

THE SCENT OF A WOMAN¹

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Odors have a power of persuasion stronger than that of words, appearances, emotions, or will. The persuasive power of an odor cannot be fended off, it enters into us like breath into our lungs, it fills us up, imbues us totally. There is no remedy for it.

Patrick Süskind, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*

Near the end of the first book of the *Aeneid*, Venus, who sometimes seems a stand-in for Vergil himself, on whose behalf she works to keep the poem and its hero on track even as Juno schemes to bend their trajectory, decides she must take precautions to guarantee that Dido falls hopelessly in love with Aeneas, the sentimental catastrophe that will be crucial, of course, to the plot of the poem's next several books. Accordingly, the goddess instructs her son Cupid to disguise himself as Ascanius, son of Aeneas (and thus her own grandson), and sends him along with the Trojan prince to greet the Carthaginian queen, where the boy-god will ply her with gifts and seemingly childish charm (*Aeneid* 1.656–722). The real Ascanius, in the meantime, must be gotten rid of for a while. This Vergil accomplishes expeditiously, first borrowing a few words from Lucretius (4.907–08) to have Venus “pour gentle repose through his limbs.” She then spirits him away, “caressed in her lap” (a preview of Dido's pose with the false Ascanius), and sets him down deep in a grove high on a mountain on the isle of Cyprus, sacred to her, “where soft *amaracus* embraces him with flowers and sweet darkness”:

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at Venus Ascanio placidam per membra quietem
 irrigat, et fotum gremio dea tollit in altos
 Idaliae lucos, ubi mollis amaracus illum
 floribus et dulci adspirans complectitur umbra.
 (*Aeneid* 1.691–94)

There the boy will sleep softly at least through Book 3, i.e., through his father's entire retelling for Dido and her court of the fall of Troy and his subsequent flight and perilous voyage. The sleeping Ascanius thus offers a kind of quiet pendant to the Trojan saga, which unfolds at times rather like a waking nightmare after Aeneas first protests that the telling will be painful and that the late-night sky more suitably urges sleep (*Aeneid* 2.3–9).

Amaracus is probably the same as or similar to the herb we call "sweet marjoram."² But for the great English Restoration poet and Vergilian translator John Dryden, the word's likely modern equivalent posed a dilemma that he felt moved to describe in detail:

If I should translate it sweet marjoram, as the word signifies, the reader would think I had mistaken Virgil: for those village words, as I may call them, give us a mean idea of the thing; but the sound of the Latin is so much more pleasing, by the just mixture of the vowels with the consonants, that it raises our fancies to conceive somewhat more noble than a common herb, and to spread roses under him, and strew lilies over him; a bed not unworthy [of] the grandson of the goddess.³

Dryden solves the problem of cheapening his translation with the English word for "a common herb" by undertranslating *mollis amaracus* as "a flow'ry bed," compensating for the loss of botanical specificity by having Venus crown the boy with "a wreath of myrtle," a detail entirely lacking

2 In modern botany, this is *Origanum majorana* L. or *Majorana hortensis* (the former being the older designation by Linnaeus, properly used with the appended "L."). Full discussion in Andrews 1961.77–78, who admirably sorts the ancient terminology for the various members of the Linnaean genus *Origanum*, arguably producing, however, more precision than we can always suppose in our sources. More discussion below.

3 John Dryden, "Dedication of the *Aeneis*," in Ker 1961.233.

in the original.⁴ Most other translators, less fastidious than Dryden about “village words,” have made do with *marjoram*. But both a literal translation and Dryden’s substitutions lose something delicate in the Latin—something even more delicate, in fact, than the extraordinary scent *marjoram* releases when crushed between your fingers.

The peripheral slumber of *Ascanius* did not escape the attention of the late antique grammarian *Servius*, whose commentary on *Vergil*’s works offers a treasure-trove of ancient antiquarian lore, including this note on the odoriferous herb that made so sweet a bed:

AMARACUS hic puer regius unguentarius fuit, qui casu lapsus dum ferret unguenta, maiorem ex unguentorum confusione odorem creavit, unde optima unguenta amaracina dicuntur. hic postea in herbam *sampsucum* versus est, quam nunc etiam *amaracum* dicunt.

Amaracus was a slave charged with keeping the perfumes⁵ for a royal house. Having tripped and fallen while carrying the perfumes, he produced an even greater perfume by their accidental blending. As a result, the best perfumes are called *amaracina*. He himself was later transformed into the herb *sampsucum*, now also known as *amaracus*.⁶

4 John Dryden, *Virgil’s Aeneid*, in Keener 1997.1.969–74:

The goddess then to young *Ascanius* flies,
And in a pleasing Slumber seals his Eyes:
Lull’d in her Lap, amidst a Train of Loves,
She gently bears him to her blissful Groves,
Then with a Wreath of Myrtle crowns his Head,
And softly lays him on a flow’ry Bed.

5 Oil (usually olive) was the regular base medium of ancient perfumes, which thus were called *unguenta* in Latin, which I shall translate “perfumes” rather than “oils,” “unguents,” or “ointments.” These latter terms, while etymologically faithful to manufacture and application, understate what the word effectively meant to ancient Latin speakers, who almost always use it with a primary reference to scent. Among the oil bases preferred by perfumers was *omphacium*, the thin and relatively unscented oil yielded by unripe olives, on which see Brun 2000.296.

6 *Servius* on 1.693. Cf. *Isidore Etymologies* 12.4.8 and 17.9.14, *Vatican Mythographers* (ed. Kulcsár) 1.34 and 2.209. Unless otherwise indicated, this and all other translations from Greek and Latin are the author’s own.

Far-fetched as this tale may be, it includes an ancient and enduring truth of the perfumer's art: the best fragrances are blends.⁷ And it seems more than likely that ancient perfumers understood as well as their modern counterparts that this is not so much a question of balance or novelty as it is of the fact that different substances release their scents at different rates, enabling a blended perfume to unfold over time. Mixing musical and structural metaphors, modern perfumers thus describe their creations as a succession of "notes": "top," "middle," and finally, "base."

The legend of Amaracus, royal perfume keeper, may, in fact, have something to do with what the ancient encyclopedist Pliny the Elder calls "royal perfume" (*regale unguentum*), explaining that it was so called because it was blended for the kings of the Parthians (*Nat. Hist.* 13.18). Pliny calls this compound the "very height of luxury, the last word on perfume" ("cumulus ipse deliciarum et summa auctoritas rei") and provides a list of over two dozen ingredients, from ben-nuts to wine, including *amaracus*. The herb likewise appears among the ingredients Pliny lists for *telinum*, "the most fashionable perfume at the time of the comic playwright Menander" (*Nat. Hist.* 13.13). Only a few fragrances were made from a single essence; Pliny calls these "noble perfumes" (*nobilia unguenta*) and notes one made solely from *amaracus* from the southern coast of the Sea of Marmara (*Nat. Hist.* 13.14). But he adds that even these sometimes then were mixed with other fragrant substances. It is clear, in any case, that the prized amaracines (*amaracina*)⁸ described by Servius contained more—much more—than their namesake herb, and the success of any particular amaracine must have had much to do with the artistry of the blend. In a remarkable timeline of shift-

7 "With their home-grown and their imported aromatics the ancients created gloriously heady blends of perfumes," gush Classen, Howes, and Synnot 1994.15, in a chapter on "The Aromas of Antiquity" (pp. 13–50) that provides a lively introduction to the subject. More in Faure 1987. God himself tells Moses what to blend to make holy perfumes at Exodus 30:22–38.

