example of an exaptation.

If we inspect the relationship between Daedalus and Icarus in the story, it is clear that initially, Icarus at pre-flight moment "was near him." Icarus doesn't speak; he follows; he plays. His function is to interrupt his father's work but also the flow of the story, to play as a child plays, and to use play as a delaying technique twice in the story: first, to delay "the admirable work of his father" and then to delay his own death. The father is the teacher, the mentor or coach; Icarus is the apprentice. The father is the leader, the initiator; the son follows and trusts. His father's invention turns into both a vehicle of freedom and of death.

Then, once the invention of the wings is completed and two sets are created, the father teaches the son how to fly. He counsels him on positioning: where to fly, to stay in the mid-height, not too high and not too low: "Fly between the two." Daedalus further counsels him to follow, come after, not to deviate or stray from or invent his own course: "I lead, follow my route." Icarus gets a complete flying/driving lesson as one modern father today might offer his son. Danger lurks, but freedom beckons. Best give counsel, and give love, for it is a passion of old for the young, a concern and love that equals any sublime passion we can find in literature: "While the old man showers upon him his attention and advice, his cheeks become damp with his tears, his fatherly hands tremble. He kisses his son (this will be for the last time)." He is in complete contact with his son, as an adult bird would teach a young chickling, his eyes fixed on his wings, guiding, coaching, encouraging. A complete driving lesson, but one given without suspense. Ovid assumes his readers already know the story and its tragic conclusion. The reader is explicitly told of the fact that this will be the last time Daedalus embraces his son. Daedalus' sentiments for his son are expressed free of the knowledge of his impending doom. Only the reader is explicitly given that knowledge.

The driving lesson turns tragic when the son departs from the flight plan. But the origin, direction, and passion motivating the entire escapade in the first place were the father's idea, not the son's. It is Daedalus' desire being served,

See for example "Adaptations, Exaptations and Spandrels" by David M. Buss, Martie Haselton, Todd K. Shackelford, April L. Bleske and Jerome C. Wakefield (*American Psychologist*, May 1998, 539ff). The survey lays out and critiques Gould and Vrba's original 1982 and subsequent uses of the term which conflate the original, historical origins of a mechanism with its current utility.

not Icarus'. Icarus' desire is to play, not to escape. There is absolutely no hubris, no overreaching, no words from Icarus signaling any wish to transgress the instructions or limits of the father. Neither is there any sign of an avenging god actively pursuing Icarus' destruction. It was an accident, not to be blamed on the son, for sure. But hardly to be blamed on the Sun, which never actively attracts Icarus to his destruction, siren-like. Only as a result of a natural effect of heating wax does tragedy precipitate. So for Icarus, it is a matter of play, and enjoying a dangerous sport, based on a rushed flying lesson and a man with a plan: a father too intent on getting to where he wanted to go. Icarus is using wings not as a mode of transportation, but as an instrument for flight and pleasure for its own sake. Then too, Icarus uses his wings for a purpose for which they were never intended: they were not designed for a superheated environment, and not for play. Perhaps Icarus is showing his own inventive powers in his ability to take any invention of the father and turn it into play, a delaying of his own death, as well as its cause. For Icarus' play both delays death as well as causes it. It delays the narrative and ignores the pressure to escape from exile and attain freedom. But playing is also the continuation of the father: his metamorphosis when work is transmuted into play. Wings for travel, for moving horizontally from point A to point B, are transformed into wings for pleasure, for exploration of a vertical space: "Ceding to the attraction of the sky, he rises." As the sky becomes aesthetic object of contemplation, no longer a transparent medium through which one uses to get from one place to another, Icarus loses himself in that space. And then we meet again with a third testimonial of passion of Daedalus for his son, as he turns towards his son, his eyes always as if riveted on his son's wings, following his traversal of space. In the next moment, Icarus is gone, and the father cries out in a style that is indicative of deep loss, such as Saul's loss of Absalom, and later, Juliet's search for Romeo: "Icarus, Icarus, where are you? Where shall I find you, Icarus?"[1] And then, once finding him, rescues his body and buries him solemnly in a tomb and with a name: *Yad vaShem*: the place and the name as a memorial.

So, if we look at the bare, literal reading of the text, the suffering is all in the father, not the son; the son even in death as in each moment of the life traced

[1] "At pater infelix, nec jam pater: "Icare, dixit, Icare, dixit, ubi es? Qua te regione requiram? Icare!" Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* Loeb Classical Library, 422-3.

here is carefully accompanied, instructed, doted over, in an intimate relationship, at the moment of death and certainly afterwards. It is the father's tears, his fears and desire described, while Ovid is literally silent about Icarus' state of mind.

While Icarus' story may be over, details of Daedalus' past are revealed and explored in the next story of the *Metamorphoses*: the story of the partridge. Let's turn next to this important continuation in Book VIII of the *Metamorphoses*.

2. Ovid's Partridge

As Daedalus was burying the body of his unfortunate son in a tomb, the garrulous partridge watched him from the bottom of a muddy ravine. She applauded by batting her wings and showed her joy by her songs; she was at that time the unique bird of her species; no one had seen any similar bird in the preceding years. Recently dressed up in this form, she must have been for you, Daedalus, a perpetual reproach. In fact, ignoring the decisions of destiny, Daedalus' sister had confided to Daedalus the instruction of her son, a child who had celebrated his twelfth birthday, and who was well suited to benefit from the lessons of a master. It was this same boy who, having noticed the backbone of a fish, and having used it as a model, fashioned in iron cutting teeth, and thus invented the saw. He also invented the compass: the first to unite two arms of iron so that, always separated by the same distance, one remained fixed, while the other traced out a circle (a compass). Jealous of him, Daedalus threw him off of the top of the Acropolis, citadel of Minerva, then started spreading a false rumor about an accidental fall. But Pallas Athena, protectress of the ingenius, caught him in her arms. She transformed him into a bird, and, while he was in freefall, covered him with feathers. His spirited vigor once so prompt passed into his wings and feet. He kept his old name. However, this bird never rises very high, he doesn't make his nest on branches or high treetops. It stays close to the ground and lays its eggs under hedges. Remembering its first fall, it fears heights.[1]

[1] Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, Book VIII, 236-261.

First, we note the striking similarity of character and genius between the two. Daedalus' nephew is the perfect example of a child prodigy, brought as an apprentice to Daedalus by his sister. Yet the nephew's too close identity with Daedalus' inventive genius—and the jealousy and rivalry that that identity engenders—end in Daedalus' attempted murder of his nephew. At the last moment, as the nephew is falling to his death, he is saved by the goddess Athena, who uses partridge feathers to cushion his fall and save his life. It is for this crime that Daedalus is banned to Crete by Minos. Ovid forces us to deal with the partridge's story retrospectively. We learn from Ovid only after the fact that Icarus' death is both repetition and retribution: that his fall to his death is at the hands of his own father, who invents the very instruments of his own undoing, and that Icarus' death is symbolic payback for the attempt on his own nephew's life.

The strange metamorphosis of the Icarus story in popular imagination which I find perplexing is that Daedalus is usually obliterated from the story: he hardly survives. Daedalus is, of course, absent from the Royal Museum painting. Even as we can agree with Kilinski that, in the smaller, practically identical treatment of the *Landscape* in the Van Buuren painting "Daedalus appears in his iconographically traditional pose at the top of the panel,"[1] he also appears in some of Bruegel's engravings and sketches and as well as in those of his contemporaries.[2] Icarus comes to symbolize everything he is not in Ovid's tale: he takes on all the unbridled hubris of the father as the father disappears from the scene. If we examine Ovid's stories, Icarus' death is retribution exacted on the father, not the son. Icarus is merely the most precious possession Daedalus can lose; he himself is an innocent pawn in the drama. How is it that Daedalus' unbridled hubris, his willful and reckless breaking of taboos and limits, his self-satisfied complacency and trust in his own genius to rescue him – all these characteristics of passionate over-reaching, none of which derive from Icarus himself, are as if transferred to the son while the father is literally obliterated from the

[1] Kilinski, "Bruegel on Icarus", 93.

[2] See Kilinski's lengthy discussion of the two paintings as well as the treatment of the Icarus theme without Daedalus by other contemporaries of Bruegel: Holbein, 1536, 1542; Hogenberg, 1559; Bol, 1573; Amman, 1570s. A key take away is that "the fall of Icarus does appear elsewhere without Daedalus in Northern Renaissance art and need not be considered a complete anomaly for the period." Kilinski, "Bruegel on Icarus", 93.

scene and from popular memory?[1] Only the partridge remains in Royal Museum painting to remind us of Daedalus, the father's transgression: its presence offers the viewer Ovid's classical moral meaning to the scene as retribution. But Bruegel's scene of Icarus' fall has other actors and other meanings, and at least one figure, literally obliterated by a late palimpsest. It is to the Royal Museum masterpiece we will now turn and inspect more closely.

