

7-3-2012

Ars Audax: The Myth of the Flight of Icarus and Its Reception Since Antiquity

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Ars Audax: The Myth of the Flight of Icarus and Its
Reception since Antiquity

by

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B.A., Classical Studies, University of New Mexico, 2009

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

May 2012

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents who taught me the value of hard work and that whatever happens, the best response is to be who I am.

To all those who have come before and to all those who will come after.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I heartily acknowledge the members of my committee, whose patience, advice, and assistance throughout this long process enabled me to do more than I thought possible. To Professor Carmen Nocentelli, who taught me the value of effectively expressing my own ideas and experience. To Professor Lorenzo Garcia, who showed me how to use the tools of the trade. To my advisor and mentor, Professor Monica Cyrino, who challenged me to realize my potential and then guided me along the way. Thank you all: this thesis would not be what it is today without your encouragement and support.

To my *Cohors Classica*—Trigg Settle, Caley McGuill, Israel McMullin, Scott Barnard, Dan Bellum—thank you for your solidarity. Our time together has been an invaluable resource for this project.

To my family: Jay Wells, Laurie Wells, Andy, and Danny, thank you for listening, talking, and at times simply being.

Thanks to Maggie and Juan for helping me find the words.

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ABSTRACT

When considering the reception of Icarus, scholars traditionally have not taken into account the focalizing character. In this thesis I argue that there are two divergent threads of reception for the Icarus myth, stemming from the versions in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and *Metamorphoses* and in Horace's *Odes*. I demonstrate that the manner in which each author employs Icarus — whether he is the object of focalization or the subject of focalization — and the manner in which each author employs the concept of *audacia* (“daring”) and makes use of sailing metaphors constitute distinct reception threads. I then trace these threads of reception through a selection of poetry, visual art, and music from the Early Modern era to the twenty-first century, and conclude that the narratological and linguistic nuances used by Ovid and Horace are traceable in both literature and art, and that each reception is responding to one ancient telling more than the other.

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Introduction

“The world that birthed that story is long gone, all its people are dead, but it continues to touch the present and future because someone cared enough about that world to keep it. To put it in words. To remember it.”
—Isaac Marion, *Warm Bodies*, 139

“Whether we go to it as pilgrims or as vandals, the Classical world is still *there* – a past that is still present, as landmark, haven, or point of departure.”
—Nigel Spivey and Michael Squire,
Panorama of the Classical World, 331

My purpose in writing this thesis is to investigate the representation of Icarus in ancient literature and its receptions. The primary concern of this project is the reception of Icarus as represented by Ovid and Horace. While scholars usually treat the reception of the Icarus myth as coming from a single source, I argue that each of these poets is responsible for what I call a “reception thread,” meaning that there are two different traditions of the Icarus myth which develop from these authors. The divergence of these two trends depends on the focalization each author uses within his narrative. These authors use the same story to differing ends, and the two threads of reception appear to follow almost exclusively from one author or the other.

Previously, scholars have considered the reception of the Icarus myth as one body of representations stemming primarily from Ovid. Scholars such as Niall Rudd, Karl Kilinski, and John H. Turner, who offer brilliant interpretations of the reception of this myth, nevertheless treat their findings as belonging to a single path of reception. However, treating the representations of Icarus as though they originate from the influence of a single author is problematic. This view does not take into account the

diverse uses of the character Icarus: some artists merely tell the story of Daedalus and Icarus, while others compare themselves directly with Icarus. There are also certain scholars who would take certain works out of the reception thread, such as Lycke de Vries, who claims that Pieter Bruegel's *Landscape* is not a reception from Ovid's famous accounts, but belongs to another tradition entirely. As I argue in this thesis, focalization is the answer to the question of determining a clear trajectory for the threads of reception concerning the Icarus myth.

I propose that there are two possible threads of reception for the Icarus myth: one which stems from Ovid's multiple uses and represents Icarus as the object of the gaze; and the other which derives from Horace and represents Icarus as the subject of the gaze and associates him with the poet or artist directly. I begin by developing a theoretical model for analyzing the use of perspective in literary and visual representations of the same story, drawing upon the theory of narratology and using the methodology and terms of Gérard Genette, Mieke Bal, and Irene de Jong. But I diverge from these models, not only in that I compare brief selections of texts, but also because I implement the terms for the comparison across different creative media. A key term of this analysis is Genette's coinage of the term *focalization*, or the concept of "who sees" as represented by the use of specific diction within a narrative.¹ I also apply this framework to the two reception threads of the Icarus myth from Ovid and Horace to delineate clearly the receptions of the myth belonging to Ovid's tradition and Horace's tradition, respectively. I determine how each ancient author represents his story through the focalization of specific characters.

In my first chapter, I root this theoretical framework in the ancient tradition by comparing the specific diction in Ovid's telling of the Icarus myth in the *Ars Amatoria*

¹ Genette 1980: 188-189.

with that in his *Metamorphoses*, as well as with the visual language of Pieter Bruegel's painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (ca. 1558), and the literary language of the twentieth-century poets inspired by this thread of reception. My intention is to show how specific features of the ancient narrative, particularly who focalizes or sees, can be traced in later iterations of the myth, in order to develop a useful method for tracing the reception of narrative features that accompany a specific version of the myth. Two features, which are indicative of the overall flight myth tradition in which both ancient authors are working, include modifying language, especially using the concept of *audacia* ("daring") to describe Icarus' flight, and metaphorical language, in the common comparison between sailing and flying.

In the second chapter, I employ the same framework to analyze Horace's various uses of the myth (*Odes* 1.3, 4.2, 2.20) and the reception of his version, primarily exhibited in *Odes* 2.20, by Early Modern poets, such as Jacopo Sannazaro, Philippe Desportes, and Lope de Vega, as well as later lyricists such as Kenny Livgren, and Brett Dennen. I argue in this chapter that the notion of reception is a complex structure involving the artist's initial experience with the myth, whether it occurs from the source of the thread of reception or a subsequent iteration, as well as his response to that encounter and his participation in the particular thread of reception, i.e. via Ovid or Horace. As in Ovid's thread of reception, both the language describing Icarus – here he is the focalizer – as *audax* ("daring") and the metaphor of flying as it relates to nautical travel persists in Horace's thread. But since Icarus is the focalizer, I also elucidate how Horace describes the *audacia* ("daring") exhibited by the Icarus character not like Ovid, as strictly negative. Horace distinguishes between an appropriate *audacia* and an

inappropriate *audacia*. Finally, I argue that the Icarus myth as told by Ovid and Horace created divergent threads of reception, and that determining the reception of a particular rendering of this myth can be achieved by following a trajectory of specific literary and visual language, particularly the objectivity or subjectivity of the character Icarus.

In order to understand the context in which the Augustan authors are working and the linguistic choices they make which have an important impact on the reception of their respective narratives, it is important to consider the surviving Greek literary sources and visual representations with which they were likely familiar. Greek vases contain the earliest surviving accounts of the Icarus myth, and the first literary instances of this myth occur in Greek sources. Indeed the visual accounts of this myth are very fragmentary and few in number, possibly five according to J. D. Beazley.² He provides a selection of the surviving accounts of the Icarus myth in which a Daedalus figure does not appear in every scene. According to Beazley's article, entitled "Icarus," the earliest of these pottery depictions originates in the sixth century BC. Moreover, Beazley makes a compelling argument about a red-figure *lekythos* from the fifth century BC. Along with Icarus, this particular scene includes, as noted by both Beazley and E. P. Warren,³ a bird flying downwards, which Beazley claims to be a directional indicator. The bird, which is above the sinking Icarus figure, flies downward in the direction of the boy pointing with its beak. These examples of vases, both fragmentary and whole, provide an indication of the kind of visual representations that may have been readily available to the poets.

It is likely that Ovid and Horace received this myth through the Greek tradition by means of both visual and literary media. Surviving literary accounts of the flight from

² Beazley 1927: 222-224. These all contain winged figures or are labeled with the name "Ikaros."

³ Beazley 1927: 231 gives credit to Warren for proposing the idea that the figure is Icarus and makes his own argument for this case.

Crete myth are few in number, and those surviving texts give an interesting variety of accounts. The first and very brief description of the flight myth from Crete is contained in the late fourth-century work of Palaephatus, *De Incredilibus* (or *Περὶ Ἀπιστῶν*). The main concern of this author is a rationalizing take on the story, according to Timothy Gantz.⁴ Instead of a literal flight by Daedalus and Icarus, Palaephatus describes their escape in very plausible terms; the title of his text certainly suggests that his goal is giving an explanation for unbelievable albeit generally well-known myths. At first he sets up, with φασὶν “they say,” the common myth that Δαίδαλος δὲ ποιήσας πτέρυγας ἀμφοτέροις προσθετάς, ἐξέπτη μετὰ τοῦ Ἰκάρου (“...and Daedalus having made wings fitted to both of them, flew away with Icarus”).⁵ Palaephatus indicates his immediate skepticism: νοῆσαι δὲ ἄνθρωπον πετόμενον, ἀμήχανον, καὶ ταῦτα πτέρυγας ἔχοντα προσθετάς (“but to imagine a man flying is impossible — and these things have attached wings”). He then allows for a more reasonable explanation for the flight from Crete — not a literal act of flying by the use of wings, but an escape by boat, an option which critics several centuries later will also exploit: Δαίδαλος ὢν ἐν τῇ εἰρκτῇ, καθεὶς ἑαυτὸν διὰ θυρίδος καὶ τὸν υἱὸν κατασπάσας, σκαφίδι ἐμβάς, ἀπήει (“Daedalus being in prison, he let himself down through a window and pulled down his son, boarded a skiff, and went away”). Palaephatus next gives an explanation for the more fantastically rendered version of the account: the skiff was moving quickly through the water on account of the ἀνέμου λάβρου καὶ φοροῦ ὄντος, πετόμενοι ἐφαίνοντο (“since the wind was blustering and favorable, they appeared to be flying”). Thus, an important feature of Palaephatus’

⁴ Gantz 1993: 274. Commentators who had a desire to rationalize this myth were still in fashion well into the fourteenth century, as noted by Rudd 1988: 37.

⁵ Palaephatus, *De Incredilibus*, 12.2-4. All translations in the introduction are my own.

account is that he changes the means of escape. Palaephatus describes a ship that only appears to be flying, compared to the traditional versions of the myth: that the father and son use wings.

Palaephatus uses metaphorical language in order to compare the dangerous means of traveling by ship with flying, which humans are not supposed to be able to accomplish. Palaephatus interprets the story of Icarus' flight as a mistake based on the metaphor of ships flying. He also describes the idea of "being seen" in his version: *πετόμενοι ἐφάινοντο* ("they appeared to be flying"). There is a certain level of focalization in this passage, but the observers are left unidentified. Daedalus and Icarus are described in such a way as to lead the audience to believe that the narrator is also participating in the focalizer role. In his rationalizing account, Palaephatus continues to describe the fate of Icarus. He drowns in this account, just as in the more fantastic version, but his death is a result of the ship's capsizing (*περιτρέπονται*), rather than falling into the sea after losing his wings to the hot sun. Palaephatus goes on to say that Daedalus made it safely to land, and that the sea was given the name *Ikarion* as a result of Icarus' death, a common aetiological trope in later tales of the same myth. This rationalizing account indicates that the myth of Icarus' flight was established before Palaephatus, who was in turn working from an earlier tradition that was seeking to rationalize.

The second account, told by Strabo (ca. 64 BC-AD 24) in *The Geography*, mentions the myth very briefly in the more familiar and fantastic story. Strabo describes the scene in passing as a mere explanation for the name of the island Icaria and the

Ikarian sea.⁶ In this version, Daedalus simply must flee from Minos and Crete, and Strabo gives the standard myth-story of Daedalus building wax and feather wings for him and his son to use. He then relates the fall of Icarus: πεσεῖν ἐνθάδε, μὴ κρατήσαντα τοῦ δρόμου· μετεωρισθέντι γὰρ πρὸς τὸν ἥλιον ἐπὶ πλέον περιρρυῆναι τὰ πτερά, τακέντος τοῦ κηροῦ (“he fell there, because he did not control his course: the feathers slipped off from all around his wings because he had risen close to the sun and melted the wax”). Unlike Palaephatus, Strabo is unconcerned with a rationalizing explanation for the flight from Crete myth; he is content to use the fabulous myth to explain the name of a particular sea and island.

A third approach to the flight myth is found in *The Library of History* of Diodorus Siculus (60-30 BC), who claims that Daedalus and Icarus fled by boat, but also includes the fantastic account of Daedalus constructing wings from feathers and wax.⁷ Diodorus’ main authorial concern is to transmit mythologies just as he has heard the stories told, an approach to mythography that is not strictly rational as in Palaephatus, nor simply aetiological as in Strabo. It appears that, having heard this same story in two different renderings, he tells the story twice. Diodorus begins his story involving Daedalus by explaining why Daedalus was exiled from Athens, as well as why he fled from Crete, an important element of Ovid’s inclusion of the same story in both the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Metamorphoses*. According to Diodorus’ text, Daedalus fled Athens upon being charged with the murder of his sister’s son, Talos, who invents a saw and a kind of compass for drawing circles. In this account, Daedalus was jealous of his nephew’s skill, and as a result he killed him, Diodorus omits the manner by which Daedalus kills his nephew, and

⁶ Strabo, *The Geography*, XIV.1.19

⁷ Diodorus, *The Library of History*, IV.77.6, 8-9

Ovid later incorporates.⁸ After Daedalus enabled Pasiphae to conceive and give birth to the Minotaur, she helps both Daedalus and Icarus escape from Crete by giving him a ship (συνεργούσης τῆς Πασιφάης καὶ πλοῖον δούσης πρὸς τὸν ἔκπλου, “Pasiphae works together with him and gave him a boat for sailing away,” IV.77.5-6). The pair then entered a port, as disaster occurs: πρὸς ἦν τὸν Ἴκαρον παραβόλως ἀποβαίνοντα πεσεῖν εἰς θάλατταν καὶ τελευτῆσαι (“Icarus recklessly stepping down toward the island fell into the sea and died,” IV.77.6).

Yet Diodorus goes on to say there is another possibly ending (τινὲς δὲ μυθολογοῦσι “other people tell the myth,” IV.77.7), in which Daedalus does not use a boat for the escape: τὸν Δαίδαλον... κατασκευάσαι παραδόξως πτέρυγας πεφιλοτεχνημένας καὶ διὰ κηροῦ θαυμαστῶς ἡσκημένας (“Daedalus equipped wings having been lovingly put together by his art and fashioned marvelously with wax,” IV.77.8). While there is a certain “viewing” implied here in the term θαυμαστῶς, “with wonderment,” it is not clear “who sees,” just as in Palaephatus’ narrative. Diodorus also gives the reason for Icarus falling into the sea as διὰ τὴν νεότητα μετέωρον τὴν πτῆσιν ποιούμενον (“on account of youth, making his flight high in the air,” IV.77.9). Thus, the flight myth is not as simple as it first appears, and even when the Roman poets choose to represent this story as a fantastic myth, they do so by drawing on all of these approaches to the same story, and most notably by employing similar metaphorical language.

This selection of the earliest Greek written accounts suggests that these Greek authors were primarily concerned with rationalizing the flight myth. Daedalus and Icarus flee from Crete not in the familiar, waxed-wing equipped, literal flight from Crete, but

⁸ Diodorus, *The Library of History*, IV.76

simply as an act of fleeing by boat.⁹ While these Greek sources make allowances for the fantastic, they offer up accounts that involve a more rationalized telling of the flight from Crete. In these extant accounts of the Icarus myth, we can see that there are three common factors: the boy, the boat, and drowning as the manner of the boy's death, due to brashness or daring. In fact, the idea that Daedalus and Icarus may have used a ship in order to escape from Crete is a recurring theme common in the narratives of Ovid and Horace from which the two threads of reception will follow.

The defining characteristics of the Icarus myth provide a tradition that delineates into two separate threads of reception initiated by Ovid and Horace. Each poet uses common themes, such as descriptive and metaphorical language, as well as divergent tropes, such as different focalizing characters, as they participate in the overall narrative tradition of the Icarus myth. Two distinct threads of reception develop from the narratives told by Ovid and Horace, which then persist as later poets and authors adopt one or the other of these versions in their own representations of the myth.

⁹ Gantz 1993: 274-275 mentions various other accounts of these three general story types of Daedalus and Icarus fleeing Crete.

Chapter 1. The Flight and Fall of Icarus as Parergon: Icarus on the Periphery in Ovid and in Receptions of the Ovidian Flight Myth

“What moves those of genius, what inspires their work, is not new ideas, but their obsession with the idea that what has already been said is still not enough.”

—Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863)

“...Burn the land and boil the sea
You can't take the sky from me...”

—Joss Whedon, *The Ballad of Serenity* (2002)

Ovid's influence on later authors and artists concerned with the myth of Icarus' flight and fall is very apparent even to casual admirers of the myth. The degree to which this ancient storyteller has influenced the reception of the Icarus myth by authors and artists throughout the centuries is clear based on obvious cues in the story. But a more complete understanding of Ovidian influence on the adaptations of this myth can be gained by first comparing the specific diction in Ovid's telling of the Icarus myth in the *Ars Amatoria* and in his *Metamorphoses*. After an initial analysis of Ovid's poems, this chapter will take into account later receptions including the visual language of Pieter Bruegel's painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (ca. 1558) and the literary language of twentieth-century poets inspired by this thread of reception. The representations of Icarus in Bruegel, W. H. Auden, William Carlos Williams, and Anne Sexton use not only the specific story as told by Ovid as a starting point of reception, but also the theme beginning in Ovid's narrative: namely, the objectivity of Icarus in focalization and Ovid's metaphorical use of nautical language.

