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Lamenting, Dancing, Praising.
The Multilayered Presence of Nymphs in Florentine Elegiac Poetry of the Quattrocento[1]

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That nymphs are conspicuously present in the Florentine culture of the Quattrocento, needs no affirmation. It suffices to recall that in Florence Sandro Botticelli painted probably the most famous Quattrocento nymph, the Flora of his *Primavera*. In my contribution, I will deal with Latin, mostly elegiac, poetry written between 1440 and 1480. I will argue that nymphs are prominent in the central context for which such poetry could be written. After briefly summarizing the concept of the nymph as it appears in some exegetic texts, I will focus on three aspects of the poetic production of Florentine humanists. The first part will deal with nymphs in epitaphs for deceased members of humanist society; the second with love elegies in which, as I argue, the elegiac *puella* is associated with the world of the nymphs to stress her inspiring function for poetic production; and the third will demonstrate how in poems praising the city of Florence, nymphs also have a hugely important function. At the end, I will suggest that this powerful presence of nymphs is reflected in the elegies of Alessandro Braccesi, which seem to capture important features of the poetic discourse on nymphs — a considerable influence on Botticelli when painting his *Primavera*.

1. Theory

A very useful source for the way Florentine humanists wrote about nymphs when speaking about ancient poets are the theoretical writings of Cristoforo Landino, the most influential Latin poet in Florence before Angelo Poliziano who, after having written verses during the first half of his life, became professor of Latin at the Studio Fiorentino — 'divenuto da poeta lettore di poeti', as Roberto Cardini has formulated with masterful brevity.[2] In 1482, Landino published a commentary

[1] I am very grateful to Susanne Opitz for many inspiring talks on nymphs in art and literature, and for her numerous suggestions to improve this article. Laura Napran has kindly corrected my English. Also, I thank the editors Anita Traninger and Karl Enenkel for their constructive suggestions to ameliorate the argument.

[2] Cardini, R., *La critica del Landino* (Florence: 1973), 15.

on Horace, a poet whose text shows close affinity to the nymphs. In his first ode (this poem is traditionally the very first within an *opera omnia* edition of Horace), after having praised Maecenas, he declares that 'the cool grove and the light-footed round dance of the nymphs, mixed with Satyrs, keep me at a distance to the ordinary business of normal people', 'me gelidum nemus / Nympharumque leves cum Satyris chori / secernunt populo'.[3] With these extraordinary verses, Horace declares that poetry for him is no vulgar business, but an elevated cultural achievement that must not be mixed with other possible lifestyles. Poetry, according to these verses, is as honourable with respect to achieving eternal glory as other, traditionally more accepted ones in Rome (like brave deeds in the army, farming, or trading). However, in order to produce their poetry, poets must not mix with the masses, but must segregate themselves in order to find a state of tranquillity and peace. This ideal poetic existence is metaphorically expressed though the image of the dance of nymphs and Satyrs, a bucolic scene of untouched nature and at the same time of utmost poetic inspiration.

Horace's ideal of the distance from the masses heavily influenced Renaissance ideas about the nature of poetry. Already Giovanni Boccaccio in the fourteenth book of his *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, in which he defends poetry from scholastic criticism (and thereby extols the life of his friend and model Petrarch), declares that poets must necessarily live far from the cities with their masses of uncultivated people.[4] Similarly, in his commentary on Horace's ode 1.1, Cristoforo Landino briefly refers to this tradition: 'with the grove and the nymphs and satyrs he shows that poets flee from the multitude of men and are pleased by solitude' ('per nemus autem et nymphas et satyros indicat poetas frequentiam hominum refugere et solitudine delectari'). And then he laconically continues: 'de satyris autem et nymphis in sequentibus dicemus' ('we will speak about satyrs and nymphs later in this commentary').[5] But the only systematic lemma I could find *in*

[3] Horace, *Odes* 1.1.30-32.

[4] Boccaccio's chapter 14.11 is entitled 'Ob meditationis comodum solitudines incoluere poete' ('Poets have inhabited the solitudes because of the advantage of being able to concentrate thinking'). Already in chapter 14.4, he contrasts the life of poets and jurists (Boccaccio, *Genealogia* 14.4: 'Poete in secessu carmina sua canunt, iuriste turbelis inmixti et frequentia fori apud rostra litigia clamant; illi gloriam et inclitam famam, aurum isti desiderant; illos taciturnitas atque ruris solitudo delectat, hos pretorium, tribunalia, et litigantium strepitus; illorum pax amica est, horum questiones et litigium.' ('Poets sing their songs in withdrawal, jurists shout out their trials at the *rostra* in between the crowds and the masses on the forum; the poets desire glory and special reputation, the jurists want gold; poets are delighted by silence and the loneliness of the countryside, jurists by the seat of the praetor, the court of law and the noise of the processing parties; peace is the friend of poets, law suits and trials are the friends of jurists.') For the portrayal of jurists in Boccaccio's *Genealogia*, see now Döring P.C., "Künstler und Rechtsgelehrte im Streit. *Genealogie deorum gentilium* XIV 4 und *Decameron* VI 5", in Enenkel K.A.E. – Leuker T. – Pieper C. (eds.), *Iohannes de Certaldo. Beiträge zu Boccaccios lateinischen Werken und ihrer Wirkung* (Hildesheim etc.: 2015), 3-24.

[5] I quote from the 1486 edition Q. Horatius Flaccus, *Opera* [cum commentario Christophori Landini] (Venetiis, [Bernardinus Stagninus]: 1486), fol. 7r (I used the copy Munich, Bayrische Staatsbibliothek BSB-Ink H-365, online via ZVDD: http://www.zvdd.de/dms/load/met/?PPN=urn%3Anbn%3Ade%3Abvb%3A12-bsb00054110-0).

sequentibus is the one to ode 1.30.6 in which Landino mentions the obvious division of nymphs into six different subtypes according to their dwelling place (the Nerinae [sea], Naiades [fountains], Oreades [mountains], Dryades [woods], Hamadryades [trees], and Napeae [flowers]), but without any further metaphorical explanation.[6] This is quite typical for Landino — if one looks for insightful comments to the Horatian passages to which he alludes in his own poetry (as we will see later), one finds scarcely anything resembling the refinement of his own *imitative* interpretation.[7]

More revealing is a lemma to the Horatian verse 'iunctaeque Nymphis Gratiae decentes' ('decent Graces mixed with nymphs', *Odes* 1.4.6). Here, Landino criticizes a scholion attributed to the third-century philologist Acro (as the attribution is very doubtful, he is mostly referred to as Pseudo-Acro now).[8] Ps.-Acro's explanation runs as follows: 'when speaking of nymphs, he wants the reader to understand it as meaning "women", with Graces, he means "virgins"' ('per nymphas mulieres intelligi voluit, per gratias virgines'). Landino refers to Acro's explanation (which in similar terms can also be found once in Servius' commentary on the *Aeneid* and once in Isidore's *Etymologies*[9]), although he does not believe that it is the most convincing one: 'but I do not see why we cannot understand the nymphs and the Graces especially within the context of poetry' ('sed non video cur ipsas etiam nymphas et gratias presertim in re poetica intelligere non possimus').[10]

Already some decades earlier, we find the same link in Giovanni Tortelli's *De orthographia*, a work containing definitions of all Greek loanwords in Latin. His explanation of the Nymphs also mentions the translation of the word as 'sponsa' (married women). Then he continues with an etymologizing explanation derived from Servius (and perhaps also from Isidore):

> sed putaverunt antiqui nymphas aquarum esse deas quasi lympharum numina. unde teste Servio in Tityrum omnibus aquis praesunt. Varro vero nymphas esse dixit quas et musas, nec

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[6] Ibid., fol. 38r.

[7] See now for Landino's commentary on Horace Stadeler A., *Horazrezeption in der Renaissance. Strategien der Horazkommentierung bei Cristoforo Landino und Denis Lambin* (Berlin and New York: 2015).

[8] For Landino criticizing the ancient commentary tradition (to which he sticks in most of the cases), see also Pieper C., "*Horatius praeceptor eloquentiae*. The *Ars poetica* in Cristoforo Landino's Commentary", in Enenkel K.A.E. – Nellen H. (eds.), *Neo-Latin Commentaries and the Management of Knowledge in the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period (1400-1700)* (Leuven: 2013), 221-240, here 229-231.

[9] Servius, *Commenrtary to Vergil's Aeneid* 8.336: 'nymphae autem maritae dicit: nam graece sponsa νύμφη dicitur. haec autem non vere nympha fuit, sed vaticinatrix'; Isidore, *Etymologies* 9.7.8: 'nam nympha sponsa in nuptiis; et nympha pro lavationis officio, quod et ad nomen nubentis adluditur.'

