

Graham's Swift's *Last Orders* (1996) typically has been viewed by such critics as Lewis MacLeod and Jodi Kanter as a novel about loss, grief, collectivity, reconciliation, and regeneration, as the characters embark on a tumultuous, one-day journey to Margate on April 2, 1990 to dispose of their friend Jack's ashes.¹ As Ray, Vince, Lenny and Vic begin their journey to Margate, the atmosphere is contentious because of the characters and their complicated, collective histories. For instance, Lenny has taken issue with Vince because, years earlier, Vince impregnated his daughter and then abandoned her to join the military. Ray, on the other hand, feels a tremendous amount of guilt because he has kept money that Vince lent Jack and that Jack in turn lent Ray.² Ray not only feels guilt for his betrayal of Vince, but also for deceiving Jack by having an affair with Amy. In spite of the contention and the disruption that the characters' histories create, they are ultimately able to reconcile their differences, while also fulfilling Jack's last orders by disposing his ashes in Margate. The pattern of disruption and reconciliation in the characters' journey, and the grotesque adventures along the way, evoke Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the carnivalesque. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin claims that carnival temporarily pulls individuals out of ordinary life by disrupting the official order and its conventions. While the official order is disrupted, people are released from standards of etiquette and of decency, and they are free to engage in what Bakhtin calls the "grotesque." *Last Orders* begins with Ray declaring that "It aint like your regular sort of day" (1), and "it aint official business, it's different" (3). Just as carnival suspends everyday life, the characters' journey to Margate also creates an impermanent space outside of the demands of their day-to-day lives. Furthermore, the characters visit various historically carnivalesque locales – Wick's Farm, Canterbury Cathedral and Margate – on their way to dispose of Jack's ashes. At each location,

¹ In "Hopeful Sentences: Gender and Mourning Language in Two Contemporary Narratives," Jodi Kanter claims that, in *Last Orders*, "Graham Swift creates a masculine mourning language that replaces individuality with collectivity." Lewis MacLeod presents a different analysis in his article "In the (Public) House of the Lord: Pub Ritual and Sacramental Presence in *Last Orders*," and contends that the characters embark on individual and collective pilgrimages that compel them "to come to terms with Jack's death and with each other."

² Jack borrows a thousand pounds from Vince and in turn lends Ray the money to gamble so that Amy is taken care of with the proceeds. On page 134-32, Vince asks Ray about the money and Ray lies to Vince, claiming that Jack "never mentioned no sum of money."

grotesque incidents reinforce the presence of the carnivalesque in *Last Orders*. In addition to the carnivalesque locations and the grotesque occurrences, the narrative style and structure of the novel is disrupted, as psychological digressions interrupt the linear flow of events. The three locations that the characters visit – Wick’s Farm, Canterbury Cathedral, and Margate – as well as the grotesque events that occur in these places and the style of the narrative itself can all be explained through Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque.

Wick’s Farm, a fictional location in *Last Orders*, is historically carnivalesque because it is based on the hop farms where working-class Londoners travelled in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to escape urban poverty via a working holiday. Canterbury can be regarded as historically carnivalesque because pilgrimages during the Middle Ages allowed people to escape the mundane aspects of everyday life. Like Wick’s Farm and Canterbury, Margate can be viewed as historically carnivalesque because, at the turn of the century, this seaside resort embodied carnival, as it was notorious for its associations with licentious behaviour. Not only can these three locales be considered historically carnivalesque, but the incidents that occur at these locations evoke Bakhtin’s idea of “grotesque realism.” According to Bakhtin, grotesque realism is a key element in the carnivalesque because it assists in regeneration by upturning dominant social customs like etiquette and decency. Although grotesque realism is superficially disruptive and degenerative, it ultimately renews the entire social system. A number of passages and situations in *Last Orders* can be considered grotesque, such as references to urine and an altercation. These situations demonstrate irreverence and an obsession with what Bakhtin calls the “lower bodily stratum” (21), and they are ultimately regenerative because they help lead the characters to reconciliation.

As the locations and the situations can be viewed as carnivalesque, so too can the novel’s particular narrative structure. The narrative structure can be viewed as anachronistic, in that it is non-linear, as the present is always interrupted by the characters’ flashbacks, thus disrupting the chronology of how events unfold. In the same way that carnival turns life inside out, the narrative in *Last Orders* is also flipped inside out through temporal dislocation. As the characters travel throughout Kent, they are often psychologically elsewhere, despite their actual physical location. These psychological digressions can be regarded as a manifestation of the carnivalesque since the temporal disruption is similar to the disruption that the characters experience on their journey to Margate. In the scenes where the grotesque situations occur, the

characters travel through the past in their thoughts, as they attempt to reconcile the issues from their pasts. These digressions are as crucial as the grotesque incidents, as they are fundamental in the development of the plot and of the characters themselves, because, without these digressions and grotesque incidents, there would be no ultimate reconciliation. While Lewis MacLeod and Jodi Kanter have contributed a great deal to the discussion regarding collectivity, mourning, rituals and the complex relationships between the characters, they have not acknowledged the possibility that these concepts can be viewed as carnivalesque. Since *Last Orders* has yet to be viewed in terms of carnival, this paper will show that the locations, the events and the narrative structure are indeed carnivalesque.

