

Ortonesque / Carnavalesque: The Grotesque Realism of Joe Orton

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[Joe Orton's] nonconformity was carried to a much greater extent than that of Shakespeare or Cervantes, who merely disobeyed the narrow classical forms. [Orton's] images have a certain undestroyable nonofficial nature. No dogma, no authoritarianism, no narrow-minded seriousness can coexist with [Ortonesque] images; these images are opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook.¹

Although Mikhail Bakhtin is commenting in this passage upon the work of Françoise Rabelais, Bakhtin's comments adopt a particular currency in the field of contemporary British drama if the name of Joe Orton is substituted for that of Rabelais. Bakhtin appears to anticipate the profound challenge and revolutionary tenor of Orton's drama: a nonconformity within the sphere of both dramatic convention and normative morality; a nonofficial anti-authoritarianism; an opposition to pomposity and the prevailing norms of thought and world outlook. But since Bakhtin views Rabelais as a quintessential revolutionary, this fortuitous accord between Orton and Rabelais would seem a small curiosity, a mere trick of name substitution, were it not for the tremendous potential of Bakhtin's study to illuminate the particular nature of Orton's drama. The preeminent concepts that emerge from Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*—the carnivalesque and grotesque realism—have a striking congruence with the drama of Joe Orton, and while I am not arguing that Orton's drama can be described only in terms of the carnivalesque and grotesque realism, I am suggesting that these two Bakhtinian concepts provide a conceptual vocabulary through which the combined aesthetic and political properties of Orton's drama can be concisely and precisely articulated.²

The Bakhtinian insight is important to an appraisal of Orton's work because even the most cursory survey of Orton criticism reveals a certain anxiety about the particular generic status of Orton's drama. Much Orton criticism tends

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to consider Orton's work within the context of farce. However, the critics who consider Orton as a *farceur* realize that the etymology of "farce" as "extraneous stuffing" and its consequent dramatic legacy as "light entertainment"³ cannot adequately describe the dark and at times sinister aspects of the Ortonesque; the content of Orton's apparently farcical plays is anything but the traditional material of farce:

Where Feydeau has flirtation, Orton has rape; where Feydeau has sexual misadventure, Orton has incest. In Feydeau sensibilities are offended, in Orton physical injuries are sustained. Feydeau's characters are driven to comic despair and momentary desperation, Orton's are driven to madness and death.⁴

In an attempt to reconcile farce and the Ortonesque, a number of critics have attempted to modify the traditional definition of farce: Charney suggests "Quotidian Farce"⁵; Bigsby argues for "Anarchic Farce"⁶; Dean proposes what might be called "Dionysian Farce."⁷ Although these critics differ in how they define Ortonesque farce, they share the conviction that Orton's drama invokes the conventions of farce only to violate those conventions. Thus, they argue, Orton creates the genre of farce anew. This new Ortonesque farce is formed, in part, by the doubly transgressive elements of Orton's dramas: their dark comic vision and their undeniable political nature. Both of these elements violate the traditional definition of farce as "light entertainment designed solely to provoke laughter," and the critics who discuss Orton as a *farceur* consequently face the task that Bakhtin faces when reading Rabelais: "To be understood he requires an essential reconstruction of our entire artistic and ideological perception, the renunciation of many deeply rooted demands of literary taste, and the revision of many concepts" (Bakhtin 3).

The challenge identified by Bakhtin arrives on two complementary levels in the context of Orton's work. On the one hand, the Ortonesque demands the revision and reconstruction of *artistic* perception: the conventional definition of farce within literary criticism. On the other hand, the Ortonesque demands the revision of *ideological* perception: the normative and moral distinctions of social reality. In this way, aesthetics and politics combine to mark the unique force of the Ortonesque oeuvre, and the inextricable association of these elements within the Ortonesque places those who view Orton as a *farceur* in the awkward position of implicitly apologizing for the dramatic trope they invoke. While the valuable contributions of Dean, Bigsby, and Charney illustrate the historical legacy of farce and how Orton disrupts the apolitical nature of traditional farce, each of

these critics continues to place Orton within the dramatic discourse of farce even though they all recognize that Orton is the round peg who does not fit the square hole of farce. Thus, Dean, Bigsby, and Charney appear trapped within a dramatic terminology that forces them to discuss Orton in terms of what he is not—i.e. a *farceur*—rather than in terms of what he is. This is the point at which the Bakhtinian concepts of the carnivalesque and grotesque realism offer the possibility of describing the Ortonesque in terms of what it is, rather than in terms of what it is not; that is, the Bakhtinian carnivalesque appears to provide the terminology which may more precisely describe the particular generic status of the Ortonesque, while the Bakhtinian concept of grotesque realism appears to provide the terminology which may more precisely describe the particular aesthetic of the Ortonesque. But in order to proceed, it is first necessary to briefly reiterate how Bakhtin articulates the two key terms that frame this analysis: the carnivalesque and grotesque realism.

Bakhtin bases the carnivalesque upon a somewhat idealized conception of folk culture by rooting the carnivalesque in the anarchic folk festivals of the Medieval and the Renaissance periods. During these festivals, the collective power of the common folk of society is unleashed in a quasi-Bacchanalian revel during which “all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” are suspended (Bakhtin 10). The explosion of the carnivalesque results in an open and honest communication between individuals who are now stripped of the artificial designation of social rank:

. . . all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among the people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, profession, and age. . . . such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed an essential element of the carnival spirit. People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced. The utopian ideal and the realistic merged in this carnivalesque experience, unique of its kind. (Bakhtin 10)

The carnivalesque is thus a locus of death and rebirth that destroys the prevailing hierarchical social order while simultaneously creating a new egalitarian relation. It is important to note how, in Bakhtin’s view, the carnivalesque does not operate simply through ironic inversion in which the existing social hierarchy is transposed so that the fool becomes king or *vice versa*. Rather, the carnivalesque

displaces the notion of hierarchy altogether as it destroys the existing social hierarchy and generates an egalitarian arena in the wake of that destruction.⁸

This fundamental structural ambivalence is one of the defining features of the carnivalesque revel, and it is sometimes overlooked. For example, Graham Pechey argues that the radical political potential of the carnivalesque is located in the “practice of inverting social hierarchies.”⁹ Pechey’s belief that the carnivalesque maintains a hierarchical social structure, even though an inverted hierarchical structure, directly contradicts Bakhtin’s stated insistence upon the notion that, in the carnivalesque, “what is suspended first of all is hierarchial structure . . . —that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age).”¹⁰ Further, Bakhtin insists that the “special type of communication” created by the carnivalesque is a direct result of “the temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank” (Bakhtin 10). Thus Bakhtin clearly states that the carnivalesque does not preserve the notion of hierarchy but displaces hierarchy altogether. This non-hierarchical egalitarian ethos is echoed, though not without significant and revealing distortion, in many of Orton’s barbed assertions from his dramas: “We’ve no privileged class here. It’s a democratic lunacy we practice”;¹¹ “You know nothing of the law. I know nothing of the law. That makes us equal in the sight of the law”;¹² “All classes are criminal today. We live in an age of equality.”¹³ These typically Ortonesque assertions share the egalitarian emphasis of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, but the displacement of social hierarchy in Orton’s characteristically acerbic observations illustrates the unique Ortonesque adaptation of the Bakhtinian paradigm, a unique adaptation that I will discuss in greater detail below.

