

BELLARIA LXVI



UNFAMILIAR LATIN POETS IV

FLORUS

Introduction

Here we meet Annius Florus, a friend (apparently) of Hadrian. He was very keen on poem about roses. There were two other Annii Flori: they may all be the same person...

A quiet life



Scythian frosts

I don't want to be Caesar, to
—walk among the Britons
—lurk among the Pannonians*
—endure the Scythian frosts.

*stretching from Bosnia to Hungary

*ego nolo Caesar esse,
ambulare per Britannos
latitare per Pannonios
Scythicas pati pruinas.*

You can't win



It's as bad possessing money as to live in penury;
just as bad perpetual daring as perpetual modesty;
just as bad is too much silence as too much loquacity;
just as bad the girl you visit as the wife at home can be.
5 None can say that this is falsehood: none but does the contrary.

*tam malum est habere nummos, non habere quam malum est;
tam malum est audere semper quam malum est semper pudor;
tam malum est tacere multum quam malum est multum loqui;
tam malum est foris amica quam malum est uxor domi;
5 nemo non haec uera dicit, nemo non contra facit.*

Priorities



Every year we get fresh consuls, every year pro-consuls too:
Only patrons, only poets, are not born each year anew.
consules fiunt quotannis et noui proconsules;
solus aut rex aut poeta non quotannis nascitur.

Early plucking



Roses are here at last: thanks to the mood
Of lovely spring, one day shows barbs of bloom;
A second, pyramids more largely swollen;
A third reveals the cup; four days fulfil
5 Their task of flowering. This day seals their doom:
— unless they are plucked, early.

*uenerunt aliquando rosae. per ueris amoeni
ingenium una dies ostendit spicula florum,
altera pyramidas nodo maiore tumentes,
tertia iam calathos, totum lux quarta peregit
5 floris opus. pereunt hodie nisi mane leguntur.*

The pain of love



Venus a garden had, rose-bushes round—
its lady's darling plot; once seen, beloved.
Her boy, in random haste to cull the blooms
and crown his tresses, pricked with pointed thorn
5 His marble fingers. Soon, as pain stabbed limbs
and blood-stained hand, the tear-drop bathed his eye.
In rage he seeks his mother with his plaints:
'Whence comes it, mother, that the roses hurt?
Whence fight thy flowers with hidden arms? They war
10 on me: the flower's hue is the same as blood!'
*hortus erat Veneris, roseis circumdatus herbis,
gratus ager dominae, quem uidisset amaret.
dum puer hic passim properat decerpere flores
et uelare comas, spina libauit acuta
15 marmoreos digitos: mox ut dolor attigit artus
sanguineamque manum, tinxit sua lumina gutta.
peruenit ad matrem frendens defertque querellas
'unde rosae, mater, coeperunt esse nocentes?
unde tui lores pugnare latentibus armis?
20 bella gerunt mecum. floris color et cruor unum est!'*

HADRIAN



Introduction

The emperor, of course (AD 117-138), and perhaps chummy with Florus.

Replying to Florus

—I do not want to be Florus, to
—walk among the taverns,
—lurk around the eating houses,
—endure the fat gnats.

*ego nolo Florus esse,
ambulare per tabernas,
latitare per popinas,
culices pati rotundos.*

Hadrian's farewell



Castel Sant'Angelo (Hadrian's burial place)

This famous poem was recorded by Hadrian's biographer, who calls himself Aelius Spartanus. He was not impressed by it: *tales autem nec multo meliores fecit et Graecos*, was his comment: 'composed [other] poems like this, and not much better ones in Greek either'. It has been translated many times.

Little soul, wandering, pleasant,
guest and companion of my body,
which now departs into places,
pale, rigid, bare,
nor will you make you usual jokes.