8 Amaracine does not appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, but in Anglicizing it (I shall use it both as an adjective and as a noun), I am following the lead of Oscar Wilde in "The Burden of Itys," in Wilde 1881.66:

And sweet with young Lycoris to recline
In some Illyrian valley far away,
Where canopied on herbs amaracine
We too might waste the summer-tranced day
Matching our reeds in sportive rivalry,
While far beneath us frets the troubled purple of the sea.

ing fashions in perfume, Pliny includes an amaracine from Cos, the vogue for which eventually yielded to a perfume of quince blossoms from the same island (*Nat. Hist.* 13.5).

Roughly four centuries before Pliny, and seven before Servius, Theophrastus, pupil of and successor to Aristotle, penned a treatise *On Odors* that survives in mutilated form alongside his other influential works on botanical subjects.⁹ It opens with the assertion that “odors in general, like tastes, are due to mixture.” Much of what follows regards the compounding of perfumes and includes this exposé concerning the composition of amaracine:

The finest amaracine (ἀμαράκτινον) is said to be compounded from all the best aromatic plants—save marjoram (ἀμάρακος). For this is the one aromatic plant that perfumers are said not to use for any perfumes at all; the name, instead, is a kind of false epithet.¹⁰

This clearly had changed by Pliny’s time,¹¹ but variations in the formula are less interesting than what remains consistent from Theophrastus through to Servius: the ancient Greeks and Romans associated the herb *amaracus* with a luxurious scent suitable for human bodies, and they attached the name to a variety of perfumes that contained varying quantities (including none) of the herb itself.¹² This is rather more remarkable than it might at

9 This fascinating treatise is conveniently available in the second volume of the Loeb edition of Theophrastus *Enquiry into Plants and Minor Works on Odours and Weather Signs*, ed. and trans. Arthur Hort (London 1916).

10 Theophrastus *On Odors* (*Fragments* 4) 30. He contradicts this assertion, however, in *Research on Plants* 9.7.3, where he includes ἀμάρακος among plants used for perfumes.

11 One does wonder a bit, however, whether the convoluted etiology offered by Servius represents, at some level, an attempt to explain the name amaracine without recourse to the herb as an ingredient; in other words, late antiquity, too, may have known a fine amaracine that contained no *amaracus*. A curious modern parallel is to be had in L’Origan, the scent that in 1905 helped to make perfumer François Coty famous: despite the name, I can find no one who includes any species of *Origanum* (including marjoram) among its supposed ingredients. Coty would go on to produce *Chypre* (1917), already a name of several nineteenth-century perfumes. On this and other evocations of Aphrodite’s island as a shorthand for beauty, see the provocative discussion of Belgiorno 2007.53–60.

12 The origins of this tradition are, in fact, far earlier: among the tablets from the “Palace of Nestor” at Pylos, Fr. 1215 describes an oil of *sambēra*, the Mycenaean antecedent of (*s*)*amarakon*. Brief discussion in Faure 1987.140. On perfume at Mycenaean Pylos generally, see Shelmerdine 1998 as well as Shelmerdine 1985.

first seem. Let us suppose that we could actually trace the history of amaracine over the centuries through access to the perfumes themselves or, at least, to the specific formulas, complete with precise quantities, that would enable us to approximate with modern ingredients the finished products. Our noses would follow a tradition that, despite names and appearances, was *not* much concerned with the imitation of nature—for if natural scent were the goal, then the ancients would have contented themselves with pure essence of *amaracus*. Each new amaracine, instead, asked to be compared not with a plant but with its predecessor perfumes, in what clearly was a long, ancient quest—from the “superior kind of amaracine” of Theophrastus to the “best perfumes” described by Servius—to produce the most intoxicating amaracine of all.

The perfumer’s art, in other words, imitates and emulates not just nature but also (and especially) prior art. On the one hand, this raises an amusing chicken-and-egg question: for an ancient nose caught up unawares in this long tradition, was it the amaracine that smelled of *amaracus* or the other way around? The answer would perhaps depend on one’s background, and we may be permitted to imagine the pampered aristocrat who found the bottle first and the herb only later (if at all). But even more interesting is the way in which this olfactory tradition resembles what we have come to expect as a matter of course from the traditions of ancient literature. Greek and Roman poetry is full of nature, for example, but only seldom do we suppose that the poet paints from life: what is not a flight of pure fancy is, more often than not, borrowed and reshaped from literary precedent. This is true not only of what poets describe but also of the words and sounds they use: thus, as already has been noted, when Vergil has Venus “pour gentle repose through the limbs” of Ascanius, he is echoing, almost word-for-word and metrical foot-for-foot, his predecessor Lucretius.¹³

The same Lucretius provides the only three appearances of the perfume amaracine (as opposed to the herb *amaracus*) in surviving Latin poetry. In the first, he observes that atoms have no odor, rather like the neutral oil base in which one compounds an amaracine or other perfume (2.847). In the second, he imagines a spurned lover piling flowers on his beloved’s doorstep, smearing amaracine on her doorposts, and kissing the locked doors themselves as he weeps (4.1177–79; more below). In the last,

13 *Aeneid* 1.691–92: “. . . placidam per membra quietem / irrigat.” Lucretius *de Rerum Natura* 4.907–08: “. . . somnus per membra quietem / irriget.”

he turns to the effects of different odors on different species, culminating in this (6.973–78):

denique amaracinum fugitat sus et timet omne
unguentum; nam saetigeris subus acre venenumst,
quod nos interdum tamquam recreare videtur.
at contra nobis caenum taeterrima cum sit
spurcities, eadem subus haec iucunda videtur,
insatiabiliter toti ut volvantur ibidem.

Thus does amaracine drive away the pig, which fears all perfume. For what from time to time makes us feel fresh and new is bitter poison to the bristly pig. By contrast, although mud to us seems disgusting filth, the same is for pigs a source of such delight that they never tire of wallowing in it.

The unsuspecting reader might suppose that the first half of this observation is the result of experience—or even deliberate experimentation—by Lucretius or someone he consulted. Instead, Lucretius is somewhat overinterpreting an ancient proverb, preserved for us by the essayist Aulus Gellius: “Nihil cum amaracino sui,” “A pig has nothing to do with amaracine.”¹⁴ The expression inevitably made its way into the *Adages* of Erasmus (1.4.38), that great Renaissance collection of ancient aphoristic wisdom, and thence into the occasional emblem depicting a pig staring perplexed at a potted marjoram plant, sometimes accompanied by the haughty motto (addressed to the pig by the herb, and thus by the emblem owner to his uncouth critics), “non” or “haud tibi spiro,” “I am not fragrant (literally “breathe” and thus also “live”) for *you*.”¹⁵ But this is only a pictographic simplification: pigs do not (as far as I have been able to learn) really avoid

14 Gellius *Praef.* 19. On the full line, “nil cum fidibus graculo (e)st, nihil cum amaracino sui,” “the crow has nothing to do with the lyre; the pig has nothing to do with amaracine,” as a likely example of popular metrical wisdom, see Sedgwick 1932.99.