[10] Q. Horatius Flaccus, *Opera* [cum commentario Christophori Landini] (Venetiis, [Bernardinus Stagninus]: 1486), fol. 13v. With this explanation, Landino is surely closer to the Horatian verses from ode 1.1 quoted earlier in which Horace defines himself as a poet remote from the ordinary masses, but not necessarily closer to the Horatian verses on which he is commenting right now (in *Ode* 1.4, the Graces and nymphs are accompanying the beginning of spring).

inmerito cum teste eodem Servio super septimam aeglogam aquae motus musicam faciat. quare idem Varro tres tantum musas commemoravit: unam quae ex aquae nascitur motu, aliam quae ex sonu fit aeris percussi, tertiam quae mera tantum voce constitit. ex quo Vergilius musas ipse velut nymphas nonnumquam invocavit cum ait in bucolica: 'Nymphae noster amor Libetrides'.[11]

But the ancients believed that the nymphs were deities of the waters (*lympharum numina*). Therefore, according to Servius in his commentary on the *Tityrus* (i.e., Virgil's first eclogue), they rule over all waters. Varro says that the nymphs are the same as the Muses — and not without reason, as (according to the same Servius on the seventh eclogue) the movement of the water produces music. Therefore the same Varro has only spoken of three Muses: one born from the movement of water, the second arising from the sound of stricken air, and a third who consists of the pure voice alone. Hence Virgil himself sometimes invokes the Muses as nymphs when in his *Eclogues* he says: 'Nymphs from Leibethra, our love'.

Both passages from Landino and Tortelli reveal that, apart from mostly being seen as water nymphs (the Naiads are indeed the most mentioned subtype of nymphs in poetry of the time), they are closely connected with poetic inspiration. With this explicit link between nymphs and poetry, we are indeed in the centre of the discourse on Nymphs in the Florentine Quattrocento, as we will subsequently see.

2. Funeral eulogies

When one turns from theory to poetic practice, the link between Nymphs and inspiration is very visible in some epitaphs or commemorative eulogies of deceased famous humanists. I start with a text not written in Florence. In 1457 Antonio Beccadelli composed an epitaph for the deceased humanist Giovanni Piero d'Avenza (Iohannes Petrus Lucensis) who, in the last years of his life, had been professor of grammar, rhetoric, and poetics in Lucca. His funeral must have been a rather impressive public spectacle, as Franco Pignatti, the author of the lemma on Giovanni Piero in the

[11] Tortelli G., *De orthographia dictionum e Graecis tractarum* (Venetiis, per Nicolaum Ienson: 1471), fol. <196v> (I used Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek BSB-Ink T-384, online via ZVDD: http://www.zvdd.de/dms/load/met/?PPN=urn%3Anbn%3Ade%3Abvb%3A12-bsb00058263-7). The reference to Servius' commentary is Servius, *Commentary to Vergil's Eclogues* 1.52 and 7.21 (the final Virgilian quotation is also *Eclogues* 7.21). The two references to Varro are also in Servius. But Tortelli surely also knew Isidore, *Etymologies* 8.11.96: 'Nymphas deas aquarum, quasi numina lympharum. Ipsas autem dicunt et Musas quas et nymphas, nec inmerito'.

Dizionario biografico degli italiani tells us:[12] his embalmed body was buried in the facade of the cathedral of Lucca, adorned with a laurel crown. Beccadelli's epitaph picks up this idea of a divinely inspired humanist:[13]

> Qui decus Italiae fueram lumenque Latinis,
> ecce brevis nostra iam premit ossa lapis.
> Ingenium Pallas dederat, Cyllenius artem,
> eloquium Musae, pulcher Apollo lyram.
> Flevistis Nymphae, flevistis fata sorores
> iam Petri nostri; sic requiescat humi.
>
> I was the adornment of Italy and the light for those who write Latin, and now — behold! — a small stone presses my ashes. Pallas Athena had given the talent, Mercury the technical skills, the Muses the eloquence, beautiful Apollo the lyre. Ye nymphs, sisters, you mourned for the end of our Piero; may he thus rest in the earth.

After having listed the inspiring deities that had shown interest in Giovanni Piero when he was still alive (Pallas Athena, Mercury, and the Muses), the poet addresses the nymphs shedding tears at the tomb. In the first instance, one might relate the final distich to a famous classical model: in Virgil's fifth eclogue the nymphs weep because of the death of Daphnis ('exstinctum Nymphae crudeli funere Daphnim / flebant', *Eclogues* 5.20f.) who in the same eclogue is addressed some verses later as divine poet ('divine poeta', 5.45). Servius, in his commentary, relates the act of weeping to the Nymphs' natural feeling of piety ('fleverunt Nymphae quibus insita est naturaliter pietas').

The main reason, however, why I quote this little epigram by Beccadelli is that it nicely illustrates Tortelli's remark 'nymphas esse … quas et musas'. The text itself does not say so explicitly, although verses 3-6 suggest an implicit causal connection between the deceased having been an inspired writer (v. 3-4) and the sorrow of the nymphs (v. 5-6). That Beccadelli's nymphs in verse 5 are indeed *replacing* the Muses of verse 4 might be corroborated by the epitaph which Carlo

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[12] Pignatti F., "Giovan Pietro (Giampietro) d'Avenza (da Lucca)", in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* 56 (Rome: 2001), 397-400.

[13] The epigram is edited in Cinquini A. – Valentini R., *Poesie latine inedite di Antonio Beccadelli detto il Panormita* (Aosta: 1907). I could not access a copy of this rare edition, but quote the text instead from the online resource *Poeti d'Italia in lingua latina*, http://www.poetiditalia.it/public/ (visited July 20, 2016).

Marsuppini had written for the deceased Leonardo Bruni thirteen years earlier in Florence (commemorating a humanist whose funeral had been celebrated with similar public pomp, the reports of which were surely known to Beccadelli). Bruni's tomb was a milestone in the development of classicistic humanist grave monuments in Italy.[14] Therefore, it is very probable that Beccadelli reacted to this by similarly alluding to the epitaph on Bruni's tomb which reads as follows:[15]

> Postquam Leonardus e vita migravit,
> Historia luget, Eloquentia muta est,
> ferturque Musas tum Graecas tum
> Latinas lacrimas tenere non potuisse.
>
> After Leonardo died, History is sad, Eloquence is mute, and one says that the Greek and Latin Muses could not restrain their tears.

Marsuppini's epitaph could (and can still) be read engraved on Bruni's tomb which was built by Bernardo Rosselini for the church of Santa Croce in Florence, and it definitively served as a model for later poets, especially in Tuscany.

Recently, Allison Levy has offered a reading of Marsuppini's verses within the culture of masculinity in Renaissance Florence. According to her, the epitaph almost undermines the suppression of grief and tears to which Bruni and other leading Florentine humanists in funeral orations had exhorted the mourners.[16] She builds on research by Sharon Strocchia who has demonstrated that women were usually not allowed at public funerals in fifteenth-century Florence.[17] Given this evidence, it might at first sight be surprising that the epitaphs stage female figures as the

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[14] Cf. Natali A., "Il pianto delle Muse. I sepolcri di Leonardo Bruni e Carlo Marsuppini monumenti dell'umanesimo", in Berti L. (ed.), *Il Pantheon di Santa Croce a Firenze* (Florence: 1993), 17-55 who mentions only very few earlier examples of similar formal characteristics, one of those being the tomb of antipope John XXIII in the Battistero of Florence by Donatello and Michelozzo.

[15] The text is now edited in Pierini I. (ed.), *Carlo Marsuppini. Carmi latini. Edizione critica, traduzione e commento* (Florence: 2014), 645.

[16] Levy A., *Re-Membering Masculinity in Early Modern Florence. Widowed Bodies, Mourning and Portaiture* (Aldershot – Burlington, VT: 2006), 41-44, here 43: 'Ironically, on the funerary monument of one of the strongest advocates for a re-orchestration of public mourning, tears are unrestrained'. See for a link between Marsuppini's verses and the funeral oration for Bruni composed by Giannozzo Manetti Natali, "Il pianto delle Muse" 21 (both texts celebrate Bruni for three outstanding merits: 'il suo essere storico, il suo essere oratore, il suo essere poeta').