I. Ovid's Fascination with the Flight from Crete Myth

The first text in which we find Ovid incorporating the myth of Icarus is the *Ars Amatoria*. Written in the middle of his career, the *Ars Amatoria* consists of sage advice from a narrator, the *praeceptor amoris* (“instructor of love”), to the young lover. Ovid’s intentional use of this myth within the *Ars* is a matter of concern for many scholars. The author himself gives this explanation early in book 2: *magna paro, quas possit Amor remanere per artes,/ dicere, tam uasto peruagus orbe puer./ et leuis est et habet geminas, quibus auolet, alas;/ difficile est illis imposuisse modum* (“I am preparing great things, to say by which arts Amor can endure, the boy who wanders so much on the enormous earth. He is both fickle and he has twin wings, with which he flies away; it is a difficult thing to impose a limit upon them,” *Ars* 2.17-20).¹⁰ While it is strange that Ovid would use the story of failure for his ability to keep control of Amor, he does reinforce, and even strengthen, his claim by the end of the story: *non potuit Minos hominis compescere pinnas,/ ipse deum uolucrum detinuisse paro* (“Minos was not able to restrain the wings of a man, I myself am preparing to detain a flying god,” *Ars* 2.97-98).

In the *Metamorphoses* Ovid’s goal is to make a catalogue of mythological transformations as they were related from earlier Greek mythology. Yet in the middle of his text he incorporates a story that ends tragically, a common occurrence in the *Metamorphoses*; yet it is one that ends without a successful transformation, a feature unique to this story. The significance to Ovid of the flight from Crete, but particularly the fate of Icarus, is apparent not only because it recurs in multiple texts of this author, but also because the context in which he tells this story, particularly in the *Metamorphoses*,

¹⁰ This and all subsequent selections from the *Ars Amatoria* are taken from Kenney 1995. All translations are my own.

and the amount of text he devotes to it in two major works is unusual enough to merit an investigation. It is noteworthy that Ovid tells this story twice at length, and that the second of these tellings parallels the first remarkably in content, despite the use of different meters. The author's use of perspective within both renderings of the Icarus myth is crucial to the reception of the story in later narratives.

II. Ovid's Use of Perspective in the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Metamorphoses*

A. Focalization in Ovid's Icarus Narratives

One of the most interesting features of both the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Metamorphoses* is the fact that Ovid tells this story from specific yet varying perspectives. The idea of "who sees" or whose perspective becomes the lens for the experience of the audience is crucial to my analysis of Ovid and the reception thread of his work. Gérard Genette's work on focalization in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method*, first published in 1972,¹¹ informs terms and concepts useful for my analysis of the reception thread of Ovid's flight myth. According to Genette, focalization in narrative depends on which character perceives the action taking place within a text. There are three distinct types of focalization, with each type depending on the amount of information that is presented in a text. In *zero focalization*, the narrator says more than the focalizing character knows; *internal focalization* expresses the story in such a way that the narrator says the same amount of information that the focalizing character knows; and in *external focalization*, the narrator says less than the focalizing character knows.¹²

¹¹ In my discussion, I cite the 1980 translation of *Discours du récit* by Jane E. Lewin.

¹² Genette 1980: 188-189.

There are moments within the Icarus narratives of both the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Metamorphoses* that make use of each category of focalization. Although the three types of focalization are all implemented, the character who focalizes, or “sees,” is most often Daedalus in both narratives. In fact, the role of Icarus himself is diminished in Ovid’s incorporation of the flight myth from the *Ars Amatoria* to the *Metamorphoses*.

Mieke Bal’s theory of distinct levels within narrative is also essential to this analysis. She defines narrative as consisting of three elements: “text,” which is the particular object that an audience deals with directly; “story,” which is contained within the text; and “fabula,” a series of events and the material of the story.¹³ Bal discusses the subjectivity of the characters in these levels of narrative: “Focalizers, in the story, are the subjects of perception and interpretation. Actors, in the fabula, are the subjects of action.”¹⁴ The subjectivity of Icarus depends completely on his role as an actor in the fabula, and since he is never a focalizer in Ovid’s narratives, he is not a subject of perception and interpretation. As the object of focalization, his peripheral position in the narrative becomes an essential element in Ovid’s renditions of this myth, as well as in receptions of Ovid’s version. In these narratives, Daedalus focalizes the story most often, although there are minor characters who are allowed to assume secondary focalizer roles. In Irene De Jong’s theory, adapted from ideas taken from both Genette’s and Bal’s descriptions of narratological concepts, primary and secondary focalizers are central to the argument.¹⁵ But de Jong’s unique contribution to this discussion is readily apparent:

¹³ Bal 2009: 5-9.

¹⁴ Bal 2009: 12.

¹⁵ De Jong 2004: 42.

“Every narrative must have a narrator and a focalizer, whether they become ‘perceptible’ in a narrative or not.”¹⁶

Both of Ovid’s major accounts are told chiefly from the perspective of Daedalus as an internal focalizer, where the narrator tells the audience the same amount of information that the character Daedalus knows. This makes Daedalus the primary focalizer of the story: while there are other characters, including the narrator, who focalize, most of the information the audience receives comes from the focalization of Daedalus. Ovid begins the account succinctly in *Ars Amatoria* 2, where the audience is given both the problem and the solution of the story: *hospitis effugio praestruxerat omnia Minos; / audacem pinnis repperit ille uiam*, “Minos had obstructed all paths for the escape of his guest; but that man [sc. Daedalus] discovered a daring way with feathers” (*Ars* 2.21-22). Note how the narrator communicates the beginning of the flight myth in the *Ars Amatoria* through Daedalus as an internal focalizer, yet gives the audience the situation in which Daedalus finds himself without mentioning how the character feels about his predicament. Moreover, while Daedalus is focalizing the narrative in the *Ars Amatoria* – he addresses both Minos (*Ars* 2.225-30), himself (*Ars* 2.33-42), and Jupiter (*Ars* 2.38-40) – note that the narrator of the text does not give a direct response by Minos. Daedalus is for the most part the only character who speaks during the course of the story, except for the instance when Icarus falls and cries out a single phrase (*Ars* 2.91).

However, Daedalus’ dominance of direct speech in the narrative and the amount of information that is associated with his direct speech are not the only indications of focalization in the *Ars Amatoria*. According to de Jong, indirect speech is a type of

¹⁶ De Jong 2004: 32.

embedded focalization¹⁷ which can be triggered by a verb of cognition, such as *crederet* (“believe”) in Ovid’s narrative: *ingenium mala saepe movent: quis crederet umquam / aérias hominem carpere posse vias?* “Evils often motivate genius: who would ever believe that a man could grasp paths through the air?” (*Ars* 2.43-44). This section is informed by Daedalus’ direct speech to himself in *Ars* 2.33-34: *quod simul ut sensit, ‘nunc, nunc, o Daedale,’ dixit ‘materiam, qua sis ingeniosus, habes’* (“Which as soon as he understood, ‘now, now, oh Daedalus,’ he said, ‘you have the innate ability by which you may be clever...’”). The fact that Daedalus recognizes and acknowledges that he has *materiam*, “innate ability,” is equivalent to the concept of *ingenium*, “genius,” mentioned in the later lines. The narrator’s speech in the indirect discourse of lines 43-44 is being focalized by Daedalus, so it becomes clear that Daedalus is the character who is focalizing the narrative at this point. As discussed in the *Metamorphoses* section (below), Daedalus seems to interpret the situation as a retrospective focalizer, an older, wiser character who relates the story after having reacted to the completed events. The “evils” that “motivate his genius” may refer to many things in the narrative, but before he experiences the death of his son by his own machination, the language describing his skills and the necessity of his escape would most likely not be as negative. Daedalus is also both the source of the question asked in *quis crederet umquam...* “who would ever believe...” (*Ars* 2.43), and the answer to it. Just as this man considers the question, the same man believes in his own ability to escape Crete by flight.

¹⁷ De Jong 2004: 38-39

B. *Prolepsis* and the Retrospective Focalizer

The language used to describe key concepts in the narrative – such as the route taken by the father-son pair, the skill Daedalus uses for creating the ability to fly, and the youth and ignorance of Icarus – points toward Daedalus as the focalizer. Yet in part of the narration, the narrator seems to recount the story in zero focalization – that is, as an omniscient narrator – because the descriptive language within the narrative seems to represent more than Daedalus can know at the time, foreshadowing as it does the fall of Icarus: at this point the narrator says more than the focalizer knows. Genette refers to similar instances of narrative description as “*prolepsis*,”¹⁸ or allusion to the future or the present experienced by the narrator. In the Ovidian flight myth, one form of “repeating *prolepsis*”¹⁹ manifests itself in the use of the descriptor *audax*, which describes both the route traveled and the skill used to follow the course.

As a general rule, the adjective *audax* in Latin literature is not necessarily a positive descriptor,²⁰ and therefore when it occurs multiple times in both of these narratives to describe the path or skill of the flight, it seems to be coming from a perspective that codes the flight as a negative experience. From a narratological perspective, I argue, *audax* functions as a *prolepsis*, indicating retrospection by the character of Daedalus. If he is the focalizer of these narratives, as I claim, then his actions at the beginning of each narrative must also be considered in order to interpret his focalized response. In the *Ars Amatoria*, for instance, Daedalus offers a prayer to Jupiter, in which he claims no desire to approach the god’s dwelling (*Ars* 2.38-42). The character

¹⁸ Genette 1980: 67.

¹⁹ Genette 1980: 73.

²⁰ For such uses of *audax*, see for example: Horace *Odes* 1.3.25; Cicero *In Catilinam* 2.9; Livy *AUC* 27.45.2.

at this point in the story is well aware of the dangers of flight, but the retrospective focalization by Daedalus reinforces the repeating *prolepsis* occurring throughout this narrative. As Daedalus is focalizing via retrospection, he is capable of alluding to future events; as a result, the descriptors that indicate his perspective and evaluation of the situation become more severe as the narrative progresses. In the *Ars Amatoria*, the word *audax* is used to describe the flight path at the very beginning of the narrative (*audacem... viam*, “daring way,” *Ars* 2.22), and again when the narrator describes Icarus becoming less fearful and bolder in his skill (*audaci... arte*, “daring skill,” *Ars* 2.76). At one point in the *Ars Amatoria*, the narrator uses the stronger descriptor *miseræ* (“wretched,” *Ars* 2.72) to refer to the escape. The adjective *miseræ* also functions as a *prolepsis* in which the audience may understand the figure of Daedalus as a focalizer who has already perceived what has happened to his son at the end of the story. Thus it is not only the terms used or description of the path or skill by which they flew, but also the descriptions of Icarus as a young boy who plays with the wax and feathers, which enable the audience to understand the story from the perspective of Daedalus.

The trend of describing Icarus in his various stages of flight as focalized by Daedalus continues later in the narrative during the explanation of the reason Icarus falls to the sea. In the *Ars Amatoria*, Icarus is described as *nimum temerarius*, “excessively reckless” (*Ars* 2.83), with his *incautis annis*, “incautious years” (*Ars* 2.83),²¹ causing him to abandon his father and fly higher, and ultimately leading him to his fall into the sea and subsequent death. Both of these descriptions also seem to be later reflections from

²¹ The full citation is: *cum puer incautis nimum temerarius annis / altius egit iter deseruitque patrem*, “when the boy excessively reckless by his incautious years took a higher path and abandoned his father” (*Ars* 2.83-84).

the point of view of an older, wiser character, as if Daedalus were considering the situation in retrospect, rather than a description of the present event.

C. Icarus in the *Metamorphoses*

Ovid's account of Icarus' flight in the *Metamorphoses* begins by providing a motivation for Daedalus' escape from Crete. The narrator says of the protagonist:

Daedalus interea Creten longumque perosus / exilium tactusque loci natalis amore /

clausus erat pelago, “Meanwhile Daedalus, weary of Crete and his long exile and touched by a desire for his birth-place, had been shut in by the sea” (*Met.* 8.183-185).²²

The narrator describes Daedalus as *perosus*, “weary,” and *tactus*, “touched” or “affected,” before revealing to the audience the problem of the character being *clausus pelago*, “shut in by the sea.” A few lines later, an important point of foreshadowing in the *Metamorphoses* hints at the older, regretful, retrospective character of Daedalus. As he attaches the wings to his son, before he could even know his fate, his reaction is described: *genae maduere seniles, / et patriae tremuere manus*, “the old man's cheeks became moistened and the fatherly hands trembled” (*Met.* 8.210-211). At this point Daedalus is aware of the potential for disaster, but as the story progresses, his focalization assumes stronger language and becomes a *prolepsis* of Icarus' fall. Note, too, that the moment when the narrator uses *prolepsis* to allude to the future in the *Metamorphoses* offers a powerful and almost disapproving description of Daedalus' craftsmanship which makes the flight possible: *damnosas... artes*, “destructive skills” (*Met.* 8.215, discussed in the next section).

²² This and all subsequent selections from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are taken from Anderson's edition (1972). All translations are my own.

In the moments before the flight, Icarus is described as *ignarus*, “unaware,” of what will soon transpire, and his face is referred to as *renidenti*, “smiling” (*Met.* 8.196-197). Both terms evoke the description of the boy as *renidens*, “smiling,” and *nescius*, “unaware,” at *Ars* 2.49-50; there the lines read: *Tractabat ceramque puer pinnasque renidens / nescius haec umeris arma parata carinis*, “the boy was tugging at both the wax and the feathers, smiling, unaware this equipment had been prepared for his own shoulders” (*Ars* 2.49-50). The *Metamorphoses* takes the *prolepsis* a step further by adding the word *pericla* (“dangers”):

*puer Icarus una
stabat et ignarus sua se tractare pericla
ore renidenti modo, quas vaga moverat aura,
captabat plumas, flavam modo pollice cera
mollibat lusuque suo mirabile patris
impediebat opus.*

(*Met.* 8.195-200)

At the same time the boy Icarus was standing and unknowing he draws himself to his own danger with a smiling face, now he was snatching the feathers, which the wandering breeze was moving, now he was softening the yellow wax with his thumb, and by his play he was hindering the marvelous work of his father.

In the *Metamorphoses*, Icarus is not only unaware that the wings are for his shoulders, but he is ignorant that these will be the instruments of his own demise. The *prolepsis* does not come from Icarus, however: it seems to come from Daedalus, who would later reflect on the playful attitude of his son. The narrator also refers to Daedalus’ work as *mirabile*, “marvelous” (*Met.* 8.199), which, while it brings about the death of his son, also wins Daedalus his freedom, and can therefore be taken as another instance of Daedalus’ focalization. Both before and after the brief description of Icarus and his play interrupting Daedalus is a description of the very work that is both literally and literarily interrupted:

lines 188-195 and 200-202 describe the *mirabile opus* of Daedalus. Just before getting to *postquam manus ultima coepto inposita est*, “after the finishing touch had been set on the work begun,” the description of Daedalus’ work is paused to describe his son at play. This scene seems to point to Daedalus as a retrospective focalizer once again. In other words, the Daedalus of the *Metamorphoses* gives the audience information that he could not know until later in the narrative. Thus, Daedalus in this text foreshadows by *prolepsis* to a much more extreme degree than the Daedalus of the *Ars Amatoria*.

The part of the narrative where Icarus becomes more daring is echoed and elaborated upon in the *Metamorphoses*: *cum puer audaci coepit gaudere volatu / deseruitque ducem caelique cupidine tractus / altius egit iter*, “when the boy began to rejoice in his daring flight, he abandoned his leader and, drawn by his desire for the sky, he took a higher path” (*Met.* 8.223-225). Here too the audience is given cognitive and emotional information about Icarus from either an omniscient focalizer in *zero focalization*, or from a retrospective Daedalus. As the focalizer at the present narrative moment, Daedalus cannot possibly know what drives Icarus to fly higher. Either an older Daedalus focalizes this moment via retrospection, or this is an instance of *zero focalization* in which Icarus’ thoughts are brought to the attention of the audience by the omniscient narrator.

The difference between these two Ovidian narratives has been discussed by Niall Rudd, who makes the case for a shift in the emotional focus of Icarus’ response to his fall.²³ Rudd notes that Icarus is directly quoted in the *Ars Amatoria*, suggesting there is “a more vivid sense of Icarus’ panic.”²⁴ At the moment in the *Ars Amatoria* when Icarus

²³ Rudd 1988: 23.