3. Bruegel's Interpreters

The absence of any written documents in Bruegel's hand,[2] and the complete lack of testimony from his contemporaries about his life, preoccupations, etc. lead scholars wishing to understand Bruegel's work to adopt one among a number of possible strategies: 1) a study of the iconographic, aesthetic and technical aspects of the work itself (e.g. Roberts-Jones, Dominique Allart and Christina Currie); 2) a study of social, cultural and historical material from the time and place in which Bruegel lived, attempting to understand the work by a kind of triangulation from secondary sources (see Sullivan, below); 3) a type of historical fiction, which seeks to get into Bruegel's head, by imaginative identification with the objective facts and historical information available about his life and work. I will only touch on the first two of these approaches through the contributions of Sullivan and Roberts-Jones.

[1] Upon reading Russell Bank's masterpiece, *Cloudsplitter: a novel* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 55, I found this description of Icarus, representative of a characteristic mistake which seems to have permanently passed into the popular imagination, and from which Icarus has never been able to shake free: "I was like the boy Icarus, who flew too near the sun on unnatural wings and was hurled back to earth as punishment for his pride and vanity." It is of course Daedalus' pride and vanity which are the issue of the story, and it is Daedalus who is being punished.

[2] Phillipe and Françoise Roberts-Jones comment on the absence of the written record: "Bruegel ne s'est livré que par ses images" in his *Breughel: la chute d'Icare* (Fribourg: Office du Livre, 1974), 32. Müller and Schauerte open their study of Bruegel's life by noting: "Sources elucidating the personal convictions of sixteenth-century artists crop up very rarely. This applies to Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Neither the letters written in his own hand, nor a last will and testament, nor personal documents of any kind inform us of his world view or religious faith. Nor do we know what languages he could speak and what books were therefore available to him." *Bruegel,* Jurgen Müller and Thomas Schauerte, translated by Abigail Prohaska, *Pieter Bruegel: The Complete Paintings* (Cologne: Taschen, 2020), 8.

Sullivan's *Bruegel's Peasants*,[1] offers a study of two of Bruegel's large-scale portraits of peasant life: *Peasant Wedding* and *Peasant Dance*. Its methodological anchoring in reception theory provides us as good a case study as any to measure what, if anything, reception theory can bring to the understanding of a work of art, and more particularly to a study of the Icarus painting.[2] Its potential importance to the Icarus is three-fold: first, in terms of subject matter, its presentation of two detailed and differing views of peasant life reverberates closely with the subject matter of the Icarus. Second, its adoption of mainstream reception theory content as her specific approach to their interpretation has broad bearing on what such an approach might contribute to a study of the Icarus. And third, the historical background of the milieu and the details of Bruegel's intended audience would not have changed in one iota had she been focused on any other painting, sketch or drawing of Bruegel.

These insights into Bruegel's contemporaries and intended audience have general bearing no matter which of Bruegel's might be our subject of interest. Indeed, one could argue her insights are completely independent of the specifics of any painting. Sullivan could arguably have accomplished the audience analysis aspects of her study without specific reference to any of Bruegel's paintings. What is sorely lacking in abundance, as she admits, are detailed discussions by Bruegel's contemporaries of any of his paintings. General comments about Bruegel abound, but it is rare indeed to find any particular comment about a particular painting of the master. So she is forced to delve into research into his contemporaries' views of peasant life, their grounding in classical works of literature and art, and their adoption of similar subject-matter in their own artistic expression. It is a work of triangulation, indirectness, and inference which, in the end she is forced to admit, can only result in broad generalizations, most particularly that the two works, *Peasant Wedding* and *Peasant Dance,* were viewed by Bruegel's contemporaries as satire. The inherent ambiguities of the satirical genre, she claims, gave rise to the diametrically opposed readings of these paintings by later critics:

[1] Margaret A. Sullivan, *Bruegel's Peasants: Art and Audience in the Northern Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994).

[2] From here on I will use 'the Icarus' to refer to Breugel's '*Landscape with the Fall of Icarus'* canvas at the Royal Museum of Belgium.

The confusion surrounding Bruegel's genre explains, in large part, why there are diametrically opposed interpretations of his peasant paintings, and why, in a debate such as that between Alpers and Miedema, there is truth in both positions. The genre of satire encompasses the moralizing and the amusing, the 'jest' as well as 'earnest.' There is no dissonance when both are central to the satirist's mandate.[1]

Sullivan provides us a synopsis of the methodological assumptions of reception theory in a footnote to her conclusions:

The work may remain a stable entity but if the perception of it changes there can be no correct, determinate meaning. The determinate, objective meaning is usually "identified with the artist's intention;" the indeterminate and subjective meaning is "totally a product of the mind of the individual viewer." Bryson makes the argument that the "viewer is an interpreter and since interpretation changes as the world changes, art history cannot lay claim to final or absolute knowledge of its object."[2]

By adopting reception theory's partial rejection of absolutist positions, she concludes her study that there is "a spectrum of possibilities" of how the paintings were interpreted or thought about, and she does not restrict this thinking to satire alone:

The paintings cannot be seen solely as "a satire of the peasant class." Peasant excesses are criticized, but social class is not the most important issue; rather it is the use of leisure time… Most important, we cannot conclude that these paintings functioned in only one way—as social satire, for example, rather than moral allegory. If they had a single function, it was to fulfill the role of poetry and give "pleasure and profit" to the audience. That function, depending as it does on the interests of the audience and the visual potential of the paintings, can subsume, and include, all the others.[3]

Seeing a painting available or "open" to a spectrum of interpretative possibilities or uses by its audience leads directly to a more direct and sustained

[1] Sullivan, *Bruegel's Peasants*, 128. The reference is to a discussion begun in Svetlana Alpers' "Bruegel's Festive Peasants", *Simiolus* 6 (304): 163-76 (1972-3) and in Hessel Miedema's "Realism and Comic Mode: The Peasant", *Simiolus* 9 (4): 219 (1977).

[2] Sullivan, *Bruegel's Peasants*, 178. The quotations come from Robert C., Holub, *Reception Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010), 101; Norman Bryson, Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1983), xiv.

[3] Sullivan, *Bruegel's Peasants*, 132.

discussion of the notion of the "openness" of a work of art, and Eco's study of aesthetics in his *The Open Work*.[1] Sullivan's immersion in reception theory produces a multiple but definitely *codifiable* inventory of possible interpretations and reactions to Bruegel's work: their general functioning as satire and as poetry versus moral allegory puts definite interpretative boundaries around them while permitting wide latitude for private experience. In a sense, Sullivan's real contribution is in understanding the work of art as a measure of social expectations of an interpretive community at a particular moment in history. It says more about the society and perhaps very little about Bruegel's work. The ability to extrapolate and triangulate from secondary source materials still ends up with one or two possible solutions to what the work *meant* in the broadest possible terms. It has very little explanatory power or much to say about what it meant in terms of an aesthetic experience for Bruegel's contemporaries, however it might protest that that is precisely what it is doing. It simply fails to deliver very much about Bruegel's intentions in return for all the effort.

4. Death's Head: The Hand of the Palimpsest

Roberts-Jones' sustained work on the Icarus[2] is one of the most detailed and thoroughgoing inspection of the canvas, amid its historical, cultural origins and significance in art history and literary thought. It is noteworthy to our discussion because he eschews critical apparatus and relies on first-hand observations and knowledge of the history of the painting, its relationship to Bruegel's oeuvre and to that of his contemporaries. Both Philippe and Françoise Roberts-Jones collaborated on several other important studies of Bruegel's oeuvre. In the 1974 earlier work, they note that, since 1455, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was in constant republication, and that the Daedalus/Icarus story was a popular theme in sketches at the time. He is careful to point out, however, Bruegel's departure

[1] Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989).

[2] Roberts-Jones, *Breughel*, 1974. See also: *Pieter Bruegel*, Philippe et Françoise Roberts-Jones (Paris: Flammarion, 1997); subsequently republished in translation in 2002 by Harry N. Abrams Inc., New York. Finally see Jürgen Miller and Thomas Schauerte's *Pieter Bruegel: The Complete Paintings,* (Cologne: Taschen, 2020), published on the 450th anniversary of Breughel's death. It commemorates the first ever comprehensive exhibition of his work at the Kunsthistorische Museum in Vienna.

from current illustrations, and even from his own earlier sketches of the theme (See Appendix Figs. 2, 3.) Bruegel rejected the popular approach that sought to recreate a "precise, narrative illustration of the poet's story." Roberts-Jones describes Bruegel's exaptation of Ovid as a "redistribution of the values of the tale":

Bruegel ne retient de l'episode de la chute que le drame consommé: Icare ne tombe pas; il est tombé. Les spectateurs, eux, sont mis en évidence, non plus badauds ou comparses, mais attelés à leurs tâches, ancrés dans leurs occupations. Cette redistribution des valeurs de l'anecdote renforce le mystère de l'oeuvre.[1]

Later on, Roberts-Jones remarks surprise at both the absence of Daedalus as well as the placement of the sun—on the horizon instead of at its zenith. Concluding an extremely detailed descriptive inventory of the painting, he considers the painting as the achievement of a pure balance between, on the one hand, thematic elements of optimism—the permanence of nature and relation of man to his destiny—and, on the other hand, pessimism—that any effort is vain, the world will be overturned, man's work undone, and human folly reigns.