*animula uagula blandula,
hospes comesque corporis,
quae nunc abibis in loca
pallidula, rigida, nudula,
nec ut soles dabis iocos...*

Alternative versions

My soul, my pleasant soul and witty,
The guest and consort of my body,
Into what place now all alone
Naked and sad wilt thou be gone?
No mirth, no wit, as heretofore,
Nor Jests wilt thou afford me more.
Henry Vaughan (1652)

Ah! Fleeting Spirit! wand'ring Fire,
That long hast warm'd my tender Breast,
Must thou no more this Frame inspire?
No more a pleasing, chearful Guest?
Whither, ah whither art thou flying!
To what dark, undiscover'd Shore?
Thou seem'st all trembling, shiv'ring, dying,
And Wit and Humour are no more!
Alexander Pope (1712)

Ah! gentle, fleeting, wav'ring sprite,
Friend and associate of this clay!
To what unknown region borne,
Wilt thou, now, wing thy distant flight?
No more, with wonted humour gay,

But pallid, cheerless, and forlorn.

Lord Byron (1806)

A favourite horse



Borysthenes Alanus, the swift horse of Caesar, [who] through the sea and the marshes and the Etruscan mounds **5** who was accustomed to fly, while pursuing Pannonian boars, him to harm with his white tooth not one boar dared: **10** the saliva from his mouth scattered even the meanest tail, as it is custom to happen. But in his youth, his healthy, invulnerable body, **15** killed on its day, has been buried here in the field.

*Borysthenes Alanus,
Caesareus ueredus,
per aequor et paludes
et tumulos Etruscos
5 uolare qui solebat,
Pannonicos nec ullus
apros eum insequentem
dente aper albicanti
ausus fuit nocere:
10 sparsit ab ore caudam
uel extimam saliuam,
ut solet euenire.
sed integer iuuenta
inuiolatus artus
15 die sua peremptus
hic situs est in agro.*

TIBERIANUS

Introduction

Another mystery poet, c. AD 320 (perhaps a governor of Gaul or prefect of Rome – or neither). His most famous poem, influential on early Christian poets, is here, addressed to:

The Supreme Being



Almighty Being, to whom heaven's age, ancient of years, shows reverence, whom for ever One amid a thousand attributes, no man shall ever have power to appraise in number or in time, now be thou addressed if under any name it is fitting to address thee; **5** yet even in name unknown, thou hast thy hallowed joy, when mightiest earth shuddereth and wandering constellations stay their rapid courses. Thou art alone, yet in thyself many, thou art first and likewise last, and similarly midway in time, outliving the world. For without end for thyself, thou bringest the gliding seasons to an end.

*omnipotens, annosa poli quem suspicit aetas,
quem sub millenis semper uirtutibus unum
nec numero quisquam poterit pensare nec aeuo,
nunc esto affatus, si quo te nomine dignum est,
5 quo sacer ignoto gaudes, quom maxima tellus
intremitt et sistunt rapidos uaga sidera cursus.
tu solus, tu multus item, tu primus et idem
postremus mediusque simul mundique superstes.
nam sine fine tui, labentia tempora finis.*

10 On high from everlasting thou beholdest the cruel destinies of the world
awhirl in their pre-destined cycle, living souls in the coils of time, and again on
their return restored to the vault above, doubtless so that there may come
back to the world what it has lost, exhausted by births, and that this may again
flow through the seasons of time. **15** Thou (if indeed it is allowed towards thee
to direct the senses and essay to grasp the hallowed beauty wherewith in thine
immeasurable power thou dost invest the stars, and dost embrace withal the
far-stretched upper air) in some quick guise mayhap with lightning limbs art
like a flame-flowing radiance wherewith thou dost cause to flash all the world
20 beneath thine own eyes and speedest onward the sunlight of our day.