²⁴ Rudd 1988: 23.

cries out: “*pater o pater, auferor*” inquit, “‘father, oh father, I am borne away,’ he says” (*Ars* 2.91), his panic is demonstrated in the preceding lines by the adjective *territus* “terrified” (*Ars* 2.87), and is emphasized by the phrase *pavido... metu* “panic-stricken fear” in the following line. Since the audience is given more information about Icarus’ panic via *zero focalization* and representation of his own words, he is a more active character in the *fabula* of the *Ars Amatoria*. In the *Metamorphoses*, he is a more passive character and is the object of the gaze of others; the subjectivity of Icarus as a character in the story, is therefore diminished. In the *Ars Amatoria*, Icarus is given his own voice and his panic is explicitly stated, while in the *Metamorphoses*, the sense of Icarus’ panic and crying out is relegated to one and a half lines: *oraque caerulea patrium clamantia nomen / excipiuntur aqua*, “...and the face crying out the paternal name was snatched by the deep blue water...” (*Met.* 8.229). At the moment of Icarus’ fall, the audience is more aware of his fate than Daedalus is, since Daedalus does not even notice his son falling. He must ask a series of questions about where the boy could be, before finally becoming aware of his son’s fate: *pennas adspexit in undis*, “he spied the feathers in the waves” (*Met.* 8.233). Even at the moment of his fall, the audience is given no indication of Icarus’ response to losing his wings and plummeting into the sea. The last we hear about Icarus is: *ora... patrium clamantia nomen*, “the mouth crying out the paternal name” (*Met.* 8.229), whereas Ovid gives Daedalus the opportunity to spend three lines inquiring about his son, and in each line he adds a vocative *Icare* (*Met.* 8.231-233). Daedalus’ emotionally charged repetition of Icarus’ name, as well as the absence of any direct quotation of Icarus in the *Metamorphoses*, further proves that Icarus is the object of focalization and only occupies a peripheral position in the *Metamorphoses*. However,

while Daedalus is the primary focalizer in both texts, as we shall see, he is not the only focalizer in either text.

The main character of this narrative in both versions is clearly Daedalus, and while the character of Icarus plays an important role within the narrative, Ovid places him on the periphery of the story, albeit more so in the *Metamorphoses* than in the *Ars Amatoria*. The use of direct quotation and descriptive language employed by the narrator to communicate the events in each story suggests that we are experiencing this event for the most part through the retrospective focalization of Daedalus. Yet there is another drastic narrative shift from the story told in the *Ars Amatoria* to the story told in the *Metamorphoses*. This second shift involves the focalization of explicit observers. Ovid manipulates secondary focalizers, in the form of observers of Daedalus' and Icarus' flight, to give a more thorough description of this narrative.

D. Explicit Observers in Ovid

Much as Ovid adapts specific narrative features from his first to his second use of the story of the escape of Daedalus and Icarus from Crete, he also allows for observers of the flight to become secondary focalizers within the narrative. In the Icarus narrative in *Metamorphoses* 8, Ovid limits Icarus' subjectivity by casting him simply as an actor in the fabula and not allowing the character to participate in the focalization of the narrative. Although Icarus participates in the events of the fabula, he is not the focalizer, and he is therefore not the subject of perception and interpretation.²⁵ Thus, Ovid emphasizes the peripheral position of Icarus, and we shall see how this is also the case for those later narratives that adopt this version of the myth.

²⁵ Bal 2009: 12.

Ovid achieves his peripheral treatment of Icarus by setting him up as the object of focalization in the narrative, as at *Ars Amatoria* 2.77-78, where we have a single explicit observer: *hos aliquis, tremula dum captat arundine pisces, / vidit, et inceptum dextra reliquit opus*, “someone, while he was trying to catch fish with a quaking fishing-pole, saw these men, and he left behind the work begun with his right hand.” This lone fisherman is described as being merely distracted from his task, but he does not give an interpretive response to the sight, as we shall see later in the account in the *Metamorphoses*. The fisherman appears to go unnoticed, certainly by Icarus who delights in his flight and by Daedalus who meticulously flies an exemplary course, which is mapped out in the next six lines with Daedalus as the apparent focalizer (*Ars* 2.79-84). The fisherman described in these lines is an external focalizer who sees the flying pair, although the narrator, by saying simply that he saw them, does not give the audience any indication of his interpretive response. But the character does respond with an action, as he abandons his work: the text clearly notes that when the fisherman saw (*vidit*) the flying pair, he immediately afterward stopped (*reliquit*). Thus, his response is in his action.²⁶

In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid incorporates other explicitly mentioned observers who share the fisherman’s perception of the flying pair. The explicit observers increase to three in number in Ovid’s later text, and not only are these new characters equipped with a response to witnessing the flight of Daedalus and Icarus, but all three share an interpretive thought. Since they are allowed such a reaction, they are focalizing more internally: the narrator gives the audience more information about their perspective on and response to events of the story. The three observers are described at *Metamorphoses*

²⁶ See Davison 1997: 263 on the response of the fisherman in the *Ars Amatoria*.

8.217-220: *hos aliquis tremula dum captat harundine pisces, / aut pastor baculo stivave innixus arator / vidit et obstipuit, quique aethera carpere possent, / credidit esse deos,* “someone, while he was trying to catch fish with a quaking fishing-pole, or a shepherd with a crook or a plowman leaning on his plow, saw these men and was amazed, and believed them to be gods, who could grasp the air.” Ovid’s use of singular verbs implies that each of these men separately saw, was amazed, and believed as individuals.

Here, Ovid demonstrates the internal focalization of these characters in their interpretive response rather than as an active response. The perception of the explicit observers that the men were gods (*credidit esse deos*), as a result of first seeing (*vidit*) and then feeling amazement (*obstipuit*), is represented as a logical conclusion, since Ovid explains what these focalizers saw: “those ones ... who could grasp the air” (*hos... quique aethera carpere possent*). Thus the narrative not only gives the response for each individual character, but also the sight which each of these three characters beheld. Unlike the external focalizing fisherman of *Ars Amatoria* 2, the narrator imparts precisely how the internal focalizers of *Metamorphoses* 8 interpret the flying duo. Therefore, from the *Ars Amatoria* to the *Metamorphoses*, we see an expansion of internal focalization in the increase of outside observers from one to three, while at the same time Icarus becomes less of a subject and more of an object of the internal focalizers’ gazes.

The lines immediately preceding the observation of the secondary focalizers in the *Metamorphoses* differ from those of the *Ars Amatoria* in that Daedalus continues to focalize the story. Daedalus’ primary focalization underscores the diminished role of Icarus as a focalizer in the *Metamorphoses* and therefore emphasizes to a greater degree the peripheral nature of his character in this text.

*dedit oscula nato
non iterum repetenda suo pennisque levatus
ante volat comitique timet, velut ales, ab alto
quae teneram prolem produxit in aera nido,
hortaturque sequi damnosaque erudit artes
et movet ipse suas et nati respicit alas.*

(*Met.* 8.211-216)

He gave kisses to his son
that were not to be given again, and raised up by wings
he flies in front and fears for his companion, just as a bird, from a high place
who led out her tender offspring from her nest into the open air,
and he both encouraged him to follow and taught those destructive arts,
and himself moves his own wings and looks back at those of his son.

The language clearly indicates that at this point in the story Daedalus remains the focalizer. The words describing Icarus from the simile – *nato*, *nati*, and *teneram prolem* – all emphasize the father’s perspective. The narrator also points to Daedalus’ emotional response in the words *timet* and *damnosas... artes*, as discussed above. Again, the use of such negative terms is an indication of the retrospective consideration of Daedalus.

Ovid presents Daedalus as the primary focalizer, and imbues him with a more dramatic and affective pathos, while he establishes Icarus as a peripheral character, whose role as the object of the gaze makes him non-active and more pathetic. In addition, the secondary focalizers, who are explicit observers of the flight in Ovid, reinforce this same idea. In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid diminishes the focalizing role of Icarus, and enhances his peripheral position by incorporating additional explicit observers. Later narratives that adopt this version of the flight myth also locate Icarus in a peripheral position. While some accounts implement explicit observers to communicate this point, others simply use implicit observers or an understood audience to convey that Icarus is a peripheral character. There are many receptions of the flight myth as told in the *Metamorphoses*; however, those crucial to the thread of this analysis engage in a dialogue

not only with the text itself, but with the next stage of reception, which is a visual rendering.

III. Bruegel's Visual Adaptation of the Flight Myth according to Ovid's

Metamorphoses

Bruegel's sixteenth-century painting entitled *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (ca. 1558) has been admired as a visual reworking of Ovid's narrative ever since its creation. Much as Ovid himself, Bruegel seems to have had a fascination with the mythological figure, since he incorporated Icarus into a number of artistic creations.²⁷ While most scholars and casual admirers of Bruegel's *Landscape* would agree that this painting borrows its context from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* at the moment immediately after the recognition of the characters in the fore and middle ground, this analysis will take into account the way both author and artist convey this narrative. Ovidian influence is clear in this piece, as observed in the representation of the setting and the figures used in the painting. Obvious visual clues point to Bruegel's use of Ovid's rendering in his masterful reception, but in addition Bruegel translates Ovid's narratological nuance onto his canvas. Just as Icarus remains the object of focalization throughout the flight myth as Ovid tells it, Bruegel effectively transforms the language of Ovid's narrative into a visual medium.

Ovid's influence can be seen in Bruegel's use of familiar characters in his painting: a plowman works his way across his field, a shepherd leans on a crook, and a fisherman sits facing the sea, while in the middle ground there is a subtle splash and a leg

²⁷ See Kilinski 2004: 92 for discussion.

is just visible above the water, indicating a man has fallen into the sea. This image is reminiscent of Ovid's account in the *Metamorphoses* of the three observers of Icarus' flight: *hos aliquis tremula dum captat harundine pisces, / aut pastor baculo stivave innixus arator / vidit et obstipuit, quique aethera carpere possent, / credit esse deos* (*Met.* 8.217-220). Yet Bruegel chooses to depict a moment in the narrative that Ovid has not yet told: the fall and impact of Icarus.²⁸ In another contrast to Ovid's account, Bruegel's image gives the observer the impression that the man plunging into the sea is unnoticed, indeed unimportant, an interpretation which will be picked up in later receptions of this narrative. In this image, the man at the plow is busy at work: he does not lean on his plow and watch the spectacle of men flying through the air, nor is he amazed by anything happening around him; he is focused on his task. The shepherd and the fisherman remain unobservant as well.²⁹ Yet because of the inclusion of these specific foreground figures, there seems little doubt that this artist has been influenced by the account of Icarus' flight from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Not every critic agrees, however, that Ovid was Bruegel's source. Lyckle de Vries (2003) argues that Bruegel's main inspiration was not the flight myth told by Ovid, but rather the Biblical book of *Ecclesiastes*, though he does suggest that Bruegel evokes the figure of an Ovidian Icarus.³⁰ De Vries' thorough analysis of this piece, in which he probes the painting's reception of the flight story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, raises several important questions. De Vries notes that unlike the version in *Metamorphoses* 8, Icarus is not in fact the main subject of the painting; he also points out that since the death of Icarus in Ovid's account is the direct result of the "hubris" of his father,

²⁸ This point is noted by de Vries 2003: 6.

²⁹ Kilinski 2004: 92.

³⁰ De Vries 2003: 17.

Daedalus – who is not represented in Bruegel’s *Landscape* – is crucial to any reception and representation of this myth; and finally, he argues that one of the most prominent features of the painting, the ship, is quite significant, although until now it has been largely overlooked. By applying narratological theory to this painting, however, I suggest a new way to argue that Ovid is the crucial source for this visual rendering of a landscape containing the flight myth.

Since, for the purposes of this analysis, Bruegel’s *Landscape* is a work of direct reception and visual interpretation, the viewer has an analytical advantage: the subject matter of Bruegel’s *Landscape* is recognizable as being related to the story in *Metamorphoses* 8. Although at first viewing, the painting may appear to be a simple landscape containing no narrative, with closer scrutiny we can see there is a sequence of events that has occurred leading up to this precise moment of representation. The image of thrashing limbs in the water at far right middle ground indicates the violent death of some ill-fated character, whose identity may very well be unknown upon an initial viewing. A closer inspection of the piece reveals that there are feathers in close proximity to this drowning figure, and so this evidence begins to create a framework for the story. The figures in the foreground also lend themselves to providing a context for the story represented, as will be discussed below.

Once the context is realized, this character is clearly revealed as Icarus, and the event represented is indisputably his impact into the sea that now bears his name. All interpretations of this painting point to the Icarus myth, and all scholars agree that this nearly submerged figure is Icarus, including de Vries, who questions only the source of

reception rather than the identity of the tiny thrashing limbs in the painting.³¹ In addition, the use of the specific figures in the foreground indicates that this painting is a reworking of the myth as Ovid tells it in book 8 of his *Metamorphoses*. De Vries may be correct in his observation that scholars pay too much attention to the peripheral position of the splashing figure in Bruegel's painting. However, as a visual motif, this figure indeed remains on the periphery in an understated and dismissible position, just like the voiceless, doomed boy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* account; the splashing figure is certainly not the subject of this painting. This fact is observed by de Vries: "The downfall of Daedalus' son is a marginal note to Bruegel's harmonious world."³² While de Vries makes the crucial point that Bruegel's Icarus is "marginal," he does not associate this marginality with the Ovidian source, in which he interprets Icarus as a subject of the narrative. However, contrary to de Vries, I claim that the figure's very marginality is proof of its Ovidian source, for Ovid depicted Icarus as a peripheral figure in his two versions and to a greater degree even still in the *Metamorphoses*. Bruegel has set up this figure not only as a clever reference to the flight myth, but he has made him distinguishable, not by his features, but by echoing his Ovidian role as the object of focalization.

The original observers from Ovid all seem to be occupied with their daily lives and mundane work. The likely observer-focalizers in this painting, still following Ovid's text, are the plowman, shepherd, and fisherman, as well as the bird seen on the lower right side of the painting in line with both the ship and the Icarus figure. While the three main figures are given the most prominent place in this painting, acting as a clear and

³¹ De Vries 2003: 7.

³² De Vries 2003: 17.

direct reference to the flight story in *Metamorphoses* 8, they appear not to notice the tragic end of this peripheral character. Yet in Ovid's version, these three figures are evident focalizers of the flight of Icarus. Though the story is certainly from Daedalus' perspective, he only witnesses his son's flight briefly at the beginning of their voyage, *...nati respicit alas* (*Met.* 8.216), right after the narrator describes Daedalus teaching Icarus *damnosas...artes* (*Met.* 8.215). This is the only instance where the narrator describes Daedalus watching Icarus fly, and in fact, in the very next lines, the perspective shifts from Daedalus *respicit*, to a fisherman, shepherd, and plowman, each of whom "saw" (*vidit*), "was amazed" (*obstipuit*) and "believed" (*credidit*).

An important feature of Bruegel's landscape is that the figures in the painting retain labor attributes reminiscent of their mention in Ovid. Although the figures in the painting witness the flight of Icarus, and as de Vries notes,³³ the figures in *Metamorphoses* 8 do not witness the fall of Icarus, the painted figures still bear an uncanny resemblance to the three literary witnesses nonetheless. The order in which the characters appear on the canvas is significant in that it is exactly opposite to the order described by Ovid. First, in Ovid's narrative is the vague reference to a fisherman who is made nondescript by the poet's use of *aliquis*; the vagueness of this Ovidian figure is evoked by Bruegel by rendering the man with his back turned toward the viewer: indeed, no part of the man's face is visible from the viewer's perspective. The second observer mentioned by Ovid is the shepherd, who appears in Bruegel's painting as the only figure looking toward the sky; in this way he retains a vestige of his spectator role described in the *Metamorphoses*. The most prominent figure in the *Landscape* is the plowman, a figure who leans on his plow in Ovid's telling: here he works his plow instead. While it

³³ De Vries 2003: 6.

appears Bruegel took some artistic license, his painting still points to the flight myth in the *Metamorphoses* 8 as a major source. Thus, Bruegel expresses his own interpretation of the unsuccessful flight of Icarus as told by Ovid, and manages at the same time to keep his references to Ovid's work very clear.

In the *Metamorphoses*, Daedalus and Icarus are both witnessed by the three observers and are understood from their perspective to be deities. In Bruegel's painting, instead of the reader hearing the father call out to the lost boy, the viewer does not see the father but only witnesses the boy crashing into the waves. Bruegel leaves out the survivor, Daedalus, and by doing so emphasizes the character who is originally lost in Ovid: Icarus, the doomed son, continues to be the object of focalization in the painting, although the focalizing father is only assumed. In fact, the only true witness to the unfortunate landing is anyone who happens to see the painting. Although Icarus is the figure whose activity is most embedded within the fabula of this visual narrative, it is not possible to get even a glimpse of his perspective within this piece. Therefore, if a primary focalizer is to be located in this painting, it is apparent that the emphasis is beginning to shift, as we shall see, from explicit to implicit observers.

The flight myth in *Metamorphoses* 8 is nestled between two myths of successful human-bird transformation (Scylla, Nisus, and Perdix at *Met.* 8.1-151, and 236-259). With his usual sense of wit, Ovid has found a convenient place to insert the flight myth of Daedalus and Icarus into his account of transformation myths. While most of the myths recorded by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* contain at least one successful transformation myth, the story of Daedalus and Icarus' escape from Crete has no successful or permanent transformation. As noted earlier, the beginning of the flight myth clearly

represents Daedalus as the main character of the myth: *Daedalus interea Creten longumque perosus / exilium tactusque loci natalis amore / clausus erat pelago*, “Meanwhile Daedalus both weary of his long exile and touched by a desire for his birthplace was shut in by the sea” (*Met.* 8.183-185). Daedalus is the protagonist of the flight myth as Ovid tells it in this poem and as de Vries notes in his article.³⁴ One of the main problems de Vries has with the *Landscape* as a reception of Ovid’s flight myth is that the Daedalus figure is conspicuously missing from the painting: “A work of art illustrating this story without showing Daedalus’ hubris is highly improbable.”³⁵ And yet, while the figure of Daedalus may be lacking, his hubris is still very clear in the depiction of his son’s downfall. In fact, in the *Metamorphoses*, it is the focalization of Daedalus described with all of his condemning terms that exposes the father’s grief and guilt.

