

5-2015

The Pandemonium of Change: Endurance of the Carnavalesque Mode

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The University of Southern Mississippi

The Pandemonium of Change: Endurance of the Carnavalesque Mode

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of English

May 2015

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Abstract

The carnivalesque is a literary mode that takes the characteristics of medieval carnivals and brings them to literature. Academic study of the carnivalesque has thus far been relatively limited, leaving the researcher to explore a largely untapped field of literary analysis. The carnivalesque is most easily observable in the more celebrated mode of literature known as magical realism, which is a mode generally associated with Latin American authors, including several Nobel laureates. Magical realism deals with the insertion of traditional supernatural elements into otherwise natural worlds, which is the point where this mode intersects with the carnivalesque (though the two are not dependent on each other). This research seeks to prove the endurance of the carnivalesque mode—specifically that its effects outlast its actions—and will include an exploration of magical realism as well. The major text for this research is Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, and the analysis will include a selection of magical realist novels. Through a careful retracing of carnival history, analysis of key carnivalesque elements, and close literary analysis, the researcher intends to study a facet of the carnivalesque mode previously overlooked by Bakhtin.

Key Terms: carnivalesque, magical realism, subversion, parody, laughter, marketplace language, material bodily principle, Latin America, medieval Europe, carnival, folklore, folk tradition

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

The carnivalesque is a literary phenomenon that is derived, as its name implies, from carnival celebration. The carnivalesque in literature was explored by Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin in his book *Rabelais and His World*, first published in 1965. Bakhtin was the first to define and explore the carnivalesque, elements symbolic of and reverential to the carnivals of medieval Europe.¹ At their core, elements of the carnivalesque, such as all-encompassing laughter and jesters, revolve around subversion—many medieval carnivals were extremely religious, but Bakhtin connects these with the austere attitudes and rigid class structures that the secular, jovial celebrations sought to undo—specifically of the elite classes (Bakhtin 6). Far from complete and reckless rebellion, the carnivalesque seeks a certain harmony between the privileged and the forgotten through the use of chaos, and it temporarily reverses the positions of these two groups during carnival time.

The reversal that results from the carnivalesque is a complex victory. While the inversion of power is temporary, an understanding lasts that exposes the gossamer pillars maintaining the social imbalances; truth is reassessed in the carnivalesque. The chaos of the carnivalesque does not reflect the futility of mindless power struggle—there is no extreme, like anarchy, and no spectatorship—but the pandemonium of change. This change results in the only fair and logical solution: a stalemate, in which both the upper and lower classes understand that while they cannot switch socioeconomic rank, they can better understand each other's experiences from a brief shift in that rank². Carnavalesque elements suggest the encompassing of all humanity; the subversion of the elite by the

¹ These celebrations were descended from the Feast of Fools.

² See page sixteen for an analysis of the communication between classes during carnival.

lower class allows every level of the social hierarchy to join the fun, resulting in the temporary destabilization of the classes. Paramount to a full comprehension of the triumphant potency of carnivalesque elements is the mindfulness that the carnivalesque descends from the carnival and, more importantly, celebration; the carnivalesque is never dull, stagnant, or somber, and is in fact incomplete without mirth. The “victory” in carnivalesque literature may be more resonant for the lower class, but it does not exclude the elite and it seeks to make everyone laugh. In addition to the carnivalesque, my argument will analyze the magical realist mode, the literature of which I believe contains the most resonant realization of carnivalesque action.

Magical realism now denotes a very specific mode in literature, but the term has changed considerably from when it was first coined by German art critic Franz Roh in his 1925 essay “Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism.” In her work *Magical Realism: The New Critical Idiom*, Maggie Ann Bowers summarizes Roh’s definition, writing that he “introduced the term to refer to a new form of post-expressionistic painting during the Weimar Republic. . . he coined the term that is translated as ‘magical realism’ to define a form of painting that differs greatly from its predecessor (expressionist art) (9). Though Roh originally created the term to describe a new kind of painting emerging in Germany, magical realism has since evolved into term describing an innovative and popular style of literature. Although authors of many different nationalities have made significant contributions to this mode, magical realism has become predominantly associated with Latin American authors, on whom I will focus on during my analysis of magical realism. At its simplest, current definitions of magical realism places supernatural, magical, or fantastic elements into an otherwise realistic environment. Yet the term is still the subject

of much contention. In his essay “Magical Realism: A Problem of Definition,” Kenneth Reeds writes, “despite so many people using the term [magical realism], it still remains obscured with few venturing a definition. This confusion stems from an early separation of Roh’s original notion from the term which later resulted in many critics using the words ‘magical realism’ in the same forum to refer to different notions” (175). Since its identification, magical realism has been developed to describe a literary mode employed by such innovative and lauded writers as Nobel Prize winners Toni Morrison and the late Gabriel García Márquez—the latter’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) is widely considered the seminal text of this mode.

The key action of magical realist texts is that they do not call attention to the juxtaposition of the real and the so-called impossible, so the fantastic elements quietly serve the story alongside their realistic counterparts; for example, in Sir Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, Saladin Chamcha begins to grow horns from his forehead, but nearby characters merely state that they see the horns and then move on with life as usual. With nuanced techniques, practitioners of this mode use its elements to stress the legitimacy of both the supernatural and the natural. Magical realism is also rooted in nostalgia; authors working in this mode seek to reestablish their folk culture beliefs as right and true, contesting the empirical and “enlightened” reality of European invaders. Because of this inherent desire to subvert those who have proclaimed themselves superior, I have chosen the magical realist mode as the most appropriate body of literature from which to select texts for my analysis of the subversive carnivalesque.

Always humorous and sometimes hostile, the subversion of the carnivalesque is based in the discontent of the people, specifically the lower class. The carnivalesque is

steeped in the socioeconomic inequality that exists between the elite and the inferior, which Bakhtin traces back to medieval Europe. Writers employing carnivalesque elements address the imbalances that exist wherever one group enjoys a higher socioeconomic situation than another. These writers also show what happens when those deemed inferior are given the chance, no matter how transient, to ridicule their self-professed superiors. This subversion also allows the lower class to reassess its opinions of the elite—if the lower class has believed the elite class to be heinous for their luxurious lifestyle, once the lower class has sampled that lifestyle its members may reconsider their opinions. The objective of the carnivalesque is that the classes must exchange circumstances and the prejudices of each must be scrutinized; the effect is the same regardless of the groups involved, so long as one of the groups enjoys a higher status than the other and there is an opportunity for the imbalance to be upset with a good joke. The humor in the carnivalesque is important because it contributes to the geniality of carnival; the good-natured carnival in turn facilitates both joy and hope.

