The Elegiac Grotesque

by

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Abstract

In Roman elegy the poet-lover has recourse to images of ugliness and disfigurement when he discovers that he is unable to retain the favour of his beloved with his love and verses. He degrades his opponents and suggests that his beloved herself succumbs to the fascination of horrid lovers. In this thesis I explore the theme of elegiac degradation from the perspective of grotesque hermeneutics, with the aim of showing that the grotesque plays a significant role in the development and self-understanding of elegy, the genre in which it is least expected.

After discussing relevant aspects of grotesque theory, I show that the historical premises for a grotesque reading of Roman love poetry are found in Lucretius’ diatribe against love, a powerful philosophical gesture against the sentimentalizations of love and a strong argument for a poetics of love grounded in grotesque materialism. I then turn to Catullus, focusing on his bold use of grotesque imagery. Catullus admits the grotesque
into the domain of love poetry and shows that, beneath the surface of elegance and urbanity that typifies romantic love, there lurks a reality that is both defiled and defiling.

Turning to elegy proper, I analyze Propertius’ use of the grotesque focusing on his creation of a grotesque ethos within the aesthetic space of elegy. In that ethos signifiers of beauty and romance reveal an underside that both degrades the ideals they represent and disturbs the interpretive focus of the reader conditioned by conventions.

I then examine Tibullus’ approach to elegiac grotesque aesthetics, finding that he engages the reader in a self-allusive exercise that leads to the discovery of grotesque signs both concealed and illuminated by the poetic conventions of elegy. By means of this technique, Tibullus accomplishes his elegiacization of the grotesque.

Finally, Ovid reveals that the presence of the grotesque in elegy, the sense of foreignness that accompanies it, and the impression that the logic of the genre is destabilized by it are all already inherent in the very premises of elegy and are generated by its very logic.
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Roman elegy makes frequent use of themes of ugliness and disfigurement, and it juxtaposes these with images of ideal beauty and sentiment. In order to overcome the obstacles to his erotic relationship, the poet-lover repeatedly represents his rivals and opponents in such a way as to ridicule their appearance and to degrade their social standing. My purpose in this thesis is to explore the theme of corporeal, intellectual, and social degradation from the perspective of the aesthetics of the grotesque. I undertake to show that the grotesque plays a significant role in the self-definition of the genre in which it is least expected. Grotesque and idealizing imagery constitute the polarities of a dialectic that lies at the core of elegy. Classical scholars have long been interested in the use of grotesque imagery in such genres as comedy, invective, and satire. There is a sophisticated discussion of the grotesque in these areas of classical literature, which are concerned in part with themes of transgression and excess. Grotesque imagery occurs frequently also in genres, such as elegy, that foreground love and beauty, but no systematic treatment of the phenomenon in this genre has yet been attempted.

With this thesis I hope to make a contribution to our understanding of elegy from the perspective of grotesque aesthetics, building on such works as the two special issues of *Arethusa* devoted respectively to the relevance of Bakhtin to classical studies (volume 26) and to the analysis of the theme of vile bodies in satire (volume 31), as well as on the scholarship of Braund, Gold, and Miller, among others. The corporeal discourse of elegy

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1. See Richlin (1992, chapters 2 and 3), who suggests that, in opposition to satire, elegy maintains an idealizing attitude towards women and boys.
2. Cf. e.g. Braund and Gold (1998); Christenson (2001); Gunderson (2005).
has yet to be read from a grotesque perspective. Such a reading, however, is necessary because, as we shall see, it is not otherwise possible to understand fully the essence of elegy. For the grotesque is inherent in the very concept of elegiac love. In their introduction to the special issue of Arethusa on the corporeal discourse in Roman satire, Susanna Morton Braund and Barbara K. Gold express the hope that their collection of articles might offer “a provocation and inspiration for further work on this field.” This thesis is a response to their invitation from within the domain of elegiac scholarship.

The field that the Arethusa special editors have in mind is perhaps satire, and their intent may be to provoke its further exploration in light of modern theories of vile literary bodies, especially the theory of the grotesque in conjunction with other theoretical methodologies relevant to particular themes and images. Satire is a genre in intimate terms with the grotesque, which provides it with an aesthetic instrument of denigration. Other genres, however, may be fruitfully brought into the horizon of grotesque studies. In this thesis, I will attempt to build on the foundation of the Arethusa scholars by applying a grotesque hermeneutic to amatory elegy and to the love poetry that immediately preceded it. Though elegy is a genre that, at first appearances, resists dialogue with the grotesque, appearances are deceiving: I will show that throughout the elegiac tradition, the grotesque emerges frequently from within the poetic substance of elegy, sometimes coming only partly into view but at other times claiming a central position on its stage.

The Roman elegists have systematic recourse to the grotesque in the depiction of the poet-lover’s rival, of the lena, of the puella and of love itself. Their use of the concepts of degradation, bestial behaviour, and physical ugliness are all aspects of the

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3 In contrast, much has been written on the puella’s and on the lover-poet’s body. Cf. e.g. Wyke (2002). See also Keith (1994) and (1999), Sharrock (1991).
aesthetic principles of the grotesque, though each author assumes a different stance and emphasizes different aspects of the grotesque. Common to all is a concept of the elegiac genre as incorporating grotesque elements in its aesthetic form and as sustained by tension and dialectic throughout its history.

As a literary phenomenon the grotesque is notoriously difficult to define because the term does not represent a self-contained idea, capable of being understood as an in-itself without reference to the world beyond it, but as an aspect or a dimension of other phenomena, without relation to which its meaning cannot be circumscribed. The elegiac grotesque is the grotesque aspect of elegy, an aesthetic phenomenon that has clear meaning only in reference to elegy, as the offensive underside of the beauty and sentiment that dominate our first encounter with the genre. The precise meaning of the grotesque necessarily depends on the historical and generic specificity of the corpus used to illustrate it.5 This difficulty has given rise to a variety of formulations which have in common the idea that the grotesque is a literary mode that admits into the purview of the artist material regarded as too outlandish for conventional aesthetic treatment, that is to say material that does not appear to have a rational base, though in reality it does. The grotesque views reality through a lens that brings into focus such things as deformity, hybridity, excess, lower corporality, transgressions, and regeneration, and it is concerned with techniques of hyperbole, derision, degradation and contradiction. The most influential theorists are Bakhtin, Harpham, and Kristeva. Bakhtin’s focus is on the lowering of sublimity into grotesque biological realism, sociologically interpreted as the

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5 As a critical category the grotesque is a relatively modern concept, but as a literary phenomenon it has a very long history, from antiquity to the present. The term grotesque was first used by Raphael in the Renaissance, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was used especially with reference to the Commedia dell’Arte. As a designation of a critical category applicable to literature it enters scholarship in the nineteenth century. See Barasch (1993), “Theories of the Grotesque.”
beginning of a community’s regeneration. Harpham is concerned with the representation of objects that intrude into one another under the literalizing power of an imagination that rejects the figurative purport of metaphors. Kristeva is not a student of the grotesque as such but a theorist of the abject, focused on the simultaneous fascination and repulsion that certain phenomena have for us when we dare confront the power of horror. The grotesque delights in contradiction rather than linear logic, in hybridity rather than purity of form, in ambivalence rather than immediate clarity. The grotesque juxtaposes refinement with brutality, all in the service of an aesthetic logic that is powerful precisely because it is hidden behind ambivalence, monstrosity, and derision.

The theoretical framework for this thesis on the elegiac grotesque derives from fundamental aspects of the theories of Bakhtin, Harpham, and Kristeva. Bakhtin develops his theory of the grotesque in *Rabelais and His World*, a work in which he examines the relationship between grotesque as a literary style and carnival as a social practice imaginatively analogous to it. Bakhtin’s sociological consideration of the grotesque in the context of the festive carnivalesque is not especially significant for the analysis of the elegiac grotesque, in which, as we shall see, it can play only a very limited role. But the grotesque sensation provoked by representations of the human body deprived of any idealizing attribute and foregrounding the coarse physicality of its lower stratum, which is a fundamental aspect of the grotesque for Bakhtin, is also central to this thesis and will be frequently invoked, albeit not from a sociological perspective. The aspects of Bakhtin’s theory most relevant to the elegiac grotesque concern his distinction between two approaches to the more or less realistic representation of the human body: one, which he calls classical, regards the body as completed, beautiful, and isolated; the other, which

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6 Bakhtin (1968), 21.
he calls grotesque, regards it as incomplete, hideous, caught in the effort to violate its own limits, and intruding into the physical form of another entity, forming a hybrid with it.\textsuperscript{7} The grotesque body is always poised to cross the boundaries that separate it from the external world.\textsuperscript{8} For this reason the nature of the grotesque body is never static and isolated but always intrusive and dynamic.\textsuperscript{9}

The grotesque imagination is focused on bodies in the act of changing their state of being: bodies ingesting food, expelling waste, copulating and transgressing the limits that polite society imposes on these activities. For Bakhtin, the grotesque style is therefore frequently concerned with basic biological processes shown in graphic detail, and focused on bowels, genitals, mouth and anus, all active to excess. Its major attributes are “exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness.”\textsuperscript{10} Its fundamental artistic principle is debasement: “all that is sacred and exalted is rethought on the level of the material bodily stratum or else combined and mixed with its images.”\textsuperscript{11} The literary mode that makes use of such a style is what Bakhtin terms “grotesque realism,” an expression that he juxtaposes to the idealizing and static conception of the human body.\textsuperscript{12} In order to achieve its goal, grotesque realism degrades bodies originally conceived in accordance with the canon of classical realism, focusing on their lower strata and on the biological functions associated with their orifices.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{7} Bakhtin (1968), 30.
\item \textsuperscript{8} Bakhtin (1968), 25.
\item \textsuperscript{9} Bakhtin (1968), 317.
\item \textsuperscript{10} Bakhtin (1968), 303.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Bakhtin (1968), 370.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Bakhtin (1968), 18. Grotesque realism deals in essence with earthiness as a dimension of life. Grotesque bodies ingest food, defecate, smell, give birth, have a repulsive interior, get sick, die, and may be dismembered. As described by Bakhtin, grotesque realism flourishes in the culture of the marketplace, which is abusive and regenerative at the same time.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Bakhtin (1968), 19-20.
\end{itemize}
Unlike Bakhtin, Harpham does not ground his discussion of the grotesque on the realistic representation of grotesque bodies but on concrete images of the abstract ideas of paradox and tension. He offers a concise but general definition of the grotesque as dependent on “the perception that something is illegitimately present in something else.”\textsuperscript{14} This definition is fundamental to the sense of foreignness that accompanies the presence of grotesque motifs in elegy, like a jeering crone inset within love poetry or an unsightly mole on a beautiful face. From Harpham’s definition it is apparent that the grotesque involves the idea of intrusion and of the subsequent conflict between two entities in the same body or form. The sense of the grotesque arises when one assumes a point of observation located somewhere between the two competing objects, a point from which both are visible in the same purview. This formulation of the grotesque enables Harpham to focus on the concept of in-betweenness as the \textit{sine qua non} of all grotesque writing. In-betweenness is what simultaneously separates and unites ideal and degenerate forms, the top and bottom parts of a hierarchy, and the margin and centre.\textsuperscript{15} As they look for unity between these polarities, readers “must ( . . . ) pass through the grotesque.”\textsuperscript{16}

Unity that includes internal opposition is necessarily dynamic, conflictual and ambivalent. Every image that is designed to give the impression of such paradoxical unity is conceived as a compressed narrative.\textsuperscript{17} An illustration of this type of narrative is the metaphor “Hector is a lion”; the sense of the grotesque arises when we momentarily interpret the metaphor literally and perceive a lion intruding into the form and body of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Harpham (1982), 13.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Harpham (1982), 11 and 13.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Harpham (1982), 43-4.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Harpham (1982), 14.
\end{itemize}
Hector.\textsuperscript{18} When we read it figuratively, as we normally would, the metaphor raises the image of a perfect classical body, consistent with the common idea of a Greek hero. But when we read the metaphor literally, the classical purity becomes a shell concealing a core of grotesque horror. For at that point the warrior and the lion are present as a hybrid construct whose nature is grounded simultaneously on an artistic sense of unity and on the perception of material incongruity, illustrating a principle of aesthetic logic that, as we shall see, is found at the very core of elegy. Harpham’s argument therefore situates hybridity at the core of the grotesque. When two incompatible bodies inhabit the same form, as in all cases of grotesque hybridity, our point of perception is relegated to the liminal space between the two images, which is an area where metaphors are momentarily literalized.\textsuperscript{19} In-betweenness is the place where grotesque transgression appears in full view.

The concept of grotesque hybridity, which is common to both Bakhtin and Harpham, merits more detailed discussion. Hybridity is a biological metaphor for the coexistence of two or more items in a dialectical relationship. In a typical image of a hybrid entity we have two beings inhabiting a single body, but nothing prevents an artist from multiplying the number of components. At the beginning of the \textit{Ars Poetica}, Horace warns against the unskilled use of this practice when the mechanical combination of images does not lead to a logical and artistic sense of unity. A painted hybrid (\textit{undique collatis membris}, 3) would be ludicrous and would arouse laughter rather than admiration (\textit{spectatum admissi risum teneatis amici?}, 5) if it lacked such unity. The implication is that in writing, as in painting, art is generally expected to explore ideas and values that

\textsuperscript{18} Harpham (1982), 156.
\textsuperscript{19} Harpham (1982), 16.
are conventionally perceived to have a rational base. This Horatian principle is fundamental for our understanding of the elegiac grotesque because it posits the identification of the logical frame of the entire work, and not only of a part of it, as the goal of the reading process. Because it leans towards the outlandish, the grotesque may appear to be grounded in irrationality but is instead informed by a concept of logic that is not limited by contradiction because it incorporates the juxtaposition of contraries.\(^2\) Marina Warner has shown that the opening lines of the *Ars Poetica* attracted the attention of Michelangelo, who referred to them in passionate defence of the grotesque. According to Michelangelo, when a painter uses hybrid beings “to divert and entertain the senses and also to captivate the eyes of mortals who long to see unclassified and impossible things, he shows himself more respectful of reason than if he produced the usual figures of men and animals.”\(^1\) Mutatis mutandis, the argument is valid for writers. From this perspective, the art of poetry would be more respectful of reason if, in addition to being predicated on the rational base of elegance and refinement – which tends to condition the reader into concluding that anything beyond that base is an illegitimate intrusion from the outside – it were simultaneously predicated on the rational base of the grotesque. The art of poetry would then be sustained by a logic of higher order.

In his comment on the *Ars Poetica*, Michelangelo contributes the term “genre of the monstrous” to designate hybrid beings as a category of grotesque beings, but also the description of readers of the grotesque as a class of people who long to see beyond the

\(^1\) Warner (2007), 249-50. Michelangelo’s reference to Horace is negative because he read the *Ars Poetica* as a statement in favour of an uncomplicated view of reason that does not incorporate internal contradictions.

\(^2\) See, e.g. *ut turpiter atrum / desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne* (Hor. *Ars*, 3-4). The hybrid crosses not only the boundary between animal and human but also complicates the perception of gender, since *piscis* is masculine. Unless otherwise noted, I follow Wickham’s OCT of Horace.
conventional limits of rationality. It follows that artificial unions in the genre of the monstrous are grotesque bodies that go against the laws of nature, though the images that represent them are artistic tools for the philosophical exploration of phenomena beyond conventional expectations. They undermine the concept of decorum, a concept that, as Ellen Oliensis notes, carries the aesthetic expectation that decorous poetry is predicated on the principle of subordination – such as the subordination of femininity to masculinity – conventionally presented as natural. On a similar basis Propp maintained that myths of hybrid creations, such as winged horses, are philosophical and artistic expressions of the uneasy coexistence of new values with the obsolescent ones they are meant to displace in the life of a nation. More recently Bhabha has argued that hybridity is the cultural mechanism through which new ideas, developed in opposition to established ones, achieve currency next to and in competition with them in history. New ideas seek to replace the old ones, but there is a period of transition in which new and old co-exist in the same view of the world in a relation of mutual opposition, and that is the view embodied as a hybrid. Since all cultures have such internal forms of opposition, the biological metaphor of hybridity describes for Bhabha the dialectical character for all cultures. The concept of cultural homogeneity, whose claim to purity is undermined by the presence of contrasting elements within it, is thus analogous to and as artificial as conventional ideas of the elegiac genre regarded as a literary form that does not harbour elements challenging its claim to aesthetic uniformity.

23 “Ciò che è vecchio continua a coesistere con ciò che è nuovo o in senso parallelo o dando luogo con esso a varie associazioni di carattere ibrido, che non sono possibili né nella natura né nella storia.” Propp (1975), 86.
Insofar as the co-existence of two bodies in one form represents a transgression of the laws of nature, hybrids are typically grotesque. They represent the intrusion of one being into the body of the other, causing the host to develop excrescences in order for the invader to be able to inhabit it. Hybrid creations may be regarded as incomplete metamorphoses: a hybrid represents the metamorphic process frozen in a moment of time when both beings are simultaneously in view. Grotesque aesthetics focuses on that moment and uses the resulting hybrid to symbolize the dialectical structure of the poet’s or artist’s viewpoint. In this connection we can say with Harpham that in-betweenness is the location of the grotesque artist’s viewpoint because from that space he can see the metamorphic process as it takes place and contemplate the ideas that the two elements of the metamorphosis represent at a given moment in time.

Though Kristeva has not been an active participant in the discussion of the grotesque, her theory of abjection is closely related to it. Abjection is the process whereby we distance ourselves from vile and defiling phenomena in order to reaffirm the state of uncontaminated purity at the core of our self-perception. In Powers of Horror Kristeva analyses the sense of repulsion provoked in us by things that threaten us with contamination or debasement, or else remind us that our own bodies are themselves receptacles of impurities. Such things are what she calls the abject, a category that includes all aspects of corporeal decay, open wounds, stench, excrement, as well as all incestuous unions and forms of aberrant sexuality. By relegating them to the region of the abject, the self safeguards its own purity and stability. However, the abject has this peculiar quality: while it violently revolts the subject, it also appeals to it, and so, in rejecting it the self also remains attracted to it. As Kristeva puts it, abjection is “a terror
that dissembles, a hatred that smiles.”\textsuperscript{25} Abjection is a form of liberation by distancing, but it is never complete because full severance from the abject is not possible. This is clear if we consider the abject within the body, which is revolting when it is expelled, but remains a reminder that it was, and will continue to be, made by the subject’s body. The subject will never be entirely separated from it. Applied to the human body, Kristeva’s concept of the abject has much in common with Bakhtin’s theory of the grotesque. Significantly, in her discussion of Celine, Kristeva observes that “abjection is resorbed in the grotesque,”\textsuperscript{26} which is to say that the abject can be conceived as part of the larger category that we call the grotesque. It serves to identify the area of the corporeal grotesque that is not concerned with social regeneration and the celebration of life.

The idea that the experience of the grotesque is imbued with abjection will serve us well in the analysis of the elegiac grotesque by shifting the focus of relevant theory away from the carnivalesque, which is central to the sociological claims of the grotesque, and towards the desire for transgression, which is central to its aesthetic claims. My discussion will in fact incorporate Bakhtin’s theory of grotesque realism, Harpham’s concept of in-betweenness as the location of the grotesque perspective on transgression, and the idea of hybridity common to both as a point of access to the monstrous. In using Bakhtin’s theory, I will respect the limitations imposed on it by the textual base from which it arises. As Miller has shown, much confusion can result from the disregard for the “historical and generic specificity” of the Bakhtinian notion of the grotesque.\textsuperscript{27} The major consequence of such confusion is the attribution of a carnivalesque and edifying function to the presentation of life through the lower stratum of the body, a function that

\textsuperscript{25} Kristeva (1982), 4.
\textsuperscript{26} Kristeva (1982), 165.
\textsuperscript{27} Miller (1998), 257.
is germane to the context of Bakhtin’s discussion but is essentially foreign to the Catullan project. Miller argues that, while the carnivalesque concept of the grotesque includes both degradation and regeneration, it is possible to develop a theory of the grotesque without the regenerative function. He argues this in relation to Roman satire, but the notion of a non-regenerative grotesque is also fully applicable to Catullus’ poetry. Considered together with Kristeva’s theory of abjection and Harpham’s analysis of strategies of in-betweenness, Bakhtin’s account of grotesque realism will provide us with an effective critical framework for the examination of the elegiac use of grotesque imagery, which, as we shall see, is not generally regenerative, but punitive, vilifying and distancing.

The language of grotesque realism, however coarse it may sometimes be, should not be misconstrued as crudeness of form. When Aristotle asked the question why ugliness could claim a legitimate place in the purview of the artist, his answer was that it is not the ugly object itself which causes delight, but its artistic representation:

σημεῖον δὲ τούτον τὸ συμβαίνον ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων ἃ γὰρ αὕτὰ λυπηρὰς ὀρώμεν, τούτων τὰς εἰκόνας τὰς μᾶλλον ἤρμιθμενας χαίρομεν συνάστους, οἷον θηρίων τε μορφὰς τῶν ἀτυμότατων καὶ νεκρῶν.

(Arist. Poet. 1448b9-13)

The truth of this second point is shown by experience: though the objects themselves may be painful to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art, the forms for example of the lowest animals and of dead bodies.28

Aristotle does not consider the fact that horrible phenomena, and not only images of horrid things, can also fascinate the senses and the mind, despite our desire to distance ourselves from them. Plato’s Leontius was ashamed of his desire to look at corpses by

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28 The text of the Poetics taken from Kassel’s OCT. This translation is Bywater’s from Barnes’ 1984 English edition of the complete works.
the roadside, but he recognized the power such desire had over his mind.\textsuperscript{29} Restricted to the aesthetic realm, however, Aristotle’s claim provides a rational base for the artistic merit of images of ugliness. Aristotle specifically argues that the viewer of art and the reader of poetry appreciate the exactitude with which ugly objects and events are represented and the skill that is displayed in the representation itself. Exact images (τὰς εἰκόνας τὰς μάλωτα ἡκριβωμένας, 1448b11) provide an aesthetic justification for the concept of grotesque realism as the style by which the abject enters poetry with disarming crudity. But when such raw details of ugliness are filtered through a creativity disciplined by an ideal of refined form, crudity achieves a different status. It ceases to be the description of an ugly object, or simply the connotation of a word for an ugly object, in order to become part of a complex aesthetic vision as a disturbing element that can cause the reader to question conventional representations of beauty. Working in the Aristotelian tradition, Eco stresses that occurrences of “ugliness in itself” and what he calls “formal ugliness,” as well as works of art that represent both, should always be kept distinct in the viewer’s mind. He defines formal ugliness as “a lack of equilibrium in the organic relationship between the parts of a whole,” while excrement and open sores that emanate a sickening stench are examples of occurrences of ugliness in itself.\textsuperscript{30} As we shall see, disturbance can be explicit in the text or else can be evoked by the text on the basis of poetic memory. Confronted by the challenge of ugliness, the reader questions artistic practices that privilege the sense of elegance and balance, of both tone and image. Ugliness covers a large semantic field since it can be applied to objects of perception as well as social and moral practices.

\textsuperscript{29} R.440a3. \\
\textsuperscript{30} Eco (2007), 19.
Exactitude, of course, does not refer to the negative emotions that such images of ugliness can engender, but to the poet’s skill as a creator of images, and it is that skill that is acknowledged in the ideal of a polished form. But the aesthetic appreciation of the grotesque, in which the impact of ugliness disturbs emotional calmness and challenges conventional logic, also implies savouring the experience of negative emotions, such as horror, fear and repugnance. On the conceptual plane the grotesque also implies the rejection of all forms of logic that would classify the experience of such emotions as foreign to the aesthetic domain. When they are induced by images, crafted with Aristotelian exactitude and design to provoke them, negative emotions and the inadequacy of logic become the stuff of the negative aesthetics presupposed by the experience of the grotesque. It is as the aesthetic experience of such emotions that our perception of grotesque imagery is articulated. The experience of negative emotions evoked by the representation of monstrosities, as Noëll Carrol has argued, “might be seen as part of the price to be paid for the pleasure of their disclosure.”

The negative aesthetic experience, at once savoured and abhorred, is a marker of the presence of the abject somewhere within conventional expressions of beauty and offers itself as evidence of the inadequacy of the internal logic by which the work is presumed to have been generated. Roman elegy, as we shall see, is a genre profoundly imbued with these ideas, throughout its historical development and thematic range. In the present thesis the breakdown of the material into chapters is based on the principles of chronological succession, and each chapter is organized as a close reading of the text from a perspective that reveals its affinity with principles of grotesque aesthetics and invites theorizing the genre in terms of its internal logic viewed from the vantage point of

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31 Carrol (1990), 184.
A significant argument advanced in this thesis is that grotesque hermeneutics offers us a unique perspective on elegy through a dialectical reading of its logic, viewed as the logic of a poetic code that ostensibly generates sublime ideas of love and beauty that necessarily incorporate degradation and ugliness as an irreducible residue. Such incorporation of contraries is strategically manifested to destabilize the dominance of artificial ideals and the logic of non-contradiction in our reading of the genre. Horace’s sophisticated *amici* do not laugh at his disrespect for the conventions of the genre, but at the absence of a rational aesthetic base in the mechanical combination of incompatible images. For when the genre is sustained by a superior aesthetic logic that encompasses contraries and derives meaning as well as aesthetic value from their opposition, such imagery expresses the very essence of the genre.

In Chapter 1, I argue that a historical invitation for such an approach to elegy may be found in Lucretius’ clinical diatribe against love (4.1037-1287), specifically in his description of the *puella*’s hidden physical reality and of the lover’s passion as a festering wound. The theory of the grotesque and the philosophy of Lucretius jointly serve as a base for the main argument proposed in this thesis. Within elegy, the lover and the beloved are ostensibly presented as the ideal subject and object of a sublime passion, but they too are conceived as corporeal beings and are therefore tinged with the grotesque, for bodies in love cannot transcend the abject aspects of their physiology. The necessary corporeality of elegiac love complicates the polarity of ugliness and beauty that characterizes the relationships between the rival, the beloved and the lover, suggesting that the grotesque-sublime dialectic is found at the core of the genre and is generated by its very code.
In Chapter 2, I examine in detail the elegiac poems in which Catullus inveighs against the rival in love, in amicitia, and in poetry. Catullus degrades his opponents by locating their essence in “the lower stratum of the body”\textsuperscript{32} and by focusing on the crude realism of bodily functions. I do not intend to consider all references to ugliness but to focus on poems 69, 71 and the Gellius cycle, in which the theme of degradation is especially prominent. Catullus writes before elegy was organized as a genre by Gallus with its own rules of form and its own dramatic scenario. Yet the boldness of his lesson was not lost on the elegists. The shocking value of coarse physicality, the rhetorical strategies used to accomplish the depersonification of individuals, the punitive function of grotesque imagery are meant by Catullus – and in a somewhat attenuated form by the elegists – to give the impression of foreign intrusions into the conceptual domain of love, though they are in fact an unsavoury part of it, being generated by the same code.

In Chapter 3, I focus on Propertius’ treatment of the Illyrian praetor in poems 1.8, 2.16 and 3.20 and the lena in 4.5, and argue that Propertius uses grotesque imagery punitively to degrade his persona’s rival by means of his social debasement. The praetor may be wealthy and enjoy a high rank in public life, but he has no lasting values to offer Cynthia. Propertius describes him as a barbarian (2.16.27) – in the sense of both his foreign origin and his social behaviour – and compares him to an animal (2.16.8). I demonstrate that Propertius’ elegiac narrative of the Illyrian praetor is characterized by a crescendo of grotesque attributes that parallels the poet-lover’s increasing awareness of his own inability to retain Cynthia with his poetry. Propertius also uses grotesque aesthetic principles in his description of the lena in poem 4.5. The procuress is an obstacle to the poet-lover’s designs because she counsels the puella to seek the

\textsuperscript{32} Bakhtin (1968) 21.
satisfaction of material goods rather than the gratification of poetry (4.5. 57-8). In a way she is a foil for the poet himself who accomplishes her degradation by characterizing her as a grotesque hag moved by vile intentions. But his most sophisticated use of grotesque aesthetics is found in his creation of what we will call a grotesque ethos – that is to say a grotesque context into which he imports conventional elegiac vocabulary and imagery, bringing about a fusion of aesthetic ideals with their contraries, as manifestations on a high level of complexity of the same code that, at a lower level of complexity, generates each polarity by itself.

In Chapter 4, I consider Tibullus’ treatment of the rival, especially in 1.9. Tibullus represents his rival, the obstacle to his desired love affair, in a way that makes him appear physically and intellectually repugnant. The rival is old, foul, bestial and, above all, unintelligent (*stultissime*, 1.9.65). He is too stolid a figure to realize that while he is cuckolding the lover-poet, he is himself being cuckolded by his wife and a rival of his own (1.9.71-2). Tibullus is the first of the elegists to emphasize to such an extent the rival’s lack of intelligence as a repulsive attribute, and therefore, by dialectical implication, that the elegist belongs to a superior intellectual aristocracy, endowed with literary memory, including memory of his own poetry. We see this at play also in Tibullus’ *lena*, a witch-like creature, who prowls around graves and practices magic spells. In 1.5 she is the object of the poet’s curse and described as a grotesque figure in his imagination. Tibullus does not dwell on her physical appearance but imagines her performing grotesque actions: she eats blood-soaked food (1.5.49), drinks gall (1.5.50), looks for bones around graves (1.5.53-4), and runs through the city with naked crotch (1.5.55-6). Tibullus’ readers keep these grotesque images in mind when they meet
another *lena* in 2.6. The curses that the poet-lover promises to call down upon this new *lena* (2.6.54-5) remind us of the ones invoked in 1.5 and therefore bring into this poem the graves, blood and gore of the other. Here, however, Tibullus emphasizes the *lena*’s cleverness and her commitment to misuse her intelligence in the service of deceitful schemes (2.6.47-9). In this sense, she is a foil for the poet and therefore another grotesque rival. Tibullus’ own poetry in this regard is highly sophisticated. The allusive and self-allusive dimensions of its verses invite the reader to discern the logic of a grotesque imagination at work in segments of text that are in themselves ostensibly non-grotesque. With his sophisticated play of allusion and intertextuality, Tibullus accomplishes the elegiacization of the grotesque simultaneously with the grotesquification of elegy.

In chapter 5, I analyze Ovid’s use of grotesque conventions in the *Amores* and in his erotodidactic works. In *Amores* 3.8 Ovid presents the rival as an ignoble professional soldier whose wealth is the result of violence and deceit. Ovid describes him in terms of blood and gore in a way that manifests his own ideology as a *miles amoris*. Ovid wonders how a delicate and learned *puella* can possibly be attracted to such a vile and rough creature (3.8.11-12), allowing herself to be touched by blood-stained hands (3.8.15-16). The fact that she is attracted to the soldier can mean only that, though it is presented as repulsive, the grotesque is actually appealing to the *puella*, who as the beloved, is the fundamental character of amatory elegy. I argue that this appeal is essentially the same as that which moves the poet to describe the rival in the first place, and thus to write elegy. The erotic appeal of the grotesque is taken to its logical extreme in the story of Pasiphae’s desire to copulate with a bull (*Ars*. 1.2829-326). The rival suitor is not just seen through the metaphor of an animal but is literally an animal, and Pasiphae wishes herself to be an
animal so that she may love him properly. In Ovid the grotesque is explored to extremes that go beyond the other elegists and that frequently make use of their corpus as the literary memory of the grotesque. The narrative fulcrum of that corpus is the beloved herself, whose beauty and erotic appeal make her the most desirable being in the social world of elegy. But this beauty, Ovid playfully reveals, is all surface, the result of medicamina that conceals her real appearance from poet-lover the way that Pasiphae concealed hers from the bull. The derisive exaggeration of the elegiac scenario is the final example of the elegiac grotesque before the historical closure of the genre.

My intent is to reach in the separate chapters specific conclusions about the grotesque principles used by each poet in the elegiac tradition. In my general conclusion I shall turn to Ovid’s *Remedia Amoris*, reading it as an occasion to synthesize these principles into an argument for the centrality of grotesque aesthetics in our conception of elegy as a genre. Here I will draw upon Conte’s understanding of the role of contradiction in the logic of the elegiac genre to suggest that the essence of this argument is based on the logic of the genre itself. For Conte, however, that logic is a form of reason that goes into a state of tension whenever something apparently foreign, like the grotesque, is allowed to emerge into its domain. Going beyond Conte, I maintain that the sense of intrusiveness that accompanies the appearance of the grotesque in elegy, as is so clearly foregrounded by Ovid, is itself a product of the logic of elegy, as is the tension into which the logic itself appears to be thrown in the course of our interpretive act.

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33 Conte (1994).
Chapter One

Aspects of the Grotesque in Lucretius’ Diatribe Against Love

In his recent essay on the Lucretian sublime, James I. Porter has shown that in the *De Rerum Natura* the sense of the sublime is grounded in the idea of “perceptual fallacy.”¹ In our day-to-day relationship with the world, we rely on the ability of our senses to receive and interpret correctly the *simulacra* that reach us from external reality. But *simulacra* frequently give rise to impressions of grandeur and beauty that do not correspond to reality. Science, however, enables us to see the error implicit in our perceptions, deflating the sense of false sublimity that they generate, and enabling us to experience the true sublimity that lies in knowledge of nature. The experience of the sublime is based on the deflation of illusion and on the enlightenment of our minds. The enlightening experience of such knowledge is a call to greatness of soul and a liberation “from slavery to easy pleasure,” as Conte defines the didactic impact of the Lucretian sublime.² As they move from disillusion to enlightenment, Lucretius’ readers are invited

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¹ Porter’s (2007) article has the great merit of showing that the idea of the sublime, as the feeling of awe generated by the blending of “natural speculation with poetic insight” (2007, 175) has a long history before the classical treatise on the subject by Longinus. Following the lead of Longinus himself, who provides examples of sublime imagery from as far back as Homer, Porter shows that Lucretius is a central figure in the pre-Longinian history of the sublime and argues that Lucretian materialism leads logically to the idea of the sublime. He analyses the Lucretian sublime in terms of the relation between the cosmic void and the atom. Building on Porter’s interpretation, this chapter extends the idea of the sublime to Lucretius’ presentation of love and explores its poetic obverse in terms of the aesthetics of the grotesque, to which the aesthetics of the sublime is dialectically linked.

² Working from a Longinian perspective before Porter, Conte (1994) also recognized the presence of sublimity in *De Rerum Natura* and argued that Lucretius textualises his readers when he describes the greatness of soul that they are actually experiencing in their aesthetic encounter with the text. Sublime readers recognize their own feelings in the poem and see themselves inscribed in its verses (19). In this chapter we will extend Conte’s insight to show that, in the context of the diatribe against love, the sublime reader is also a reader of the grotesque that is similarly textualised in the poem.
to read the text as a commentary on their emotional experience. In the diatribe against love, Lucretius applies his deflationary and revelatory process to the perceptual fallacy of lovers in their deification of the beloved and in their understanding of love as the expression of a sublime sentiment. In order to accomplish his scientific exposure of the fallacy in the logic of lovers, Lucretius uses techniques of degradation identical with methods that are central to the aesthetics of the grotesque. In Lucretius the grotesque is the aesthetic process that takes the reader from false to true sublimity.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to show that in the philosophical discourse that immediately preceded the development of Roman amatory poetry there exists a cultural context that is amenable to a grotesque figuration of the quest for the sublimity of love. In Rome this discourse was dominated by Lucretius. It is therefore convenient to locate the starting point of this project in Lucretius’ diatribe against love in Book 4 of the De Rerum Natura. Lucretius writes just before the period of Roman literary history in which Latin love poetry develops as a genre in its own right. His chronological priority invites scrutiny of the treatment of love in the De Rerum Natura. This study explores Lucretius’ diatribe in connection with the grotesque and seeks to show that, just as in modern philosophy and physics, the De Rerum Natura has much that resonates familiarly in the critical discourse on the aesthetics of the grotesque.

Working independently but each in tune with a branch of modern thought, a number of theoretically informed classicists have argued that Lucretius is an ideal contemporary of the modern reader on various fronts. In his systematic effort to dispel

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3 Conte (1994), 19.
unfounded fears, Lucretius sought to provide man with a knowledge base that could be the source of rational delight. In examining that base, scholars have found that Lucretius readily engages in dialogue with modern philosophy, psychology, and physics. A reason for this, as Porter observes, may be that the pleasures that he seeks to make available to his readers “fall out of the framework of time itself” and hence have relevance for different periods of history, including the contemporary. One such source of knowledge, I shall argue in this chapter, is aesthetic, that is, the pleasure resulting from the poetic contemplation of love as perceived through the epistemic filters of materialism, which are remarkably close to those employed by modern theorists of the grotesque. Lucretius, however, also dialogues with the poetry and natural philosophy of the centuries that preceded him, especially in the expository genres that united poetry and philosophy. Accordingly we begin our study of the Lucretian grotesque by examining aspects of the tradition that helped shape his philosophical outlook as well as his poetic imagination.

His most ancient literary and philosophical forerunner was Empedocles. Long before Lucretius, Empedocles had employed grotesque and sublime imagery in natural philosophy in his description of the void filled with sentient human and animal body parts floating aimlessly about:

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ἡ πολλαὶ μὲν κόρσαι ἄναψεν ἐβλάστησαν,
γυμνοὶ δ᾿ ἔπλαξοντο βραχίόνες εὐνδής ὄμων,
δηματὰ τ᾿ οἱ ἐπλανάτο πενητεύοντα μετώπων. (fr. 64 / 57)
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5 Porter (2005), 122.
6 Sedley (1998, 23) argues that Lucretius considers Empedocles, who had cast his natural philosophy in hexameters, a literary forebear and shows that the De Rerum Natura may be read as a conscious imitation of Empedocles’ poem. We can add to his argument that Empedocles was a precursor of Lucretius also with reference to the fusion of scientific theory and grotesque aesthetics.
7 The text, numbering of the fragments, and translation are cited from Inwood’s (2001) edition. I follow this edition first of all because it is based on the assumption that there is only one poem rather than two, and secondly because its translation aims “to save as much of the meaning as possible” even if at the expense of poetic texture (Inwood 2001, 6 and 4, respectively).
As many heads without necks sprouted up
and arms wandered naked, bereft of shoulders,
and eyes roamed alone, impoverished of foreheads.

When they collide (ταύτα τε συμπίπτεσκον, ὃπη συνέκυρον ἔκαστα, ‘and these things came together as each happened to meet,’ fr. 65 / 59), love at times unites them into monstrous creatures, incongruous combinations of animal and human limbs:

πολλὰ μὲν ἀμφιπρόσωπα καὶ ἀμφίστερα φύεθαι,
βουγενὴ ἀνδρόσιμωρα, τὰ δ’ ἐμπαλιν ἐξανετέλλειν ἀνδροφυὴ βούκρανα, μεμειγμένα τῷ μὲν ἀπ’ ἄνδρων τῷ δὲ γυναικοφυὴ σκιεροῖς ἑκατέτελλα γυίοις. (fr. 66 / 61)

Many with two faces and two chests grew,
oxlike with men’s faces, and again there came up androids with ox-heads, mixed in one way from men and in another way in female form, outfitted with shadowy limbs.

These lack stability and eventually disappear from the world. But when the proper parts come together, love enables them to form whole-natured animals or human beings, progenitors of our human and animal species. The Empedoclean image of the beginning of life on earth is one of the primordial sublime that establishes the possibility of viewing both the body and love through the filter of a grotesque imagination that subjectivizes body parts, driven by love despite their aimless motion, and then subjects them to the power of a love that frequently conjoins them into monstrosities. Through the corporification of desire Empedocles affirms that love was already de-sublimized when it made its primordial appearance in the cosmos.

Lucretius worked in the philosophical and literary tradition of Empedocles.

Cicero implicitly acknowledged as much when he juxtaposed Lucretius’ name with that

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8 Cf. also Empedocles, frr. 64/57, 65/59, 66/61, 67/62.
9 It is generally agreed that Lucretius’ main poetic model is Empedocles. See Volk (2002, 72, n.6) who gives a summary of the scholarship. Citing Sedley (1998) as well as Tatum (1984), Wöhrle (1991), and
of Empedocles, a fact that, as Sedley has argued, “constitutes strong evidence” that informed readers could recognize the similarities. Lucretius’ discussion of love is rooted in a mode of thinking that makes analogous use of a grotesque perspective in philosophical poetry, albeit focused on the human body and its inner workings. Lucretius, however, also worked in the materialist tradition of Epicurus, and his commitment to the doctrines of Epicurus was profound, though his adherence to Epicureanism was somewhat problematic with respect to both contemporary Epicureans and Epicurus himself. Lucretius remained loyal to Epicurus in privileging natural philosophy over all other areas of human thought. Yet he entrusts his philosophical doctrine to verse, despite the fact that Epicurus himself was generally believed to have been inimical to poetry tout court. However, as recent scholars have shown, this view can by no means be taken for granted.

The Epicurean tradition had indeed developed considerably since the time of Epicurus. Under Philodemus the arts were not disparaged in the same way and were granted “a modest degree of positive value.” Philodemus adapted Epicureanism to

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10 Q. fr. 2. 9.4: Lucretii poemata, ut scribis, ita sunt: multis luminibus ingenii, multae etiam artis. ed, cum veneris, virum te putabo, si Sallustii Empedoclea legeris, hominem non putabo.
12 Lucretius had apparently no connections with any contemporary Epicureans. He worked in isolation. Castner (1988, 37) argues that in fact “no solid evidence” has been brought forth to show that Lucretius participated in any Epicurean community.
13 In choosing to elaborate his Epicureanism in verse, Lucretius supposedly went against a direct teaching of Epicurus against poetry. For scholars who accepted this view, Lucretius and Epicurus could not be reconciled on their respective attitudes to poetry, Castner (1988, 37). However, the simple fact that in the Villa dei Papiri there may be a copy of the De Rerum Natura should at least raise the possibility that, in the Epicurean library, the hostility towards philosophical poetry was not as strong as is generally assumed. As Dirk Obbink puts it, the view that Epicurus was hostile to all poetry is “anecdotally preserved” in Diogenes Laertius but is not actually attested in the extant fragments of Epicurus (Obbink 1995, 193). Michael Wigodsky (1995, 61) is correct in believing that it is at least possible to suppose that Epicurus’s statements on the subject were “elliptical and ambiguous,” similar perhaps to those of Philodemus.
14 Sedley (2009), 40. David Sider (1995, 57) is correct in maintaining that, in his epigrams, Philodemus creates “a poetic amalgam of philosophy” which shows that poetry can incorporate philosophy by turning
Roman society and made room for the arts in the life of the Epicurean student. However, he believed that poetry should not be confused with philosophy because verse was not a proper vehicle for education. In his view, the appreciation of poetry should not be predicated on ethical and educational criteria, even when the content and form are appropriately harmonized. His perception of the kind of poetry represented by Lucretius remains uncertain, but it is clear, as Gigante has argued, that in his final evaluation of poetry Philodemus privileged aesthetic refinement over instructional aims.

Lucretius went a step further in the development of Epicureanism, choosing poetry as the sole vehicle for the exposition of his Master’s philosophy. His adherence to Epicureanism was conducive to the consideration of love in physical terms, by means of poetic images designed to uncover the essence of phenomena that lay hidden beneath the visible surface. He studied hard, Lucretius says to his addressee Memmius, to find the appropriate linguistic and rhetorical means.

In Rome that tradition was by no means homogeneous. By the first century BC, Rome had become a place where different philosophies in contiguous service to the same patrons functioned as reciprocal catalysts of change, giving rise to different streams of the same thought. This was also true of Epicureanism, as is clear from the Roman prosopography of Epicurus gathered by Castner (1988). In this new philosophical climate, for example, Philodemus in On Arrogance could cite approvingly the non-Epicurean philosopher Ariston. It is not clear whether the Ariston in question was Stoic or Peripatetic, but he was certainly not an Epicurean (Sedley 2009, 39). In its diaspora to Rome, Epicureanism rethought its heritage and realigned its future development, also dealing with subjects “less familiar to Epicurus,” (Gigante 1995, 16). Rawson (1985) remains a fundamental study of the intellectual background of the Roman literary public, though it does not deal extensively with poetry.

Philodemus is anything but inimical to Lucretius, with whom he had “common roots” (Gigante 1995, 36). The relevance of Philodemus’ position to Lucretius lies in the fact that Philodemus does not spurn philosophical poetry, saying merely that it should not be regarded as a substitute for philosophy. As a literary theorist, Philodemus is in dialogue with other critics, his own work being structured as a critique of recent theories of poetry viewed from a single position (Janko 2000, 191). Philodemus identifies poetry as a distinct area of research that cannot be reduced to either the exterior form of individual works at the expense of their thematic content, and vice versa.
In his discussion of love, the terms and images used by Lucretius are analogous to those occasionally employed by contemporary practitioners of Roman amatory poetry and are akin to fundamental concepts and categories of the theorists of the grotesque. The similarity suggests that Lucretius and the theorists of the grotesque can jointly serve as a basis for the analysis of Latin elegiac poetry from the perspective of the physicality of love and lovers. Within elegy, the lover and the beloved are ostensibly presented as the ideal subject and object of a sublime passion, but they too are conceived as corporeal beings and are therefore tinged with the grotesque, for bodies cannot transcend the coarse aspects of their physiology. The beloved’s corporality is for the elegists a locus for the de-sublimization of love.

After a preliminary discussion of the nature of appetite, I will turn to the diatribe, focusing on Lucretius’ philosophy of love as an appetite that does not lead to satiety. I will examine a number of programmatic passages to show that Lucretius develops his theory of love in a manner that looks forward to basic principles of the theory of the grotesque and the abject. I will then focus on Lucretius’s treatment of the wounds of love, and argue that he debunks the metaphorical world of conventional love poetry by reducing it to its literal images of violent injury. At this point I will examine Lucretius’ view of love as infection and disease, resulting from the wounds of love that fester when left unattended. Finally I will examine Lucretius’ discussion of the beloved, focusing on the intrusive nature of smell, as an unconcealable symptom of her physicality, in opposition to idealization of her body and sentimentalization of her love.

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17 In the first century BC, the Latin language did not have equivalent technical terms for Greek scientific words. Lucretius constructed a vocabulary capable of showing the hidden nature of reality by means of the mental images suggested by the words. Kennedy (2002, 73) is right in arguing that Lucretius is in pursuit of a language that will induce his readers “to see ‘things’ as they ‘really’ are.”
In order to reveal the perceptual fallacy of lovers and the insubstantiality of their fictional world, Lucretius focuses on the interior organs of the body and on abject aspects of their operation, and in this he is typically grotesque. The grotesque imagination moves in domains forbidden by both polite society and poetic conventions, penetrating under make-up, clothing and the skin itself. This intrusive aspect of the grotesque, as we shall see, is especially relevant to Lucretius, who, in his diatribe against love, even more daringly than modern theorists, locates his readers’ perspective inside the human body. This is not merely additive with respect to ways of depicting the grotesque but qualitatively significant, since, as we shall see, the addition of olfaction to the amatory sensorium raises the possibility of externalizing the grotesque interior of the beloved’s otherwise beautiful body by means of smells emanating from within it and penetrating into the body of lover the moment he senses it. In his exploration of the material base of the human emotions that are the stuff of amatory poetry, Lucretius invites his readers to consider love from within the body and to visualize the body’s inner workings as the explanation of the phenomenon. In doing so, Lucretius brings together the Latin and Greek vocabulary of love and the conceptual framework of Epicurean materialism in a manner that, as we shall see, is suggestive of the aesthetics of the grotesque body and goes even beyond it. Lucretius, in fact, devotes considerable space to the phenomenon of offensive smell which, though highly effective in undermining poetic idealizations of the human body and hence inherently grotesque, is virtually passed over in silence by theorists of the grotesque as the olfactory equivalent of ugliness.18

18 In the misogynist discourse of the Middle Ages, the penetrative potential of the malodoursness of the bodies of women was frequently used to debase the love relationship. See Bettella (2005), 21-25.
Love as Sexual Desire and Sexual Appetite

The Lucretian treatment of love is dispassionate and devoid of romance and idealizations. Love is sexual instinct and gratification, and both of these are natural functions of the body that can be explained in purely physical terms. As a natural philosopher, Lucretius reduces love to the “raw facts,” which are no more than physiological phenomena. The themes on which he concentrates the reader’s attention concern the nature of love, understood as a physiological process that involves the movement of fluids in the body and the transmission of simulacra from one body to another. Presented in the context of Lucretius’ discussion of a general Epicurean theory of appetite and thirst, love is viewed under the guise of the physiology of erotic instincts. Lucretius’ usual procedure is to present new ideas with reference to principles that he has already explored and are familiar to his readers. In this case, the physiology of thirst and hunger serves as a conceptual base for his exploration of love. It also serves as a source of analogies for the description of particular details:

propterea capitum cibus ut suffulcit artus
et recreet viris interdatus, atque patentem
per membran um acti venas ut amorem obturet edendi.
umor item discendit in omnia quae loca cumque
poscunt umor: multa vaporis
corpora, quae stomacho praebent incendia nostro,
dissipat adveniens liquor ac restignant ut ignem,
ure ne possit calor amplius aridus artus.
sic igitur tibi anhela sitis de corpore nostro
abluuit, sic expletur ieiuna cupidio.20 (4.867-76)

19 By means of this organizational principle, Lucretius links disparate parts of the De Rerum Natura in a very economical and effective way. The result is that ideas that are at first sight very different are logically intertwined. However, as Brown also observes, this logic is “more rhetorical than philosophical,” Brown (1987), 44.
20 Unless otherwise stated, I follow Bailey’s OCT for text of the De Rerum Natura.
In this description of the physical mechanics of hunger and thirst we note that there is, as expected, an abundance of corporeal terms: *artus, membra ac venas, corpora, stomacho.* Mixed within the description of the body in a state of hunger and thirst, moreover, is language normally associated with the poetic discourse of love: *amorem* and *cupido* are words for love, while *ignem, incendia, urere* and *calor* belong to its metaphorical vocabulary.\(^{21}\) The co-occurrence of the vocabulary of love and the vocabulary of the body, and especially of ingestion, suggests that for Lucretius the two phenomena can be treated on the same plane and foreshadows his employment of the former to explain the latter. At this point in the poem, Lucretius has not yet focused on love but conditions the reader to expect a treatment of love in equally physical terms. Already *amorem...edendi,* at the end of the first thought in this passage, and *ieiuna cupido,* emphatically placed in final position, make explicit the link between love and appetite.

It is also important to note that the passage concerns the interior of the body, and that the imagination of the reader is invited to reflect on the body’s operation, a fact that will become increasingly significant in the discussion of love, as it suggests a conceptual environment hospitable to the modern aesthetics of the grotesque. We observe that the operation of the body contemplated here consists of ingestion, digestion, and expulsion, all of which are typically grotesque preoccupations.\(^{22}\) In particular, the occurrence of

\(^{21}\) Cf. e.g. in the elegiac corpus: *ignes* – Prop.1.9.17, Ov. *Ars.*1.573, *Rem.*453; *urere* – Tib. 2.6.5, 1.8.7, 2.14.5, Ov. *Am.* 1.1.26, 1.2.43, 2.9.5, 2.18.3, *Ars.* 1.23; *calor* – Prop.1.12.17, 3.8.9, Ov. *Ars.*1.237. Cf. *calere* – Tib.1.10.53, Ov. *Am.* 3.6.83. For these and other references see Pichon (1902), 165f, 301, 97, respectively.

\(^{22}\) See, e.g Bakhtin (1968), 163 where all the activities concerned with the *viscera* are discussed as fundamental aspects of grotesque realism, and see, moreover, 281 where the apparently innocent activities of eating and drinking are shown to be “the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body.” See also Remshardt (2004), 143.
amorem and umor (as well as umorem) in such close proximity hints at the explanation to come of amor in terms of liquids moving within the body.  

Lucretius introduces his readers to the basic premises of his argument in a discussion of dreams, which opens with the image of a thirsty person (sitiens, 4.1024) whose desire to quench his thirst is so strong that he would drink a whole river:

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\text{flumen item sitiens aut fontem propter amoenum adsidet et totum prope faucibus occupat annem. puri}^{25} \text{ saepe lacum propter si ac dolia curta somno devincti credunt se extollere vestem, totius umorem saccatum corporis fundunt, cum Babylonica magnifico splendore rigantur. tum quibus aetatis freta primitus insinuatur semen, ubi ipsa dies membris matura creavit, conveniunt simulacra foris e corpore quoque nuntia praeclari vultus pulchrique coloris, qui ciet irritans loca turgida semine multo, ut quasi transactis saepe omnibus rebus profundant fluminis ingentis fluctus vestemque cruentent. (4.1024-1036)}
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Though scripted largely in the indicative mood (e.g. adsidet...occupat, 4.1025), which is the mood of reality, the episode describes a fantasy scene. Framed by flumen and fontem in 1024 and fluminis and fluctus in 1036, this passage places fluid imagery in the foreground of the readers’ imagination, which moves quickly inward from the beautiful stream of the locus amoenus to the abject fluids that run through the vessels in the interior.

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23 On this see Friedländer (1941); Snyder (1980), 94, esp. n.31; Brown (1987), 64. See also Gale (2001). This connection of amor and umor continues also amongst the elegists, albeit in a less overt manner. Pichon (1902, 299) includes umida in his list as an adjective used to describe faces and eyes wet with tears: cf. Prop.3.6.17. Pichon also mentions that elegiac oscula can be umida: Tib.1.8.37.

24 Schrijvers (1985) argues that Lucretius’ approach to dreams is an eclectic one, using source materials from the medical and philosophical tradition. This reinforces the relationship between Lucretius and modern theories of the grotesque which, insofar as the body is concerned, are largely based on the classical medical tradition. See Bakhtin (1968), 355-60.

25 Bailey (1947, ad loc.) argues that puri cannot be taken as a contraction for pueri, because there is no evidence elsewhere for such a contraction. He also rejects Giussani’s (1896) interpretation of puri as “innocent” and hence as “children.” Bailey observes that the contrast is “not between two ages, but between two kinds of dreams.” I follow Bailey’s text, though the difference in interpretation has no consequence for my argument.
of the body. Lucretius uses fluid imagery throughout the De Rerum Natura in his
discussion of numerous themes, but in his dream sequence he gives it great prominence
in a variety of contexts.\textsuperscript{26} The passage is a discussion of the two bodily fluids of urine and semen. Coming as it does right before Lucretius’ diatribe against love, this discussion compels the reader to consider the phenomenon of love from a perspective rooted in the interior liquids of the body, which need to be expelled. When desire is very intense, it dominates the mind even in dreams, and this holds true, Lucretius argues, whether the object of desire is nourishment or sex.

By means of the term \textit{sitiens} (4.1024) Lucretius reminds the reader of his earlier discussion of appetite and thirst as desires. The passage goes on to describe how in dreams the urge to urinate can be so strong as to cause some to wet their beds (\textit{somno…/ totius umorem saccatum corporis fundunt}, 4.1027-8).\textsuperscript{27} On a similar plane, sexual desire in dreams can be so intense as to cause \textit{aduluscentes} (\textit{aetatis freta}, 4.1031) to ejaculate in their sleep. In the Epicurean tradition, the process involves two steps: first, \textit{semen} mysteriously arises throughout the body of young men when they reach maturity\textsuperscript{28} and then swells up the areas in which it gathers (\textit{loca turgida semine multo}, 4.1034).

\textsuperscript{26} For David West, the significance of fluid imagery in the \textit{De Rerum Natura} is such that the movement of fluids may be regarded as a metaphorical paradigm for studying even non-fluid images. West (1969, 88) regards “the fluidity of images” as a critical category that can enable the reader to grasp the essence of Lucretius’ creative use of imagery. On this model, the grotesque treatment of love in the diatribe figures as an excellent example of Lucretius’ creative process, in which images of moving fluids behave as if they were themselves metaphorically fluid in the body of the poem.

\textsuperscript{27} Brown (1994) includes a detailed analysis of Lucretian bed-wetters without mentioning, however, any links to the grotesque.

\textsuperscript{28} In this argument Lucretius is in alignment with Hippocrates (\textit{Genit.} 8), who also held that \textit{semen} originates throughout the body, though it gathers in a small region during sexual arousal. On this interpretation of \textit{Genit.} 8, cf the scholiast, cited in Leonard and Smith (1942, 614). Further support is also found in Bailey (1947, 1301), who adds that \textit{decedit corpore toto} (4.1042) accurately reproduces Democritus’ view on the subject as adopted by Epicurus.
"Simulacra" of the beloved enter the body and irritate those places of tumescence, causing the urge to have sex.

Physiologically speaking, thirst and hunger are forms of desire for satiety that can be fulfilled by means of ingestion. In contrast, sexual desire does not involve the incorporation of external materials, like food and water, but the expulsion of an internal material, the *semen* that accumulates in the body during the arousal. The original stimulus for the arousal is the *simulacrum* of the beloved which first enters the mind and body of the lover through the eyes. *Simulacra*, however, are unlike food in that they do not cause satiety but increase the desire for their bodily source.

From a literary perspective, the physicalisation of love in this dream sequence and its comparison with the ingestion of food and drink suggest a reading of Lucretius’ philosophical discourse on love in relation to the fundamental precepts of grotesque poetics. As we shall see, throughout this thesis, ingestion and expulsion are central to the grotesque conception of the human body, as is the subsequent invitation to explore imaginatively the interior and lower parts of the body. The comparison of *simulacra* to food and drink draws them immediately to the lower strata of the body and taints them with suggestive features of abjection. *Simulacra* are neither consumed nor expelled by the body, but cause *semen* to grow within it and give rise to the urge to expel it in order to achieve satisfaction. From an aesthetic perspective, the physicalisation of love in terms of natural bodily functions causes the readers to consider imaginatively their own physiology in analogy to the one described in the text. Just as readers of poetry of the sublime become sublime readers, in Conte’s sense of the term, in that they experience by empathy the noble passions that are described in the text, so readers of the deflated
sublime become grotesque readers, who recognize, and linger imaginatively on, their own abject physiology scripted in the poet’s verses.

As the terms *fontem ... amoenum* (4.1024) make immediately clear, the dream sequence opens with the image of a *locus amoenus*, a literary landscape that carries with it the expectation of a sexual initiation. In antiquity *amoenus* was semantically linked to *amor*, as we can deduce from an etymology by Varro preserved by Isidore: *amoena loca* Varro dicta ait eo quod solum amorem praestant et ad se amanda adliciant.29 The linguistic relationship between *amoenus* and *amor* marks the setting of the Lucretian dream as an ideal landscape suggestive of an imminent erotic encounter. A further implication is that the *sitiens* is figured, initially at least, as the potential protagonist of such a meeting, partaking of the amorous suggestiveness of the ambient. The reason for this expected characterization of the *sitiens* is that those who find themselves in *loca amoena* frequently have explicit erotic roles to play, either subjects or objects of love. Even though the *sitiens* is neither a lover nor a beloved, the amorous literary tradition behind the *locus* of his dream raises the expectation of some erotic act. Such an expectation, however, is no sooner raised than is deflated, since there is no erotic encounter and the *locus* is immediately befouled by a grotesque ethos. The dreamer’s impulse to drink the whole river is tantamount to the desire to devour the world that is central to the Bakhtinian idea of the grotesque.30 The thirst of the dreaming *sitiens* is itself of such grotesque proportions that, in order to satisfy it, he would destroy by ingestion the *locus amoenus* in which he finds himself. The sense of the grotesque is intensified by the description of urination that immediately precedes Lucretius’

30 As Bakhtin (1968, 317) reminds us, the grotesque body “swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world.”
description of the dynamics of the boy’s ejaculation while dreaming of love. From an aesthetic point of view, the sense of the grotesque is achieved by the incorporation of the literary topos of the *locus amoenus* in a way that intentionally distorts its original meaning by essentially enclosing it in a new form. The resulting *deformazione* of the *locus amoenus* shifts the focus of the readers’ attention from the literal to the figurative order – which, ironically, is the order of materialism – causing them to re-conceptualize love as a species of physical appetite and inducing them to change the image of a beautiful literary landscape into that of a mass of material going through the digestive system.31

Lucretius develops the analogy between appetite and love to demonstrate that the latter, that is to say sexual appetite, cannot be appeased as easily as the former, that is to say hunger. According to Lucretius, the reason why the desire for food and water can be satisfied is that the substances ingested fill up the interior regions of the body where the sensation of emptiness is strongest, *hoc facile expletur laticum frugumque cupido* (4.1093). Erotic appetite cannot be satisfied because only *simulacra* of the beloved enter the lover’s body, and though *simulacra* are of a material nature, they cannot fill up any space. For this reason, love resembles more closely the sensation of a man who attempts to quench his real thirst in a dream. The simulacrum of water that is available in his dream can have no effect on his thirst:

\[
\text{ut bibere in somnis sitiens cum quaerit et umor}
\]
\[
\text{non datur, ardoem qui membris stinguere possit,}
\]

31 The concept of *deformazione* is a critical category denoting the transformative, misrepresentative and de-formative rethinking of a literary motif or textual passage from the perspective of the work that incorporates it. See Cairns (2006, 82n.57,104-106, and *passim*), who uses the concept to examine specific Gallan passages in Propertius, and Keith (2008, 65-66), who uses it to study the phenomenon of incorporation across generic boundaries. Both Cairns and Keith utilize the concept of *deformazione* in the context of Propertian elegy. The concept, however, is also applicable to Lucretius, or indeed to any other author who incorporates and intentionally misrepresents the intent of another text.
Like Tantalus, the thirsty man who dreams of drinking will remain frustrated in every attempt to satisfy his thirst (*frustraque laborat*, 4.1099). Lucretius has transposed the physiology of appetite and thirst into the realm of dreaming in order to show that all appetites are frustrated when one attempts to satisfy them with *simulacra*.