So Daedalus himself is not needed to draw out a different reading from the painting. As Kilinski observes: “... it is worth noting that the fall of Icarus does appear elsewhere without Daedalus in Northern Renaissance art, and need not be considered a complete anomaly for the period.”³⁶ Instead of using the absence of Daedalus as a reason for an alternate reading, Kilinski points to contemporary representations to support the likelihood for a visual rendering of this narrative without the inclusion of the main character, Daedalus. I propose that this painting can be read just as one reads the flight of Daedalus and Icarus in the *Metamorphoses*, with Daedalus as the focalizer. The audience of the painting peers into a coastal landscape scene equipped with particular visual elements: workers engaged in the obvious tasks of *captat ... pisces, pastor, and arator*; ships, the method of escape specifically denied to Daedalus in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*

³⁴ De Vries 2003: 6.

³⁵ De Vries 2003: 6.

³⁶ Kilinski 2004: 93.

(*clausus erat pelago*); and finally, the limbs and feathers in the waves signifying that Icarus no longer follows Daedalus (*pennas adspexit in undis*). In addition to these features, the perspective of the piece is located high above the entire scene, giving the audience an elevated viewpoint. The observer of the painting witnesses all the elements of the account in the *Metamorphoses*, except for the main character, Daedalus: indeed, the focalization of this painting is not embedded within the “text,” but rather the focalizer may very well be the figure that is lacking from this expression of the story. Perhaps Bruegel intended to suggest it is the gaze of Daedalus through which the audience experiences the scene depicted in his *Landscape*. If so, Daedalus is the focalizer of this representation of the flight myth, just as he is in Ovid’s accounts.

While Daedalus’ conspicuous absence from the *Landscape* continues to vex scholars, the fascination with Daedalus *in absentia*, as well as the peripheral treatment of Icarus, persists as an inspiration to artists and poets. In fact, as will be discussed further in the next section, this very concept becomes crucial to the reception thread of this narrative. Thus when de Vries states: “The absence of Daedalus and the subordinate position of his son in this painting indicate that it is only remotely related to the *Metamorphoses*,”³⁷ he is neglecting not only the importance of Bruegel’s painting as a piece of reception, but also as a piece being received. That is, the painting is a retelling of Ovid’s narrative, which is in turn appropriated by later authors and artists. It is the very subordination of Icarus within the *Landscape* that allows it to be interpreted as a piece of reception from Ovidian poetry. Only with a clear understanding of the paradoxical treatment of Icarus as both peripheral and crucial to the narrative can we interpret later

³⁷ De Vries 2003: 8.

poetic and artistic receptions of this painting within the thread of reception beginning with Ovid.

The ship represented in the *Landscape* has been suspected of being a creative addition to the myth of Icarus as visualized by Bruegel for quite some time. Scholars usually attribute the inclusion of the ship to the importance of mercantilism of the time during which Bruegel was working. In fact, de Vries uses the ship as evidence in his argument that the *Landscape* should not be read as a reception of the story in the *Metamorphoses*: “Industry depends on trade, and trade flourishes through shipping. The ships in Bruegel’s prints traveled the world; they were swift, large, technologically up to date, and they were essential for the growth of Antwerp’s economy. Gibson’s proposal to see *The Fall of Icarus* as a world landscape, and Silver’s idea of associating ships with industry, trade and prosperity, combine very well.”³⁸ While this is a sound explanation, the ship remains an arresting inclusion in the painting, especially due to the early history of the reception of this piece, as well as the use of ships in flying metaphors and flight in shipping metaphors in the literature of the ancient world.³⁹ The ship depicted in the Bruegel painting is actually essential to the reception thread of the flight myth. The ship also influences the later representations of this myth with Icarus represented as the object of focalization, as well as examples in the next chapter for which Icarus is the focalizer. Continuing to follow the path of reception along this thread will lead out of the confusing mess of the various and apparently incongruous pieces of this visual representation and shed light on a cohesive reading that allows for all parts to work harmoniously.

³⁸ De Vries 2003: 10.

³⁹ Kilinski 2004: 96-98 also notes the connection to this metaphor.

Seafaring was well known for being hazardous in the ancient world, and the ancients saw it as a daring endeavor frequently accompanied by terrible misfortune. Ancient authors, such as Horace, communicate the needless danger brought on by traveling by boat, especially out of season, as well as the fear experienced by sailors and seafarers.⁴⁰ The use of metaphor in literary texts also points to this attitude toward the relation between the risk involved in traveling by sea and by air, and the conflation of flight and sailing in metaphors reinforces this notion. The analysis of this chapter indicates that a connection can be drawn between the descriptive language and the thread of reception from Ovid to Bruegel and beyond by examining the earlier accounts of this myth and looking closely at the language used to describe Daedalus and Icarus in particular, as well as ancient aeronauts in general. According to Niall Rudd, the metaphor was discounted in the seventeenth century: “Borelli showed that a bird’s wing does not produce lift by striking down and backwards like an oar. So the old metaphor, which goes back at least as far as Aeschylus (*Ag.* 52), turned out to be misleading.”⁴¹ While the notion that this metaphor conflating the activities of sailing and flying may be based on realistic properties of flight and movement is clearly absurd, the fact that the metaphor exists still merits inquiry.

As mentioned earlier, the desire to rationalize the flight myth from Crete began very early among the Greek historians of the fourth century BCE, and continued into the fourteenth century CE with Giovanni del Virgilio, whom Rudd mentions.⁴² De Vries also notes the ship as a piece of evidence supporting his argument.⁴³ In his article “Bruegel on

⁴⁰ Horace *Odes* 1.3, 5; 2.13, 16

⁴¹ Rudd 1988: 46.

⁴² Rudd 1988: 37.

⁴³ De Vries 2003: 10.

Icarus: Inversions of the Fall,” Kilinski comments on this association: “The association of wings with sails and ships in conjunction with Daedalus and Icarus is well attested in classical literature. Surely Bruegel was aware of this fact so that we cannot avoid wondering if he intentionally made use of it in this engraving and in his painted composition.”⁴⁴ The Greek sources discussed earlier provide the association of the myth with the metaphor in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* account and Bruegel’s *Landscape* rendering.

By the time of Ovid’s telling, this myth had already existed in many media with many variations in content. The narrative thread that existed before Ovid’s reception and interpretation clearly influenced the poet. Although the definitive link of reception between the myth of Icarus falling off a ship and the myth of Icarus flying too close to the sun is unknown, the influence of these earlier and more rational myths on the later and more fantastical myths is displayed plainly in the metaphorical language used to describe Icarus, as seen in the Greek sources.⁴⁵ Ovid in turn takes the story to new and equally fatal heights; he removes the physical ship, giving Daedalus no way out except the sky (*Met.* 8.187). Furthermore, he keeps the language that refers back to the ship, which is in the ancient world a common symbol for daring, or *audacia*. While the Greek sources generally tend to rationalize the scene of the boy’s daring – not in trying a new art, but as he overzealously steps off a ship before it has docked – Ovid romanticizes the tale but keeps the story much the same; significantly, he uses metaphors that at the very least refer back to these earlier versions of the story.

⁴⁴ Kilinski 2004: 96.

⁴⁵ See my introduction above for a discussion of these sources: Palaephatus, *De Incredibilibus* 12.2-4; Strabo, *The Geography* 14.1.19; Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History* 4.77.6, 8-9.

Bruegel's incorporation of the ship element as a metaphor for the daring venture of flying, as well as his representation of figures taken directly from Ovid, demonstrates his reception of the flight myth from Crete as it was passed on through Ovid's *Metamorphoses* from earlier Greek sources. The thread of reception of the flight myth from the perspective of observers, both explicit and implicit, brings this analysis back to literature. The next stage of reception involves poets of the twentieth century who experienced this thread through Bruegel's visual rendering of Ovid's poetic text.

IV. Focalization in the Poetic Adaptations of Bruegel's Visual Reception

In the receptions of the flight myth discussed thus far, the focalization of the narrative remains mostly contained within the text. The following examples include a number of poems written in the twentieth century. Each poem takes as its primary influence Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. In these examples, I will address the reception of Ovid's narrative as it is communicated by Bruegel and adapted by these twentieth century poets. A key feature in the adaptation of the thread of this narrative is that the focalization shifts from explicit observers to implicit observers, all the while keeping Icarus as the object of focalization. The poets also implement a paradoxical concept of ubiquitous and isolated suffering, which works as a theme throughout these poems.

W. H. Auden is an important creative mind who picked up on this thread of reception. In the 1930s, Auden created several poems involving human suffering primarily as a response to the turbulent contemporary atmosphere of Europe. One such collection of poems, known as "In Time of War," catalogues human failure and

disunity.⁴⁶ At the end of this decade, during an era of great turmoil, Auden visited the Brussels Royal Museum and responded to a number of paintings by Bruegel, particularly the *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. In “Musée des Beaux Arts,” Auden depicts the plight of Icarus:

About suffering they were never wrong,
The old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position: how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer’s horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Breughel’s Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.⁴⁷

The emphasis of Auden’s poem is on the suffering referred to in the first line. Next, the poet goes on to say that the “old Masters” understood the relation between suffering and humanity. He then deviates from the concept of suffering for most of the stanza, returning only briefly in his mention of martyrdom. In this deviation, he describes scenes from several of Bruegel’s other pieces, whether real or embellished by the author.⁴⁸ The entire last half of the poem centers on the figure of Icarus. Not only does this section focus on a

⁴⁶ Spears 1963: 132.

⁴⁷ Auden 2007: 179.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the imagery used by Auden in this poem, see de Vries 2003.

single character, but the use of language in this section varies widely between extremes of calm and calamity, suggesting mental and emotional distress. The terms Auden uses to describe the internal response of the explicit observers are non-panicked, because the observers, whether they have seen Icarus or not, are, at least to Auden, unconcerned with his suffering. This is especially characteristic of the opening of the description: “how everything turns away / Quite leisurely from the disaster.” Every element in the painting is functioning in a leisurely manner, even the laborers, except for the Icarus figure, who is completely isolated and ignored in the piece. When Auden includes descriptions of elements such as the explicit observers, the plowman and ship, the narrator further interprets the unimportance of Icarus’ failure in the poem.

As for the explicit observers in this reception of the flight myth, Auden allows for the possibility that either could be aware of the drowning figure. The first observer “may / Have heard the splash” while the second “must have seen / Something amazing.” The act of witnessing by the plowman is less certain than that of the ship, but both are extremely speculative. De Vries interprets this section of Auden’s poem by suggesting the observers have indeed seen the Icarus figure: “The farmer plowing in the foreground considered Icarus’s fall ‘not an important failure,’ and the crew of the ship ‘sailed calmly on,’ although they had seen ‘something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky.’”⁴⁹ The possibility of the characters seeing Icarus falling or drowning is explicitly stated in the poem and clearly observable in the painting, but whether the explicit observers are actual witnesses is indeterminable.

The narrative in Auden’s poem is being focalized not internally, but externally, and presumably by the narrator, who is the poet himself. Auden as narrator notes that the

⁴⁹ De Vries 2003: 6

characters “may have heard” and “must have seen” but does not show the characters themselves hearing or seeing. Auden exhibits with his poem the response to human suffering characterized in paintings by the old Masters. “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...” Auden isolates the Icarus figure in his poem by limiting the focalization to the narrator, who interprets what the explicit observers would have thought if they had seen the boy falling from the sky. He also reduces the possible observers to the most prominent observer in Bruegel’s painting and last mentioned in the *Metamorphoses*, the plowman, and the “expensive delicate ship.” The plowman takes on a different role for each reception: in Ovid, he is amazed not at suffering but at spectacle; in Bruegel, he is hard at work and appears not to notice Icarus’ splash; and in Auden, he is indifferent and described with all others as turning “away / Quite leisurely from the disaster” and his unresponsiveness, at least according to Auden, may be explained because “for him it was not an important failure.” Clearly for Auden, human suffering like that exhibited in Bruegel’s *Landscape* should not be neglected, but rather it should be important to humanity in general. In his book, *Literature in Perspective: W. H. Auden*, Dennis Davison categorizes Auden’s casual approach to the situation in the painting as “sensitive acceptance,” and notes: “Behind the controlled verbal surface we feel the anguish of one who has registered the fact of human suffering, taking place in isolation from an unseeing, uncaring environment. The poem balances between moral revulsion... and acceptance of the nature of things.”⁵⁰ Auden’s poem becomes a critique of the human response to suffering, which emerges from the chaotic social and political context during

⁵⁰ Davison 1970: 60.

which Auden was composing. This idea of neglected suffering is also adopted by post-Auden receptions of the flight myth.

In addition to Auden's interpretive poetic response to Bruegel's famous *Landscape*, a number of other artists and authors have been influenced directly by the piece, two of whom published poems in 1962. William Carlos Williams and Anne Sexton both authored poems that contribute to the thread of reception. Each creates a poem based on the untimely end of this tragic figure. In a collection titled *Pictures from Bruegel*, Williams wrote the aptly named poem "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus":

According to Bruegel
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 drowning⁵¹

⁵¹ Williams 1991: 385.

Williams takes the idea of the suffering individual as noted by Auden, and emphasizes it by the organization of his poem. He mentions Icarus at the beginning of the poem and at the end, but the middle he reserves for the indifference and self-absorption of every other element in the painting. Williams makes mention of only one explicit observer in his poem, “a farmer ploughing / his field,” who certainly does not notice Icarus, and unlike Auden he leaves out the ship entirely. He does mention other would-be observers when he notes “the whole pageantry,” but since it is “concerned / with itself,” this too turns out to be an ineffective explicit observer. In her article entitled, “A Double Reading by Design: Breughel, Auden, and Williams,” Mary Ann Caws equates the situation of suffering described in each of the renderings of Ovid’s Icarus: “Both the Auden and the Williams poems and the picture are concerned with individual suffering, but they are also concerned with continuity, with the way the universal may triumph over individual failure, simply by continuing past each human disaster in its legendary presentation, no matter how real, no matter how close up, or far away.”⁵² Caws’ explication of the similarities of the scenes draws the common thread of isolated suffering in each of the pieces, and she also summarizes what Williams attains at the finale of his poem. In the very last line of William’s poem, the narrator-focalizer offers the element that he suggests is least important in the composition of the painting, “Icarus drowning.” The terms Williams uses to describe the drowning figure, “unsignificantly” and “quite unnoticed,” give no possibility of any internal witness of the fall. De Vries comments on Williams’ interpretation, noting especially that his last stanza exaggerates even further the indifference of the figures from Auden’s version: “This lack of concern intensifies Auden’s image of spectators who did notice something, deciding however to turn away

⁵² Caws 1983: 328.

from the disaster.”⁵³ The degree of emotive difference in these two poems is also clear by the structure of each. The short staccato lines of Williams’ poem, with few words per line, allow the emphasis of whole lines to settle on important words and phrases. Auden, on the other hand, uses parallel structure to emphasize his use of explicit observers.

Another poet who participates in this thread of reception is Anne Sexton, although with a slightly different tactic: she invites the audience to participate along with Icarus in the flight experience. In *Anne Sexton: A Biography*, Diane Wood Middlebrook recounts how Ovid’s story of Daedalus and Icarus was first introduced to Sexton as a poetic influence in 1956 during a poetry workshop taught by John Holmes.⁵⁴ Middlebrook also suggests that the poet was likely influenced by Auden’s “Musée des Beaux-Arts.” In Sexton’s subtly titled poem “To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph,”⁵⁵ she evokes the tradition of Icarus carried through history by Ovid and Bruegel in a number of ways: these include the elation of Icarus’ emotive state as described by Ovid focalized by Daedalus; the relationship between flying and sailing as discussed above; and even the nonchalance of the author toward Icarus’ plunge back to earth. Though the title of this poem refers to W. D. Snodgrass’ winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1960, and so this reference to Icarus in Sexton’s poetry does not necessarily indicate a personal connection with the artist, still she makes a connection between Icarus and the creative mind, which will be an important term of analysis in my next chapter.⁵⁶

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

⁵³ De Vries 2003: 6.

⁵⁴ Middlebrook 1991: 50, 231.

⁵⁵ Sexton 1981: 53.

⁵⁶ Middlebrook 1991: 231-235 gives a detailed description of the complexity of Sexton’s fascination with the character Icarus.

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 begins her poem by directly engaging the audience with an invitation to visualize the narrative of Icarus. Sexton's interpretation of the flight myth completely removes the explicit observers of previous versions: instead, she invites the audience to experience the flight of Icarus, and her language suggests that they participate in the focalization as well. Sexton uses imperatives throughout her poem to urge audience participation, to see what the Icarus character sees and feel what he feels. She begins at first with cognitive verbs. In the beginning of the poem, the narrator demands that the audience "Consider Icarus," not an unusual request. The next three imperatives, in an incantatory repetition of the same verb, are closely related to the first in their cognitive nature: "think of that first flawless moment," "Think of the difference it made!" and "think of innocent Icarus." Sexton commands her audience to conjure the image of the boy flying. She then invites the audience into the narrative to experience the drama first hand, as she describes Icarus "pasting those sticky wings on" as if from the boy's own perspective. With her use of deictic language, "There below are the trees, as awkward as camels" and "here are the shocked starlings pumping past," she insists that the audience see themselves flying along with Icarus. In this way, Sexton incorporates a new adaptation to the thread with the use of vivid imperatives and deictic expressions: her poem goes to a verbal extreme that the

other artists merely suggest. In each of the former renderings of the myth, the artists endeavor to make Icarus a sympathetic character, but Sexton achieves an Icarus with whom the audience can clearly empathize: this feature will be a significant part of the analysis in my next chapter. Here Icarus begins to emerge from the periphery of the narrative as Sexton tells it, but ultimately she relegates him back to the periphery in the treatment of his isolated suffering.