The world that results from carnivalesque subversion is a world that exists as the hope of lower classes. As Bakhtin explains, “While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside of 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” (Bakhtin 7). My argument begins here, with Bakhtin’s stipulation that freedom, revival, and renewal only occur “while carnival lasts.” The subversion that occurs as a result of carnivalesque action is temporary and any inversion of structure and power must revert to their original order. Yet Bakhtin appears to take the position that because the subversion itself is temporary and because

the parent concept, carnival, was temporary, the effects of the carnivalesque must also end. The evidence, however, points to the opposite: while carnivals did indeed end, they were seasonal events that took place every year as a result of many months of preparation and anticipation. Carnavalesque chaos and subversion are finite, but the excitations carnival seeks to evoke continue in the participants. I argue that the effects of the carnivalesque do not end with the conclusion of carnivalesque action. By observing carnivalesque elements in the texts of Latin American writing in the magical realist mode, I will demonstrate that the effects resulting from the carnivalesque—the sentiments, exhilarations, and memories of carnival participants—are not temporary, but last long after the close of the event. I will also demonstrate that even though it exists within the often nostalgic magical realist novel, the carnivalesque looks to the future.

SOURCES RELATED TO THE CARNIVALESQUE AND MAGICAL REALISM

The primary text that will be used for the identification of carnivalesque elements in the literature will be Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, the critical text that first identified and explored the carnivalesque. Maggie Ann Bowers' *Magical Realism: The New Critical Idiom* will be the primary text for discussing magical realism. A variety of critical articles pertaining to magical realism and the carnivalesque will also be used to further understanding of the respective elements and to aid in a more grounded, thorough development of the argument.

SOURCES EXHIBITING THE CARNIVALESQUE AND MAGICAL REALISM

The literature used for the observation of both the carnivalesque and magical realism will be works from the Latin American tradition. The primary text for the thesis will be Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972). In addition, the argument will also draw on *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985) by renowned author Gabriel García Márquez. Additional texts may be cited as needed. All the texts used in the research and analysis will be in the magical realist mode.

METHODOLOGY

By careful close-reading, the elements representative of the carnivalesque will be identified and described in the literature. Excerpts will be taken from the selected texts to provide examples of those carnivalesque elements and enhance the comprehension of their function and importance. In the third section of this thesis, a substantial excerpt will

be taken from Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* for an extended analysis of all of the carnivalesque elements in action.

1: The Last Laugh

The carnivalesque is a literary phenomenon derived from the sentiments, exhilarations, and memories of the carnival, specifically the religious carnivals of the medieval age—making the history of the carnivalesque a history of the people. These sentiments occur during carnival celebration, and though the physical festivity ultimately ends, the exhilarations and memories continue to live on in the people. The critic most associated with the carnivalesque is Mikhail Bakhtin, whose his foundational work *Rabelais and His World* (1965), asserts that medieval religious carnivals “celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; [they] marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast . . . of change and renewal” (Bakhtin 10). Carnivals possess a subversive power that allows revelers to undam the frustration and disillusionments of their lives and go on living. By analyzing the magical realist texts *Bless Me, Ultima*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and *Love in the Time of Cholera*, I will argue that while Bakhtin’s claim that celebration brings liberation is accurate, it is only the physical action of carnival that is “temporary”; the effects of that action last beyond carnival’s end because the carnivalesque fosters enduring change. The effects that are inspired in carnival-goers do not cease with the close of the celebration, in fact do not cease at all, but continue in the lives of the practitioners; it is critical to remember this continuation in order to refrain from trivializing carnival’s subversive and humorous power, which is depleted and potentially invalidated if considered temporary. The following analysis of the critical work of Bakhtin and a number of other critics will outline the various elements of the carnivalesque in literature. Bakhtin’s quintessential critical work on the

carnavalesque mode identifies the following elements as indispensable to the categorization of a literary work as carnivalesque: subversion, parody, laughter, a universal spirit, communication, marketplace language, the material bodily principle, madness, masks, diffusion of fear, and jesters.

My thesis draws primarily on Bakhtin's definitive analysis of carnivalesque elements, most fully realized in medieval literature. Bakhtin's critique is essentially an analysis of the French Renaissance author François Rabelais, specifically of Rabelais' five-, mid-16th century work, *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel*. Bakhtin asserts that the Renaissance was likely the last time the carnivalesque was employed in literature in keeping with its origins in pure carnivals; in his opinion, its perversion (its use in literature for purposes other than humorous subversion, or the misuse or misunderstanding of carnivalesque elements) had at least begun by the eighteenth century. Bakhtin also claims the literary presence of the carnivalesque had certainly been misunderstood and misused by the dawn of the twentieth century; i.e., authors were employing the carnivalesque in their work without appreciating its original purpose, which led them failing to utilize the carnivalesque to its best and originally-intended potential. The carnivalesque was ideally suited to the Renaissance period because of its connection to rebirth and renewal. In Bakhtin's estimation, Rabelais is the author who best and most accurately employed carnivalesque elements in his literature, writing so that each element worked in the fiction the way it worked in carnival; however, to facilitate ease in understanding the parts of my argument, I will focus on contemporary texts. Worth noting and exploring are some critiques of Bakhtin, which identify potential deficiencies in his analysis.

