

# Trilingual Love on the Bay of Naples: Philodemus *AP* 5. 132 and Ovidian elegy

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This paper examines the relationship between the Augustan poet Ovid and Philodemus, the Epicurean philosopher who resided on the Bay of Naples in the late Republic, probably between the 60s and 40s BC. His patron there was Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, father-in-law of Julius Caesar and probable owner of the Villa dei Papyri at Herculaneum, where many of Philodemus' writings have been found, greatly expanding our knowledge of his philosophy, intellectual milieu, and far-reaching influence<sup>1</sup>. As Gregson Davis and others have now explored in depth, Philodemus seems to have been a major influence on Vergil who wrote his *Eclogues* and *Georgics* on the Bay of Naples; Philodemus dedicated one of his prose works to Vergil and other poetic luminaries of that time<sup>2</sup>. But what has Ovid to do with Campania? This very urbane and urban poet centres much of his poetry firmly on Rome – until he was banished to the seaside, but not to the luxurious bay of Naples, rather, to inhospitable, barbarous Tomis on the Black Sea.

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1 — For a succinct introduction to Philodemus' career and the relationship between his poetry and prose writings, especially his aesthetic works, see Janko (2000) 3-10; further, Janko (1995).

2 — Davis (2012); see also Armstrong *et al.* (2004).

However, if we consult David Sider's index to his edition of the *Epigrams of Philodemus*, we see that Ovid, along with Propertius, Tibullus and Vergil, has many entries<sup>3</sup>. In particular, it has been shown by Sider and others that one particular epigram of Philodemus, *AP* 5.132 (=Sider 12), influenced Ovid's *Amores* 1.5, the programmatic poem in which he first introduces his girlfriend Corinna<sup>4</sup>. Philodemus' epigram concerns the poet's infatuation with a dancer who has an Oscan/Latin name, Flora, and who cannot sing the Greek poetry of Sappho, a surely particularly grating feature for a poet who, according to his treatise *On Poems*, valued poetry where sound was firmly wedded to ideas<sup>5</sup>. But despite this touch of Hellenic condescension, Philodemus' epigram reveals a poet interacting with the linguistic and cultural diversity of Campanian society in the late Roman Republic. What I shall also argue here is that Philodemus' play in his epigram with the dynamic multiculturalism of Campania transfers in Ovid's *Amores* and *Fasti* to a fuller exploration of the crosscultural resonances and metapoetic possibilities in the *name* of the elegiac woman. For a play with names is an important feature of Hellenistic epigram and its reception by Roman poets<sup>6</sup>.

Philodemus is known mostly for the philosophical prose texts that have been found in the library of the Villa dei Papyri at Herculaneum. But he also wrote epigrammatic poetry that has mostly been preserved in the Palatine Anthology; Sider estimates that we possess thirty-six genuine epigrams of Philodemus<sup>7</sup>. In his oration attacking Piso, Cicero mentions Philodemus in ambiguous terms, insinuating that the writing of poetry was contrary to strict Epicurean practice (*In Pisonem* 70):

Est autem hic de quo loquor non philosophia solum sed etiam ceteris studiis quae fere ceteros Epicureos neglegere dicunt perpolitus; poema porro facit ita festivum, ita concinnum, ita elegans, nihil ut fieri possit argutius... rogatus invitatus coactus ita multa ad istum de isto quoque scripsit ut omnis hominis libidines, omnia stupra, omnia cenarum genera convivorumque, adulteria denique eius quoque delicatissimis versibus expresserit.

The man about whom I speak was highly sophisticated not only in philosophy but also in other pursuits which people say other Epicureans generally neglect; furthermore he composes poetry that is so witty, so harmonious, so elegant, that nothing could be more polished... in response to request, invitation, and coercion he wrote many poems to him (sc.

3 — Sider (1997).

4 — As Höschele (2011) 26-9, has shown, this epigram also influenced Horace. *Carm* 2.4 contains several allusions to Philodemus' poem and includes a translinguistic pun on his name.

5 — Janko (2000) 8-10.

6 — Importantly argued by Höschele (2011).

7 — See Sider (1997) 32-9.

Piso) and also about him so that he expressed all the man's lusts, all his types of dinners and banquets, finally his adulteries, in the most carefully finished verses<sup>8</sup>.