At one point Sexton even tells the audience “Admire his wings!” No doubt any person who saw the wings Daedalus constructed for Icarus would admire them, but this word recalls the moment in the *Metamorphoses* when Ovid describes Daedalus’ work as *mirabile* (“marvelous,” 8.199). The narrative progresses with the narrator suggesting the audience focalize and interpret the story from Icarus’ side until the tenth line: here the narrator gives the audience an imperative, which breaks with the sequence of cognitive imperatives used in the poem thus far. The narrator says: “Feel the fire at his neck.” Prior to this line, the commands of the narrator all involve imagining Icarus’ situation from an observer’s perspective: consider, think, admire. But Sexton’s use of the word “feel” in line 10 demands that the audience not only participate as implicit observers, but asks them to share in focalizing his flight, sensations, and panic as well: only Icarus does not seem panicked because “casually he glances up.” Sexton quickly brings the audience back to the safe status of implicit observer when she uses the next imperative “see” before Icarus plunges into the sea. The focus on Icarus in this poem indicates that his character is not necessarily on the periphery for Sexton’s interpretation of the flight myth; however, her treatment of the Daedalus character suggests that Icarus is still not central in her poem.

Sexton incorporates a sense of indifference into her poem, not in the figures of explicit observers but in the figure of Daedalus, or “his sensible daddy”: this is the only character in Ovid’s narrative who was sympathetic to Icarus’ demise, and the one who was omitted in Bruegel’s painting. In addition to developing an empathetic relationship between both the audience and Icarus, Sexton asks the question: “Who cares that he fell back to the sea?” After developing such an empathy between Icarus and the audience, the obvious answer to this question would be: “I care,” or at least, “Daedalus must care.” But Sexton, who herself was familiar with the concept of suffering, describes Daedalus as being indifferent to Icarus’ suffering; she therefore sets up suffering as an isolating experience in the same way as the accounts of this narrative discussed above.⁵⁷ In addition to her incorporation of the indifference toward Icarus’ suffering, Sexton includes an element reminiscent of the sailing as flying metaphor discussed above. She describes Icarus as “larger than a sail, over the fog and the blast/ of the plushy ocean, he goes.” Not only is Icarus himself “larger than a sail,” but he is also traversing across “the plushy ocean.” Thus, Sexton’s poem fits into the reception thread, though she leaves the explicit observers out of her narrative, and instead engages the audience as part of the focalization of the narrative. She incorporates other aspects of this reception, such as the indifference of a character and the description of Icarus using the sailing as flying metaphor.

In conclusion, the analysis in this chapter has focused on the narratives in which Icarus is found on the periphery of the text, or simply the object of focalization. My argument has traced the thread of reception of this narrative from Ovid’s treatment of the story in his *Ars Amatoria* and *Metamorphoses*, to the visual rendering by Pieter Bruegel the Elder in the sixteenth century, to the reception of these works in the twentieth century

⁵⁷ Sexton and Ames 2004: 3.

by a number of poets, in particular W. H. Auden, William Carlos Williams and Anne Sexton. Sexton's work in particular looks forward to my next chapter, which will concentrate on those renderings of the flight myth that have Icarus as the focalizer of the narrative.

Chapter 2. Icarus as Focalizer: The Centrality of Icarus in Comparisons with the Creative Individual

“Art is either plagiarism or revolution.”
—Paul Gauguin (1848-1903)

“Springtime came again, and Icarus fell
I flew past the numb-lipped nuns who’ll never tell
The secrets of the sailors and their seven-year spell
I will not fall, nor will my wings ever melt...”
—Brett Dennen, *So Long Sweet Misery* (2006)

In chapter one we saw how Ovid’s lengthy narratives use focalization in order to highlight Icarus as the object of a gaze. Ovid establishes Daedalus, who relates the narrative, as the primary focalizer of the narrative of Icarus’ flight and fall (*Ars Amatoria*), and he incorporates a number of secondary focalizers who witness the flight as well (*Metamorphoses*). The audience perceives the entire flight and fall through a character other than Icarus. Ovid also uses the adjective *audax*, “daring” (from the noun, *audacia*, “boldness” or “daring”) with a negative connotation, and this attitude toward Icarus’ disobedience persists through the receptions of his narrative.

In this chapter, I turn to Horace’s references to the myth of Icarus. The distinguishing feature of his treatment of the myth, as I will demonstrate, is that Horace focalizes the story through the figure of Icarus himself, he also draws a direct comparison between Icarus and the poet. Horace compares the poet with Icarus directly, through explicit comparison, as well as indirectly, through the use of focalization in the narrative from a character who is Icarus or at least situated in Icarus’ position, such that the audience perceives Icarus’ experience through his own gaze. Horace’s narratives of Icarus’ flight and fall, therefore, differ from Ovid’s because they render the poet’s

activity metaphorically as a kind of flight: the poet who dares much may achieve great success, but he runs the risk of total loss.

Along these lines, I will demonstrate the significance of Horace's poetic diction in his references to Icarus – specifically his use of the adjective *audax*, “daring.” Although Ovid and his reception thread also used *audax* in transmissions of the Icarus myth, he did so in a way that indicates primarily a negative quality for the flying youth. Horace, I will argue, uses *audax* in a more nuanced way, distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate modes of “daring.” Appropriate daring can be of great benefit for the poet, while inappropriate daring is potentially detrimental. It is worth noting that Horace's *Odes* were published at various times: books 1-3 were published in 23 BCE, while book four was not published until 13 BCE.⁵⁸ In *Odes* 1.3, a *propempticon* to Vergil, Horace compares the journey of the poet to Greece with a number of daring figures as a warning for Vergil to consider whether the *audacia* he must exhibit is worth the danger. In *Odes* 4.2, a *recusatio*, Horace distinguishes himself and his style from the Greek poet Pindar in order to shun the inappropriately daring act of writing praise poetry for Augustus. Lastly, in *Odes* 2.20 Horace uses *audax* to predict his own poetic fame.

As in the previous chapter, I argue that Horace's representation of Icarus as a figure for the poet himself constitutes a distinct thread of reception, which I trace by looking at later artists who follow this Horatian trend. A number of Renaissance poets use comparison with Icarus to communicate attitudes and ideas about poetic daring. These poets refer to the Icarus narrative as it is focalized from the perspective of an Icarus figure. The poets who follow his thread of reception likewise participate in using what seems to be the stock vocabulary for this myth, words such as *audax* in the attempt

⁵⁸ Garrison 1991: x, 200 and Thomas 2011: 5-7.

made by Icarus; and like Horace they do not consider this concept to be necessarily negative or blameworthy, but use it to communicate that the daring attempt is sometimes more important than success or failure. In fact, the thread of reception originating from Horace's representations of Icarus contains both failure and success in which each poet poses the question of appropriate or inappropriate *audacia*.

As we will see, in the poetry of Jacopo Sannazaro (1458-1530) and Philippe Desportes (1546-1606), the poet finds success in the daring attempt, even though he may fail. The poet Lope de Vega (1562-1635), on the other hand, questions whether the act of daring was worth attempting at all. In addition, there are a number of modern lyricists that I will draw upon to show a consistency in this thread up to the present. For instance, in songs by Kansas (1975) and Brett Dennen (2006), the poet achieves transcendence by means of his poetic ability and rejects Icarian failure. Whatever the fate of the figure compared with Icarus in each representation, whether he succeeds where Icarus did not, or even if he fails just as his predecessor, the most important quality exhibited by the figure, frequently the poet himself, is that of daring.

I. The Transforming Power of Daring Arts

Although Horace nowhere tells the entire story of Icarus' flight and fall, he makes three distinct references to it. Horace's three references to Icarus in his *Odes* are personal and represent the poet in a direct comparison with Icarus. Horace makes this comparison between Icarus and the poet using himself and two other poets, Vergil and Pindar. In the first poem, *Odes* 1.3, Horace compares Vergil to various mythological characters of daring, notably Daedalus and very suggestively, Icarus. In the second poem, *Odes* 4.2,

Horace declares that a poet writing in the style of Pindar is a potential Icarus figure. Significantly, in *Odes* 2.20, he records the flight of a successful type of Icarus who exhibits appropriate daring. He compares himself with Icarus to engage the audience with the narrative of Icarus' flight from Crete. Horace uses this comparison to declare a significant feature of poetic art, namely that it has the potential to take the poet past the point of death, if the poet is willing to exhibit an appropriate kind of daring.

A. *Odes* 1.3: Horace Warns Vergil of Inappropriate *Audacia*

I argue that Horace uses references to Icarus in a specific context: the poet always uses the figure of Icarus during moments of daring and potential danger, but also potential fame and achievement. In his first mention of Icarus, *Odes* 1.3, Horace addresses Vergil who is about to travel to Greece. He constructs the poem in such a way that the first two stanzas give a plea for the present situation; the third through fifth stanzas describe the stalwart first traveler or sailor; the sixth stanza evokes the futility of the separation of lands with dangerous seas; the seventh through ninth stanzas refer to other figures of daring from mythological tales; and the tenth and final stanza generalizes the specific description of the first two stanzas.

*Sic te diva potens Cypri,
sic fratres Helenae, lucida sidera,
ventorumque regat pater
obstrictis aliis praeter Iäpyga,*

*navis, quae tibi creditum 5
debes Vergilium; finibus Atticis
reddas incolumem, precor,
et serves animae dimidium meae.*

*Illi robur et aes triplex
circa pectus erat, qui fragilem truci 10
commisit pelago ratem
primus, nec timuit praecipitem Africum*

*decertantem Aquilonibus
nec tristis Hyadas nec rabiem Noti,
quo non arbiter Hadriae 15
maior, tollere seu ponere vult freta.*

*Quem mortis timuit gradum
qui siccis oculis monstra natantia,
qui vidit mare turbidum et
infamis scopulos, Acroceraunia? 20*

*Nequiquam deus abscidit
prudens Oceano dissociabili
terras, si tamen impiae
non tangenda rates transiliunt vada.*

*Audax omnia perpeti 25
gens humana ruit per vetitum nefas.
Audax Iapeti genus
ignem fraude mala gentibus intulit.*

*Post ignem aethera domo
subductum macies et nova febrium 30
terris incubuit cohors,
semotique prius tarda necessitas*

*leti corripuit gradum.
Expertus vacuum Daedalus aëra
pinnis non homini datis; 35
perrupit Acheronta Hercules labor.*

*Nil mortalibus ardui est;
caelum ipsum petimus stultitia, neque
per nostrum patimur scelus
iracunda Iovem ponere fulmina.⁵⁹ 40*

Just so, may the goddess ruling over Cyprus,
just so, may the brothers of Helen, bright stars,
and may the father of the winds,
with others bound except Iapyx, guide you,

ship, you who owe [me] Vergil, entrusted to you;
may you return him safe from the Attic borders,

⁵⁹ This and all subsequent selections from Horace's *Odes* are taken from Garrison's edition (1991); all translations of Horace are mine.

I beg, and protect half of my soul.

For that man there was oak and triple-fold bronze around his
breast,
the first man who joined a brittle skiff with the savage sea,

he feared neither the headlong Southwest wind fighting with the
North wind, nor the gloomy Hyades nor the raging of the South
wind,
than which the master of the Adriatic is no greater,
whether he wants to raise or calm the sea.

What step of death does he fear,
[that man] who saw with dry eyes swimming monsters,
who saw the unruly sea and the infamous cliffs: Thunderbolt-
peaked?

Pointlessly the wise god cut off lands from the incompatible sea,
if undutiful skiffs still dash across the depths that should not be
touched.

Daring to fully endure all things
the human race rushes through forbidden sin.
The daring offspring of Iapetus
brought fire among the races with a wicked trick.

After the theft of fire from its heavenly home,
emaciation and a new crowd of fevers burdened the lands,
and the once slow fate of previously distant death quickened its
pace.

Daedalus tested the empty air on wings not given to man;
the Herculean toil broke through Acheron.

There is nothing too steep for mortals;
we seek the sky itself in foolishness,
nor through our crime do we allow
Jupiter to put away his wrathful thunderbolts.

Horace begins this poem by invoking deities, not only those who guide travelers, but
appropriately those who guard seafarers: Cyprian Venus, Castor and Pollux, and Aeolus,
who is responsible for favorable winds.⁶⁰ He addresses the ship itself in the opening lines

⁶⁰ See Garrison 1991: 206.

of the poem, and pleads with it to bring Vergil back safely. A shift occurs at line nine, at which point Horace gives a description of the first traveler-by-sea. In this stanza, Horace exchanges the more solid *navis* (“ship”) for the flimsier *fragilem...ratem* (“brittle skiff”). This begins his invocation of the dangers of traveling, but along with it Horace declares that the first man to make his way across the sea must have been made of stronger stuff than the boat itself: note *robur et aes triplex* (“oak and triple-fold bronze”) in contrast with the *fragilem...ratem* (“brittle skiff”) and the danger they face together, the *truci...pelago* (“savage sea”). In this way, Horace introduces the concept of a man who is *audax* before he uses the word explicitly in the poem. The man seems not to need the prayer uttered by Horace in the beginning stanza because he does not fear the sea or winds.

Each of the winds in this and the following stanza negate the prayer in which Horace petitions the *ventorum...pater* (“father of winds”) at the beginning of the poem. It is clear that *obstrictis aliis praeter Iapyga* (“with others bound except Iapyx”) has not been successful at this point in the poem. The winds are free to fight one another and endanger the traveler. The dangers continue to increase in the next stanza with the mention of *mortis* (“death”), *monstra natantia* (“swimming monsters”), *mare turbidum* (“unruly sea”), and *infamis scopulos* (“infamous cliffs”) impressively named *Acroceraunia* (“Thunderbolt-peaked”). Up to this point in the poem the man who first dared to cross the sea appears to have good qualities—that is, he faces every danger bravely. It is not until stanza six that Horace reveals the reason humans should not overreach and attempt to accomplish great feats.

Horace begins to establish the parameters for the concept of daring when he alludes to the man made of bronze and oak. He compares the man with the *fragilem...ratem* (“brittle skiff”), which is a much less stable object. After having set up this distinction, Horace uses the term *ratis* again in the sixth stanza. He tells of a god having the wisdom to separate land from water in vain since the *rates* (“skiffs”) which are *impiae* (“undutiful”) take over the depths that “should not be touched” (*non tangenda...vada*), and the words even literally wrap around the description of the sea: *impiae non tangenda rates* (23-24). The term *impiae* (“undutiful”) refers to the bold man from earlier in the poem as a transferred epithet. He exhibits the inappropriate daring that Horace himself shuns. The bold man, and travelers in general, violate natural boundaries by boarding undutiful skiffs, ones which continue to cross the sea that should not be touched (*si tamen impiae / non tangenda rates transiliunt vada*).⁶¹ Immediately following such a strong description that denotes irreverent disobedience, Horace begins a catalogue of notorious rule-breakers. This catalogue completes Horace’s conceptual definition of inappropriate *audacia*. In this poem he disassociates himself from the specific daring individuals who accomplished great things for the benefit of humanity or their own fame because these men defied the convention of the order of elements,⁶² which have been established by the *deus... prudens* (“wise god,” 21-22).

The poet places the most important word of the stanza, *audax* (“daring”), as the first word of line 25, and he then reproduces it at the beginning of line 27 in emphatic anaphora. This literary tactic allows the reader to associate each following character with

⁶¹ For the definition and connotations of *pious*, see OLD entry 2 “(spec.) Faithful in discharging one’s religious obligations, devout, etc.” Glare 1976: 1384, with the following examples: Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* 10.7.4, Vergil *Aeneid* 6.530, and Cicero *De Re Publica* 3.15.

⁶² For a discussion on the violation of the elements found in this poem, see Rudd 1988: 22.

that same adjective. Horace goes from a general description of the *gens humana* (“human race”) as *audax* to the more specific *Iapeti genus* (“offspring of Iapetus,” i.e., Prometheus), and he uses negative terms, such as *vetitum nefas* (“forbidden sin”) and *fraude mala* (“wicked trick”), in order to intensify the inappropriateness first expressed in *audax*. Horace lays out the result of Prometheus’ daring aid in stanza eight, namely hunger and disease (*macies et nova febrium...cohors*) and quickened death (*semiotique prius tarda necessitas leti corripuit gradum*). In the next stanza, Horace describes Daedalus’ flight and Hercules’ journey to the underworld. Each of the three offenders involves himself in realms which are by nature dangerous for humanity for one reason or another. Prometheus stole fire from Jupiter to give to mortals, Daedalus took to the skies, the realm of the gods, and Hercules crossed into the underworld. Notably, the only human Horace mentions is Daedalus, who “tested the empty air on wings not given to man” (*Expertus vacuum Daedalus aëra pinnis non homini datis*), and he uses Daedalus’ actual name, not a patronymic in the case of Prometheus, or a nominal adjective as with Hercules. With the use of a patronymic, Horace suggests the person of Prometheus, rather than saying his name outright in so doing he places more emphasis on the element which Prometheus procured for humanity: *ignem* (“fire”). His reference to Hercules is similar in that while Hercules’ name is used, it is used as a modifier of the crucial element of the story: *labor* (“toil”). Since the Daedalus story is being compared in a parallel structure with these two stories, the reader is able to understand the missing figure in the myth: Icarus. He has as much to do with the story as his father, and in fact his death is understood as a punishment for his father. Finally, in the last stanza of the poem, Horace generalizes once again with the term *mortalibus* (“mortals”), but he evokes the flying

man one last time in the phrase: *caelum ipsum petimus stultitia*, “we seek the sky itself in foolishness.” Horace appears to be hung up on the concept of a human exhibiting *audacia* by flying.

