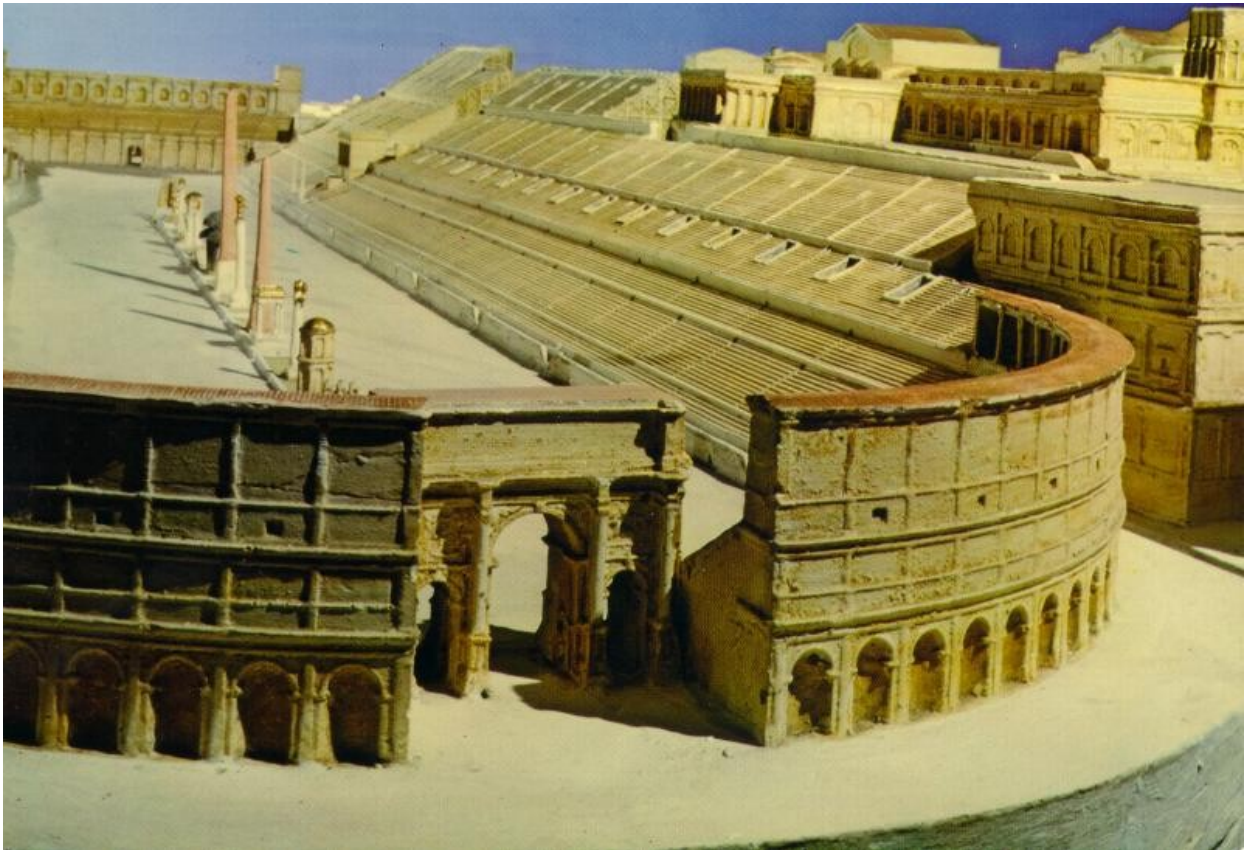


**“Finding Love at the Races”**  
**Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* I. 135-164**  
**Text and Notes**



Reconstruction of the Circus Maximus, Refurbished Model, Paul Bigot (1870-1942), Caen University, Caen, France. ([www.unicaen.fr](http://www.unicaen.fr))

By: Eric Adams.  
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## Introduction