Mikhail Bakhtin explains his theory of the carnivalesque in *Rabelais and His World*. Bakhtin explains that carnival is a temporary escape from ordinary life: “one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (10). Bakhtin describes the carnivalesque as a force that temporarily liberates individuals from the official way of life and from its ideologies. During carnival, social stratification is suspended, along with rules and social restraint. In *Last Orders*, the characters’ journey to Margate to dispose of Jack’s ashes displays aspects of Bakhtin’s carnivalesque because the characters are briefly freed from the constraints of their everyday lives, and, as a result, rules for etiquette and decency are abandoned.

While carnival offers an impermanent escape from day-to-day life, it also encourages metamorphosis, regeneration, and inversion, as can be seen in the characters’ relationships in *Last Orders*. Bakhtin explains:

All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the “inside out” (*à l’envers*), of the “turnabout,” of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crowning and uncrownings. A second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extracarnival life, a “world inside out.” (11)

By turning the world inside out, carnival creates an atmosphere of transfiguration, rejuvenation, and anarchy; this world of carnival rejects the values and social constructions of the world

outside of carnival.³ Although the majority of the journey contains an atmosphere of disruption, the journey ultimately ends in reconciliation and the characters relationships are changed and renewed.

Another important aspect of carnival that can be seen in *Last Orders* is what Bakhtin refers to as “grotesque realism” (28-9). Grotesque realism plays a significant social role in carnival because it degrades everything that is exalted: “The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high and spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (19). By degrading all that is elevated and metaphysical, grotesque realism focuses on the physical and the base. Bakhtin further explains that the grotesque is linked to death and rebirth:

Degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with the earth as element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better. To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation, copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one. (21)

Bakhtin explains that degradation is both destructive and regenerative. In *Last Orders*, while the characters are travelling to Margate to dispose of Jack’s ashes, they are fixated with the physical. Not only do Lenny and Vince get into a physical fight on their journey, but the characters’ thoughts and conversations are filled with references to urine and to copulation. In spite of the coarseness of the grotesque, however, it is important to note that, while the grotesque degrades, it also regenerates. Bakhtin claims that the “grotesque body” and death are connected and that both are connected to renewal:

In the development of this theme the grotesque body plays a most important part. It is the people’s growing and ever-victorious body that is “at home” in the cosmos’ own flesh and blood, possessing the same elemental force but better organized. The body is the last and best word of the cosmos, its leading force. Therefore it has nothing to fear. Death holds

³ Similarly, in Emma Parker’s essay “No Man’s Land,” she claims that “[a] crisis in masculinity and concomitant crisis in the patriarchal order are signalled by the theme of disorder” (91).

no terror for it. The death of the individual is only one moment in the triumphant life of the people and of mankind, a moment indispensable for their renewal and improvement.
(341)

The grotesque creates universal human awareness, as death reaffirms and regenerates the life of the collective. While the characters wallow in the grotesque for a significant part of their journey, regeneration comes out of the incidents because they are able to resolve their differences and to feel a sense of unity due to their journey.

Just as carnival disrupts ordinary life and its customs, in *Last Orders*, the style and structure is also disrupted because of its anachronistic constitution. Instead of a linear narrative, the narrative in *Last Orders* is fragmented by numerous psychological digressions: While the characters are in one place physically, they are almost always somewhere else psychologically, creating temporal dislocation, as the past is constantly interrupting the present. In *Understanding Graham Swift*, David Malcolm discusses Swift's narrative technique in *Last Orders*, as he claims that "the narrative itself is composed of radical detours and digressions" and observes that "the text moves freely backward and forward in time, oscillating between that present in 1990 and various points in the past" (165-66). While I agree with Malcolm's observations, he does not discuss Swift's narrative techniques as possessing carnivalesque qualities, and this paper will argue that the narrative structure, and the psychological detours in particular, are manifestations of the carnivalesque. Disruption is as central to the book's narrative structure as it is to the incidents and to the location of the narrative. Just as the characters take a vacation from day-to-day life to dispose of Jack's ashes, the psychological detours in the narrative appear to function similarly in that the characters take vacations from their present duty. For example, as Ray is physically in Canterbury Cathedral, he is mentally revisiting various memories of Jack and of his daughter, Susie, and relating those memories to the reader; this example demonstrates the anachronistic nature of the narrative. In spite of the present moment and place, the characters are very often somewhere in the past. Although the majority of the narrative is disrupted due to the mental detours, the structure, like carnival itself, ends harmoniously, as these mental detours eventually bring the characters closer together and heal their differences.