[17] Strocchia S.T., "Death Rites and Ritual Family in Renaissance Florence", in Tetel M. – Witt R.G. – Goffen R. (eds.), *Life and Death in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (Durham – London: 1989), 120-145, here 125-127.

most important mourners of the deceased. At a second glance, however, Levy's observation seems somewhat overstated, as it underestimates the importance of three elements with respect to the inscription. First, the generic rules of funeral orations are very different from funerary poetry. Weeping divine female figures are, in fact, part of the poetic imagery of the fifteenth century, but they are much less expected in orations. Second, Marsuppini's text inscribes itself into the ancient tradition of grave epitaphs. In this case, the verses are authorized by being intertextually linked to two of the most ancient surviving examples of antiquity, the funerary inscriptions on Naevius' and Plautus' tomb respectively, as reported by Aulus Gellius in *Noctes Atticae* 1.24.2-3.[18] By relating the epitaph for Bruni to that of two early Roman poets, Marsuppini stresses what Bruni himself in his writings had claimed so often: Florentine humanist culture is the heir of Rome's literary heritage, while Bruni is maintained to be one of the founding fathers of this Florentine cultural flourishing.

Within this rhetorical strategy, the crying Muses are part of the (intertextual) game. In Naevius' epitaph, the possibility of gods weeping for the death of mortals is expressed in verses 1-2 in a hypothetic formulation ('Immortales mortales si foret fas flere / flerent divae Camenae Naevium poetam', 'if it was acceptable for gods to cry for mortals, the divine Muses would weep for Naevius, the poet'). Marsuppini's verses transform this irrealis mood into a realis, as if he wanted to disagree with the premise underlying Naevius' auto-epitaph, namely that divine law and custom forbid the Muses to be so heavily afflicted by human affairs. Instead, he proposes that Muses can and will indeed weep for a learned writer whom they have fostered when he was alive. That Marsuppini's contemporaries did see the importance of this claim, as well as its anchoring in ancient routes, finds proof when he himself died nine years after Leonardo Bruni. Marsuppini was honoured with a public funeral as well. The funerary oration was delivered by Matteo Palmieri in Santa Croce (that means, within the range of vision of Bruni's tomb), and Palmieri explicitly links the two deceased via a reference to the ancient pretexts of Bruni's epitaph. After a triple invocation of the defunct (celebrating him as 'sapientiae lumen', 'Latinae et Graecae linguae e elegantiae princeps', and 'vir doctissimus'), Palmieri begins the actual speech by quoting verbatim the first two lines of Naevius' epitaph, only exchanging the two names ('Carolum' instead of 'Naevium').[19] Palmieri thus corroborates the importance of Marsuppini's epitaph for Bruni, and thereby the presence of the weeping Muses at the funerals of leading humanists. Whereas the oration reacts to the pretexts of

[18] Cf. Courtney E. (ed.), *The Fragmentary Latin Poems* (Oxford: 1993), 47-50 (s.v. *'Epitaphs' of Poets*). For a sound treatment of the allusions to Plautus and Naevius in Marsuppini's epitaph, see Schmidt V., "A Humanist's Life Summarized. Leonardo Bruni's Epitaph", *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 47 (1998) 1-14.

[19] The text of the *oratio* can be found in Salvini S., *Fasti consolari dell'Accademia fiorentina* (Florence: 1717), 525-527.

Marsuppini's epitaph for Bruni, the epitaph on Marsuppini's tomb by Francesco Griffolini[20] (directly opposite Bruni's monument) can be seen as an answer to the content of the verses. Indeed, when the Florentine rulers ordered Desiderio da Settignano to design Marsuppini's tomb, he copied many of the visual elements from that of Bruni. Hence it is no surprise that the verse inscription also repeats the idea of Latin and Greek Muses crying together (v. 5-6): 'Ausoniae et Graiae crines nunc solvite Musae: / occidit heu vestri fama decusque chori.' ('Italian and Greek Muses, unbind your hair now: the glory and ornament of your dance is dead.')[21]

As we have seen so far, the fact that nymphs and Muses are closely related, if not equal, is easily understandable in the case of a fellow humanist. But the tradition expands: we also find weeping nymphs in eulogies of important persons from public life, especially learned patrons of the arts. To give just one very powerful example (for which I leave the Florentine context again, although I suspect that the author knew the epitaphs on the tombs in Santa Croce[22]): in 1472 Martino Filetico wrote a poem of 356 verses on the death of Battista Sforza, the second wife of Federico da Montefeltro.[23] At a certain moment, when describing her death, he expands on the sorrow of the gods who are listed in an enumeration of many verses. The beginning of the catalogue is a potent example of lamenting nymphs who are (this time explicitly) connected to the Muses:

> Ante omnes divae plorarunt funera Musae:
> intumuit Pallas, indoluitque Venus;
> Naiades hanc omnes et agrestia numina nymphae,
> luxerunt Dryades, Nereidumque chorus.[24]

[20] I am grateful to Prof. Donatella Coppini (Florence) for helping me with the name of the author of the epitaph. Griffolini's authorship is mentioned in Benedetti S., "Griffolini, Francesco", in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* 59 (2002) 382-385, here 384. Pierini, *Carlo Marsuppini* 642f. (n. 508) remarks that the attribution is widely accepted 'pur con qualche incertezza'.

[21] Natali, "Il pianto delle Muse" 55 has remarked that these verses echo Marsuppini's weeping Muses in his epitaph fort Bruni.

[22] The expression 'divae … Musae' echoes the 'divae Camenae' of Naevius' epitaph, and thus also refers to the aforementioned Florentine tradition (as far as I can see, 'diva Musa' is not attested in classical Latin and appears for the first time in Arnobius, *Adversus nationes* 3.38).

[23] The text is edited in Cinquini A., *Elegie latine di Martino Filetico, umanista del Lazio* (Aosta: 1906). Filetico had been Battista's teacher for some years, cf. Bianca C., "Filetico (Filettico), Martino", in *Dizionario biografuico degli italiani* 47 (1996), 636-640, here 637.

[24] Filetico, *Elegia* 269-272.

> First of all, the divine Muses lamented her funeral, Pallas became swollen from grief, Venus was sad. All Naiads and the nymphs, divinities of the fields, the Dryads, and the choir of Nereids wept for her.

As mentioned above, Filetico's text inscribes itself into the cultural surrounding of the court of Federico da Montefeltro, a place where classical culture was received and transformed into propaganda for the ruler in a rather spectacular form. One part of the representation aimed at showing Battista as an ideal duchess and wife.[25] The best-known object is the famous double portrait by Piero della Francesca (today in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence) depicting the rulers of Urbino on one side and their triumph of virtue, piety, and love on the other. The epitaph by Filetico transforms this public image into a memorial after Battista's death.[26] The deep sorrow of all divinities assimilates the deceased with divine spheres, a technique that might recall similar features in the poetry written at the court of Rimini some twenty years earlier, celebrating Isotta degli Atti, the beloved and future wife of Sigismondo Malatesta. Especially, one could think of the little elegiac cycle *De amore Iovis in Isottam* by Giannantonio Porcelio[27] in which the whole classical Olympus is depicted as battling due to Jove's love for Isotta. As has been shown more often, the propaganda at the court of Urbino reacts to that of Sigismondo Malatesta, as the Montefeltro was eager to outdo his most influential opponent and to claim his primacy both as local ruler and as pan-Italian condottiere.[28] Filetico's abundant eulogy fits this picture. His Battista is not only praised as the ideal learned woman and wife, but as a semi-divine being whose death compels both gods and nymphs to shed tears.

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[25] On Battista see, e.g., the biography by Mazzanti Bonvini M., *Battista Sforza Montefeltro. Una 'principessa' nel Rinascimento italiano* (Urbino: 1993).

[26] The huge poem with its divine apparatus fits well the rather spectacular commemoration of Battista's death. Poems dealing with the event were collected in one manuscript, the actual Vat. Urb. Lat. 1193 in the Vatican Library, and Piero della Francesca's Brera Altarpiece (today in the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan) has also been interpreted as a commemorative painting for both the birth of the expected male heir Guidubaldo and Battista's death, cf. Webb J.D., *The Making of the Montefeltro. Patronage of the Arts and Architecture during the Reign of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza* (Ph.D., Bryn Mawr College: 2006), 287-289 and Roeck B. – Tönnesmann A., *Die Nase Italiens. Federico da Montefeltro. Herzog von Urbino* (Berin: 2007), 187-189. Federico is depicted kneeling in front of the Virgin Mary with a baby. The Virgin might represent Battista — in this case, Federico would venerate the deceased as an *angelica figura*, and Battista would be closely related to the divine sphere, very similar indeed to Filetico's poem.

[27] Cf. Pieper C., "Die vielen Facetten des Sigismondo Malatesta in der ideologischen Poesie des Hofes in Rimini", in Enenkel K.A.E. – Laureys M. – Pieper C. (eds.), *Discourses of Power. Ideology and Politics in Neo-Latin Literature* (Hildesheim etc.: 2012), 19-41, here 24-28, for a short summary of the major propagandistic features of the work.