The displacement of hierarchy in the carnivalesque is also significant because it carries an important implication for the consideration of literary genre. In short, any work that is described as carnivalesque can only, with great care, be considered simultaneously within the context of parody or satire. While Bakhtin acknowledges that parody and satire are related to the carnivalesque and may even be tools of the carnivalesque, he clearly indicates that modern forms of parody and satire are not identical with the carnivalesque: “We must stress, however, that the carnival is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negation is completely alien to folk culture” (Bakhtin 11). Bakhtin makes this point because, in his view, the kinds of parody and satire that are exemplified by the Augustan Age of Pope and Swift—and which still exert considerable influence upon our conceptions and deployments of satire and parody today—minimize the creative regenerative pole of the carnivalesque. Consequently, both can reduce the fundamental ambivalence of the carnivalesque

to bare negation or destruction (Bakhtin 62). Further, in as much as these kinds of parody and satire tend to rely upon ironic inversion for their parodic and satiric effect, each tends to preserve the very notion of hierarchy that is displaced by the Bakhtinian carnivalesque.¹⁴ The reservation that Bakhtin expresses toward parody and satire is especially relevant to the discussion of a carnivalesque-Ortonesque because Orton's work is sometimes viewed as satiric or parodic; these views are often in tension with the Bakhtinian carnivalesque.

In the largest possible terms then, the Bakhtinian carnivalesque marks a structural paradigm that is fundamentally ambivalent: simultaneously destroying while creating; fundamentally anarchic while positing a new egalitarian order. The political implications of the carnivalesque are clearly manifest in both its hostility toward the prevailing social order and, as Bakhtin states, "the new mode of man's relation to man [that] is elaborated" as the result of the carnivalesque itself.¹⁵ The possibility of this new mode of social inter-relation combines with the hostility toward prevailing social structures to reveal the revolutionary political force of the carnivalesque. However, the revolutionary force of the carnivalesque is not limited to the folk in the market-place; it also extends into the realm of aesthetics. Bakhtin notes how a particular carnivalesque aesthetic develops in conjunction with revolution that takes places among the folk:

. . . a special idiom of forms and symbols was evolved—an extremely rich idiom that expressed the unique yet complex carnival experience of the people. This experience, opposed to all that was ready-made and completed, to all pretence at immutability, sought a dynamic expression; it demanded ever changing, playful, undefined forms. All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. (Bakhtin 10-11)

Bakhtin identifies this special idiom, this carnival idiom, as *grotesque realism*: the aesthetic of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin 18-19).

Grotesque realism mirrors the structural ambivalence of the carnivalesque and is a fundamentally destabilizing transgressive aesthetic. This structural ambivalence can be glimpsed in the Bakhtinian folk who form the basis of the carnivalesque tableau and who, as Michael Holquist suggests, are vulgar in their brute physicality and carnal nature while also vital in the thriving life-force that permeates their appetites and existence: "His folk are blasphemous rather than adoring, cunning rather than intelligent; they are coarse, dirty, and rampantly physical, revelling in oceans of strong drink, poods of sausage, and

endless coupling of bodies.”¹⁶ The vulgar corporeal vitality of the Bakhtinian folk provides a fertile arena in which the grotesque realism of the carnivalesque can thrive; indeed, only through the vulgar vitality of the folk can grotesque realism become manifest: “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 all their indissoluble unity” (Bakhtin 19-20).

This degradation of the sententious and abstract to the material realm of the body and earth is not, however, a form of ironic deflation or bathos that negates the degraded object. On the contrary, the operation of degradation within grotesque realism maintains its affirmative role by lowering the abstract to the vulgar and vital realm of the body so that the object of degradation may be re-created and renewed. For example, Bakhtin points (Bakhtin 310) to a passage from Book 1, Chapter 45 of Rabelais’ *Pantagruel* in which Friar John proclaims that “The very shadow of an abbey spire is fecund.” Clearly, Rabelais is playing with the phallic image of the abbey spire, and in the process, satirizing the moral depravity of the monks of the Church. But Bakhtin insists that “the form of a giant phallus, with its shadow that impregnates women, is least of all an exaggeration of the monk’s depravity” (Bakhtin 312), and thus is not simply a parodic or satiric negation of the Church and her brethren. What is bound up with the satiric negation is the positive affirmation of “Friar John—glutton and drunkard, pitilessly sober, mighty and heroic, full of inexhaustible energy, and thirsting for the new” (Bakhtin 312). This particular example of grotesque realism in Rabelais reveals the double-edge of grotesque degradation: how the abstract concept of monastic corruption and the hypocrisy of the Church is brought down to the level of the material body only to be transformed into an affirmation of the corporeal vitality of Friar John’s humanity. Thus, “degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one” (Bakhtin 21).

Bakhtin discovers a pithy image of grotesque realism that captures the ambivalent duplicity of the carnivalesque aesthetic—its negative and affirmative quality—

In the famous Kerch terracotta collection [where] we find figurines of senile pregnant hags. Moreover, the old hags are laughing. This is a typical and very strongly expressed grotesque. It is ambivalent. It is pregnant death, a death that gives birth. There is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine a senile, decaying and deformed flesh with the flesh of new life,

conceived but as yet unformed. Life is shown in its two-fold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness. (Bakhtin 25-26)

In the process of death—the negating degradation of the abstract concept—life is born anew—the regenerating renewal of the abstract concept. Within this image of the pregnant hag, the union of death and life mirrors both the duplicitous destruction and renewal within grotesque realism, and the structural ambivalence of the larger carnivalesque revel itself. In the Ortonesque, the renewing degradation of grotesque realism is most often displayed in Orton's lowering of all human motivations to the base level of desire: sexual and material. Once human nature is reduced to this level, the social inter-relations among people are transformed from the hypocritical banality of genteel society to the naked rapacity that is true to the Ortonesque view of humanity. In this way, the Ortonesque uses a form of grotesque realism to degrade and renew social interaction.