Though Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* is the definitive study of the carnivalesque, the text is not without its opposition. In "Bakhtin's Carnival Laughter and the Cajun Country Mardi Gras," critic Carl Lindahl insists that while *Rabelais and His World* essentially captures the ultimate spirit of the carnivalesque, the book lacks a full understanding of the carnivalesque action due to Bakhtin's failure to acknowledge *all* of the nuances of the carnival.³ He suggests "Bakhtin, in setting up folklore as an absolute pole in his dialectic of culture, exaggerates certain aspects of carnival to an extreme" (Lindahl 57). Lindahl agrees that carnivals were a time of subversion, but he insists that the subversion was not as absolute as Bakhtin believed because the lower-class then used their parodies to mockingly lord over the elite as the elite had lorded over them. This simple inversion of power would suggest that carnival and the carnivalesque did not work to inspire or rejuvenate, but merely to exact revenge by degrading the elite, as opposed to mocking them with playful insults. Lindahl points out the many instances where carnival asserts its own strict rules amongst all its humor, as when he describes the role of the "capitaine" of the Courir de Mardi Gras. The capitaine acts as a "temporary despot" as he leads the group; he "calls his troupe to a halt on the road before the farmhouse, then rides forward alone to ask the owner's permission to enter" (58). In Lindahl's estimation, the capitaine is an example of how rank still exists in the carnivalesque along with a rigid order in the celebration. Of Bakhtin's dogmatic insistence that carnival facilitated the absolute, though temporary, liberation of the lower-class, Lindahl writes, "Here he is half-correct, but half—and essentially—wrong. The freedom of Mardi Gras . . . is rooted

³ In his article, Carl Lindahl attempts to redefine the carnivalesque by testing it against the contemporary festival *Courir de Mardi Gras*, analyzing carnivalesque elements as they have come to manifest in the present-day.

in order . . . the degree of liberation is proportionate to the intensity of the discipline imposed. Even on its most superficial level, Mardi Gras imposes enormous restraints” (62). Bakhtin does overlook the structured hierarchy of carnival, even though some elements of hierarchy manifest in his work, particularly in his descriptions of the jester, who leads the celebration, and his parodies of royal courts and religious observances. Though imperfect, *Rabelais and His World* is the critical text my thesis will draw on most, as it remains the preeminent critique of the carnivalesque, evidenced by the fact that even with his dissatisfaction with Bakhtin’s ideas, Lindahl seems to understand that he cannot analyze carnivalesque elements without quoting and drawing from Bakhtin’s foundational work. The carnivalesque is about subversion and liberation, but like any other system it needs guidelines in order to exist and be definable; the parent of the carnivalesque, carnival, is also a system in which rules and parameters exist, a structured event whose regulations and conventions ensure its repeatability. For better or worse, Bakhtin’s work remains the best and most complete analysis of the carnivalesque in literature.

Whether one supports Bakhtin’s position that carnival achieves complete, albeit temporary subversion, or Lindahl’s argument that inversion of the power structure is hardly subversive, neither analytical work can deny that the effects of the carnivalesque are long-lasting. Even in Lindahl’s assessment, carnival action works to foster sentiments and influences that survive long past the festival itself. Lindahl writes, “the lower classes—in duplicating the power structure of their leaders—simply reaffirmed their submission to the social order . . . The lower classes’ day of play power was just enough to keep resentment [for the elite] containable” (65). Thus, even if the carnival does not

succeed in the way, or to the degree, that Bakhtin asserts it does, the fact that it perpetuates a system is further proof of its ability to create effects that outlast its physical period of celebration. Before continuing my argument, however, it is necessary to first cover a brief history of the medieval carnival.

There are two major manifestations of carnival celebration from which the carnivalesque is born: pure feasts, in which the lower-class triumphs, and official feasts, which features the triumph of the elite. The pure feasts, which were the original, gay carnivals, provided a “nonofficial, extraecclesiastical, and extrapolitical aspect of the world” and a “second life” that permitted the medieval lower-class to experience the same escapism that modern man might seek at the cinema (Bakhtin 6). Much of Bakhtin’s introduction to the carnivalesque rests on his comparison of chaotic, rejuvenating pure feast, representing equality for all, to its less attractive twin, the austere, rank-recognizing official feast representing the “consecration of inequality” (10). The official feasts sought to perpetuate what the pure feasts sought to subvert: the disparity of the socioeconomic structure. According to Bakhtin, the official feasts, which “sanctioned the existing pattern of things,” “used the past to consecrate the future,” and “asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy . . . the existing values, norms, and prohibition” (9). The “second life” of the carnival was all about the parody of the elite, as it was the only form of subversion available to the lower-class. Carnival provided a fleeting opportunity for the inequality of daily life to be subverted, and in some instances inverted and distorted. Carnival was a celebratory time when class was only as valuable as the parody used to discredit it—this discrediting is itself carnivalesque subversion.

Subversion is central to the presence of the carnivalesque in literature, though the precise act of subversion is temporary. While Bakhtin focused on the struggle between the lower and upper classes, Gulnara Karimova focuses on the behavior of children subverting adult authority in contemporary animated productions. In her article, “Interpretive Methodology from Literary Criticism: Carnavalesque Analysis of Popular Culture: Jackass, South Park, and ‘Everyday’ Culture,” Karimova writes, “the abusive language⁴ used by the South Park characters is directed towards the adults’ authority and destroys the borderline between adults and children” (42). “Abusive language” is a powerful tool, but because the children are still dependent on their parents, the structure of authority can never truly be dismantled. Karimova’s analysis deals with a different time and place than Bakhtin’s, but her work shows that carnivalesque elements are as subversive and powerful in contemporary creative work as in the work of both Bakhtin’s time and medieval times. Similarly, while Bakhtin looks at the literature and festivals of medieval times, the carnivalesque elements he outlines are not limited to that period, even if that time is where they are best observed. Bakhtin explains that carnival “opposed the official and serious tone of medieval, ecclesiastical, and feudal culture” (Bakhtin 4). He goes on to describe the entirety of the carnival’s elements in fiction as the “literature of parody,” referring to the lower-class’s retaliation against the implementation of the official feasts, a retaliation that never rose above celebration. “These official feasts had a tendency to make carnival traditions grave and supportive of elite-class values, in the latter case often appropriating the elements of pure carnivals and performing them more austere, then proclaiming the stricter interpretations to be “official.” This tendency only

⁴ See page seven for more details on carnival language.

strengthened the resolve of the lower class to carry on pure carnivals and seek the subversion and of carnival parody and celebration.