10 *altus ab aeterno spectas fera turbine certo
rerum fata rapi, uitasque inuoluier aeuo,
atque iterum reduces supera in conuexa referri,
scilicet ut mundo redeat quod partibus haustus
perdiderit refluumque iterum per tempera fiat.*
15 *tu (siquidem fas est in temet tendere sensum
et speciem temptare sacram, qua sidera cingis
immensus, longamque simul complecteris aethram)
fulmineis forsan rapida sub imagine membris
flammifluum quoddam iubar es, quo cuncta coruscans*
20 *ipse uides nostrumque premis solemque diemque.*

Thou art the whole kindred of the gods, thou art the cause and energy of
things, thou art all nature, one god beyond reckoning, thou art full of the
whole of sex, for thee cometh to birth upon a day here a god, here a world—
this home of men and gods—**25** lucent, starred with the majestic bloom of
youth. Touching this world (vouchsafe thy favour, I pray), grant to a willing
mind the knowledge of the principles on which it was created, the manner of
its origin and making. Grant, O Sire, that I may have power to learn causes
majestic, by what alliance of things the world's masses of matter of old **30** thou
didst upraise, and of what light texture, intimate yet dissimilar, thou didst of
old in thy might weave the soul, and what that vigorous element is which in
quick-moving bodies constitutes life.

*tu genus omne deum, tu rerum causa uigorque,
tu natura omnis, deus innumerabilis unus,
tu sexu plenus toto, tibi nascitur olim
hic deus hic mundus, domus haec hominumque deumque,*
25 *lucens, Augusto stellatus flore iuuentae.
quem (precor, adspires), qua sit ratione creatus,*

*quo genitus factusue modo, da nosse uolenti;
da, Pater, augustas ut possim noscere causas,
mundanas olim moles quo foedere rerum
30 sustuleris, animamque leui quo maximus olim
texueris numero, quo congrege dissimilique,
quidque id sit uegetum, quod per cita corpora uiuit.*

SULPICIUS LUPERCUS SERVASIUS JUNIOR



Introduction

Another poet (4th C AD?) of whom nothing is known, except a poem on time and another one, directed at budding young lawyers (here extracted), on

GREED

It is not unlikely that the young men of Rome learn fine accomplishments and sweat at distinguished rhetoric **25** only in order that, after the glorious campaigns of an eloquent lawyer's tongue, they may prize barbaric wealth above talent. Yet who are those (glib pleaders) thanks to whom pale avarice ventures on the forbidden crime of breaking an honourable compact? They are beggared of Latin style, and their confused jargon **30** minces ridiculous words

to an accompaniment of shocking sounds. Yet does their dress prompt the younger generation to indulge pleasing hopes (of legacies)? Have they at least such a share at least of our Roman dignity? No, theirs is the appearance of a burnt-out firebrand: they walk like skeletons gnawed by time from ancient graves!

*mirum ni pulchras artes Romana iuuentus
discat et egregio sudet in eloquio,
25 ut post iurisonae famosa stipendia linguae
barbaricae ingeniis anteferantur opes.
at qui sunt, quos propter honestum rumpere foedus
audeat illicite pallida auaritia?
Romani sermonis egent, ridendaque uerba
30 frangit ad horrificos turbida lingua sonos.
sed tamen ex cultu appetitur spes grata nepotum?
saltem istud nostri forsitan honoris habent?
ambusti torris species, exesaque saeclo
amblant ut priscis corpora de tumulis! –*

35 Their hair is tangled, forehead impudent, temples thin, jaws protruding while their cheeks are sunken, and their flattened nostrils rest on a tip-tilted curve: the toothless mouth is a terror and the chapped lips are swollen. Forced down by the impetus of weight, back sinks to belly; **40** and the knees swell on a shrunken leg. Sallow is the look of their jaws, and it is an uglier feature that the skin wears a mysterious pallor suggestive of envy.

*35 perplexi crines, frons improba, tempura pressa,
exstantes malae deficiente gena, _
simataeque iacent pando sinuamine nares,
territat os nudum caesaque labra tument.
defossum in uentrem propulso pondere tergum
40 frangitur et uacuo crure tument genua.
decolor in malis species, hoc turpius illud,
quod cutis obscure pallet in inuidiam.*

Next week: the final episode of this sequence, featuring Latin's only surviving poetess Sulpicia, Cato the Elder (again), the phallic god Priapus reflecting priapically on Homer, and the epitaph of a comedian.