The first location that the characters visit on their way to Margate is Wick's Farm. Although Wick's Farm is a fictional place, it is important because of its association with hop-picking and the carnivalesque. Bakhtin's theory of carnival can be applied to hop-picking as

people migrated to hop gardens as a sort of working holiday. In *Goodnight Campers: The History of the British Holiday Camp*, Colin Ward and Dennis Hardy discuss labour migrations and hop-picking:

[T]he growers had relied for at least two hundred years, not only on casual labour from the surrounding towns and countryside, but on mass-migration of Londoners: poor people welcoming the chance to pick up a little money in the autumn sun. In the nineteenth century the beer consumption of a rapidly increasing population led to a huge increase in the acreage devoted to hops. This and the expansion of the railway network turned hop-picking into a vast Cockney family holiday with its own rituals and traditions. (8)

While hop-picking allows individuals to escape everyday life, it also offers these individuals the opportunity to make some money. Hop-picking can be viewed as carnivalesque since the Londoners who escaped to hop-farms created a carnivalesque way of life complete with its own rituals and traditions. Hop-picking migrations evince the ways in which individuals step outside of their daily routines in order to travel and to engage in activities that serve as a means of diversion.

Hop-picking is significant in *Last Orders* because Wick's Farm, the first historically carnivalesque locale that the characters visit, is where Amy and Jack originally met before the Second World War. As Amy recalls hop-picking at Wick's Farm, her experience appears carnivalesque because, while hop-picking, she and the other hop-pickers are in their own world apart from ordinary society:

And don't tell me that there weren't general compensations. Doing it for free, getting it for free, down there in the garden of England, with the sunshine, and the fresh air and the haystacks and the hop-bines, and that feeling, though it was stay-put and keep-at-it work, bins all in a row, three or four to a bin like a factory outdoors, of being set loose. On the loose. Living in huts and tents like natives, living on the land, no fixed abode. No hawkers, no gypsies, no dogs, no hoppers. The smell of fry-ups at night. Wood fires, billycans, oil lamps, natter. (234)

Just as the male characters are focused on the lower bodily stratum, so is Amy as she recalls the sexual liberation that occurred while hop-picking. Amy's reference to the sexual freedom that comes through hop-picking – “doing it for free, getting it for free” – demonstrates the carnivalesque through its connection to the body and its processes, as well as renewal, since

copulation is connected to life. While hop-picking liberated people like Amy from the sexual mores of her time, it also provided a general sense of freedom, or of being “set loose,” in that it allows Amy to imagine what a nomadic life might be like. Further to the general sense of freedom, Amy discusses how she began a relationship with Jack in spite of her better judgement: “I thought, What are you doing Amy Mitchell, what are you doing? You don’t even know this boy. You don’t even fancy him, not that much, not so much. But the air was soft and ripe and still. And there was that feeling inside of me, between me, like a bowl” (237). Again, Amy is referring to the lower bodily stratum, but in this instance, she is discussing her sexual receptiveness. Just as the air is ripe, so too is Amy; however, as Amy mentions, Jack is not necessarily the type of man she wants to be with, but the carnivalesque atmosphere, and her resulting sexual receptiveness prompt her to choose him as her partner anyway.

Unlike Amy, Ray, Lenny, Vic and Vince visit Wick’s Farm after it ceases to be a hop farm and their experience there is carnivalesque because of the grotesque incidents. At Wick’s Farm, Lenny physically attacks Vince, which starts a fight:

Vince gets up, all fired up now, all hunched and snorting and puffing, and Lenny holds out the jar in front of him in both hands, teasing and sort of skipping on the spot. I’ve never seen Lenny so neat on his pins. Vince moves forward and Lenny moves back, dodging, like he could chuck the jar to Vic or me if that was the idea and we were ready to catch it, but he does a sort of rugby leap with it, low and quick to one side, so it lands on the grass away from any of us, then he steps around so he’s between it and Vince, and puts out his fists and starts ducking and weaving. (148)