Punishment is a constant theme alongside these exhibitions of daring. Significantly, however, while Prometheus and Daedalus were both punished and Hercules was famous for his audacity,⁶³ none of these individuals died as a result of his transgression. Nevertheless in each case, others suffered as a result of these men and their daring. Horace tells more of Prometheus’ story than the others, but each reference is meant to call to the mind of the audience a story that goes with it. Each of these stories would have been familiar to Horace’s contemporaries, by the mere mention of character or place of significance. Thus when Horace makes mention of Daedalus, , the audience understands the character of the famous craftsman’s son, Icarus, who fell to the sea and died as a result of Daedalus’ daring, as well as his own. While Horace avoids the direct mention of Icarus’ name, he invokes his fall and death by mentioning Daedalus in the context of his most daring moment. He therefore suggests the loss he experienced in the death of his son as a punishment or retribution for possessing the *audax* quality and imparting it to his son in the form of artificial wings. *Audax* activates negative connotations; in this poem it can lead to disease, famine, and the death of loved ones. It can also, however, be beneficial, as in the case of Prometheus bringing fire to mankind, Daedalus freeing himself from Crete, and Hercules completing his labors. Horace’s evaluation of *audax* is, therefore, more nuanced than Ovid’s, who describes the daring of Icarus as purely detrimental. As we shall see in poem 4.2, Horace uses *audax* once again; but in 2.20 the term is conspicuously absent.

⁶³ Garrison 1991: 208.

B. Odes 4.2: Horace Rejects Pindar's Inappropriate Audacia

Next, Horace associates a poet with Icarus during a brief mention in *Odes* 4.2. In this *recusatio*, Horace addresses a young poet named Iullus and explains why he will not write praise poetry for Augustus. Horace very clearly distinguishes his poetic ability in Roman lyric verse from Pindar's wordy and bombastic epinician verse. Yet he uses an allusion to Callimachean verse to deprecate his own poetic skill in order to refuse the act of writing praise poetry, while at the same time he mocks Pindar for writing in that same style. Because Horace's verse contains a Callimachean intertext, Horace is able to express subversive ideas in a subtle way, not only does he question the validity of the praise poetry genre, but at the same time he questions the validity of the subject in praise poems. In his case, the subject is Augustus. This ode describes the danger of the poet overreaching in an inappropriate form of *audacia*, which it seems Horace is equating to his writing praise poetry for Augustus in Pindaric style.

*Pindarum quisquis studet aemulari,
Iulle, ceratis ope Daedalea
nititur pinnis, uitreo daturus
nomina ponto.*

*Monte decurrens uelut amnis, imbres 5
quem super notas aluere ripas,
feruet inmensusque ruit profundo
Pindarus ore,*

*laurea donandus Apollinari,
seu per audacis noua dithyrambos 10
uerba deuoluit numerisque fertur
lege solutis...*

*Multa Dircaeum leuat aura cycnum, 25
tendit, Antoni, quotiens in altos
nubium tractus; ego apis Matinae
more modoque*

grata carpentis thyma per laborem

*plurimum circa nemus uuidique 30
Tiburis ripas operosa paruus
carmina fingo.*

...

Whoever is eager to emulate Pindar,
Iullus, depends on wings smeared with wax
by a Daedalean power and must give his name
to a shimmering sea.

Just like a river rushing from a mountain,
which rains nourished over the familiar banks,
so does boundless Pindar surge and fall with a deep voice,

he must be granted the Apollonian laurel,
whether he rolls out new words
through daring dithyrambos
and is born by meters freed from rule...

Many a breeze lifts a Dircean swan, Antonius,
whenever it stretches into high regions of clouds.
I, in the style and manner of a Matinean bee

plucking pleasing thyme with the most toil
around a grove and the flowings of the damp Tibur,
as a small creature I compose painstaking poems...

The poem begins with the three most important names that support Horace's argument for not writing an ode in the Pindaric style to celebrate a great victory by Augustus:⁶⁴ *Pindarum, Iulle, and Daedalea*. While Horace capitalizes on the style of Pindar somewhat ironically in this *recusatio*, he defaults immediately to imagery with which he is familiar to make Iullus aware that while he is capable of writing in such a style, he cannot match the glory of Augustus with his little verses.⁶⁵

Horace uses a number of elements in this *recusatio* in order to explain why his style is not apt for writing praise poetry for Augustus. First, he makes a comparison with Icarus and the poet who tries to emulate Pindar. He uses an adjectival form of Daedalus'

⁶⁴ See note on Iullus Antonius in Garrison 1991: 371.

⁶⁵ Freis 1983: 28.

name in order to refer to Icarus, whom he does not mention in this poem. The first stanza, however, is devoted to the poet as an Icarus figure; if the *ceratis ope Daedalea...pinnis* (“wings smeared with wax by a Daedalean power”) are not suggestive enough of Icarus, Horace includes the phrase *vitreo daturus nomina ponto* (“must give his name to a shimmering sea”) to solidify the comparison.⁶⁶ Thus, Horace refuses to praise Augustus in the daring style of Pindar, for to do so would be like Icarus trying to fly and consequently failing. After confidently expressing that he would fail at such an endeavor of praising Augustus in the style of Pindar, Horace explains that their styles are very different. He moves into a simile devoted to a comparison of natural phenomena with Pindar’s voice, which resembles a description that Callimachus gives in his *Hymn to Apollo*. Horace speaks of a river rushing from a mountain (*Monte decurrens uelut amnis*) and continues to use natural water imagery while describing how Pindar uses his voice with the verbs *feruet* (“surge”) and *ruit* (“fall”) as well as with the adjectives *immensus* (“boundless”) and *profundo* (“deep”). The language Horace uses while describing Pindar’s poetic style is reminiscent of the following section in Callimachus’ *Hymn to Apollo*.

τὸν Φθόνον ὠπόλλων ποδί τ’ ἤλασεν ὦδέ τ’ ἔειπεν·
 “Ἀσσυρίου ποταμοῖο μέγας ῥόος, ἀλλὰ τὰ πολλὰ
 λύματα γῆς καὶ πολλὸν ἐφ’ ὕδατι συρφετὸν ἔλκει.
 Δηοῖ δ’ οὐκ ἀπὸ παντὸς ὕδωρ φορέουσι Μέλισσαι,
 ἀλλ’ ἦτις καθαρὴ τε καὶ ἀχράαντος ἀνέρπει
 πίδακος ἐξ ἱερῆς ὀλίγη λιβάς ἄκρον ἄωτον.”

Apollo spurned Envy with his foot and spoke thus:
 “Great is the stream of the Assyrian river, but much
 filth of earth and much refuse it carries on its waters.
 And not of every water do the honey bees carry to Deo,
 but of the trickling stream that springs from a holy fountain,

⁶⁶ For Icarus giving his name to the sea in ancient texts, see for example: Palaephatus, *De Incredibilibus*, 12.2-4 and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.230.

pure and undefiled, the very crown of waters.” (*Hymn to Apollo* 107-112)⁶⁷

By using loud, rushing water imagery to describe Pindar’s poetry, Horace ties his *recusatio* to the tradition introduced by Callimachus, who did not write in the grand style of epic, but preferred composing poems of shorter length and lighter subject matter. Thus, when Horace describes Pindar’s style as *decurrens...amnis* (“a rushing river,”⁵), he implies that it also contains λύματα (“filth”) and συρφετόν (“refuse”), just like the Assyrian river in this selection of Callimachus. The description of the stream whence the bees collect the water as καθαρή τε καὶ ἀχράαντος (“pure and undefiled”) provides Horace with the image of the poet as a bee performing its task laboriously (*ego apis Matinae / more modoque ... per laborem plurimum ... Tiburis ripas operosa paruus carmina fingo*, 27-32). With this comparison between his style and Pindar’s style through allusion to well-known Callimachean similes, we can understand Horace’s critique of Pindar’s poetry as a rushing river, filled with filth and refuse. Therefore, Horace rejects Pindar’s style in the same way that Callimachus rejects epic. In addition, as Horace invites a comparison between Pindar and Icarus, he describes Pindar’s dithyrambs as inappropriately “daring” (*audacis...dithyrambos*, 10); Horace will therefore not make the mistake of emulating Pindar, but will make small lyric verses instead. Horace’s lyric poetry fits into the Callimachean idea of smallness in poetic work not only because they are shorter than both epic and praise poetry, but lyric meters are lighter and more whimsical than the meters of epic and epinician verse. Horace also relates his poetic style to Callimachus when he refers to himself in a simile as *apis Matinae* (“a Matinean bee,”

⁶⁷ This and all subsequent texts and translations from the *Hymn to Apollo* are from Mair 1977 (slightly adapted).

27). Callimachus uses a similar concept while explaining in his *Aetia* how the god Apollo directed his poetic path.

Halfway through the poem, Horace once again brings to the mind of the audience and his addressee, Iullus, Pindar's innate and excessively-daring ability for praise poetry. In the phrase *Multa Dircaem leuat aura cycnum*, "many a breeze lifts a Dircean swan," Horace refers to Pindar in familiar terms.⁶⁸ Horace refers to the opening of the poem in his description of the difficult ascent of the swan, and he contrasts this labor with his own by the adjective *parvus* ("small creature").⁶⁹ For the sake of the *recusatio*, he playfully diminishes his own poetic ability by alluding to a similar *recusatio* in Callimachus. Horace compares himself to a less significant winged character, a Matinean bee.⁷⁰ He also describes his poetic process as *operosa parvus carmina fingo*, "as a small creature, I compose painstaking poems." With this description of the bee's task – *grata carpentis thyma per laborem plurimum circa nemus uuidique Tiburis ripas* "plucking pleasing thyme with the most toil around a grove and the flowings of the damp Tibur" (29-31) – Horace emulates Callimachus instead of choosing Pindar as a model. His description of the bee is particularly reminiscent of Callimachus when he speaks of the $\Delta\eta\omicron\iota\delta'$ οὐκ ἀπὸ παντὸς ὕδωρ φορέουσι Μέλισσαι ("And not of every source do the honey bees carry water to Deo," 110). Likewise, Horace also refers to the section of Callimachus' *Aetia* in which he uses another insect to describe how Apollo instructs him to keep his verses light.

καὶ γὰρ ὅτε πρῶτιστον ἐμοῖς ἐπὶ δέλτον ἔθηκα
γούνασιν, Ἀπόλλων εἶπεν ὁ μοι Λύκιος·
".....] ἀοιδέ, τὸ μὲν θύος ὅττι πάχιστον

⁶⁸ For a discussion on Pindar as the Swan of Dirce, see Thomas 2011: 113 and West 1998: 145.

⁶⁹ Thomas 2011: 113.

⁷⁰ See discussion in Highbarger 1935: 224.

θρέψαι, τή]ν Μοῦσαν δ' ὠγαθὲ λεπταλέην·
 πρὸς δέ σε] καὶ τόδ' ἄνωγα, τὰ μὴ πατέουσιν ἄμαξαι
 τὰ στείβειν, ἑτέρων δ' ἵχνια μὴ καθ' ὁμά
 δίφρον ἐλ]ᾶ μηδ' οἶμον ἀνά πλατύν, ἀλλὰ κελεύθου
 ἀτρίπτο]υς, εἰ καὶ σεινοτέρην ἐλάσεις.
 τεττίγω]ν ἐνὶ τοῖς γὰρ ἀεῖδομεν οἱ λιγὺν ἦχον
 θ]όρυβον δ' οὐκ ἐφίλησαν ὄνων.”
 θηρὶ μὲν οὐατόεντι πανεῖκελον ὀγκήσαιτο
 ἄλλος, ἐγ]ὼ δ' εἶην οὐλαχύς, ὁ πτερόεις,
 ἅ πάντως, ἵνα γῆρας ἵνα δρόσον ἦν μὲν ἀεῖδω
 προίκιο]ν ἐκ δίης ἡέρος εἶδαρ ἔδων.

For, when I first placed a tablet on my knees,
 Lycian Apollo said to me: “...poet,
 feed the victim to be as fat as possible but, my friend,
 keep the Muse slender. This too I bid you:
 tread a path which carriages do not trample;
 do not drive your chariot upon the common tracks of others,
 nor along a wide road, but on unworn paths,
 though your course be more narrow. For we sing
 among those who love the shrill voice of the cicada
 and not the noise of the...asses.”
 Let others bray just like the long-eared brute,
 but let me be the dainty, the winged one.
 Oh, yes indeed! that I may sing living on dew-drops,
 free sustenance from the divine air. (*Aetia* 21-34)⁷¹

Significantly, in both of these selections from Callimachus, Apollo is the figure responsible for setting Callimachus on his path of refusing epic. Callimachus receives his poetic direction from the god of poetry, which is appropriate. He likens himself and his songs to a small creature, τεττίγω]ν ... λιγὺν ἦχον (“the shrill voice of the cicada”). Horace derives his imagery of the Matinean bee also from Callimachus’ cicada in this poem, which is also a *recusatio*.⁷² In each of his *recusatio* poems, Callimachus declares that Apollo has told him to write slight verse, especially when he uses descriptions in such phrases as: τή]ν Μοῦσαν δ' ... λεπταλέην (“...the Muse slender”). Horace as well claims his inspiration from the god Apollo, when he continues Callimachus’ trend of

⁷¹ This and all subsequent texts and translations from the *Aetia* are from Trypanis 1978 (slightly adapted).

⁷² Acosta-Hughes 2002: 76.

referring to poetic art as a swan. Callimachus himself describes a swan in the *Hymn to Apollo*: οὐχ ὀράας; ἐπένευσεν ὁ Δήλιος ἠδὺ τι φοῖνιξ / ἔξαπίνης, ὁ δὲ κύκνος ἐν ἠέρι καλὸν αἰίδει, “See’st thou not? the Delian palm nods pleasantly of a sudden and the swan in the air sings sweetly” (4-5). Horace uses the swan imagery in *Odes* 4.2, to describe Pindar and his ability to compose praise poetry. However, as we shall see, Horace uses the Callimachean imagery of a swan in his *Odes* 2.20, where Horace becomes the swan of poetic art. As I argue in the analysis of the next poem, Horace is able to be the swan of Roman lyric, while Pindar is the swan of bombastic praise poetry, because Horace claims to be just a small bee compared to Pindar’s swan in that genre of poetry. Horace is good at what he does, and he makes sure that fact is known, but he chooses not to engage in the certain types of poetry that require the kind of *audacia* which he determines to be inappropriate.

For Horace, praising great men in the style of Pindar is dangerous and requires the wrong kind of *audax*. Horace seems to insinuate that his slight verses are not able to contain the great accomplishments of Augustus, thus: *ego apis Matinae more modoque... operosa parvus carmina fingo* (“I, in the style and manner of a Matinean bee... as a small creature, compose painstaking poems” 2.20.27-32). By incorporating a Callimachean intertext, Horace is not simply saying that his verse is too small to contain the magnificence of Augustus, he may, in fact, be implying that like Callimachus’ Ἀσσυρίου ποταμοῖο μέγας ῥόος (“great stream of the Assyrian river”), Pindar’s verse, and even Augustus’ deeds are filled with λύματα (“filth”) and συρφετόν (“refuse”). This is the inappropriate *audacia* of epinician praise poetry. If Horace were to compose verse for Augustus in Pindar’s style, he must fill it with filth, not only because the genre calls for

it, but also because Horace may be subversively referring to Augustus' deeds as filth and refuse.

C. *Odes* 2.20: Horace Embraces Appropriate *Audacia*

The ode in which Horace describes himself transforming into a swan and then traveling around the world throughout time, has inspired much discussion concerning the poet's lasting fame through his poetry. In *Odes* 1.3, Horace compares both the first seafarer and Vergil himself to Daedalus, but makes a reference to the danger of traveling over the sea, particularly by flying, in that he also implicitly suggests Icarus in the brief allusion to the tale. In *Odes* 4.2, he participates in a rather complex discourse with both Pindar and Callimachus, which brings him to the conclusion that to write praise poetry for Augustus would be an exhibition of inappropriate *audacia*. In *Odes* 2.20, Horace implements vivid language, focalization, and a rather curious comparison with Icarus to predict his lasting fame. He sets up a comparison between himself, as a poet, and the character Icarus, here not to express the dangers of travel or of possessing a creative personality, but to contrast his perpetual success with the impermanence and failure of the daring boy. However, the poet will succeed where Icarus failed, and he will not perish but live on through his poetic corpus.

