

On The Source of the Olympic Credo

David C. Young*

'It is more important to participate than to win' Who Said it: Coubertin, Bishop Talbot, St. Paul, or Ovid?

No phrase or idea associated with the Olympics, not even the Olympic motto itself, "Citius, Altius, Fortius,"¹ is so often quoted as the credo noted above on which this article is focussed. Recent years prove that the credo still bears a strong emotional impact, even during our changed Olympic times. For most people, that sentiment still exemplifies the meaning of the Olympic Games. Sportscasters and athletes at the 1994 Winter Olympic Games, members of NOC's at International Olympic Academy Conferences in Olympia, Greece², people from the Olympic family and laymen the world over have all quoted these words repeatedly in recent years, with only slight variations of wording.

I head this article with the simple wording heard most often, though it is perhaps the least authentic. It is not far from the message Coubertin himself sent to Los Angeles for the Games of 1932: "The important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning but taking part."³ Some purists insist on Coubertin's wording of 1908. And Olympic *cognoscenti* pride themselves in noting that the sentiment was not original with Coubertin, as many think, but that the words were first spoken earlier the same week by "the bishop of Pennsylvania." For Coubertin himself quotes the bishop as the source of his 1908 sentence: "Last Sunday, in the course of a ceremony organized at St. Paul's in honor of the athletes, the bishop of Pennsylvania recalled this in felicitous words: 'The important thing in these Olympiads is less to win than to take part in them.'"⁴

It turns out, however, that the bishop never said that at all. Recently Ture Widlund and John Lucas have done important research on this matter. Widlund has determined exactly who the bishop was; and Lucas has uncovered exactly what he said.⁵ His name was Ethelbert Talbot (1848-1928) the Anglican Bishop of Central Pennsylvania from 1898 to 1927. His diocese was headquartered in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. From July 6 to August 6, 1908 he went to London to attend the Fifth Conference of Anglican Bishops. During that period, The Games of Olympiad IV were held in the same city. By invitation, Talbot preached the Sunday sermon at St. Paul's Cathedral, London, at a service to which various Olympic officials and athletes were invited. That sermon is the speech to which Coubertin referred when he attributed the words of the Olympic credo to the Bishop of Pennsylvania. But the

* David C. Young is Professor of Classics, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA.

words which Talbot actually spoke prove to be very different from the words that we, trusting Coubertin's citation, have always thought they were. What Talbot said is really not very close. The closest passage ran as follows:

“The only safety after all lies in the lesson of the real Olympia -- that the Games themselves are better than the race and the prize. St. Paul tells us how insignificant is the prize.⁶ Our prize is not corruptible, but incorruptible, and though only one may wear the laurel wreath, all may share the equal joy of the contest.”⁷

These words differ greatly from what Coubertin attributed to Talbot; but there can be no doubt that it is the passage the baron had in mind. Lucas and Widlund, who have seen the full text, have no doubts, nor do I. Must we now attribute the Olympic credo to St. Paul? For what Talbot says seems close in spirit, if not in wording, to our credo. But St. Paul's passage itself is even further away. Bishop Talbot omits crucial words, badly garbles what Paul said, takes it wholly out of context, and even misrepresents it. In fact, as a whole, Paul's biblical passage contradicts all that the Olympics and their philosophy stand for:

“Don't you know? When men run in the stadium, they *all* run but only *one* receives the crown. Run in such a way that you receive it. Everyone who competes must give up everything else.⁸ These men [athletes] give everything up so they can win a corruptible crown; but we [Christians] for an incorruptible one. Therefore I run this way [my way], not as if to an uncertain goal; I fight [box] this way, not as if beating the air. I mortify my body, and subjugate it.”⁹

This is precisely the kind of medieval, clerical “hatred of the flesh” (as Coubertin himself called it) that the baron spent his life fighting against.¹⁰ With his scoffing metaphors drawn from foot-racing and boxing, Paul is clearly belittling athletic performances. And there is nothing in St. Paul to suggest Talbot's interpretation that the athletes “all may share the equal joy of the contest.” Paul's attitude is clearly that “Winning is everything,” and to lose is to fail. ‘Be the one winner,’ he admonishes his audience. And he says nothing of joy. Even if Talbot did cite St. Paul as his source, and Coubertin, in turn, did cite Talbot as his, Paul is hardly the author of our Olympic credo. In fact, the anti-athletic, winning-is-everything passage in St. Paul is perhaps the last place in published literature one might claim to have found it.

