

Musée des Beaux Arts Literary Device

Writer: W. H. Auden | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Figures of Speech

Imagery: Auden paints clear visual scenes. He describes children skimming, an old man waiting for death, and the calm sea near Icarus's fall. These images come from paintings in the Brussels museum. It makes the poem feel real and vivid.

Allusion: The poem alludes to the Greek myth of Icarus, who fell into the sea after flying too close to the sun. This connects human art and myth to the idea that people ignore suffering around them.

Irony: There is quiet irony in how ordinary life continues while tragedy happens. Farmers, ships, and dogs carry on; that shows how normal people ignore great pain.

Symbolism: Icarus's fall symbolizes human suffering, pride, and failure. Everyday scenes symbolize the world's indifference to others' pain.

Personification: Human feelings are given to abstract ideas. For example, "About suffering they were never wrong, the Old Masters." Here, the Old Masters are treated as if they can think and know.

Contrast: The poem contrasts suffering and indifference, tragedy beside daily routine. This contrast makes the message powerful and clear.

Moral Lesson: The poem teaches that people often ignore the pain of others. Life goes on even when someone suffers nearby. Auden reminds us to be more aware and kind. True humanity means feeling sympathy for others, not turning away from their sorrow.