ICARUS, BRUEGHEL AND THE POETS

A STUDY OF MEANING IN THE MYTH OF DAEDALUS AND ICARUS

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STATEMENT

I declare that the dissertation hereby submitted by me for the Master of Arts degree at the University of the Free State is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted by me to another university/faculty. I furthermore cede copyright of the dissertation in favour of the University of the Free State.

A G Ullyatt

For Gisela, who has flown with me

I do not believe in things;
I believe in relationships

- Georges Braque

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A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Where other writers are quoted, their original spellings have been retained. There has been no attempt to standardise words ending in –ise or –ize and –sation or -zation, for example. The same holds true of other American and British spellings.

Although some of the authors cited use male-centered terminology such as "he", "his", "himself", and so on without the accompanying female equivalents, no attempt has been made to rectify that terminology; the appearance of [*sic*] on every occasion would have made the text even more untidy than it is already. It goes without saying that such male-centered terminology is unacceptable; that it was characteristic of the times does not excuse its inherent biases and prejudices.

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INTRODUCTION

"MORE THAN A CAUTIONARY TALE ABOUT DISOBEDIENCE"

> *The tragic legend of Icarus has fascinated writers and artists of all times. Herodotus, Callimachus, Apollodorus, and Sophocles all recalled the tragedy of Daedalus's son who, like Phaeton, plunged to death in that part of the Aegean Sea which bears his name. It was, however, the account in Ovid's Metamorphoses, so widely read in Christianized versions during the late Middle Ages, that brought Icarus to Dante and Chaucer. Later the original version of the text by Ovid was available to Renaissance poets such as Sannazzaro, Tansillo, Desportes, and Gongora, and served as the inspiration for their poems* (Clements, 1981/1982, p. 253).

And that fascination has persisted to the present day.

The myth of Daedalus and Icarus has always seemed such a simple story: a cautionary tale about disobedience. The fallacy of that presumption, as well as the brevity implicit in it, has resulted in this dissertation.

The research question took a deceptively simple form: What does the myth of Daedalus and Icarus "mean"? Such a question presumes that there is a definitive "original" version of the myth. This turned out not to be the case. As a result, three subordinate research questions emerged: (a) how might the myth be understood if different versions of it existed? (b) what form might these differing variants take? and (c) what broader, connotative meanings might the myth possess?

The research was originally intended to result in an essay on three poems by William Carlos Williams, W H Auden, and Michael Hamburger. That all three texts have, as their subject matter, Pieter Brueghel the Elder's depiction of the fall of Icarus seemed to provide an apparent thematic unity that would facilitate the investigation of these works. However, a clear understanding of the "original" myth was crucial not only to comprehend Brueghel's painting but also to any appreciation or interpretation of the chosen poems.

A complex web of inter-relationships between the myth, the painting, and the poems began to emerge, not least the fact that Brueghel's painting is itself a "reading", an interpretation or variant of the myth while the individual poems constitute "readings" or variants of the painting. And as if that were not enough, it transpired subsequently that Brueghel had painted

not one, but at least two, versions of *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* and there were many poems whose subject-matter centred, one way or another, on the myth.

To have a rudimentary grasp of what the basic story of the myth is "about", one needed to read Ovid, if only in translation. This source, it was presumed, could yield an understanding of the story's main characters, their relationships, and the events affecting them. Ovid's is not the only account, however, and from various sources, it became clear that the story of Daedalus and Icarus has a number of variants, each proposing somewhat different endings, endings that result in the myth having different meanings. It also became evident that even the term "myth" would have to be subjected to some scrutiny if one was going to regard the story of Daedalus and Icarus as a "myth". Nothing could be assumed.

Only at this point was it possible to turn to the poems themselves, to begin a discussion of the ways in which poets had created texts based on "the" myth – or what they assumed to be "the" myth. Then there were the three poems based specifically on Brueghel's painting of the myth. This aspect of the investigation should have been relatively straightforward but research revealed some earlier depictions of the myth which bear a remarkable similarity to Brueghel's work.

The dissertation comprises three parts: Part 1 consists of the first three chapters whose primary but not exclusive focus is mythological. Part 2 is made up of Chapters 4 and 5, both of which focus on poetry having the Icarian myth as its subject-matter. Part 3 contains Chapters 6 and 7; they offer broader perspectives on the meaning of the myth.

In attempting to answer the main research question and its corollaries, the dissertation has a number of purposes, the first of which is to try to define what we mean when we talk or write about myth. While some of the major debates are touched upon, Chapter 1 pretends to be little more than an introduction to a vast and amorphous topic. Some of the theoretical matters underpinning this research are also dealt with here.

The second purpose is to offer a critical reading of Melville's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This is the focus of Chapter 2. However, what we understand and perceive about the myth, its main characters, and what the mythic events "mean" create presuppositions and presumptions that impinge on our understanding of its meaning/s. Our own experiences of life in the world provide a context for those meanings too. Consequently, the second chapter begins with an overview of the inter-relationships of the major characters involved in the myth and those tales associated with Minos and Crete. Chapter 3 may be considered almost as an adjunct to the first two. It presents several of versions and variants of the Icarus myth, most of which differ primarily in the manner of Icarus's death. These

alternatives affect the way his premature demise is perceived and its significance or meaning understood.

The dissertation's third purpose is to study how a number of poets from America, Britain, and South Africa have made use of various aspects of the myth to create poems that serve as "interpretations" or variants of the myth. Six poems comprise the subject of Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 has a narrower focus, given over, as it is, to an examination of how three major English-speaking poets have used one of Brueghel's paintings of the myth in various ways to produce poems about, or related to, the subject of Icarus. To this end, the chapter opens with a discussion of Brueghel's work as well as the earlier depictions of the myth.

Chapter 6 explores several broader connotative meanings of the myth. It explores "what else" the myth could mean. A brief opening discussion of denotative and connotative meaning leads to a range of reflections on such matters as exile, flight, the rebel and conformity, and the father/son relationship among others. The various sections of the chapter are intended to initiate, even provoke discussion and debate about the myth's meaning; it offers nothing that should be construed as either comprehensive or definitive.

Chapter 7 contains a collection of more than two dozen poems (in English) inspired in some way by the Icarian myth. It goes without saying that many more texts exist in German, French, and Spanish, to say nothing of examples in Eastern European languages. The texts included here provide nothing more than a *soupçon* of the range and diversity of responses the myth has provoked. Their inclusion should not be taken as any sort of benchmark for creative quality or otherwise.

The dissertation concludes with a list of references.

From this overview, it should be evident that, methodologically speaking, one is caught between what van Deurzen (1998, p. 79) calls "the practices of eclecticism on the one hand and of integrationism on the other". She goes on to explain the distinction thus: "The former takes the view that diversity of method should match individual difference and preference. The latter holds that we need to arrive at a principled integration of all this diversity whilst retaining breadth". Both approaches have much to recommend them; both have shortcomings. To choose between them is an invidious task but an inevitable one. After careful consideration of the content and scope of the material this dissertation sought to encompass, "the practices of eclecticism" seemed to make available a diversity of methodologies and perspectives that has proved most amenable to the task. Secondly, this dissertation is less concerned with proposing and arguing a narrowly-focused thesis, what van Deurzen calls "a

principled integration", than it is with employing a range of different approaches in an attempt to comprehend the many meanings of the Icarian myth.

Throughout the research process, it became increasing apparent that all information about the myth – paraphrases and summaries in reference books, differing accounts in classical texts, modern poems with the myth as subject – constitute some, although by no means all, of the variants and versions to which Lévi-Strauss and Thompson refer. (See Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion.) Ultimately, each text adds to whatever might be construed as the "original" or "first" text.

Although there are recurrent principles and thematic preoccupations throughout the work as a whole, each chapter is predominantly, but not entirely, discrete. The overall structure of the work is achieved through the accretive effect of dealing with a diversity of materials from a variety of perspectives, using a variety of methodologies. Consequently, for those searching for a neatly ordered cohesion, disappointment is inevitable. But, as W Gordon Lawrence (1979, p. 240) has trenchantly remarked: "The question is whether the social sciences are to provide neatly ordered accounts of reality or whether the accounts are to reflect the complexity and latent disorder." This dissertation attempts to provide an account of the subject's complexity and latent disorder rather than present an artificially tidy and misrepresentative version of its realities; this choice is rooted in a belief, shared with and by Lawrence that "anxiety, disarray, chaos, uncertainty are the seedbeds of creativity" (Lawrence, 1979, p. 248). Research itself, we would contend, is a creative activity and a subjective activity, despite the fact that "the stance of some social scientists has been to maintain an I-It, instrumental, pseudo-professional relationship with their world" (Lawrence, 1979, p. 239). In literary studies, and in the human and social sciences generally, an honest open passion for one's research and for the processes – chaotic, uncertain, and disarrayed though they may be - in which one invests so much time, energy, and enthusiasm seems infinitely preferable to the pseudo-professional aloofness of will-o'-the-wisp "objectivity".

Above all else, this work has striven to avoid Daniel Keyes's indictment that much, but by no means all, research is "money, time, and effort squandered on the detailed analysis of the trivial" (1989, p. 110). The ubiquitous influence of the Icarian myth itself controverts any suggestions of triviality.

PART 1

ON MYTH, DAEDALUS AND ICARUS IN PARTICULAR

CHAPTER 1

"A HANDFUL OF ICE FROM THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG": TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF MYTH

It seems more than appropriate to begin a discussion of meaning in the myth of Daedalus and Icarus with an exploration of the meaning of the word "myth" itself. It would be wonderfully convenient if there were just a single definition but, alas! such is not the case. The complexity of myth as an area of study and as a subject of discourse is matched only by the difficulty of defining its constituents. Its diversity overlaps or encompasses disciplines such as archaeology, history, religion, sociology, and more. Consequently, we need to spend a little time here attempting an understanding of what we mean when we talk about "myth" as well as some of the function/s of, and approaches to, myth. This is much like trying to describe the dimensions of a gigantic iceberg by scooping up a handful from its summit. It will be obvious that what follows constitutes little more than a handful of ice from the tip of the iceberg. Another person's handful of ice might look entirely different, even though it comes from the same iceberg.

This discussion also hopes to explore why we should still invest time in reading myths that are more than 2000 years old. Ellmann and Fiedelson have argued (1965, p. 617):

> *The modern return to mythic forms is in part an attempt to reconstitute the value-laden natural environment that physical science has tended to discredit. At the same time, it is a repossession of a cultural heritage. These mythical forms are still available because in another sense they are outside history, residing in a timeless world below the threshold of consciousness. Myths are public and communicable, but they express subliminal mental patterns that come close to the compulsive drives of the unconscious.*

In her book, *Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry* (1971, pp. 3-4), Lillian Feder points out:

> *In the confusion of disputes over its definition, exaggerations of its values, and warning of its dangers, one fact about myth is clear: it survives because it functions in the present, revealing a remarkable capacity to evolve and adapt to the intellectual and aesthetic requirements of the twentieth century. Critical controversy over myth and the diversity of poetic experimentation in its use reflect the vitality of myth as a means of expressing a variety of contemporary approaches to the inherited past, to time, history, and the yearning for order and meaning in a skeptical age.*

Ricarda Schmidt (1990, p. 253) concurs:

> *The fact that myth has met such widespread interest in recent years has generally been attributed to the social crisis of postmodern times, a crisis characterized by a loss of belief in progress, rationality, or even revolution, and by a lack of justification for social institutions, a lack of meaning.*

Turning now to some basic definitions of the term "myth", we should bear in mind that definitions vary quite substantially and, as we shall see later, those variations have consequences for how we understand the term and what we understand it to mean. We should begin to understand the accuracy of what Ruthven (1976, p. 1) says when he writes:

> *What is myth? ... It is the question itself, we come to realize, which is at fault, for we have no direct experience of myth as such, but only of particular myths: and these, we discover are obscure in origin, protean in form and ambiguous in meaning.*

1.1 TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF MYTH

Before moving into the detail of definitions, we should remember that myth has didactic functions of various sorts and kinds, and that means there are always moral lessons to be learned and psychological insights to be gained. Paradoxically, it is the nature of myth to retain an openendedness with regard to the meaning/s implicit or explicit in these two dimensions. Originally, myth was always related to rite, *mythos* (the spoken element) accompanying the *dromenon* ("that which is done", the rite performed) (Feder, 1971, p. 5). There has been a subsequent and much-debated separation of these constituents.

1.1.1 MYTH VERSUS OTHER FORMS OF TALE-TELLING

Not only are there numerous definitions of the term "myth" but there are also several distinctions between "myth" and other forms of tale-telling. Eliade (1970, p. 1134) notes the distinction between "myth" and "tales", the former being "true stories" and the latter, "false stories". Alan Dundes (1970, p. 1140) offers a distinction between mythology and "primitive mythology", noting a further distinction between polygenesis and monogenesis theories of myth.

Michael Grant (1971, p. 261) observes that "[v]ery often, especially by anthropologists and theologians, no myth is described as a myth unless it *is* a religious or sacred tale". Others give the term "myth" only to tales whose subject matter focuses on the origins of the universe. Yet, as Grant also notes, "there are also a great many other quite different definitions of the word 'myth'" (1972, p. 261). A little later (p. 262), he avers that "Belief or non belief, on the part of those who told and those who listened to the stories, is one criterion employed in the distinction between the term 'myth' and 'folk-tale'". He also suggests a useful distinction

between "myth" and "legend". The former is "thoroughgoing fiction" while the latter - also called "pseudosaga" by H. J. Rose - consists of stories based, no matter how remotely, on historical fact.

In his characteristic manner, Graves (1960, vol. 1, p. 12) proposes that:

> *True myth must be distinguished from:*
>
> *(1) Philosophical allegory, as in Hesiod's cosmogony.*
> *(2) "Aetiological" explanations of myths no longer understood, as in Admetus's yoking of the lion and the boar to his chariot.*
> *(3) Satire or paraody, as in Silenus's account of Atlantis.*
> *(4) Sentimental fable, as in the story of Narcissus and Echo.*
> *(5) Embroidered history, as in Arion's adventure with the dolphin.*
> *(6) Minstrel romance, as in the story of Cephalus and Procris.*
> *(7) Political propaganda, as in Theseus's Federalization of Attica.*
> *(8) Moral legend, as in the story of Eriphyle's necklace.*
> *(9) Humorous anecdote, as in the bedroom farce of Heracles, Omphale, and Pan.*
> *(10) Theatrical melodrama, as in the story of Thestor and his daughters.*
> *(11) Heroic saga as in the main argument of the Iliad.*
> *(12) Realistic fiction, as is Odysseus's visit to the Phaenacians.*

These distinctions, no matter how petty or quibbling they may seem, are meant to delineate differences between myth and other forms of story- and tale-telling. Leach (1996, p. 68) observes that the distinction that history is true and myth is false is "quite arbitrary". We would argue that, instead of trying to make compartmentalised, self-contained generic definitions, we should explore the possibility of a continuum that begins with myth and its fantastic accounts of creations – the cosmos, the earth, the living creatures (human and phantasmagorical), which then goes on to the legends of great "human" characters – real but not necessarily "proven" with historical documentation, and concludes with demonstrably proven historical people and events. We might move the continuum just a little further on to include accounts of the demonstrably powerful archaeology of myth within the individual psyche. Such a continuum would possess an elegant congruence with Hollis's thesis (outlined later) that myth addresses questions of cosmology, metaphysics, sociology, and psychology. At the same time, we should not lose sight of James Lewis's caveat (1999, p. 195) that "the distinction between myth and history remains both subtle and controversial".

What we need to look at now are the different ways in which the term "myth" has been defined. We should not necessarily expect clarity and precision to be the outcomes of what follows.

1.1.2 DEFINITIONS OF THE TERM *MYTH*

In the *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* (Reber, 1995, p. 480), myth is defined in part as follows: "From the Greek, meaning *tale* or *speech*, a story that is of unknown or unverifiable origin but is part of the tradition of a culture or a group. Usually a myth carries some explanatory component that ostensibly relates historic events, particularly those of importance for the culture".

The next definition comes from the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1982, p. 670): "traditional narrative usually involving supernatural or fancied persons etc. and embodying popular ideas on natural or social phenomena etc.; such narratives collectively; allegory (*Platonic myth*); fictitious person or thing or idea".

The *Reader's Digest Great Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (1972, vol. 2, p. 587) defines myth as "fictional (primitive) tale, usu. Involving supernatural persons, embodying some popular idea concerning natural or historical phenomena; fictitious person or object".

According to Maranda (1972, p. 13):"Myths are stylistically definable discourses that express the strong components of semantic systems". The link between language and myth is important because, as Cassirer (1946, p. 83) observes, "the intellectual link between language and myth is metaphor". This would seem to predate but, at the same time, support Rycroft's (1992, p. 52) assertion that all mental processes are dealt with metaphorically. Guiart (in Maranda, 1972, p. 114) argues that "in principle, no two versions of a myth can be the same, even if given by one individual" while Burridge (in Maranda, 1972, p. 127) says that

> *myths in general have the attributes of objective truth largely because, perhaps, they are stories having a weight of common consent. This does not mean that storytellers cannot make their own additions to a particular myth; but it does mean that the additions they make have to obtain popular consent if they are to remain parts of the myth. Myths are stories stamped large with social approval.*

From *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1974, pp. 538-541), Philip Wheelwright discusses the subject of myth in some detail, beginning with this definition:

> *Myth may be defined as a story or a complex of story elements taken as expressing, and therefore as implicitly symbolizing, certain deep-lying aspects of human and transhuman existence.*

He then goes on to address "two contrary and one-sided views of the matter". For the diligent reader, these debates are worth pursuing but would lead us into theoretical terrain that will take us far from the main concerns of this research.

What is crucial, however, is the mention of "human and transhuman existence". Myths contain stories, materials dealing with more than the merely human and the tangibly real. Indeed, in the 19th century, the word "myth" was used as an antonym for anything that was not "real". For the Greeks, "*mythos* meant "fable", "tale", "talk", "speech". Contrasted with both *logos* and later with *historia*, *mythos* finally came to denote "what cannot really exist" (Eliade, 1970, p. 1132). Clearly, myths deal with materials from several realms: the human, the historically verifiable, the supernatural, the transhuman, the imaginary, and much else.

But defining myth is not just a matter of sorting out the fictional wood from the factual trees; there are other matters to be taken into account. As Eliade observes, "[i]t would be hard to define myth in a way that would be acceptable to all scholars and at the time intelligible to nonspecialists. Myth is an extremely complex cultural reality, which can be approached and interpreted from various and complementary viewpoints." He adds (1970, p. 1134): "In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the supernatural) into the world. ... Furthermore, it is a result of the intervention of supernatural beings that man himself is what he is today, a mortal, sexed, and cultural being".

Eliade's argument rests on the distinction he posits subsequently between myths and tales. Myths centre on origins and cosmogonic issues. They

> *narrate not only the origin of the world, of animals, plants and man, but also all the primordial events in consequence of which man became what he is today - mortal, sexed [those words again!], organized in a society, obliged to work in order to live and working in accordance with certain rules. If the world exists, if man exists, it is because supernatural beings exercised creative powers in the "beginning"* (1970, p. 1134).

There are, however, other types of myths that Eliade (1970, p. 1138) classifies as

> *(1) myths of the gods and of other divine beings;*
> *(2) myths of the creation of man;*

(3) *myths telling of the subsequent modifications of the world and of the human condition;*

(4) *myths associated with celestial bodies and the life of nature;*

(5) *myths about heroes.*

We could continue collecting definitions and would not be any closer to consensus than we are now. The purpose behind looking at these definitions has been threefold: (a) to come to an awareness of the breadth and complexity of issues involved in defining and understand myth; (b) to appreciate that there are many different, even conflicting ways of approaching and studying myths; (3) to delineate the inevitable limitations of what follows.

1.1.3 A TENTATIVE DEFINITION OF MYTH

Nonetheless, to move our discussion forward, we require a working definition of the term "myth" as it will be used here. So let us move toward a rough definition that may serve our purposes, unscholarly and unsophisticated though such a definition may be: *A myth is an account of events (fabulous, fictional, legendary, or historical) enacted by human, superhuman, semi-divine and/or divine characters that focus on, and allow the contemplation of, some of the deep-seated dilemmas and issues of human existence.*

Inadequate and imprecise though this definition may prove to be under incisive critical scrutiny, it does allow us to move on to a brief consideration of the *function* of myths.

1.2 THE FUNCTION OF MYTH

> *The fact that myth has met with such widespread interest in recent years has generally been attributed to the social crisis of postmodern times, a crisis characterized by a loss of belief in progress, rationality, or even revolution [...] a lack of meaning. [Myth] is about coming to terms with the world, working through something that is disquieting, and making sense of the world.* (Schmidt, 1990, p. 253)

This broad view of the function/s of myth has evolved from the very early but specific function of accounting for the origins of the universe. Subsequently, more embracing or comprehensive functions were attached to myth. At the same time, Schmidt reiterates Feder's notion of a contemporary need for order and meaning, of its use as a mode of sense-, meaning-, or even order-making.

Mircea Eliade, for example, asserts that "myths represent both the sum of ancestral traditions and the norms it is important not to transgress, and because its transmission – generally,

secret, initiatory – is equivalent to the more or less official 'education' of a modern society" (1960, p. 31).

He continues: "In antiquity there was no hiatus between mythology and history: historical personages endeavoured to imitate their archetypes, the gods and mythical heroes". Braysher (2000, p. 4) argues for even broader functions: "myths didn't just express religious beliefs; historical myths were given a near-religious status in ancient Rome. Mythology can show much, not just about ancient worship but also about history, philosophy, science, morality and even climate".

Myths deal not merely with the realities of the lived world of facts and beliefs but also with the boundless worlds of fantasies, the super-natural (both beings and occurrences), the super-human, the unimaginable, the incomprehensible, the nightmarish, and events wherein the natural laws of the universe are irrelevant or, at least, inapplicable. They serve as the boundary territory between the unlimited possibilities of unbridled imagination and the certainties of the actual and factual.

According to Maranda (1972, p. 13), myths solve problems or declare them unsolvable as elegantly as pure mathematics, but their language is more difficult to learn. Adopting a similar stance of scientific precision, Lévi-Strauss (1964, p. 230) states that "The kind of logic in mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science, ... the difference lies, not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied". One presumes that Lévi-Strauss is here discussing the rigour of the intellectual processes required of researchers for any understanding of both mythology and modern science. Otherwise, to compare mythology to modern science is to commit oneself to a tenuous mathematisation of myth and culture as well as the folly of replication and other facets of scientific methodology.

The work of Carl Jung has done much to refocus intellectual attention on the uses of myth for modern man. Lewis (1999, p. 196) observes:

> *The other major use of mythology is in terms of the psychology of Carl Jung, who proposed that similarities among myths and pantheons could be explained if they arose from archetypal structures in the Collective Unconscious or Deep Mind that is common to all human beings. If this is so, myth represents another way in which the Deep Mind attempts to communicate with the individual ego, and the study of myths can give insight into one's own psychic structure.*

Criticising statistical approaches to the investigation of human behaviours, Jung himself writes [*CW* 16, par. 161]:

> *The scientist is always looking for an average. Our natural science makes everything an average, reduces everything to an average; yet the truth is that the carriers of life are individuals, not average numbers. When everything is statistical, all individual qualities are wiped out, and that, of course, is quite unbecoming. In fact, it is unhygienic, because if you wipe out the mythology of a man, his entire historical sequence, he becomes a statistical average, a number; that is, he becomes nothing.*

Here, Jung not only rebuffs the impersonality of the quantitative approach in scientific methodologies but also emphasises the importance of mythmaking at the individual level, the creation of "the mythology of a man".

Eliade (1960, p. 37) reiterates the idea thus:

> *We cannot say that the modern world has completely eliminated mythical behaviour; but only that its field of action is changed: the myth is no longer dominant in the essential sectors of life: it has been repressed, partly to the obscurer levels of the psyche, partly into the secondary or even irresponsible activities of society.*

Somewhat less pessimistically, Joseph Campbell (according to James Hollis, 1995, pp. 13-17) has identified four ways in which myth serves human need. Hollis continues: "Each office of myth is an imaginal speculation upon the character of our relationship with the four orders of mystery – to the cosmos, to nature, to each other and to ourselves". Consequently, Hollis contends, myth addresses questions of cosmology, metaphysics, sociology, and psychology. However, it does so speculatively rather than scientifically.

While these four loci or foci may serve as indications of the content of myth, we need to establish ways in which we can approach that content with a view to interpreting and understanding its meaning/s. (The plural becomes necessary if we accept the four contexts that myth addresses.)

1.3 APPROACHES TO MYTH

There are a variety of ways in which myth may be approached. It is not our intention here to deal with all possible facets here, nor to explicate those presented below. Indeed, the discussion will be restricted to a fairly limited, but nonetheless, powerful range of possibilities. The discussion opens with a crucial matter: the question of the "first" or "true" version of a myth and the concomitant issue of variants. Graves (1960, vol. 1, pp. 12-13), for example, states that "the fullest or most illuminating versions of a given myth is seldom supplied by any one author; nor, when searching for its original form, should one assume that the more

ancient the written source, the more authoritative it must be". Neither Lévi-Strauss nor Thompson disagrees with this position, although they flesh out the argument in significantly more detail. Since most of what follows depends on premises drawn from Lévi-Strauss and Thompson, it is to these authors that we shall now turn our attention.

1.3.1 LÉVI-STRAUSS & THOMPSON ON MYTH

In his classic essay, "The Structural Study of Myth", Claude Lévi-Strauss (1958, p. 58) argues:

> *It cannot be too strongly emphasised that all available variants should be taken into account. If Freudian comments on the Oedipus myth are part of the Oedipus myth, then questions such as whether Cushing's version of the Zuni origin myth should be retained or discarded become irrelevant. There is no one true version of which all the others are but copies or distortions. Every version belongs to the myth.*

He goes on to justify this approach by arguing that:

> *... our method eliminates a problem which has been so far one of the main obstacles to the progress of mythological studies, namely, the quest for the true version, or the earlier one. On the contrary, we define the myth as consisting of all its versions; to put it otherwise: a myth remains the same as long as it is felt as such. A striking example is offered by the fact that our interpretation may take into account, and is certainly applicable to, the Freudian use of the Oedipus myth. Although the Freudian problem has ceased to be that of autochthony versus bisexual reproduction, it is still the problem of understanding how one can be born from two: how is it that we do not have only one procreator, but a mother plus a father? Therefore, not only Sophocles, but Freud himself, should be included among the recorded versions of the Oedipus myth on a par with earlier or seemingly more "authentic" versions.*

In agreeing with Lévi-Strauss's approach to myth, William Irwin Thompson (1981, p. 10) has the following to say:

> *Lévi-Strauss argues for a point of view in which all the variants of a myth are brought together in a single imaginary space without a concern for their historical context.*

He continues (1981, p. 11):

> *Once we are freed from the quest for the one true version of a myth, we are also freed from the concern for determining the exact provenance of the variant.*

Although in agreement with Lévi-Strass, Thompson (1981, p. 14) pursues the argument:

> *But there are also other reasons why all the versions of a myth must be considered, and these reasons have to do with the applicability of information theory to the study of myth as noted by the anthropologist, Edmund Leach. Every message goes from a Sender to a Receiver through a transmitting medium, but every medium of transmission inevitably distorts the message, and so along the way the signal picks up noise. What the Receiver must get is a mixture of noise and information. If there is only one message, then the Receiver has no way of sorting out the noise from the information; but if the message is sent over and over again in many different ways, then the Receiver can line all the versions up in a single imaginary space, see the common structure, and sift the information from the noise.*

The merits of this argument lie in its arguing the possibility of diversity and variations, that is, of different variants of the myth. Once an original and definitive version ceases to be the *sine qua non*, the possibility of multiple meanings for a single myth becomes central to any understanding of it. This assumption would then imply that the meanings of myth assume a timeless quality and contemporary relevance.

Octavio Paz (quoted by Mellors, 1987, [p. 18]) writes that, in mythological time, "time is not succession and transition but the perpetual sound of the fixed present in which all times, past and future, are contained". Paz's words would seem to reinforce what Lévi-Strauss (in Thompson, 1981, p. 10) argues for: "a point of view in which all the variants of a myth are brought together in a single imaginary space without a concern for their historical context". Lévi-Strauss argues against "the quest for the *true* version, or the *earlier* one". He continues by stating "we define the myth as consisting of all its versions". Consequently the problems provoked by versions and variants do not reduce to issues of either/or, for they are all correct (Thompson, 1981, p. 13).

While accepting the general validity of Thompson's observations, any study of a specific myth must, of necessity, opt for one version of the story that can serve as the basis for an understanding of other variants and versions. Because virtually any version of the myth can serve as a starting-point for our discussion, Ovid's is as good a text as any with which to begin, in order to establish the basic elements of the myth. Once the variants of the Daedalus/Icarus myth have been overviewed, the most commonly recurring version will be delineated. It is this version that all the poets under discussion have used as the basis for writing their own versions of the myth. Although this is the predominant version of the myth for the present purposes, reference to other variants will be included in the discussion where this is deemed pertinent.

Here our concern is primarily with the variants that poets have created from the basic materials of the myth of Icarus rather than the common structural features they might share. That Ovid's is the version chosen does not mean that it is *de facto* the "first" or the "true", and that future research could not yield an earlier or more accurate/reliable version. The concerns here are with how some twentieth-century poets have used various elements of the myth in the course of producing a text of their own about Icarus.

In accepting Lévi-Strauss and Thompson's arguments about the accretive processes by which all variants contribute to the meaning of a myth, we presume too that the poems discussed in later chapters (as well as those included in Chapter 7) also contribute to the cumulative meaning of the myth. So too do the various accounts of the myth as it is paraphrased, summarised, and retold in reference works.

1.3.2 HOLLIS'S 10 APPROACHES TO MYTH

While Lévi-Strauss and Thompson's theorising focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on the content inherent in the many variants of a myth, Hollis's ten approaches to myth (Hollis, 1995, pp. 17-23) are here taken to mean "ways of understanding how and what myths mean". In other words, they constitute theoretical approaches to the interpretation of mythic content.

a. Antiquarian -> which concerns our curiosity about our ancestors;

b. Sociological -> in which myth is seen as the carrier of social values;

c. Historical -> which sees the gods and heroes as "faded accounts of real people and real events";

d. Proto-scientific -> presumes myth to be what human beings had before science to explain natural (and unnatural) phenomena;

e. Anthropological -> regards ancient myth as accounts of the origins and rise of human culture/s;

f. Linguistic -> which constitutes "The etymological study of a word, concept or mythologem [which] will often lend considerable insight into the root metaphor which arose to express the inexpressible primal experience";

g. Psychological -> in which myth may serve to provide scenarios dramatising the processes of psychological life;

h. Archetypal -> which arises from the work of C G Jung, and centres on the idea that "all human beings possessed a similar psychic structuring process" (Hollis, 1995, p. 21);

i. Phenomenological -> which proposes that myth is a form of radical apprehension;

j. Symbolic -> suggests that "Mythic images help us to approach the mysteries" and that "Myth is a way of talking about the Ineffable" (Hollis, 1995, p. 23).

Each of these approaches embodies an implicit if not explicit methodology; together, they are self-evidently intended to facilitate ways of dealing with a wide diversity of content with the whole body of myth. It could be argued, for example, that the proto-scientific method would be more useful in dealing with myths about origins and cosmology than the psychological method. To approach myths concerned with the creation of the universe, one might choose between the proto-scientific and the symbolic. Alternatively, a particular myth may be subjected to, or "read" from all of Hollis's methodological approaches to see what cumulative meaning and understanding is to be garnered.

To the ten approaches Hollis identifies here, there is at least one more to be added, one particularly relevant to this research. Unfortunately, it lacks a convenient name but it originates in the idea that *mythopoeia* may take the form of creating poems about the myth or that make use of components of a myth, poems which themselves become mythic variants contributing further meanings to the myth.

1.4 OVID'S METAMORPHOSES AND THE MYTH OF ICARUS

Because the main source of the Daedalus/Icarus story we shall be using here is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, we need to have some sense of his purpose in writing this fifteen-book poem. According to Feder (1964, pp. 253-254), the *Metamorphoses:*

> *... is at once a collection of the most important myths of the ancient world and a commentary on the passions that rule human beings. The myths deal mainly with transformations from the human state to that of an animal, a bird, a tree, a rock, a body of water, or a star. Beginning with the first great transformation – from chaos to order – Ovid has collected and retold about two hundred and fifty myths from before the time of Homer to his own time, ending with the deification of Julius Caesar. The stories are unified by mythological chronology, by the relationships among the characters and their strange transformations, and especially by Ovid's technique of suggesting human motivation, conflict, and suffering through mythical figures.*

We notice here not only that the metamorphoses transform humans into non-human entities (although rarely if ever the other way around: from non-human into human) but also that the metamorphoses often eventuate as a consequence of some sort of divine intervention. Note too the way in which psychological issues – motivation, conflict, and suffering, for example – are incorporated at the human level.

The Daedalus/Icarus story is messy in the manner in which it is presented. In fact, the way Icarus's story is told reveals several post-Modernist traits, although Ovid died in AD 18, almost

2000 years before the term had been invented. Our expectations will be confounded if we are looking for a neat chronological narrative. If Icarus's death is a punishment inflicted on Daedalus by the gods, then we will need to know something of Daedalus's earlier life to appreciate why the gods were angry with him. However, we are provided with information about Daedalus's past only *after* Icarus is already dead. In other words, this *ex post facto* information is out of chronological or narrative sequence. By subverting chronology as a structuring device, Ovid manipulates our responses to the tale while adding further meanings to our understanding of the deep-seated dilemmas the myth seeks to explore.

Ovid's compositional strategy here is reminiscent of the novelist's processes, as described by Percy Lubbock (1954, pp. 234-235), when he writes:

> *The process of writing a novel seems to be one of continual forestalling and anticipating; far more important than the immediate page is the page to come, still in the distance, on behalf of which this one is secretly working. The writer makes a point and reserves it at the same time, creates an effect and holds it back, till in due course it is appropriated and used by the page for which it is intended.*

Lubbock's comments were originally written in 1922 yet if we substitute the term "myth" or "tale" for "novel", they could well serve as a delineation of what Ovid was doing in his *Metamorphoses* in about AD 8.

CHAPTER 2

"STRANGE FATHERS, STRANGER SONS": OVID ON DAEDALUS & ICARUS

2.1 THE MYTH OF DAEDALUS & ICARUS AND OTHER STORIES

The myth of Icarus sprawls in the sense that it is not a compact, self-contained episode but has a number of loose threads that tie it, both backwards and forwards, to other episodes in Ovid's text. Because the Daedalus/Icarus tale constitutes only a tiny part of *The Metamorphoses*, it is linked to other, equally well-known myths dealing with King Minos, Theseus and Ariadne, the Minotaur, and so on. This means that we must be prepared to move off at tangents from Icarus's story from time to time because each of these stories may provide insights, however tenuous, that we may well need if we are to attempt an adequate understanding of the Daedalus/Icarus myth itself.

These linked stories serve a most valuable purpose. They provide observations and insights designed to enable us to understand the subtleties and nuances of the characters and events that make up the Daedalus/Icarus story. And there is, of course, a sound theoretical underpinning to this approach, articulated by Laing (1971, pp. 81-82), who writes:

> *[W]e cannot give an undistorted account of "a person" without giving an account of his relation with others. Even an account of one person cannot afford to forget that each person is always acting upon others and acted upon by others. The others are there also. No one acts or experiences in a vacuum. The person whom we describe, and over whom we theorize, is not the only agent in his "world". How he perceives and acts towards others, how they perceive and act towards him, how he perceives them as perceiving him, how they perceive him as perceiving them, are all aspects of "the situation". They are all pertinent to understanding one person's participation in it.*

Because all the stories and personages linked to the Daedalus/Icarus myth are pertinent to our understanding of it, this chapter now continues with a delineation of these characters, their relationships, and, in several cases, their inter-relatedness. The point of pursuing this tack is that we will acquire many more details and nuances than we will obtain from the next chapter and its discussion of the myth's variants. These details provide some indication of the myth's contextual complexity.

So, let us begin with the obvious: there is no Icarus story without his father. Conversely, Daedalus cannot assume the role of father without his child. Daedalus's history is central to the story of what happens even before Icarus is born on Crete. Why Daedalus is in Crete in the first place may be traced to what he has done to his sister, Polycaste, and her son, Talos.

The Daedalus-Talos subplot not only explains why Daedalus is in Crete but also reveals crucial aspects of his personality.

Icarus is born in Crete – an important fact to remember when we come to discuss his flight. His mother, Naucrate, is one of Minos's slaves. This means that both she and Daedalus are in the employ of King Minos. Not only is Minos the King of Crete, he is also one of the children of Zeus. Poseidon is one of Zeus' brothers, and, consequently, Minos's uncle. These familial ties play a significant role when Minos makes a deal with Poseidon.

Minos is married to Pasiphae, who thus becomes Poseidon's niece by marriage. Minos and Pasiphae have several children including Acacallis, Ariadne, Androgeos, Catreus, Deucalion, Glaucus, and Phaedra. Pasiphae also bore Cydon to Hermes and Libyan Ammon to Zeus (Graves, 1960, vol. 1, p. 303). Ariadne subsequently falls in love with Theseus, who is one of Poseidon's children and therefore Minos's cousin. Of Minos's other children, we should note that Glaucus drowned in a great jar of honey but was brought back to life by Polyeidus the Argive (Graves, 1960 vol. 1, pp. 304-305).

Although this covers most – but perhaps not all - of the main characters of the story, we may also need to pay some attention to the Labyrinth. A labyrinth is different from a maze because the entrance and exit of a labyrinth are one and the same while a maze has numerous entrances and exits. It is easier, therefore, to exit a maze than a labyrinth. This becomes an important consideration when one is planning to escape.

The two commonest forms of labyrinths are the square format, and the more familiar unicursal format. In both instances, to get from the entrance to the centre or *vice versa*, one would necessarily have to traverse every part of the labyrinth; no part is omitted from the process. Doob observes (1990, p. 48):

> *... a unicursal maze by its very nature defines the most circuitous route conceivable within any given space, the longest possible way to get to the center. In most surviving unicursal designs, the path leads in and out repeatedly so that, ironically, one may be unknowingly closer to the goal as the crow flies early in the journey than one is almost through the course.*

That the entrance and exit in a labyrinth are one and the same is a particularly relevant issue for understanding the myth. If Daedalus, when imprisoned with Icarus in the labyrinth, sought to escape, he would have to find the way out, itself a complex, time-consuming, and frustrating process, even for the man who, ironically, had created it in the first place. Then, were Minos's soldiers or guards to detect the attempted escape, they would be able to detain

Daedalus and Icarus simply by blocking the entrance/exit. As Doob notes (1990, p. 48): "safe exit is difficult or impossible without a guide [such as Daedalus had provided for Theseus with the ball of thread] or Daedalian wings". For Daedalus, knowing the intricacies of the labyrinth, the challenge of escape would lie in designing and creating workable wings suitable for their unimaginable purpose.