Cicero gives praise with one hand and takes it away with the other. But as Elizabeth Asmis has argued, in this period of the late Roman Republic Epicureans were engaged in active discussion about the relationship between aesthetics and philosophy; indeed, those philosophers residing on the Bay of Naples often accommodated their teachings to their wealthy Roman patrons<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, as Richard Janko has shown, the outright hostility of Epicurus to poetry is a misapprehension. Epicurus believed it was an unnecessary pleasure, but a pleasure nonetheless; in his aesthetic prose treatises Philodemus seems to have developed Epicurus' view<sup>10</sup>. The intellectual circle around Piso and Philodemus on the Bay of Naples included leading Roman writers of the day, among them Vergil to whom, along with three other Roman poets, Philodemus dedicated several of his prose works<sup>11</sup>. As Joan Booth has argued in a key article on the epigram by Philodemus under discussion here, its context suggests a symposium on the Bay of Naples among wealthy, cultured friends where the speaker expresses fascination with a dancing girl<sup>12</sup>.

We are just beginning to understand how influential Philodemus' epigrams were on Latin poetry not only of the late Republican period but well beyond. Indeed Ian Fielding has convincingly argued that their direct influence extended to the sixth century Latin elegiac poet Maximianus<sup>13</sup>. As for our particular epigram under discussion here, Booth sees its relationship with Ovid's *Am.* 1.5 as more than the inert model that Sider suggests; rather it was to be elegantly varied by his Latin imitators, particularly Ovid<sup>14</sup>. This essay makes, I hope, a small contribution to this discourse by examining further the influence of Philodemus' epigram not only on Ovid's *Am.* 1.5 but also on his *Fasti*. I will argue that Philodemus' epigram invites in these later Ovidian texts cross-cultural and cross-linguistic play that develops the complex character of the elegiac woman.

Let us now turn to the epigram in question and, first, *Am.* 1.5.

*AP* 5.132 (=12 Sider):

ὦ ποδός, ὦ κνήμης, ὦ τῶν (ἀπόλωλα δικαίως)  
μηρῶν, ὦ γλουτῶν, ὦ κτενός, ὦ λαγόνων,

8 — On Cicero's attacks on Piso see Sider (1997) 6-7.

9 — Asmis (1995).

10 — Janko (2000) 9.

11 — Janko (2000) 6-7; Sider (1997) 12-24.

12 — Booth (2011); Sider (1997) 104.

13 — Fielding (2016).

14 — See Booth (2011) 54-5.

ὦ ὤμοιν, ὦ μαστῶν, ὦ τοῦ ῥαδιοῖο τραχήλου,  
 ὦ χειρῶν, ὦ τῶν (μαίνομαι) ὀμματίων,  
 ὦ κακοτεχνοτάτου κινήματος, ὦ περιάλλων  
 γλωττισμῶν, ὦ τῶν (θυέ με) φωναρίων·  
 εἰ δ' Ὀπικὴ καὶ Φλώρα καὶ οὐκ ἄδουσα τὰ Σαπφούς,  
 καὶ Περσεὺς Ἰνδῆς ἠράσατ' Ἀνδρομέδης.

O foot, O leg, O (I'm done for), those thighs! O buttocks, O bush, O flanks, O shoulders, O breasts, O delicate neck, O hands, O (madness), those eyes, o wickedly skillful moves, O fabulous tongue-kisses! O (slay me), the sounds she makes! And if she is an Oscan – a mere Flora who does not sing Sappho's verses – Perseus too fell in love with Indian Andromeda (text and translation Sider, the latter slightly adapted).

Ovid, *Am.* 1.5.1-2, 9-10, 13-14, 19-22:

Aestus erat, mediamque dies exegerat horam;  
 adposui medio membra levanda toro...  
 ecce, Corinna venit tunica velata recincta,  
 candida dividua colla tegente coma...  
 deripui tunicam; nec multum rara nocebat,  
 pugnabat tunica sed tamen illa tegi...  
 quos umeros, quales vidi tetigique lacertos!  
 forma papillarum quam fuit apta premi!  
 quam castigato planus sub pectore venter!  
 quantum et quale latus! quam iuvenale femur!

It was hot, and the noon hour; I placed my limbs for relief in the middle of my couch... Look, Corinna comes, clad in a short dress, her hair parted and covering her fair neck... I ripped the dress down; it didn't cover much but still she fought to be covered with it... what shoulders, what arms I saw and touched! How inviting to fondle was the beauty of her breasts! How flat her stomach beneath her smooth chest! A long and beautiful side! What a youthful thigh!

As Giangrande points out of Philodemus' epigram, the description is dynamic, as the Oscan girl is seen in the round rather than frontally, as in Ovid's elegiac poem<sup>15</sup>. Booth therefore suggests that Philodemus' girl is moving, that is, dancing. The occasion is not the bedroom during a siesta, as in *Am.* 1.5, but a symposium where the girl, a courtesan and dancer, is part of the entertainment; as the speaker watches her dance, he becomes increasingly aroused<sup>16</sup>.