P. Ovidius Naso was born in 43 BCE in Sulmo in the Italian region of Paeligni. He trained in oratory, but soon, to the dismay of his father, he found poetry was his true calling. Around the age of eighteen, he began his poetic career by writing elegy. He starts with a theme which would continue to dominate his writing, that of erotic humor. In the genre of Tibullus and Propertius, Ovid composed the *Amores*, a set of three books of Love Elegy. Unlike his predecessors, however, Ovid pushes the genre of elegy to its limit, where it becomes parody. After the *Amores*, Ovid composed a tragedy, *Medea*, which is no longer extant. Then came the *Heroides*, a set of elegiac letter from mythological women to their lost men, the *Medicamina Faciei Feminae*, a didactic poem about cosmetics for women, the *Ars Amatoria*, about which we will say more below, *Remedia Amoris*, a recantation of the *Ars*, the *Metamorphoses*, his epic opus and his only extant work not in the elegiac meter, and the *Fasti*, a poetical calendar detailing the Roman year by month.

At this point in 8 A.D. that Ovid's career took a dramatic turn under the emperor Augustus. For unknown reasons, about which there has been much speculation, the emperor exiled Ovid to Tomis on the Black Sea. Ovid himself gives as the reason for his exile only *carmen et error*. Most scholars identify the *carmen* as the *Ars Amatoria*, the bawdy subject matter of which clashed with Augustus' moral agenda and new order. The *error* is much more nebulous. Ovid would remain in exile to the end of his life, probably in 17 CE, three years after the death of Augustus himself. In exile Ovid would write *Tristia*, a series of poems addressed to his wife and various others at Rome, in which he often appeals for clemency from the emperor and bemoans his fate in Tomis, and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, four books of poems with the addressees named (unlike the *Tristia*).

The selection here comes from the first book of the *Ars Amatoria*. The *Ars Amatoria* is a set of three didactic elegiac poems, in which Ovid shines with his greatest combination of eroticism and humor. They are essentially a handbook for how to "pick-up" women, with the third book giving reciprocal advice for women. The passage discussed in this unit is lines 135-164 of Book One, in which the reader, his "love student," learns of several locales to practice his "girl-hunting." Ovid espouses the Circus Maximus as an ideal spot to find that special lady, and in humorous detail lists all the advantages of looking for a girl at the *Ludi Circenses*. Here Ovid plays the part of master "Doctor of Love," who shares all his techniques in the hope that the ordinary reader (such as you) find romantic success. The humor jumps from the page without being overt. As always Ovid keeps a straight face with his instructions, all the while winking at the reader.

The meter in which Ovid writes is elegiac couplet. It is almost his only meter, for it implies his ever present preoccupation with the erotic (save for his epic masterpiece *Metamorphoses*). Elegiac is related to dactylic hexameter, the meter of epic. It consists of couplets, the first line in dactylic hexameter and the second dactylic pentameter. The basic units of each are the dactyl and spondee.



Modern site of the Circus Maximus with Palatine Hill in the background, Photo: Simon Ho. (www.simonho.org).

