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(Translating) Laughing at the Boundaries of Genre in Ovid's *Amores*

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Relevant Definitions:

Edmund Bergler's "Popular Theory" of Laughter

"[O]ne laughs when and because something is funny, and something is funny because and when one laughs."

—Edmund Bergler, *Laughter and the Sense of Humor* (1956) p. vii.

Stephen Harrison's Definition of Genre

"The fundamental concept of literary genre as applied in this book is that of *a form which can be identified through a particular generic repertoire of external and internal features.*"

—Stephen Harrison, *Generic Enrichment in Vergil and Horace* (2007) p. 11.

Item 1: Horace's *Ars Poetica* vv. 73-88

*res gestae regumque ducumque et tristia bella  
quo scribi possent numero, monstravit Homerus.  
versibus impariter iunctis querimonia primum, (75)  
post etiam inclusa est uoti sententia compos;  
quis tamen exiguos elegos emiserit auctor,  
grammatici certant et adhuc sub iudice lis est.  
Archilochum proprio rabies armauit iambo;  
hunc socci cepere pedem grandesque coturni, (80)  
alternis aptum sermonibus et populares  
uincens strepitus et natum rebus agendis.  
Musa dedit fidibus diuos puerosque deorum  
et pugilem uictorem et equum certamine primum  
et iuuenum curas et libera uina referre. (85)  
descriptas seruare uices operumque colores  
cur ego, si nequeo ignoroque, poeta salutor?  
cur nescire pudens praeu quam discere malo?*

**The accomplishments of kings and leaders and sorrowful wars—  
in what meter they can be written, Homer has shown.  
In verses unequally paired laments were first enclosed,  
then, also, the sentiment of a discharged vow;  
Still, who the founder was who published short elegies,  
the grammarians dispute, and to this day the jury is out.  
Madness equipped Archilochus with the characteristic iamb;  
slippers and lofty buskins took hold of this foot,  
suited to conversational exchanges, overcoming  
the popular din, and natural for moving matters along.  
The muse granted strings the reporting of the gods, the boys of gods,  
the victorious boxer, the first horse in the race,  
and the concerns of young men and flowing wine.  
Why am I, if I am incompetent and I neglect to preserve  
the established turns and colors of works, greeted as a poet?  
Why do I, perversely modest, prefer ignorance to learning?**

Item 2: Ovid's *Amores* 1.1

*arma graui numero uiolentaque bella parabam  
edere, materia conueniente modis.  
par erat inferior uersus—risisse Cupido  
dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem.*

Weapons in a weighty number and violent wars I was preparing  
to put forth, with the material suiting the meter.  
The second verse was equal to the first—Cupid is said  
to have laughed and to have snatched away one foot.

*'Quis tibi, saeue puer, dedit hoc in carmina iuris? (5)  
Pieridum uates, non tua turba sumus.  
quid, si praecripiat flauae Venus arma Minervae,  
uentilet accensas flaua Minerva faces?  
quis probet in siluis Cererem regnare iugosis,  
lege pharetratae Virginis arua coli? (10)  
crinibus insignem quis acuta cuspidi Phoebum  
instruat, Aoniam Marte mouente lyram?  
sunt tibi magna, puer, nimiumque potentia regna;  
cur opus adfectas, ambitiose, nouum?  
an, quod ubique, tuum est? tua sunt Heliconia tempe?  
uix etiam Phoebus iam lyra tuta sua est?  
cum bene surrexit uersu noua pagina primo,  
attenuat neruos proximus ille meos;  
nec mihi materia est numeris leuioribus apta,  
aut puer aut longas compta puella comas.' (20)  
Questus eram, pharetra cum protinus ille soluta  
legit in exitium spicula facta meum,  
lunauitque genu sinuosum fortiter arcum,  
'quod' que 'canas, uates, accipe' dixit 'opus!'*

“Who, cruel boy, gave you this degree of authority in songs?  
We poets are the crowd of the Muses—not yours.  
What, if Venus should snatch the weapons of golden Minerva,  
would golden Minerva fan the flaming wedding torches?  
Who would approve that Ceres reign in the hilly woods,  
that the fields be cultivated by the law of the quivered maiden?  
Who would equip Phoebus, distinguished in his locks,  
with a sharp blade, leaving Mars to handle the Aonian lyre?  
There exist for you, boy, great and extremely powerful kingdoms:  
why do you ambitiously lay claim to a new work?  
Or is what is everywhere yours? Yours the vales of Heliconian Tempe?  
Scarcely even now is his own lyre safe for Phoebus?  
When a new page has started well with the initial verse,  
that next one diminishes my powers.  
Nor do I have material to accommodate lighter meters,  
neither a boy nor a girl adorned with long hair.”  
I complained, when straightaway he, with his quiver loosed,  
collected arrows fashioned for my destruction,  
and boldly crescented on his knee his pliant bow,  
and he said, “What sort of work you'll sing—take it!”

*Me miserum! certas habuit puer ille sagittas. (25)  
uror, et in uacuo pectore regnat Amor.  
Sex mihi surgat opus numeris, in quinque residat:  
ferrea cum uestris bella ualete modis!  
cingere litorea flauentia tempora myrto,  
Musa, per undenos emodulanda pedes! (30)*

Wretched me! That boy had reliable arrows.  
I'm burning, and in an empty heart reigns Love.  
May the work rise for me with six beats, may it settle in five;  
unyielding war with your meter, farewell.  
You, wreath your golden temples with shore-born myrtle,  
you, Muse, who must be celebrated through eleven feet.

Item 3: Ovid's *Amores* 1.1 vv. 25-26

*me miserum! certas habuit puer ille sagittas. 25  
uror, et in uacuo pectore regnat Amor.*

Wretched me! That boy had reliable arrows. 25  
I'm burning, and in an empty heart reigns Love.

Item 4: Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* 1 vv. 7-10

*me Venus artificem tenero praefecit Amori;  
Tiphys et Automedon dicar Amoris ego.  
ille quidem ferus est et qui mihi saepe repugnet:  
sed puer est, aetas mollis et apta regi.* 10

Venus placed me as *maestro* in charge of tender Love;  
The Tiphys and Automedon of Love I'll be called.  
He indeed is wild and the type to fight against me often:  
but he is a boy, soft of age and suitable to be guided. 10

Item 5: Ovid's *Amores* 1.6 vv. 9-13

*At quondam noctem simulacraque uana timebam;  
mirabar, tenebris quisquis iturus erat. 10  
risit, ut audirem, tenera cum matre Cupido  
et leuiter 'fies tu quoque fortis' ait.  
nec mora, uenit amor [. . .]*

But formerly I feared the night and false phantoms;  
I was amazed at anyone about to go through the shadows. 10  
Cupid laughed, so that I could hear, he with his tender mother  
and lightly said, “You also will become brave.”  
Without delay, love came [. . .].

Item 6: Ovid's *Amores* 2.5 vv. 51-52

*risit et ex animo dedit optima—qualia possent  
excutere irato tela trisulca Iovi.*

She laughed and gave—from the heart—the best kisses, the kind able  
to strike out forked bolts from an angry Jupiter.

Item 7: Ovid's *Amores* 2.18 vv. 15-16

*risit Amor pallamque meam pictosque cothurnos 15  
sceptraque privata tam cito sumpta manu.*

Love laughed at my cloak and my painted boots 15  
and the scepter so quickly taken up by my ordinary hand.

Item 8: Ovid's *Amores* 3.1 v. 33

*altera, si memini, limis subrisit ocellis [. . .].*

The other, if I recall, smiled sidelong with her eyes [. . .]. 33

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