15 — Giangrande (1973).

16 — Booth (2011) 58-60. She argues that dancing girls also provided sexual services. See also Edwards (1997).

Ovid's debt to Philodemus is particularly apparent in the enthusiastic enumeration of the girls' body parts. However, whereas Philodemus' poem starts from the foot and moves upward to the eyes and the mouth, Ovid starts from the shoulders down, omitting the head and face. As LaPenna discusses, an enumerative description of a beloved's body parts is conventional enough, but an ascending order is rare<sup>17</sup>. Philodemus seems here to play with the conventions of erotic epigram. The unusual ascending order of bodily description and its sexual explicitness emphasise the poem's inversion of traditional erotic *topoi*, including the girl's lack of eloquence (7). A beautiful voice is a conventional attribute of the beloved in Hellenistic epigram; for instance, Philodemus addresses his Xanthippe as εὐλαλε (beautiful voiced, *AP* 9.570,2 = 3 Sider). Meleager praises his beloved Zenophila for her melodious music and eloquent speech as well as her beauty (*AP* 5.140). Philodemus' epigram seems designed to surprise his cultured, learned audience.

My particular interest here, however, lies not in the much-discussed enumeration of body parts, but in the last two lines of Philodemus' epigram<sup>18</sup>. Line 7 describes the dancing girl in terms of the three major linguistic groups on the Bay of Naples at this time: Oscan, Latin, and Greek. Hence my title "trilingual love": the girl is Oscan with a Latin name transliterated into Greek (Φλώρα), and she is negatively associated with one of the most famous Greek poets, Sappho, "the tenth Muse", who seems to have represented for Philodemus the very best of poets<sup>19</sup>. Philodemus gives us our first attestation of the adjective Ὀσκή (Oscan) in Greek poetry; otherwise it is a rare prose, geographical word. It is generally accepted that Philodemus' use is not simply geographical but is derogatory, indicating uncultured, particularly with regards to the Greek language. This seems to be its sense when it appears in Latin, although attestations are mostly late, beginning with Juvenal, 3.207: "divina opici rodebant carmina mures" (unlettered mice were nibbling away at divine poetry). For the Romans the Oscans were rustics who were closely connected with the rude and lewd Atellan farces. Cicero, for instance, refers to the "Oscan games" as shorthand for the embarrassing, farcical goings-on in the Republican senate (Cic. *Fam.* 7.1.3 (to a Campanian friend, living near Pompeii):

non enim te puto Graecos aut Oscos ludos desiderasse, praesertim cum Oscos ludos vel in senatu vestro spectare possis.

17 — La Penna (1997) 103-105.

18 — On the anatomical description in both poets see Booth (2011) 54-6.

19 — See Sider (1997) 28-31 where he discusses Sappho's appearance in Book 5 of Philodemus' *On Poems*.

For I don't think that you missed the Greek or Oscan plays, especially when you can see Oscan farces in your very own senate.

Sider claims that the name "Flora" also makes further claim to the girl's rusticity<sup>20</sup>. She does not bear a Greek name as was typical of most high-class courtesans circulating in Roman society<sup>21</sup>. In the homosocial context of the symposium, the speaker of Philodemus' epigram seems in the penultimate line to apologise in a tongue-in-cheek way to his sophisticated male friends for being aroused not by a high-class courtesan with a Greek name who could recite Sappho fluently but by a local, Oscan girl from the Bay of Naples.

When Aulus Gellius claimed that Ennius said he had three hearts, Greek, Latin and Oscan (Gell 17.17.1), "Quintus Ennius tria corda habere sese dicebat, quod loqui Graece et Osce et Latine sciret" (Quintus Ennius said he had three hearts, because he knew how to speak in Greek, Oscan, and Latin), he seemed to give equal value to each language<sup>22</sup>. In his epigram, however, Philodemus marks out Greek as the sign of superior culture. The dancer is a local Oscan girl who is no Sappho in speech or language. There is a cultural divide between her and the Greek-speaking Philodemus, the globetrotting philosopher and poet, friend moreover of the Roman elite. Ovid turns Philodemus' apologetic line into a recommendation for the "docta puella" in *Ars Amatoria* 3.331: "nota sit et Sappho – quid enim lascivius illa?" (you should also know Sappho – what is more provocative than her?).

Curiously, however, in Rome around this time the youthful Pompey consorted with a high-class courtesan called Flora; the name therefore was not only associated with lower-class girls. Sider expresses confidence that, despite the subaltern status of Pompey's Flora, she would have known how to recite Sappho! She was certainly literate; Plutarch tells us that in her old age she left written accounts of her time with Pompey<sup>23</sup>. Sider assumes that the name Flora in Philodemus' epigram has no connection with Pompey's courtesan and that the poem must have been written before Pompey's Flora "gained notoriety".