- 135 **nōbīlium...certāmen equōrum**: the *Ludi Circenses*, chariot races of four horse teams, the most popular form of entertainment in Rome.  
**Nec...fugiat**: jussive subjunctive (let the subject not verb).
- 136 **Multa...Circus**: synchysis and word picture to mimic the crowded and intermingled nature of the crowds at the races, with the **populi** in the middle of the line itself.  
**capāx, capācis**: *capable, able, (+gen.) big enough for.*  
**commodum, -ī, n.**, *advantage.*
- 137 **Nīl = nihil**: here the equivalent of “**nōn.**”  
**Opus est**: impersonal verb, *there is need, it is necessary.*  
**arcānus, -a, -um**, *secret, hidden* (here **arcāna** is used substantively).  
**loquāris**: subjunctive in a relative clause of purpose.
- 138 **tibi**: why is this dative? (Hint: look at the verb **accipiēda est.**)  
**nūtus, -ūs, m.**, *nod of the head.*  
**accipiēda est**: gerundive of obligation (the subject must be verbed).  
**nota, -ae, f.**, *note, indication.*
- 139 **Proximus ā dominā**: closest from the mistress; i.e. right next to her.  
**Nūllō prohibente**: ablative absolute.  
**prohibeō, prohibēre, prohibuī, prohibitus**, *forbid, not allow, prohibit.*  
**sedētō**: future imperative.
- 140 **latus, lateris, n.**, *side, flank.*  
**quā potes ūsque**: as much as you are able; lit., by which all the way you are able.
- 141 **Et bene**: sc. **est** and takes **quod cogit** as the subject, which introduces indirect speech with **linea** as the subject.  
**Sī nōlīs = Etsī nōlīs**: future less vivid conditional clause.  
**Quod...quod**: the setup that the Circus itself creates due to its layout (*Even if you should not want it, (this setup) which compels that the line of seats be joined; this setup ( is well that) the girl...*).  
**linea, -ae, f.**, *line of seats, row.*  
**tibi tangēda est**: cf. 138.
- 142 **lēx, lēgis, f.**, *law, rule, condition.*
- 143 **quaerātur**: cf. **fugiat**, 135.  
**socius, -a, -um**, *friendly, allied .*  
**sociī sermōnis**: i.e. *small talk.*  
**orīgō, orīginis, f.**, *origin, beginning, source start.*
- 144 **sonus, ī, m.**, *sound, tone.*  
**prīmōs...sonōs**: chiasmus; the public words and possible shouting of the crowd contrast with the startup of a personal conversation.  
**moveant**: cf. **faciat**, 135 and **quaerātur**, 143.



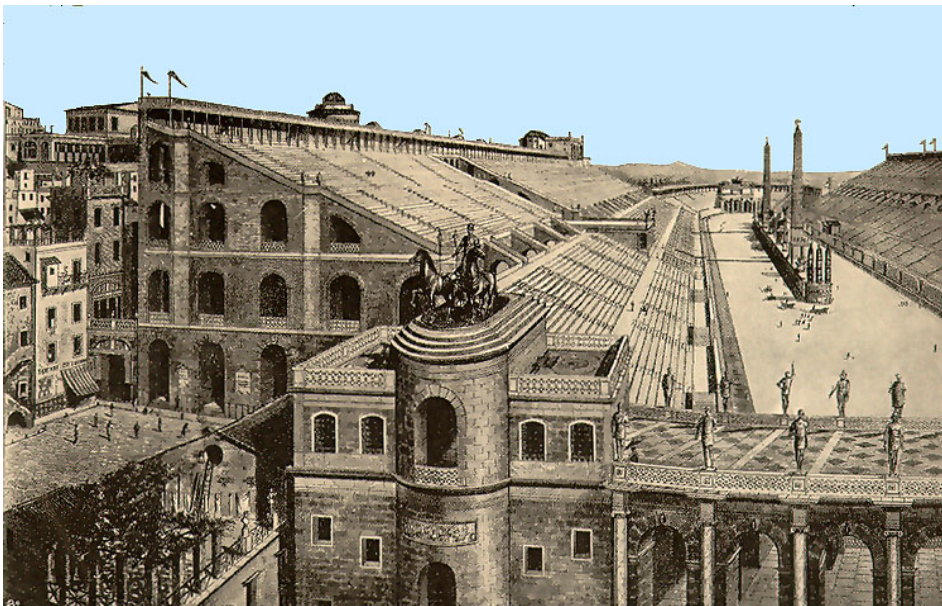
135 Nec tē nōbīlium fugiat certāmen equōrum;  
136        Multa capāx populī commoda Circus habet.  
137 Nīl opus est digitīs, per quōs arcāna loquāris,  
138        Nec tibi per nūtūs accipiēda nota est:  
139 Proximus ā dominā, nūllō prōhibente, sedētō,  
140        Iunge tuum laterī quā potes ūsque latus;  
141 Et bene, quod cōgit, sī nōlīs, līnea iungī,  
142        Quod tibi tangēda est lēge puella locī.  
143 Hīc tibi quaerātur sociī sermōnis orīgō,  
144        Et moveant prīmōs pūblica verba sonōs.