Just before we turn to the events of the story, we should note the importance of the main characters' names. Daedalus means "cunningly wrought" or "bright" while Talos means "sufferer". Icarus's mother's name, Naucrate, means "sea-power", an irony when one recalls Minos's defeat in Sicily and the passing of sea power from Crete to Greece (Graves, 1960, vol. 1, pp. 316-317).

Now we can turn to the main events of the story; in doing so, we shall follow as closely as is reasonably possible the "careers" of the characters we have just mentioned.

We begin with the question of why Daedalus is in Crete in the first place. Here is the paraphrase offered by Feder (1964, p. 111):

> *In* Metamorphoses VIII, *Ovid tells the story of how Daedalus, jealous of the skill of his nephew Talus (Talos), whom Daedalus's sister had sent to study with the great inventor, pushed the boy off the Acropolis and then pretended that Talos had slipped. Athena saved Talos and transformed him into a partridge (Perdix). Daedalus was found guilty of his crime and fled to Crete.*

Jealous of his abilities as the most innovative and inventive of craftsmen, Daedalus kills his nephew, a brilliant young apprentice. His desperate need to protect his reputation drives him to push his nephew, Talos, from the top of the Acropolis. Through his vanity, his pride, and his brutality, he betrays not only his nephew but also his sister's trust. Daedalus intended to tell his sister, Polycaste, that her son had slipped and fallen from Athena's temple; so he is a liar too. Worse still, Daedalus suspected Talos and Polycaste of having an incestuous relationship.

Found guilty of the crime by the Areiopagus, the Athenian Daedalus is banished; he goes into exile in Crete. He is made invalid by his own society: it rejects him, and refuses him the benefits and privileges of citizenship. He becomes an outcast who will have to find redemption through sacrifice. Daedalus's sister hangs herself when she hears of her son's death.

The intervention of the goddess, Athena, brings a touch of justice – and a good deal of irony - to the tale. Although generally known as one of the goddesses of war, she is also patron of the arts and crafts and of Athens where her most celebrated temple is, ironically for Daedalus, the

Acropolis (Braysher, 2000, p. 91). Unwilling to allow one of her most brilliant prospects to die ignominiously, she metamorphoses – an embodiment of Ovid's title - Talos into a partridge. Talos, the boy who cannot fly, is saved from brutal death – the long fall from the top of the Acropolis – through the intervention of the goddess who gives him wings to fly.

That Daedalus is accepted into the society of Crete and the palace of King Minos says a good deal about Crete and the King himself. Minos is delighted to have such a skilled and brilliantly inventive craftsman as Daedalus in his kingdom. He is so pleased that, at first, he fails to note the man's inherent cunning and cleverness. It is an oversight he will regret.

As the child of Zeus and Europa, Minos became king of Crete after a dispute with his brothers, Sarpedon and Rhadamanthys, who left the island to their separate destinations. The quarrel between the three brothers was resolved after Minos had prayed to Poseidon for a worthy sacrificial victim. Poseidon sent a magnificent white bull. According to Graves (1966, vol. 1, p. 297), white bulls were considered peculiarly sacred and featured in a number of sacrificial rituals. Although Minos's claim to the throne was vindicated, he neglected to sacrifice the bull because he thought it such a magnificent specimen (Grant & Hazel, 1993, p. 282). Minos again proves himself untrustworthy by reneging on his agreement with Poseidon, his own uncle. Knowing that Poseidon was also a god invested with suprahuman power should have led Minos to consider behaving more circumspectly.

Poseidon is deeply angered by Minos's failure to sacrifice the bull, and, in revenge, causes Pasiphae to fall in love with it. Such is Pasiphae's passion for the bull that she wishes to mate with it. To this zoophiliac end, she asks Daedalus confidentially to construct a wooden cow into which she can climb - overtones of the wooden horse of Troy – and so mate with the bull. By agreeing to build the cow, Daedalus becomes both Poseidon and Pasiphae's co-conspirator. Daedalus's skills and ingenuity as a craftsman get him ravelled up in disputes between members of a family. How dangerous that can be, he is destined to find out.

Pasiphae's affair with the bull occurs while Minos is away. When he arrives back, he is confronted by the realities of the Minotaur, the half-man, half-bull creature born of his wife's passion for the white bull he refused to sacrifice.

To hide this creature and all that it represents, Minos calls upon Daedalus to build the Labyrinth. It is ironic that Daedalus and his son will both find themselves confined within this very structure, together with the dreaded, dreadful Minotaur.

Seven young men and seven young women are fed to the Minotaur each year, these young people coming from Athens, the city that banished Daedalus. Then, one year, Theseus was

chosen as one of the sacrificial youths. Arriving in Crete, he fell in love with Ariadne, one of Minos's daughters. Instead of becoming the Minotaur's victim, Theseus decides to kill the monster. He also needs to know how to get out of the labyrinthine convolutions so skilfully devised by Daedalus. In some variations of the story, Daedalus himself tells Ariadne how to get Theseus back safely from the centre of the Labyrinth. She provides Theseus with a thread that he trails into the centre of the Labyrinth. Once he has killed the beast, Theseus follows the thread back to where he came in. He then sails away with Ariadne to the island of Naxos. There he simply and cruelly abandons her. She, in return, seeks solace in the arms of Bacchus.

Meanwhile, Daedalus had come to hate the island of Crete while his long years of exile were beginning to take their toll. There are at least three reasons why he may have come to hate Crete (Doob, 1990, p. 12):

> *Some say that Minos cast him and his son Icarus into the labyrinth as punishment for assisting Pasiphae or for having helped Ariadne save Theseus; others claim that Minos refused to let so ingenious an inventor return home to Athens.*

We need to decide at this point whether to see Daedalus (and Icarus, by implication) as the sort of characters deserving punishment (hence legitimising Minos's action in confining them to the labyrinth), or whether to respect Minos for admiring and wanting to keep Daedalus simply because he was too ingenious an inventor and engineer to be allowed back home. Of course, to keep Daedalus "captive" in that sense raises somewhat different moral issues from the idea of punishment.

Either way, Daedalus needs to escape, taking Icarus with him. How the escape is effected depends on the variant one reads, as we shall see in the next chapter. The most familiar version tells of Daedalus making wings of wax and feathers for himself and his son. He offers wise counsel to his son, warning him not to fly too low else the waves might dampen the wings making them too heavy, or too high otherwise the sun will melt the wax holding everything together. In mid-flight, Icarus is so exhilarated by the experience of flying that he chooses to ignore his father's advice. He soars heavenward, the wax melts, and he falls into the sea and drowns. Daedalus, unable to do anything to save his son, is compelled to fly on. Doob (1990, p. 13) provides the continuation of Daedalus's story:

> *After the death of Icarus, Daedalus flew to Italian Cumae, where he built a temple to Apollo, sculpting on its doors the story of the Cretan labyrinth. Some say that Daedalus then flew to Sicily, where he was welcomed by King Cocalus. Still seeking revenge, Minos offered a reward to anyone who could thread a tightly spiralled shell.*

> *Daedalus, crafty as ever, drilled a tiny hole in one end, inserted an ant with a thread attached to its body, induced it to enter by smearing honey on the shell's mouth, and thus traced the windings of the shell. Sure that no one but Daedalus could have accomplished such a task, Minos came to claim him, but the Sicilians, reluctant to give Daedalus up, murdered Minos.*

Some accounts tell of a singularly brutal end for Minos. Before taking charge of his captive, Minos was offered a bath by Cocalus of Camicus in Sicily. "Through pipes which he had installed, Daedalus scalded Minos to death with boiling water, and so was rid of his foe" (Grant & Hazel, 1993, p. 223).

How Icarus arrives at his final resting-place also depends on which version you read. In Ovid's story, Daedalus himself buries his son on the island of Icaria, west of Samos.

2.2 MATTERS ARISING

It is almost self-evident that the entire context of relationships within which the Icarus and Daedalus legend occurs is bizarre to the point of abnormality: consider, for example, the following brief examples:

- Daedalus's killing of his nephew out of jealousy (envy = one of the deadly sins);
- what Doob (1990, p. 12) calls Parsiphae's "lechery" - what could be defined more accurately though clinically as "zoophilia");
- Minos's willingness to sacrifice (that is, destroy) the younger generation of Athenians in order to avoid confronting the consequences of reneging on his promise or oath to Poseidon;
- The bizarre nature of the curse Poseidon places upon his wife;
- how, in these situations, "normality" can be judged when the prevailing norms are "abnormal"?

Within a context of abnormality such as this, the major characters of the myth can scarcely be seen as "heroes" in anything like the sense we attach to the word when referring to brave, noble, exemplary men of high moral conduct. Yet in seeking to escape from the bizarre environment represented by Crete, Minos and Pasiphae, both Daedalus and Icarus manifest

their preference for "normality" and hence their inappropriateness in such a situation. The American poet, Wallace Stevens, expresses the idea this way (1955, p. 120):

> But I am, in any case,
> A most inappropriate man
> In a most unpropitious place

Yet it should not be forgotten that, although "normal" within the environment of Crete, Daedalus is nonetheless a murderer, and thus, by "normal" societal standards "abnormal".

Within the narrative structure of myth, some form of literal or metaphorical sacrifice is required in order to expunge the "abnormality" apparent in the cursed place and to restore "normality". A curse demands a sacrifice to lift it. Some form of sacrifice or retribution is also demanded of those who undermine the "normal" fabric of society by perpetrating 'abnormal' actions. Thus it is that Minos continues to sacrifice Athenian youths to the Minotaur until Theseus kills the beast. Later, Daedalus is obliged to watch his son die, and Minos himself is killed. Death – sacrificial or otherwise, is everywhere.

2.3 OVID'S VERSION OF THE MYTH: A CRITICAL DISCUSSION

Minos has been doing battle with King Aegeus prior to his return to Crete. We are told that the "surest" thing about Minos was his anger as he sought to avenge the death of one of his sons, Androgeos. In pursuit of alliances "he roamed the Aegean sea." After gaining allies, he begins "laying waste the shores/Of Megara, testing his martial strength/Against the city of Alcathous." Minos has also negotiated his way clear of Scylla, daughter of Nisus, King of Megara. When Minos leaves Megara, Scylla screams at him (Melville, 1986, p. 175):

> Fit mate were you
> Of that adulteress who in a cow
> Of wood beguiled a savage bull and bore
> A monster in her womb! Do my words reach
> Your ears or do the winds blow them to waste?
> Those winds, ungrateful wretch, that fill your sails!
> No wonder your Pasiphae preferred
> Her bull to you: you were the fiercer beast.

Here, we as readers are introduced to Pasiphae, Minos's wife, and some of the strange behaviours she has been indulging in. The reason for this is not made evident at this juncture, nor are we informed who the maker of the pseudo-cow is (Melville, 1986, p. 175):

> Minos reached harbour in the isle of Crete
> And, disembarking, paid his vows to Jove,
> A hundred bulls, and hung the spoils of war
> To adorn his palace walls. His dynasty's

> Disgrace had grown; the monstrous hybrid beast
> Declared the queen's obscene adultery.

The subject of sacrifice is initiated here. It is a central theme in understanding the myth. Although mention is made of the 100 oxen, no comment is made at this point as to whether this constitutes a sufficient sacrifice in terms of what he promised the god/s or whether, through this sacrifice being too small, Minos reneges on his promise to the gods. The issue assumes more significant dimensions later in Ovid's account. The irony of Minos's sacrificing such a substantial number of cattle becomes patently clear when we confront the familial circumstances into which he returns.

In Minos's absence, the monstrous child the queen had borne, to the disgrace of the king's family, had grown up, thus revealing his wife's disgusting love affair to everyone.

The curse laid upon Minos - not Pasiphae, we should note - is given tangible form and existence in the form of "the monstrous child", an aberration of nature and a corruption of the maternal process. Ovid writes of Pasiphae's "obscene adultery", an assertion strongly implying that Pasiphae made such a choice of her own volition. This fails to account for Poseidon's role in the proceedings, a strategy that draws attention away from the malicious nature of the god and shifts culpability to Pasiphae, and, in so doing, depicts woman as the patriarchal victim, a position that women continue to hold to the present day.

It is a stringent comment that it is the Minotaur that "declares Pasiphae's love affair to everyone", once again shifting the blame and the scandal to Pasiphae, and prompting "everyone" to blame her for her disgusting zoophiliac relationship. Of course, the issue here is scarcely one of zoophilia. It is useful to remember why Minos's wife had been made to fall in love with the bull by which she conceived the Minotaur. According to Feder (1964, p. 258):

> *When Minos broke his promise to sacrifice to Poseidon a magnificent white bull given him by the god, Poseidon made Pasiphae fall in love with the bull.*

Given this situation, perhaps Ovid wishes to draw the attention away from Minos deliberately by focusing on the power of Poseidon and his revenge on Minos through Pasiphae. Nonetheless, in reneging on his promise to Poseidon, Minos is certain to be the object of the god's revenge, if only indirectly. Thus, Pasiphae is allocated the role of scapegoat in these contorted circumstances, Poseidon opting to punish Minos through Pasiphae rather than punishing Minos directly.

Pasiphae becomes both Poseidon's instrument and his victim as she is made to bear not only the Minotaur but also the responsibility and the shame for her husband's reneging on his

promise. However, she is not alone in the god's zoophiliac plan for revenge. Feder's account continues: "Pasiphae asked Daedalus to construct a cow's form in which she could receive the animal as her lover" (1964, p. 258).

As the maker of the cow's form - by which device she is able to receive the bull as her lover - Daedalus becomes involved in the conspiracy, and so becomes another of Poseidon's instruments. Thus Poseidon punishes Minos by punishing Pasiphae while involving Daedalus in the deity's plot against Minos. To the extent that Daedalus facilitates the perpetration of Poseidon's perverse wish, Daedalus becomes party to the zoophiliac act Pasiphae commits.

At this juncture, it would seem reasonable to presume that if Pasiphae is compelled to suffer as both instrument and victim of the god, so too will her co-conspirator, Daedalus, be compelled to suffer at some future stage.

Minos wishes to hide the Minotaur, ostensibly hiding not only the consequences of his wife's shameful deed but also avoiding acknowledgement of his own shameful failure to honour his promise to Poseidon. To this end, he orders the building of the labyrinth (Melville, 1986, p. 175-176):

> To rid his precincts of this shame the king
> Planned to confine him shut away within
> Blind walls of intricate complexity.
> The structure was designed by Daedalus,
> That famous architect.

We notice here that Minos is placing much faith in the old adage, "out of sight, out of mind". He presumes that, by placing the Minotaur in the centre of an almost impenetrable labyrinth, the people of Crete will forget the shame and ignominy attached to the conception, birth, and existence of the Minotaur. It is a significant revelation of the king's short-sightedness and naïve desperation to presume that the absence from view of the Minotaur would result in its absence in the minds and memories of his people. Indeed, the existence of a construction as complex and as ingenious as the Labyrinth would, contrarily, serve as a constant reminder of the presence at its centre of the creature Minos sought to obliterate from memory.

The Labyrinth served as both a place of confinement (first for the Minotaur; later for Daedalus and Icarus) and as a tangible manifestation of Daedalus's own devious convoluted mind (Melville, 1986, p. 176):

> Appearances
> Were all confused; he led the eye astray
> By a mazy multitude of winding ways,
> Just as Meander plays among the meads
> Of Phrygia and in its puzzling flow

Glides back and forth and meets itself and sees
Its waters on their way and winds along,
Facing sometimes its source, sometimes the sea.
So Daedalus in countless corridors,
Built bafflement, and hardly could himself
Make his way out, so puzzling was the maze.

Strictly speaking, the difference between a maze and a labyrinth is that the former has numerous entrances and exits while the latter has only one entrance/exit. The way in and the way out are one and the same in a labyrinth, hence the success of Ariadne's trick with the thread she gives to Theseus.

One of the issues of considerable importance here, although one not explicated in the text itself, is whether, at the time of instructing Daedalus to create the labyrinth, Minos is aware of Daedalus's part in constructing the cow's form which facilitated the union between Pasiphae and the bull. Without textual certainty, we may only speculate on the delicious irony that the king was unaware of Daedalus's complicity, an irony that is doubly delicious when he approaches Daedalus to build the Labyrinth.

And so Daedalus becomes involved not only with the building of the cow's form by which the Minotaur is conceived but also the construction of the labyrinth in which he can be hidden from view (Melville, 1986, p. 176).

Within this labyrinth Minos shut fast
The beast, half bull, half man, and fed him twice
On Attic blood, lot-chosen each nine years,
Until the third choice mastered him.

At this point, Ovid interposes the story of Theseus and Ariadne. The ironies here are threefold: (a) that Ariadne is Minos's daughter and hence subverts her father's anger and resentment about and toward the Minotaur, (b) that she helps Theseus to escape with her cunning trick, and (c) that Theseus behaves so appallingly after his escape (Melville, 1986, p. 176):

The door
So difficult, which none of those before
Could find again, by Ariadne's aid
Was found, the thread that traced the way rewound.
Then Theseus, seizing Minos's daughter, spread
His sails for Naxos, where, upon the shore,
That cruel prince abandoned her

Fortunately, Ariadne's finds consolation soon enough:

and she,
Abandoned, in her grief and anger found
Comfort in Bacchus' arms.

In some accounts, Daedalus himself is reputed to have given Ariadne the idea for saving Theseus using the thread. If so, then Daedalus is again a conspirator in a sub-plot of events mitigating against Minos's desires. Once the king establishes Daedalus's links with these events, he will seek revenge; we know Minos is capable of that.

After the Ariadne and Theseus interlude, Ovid resumes the telling of Daedalus's story. The inventor has become dissatisfied with his present situation (Melville, 1986, p. 176-177):

> Hating the isle of Create and the long years
> Of exile, Daedalus was pining for
> His native land, but seas on every side
> Imprisoned him. 'Though land and sea', he thought,
> 'The king may bar to me, at least the sky
> is open; through the sky I'll set my course.
> Minos may own all else; he does not own
> The air.' So then to unimagined arts
> He set his mind and altered nature's laws.

Daedalus's position in Minos's court is nothing short of precarious, given his complicity in the events surrounding Pasiphae and the Minotaur, Minos himself and the Labyrinth, as well as Ariadne and Theseus. Some accounts place Daedalus and Icarus in the Labyrinth, perhaps as a result of this complicity, although others, as we have seen, suggest that Minos did not wish to lose so skilled an inventor and architect as Daedalus.

Clearly the words – "Though land and sea/The king may bar to me" - imply Daedalus's essential imprisonment on the island and his inability to move freely elsewhere for whatever reason. This situation generates questions about the relationship between the King and Daedalus. Why must Daedalus *escape* from Crete rather than simply leave? And, why does Minos keep Daedalus imprisoned to all intents and purposes on the island? And why is Icarus confined with Daedalus when he has played no part in the multiplicity of devious devices and events besetting Crete and its monarch?

We may reasonably speculate that Minos's treatment of Daedalus may be related to Daedalus's complicity in the Minotaur affair. Alternatively, if Daedalus is being treated correctly, we have not been apprised, at this point, of any reasons why he should wish to make such a dramatic and risky escape, other than that he is homesick. The risks involved in his aerial escape plan can scarcely be justified on the basis of mere homesickness! However, such risks - for both himself and his son, who has not been mentioned yet - may be better understood as an act of rebellion.

Daedalus's hatred of Crete may be a symptom of something more profound, perhaps some sense of revulsion at the bizarre goings-on in the court of King Minos. In addition, Daedalus might be experiencing some apprehension about ways in which the king might behave towards either himself, his son, or both at some later stage, bearing in mind the tough treatment the king meted out to his wife for an indiscretion for which the king himself was ultimately culpable. Although Daedalus has criminal and rebellious traits, he lacks the bizarreness associated with many of the events occurring on Crete.

In his bold and imaginative plan to escape, the maze-maker is plotting against the king and, in so doing, is planning to take man beyond "nature's laws". His plan means taking man beyond his proper element - the earth - into the element of air, into the processes of flight, and into unknown areas for which man had no or insufficient knowledge. In fact, we are told that Daedalus has "set his mind" to "unimagined arts". Daedalus's flight plans may be perceived not so much an alteration of nature's laws but rather as a challenge to them. In other words, Daedalus opts to challenge the natural order and the gods' power in and over it as well as man's conventional place in the universal scheme of things.

At the same time, there is a sense in which we admire the skill, imagination, ingenuity, and daring of the labyrinth-maker and the manner in which he so carefully designs wings for himself and his son, to say nothing of his meticulous execution of that design (Melville, 1986, p. 177):

> Row upon row of feathers he arranged,
> The smallest first, then larger ones, to form
> A growing graded shape, as rustic pipes
> Rise in a gradual slope of lengthening reeds;
> Then bound the middle and the base with wax
> And flaxen threads, and bent them, so arranged
> Into a gentle curve to imitate
> Wings of a real bird.

While it may at first appear that Daedalus is bringing about a metamorphosis for himself and Icarus, it is not so. Neither he nor his son will be metamorphosed in the way that Athena metamorphosed his nephew, Talos, into a partridge. Alas! Metamorphoses of that sort require benign divine intervention; there is little reason to assume that Daedalus should expect such intervention. At best, the wings he makes so beautifully and ingeniously are man-made imitations, and, by implication, not sanctioned by the gods. In fact, his intended imitation of bird flight is intended to subvert the natural and ordained scheme of things by taking man into an improper element (Melville, 1986, p. 177):

> His boy stood by,
> Young Icarus, who, blithely unaware
> He plays with his own peril, tries to catch

> Feathers that float upon the wandering breeze,
> Or soften with his thumb the yellow wax,
> And by his laughing mischief interrupts
> His father's wonderous work. Then, when the last
> Sure touch was given, the craftsman poised himself
> On his twin wings and hovered in the air.

Icarus is depicted as a youthful prankster, unable to appreciate that he "plays with his own peril". And while he may lack seriousness and an understanding of the dangers inherent his father's imaginative escape plan, he is neither evil nor criminal.

We notice too that Daedalus's construction of the wings is called "wondrous work", despite its subversive, unnatural intentions. Of course, this should not entirely surprise us; after all, Daedalus has been willing to build, and is capable of building, the pseudo-cow form as well as the labyrinth, neither of which were intended for wholesome or moral purposes.

Once he has undertaken this admittedly brief "test flight", Daedalus turns his attention to Icarus (Melville, 1986, p. 177):

> Next he prepared his son. "Take care", he said,
> "To fly a middle course, lest if you sink
> Too low the waves may weight your feathers; if
> Too high, the heat may burn them. Fly half-way
> Between the two. And do not watch the stars,
> The Great Bear or the Wagoner or Orion,
> With his drawn sword, to steer by. Set your course
> Where I shall lead."

One of the crucial questions this section of the story provokes resides both in what Daedalus says to his son and the manner in which readers perceive his saying it. Certainly the advice to "follow a course midway between earth and heaven" appears both moderate and intelligent, embodying as it does, the essence of those philosophies advocating pursuit of the golden mean. Will this young boy comprehend the seriousness (and the inevitable dangers) of his flight?

Central to our understanding of the issue is whether his father's admonitions should be perceived as advice or threat. To insist on the golden mean - "Fly halfway/ Between the two" – makes sound sense, embodying, as it does, the caution necessary to man's maiden flight. It seems well-meant and well-intentioned. But this positive response is mitigated by Daedalus's insistence that Icarus take him as his guide and follow him. Is the boy capable of following – that is, imitating – his father without indulging in characteristically youthful experiment? Should a father reasonably expect this?

Then the moment of truth arrives, when theory confronts practice (Melville, 1986, p. 177):

He fixed the strange new wings
On his son's shoulder and instructed him
How he should fly; and, as he worked and warned,
The old man's cheeks were wet, the father's hands
Trembled. He kissed his son (the last kisses
He'd ever give) and rising on his wings
He flew ahead, anxious for his son's sake,
Just like a bird that from its lofty nest
Launches a tender fledgling in the air.

The image of Daedalus creating wings that imitate bird wings is picked up in the depiction here of Icarus as "a tender fledgling". At the same time, these lines reveal things about Daedalus that we have not encountered before. He is described (in this as well as in Innes's prose translation (1955, p. 184) as "the old man", suggesting a much older person than one might have expected, an age at which his child would have been at least close to adulthood.

At the same time, in his kissing his son, we are shown a tender, gentle side that we have not experienced before in encounters with Daedalus. This provides a strong contrast to what we have come to understand of his ingenuity and architectural skills. Now his compassionate side is revealed, although it is unlikely to bring any sort of grace from the gods. There is always a sense of shock when we are shown a facet of a character's personality that suddenly skews our picture of him (Melville, 1986, p. 177):

Calling his son to follow, schooling him
In that fatal apprenticeship, he flapped
His wings and watched the boy flapping behind.

Their fateful journey has begun. At this point, Ovid shifts the narrative focus to a group of people who are witness to the extraordinary sight of a man and his son flying overhead (Melville, 1986, p. 177-178):

An angler fishing with his quivering rod,
A lonely shepherd propped upon his crook,
A ploughman leaning on his plough, looked up
And gazed in awe, and thought they must be gods
That they could fly.

The ordinary mortals Ovid describes in these lines live in the "normal" world; there only gods can fly, not mortal men. Daedalus and Icarus are altering nature's laws. They are rising above the earth, the clay, the matter, the *mater* or mother, the mother-earth that is man's natural element to enter into the heavenly realm of immortal beings and the gods. They aspire to accomplishments above their position in the natural scheme of things. They are irrevocably committed to the path of self-aggrandisement, of the over-inflated ego, of the suprahuman. The gods are unlikely to tolerate this impertinence, this affrontery, this rebelliousness, this

challenge to their world. Reprisal is inevitable, although its precise form remains unpredictable.

The journey proceeds satisfactorily for a good while before calamity strikes (Melville, 1986, p. 178):

> Delos and Paros lay
> Behind them now; Samos, great Juno's isle,
> Was on the left, Lebinthos on the right
> And honey-rich Calymne, when the boy
> Began to enjoy his thrilling flight and left
> His guide to roam the ranges of the heavens,
> And soared too high. The scorching sun so close
> Softened the fragrant wax that bound his wings;
> The wax melted; his waving arms were bare;
> Unfledged, they had no purchase on the air!

This detailed geographical information reveals that the two birdmen had travelled a substantial distance without mishap. In fact, they had accomplished the greatest part of their flight to safety. Then, catastrophically, Icarus forgot that his wings were a means to an end – escape from Crete – as he began delighting in flying for its own sake. The means to an end has become an end in itself, and immediate satisfaction of delight replaces the longer term purpose of escape. We are reminded of Icarus's youthfulness when he is referred to as "the boy" with all its implications of lack of age, lack of maturity, lack of wisdom, irresponsibility, sheer delight in physical experience, lack of foresight, low boredom tolerance levels, and so on as well as the sheer thrill of flying. The thrill of flying is so overwhelmingly exciting that he "left/His guide", and so the cautious, reasonable trajectory Daedalus insisted upon.

Caught up in such delights and thrills, a boy is likely to forget the prime purpose of achieving his destination and to overlook the dangers inherent in shifting from necessity to enjoyment. Nonetheless, the question remains: Why is Icarus, and not his father, chosen as the victim of the gods, circumstances, fate, call it what you will?

It is ironic that the wax holding the wings together is described as "sweet-smelling", even as it becomes dysfunctional. Deprived of their artificial wings, the boy's arms are "bare" as they wave futilely, unable to gain any purchase on the air. Man's abilities to emulate the birds and the gods are enfeebled by his need to rely on artificial accoutrements such as wings. Flying is unnatural for man while the air, the sky is beyond, literally and metaphorically, man's capacities and capabilities.

Having left his guide, Icarus seeks him desperately in his fatal dilemma by "calling to his father as he fell" (Melville, 1986, p. 178):

> The boy was swallowed in the blue sea's swell,
> The blue sea that for ever bears his name.

Ironically, the boy who can fly drowns. You should not have to know how to swim in order to fly.

Why does Icarus call to his father for help? There are several possible explanations. The first is that Icarus is still a boy and, as with the escape from Crete itself, requires his father's ingenuity to find an appropriate solution to his irredeemable dilemma. A second explanation is that the boy is attracting his father's attention to the failure of the wings and, by implication, the failure of Daedalus's engineering ingenuity. This explanation would also encompass the boy's failure to obey his father's instructions not to fly too near the sun. It is points to the deflation of Daedalus's inflated ego.

A third explanation centres on the revenge element of the myth, with Daedalus having to sacrifice his own child as the price the gods exact for what he perpetrated against his nephew, Talos. A fourth explanation suggests that Icarus's death is the inevitable sacrificial prerequisite for Daedalus to gain wisdom, while a fifth explanation concerns the consequences of Icarus's disobedience (Melville, 1986, p. 178).

> His wretched father, now no father, cried
> "Oh, Icarus," where are you? Icarus,
> Where shall I look, where find you?" On the waves
> He saw the feathers. Then he cursed his skill,
> And buried his boy's body in a grave,
> And still that island keeps the name he gave.

Daedalus the craftsman curses his skills which, he realises too late, may have been put to improper, even iniquitous use.

It is as if the gods punish indirectly by compelling their victims to suffer indirectly. Minos is compelled to confront the ignominy of Pasiphae's affair with the bull while Daedalus is compelled to confront his own wickedness - the murder of his nephew, for one instance - by having to live without his own son, just as Talos's family would have been compelled to do after his death.

Icarus's body is laid to rest and his name venerated through naming the island [of Icaria] after him. The scope of the veneration accorded to the boy-victim may serve as a final affirmation of the boy's innocence thus separating him from his father's deeds.

With the burial of Icarus, the story of Daedalus and Icarus would seem to be complete, yet it is at this point that Ovid takes readers back in Daedalus's life to the time when he was still living in Athens, and before he had a son (Melville, 1986, p. 178).

> Now while he laid his poor dear son to rest
> A chattering partridge in a muddy ditch
> Watched him and clapped its wings and crowed for joy-
> A bird unique and never seen before,
> A new creation and a long reproach
> To Daedalus. His sister, never guessing
> The fate in store, had given her boy to him
> For training, twelve years old and quick to learn.
> This lad observed the backbone of a fish
> And copied it; he cut a row of teeth
> In a slim blade of iron and a saw
> Was his invention. He too was the first
> To fasten with a joint two metal arms
> So that, keeping a constant space apart,
> While one stood still the other traced a circle.

One would have thought that Daedalus would have been proud of his nephew's ingenuity and mental alertness, but such was not the case (Melville, 1986, p. 179):

> In jealous rage his master hurled him down
> Headlong from Pallas' sacred citadel [the Acropolis],
> Feigning a fall; but Palls who sustains
> Talent, upheld him, changed him to a bird
> And clothed the lad with feathers as he fell.

We cannot fail to note that Talos is given "feathers" (wings) to prevent him from falling to his death, an brutally ironic inversion of what happens to Icarus.

The partridge plays the role of a malevolent phoenix, not recreating itself out of its own ashes but drawing Daedalus's attention back to his encounter with his nephew.

At the time, Daedalus's role was that of wise man, shaman, or teacher. This role appears to controvert what we have already been told of him. If readers have sympathy with Daedalus because of Icarus's death, that feeling is radically altered by the knowledge that he has murdered his own nephew out of jealousy.

He is willing to commit murder and then perpetrate blatant fabrications of the truth by claiming that Talos "fell". If brutality and deception are symptomatic of the human condition, the gods bring about a necessary, balancing reparation. Daedalus's mischief in killing his nephew angers Pallas who brings about a supernatural metamorphosis of the boy. Yet there remain in the partridge's behaviour certain symptoms of its history (Melville, 1986, p. 179):

> But this bird never lifts itself aloft,
> Nor builds its nest on boughs or high tree-tops,
> But flits along the ground and lays its eggs
> In hedgerows, dreading heights for they recall
> The memory of that old fearful fall.

Daedalus's nephew has been metamorphosed fully into a bird, albeit one that "does not soar high into the air", while Daedalus has proved capable of producing only a partial and provisional transformation of himself and his son into birdmen. Here is the stringent distinction between the powers of the gods and the more limited powers of man (Melville, 1986, p. 179).

> Now Etna's land gave weary Daedalus
> Welcome, and Cocalus who took up arms
> On his behalf was kindly.

Given Daedalus's suffering at the hands of the gods, he may be seen as emotionally, spiritually and psychologically weary, and in need of both a place of refuge and some form of compassion. Hence the clemency he receives from Cocalus.

Of course, for the reader, part of the moral debate raised by this conclusion resides less in the fact that Daedalus places himself at the mercy of Cocalus, a ruler with a reputation for clemency, and rather more around the question whether clemency necessarily implies forgiveness and/or repentance. Redemption becomes another matter altogether.

While the myth provides an account of several literal re-enactments of the fall of man and of the malign angels from heaven, it is self-evidently more complex than a story of the gods' revenge on man, as we shall see, when we look at some broader meanings of the myth in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 3

" A PRO/CON/FUSION OF FACTS": VARIANTS OF THE DAEDALUS & ICARUS MYTH

Usually, we come to our understanding of mythological tales and stories through summaries, paraphrases, and retellings of the essential details rather than by reading the original myth (even in translation). This is particularly so if we are not readers of the original languages in which the myths are written. Of course, the processes of recounting myths are themselves acts of interpretation that allow their writers to include or omit whatever they believe to be relevant or irrelevant aspects or details of each myth. These acts of inclusion or omission result in different "readings" or variants of the myth while the variants themselves result in the myth having a number of meanings. Critics frequently find themselves caught between the demands of brevity and the need for completeness.

Critics too compound the problem by writing about the Daedalus/Icarus myth as if there were one agreed-upon true and original version. Theirs is the mistake Lévi-Strauss (1981, p. 44) finds in those who try to understand the myths by means of a single and exclusive code, when in fact several codes are always in operation simultaneously. It is impossible to reduce the myth to any one code, nor can it be explained as the sum of several codes. It would be truer to say that a group of myths constitutes in itself a code, the power of which is superior to each individual code it uses to decipher manifold message.

Because the Daedalus/Icarus myth itself is not devoid of variants, we need to examine some of these overviews and paraphrases to attempt a rudimentary unravelling of the alternatives, otherwise we may not be able to understand the convolutions and complexities of this deceptively simple tale. To this end, it is useful to survey some overviews contained in reference works dealing with classical mythology. The entries are presented *in toto*, without any critical commentary. It seems preferable to allow readers to confront the materials directly for a number of reasons. First, this approach prevents any biases and preferences from intruding. Secondly, readers can then read and experience what are essentially *interpretative variants* of the myth firsthand. In that way, they will perceive not only the differences these interpretations reveal but also what their authors understand the significant features, components, and characters of the story to be. Thirdly, these interpretations masquerade as factual accounts, reports of historical events yet they often contain distinctly different "facts", not the least of which being the circumstances of Icarus's death. Fourthly, readers will notice that the extent of the contextualisation of the Dedalus/Icarus story also varies substantially and substantively. Clearly, these distinctions and differences influence not only the ways in which the myth will be interpreted but also the manner in which they, as variants of the myth, contribute to its meaning. For example, in one variant of the myth,

Icarus dies as a result of inadequate sailing skills. This form of death will be interpreted and understood differently from another variant in which Icarus dies as a result of ignoring parental injunctions about flying. By their very nature as well as the differing natural elements involved, sailing and flying are different, and flying may well be seen as riskier, more dangerous than sailing. The risks attached to flying, if perceived as greater than those attached to sailing, could well result in a perception that Icarus is more heroic when attempting to fly and less heroic when attempting to sail. Sea and air will also produce differing metaphorical approaches to understanding the myth or certain facets of it. Certainly, these variants create a multiplicity of permutations of meaning, and, as a consequence, evoke different perceptions about the "message" inherent in the myth. Finally, it is important to recall that these summaries, paraphrases, and retellings in themselves also constitute variants of the myth and so add further meaning/s to whatever we understand the "original" to be.

In some reference works, Icarus as a mythological character does not enjoy a separate entry and his story is subsumed under the entry for Daedalus. This may reflect the fact that Icarus is indeed a *minor* character, or it may indicate an author's preference for the "seniority" of the father, or it may reveal something of the author's conscious or unconscious attitude towards the boy and/or his father.

A variety of overviews of varying detail, accuracy, and completeness is available on the Internet. They are designed for different audiences, although they appear to be intended primarily to satisfy student needs. It is not our intention here to attempt to access, let alone discuss, all or even most of these commentaries. Nonetheless, one or two examples should suffice.

Earley and Harris (http://www.torecover.com/icarus.htm [2001, p. 1]) give this paraphrase of the story as a prelude to "The Icarus Phenomenon":

> *Icarus was a minor character in Greek mythology famous for not surviving the transition from boyhood to manhood. He was the son of Daedalus, an accomplished inventor, who produced an ingenious labyrinth on the island of Cnossos for Minos, the king of Crete. Even Daedalus could not find the way out of his maze. Sometime after building it, Daedalus fell into disfavor with the king of Crete and was condemned to live the rest of his life inside the labyrinth. Because he was his father's son, Icarus faced the same fate.*
>
> *Icarus and his father were trapped. Ever the inventor, Daedalus built wings of feathers and wax to escape. In theory, the wings would allow Daedalus and Icarus to fly above the labyrinth and off the island to freedom. Just before their flight, Daedalus warned*

his son to be careful. If he flew too low, the wings would get wet in the ocean; if he flew too high, the sun would melt the wax and the wings would fall apart.

Icarus took off with all intentions of following his father's sage advice. Away they flew, escaping the labyrinth. Like an adolescent boy, Icarus struggled with parental advice. He found flight awkward at first, but learned quickly and soon flew with the attributes of adolescence – his physical strength made up for his lack of coordination and balance. Also, like many adolescents, Icarus moved rapidly from ungainliness to false prowess. Drunk with his newfound power, he soared higher in the sky, ignoring his father's warning. Daedalus looked around in flight and could not find his son. He peered down at the ocean and saw a small cluster of feathers floating on the water. The wax holding Icarus' wings had melted, and he had fallen to his death.