15 An excellent example is in Joachim Camerarius the Younger, *Symbolorum et emblematum centuria quatuor*, vol. 1, no. 103, consulted in a copy of the 1677 Mainz edition at the University of California, Los Angeles, where the emblem appears on p. 186. See also Corbett and Lightbown 1979.36–37, 59–64, with a reproduction on p. 58 of the title page of a 1593 edition of Sidney’s *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia*, featuring a version of the same emblem.

marjoram. Rather, the point of the original motto is that pigs, being pigs, prefer mud to fine perfume. “A pig,” we might translate and update, “has nothing to do with Chanel No. 5.” Ancient amaracine’s influence, in other words, was sufficient to produce yet another slander against pigs (compare, of course, the biblical “pearls before swine”¹⁶), although they actually are among the most hygienic and intelligent of mammals, and their sense of smell, as every truffle lover knows, is keen and refined. But even more interesting is the way in which the later iconic simplification of amaracine into its eponymous ingredient invites us to reread instances of *amaracus* in ancient poetry, including the one with which we began, deep in a grove sacred to the goddess of love. For Vergil’s *amaracus* should we read—and thus smell—not a “common herb” but a famous perfume? After all, Venus’s own hair, a few hundred lines earlier, has already emanated another heavenly scent—indeed, the gods’ proprietary fragrance: ambrosia.¹⁷

Venus, in fact, is not the only alluring female whom the poets associate with *amaracus*.¹⁸ The earliest example, and the only one in Greek, is

16 “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet,” Matthew 7:6 (King James Version). Ancient aphorisms involving pigs are too numerous to list (*sus Minerva*; *sus per rosas*; *matrem sequimini porci*; etc.). See Otto 1890.224, 336. But many more are collected by Erasmus.

17 *Aeneid* 1.402–04. On ambrosia and other scents of divinity, see Lilja 1972.19–30. Cf. the departure of Flora (who, of course, might smell of ambrosia or flowers or both) in Ovid *Fasti* 5.376: “mansit odor: posses scire fuisse deam,” “Her scent lingered: you would have been able to tell that a goddess had been present.”

18 We should note before proceeding that the use of perfumes in antiquity was hardly confined to women. For Rome, Horace calls for wine, garlands, and perfume with which to welcome Augustus back from war (*Odes* 3.14.17). He elsewhere invites a friend to set aside worry and suggests: “Why don’t we perfume our white hair (while it lasts!) with rose and our bodies with oriental nard, fling ourselves under a tall plane tree, or a pine—and drink?” (*Odes* 2.11.13–17). Propertius douses his hair with perfume to attract Cynthia, in vain (2.4.5). Nero had the ceiling of his dining room fitted out to sprinkle perfume on his dinner guests (Suetonius *Nero* 31.2). Cicero, however, ridicules the crowd of Catiline as being “drenched in perfumes” (*unguentibus obliti*: *Cat.* 2.10); Juvenal has Laronia ask a *cinaedus* where he buys the expensive perfumes of which he reeks (*Satires* 2.41–42). There are numerous perfumed antics (and onomastics) in Plautus’s *Casina*, including an old, over-perfumed, would-be adulterer (226ff.) and a (cinnamon-scented?) cross-dressed stand-in for the title character (814); more in Connors 1997.

As these few examples already suggest, the explicit mention of a man’s perfume, positively or negatively, usually connotes extravagance; when negative, the accusation usually is of effeminacy. The former, at least, is evident in two possible references to the use of amaracine by men, both from lost comedies quoted by Athenaeus in the same passage: Eubulus frag. 107.3 K-A (108.3 Hunter) = Athenaeus 12.553a, where “luxurious maidens” rub the speaker’s “foot” with amaracine, and Antiphanes frag. 105.6 K-A = Athenaeus

in the longest surviving fragment of the works of the tragedian Chaereon, known, until his plays were lost, for “having a penchant for flowers.”¹⁹ In opulently erotic language, the narrator describes having spied upon a band of beautiful young women whose scanty clothes parted to reveal a breast here, a thigh there; others were slumbering on beds of variegated flowers, while, finally, “thriving on dew, thick ἀμάρακος stretched out its stems on tender meadows.”²⁰

A Roman bride is the object of the earliest surviving Latin example, a poem that Catullus wrote to celebrate the wedding of L. Manlius Torquatus to the beautiful young Junia Aurunculeia (Catullus 61). The poem opens by calling Hymen, god of marriage, down from Helicon, mountain of the Muses, instructing him to hurry happily to the ceremony, a flame-colored veil in hand and a wreath of “flowers of sweet scented *amaracus*” on his head.²¹ The veil, of course, is for the bride, and though flowers and foliage were ubiquitous in a Roman wedding, Hymen’s wreath here pointedly echoes the one the bride herself wore, traditionally composed, we are told by Festus, “of flowers, twigs, and herbs she herself had gathered.”²² Next, in chronological order, comes Vergil, followed by Columella, who in the tenth book (in verse, on gardens) of his *de Re Rustica* offers a veritable orgy of flowers into which he invites, about midway through, whole nations of

12.553d and 15.689e–f, where the speaker extracts a variety of unguents from a gilded box, including amaracine, applied to “eyebrows and hair.” The first passage has been taken to be a riddling joke on the male genitalia that depends on ποῦς = “phallus” (see Henderson 1991.126, 129–30, 176), in which case being rubbed by maidens with amaracine takes on several possible meanings (Henderson thinks the “maidens” are the speaker’s testicles): perfume is hardly the point and euphemism is the game (i.e., the speaker no more means “amaracine” than he does “foot”). And in the second, the speaker’s gender actually is not clear: even if male (as some translators have assumed, probably precisely in order to make the passage funny), the comic context would prevent us from taking his use of amaracine as typical—indeed, the humor might well depend on its inappropriateness. Cf. Xenophon *Symposium* 2.3–4 for a conservative take on the scents, both natural and artificial, appropriate to men and women. Nevertheless, regarding antiquity and amaracine, as with other scents in other ages, there is no reason to suppose an absolute line between the genders; rather, amaracine was ordinarily, but probably not exclusively, worn by women.

19 Athenaeus *Deponosophistae* 13.608d: ἐπικατάφορος . . . ἐπὶ τὰ ἄνθη.

20 *TrGF* (Snell) 71 Chaereon F 14.15–16.

21 61.6–8. The *Enciclopedia virgiliana*, vol. 1 (Rome 1984), p. 328, s. v. “aromatiche, piante,” suggests that this passage (or a general use of marjoram in bridal crowns) is echoed by Vergil’s *amaracus* at *Aeneid* 1.693, which “potrebbe alludere alle imminenti nozze fra Didone ed Enea.”

22 Paul. Fest. 45: “Corollam nova nupta de floribus, verbenis herbisque a se lectis cum amiculo ferebat.” Tertullian *de Corona* 13.4 suggests that both bride and groom were crowned.

nymphs to come gather his narcissus, etc., “while Apollo sinks his steeds into the Spanish deep, where *amaracus* carpets scented darkness.”²³ The final poetic example, from Claudian’s *Abduction of Proserpina*, has “tender” (*mollis*) *amaracus* adorn one of the girls in the goddess’s train as they all traipse “through the flowering countryside” (*per florea rura*) of Sicily, gathering shoots and blooms as they go, moments before the violence that gives the poem its title (2.129, 118).