I argue that the source of our credo, “The important thing ...” is **not** really Bishop Talbot, but Pierre de Coubertin himself, after all. And the ancient words -- severed from their context and paraphrased to suit the modern Olympic context -- come not from the Greek of St. Paul, but from the Latin of the pagan author, Ovid.

If Talbot's words were not very close to what we always thought they were, some earlier words of Coubertin were much closer. And the baron spoke these “much closer” words some fourteen years before the confusion about who said what in 1908. In an Olympic speech given to the Parnassus Literary Society, Athens, Greece, 16 November, 1894, Coubertin said:

“Le déshonneur ne consisterait pas ici à être battu: il consisterait à ne pas se battre.”¹¹

A literal translation is: “The dishonor here would consist not of being beaten; it would consist of not contending.” Another ready English version is found in Dixon’s translation of Coubertin’s own later brief summary and paraphrase of that same speech: “‘Dishonour,’ [I] said, ‘would not lie in defeat, but in failure to take part.’”¹² Dixon’s version is accurate enough, but perhaps phrased with the later application of the credo in mind, that is, its relevance to the value of individual athletes’ participation.

Yet if we view these words of Coubertin in their full context in the text of the original speech, we see that the Baron’s original sentence made a point rather different from the value we usually give this Olympic credo. Coubertin was not seeking to state a general truth about the individual athletes who compete in the Olympics. In that 1894 Athens speech to the Parnassus Society, he had a very specific goal in a very specific historical situation. He was trying to convince the Greeks to agree to hold the First International Olympic Games in Athens, a prospect that had been cast in much doubt.

Coubertin thought (or pretended to think?) that some Greeks were balking at holding the 1896 Games for fear their athletes would lose.¹³ First he tried to assure them that some Greeks might well win; he even offered to “bet two drachmas” that Greek athletes would indeed win some victories. Then, to appeal to the Greeks’ strong patriotic sense, he cited recent Greek history -- or rather, he threw out a challenge, bordering on insult. He remarked that if the previous generation of Greeks had carefully weighed their odds of victory before they revolted against the Turks, “you” -- he addresses the men sitting in his Parnassus audience -- “would not be free men right now.”¹⁴ Imagine the rhetoric and the setting. Then, after one sentence noting that French fears of never beating the English at football were groundless, he uttered the crucial words: “The dishonor here would consist not of being beaten; it would consist of not contending.”

So the sentence was originally intended to goad the Greeks into sponsoring the games, And it was first voiced in an appeal to Greek patriotism in a context as much military as athletic. Yet there was an athletic context and meaning to it. And the sentence indeed lends itself well to the general application we now give it; namely, the potentially significant value of Olympic participation for everyone, losers and winners, alike. And this very sentence of the Parnassus speech is the closest, I think, anyone ever came to expressing the Olympic credo before Coubertin said it again, even better, attributing it to Talbot in 1908. But why, we instinctively ask, did the baron credit it to Talbot when what he himself had said in 1894 was much closer than what Talbot said in 1908? I see no sure answer.

It is possible that the Baron had forgotten his earlier speech, and when he heard a somewhat related idea from Talbot, he recalled subconsciously his own earlier words, liked them -- and decided to give them to Talbot. I find Coubertin often forgetful of accurate details even about what he himself had done.¹⁵ Or perhaps he recalled that the original context of his own words was too specific, strictly a spur to motivate the Greeks. Whatever the case, I am convinced that his 1908 words are more Coubertin

than Talbot. But were the words of this saying wholly original with Coubertin, or did Coubertin himself have it planted in his mind from another place and time, perhaps so subconsciously he could not recall the exact source?

It is highly likely that the Baron had this sentiment etched in his subconscious mind, implanted there in his youth. If so, he could have simply recalled it and expressed it -- even twice, once in 1894, again in 1908 -- not knowing the source. We often do that when impressive phrases learned when we are young indelibly but subconsciously remain. More to the point, I think I have uncovered the source of the Baron's sentiment, the source of our Olympic credo; namely, in the Latin poet Ovid.