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### Discussion Questions

1. What do lines 137-139 indicate about the usual obstacles of “hooking up” with a lady in Rome?
  2. How is the synchysis of line 140 suited to the scene?
  3. How does the explanation of Circus attendance and circumstance in 141-142 provide explication for the statement given in 136?
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*Reconstruction drawing of the Circus Maximus by G. Gatteschi, Albert Kuhn, Roma, fig. 122, p. 114, 1913. (www.vroma.org)*

- 145 **Cuius veniant:** subjunctive indirect question .  
**Facitō:** future imperative (*make sure that*), introduces subjunctive indirect command  
**(Facitō... [ut] requirās).**  
**studiōsus, -a, -um,** *studious, attentive (studiōse is vocative).*
- 146 **mora, -ae, f.,** *delay (Nec mora = sinē morā).*  
**Quisquis:** whoever.  
**Quisquis...favē:** use this word order: **favē (eī) cui favet illa, quisquis erit.**  
**faveō, favēre, fāvī, fautus + dat.,** *favor, give favor to.*
- 147 **pompa, -ae, f.,** *procession, parade.*  
**frequēns, frequentis,** *frequent, packed together, crowded.*  
**caelestis, -is, -e,** *celestial, godlike, divine.*  
**eburna, -ae, f.,** *ivory.*
- 148 **Utque = et ut** (how does **ut** translate with the indicative verb **fit?**).  
**plaudō, plaudere, plausī, plausus,** *applaud, clap.*
- 149 **gremium, -ī, n.,** *lap.*
- 150 **dēcidō, dēcidere, dēcidī,** *fall down, drop.*  
**Dēciderit:** enjambment to heighten the lasciviousness of the situation in a girl's lap.  
**excutiō, excutere, excussī, excussus,** *shake off, shake out, dust off.*  
**excutiendus erit:** it will have to be...  
**nūllus...nūllum:** chiasmus and anaphora heighten the dramatic humor and comedic contrast.
- 152 **quaelibet,** *in any way, in every way.*  
**officium, -ī, n.,** *duty, service.*  
**causa, -ae, f.,** *cause, reason.*  
**sit:** cf. **faciat**, 135, and **quaerātur**, 143, and **moveant**, 144.  
**aptus, -a, -um + dat.,** *suited to .*
- 153 **Pallia sī = sī Pallia** (future more vivid conditional).  
**nimum,** adv., *too much* (taken with **dēmissa**).
- 154 **colligō, colligere, collēgī, collectus,** *gather up, collect.*  
**immundus, -a, -um,** *dirty.*  
**sēdulus, -a, -um,** *attentive, busy, officious.*  
**humus, -ī, f.,** *ground (humō, abl. place from which).*
- 155 **prōtinus,** adv., *immediately.*  
**patiente puellā:** ablative absolute.
- 156 **contingō, contingere, contīgī, contāctus + dat.,** *come into contact, reach, appear.*  
**crūs, crūris, n.,** *shin, leg.*  
**videnda:** future passive participle / gerundive (about to be verbed).