At (http://icarus.cso.uiuc.edu/icarusicarus.html), an anonymous writer has the following to say:

The son of Naucrate & Daedalus, Icarus found himself exiled in the Labyrinth with his father by King Minos. But, they say, Daedalus constructed wings for himself and his son. Daedalus told his son, when he took flight, neither to fly too high, lest the glue should melt in the sun and the wings drop off, nor to fly near the sea, lest the pinions should be detached by the damp. But Icarus, disregarding his father's instructions, soared ever higher, till, the glue melting, he fell into the sea and perished.

The Icarian Sea, where he fell, was named after him and it is said that Heracles, who passed by, gave him burial.

But others say that they travelled by sea and that Icarus's vessel was overturned and he drowned, or that he disembarked in a reckless manner, fell into the sea and perished. For, they say, they were fleeing from Crete in small vessels which Daedalus had made for himself and his son. It is said that he devised for the ships sails, an invention as yet unknown, so as to take advantage of the wind and outsail the oared fleet of Minos. Daedalus himself escaped, as all reports say, but the ship of Icarus is said to have overturned, as he was an inexperienced steersman. Icarus drowned, was carried ashore by the current to the island, then without a name, that lies off Samos and Heracles, coming across the body, recognized it, and buried it. After this Icarus are named both the island and the sea around it.

Van Reeth (1994, p. 57; p. 116) offers two brief entries in the *Ensiklopedie van die Mitologie*:

> ***Daidalos*** *(Lat: Daedalus): 'n Griekse heros, 'n beroemde uitvinder en die verpersoonliking van kunstige handwerk. Hy word uit Athene verban nadat hy uit jaloesie een van sy leerlinge doodgemaak het, en vlug na Kreta waar hy vir koning Minos die berugte Labirint bou. Daidalos word van medepligtigheid aan die ontsnapping van Theseus verdink en met sy seun Ikaros in die Labirint opgesluit. Daar maak hy vlerke en vlieg dan saam met sy seun na die vasteland. Ikaros vlieg te naby die son verby, wat die was waarmee die vlerke aanmekaargelym is, laat smelt en hy stort in die see. Daidalos self bereik Sisilië. Hy het onder meer in Cumae aan die Golf van Napels die Apollo-tempel gebou.*
>
> ***Ikaros*** *(Lat: Icarus): In die Griekse sage die seun van Daidalos, met wie hy met behulp van self gemaakte vlerke uit die Labarint op Kreta vlug. Toe Ikaros te na die son vlieg, smelt die was wat die vlerke aanmekaar hou en stort hy in die see (die Ikariese See). Sy vader het hom op die eiland Ikaria, wes van Samos, begrawe.*

In *The Penguin Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, Pierre Grimal (1991, pp. 117-118; p. 215) also presents two entries:

> ***Daedalus*** *An Athenian descended from Cecrops. Daedalus was a skilled artist, architect, sculptor and inventor. In antiquity he was credited with such archaic works of art and such inventions as the animated statues mentioned in Plato's Meno. According to some legends, Daedalus's father was Eupalamus or alternatively Metion.*
>
> *Daedalus worked in Athens, where his nephew Talos was his pupil. Talos proved so talented that Daedalus became jealous, and when Talos, drawing his inspiration from the jaw-bone of a serpent, invented the saw, Daedalus threw him from the top of the Acropolis. Daedalus was tried before the Aeropagus and sentenced to exile. He fled to the court of King Minos at Crete. When Minos' wife Pasiphae became enamoured of a bull, Daedalus constructed a wooden cow for her. He also built the Labyrinth for Minos – a building with a maze of corridors in which the Minotaur was confined – and then in due course suggested to Ariadne the trick which saved Theseus when he went to fight the Minotaur. When Minos learnt of Theseus' success he imprisoned Daedalus in the Labyrinth, as Theseus' accomplice, together with his son Icarus. But Daedalus made wings for himself and his son, which he attached with wax, and they both flew off. Daedalus reached Cumae and subsequently took refuge at Camicis in Sicily, under the protection of King Cocalus. Once Minos had been killed, Daedalus showed his gratitude to his host by erecting many buildings.*

> ***Icarus*** *The son of Daedalus and one of Minos' slaves called Naucrate. When Daedalus explained to Ariadne how Theseus could find his way out of the Labyrinth, Minos was so angry that he imprisoned Daedalus and his son in it. However, Daedalus made wings for Icarus and himself, and fixed them to their shoulders with wax. Daedalus advised Icarus not to fly too near the ground or too high in the sky. Icarus did not listen to his father's advice. He flew upwards so near to the sun that the wax melted, and he fell into the sea, which was thereafter called the Sea of Icarus (it surrounds the island of Samos). According to another version, after killing Talos, Daedalus flew from Athens. At the same time Icarus was banished and set out to find his father. However he was shipwrecked and drowned off Samos, and the sea was given his name. His body was washed ashore on the island of Icaria, where he was buried by Heracles. It is also related that Icarus and Daedalus fled from Crete by boat. Daedalus had just invented the use of sails. Icarus, however, did not know how to control his sails and he capsized. Another version states that as he was approaching Icaria he jumped clumsily from his boat and was drowned. Daedalus erected two pillars, one in honour of his son and the other bearing his own name. These were in the Amber islands. Also, on the doors of the temple at Cumae he was said to have portrayed with his own hands the sad fate of his son. Icarus is occasionally said to have invented woodwork and carpentry (1991:215).*

In *Crowell's Handbook of Classical Literature*, Feder (1964, p. 111) provides one entry for Daedalus and Icarus:

> ***Daedalus (Daidalos).*** *A legendary Athenian inventor and architect, the son of Metion and a descendant of Hephaestus. In Metamorphoses VIII, Ovid tells the story of how Daedalus, jealous of the skill of his nephew Talus (Talos), whom Daedalus' sister had sent to study with the great inventor, pushed the boy off the Acropolis and then pretended that Talus had slipped. Athene saved Talus and transformed him into a partridge (Perdix). Daedalus was found guilty of his crime and fled to Crete. There he built the Labyrinth for Minos. Tired of exile and longing for Athens, Daedalus decided to construct wings made of wax and feathers for himself and his son Icarus so that they could escape from Crete. Daedalus warned Icarus not to fly too near the sun, but when Icarus did not heed this warning his wings melted and he fell into the sea named for him, the Icarian Sea. James Joyce's character Stephen Daedalus of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Ulysses is based on the great artist of antiquity.*

One of the more comprehensive summaries of the Daedalus/Icarus story is to be found in Grant and Hazel's *Who's Who in Classical Mythology* (1993, pp. 99-101):

Daedalus *A mythical Athenian craftsman; the name means 'the ingenious' and he was famous for many crafts and inventions. His father, who was allegedly descended from King Erechtheus, was Eupalamus, 'clever-handed', or Metion, 'knowledgeable'. Socrates pretended to claim descent from Daedalus.*

Daedalus grew up to be the best painter and sculptor in Athens; his works were so lifelike that they appeared real. His sister gave him her son Perdix (also called Talos or Calus) as his apprentice. But the boy proved an even better craftsman than Daedalus himself for he invented the saw (by copying the bone of a snake's jaw, or the backbone of a fish), the geometrician's compass, and the potter's wheel. In consequence, Daedalus killed his nephew in a fit of jealousy, pushing him off the Acropolis or over a cliff into the sea. Athena, who loved him for his skill, saw him fall and turned him into a partridge which was called after him. For this crime Daedalus was put on trial before the court of the Areopagus. He went into exile in Crete, either because he was condemned to do so, or else voluntarily.

There King Minos received him, and Daedalus performed many feats of engineering at his request. But the strangest invention he made was the artificial cow in which the queen, Parsiphae, hid herself in order to gratify her passion for a bull. The bull was deceived by the contrivance, and Parsiphae conceived the Minotaur, which was half man, half bull.

Minos, in shame at the existence of this monstrosity, determined to conceal it and commissioned Daedalus to construct the Labyrinth, an underground maze of tunnels and corridors with one entrance, so devised that any who entered it was unable to find his way out again. The Minotaur was placed in the middle. It was fed on human flesh, for the Athenians, whom Minos had beaten in war, were compelled – either annually or every nine years – a tribute of seven youths and seven girls, who were sent one by one into the Labyrinth to provide its food. When Theseus came to Crete some years later, Daedalus was the maker of the thread which Ariadne gave him so that when he had killed the Minotaur he could make his escape from the Labyrinth.

When Minos discovered Daedalus' treachery, he shut him into the maze together with his little son Icarus (his child by one of Minos' slave girls), and kept them imprisoned. Realising that all normal methods of escape were useless, Daedalus resolved to fly out of the place on wings like those of birds. Using wax and feathers he constructed a pair of wings for Icarus and himself and after instructing the boy to fly neither too high nor too low for fear that the sun's heat might melt the wax or the sea-spray weigh down the feathers, he launched himself into the air, with Icarus following closely behind.

They flew in a north-easterly direction past Paros, Delos, and Samos; but when they were in the stretch of sea that separates the Sporades Islands from the Ionian coast of Asia Minor, Icarus' exhilaration ran away with him and he flew too high. As he approached the Sun, the wax of his wings melted and he fell headlong into the sea that bears his name. Daedalus landed on the island that is now called Icaria, retrieved the body from the sea, and gave it burial. A partridge (his former nephew Perdix) beheld his sorrow with glee.

According to another story, Pasiphae released Daedalus from the Labyrinth. Then, after building a ship and inventing the first sail with which to propel it, he boarded the vessel with Icarus and escaped from the island.

He took refuge in Sicily at the court of Cocalus, the Sicanian king of Camicus. But Minos, who was determined to take his revenge, eventually traced his whereabouts. This he did by approaching all the rulers of the West and presenting them with the same problem: how to thread a spiral seashell. Only when Cocalus returned the shell threaded could Minos be sure that he had Daedalus in his grasp, for he assumed that nobody else could perform the feat. Daedalus is said to have bored a hole in the top of the shell and harnessed the thread to an ant, which proceeded to weave its way through the shell, coming out through the hole at the end.

Minos now demanded the surrender of Daedalus, but Cocalus refused, since the craftsman had built him an impregnable city. Minos then besieged the place, and Cocalus with a show of conciliation invited him to a feast, offering to give up the wanted man. First Minos was offered a bath, in which the king's three daughters were to bathe him in the traditional way. However, Daedalus, having mastered the art of plumbing, had equipped the bath with pipes. Through these he now passed a torrent of boiling water which ended Minos' life in agony. According to an alternative version, Cocalus was killed fighting Minos' troops.

Many other important constructions and devices were attributed to Daedalus' ingenuity. He was said to have built Apollo's temple at Cumae and to have adorned it with pictures telling his own life-story. In Sicily he was reputed to be the builder of a reservoir on the river Alabon, a steam-bath at Selinus, a fortress at Acragas (Agrigentum), and the terrace of Aphrodite's temple at Eryx. Here he also left a model honeycomb made of gold. He was believed to have invented masts and sails and to have given mankind glue and most of the tools used in carpentry – the axe, the saw (if not the invention of Perdix), the plumbline, and the auger. Moreover, a folding chair on view in the temple of Athena Polias, in Athens, was believed to be Daedalus' work.

> *He was also regarded as the carver of many wooden images, some of which had moving eyes and arms and could walk; these were to be found at various places in Greece and Italy. In Sardinia certain towers called Daedalea were attributed to him. Furthermore, there were Greek traditions which attributed the Pyramids and the great temples of Egypt (for example, the Shrine of Ptah at Memphis) to Daedalus' design.*

It is noteworthy that the cover illustration for Grant and Hazel's book depicts Theseus killing the Minotaur, a story related to the Daedalus and Icarus myth, as we shall see.

The final source, although certainly not the last in terms of possibilities, is the account given by Robert Graves (1960, vol. 1, pp. 311-314, the opening paragraph about Daedalus's disputed parentage is omitted here):

> ***b.*** *One of his [Daedalus's] apprentices, Talos the son of his sister Polycaste, or Perdix, had already surpassed him in craftsmanship while only twelve years old. Talos happened one day to pick up the jawbone of a serpent or, some say a fish's spine; and, finding that he could use it to cut a stick in half, copied it in iron and thereby invented the saw. This, and other inventions of his – such as the potter's wheel, and the compass for marking out circles – secured him a great reputation in Athens, and Daedalus, who himself claimed to have forged the first saw, soon grew unbearably jealous. Leading Talos up to the roof of Athene's temple on the Acropolis, he pointed out certain distant sights, and suddenly toppled him over the edge. Yet, for all his jealousy, he would have done Talos no harm had he not suspected him of incestuous relations with his mother Polycaste. Daedalus then hurried down to the foot of the Acropolis, and thrust Talos's corpse into a bag, proposing to bury it secretly. When challenged by passers-by, he explained that he had piously taken up a dead serpent, as the law required – which was not altogether untrue, Talos being an Erechtheid – but there were bloodstains on the bag., and his crime did not escape detection, whereupon the Areiopagus banished him for murder. According to another account he fled before the trial could take place.*
>
> ***c.*** *Now, the soul of Talos – whom some call Calus, Circinus, or Tantalus – flew off in the form of a partridge, but his body was buried where it had fallen. Polycaste hanged herself when she heard of his death, and Athenians built a sanctuary in her honour beside the Acropolis.*
>
> ***d.*** *Daedalus took refuge in one of the Attic demes, whose people are named Daedalids after him; and then in Cretan Cnossus, where King Minos delighted to welcome so skilled a craftsman. He lived there for some time, at peace and in high favour, until Minos, learning that he had helped Pasiphaë to couple with Poseidon's white bull,*

locked him up for a while in the Labyrinth, together with his son Icarus, whose mother, Naucrate, was one of Minons's slaves; but Pasiphaë freed them both.

e. *It was not easy, however, to escape from Crete, since Minos kept all his ships under military guard, and now offered a large reward for his apprehension. But Daedalus made a pair of wings for himself, and another for Icarus, the quill feathers of which were threaded together, but the smaller one held in place by wax. Having tied on Icarus's pair for him, he said with tears in his eyes: "My son, be warned! Neither soar too high, lest the sun melt the wax; nor swoop too low, lest the feathers be wetted by the sea.' Then he slipped his arms into his own pair of wings and they flew off. 'Follow me closely,' he cried, 'do not set your own course!'*

As they sped away from the island in a north-easterly direction, flapping their wings, the fishermen, shepherds, and ploughmen who gazed upward mistook them for gods.

f. *They had left Naxos, Delos, and Paros behind them on the left hand, and were leaving Lebynthos and Calymne behind on the right, when Icarus disobeyed his father's instructions and began soaring towards the sun, rejoiced by the lift of his great sweeping wings. Presently, when Daedalus looked over his shoulder, he could no longer see Icarus; but scattered feathers floated on the waves below. The heat of the sun had melted the wax, and Icarus had fallen into the sea and drowned. Daedalus circled around, until the corpse rose to the surface, and then carried it to the near-by island now called Icaria, where he buried it. A partridge sat perched on a holm-oak and watched him, chattering for delight – the soul of his sister Polycaste at last avenged. This island has now given its name to the surrounding sea.*

g. *But some, disbelieving the story, say that Daedalus fled away from Crete in a boat provided by Pasiphaë; and that, on their way to Sicily, they were about to disembark at a small island, when Icarus fell into the sea and drowned. They add that it was Heracles who buried Icarus; in gratitude for which, Daedalus made so lifelike a statue of him at Pisa that Heracles mistook it for a rival and felled it with a stone. Others say that Daedalus invented sails, not wings, as a means of out-stripping Minos's galleys; and that Icarus, steering carelessly, was drowned when their boat capsized.*

h. *Daedalus flew westward until, alighting at Cumae near Naples, he dedicated his wings to Apollo there, and built him a golden-roofed temple. Afterwards, he visited Camicus in Sicily, where he was hospitably received by King Cocalus, and lived among the Sicilians, enjoying great fame and erecting many fine buildings.*

i. *Meanwhile, Minos had raised a considerable fleet, and set out in search of Daedalus. He brought with him a Triton shell, and wherever he went he promised to reward anyone who could pass a linen thread through it: a problem which, he knew, Daedalus alone would be able to solve. Arrived at Camicus, he offered the shell to Cocalus, who undertook to have it threaded; and, sure enough, Daedalus found out how to do this.*

Fastening a gossamer thread to an ant, he bored a hole at the point of the shell and lured the ant up the spirals by smearing honey on the edges of the hole. Then he tied the linen thread to the other end of the gossamer and drew that through as well. Cocalus returned the threaded shell, claiming the reward, and Minos, assured that he had at last found Daedalus's hiding-place, demanded his surrender. But Cocalus's daughters were loth to lose Daedalus, who made them such beautiful toys, and with his help they concocted a plot. Daedalus led a pipe through the roof of the bathroom, down which they poured boiling water or, some say, pitch upon Minos, while he luxuriated in a warm bath. Cocalus, who may well have been implicated in the plot, returned the corpse to the Cretans, saying the Minos had stumbled over a rug and fallen into a cauldron of boiling water.

j. *Minos's followers buried him with great pomp, and Zeus made him a judge of the dead in Tartarus, with his brother Rhadamanthys and his enemy Aeacus as colleagues. Since Minos's tomb occupied the centre of Aphrodite's temple at Camicus, he was honoured there for many generations by great crowds of Sicilians who came to worship Aphrodite. In the end, his bones were returned to Crete by Theron, the tyrant of Acragas.*

k. *After Minos's death the Cretans fell into complete disorder, because their main fleet was burned by the Sicilians. Of the crews who were forced to remain overseas, some built the city of Minoa, close to the beach where they had landed; others, the city of Hyria in Messapia; still others, marching into the centre of Sicily, fortified a hill which became the city of Enguos, so called from a spring which flows close by. There they built a temple of the Mothers, whom they continued to honour greatly, as in their native Crete.*

l. *But Daedalus left Sicily to join Iolaus, the nephew and charioteer of Tirynthian Heracles, who led a body of Athenians and Thespians to Sardinia. Many of his works survive to this day in Sardinia; they are called Daedaleia.*

The concluding section *m* has also been omitted here since it deals with another character named Talos; this one is "Minos's bull-headed bronze servant, given to him by Zeus to guard Crete" (Graves, 1960, vol. 1, p. 314), not Daedalus's nephew.

Because the Daedalus/Icarus story constitutes a very small part of a much larger body of myth, and is linked to numerous other characters and stories, authors find it difficult to decide which of these linked stories – which serve as contextualisations or which provide information important to any accurate interpretation - to include or exclude in their paraphrasing of the myth. Every paraphrase or summary of the Daedalus/Icarus story omits some portion of the story, some piece/s of information necessary to the undertaking of an adequate interpretation of the myth. What is included or excluded affects what readers understand the myth to mean.

In several cases, the content of the myth itself is approached in a particular manner because of the underlying purpose to which the author or authors of the summary wish to put it.
And so the question arises: Why are certain elements of the Daedalus/Icarus story omitted from these paraphrases? The obvious, and perhaps simplest, answer is that such details were not considered sufficiently important to include in the paraphrase or summary. One might argue, for example, that the fact that Icarus's mother was a slave is irrelevant to the boy's fate. Or that the fact that Icarus died is more significant than whether he drowned when he fell out of the sky or when he capsized some small vessel or fell into the sea.

Yet these omissions become important for two reasons: (a) because they themselves constitute variants of the myth, thus affecting ways in which its meaning is understood, and (b) when we come to consider the "meaning/s" of the myth in the poems that make the myth their partial or total subject matter. The authors of these poems, it is interesting to see, also make what may be termed "acts of omission" when dealing with that same subject matter. Consequently, it seems apt to propose that the myth itself contains many details that paraphrasers and poets alike deem irrelevant for their purposes. However, not only do these omissions result in very different interpretations of the myth and what it means (thus creating new variants), they also suggest that poets may understand its meaning differently. In writing poems about the myth, they too would then be creating new variants of it.

PART 2

ICARUS, BRUEGHEL, AND THE POETS

CHAPTER 4

"PROBING THE WOUND OF ICARUS": RUKEYSER, SEXTON, FIELD, MacCAIG, McGOUGH, AND VAN HEERDEN ON THE MYTH OF DAEDALUS & ICARUS

This chapter is devoted to a discussion of a number of poems with the Icarian myth as their essential subject-matter. Since this dissertation is concerned almost exclusively with English-language poems – van Heerden's is the one exception – no attempt has been to deal with the myth's impact on poets writing in other languages. One thinks here of Gottfried Benn, Ranier Maria Rilke, Stefan George, Bettina Wegner, Helga Schubert, Wolf Biermann, and Gunter Kunert, to mention only a number of German artists, or Baudelaire's "Les Plaintes d'un Icare". (More substantial lists of poets and artists influenced by the myth are to be found in Greiner, 1982 and Clements, 1981/1982, while further texts in English are to be found in Chapter 7.) Nor shall we be concerned here with articulations of the myth in other genres; novels such as Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and *Ulysses* (1922) or Monika Maron's *Flugasche* (1981), and plays such as Sam Shepherd's *Icarus's Mother* (1969) fall outside the ambit of the present research whose focus is poetry.

Of the texts dealt with here, the first three are by Americans, and the next two by British poets, while the final text, by a South African poet, was originally written in Afrikaans but is presented here with an English translation. These texts offer a modest sampling of the variety that is to be found in poems devoted to the myth of Icarus. This variety encompasses not only many Modernist approaches but also divergent characteristics of style, language, and tone. From three geographically diverse separated positions, these poems offer further dimensions to the meaning and understanding the original myth. For the reader's convenience, the text of each poem is given in its entirety.

4.1 MURIEL RUKEYSER: *Waiting for Icarus*

He said he would be back and we'd drink wine together
He said that everything would be better than before

He said we were on the edge of a new relation
He said he would never again cringe before his father
He said that he was going to invent full-time
He said he loved me that going into me
He said was going into the world and the sky
He said all buckles were very firm
He said the wax was the best wax
He said Wait for me here on the beach
He said Just don't cry

I remember the gulls and the waves
I remember the islands going dark on the sea
I remember the girls laughing
I remember mother saying: Inventors are like poets, a trashy lot
I remember she told me those who try out inventions are worse
I remember she added: Women who love such are the worst of all
I have been waiting all day, or perhaps longer.
I would have liked to try those wings myself.
It would have been better than this.

Rukeyser's poem is fascinating for a number of reasons. In the first place, the Icarus depicted here is less the adolescent boy of the myth and rather more the lover whose beloved reflects upon his fate, having out-waited his promised return. (One notes similarities between the speaker and Odysseus's ever-patient Penelope.) Secondly, the young woman is Rukeyer's own invention; she does not appear in the myth itself or any of its other variants. To this extent, then, Rukeyer's poem adds a female/feminine dimension to the myth beyond that of Naucrate, Icarus's mother, whose presence in the myth is implied rather more than stated. This is an important addition to what is an overtly male/masculine story. Thirdly, while the relationship between Icarus and the young woman is peripheral to the main events of the myth, it adds dimensions of sanity, of romance, of love even that contrast powerfully with the bizarre abnormalities that characterise events and personages at the court of King Minos. Finally, the strategy of recounting Icarus's remarks about the impending escape - the subject matter of the first section – enables the poet to offer readings and interpretations of the myth itself, as we shall now see.

Throughout these 11 lines, the irony is overwhelming in its impact, both cynically and emotionally. Icarus has plans to return. We recall that he had been born on Crete so his escape was a journey into exile. A youthful idealism, somewhat out of touch with the realities of his situation, leads him to believe in the possibilities of return. To this idealism should be added his relationship with the girl, with whom he intends to celebrate that return. As it turns out, Icarus does not even make his destination, let alone the return journey. The promise to return is almost a stereotypical aspect of young love; the intentions are genuine even when circumstances seem – or prove - quite impossible. Indeed, an integral part of such promises is the conviction that "everything [will] be better than before" because he and she are "on the edge of a new relation". And indeed they are, but certainly not the sort of relationship either of them envisages.

In pursuit of their love, young lovers make plans and may even challenge or defy parents. Here, Rukeyser offers brief but trenchant insight into the father/son relationship. Icarus promises that "he will never again cringe before his father". That Daedalus evokes fear in his son, sufficient for the boy to "cringe", is scarcely surprising, knowing that Daedalus's jealousy of his nephew's skills and talents is violent enough to make him throw his nephew, Talos, from

the Acropolis. We know too that Daedalus is devious enough to lie to Talos's mother about the cause of the boy's death. Icarus is on the brink of shifting from immature dependence to mature autonomy, not only in his refusal to submit to his father but also in his plans "to invent full-time". By following in his father's footsteps as an inventor, Icarus must know that he will be risking his father's wrath. However, it may be that Icarus plans to pursue his full-time career only when he has returned to Crete and his lover.

Because both he and she are young, it is possible that the distinctions between love and sexuality are blurred. Not only does Icarus love her, he also loves "that going into me".

By "going into the world", Icarus epitomises the necessary shift from child to young man, while his going into "the sky" delineates the heroic task that lies ahead for him. One of the recurrent structural features to be found in numerous myths is the journey undertaken by the young hero, a journey that usually has redemptive consequences for many people. Of course, in Icarus's reference to going into the sky, there may be a touch of youthful braggadocio (or downright nervousness) in the face of the flight he is about to make.

After all, he is about to abandon the security and the safety of the earth, to risk death by flying, to say nothing of challenging or threatening the gods' powers. His youthfulness may inhibit his awareness of this last.

For the flight to succeed, the wings had to remain in place. The probability that they would do so depends on the necessary precautions and the quality of the materials used in making the wings (which, interestingly enough) receive no mention. Icarus assures her that "all buckles [are] very firm" and that "the wax [is] the best wax". Given Daedalus's ingenuity, skills and workmanship, shoddiness would be the least of concerns.

Then Icarus asks her, romantically but idealistically: "Wait for me here on the beach", before telling her "Just don't cry". Male/masculine rationality does not want to be touched or moved by any display of female/feminine emotion, emotion which might prove distracting, seductive even, by pulling him back to the earth where she stands instead of allowing him the freedom to fly. The section abounds with the naïve optimism that imbues young love/rs with determination, innocence, and beauty as well as a potential for tragedy. These lines move from Icarus's buoyant reassurances of return and celebration to the practicalities of flight. Yet there is a terrible irony in these practicalities when one is about to attempt the impossibility of human flight. Nonetheless, there is no lack of resolution and conviction. The old adage is proposed: Love will triumph over all things. And in an abstract, theoretical sense, it might well. But this love is neither abstract nor theoretical; it is situated in the fiercely abnormal environs of Minos's Crete where love is epitomised by Pasiphae's zoophilia and Theseus's abandonment of Ariadne.

The second section of the poem shifts from the pseudo-objectivity of third-person reported speech to the intimacy of the first person, as we explore the young woman's response to Icarus's departure. Her first recollections are clotted with ironies. The gulls epitomise the capacity to fly that Icarus is attempting to emulate while the waves adumbrate his death by drowning. The "islands going dark on the sea" evoke not only the distant world into which Icarus was heading but also the dark foreboding of "the sea" awaiting Icarus's fall.

There are a number of things that may account for "the girls laughing", whether it is the sheer folly of Icarus's flight or the contempt they have for her and her relationship with the mad Icarus. They may also be ridiculing the girl's naivety, because she believes Icarus will keep his promise and return to her, to make everything better than before. Implicit in such a reading is the young woman's lack of cynicism or worldly wisdom compared with her peer group.

The girls are not the only ones to inflict criticism on the girl. Her mother is party to the process too. That the mother perceives inventors as "a trashy lot" says a good deal about Daedalus and, therefore by implication, Icarus. Her mother might well be suggesting that men such as Daedalus and Icarus are socially inferior too, and therefore unworthy of her daughter. The analogy she makes between inventors and poets relies on rather negative perceptions about creative people, of their non-conformist attitudes and behaviours. Both are eccentric, albeit for different reasons, and that makes them unfit for normal life in society. The girl's mother symbolises staid conventionality, an ideological position she affirms by telling her daughter that "those who try out inventions are worse". If her criticism of Icarus is uncompromisingly brutal in its forthrightness, it is even more virulent when she addresses her own daughter: "Women who love such are the worst of all". Within the stereotypical behaviour that parents exhibit towards their children, especially when they are in relationships with individuals the parents do not approve of, inter-generational conflict is recurrent and often irreparably damaging, leading, as it can, to the death of the family through elopement or the death of the younger generation by suicide. (*Vide* Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance.) The mother seeks to destroy the young lovers' relationship through guilt and shame. Through the deliberate confusion of love and psychological violence, the mother creates a mystification of experience for the young woman.

Like many other women throughout history awaiting the return of their beloved, the young woman waits "all day, or perhaps longer" for Icarus. Her admission that she "would have liked to try those wings [her]self" suggests not only her non-conformist disposition and daring - making her an amiable partner well-suited to Icarus - but her desire to escape, not least from her mother's destructive tirades, even if that escape were to parallel Icarus's own journey into exile.

To escape "would have been better than this." The word, "this", carries a significant load of baggage, for it encompasses all the unpleasantness of the girl's current situation. She believes that anything would be preferable to her peer group's ridicule and her mother's carping criticisms, preferable too to her present loneliness and the gnawing uncertainty of waiting.

The poem metamorphoses the myth into a tale of young love lost through tragedy. Its emotional impact is achieved through the gaunt simplicity of domestic colloquialisms. The ordinariness of its tone runs counter to the elevated elegance one might expect of a text dealing heroic gambling/gambolling with the gods and the tragic dimensions of Icarus's death. At the same time, the tragedy of love thwarted by circumstance or parental disapproval has a long history from Antony and Cleopatra, and Heloise and Abelard, to Romeo and Juliet and beyond. The gods remain relentless in their envy.

4.2 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.

Sexton's title evokes Yeats's poem, "To A Friend Whose Work Has Come To Nothing". Because Sexton's poem may be read as the counterpart of Yeats's – the pairing may evoke Milton's pair of poems, "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" – it is worth quoting Yeats's text in full:

> Now all the truth is out,
> Be secret and take defeat
> From any brazen throat,
> For how can you compete,
> Being honour bred, with one
> Who, were it proved he lies,
> Were neither shamed in his own
> Nor in his neighbours' eyes?
> Bred to a harder thing
> Than Triumph, turn away
> And like a laughing string
> Whereon mad fingers play
> Amid a place of stone,
> Be secret and exult,

> Because of all things known,
> That is most difficult.

The sombre tone of Yeats's poem, cast in quatrains, is congruent with its subject-matter of failure and defeat, both of which are difficult for anyone to accept. Yet there is an optimistic and affirmative turn in the line, "Be secret and exult".

Anne Sexton's poem, in the form of an English sonnet, begins with an invitation to the reader to contemplate Icarus's existential situation:

> 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!

Given that the word "sticky" means "tending or intended to stick to what is touched", the element of uncertainty, of the possibility that the wings might come unstuck, is introduced into the poem at the very beginning, thus adumbrating Icarus's fate. The word "pasting" contains similar implications that reinforce the perilous nature of the flight Icarus is about to make.

Icarus's sense of trepidation is manifest clearly in the way he tests "that strange little tug at his shoulder blade". Of course, he is right to be apprehensive. After all, he is about to try flying; he might feel a little better if the wind was something rather more powerful than a "strange little tug". There is a nice ambiguity in the word "tug": not only does it mean "pull vigorously" – thus creating an interesting oxymoron when combined with "little" - but also the small powerful vessel that helps larger vessels in and out of harbour. Through this second meaning, we can propose an analogy by which Icarus becomes the larger vessel controlled by the push and pull of the wind.

The flight begins with "that first flawless moment over the lawn/of the labyrinth." There is a potent irony in the fact that Daedalus's invention of wings enables him and his son to escape by flying over the labyrinth, another of his engineering feats. Ironic too, with hindsight, is the fact that their flight begins with a "first flawless moment", a perfection that cannot be sustained in the human realm, least of all when that perfection comes to be tested against one of the enormous forces of nature, the sun itself.

"Think of the difference it made!" readers are asked to contemplate. Daedalus and Icarus are the obvious people for whom this triumph made a difference. But we should not forget that it makes a difference for Minos, who will eventually die in his attempts to recapture Daedalus, whatever the reason. And it makes a difference for Naucrate, Icarus's mother, who is left behind, abandoned in Crete by both her husband and her son.

There is a further dimension of difference that requires attention too. Once they are off the ground, and, to all intents and purposes free, there can be no turning back for Daedalus and Icarus; their decision is irrevocable. And, for Icarus himself, knowing (as we do) what awaits him, there is yet another ironic difference.

The distance between the ground and the height at which Icarus and his father are flying is skilfully conveyed in the next two lines. Our attention is drawn first to the trees "[t]here below". From this new, unique perspective, they are described as "awkward as camels". It seems possible that this simile draws its power from the fact that camels have an awkward stride. Horses, cows, dogs, and most other quadrupeds have a cross-pattern gait, moving right foreleg and left hindleg simultaneously, followed by left foreleg and right hindleg. Camels, however, move right foreleg and right hindleg simultaneously, followed by left foreleg and left hindleg, which gives them their characteristically rolling, almost clumsy gait.

Next, our attention is drawn to "the shocked starlings pumping past". We are now up "here" with birds that are "shocked" at the sight of flying humans. We are being invited to consider the disruption in the natural order of things that Daedalus and Icarus are causing. Such disruption will demand rectification, and rectification often insists on some sort of sacrifice.

The power of the birds' capacity to fly is neatly captured in the mechanical strength of the word, "pumping". Implicitly, we are also aware of Daedalus and Icarus's lack of power to "pump" their wings on which they place their heavy - literally – reliance.

And while we – poet and reader alike – are up "here", we are asked to contemplate "innocent Icarus who is doing quite well". The boy is "innocent", a word that has a number of meanings and implications for the way in which the poet suggests we should understand the myth. The word "innocent" means "free from moral wrong", "guileless" (without cunning or deceit), and "naive" and "unacquainted with evil". All these meanings have relevance to our understanding of the myth. If Icarus is "free from moral wrong", then we should ask: Why does he die? Is he free from moral wrong *only up to the point* when he chooses to ignore his father's injunctions? Being "guileless" and thus lacking in cunning or deceit characterises Icarus as singularly unlike his father, Daedalus. Consequently, Icarus's disobedience should not be read as deceitfulness but rather as an outcome of his naivety and a lack of acquaintance with evil. His naivety, however, may be seen as a youthful lack of worldly knowledge, perhaps about his father's devious, dubious roles in Minos's court in particular. Nonetheless, Icarus is overwhelmingly "innocent" and so becomes the innocent victim of malign fate or the gods. His innocence makes his death all the more tragic.

Yet tragedy is not the dominant tone of these lines. Indeed, we learn that, in his flight so far, the boy is doing quite well", a phrase resonant with the terminology of school reports. His accomplishment is a qualified, rather than overwhelming, success. Nonetheless, it should enable him to accomplish the remainder of the task. After all, with his wings, he is "larger than a sail". Knowing of the other variants of the myth in which Icarus drowns as a result of either getting out of a boat prematurely or being ignorant of how to handle a boat, the image of the boy-flier "larger than a sail" becomes particularly ironic. However, such irony would be limited for readers familiar with the myth only in its traditional version. The "sail" connects with "wings" through their mutual use of, and dependence on, an adequate wind.

On his flight, Icarus is depicted as going "over the fog and the blast/of the plushy ocean." The fog, so typical of sea weathers, is a symbol of a lack of clarity, of difficulty in seeing or perceiving clearly, yet we learn that Icarus is above this; and not just this. He is also above the blast/of the plushy ocean". The word "plushy" means silky or velvet-like, an image constituting one half of its the paradoxical nature of the sea itself, attractive yet powerful in its "blast". But this power is neither a threat nor a danger to Icarus since he is above it, beyond its threat. He continues "doing quite well".

As witnesses to this miraculous event, we are called upon to "Admire his wings!" He would appear to have mastery over the air; he is doing the humanly impossible: flying. He is heroic; he becomes more than human, almost divine.

With him, we "[f]eel the fire at his neck", a fire that is more than simply the sun's heat. It is the fire of the imagination, or the Promethean fire stolen from the gods.

Given the imaginative possibilities in Icarus's semi-divine situation, "he glances up" – we note "how casually" he does so – "and is caught" by the opportunities of exploring his unique circumstances; they are irresistible for the triumphant boy-flier. He commits himself to "wondrously tunneling/into that hot eye." The spread wings become the broad flanges of a reaming drill bit, tunnelling into the sun. Of course, there is a long tradition of poetic convention behind calling the sun "the eye of heaven" – one only has to think here of Shakespeare's "Sonnet 18", for example.

But one can drill into the hot eye of the sun only at a price. The sun, as part of the natural world, will not allow mankind to inflict damage and pain without some considerable cost. The cost to Icarus is his life; it is the price many explorers have had to pay. Nonetheless, we admire their courage and vision. After all, death is the price we all pay ultimately, whether we dare pursue perilous adventures or sit in armchairs. We are inclined to recall the heroism rather than the failure, stupidity, or recklessness of such ventures. And so too with Icarus:

"Who cares that he fell back to the sea?" We admire, respect, perhaps even envy "him acclaiming the sun", even though we are obliged to witness him "come plunging down".

Apparently, his father does not waste time mourning his son's loss but "goes straight into town". While such action may seem unfeeling and characteristic of the devious Daedalus, we will recall that he is now back home. We know of Daedalus's behaviour – expedient, pragmatic, technically brilliant but morally questionable – yet here he is described as "sensible". Meaning "aware, not unmindful" as well as "having or showing good sense, reasonable, judicious, moderate, practical" - all positive qualities - this word offers other insights into Daedalus's personality, and reminds us of his instructions to Icarus just before they leave Crete: to follow the middle way, flying neither too low nor too high. Icarus, for whatever reasons, chooses to ignore his father's words.

What is different about Sexton's version of the myth is that she includes Daedalus, although only the word "daddy" pertains to the father/son relationship. To the extent that Daedalus is included, her version is similar to the myth itself, although it is different from the better-known of Brueghel's depictions of the myth. Sexton's minimisation of Icarus's death when compared with his accomplishment (albeit temporary) finds its visual counterpart in Brueghel's painting in the image of nothing more than Icarus's legs disappearing into the water.

4.3 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 him,
Never dreaming that the gray, respectable suit
Concealed arms that had controlled huge wings
Not 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.

One of the most surprising variants of the myth is Edward Field's poem, "Icarus", not only because of its twentieth-century suburban setting but also because Icarus survives his fall. By allowing Icarus to do this, Field uses the myth as a scathing attack on the mediocrity of contemporary life and the bureaucracy that is its central ideology.

The first part is given over to a colloquial, almost off-handish manner retelling of the myth:

Only the feathers floating around the hat
Showed that anything more spectacular had occurred
Than the usual drowning.