Since 1974, however, a scientific study of the canvas at the Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts has uncovered further evidence of the original state of the painting. The *Landscape with Fall of Icarus* on view in the Bruegel room has one area which radiographic analysis reveals has been painted over well after Bruegel's death. One might have suspected that it was the area of the sky to the top left where Daedalus is portrayed in the Van Buuren Museum copy of the Icarus painting.[2] However, the adjustment is actually an area in the dark bushes to the far left, where the head of a dead man appears, emerging from the shadows in a brilliant shade of white.

This addition to the painting is, however, a palimpsestic adjustment, since it not only adds a new and foreign element to the painting, but also covers over an earlier figure which Roberts-Jones explains by reference to Allart's 1996 infrared reflectographic study in their 2006 article:

Ainsi trouve-t-on, par réflectographie infrarouge à la place du mort dans le fourré face

[1] Roberts-Jones, *Bruegel*, 1974, 20.

[2] *The Fall of Icarus*, after Pieter Bruegel the Elder. End of 16h century, oil on wood, Museum of David and Alice Van Buuren, Brussels, Belgium.

à la charrue—qui ne fut jamais expliquée avec pertinence—l'image d'un homme accroupi assouvissant un besoin naturel. ("Thus infrared imaging reveals at the place of the dead man in the thicket facing the plow—a detail which was never been explained adequately—the image of a crouching man defecating.")[1]

Allart and Currie's 2012 radiographic study revealed a miniature portrait of a bent over or crouched figure, which they conclude is the image of "un personnage déculotté, occupé à satisfaire ses besoins." (a man with his pants down, busy defecating.)[2] This seemingly minor, marginal adjustment amounts to an attempt to force a certain interpretation and "resolution" of the painting as a whole. Many commentators, including Roberts-Jones, citing Ch. de Tolnay,[3] have generally explained the dead man's head in the Royal Museum painting as a reference to the Flemish saying: "Work waits for no man's death." While Bruegel did actually do a series of illustrations of folk sayings and proverbs — and we find the proverb literally written in at the bottom of several of these — the *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* was not one of them. However, this obliteration of Bruegel's figure of a man in a crouched, bent-over position, and its replacement with the head of a dead man permits a visually harmonious thematic balance of center and extremes, between the central figure of the ploughman and the peripheral figure of Icarus on the right and the dead man on the left. Both are virtually identical visual synecdoches for their respective stories: legs of Icarus and head of dead man: partial objects of death. The "completion"

[1] Roberts-Jones, Phillippe, Reisse, Jacques, Roberts-Jones-Popelier Françoise. "Bruegel inventit. La Chute d'Icare: mise au point et controverse." Bulletin de la classe des Beaux Arts, tome 17, no 1-6, 2006, 183. The reference is to Dominique Allart's infrared reflectographic study of the Royal Museum's Icarus painting: *La Chute d'Icare des Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique à Bruxelles* (Université de Liège: Mélanges Pierre Colman, 1996, 15), 104-107. See also Dominique Allart and Christina Currie, "Trompeuses séductions. La Chute d'Icare des Musées royaux de Beaux-Arts de Belgique" *CeROArt HS* 2013, 29. It should be pointed out that Françoise and Philippe Roberts-Jones' *La chute d'Icare* was published in 1974, long before Allart's and Currie's radiographic infrared studies of the Icarus and their discovery of a crouched man underneath the dead man's head.

[2] Dominique Allart, and Christina Currie, "Trompeuses Séductions, La Chute d'Icare des Musées royaux de Beaux-Arts de Belgique" (*CeROArt HS*, 2013), 29. Christina Currie, and Dominique Allart, *The Brueg(H)el Phenomenon. Paintings by Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Pieter Brueghel the Younger with a Special Focus on Technique and Copying Practice* (Brussels: Scientia Artis. Institut royal du patrimoine artistique, 2012), 844-878.

[3] Cf. Roberts-Jones "Bruegel inventit.", 183, note 4.

or minor "correction" would certainly massively influence any contemporary observer's interpretation of the work, closing off other possibilities: it might certainly have even strengthened Auden's response had he seen it.[1] The reference to the Flemish saying: "Work waits for no man's death" does not necessarily resolve about which death figure in the painting the saying is referring to. It could just as easily be referring to Icarus as to that of the dead man in the bushes. In fact, the dead man's head is, for a certain interpretation, an elegant reminder, and "completion" of how death can arrive in the humdrum life of a mid-16th century peasant, an echo of Icarus' dying, and one which reinforces a very specific moral lesson of his death for Bruegel's contemporaries. And however subtle it may seem, it is a repurposing of Bruegel's work, not any attempt at "completing" or making the painting more coherent. In this sense, the dead man's head may be seen as an exaptation of Bruegel for the palimpsest's purposes: no claims of "faithfulness" or "improvement" of an unfinished part of the painting will do. For the original state of the crouched figure is not sure from the radiographic analysis: if it were a shadowy, dark and not well-defined figure, it may have seemed to the palimpsest that he was doing Bruegel a favor by adding the brightest white of all whites on the canvas, equal in white intensity to Icarus' legs: precisely the exact same tone of whiteness as Icarus' legs in order that the viewer make the connection and relationship of one to the other. Whether the crouched figure itself was from Bruegel's hand may be a matter of controversy. But my claim is that very shadowy, unclear and hidden figure of a crouched man is precisely another stroke of genius of the painting.

That the figure of a bent-over man, much like a miniature of Rodin's *Thinker*, was there in the original suggests another interpretation, one which would have perhaps a stronger resonance. Since two of the main figures in the painting—the ploughman and the fisherman—are in a similar pose of bent-over immersion in

[1] Auden makes no mention of the dead man in the poem, leading one to conclude that he never saw the dead man's head or chose to ignore him: the dead man would thus be the Icarus of the Icarus: the one Auden chose to ignore, or not mention, the real unnamed death. Since this adjustment/addition was done after Bruegel's death but before its acquisition by the Musée des Beaux Arts in 1920, it is clear that Auden had no idea of the crouched figure in the bushes, and may only have noticed the bright strike-over figure of the dead man's head. But what of the crouched figure underneath? How does its arrival on the margin of the scene alter our response, if at all? For now, as inheritors of both the Bruegel and his palimpsest, we must respond to both.

their respective tasks, the appearance of a shadowy miniature in the bushes would add enormous weight to the theme of self-immersion, inner directedness, and unconcern with the fate of Icarus. Perhaps the crouched figure in the bushes represents both the location and the very position of deepest concern: Auden's "position of suffering" comes to mind.[1] This marginal place of hiddenness and isolation is chosen not by a dead man as a last resting place in the shade to expire, but by a man actively withdrawing from life. Unlike the other peasants, his pursuit is not of worldly gain, but of pure thought and introspection, engaged only in an inner experience and meditation, the symbol of a chosen withdrawal, a monastic figure. Some are forced to leave life and have no choice; others choose to withdraw from life on their own. Both are found escaping the boundaries of the painting.

The various positions—that of the ploughman, the shepherd, the fisherman, the sailing ship—are all in turn bent over or sailing into their own trajectory, none capable of being turned away or towards one another. Each is paying attention to their own salvation and to the demands and the economies of a worldly self. Each ignores the dying hand at the very moment it is about to disappear. Hands or feet, it's all the same. Each of the landed positions in the Bruegel can be seen as variations on the same theme, the same curved position bent over and engaged in its 'good peasant' work-a-day activity. The crouched-over shadowy figure would then be a meditation, an echo and visual commentary on the crouched-over position of the other peasants, and especially the main figure: a meditation on the notion of turning away: attending to that part of the world that can be changed and a letting-go of the world, even the tragic part, especially the tragic part, that cannot be changed, even a martyrdom, especially a martyrdom. In Breugel's *Procession to Calvary,* Christ is just one more figure in the canvas on his way to martyrdom because he must not be isolated from the peasant's life. A boy, Icarus, falling out of the sky, is just another part of the canvas, part of the landscape. Is this acceptance of a dreadful but nec-

[1] A version of the Icarus on wood at the van Buuren museum in Belgium includes the image of Daedalus in the sky. The shepherd gazing into the air is staring at him. In the canvas version at the Musée des Beaux Arts, Daedalus is no longer in the frame. In the original work, now lost, there was probably also a figure of Daedalus in the sky to the left at which the shepherd was staring. The Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts' version retains the shepherd staring at the sky, but Daedalus is absent.

essary finale of a godlike creature, or is it willful rejection of caring and our ability to save a boy, just a "boy falling out of the sky"? In the latter case, we can let it be a morality tale about hubris no matter who was to blame; in the former case, we must respond as Auden did, and try to change the world, and save the boy as Athena did, transforming ourselves in the process into a new form, a new species of bird, but one fearful of heights.