Many classicists would immediately see that Coubertin's sentence in the 1894 Athens speech was not original -- but rather two thousand years old. Coubertin said, "Le déshonneur ne consisterait pas ici à être battu: il consisterait à ne pas se battre" ("The dishonor here would consist not of being beaten; it would consist of not contending"). That is probably a direct translation (with change of tense) of a sentence that appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, his well-known mythological epic poem: "*Nec tam turpe fuit vinci quam contendisse decorum est.*"¹⁶

A literal translation is, "It was not so shameful to be beaten as it is honorable to have contended." One standard American edition gives, "[N]or was it so much a disgrace to be defeated as it was an honour to have striven at all."¹⁷ There is the Olympic credo in a nutshell. Not only does Ovid's sentence account for Coubertin's own sentiment, but it is much closer to what we mean by the Olympic credo than anything Talbot or St. Paul ever uttered.

But could Coubertin have had Ovid's passage in the back of his mind when he said almost the same sentence? The probability is very high; for both sentences appear in similar contexts. We recall that Coubertin used the sentiment in a context where there hangs the spectre of defeat; he thought the Greeks hesitated to hold Olympic Games because they feared losing. In Ovid, the context is defeat. In the previous sentence, the speaker has said, "*Quis enim sua proelia victus commemorare velit? referam tamen ordine*" ("Who, when he is defeated, wants to tell of his battles? Yet I will tell it in full").¹⁸ And we will also recall that Coubertin's context was martial, as well; he had just reminded the Greek audience of their fathers' military victory over the Turks. Ovid's word *proelia* essentially connotes military battles, though it may be used for other kinds. Yet Ovid's context is indeed heavily martial. We may then see why Coubertin in 1894 used the rather violent and martial *se battre* ("tight, do battle") rather than words especially suitable to athletic "competition," such as *concourir*, *disputer*, or *rivaliser*, ("compete"); or even *prendre part à*, *participer à*, ("take part, participate")¹⁹.

So it seems that Ovid is indeed the ultimate source of our Olympic credo. But Ovid's martial context, unlike Coubertin's in Athens, 1894, has but a little to do with athletics. Instead it is a gripping tale of love. This is a mythological poem. The speaker of "*Net tam turpe fuit vinci quam contendisse decorum est*" is the Greek mythological river god, Achelous. The tale he reluctantly agrees to tell is this. He, the river Achelous, fell in love with the beautiful young woman, Deianeira. But Deianeira had another suitor, as well. That suitor was Hercules. So Hercules and Achelous did battle for Deianeira's hand. It was a violent, drawn out (two full pages in Ovid's text²⁰), knock down-and-drag-out wrestling and boxing match combined.

But such a brawling contest was indeed an ancient Olympic event called the “*pancratation*” (“no holds barred”). So the context is mildly athletic. Finally, after Achelous had tried every trick he knew, Hercules beat him. He lay there mutilated and defeated, but he lived to tell the tale. He feels no dishonor in having lost: look at my competitor, he says, the great Hercules; and look at the prize: Deianeira (*Net tam turpe fuit vinci, quam contendisse decorum est*). In this case, the honor of contending, even in defeat, outweighed any dishonor in losing -- even in the mind of the loser. It is likely that that sentence gives us not only the Olympic credo, but also the proverb “‘Tis better to have loved and lost than not to have loved at all.”²¹

One last question remains. How likely is it that Coubertin had read Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*? “Likely” is not the word. It is certain that Coubertin had read at least some of Ovid’s poem. No author, no text has been so ingrained in the French school curriculum as Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, from medieval times until now. Despite its paganism and often racy content, the poem was not banned by the church; rather its content was allegorized to confer on it Christian values that it did not have. Even the nuns had to read Ovid, and scenes from the *Metamorphoses* deck the exterior of the famous cathedral at Chartres. Later, the Jesuits demanded special classical training, including the staple text, *Metamorphoses*.²² Coubertin entered a Jesuit school when he was eleven years old, and remained there for his seven most formative years. I quote from MacAloon’s account of the young baron’s Jesuit education. “The curriculum at Saint-Ignace conformed closely to the *ratio studiorum* of 1832 ... In the *cours de lettres* (sixth form through *rhétorique*), which Pierre entered and completed, Latin and Greek grammar and composition were pre-eminent.” “[C]lerical education meant classical education”; “[Coubertin] intensively absorbed Latin and Greek literature in the Jesuit mode.”²³ There is really no chance that Coubertin did not read Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

I conclude with some confidence, then, that the Olympic credo came not from an American bishop, not the crusty, anti-athletic St. Paul. It came instead from the *renovateur* himself, and an old pa an poet, known as much for his racy stories as for his myths or his athletic writings.²⁴ Or was it a river?