The remnants of Icarus's wings serve to distinguish this from "the usual drowning". Ironically, the failure of Icarus's wings is not seen as anything to do with flying; the drowning reminds us of those mythic variants that have Icarus dying as a result of poor seamanship rather than as a result of his flying too near the sun. Although only the feathers remain, observers deduce that something "more spectacular" has occurred. In this sense, it is also something both extraordinary – and confusing, certainly for the police who are called in to deal with it: "The police preferred to ignore/The confusing aspects of the case".

And their job is made no easier because what witnesses there were to the incident "ran off to a gang war." Here, the seedy, squalid atmosphere of gangs and gang warfare and of urban back streets supersedes the Mediterranean grandeur and glory of the original myth. The witnesses themselves have other priorities as do the passengers on "the expensive delicate ship" in Auden's poem (as we shall see in the next chapter). Similarly, Field metamorphoses the heroic Icarus into a suburban nonentity, as we shall see.

The inadequacy of bureaucratic procedures to deal with extraordinary circumstances for which there are no rules and regulations is criticised in these words: "So the report filed and forgotten in the archives read simply/'Drowned'".

The report's conclusion is made all the more ironic by the extraordinary events surrounding Icarus:

"Drowned", but it was wrong: Icarus
Had swum away, coming at last to the city

Where he rented a house and tended the garden.

Where Auden chooses to attack society for its indifference towards human suffering (Chapter 5), Field explores the mediocrity of contemporary urban living by having Icarus rent a house and tend a garden (drably suburban processes) as well as the unimaginative and undiscriminating dullness characteristic of its inhabitants:"'That nice Mr Hicks' the neighbors called him".

Icarus has undergone a metamorphosis, reminding us of Ovid's title, to become Mr Hicks as "the neighbors called him". They also inflict upon him the indignity of labelling him "nice", that scurrilously mundane but ubiquitous adjective of suburban existence. The very blandness of the word "nice" offers an incisive, one-word vignette of the neighbourhood mentality. The neighbours' pervasive ordinariness makes it impossible for them to dream:

> that the gray respectable suit
> Concealed arms that had controlled huge wings
> Nor that those sad, defeated eyes had once
> Compelled the sun.

And it is equally impossible for Icarus to explain because "had he told them/They would have answered with a shocked, uncomprehending stare." Suburban existence is incapable of imagining or comprehending anything beyond the ordinary. They do not see his "sad, defeated eyes" that "had once/ Compelled the sun" but do notice his "gray respectable suit". It is that greyness and respectability that suit their perceptions of him as "nice" and prevent them from having to confront what is beyond their comprehension and their imagination. He realises that "he could not disturb their neat front yards". His story would bring disorder, consternation, and chaos to lives so tidily symbolised by the neatness of their front yards. External appearances are suburbia's badges of respectable, conformist behaviour. They also act as façades for the lives lived behind such appearances.

Icarus finds himself in a ghastly dilemma between time past and time present: "all his books insisted that this was a horrible mistake". Stepping out of the ancient myth into contemporary life through some unexplained time warp, Icarus reads about himself, to discover from those texts that he is living another life, less heroic, less spectacular. He is no longer the young hero. He wonders first, poignantly: "What was he doing aging in a suburb?" before asking: "Can the genius of the hero fall/To the middling stature of the merely talented?" One might ask whether this question is an exploration of despair and failure or whether it embodies Icarus's pretensions and inflated ego. His search for an answer to the question continues to haunt him in his suburban reincarnation:

> 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.

We observe here the necessity of keeping the "curtain carefully drawn" in his workshop, to hide his desperate experiments from the neighbours' eyes and their inability to comprehend the extraordinary. That he constructs only "small wings" implies a smallness of vision; he is no longer attempting to fly across inhospitable seas. He is trying to do nothing more ambitious than reach "the lighting fixture". He is no longer the mythic hero of the books he reads; he has metamorphosed into a suburban crank.

In pursuit of his lost abilities, he "[f]ails every time and hates himself for trying". The accomplishments of his earlier life fail to provide him with enough to sustain his dreams:

He had thought himself a hero, had acted heroically,
And dreamt of his fall, the tragic fall of the hero.

Icarus's perception of himself as "hero" raises the Aristotelian problem of *hamartia,* the so-called "tragic flaw" or "tragic error in judgement". Perhaps the most familiar form of *harmartia* is *hubris*, when pride or overconfidence leads a person (usually a male) to overlook a divine warning, or to break a moral law. Through the hero's fall – a literal one, in Icarus's case – we are moved to pity, often because his misfortune is greater than he deserves (Abrams, 1957, p. 99). In this version of the myth, Icarus's fate is, quite clearly, far greater than he deserves.

Sadly, he is doomed to live out his life in the soul-destroying, dream-shattering environment of twentieth-century suburbia, a society utterly devoid of heroic visions and gestures; he

. . . now rides commuter trains,
Serves on various committees,
And wishes he had drowned.

Icarus is our catharsis.

Field's version of the myth is notable for its omission of Daedalus and his history. It also shows one of the ways in which the myth's meaning serves as a critical exploration and indictment of contemporary society.

4.4 NORMAN MacCAIG: *Down and down*

Therefore I fall
in a way that never misses the target
like all the marvellous fallers
Icarus Phaethon (Lucifer).

The depth I fall into

is cruelly just light enough
for me to see it;
else how know I was falling?

I had only the usual
pride, the usual ambition.
Icarus Phaethon Lucifer,
I will be no legend.

When I reach the bottom
of bottomlessness, there will be
no broken wings beside me,
no chariot of sun.

And no crystal battlements
will infinitely shine above me.
I will be left with only
the loneliness of falling.

MacCaig's poem achieves much through its apparent imprecision. As the poem begins with the word "Therefore", we could ask what has occurred prior to the opening of the text, of which the text becomes consequential? And what, precisely, is the nature of the speaker's "fall"? What kind of fall is it, since it is clearly metaphorical rather than literal?

Therefore I fall
in a way that never misses the target
like all the marvellous fallers
Icarus Phaethon (Lucifer).

In effecting his "fall", the speaker "never misses the target". There are no accidents, no misadventures, no interferences by the gods, fate, or any other benign, even malign power. To that extent, the speaker is different from "all the marvellous fallers", those whose falls are something to marvel and wonder at, falls that have become entrenched in, and remembered through millennia of, humankind's mythic history, those who missed their targets in various ways. The three serve as exemplars of what happens to those daring enough to challenge (or, seen from another perspective, threaten) the gods/God. By placing Lucifer's name in parentheses, the speaker sets him apart from the other two. Readers will read their own meaning into this, although it is clear that we are to understand that his fall is manifestly different from the other two.

The depth I fall into
is cruelly just light enough
for me to see it;
else how know I was falling?

In his fall, the speaker plunges into depths that do not offer the blackness or oblivion of death; they are "just light enough/for me to see it". The speaker perceives his being able to see the depths into which he plunges as a kind of cruelty, a cruelty absent from the fate of the other

three fallers. Indeed, the speaker's fall has a further dimension of cruelty attached to it, as we shall see shortly.

> I had only the usual
> pride, the usual ambition.
> Icarus Phaethon Lucifer,
> I will be no legend.

The speaker makes a further distinction here between himself and the other three: his pride and ambition are "usual", thus stressing not only the unusual nature of their pride and ambition but also the mundane ordinariness of his own. Icarus, Phaethon, and Lucifer are, by implication, heroic and famous (or infamous); either way, they are non-conformists who refuse to abide by the prevailing rules, no matter who makes them. (It is worth recalling that "pride" is one of the seven deadly sins of the Bible.)

Unlike Icarus, Phaethon, and Lucifer (the last now out of the brackets and thus an integral part of this unique trinity), the speaker "will be no legend" but is destined for the anonymity the majority of humankind are destined to suffer. Many of the non-conformists in society remain forgotten until they achieve spectacular fame or infamy, and the speaker's fall is insufficiently spectacular to be recorded in the annals of legend or myth. And yet, as James Hollis (1995, p. 149) puts it: "To reach the end of one's life and to know that one has not truly taken the journey is more terrible than any terrors one would have had to face on the way". He goes on to argue that we need "to experience the paradox that by the humble task of simply being ourselves we are thus more than ourselves. Then, in a time when the gods seem to have gone away, we may nonetheless glimpse the divine." But, for some, despair is overwhelming, not least in its paradoxicality; one vanishes without trace:

> When I reach the bottom
> of bottomlessness, there will be
> no broken wings beside me,
> no chariot of sun.

The catastrophic deaths of both Icarus and Phaethon are neatly recalled in the images of the "broken wings" and the "chariot of the sun". More significantly, Lucifer is absent here, having fallen but not, as with Icarus and Phaethon, to his death. His fall is of another kind.

> And no crystal battlements
> will infinitely shine above me.
> I will be left with only
> the loneliness of falling.

The "crystal battlements" evoke a passage from Book I of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Lines 738-751 read as follows:

Nor was his name unheard or unadored
In ancient Greece, and in Ausonian land
Men called him Mulciber; and how he fell
From heav'n, they fabled, thrown by angry Jove
Sheer o'er the crystal battlements; from morn
To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
A summer's day; and with the setting sun
Dropped from the zenith like a falling star,
On Lemnos th' Aégean isle. Thus they relate,
Erring; for he with this rebellious rout
Fell long before; nor aught availed his now
To have built in heav'n high tow'rs; nor did he scape
By all his engines, but was headlong sent
With his industrious crew to build in hell.

Thrown from Olympus by Zeus, Mulciber - also known as Vulcan and better known as Hephaestus - does not die from the fall but lands, half-dead, on the island of Lemnos, where the local inhabitants, the Sintians care for him. For Hephaestus, this was not the first but the second fall from Olympus. Because he was ugly and deformed as a baby, his mother Hera threw him from Olympus. On that occasion, he landed in the sea (like Icarus) and was cared for by Thetis and Eurynome for nine years. (His tale is to be found in the closing lines of Book I of *The Iliad*.)

Clearly, this story reveals strong parallels with the expulsion of Satan and his followers from heaven. In Satan's case, it is a spectacular fall from heaven to hell, although not to death but to an infinite and infinitely evil existence.

At the same time, MacCaig's poem manifests equally strong parallels with lines (105-121) drawn from Canto XVII of Cantica I (*L'Inferno*) of Dante's *Divina Commedia*:

No greater fear, methinks did any feel
When Phaethon dropped the chariot-reins of the sun,
Firing the sky - we see the mark there still -

Nor when poor Icarus felt the hot wax run,
Unfeathering him, and heard his father calling,
"Alack! Alack! Though fliest too high, my son!" -

Than I felt, finding myself in the void falling
With nothing but air all around, nothing to show,
No light, no sight but the sight of the beast appalling.

And on he goes, swimming and swimming slow,
Round and down, though I only know it by feeling
The wind come up and beat on my face from below.

And now I hear on the right as we spin wheeling
The noise of the cataract under us horribly roaring,
And I crane my head and look down with my sense reeling.
Then the terror of alighting seemed worse than the terror of soaring.

These lines, taken from Sayers' translation (1949, vol. 1, p. 177), describe Dante and Virgil's flight on the Geryon's shoulders over the Great Barrier to the Eighth Circle, also known as the Circle of the Counsellors of Fraud (Sayers, vol. 1, p. 138). That both Dante and MacCaig refer to Phaethon and Icarus is perhaps no coincidence; after all, both Phaethon and Icarus have been frequently perceived as similar strong-headed young men seduced into reckless and, ultimately, fatal behaviour by daring to challenge the gods. Lucifer too dared to challenge God – and, like the others, lost. MacCaig's invocation of Lucifer/Satan is appropriate, given that this first volume of the *Divina Commedia* is centred on the Inferno, Hell itself. They are, all three of them, "marvellous fallers".

But no such flamboyant mythic destiny awaits the speaker. He has no guide (like Dante or Icarus) and no followers (like Lucifer) with him; he is alone in the existential void, "left with only/the loneliness of falling." Within a twentieth-century context, this fall may be read less as a literal than as a psychological one, as an articulation of the speaker's decline into a state of depression that is "bottomless" – hence its bleak and perpetual cruelty.

In writing about depression, Andrew Solomon (2001, p. 27) says:

> *Depressives use the phrase 'over the edge" all the time to delineate the passage from pain to madness. [...] When asked, people describe the abyss pretty consistently. In the first place, it's dark. You are falling way from the sunlight towards a place where the shadows are black. Inside, you cannot see, and the dangers are everywhere (it's neither soft-bottomed nor soft-sided, the abyss). While you are falling, you don't know how deep you can go, or whether you can in any way stop yourself.*

A little later, he adds pertinently: "Oh, some of the abyss imagery fits: the darkness, the uncertainty, the loss of control. But if you were actually falling endlessly down an abyss, there would be no question of control. You would be out of control entirely" (2001, p. 28).

In MacCaig's poem, the speaker has not challenged the gods, and has not threatened their power by flying. Yet he is compelled to suffer a fate that is, in a sense, worse than Icarus's or Phaethon's. Icarus and Phaethon die and are not compelled to survive the perpetual state of terror and lack of control that accompanies a fall without end, an eternal descent, the perpetually recurring punishment – similar, at least, in their eternal repetitive pattern to those inflicted on Prometheus and Sisyphus – that God inflicted on both Lucifer and humankind. Every human being is compelled to suffer this punishment, their own fall, whether literal or metaphorical, to replicate Satan's own.

4.5 ROGER McGOUGH: *The Fallen Birdman*

The oldman in the cripplechair
Died in transit through the air
And slopped into the road.

The driver of the lethallorry
Trembled out and cried: 'I'm sorry,
But it was his own fault'.

Humans snuggled round the mess
In masochistic tenderness
As raindrops danced in his womb.

.....

But something else obsessed my brain,
The canvas, twistedsteel and cane,
His chair, spreadeagled in the rain,
Like a fallen birdman.

[NB: The ellipses between stanzas 3 and 4 are in the original; there are no omissions there – or here.]

At first glance, the fatal collision between an old man in a wheelchair and a lorry seems to have little or nothing to do with the myth of Icarus. After all, the myth is about flying, risk, disobedience, and death. The only link between the poem and the myth would appear to be the subject of death.

Of the poem's thirteen lines, the first nine are given over to a description of the accident itself. The diction is colloquial, at times bluntly repugnant terms:

> The oldman in the cripplechair
> Died in transit through the air
> And slopped into the road.

The victim, described as "the oldman", is hit by a lorry and thrown some considerable distance through the air. This "flight" is fatal because the old man dies "in transit", a phrase reminiscent of baggage and various kinds of air cargo. That the old man "slopped into the road" suggests the softness of his body, its comprehensively broken bones, its less than solid constitution.

> The driver of the lethallorry
> Trembled out and cried: "I'm sorry,
> But it was his own fault".

The lorry driver refuses to accept culpability, placing the responsibility on the victim: "it was his own fault". It is here that overtones of the Icarian myth begin to emerge. In at least one

interpretation of the myth, Icarus, by disobeying his father's instructions, is at fault and hence culpable for his own demise. One might propose that, here in McGough's poem, the father and son roles of the myth are reversed. In this text, it is "the oldman" that dies rather than the young one. To lend further credibility to this premise, one might reasonably hypothesise that the lorry driver, *precisely by virtue of his being a lorry driver*, is younger (and physically stronger) than the victim.

> Humans snuggled round the mess
> In masochistic tenderness
> As raindrops danced in his womb.

This, the third stanza, is devoted to a pungent criticism of the morbid fascination – and sexual titillation too - that human beings have with accidents, the suffering of others, and death. In two of its meanings, the word "snuggled" means "cozy" or "comfortably situated", a brusque indictment of those standing around, looking at "the mess", a word reinforcing the earlier "slopped". We notice these bystanders are perceived as bound together by their "masochistic tenderness", a brilliantly incisive and savagely critical oxymoron, exposing one of the pervasive sicknesses of contemporary society.

Having described the accident in finely-weighed, highly evocative terms, the poet attaches a final stanza in which he presents his highly personal reaction to it.

> But something else obsessed my brain,
> The canvas, twistedsteel and cane,
> His chair, spreadeagled in the rain,
> Like a fallen birdman.

For the poet, the accident has resonances beyond the "masochistic tenderness" of the other witnesses. Beyond the images of the wheelchair (and, by implication, its occupant) smashed to pieces – the "canvas, twistedsteel, and cane" - the poet finds that his "brain" becomes "obsessed" with "something else", something remote from the present and the immediacy of the collision itself, something mythical, something "spreadeagled in the rain,/Like a fallen birdman." While the specific details of the old man's death differ from Icarus's plummet in the sea, there remain some ineluctable parallels, not the least of which is a brief but deadly flight. The accident brings myth into contemporary history, democratising and redefining the hero's role as it does so. The poem affirms the presence of mythic dimensions in present-day existence. To this extent, the text assumes a stance diametrically opposed to Edward Field's poem. McGough may be trying to democratise the Icarus myth, elevating the grotesque mundanity of a traffic accident into an event with at least some mythic overtones. Or he may be trying to invest the dullness and mundanity of twentieth-century living with a sense that it lacks the mythic, the epic, the heroic in its headlong rush.

At this juncture, it is worth noting that McGough has drawn on the Icarus myth in writing another poem, "Icarus Allsorts", that attributes the start of World War Three to the death of Icarus. This is the opening stanza:

> A littlebit of heaven fell
> From out the sky one day
> It landed in the ocean
> Not so very far away
> The General at the radar screen
> Rubbed his hands with glee
> And grinning pressed the button
> That started World War Three.

The remainder of the poem is devoted to a depiction of the devastation brought by the war, presented with McGough's characteristic black humour.

The interest this opening stanza has for us resides in the catastrophic outcome – the death of "Three thousand million, seven hundred, and sixty-eight people" (line 55) – of the General's misreading of events. The ironic misreading of Icarus's fate (implied at least in the title) is further compounded by the epigraph heading the text of the poem:

> *"A meteorite is reported to have landed/*
> *in New England. No damage is said..."*

Icarus is innocent after all.

4.6 ERNST VAN HEERDEN: *My Ikaros*

> Die vlugtige en verbanne seun
> wou ligter vleuels beproef,
> om oor die vreemde see te klim,
> die maankalbas te tik,
> die sonoonddeure toe te klap,
> en arendvry sy eie ster te kies.
>
> Maar deur die onder-eb
> en die stormende golf versprei,
> sal hierdie sypelende bloed
> 'n donker sleepsel
> om die sidderende wereld voer
> en uitmond teen ons Afrika.

The final text we shall focus on here was written by one of South Africa's major Afrikaans poets, Ernst van Heerden. Since the poem was written originally in a language other than English, some remarks on what happens in the translation process seem crucial in the light of our probe for meaning. Consequently, the translation into English that accompanies the bilingual edition of van Heerden's poems will be scrutinised in some detail so that the

translation given above can be placed in an appropriate context. Only then will some critical discussion be possible.

Within the context of the Icarus myth, the processes of translating become [a] a way of reading another version of the myth and [b] then of creating yet another reading. Indeed, in these processes, there are strong overtones of the paradox of infinite regress.

The point of introducing this particular text is to examine what can happen to our understanding of the poet's reading and use of the mythic subject when we are obliged to tackle the original through the medium of a translation. It is perhaps important to recall that Paul Jennings said: "It is difficult to decide whether translators are heroes or fools" (in Cohen & Cohen, 1980, p. 173).

In the bilingual edition (Van Heerden, 1986, p. 93), the poet comments graciously that the translator "has stuck to a meticulous precision, even to the extent of preserving the same syllable count per line." Perhaps it is precisely the desire to preserve a line-by-line syllable count that inhibits some aspects of the translating process. Anyway, here is Jean Branford's translation:

> Incorrigible, wayward boy
> wished to try his lighter wings,
> to soar above the unknown sea,
> to tap the moon's pale gourd,
> to slam the furnace-doors upon
> the sun, and choose his own star, eagle-free.
>
> Spread by the under-tow
> and driven by the stormy waves,
> this seeping blood will filter, draw
> a darkened current
> round about the quivering earth to
> cast up on our Africa.

Let us begin with line 1. The word "vlugtige" has a number of meanings including "fleeing", "fugitive", "swift" and "hurrying". The word "verbanne" means "banished", "exiled", "expelled" and "outcast". To translate "vlugtige" as "incorrigible" and "verbanne" as "wayward" seems, in itself, somewhat wayward on the translator's part, especially when one considers the alternative meanings available for what might constitute an appropriate diction for the subject of the poem. What is happening here, interestingly, is that the choice of the target language diction constitutes interpretation rather than translation.

Also in line 1, the word "seun" may mean either "boy" or "son"; it seems strange, almost perverse, to lose the importance of the father/son relationship integral in the myth by opting for the word "boy".

And the problems created by the translation go further than this.

The second line, "wou ligter vleuels beproef" translated word-for-word, yields "would lighter wings try" which scarcely requires poetic genius for it to become "would try lighter wings". Since the line contains no possessive in the original, the "wings" ("vleuels") are only "his" (as the translation suggests) by implication since it is Icarus who is wearing them. Paradoxically, the wings are also not "his" because they were made by Daedalus. The phrase, "would try lighter wings", suggests that Icarus was in a position to make a choice that had potentially ironic outcomes which he failed or refused to perceive. Further, the word, "would", contains a hint of persistence or insistence about the act of "trying" the "wings", while the word "lighter" could be taken to possess connotative meanings closer to "inappropriate" or "unsuitable" for the purpose for which they were intended. If the wings made by Daedalus are now perceived as "lighter" in the sense of "unsuitable", then the poet has cleverly introduced a profound moral issue into his text. At the same time, that Icarus wishes to try "lighter" wings implies his less-than-adult strength to bear the wings, reinforcing our notion that, although he is, first and foremost, Daedalus's son, he remains just a boy.

Branford translates line 3, "om oor die vreemde see te klim", as "to soar above the unknown sea" while we have rendered it as "to rise above the unfamiliar sea". The verb, "te klim", means to "rise", "climb", or "ascend", conveying the effort required to get off the ground. This seems congruent with the earlier idea that Icarus had chosen to try "lighter wings" which would make the whole business of getting airborne that much more difficult. The adjective, "vreemde", means "strange", "queer", "funny", "alien", or "unfamiliar". It does not mean "unknown", however. In our translation, the sea is perceived to be "unfamiliar" in the sense that, in not being man's natural environment, it would therefore prove as uncongenial to Icarus as the aircurrents he strives to rise and ride on.

In line 4, "die maankalbas te tik", the original offers a metaphoric relationship between the moon ("die maan") and the calabash ("kalbas") through the compounding process characteristic of Afrikaans. In the original, there is no mention of the moon's paleness, because the idea of a "pale moon" is perilously close to cliché, in any case. Regrettably, the translation perpetrates the Romantic cliché. In the original text, the moon does not possess a "gourd"- pale or otherwise - nor does the "pale gourd" appear to function symbolically in the English translation. Indeed there seems little reason, other than a passion for identical syllable count, to do more than translate "die maankalbas" as "the calabash moon". The word "tik" can indeed mean "tap" as well as "touch" and a number of other things. The word "touch" was chosen to suggest that Icarus's gentle response to the moon would contrast dramatically with his violent slamming action in the next line.

The fifth line, "die sonoonddeure toe te klap", for example, is translated as "to slam the furnace-doors upon the sun", a rendering somewhat different in both meaning and context from the more accurate, "to slam the sun's furnace-doors shut". In the translation, the "furnace-doors" appear to belong to some thing that is not the sun itself in such a way that these doors may be closed upon the sun. And yet it seems that the desire to close the doors of the sun's oven and thus to shut out its heat and so prevent the imminent tragedy seems crucial not merely to the central meaning of the poem but also to one of the basic elements of the myth itself.

And in the sixth line of Branford's translation, there is no sound reason for shifting the word "arendvry" - translated literally as "eagle-free" - from its position as the second word of the line to place it as the last word of the line.

The opening lines of the second stanza – "Maar deur die onder-eb/en die stormende golf versprei" - contain only one verb ("versprei") in the original, yet Branford opts for two ("Spread" and "driven"). The Afrikaans word "versprei" is accurately translated as "spread" while the word we have chosen, "borne", may be perceived as less accurate, perhaps. However, it is intended to combine the sense of being "spread" by while being carried on òr in the sea currents. The word, "borne" had the further advantage of being only one word, as in the original.

In line 11, the word "sidderende" means "shivering", "trembling", "shuddering", or "quaking". The last option seemed to us to be most expressive of fear as well as the destructive power of the earthquake. Branford's word, "quivering", seemed to lack the necessary potency. The final line of the poem contains the word "uitmond", a word defined as "debouch", "discharge", or "empty". None of these alternatives possessed sufficient power or ambiguity so we decided on "heave up", a pair of words that captured the sea's power as well as the inherent ambiguity of "casting upon" and "regurgitating".

Attempting to get closer to the literal meaning of the poem as well as to its relationship to the engendering myth has resulted in this tentative translation of the poem:

The fugitive and outcast son
would try lighter wings
to rise above the unfamiliar sea
to touch the calabash moon
to slam the sun's oven-doors shut
and, free as an eagle, choose his own star.

But borne on the under-tow
and the stormy breakers,
this oozing blood will trawl

a dark trail
round the quaking world
and heave it up on our Africa.

Now let us take up our discussion of this interpretation, using this translation of the text. The poem draws its significance from what happened to Icarus after his death as his blood gets caught up in the ocean tides.

By calling his poem "My Ikaros", van Heerden acknowledges a personalisation of the myth, and through a specifically African image - "the calabash moon" - transports the significance of the myth from Europe to Africa.

From the outset, Icarus is depicted in non-conformist terms; he is both "fugitive" and "outcast". These words compel us to see Icarus in a less sympathetic light than some of the other poets have chosen. He is no innocent, as Sexton suggests, and is devoid of "the genius of the hero" that Field mentions; and he is certainly not, as Hamburger sees him, the "angel". Van Heerden's depiction of Icarus is more stringent.

Yet he is seen as a "son", a term that not only reminds us of his relationship with Daedalus (the "sensible daddy" of Sexton's poem), but also, through a homophonic pun, evokes the "sun" by which he dies. The word "son" also suggests his youth; he is a boy, the word Auden uses to describe him, who "would try lighter wings" because he might lack the physical strength necessary to carry him to safety. The boy's vulnerability to the circumstances he is about to confront is already manifest, albeit implicitly. He needs such wings to be able "to rise above the unfamiliar sea". That the sea is unfamiliar draws attention to the fact that both father and son are about to enter an element – the air – which is not man's proper element. That the sea remains "unfamiliar" to Icarus suggests that, despite his having been born and raised on the island of Crete, he has no experience of its fickleness. This would be particularly relevant for readers acquainted with those variants of the myth in which Icarus drowns after capsizing his vessel or being shipwrecked rather than as a result of his flight toward the sun.

Given the word "would" in the phrase "would try", we are led to understand that Icarus's flight is rather more fantastic than its mythic predecessor. In this text, Icarus wants to journey, first, "to touch the calabash moon", then he wishes "to slam the sun's oven-doors shut" and then, "free as an eagle, choose his own star." The scale of this envisioned journey is far grander than the original mythic task of merely getting away safely from Crete. It is a flight that will touch the silver-white coolness of the feminine (embodied in the moon, appropriately depicted as a calabash, a vessel of containment) before going on to seal off the masculine heat and power of the sun and so prevent the danger of the wings' wax melting. Having accomplished these tasks, Icarus would be "free as an eagle". This image recalls the shepherd

in Hamburger's poem, who thinks the wings he might have heard are "Perhaps an eagle's". Given this soaring avian freedom, Icarus will be able to choose his own destiny. At least, this is what Icarus would have liked to happen.

When we come to the second stanza, the discrepancy between dream and reality is made manifest. Icarus is already dead, although the mode and manner of his death is not dealt with, nor is his father's fate. These omissions set this text apart from other poems. All that remains of the fated boy's tragic body is "this oozing blood" which is "borne on the under-tow/and the stormy breakers". Entering the movements of the ocean tides

> this oozing blood will trawl
> a dark trail
> round the quaking world
> and heave it up on our Africa.

Eventually, after a long and turbulent journey, Icarus's blood spills onto the beaches of Africa. Van Heerden's reference to "our Africa" presents us with a phrase imbued with a multiplicity of meanings and readings. One might speculate that it might embody the idea of Africa's cultural colonisation by Europe, that Africa is touched, if not tainted, by the "blood" of European myths. Given that Africa has had the blood of European mythology cast on its shores, we, in Africa, are being asked what we can we make – or what should we make - of such mythologies. Further still, the possibility remains that all that comes to Africa is the "oozing blood" of the protagonist destined to stain African shores, diluted by its long journey through the undercurrents and stormy breakers of the very element that destroyed Icarus.

4.7 CONCLUSION

After these detailed discussions of the individual texts, any attempts to synthesise their diversity should be redundant. Each offers its particular way of "probing the wound of Icarus", not merely in the sense of the fatal wound inflicted on Icarus but also of the wounds that the myth of Icarus inflicts on the poets. It is clear from these texts that the myth exerts a strangely powerful yet radically diverse influence. The myriad ways of reading and using the myth creatively (as evidenced by the texts included in Chapter 7) suggests that the myth's influence remains as potent as ever. This seems true even when a number of poets focus their creative efforts on a single depiction of the myth, as we shall see in the following chapter, which examines three texts dealing with Pieter Brueghel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*.

CHAPTER 5

"CHRONICLING THE IMPOSSIBLE": WILLIAMS, AUDEN, AND HAMBURGER ON BRUEGHEL'S LANDSCAPE WITH THE FALL OF ICARUS

This chapter consists of two parts. The first – dealing with various depictions of the Icarus myth, including two by Brueghel - serves as a prolegomenon to the second. The second part presents a discussion of poems written by William Carlos Williams, W H Auden, and Michael Hamburger on Brueghel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*.

5.1 A PROLEGOMENON: DEPICTIONS OF THE MYTH OF ICARUS

Breughel's is not the first artwork to be devoted to the myth and it is unlikely to be the last. The myth has exerted its influence on artists from Finiguerra (c. 1460), Brueghel (c. 1525-1569), Saraceni (c. 1585-1620) and Peter Paul Reubens (1577-1640) to Matisse (1869-1954), the South African Alexis Preller (1911-1975) and on to contemporary artists such as Kathy Beal, Norman Burkett, Matthew Friday, Kent Lew, and Simon Toparovsky as well as the Egyptian-born French photographer, André Naggar, and the Germans, Dieter Appelt's "Oppedette" (Anonymous 2, 2000, p. 21), Wolfgang Mattheuer's "Der Nachbar, der will fliegen" and "Seltsamer Zwischenfall" (Fries, 1986, pp. 533-534), and his "After Sunset" (Walther, 1998, vol. 1, p. 367), to say nothing of Anthony Gormley's "A Case for an Angel II" (Anonymous 1, 1999, p. 173). (The Internet sources of the art works not referenced here may be found in the third section of the References.)

Of course, the essential subject of this research does not require a comprehensive disquisition on works of art devoted to the subject of Daedalus and Icarus; that would be a substantial project in itself. Instead, the focus falls on a handful of works that are intended to serve not only as examples of the way the myth has been depicted but also to provide a context for Brueghel's work.

In Figure 1, an anonymous woodcut from 1493 (Dalton, 1977, p. 103), we notice that both Daedalus and Icarus constitute the woodcut's subject matter. Figure 2 shows an earlier copperplate etching dating from about 1460 and attributed to Maso Finiguerra (Doob, 1990, p. pp. 108-109). Bearing the title, *The Cretan Legend*, its ostensible subject is the story of Theseus and Ariadne, the labyrinth itself taking up almost two-thirds of the left-hand part of the etching. Figure 3 is probably the best-known of Brueghel's work devoted to the Icarian myth (Hagen & Hagen, 2000, p. 61).

Whether Brueghel himself ever saw the Finiguerra's copperplate remains an interesting speculation, but there are some particularly noticeable similarities, including:

- the design of the ship as well as the angle and direction of its travel in relation to the coast;
- Icarus himself who is depicted in both works as nothing more than a pair of legs disappearing into the sea;
- the presence in the centre left foreground of a dominant figure [presumably Theseus since the words *laberintio TESEVS* are inscribed on the exterior wall of the labyrinth] who is not the central character of the myth/legend and who ignores the event occurring behind him;
- the way in which the land falls away behind this figure to the sea;
- the presence of other figures in the landscape, none of whom appear aware of or concerned with what is happening;
- the background landscape which is extremely hilly with castles and towers.

There is, however, one major significant difference between the Finiguerra copperplate and Breughel's painting. In the etching, we notice the presence of a second figure immediately above the drowning Icarus, a figure who is also plummeting headlong into the sea. Since little information about a second figure features in Ovid's telling of the tale, speculation, dangerous and futile though it may be, becomes a fascinating game at least.

Parenthetically, one might ask whether the fact that Icarus is falling into the sea immediately above some of the plumes in Theseus's helmet is deliberate or coincidental on Finiguerra's part. In several versions of the myth, Daedalus survives the flight, but sees only a few feathers on the waters to indicate Icarus's fate.

But this painting is not Brueghel's only work devoted to the subject. There is also an etching of the myth done from one of Brueghel's drawings [Figure 4]. It is significant to our research because it is titled *Man of War with the Fall of Icarus* (Hagen & Hagen, 2000, p. 60). In this work, the artist has chosen to include not only the ship of its title and the fall of Icarus but Daedalus too. This raises the obvious question: Why is Daedalus omitted from the *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*? Perhaps there is an answer.

According to Hagen & Hagen (2000, p. 95), there is a painting very similar to *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* to be found, also in Brussels, in the Van Buuren Collection. The authors say that the two versions – the second is titled *Icarus's Fall* – "differ only slightly". But let us look at the Van Buuren version [Figure 5] for a moment (Claessens & Rousseau, 1969, p. 163).

Immediately, it will be obvious to the discriminating viewer that the difference is more than slight. In the Van Buuren version, Daedalus is present, looking backwards and downwards to catch sight of his son disappearing into the water. One wonders why the Van Buuren painting is lesser known than the Musée des Beaux Arts version. One might speculate that there is less public access to, or familiarity with, the Van Buuren collection.

Although it is appropriate at this point to attempt a description of the painting itself, let us first recall the painting's title: *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. Clearly, Icarus's fatal fall is not meant to serve as the central subject of the painting; rather it is the landscape and its three congruent characters – the ploughman, the fisherman, and the shepherd - that predominate as subject.

Prominent in the centre left foreground of the work is the ploughman, whose bright red doublet is the dominant colour in the picture; he is the one most likely to attract notice first although his back faces the viewer. The ploughman's head is turned to the left, and thus away from the sea and Icarus. Behind and slightly to the left of the ploughman's right shoulder, on a ledge of ground lower than that where the ploughman is working, stands a shepherd, staring upward. According to Ovid, the three men "looked up/And gazed in awe, and thought they must be gods/That they could fly."

In Ovid's version, both father and son are seen, and are in sight of the three men. In Brueghel's version, the shepherd's attention or gaze is focused only on Daedalus flying above him. By having the shepherd notice Daedalus, Brueghel adds the irony that the shepherd is necessarily oblivious to Icarus's fate.

In the bottom right-hand corner of the painting, a fisherman is perched on a rocky outcrop, his back to the viewer with his head tilted towards his right arm. Although he is facing the sea, he is busy with the line that appears to fall from his outstretched right hand straight down into the water. Immediately above his left shoulder, and 'half-way' - such a measure is obviously risky when such perspectives as Brueghel's are being discussed - between himself and the ship are the legs of Icarus. Further out from the shore and some distance to the left of Icarus is the ship, with one sailor visible in the rigging.

Ahead of the ship, in broad sweep for almost the entire width of the canvas, is a large stretch of water, with an island to the port side and other ships on the far starboard side. A crescent of land behind the water begins as a towering rocky promontory (on the upper left section of the painting) sweeping round to the top right of the painting, becoming flatter at the water's edge, despite the persistence of high rocky ridges behind the towers and what appears to be urban settlement. As we have already noted, of Icarus himself, only the legs are fully visible, his head and torso already submerged beneath the water.

This description has been necessary so that, when we come to discuss the three poems, readers are able to perceive which of the painting's features the poets have chosen to emphasise and, concomitantly, what features they have chosen to omit.

At this point, we should appreciate that Brueghel's painting constitutes a "reading", an interpretation of the myth itself. Consequently, the three poems using Brueghel's painting as subject-matter are interpretations, "readings" primarily of the painting rather than of the original myth. This is important because we shall discuss the poems using the Brueghel painting rather than the Ovid text as the primary yardstick of our understanding.

5.2 THREE BRUEGHEL-BASED POEMS

In this section, we shall be concerned with three poems, by William Carlos Williams, W H Auden, and Michael Hamburger respectively, all of which deal with Pieter Breughel the Elder's painting, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. As an introduction, some remarks about poems having works of art as their subject seem relevant here. These comments assume the form of questions:

- Why would one write a poem that assumes that, if readers are to understand it, they must have seen the work of art first?

- Why would one write a poem anyway, when the artwork has all the benefits – immediate impact, colour, design, etc, etc – of the visual medium?

- What sort of poem is one creating when one writes about an artwork?

- Because the poem by its very subject-matter cannot be self-sufficient, what is the subject-matter?

- What is the function of a poem based on an artwork? Is it an interpretation? Does it constitute a commentary on the poem? Is it a description? Or is it perhaps all three?

And there are more technical matters as far as the poet is concerned:

- Should there be a congruent relationship between the form of the artwork and the form of the poem, and, if so, what form should that congruence take?

- In dealing with an artwork as subject, is one meant to handle the subject denotatively or connotatively?

- Is the purpose of writing such a poem primarily objective and viewer-focused or is it primarily subjective and writer-focused?

- How well-known does the artwork itself have to be? In other words, how accessible (well-known and famous) does the artwork need to be for the poem to enjoy a readership?

- What style should one use to present such subjects? Does one try to emulate the style of the artwork or does one confine oneself to the style of the period in which the poem is being written?

There are many other, equally problematic issues in trying to write poems about works of art. Nonetheless, three factors seem fairly certain: (a) the artwork precedes the poem, and that requires the reader to be familiar with the artwork in order to read the poem; (b) the poem always represents some form of "reading" or interpretation of the painting on the poet's part, a reading which may differ in content from the painting; and (c) the poem is never an objective descriptive account of the artwork, otherwise it ceases to be a poem and assumes some other form of discourse.

If, as is the case with Brueghel, the painting itself is a reading of the myth, then a process similar to the paradox of infinite regress occurs. The poem constitutes a reading of the painting which, in itself, constitutes a reading of the myth whose written forms – the plural is necessary because of the variants - constitute various readings of an oral original. At each stage, then, the interpretative process and the tendency to elaborate and improvise on the tale exert their influence.