[28] Cf. Pernis M.G. – Schneider Adams L., *Federico da Montefeltro and Sigismondo Malatesta. The Eagle and the Elephant* (Frankfurt am Main etc.: ^{2}2003) and (summarizing) Roeck – Tönnesmann, *Die Nase Italiens* 106-117.

3. Love elegies

3.1. Landino's Xandra

From the idealized image of Battista Sforza, the transition to dealing with elegiac love poetry is not difficult. In Florence, Cristoforo Landino was one of the founding fathers of the Neo-Latin elegy. His *Xandra* is a collection of three books dealing with the speaker's love for the elegiac *puella* Xandra, with Florentine culture and politics, and with the question of divine inspiration of poets. One of the most famous poems of the first book (*Xandra* 1.25) is a composition in Sapphic stanzas about Xandra's visit to Fiesole.[29] Here is the beginning:

> Nunc virent silvae, nemus omne frondet,
> ridet et tellus variisque frontem
> floribus pingit, fugiuntque nubes
> montibus altis.
>
> Naiades laetas agitant choreas
> Gratiis passim Satyrisque mixtae
> et comas flavas religant corona
> versicolore.
>
> Concidunt venti, levis afflat aura,
> parcit atque haedis lupus et capellis,
> nostra dum celsas Faesulas frequentat
> candida Xandra.

Now the woods are green, the whole grove has leaves, earth is laughing and paints her face with all kinds of flowers; the clouds flee away from the high mountains. The Naiads lead happy round dances, mixed with the Graces and the Satyrs, and they garland their blond hair

[29] On this poem, see the interpretations by Blänsdorf J., "Landino – Campano – Poliziano – Pascoli. Neue Dichtung in antikem Gewande", *Gymnasium* 91 (1984) 61-84; Rombach U., "L'idea della natura nella poesia di Cristoforo Landino", in Rotondi Secchi Tarugi L. (ed.), *L'uomo e la natura nel Rinascimento* (Milan: 1996), 113-124; Pieper C., *Elegos redolere Vergiliosque sapere. Cristoforo Landinos Xandra zwischen Liebe und Gesellschaft* (Hildesheim etc.: 2008), 184-192; Wenzel A., *Die Xandra-Gedichte des Cristoforo Landino* (Heidelberg: 2010), 54-58 and the line-by-line commentary 254-259; Comiati G., "Sonoros cantat amores. Un'analisi dei *Carmina* in metro saffico di Cristoforo Landino", *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 65 (2015) 43-73.

with a multi-coloured crown. The winds subside, a cool breeze blows, and the wolf spares the young goats and sheep, while our fair Xandra visits the heights of Fiesole.

The lively description of spring is very reminiscent of Horace's ode 1.4 and of Virgil's bucolic landscapes, as has been shown previously.[30] The Naiads and Graces dancing with the Satyrs can be understood as part of such an archaising, bucolic surrounding.[31] In the third stanza of the poem, the reason for the explosion of happiness is given: Xandra has come to Fiesole, and her adventure makes nature rejoice. In the sixth stanza, however, her return to the city will lead to the end of the perfect season. This means that spring is not an unconditional setting of an amorous poem as would be typical for a medieval *Natureingang* (i.e., a love poem starting with a description of spring before turning to the topic of love which is inspired by the awakening of nature).[32] Instead, it is dependent on the presence of Xandra as its inspiring — maiden? deity? Perhaps it would not be too far-fetched to say 'nymph' in this case. The dance of nymphs that Landino mentions and that represents spring in all its magnificence seems to be centred around Xandra whose name is virtually the middle of the poem (the end of verse 12 out of 24, i.e. the last word of the third stanza). Xandra therefore could be seen as one of these nymphs, even the most important one if we accept that the nymphs dance because of the awakening of nature caused by Xandra's arrival. There are, moreover, other arguments for interpreting Xandra as associated with the nymphs — they stem from metapoetics, intra- and intertextuality.

The first takes up the definitions we have seen previously, namely that nymphs and poetry are closely linked. It is an obvious step to interpret the poem by Landino as one that reflects Xandra's quasi-divine status — which fits traditional elegiac concepts of the beloved *puella*.[33] In antiquity, as has been convincingly argued, the elegiac *puella* is also the inspiring force that enables the poet to write his verses. Propertius put it like this in his elegy 2.1.4: 'ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit', and Ovid would take up the idea in the prooemium to the first book of his *Ars amatoria*.[34]

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[30] See Rombach, "L'idea dellas natura" 115f.; Pieper, *Elegos redolere* 185f.; Wenzel, *Die Xandra-Gedichte* 254-256 *ad loc.*

[31] See Comiati, "Sonoros cantat amores" 60 on this aspect.

[32] See for this topic the old dissertation by Wulffen B. von, *Der Natureingang in Minnesang und frühem Volkslied* (Ph.D. Munich: 1961). On its reception in Quattrocento elegy, see Pieper C., "Medievalisms in Latin Love Poetry of the Early Italian Quattrocento", in Montoya A.C. – Romburgh S. van – Anrooij W. van (eds.) *Early Modern Medievalisms. The Interplay between Scholarly Reflection and Artistic Production* (Leiden – Boston: 2010), 45-65, here 57-61 (*inter alia* about Landino, *Xandra* 1.3 in which a reflex of this literary phenomenon can be found).

[33] This starts with the first verses of Propertius' elegy 1.1 in which Amor and Cynthia in a joint attack capture the elegiac speaker; Cynthia is presented as Amor's medium, just as Laura will be in Petrarch's *Canzoniere* 3.

[34] Cf. Propertius, *Elegie Libro II*, ed./comm. P. Fedeli (Cambridge: 2005), 45f., who underlines the surprising innovation of Propertius' verses compared to traditional reflections on poetic inspiration ('La domanda sulla fonte della creatività

Above, I have quoted Landino's commentary on the passage of Horace's ode 1.4 (one of the most obvious pretexts of Landino's poem) in which nymphs and Graces take part in Venus' round dance. Landino had explained the two groups of divine creatures as part of a discourse on poetry. Landino's poem testifies to the fact that almost forty years before his commentary, he had understood the Horatian passage in a similar way. The power Xandra has over nature, her capacity to awaken the spring, clearly mirrors her Muse-like inspiration for the poet. Thus, she fits perfectly into a landscape which is inhabited by nymphs.

A second argument comes from an intratextual link to the previous poem. The long elegy 1.24 is about Landino's family and about his inherited poetic inspiration.[35] The major part of this 'autobiographical' elegy is dedicated to Francesco de' Landini, a composer of the fourteenth century whom Cristoforo Landino presents as one of his ancestors and as his artistic predecessor. Francesco is fostered by the Muses, but also has a powerful enemy: Phthone, the personified Envy. Landino makes Greek *phthonos*, 'envy', female, probably due to the Latin equivalent *invidia*, but — as I would argue here — also to be able to describe Phthone as a *nymph*. For this ugly and malicious entity is characterized as 'Phthone, the least amongst the Stygian nymphs' ('inter Stygias Phthone deterrima nymphas', *Xandra* 1.24.45) whose main aim is to prohibit Francesco de' Landini from becoming a good artist (in this respect, we could call her an anti-Muse). Her presence in the poem preceding the description of spring in 1.25 invites the reader to read the two appearing nymphs, Phthone and Xandra, as antithetic: Xandra is not a Stygian, but a celestial nymph; not envy, but inspiration is her main characteristics, and she is not *deterrima*, but *prima*.

The third argument is an intertextual one and is a bit less straightforward, though in my view, it is ultimately the strongest one. It is based on the setting of the poem: Fiesole. Florentine humanists loved to imagine a relocation of the divine beings of Greek and Roman antiquity in the Quattrocento: Muses, nymphs, even gods like Diana and Pan were said to have left their native Helicon and moved to the hills of Fiesole, a city of ancient Etruscan age — the remote antiquity of

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trova una singolare risposta'), as well as mentioning the parallel with Ovid. In Propertius, *Elegies* 2.30.37f. Cynthia is even presented as leading the chorus of the Muses, cf. Fedeli *ad loc.* (p. 867): '…proprio per il ruolo che ora occupa fra le Muse Cinzia appare come *l'unica sua fonte* d'ispirazione' (my emphasis). However, the text Fedeli comments upon is a (largely accepted) emendation of the unanimously transmitted *me* in verse 37 into *te*: 'hic ubi *te* prima statuent in parte choreae, / et medius docta cuspide Bacchus erit' ('as soon as they will put you [Cynthia] as the leader of their round dance and Bacchus will be in the middle with his learned thyrsus'). The emendation is old and occurred somewhere before 1600 according to Hayworth S.J., *Cynthia. A Companion to the Text of Propertius* (Oxford: 2007), 245. Fedeli in his commentary, p. 867, attributes it to François Guyet (1575-1655) — I have not been able to check this. Nevertheless, it is probable that Landino still read the text without the emendation and thus found in these verses not Cynthia as part of the Muses' choir, but the promotion of the elegiac speaker into a leader of the choir of the muses, a *musagetes*.