The proximity of *umor* to *ardorem* (4.1097-8) which derives directly from the language of love, functions as a pun and anticipates Lucretius’ discussion of *amor* in terms of *umores*. The image of a man standing in the middle of a torrent, that is to say of flowing liquids that recall the inner workings of his body, is further conducive to a discussion of love in terms of *umores* and *simulacra*. If the thirsty man could drink water rather than *laticum simulacra* (4.1099), his efforts to satisfy his thirst would not be in vain. This is not possible for him in a dream, though it certainly is when he is awake. Lovers, however, feel as frustrated as thirsty dreamers because they can fill themselves only with *simulacra* of their beloved. The comparison of love and thirst justifies the occurrence of *torrenti* (4.1100) as a reference to the emotional turmoil that accompanies frustrated love. This contrasts pointedly with the earlier image at the beginning of the dream sequence. There the desire to drink a whole river, a *fons amoenus* (4.1024), was

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32 On the Lucretian allusion to Tantalus, there is a considerable amount of scholarship that can be adduced in support of the argument presented here. Particularly relevant is Hardie (1988, 82 n.27 and 28), who identifies the allusion to Tantalus and describes his insatiability in terms of the theory of *simulacra*, which can satisfy neither hunger nor sexual appetite. Gale (1994, 183) also identifies Tantalus, showing moreover that *in medio flumine* is an echo of Homer (*Od*. 11.582-592) and that it contributes to the satirical view of romantic love in the diatribe, to which we would add only that Lucretius’ ridicule invests love poetry as well. Betensky (1980, 295 n.19) is essentially in agreement since she sees in this Lucretian passage the presence of an “un-named Tantalus type” representing insatiability. None of these scholars, however, explicitly relates the idea of insatiability to those of excess and physicality and hence to the aesthetics of the grotesque, as in the present chapter. It is worth mentioning, moreover, that the Lucretian passage is linked to Propertius and Ovid: Prop.1.9.14-15 has a Tantalus-like *insanus* as a frustrated lover seeking water in *medio flumine*, and Ovid in *Am*. 2.2.43-44 describes a similar situation, *quaerit aquas in aquis*. Propertius and Ovid may well have had this passage of the *De Rerum Natura* in mind.
not cast as an image of emotional turmoil but as a confident pursuit of satisfaction. Here instead the lover is frustrated. The Lucretian philosophy of love is a theory of this frustration explored in terms of the body’s incorporation of and material response to the *simulacra* of the beloved, which instead of gratifying his erotic desire leave him with an even greater feeling of emptiness.

The effect of *simulacra* is to increase the intensity of the desire and not to gratify it (*nec satiare queunt*, 4.1102). *Simulacra* are a central theme of Book IV, and their significance in Lucretius’ argument must be duly emphasized. That the *simulacra* of the beloved have no gratifying potential for the lover is for Lucretius a condition *sine qua non* of the diatribe against love.\(^{33}\) The fact that Venus teases lovers with *simulacra* introduces an element of mockery into the discussion.

\[
\text{sic in amore Venus simulacris ludit amantis,} \\
\text{nec satiare queunt spectando corpora coram} \\
\text{nec manibus quicquam teneris abradere membris} \\
\text{possunt errantes incerti corpore toto.} \quad (4.1101-04)
\]

Taken together with the analogical image of the lover as a thirsty man unable to quench his thirst in the middle of a river, the image of Venus sporting with lovers who are incapable of satisfying their erotic desires resonates with allusions to the myth of Tantalus. Lovers’ attempts to achieve fulfillment are comparable to Tantalus’ attempts to satisfy his thirst. But whereas Tantalus was assigned that fate by Jupiter as a form of punishment, here the lovers are victims of Venus’ mockery. As the goddess of love, it is she who frustrates lovers; but insofar as she is a personification of love, she is a part of every lover, and what she represents is love itself. The implication of this allusion is that

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\(^{33}\) Brown (1987), *passim.*
love is its own source of frustration. By means of the concept of *simulacra*, Lucretius explains how the frustration occurs and why it is inevitable.

When the Lucretian lovers actually come together in the urge to overcome that emptiness by fusing their bodies into one, we are presented with a theory of love and love-making amenable to an analysis from the perspective of grotesque aesthetics.

> denique cum membris conlatis flore fruuntur aetatis, iam cum praesagit gaudia corpus atque in eost Venus ut muliebria conserat arva, adfigunt avide corpus iunguntque salivas oris et inspirant pressantes dentibus ora, nequiquam, quoniam nil inde abradere possunt nec penetrare et abire in corpus corpore toto (4.1105-1111)

A very striking feature of this passage is that we are presented with a body that thinks (*praesagit...corpus*, 4.1106), not through a mind that can be conceived separately from it, but through its own physical constitution. By coupling *praesagit* with *gaudia* and *corpus*, Lucretius emphasizes that the experience of enjoyment and the presentiment of the future are physical phenomena. Because in classical Latin *praesagit* and *gaudia* are primarily used to describe experiences of the mind, while here they are used to describe bodily experiences, it is clear that in Lucretius’ understanding of Epicurean philosophy the activity of the mind, including its experience of joy and its ability to intuit things to come, is materialist, i.e. it is only a function of the body.34 Lucretius’ use of the words *gaudia* and *praesagit* thus represents a lowering of the higher activities of the mind into the physiological workings of the body and implies a subjectification of the body that recalls the sentient Empedoclean body parts driven to roam the void by their desire to be united.

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34 See *OLD* s.v. *gaudium* 1, defined as “joy, delight, gladness,” which are psychological states rather than bodily experiences; s.v. *praesagio* 1, defined as “to feel a presentiment of, apprehend,” which are cognitive rather than bodily experiences.
In the lines that follow, Lucretius offers us a theory of love which is all about the lovers’ attempt to absorb, and to be absorbed by, each other’s body, transgressing the boundaries of their own. Lucretius describes such erotic encounters with images of sexual aggressiveness that mimic acts of cannibalism. In line 1108 two verbs of joining are arranged around the word for body, *adfigunt avide corpus iunguntque salivas*.

Although they may force their bodies together greedily (*avide*, 4.1108), the lover and his beloved are unable to become one, and their bodies will continue to be distinct: *adfigunt* designates the action of bringing together but does not connote complete interpenetration or imbrication. As Maggie Kilgour argues, images of cannibalism in an act of incorporation signal at once the desire to affirm and to overcome the distinction between the inside and the outside of the bodies. Only the saliva of Lucretius’ lovers cannot be distinguished. The lovers’ inability to penetrate fully into each other’s body remains of course, as Brown observes, “wryly paradoxical” since *penetrare* implies sexual intercourse.

The mechanistic attempt to join one body to the other is a reference to Aristophanes’ account of love in Plato’s *Symposium* as arising from the urge to integrate by intercourse two human beings into the physical unity of their supposed original whole. Lucretius’ lovers respond to the same urge and similarly fail in the attempt.

Instead of achieving the experience of unity, the only thing that they manage to join is

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35 The opposition between the inside and the outside of the body, so basic to the psychological culture of sexual relations (Kilgour 1990, 4), is fundamental to the Lucretian diatribe against love. Propelled by the desire to incorporate the beloved, lovers attempt to collapse the opposition, but in the process engage only in an abject mimicry of cannibalism.
37 Brown interprets the term metaphorically, although, according to Adams (1982, 151), the verb is not an overtly sexual word in the classical period. The OLD and Lewis & Short do not give a sexual meaning in the definition of *penetrare*.
38 Plato *Smp.* 191d.
their saliva, *salivas / oris*. In accordance with his materialistic view of the phenomenon of love, Lucretius describes the mouths of the lovers as if they were mimicking their sexual organs in the coital act, which involves mixing bodily fluids. The *salivas / oris* are the fluids that are most closely associated with appetite, and the use of the image here underscores the similarity between sexual appetite and the appetite for food. The focus of the entire scene is the mouth, the orifice through which bodily appetite is satisfied. This concentration of attention on the mouth is an example of the Lucretian propensity to revel in the grotesque, since the mouth is one of the fundamental focal points of the grotesque imagination. The exchange of saliva occurring when the two mouths come together (*iunguntque salivas / oris, 4.1108-9*) is an apt metaphor for the sexual act, to the figuration of which it adds an element of abjection, for the ingestion of another person’s saliva is a clearly abject prospect. The focus on saliva momentarily, but effectively, induces the readers into identifying with the characters and causes them to undergo the experience of a grotesque self-reflection. In fact, we involuntarily swallow our own saliva thousands of times a day, but only because it does not first come out of our mouths. Like all other bodily fluids, even our own saliva becomes abject as soon as it leaves the mouth; the thought of ingesting it at that point provokes a feeling of revulsion, a reaction that would be greatly compounded if the saliva were to come from somebody else’s mouth. In the situation described by Lucretius, the lovers engage in an act of mutual abjection.

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39 In terms of grotesque hierarchy, Bakhtin (1968, 317) locates the mouth in third position after the genitals and the bowels.
40 Hyde (1997), 212.
41 The elegists’ *umida oscula* are related to the Lucretian mixing of saliva and, as a theme, retain part of its abject characteristic, but, as we shall see in later chapters, in an aesthetic purview that renders the grotesque less crude.
Lucretius fully exploits the suggestive power of this image, revealing an aesthetic sensitivity that is decidedly grotesque. The next line, in fact, starts with *oris* and ends with *ora*. The two most conspicuous positions of the line are assigned to the same word for mouth. But we also note that between them are teeth and the action of breathing. In other words, the line suggests by the arrangement of its words the shape of the lover’s panting mouth that it describes. In this configuration of the image we note that *dentibus* (4.1109) suggests that kissing is a ravenous act in which the lovers attempt to devour each other, since the teeth are used for biting and chewing. In Catullus and the elegists, we shall find the same image transformed into love bites, both aggressive and tender.\(^{42}\) Here, however, no tenderness is implied, as conveyed by *pressantes* (4.1109) which suggests force rather than the nibbling of a lip. We also note that *inspirant* (4.1109) indicates an action of breathing in each other’s breath that parallels the absorption of each other’s saliva.

The mixing of saliva and breath is all that lovers can actually achieve in their effort to possess and devour each other’s bodies. For Lucretius, complete bodily fusion is impossible: *nequiquam, quoniam nihil inde abradere possunt /nec penetrare et abire in corpus corpore toto* (4.1110-1). In fact, *abradere* and *penetrare* are verbs that presuppose aggressive physicality. *Abire* also has the value of a physical verb because it is immediately followed by the corporeal polyptoton *corpus corpore*. The lovers must fail in their attempt to achieve complete possession of each other’s bodies. All that the lover can rub off (*abradere*, 4.1110) the beloved’s body is a *simulacrum* that has the sole effect of intensifying his sexual appetite.

\(^{42}\) Cf. Catul.8: *quem basiabis? cui labella mordebis?*
Lucretius’ account of Epicurus’ natural philosophy of love is a materialist theory that deflates the ideal of sublime love by desentimentalizing erotic drives in a manner that finds a close parallel in the contemporary aesthetics of the grotesque and the abject. The Roman philosophical discourse that precedes the development of amatory elegy is shown to contain the elements for the undoing of a quest for the sublimity of love, making plain that in love there is grotesque interior and a repulsive physicality that can turn amatory discourse upon itself. As we shall see, the focus on bodies, on their orifices, on the exchange of fluids and on the mimicking of cannibalism, all accompanied by derision, recurs frequently in Catullus and the elegists. Lucretius anticipates very closely these products of the unrequited furor of elegiac lovers, a passion that exists only in a state of excess and only as a violent threat to ideals of containment and refinement.

Wounds of Love

In using the tropes of wounding in his examination of love, Lucretius both associates himself with and distances himself from the epigrammatic tradition, in which the comparison of love to warfare is a common motif. What distinguishes Lucretius is his choice of wounds as the point of comparison and the derisive tone in which the figurative wounds of love are likened to real battle wounds.

idque petit corpus, mens unde est saucia amore. namque omnes plerumque cadunt in vulnus et illam emicat in partem sanguis, unde icimur ictu, et si comminus est, hostem ruber occupat umor. sic igitur Veneris qui telis accipit ictus, sive puer membris muliebribus hunc iaculatur seu mulier toto iactans e corpore amorem,

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43 On metaphors of arrows, wounds, and nets see Kenney (1970) who traces Lucretius’ allusions to Hellenistic epigrams, showing that Lucretius is in dialogue with the literary tradition on the military tropology of love. The evidence gathered by Kenney supports the argument advanced here that the diatribe against love is also a diatribe against love poetry.
unde feritur, eo tendit gestitque coire
et iacere umorem in corpus de corpore ductum.
namque voluptatem praesagit muta cupido. (4.1048-57)

The image of the mind wounded with love, *saucia amore* (4.1048), refers to the tradition of the τραῦμα and ἕλκος ἔρωτος but adds to it a significant feature, namely the application to the mind (*mens*) of an adjective normally reserved to describe an injured body. In the economy of the passage, *saucia amore* serves the function of recalling the epigrammatic precedent and of introducing Lucretius’ discussion of the wounds of love, while establishing the locus from which to interpret it. The lover’s state of mind is described in overtly physical terms, a fact that is further emphasized also by the juxtaposition of *mens* and *corpus*. Lucretius skillfully shifts the focus of amatory epigram from the metaphors of warfare to epic acts of violence in a battlefield.

The passage comes in a long simile, in which the tenor is the suffering of unrequited love, while the vehicle is a wound produced by means of a violent blow with a weapon. The term *vulnus* (4.1049) is used in the literal sense to designate a wound received in combat, a wound from which blood gushes out, *emicat ... sanguis* (4.1050). Love poetry thrives on metaphorical language, and so Lucretius offers his antidote to love by literalizing its metaphors and by lingering on the images of materiality that they bring to consciousness. In the simile’s vehicle, the blood that issues from the wound is

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44 Cf. e.g. *AP* 5.177, 179, 180, 189, 198, 215; 12.48, 50 in all of which we find descriptions of Eros bearing weapons. Cf. also 5.162 by Asclepiades in which we find the words ἔτρωσε and τραῦμα. However, it is not Eros but Philaenion who inflicts the wound on the speaker. On this epigram see Gow and Page, *ad loc.* For an exhaustive list of comparanda from the *AP*, see Brown (1987), 132-3.

45 Brown (1987, 191) correctly observes that *sauclus* “has vivid physical connotations of bloodshed and swooning.”


47 Cf. Ennius *Trag.* XII 14 Jocelyn: *misco sanguine tepido tullii efflantes volant*. The episode of the death of Ajax suggests comparison with the theme of a hero’s death, viewed through military imagery and set against an epic background. Lucretius is using language in the same way, though he is speaking only figuratively. Lucretius metaphorizes the image of blood coming out of a wound, turning it into an expressive instrument for an idea that has none of the epic grandeur of a hero’s death, which it instead deflates into an episode of sexual triviality.
described by the use of *ruber* (4.1051), an adjective that adds considerable vividness to the image and thereby invites the reader to delay leaving it. It also renders the image dynamic, since the blood spurts out of the wound in the direction of the enemy, a fact that is further emphasized by the verb *emicat*, typically used to describe the sudden issue of blood from a cut.\(^{48}\) In accordance with the simile’s tenor, however, the red liquid is called *umor* which recalls the movement of semen in arousal and, at the same time, the physiology of fluids in the Epicurean explanation of emotions and desires. Two different kinds of liquids are involved: blood gushing out when the victim receives a corporeal wound, and *semen* issued by the lover in sexual arousal. In the medical tradition semen was frequently theorized as a blood residue in the body,\(^{49}\) but the Lucretian comparison has a dialectical structure that threatens its apparent balance: being a source of life, blood should not come out of the body; *semen*, despite its hematogenous nature, must come out or else its accumulation can lead to even greater psycho-physical disorders (in fact Lucretius’ cure for love will be a release of built-up *semen*).\(^{50}\) As the victim’s blood spurts onto the enemy, so the lover’s *umor* spurts onto Venus. Besides making Venus a parallel of the enemy, as the one who inflicts the wound of love, this image turns her into the beloved and hence characterizes the beloved as the lover’s enemy.\(^{51}\)

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\(^{48}\) Brown (1987, 192) makes the connection between the spurting of blood and ejaculation but he does not develop it into a interpretative argument. As we shall see, however, the metaphorical identification of semen and blood is central to Lucretius’ characterization of Venus as the beloved and as the enemy.


\(^{50}\) On the “cure” for love offered in the diatribe see Fitzgerald (1984). Schiesaro (1990, 121) argues that the fluidity of *semen* suggests similarity with rain, which would connect *semen* to the agricultural metaphor of sowing. We can then connect this to line 1107: *ut muliebria conserat arva*, which is an agricultural metaphor for intercourse. The metaphor, as Bailey (1947, *ad loc.*) notes, is relatively common, occurring in different forms in, e.g., Aesch. *Th.* 753, and in Verg. *G.* 3.136.

\(^{51}\) This is reminiscent of, though not exactly parallel to, Hellenistic epigrams in which the speaker is wounded either by his beloved (e.g. 5.162) or by Eros (but not Venus), who wields the flaming arrows or darts. For comparanda see note 43, above.
The identification of the beloved as the one who causes injury to the lover lies at the very heart of Lucretius’ diatribe against love. The simile discussed above suggests that the wound is an orifice from which the body can leak out its blood when pierced, just as the sexual orifice sends out a stream of *semen* in ejaculation when struck by the *simulacrum* of the beloved. Lucretius’ imagery places the reader in the aesthetic terrain of the abject and the grotesque. Bleeding wounds, as Kristeva argues, are abject elements that awaken in the observer a sense of revulsion. The image of ejaculation as a parallel to that of spurting blood is also abject, especially because the proximity between the two suggests the possibility of mutual pollution. The flow of blood and *semen* in the direction of the lover suggests a contamination of the outside of his body with fluids coming from the inside of his beloved’s body. Wounds of love as sexual orifices are grotesque in the full sense of the term, in that they both debase and deride a romantically idealized sentiment. By means of its literalizing vocabulary, the materialist philosophical discourse belittles the sentiments by dwelling on the physicality that they conceal.

The philosophical diatribe against love is also a literary diatribe against the love poetry that sentimentalizes love by obfuscating its darker side. Lucretius’ war and combat imagery not only calls to mind the conventional comparison of love and war in Hellenistic epigram, but also looks forward to the idea of the lover as a soldier of love (*miles amoris*) common to the Roman elegists. In this part of his diatribe Lucretius focuses the reader’s aesthetic perception on images of wounds that represent the point of greatest intensity in the development of amorous urges, when the lover feels struck down as if by a powerful enemy. However, the wounds of love are nowhere close to wounds of war, which spill the blood of life rather than release the pressure of accumulated *semen*. 
By literalizing the metaphorical language of the poets, Lucretius transforms the reading process into an imaginative experience of the grotesque, in which the literal and the figurative co-exist in a single act of perception.\textsuperscript{52} By means of this experience, Lucretius derides the poetry of ideal love. Venus’s darts have little resemblance to the weapons of war, and the girls and effeminate boys who symbolically throw them are not like epic warriors. Unlike a wounded soldier, a man wounded by the darts of love wants to throw himself into the arms of the beloved who wounds him, \textit{eo tendit gestitque coire} (4.1055).

To describe the strife of lovers by recourse to the epic language of heroes at the height of their sublimity as warriors is to yield unknowingly to the urge of the grotesque.

\textbf{Love as a Disease}

That is not to say, however, that the wounds of love are not fraught with consequences. When love is allowed to degenerate into an obsession, that is to say when it turns into a passion that prevents the lover from attending to his emotional state, or, metaphorically, from taking care of his wounds, the ramifications can be very serious indeed. Untreated wounds soon begin to fester and eventually transform the sudden pain of injury into the protracted suffering of illness. In the Lucretian diatribe against love, the progress from wound to disease follows the degenerative path of unattended injury.

Illness is clearly related to wounds, but it deserves to be treated separately. The key passage is 4.1068-72:

\begin{center}
\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\item[52] Metaphor is the foundational trope of grotesque aesthetics because it is based on hybridity, that is to say on a fusion of the two elements of the comparison. Metaphors force the reader to consider language as referential and non-referential at the same time. The two approaches to language logically undermine each other and yet generate sense by means of that paradox. As Harpham (1982, 157) observes, when we consider them referentially, metaphors “parody themselves.” This is also true for the military language of love.
\end{enumerate}
\end{center}
ulcus enim vivescit et inveterascit alendo
inque dies gliscit furo atque aerumna gravescit,
si non prima novis conturbes vulnere plagis
volgivagaque vagus Venere ante recentia cures
aut alio possis animi traducere motus.

The opening word of this passage, *ulcus* (4.1068), places the reader into the realm of illness rather than that of injury, since it refers to a wound which, left unattended, has become infected and has turned into a sore.\(^5^3\) For Lucretius the basic difference between injury and disease is that a wound is inflicted by another upon the lover, who is struck (*ictur*, 4.1050) and receives it (*accipit*, 4.1052). The subject doing the wounding is the beloved, and the wound is the object received by the lover.

A disease instead has agency, and so moves of its own accord to increasingly virulent stages of development, a fact aptly illustrated by the use of *ulcus* in the nominative case. Lucretius describes the development of the *ulcus* by attaching it to verbs that indicate intensification of the symptoms and that mark the onset of different stages of the disease: the sore first comes to life (*vivescit*, 4.1068), then becomes a chronic condition (*inveterascit*, 4.1068), whose main symptoms, *furo* and *aerumna* (4.1069), respectively swell up (*gliscit*, 4.1069) and are weighed down (*gravescit*, 4.1069). All four verbs have the –*sco* form of the incohative aspect, which marks the flare up of a new stage of the disease. The verbs also rhyme (they all end in –*scit*) and this phonetic relation further strengthens the semantic one by which they are linked.

The passage on the degeneration of wounds of love into a disease consists of a single conditional sentence. In general, such sentences imply a temporal as well as a

\(^{5^3}\) Brown (1987), 208-9; *OLD* s.v. *ulcus*. See Maltby (1991) citing Isid. *Orig.*4.8.20: *ulcus quod olet*. We can add to this that smell compounds the abject dimension of the wound, which has turned into a sore. The malodorous wound of love looks forward to the malodorous beloved, and hence to the use of smell as the olfactory means of deflecting the sublime appeal of the *puella.*
causal relationship between the protasis and the apodosis, since the consequence must follow the condition both in logic and time. Lucretius here structures the sentence in the reverse order, giving us first the consequence and then the supposition in the form of a warning. This syntactical arrangement represents a very subtle way of continuing the narrative of the wound of love as if it were a degenerative disease. Lucretius continues his description in the same fashion, describing a disease that appears to be just as real and as concrete as the wound, though in fact the festering has not occurred. The reader discovers that such an ulcus occurs only when the proper therapeutic steps are not taken (si non ... cures, 4.1070-1).

In classical Latin ulcus was also used with the meaning of morbid erotic craving, a form of satyriasis the cure for which was intercourse. Wounds of love, inflicted on the lover by his beloved (or by Venus), are by no means incurable. The very fact that Lucretius uses the medical verb cures, which means “to administer remedies, to treat or to cure,” implies that for him love sickness is a treatable disease. Cures, moreover, resonates with cura, a word that can mean both cure and anxiety, including the anxiety that needs to be treated. As we shall see, cura enters the vocabulary of elegy because unrequited love – itself a pose, of course – is productive of a narrative of cura as suffering beyond remedy, and also perhaps because it was etymologized as deriving from the Doric κώρη. Only a few lines before he uses cures, Lucretius couples cura with

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54 OLD, s.v. ulcus 2. Cf. Mart. 2.60.2: pulchrior est Chione; sed Phlogis ulcus habet.
55 Adams (1982), 41.
56 OLD, s.v. cura 3 a, c.
57 For the possible etymology of cura from the Doric κώρη see Ross (1976, 68-9), who notes that in this case, cura stands for the beloved, the amica. The Ionic form is κώρη and the Attic is κόρη, which are the more common forms. Varro L. 6.46 glosses cura as “quod cor urat,” see Maltby (1991), 166. Among the elegists, cura is frequently used in the sense of the lover’s pain (cf e.g. Prop. 1. 13.7; Ov. Ars. 3.680, Rem. 495), for the beloved, who provokes the pain (cf e.g. Tib. 2.3.31; Prop. 1.1.36, 2.25.1, 2.34.9; Ov. Am.1.3.16, 3.9.32, Ars. 1.512, 1.555, 2.350), and for love itself (cf. e.g. Prop.1.15.31, 2.12.4, 3.21.3; Ov.
pain (\textit{curam certumque dolorem}, 4.1067), indicating that it is something that should be cured away. The verb \textit{cures} subsumes an etymological play in which the remedy and the ailment are fused into each other. For Lucretius, \textit{Volgivaga Venus} (4.1071), which is a poetic term for (therapeutic) sex with different lovers, represents the possibility, or perhaps the illusion, of such a cure.\footnote{Such therapeutic sex has nothing to do with frustrated \textit{amor}. See 4.1073, as Bailey (1947, ad loc.) observes, sexual satisfaction (\textit{veneris fructu}) is opposed to \textit{amor}. The significance of this Lucretian opposition will emerge in the following chapters on Roman elegy, since frustrated \textit{amor} is the central concept of their poetics.} It curbs the lover’s tendency to become obsessed with his unattainable beloved, that is to say his \textit{cura}, while offering him the possibility of releasing the otherwise dangerous build up of \textit{semen} caused by his first wound.\footnote{Betensky (1980, 295) argues that Lucretius’ diatribe is evidence that he perceived contemporary Rome as a sick society. If this is true, then Lucretius must have also seen in Rome the possibility of its regeneration, in alignment with the concept of the grotesque social body. Certainly he does this with respect to its literature, the diatribe against love being also an injunction against the pretense to sublimity. See also Wallach (1976).}

Wounds are inflicted by means of a blow, and hence our attention tends to focus on the piercing effect of the blow itself, which corresponds to the instant of greatest suffering. But in diseased wounds there is an element of time that accompanies the progressive worsening of the infection. The verb \textit{inveterascit}, with its connotation that the disease that develops in the wound continues to degenerate, gives rise to the intimation that the “\textit{ulcus} comes to life and grows old”\footnote{Brown (1987), 210. The element of time is explicit in \textit{OLD s.v. inveterasco} 2, where, with respect to diseases, the definition is “to become chronic.”} precisely by introducing a durative element into the condition, so that the suddenness of the original injury becomes the beginning of a chronic condition that stretches out in time. When Lucretius uses the term for wound in the same passage, he qualifies it by an adjective that focuses our attention only on the initial piercing of the lover, \textit{prima ...vulnera} (4.1070). The adjective \textit{prima}, however, reinforces the idea that something else will follow, and that something...
is infection. The earlier image of the vulnus of love that spurts out blood in the direction of the beloved contrasts heavily with that of the ulcus, “which digs itself in”⁶¹ and collects pus within itself. Ulcera take something in and grow with their nourishment, and by feeding (alendo, 4.1068) on such nourishment become swollen with infection. In other words, the festering wound of love has an appetite, and this is an image that looks back to Lucretius’ initial explanation of love as sexual appetite. Infection occurs when the lover remains obsessed with a single beloved. If he is able to confound (conturbes, 4.1070) his obsession by means of novis ...plagis (4.1070), that is to say by means of sex with others,⁶² no rotting will ensue. If he is unable to do so, the obsessive lover allows his body to become metaphorically grotesque. The verb gliscit in the previous line gives rise to an image of tumescence caused by the engorgement of virulence in the affected area. This image recalls the swelling of the genitals with semen (tument loca semine, 4.1045), and compounds the initially grotesque image of love – as fluids moving within the body – with the decidedly abject connotation of pus.

However unappealing some aspects of physicality may be, for Lucretius physicality is the necessary core of the theory of love. As a didactic poet who chooses such a theory as his subject matter, Lucretius revels in images of its unappetizing nature. As a philosopher he writes about love from within the tradition of Epicurean materialism, which enables him to argue that love, far from being the sublime sentiment postulated by

⁶¹ Fitzgerald (1984), 76. The movement suggested by this type of wound is directed towards the inside of the body, which is its centre of grotesque activity. As it digs itself into the interior, a sore generates pus, a fluid that the body needs to expel. The body’s urgency to expel itself of pus is analogous to its need to ejaculate semen gathered in arousal. The resulting association of pus and semen adds a semantic layer of abjection to sexual arousal, suggesting that semen is produced as a befouling fluid. Fitzgerald describes all the elements of this situation but does not link them into the unifying concept to which they reach out – which is that of the abject grotesque – his objective being only to illustrate the different direction of movement generated by ulcerating and non-ulcerating wounds of love.

⁶² See Fitzgerald (1984, 77), who believes that the plagae refer specifically to sex with prostitutes.
the poets, is actually a physical phenomenon whose examination involves analyzing revolting biological processes. As a poet Lucretius offers a figuration of love in which the consideration of such details is paramount: he dwells on them with care by means of images that invite a prolonged contemplation of sordid physiology, and in this way argues by example for their claim to legitimacy in poetic practice. The fusion of the poet and the philosopher in the same narrative voice reveals an aesthetic sensibility that is on all fronts grotesque.

The Beloved

Since for Lucretius love is a biological phenomenon, to be understood materially in medical and clinical terms, it cannot be conceived apart from the physicality of bodies. However, this is precisely what takes place in love poetry: the beloved is idealized and made to transcend the baser aspects of her physicality. In a passage that includes several Greek words,\(^63\) Lucretius derides such idealizations as impossible constructs and reminds his readers – and implicitly the readers of all love poetry – that physicality, in all of its aspects, cannot be denied or concealed. Yet once he yields to the power of love, the lover portrayed by the poets looks at his beloved through the filter of his feelings, which enable him to see in his beloved exactly what he wants to see. Lucretius illustrates how ridiculous this situation is in a passage that catalogues and derides the euphemisms

\(^{63}\) These words (which are not all discussed here because they are not part of the vocabulary of the grotesque) may be evidence that Lucretius used a Greek model. Bailey (1947, 1310f) suggests Pl. R. 474d ff. Theoc. 10.24ff. and epigrams of the Greek Anthology as possible sources. Brown (1987, 281) adds that while some of the Greek terms are literary, “others have a colloquial tang.” The Lucretian passage, as Bailey (1947, 1310) points out, was influential on later poets: Hor. S.1.3.43ff (possibly); Ov. Ars. 2.657ff (certainly).
through which love-sick suitors\(^{64}\) represent the appearance, scent, and character of their beloved, who in reality, resembles anything but the idealized portraits by lovers:

multimodis igitur pravas turpisque videmus
esse in deliciis summoque in honore vigere.
atque alios alii irrint Veneremque suaudent
ut placent, quoniam foedo adflictentur amore,
nec sua respiciunt miseri mala maxima saepe.
nigra melichrus est, inmunda et fetida acmos,
caesia Palladium, nervosa et lignea dorcas,
parvula, pumilio, chariton mia, tota merum sal,
magna atque inmanis cataplexis plenaque honoris.
balsa loqui non quit, traulizi, muta pudens est;
at flagrans, odiosa, loquacula Lampadium fit.
ischnon eromenion tum fit, cum vivere non quit
prae macie; rhadine verost iam mortua tussi.
at tumida et mammosa Ceres est ipsa ab Iaccho,
simula Silena ac saturast, labeosa philema.  

(4.1155-69)

When they look at them as the objects of their desire, lovers tend to see their beloveds as ideal women without flaws of either body or mind. The reader is complicit (\textit{videmus}, 4. 1155) in the poet’s denunciation of myopic lovers. Thus the women they love are really \textit{pravas turpisque} (4.1155) and yet they are regarded as worthy of honour and adoration despite their misshapen bodies and unattractive forms. The order of the adjectives in this phrase is significant because, whereas \textit{pravas} indicates only a visible deformity,\(^{65}\) \textit{turpis} adds to the deformity the beholder’s feeling of repugnance. \textit{Pravas} is a descriptive term that refers to physical appearance of the beloved women; \textit{turpis} has a moral dimension.

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\(^{64}\) The image of a love-sick suitor also occurs at 4.1075-6: \textit{nam certe purast sanis magis inde voluptas / quam miseris}. Bailey (1947, \textit{ad loc}) translates \textit{sanis} as “heart-whole” and \textit{miseris} as the “love-sick.” The adjective \textit{miser} is juxtaposed with \textit{sanus}, thereby acquiring visibility as a marker for the suffering lover, whose behaviour is in line with the \textit{adulescentes} of Roman comedy. It is significant that Lucretius opposes \textit{sanus} to \textit{miser} rather than to \textit{insanus}. In other words, Lucretius chooses a term from the lover’s vocabulary and uses it derisively. In Roman elegy, on the other hand, \textit{miser} will become the quintessential characteristic of the lover-poet and the main source of the elegiac ethos. See Pichon (1902, 202-3), who offers various examples of \textit{miser} and its cognates as elegiac commonplaces.

\(^{65}\) Brown (1987), \textit{ad loc}. Cf. 4. 513-20 where Lucretius uses it to describe warped architectural lines or crooked buildings.
and so redirects our attention to the sense of repulsion felt by men who are not in love with them.

Men who are not blinded by passion but guided by reason, as Lucretius instructs his readers to be, see the reality covered up by euphemisms and recognize the sense of revulsion that it provokes. The physical imperfections of the beloved from which the lover shields his perception concern complexion (nigra, 4.1160), physical size (magna atque inmanis, 4.1163), elocution (balba, 4.1164), proportion (tumida, mammosa, labeosa, 4. 1168-9), and smell (foetida, 4.1160). The passage contains a number of adjectives in –osa, the suffix that typically indicates an excess of the quality or substance designated by the stem.66 Deformity is therefore to a large extent a matter of overstepping the natural limits of the body. A similar sense of excess is conveyed by tumida, which indicates a swelling of the body beyond its normal dimensions. The language is comic and the sense of excess that it carries brings to mind the very concept of satire as satura. Tumida recalls the swelling of the genitals with an excess of semen during arousal (4.1045). The sense of excess is counterbalanced by the equally unattractive one of smallness, as exemplified by the reference to dwarfism. According to an ancient tradition, dwarfs were grotesque beings with large phalluses and a commensurate sexual appetite. In fact, as Shapiro observes, in the small statuary of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, “the dwarf with distorted countenance and enormous phallus is a standard type of grotesque."67 With their differently shaped bodies, dwarves represent deformity of size and proportion on the small scale of their height.

66 OLD s.v. -osus. See also Brown (1987), 286. 67 Shapiro (1984), 391. In keeping with this tradition Aristotle compares them to small mules with large genitals in HA 577b27-29.
Simula in the last line (4.1169) also carries significant grotesque associations. Σιμός is used by Callimachus (Epigr. 49) of a satyr, a description that resonates in Satura (4.1169), giving the Lucretian beloved the lusty character of a female Silenus (Silena, 4.1069) and reinforcing the suggestion of animal hybridity and goat-like smell. Since satira also means satire, the term confers on the beloved the metaliterary function of implying that the conventions of love poetry may be viewed satirically. Moreover, in various epigrams Σιμός is used of Eros, the mischievous god who inflicts wounds of love. The association with Eros confers on the Lucretian beloved the characteristic of aggressiveness and, as already indicated, depicts her as a feared enemy. Lucretius does not compare the beloved to Venus but to her snub-nosed son by means of a term that is intentionally denigratory. Theocritus uses the same term in a rustic tongue-in-cheek version of the paraclausithyron (Theoc. Id.3.8), in which the suitor serenades his beloved by the entrance to her cave. The Theocritean allusion in this case also points us forward to the passage of the De Rerum Natura in which, as we shall see, when the lover is admitted to his beloved’s chamber, he is repelled by her smell. The literary memory of snub noses available to Lucretius includes the philosophical tradition, for the expression simula silena resonates with derisive echoes of Plato’s characterization of Socrates as a snub-nosed man who looked like one of the comic statues of sileni. Xenophon adds that Socrates was especially proud of the snubness of his nose because its open and flat nostrils could capture smells from all directions. Simula silena both deride and celebrate sensitivity to smell.

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68 E.g. AP 5.177, 178, 179.
69 In Theaetetus 143e, we read that Socrates is snub-nosed as is his favourite pupil, the young Theaetetus, while in Symposium 215b, 216c, 221d-2, we are told that he resembles the funny statues of sileni.
70 Xen. Smn. 5.5-7.
The characteristics that provoke a feeling of repugnance have to do with sex (foedo...amore, 4.1158), personal hygiene (immunda, 4.1160), scent (fetida, 4.1160), and disease (tussi, 4.1167). By using these terms Lucretius focuses on the reaction to the euphemised woman by a man who is not obsessed with her when he finds himself in her proximity. Such a reaction must include a charge of opprobrium, since foedus describes the reaction to a fact rather than the fact itself.\textsuperscript{71} The same is true of immunda, which connotes the offensive nature of dirt, the contact with which represents a risk of pollution.\textsuperscript{72} Fetidus and tussis refer to phenomena that cause not only a psychological but also a physical reaction in their proximity, since halitosis and coughing, which compounds halitosis by releasing interior smells with aggressive force, are physically as well as psychologically offensive. Moreover, they imply some discharge, which may reach others in the form of spittle or as the simulacra of smell. In either case, the connotation is that of a rotting interior externalized as malodorousness and coughing, material signs of disease as well as threats of potential contagion.

Far from being the sublime manifestation of a pure ideal, the beloveds about whom Lucretius writes are women with real bodies, imperfect in their structure and, at least some of them, possibly very sick in their interior. From a philosophical perspective, the beloved’s coughing and malodorousness are, among other things, negative reminders of her physicality and signs that in her body, however beautiful it may appear to the sense of sight, there is a real core of phlegm and, possibly, foul-smelling infection that cannot

\textsuperscript{71} The OLD defines foedus as “offensive to the senses,” (1) and “repugnant to refined taste or civilized feeling.” Both definitions are focused on the reaction provoked by something that is foedus.

\textsuperscript{72} In the diatribe against love, the binary opposition between purity and pollution, so basic to the symbolism of culture (Douglas 1966), is parallel to the opposition between the sublime and the grotesque. To be in the presence of amorous sublimity means to be in the hidden presence of the grotesque and the abject. See OLD s.v. immundus 1, “unclean or untidy in appearance,” that is, in the perception of others.
be concealed from the sense of olfaction. For Lucretius’ obsessive lover, the beloved is also the source of his malady, a metaphorical infection in the *ulcus* by which he becomes afflicted when he abstracts her from her imperfect physicality. Lucretius observes that, in his attempt to overlook her imperfections, the lover is helped by the beloved herself, who is at pains to hide the offensive physicality of her body. The lover depicted in the poetic tradition cannot dissolve away his beloved’s body, but he allows himself not to be impeded by its physicality. So long as she is *bello animost et non odiosa* (4.1190) – an expression that looks forward to the *puella* of elegy, who is a good match for the poet-lover also because she is clever – he can make concessions to her physicality: *humanis concedere rebus* (4.1191).

Malodorousness, however, is difficult to ignore; the sense of smell is not as easily deceived as the sense of sight, though, ironically, it is the latter that is privileged by lovers and philosophers. Unlike the beloved who exists visually in her lover’s obsessive imagination, from which all negative aspects of physicality are conveniently scripted out, the beloved from which she has been romantically fantasized is unable to transcend the limitations of her material body, limitations to which all women are subject. Lucretius intimates that if the lover were not blinded by his obsession with his vision of his beloved, he too would know that even she is subject to ailments, has a body and must do things that are not erotically appealing and that externalizes its interior as smell. Even the beloved without whom the lover cannot live, occasionally *taetris se suffit odoribus* (4.1175) in a vain attempt to fumigate away illnesses and imperfections. Lucretius adds that her *famulae* secretly laugh at her, *furtimque cachinant* (4.1176), and this is because in performing such actions she displays a pathetic and grotesque image of herself. If her
suitor were to see her then, he would be repelled by the smell, offenderet aura (4.1180), and he would immediately realize the illusory quality of his love. As a poet whose task it is to illustrate this philosophy, Lucretius uses such images liberally, turning the lover’s revulsion into the aesthetic appeal of his poetry.

Malodourousness is a symptom of mortal physicality. Beloveds who want to be regarded as Venuses are at pains to conceal the unappealing aspects of their physicality that might cause the lovers whom they want to retain, quos retinere volunt adstrctosque esse in amore (4.1187), to become disenchanted with them and think them only ordinary mortals rather than Venuses. Goddesses do not have mortal bodies and so do not emanate offensive odours. But if the lacrimans exclusus amator (4.1177) is allowed in, and if he should catch a glimpse of his beloved’s unseemly toilette, he would immediately see the foolishness of his idealization and recognize that he had unduly imagined her to be like a divine being (4.1183-1184). The Lucretian beloved resembles a Plautine courtesan, who cunningly uses fragrances to bewitch her clients. If she does not use such perfumes to conceal her true physicality, her body odours break the spell and allow the invisible aspects of her grotesque interior to be perceived. One of the reasons why Lucretius goes on at such length is his commitment to a materialist philosophy which spills over into his poetics. His position is partly a denunciation of sex masked as love, and partly a celebration of the aesthetics that revels in its description, i.e. the grotesque. His is a

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73 On the treatment of odours associated with divine beings see Lilja (1972), 19-25. This part of my chapter is indebted to Lilja’s book, an underutilized study of the theme of odours in classical poetry. It consists of a philological examination of a large collection of passages viewed in relation to their poetic contexts and to the literary, scientific, and philosophical traditions that inform them. Lilja, however, makes no attempt to see the data from the perspective of the aesthetics of the grotesque, even though she discusses the relationship between perfumes and stench. In this final part of my argument, I intend to show that in the Lucretian diatribe malodourousness is a key element of grotesque deflation.

74 Lilja (1972), 226-7.
stance that subsumes unverbalized tension, since it implies simultaneous repulsion for the theme and attraction for its aesthetic potential.

In an aesthetic context these symptoms represent a lowering of the sublime beauty of the beloved into degraded and degrading physicality, in accordance with a basic procedure of grotesque realism. Sublime beauty has its olfactory correlative in fragrant breath and sweet body odour. The bodies of goddesses, the most beautiful imaginable, release olfactory effluences in every way comparable to their visual beauty. But a beautiful body that emanates an offensive odour is the manifestation of a grotesque dialectic, since it is a body that is being degraded from the inside. In the guise of an offensive smell, ugliness is already within sublime beauty. However, such a body continues to be perceived as beautiful by the lover until the smell enters his nostrils with evidence of his beloved’s foul interior. Smell externalizes the beloved’s interior and internalizes the lover’s gaze. Because it cannot be effectively concealed, smell reveals the delusive nature of idealizations and debunks all images of physical sublimity. In classical antiquity the hierarchy of the senses generally placed the sense of smell in third position, after hearing and vision; yet, in terms of the aesthetics of grotesque realism, olfaction is a potent betrayer of a beloved’s designs to delude herself and her lover. For even when the beloved’s physical appearance is appealing, her bad smell causes the lover to distance himself from her by imagining the interior of her body.

The attention that Lucretius pays to smell as a device of grotesque aesthetics contrasts with modern theories of the grotesque body, in which bad smells, associated with bodily functions, are an implied element of the grotesque imagination but are not

75 Lilja (1972), 25, 120-1.
76 Jütte (2005), 61.
explicitly discussed as such.\textsuperscript{77} In this regard, Lucretius goes somewhat beyond the theorists of the grotesque. Since his concern is with the beloved’s body as perceived by her lover, smell is for him an essential component of grotesque deflation. It is also a very powerful component, since, unlike the visual elements of the grotesque, its presence raises automatically the risk of contagion, and hence demands a self-protective response. Foul smell desentimentalizes and threatens at the same time.

The introduction of stench into the vocabulary of love is a powerful gesture against the idealization of love and a strong argument for viewing both love and the beloved through the lens of the aesthetics of the grotesque. Lucretius denounces all sentimentalizations of love and all ideal depictions of the beloved as denials of the material base of reality. Steeped as he was in the Epicurean tradition, Lucretius offers a theory of love as a function of the material core of life. Love is no more than sexual appetite and, as such, is both the product and the cause of a dynamic whirlwind of physiological activity deep within the body. In his diatribe against love, Lucretius examines various aspects of this activity, focusing on details that are not disturbing in medical discourse but may shock the imagination of readers conditioned to consider love from an idealizing perspective. Lucretius, however, is also a poet, and in this capacity relishes or revels in the description of such details, claiming for them pride of place in a poetics of love grounded in materialism. Lucretius argues for the need to remain anchored to reality in all considerations of love and the beloved, and in the process lowers the fictional reality of conventional poetry into the physicality that is

\textsuperscript{77} Bakhtin (1968), Harpham (1982) and Kristeva (1982) use olfactory terms only incidentally and not as objects of theoretical concern.
proper to it. In doing so Lucretius displays an aesthetic sensitivity that is analogous throughout to the tenets of the grotesque, including its poetic rehabilitation of the abject.
In one of his most famous and shortest compositions (poem 85), Catullus says that his experience as a poet moves between hatred and love: *odi et amo*, the first emphasized by position and the latter by elision, hate and love are the emotional polarities of his poetry, which is articulated as the expression of both. The conventional assumption that in their reception of poetry the readers experience an elative gratification of positive emotions is rejected outright as a principle of poetics. The strained antithesis of negative and positive emotions determines Catullus’ self-understanding as a poet and characterizes the intended aesthetic experience of his poetry. Straddling the boundary that separates them, Catullus defies the logic of conventional aesthetic gratification and situates his poetry at a point “beyond which logical analysis cannot advance.”\(^1\) The region that the readers are invited to enter, transgressing the conventional limit of aesthetic pleasure, is the psychology of negative aesthetics. This is a region in which the experience of displeasure becomes the source of aesthetic enjoyment, frustrating both the anticipation of positive emotions and the logic of positive aesthetics that leads one to expect gratification in an encounter with poetry, especially love poetry. In the aesthetic experience of displeasure the reader’s intellectual and imaginative focus falls into “the nether region of negative value.”\(^2\) The means by which Catullus accomplishes that experience of aesthetic frustration is

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\(^1\) Quinn (1973), 421.
\(^2\) Berleant (1988), 83.
Towards a Grotesque Reading of Catullus: Poems 1, 16 and 65

While the purpose of my thesis is to explore the theme of degradation in Roman elegy, with the intent of showing that the grotesque plays a significant role in the genre in which it is least expected, in this chapter I shall examine the occurrence of grotesque images and motifs in Catullus’ elegiac libellus. Written in elegiac couplets, the poems in this collection represent the earliest rudiments of the Roman elegiac genre, though they are not in their entirety examples of what later became Roman erotic elegy. We can consider Catullus a kind of proto-elegist since his poems have various elements in common with the later tradition. Catullus’ treatment of these elements contains a grotesque core that, as will be shown in later chapters, will re-emerge as basic tropes of elegy proper, though with a decidedly less emphatic use of coarseness. Two such elements of Catullan amatory poetry are the rival and the unrequited love relationship. I shall first examine how Catullus uses grotesque imagery to characterize his rivals by subjecting them to various forms of derisive degradation and social abjection. I shall then analyze his representation of love as a coarse physical carnality, perversion and infectious disease.

Before we pursue an analysis of the Catullan grotesque it is necessary to establish the textual conditions that warrant such an approach. These are (i) that for Catullus

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3 See Richlin (1992, chapters 2 and 3), who suggests that, in opposition to satire, elegy maintains an idealizing attitude towards women and boys.
4 This term has been current in criticism since Skinner’s study of 2003.
5 Farrell (2003), 398.
images of coarseness do not imply crudeness of form, (ii) that Catullus himself invites a grotesque reading of his elegies.

Concerning the first of these conditions, we observe that the thematic content of Catullus’ poetry varies considerably, from the highly refined to the hideously grotesque, but the meticulous care with which he polished his writing is visible throughout. Catullus focuses our gaze on his craftsmanship in poem 1. While presenting his work as a finished product to Cornelius Nepos, he says that it is \textit{arida ... pumice expolitum} (1.2).\footnote{Unless otherwise stated, I follow Mynors’ OCT for the text of Catullus’ poems.} This reference to the act of filing down the previously rough edges of his papyrus roll calls attention to the labour Catullus put into his poetry, polishing it and making it aesthetically fine in all respects. He claims that he has refined the \textit{libellus} that he is offering Nepos, but he does so in such a way as to enable his readers to imagine the book in the state of roughness in which it was before he started filing it down. The first poem is informed by a sense of creative dynamism and illustrates the significance of craftsmanship for Catullus, the special importance that showing both the process and the product has in his poetics. The finished \textit{libellus} itself is \textit{lepidus} (\textit{lepidum novum libellum}, 1.1) and therefore a work of art that ultimately produces a sense of aesthetic satisfaction.

The hybrid combination of the explicit image of a refined product and the implied image of its earlier coarseness found in the first poem is not in itself especially grotesque but already suggests a region of in-betweeness that literary theorists identify as a locus congenial to the grotesque imagination.\footnote{Harpham (1982), 10. See also Bakhtin (1968, 317) where the body is described as always in the act of becoming and never with a definite shape.} Moreover, its contents seem to defy categorization and naming: Catullus calls his individual poems \textit{nugae} and uses such vague designations as \textit{aliiquid} (1.4), \textit{quidquid} (1.8), and \textit{qualecumque} (1.9), implying that...
the conventional terminology of received genres may not be accurate labels for them. As Bhabha has shown, newness enters history by means of hybrids.\textsuperscript{8} The \textit{libellus} belongs to a not yet established category whose constitutive parts are heterogeneous and in tension with one another – another textual feature that suggests the application of a grotesque hermeneutic to the \textit{libellus}.\textsuperscript{9} These characteristics prepare the reader for the detailed exploration of grotesque themes found throughout the book. The aspects of the grotesque that are most relevant to the rest of the \textit{libellus} concern the degradation of the addressee, which is achieved by fragmentation, distortion and debasement. As we shall see, Catullus’ poetry frequently inverts the hierarchy of the body and superimposes on one another images of physicality and of bodily functions that create in the reader a sense of alienation from the poem and of bewilderment by the phenomenon that it describes. The spectacle that is created through the medium of language is one of perversity and revulsion. At the same time the poem invites the reader to respond simultaneously to the sordid details of its thematic articulation and to the consummate skill and highly polished idea of form in which Catullus frames them aesthetically.\textsuperscript{10} Catullus illustrates the principle, articulated by Kristeva, that a writer interested in the abject “imagines its logic, projects himself into it, introjects it, and as a consequence, perverts language.”\textsuperscript{11} In this sense, the grotesque element of Catullan poetry appears as an outline of the abject elements of reality that frequently lie hidden beneath a flimsy surface of formal elegance. The tension between formal perfection and grotesque content is striking, and the disjunction informs the reading process with the logic of negative aesthetics, frustrating

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{9} See Harpham (1982), 11 and Bakhtin (1968), 308. See also Fingesten (1984).
\textsuperscript{10} As Selden (1992, 498) shows, Catullus routinely exploits the expressive potential of common tropes beyond the standards sanctioned by handbooks of rhetoric.
\textsuperscript{11} Kristeva (1982), 16.
\end{footnotesize}
the expectation of positive aesthetic content suggested by the form and calling for an
aesthetic reconciliation between offending content and polished craft.

Catullus makes clear the second condition – that he invites a grotesque reading of
his elegies – in poem 16, when he considers whether the severe criticism implicit in the
language of calumny that he addresses to his opponents could be invoked to justify a
moral attack on him. Catullus defends himself with great vigour by claiming as a general
principle that, whereas a good poet must be a man of virtue, castum esse dect pium
poetam/ ipsum (16. 5-6), his poetry need not be. Themes of turpitude in poetry are not
an indication of the poet’s character, and no facile equivalence between the poet’s
biography and his literary language is justified. His imagery is an integral part of his
poetry as a work of art and must be judged in that context. Such things as abject sexuality
and graphic scatology, in other words, are the result of a negative aesthetic choice. Verses
have greater charm and wit if they are molliculi and parum pudici (16.8). These are
positive aesthetic terms that imply well-measured participation in the discourse of
positive and negative aesthetics, despite the overtly negative aesthetic fruition that the
offensive grotesque content may provoke in unsophisticated readers. In glossing and
appropriating Catullus’ stance, Martial draws out the logical implications of Catullus’
position and goes so far as to restate it as a first principle of composition. Poetry cannot
gratify unless it can also titillate: lex haec carminibus data est iocosis / ne possint nisi
pruriant iuvare (1.35.10-11). The gratification of the readers is due also to the virtuosity
of the poet in making aesthetically prurient use of the impurum.

12 For castum Quinn (1970, ad loc.) suggests the interpretation “should stay clear of dirty behaviour” as
opposed to “should stay chaste.”
13 Martial also seconds Catullus’ personal stance in 1.4.8: lasciva est nobis pagina, vita proba. On Martial’s
reception of Catullus see, e.g., Lorenz (2007).
The second condition that justifies the pursuit of a grotesque interpretation of the elegies is that Catullus himself invites such a reading in poems 65. This poem signals a change in the collection because it is the first in which Catullus uses the elegiac metre. The polymetrics that precede it have thematic material in common with the elegiaca in the rest of the collection but not the metre.\textsuperscript{14} In this sense Poem 65 may be said to be a programmatic introduction to the elegiac \textit{libellus}. As various scholars have shown, this poem may be read as a pledge to the elegiac metre, fulfilled in the \textit{libellus} that follows it.\textsuperscript{15} It may be argued, however, that this poem is also programmatic with respect to the grotesque aspects of the elegiac \textit{libellus}. It is structured as a single sentence, the sense of which is interrupted by the sudden intrusion of a long apostrophe (lines 5 to 14) to the poet’s dead brother and a simile comparing the poet’s own \textit{maesta ... carmina} (65.12) to those sung by the mournful Daulian (\textit{Daulias ... gemens}, 14). The poem is about the poet’s virtuosity when he feigns being devastated by his grief. In saying that his \textit{cura} draws him away from the learned muses (65.1-2), he employs the rhetoric of affected modesty. The poem that he writes is actually very complex and depends on the reader’s ability to recall evocative poetic memories in the reading process by means of grotesque images and motifs.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} Although we cannot be certain of the order in which Catullus’ original readers encountered the poems, we can say that, in the collection as we have it now, our reading of the polymetrics necessarily informs our reading of the elegies. There has been much debate over the arrangement of the \textit{liber Catulli} and whether it is the work of the poet himself or posthumous editor. Consensus is growing around the assumption that Catullus is ultimately responsible for the order of the collection. Wiseman (1969), Quinn (1972), Skinner (2003), Bender and Young Forsyth (2005), e.g., all argue that large portions (if not all) of the poems were arranged by the poet.


\textsuperscript{16} The link between memory and the grotesque is well established in antiquity. For example, after saying that very beautiful and singularly ugly images have a high mnemonic value, the author of the \textit{Rhetorica ad Herennium} recommends the construction of grotesque imagery as an effective vehicle of recollection: “aut si qua re deformabimus, ut si cruentam aut caeno oblitam aut rubrica delibutam inducamus, quo magis insignita sit forma, aut ridiculas res aliquas imaginibus adtribuamus: nam ea res quoque faciet, ut facilius meminisse valeamus” (\textit{Rhet. Her.} 3.22)
The textual surface of the poem is mournful but includes some disturbing details. The poet’s dead brother has been buried in Trojan soil, which weighs heavily upon him. Catullus calls attention to the physicality of death through the term *obterit* (65.8) which suggests the grinding and crushing pressure of a heavy weight. This verb conjures up the image of a corpse being crushed by soil, an abject image likely to horrify the imagination. The sight of a cadaver, Kristeva says, “is the utmost of abjection.”\(^{17}\) The suggested image of the dead body under a crushing weight of earth raises the possibility of other disturbing images in the poem. In the simile between the poet and the Daulian, Catullus leaves it to the readers to provide for themselves images of savage details that he leaves unmentioned. Catullus and his readers had access to two versions of this myth: an early one, cited by Homer, and a later one, used widely in the dramatic tradition including Sophocles, Livius Andronicus and Accius, though the dramatic texts have survived only in fragments.\(^ {18}\) In Homer (*Od. 19.518-23*) Aëdon, jealous of her sister-in-law (Niobe) and her many children, attempted to kill Niobe’s son, but accidentally killed her own son, called Itylus. In the later and more familiar version, Procne, wife of Tereus, king of Daulis, murders her son, called Itys, and feeds him to his father to avenge her sister’s rape. Procne, Philomela and Tereus are all transformed into birds. The second version was probably the source for Accius’ *Tereus*, a play that, as we know from Cicero, was very popular on the contemporary Roman stage.\(^ {19}\) Consequently this version of the myth was likely familiar to Catullus and his readers. Certainly Catullus places the scene in

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\(^{17}\) Kristeva (1982), 4.

\(^{18}\) Livius Andronicus frr. 24-9 (Warmington), Accius frr. 639-655 (Warmington). Fitzpatrick (2001, 91-2) proposes a reconstruction of Sophocles’ play mentioning also the two Latin tragedies in his discussion of the versions of the myth. Dobrov (2001, 110) observes that, among the later attestations of this version of the story, the surviving nine fragments of Accius’ *Tereus* are “the most useful and the most likely to reflect knowledge of Sophocles’ play.”

\(^{19}\) Cic. *Att.16.2,16.3* and *Phil.1.36*. See also Fitzpatrick (2001), 92.
Daulis (Daulias, 65.14), as in at least one variant of the second version. Because he uses names from both stories, Catullus may be referencing both versions in 65.14: *Daulias absumpti fata gemens Ityli*. But the gruesome connotation of *absumpti* leaves little doubt that Catullus privileges the later version.

Catullus offers the readers only the aftermath of the story of the murder of Itylus or Itys, but he is careful to say that the Daulian bird “*sub densis ramorum concinit umbris*” (65.13), hiding the abject via allusivity, so that the readers may focus on the sorrowful moments of the tale and receive an initial impression of tonal balance. Nor is the mournful tone *(gemens)* of the nightingale at first disturbed by the occurrence of the participle *absumpti*, which in this case means “carried away by death.” In this sense the death of Itylus harks back to the death of the poet’s brother, who was snatched from sight, *ereptum nostris...ex oculis* (65.8). However, this is only a surface parallel, because *absumo* also means “devour” and as such recalls the gruesome details of the Daulian’s story and introduces a powerful sense of the grotesque into the poem. By transforming the human body into food and readying it for ingestion, digestion, and defecation, cannibalism is emblematic of the grotesque process of debasement. Cannibalism is “the most demonic image” for the incorporation of the external world into a human body.