Now, let us turn to the poems themselves. In each instance, the text is given complete.

5.2.1 *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
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

Williams's "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" – the poet uses Brueghel's own title for his poem - is the second in a sequence of 12 pieces devoted to Brueghel's works bearing the overall title of *Pictures from Brueghel*.

As an Objectivist, Williams creates texts characterised "by a clean stripping of poetry to its essentials, by a holding of emotion at arm's length, and by vivid observations, restricted almost entirely to sensory experience" (Hart, 1965, p. 929). One might also wish to speculate on why the Objectivist school appealed to a poet who ran a medical practice for more than 50 years; perhaps, there are parallels between the Objectivist stance and the rigours of medical science.

Of the three poems on Brueghel's interpretation of the Icarus myth, Williams's is the briefest. The poet appears to be presenting his readers with what would seem to be an 'objective' account of Brueghel's painting. Further, the poem's dispassionate diction and detached tone complement its 'objectivity', resulting in a simplicity that ironically undercuts the powerful emotions inherent in the event.

As an opening gambit, the poet deftly side-steps the issue of creating his own "interpretation" of the painting by asserting that what follows is "According to Brueghel" rather than according to Williams. Skilful though this gambit is, it represents a perceptual sleight-of-hand in the sense that Williams is actually attributing his own "interpretation" of the Brueghel painting to Brueghel. What the poet is really saying is, "This is how I see Brueghel's way of seeing the myth". Of course, this clever strategy enables the poet to present his own "reading" of the painting in the guise of a detached and apparently objective description of the Brueghel painting. In opting for such an opening gambit, the poet is emulating precisely what the painter has done: while Brueghel creates an interpretation of Ovid in his painting, Williams creates an interpretation of Brueghel in his poem.

Because the poem actually constitutes an interpretation of the painting, it begins a process similar to the paradox of infinite regress. The poem represents a rendering into words, an interpretation of the painting, a work which is itself an interpretation, a rendering into paint, of one of the versions of the original myth (of which there several versions), as we have already seen. The reader's act of "reading" or interpreting the text of the poem takes the process one step further. The reader interprets Williams's poem which interprets Brueghel's painting which interprets one of the versions (perhaps Ovid's) of the myth. Here we begin to understand how each regression makes for possibilities of "misinterpretation through omission".

The second line, "when Icarus fell", introduces what may be called the secondary theme of the painting's title. Many artists have given works titles that seem to have only secondary relevance or importance to the work itself. Shakespeare, for example, kills off a character like Julius Caesar before the play named after him is halfway through. This ploy centres on the paradoxical nature of the play's subject. Although Caesar is dead about one-third the way through, his death continues to engender consequences – many of them unforeseen – which play themselves out in the remainder of the text. Similarly, in the course of this 21-line poem, Williams refers to Icarus by name twice only: "when Icarus fell" (line 2) and "Icarus drowning" (line 21). Because, as we have already noted, the landscape constitutes the predominant portion of the title - and the painting itself for that matter – it also constitutes the predominant portion of the poem.

It is only in the third line that we are presented with "spring", the season of burgeoning growth and natural power. That this is the season in which Icarus dies constitutes a powerful irony, even more so given his own youthfulness.

In the foreground of Brueghel's painting, the largest figure is that of the ploughman, described in Williams's text as "a farmer" who is busy "ploughing his field". The concentration the

ploughman invests in his treading behind the plough and the neat precision with which he slices the earth explain why the ploughman fails to notice Icarus drowning.

The next eight lines of the poem focus on the landscape by detailing "the whole pageantry of the year" which is "awake" (appropriately linking it to springtime) and "tingling/near//the edge of the sea". The idea that nature or the sea – the ambiguity seems deliberate - is "concerned with itself" rather than man's follies is reinforced the words of line 19: "a splash quite unnoticed". Icarus's death is unnoticed by the people on the shore, the people on the ship (which is also not mentioned in Williams's poem), and by nature itself. Indeed, there is an air of blunt callousness in the final lines "this was/Icarus drowning".

Apart from Icarus, the farmer is the only other person mentioned by Williams. Yet there are, as we know from Brueghel's painting, three other characters: the shepherd, the fisherman, and the sailor in the ship's rigging.

As far as the sailor is concerned, it is almost impossible to attribute to him any response about Icarus's death because he is so far away from the observer's point of view. That there are others – crew at least and passengers perhaps - on the ship is understood implicitly.

The fisherman assumes a posture suggesting that he is focused intently on what is happening to the line he holds in his right hand while he uses his left arm to maintain a precarious balance on the rocks. The position of his head suggests that he – like the farmer - is oblivious to Icarus's pale legs disappearing into the water.

The shepherd, however, is not preoccupied with his task. He is leaning on his crook and staring, somewhat stupidly, skywards. To observers of the painting, nothing is visible; Brueghel has chosen to tantalise us by omitting the object of the shepherd's attention. Yet the shepherd's skywards gaze, together with its direction, suggests the presence of Daedalus flying past, just out of our range of vision.

Using the painting hanging in the Musée Royale des Beaux Arts in Brussels as its subject, Williams presents a text that appears to be offering an "objective" description yet the poem contains no mention of the sailor, the fisherman, or the shepherd, characters who not only symbolise human indifference but also emblematise a "stoic" stance by obeying the laws of the cosmos thus allowing the "lawbreaker" (Icarus) to succumb to his supposedly just fate (Hagen & Hagen, 2000, pp. 60-61). According to such a philosophy, one challenges the gods at great risk and at great cost to oneself.

By adopting his overtly "objective" stance and by omitting Daedalus, the father, from the painting, Williams thus avoids painful questions about father-son relationships and culpability in order to focus on the simplicity of Icarus's fate. Similarly, both Brueghel and Williams choose to overlook the Christian symbolism of the shepherd and the fisherman. That omission, it could be argued, may be traced to the myth's pre-Christian origins.

To leave Daedalus out of the poem is to ignore the complexity of the issues raised by the myth. The nearest that the poet comes to tackling these issues lies in the verb "fell", with its ambiguities as well its mythical and Biblical parallels. Only through a process of extrapolation from Biblical myth, together with Milton's account of Satan's fall from grace, can the reader bring to the poem some of the moral complexities inherent in the Icarian legend, and so begin to comprehend and interpret it.

5.2.2 W H AUDEN: Musée des Beaux Arts

> 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 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.

Unlike the "objective" voice Williams employs, Auden uses Brueghel's painting as an example of the way in which the Old Masters – the great painters of Europe prior to 1700; some give the period from approximately 1400 to 1600 – depicted human suffering. In the opening section of the poem, Auden proposes that suffering impacts only on individuals while those in the vacinity – human and animal alike - get on with their own lives, generally oblivious to the suffering. Auden posits a traditional There-but-for-the-grace-of-God-go-I attitude. The juxtaposition of "the dreadful martyrdom" and "some untidy spot" places heroic action in the most terribly mundane of environs. While the brutalisation, torturing, and killing of individuals continues, we know that "the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's

horse/Scratches its innocent behind on a tree". If it were only the neighbourhood animals that showed indifference to human suffering, we as humans might be able to comprehend it, if not accept it. But it is the indifference of human beings towards the suffering of other humans that is deemed "dreadful". Auden celebrates the absolute rightness of the Old Masters' ability to understand suffering and place in its human contexts; the Old Masters were "never wrong" and "They never forgot".

The second part of Auden's text explores Brueghel's painting of the Icarian myth as an "instance" of how well one of the Old Masters understood suffering. We learn that Icarus's death is intrinsically a "disaster"; nonetheless, it is ignored as "everything turns away" from it. Those who could have done something for Icarus perhaps turn away – and here is a most telling phrase – "quite leisurely". And whether the ploughman ignores Icarus deliberately or not is left open to question through the poet's subtle use of the verb "may": "the ploughman may/Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry". Yet his own preoccupations, which prevent him from even noticing Icarus's death or Daedalus's passing in flight overhead, are, Auden maintains, self-centred because "for him it was not an important failure".

Auden gives the landscape of the painting's title short shrift. Only the inevitable sun is mentioned as it shines on Icarus's "white legs disappearing into the green/Water". It could be argued that, since the poem is about suffering, and man's behaviour towards his fellow men, the natural world remains immutably indifferent to human affairs. Here, Auden's approach, focusing as it does on Icarus and his suffering – about which the poet does not moralise – reverses, in a sense, the painting's emphasis on the landscape and its minions – the ploughman, the fisherman, and the shepherd – as well as the diminution of Icarus's suffering to a pair of white legs disappearing into the sea.

The poet contends that someone on the ship - the opulence and self-indulgence of whose passengers is captured with exquisite precision in the two adjectives, "expensive" and "delicate" - "must have seen/Something amazing" yet did nothing about it. What the passengers might have seen was not a man and a boy flying overhead toward the safety of their destination but "a boy falling out of the sky". Witnesses not to Daedalus's success but to Icarus's failure, they "Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on." Their calmness in the face of such catastrophe serves as an indictment of humankind's narcissistic preoccupation with itself.

While Auden's poem deals overtly with the theme of human suffering, it explores implicitly the relationship between individual suffering and the selfish and self-centred indifference of others who offer neither assistance nor, more nobly, redemption to the tormented individual. Broadly speaking, Auden's text offers a devastating indictment of society's unwillingness to tolerate,

much less help and support, non-conformist individuals in their struggle to achieve "abnormal" heights of accomplishment.

5.2.3 MICHAEL HAMBURGER: Lines on Brueghel's Icarus

The ploughman ploughs, the fisherman dreams of fish;
Aloft, the sailor through a world of ropes
Guides tangled meditations, feverish
With memories of girls forsaken, hopes
Of brief reunions, new discoveries,
Past rum consumed, rum promised, rum potential.
Sheep crop the grass, lift up their heads and gaze
Into a sheepish present: the essential,
Illimitable juiciness of things,
Greens, yellows, browns are what they see.
Churlish and slow, the shepherd, hearing wings -
Perhaps an eagle's - gapes uncertainly.

Too late. The worst had happened: lost to man
The angel, Icarus, for ever failed,
Fallen with melted wings when, near the sun
He scorned the ordering planet, which prevailed
And, jeering, now slinks off, to rise once more.
But he - his damaged purpose drags him down -
Too far from his half-brothers on the shore,
Hardly conceivable, is left to drown.

It is noteworthy that the title of Hamburger's poem does not replicate Brueghel's, and omits all mention of the landscape, even though it features in the text itself.

Hamburger begins with the focal figure of Brueghel's painting, the ploughman with the red doublet: "The ploughman ploughs". The phrase possesses a characteristically naïve Zen-like quality, similar to what one finds in the drawings of Paul Reps. He calls one of his artworks [Figure 6] "cucumber unaccountably cucumbering" (Ross, 1962, p. 261).

The ploughman is doing what ploughmen do: ploughing. While this may seem to be overstating the obvious, it is necessary to appreciate this point if we are to understand what happens to Icarus. That the ploughman is doing nothing more or less than ploughing, we may assume, means that, being entirely focused on the task, he is oblivious not only to Icarus's fatal fall but also to Daedalus's passing overhead.

According to Hamburger, Brueghel's depiction of the fisherman's posture suggests that he is dreaming "of fish". The poet "reads" the physical posture as a state of mind, something he does not do with the ploughman explicitly, but implicitly.

Of the four characters in Brueghel's painting (apart from Icarus) – the ploughman, the fisherman, the shepherd, and the sailor in the ship's rigging – Hamburger is the only one to focus on the distant sailor. He is "aloft", as Icarus himself has been, but the sailor is held in "a world of ropes" not of his own making, a world that not only provides him with a realistic sense of safety but also allows him to daydream, to reflect "feverishly" on his own life history. He recalls the women he has "forsaken", his desire for "brief reunions" with their sexual potential, and his need for "new discoveries" that, from the context of his sailor's world, would have much less to do with geography than with landscapes of the female body. And he cannot forget his rum. It is the rum perhaps that "tangles" his contemplation of a stereotypical sailor's basic desires and lusts. What relevant consequences could Icarus's death have for this seafarer? The sailor may well be so preoccupied with his delectable meditations that he fails to see the falling Icarus.

Hamburger leaves the sailor aloft, meditating, to turn his attention to the sheep and their shepherd. The word "crop" is a brilliant *mot juste*; it is admirably suited to the whole agricultural ambience of Brueghel's landscape while possessing an almost onomatopoeic quality for the sound of the sheep grazing. Because they are sheep, when they raise their heads, they do no more than "gaze/Into a sheepish present", a present comprising "the essential,/Illimitable juiciness of things". The succulence of the grass they taste and devour is metamorphosed into the colours they see: "Greens, yellows, browns".

Turning from the flock to the shepherd himself, Hamburger describes him as "[c]hurlish and slow". Should one expect more of a shepherd in those times of ignorance and illiteracy? Nevertheless, it is he alone who hears the sound of wings passing overhead; his first thought is that they are "[p]erhaps an eagle's", posing a threat to his flock. However, the uncertainty with which the shepherd "gapes" suggests that he sees something other than an eagle. In fact, he sees Daedalus. In gazing skyward, his attention is drawn away from the catastrophe befalling Icarus. In being amazed at the sight of a man flying, speculating perhaps that it could be a god, the shepherd devotes his attention to the father's miraculous success and so misses the son's failure. Thus the shepherd is absolved of culpability, of negligence, of indifference towards Icarus and his suffering: being witness to the miraculous seems a good enough reason for failing to notice mundane reality.

Coming to the phrase, "Too late", the reader may well be inclined to find this little more than a statement of the obvious, presuming that the words, "The worst had happened", refers to Icarus's death. Instead, Hamburger proposes that the worst thing is not Icarus's loss of life but the fact that Icarus is "lost to man". Clearly, we need to know what role Hamburger perceives for Icarus that his death should represent a loss for all mankind.

The poet describes Icarus as "The angel ... for ever failed". The motive behind Icarus's flight – to escape from Crete – is transformed into a holy flight as the boy Icarus is transformed into an angel. Yet he is not perfectly angelic because he is arrogant enough to scorn the sun, the planet that, according to the poet, structures man's life and livelihood by "ordering" it. The sun restores order to the universe, prevailing over the disorder by melting Icarus's wings and showing its malicious delight by "jeering".

Having killed the boy who dared challenge the natural order of things, the sun "slinks off", the furtive culprit of catastrophe. Ironically, it is the destructive sun that will "rise once more", unlike the drowned Icarus. The boy has failed in his role as angel or saviour. He will not rise again because "his damaged purpose drags him down". At the same time, he is "Too far from his half-brothers on the shore"; the fallen angel desperately needs the assistance of mortal men, his "half-brothers". But they are, in every way, too far from Icarus; they fail to notice his plight. That he "is left to drown" is "Hardly conceivable", yet it happens. Hamburger argues that Icarus is deliberately and maliciously allowed to drown by those on the shore – the ploughman, the fisherman, and the shepherd, despite the fact that they are oblivious to his failure. Their dilemma – how can they save Icarus from drowning when they do not see it happen – embodies touches of existentialism or, perhaps, surrealistic irony.

Of course there is another irony about Icarus's fate, an irony encompassed in the idea that you ought not to need to know how to swim in order to fly. The minute you choose to fly over any significant body of water, it makes sense to know how to fly and how to swim; both swimming and flying can serve as a means of getting back to man's proper element: the earth. But this myth is not about common sense. Icarus is not busy being an earth-bound human being; he is busy beyond the human element of the earth, flying as a bird or a god might. He has lost his essential "Isness" or what might be understood by Gerard Manley Hopkins's concept of "inscape": to escape from Crete as effectively as possible. Distracted by the seductions of flying, his purpose is "damaged" (to use Hamburger's term) and he is compelled to face the consequences of his actions.

Despite their many differences in terms of form, structure, language, and tone, these poems share some common features. Thematically, they present insights into, and comment on, the place of suffering in the human condition. This theme raises far-reaching questions about the ethics of responsibility and culpability as well as of selfishness, self-interest, and self-preservation. The biblical question of whether I am my brother's keeper becomes a question of how I can be my brother's keeper in the face of such ironic circumstances? To what extent can individual suffering be construed as "deserved"? Does Icarus and/or Daedalus get what they deserve, and, if so, on what grounds have they "deserved" what happens to each of them? To what extent is it – or should it be – an individual's responsibility to save another from the

consequences of his/her own choices? Because Daedalus and Icarus were suffering at Minos's brutal hands, should their attempt at escape be construed as folly, self-preservation, right or wrong?

And it has to be said: hindsight always provides 20/20 vision.

It is strange, too, that a myth about a father and son should not provoke in the poets a need to devote at least some attention to the plight of the father. This is stranger still when one considers that Daedalus is essentially the "cause" of the circumstances in which both he and Icarus find themselves.

But in omitting Daedalus from their poems, Auden, Williams, and Hamburger are making it quite clear to their readers that they have seen only one – the best-known or most-frequently reproduced one - of Brueghel's paintings dedicated to the subject of Icarus. Brueghel himself chose to include Daedalus in several other artworks, as we have seen. It seems peculiar that, in writing poems about the Daedalus/Icarus story as depicted by Brueghel, the poets themselves did not question the artist's omission of the father from the painting. That none of the poets chooses to focus on the responsible father but opts instead to ignore the absence of the father-figure entirely, says something profoundly disturbing about their readings of the painting.

In every case, the poet misses an opportunity to observe and record the fact that (a) Brueghel omits the father from the painting, and (b) that Daedalus is witness to his own son's death. One of the most devastating forms of suffering is for a parent to be witness to his/her own child's demise.

Although Auden's text lacks any reference to Daedalus, *per se*, the poet refers to Icarus as "a boy", so that both the father-figure and the father-son relationship are invoked, albeit implicitly. Having said that, however, we should be perceptive enough to realise that there are substantial psychological differences between the terms, "boy" and "son". Some readers may wish to read them as synonyms, but the term "son" articulates the existence of an important bond between the two main characters of the legend. This, in turn, raises a number of important moral, judgmental, and interpretative issues, issues that would be very different if Icarus were someone else's son. But Icarus is not defined as Daedalus's "son", and again the poet obliterates the father-figure from his version of the painting. It strikes one as inexplicable that, in a poem ostensibly committed to a discussion of suffering's place in the human experience, Auden chooses to pay no attention to Daedalus's suffering as he watches his son drown, unable to do anything for his son because of his need to preserve his own safety. Williams too pays no attention to Daedalus, even in his efforts to create an 'objective'

description of the painting. Such omissions must be construed as deliberate, and therefore make profound statements about the poets' concerns in their poems.

In his poem, Hamburger writes of "The angel, Icarus, for ever failed" which appears to offer a very idealised view of Icarus, son of Daedalus, the murdering inventor. Indeed, for Hamburger, Icarus is depicted as the hero who dares to challenge, to break new boundaries, to lift earth-shackled man to a higher plane. Icarus's fellow-men are described as "half-brothers", a phrase that implies both relationship and incompleteness. So it can be deduced that Hamburger's view of Icarus is of the fallen angel, still superior to ordinary mortals who have abandoned, or never taken up, the angelic side of their nature. Indeed, Icarus is "lost to man". Yet there is an inherent criticism of Icarus's rebelliousness, of his scorning "the ordering planet". The reader is placed in the paradoxical situation of sympathising with Icarus for his willingness to dare and risk, despite his ultimate failure while criticising him for his role as an agent of disobedience and disorder. Through this strategy, the poet embodies the central human paradox itself.

"The worst had happened", not only for Icarus but for all mankind now doomed to live "for ever failed". To challenge the gods is to be doomed to failure for ever; to challenge the gods is to become their sacrificial victim; but to challenge the gods is also to define the scope of mankind's potential and capacities. To fail, to die even is the price we have to pay for some rapturous moments of knowing. As long as the Tree of Knowledge remains in the Garden of Eden, there will always be those willing to venture into that forbidden territory to steal the fruit and know its delectable but deadly juices, if only for one brief moment. For those adventurers, the gatecrashers of Eden, knowledge and the all-pervasive suffering it brings remain preferable to the purported bliss of ignorance.

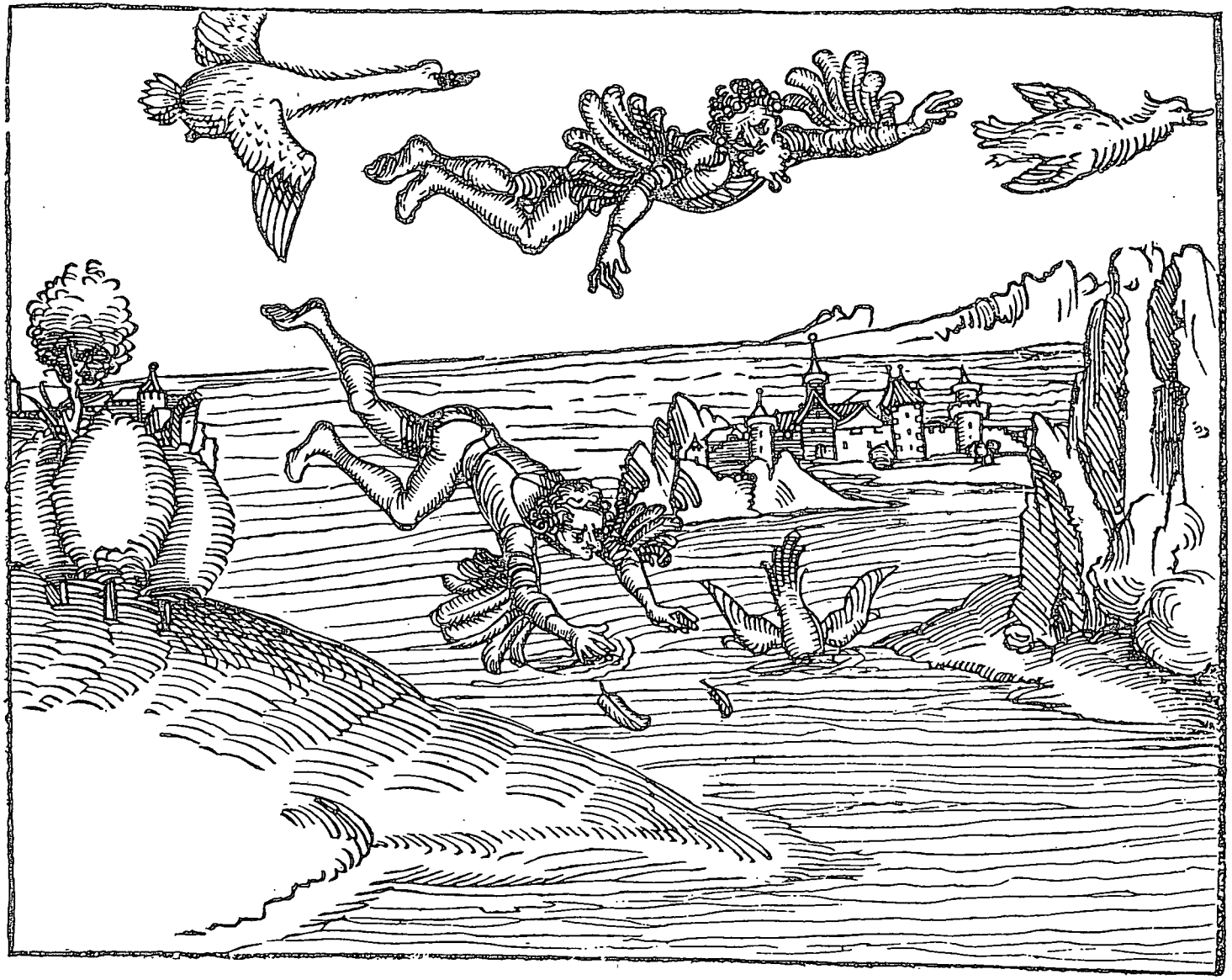

Figure 1 *Daedalus and Icarus*: Anonymous woodcut, 1493

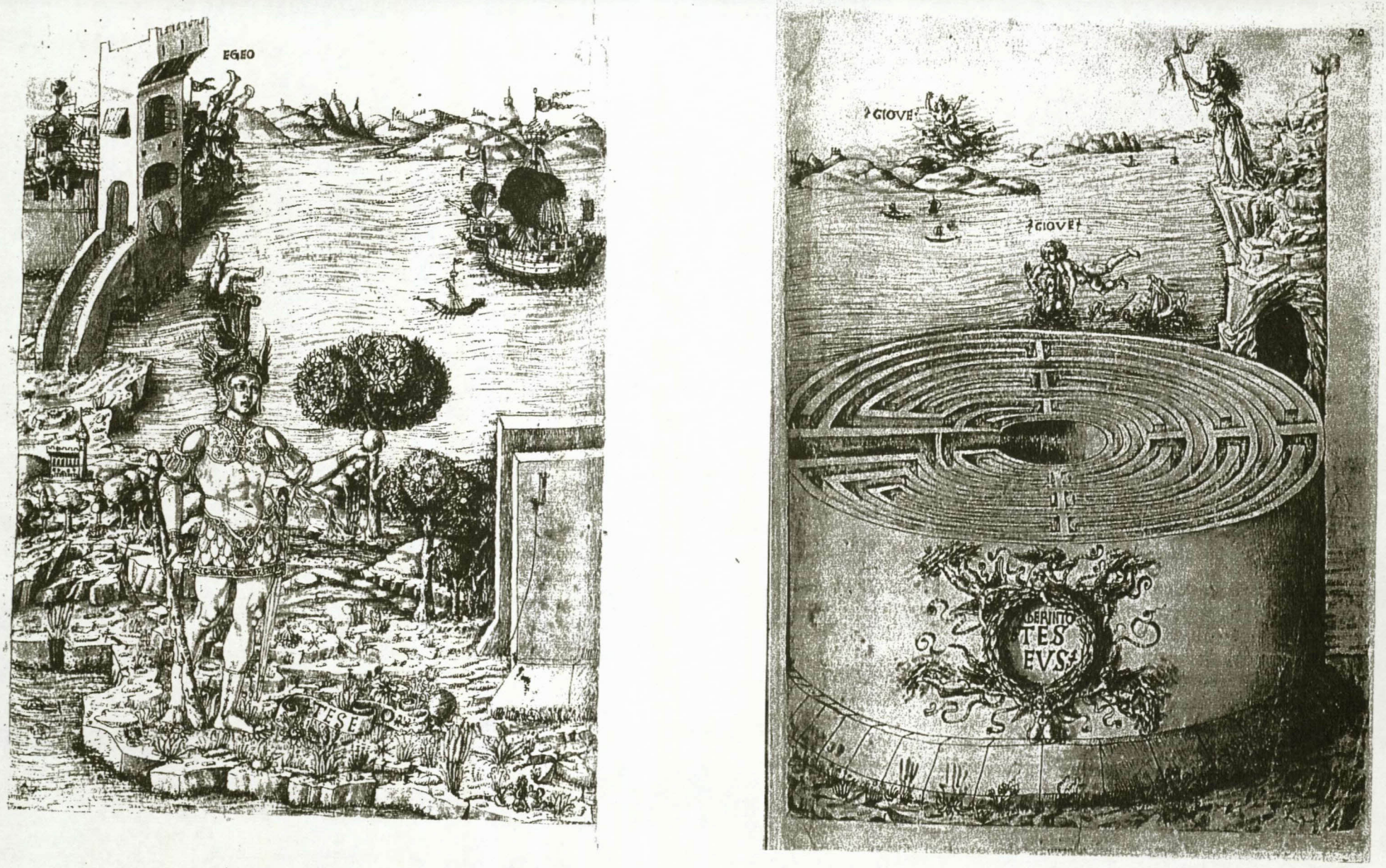

Figure 2 *The Cretan Legend*: Etching attributed to Maso Finiguerra, c. 1460

Figure 3 *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*: Pieter Brueghel, c. 1558

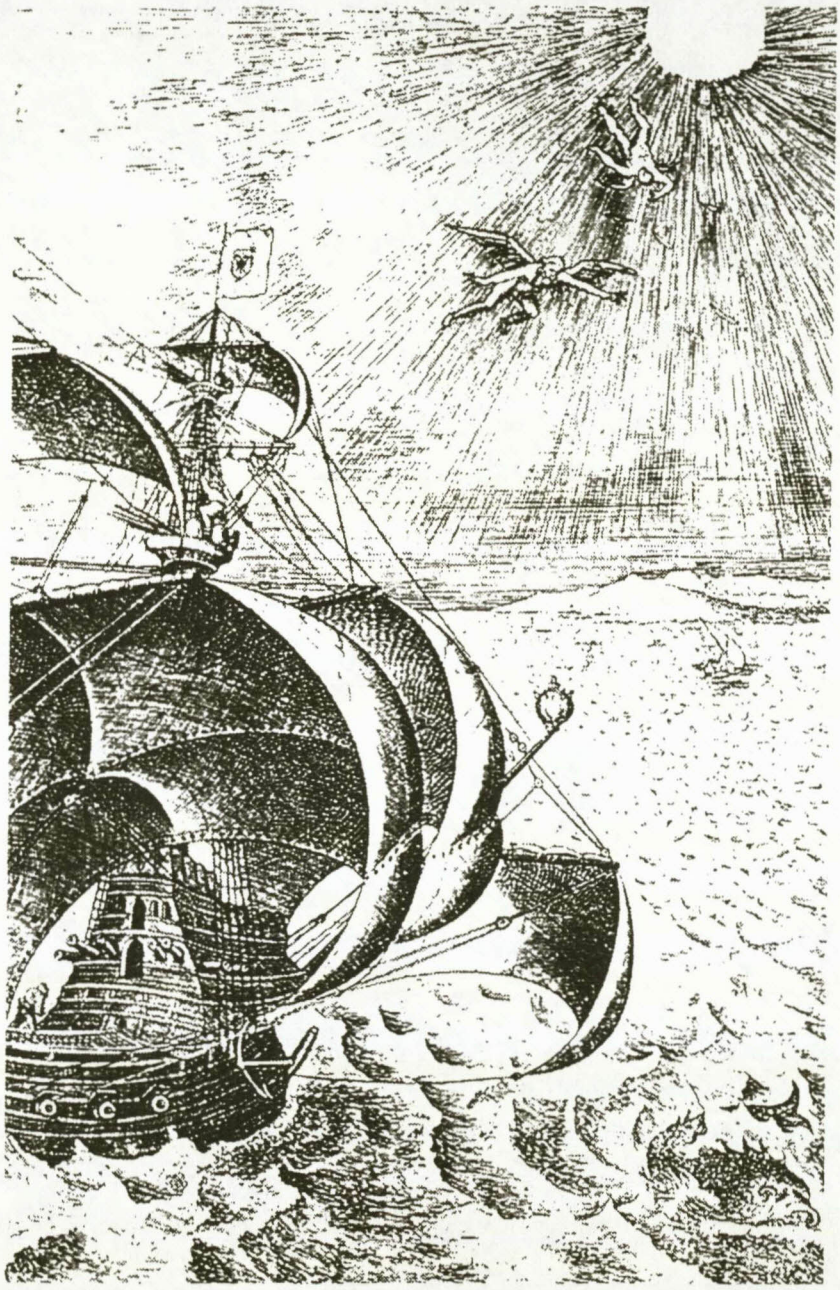

Figure 4 *Man of War with the Fall of Icarus*: Pieter Breughel, undated

Figure 5 *Icarus's Fall*: Pieter Brueghel, undated

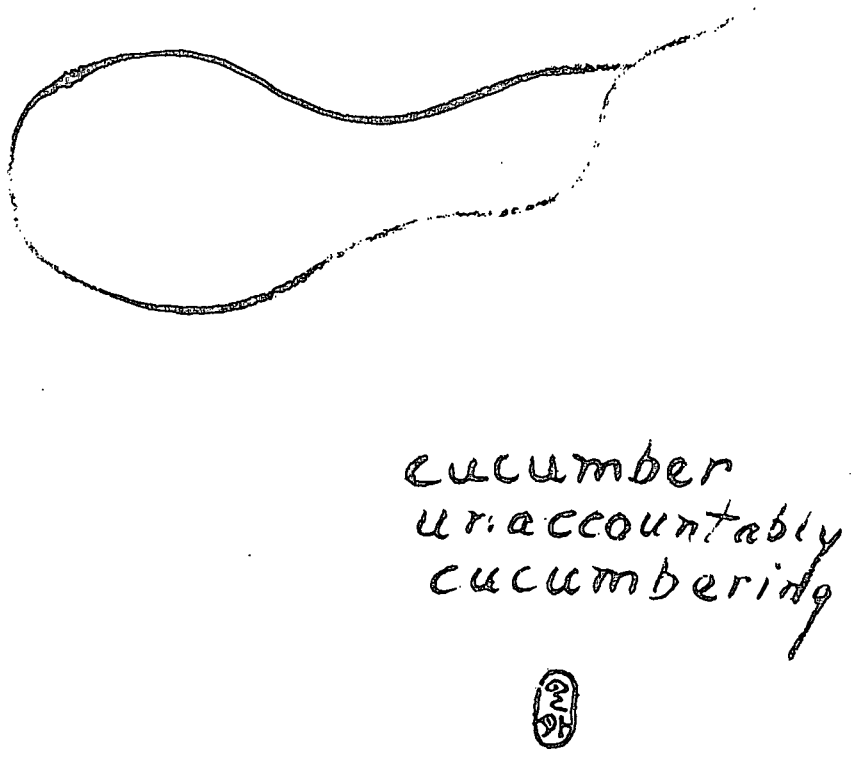

Figure 6 *cucumber unaccountably cucumbering*: Paul Reps

PART 3

FLYING OFF AT A TANGENT

CHAPTER 6

"FLYING OFF AT A TANGENT": SOME CONNOTATIVE MEANINGS OF THE MYTH OF DAEDALUS & ICARUS

While Robert J Clements is correct when he argues that "The lessons poets derived from this primordial tragedy are many and varied" (1981/1982, p. 253), we would extend his argument well beyond a coterie of poets to a vastly diverse, international audience of readers generally. To reduce the myth to a simple tale of *hubris* is to do its subtleties and complexity an injustice. Its apparent simplicity is deceptive, as we noted at the beginning of the Introduction.

However, to understand what follows, it is necessary to begin by clarifying some assumptions, particularly about what the term "connotative" is taken to mean in this context. A myth, like a poem, has a subject that exemplifies a number of broader philosophical issues or themes. Thus, a myth's subject-matter constitutes its denotative meaning while its *themata* embody connotative meanings. The denotative subject is neither symbolic nor ambiguous; consequently, it is not amenable to interpretation. Connotative themes, on the other hand, are, primarily because much of what a myth means at the connotative level depends on what individual philosophical and psychological dispositions, life experiences, values and attitudes, prejudices, and creative imagination each reader brings to it. The myth is "seen" and "read" at the connotative level through these "eyes", from these perspectives.

Put another way, connotative meanings may be seen as extrapolations of issues raised by the denotative meaning of the myth. Thus, in Daedalus and Icarus's case, the father, the boy, their circumstances, their flight – all are just that. However, connotatively, the myth may be read for its insights into flying, or success and failure, or conformity and non-conformity, or father-son relationships; or the theory and practice of rebellion; or escape and freedom; and there are others.

The validity and pertinence of connotative meanings can be tested against the context of the myth's subject-matter. Thus: while it may be argued validly and pertinently that the Daedalus/Icarus myth is "about" father/son relationships, few enough people are likely to perceive the myth as offering insight into town and regional planning or the lack of adequate airport facilities in Crete.

To continue the analogy of the iceberg introduced in Chapter 1: this chapter will be devoted to a variety of day trips during which we shall meander through some, but by no means all or

even most, areas of the iceberg that constitutes the Icarian myth. These excursions may help us to see what they have to reveal about various dimensions of the human condition. Having said that, we must acknowledge the subjective nature of these explorations of the proximate topography. James Hollis (1995, p. 133) remarks that "every myth is polyfaceted and each variant reflects another surface". Because of the multidimensionality of myths, there are places in what follows where ideas have overlapped to some extent. This is inevitable.

Alternatively, a particular idea may appear somewhere other than what might seem its logical place. Like the myth itself, these explorations are not rigid and definitive; they are not chiselled in stone but are intended to give some indication of the myth's connotative possibilities in reflecting on some of the persistent issues in the human condition. They are matters initiated, but not necessarily resolved, explained or answered, by the Icarian myth.

6.1 CONFORMITY AND NON-CONFORMITY: DARING TO RISK

The myth of Daedalus and Icarus is a cautionary tale about the price one must be willing to pay for daring to challenge the gods or the Ineffable. Conversely, it may be read as a story about conformity, non-conformity, and about permissible and non-permissible behaviours.

In order to read the myth this way, we shall need to understand how society understands itself and how it deals with dissenters and non-conformists. This, in turn, means that we shall have to reflect on what we believe constructs such as "normality", "sanity", and "madness" to mean. This understanding should assist us by providing insights into how we perceive the "situation" in which Daedalus, Icarus, and others find themselves, and how these insights enable us to comprehend at least some of the broader meanings of the myth.

Society likes normal people, and it tolerates sane people, but it does not like mad people because it does not know how to perceive them simply because it does not know what they mean. Secondly, society does not know how to attach a meaningful meaning to mad people. In 1844, Lord Shaftesbury remarked that the lunatic's words "are generally disbelieved, and his most innocent peculiarities perverted; it is natural that it should be so; we know he is insane; at least, we are told that he is so" (Porter, 1991, p. 4). It is important to note at this stage that there are singular differences between the terms "mad" and "criminally insane", as we shall see later in this section.

Society functions on the basis of its fantasy of itself as a good, healthy, normal, even sacred place where its members can share realities. In its efforts to transform this fantasy into reality, society devises and applies norms of permissible and non-permissible behaviours.

Against both sets of norms for social behaviours – permissible and non-permissible – individual and group behaviours are measured, defined, labelled, and judged.

Social institutions each have their own hermeneutic codes for interpreting behaviour and attaching meaning not only to their particular, perhaps peculiar, norms but also to the meaning of behaviours – "normal" or otherwise – of other institutions and individuals. In every case, attachment of meaning requires the use of language, if only for definition purposes. Belonging to any social institution thus requires individual members to accept its prevailing interpretative and hermeneutic processes as far as the individual is able to understand them. In other words, the individual interprets what he/she understands the interpretation processes of the social group to be, and accepts the received definition of its norms and their behavioural implications and consequences. He/she thus attaches the meaning he/she believes the institution's meaning to be. Failure to adhere to the institutional processes of making meaning could result in the individual being labelled as "deviant", "rebellious", or "non-conformist". Labels such as these invalidate the individual within societal institutions and/or groups.

Group norms delineate expectations about the social, linguistic, and psychological behaviours of its members. Underpinning these norms are systems of authority encoded in rules that urge or compel expected behaviours upon members.