Finally, the sun. Auden comments: "The sun shone, as it had to." It is important to note that both here as well as in Bruegel's *Adoration of the Magi* with children skating on a pond,[1] located in the same *Salle Bruegel* at the Musée des Beaux Arts, the sun is always setting. In the Icarus, the sun also melted wax, as it had to, because it could do nothing else, and could not be held accountable or responsible for its melting action: it is a natural element, not an ethically active, evil actor. In this way, Auden is indeed faithful to both Ovid's text and the myth of Icarus. And Bruegel may have sensed that the setting sun is necessary, and not, as in the Ovid tale, at its apogee, since it will echo the dying son, the boy disappearing into the waves as the sun disappears. These are the only two partial objects in the painting, and they are partial because they are both dying, receding from view. In some sense, the sun is the one "actor" in the painting which is in greatest sympathy with the Icarus figure, mimicking and experiencing in its own action the disappearing beneath the water at the horizon's edge. The sun says: "I too disappear into the sea; I experience that withdrawal from the world each day. It is part of the cycle of my life. My warmth which melted your waxed wings also dies, here at the horizon, at the end of the day." So the sun too is a secret sharer of Icarus' agony, just as the crouched figure is for the peasants.

Is this the end of the story? It might be or have been unless we wish to understand Auden's specific contribution to 20th century poetry and the exaptations which he produced by writing about the Icarus. His teachings, in the most literal and didactic sense, follow now, even as they came before, just as Ovid backfills the story of the partridge after dumping Icarus into the sea.

[1] Note the children on skating sleds in the foreground next to the tent in Breugel's: *Adoration of the Magi in a Winter Landscape.*

Figure 6. *W. H. Auden, St. Mark's Place, New York, March 3, 1960*. Photo by Richard Avedon. Courtesy The Richard Avedon Foundation, copyright © 1960 The Richard Avedon Foundation.

5. The Auden Poem

Musée des Beaux Arts
About suffering, they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
The human position: how it takes place
While someone is eating, or opening a window
or just walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.
In Bruegel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

5.1. First Pass: The Position of the Title

Auden's title locates us in a particular place, a museum, containing some of the greatest artifacts of western civilization. Paintings will tell the story, not literature. In fact, this is a reference to the actual Musée Royal des Beaux Arts de Belgique located in Brussels, Belgium. The precise museum can be determined from the fact that it contains four Bruegels, one—*Landscape with Fall of Icarus* – explicitly mentioned in the poem—and two others also alluded to more

obliquely in the poem: *the Adoration of the Magi* (1555/57), and *the Numbering at Bethlehem* (1566). Which paintings were present in December 1938 is of some interest here since it is clear from the list that Auden had all his subject matter for the poem readily at hand in one room. Philippe Roberts-Jones, formerly Head Curator of the Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgique, has provided us with his magnificent blow-up of the Icarus in his *Bruegel, la chute d'Icare.* as well as a photograph of the museum's *Salle Bruegel* with a precise description of the room in which the *Icarus* is reunited with three other works, including the *Adoration*, where Auden found himself one day in December 1938: *Situation du tableau au musée de Bruxelles*:

L'œuvre occupe le mur du fond de la salle Bruegel où sont réunis, en outre, trois autres chefs-d'œuvre du maître, *l'Adoration des Mages*, peint à la détrempe sur toile, que l'on situe vers 1555/1557, *la Chute des Anges rebelles*, panneau signé et daté de 1562, *le Dénombrement de Bethléem*, de 1566, ainsi qu'une petite peinture ovale, connue sous le nom du Bâilleur."[1]

The poem's title uses the name of the museum and then generalizes it so that it no longer is located at a specific place. This raises it to the status of a universal: *the* museum of fine arts as it deals with the universal question of human suffering. The poem is a paean to the painterly arts, and it encloses us within its limits. Its internal walls construct a space between birth, which comes first, "the miraculous birth" depicted on one side of the room in the *Adoration of the Magi*, and death, "the dreadful martyrdom" depicted on the opposite side in the *Icarus* and in the *Fall of the Avenging Angels.* It has been frequently noted that the *Icarus* is Bruegel's only painting with specific mythological reference.[2]

[1] Roberts-Jones, *Bruegel*, 44.

[2] See, for example notes of four art historians: Lycle de Vries, 'Bruegel's Fall of Icarus: Ovid or Solomon?' *Simioulus* (2003): "Apart from Icarus, Bruegel treated no mythological themes.", 12. James V. Mirollo, 'Bruegel's Fall of Icarus and the poets', in A. Golahny (ed.), *The Eye of the Poet. Studies in the Reciprocity of the Visual and Literary Arts from the Renaissance to the Present* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1996): "Indeed, as Bruegel's only foray into pagan myth…", 131. Philippe Roberts-Jones, *Bruegel,* 1974: "Peut-on faire des rapprochements avec d'autres tableaux dont le thème serait voisin? Non, la *Chute d'Icare* est, de Bruegel, le seul sujet mythologique.", 7. Ulrich Weisstein, "The Partridge Without a Pear Tree: Peter Bruegel the Elder as an Illustrator of Ovid.", *Comparative Criticism 4*, 1982: "…Bruegel's only mythological painting.", 59. In note 7 to his essay Weisstein hedges his bet when he mentions Gustav Glück's essay on graphic works treating Daedalus-Icarus

The other set of limits and internal opposition is thus between myth and religion. Yet the reference to "the dreadful martyrdom" may be pointing elsewhere as well, to the religious depiction of Christ's martyrdom, specifically to those other painterly references in Bruegel's oeuvre which explicitly treat that theme. Icarus' fall cannot truly be considered a martyrdom: it was never considered any more than a kind of hubris and overreaching, similar to Tower of Babel paintings. It is perhaps these other great paintings in Bruegel's oeuvre to which the Icarus is a direct descendant. For if we are in the universal museum and not the particular one in Brussels, Belgium, all of Bruegel's works come into play, along with all those explicitly summoned as belonging to the Old Masters. And it is on this universal plane that Auden lifts us quickly, drawing our attention first to the generality before the particulars are fleshed out, opening with references to a non-specific suffering, and to *the* human position.

> About suffering, they were never wrong,
> The Old Masters:

Note the indeterminacy of 'they,' coming inverted in reference to the subject of the sentence: 'The Old Masters'. The double negative 'never wrong' instead of the more direct 'always right' may initially be considered as a subtle challenge to the moral authority of the Old Masters, as if to say: "at least on that topic, suffering, they were never wrong." Or: "As wrong as they were on a slew of other issues, on suffering they got it right." 'Never wrong' about suffering doesn't equal 'always right' about everything else. So what were the Old Masters wrong about? Perhaps the subtle rhyme and meter of 'suffering' and 'never wrong' lend us an answer to the word choice.

The syntax of the opening sentence contributes to the strong poetic line. Normative sentence syntax would demand something more along the lines of: "The Old Masters were never wrong about suffering." To open with "About suffering", however, continues a style of title selection common in the pagan, Latin tradition, the tradition of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and Montaigne's *Essays* rather than to any Christian or religious reference. Is this poem indirectly treating a certain 'martyrdom' of the pagan order, its decline and fall, its overwhelming by the Christian and religious subject matter in Bruegel? Is Icarus' fall into

and other mythological themes attributed to or derived from Bruegel. See Gustav Glück: "Peter Bruegel the Elder and Classical Antiquity", *Arts Quarterly*, 6, 1943, 167-181.

the sea Auden's own noticing of the decline of myth as an explanatory force ordering men's lives? To name the ostensible subject in the first two words of the poem, to tell the reader what the poem (and, indirectly, the painting) is 'about' adopts the tone of the rational essayist of the renaissance.

> The Old Masters: how well they understood
> The human position:

We expect 'condition' and thus find 'position' surprising and felicitous: 'position' connotes a visual; 'condition' points to a linguistic turn. One could think that Auden meant us to consider: 'The human condition.' Instead of a condition, however, we are given a location, an orientation; a place, not a metaphysics; geography, not theology. Perhaps theology as a study of space, orientation in space. But it is as a question posed of the painting itself: where is *the human* located in the painting? What is its position in the work, its actual physical position? It must be most rightly attributed in the plural if we gaze at the painting, or paintings: there are many positions. In the Icarus, it is simpler: there is the position at the center of the ploughman; and just below him, but above because of the perspective, that of the shepherd, facing up and out of the painting, (an earlier version of the painting would have had him fixing his gaze on Daedalus); and finally, the ignored (by whom ignored is particularly relevant here and to what degree ignored…) position of Icarus. The black and white rendition doesn't do any justice to the color painting itself, especially the overwhelming presence of the stifling sun at the top of the painting, melting Icarus' wax on his wings, but spreading itself as if melting its color throughout the space of the painting.

> how it takes place
> While someone is eating, or opening a window
> or just walking dully along.[1]

Once again, the 'it' refers to the suffering *and* the position of suffering taking place. The length of the line and especially the plodding step by step sounds of "just walking dully along" is notable.

> How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
> For the miraculous birth, there always must be

[1] In Auden's Collected Poems, 1991 edition, this line is wrapped to fit on the page.

