

Literature and Other Arts; A study of three works, namely, Pieter Breughel's painting titled Landscape with the Fall of Icarus (c.1560), a Poem titled "Musee des Beaux Arts"(1936) by W. H. Auden, and a poem titled "Landscape with the fall of Icarus" (1960) by William Carlos Williams

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Abstract: Art is literature and vice versa. Art mediates communication between different people through the medium of the artwork. It can be conveyed through words, strokes of paint, or lines. Thus anything that gives an emotional or an intellectual appeal to an audience or a viewer can be considered an art. Thus every artwork provides allusions to the vast plethora of experiences centered on human life, whereby viewers will view and respond differently based on their experiences. Art and literature have always been related to each other as a source of narrative meant for communication and expression. Several great works of art have inspired literature and vice versa. Art and literature have encompassed the liberal arts and humanities on their horizon, encouraging one another.

"How

Everything turns away

Quite leisurely from the disaster".

(Auden, Musee des Beaux Arts, 2)

"Unsignificantly

off the coast

there was

a splash quite unnoticed".

(Williams, Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, 5)

I. Introduction

Art is abstract, and its horizon of freedom is a broad area where the interpretation of every art form is beyond the constraints of time and space in which it is created. The creation of work might influence the subjective viewpoint of the creator, which is the cumulative result of his life experiences. Also, artworks are featured by the socio-cultural background in which the creator is located. However, the response of the viewers will vary depending on their perspectives. An artist enjoys the freedom to create an artwork of his choice irrespective of the background to which he belongs. Similarly, the viewer is pleased to bend things that everyone witnesses to be a straight line. The concept of understanding takes multiple dimensions depending on the viewer who views the artwork.

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to the vast plethora of experiences centered on human life, whereby viewers will view and respond differently based on their experiences. Art and literature have always been related to each other as a source of narrative meant for communication and expression. Several great works of art have inspired literature and vice versa. Art and literature have encompassed the liberal arts and humanities on their horizon, encouraging one another.

This paper tries to substantiate the relationship between literature and arts through three different works, namely Pieter Breughel's painting titled Landscape with the Fall of Icarus (c.1560), a Poem titled "Musee des Beaux Arts" (1936) by W. H. Auden and poem titled "Landscape with the fall of Icarus" (1960) by William Carlos Williams. This paper will highlight how a particular theme is expressed using two different communication mediums, i.e., via strokes of paint and words.

All three works have their foundation in the Greek mythological character Icarus. Icarus is the son of the master craftsman Daedalus, the labyrinth's founder. Both the father and the son attempt to escape from the hands of Crete, and thus Daedalus using his power, prepares wings using wax. Both of them manage to escape from the clutches of Crete. However, Icarus decides to fly high despite the advice given by his father not to fly so high near the sun as its heat can melt the wax. However, Icarus flies high, ignoring his father's advice, and thus Icarus has to pay the price for his ignorance, and he dies drowning in the sea. The works mentioned above rely on this basic story of Icarus and try to tell the universal human nature through different modes of language.

II. Analyzing Landscape with the Fall of Icarus by Pieter Breughel, The Elder

The painting titled Landscape with the fall of Icarus is attributed to Pieter Breughel, the Elder, and is supposed to have been painted in the 1560s. According to reports, it is a painting in oil on canvas measuring 73.5 by 112 cm and is currently located in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels.

The painting features the fall of Icarus, the character from Greek mythology who had to pay the price of not obeying his father's advice. The image focuses on the landscape surrounding the drowning of Icarus, and thus the picture is portrayed with attention given to minute details regarding the surroundings. It can be assumed from the painting that the time of the year is spring, and people are busy with their activities needed for livelihood. While a farmer is seen herding his cattle, another man is fishing by the side of the sea. The trees are painted in an impressive dark green color, and the tremendous cozy attitude of the situation is further depicted through the horse who carelessly walks on the road. A bird is painted on the branches of a tree, watching the events around it.

Moreover, a ship with a crew on board is painted, and they are helplessly looking at Icarus, who is drowning nearby. It is worth noting that everyone present there is in a position where they can easily see the drowning Icarus, and they could have helped him. Nevertheless, then, everyone acts indifferent to the suffering of Icarus, and this is beautifully brought out in the painting. Everyone wishes to immerse themselves in their activities without lending a hand to help Icarus. Moreover, the artist has painted just the drowning legs of Icarus, and the rest of the attention is

given to the dynamic landscape with lush green trees and bushes around.