Rules encourage permissible and discourage non-permissible behaviours. For those who deviate from the accepted and acceptable norms, the rules usually provide for numerous forms and methods of punishment, censure, castigation, expulsion, excommunication, compulsory institutional confinement, physical damage, and even death.

Hardly any of the discussions of how rules and norms operate in groups make mention of the metarules. These are the rules that rule the rules. There is no mention of the metarules because they are unwritten (so there can never be any questions about how the rules are applied) and they are unacknowledged (so that everyone can deny their existence when it is convenient or expedient to do so). The main function of the metarules is to control the way/s in which the rules are interpreted and applied to others. R. D. Laing (1976, p. 102) explains metarules this way: "Rule A: Don't. Rule A1: Rule A does not exist. Rule A2: Rule A1 does not exist".

Although the focus here is on understanding individuals – conforming or dissenting – it will be clear that we are dealing with more than any one individual at any given time. We are dealing with a situation, the interaction of a set of events and a set of people. Individuals in a situation may or may not understand the interpretative systems that other individuals are employing to understand the events, and/or the behaviours of themselves and others. As Goffman (1990, p.

26), for example, says: "I assume that when an individual appears before others he will have many motives for trying to control the impressions they receive of the situation".

Man has been an image-maker for at least as long as he has been aware that he too is an image. He has made images to record his experiences, both natural and supernatural, of the world, its history, and its origins. But even before he was an image-maker, he was a classifier, a labeller, an organiser of phenomena and experience. Through his capacity to classify, man came to know the world, what it means (or does not, or fails to, mean), and how to pass this knowledge on to later generations.

If classification is a systematic means of (a) knowing and recording the experiences and phenomena of the world and (b) of imposing order on the world (and so alleviating some of our deepest anxieties about chaos, confusion, and disorder), it is also a way of rejecting, consciously or unconsciously, the possibilities of anarchy, disorder, non-order, or chaos in the world. Classification may be viewed as a form of pattern-making through the establishment and application of norms and labels.

Classification or categorisation may be sub-divided into three processes: identification, definition, and labelling. Classification also presumes that, once identified, defined, and labelled, any phenomenon or object is self-evidently precluded from belonging simultaneously to any other category. Regrettably, reality cannot be so neatly packaged. So the question remains: Why is it so difficult to categorise reality?

Rycroft (1992, pp. 47-48) explains:

> *1. All societies, and indeed all individuals taken singly too, attempt to impose order on the universe by establishing categories into which, in theory, all phenomena can be fitted.*
>
> *2. These prevailing categories do not, in fact, work, and there always remains a range of phenomena which cannot be fitted into them.*
>
> *3. Phenomena which resist categorization evoke peculiar emotional reactions, varying from anxiety and disgust to fascination and awe, and are felt to be in some strange way "taboo", "unclean", or "sacred".*

Phenomena that fall within the non-category of non-categorisable phenomena – in other words, taboo – may be linguistic and/or behavioural. However, it is extremely difficult to discuss matters that are socially unacceptable for discussion. Although language facilitates the

labelling of both permissible and non-permissible phenomena, taboo prevents discussion of the latter. And what does and does not constitute taboo is identified, defined, and labelled according to norms established by numerous social groups and processes.

The labelling process consists of social, psychological, and linguistic behaviours. It also plays a significant role in man's understanding of two of his basic drives: the first, for self-assertion and, by implication, non-conformity; the second for group membership and, by implication, conformity (Capra, 1982; Stein & Hollwitz, 1992). Labelling thus becomes a powerful means of controlling individual self-assertion in order to achieve conformity.

Through its many and varied institutions and their diverse vocabularies, society uses or misuses language to classify, sanction, and control individuals who cannot or will not conform to prevailing societal and/or institutional norms of behaviour. "Language ... does more than provide us with a classification of things; it actually moulds our environment; it places each individual at the centre of a social space which is ordered in a logical and reassuring way" (Leach, 1963, p. 48). What Leach omits to point out is that the logical and reassuring order of social space is better suited to the conformist than to the non-conformist.

In passing, one should notice the way in which the terms "conformist" and "non-conformist" are antithetically paired, as if such a dichotomous pairing offers the only option for the classification process. This pairing also presumes that the person unwilling to conform should be described with the appropriate negative prefix "non-", which suggests some form of lack, some detrimental absence of a desirable quality, personality attribute, or behavioural pattern. In fact, as a result of the pervasiveness and power of the dualistic philosophy entrenched in western civilisation, permissible and non-permissible behaviours are generally perceived and articulated in antithetical pairings such as "normal/abnormal", "good/bad", "healthy/ unhealthy", "sane/insane", "sacred/profane" and the like. A problem inherent in such pairings is that some – "strong/weak" or "male/female" for example – represent distinctions of fact. Others such as "sane/insane", "normal/abnormal" or "good/bad" – constitute distinctions of value, thus making classification and labelling inaccurate, even suspect because of inevitable differences in the interpretation of terminological meaning.

No matter how one approaches the processes of defining the individuals and events making up a situation, some form of language is inevitable to attach definition and meaning to each entity, each identity, each id-entity. And we know how unreliable language can be: "[I]t is too often forgotten that the gift of speech, so centrally employed, has been elaborated as much for the purpose of concealing thought by dissimulation and lying as for the purpose of elucidating or communicating thought" (Bion, 1995, p. 3). The purpose of using language as a mode of concealment becomes relevant when we recall, with Goffman (1990, p. 77), that

"there are many individuals who sincerely believe the definition of the situation they habitually project is the real reality".

Besides their rules and their unspoken, unspeakable metarules, social institutions such as families, schools, churches, work organisations, bureaucracies, monasteries, universities, and almost all others have vocabularies of proscription and irrefragible rules for applying labels to identify and define the prevailing norms of permissible and non-permissible behaviours. Here are four examples Miller (1983, pp. 6-7) provides:

> Heresy. *Less heard nowadays, but not quite obsolete. Certainly very potent in the past as a rationale for hounding and persecuting Galileo and others who dared to point out the discrepancies between the accepted cosmology and scientific observation.*
>
> Subversion. *A more overtly political version of heresy, reserved for those who offer a new perspective from which to view the social order. May sometimes include the statutory offence of treason. Socrates; Christ; Marx; Gandhi...*
>
> Delinquency. *Robin Hood, a popular hero for his innovative method of redistributing wealth, was plainly a delinquent in the eyes of the Sheriff of Nottingham. The social advantage of this term is that it dismisses any creative element and devalues it by lumping the perpetrator in a huge category consisting mainly of manifestly non-creative common criminals. A similar purpose is served by ...*
>
> Madness. *The number of artists and scientists who have been labelled mad is legion. Some have been locked away. By no means obsolete. For example, it is little more than 50 years since Wegener was scorned as mad by fellow-scientists when he propounded his hypothesis of continental drift. Now it is established theory.*

Miller goes on to suggest that: "The richness of the vocabulary reflects social anxiety about the boundary between the permissible and the non-permissible".

Another way of dealing with non-conformist behaviour and of achieving conformity is through what Laing has called "mystification" (in Boszormenyi-Nagy & Framo, 1965, pp. 344-363). The prime function of the mystification process "appears to be to maintain the status quo" (p. 350). In dealing with an individual within a family context, for example, "there is a radical failure to recognise [the individual's] own self-perception and self-identity" because "his experience and actions generally are construed [by others] without reference to his own point of view" (p. 351).

Mystification, Laing argues (p. 315),

> *is brought into play ... when one or more members of the family nexus threaten, or are felt to threaten, the status quo of the nexus by the way they are experiencing, and acting in, the situation they share with other members of the family.*

Befuddling though it is for the individual, mystification is intended to compel conformity upon him/her and so reduce the anxiety and threat felt in and by the family/group.

Figure 7 offers what might be termed the "normal" view (or fantasy) society has of itself in the sense that madness – however it might be defined – constitutes the almost diametric opposite of sanity and normality – however they might be defined. The underlying presumption of this model is that normality or sanity is preferable to madness in whatever form. The model implies that it is possible to grow beyond normality toward sanity. It also suggests that regression may be an integral way of avoiding madness.

However, we should note that, while sanity and normality are closely related, they are not identical.

But this model, Cooper argues is erroneous. Figure 8 (Cooper, 1967, p. 16) represents a more accurate reflection of social reality. While the components remain the same as in the previous diagram, they are reorganised – with radical and profoundly significant consequences. Now, "sanity approaches madness but an all-important gap, a difference always remains" (Cooper, 1967, p. 16). The diametric opposite of both sanity and madness is normality, which is not "only a statistical concept that most of us live by as a golden rule" but also a state of arrest or inertia brought about by conformity to societal norms which, in turn, lead to individual invalidation.

Perhaps the most potent feature of Cooper's diagram is represented by the dotted line that indicates the desirability or necessity of psychotic collapse as a route – perhaps an inevitable one – out of the constrictures and constraints of normality as they inhibit individual development and growth toward sanity. Both sanity and madness constitute a rejection of normality and its systems of control, labelling, and conformity as well its hermeneutic underpinning, its rules and metarules, of all things which result in what Cooper (1970, p. 11) scornfully refers to as "the well-conditioned, endlessly obedient citizen", one who is

> *so estranged from every aspect of one's own experience, from every spontaneous impulse to action, from every bit of awareness of one's body for oneself (rather than one's body as an object for inspection by others in the world), from all the carefully*

> *refused possibilities of awakening change, that one might truly, and with metaphorical sleight of hand, regard this normal person as being* out of his mind.

Which may well lead one to believe that "anyone who is adjusted to this society is mad and anyone who is not is sane" (Hermes in Ruitenbeek, 1972, p. 29). Indeed, as Joseph Berke writes: "More often than not, a person diagnosed as 'mentally ill' is the emotional scapegoat for the turmoils in his or her family or associates, and may, in fact, be the 'sanest' member of the group" (Barnes, 1971, pp. 84-85).

Alternatively, we can consider two lines by the Canadian poet, Geraldine MacEwan. In a poem entitled "The Thing is Violent", she writes (1996, p. 39):

> I do not fear that I shall go mad
> but that I may not.

We have developed numerous ways and means of identifying, defining, and labelling the "mad", the non-conformist members of our families, our social groups, our work organisations, and our society. However, it is our own confinement within the paradigms of "normality" that not only compels us to indulge in such classifications but also makes us incapable of comprehending how "madness", non-conformity, or non-normality may be close to sanity.

The myth of Daedalus and Icarus has much to reveal about normality, non-normality, madness, sanity, meaninglessness, and how others respond to them.

6.2 FATHERS & SONS: THE ORIGINS OF DYSFUNCTIONALITY

> *and if I am his son, this man*
> *is from as far a place and time*
> *as yours is, carries with him*
> *the strangeness you and I will carry*
> *for our sons, and for like reason*
>
> \- Charles Olson

A man's biological role in the conception, gestation, and birth of a child is complete some time prior to conception even. Consequently, in relation to the mother-foetus/child dyad, the father may feel outside or Other to both mother and child, a situation that may precipitate some forms of resentment. The man may project unconsciously that resentment of exclusion onto the child. If the child is male, the father may recognise, in his child's potential, a host of lost opportunities and missed chances. The child may also serve as a focus of the father's need for revenge, as might the mother.

Ironically, the Bible provides some disturbing insights into the father/son relationship. One or two will serve our purposes here. [The edition of the Holy Bible used in the following paragraphs is the King James translation, published by William Collins in 1951.]

In the 22nd chapter of the *Book of Genesis*, we are presented with God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. It is worth remembering that Isaac, being born to very elderly parents - Sarah being 90 years old and Abraham, 100 (*Genesis*, 17:17) - was most precious to them. God instructs Abraham to take the son "whom thou lovest" to the land of Moriah "and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains" (*Genesis*, 22:2). Within the context of sane human behaviour, the demand to kill one's own child can be seen only as a radical form of abnormality designed to instill fear of God into Abraham. This cannot but strike one as anomalous: What sort of divine being – having created the world and seen that it was very good - would miraculously provide such an elderly couple with a son only to demand his sacrifice as an act of faith? The exercise of parental omnipotence, emulating the gods, plays a significant role in father/son relationships. Jaffe (1990, p. 116) posits the following argument:

> *Just as a child cannot truly recognize its parents until it has developed an independent standpoint which allows for some emotional and psychological distance from them, so we cannot fully appreciate the world until we have "put away childish things." A too-innocent, unrealistically pure and trusting childishness ... must be sacrificed. The killing of children in myth or dream, writes Edinger, may be interpreted as "the mortificatio of infantile desirousness and the extinction of libido from immature modes of being". It can help free us from childish habits to know that we are sacrificing them to a higher purpose.*

A little later, he remarks: "Abraham, like God, loved so much that he was willing to sacrifice his first-born son (his highest value)." A willingness to kill one's children as a manifestation of love presents a significantly morbid pathology, and argues for brutal behaviours characteristic of patriarchal societies. The paternal injunction - "I'm doing this because I love you, and it's going to hurt me a lot more than it's going to hurt you" – just prior to the infliction of corporal punishment is one way in which the patriarchy continues to create abnormal links between love and pain (and/or death) as a means of achieving conformist behaviour.

All this constitutes part of the deliberate mystification of experience; that boys learn to emulate such deviant paternal behaviours is scarcely surprising. Patriarchal society reinforces the inflated ego-perception of men as "gods" within their own domestic universes, so they persist in their pursuit of inflated ego behaviours, of pseudo-omnipotence. These "domestic divinities" are small-scale similes of a God of Judgement and Retribution.

Because ideological demands for conformity are antithetical to the individual desire for autonomy and wholeness, ideological communities – such as churches - are obliged to insist on conformity from their adherents. Adherence to ideological norms may be enforced in a wide variety of ways, from expulsion and ostracism to torture and death. None of these methods of enforcement constitute love, however, but various forms of fear, terror, and hate. As Peter Porter notes in his poem, "Soliloquy at Potsdam" (1962, p. 118): "Who would be loved/If he could be feared and hated".

R D Laing (1967, p. 50) explicates the love/violence relationship thus:

> *Love and violence, properly speaking, are polar opposites. Love lets the other be, but with affection and concern. Violence attempts to constrain the other's freedom, to force him to act in the way we desire, but with ultimate lack of concern, with indifference to the other's own existence of destiny.*
> *We are effectively destroying ourselves by violence masquerading as love.*

A little later, Laing observes: "Children do not give up their innate imagination, curiosity, dreaminess easily. You have to love them to get them to do that" (1967, p. 60). To love is, of course, to perpetrate violence upon those who, in searching to become themselves, refuse to become what we want them to be.

The Christian myth may have taught us to fear death and, more especially, unshriven death more than anything else. That being the case, Albert Camus (1950, p. 123) asks: "since the order of the world is shaped by death, mightn't it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him, and struggle with all out might against death, without raising our eyes towards the heaven where He sits in silence?"

Redemption from death and the promise of eternal life are integral rewards for adherents/adherence to Christian conformity. Non-believers are doomed to eternity elsewhere, be it Hell (of which there are hundreds of terrifying depictions, both visual and verbal) or Limbo (where one's destiny lies in the indifference and anonymity of oblivion). To avoid either of these inconceivably cruel places of torment, conformity to the Christian ideology comes highly recommended.

There is a counter-argument to much of what has gone before. The depiction of God as Judge is characteristic of the Old Testament; the New Testament depiction of God is of the forgiving Father. Indeed, there is a certain accuracy in such an argument. However, that God allows Christ to suffer torment and brutal death again associates pain, suffering, and death with love. In her essay, "Holbein's Dead Christ", Kristeva (1989, p. 113) writes:

> *Christ's dereliction is here at its worst: forsaken by the Father, He is apart from all of us. [...] With no intermediary, suggestion or indoctrination, whether pictorial or theological, other than our ability to imagine death, we are led to collapse in the horror of the caesura that is death or to dream of an invisible beyond.*

Later in the essay, Kristeva (1989, p. 135) says:

> *Hegel brought to the fore the dual action of death in Christianity: on the one hand, there is a natural death of the body; on the other death is "infinite love," the "supreme renunciation of the self for the sake of the other". He sees in it a victory over the tomb, the sheol, a "death of death," and emphasizes the dialectic that is peculiar to such a logic.*

Our concern here is with "the dialectic that is peculiar to such a logic". To commit one's son to inevitable death scarcely constitutes an act of love, and runs contrary to most of what is understood about positive parent/child relationships. However, such behaviour goes a long way to confirm the confusion between love and violence Laing noted earlier. Obedience, obeisance reinforced by fear, emphasises violence as an integral part of parent/child interactions. Violence, whether implicit or explicit, has been built into the human psyche as a result of an ideological dialectic embodied in biblical statements such as these: "He that is not with me is against me" (*St Luke*, 11:23),"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (*Romans*, 12:19), "Fear God" (*1 Peter*, 2:17), and "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (*Philippians*, 2:12).

How can the destructive side of religion be explained? Note that here we are attempting an understanding of that destructiveness, not a legitimisation of it. Part of an answer lies in the following substantial extract from Phra Khantipalo's book, *Tolerance* (1964, p. 21):

> *The foundations on which the various world faiths rest are of two contrasting types. The great majority are Divine-Revelations religions. That is, where a "God" has revealed certain matters to individuals he is said to have selected. Such Gods are thought to be All-Knowing, All-Loving, All-Powerful (etc), Creators of the Universe. Since they have these attributes, whatever they reveal is taken to be THE TRUTH. Also those through whom such "TRUTH" is revealed are at least thought to be divinely inspired prophets or else a relation of or aspect of God, even God himself. Difficulties are therefore threefold. First, there are claimed to be a number of such Omnipotent Gods. Thus the Christian speaks of God, the Muslim of Allah, the Jew of Jahveh, while the Hindu may give many names to Ishvara. It is not surprising that the various myths*

> *and theologies woven around these Gods are quite different and their attributes and relationship to their creation may vary considerably. Secondly, various degrees of exclusiveness are propounded for the intermediate messengers between these Gods and man. They are prophets, avataras, the Last Prophet, the Son of God, God's Messenger, etc. It is intended by such titles to increase the importance of one's own prophet in the eyes of men at the expense of the others. The third difficulty lies with the TRUTH. One cannot have a number of such divinely inspired TRUTHS which conflict with each other. Either some of the Gods are wrong or their messengers mistaken or fraudulent, or plainly some of these TRUTHS are untruths. Viewed from this basis, the religion one believes in becomes merely a matter of blind faith or convention.*

To revert to the question of the sacrifice of the son by the father, the question arises: How should we perceive Icarus? Does Icarus die as a sacrifice for his father's evil, as an appropriate sacrifice for the death of Talos? Or did he die because of an unwillingness to accept and adhere to his father's advice? Or was he just a plaything of the gods?

Answers to questions such as these focus the reader's attention inevitably on the father/son relationship. A careful consideration of the myth yields a number of hypotheses.

To begin, one could propose that a son's disobedience towards the father must result in punishment for the son, an idea that parallels the biblical theme of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the sons.

A second hypothesis might be that the wisdom and experience of the father are superior to the experience of the son, even though this would imply that the son's generation must always rely on the older generation's experience and wisdom. This presumes that first-hand experience (no matter how hard it may be) is less valuable than knowledge gained second-hand from the previous generation.

A third hypothesis might be expressed in terms of human progress: how can there be progress beyond the father's generation unless the son's generation is willing to risk disobedience and make sacrifices to obtain new knowledge and new experiences?

A fourth could be that the younger generation tends to ignore the older generation's advice when that advice seems inhibitive and unimaginative or unnecessarily cautious.

A fifth hypothesis could propose that there are many complex difficulties in attempting to draw that fine distinguishing line between cautious practicality (escape) and arrogant daring or imagination (flying).

A further question could be: what roles do divine and human justice and/or injustice play in this myth?

These questions are by no means the only questions that can or ought to be asked but they constitute an adequate start.

6.2.1 AN EXTRAPOLATION: FATHERS & DAUGHTERS

Although the focus of this discussion has been the father/son relationship, the father/daughter relationship is equally fraught with fear as its basis, as we can see from this brief example from the opening of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Parenthetically, we could note Shakespeare's preoccupations with dysfunctional family relationships not only in *King Lear* but also in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and the so-called history plays.

In the first scene of *King Lear*, the aging monarch asks his three daughters: "Which of you shall we say doth love us most?" (Alexander, 1961, p. 1073). We notice that Lear's power is corrupted here to the point where he demands public declaration of his daughters' love. Lear is pleased when Goneril declares, extravagantly:

> Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter;
> Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty;
> Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare;
> No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;
> As much as child e'er lov'd, or father found;
> A love that makes breath poor and speech unable:
> beyond all manner of so much I love you.

Not to be outdone, Regan, proclaims:

> I am made of that self metal as my sister,
> And prize me at her worth. In my true heart
> I find she names my very deed of love;
> Only she comes too short, that I profess
> Myself an enemy to all other joys
> Which the most precious square of sense possesses,
> And find I am alone felicitate
> In your dear Highness' love.

Lear asks of Cordelia: "what can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters?" (I, i, 84-85). Cordelia, youngest and most honest of the three, replies:

> Good my lord,
> You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me; I
> Return those duties back as are right fit,

Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Haply when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty.

Sure I shall never marry like my sisters
To love my father all.

Within the unreasonable and unreasoning context of Lear's inflated egotism, driven by an overweening narcissism, Cordelia's reasonable reasoning appears inappropriate, impertinent, insubordinate, insufficiently flattering. The King does not accept the filial love of his daughters but demands public displays of sycophancy, and so violates the norms of a sane parent/child relationship.

Guilt is at the heart of our fear of both parents and the gods. With his usual relentless insight, Laing (1971, p. 152) observes: "True guilt is guilt at the obligation one owes to oneself to be oneself. False guilt is guilt felt at not being what other people feel one ought to be or assume that one is." Guilt and fear are the means by which most ideological entities and communities foster and maintain adherence and conformity to their norms. The family is no exception.

6.3 NORMS, WORK, & SOLAR MYTHOLOGY

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve "lived an idyllic existence. There was harmony between them; they had little to do; and they experienced none of the doubts, fears, and anguish which no man has escaped since their tragic error" (McElroy, 1963, p. 3). The words, "they had little to do", are crucial, for they tell us that Adam and Eve *did no work*. The expulsion from the Garden of Eden brought not only the curse of consciousness on mankind but also the curse of work. Work has been predominantly male-centred for millennia, and remains so.

In the world of work, one gains recognition for one's diligence, application, and conformity; it is the arena where success earns its rewards. In the contemporary world, rewards are most commonly of a material kind - cars, allowances, privileges – and the methods of perceiving success and distributing rewards are governed by the covert metarules that so easily allow the manipulation of the overt rules. Although there are many organisational rituals surrounding the achievement and recognition of success – performance appraisal is one such that comes immediately to mind – few if any represent transparent processes that can be scrutinised and interrogated by employees. Textbooks and management schools abound and proliferate yet organisations are peopled by the disgruntled, the demotivated, and the dissatisfied. One wonders how this paradoxical situation has come about.

In the course of the last year or so, the researcher has asked more than 400 individuals what they would do if they knew unequivocally that they had just seven days to live, after which death was certain, assured, guaranteed. Not one, not a single one, said they would go to work, yet we commit so much of our physical, emotional, and psychological energy and life to the workplace to arrive home exhausted, battered, damaged, unfit for our partners and our children. The militancy of the male world of work finds, for each of us, a unique way of destroying us (Corneau, 1991, p. 47-48):

> *We live with an exclusively solar mythology that has no place in it for the coolness of night. Going south for a winter tan - at the risk of developing skin cancer - has become a must for anyone who can afford "a place in the sun". We burn with ambition; we get sunburned on the beach; in short, we like the sun so much that we try to become it. We want to sparkle in the eyes of others. We want to become stars and, as Walter Pater put it, "to burn always with this hard, gemlike flame." Living in the shadow or existing in the darkness has become a sign of mental illness for us. Therapists' offices are full of people suffering as a result of their inability to shine as brightly as others.*

Solar mythology is a male mythology. It extends even to the way we organise work. Humankind does the majority of its work during daylight, when the sun is "up" and visible.

The workplace ignores the coolness, the gentleness, and the potential of a lunar mythology. We presume the moon is a pale reflection of the sun. We presume that women embody the darkness that compelled Eve to succumb to Satan's guile, hence women are gullible, easily duped, pale reflections of men. They may just be useful as bronzed ornaments on the beaches where the sun is worshipped for his power, carcinogens and all, and his neophytes strut their male stuff.

But the strutting comes to an end eventually. Innumerable accounts of dying patients record their lost wish to have lived their lives otherwise, men and women who regret the time they gave to trying "to shine as brightly as others". And the things they wish they had devoted more time to are not those bringing the rewards of success; they are the ones bringing with them abundant fulfilment.

Fulfilment is the reward that comes with the satisfaction of the inner world's needs, the needs of the heart and of the soul, generated by passion rather than ambition. Yet many of us, thousands, even millions gain little or no sustaining fulfilment from our work. Worse still, we *know* that we are heading toward death unfulfilled; we acknowledge the fact rationally yet refuse to allow it the full power of its emotional impact lest we are compelled to confront that

part of ourselves that insists we rebel. We find ourselves caught between self-assertion and non-conformity, on the one hand, and submission to conformity and its inhibiting norms, on the other. Our struggle is to learn how to manage the boundary area between these two needs; often, we find it easier, simpler, and less stressful to focus on the need to belong and conform at the expense of the need to affirm ourselves. Then, one day, we leave work, we retire – and we are reminded of how little time remains for us to achieve some measure of fulfilment (Corneau, 1991, p. 47-48):

> *We know the legend of Icarus, who flew too close to the sun and was destroyed by it. His feathered wings, held together by beeswax, began to melt as he flew higher and higher, so that in the end he plummeted into the sea. This is the fate reserved for us when we become too "solar": we go down in flames, we experience burnout. Surely this is a graphic illustration of the symbol. We have given up our inner light for the light of recognition that comes only from the outside.*

Yet we cannot die peacefully unless we have rekindled that inner light, and acquired sufficient fulfilment to last us for eternity. And the need for fulfilment often requires an individual to show a willingness to risk, to dare, to rebel, to reject conformity, to challenge the solar mythology. Not everyone agrees, however. The Welsh poet, John Ormond, offers this dissenting view (1979, p. 39): "It was Sod's Law and not the sun/That made things come unstuck for Icarus."

6.4 THE REBEL

To challenge the solar mythology, one must of necessity become a rebel, which is not necessarily the same as a hero. So let us first distinguish between a "hero" and a "rebel". According to the American poet, e. e. cummings (1968, p. 636): "a hero equals any jerk/who was afraid to dare to answer no". The hero is the automated being who answers "Yes" to everything. He is the stuff of military obedience (and the rigorous conformity it demands of its adherents at all times). He is anxious always to do "the right thing" and equally anxious never to do "the wrong thing". He is willing to obliterate most of his inner world and to hand over control of his life to others. He is the other side of individuation, commanded by or commanding others.

This sort of conformist behaviour guarantees individuals a successful, "normal" life. Such a life does not question the nature of the relationship between those in authority and their subordinates; that relationship is accepted as "normal", healthy, and inevitable. It is a manifestation of the scheme of things in which the gods are superior while human beings remain inferior to them. To ensure the *status quo* of this arrangement, from time to time there

occurs "the descent of an emissary god or angel from heaven bearing a message to earth" (Greene, 1960, p. 7). Greene argues that a celestial descent "represents the intersection of time and the timeless; it points to the human realm of paramount concern to the gods".

The Icarian myth may be read as a caricature of such a celestial descent. It assumes an inverse progress, not from heaven to earth but from earth toward heaven – and back to earth according to the laws of gravity. As Estes (1993, p. 45) points out:

> *The Greek Icarus flew too close to the sun and his waxen wings melted, catapulting him to earth. The Zuni myth "The Boy and the Eagle" tells of a boy who would have become a member of the eagle kingdom but for thinking he could break the rules of Death. As he soared through the sky his borrowed eagle coat was torn from him and he fell to his doom. In Christian myth, Lucifer claimed equality with Yahweh and was driven down to the underworld. In folklore there are any number of sorcerers' apprentices who foolishly dared to venture beyond their actual skill levels, or attempted to contravene Nature. They were punished by injury and cataclysm.*

The descent of the celestial messenger suggests a top-down, gods-to-humankind structuring of the universal scheme of things, a scheme intolerant of any sort of bottom-upwards approaches. This intolerance is a manifestation of the gods' need to restrain humankind within an infantilised role in its relationship with parental god figures. Given this parent-child relationship in lieu of an adult-adult one, the infantilised human race remains in a dependent relationship that, by its very nature, inhibits autonomy and independence, and may frequently prohibit them. The relationship is an obvious, perhaps inevitable source of frustration and aggression. It places humankind in the same tantalising position as the one in which Adam and Eve found themselves when eyeing the Tree of Knowledge. Such wilfulness on the part of the gods suggests they may fear insubordination and usurpation, a fear that reveals the insecurity of their superiority. Nothing evokes their fear more than a non-conformist rebel aspiring to autonomy and independence. As far as the Daedalus/Icarus myth is concerned, the question must be asked: Who is the rebel? Daedalus? Icarus? Both (if for differing reasons)?

Albert Camus (Cole & Schepman, 1971, p. 1) asks "What is a rebel?" and answers his question thus: "A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes, from the moment he makes his first gesture of rebellion." He goes on to assert that "the fountainhead of rebellion ... is the principle of superabundant activity and energy" (Cole & Schepman, 1971, p. 4), factors distinguishing it from Scheler's definition of resentment. Camus argues (Cole & Schepman, 1971, p. 5) not only that "[r]esentment is always resentment against oneself" but also that "resentment is always highly coloured by envy. But one envies what one does not have, while the rebel's aim is to defend what he is."

We notice here the sharp distinction between materialistic envy and the affirmation of oneself/one's self.

What Camus is saying here seems to be reinforced by Lacan's argument (1987, p. 116) that what one envies is not at all necessarily what one wants. He suggests that "true envy [is] the envy that makes the subject pale before the image of a completeness closed upon itself". A rebel is a non-conformist; he is a self-managing individual, one who refuses "to allow cultural assumptions to remain untested and he is disentangling the cobweb of myths and mysteries of our social institutions. He has to differentiate between what is conventionally agreed to be reality and what is reality for him" (Lawrence & Miller, 1976, p. 365). His need for autonomy, for independence, and for the knowledge that will make him meaningful may well allow him to gatecrash the Garden of Eden. He will be willing to take the risks - including *phthonos theon* (the envy of the gods) - that such a venture demands. If he is not destroyed by petulant gods affronted by his insubordination and his refusal to be infantilised, he may have to risk being banished into some sort of exile, metaphorical if not literal.

6.5 EXILE

exile n. **(state of) being expelled or long absence from one's native land**
exile n. **an exiled person**
exile v.t. **to condemn to exile**

Icarus was born on the island of Crete where Daedalus, his father, was in exile, the punishment for killing his nephew, Talus. His mother was Naucrate, a slave or servant of Minos. He is Cretan. This means that we are to understand the import of his journey differently from the manner in which we comprehend Daedalus's flight.

Daedalus is busy escaping from Crete and the wrath of Minos while Icarus, in accompanying his father, is moving from Crete, his home, and into exile. If Daedalus's destination represents safety and some sense of security, Icarus's represents uncertainty and insecurity in foreign parts.

According to Frankl (1967, p. 119), "[a] community needs personalities in order to be a real community and a personality again needs a community as a sphere of activity. A mass is different; it is only disturbed by individual personalities, and therefore it suppresses the freedom of the individual and levels the personality down". Collectivist and conformist thinking characterises a mass, the masses.

Exile is the punishment we inflict on those we believe to be unsuitable as members of our own society. We identify and label such individuals as non-conformist and then invalidate them by expelling them. Thus, a synonym for exile is banishment. The individual is forbidden to live in the midst of the masses. He or she becomes a displaced person, lacking the accoutrements of a national identity, and doomed to remain a foreigner.

We should consider the possibility that Icarus's death prevents his having to live out his life in a place where he would be a foreigner, deracinated from his own culture. He is saved from being an alienated outsider destined to complete his maturational processes under the aegis of his disreputable if talented father. Icarus is saved from living his life *with* his father (whom we know to be devious, cunning, and murderous) and *without* his mother. There may be insights here too on the question of children and divorce. We may also contemplate that he is merely the innocent victim of the gods who punish Daedalus not with banishment as the Athenian court did but by depriving him of his son and hence of his fatherhood.

6.6 FLYING AND FLIGHT

Apart from being a cautionary tale about families and about father/son relationships, the myth of Icarus is about flying and dying. Flying may be understood as a metaphor for birth - the separation from Mother Earth with its accompanying sense (and fear) of separateness and of separatedness. Unlike the birth process, however, we return to the earth safely in most cases after our flight.

Flying may also be understood in terms of a metaphorical means by which the mind – through processes such as imagination, memory, and the unconscious - is enabled to surmount the constraints of time and history, space and geography as well as the natural laws of gravity. The itinerary may consist of more than mere flights of fancy. The journey may take a route through one's history and the memories and recollections of one's life experiences, good and bad, in the so-called "real world". Alternatively, the mind may move inwardly toward the more sombre reaches of itself and its perturbations, taking the individual into the shadow world of his or her own mental functioning or, more gloomily yet productively, dysfunctioning. Kelley-Laine (1997, p. 3), from her psychoanalyst's perspective, observes:

> *The moment when the individual discovers the dynamic of his unconscious is a most impressive one. It usually happens unexpectedly, squeezed in between the cracks of associations, when vigilance is relaxed. It opens onto archaic images, even if only for a moment.*

> *We know these images are meant to retreat, and that to enable us to live our daily lives they must remain hidden; but we also know that to be true to ourselves, we must descend from time to time to this painfully accessible underground of the mind.*

Perhaps it is worth remembering here that Peter Pan, the eternal child whose youth is the object of much envy, is able to fly. Part of the reason for this capacity to fly, Kelley-Laine (1997, p. 1) argues, may be traced to the fact that "Peter Pan was a sad child who enabled James Matthew Barrie, his creator, to mourn his own unhappy childhood". Through Peter Pan, Barrie was able to fly into, and confront, his own past. Flying epitomises the challenge to know oneself and to be true to oneself, no matter what the consequences, unpredictable as they are, might be.

Part of our understanding of Peter Pan resides in Barrie's use of the mythological links between his character and Pan, the god of pastures. That Barrie's Peter Pan wishes to return to the Kensington Gardens – the place of his origins - reinforces these connections. That Peter Pan wishes to fly out of the nursery window to effect this return links him to the central theme of this section. In mythology, Pan's paternal parentage is equivocally diverse, but one of his reputed fathers was Cronos, the son of Uranus (the Sky) and Gaia (the Earth)(Grant & Hazel, 1993, p. 93). Cronos is frequently but erroneously confused with Chronos, the Greek word for time. Hence, our perception of Peter Pan as a symbol of eternal youth may have arisen as a result of a semantic misunderstanding.

Although we may wish to flee/fly from the knowledge and reality that our individual lives are finite, we may envy Peter Pan his eternal youth because it appears to repudiate the depredations of time. That said, we would not wish to remain, as he does, in a perpetual state of infantilisation. Consequently, we are not jealous of Peter Pan because that would mean we *want* what he has. Instead, we are envious because we want him *not to have* what he has: eternal youth.

In writing of the baby Peter Pan, Kelley-Laine (1997, p. viii) notes that "everyone knows that babies before they are born are birds". What might strike readers as quaint, even whimsical (although entirely appropriate to the Peter Pan story) finds strangely similar resonances in these lines from Naomi Clark's poem, "Waking Up in Intensive Care" (in Weiss, 1993, p. 106):

> A nurse's hand touches his hand,
> brings him into the named world.
> He's fallen, new hatched,
> into a nest of pillows.
> His blood, like the light, pulses.
> The bones of his arms, hollow,
> Ache with the rhythm of flight.

The resonances of the Icarus myth in the last two lines – (the complete poem is to be found in Chapter 7 – are as noteworthy here as they are in the final lines of James Bertolino's "The Flying Dwarf" (in Weiss, 1993, p. 37):

> If finally I flew, it would be without
> a body, or on wings
> of sufficient enormity
> to bear the full burden
> of my species.

To know that the formula $\frac{L}{D} = \frac{1}{\text{SIN } \alpha}$ is known as the glide ratio may explain something of the physics of flying as might knowing that (according to Newton, at least) *G*, the gravitational constant, = 6.6×10^{-8}, but it contributes nothing towards an understanding of the metaphysics manifest in man's desire to emulate birds and other flying creatures (Pringle, 1970, p. 442):

> *Man's first attempts to fly were based on his observations of flying animals, which have aroused his envy and stirred his imagination. 'The way of an eagle in the air' was 'too wonderful' for the author of Proverbs. The more practical-minded Greeks had the legend of Daedalus, who was supposed to have built wings of wax and feathers that he and his son Icarus used in flying.*

For centuries, it may be speculated, man has resented his confinement to the element of earth while, simultaneously, envying the apparently unfettered freedom that bird enjoy:

> *Since the dawn of his history man could not have failed to be impressed by the mysterious phenomenon of flight, as birds and insects were constantly around him to observe and admire. He must have longed for wings of his own so that he too might take off and experience the rush of cool air as he swooped and turned in the skies. Unobstructed and free, he would be able to escape from the constraints of his earthbound existence. It is no wonder that wings with their power, mobility and speed have always symbolized the unearthly, the superhuman and the divine* (Dalton, 1977, p. 102).

It is perhaps worth noting, parathetically, that when human being speak of the freedom that birds enjoy, thye do so oblivious to the multiple dangers that threaten birds on a daily basis, from rampant felines to idiots with guns.

Man's passion for flying was born out of envy and resentment, and, initially, had little to do with scientific knowledge. Because man envied the birds and insects that could fly while he could not, he resented his own incapacity to do so. How could he be expected to accept the freedom that the gnat and the mosquito enjoyed while remaining earthbound himself? As master of the planet, how could he not have mastery over all four elements of his ancestors? He desired "the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!" embodied in Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Windhover" (Gardner, 1975, p. 30).

