**Landscape With The Fall of Icarus**

**By William Carlos Williams [1883-1936]**

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



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (c. 1558)

**Musee des Beaux Arts**

**By W. H. Auden [1907-1973]**

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.

**The Starry Night**

**By Anne Sexton [1928-1974]**

That does not keep me from having a terrible need of—shall I say the word—religion. Then I go out at night to paint the stars.Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother

The town does not exist

except where one black-haired tree slips

up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.

The town is silent. The night boils with eleven stars.

Oh starry starry night! This is how

I want to die.

It moves. They are all alive.

Even the moon bulges in its orange irons

to push children, like a god, from its eye.

The old unseen serpent swallows up the stars.

Oh starry starry night! This is how

I want to die:

into that rushing beast of the night,

sucked up by that great dragon, to split

from my life with no flag,

no belly,

no cry.



Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night* (1889)

**The Starry Night**

**By Robert Fagles [1933-2008]**

Long as I paint

I feel myself

less mad

the brush in my hand

a lightning rod to madness

But never ground that madness

execute it ride the lightning up

from these benighted streets and steeple up

with the cypress look its black is burning green

I am that I am it cries

it lifts me up the nightfall up

the cloudrack coiling like a dragon's flanks

a third of the stars in heaven wheeling in its wake

wheels in wheels around the moon that cradles round the sun

and if I can only trail these whirling eternal stars

with one sweep of the brush like Michael's sword if I can

cut the life out of the beast - safeguard the mother and the son

all heaven will hymn in conflagration blazing down

the night the mountain ranges down

the claustrophobic valleys of the mad

Madness

is what I have instead of heaven

God deliver me - help me now deliver

all this frenzy back into your hands

our brushstrokes burning clearer into dawn.

**In Goya’s Greatest Scenes We Seem to See**

**By Lawrence Ferlinghetti [1919-]**

In Goya’s greatest scenes we seem to see

                                           the people of the world

       exactly at the moment when

             they first attained the title of

                                                             ‘suffering humanity’

          They writhe upon the page

                                        in a veritable rage

                                                                of adversity

          Heaped up

                     groaning with babies and bayonets

                                                       under cement skies

            in an abstract landscape of blasted trees

                  bent statues bats wings and beaks

                               slippery gibbets

                  cadavers and carnivorous cocks

            and all the final hollering monsters

                  of the

                           ‘imagination of disaster’

            they are so bloody real

                                        it is as if they really still existed

    And they do

                  Only the landscape is changed

They still are ranged along the roads

          plagued by legionnaires

                     false windmills and demented roosters

They are the same people

                                     only further from home

      on freeways fifty lanes wide

                              on a concrete continent

                                        spaced with bland billboards

                        illustrating imbecile illusions of happiness

                        The scene shows fewer tumbrils

                                                but more strung-out citizens

                                                                     in painted cars

                               and they have strange license plates

                           and engines

                                           that devour America

**I Am Goya**

**By Andrey Voznesensky [1933-2010]**

I am Goya

of the bare field, by the enemy’s beak gouged

till the craters of my eyes gape

I am grief

I am the tongue

of war, the embers of cities

on the snows of the year 1941

I am hunger

I am the gullet

of a woman hanged whose body like a bell

tolled over a blank square

I am Goya

O grapes of wrath!

I have hurled westward

the ashes of the uninvited guest!

and hammered stars into the unforgetting sky – like nails

I am Goya

Francisco de Goya, *The Third of May, 1808: The Execution of the Defenders of Madrid* (1814)

**Francisco de Goya, *The Disasters of War, the Carnivorous Vulture* (c. 1810)**

**Journey of the Magi**

Sandro Botticelli, *Adoration of the Magi* (c. 1475)

**By T. S. Eliot [1888-1965]**

A cold coming we had of it,

Just the worst time of the year

For a journey, and such a long journey:

The was deep and the weather sharp,

The very dead of winter."

And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,

Lying down in the melting snow.

There were times we regretted

The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,

And the silken girls bringing sherbet.

Then the camel men cursing and grumbling

And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,

And the night-fires gong out, and the lack of shelters,

And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly

And the villages dirty, and charging high prices.:

A hard time we had of it.

At the end we preferred to travel all night,

Sleeping in snatches,

With the voices singing in our ears, saying

That this was all folly.

****Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,

Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;

With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,

And three trees on the low sky,

And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.

Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,

Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,

And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.