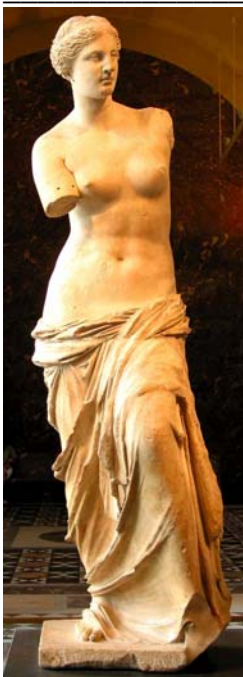
145 Cuius equī veniant, facitō, studiōse, requīrās:  
146       Nec mora, quisquis erit, cui favet illa, favē.  
147 At cum pompa frequēns caelestibus ībit eburnīs,  
148       Tū Venerī dominae plaude favente manū;  
149 Utque fit, in gremium pulvis sī forte puellae  
150       Dēciderit, digitīs excutiendus erit:  
151 Etsī nūllus erit pulvis, tamen excute nūllum:  
152       Quaelibet officiō causa sit apta tuō.  
153 Pallia sī terrā nimium dēmissa iacēbunt,  
154       Collige, et immundā sēdulus effer humō;  
155 Prōtinus, officiī pretium, patiente puellā  
156       Contingent oculīs crūra videnda tuīs.

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### Discussion Questions

1. Venus is referred to as a **domina** in 148. Why would this be an appropriate reference to her in this situation?
  2. What is the effect of the enjambment of **dēciderit** in line 150?
  3. What is the effect of the chiasmus in 151?
  4. How can the actions commanded in 154 be considered subversive?
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*Venus de Milo, Louvre, Paris.* ([www.louvre.fr](http://www.louvre.fr))

- 157 **respiciō, respicere, respēxī, respectus**, *look behind, keep an eye on.*  
**quicumque, quaecumque, quodcumque**, *whoever, whichever.*
- 158 **Nē premat**: *lest he press* (negative purpose clause).  
**oppositō...genū**: chiasmus and word picture suggest the knees come on each side of the girl, enclosing her in the rival's thighs.  
**oppōnō, oppōnere, opposuī, oppositus** – *place against, oppose, place opposite.*  
**genū, -ūs, n.**, *knee.*
- 159 **parva**: here substantive, “little things.”
- 160 **pulvīnus, -ī, m.**, *pillow, cushion.*  
**facilī**: here “steady/ready.”
- 161 **prōsum, prōesse, prōfuī, prōfutūrus**, *benefit, be for.*  
**tenuis, -is, -e**, *delicate, thin, fine.*  
**tabella, -ae, f.**, *tablet.*  
**tenuī...tabellā**: perhaps the pamphlet or program for the races and easily made into a fan.
- 162 **cavus, -a, -um**, *hollow, cavernous.*  
**tener, tenera, tenerum**, *soft, tender, delicate.*  
**scannum, -ī, m.**, *bench, stool, bleacher.*
- 163 **aditus, -ūs** – *approach*, i.e. technique.  
**praebeō, praebēre, praebuī, praebitus**, *present, offer, give.*  
**spargō, spargere, sparsī, sparsus**, *scatter, spread out.*  
**Sparsaque...trīstis...harēna**: This is another subject to **praebēbit** (163).  
**Sparsaque...forō**: Refers to the sand of gladiatorial combat, which makes the “arena.” Before the first permanent amphitheater of Statilius Taurus was built at Rome in 29 BCE, gladiatorial games were often held in the forum with temporary wooden seating.



157 Respice praetereā, post vōs quicumque sedēbit,  
158 Nē premat oppositō mollia terga genū.  
159 Parva levēs capiunt animōs: fuit ūtile multīs  
160 Pulvīnum facilī composuisse manū.  
161 Prōfuit et tenuī ventōs mōvisse tabellā,  
162 Et cava sub tenerum scamna dedisse pedem.  
163 Hōs aditūs Circusque novō praebēbit amōrī,  
164 Sparsaque sollicitō trīstis harēna forō.

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### Discussion Questions

1. In 157-158, we are alerted to another possible suitor sitting behind. How and why does Ovid suggest that this rival is worth attention?
  2. What do 159-162 suggest about the comforts (or lack thereof) of attending the races? How does Ovid use these? Does he change them (a lá “turning lemons into lemonade”)? In the end, are they disadvantages or advantages? (Recall **commoda** in 136).
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*A Pompeian Couple, Pompeii, 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE.  
Museo Archeologico Nazionale  
Naples Italy.*