Within the paradigm of the carnivalesque, Bakhtin outlines a distinct genre with a distinct aesthetic that unites the complementary registers of politics and art: precisely the double register that causes the critics of Orton such problems. If, as is obvious, Orton cannot easily be accommodated within the context of farce primarily because of his dark comic vision, political edge, and patent affront to normative morality, then perhaps the Ortonesque with its attendant political and aesthetic peculiarities is more easily accommodated within the Bakhtinian paradigm. The question then becomes whether and to what extent Orton's work is structurally congruent with the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and whether and to what extent Orton's drama displays the Bakhtinian aesthetic of grotesque realism. A related question, though a less prominent one in this discussion, concerns whether and to what extent the unique Ortonesque adaptation of the Bakhtinian paradigm reflects back upon and transforms the concepts of the carnivalesque and grotesque realism.

Since Bakhtin roots the carnivalesque in the vulgar and vital folk culture that is both subject to and author of the carnivalesque revel, the possibility of an Ortonesque carnivalesque must similarly be founded in the characters who populate Orton's dramas. To a large extent, the Bakhtinian folk and the Ortonesque folk share common elements. But a few revealing distinctions emerge, particularly where the issue of vulgarity is concerned. Whereas Bakhtin portrays the folk as a vulgar but vital force whose energy motivates the larger carnivalesque revel, Orton creates characters whose vital energies drive the fanciful machinations of their respective dramas, and in a strong sense, Orton's characters are every bit as vulgar as those in a carnivalesque revel. However, the vulgarity that is displayed in the Ortonesque is often of a different kind than that

outlined by Bakhtin; Orton's adaptation of the Bakhtinian concept of vulgarity is inflected in a characteristically Ortonesque fashion. Whereas the Bakhtinian folk "not only picked their nose and farted, but enjoyed doing so,"¹⁷ Orton's most intriguing characters not only murder, rape, and blackmail, but profit from it. Thus, the vulgarity of these characters is depicted not primarily in corporeal terms, but in moral terms. Whereas the Bakhtinian aesthetic finds its most forceful expression in the material body, the Ortonesque aesthetic finds its most forceful expression in the (im)morality of its characters. However, the immorality of Orton's characters is not, in itself, a sententious abstract concept that is far removed from the realm of corporeal vitality. Although the vulgarity of Orton's folk is primarily moral, rather than corporeal, that moral vulgarity is bound up with the appetites of Orton's characters: both sexual and material appetites. In short, Orton's characters hunger for sexual gratification, or money, or power, and those appetites motivate their actions.

For example, in *Entertaining Mr Sloane*, both Kath and her brother Ed lust after and fight over the youthful and attractive Sloane; in *Loot*, Hal, Dennis, Fay, and Truscott all desire and extort their (im)proper share of the money; in *What the Butler Saw*, the incestuous liaisons between Prentice and his daughter Geraldine, Beckett and his mother Mrs. Prentice, reveal the fundamentally unregulated nature of human passions. All these elements combine to reveal the "animalistic, and often unsavory side of human selfishness, desires, and out-and-out lust"¹⁸ in the Ortonesque. Orton relentlessly stresses the baseness of human motivation in his drama, and thereby reduces the essence of human interaction to the level of mutual exploitation that is motivated by the need to satiate individual appetites through selfish desire. The Ortonesque proceeds to ruthlessly strip away the patina of civility that masks what the Ortonesque views as the true nature personal motivation, but in that moment of degradation, the Ortonesque proceeds to re-create the nature of human social interaction by forging a new and essentially rapacious social matrix in which the characters thrive. This kind of degrading renewal or negating affirmation of social interaction within the Ortonesque combines with the unique vulgarity of Ortonesque characters to create part of the grotesque realism in Orton's drama.

It is interesting to note, however, that the Ortonesque concept of vulgarity extends beyond the limit of a certain (im)morality, which is related to the corporeal nature of vulgarity in Bakhtin. Orton's characters are vulgar not only because they are driven by their appetites to such egregious inequities as murder, rape, and blackmail; their vulgarity extends to the more mundane pretensions of polite society: pretensions that are primarily motivated by the lower- to middle-class situation of the characters who aspire to and pretend higher class status.

In general, the characters that populate Orton's drama are not of the genteel class of society. More often, they—like the Bakhtinian folk—are part of the disaffected mass of society who are an integral component of the larger whole, but who do not share the full measure of the benefits that society has to offer (but hypocritically refuses to bestow). In *Erpingham Camp*, Orton presents Kenny and Eileen—a lower class couple whose “love was banned” and who advocate, in an orgy of socialist good-will, “Have a bash for the pregnant woman next door!”—and Lou and Ted—a middle-class couple who met “outside the Young Conservative Club” and who measure their prosperity by the intensity of their sun-lamp. In *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, Orton depicts the opportunistic Sloane, the sexually rapacious and pathetic Kath, and the manipulative but coy Ed, all of whom reside in an arrested housing development that is located in the midst of a municipal dump site. *Loot* presents characters who all attempt to better their financial situations through morally dubious means: Hal and Dennis through robbery and violating corpses; Fay by killing her husbands; the detective Truscott by accepting a bribe. What this abbreviated description of Orton's rogues' gallery does not reveal is the way in which each of these characters mask their nature behind a patina of civility:

Orton was preoccupied with vulgarity in his plays. All of his most vigorous characters are vulgar in the literal sense of the term: they pretend to a refinement, tact and gentility that they do not at all have. Their politeness consists of empty, conventionalised formulae—slogans, proverbs, advertising copy, political shibboleths, and all the other verbal junk of a liberal, democratic society.¹⁹

Their affectations are not only a pretence to a higher social standing, but to a higher moral standard. Of course, the Ortonesque proceeds to exploit this distance between pretence and reality, between surface and substance, thus creating the characteristic darkness and edge that unsettles so many.