Carnival inspired an internal freedom based on people's ability to escape from the everyday problems of lower-class life, and that internal freedom outlasted the physical carnival celebration. It must be remembered that for all its subversive action, carnival could only upset the power of the elite in parody, during festival time. Lindahl writes, "Not for one second during [festival] was the official social structure dismantled" (65). The lower class had to enjoy the illusion of freedom brought by parodies and the carnival celebration itself, but these faux freedoms further contributed to the very real sentiments being inspired within the lower class. In its festival celebrations, the lower class was freed from "all religious and ecclesiastic dogmatism" including "magic and prayer" (Bakhtin 7), and once outside of the rigid structure that demanded they humble themselves in supplication (to God, their superior), they were free to act on instinct rather than requirement. That instinct was part of the people and though its realization depended on carnival, it had already been inspired in the people by the inequality of their daily lives—triggered by carnival, but already born in the people. It is important to note that while the inspiration may have resonated more with the lower class, it was also available to the elite.

As liberating as this "second life" was, carnivals were not exclusive. Carnival had a "universal spirit," meaning everyone participated (Bakhtin 7). The subversion, which required the full participation of unequal parties, was built on the foundation of laughter: the lower class enjoyed parodying the elite and the elite enjoyed it, too, as they recognized that the parody existed only within the perimeters of carnival (Bakhtin 8).

Parody and subversion are observable in Sir Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, wherein Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha transform into the archangel Gabriel and Satan, respectively, reducing and debasing the Muslim faith (and arguably all three Abrahamic religions). The regenerative celebration of the carnivalesque was enjoyed by both classes, but it was more beneficial to the lower class because carnival time was the only period when they could revel in such celebration, whereas the elite could celebrate whenever they chose. Still, the celebration was a unique freedom for both classes, as it allowed the elite to live outside of their strict daily social expectations. The laughter of this celebration is part of the freedom inspired in the carnival-goers, a freedom they relished that outlived the celebration in encouraging them to continue to hold carnival each year.

It is because carnivals were held every year that the carnivalesque becomes very much concerned with time: carnival celebrations were often seasonal and reoccurred on the same date annually. Carnival's physical end is what gives the impression that its offspring, the carnivalesque, can only accomplish the impermanent.⁵ It is precisely because the carnival was temporary, lasting days before coming to an end, that Bakhtin believes the effects of the carnivalesque are temporary. As the carnivalesque is derived from the carnival, taking all of its major characteristics and aims from the medieval event, Bakhtin cannot be faulted for drawing what would appear to be the most logical conclusion (carnivals ended, so the carnivalesque and its effects must end); however, I

⁵ It is early in his work that Bakhtin begins to associate his theory with a notion of time. "The [carnival] is always essentially related to time" is the beginning of a passage that discusses the temporal nature of the carnival; further on, Bakhtin writes that "carnival celebrated temporary celebration from the prevailing truth and from the established order" and it is here that my assumptions about the longevity of carnivalesque elements begins to diverge from those of Bakhtin (9-10).

contend that though carnival ends, the sentiments that it fosters remain within the participants. Bakhtin himself writes, “Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal” (10). His use of “change” alone challenges the temporality of the carnivalesque: if something retains the effects of change, then the effects of the carnivalesque are not finite. Similarly, Bakhtin’s description of “becoming” indicates a transformation and also suggests a continuing effect. In fact, much of Bakhtin’s research contradicts his own argument: at no point in his work does he appear to describe the end of anything, only the beginnings. Just as other particulars of carnival, such as its location, do not influence the carnivalesque elements Bakhtin analyzes in literature, neither should carnival’s length be a determinate for those elements; only the actual components, the characters and processes, of the celebration should be considered when identifying and describing the elements. One of these elements, communication, was crucial in setting up the connection between classes that facilitated subversion and laughter.

Communication is another pivotal element of the carnivalesque that is facilitated by carnival, as it allows the elite and lower classes to experience the life of the other. The communication that occurs uniquely during carnival makes it possible for these classes, usually separated by socioeconomic boundaries and prejudice, to see each other plainly and to learn about each other’s positions. More importantly, this communication makes it possible for members of the lower class to bond together and strengthen each other. Bakhtin writes that carnival communication “creates new forms of speech or a new meaning given to the old forms” (16). Carnival communication includes a speechless social discourse between the classes that doesn’t exist in everyday life, offering a “new”

way for the classes to converse that is especially seen in parody. An example of is found in *The Satanic Verses*: Chamcha and Farishta's new way of communicating comes through their transformation, allowing them to interpret each other on the normal human interactional level, but also on a religious and preternatural level. This unspoken conversation, too, will outlive carnival. The knowledge the classes gain from each other makes humor possible because it permits the elite to understand that their power hasn't really been taken and permits the lower class to see that the elite aren't opposed to mockery, since that mockery is harmless within the perimeters of carnival. Bakhtin's quote also provides an opportunity for critique, for if the carnivalesque can "create" and can change "old forms" to mean something "new," then it cannot be temporary. In addition, the knowledge gained is as internalized and enduring as sentiment. Lindahl seems to agree with my argument when he writes, "Mardi Gras defines the vitality and promotes the continuity of the group"⁶ (Lindahl 59). Carnival communication can also be literal, verbal communication when needed. In *The Satanic Verses* there are numerous instances where Farishta and Chamcha talk to each other, such as when Farishta slowly transforms into the archangel Gabriel, thus representing the elite and religion, while Chamcha transforms into Satan, thus representing the disenfranchised and lack of faith (or at the very least secularism). Carnavalesque communication creates a kind of fraternity among carnival-goers, as the elite and lower class are able to connect; however, carnival also provides the lower class with cohesion and, in turn, the strength to endure the challenges of daily life.

⁶ Mardi Gras was Lindahl's focus in his study of the carnivalesque, as well as one of the major carnivals on which Bakhtin's work draws.