Among these, the Catullan poem, one of his best known, invites special scrutiny. This pretended “wedding song” (*epithalamium*) piggy-backs on the symbolism of the Roman (and Greek) marriage ceremony to offer a long series of decreasingly metaphorical anticipations of Torquatus’s physical enjoyment of his new wife on their wedding night. This begins, of course, with Hymen himself, whose name means “membrane”; other double-entendres are rolled out almost stanza by stanza (“throw open the unbolted doors,” etc.). The poem directly addresses not just Hymen but practically everyone involved in the wedding, especially the bride herself, who is urged at length to yield to, and thus participate in, the pleasures of the coming night. But this only thinly disguises vicarious enjoyment of her by the poet and his readers. Never entirely pornographic, the poem nevertheless is driven by an insistent voyeurism that, though not blind to her “no less beautiful” husband and to their now imminent “play” (*ludus*),²⁴ remains mostly focused on the young bride herself. This culminates, without quite climaxing, in this final snapshot from the bedroom:

iam licet venias, marite:
uxor in thalamo tibi est,
ore floridulo nitens,
alba parthenice velut
luteumve papaver.

Time to come, husband!
A wife waits in your wedding bed,
her face blooming with beauty,

23 Columella *de Re Rustica* 10.295–96: “. . . dum Phoebus equos in gurgite mersat Hiberno, / sicubi odoratas praetexit amaracus umbras . . .” The full passage begins at 10.264.

24 Catullus 61.190–92: “. . . nihilo minus / pulcer es, neque te Venus / neglegit.” 61.202–04: “. . . vestri . . . / multa milia ludi. / ludite ut lubet . . .”

like the white virgin-flower,
or the reddish poppy.²⁵

White face and red lips (the two contrasting colors exploit the double meaning of *os*) offer their own delights, of course, but stand here as well for the similarly contrasting body soon to be unveiled (though not to our gaze), which is anticipated by the figure of a flower whose whiteness is analogized by its name, *parthenice*, to a virgin's purity. But there is more to this metaphor than meets the eye. If *parthenice*, which appears only here among Latin texts, is chamomile (as the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* suggests), then it joins the notoriously soporific poppy to surround the bride with scents most suitable for a bed.²⁶ "Not this bed!" one might object, since its immediate purpose is hardly sleep: but this is Catullus's analogic game throughout the poem, substituting one seductive pleasure for another. Here he suggests that the couple's "play" will be, for them, like a dream and, for us, something worth dreaming about, not only now but even once the poet's own "play" comes to an end (*lusimus satis*) in the poem's final stanza.

Poppy and chamomile are not the poem's only botanical similes for the bride, herself once described as a *florida puellula*, a "girl in her first bloom" (Catullus 61.57). Her beauty will remain unrivalled, like that of a proud "hyacinth among the many colors of its rich master's flower-bed" (61.87–89). She will embrace her husband as a "trellis-tree" embraces the "sinuous grapevine" (61.102–05). So, too, is her mind a tree, gripped by love as if by "clinging ivy" (61.33–35). Finally, she is "like an Asian myrtle, dazzling with its flowery branches, that tree nymphs feed with wet dew and treat as a toy."²⁷ None of these figures, of course, is innocent of sexual innuendo, which brings us back to the beginning of the poem's floral assault on the reader's senses: Hymen, crowned "with flowers of sweet

25 61.184–88. On *luteum* meaning "red" here, see Thomson 1997.362 and compare the similar red/white contrast earlier in the poem at lines 9–10. The long-deferred permission granted by *iam licet venias* can hardly be without a secondary sexual sense, though it is difficult to know whether the Latin *venire*, by itself, could suggest orgasm in the way of the English "come" (or, e.g., the Italian *venire*); for such a sense for verbs of "reaching a goal" (including *pervenire* and *adventare*), see Adams 1982.144.

26 On the poppy and the ancient use of its narcotic and sedative extracts, see Baumann 1993.69, 72. Poppy seed is *soporiferum papaver* in Vergil *Aeneid* 4.486.

27 61.21–25: "floridis velut enitens / myrtus Asia ramulis / quos Hamadryades deae / ludicrum sibi roscido / nutriunt umore."

smelling *amaracus*.” As has already been said, Junia may well have worn an *amaracus* crown; the choice, in any case, is scarcely an improbable or inappropriate one by the poet (*RE* 1.2.1728.4ff.). But given the sexual charge of the poem’s later floral metaphors, it seems difficult to read only straightforwardly the perfumed Hymen with which it opens.

Whatever she wore in her hair, so fancy a bride, or the entourage that dressed her (perhaps the sexually experienced matrons whom Catullus will instruct to arrange her in her marriage bed), would surely have reached as well for costly unguents arrayed in tiny alabaster jars.²⁸ In other words, if Junia’s wedding day began with her gathering real *amaracus* with her own hands, then it could have ended (and her wedding night have begun, moments after the poem subtracts the couple from our view) with the groom’s nose pressed into skin anointed with amaracine, or the like.

Indeed, our suspicion that our poet is imagining just such a scene (and scent) is heightened by a short piece earlier in the collection. In Poem 13, Catullus puts off a friend who wants to come for dinner, ostensibly because he has nothing to feed him, but implicitly because he is having too much fun in bed to stop for supper. Come back in a few days, Catullus asks, and bring everything we need to dine; in exchange, “I shall offer you a perfume that Venuses and Cupids gave my girlfriend, and when you smell it, you will pray to the gods, Fabullus, to make you all nose” (13.11–14). As one scholar has observed, Catullus here purveys not just perfume but also his own softly scented verses.²⁹ In this regard, his task in Poem 61 is not terribly different, for as surely as Junia must seduce Torquatus, Catullus must seduce his readers—first and foremost among whom, of course, is the same Torquatus, a close friend, judging by the tone with which the poet addresses him. He thus begins this seduction not with the smell of a “common herb” but with what Roman readers (or, at least, elegant admirers of sophisticated Roman ladies) would have recognized as the scent of a woman.

We may, in fact, go further and, along the way, offer a new solution to a vexing puzzle. Poem 13 has inspired a number of scholars to look for a second layer of meaning that makes the poem’s second half humorous,

28 Faure 1987.166–67. Cicero mentions an *alabaster* of perfume at *Acad.* 2 frag. 8. On the phallic shape of these jars (and ancient jokes thereon), see Henderson 1991.120.

29 “Thus, Fabullus would want to become all nose so that he could better appreciate the poetry Catullus has to offer,” Bernstein 1984–85.130. Horace *Odes* 4.12.13–16, generally thought a play on Catullus 13, offers an exchange of poetic emblems: Horace’s wine for Vergil’s perfume; discussion in Putnam 2006.96–98.

pornographic, or both.³⁰ There have been dissenters who have objected that “a nose is a nose is a nose,”³¹ but those who detect something more going on here than meets the eye (or nose) are surely right. Nevertheless, it does not seem necessary to suppose that the *unguentum* Catullus will give his friend is an “ointment which aided anal congress with his *puella*” (Hallett 1978.748), or “an unmentionable substance” used by prostitutes and the like (Case 1995.874), or even code for the “vaginal secretions which sexual excitement causes to flow” in the poet’s girlfriend, the sexual use of whom is the real gift the poem thereby promises euphemistically (Littman 1977.123). We simply need to ask what part or parts of her body a Roman woman perfumed. For if her genitals were regular objects of this anointing (and let us remember that ancient perfumes were oil based, unlike their modern counterparts, the alcohol base of which makes them drying and thus ill-advised for delicate areas), then the sexual significance of Catullus’s *unguentum* needs no special pleading: the whole joke rests, as readers long have suspected it must, on the poem’s final *nasum*, which embodies olfactory (and other) pleasures for Fabullus even as it proposes the fantasy of a nose as big as his whole body with which not only to smell but to pleasure her.