The strongest expression of the grotesque, however, is that in the story that Catullus evokes Itylus is the victim of his mother’s infanticide and of his father’s cannibalism. Procne butchers Itylus, turning his flesh into meat for his father. She then

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20 Thuc. 2.29.
21 See Thomson (1997, *ad loc.*) and also Skinner’s discussion of the lines (Skinner (2003),13).
22 OLD s.v. *absumo* 7.
24 Remshardt (2004), 143.
25 Kilgour (1990), 16.
gives back to her husband his own flesh and blood so that he may incorporate into his
own body in an act of “inverted birthing.” 26 This inversion of birth is an act of supreme
abjection by the child’s mother. Unlike the carnivalesque cannibal who can devour the
whole world “without being devoured himself,” 27 Tereus is forced by Procne to devour
his progeny and therefore to devour himself. In just a few apparently innocent images,
Catullus incorporates into the programmatic poem of the elegiac *libellus* a story of
abjection and grotesqueness of enormous proportions. Procne forces Tereus to transgress
fundamental boundaries of nature and society, and, by her own abjection of her son,
itself an act of profound transgression, she distances herself from her husband. But in the
illusory effort to regain control of her uncontaminated self, she ends up defiling herself to
the utmost. Behind the sad melodies of the nightingale and the *maesta carmina* of the
poet, there is much that is grotesque, abject, and transgressive. By evoking the myth of
the Daulian in relation to his account of his dead brother, Catullus introduces a
conspicuous element of the grotesque into his first elegiac poem and dares the reader to
look forward to further explicit grotesqueness in the rest of the *libellus*.

**Charting Out the Catullan Grotesque: Poems 69 and 71**

Catullus introduces various aspects of the grotesque into his exploration of the
conventional love triangle which for him conceals the degrading nature of both love and
the lovers. Already in poem 67, the relationship is represented as being consummated
behind closed doors for the simple reason that it represents a perversion of accepted rules

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27 Bakhtin (1968), 281.
of conduct. This particular relationship is incestuous, a fact that, as we shall see later in our discussion of the Gellius cycle in which the theme of incest is developed more fully, makes it fundamentally grotesque. Here I would like to call attention to the fact that the door, like the poet, likes to gossip about the types of misconduct practiced by lovers, calling attention to the degrading elements of their relationship. As a metaphor of the liminal separation between proper and nefarious conduct, the door is at once an instrument for the abjection of what is offensive to society and an invitation to cross the boundary and to muse over it with delight. The rhetoric of “the inverted pleasures of decrying perversion,” as Gunderson succinctly terms this phenomenon in the context of Roman satire, is also basic to the Catullan grotesque throughout the elegiac libellus.

Much of the elegiac libellus is concerned with this double attitude towards ugliness and debasement concealed by the conventional love triangle. Catullus pays special attention to the rival, especially when the rival is the addressee of the poem. He repeatedly uses aspects of ugliness to degrade the rival calling our attention to the lower stratum of his body and focusing on crude sensory perceptions, to reduce the rival to a hybrid bestial entity. We first encounter the outright debasement of the rival in poem 69:

Noli admirari, quare tibi femina nulla,
Rufe, velit tenerum supposuisse femur,
non si illam rarae labefactes munere uestis
aut per lucidi deliciis lapidis.
laedit te quaedam mala fabula, qua tibi fertur
valle sub alarum trux habitare caper.
hunc metuunt omnes, neque mirum: nam mala valde est
bestia, nec quicum bella puella cubet.

The members this incestuous triangle are two men, father and son, and the son’s wife. The son was impotent, and the father carried on an affair with his son’s wife. For a detailed summary of the story of this poem see Copley (1949), 246. On poem 67, its “riddle,” its comedy and diffamatio see e.g. Copley (1949), Giangrand (1970), Murgatroyd (1989).

Gunderson (2005), 227.

Bakhtin (1968), 19-20.
quare aut crudelem nasorum interfecte pestem, 
aut admirari desine cur fugiunt.

Considered in isolation poem 69 is ostensibly about the reason why Rufus is unable to have a successful love affair: his body odour is so offensive as to ward off all *puellae*. The poet describes Rufus’ odour by means of the grotesque image of a goat harbour and nourished under his armpit (*valle sub alarum trux habitare caper*, 6). The armpit is itself referred to as *vallis alarum*, an image that, in a bit of grotesque bucolic poetry, implicitly pictures body hair as a forest in which the goat dwells. The extension of this is that Rufus’ whole body is metaphorically a grotesque combination of various elements of nature, in that his armpit is the place where a *caper* can dwell and flourish. Such a combination is incompatible with human beings on the literal level and urbane Romans on the metaphorical one. The contrast between the image of a *tenerum ... femur* (2) and a *trux ... caper* (6) is an expression of this incompatibility in terms of positive and negative aesthetics. The idea of a savage goat dwelling in the cave of a man’s armpit is grotesque, at once horrible, subversive of the human form, and ludicrous.\(^\text{31}\)

The language of the poem is carefully chosen to call our attention to, and to restrict our imaginative perusal of, the lower stratum of Rufus’ body and the sexuality that is associated with it. Thus Rufus is rudely disabused of wondering why no *puella* would want to place her soft thigh under him (*tenerum supposuisse femur*, 2). *Supposuisse* is suggestive of the sexual act, as is made explicit in line 8 with the use of *cubet*.\(^\text{32}\)

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\(^\text{31}\) Cf. the first lines of Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, discussed above. A fuller discussion is found in the introductory chapter.

\(^\text{32}\) For the use of *cubo* in a sexual context cf. Plaut. *Mer.* 538, Ter. *Hec.* 138. See also Adams (1982), 177. The other sexually charged term is *femur*. As Adams points out, the thighs were for the Romans “a sexually significant part of the body, in that the space between them was the sight of the sexual organs,” 51. Cf. e.g. Tib. 1.8.26; Ov. *Am.* 3.14.22.
The image of the goat in the armpit is synaesthetic because the goat is a personification of Rufus’ bad smell. The effect of this personification, like the satyrs that the image subsumes, is to make explicit the aggressive assault of the stench which is *trux* (6). This adjective suggests a dialectic with the *puella’s tenerum femur* and provides further allusive context for the fleeing *puellae* (*fugium*, 10) who shun Rufus’ enticements. At the same time, the personification of smell adds a visual dimension to the scientific understanding of smell as atoms emanating from filth and decay attacking the defenseless nostrils of others. This *crudelem nasorum…pestem* (9) gives tangible materiality and almost the status of a satyr-like character to a smell. The goat under the armpit is, of course, a hybrid, while the man in whose armpit the creature dwells is himself a hybrid of the same type – that is to say a fusion of the human figure and the metaphorical hybrid he keeps under his arm. The personification of the smell as satyr de-humanizes Rufus: it makes him a hybrid of human with satyr (itself a hybrid). This play of self-similarity has the aesthetic effect of creating a grotesque figure (Rufus) decorated with a smaller grotesque that resembles it.  

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33 In the atomic theory of Lucretius, smell is caused by an emanation of atoms that meet the receiver’s nostrils. The atoms of good and bad smells have different shapes (2.414-7), they penetrate the body in ways sound and colour do not (2.680-3), but in and of themselves, as the building blocks of nature, they do not emit odours if they are not in combinations (2.842-864). Significantly, smells are not only surface phenomena, but come from deep inside things (4.694-5) and are therefore an indication of the innermost quality of things. Bailey (1964, 405) notes that the theory that smells originate deep below the surface is an original Lucretian contribution to the atomic theory of sensation.

34 We are reminded here of poem 13 where Catullus’ guest is figuratively transformed into a big nose (*deos rogabis, / totum ut te faciant, Fabulle, nasum*,13.13-4), though in that case the grotesque image has a positive function since the smell in question is the beloved’s fragrance. Fordyce (1962, *ad loc.*), Quinn (1970, *ad loc.*), Thomson (1997, *ad loc.*) all note that poem 13 is also a reworking of the invitation to dinner theme common in epigrams. The contemporary example most often cited is the epigram by Philodemus to his friend and patron Piso, *AP* 11.44. On this poem and on Philodemus’ influence in general on Catullus and the elegists see Tait (1941), ch. 2.

35 This decoration is reminiscent of the ornamental frescoes in the *domus aurea*, hybrid figures of various animals and plants, conventionally called *grottesche*. As decorations they are not the main focus but they contribute to the perception of the picture as a whole. On *grottesche* see Harpham (1982) ch. 2: “Grotesque and *Grottesche*,” 27-20.
The animal part of the hybrid figure in poem 69 is also emphasized at the narrative level. The unwillingness of the *bella puella* (8) to yield to his advances provokes the further image of her union with him, as a union between a girl and a grotesque hybrid monster, thereby multiplying images and ideas of grotesque hybridity in the mind of the reader, and potentially generating more grotesque hybrids. Rufus’ smell is referred to as a *mala…/ bestia* (7-8). If the *bella puella* were to allow Rufus to have sex with her, she would be yielding also to the *mala bestia*, and the sex itself would extend into an act of bestiality. The love that binds the three elements of the elegiac relationship (beloved, lover and rival) would itself be a hybrid, at once frightening and grotesque.

In poem 71 Catullus suggests that in the elegiac situation there is a strong grotesque dimension in the image of the *aemulus*’ smell and his gout:

> Si cui iure bono sacer alarum obstitit hircus,  
> aut si quem merito tarda podagra secat,  
> aemulus iste tuus, qui vestrum exercet amorem,  
> mirifice est a te nactus utrumque malum.  
> nam quotiens futuit, totiens ulciscitur ambos:  
> illam affligit odore, ipse perit podagra.

For the relationship between gout and goats we are indebted to a shrewd observation by Nicholson, who notes that gout is a disease associated with overindulgence in food and drink, and that overindulgence in drink and sex is a characteristic of the satyrs. To this we can add that overindulgence of any of the senses, but especially in those associated with the lower parts of the body, is located at the very heart of grotesque aesthetics, which
reveals the presence of an ignoble core in all apparent purity, and of malicious aggressiveness and ugliness in all claims to elegance and beauty.\textsuperscript{36}

Poem 71 continues to explore and to build on the themes of poem 69. This may be regarded as an invitation to consider the two poems sequentially and together: poem 69 informs poem 71, and poem 71 sheds retrospective light on poem 69. The goat that lurks under Rufus’ armpit in poem 69 is a \textit{caper} (69.6) that is pastured and is therefore somewhat domesticated. In 71, however, the \textit{caper} from 69, which is a castrated and semi-urbane goat, is transformed into a \textit{hircus} (71.1), that is to say a wild animal.\textsuperscript{37} The \textit{hircus} is not passive, but aggressively active since he creates a barrier between the man and the woman he pursues. Moreover, in contemporary Latin, the word \textit{hircus} was not only the designation for a he-goat, but was also a common figurative term for the bad smell emanating from unclean and sweaty underarms.\textsuperscript{38} There is, therefore, an intensification of emphasis from 69 to 71:\textsuperscript{39} both poems are strongly based on the visual and olfactory senses, but only in 71 is Rufus’ evil stench given agency and focal clarity. There is a significant cultural context that underpins Catullus’ use of the smell of goats as the grotesque element of his vision. By characterizing the \textit{aemulus} as an individual who smells of goat Catullus has given narrative extension to the \textit{τραγομάσχαλος}, a man who

\begin{enumerate}
\item[37] Cf. Skinner (2003, 72) who, in her discussion of the increasing disgust of the metaphor, notes that as an entire male, a \textit{hircus} “would smell even ranker.” Skinner does not mention, however, the significance of the change in terms: a \textit{hircus} mates, and in this poem, that is the problem. In poem 69, no one was sleeping with Rufus, and now he is involved in a love triangle.
\item[38] The adjective \textit{hircosus} is defined only as smelling like a goat from uncleanliness. See the \textit{OLD s.v. hircosus} which cites the \textit{senex hircosus} from Plaut. \textit{Merc.} 575. See also Riley (1869, 290) who notes that “the Romans called the strong smell produced by the glands of the arm-pits by the name of \textit{hircus}…by reason of the rank smell of that animal.”
\item[39] Both Skinner (2003) and Young Forsyth (1973), mention the increasing intensity also in the Gellius Cycle when the poems are read in the order we have them.
\end{enumerate}
emanates the stench of a goat.\textsuperscript{40} The term is used by Aristophanes in the \textit{Peace} (811) to describe Melanthius and Morsimus, two other playwrights characterized as gluttons, harpies and lecherous pursuers of old women.\textsuperscript{41} This layer of grotesque imagery suggested by the metaphor of \textit{hircus} had also been further developed in the Roman comedic tradition. In Plautus, of particular relevance is the \textit{Pseudolus}, in which the \textit{aduluscens} Charinus’ sharpness of character is punningly described as goat stench: \textit{hircum ab alis} (737).\textsuperscript{42} In the \textit{Poenulus}, moreover, Plautus uses \textit{hirquinae} to describe the hairy armpits of the \textit{servus} Syncerastus (873). Such instances of the use of \textit{hircus} and cognates in early Latin descriptions of disgusting appearance and smell provide Catullus with a comedic source for the grotesque elements that he introduces into his poetry and into his epigram cycle. The later relationship of elegy to the comedic tradition is well known, but here we see evidence of the contribution that the idea of repugnance found in comedy can make to the grotesque aesthetic purview in the neoteric poets.

The vocabulary of poem 71 presents the body in its most distasteful and crude dimensions: \textit{sacer alarum obstitit hircus} (1), \textit{tarda podagra secat} (2), \textit{illum affligit odore, ipse perit podagra} (6). The sense of aggression and excess that characterizes the gout and the stench is stylistically suggested by the abundance and hyperbolic quality of the imagery. The \textit{podagra} and odour are represented as contagious diseases: the rival has them, and transmits them to the girl, who in turn passes them on to another of her lovers, whoever he may be – perhaps even Catullus’ poet-lover himself.\textsuperscript{43} The dialectic of \textit{Odi et

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{LSJ} s.v. \textit{τραγομάσχαλος}: “with arm-pits smelling like a he-goat.”

\textsuperscript{41} Cf. Ar. \textit{Ach.} 852-3 and Ar. \textit{Pl.} 294. See also Olson (1998) \textit{ad loc.}

\textsuperscript{42} See Willcock (1987, \textit{ad loc.}) who discusses the succession of puns which \textit{hircum ab alis} sets off. Cf. Lefèvre (1997, 66) who also briefly mentions this chain of jokes.

\textsuperscript{43} Forsyth (1973), Noonan (1979), Nicholson (1997) and Skinner (2003) are all concerned with the identities of the characters in these two poems. Skinner (2003, 71) is of the opinion that Catullus is addressing himself in this poem.
amo is recalled by the reference to sex and revenge in the preceding line, nam quotiens futuit, totiens ulciscitur ambos, but the scale is tipped in the negative direction. Far from being the perfect consummation of desire and love, sex is degraded as the physical mechanism for the transmission of disease (utrumque malum, 4). The three elements of the love triangle yield to distasteful coarseness and fall into debilitating disease, as we shall see again, especially in our discussion of poem 76. The puella, who we can assume is Lesbia, is not spared this fate but instead becomes herself an instrument of contamination and debasement through her contact with Rufus. Through the imagery of the rival’s armpit-goat and gout, poems 69 and 71 look forward to the major nexus of grotesque imagery in the elegiac libellus: the debasement of the rival into a physically and morally abject individual, and the degradation of love into a contagious disease.

The Degradation of the Rival

A variation of the type of the rival is Aemilius, the subject of poem 97. He fancies himself a successful lover and thinks he has the wit and charm necessary to be such. Catullus abuses him vehemently by deploying images of gross physical degradation:

Non (ita me di ament) quicquam referre putavi, utrumne os an culum olfacerem Aemilio. nilo mundius hoc, nihilque immundius illud, verum etiam culus mundior et melior: nam sine dentibus est. hoc dentis sesquipedalis, gingiuas vero ploxeni habet veteris, praefera rictum qualem diffissus in aestu meientis mulae cunnus habere solet. hic futuit multas et se facit esse venustum, et non pistrino traditur atque asino? quem siqua attingit, non illam posse putemus aegroti culum lingere carnificis?
The poemcatalogues some of the filthiest motifs of the Catullan corpus, ranging from excrement to the stench of urine, the sexual organs and the anus. The erotic relationship of the love triangle is configured as a grotesque triangle of orifices. The degradation is achieved by means of a single image that is then expanded with details and comparanda: Aemilius’ mouth is like his anus, and his anus is like a toothless mouth. In fact his mouth is filthier than his anus (culus mundior et melior, 4), and we can infer that what comes out of it is no better than excrement. Aemilius’ upper and lower orifices are brought together into a single image in the last line, in which the girl who kisses him is pictured as one whom we could believe capable of licking the anus of a sick hangman: aegroti culum lingere carnificis (12). One of the major themes of grotesque aesthetics is the lowering of the upper into the lower stratum of the body with the consequent juxtaposition of the mouth and the anus on the one hand, and the mouth and the vagina on the other. Itself a frequent source of filth because of its association – especially in Catullus – with oral sex, the mouth is here transformed figuratively not only into an anus but also into a vagina. What is more, it is the vagina of a female mule (mulae cunnus, 8), a hybrid of horse and donkey, which, though female, is infertile. Aemilius’ mouth can issue only abject filth similar to feces. The image of a stinking mouth is ambivalent, referring the reader to the stench that actually comes out of it and to the language of wooing that Aemilius produces. His words have none of the elegance and refinement necessary for the wooing that Aemilius thinks he is good at: hic futuit multas et se facit esse uenustum (9). This grotesque contamination of the poem’s narrative language transforms language into a material agent of the grotesque. Within the narrative Aemilius is a victim of delusion since the girls who yield to his advances are not the neoteric

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44 See Richlin (1992), 151.
puellae of Catullus and his circle, that is girls who cannot be wooed other than with the proper venustas, but those who posse putemus / aegroti culum lingere carnificis (11-12). On the narrative surface, however, Catullus can make such pronouncements without damning himself because his own technical virtuosity and sense of formal elegance are so conspicuous as to justify the stance of superiority he assumes despite his own filthy content. Aemilius’ failed performativity is in sharp contrast with the successful one of the narrator, whose formal dexterity is challenged by the materially grotesque nature of the words at play but is not impeded by them.

The inversion of the mouth and the anus and their graphic combination into a single image are carried over into poem 98, addressed to an otherwise unknown Victius, who utters inanities each time he opens his mouth:

In te, si in quemquam, dici pote, putide Victi,
  id quod verbosis dicitur et fatuis.
  ista cum lingua, si usus veniat tibi, possis
    culos et crepidas lingere carpatinas.
    si nos omnino vis omnes perdere, Victi,
    hiscas: omnino quod cupidis efficies.

Catullus singles out the organ of taste and speech for emphasis because it suggests at once the physicality of sensation and speech, as well as that of literary taste and composition. Catullus degrades Victius’ use of the tongue by describing him in the act of applying it to culos (4) and crepidas... carpatinas (4). As the footwear of peasants and farmers, the carpatinae that Victius may as well lick are imagined covered with dirt and dung. On the figurative level, the image represents an indictment of Victius’ linguistic abilities and of the sense of literary elegance that goes with them. Linguistic and literary

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45 Adams (1982, 110) cites this line as an illustration of the types of vulgar context in which culus could be used.
degradation goes hand in hand with moral debasement, as Catullus implies in the downward trajectory of the tongue to reach both anus and boots. There is also a parallel social degradation of Victius since the boots he licks are not the footwear of the urbane elite.\footnote{Cf. Quinn (1970, ad loc.) who notes that these are cheap shoes worn by peasants.} Though not itself mentioned, a significant feature of the situation described is the smell that must accompany the taste. Catullus makes sure, at the very start, that the reader retains for the remainder of the poem the olfactory sensation of revolting smell by characterizing his addressee as putidus in an emphatic position at the end of the first line. Besides indicating stench, putidus has connotations of festering wounds and decay.\footnote{OLD s.v. putidus 1.} It therefore implies a sense of revulsion and disgust on the part of the speaker, something that is also suggested by the plosive phonemes with which the line begins and which, like all other plosives, mimic the gesture of spitting out. Catullus emphasizes this gesture of the mouth again at line 4 by repeating the plosives c, p, t in the verse and combining them all in the last word in the line: culos et crepidas lingere carpatinas. There, lingere is the only word in which these spitting sounds do not occur and, appropriately enough, it is the only word describing the action that Victius performs. Victius absorbs with his tongue, whereas Catullus is, in effect, spitting out Victius’ foulness. It is also noteworthy that in contemporary Latin the term putidus could be used to describe objectionable and tiresome speech.\footnote{See OLD s.v. putidus 3. Cf. e.g. Cic. De Or. 3.51, Att. 1.14.1, Orat. 27, Off. 1.133; Hor. S. 2.7.1.} Catullus makes use of this ambivalence and further emphasizes it with the words verbosis, fatuis (both in line 2), and even lingua (3), that is to say the very organ for the production of speech. Victius may not be a rival in love, but he is one in the use of language, and Catullus excoriates him for producing mediocre speech. In order to do so, however, he first filters that speech through the paradigm of the grotesque, which
turns the act of speaking into a degrading and ugly gesture. He then expresses Victius’
debasement in carefully refined verse. From the perspective of grotesque aesthetics, the
poem is itself a hybrid construct, uniting as it does the negative and positive polarities of
the reciprocally transgressive objects (artistic refinement and sordid content) on which
the poet simultaneously focuses.

Polluting the Act of Love

Having turned speech into a grotesque gesture, Catullus turns next to the other act
performed by the lips of lovers, that is to say kissing, and transforms it into a repugnant
experience for the beloved Juventius, whose lips are befouled by those of the poet-lover:

Surripui tibi, dum ludis, mellite Juventi,
suaviolum dulci dulcius ambrosia.
verum id non impune tuli: namque amplius horam
suffixum in summa me memini esse cruce,
dum tibi me purgo nec possum fletibus ullis
tantillum vestrae demere saevitiae.
nam simul id factum est, multis diluta labella
guttis abstersisti omnibus articulis,
ne quicquam nostro contractum ex ore maneret,
tamquam commictae spurca saliva lupae.
praeterea infesto miserum me tradere amori
non cessasti omnique excruciare modo,
ut mi ex ambrosia mutatum iam foret illud
suaviolum tristi tristius elleboro.
quam quoniam poenam misero proponis amori,
umquam iam posthac basia surripiam.

Poem 99 juxtaposes opposites and produces images of distortion that blend pleasant and
unpleasant, upper and lower body, and fluids that issue from upper and lower orifices.
The action that occasions the poem appears to be intentionally pure, but, when Juventius
wipes the kiss off his mouth, he performs a gesture that lowers elegiac love into
scatology. If we consider this poem together with 81, in which Juventius prefers the love of his guest who is paler than a gilded statue (*hospes inaurata pallidior statua*, 81. 4) to the speaker, we can surmise that the Juventius cycle includes an elegiac love triangle of lover, fickle beloved and rival. However, as far as the motif of the *os impurum* is concerned, 99 must be read in conjunction with 98. The two poems are brought together by the parallel occurrence of the qualified vocative in the final position in the first line, the only such occurrence in the elegiac *libellus*. In moving from *putide Victi*, however, to *mellite Juventi*, the reader leaves the realm of negative olfaction and enters that of positive taste. As the ideal beloved, Juventius carries into the poem many of the refined and elegant features and vocabulary of the earlier polymetric Lesbia poems. This positive content is juxtaposed immediately, however, with the offensive imagery of the *os impurum*. Significantly the *os impurum* this time belongs to the speaker who snatches a kiss from Juventius, contaminating the boy’s lips. Juventius is revolted by the contact and wipes the kiss away with the same fear and vehemence *tamquam commictae spurca saliua lupae* (10). Richlin observes that the commixture of spittle and urine is the result of an implied fellatio. At this point the sweetness of honey becomes the bitterness of hellebore. The tender kiss of an idealized *puer delicatus* is lowered into vulgar materiality. It is not like the kisses that Catullus and Lesbia exchanged in poem 5, nor

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49 Juventius appears also in 24, where there is a rival and in 48 where the speaker’s kisses are described in physical terms but without crossing over into the grotesque. In the polymetrics, Juventius remains pure and idealized.

50 Cf. Young Forsyth (1979), who argues that, on the basis of the complex juxtapositions and common themes running through poems 97-99, the ordering is the work of the poet.

51 As Skinner (2003, 121-2) observes, the poem includes a “patchwork” from the amatory poems, especially those with Lesbia. See also Richlin (1992, 152) for an interpretation of Juventius as conventional beloved parallel to Lesbia.

52 This reminds us of the Rufus triangle in which love is expressed in terms of contagion and disease, an aspect of the theme that will be explored later in the chapter.

53 Richlin (1992), 150. We are also reminded here of poems 37 and 39 which viciously attack the rival Egnatius who brushes his teeth with urine, suggesting that this commixture is carried over from the polymetrics.
like those the speaker gives to Juventius in poem 48. Here ideal love is contaminated by fellatio.

It is noteworthy that the initial image of a honeyed beloved has been transformed by the contaminating kiss into the bitter taste of a poisonous plant. A basic tenet of the grotesque style is that it shows the body not as a static entity but in flux between contrasting natures. Lesbia remains always herself, despite the many faults of her personality, but Juventius, having been polluted by the poet-lover, changes from a Lesbia-like beloved to a contaminated foul individual. Although he washes the kiss off, he has been degraded to the level of vulgarity that typifies his admirer, and is no longer the ideal beloved of elegy and epigram. In contrast to Lesbia who performs fellatio in back alleys in the polymetrics (poem 58), but who receives and continues to receive the poet’s adoration in elegiacs (for example, poems 75, 87 and 92) without suffering permanent degradation, Juventius is tainted forever. The reason for this is that the contaminator is the poet-lover who had already lowered himself into the world of sordidness described in the two previous poems. Juventius wipes off the kiss and the speaker promises not to steal any more kisses: *numquam iam posthac basia surripiam* (16). We may see in this line a possible reason why Juventius does not appear again in the *libellus*.

The Gellius Cycle: Moral and Social Turpitude

The poems of the Gellius cycle introduce another type of ugliness into Catullus’ depiction of love: the moral and social ugliness of incest. The Gellius cycle consists of six poems (74, 80, 88, 89, 90, 91) placed at various locations in the elegiac *libellus* and of

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54 On the last couplet of the poem see Marshall (1971).
a seventh one (not relevant to the grotesque) at the very end as the closing composition (116). The dominant feature of the six poems is Catullus’ characterization of Gellius as a man who practices the unnatural vice of incest. In his use of the topos of incest and his chastisement of Gellius as an incestuous lecher, Catullus assumes the view of polite society, which condemned incestuous sex in very severe terms. Incest is forbidden sex, morally and juridically, because copulation between members of the same family threatens the natural order of society and violates both the natural and the social order. The social posture of the aristocracy on the need to maintain affinity within the family offered a “notional connection” between the moral and political arenas of incest as a scelus.\textsuperscript{55} The need for such affinity readily invites speculation about incestuous practices. The political and moral dimensions of incest appear to be inseparable for Catullus in his treatment of Gellius. However, if Catullus had stopped at this indictment of incest, his Gellius cycle would have little or no interest for an aesthetic of the grotesque. But in the poems of the Gellius cycle there are at least two points of profound relevance to the theory of the grotesque. The first is that he dwells at length on the motif, uniting it with details both positive and negative, of his particular poetic world of elegy. In poem 80 the pallor of Gellius’ normally rosy lips \textit{(rosea ista labella / hiberna fiant candidiora nive,1-2)}, sets up the expectation of an elegiac lover because paleness is a standard attribute of the unrequited lover.\textsuperscript{56} But in fact his lips are pale from the act of fellatio.\textsuperscript{57} He is a lover, but a grotesque and perverse one. Moreover, in poem 88 his incest is compared to an act of self-fellatio, which conjures up the image of a contorted body that is grotesque in the

\textsuperscript{55} On this see Tatum (1997), 499.
\textsuperscript{56} He is also \textit{tenuis} in 89.1, but that is as a result of his affairs, not because he is being described as someone wasting away from love.
\textsuperscript{57} Skinner (2003, 84) notes how this image makes the paleness of Juventius’ preferred lover in 81 more sinister.
extreme: *non si demisso se ipse voret capite*, (88.8). The second point of interest is that in poem 89 Catullus describes, though mockingly, Gellius’ situation as that of a man faced with an overwhelming temptation. How can he restrain himself when he is surrounded by such enticing women as his aunt, sister and mother? (*tam bona mater*, 1; *venusta sorror*, 2; *puellis / cognates*, 3-4). The temptation of incest, however, is not only the enticement of sex, but the desire to transgress a supreme rule of social order. Grotesque situations put our fortitude to the test; they tempt us with an experience of monstrousness that is a corrupted form of familiarity.\(^{58}\)

In the Gellius cycle Catullus iterates in escalating aggression his charges of multiple incest, conjuring up shocking images of disloyalty and familial perversion that belong to the socially monstrous. In poem 90, Gellius yields to the most monstrous perversions of sex, which is copulation with his mother. Catullus wishes upon Gellius that his impious mating with his mother may produce an unholy offspring:

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Nascatur magus ex Gelli matrisque nefando coniugio et discat Persicum aruspicum:
nam magus ex matre et gnato gignatur oportet,
si vera est Persarum impia religio,
gratus ut accepto veneretur carmine divos omentum in flamma pingue liquefaciens.
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A son-mother incest is an unnatural union of enormous gravity (*nefando / coniugo*, 90.1), productive of such monstrous moral hybrids as only grossly incompatible sex partners can engender. Catullus imagines that Gellius mating with his mother will result in the creation of a *magus*, a product of unnatural hybridity well disposed to practice Persian augury and to sing chants to impious gods. Themselves conceived as hybrids of human and divine, the anthropomorphic Persian deities will receive from Gellius’ son the fat of

\(^{58}\) Harpham (1982), 5.
omenta, removed from the body of animals for the ritual of divination and placed to liquefy and burn on their braziers. The aesthetic prism through which Catullus views all of these details is the familiar paradigm of the grotesque imagination, which enables him to bring together in the depiction of his rival images of incest, hybridity, disgusting physicality, and animal viscera. It is, moreover, possible that Catullus’ rival in amicitia is also a rival in poetry. Given that dried omenta were used as writing materials, and considering that omentum ... pingue can be read as a reference to un-Callimachean poetry⁵⁹– poetry that Catullus would not appreciate⁶⁰– his opponent would have all the makings of a poetic rival, though a poor one. Omentum...pingue in that case would be another form of cacata charta (poem 36).⁶¹ The future magus’ carmina – a word that means poems as well as incantations – would become in the reader’s perception grotesque poems by a natural affinity of ideas.

The incestuous union of Gellius with his mother belongs, arguably, to the most abject category of forbidden sex. On the one hand, it has the union of Oedipus and Jocasta as a precedent, with all the disruptive impact that their act entailed both personally and socially. On the other hand, Catullus explicitly equates the potential offspring from such a union with a Persian magus. The poem makes ample use of the vocabulary of the contemporary culture of witchcraft and wizardry: Persicum aruspiciun, 2; magus, 3; impia religio, 4; carmine, 5.⁶² The grotesque sensibility that animates the poem draws into its ambit omentum, the innermost part of the body that contains yet another part of the body, namely the intestine, while the intestine itself

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⁵⁹ Thomson (1997), ad loc.
⁶¹ We can imagine that the speaker, as far as merit is concerned, would group these poems with Volusius’ Annals which are described as the electissima pessimi poetae / scripta, 36. 6-7.
⁶² On the language typical of Greco-Roman magic and magicians see Burriss (1936) and Dickie (2001).
contains that part of the outside world that the body has devoured and turned to fecal matter. By describing Gellius’ *magus* offspring as a Persian priest practicing a demonic religion, Catullus suggests that mother-son incest is a most un-Roman vice. Gellius is a member of the Roman elite and a senator, but he is Roman only in name, and Catullus wishes upon him the total ruin of siring a barbarous child who will seek his education from the priests of hideous foreign gods.

In addition to committing such unnatural acts that undermine the social order by perverting family relationships, Gellius also undermines the principles of loyalty on which *amicitia* was based. In poem 91, Catullus accuses him of having betrayed him with Lesbia. Therefore Gellius has cast himself as a rival rather than as an *amicus*:

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Non ideo, Gelli, sperabam te mihi fidum
in misero hoc nostro, hoc perdito amore fore,
quod te cognossem bene constantemve putarem
aut posse a turpi mentem inhibere probro;
sed neque quod matrem nec germanam esse videbam
hanc tibi, cuius me magnus edebat amor.
et quamvis tecum multo coniungerer usu,
non satis id causae credideram esse tibi.
tu satis id duxti: tantum tibi gaudium in omni
culpa est, in quacumque est aliquid sceleris.
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In order to describe what he felt for Lesbia Catullus makes use of a singularly grotesque expression that subsumes several of the most basic principles of grotesque aesthetics: *me magnus edebat amor* (6). Unlike the more conventional expression for this sentiment – that is, burning with love – Catullus imagines himself being eaten by a magnified

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personification of love and being ingested by another body. The interpretation of Lesbia as Catullus’ *magnus amor* is unavoidable, and therefore it is she who devours the speaker. The effect of the carnal physicality implicit in the verb *edere* is to transform elegiac love into a physical act imagined as the melding of two bodies through what is in essence an act of cannibalism. Moreover the conventional image of a burning love has a sublime dimension, in that burning always ends in the insubstantial and may remind us of a heavenly offering. On the other hand, the image of a devouring love has a grotesque dimension, in that eating drags the focus of the poem into the interior of the devourer’s body and is an act that ends with defecation. Though his own love is not as overladen with the distasteful features he attributes to his rivals, it is nonetheless a grotesque form of love, and not one altogether free of the taint of censurable fellatio.

Tatum suggests that Gellius’ seduction of Lesbia is comparable to political incest. The basis for the parallelism lies in the fact that Gellius, who is inclined to incestuous relationships, selects his lovers only from his immediate social equals. Since he also pursues Lesbia, Catullus presents him as a man who, on some level, considers her related to him in a quasi-familial way by the bond of his *amicitia* with Catullus. As Skinner observes, “the application of the noun *amicitia* to a relationship imposed upon it an idealized vision of conduct prompted by reciprocal goodwill.” The relationship between Catullus and Gellius is figuratively on a par with that between Gellius and his uncle, though Catullus has surreptitiously inverted the hierarchy by assuming the role of

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64 Catullus does use *edere* of the consumptive power of love in 35.15, but there it is fire that devours, not *amor: ignes interiorem edunt medullam.*
65 It is worthwhile to recall at this point that Catullus is himself a rival, since Lesbia is married. In poem 83 we find out that she abuses Catullus in front of her husband: *Lesbia mi praesente viro mala plurima dicit,* 83.1.
66 Tatum (1997), 498.
67 Skinner (2003), 76.
the wronged *amicus maior* in the now tainted *amicitia*. Gellius’ action is comparable to that of Catullus’ other rival, Rufus, who similarly subverts the principles of loyalty on which his *amicitia* with Catullus is built. By their disloyal actions, Catullus’ rivals have contaminated their *amicitia* and lay upon it the burden of abominable guilt.

In poem 91 the relationship of *amicitia* appears to contain at its core a criminal element that could subvert it. That explains the use of *culpa* and *sceleris* in the closing line of the poem. Given that *amicitia* has a quasi-familial dimension, such a crime elicits a sense of horror. Catullus is the wronged *amicus*, while Gellius’ seduction of Lesbia is very similar to that of his uncle’s wife. However, Catullus will not be as complacent as Gellius’ uncle (*tamque bonus patruus*, 89.3), even if Gellius is a Roman citizen of higher rank.

**Love as Illness**

In poems 76 and 77 Catullus presents his persona as the locus of grotesque activities rather than as their observer or perpetrator. We can see an instance of this approach when the persona’s suffering on account of failed love and failed friendship is metaphorically presented as the result of a terrible disease. In poem 76 Lesbia has become indifferent to his advances and as a result he becomes lovesick. He describes his own love as a malady that insinuates itself into him, making him suffer to the point of desperation. In poem 77 he is afflicted by another disease, which has also insinuated itself inside him and burns him from within his intestine. This malady was caused by Rufus’ violation of the bond of *amicitia* between them. Elsewhere (poems 69 and 71) Catullus suggests that Rufus was his rival in love for Lesbia and that therefore he was also the
cause of Lesbia’s indifference towards him. The two diseases of poems 76 and 77, both of them literally destroying the poetic persona, are related and may in fact be read as different aspects of the same condition. Their identification is suggested especially by their common vocabulary: pestem perniciem (76.20) and pestis amicitiae (77.6).

In her theory of illness as metaphor, Susan Sontag suggests that the non-scientific discourse of illness is not concerned with the sick but with “the punitive or sentimental fantasies”⁶⁸ that the healthy construct in their descriptions of illness. If such descriptions concern the self, then in the same fantasies the self figures as a victim. We can see this especially in poem 76 in which Catullus seeks deliverance from his condition by praying to the gods in a manner that suggests that he did not deserve any of the suffering that has been inflicted upon him:

eripite hanc pestem perniciemque mihi,
quae mihi subreps imos ut torpor in artus
expulit ex omni pectore laetitias.

...  
ipse valere opto et taetrum hunc deponere morbum.
o di, reddite mi hoc pro pietate mea.  (76. 20-2, 25-6)

The suffering is moral as well as physical, but it is expressed as a physical affliction causing a paralysis of the body; however, the part of the body that is most affected is described as imos, innermost, with the implication that the ailment concerns the persona at the most profound level of his being. The poem is both punitive and sentimental. The love malady is both spiritual and physical, but in the imaginative world of the poem the spiritual element is lowered into the world of materiality (torpor in artus, 21). Because of its association with the word imos, artus, which designates an exterior limb of the body, assumes also the meaning of the speaker’s interior being. The speaker’s body as well as

⁶⁸ Sontag (1979), 3.
his soul suffers from the *torpor*. Further textual support for this idea is found in line 22: *expulit ex omni pectore laetitias*. Quinn observes that *pectus* refers both to the trunk of the body and the location of a person’s *animus*, which is the source of emotions,\(^{69}\) but he does not make the connection suggested here, that is, that the malady from which the lover suffers is both spiritual and physical. The significance of Catullus’ formulation of both aspects of the disease in material terms emerges when we recall that in addition to meaning the limbs of the body, *artus* also refers to the sexual organ. Once again Catullus introduces an element of grotesque aesthetics into his poetry. The *torpor* of the soul, is also a *torpor* of the body and ultimately a sexual paralysis: the movement of the reader’s focus is the familiar one of degradation from spirit to body down to the lower stratum represented by the sexual organs.

A further reminder of the grotesque frame of the poem is found in the word *pestem* itself, which – assuming, with the *communis opinio*, the author’s arrangement of the elegiac *libellus* – looks forward to the characterization of Rufus as *pestis amicitiae* in the following poem (77) and recalls at the same time the goat of 69 (*nasorum... pestem, 69.9*):

> Rufe mihi frustra ac nequiquam credite amice<br>  (frusta? immo magno cum pretio atque malo),<br>  sicine subrepsti mi, atque intestina perurens<br>  ei misero eripuisti omnia nostra bona?<br>  eripuisti, heu heu nostrae crudele venenum<br>  vitae, heu heu nostrae pestis amicitiae.

The malady of the lovesick persona is associated at once with the most grotesque traits of the rival, a foul-smelling lover and a destroyer of *amicitia*. In poems 71 and 77 Rufus\(^{70}\)

\(^{69}\) Quinn (1970), 410.

\(^{70}\) We can assume that the unnamed rival in 71 is Rufus because of the same stench characterized in both cases as the underarm goat.
is identified with the disease itself which creeps up into the protagonist and burns through him: *sicine subrepsti mi atque intestina perurens* (77.3). Catullus’ desire to be rid of his affliction is, on the one hand, a wish to eradicate from his mind the negative passion that devours him – that is, Lesbia, who is the ultimate source of his passion – and on the other hand to chastise his rival. He cannot accomplish the first task, because to do so he would have to abandon the elegiac genre of his final collection which requires him to be unhappy (cf. 65.12). As for the second task, he can only provide the reader with a sense of the gravity of Rufus’ action by describing the effect that it has had on him and on their friendship. It is by means of this second, equally desperate task, that Catullus grafts on to the conventional understanding of love poetry a conspicuous element of grotesque aesthetics. Rufus is degraded to the point that he becomes a *crudele venenum* (5) and a *pestis* (6) that burns through his intestines (*intestina perurens*, 3). The reader who is alert to Catullus’ proclivity for the grotesque, and who has already been drawn into the creative process, can easily supply the missing image of what goes through the intestines and ultimately identify Rufus with the speaker’s excrement.

In this aggressive act of degradation Catullus is punitive and venomous in his characterization of Rufus whom he reduces to the essence of turpitude. By doing so, he shows Rufus to be an offensive transgressor of the rules of urbanity and employs figures of hyperbole and the imagery of abjection to punish him. The distancing of defilers from good society is always an attempt to impose rules “on an inherently untidy experience.”

In poem 69 Rufus smelled, that is to say he exhibited the symptoms, but in poem 77 he

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71 Godwin (1999, ad loc.) points out that burning is frequently used as an image for sexual passion. Cf. 68. 52-3 where the poet-lover burns with desire, and 83.6 where it is Lesbia who burns with love.

has become the disease itself, a disease which has entered the poet-lover’s body and is
devouring him from the inside. According to Quinn, the verb *subrepsti* (77.3) “is used to
suggest the insidious onset of a slowly debilitating disease.”  
A compound of *repo*,
which in its literal and primary meaning denotes crawling on the ground, and of the
preposition *sub*, which adds the suggestion of concealment from vision, *subrepo* pictures
the disease as something that moves imperceptibly and insidiously, that is with malicious
designs.  
Such a characterization of disease illustrates well Sontag’s theory of the
common metaphorical representation of diseases as punitive and malevolent fantasies of
organisms driven by the intent to debilitate and destroy.  
When the disease reveals its
presence, Catullus focuses on its destructive effect by means of a verb of predation,
*eripuisti* (77.4), which literally means to seize by force. He then further intensifies the
image of predatory violence by repeating the same verb in a very emphatic position, as
the first word of a line followed by a natural pause (77.5), and immediately adds to it the
sense of malicious intent by calling the disease *venenum* (77.5) with respect to the
speaker’s life, and a *pestis* (77.6) with respect to the institution of friendship. By means
of his metaphorical depiction of Rufus as a disease, and by his subsequent depiction of
the disease as a crawling organism that enters under cover of friendship into the speaker’s
body and soul in order to consume him from within, Catullus effects a grotesque
debasement of his rival, attributes deception and malevolence to him, and simultaneously
proclaims the unfairness of the suffering that he must endure as his victim. Rufus is guilty
of violating the most basic rules of *amicitia*, and therefore deserves to be debased
grotesquely as a disease of the bowels.

73 Quinn (1970), 411.
74 *OLD s.v. repo* 1; *OLD s.v. subrepo* 2.
75 See Sontag (1979), 6.
The stability of Roman society depends on proper respect for traditional values and basic principles of social order. That Rufus should undermine the stability of society with his uncleanliness is, of course, a rhetorical exaggeration, but, as both Mary Douglas and Homi Bhabha remind us, it is only through such exaggerations that order can be created and cultural stability maintained.\textsuperscript{76} Unlike Rufus, Catullus considers himself a good *amicus*, respectful of the rules of proper conduct (*reddite mi hoc pro pietate mea*, 76.26).\textsuperscript{77} But why is it that he is made to suffer so, that he should have to beg the gods for deliverance? As far as the poetic world of his persona is concerned, Catullus has indeed obeyed the rules of proper conduct: he has loved Lesbia despite her fickleness, and he has cast himself in the role of the lover. But in order to do so, he has had to violate a rule of society, according to which he must not have an affair with a married woman, and Lesbia is indeed married. Yet such an affair is precisely what he pursues, and he takes delight in imagining his affair as a marriage made up of gifts stolen from the lap of his mistress’ husband (*sed furtive dedit…munuscula…/ ipsius ex ipso dempta viri gremio*, 68b.145-6).

The rules of society are present in the poetry as the background against which individual love affairs take place, but their presence, as we shall see in detail in later chapters, is not normally foregrounded by the Augustan elegists. In elegy proper the grotesque is more narrowly focused on the obstacles, represented especially by the *lena* and the rival, that the poet-lover wants to but cannot overcome in the pursuit of his beloved. Catullus, however, also calls attention to the social order that is the *mise-en-scène* of the love relationship, revealing in it the presence of something that undermines its polished exterior. As practiced by Catullus, the genre is built on a tension that joins together

\textsuperscript{76} Douglas (1966), 4; Bhabha (1986), 163.
\textsuperscript{77} Cf. also 87.4 where he reminds Lesbia of his faithful contract in love with her.
incompatible visions of conduct and that characterizes the relationship between form and content. To focus on one or the other of the two elements is to miss the point of the tension. For the juxtaposition of reciprocally undermining elements is an aspect of the fundamental dialectic of grotesque aesthetics.78

The metaphorical identification of Rufus with a pestis simultaneously de-personifies the rival and personifies the disease. In grotesque aesthetics, metaphor is at once a figure of speech and a figure of thought. It induces the reader to see the tenor in terms of the vehicle, momentarily grasping the imaginative transformation at the literal level, and merging into one the “distinct significative realms” to which the two elements belong.79 The experience of metaphor literally understood as a material identification is an experience of incongruity and hybridity, at the linguistic and at the referential levels, an experience that jolts the reader into the estrangement necessary for aesthetic reception and interpretation.

The perception of metaphors as instances of material identification shock the reader with the violation of logic and the transgression of nature. We have seen that in the elegiac libellus Catullus resorts frequently to such violations, extending them to the human body, to social conduct, and to love itself. Using a theoretical framework derived from Bakhtin, Harpham and Kristeva, we have shown that Catullus makes bold use of the grotesque to show that beneath the flimsy surface of elegance, urbanity, and romantic love, there lurks a reality that is both defiled and defiling. By using images and evocations of this reality, Catullus admits into the domain of love poetry thematic materials and language that transgress expectations of works meant to foreground love

78 Harpham (1982).
79 Remshardt (2004), 151.
and beauty. Catullus’ persona has recourse to the grotesque in order to vilify his rival in love as an individual worthy of the worst form of physical, social, and moral abjection. Love itself is not the idealizing sentiment that it may appear to be but coarse physical carnality, indeed a disease that crawls like an animal inside the lover’s body, degrading it and devouring it. The persona is therefore also imagined as the locus of grotesque and abject actions. For Catullus, lovers and love are not immune to defilement, which is why love poetry can also be poetry of denunciation.

Much of Catullus’ grotesque is explicit and graphic, but much of it relies on poetic and cultural memory to achieve aesthetic fullness. In order to appreciate it, readers must bring to their encounter with the text a readiness to supply missing images and to pursue allusive suggestions, for the possession of an active memory is the condition for the sudden proliferation of images in which the aesthetic experience of the grotesque culminates. Such images are also literary materia that enables and supports the working of memory and writing. The poet’s identification of Rufus with the disease that burns his intestine calls to renewed presence the goat under his armpit, which is also a pestis. It also brings into the picture the gout-afflicted persona of the poet, since the suet of billygoats was used in the treatment of this malady.\textsuperscript{80} The poet’s gout in turn summons forth Juventius, whose kiss had for him the bitterness of hellebore, a plant also commonly used to treat the gout.\textsuperscript{81} Finally the association of images brings into the aesthetic experience a future magus, progeny of incestuous parents, burning the inner fat of sacrificial animals while chanting incantations that are also poems. Catullus’ grotesque imagination truly delights in opulence.

\textsuperscript{80} Pliny \textit{Nat.} 24.35.
\textsuperscript{81} Hippocrates as cited in Copeman (1964), 24.
Chapter Three

The Grotesque Rival, Lena and Puella in Propertian Elegy

The major principles of grotesque theory on which this chapter is based are that aggressive degradation is a pivotal concept of grotesque realism and that in the ethos evoked by grotesque imagery, beauty and sentiment are disrupted without being destroyed. In the grotesque imagination, the world of the beautiful and the elegant is lowered to the level of the repulsive, the domain of abstractions and sentiment is brought down to the realm of crass economics and physicality, and pretenders to refinement and status are ridiculed as haughty inferiors.¹ Propertius has strategic recourse to the principle of grotesque degradation in his depiction of the poet-lover’s rival and, especially, in his characterization and description of the procuress. Propertius also resorts to the transformative and revelatory power of grotesque imagery to explore the character of the puella as the cornerstone of the elegiac genre. By introducing grotesque motifs in his treatment of the elegiac love situation, he destabilizes the conventions of elegy and points the reader to the recognition of a dialectical base at its core. In the elegiac tradition the ideal of attainment is highly refined amatory poetry, polished with great care in every detail and elegant in all aspects of its form.

¹ Bakhtin (1968, 19-20) states that “the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity.” In the context of the Renaissance, to which Bakhtin applies the concept, grotesque degradation is used in arguments for the celebratory affirmation of life in folk culture, but as an analytical category, it is applicable to literary works that have nothing to do with folk culture. In classical studies, Bakhtin’s theory has been invoked especially in the study of satire and comedy, in particular by Braund (1989), Braund and Gold (1998), Christenson (2001).
For Propertius this ideal is best represented by the image of Coan silk, a finely spun and elegant material that requires great skill for its production. This occurs programmatically in the Propertian corpus in two key places:

\[
\text{quid iuvat ornato procedere, vita, capillo et tenuis Coa veste movere sinus} \quad (1.2.1-2)
\]

and

\[
\text{sive illam Cois fulgentem incedere cogis, hac totum e Coa veste volumen erit}\quad (2.1.5-6)
\]

Given the common association of poetic composition with the art of weaving, scholars are agreed that Coan silk is a trope for the fine art and delicate labour presupposed by poetry in the Callimachean and Philetan tradition. The original source is thought to be Call. fr. 532 Pf., where Coan silk is compared to Philetas’ writings: \(\tau\omega\ \iota\kappa\epsilon\lambda\omicron\nu\ \tau\omicron\ \gamma\rho\acute{\alpha}m\mu\alpha\ \tau\omicron\ \K\omega\acute{\iota}n\). Against the background of such refinement, the reader encounters instances of aggressive material realism that have the air of unexpected intrusions of the grotesque into a world of luxury and artistic elegance. My purpose in this chapter is to examine the principal instances of such “intrusion,” particularly in relation to the figures of the rival, the \textit{lena} and the \textit{puella} in order to determine how the poet deploys them to question the conventions of the genre from within its core, showing that the grotesque is an inalienable part of the elegiac \textit{mise-en-scène}.

A grotesque reading of Propertius can be linked on several fronts to recent

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2 Unless otherwise stated, I follow Fedeli’s Teubner for the text of Propertius’ \textit{Elegies}.

3 On the significance of Coan silk as a trope for refined poetry in Propertius see \textit{inter alia} Heyworth (1986), 209 and (2007), 104; Keith (1994), 27-8 and (2008), 92-3, 99; Wyke (2002), 150; Fedeli (2005), 50ff. On Philetas see Spanoudakis (2002), 42-3. For a thorough discussion of the relationship between Propertius, Callimachus and Philetas see Boucher (1965), ch. vi and vii. In the present argument the image of Coan silk will recur with metaliterary implications in our discussion of 4.5 where it is quoted from 1.2 by the \textit{lena} Acanthis.
Propertian scholarship, which has been centrally concerned with such themes as the transgression of boundaries, exaltation of poetic craft, and the revision of hermeneutical expectations. Variously situated with respect to the articulation of these themes, scholars such as Gutzwiller, Myers, Keith and Wyke, have raised issues and proposed interpretations that are, as we shall see, of great relevance to the argument advanced in this chapter, which moves in an independent direction but is much indebted to their conclusions.

Building on some of their accomplishments and on details gleaned from Fedeli’s rich commentaries, I aim to show that the destabilizing elements associated with the rival, the lena and the puella are grotesque motifs that appear to be intrusions into the world of elegy without actually being extraneous to the aesthetics of the genre. The narrative discourse that such instances of the grotesque support is that of a poet-lover who becomes increasingly aware of his inability to retain his puella with his love poetry.

As Propertius’ narrative ego evolves, he surmises that his inability is due to the actions of two characters, the rival and the lena, who present obstacles to his love and to his poetry from within the elegiac mise-en-scène itself. He also imagines that the puella rejects the poetry that he claims she has inspired. This narrative discourse reveals that the poet-lover’s conception of his genre is unstable at the core and that the grotesque elements, while they have the appearance of intrusions, are no intrusions at all but expressions of

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4 Of particular relevance to my reading of Propertius are Gutzwiller’s (1985) observation that through the *lena* the poet distances himself from the voice of his autobiographical persona which dominates much of the narrative, Myers’ (1996) conclusion that internal anti-elegiac postures are necessary to the composition of erotic elegy, Keith’s (2008) argument on Propertius’ dependence on the rhetorical theory of *prosopopoeia*, Wyke’s (2002) idea that the *lena* represents the dialectical opposite of the puella and is equally necessary to erotic elegy precisely for that reason, and Richlin’s (1992a) interpretation of elegy as a genre focused on the idealization of characters and their erotic relations – as we shall see this idealizing tendency is challenged from the inside by the incorporation of grotesque motifs. The work of these and other scholars will be invoked at various times in the development of my argument for a grotesque reading of Propertius.

5 This use of “narrative discourse” is based on the distinction between story and plot made by Brooks (1985, 13f). The story corresponds to the imagined sequence of events narrated in the *Elegies*. The plot, or narrative discourse, is the interpretative selection and organization of the events presented by the narrator.
the dialectical incongruity that lies at the heart of elegy, to the realization of which they are as necessary as the Coan elegance with which they clash.

The Rival

Though in the story he poses a real threat to the poet-lover’s intentions, Propertius’ rival, the Illyrian praetor, has a surprisingly small presence in the plot. He is introduced very quickly in 1.8, without any suggestions of the grotesque: *et tibi iam tanti, quicumquest, iste videtur, / ut sine me vento quolibet ire velis?* (1.8.3-4). He next appears again in 2.16 in a context that, as we shall soon see, is replete with grotesque images; he reappears in similar guise though very briefly in 3.20; and makes a final appearance in 4.5, as the contender to whom the lena directs the puella. His basic features are that he is rich, haughty, comes from another province, is accustomed to a non-elegiac life, and lacks all the sentiment and social refinement that alone should make him eligible as a contender for Cynthia’s attentions, which instead he purchases with his wealth. These aspects of his character make him an ideal target for the poet-lover’s punitive application of grotesque features.

In the context of a reading based on the structural unity of the poem and on the recognition of its allusions, Barbara Gold has shown that 1.8 must be read simultaneously on two levels, since the narrative resonates with references to poetry as well as elegiac love. For this reason she interprets the *rivalis* (1.8.45) as specifying the *iste* (1.8.3) on the one hand and as a reference “to any potential literary rival” on the other.6 We can extend this argument to include other poems in which there is a denigration of the rival,

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especially 2.16, in which the *iste* of 1.8, who tempts Cynithia to sail with him to *gelida Illyria* (1.8.2), returns as the Illyrian *praetor*.

In the first line of 2.16, the rival is in fact identified as a *praetor* recently arrived *ab Illyricis ... terris*. This expression serves a double purpose in that it denotes the *praetor’s* geographical provenance and implies his literary ignorance. Hendry argues that *Illyricis* can be understood to suggest *haud lyricis* and concludes that since the poet’s rival is a vulgar *barbarus*, “a province populated by *Illyrici* is the most appropriate possible posting for him.”7 We may support his argument by noting that phonetically the word *Illyricus* also brings to mind the meaning of *haud lyricus*, by analogy with words in which the privative prefix *in-* is assimilated into *il-*. The rival is thus presented as an unpoetic alien, an outsider to both Rome and poetry, and hence doubly incompatible with Cynthia. The double sense evoked by the sound of the word also illustrates a principle that is characteristic of grotesque writing, namely the principle according to which apparently stable forms reveal their semantic instability upon scrutiny, simultaneously suggesting that in producing that subtle instability the speaker has assumed a stance that is derisive and angry at the same time.8 The image of the rival as an unlettered anti-lyric foreigner establishes immediately the superiority of the poet-lover and provides the reader with a clue to his rival’s literary provenance. The disqualification of the rival, however, is not absolute, for it is meant to increase the dominance of the narrator over his

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7 Hendry (1997), 602. Fedeli (2005, 475) cites Hendry but finds his interpretation problematic, since *Illyricus* is a term of Greek origin. My argument is based on the phonetic consideration of the word in which there can be little doubt that it can connote *haud lyricis*. The phonetic connotation plays against the literal meaning of the scripted term, deforming it semantically in the sense of what Thomson (1972, 27) calls playful grotesque.

8 In more general terms the principle applies to all images that conceal a smaller ludicrous image which elicits mockery. As Thomson (1972, 42) explains, upon discovery of the contained image, the readers’ reaction to the combination is a confusion of the two distinct reactions that the images would elicit if they occurred separately. The provocation of a confused reaction is what distinguishes grotesque from satire, in which the two reactions must remain distinct.
subject matter: in order to put forward the poet-lover in a sympathetic light, the narrator
denigrates the poet-lover’s rival by pointing out his ignorance and his foreignness.

As a character in love relationships, the Illyrian praetor has significant parallels in
Roman comedy. The main traits that he has in common with various comedic rivals are
his military background, his wealth and his willingness to use it in love affairs, and,
finally, his foreign provenance. With respect to his wealth, among his comedic
prototypes we find the rivals of the Miles Gloriosus and the Epidicus, both of whom use
their riches to take the puella from another suitor. With respect to the sense of
foreignness that he conveys, he can be paralleled by the military rivals in Pseudolus,
Truculentus, Bacchides and Eunuchus, all of whom are foreigners: Polymachaeroplagides
in the Pseudolus (1152) is Macedonian, Stratophanes in the Truculentus (84) is a
Babylonian, Cleomachus in the Bacchides is designated a peregrinus (1009), as is Thraso
in the Eunuchus (759). The place of origin of some military rivals, like Pyrgopolynices in
the Miles Gloriosus, is not specified – and neither, we can add, is that of the Illyrian
praetor – but, as Brown has argued, “their very profession makes them outsiders even in
their own home state.” These comedic precedents of the Illyrian praetor raise the
expectation that his efforts in love will be subjected to comparable mockery and
degradation.

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9 The rival in the Epidicus is especially like the imagined character of Propertius’ Illyrian praetor: auro opulentus / magnus miles Rhodius, raptor hostium, / gloriosus: hic emet illam de te at dabit aurum lubens (Plaut. Epid. 300-301).
10 Brown (2004), 3. Brown suggests that, by being cast as a foreigner who has become rich in mercenary service, the military rival always has an advantage over the private citizen, who is by comparison poor. Building on this precedent, the elegiac poet-lover casts himself as poor and wants to use poetry as gift and compensation for the puella’s love.
11 Lape (2004, 64) argues that the romantic defeat of the rival in Menandrian comedy, which is the prototype of Roman comedy, has an essentially political significance, since the mockery allows “the citizen (and the city that he stands for) to come out on top.” In the elegiac situation the political allegory
This expectation is fulfilled a few lines later, when the poet-lover accomplishes what Fedeli calls a “degradante metamorfosi”\(^\text{12}\) of the *praetor* by means of comparisons drawn from the world of husbandry. Propertius compares the *praetor* to a *messis*, or an element of the agricultural world, and then turns him into a *pecus*, or a farm animal, both ready to be harvested by Cynthia: *quare, si sapis, oblatas ne desere messis / et stolidum pleno vellere carpe pecus* \(^\text{2.18.7-8}\). The precedent for this degradation is found in Plautus’ *Bacchides* where the two *senes* are regarded as sheep to be shorn by the courtesans \(\text{Plaut. Bac. 1121-48}\). Nicobulus, for example, is described as shorn twice in figurative language that indicates that he has been defrauded, or “fleeced,” as we say in English.\(^\text{13}\) Despite the fact that the insulting comparisons in Propertius 2.16 are in the form of metaphors, in which the figure of the *praetor* is mentally transformed into that of a field and an animal, the grotesque tone of the situation is still somewhat subdued, since it is based on individual, undeveloped details: the images of a *praetor-messis* and *praetor-pecus* are not pursued further than the couplet in which they occur. That is not to say, however, that the degrading element of the two comparisons is not emphasized, for in both cases the degrading word occurs in line-final position. Moreover, in the manner of the grotesque style, the couplet displays conspicuous artistic refinement. Line 8 is chiastically arranged though the chiasmus is interrupted by the verb. The interruption serves the purpose of calling attention to the verb and hence to the phrase *carpe pecus*, which, as Fedeli points out, alludes to Horace’s famous phrase *carpe diem* (*carpe diem,* loses its centrality but the dynamics of the relationship remain much the same. The poet-lover makes every effort to degrade his military rival and come out on top.