Another element of the carnivalesque that is related to communication is “marketplace language” or “billingsgate,” meaning the incorporation of offensive language and vulgarities; this language furthers my argument for the carnivalesque’s lasting effects because the language itself exists before and after carnival as part of the revelers’ daily cultural life. Bakhtin describes marketplace language as insults and indecent phrases that could not be spoken in upper-class society or in formal conversation, and thus were relegated to the free or “familiar” marketplace (17). Over time this pejorative language acquired an increasingly general character until it became universally applicable; it is at this point that Bakhtin believes the language becomes fitting for the carnivalesque (17). What Bakhtin does not acknowledge is the consequence of this language’s origins: because marketplace language begins outside of carnival it cannot be contained by carnival. This language becomes a part of the carnivalesque and if the language exists prior to and extends beyond carnival, the carnivalesque itself must also extend beyond the celebration. Marketplace language supports my argument that the carnivalesque is lasting by its very nature, for marketplace language is no different from dialect or slang: it is a part of a people’s daily cultural expression. In Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima*, a group of boys acting in a Nativity play frequently curse and insult each other on stage.⁷ In one instance, one of the boys named Horse yells, “Damn you!” to another actor and the boys’ exclamations in Spanish are much worse (Anaya 157). Karimova adds an important perspective to marketplace language in writing, “this abusive language liberates the speaker from social orders and conventional rules through expressions which are broken in syntax, illogical and, by many accounts, senseless” (42).

⁷ I will provide a more in-depth analysis of this Nativity play in the third section of this thesis.

As with all parts of the carnivalesque, marketplace language must work to liberate the reveler, to subvert those who are superior and give advantage to those who are not, as well as providing an opportunity for laughter. Marketplace language is unique among components of the carnivalesque because it was a form of subversion, though only verbal, that was not wholly dependent upon carnival and could be retreated to daily.

Marketplace language is a carnivalesque element that deals directly with the action of the body and, linking it to yet another important element: the material bodily principle. This principle categorizes carnivalesque exaltation of the human body—which, by virtue of its ability to perpetuate life, ensures that the carnivalesque continues to live past carnival. The material bodily principle celebrates corporeality and provides tremendous support to my adamancy that the carnivalesque has lasting effects. In Bakhtin’s words, this principle represents the “images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life” (18). The foundation of the material bodily principle is that it represents two things; first, it represents both what the body consumes and produces. Critic Pollie Bromilow furthers the definition of the principle in her article, “Inside Out: Female Bodies in Rabelais,” writing “the significant features of the body are those points which facilitate exchange with the world: bodily protuberances and orifices through and within which transactions between the world and the body take place” (28). Second, the material bodily principle represents cyclicity through sexual life and provides the link to long-lasting effects of the carnivalesque. The material bodily principle is as important as it is complex, and the sexual, reproductive aspect is best presented in Bakhtin’s own words:

The leading themes of these images of bodily life are fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance. Manifestations of this life refer not to the isolated biological individual, not to the private egotistic “economic man,” but to the collective ancestral body of all the people. Abundance and the all-people’s element also determine the gay and festive character of all images of bodily life. (19)

Even that which is merely sexual in everyday life becomes reproductive and regenerative in carnivalesque literature, and symbolizes the continuity of sentiments, exhilarations, and memories that carnival creates. The reproductive potential of the material bodily principle can also be understood in terms of another of its functions, degradation.

Degradation represents, in part, the perpetuation of things born in carnival. According to Bakhtin, degradation does not simply mean destroying something, but also bringing something new forth (21). Bakhtin defines degradation as the process of taking something to the level of the body’s lower region: the stomach, genitals, and buttocks, suggesting food, sex and urination, and defecation, respectively. The material bodily principle represents the essential needs of the body’s lower region and signifies the rejuvenation that is key to the carnivalesque. The body’s lower region invokes the ideas of pregnancy, birth, new life, and propagation, supporting my argument on the lasting effects of the carnivalesque. Birth is not end, but beginning; those sentiments born in carnival do not die because the celebration ends. In fact, carnival is merely the process by which those sentiments are realized. Propagation—which I use to signify not the continuation of the inspired sentiment, but the larger perpetuation of carnival itself—is how carnival endures, for each reoccurrence of the celebration recalls the joy and benefits

of carnival, ensuring the people not only hold carnival again, but that they look forward to it in the meantime. Bakhtin writes that degradation is suggestive of earth, which, through sowing of harvests, invokes ideas similar to pregnancy (21). Pregnancy is creation, meaning that degradation seeks continuance just like sexual life. Lindahl writes, “There is in Mardi Gras a great creativity even at the moment of destruction” (60). Degradation may bring things down, but it also brings something new forth; it is creative, it perpetuates. As Lindahl continues to explain, “The re-creative nature of carnival shows itself precisely at the time of destruction” (61). Here Lindahl and Bakhtin intersect, as they both consider the moment of trouble—subversion, inversion, parody, degradation, etc.—to be the moment when the true purpose of carnival, rejuvenation, is possible. Like marketplace language, the material bodily principle supports my view of the lasting effect of the carnivalesque by its very nature; this principle implements the notions of birth and sowing, of continuing beyond an initial action.

Once understood, it is not difficult to identify the material bodily principle when it is in use. Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* provides copious examples of this principle. In the novel, the Buendía family line constantly receives new members in a town where prostitutes roam free and family members are always in danger of sleeping with each other. Food also plays an important role in community lunches, sustaining of the family and nourishing Aureliano’s dining competitions. The act of defecation is prominent in the story by Fernanda, who insists on defecating in a golden vase and encourages her daughter’s houseguests to fill up seventy-two other vases. Remedios the Beauty underscores this prominence with her peculiar habit of “paint[ing] little animals on the walls with a stick daubed in her own excrement” (Márquez 196). In

“‘A Chaos of Sin and Folly’: Art, Culture, and Carnival in Antebellum America,” David Wall analyzes the carnivalesque in Antebellum American art and suggests that Bakhtin “emphasizes the importance and prominence of the buttocks in grotesque imagery, not only because they are such a powerful symbol of degradation, but also because the anus represents the essential permeability of the body” (519). Permeability is a necessary symbol, as carnival action must enter the body and saturate it in order to take effect; defecation symbolizes not only the body’s action in and on the world, but also the expulsion of sadness and displeasure, the antithesis of carnival. It should be noted that every element of carnival must work to relieve the suppression of the lower class; the material bodily principle, like marketplace language, can only be carnivalesque if it offers some chance for regeneration and lightheartedness. Through its allusions to the lower body stratum and regeneration, the material bodily principle often requires specific imagery, none as crucial as that of the woman’s body.