*Non usitata nec tenui ferar
penna biformis per liquidum aethera
vates neque in terris morabor
longius invidiaque maior*

*urbes relinquam. Non ego, pauperum 5
sanguis parentum, non ego, quem vocas,
dilecte Maecenas, obibo
nec Stygia cohibebor unda.*

*Iam iam residunt cruribus asperae
pelles et album mutor in alitem 10*

*superne, nascunturque leves
per digitos umerosque plumae.*

*Iam Daedaleo notior Icaro
visam gementis litora Bosphori
Syrtisque Gaetulas canorus 15
ales Hyperboreosque campos.*

*Me Colchus et qui dissimulat metum
Marsae cohortis, Dacus et ultimi
noscent Geloni, me peritus
discet Hiber Rhodanique potor. 20*

*Absint inani funere neniae
luctusque turpes et querimoniae;
compesce clamorem ac sepulcri
mitte supervacuos honores.*

I shall be born on a wing, neither common nor weak,
through flowing sky, a two-formed poet,
and I shall not delay on the lands any longer,
and greater than envy I shall abandon the cities.

I, progeny not of poor parents, I, whom you call,
dear Maecenas, shall not meet death,
nor shall I be embraced by a Stygian wave.

Now, already rough skin settles on my legs,
and I am changed into a white bird on my upper body
and smooth feathers are sprouting
throughout my fingers and shoulders.

Soon, more famous than Daedean Icarus,
I shall behold the shores of the roaring Bosphorus
and the Gaetolian sandbanks
and the Arctic fields as a melodious bird.

The Colchian man and the Dacian,
who disguises fear of the Marsian infantry,
and the farthest Scythians will become acquainted with me,
the skillful Spaniard and the drinker of the Rhone will learn of me.

Let dirges be absent from the empty burial,
both ugly sorrow and laments as well;
restrain crying and throw out
the useless praises of the tomb.

In the opening stanzas of the poem Horace uses verbs in the future tense, all first person singular: *ferar* (“I shall be born”), *necque...morabor* (“I shall not delay”), *relinquam* (“I shall abandon”), *non ego... obibo* (“I shall not meet death”), *nec...cohibebor* (“nor shall I be embraced”). Horace is using his own voice and describing his own physical body as a metaphor for his poetic corpus. Horace emphatically repeats *non ego* in the second stanza, and his continued use of first person singular verbs indicates a consistency of focalization throughout the poem. The focalizer and the narrator are one, in this case the poet himself, what Genette calls *internal fixed focalization*, where the character “who sees” can be found in the text and remains the same throughout the narrative.⁷³ The beginning of the third stanza marks an important shift, and Horace makes this clear by inserting *iam iam* which West explains as meaning: “now, even at this very moment.”⁷⁴ This emphatic repetition demands the audience’s attention for the upcoming description of mutation. Horace then switches tenses to the present in order to describe a mutation that is currently happening to his own body. With *residunt* (“settles”), *mutor* (“changed”), and *nascuntur* (“are sprouting”), Horace lays out the sequence of changes that takes place on his person. Starting with his legs, he graphically catalogues his mutation up to his torso and then to his shoulders and fingers. He points to his changing limbs during the process of transformation, which continues the deictic trend initiated by the *iam iam*.

Scholars generally associate the *album...alitem* (“white bird,” 10) with a swan, which is a special reference to Pindar who was the Swan of Dirce and to Horace’s own *Odes* 4.2,⁷⁵ which I discussed above. At this point Horace directly compares himself,

⁷³ Genette 1980: 186-192.

⁷⁴ West 1998: 144.

⁷⁵ See West 1998: 145; and Lowrie 1997: 213.

without actually using the term *cycnum* (“swan”), to Callimachus’ swan in the *Hymn to Apollo* and to Pindar as the “Swan of Dirce.”⁷⁶ In *Odes* 4.2, Horace described Pindar as a swan, while he reserved for himself the description of *apis Matinae* (“Matinean bee,” 27). In a sharp contrast, in *Odes* 2.20 Horace himself transforms into a swan. Along with the swan imagery in this poem, Horace establishes in his comparison between the transformed poet and Icarus that the *audacia* he exhibits with his verse is an appropriate *audacia*, whereas in *Odes* 4.2 the *audacia* he would need to match Pindar’s style is inappropriate.

In the following stanza, Horace makes his comparison between himself as a poet using appropriate *audacia* and Icarus. We shall see that Horace is makes this comparison in order to contrast the success of his poetry with the failure of Icarus. He marks the line which contains the comparison as emphatic with anaphora: *iam* (13). This line is dominated by the phrase *Daedaleo notior Icaro*, “more famous than Daedalian Icarus” (13). This comparison is startling, because Horace uses Icarus to describe his fame at a point where one would think another comparison would be more apt: that of Daedalus, one of the most skilled individuals in mythology. While Horace neatly and concisely mentions both members of the father-son duo who famously flew from Crete, the primary character of comparison is Icarus, the daring boy, and not the skilled craftsman. He subordinates Daedalus by using his name as an adjective (*Daedaleo*), while emphasizing Icarus by using his name along with the patronymic adjective. In this comparison, Horace seems to be making reference to his own poetic skill being of the same caliber as Icarus’ flying skill. The significant difference between the poet and the boy is that the boy clearly does not survive. While traditionally in the story, the Daedalus figure survives and makes

⁷⁶ Many others have noted the connection. See Rudd 1988: 22; West 1998 :145; and Lowrie 1997: 213.

a safe landing, the poet-bird in Horace's ode does not ever land, or at least not during the narrative of the journey which Horace presents. The comparison between the transformed poet and the flying duo highlights the differences between the two flying men and the poet; the bard is not truly Daedalus nor is he Icarus.

I argue that the most significant contrasting trait, to which Horace subtly refers, is the fact that Horace is claiming actually to be a swan, even if it metaphorically stands in for his poetic work; he is telling his audience that his wings cannot melt like those of Icarus, nor does he require to keep a level path like Daedalus. Also, since Horace claims to possess his wings organically, he does not violate natural boundaries as he warns the poet in *Odes* 1.3. With his description of flying, Horace leaves behind the less natural, and therefore more violating, mode of travel, sailing. Since he does not violate natural boundaries, like those he established in *Odes* 1.3, Horace spreads his fame without fear of repercussion by the *deus... prudens* ("wise god," 21-22). In this way Horace's *notior* (13) signifies not only that he is more famous than Icarus and even Daedalus, but that he is also better and more deserving of fame and recognition. The fact that Horace says that he may fly as high as he likes and not be punished also makes him a source of envy. He therefore diminishes the limitation of the ascent of his poetic fame by suggesting that his ability is something natural and innate, not simply constructed by means of skill or augmented by a single moment of daring.

Horace switches back to the use of the future tense as he begins to describe with deictic emphasis his post-mutation journey. With *visam* ("I will see," 14), Horace declares that, as a melodious bird (*canorus ales*), his poetry and fame will travel great lengths. He then mentions three noteworthy places: *gementis litora Bosphori* ("the shores

of the roaring Bosphorus”), *Syrtis Gaetulas* (“the Gaetulian sandbanks”), and *Hyperboreos campos* (“the Arctic fields”). At the mention of each of these places, Horace brings the audience, as implicit observers, along with him; he is pointing to each place along the way. The first two locations are far removed from Rome, but are still imaginable for the contemporary audience, being located in North Africa. However, the Arctic fields to which Horace refers are, as West says, “in the inconceivably distant north of the world.”⁷⁷ Horace continues in a similar manner to plot out the rest of his course until he transcends the entire world as understood by his audience. Another indication that the poet’s own body stands in for the poetic text is that throughout this itinerary Horace repeats *me* (at lines 17 & 19). The concluding stanza of the poem solidifies this blurred association between the poet and his body of work.

In describing his funeral and tomb, Horace makes an important point: his body will not be present. This stanza indicates two things unique about the poet’s funeral: that there will be mourning, when there should not be; and that there will be no body, when there should be. The hortatory subjunctive and two imperatives: *absint* (“Let them be absent”), *compesce* (“restrain”), and *mitte* (“throw out”) demand from the audience an obligation to keep mourning away, and Horace indeed gives a reason for this when he says: *inani funere* (“empty burial”) and *sepulcri...supervacuos honores* (“the useless praises of the tomb”). The empty burial follows logically from Horace’s earlier assertion that his body has changed into a bird and flown away, and therefore the poet has no use for the praises of the tomb. Horace’s main claim of becoming more famous than Icarus, as a result of making a successful flight due to natural rather than acquired skill, reaches a crescendo at this point in his poem. This is because the most important piece of evidence

⁷⁷ See discussion in Garrison 1991: 290; and West 1998: 145.

of the failed flight, which is contained in Ovid's narrative but is absent in Horace's, is a description of the body of Icarus. The entire reason that Daedalus knew the fate of Icarus in *Metamorphoses* 8 is: *pinnas adspexit in undis*, "he spied the feathers in the waves" (*Met.* 8.233). Ovid then tells that Daedalus: *devovitque suas artes corpusque sepulcro / condidit, et tellus a nomine dicta sepulti*, "he both devoted his skills and stored the body in a tomb, and the land was called by the name of the buried boy" (*Met.* 8.234-235). Daedalus' *artes* described at this point in the passage are those of building a tomb for Icarus. The very thing that Daedalus gives to Icarus at the end of the flight myth in Ovid a *sepulcrum* ("tomb," 234) is the very thing that Horace rejects at the end of *Odes* 2.20. Horace is making a bold claim about his future fame: the evidence of his success is the lack of a dead body to fill a tomb, but the poet's work has become a substitute for the poet himself.

Horace is implying that he will achieve poetic immortality through his literary works. He will therefore transcend the traditional role of the Icarus figure. While Icarus crashed into the sea and drowned, which results in the sea taking his name and producing his fame, Horace's poet-bird does not ever again touch the ground. It does not even leave behind a body, which suggests that the bird is immortal. Therefore in Horace's *Odes* 2.20 the poet surpasses Icarus in two ways. He is not only successful in his flight, and he also does not need a dramatic death to make his fame eternal. By making these comparisons in his *Odes*, Horace gives great value to his own poetic ability. He suggests that the skill he exhibits in his poems will bring about his eternal fame, many various peoples in different locations will learn well his poetic texts, and he will live on forever through their knowledge of him. In this way Horace, who is daring in his own style of poetry, becomes

immortal, not through the serious and weighty verses of poets such as Pindar, but through his own delicate verses.

Throughout his poetic corpus, Horace uses the Icarus figure in comparison with a number of poets, including himself, in order to set parameters for the appropriate and inappropriate use of *audacia* with respect to poetic ability. In the next sections I shall trace poets who follow the thread of reception that compares the creative individual directly with the character of Icarus in order to communicate Horatian appropriateness in the use of the term *audax*.

II. Three Early Modern Evocations of Icarus

The poets of the Renaissance adopted Icarus as a representative character in a number of contexts. The most notable of these contexts is to represent the striving of the poet himself, much like Horace did. In most cases the poet uses Icarus to represent himself in a context of appropriate daring, whether he achieves success or fails in the attempt. Erich Segal claims: “Icarus had a special fascination for the Renaissance mind, since he simultaneously exemplified bold striving and punishment for over-reaching.”⁷⁸ The Renaissance poets use Icarus in terms that are familiar to their own situations. They strive for poetic success, just like Horace, but these poets describe the daring attempt as valuable, whether they succeed or more often fail like Icarus. Many notable scholars, including Niall Rudd and John H. Turner, have undertaken the task of analyzing and interpreting these poems in order to place them in the tradition of the uses of mythological figures. However, scholars rarely take into account the narrative structure

⁷⁸ Segal 1963: 339.

of the poems in order to delineate a clear thread of reception, as I propose in this section. While Ovid clearly influences many Early Modern artists and poets, I argue that Horace's influence can also be seen in the medium of poetry. As demonstrated above, Horace uses comparison with the poet to create an Icarus who focalizes the narrative. Although Icarus still has the potential to fail as in *Odes* 1.3 and 4.2, Horace establishes himself as a successful figure in contrast to Icarus in *Odes* 2.20 as he compares the transformation of his own person with the doomed figure. Horace also uses the concept of *audacia* in both appropriate and inappropriate contexts to compare the work of the poet with the Icarus figure. The later poets adopt a Horatian Icarus exhibited in the following poems, which suggests that this treatment of Icarus also persists through the Early Modern period.

The first poet to capitalize on the positive quality of Icarus' daring was the Italian, Jacopo Sannazaro (1458-1530). In the following poem, Sannazaro describes Icarus as a daring individual who will no doubt be emulated. In his book *The Myth of Icarus in Spanish Renaissance Poetry*, John H. Turner says of the poem: "Sannazaro glorifies Icarus' venture and points out, as will many poets who follow, that in his death Icarus was assured of immortality by giving his name to the sea into which he fell."⁷⁹ Much like in Horace's *propempticon*, *Odes* 1.3 and his *recusatio*, *Odes* 4.2, Sannazaro refers to the familiar story in a single moment.

*Icaro cadde qui: queste onde il sanno,
che in grembo accolser quelle audaci penne;
qui finì il corso, e qui il gran caso avvenne
che darà invidia agli altri che verranno.*

*Aventuroso e ben gradito affanno,
poi che, morendo, eterna fama ottenne!
Felice chi in tal fato a morte venne,
c'un sì bel pregio ricompensi il danno!*

⁷⁹ Turner 1976: 50.

*Ben pò di sua ruina esser contento,
se al ciel volando a guisa di colomba,
per troppo ardir fu esanimato e spento;*

*et or del nome suo tutto rimbomba
un mar sì spacioso, uno elemento!
Chi ebbe al mondo mai sì larga tomba?*⁸⁰

Here Icarus fell; these waves beheld his fate,
which drew the daring wings to their embrace;
here the flight ended; here the event took place,
which those unborn will yearn to emulate.

Thrilling and welcome was his sorrow's weight,
since dying he achieved immortal praise;
happy that, since he died above disgrace,
so fair a prize his loss should compensate.

With such a fall well may he be content,
if, soaring to the sky dove-like and brave,
he with too fierce a flame was burnt and spent;

his name now echoes loud in every wave,
across the sea, throughout an element;
who ever in the world gained such a grave?

In the first stanza Sannazaro uses deictic expressions, such as *qui* (“here”), to emphasize the location of Icarus’ impact, which is significant in the final stanza as well. He notably begins his poem with Icarus’ name. His repetition of the same word, *qui*, three times in the first stanza is reminiscent of Horace’s *iam* anaphora in *Odes* 2.20.9 & 13. With the line *che darà invidia agli altri che verranno* (“which those unborn will yearn to emulate”), Sannazaro also captures the predictive gesture made by Horace in *Odes* 2.20.17-20, where he names the particular variety of people who will become acquainted with his poetic corpus. The term *invidia* (“envy”) is reminiscent of Horace’s *notior* (“more famous,” 13) because just as Horace was not limited by mortality, so too this

⁸⁰ Turner 1976: 50. For translation see Rudd 1988: 40.

Icarus does not allow himself to be limited. This Icarus inspires envy in others not because he is successful, but because he dared.

Sannazaro uses the modifier *audaci* (“daring”) to describe the *penne* (“feather”) that Icarus used. This is the same cognate word that Horace uses in *Odes* 1.3 and 4.2 when describing Prometheus, Daedalus, the first seafarer, and Pindar in an inappropriate context. However, unlike Horace in his description of these daring men, Sannazaro does not view his Icarus as being inappropriately daring. When he says *morendo, eterna fama ottenne* (“since dying he achieved immortal praise”), Sannazaro finds a positive outcome for Icarus’ fate, and in this way Sannazaro’s Icarus makes himself into a sacrificial character who makes a fair exchange for his life. Unlike the traditional Icarus who gives his name to the sea thereby exchanging his life for fame, the poet views the loss as a worthy compensation. Yet the *biformis vates* (“two-formed poet”) turned *canorus ales* (“melodious bird”) in *Odes* 2.20.2-3 & 15-16 achieves the same result of eternal fame without making a sacrifice. In the final stanza, Sannazaro’s Icarus differs from Horace’s in that once again the boy is entombed. His wide tomb consists of the entire sea, which referring back to the first stanza’s declaration of the position of Icarus’ resting place.

Sannazaro’s Icarus sonnet influenced many later poets. Philippe Desportes (1546-1606), a French poet of the sixteenth century, emulates Sannazaro’s Icarus sonnet with one of his own. Desportes, like Horace and Sannazaro before him, uses key vocabulary to communicate an idealized Icarus, who has enviable qualities and is not simply being punished for disobedience.

*Icare est cheut icy le jeune audacieux,
Qui pour voler au Ciel eut assez de courage :
Icy tomba son corps degarni de plumage,
Laissant tous braves cœurs de sa cheutte envieux.*

*O bien-heureux travail d'un esprit glorieux,
Qui tire un si grand gain d'un si petit dommage !
O bien-heureux malheur plein de tant d'avantage,
Qu'il rende le vaincu des ans victorieux !*

*Un chemin si nouveau n'estonna sa jeunesse,
Le pouvoir luy faillit mais non la hardiesse,
Il eut pour le brûler des astres le plus beau.*

*Il mourut poursuivant une haute aventure,
Le ciel fut son desir, la Mer sa sepulture :
Est-il plus beau dessein, ou plus riche tombeau ?⁸¹*

Here fell the daring Icarus in his prime,
He who was brave enough to scale the skies;
And here, bereft of plume, his body lies,
Leaving the valiant envious of that climb.

O rare performance of a soul sublime,
That with small loss such great advantage buys;
Happy mishap fraught with so rich a prize,
That bids the vanquished triumph over time.

So new a path his youth did not dismay.
His wings, but not his noble heart, said nay;
He had the glorious sun for funeral fire;

He died upon a high adventure bent;
The sea his grave, his god the firmament.
Great is the tomb, but greater the desire.