The painting can be considered a conglomeration of various colors best mixed to create an accurate landscape picture. The use of dark, impressive green in painting the sea and the trees gives a touch of prosperity and greenery to the whole situation. Thus, by showing the indifference of other characters in the painting, the artist has tried to show the universal nature of humanity where they show selfish, self-centered attitudes and disregard toward others' suffering. Also, the traditional moral associated with Icarus's downfall is the warning against excessive ambitions. The painting can be considered an attack on the generally accepted notion of social, cooperative, and helpful human nature. The artist tries to portray life's humble realities through his painting genuinely.

III. Analyzing "Musee Des Beaux Arts" By W.H. Auden

The poem "Musee des Beaux Arts" was written by W. H. Auden in 1938 after visiting the Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels. Thus, the poem directly relates to Breughel's painting that depicts the fall of Icarus. The poem is divided into two sections. Wherein the first section, the poet mentions the indifference prevalent among people in his society concerning two paintings done by "Old Masters," namely, "The census at Bethlehem" by Breughel the Elder and "The massacre of the Innocents" by Breughel the Younger.

The poem begins with the phrase "Old Masters," representing popularly acclaimed ancient artists keen on expressing genuine human emotions meant to sympathize and empathize with each other. The poet details through their

paintings that humans have always been greedy and selfish and never cared about or expressed concern about other fellow beings. Auden mentions Breughel the Elder's 'The census at Bethlehem,' which paints Joseph and Mary after completing their journey to Bethlehem. The poet expresses those scenes by describing the daily monotonous activities done by fellow beings like "eating," "opening a window," or "walking daily along." Further, he adds that, while there are elders who anxiously wait for the birth of Christ, there are younger people who are ignorant of such events of importance. Then he details the indifference meted out to the victims by the society who merely watches it from the outside. This is done through the description of Breughel the Younger's 'The massacre of innocents,' which is mentioned in the poem by depicting "dogs go on with their doggy life" and "the/torturer's horse/scratches it its innocent behind on a tree." Here the indifference is depicted amidst the brutal killings made by the aging King Herod, who saw Jesus's birth as a threat to his power.

The second section of the poem deals with Breughel's painting, which depicts the drowning of Icarus. The poem describes the landscape with the fall of Icarus, where everybody present in the scene is indifferent to the sufferings of Icarus. The poet first details a farmer who may/may not have heard the splash Icarus fell into the sea and the "forsaken cry" but continues to plow the field. He then describes the sun that continues to shine even after causing Icarus's death. Then he points out a ship that must have seen Icarus falling yet continues with their journey. Moreover, the poet describes Icarus's death as a disaster and something unique. Further, their use of words Auden suggests that the fate of Icarus was inevitable and that the

society is trained to be indifferent over time, specifically adding that even those who recognize human indifference to suffering cannot escape that indifference.

The use of lucid words and end rhyme scheme throughout the poem has established the theme where the tradition is suggested with a twist, and the reality is stretched and loosened to an extent. Further, the conversational tone of the speaker is made clear through the use of long clauses with clearly placed punctuations. The poet writes the poem so that it can be considered a long sentence told with utmost sincerity that it concludes with a period only in the last line of the poem. Moreover, commas, colons, and semicolons play a crucial role in developing the argument throughout the poem. The poet has also used the technique of enjambment, which ensures a smooth flow from one line to another.

IV. Analyzing “Landscape With The Fall Of Icarus” By William Carlos Williams

The second poem "Landscape with the fall of Icarus" written by the poet William Carlos Williams in 1960, also deals with Breughel's painting. It is an ekphrastic poem written solely describing the artwork done by Breughel. The picture features the image of drowning Icarus, whose body had half submerged in water, waving his hands for help amidst the background of springtime.

In the poem, William Carlos Williams paints the drowning of Icarus in words. The poem is set into six short stanzas in the terse form of writing. The poem is told in the form of a short story where human activities around Icarus are described in minute details. The poet sets the poem in the springtime, the time of prosperity when the farmers are busy plowing their fields in the hope of profit.

The poet further hints at the hypocritical nature of sunlight, where it helps the farmers cultivate their crops, leading to Icarus's death by melting his wax wings. The gravity of Icarus drowning in the sea as witnessed by everyone around is described using the words "insignificantly/off the coast/there was/a splash quite unnoticed/this was/Icarus drowning." Thus the poet says that no one was aware of such suffering happening besides them.

