

## RS904: Renaissance Culture and Society

### Looking Beyond Ovid: The Afterlives of Icarus and Phaethon

The below offers an introduction to some of the 'alternative' sources for the tales which Ovid made famous, and literary references to them in other contexts. Please look at the scanned section of mythographical writing (in no. 1); the two emblems of Alciatus (linked under no. 2); and the sonnets printed here (no. 3). There are also notes for extensions/further reading after the seminar, if you are interested in this kind of topic. Literal translations are given for the sonnets, as a guide to the Spanish.

1. Mythography. As a sample, attached in a separate file is the account of the Phaethon tale from Natale Conti's *Mythologiae* (in the translation of Mulryan and Brown). Please read this account, for an introduction to the kind of explications and allegorical interpretations that are routinely applied to these tales.

For interest, as possibilities for extending this kind of approach in future:

- For Conti's account of Icarus, see the material inserted into the long chapter on Daedalus (book 7, chapter 16). This is pp. 663–90 in the Mulryan/Brown translation.
  - If you are interested in other examples of Renaissance mythography, see, for example:
    - Boccaccio, *De genealogia deorum* (Latin; some volumes available in parallel text as part of an ongoing project in the I Tatti series)
    - Giraldo, *De deis gentium* (1548; Latin)
    - Cartari, *Imagini de i dei de gli antichi* (1555; Italian)
    - Pérez de Moya, *Philosophia secreta* (1585; Spanish)
  - On mythography in England, see now: Anna-Maria Hartmann, *English Mythography in its European Context 1500–1650* (Oxford: OUP, 2018)
2. Emblems. The most influential emblem book in Renaissance Europe was the *Emblemata* of Andreas Alciatus, first published in 1531 but enlarged in many later editions and translations; the definitive collection came with the 1550 *Emblemata* published in Lyons. Many editions are available online, with English translations, here: <https://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/>. You should read the two emblems which focus on Icarus and Phaethon, namely:
    - 'In temerarios'
    - 'In astrologos'
    - Extension/to note: that website also includes two extensive Renaissance commentaries on the emblems: the 1615 Diego López edition (in Spanish) and the deluxe 1621 edition (in Latin) which includes four separate Latin commentaries. Unfortunately, no translations of these commentaries exist, but you can see scans of the books and read the commentaries in the original by clicking the link to the image at the top of each emblem.

### 3. Sonnets

Garcilaso de la Vega (1499?–1536):

Si para refrenar este deseo  
loco, imposible, vano, temeroso,  
y guarecer de un mal tan peligroso  
que es darme a entender yo lo que no creo,  
no me aprovecha verme cual me veo,  
o muy aventurado o muy medroso,  
en tanta confusión que nunca oso  
fiar el mal de mí que lo poseo,  
¿qué me ha de aprovechar ver la pintura  
d'aquel que con las alas derretidas,  
cayendo, fama y nombre al mar ha dado,  
y la del que su fuego y su locura  
llora entre aquellas plantas conocidas,  
apenas en el agua resfriado?

*If to suppress this urge, this appetite | – mad, hopeless, futile, dreadful – and protect | myself against  
so perilous a plight, | making myself believe what I reject, | it does no good to view my present state, |  
audacious now, now wracked by consternation, | so troubled that I dare not contemplate | the danger  
that pervades my situation, | of what use can it be for me to view | a sketch of him whose wings melted  
away | and, falling, named and glorified a sea, | or him who, where the fabled poplars grew, | bewailed  
his fire and his insanity, | a fire that even water can't allay? (Tr. Rutherford, in *The Spanish Golden  
Age Sonnet*)*

Gutierre de Cetina (c. 1514–c. 1554):

Amor me tira y casi a vuelo lleva  
por do mi presunción hizo la vía;  
tan alta va mi loca fantasía  
que las nubes pasar volando prueba.  
No espero ya que el fin de Ícaro mueva  
la dura obstinación de mi porfía,  
pues veo que el ardor que la desvía,  
él mismo la rehace y la renueva.  
Está el alma una nueva Fénix hecha,  
y en fuego del dolor que ha fabricado  
se consume y renace cada hora.  
Quiérela así el Amor y es ley derecha  
que siendo Fénix vos, fuese forzado  
Fénix la mísera alma que os adora.

*Love knocks me down, and carries me away – as if I'm flying – down a path made by my own  
presumption; my mad imagination flies so high that it seeks to reach higher than the clouds. I've no  
hope now that Icarus's fate might alter my hard, unyielding obstinacy; for I see that the very burning  
which undoes that obstinacy also renews and remakes it. My soul is transformed into a new phoenix,  
and in the fire of grief which it has constructed, it consumes itself and is reborn each hour. That is the  
way Love wants it; and it is a just law that since you are yourself a Phoenix, so the miserable soul which  
adores you should be forced to become one too.*

Amor mueve mis alas, y tan alto  
las lleva el amoroso pensamiento,  
que de hora en hora así subiendo siento  
quedar mi padecer más corto y falto.