For medical purposes, at least, the evidence that ancient women applied unguents of marjoram to their genitals is clear. The first-century A.D. pharmacological writer Dioscorides includes recipes both for ἀμαράκινον and for σαμψούχινον (from σάμψουχον/*sampsuchum*, which Servius gives as an earlier name for *amaracus* and which Pliny explains [*Nat. Hist.* 21.61]

30 A skeptic of such readings herself (see below), Richlin 1988 nevertheless notes that their cue lies in the poem’s cavalier play on the *puella* and her *unguentum* as interchangeable commodities to such an extent that the former’s “human function almost disappears” (357). For a more extensive review of recent interpretations of the poem than is provided below, see Gowers 1993.229–44, who offers her own provocative reading of the poem and its *unguentum* as emblems of “those aspects of Catullus’ writing that are both most wickedly suggestive and most elusive and intangible: the indescribable something that cannot be written down in a recipe” (244).

31 For a defense of the conservative view against “revisionists,” see Witke 1980.325–31. See also Nappa 1998, who, while insisting that “we must not confine ourselves to the sexual possibilities of a poem like 13,” offers a reading that he hopes will not “desexualize the text” entirely: “The union envisioned by this poem includes all these individuals [Fabullus, Catullus, the *puella*], not in a sexual act particularly, but in the *coniuiuium*, spiritualized, as it were, by the divine *unguentum*” (390). Despite her title, Helena Dettmer 1989, “Catullus 13: A Nose is a Nose is a Nose,” offers a series of arguments for taking *nasus* as a double-entendre for “phallus.”

as the herb's Egyptian and Syrian name, whereas *amaracus* was Sicilian). Dioscorides describes *sampsuchinum* as follows:

It has warming, attenuating, and sharp properties. It is efficacious for closings and twistings of the uterus, it draws down the menses and the afterbirth, it revives those in a state of uterine suffocation, and it soothes pains of the lower back and groin. But because it hardens the *pudenda muliebria* with its excessive astringency, it is best used with honey.³²

This last suggestion may have something to do with the presence of honey in the preparation of ἀμαράκινον described by Dioscorides a few chapters later. Among its many uses, ἀμαράκινον “dissipates uterine inductions and swellings” and “sets the menses going when applied to the cervix,” which means that, like other emmenagogues, it is a potential abortifacient.³³ Pliny, too, offers a discussion of the medicinal uses of marjoram, first describing rudimentary poultices of leaves, vinegar, and salt; these repel scorpions and are “very beneficial when used for menstruation.”³⁴ He then provides this note on marjoram extract:

An oil (*oleum*) is made from marjoram that is called *sampsuchinum* or *amaracinum* and is used to warm and soften muscles; it also heats the womb (*vulvae*).³⁵

He later notes an herb that “some call *amaracus*,” a concoction of which is indicated for “hardening or inflammation of the womb.”³⁶

32 Dioscorides *de Materia Medica* 1.48.2; translation from Beck 2005.35.

33 There is a modern debate about the effect of essential oil of marjoram on menstruation and pregnancy: see Guba 2000.18–19. For an extensive account of the therapeutic properties of sweet marjoram and its extracts, see Potty and Kumar 2001.

34 Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 21.163: “menstruis quoque multum confert inpositum.”

35 Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 21.163: “fit ex eo et oleum, quod sampsuchinum vocatur aut amaracinum, ad excalfaciendos molliendosque nervos; et vulvas calfacit.”

36 21.176. Among this herb's several names, Pliny first lists *parthenium*, which raises the possibility that this is the plant called *parthenice* by Catullus. Pliny's description both of the plant and of its uses resembles pellitory of the wall (*Parietaria officinalis*), the *OLD*'s first meaning for *parthenium*, though it associates this locus instead with feverfew, s. v. *parthenium*, and with chamomile, s. v. *perdicium*, also listed by Pliny as a name used for the same plant.

To be clear, Dioscorides and Pliny list a wide variety of other medical benefits of marjoram extracts for both men and women. But gynecological uses, including topical application to the genitals, are among these. What, however, is the relationship between these medicines and the perfume with which some of them, at least, share a name? Pliny's medical notes do not come from his excursus on perfumes in Book 13 but rather appear among his pharmacological observations in Book 21; it may also be significant that Pliny here refers to *amaracinum* as an oil (*oleum*), whereas the perfume was an ointment (*unguentum*). Likewise, Dioscorides says nothing about the use of the compounds he describes as perfumes, a matter admittedly beyond his scope, but still surprising not to see mentioned in passing given the perfume's fame and the length of his discussion of ἀμαράκινον, of which he describes several varieties.

Other considerations, though, muddy any clear distinction. Implicitly linking scent with medical potency, Dioscorides recommends (*de Materia Medica* 1.48.1) choosing a σαμψούχινον "smelling of much marjoram." Pliny, in turn, describes the use of marjoram poultices on the island of Cyprus, home of the "most prized, aromatic" plants ("sampsuchum sive amaracum in Cypro laudatissimum et odoratum").³⁷ Medicine and perfume shared not only ingredients (something true of the two industries generally, as the lists of ingredients in Theophrastus, Dioscorides, and Pliny make clear) but also centers of production. Dioscorides opens his discussion of ἀμαράκινον by noting that the best one came from Cyzicus, which Pliny, too, mentions in his discussion of perfumes as the source of a famous pure essence of *amaracus*.³⁸ Dioscorides also notes an especially sweet smelling ἀμαράκινον (called ἡδύχρουν) from Cos, likewise given by Pliny as the origin of a prized amaracine perfume.³⁹ Finally, Amaracus, the inventor of "royal perfume" noted by Servius, is said to have been the son of Cinyras, mythological king of Cyprus (and father also of Myrrha, who would give her name to the myrrh tree and its aromatic resin used in perfumes); Pliny, as we just have seen, praises the medicinal strength of the same island's famously fragrant plants of *amaracus/sampsuchum*.⁴⁰ In this last regard,

37 Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 21.163. Archeometric analysis of finds at Pyrgos-Mavroraki now confirms the use of marjoram in the manufacture of perfumes on prehistoric Cyprus: Belgiorno 2007.41.

38 Dioscorides 1.58.1, Pliny 13.14.

39 Dioscorides 1.58.3, Pliny 13.5.

40 *RE* 1.2.1726 (Amarakos 1), Pliny 21.63.

it can scarcely be a coincidence that Cyprus still produces aromatic and therapeutic oils of marjoram, both from sweet marjoram proper (*Origanum majorana*), of which two varieties grow on the island, and from its very close cousin, “Cyprus oregano” (*Origanum dubium* or *cordifolium*), an indigenous species that grows wild in the island’s mountains.⁴¹ This last is the basis of an oil manufactured and sold by the monks of the Kykko Monastery in the Troodos Mountains—a tantalizing hint of an enduring link between such oils and the island’s centers of cult.

