



## Musée des Beaux Arts

*The title of this poem, which belongs to the section 'People and Places' of the collection Another Time, refers to the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels, which Auden visited in 1938. There he saw Brueghel's painting Landscape with the Fall of Icarus (1558 ca); drawing on this and other paintings, Auden developed a notion of human nature and suffering which transcends time and space.*

Wystan Hugh Auden  
*Another Time*  
(1940)

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;  
5 How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting  
For the miraculous birth<sup>1</sup>, 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  
10 That even the dreadful martyrdom<sup>2</sup> 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<sup>3</sup> its innocent **behind** on a tree.

In Breughel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away  
15 Quite **leisurely** from the disaster; the ploughman<sup>4</sup> 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  
20 Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,  
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on<sup>5</sup>.

- 1 **the miraculous birth.**  
Riferimento a una Natività di Cristo vista da Auden al museo.
- 2 **dreadful martyrdom.**  
Orribile martirio. Probabile riferimento al quadro di Brueghel (1525-69) *Strage degli Innocenti*.
- 3 **Scratches.** Si gratta.
- 4 **ploughman.** Aratore.
- 5 **sailed ... on.** Continuava serenamente il suo viaggio.

### READING COMPETENCE

#### 1 READ the poem and match the highlighted words with their meaning.

- |                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1 bottom ..... | 4 casually ..... |
| 2 place .....  | 5 desolate ..... |
| 3 border ..... | 6 lazily .....   |

#### 2 READ the poem again and to the following activities.

- 1 The poem is divided into two parts related to one another. Say what the poet introduces in each of them.
  - Lines 1-13: .....
  - Lines 14-21: .....
- 2 Focus on lines 1-13 and explain
  - who the Old Masters were;
  - what they could understand;
  - the two exceptional events suggested by the poet;
  - the reactions of people and animals in the surrounding.



## 3 Complete the paragraph about the myth of Icarus with the words from the box.

body  
warnedartisan  
imprisonfell  
crimewax  
exiledfreeing  
bull

Daedalus was a highly respected and talented Athenian **(1)** ..... who was **(2)** ..... to Crete for committing a **(3)** ..... of envy against his nephew Talus. There he had a son, Icarus. One day the king of Crete, Minos, called Daedalus to build a Labyrinth in order to **(4)** ..... the frightening Minotaur, a monster with the head of a **(5)** ..... and the **(6)** ..... of a man. After Theseus, the king of Athens, had succeeded in **(7)** ..... the Minotaur, Minos had Daedalus and Icarus imprisoned in the Labyrinth themselves. Daedalus created **(8)** ..... wings to escape and **(9)** ..... Icarus not to fly too close to the sun. Icarus, ignoring his father's warning, burned his wings, **(10)** ..... into the sea and died.

## 4 Look at Brueghel's picture. What elements does Auden concentrate on?



Pieter Brueghel, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, c. 1558. Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts.

## 5 Tick as appropriate.

- ☐ The poem has a regular rhyme scheme.  
☐ There are occasional rhymes in the poem.  
☐ The poem is written in free verse.

## 6 Complete the sentence below with the right option.

The tone of the poem is *lyrical* / *conversational*.

## 7 Write down the adverbs used by the poet.

## 8 What is the world's attitude towards tragedy according to the poet?



9 What view of suffering and death does Auden present?

- A Romantic.
- B Disenchanted.
- C Idealised.

10 Focus on the language of the poem. How would you define it?

11 Complete the paragraphs about the theme of the poem with the words from the box.

|            |             |                |             |              |
|------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|
| burdens    | perspective | categorisation | awareness   | indifference |
| comparison | response    | continuity     | juxtaposing | trivial      |

The poem analyses the permanent human (1) ..... to tragedy and questions the accepted (2) ..... of 'ordinary' life experiences. By (3) ..... images of suffering and tragedy with the (4) ..... actions of everyday life, it suggests that individual tragedies are individual (5) ..... as humankind responds with (6) .....

The poem places the reader in front of a painting in a museum, inviting him or her to draw a (7) ..... between the world within the painting and the world outside the museum. The images in the poem lead the reader through various periods of time thus implying a (8) ..... of events. There is a constant shift of (9) ..... to put the reader into the position of being able to see things in a way one normally would not see. Such shifts create the (10) ..... of his/her 'human position' in the reader.

#### > COMPETENCE: LINKING LITERATURE TO PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

3 **DISCUSS.** Do you think that Auden's lines can be applied to today's reality? Can you provide some examples of the juxtaposition of suffering with banal actions of everyday life?