Children who did not specially want it to happen skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:

There is a clear shift here of Auden's gaze to the opposite wall and the other painting in the Bruegel Room, the *Adoration of the Magi:* only in that painting can we find any visual reference to "the aged," "the miraculous birth," "children," "skating on a pond," etc. In the foreground, outside the central elements of Mary with child, visiting Magi and elders radiating out and surrounding them are the children skating on the pond. This heterogeneous element inserted by Bruegel is his genius, and what chiefly sets him apart from his world: the attention to local details, the details of everyday life intruding upon and fashioning a counterpoint to a unitary aesthetic message, both within his own paintings as well as those of his contemporaries. It must have been a tremendous shock to his contemporaries as well as to the artistic community of his time to witness these contradictory oppositional elements in the same painting of a traditional, sacred, or mythical topos. What could ruin the painting of the sacred more than the everyday flotsam and jetsam of the profane, intruding upon the sacred's space, taking up room, aesthetic real estate? What could interrupt the *vita contemplativa* of the sacred, the attitude of beatific contemplation of the divine, and the ultimate portrait of that divine in its suffering on the cross?

The 'how' echoes and extends the initial "how well they understood" of line 1, but now the opposition of age to youth is inserted. Auden draws attention to these inevitable, mundane companions of heroic tragedy and suffering in Bruegel's work: 'there always must be.' More strangely, if the poem is 'about' suffering, the theme of 'the miraculous birth' might seem out of place, if not out of position, given that only the mother could in any sense be considered the object of suffering. In any case, a subtle shift occurs in the players of the scene: the children are not mere passers by or remote actors in the drama (of suffering, or of birth) unconsciously going about their business. They 'did not specially want it to happen.' Like the old people, the children are not only aware of the birth, they have fashioned enough knowledge of it to understand that they want no part of it, that they are not there for the event, for whatever reason, whatever the event means.

Auden, however, is not explicitly addressing the contradictions within the images of the child in Bruegel's narrative scenes at the Musée: the children at the

margins of the Winter Scene painting—clearly referenced in the poem (children as periphery), the Christ child at the center of his *Adoration of the Magi* and the children in the painting as well (children as both center and periphery), and Icarus himself ('a boy falling out of the sky') who occupies the ambiguous position of both center and margin, the marginalized position brought into a central focus. Yet whether these other actors in the scene are conscious or not of the myth playing out in their space, they are clearly aesthetic vagrants as well, taking away from the unity of theme and place of the painting, playing about at its margins.

There are several results to this break with tradition which Bruegel represents. First, the multiplication of themes clearly undermines the idea that all elements in the painting must contribute and support the central theme whose source is the sacred or the mythic. Second, the heroic is no longer larger nor grander; Jesus is the same literal size as all other human elements. The heroic or sacred is literally just another part of the scene; it can be visited. Third, there is no longer a single position from which all meaning begins and ends, and radiates, and to which all other aesthetic positions contribute. There are positions, and each of them has its agenda, its beginning and ending, its meaning and telos.

The children gain their meaning in opposition to the miraculous birth; they are *not* present at the birth, or only marginally present, in opposition to it; they are *not* part of the sacred space, they do *not* suffer; rather, they play, oblivious to suffering. Play becomes in this context the occasion for cruelty: play in the face of suffering increases the sense of the cruelty of children. Richard Rorty's work exploring the themes of cruelty and suffering is especially germane here, when he recently documented "the particular form of cruelty about which Nabokov worried most—incuriosity."[1] There is much that requires closer attention here about the explicit theme of incuriosity in the Auden poem as well as in the Bruegel. For it would seem as if this painting is the only one in which Bruegel emphasizes the lack of human solidarity, and visualized it as human incuriosity. Auden the teacher draws our attention to it directly as well:

> how everything turns away
> Quite leisurely from the disaster.

[1] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 158.

Each actor in the scene is not only incurious about Icarus (the ship, the plowman, the shepherd, the fisherman, etc.) but is just as incurious about anyone or anything else in the scene, precisely because they cannot be drawn away from their activities, in which they are totally absorbed. This absorption (in work, in profit, in self) is a turning inward, turning away from the other, from nature and from tragedy. It is extremely unlike any other of Bruegel's paintings, in which people and animals are in a touching, facing, playful, dependent relationship to one another, even when that dependency leads to disaster (as in the *Blind leading the Blind*: each blind man touching and depending on the one in front). Here in the Icarus, total isolation reigns, as if everyone is bent upon their private salvation, what Rorty calls their "private projects of self creation."footnoteRorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, 158. Icarus himself is the chief architect and emblem of a private project of self-creation: his attempt to fly and reach heaven, to challenge the gods by becoming like them, is all part of his private obsession, not a public ideal or part of a social utopian vision. That Icarus fails is a private tragedy, but Bruegel and Auden draw our attention to our inability to interrupt the human trajectory—neither the path of the fall of Icarus, nor that of the ship, nor that of the ploughman or his horse carving out the troughs, not the path of the traveler.

The cruelty is thus deeply embedded in the fact that none of these paths intersect either visually or poetically. The very length of the line "while someone is eating, or opening a window or just walking dully along" can now be understood as emblematic of cruelty: the painting's thematic refusal to break off from private actions and attend to suffering is reflected in the poetic line's refusal to be interrupted as a line of poetry, proceeding without attention to its relationship to the poem as a whole.

It is as if Bruegel's masterpiece and Auden's poem are themselves illustrations of Rorty's notion that the goal of human solidarity is to be achieved by "the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers." (cf. Auden's "the expensive delicate ship that must have seen/Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky.") The inability to attend to suffering and the consequent lack of human solidarity is a theme traced again and again across the painting and the poem. Auden and Bruegel intersect in their attempt to answer what had they personally done to alleviate human suffering. In bringing into focus the Icarus we can extend matters to include the problematic of suffering in the

Tower of Babel narrative and its painting. (Bruegel painted the Babel narrative three times, with important thematic differences.) The issue relating Babel to the Icarus theme is that hubris is writ large into a whole society. It is not the private project of self-creation of an Icarus, but a public (works) project set to by an entire civilization. Human solidarity is key to its success and to building the tower, and its defeat comes by interrupting human communication, not by destroying the people or their creations. People can be solidary yet parochial in their interests; and they can very well be set on the 'wrong' project as a society as a whole. Human solidarity does not of itself guarantee a respite from suffering, only from imagining it as a social utopia; the utopia may still suffer defeat and loss, yet people do not experience cruelty either directly from torture or indirectly from human incuriosity.

When Bruegel portrays transgression, using birth rather than death, its intent and message are the same. Martyrdom (of Christ? of Icarus?) is never far away from or behind the birth, its inevitable counterpoint and diminution:

> They never forgot
> That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
> Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
> Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
> Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

The theme of inevitability and fate weighs heavily at three moments in the poem: 1) "there always must be children" 2) "the dreadful martyrdom must run its course and 3) "the sun shone as it had to." Inevitability highlights the tragic nature of the scene and its meaning: if there were any freedom to escape the predictable ending, if there were any 'elbow room'[1] for free choice to counterbalance fate, the poet's contribution is to put man, nature and even the particular claims of children into a single, tragic narrative, players going through prefabricated motions.

Once again, the insistence on the Old Masters' perfect habit, their perfect design consistency, always containing a reference to the commonplace nature of tragedy, the gritty details of the position of suffering. The words "They never

[1] Cf. Daniel Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984).

forgot" and "the torturer's horse" anticipate both the 20th century's most horrific places of suffering, the death camps of Nazi Germany, and the martyrdom, for which the survivor's motto is precisely never to forget, to retell the story of that untidy spot. The killing fields of Cambodia, the slaughters in Africa, all testify to Auden's absolute accuracy in telling this story not of the suffering, but the turning away from the suffering, the ordinary bystander's complicity in the tragedy.[1] However, the entire purpose of the poem is to put the everyday in context with the torturer and martyrdom. The large proportions which

[1] Cf. Max Bluestone's extended commentary on Auden's reactions to historical events of the late 1930's and man's indifference to suffering in "The Iconographic Sources of Auden's 'Musée des Beaux Arts"', *Modern Language Notes,* April, 1961, Vol. 76. No. 4, 331-336. Compare Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (Paris: Fayard, 1985, 48-49; my translation), recording of the reaction of a Polish peasant living next to Treblinka who heard everything, keeping their heads down:

Peasants of Treblinka

"There was a field 100 meters from the camp. And he worked there during the occupation as well."

— He worked in his field?

"Yes. So he saw how they asphixiated the Jews, he heard how they cried, he saw all of it. There was a small hillock and from there he could see quite a bit."

— What did he say?

"You couldn't stop and stare, that was forbidden because the Ukranians would shoot down on them from above."

— They let them work in their field even if their field was only 100 meters from the camp?

"You could, yes, you could. From time to time he would take a peek when the Ukranians weren't watching him."

—So he worked with his eyes down.

"Yes, it was very close, he could work there, it wasn't forbidden."