Cyprus, of course, is also home to the mountain that is home to the forest in which grows the *amaracus* on which Venus puts Ascanius to bed in Vergil. Given what we have just seen, it seems unlikely that the poet chose Cyprus simply for the banal reason that it was home to the most famous centers of Aphrodite’s worship; he must have known, as did Pliny, that the island was famous for its *amaracus*. Paul Reinhold Wagler, author of a two-volume study of the oak tree in the myths and rituals of antiquity and beyond (1891) and of a more diminutive article on *amaracus* in Pauly-Wissowa (*RE* 1.2.1726–28, *Amarakos* 2), somewhat predictably suggests that the latter bore a sacred and even magical connection to the Liebesgöttin. We might object that any link would more aptly be described as medical rather than magical: *amaracus* was a famous ingredient in gynecological (and other) cures used on Cyprus, quite possibly in and around its sanctuaries of Aphrodite. But since the same goddess could just as appropriately have lent her sanction to a divinely seductive perfume, she scarcely helps us to sort medicinal purposes from cosmetic ones, on Cyprus or elsewhere.⁴²

41 Tsintides, Hadjikyriakou, and Christodoulou 2002. *Origanum dubium*: “A valuable aromatic oil (locally known as ‘rianelao’) is obtained by distillation, mainly at Kampos and Tsakikistra, and it is used in perfumery and medicine” (371). *Origanum majorana* (which the authors identify with ancient ἀμάρακος and σάμψουρον): “It is common locally to distill the leaves to obtain an essential oil that is used in perfumery and medicine” (372). On the relatively recent scientific distinction of *Origanum dubium* from *Origanum majorana*, see *Proceedings of the American Pharmaceutical Association at the Fifty-Sixth Annual Meeting* 1908.200. In the end, it seems doubtful that *amaracus* in our ancient sources reliably indicates only *Origanum majorana* (= *Majorana hortensis*), especially given that even modern perfumery shows a certain degree of terminological slippage between marjoram and oregano (and even thyme): Groom 1997.204, 238.

42 The Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* (5) associates the goddess and Cyprus with a perfume even more luxurious than amaracine, albeit one seldom made available to mortals: “ambrosial oil,” derived from or the same as (the matter deserves better sorting than it seems to have received) the ambrosia—literally, “immortality”—consumed by the gods and famous for its heavenly scent (on which, generally, see Faure 1987.152–56). In love with Anchises, Aphrodite prepares to seduce him: “To the isle of Cyprus she went, entering her fragrant

Vergil, for one, invokes Venus's Cypriot *amaracus* not for its medicinal (or magical) properties but rather for its scent—which is precisely why Servius seizes the opportunity to recount the origins of perfume.

Ultimately, regarding antiquity's various oils and unguents of marjoram, it is difficult to know whether we are dealing with single substances with a dual use or whether particular compounds were made and purveyed specifically either as medicine or as perfume. Probably we can imagine a bit of both and, one way or another, a certain amount of productive confusion in the minds of a consuming public. In other words, real or perceived medical benefits probably have at least something to do with the enduring popularity of the perfume amaracine, and vice versa. Nevertheless, it was as a scent that amaracine became proverbial, for it is a perfume, not a medicine, that perplexes the uncouth pig invoked by Gellius and Lucretius.⁴³ And this

(θυώδεα) shrine, at Paphos, home to her sanctuary and fragrant (θυώδης) altar. Once inside, she shut the gleaming doors, and the Graces washed (λοῦσαν) and anointed (χρίσαν) her with the oil immortal (ἐλαίῳ ἀμβρότῳ) that envelops the deathless gods, ambrosial (ἀμβροσίῳ), sweet (ἔδανῳ), which had been perfumed (τεθειωμένον) for her" (5.58–63; cf. *Odyssey* 18.192–93). The richly odoriferous language begins with the fragrance of incense and burnt sacrifice—either of which could have included local herbs like "Cyprus oregano"—and ends with the goddess's specially formulated perfume: might the latter, here at least, apotheosize the island's real-world production of amaracine? More generally, Belgiorno 2007.53–57 sketches the provocative argument that Aphrodite's prehistoric evolution from fertility goddess to goddess of beauty may have been driven by the fame of cosmetics from Cyprus.

- 43 One does wonder, in light of what we have learned, whether the proverb carried a second, obscene layer of meaning, given that, in Greek at least, the pig (χοῖρος) "is the land animal to which the cunt is most frequently compared in double entendres; this word seems to have been a popular slang expression," as observes Henderson 1991.131. The only Latin word attested as an animal metaphor for the female genitalia is, in fact, *porcus*, and this only in a single passage in Varro (*Rust.* 2.4.10), who, however, indicates wide use: "nam et nostrae mulieres, maxime nutrices, naturam qua feminae sunt, in virginibus appellant porcum, et Graecae choeron, significantes esse dignum insigne nuptiarum," "For even our women, especially children's nurses, call the female organ in older girls 'pig,' *choeros* in Greek, by which they mean that it marks them as ready for marriage" (which Varro improbably connects to the pig sacrifice of the now imminent wedding); discussion in Adams 1982.82. Henderson 1991.131 explains that χοῖρος "indicates the pink, hairless cunt of young girls as opposed to that of mature women" (for whom other pig words were sometimes used, p. 132); this is ratified by Varro for *porcus*. Were the proverb "nihil cum amaracino porco," we would be tempted to hear this second sense: a young girl's genitals need no deodorant. But this seems more difficult to understand from *sus* ("sow"), the Greek equivalent of which (ὤς) indicates instead the genitals of a mature woman (ibid.; cf. Lucretius 6.974, cited above, where *sues*, just following the proverb, are *saetigeræ*, "bristly"). The humor would thus depend simply on the absurdity of the second layer of meaning producing the opposite answer to the first: the pig has nothing to do with amaracine—but not so the "pig"!

brings us back to the jilted lover, who, in the latter, showers his beloved's bolted door with flowers and amaracine (4.1177–79):

But the lover, shut out, weeping, often piles her threshold
with flowers and garlands, perfumes her haughty doorposts
with amaracine (“postisque superbos / unguis amaracino”),
and, desolate, plants kisses on the doors.

Having concluded that *amaracus* was sacred to Venus, Wagler supposes that the lover here applies amaracine not as a perfume but as a kind of magical potion intended to summon love (*RE* 1.2.1726–28). It is true that doorways were especially charged places for the Romans, but this particular doorway, like Fabullus's nose, is something more. The immediately preceding lines are addressed directly to the lover by the poet (4.1171–76):

But let her face be as lovely as you like, with the power
of Venus coursing through her limbs. She's hardly the
only one, and we got by without her before. You can be
sure that she does the same things (we all know it) that
an ugly woman does, and that even she fumigates her
wretched body with foul smells (“et miseram taetris se
suffit odoribus ipsa”), while her slave girls keep their
distance and quietly snicker.

Lucretius next describes the lover's antics at the door and then concludes (4.1180–81): “quem si, iam admissum, venientem offenderit aura / una modo, causas abeundi quaerat honestas,” “If he is let in and just one whiff reaches him as he approaches, he would scramble for an excuse to leave.”