While all these characters are vulgar in both a social and a moral sense, they appear to lack the fundamental ambivalence of the Bakhtinian folk. Instead, Orton's characters appear nakedly rapacious and patently immoral, immersed in a sea of self-serving currents. However, although altruism and morality are surely not present in Orton's characters, this does not exclude the possibility of their similarity to the fundamental ambivalence of the Bakhtinian folk. Orton's characters are similar to the Bakhtinian folk because just as the Bakhtinian folk are vulgar but vital, so Orton's characters possess a raw energy that allows them not merely to survive their vulgarity but thrive upon it. Orton's characters not

only hide their immorality behind a pretention to civility, but they flourish on the basis of their duplicity. Consequently, the fundamental ambivalence of Orton's characters is not so much a matter of their being simultaneous embodiments of good and evil or of altruism and selfishness; their ambivalence is found in their duplicitous role as agents of death and destruction who are the surviving and thriving life-force of the drama.

The fundamental ambivalence of the characters in Orton's dramas suggests that they, like the Bakhtinian folk, form the basis of a carnivalesque tableau. And, if we follow Bakhtin's example of the terracotta pregnant hags, it is possible to see an almost direct reflection of this specific example of grotesque realism in the some of the women in Orton's drama. For example, after Kath's pathetic seduction of Sloane in Act One of *Sloane*, their sexual liaison continues only to result in the pregnancy of Act Two. Kath may not be a senile hag but she is depicted as far past her sexual prime: no teeth; "fat and the crow's feet under your eyes would make you an object of terror"; "You showed him the gate of Hell every night. He abandoned Hope when he entered there"; and in a withering phrase, Ed compares Kath's pretence at sexual vitality to that of "an old tart grinding to her climax" (Orton 143). In this way, Kath's physical description, combined with her role as a cognizant Jocasta in this Oedipal relationship with Sloane, positions her squarely within the aesthetic of grotesque realism as outlined by Bakhtin. Within a decaying body and a perverse relationship, Kath simultaneously embodies new life through her pregnancy. A similar duplicity can be seen in Eileen of *Erpingham Camp*. While on the one hand she repeatedly proclaims "I'm in the family way!" she uses her pregnancy as the justification for physical brutality and the revolution that ensues: "He hit me! I'm an expectant mother! Hit him! Hit him!" (Orton 297). Eileen is simultaneously a locus of birth and new life and an agent of death and destruction: precisely the duplicity of grotesque realism. In addition, Fay of *Loot*, although not pregnant, embodies the possibility of new life through her repeated marriages. But that possibility is always checked by her repeated murders of her husbands. Thus Fay also conforms to the fundamentally ambivalent structure outlined by Bakhtin that marks the duplicity of grotesque realism.

In this way, the characters that populate Orton's dramatic landscape are similar to the Bakhtinian folk, although cast in a distinctly Ortonesque fashion. That is, the vulgarity and vitality of Orton's characters are displayed not only through their lower to middle class status and the pretensions to a higher social and moral standard, but through their material profit and spectacular success that rests squarely upon their morally reprehensible activities: activities which are, in turn, motivated by their vulgar corporeal appetites for sexual gratification, money or power. Orton appears to expand the range of Bakhtin's grotesque ambivalence

beyond the predominantly corporeal limit established in *Rabelais and His World*, although the grotesque realism of the material body that is so strongly identified by Bakhtin is clearly displayed in some of Orton's women, and less strongly—though no less significantly—related to the immoral vulgarity of the Ortonesque conception of character. Grotesque realism in Orton's drama clearly degrades its characters by reducing their motivations to the base level of desire and appetite, but it simultaneously renews those characters by re-weaving the social fabric in which those characters thrive. Within the carnivalesque moment of Orton's drama, characters no longer must hide their true motivations behind a patina of social propriety; rather, the naked lustful rapacity that churns within each is liberated and this liberation becomes the basis for a new mode of social interaction. In this way, the Ortonesque treatment of character through grotesque realism degrades those characters in order to renew the social matrix. This is how the duplicity of the Ortonesque folk is revealed: vulgar but vital; cognizant of social propriety but disregarding social convention; destroying one social system while simultaneously constructing a new social system.

With the duplicitous Ortonesque characters at the basis of the dramatic tableau, the potential for a carnivalesque explosion is prepared. But in order to follow how that carnivalesque explosion is actualized, it is necessary to consider some issues of plot in Orton's drama. A central structural component of the carnivalesque in Bakhtin is the tension between order and disorder. As Bakhtin indicates, the carnivalesque is an irruption of disorder in an otherwise ordered social system: the presence of anarchy within hierarchy. Generally, Orton's dramas are built upon a similar plot structure, one that first establishes a particular systematic order, but then proceeds to demolish that order in an anarchic carnivalesque explosion which is, in most cases, the result of a single catalytic act. The most obvious example of this progression from ordered system to anarchic explosion can be seen in *Erpingham Camp* where the drama opens by establishing first, the respective positions of Erpingham and his minions as administrators of the camp and second, the position of Lou and Ted, Eileen and Kenny, as campers. Although Ted and Kenny are differentiated by their abbreviated argument over Labour politics (Scene Two), they are both subject to the camp administration. In this way, the social division within the camp is clearly marked and it takes no large metaphorical leap to view *The Erpingham Camp* as a model of any classist society. However, in true carnivalesque fashion, this stable social order is profoundly challenged in the wake of Ted's response to Riley's smacking Eileen (Scene Six) and even more so when Ted directly attacks Erpingham: "You've struck a figure of authority!" (Orton 303). The battle lines are drawn; the peasants are revolting.

Similarly, in *Sloane*, a certain domestic order is established through the assimilation of Sloane into Kath's house. She takes Sloane as her lover while Ed's sexual hunger for Sloane prevents him from asking Sloane to leave. This uneasy order, predicated upon a quasi-Oedipal liaison between Kath and Sloane and the unresolved homosexual attraction of Ed for Sloane, is maintained until the disruptive element of Kemp threatens to undo the arrangement by revealing Sloane's murderous past. In the wake of Sloane's murder of Kemp, this uneasy order is undone and anarchy is unleashed as Kath and Ed fight for possession of Sloane who is reduced to a sexual commodity.

In *Loot* a certain social order is established once more, but it is an order of social appearances that is predicated upon the maintenance of a relationship of knowledge and ignorance between individuals. That is, the play immediately opens with the acknowledgement of a robbery by Dennis and Hal, and action of the play primarily revolves around the complications that ensue from the attempt to maintain a patina of normality in a situation that is anything but normal. Consequently, the catalytic event that motivates the anarchy of this play actually precedes the opening of the drama, and the dramatic action presented is, arguably, the anarchic result of that event. The social order that is broken by this anarchic situation is both assumed and intimated: assumed in terms of a "conventional morality" that ostensibly disdains robbery, bribery, and the violation of corpses; intimated by the desperate bid to maintain that patina of "conventional morality" by the guilty characters within the play.