— He worked, he gardened there?

"Yes, even the place where the camp was, part of it was his land."

— Ah, it was partly his field.

"You couldn't go there, but you could hear everything."

— It didn't bother him to work so close to the cries?

"At the beginning, really you couldn't stand it, but then you got used to it…"

— You get used to everything?

"Yes."

Most recently, the 2024 Academy Awards awarded the prize for best international feature film to *Zone of Interest.* (Production companies: Film4, Polish Film Institute, JW Films, Extreme Emotions). The plot focuses on Rudolf Höss, commandant of the Auschwitz concentration camp, who lived in 1943 with his wife Hedwig and their five children in an idyllic home next to the camp. The deep irony is that the film forces the viewers into the uncomfortable position as witnesses of both the Höss's everyday family life and to the unfolding catastrophe just beyond the walls.

mythic events and tragedy occupy in the classical mind are marginalized to the point that no one notices anymore. And yet, both Bruegel and Auden seem to be saying, these events happened side by side, they occupy the same space, they are both inevitable and inevitably they are contradictions we must think together.

5.2. Second Pass: The Art Lesson

All this generality, the laying bare of meaning, comes before the examination of the specific and its detail: its illustration in the work of Bruegel. We are taught the lesson, handed the wisdom and generality before he considers the actual painting. The reading is already finished and done for us by the Master poet and his Old Masters. Bruegel is merely the example Auden is using. The interpretation is pragmatist and open in its motivation, as if to say: "I am using Bruegel to make my point about suffering."

> In Bruegel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away
> Quite leisurely from the disaster;

Notice the position of everything (not everyone): the sailing ship, the plough. Things also participate in this turning away, a willful ignoring of the tragic hero. Note too the opposition of the leisurely vs. the cataclysm. In particular, at the fourth instance of the adverbial *how:* 1) "how it takes place…" 2) "How…there always must be…" 3) "Anyhow in a corner,…" and 4) "how everything turns away…" Auden is drawing our attention to specific techniques, those of the artist, but as well those also of everything else—all of nature –in their avoidance if not outright dismissal:

> the ploughman may
> Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
> But for him it was not an important failure;

It is as if Auden were the reporter or the detective on the scene moments after, interrogating the ploughman: "What did you hear? Did you know about Icarus' flight?" The callous indifference of 'the expensive delicate ship,' like a rich banker on his lunch hour, late for an appointment, "had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on."

This decided lack of amazement, as if the event were neither relevant to their lives, is believable in Bruegel's anachronistic updating of the events in all his painting: his people are always contemporaries, even as they participate in events out of biblical or Hellenistic times. If the power of myth can no longer be heard, if the ultimate contest between man and God ends in silence and can no longer speak the enormity of the disaster, neither does the bare event stripped of all myth: 'a boy falling out of the sky.'

What are the types of failure marked here? The Icarus can be read as the portrait of human failure—a disconnect between worlds, one characterized by a lack of any human capability to be amazed, to wonder, to notice, to stop and listen, to break the trajectory of the mundane. But it is not merely that the world of myth is no longer operative in man: the failure here is clearly marked by the virtual disappearance of any trace of myth: the 'white legs' of Icarus are all that is left of that world as it disappears into the sea. The sun is necessity incarnate: "the sun shone /As it had to." The mundane world's failure, the world Bruegel is famous for, is that it has no other dimensions: its attitude is calm detachment or what might be called 'benign neglect,' or depraved indifference. It is the artist capable of incorporating both worlds in a single vision: both the tragedy of the myth as it must unfold, and the tragedy of the common man as he must continue to live in denial and refuse to confront that other world.

Richard Rorty's emphasis on the need to ground solidarity in the particularity of human experience comes to mind. In his view, it will not do to elevate our claims of solidarity with another human's suffering to a universal plane. For to claim that the victim is a human being is to make the weakest claim of all. It is more parochial but far more effective to say, 'Ich bin ein Berliner,' or a New Yorker,[1] or from anywhere in particular to remind the Other of our com-

[1] Auden was born in England but resettled in New York, and became an American citizen. Auden, Richard Johnson tells us, "always considered himself, not an American, but a New Yorker." In his "Prologue at Sixty," Auden writes: "An American? No, a New Yorker, /who opens his *Times* at the

mon experience. This rootedness in the local may seem impossible from within the long-distance disembodied cyberspace of the 21st century, but what is the alternative?

5.3. The Two Martyrs

Another strand of reading becomes more problematic when we turn our attention to what Auden didn't see or chose to be silent about. Here, instead of reading 'with' Auden, we read 'against' him in order to see things he perhaps could not see or overlooked. In a sense, Auden was leisurely sailing on in the direction of his own poetic and moral trajectory. The important lesson here is so marginal that many reproductions of the Icarus simply leave them out, either by cropping the reproduction, or blending colors so that the important elements are blurred or totally missing. For there are not one, but two corpses in the painting. Karl Kilinski points out that "[a] key to the painting's interpretation lives in the woods at the far left: the corpse of an old man, which in its strategic position on the edge of the cultivated field, brings to mind an old German proverb, 'es bleibt kein Pflug stehen um eines Menschen willen, der stirbt' ('No plow stops for the sake of a man who dies') recorded at least as early as 1604."[1] The one corpse-to-be on its trajectory of death, the icon of the story itself is Icarus; the other, corpse-in-fact lies hidden in the dense undergrowth on the left side of the hill.

Could Auden have literally missed seeing this real corpse of a peasant? He does not seem to be drawing our attention to it, even in the lines "that even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot." For if we look at the legs of Icarus dropping into the sea, we are most assuredly not looking at the corpse in the dense bushes. If we, as Auden, are fascinated with the dreadful martyrdom, our gaze cannot fasten at the same moment on what is hidden away, the death of a nameless, faceless, common man. Only if we seek to extrapolate a lesson from the Greek myth good enough for the

obit page…" Originally published as "a poem" in the May 18, 1967 edition of the *New York Review of Books*. Subsequently in *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden: Poems, Volume II: 1940-1973* (Princeton: Princeton UP).

[1] Kilinski, "Bruegel on Icarus", 103.

common man can Icarus' death have some resonance in our own. In one sense, Auden did not know how right he was in choosing Bruegel's Icarus to mark an 'untidy spot' of human cruelty. He could not have chosen a better example, and yet, if we, as Auden, are fascinated with Icarus the myth, our glance cannot comprehend or see the real Icarus, the boy falling out of the sky. The common man is also found 'in a corner, some untidy spot,' but its unburied state means that no one has marked his death or remarked even his disappearance. His death is even more cruel than Icarus': Icarus is a boy with a name, a story, a myth, a place in human history; Icarus is the one we can choose to ignore; the peasant is the definition of the nameless, of ignorance and forget.

Death and specifically the portrayal of peasants' death are a general concern in many of Bruegel's other works. So to what can we attribute this lapse on Auden's part, if it is a lapse at all? It is most assuredly not Bruegel's fault, for the position of the corpse neatly balances horizontally and vertically the marginally relative position of Icarus.

One answer relates to the form of the lyric poem itself: we could let Auden off the hook by attributing it to the need for a unity of theme, the need to entertain only a single thought or gesture. The painting's name itself as well as its most brilliant effect is achieved by Bruegel's knowledge that the myth was known to all Ovid reading contemporaries. By inscribing the myth into a typical seascape from his tour of Italy, Bruegel must have calculated its surprise effect and even its shock value.

Another possible course of explanation is that the corpse-for-real deconstructs the corpse-to-be: reality deconstructs myth; the boy deconstructs the Name. The use of parallelism in the painting is also striking. Just as the foreground with its central ploughman and its marginal dead man illustrates the Flemish proverb, Bruegel repeats the theme in the background: the elegant sailing ship (like the ploughman) passes by Icarus (like the dead man) as he plunges into the sea. So too, both Icarus and the dead man are visual synecdoches: body parts, not whole men; and both are painted in bright white color. You can't miss them.