Lenny and Vince’s fight is depicted as a performance in the Bakhtinian sense, in that, during carnival, there is no separation between the actors and the spectators and, as a result, everyone, including Ray and Vic, experiences carnival. According to Bakhtin, “While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom” (7). While Lenny and Vic are active participants in the fight, Ray and Vic are also involved, as they are living in it, experiencing it and being consumed by it. As Lenny and Vince’s fight ends, it is clear that there is no barrier between the performers, Lenny and Vince, and the audience, Ray, Vic and the sheep: “Lenny’s sort of sprawled, half sitting, half lying, leaning on his hands, breathing and dribbling. Vince is standing over him, bent, breathing too. All you can hear is their breathing and the sheep bleating and baa-ing like spectators” (149). Just

as Ray and Vic are involved in the altercation between Lenny and Vince, thus demonstrating the presence of Bakhtin's theory that carnival creates its own world guided by its own rules, the sheep are also involved. By fighting, Lenny and Vince are degrading the dignity of the journey, and this is further emphasized when Lenny throws Jack's urn like a football. After the debacle at Wick's Farm, Ray expresses that he and the other characters feel ashamed of themselves for fighting over Jack's ashes: "It's all our fault. Fighting over a man's ashes. And the jar's sitting there in Vince's hands like its shaking its head at us all, with a bit of him left behind in the field for the sheep to trample on. He didn't expect this, he didn't expect this at all" (180). Ray's lament over the fight at Wick's Farm shows that the journey has the potential to be regenerative, as Ray adopts a tone of disgust over his and the other characters' behaviour.

While the grotesque incidents emphasize the carnivalesque in *Last Orders* through degradation and regeneration, the psychological detours also suggest the presence of the carnivalesque, as the events in the text are disrupted. At Wick's Farm, Ray recalls how his affair with Amy began: "In spite of her and Jack getting stuck in their ways as if they'd been put in a mould long ago and come out and gone solid. But I suppose we all do that. We all need something to stir us up" (170-71). Although Ray is presently on a journey to dispose of Jack's ashes, he is preoccupied with thoughts of Amy. On this particular psychological detour, Ray's thinking demonstrates the carnivalesque because his thoughts are a counterpoint to his present task and because he recognizes the need for ordinary life to be disrupted. Just as the characters escape the mundanity of day-to-day life by journeying to Margate, Amy and Ray create excitement in their otherwise stable lives by beginning an affair:

I suppose two people know when something's going to happen, even when they're not so sure it ought to and they don't know how they're going to bring it about and they're afraid of it as wanting it. But they know if it's ever going to happen, now's the time.... I thought Amy chose June, she didn't choose Jack, now I've chosen Amy. They weren't so faded.... And afterwards that became out regular spot, Epsom Downs, every Thursday, for fourteen weeks, racing or no racing. (175)

Although Ray mentioned that Amy and Jack were in a rut, Ray has helped to shake things up, outside of the ordinary strictures on married life, through an affair with his friend's wife. While Ray is currently at Wick's Farm, he psychologically digresses through thoughts of Amy, demonstrating how the text avoids a linear construction of events and how the psychologically

detours involve instances where characters, in this case Ray and Amy, have rejected social conventions in the past.

After the characters visit Wick's Farm, they visit another carnivalesque location: Canterbury Cathedral. After Thomas Becket's murder, Canterbury Cathedral became a popular pilgrimage destination. The pilgrimage represents a variation of the carnivalesque because it has historically allowed individuals to evade the mundane aspects of ordinary life. As with hop-picking, the pilgrimage suspends social order. A pilgrimage often meant travel or holiday in the sense that it provided "an excuse to travel in a time and society where opportunities to escape from everyday life were limited by such things as wealth, class, gender and religious status" (Webb 45). In *Chaucer and the Late Medieval World*, Lillian M. Bisson notes that

Because pilgrims had such a variety of motives, they could include among their number a curious jumbling of the pious and the profane. Indeed pilgrimages attracted some of the less savory elements of society: thieves, pimps, bawds, and pickpockets found ample opportunity to exercise their talents. But in spite of their widely varying motivations and talents, all pilgrims dressed alike and were supposed to be treated alike in the communities that they passed through. (109)

As with Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, the pilgrimage temporarily liberates participants from social hierarchies, creating equality amongst the pilgrims. While pilgrimages created equality, they also offered individuals a means to escape the constraints of day-to-day life. Bisson claims that pilgrimages "gave people the chance to make safer journeys, see new sights, meet new people, and enjoy a break from the humdrum" (109). While hop-picking and medieval pilgrimages are similar, in that they allow people the opportunity to avoid the mundanity of day-to-day life, pilgrimages are slightly different because they incorporate worldly pleasure with the spiritual. In *Last Orders*, the pilgrimage is significant because the characters use their journey to Margate as an opportunity to visit historically important locales, like Canterbury Cathedral, and to experience a sense of reverence.