Temo tal vez mientras mi vuelo exalto,  
mas llega luego a mí el conocimiento  
y pruébese que es poco en tal tormento  
por inmortal honor el mortal salto.

Que si otro puso al mar perpetuo nombre  
do el soberbio valor le dio la muerte,  
presumiendo de sí más que podía,  
de mí dirán: —«Aquí fue muerto un hombre  
que si al cielo llegar negó su suerte,  
la vida le faltó, no la osadía».

*Love moves my wings, and my loving thought carries them so high that as I rise for hour upon hour I feel my suffering grow more lacking, more wanting. From time to time I fear as I exalt my flight; but then knowledge comes to me, bringing proof that amid such torment, a mortal leap is a small price to pay for immortal honour. For if another gave an enduring name to the sea where prideful valour brought him death, presuming more of himself than his abilities warranted, people will say of me: 'A man was killed here; although his fate did not let him reach the sky, he wanted for life, but not for boldness'.*

*Cf. too Luigi Tansillo, 'Amor m'impenna l'ale', to which Cetina is responding.*

Fernando de Herrera (c. 1534–c.1597):

¡O, cómo buela en alto mi desseo,  
sin que de su osadía el mal fin tema!  
que ya las puntas de sus alas quema  
donde ningún remedio al triste veo.

Que mal podrá alabarse del trofeo  
si, estando vfano en la región suprema  
del fuego ardiente, en esta vanda extrema  
cae por su siniestro devaneo.

Devía en mi fortuna ser exemplo  
Dédalo, no aquel joven atrevido,  
que dio al cerúleo piélagos su nombre.

Mas ya tarde mis lástimas contemplo.  
Pero si muero, porque osé, perdido,  
jamás a igual empresa osó algún ombre.

*Oh how my desire soars up high, with no fear of the awful fate that awaits its daring! Already it burns the tips of its wings, where I see no salve to cure sorrow. For its boast of a trophy will be hollow if, when it proudly occupies the highest realm of burning fire, it falls down to this other extreme, brought low by its own ill-omened, mad intent. Daedalus should have been the example for my destiny, not that rash youth who gave his name to the cerulean sea. But now I contemplate my grief too late. But if my daring brings me, lost, to death, [at least] no man ever dared anything to equal me.*

Dichoso fue'l ardor, dichoso el buelo  
con que, desamparado de la vida,  
dio nombre a su memoria esclarecida  
Ícaro en el salado i hondo suelo.

I quien el rayo derribó del cielo,  
culpa de la carrera mal regida,  
que Lampecie, llorosa y afligida  
lamenta en el hojoso i duro velo.

Pues de uno i otro eterna es la osadía  
i el generoso intento, qu'a la muerte  
negaron el valor de sus despojos.

Yo más dichoso en la fortuna mía,  
pues al cielo llegué con nueva suerte,  
i ardí vivo en la luz de vuestros ojos.

*Blessed was the heat and blessed the flight with which Icarus, forsaken by life, brought renown to his illustrious memory as he fell into the salty depths. And [blessed was] the one whom the lightning-bolt cast down from the sky, all because of the badly-driven chariot, mourned by Lampetia, tearful and grief-stricken beneath her harsh and leafy veil. For the daring of each one of these is eternal, as is the nobility of their attempt; these qualities deny death the value of its spoils. Still more blessed am I in my own fortune, for I reached my sky/heaven in quite a new kind of state, and I burnt – while still alive – in the light of your eyes.*

Juan de Arguijo (1567–1622):

Osaste alzar el temerario vuelo  
Ícaro, vanamente confiado  
en mal ligadas plumas, y olvidado  
del sano aviso, te acercaste al cielo,  
Donde el ardor del que gobierna a Delo,  
deshaciendo tus alas, despeñado  
te arrojó al mar, a quien tú nombre has dado  
y él sepultura a ti en su hondo suelo.

Por más cierto camino el sabio viejo  
de tal peligro discurrió seguro,  
y a Febo dedicó el cumano templo.

¡Oh, si seguir supieras su consejo  
que no quedara en tu castigo duro  
de las rendidas alas el ejemplo!

*Icarus, you dared to raise your reckless flight, trusting vainly in feathers poorly bound together; and forgetful of the sound advice you heard, you rose to approach the heavens, where the heat of the ruler of Delos unmade your wings and cast you down headlong into the sea, which you have given your name, as the sea gave you your grave beneath its depths. The wise old man passed safely through such danger, taking a surer path, and dedicated to Phoebus his temple at Cumae. Oh, if only you'd been able to follow his advice, and the exemplum of those worn-out wings not brought your painful punishment!*