The epigram of course is impossible to date precisely. And yet it seems to me that the name "Flora", whether or not at it would have resonated with Pompey's courtesan, is more interesting than commentators have made out. The name captures the fluidity of social relationships on the

20 — Sider (1997) 108-109.

21 — See Keith forthcoming. There is evidence from Roman satire that "Flora" indicated a low-class prostitute; cf. Varro *Menipp.* 136; Juv. 2.49.

22 — Cf. Meleager's claim to a tripartite identity as Syrian, Aramaic, and Greek: he was born in Gadara (like Philodemus), raised in Tyre, and spent his old age on Cos.

23 — Plut. *Pomp.* 2.2-5; Sider (1997) 109; Keith forthcoming.

Bay of Naples that are mirrored in the Oscan girl's linguistic and generic translation to Philodemus' epigram. It also has a rich semantic valence. Flowers are a common poetic metaphor for both youthful beauty and poetic inspiration. Meleager, Philodemus' older compatriot and a major influence on Philodemus' epigrams, compared his mistresses Zenophila and Heliodora to flowers woven in garlands (*AP* 5.144 and 147). A garland, moreover, was a common metaphor for a poetic work. In the preface to his *Garland* (*AP* 4.1) Meleager "weaves" into his poetry collections plants and flowers that represent individual poets. The name Φλώρα, marked off by the caesura and flanked in line 7 with two negative descriptors, nonetheless surely draws on this rich metapoetic tradition.

The name also carries a hint of divinity. Neither Sider nor Booth entertains the notion that Flora was also the name of an ancient Italian goddess who was worshipped in Campania as well as in Rome. She presided over flowers and gardens and, given her name's association with fertility, was also the patron of prostitutes<sup>24</sup>. Ovid gives us our fullest account of Flora in *Fast.* 5. 183-378, at the time of her festival, the Floralia, which extended over six days, from April 28-May 3. Prostitutes acting in mimes are reported to have danced naked at the festival<sup>25</sup>. In a famous anecdote, recorded however no earlier than the Tiberian age, Cato is said to have left the games of Flora in disgust, although one wonders why he attended them in the first place (Valerius Maximus 2.10.8):

eodem ludos Florales, quos Messius aedilis faciebat, spectante, populus ut mimae nudarentur postulare erubuit. Quod cum ex Favonio amicissimo sibi una sedente cognosset, discessit e theatro, ne praesentia sua spectaculi consuetudinem impediret.

While Cato was watching Flora's games, which the aedile Messius was putting on, the people were embarrassed to demand that the mime actresses strip naked. When Favonius, who was a great friend and was sitting beside him, realized this, Cato left the theatre so that his presence would not hinder the custom of the show<sup>26</sup>.

Republican writers, however, emphasise that Flora was a major indigenous agricultural deity. She is invoked, for instance, by Varro at the start of his *Res Rusticae* (*RR* 1.1.4, 1.1.6):

invocabo eos, nec, ut Homerus et Ennius, Musas, sed duodecim deos Consentis; neque tamen eos urbanos... sed illos XII deos, qui maxime agricolarum duces sunt... quarto Robigum ac Floram, quibus propitiis neque robigo frumenta atque arbores corrumpit, neque non tempestive

24 — See Bömer (1958) 304 on *Fast.* 5.183.

25 — See Howell (1980) 100 on *Mart.* 1 *praef.* 15.

26 — *Mart.* 1 *praef.* 18-21 refers to the same incident.

florent. Itaque publice Robigo feriae Robigalia, Florae ludi Floralia instituti.

I shall not invoke, like Homer and Ennius, the Muses, but the twelve chief deities; and not those city gods... but those twelve gods who are the particular patrons of farmers... fourth (I shall invoke) Robigus and Flora for when they are propitious blight does not harm the crops and trees and everything blooms at the right time. Consequently the festival of Robigalia has been instituted in honour of Robigus, and the games called Floralia in honour of Flora.

In Rome she was one of the few indigenous deities to have the distinction of her own *flamen*, or priest (Varro, *LL* 7. 45):

eundem Pompilium ait fecisse flamines... sunt in quibus flaminum cognominibus latent origines, ut in his qui sunt versibus plerique:  
 Volturnalem,  
 Palatuaem, Furinalem, Floramque  
 Falacrem(que) et Pomonalem fecit hic idem (= Ennius, Ann. 116 Sk.).

He (sc. Ennius) says that Numa created the flamens... some of their names are of obscure origin, like several in the following verses: "He created the flamen of Volturnus, Palatua, Furrina, Flora, Falacer, and Pomona".