Just as the characters stop at Wick's Farm to avoid their present duty, their stopover in Canterbury is equally digressive. As the characters arrive in Canterbury, Ray mentions that Jack's request for them to dispose of him at Margate has allowed them this unique opportunity: "and it's like we're all thinking we might have lived all our lives and never seen Canterbury Cathedral, it's something Jack's put right" (193). Since Ray and the other characters are part of

the working class, opportunities to travel to locations like Canterbury are limited. In Canterbury, the characters become pilgrims. This is evident when Ray says, “It’s like we aren’t the same people who left Bermondsey this morning, four blokes on a special delivery. It’s like somewhere along the line we just became travellers” (194). Although Ray and the other characters embarked on a journey to Margate specifically to dispose of Jack’s ashes – which in itself is carnivalesque since it pulls them out of their ordinary routines – their journey becomes increasingly carnivalesque because, in Canterbury, the characters, like pilgrims in the past, become travellers. Since the characters are able to adopt the role of travellers while in Canterbury, there is clearly some carnivalesque residue attached to the place.

The characters’ experience in Canterbury incorporates not only a sense of universal humanity, as the characters become travellers as opposed to individuals, but also the spiritual in that they experience a sense of anxiety, as well as, eventually, a sense of veneration. As the characters explore Canterbury, Ray feels threatened: “It makes the cathedral at Rochester look like any old church and it makes you feel sort of cheap and titchy. Like it’s looking down at you, saying, I’m Canterbury Cathedral, who the hell are you?” (194) Ray’s initial response to the church indicates a sense of discomfort, as he feels insignificant and unworthy in its presence; however, in spite of Ray’s initial apprehension upon visiting the cathedral, he also experiences reverence. This is made clear when he compares his experience in Canterbury to a past experience when he visited June – Jack and Amy’s daughter who lives in a nursing home due to her disabilities – at the nursing home with Amy: “I look up at the arch and the walls and the carvings and the funny knobs and pinnacles and I feel like I felt at the Home when Amy said yes I could go in with her” (194). By comparing his experience at Canterbury Cathedral to his experience at the home with Amy, Ray clearly feels a sense of reverence in the presence of the cathedral, which closely mirrors the sense of reverence he experienced at the home with Amy. While the experience at the home may not necessarily be sacred, it is equally powerful, since Ray uses the experience as a comparison for the veneration and the acceptance that he feels as he enters the cathedral.

During the characters’ visit to Canterbury Cathedral, the grotesque incidents that have previously occurred at Wick’s Farm provide a certain level of rejuvenation, in that the characters’ behaviour improves. After Lenny and Vince’s fight, Vince’s behaviour changes and he becomes conciliatory: “[Vince’s] voice sounds all sweet and mild, like you wouldn’t think that half an

hour ago he nearly punched Lenny's face in" (193). Vince's behaviour has changed as a result of the fight at Wick's Farm and as a result of their present location, Canterbury Cathedral. Since the Cathedral is a place of veneration and repentance, Vince's behaviour appears to adhere to these standards, as he is visibly pacific. Later, Ray makes another reference to the fight at Wick's farm and to Lenny and Vince's subsequent appearances:

We must look a strange bunch. Me and Vic aren't much the worse for wear but Vince is all scuffed and mud-stained. He puts on his coat, which hides most of it except the bottoms of his trousers, where it's worst. Lenny looks like he's been pulled through a hedge. He's hobbling slightly but he's trying not to show it. (192)

Vince and Lenny both look dishevelled as a result of their fight. Although the fight between Lenny and Vince occurs at Wick's Farm, for the rest of their journey they look as though they have just been in a fight. Their dishevelled appearances suggest the grotesque because they have compromised the dignity of their journey by fighting over Jack's ashes.

Another striking example of the grotesque is Lenny's inappropriate thoughts. While in the cathedral, Lenny recalls how, forty years ago, he was sexually attracted to Amy:

It's like I shouldn't be thinking right now, when I'm taking a turn in the cloisters, of Amy, forty years ago, when Sally was a nipper, fresh back from the seaside. But I am all of a sudden, I am. It don't do when you're escorting her dead husband's remains for the final disposing to think of the way her tits used to point and the way her frock used to hang on her. But I am. (209)

Although Lenny feels that it is inappropriate to have carnal thoughts of Amy when he is in the cathedral and while he is on a journey to dispose of her late husband's ashes, he is unable to abide by the rules regarding decency and etiquette. In spite of Lenny's inability to follow these rules, he views the stopover in Canterbury as a way for him and the other characters to reform their behaviour: "It was for us, to put us back on our best behaviour, to clean up our acts. Seeing how Amy aint here" (210). Although Lenny regards the cathedral as a means for him and the other characters to improve their behaviour, he is still unable to control his thoughts: "It's just as well your thoughts don't show in your face, though that aint such a let-out with my mush. Face like a fire alarm. But you can't help your face, even less than your thoughts. You can't help flesh being flesh" (210). By speaking about "flesh being flesh," Lenny is invoking the grotesque, as he is bringing the discussion about thoughts, in this place of veneration, to the bodily, and

therefore grotesque, level. As a flesh and blood man, Lenny cannot escape his lewd thoughts, despite the sacredness of his location.

