



**W.H. Auden--Musee des Beaux Artes**

About suffering they were never wrong,  
The old Masters: how well they understood  
Its human position: how it takes place  
While someone else 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 Breughel'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.

**William Carlos Williams--Landscape with the fall of Icarus**

According to Brueghel  
when Icarus fell  
it was spring  
a farmer was ploughing  
his field  
the whole pageantry  
of the year was  
awake tingling  
with itself  
sweating in the sun  
that melted  
the wings' wax  
unsignificantly  
off the coast  
there was  
a splash quite unnoticed  
this was  
Icarus drowning

**Edward Field--Icarus**

Only the feathers floating around the hat  
Showed that anything more spectacular had occurred  
Than the usual drowning. The police preferred to ignore  
The confusing aspects of the case,  
And the witnesses ran off to a gang war.  
So the report filed and forgotten in the archives read simply  
"Drowned," but it was wrong: Icarus  
Had swum away, coming at last to the city  
Where he rented a house and tended the garden.

"That nice Mr. Hicks" the neighbors called,  
Never dreaming that the gray, respectable suit  
Concealed arms that had controlled huge wings  
Nor that those sad, defeated eyes had once  
Compelled the sun. And had he told them  
They would have answered with a shocked,  
uncomprehending stare.  
No, he could not disturb their neat front yards;  
Yet all his books insisted that this was a horrible mistake:  
What was he doing aging in a suburb?  
Can the genius of the hero fall  
To the middling stature of the merely talented?

And nightly Icarus probes his wound  
And daily in his workshop, curtains carefully drawn,  
Constructs small wings and tries to fly  
To the lighting fixture on the ceiling:  
Fails every time and hates himself for trying.  
He had thought himself a hero, had acted heroically,  
And dreamt of his fall, the tragic fall of the hero;  
But now rides commuter trains,

Serves on various committees,  
And wishes he had drowned.

**Anne Sexton - To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph**

Consider Icarus, pasting those sticky wings on,  
testing that strange little tug at his shoulder blade,  
and think of that first flawless moment over the lawn  
of the labyrinth. Think of the difference it made!  
There below are the trees, as awkward as camels;  
and here are the shocked starlings pumping past  
and think of innocent Icarus who is doing quite well.  
Larger than a sail, over the fog and the blast  
of the plushy ocean, he goes. Admire his wings!  
Feel the fire at his neck and see how casually  
he glances up and is caught, wondrously tunneling  
into that hot eye. Who cares that he fell back to the sea?  
See him acclaiming the sun and come plunging down  
while his sensible daddy goes straight into town.