The lower body stratum represents birth among its many other implications and there is no clearer symbol for the combination of lower body and birth than woman, whose imagery demonstrates the ability of the carnivalesque to extend beyond the carnival that gives birth to it. The material bodily principle made imagery of the woman’s body necessary to carnival and the carnivalesque. Throughout his definition of this principle, Bakhtin often mentions the images and importance of the womb and pregnancy. They both symbolize potentialities, representing the moment in carnival celebration when the lower class is spiritually freed from the awareness of their actual lives and allowed to experience the subversion of the elite. Once degradation has taken place, the invocation of the womb and pregnancy become necessary for the subsequent

regeneration (21). The cyclicity of death, life, and rebirth also necessitates the presence of the female body. In Bakhtin's own words:

Death is here always related to birth; the grave is related to the earth's life-giving womb. Birth-death, death-birth, such are the components of life itself . . . Death is included in life, and together with life determines its eternal movement. Even the struggle of life and death in the individual body is conceived by grotesque⁸ imagery as the struggle of the old life stubbornly resisting the new life about to be born, as the crisis of change.

(50)

Bakhtin's language proposes a continuing of things created during carnival time. In writing that "death is here always related to birth," Bakhtin reduces death to another phase of the reproductive process—not sometimes, but "always." Even the home of the dead is converted to the birthplace of the new when "the grave is related to the earth's life-giving womb." If Bakhtin's own language erases death, the ultimate end, it also cannot help but to deny an end to things born in or of the carnival; i.e., the carnivalesque. Just as carnivals were held every year in seasonal cycles, thereby becoming unending, Bakhtin makes death a cycle with his wordplay: "birth-death, death-birth." He further characterizes death as perpetuating when he writes, "death . . . together with life determines [life's] eternal movement." Bakhtin finishes his passage by relating the natural cycle and the image of childbirth back to one of the fundamental results of the carnivalesque, which is the "crisis of change." Although he concludes that the

⁸ Bakhtin refers to the carnivalesque as either "folk grotesque," when describing it as a mode, or "folk culture," when discussing its origins and legacy. "Folk culture," also often "folk humor," refers to the elements and inspirations of carnival as they existed before the encroachment of the official feasts.

carnavalesque is incomplete without change, Bakhtin fails to acknowledge that the notion of death existing merely as part of a cycle must instruct at least its own share of the carnivalesque. The invocations of woman's body are copious in the above excerpt and *Rabelais and His World* is brimming with allusions to birth, wombs, new life, and similar concepts. The ultimate purpose of the cycle Bakhtin suggests is the continuance of life—thus the incredible importance of woman and the imagery of reproduction and birth her body represents. If death is so defeated, whatever would have ended with it will now live on and in fact is only just becoming, as evidenced in Bakhtin's "new life about to be born." Bakhtin's own language allows for the interpretation that the connection between carnival's end and the end of its effects cannot be completely or satisfactorily established. So much of the imagery of the carnivalesque represents regeneration, reproduction, and life; however, there is dissention about the effectiveness and truthfulness of some of these images.

The female body, with all its imagery and suggestion of new life and continuance, is a point of contention in the critique of carnivalesque literature. Bromilow in particular insists that Bakhtin's interpretation of the presence of the female body in Rabelais⁹—essentially just a description of the importance of woman's womb—is incorrect and a result of either oversight or simple dismissiveness. She argues that Bakhtin's theory "marginalises [*sic*] the female bodily specificity," effectively converting what is distinctly feminine into something all-encompassing and turning functions of the woman's body into a 'universal experience' for all carnival-goers (29). Bromilow offers an important critique of Bakhtin because it is true not only of his interpretation of the

⁹ Bromilow is also working with Rabelais' novel *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel*.

female body, but also of his larger interpretations of carnival-goers, elite and lower class alike. The carnivalesque abounds in language and imagery that evokes togetherness, fraternity, equality (during temporary subversion), and universality. In Bakhtin's estimation everyone is laughing, celebrating, wearing masks, and being liberated, so individuals and even whole groups of people disappear into one enormous, chaotic body. Bromilow is critical of Bakhtin's erasure of the female, wherein "pregnancy and birth are presented as generative processes common to all rather than as uniquely female functions. Denied of her real sexual difference, woman is 'metaphorized out of existence'" (29). This accusation is well-proven in Bromilow's article and is one of many ideas missing or underdeveloped in Bakhtin's conceptualization of the carnivalesque. Bromilow's critique notwithstanding, I believe woman is still as liberated by carnival as man, for the specific reason that she was not the target of carnivalesque action. Carnival rejuvenated all of the lower class and subverted all of the elite, not just the men. While the image of her body may overshadow her, or even work to reduce her literary presence, woman is not in any way or at any time physically excluded from carnival. While Bakhtin and Rabelais may have marginalized the female body, the same does not have to be true of the carnivalesque mode, wherein the female body and its processes remain indispensable for the suggestion of birth, new life, sex, and cyclicity. What must be remembered is that like every other carnivalesque element, the woman's body—though its specific symbolism is not to be dismissed—must create or facilitate laughter.

What ties together the image of the female body and the other elements of the carnivalesque is laughter; no carnival, thus no instance of the carnivalesque, is complete without a good laugh, the most pivotal of carnivalesque's subversive elements. After all,

what gave the pure feasts their defining signature was their parodies of the elite and the religious. Bakhtin describes carnival laughter as “first of all, a festive laughter. . . Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival’s participants . . . third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives” (11-12). This laughter works harder than any other component of the carnivalesque; laughter performs the necessary subversion by ridiculing the elite, but when the elite, too, laugh then the laughter becomes an adhesive and carnival becomes true celebration, as opposed to becoming another variety of biased, official feast. The all-encompassing nature of the laughter of carnival distinguishes it from satire, for this laughter is “also directed at those who laugh” while satire places itself “above the object of [its] mockery” (Bakhtin 12). Carnavalesque laughter is demonstrated in *Gabriel García Márquez’s Love in the Time of Cholera*, wherein Fermina wants to keep a pet around the house, but her husband, Dr. Urbino says, “Nothing that does not speak will come into this house” (Márquez 23). To spite him, Fermina buys a parrot¹⁰, which does indeed talk and can still serve as a pet. To spite her in kind, Dr. Urbino teaches the parrot to speak perfect French, Spanish, and Latin, as he is a man in love with learning while his wife does not speak any of the three languages. Of course, when the bird arrived it “knew only the blasphemies of sailors” and “was excited by the servant girls” (Márquez 23), bringing much crudity to the upper-class, educated home. Before long, both Fermina and Dr. Urbino are content with the bird and they have each been both the professor and the subject of ridicule, from one another and from the bird. It is critical that all occurrences of the carnivalesque follow this pattern

