

Icarus as depicted by three artists essay examples

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



The story of Icarus comes from Greek mythology. Essentially, it is the opposite of a coming to age story, and is more a leading to one's own demise through failed ambition. Icarus is the son of Daedalus, a craftsman on the island of Crete. His father constructed a pair of wings using feathers and wax and warned Icarus not to fly too close to the sun. Icarus, ignores this warning and this leads to his death. He flies too close to the sun and the heat of it melts his wings and he falls into the ocean where he is drowned. This story has been the spin-off for a variety of other works of art in a multiplicity of crafts.

While the origins are not known with complete certainty, in the mid 16th century a painting "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" was painted depicting the story of Icarus. The painting depicts a road by a harbor where boats are coming and going. On the shore is a shepherd tending his sheep and on the road is a farmer plowing his field. It shows a simple bucolic life. In the right corner of the painting, just barely perceptible are two legs coming out from the sea with some feathers drifting towards the water. This is Icarus and he is almost as difficult to find within the painting as Waldo in a "Where's Waldo" book.

Though Icarus is the only identifiable figure depicted in the painting, he is not given a place of visual prominence or attached importance. Purposely, he has been brushed to the side. None of the men in the painting seem to notice that he has just fallen from the sky into the sea and is now drowning. American poet William Carlo Williams titled a poem using the title of the painting and uses language to carry the torch of exploring the theme of Icarus where the painting leaves off. The poem is brief, with seven stanzas of

three lines each and no more than ten words in each stanza.

He identifies the assumed artist of the painting, indicating that this is Icarus as Brueghel saw it. Carlos creates an imagery of excitement by indicating that it is spring and things are beginning again: “ the whole pageantry / of the year / was awake tingling / near.”

He identifies Icarus as “ insignificantly off the coast” where there was “ a splash quite unnoticed” which was “ Icarus drowning.” The poem captures the same symbolism employed within the painting and the means of that does not change it’s essence but alters it’s form. Though the people depicted in the painting like the farmer who was “ ploughing his field,” they may be simple, but they are still alive. Icarus, in his recklessness of flying so close to the sun, has lost his life and will be unable to regain it.

Michael Hamburger makes a closer connection by speaking of the intentions of those in the painting from the sailors’ “ hopes” to the sheep consuming the “ illimitable juiciness of things.”

In Hamburger’s poem, Icarus is accused and for that his death seems more just and a result of offenses rather than as it is depicted in Williams—an unfortunate tragedy no one seems to note.

In Hamburger’s poem Icarus “ scorned” the earth, which prevails against him while his “ damaged purpose” drags him down. The last line resonates with the reader. That the shore is now “ hardly conceivable, is left to drown.”

Hardly conceivable provides a strong image of what it would be like to drown, to be literally and figuratively so immersed, that dry land seems like an inconceivable prospect.

Work Cited

Brueghel " Landscape with the fall of Icarus"

Michael Hamburger's " Lines on Brueghel's Icarus"

William Carlos Williams " Landscape With The Fall of Icarus"