Scholars have long struggled to understand whether this “whiff” (*aura*) is of a perfume or of what it seeks to conceal.⁴⁴ But Robert Brown almost certainly has solved the mystery by finding here instead a reference to the well-attested ancient medical practice of “fumigation,” which “involved the application of fumes to the nostrils or, commonly in the case of gynecological complaints, to the womb by means of a tube introduced into the vagina.” These fumes might, depending on the ailment, be pleasant or “evil smelling”: for the latter, “among the substances used were sulphur, burnt

44 Summary in Brown 1987.296.

hair or wool, urine, and dung—which accounts for the Lucretian epithet *taetris*” (Brown 1987.296–97). Amy Richlin adds this observation: “Here the woman’s body, as often, is mapped onto the parts of the house”; “Lucretius sums up: women know that if men realized what it was like inside, they would run away” (1995.190). In other words, the amaracine smeared on this lady’s doorposts, whether or not Lucretius means to make such efforts all the more pathetic by giving them mock magical or religious overtones,⁴⁵ is first and foremost a crude metaphor for the lover’s naïveté regarding what women’s bodies (and what they do to them) “really” smell like.⁴⁶

The Lucretian lover is a satirical fiction, of course, but he does permit us, perhaps, to imagine the sheltered Roman man who had slept only with well-perfumed ladies, or even one ready to suppose that women smell naturally like marjoram.⁴⁷ At another extreme (or if you prefer, the flip side

45 For the latter, see Brown 1987.300.

46 The hapless hero of Jonathan Swift’s “The Lady’s Dressing Room” (1730), for which our Lucretian passage is the model, learns the same lesson. Thenceforth, “His foul imagination links / Each dame he sees with all her stinks,” from her pomades to her excrement: Rogers 1983.451 (ll. 121–22). Compare the aphoristic counsel of a character in Plautus’s *Mostellaria*: “mulier recte olet, ubi nihil olet,” “A woman smells right when she doesn’t smell at all,” where the advice is against the use of perfume lest, rather than covering odor, it mingle with a woman’s sweat to produce a disgusting “broth”: “You can’t tell *what* exactly the smell is, but you do know this: it stinks” (273–78). Discussion in Stevens 2008.160–62. The opening aphorism clearly circulated as a proverb: cf. Cicero *Att.* 2.1.1 (on the style of Atticus’s writings: “ut mulieres, ideo bene olere, quia nihil olebant, videbantur,” “Like women, they struck me as smelling nice precisely because they had no smell at all”); Martial *Epigrams* 2.12.4 (“non bene olet qui bene semper olet,” “He who always smells nice doesn’t smell nice”) and 6.55.5 (“malo quam bene olere nil olere,” “I would rather have no smell than to smell nice”), quoted by Jerome (but attributed to Petronius) at *Epist.* 130.19; Seneca *Epist.* 108.16 (“optimus odor in corpore est nullus,” “The best bodily scent is none at all”); Ausonius *Epigrams* 84.2 (“nec male olere mihi nec bene olere placet,” “I don’t like to smell bad or nice”). Williams 2004.65, in his commentary on Martial, hypothesizes on the basis of Plautus and Cicero that “the phrase was particularly connected with women,” thus lending Martial’s exceptional application of it to the male body “a particular point.” Ovid complains about the stench of cosmetics at *Ars Amatoria* 2.213–14 and *Remedia Amoris* 353–56. In a different vein, Cicero *Orator* 154, as Stevens 2008.164 well explains, ridicules an orator who would use the phrase *cum nobis* because, pronounced together, it “smells” like *cunnius*.

47 They really do according to Debay 1846.49–50: “. . . la tendre odeur de marjolaine que la vierge exhale est plus douce, plus enivrante que tous les parfums d’Arabie; masquer ce parfum naturel par une odeur empruntée serait un contre-sens énorme.” (For an analogous view about the naturally pleasant scent of young brides, see Xenophon *Symposium* 2.3.) Debay, too, lived in an age that used marjoram in perfumes—in the immediately preceding pages, he himself has included it in two recipes for pot-pourri!—and if his comparison is not pure fantasy but is based on experience, then one wonders whether he was duped

of the same coin) are Lucretius and his imagined readers, who share with him, he assumes, a revulsion that combines a general distaste for human odors (intensified by the whole poem's obsession with bodily putrefaction) with unmistakable anxiety about specifically female bodies. But between these two extremes, let us imagine more subtle and sophisticated lovers—for example, as far as it goes, Catullus and “Lesbia,” the likely *puella* of Poem 13—who used perfume less to conceal than to complement and even intensify the body's natural scents.⁴⁸ Perfume, for such a pair, marks and even multiplies erogenous zones (ancient women did not, of course, apply perfume *only* to their genitals); it also connects bodies in atypical ways. Indeed, Catullus probably implies that this particular perfume has invited him—or at least would tempt Fabullus—to perform a sexual act not normally suitable for a Roman male, i.e., cunnilingus, object of a general Roman scorn that, however, sometimes seems to mask fascination.⁴⁹ This illicit suggestion is mirrored by Fabullus's own whole body pleasure, both with and as a nose.

Catullus does not give the name of his girlfriend's perfume, but his description of it as a gift from “Venuses and Cupids”⁵⁰ adds a bit of evidence

by a young woman who had resorted precisely to the artifice he decries or who simply was innocently clean: his contemporary G. W. Septimus Piesse (1857.74) notes that the essential oil of *Origanum majorana* “is extensively used for perfuming soap, but more in France than in England.” On the increasingly floral olfactory tastes of Debay and Piesse's age and their attendant notions of hygiene, see Corbin 1986.176–99.

48 Their comic opposites, we might say, are Cinesias and Myrrhina in Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 940–46, who fight over the proper perfume for marital sex: Cinesias, suggests Witke 1980.327, wants one that will “replace or submerge a natural body scent.” Of course, an oil-based perfume is also a potential lubricant, and this, too, may be part of the joke somehow (perhaps suggesting the kind of sex Cinesias wants?).

49 See Richlin 1992.49, 59, 83, 99, 109, 134, 148, 235, 245, 249 n. 18. This last treats Catullus 13, where, however, she seems to consider but reject an insinuation of cunnilingus, siding with Witke 1980, “on maintaining the integrity of the context of a poem,” noting that Catullus “barely hints of cunnilingus elsewhere, and never mentions fellatio or female genitalia without disgust.” In this light, however, perhaps Catullus's point is this: he himself has enjoyed the perfume on its own terms, but the same would invite the *os impurum* of Fabullus to go too far. On cunnilingus, see also the excellent discussion in Parker 1997.51–53, 57, 62; also Williams 1999.199–200, 346–48, with numerous examples.

50 Cf. Propertius 2.29.18, where Cynthia emanates “scents not from the grasses of Arabia, but which Love (Amor) himself made with his own hands.” It has been common to suppose that the contrast is between perfume of any kind and her natural scent rather than between two kinds (one Orientalized) of perfume. Thus Quinn 1963.176 connects the passage to the use of *aura* “by the Roman poets to represent the mysterious breath of fascination that emanates from an attractive woman,” comparing, e.g., Horace *Odes* 2.8.21–24

to the already reasonable assumption that it was an amaracine, like the one smeared on the doorposts of the similarly high-born and well-coiffed lady derided by his contemporary Lucretius. In any case, Catullus the connoisseur cannot have been unaware of the perfume that his fellow poet expects any reader to recognize. We can hardly suppose, in other words, that the Catullus of Poem 13 does not have a woman's perfume somewhere on his mind when he opens Poem 61 with a Hymen softly scented with *amaracus*.

