

THE GROTESQUE IN ROMAN LOVE ELEGY

Roman elegy makes frequent use of themes of ugliness and disfigurement, juxtaposing them 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. This book explores the theme of corporeal, intellectual, and social degradation from a perspective attentive to the aesthetic significance of the grotesque imagery with which such degradation is accomplished. Although there has been sophisticated discussion of the use of grotesque imagery in genres like comedy, invective, and satire, which are concerned in part with themes of transgression and excess, Mariapia Pietropaolo demonstrates that the grotesque plays a significant role in the self-definition of love elegy, the genre in which it is least expected.

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Mariapia Pietropaolo
Frontmatter
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For Laura and Domenico

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Preface

This book is a study of the aesthetic function of grotesque imagery in Roman love elegy, and it was conceived in the wake of recent interest in the aesthetics of antiquity. It is the first study of its kind in the field of Roman love elegy. It seeks to fill a genuine gap in the study of elegy and aims to open a new area of inquiry in the field. It explores from an aesthetic perspective the themes of ugliness and revulsion through which the elegists occasionally uncover the dark underside of love, in a context of refined beauty and sentiment. This is the essence of the elegiac grotesque. In order to overcome obstacles to his erotic relationship, the poet-lover of elegy routinely represents his rivals and opponents in such a way as to ridicule their appearance and to degrade their social standing. He accomplishes this by having systematic recourse to the aesthetics of the grotesque.

The Grotesque in Roman Love Elegy focuses on the theme of corporeal, intellectual, and social degradation in the elegiac corpus from the vantage point of its aesthetic of grotesque imagery, showing how and why the simultaneous occurrence of feelings of repugnance and admiration is a fundamental aesthetic premise of the genre. The book as a whole demonstrates that grotesque and refined imagery constitute the polarities of a dialectic – epistemological and ontological as well as artistic – that is at the core of Roman love elegy.

Though as an aesthetic concept, rather than as a social or a natural phenomenon, the grotesque is more familiar to scholars working in the visual arts, it also plays an important role in literature. In some genres, such as satire and broad comedy, the presence of the grotesque may be readily presumed and appreciated, while in other genres, such as love poetry, its presence is less expected and its aesthetic role more difficult to justify. Such a justification is one of the contributions to scholarship that forms the aim of this book. It builds on classical scholarship on the body and the physicality of the human passions as well as on insights derived from modern and ancient aesthetic and literary theory.

The motivation behind this book is threefold: recent and current interest in ancient aesthetics and in the theory of grotesque realism in Roman literature; the fact that classical scholars have tended to focus their studies of the grotesque on satire and comedy but not on elegy; and the fact that the aesthetic role of the non-beautiful has not yet been studied in any detail with regard to elegy. The book is intended as a contribution to our understanding of elegy from the perspective of grotesque aesthetics, a perspective that can bring into clear focus the role of ugliness in the aesthetic logic of complex visions of art and its domain.

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In my research and writing, I benefited greatly from a postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Ancient Mediterranean Studies at the University of Missouri, and I am pleased to express heartfelt thanks to all of my colleagues. I am especially grateful to Sean Gurd and Raymond Marks for their reading of various parts of my manuscript, for their sharp but always constructive criticism, and for their thoughtful advice. I am also deeply indebted to Barbara Price Wallach for her friendship and stimulating conversations about my project.

In the Department of Classics of McMaster University, where I am now based, all of my colleagues have contributed in some way to my completion of this work. I am grateful to all of them for their friendly support and collegial encouragement. I would also like to thank Barbara Scarfo for her meticulous and diligent work as a research assistant.

At Cambridge University Press, I owe a debt of gratitude to Michael Sharp for his help and advice throughout the submission process, as well as to Hal Churchman, Caroline Morley, and the other members of the production team for their assistance, and Lesley Hay for copy-editing the manuscript. Most of all, I am grateful to the two anonymous scholars who reviewed my manuscript for the Press. I thank them for their careful reading of the text, for their critical insight and for their valuable

recommendations, all of which have enabled me to clarify and strengthen my argument in various parts of the book.

My deepest gratitude is for my parents for all their love and understanding. To them I dedicate the book.

Abbreviations

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:

DK	Diels, H. and Kranz, W. (1952) <i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker</i> . Berlin.
Ernout– Meillet	Ernout, A. and Meillet, A. (1959) <i>Dictionnaire etymologique de la langue latine, histoire des mots</i> . 4th edn. Paris
Lewis and Short	Lewis, C. T. and Short, C. (1879) <i>A Latin Dictionary</i> . Oxford.
LSJ	Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., and Jones, H. S. (1940) <i>A Greek–English Lexicon</i> . 9th edn. Oxford.
OCT	Oxford Classical Text
OLD	Glare, P. G. W. (ed.) (1968–1982). <i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i> . Oxford.
Pf.	Pfeiffer, R. (1949–1953) <i>Callimachus</i> , 3 vols., Oxford.
Teubner	Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana
TLL	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i> . (1900–). Leipzig.

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