According to the Bakhtinian paradigm of the carnivalesque, what occurs as a result of the carnivalesque explosion is a direct and open relation between individuals, regardless of their social rank. In the moment of the carnivalesque explosion, hierarchical rank is demolished and all are free to communicate openly and honestly in this egalitarian arena. It seems clear that carnivalesque communication Bakhtin has in mind is a fraternal and convivial communion suffused in a spirit of mutual good-will. What Orton provides through the carnivalesque arena of his dramas is an open and honest communication that is anything but fraternal and convivial. Rather, once the artificial patina of hierarchical social convention has been stripped away through carnivalesque anarchy, the raw aggression and vulgar passions of humanity are bare for all to see. To the Ortonesque eye, the social relation that is true to humanity is hostility and blackmail: Kenny tells Erpingham, "You'll pay for this you ignorant fucker!" (Orton 307); Eileen tells Ted "Piss off you dirty middle-class prat! And take your poxy wife with you" (Orton 311); Kath extorts Sloane with a blunt "I was never subtle, Mr. Sloane . . . If you go with Eddie, I'll tell the police" (Orton 145); Ed is equally blunt in extorting his sexual reward as he threatens Sloane with "Get on the blower and call the law. We're finished" (Orton 133); and *Loot* operates

almost exclusively through blackmail as Hal threatens Fay who then threatens Hal who are both in turn threatened by Truscott, but who all arrive at the equitable solution of framing the innocent widower McLeavy. The “purely human relation” that Bakhtin isolates as the immediate and real result of the carnivalesque is skewed through the Ortonesque into a naked display of the essence of human interaction: vice, lust, and greed.

The relationship between the base nature of human interaction and the nature of human communication in the Ortonesque has caught the attention of many critics who, like Charney, suggest that the vacuity of sloganeering and the pervasive media-idiom spoken by Orton’s characters have a specific function in the context of the Ortonesque. Charney argues that Orton’s dramas operate through the deliberate deployment of an “occulted discourse” in which the surface of language masks a deeper sinister meaning: “The stated meaning is bland, polite, innocuous, even vacuous, in order to conceal a violent, chaotic, and painful truth.”²⁰ By way of elaborating upon Charney’s remark, I would argue that language is occult only when it conforms to the polite conventions of society in the pre-carnavalesque moments of Orton’s dramas. What Charney identifies as the sub-textual menace of Orton’s language provides part of the edge and dark vision of the Ortonesque. However, in the carnivalesque explosion that destroys the structures upon which social convention is predicated, it appears that occulted discourse is rendered transparent; the suppressed latent content of this menacing discourse is made manifest as the characters of the drama communicate in an open and honest manner. Clearly this honest communication has nothing in common with the honest communication that Bakhtin identifies as the result of the carnivalesque explosion, nothing in common except for the fact that it is honest: Kenny can call an authority figure an ignorant fucker; Kath can use her knowledge to blackmail her man; Fay can demand a cut of the loot by openly stating her intentions. The ironic relationship between the patina of civility and the underlying hostility of Ortonesque discourse is destroyed through the carnivalesque energy of Orton’s dramas. In the wake of this destruction of the social order, a new egalitarian brutality is spawned, but spawned from the undercurrents that inhabited the original social order.

If the Ortonesque is viewed in this way, the carnivalesque explosion that strips the patina of civility from the naked aggression of humanity can be characterised as an unmasking. The carnivalesque-Ortonesque unmasks the true nature of social relations as avaricious, rapacious, immoral, and rampantly sexual. Figures of social authority are unmasked as petty dictators who are no less immoral than those whom they brutally subject. Conventional morality is unmasked as a normative rule that is hypocritically flaunted by those who most stridently proclaim its propriety. Social order is unmasked as an oppressive

system that perpetuates class divisions. These elements of unmasking within the Ortonesque—the tendency of Orton’s dramas to expose the dark truths that are obscured by the conventions of polite society—are what has led John Lahr to label Orton as a satirist,²¹ and satire is undoubtedly an element of the Ortonesque: an element that is revealed through the ubiquitous use of parody, travesty, and caricature in Orton’s dramas.²² But to limit the Ortonesque to a satiric function tends to diminish the carnivalesque potential in Orton’s work, at least in the context of Bakhtin’s conception of satire. As Bakhtin consistently argues, the nature of modern satire is negative, diminishing, and lacking any positive affirmative power. Although Bigsby argues that “in the latter part of his career he [Orton] developed an intensely personal form of farce—brittle, contingent, violent and deliberately subversive of social and moral structures”²³—a form of farce that strikes me as remarkably akin to satire—Bigsby does not indicate how the Ortonesque might move beyond the negativity of satirical-farce into a positive regenerative moment that is integral to the Bakhtinian conception of the carnivalesque genre. If Orton is a satirist as Lahr explicitly suggests and as Bigsby seems to suggest through what he vaguely defines as Orton’s “personal form of farce,” then the Ortonesque appears to offer no more than a critical comment upon the hypocrisy of society; the ambivalence of both the carnivalesque structure of the plays and the ambivalent nature of the characters who populate the Ortonesque is correspondingly diminished:

What remains is nothing but a corpse, old age deprived of pregnancy, equal to itself alone; it is alienated and torn away from the whole in which it had been linked to that other, younger link in the chain in growth and development. The result is a broken grotesque figure, the demon of fertility with phallus cut off and belly crushed. (Bakhtin 53)

In order to restore the Ortonesque phallus, Orton must be rescued from what Bakhtin suggests is the negativity of satire. The ambivalence that permeates both the structure and the characters of the Ortonesque must be recognized. However, this task is not simply accomplished given the apparently ironic endings of many of Orton’s dramas.