Whereas imperial writers emphasise Flora's licentiousness, Flora's ritual importance in the flourishing of the Roman state is emphasized in these Republican texts.

The cult of Flora was important not only in Rome but in Oscan-speaking territory, which included Pompeii and Herculaneum on the Bay of Naples. For instance, the *Tabula Osca*, from Agnone in south central Italy, is a small bronze tablet that refers to the Floralia. Inscribed probably in the middle of the second century BC, it closely links Flora with Ceres in what seems to be an inventory of statues (*Tabula Agnonensis* 20-24)<sup>27</sup>:

Fiuusasiaís az húrútm  
 sakareter  
 Pernaí Kerríiaí statíʃ  
 Ammaí Kerríiaí statíʃ  
 Fluusaí Kerríiaí statíʃ

On the Floralia there will be a sacrifice at the grove. A statue to Ceres' Perna, a statue to Ceres' Amma, a statue to Ceres' Flora.

27 — Janssen (1949), pp. 28-31, n° 16. The inscription seems to describe the sacred place where ceremonies to Ceres took place and suggests that every year on the Floralia worshippers were expected to offer sacrifices to four different deities.

And in the House of the Faun in Pompeii, a small altar simply inscribed in Oscan *fluusat* (to Flora) “to Flora” was found during excavations; the statue recorded to be with it, presumably of the goddess, is now lost<sup>28</sup>.

Philodemus’ Oscan girl thus bears a name that has both Oscan and Roman cultural referents; line 7 is not necessarily derogatory, therefore, in a Campanian context where bilingual and bicultural exchange between Oscan and Latin seems to have been fairly common. James Adams notes that Oscan inscriptions proliferate in the last two centuries BC and that, despite the encroachment of Latin, there is considerable evidence of bilingualism in Oscan and Latin at all social levels in the late Republic, the period in which Philodemus wrote<sup>29</sup>. Sider’s translation, “a mere Flora” (which I reproduced in the translation above) should be emended. The name Flora, both Oscan and Latin and transliterated into Greek, marks her ambiguous generic status in the epigram as the object of the speaker’s desire, a local girl but worthy of translation to Hellenistic epigram, with at least a hint of divinity.

Furthermore, her name’s association with both “flowering” and an ancient Italian goddess make her an appropriate figure of poetic inspiration and production. The Oscan girl’s naming as “Flora” therefore is pivotal in Philodemus’ poem, for the name bridges the cultural divide between Oscan and Roman, between courtesan and goddess, and between the physical world of erotic dance and the polished text. The name Flora beautifully encapsulates the dynamic trilingualism of late Republican Campania.

The speaker thus defends his love for a local girl – even though she does not sing Sappho’s verses (7) – by suggesting that she is, in his enamoured eyes at least, worthy of celebration in his Greek epigram, which transforms her into elegant verse, and indeed elevates her. The epigram’s final surprise occurs in the last line where the concessive tone of line 7 is refuted by the comparison of the poet to Perseus, and of the local girl to Andromeda, in Greek myth an Ethiopian princess and a bright constellation in the sky (Ov. *Met.* 4.443-764; Man. 5.538-630); the introductory, defensive καὶ (8) marks the conceptual shift. Social discrepancy between lovers was a common Hellenistic topos, found, for instance, in Theocritus where Venus is ashamed of her love for mortal herdsmen (Theoc. 1.105-107; 3.46-8)<sup>30</sup>. But Philodemus’ final exemplum of Andromeda and Perseus has an ethnic component that adds to

28 — Crawford (2011), Campania/Pompeii 36 (*ST Po* 20; Ve 21), altar to Flora, Casa del Fauno, c. 150-100 BC.

29 — Adams (2008).

30 — Cf. also Theoc. 20.34-45 where a goatherd complains that the woman Eunice refuses to kiss him, thinking herself greater than Cypris, Cybele, or Selene, goddesses who loved mortals.

the social and cultural complexity of the epigram. As Peter Knox notes in his commentary on the *Epistle of Sappho*, 35-6, Andromeda became a standard exemplum in dismissing skin colour and foreignness in matters of love. And as Courtney shows, Ovid, who refers to Andromeda's skin colour several times, probably inherited this trope from Philodemus<sup>31</sup>. But Philodemus' analogy has a wit not in the Ovidian examples. For Philodemus, like his older, influential compatriot Meleager, was from Gadara in Hellenistic Palestine<sup>32</sup>. Geographically speaking he, not the Oscan girl, is the foreigner on the Bay of Naples. While the last two lines of the epigram underline the overriding importance of Greek as the universal language of culture in multilinguistic Campania, they also poke some fun at Philodemus, an ageing lover, here ironically self-cast in the youthful role of the Greek hero Perseus; they also undermine the validity of ethnic stereotypes. By defending and elevating his love for an Oscan girl, Philodemus also acknowledges his participation in the Campanian melting pot and the value of cross-cultural social relationships; on the Bay of Naples he hobnobs not only with the Roman elite but also with the local courtesans.