¹⁰ The parrot can also serve as the madman/clown/jester of *Love in the Time of Cholera*, a role that is pivotal to the realization of the carnivalesque. See page eighteen for definition of the jester.

that allows both sides to embarrass and be embarrassed. In the realm of the carnivalesque the bird must make it possible for the doctor and his wife both to laugh, to each obtain a victory and acknowledge the victory of the other. Carnavalesque laughter spread so widely in medieval times that even in churches and schools, people could share in the joke through humorous literature such as parodies of sacred texts, prayers, and hymns (Bakhtin 14). This contagion shows once again that while simultaneously insulting and rewarding, the laughter of carnival is universal and critical to the work of carnivalesque components. Crucial to carnivalesque parody, and thus crucial to carnivalesque laughter, are masks and madness, two carnivalesque elements that in turn work to diffuse practitioners' fear and allow laughter.

Madness, masks, and fear are key elements in the carnivalesque and each helps to inspire or create the sentiments that will outlast carnival's end. The display of madness is important for the function of the carnivalesque, acting similar to intoxication by allowing the reduction or eradication of inhibition. More importantly, madness provides another opportunity for subversion, as intellectuals are challenged by those with less formal training. Madness is a "gay parody of official reason," according to Bakhtin (39). This parody of reason was realized in chaos, the only logic of carnival. In a maddened or exhilarated state of mind, revelers were free to indulge in behaviors and actions that were not logical, reasonable, or acceptable in their everyday lives. For example, in Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, family patriarch José Arcadio Buendía becomes mad, seeing visions of the dead and believing the same day is continuously repeating itself. Yet madness should not always be considered synonymous with "insanity" in the carnivalesque. Remedios the Beauty is another character who can serve as an example

because most believe her to be mentally underdeveloped, while Colonel Aureliano Buendía believed her to be “quite the opposite [...] ‘as if she’s come back from twenty years of war’” (197). Madness thus allowed the revelers “to escape the false ‘truth of this world’ in order to look at the world with eyes free from this truth” (Bakhtin 49). The vision of the world the revelers saw exhilarated them and inspired them to continue to hold carnival. Worth noting is that it is the great memories of the previous carnival that give reason to hold the next celebration. Madness thus contributed to the sentiments, exhilarations, and memories that carnival as a whole intended; so, too, do carnivalesque masks.

The mask¹¹ is a prominent element representing the change, rebirth, ecstasy, and humor characteristic of the carnivalesque. The symbol should not always be considered literally, as a mask could manifest as a costume, face paint, or any other method of disguise. Bakhtin insists that the metamorphoses invoked by the presence and use of the mask is what gives this symbol its real ability to mock (40). Revelers put on the mask to “become” the elite, not only as parodies of actual royal persons, but also as faux regents of carnival. This simultaneous transformation and concealment allowed revelers to indulge and feel more of the sentiments that would stay with them long after the carnival was cleared. The parrot of the Urbino household again provides a useful example, as he disguises himself with voices, surprising thieves with the bark of a dog and chasing girls with language of a sailor; in both of these instances the parrot uses the cover of voices to indulge in actions abnormal for a bird. Analyzing carnivalesque painting, Wall identifies “blackface” as a particular kind of mask, writing “masking and blackface had been

¹¹ Bakhtin argues that the “theme of the mask” as well as the other carnivalesque elements were eventually perverted by Romanticism and the encroachment and appropriation of the official feasts (39-40).

ubiquitous features of all crowd-directed social disorder, from battling fire crews, to race riots, to anti-rent protests” (533). The mask itself is a dialectic symbol that questions both the person behind it and the person looking at it, simultaneously dispelling the fears each side has of the other. This dispelling of fears is another key element that characterizes the carnivalesque. Bakhtin’s cursory discussion of fear suggests this element is less important than the others, though I believe it at least merits inclusion in my discussion. Once carnival practitioners are no longer afraid—of the elite class or of consequences for upsetting their superiors (both within the context of carnival, of course)—they are free to laugh, celebrate, and revel in the joy of carnival. *Bless Me, Ultima* provides a strong example of the carnivalesque dispelling of fear. The boys acting in the Nativity play retreat to speaking in Spanish while carnivalesque chaos ensues on stage; this retreat to their native tongue allows the boys to speak more vulgarly and more boldly, their fear erased by the comfort of familiar Spanish and their white teacher’s inability to understand it. The boys are usually expected to speak in English around their English-speaking teachers—a language they are less comfortable with because it is neither their native tongue nor frequently used in their daily lives outside of school—but in the midst of carnivalesque action normal rules do not apply. The expulsion of fear is equal to the creation of strength mentioned earlier in this thesis and thus, like madness and the mask, contributes to the lives of revelers outside of carnival. Jesters can also help to dispel fear, as they usher practitioners into chaos and guide them through the celebration.

The presence of jesters, clowns, and even madmen is characteristic of the carnivalesque and the only specific role that Bakhtin ascribes to this literary tradition. With such singularity the jester’s importance may be assumed with some certainty,

although Bakhtin's discussion of it is brief. Jesters are the "constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit" (8). The jester incited the revelers to celebrate, indulge, and undam themselves. The critic's description of the jester and his role is incomplete at best, murky at worst, though Bakhtin insists that jesters are not actors and are central to the instigation of carnivalesque subversion (8). He seems to believe that they serve as bridges between the physical, common man and his spiritual, regenerative revelry. The parrot in *Love in the Time of Cholera* is the jester of that story, inciting humor between husband and wife, chaos in the household, and "laughing madly" (Márquez 24). It is easiest to think of the jester as an usher, directing carnival-goers to the revelry and subversion that they seek, as it is often the jester's job to incite chaos. More still, the jester symbolizes incitement not just of chaos, but of celebration, of revelry, of debauchery, of subversion, of laughter; as such, he effectively becomes a symbol of the carnival itself. The jester's ability to cross over so many aspects of carnival is representative of a destruction, or at the very least a permeability, of boundaries, and thus he embodies the ability of the carnivalesque to cross the temporal boundary of the physical end of carnival celebration and continue living. The effectiveness of the carnivalesque rests on what its individual elements, like the jester, are able to create and sustain.