\(^\text{12}\) Fedeli (2005), 478.

\(^\text{13}\) According to Barsby (1986, 186) the motif of the two *senes* as metaphorical sheep, developed at some length in the *Bacchides*, is largely of Plautine origin.
quam minimum credula postero, Hor. Carm. 1.11.16) “in senso dissacratorio,” turning
the lyric poet’s exhortation into a caricature15 – a fact that lends further support to the
punning suggestion that a governor of Illyrici has no acquaintance with lyric poetry. The
result is a hesitant or mild kind of grotesque that emerges indirectly, almost as a
quotation, embedded in an otherwise non-grotesque text, a technique that we shall
observe on a much larger scale in the lena’s song in poem 4.5.

The effect of this process is not only that of subjecting the praetor, as a rival in
love, to grotesque treatment but also that of subjecting Horace and Horatian lyric, to a
reading from a perspective grounded in the aesthetics of the grotesque.16 The resulting
degradation of the Horatian dictum, which is lowered into the context of a prostitute’s
financial prospects, transforms the wisdom involved in focussing one’s attention on the
“eroticism of the present”17 into the practical savoir-faire involved in fleecing a rich
lover, ludicrously figured as sheering a sheep’s wool, as in the Bacchides. This
recontextualization of the Horatian bon mot introduces into the reading process a

14 Fedeli (2005), 279.
15 The direction of influence is not entirely clear. In 2.16 Fedeli (2005, 279) identifies a “precisa
allusione” to Horace (Carm.1.11.8), without mentioning any need to account for the chronology. In his
view, Propertius was familiar with at least the first book of the Horatian odes. The general consensus,
however, is that the odes were published in 23 BC; on this point cf, e.g. inter alia, Keith (2008), 56;
Sullivan (1979), 84; Nisbet and Hubbard (1970), xxxvi. This was between Propertius’ second and third
books, as observed by both Lyne (1998, 523) and Solmsen (1948, 105). According to Lyne (1998, 523),
who dates the book by allusions to events, the date of publication of the second part of Propertius’ second
book is 24 BC. The context of his discussion is the relationship between Propertius and Tibullus,
concerning whom Lyne (1998, 524) observes that the probability of “pre-publication influence” by one
poet on the other through recitations must be taken into account. This type of familiarity with each other’s
current work is highly probable also for Horace and Propertius, both of whom were under the patronage of
Maecenas (Keith 2008, 56). Horace may have written the Odes at an earlier date, even before 31 BC, since,
according to Nisbet and Hubbard (1970, xxviii) he may have already been working in the lyric mode before
Actium (see also Keith 2008, 56 n.60). On Propertius and Horace cf. also Flach (1967).
16 The rivalry between Horace and Propertius is widely acknowledged. Horace does not mention Propertius
by name, nor does Propertius ever mention Horace, despite the fact that they were both active in Maecenas’
circle. However in Ep. 2.2.91-101, Horace paints an unflattering sketch of a literary rival, which scholars
believe is a portrait of Propertius. On this point see, e.g., Keith (2008, 13) and, among others, Sullivan
(1979, 83-84), and Solmsen (1948, 103-104).
17 Ancona (1994), 57.
mocking tone, generated by the incongruity between the original *diem*, which denotes an abstract entity without a visual dimension, and the parodic *pecus*, which belongs to a lower animalistic and materialistic level of reality. Moreover, since the comparison of men, particularly unintelligent men (and the *praetor* is *stolidum*, 2.16.8), to sheep had a precedent in comedy, its occurrence here increases considerably the incongruity between the Horatian text and its Propertian appropriation. For a *meretrix*, however, seizing the gratifying opportunity of the present can very well mean only and precisely what is conveyed by plucking the metaphorical sheep that is her wealthy client, and so for her there would be no incongruity at all between *carpe diem* and *carpe pecus*. The presence of incongruity as a principle of derisive degradation that marks the reading experience is resolved into congruity once we relocate the hermeneutical point of view in the crude reality of the character affected. As Scruton observes, the incongruity of caricature displays the existence of “a deeper congruity” between the original and its deformed rendering. Whether she has read Horace or not, the Propertian *puella* has learned the principle well, interpreting it from a perspective that enables her to apply it to her own life by translating it into her own realm. The resulting superimposition of *carpe diem* and *carpe pecus* is the fruit of a grotesque principle that filters conventional poetic discourse through the prism of material existence.

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18 According to Barsby (1986, 186), the comparison of such old men to sheep was based on the fact that sheep were regarded as “proverbially both stupid and harmless.” Propertius may be making use of this general perception of sheep in order to reduce the threat represented by the rival.

19 Scruton (1987), 161. Among the theorists of laughter, Scruton is most useful to this argument because he explores the concept of amusement as an aesthetic interest in which the laughter of incongruities is a tool for de-valuing the derided object.

20 As a *docta puella*, Cynthia would recognize that *carpe pecus* belongs to the Plautine courtesan vernacular, and it is also likely that she would recognize the pragmatic implication that the phrase had for her. The reason why she would recognize both levels of meaning is that, *doctae puellae* are based at once on the courtesans of New Comedy and on such real contemporary courtesans, as James (2003) argues (see esp. pages 35-41). Contemporary courtesans who could have served as models included such women as Volumnia Cytheris (on whom see Keith, forthcoming).
Considering, as he is inclined to do, his world from an apparently more refined perspective, however, the poet-lover is angered by the rival’s ability to steal Cynthia from him and, in his desire to retaliate, aggressively seeks a grotesque punishment beyond the metaphorical degradation of his rival into a field or a sheep. Impelled by his love for Cynthia and his inability to retain her from the praetor, he prays to Venus that his rival split his loins in Cynthia’s bed: *rumpat ut assiduis membra libidinibus* (2.16.14). Though it is not as crass, this situation is similar to the one in Catul. 11 in which the speaker wishes for the beloved to break the groins of all her three hundred adulterers: *omnium / ilia rumpens* (Catul. 11. 19-20). Propertius’ prayer in 2.16, as we shall see, looks both backwards to Catullus and forwards to the Propertian poet-lover’s prayer to Venus for Acanthis’ death in 4.5. Such prayers to Venus, motivated by love and hatred\(^{21}\) and addressed to the goddess of love, imply that, for Propertius as for Catullus, the love professed by the elegiac poet-lover has a grotesque dimension that cannot be concealed. Like Catullus,\(^{22}\) Propertius’ poet-lover imagines the rival as a depraved individual, yet the girl in whose company he pictures him is the poet-lover’s own beloved and the object of his erotic desire. She is unattainable to him, but he pictures her as a willing participant in scenes that degrade her as much as they do the rival. For the frustrated poet-lover neither can be pure and both embody some aspect of the grotesque, which is a product of the punitive stance he assumes for his rejection. For the accomplished elegiac poet, this is a stratagem for inserting grotesque sexuality into his polished verse, for whenever his persona thinks about love in a degrading manner, the poet narrating that thought in the first person must give his poetry a grotesque character.

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\(^{21}\) Parallel love and hate remind us also of Catul. 85.

\(^{22}\) Cf. Catul. 69 and 71.
The poet-lover acts in a grotesque manner by continuing to depict his rival in punitive terms. He subjects the praetor to further physical degradation, representing him as a vir foedus (candida tam foedo bracchia fusa viro, 2.16.24), and then also to social degradation, picturing him as a former slave: barbarus excussis agitat vestigia lumbis (2.16.27). The poet-lover presents the praetor as a barbarian slave exhibiting his physical prowess, including his sexual vigour – given that lumbus is also a sexual word23 – shaking his naked body on the market platform under the gaze of potential buyers. Cynthia is shown participating in the praetor’s grotesque condition by intertwining her body with his to the point of losing her distinctiveness (fusa). In so doing, she flounders in a revolting experience, since foedus signifies something that is “offensive to the senses.”24 The result of her action is the contamination of her purity,25 since, as Fedeli notes, foedus can also have an active sense, indicating something that befouls on contact.26 The grotesque, as we have seen in both Catullus and Lucretius, is contagious.

On the other hand, the word order of the line is designed to reinforce the image of Cynthia’s arms around the praetor with her candida… brachia surrounding the most repulsive of his attributes, his filthiness, foedo, rather than his manhood (viro). On the other, Cynthia’s action also connotes elegy’s embrace of the grotesque, since the puella may be taken as an emblem for elegiac poetry27 and it is her arms that surround the praetor’s foulness. The occurrence of viro at the end of the line, moreover, reinforces the idea that the praetor’s foul nature derives from his being like an animal, since it recalls

23 Adams (1982, 48) notes that in sexual contexts, lumbus usually occurs in the plural and generally “occurs in the descriptions of seduction or copulation.” cf. Catul. 16.11. See TLL VII.2.1808.84-1809.36 and OLD s.v. lumbus 1b.
24 OLD s.v. foedus 1. See also TLL VI.1.999.7-52.
25 OLD s.v. candidus 4d: candidus can be a sign of cleanness. See also TLL III.240.26-33, III.240.60-63 and III. 241.10-14. S.v. candor III. 248.45-249.2.
26 Fedeli (2005, 485) citing Ernout-Meillet (1967, 244) in which foedus is glossed as “qui enlaidit.”
27 On this see esp. Wyke (1987).
by its position his earlier metaphorical debasement as *pecus*, also at line end (8). The term *vir*, the second word of the *Aeneid*, brings an epic valence into the line, but the fact that it occurs in the fifth and last foot of a pentameter, rather than in a hexameter, suggest a mockery of epic, conventionally regarded as the highest of genres, and a degradation of its central hero, now reclining in the embracing arms of an elegiac *puella* who ought to recognize his foulness. Cynthia’s readiness to lower herself into the grotesque world of the *praetor* makes her love *turpis* (16) and, in the poet-lover’s imagination, perhaps even bestial, as Propertius hints with the presence of the erotically charged verb *cubares*, also at the end of a line (23).²⁸

Cynthia yields so completely to the rival that their union leads to an exchange of attributes. We see this especially in elegy 3.20, in which we are told that the rival is *durus* (3), a word that alludes, not only to his non-elegiac (epic) origin and to the harshness of the landscape that he normally inhabits, but also to the *duritia* that is one of the distinctive features of the elegiac *puella*, who throughout the genre is *dura*, in the sense that she is conventionally unyielding to her lover’s pining. It is in the epic genre that a man is expected to be *durus*. In this connection, Cynthia’s embrace of the *praetor* as a grotesque and filthy being suggests that elegy both degrades and incorporates epic, its rival genre (as indeed the elegiac couplet does, being composed of one dactylic hexameter and one pentameter). Masculine sexuality is aristocratic and militaristic and entails epic impassivity and hardness. Elegy inverts the gender relation with respect to hardness: the poet-lover is soft because his *puella* is *dura*. In this poem, the background

²⁸Adams (1982, 177) comments that expressions with *cubo* and its cognates to mean “sleep with, lie with” are “favoured in comedy and elegy.” The *TLL* identifies one of the specific usages of the verb *cubo* as pertaining to sexual intercourse: *TLL* 4.1279.9 - 35. Cf. *OLD* s.v. *cubo* 2b. *Cubo* and its compounds can be applied to all sexual relations, including the copulation of animals. Vergil and Columella, for example, both use *concubitus* with reference to animals: Verg. *G.* 3.130 and Col. 9.2.4.
landscape is not Illyrian but African, a provenance that may raise doubts concerning the identification of the rival with the prætor,\textsuperscript{29} but the detail makes little difference in the aesthetic sphere, where what matters is the poet’s conception of the role of the rival rather than the individual exemplar. Whether he is associated with Illyria or Africa, the important fact is that he must be ridiculed as a social, intellectual and amatory inferior. Cynthia yields to him, and in so doing degrades herself and acquires one of his defining features, stultitia. By taking the rival as her lover, Cynthia indeed becomes stulta (3.20.5), an adjective that was earlier applied only to describe him as a stultum pecus (2.16.8). The two lovers begin to resemble each other in a way that suggests how, in the privacy of sexual union, Cynthia may in fact become grotesquely fused (fusa, 2.16.24) with him, despite her white arms and his repulsive physical appearance. Elegy 3.20 ends with the poet-lover vehemently cursing his rival, that he suffer the pains of unrequited lovers: illi sint quicumque solent in amore dolores (3.20.27). We note, however, that in desiring that the rival suffer like him, the poet-lover is essentially saying that in pining for Cynthia the rival and the poet-lover are themselves similar and partly identical. The poet-lover, in other words, has some aspects of the rival in himself, the purity of his own character being only a narrative front, since his encompasses that of being somebody else’s rival. Propertius’ conception of the relationship between the rival and the poet-lover is very similar to Girard’s idea of the relationship between the two suitors in his

\textsuperscript{29} I agree with Cairns (2006, 34) who suggests that the rival in 1.8, 2.16 and 3.20 is probably the same prætor posted to different places at different points of his career. Though developed from a historicist perspective, Cairns’ reading is consistent with a narratological interpretation grounded in Girard’s theory of love as desire. The elegiac mise-en-scène is a manifestation of what Girard (1961, 16) calls “désir triangulaire.” It is the narrative of a desire whose manifestation in the lover-poet is mediated by a rival who has already posited the same beloved as the object of his own desire. The lover-poet’s frustrated love is, in effect, the result of his secret imitation of his rival. In this type of narrative, it is essential that “l’écart spirituel” (Girard, 1961, 21) that distinguishes the two men is not significantly altered when the mise-en-scène moves from one event or location to another, since a greater psychological distance between them would undermine the nature of the central emotion of elegy, namely frustrated love.
theory of love as “désir triangulaire”. The triangle is a front for the fact that rivalry, being expressed as imitation, is actually a form of attraction of one man for another, with whom he secretly identifies in the pursuit of his beloved. It follows that narratives of homosexual and heterosexual attraction are related by “mutual inscription,” as Sedgwick observes. In the context of Propertian elegy, the poet-lover’s grotesque chastisement of his rival is nothing more (nor less) than the revelation that gross elements of self-contradiction and ambivalence have been incorporated into his character. In a mise-en-scène that includes two male lovers and a single male or female beloved, the role of the beloved is also to make explicit that ambivalence, giving rise to the poet-lover’s desire to identify with his rival by displaying his attraction to her. In such a social matrix, Irigaray would say, women become commodities “en étant miroir de/pour l’homme,” making possible, we may add, the construction of a narrative that simultaneously reveals and conceals the ambivalence and self-contradiction of the elegiac narrative front. On that plane, a condemnation of the rival represents Propertius’ challenge (from within the genre) of the narrative convention on which the genre itself is presumed to be based.33

Something similar occurs in the last poem of the third book (3.24), in which the poet-lover launches an invective against Cynthia challenging the notion that in elegy the puella must always be beautiful. In punishment for all her present and past duritia, she is imagined in her later years as a woman covered with wrinkles and broken by age. Since

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30 Girard 1961, 16.  
31 Sedgwick (1985), 22.  
32 Irigaray (974) 182.  
33 The elegiac mise-en-scène is remarkably close to the situation presupposed by Roland Barthes in Fragments d’un discours amoureux. He observes that, as far as the beloved is concerned, the roles of the lover and the rival are close parallels of each other, so close, in fact, that the lover should expect to become subject to the same treatment as his rival. Barthes speaks explicitly of the dépréciation of the rival by the beloved (1977, 80), but his argument is also applicable to the disparagement of the lover by the rival and vice versa, in collusion with the beloved who must reject one to accept the other, in accordance with a fundamental convention of elegy.
at the narrative moment Cynthia is still young, the image of the old woman that she will become coexists and contrasts heavily with the one of her present beauty; this is consistent with the tension at the basis of grotesque form. Thematically, the grotesque aspect of the situation is revealed when Cynthia herself is made to confront her image as an old woman: *a! speculo rugas increpitante tibi* (3.24.34). At that point, when she is taunted by the mirror, the poet-lover wishes upon her the overwhelming desire to pull out her white hair from the root: *vellere tum cupias albos a stirpe capillos* (3.24.33). The image of Cynthia transformed by time and tearing out her hair in desperation at the end of book 3 is the image of a reality *in votis*, a sign that the illusions of the elegiac conventions that have guided the poet-lover so far have no longer the same hold on him.

As Ancona observes, eroticism is an aspect of life experienced exclusively in the present. Erotic elegy must therefore figure as a concurrent representation of that experience and hence as a poetic form whose conventions are valid only when the experience is there to warrant them. The poet-lover imagines Cynthia as an old woman and indulges his punitive streak in the thought that, once she becomes a degraded version of herself, she will no longer have any erotic appeal and inspire elegiac poetry. Yet the poetry in which she figures even as a decrepit old woman is that same elegy whose conventional base is the desire for erotic experiences in the present, and so her presence as an image from the future undermines the conventions of the present. Ancona develops her interpretation of eroticism in the context of the Horatian philosophy of *carpe diem*, but, as we shall see, a similar principle can be found in Propertius, in the pragmatic version that the *lena* imparts to her *amica* in 4.5. Strategically placed at the end of the book (and the amatory collection – that is before the aetiological Book 4), the image of

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34 Ancona (1994), 58. See also Gutzwiller (1985), 115 n.36.
Cynthia as an old woman in 3.24 and the challenge of the conventional understanding of amatory elegy that it represents point the reader forward to a poetic world in which the story of the poet’s love is displaced from the puella / Cynthia by an old lena.

The Lena

The procuress is an obstacle to the poet-lover’s designs because she counsels the puella to seek the satisfaction of material goods rather than the gratification of poetry:

aurum spectato, non quae manus afferat aurum! / uersibus auditis quid nisi uerba feres? (4.5. 57-8). In his indignation, the poet-lover degrades her completely, characterizing her as an exceedingly ugly hag, rotten to the core and moved only by vile intentions: in short, he utilizes grotesque aesthetic principles. In the process, moreover, the poet-lover reveals himself as vengeful, inspired wholly by anger and by the desire to annihilate the lena. The poet’s punitive wrath is especially visible in the introductory passage before the lena’s speech and in the verses that follow it, at the conclusion of the poem. Within these two framing passages, both spoken in the voice of the poet-lover, the lena pronounces a long poetic speech, in which, in lines of refined poetry, she takes up the poet-lover’s arguments one by one and tutors the puella against his romantic intent. The idea of artistic refinement and vile theme are dialectically linked in a single act of aesthetic perception. In studying this act, it is essential to respect the individuation of the voices that articulate it. Though in the reading process the poet’s framing voice is met in two stages, separated by the lena’s song, in examining its aesthetic impact I shall preserve its integrity by treating it in a single purview.

35 Cf., e.g., James (2003), 55-58, and ch.3; Wyke (2002), 101; Myers (1996), 5; Gutzwiller (1985), 105.
36 Cf. James (2003, 52) who notes that the lena’s logic and argument match and refute the elegiac poet-lover’s strategies. Cf. also Myers (1996), 1-2, 9-10 and 19.
The aesthetic nucleus of the elegy is located in the contrast between the hideous picture of the *lena* who is the internal speaker of the poem and the carefully-wrought elegance of the lines entrusted to her. She is as ugly and as hateful as could be imagined, but she speaks like the refined poet Propertius. The aesthetic tension that permeates the entire poem, however, can be reconciled in the interpretive context of the grotesque. The critical problem of having to account for the tension is not a difficulty for grotesque aesthetics, in which the artistically beautiful and the thematically sordid are expected to occur together, dialectically united in single images in which they appear to have the function of undermining each other’s claim to pre-eminence. In what follows, I shall offer such a reading of elegy 4.5, by considering its narrative end points from the analytical perspective of grotesque aesthetics.

Consistent with a structural principle of Book 4, in which Propertius showcases un-elegiac figures, elegy 4.5 grants pride of place to a *lena* who is hostile towards the designs of the main narrator, the poet-lover. Propertius introduces his readers to her in a setting replete with grotesque imagery. The tone is that of invective and the narrative motif is that of the curse, both of which suggest the possibility of a debasing descent to an inferior plane of existence. We can see this in the opening lines of the poem:

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terra tuum spinis obducat, lena, sepulcrum,
et tua, quod non uis, sentiat umbra sitim;
nec sedeant cineri Manes, et Cerberus ulti
turpia ieiuno terreat ossa sono!                      (4.5.1-4)
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Wyke (2002, 103) accurately describes Acanthis as a perversion of Cynthia, which Propertius accomplishes by transforming Cynthia’s catalogue of beauty to a catalogue of ugliness. However, Wyke does not relate this transformation to the grotesque.
In contrast with the usual practice, which in punitive poems is to reserve *dirae* for the conclusion, Propertius begins his diatribe against the *lena* by envisioning her funerary monument wrapped in thorns that virtually hide it from view. The grotesque significance of her thorny grave is fully revealed at the end of the poem, when we are told that the *lena* is named Acanthis, a Greek term that means “thorny.” At that point we will recognize that the hybrid image of a grave wrapped in thorns implies the identification of the *lena* with the thorns that surround her remains, in a union of botanical and human continuity that only a grotesque imagination can fathom. At the outset of the elegy, however, the thorns are the exterior decorations of her grave and not yet the internal features of her very being. The funerary opening thus introduces us to a world of hybrid images that imply physical continuity between different realms of reality, as in the bizarre decorations of the grotesque (*grottesche*), in which the eye of the beholder, much like the imaginary eye of the poet-lover, moves from one thing to another without experiencing discontinuity.

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39 As James (2003, 274 n.110) observes, the name Acanthis includes an allusion to the *Truculentus* (227-228), in which Astaphium says that *meretricem sentis simile esse condecet* in order to take as much as possible from men. The thorns suggested by Acanthis’ name are moreover reminiscent of the *lena*’s thirst (for wine), as indicated by the fact that the name of the thorny shrub *dipsas acanthis* was glossed by Pliny as *spina quae sitiens vocatur* (Plin. *Nat.* 13.139). Acanthis and Dipsas allude to the plant’s tendency to desiccation and its figurative equivalent displayed by the person so named, given that in the medical tradition women’s sexuality represents a threat of “desiccation and debility” for men, as Myers (1996, 8) observes.
40 In his detailed study of plant symbolism in Prop. 4.5, O’Neill (1998) places Propertius in the context of a wide-spread contemporary artistic practice in which many botanical species were combined, especially in relation to themes of magic. The acanthus plant is one of the most frequently used. O’Neill however does not relate any aspect of his interesting analysis to the concept of hybridism as an aesthetic ideal of the grotesque. On hybridism see, e.g., Harpham (1982), 85-92, and passim.
41 A significant hermeneutical impact of *grottesche*-like settings is that they situate the reader in what Harpham (1982, 77) calls a region of “cosmic continuum,” in which reality has no internal boundaries, including spatial and chronological boundaries, and hence offers no resistance to the transgression, interpenetration and confusion of different realms. The relevance of the comic courtesan to Propertius’ representation of Acanthis will emerge in the course of my analysis.
The continuity between the lena and her grave is established right away in the first line of the poem by the contiguity of lena and sepulcrum in the emphatic position at the end of the line. The occurrence of the two words next to each other serves to raise the possibility of an equation between the two, and connects them indissolubly in the reader’s imagination. What is reported as visible on the exterior of the grave and what is consequently visualized within it, the lena’s body, reinforce and extend the continuity of images from the world of visible reality to the world of the dead. This sets the stage for the lena’s later monologue as if coming from beyond the grave. Grotesque continuity of images takes us into the underworld, where we visualize the lena’s umbra and Cerberus, whose function is not to guard the entrance of the underworld against intruders, but to threaten her bones with his hungry howling. As a three-headed monster, Cerberus is himself a perfectly hybrid and grotesque being, and the line in which his action is described is a noteworthy specimen of grotesque poetry, in which the elegance of form contrasts heavily with the turpitude of the content: turpia ieiuno terreat ossa sono!

(4.5.4). The lena’s corpse is presented synecdochically as ossa. However, these are not just bones but turpia ossa. Similarly, Cerberus’ barking is not just a sound, sono, but a ieiuno sono. These nouns and their adjectives are chiastically arranged around the verb, which, by signifying the action of terrifying, threatens to tear apart, and this action is graphically represented by the separation of the nouns from their adjectives. They are separated so that they can be intertwined in a finely-crafted pentameter golden line that invites the reader to linger over the elegance of its structure, and, as a consequence, also over the horrible image to which it gives shape. The resulting aesthetic experience is exquisitely grotesque. Propertius entrusts this experience to the pentameter, the line that
immediately distinguishes elegy from epic, since the other element of the elegiac couplet, the hexameter, is shared with epic. By lingering on the golden pentameter, the readers not only visualize a three-headed dog about to devour a corpse, but also appreciate Propertius’ inclination towards the grotesque from within the body of elegy.

In such lines the grotesque dimension of Propertius’ poetics is conspicuous. We note, moreover, that the grotesque is not antagonistic to elegy but is rooted within the genre and emerges out of it. Though the fourth book features “non-elegiac” characters, 4.5 represents a quintessentially elegiac situation: the three canonical elements of the elegiac love triangle are presented in the characters of the poet-lover, his foil and his beloved. Moreover, the lena is advising the amica to act precisely in the manner that will inspire – and has already inspired – the type of poetry in which she is now found, to be in other words, the unattainable beloved who will cause the lover to suffer and to lament his suffering in elegies. The hideousness of the imagery and the elegance of the form in which this inspiration is expressed lay bare the grotesque aesthetic principles at the heart of the poetics of elegy.

The grotesque aspect of the imaginary world inhabited by the lena is made explicit in the poet’s description of her activities and her powers. She can make nature violate its own laws: she can make a magnet repel iron (poterit magnes non ducere ferrum, 9), she can make a mother bird turn on her nestlings (uolucris nidis esse nouerca janan (2001, 87) persuasively argues that the amica cannot be other than Cynthia, since there would be no reason for the procurress to instruct a different puella by citing lines from 1.2 that were originally addressed to Cynthia (for the textual issues in these lines, see below, n. 77). In agreement with Weeber (1977), Janan points out that the strategies of Acanthis’ “hetairoteichism (tantrums, jealousies, excuses for postponing assignations) correspond too closely to Propertius’ history of his affair with Cynthia” to justify another identification of the amica. Hutchinson (2006, 138) has a somewhat more cautious tone but does not disagree: we are compelled to read 4.5 “with the possibility very much in mind that this is Cynthia.” For Butler and Barber (1933, 350) the identification of the amica with Cynthia remains uncertain, while Camps (1965, 97) claims with certainty that she is not Cynthia. For Gutzwiller (1985, 105), she is “almost certainly” Cynthia.
suis, 10), and she can transform crops into running water \((stantia currenti diluerentur aqua, 12)\). Subjected to her magic, the world around her knows no natural boundaries and is not fixed on a single course. Such a world can be associated with the grotesque. When the *lena* subjects her own body to this metamorphic power she reveals herself to be an essentially grotesque character because she is no longer contained by her natural form but intrudes into the form of another being – indeed of a being from another species – and achieves temporary existence in that alien shape:

\[
\text{audax cantatae leges imponere lunae et sua nocturno fallere terga lupo,} \quad (4.5.13-14)
\]

In these lines she commands the moon as she wishes and gives her body the semblance of a wolf, so that she is wolf \((lupo, \text{masculine})\) on the outside and *lena* \((\text{feminine})\) on the inside, suggesting that she is a hybrid of human and animal. Her hybridization involves gender as well as species. The fact that *lupa* is a term for "prostitute"\(^{44}\) adds another layer of meaning, since she advises the *amica* to obtain cash for her services \((aurum spectato, \text{...})\).

\(^{43}\) The dominant feature this line is the hissing sound of the letter “s,” which suggests the snake and imperceptibly adds it to that of the nestlings. The association must have been common since, on the Ara Pacis, there is a small relief of a snake approaching a nest of baby birds. Moreover the scene takes place under large acanthus leaves in which we cannot fail to see suggestions of both the acanthus bird and this *lena*. Zanker (1988, 180) observes that, in a close-up view, the leaves and snake of the Ara Pacis, alongside many other naturalistic combinations of foliage and crawling animals, convey to the observer the idea that the fertility of nature is “unrestrained” and leave them with the impression that the symbols chosen by the artist are both “curious and unexpected.” A more inclusive purview, however, reveals that “a model of perfect order” governs that growth (Zanker, 1988, 180-181). The Ara Pacis decorations, in other words, are also generated by an aesthetic principle for which order incorporates disorder, or more generally stated, an artistic form incorporates another that tends to negate it, as in Propertius’ poetics. Propertius, it seems, was tapping into a contemporary sensibility. Galinsky (1996, 152) observes that the Ara Pacis snake symbolizes that “peace and growth are never unthreatened,” and argues that in the Augustan period poetry, art and architecture are based on similar aesthetic principles (see esp. 141 and 225).

\(^{44}\) See Adams (1983), 333-4 who notes that it was the “rapacity of the she-wolf that inspired the image” in order to stress the prostitute’s predatory character, and, moreover, that *lupa* was the term for “particularly low whore[s] … who plied their trade in graveyards.” We recall that a tomb is in fact the setting for the opening of the poem.
53), just as a prostitute would do.\(^{45}\) The fact that \textit{lupo} is masculine may suggest a partial identification with the poet, for, though he speaks chiefly through his persona of the poet-lover, she is also a creature of his imagination and a \textit{praeeceptor amoris}, just as he is. By becoming a wolf, however, Acanthis lowers herself into the inferior life-form of an animal that can manifest its intentions with strength and violence. Given that the \textit{lena} is described as weak, scrawny, and very old, her transformation into a powerful animal is simultaneously a form of debasement and a form of empowerment. Nor does the tension between empowerment and debasement generate artistic incoherence, for it is consonant with the fundamental principles of the grotesque. The aesthetics of the grotesque privilege images and forms that are based on a paradox, all the while flaunting their dependence on it.\(^{46}\)

The nocturnal ambience of Acanthis’ imaginary transformation into a wolf sets the scene for the sinister tone and horrid image that we meet in the following couplet, in which she is visualized as having torn the cheeks and eyes of crows,\(^{47}\) in a heinous exercise meant to enable her to blind watchful husbands in order to ensure more clients for their wives.

\begin{quote}
posset ut intentos astu caecare maritos, cornicum immeritas eruit ungue genas  
\end{quote}

\((4.5.15-16)\)

\(^{45}\) Adams (1983), 348-50 and Myers (1996), 5 both point out that \textit{amica} is also a term for prostitute. Myers (1996) is concerned with the social status of the \textit{lena} compared to and contrasted with that of the \textit{amica} or \textit{puella}. But see also James (2003, esp. 35), who maintains that the \textit{puella} “is a independent courtesan.”\(^{46}\) In grotesque aesthetics, paradox occupies a place of privilege because it has shocking as well as revelatory power. “Because it breaks the rules,” Harpham (1982, 23) observes, “paradox can penetrate to new and unexpected realms of experience, discovering relationships syntax generally obscures.”\(^{47}\) Hutchinson (2006, 142) notes that the action Acanthis performs literalizes the proverbial expression \textit{cornici oculum}, in the sense of outwitting someone, however sharp-sighted he may be. The irony of the situation – and hence the sense of mockery associated with the grotesque – is that husbands in elegy are easily duped and not at all sharp-sighted, as far as their wives’ affairs are concerned. Cf., e.g., Ov. \textit{Am.} 1.4 and 2.19.
Here too we can see a product of the Propertian grotesque in another finely crafted quasi-golden line (16). Because of the elision of cornicum with immeritas, the two words sound like cornicimmeritas as the genitive ending -um disappears and meritas echoes maritos from the previous line, thereby suggesting for an instant that the genas that are being torn are those of the husbands. The fact that maritos occurs in a an equally mannered line, though in this case the sophistication is in the neoteric word order,\(^{48}\) reinforces its attraction to genas, because both words occur in highly mannered lines. Moreover, genas is separated from its adjective and from its original possessor by ungue, which is what the lena uses to perform the action of tearing out (the prefix e of eruit indicates separation). We can also note that, consistent with the grotesque predilection for images of separate body parts, the line ends with two anatomical parts presented in isolation from the rest of their respective bodies. Yet their juxtaposition in an emphatic position serves to present the unnatural act of the lena in an almost natural way, since the only occasion in which a sharp nail and a soft cheek can be visualized coming together is when the former harms the latter. Since Acanthis is casting a spell, moreover, the sound of the words is especially significant. Once again we have a carefully constructed line that causes us to linger on its sound as well as its word arrangement. By doing so, however, we also linger on the torn genas and on the lena engaged in her savage act. While the tense is the perfect, and so the action is presented as having already occurred, it is not on its finished aspect that we are made to linger, but on the act itself which causes it to occur. The savage act is reminiscent of rituals of lament at funerals, at which wailing women tore their hair and scratched their cheeks. This allusion to the practice of

\(^{48}\) On Neoteric word order consisting of adjective at caesura and noun at line end, see Ross (1969), 132-133.
lamentation functions as a metaliterary reference to elegy itself, since, as Fantham observes, “lament is a fundamental mode of elegy that goes back to Orpheus.” The conclusion to which Propertius leads the reader is that the grotesque savagery that accompanies laments has a legitimate place in erotic elegy. The contrast between the highly-mannered form of the lines in which the scratching of the cheeks is suggested, together with the metaliterary allusion to elegy, make this detail a fine example of the poet’s grotesque stance.

This stance is developed significantly in the conclusion of the poem, where, in the voice of the poet-lover, we are offered an elaborate description of the lena’s death. A very important point in the narrator’s description is that here, after the lena has finished speaking, he finally reveals that her name is Acanthis. Though there is nothing outlandish about the name itself, it is a pivotal detail in Propertius’ poetics, because it brings to a single focus the narrative and the aesthetic aspects of his grotesque perspective. As already mentioned, the name Acanthis invites us to recognize that the thorns that cover the lena’s grave at the beginning of the poem are an image of her identity as a “thorny” being at the narrative level. The thorny bush at the beginning of the poem is a prefiguration of her full characterization at the end. However, the name Acanthis also invites us to explore Propertius’ aesthetic claim for the centrality of grotesque imagery.

As O’Neill has shown, there are many early and contemporary references to the word acanthus, to its etymology, and to its derivatives, as well as to the ideas associated with them. Besides the meaning of “thorny,” the most significant associations of the

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49 Fantham (2004), 123. Keith (2008a, 254 n.15) observes that the traditional association of Elegy with funeral laments “was the subject of renewed elaboration” in Augustan elegy and lyric poetry.
50 The names Acanthis and Acanthus are attested in contemporary Rome. See Solin (2003), 1152.
term are those summarized by Aristotle when he says that the acanthis is an ugly bird with a lovely voice. This *lena* is not only a thorny being, likely to injure the poet and aggravate his sufferning – which is the reason why his grotesque stance is punitive and abusive towards her – but also a bird capable of beautiful song. As O’Neill argues, by associating the *lena* with such a bird, the poet endows her with “the ability to sing elegantly,” her appearance and the content of her song notwithstanding. The bird acanthis is a suitable emblem for the aesthetic stance of the grotesque, which, among other things, cultivates the tension between formal polish and outlandish content. As O’Neill points out, the acanthus plant provides nourishment to the acanthis bird and was a source of decorative motifs for the capitals of the Corinthian order, which was favoured by Roman architects and commonly considered the height of elegance. In the context of the Propertian grotesque, we may regard his naming of the *lena* Acanthis as a sign of the intra- and intertextual richness of elegy 4.5, and an implicit judgment on the aesthetic merits of the appropriated segments of previous literary texts.

In the final 15 lines of the poem our point of perception moves from the *lena’s* body to her death and entombment, and in each case we are offered an example of Propertius’ punitive use of the grotesque. As soon as she ends her speech she is described as so scrawny that her bones can be enumerated under her thin skin.

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52 Arist. *HA* 616b30. Aristotle also adds that the acanthis bird has difficulty in finding food, and this fact resonates in the *lena’s* poverty and her preoccupation that Cynthia might end up without the means to support herself. Thompson (1895, 18) observes that, on the basis on the mythical accounts found in literary works, the acanthis bird can be identified either with the linnet or a goldfinch.


54 O’Neill (1998, 57). Stamper (2005,68) observes that, acting under the influence of Hellenistic aesthetics, Roman architects shifted their focus from the Ionic to the Corinthian order. By the middle of the first century BC the Corinthian order “with its elegant, stylized acanthus-leaf capital came to dominate temple construction.” According to Winter (2006, 195) the Corinthian capitals used as models by Roman architects were the ones designed by Cossutius for the Olympieion, as described in Vitruvius. Vitruvius (4.9) also transmits the legend of the beginnings of the Corinthian capital as being inspired by an acanthus plant growing around the grave of a little girl. In Propertius we find the same elements of this tale: a grave, a plants growing around and over it, and the name Acanthis identified with the person buried there.
We are invited to focus directly on her body and to recall the turpia ... ossa threatened by Cerberus in the first few lines of the poem. Even while she is speaking (animam...dum versat, 63) she seems already dead. The sign that communicates this to the readers is that the focal point is the ossa, the same ones that are already buried in the poem’s opening curse. Here the question may arise of whether Acanthis is actually living or dead. The aesthetics of the grotesque, however, embrace just such impossible contradictions and, in fact, invite us to cultivate our ability to perceive them in a unified aesthetic view.

Contradictory forces inhabit a place that Harpham describes as a region of in-betweenness, which he defines as the essential locus of the grotesque. In such a region there is a dynamic fluidity of forms and identities. There separateness ceases to be a mark of distinction. The region between life and death is a grotesque region of in-betweenness where the lena may be both living and dead, and, in fact, where she may be first encountered as dead and then as alive, in an order that reverses that of nature at the beginning of the poem the lena is already in her tomb (4.5.1-3), in the middle of the poem she delivers a long poetic speech (4.5.21-62), while at the end of the poem we witness her dying breath and her scrappy funeral rites (4.5.63-78).

55 Propertian scholars are not agreed as to whose bones these are. Wyke (1996, 8) takes them to be the poet-lover’s on the basis of the threat of desiccation associated with lenae. Hutchinson (2006, 149), however has no doubt that they belong to Acanthis since the poet-lover “can hardly lose weight instantly in response to her words.” From the perspective of the argument advanced in this chapter, it is highly probable that the ossa are the lena’s because this is consistent with the idea of her wasting away and dying.

56 On this see Harpham (1982, xv, 17 and passim). In such a region a substance is always between two different states and always in a process of becoming something else.

57 According to Harpham (1982, 3), by entering the mid-region inhabited by the grotesque, we locate ourselves on the “margin of consciousness,” where we can witness things occupying “multiple categories” at the same time. This relocation of our point of view enables us to proceed simultaneously in different temporal and spatial directions. In his treatment of Acanthis, Propertius plunges his readers into just such a region, enabling us to cross from life into death and out again effortlessly and without experiencing any resistance from our consciousness of the logic of movement and without awareness of confusion.
The poet intrudes into his description of Acanthis’ body an apostrophe to Venus, offering her a sacrifice:

\[
\text{sed cape torquatae, Venus o regina, columbae ob meritum ante tuos guttura secta focos} \quad (4.5.65-66)
\]

The visual focus is explicitly situated on the slit throat (\textit{guttura secta}) of the dove. Since the \textit{guttura secta} constitute the direct object of the verb, \textit{cape}, the impact of the scene is to focus our perception on that image rather than on the ritualistic sacrifice itself. In the poet’s presentation of that image there is the typical tension of the grotesque, for Acanthis is herself associated with a bird and about to be shown dying. Moreover, in her last moments our gaze is directed towards her throat, which moves with the accumulation of phlegm and blood inside. Because her throat is not cut, however, the bloody phlegm escapes through her rotten teeth:

\[
\text{uidi ego rugoso tussim concrescere collo, sputaque per dentis ire cruenta cauos, atque animam in tegetes putrem exspirare paternas: horruit algenti pergula curua foco.} \quad (4.5.67-70)
\]

As Keith explains, Propertius’ use of the verb \textit{vidi} lends the credibility of an eyewitness to his rhetorical description of Acanthis’ dying moments.\textsuperscript{58} By means of this verb, the experience of seeing is itself textualized and serves as an internal sign for the need to visualize every detail of the ekphrasis in order to appreciate it as a work of art.

These lines are densely packed with ugly images. The nouns on which the poet focuses in his description of the \textit{lena}’s death are neck, sputum and teeth, each qualified by an adjective denoting ugliness that turns it into a grotesque image: \textit{rugoso} \textit{... collo}, \textit{sputa} \textit{... cruenta}, \textit{dentis} \textit{... cavos}. The dying \textit{lena} is a composite of grotesque images, but these parts do not form a whole. In constructing her body thus, the narrator is punitive.

\textsuperscript{58} Keith (2008), 35.
and vengeful. But the poet shows that he is not adverse to the inclusion of such grotesque images into the body of elegy, and he does so with refined skill. In line 68 he interlaces *sputa...cruenta* and *dentis...cavos*, and, by means of this chiasm, suggests that the preposition *per*, one word away from *ire*, can also call to mind through tmesis *perire*, which means to die – precisely as the *lena* is described as doing. The aesthetically significant aspect of line 68, the element that shows it to be the result of careful refinement, is the interlaced word order and the semantic emphasis on the visual aspects of the *lena*’s death. The order of the words mimics their content: just as the bloody sputum oozes between her teeth, the *sputa* and *cruenta* alternate with *dentis* and *cavos*, existing, as it were, between them. In the next line (69) the poet’s (and so the readers’) attention falls onto the phonetic dimension of the words as he mimics the sound of Acanthis’ last breath with a series of tricky elisions. The phonetic arrangement of the line represents Acanthis’ difficult (and, we are invited to imagine, sputtery) breathing and coughing. Her final breath is not easy. Indeed when she expels her final breath, Propertius tells us that it is an *animam putrem*, rather than simply an *animam*. The qualification is a significant addition because while designating bad breath, it also suggests that the source of the stench is disease. Acanthis is as rotten on the inside as she is ugly on the outside. Everything is laid bare, even her insides.

The rank quality of her breath links her to an aspect of the grotesque that is more typically Roman than modern, as we have seen in the chapters on Lucretius and Catullus. Propertius follows suit in engaging the sense of smell in his sensual project,

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59 Keith (2008, 34) takes *cavos* to mean “gapped”, as is evident from her translation, and that is the meaning presupposed here. Hutchinson (2006, 150) interprets it as “hollowed out by decay.”

60 Chapters 1 and 2.
into which it bears the sense of the grotesque linked to disease. The stench of Acanthis’ breath is that part of her inside which reaches those who are outside. Like the sputtering bloody spittle it represents the exteriorization of the inside, though it reaches farther and penetrates through the nostrils of those in proximity, insinuating itself into the interior of their bodies. The movement of the grotesque imagination comes to a visual halt when it focuses on appearances, including the appearance of moving surfaces, such as the wrinkled skin on her neck. But when it is carried by particles of rank breath, it is much more dynamic, and penetrates further, moving from the inside to the outside of the body as if carried by the particles of breath. The experience of the grotesque is principally visual, but the olfactory component, represented by a single word, is by no means negligible.

Immediately after her death, the poet turns his attention to her funeral rites:

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    exsequiae fuerint rari furtiua capilli
    uinclula et immundo pallida mitra situ,
    et canis, in nostros nimis experrecta dolores,
    cum fallenda meo pollice clatra forent. (4.5.71-74)
```

The context can be interpreted as a deformation of elegiac topoi: *rari ... capilli* may pervert *Cynthia rara*, while *furtiva ... vincula* can parody *furtivus amor*, and *pallida mitra* can be read as a degrading allusion to the pallor of the elegiac *amator*. Acanthis’ sparse hair is decorated with stolen ribbons and a mitre turned pale from foul neglect. Acanthis

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61 This passage is not discussed in Lilja’s (1972) very rigorous philological study of the theme of odours in classical poetry. In her examination of representations of bad breath, Lilja covers instances in which bad breath is caused by the excessive consumption of food and drink (traditionally the *lена* has a great fondness for drink), as well as by the practice of fellatio but not by disease. Richlin (1992, 69) also mentions bad breath from oral sex.

is thus both a socially degraded individual (as a pauper) and also a repulsive one. The attempt to give her corpse a more acceptable appearance for her funeral actually compounds her ugliness and adds a derisive dimension to her grotesque debasement. Just as beauty is enhanced by appropriate decorations so ugliness is also increased by unattractive ornamentation. The funeral procession of this despicable lena, plagued with the ugliness of a decrepit body, and dressed up in a manner that makes her more outlandish dead than alive, is imagined to consist of a female dog that was as inimical to the lover as the lena herself. The pathos that is implicit in the idea of a funeral is mixed with mocking indignation for her pomp, in a melding of emotions and psychological attitudes that is consistent with the main tenets of the grotesque. Modern theorists of grotesque realism have shown scant interest in the higher genres of classical antiquity and have paid no attention to elegy. Yet images of this kind show that the concept of the grotesque body has deep roots in elegy and invite us to engage a more inclusive empirical base for the theory of the grotesque, with respect to both chronology and genre. For Propertian elegy repeatedly calls attention to the shocking presence of the grotesque body in the world of amatory sentiment and artistic refinement.

Propertius’ artistic refinement is especially visible at the technical level. In the passage under examination we can see it in the enjambed expression furtiva capilli / vincula (4.5.71-71). The conventional explanation for the impact of enjambment is that the ideas the poet wants to express in a single verse exceed the verse’s capacity to carry

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63 The idea that Cynthia is a younger version of her lena is especially ominous in this context. As a lena Acanthis is a former puella, beloved of poets who paid her with their verses. The warning issued here is that Cynthia should not fall into the same error, or else she will end up just like Acanthis: a pauper and a social outcast.

64 While Richlin (1992) does not focus on the grotesque per se, she does examine elegy in the context of the highly obscene and grotesque imagery of satire in a way that makes her study an important precursor of this project.
them. Here Propertius makes use of enjambment to compound the derision of Acanthis’ sparse hair, ludicrously treating it as if it were so thick that he needed to enjamb its description. Yet what there is in such great quantity that it needs to be enjambed is in fact the empty space between the hairs. The enjambment thereby exaggerates how sparse her hair is. This subtle way of creating derision is further enhanced by a shrewd use of hypallage. *Immundo sit* (4.5.72) means “befouling neglect,” that is to say neglect that has the effect of making something foul. The contextual reference of *immundo* is therefore not *situ* but Acanthis’ *mitra*, which has been made pale by neglect. By transferring the epithet to *situ*, Propertius gives a tangible quality to an act that is impossible to visualize other than through its effect, since in itself *situ* does not represent an action but the absence of one. Propertius thus employs two figures of rhetoric (enjambment and hypallage) to exaggerate the nothingness-of-hair and the nothingness-of-action that are the primary causes of Acanthis’ appearance. The excess of nothingness is the primary stylistic source of grotesque mockery at the end of the poem and evidence of the poet lover’s desire to annihilate Acanthis.

The suggestion of nothingness – indeed of too much nothingness – is thematically significant. The befouling *lena*, who had become so scrawny that her ribs could be counted, virtually disappears into nothingness, in the imagination of the lover and of the poet. Even from a material point of view, Acanthis’ grotesque degradation is a way of turning her into nothing.

*sit tumulus lenae curto uetus amphora collo:*
*urgeat hunc supra uis, caprifice, tua.*
*quisquis amas, scabris hoc bustum caedite saxis,*
*mixtaque cum saxis addite uerba mala! (4.5.75-78)*
Thorns cover her monument, the *caprificus* will overpower it, and lovers are invited to throw rocks at it, while expressing their indignation with insults. Her funerary urn is a clay amphora with a broken neck (4.5.75), a detail that echoes the wrinkly neck of the *lena*, when she was alive (4.5.67), and of the slit throat of the bird offered in sacrifice (4.5.66). The echoes carry the suggestion that the amphora itself, like her grave, is a material figure for Acanthis. The fact that amphorae were used to keep wine, and that Acanthis is true to her literary antecedents as a wine drinker especially in comedy, further strengthens the identification and sheds retrospective light on the upward movement manifested on her neck as the phlegm was rising in her throat, for that image is a grotesque parody of the image of the downward movement of wine in earlier days of her life. Now that the amphora and Acanthis are finally equated, the rocks that will be hurled at it will crack it further and reduce it to rubble. At that point Acanthis’ grotesque debasement will be complete. Yet this debasement, powerful and perhaps even cruel though it is, does not really annihilate Acanthis. To the extent that the *lena* is part of his imaginative purview of the elegiac situation, she is an indissoluble part of the poet’s world as a necessary antagonist, and so she can never be annihilated.

**The Lena’s Song**

When the *lena* speaks *in propria persona*, we are not presented with nightmarish content but with the practical advice of a procuress who has wide experience of both the world and literature. The *lena’s* song falls in the type of rhetorical exercise known as *prosopopoeia* or speech in the voice of an impersonated character, a form that, as Keith

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has shown, is more typical of Book 4 than of the other books of the Elegies. In this type of composition, the main narrator of the poem assumes the role of another character. The structure of that narrative in our case is articulated as a complex mise-en-abyme of voices. The first voice that we hear is that of the elegist, and he speaks pretending to be an elegiac poet-lover, who assumes the voice of a lena, who in turn briefly cites the elegist and hence speaks momentaril in his voice, which is, in any case, the only voice actually speaking and counterfeiting all the others. The final product of the exercise in counterfeiting, as we shall see, is the poet’s own voice, counterfeited by the lena. A significant argument implicit in these considerations is that the poet presents his aesthetic stance as determined by the poem itself and not by extratextual considerations. When he assumes the lena’s perspective, however, the poet shifts key in syntax, sound, and imagery. As we shall see, the lena’s song is sophisticated in both form and content, and is cast in the refined mode of elegy.

The lena begins her song with an elaborate conditional sentence in which the protasis comprises multiple images:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{si te Eoa ‡dorozantum† iuuat aurea ripa} \\
\text{et quae sub Tyria concha superbit aqua,} \\
\text{Eurypylique placet Coae textura Mineruae,} \\
\text{sectaque ab Attalicis putria signa toris,} \\
\text{seu quae palmiferae mittunt uenalia Thebae,} \\
\text{murreaque in Parthis pocula cocta focis;} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(4.5. 21-26)

Keith (2008, 30) points out that in contemporary rhetorical education, a prosopopoeia was an exercise meant “to train the student in adapting speech to character.” In book 4, Propertius composed 3 elegies as prosopopoeiae (4.2, 4.3, 4.11), and 6 with embedded prosopopoeiae (4.1.71-150, 4.4.31-66, 4.5.21-62, 4.6.37-54, 4.7. 13-94, 4.9.33-60), all in voices other than the poet-lover’s. Hutchinson (2006, 13) suggests that Propertius would have received such rhetorical training in preparation for a career as an advocate and reminds the reader that the analysis of speeches in his poems requires rhetorical deconstruction.
Gutzwiller, O’Neill and Warden have argued that the *lena’s* song is an appealing and sophisticated display of poetic language, imagery and doctrina, including the use of parallelisms, Greek words, and literary appropriations. Building on their views, we can say that the appeal of the *lena’s* song is also due to a very shrewd use of rhetoric and syntax in order to present the speaker as a rhetorically effective advocate for the interests of her mistress. By accumulating examples of appealing luxuries in a conditional clause, the *lena* delays the inception of the apodosis, thereby creating an increasing sense of anticipation with respect to her objective, which will appear as a necessary inference from all the desirable material things that she lists as premises of her argument. The *puella* is no doubt attracted to the prospect of an income that could enable her to fulfill her most exotic desires, and hence can be imagined as ready to agree with the *lena* as she lists each of the items in the protasis. By reciting them separately, however, the *lena* invites the *puella* (and the reader) to linger over each item, persuasively inclining her to agree with her *lena*, since all items in the apodosis are presented to her as simple rather than contrary-to-fact conditions. The *lena’s* rhetorical approach is that of a strategist who first lays down all the conditions to which the *puella* can easily consent, and then expects not simple agreement, such as might be given after one of the conditions, but an enthusiastic one, resulting from their cumulative prompting and from their joined inferential force. The *lena’s* opening lines are formulated in order to achieve her protégé’s assent.

67 Cf. Warden (1980, 110), Gutzwiller (1985, 108), and O’Neill (1998, 56) all of whom focus on the captivating aspects of the *lena’s* language and on the elegance of her style, especially in the opening lines of her song, focussing on learned words, literary allusions, and parallel structures, but not on Acanthis’ rhetorical manipulation of her syntax and her arguments.

68 Acanthis’ catalogue of Coan silk, perfumes and other precious accessories represents a literary version of Rome’s appropriation of luxury products from annexed foreign countries and is paralleled by the poet’s importation of Greek words into his poetic lexicon: cf. Keith 2008, ch. 6, esp. 146-7 and 152.

69 Cf. James (2003), esp. ch. 3.
The lena’s physical appearance, which is a grotesque version of the young and beautiful puella of the elegiac mise-en-scène, parallels the poet-lover’s perception of her perversion of the principles of elegy, as suggested by the catalogue of precious gifts that she recites. Here, for example, the lena lists figures cut from Pergamene coverlets that are meant to be sewn onto clothes: 70 Eurypilique placet Coae textura Minervae / sectaque ab Attalicis putria signa toris (4.5.23-24). This couplet includes a learned reference that invites the reader to superimpose the images of the cut-out figures onto garments of that finely spun cloth and to reflect on its metaliterary implications for Propertius’ poetic project. If we consider that the figures are qualified by the word putria71 and that Acanthis is herself putrid (she has an animam…putrem, 4.5.69), we realize that the lena articulates for the amica a grotesque aesthetic project in the combination of rotting patches and Coan silk. Given her own grotesque nature and the fact that she has been included in the collection of Propertian elegies, the image of grotesque figures on Coan silk exemplifies her own status in Propertian elegy.

The occurrence of such refined imagery and syntax at the core of the poem is consistent with the grotesque aesthetic already displayed by the poet-lover in his framing narrative. In the lena’s opening lines, the immediately perceived impact of the grotesque does not arise from the images in her song, which in themselves have nothing unappealing and are instead aesthetically warranted by a poetics of neoteric refinement.

70 Hutchinson (2006), 143. He gives, as an example of such figures, a griffin, a mythological creature whose hybrid body can be read as grotesque. Cf. Hor. Ars 1-5. There is another example of such coverlets at Plaut. Ps. 147. There the cloth is decorated with beasts: Alexandrina beluata tonsilia tappetia. For a marble reproduction of a couch draped in embroidered fabric, see Williams (1905), 96-97, and 136, plate IV. The sculpture is fragmentary; what remains is the leg of the couch, but designs on the drapery are clearly visible.

71 Hutchinson (2006, 143), however, argues that, in the sense of “decaying,” putria would be “too intrusive a narratorial focalization against A.’s own rhetoric,” suggesting instead vivida or lucida. However, in light of the present grotesque perspective, Hutchinson’s comment draws attention to his limited and limiting program of reading Propertian elegy.
Nor does it come from their syntactical deployment, which, as we have seen, shows an
elegance of form parallel to that of the poetic diction that it carries. The sense of the
grotesque, with all its unsettling psychological power, comes rather from the fact that
such poetry issues from the grotesque mouth of the lena. The refinement of the initial
lines of her song contrasts heavily with the offensive nature of the person speaking them.
The contrast between the singer and the song as components of the same picture is an
illustration of a basic principle of grotesque aesthetics, which is that the work’s structure
incorporates unresolvable disharmony among its constitutive elements. In elegy 4.5 this
principle governs both the embedding and embedded contexts of the poem. In the
embedding or framing section, the singer is the refined elegiac poet lover, while the song
is his depiction of the savagely debased lena. In the embedded section, the singer is the
lena, while the song is her elegant enticement of the beloved to prefer the comfort and
security of the rival’s wealth to the elegance of the lover poet’s verse. The fact that the
content of her song is necessarily identical with the poetry of the poet-lover’s discourse,
and that she is singing an anti-elegiac lesson in an elegy – which is itself a condition
necessary for elegy to exist in the first place – serve to show that a principle of grotesque
instability operates deep within Propertian elegy, which contains its opposite within it.

Propertius’ prosopopoeia of the lena is an instance of what Elizabeth Harvey
calls “transvestite ventriloquism,” the appropriation of a female voice by a male writer in
a manner that erases the readers’ consciousness of his gender and of his own voice as the
speaking character.72 The greater the author’s mastery of the rhetoric of prosopopoeia,
the more complete the erasure of his own voice as the vehicle of his speech in character.

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72 Harvey (1992), 1 and passim.
The hybrid double-voicing involved in the exercise performed by the poet-lover gives prominence to the ventriloquized feminine voice, making it the focal centre of the reading experience. In order to achieve such an effect, the poet-lover constructs the *lena* as a composite of vile attributes and accentuates the impression of the grotesque by making her sing an anti-elegiac song in the refined mode of elegy. In the resulting vocal hybrid the elegiac mode belongs to the ventriloquizing voice of the poet-lover, while the message is produced by the ventriloquized source. At the end of the song, when we focus on the speaking character rather than on the text that she has spoken, we need to remind ourselves of the fact the *lena*’s song comes with a framing text from which we cannot separate it without doing violence to the aesthetic nature of the whole composition. The elegy of which the *lena*’s song is a simple part includes also the embedding narrative and the speaking character, and we would miss the genre’s signature of authenticity if we did not conclude that the grotesque is implicit in and central to elegy, and that the grotesque is there to be found even when the text appears at it most innocent.

The adoption of a grotesque hermeneutical perspective implies that the reader must refrain from considering the poem from the perspective of the poet-lover, since his voice is only one of the constitutive elements of the poem. If from a formal point of view the *lena*’s song can be considered an exercise in *prosopopoeia*, so can the frame in which it is embedded in the manner of a quotation. The frame thus invites interpretation of the *prosopopoeia* as a speech in the character and voice of an angry lover who resorts to grotesque abuse in order to express his vindictiveness. The elegy may be read as consisting of two *prosopopoeiae*, one enclosing the other within its body the way a frame encloses a figure, or a large image can incorporate a smaller one. As an aesthetic
structure, the combination of one form enclosed by another with which it is incompatible is a common pattern in grotesque art, and we have already seen an effective use of it at the single-phrase level in 2.16.24, in which the incongruity of Cynthia and the rival is depicted by the strategic deployment of the words _candida_ and _bracchia_ around _foedo_. The grotesque incompatibility of the images is an expression of the irreducible dialectical tension found at the core of the genre.

The superimposition of voices entailed by the intertwining of _prosopopoeiae_, which may be conceived as a narrative parallel of the dyadic structure of the elegiac couplet, suggests that the _lena_ can speak like the poet because she has been conceived as one of his personae, for throughout her song she displays the same skill as the poet and the same stylistic preferences. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this. At line 61, _vidi ego odorati victura rosaria Paesti_, the use of the verb _vidi_ introduces into this part of the narrative an element of the rhetoric of realism. The speaker is shown as describing what she has seen rather than as inventing what she is describing. The poet uses the same formula himself _in proppria persona_ at line 67: _vidi ego rugoso tussim concrescere collo_. The _lena_ uses the eyewitness formula in her description of a withering rose bush, whereas the poet employs it to describe the _lena_’s imminent death. The poem may thereby imply the identification of the _lena_ with the rosebush, a hint already adumbrated by the image of the thorny being connoted by her name and her withered appearance.

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73 Thomson (1972, 20) identifies the impression of disharmony produced by the incompatibility of such combined images as the “most consistently distinguished” characteristic of the grotesque.

74 Cf. Harpham (1982, 79-80), who argues that grotesque aesthetics, like myth, enable us to recognize the existence of internal contradictions and to overcome the logic that would otherwise prevent us from understanding them.

75 It is noteworthy that in line 62 the _lena_ describes the rosebush as _cocta_. She uses this adjective another time, referring to stone cups fired in Parthian kilns, vessels that recall the amphora of her tomb: _murreaque in Parthis pocula cocta focis_ (4.5.26). In line 62, the word _cocta_ refers to a dying image, since this is how the roses wither away. The second hemiepes of line 26 contains partial echoes of the word: _pocula cocta_.
The use of the same formula by the *lena* and the elegiac poet-lover also establishes an identity between the speakers, who echo and mirror each other. *Vidi ego* occurs in the same metrical *sedes* in both instances, at the beginning of the hexameter line. The *lena’s* expression, however, contains more elisions than the lover’s: *vidi ego odorati* as opposed to *vidi ego rugoso*. The *lena* is in a sense an echoic figure of the poet, and just as echoes are never complete identifications, but partial and distorted, so the *lena* is a partial replica of the poet-lover, reverberating against him in the poetic imagination of Propertius, each speaking their own *prosopopoeia*. As the embedding and quoting voice, the elegiac speaker is given prominence, in that he addresses the reader directly. But in the present tense of the narrative, he echoes her. Her body disappears but her words continue to exist in his imagination and insinuate themselves into his speech. As an echo figure, the *lena* is constructed of words originally spoken by somebody else. She speaks echoically, exhibiting fascination for the controlled repetition of sounds. The echoes are internal to the collection because, although she is inside his poetry, she is conceived as a voice that echoes the poet himself. Propertius thereby scripts himself into his own poem, not only in the persona of the poet-lover, and, as we have seen, of the rival whom he incorporates, but also in that of the *lena*. As she wastes away into a pile of bones or a jar of ashes, only her words remain. But these, of course, are his words,

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*facis*. We note that in all instances the repetition of *-oc-* does not occur in the last but in the first syllable, and hence, strictly speaking, is not a real echo – a signal, perhaps, that the real echo is about to come. As a repetition of the beginning rather than the end of a word, *-oc-* is a perverted echo, in alignment with the grotesque principle of perversion that governs the poem.

76 She is an Echo figure who wastes away and yet continues to exist as repeated words. The fact that her use of the eyewitness formula is more heavily elided suggests that her words are much closer to being a real echo than the words pronounced by the lover poet. The *lena* is therefore a true echo figure in the sense that she quotes and echoes lines originally entrusted by Propertius to another voice.

77 Cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.397-401 where Echo’s body wastes away and all that remains is her voice: *adducitque cutem macies et in aera sucus / corporis omnis abit; vox tantum atque ossa supersunt: / vox manet, ossa*
spoken in her voice, as quoted in the voice of the poet-lover, who is his primary biographical persona.

Given this structural arrangement of the two prosopopoeiae, the question of the relationship between the two speaking voices calls for careful scrutiny. Indeed, at one point the two voices are exactly superimposed, as the lena quotes from elegy 1.2: 78

Quid iuvat ornato procedere, vita, capillo
et tenuis Coa veste movere sinus
(1.2.1-2 and 4.5.55-56)

The tension resulting from the intertwined prosopopoeiae is here focussed, since the voices of the poet and his foil travel on the same breath, and is saturated with metaliterary implications. In this couplet, elegy 4.5 reaches its most dizzying layering of voices as the story of an elegiac poet who poses as a vindictive poet-lover who quotes a lena, who, in turn, quotes the poet himself, the creator of both. In the process of embedding quotations the poet blurs the expected boundary between his dramatis personae and scripts himself into the song of his most grotesque character, who perverts the original meaning of his words. The lena uses the poet’s words with the intent to keep the puella away from her elegiac lover. Though they speak the same words, the lena and the poet’s elegiac persona, who quotes her prosopopoeia in his own, move in opposite directions. Yet both movements are necessary to the elegiac situation, since, by prompting the puella to yield to the advances of a wealthy rival, the lena is in fact teaching the puella to be dura

ferunt lapidis traxisse figuram. / inde latet silvis nulloque in monte videtur, / omnibus auditur: sonus est, qui vivit in illa.

78 The status of this couplet is a matter of contention. Scholars who accept it as authentic include Myers (1996),19 n. 126; Shackleton Bailey (1967), 242; Luck (1955), 430-433; Camps (1965), ad loc. Others, such as Hutchinson (2006, ad loc) consider it spurious. Richardson (1977, 445) considers it an interpolation.
towards the lover, who could not be what he is in the absence of her duritia.\textsuperscript{79} In her own prosopopoeia, however, the lena proffers another speech in character, though this time it is a speech in her voice but in the character of the poet himself, who is the author of the quoted programmatic lines on the Coan elegance of his poetry. The process appropriates the Coan elegance of the Propertian style to an aesthetics of the grotesque, which the lena exemplifies.

The crucial test of the validity of this claim on behalf of elegy, however, does not lie in Propertius’ grotesque treatment of the rival and the lena, with both of whom he can be punitive, but in a grotesque treatment of the puella herself. For she represents the primary condition for the genre: the puella, however touched by the grotesque, must remain beautiful and alluring at all times.\textsuperscript{80} The frustrated poet-lover may call down the curse of old age upon her (3.24), but as a character in elegiac poetry she cannot actually grow into the likes of a lena, since in such a hideous state she would no longer be the generative source of the poet’s love and love poetry. In carrying out this part of his project, Propertius must approach the grotesque treatment of his beloved Cynthia without resorting to punitive degradations and without annihilating her erotic appeal. This he attempts in 4.7 by situating his point of observation on the limen between the eeriness of the grotesque and the eroticism of elegy – by assuming, that is, a position that enables him to filter the latter through the imaginative ethos of the former. The lena is the depository of the grotesque of the puella herself.

\textsuperscript{79} As O’ Neill (1998, 64) observes, the lena “plays an odious, but necessary role, making the lover suffer so that he may thrive as a poet.”
\textsuperscript{80} Cf. Myers (1996), 14.
Cynthia and the Grotesque Ethos

In the temporal realm of the imagination, the equivalent of the spatial concept of liminality is the transitional state of consciousness when the body is between wakefulness and sleep. This occurs at the onset of sleep when consciousness is in a drowsy state and the imagination dwells simultaneously in both regions. Modern psychology describes such a state of consciousness as hypnagogia and calls hypnagogic dreams the imaginings that it brings.81 The phenomenon was also familiar in antiquity, in which it was generally regarded as a species of sensory activity caused by phantasms of troubling events that occurred during the day. Cicero records that the common names for such imaginings were visum and phantasian,82 while Artemidorus groups them in a special class of dreams called ἐνύπνια or visions in sleep, which, unlike other dreams, were to be interpreted as reflections of recent preoccupations rather than as predictions of future events.83 Propertius draws on this tradition in 4.7, in which he represents the poet-lover on the night after Cynthia’s funeral, in a state of drowsy consciousness and unable settle into sleep: cum mihi somnus ab exsequiis penderet amoris (4.7.5). Scholars are not agreed on the interpretation of this line but the argument set forth by Papanghelis is difficult to refute: whether we take penderet conceptually in the sense of “sleep was holding off,” or visually in the sense of “sleep as a winged god hovering over the [poet’s]

81 See Mavromatis’ (1987) influential investigation of the state of hypnagogia.
82 Cic. Acad. 1.11, 2.18. The context of Cicero’s discussion of the phenomenon is not dreaming but the theory of sensory knowledge.
83 Artem. Oneir. 4. prol. Artemidorus does not discuss these visions in detail precisely because they deal with the recent past rather than the future, but he records that detailed examinations of the phenomenon were produced by Artemon of Miletus and Phoebus of Antioch (1.2.), whose works are no longer extant. Prior to all, Aristotle observed that hypnagogic sensory apparitions terrify the young because they are unable to understand their origin (Insomn. 462a10-14). Macrobius later summarized the tradition but classified such imaginings as a species of dreaming (In Somnium Scipionis 1.3.7).
head,” the implication is that Propertius was not quite asleep and that after Cynthia’s funeral the poet-lover’s consciousness is troubled.

In this state he is visited by Cynthia, who comes to him as a strange apparition:

\[
\text{eosdem habuit secum quibus est elata capillos,} \\
\text{eosdem oculos; lateri uestis adusta fuit,} \\
\text{et solitum digito beryllon adederat ignis,} \\
\text{summaque Lethaeus triuerat ora liquor.} \tag{4.7.8-10}
\]

Although she comes to the poet-lover as a ghost, Cynthia displays characteristics of one who is both dead and alive. While her hair and her eyes are exactly as they were at the time of burial, her dress and her ring are already burnt by the pyre. She has already been to the underworld and has already drunk from the river Lethe, whose waters have worn way the edge of her lips, though as her monologue will make clear, she has not forgotten anything. As Hutchinson notes, these lines indicate that in her appearance are combined “the state of [her] body just before,… during,… and after… cremation.” In alignment with the principles of his grotesque aesthetics, Propertius does not give an overall impression of Cynthia’s appearance, caught in a single purview, but focuses instead on different parts of her body, visually considered in isolation from the rest. Moreover, these parts of Cynthia’s body belong to different moments of the final stage of her material existence, with the consequence that the figure that appears to Propertius in his

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84 Papanghelis (1987), 150. Fedeli (1988, 320) also believes that the speaker is in a state of “incerto sonno,” whereas Hutchinson (2006,173) makes an unconvincing attempt to argue that he must be fully asleep, offering the translation “when I, in my sleep, was utterly involved in the burial of my beloved.”
85 Plato (R. 10.621a) and Vergil (A. 6.703-15) both locate the river Lethe well inside the Underworld. It is, however, interesting to note that in Ovid’s geography the river is configured near the Cimmerian land within the cave of Somnus, (Met. 11.602-4) where it seems to emerge from the underworld. The cave of Sleep is thus a place that bridges the realms of life and death, sleep itself being the very state that allows Passage from the lower to the upper world and vice versa. Aptly enough, caves and grottoes are the points of origin for the term grotesque.
86 Hutchinson (2006), 173. See also Fedeli (1988, 320), who notes that not only Cynthia’s physical traits are indicative of her being between life and death, but also the manner in which she expresses herself “è tipico di chi si trova ai confini fra la vita e la morte.”
hypnagogic state is a temporally composite one, a hybrid of itself from various points in the course of its destruction. The verb used to describe the effect of fire on Cynthia’s body is adederat, which personifies the flames, endowing them with appetite, and presenting them grotesquely eating a cadaver. From a formal perspective, we note that in line 9 the readers encounter this image in the reverse order of the action that it depicts. In the temporal progression of the action, the fire comes first, then the metaphor of eating, and finally the ringed finger. But in the line we first see the ringed finger, then the action of something eating away at it, and finally the agent of that action. In this progression, verb adederat is visually restricted to its literal and grotesque sense until its subject is named at the end of the line, at which point it suddenly becomes metaphorical. The direct object of adederat is the ring, but the ring is not itself conceived separately from the finger on which it is worn, as indicated by the fact that solitum and berylon are arranged around digito, syntactically imitating the ring’s encirclement of the finger. Moreover, since adederat is phonetically identical with ad ederat, the image carries the suggestion that the action of eating applies not only to the ring but to the finger itself, which someone or something is gnawing it up to the ring, though that is not what the text actually says. The vividness of this implication of the phonetic structure of the verb renders the text momentarily unstable. Only when the subject of adederat appears is the action of eating revealed to be figurative and the grotesque impact of the image attenuated.

Propertius intensifies the sense of the grotesque again in the following line, in which the mouth (ora) is no longer the fire’s but Cynthia’s. Whereas in the previous image we have a metaphorical mouth eating a dead body, we now see the mouth of a

87 OLD s.v. ad 1a.
dead person drinking, and the water eroding away the surface of her lips. Images of chewing and ingestion are central to theories of the grotesque since they represent the transgression of boundaries between the inside and outside of bodies. In the case at hand their impact as depictions of grotesque activities is compounded by their combination with the abject ingestion of parts of Cynthia’s cadaver. The action of eating is a result of a metaphorical treatment of the funeral pyre and of the water of Lethe as devouring agents in the narrative that precedes Cynthia’s speech. However, this does not make the images that represent ingestion any less abject and grotesque.

The sense of the grotesque, moreover, is considerably enhanced when Cynthia begins to address Propertius, for she speaks with the voice of a living person though she rattles the bones of her fingers, as if they were those of a skeleton:

\[
\text{spirantisque animos et uocem misit at illi}
\]
\[
\text{pollicibus fragiles increpuere manus} \quad (4.7.11-12)
\]

Occurring as it does at the beginning of the line, \textit{spirantis} contrasts heavily with the image of Cynthia’s decaying lips taken from her state in the underworld. As a present active participle, \textit{spirantisque} gives the impression that someone is alive and actually breathing, and raises expectations of elegiac mourning. But the rattle of the bones, with its sudden suggestion of acoustic horror, dispels any possible illusion that \textit{spirantis} may have momentarily suggested. Considering the fact that Propertius has already described Cynthia as \textit{elata} and \textit{adusta}, both passive participles, and as the receiver and not the

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88 Bakhtin (1968, 281) observes that eating and drinking figure among the most important activities of the grotesque because they show the body in “its open unfinished nature, [and in] its interaction with the world.” In the act of eating, the body transgresses its biological limits. Kristeva (1982, 3) argues that the sight of a cadaver provokes in us a strong sense of abjection because it places us in the disturbing presence “of signified death,” which we always tend to keep out of our consciousness. In Propertius’ case the two experiences are combined into one.

89 As in previous chapters, the term “abject” is here used in the technical sense it has in Kristeva (1982, e.g.4) as something repulsive from which we cannot distance ourselves.
agent of the actions signified by the active verbs *adederat* and *triverat*, the sudden suggestion that she is endowed with the agency of a living person is startling for its incongruity. The suggestion that Cynthia has agency is confirmed at the end of the line with the verb *misit*, of which she is the unstated subject. The two implications of *spirantis* are, first, the presence of spirit, since an *animus* is necessary for life, and then that of voice, which indicates that there will be speech. What follows is therefore another *prosopopoeia*. Unlike the other *prosopoeia* that we have already examined, however this one in written in the character of someone who has features of a dead as well as of a living person. Cynthia, who is dead, has the voice and spirit of someone who is alive.

At the outset of her speech, however, she also makes a noise with her brittle fingers (*fragiles*, 4.7.12). The word-order of the four-word pentameter is also noteworthy, because *fragiles* is at the caesura while the noun that it qualifies, *manus*, is at the end, in accordance with Propertius’ taste for mannered neoteric line-patterns. The word-order calls attention to *fragiles* in a context that makes the adjective part of a highly significant grotesque image. In the parallel between the body of a character and the body of poetry in which the character appears, “graceful and soft” hands figure among the symbols that represent for the elegists the height of poetic achievement, as Keith has shown. Yet here the grotesque valence of *fragiles* as the rattling of the bones in the hands introduces into the metaphorical world of elegy an image, partly constructed with an elegiac word, that undermines the genre’s conventional claim to elegance.

In the context of line 12, in which it is used intransitively to express the production of a sound, *increpuere* can mean either to snap or to rattle. If we read the verb

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90 Keith (1999), 62.
in the first sense, as Hutchinson does,\textsuperscript{91} the implication is that the hands behave very much as those of a living person, with their flesh intact and capable of producing snapping sounds in order to call the attention the poet-lover, who is sinking into sleep.

The animation of Cynthia’s hands in this case would be consistent with Propertius’ use of \textit{pollicibus}, which can only be envisaged in making snapping sounds. It would also be consistent with the occurrence of the word \textit{spirantis} immediately above it, in the first position of the previous line. However, if we take the verb in the second sense of “rattle,” following Fedeli, Cynthia’s hands must be viewed as those of a dead person, rattling as if already reduced to mere bones.\textsuperscript{92} This would be consistent with \textit{fragiles}, in the sense of brittle, and would imply that the sound that is produced carries the suggestion of breaking, a fact that Fedeli incorporates into his translation of the line by treating \textit{fragiles}, not as the adjective “brittle” but as a verb of breaking: “ma le sue mani sembravano rompersi e scricchiolavano nei pollici.”\textsuperscript{93}

Propertius’ choice of words cannot be used to argue that one interpretation is better than the other. On the contrary, it suggests that whichever interpretation we follow, our reading can be easily undermined by another part of the image. The reader cannot focus on one interpretation without also thinking about the other. Propertius’ wording is designed to elicit a hermeneutical ambivalence, generating a dynamic shifting of focus between the image of the hands of a living and those of a dead Cynthia. As this occurs

\textsuperscript{91} Hutchinson (2006), 174.
\textsuperscript{92} Fedeli (1988), 211. Artemidorus, who discusses knucklebones in the context of children’s games, regards them as portents of danger because they belong to dead bodies: \textit{ἐκ νεκρῶν γὰρ σωμάτων γεγόνασιν οἱ ἀστράγαλοι. διὸ κινδύνος τοῖς λοιποῖς προαγορεύουσιν. (3.1)}
\textsuperscript{93} Fedeli (1988), 211. See also Papanghelis (1987, 152) who notes that \textit{fragiles increpuere} “verges on the onomatopoetic,” and that this poem explores the possibilities of making “melody of cacophony.” We can take this observation even further if we consider that the cacophony produced by Cynthia’s rattling hands is simultaneous with her speech, whose sophistication constitutes its melody. The seamless blending of incongruities constitutes the beauty inherent in the Propertian grotesque.
just before Cynthia begins to speak, Propertius situates her words in the domain of the grotesque, in which they figure as if issuing from incongruous sources – the dead and the living Cynthia – at the same time.

In Cynthia’s *prosopopoeia*, the first conspicuous instance of grotesque imagery centred on her own body occurs when she swears an oath that she has been faithful to her lover:

\[
\text{iuro ego Fatorum nulli reuolubile carmen,} \\
\text{tergeminusque canis sic mihi molle sonet,} \\
\text{me seruasse fidem. si fallo, uipera nostris} \\
\text{sibilet in tumulis et super ossa cubet.} \quad (4.7.51-54)
\]

Instead of describing Cerberus as a three-headed animal, a fact that already makes him a grotesque monster in Propertius’ third book, where he is presented as the three-throated guardian of hell (*tribus... faucibus* 3.5.44), Propertius says that his body consists of the combination of three bodies (*tergeminusque canis*, 4.7.52). Only the three separate heads are visible as signs of the threefold origin of Cerberus’ body. The difference that *tergeminus* makes is that it exacerbates the grotesque nature of the image: three dogs are made to inhabit the body of one, except for their heads, which have retained their independent form. The emphasis on the threefold rather than three-headed is a subtle grotesque enrichment of the figure received from earlier literature (*tergemini...Gerionai*, Lucr. 5.28). Yet this monster is imagined as being capable of barking *molle* to Cynthia’s spirit,\(^{94}\) in a manner that transforms him into a figure capable of elegiac *mollitia*. Though expressed only as part of an oath, the image of a quasi-genteel Cerberus serves to appropriate the epic monster for elegy. This appropriation does not attenuate the

\(^{94}\) Cynthia’s wish for Cerberus’ soft baying recalls Cerberus’ barking at the *lena* in 4.5.4, where the poet’s wish was that Cerberus frighten the *lena’s* bones with his *ieiuno... sono*. Cerberus’ appearance in the two contexts reinforces the parallel between the *puella* and the *lena*. 
The grotesque nature of Cerberus but exacerbates it further, by making him produce sounds and sentiments that are totally incongruous with the nature that he has in the literary tradition since the Greek archaic age. Hesiod, for example, describes him as devouring anyone who attempts to leave Hades (Theog. 770-773).

The appropriation of epic by elegy in the service of the grotesque continues in the following line, in which we are presented with the image of a viper slithering over Cynthia’s grave and lying on her bones. In the literary tradition, Cerberus had the tail of a serpent and snakes sprouting all over his body. Propertius does not mention any of this but subtly exploits the expectation of snake imagery by introducing the image of a viper. In so doing he reduces to the smaller scale of elegy the epic monstrosity of Cerberus’ snakes while enhancing, as we shall see, the grotesque effect of the scene in various ways.

To begin with, Propertius gives his image of the viper moving over Cynthia’s grave a phonetic dimension that enhances its aesthetic effect. The phonology of the two lines is dominated by the hissing sound of the letter s, which occurs as a single and as a double consonant. The letter s was an especially negative letter that carried a sinister

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95 According to Vergil, Cerberus has serpents on each of his three necks (Aen. 6.419). For Apollodorus he is a more monstrous creature, possessing 3 dog heads, a tail of a dragon, and a multitude of snake heads sprouting along his back (2.5.12). Cerberus was also a popular subject in the decorative arts, especially in the second half of the sixth century BCE and especially in vase painting. There is a long iconographic tradition of representing Cerberus as a large multi-headed dog with a body covered in snakes. The earliest example is on a Corinthian cup from c.580 BCE, where Cerberus has only one head, but a body covered with 6 snakes sprouting out of his fur, giving him the appearance of a creature with ten limbs. But Carpenter (1991, 111) notes that for the most part on Attic vases, “Kerberos has only two heads and his snakiness is restricted to his tail.” The most common representations of this myth, according to Carpenter (1991,130), depict Hercules leading or dragging Cerberus, but see also the Laconian cup of c.560 BCE where the entire tondo is filled by a very detailed rendition of the three-headed dog and his snakes. All we can see of the hero is a sliver of his club on the left-hand edge. Cf. also a more humorous depiction on a hydria from Caere, dated to the third quarter of the sixth century BCE, where Hercules is depicted bringing the hound back to a frightened Eurystheus, who cowers in a pithos. Each of Cerberus’ three heads has been rendered in a different colour and the snakes are clearly visible coiled along and growing out of his necks, noses and paws. On this hydria see, e.g., Osborne (1998), 111.
association with snakes, and its hissing sound was regarded as highly disagreeable, especially when it occurred as the last letter of a word and the first letter of the following one. Propertius uses the combination but enjambs it in *nostris / sibilet*. The enjambment gives the visual impression of breaking up the combination and the aural one of prolonging the viper’s hissing. Moreover at this strategic point at the end of the hexameter and the beginning of the pentameter, Propertius reverses the position of the hissing phoneme in relation to the sound nearest to it, ...*is / si...*, thereby simulating on the phonetic plane the viper’s curvilinear motion as it slithers from the surface to the interior of the grave.

All snakes belong to a class of animals that are especially amenable to the grotesque imagination and hence suitable for inclusion in grotesque works of art. As Kayser observes, their qualifying attributes in this regard are that they are nocturnal creatures that dwell in places where it is not normally possible for human beings to enter. Their presence in a scene about human beings is both eerie and fascinating because they bring into the world of man an invitation to penetrate imaginatively into the secret places in which they normally live and conduct their otherwise invisible activities. In the case of snakes, invisible activities include those associated with their phallic symbolism. Vipers are nocturnal and venomous snakes that carry the additional signification of insidiousness and death; they bring to the experience of the grotesque the more human dimension of scheming by poisoning, a fact that in our context resonates well with Cynthia’s suggestion that she may have been poisoned by Lygdamus (4.7.36).

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96 Quint. *Inst.* 9.4.37. The sinister association of the letter *s* with snakes was already found in Greek asigmatism, as recorded in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp.* 14.80-81.

In the larger context of contemporary culture, it also resonates suggestively against the contemporary rumour of Cleopatra’s choice of an asp as the instrument of her death in the account offered by the author of *carmen de bello Actiaco*.98 This is not to say that Lygdamus should be identified with the viper throughout the scene, but only that the image of the viper is conceptually evocative of him. Another significant detail in this regard is the fact that the viper has hollow fangs, rather like Acanthis’ teeth, and therefore the image evokes her presence as well. The image of the viper, in other words, generates a grotesque ethos around Cynthia’s grave that reaches beyond its specific signification as a symbol.

True to its nature as a grotesque animal, the viper is invoked by the ghost of Cynthia at night, at the onset of sleep, when the poet’s imagination is more easily disposed to call to presence grotesque images of his preoccupations. The viper is first pictured by Cynthia as hissing over her grave, and then as lying upon her skeleton in the grave itself. The grotesque ethos that is generated by the viper and the skeleton is intensified by their sexually evocative union in the grave. The term that Propertius uses to describe the action performed by the viper on Cynthia’s bones, *cubet*, has decidedly erotic overtones that transform the scene into a sinister mimicry of elegiac sex. The erotic sense of *cubet*,99 which surpasses the *mollitia* of the epic monster Cerberus, transforms the viper into a figure of the elegiac lover and naturalizes it as a grotesque being of elegy.

98 This hexameter papyrus offers a narrative of Cleopatra’s grotesque examination of various modes of death by watching the execution of criminals before choosing the poisonous asp as the instrument of her suicide. On this papyrus see Courtney (2003), Keith (2000) 119-121 and Sider (2005), 66-7.

99 On the erotic dimension of *cubo* see above, n.28.
Just how deeply ingrained is the viperous grotesque in Propertius’ elegy is revealed in the image of ivy growing over the grave and wrapping itself around Cynthia’s skeleton:

\[
pone^{100} \text{hederam tumulo, mihi quae praegnante corymbo molli<a> contortis alliget ossa comis.} \quad (4.7.79-80)
\]

Though the viper is not explicitly mentioned, the movement of the ivy growing over the surface of the grave, and its subsequent penetration into the interior, where it may bind Cynthia’s bones, seems to mimic the action of the viper. However it is the ivy’s and viper’s respective relation to Cynthia’s bones that enables us to ground that connection philologically in the text and to explore the hermeneutical implications that it has for the poem as a whole. The text suggests the adoption of such a stance by the fact that \textit{ossa} occurs in the same \textit{sedes}, as the penultimate word of the lines in which the images are presented (4.7. 54 and 80). On this plane of consideration, the images of the ivy and the viper enrich each other, contributing to the grotesque ethos surrounding the grave.

The ivy also recalls the thorny plant on Acanthis’ grave and brings into the hermeneutical context the idea that, though ivy is symbolic of poetry, it also represents a threat to the stability of elegiac poetry issued from within its narrative fiction. Moreover, Propertius enriches the image of growing ivy with a surprising association that speaks of

\footnote{Richardson (1977, ad loc.) and Hutchinson (2006, ad loc.) both prefer the \textit{pelle} of the MS tradition to Sandbach’s emendation of \textit{pone}. They cite Cynthia’s wish for the poet-lover to burn his poetry of praise for her in lines 77-8 as the primary reason. They are in agreement that the ivy has associations with the poet, and is not appropriate for the poetic subject – especially not one who desires to be free of associations with the poet. But they overlook the fact that Cynthia is a \textit{docta} and a writerly \textit{puella} not entirely separate or separable from the poet, and so a \textit{puella} for whom the poetic associations of ivy are equally suitable. I agree with Fedeli who prints \textit{pone}, noting in his \textit{apparatus criticus} that it would not be proper for a \textit{docta puella} to want ivy to be removed from her grave. Richardson (1977, ad loc.) mentions that the image of the (poet’s) ivy twining around the beloved’s bones hits “exactly the right note” of macabre. We should be mindful of the fact that his picture includes the beloved demanding that it be removed. For the purposes of this argument, however, it is precisely the macabre element that is an essential aspect of Cynthia’s grotesque dimension.}
life and renewal rather than threats. When he refers to a cluster of berries growing on the stem of the ivy plant, he describes the plant as *pregnante corymo* (4.7.79), a phrase that suggests a form of pregnancy resulting in birth. The image of a pregnant limb of a plant is by itself a grotesque image that endows the plant with a mode of self-renewal that is natural only to animals and humans. The image also recalls the decorative plant-animal hybrids at the origin of the idea itself of the grotesque. But it is the relation of this detail to the viper that makes the image of a pregnant plant especially poignant in the immediate context. For it was believed that, when a pregnant viper was in the process of giving birth, its most impatient young would break through the sides of their mother’s body and emerge through the wound. The location of the place of issue for both the viper and the ivy, namely the side, is a significant detail, Cynthia’s dress too was burned only at the side by her funeral pyre. The grotesque dimension of the ivy is thus enhanced by its connection with the viper, while the viper’s and, by implication, Cynthia’s are retroactively enriched with the power of regeneration and growth even in the context of death. Cynthia may have died and her ghost may ask that her poetry be burned, but that does not imply the demise of elegy, which must also incorporate a principle of self-contradiction without leading to its own end. For Propertius, as for Bakhtin, death is not a total denial of life but a condition of renewal and regeneration.

The metaliterary correlative of the idea of regeneration is the affirmation by Propertius that his inspiring muse is none other than himself. In general, Augustan elegy

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101 Pliny, *Nat.* 10.82.
102 Bakhtin (1968), 50. For Atemidorus ivy can symbolize either good luck (only for actors) or imprisonment and sickness (for all others): ἀμπέλοιο δὲ καὶ κισσοῦ σῶμα τὸς περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον τεχνίταις συμφέρει, τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους δεσμᾶ ἑλκεῖ διὰ τῶν ἑλκεῖ καὶ τὰς προσπλοκάς τοῦ κισσοῦ ἔν τὸν διὰ ταύτα, (1.77). A significant hermeneutical implication of the ivy motif is that the writing of elegy is somewhat like acting, in that it purports sincerity of romance and passion but is in reality the result of studied gestures and poses. The fact that Cynthia wants the ivy around her grave (4.7.79) indicates that she too is conscious that the elegiac situation is in reality just a scenario.
secularizes the muses by locating the source of its poetic inspiration in the beloved within the poems rather than in a divine muse somewhere beyond the poet’s ordinary reality.\textsuperscript{103} This phenomenon, Bronfen observes, induces us to conceive the muses as the begotten rather than the begetters of poetry.\textsuperscript{104} But in the poem of Cynthia’s death, Propertius goes one step further, imaging his supposed muse as dead and his poetry as continuing to flourish nonetheless. Indeed it thrives on her death, using the event as a source of thematic content and celebrating, as it were, her corpse. When a poet continues to write “over the dead body” of a woman created by his art, he does so because, as a construct, she continues to elicit “an erotic desire” to celebrate her as an object of his creation.\textsuperscript{105}

Propertius’ most grotesque treatment of the concept of death occurs at the end of Cynthia’s \textit{prosopopeia}, where she envisages their eternal union once he too will have been reduced to mere bones:

\begin{quote}
\textit{nunc te possideant aliae: mox sola tenebo:}
\textit{mecum eris, et mixtis ossibus ossa teram.}
\end{quote}

\textit{(4.7.93-94)}

\textit{Mixtis and teram} belong to the overtly sexual vocabulary of the period and focus the reader’s attention on physicality.\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Teram} does so with its own power of vivid description, since it is a low-register word for the movements involved in the sexual act, and by position, since it is emphatically placed at the end of the line as Cynthia’s last

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{103} E.g. Prop. 2.1.1-4.
\textsuperscript{105} Bronfen (1992), 60.
\textsuperscript{106} Adams (1982, 183) states that \textit{tero} can be used metaphorically of sexual intercourse, but can also be interpreted as “a concomitant of the sexual act.” He also notes that this verb is common for double entendre jokes in the lower registers of comedy, mime and farce. See also Allison (1980, 171) who argues that \textit{teram} in this line is explicit to the point of vulgarity, and that it connotes vigorous sexual activity. Cf. \textit{OLD} s.v. \textit{tero} 1b.
\end{flushleft}
word. *Mixtis* is a less vivid expression, but its descriptive strength is also enhanced by position, since in *mixtis ossibus ossa teram* it represents the positional counterpart of *teram* in enclosing the mixing bones, in a syntactical arrangement that seems to mimic the embrace of the sexual partners. Taken literally, the final line of Cynthia’s speech depicts an act of passionate sex between two skeletons, grinding against each other. The end that Cynthia envisages for the poet takes the grotesque ethos of the poem to its highest intensity, adding to it a dose of black humour, which had been missing so far. The two sexual partners described by Cynthia, being only skeletons, cannot achieve the climax available only to bodies still covered with flesh and endowed with senses.

The image of the combining skeletons is carefully constructed to benefit from retrospective allusion to other parts of the text and to shed its own eerie light on them. We note first that the poet’s *ossa*, strategically named in the penultimate word of Cynthia’s last line, recall by position Cynthia’s own *ossa* (4.7.54 and 80), suggesting that what was said of her is also valid for him, and that in describing the action of the viper and the ivy on her bones, the poet was also looking forward to the line in which his own *ossa* would become the object of his beloved’s attentions. The term *mixtis* recalls the image of Cynthia’s and the poet’s lovemaking when, *pectore mixto*, they warmed the street in passionate sex (4.7.19-20). The allusion enhances the grotesque impact of the action of the skeletons because it invites the reader to envisage their attempt at lovemaking as a ludicrous imitation of the sexual movements that they performed when

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107 *Misceo*, when used in the context of the sexual act is, according to Adams (1982, 180-81), of higher register, because it was used as a technical term by medical writers and had therefore a learned tone. Moreover the corresponding Greek term *μίγνυμι* was used by Homer and Hesiod as a designation of sexual intercourse, cf. *LSJ* s.v. *μίγνυμι* II. B. 4. *Misceo* was used in elegy with the same meaning – cf. Pichon (1902, 202): *ad rem venereum spectat* – but the elegists’ tendency to foreground the allusive capacity of single words adds a sense of considerable refinement to their usage. Cf. *TLL* VIII. 1081.1-10; *OLD* s.v. *misceo* 4c.
their bones were still covered with flesh. Without the reference to the sexual act of living lovers, the image of bones seeking gratification from each other would be merely macabre. Without the reference to Cynthia’s ossa in her grave, the two skeletons could not be used as a way of channelling the poet’s grotesque treatment of Cynthia as a commentary on his amor and his amores. But the reference to the lovemaking of living individuals brings momentarily to the foreground the derisive stance of grotesque aesthetics, which undermines Cynthia’s blind seriousness. The reference to Cynthia’s bones prefigures the poet’s own bones and situates our hermeneutical perspective in the heart of grotesque aesthetics, preventing us from dwelling excessively on the physicality of the mise-en-scène as a form of ghastly prurience or from offering interpretations designed to transcend its otherwise offensive nature.

The interpretive project of this chapter has been to understand how the main characters and the physicality of the elegiac drama, filtered through the imagery of a grotesque ethos, illuminate the poetic program of Propertian elegy. The grotesque ethos shows us first of all that Propertius’ gaze remains fixed on the constituents of elegy, from its dramatis personae to the various views of the sentiment of love that informs their drama. But it also demonstrates that a conventional perception of amatory elegy as poetry of refinement, sentiment, and beauty remains under-theorized if it does not take into account the fact that, at the core of these elements, their ideality is undermined and their conceptual stability disrupted. Propertius’ elegiac program is centrally committed to a grotesque ethos in which conventional expressions of beauty and romance reveal an underside that both degrades the idealization that they purportedly represent and disturbs the interpretive focus of the reader concerned with the pleasure of love alone.
At the thematic level of the elegiac fiction, Propertius articulates his grotesque ethos by endowing his *dramatis personae* with repulsive attributes that, while often occluded, occasionally come into full view to shatter romantic expectations by subjecting his characters to sudden degradation. In this manner, Propertius uses the grotesque as a point of narrative access to the emotions and imagination of the poet-lover as he realizes that he cannot secure Cynthia’s love with his poetry. In his depiction of the characters that are antagonistic to the poet-lover, namely the rival and the *lena*, Propertius attributes to them grotesque physical, cultural, and social traits designed to degrade their human stature and denounce their respective roles in the drama. In his depiction of Cynthia, however, Propertius uses grotesque motifs to take account of the uncanny erotic appeal of the beloved revenant and the verse form which she incarnates.

At the level of the poetics of the genre, Propertius’ infusion of grotesque images into the world of elegy reveals an uneasy symbiosis of refined forms and degrading content. Forms that would be conventionally expected to rarefy the experience of unrequited love acknowledge that the sublime erotic experience is equally constituted by its degradation in the ugly and the eerie. Such incongruous unions result from Propertius’ use of elegiac vocabulary in a grotesque context, and from his recourse to refined neoteric techniques of verse construction and subtle allusion that invite the readers to muse on a single detail even as they discover its grotesque aesthetic purport and recognize that in the art of amatory elegy the beautiful incorporates its antithesis. The grotesque filtering of elegy does not destroy beauty and refinement but conjoins them to the grotesque. The aesthetics of the grotesque thus reveal that the conceptual domain of elegy is deeply marked by ambivalence and self-contradiction. The textual representation
of the imaginative world of amatory elegy requires readers to shift their interpretive base continually, crossing conventional boundaries until they can assume a perspective in which the incongruous union of the beautiful and the ideal with their contraries appears as the manifestation of a congruity of a higher order. That dialectical form of congruity is the distinctive feature of the Propertian grotesque.
The poet-lover’s awareness of his inability to retain his beloved is the source of many themes of elegiac poetry, including the one in which he blames others for his suffering. This is certainly true of Tibullus, whose poet-lover blames his rival and the lena for raising obstacles to his desire, the one attracting his beloved away with his riches and the other keeping her away from him with her clever stratagems to acquire wealth. In responding to their actions, the poet-lover makes use of basic techniques of grotesque degradations, focusing his attention, however, more on the mind than on the body of his foes and enacting his most violent and physical vilifications as a fantasy in his own mind. My purpose in this chapter is to examine how Tibullus incorporates the grotesque into his poetics of elegy, foregrounding the subtlety that distinguishes his approach from that of contemporary elegists. Specifically I will examine his treatment of the lena and the rival in three poems, 1.5, 1.9, and 2.6.

At significant points of my discussion, I will pay some attention to Tibullus’ dialogue with Horace, whose declared vision of elegy corresponds to expectations that we normally regard as conventional. Politely criticizing the genre, Horace exhorts an Albius not to spend so much time writing miserabilis ... elegos (Carm. 1.33.2-3), lamenting his unrequited love and his displacement from the role of lover by a younger rival. The identification of the Albius mentioned by Horace in this ode – and also in
Epistle 1.4 – as Tibullus has been the subject of critical disagreement, but most critics now accept it as an established fact.¹ In the elegiac situation described by Horace there is no room for the disturbing emergence of grotesque motifs, which presumably belong to other genres, such as invective, satire, and comedy. The grotesque content of these genres has attracted the attention of a number of classicists, who, working mostly from a Bakhtinian perspective, have produced a substantial body of highly insightful criticism.² For the purposes of this chapter, the most relevant interpretations are those of Paul Allen Miller, Jonathan Walters, and Barbara Gold. Miller demonstrates that Bakhtin’s analytical categories are coherently applicable to classical satire once we separate them from the idea of the carnivalesque: Roman satire is aggressive and non-regenerative, and upholds masculinity while degrading femininity.³ Walters shows that the satirist chastises his victims as deviants by speaking through a persona who never falters in upholding standards of conduct, a stance that enables Tibullus to appropriate techniques of satire for elegy through his own persona of the poet-lover, who remains generally consistent in his stance, though, as we shall see, in his relationship with Marathus he reveals himself

¹ Murgatroyd (1980, 3) considers the identification very likely, the objections by Postgate (1903), 179-84, and (1912) notwithstanding. Having sifted the evidence, Murgatroyd finds it “scarcely conceivable” that the Horatian Albius be anybody else. For Putnam (1973, 134-5), the fact that the name Pholoe occurs in Carm. 1.33.7 and in Tib. 1.8.69, adds evidence to the interpretation of Horace’s Albius, to whom Carm. 1.33 is addressed, as Tibullus. Maltby (2002, 50) accepts the arguments advanced for the identification of Tibullus and Albius and observes that the Tibullan idea of elegy - “the instability of love [and] the constant replacement of one lover by another” – is central to Carm. 1.33, indicating that Horace had “a shrewd appreciation” of Tibullus. Kiessling and Heinze (1901, 139) state that this Albius, as well as the one to whom Ep. 1.4 is addressed, is the elegist. Other scholars in favour of the identification are Ullman (1912a, 1912b), who provides the first rejoinder to Postgate (1903); Frankel (1957), 323; Nisbet and Hubbard (1970), 368, who add that Horace has a good grasp of Tibullan elegy; Kilpatrick (1986) 57; Ball (1994), whose article argues for the identification and gives an overview of the Ullman and Postgate debate; and Keith (1999), 47, who accepts the identification and strengthens the case by noting that Horace’s pun between Albius and candidus echoes the Tibullan play between albus and candidus in 1.7.58. Mayer (1994, 133) regards as inconclusive the evidence cited in support of identification of Albius as Tibullus.

² See in particular the articles in Arethusa 26 (1993) and 31 (1998).

susceptible to the appeal of grotesque imaginings. Gold observes that in Roman culture gender was not a polar distinction but operated on a complex “sliding scale,”\(^4\) a fact that enables us to see how the poet-lover is continuous, at least in conception, with all the other characters of the elegiac scenario, all of whom are fictive personae of Tibullus, all contributors to the creation of his composite narrative ego. Among earlier critics, Catharine Edwards is especially relevant to our discussion, since Miller’s interpretation of satire is partly based on her work. Edwards argued that in Roman society masculinity implied virtue while femininity connoted pleasure, characterized as *mollitia*.\(^5\) Given that *mollitia* is a defining attribute of the genre of elegy, the view of satire as punitive of the world of *mollitia* has significant implications for the poetics of elegy. As we shall see, Tibullus incorporates into elegy an aggressive form of the grotesque, undermining the expectation that the exclusive content of the genre is in fact *mollitia*, and yet maintaining the decorum of the elegist. But decorum, as Ellen Oliensis has argued, invoking Foucault, “is never innocent” – for it is always an expression of power over others, including the power of aggression.\(^6\) The theoretical position that I assume in examining the Tibullan elegiac grotesque is grounded in this body of criticism, but in presenting my arguments I aim to build on specific readings of the text by various Tibullan scholars, most notably Francis Cairns, Paul Murgatroyd and Robert Maltby. Among the commentators on Horace, Elisa Romano remarks that the *Epodes* have noteworthy traits in common with elegy, including two that, as we shall see, are central to Tibullus’ project: the use of

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\(^4\) Gold (1998), 370.  
\(^5\) Edwards (1993, 174) bases her interpretation on Seneca’s *De vita beata* 7.3, in which virtue is hard and dry while pleasure is soft and wet.  
punitive language to degrade the character of an old hag, and of powerful invectives against a rival, upon whom the narrator invokes all manner of suffering.\(^7\)

In examining Tibullus’ incorporation of the grotesque into elegy, it is useful to distinguish between the events in chronological sequence and their narrative arrangement, since it is their relationship in the narrative that links them to each other in the reading experience. The meticulous work by Cairns leaves no doubt concerning the significance of the “apologetic function”\(^8\) of “plot design” in the distribution of events without regard for their temporal order. Plot design, according to Peter Brooks, is the interpretive structure to which a story is subjected by its author.\(^9\) It is the interconnectedness of episodes, which frequently eludes us when we concentrate on single passages in isolation, that enables the author to govern the interpretation of each passage from within the text itself. Cairns’ main interest in the apologetic function of narrative structure is to show that by distorting the temporal order of his elegiac story Tibullus manipulates his reader’s reaction to its details. Building on Cairns’ work, I argue that Tibullus deploys his major episode of grotesque poetics – the poet-lover’s curse of the procuress in 1.5 – in strategic relation to the rest of the corpus. Tibullus expands the effect of the grotesque with great subtlety to include the experience with which the reader is left at the end of the collection, namely that the grotesque is not only a feature of 1.5 but an essential part of the nature of elegy.

The narrative of the Tibullan grotesque begins when the *lena* enters the scene in the company of a *dives amator*:

\(^7\) Romano (1991, 975 and 1000-1002) makes these very important suggestions without pursuing them herself, since her goal is to gloss Horace rather than the elegists.

\(^8\) Cairns (1979), 178.

haec nocuere mihi, quod adest huic dives amator,
venit in exitium callida lena meum.\(^{10}\) (1.5.47-48)

All that we are told about this nameless \textit{lena} is that she is \textit{callida}, an adjective that foregrounds the way she thinks rather than her appearance.\(^{11}\) The procuress is generally rapacious,\(^{12}\) and there is no reason to assume that her greed is ever absent from her Tibullan personality, but here it is her cleverness that is foregrounded. Tibullus’ nameless \textit{lena} will later be characterized as greedy (\textit{sagae...rapacis}, 1.5.59), but that is not the first impression the reader has of her. Our attention is initially focused instead on her ability to plot and plan, for the destruction of the poet-lover.

The \textit{lena} descends into the grotesque immediately as the subject of the poet-lover’s curse, which transforms her into a highly physical character, performing acts of grotesque savagery:

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
sanguineas edat illa dapes atque ore cruento
tristia cum multo pocula felle bibat:
hanc volitent animae circum sua fata querentes
semper, et e tectis strix violenta canat:
ipsa fame stimulante furens herbasque sepulcris
quae rat et a saevis ossa relicta lupis;
currat et inguinibus nudis ululetque per urbes,
post agat e triviis aspera turba canum.
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

(1.5.49-56)

In this passage, the poet-lover suddenly plunges into a scenario of hideous violence, starting with an image of the \textit{lena} as a wild creature devouring bloody flesh. The actions that the \textit{lena} performs are in the subjunctive, a mood especially suitable for indicating that she does not actually perform them in the present, though she is conceived as a type who regularly engages in such activity. In a grotesque display of anger, the poet-lover

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\(^{10}\) Unless otherwise stated, I follow Postgate’s OCT for the text of Tibullus’ poems.

\(^{11}\) Cf. \textit{OLD} s.v. \textit{callidus} 1a and 2a; \textit{TLL} III.171.22-30.

\(^{12}\) Myers (1996), 12-16; James (2003), 53 and 71.
imagines her performing these savage actions as if in accordance with her true nature, without even a hint of his own poetic agency that may be forcing her to act against her will. Judged by the conventions of the elegiac world, this scenario, created as a fantasy by the poet-lover, has the appearance of a disturbing intrusion, despite its introduction by a character who is himself an elegist. The sudden lowering of consciousness from the abstract realm of the mind to that of abject corporality constitutes the *spiritus movens* of the aesthetic experience of the grotesque governed by Tibullus’ poetics of elegy.

Aesthetic experience is also governed by intertextual associations in the reading process. Intertextuality is not as common an approach to Tibullus, as it is in Propertian and Ovidian studies. Most commentators who note correspondences and similarities with Horace tend to limit their remarks to the *Odes*, but, as I will argue, there are substantial similarities between the Tibullan corpus and the *Epodes* and *Satires* of Horace. Unlike the *Odes*, which were published after the elegies and can therefore have no philological implications for Tibullus, the *Epodes* and *Satires* were well known to Tibullus as he worked on his elegiac collection. Tibullan commentators and critics generally point out situational similarities between Tibullus’ 1.5 and the *Epodes* and *Satires*. Building on their observations, we shall see that other similarities are substantial enough to warrant an intertextual approach to Tibullus in relation to Horace,

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13 Cf. the poet-lover’s other fantasy scenario in this poem (19-34) where he imagines his ideal rural life with Delia.

14 In insisting on intertextual associations, I follow the lead of various scholars, especially Cairns (1979, 29), who grounds in Hellenism his critical perspective on Tibullus, arguing that Tibullus does not ostentatiously display his *doctrina* because he may well be “the spiritual descendant of an area of Hellenistic poetry in which such boasts were felt to be out of keeping with the subject-matter.” Hunter (2006, 58) examines a number of echoes in Tibullus and points out that he frequently “turns commonplace into high-style poetry,” a characteristic of his style that makes intertextual analysis as necessary as it is difficult. Similarly Maltby (2011, 87-98) argues that Tibullus is more heavily indebted to the Greek epigrammatists than other elegists, though he “never spells out openly” his literary precedents. Building on the methodological implications of these scholars, I will focus especially on Tibullus’ subtle intertextual dialogue with Horace.

particularly on grotesque motifs. That Tibullus and Horace were engaged in a real
dialogue is attested by Horace himself. In Epistle 1.4 he addresses Tibullus as a frank
critic of his satires (candide iudex, Ep. 1.4.1) and he offers critical advice concerning
Tibullus’ elegies, a genre that keeps Tibullus in a state of perpetual anxiety (inter spem
curamque, timores inter et iras, Ep.1.4.12). In Odes 1.33 Horace advises him to leave the
genre altogether (neu miserabilis / decantes elegos, Carm.1.33.2-3). The widely-accepted
interpretation of Albius as Tibullus constitutes evidence of a literary dialogue that has left
traces in the poetry itself.

Such traces are visible in the imagery of the poet-lover’s curse in Tibullus 1.5,
which so degrades the lena that she is now little more than a wild animal herself. Maltby
notes that the sanguineas dapes that she devours are most likely bloody sacrifices to the
gods of the underworld,16 an interpretation supported by the fact that dapes belongs to a
high register of poetic diction.17 However, sanguineas dapes may also refer to the
contemporary practice of funeral visceratio, or the distribution to the poor of meat from
the animal sacrificed in honour of a person just laid to rest, a practice described as a
routine event in funerals of the rich and powerful by both Cicero (De Off. 2.55) and Livy
(8.22; 39.46; 41.28). In both interpretations the lena is linked with the dead. Watson
comments that dapes normally designates a religious offering and on that basis
concludes that the bloody dapes devoured by the lena are “the raw offerings prepared by
magicians for the demons whose aid they enlist.”18 The fact that they are eaten by the
lena, means that she is equated with such infernal deities. The resulting interlayering of

16 Maltby (2002), 254.
17 Watson (2003), 212. Cf. OLD s.v. daps 1 and 2a; but also note that 2b defines daps as the food or meal
of animals. Cf. also TLL V. 36.9-38.53.
18 Watson (1991), 161 n. 450. Cf. OLD s.v. daps 1a and 2a: the term signifies a sacrificial meal, a feast or
the food comprising it. Cf. also 2b “food or meal of animals.”
allusions, one to a literary character and the other to a contemporary social custom, gives rise to the composite figure of a witch that both recalls literary precedent and lends credence to the fiction of the elegiac drama. The witch is the figure Tibullus uses to represent the *lena*, while the grotesque violence to which she is driven by hunger is the degradation invoked by the poet-lover in his vilification of the scheming procuress. The sense of the grotesque associated with the act of devouring is compounded by the raw and bloody repast that assimilates the *lena* to a wild animal. Already a vulgar character-type borrowed from Roman comedy, the *lena* is further debased by the angry poet-lover, who depicts her as the witch of satire and invective and portrays her as a wild predator devouring her prey. This way Tibullus can malign her not only with comic vulgarity but also with the grotesque of the horrid and the abject, as his frustrated desire gives way to morbid visions.

For even in a scenario of such grotesque savagery it is not difficult to notice the poet’s neoteric propensity to enrich with literary allusion the sense-bearing capacity of his words in the manner of conventional elegy. When Tibullus describes the *lena* as a *saga rapax* (1.5.59), he refers to the conventional greediness of the type and simultaneously fuses the stock image of the *lena* with that of a witch. In this regard Tibullus’ *lena* recalls Horace’s Sagana, one of Canidia’s associates in *Epode* 5. As we shall see, Tibullus’ description of the *lena* includes other allusions, but the allusions to Horace invite especially close scrutiny in any discussion of the grotesque. The *Epodes* and *Satires* of Horace, with which Tibullus was demonstrably familiar, offer the

19 Leach (1978, 82) argues convincingly, mostly on the basis of structural analogies, that Horace’s *Sermones I* are modeled on Vergil’s *Bucolics*, and that Tibullus patterned his first book of *Elegies* on both: “In his own subtle manner Tibullus models his program of self-definition upon the patterns set by Vergil and Horace.”
opportunity of adding a further layer of grotesque meaning to his language by suggesting that his imagery is the result of a running dialogue with the Horatian texts. At the centre of that dialogue is the similarity between Tibullus’ *lena* and Horace’s *Canidia*.\(^{20}\) In the dialogue Tibullus engages Horace in passing an abject woman between them as an object of homosocial exchange that purports instead to exclude her from their domain through the instrumentality of the grotesque, without, however, making explicit the fact that such an abjection of woman is a essential feature of the elegiac genre.

We should not expect this intertextuality to concern only single words and phrases. It also concerns large patterns of thought, narrative motifs, and imagery, or, in a word, poetics. As Oliensis has argued, by casting Canidia as a witch, “Horace activates, however grudgingly, the musical suggestions of the name (*canere*)” making her in effect the embodiment of “an indecorous poetics.”\(^{21}\) It is precisely such a poetics that Tibullus seeks to appropriate into the domain of elegy. We see this especially in the intertextual relationship established between elegy 1.5 and satire 1.8. The setting of both poems is similar: Tibullus’ scene begins in a graveyard where the *lena* is imagined gathering herbs for her meal, *herbasque sepulcris* (1.5.53), and ends with her running through the city, *per urbem* (1.5.55). Horace’s begins on the Esquiline, which was once a cemetery for the poor, *commune sepulcrum* (S.1.8.10), where the witches gather bones *herbasque nocentis* (S. 1.8.22) and ends with the two witches running through the city, *in urbem* (S. 1.8.47). Moreover, both scenes involve magic rituals, which are only suggested in Tibullus (1.5.49-51) but described in detail by Horace (1.8.22-34). In both cases the rituals involve eating bloody flesh. In Horace the two witches tear apart the flesh of a lamb with


\(^{21}\) Oliensis (1991), 110.
their teeth, *pullam divellere mordicus agnam* (S. 1.8.27), while in Tibullus the *lena* is pictured eating raw flesh, *sanguineas edat illa dapes* (1.5.49). Among other details that Tibullus echoes from Horace we note also a phonetic feature. The four /u/ sounds in *cum Sagana maiore ululantem; pallor utrasque* (S. 1.8.25) are echoed and increased to six by Tibullus in *currat et inguinibus nudis ululetque per urbes* (1.5.55), who also echoes the verb *ululo* itself.\textsuperscript{22} However, whereas in Horace the actions of howling and running occur at different times – the first when the witches are digging for bones in preparation for their ritual scene in the cemetery, the second at the end of the poem when they are frightened by Priapus’ flatulence – in Tibullus they are brought together and occur simultaneously.\textsuperscript{23}

The *lena* is shown howling and running at the same time in a hexameter, a line that is metrically reminiscent of Horace’s. On the other hand, Tibullus pulls apart the action and location in Horace’s *currere in urbe* by placing the verb at the beginning of his line while leaving the noun at the end: *currat ... per urbes*.\textsuperscript{24} Tibullus, in other words, dwells on Horace, inviting the reader to linger over his description of the *lena* in relation to her Horatian reference text. Tibullus combines and condenses the two scenes from Horace, suggesting that his *lena*’s behaviour is a result of her being subjected to the kind of magic performed by the witches, except that in her case it is a

\textsuperscript{22} Murgatroyd (1980, 180), observes that the repetition of the /u/ in this line communicates the *lena*’s cries. We can add to this that it may also suggest the crying implicit in the lament of elegy’s etymology.

\textsuperscript{23} Tibullus uses a similar technique of allusion in the phrase *herbasque sepulchris* (1.5.53), which combines two separate Horatian lines from *Satire* 1.8: *commune sepulchrum* (1.8.10) and *herbasque nocentis* (1.8.22). Tibullus’ *sepulchris* retains both *sepulchrum* through the root of the word, and *nocentis* through the sound of the suffix. The resulting meaning is a superimposition of *nocentis* on *sepulchrum* indicating that *herbas* are noxious because they are sepulchral.

\textsuperscript{24} The earliest and most authoritative Tibullus MS has the plural *urbes*. The singular is a later emendation, which Maltby (2002, *ad loc.*) deems unnecessary since the “witch is being pursued from town to town.” In the singular, the end of Tibullus’ line would be a direct echo of Horace’s line. The plural, however, which is more likely, is also relevant to this argument since it may be Tibullus’ acknowledgement of Horace’s two witches (both Canidia and Sagana) or a nod to the several times Canidia’s character recurs. Alternatively, Tibulus’ use of the plural could also be read as a reference to the ongoing torment with which the *lena* is cursed.
curse by the poet-lover. Unlike her Horatian counterparts, the *lena* is not the agent of 
malfeasance but the object of malediction.

In his depiction of the *lena*’s actions, Tibullus makes use of grotesque images 
from the *Epodes* and *Satires* of Horace, adapting them to his elegiac context. The two 
Horatian genres readily lend themselves to Tibullus’ desire to enrich elegy with grotesque 
elements because, as genres of aggression, they are themselves deeply imbued with a 
grotesque temperament. Canidia appears in both genres: she is the protagonist of *Epode 5* 
and plays significant roles in *Epode 17* and *Satire 1.8*.25 The epodes are written in the 
tradition of iambic invective, a style suitable for the aggressively grotesque treatment of 
adversaries.26 By recalling from within elegy the grotesque content of iambic origin, 
Tibullus endows his elegiac collection with a trans-generic reach, thus enabling the 
reader to savour the aesthetic pleasure of aggression from within a genre dedicated to 
mollitia and amor.27 The significance of such an extension of the conventional limits of 
the genre becomes apparent when we realize that the iambic metre, in all its variations, 
has the signature effect of verbal abuse.28

The couplet structure of *Epode 5* consists of stanzas in which the iambic metron is 
used consistently as the building unit of both lines, though the second line has one foot 
feather than the first. Elegy has an analogous structure: it uses the dactyl consistently for

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25 Canidia appears in several of Horace’s poems: *Epod. 3, 5, 17; S. 1.8, 2.1.48, 2.8.95*. Mankin (1995, 299) 
notes that she may also figure, although unnamed, in *Epod. 8, 12* and *Carm. 1.16.*

26 Horace observes that the tradition he follows goes as far back as Archilochus, the inventor of the iambus 
(*Archilochum proprio rabies armavit iambo, Ars. 79*), and claims that he earlier followed him both in 
metre and attitude, *numeros animosque / secutus Archilochi* (*Epist. 1.19.24-25*). Cf. Hutchinson (2007), 37- 
38.

27 The elegist thereby assumes a stance analogous to that of one seeking what Gunderson (2005, 224), in his 
reading of satire, calls “the perverted pleasures of reproaching perverts.” By means of strategic allusions to 
satires and epodes, Tibullus gives expression to a strong desire for grotesque aggression while remaining in 
the territory of elegiac love.

28 Morgan (2010), 116-117.
both lines, though the pentameter has one foot fewer than the hexameter. The structural analogy of the two verse forms facilitates Tibullus’ adaptation of iambic imagery into the elegiac metre by way of allusion. Similarly the presence of Canidia in *Satire* 1.8 presents no metrical obstacles to allusion, since the verse form of satire is the dactylic hexameter, which is also the verse form of the first line of the elegiac couplet. Tibullus’ use of the elegiac couplet as a vehicle for the grotesque is based on the affinity between its metrical form and the form of the two contemporary genres in which the presence of grotesque elements has an organic place.

*Satire* 1.8 becomes decidedly grotesque when Horace begins to describe the witches and their actions:

\[
\begin{align*}
  \text{vidi egomet nigra succinctam vadere palla} \\
  \text{Canidiam, pedibus nudis passoque capillo,} \\
  \text{cum Sagana maiore ululatentem} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(S. 1.8.23-5)

Against the ritualistic background of Horace’s satire, the *lena’s* magic has the effect in Tibullan elegy of transforming her into a wild animal. The verb *ululo* indicates for the Tibullan reader that the *lena* succumbs to lycanthropy because she has gnawed on bones snatched from wolves. The dialogue with Horace continues into the savage imagery used to depict the *lena’s* attack on the meat that she finds. The bloody *daps* (*dapes*, 1.5.49) that she voraciously consumes is strongly reminiscent of Horace’s *pullam divellere mordicus agnam* (S.1.8.27). It is noteworthy that Tibullus alludes to the grotesque imagery of Horace but does not emulate it himself. Expecting his reader to recognize the allusion to Horace and to recall the images, Tibullus leaves the truly disgusting material in Horace’s text, though in a sense he appropriates it by having the reader recall it from within the elegy. Among the most grotesque features of the Horatian scene is the blood-spilling
savagery of the witches, stressed by the satirist in a highly refined way. In describing how the two witches begin to tear apart the lamb with their teeth, *divellere mordicus agnam / coeperunt; cruor in fossam confusus* (S. 1.8.27-28), Horace enjambs the verb *coeperunt.* The movement implied by this enjambment foreshadows the spilling of the *cruor* into the ditch described immediately after.

Tibullus’ curse reproduces a miniature imitation of the genre *dirae,* which was well established in the period. This is the genre of spells and maledictions, in which grotesque imagery is an essential part of the poet’s punitive vocabulary. Tibullus’ text is also replete with allusions to specific passages in recent and contemporary poetry. The actions that the poet-lover imagines the *lena* performing are reminiscent of those mentioned in Callimachus’ fr. 530 Pf.: χολῇ δ’ ὑσα γέντα πάσαιο, “flesh like to gall may you eat.”30 The expression *ululatque per urbes* resonates with allusions to G.1.486, where it is used of the howling of wolves echoing through a city at night, and to Horace’s *Satire*

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29 Cf. Maltby (2002), 254. On ancient curse literature see Watson (1991, esp. 79-149) who discusses the common elements and themes in Hellenistic curse-poetry and its relationship to Latin curses, especially Ovid’s *Ibis.* He also analyzes three “case studies” of curses that occur outside of the proper curse-poetry genre, one of which is the curse on our *lena* in Tib.1.5.49-48: Watson (1991), 160-163.

30 The translation is from Lee’s edition. Commentators note that the context of the Callimachean fragment is too uncertain for a definite allusion. See, e.g., Murgatroyd (1980), 179. Many commentators mention the comparandum but do not discuss the similarity: Lenz (1964, 67), Lee (1990, 129), Maltby (2002, 254). Murgatroyd (1980, 179) observes that the claim that Tibullus alludes to Callimachus must remain unproven, since the Callimachean fragment is much too short to provide conclusive evidence. Pfeiffer (1949-53, 383-384) observes that the Callimachean context is uncertain but suggests that the fragment is part of a curse, pointing out that it is similar to that of other curses by Callimachus and later authors, including Tibullus in 1.5. Ball (1983, 86) finds the parallel tantalizing but advises caution because “the manuscripts provide no information whatsoever about the context.” Watson (1991, 163) says that Tibullus’ curse does recall Callimachus’ fragment, “although not very closely,” and adds that Tibullus’ savage tone here is quite different from the controlled one of Hellenistic poets. Della Corte (1980, 183) has no doubt that Tibullus is alluding to Callimachus, remarking that whereas Callimachus uses bile in a comparison with food, in his appropriation of fr. 530 Pf. Tibullus treats the bile as drink. We can add to this that in Callimachus there is only one action with a comparison to another, but Tibullus makes his *lena* perform two separate grotesque actions: she eats the flesh and she drinks the gall.
1.8.25, where it describes the howling of witches in their rituals.\textsuperscript{31} Tibullus’ grotesque imagery, in other words, is very much like other literary material in elegy, in that it is borrowed from other writers and presented as semi-concealed \textit{doctrina}. The original contexts of the citations are imported into Tibullus’ poem and fused in the characterization of the \textit{lena}. Individually they are all ominous, but when they are combined they give rise to a monstrous hybrid entity that conditions our interpretation of the \textit{lena}. When we consider that such an interpretive paradigm is generated in the body of an elegy by the principle of allusion, which is a fundamental part of elegiac poetics, Tibullus’ grotesque imagery is less alien to the narrative of elegy than may at first appear. The specifically elegiac nature of the context is illustrated by the fact that the ghosts with which the poet-lover surrounds the \textit{lena} in his imagination are \textit{querentes} (1.5.51), and so very much at home in the world of elegy.\textsuperscript{32}

Tibullus thus elegiacieizes the grotesque by treating it as part of the \textit{materia literaria} within the allusive reach of the genre, but he does not attenuate its ability to provoke intense and disturbing emotions. The Tibullan \textit{lena} is associated with death, as is Propertius’ \textit{Acanthis}. The thematic context of death is close to the elegiac genre, as revealed, among other things, by the presumed derivation of its name from a funerary lament and from its literary antecedent in the sepulchral epigram.\textsuperscript{33} Unlike \textit{Acanthis}, however, Tibullus’ \textit{lena}, is very much alive, and her body is in no way decaying. The grotesque impact that she draws into the fictional world of the poem is not based on her

\textsuperscript{31} Commentators have noted these parallels. See, e.g., Maltby (2002), 254 and Putnam (1973), 105-6. See also Ball (1983), 85-86. No one, however, has noted that it is the combination of the contexts that, as we shall see, conditions the reading of the \textit{lena}.

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. Pichon (1902, 248-9) s.v. \textit{queri}. Cf. Kennedy (1993, 32) who observes that “the verb ‘to bewail’ (\textit{queri}) becomes discursively constructed to signify the act of writing elegy.” See also Saylor (1967), who shows that Propietius uses the word \textit{querela} as a proper and technical term to refer to his elegies.

\textsuperscript{33} See Hor. \textit{Ars} 75; Hinds (1987), 103-104; 2; Maltby (1991), 201-202, s.v. \textit{elegeius, elegia, elegiacus}; Hunter (2006), 29-30; Keith (2011).
body but on her behavior. Driven mad by hunger (*ipsa fame stimulante furens*, 1.5.53) she searches the cemetery for herbs and harvests bones left behind by wolves: *herbasque sepulcris / quaerat et a saevis ossa relicta lupis* (1.5.53-4). The association of herbs with magic spells that the reader is likely to bring to the text serves to strengthen the impression of the *lena*’s profile as a witch and to prompt us towards the interpretation of the grotesque imagery as an incorporation of the uncanny into the elegiac.

The identification of hunger as the motive of the *lena*’s actions gives the grotesque a conspicuous social dimension. In contemporary Rome it was the custom for the relatives of a deceased person to leave food on the grave, ostensibly for the spirit, who would emerge to eat these funeral offerings, but in reality for the poorest of the poor, who roamed graveyards at night to gather whatever they could for their meal.\(^3^4\) The imagery involved in the poet-lover’s depiction of the *lena* anticipates therefore at least three sources of the grotesque: social degradation, the consumption of abject victuals, and the uncanny setting of burial grounds.

A fourth source is intellectual degradation. For a person initially credited with intelligence (*callida*, 1.5. 48), the experience of being lowered from a state of sound mind to one of wild madness (*furens*, 1.5. 53), in which she loses all control of her actions, is the greatest form of degradation. This is precisely what the poet-lover achieves in his curse. He begins by degrading the *lena* into a wolf-like creature. He pictures her gathering bones discarded by wolves,\(^3^5\) *saevis ossa relicta lupis* (1.5.54), thereby causing

\(^3^4\) This custom which is an extension of the funeral feast, *silicernium*, included the distribution of remnants of meat from the sacrificed animal – *visceratio*. On this see Kajara (1998). See also Erasmo (2008). Cf. Catul. 59; Prop.1.17.19-24, 2.24.35-38, 49-52; Tib.1.3.6-8; [Tib]. 3.2.
\(^3^5\) We can read this as a perversion of the practice of *ossilegium* (on which see Erasmo (2008), 54-55). because the *lena* is not concerned with saving the bones in a funeral urn, but with chewing them and using them in her potions.
the reader to imagine her trying to chew them like a wolf herself.\footnote{The ossa of 1.5.54 echo those mentioned by Horace in Epode 5.23, et ossa ab ore rapta ieiunae canis, in which the bones snatched from the jaws of a hungry dog are probably human. Smith (1913, 303), notes the similarities between Horace and Tibullus and suggests that the Tibullan bones may also be “the remains of the unburied dead” in a graveyard. Tibullus also uses the verb ululare to describe the lena’s wailing, a verb that Horace uses in Satire 1.8.22, in which sepulchral bones are gathered together with poisonous herbs: protulit os, quin ossa legant herbasque nocentis.}

The resulting image of the lena as a wolf is not without a touch of derision, since lupa also means “whore,” a meaning that adds social to animalistic degradation.\footnote{Especially since lupa indicated a particularly low-class prostitute whose territory was the graveyard, not the brothel. It was also one of the more abusive terms for prostitutes: see Adams (1983), esp. 334; cf. Della Corte (1980, 184) who considers lupa synonymous with meretrix.} Tibullus does not reveal the gender of the wolves either by the adjective (saevis) or by the noun (lupis), and the ambivalence is suggestive of a proliferation of the image of social lupae, who also move in packs. The poet-lover then proceeds to a more punitive form of degradation by having the lena engage in irrational behavior: she howls like a wolf and runs through the crossroads exposing her genitalia: currat et inguinibus nudis ululetque per urbes (1.5.55). Once callida, the lena now acts out an animal frenzy, endowed with the desire to make herself even more repulsive by self-exposure, the epitome of social opprobrium for a woman at Rome.\footnote{Cf. Richlin (1993, 68 and passim) who argues that women’s genitalia are described “in terms of extreme loathing” in Latin literature.}

The image connoted by the phrase inguinibus nudis reminds us of Horace’s description of Canidia with her tunic rolled up, succinctam (S. 1.8.23). The correspondence establishes an allusive relationship, in which Tibullus goes one step further than Horace. By revealing only her feet, (pedibus nudis, S.1.8.24), Horace shows considerable restraint in his denigration of Canidia. Tibullus appropriates by allusion Horace’s expression pedibus nudis, but exposes the lena’s genitalia, inguinibus nudis (1.5.55). In his dialogue with Horace, Tibullus casts his lena as a type of Canidia, but
exposes more of her body, subjecting the lena to “an obscene and degrading nakedness.” He goes beyond Horace only in this instance, and he does so without language for a lower lexical register. The allusion suggests that the lena and Canidia should both be interpreted as lupae or common prostitutes, and both as dogs, an animal that symbolizes sexual desire. In both cases – Canidia and the lena – we find the degradation of social stature suggested by the imaginary transformation of a woman into a wild and lustful animal. The connection with Canidia suggests that the image of the lena running away from pursuing dogs should also be correlated with the Horatian witches frightened by Priapus’ flatulence. The intertextual relationship gives rise to a strong sense of derisive grotesque not otherwise present in Tibullus’ original image.

Priapus’ description of the witches’ invocation of the infernal deities is arranged chiastically across two lines: Hecaten vocat altera, saevam /altera Tisiphonen (S. 1.8.33-34). One witch calls on Hecate in the second half of the hexameter, while the other calls on Tisiphone in the first half of the next line. The adjective saevam is placed prominently at the end of line 33 and figures as the word around which the chiasmus is arranged. The presence of such a mannered construction suggests that the speaker here speaks for the poet, regardless of the fact that he is simply a grotesque statue of the god Priapus. The entire episode is in fact reported in the voice of Priapus. Even if the narrator is separate from the poet, in this case the speaker is definitely not the poet but a grotesque wooden sculpture. However, the fact that he speaks from the same point of view as the poet and

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39 Watson (1991), 162. The uncharacteristic sexual overtones of this passage are widely recognized by Tibullan scholars. E.g., Putnam (1973, 106) sees in inguinibus nudis an expression of “sexual desire run amuck”; for Myers (1996, 8), the image of the lena’s naked crotch suggests “sexual rapacity,” to be added to the financial rapacity with which the lena is usually more concerned.


41 Fedeli (1994, 481) remarks that the function of the chiasmus is to reinforce the impression that the invocation of the two infernal beings consists of two perfectly synchronous actions.
with his refined technical skill suggests an identification of the poet with Priapus. This implies that the speaker has lowered himself into a grotesque creature, though Horace’s cognomen, Flaccus, distances him from the narrative persona. Priapus is in fact a wooden effigy, with an exaggerated phallus that is anything but flaccus (obsceoque ruber porrectus ab inguine palus, S. 1.8.5) and this is suggestive of the excessively aggressive eroticism of the god. Moreover, he emits flatulence so exaggerated that he splits his buttocks and frightens the witches away (nam displosa sonat quantum vesica pepedi / diffissa nate ficus: at illae currere in urbem, S. 1.8.46-47). The satire in this scene of comic obscenity is somewhat unusual, in that Horace does not inveigh against the magic rituals which are the object of his satire but merely ridicules them by showing how ludicrous they appear. Tibullus, on the other hand, reports his scene in the voice of the poet-lover. Since they are both narrators in poems that are linked intertextually, an allusive relationship of equivalence is established between the Tibullan poet-lover and the Horatian statue of Priapus. The poet-lover is thus a potentially grotesque character,

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42 Plaza (2006, 67) regards Priapus as Horace’s “comic version” of himself (66) frightening away witches who are figures of competing poets attempting to enter Maecenas’ garden. Keane (2006, 56) accepts the identification and suggests that Horace dramatizes his own precariousness as an established poet in Maecenas’ group, since the wood from which the statue of Priapus was fashioned could have just as well been used to make a bench for the garden (lines 2-3). For a survey of the arguments in favour of the equivalence of Horace with Priapus, see also Edmunds (2009), who includes a very helpful bibliography, despite the fact that the Priapus-Horace identification is not his main concern. Cf. Charland (2003), Habash (1999), and Anderson (1972).

43 The adjective flaccus means drooping or floppy (cf. OLD s.v. flaccus 1): for Horatian play on his cognomen, see Oliensis (1998,74), who, in her discussion of the Epodes, observes that “the use of the cognomen “Flaccus” (cf “flaccid”) not only etymologizes Horace’s impotence but draws attention to the absent sting in Horace’s promised vengeance.”

44 Fedeli (1994, 473) observes that the symbolic function of Priapus in garden settings is always based on the “carattere aggressivo dell suo fallo.”

45 As Brown (1995, 169-70) observes, the reader is presumed to share the scepticism of the author concerning such rituals.

46 Priapus is a central figure in another Tibullan elegy (1.4), in which the poet addresses him directly, promising him a shady pergola in exchange for secrets about how to seduce young boys. Fedeli (1994, 473) argues that the promise implies “un rapporto di scambio” between the poet and the god, a fact that resonates well with his dialogic relationship with Horace, especially in view of the possible identification of Horace with Priapus. However, no equivalence between Priapus and the poet is implied in 1.4.
since he has a Priapic dimension, which explains the readiness with which the poet-lover creates grotesque images of the lena.

In Epode 17 Horace pleads with Canidia to stop tormenting him for what he said about her magic powers. He promises to take it back, but Canidia responds that she will show him no mercy. She imagines for the narrator, who is her interlocutor, a life of torment, in which he is seized by an irrational drive to commit suicide and to split his chest (Epod. 17.70-75). This scene is reversed by Tibullus, who imagines the lena falling prey to her irrational impulses. Tibullus does not depict her killing herself but running away from dogs (post agat e triviis aspera turba canum, 1.5.56). And while this fate may at first seem not as severe as the suicide wished by Canidia on the poet, in fact it is worse: the poem leaves no hint that the dogs will ever catch her, and so she is condemned to eternal suffering. As Watson notes, this is an especially savage curse.47 In Horace, Canidia has the better of her prey in that she imagines him forced to carry her on his shoulders: vectabor umeris (Epod. 17.74). It is interesting to note that she is condemning him to something, which makes him the receiver of her action; but she does this with a passive verb, of which she is the grammatical subject, and so, in a sense, the receiver of the same action. The play between subjectivity and objectivity in this phrase alerts the reader to a double functionality in the symbolic language associated with the Horatian Canidia and, by implication, with the Tibullan lena. Since on the level of analogical allusion the lena is reminiscent of Canidia, Canidia is also present in Tibullus’ elegy. But the sound of Canidia’s name is close to that of canum that, on the symbolic level of

47 Watson (1991), 160. Watson also observes that saeva is appropriately used of Venus in line 58, because she is the overseer the execution of such curses. The savagery of this scene is rare in Roman poetry. Smith (1913, 301) suggest that it is the “black bitterness … and the awfulness of the scene” that makes the Tibullan motif unique.
phonetic association, Canidia is herself among the dogs pursuing the *lena*. The phonetic symbolism, however, has the effect of suggesting that the *lena* is also to be found among the dogs, despite the fact that on the narrative level she figures as their prey. The combination of phonetic and allusive symbolism, in other words, suggests that, on one level of interpretation, the *lena* figures as one of the agents of the pursuit, while on the literal level of the narrative she is clearly the object of that pursuit. At that level, the image of the *aspera turba canum* (1.5.56) serves the purpose of vilifying the *lena* as the prey of dogs gone wild. The adjective *aspera*, grammatically singular yet plural in meaning, echoes the very first words of the poem, *asper eram* (1.5.1), and thereby includes by phonetic association the poet-lover in the pack of dogs after the *lena*. The phonetic inclusion of the poet-lover among the pursuing dogs makes sense in the narrative design of the poem, in which the poet-lover blames the *lena* as the cause of his suffering as an unrequited lover. The symbolic inclusion of the *lena* in the same *turba* – by way of her association with Canidia – helps to justify the narrative suggestion that the prey will never be caught, since prey and predator are partly identical on one symbolic level though quite distinct on another, in accordance with the dialectical tension that is typical of the genre.

On the narrative level, the Tibullan scene is a depiction of gross deviant behaviour in a public street, an act of self-exposure in which the *lena* stigmatizes herself as a grotesque being. The episode reveals the *lena* to be not only irrational, or intellectually degraded, but also socially opprobrious. By describing her making an indecent spectacle of herself, the poet has subjected her to a serious form of degradation while enabling the poet-lover to enjoy the spectacle. On this point elegy has much in common with satire.
According to Walters, an object of satire that is shown deviating from the norm “enables the readership to implicate themselves pleasurably in the spectacle of deviancy while at the same time reaffirming their own non-deviant status.”48 In Tibullus such a pleasurable involvement occurs through the identification of the reader with the poet’s persona of the poet-lover. For this reason, it is indispensable for the poet-lover not to be implicated in the grotesque degradation that he describes. He and the audience stay on the non-grotesque side of the line that marks off the conduct of the lena.

Yet when we recall that the deviancy is imagined by the poet-lover, who is the main character of elegy, we discover that the source of the grotesque is in the genre itself. Since the lena’s grotesque behaviour is presented as a desire or a curse, we can see that the poet-lover is generating the grotesque in his mind and verbalizing it in his verses. His imagination, which is normally attracted to ideal beauty and to the sublime sentiments of unrequited love, now engages in the creation of grotesque images. The poet-lover thereby releases into the conventional elegiac situation an expectation of instability, since the grotesque is always potentially present in the ravings of its main character as a consequence of his frustrated love. Because it is released from within the elegiac situation and motivated by unrequited love, this type of grotesque in the Tibullan elegy is in a real sense an elegiac grotesque, expressive with respect to the poet-lover’s frustration and punitive with respect to the lena’s obstacles to his love. In order to participate more fully in the lena’s punishment, he goes so far as to subject himself to an imaginary transformation into a dog. In his own and in the reader’s imagination, the poet-lover is lowered into a more primitive life form in the manner of grotesque aesthetics. Yet his

48 Walters (1998), 355. See Cairns (1979, 153) for a similar statement concerning the depravity of the situation of Tib. 1.9. On the disgust at and degradation of the wealthy rival in 1.9, see below.
physical lowering does not involve moral or intellectual debasement. On the contrary, it raises his moral stature to that of instrument of rightful punishment.

The morally positive nature of this type of grotesque resonates with two Horatian images: in *Epode* 6 Horace’s persona casts himself as a noble watchdog (6.5), perhaps in order to suggest that his opponent is no more than a mongrel,\(^49\) while the sound of the word *canum* recalls Canidia (from *Epode* 5 and *Satire* 1.8) by simple phonetic association.\(^50\) The similarity of these passages places the Tibullan reader in the recollected context of Horace’s metaphorical self-transformation, achieved in order to attack evil-doers (*malos*, 6.11). Likewise the Tibullan poet-lover imagines himself as one of the dogs pursuing in the name of righteousness a *lena* who is morally, socially and physically repulsive. The allusion to Horace raises for the reader the possibility of a positive use of the grotesque, in a version that we might call the apotropaic grotesque. In this type of grotesque, corporeal degradation from man to beast connotes a rise in moral stature for the purpose of repelling the advance of a despicable adversary. As an instrument of rightful punishment, the apotropaic grotesque, already common in the Hellenistic world,\(^51\) is both punitive of adversaries and liberating of the subject’s inner strength.

We should also recall that the owl, which is an emblem of the witch herself, sings on rooftops: *semper, et e tectis strix violenta canat* (1.5.52). The screeching of the owl (*canat*), recalled conceptually by the *lena*’s howling (*ululet*, 1.5.55) and phonetically by the name for the pack of dogs (*canum*), is allusively the spell cast by the *lena* in her guise

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\(^{49}\) Mankin (1995), 139-140.

\(^{50}\) On the association of Canidia with dog imagery, see Oliensis (1991), 111.

\(^{51}\) Zanker (2007), 125.
as a witch. But because *canere* is the verb for poetic writing and performance,\(^{52}\) the
screeching by the owl is an inverted image of the poet’s song and a singular trope of the
elegiac grotesque. The grotesque activities that are performed by the *lena* as events in the
story – in Brooks’ sense of the word\(^ {53}\) – are transformed by narrative discourse into
poetry designed to give the reader the experience of the grotesque as an aesthetic object.

The commentators note that line 60 (*nam donis vincitur omnis amor*) may be a
reversal of Vergil’s famous phrase *omnia vincit amor* (*Buc.* 10. 69).\(^ {54}\) In Tibullus’ line,
every kind of love is overcome by wealth and gifts, which is why the elegiac poet-lover
continues to lament his suffering, since he only has verses to offer. This is how love
works in elegy, especially for Tibullus.\(^ {55}\) Writing from within the heart of elegy, Tibullus
appears both to pervert Vergil, and to correct him: elegiac love purports to be ideal but is
always degraded, and its degradation is the very condition on which elegy is based. For
line 60, Murgatroyd offers the meaning “a man’s love ends when he has to give gifts,”
i.e., when the *lena*’s instructions are followed.\(^ {56}\) Tibullus turns the Vergilian line into an
explicit cry of the elegiac poet-lover lamenting his situation. The elegiac beloved is lured
away from the *pauper* poet-lover by the rival, the *dives amator*. Ideal elegiac love
necessarily contains what is not ideal, which is the grotesque principle that informs the
presence of grotesque motifs in elegiac poetry.

A beloved swayed by gifts is what occasions poem 1.9: *muneribus meus est captus puer* (1.9.11). This elegy explores a love triangle in which the beloved *puer*

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\(^{52}\) Cf. *OLD* s.v. *cano*: 1b of singing incantations and 3c of composing and singing writings; *TLL* III. 269.39-270.55 (*componere, scribere carmina*).

\(^{53}\) Brooks (1984), ch.1, i.e., the temporal subject matter of the poem.

\(^{54}\) See, e.g. Putnam (1973), 106; Murgatroyd (1980), 182; Maltby (2002), 256.

\(^{55}\) Other instances of *pauper* for the elegiac lover’s circumstances in Tibullus: 1.1.19, 37; 1.5.61, 63, 65; 1.10.19.

\(^{56}\) Murgatroyd (1980), 182.
Maratus\textsuperscript{57} shifts the focus of his attention from the poet-lover, who can offer him only love poems, to a wealthy rival, who can shower him with rich gifts:

\begin{quote}
Quid mihi, si fueras miseris laesurus amores, foedera per divos, clam violanda, dabas?
\end{quote}

(1.9.1-2)  

Love triangles occur in other poems, but this poem is of special interest in a study of the Tibullan grotesque because it is dedicated in large measure to a love triangle in which the rival is the object of the poet-lover’s indignation. Again in Elegy 1.9, Tibullus dramatizes his love triangle in dialogue with Horace, who describes an analogous situation with a wealthy rival in \textit{Epode} 15. The traces of their dialogue are visible in the opening lines of the poem: Tibullus’ description of the oath as \textit{foedera … dabas} (1.9.2) is analogous to Horace’s \textit{verba iurabas} (\textit{Epod.} 15.4).\textsuperscript{58} The dramatic situation that propels the narrative forward is the instability of the elegiac love relationship caused by the appearance of a rival. As in other contexts of this type, the elegiac beloved does not love the wealthy rival, but rather is attracted to the riches, finery, and gifts that the wealthy rival can provide and so no longer cares for the love and poetry of the poet-lover. We know from line 1 that the poet-lover is the one for whom \textit{amores} are a concern, \textit{amores} that become \textit{miseros} the moment the rival enters the scene. This rival is an immediate threat and not a

\footnotesize{
\textsuperscript{57} He is never named, but the general consensus is that this \textit{puer} is Maratus, also mentioned in 1.8, with which this elegy forms a close pair. See, e.g. Murgatroyd (1980), 9 and 255; Maltby (2002), 322. Cairns (1979, 152-153) not only argues that the nameless boy beloved is Maratus, but also that the poet-lover’s rival is Pholoe’s old lover of 1.8. He argues convincingly that the same set of \textit{dramatis personae} occur in both of these poems.

\textsuperscript{58} Mankin (1995, 234) interprets \textit{Epode} 15 as alluding to common \textit{topoi} in the amatory tradition but does not discuss it any with reference to Tibullus. Watson (2003,467) notes the similarity without comment. With respect to \textit{miseros… amores} (Tib.1.9.1), Maltby (2002, 324) notes that both “the hint of self-pity and the theme of the beloved’s broken faith are picked up in Horace’s apparent reference to Tibullus’ elegies in \textit{Carm.} 1.33.1-4,” but does not comment on the similarity with \textit{Epode} 15.4. Both Romano (1991, 1001) and Mankin (1995, 235) point out that the expression in 15.4 is formulaic and derives from military language.
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potential one because he has already had some degree of success, which is why the poet-lover is angry and disposed to punish him in the *mise-en-scène* of the poem.

The poet-lover expresses his anger through a grotesque paradigm and carries out his amatory project by means of iambic techniques of debasement. The first element of the elegiac *mise-en-scène* that he degrades is love itself, which ceases to be a refined sentiment once it has become a marketable commodity:

\[
\text{tu procul hinc absis, cui formam vendere cura est,}
\]
\[
et pretium plena grande referre manu. (1.9.51-52)
\]

In the Tibullan world view, the commodification of love is the result of its degradation by the wealthy rival. Fifty-one lines into the poem the speaker dismisses Marathus (*tu*) for his willingness to trade his beauty for lucre and launches his attack against his rival (*at te*, 1.9.53), continuing steadily almost to the end of the poem. First introduced early in the poem, the power of wealth over love and poetry (*muneribus meus est captus puer*, 1.9.11), returns in the opening words of the poet-lover’s diatribe in the reference to the rival’s corrupting use of gifts (*qui puerum donis corrumpere*, 1.9.53). With the word *corrumpere* the rival acquires agency, and a sinister one at that. Gifts, money and gold are mentioned frequently in the first fifty lines of the text, as if to prepare the reader for the poet-lover’s aggressive stance towards his rival. Greed and money make for filth; the possessor of wealth and the one who longs for it are dirty and base. Money is literally filthy because it circulates through many hands, and it is figuratively filthy because it corrupts love. Corruption is possible only when the person at whom it is directed is