According to Johnston (1970, p. 901):

> *From time immemorial man's aspirations seem always to have been directed upwards. He has thought of his blessings as descending from above – and to reach heaven the souls of the departed must fly upward. Many of the old religions clothed their celestial being in birdlike forms [...] The ancient seraphim and cherubim of the Hebrews, and the heavenly hosts of later dispensations, have all been provided with wings.*

Flying has both psychic and practical dimensions to it. With regard to the former, Freud (1997, p. 257) has the following to say:

> *The intimate connection between flying and the idea of a bird makes it comprehensible that the dream of flying, in the case of male dreamers usually have a coarsely sensual significance [based on the similarity between the German slang word vogeln (to copulate) and vogel (a bird)], and we should not be surprised to hear that this or that dreamer is always proud of his ability to fly.*
>
> *Dr Paul Federn (Vienna) has propounded the fascinating theory that a great many flying dreams are erection dreams, since the remarkable phenomenon of erection, which constantly occupies the human fantasy, cannot fail to be impressive as an apparent suspension of the laws of gravity (cf. the winged phalli of the ancients).*

Flying has also been used as a metaphor for sexual intercourse – and *vice versa*:

> COMING DOWN TO EARTH
>
> An initial orgasmic impetus jets
> the plane along the quite invisible
> Fallopian tube of its flight corridor,
> as lonely as a solitary sperm.
>
> After every hasty assignation,
> your lover would head home,
> while the plane jetted,

sperm-like, to its destination.

After every hasty assignation,
you would drive home alone
while his sperm jetted,
plane-like, to their destination.

Then, you and your lover were both in flight,
on the same plane to different destinations.

Now, every aircraft over your house
reminds you of weekends crowded
with urgent sex; many rooms witness
the sweaty push and grunt of orgasm;
less frequently, you recall the smell of
condoms on your lithe and busy fingers.

You choose to keep his letters still:
rousing documents bursting with
meticulously conceived seminal details
of your ecstatic copulations, heaving
with clichés desperate to make your
having sex sublimely different from
everyone else's having sex. But, then,
we all know what it comes down to:

Taking-off may be almost instinctive,
and level flight, perhaps a touch routine;
it's the landing that demands most judgement.

In learning to fly, we have devised myriad forms of flying machines. All of them – military and civil alike – have the capacity to allow man to soar almost but not quite like the flying creatures he so envies. From a new perspective miles above his traditional element, the earth, man can have "a bird's eye" view of his planet. He may even sense how it might have been to relish the flight of angels – or Milton's Satan as he circles the planet (*Paradise Lost*, III, 560-566 in Milton, 1969, p. 270):

Beyond th' horizon; then from pole to pole
He views in breadth, and without longer pause
Down right into the world's first region throws
His flight precipitant, and winds with ease
Through the pure marble air his oblique way
Amongst innumerable stars, that shone
Stars distant, but nigh hand seemed other worlds.

In the end, however, Satan is confined in the underworld; he is put *down* in the infernal regions of hell. He lives with his minions *beneath* the surface of the earth, in perpetual darkness and chaos, where they cannot see the skies, the sun, and heaven or the moon and the stars.

Although Satan's may be a subterranean pandemonium of eternal darkness, pain, and suffering, Milton's world is dominated by a solar mythology, as we see a few lines later (III, 571-587 in Milton, 1969, p. 270):

> Above them all
> The golden sun in splendour likest heaven
> Allured his eye. Thither his course he bends
> Through the calm firmament (but up or down,
> By centre, or eccentric, hard to tell,
> Or longitude, where the great luminary
> Aloof from the vulgar constellations thick
> That from his lordly eye keep distance due,
> Dispenses light from far; they as they move
> Their starry dance in numbers that compute
> Days, months, and years, towards his all cheering-lamp
> Turn swift their various motions, or are turned
> By his magnetic bean, that gently warms
> The universe, and to each inward part
> With gentle penetration, though unseen,
> Shoots invisible virtue even to the deep:
> So wondrously was set his station bright.

The sun is the source of universal, if invisible, virtue. It is impossible not to notice the overt imagery of sexual intercourse by which such virtue is spread. The sun is male – and a vast controlling force in ordering the universe. (See Hamburger's poem for a similar perspective on the sun as an ordering planet.) The sun's position is literally superior to all the constellations, and is the power behind the structuring of time – days, months, years - for humankind. In his flight circumnavigating the world, even Satan flies *below* the sun, and does not challenge his power (Estes, 1993, p. 45):

> *In myth and story we find that the consequence for an entity attempting to break, bend, or alter the operating mode of The Ineffable is to be chastened, either by having to endure diminished ability in the world of mystery and magic - such as apprentices who are no longer allowed to practice - or lonely exile from the land of the Gods, or a similar loss of grace and power through bumbling, crippling, or death.*

Unlike most birds, who kill for biological necessity (and rarely kill for reasons other than feeding and territorial survival), the majority of flying machines man has invented can be used to kill for ideological purposes. These machines have the capacity, in their military versions not only to destroy one another but also to drop bombs, each of which can kill hundreds of thousands of individuals. *Vide* Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Airborne missiles make it possible for planes to kill people the pilots cannot see. These flying machines can inflict death indiscriminately while providing anonymity for the pilot as well as a way of assuaging any sort of guilt he/she might experience.

Civilian/passenger aircraft share their military cousins' capacity for killing those inside them. If one of them should crash because of technical failure or human error, a plane may randomly kill those within the proximity of airfields, airports, runways, and urban settlements, to say nothing of visitors to air shows. Yet humankind refuses to placate the gods; our inflated ego prevents the possibility of humility.

Despite our desire to emulate birds and other flying creatures of all kinds, the machines, technologies, and procedures we have developed to enable us to fly remain cumbersome, clumsy, and limited when compared with the competencies and capacities of birds, for example. There are many competencies humankind has yet to be able to copy. How does the homing pigeon "home" when released hundreds, even thousands of kilometres away from its home? Perhaps they have knowledge about their element, the air, we have yet to discover, even though a pigeon's brain is smaller than a human thumb. There may be lessons here about humility and acceptance of our species' place in the universal order of things, lessons we find difficult to learn, inhibited as we are by our arrogance. It may be that we need a catastrophe from time to time to refocus our attention on the value of humility. Certainly, the gods themselves play a significant role as catastrophe's cohorts and *agents provocateurs*.

From mythical times to the present, the gods have done their utmost to provide humankind with unequivocal indications of the price to be paid for shifting out from, and beyond, humankind's natural element. We shall never be able to emulate the birds, no matter how hard we try. Clumsy imitation is the best we may ever be able to achieve. Still, we cannot – and perhaps should not – avoid the temptations of gatecrashing the Garden of Eden to go scrumping for a little more knowledge, despite the risks, to make imitation closer to emulation.

Some flights of fancy and the imagination may well prove to be just as risky and, ultimately, perhaps equally catastrophic.

6.7 DISOBEDIENCE

This is the myth's most common and recurrent theme. It is, if you like, the "standard reading" of the myth. Icarus disobeys his father and suffers the consequences. As we have already seen, the meaning of the myth is not quite as simple as that but, nonetheless, it is important for us to take cognizance of it.

Perhaps the most convenient way to tackle this established view of the myth's meaning is to define "obedience":

> ***obedience.*** **obeying as act or practice or quality; submission to another's rule; compliance with law or command.**

Before we go any further, it is valuable to look at the meaning of another word from the same root:

> ***obeisance.*** **gesture ... expressing submission, respect, or salutation; deference, homage, submission, obsequiousness.**

In both cases, the word "submission" occurs. Among the meanings attached to that word are the following:

> ***submission.*** **humility, meekness, resignation, acceptance of authority, obedient conduct of spirit.**

Almost all of these words imply some sense of unquestioning conformity, even servility. A good number of them would not typify a father-son relationship, except one of the father's autocratic domination of his son. Nonetheless, this is the terminology of obedience, just as "Yes" is the quintessential word of the hero/conformist. Obedience demands suppression of the self in pursuit of meekness, servility, compliance, and acceptance of another's authority over, and control of, one's life.

However, obedience also characterises some paths to wisdom, religious or otherwise, while discipleship is epitomised by emulation. As Robert Burton (1577-1640) put it in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (III §4, memb.1.2 in Cohen & Cohen,): "The fear of some divine and supreme power keeps men in obedience". Indeed, this stance is to be found in a number of critical comments on the myth.

Although he focuses only on Greek myths, Vickers (1979, p. 214) makes the important observation that "the majority of myths are concerned to draw the line sharply between god and man and to punish whoever violates the essential proprieties. Human myths conceive dreadful punishments for those who try to break down the distinction between man and god". Leach (1996, p. 88) too notes that "the friendship of the gods is bought only at enormous cost". Noteworthy here is Leach's suggestion that the friendship of the gods is something to be "bought", a commodity purchased at great cost to one's self/oneself.

If Icarus's behaviour is understood as *dis*obeying his father and his advice, how are we to interpret that disobedience and its consequences? There are a variety of possibilities; he is

1. simply being disobedient;
2. demonstrating his genetic inheritance: his father's innovative and imaginative, albeit devious brilliance;

3. affirming his heroism to challenge the wisdom of the fathers;
4. probing new possibilities and experiences in order to advance knowledge, to progress, even though he risks death in the process;
5. affirming the fearless nature of the heroic;
6. defining the distinction between heroism and stupidity;
7. illustrating the distinction between daring without knowledge and knowledge without daring;
8. exemplifying ways in which the gods punish those who dare affront or challenge them and their powers;
9. indulging his inflated ego.

This last possibility may need a brief moment of explication. As the term suggests, an inflated ego is characterised by its unrealistic, distended, vain size, a size that manifests an unrealistic importance, pomposity, pride, and/or presumptuousness (Edinger, 1972, p. 7). In brief, at one level, it presumes an omnipotence to which it has no justifiable claim if one attributes omnipotence to God alone (Edinger, 1972, p. 15).

And there is, according to Edinger (1972, p. 15), a "negative inflation" which he describes as:

> *identification with the divine victim – an excessive, unbounded sense of guilt and suffering. [...] This is too much guilt. [...] In fact taking on oneself too much of anything is indicative of inflation because it transcends proper human limits. Too much humility as well as too much arrogance, too much love and altruism as well as too much power striving and selfishness, are all symptoms of inflation.*

Inflation is at the root of all challenges to the powers that be, whether divine or human. June Singer (1994, p. 233), for instance, uses Icarus as an example of people who believe they have *mana*, a magical power which will protect them from harm. Joseph Berke, in discussing the decline and fall of John De Lorean, the maverick car-maker who dared to challenge the established manufacturers, writes (1988, p. 227): "De Lorean remains an automotive Icarus brought down to earth by institutional malice because of overweening style and ambition. In order to survive he may still have to choose to become mediocre and curb his challenge to the powers that be".

The Icarus myth is a useful yardstick of other kinds of performance too. As part of a discussion of Lorenzo Valla's *Voluptas et Fruitio, Verba et Res*, Charles Trinkaus (1970, vol. 1, p. 145) refers to "a passage imagining how the pleasures of humanism find their transcendence in heaven". Some of these delights include "the sight of outer space with the earth below, the

sensation of swooping with the newly acquired wings, in which Valla outdoes the legend of Icarus and Leonardo's attempted flying machine" (1970, vol. 1, p. 146).

These insights indicate ways in which we, as readers, may bring our own (mis)readings or purposely skewed (mis)understandings to the myth. Nevertheless, whatever we perceive Icarus to be doing, it is likely to be more than merely being disobedient. This is part of the fascination the myth holds for us.

6.8 ESCAPE AND FREEDOM

The myth of Daedalus and Icarus is a tale about escape, a theme frequent throughout many literatures. The courage and ingenuity of the escapees fascinate us; perhaps we gain a certain satisfaction from these re-enactments of the David and Goliath encounter. So often, the "small" fellow embodies a resilient goodness that cannot be overwhelmed or conquered by the warriors of evil, no matter what their size.

In many of these tales, the distinction between right and wrong, good and evil is deliberately unambiguous. Even in films about cowboys, we know that when a good guy kills a bad one, the result is *a good thing*, usually for the individual and the community. When a bad guy kills a good one, the result is *a bad thing*. The moral and ethical issues are clear. But when a bad guy kills another bad guy, the outcome is much less clear in moral and ethical terms.
(These issues were cleverly exploited in Sergio Leone's so-called "Spaghetti Westerns" in which Clint Eastwood played an enigmatic, nameless character.)

The moral issues surrounding Daedalus and Icarus's escape from Crete are no less ambiguous. Daedalus's name, we recall, means "cunning, ingenious". Both these characteristics are essential if good individuals (no matter how small) are to elude the brutal representatives of organisations and systems (no matter how big). Individual ingenuity can accomplish so much more than group stupidity. Working alone, the individual needs to co-ordinate only his/her own actions. Groups require much more co-operation to co-ordinate their activities effectively. And the individual can escape and get ahead of his opponents with an unobtrusiveness that a group cannot match.

How we perceive the ingenuity with which Daedalus and his son escape from Crete depends on which variant we prefer. We recall that the most-established variant has them flying from the island. Other variants have them escaping by sea. In these variants, Icarus dies either by falling into the sea and drowning in his over-enthusiasm to disembark from a sailing boat, or by capsizing his boat because of his lack of experience in sailing it. In all variants of the myth, Icarus drowns. The sails for these small craft are reputed to have been invented and/or

designed by Daedalus. The sail and the wing share a number of basic design elements, not the least of which is a dependence on the presence of the wind.

In following his father, Icarus would be banishing himself rather than escaping; he would be sacrificing his connections with the maternal in leaving Naucrate behind. That Icarus falls into the sea and is consumed in the waves, with only a few feathers remaining, may constitute a symbolic return to the waters of the womb.

Usually, we understand "escape" to imply confinement, some restriction of one's freedom. This, in turn, requires us to understand what "freedom" means within the context of the myth – and beyond. Daedalus and Icarus have been confined in the Labyrinth with the Minotaur, the half-man, half-bull creature born of the mating of Pasiphae and Poseidon's great white bull. To the extent that Daedalus conspired with Pasiphae by building the pseudo-cow in which she could mate with the bull, Daedalus is responsible for the consequences of these actions. Daedalus is also responsible for the building of the Labyrinth in which the Minotaur – outcome of the intercourse between Pasiphae and the bull – is hidden away to ameliorate Minos's shame. Thus Daedalus becomes co-conspirator with both Pasiphae and Minos, a situation that eventually results, ironically, in his own and Icarus's confinement in the Labyrinth with the Minotaur.

That Minos hopes to hide the Minotaur within the Labyrinth seems futile; the Labyrinth, by its very intricate nature, is bound to attract precisely the public attention Minos hoped to avoid. That Daedalus thought himself sufficiently cunning to conspire with both Minos and Pasiphae gives some indication of his curtailed ingenuity.

In the convolutions of this situation, it remains unclear why Icarus should be thrown into the Labyrinth with his father. Perhaps we are meant to perceive something of Minos's character by this inexplicable, brutal act. Perhaps we should understand how Minos inflicts suffering on Icarus's mother, Naucrate, as a consequence of this action.

Perhaps we are to believe that the gods inflict suffering indiscriminately on the guilty and the innocent alike. Perhaps Icarus has to suffer merely because he is Daedalus's child. Whatever the reason, Daedalus's precarious position in the Labyrinth, together with his son, demands a mode of escape sufficiently ingenious not only to restore his reputation but to effect a successful escape. He needs to free himself of the situation. At the same time, we should remember that Daedalus built the Labyrinth in the first place; escape may prove difficult but certainly not impossible. And if the myth of Daedalus and Icarus is about escaping from confinement – literal like the Labyrinth or metaphorical like the mind or one's own history – in

order to rise above them and begin again, it is perhaps no coincidence that one may readily perceive the labyrinth's design as a stylised depiction of the human brain.

To escape is to gain freedom. However, according to Erich Fromm (1999, p. 80), we should distinguish between "freedom to" and "freedom from".

> *What is meant by 'freedom to do something' we all understand very well – particularly if it is something we would like to do but cannot afford. In fact most of us wish that we had more of it. 'Freedom from', however, needs some explanation; because, being free in this particular way, we tend to take it for granted. This 'freedom from' is the kind of freedom which animals, small children, and primitive men do not have; and they do not have it because they are ruled by external compulsions over which they have no control* (McElroy, 1963, p. 7).

Individuals with sufficiently inflated egos may be willing to take the risk, but their delusion that human beings can achieve god-like superiority can cost them dearly. They become victims of their childlike/childish fantasies, and fail to understand man's finite limits and conditions, as Frankl (1967, p. 3) observes:

> *Man is not free from conditions, be they biological or psychological or sociological in nature. But he is, and always remains, free to take a stand toward these conditions; he always retains the freedom to choose his attitude toward them. Man is free to rise above the plane of somatic and psychic determinants of his existence.*

However, man may not be free to rise above the earth and take to the skies if, in so doing, he seeks to escape the consequences of his actions. And if he dares, the gods may make him pay an awful price to free himself from the confinement he currently endures, whether literal like the labyrinth or metaphorical like the mind or one's own history. Will ingenuity as a means to an end succeed only when the end is good? How can we presume that escape necessarily leads to a beneficial freedom?

> *To avoid ending up like Icarus, we might follow his father's advice: fly neither too low nor too high. Heroes fly too close to the sun; tempting fate in that way brings about the downfall of the heroes' ideals of absolute perfection, of glory at any price* (Corneau, 1991, pp. 47-48).

The Golden Mean has much to commend it, but if we do not challenge the gods, where does the possibility of progress lie? Is it man's eternal destiny to follow obediently and unquestioningly in the footsteps of the previous generation?

> *Their [Adam and Eve's] action against divine authority, their sin, was also the first act of human freedom, the first human act* (McElroy, 1963, p. 3).

Where are we to find new knowledge and gain new wisdom unless we gatecrash the Garden of Eden from time to time? And how can death be too high a price to pay? Death is the price we have always had to pay, whether we conform or rebel.

And if we dare not rebel, the alternatives seem bleaker still (Ullyatt, 1996, p. 25):

> Standing at the gates of Eden
> -they were much less elaborate
> than I had come to hope – I found
> myself looking in and failing
> to recall I had been thrown out.
>
> Among the shadows, I could see
> the gardener, preoccupied,
> carefully picking and pruning
> the blooms and the sweet green shrubs.
> He looked the way I imagined
> God to look when I was quite young
> and nourished on the fallacies
> of faith some priest force-fed me with.
>
> He looked up, catching sight of me,
> but refused to allow himself
> a faint smile of recognition.
> He went on, picking and pruning,
> allowing me to walk away,
> knowing we know each other well.
>
> There have been many times like this:
> hardly anyone has needed
> the distraction of my presence;
> but I remember that extraordinary face
> behind the gates. The wind was kind,
> obliterating from the dust
> what last few footprints remained.

6.9 DEATH & DYING

Of course, the myth raises questions about death too. But before we can consider some of these questions, it is perhaps important to give some attention to the distinction between death and dying.

In a characteristically eccentric text taken from the 1950 volume entitled *XAIPE*, the American poet, e. e. cummings, makes these distinctions; this is the entire poem (1968, p. 604):

dying is fine)but Death

?o
baby
i

wouldn't like

Death if Death
Were
Good:for

when(instead of stopping to think)you

begin to feel of it,dying
's miraculous
why?be

cause dying is

perfectly natural;perfectly
putting
it mildly lively(but

Death

is strictly
scientific
& artificial &

evil & legal)

we thank thee
god
almighty for dying

(forgive us,o life!the sin of Death

Once the reader has delved behind the disconcerting style into the subject of the poem, the apparent simplicity of the death/dying issue proves deceptive. One could propose that the poet wished to juxtapose death – perceived as a permanent and non-desirable state - and dying – seen as an entirely natural process. In fact, cummings juxtaposes the "perfectly natural" process of dying (as an integral part of the birth-life-death cycle characteristic of all earth's creatures) with the "strictly/scientific/& artificial &/evil & legal" activities that surround the bureaucratic processes of death. Death, as a permanent state of arrest, constitutes that part of human existence that can be managed by the conformist demands of bureaucracy. Dying, as a lifelong dynamic process which takes exactly a lifetime to accomplish, presents individuals with unique opportunities to enrich and fulfil their lives, no matter how long or short they may be.

The most important question would seem to be: What is the purpose of death? A corollary would be: If life ultimately kills you, what distinctions can be made between life and death, or are they, in fact, synonyms of a kind?

Ernest Hemingway, whose own life ended, like his father's, in suicide, offers one perspective:

> *If people bring so much courage to this world, the world has to kill them to break them, so of course, it kills them. The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry* (Cohen & Cohen, 1980, p. 151).

To have courage is to challenge life - or death's power to destroy life; the more courageous, good, gentle, or brave you are, the more vigorously life will strive to destroy you. If one construes life's malign power as an activity of the gods, then one should perhaps be wise enough not to challenge them. To challenge the gods, to aspire to their power, albeit briefly, is to challenge, perhaps threaten their power. From fear, they respond by exercising their capacity to destroy.

Ultimately, the question is not about whether or not life will prevail in its deadly business; that is a given, the central paradox of existence. Life will certainly find a way to kill you, and so reinforce the biblical promise of death, inflicting the full penalty for man's infringement of the virginal sanctity of the Tree of Knowledge. The issue is not whether we will die but how we die.

Essentially, we are left to choose between unquestioning and mindless conformity, on the one hand, and provocative self-actualisation, on the other. Should we accept a persistently subordinate role or should we find the courage to challenge the gods on their own terms? Our decision may depend to some extent on the way we understand death and dying, whether we perceive death as always preordained or entirely arbitrary, or whether life and death should be construed as polar opposites or integral parts of a cycle? Such perspectives impact dramatically on ways in which we understand Icarus's death and his father's survival.

In the film, *Zorba the Greek*, Zorba asks the young English teacher: "Why do the young die? Why does anybody die?" When the teacher says he doesn't know, Zorba demands: "Then what's the use of all your damned books? If they don't tell you that, what do they tell you?" The teacher explains: "They tell me of the agony of men who can 't answer questions like yours." Articulating that agony in another way, an anonymous military chaplain (in Jamison, 1999, p. 69) notes, poignantly: "I do not know why young men have to die. You would think it

would break the heart of God." But if it doesn't break the heart of God, what does that tell us about God and how He regards us?

The chaplain's statement also presents the stereotypical assumption that dying young *necessarily* means dying purposelessly. Futility and purposelessness may reside in the lives of those who, dying young, never find the courage to dare, as Vachel Lindsay, another who died by his own hand, writes in his poem, "The Leaden-Eyed"(1963, p. 141):

> Let not the young souls be smothered out before
> They do quaint things and fully flaunt their pride.
> It is the world's one crime its babes grow dull,
> Its poor are ox-like, limp and leaden-eyed.
>
> Not that they starve, but starve so dreamlessly,
> Not that they sow, but that they seldom reap,
> Not that they serve, but have no gods to serve,
> Not that they die, but that they die like sheep.

While Lindsay rejects the bland sobriety of life style that conformity demands, Adrian Mitchell's poem, "Icarus Schmicarus", pinpoints issues of conformity through a paradoxical approach:

> If you never spend your money
> you know you'll always have some cash.
> If you stay cool and never burn
> you'll never turn to ash.
> If you lick the boots that kick you
> then you'll never feel the lash,
> and if you crawl along the ground
> at least you'll never crash.
> So why why why –
> WHAT MADE YOU THINK YOU COULD FLY?

The question makes sense from a conformist perspective. Put another way, it asks why attempt the impossible? And, by implication, it suggests that one should do nothing other than accept one's limitations.

Through an extraordinary set of circumstances, Icarus is presented with a situation in which he can do "quaint things" and fully flaunt his pride. It is worth recalling here that, in Christianity, pride is one of the seven deadly sins, sins that earn the direst of divine punishments. Although meek conformity runs counter to the affirmation of one's individuality, most ideologies require the subjugation or obliteration of oneself if one is to become an adherent or devotee. To avoid subjugation and/or virtual self-obliteration, one is compelled to assert oneself and take full responsibility for one's autonomy in the human experience. This may well provoke the gods; they will find diverse ways of destroying those who threaten or

challenge them. Estes (1992, p. 45) attributes this destructive quality to a malignant predatory dimension of the psyche:

> *... we see the predators in them desire superiority and power over others. They carry a kind of psychological inflation wherein the entity wishes to be loftier than, as big as, and equal to The Ineffable, which traditionally distributes and controls the mysterious forces of Nature, including the systems of Life and Death and the rules of human nature, and so forth.*

The gods, in resentment, anger, or effrontery, may well want to destroy every individual who dares aspire to the divine but they will be able to defeat no one. If death lies in the hands of the gods, dying (which is also living) remains in human hands "and death shall have no dominion" (Thomas, 1974, p. 62).

An alternative but less consolatory solution is simply to refuse to believe in the gods and their powers in the first place. This is too frightening for most people.

6.10 SUCCESS & FAILURE

It is Joseph Campbell (1988, pp. 131-132) who raises the issue of success and failure in the myth this way:

> *When Daedalus, who can be thought of as the master technician of most ancient Greece, put wings he had made on his son Icarus, so that he might fly out of and escape from the Cretan labyrinth which he himself had invented, he said to him: "Fly the middle way. Don't fly too high, or the sun will melt the wax on your wings, and you will fall. Don't fly too low, or the tides of the sea will catch you." Daedalus himself flew the middle way, but he watched his son become ecstatic and fly too high. The wax melted, and the boy fell into the sea. For some reason, people talk more about Icarus than about Daedalus, as though the wings themselves had been responsible for the young astronaut's fall. But that is no case against industry and science. Poor Icarus fell into the water - but Daedalus, who flew the middle way, succeeded in getting to the other shore.*

Campbell is correct: people do write more about Icarus than Daedalus. One explanation, as we have seen in the previous section, is to be found in the stereotypical tragedy of a young death, a death made the more tragic not only by the fact that the boy was leaving home and heading into exile but also by his incorrigibility or disobedience. That Icarus may have been a victim –

arbitrary or deliberate - of the gods makes his death all the more poignant and, from some points of view, futile and meaningless.

That Daedalus managed to arrive at his destination may be perceived as success, certainly, but not an unequivocal one. If Daedalus's advocacy and pursuit of the cautious middle way to achieve his goal can be counted as success, then he is successful. But he lacks Icarus's ebullient ecstasy. To the extent that Icarus knows ecstasy, he is successful and Daedalus a failure. The success/failure dualism is, thus, an oversimplification.

Let us ponder the proposition that success is primarily a concept prevalent in the external world while fulfilment assumes a more significant role in the internal world. Let us also propose that rewards for success in the external world usually take the form of material benefits while rewards for fulfilment in one's internal world are essentially non-material in nature. Generally, these are the precepts inherent in Erich Fromm's distinction between having versus being as modes of existence. But, these alternatives are not equally attractive, as Fromm observes (1999, p. 25):

> *The alternative to having versus being does not appeal to common sense. To have, so it would seem, is a normal function of our life: in order to live we must have things. Moreover, we must have things in order to enjoy them. In a culture in which the supreme goal is to have – and to have more and more – and in which one can speak of someone as 'being worth a million dollars', how can there be an alternative between having and being? On the contrary, it would seem that the very essence of being is having; that if one has nothing, one is nothing.*

The difference can be usefully exemplified in the differences between the sentences: "I have success" and "I am fulfilled". Having, as Fromm (1999, p. 36) notes, is also manifest in incorporation which is itself a dimension of consumerism:

> *... to consume is one form of having, and perhaps the most important one for today's affluent industrial societies. Consuming has ambiguous qualities: It relieves anxiety, because what one has cannot be taken away; but it also requires one to consume ever more, because previous consumption soon loses its satisfactory character. Modern consumers may identify themselves by the formula: I am = what I have and what I consume.*

The myth of Daedalus and Icarus epitomises the dichotomy of having and being.

6.12 A FIRST UNIFYING THEME: THE PARADOX OF CHOICE

Throughout these discussions, there have been numerous manifestations, explicit or implicit, of dualistic oppositions. For brevity's sake at this stage, let us list these as well as the subsections in which they have been discussed:

6.1 Conformity versus non-conformity
6.2 Conflict between generations: fathers & sons
6.3 Work and knowledge versus ignorance and Edenic idleness
6.4 Rebellion versus conformity
6.5 Home versus exile
6.6 Flying (albeit temporarily) versus remaining earthbound
6.7 Obedience versus disobedience
6.8 Escape and freedom versus confinement and restriction
6.9 Risking death and dying versus a cautious life and living
6.10 Success versus failure/having versus being

Thus the myth may be read and understood as an exploration of the ontological dilemmas created by the need to choose between remaining essentially conformist and dependent on societal norms, on the one hand, or striving for autonomy and individuality, on the other. While the former is not entirely risk-free, it remains significantly less risky than the latter. Because homeostasis inherently seeks to reduce anxiety, and because anxiety can be reduced by avoiding risk and/or threat, conformity usually prevails over non-conformity, and most human beings pass through life with a significant measure of guaranteed anonymity.

The idea of having to choose, or, at least, of having choice, between alternatives surreptitiously disguises one crucial aspect of the process. Having choice would suggest that alternative means also offer alternative ends. The reality is that our choices lie only in the means, not in the end because the end, for all of us, remains the same: death. The choices we are offered, or are required to confront, throughout our lives delineate the means by which we manage our lives until we die. This would lend substance to the adage that it is the journey rather than the destination that matters. If the destination remains the same for everyone then the route we choose to that destination is what ultimate determines the quality of the life we live in getting there. As Andrew Solomon (2001, p. 432) expresses it: "One's self lies in the choosing, every choice, every day." And it is in choosing sanity, or even madness, over normality and arresting conformity that assures us that we are fully alive and unique.

Those who risk, venture, and dare are known to us by name.

6.13 A SECOND UNIFYING THEME: PHTHONOS THEON : (*THE ENVY OF THE GODS*)

At this point, we might ask ourselves whether there is any unifying principle underlying this diverse assemblage of themes. We would propose that they are all linked through the concept of *phthonos theon*, a Greek phrase meaning "the specific hatred and retribution of the gods towards mortals who challenge their prerogatives or power" (Berke, 1988, p. 40). The origin of this malice toward humankind may be traced to envy. Envy is wanting someone else *not to have* what they already have whereas jealousy is wanting what someone else has. The focus of envy is on the other; we do not want them to have possessions, or prosperity, or status. We do not want those things for ourselves; we just want others not to have them and/or to be without them.

In the case of jealousy, we want what others have, plain and simple.

Consequently, the gods do not want humankind to have what they have. They do not wish to be challenged or threatened by mere mortals so they inflict severe penalties on those who aspire to divine or semi-divine power.

They approve of conformity and condemn non-conformity and rebelliousness. They resent our desire to fly as much as our willingness to disobey them in the pursuit of progress, wisdom, and knowledge. They approve of our failures and loathe our successes. They act towards mortals as dour and inflexible fathers towards recalcitrant sons. They celebrate the brutalities of solar mythology and denigrate whatever pleasures and delights emanate from its lunar counterpart. And they command the prerogatives of death and destruction to punish the non-permissible behaviours of mortal beings. It is the gods who envy humankind; it is we who provoke that envy through our jealousy of the gods. The more we wish to be like them, the more they will wish us not to be like them. Hence the persistence of conformity as a societal ideal (as well as systems to enforce it) from the mythic times of Daedalus and Icarus to the present day. We continue to live out our mythic past.

6.14 STOPPING IN MID-AIR: A SORT OF CONCLUSION

Because this chapter does not pretend to do more than identify and reflect upon some of the myth's possible connotative meanings, it remains predominantly speculative, and rightly so, for the processes of interpreting connotative meaning are affected by the life experiences – both conscious and unconscious - that readers bring to the text. Consequently, these processes of reading and interpretation resist neat conclusions and elegant endings. At the same time, the constraints of length inherent in a dissertation – to say nothing of the reader's

patience and endurance - oblige one to draw a quite arbitrary line somewhere, leaving these reflections, like Icarus, in mid-air....

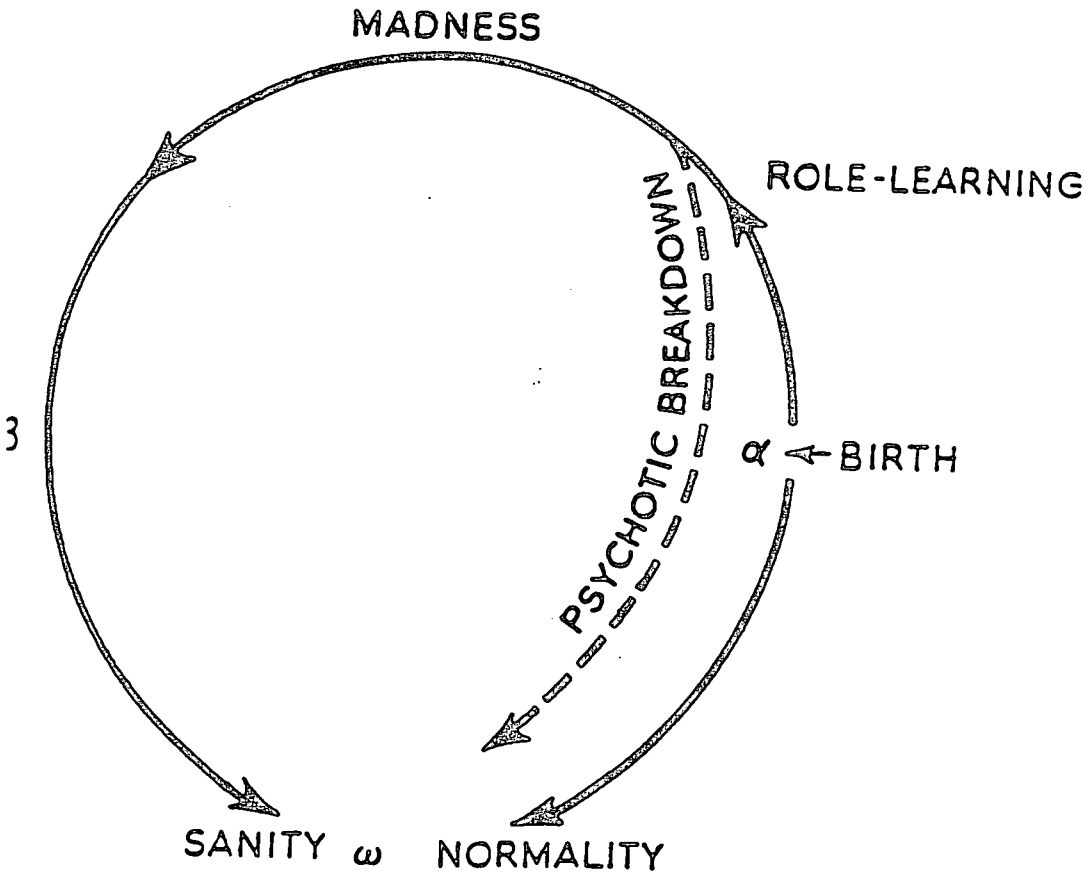

Figure 7 Ullyatt's modification of Cooper's diagram

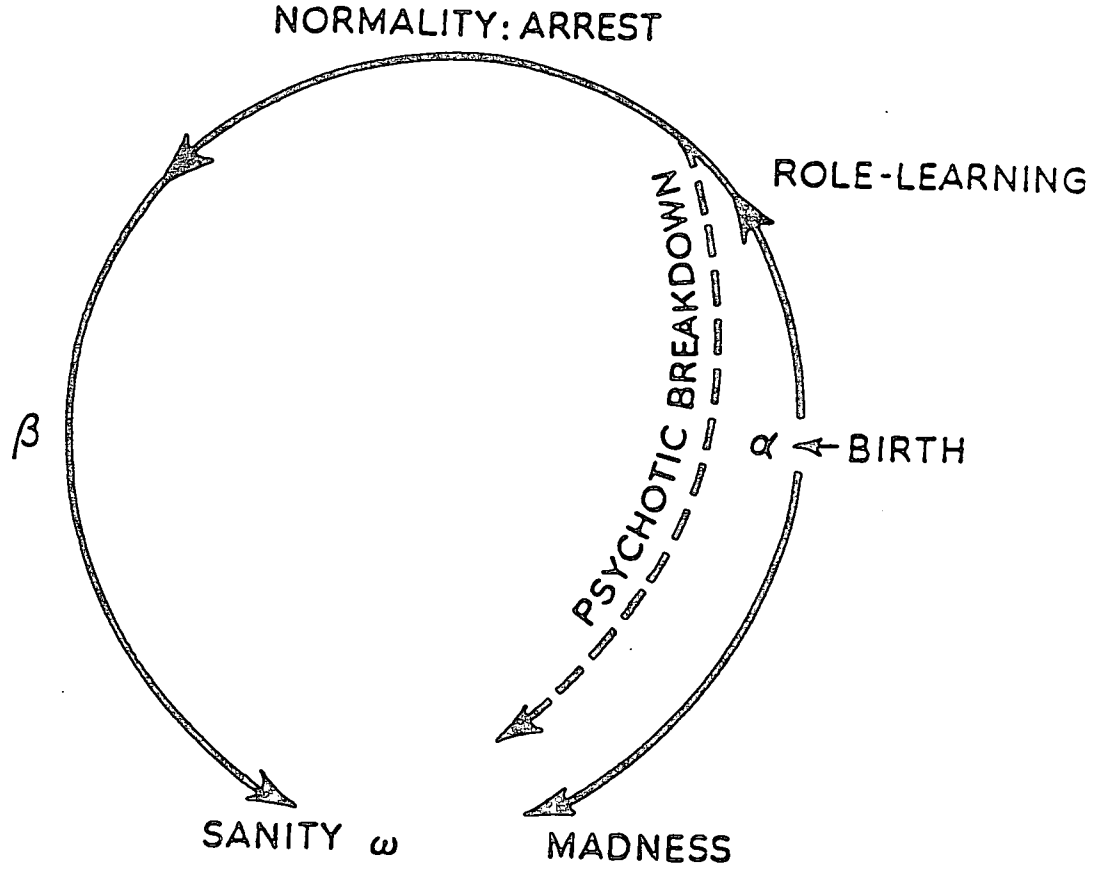

Figure 8 Cooper's diagram

CHAPTER 7

"MISTER DEATH'S BLUEEYED BOY"* METAMORPHOSES OF THE ICARUS MYTH IN SOME MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY POEMS

In the Epilogue of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Melville, 1986, p. 379), we find these lines:

> Yet I'll be borne,
> The finer part of me, above the stars,
> Immortal, and my name shall never die.

As much could also have been said about Icarus and the persistent fascination of his life and fate. His story continues to attract readers and inspire poets, almost relentlessly.

This chapter is a collection of more than 30 poems and sequences in English, dealing in some way or another with the myth of Icarus. It is intended as a research resource. Consequently, no critical discussion of the texts is offered. Full bibliographic details are provided in the List of References.

After presenting readers with 9 texts by several of the twentieth century's major English-language poets (Chapters 5 and 6), it seems appropriate to offer readers some sense of the range of poems about Icarus. What follows is probably a small sampling. Almost certainly, there are many living out there in obscure anthologies and on the Internet, and there are certainly numerous others in languages other than English.