As is often noted, Orton’s dramas repeatedly present the triumph of adversity over life, the valorization of the guilty at the expense of the innocent. In order to wrest some positive regenerative element from these concluding tableaux, critics have gone to considerable lengths. Bigsby brings the big gun of Adorno to bear upon the Ortonesque and argues that “Orton becomes the ultimate critic, inviting his audience to recuperate those values ruthlessly excluded from

his plays.”²⁴ Bigsby appears to suggest, according to this peculiar logic of exclusion, that the Ortonesque must be inverted in order to wrest a conventional morality from Orton’s dramas; we must read black as white, murder as love:

As Adorno implies, the temptation is perhaps to recuperate those values so absent from the plays, to respond to the crucial absences of the text, to see Orton’s characters, as Adorno saw Beckett’s, as ‘what human beings have become,’ while ‘the minimal promise of happiness they contain, which refuses to be traded for comfort, cannot be had for a price less than total dislocation, to the point of worldlessness.’²⁵

In his haste to make Orton postmodern—hence the recourse to Adorno—Bigsby appears to forget momentarily that the conventional morality Adorno would supply is precisely what is scrutinized throughout the Ortonesque. However, Bigsby does partially remember himself when he asserts that “Orton is less concerned with the generation of values than with ridiculing a world committed to the chimera of meaning.”²⁶ But if the Ortonesque is to be considered within the context of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and is not to be limited to a satiric function of “ridiculing a world,” then the Ortonesque must be concerned with the generation of values. And it seems to me that Adorno is suggesting the right place to look for the creation of those values: the audience. Orton may not portray a new regenerative value system on stage, and hence he is often viewed as a satirist. But the experience of the Ortonesque arguably plants the seeds of change in the audience, and it is within those seeds that the potential for a regenerative affirmative action is located. However, in order for the conception of a carnivalesque-Ortonesque to be valid, the scope of the theatrical event of a performance of Orton’s dramatic work must be conceived of as breaking through the “fourth wall” that separates stage and audience because, strictly speaking, the carnivalesque is a revolutionary force that implicates both actor and audience by conflating the distinction between participant and spectator. Indeed, the carnivalesque cannot strictly be applied to drama *per se*:

But the basic carnival nucleus of this culture is by no means a purely artistic form nor a spectacle and does not, generally speaking, belong to the sphere of art. It belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play.

In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and

spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy the theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants. (Bakhtin 7)²⁷

The Ortonesque conforms to the radically transgressive dynamic of the carnivalesque and violates the boundary between stage and audience by situating the carnivalesque event half way between actor and assembly. Orton manages to extend the scope of his dramatic event beyond the limitation of the footlights by adopting the persona and *nom de plume* of Edna Welthorpe, a prudish and outraged prig who penned numerous letters to the pages of *The Daily Telegraph* and to the offices of various dramatic institutions. In these letters, Edna Welthorpe complained about the immorality of Orton's work: "the endless parade of mental and physical perversion" in *Sloane*;²⁸ "the raping of children with *Mars bars*" and the "other filthy details of a sexual and psychopathic nature" in *Loot*.²⁹ These letters can be viewed as effectively extending the scope of Orton's dramatic activity beyond the limit of the stage footlights. The letters of Edna Welthorpe attempt to orchestrate and stimulate a certain response to the Ortonesque. This response not only fosters and directs public debate upon the nature of the Ortonesque, but also extends the assault of social morality and sociable pretension that permeates the Ortonesque into the world beyond Orton's stage. As Lahr argues, "the stupidity behind her [Edna's] censoriousness" was a strategy that sought to expose "the viciousness behind decency" which defines society not only in Orton's drama, but also in Orton's London.

The letters of Edna Welthorpe may extend the range of Orton's dramatic activity beyond the limit of the stage, and thus help push the experience of the Ortonesque through the "fourth wall" that separates actor and assembly, but they do not, in and of themselves, provide the positive regenerative affirmation that is integral to the paradigm of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. However, Simon Shepard argues in his "Edna's Last Stand, Or Joe Orton's Dialectic of Entertainment," that Orton's drama, even without the additional support of the letters of Edna Welthorpe, presents the possibility of an affirmative moment to audience members. In short, Shepard argues that Orton's drama can provoke audience members to question their complicity in the world of the Ortonesque: a

world that includes not only such extreme elements as murder and rape, but more pervasive and familiar principles such as hypocrisy and deceit. Shepherd argues that Orton's drama destabilizes the viewing audience by presenting them with irreconcilable alternatives that split their sympathy between equally untenable options. For example, in Shepard's view, *The Erpingham Camp* suspends the audience between their sympathy for Eileen and Ted and their horror at the violence perpetrated by Eileen and Ted:

Eileen has the last word: 'I'm terrified all this will affect my baby.' This is the most difficult aspect of the play. Here are 'ordinary' people, who have, like us, a respect for the family. Yet hitherto their violence has horrified us. Our laughter at the theatrical camp drives us to side with the exploited, the 'real' people, but the siding is compromised, hypocritical, eventually destructive. We have been caught in a situation where two of our deepest assumptions contradict each other. We have gone to the theatre to be entertained, uncritically. That entertainment, that form of theatre, is destroyed, violently, by those who act in the name of family.³⁰

The Erpingham Camp situates the audience on the horns of a dilemma and, for those audience members who care to reflect upon the nature of their divided sympathy, can thus be profoundly unsettling. What Shepard outlines in his articles is, in rudimentary Hegelian terms, a classical opposition between thesis and antithesis. And what Shepard's implicit Hegelian schema necessarily points to is the potential for sublation. This potential sublation can be achieved only by a fundamental transformation of an individual's values, a transformation that would be unique to each individual, but which would commonly be prompted by the experience of Orton's drama. In this way, the potential moment of sublation that Shepard identifies as part of the experience of Orton's drama marks the moment in which the Ortonesque can move beyond the negative limitation of satire to the positive regenerative pole that is necessary for a carnivalesque-Ortonesque. What can be potentially regenerated in this moment is, of course, the normative ethical values that orient an individual's world view. It is important to a Bakhtinian consideration of the Ortonesque that the positive regenerative potential of Orton's work does not lapse into the didactic. The implicit invitation that Shepard uncovers in the Ortonesque neither preaches to nor forces any specific moral message upon society at large, and thus Orton avoids the moral sententiousness that "destroys the very contents of the truth which it unveils" (Bakhtin 94).

Orton's Edna Welthorpe letters and Shepard's Hegelian argument about the potential audience response to Orton's drama both point to how the Ortonesque can be viewed as breaking through the "fourth wall" that separates stage and street. The inherently social nature of the carnivalesque—its concern with the folk and with the social structures of authority and value—make it necessary that the Ortonesque participate in the social sphere beyond the limit of the footlights. Although Bakhtin's implicit segregation of the theatrical stage from the larger extra-dramatic social sphere betrays a certain formalist approach that regards literature as a hermetically sealed autonomous entity—this approach has since fallen out of favour as the relationship between various social determinants and literature is ever more intensively scrutinized—the essentially social and revolutionary nature of the carnivalesque itself reveals Bakhtin's concern with precisely those social determinants that are apparently marginalized in the actor/assembly dichotomy.