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59 This desire to create such an iambic effect, according to Della Corte (1980, 217), is an isolated incident in Tibullus elegiac corpus.
60 Cf. *OLD s.v corrumpo* 1a,b and 3a; *TLL* IV. 1054.60 (*delere, mutare in deterius*), 1057.16-1058.32 (*de pecunia* specifically).
61 Cf., e.g., *lucre*, 7 and 9; *muneribus*, 11; *auro*, 17 and 18; *divitiis*, 19; *divitis auri*, 31; *munere*, 43.
willing to be corrupted. The poet-lover’s attack therefore also strikes the young beloved, who is willing to circulate from one partner to the other in accordance with the type of gratification that he wants at that particular time.\textsuperscript{62}

The lowering of love into a meretricious commodity out of greed and the suggestion that such a debasement is a befouling act carry the reader into the realm of grotesque aesthetics. The menace of disruption by the degradation of love and lovers is a permanent feature of the elegiac genre alongside its conventions of refinement. But by shifting the focus of the reader from the world of refinement to that of corruption and prostitution, Tibullus gives the reader the aesthetic gratification of a lower genre. The social status of the characters and the low level of the actions in which they are engaged are content-based markers of the rank of the genre in the hierarchy of literary forms. Low-life types and such actions as deserve ridicule belong to the lower genres. In the \textit{Ars Poetica} (80-88) Horace maintains that the genres should not be mixed because each genre has a specific verse-form and content (Hor. \textit{Ars.} 73-88). By making use of images and motifs from the world of common prostitution in order to bring about the degradation of love – that is, by feigning that elegiac love is not already a degraded form of love that pretends to be sublime – Tibullus calls attention to the elements of elegy that compromise its claims to formal purity, degrading his genre in tandem with the degradation of his characters. Yet in doing so, he also expands the purview of the genre, since by admitting the comic he creates space for the theme of ugliness in the domain of the refined. As Aristotle had observed (\textit{Poet.} 49a33-34), the comic is a species of the ugly, a fact that Bakhtin theorized readily lends it to grotesque aesthetic treatment as an image of the

\textsuperscript{62} The image of the circulating beloved resonates with that of Callimachus’ roaming lover (περίφοιτον ἐρώμενον, 3) and the character of Lysanias, who is shared by many lovers (Λυσανίη, σὺ δὲ ναιξὶ καλὸς καλὸς—Ἀλλὰ πρὶν εἰσεῖν / τοῦτο σαφῶς, Ἡχῶ φησί τις· ἀλλος ἔχει, 5-6) in \textit{Epigr.} 28 Pf.
lower levels of society from a perspective located in the world of refinement. “The place of life in literature,” Bakhtin theorizes, “belongs only to the low genres, showing the life of private individuals and the inferior social levels.” The gratification of lower genres achieved within the confines of elegy includes the humor that comes in the typically grotesque version of growth and “a brimming-over abundance.” The poet-lover in fact wishes for another love triangle and another rival for his rival (1.9.57-60); moreover, he wishes his rival’s wife to take another lover. In the imaginative world of the poet-lover’s wish, the elegiac situation explodes into one that has much in common with comedy and farce. The soror drinks and sleeps with numerous men, and so does the rival’s wife. Maltby observes that this behavior recalls the behavior of a lena or a meretrix, and both are socially unfavorable comparisons, but, we may add, aesthetically enriching as vehicles of the grotesque. The whirlwind of messy sexual activity that comes with the opening of elegy to the grotesque does not leave the poet-lover himself clear of the complications that he unleashes. He is entangled in these regular complications and, it is implied, will be subjected to the grotesque degradation this setting entails.

In line with the thematic content of the lower comic genres, the degradation of the rival is first of all a form of intellectual debasement. He is too foolish to realize that his wife does not have him in mind when she renders herself erotically appealing:

\[
\text{at tua perdidicit: nec tu, stultissime, sentis, cum tibi non solita corpus ab arte movet} \quad (1.9.65-66)
\]

It is in line 65 that we first see the rival explicitly made intellectually repugnant by being addressed as stultissime. This is a low-register word commonly used to describe lovers

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63 Bakhtin (1968), 67. For this reason, laughter is used to punish “corrupt and low persons.”
64 Bakhtin (1968), 19.
who have been duped by their beloveds. In grotesque theory when an otherwise normal character is suddenly represented as unintelligent, he is degraded and derided. Given the dialogue with Horace, it is likely that *stultissime* (1.9.65) alludes to *potiori*, the term with which Horace describes the rival in *Epode* 15 (*Epod.* 15.13). His lover breaks her faith, so he promises to get even. The comparative *potior* to indicate a rival belongs to the language of comedy but not to that of elegy, in which Tibullus is the only poet who uses it (1.5.69). Though in *Epode* 15, the rival is despised, the comparative *potior* presents his effectiveness as contender in a grammatically positive way. Tibullus turns the comparative into a superlative but reverses it semantically, thereby degrading his rival into a very stolid person. He also addresses him directly, and the vocative gives the superlative the force of an appellative that singles out the rival, forcing him to recognize that he is the *stultissimus* being addressed by the poet-lover. Finally, he places the vocative before a verb that continues its already strong sigmatism (*stultissime*, *sentis*, 1.9.65), prolonging the appellation of stupidity to the end of the line.

The process of debasement is analogous to the shift in emphasis from the upper to the lower strata and interior of the human body in the case of grotesque realism. The parallel is based on the fact that, as Bakhtin explains, foolishness is “the inverse side [or] the lower part of official wisdom.” In the elegiac situation of 1.9 the narrator, of course, identifies himself with such wisdom by situating himself in a position of superiority from which to look down on his rival as a most foolish man. Here the poet appears to consider

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67 Romano (1991, 1002) states “*potiori* equivale a *rivalis* con una accezione che è nei comici.”
68 Mankin (1995), 240. He also notes that *potior* in the sense of “a favoured rival” is found in comedy (e.g., Plaut. *Men.* 359 and Ter. *Ph.* 533).
69 Bakhtin (1968), 382. The wisdom that sustains the legitimate order is degraded as foolishness, embodied by fools of all kinds who are also somehow regenerative and hence rise to new life. In Tibullus the downward glance at the rival is an attempt to degrade him down to the level of a fool, but the fact that remains his rival raises him automatically up again.
elegy a genre in which the poet-lover can express his indignation by casting his rival as the epitome of foolishness. Propertius also characterizes his poet-lover’s rival as foolish, *stolidus* (Prop. 2.16.8), using elegy as a genre of indictment for wronged lovers. Tibullus, however, goes one step further by using the superlative form of the vocative, and another by calling his rival *stultus*, a term that he has already used to call himself a foolish man: *tum miser interii, stulte confus amari* (1.9.45). *Stultissime* (1.9.65) both echoes *stulte* (1.9.45) and intensifies its deprecatory message, giving Tibullus’ conception of the poet-lover centrality in his conception of the rival. The superimposition of the identities of the rival and the poet-lover undermines the stability of the elegiac fiction, in which they are separate and antagonistic figures. The antagonism between the rival and the poet-lover turns out to be a form of self-identification masked as competing desire for the same person, in a scenario that Girard would call “désir triangulaire.” The triangle is an unstable fiction that conceals and expresses at the same time the desire for a superimposition of identities.

The dramatic situation envisaged by the poet-lover, for whom its narrative is stable, contrasts with the ones envisaged by the poet and the reader, for whom it is unstable. The mode of indictment becomes a mode of self-indictment. The superimposition of the poet-lover and his rival also reveals the narrative logic to which Tibullus subjects the central details of his elegiac drama. The incorporation of *stulte* in *stultissime* is a structural device by means of which two discrete figures are fused into one in the imaginative experience of the reader. The poet-lover’s expression of anger at his opponent, *stultissime*, is destabilized by the echo of *stulte*, which is the insult that he

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70 The poet-lover, however, projects himself into the figure of his rival and raises him to his own level by the bilateral echoic association in *stulte* (poet-lover) and *stultissime* (rival).

71 Girard (1961), 16.
hurls at himself earlier in the poem. The reciprocal echoing of *stulte* and *stultissime* with reference to the shared beloved is an example of the type of narrative intersection Sedgwick calls “mutual inscription.” The poet, in other words, constructs his narrative in such a way that his narrator’s language makes a full circle back to himself as speaker. The suggestion that the poet-lover and his rival are momentarily identical – the difference between them being only the degree of foolishness that they exhibit – introduces an element of subtle humor into the narrative discourse, since by pointing an insulting finger at his rival, the poet-lover is actually shown pointing at himself, as if he were looking in a mirror.

The intellectual degradation of the rival does not come independently of physical repugnance, nor does it stand apart from beautiful *comparanda*. The wife’s toilette, in which she makes herself beautiful (1.9.67-70), is described just before we learn that the rival is senile, filthy, and suffers from gout:

> non tibi sed iuveni cuidam volt bella videri,  
> devoveat pro quo remque domumque tuam  
> nec facit hoc vitio, sed corpora foeda podagra  
> et senis amplexus culta puella fugit.  

(1.9.71-74)

The poet-lover subjects his rival to physical degradation by envisioning him as afflicted by gout, a disease that automatically casts him as spent, aching, and awkward of movement. Similar to the punitive use of the grotesque that we encountered in Catullus, for whom the rival’s gout was a veritable source of contagion,\(^{73}\) the foul body of the Tibullan rival represents the danger of contamination for those who come into contact with it. Moreover he is an old man, and so repulsive that his wife, a discerning girl (*cul
ta*

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\(^{72}\) Sedgwick (1985), 22.  
\(^{73}\) Cf. Catul. 69 and 71 discussed in Chapter 2.
puella, 1.9.74) flees him. As far as age is concerned, he resembles Horace’s Varus, a senem... adulterum (Epod. 5.57), though Tibullus also afflicts his rival with gout on the Catullan elegiac model. Bakhtin classifies gout as a disease that results from overindulgence in food, drink, and sex – the physical overindulgence of the lower stratum of the body. The danger is made explicit by the adjective foedus, which, as we have already seen in connection with Propertius’ appropriation of the grotesque, means “foul” but can also mean “befouling.” The grotesque nature of gout lies in its lack of self-containment, for it spreads its befouling character by intimate physical contact.

The word corpora puts the focus on the rival’s body but, at the same time, raises the image of a plurality of bodies, its phonology suggesting a logic of momentary association that operates above that of its syntax and contrasts with it. That fleeting plurality of images includes the poet-lover himself, already identified with the rival by their shared stultitia in intellectual degradation. The befouling nature of gout manifests itself principally through smell, since its treatment normally includes the application of bandages with a revolting smell. Foul smell is associated with the medical condition and hence is evoked by its name. In the Tibullan elegy, which is centred on the poet-lover’s much-hated rival, the smell is also evoked by recent poetic memory: Catullus in poems 69 and 71 inveighs against a foul-smelling and gouty rival, debased by an elaborate allegory of an armpit goat. Horace borrows the hircine motif in Epode 12, in which he describes a revolting woman who pursues the speaker, but he reverses the

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74 Part of his repulsiveness is due to the fact that gout was thought to render the afflicted individual impotent. Cf. Della Corte (1980, 224) who explains “la gotta è nemica della virilità.”
75 Bakhtin (1968), 161.
76 See Propertius chapter, n.24.
77 Murgatroyd (1980), 275. See also Smith (1913, 374) who observes that the remedies for gout made the patient “especially repulsive” because of these bandages.
gender of the diseased individual, who is for him a hateful old woman, afflicted not with
gout but with other grotesque maladies: *polypus an gravis hirsutis cubet hircus in alis*
(*Epod.* 12.5). Tibullus evokes this literary memory, reversing the gender once again, with
his old gouty rival, both foul and befouling: *corpora foeda podagra / et senis amplexus*
(1.9.73-4). By means of this evocation, Tibullus imbues his poem with the grotesque
smell of the Catullan and Horatian characters without actually describing any of the
odour’s offensive aspects.

Tibullus does, however, extend the grotesque dimension of his characters when,
in describing his sexual act with the *puer*, he says that the poet-lover’s rival evokes
images of bestiality: *cum trucibus venerem iungere posse feris* (1.9.76). Tibullus thereby
momentarily raises the literal image of the occurrence of bestiality without actually
mentioning it. Joining Venus to the unexpected, however, has also a metapoetic
resonance, since the poet’s project is to create unanticipated and uncanny effects with his
love imagery. On the metapoetic level Tibullus metaphorically joins Venus to wild
beasts, while on the narrative level he hyperbolically suggests that his rival may have
done something literally analogous. The comparison of the rival’s sexual act to
copulation with wild beasts resonates with the literary memory of *adynata* describing
unnatural couplings of different species.  

Significantly, that resonance includes clear echoes from *Epode* 16.30-1, in which the mating of animals from different species is
given as an impossibility: *novaque monstra iunxerit libidine / mirus amor*. An *adynaton*
is a figure of paradox and exaggeration, and hence suitable for the description of
unnatural unions that lead to the formation of hybrids, which always depends on the

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78 Murgatroyd (1980), 276. He also notes the presence of *adynata* in Verg. *Buc.* 8.27. Della Corte (1980, 225) observes that Marathus has made an *adynaton* believable.
transgression of boundaries. Since hybrid formations are typical of grotesque sensibility, Tibullus’ *cum trucibus venerem iungere posse feris* (1.9.76), taken together with its reminiscence of Horace, may be read as a subtle allusion to the aesthetics of the Tibullan work itself, in which there is a disturbing crossing of boundaries into the iambic territory of invective. But the statement that the rival would sleep with wild beasts is also reminiscent of *Epode* 12, which is replete with animal comparisons and associations, in a sexualized context, meant to evoke the poet’s sense of disgust at the woman by whom he is pursued. Horace calls his female pursuer *dignissima barris* (*Epod.*12.1), a phrase that includes both the insulting superlative in the vocative case and the grotesque sexual suggestion in the ablative plural. The envisaged sexual partners are at line end for both poets, but, significantly, in Tibullus *feris* concludes the pentameter, which is the metrical marker of elegiac couplet – a subtle suggestion that the grotesque is at home in elegy.

These points of textual contact warrant further comparison of *Epode* 12 with the Tibullan elegy. We note that Tibullus mentions his rival’s age and gout, which is a concise description of his physical repugnance: *corpora foeda podagra / et senis amplexus culta puella fugit* (1.9.73-4). Horace does the same with his pursuer, though he focuses on her sweaty smell (*qui sudor vietis et quam malus undique membris / crescit odor, Epod.*12.7-8) and disgusting make-up, which includes crocodile excrement as one

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79 Harpham (1982), 85-92 and passim.
80 Images of animals occur throughout the poem: *barris, 12.1; polypus* (which means octopus as well as tumor) and *hircus, 12.5; canis and sus, 12.6; crocodilii, 12.11; taurum, 12.17. Moreover, the last line of the poem is composed of four words, all of which represent animals: *agna lupos capreaeque leones, 12.26*. The sexual context is indicated several times throughout the poem: *munera quid mihi quidve tabellas / mittis, 1.2-3* is reminiscent of the elegiac mise-en-scène of the lover wooing his beloved with gifts; *cum pene soluto, 12.8; tenta cubilia tectaque rumpit, 12.12; langues,12.14; inertem, 12.17*. Richlin (1984, 70-72, 77) argues that, in the masculine and misogynist self-understanding of Roman society, the use of bestial analogies to inveigh against women effectively removes them from humanity. The interpretation proposed here builds on Richlin’s view, adding that dehumanizaton is part of an elegiac grotesque vision in which the lover’s antagonists are subject to punitive degradation.
of its ingredients (*neque illi / iam manet umida creta colorque / stercore fucatus crocodili, Epod. 12.9-11.*). Horace does not mention her age, although *Epode* 8, the poem with which *Epode* 12 is usually paired,\(^\text{81}\) offers an elaborate physical description of an ugly old hag. Commentators suggest that the women of *Epodes* 8 and 12 are the same individual, possibly identifiable with Canidia,\(^\text{82}\) thus rendering the *dignissima barris* old and ugly, as well as malodorous and possibly a witch. Tibullus imports all of these grotesque suggestions into his vilification of the rival in 1.9 without explicitly citing any of them. Horace unleashes his grotesque vehemence onto a now hated sexual partner who continues to pursue him. Tibullus transfers the grotesque sentiments onto the poet-lover’s rival in order to vilify him.\(^\text{83}\) The analogy between the rival and a Horatian hag worthy of mating with elephants accomplishes his final degradation and concludes the narrative discourse of his role with grotesque derision. As an essential component of the elegiac mise-en-scène, the rival continues to be present in the fictional world of the poem, although in the collection he is not foregrounded again for grotesque degradation.\(^\text{84}\)

\(^{81}\) On this see, e.g., Mankin (1995), 153 and 205. Romano (1991, 975) observes that the theme of the punitive degradation of an old woman links the epodic genre to elegy, since it is “una componente dell’elegia latina” as well as a part of the Archilochean tradition.

\(^{82}\) See, e.g., Mankin (1995), 153, 205 and 299.

\(^{83}\) Even though she is not a rival, in *Epod.* 12.23-24, the old woman expresses the wish that the poet may find himself entangled in a love triangle that resonates well with the elegiac scenario: *ne foret aequalis inter conviva, magis quem / diligeret mulier sua quam te.* This is comparable to the fact that Tibullus wishes another rival for his rival, in 1.9.54: *rideat adsiduis uxor inulta dolis.* The similarity between *Epode* 12 and elegy has not been examined by the commentators, though some of them come close to suggesting it. For example, with respect to lines 23-24 Mankin (1995, 213) mentions only an uncertain echo of Catullus 70.1-2. With reference to lines 25-26 he says that the similes in the description of the chase are proverbial. Watson (2003, 415) also cites Catullus for lines 23-24 and adds that lines 25-26 invert the genders in the *topos* of the erotic hunt.

\(^{84}\) The similarity between *Epode* 12 and the description of the old gouty rival of Tibullus 1.9 has not been discussed by Horatian and Tibullan scholars. Since *Epode* 12 is especially vulgar, a comparison with the conventional perception of elegy would not be expected. In fact Watson 383-84 compares it to Archilochus’ *Cologne Epode* (fr. 196a W.) but not to elegy. However, given the idea of elegy put forth here – that elegy incorporates grotesque motifs – the similarities between *Epode* 12 and Tibullus 1.9, as well as elegy in general, are not difficult to see. For example, the image of an old woman suggesting that love can be bought reaches out to the *lena,* as a specifically elegiac stock character. Moreover, the idea of purchasable love is the theme explored in Tibullus 1.9.
As we have seen in 1.5 and as we shall see again in 2.6, the poet-lover reserves his most intense vilification for the *lena*, who, acting as an agent for the rival, is the real source of elegiac suffering. Tibullus returns to the *lena* type in the last poem of the collection, at first in a somewhat attenuated tone, but at the very end, as we shall see, with great vehemence. Tibullus’ readers naturally bring their memory of the savage grotesque of 1.5 to their reading of 2.6. The progression of poems in the collection allows the reader to use the imagery of 1.5 as background for the text of 2.6. In the lines just before their encounter with the *lena*, the readers are brought to contemplate images in some respects reminiscent of the grotesque: bones (*ossa sororis*, 2.6.29), a grave mound (*sepulchro*, 2.6.31), ashes (*cinere*, 2.6.34) and a bloody body (*sanguinolenta*, 2.6.40). The images, however, are not grotesque in themselves, since they occur in the description of the death of Nemesis’ sister. They are elegiac and inspire pathos rather than grotesque fascination. But in the narrative flow of the poem, the pathos of the episode is rather short-lived, being only a stepping-stone to a setting dominated by grotesque imagery. If Nemesis persists in being an uncooperative beloved (*sis mihi lenta*, 2.6.36), she will be haunted by an apparition (*mala somnia*, 2.6.37) of her dead sister as she was when she entered the realm of the dead (*venit ad infernos sanguinolenta lacus*, 2.6.40). From that point on, the atmosphere of the elegy is decidedly grotesque. In 2.6 Tibullus emphasizes the *lena’s* cleverness and suggests that she has a grotesque nature, susceptible to and deserving of vilification, but it is only when the episode is viewed against the curse of 1.5, rather than in relation to the imagery of Nemesis’ sister, that the *lena* emerges once more as a conspicuous part the author’s grotesque project.
The *lena*’s association with the world of the grotesque is made explicit by her name, Phryne, the Greek for “toad,” a nocturnal and slimy creature from the grotesque repertoire. But Phryne was also the name of a celebrated courtesan of great beauty who bequeathed her name to generations of actual and literary prostitutes in antiquity. Quintilian recalls an episode in which she used her naked body to overwhelm the logic of the law, persuading her judges to rule in her favour not with her rhetoric but by opening her tunic to them. By choosing her name for his *lena* Tibullus situates his character against the background of the courtesan’s legendary beauty and her propensity to trounce the legitimate order of things. Moreover Tibullus links his elegiac stock situation to Horace’s *Epode* 14, in the last line of which Phryne occurs as the name of a woman who is not satisfied with a single lover: *neque uno / contenta, Phryne*, (*Epod.* 14. 15-16). The link is motivated by the fact that, although *Epode* 14 is ostensibly about the art of iambics (*olim promissum carmen, iambos, Epod. 14. 7*), its dramatic situation resembles an elegiac scenario: a disloyal beloved and an unhappy lover. Since the iamb is a form of abuse and degradation, the relationship that Tibullus establishes with it suggests that elegy also includes iambic material, appropriate for grotesque treatment. For Horace Phryne is a girlfriend, but for Tibullus she is a *lena*, a foil for the lover. The change is

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85 Kayser (1961), 196.
86 Phryne is the name of a courtesan of legendary beauty, who modeled for the painter Apelles and the sculptor Praxiteles as Aphrodite (Ath.13.59). She was wealthy and offered to reconstruct the walls of Thebes on condition that credit be given to her in an inscription on the wall itself, cf. Athen. 13.60. Later Phryne became a typical name for actual courtesans. On Phryne as a name for courtesans in both Greece and Rome, cf. Prop. 2.6.6, Hor. *Epod.* 14.16. See also Solin (2003), 276. Cf. Putnam (1973, 199) and Murgatroyd (1994, 266), who both note that the toad’s poisonous nature and ugly skin may also be in the poet’s mind here. In Horace she is not explicitly called a courtesan but marked as one by the adjective *libertina* (*Epod.* 14.15), glossed by Watson (2003, 454), as a reference to the fact that “Prostitutes were frequently of the freedwoman class.”
87 Quint. *Inst.* 2.15.9
significant because Tibullus reserves grotesque treatment for his antagonists, explicitly excluding his beloved from any explicit blame: *ipsa puella bona est* (2.6.44).

Phryne can be vilified in ways that the *puella*, who is the real object of the poet-lover’s anger, cannot, because her erotic appeal is a necessary condition of elegy. The poet-lover therefore shifts the blame of his suffering onto Phryne as soon as she enters the scene: *lena nocet nobis, ipsa puella bona est* (2.6.44). As this line makes clear, the *lena* cannot but suffer the poet-lover’s great indignation because he cannot overtly blame the *puella*, whom he, as a poet of amatory elegy, must continue to love. The conventions of the genre require him to suffer and he blames his suffering on the figure that is most easy to vilify. That figure is the *lena* because she represents what the *puella* may eventually become and is therefore an easy substitute for her, as Myers suggests. The double valence of *phryne*, as a common name for courtesans and toads, considered together with the idea that the *lena* represents the future *puella*, indicates that the poet’s beloved already possesses the same sinister associations, which she will manifest only in the future. In a sense, the *puella* is presented as a woman whose sublime beauty conceals from sight the fact that she is also a toad. Her concealing beauty is her visible present dimension; her concealed grotesqueness is a futural dimension, whose revelation in the present is forbidden by the genre’s convention regarding the supposedly necessary beauty of the *puella*. The associative and suggestive mechanism of allusion, in other words, allows the poet to inscribe into the text his *puella*’s grotesque features without actually delineating them.

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89 Myers (1996), 1 and 14.
90 On this point Tibullus differs from Propertius 3.24-25 and Horace *Carm.* 1.25. Tibullus’ *puella* is scripted by means of an invisible grotesque vocabulary that can be brought to light only through the interpretation of allusion. In his presentation of a *puella* with hidden grotesque attributes, Tibullus calls for
Tibullus foregrounds the *lena*’s role by having two consecutive lines (a pentameter and the hexameter from the next couplet) begin with the word *lena*. In line 45, *lena vetat miserum Phryne furtimque tabellas*, we have *lena* at the start and Phryne at the caesura enclosing the speaker who is *miserum*, as if to suggest by the arrangement of the line that the role of the *lena* is to block the poet-lover’s access to the *puella*, a role further emphasized by the word that immediately precedes *miserum*, the verb *vetat*.\(^9^1\) By playing her role in the elegiac mise-en-scène, Phryne provides one of the fundamental conditions for writing elegy. She keeps the poet away from the girl, and she keeps the girl with a rival suitor who can pay and give gifts. The *lena* is anti-elegiac and yet furnishes the conditions for elegy, exemplifying how the poetics of elegy call for the inclusion of destabilizing factors among constituents of the genre.

As a major constituent of the elegiac scenario, the stock character of the *lena* must be the victim of the poet-lover’s wrath. In the last two lines of the poem, also the last two lines of the book, the poet-lover hurls another curse at her:

\[
\text{tunc tibi, l\(ena\), precor diras: satis anxia vivas, mo\(verit\) e votis pars quotacumque deos.} \quad (2.6.53-54)
\]

We have already seen the grotesque details of such a curse played out in 1.5, where the poet-lover pictures the *lena* as the subject of such *dirae* (1.5.49-58). In the closing image an hermeneutic that is not dissimilar from the one presupposed by medieval writers who regarded the outer beauty of a woman as a concealment of internal monstrosity. As Miller (2010, 4) notes: “The absence of any detectable sign of this secret of women evinces the problematic hermeneutic process whereby monstrosity is inscribed in the female body to be read in the form of secret signs.” \(^9^1\)

\(^9^1\) *vetat* is the main reading of the MS tradition and is adopted here. The OCT, however, prints *necat*. Maltby (2002), *ad loc.* notes that *necat* is found in a marginal note in a later MS, possibly influenced by the *nocet* in the previous line. While *necat* is a much stronger verb, its metaphorical use is rare and so would be extremely emphatic (see Murgatroyd (2002), *ad loc*). One verb emphasizes the *lena*’s actions (she forbids the poet-lover access to his *puella*), the other the affects of those actions (as a result of not being with her the poet-lover is *miserum* and wasting away from love-sickness). It is her actions that are being catalogued in these lines (as a go-between, she facilitates the affairs for the *puella* and her other, paying suitors), and *vetat* emphasizes the contradiction in her dislike directed at the poet-lover.
of the book, the phrase *precor diras* evokes the poet-lover’s grotesque anger of 1.5. The reader is therefore asked to bring into this poem the blood, bile, graveyard, and groin-bearing *lena* of the other. This retrospective on the most vivid expression of the Tibullan grotesque is the image which concludes the collection.

Tibullus thereby binds two distant poems intratextually in the creation of meaning. A significant implication of this approach is that Tibullus does not need to repeat the gory details of a grotesque motif to have the reader consider it an indispensable constituent of another episode as well. The grotesque effect of the curse articulated by the poet-lover in 1.5 is very much present in the invocation that closes the last poem of the collection.

This narrative approach to the grotesque is a subtle way of ensuring that the grotesque enters the world of elegy in larger measure than individual poems disclose when considered in isolation. And even in individual poems, in which the grotesque is mostly the fantasy of a character, and therefore an interior rather than an exterior phenomenon, the impression remains that it may not have been fully externalized and may, in any case, emerge at a later time under the right stimulus. For what is there to prevent the poet-lover from expressing in grotesque images his hatred of the rival and, especially, the *lena*? Indeed, what is there to prevent the rival from displaying his foolishness again and again? By concentrating the source of the grotesque in the mind, which is also the stage of all the elegiac emotions, Tibullus achieves the elegiacization of the grotesque underpinning the psychological state of the suffering lover.
Chapter Five
The Ovidian Elegiac Grotesque

In a biographical anecdote, Seneca the Elder reports that Ovid considered the presence of a mole on a face an enhancement of its beauty.\(^1\) The aesthetic ideal illustrated by Seneca’s remark emphasizes the desirability of a jarring element in an otherwise uniform setting, on the principle that the whole is more appealing if it incorporates a detail that mars the elegance of its symmetry. That principle represents a fundamental criterion of the theory of the grotesque, for which an expression of beauty that includes its own contradiction is the objective. Seneca’s anecdote invites us to explore Ovid’s poetry with particular attention to the grotesque. The programmatic Amores 3.1, in which Ovid represents elegy as a literary form that incorporates a principle of deformity, suggests that this is an essential aspect of his poetics.

In this poem, Ovid personifies the genre as Elegia, a maiden who limps because her feet are of unequal length. But he justifies the metrical “limp” of elegy with these words: \textit{et pedibus vitium causa decoris erat} (Am.3.1.10).\(^2\) The allegory refers to the defining feature of the elegiac couplet, in which the inequality of the verses, symbolized by the different length of the maiden’s feet, is not a defect of poetic form but a mark of

\(^{1}\) Sen. Con. 2.2.12: \textit{aiebat interim decentiorem faciem esse, in qua aliquis naevos fuisse.} \\
\(^{2}\) Unless otherwise stated, I follow Kenney’s OCT for the text of the Amores, Ars Amatoria, Remedia Amoris, and the Medicamina.
elegance. Elegia has one foot longer than the other (pes illi longior alter erat, Am.3.1.8), and yet her physical defect is presented as an appealing aesthetic aspect of her form, just like the mole that enhances the beauty of a face. Ovid constructs the allegory of Elegia by situating his perspective on the short foot (symbolic of the pentameter) and observing that the other foot (symbolic of the hexameter) is longer, as distinct from situating himself on the long foot and observing that the other is shorter. By locating his perspective on the pentameter rather than the hexameter, which are respectively marker of elegy and epic, Ovid decidedly privileges elegy.

Read together, the Senecan anecdote and Amores 3.1 encourage the application of the aesthetic of a vitium on a uniform background. From such a perspective the presence of imagery and themes incongruous with the aura of sublimity that surrounds elegiac love figures as part of the aesthetic appeal of the whole genre. The words et pedibus vitium causa decoris erat reach out to a theoretical justification of the elegiac grotesque from within the body of elegy itself. In the allegorical narrative of Amores 3.1 the literary body of elegy is represented by Elegia’s physical one.

In this chapter I explore Ovid’s elegiac grotesque, to argue that Ovid occasionally approaches the elegiac mise-en-scène through a literalizing imagination that quickly shifts our focus from the aura of ideal romance to its disturbing physical underpinnings, embedded in imagery and literary memory. I argue that for Ovid the theme of unrequited love and of the suffering of the poet-lover, displayed in counterpoint with destabilizing sentiments, eventually reaches exhaustion and brings closure to the genre from within its own literary materia. I begin by examining the way Ovid undermines the ideality of

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3 As Wyke (2002 [1989]), 123, observes, Ovid reshapes the female body in order to suit his elegiac program, in which the maiden’s unequal feet “physically ... constitute a defect (vitium), stylistically an asset (decor).”
elegiac romance by allowing the impression that the grotesque intrudes into the poetics of
elegy through the theme of abortion in *Am. 2.13-14*, which appears as a disturbing *vitium*
on the canvas of love. I then consider the way he locates the grotesque at the heart of the
elegiac scenario – beginning with the *puella*, brought down by the grotesque physicality
of her own body, and moving on to the *lena* and the rival as foils for the *puella* and the
poet-lover throughout the *Amores*. Finally I turn my attention to the *Ars Amatoria*, in
which the aspects of elegy developed in the *Amores* are exacerbated by the grotesque
content of literary memory and the erotodidactic nature of the genre. In connection with
both the *Amores* and the *Ars*, I also analyze key passages in the *Medicamina*, arguing
that, even in a manual on cosmetics, which may be considered the art of concealing
grotesque aspects of physicality and hence of preventing the emergence of grotesque
motifs in erotic narrative, Ovid makes plain the inclination of his poetics towards the
strategic foregrounding of grotesque elements in the elegiac genre.

**Abortion: the *vitium* of elegiac love**

Ovid’s treatment of the theme of abortion is found in the diptych *Amores 2.13-14*. In the first elegy of the pair, the *puella* has an abortion and becomes seriously ill,
occasioning an angry tirade against abortion in the next poem. The poet is afraid for
Corinna because she is now so sick as a result of her abortion that she is lying at death’s
door (*in dubio vitae lassa Corinna iacet*, 2.13.2). Ovid hints at the significance of the
theme in his concept of elegy by strategically placing the diptych on abortion near, but
not quite at, the structural centre of the collection. Being located only two poems beyond
the midpoint, the abortion diptych is close enough to the centre to suggest the centrality
of its aesthetic theme in our perception of the genre, but it is also sufficiently off-centre to remind us that it is not the feature around which the *Amores* are balanced. For Ovid, the theme of the diptych is rooted in the deep interior of elegy, but it is not the point around which the genre is built.

The background against which the abortion poems are written is the motif of the sick *puella*, a topos of the elegiac tradition familiar to Ovid’s readers. It is found in Tibullus (1.5.9-18), who, unlike his rival, helps treat the sick *puella*, showing great cura, even though, when she recovers, she treats him with indifference and ingratitude, shunning him for his rival, who is enjoying her love. It also occurs in Propertius (2.28), who imagines that his *puella* was punished with illness for being more beautiful than a goddess. Ovid (*Am.* 2.13) starts with the topos but takes it further than his older contemporaries by giving us the reason for the *puella’s* illness, and the reason is shockingly anti-elegiac: Corinna has had an abortion, *labefactat onus gravidi temeraria ventris* (2.13.1). Behind Ovid’s development of the topos is the idea that elegiac love has resulted in an unwanted pregnancy, a burden of which Corinna must relieve herself.

Caught in a dialectic between *gravis* and *levis*, between the weightiness of her condition and the lightness of her role as an elegiac *puella*, Corinna opts to return to her original levity. *Gravis* and *levis* are both elegiac words, but whereas the former is used of the

4 Lines 11, 13, 15 start with *ipse*, showing his concern and his involvement. Yardley (1973) argues that the use of the motif of visiting the sick girlfriend in order to show the lover’s / friend’s devotion to her may have its origins in Hellenistic philosophical treatises on friendship, as well as in epigram and narrative elegy. A common reason for the illness – assumed by the lover – is the breaking of, or non-fulfillment of, an oath (Yardley cites as a Hellenistic example of such an illness Cydippe’s fever in Callimachus’ *Aetia*, frs. 67-75 Pf.). The elegiac poet, he argues uses his visit to the sick *puella* in order to draw attention to a contrast between himself and his rival: he, unlike the rival, visits the sickbed of his beloved, and performs the rites necessary for her recovery.

5 Yardley (1977, 398) notes that Ovid alone of the elegists specifies the nature of the girl’s sickness, observing that, with abortion as the cause of Corinna’s illness, he can represent himself “in a dilemma, torn between fear and indignation,” thus affording himself novel approaches to the motif of praying for the sick *amica’s* recovery.
suffering of unrequited love, the latter is used to refer to the physical beauty and the lightness of the *puella*. The role of the *puella* is confined to a domain of levity. Corinna crossed the boundary by becoming pregnant and must now step back into her world. If allowed to continue, her pregnancy would write her out of the genre. Out of a commitment to the elegiac affair, Corinna subjects herself to an abortion. In earlier uses of the illness topos, the reason for the *puella*’s malady is not given, since the important point is that the poet-lover is concerned for his beloved, and his *cura* is the focus of the poem. In Ovid, however, the motif of abortion as the cause of the illness takes us into an anti-elegiac world, since abortion is not only not an elegiac motif but also not a poetic image. The crude realism that it suggests is more readily associated with such genres as invective and satire than it is with elegy. Yet abortion is here allowed to appear as if intruding into the elegiac world with its disruptive grotesque aesthetics and is discussed in an elegiac poem as an act of self-wounding performed in order to reestablish an elegiac

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6 For *gravis* in relation to suffering on account of love, see Catul. 2.8, Prop. 3.8.10, and Ovid *Ars* 3.575, and cf. Pichon (1902), 161; *gravis* is also used with reference to the poet-lovers *querelae*, Pro. 1.16.13, 2.20. For *levis* with reference to physical beauty, see Prop. 1.3.15; with reference to the *puella*’s lightness, see Catul. 61.97-98, Tib 1.9.40, Prop. 1.15.1, 2.16.26, Ovid. *Am.* 2.9.49, 2.16.45, *Ars* 2.19, *Rem.* 380, and cf. Pichon (1902), 187.

7 James (2003, 175) argues that pregnancy is a “professional risk” for the elegiac *puella*. She must be sexually attractive to men, but a pregnancy’s “disfiguring” effects on the body would make this impossible. See also below.

8 In the philosophical, medical and legal literature, abortion receives the treatment of a significant social problem. Plato (*R.* 5.461c), for example, considered it acceptable only if it did not impede proper political development, Aristotle (*Pol.* 7.16.20) allowed it in order to control population growth but only if carried out before the embryo’s development as a sensory being. In Rome the general attitude was against the practice of abortion, though, according to den Boer (1979, 273) the data are not as complete or as clear as they could because there was no precise terminology for abortion-related issues. He does point out, however, that in legal parlance *mala medicamenta* referred to means of procuring abortions (273 n.3). In poetry the presence of abortion as a theme is extremely rare. Ovid is the only elegist who makes space for it. Juvenal uses it twice: once to describe Domitian’s niece Julia, impregnated by her uncle, relieving herself *cum tot abortuius fecundam Iulia uulium / solueret* (2.32-33), and the other to say that it was common among rich women (6. 592-609). In the latter context he uses the term *medicamina* to refer to the strong potions commonly employed to procure abortions: *tantum medicamina possunt* (2.6.595).
situation. The grotesque enters deeply into the elegiac genre, since it is used to restore the condition that can make elegiac love possible again, though, as is also suggested by the off-centre position of the diptych, it does not become the main point of elegy. It represents, rather, the internal element of anti-elegiac sentiment, whose presence in the scenario enables the elegiac sentiment and raises the emotional intensity of its narrative.

At the end of 2.13, Ovid characterizes abortion as a *pugna* (*si tamen in tanto fas est monuisse timore, / hac tibi sit pugna dimicuisse satis*, 2.13.27-28). Coming in the concluding line, this term retrospectively casts a military or epic colour over the language and imagery used throughout the poem to account for Corinna’s perilous health. The ethos of (epic) warfare contrasts heavily with the *puella’s* identity as a non-military, or elegiac, persona. While Tibullus and Propertius also have sick *puellae* – indeed such a motif is a topos of elegy – Ovid departs from their precedents by identifying the reason for Corinna’s state as the physicality of love allowed to take its course. She is sick as a result of a surgical operation on the innermost part of her body. As an unwanted consequence of elegiac love, abortion is a theme through which the aesthetics of the grotesque can easily enter the genre. Abortion is linked to the grotesque principally as a gesture of abjection by the pregnant woman, in the surgical act by which she detaches her body from a fetus, regarded as an unwelcome and disturbing presence in her womb, a

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9 Cairns (2007 [1972], 153-7) argues that *Am. 2.13* should be read as a dramatic *soteria*, similar to Prop. 2.28 and [Tib.] 3.10. In this kind of poem the reader is taken through the different stages of the *puella’s* sickness to her recovery which is only possible because of the prayers of the lover. Cairns (2007, 73) defines a *soteria* as a speech of thanksgiving for one who has recovered from an illness. See also Yardley (1977, 400), who argues that we do not see Corinna healthy again in *Am. 2.13*, and that the poem should not be read as a dramatic *soteria*.

10 The theme of abortion carried out on a girl in order to restore her to the social and professional role she had before pregnancy has a famous precedent in Hippocrates. A young woman had to have an abortion in order to keep her role as a dancing girl, not unlike Corinna, who needs an abortion in order to continue being an elegiac *puella*. The grotesque side of the abortion witnessed by Hippocrates is brought to the foreground in the description of the aborted fetus, the details of which are given in raw clinical imagery that closely resembles a grotesque literary style. See Hp. *Nat. Puer*.13.
threat to her identity as a woman. We are reminded of Kristeva, who argues that, in order to preserve her identity as the person she was before becoming pregnant, the mother abjacts her fetus through an act of self-mutilation.\textsuperscript{11} Elegiac love has its roots in physicality and, for that reason, may be said to contain the seeds of its own undoing. For pregnancy would mark the end of the \textit{puella}’s life as the elegiac beloved.\textsuperscript{12} A commitment to abortion, however grotesque it may be, is an essential aspect of the \textit{puella qua} elegiac beloved.

Yet the separation of the fetus can be physically accomplished only through a gesture that is itself highly grotesque. It requires piercing with surgical instruments the innermost part of the body in order to remove the fetus: \textit{vestra quid effoditis subjectis viscera telis} (2.14.27). The word \textit{effodit}, consisting of \textit{ex} and \textit{fodit}, is an appropriately violent term, meaning literally to dig out\textsuperscript{13} (here from the mother’s \textit{viscera}), breaking the inside-outside barrier of the body with grotesque force. In subjecting herself to such an operation, the pregnant \textit{puella} does battle against her own body. The expression \textit{viscera telis} at line end (2.14.27) harks back to \textit{vulnera telis} (2.14.3), with the suggestion that the wounds are inflicted in the woman’s \textit{viscera}. Love is conventionally the cause of metaphorical wounds in the heart, but abortion shows that when love is regarded in its

\textsuperscript{11} Kristeva (1982, 54).
\textsuperscript{12} According to James (2003, 174), the elegiac \textit{puella} is a \textit{meretrix} whose profession demands intimate relationships with men who enjoy looking at her body – as long as it is one without the stretch marks left by pregnancy. On “loss of attractiveness through childbearing and nursing,” see McKeown (1998, at 2.14.7). In order to continue in her profession, the elegiac \textit{puella} must cultivate her beauty to entice the poet-lover, yet the elegiac sex the poet-lover wants from her “presents her with a constant risk to her…beauty and…her very life.” (James 2003, 182). Poague and Parsons (2000, 268) report that Sontag in an interview expressed the view that, metaphorically, abortion stands for values that have nothing to do with the biological condition of pregnancy or its termination. By contrast, Ovid claims that abortion does not favour the advancement of the human race (see below). However, Ovid is against it because it also endangers the life of his beloved. On Ovid’s and his society’s views on abortion see also Watts (1973). Dixon (2001, 57) argues that the representation of abortion in classical Rome is largely the product of a “masculine anxiety” rather than reliable knowledge of the practice. Cf. also Olson (2008), 70.
\textsuperscript{13} Cf. \textit{TLL VI}\textsuperscript{2}196.40-76 (\textit{partes corporis}), 77-82 (\textit{partes intiores}); \textit{OLD} s.v. \textit{effodio} 2, 3, 4. See also \textit{TLL VI}\textsuperscript{1}992.50-993.2, s.v. \textit{fodio}.
brutal physical realism, the act by which it inflicts its wounds is the piercing of the uterus by surgical instruments. *Viscera*, as McKeown notes, carries the anatomical meaning of one’s flesh and blood but the figurative meaning of one’s children. On that figurative level, the act of abortion appears to be particularly savage, being directed by the pregnant woman against her body as well as the fetus.

In condemning Corinna’s action, Ovid compares her to all the mothers of ancient history. If abortion had been a widespread practice in the earlier stages of civilization, Ovid says, the human race would have quickly come to an end, because abortion denies regeneration: *si mos antiquis placuisset matribus idem, / gens hominum vitio deperitura fuit*, (2.14.9-10). In Bakhtin’s theory of the grotesque, the mother’s body is regenerative through the natural biological cycle of its physicality. It is regenerative even when the mother dies as she gives birth. The grotesque experience of death is accompanied by the *jouissance* of new life. Such situations are the very opposite of an abortion, in which only the mother survives. Abortion is the denial of regeneration, and the grotesque experience that it connotes is therefore at the other end of the spectrum. The Ovidian elegiac grotesque, in other words, is the very opposite of the Bakhtinian regenerative grotesque. In the narrative world of elegy, with its roots in funerary epigrams, there is room for the sadness of death but none for the festivity of birth.

*A puella* capable of focusing savagery on a fetus is tender only in a profoundly ironic sense. However, in the abortion she also directs the same savagery on herself, and so is tender in the literal sense of being physically vulnerable to the violence inflicted on her body: *suos utero quae necat, ipsa perit* (2.14.38). The aborting *puella* is the agent of

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15 With reference to Rabelais, Bakhtin (1968, 206) observes that the world of the regenerative grotesque represented by such operations is a “two-bodied world that gives birth in death.”
her own undoing. The Ovidian puella’s undoing of herself qua elegiac beloved embodies the seeds of the genre’s tendency towards its own destruction. The emergence of this tendency in the face of the restrictiveness of conventions is the cause of a powerful tension within the structure of the genre, a tension that can only result in the urgency to overcome what Conte calls the “closure of the elegiac code.”16 We may add, however, that both the possibility of contemplating the closure of the code and the urgency to overcome it are themselves encoded into vocabulary of elegy as a source of disturbance that threatens the stability of the genre’s conventions of refinement and elegance. On the analogy that all that can be said within a language is already made possible by its grammar and vocabulary, so all that can be said within elegy is also made possible by the elegiac code, including the horizon of its closure and the desire to break through it in order to enter a forbidden region of the imagination.

In the historical development of elegy, it is important to distinguish closure from end. As Critchley observes summarizing Derrida, “end signifies the completion of the act and not the act of completion.”17 Closure is the act of completion signified as the projection of a boundary located within the domain of the code. Transgressing such a boundary does not imply transgressing the code. The end of elegy, on the other hand, is simply the real boundary of its cessation. The horizon of code closure around the theme of love is signified by the genre’s dominant conventions of refinement and elegance. But

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16 Conte (1989), 467. Conte argues that the world of elegy is an enclosed system of conventional language and themes that is threatened with instability and tension when the poet allows into its domain any idea foreign to the defining conventions, thereby giving rise to a need to overcome the closure of the genre. We can add to Conte that Ovid’s foregrounding of the grotesque, which is latently present in the conventions themselves, is a major source of the tension of the genre and a threat to its logic.

17 Critchley (1992, 62). Moreover what finds expression in elegy can never actually be an intrusion from the real world, for as Lacan observes, to a perspective located in a given symbolic order, the real world is never available, not even in the imagination. What may present itself as an element of the real world is in effect a product of the same code. See Lacan (1988), 164 and Derrida (2005), 79.
if the theme of love is explored deeply enough, it will lead to a narrative of transgression, though, of course, that narrative will still be within the domain of forms generated by the elegiac code and will remain integral to the genre. This is simply the way in which the elegiac code encodes the idea of its own closure. Ovid articulates elegy’s propensity to transgress the closure of its dominant conventions by foregrounding the theme that refined elegiac love can have a horribly grotesque underside.

The Bald Puella: Amores 1.14

Such a transgression is a fundamental aspect of Ovid’s poetics of the elegiac grotesque. The abortion episode is *sui generis* in the narrative of elegiac love, but there are other examples of Corinna’s physical degradation as an elegiac *puella*. In 1.14, for example, the elegiac *puella* despairs when all her hair has fallen out, since her role is to be beautiful and elicit erotic desire. Even though hair, as Oliensis observes in her study of the theme in Horace, is not part of the body but merely a “detachable extension of it,”[^18] its signifying power is considerable, in thematic as well as in metaliterary terms. Being essential to a *puella’s* appeal, hair is a conventional presupposition of elegiac love and hence of elegiac poetry. In the *Ars Amatoria* (3.235-50) Ovid reaffirms the importance of appropriately groomed hair for erotic appeal. In *Amores* 1.14, the *puella’s* hair falls out because she has dyed it too frequently, and she now finds herself without one of the most alluring aspects of her body.

Here Ovid appears to take a stand against the use of artificial means of masking ugliness in order to enhance erotic appeal in contrast to the principles that he upholds in the *Medicamina*. The inconsistency with the *Medicamina*, however, is only surface deep

[^18]: Oliensis (2002), 93.
and may be explained as the result of a conscious adherence to an elegiac convention, according to which the beloved is deemed most attractive when no make-up is involved (on display in, for example, Prop. 1.2). Ovid’s approach, as Rosati argues, was purposely “vincolato al modello elegiaco.”\(^{19}\) Nonetheless in describing Corinna without her make-up, when her natural appearance is anything but erotically appealing, Ovid reveals that his adherence to the elegiac model is tongue-in-cheek. In reproaching Corinna for having used medicamina to excess he defends the conventional perspective of the genre in the name of natural beauty, but he does so while showing Corinna at her worst, and thereby undermines the conventions themselves. As Conte argues, in his approach to elegy Ovid follows the conventions of the genre, but he does so in a manner that reveals them to be nothing but conventions.\(^{20}\)

The same is true of the Medicamina. In a poem dedicated to the art of beautifying a woman’s face the grotesque occasionally erupts with disgusting force. Ovid’s references to witchcraft are a case in point:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{nec vos graminibus nec mixto credite suco} \\
\text{nec temptate nocens virus amantis equae.} \\
\text{nec mediae Marsis funduntur cantibus angues} \\
\text{nec redit in fontes unda supina suos;}
\end{align*}
\]

\((\text{Med. 37-40})\)

The presence of images connected with the magical arts of witches, contrasted with the \textit{ars} of \textit{cultus}, responds to a desire to create an opposition between the image of the woman’s face reflected in a mirror when she applies her make-up and that of the lower parts of an animal’s body, with a temporary focus on the vaginal excretion of a mare (38). At the same time, the image of a snake (39) is made vividly grotesque with the reference

\(^{19}\) Rosati (1985), 37.
\(^{20}\) Conte (1989), 450.
to the snake’s sides bursting open under the magic arts of the Marsians. The overt convention of the *Medicamina* involves the principle that the final image produced by cosmetic art is an image of perfect beauty, exemplary of feminine *cultus* in every aspect. Yet like all conventions, including those of elegy, it may lend itself to deconstruction even in its affirmation.

Ovid is clearly aware that the elegiac conventions entail tensions of this sort, incongruities that normally remain concealed; but he occasionally removes the mask by which they are hidden and brings them into full view as subterranean elements of the genre. For this reason the grotesque, which thrives on incongruity and contradiction, can be used by Ovid as a stock element of the elegiac genre. In *Amores* 1.14 the mask of beauty is a wig. In order to enhance its natural beauty and to fashion her own hair in the style she wished, Corinna has so weakened it that she now has none left. When it was at its best, her hair was an abundant mane, *spatiosius* (1.14.3), in contrast to the hair of aging bawds, described as *albam raramque comam* (1.8.111) or *rari ... capilli* (Prop. 4.5.71). Without her hair, Corinna has reached the limit of her activity as an elegiac *puella* whose business it is to be seductively beautiful, becoming instead prematurely like a *lena*. The adjective with which her hair could once be described, *spatiosius*, indicates that it occupied space and had a large presence, whereas the hair of both the *lenae*, sparse as it is, reveals empty patches of baldness where once there was hair.

The conventional world of elegy is momentarily overcome by tension because the *puella*, who is at the heart of the genre, is presented as a beloved whose appearance is in contrast with expectations. Yet the adjective implied for Corinna’s hair in its present state, *rarus*, is typical of the elegiac vocabulary. As Pichon notes, *rarus dicitur* ...

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21 Cf. Rosati (1985), 70.
The adjective, however, is invested with a significance that is the very opposite of the one normally found in the language and worldview of the genre. Conte observes that the genre “codifies the reciprocal correspondence of signifiers and signifieds” in a manner that offers the reader only a selective view of the world and a restricted vocabulary for its description. Yet by allowing the semantic dimensions of a word such as *rarus* to carry an unprecedented grotesque significance, Ovid discloses the presence of a powerful source of tension in the language of elegy. At the same time he activates the genre’s internal tendency to undermine itself, revealing in the process the conventionality of the selective view of reality to which the genre affects to be confined.

Fully conscious of the fact that she has become the embodiment of such tension, Corinna makes every effort to resist the threat of her annihilation as an elegiac *puella*. She compensates by wearing a wig in her public life, though in her private moments she suffers miserably for her loss and finds it difficult to look at herself in a mirror. The poet-lover encourages her with words that have a metaliterary reach:

> quid speculum maesta ponis inepta manu?  
> non bene consuetis a te spectaris ocellis:  
> ut placeas, debes immemor esse tui.  

(1.14. 36-38)

A balding head on an otherwise erotic *puella* is a jarring feature that undermines the sense of ideal beauty that she conventionally embodies. The image of a *puella* so decomposed is in alignment with basic principles of grotesque aesthetics, which call for the

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22 Pichon (1902), 250 and cf. *quamvis dura, tamen rara puella fuit* (Prop. 1.17.16); *Cynthia rara mea est* (Prop. 1.8.42); *facies tibi rara* (Ov. Ep.17.93), said of Paris.
23 Conte (1989), 443. Conte calls this selective worldview the ideology of elegy, that is the partiality of its perspective, beyond which there is nothing relevant to it. However by revealing the presence of foreign ideas into its field of vision, Ovid reveals that the ideology is just a convention of selective perception, a pose generated by the elegiac code.
uneasy coexistence of traditional ideas of beauty and images that imply its contrary. The appearance of the *puella* is an instance in which an aesthetic principle has been turned into a narrative theme with significant implications for our appreciation of Ovid’s poetics of elegy. We are reminded here of *Am.* 2.17 where Corinna looks at her reflection and is pleased by her own beauty. But she never looks at herself in the mirror until she is *conpositam* (10). Within the elegiac fiction this word refers to the fact that Corinna looks at herself only after her toilette when her appearance is at its best, yet the same term may refer to the moment when the composition and refinement of the poem is complete. That now Corinna cannot look at herself in a mirror means that her loss of hair is repugnant to her conventional sense of beauty but not to her generic decorum, as she will come to appreciate – the text suggests mockingly – as soon as she acquires new aesthetic ideals. In an ironic display of sympathy, the poet explains that novel aesthetic ideals always appear strange and unappealing.

Corinna’s eyes must become accustomed (*bene consuetis*, 1.14.37) to her new appearance, and she herself must let her new image displace images of her former self from her consciousness (*immemor*, 1.14.38). At that point she will be ready to accept the innovation that her new image, complete with its disturbing component, represents in the aesthetic sphere. In the aesthetic domain in which Corinna is still grounded, beauty is conceived as an exterior appearance that does not conceal anything ugly beneath it. In the snide elegiac aesthetic of the beautiful *puella* with thinned hair, the exterior is conceived as a mask covering unappealing defects. The artistic melding of mask and reality in an elegiac form can be the source of a new aesthetic pleasure, based on the transgression of

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24 Cf. *Am.* 2.1.1, 2.1.10 for uses of the verb *compono* to mean the writing of poetry, not only prose.
the limits of purity and simplicity and on the revelation of the arbitrariness of their conception.

At the end of the poem, we encounter a concrete case of such an aesthetic practice, as the normally beautiful Corinna looks at her own hair in her lap while thinking that on her head she will have to wear a wig made from the hair of a captive German girl:

me miserum! lacrimas male continet oraque dextra protet ingenuas picta rubore genas; sustinet antiquos gremio spectatque capillos, ei mihi, non illo munera digna loco. collige cum vultu mentem; … (1.14. 51-54)

*Me miserum* is a formula that introduces a radical change in attitude. The poet-lover who has been harsh with the *puella*, chastising her for having ruined her hair, now changes the tone of his narrative, as he shows Corinna in all her “fragilità psicologica.”

The image of her fragility is grotesque in the full aesthetic sense of the word: the conventional image of beauty is a mask covering a disturbing aspect of reality. Without her mask, when she finds herself outside of the elegiac conventions as she sees them, Corinna weeps. In speaking the words *me miserum* (1.14.51), the poet laments the *puella’s* loss and expresses sorrow simultaneously with her. At the end of the poem he exhorts her to weep no more. As the protagonist of the narrative scene of elegy, the *puella* puts on her make-up and readies herself for a public performance of her beauty. As an observer of herself forced to carry out these actions in order to conceal the deterioration of her beauty, Corinna is sadly aware that her life is one of concealment.

The poet describes the psychological state of his *puella* and at the same time elicits derisory sympathy for her. The reading experience that his poetry engenders is one that

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25 Of the many cases listed by Pichon (1902, 202-203), the following are especially relevant here: Prop. 1.1.7,1.3.40, 3.23.19; Tib. 1.6.73-4; 2.3.78 Ov. *Am.* 1.1.25, 1.2.35, 2.5.8.

encompasses grotesque aesthetics and ironic pathos. The puella’s condition reaches the readers through the poet’s mock commiseration, which is impervious to her wretchedness and transforms her psychology into that of one who is ridiculous because she is no longer beautiful.

Poem 1.14 is strategically situated before the sphragis of the first book of the Amores, a location that, as James has observed, gives it determining force over the meaning of the sphragis, which sets out Ovid’s elegiac poetics. We can add that a metaliterary reading of baldness is a determinant of the meaning of the sphragis as inclusive of the aesthetics of the grotesque. This implies that the project put forth in the sphragis, which is about the glory that Ovid wants to achieve with his poetry, is inseparable from a commitment to a poetics of elegy that incorporates the sardonic and the pathetic as well as the overtly grotesque alongside the expected conventions.

Manifestations of the Grotesque: The Lena and the Rival

Among the elements of the grotesque with which the elegiac puella is in frequent contact we find the lena, the character whose function in the elegiac scenario is to disrupt the ideality of the romance envisioned by the poet-lover. Her appearance, her actions, and her speech are all significant points of entry of the grotesque into the poetics of elegy. We can see the role of Ovid’s lena fully delineated in Amores 1.8, a poem strategically located at the centre of Book 1. This poem consists almost entirely of a prosopopoeia in the voice of the lena Dipsas, framed by the poet-lover’s reflections on

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27 James (2003), 167.
28 For a metaliterary reading of 1.14 see Zetzel (1996). Zetzel argues that, since elegiac descriptions of a puella’s hair “are as appropriate to verse as to hair” (79), the fact that Corinna has lost much of her hair through an excessive use of medicamina implies that, for Ovid, “the fancy tricks of elegy have been done to death” (81).
her words to his \textit{puella}. She advises the \textit{puella} to spoil the poet-lover’s plans and thereby ensure that his love remains unrequited. Etymologically, Dipsas means thirst, but, as Myers observes,\textsuperscript{29} it is also the name of a small snake that is believed to be perennially thirsty and capable of inflicting fierce thirst in its victims. By naming his \textit{lena} Dipsas, Ovid communicates to his readers both her habitual drinking and the insidious nature of her advice.\textsuperscript{30} However, as Courtney first pointed out, \textit{dipsas acanthis} is the shrub to which Propertius alludes in his curse of Acanthis, \textit{et tua...sentiat umbra sitim} (4.5.2), and it is likely that Ovid also alludes both to the shrub and to Propertius’ poem.\textsuperscript{31} We can therefore add that the Ovidian \textit{lena}’s name recalls the grotesque ethos in which Propertius sets Acanthis.\textsuperscript{32} Moreover, since snakes are part of the repertoire of the grotesque,\textsuperscript{33} and since Dipsas establishes herself as a central figure in the elegy, Ovid also signals to his readers that there is an elegiac grotesque that is an essential part of his conception of the genre, even central to it.

As a \textit{lena}, Dipsas has the metaliterary function of ensuring that the material contemplated by the poet remains suitable to the conception of love presupposed by the genre. Her character is the conventional one of the obnoxious bawd: she is drunk (1.8.3-4), duplicitous, ugly and old (\textit{anus} and \textit{corpus anile}, 1.8.2 and 14; 1.8.111-4), as in the comedic tradition, to which elegy is much indebted.\textsuperscript{34} Her function in elegy is to spoil the poet-lover’s plans; she is a blocking character, as in comedy. In order to accomplish

\textsuperscript{29}Myers (1996), 7.
\textsuperscript{31}Courtney (1969, 80-2).
\textsuperscript{32}A full discussion of Acanthis and her grotesque ethos is given in my chapter on Propertius.
\textsuperscript{33}Kayser (1961, 196) states “Es gibt von dem Grotesken bevorzugte Tiere, wie Schlangen, Eulen, Kröten, Spinnen - das Nachtgetier und das kriechende Getier, das in anderen, dem Menschen unzugänglichen Ordnungen lebt.”
\textsuperscript{34}For a survey of the \textit{lena}’s antecedents in comedy see esp. Myers (1996). Cf. Yardley (1972), Gutzwiller (1986) and Traill (2001). The \textit{lena} also appears as a stock character in Herondas’ \textit{Miniamb} 1. Cf. also my discussion of Acanthis (and the \textit{lena}’s antecedents) in my chapter on Propertius.
her task the *lena*, who is also a witch, makes use of her knowledge and skill: *illa magas artes Aeaeeaque carmina novit* (1.8.5). Literally interpreted, her *artes* are the magic arts, while the *carmina* are the incantatory chants of witches. But at the symbolic level, they refer to the poet himself, since he is the author of *carmina* composed with great *ars*. The literal level concerns her use of grotesque stratagems and exercises in order to carry out her plan, but at the symbolic level she imparts to the aesthetic make-up of the poem a disturbing element, adding a tone that jars with the conventional perception of the elegiac world. The setting is nocturnal, sepulchral and incantatory – all characteristics that we have seen in other encounters with the *lena* in the elegiac tradition.

The setting that the poet imagines for Dipsas’ magic consists of eerie images that dominate the landscape. The stars bleed in the sky, while the moon’s face turns crimson with blood: *sanguine ... stillantia sidera vidi / purpureus Lunae sanguine vultus erat* (1.8.11-12). The pentameter is constructed to add the effect of increasing emotional intensity to the grotesque images: from *purpureus*, which is an indication of colour, we move to the moon, as the object that is so coloured; we then proceed to blood as the source of its colour, and finally to the face, which personifies the bleeding moon and elicits a reaction of both empathy (due to the personification) and revulsion (due to the blood) from the reader. In this strange setting Dipsas moves in and out of nocturnal shadows and – the poet imagines – transforms herself into a bird: *suspicor et pluma*

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35 In *Am*.2.1 Ovid uses *carmina* with the meaning of spells (*carmina sanguineae deductunt cornua luna, 2.1.23*) and elegiac poems (*carminibus cessere fores, insertaque posti / quamvis robur erat, carmine victa sera est, 2.1.27-28*). A similar phenomenon can be observed in *Am*.3.7.28, where the incantation used to bewitch the poet’s body is also called *carmen*. The significance of the parallelism is remarked by Hardie (2002, 241), for whom the “power of the elegiac witch mirrors the power of the poet and his *carmina*.”

36 Cf. my discussion of Prop. 4.5 (in Ch.3) and of Tib.1.5 (in Ch.4) where the *lenae* are also presented as nocturnal creatures.

37 Brenk (1990, 219) argues that for the Greeks, the colour purple (*porphyreos*) conveyed through its etymology an ominous atmosphere, derived as it was from a rushing of blood to the surface of the skin or gushing out from a wound. He argues that these “sinister tones” were present in the Latin use of the word.
**corpus anile tegi** (1.8.14). In his description Ovid withholds the final image of Dipsas’ metamorphosis, allowing his readers to focus on the process but virtually preventing them from visualizing the transformation as completed. In the words pluma corpus anile tegi the metamorphosis appears still in progress, since Dipsas retains her aged female body, which is merely covered with feathers. In an instance of hybridism, both natures remain visible almost as if their union were the result of an awkward superimposition.

The unfinished outcome functions as a parody of the many transformations in which the metamorphic process is carried through to completion with refinement. It suggests that the lena was conceived by the poet as a character unable to finish the transformation. Her hybridity exemplifies that of elegy itself, which, as Farrell puts it, is “a hybrid genre if there ever was one,” but the ineptness implicit in her transformation contrasts heavily with the poet’s control over his subject matter, who so designs her to parody the literary tradition of metamorphoses. Moreover, as a parallel to the poet, she is therefore a poor maker of metamorphoses, in contrast to Ovid, who will prove himself a great master of the art. The derisive suggestion adds a tone of mockery to the grotesque imagery.

The concept of the grotesque associated with witchcraft inevitably carries a suggestion of evil. In Dipsas’ case this is brought forth by the fact that she is described as having two pupils, pupula duplex (1.8.15) in each eye. With this image Ovid alludes

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38 The lena is frequently depicted as having magical powers, and, more specifically, as being a saga. On this point see Myers (1985, 57) and James (2003, 228 and 236). Her magical powers, as listed in this poem, are standard as McKeown (1989, ad loc.) and James (2003, 276) note. Her ability to transform her body into that of an animal marks this lena out as a versipellis. On versipellis see Luck (2006 [1985]), 20. On other magical spells with which the lena is associated (especially love spells – erotic pharmacology – and curses), see Sharrock (1994, 53-84), Gager (1992) and Winkler (1990).

39 The image of a human partially metamorphosed into a bird also occurs at Hor. Carm. 2.20.10-13. The process of the metamorphosis of the poet into a swan is not of great concern to the Horatian commentators; they are more interested in the final image of the swan, not in the fact that Horace depicts the process of becoming a swan. See, e.g., Nisbet and Hubbard (1978, ad loc.) who remark that this is a literalization of the metaphor of poet as swan. Cf. Harrison (2007, 31) who observes that it is “jarringly literal.” West (1998, 144) notes only that “the change begins before our eyes.”

40 Farrell (2003), 397.
to the common belief that there were women with double pupils in one eye, and that they had the ability to cast evil on people simply by staring at them.\footnote{Pliny \textit{Nat.} 7.16-18.} However, he also continues the mocking tone introduced with the image of Dipsas’ transformation, since the two pupils suggest that the \textit{lena}, as a habitual drunk, has double vision. He compounds the sense of mockery by adding that Dipsas’ rays of vision emanate \textit{gemino} ... \textit{ab orbe} (1.8.16), where the term \textit{gemino} indicates that the source of her evil power is found in both eyes.\footnote{McKeown (1989), 209.} On a more serious note, we can observe that the verb describing Dipsas’ casting of the evil eye, \textit{fulminat}, is a term Propertius uses of Cynthia (4.8.55); it may imply that Dipsas is conceived as an older version of the beloved, and hence that the beloved too has potentially grotesque aspects.

In the elegiac narrative, Dipsas has the role of disrupting the romantic union of the poet-lover and his beloved: \textit{haec sibi proposuit thalamos temerare pudicos} (1.8.19). In this line \textit{thalamos} is a high-register word by which the poet confers a sense of dignity and nobility on his elegiac relationship, which is further ennobled by the adjective \textit{pudicos}, itself a claim to purity and blamelessness.\footnote{McKeown (1989), 211. Cf. \textit{OLD s.v. pudicus} 1 (sexually pure, chaste) and 2 (honourable, decent).} \textit{Proposuit ... temerare} leaves no doubt concerning the nature of Dipsas’ plans: she will impede the fulfillment of their love with her insidious instruction of the \textit{puella}. A verb of rare occurrence in the infinitive, \textit{temerare} is a very strong word, “exaggeratedly strong,” according to McKeown.\footnote{McKeown (1989), 211.} It occurs as an infinitive only in the \textit{Aeneid} (6.840), where it refers to the desecration of the shrine of Minerva. However, from the perspective of a grotesque reading of Ovid, the most significant aspect of this verb is its literal meaning, which is to
violate or to pollute,\textsuperscript{45} for this meaning points to the very essence of grotesque poetics. Whilst on the narrative plane it signifies to raise obstacles to the union of the poet-lover and his beloved, on the metaliterary one it alludes to the poet’s design to subvert the conventional ideality of the romance. In \textit{Am.2.13.1} Corinna is called \textit{temeraria} by the poet because she rushed into the decision to have an abortion without consulting him. Phonetically, \textit{temeraria} echoes the verb \textit{temerare} and hence links Corinna’s act to the ideas of defilement and violation associated with the figure of Dipsas without actually naming them.

Another major polluting element in elegiac love is the rival, a purely physical being incarnating vulgar habits and the blood of war. As a foil for the poet-lover, he is a constant reminder of the power of the grotesque to undermine the lover’s efforts to retain his \textit{puella} with his poetry, that is, he fails to get the girl.\textsuperscript{46} Unlike his rival, the poet-lover is a refined human being, though as a result he is impotent in love and even love-making (\textit{Am. 3.7}). He may thus not fulfill his desire, not only because Corinna is attracted away from him by his rival, but also because he is sexually dysfunctional, and hence sinks into the grotesque as an elegiac lover just as Corinna does so as a \textit{puella} when she aborts (\textit{Am. 2.13-14}). He is in a state of ambivalence, not knowing whether he should refer to himself as a body or a ghost: \textit{non exactum, corpus an umbra forem} (\textit{Am. 3.7.16}). Already in the paraclausithyron poem in which he asks the doorkeeper to leave the door of his beloved only slightly ajar because his body, emaciated by love, can fit through a narrow slit, the poet had situated himself in a region of linguistic ambivalence in order to refer simultaneously to the limbs of his body and the components of his verses: \textit{longus amor}

\textsuperscript{45} Cf. \textit{OLD} s.v. \textit{temero}.
\textsuperscript{46} E.g., \textit{Am. 1.6}, 11-12, 2.2-3. Cf. also Prop. 1. 11-12, 5, 17, 18, 19, \textit{inter alia}.  

tales corpus tenuavit in usus / aptaque subducto pondere membra dedit (Am.1.6.5-6).

Since *membra* can designate the limbs of the lover’s body as well as the clauses of the poet’s verses, Ovid casts his body as a trope for a poem in the elegiac genre and the poem as a the trope of a lover who is getting thinner by the day.\(^{47}\) The focus of the poet’s imagination is a physical body and not an abstraction of refinement. In the impotence poem, the emaciation has advanced to the point the poet-lover is virtually a ghost without sexual drive. The poet here describes himself as an elegiac lover who is no longer able to live up to the conventional expectations of his role, and suggests a parallel between the literary body of elegy and the physical body of one who can no longer be elegiac in the expected manner precisely as a result of earlier conventional elegiac practice. By positioning himself in the region of ambivalence, Ovid figuratively documents “the poet’s flagging interest in elegiac verse,” as Keith argues.\(^{48}\) Such an ambivalence is aesthetically meaningful: though in his self-perception he himself is not conspicuously grotesque – his corporality and impotence notwithstanding – the poet-lover occasionally dwells in a realm of grotesque imagery, for ambivalence is the breeding ground of grotesque poetics.\(^{49}\) When he enters that realm of consciousness, the poet figures in his own imagination as a grotesque caricature: *troncus iners ... species at inutile pondus* (Am. 3.7.15). In this closural poem, Ovid affirms the grotesque in the poetics of elegy at the expense of his persona’s sexuality. Precisely how far he is willing to go in the affirmation of this position is clear from his treatment of the rival, who represents a constant threat of the thematic intrusion of the physical grotesque, itself already a part of

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\(^{47}\) Keith (1999, 59) examines in detail the relationship between the anatomy of the text and the anatomy of the elegiac lover’s body.

\(^{48}\) Keith (1999) 60.

\(^{49}\) Harpham (1982, 92) observes that the grotesque belongs to a region of the mind governed by ambivalence.
elegy, into the more refined region of elegy, which is the location of both his art and his love.

In *Amores* 3.8 the poet-lover contrasts his art, which is the product of his mind, with that of his rival, a *recens dives* (3.8.9) who has gained his riches by fighting in wars. The rival is a purely physical being who has engaged in savage acts of mercenary violence through which he has obtained his riches. Ovid finds him disgusting and presents him as a man fattened on the blood that he has spilled, *sanguine pastus* (*Am.* 3.8.10). In addition to carrying the meaning of eating and grazing, the past participle of *pascere*, especially when used with an ablative as in the case at hand, means “to grow rich or fat on” the substance named in the ablative, and also refers to the feeding of slaves and soldiers, who come in herds, like animals, for the word carries a definite connotation of animality. Since the battlefield is covered with blood and corpses, the image suggests a continuous feeding on the gore that is all around. The image of the rival *sanguine pastus* is therefore singularly grotesque on various counts: it expresses the rival’s accumulation of wealth as a form of unnatural ingestion, it casts him as a grazing animal, it further degrades him socially as a slave, and it endows the action of eating with the power to elicit a sense of abjection, since the substance being ingested is the spilled blood of other men. It also casts him as a man polluted both on the outside and the inside by the blood of others. He therefore discloses the presence of a source of pollution within the world of elegy itself:

Yet the soldier is the *puella*’s chosen suitor for the moment. The rival’s body is on display, and on it there are traces of his past and his activities. A significant metaliterary

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50 *OLD s.v. pascere* 3b.
51 Cf. Douglas (1966, *passim*) on blood and being stained with blood as a cause of pollution.
detail is that, by their appearance, his scars tell tales of his hard profession, signs of his past on his body: *cerne cicatrices, veteris vestigia pugnae* (*Am. 3.8.19*) The rival is *scriptus* in a material sense, in that he bears on his person traces of the battles in which he has fought. The line alludes to Vergil’s *Aeneid* (*agnosco veteris vestigia flammae*, 4.23), and this makes the rival *scriptus* in a figurative sense as well. However, whereas the Vergilian line is spoken by Dido in a love story contained within an epic, here Ovid flips the situation around: the words are spoken by the poet-lover of elegy about a military rival. The poet-lover assumes that the *puella* must read such a tale as one of wealth and heroism, though he himself views it as horrid. In the world of elegy, the rival’s epic pretensions are degraded and exposed for what they really are: grotesque.

**Pasiphae in *Ars I***

The intrusions of the grotesque into the elegiac poetics of the *Amores* anticipate highly sophisticated instances of grotesque aesthetics in Ovid’s erotodidactic manual, the *Ars Amatoria*, in which we can find several well-known episodes of literary memory that lay bare the grotesque aesthetics of the genre. The *Ars* is purportedly didactic, with some formal features of the mode’s lofty epic instantiations – such as comparisons with myth and interruption of narrative flow to discuss examples in detail – though the poem concerns various aspects of elegiac love. This is a trivial theme for didactic poetry, but the *Ars* employs elegiac couplets for its metre and hence appropriates didactic elements for elegy. In comparison to the philosophy of such didactic poets as Lucretius the art of love is trivial, not to say frivolous; in this way Ovid has fused the didactic with the elegiac. Like elegy, the *Ars* is written in couplets and deals with love but in the didactic
mode which offers instruction, uses myths as comparanda, and interrupts the flow of the narrative in order to discuss significant examples in detail. Among the many such grotesque elements in the Ars Amatoria, those connected with Ovid’s retelling of the myth of Pasiphae are especially conspicuous and constitute the main focus of my discussion. The praecceptor introduces Pasiphae in his review of myths of improper love and his condemnation of women’s lust as a destructive force.

Scholars have analyzed the myth as a negative exemplum of love, received by Ovid from other poets and invested by him with textual traces of a long literary memory. Ovid’s tone in his use of literary memory is simultaneously sentimental and derisive, a combination that is eminently suited for a grotesque perspective. Ovidian scholars routinely call details of the story grotesque, but not in the technical sense of the term in aesthetic theory. A full analysis of Ovid’s treatment of the myth from the perspective of grotesque aesthetics has yet to be offered, nor have modern students of the grotesque paid much attention to it. I undertake such an analysis here, building on various aspects of Ovidian scholarship and modern theory.

First it is important to observe that, just before he starts his account of Pasiphae, Ovid raises in his readers the expectation that the language of grotesque lust is always already present in some form in elegy. Women, he says, are given tam furiosa libido (1.281) that they can even transgress natural boundaries, in contrast to the flamma virilis

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52 The inclusion of mythological exempla is a practice common to the Roman elegists, tracing back to the Hellenistic poets. For the differences between Catullus’, Tibullus’, Propertius’, and Ovid’s uses of and intentions towards mythological exempla, see Whitaker (1983). According to Whitaker Ovid employs myth as illustrative or witty exempla, frequently even debunking the loftiness of the characters or skewing his narration of the myths for “the production of shocked amusement” (148).

53 The story of Pasiphae continued to be used as a negative exemplum in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. For example, Pasiphae’s union with a bull was recalled as an emblem of grotesque lust by Dante in Purgatorio 26, 41-42, “Nella vacca entra Pasife / perché’ I torello a sua lussuria corra,” and Fernando de Rojas in act 1 of La Celestina, “¿No has leýdo de Pasife con el toro?”

(1.282) of men, which is always contained within proper limitations. The story of Pasiphae comes after references to Byblis and Myrrah (Ars.1.283-6), and implies that bestiality is more hideous than incest, while the adjective *furiosa* describes the raging passion associated with elegiac love. In the language of elegy – and not only in the elegiac narrative – words such as *furor* and *libido* have a grotesque potential.\(^55\) The words for grotesque passions and disorders are already part of the vocabulary of elegy, and Ovid here has recourse to one of them in his description of Pasiphae’s love for a bull, the best example he can give of the disordered passions of women. Ovid’s story is about Pasiphae rather than the Minotaur, but, since his readers are familiar with the outcome – *nota cano* (1.296) – the birth of the Minotaur haunts their reading teleologically.\(^56\) As the product of a shameful love and as devourer of human flesh, the Minotaur – *semibovemque virum, semivirumque bovem*, as Ovid calls him in a famous line of this very treatise (Ars 2.24) – compounds the ominously grotesque dimension of Pasiphae’s lust from her very first appearance in the story. By means of this teleology, Ovid channels into the poem the hybridity that is at the very heart of the grotesque.\(^57\)

Pasiphae enters the scene of the *Ars Amatoria* as the first word of the line with which her story begins: *Pasiphae fieri gaudebat adultera tauri* (1.295). Even before having sex with the bull, Pasiphae fantasizes about it. *Gaudebat* is a verb that indicates physical enjoyment in the guise of sexual pleasure.\(^58\) Pasiphae enjoys her very desire to

\(^{55}\) *Furor* is central to the elegiac vocabulary, cf. Pichon (1902), 157-158. It normally signifies the impetus to go beyond acceptable limits of behaviour and hence represents a potential foray into the realm of the grotesque.

\(^{56}\) Harpham (1982, 87) observes that the Minotaur represents the culmination of a development of the image of the bull-man, found in primitive caves, symbolizing erotic attraction, danger, and fertility. The horn has survived in later culture as an image of erotic attraction and physical danger, among other things.

\(^{57}\) For discussion of this line, which represents a highly significant point of contact between the Ovidian and the Empedoclean approach to the grotesque in the second book of the *Ars*, see below.

have sex. We can see here already the magnitude of her grotesque degradation of elegiac love, soon to become an act of gross bestiality. All will be degraded: love has become depraved lust, the lover will be replaced by a bull, and the *puella* would prefer to be a cow. In the elegiac corpus, the rival lover is figuratively represented through debasing animal attributes (such as smell and appetite – as we just saw in *Am.* 3.8, and as we have seen with the Catullan armpit-goat), but here he is literally an animal to start with. In the process of degradation of love, moreover, Pasiëphae reverses the role of the elegiac mise-en-scène, assuming the role of the pursuer rather than that of the beloved. She is the one who strategizes how to trick the bull into having sex with her, and in doing so she debases not only herself but also love (*amor*) and, by implication, the genre of the *Amores.* Her action also debases the *Ars Amatoria* itself as the art of erotic appeal without which the elegiac genre has no grounds for existence.

Instead of feeling abjection for bestiality, she is attracted by it and does all she can to reach it. In the line in which she is introduced (*Pasiphae fieri gaudebat adultera tauri*, 1.295), Pasiphae is separated from *tauri* by the length of the line – but the juxtaposition *adultera tauri* makes an impact because *adultera* is a human word with moral connotations and *tauri* belongs to the animal realm. The charge of adultery marks her as married, and so we have a triangle reminiscent of an elegiac situation, though certainly not a conventional one. Pasiphae, in fact, is married and a royal consort, not an elegiac *puella.* Although the word *adultera*, which was too undignified to figure in the vocabulary of epic,\(^59\) was part of the conventional elegiac vocabulary, here it transgresses the limits of normal elegiac usage by denoting an act of bestiality. United with *tauri*,

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\(^{59}\) Anderson (1997) 288. Ovid has Juno use it of Callisto in *Met.* 2.472, adapting it from elegy. *Adulter* and *adultera* are both words belonging to the vocabulary of elegy: see Pichon (1902), 80-81.
*adultera* ceases to be conventionally elegiac and assumes a shockingly grotesque dimension.

That dimension combines the horror of bestial lust with a derision of its literary articulation. Dressed in her regal robes, Pasiphae wanders about a mountain with a mirror in her hand. The poet wonders why, expressing mock sincerity: *quid tibi cum speculo montana armenta petenti?* (1.305) Ovid’s Pasiphae behaves as a naïve reader of the elegiac tradition, one who accepts its conventions as forms that can be filled with all manner of narratives, including her own. Having equipped herself with a mirror, Pasiphae begins to pose as an elegiac *puella*, examining her reflection\(^{60}\) in order to see if she is beautiful enough for her intended lover – which, in her case, means seeing whether she has started to grow horns on her forehead. Though her action is perfectly in line with the formal conventions of elegy, the mirror being a necessary accoutrement of the beloved,\(^{61}\) Pasiphae’s desire to see herself as a cow is ludicrously incongruous with the psychology of an elegiac *puella*, which she is not. At the same time, she also poses as a pastoral character, in alignment with her literary background in Vergil’s sixth *Bucolic*. But she fails in that as well. In *Ars* 1.295, *Pasiphae fieri gaudebat tauri*, there is no bucolic dieresis as a marker of pastoral, and its absence underlines Pasiphae’s alienation from the bucolic landscape. Her desire to be sexually desirable to a bull is a form of grotesque lust rather than love. When it does not involve some form of self-degradation, erotic desire is directed at somebody who is either equal or superior to the desiring subject. Pasiphae’s desire is both debasing and transgressive. She is so unaware of the grotesque nature of

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\(^{60}\) We see such an action in 2.14 and 2.17.

\(^{61}\) For example of *puellae* who primp and preen to make themselves alluring for their lovers, see *Med.* 31-2: *est etiam placuisse sibi cucumque voluptas: / virginibus cordi grataque forma sua est.* Cf also Lucr. 4. 1185-87: *nec Veneres nostras hoc fallit; quo magis ipsae / omnia summo opere hos vitae postcaenia celant, /quos retinere volunt adstrictosque esse in amore.* Cf. also *Am.* 1.14, 2.17.
her lust that her behaviour, earnest though it is for her, appears recited, an echo of what we might call, adapting Barthes’ famous title, a bovine lover’s discourse in the form of elegy. Love is treated as the vocabulary of a learned behaviour by both Pasiphae and Ovid, though Pasiphae appropriates it ingenuously while Ovid manipulates it disingenuously. As Kennedy argues, when poets reduce love to discourse, they reveal (as they revel in) its rhetoricity.\(^\text{62}\) Ovid displays all of his facetiousness concerning that rhetoricity when he focuses on Pasiphae’s lust and on its intended beneficiary. Addressing her directly, he pretends to be dismayed by the downward direction of her love, and tries to remind her that she is not a cow. He asks her to return to her senses, crede tamen speculo (1.307), but recognizing her desire to be a cow, he laments, mimicking her naivety, that no horns have sprouted on her forehead: quam cuperes fronti cornua nata tuae! (1.308).\(^\text{63}\) Pasiphae cannot acquire the bovine beauty to which she so desperately and ridiculously aspires.

All puellae want to be beautiful and do whatever they can to augment their beauty. In the Medicamina Ovid explains that the pursuit of beauty is the result of a natural impulse that eventually takes women as far as to use heavy make-up to mask their deficiencies and to enhance their erotic appeal.\(^\text{64}\) A didactic work in several ways

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\(^{62}\) Kennedy (1993), 67.

\(^{63}\) In this line there is an allusion to Vergil, for whom Pasiphae is worse than the daughters of Proteus, who, though persuaded in their madness that they were cows, to the point that one of them hoped to feel horns growing on her forehead, et saepe in levi quaesisset cornua fronte (Verg. Buc. 6.51), did not seek union with a bull. Ovid takes the comparison a step further with Pasiphae, in addition to feeling lust for the bull, longing to see horns sprouting on her forehead and hoping to see them in her mirror.

\(^{64}\) According to Ovid women resort to cosmetics to enhance their beauty not only to please others but also to please themselves, because the pursuit of beauty in one’s own body is a natural inclination, an impulse to what Rosati (1985, 26) calls “narcisistica soddisfazione.” Even girls who dwell in the country, far from the eyes of men might want to enhance their beauty, do not neglect their appearance, rare latent finguintque comas (29). This is all the more so when they are trying to appear seductive. Rimell (2005) has pointed out that the Medicamina is as much about the art the puella needs to make herself attractive as it is about “the poet’s and reader’s experience of spying on her cosmetic routine” (178), and has argued that “Writing a poem and creating a look are analogous, corresponding, mirroring projects” (183).
parallel to the *Ars*, the *Medicamina* is situated in the context of elegy by its metrical form as well as by the theme of erotic appeal, but it is the product of a double-edged poetics. By letting the reader know that beneath the beauty that seduces the poet-lover there is an ordinary face, with imperfections that are hidden from view, the *Medicamina* serves as a reminder that the convention of unblemished beauty is based on a surface-thin mask. We know from Pliny that Roman women frequently suffered from various types of skin ailments, some no doubt caused by ingredients in the cosmetics that they used.\(^{65}\) This may well be a reason, Olson suggests, why Roman beauty treatments concerned the skin, “since it must have been ravaged by dirt, disease, and the effects of lead and mercury in makeup.”\(^ {66}\) The ingredients in the *Medicamina* are intended for beautification, but because they are also commonly employed in the treatment of ailments, their occurrence in the text raises the images of the ailments for which they were known: saltpetre (*Med. 85*), for example, was used to remove warts, rose leaves and poppy (*Med. 93*) to remove dirt.\(^ {67}\) When they are applied to the face in order to enhance its beauty, such *medicamina* also conjure up the image of dirty warts in need of removal. Oesypum was among the most offensive cosmetics, since it was not only malodorous but also grossly grotesque by association, being used medically as a remedy for a fissured anus.\(^ {68}\) Moreover, the word *medicamina* itself and its variant *medicamenta* were commonly used to describe abortifacient drugs.\(^ {69}\) Such associations suggest that images of a beloved’s cosmetic beauty may have a profoundly grotesque underside. These intimations of a less

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\(^{65}\) Pliny *Nat.* 30.28-30, 28.109, 28.187, 28.183. For a detailed analysis of the properties of the substances in the recipes of the face packs in the second half of the *Medicamina* see Green (1979).

\(^{66}\) Olson (2008), 64.


\(^{69}\) See above, n.8.
glamorous side to the *puella*’s beauty look back to Lucretius’ diatribe against love and forward to Ovid’s own *Remedia*, which, as we shall see in the conclusion, marks the closure of the elegiac genre.

Viewed against this background, Pasiphae is a character who brings the grotesque underbelly into full view, reversing the aesthetic hierarchy suggested by the *ars* of the *Medicamina*. Pasiphae is a queen who would rather be a cow and looks hopefully in the mirror to see if she has started to grow horns as evidence of bovine beauty. Her use of a *puella*’s accessory in order to see if she has started to resemble a cow as a result of her desire to be appealing to the bull is both pathetic and ridiculous, while Ovid’s twisted use of the elegiac motif of the mirror is a remarkable degradation of the genre. Ovid derides both the formal conventions of the genre and the sublime beauty to which it aspires, degrading it into animal physicality.

All cows attractive to the bull of the herd become Pasiphae’s hated rivals, and she has them killed under the pretext of performing a ritual sacrifice: *cadere ante aras commentaque sacra coegit* (1.319). She rejoices as she raises their intestines in her hand: *et tenuit laeta paelicis exta manu* (1.320). The mannered word order of the line, with adjective at the caesura and the noun at line end, surround the *paelicis exta* with the adjective and noun combination that describes, as a unit, the hand holding them. Ovid gives no other details, except that Pasiphae’s savage treatment of the cows was a frequent occurrence (*quotiens*, 1.321), and that in each case, she mockingly dared her eviscerated rivals to try to please the bull in their present condition: *atque ait, exta tenens, ‘ite, placete meo’* (1.322). The pleasure that Pasiphae expresses with the gesture by which she exposes the interior of slaughtered cows is supremely grotesque and represents the
ultimate transgression of biological, moral, and ritualistic boundaries, expressing not only savagery but also religious defilement, because her ritual is a false sacrifice. The mocking tone with which Pasiphae addresses the eviscerated the cows is an aspect of black humour written into the character herself and hence into the elegiac narrative of her lust.

The grotesque motif of that narrative assumes a central position when, deceived by the wooden stratagem prepared for Pasiphae by Daedalus (\textit{vacca deceptus acerna,} 1.325), the bull mates with Pasiphae. Pasiphae’s transformation recalls Io’s metamorphosis into a cow and Jupiter’s metamorphosis into a bull in order to carry off Europa both of which are invoked from literary memory in earlier Ovidian elegy\textsuperscript{70} as examples of material worthy of poetry (\textit{materiem felicem in carmina, Am.} 1.3.19), and as the poet-lover’s suitable \textit{comparanda} for his love songs. In this earlier reference, in other words, Ovid already raised the expectation of grotesque motifs in elegiac narrative.\textsuperscript{71} But whereas Io actually became bovine, Pasiphae can only conceal herself in an artificial cow suit, which functions like a mask to cover her entire body. The grotesque elements here include Pasiphae’s attempt at self-hybridization in order to make herself more alluring to her intended lover, and the fact that the product of the hybridization is more shocking than the metamorphosis of a human being into an animal. A complete metamorphosis implies transgression by becoming the other, while by her stratagem Pasiphae will

\textsuperscript{70} The raising of expectations is a basic narratological technique for Ovid. Fowler (1989) has shown that the technique is especially visible at book ends of the same work. The description of Europa at the end of \textit{Met.} 2, for example, raises narratological expectations of its continuation in the next book, though the expectation is purposely frustrated (96). In the case at hand, we can observe that Ovid uses the same technique not only within the same work (the \textit{Amores}) but also across different works (\textit{Amores} and \textit{Metamorphoses}). In fact Ovid mentions both Io and Europa in the third elegy of his first book of \textit{Amores}. See \textit{Am.} 1.3.21: \textit{carmine nomen habent exterrita cornibus Io;} and \textit{Am.} 1.3.23-24: \textit{quaeque super pontum simulato vecta iuvenco / virginea tenuit cornua vara manu.}

\textsuperscript{71} Ovid later tells the stories of Io and Europa in \textit{Met.} 1.568-667 and 2.868-9, respectively. This is appropriate because the \textit{Metamorphoses} is about changes and crossing boundaries. There is a sexual element to both of these episodes, especially the tale of Europa, who is seduced by Jupiter in the guise of a bull. She does not, however, lust after the bull in the same way that Pasiphae does. The eroticism of the scene is not as grotesque.
execute a foray into the realm of the bull from which she will return pregnant with his offspring to her own world, carrying within her body the unborn Minotaur that will one day begin feeding on human flesh. Pasiphae’s action therefore constitutes a double transgression.

The Minotaur is a hybrid of human and bovine. He is not described in the text, but the fact that Ovid sings *nota* indicates his awareness of audience expectation and he writes his tale accordingly. The Minotaur dominates the reader’s consciousness as a constant reminder of the enormity of Pasiphae’s depravity. Her sexual act is described in the language of animal husbandry. This is part of a larger strategy in the *Ars Amatoria*, where Ovid uses georgic imagery to articulate his art of love, viewing the sexual behaviour of women through the paradigm of the sexual conduct of animals.\(^\text{72}\) The effect of the paradigm is to create an area of erotic ambivalence from which the step to biological ambivalence, the region of grotesque hybrids, is easy to take. Such ambivalence is meaningful, in Harpham’s technical sense,\(^\text{73}\) because it leads to the creation of new meaning and aesthetic value by corrupting the meaning that a narrative motif had in literary memory. It is also meaningful because it makes possible the coexistence in the same form of elegiac conventions and anti-elegiac principles designed to debunk them. In Pasiphae’s story the creation of such a region of meaningful

\(^{72}\)From her rigorous analysis of the georgic language of Vergilian origin in the *Ars* Leach (1964, 154) concludes that Ovid celebrates the *mores* of contemporary Roman society despised by Augustus by parodying the georgic world described by the most Augustan poet. In conducting this poetic operation, Ovid triumphs as a poet of great refinement and skill. We can add to this interpretation that a prominent aesthetic function of georgic language in the *Ars* is to depict the grotesque aspects of the erotic aggressiveness of women in verse that can display the grotesque without compromising refinement.

\(^{73}\)Harpham (1982) 92, distinguishes between meaningless and meaningful ambivalence as the two polarities within which all grotesque phenomena are found. Meaningless ambivalence signifies nothing beyond the corruption of pre-existing meaning; meaningful ambivalence is always highly significant. Harpham observes that the categories of the grotesque based on these two polarities are not totally separate but frequently “inhabit each other,” though one may dominate the other.
ambivalence allows the poet to import into the narrative ambient of elegy a hybrid 
monster from ancient literary memory presenting it as a future grotesque consequence of 
the bestial sexuality of a woman possessed by elegiac love for a bull. The narrative of 
Pasiphae’s love in a didactic poem on elegiac love situates the reader in a region of 
ambivalence, inhabited by mythological memories of grotesque hybridity and informed 
by a topsy-turvy eroticism, in which the pursuer is a queen rather than a poet-lover and 
the pursued is a bull rather than a puella. Such a treatment of elegiac love, showing it to 
have a side that is both dark and ludicrous, is greatly facilitated by georgic language. For 
seen through that language, Pasiphae illustrates the principle that women, even regal 
members of the species, are “creatures of untamed nature ... the raw material of love,”74 
and that is the premise for the birth of the Minotaur.

The bull impregnates Pasiphae: hanc tamen implevit, ... / dux gregis (1.325-326). 
The verb impleo, comes from the veterinary vocabulary of classical Rome and has no 
conventional elegiac connotations.75 By contrast, the locution dux gregis comes with 
significant poetic and literary memory. Its sense varies, depending on whether the first or 
the second term is regarded as a metaphor. The variation in which princeps is used 
instead of dux is recorded by Varro in De Lingua Latina as a metaphor for the head of a 
herd (princeps gregis immolatur, 6.12), and in this usage princeps gregis trivializes the 
social dignity of a princeps by degrading him into an animal.76 The phrase dux gregis 
occurs in Tibullus without any trivialization, since it designates a shepherd (dux gregis 
inter oves, Tib. 1.10.10), viewed in a pastoral landscape as yet unspoiled by wars waged

74 Leach (1964), 144. 
75 TLL VII1.633.67 and 82. Cf. Pliny Nat. 8.199.200-205; Col. 6.1.3: parandi sunt boves novelli ... capaci et tanquam implente utero. 
by military *duces*. Tibullus also uses the phrase in the variation *dux pecoris* (Tib. 2.1.58), to designate a ram, but without grotesque degradation since it occurs in the context of a celebratory catalogue of rural arts. Vergil also uses it to mean a ram (*vir gregis ipse caper*, Verg. *Buc.* 7.7), metaphorizing a term that conventionally means man, husband and hero. Ovid himself had used the expression earlier in the *Amores* to designate a ram (*dux gregis cornu ... recurvo, Am. 3.13.17*), and will use it again in the *Metamorphoses* in allusion to Jupiter’s transformation into a ram when he hides from Typhoeus (*Met. 5.327*). But in his version of Vergil’s version of Pasiphae, Ovid shifts from the caprine to the bovine world, and literalizes the metaphor’s potential for grotesque effect by associating it with the queen’s depraved sexuality: instead of loving her *vir* or her *dux*, she lusts after the *dux gregis* and gives birth to a monstrous offspring.

The *dux gregis* displaces Pasiphae’s real consort, King Minos. The displacement is reinforced by the text in a very subtle way. Near the beginning of the episode, the term *coniugis* (1.302) is enjambed with respect to its verb (*moratur, 1.301*) and occurs as a dactyl at the beginning of the next pentameter. The same may be said of *dux gregis* (1.326), which is also a dactyl separated by enjambment from its verb (*implevit, 1.325*), and is also placed in the initial position of the pentameter. The positional and metrical parallel suggests that the expression *dux gregis* displaces the word *coniugis* just as the bull takes the place of the king for Pasiphae. Her new bovine *coniunx* fills her (*hanc ... implevit, 1.325*). The grotesque dimensions of the image include a further emphasis on the animal physicality of the sexual act, in which the bull is preferred to the human *coniunx*, and the sense of abundant inseminating fluid – this way, by implication, could Pasiphae’s depraved desire be satisfied.
The source of Pasiphae’s bovine fullness is her *auctor* (*et partu proditus auctor erat*, 1.326), a word that carries a double meaning: on the narrative level, it refers to the bull, subject of *implevit* and originator of Pasiphae’s pregnancy; on the metaliterary level, however, it may suggest the author of the poem. In both senses its etymology from *augere*, ‘to increase,’ is preserved. The bull increases Pasiphae’s physical body by making her pregnant, while the poet increases Pasiphae’s literary body by adding details of his own invention to the accumulation of literary memory with which the character reached him. The most significant element that he has added, however, is the sense of the grotesque, as an element of disturbance in the textual field and in the narrative into which that literary memory is woven. In this way, Ovid has imprinted his special aesthetic mark on traditional material. The word *auctor*, strategically placed at the very end of the episode, *auctor erat*, where it is likely to condition the reader’s retrospective interpretation of the text, suggests that the poet too is in his poem.

As a dialogue partner within the poem, Ovid describes Pasiphae’s hostility towards the cows who prance in front of her beloved bull, *a, quotiens vaccam vultu spectavit iniquo* (1.313). The neoteric *a* imports into the episode literary memory from Vergil’s apostrophe to Pasiphae (*Buc.* 6.47 and 52) and Calvus’ apostrophe to (the bovine) Io. But the most significant poetic recollection is from Propertius, who describes a jealous queen punishing a *famula*, just as Pasiphae orders that a cow be put to the yoke: *iussit et immeritam sub iuga curva trahi, / aut cadere ante aras commentaque*

77 Cf. *TLL* II. 1210.76-1211.35.
78 *OLD* s.v. *auctor* 10 (the originator, source, author) and 11 (the one responsible for an action); Cf. 15a and b (the originator or progenitor of a family or race). Cf. *TLL* II.1194.38-1358.23 and II.1194.47-1213.9.
sacra coegit (1. 318-19). These echoes establish that, in his treatment of Pasiphae, Ovid is himself in dialogue with the other poets of the elegiac tradition in the character’s literary memory. What he adds to that memory are grotesque variations and a mocking tone, tempering it with apparently sympathetic participation in Pasiphae’s desperate longing for the bull.

A significant Ovidian variation of Vergil’s image in Bucolic 6 of the bull, which is presented as pure white, nivei...iuvenci (6.46) and latus niveum (6.53), is the addition of a single black mark on his forehead: signatus tenui media intercornua nigro (1.291). The principle involved in Ovid’s depiction of the bull is the same as that presupposed in the personification of Elegia as a maiden with one leg shorter than the other. A limp or a black mark are defects which, judged from the perspective of conventional aesthetics, disrupt the reader’s appreciation of uniformity and elegance. Ovid makes explicit the fact that these alleged flaws are conspicuous: the limping gait of Elegia is highly visible, since her legs are of unequal length, and the black spot on the bull’s forehead is perfectly framed by his horns, tenui media intercornua nigro (1.291). The black spot is evenly placed and openly displayed as a mark of distinction, to which Ovid draws attention even by his mannered word ordering. There is no question about the fact that the black spot is a flaw when it is considered in isolation: Ovid calls it a labes, a term that designates a physical defect and a flaw in the uniformity of colour that renders an animal unsuitable for religious sacrifice. Yet the bull is armenti gloria (1.290), and its black spot is tenuis, an adjective that gives it a Callimachean resonance in Ovid’s poetics. The narrative setting in which the bull appears, moreover, is marked as typically elegiac when Pasiphae

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80 Cf. Prop. 3.15.15-16.
81 OLD s.v. labes 3 and 4a
refers to the grasses that she cuts as *prata tenerrima* (1.299) and an attractive heifer is described as prancing on *teneris ... herbis* (1.315). The black spot does not alienate the bull from the elegiac genre. The bull is handsome and erotically desirable (1.293-294), the black spot between his horns being like the mole in the anecdote of Seneca the Elder. It enhances the erotic attraction of the bull, just as an extraneous element disrupts the evenness of an image only to make it aesthetically more appealing.

**Mythological Markers of the Grotesque in the *Ars***

Such jarring myths occur throughout the *Ars* as narrative details that manifest Ovid’s sense of the grotesque. Like the black spot on the bull’s forehead, they call attention to themselves as motifs apparently foreign to the contexts in which they are found. Among the most significant examples are Ovid’s treatment of Scylla, Ariadne and the ensnarement of Mars and Venus, all stories with a rich and complex literary background. With these stories Ovid illustrates the full gamut of the grotesque, from the horrible to the ludic, in his narrative deployment of human passions and in his poetics.

Like Pasiphae, the mythological Scylla is an example of grotesque horror and unbridled sexual appetite. She appears as monstrous hybrid, her lower body having been turned into savage dogs: *filia purpureos Niso furata capillos / pube premit rabidos inguinibusque canes* (1.331-332). The two Scyllas received from tradition, namely the daughter of Nisus and the victim of Circe’s jealousy, are conflated in this couplet. Whereas in the *Metamorphoses* Ovid will keep the two Scyllas separate, dealing with Nisus’ daughter in Book 8 (148-151), where he transforms her into a bird, and Circe’s

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82 Sen. Con. 2.2.12: *aiebat interim decentiorem faciem esse, in qua aliquis naevos fuisset.*
83 Vergil also conflates the two characters in Buc. 6. 74-76: *quid loquar aut Scyllam Nisi, quam fama secuta est / candida succinctam latrantibus inguina monstris / Dulichias uexasse rates.*
victim in Book 14 (59-67), where he encircles her lower body with a pack of dogs, here and in the Amores (3.12.21-22) he conflates them into a single character, grotesquely hybridizing into one the two already grotesque monsters. The detail of interest to Ovid in a discussion of sexual appetites could only come from the second Scylla. Harpham discusses at length Ovid’s treatment of this Scylla in Met. 14.59-67, in which she both tries to run away from the dogs that stem from her waist and pulls them along with the rest of her body. He argues that Scylla experiences a liberation of her sexuality comparable to the liberation of thought when it succeeds in overcoming conventions and plunging into the anomalous. For the subject of such a liberation is a way of expanding the horizon of knowledge, though in the highly disturbing manner of a supremely grotesque experience. In the Ars, in which sexuality is more openly displayed and in which Scylla makes no attempt to run away from the dogs (she has already been transformed), the anomaly is not as disturbing though, arguably, it is equally liberating, in keeping with the work’s erotodidactic objective.

Originally a chaste and beautiful woman who would not yield to the advances of the sea deity Glauclus, Scylla is transformed by Circe, who was herself enamoured of Glauclus, into a hideous hybrid. Of note in the description of her monstrous lower body is that Ovid stresses her sexual organs, her pudenda (pube) and her loins (inguinibus), both in the pentameter, the metrical marker of the elegiac couplet. Since they have no epic resonance, such words as pube and inguinibus would be inappropriate for the hexameter, which, even in the elegiac couplet, would be expected to retain what Llewelyn Morgan

aptly calls its original “ethos of grandeur.” Moreover, the word *premit*, which implies that she presses the dogs against her sexual organs, also means to copulate, especially when used of animals or men. Scylla has become a personification of unbounded and aggressive sexual appetite and serves as a reminder that disturbing grotesque passions lurk beneath the formal elegance of elegiac love as an invitation to transgress its boundaries.

Yet the experience of the grotesque does not have to be disturbing from the aesthetic perspective, to create the temporary sense of disruption that typifies the reception process. Perhaps the most well known aspect of the grotesque theory promoted by Bakhtin is the Saturnalian celebration of excess and earthiness. In the *Ars*, we are treated to such a scene in the description of Bacchus’ arrival in the Ariadne episode:

```latex
ecce, Mimallonides sparsis in terga capillis; 
ecce, leves satyri, praevia turba dei. 
ebrius, ecce, senex pando Silenus asello 
vix sedet et pressas continet ante iubas. 
dum sequitur Bacchae, Bacchae fugiuintque petuntque, 
quadrupedem ferula dum malus urget eques, 
in caput aurito cecidit delapsus asello; 
clamarunt Satyri ‘surge age, surge, pater.’ 
iam deus in curru, quem summum texerat uvis, 
tigribus adiunctis aurea lora dabat. 
(Ars 1.541-550)
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The atmosphere is one of riotous celebration, including as it does the frantic beating of drums, wanton Bacchantes, a crowd of satyrs, drunken Silenus *delapsus asello* and, finally, Bacchus on his chariot, decorated with grapes and drawn by tigers. The scene

85 Morgan (2010), 285. The hexameter was regarded as the intrinsically superior metre and hence suitable for elevated subjects. Subjects of a lower order were the domain of other metres.
86 OLD, s.v. *premo* 2b. Cf. Adams (1982, 182), who notes that *premo* and “verbs of pressing … are often used of the male role.”
87 Bakhtin (1968), 198-199 and passim.
manifests several grotesque ideas, all intrinsic to the theme of revelry: a sense of carnival-like overindulgence, frenzied behaviour (*Bacchae fugiuntque petuntque*, 1.545) wine, and celebratory sex. Earlier in the *Ars*, the revelry was foreshadowed by the image of Cupid, unable to fly because his wings were soaked with wine, *bibulas... alas* (1.233). The scene of Bacchus’ entry introduces into the *Ars* a new form of grotesque, the ludic grotesque of anticipated erotic feasting, which resembles the carnival atmosphere and folk humour of Renaissance Grotesque theorized by Bakhtin. Like the carnival grotesque, the Ovidian ludic grotesque involves everyone in the entire community, in this case that of Bacchus’ followers. Moreover, Bacchus is going to marry Ariadne: *Bacchi Cnosias uxor eris* (1.556). The humour, the revelry, and the sensual earthiness of the scene represent a new beginning in the life of Ariadne, whose tribulations now come to an end.