The fall of Icarus' body into the sea and the moment of impact captured in the painting are a moment in the narrative whose continuation is figured in the dead man's traces lying above ground, thus out of range of burial. There are traces of the Antigone here. Further thematic material lies in Icarus' 'burial' at

sea, in water, versus burial on land, which requires digging and the work of ploughing up the soil to make room for the dead. This turning over and excavation of the soil is the main action of the painting—preparing the ground for the dead—the gravedigger's function—and the ploughman's function —nowhere else is it so heavily inscribed that Icarus' telos is being prepared by the ploughman. As he is dying, the grave is being dug. The ploughman must have known, prior to any event of hubris or mythic unification, that an impression or engravure in the soil would be required to house the meaning of Icarus' fall. Preparing the earth, engraving, tattooing the ground, inscribing the trace in a substrate: Is not all this the act of writing which continues despite the presence of 'the hand that is dying?' (cf. Georges Bataille) Icarus' body is the blade, excavating the sea, as the plough's blade excavates the land in the foreground. Thus, far from ignoring the fall of Icarus, one might entertain the view that the plowman is anticipating it and preparing for it, repeating it in and on the dry medium of earth.[1]

6. Dennett: Suffering That Matters

Dennett's complete commentary on the Auden poem is encapsulated in a single sentence: "That is our world, and the suffering in it matters, if anything else does." It was more a matter of faith and intuition that I set about exploring this theme in the sources available, without any more than this passing reference in Dennett. What else would be added if Dennett put his mind to elaborating the topic of suffering? What was the relationship of suffering to consciousness? A surprising and contrarian answer would have to wait for his next publication, *Kinds of Minds*.[2] "Pain and Suffering: What Matters" is the title of its final section, and it is that title which patently and ostensibly links together the two

[1] The Ovidian source of burial on earth by Daedalus comes in the final lines of the chapter on Daedalus and Icarus in the *Metamorphoses*: "[Daedalus] laid the body in a tomb, and the land was named for the buried boy." (Cf. Fig. 1: Georg Wickram's woodcut illustration in his *Metamorphoses d'Ovide*).
[2] Daniel C. Dennett, *Kinds of Minds: Towards an Understanding of Consciousness* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996).

works, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* and *Consciousness Explained.* [1] In *Kinds of Minds* Dennett wrote a layman's introduction to the study of consciousness and had sought to clarify some of the topics raised in his earlier works. The topic of suffering happened to be one of them. In his final thoughts, Dennett argues that the distinguishing trait which makes us truly human is not a language-using mind endowed with consciousness, but rather one capable of experiencing suffering.

His arguments are overlaid with ethical versus strictly epistemological concerns. For suffering to matter, "an enduring subject" is required. Here is how he presents his claims.

> We might well think that the capacity for suffering counts for more, in any moral calculations, than the capacity for abstruse and sophisticated reasoning about the future (and everything else under the sun). What then, is the relationship between pain, suffering and consciousness?
>
> While the distinction between pain and suffering is, like most everyday, nonscientific distinctions, somewhat blurred at the edges, it is nevertheless a valuable and intuitively satisfying mark or measure of moral importance. The phenomenon of pain is neither homogeneous across species, nor simple. We can see this in ourselves, by noting how unobvious the answers are to some simple questions. Are the stimuli from our pain receptors—stimuli that prevent us from allowing our limbs to assume awkward, joint-damaging positions while we sleep—experienced as pains? Or might they be properly called unconscious pains? Do they have moral significance, in any case? We might call such body-protecting states of the nervous system 'sentient' states, without thereby implying that they were the experiences of any self, any ego, any subject. For such states to matter—whether or not we call them pains, or conscious states, or experiences—there must be an enduring subject *to whom* they matter because they are a source of suffering.
>
> Consider the widely reported phenomenon of *dissociation* in the presence of great pain or fear. When young children are abused, they typically hit upon a desperate but effective stratagem: they "leave." They somehow declare to themselves that it is not they who are suffering the pain. There seem to be two main varieties of dissociators: those who simply reject the pain as theirs and then witness it from afar, as it were; and those who split at least momentarily into something like multiple personalities (*I* am not undergoing this pain, *she* is). My not entirely facetious hypothesis about this is

[1] Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); and Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1991).

that these two varieties of children differ in their tacit endorsement of a philosophical doctrine: Every experience must be the experience of some subject. Those children who reject the principle see nothing wrong with simply disowning the pain, leaving it subjectless to wander around hurting nobody in particular. Those who embrace the principle have to invent an alter to be the subject—anybody but *me!*

Whether or not any such interpretation of the phenomenon of dissociation can be sustained, most psychiatrists agree that it does work, to some degree. That is, whatever this psychological stunt of dissociation consists in, it is genuinely analgesic—or, more precisely, whether or not it diminishes the pain, it definitely *obtunds suffering*. So we have a modest result of sorts: the difference, whatever it is, between a nondissociated child and a dissociated child is a difference that markedly affects the existence or amount of suffering. (I hasten to add that nothing I have said implies that when children dissociate they in any way mitigate the atrocity of the vile behavior of their abusers; they do, however, dramatically diminish the awfulness of the effects themselves – though such children may pay a severe price later in life dealing with the aftereffects of their dissociation.)[1]

Dennett returns here to contrast the theory of a centered subject maintaining a command post of consciousness in a "Cartesian theatre" versus a post-cartesian, dispersed, non-centered, multiple personalities subject he articulated in *Consciousness Explained*. I want to particularly note and focus on Dennett's use of children as exemplary of a certain reaction to pain and fear, but more importantly how Dennett uses the children's dissociative reaction to pain and suffering as if they took a stand for or against his theory of consciousness![2] Rejecting a certain experience of "pain" becomes tantamount to rejecting a certain "theory" of consciousness, precisely the theory of a decentered subject of consciousness. And it is Dennett's seriousness in proposing that, in the midst of contemplating children's reactions to pain and fear, we focus our attention on children as purveyors of "theory": "my not entirely facetious hypothesis." The dissociation Dennett speaks of is specifically the kind of dissociation which Auden notes in the Breugel:

[1] Dennett, *Kinds of Minds*, 162-64.

[2] Perhaps Dennett is reacting to Auden's use of children in the poem and Bruegel's use in his work, both in the Icarus and elsewhere. Dennett may be at some level repeating or reacting to the Auden poem, specifically to Auden's casting of children as rejecting or denying the scene of birth (manger) and suffering (Calvary). Perhaps Dennett has found in the scientific literature a confirmation of the poetic truths Auden articulated about children in the Icarus poem.

how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster

Dennett claims that children, as he says, "leave." Some find a way to literally take leave of their senses. The expression is commonly used to mean someone who goes out of their mind, is temporarily insane. Someone sane is someone in touch with their senses, someone who simply suffers their pain, and does not dissociate themselves from it. Thus to suffer pain is to tend to the experience of it as any other experience. Dennett then pursues the ineluctable conclusion:

> A dissociated child does not suffer as much as a non-dissociated child. But now what should we say about creatures that are naturally dissociated - that never achieve, or even attempt to achieve, the sort of complex internal organization that is standard in a normal child and disrupted in a dissociated child? An invited conclusion would be: such a creature is constitutionally incapable of undergoing the sort or amount of suffering that a normal human can undergo. But if all nonhuman species are in such a relatively disorganized state, we have grounds for the hypothesis that nonhuman animals may indeed feel pain but cannot suffer the way we can.
> How convenient![1]

7. Conclusion

"Should you leave?" This is a question a psychiatrist uses as the title for his meditation on the limits of what we can actually know about other minds, and how we "consistently underestimate the otherness of others."[2] It is not a question that any one of the 'actors' in the Icarus painting can answer. Each of them in their penchant positions, bent over into their tasks, would seem to be engaged in their private actions, unfathomable intentions and thoughts. Yet if we step back a level to Bruegel and to the possible messages he set loose, we may see these actors as the result of a single motion, even if that motion is contradictory, ambiguous, paradoxical, and that perhaps each is drawn in acceptance and respect of each others' inevitable line and trajectory. If they could speak, what would each actor say?

[1] Dennett, *Kinds of Minds*, 164.
[2] Peter D. Kramer, *Should You Leave?* (New York, Scribner, 1997), 16.

Perhaps the peasants' reply to Icarus would be:

Leave if leaving is the natural end-point of your trajectory, where you will end up anyway. Our leaving is the turning away that permits us to continue our lives, be the good peasants and servants of your moral platitudes. Our turning away is the selective inattention to suffering that plowing fields, tending sheep, fishing for food, making for port require, if the world is to continue and the sun is to continue to rise and set. There is a natural course to events beyond our control, and so our willfully ignoring you, leaving you to your own devices and fate and to your own disappearance, can at most be conceived of as a sin of omission; we committed no crime. It is not an evil of the heart, but the result of an indifference we cannot abandon without abandoning the positions we occupy here, why we were put here on this earth, the meaning we derive from our functions on this canvas and in this story.

And Icarus' reply to them would mirror theirs:

Should you leave? Do you think the question is any different for me, Icarus, than for you? My leaving is destined, and destined to be as agonizing as your turning away is indifferent. It is just a different kind of leaving, one that rebels against having to leave, now that the moment has arrived and I must disappear into the waves, leaving only traces and feathers for you to discover. If it is any consolation, I did not plan on this leaving, it was not me who set it in motion, and I can rightly argue that my leaving is premature and should not be ignored.

And the sun's reply to Icarus might be:

Should you leave? I am the direct, natural "proximate cause" of your death. You died of natural causes: how wax melts in the presence of heat. The fact that it was my heat and my shining ("as I had to" shine that day) which caused your death may be incidental and I should feel no responsibility in that tragedy of your life. I was just another element of tragedy, Pascal's "external circumstances." But I cannot help feel responsible, and so I must sink into the waves along with you, somehow die with you, disappear in perfect harmony with your disappearance, at the moment you leave, so that the dying sun on the horizon is my memorial to you each day, reminding the world of your loss, and my hand in your loss, and that without the sun and the pure heat of your life, their work-a-day world would grind to a halt, and have no moment, not even the sails of the frigate would fill with wind, since there would be no wind without my heat.

