Short Day with Sound

As I stated in my pre-Christmas post about *On this Short Day of Frost and Sun*, I have made a copy of the file with embedded sounds. For each of the poems, there is a recitation, often by the author of the poem. While inserting the soundfiles, I also corrected a few typographical errors in the original pdf.

The resultant pdf file is very large – 588 KB. Because of its size it is only available on my google drive:

On this Short Day of Frost and Sun Text and Sound version 1.0

I have not been able to download the file on my phone, and I think that it would too complicated to operate on a phone or a simple tablet. It should be downloaded onto a computer. Your browser may complain that the file is too large to check for viruses, but that you can "download anyway." There are no viruses in the file.

Once you have downloaded the file to your computer, it should be opened using Adobe Acrobat Reader (free to download.) If the file is opened in other pdf-reading programs, the file will either be rejected as too large, or the sound files won't work. For example, Google may automatically try to read the file using its Google-Doc programs but this will not work.

In order to listen to the embedded sound files, you must set up the Adobe Reader to play multimedia files. To do this follow these steps:

Edit > Preferences (bottom) > Multimedia & 3D (in menu)> tick box for Enable Playing of Multimedia & 3D content (topmost box).

Like its soundless cousin, the file is best viewed using a full-screen two-page viewing mode. To set this up in Adobe follow these steps:

View > Page Display > Two Page View

This is a screen-shot of what it looks like when it works.

Judith Anderson

Divinely Superfluous Beauty

The storm-dances of gulls, the barking game of seals,
Over and under the ocean…
Divinely superfluous beauty
Rules the games, presides over destinies, makes trees grow
And hills tower, waves fall.
The incredible beauty of joy
Stars with fire the joining of lips, O let our loves too
Be joined, there is not a maiden
Burns and thirsts for love
More than my blood for you, by the shore of seals while the wings
Weave like a web in the air
Divinely superfluous beauty.

Robinson Jeffers, 1924

Auden

Musée des Beaux Arts

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

In 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.

W. H. Auden, 1939

Divinely Superfluous Beauty

Robinson Jeffers lived most of his adult life in Carmel, California, where he and a stone-mason built Tor House on Carmel Point. He and his wife Una lived there for the rest of their lives. From the house and the adjacent Hawk Tower, they could watch the waves and listen to the seals.

The poem's rhythm is irregular and there is no rhyme. Long lines alternate with pairs of shorter lines. The final image of the flying seagulls – "while the wings weave like a web in the air divinely superfluous beauty" – sums up the poet's response to nature: there is no need for it to be so beautiful, and yet it is.

Musée des Beaux Arts

Auden and Isherwood visited Brussels at the end of December 1938, just before they emigrated to America. At the *Musée des Beaux Arts*, Auden was struck by the paintings of Pieter Brueghel the Elder.

In this poem he describes details from three of the paintings. *The Massacre of the Innocents* shows Herod's soldiers murdering the babies of Bethlehem, while dogs play and a horse scratches his head against a tree ("behind" sounds better). *The Census at Bethlehem* shows Joseph and Mary arriving at the inn amidst all the activity in a Flemish winter village, such as the children skating on the frozen pond. Finally, in *The Fall of Icarus*, the amazing event of a boy falling out of the sky and disappearing into the water is portrayed as a minor detail in the lower right of the painting. Everything else goes on as if nothing had happened. This is the message of the poem. Momentous happenings and great disasters occur, but life goes on as if they had not. This response may appear cold and cruel but is, in fact, an affirmation that human beings will survive come what may.

The poem uses lines of irregular length and variable rhythm. Every line except one ("place") rhymes with another line but there is no definite rhyme scheme. Despite its irregularities, the poem sails calmly on.