As in the first book of the *Ars*, in the second there are single images that betray a marked grotesque sensitivity, particularly in Ovid’s treatment of motifs that suggest a new reading of literary memory and that introduce different aspects of grotesque aesthetics. A very prominent image in this regard is found in a reference to the Minotaur in Ovid’s account of the myth of Daedalus. Already associated with the grotesque by the hybridity of the craftsman’s attachment of wings to a human body, the myth of Daedalus becomes central to the Ovidian grotesque in its recollection of the episode of Pasiphae. Daedalus is the *artifex* who constructed the wooden cow and hence was essential to the creation of the minotaur, a being, as Ovid now says in a highly mannered line,

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88 Bakhtin (1968), *passim* but especially Chapter 3.
The image of the Minotaur is articulated as a double hybrid first presented from the human perspective, as the image of a man who is half bull, and then turned upside down and re-presented from a bovine perspective, as the image of a bull who is half man. The line perfectly exemplifies what we might call the mannered grotesque. The image itself calls for a repeated reading, the second half reaching back to the first, just as the first half proceeds to the second. In the first hemiepes, the minotaur is half a bull combined with a man, while in the second, he is half a man combined with a bull, and both combinations are hybrids. The aesthetic effect is one of a continuously turning grotesque entity under the gaze of the observer.

Moreover, the line in which the image is described is a fragment from Empedocles incorporated into the textual body of the *Ars*, a hybridic text which also calls for a double reading. On the one hand, the reader is invited by the passage to see the Minotaur in the context of the Empedoclean grotesque. In the *Peri Phuseos* Empedocles mentions bull-headed men among the many hybrids formed by the human and animal parts that float aimlessly in the primordial void until they are brought together by love. On the other hand, the reader is invited by the Ovidian embedding context to assume a light, if not an altogether flippant, attitude towards the literary memory of Empedocles’ cosmic grotesque. For just as Empedocles’ high didacticism of primordial love is absorbed into

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89 Seneca the Elder’s anecdote refers also to this line: Ovid was determined to keep this line when others were encouraging him to remove it (*Con. 2.2.12*). It would seem probable that Ovid liked this line for the same reason that led him to appreciate the presence of a mole on a face: it enhanced the elegance and beauty of the context, even though, in itself, the line represents an excess of artificiality and hence an imperfection.

90 The beginning of Horace’s *Ars Poetica* also comes to mind since Horace ridicules the hybridization of forms using disparate parts of animals:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{humano capiti ceruicem pictor equinam} \\
\text{iungere si uelit et uarias inducere plumas} \\
\text{undique collatis membris, ut turpiter atrum} \\
\text{desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne,} \\
\text{spectatum admissi, risum teneatis, amici?} \\
\end{align*}
\]
Ovid’s manual for securing lovers, so is his skill as a poet superseded by Ovid’s. By reducing to three (semi, bov-, vir-) the four word roots employed by Empedocles (bou-, andro-, -genes, and -fues), and by compressing the latter’s two verses into a single pentameter, Ovid shows greater skill than Empedocles in fashioning the hybrid image of the Minotaur. Moreover, by fitting the Empedoclean fragment into a pentameter, the line that represents the metrical marker of elegy, he appears to be claiming that the Empedoclean grotesque is material for elegy, and that the elegiac grotesque is a perspective from which to appropriate Empedocles, reading him mockingly at the same time. The Empedoclean valence of Ovid’s Minotaur recalls the cosmic grotesque of the Peri Phuseos almost as if the Minotaur were a relic from primordial times, repackaged to fit into an elegiac pentameter, where he may remind naïve readers of the dark underside of elegiac love as well as of the silliness of its posturings. The aesthetic impact of the passage is that of a double-voiced hybridic text in which the original intention of the image and the intention of its reuse come through simultaneously but in a manner that allows the stylistic facetiousness of the latter to dominate the dark metaphysics of the former.

The Empedoclean grotesque represents nature impelled by love. Ovid retains love as the driving force, though he condemns it as a transgressive desire of Pasiphae. However he enables that love to produce the Minotaur only through the intervention of

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91 On Ovid’s display of skill in his refashioning of the Empedoclean fragment see Rusten (1982), 333.  
92 The metaliterary implications of the Empedoclean resonance are significant. Like the disparate anatomical fragments combined by love in Empedocles, disparate parts of literary memory are brought together from different genres and sources, including Empedocles, into a cohesive whole in elegy, which is governed by love. Since Empedocles theorizes that the universe is driven by love, Ovid also claims that because epic, cosmogony and philosophy – all of which are implicit in the Peri Phuseos – are driven by love, they are appropriate material for the elegist.  
93 According to Bakhtin (1984, 189), we have such double-voiced texts whenever the author inserts “a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own.”
Daedalus, the human *artifex* who so closely resembles the poet in the *Ars Amatoria*,94 with the suggestion that the ultimate creator of grotesque hybridity is the elegiac poet himself, who fuses hexameters and pentameters. In the elegiac couplet, the hexameter looks back to epic, the genre of war and hence of Mars; the pentameter, as the elegiac marker of the couplet, is the expressive medium of love and hence of Venus. Love and strife are the opposing forces in the Empedoclean universe, but they are also the main forces of the elegiac world. We can see this played out in the episode of Vulcan’s entrapment of Venus and Mars, the goddess of love and the god of war, which grows from strife. As in the case of Daedalus, the narrative background of the episode always already includes various grotesque elements. Venus ridiculed Vulcan’s limp, *pedes risisse mariti* (2.567), and mimicked him to entertain her lover Mars, mingling beauty with derision. Since *pedes* is a central term in the metrical vocabulary of poetry, we can already see the elegiac implications of the episode.

When Venus and Mars are caught in the net, they become *spectacula* (2.581) on display, unable to use their hands to cover their faces and *partibus obscenis* (2.584), and objects of ridicule.95 Ovid’s narrative of their ensnarement illustrates the sense of dismay involved when we suddenly move from one realm of experience to another. Harpham describes this phenomenon as an experience of the “interval of confusion” that comes when we first cross boundaries.96 The text puts us in a position to appreciate the

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94 The most elaborate argument in favour of the interpretation of Daedalus as a figure of the poet is Sharrock (1996), chapter 3.
95 Following this episode, Ovid mentions the statue of Cnidian Aphrodite who modestly covers her pudenda, *pubem .../protegitur laeva ...manu* (2.613), which is just what Aphrodite cannot do in the net. Beasts unite in the open, *in medio passimque coit pecus* (2.615), on display, like the two gods caught in the hunting net. People, on the other hand, have sex in secret and under cover of darkness, because they are ashamed. In love there is both physical pleasure and a desire to conceal the physicality of love. In this uneasy combination lies one of the major sources of the elegiac grotesque.
96 Harpham (1982), 20.
experience from the perspective of the characters undergoing it. Until the moment of their
discovery, Mars and Venus regard themselves as making love in privacy, engaged in a
sublime act appropriate to elegy. When they are ensnared they suddenly see themselves
put on display for the entertainment of others. Their desire to cover their nudity and their
inability to do so shows them to be defenseless against the derision of the other gods,
assembled by Vulcan to enjoy the show.

The final spectacle, in which previously powerful gods appear powerless in the
face of mockery, is the grotesque result of Vulcan’s art of entrapment. Vulcan is
indirectly shown to be the impresario of the grotesque. Since the dynamics resemble
those of an elegiac love triangle, Vulcan may be interpreted as the equivalent of the poet-
lover. The fact that Vulcan is a lame-legged god reinforces the parallelism, since that
characteristic recalls the uneven legs of Elegia and hence the limping pentameter of the
couplet of the elegiac poet. Like Vulcan, the parallelism suggests, the elegiac poet is an
impresario of the grotesque.

The Puella between Beauty and the Grotesque in Ars 3

The fiction of Ars 3 is that Ovid, in the guise of a sympathetic praeceptor, teaches
women how to enhance their erotic appeal by covering up their defects and turning
themselves into puellae cultae, capable of attracting and retaining desirous lovers. Cultus
is what enables women to change the roles of the elegiac situation surreptitiously, so that,
by preparing themselves to be sought, they are actually the suitors. In the erotic
encounter, the men do not see the defects concealed by cultus and hence play out their
ostensible role of suitors without realizing that they are sought. As this narrative unfolds,
the readers of *Ars* 3 are offered images of the features that *cultus* hides from the gaze of intended lovers, so that while ostensibly teaching women to conceal unattractive details, the poet exhibits unvarnished images of them to his readers as integral components of his poetry. The lesson imparted by the narrative, in other words, is at odds with the lesson imparted by the poetics presupposed by the poem in which the narrative is contained. The aesthetic material of the poem includes images of ugliness, whose presence is ironically justified by means of a lesson on how not to show one’s own ugliness. The aesthetic narrative principles undermine each other, with the result that the reception process is dialectical and in alignment with contemporary theorization of the grotesque.

The physicality of the *puella* undergirds the images of ugliness as her body is subject to the degradation of age:

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quam cito, me miserum, laxantur corpora rugis
et perit, in nitido qui fuit ore, color,
quasque fussisse tibi canas a virgine iures
spargentur subito per caput omne comae!
anguibus exuitur tenui cum pelle vetustas,
  nec faciunt cervos cornua iacta senes;
(Ars 3.73-78)
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Speaking like a *lena*, the *praeeceptor* of *Ars* 3 advises women to take advantage of their natural good looks while they can because soon they will be ravaged by time. The passage is marked by an expression of compassion in the first person, signaling to the readers that the intended impact of the lines is to provoke a sympathetic response to the effect of the passage of time on a *puella*’s physical beauty. The imagery underscores the rapid (*cito*, 3.73) loss of beauty with age: the sudden loss of postural tone (*laxantur*, 3.73), the disfiguration of the face by signs of aging (*rugis*, 3.73), the disappearance of a youthful complexion (*et perit...color*, 3.74), and the embarrassing graying of a once

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97 On eroticism as an aspect of life experienced exclusively in the present, see Ancona (1994), 58. Cf. similar advice to the *puella* in Propertius, Tibullus and Horace.
beautiful mane of hair (*quasque fuisse tibi canas a virgine iures*, 3.75). The tone of the presentation is contemplative, focused on the static portrait of a *puella* who has grown old, and has nothing especially disturbing or grotesque about it. But as soon as the portrait has been drawn, Ovid introduces snakes into the picture (*anguibus*, 3.77), without signaling to his readers by means of some adverb of comparison that this sinister image is part of a simile. The immediate narrative suggestion is the coalescence of the old *puella* and the menacing snakes, while the contemplative tone of the poem is suddenly shaken by jarring contrast. Snakes, as we have seen elsewhere, are grotesque creatures with the power to overturn conventional images of elegiac beauty by giving them sinister connotations. The snakes, moreover, are not steady like the rest of the picture: old age is cast off (*exuitur*) by them and left behind as a shell of dead skin, yet another grotesque element in the picture.

The image of snakes sloughing off their skins undermines the contemplative portrait of the old *puellae* and confirms the conventionally grotesque definition of their role in elegy. In so far as they are elegiac figures of the beloved, *puellae* are in fact very similar to the snakes. The text on this point is emphatically clear: the skin that the snakes leave behind is *tenuis*, an adjective appropriate to both the elegiac *puella* and the genre.98 Thus, for example, in Tibullus 2.3.53 (*illa gerat vestes tenues, quas femina coa / texuit*) and Propertius 1.2.2 (*tenui coa veste movere sinus*), the adjective *tenuis* is used to describe the *puella*’s Coan silk, an image of the refined Callimachean poetics at the root of the elegiac tradition.99 In his own *Amores*, Ovid uses the adjective to describe the dress

98 Cf. Pichon (1902), 278-79. It is standard vocabulary of the elegists. Cf., e.g., Catul. 89.1; Tib. 1.10.61; Ov. *Am*. 3.1.9.
99 In Tibullus 1.4.35, regarded by Lee (1990,123) as the most Callimachean in the collection, we encounter the image of a snake shedding its skin: *serpens novus exuit annos.*
of Elegia herself (forma decens, vestis tenuissima, 3.1.9) between the two pentameters that mention the unequal length of her feet and describe her notorious limp, which is the distinctive feature of the genre. The snakes tenui cum pelle are elegiac and grotesque creatures at the same time. Elegy can be grotesque just as the grotesque can be elegiac.

A significant internal characteristic of her relationship to the grotesque is constituted by her negative emotions, chief among them anger. Traditional philosophical discussion emphasized the idea that anger was a passion of the soul and, indeed, when uncontrollable, a serious disease of the soul. Ovid has little interest in the souls of his discipulae, however, showing concern only for the deleterious effect of anger on their erotic appeal and hence on their suitability for the role of elegiac mistresses. He instructs them to keep their irascible passion in control at all times, because it is a beastly emotion that can make them very unappealing, and proceeds to show them just how.

...trux decet ira feras.
ora tument ira, nigrescunt sanguine venae,
   lumina Gorgoneo saevius igne micant.
‘i procul hinc,’ dixit; ‘non es mihi, tibia, tanti,’
ut vidit vultus Pallas in amne suos.
vos quoque si media speculum spectetis in ira,
cognoseat faciem vix satis ulla suam. (Ars 3.502-8)

Since for Ovid anger is a passion that befits animals rather than human beings, its expression lowers human beings to the level of beasts, and observing this degradation returns us to the Pasiphaen exemplar of the grotesque. In his statement of the general principle involved, trux decet ira feras (3.502), Ovid stresses the savage nature (trux) of the passion that he has in mind and the ferocious type of animals to which he compares.

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100 Aristotle regards anger (thumos) as a passion of the soul (de An. 403a17-18), but this idea was very common. When the passion was uncontrollable it was regarded as an ailment of the soul, a notion that was a commonplace as early as the age of Athenian tragedy. Cf. Harris (2001, 340). The contemporary philosophers who studied anger in some detail were Philodemus (de Ira), who distinguished positive from negative types of anger, and Cicero (Tusc. IV), who maintains that wisdom and anger are antithetical.
angry women, *feras* being the term for wild beasts. Having stated his major premise, Ovid now offers his readers several grotesque images depicting the physical symptoms of anger: the face swells, the veins become dark lines on it, and the eyes flash. The grotesque dimension of the images is made prominent by the addition of significant details. The inchoative aspect of *nigrescunt* (3.503) designates the onset of the process whereby the veins in the image become black, while the colour black itself signified by the root of the verb carries the association of spilt blood that it had in contemporary usage.\(^{101}\) The angry flashing of the eyes is *Gorgoneo* (3.504), an adjective that recalls the Gorgon, a particularly grotesque female monster of deformity and hybridity. *Gorgoneo* moreover links the image of the fiery eyes to Pallas herself, whose breastplate included the head of the Gorgon. In the next image Pallas, in a fit of anger provoked by the reflection of her face as ugly in a river, casts away her flute because playing it puffed up her cheeks, and so, with the irony typical of the grotesque style, ceases to be ugly as a result of flute playing only to turn uglier as a result of anger (3.505-6). The warning that Ovid issues to the *discipulae* of his art is that they should divest themselves of all that makes them unattractive, just as Pallas got rid of the flute that puffed up her face, but Ovid’s audience should especially avoid anger because its physical effects are repugnant to their lovers.

In his teaching, the poet assumes the part of a *lena*, reversing the gender, in what Gibson calls a “recuperation of her role” from a male perspective.\(^{102}\) Like a *lena*, he instructs girls on how to be alluring, but on the question of anger he changes the intent of the traditional teaching. Whereas the *lena* taught that anger could be useful to the *puella*

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\(^{102}\) Gibson (2003), 20.
in her efforts to control the behaviour of her suitor,\footnote{et quasi laesa prior nonnumquam irascere laeso (Ov. Am. 1.8.79). Propertius’ lena advises the puella to make use of her lover’s fits of anger: si tibi forte comas vexaverit, utlis ira (Prop. 4.5.31).} the praeceptor advises women to avoid anger because the expression of this emotion makes their appearance repugnant to their lovers. The praeceptor, in effect, teaches puellae to adapt themselves to the desires of men, to become what men want them to be. In order to reverse the lena’s teaching, the praeceptor makes use of grotesque imagery and a mythological exemplum. By following this strategy, he is able to undermine his readers’ memory of the lena’s teaching, derived from their familiarity with Tibullus and Propertius as well as his own Amores. The conclusion that he draws from his imagery is that by adapting to the desires of men, the puellae actually follow their natural inclination, since they too, like Pallas, also want physical beauty as an end in itself and not only so that they may be erotically appealing to men. For Ovid’s discipulae the two goals are identical. As a virgin goddess, however, Pallas is a puzzling model for the discipulae to whom the Ars Amatoria is addressed. Unlike a typical elegiac puella, Pallas does not use cosmetics or mirrors. The literary memory with which she reaches Roman elegy includes a passage in Callimachus in which the women who prepare her bath are asked not to bring perfumes, unguents, or mirrors because she has no use for any of them.\footnote{Cf. Call. Lav. Pal. 13-17.} The juxtaposition of a non-elegiac goddess and the elegiac puellae that the praeceptor is trying to fashion illustrates the artificiality and arbitrariness of conventions of beauty and invites crossing the boundaries that separate them.

At the thematic level, the artificiality and arbitrariness of the conventions of beauty are consigned to the seclusion of women’s quarters and to their skill in changing their appearance. The successful pursuit of beauty requires knowledge of the art of
cosmetics and the privacy in which to practice it. The technical principles of the art were collected by the *praecceptor* himself in a little manual to which he dedicated considerable effort (*parvus, sed cura grande, libellus, 3.206*) – viz. the *Medicamina*. By this art women who are not naturally endowed with great beauty are able to create for themselves a mask of beauty that can transform them into the desirable mistresses of elegy. Their art, however, must be practiced in total privacy, since it requires them to apply to their bodies cosmetics that are in themselves disgusting:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{quem non offendat toto faex illita vultu,} \\
\text{cum fluit in tepidos pondere lapsa sinus?} \\
\text{oesypa quid redolent, quamvis mittatur Athenis} \\
\text{demptus ab immundo vellere sucus ovis?} \\
\text{nec coram mixtas cervae sumpsisse medullas,} \\
\text{nec coram dentes defricuisse probem.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(*Ars* 3.211-216)

Taking advantage of the principle that creation of beautiful products at times requires the manipulation of ugliness – *multaque, dum fiunt turpia facta placent* (3. 218) – Ovid justifies the introduction of grotesque details in the use of cosmetics to enhance facial beauty. Once the cosmetics have been applied, the lover sees neither the ugly process nor the disgusting concoctions employed to create an artificial surface of beauty. We have a good sense of the art by which such beauty is created from the surviving portion of the *Medicamina*. The art of applying *medicamina* is first of all an art of dissimulation, and it is successful if the transformative intervention of the artist on the original appearance of his object remains invisible, in the spirit of a doctrine aphoristically enunciated by Ovid as *si latet, ars prodest* (*Ars* 2.313-14).\(^{105}\) Taken both literally, in the sense of materials and technique, and aesthetically, as a reference to the ideal of a seamless creation of

\(^{105}\) A similar principle is expressed by Ovid in *Met.*10.252 with reference to Pygmalion’s statue: *ars adeo latet arte sua.*
beauty, the Ovidian principle presents us with a sophisticated play of simulation and dissimulation. The girl who employs the poet’s cosmetic *ars* to cover up her blemishes, in both the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Medicamina*, is herself the poet’s *scripta puella*, or a product of his poetic *ars*. She was created by his imagination with an awareness of her flaws and with the desire to conceal them in order to please men. As Maria Wyke observes, the beautified body of women was used “as a paradigm and extensive metaphor for the male creative process.” In the art of a *puella’s* cosmetic self-enhancement, in other words, the poet shows us the blemishes and the mask as well as the process by which the latter is created, all as necessary aspects of his poetics. For in order to be useful (*prodest*) in this sense, the cosmetic art must make use of *faex*. Though most commonly understood to refer to the dregs or lees of wine, *faex* here is an offensive substance, and the poet makes sure that we understand that meaning by using the verb *offendere* (*offendat...faex, 3.211*), which signals that an experience of the grotesque is about to come. The *faex* is smeared over the entire face – a descriptive detail that, as Gibson rightly observes, “comically exaggerates the grotesqueness of the sight.” The word *grotesqueness* is probably not intended by Gibson as a technical term, but it is accurate even in our technical sense, since the situation to which it refers includes the ideas of excess and derision, which are central to grotesque theory.

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107 Gibson (2003), *ad loc.* Cf. OLD s.v. *faex*, 1 and 2, but cf. also 3 “contemptuously applied to anything base or sordid.”
108 Horace in the *Ars Poetica* 276-277 uses it for the face paint of actors, *poemata.../ quae canerent agerentque peruncti faecibus ora*. Contra Gibson (2003), 184, who does not consider Horace’s use of the word relevant for Ovid, the idea of a painted face introduces an element of role-playing and constructed appearance germane to the teachings of the *Ars* and indeed to Ovid’s *Amores*.
The literary context of this exaggeration is an anti-cosmetic tradition in which authors ridicule women by describing make-up dripping off their faces. Ovid makes use of this tradition, but not in an anti-cosmetic diatribe – since the women to whom the Ars is addressed are not imagined to be as naturally beautiful as the scriptae puellae of elegy, a reason why, after all, he wrote the Medicamina, to which he refers just before. Ovid’s perspective is similar to Lucretius’ derisive one in the postscena episode of De Rerum Natura. Lucretius and Ovid appear to be saying the same thing, namely that without make-up some women are just not beautiful. As Gibson observes, “Lucretian comedy is latent in Ovid’s advice.” Ovid recommends his Medicamina to women in need of make up to cover up the smell of underarms, to whiten stained teeth, to hide the pallor of their faces, to give profile to their eyes, and to enhance their cheeks with an artificial mole, as in the Senecan anecdote expressive of the Ovidian aesthetics of the grotesque. Ovid uses the anti-cosmetic commonplace in order to introduce grotesque elements into his poem by way of a grotesque reading of literary memory. The painted face of a puella clumsily trying to make herself beautiful with an excess of make-up is presented as if it were an unstable mask, a face grotesquely deformed by its own weight (pondere), partly slipping off the puella’s face and flowing down (fluit) into her chest. As this process occurs, such words as pondere and fluit, which suggest viscosity and movement initiated by the substance itself, invite the reader to picture the puella’s artificial face metamorphosing into distortion and becoming even more grotesque, for as

110 Xen. Oec. 10.8; Plaut. Most. 273-275; Hor. Epod 12.9-12; Mart. 2.41.11-12; Juv. 6.461-464. Ovid also makes use of the commonplace in Rem. 353.
112 est mihi, quo dixi vestrae medicamina formae./ parvus, sed cura grande, libellus, opus (Ars 3.205-206).
113 Discussed in Ch. 1.
114 Gibson (2003), 181.
the make-up drips away it partially reveals the naked skin of her face while filling her cleavage with slimy dregs. The resulting succession of images and the dynamic process by which they are fashioned fully realize the grotesque promise of the verb *offendere* in the previous line.

Focusing our attention directly on the cosmetic, Ovid exacerbates the grotesque by provoking an experience of the sense of abjection. The cosmetic *oesypa* consist of grease derived from uncleaned fleece, *immundo...vellere*, and is notoriously malodorous.\(^\text{115}\) *Immundus* is an adjective of impurity and therefore carries the risk of defilement by filth. As Mary Douglas has shown, filth is what is not allowed in a particular view of the world because it would undermine its logic.\(^\text{116}\) Cosmetics exist in the realm of the ugly, outside the world of conventional beauty of the elegiac mistresses, and appear therefore as a disruptive intrusion of the abject when they come under the gaze of an elegist. *Sucus* and *medulla* as materials of *medicamina* are moreover strong stimuli of grotesque experiences because they denote viscous liquids from within the body of animals. The cosmetics are repulsive, and so is the *puella* while she is using them, even if only to clean her teeth: *nec coram dentes defricuisse probem* (3.216). In his *Remedia* against love, in fact, Ovid asks the lover seeking a cure from love to look at how his beloved spreads repulsive *medicamina* on her face in order to make herself beautiful, for that will surely cure him by revulsion (*Rem.* 351ff). For the *puella* the experience of the grotesque precedes the experience of beauty and is inseparable from it, while her lover’s gaze – if the *puella* has heeded the *praecceptor*’s advice – may not penetrate beyond the surface and may remain untouched by the grotesque. But the poet, by

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\(^\text{115}\) Cf. Gibson (2003, *ad loc.*) who notes that Pliny says that a test for its purity is *ut sordium virus oleat* (*Nat.* 29. 36).

\(^\text{116}\) For this view of filth, see Douglas (1995 [1966]), 4.
inviting us to spy on the *puella* while she prepares her public appearance, provides his readers with sufficient negative imagery to cause in them an aesthetic experience of the grotesque where they would least expect it, that is in a close-up view of a beautiful beloved.

Like the visual effect of a mole on a woman’s face, the impact of that experience is a complex one, since a jarring detail, unattractive in itself, can be strategically deployed to enhance the appeal of its encompassing form, giving the whole a dialectical aesthetic structure that places both the detail and the frame in a more revealing light. As a poet and as a reader of the literary tradition, Ovid maps out different ways of building such dialectical structures within the aesthetic landscape of amatory elegy. In the process he shows that they are all already present in the very premises of the genre and in the literary memory that provides it with much of its *materia*. By actualizing the grotesque potential of elegiac narrative, Ovid explores the composition of elegy on the threshold of its conventions, adhering to them and undermining them at the same time, and always on the verge of disengaging from the genre. His disengagement becomes actual and complete, however, only in the *Remedia Amoris*, where Ovid teaches men how to avoid succumbing to the temptations of elegy by reversing the proportion of the grotesque to the beautiful in the premises of the genre. In the therapeutic aesthetics of the *Remedia Amoris*, as we shall see in the Conclusion, the mole is not meant to enhance the beauty of the face but to mar it, not to enrich the elegiac genre but to enact the closure of its conventions.
Conclusion

In the aesthetic makeup of elegy, the Ovidian anecdote of the mole on the _puella_’s face lays bare the trope as a relatively minor intrusion of the grotesque into the ideal world of conventional beauty, or as a signifier that is purportedly from outside the code of elegy but is actually another of its elements. We have seen such a trope emerge in different guises and with a shocking impact throughout the elegiac tradition, as well as in the love poetry of Catullus and in the philosophical diatribe of Lucretius against the deleterious effects of the passion of love. The grotesque imagination that generates such tropes is prone to see and to reveal, in a more or less shocking manner, that conventions of beauty and love have an unsavoury underside that sooner or later comes into full view to shatter any illusions we may have about the sublimity of love and the aesthetic purity of love poetry. The aesthetic implication of the mole on the _puella_’s face, however, has no shocking value and does not disrupt the background on which it appears: it is so small an imperfection that, while appearing to draw the attention of the viewer onto itself as a point of contrast, it actually refocuses it more intensely on the face, enhancing its erotic appeal. Its function is to incite desire and underscore at the same time that the object of that love is unattainable. The mole on the _puella_’s face is analogous to what Lacanian theory knows as _L’objet petit a_, a small sign of the elusive otherness that frustrates the subject’s desire.\(^1\) In the trope of the mole, the juxtaposition of ugliness to beauty has

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\(^1\) _L’objet petit a_ refers to a fundamental concept of Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory of desire, developed over several years in various works. See, e.g., Lacan (1981), 67-122. The _objet petit a_ is the “fascinatory
been deprived of all disruptive force and transformed into a refined form of the grotesque, a decorative enrichment of the context in which it is framed and an enhancement of its aesthetic import.

It hints more darkly, however, at more grotesque features than a single blemish. In the *Remedia Amoris* Ovid explores the elegiac grotesque from the perspective not of small to large but large to small. A work whose aesthetic character displays only a few and unshocking traces of grotesque aesthetics on its textual surface, the *Remedia* instructs elegiac lovers in its narrative content to train their imagination to relate to the world of love through a grotesque paradigm of perception. The *praecceptor* advises the elegiac lover to think of his beloved’s deeds as those of a *scelerata puella* (*Rem.* 299), thereby linking them to the morally defiling grotesque. He should watch his *puella* trying to cover up her blemishes with *medicamina*, especially when the awful-smelling *oesypum* drips from her cheeks to her bosom, which should be enough to push him away from her: *stomacho nausea facta meo est* (*Rem.* 356). He asks the lover to fix his eyes on her faults, *luminaque in vitiis illius usque tene* (*Rem.* 418), in accordance with the grotesque principle of physical degradation that we have seen in various forms throughout the elegiac tradition. And he suggests the therapeutic advantage of spying on her privacy, *reddente obscena puella* (*Rem.* 437). Such actions have therapeutic value because they train the elegiac lover to picture his beloved through a filter designed to make her appear repellent. By following this routine the lover who wishes to unburden himself of his elegiac love will endow himself with a grotesque imagination capable of thwarting his passion and driving him away from his beloved.

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Element introduced by the gaze” (118). For a discussion of its development and significance see Dosse (1997) 242-247.
While it is meant to generate grotesque images in the mind of the lover, the therapeutic routine itself is not textualized in an especially grotesque way. In comparison with occurrences of grotesque imagery in the elegiac corpus, the grotesque content of the Remedia is scarce and devoid of mordacity. Such are, for example, the quick references to Amor flying with maimed wings (*debilibus pinnis*, *Rem.* 198), and to an old love as a badly healed wound (*male firma cicatrix*, *Rem.* 623) that may reopen at the sight of the beloved, in neither of which Ovid indulges at all. Among the most grotesque images is that of a bed soiled in lovemaking: *vidit in immundo signa pudenda toro* (*Rem.* 432).\(^2\)

The emphasis, however, is not on so much on the aesthetic shock of the image viewed against more conventional views of the elegiac bed, as on the sense of disgust that is desirable for the lover to feel who wishes to relieve himself of the passion of love. The fact that the image is reported as seen by a character distances it from the reader and attenuates considerably the grotesque experience that it can provoke in the reading process. The reader identifies with the *praecceptor*, who quotes such examples without registering the impact of the grotesque on himself or attempting to generate the sense of a grotesque aesthetic experience in the reader. Because it is reported, the grotesque image is at one remove from the immediate experience of consciousness in the reading process. The *Remedia* is cast as a set of instructions designed to cure elegiac lovers from their affliction by means of induced grotesque experiences without, however, generating the same sensation of the grotesque in the reader, who remains essentially a reader of conventional elegiac verse. The inference that we may draw from this observation is that Ovid safeguards for his reader an aspect of the conventional elegiac experience by the very gesture in which he totally destroys it for the elegiac lover. The reader of the

\(^2\) Cf. also Prop. 2.29 for this image.
Remedia does not identify with the lover. It is the elegiac lover who is sick, and not the reader of elegy. The elegiac lover needs to be turned away from love; the reader of elegy does not need to be turned away from elegy. Elegy will disappear from the page as soon as the elegiac lover is cured of his malady. In his therapeutic instructions, Ovid revisits the basic themes of elegiac poetry, making use of the grotesque as a form of therapy in what is in essence an elegiac diatribe against elegiac love from within elegy itself. The grotesque is the aesthetic instrument of Ovid’s approach to the malady that afflicts elegiac lovers, who had become afflicted by the grotesque the moment they fell in love, given that elegiac love has an inalienable grotesque underside. The malady becomes the source of its own cure.

The tradition that love can give rise to psychological and biological disorders is long and complex, reaching from remote antiquity to the present. The discussion most relevant to the elegists, however, remained that of Lucretius. We have seen that in his diatribe against love in the De Rerum Natura, Lucretius unleashes a powerful grotesque imagination, endowing it with the gravitas of his philosophy, against the type of love that was to furnish the elegists with basic thematic substance for their poetry. Writing the Remedia a generation later, Ovid assumes a perspective on elegiac love reminiscent of Lucretius, but whereas Lucretius was writing outside the boundaries of elegy, by chronology as well as choice of genre, Ovid is an elegist and writes from within its conventions. Nonetheless, Ovid shares with Lucretius the premise that, if one desires to be cured from the affliction, it is best to start the treatment at the onset of the symptoms: opprime, dum nova sunt, subiti mala semina morbi (Rem. 81). In this line the echo of Lucretius is strong. Semina is the Lucretian term for the generating elements of all things,
both biological and figurative,⁴ and the fact that these seeds of disease are *nova* recollects the Lucretian reference to new wounds, *vulnera ... recentia* (4. 1071), which must also be treated quickly upon the onset of love in order to prevent them from getting infected. The allusion is as flippant as it is clear, however, for the line also recalls the wound that the Ovidian poet-lover anticipates receiving when, speaking as a captive in Amor’s triumph, he imagines himself as the fresh prey of love: *ipse ego, praeda recens, factum modo vulnus habebo* (*Am.* 1.2.29).⁴ The parallel with Lucretius and the reference to the *Amores* suggests the argument that the wounds of love we find in Lucretius, a generation before they become the ground of the elegiac scenario at the beginning of the genre’s history, have been allowed to fester in the elegiac tradition and to become a *morbus* in need of therapy. Once the seeds of love poetry took root in Roman culture, they flourished in the works of the all the elegists. But in the *Remedia Amoris* Ovid evokes Lucretius only to tell us that the elegists’ pursuit of the possibilities of the genre was a morbid process. This verges on saying that the constitutive elements of elegiac poetry have virtually exhausted treatment in the genre except as grotesque imagery and now require a radically new treatment. Such a treatment for Ovid is to offer a narrative of an anti-elegiac cure drawn from within the substance of elegy, without, however, foregrounding for his reader the grotesque experience meant to be felt by the elegiac lover.

Lucretius employs abundant grotesque imagery in his clinical diatribe against love. Ovid pretends to offer a diatribe against elegiac love, not by displaying his own ability to generate grotesque text, but by asking the elegiac lover to think in a grotesque

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⁴ Cf. Lucr. 1.500-502: *esse ea quae solido atque aeterno corpore constent, / semina quae rerum primordiisque esse docemus, / unde omnes rerum nunc constet summa creatae.*  
⁴ But cf. *Am.* 1.2.29, and see also *Am.* 1.2.44: *vulnera multa dabis.*
manner when he approaches questions of love. While for Lucretius love is a passion, for
Ovid it is both passion and the process associated with it, and since that wooing process
is recorded in love poetry, love is also the discourse textualized in that poetry. The
elegiac poet-lover woos his beloved and must retain her with his verses. Ovid’s diatribe
against elegiac love is therefore also a criticism of elegiac poetry, from within that poetry
itself. Ovid is pointedly paradoxical in his logic and flippant in his attitude towards
Lucretius. By mockingly assuming a Lucretian stance, he ridicules the seriousness of
Lucretian didacticism. The Ars Amatoria may be read as an attempt to undo the teaching
of Lucretius’ diatribe, while the Remedia can be read as a work analogous to it, but both
trivialize the seriousness of Lucretius’s philosophical stance. Lucretius is lofty in
purpose, genre and style as befits epic verse; Ovid is frivolous in all of them as befits
elegiac verse.

Lucretius pokes gentle fun at the nicknames that lovers, caught up in their love,
use when they speak about their beloveds, whom they see as much more beautiful than
they actually are. Lovers do not want to see any faults in their beloveds and therefore,
without being fully cognizant of what they are doing, transform them into sublime
creatures: a dark girl is honey-coloured, nigra ‘melichrus’ est (Lucr.4.1160), while a fat
and heavy-breasted woman is the goddess Ceres herself, at tumida et mammosa ‘Ceres’
est (Lucr. 4.1168). Lucretius speaks as a scientist, persuaded that he can determine the
essence by dispassionate observation, and then lays bare the inaccuracy of the
descriptions given by lovers from their passionate perspective. Lucretius does not apply
the principle to himself, but when he speaks of lovers he says that they are unable to
transcend the linguistic limitations of their passion. They willingly trap themselves in a
euphemistic vocabulary that names beauty without mentioning defects, a vocabulary that functions as a paradigm for the idealizing perception of the beloved. Ovid reverses Lucretius’ teaching, asking those lovers who are sick with love to move into the domain of a pejorative vocabulary and to force themselves to undo the effects of the idealizing language of lovers, using such words as fat instead of full-bodied and black instead of dark: *turgida, si plena est, si fusca est, nigra vocetur* (Rem. 327). Ovid is more keenly aware of the conditioning power of lovers’ language because his own discourse on love is, as we have seen, a discourse on discourses on love. Unlike Lucretius, for whom the grotesque is a way of inspiring in lovers the desire to liberate themselves from the illusory power of their euphemistic language, Ovid asks elegiac lovers to move from one vocabulary to another, thereby inverting the values of their language of love but retaining a secure discursive space for his praeceptor-in-verse.

The aesthetic significance of the grotesque is that the elegiac code includes a few signifiers – the signifiers of the grotesque – that simulate foreignness of origin, in that they appear to intrude into the elegiac domain from somewhere beyond its boundary, while expressing ideas that are in fact generated entirely by the same code. Starting with this aesthetic premise and a narrative scenario in which unfulfilled desire figures as an apparently incurable malady, Ovid expresses in his *Remedia* a version of the genre in which the constitutive elements of its code have been played out in many permutations. The *Remedia* assumes a therapeutic stance with respect to both the afflicted lover and the elegist, teaching the one how to “unlearn” his behaviour as a lover and the other how to attempt the ultimate permutation of the elegiac scenario, a permutation in which the

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5 As Conte (1989,459) observes, playing the part of an elegiac lover means “putting on the costume of the lover of elegy, that is, of a character whose part is already written in the pages of the elegiac poets.”
narrative premise is turned upon itself. Ovid’s therapeutic turn is an analytical exercise meant to persuade the lover that the object of his desire is nothing but an illusion, a projection of the elegiac code devoid of substance. The therapy is to nullify that projection by contemplating the unsavoury images that it conceals.

The possibility for such a disruption of illusory beauty has always been there, since grotesque elements occasionally assume centre stage throughout the history of elegy. What distinguishes the Remedia is that the praeceptor teaches the elegiac lover to assume a grotesque perspective while viewing his puella in order to undermine her erotic appeal, and the elegist that it is possible to write elegy even while conceiving the elegiac scenario through the filter of grotesque aesthetics. The purport of the lover’s traversal of fantasy for the poetics of elegy is that in order to liberate the lovesick imagination from the strictures of the elegiac code that generate his desire, it is not necessary for the poet to look for signifiers beyond the code itself. What is necessary, rather, is to assume a different attitude from within the code itself, changing the objet petit a from a signifier of foreignness, which is what it is in the Senecan anecdote, to a signifier of simulated foreignness generated by the code itself. The elegiac code signifies all instances of the presumption of foreignness that are found in elegy because it generates them. What lies beyond elegy is inaccessible to the elegiac imagination. The impact of such a transformation is to dissolve the surface elegance of elegiac convention and reveal the

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6 To “unlearn” elegiac love is an expression borrowed from Rosati (2006), who stresses that for the elegiac lover it is not a matter of forgetting what he has already learned from the Ovidian praeceptor in the Ars, but a matter of “unlearning” the behaviour that he has acquired from it while holding on to his literary memory. On the function of literary memory in the Remedia, see also Hardie (2006).

7 The Lacanian traversal of fantasy is applicable to the sick elegiac lover, who finds that the object of his desire has no real existence, and not to the reader of elegy, concerning whom Ovid is unwilling to make the final sacrifice by denying the aesthetic value of the genre. In fact the traversal does not remove the reader from the realm of elegiac poetry but takes him to a form of elegy that merely inverts the vocabulary of love. Ovid pretends that his praeceptor has a therapeutic function with respect to the elegiac lover but no more than a teaching or critical function with respect to the lover of elegiac verse.
unappealing underside of elegiac desire, almost as if that underside came from outside the
genre.

In order to realize this reversal and yet remain within the genre, Ovid advances
the claim that he is as good a praeceptor of the art of provoking erotic feelings as he is of
the art of deterring them. His perspective is effectively summarized in a single line:
discite sanari per quem didicistis amare (Rem. 43).8 The manner of his teaching is that
of a doctor with a cure for a disease. The art of deterring elegiac love is presented
medically as a form of healing, while love is depicted as a psychological disorder from
which the lover seeks to be cured. The instruments of the cure are the principles of
grotesque aesthetics. The poet asks his lovesick patient to focus his imagination on the
defects of his beloved to the point that they become for him all pervasive and
overshadow any elegance and refinement that she may actually have. Precisely how
grotesque the images are in the lover’s mind when he undergoes Ovid’s anti-elegiac
treatment we cannot say, because, ironically, in the text of the Remedia Ovid does not
indulge in the grotesque. Nonetheless he claims that his treatment is effective. If the
mythical heroes and heroines known for succumbing to love were to read his Remedia,
they would all be cured of their malady (Rem. 55-68). Even Pasiphae, who is not seeking
any kind of therapeutic aid but wants only to fulfill her desire, would cease to love a bull
if she were to become acquainted with the Remedia. The implication here is that Ovid’s
teachings are so powerful that, by reading his verses, she would desist from committing
her grotesque act of bestiality. Ironically his teaching is that, in order for her to fall out of
her grotesque love, she should approach the beloved through a grotesque-inducing filter.

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8 But cf. also Rem. 71-72: Naso legendus erat tum, cum didicistis amare: / idem nunc vobis Naso legendus erit.
The circularity of the logic indicates that we remain unable to escape the closure of the elegiac code, even when we appear to do so. The *Remedia* is in fact a work in which the grotesque imagination is recommended to the lover who wants to distance himself from his beloved, but the grotesque aesthetic is not actually instantiated in the poem.\(^9\)

The treatment of lovesickness by means of an imagination trained to generate a sense of the grotesque is an ambivalent project, referring simultaneously to the narrative content of elegy and to the aesthetics of the genre. On the latter level we observe that lovesickness is a metaphor for the state of the elegiac discourse on love. The principle that illness tends to be transformed into a metaphorical vehicle for non-medical preoccupations is familiar to modern critics from Sontag’s theoretical analysis of the phenomenon.\(^10\) Here, however, it gives way to a counterpoint image, in which the conventions of the elegiac discourse on love are treated as if they were a metaphor for clinical lovesickness, as if the strategy for curing the latter were indeed the author’s real preoccupation. Ovid’s critique of the elegiac genre is figured as the treatment of a psychological illness by means of the grotesque. This approach works well in the *Remedia* because it enables Ovid to use the language of illness and therapy in a sustained and coherent way throughout his narrative, while making it clear that his primary intent is to offer a critique of the conventions of elegy and of the literary expectations to which they have given rise. Narratively the *Remedia* posits itself as a cure for elegiac love articulated from a mock-didactic Lucretian posture, but aesthetically it speaks to the nature of the genre from the perspective of a sophisticated practitioner of elegy. In this context, a fundamental aspect of the therapy prescribed is to stop reading love poetry:

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\(^9\) That is, instead of a *poetic mole*, which we might conceive of as a purposely designed artistic imperfection, like an instance of noise in music, we have only the word *mole*.
teneros ne tange poetas (Rem. 757). The praeceptor’s catalogue of proscribed poets includes Callimachus, Philetas, Sappho, Anacreon, Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid himself, whose poetry resonates with a certain nescio quid that links him directly to Gallus (Rem. 765).  

11 In the world of elegy contemplated by the Remedia, Love poetry has a contaminating effect and can only exacerbate the malady of love while intensifying its grotesque dimension. Ovid issues his warning with a telling imperative, ne tange, in which the experience of touching, that is of bodily contact, figures as a metaphor for the reading process. The sexual overtones introduced into the warning by means of this metaphor resonate well with the emphasis on physicality central to grotesque poetics and presupposed by the concept of love as a spreadable disease. Moreover, by rhetorically grounding the reading of elegy in the sense of touch, Ovid evokes the idea of Lucretian simulacra emerging from his words, as if through his poetic language one could actually touch the substantive world on the other side of the elegiac imagination. The Lucretian overtones of the metaphor of touch both reinforce the impression of material existence and remind us that the source of that impression is the elegiac code itself.

The fact that Catullus is missing from the list is an indication that, in Ovid’s perception, he is in a category of his own. Ovid had already made clear in Amores 3.9 that Catullus’s poetry was so closely related to that of the elegists as to include him in the company of Calvus and Gallus in the group of poets invoked to welcome the soul of

11 Callimachum fugito, non est inimicus Amori, et cum Callimacho tu quoque, Coe, noci. me certe Sappho meliorem fecit amicae, nec rigidos mores Teia Musa dedit. carmina quis potuit tuto legisse Tibulli vel tua, cuius opus Cynthia sola fuit? quis poterit lecto duros discedere Gallo? et mea nescioquid carmina tale sonant.

(Rem. 759-766)
Tibullus to the abode of the dead (*Am. 3.9.61-64*). The omission of Catullus from the list of the *teneri poetae* of the *Remedia* suggests that reading his poetry is not as dangerous an exercise for lovesick men. One reason for this may well be that Catullus has such an abundance of crass detail that, however refined and neoteric his depiction of love may be, he has already set in place grotesque safeguards against the temptation of further desire. The Catullan grotesque abounds in images of coarse physicality and punitive degradation that expose the lurid underside of love and love lyric, which emerge as both defiled and defiling. Love crawls like a hungry worm in the lover’s body. Catullus forcefully ushers into the domain of Latin love poetry a shockingly coarse form of the grotesque, showing that it does not come from outside the code but from within it. The expressive code of love and lovers consists of signifiers with two dialectically-linked domains of signification, one conventionally beautiful and light the other dark and shockingly grotesque.

Catullus stands on the margins of elegy, whose formal development as a genre owes much to the boldness of his sensual imagery and the refinement of his metrical craft, but it is perhaps that very boldness that keeps him out of Ovid’s catalogue of *teneri poetae*. Elegy was not completely open to the more lurid aspects of his grotesque. Unlike Catullus, however, Propertius is a tender poet in the full sense of the adjective, even in his harshest grotesque. In order to reveal the grotesque dimension of the elegiac code, he skillfully manipulates details of narrative and the suggestive power of literary memory. Propertius thereby articulates a grotesque ethos in which conventional signifiers of beauty and love can also signify the grotesque. The grotesque disturbs the interpretive focus of his readers and overturns their expectations of ideal sentiment. In the revelation
of this double capacity to signify the beautiful and the grotesque, Propertius exhibits a
dialectical poetics of elegy in which the beautiful incorporates the grotesque, in an
aesthetic domain of occasionally uneasy ambivalence.

Tibullus explores the poetics of ambivalence from the perspective of its narrative
potential for the elegiac scenario mostly by means of self-echo and self-allusion. For
example, he focuses the attention of the reader on the lurid aspects of a curse in elegy 1.5
and then uses the power of ambivalent signification to recollect it later in 2.6, so that the
grotesque details become an essential component of the episode and thereby of his genre
at the end of the collection. By means of this narrative approach to the grotesque,
Tibullus strategically affirms the implicit significance of this aesthetic as his collection
draws to a close. There he engages the reader in a self-allusive exercise that leads to the
discovery of grotesque signs concealed and yet illuminated by poetic convention. The
grotesque emerges from the text when the reader accepts the challenge to read Tibullus’
own self-citation. By means of this technique, Tibullus accomplishes what we may call
the elegiacization of the grotesque.

When he asks his lovesick readers to stop reading all the elegists, himself
included, Ovid performs a grand gesture of disengagement by which he appears to extract
himself from the genre and to pass judgment on it from the outside. But he does so from
within an elegiac form, feigning a declaration of the end of the genre from within. With
this gesture, Ovid documents elegy’s thematization of its own end and instructs his
readers how to foreclose the elegiac tradition. The direct recipients of his instruction are
elegiac lovers, the genre’s raison d’être, and so, the praeceptor’s argument goes, if such
lovers are retrained to seek self-transformation into other generic characters, elegy will
lose its reason for being and naturally annihilate itself. But just as the poet does not extract himself from the genre, neither does he extract its main character from it, or import into it grotesque images and narrative motifs from beyond the boundary of its conventions. All signifiers, grotesque and otherwise, are generated by the elegiac code, and all gestures are performed in the domain of the genre, now brought to so high a level of sophistication that it can be made to appear to plot its own demise through the instrumentality of the grotesque aesthetics hidden in its code.
Abbreviations of the names of classical authors and works follow or are more complete than Liddell-Scott-Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* and Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Periodical titles are abbreviated according to the system of *L'Année philologique*. The following abbreviations may be noted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Author(s) and Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>OCT</td>
<td>Oxford Classical Text</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teubner</td>
<td>Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana</td>
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________. (forthcoming) “Lycoris Galli / Volumnia Cytheris: The Roman Traffic in Greek Courtesans”


__________ (1912b) “Rejoinder to Mr. Postgate,” *AJP* 33: 456-60.