And finally, the crouched-over figure would reply to Icarus, and say:

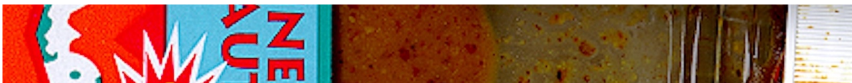
Should you leave? You have to leave sooner or later, and I am your shadow, that only centuries later was revealed. Even then, Bruegel put me here in the bushes to remind those who can enjoy the subtlety of a still, small voice that this painting of the peasants' turning away from your agony is a meditation on withdrawal and turning away. It took a Dennett to tell us that physical suffering gave birth in some sense to consciousness. and with it the ethical imperative to turn towards and face the suffering as Bruegel did in painting his masterpiece. That it took a very lonely English poet to tell the world that message four centuries later was replayed in his own life, when he arrived at the doorstep of Hannah Arendt, the woman to whom he tragically thought she had written her "The Human Condition" as a love letter to him.[1] And it was to her that he turned in his loneliness at the end of his life, to whom he proposed some kind of impossible marriage in the evening of their lives, to his true soul mate, only to be turned away by her, because she found him so unkempt and disheveled: a homeless gay man on his way down.

Bruegel was assured that his 16th century interpretive community would find Icarus' remains, and understand that the classical world was still capable of penetrating their lives, if not interrupting and shocking it: as the politics of the time dictated, the hand of death and fate often came upon them to suddenly destroy their countrymen's lives if not their own. Bruegel perhaps honored their willingness to turn away, their ability to ignore death for the time being and continue on their way. So the ploughman is central to Bruegel, because in his world, the peasant was part of the landscape, the action of civilized man changing and subduing nature, the way in which whatever man could control was put under his dominion and domesticated through hard work by rather dull individuals who mattered as well—people who had a simple but striking solution to life and their function in the larger scheme of things: to get to the end of the row before the end of the day, to get to port, not lose a single sheep, catch one more fish before the sun set.

[1] Position/Condition: In 1956, Hannah Arendt, the German-Jewish philosopher, wrote *The Human Condition*, provoking Auden, the English-Catholic poet, to write in a review of the work the following: "Every now and then, I come across a book which gives me the impression of having been especially written for me…*The Human Condition* belongs to this small and select class." Auden's essay on Arendt appeared in *Encounter*, June 1959, 72-76: "Thinking what we are doing."

How can Icarus be seen in such an economy? His economy is not theirs, but like some time-warped traveler falling through, plunging into their world and their moment on a canvas from another century, another era, another culture, another economy. He is caught vertically for perhaps only a single instant before disappearing again, vanishing before we can hear his shouts or understand anything of the classical world and his story and his place in it. Icarus is there because perhaps Bruegel needed to tell his interpretive community that this is how Icarus would look if he stepped into the mid-16th century of commerce and trade. Perhaps he is Bruegel's (after)thought experiment, like the cheap tricks Christian preachers offer their American audiences: What if Christ were to return and land on Wall Street, or Main Street, or any street in our world? Icarus is, in this manner, a stand-in for another lost world of the past, his values are also foreign and marginal to the lives of these peasants and commerce. Is the depiction of Icarus' death a rejection of the classical past, or an attempt at its simple preservation as a quaint relic which still intrudes awkwardly and only as a partial object on the main body of a 16th century landscape?

If Dennett had stood in front of the Bruegel, how might he have assessed the chances of Icarus' survival as he did that of organized religion? Would he have had as much sympathy for Bruegel's Icarus as he did for Auden's. Or only enough to make him comfortable, somewhere at the margins of society, a quaint relic of a bygone era? I imagine him visiting the Bruegel Room in Brussels, standing in front of these masterpieces of the Northern Renaissance, and viewing the same works Auden once saw. And I believe he would have fallen silent once again, transfixed by the awesome beauty of this world and its creations, and thankful for the illusion Bruegel created with paint and color and light. Perhaps that will be reason enough to reconsider the passionate resilience religion plays in our world. If the institutions of the human spirit are marginalized, how long will it take until those housing so many of its aesthetic treasures will sink beneath the waves? I believe, however, that visiting such a room might have filled him with awe and that it would have been enough to make him pause and reconsider.



8. Postscript

I hope you will admit that a number of
very remarkable, disconnected facts
are brought together in it into a consistent whole.[1]

Works of art, stories, poems, old photographs, are like sea shells: they're just lying around on the beach for us to discover and 'carry home,' to put in a jewelry box in a closet, like so many atoms matched like pearls, in perfect symmetry, or else in a book or machine-readable form, like so many electrons floating around in a vast sea of information, waiting sometimes years before we open them up and reconsider them again, in another work, for another purpose. The exaptations I have traced from Ovid to Dennett 'make sense' as each artist's admittedly idiosyncratic response to prior, available material. The deformations or decentering of a work is a natural by-product of strong artists, poets and philosophers engaged equally in the contemplation and the production of works of art, poetry and philosophy. While at least four distinct disciplines and types of discourse intersect at the moment I have explored in Dennett's text, only by tracing this decentering process of exaptation from work to work could the theme of suffering begin to make sense for me, and become available for use as a lens—an iris if you will, to focus experience, letting in certain forms of understanding and keeping out others. The progressive exaptation of Ovid by Bruegel, Bruegel by Auden and finally Auden by Dennett for this purpose is what Gérard Genette and Roland Barthes have on occasion asserted that all interpretation is about: a form of *bricolage*, a scavenging for meanings. We take the shell off the beach sometimes because it is simply beautiful and it speaks to us alone, and touches something we don't even understand. We put it to our ear and listen. And we hear ourselves listening. We may use it eventually to solve another problem, using the material remains to create new forms of experience and understanding about the world.

This is how Ovid's Daedalus and Icarus' story ends: on the beach, as the father gathers up the pieces of the son, trying to piece together the broken corpus and reassemble some organic unity, to regain a lost presence by burying the parts in

[1] Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, iv. On the purpose of the essay..

a sepulcher, and giving the place a name: the Icarian sea (see Fig. 1). Such an outcome would perhaps be one more example of the metaphysics of presence for the 20th century's most important contemporary philosophers, Jacques Derrida. Against that possible outcome, Derrida offered a reading of Baudelaire's poem "The Complaints of an Icarus,"[1] with surprising results: Baudelaire's retelling starts later and ends earlier: Daedalus is absent from the poem and from Derrida's commentary.[2] In Baudelaire's poem, Icarus remains nameless, placeless, and homeless, so the story would fit a deconstructive redescription and repurposing. Icarus' story can become "among others, the whole story, all of history. In any case, and at least, a certain history of philosophy."[3]

My sense is that a simple inspection of Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* at the Royal Museum in Brussels could have served that redescription well: the father is *absent*, the son is *disappearing*: Icarus could have become a poster boy for deconstruction. Like Auden, Derrida did not know how right he was in finding in Baudelaire's Icarus poem a way to mark an 'untidy spot' of human cruelty: 'donner mon nom à l'abîme/Qui me servira de tombeau.'[4] For Derrida's readers, the *Landscape with Fall of Icarus* provides an exemplary image of *Icarus Deconstructus*.

How convenient!

[1] See Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968), *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 85: "Les Plaintes d'un Icare."

[2] Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 170-172.

[3] Derrida, *Given Time,* 170.

[4] Baudelaire, *Œuvres Complètes*, 85, l. 15-16.

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My thanks to the Richard Avedon Foundation for the rights to reproduce the photograph of W.H. Auden (Figure 6).

The Auden photograph, part of Avedon's private collection, was on display for the first time at New York Metropolitan Museum of Art's retrospective on Richard Avedon's photography.[1] The following quotation from Harold Pinter's *No Man's Land* greeted visitors at the entry to the exhibition:

I might even show you my photograph album. You might even see a face in it which might remind you of your own, of what you once were. You might see faces of others, in shadow, or cheeks of others, turning, or jaws, or backs of necks, or eyes, dark under hats, which might remind you of others, whom once you knew, whom you thought long dead, but from whom you will still receive a sidelong glance, if you can face the good ghost. Allow the love of the good ghost. They possess all that emotion (...) trapped. Bow to it. It will assuredly never release them, but who knows (...) what relief (...) it may

[1] *Richard Avedon: Portraits.* September 26, 2002-January 5, 2003: `http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2002/richard-avedon`.

give to them (...) who knows how they may quicken (...) in their chains, in their glass jars. You think it cruel (...) to quicken them, when they are fixed, imprisoned? No (...) no. Deeply, deeply, they wish to respond to your touch, to your look, and when you smile, their joy (...) is unbounded. And so I say to you, tender the dead, as you would yourself be tendered, now, in what you would describe as your life.[1]

Inner Beauty. Photo provided by the Author.

[1] Harold Pinter, *No Man's Land*, act 2, in *Collected Works of Harold Pinter*, vol. 4 (New York: Grove Press, 1981), 137.