Notes

1. The source of this Latin motto (“faster, higher, stronger”) is not in dispute; it comes from Henri Didon, a Dominican priest and close friend of Coubertin from 1889 on (see John J. MacAloon, *This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Modern Olympic Games*, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1981, p. 153). But recently Allen Guttman (*The Olympics*, Urbana: Univ. of Illinois, 1992, p. 41) has suggested that this motto dates from the Seventh Olympic Congress held in Lausanne in 1921: “At this occasion, a French cleric, Pêre Henri Didon, suggested the now-familiar Olympic motto, *Citius, Altius, Fortius*. Perhaps some further distinction was given the motto in 1921 (in a glance at accounts of the 1921 Lausanne Congress I find nothing); but Didon’s motto actually dates from the IOC’s beginnings and beyond. In 1929 Coubertin said of this motto, “La plus ancienne des devises sportives récentes remonte à quelque trente-cinq ans” (Norbert Müller, ed., *Pierre de Coubertin, Textes Choisis II* [hereafter cited as “Müller”], Zürich: Weidmann, p. 454). Coubertin’s accounting is correct, for the motto (in a different order: *Citius, Fortius, Altius*) appears at the top of the very first number of the *Bulletin Olympique* (then called

Bulletin du comité international des Jeux Olympiques, Paris, July 1894). And in 1896 the baron explained where he got that motto: "... ces trois mots que le Père Didon donna une fois pour devise sportive aux élèves de son école" (Müller, p. 89). Later, but as early as 1912, he could call *citius, altius, fortius* "la fameuse devise" of the IOC (Müller p. 244). In distinguishing this "motto" from the "code" ("the important thing,"), I follow John A. Lucas, *Future of the Olympic Games*, Champaign, III.: Human Kinetics, 1992, pp. 96-98.

2. See, for example, *Proceedings: First Joint International Session for Directors of National Olympic Academies, Members and Staffs of National Olympic Committees and International Federations*, Olympia, Greece, 1992.

3. That message was displayed on the scoreboard during the opening of the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games (see Widlund [below, n. 5], p. 13).

4. Pierre de Coubertin, "Trustees of the Olympic Idea," pp. 18-20 in *The Olympic Idea* (above, n. 1), p. 20; translated and reprinted from *Revue Olympique*, July 1908, pp. 108- 111). The French original is the same: "L'important dans ces olympiades, c'est moins d'y gagner que d'y prendre part" (Müller p. 449). The whole passage comes from a speech that Coubertin gave on 24 July, 1908 at a dinner given by the British Government for people associated with the Olympics.

5. Ture Widlund, "Ethelbert Talbot: His Life and Place in Olympic History," *Citius, Altius, Fortius: Journal of the International Society of Olympic Historians*, Durham, N.C., Vol. 2, No.2 (May 1994) pp. 7-14. A brief earlier version appeared in the *Olympic Review*, No. 187 (May, 1983), pp. 294-295 (after a long 1982 essay in Swedish which I have not seen [as cited by Lucas, 1992, p. 102]). Lucas (above, n. 1), pp. 97-98 with notes (and in a postscript to Widlund's article in *Citius, Altius, Fortius* [above]).

6. Widlund's text here reads "price," surely a typo for "prize" (the reading in Lucas).

7. Widlund (above, n. 5) p. 11; Lucas (above, n. 1), p. 87. Widlund's text is somewhat fuller than Lucas' (who omits all reference to St. Paul). But Lucas was indeed the first to find the speech and the passage (in the archives of the American Episcopal Church, in its Austin, Texas Depository: *The Guardian of the American Episcopal Church*, 22 July 1908, p. 1247).

