The Recurring Grotesque in Ovid’s *Amores*

1: *Amores* 1.5.19-23:
quos umeros, quales vidi tetigique lacertos!  
   forma papillarum quam fuit apta premi!  
   quam castigato planus sub pectore uenter!  
   quantum et quale latus! quam iuuenale femur!  
singula quid referam? nil non laudabile uidi

2: *Amores* 2.13.1-2:  
Dum labefactat onus grauidi temeraria uentris,  
in dubio uitae lassa Corinna iacet.

3: *Amores* 2.13.19-24:  
tuque laborantes utero miserata puellas  
   quorum tarda latens corpora tendit onus  
   lenis ades precibusque meis faue, Ilithyia:  
   digna est, quam iubeaes muneris esse tui.  
ipse ego tura dabo fumosis candidus aris,  
ipse feram ante tuos munera uota pedes.

4: *Amores* 2.14.13-20:  
quis Priami fregisset opes, si numen aquarum  
   iusta recusat pondera ferre Thetis?  
Ilia si tumido geminos in uentre necasset,  
   casurus domiae conditor Urbis erat;  
si Venus Aenean grauida temerasset in aluo,  
   Caesaribus tellus orba futura fuit.  
tu quoque, cum posses nasci formosa, perisses,  
temptasset, quod tu, si tua mater opus.  

5: *Amores* 2.14.37-42  
at tenerae faciunt, sed non inpune, puellae;  
saepe, suos utero quae necat, ipsa perit  
ipsa perit, ferturque rogula resoluta capillos,  
et clamant ‘merito’ qui modo cumque uident.  
ista sed aetherias vanescant dicta per auras,  
et sint ominibus pondea nulla meis.

Peter Green’s translations:  
Smooth shoulders, delectable arms (I saw, I touched them),  
Nipples inviting caresses, the flat  
Belly outlined beneath that flawless bosom,  
Exquisite curve of a hip, firm youthful thighs.  
But why catalogue details? Nothing came short of perfection

Corinna got pregnant– and rashly tried an abortion.  
Now she’s lying in danger of her life.

[...] and your compassion  
For girls in labor is well-known.  
Ilithyia, Goddess of Childbirth, hear my entreaties, save her–  
She’s worth it, truly. Just say the word,  
And I’ll robe myself in white, burn incense on your smoking  
Altar, lay at your feet the gifts I vowed.

Who would have cracked Priam’s might if the sea-goddess Thetis  
Had refused to carry her load?  
Had Ilia ripped those twins from her swollen belly  
Our City’s Founder would have been lost.  
Had Venus aborted the unborn Aeneas, no Caesars today would  
Exist in the world. You too  
Would have perished, your beauty still embryonic, had your  
Mother attempted the same game.

Yet tender young girls do this– though not with impunity: often  
The uterine murderess dies herself,  
Dies, and is carried out for cremation, hair, all disheveled,  
To cries of ‘Serve her right!’ from the passers-by.  
May these utterances of mine be scattered down the wind, and  
No weight attach to such ill-omened words!
6: Amores 2.15
Anule, formosae digitum uincture puellae,
in quo censendum nil nisi dantis amor,
munus eas gratum; te laeta mente receptum
proutinus articulis inductu illa suis.
tam bene conuenias quam mecum conuenit illi,
et digitum iusto commodus orbe teras.
felix, a domina tractaberis, anule, nostra:
inuideo donis iam miser ipse meis.
o utinam fieri subito mea munera possem
artibus Aeaeae Carpathiue senis!
tunc ego, cum cupiam
elabor digitu quamuis angustus et haerens,
inque sinum mira laxus ab arte cadam.
idem ego, ut arcanas possim signare tabellas,
non ego dedecori tibi sum, mea uita, futurus,
quodue tener digitus ferre recuset
me gere, cum calidis perfundes imbribus artus,
damnaque sub gemmam perfer euntis aquae.
irrita quid uoueo? paruum proficiscere munus;
illa datam tecum sentiat esse fidem.

Ring of mine, made to encircle my pretty mistress’ finger,
Valuable only in terms of the giver’s love,
Go, and good welcome! May she receive you with pleasure
Slip you over her knuckle there and then.
May you fit her as well as she fits me, rub snugly
Around her finger, precisely the right size!
Lucky ring to be handled by my mistress! I’m developing
A miserable jealously of my own gift.

But suppose I could be the ring, transformed in an instant by
some famous magician’s art–
Then, when I felt like running my hand down Corinna’s
Dress, and exploring her breasts, I’d work
Myself off her finger (tight squeeze or not) and by crafty
Cunning drop into her cleavage. Let’s say
She was writing a private letter – I’d have to seal it,
And a dry stone sticks on wax:
She’d moisten me with her tongue. Pure bliss – provided
I didn’t have to endorse any hostile remarks

Against myself. If she wanted to put me away in her jewel-
Box, I’d cling tighter, refuse to budge.
(Don’t worry, my sweet, I’d never cause you discomfort or burden
Your slender finger with an unwelcome weight.)
Wear me whenever you take a hot shower, don’t worry
If water runs under your gem –
Though I fancy the sight of you naked would rouse my
Passions, leave me ring of visibly virile parts…
Pure wishful thinking! On your way, then, little present,
And show her you come with all my love.