In spite of their disreputable appearance and the bawdy nature of Lenny's thoughts, the characters are able to reconcile in Canterbury. As the characters first arrive in Canterbury, Vince goes out of his way to act as a tour guide in an effort to apologize for his behaviour earlier in the journey, as Lenny observes: "I reckon he's sorry, that's what he is. I reckon he's trying to make amends. We've all got a bit of that to do if you look back over the years. Excluding Vic maybe. Clean hands, as always" (203). Lenny recognizes Vince's behaviour as conciliatory, and he also realizes that the entire group, except for Vic, have done things over the years that require some level of recompense. By the end of their stopover in Canterbury, the characters achieve a sense of forgiveness and of collectivity that is clear as Ray exits the cathedral:

I sit there, keeping an eye out, but I don't see them anywhere, so I get up and find the way out, and then I spot them, standing on the paved area, looking out for me. I think, Friends. The sky's dark and threatening and the wind's cold but they don't look like they're getting peeved. They look like they're glad to be here together, like all's forgiven. (225)

The dark and threatening sky juxtaposes with the forgiveness that results as the four friends reunite. Although the cathedral was initially threatening, Ray and the other characters have reconciled and are leaving the locale with the sense that they are, once again, friends.

The psychological detours function similarly to the grotesque, as both reinforce the presence of the carnivalesque. During the visit to the cathedral, Ray takes a vacation from the present, as he recalls a conversation that he had had with Jack concerning the money that Jack had borrowed from Vince for Ray to gamble. Ray experiences a sense of guilt because, at this point in the novel, he has kept the proceeds and is potentially hurting Amy, since the money is ultimately meant for her and Vince's benefit. This is clear when he says,

Thinking, It's like he's looking at me now, knowing. Better make your mind up, Raysy, better make it up quick. It's like it wasn't just the dosh, it was me an' all, the two together. There's the money, Ame, and there's Raysy. You'll be all right with Lucky. Nudge, wink. I reckon you'll see each other right. (225)

The narrative is disrupted because, in spite of Ray's actual physical location, he is psychologically in the past, as he remembers a conversation that he has had with Jack. While the

narrative is dislocated by Ray's psychological detour, the passage is also disrupted because Ray's voice is mixed with Jack's. Just as carnival destroys hierarchies and barriers, the litany of voices in this passage disrupts the monologue and creates an internal dialogue. As the psychological digressions interrupt the flow of the narrative, they also allow the characters opportunity to resolve their issues. During Lenny's mental detour in the cathedral, he recalls how he and his daughter, Sally, became estranged:

Seeing as there's three of us here involved, counting Raysy. And Sally's paid her price, if you can say she ever deserved to in the first place, being the innocent party, or at least the least guilty. Since I don't suppose it happened while she was looking the other way. It was Vincey's doing in the first place, but it was me who said, when she came right out with it and she said she wanted to have the baby, "No you don't, my girl." My first fully weighed up response as a father, words just shot from my gob. She said he'd come back and do right by her. I said, "Don't talk bollocks, girl. What book've you been reading?" And she ain't ever forgiven me since. (203)

Lenny realizes that he is responsible for his estrangement from his daughter Sally because he persuaded her to have an abortion in spite of her objections. While Lenny may still hold Vince responsible for impregnating Sally, thus creating the situation, he is now willing to take responsibility for his complicity in the aftermath. Lenny later suggests that he will contact Sally after the trip, demonstrating his progression: "Maybe the first thing I ought to do after we've done our duty by Jack here is go and pay Sally a visit. It's me, girl. It's your old dad, remember? It aint just another passing prick" (209). Lenny's psychological detour proves to be regenerative because, while Lenny has yet to reconcile with Sally, he has emotionally progressed on these psychological detours towards reconciliation with her, since he plans to make amends with her after his journey to Margate.

