Flight 063

1

Brian Aldiss

Why always speak of Icarus’ fall?—

That legendary plunge

Amid a shower of tallow

And feathers and the poor lad’s

Sweat? And that little splash

Which caught the eye of Brueghel

While the sun remained

Aloof within its private zone?

That fall remains

Suspended in the corporate mind.

Yet as our Boeing flies

High above the Arctic Circle

Into the sun’s eye, think---

Before the fall the flight was.

(So with Adam---just before

The Edenic Fall, he had

The first taste of Eve.)

Dinner is served aboard Flight 063.

We eat from plastic trays, oblivious

To the stratosphere.

But Icarus—his cliff-top jump,

The leap of heart, the blue air scaled---

His glorious sense of life

Imperiled. Time

Fell far below, the everyday

Was lost in his ascent.

Up, up, he sailed, unheeding

Such silly limitations as

The melting point of wax.

Icarus

2

Stephen Spender

He will watch the hawk with an indifferent eye

Or pitifully;

Nor on those eagles that so feared him, now

Will strain his brow;

Weapons men use, stone, strong and strong-thewed

bow

He will not know.

This aristocrat, superb of all instinct,

With death close linked

Had paced the enormous cloud, almost had won

War on the sun;

Till now, like Icarus mid-ocean-drowned,

Hands, wings, are found.

Landscape with the Fall of Icarus

William Carlos Williams

3

According to Brueghel

when Icarus fell

it was spring.

a farmer was ploughing

his field

the whole pageantry

of the year was

awake tingling

near

the edge of the sea

concerned 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

4

Musée des Beaus Arts

W.H. Auden

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;

Who, 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 Brueghel’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.

Icarus

5

Edward Field

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. Hick,” the neighbors called him,

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 wished he had drowned.

To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph\*

6

Anne Sexton

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.

\*The title alludes to and reverses the title of a poem by William Butler Yeats, ‘To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothin’ (1914).

**Icarus' Diatribe  
 Aaron Pastula**

7

How we have wasted the years here, Father;   
Grounded in the shadow of Talus, whom you envied   
Too much, and murdered. We might be free   
If

Ariadne had not received a precious ball of thread   
With which to save her lover, yet you would rescue   
Another even though we are trapped, and only   
Two left.

I've watched your shadows sleep against stone walls   
While I ran our labyrinth, the sun above   
Driving me as if I should call for my final repose   
Alone.

Do you remember the torrid wind maneuvering   
Around the angles of our usless garrison,   
Filling empty mouths with surrogate conversation?   
We

Seldom spoke, you and I, roaming like languid souls   
When the Minotaur's threat was dead.   
And yet I felt the lyre singing in my breast,   
Always

Crying out background noise for the construction   
Of my cunningly wrought wings; my only means to rise   
Above these steadfast fortress walls, lest I   
Surrender

To your silence. I know the gulls were wailing   
When I robbed them, but they had flown too close:   
I am not to blame for the necessity of my purpose.   
To you

I am as your own divided heart - double-sexed   
And beating as a thief's in the falling hours of twilight,   
Awaiting my time to retire. Instead I take flight,   
The sun

Drawing me as an opiate away from our   
Etherized utopia, leaving you puzzled; compelling   
You to follow me out above the open,   
Beguiling sea

**Icarus  
 Christine Hemp**

8

It was his idea, this flying thing.  
We collected feathers at night, stuffing  
our pockets with mourning dove down. By day,  
we'd weave and glue them with the wax  
I stole after we'd shooed the bees away.

Oh, how it felt, finally, to blow off Crete  
leaving a labyrinth of dead-ends:  
my clumsiness with figures, father's calm  
impatience, cool logic, interminable devising.  
The sea wind touched my face like balm.

He thought I'd tag along as usual,  
in the wake of his careful scheme  
bound by the string connecting father and son,  
invisible thread I tried for years to untie.  
I ached to be a good-for-something on my own.

I didn't know I'd get drunk with the heat,  
flying high, too much a son to return.  
Poor Daedelus, his mouth an O below,  
his hands outstretched to catch the rain  
of wax. He still doesn't know.

My wings fell, yes - I saw him hover  
over the tiny splash - but by then I'd been  
swallowed into love's eye, the light I've come to see  
as home, drowning in the yes, this swirling  
white-hot where night will never find me.

And now when my father wakes  
each morning, his bones still sore  
from his one-time flight, his confidence undone  
because the master plan fell through,  
he rises to a light he never knew, his son.

**Icarus  
Tony Curtis**

Out of an English summer morning's sky  
drops an Indian who failed in flight  
miles short of heaven. This frozen Icarus  
thrown from the wheel-bay of a 747,  
splashes into a Surrey reservoir,  
cracking the water like a whip.

9

This poor man stowed away  
in the Delhi heat, curled  
himself into an oven of rubber and oil,  
and dreamed as he rose in the deafening take-off  
of food and rain and Coca-Cola  
and television where the colour never ends.

The waitress at the Granada stop  
tapping in two coffees and a Danish  
at the till, for no reason at all,  
looked up, saw a bird, or an engine,  
or a man, and then nothing  
but blue sky again.