One social determinant that is sometimes factored into a consideration of the Ortonesque is Orton's sexual orientation. While Orton's homosexuality—lustfully celebrated and extensively documented in his diaries—might arguably influence his drama in any number of ways, Orton's sexual orientation also provides a strong reason not to consider the Ortonesque within the context of satire. This is because in as much as satire tends to work through ironic inversion, Orton's sexual orientation might be seen as the source of such an inverted perspective by virtue of the mistaken and offensive view that homosexuality is the deviant inversion of the heterosexual norm. If this view is adopted, the trope of inversion could become invested with a moral weight which offensively implicates Orton's sexual orientation and simultaneously valorizes heterosexuality as the normative standard. Although Maurice Charney certainly *does not* make this blunder and implicate Orton's homosexuality in this way, he does open the door for others to blunder through because Charney explicitly makes a ligature between the playwright's homosexuality and the trope of satiric inversion. Charney argues that "Orton as homosexual playwright assumes the stance of alien, outsider, critic, and satirist of *all* the values that straight middle-class society most cherishes."³¹ Further, Charney suggests that Orton makes these satiric points by means of numerous "easy reversals."³² Based upon the premise of a ligature between Orton's gay identity and the satiric function of his texts, the logical syllogism could look like this: 1) Orton is gay; 2) Orton satirizes heterosexual morality by means of easy reversals; 3) satire by means of inversion is proper to a gay playwright such as Orton because homosexuality is the inverse of heterosexuality.

This line of argument does a disservice not only to Orton himself, but also to Orton's work. The offensive conflation of homosexuality with inversion

is compounded by the oversight of the fundamental ambiguity of Orton's work that is made by invoking the trope of inversion within the context of the Ortonesque. If, however, Orton's work is viewed within the context of the carnivalesque, both dangers are alleviated. Not only does the carnivalesque adequately encompass the fundamental ambiguity of Orton's drama, but it also implicates not only Orton's homosexuality, but all sexuality—including heterosexuality—within the same ambiguous, anarchic matrix. A kind of fundamentally polymorphous perversity is much closer to the Ortonesque view of sexuality; the social strictures that individuals choose either to respect or to disregard channel that fundamentally anarchic sexuality into various socially sanctioned and condoned avenues. But no matter what the ultimate expression that sexuality takes, it is still motivated, as the Ortonesque repeatedly suggests, by a kind of joyful anarchic sexual energy and impulse. This is what Charney suggests is one of the defining features of Orton's treatment of sexuality: "There is a cheerful anarchy about all of Orton's works in which nothing can be assumed, and in which all values—including the shibboleths of sexuality—are up for grabs. This endows his work with a 'carnavalesque' quality (in Bakhtin's terms)." ³³

The greatest challenge to a consideration of Orton's work within the context of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque concerns an element that is essential both to the comedy of Joe Orton and to the carnivalesque: laughter. While Orton's work is often hilariously funny, the laughter usually associated with comedy—"gay, fanciful, recreational drollery deprived of philosophical content" (Bakhtin 12)—is not the same kind of laughter that Bakhtin identifies as being particular to the carnivalesque. In Bakhtin's view, carnival laughter has three defining characteristics; it is inclusive, self-reflexive, and ambivalent:

Let us say a few initial words about the complex nature of carnival laughter. It is, first of all, a festive laughter. Therefore it is not an individual reaction to some 'comic' event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in its scope; it is directed at all and everyone including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of the carnival. (Bakhtin 11-12)

Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate out the laughter that results from the audience's reaction to the "comic event" of Orton's drama and the laughter that results from the audience's recognition of their unity in the

existential absurdity of the human plight, it is extremely unlikely that a performance of Orton's work could be staged in which the audience laughter would be joined with the laughter of the actors. Orton's production notes for the Royal Court run of *Ruffian on the Stair* explicitly indicate that this particular play "must be directed and acted with absolute *realism*. No 'stylization,' no 'camp'. . . . Every one of the characters must be real. None of them is ever consciously funny. Every line should be played with a desperate seriousness and complete lack of any suggestion of humour."³⁴ Thus the separation between stage and audience appears to be maintained, at least as far as the issue of laughter is concerned. However, the self-reflexive nature of the carnivalesque laughter could be glimpsed in those audience members who recognize elements of their own social lives in the Ortonesque tableau upon the stage. Further, the ambivalence of carnivalesque laughter could be glimpsed in those audience members who are able to resolve the dialectical tension created by Orton's drama; their laughter could thus negate their divided sympathies while affirming their new resolve.

Although the argument for the self-reflexive and the ambivalent aspects of the laughter in the Ortonesque may appear to rely unduly upon speculation about a hypothetical audience response, there can be no doubt that the Bakhtinian insistence upon the inclusive nature of carnival laughter is not fulfilled in the Ortonesque. This lack of an inclusive laughter clearly violates the definition of carnivalesque laughter within the Bakhtinian paradigm. However, it is important to remember that in arguing for the merits of a Bakhtinian approach to the Ortonesque, I do not mean simply to propose a comparative measure in which a kind of checklist is used to match up defining elements of the carnivalesque with elements of Orton's dramatic craft. The larger purpose of this discussion is to examine whether the Bakhtinian paradigm productively illuminates Orton's work.