After the characters sojourn in Canterbury, they arrive at another historically significant locale: Margate. Although Margate is no longer a major English holiday destination, it still performs a carnivalesque function for the characters since, at the end of the novel, the characters achieve a sense of release. At the turn of the century, Margate was a popular seaside resort. Historian John Walton describes Margate as a seaside resort that put the "civilizing process" in reverse and evoked the "spirit of carnival through the upturning of social order and the celebration of the rude, excessive, anarchic, the hidden and the gross, in a way that generates

tension and challenges the notion of respectability” (4). As a result, continues Walton, a culture war seems to have been in effect through a confrontation between the “prim and the Rabelaisian aspects of British character [whereby] the genteel, controlled, symmetrical front of the resort is invaded by disorder, untidiness and misrule” (4). Margate, therefore, embodied Bakhtin’s idea of the carnivalesque because Margate pulls British citizens out of ordinary life by suspending the customary order.

Despite her absence from the characters’ journey to Margate, Amy experiences release from her obligation to her daughter June. As Amy is visiting June at the nursing home, she is able to free herself from the responsibility of visiting June: “What I’m trying to say is Goodbye June. Goodbye Jack. They seem like one and the same thing. We’ve got to make our own lives now without each other, we’ve got to go our different ways. I’ve got to think of my own future” (278). Amy experiences a release since, after Jack’s death, she is liberated from her oppressive routine of visiting June at the nursing home. Amy’s emancipation from June is permanent, as she is looking to escape her solitary responsibility of parenting June, since Jack had refused to take part in June’s life (171). After Jack and Amy’s wedding, Amy looked for a temporary release from her life with Jack when she suggested that they spend their honeymoon in Margate. This becomes clear as Amy recalls her honeymoon with Jack:

I felt everything is still possible, everything is still floating, the water lapping and slapping beneath us, and I didn’t notice, or care if I did, that the smile he’d put on his face now was like the smile on one of those ducks. It was only when we got to the end that I thought, This isn’t true, it’s only a picture, a seaside postcard, and maybe that’s what he was thinking. How could I laugh and smile and act like life was a holiday? My whole stupid idea of going to Margate. (254)

Since Amy chooses Margate as a honeymoon spot, she is clearly seeking a temporary escape from motherhood, as well as her married life in London; however, for Amy, the honeymoon in Margate fails to perform a carnivalesque function, as she cannot escape her recognition of the artificiality of her surroundings or the reality she is fleeing. In spite of Amy’s carnivalesque aspirations – believing that Margate can restore her relationship with Jack – she cannot enjoy her holiday, as the artificial atmosphere in Margate reinforces the failure of the honeymoon to regenerate her relationship with Jack.

As already mentioned, Margate is significant because that is where Amy and Jack honeymooned; however, Margate is also significant because Jack wants his ashes thrown off of Margate's jetty. Unfortunately, according to Vince, the jetty was destroyed in the nineteen seventies:

“Got swept away, didn't it, in a storm. Nineteen seventy- something. I remember Amy saying, ‘Did you hear about Margate Jetty?’ I reckon that's why Jack specified the Pier. He didn't mean the Pier, he meant the jetty. That's what we all remember, going to the jetty. But he must've remembered there wasn't no jetty any more, so he settled on the Pier.’ (271)

While Vince claims that the jetty no longer exists due to its destruction in a storm, in Ray's narrative, as the characters are throwing Jack's ashes off of the Pier, Ray sees remnants of the jetty:

But there aint nothing here but huge great slabs of stone laid as flags, all pocked and pitted and puddly, and a low granite parapet, like kerbstones, half broken away, and the wind and the rain and the spray. On one side the waves are smacking and crashing, and on the other they're gurgling and clucking like they're trying to apologize. One way there's Margate and Dreamland, the other there's the open sea. Except it aint just the open sea, because now we can peer round the end of the raised bit, we can see it: a rusty mass of old iron-work sticking up out of the water about three hundred yards out, the waves surging around it, like what's left of a fall-in bridge. (292)

While Margate is no longer overtly carnivalesque, the remnants of the jetty serve as a reminder of the former atmosphere, especially considering that, upon the characters' arrival, Margate appears run-down, as the weather is imposing and most of the arcades are closed (269). In spite of Ray's initial impression of Margate – “it don't look so golden, not in this weather, it don't look like it's made of gold” (269) – the location still contains elements of its previous incarnation.

Although there has been a decline in Margate's significance as a popular seaside resort, there are grotesque elements that re-establish the carnivalesque in Margate; however, examples of the grotesque are less prominent than at Wick's Farm or Canterbury Cathedral. As the characters arrive in Margate, the first thing that Lenny mentions is that he needs to urinate: “Journey's end. Allelujah. I need a pee” (262). In this instance, the act of urinating is celebratory, as it marks the end of the characters' journey; however, Lenny is also referring to the amount of alcohol that has

been consumed on their journey and the natural by-product of drinking. While urinating can be considered ceremonial in this circumstance, Ray uses urine metaphors to discuss the weather in Margate, emphasizing the grotesque: “All wind, no piss” (264). By comparing rain to urine, Ray is evoking the grotesque, as the earth and the body are presented as permanently united.