The poet has mentioned society's indifference by using short lines, thereby signifying the short time people use to show concern for fellow beings. The poem gives a direct message regarding the drowning of Icarus compared to Auden's poetry. The poem describes Breughel's painting and deals with a standard issue, i.e., Fall of Man. The poet has suited the syntax and language of the poem to suit the situation. The deliberate lack of punctuation marks throughout the poem clarifies the delivered message.

The poem details the fall of humanity, which signals degrading human values and the essence of human life. It shows the dependent helpless nature of human beings irrespective of the number of people surrounding every being. The poem can be considered an iconic piece of literature that aims to satirize the generally accepted notion of spring, human life, and nature. In this poem, man is portrayed as individualistic, selfish, and self-centered who is indifferent to the concerns of others in the world of competitions. The poet maintains a neutral stand regarding the fall of Icarus, just like the people around Icarus witness his death.

All three works use different choices of words and colors to communicate a specific theme. While

Auden expresses the indifference in the society by use of long continuous sentences finally culminating in a period in the last sentence, Williams expresses it by using short sentences and small stanzas. While the former represents the monotonous nature of such grave happenings in everyday life that go unnoticed, the latter represents the brief period spent by people to show empathy or sympathy to the suffering fellow beings. Whereas, in the case of the painting by Breughel, he depicts the universal truth about human nature as selfish, greedy, and individualistic, which is devoid of the socially acceptable moral order, kindness, and cooperation between individuals using specific colors and shapes? Breughel made use of dark colors to depict the prosperity of the landscape. Thus he details the indifference meted out to others by fellow beings irrespective of their social, cultural, and economic conditions.

In analyzing a particular set of artworks, the relation between depiction, history, and ideology is exposed. It exposes the platform for deriving a self-definition regarding the artwork. It's worth noting that self-definitions are social, political, and personal. Thus in achieving a radical reorganization of thinking, such works promote a critical, self-aware, and self-questioning stance that is political and aesthetic. As mentioned earlier, every piece is accumulative of the socio-cultural backgrounds of the creator. However, it depends on the reader's perspective to decipher its meaning.

Keeping aside the poetic and artistic techniques used in the discussed works of art, it is to be noted that these works remain truthful and accurate even after years of their composition. Moreover, all the three works discussed are written over a period

that differs from each other by at least fifty years. While Breughel represents the Renaissance period, Auden and William Carlos Williams represent the Modern age of representation. In the current political scenario, many instances are available that depict the selfish indifferent attitude of human beings. It is evident in their use of nature and their attitude towards fellow beings. In this age of rapid globalization, countries have come close to each other as small global villages. However, competition in the market economy has led to the negligence of emotions and care that should be meted out to other individuals. Machines have taken the place of humans with the rise of industrialization, and nature has been destroyed to satisfy the greed and selfishness of human beings.

Moreover, the age has witnessed several wars and rebellions where millions were put to death, disregarding their personal choice about whether to live or not. Millions were left homeless and orphaned and left to die of poverty and hunger. Indifference among individuals in society poses the greatest danger of all time to humankind, and it is this universal truth that is represented in the works mentioned above.

The poem can also be interpreted to form traditional moral advice given by elders to younger ones regarding the faults of being over ambitious. It can also mean covering the advice provided by ancestors to the future generations regarding the need to care and be aware of the need to hear advice which is often the fruit of experiences in life.

In this age of science, a different interpretation attributed to the poem is regarding the pros and cons of scientific inventions. The invention of wax wings

enabled them to escape from King Crete, and it is the same thing that led to the death of Icarus. While Icarus fell and drowned in the sea, other folks of the village are seen busy with their daily activities, mainly agriculture. Thus, the poem can also be interpreted to represent the need to have reasonable use of scientific inventions.

V. Conclusion

All three mentioned works convey a theme that is integral and accurate to the current society even though it was written years ago. However, these works don't need to be confined only to the given three interpretations. It can have a plethora of meanings embedded in it, and every viewer or reader can have a performance of their own regarding these artworks. Be it through words or painting, the themes acquire an aesthetic sense of understanding in the viewer's minds depending on their socio-cultural background and their inherent emotional and intellectual qualities. All the three works under discussion have brought out the universal nature of human beings by divergent means of color and words,

picturing Icarus from a specific period while letting the doors open for its interpretation, defying the limits of time and space in which the work was created.

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