Desportes emphatically begins his sonnet with Icarus' name, just like Sannazaro. He also indicates the location of Icarus' landing with the deictic adverb *icy*, which he repeats two lines later. Desportes describes the boy himself as *le jeune audacieux* ("daring...in his prime") in the first line, which refers directly back to Sannazaro's *audaci* and Horace's *audax*, and that he has *assez de courage* ("brave enough") in the second line, and makes a comparison with *tous braves cœurs* ("the valiant") of line four. Much like in both Sannazaro's sonnet and Horace's *Odes* 2.20, in Desportes' poem Icarus leaves others

⁸¹ Desportes 1960: 11-12. For translation see Rudd 1988: 42.

envious by his daring flight. Desportes continues to praise Icarus throughout the poem. He notably refers to Icarus' failure as *petit dommage* ("small loss") and *bien-heureux malheur* ("happy mishap"), which removes the connotations of blame and disobedience commonly associated with Icarus' failure. He also contrasts this idea with the phrase: *Qui tire un si grand gain* ("such great advantage gains"). Icarus' gain outweighs his suffering, as Sannazaro also notes: *c'un si bel pregio ricompensi il danno!* ("so fair a prize his loss should compensate," 8). Desportes also does not blame the boy's *la hardiesse* ("noble heart") because according to Desportes, that is not why he failed. Icarus' power fails him, not his courage, and Desportes praises the boy for possessing *audacia*, not ability. While Horace's *biformis vates* ("two-formed poet," 2-3) has both ability and daring, Desportes still adopts Horace's concept of appropriate *audacia* even while he adapts it to fit the context of his poem. Moreover, where Sannazaro differs from Horace, Desportes similarly describes Icarus' tomb in the final stanza: *la Mer sa sepulture* ("the sea his grave"). Throughout this poem Desportes is responding to Sannazaro who first responded to Horace, and therefore the Desportes' poem is still a reception of Horace's text as interpreted by Sannazaro. Desportes colors Icarus' situation as enviable, not pitiable, with the final line: *est-il plus beau dessein, ou plus riche tombeau?* ("Great is the tomb, but greater the desire"). Desportes contributes to the thread of reception by following Sannazaro's interpretation of an Icarus who is not only worthy to be celebrated because of his daring, but who also benefits from it. In both poems the boy achieves eternal fame, which for these poets makes up for his loss of life. Both poets use the familiar concept of *audacia* to make Icarus an enviable character.

The next poem, authored by Spanish poet Lope de Vega (1562-1635), contains even more similarities to general mythological references in Horace's Icarus odes. It seems that de Vega was influenced more directly by Horace's poems. In a poem published in *La Filomena* and dedicated to Dona Leonora Pimentel, De Vega makes a poet-Icarus allusion, he describes the flight of Icarus as daring, and he uses two mythological characters familiar from Horace: Daedalus and Prometheus.

*Las plumas abrasó rayo febeo
del que miró su luz, águila humana,
lince infeliz, por sendas de oro y grana,
jamás tocadas de mortal deseo.*

*No menos alto el pensamiento veo
que me conduce a vos, oh soberana
deidad, oh sol, que mi esperanza vana
Dédalo mira, y teme Prometeo.*

*Si de mis alas el incendio culpa
vuestra sangre real y entendimiento,
dulce ambicion de gloria me disculpa;*

*que, cayendo del sol mi pensamiento,
vuestro mismo valor tendrá la culpa,
y el castigo tendrá mi atrevimiento.⁸²*

The Pheobean ray scorched the feathers
of the one who looked at his light, the human eagle,
unlucky lynx, by paths of gold and scarlet,
never touched by mortal desire.

I see nothing so lofty as the thought
that drives me to you, oh sovereign
deity, oh sun, my vain hope that
Daedalus looks upon, and Prometheus fears.

If your royal blood and understanding
blames me for the fire on my wings,
my sweet ambition for glory pardons me;

So that, falling from the sun, my thought:

⁸² Turner 1976: 103-104. This translation is mine.

your same courage will be your fault,
and my punishment will be my daring.

De Vega's poem is significant for a number of reasons: not only does he state a concept similar to *audacia* in the last line of his poem, *atrevimiento* ("daring"), but he also implements imagery similar to that which we have seen in one of Horace's descriptions of inappropriate *audacia*. He seems to allude to *Odes* 1.3 with line eight: *Dédalo mira, y teme Prometeo* ("see Daedalus, and fear Prometheus"). This line recalls lines 27-35 of Horace's famous *propempticon* to Vergil: *Audax Iapeti genus / ignem fraude mala gentibus intulit ... Expertus vacuum Daedalus aëra / pinnis non homini datis*, "The daring offspring of Iapetus (Prometheus) brought fire among the races with a wicked trick... Daedalus tested the empty air on wings not given to man." With the brief mention of these two notoriously daring figures during this poem, de Vega makes reference to Horace's warning to Vergil about over-reaching. Turner notes a similar, but generalized, connection that de Vega makes in this stanza: "The familiar parallel is then made between the flight of Icarus and the lofty aspirations of the poet – '*no menos alto el pensamiento veo / que me conduce a vos...*'"⁸³ As Horace shows, the lofty aspirations of the poet can have one of two opposite results: either success, as in *Odes* 2.20 and in 4.2 for Pindar in his poetic style, or failure in the form of punishment, suffering, or death, as in *Odes* 1.3 and in 4.2 for the young ambitious poet, Iullus, or Horace himself if he violates genre boundaries.

⁸³ Turner 1976: 104 (my italics).

III. The Successful Icarus and Modern Lyric Artists

The reception thread of the Icarus narrative as first used by Horace persists even today in a number of modern popular songs. This analysis will take into account three songs from the late twentieth to early twenty-first centuries in which Horace's lyric poetry seems to influence the composers of the songs. Kerry Livgren, a primary songwriter for the band Kansas, composed the first two in the 1970s. In 2006, Brett Dennen, an independent singer-songwriter, wrote the final song to be discussed. While the previous poems in this analysis may not have directly influenced these composers, they still belong to this thread of reception because each song makes a comparison between the lyricist and the Icarus figure.

Livgren, of the band Kansas, wrote the first song "Icarus (Born On Wings of Steel)" in 1975. The title alone is enough to exhibit this song as an exemplum of modern adaptation of classical mythology, but this relates to Horace's *Odes* in particular because the composer makes use of Horatian tactics. In this song Livgren compares the poet as a focalizer directly to Icarus, and makes a number of different comparisons similar to those Horace initiated.

Early in the morning sunlight
Soaring on the wings of dawn
Here I'll live and die with my wings in the sky
And I won't come down no more

Higher than a bird I'm flying
Crimson skies of ice and fire
Borne on wings of steel I have so much to feel
And I won't come down no more

Sail on, sail on, I will rise each day to meet the dawn
So high, so high
I've climbed the mountains of the sky
Without my wings, you know I'd surely die

I found my freedom flyin' high
I've climbed the mountains of the sky

Floating on a cloud of amber
Searching for the rainbow's end
Earth so far below me,
I'm here alone, free
I can't come down no more⁸⁴

In this song, Livgren writes, “Here I’ll live and die with my wings in the sky / And I won’t come down no more,” lines which are particularly Horatian in that the poet will neither crash nor land but will perpetually remain in flight. “Without my wings, you know I’d surely die” seems to suggest a more natural, much like Horace’s *album...alitem* (“white bird,” 10), than contrived set of wings of the doomed Icarus figures so often marked by unnatural feathers stuck in place with wax. But he distances himself from the natural bird image in the comparison: “higher than a bird I’m flying.” In this comparison, Livgren seems to be making the statement that the poet is not only a metaphorical bird, but something better. Horace makes a similar claim in *Odes* 2.20.13 with *notior* (“more famous”). The poet is better than Icarus in Horace’s ode because he need not sacrifice his life to achieve fame, but the poet in the modern song is something even greater than a natural bird. The force of the comparative language that Horace uses is startling; by describing his transformation from human to bird in the vivid present tense, it is apparent that he has no need of manufactured wings. However, the force of the comparison Livgren uses in “Icarus (Born On Wings Of Steel)” transcends natural ability when he claims that he will fly higher than a bird with “wings of steel” which are clearly stronger and thus superior to fleshy bird wings. The focalizer of the narrative in this song not only

⁸⁴ Livgren 1975.

flies dangerously high, but specifically higher than a creature that is familiar with the concept of flight and meant to take to the skies in the first place.

The next song to be discussed is “Carry On Wayward Son” also by Livgren and performed by the band Kansas. These lyrics are more suggestive in their association with the Icarus figure, although they never actually say his name; moreover, this song suggests a fallen but not doomed figure as the focalizer.

Carry on my wayward son
There'll be peace when you are done
Lay your weary head to rest
Don't you cry no more

Once I rose above the noise and confusion
Just to get a glimpse beyond this illusion
I was soaring ever higher,
But I flew too high...

On a stormy sea of moving emotion
Tossed about I'm like a ship on the ocean
I set a course for winds of fortune
But I hear the voices say...⁸⁵

The opening line of this song is immediately suggestive of the Icarus narrative, but because of the direct speech and vocative, “carry on, my son,” it would seem that the focalizer is the father, or Daedalus figure. During the verses the focalization shifts to an Icarus figure in the line, “Once I rose above the noise and confusion,” although the allusion to the Icarus character is not completely clear until the last two lines of this verse: “I was soaring ever higher, / But I flew too high.” Livgren merely suggests the fate of this Icarus at the end of the verse; Icarus fell, but did not necessarily perish. The songwriter also does not indicate whether this figure was flying by natural or artificial means. His fall seems to come about as a result of the sun melting his wings, like the

⁸⁵ Livgren 1975-76.

traditional Icarus. This is suggested by the phrase “But I flew too high,” which would indicate that the sun has melted the wax holding the wings together. The Icarus whom Livgren represents in this song is therefore different than the Icarus in his first song; he is a more traditional Icarus, but he survives even after he crashes into the sea. It is after the next chorus that Livgren solidifies the Icarus comparison, in the line: “On a stormy sea of moving emotion.” This result of Icarus flying too high follows from the familiar story, although the rest of the verse reveals that the focalizer is now on a ship, rather than sinking into the sea or flying above it. This Icarus, though he fell, is like Horace’s because he continues to move himself along with the line “I set a course for winds of fortune.” He also exhibits appropriate daring because he has the audacity to keep going even after his fall. In fact, the concept that Livgren expresses with the term “fortune” suggests the potential for success in this endeavor. The term is also reminiscent of Horace’s own *notior* (“more famous,” 13) because both terms imply that each poet is seeking a great destiny. Livgren seems to derive this comparison between himself and Icarus to indicate transcendence beyond ordinary poetic ability from Horace’s ode in which he predicts his own poetic immortality.

The final song that displays traits derived from Horatian influence is Brett Dennen’s 2006 composition, “So Long Sweet Misery.” Dennen chronicles the struggles of the poet in this song by using a first person focalizer. About halfway through the song, Dennen makes his comparison between the poet and Icarus.

Spring time came again and Icarus fell.
I flew past the numb lipped nuns who’ll never tell,
The secrets of the sailors and their seven year spell.
I will not fall, nor will my wings ever melt.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Dennen 2006.

Dennen begins the comparison by speaking of Icarus in the third person, just as in Horace's *Odes* 2.20 the poet is not Icarus but better than he is. In the next line he establishes the focalizer, who is flying, whereas Icarus has just fallen. In the final line Dennen switches the tense to the future, much like Horace does throughout *Odes* 2.20, *ferar* ("I shall be born"), *morabor* ("I shall delay"), *relinquam* ("I shall abandon"), and *visam* ("I shall behold"). Dennen also makes a bold claim in this line, that unlike the traditional Icarus, whom he has just mentioned as falling, he will not fall, but will succeed. He also claims that his wings will not melt, perhaps because like Horace's description of his natural ability, he organically possesses them; they are not simply counterfeit.

Just as Horace himself once predicted, his influence persists throughout the ages. I have focused on his use of first person focalization which has developed its own reception thread, similar to, but also distinct from, that of Ovid. I have traced some of the poets who engage with Horace's text, from the Early Modern period with Jacopo Sannazaro, Philippe Desportes, and Lope de Vega, to the more recent writers Kerry Livgren, and Brett Dennen. While the Icarus figure is represented differently by these various poets who depict him, what remains consistent throughout this reception thread is the fact that, whether he succeeds or fails, he exhibits appropriate daring in the attempt.

Conclusion

“The sky provides the most natural and available of all theatres. The spectators need only look up.”

—Niall Rudd, *Ovid Renewed*, 35

“The fate of Icarus frightened no one.
Wings! Wings! Wings! They cried from all sides,
even if we should fall into the sea. To fall from the
sky, one must climb there, even for but a moment,
and that is more beautiful than to spend one’s whole
life crawling on the earth.”

—Théophile Gautier (1811-1872)

In the larger tradition of the reception and representation of myth, the Icarus story is usually categorized in a single trajectory, and no study has yet been made for the varied uses of perspective in these narratives. What I have argued in this thesis is that the narratives of Icarus represented by the Roman poets Ovid and Horace produced two divergent threads of reception. These threads differ from each other in their method of representation: in Ovid’s narrative, Icarus is the object of focalization, whereas in Horace’s references to Icarus, he is the subject of focalization.

In Ovid’s rendition, as well as those who follow from his thread of reception, the primary focalizer is Daedalus; he “sees” the story that the narrator relates to the audience. Ovid uses secondary focalizers as well, who remain as an important feature in the receptions of Ovid’s two evocations of the narrative. Another key feature of the overall argument is the connotation of the concept of *audacia* (“daring”). In both the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid employs the term to describe the flight of Icarus. He uses the term in order to characterize the youth as excessively brash, and asserts that it is the reason for his death.

In Horace's references, Icarus is the primary focalizer or, at the very least, he is set in a direct comparison with the focalizing poet. The narrative is "seen" by the flying and falling figure, and this focalization is used by those following the Horatian thread of reception. The *audacia* which Horace uses to describe his Icarus is not necessarily negative, but he uses the context of the poems to determine whether he uses *audacia* to describe an inappropriate daring, as in his *propempticon* to Vergil warning about sea-faring and as in his *recusatio* to Iullus about composing praise poetry for Augustus in the style of Pindar, or to describe an appropriate kind of daring which he reserves for the success of his own poetic texts.

In demonstrating that there are two distinct threads of reception for the Icarus myth, I suggest that each response to this myth follows from a thread of reception initiated by either Ovid or Horace, and that the source for any given reception can be determined by examining the use of focalization and the connotation of *audacia* within the narrative. The opposing view suggests that poets and artists are responding to a singular trajectory of reception for the Icarus myth. I argue that the thread of reception stemming from Ovid is clearly divisible from that of Horace, and in each new response the artist is responding primarily to only one of these poets.

In order to trace the two reception threads specific to these authors within the over-arching trajectory of the reception of the Icarus narrative, I examined manner by which subsequent artists and poets employed the narratological and linguistic parameters established by Ovid and Horace. In Ovid's thread of reception, Daedalus continues to be the primary focalizer and Icarus the object of focalization, although secondary focalizers are often incorporated. Many poets and artists have adopted Ovid's use of focalization in

numerous literary and visual texts. I examined Ovid's influence on the visual language of Pieter Bruegel, who seems to suggest the absent character, Daedalus, is the focalizer in his *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. I then traced Bruegel's influence to the twentieth century poets W. H. Auden and William Carlos Williams. The main concern of these poets is to use the Icarus myth to lament the human condition of isolated suffering. Anne Sexton also participates in Ovid's thread of reception with her representation of Icarus in "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph." She deviates slightly from the thread with an invitation for the audience to imagine participating in Icarus' flight. In Horace's thread of reception, the Icarus figure is depicted as laudatory and his daring is praised rather than scorned, regardless of the outcome, whether he succeeds or fails. Jacopo Sannazaro and Philippe Desportes take on the idea that Icarus' daring is what brought him his fame and therefore should be praised. Lope de Vega makes a clear allusion to Horace's *Odes* 1.3 in his use of Daedalus and Prometheus in his Icarus sonnet. The more recent composers, Kenny Livgren of Kansas and Brett Dennen, use the focalization of Icarus to suggest a more successful daring poet, as Horace does in his *Odes* 2.20.

The focus of this thesis did not allow me to trace further cultural connotations of the reception threads, but in a larger version of the topic I would explore additional ideas within each thread. Pieter Bruegel used Icarus in more pieces than just his *Landscape*, and his use is not limited to paintings but include engravings as well. Clearly, this artist felt a deep connection to the doomed boy. I discovered the possibility that Icarus is a coding for the anxiety of acquiring patronage, especially as he is represented by poets who needed to seek out and maintain patronage. Sannazaro and Lope de Vega use Horace's Icarus in the context of *Odes* 4.2, in which Horace mentions one of the original

poets-for-hire, Pindar. The idea of the flight of Icarus in modern rock music as an allusion to the experience of a drug high and crash occurred in a discussion on the potential uses of Icarus in more recent music. Icarus continues to be an immediately identifiable character, who is consistently represented by both artists and poets. These artists are working within the thread of reception following from Ovid or Horace when they choose to depict Icarus as the subject or object of focalization.

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Images

Bruegel the Elder, Peter, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (ca. mid 1560s) oil on canvas, 73.5 cm × 112 cm, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Belgium.

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