[35] See Pieper, *Elegos redolere* 166-184 for a more detailed analysis of this poem.

which, as Armando Balduino has stressed, the early modern public was accustomed to narrate.[36] In Giovanni Boccaccio's *Ninfale fiesolane* we find a description of Diana, the queen of Fiesole (cf. *ott*. 7), arriving there. The stanza in ottave rime is very reminiscent of Landino's poem:

> Diana a Fiesol in quel tempo venne,
> com'usata era sovente di fare;
> grande allegrezza pe' monti si tenne,
> sentendo di Diana il ritornare,
> e ciascheduna ninfa festa fenne:
> e cominciârsi tutte a ragunare,
> com'usate eran, con lei molto spesso
> tutte le ninfe, da lunge e da presso.[37]

At first sight, the intertextual link suggests an equation of Boccaccio's Diana and Landino's Xandra. Such an interpretation is further corroborated by the meter of *Xandra* 1.25. Landino's poem is one of only three components in Sapphic stanza in the whole *Xandra*. The first of these, entitled *Laudes Dianae,* is a prayer to Diana Lucina to assist the pregnant Xandra (*Xandra* 1.22). This conspicuous meter in an elegiac collection, coupled with the relative closeness of the poems within the collections (they are separated merely by two others in elegiac distichs), obviously unites them and invites the reader to think about their connection. One link is the presence of Diana in both poems — literally in 1.22 and intertextually in 1.25. Taken together, this could reinforce the association of Xandra with Diana, both being praised by the poets for their supernatural capacities.[38]

But is Xandra really equated to the Roman goddess? Whereas poem 1.25 in connection with 1.22 and with Boccaccio's pretext could invite such interpretation, the third poem in Sapphic stanza, *Xandra* 1.27, is about Xandra's return to Florence from her native land, i.e. Fiesole.[39] Again, one

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[36] Balduino A., "Introduzione", in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, vol. 3: *Ninfale Fiesolano*, ed. A. Balduino (Milan: 1974), 275-489, here 277: 'lo stesso pubblico per cui … favoleggiare di Fiesole antica era stata atavica e domestica consuetudine'.

[37] Boccaccio, *Ninfale Fiorentino* (ed. Balduino), *ott*. 401. Translation: 'Diana came to Fiesole in these days as she was accustomed to do. A great joy was seen on the mountains when one heard of Diana's return; every nymph feasted, and all the nymphs from far and from near began to join together with the goddess, as they were accustomed to do.'

[38] Comiati, "Sonoros cantat amores" does not mention this metapoetic link, although his article deals with the three poems in Sapphic stanzas in the *Xandra*.

[39] Landino, *Xandra* 1.27.9-12: 'Cernimus certe: redit ecce nobis / rure materno, mea magna cura, / Xandra. Nunc omnis timor atque tristis / luctus abito!' ('I have seen it well: behold, Xandra, my dear sweetheart, comes back from her native soil. Now farewell, every fear and sad sorrow!')

might think of Boccaccio's *Ninfale* to understand the deeper meaning of the expression 'rus maternum', 'native soil'. In ottava 8–10, Boccaccio tells that in ancient times many maidens were offered to Diana to serve in her corona. They form a 'bella brigata / delle vergine' (*ott*. 9.5-6) to live in Fiesole and await the visits of the goddess there. The name of these maiden-followers is 'nymphs' (*ott*. 9.7-8): 'tutte eran ninfe a quel tempo chiamate / e sempre gìan di dardi e d'archi armate' ('all were called nymphs in these days and were armed with arrows and bows'). I therefore propose that Landino has associated Xandra with Diana not in order to equate the two, but to invite the reader to think of her within a landscape defined by the presence of Diana. By calling her a daughter of Fiesole, he indicates that one rather should see Xandra as one of the *ninfe fiesolane*.

As a consequence, Xandra is no divinity, but is situated at the edge between the mortal and the divine world, a transitional figure. One can see traces of these characteristics already in Propertius' Cynthia who is depicted as the new Muse in his elegy 2.1 (see above).[40] A more powerful tradition, however, is offered by earlier poetry in the Italian language. Especially in Dante and Petrarch, the beloved women had been depicted as participating in the divine realms — Beatrice accompanying Dante through the *paradiso* up to the Virgin Mary, and Laura being substituted with the Virgin Mary in the last canzone, *Vergine bella*, of the *Canzoniere*. Xandra stands in this tradition, too. That Landino could approach such a semi-divine elegiac *puella* (no goddess, but a mortal woman associated with the realms of the divine) to the realm of nymphs, might also be due to a Boccaccian pretext. In the *Ninfale*, he describes the nymphs not as genuinely divine, but as mortal women who have been given into Diana's service by their parents and who thereby enter a semi-divine sphere through their contact with the world of the goddess.[41]

3.2. Bucolic flavour

[40] Cf. Badet M., "De l'élégie à la nymphomanie. L'image de la femme fatale à partir de *L'enlèvement d'Hylas*", in Poignault R. (ed.), *Présence de Catulle et des élégiaques latins. Actes du colloque tenu à Tours (28-30 novembre 2002); à Raymond Chevallier in mmemoriam* (Clermont-Ferrand: 2005), 411-429, here 414, who comments on the Hylas-elegy by Propertius (1.20): 'D'une certaine façon, Vénus, Cynthie et les nymphes symbolisent la magnificence inaltérable du corps féminin' and interprets the link between the sexual licence of nymphs and Cynthia as a hint for the reader that Cynthia is a courtesan. This does not apply to the *puellae* of Quattrocento elegiac corpora who are all represented as members of higher social groups.

[41] Cf. Boccaccio, *Ninfale Fiorentino,* ott. 8.1-3: 'Ed ancor molte glien'erano offerte / dalli lor padri e madri, che promesse / l'avean a lei per boti.' ('And many still were given to her [i.e., Diana] by their fathers and mothers who had promised them to her by vows.') See also the ancient definitions of nymphs as '(married) women', quoted under subheading 1 in this article.

That nymphs are a substantial part of the pastoral world needs no mentioning. They inhabit fields and groves in a world opposed to the city.[42] Fiesole in Landino's poem 1.25 is also characterized as a space of bucolic relaxation. The first verse of Landino's poem alludes to two verses of Virgil's eclogues (3.57 and 7.59),[43] as well as the primary idea that the arrival of a certain person in a landscape awakens nature and that nature dies again with the departure of that person, is reminiscent of Virgil's seventh eclogue in which two shepherds are engaged in a singing contest. Whereas Corydon talks about dying rivers when beautiful Alexis leaves the rural surroundings, Thyrsis praises his beloved Phyllis for almost the same marvels as the ones Xandra can cause: she makes nature blossom. In another poem of the *Xandra*, not by chance the twenty-fifth of book 2, Landino re-evokes such a bucolic setting and the nymphs that are part of it. However, things have changed. Xandra is no more part of the bucolic landscape, no longer part of the world of the nymphs. Instead, she has left for Rome (Rome as compared to Florence will play a major role in the third book of the *Xandra* where Florence is fashioned as the true heir of ancient Rome, a kind of *Roma rediviva*). The speaker's reaction is sadness, as well as anger, and at the end he decides to tease her: he declares that he will leave the city, too, in order to go back into the bucolic world of an unnamed mountain — perhaps Mount Falterone, the source of the Arno:[44]

His ego verticibus misero deceptus amore
tentabo flammas pellere corde malas.
Namque ibi Naiades grata testudine nymphas
mulcebo et Satyros; rustica sacra canam.

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[42] In Angelo Poliziano Silva *Rusticus*, a versified *prolusione* for a course on Virgil's *Georgics*, we read a huge praise of the excellence of the life of shepherds, and among their wealth he explicitly counts 'nymphs, Fauns, and Satyrs with feet like goats' ('et nymphae, et fauni, et capripedes satyrisci', v. 322). In a way, Poliziano with this long description incorporates the poetic world of bucolic poetry into that of Virgil's *Georgics*, surely in order to stress the unity of Virgil's oeuvre — the passage starts in an overtly bucolic tone in v. 283 with the exclamation 'o dulces pastoris opes! o quanta beatum / quam tenet hunc tranquilla quies!' ('Oh sweet abundance of shepherds! Oh what a peaceful quietness surrounds the blessed one!'). Virgil has undoubtedly idealized the landscape of the *Georgics*, especially in the famous *laus Italiae* in *Georg.* 2.136-176, but this passage is much more concrete in describing the ideal tempered climate and soil of the Italian peninsula and no purely poetic realm. Modern commentators therefore do not tend to link the *laus Italiae* to the world of the *Eclogues*, but to early Augustan ideals of the new *aurea aetas*, cf. Vergil, *Georgica*, ed./comm. by W. Richter (Munich: 1957), 206 and Virgil, *Georgics*, ed./comm. by R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: 1990), 121 on verse 2.149 ('hic ver adsiduum atque alienis mensibus aestas' ('here spring is everlasting and the warmth of summer lasts more months than is common').