Another striking example of the carnivalesque occurs when the characters dispose of Jack’s ashes, as the scattering process becomes grotesque. As the characters are about to throw Jack’s ashes off of the pier, they realize that the rain makes the ashes stick to their hands: “and Vic says, ‘Keep your hands as dry as you can,’ wiping his own hands on a handkerchief, and I realize what he means. It’s so Jack don’t stick to us, it’s so we don’t get Jack stuck to our hands” (293). While ashes can be associated with death and decay, in this instance, they are also associated with life, as Ray compares scattering Jack’s ashes to sprinkling seeds: “And I know I’ve got to do it quick, like scattering seed” (294). Ray compares Jack’s ashes to seeds and, as a result, the ashes become associated with life, as opposed to death. In fact, the ashes serve as sort of restoration for the characters, as the disposing of Jack’s ashes creates a sense of collectivity and of resolution, since Margate brings the characters together in spite of their issues with each other. This is made clear when Ray says,

Then I throw the last handful and the seagulls come back on a second chance and I hold up the jar, shaking it, like I should chuck it out to sea too, a message in a bottle, Jack Arthur Dodds, save our souls, and the ash that I carried in my hands, which was the Jack who once walked around, is carried away by the wind, is whirled away by the wind till the ash becomes wind and the wind becomes Jack what we’re made of. (294-295)

Margate becomes the spiritual end to the characters’ pilgrimage in both the metaphorical and physical sense because the characters are able to achieve a sense of reconciliation and they come together. Bakhtin’s claim that death creates a sense of collectivity is present in *Last Orders* as the disposing of Jack’s ashes brings the characters together. As Ray and the other characters’ throw Jack’s ashes off of Margate Pier, a sense of collective human awareness is created, since the characters and their relationships with Jack and with each other are revitalized.

Just as the grotesque incidents ultimately revitalize the characters’ relationships with each other, so do the psychological digressions. Although the characters issues are resolved in Margate, during their psychological detours, the characters are still in the process of resolving their issues. As the characters reach the pier to lay Jack’s ashes to rest, the characters continue to

vacation from the present moment via mental diversions. During Ray's narrative, he embarks on a mental detour through his past, as he imagines himself addressing his daughter Susie in an attempt to mend their relationship:

And I could say, I'm sorry I stopped writing. Because it was me who stopped first, I'll admit that, but I had my reasons. I'm a small man but I've got my pride and I aint good at admitting things. It was because of Carol. It was because Carol went and left me, dumped me for some other joker, and I was ashamed and afraid to tell you because I reckoned you'd think, for all that you and she used to be daggers drawn, that it was my fault somehow, or I was only pitching for sympathy or it was something to do with you having taken off in the first place. (281)

Although Ray has just arrived in Margate with his friends, he psychologically digresses by lamenting the breakdown of his relationship with Susie. In this instance, the narrative exhibits carnivalesque qualities as the sequence of events is disrupted: While Ray is physically in Margate, he is psychologically in the past, once again demonstrating the anachronistic nature of the narrative. Ray's mental detour also shows that psychological digressions lead to reconciliation, as Ray is able to envision a way to reconcile mistakes from his past.

Last Orders can be regarded as carnivalesque since the locations – Wick's Farm, Canterbury and Margate – are historically carnivalesque because, in the past, these three locations temporarily suspended ordinary life. Not only are the locations carnivalesque, but the grotesque incidents in which the characters are involved that occur at the locales are also carnivalesque, as they offer a temporary suspension from everyday life and its conventions. In addition to the carnivalesque locations and the grotesque situations, the narrative can also be viewed as carnivalesque, as events in the text are disrupted and anachronistic. Although the journey begins with contention, over the course of the journey, the grotesque incidents lead the characters to reconciliation. In spite of the problems that the characters have with each other, there is a sense of camaraderie towards the end of the journey as their relationships with one another are revitalized. For instance, while Ray has been dishonest with Vince regarding the contested money, at the end of the novel, Ray decides to come clean and tells Vince that he indeed has the money for him, thus demonstrating a significant level of reconciliation. Since Margate provides the characters with the ultimate sense of revitalization, the other locales can be viewed as instrumental in the development of this process. While there is a significant level of disruption at

Wick's Farm, in Canterbury, the characters demonstrate progression in their behaviour towards each other and through their psychological detours; it is the carnivalesque that drives the characters towards this reconciliation. As though in acknowledgement of the presence of the carnivalesque in their journey, Ray says in the final passage, "special circe, special request, special mission" (289).

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