

## Rape and Reconciliation: Flora in the *Fasti*

Although a number of supernatural transformations are effected by means of rape or other violence in the *Fasti*, Flora's is unusual in the level of power to which she rises as a consequence of this violence. In this story (5.195-220), Flora begins as a nymph named Chloris, who is abducted and raped by Zephyrus. She is initially resistant to him, but he wins her over by formalizing their marriage and bestowing upon her a large garden, in addition to divine authority over flowers, transforming her into the Italian goddess Flora. As a rape narrative, Flora's story is noteworthy for two reasons. First, although rape is an offense that categorically deprives the victim of power (Brownmiller 1975, Richlin 1992, Horvath 2009), Flora nevertheless gains a remarkable degree of power as a consequence of her rape (in this way her story closely models Raval's analysis of Persephone in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*): not only is she granted social acknowledgment as the wife of Zephyrus and the leverage that can be exercised as a god's wife, she is accepted into the confraternity of gods, no longer a minor Greek nymph but a full Italian goddess, whose celebrations and worship are enshrined in the Roman calendar. She is given not only the property encompassed by her garden, but divine authority over flowers, to the extent that she can commemorate remarkable humans by transforming them to flowers, and even reveals to Juno the secret of parthenogenesis. The power she gains is even evidenced in the means by which her story is revealed in the *Fasti*: she narrates it unmediated to the reader; she herself is the authority guaranteeing the veracity of the story (Murgatroyd 2005). Such authority over truth and its dissemination is an honor seldom granted in the *Fasti*, and Flora decidedly owns her own narrative.

The second noteworthy feature of Flora's story is the degree to which she absolves her rapist of wrongdoing and thereby endorses his rape. Although the works of Ovid contain a great

many rape victims, they contain surprisingly few rape survivors, since most of these stories focus on the moment of violation, with only a brief summary of the consequences of the tragedy. Flora's case is one of the few in which the aftermath of the rape is foregrounded, and it is notable in this case that not only has she acquiesced to marry her rapist, but she even claims to enjoy the marriage and bear no lasting grudge against him. The reader is reminded of the earlier appearance of the Sabine Women (*Fasti* 3.179-234), who begged their fathers to stop attacking their rapists and endorsed their own rapes (also legitimized as marriages) to the extent that they risked their own lives. By casting Flora as a representative first-person voice for all the raped women in the *Fasti*, Ovid invests her with authority on the question of how these women react to being raped, and the answer returned is: the experience is momentarily unpleasant, but ultimately forgivable. Flora is a rape survivor whose perspective on rape is closely aligned to that of the patriarchal establishment, and her opinion contrasts strongly to that of other rape victims in the *Fasti* such as Lucretia; nevertheless, Flora's is the most authoritative perspective we hear. In Ovid's contemporary world, surviving rape was no doubt a harrowing process of navigating social reactions, health consequences, and the possibility of pregnancy, and Ovid's bland whitewashing of the unpleasant possibilities encourages his readers to disregard the crime's gravity. In sum, Ovid engineers a skewed perspective of rape by giving voice to victims who endorse their own rapes, by attaching disproportionate value to their testimony, and by silencing the voices of the victims who refused to sanction what they had suffered.

## Bibliography

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