

Planting the Seeds of Rome: Three Botanical Love Stories  
from Ovid's *Fasti* and *Metamorphoses*  
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The story of Pomona and Vertumnus in Book 14 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has evoked a wide range of critical responses (e.g., Littlefield 1965, Fantazzi 1976, Nagle 1988, Fantham 1993, Myers 1994, Gentilcore 1995, Johnson 1997, Tarrant 2000, Jones 2001), interpreting it as everything from mutual love to devious strategy or female objectification. The Pomona-Vertumnus narrative, however, takes on greater significance when it is read specifically in conjunction with two other Ovidian stories: the Flora-Zephyr episode of *Fasti* 5 and the Janus-Carna tale of *Fasti* 6. These three stories form a distinct pattern in which divine *amor* combines with botanical elements and early Roman history. This paper examines the narratives as parts of an overall Ovidian theme that locates each love story and its links to the natural world in the grand scheme of early Rome and its continuing welfare. In short, the three tales together form a triple image of Roman beginnings that reconfigures previous patterns of *amor*, transmuting them into specifically Roman contexts and purposes. Amatory union of complementary partners evokes the grander purpose of Roman growth and concord. The presence of the floral or vegetative element in each story reinforces this by taking literal blossoming and fruition and transforming it into the metaphorical blossoming and fruition of Rome itself.