The benefits that the Bakhtinian perspective brings to a consideration of Orton's work are multiple. Foremost among these benefits is the potential for the structural nature of the carnivalesque to provide a generic rubric that emphasizes the fundamental ambivalence which permeates Orton's drama. This ambivalence not only extends to considerations of plot—the simultaneous registers of order and disorder—but also to aspects of theme—including, but to limited to, sexuality, communication, and class. Another benefit of the Bakhtinian view of the Ortonesque is revealed in how the carnivalesque aesthetic of grotesque realism emphasizes the carnal and vulgar nature of the Ortonesque view of humanity. This grotesque realism is most clearly displayed in Orton's characteristic emphasis upon the base nature of human motivation, which is intimately wedded to the lustful nature and avaricious capacity of humanity. When the fundamental ambivalence of Orton's drama is viewed in conjunction with Orton's degraded view of humanity and the sinister aspects contained within Orton's drama, the

inadequacy of the generic rubric of farce becomes apparent. But that inadequacy makes the suitability of the Bakhtinian paradigm even more apparent. When conceived of as a literary genre, the carnivalesque not only encompasses the structural ambivalence of the Ortonesque, but also the dark and disturbing content of the Ortonesque. While it is true that the specific example of the carnivalesque that Bakhtin identifies in Rabelais uses the carnivalesque and grotesque realism to affirm life and human interaction in an essentially hopeful way, the Ortonesque adaptation of the carnivalesque and grotesque realism uses the Bakhtinian tropes to a distinctly different end. That is, while the Ortonesque may operate through a carnivalesque paradigm and a specific form of grotesque realism, the Ortonesque uses grotesque realism to affirm an essentially different view of humanity: avaricious, rapacious, and rampantly sexual. In this way, the carnivalesque utilizes the Bakhtinian trope, but not the Rabelaisian message. However, this utilization of the carnivalesque paradigm is consistent with Bakhtin's assertion that his categories are primarily functional and not substantive: "Carnival celebrates the shift itself, the very process of replaceability, and not the precise item that is replaced. Carnival is, so to speak, functional and not substantive. It absolutizes nothing, but rather proclaims the joyful relativity of everything."³⁵ The carnivalesque and grotesque realism are forms which can easily accommodate the barbed observations of Orton, and thus it appears that Orton adopts the Bakhtinian categories more than he modifies the tropes of carnivalesque and grotesque realism.

Notes

1. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Hélène Iswolsky, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) 2-3. All subsequent references will appear in parentheses.

2. The conceptual groundwork for the carnivalesque is outlined in Bakhtin's earlier work, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1984) which was first published in 1929; a second and much expanded edition was completed by Bakhtin and published in 1963. *Rabelais and His World* was completed in the mid-1930's, but was suppressed until its publication in 1965. Given that the carnivalesque is found in Bakhtin's earlier work, I will occasionally refer to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* in this paper in order to illuminate certain aspects of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque.

3. See the following two articles: Simon Trussler, "Farce," *Plays and Players*, June 1966, 56-58 & 72. Joan F. Dean, "Joe Orton and the Redefinition of Farce," *Theatre Journal*. XXXIV: 4 (1982) 481-92.

4. C.W.E. Bigsby, *Joe Orton* (London: Methuen, 1982) 56.

5. See Maurice Charney, "Joe Orton's *Loot* as 'Quotidian Farce': The Intersection of Black Comedy and Daily Life," *Modern Drama*, XXIV: 4 (December 1981) 514-24.

6. Bigsby, *Joe Orton*.

7. Dean, "Joe Orton and the Redefinition of Farce."

8. I find it helpful to think of this carnivalization of social hierarchy in terms of Derridean deconstruction in which a hierarchical opposition—Derrida addresses the specific case of speech and writing—is simultaneously *overturned* and *displaced* by means of “a double writing”

that *simultaneously* provokes the overturning of the hierarchy speech/writing, and the entire system attached to it, *and* releases the dissonance of a writing within speech, thereby disorganizing the entire inherited order and invading the entire field. (Jacques Derrida, *Positions*. Alan Bass, trans. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981) 42.

It is important to note that Derrida stresses the simultaneity of the operation in which inversion and displacement occur concurrently. Bakhtin similarly emphasizes how the carnivalesque simultaneously combines an affirmative regenerative moment with its negating destructive quality:

The essence of the carnivalesque is precisely to present a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life. Negation and destruction (death of the old) are included as an essential phase, inseparable from affirmation, from the birth of something new and better. (Bakhtin 62)

What the Bakhtinian carnivalesque creates in the moment that it destroys the existing social hierarchy is, of course, the egalitarian social arena of the market-place.

9. Graham Pechey, “On the Borders of Bakhtin: dialogisation, decolonisation,” in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, Ken Hirschkop and David Shepard, eds. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1989) 51.

10. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Caryl Emerson, ed. and trans. (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1984) 123.

11. Joe Orton, *What the Butler Saw*, *Orton: The Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 1976) 412.

12. *Loot*, *Orton: The Complete Plays* 254.

13. *Funeral Games*, *Orton: The Complete Plays* 333. All subsequent references to Orton’s work will appear in parentheses.

14. Bakhtin limits his comments to modern parody and does not consider—for obvious historical reasons—the kind of postmodern parody championed by a figure such as Linda Hutcheon. In her *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), Hutcheon argues that postmodern parody must be distinguished from modern parody whose definition as “ridiculing imitation” is “rooted in eighteenth-century theories of wit” (26). For Hutcheon, postmodern parody embodies a positive, regenerative impulse that is absent from its modern antecedent: “The collective weight of parodic *practice* suggests a redefinition of parody as repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity” (26).

15. Krystyna Pomorska, “Foreword,” *Rabelais and His World* by Mikhail Bakhtin x.

16. Michael Holquist, “Prologue,” *Rabelais and His World* by Mikhail Bakhtin xix.

17. xix.

18. Joan F. Dean, “Joe Orton and the Redefinition of Farce” 491.

19. Charney, *Joe Orton* 126.

20. 70.

21. John Lahr, “Introduction,” *Orton: The Complete Plays* by Joe Orton 7.

22. Bigsby, *Joe Orton* 61.

23. 61.

24. 70.

25. 72.

26. 72.

27. Although Bakhtin stresses the fact that carnival belongs to the people and not to literature, he acknowledges that “from the second half of the seventeenth century on, carnival almost completely ceases to be a direct source of carnivalization, ceding its place to the influence of already carnivalized literature; in this way, carnivalization becomes a purely literary tradition” (Bakhtin,

Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 131). Obviously, the fact that Bakhtin devotes his study of carnival to the literary work of Rabelais makes it possible to discuss the carnivalesque in other literary work, such as the corpus of Joe Orton.

28. John Lahr, ed., *The Orton Diaries: Including the Correspondence of Edna Welthorpe and Others* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986) 281.

29. 287.

30. Simon Shepard, "Edna's Last Stand Or Joe Orton's Dialectic of Entertainment," *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, XXII (1978) 95.

31. Charney, "Orton's *Loot* as 'Quotidian Farce': The Intersection of Black Comedy and Daily Life" 517.

32. 517.

33. 517. This is the only explicit mention of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque in Orton criticism that I have been able to locate.

34. John Lahr, *Prick Up Your Ears: The Biography of Joe Orton* (New York: Knopf, 1978) 130.

35. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 125.