8. Cf. Plato Laws 7.807c: "As the man who aims at a Pythian or Olympic victory has not time for all the other activities of life..." Further, the Plato passage is probably St. Paul's source for his own words. The rest of Laws 7.807c compares the athlete's full-time devotion to his pursuit of victory to the philosopher's full-time, more noble -- and even more demanding -- devotion to his pursuit of excellence. Note that, if we substitute 'the Christian' for 'the philosopher,' and the concept 'salvation' for 'excellence,' St. Paul's general message is precisely the same. Each author uses the comparison with athletic training to promote training in the discipline he himself regards as far superior to athletics. The full-time training which Plato (and St. Paul) attribute to the ancient Olympic athlete again expresses the exact opposite of the long-lived, finally defunct modern Olympic principle of amateurism, where Olympic athletes were expected to train only in their spare time. The young amateur athlete Avery Brundage was proud of the fact that he spent "two hours every night exercising" in his "spare time" after a full day's work at his company's office (*World Magazine*, Story Section, October 1, 1916, caption to Brundage's picture on the cover). Plato did not know the Brundage-style athlete. The passage from Plato's Laws, of course, was suppressed or ignored throughout the long heyday of amateurism, while irrelevant ancient passages were cited in hopes of finding an

ancient precedent for amateurism. See my *Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletics*, Chicago: Ares, 1984.

9. I Corinthians 9.24. The translation is mine (so, too, are the brackets), but should not differ substantially from any accurate New Testament version. It is straightforward Greek, and the only question a classicist might raise is my translation (from several possibilities) of the verb *enkrateuomai*, which I have rendered “give up.” Here I take my cue from the Latin vulgate Bible (*ab omnibus se abstinere*), and from the Plato (*pasan ton allon panton ergon biou ascholion*), which I think is probably Paul’s source. The last sentence is literally, “I maltreat [the verb is used for giving someone a black eye] my body and make it a slave.” This passage even exemplifies the “hatred of the flesh” that Coubertin abhorred (next note).

10. A typical Coubertin passage defends athletics against their critics [emphases mine]: “... une opposition raisonnée issue du mépris qu’inspire l’exercice physique. C’est la réaction des premiers temps du christianisme qui dure toujours; c’est la haine inconscient de la chair, ce sont les méfiances ascétiques cristallisées par le temps, passées dans les moeurs. Au prix de quels efforts reviendra-t-on à une conception plus juste de la machine humaine, de son harmonieux équilibre?” See Coubertin, “La Preface des Jeux Olympiques,” *Cosmopolis 2* (1896), 146-159 (see also, Müller, p. 92).

11. Coubertin, in Müller, p. 372. This section (pp. 364-375) reprints (from the French language Athenian newspaper, *Le Messager d’Athènes*, 1894, nos. 39 and 42) the full original text of this important speech.

12. Coubertin, *The Olympic Idea* (above, n. 4) p. 10; this section of The Olympic Idea, pp. 7-10, merely translates and reprints the greatly abridged and paraphrased version which appeared in the *Bulletin du comité internationale des jeux olympiques*, Jan. 1895, p. 4). There (note “extracts”) Coubertin left out many major points of the original speech, including such things as his reference to the Greek War of Independence. The only full and valid texts of this speech available now are the original version in *Le Messager d’Athènes* and its reprinting in Müller (see previous note). In Athens I have seen a Greek version (the speech was given in French) published in an 1894 Athenian journal, but I did not note the citation.

13. The paragraph preceding that which contains the pertinent sentence begins, “La seconde objection repose sur votre infériorité au point de vue sportif” (Müller, p. 372).

14. “Messieurs, est-ce que vos pères ont posé et soupsé leurs chances avant de se soulever contre les Turcs? S’ils l’avaient fait, vous ne seriez pas libres à l’heure actuelle. Ce sont là des choses qu’on ne discute pas, elles sont indignes de vous!”