The associations of Philodemus' girl with both prostitution and divinity also seem to anticipate the ambiguous identity of the elegiac mistress of Roman poetry. Ovid alludes to Philodemus' epigram when in *Am.* 1.5 he first introduces Corinna in his love elegy and lists her physical attributes; it may not be accidental that Ovid came from Oscan speaking territory in Paelignia. But Ovid not only plays on Philodemus' anatomical list of his girl's body parts, he also, I suggest, plays on the mistress's name as the site of her paradoxical character, both common and transcendent and, in this case, both Roman and Greek. Corinna's name echoes the Greek word "κόρη", an ordinary girl, but Corinna is also the name of a famous Greek female poet from around the sixth century BC.

Moreover, Corinna seems initially like a goddess. At the start of *Am.* 1.5 she first enters Ovid's poetry and his bedroom at the noon hour, and in the kind of half-light that one associates with divine epiphanies. As Stephen Hinds has noted, Ovid teases the reader with these suggestions of divinity; line 10, "candida dividua colla tegente coma", alludes to Catullus' description of Lesbia at 68.70 as "candida diva", fair goddess, for "candida div-idua" arouses in us the momentary expectation that the figure who appears in the half-light is indeed a goddess, a "diva", and not a flesh-and- blood mistress. But as Stephen Hinds comments, soon

31 — Ovid *Ars* 1.53; 2.643-4; *Ep. Sapph.* 35-6. Courtney (1990) demonstrates that Philodemus probably inherited this trope from Theocritus (10.28) and his contemporary epigrammatist Asclepiades (*AP* 5.210).

32 — See *AP* 7.418.

enough “the epiphany fades” before a sexually charged scene<sup>33</sup>. While the adjective “dividua” grammatically qualifies “coma”, it surely also suggests the split character of the elegiac and the epigrammatic mistress, both goddess and call girl, both Greek and Roman – in short, the adjective on this first appearance of Corinna pinpoints the ambiguity of the figure that Philodemus, with his trilingual love, teases out.

Ovid thus inherited from Philodemus’ epigram not only titillating anatomical enumeration; he drew on the potential in the ambiguity of the girlfriend’s name to access complex roles and emotions. As Alison Keith has argued, the encounter between Ovid and Corinna can also be understood as Ovid’s first encounter with his elegiac poetry book, perfect in all regards apart from the uneven metrical feet, notably *not* described in *Am.* 1.5 as they represented a flaw in the otherwise perfect elegiac body<sup>34</sup>. Ovid’s Corinna represents the multiple allusivity of Ovid’s erotic elegy, a project to be mastered; she is neither Greek nor divine, but love elegy alone for some moments makes her so, and indeed in the *Amores* Corinna will play these different roles at various times, and, in the way of a lover – or a writing project – leads the poet to heaven, hell, or simply down to earth.

Let us turn now briefly to the *Fasti* where Ovid indulges in more overt bilingual play with “Flora”. Ovid’s *Fasti* brings to the fore ancient deities and festivals whose rites were at odds with the moral programme of the Augustan regime; he spends almost two hundred lines of his poem on the fertility goddess of flowers, Flora (5.183-378), whose festival fell at the end of April and the start of May. Ovid’s Flora is initially invoked as “mater... florum”, mother of flowers (*Fast.* 5.183), and in a kind of epiphany she engages in a friendly interview with Ovid about her cult. But in addition to her maternal protection of plants, she appears in Ovid’s poem as a goddess of pleasure, “numen non... severum” (not a severe divinity, 5. 333), associated with the symposium, with the stage, with dancing and with prostitutes. In other words, amongst her various responsibilities, Ovid’s Flora rules over the realm to which Philodemus’ dancing girl belongs. Indeed, her festival incorporates entertainment that evokes a symposiastic context similar to that found in Philodemus’ epigram, except that the dancer here is male (*Fast.* 5.335-8):

Tempora sutilibus cinguntur pota coronis,  
et latet iniecta splendida mensa rosa;  
ebrius incinctis philyra conviva capillis  
saltat et imprudens utitur arte meri.

33 — Hinds (1987) 8.

34 — Keith (2012) 297-9; Booth (2011) 63.

The brows of revelers are wreathed with woven garlands, and the table gleams spread with a heap of roses; the drunken guest, his hair wreathed with linden, dances and carelessly enjoys the art of wine.