What we have seen in Latin now enables us to read our fragment of Chaerephon, with its final invocation of ἀμάρακος, as a miniature masterpiece of synesthetic pornography:

One lay there displaying to the moonlight her white breast,
her tunic slipped from her shoulder; of another girl, again,
the left side had been loosed to view by the dance; bared
to the eyes of the sky, it showed a living picture; its colour,
so white to my eyes, outshone the effect of the shadowy
darkness. Another girl had bared her fair arms and shoulders
as she clasped the delicate neck of her companion;
she, meanwhile, her robes all torn, showed her thigh from
beneath its folds, and desire for that smiling loveliness
was stamped upon my mind, but without hope. Fordone
with sleep they lay where they had thrown themselves,
on beds of calamint, after twining together the darkling
petals of violets and the crocus, which had rubbed its

describing the irresistible charms of Barine, whom even “newly wed virgins fear, lest your *aura* cause their husbands to tarry” (“metuunt / . . . nuper / virgines nuptae, tua ne retardet / aura maritos”). In his edition of Catullus, Quinn 1973 then uses the Propertius to ask whether the *unguentum* of Catullus 13 was not, in fact, “the alluring fragrance of her person.” Horace’s allusion to Barine’s *aura*, however, is actually a clever joke, *hysteron proteron*, on her perfume, by the lingering scent of which on their husbands, said wives would deduce the real reason for their delay (an enduring motif in the combined histories of perfumery and infidelity!). Several Pompeian wall paintings show Amores manufacturing perfume, adding doubt to the notion that perfume made with Love’s own hands can only be a woman’s unaided scent; on these (with black-and-white reproductions) and their relation to the local perfume industry, see Mattingly 1990. Surely the point underlying all of the above is the productive confusion between natural and artificial scents, real or supposed. In a different vein, Kilpatrick 1998 interestingly argues for a connection to the perfume given by Venus to Phaon, who drove Sappho to suicide, but considering the widespread association of perfume with Venus and Cupid(s), such a specific allusion is difficult to imagine in the absence of other textual cues.

sunny likeness into the woven texture of their robes, and there sweet marjoram (ἀμάρακος), lush-grown by the dew, stretched forth its tender stalks in the meadows.⁵¹

The fragment's erotic escalation passes through three phases. First, the narrator's secret gaze (which is also ours, of course) proceeds not only from girl to girl but also steadily downward, anatomically, from shoulder to side to thighs. Dancing then yields to sleep, an opportunity, we are surely meant to imagine, to step out of hiding and move closer without being seen. And finally comes a series of richly sensual floral metaphors that emphasize

51 The text is preserved in Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 13.608b–d, and I borrow here the translation of Gulick's Loeb (1937.277). (Olson's replacement has not yet reached, at time of writing, Book 13.) Both text and translation present a number of difficulties, most of which are discussed by Collard 1970.32–34. For the fragment's final two lines (which are what matter most to us here), Gulick's text is identical to that of Snell and Kannich 1986.221 (*TrGF* 71 Chaeremon F 14.16–17): ἔρση δὲ θαλερὸς ἐκτραφεὶς ἀμάρακος / λειμῶσι μαλακοὺς ἐξέτεινεν αὐχένας. The manuscripts have μαλακοῖσιν ἐξέτεινον, which has led some editors to seclude the penultimate line and to suppose that it instead belongs, perhaps, to the following fragment (F 1) in Athenaeus, as first suggested by Friebe1 1837.81 (who actually secludes both lines and proposes other textual juggling). The suggestion of transposition, however, is largely born of Friebe1's overly narrow reading of F 1 and its heading (*pace* Friebe1, the heading does not promise an explicit reference to flowers, and the fragment, describing a blushing maiden whose hair waves in the breezes, is more than able to be read as floral in a metaphorical sense); furthermore, as West 1983.80 observes: "It is not clear how the line would fit" there anyway. Collard 1970.34 supposes transposition from a separate, lost heading, but this is working too hard: a milder measure, such as the ἐξέτεινεν adopted by Snell, following Scaliger and Wilamowitz, is enough. If something stronger is needed, then West is probably right to mark a (one-line) lacuna after ἀμάρακος. This allows him to preserve the plural ἐξέτεινον and to suggest a meaning along the lines of "The dew-fed marjoram also <cushioned their lovely bodies, as in slumber> on the soft [reading μαλακοῖς] meadow they stretched out their necks." He notes: "If it were the marjoram that extended its neck, we should expect the neck to be singular." One could object that a single marjoram plant does indeed have many stems; more pertinent, perhaps, is that this use of αὐχὴν to mean "stalk/stem" is unparalleled, though the metaphor is logical enough. Note, too, that medical writers use the word for the "neck" of the womb, though it seems unlikely that this is echoed here. One way or another, the final lines exemplify the fragment's relentless blending of the girls' bodies with their landscape. At the root of the image is, surely, a simple conflation: as the girls stretch themselves out, so too must the *amaracus* crushed beneath them. One thing, thankfully, seems certain: these lines belong to a long tradition of using fertile fields as a genital metaphor, where foliage often figures pubic hair. See Henderson 1991.27, 46, 135–36, with numerous examples, the most famous of which is surely the Boeotian girl of Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 87–89, whose "field" is celebrated for its "very nicely weeded pennyroyal." This alone makes it clear that line 16 is integral to the image, though as we are now prepared to see, Chaeremon's unparalleled choice of ἀμάρακος pushes the trope one step further.

color, all made even more sumptuous by Chaeremon's echoes of the technical language of Greek painting,⁵² blending an ecphrastic gaze into his voyeurism. Only at the end does our visual pleasure yield to an olfactory one—we must be very close now!—and in a poetic and pornographic finale that transcends both word and image, we breathe deeply what had become one of the very smells of sex.

These literary windows on a vast world of ancient perfumery (and of perfumed bodies) makes it impossible, in the end, to read Venus's bed of *amaracus* in Vergil as a mere matter of botany. (Dryden, in fact, was righter than he knew.) Vergil, consciously or not, already begins to make less innocent associations several lines before we reach the mountains of Cyprus by having Venus carry Ascanius through the air "caressed in her lap" (*fotum gremio*). As we have noted, this anticipates the antics of the alter-Ascanius, Cupid, whom, lines later, the unsuspecting Dido "now and again caresses in her lap" (*interdum gremio fovet*) while the god works his spell.⁵³ It is Dido, in fact, who is the real key to the whole passage. Vergil is about to embark on the long romantic episode for which, for better or worse, his poem is best remembered—a story that ends, famously, with betrayal but which opens, necessarily, with seduction. And just a few lines before that seduction begins in earnest, the poet perfumes his page with the unmistakable scent of an irresistible woman. Aeneas is still steps away from Carthage's palace, but the reader has already caught a whiff of a *regale unguentum*—three long books before a queen's life will be scattered *in ventos* (*Aeneid* 4.705).

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52 In particular, of σκιαγραφία: see Collard 1970.33–34. On the term and technique, see Keuls 1975.

53 1.692, 718. Cupid's maternal instructions likewise place him in Dido's "lap" (683).

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