15. Two examples must do. By 1931 Coubertin had forgotten the sequence of events during his 1894 Athens visit, wrongly placing the first Organizing Committee meeting in the Zappeion prior to the Parnassus Society speech (*Mémoires Olympiques*, Lausanne: IOC [N.D., but 1979], p. 16 [pagination differs from the original 1931 edition, not available to me; the material is on pp. 16-17 of the companion 1979 English edition, *Olympic Memoirs*]). So, too, when speaking of the invitations for the 1894 Paris Congress (which founded the IOC), did Coubertin state that the “programme définitif” with details such as de Courcel’s presidency of the Congress, was “publié au debut de 1894” (*Mémoires* p. 9; same in English edition). But he has the wrong document. He is referring to the ten point document that actually dated from April that year; it was the earlier, tentative (“Programme Préliminaire”) eight point document that was published in January 1894. See my *Olympic Myth* (above, n. 8), pp. 60-62 and Appendix 2; also my “Origins of the

Modern Olympics,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 4 (1987), 271-300 (p. 295, n. 46: Coubertin never even met de Courcel until the spring of that year, but his own confusion has confused others). Scholars who work with Coubertin’s writings are accustomed to such forgetfulness and inconsistencies.

16. *Metamorphoses* 9. 5-6.

17. Ovid Vol. IV, *Metamorphoses*, Frank J. Miller, transl., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. (Loeb Classical Library), 1984, p. 3.

18. Again, the same standard American translation (previous note) has, “[F]or who would care to chronicle his defeats? Still I will tell the story as it happened.”

19. When he saw precisely how the sentiment might apply to athletic competition the baron altered the rather violent “fight” to “take part” in his 1908 and 1932 versions (above). But even then he insisted on the original, somewhat violent martial metaphor, as well. In the same 1908 speech, he follows the supposed “quotation” from Bishop Talbot directly with these words: “Gentlemen, let us bear this potent word in mind. It extends across every domain to form the basis of a serene and healthy philosophy. The important thing in life is not victory but struggle, the essential is not to have won but to have fought well” (emphases mine; Dixon transl., *Olympic Idea*, [above, n. 4] p. 20). The French for the emphasized words is combat ...s’être bien battu (Müller, p. 449).

20. *Metamorphoses* 9.32-86. The Achelous story begins at 9.1.

21. John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations* (13th edn., Boston and Toronto, 1955) seems to know nothing of Ovid’s priority for this phrase and its congeners. Bartlett gives “Better to have fought and lost / Than never to have fought at all” to Arthur Hugh Clough [18 19- 1861], *Peschiera*. The adage, “‘Tis better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all” Bartlett gives to Tennyson [1809- 1892], *The Princess*. Part XXVII, Stanza 4 (551b- 552a).

22. Ovid’s surprising popularity and his use as a required text in the schools, especially in France, from medieval times onward, are common knowledge to those who study the history of the Classical influence in Europe. I give but a sample. “[I]n the 12th century [Ovid] was studied regularly in [the schools] of France,” Wilmon Brewer, *Ovid’s Metamorphoses in European Culture*, Francetown, N.H.: Marshall Jones, 1978, I. 357. The length and often racy content of the poem made the reading of the whole *Metamorphoses* in schools problematic; so by the 16th century schoolmasters made excerpts of popular or ennobling passages for a kind of “Selections from Ovid” textbook. “The Jesuits adopt a rigorous policy of selection which appears to ban the *Metamorphoses* from the syllabus, but in fact encourages the publication of books of excerpts, which proliferate in the seventeenth century,” Ann Moss, *Ovid in Renaissance France*, Leeds: Warburg Institute, 1982, p. 41. The Jesuits of Coubertin’s day did not blush so much as their Renaissance forbears, but the tradition of required reading of excerpts, at least, from the *Metamorphoses* surely survived. “Chateaubriand [1768-1848] in his youth was fond of it [Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*],” Brewer (above), p. 383. And Ovid remained firmly entrenched in the French and the Jesuit curriculum. He was especially used as a model for rhetoric and Latin composition, lingering items in French education that we know were paramount in Coubertin’s own Jesuit schooling. See MacAloon’s description of his curriculum at Saint-Ignace quoted in the text above. In fact it was the conservatism, almost medievalism of the French nineteenth century Classical education that motivated Coubertin to seek educational reform.

23. MacAloon (above, n. 1), pp. 34-37.

24. Next to the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid's best known work is a shorter poem titled *Ars amatoria* ("The Art of Love"); in our own modern culture, its title would surely have been, "How to pick up girls."