The repeated emphasis on the garland, a frequent metaphor for poetry as spelled out in the proem to Meleager's collection of epigrams, the *Garland*, endows these lines also with a strong metapoetic component. *Tempora*, a word which can mean either 'temples' (of the head) or 'times', moreover nearly always in the *Fasti* punningly alludes to the poem's theme as identified in its very first word, *tempora* 'the times' (marked in the calendar)<sup>35</sup>. As we shall shortly see, Flora here is closely connected with the richly allusive poetics of the *Fasti*, a poem that transforms Callimachus' *Aetia* for Roman times.

According to Ovid, "Flora" is again a name associated with linguistic and cultural duality. He oddly gives Flora a Greek origin. She herself tells the poet that she was once a Greek nymph who was raped by the god of the west wind, Zephyr; however, he compensated her by giving her marriage, a Roman name, and Roman divinity (*Fast.* 5.193-206, 209-212):

sic ego; sic nostris respondit diva rogatis  
 (dumque loquitur, vernas efflat ab ore rosas):  
 "Chloris eram quae Flora vocor: corrupta Latino  
 nominis est nostri littera Graeca sono.  
 Chloris eram, nymphe campi felicitis, ubi audis  
 rem fortunatis ante fuisse viris.  
 quae fuerit mihi forma, grave est narrare modestae;  
 sed generum matri repperit illa deum.  
 ver erat, errabam; Zephyrus conspexit, abibam;  
 insequitur, fugio: fortior ille fuit.  
 et dederat fratri Boreas ius omne rapinae,  
 ausus Erecthea praemia ferre domo.  
 vim tamen emendat dando mihi nomina nuptae,  
 inque meo non est ulla querella toro...  
 est mihi fecundus dotalibus hortus in agris:  
 aura foveat, liquidae fonte rigatur aquae:  
 hunc meus implevit generoso flore maritus,  
 atque ait 'arbitrium tu, dea, floris habe'.

Thus I spoke; the goddess replied to my questions (while she speaks, she breathes spring roses from her mouth): "I who am now called Flora was once Chloris; the Greek letter in my name was corrupted by Latin sound. I was Chloris, a nymph of those Blessed Plains, where you hear fortunate men once lived. It is difficult for me, being modest, to speak

35 — Barchiesi (1989) 91.

of my beauty; but it brought a god as son-in-law for my mother. It was spring, I was roaming; Zephyr saw me; I went away; he follows, I flee; he was the stronger. Boreas had given his brother every precedent for rape when he dared to bear a prize from Erechtheus' home. He makes up for the violence by giving me the name of wife, and in my bed I have nothing to complain of... I have a fertile garden in land that is part of my dowry; the breeze nourishes it, and it is watered by a spring of pure flowing water. My husband filled this garden with flowers of noble stock and said, 'have authority over flowers, now as a goddess'".

This story seems to be Ovid's invention, and the claim that Flora is a Latin corruption of Greek "Chloris" is clearly false<sup>36</sup>. Like Philodemus' Flora, Ovid's Flora straddles two worlds, in this case Greek and Roman. Yet the transformation of Flora from Greek nymph to Roman goddess in the *Fasti* is accompanied by a clear bilingual *and* cultural upward shift from victim of rape, as in many Greek myths, to a Romanised name, marriage, and divine status; Flora is mother, wife, and goddess. This odd bilingual myth of Flora's double origins allowed Ovid to suggest the complex notions of the female embodied in this particular name, here extending well beyond the mistress/goddess paradigm. Flora with her Greek origins and Greek husband Zephyr (the Roman equivalent is Favonius), yet Roman devotion to agriculture and its festivities represents a happy union of both Roman and Greek, the domestic and the public spheres.

Why does Ovid privilege Greek origins for Flora rather than Italian (as opposed to strictly Roman)? The Oscan dialect was still alive in Ovid's time but it was now associated with very racy material and occasions such as Atellan farce; we saw above that Cicero used the adjective "Oscan" as shorthand for crude and farcical<sup>37</sup>. By giving Flora Greek rather than archaic Italian origins, and by omitting the Oscan, Ovid upgrades her status; the association with prostitutes and licentious games is only one part of her ritual remit. He grants her authority and visibility in the Augustan age and in his calendar poem as a powerful divinity who challenges the strictures of the Augustan moral code and the political-religious reshaping of Roman cult by acting as both dutiful wife and mother but also as patron of prostitutes; she generously combines roles that were social opposites. Ovid's Flora is a sophisticated version of Philodemus' Flora, adapted to a Roman ritual and elegiac context.

