

Grotesque



(1) This term originated from oddly shaped ornaments found within Roman dwellings, or grottoes, during the first century. From a literary standpoint, this term implies a mutation of the characters, plants and/or animals. This mutation transforms the normal features and/or behaviors into veritable extremes that are meant to be frightening and/or disturbingly comic (Cornwell 273). Example: An example of the term grotesque can be found within the short story “Rappaccini’s Daughter.” Within the tale, the flowers found within the garden of the inventor have been mutated into beautiful harbingers of death. While the physical features of the plants have grown more exquisite, their interior workings have become a frightening caricature of normal plant-life.

(2) The term grotesque also defines a work in which two separate modes, comedy and tragedy, are mixed. The result is a disturbing fiction wherein comic circumstances prelude horrific tragedy and vice versa.

Example: Within the short story “Revelation,” penned by Flannery O’Connor, the author blends the comic aspects of the conversation between the two elder women within the tragic appearance and anger of the young girl. Comedy and tragedy continue to mix throughout the tale as the elder woman, Mrs. Turpin, comes to discover the “true” nature of God as a result of the young woman’s outburst. A perfect example of the grotesquely sublime is her heavenly vision while standing in the hog-pen.

Works Cited

Cornwell, Neil. “Grotesque.” *Handbook to Gothic Literature*. Ed. Marie Mulvey-Roberts. New York: NYUP, 1998. 273.

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