

The Sphragis of Ovid's Floralia

Ovid ends the long conversation between himself and the goddess Flora in *Fasti* 5 thus (375–78): *omnia finierat: tenues secessit in auras, / mansit odor; posses scire fuisse deam. / floreat ut toto carmen Nasonis in aevo, / sparge, precor, donis pectora nostra tuis*. The passage has been appreciated in terms of its allusion to Callimachus fr. 7.13–14, the poet's prayer to the Graces for the long life of his work at the end (as here) of the first aiton in the *Aitia*, the most important poetic model of the *Fasti*; as an index of the special intimacy projected between Flora and Ovid himself (Barchiesi 1997); and as confirming the importance of Flora as an emblem of the poetics of the entire work (Newlands 1995). The larger significance is marked in particular by Ovid's (punning) naming of himself for the only time in the six books of the poem.

The present paper builds upon these insights with some additional observations:

1. The intertextuality of the verses is extremely dense, in ways that both expand upon and complement reference to the important Callimachean envoi to the Graces as quasi Muses. Flora vanishes but leaves behind her divine fragrance, just as Venus in *Aeneid* 1 leaves her son while exuding *diuinum odorem* (1.402–4). Behind the pun on Ovid's name (*Naso*) in this olfactory context lurks Catullus' promise in an invitation to a party (not unlike the amatory, sympotic world symbolized by Ovid's Flora) that Venuses and Cupids will serve up a powerfully fragrant unguent which will make his friend pray to the gods to make him all nose—*totum nasum* (13.11–14); that *unguentum* in turn dovetails with the anointed hands that Callimachus would have the immortalizing Graces wipe upon his elegies (ἐλέγοισι δ' ἐνψήσασθε λιπώσας / χεῖρας ἐμοῖς, ἵνα μοι πούλῳ μένωσιν ἔτος). Also recalled here is Ovid's own previous assurance, at the end of

the *Amores* (3.15.19–20), that his love elegies will be immortal, which itself looks to Callimachus' appeal to the Graces. Ovid's concluding request matches the programmatic moment at the start of *Fasti* 4, where he asks Venus, the patroness of his earlier elegy, for her favor upon his present work. In response she touched the poet's temples with her sacred myrtle (4.15–16); Ovid would to similar effect have Flora scatter upon his breast her characteristic gifts. Ovid's closing moment with Flora also refers significantly, if more faintly, to Aphrodite's beautifying, and implicitly immortalizing, touch of Berenice's sweet-smelling bosom at Theocritus 17.36–37 (itself evidently imitating Callimachus to the Graces), and to Lucretius 5.737–40 (alluded to earlier in Ovid's *Floralia*), where Flora scatters (*praespargens*) everything with colors and perfumes in the company of Venus and Cupid.

2. On the basis of the passage's rhetoric and the allusion to Callimachus, Barchiesi (1997) noted that it 'has all the appearance of an effective seal on the whole poem.' That the intertexts collected above are mostly endings (or beginnings) points up the retrospective quality of Ovid's *Floralia* (e.g. in many respects Flora matches Janus, Ovid's first divine interlocutor in the poem). The same impression arises from Ovid's habit elsewhere in his works of naming himself as an opening (*Amores*) or concluding (*Ars* 2 and 3) gesture, or, in other late elegies, to sum up his life and life's work (the epitaphic self-references in the *Tristia*, on which see recently Martelli 2014).

3. The cluster of intertexts gathered above puts the seal also on Ovid's creation of a mythical Flora in terms of Venus, whether we understand the lesser deity as an Ovidian personality to see herself accompanying or rivaling the Olympian. The rest of Flora's self-presentation in the long interview is full of Venereal touches: she is goddess of

gardens, of roses—both traditional emblems of Venus—she seems to appropriate the Hours and Graces who follow Venus to her own entourage. And in closing Ovid asks Flora to bless his *Fasti*, as Venus has served as the chief inspiration of his poetry.

Bibliography

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