It is interesting that in Ovid's invented myth, Chloris/Flora is said to originate not from Greece proper but from an intermediary zone, a "happy plain where fortunate men were said to go" (197-8). This has been identified with the Islands of the Blessed; it could possibly evoke

36 — See Bömer (1958) 304-305 on *Fast.* 5. 195.

37 — Above 00.

specifically the “arva beata” of Horace’s *Epode* 16, his imagined escape for Roman citizens from civil war and political turmoil<sup>38</sup>. Whether we wish to make that link with Horace or not, Ovid’s Flora, like Philodemus’ Flora, is a mediating figure between languages and cultures; in the *Fasti* she represents the inclusive face of the Augustan peace as imagined by Ovid. She also, I suggest, represents in her myth of origins the act of literary and cultural translation in Ovid’s *Fasti*, as the poet “translates” the *Aetia* of the Hellenistic poet Callimachus to Roman history, religion, institutions, and contemporary politics.

Thus Ovid treats Flora as his personal Muse. As we saw, at lines 335-8 he emphasises the importance of Flora’s festival for his own poetics with the emphasis on garlands and the pun on the festive wreathing of *tempora*. The long account of Flora’s festival stands out in the poem and in fact engenders its own closural moment; there will be no other deities so receptive to the arts and their associated pleasures invoked in the rest of the poem. Ovid thus ends his account of her festival by invoking her favour for his poem (Ovid, *Fast.* 5.377-8):

floreat ut toto carmen Nasonis in aevo,  
 sparge, precor, donis pectora nostra tuis  
 That Naso’s poem may flourish for all ages, sprinkle, I pray, my breast  
 with your gifts.

Here, in his poetic envoi, he plays upon the connection between flowering, eroticism, and poetic inspiration; “flos” (flower) is a metaphor for poetic ornament. And he puns on his own name Naso. As in contemporary English usage, the nose (“naso”) is a metaphor for cultural discrimination<sup>39</sup>.

Indeed, it is interesting that from Philodemus on, when Flora appears in literature, she often plays a metapoetic or at least programmatic role. As we have seen, she is invoked in the preface of the Republican Varro, a sign of agricultural productivity that is tacitly associated with literary production. She is also invoked in the epistolary preface of Book I of the epigrams of the imperial poet Martial, who claims that he writes for those who like to watch the games of Flora (1 *praef.* 14-15). He emphasises her metapoetic significance in the short epigram that concludes the preface (1 *praef.* 18-21):

Nosses iocosae dulce cum sacrum Florae  
 festosque lusus et licentiam volgi,  
 cur in theatrum, Cato severe, venisti?

38 — See Mankin (1995) 261-2 on Hor. *Epod.* 16.41-60.

39 — See Newlands (1995) 109-110.

An ideo tantum veneras, ut exires?

Since you knew what the sweet rite of merry Flora and her festal games and popular licence were about, why, stern Cato, did you come to the theatre? Did you only come in order that you could stage an exit?

Here Martial uses Flora and her games to indicate the licentious nature of his poetry book of epigrams<sup>40</sup>; he also uses the Floralia metapoetically, to indicate the pleasure, variety and ambitious range of imperial epigram to which he is giving an expansive stamp. In his first line he brings together apparent contradictions between poetic form and aspirations. *Sacrum*, moreover, is the word that Ovid uses to introduce Flora's sacred festival (*Fast.* 4.947); for Martial, the religious occasion is "sweet". Flora herself is "merry", and, with the example of Cato who, like the dancers, wishes to draw attention to himself, Martial hints at the hypocrisy behind any attempts at censorship. At 1.38 he again identifies his new poetry with the Floralia. This metapoetical play with Flora may well go back to Philodemus. His culturally and linguistically ambiguous Flora represents not only the social fluidity of the multicultural world in which Philodemus moved; she is also a type of Muse for his epigrammatic collection, his "florilegia", which, through linguistic play, translates the mundane into the written, the elegant, and the enduring.

To sum up, I have argued here that the name "Flora" in Philodemus' epigram not only anticipates the ambiguous nature of the elegiac mistress of Roman poetry; it also becomes a sign of the wit and the creative tensions within erotic elegiac and epigrammatic poetry. Moreover, as Philodemus' Flora offers an inclusive, generous view of Campanian multiculturalism, so Flora in Ovid's *Fasti* offers not a univocal view of Augustan identity and culture but a generous and capacious one, which Martial builds upon in his imperial expansion of epigram. Philodemus' Oscan Flora thus provided the invitation for later Roman crosscultural and crosslinguistic play in a Rome that, like Republican Campania, was a new melting pot of cross cultural contact and experiment<sup>41</sup>.

40 — On the preface see Howell (1980) 100-101.

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