Because there is no critical discussion of the texts, there is no intervention between readers and the texts themselves. It should be added that, in terms of the main premise of the dissertation, critical discussions of the individual texts included here would, in themselves, constitute further variants of the myth thus adding yet more meaning to it.

It is necessary to add one final remark. The inclusion of a text is not intended to say anything about its quality as poetry, but rather to give some idea of the range and sort of writing that the myth itself has attracted.

*The title of this chapter is take from a poem by e e cummings (1968, vol. 1, p. 60).

MARVIN BELL
Icarus Thought

The nature of a circle prevents it
from ever being a human hand.
And the essence of a rectangle
prevents it from ever being a skull.
Yet important people who can see
for themselves can't get this straight.
So others have to give them a picture
of the moon burning inside a mouth
and worms nesting within a cloud
and an empty sleeve that screams.

One who knows the hollows of a skull
will have felt the remorse of the knife.
And one who truly sees the moon
will know the sadness of the twilight.
But that fool we were in wax,
he will be lifted always by emptiness
and made to embrace the music,
first of the sun and then of the moon,
and learn the ambivalence of doorways
and a dawn that looks like evening.

MAREK BIENKOWSKI
Icarus Descending

Before I hit earth
victim of the wind's broken wing
slip into my hand
the heat from your own hand
& thrust in my pocket
a smile from your face
Only this will give me the surety
you were not just something I dreamed

MICHAEL BLUMENTHAL
Icarus Descended

Ah Socrates, behold him here at last
Wingless and heavy, still enthusiast.
- Howard Nemerov
- "The Poet at Forty"

I was a bird once, and I flew,
high over the clouds. The landscape
was beautiful, beckoning, a rich cornucopia
of women and flowers, and I was a happt raptor,
moral as a condor. Wherever I went
the envy of those who had fallen prey
to their own goodness washed over me,
but I must have felt, somewhere,
the tipped arrows of their envy
entering my happy flesh and lodging there.

Tame, sublimated, psychoanalyzed,
I walk out now among the terrestrial animals
and smiling, moribumd creatures,
with their dark pieties
of happiness and sacrifice.
Oh where are the bright galaxies
of yesteryear? I ask,
the rapidly beating hearts
of those who could never have me?

Silly boy, who though
he could defeat death so easily,
who thought he could live forever
in the moans of abandoned women, look
how you have joined the dark, plaintive race
of your brothers and sisters, just look
at your newly world: eight wheels
of cold metal where your wings once were.

DAVID BUNN
A Kind of Icarus

There is this special panting in the air
As moss creeps furiously and pomegranate hearts break
To show the fruit.
The air is full of labour-pains, green shoots writhe;
There is a kind of Icarus in this Night.

Where is the art that once leapt up
From thighs and gut
Like eager vegetation?
Moths have nibbled at my liver,
Have shuddered at the soul's interior darkness:
Grey against black, nondescript as sparrows, they beat against the stomach walls
Perplexed to terror by lack of light.

But to night:
The succulent surroundings shriek for mortal men
And art to rise on wings from sadness.
My sluggish reptile blood, so old, so long,
Takes heart, and lace-winged moths
Too scared, too long, find furious flight;
Darting up from gut to heart to head
To meet the welcome glow that is the brain:
Icarus.

Within the cative Labyrinth of Time,
Amongst the little kennels of recorded fact,
We start-awake through Pain to sudden Art.
With furious need we sew ourselves and sorrows up,
Embraced by wax and eagle feather words,
And see in sad remembrance, our sudden re-discovered wings.

Occasionally -
Above the little hovels of impassive Time,
We rise in fascinated pilgrimage
Destination Sun.
This is all there is...not god, not love.
But only once or twice to be a sudden moth.
Consequence is still to come - now yelping far away -
Not yet scorched flesh, blood and wax on the Icarian sea.

In the agony of melting moments
We realise, in gut and heart and head,
A momentary Icarus from Labyrinth.

CHARLES CAUSLEY
I Saw A Shot-Down Angel

I saw a shot-down angel in the park
His marble blood sluicing the dyke of death,
A sailing tree firing its brown sea-mark
Where he now wintered for his wounded breath.

I heard the bird-noise of his splintered wings
Sawing the steep sierra of the sky,
On his fixed brow the jewel of the Kings
Reeked the red morning with a starving eye.

I stretched my hand to hold him from the heat,
I fetched a cloth to bind him where he bled,
I brought a bowl to wash his golden feet,
I shone my shield to save him from the dead.

My angel spat my solace in the face
And fired my fingers with his burning shawl,
Crawling in blood and silver to a place
Where he could turn his torture to the wall.

Alone I wandered in the sneaking snow
The signature of murder on my way,
And from the gallows-tree, a careful crown
Hitched its appalling wings and flew away.

NAOMI CLARK

Waking in Intensive Care

Any now could eat him.
He's shelless, soft.
His eyes open; each moment

flashes through him,
transparent. Leaves of winter ivy
on the window's ledge, every
thing to be known: and he

alone, without language.
A nurse's hand touches his hand,
brings him into the named world.
He's fallen, new-hatched,

into a nest of pillows.
His blood, like the light, pulses.
The bones of his arms, hollow,
Ache with the rhythm of flight.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS

Let Go the Ghost of Icarus

Ideal mother, please stay far away
from this dead saint's bloodless lips.
At his kitchen sink Sunday,
the morning after, both men
kept mute, sighing
down into his cold cups.
Can others see under
a clay deathmask's stiff lip
the globe trapped in this skull?
Imagine it a flooded dome,
a cesspool of fluid shadows,
the black murk halfway risen
to the vaulted ceiling buried
under a knit brow, the eyelids
closed, its eyeballs bent
forever in, in love
with unreflected deeps.
Out in the brine, a swimming
soul thrashes
a whirlpool forward,
back a wake. Through our dim breath, the white
wrists flicker. The fingers knifing
down create fresh holes
in the wet shroud, the corpse
a spermcell working closer, ever
coming, never
born, trapped
too deeply in death's promise
for becoming, never lifted out,
rocked on dry land, nor held
in warm arms even now, a wave responding
in thy mouth, a worried
prayer kissed
from your lips.

GENE DERWOOD
Bird, Bird

Age after age our bird through incense flies,
Angel or daw, dove, phoenix, falcon or roc,
Till this last met of wings dark charged to wreck
The hoops of heaven, dove's arc, and all that cries.
The clogged frets of Daedalus unlock
An egg of paradox the gods disguise;
Men as organs of the bird demise
Heaven's breath under the bombers' moon, flac-flac.

Plunge, boy, to paradise that in heart's choir
Is home, rocked on the cords of birth, low
Again home, bringing to earth your found fire
Be hound or vine, not entrail to the crow
Of metal death, -explode the skies of fear –
Come down, O Icarus, come down, down, O.

ROSEMARY DOBSON
Knossos

Impossible to build the palace again over our heads,
The painted roof-beams, the cisterns, the great granary,
Impossible to think of people living simply,
Going about their errands in the sunshine,
The king receiving supplicants in the throne-room.

In the empty courtyard by the fallen columns
It is possible, nevertheless, to feel continuance.
A cock crows in the valley, noonday
Exhales resin, sunlight settles
Almost like thin golden beaten petals,

Settles about us like burning hammered petals,
Falls on the hand or the cheek like burning metal,
So that one turns with hand or cheek, awaking
From noonday dreaming with an urgent question—
Is the impossible possible? What has happened?

Better that one should listen to the cock, be attentive
To the farmer calling his daughter from the vineyard
(Go back to the house, he says, go back my daughter),
Listen to the cicada, rub a little
Of the ancient Cretan dust between the fingers.

Do not disturb the gods, do not disturb them
Asking urgent and impossible questions.
This is the birthplace of Zeus, home of the snake-charming
Dangerous goddess. Remember here also
Icarus flying too close to the sun.

RIEMKE ENSING
Icarus

(for Tony, who jumped)

1/MYTH - GREECE

Icarus, you could say, died by misadventure.
A young boy, wilful, going his own way,
testing exuberant wings against
the wind under,
deceptively playful
the sun
gliding towards.
And so he got burned (and there's a moral there)
fell from his circle of sky
and drowned in the relieving waves.

2/ HISTORY - NOW - ANY OF THE MANY PLACES

Among the many wounded hills
in any of the many places
a modern icarus is a plane
(perhaps by any other name)
it carries fire,
defies the sun / becomes
prometheus unbound.
Flying in perfect formation
the bomber leave the sky,
head home.
But on the ground
the child still screams,
and runs /
a flying flame.

3/ ACTUALITY - AUCKLAND

And you were burned by yet another sun.
You too took flight,
form, fronting like some small crucifix
the cold steel girders of the harbour bridge.
What trick brought you down to stride
so boldly down / to break water
to break you?

You crossed your world in one lead-footed leap;
holding the bird of wing dead in your arms
and now lie bruised with myths
deep
down
dead

ZYGMUNT FRANKEL
Icarus

I stay at home,
deaf and blind,
remembering my last flight all the time.

On wings of wood and fabric
I crept too close
to things terrifying from afar

I never knew
storm clouds could be so huge and black,
and boiling like a witches' cauldron.

Then lightning, thunder,
one, simultaneous, right in front of the glider,
and across my ears and eyes.

By touch alone, I bailed out;
the wind on my face was silent,
and the invisible parachute lowered me safely to the
invisible earth.

I can speak,
But I prefer not to.
The storm still speaks to me, and there is nothing equal
to its voice.

CHARLOTTE GARRETT

Recalling Icarus

They were out of everything:
flour, cat food, money, health,
but mostly they were out of love
with life.

They had done everything worth
doing from having and raising
children, cats and dogs, gardens,
roofs, even a bit of hell.
They'd traveled to all the known
and unknown places, camped at some,
climbed some, canoed, sailed, kayaked
others. They'd learned languages,
studied cathedrals, ruin, and bird.

They'd done it all, from scuba diving to
skydiving, which they liked the best for
its beautiful terror, the lunge
into such a vastness of light and silence.
Then the rush of air against body,
the jerk into an upright position as
the chute bloomed above, and below the world
like a Polaroid photograph slowly resolving
from a blur of colors to distant details.

So while the children they had raised
talked about what they should do,
they silently sold the silver tea service
they'd never used and the silver sword
said to have belonged to General Grant.
And the daughter whined that the tea
service was to have been hers, and the son
said he'd always coveted the sword.

But they ignored them, although they wondered
aloud if perhaps one thing they hadn't done
was to teach their children
how to live. They concluded it was too late
to worry and continued with their plan.
Which was to rent a car to drive
to an airport where they could rent a plane,
pilot, and parachutes and take one last dive
into weightlessness, to feel, if only
for a moment, freedom from their bodies.

All went according to plan, and they plunged
from the plane hand in hand, singing
into the emptiness of the air just as
they had that other time. As they tumbled
away from each other, the earth seemed
both further away and then closer
than she remembered, explaining
the sudden jolt of slowed momentum.

He, seeing that the plan had changed,
felt for his ring, found it,

and, as nothing happened, continued
his long fall in the enlarging photograph
of lakes, mountains, seas below.

She, seeing what had not happened,
tried to maneuver her chute
to intercept him, arms and legs kicking
and twisting except that by the he
was a mere speck in blue air,
a hawk enjoying the up and down drafts
of a perfect summer day.

She, her own descent continuing
in a more leisurely manner,
commented to the supporting air that
indeed, they had done everything now.
And that indeed, they were out
of everything.

ROBERT HAYDEN
O Daedalus, Fly Away Home

Drifting night in the Georgia pines,
Coonskin drum and jubliee banjo.
  Pretty Malinda, dance with me.

Night is juba, night is conjo.
  Pretty Malinda, dance with me.

Night is an African juju man
Weaving a wish and weariness together
  To make two wings.

  O fly away home fly away

Do you remember Africa?

  O cleave the air fly away home

My gran, he flew back to Africa,
just spread his arms and
  flew away home.

Drifting night in the windy pines;
night is a laughing, nigh is a longing.
  Pretty Malinda, come to me.

Night is a mourning juju man
weaving a wish and a weariness together
  to make two wings.

  O fly away home fly away

ROY HOLLAND
Icarus

Mastered, the air was mastered, and the wings beat!
Substance and making met. The dream was hawked. Oh, the
Glitter of the sea!

But bright seals opened, wings shuddered and the day burst.
How the sun's atoms split on the tongue's salt
So blindingly!

Such exile on that shore impossible, freedom was death.
Yes, but you also would have quenched
Your long dream's thirst.

VALENTIN IREMONGER
Icarus

As, even today, the airman, feeling the plane sweat
Suddenly, seeing the horizon tilt up gravely, the wings shiver,
Knows that, for once, Daedalus has slipped up badly,
Drunk on the job, perhaps, more likely dreaming, high-flier
Icarus,
Head butting down, skidding along the light-shafts
Back, over the tones of the sea-waves and the slip-stream,
heard
The gravel-voiced, stuttering trumpets of his heart

Sennet among the crumbling court-yards of his brain the mistake
Of trusting somebody else on an important affair like this;
And, while the flat sea, approaching, buckled onto oh! Avenues
Of acclamation, he saw the wrong story fan out into history,
Truth, undefined, lost in his own neglect. On the hills,
The summer-shackled hills, the sun spanged all day;
Love and the world were young and there was no ending:

But star-chaser, big-time going, chancer Icarus
Like a dog on the sea lay and the girls forgot him,
And Daedalus, too busy hammering another job,
Remembered him only in pubs. No bugler at all
Sobbed taps for the young fool then, reported missing,
Presumed drowned, wing-bones and feathers on the tides
Drifting in casually, one by one.

ANNE KELLAS
Following Icarus

The morning sun shone.
She polished it daily
and put it out to dry.

By midday she was ready
her petals just
crisp enough to fly.

Her form refined enough
her attunement
exact.

By evening she had learnt
how to cry.

JAMES LARSEN
Icarus

Icarus did not die
that morning off the coast of Calymne.
The evidence refutes the legend.

Time maintains
the wrong myth;
not pride,
not foolishness,
not fate –
half-god himself
he knew Phaeton
but not the sun;
knew his father
and his father's earth,
but not the wings
that were not his,
not
the sail
and
labyrinth.

There should have been a moment
within
the haloed sun,

but
the plunge
was the closest approximation.

The ploughman turned
away too soon;
wax rehardened
wings moved
but the sky held tight;
floating,
the boy knew himself
an artifice,
some thing to be
brushed by Brueghel's hand
and Auden's pen.

But he is
still Icarus,
my Icarus,
with wax for wings
wings for the moon,
built with some strings
one afternoon.

DAVID LEHMAN
Third and Icarus

1.

Upon reflection the mirror sends back a face
That will be yours someday – was mine yesterday –
But today belongs to a skater, new to the area,
Whose scarf flying in the wind of his momentum
Excites the crowd that has gathered to egg him on
To a spectacular fall on thin ice. No such luck.
The ice is safe. Everyone applauds his "daring"
Nevertheless. Or possibly the dreamer's
More resourceful, the lake is approached
Without the observer's image in it, the surface
A blank; and the fall from the heights turns into leap
Turns into graceful dive in the air, and stays there.

2.

A diversionary tactic: the wind seems to be whispering
Rumors of disaster in the ears of the hundreds
Hurrying home in trenchcoats, away from the scene
Of the crime that hasn't yet happened but will,
Involving messages written with lipstick on mirrors
Which shatter when looked at, before they can be read,
In hotel rooms abandoned by harmless heroines
And their psychotic twins, Here, in this elaborate maze
Of fire escapes, themselves fire hazards, the hero
Without knowing why, receives his instructions on how to fly.

3.

What Icarus doesn't realize is this: he is given
The power to fly on condition that he never
Use it. Still, staying there might prove fatal.
A warrant for his arrest circulates among corrupt
Party officials, suspicious from the start. Books
Are burned by the authorities. A fire breaks out
On the lower deck of the ship he planned to board
For exciting stowaway escape. Ever a coward at heart,
What else can he do but trust the wind
To lift him skyward from cloud to cloud
And finally to the sea which shall (his father said)
Receive him like a lover? It is a destiny
Not meant for me or you, but one that will have to do
Until the time when he can hurl
The earth behind him with his feet,
And fly into the mirror of the sky.

4.

Perhaps, after all, he really wanted to fall,
And land right here, on these sheets of newsprint,
Under the faded brown awning of the Third Avenue Bar
And Grill. Do not disturb him, He has traveled a long way
Down, down, and across, two steps down for each step across,
Like the movement made by the knight in chess.
At what moment did he pause in his descent

To sing serenades for shut windows? At the moment
When, in the mirror of fortune and women's eyes,
Icarus turns into Orpheus to his and our surprise.

5.

He intended to shatter the mirror, not enter it,
But at his touch it dissolves
Into waves of warm water, and in he plunges,
A part of the solution yet unaffected by it,
Judging by the glazed, indifferent look in his eyes.
The lakes freezes over a dead minute later
But that's not the point. The point is,
What did he see in the mirror? (Cocteau called it death,
A stunning blond, and dressed her assistants
In surgical masks.) whose image floated
Up to the surface and beckoned him inside?
Alas, not the one he expected to find.
This so enraged our widower that he tried
To shatter the mirror, as reported above.
So much for "the heresy of self-love."

6.

Isaiah Berlin tells an anecdote about Nijinsky
Who, when asked how he managed to stay
Up in the air after leaping, made it sound simple:
"Why should you come down at once? Stay
In the air a little before you return, why not?"
That's half the story. A student of mine, the other day,
Cheerfully cut into "valuable" class time
With the mirror version: a dream he's had the night before.
I was in it, he told the class, I was his father,
And leaped from the window of their Brooklyn apartment
Four flights up, landing safely on the sidewalk below.
So far, so good. Then, however, I spoil everything.
I motion the boy's mother and brother
To follow my lead and jump, which they do, to their deaths.

7.

The elders gather to decide the meaning of the myth.
"The hero is the son, according to one
Interpretation. According to another, it is the sun
Who burns the wings of waxed presumption."
And the common folk? Are they indifferent?
Has nothing changed in the dismal tenement?
While they talk, unnoticed by all, our hero
(Having burst the straps of his airplane seat
And cut the cord of the chute that lowered him
Gently, like a teabag, down to unfiltered darkness)
Lounges comfortably, in the solace of his obscurity, dreaming
Of balconies balanced in air, with no visible means of support,
And subway pillars acting like Birnham Wood,
Gravity defeated once and for all, the landscape cleared
Of monuments and waste. Now he alone remains inert
Far from the reflecting pools he had expected to find, not
Dead, just playing, his bandaged head resting on his hands
Pressed flat together, as though in prayer,

Weary after his celebrated descent
And the difficult flight that preceded it, many months ago.

DOUGLAS LIVINGSTONE
The Crackpot

As a child he dreamed of flying.
He walked to the top of the staircase,
stretched his arms – a fledgling trying –
and fell the flight, fracturing both wrists.

A small boy, he made a huge box-kite;
like the man with three eyes, he went up
in a near gale, before the night.
His inadequate anchor cupped
small-boy hands and shouted high: "I'm
going home," and watched him braced, free,
somersaulting struts winding twine,
and did not stay longer to see
the fluttered, inclined, windblown crash
in whipped branches of a tree bent
thrashing away. Two ribs he smashed,
easily fixed; his holed throat wasn't.

Years later he burnt all his hair:
a hot-air balloon that never too
off flamed like a crimson pear,
and collapsed like an incandescent rook.

In his tortured teens he almost
went off his pillow-damping head
through sleepless nights, his souls a ghost,
rigidly trying to levitate.

He got married and had a pair
of dully normal kids – no pranks
marred parenthood, no manager's
lightning frown his career in banks.

One day he built 9 tapered feet
of bamboo-splint and light plastic
wingspread and went out to a steep
nearby hill. He ran, wing jutting, fixed
from a complicated harness,
and was off, gliding gloriously
8 yards; jackknifed by sudden-stressed
wings he snapped up, down; uproariously
stopped by an antheap. Two linesmen
helped to brush him down, bruised and grinning;
the slim wing ruefully crushed, stilled.

He climbe the local swimming-bath
wall, closed for the night. Repaired, shorter,
the new wings newly strapped, he took off
the top board and hit the flat water.

Helicopters came next and one
with an ancient 1½
h.p. motor, a 12 foot vane
and a bicycle frame gave a cough
and rose 1/16th of an inch;
frame spinning madly it fell over,

jerking cruelly it gouged and wrenched
the lawn, his back and a grass-mower.
He tried the wings again. Tighter,
even more complicated
the straps, the spread much larger, lighter;
a cork crash-helmet on his head
like a handleless domestic pot
worn at his best friend's insistence.
Crouching on a friend's car roof, taut,
Nervous, hawklike, shakily tense,
He fell off at 35 miles
An hour and spent a bandaged age
in hospital: concussed and closed eyes
from a sub-arachnoid haemorrhage.

He came out quite convinced anti-
gravity (which evryone knows is
impossible) – no more antics –
was the answer. His wife left roses
and a note on the mantleshelf,
but the rest of her and the children
had gone: "to find for them, myself,
a decent, sane, father and husband."

Vaguely, he thought this would leave more
room – room for electro-magnetic
coils; spread, assorted parts of four
home-construction, electronic
kits "we supply the parts"; diodes,
soldering-irons, pliers, screw-
drivers; disassembled radios,
valves, tubes, plugs, and more than a few
rolls of wire. He has managed mildly
to electrocute himself dozens
of times but he still gets wildly
excited by theories, unproven
or fantastic. A pair of privileged
friends have seen some quite startling things
with an alloy pin: it quivered
in a stoppered, vacuumed, thin-
walled test-tube.
Now – it sounds funny – he
tries lifting a farthing (the widow's
mite) from thin sheets of ebony.
No one will laugh much if it does.

VASSAR MILLER
The New Icarus

Slip off the husk of gravity to lie
Bedded with wind; float on a whimsy, life
Upon a wish: your bow's own arrow, rift
Newton's decorum - only when you fly.
But naked. No false-feathered fool, you try
Dalliance with heights, nor, plumed with metal, shift
And shear the clouds, imperiling lark and swift
And all birds bridal-bowered in the sky.

Your wreck of bone, barred their delight dominions,
Lacking their formula for flight, holds imaged
Those alps of air no eagle's wing can quell.
With arms flung crosswise, pinioned to wooden pinions,
You, in one motion plucked and crimson-plumaged,
Outsoar all Heaven, plummeting all Hell.

ADRIAN MITCHELL
Icarus Schmicarus

If you never spend your money
you know you'll always have some cash.
If you stay cool and never burn
you'll never turn to ash.
If you lick the boots that kick you
then you'll never feel the lash,
and if you crawl along the ground
at least you'll never crash.
So why why why –
WHAT MADE YOU THINK YOU COULD FLY?

ROBERT PACK
Resurrection

On the taut shore, the bald skull,
Bleached, abandoned , more regular than stone,
Glistens, a little cast-away sun
Among planetary pebbles, galaxies of sand.
Dragged out again, again to drown,
By choked water, wheezing waves,
The outflung aged angel gulls
Gossip its descent; cliffs moulder,
Smoldering the anger of the drugged earth's age,
While the skull's socket suck the foam,
Windows for eels to swim like sight away,
With the crooked teeth laughing seaweed,
Sighing from the ribs of the deep sea-dunes.

Beyond bird-rubbed air, a skeleton,
From denial of its burned-out blood,
Rises erect in the moonlight like a soul;
Like shaped clouds clustered in, see
There is the furled skull, and there to the south,
Outstretched, float delicate finger-bones;
To the north, the cupped right palm
Catches feathers fallen from angel-wings.
Thigh-bones, knee-bones, ankle-bones, toes, dangle
Eastward, all parts are there, jointed,
All held intact, prayerful, and pure.

He rises swiftly now, rises
To the west, as if summoned, as if
Called forth and dreaming himself unencumbered
Up through space, without
A tongue, voiceless, with no lips.
The sea sparkles with the sperm
Of his rejected light.

AARON PASTULA
Icarus' Diatribe

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 useless 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.

E SHAUN RUSSELL
The Icarus Trilogy

I) UNDERWING

I led a sheltered life
In a labyrinth of strife
My parents stopped my flight
And kept me safe from light
But my appetite for freedom
Eluded
Their defense
I knew I did not need them
To carry out my life intents.

Then one day I learned that I
Could make my tender wax wings fly
I was Icarus but my wings never melted

I got away from the ones who kept me underwing
I flew as high as I wanted to
I did my own thing
I flew like a bird with his heart set on the sky
On simple wings made from wax and string

In my newfound days of freedom
I discovered a place on high
Set in a source of light
Far beyond the sky
I gathered my mortal strength
And set to fly abroad
A course through the rays of the sun
To the palace of the gods

I got away from the ones who kept me underwing
I flew as high as I wanted to
I did my own thing
I flew like a bird with his heart set on the sky
On simple wings made from way and string

On the day I decided to fly away
I flew to the sun
My wings never melted
But my heart did burn
The days when I was underwing were done

The gods gave me eternal life
In Olympus on young Sol
They named me the god of hope
And liberator of soul
The days when I was underwing
Were left far behind
When the light had called me
I had made up my mind

I was Icarus but my winds never melted

II) CLIPPED WINGS

Throw me down from these heavens
Let me plummet to the deep blue sea
My life as a god
Is not the way I wanted it to be
My views of hope have been lost
Liberations of soul are no more
Let me back to the labyrinth
For I no longer want to soar...
Immortality
I never meant to reign on high
Immorality
All I ever wanted to do was to fly
Oh mortality
Your ties long to bound me again
Massed morality
I won't believe in godhood's reign

The burning heart of my youth
No longer beats in my tight chest
My appetite for freedom
Isn't quite so easy to digest

Forfeit my wings
For better things
I am Icarus
Please untie my strings

The sun's not high enough
But what's beyond it just can't be attained
There's more to see
Past where Olympian gods have ever reigned
Bound by righteousness
I'll never be allowed to roam
If I cannot strive
I might as well plunge down to my home

Immortality
I never meant to reign on high
Immorality
All I ever wanted was to fly
Oh mortality
Your ties long to bound me again
Massed morality
I won't believe in godhood's reign

Forfeit my wings
For better things
I am Icarus
Please untie my strings

I am Icarus and my wings should have melted

III) WINGED ASCENT

I've been here and I've been there
On this earth I've been everywhere
To the North, the South, the East, the West

A wingless traveller with no rest
And I've found myself looking
At a time I knew before
Longing for a new way
Another future in store
I'd seen the earth from so far away
I though I might have been blind
But now I know it's the same land
I once had left far behind

What we see
Isn't always what we're looking for
Implore
Explore
Be more

When I look back in retrospect
I see one thing I can't affect
And my forlorn destiny
Will forever beckon me
Man is bound on Earth to die
But for me I'd rather fly
Seek out other better things
And don my tender waxen wings

On a warm and windy night
I'll make my eternal flight
Beyond the sun, beyond the moon
Beyond this solar system's boon
Beyond the Earth and its terrain
Beyond the heavens – so insane

I am Icarus and I shall fly beyond this plane
What we see isn't what we're looking for
Implore
Explore
Be more
What we do
Isn't always what has been programmed in
Win
Begin
It's not a sin

I may never reach my goal
My lunacy
Might take its toll
But if perchance I ever die
At least I had the will to try

I am Icarus and I shall fly beyond this plane.

DAMIAN SHAW
Icarus Bakes

It bothers me that Icarus
May have baked a casserole.

He surely used ingredients,
And took it out in time...
But then he ate the whole thing up
And threw his life away.

I do not know how good it was,
Or what it tasted like.

STEPHEN SPENDER
Icarus

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, sling 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.

W. F. M. STEWART
Icarus

(for Noel)

I write not knowing whether
Icarus lives or is dead
If the sun has melted the wax the wax
Or the gunfire Brueghel's earth:
Death Death Death
In the Mediterranean basin
And his crest was a light blue wingy horse
On a mulberry mulberry flag.

On the Oxford Bypass
In a powerful car
Crisp, crisp in command of men,
With my braided blouse
And sharp peaked cap,
And weaving up the road to Wales
The proud young despatch riders jockey the column
Going to practice killing laughing.

Who left his younger brother
In the deep-gabled house
And the garden Tennysonian
All moonlight grace.

O who will come on a trip to Jerusalem
From the pub still called The Trip to Jerusalem
In English Nottingham?
No, not for justice, right, or democracy,
But to follow the crusaders their king?

Beyond the file of poplars the still lake
Waits in silence for the whispering canoe
That Hugh built with Michael; you recollect
Involuntarily one whispers, out at night,
And paddled round the islets all night long
Until the morning came in a white mist.

'It is curious,' the commentator said
at the departure of the Crusade,
'That I see no king only
An empty suit of armour on a horse,
The visor open and no face.'

O Icarus, the air is thin
And you may not walk on light,
Surely you should have known
Why you would tempt the sun,
Why this blue-pinioned horse
And fealty to the outline king.

DOUG TANOURY
Icarus Poems

August

Late on these August nights,
I sit on my front porch
Unable to sleep,
And watch the stars,
But mostly I watch
The wind in the trees.

The is Elm a few doors down
That has branched out
Around the street lamp
So that the leaves glow
Translucent green in the night.
The wind moving branches
And leaves making it look
Like a carved jade sculpture
Come to life.

And I think that this has been
The summer of cut jade,
I have never seen grass so deeply green,
Or trees more ornate in their foliage,
And the sky has never been painted in
Finer shades of skyborn blues.
And I think too,
That this is what Icarus saw
And felt just before...
So if my wings fail now,
Let me fall, for I have kissed the sky
As if it were a holy icon
And filled my lungs with the
Pure whiteness of clouds, so
If I fall there will be no splash,
No sound except a sigh lifted
Airborn by the waves.

Flight

We all know
I want to super glue feathers
To my arms and make an Icarus-
Like escape, leave my old earth-
Bound problems and test my wings
On the warm air of a June morning,
To fly up and down the street
Just above the treetops, until the
Neighbor women come to their doors
Looking out, looking up, shielding
Their eyes and squinting to see
Me set against the sun, white winged
And naked, spiraling upward,
Climbing until I am one small dot
Winking out of the sky, swallowed
In a deep blue sky.

My ears filled with the wind,
My eyes half closed against the
Rush of air as I rise to
Discover what we all know,
Touch its face and wrap my arms
Around its neck, up where the
Velcro backs of clouds
Meet the fabric of sky.

Wings Of Icarus

Was it as Williams said
And Brueghel painted,
Icarus with

Wings that worked too well
Flying high over
A farmer

In the field, sweating
Behind his
Plough,

Never looking up to see
The flight of wax
And

Feather wings, never
Getting a chance
To laugh,

But a man, head bent
In practical pursuit.
Icarus

Looking down on him
Behind his plough
Far below

Smiling at slow progress
Across the field,
A trail

Of turned up earth, a
Thin line seen from
Great height

A single scene that let
Icarus fall happily to
The sea.

Poem in opposition
To Del Corey's elaboration
Of Doug Tanoury's reaction
to William Carlos William's
Depiction of Brueghel's
Rendition of Appollodorous'
Retelling of Ovid's variation
Of Virgil's description of
Hesiod's account of Icarus
In flight.

Icarus running across a field,
Wings extended to the sea breeze
Whistling in his ears, feet
Sinking slightly with each stride
Into soil softened by spring,
As wind catches wings and
Slowly lifts. Footprints trailing
To the center of the field
Abruptly stop, magically vanish.

Green covers the eastern hills.
To the west the sea colors the
Horizon pale hues of blue and
Green beneath white clouds,
As a farmer plodding slowly
Across his field stops behind his
Plow to wipe sweat from his face
And neck, turning up clods of soft
Black soil, breathing the smell
Of moist earth and grasses come
Alive.

In the distance, a splash goes unseen,
A dolphin riding upright on its tail,
Dancing on the polished blue topaz
Surface of the sea, nose pointed skyward,
Eyes shut, offering a mouthful of
Feathers to the sun.

Icarus Undaunted

I want to fly
With feathered and waxen
Wings, to escape from
My escape gone awry,
To rise so high above
The common and mundane
That I lose sight of the earth
And see only a thick covering
Of clouds far below.
I want these home-made wings
To uplift me to ethereal reaches,
Until my terrestrial life
Left behind and earthbound
Fades into nothing
Like the thin mauve line
That is the horizon and
Separates the light blue sky

From the light blue sky.
I want to barrel roll, unseen, in the jetstream,
Speeding blindly into clouds,
The wind cheering in my ears,
Pushing my eyes shut
In the onrush,
Up, up, in graceful spirals up,
Up where the only smell
That hangs in the air
Is the breath of God.

Icarus In Winter

I want to take a running start
Stretching out my arms and like
A white winged Icarus be uplifted

My footprints in the snow stop
Midstride and vanish at the spot
Where my feet become airborne.

Raising my legs arms outstretched
Rising into the chilling air of a
Sunday afternoon in February.

Throwing back my head, opening
My mouth and closing my eyes
Against the force of speeding wind

As I race white wings swept back
Slightly into the wind as I streak
Into dark clouds purple with snow

And in the gloomy interior of winter
Clouds ice on my lashes seal my eyes
Shut to the darkened swirling mists

Were it not for the cloud cover and
My eyes frozen shut I could see God's
Face clear and unhidden this moment

Icarus Upward

I want to stretch out my arms
Like Icarus wings and rise up
Into heaven's unstained blue

I want to glide gently in long
Slow spirals up and up and up
Until my world shrinks below

And all my troubles become
Little and hard to see from
Greater and greater height

Where the air is thinly cold and
I pass through clouds emerging
Again in bright sunlight above them

To spin, role and tumble above
All eyes in lone and solitary
Sweeping rising lifting motion

Head bowed against the wind
In solar benediction and divine
Highest homage speeding upward

To brush the upper lip, tickle the
Nostrils and touch the cheek of
That which lifts me mercifully up

TONY ULLYATT
The Unfallen Birdman

When I fly like Icarus
the sun fails me

the supple wax never melts
the feathers work

higher I rise and higher
toward heaven

the air always amiable
sympathetic

even though I scorch and burn
I never fall

only darkness compels me
to earth again

with my tender flesh destroyed
my soul remains

my solitary asset
I am appalled

no one tries to possess it
save or heal it

in ears deafened by the wind
I always hear

the relentless malice of
a smoky laugh

haunting me until I fly
and burn again

TONY ULLYATT
The Icarus beetle

(for Gisela)

Last night, I was sitting typing
when this brown beetle landed
on my hand; I did not want it
to die, least of all in the alien
territory of our flat. I needed
to show it some compassion:

I opened the window, and let it go.
It made no attempt to fly, falling
as if it had no wings – like Icarus -
the eight stories to the concrete.
I'm not sure which of us is the most
stupid - but the beetle made me
wonder what I thought I was doing
and who I, momentarily, had become.

TONY ULLYATT
The Boy Who Would Be Icarus

He learnt the story
from his father, a professor
who knew more about mythology
than aeronautical engineering.

Missing only feathers and wax
he plunged like a clumsy swallow
from the top board;
it would have been nice
had the swimming-pool not been
almost drained at the time.

Recuperating
in the orthopaedic ward,
he understood the importance
of acquiring wings, or growing
feathers. But an exclusive diet
of chicken food and bird seed
failed to produce anything
more than massive amounts
of gas – but not enough
to propel a flight.

He became a regular
at orthopaedics.

The problem, he read somewhere,
was excessive bone density.
He began drilling holes
into his limbs to suck out
the weighty marrow
but the project stopped
through insufficient funding
for painkillers.

Now confined to a special bed,
his arms and legs restrained
with just the sort of straps
needed to attach wings,
he stares through barred windows
at the empty, empty sky.

Occasionally, a bird smashes
into the window-pane. That
makes him smile: to know just
how close he had come.

PHILIP WHALEN
Brueghel: The Fall of Icarus

Beyond what figure will you refuse to go?
Beyond that one which stands
unseen
behind the grille

Let us proceed in some other direction, sixteen
pages to learn
It is the wrong direction

Lost down

air sand glass
breeze

Strayed and stolen away away
Where's the edge
Where are the neiges d'antan

you bet.

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SUMMARY

The myth of Daedalus and Icarus has always seemed such a simple story: a cautionary tale about disobedience and hubris. The fallacy of that presumption has resulted in this dissertation.

The research question took an equally simple form: What does the myth of Daedalus and Icarus "mean"? Such a question presumes that there is a definitive "original" version of the myth. This turned out not to be the case. As a result, three subordinate research questions emerged: (a) how might the myth be understood if different versions of it existed?, (b) what form might these differing variants take?, and (c) what broader, connotative meanings might the myth possess?

In attempting to answer the main research question and its corollaries, the dissertation has a number of purposes, the first of which is to try to define what we mean when we talk or write about myth. While some of the major debates are touched upon, Chapter 1 pretends to be little more than an introduction to a vast and amorphous topic. Some of the theoretical matters underpinning this research are also dealt with here.

The second purpose is to offer a critical reading of Melville's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This is the focus of Chapter 2. However, what we understand and perceive about the myth, its main characters, and what the mythic events "mean" create presuppositions and presumptions that impinge on our understanding of its meaning/s. Consequently, the second chapter begins with an overview of the inter-relationships of the major characters involved in the myth and those tales associated with Minos and Crete. Chapter 3 may be considered almost as an adjunct to the first two. It presents several of versions and variants of the Icarus myth. Most of these alternatives affect the way his premature demise is perceived and its significance or meaning understood.

The dissertation's third purpose is to study how a number of poets from America, Britain, and South Africa have made use of various aspects of the myth to create poems that serve as "interpretations" or variants of the myth. Six poems comprise the subject of Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 has a narrower focus, given over, as it is, to an examination of how three major English-speaking poets have used one of Brueghel's paintings of the myth in various ways to produce poems about, or related to, the subject of Icarus. To this end, the chapter opens with a discussion of Brueghel's work as well as some earlier depictions of the myth.

Chapter 6 explores several broader connotative meanings of the myth. It explores "what else" the myth could mean. A brief opening discussion of denotative and connotative meaning leads to a range of reflections on such matters as exile, flight, the rebel and conformity, and the father/son relationship among others. The various sections of the chapter are intended to initiate, even provoke discussion and debate about the myth's meaning; it offers nothing that should be construed as either comprehensive or definitive.

Chapter 7 contains a collection of more than two dozen poems (in English) inspired in some way by the Icarian myth. It goes without saying that many more texts exist in German, French, and Spanish, to say nothing of examples in Eastern European languages. The texts included here provide nothing more than a soupçon of the range and diversity of responses the myth has provoked. Their inclusion should not be taken as any sort of benchmark for creative quality or otherwise.

The dissertation concludes with a list of references.