[43] See Wenzel, *Die Xandra-Gedichte* 254, and Pieper, *Elegos redolere* 187f.

[44] Cf. Landino, *Poems*, ed. M. Chatfield (Cambridge, MA – London: 2008), 348 *ad loc.* Alternatively, one could think of Fiesole or the Mugello, a mountains region in the North of Florence which has often been connected to the divine inhabitants by Florentine poets: cf., e.g., Ugolino Verino, *Flametta* 1.20 (in which the Muses declare that they have moved to the Mugello), or Naldo Naldi, *Eclogae* 9 (in which Pan lives there, cf. for a short assessment of the text see Grant W.L., "The Major Poems of Naldo Naldi", *Manuscripta* 6 (1962) 131-154, here 150f.).

Et Dryades nobis aderunt, laetissima turba,
quae montes et quae florea prata colunt.[45]

In these mountains I will try to banish the bad flames, deceived by love as I am! For I will charm the Naiad-nymphs with their pleasing lyres and the Satyrs; I will sing of rustic, but holy things. And the Dryads will be present at my song, a very happy crowd who live on the hills and in meadows full of flowers.

Obviously, the connotation of nymphs has changed in the poem. They are no longer the inspiring deities, but the public of Landino's singing, replacing Xandra who had previously been the addressee and intended internal public of the elegies. The charms of the inhabitants of the rural surroundings are clearly meant to awaken Xandra's jealousy — Landino was well familiar with the erotic connotations nymphs often had in ancient literature, as testified by the many stories of rape of nymphs by deities or Satyrs.[46] But not only the erotic subtext can make Xandra jealous —the fact that the speaker of the poem tells her that he no longer needs her anymore for him to write holy poetry, is not flattery for an elegiac girl. The nymphs, that in the first book of the *Xandra* accompanied the beloved *puella*, have separated from her and offer an alternative thematic field, i.e., the happiness of rural life, one of the remedies against an unhappy love suggested in Ovid's *Remedia amoris*.[47] Even if Landino's speaker ultimately chooses a different thematic re-orientation (he will not write about life in the countryside, but instead will return to the city of Florence and sing of her humanistic ideology), the visit to the nymphs, a small detour, should again be understood metapoetically. As we have seen above, inspired poetry according to Horace and Boccaccio needs the remoteness of rural solitude to exist. When the speaker in book 2 visits the landscape outside the city, the nymphs welcome him, thus sealing his status as poet worthy of inspiration, a poet of a similar excellence to Horace or Petrarch,[48] not only when he sings of amorous themes.

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[45] Landino, *Xandra* 2.25.51-56.

[46] See Larson J., *Greek Nymphs. Myth, Cult, Lore* (Oxford: 2001), 4 on the erotically challenging nature of nymphs: 'The nymph is a highly ambiguous figure. Though sexually desirable, she is usually free of the familial restrictions applied to mortal women and can rarely be fully domesticated.' Cf. also Kramer A., "Nymphen" in *Der Neue Pauly,* Suppl. 5 (*Mythenrezeption*), 474-484, here 478 ('In der bukolischen Literatur der Neuzeit fungieren die N[ymphen] als Projektionsfiguren für die Reflexion über die weibliche Sexualität und das Begehren ihrer männlichen Betrachter').

[47] Cf. Ovid, *Remedia amoris* 169-248; esp. v. 241f.: 'cum semel exieris, centum solatia curae / et rus et comites et via longa dabit' ('once you have left, the countryside, the fellow travelers and the long route will give a hundred consolations of your care').

[48] Petrarch is Boccaccio's model when in the *Genealogia deorum gentilium* he asserts that poets have to live in solitude (see above). In Landino's *Xandra* 3.10, Petrarch is praised as the Tuscan Horace, cf. Pieper. *Elegos redolere* 300 (with n.309).

3.3. Flora/Florentia

Shortly after the second version of Landino's *Xandra* had been dedicated to Piero de' Medici in 1458 (the first version of 1444 had much less impact), it became an important model for a group of younger Florentine poets.[49] They imitated not only structural elements of Landino's collection, but also showed interest in motifs he had used. Thus, Ugolino Verino in his *Flametta* 1.20 describes how the poetic speaker is sleeping in a grove in Fiesole when Apollo appears and tells him that he and the Muses now inhabit the mountains around Florence, clearly alluding to *Xandra* 1.25.[50] More obvious still is the imitation of Xandra's visit to Fiesole in Alessandro Braccesi's *Amores* 7 which has the telling title 'Contemnit urbium cultores' ('He hates people who frequent the cities'). The poem starts with a long passage in which the speaker enumerates the luxury that others accumulate in the city, and firmly declares that he is not interested in it. Instead, he wants to leave the city. The reason for this is that his *puella*, Flora, has previously gone to the countryside:

> Quae postquam apricos hilaris migravit in agros
> prataque multiplici mollia flore colit,
> o ego quam cupio totos perferre labores
> ruris et aestivi tedia ferre canis.[51]

[49] Cf. Thurn N., *Neulatein und Volkssprachen. Beispiele für die Rezeption neusprachlicher Literatur durch die lateinische Dichtung Europas im 15.–16. Jahrhundert* (Munich: 2012), 143-157, and Pieper C., "*Xandrae cesserunt illa vel illa simul.* Landinos *Xandra* und die sogenannten *poeti medicei* (Ugolino Verino, Naldo Naldi und Alessandro Braccesi)", in Kofler W. – Novokhatko A. (eds.), *Cristoforo Landinos Xandra und die Transformationen römischer Liebesdichtung im Florenz des Quattrocento* (Tübingen: 2016), 61-80. Coppini, D., "Cosimo togatus. Cosimo dei Medici nella poesia latina del Quattrocento"*, Incontri triestini di filologia classica 6, 2006-2007* (=*Atti della giornata di studio in onore di Laura Casarsa, Trieste, 19 gennaio 2007*, ed. L. Cristante – I. Filip), 101-119, shows the same dependence with respect to the image of Cosimo. The once seminal book by Bottiglioni G., *La lirica latina in Firenze nella seconda metà del secolo XV* (Pisa: 1913) has by now only antiquarian value due to its outdated methodology.

[50] On this poem, see Pieper, "*Xandrae cesserunt*" 69f.

[51] Braccesi, *Amores* 7.27-30 (= *Carmina* 1.7.27-30). The verses are full of classical intertexts. For 'mollia prata' as part of a bucolic landscape (together with sources of water and a grove), cf. Virgil, *Eclogues* 10.42f. ('hic gelidi fontes, hic mollia prata, Lycori, / hic nemus …'). For the expression 'labores ruris', cf. Seneca's *Hercules furens* 929-31, Hercules' 'prayer for a new Golden Age' (so Fitch J.G., *Seneca's Hercules Furens. A Critical Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Ithaca and London: 1987), 361) in which the *rus* is classified as harmless or innocent ('… alta pax gentes alat; / ferrum omne teneat ruris innocui labor/ ensesque lateant …'). For the wish to endure the heat brought by the Dog Star without protection, cf. the description of the rural god Priapus in Tibullus, *Elegies* 1.4.6 ('nudus et aestivi tempora sicca canis') with 'aestivi … canis' in the same metrical position.

After she has travelled happily to the sunny fields and decorated the soft meadows with colourful flowers, O how much do I wish to endure all labours of the countryside and the annoyance of the Dog Star in summer.

The parallel of Braccesi's *puella* with Xandra whose arrival in Fiesole makes the meadows blossom is more than obvious. Indeed, Braccesi's poem can serve as additional evidence for the interpretation offered above of Xandra as a nymph. Obviously Braccesi understood Landino's poem in a similar way when he rendered more explicit the association of his beloved with a nymph:

Naiades hanc ducunt circum de more choreas
mutatisque canunt carmina docta notis.
Pan ovium custos, Fauni Satyrique bicornes
cunctorumque simul rustica turba deum
illius a facie nequeunt avertere visum
suspirant forma dispereuntque nova.[52]

The Naiads are leading their round dance around her and sing learned songs with a changed tune. Pan, the shepherd, Fauns, and Satyrs with two horns on their heads, and with them the rustic host of all the other gods, cannot avert their eyes from her face; they sigh and perish due to the unknown beauty.