But there was no information, and so we continued

And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon

Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,

And I would do it again, but set down

This set down

This: were we lead all that way for

Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,

We had evidence and no doubt. I have seen birth and death,

But had thought they were different; this Birth was

Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,

But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,

With an alien people clutching their gods.

I should be glad of another death.

**The Magi**

**By W. B. Yeats [1865-1939]**

OW as at all times I can see in the mind's eye,

In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied ones

Appear and disappear in the blue depth of the sky

With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,

And all their helms of silver hovering side by side,

And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more,

Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,

The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.

**Giotto di Bondone, *Adoration of the Magi* (1313)**

**The Scream**

**By Donald Hall [1928-]**

Observe. Ridged, raised, tactile, the horror

of the skinned head is there. It is skinned

which had a covering-up before,

and now is nude, and is determined

by what it perceives. The blood not Christ’s,

blood of death without resurrection,

winds flatly in the air. Habit foists

conventional surrender to one

response in vision, but it fails here,

where the painstaking viewer is freed

into the under-skin of his fear.

Existence is laid bare, and married

to a movement of caught perception

where the unknown will become the known

as one piece of the rolling mountain

becomes another beneath the stone

which shifts now toward the happy valley

Edvard Munch, *The Scream* (1893)

which is not prepared, as it could not

be, for the achieved catastrophe

which produces no moral upshot,

no curtain, epilogue, nor applause,

no Dame to return purged to the Manse

(the Manse is wrecked) – not even the pause,

the repose of art that has distance.

We, unlike Munch, observe his The Scream

making words, since perhaps we too know

the head’s “experience of extreme

disorder.” We have made our bravo,

but such, of course, will never equal

the painting. What is the relation?

A word, which is at once richly full

of attributes: thinginess, reason,

reference, time, noise, among others;

bounces off the firm brightness of paint

as if it had no substance, and errs

toward verbalism, naturally. Mayn’t

we say that time cannot represent

space in art? “The fascination of

what’s impossible” may be present,

motivating the artist to move.

So the poet, the talker, aims his

words at the object, and his words go

faster and faster, and now he is

like a cyclotron, breaking into

the structure of things by repeated

speed and force in order to lay bare

in words, naturally, unworded

insides of things, the things that are there.

**Rooms by the Sea**

**By John Hollander [1929-]**

It may recall
An earlier glimpse of emptiness, a corner
Of a room by the sea, opening seemingly
Onto an uncontainable expense of ocean.
The front room,

To step right out of the room in to the sea
Directly, as if the land outside had all vanished with some silent “Boom!”
How wonderfully sudden it would be!

How grandly liberating it could be,
Having swept away all but sunlight with a painter’s broom,
To step wide out of the room out to the sea,

To step straight out of the room onto the sea,
The blue hardwood floor or its surface stretched over an almost bottomless gloom:
How shockingly stabilizing it should be.

How nonchalant yet stirring it might be
Straw-hatted, wearing some buttonhole in yellow bloom,
To step gaily out of the room off to the sea.

To step wrongly out of the room up to the sea,
As if suddenly there were nothing any more about perspective that we could assume,
How seemingly possible, yet it can’t be…

How simple and familiar it shall be
In the broadly ordinary that for the time being remains our doom
To step simply out of the room and down to the sea.

Edward Hopper, *Rooms by the Sea* (1903)

**Jesus and the Woman at the Well**

**By Marilyn Chandler McEntyre [1949-]**

You never know who will be chosen.

A lot of folks who would have loved

to spend half an hour with God Incarnate

didn’t get to.

 A lot of those

who had their moment with the Lord

never made it into history. Lost pearls,

those words exchanged along the dusty roads

that no one wrote down.

Then there’s this woman. She’s not a seeker.

She’s just tired of coming all this way

for water, tired of men who take more

than they give, tired of righteous people

who still have their reputations.

She’s no Rebekah, virginal and fair,

nor Rachel, ripe for love, ready with her water jar,

nor Zipporah, grateful for deliverance.

What mockery even to imagine her

among those holy women who found

their bridegrooms waiting by the well.

Baffled again, the disciples wondered:

*Why should she be an object of such attention—*

*not only Samaritan, but a woman*

*and angry as a shrew? At least the whores*

*had a little laughter in them.*

*Odd how he’ll talk to anyone.*

*Could get him into real trouble*

*one of these days.*

 *Not to mention*

*the embarrassment for the rest of us.*



**School of Rembrandt Van Rijn, *Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well* (1659)**