If in Landino's poem, the impression of Xandra being the focus of the round dance is triggered by the word order (Xandra's name in the middle of the poem), in Braccesi's verses their *chorus* is literally arranged around Flora. She stands in the centre of the group and is hence for the viewer automatically part of the group of nymphs. That she is indeed recognizable as such, is expressed through the following verses mentioning the prototypical male divinities and semi-divinities of the

[52] Braccesi, *Amores* 7.41-46 (=*Carmina* 1.7.41-46). The verses link the poem to the bucolic tradition, as they echo closely Calpurnius Siculus' second eclogue (2.12-14): 'convenit umbrosa quicumque sub ilice lentus / pascit oves, Faunusque pater Satyrique bicornes / affuerunt sicco Dryades pede, Naiades udo'. Moreover, the expression 'Pan, ovium custos' is only found attested in classical Latin, but in a very prominent place: in Virgil's *Georgics* 1.17 he is invoked (in the same metrical position) as the inspiring deity for the poem.

woods staring at her in excitement, a reference to the manifold stories of nymphs being the victims of rape through Satyrs or Fauns.[53]

Between the verses describing the springing of flowers and the ones on the dance of the Naiads, Braccesi has added six extraordinarily dense lines. In these, Flora is said to pick the flowers she has just let sprout and to bind them into a garland for her head:

> Lilias quae manibus nunc candida carpit eburnis
> nunc legit et violas purpureasque rhosas,
> nunc vario pulchras contexens flore corollas
> imponit capiti pulchrior illa suo
> et modo narcissum viridi perfundit achanto:
> omnia sic late complet odore loca.[54]
>
> Sometimes she chooses lilies which the radiant gathers with her white hands, and violets and purple roses, then she braids the many flowers into beautiful little crowns and puts the more than pretty one on her head, or she sprinkles daffodils on green acanthus: like this, she fills the whole place far and wide with fragrance.

The catalogue of flowers is impressive and adds to the impression of a perfect landscape.[55] Additionally, its thick metapoetic meaning adds an extra layer to the imagery we saw in Landino's poem. Flora is not only the nymph-like being who is stimulating nature to blossom and thus a symbol for the inspiring power of the beloved elegiac girl, but she also picks the flowers she herself has created, thus receiving what she herself has inspired. Thirdly, her name is Flora, which means that the flowers she allows to grow and picks are she herself. Thus, Braccesi's six verses metaphorically enclose three functions of an elegiac *puella*: she is inspiration, object, and the first and foremost addressee ('reader', as the double meaning of the word 'legit' in v. 36 suggests) of the

[53] Kramer, "Nymphen", 474 mentions this motif as typical for nymphs since antiquity. Larson, *Greek Nymphs* 155f. recalls several of Pan's unsuccessful attempts to abduct nymphs (Syrinx, Echo, and Pitys).
[54] Braccesi, *Amores* 7.35-40 (=*Carmina* 1.7.35-40).
[55] The combination of roses, violets, and lilies is rather topical, especially in Christian authors describing the paradise, and often explained allegorically (meaning love, humility, and chastity). An interesting pretext for Braccesi's combination is Naldo Naldi's *Elegia* 3.2.11f., in a text describing the Mugello as a terrestrial paradise (see note 44 above): 'illic et violas cernas viguisse perennes / mixtaque puniceis lilia cana rosis' ('there you will also recognize that eternal volets are in full bloom, and white lilies are mixed with purple roses'). The very rare combination of daffodil and acanthus in one single verse refers to Virgil, *Georgics* 4.123 where the two plants are the first and the last word of the hexameter, within a passage in which Virgil (in the form of a a *praeteritio*) sketches a rich garden.

poetry written by the male elegiac speaker. If all three functions are fulfilled, fragrant odours spread everywhere, a metaphor for the diffusion Braccesi wanted to achieve for his poetry. With this passage, Braccesi seems to react to Petrarch's *Canzoniere* with the notorious Laura-landscapes formed by assonances of her name (*l'aura, laurus, l'oro* etc.) and which symbolize her all-encompassing presence for Petrarch's speaker.[56]

But Flora is an even more speaking name within the historical context in which Braccesi publishes his poems. *Amores* 7 is part of the earlier version of the collection which Braccesi in 1477 dedicated to Francesco Sassetti, a successful Florentine banker and close friend of Lorenzo de' Medici.[57] It is precisely for this context that Botticelli would paint his masterful allegorical painting *Primavera* on which Flora also figures prominently (as she will on the slightly later *Birth of Venus*). The *Primavera* (see ill. 1) is traditionally dated to around the year 1482, although Horst Bredekamp in his monograph has offered strong evidence for a slightly later date.[58] On the right side of Botticelli's painting, the metamorphosis of the nymph Chloris is depicted, who is desired and pursued by the god Zephyrus. As a consequence, she is transformed into the goddess Flora who spreads a multitude of diverse flowers over the earth. In this contribution, it is not possible to enter into the huge number of interpretations that have been offered for the painting.[59] It is without doubt that Botticelli's painting was influenced by a vast number of literary texts that were *en vogue* in the intellectual circles of Lorenzo's Florence. Apart from classical authors such as Horace (ode 1.30) and Lucretius, or late antique writers such as Martianus Capella, Angelo Poliziano's *Stanze per la giostra* and his Silva *Rusticus* with the description of an idealized bucolic landscape have been identified as important sources for Botticelli.[60] In the following, I merely want to suggest that Braccesi's *Amores*, a text that to my knowledge has not been connected to Botticelli's programmatic painting thus far,

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[56] Cf. for this concept, e.g., Küpper J., "*Mundus imago laurae*. Petrarcas Sonett 'Per mezz'i boschi' und die Modernität des Canzoniere", *Romanische Forschungen* 104 (1992) 52-88.

[57] On the publication history see Perosa A., "Braccesi (Braccese, Bracci, Braccio, Braccia; Braccius, de Braccesis, Brachiensius), Alessandro", in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* 13 (1971) 602-608, here 604: the *Amores* are part of an edition in three books of Braccesi's poems which is transmitted in two versions: 1st red. 1477 (first book dedicated to Sassetti, books two and three to Lorenzo de' Medici), 2nd red. 1487 ca. (dedicated entirely to the then adolescent Guidobaldo da Montefeltro).

[58] Bredekamp H., *Sandro Botticelli, Primavera. Florenz als Garten der Venus* (Berlin: ²2009), 35 thinks that Botticelli would not have been able to paint the flowers in his painting with so many details if he had not known the so-called Portinari-Altarpiece by Hugo van der Goes which arrived in Florence from Ghent in May 1483, and thus considers this moment the *terminus post quem* for the *Primavera*. Further, Bredekamp on stylistic grounds dates the *Birth of Venus* earlier than the *Primavera* (ca. 1482) — but these details are not particularly relevant for my argument.

[59] For a concise overview of major trends, see chapter 15 ("La Primavera. Das mediceische Florenz als irdischer Heilsstaat") in Leuker T., *Bausteine eines Mythos. Die Medici in Dichtung und Kunst des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne etc.: 2007), 259-288.

[60] Cf., e.g., Dempsey C., *The Portrayal of Love. Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (Princeton: 1992), 20-49 (chapter 1: "Poetry as Painting").

was also composed within the same cultural context by a poet who had very close connections to the Laurentine circle including Angelo Poliziano and could have been known (directly or indirectly) to the painter. Moreover, the protagonist of the *Amores* is called Flora — even if she clearly is not Botticelli's goddess, but a mortal elegiac *puella*.[61] There are indeed some parallels between the poem analysed above and Botticelli's *Primavera*.

First, as we have seen, Braccesi's Flora is closely associated with the nymphs — one could speak of the transformation of an elegiac *puella* into a nymph, whereas Botticelli's Flora is the transformation of a nymph into a goddess. This part of the *Primavera*, as has been acknowledged by almost all interpreters, is informed by Ovid's *Fasti* in which Flora narrates about her metamorphosis from Chloris into Flora, as well as of the sexual violence that accompanied it.[62] Of course, in Braccesi's poem, Flora never changed her identity as radically and was always called Flora, but the possibility of rape by the Satyrs and Fauns is, as we have seen, present in *Amores* 7. In *Amores* 9.17-32 the idea of a possible metamorphosis is spelled out as a menace towards Flora. In an enumeration, the speaker gives exempla of mythological figures who have not answered the prayers of their lovers: Daphne, Syrinx, Narcissus, and Cephalus have been punished by the gods. He concludes: 'crede mihi, similis tibi sors miserabilis instat, / ni minuas tantum, Flora, supercilium' ('believe me, a similar fate awaits you if you do not lower your haughty eyebrow, Flora').[63] The poem, however, appears only in the second version of the *Amores* of 1487. If a link with Botticelli's painting is plausible, then in this case the dependency would be reversed: the picture with the explicit transformation of Chloris into Flora might have invited Braccesi to intensify the theme of metamorphosis in his collection.

Second, Braccesi's text emphasizes the inspiring power of Flora who transforms a world without flowers into one adorned with flowers. As I have tried to show, this theme was culturally

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[61] Perhaps this difference is smaller than it seems if one takes Giovanni Boccaccio's successful *De mulieribus claris* into account (ed. by V. Zaccaria in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, vol. 10 (Milan: 1970). In chapter 1.64, Flora is portrayed, and as we saw above in his Ninfale, Boccaccio again does not credit his protagonist with divinity. For Boccaccio, Flora is a prostitute, as the title already suggests ('De Flora meretrice dea florum et Zephiri coniuge'). The story of the metamorphosis of Chloris (Clora for Boccaccio) into the goddess Flora is said to have been a tale invented to attribute honours to her that she did not deserve. For, as Boccaccio continues: 'Qua seducti fallacia, eam, que vivens fonices coluerat, a quibuscunque etiam pro minima stipe prostrata, quasi suis alis zephyrus illam in celum detulerit, cum Iunone regina deabusque aliis sedere arbitrati sunt.' ('The general public was misled by this deception. Flora, who during her lifetime had lived in brothels and had debased herself with any and everyone for even the smallest fee, was now thought to sit with Queen Juno and the other goddesses, as if Zephyrus had borne her on his wings to heaven', tr. V. Brown in Boccaccio G., *Famous Women*, ed. V. Brown (Cambridge, MA – London: 2001)).

[62] Ovid, *Fasti* 5.195-206 beginning with 'Chloris eram quae Flora vocor' in v. 195 and the self-definition of Chloris as nymph in v. 197: 'Chloris eram, nymphe campi felicis'.

[63] Braccesi *Amores* 9.21f. (=*Carmina* 1.9.31f.)

marked in Braccesi's era as it repeated a similar idea in Landino's *Xandra* and had already become a core element of Florentine elegiac poetry. The same theme is visualized in Botticelli's painting.[64] That the goddess Flora spreads flowers over the earth is of course not surprising. But Frank Zöllner who follows Charles Dempsey in the proposal that one should read Botticelli's painting from right to left, has noted that 'in the upper right corner of Botticelli's picture [the one from which Zephyrus attacks Chloris, CP], there are neither blossoms nor oranges to be seen in the trees: indeed this area appears far from fruitful.'[65] That Botticelli indeed painted the transition from a (almost) blossomless nature to one in full bloom in the beginning of his visual narrative, connects the painting thematically with the poems discussed above.

The third aspect has to do with the political symbolism of the text and the image. Many interpreters have linked Botticelli's *Primavera* to the city of Florence under the regime of Lorenzo il Magnifico. However difficult, if not impossible it is to find one exact meaning of Botticelli's painting, most specialists agree that it is an idealization of Florence, a depiction of a kind of golden era.[66] As Charles Burroughs has put it: 'Botticelli had the goal — which would be validated by time — of producing a work of universal significance, a work for the ages. And this made it all the more effective as a symbol of Laurentine Florence, as Lorenzo, following Augustus, well knew.'[67] An important key for such an understanding is Flora whose name is easily relatable to the city's name.[68] Nowhere in Braccesi's text is Flora directly linked to the city, but a contemporary public, accustomed to frequent identifications like *Cosmus* (i.e. κόσμος, 'world') for Cosimo de' Medici or *laurus* (laurel) for Lorenzo,[69] would be invited to think of a speaking name anyway. Moreover, in Naldo Naldi's *Eclogues* 3 and 5 (written in the 1460s) the nymph Anthea (from ἄνθος, 'flower') has

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[64] Dempsey, *Portrayal of Love* 149f. is close to linking the poem with elegy when he reads the assault of Zephyr as 'a metaphor for the violent passions, uncertainties, and tears of the first onslaught of love'. The formulation could serve for a reading of love elegy as a kind of fictitious *Entwicklungsroman* as proposed by Pieper, "*Xandra cesserunt*" 77. But Dempsey links it to Poliziano, *Stanze per la giostra* 1.44, who varies the topic by saying that Simonetta Vespucci (who served as inspiration for Botticelli's female protagonists, e.g. the Venus of the *Primavera*) changed the air around her with her gaze ('l'aier d'intorno si fa tutto ameno').

[65] Zöllner F., *Botticelli. Images of Love and Spring* (Munich etc.: 1998), 57f.

[66] See, however, Leuker, *Bausteine eines Mythos* 288 who believes that the earthly Florence, though highly idealized in Botticelli's painting, is only a precursor of the perfection of God's paradise ('die Vorstufe der himmlischen Herrlichkeit').

[67] Burroughs C., "Talking with Goddesses. Ovid's Fasti and Botticelli's Primavera", *Word & Image* 28.1 (2012) 71-83, here 78.

[68] Cf. Bredekamp, *Sandro Botticelli* 44; to corroborate his claim, he refers to the three laurel trees at the right margin of the painting (the alleged starting point for its interpretation) which symbolize Lorenzo de' Medici.

[69] Examples for these metonymies are countless. I give one of each: for Cosimo = 'world' cf. Naldi, *Bucolica* 5.68 ('Cosmo, qui mundi mensuram nomine implet', 'Cosimo, who with his name fills the measure of the world'); for Lorenzo = 'laurel' cf. Verino, *Flametta* 1.1.23 ('per te, Laurenti, laurus parnasia floret', 'because of you, Lorenzo, the laurel of the Parnassus florishes').

been identified as representing Florence by Leonard Grant.[70] And if one is willing to interpret Flora's name as a speaking one, one might think of Landino's poem 2.25 in which the nymphs do not represent love poetry anymore, but a new project of a matured poet, i.e., the exaltation of Florence and the Medici in the third book of the *Xandra*. Braccesi's edition of his poems in three books confines love elegy to the first, whereas the second and third are entitled *Epistulae ad amicos* and *Epigrammata*. As I have shown elsewhere, with this structure, he reacted to Landino's programmatic turn from love to society.[71] However, this Landinian movement was never meant to undermine the value of love poetry as a genre worthy of being treated by the best poets. Of anyone, Alessandro Braccesi showed this most clearly by giving his elegiac girl a name connecting her to the city he had served for his entire life and which he, as many of his contemporaries living under the regime of Lorenzo de' Medici, wanted to extoll as the ideal place of *humanitas*.[72]

5. Summary

As we have seen, in Florentine elegies of the Quattrocento nymphs are evoked in quite diverse ways. First, they mark the excellence of the deceased, as divine beings would only engage with the affairs of truly great men (and women) gifted with humanistic ethos. Second, they inspire amorous poetry by favouring both the poet (as a kind of Muse) and the object of his love (the elegiac *puella*), hence stressing not only their distinctiveness, but also the worthiness of the elegiac genre as such. Third, they denote idealized bucolic landscapes which in the Florentine context regularly symbolize the cultural and political achievements of the ruling Medici family who have managed to create a paradise on earth. Fourth, they can even represent the city as such, thus representing an almost paradoxical desire of humanist poetics: poets want to fulfil the Horatian and Petrarchan model in retiring from the masses to lonely groves, and at the same time serve the city and her rulers as part of the representative group of intellectuals who form the current cultural discourse. The transitional nature of nymphs between the world of gods and men seems a fitting metaphor for all these diverging aims that appear to converge on one point: the alleged elevation men receive when in

[70] Grant, "Major Poems" 148f. The identification is indeed straightforward, as Anthea is introduced as 'Nymphis Arni formosior una' ('prettier than the other Nymphs of the Arno', 3.4) who is said to have been born from blood that was both royal and that of shepherds ('pastorum genus illa trahens de sanguine regum', 3.5), an allusion to Rome's first king Romulus who was brought up by the shepherd Faustulus.

[71] Pieper, "*Xandrae cesserunt*" 75f.

[72] Similarly, in Naldi, *Bucolica* 5.29f., a shepherd who is love with Anthea (=Florence) and whom Grant identifies convincingly with Cosimo, promises her that he will always venerate her as Artemis in Fiesole, thus also mixing a female figure representing Florence with the divine world of pastoral Fiesole ('o nemorum virgo Fesulum tu Delia nobis / semper eris').

contact with these nymphs. Thus this marking of grandeur might be one of the most important meanings of nymphs in the context I have investigated in this contribution.

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