Together these elements—subversion, parody, laughter, a universal spirit, communication, marketplace language, the material bodily principle, madness, masks, diffusion of fear, and jesters—work together to create the spectacle of the carnivalesque, the grand festival that facilitates and demands rejuvenation. My argument has thus far insisted that the carnivalesque is a literary phenomenon that fosters enduring change in

the form of sentiment, exhilaration, and memory. The carnival is a magnificent event that allows the lower class to celebrate and forget their circumstances for a time. Although every carnival comes to an end, they are recurrent, annual, and there are multiple carnivals every year. After experiencing carnival, the practitioners look forward to its return all year long, carrying the mirth and fond memories until a time when they can make more. What is truly exposed during carnival is the contempt between classes and the potential of a united lower class; the elite are able to see how badly the lower class desires liberation and that the lower class, who outnumber the elite, is capable of accomplishing large endeavors when working together (in this instance, the lower class works together to present carnival). This glimpse of the lower class's potential to work together to create large-scale change—such as revolution, though this is not to be confused with the true purpose of carnival, which is celebration—creates a wariness and a vigilance on the part of the elite to keep the lower class in order and maintain their own superiority, hence the encroachment of the official feasts on inveterate pure carnivals. That vigilance encourages the elite to continue to oppress the lower class, functioning as another product of the carnivalesque that perpetuates even when carnival is done. It must not be forgotten, however, that the glimpse of the lower class' potential cannot create full-fledged fear in the elite class, for the dispelling of fear is a key component of the carnivalesque. In addition, while wary of the lower class, the elite know that carnival parodies and subversion are essentially jokes, and it is that knowledge that allows the elite to laugh. Everyone is rejuvenated by the carnival and liberated by the work of the components outlined in this section; everyone is able to share the all-encompassing laughter born in carnival. The elements of the carnivalesque ultimately seek to create

laughter, facilitate celebration, and rejuvenate anyone willing to submerge themselves in the regenerative action of the carnivalesque. Magical realism has goals similar to the carnivalesque and shares many of the same methods. The power and reach of magical realist authors seeking the same reclamation of power as the medieval lower class will constitute the next section of my work.

2: A Perfect Match

The magical realist mode¹² is akin to the carnivalesque because the two have similar goals and methods, though not identical. Magical realism seeks to reclaim the lost traditions of the ancestors of its practitioners—those traditions belittled, considered savage imagination, and nearly erased by the encroachment of European religion and philosophy. I will focus on the postcolonial magical realism of Latin America, the chief and most widely accepted expression of the mode.¹³ In her critical work *Magical Realism: The New Critical Idiom*, Maggie Ann Bowers writes,

magical realism has become associated with fictions that tell the tales of those on the margins of political power and influential society. This has meant that much magical realism has originated in many of the postcolonial countries that are battling against the influence of their previous colonial rulers, and consider themselves to be at the margins of political power. It has also become a common narrative mode for fictions written from the perspective of the politically or culturally disempowered. (33)

Like revelers seeking the rejuvenation and subversion of carnival, magical realism seeks to undo the marginalization, disempowerment, and invalidation imposed by colonizers. Whereas imperial efforts and the inevitable “enlightenment” and Christianization that followed effectively reshaped the countries that were invaded, magical realists work to

¹² There is much debate about magical realism’s classification. Different scholars argue that magical realism can be a mode, genre, style, or even cultural concept. In addition, this literary phenomenon may be identified as “marvellous,” “magic,” or “magical” realism depending on the time period (the last is the variant discussed in this argument). Bowers writes of the various terms for magical realism that “due to the variety of applications of these terms and their changing meanings, critics have found that it is difficult to consider them in terms of one unifying genre, but rather that they constitute particular narrative modes” (3).

¹³ There are of course other examples of magical realism; however, a discussion of those texts lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

uncover what those efforts buried. Still, as with the carnivalesque, there is a spirit within magical realism that accommodates more than just victims depreciated by colonial hegemony, evident in the fact that magical realism's primary objective is to situate the supernatural alongside the natural and insist that the two exist within the same world. The magical realist mode is often intensely political and accusatory, yet aims in part for a harmony between what is empirically sound and what is taken on faith. Bowers writes, "[Magical realists'] aim is to challenge the dominant culture's authority and thereby lessen its power in order to articulate their communal histories which provide the necessary knowledge for establishing and articulating their cultural identities" (85). The search for those lost traditions (myths, religions, rituals, folk culture, oral history, etc.) forces the magical realist author to push against derisive European beliefs in an effort to not only express their own beliefs, but to establish those beliefs as true, and part of the norm. Bowers also writes, "the characteristic of magical realism which makes it such a frequently adopted narrative mode is its inherent transgressive and subversive qualities" (66). By defending their respective native cultures—not only stating, but insisting that the depreciated traditions are as pivotal as the bullying European counterpart in the conception of the civilized world—the authors effectively begin to subvert the foreign culture that originally undermined theirs. It is because of this inherent subversion that the carnivalesque fits so comfortably within magical realism.

Though the two modes are incredibly similar in action and motive, there are differences between magical realism and the carnivalesque, and neither is inherent in the other. A significant distinction between the two is that the carnivalesque deals with the good-humored subversion of the elite by the lower class within a particular society, while

magical realism deals with the retaliation of colonized countries against the countries that colonized them—specifically against the beliefs that were used to colonize them. For example, in *Love in the Time of Cholera* there is carnivalesque action between the bird and Dr. Urbino and his wife, but the novel as a whole can be taken as a critique against the Western European insistence of empiricism. While both literary modes have lasting effects, magical realism has an arguably more substantial physical consequence: the ability to prolong the life of its statements by use of the written medium. The carnivalesque, too, is present in literature, but not rooted in it; medieval carnivals were events that happened and then ended. Magical realism is, by definition, a literary mode. The subversion revelers experienced wasn't an honest upset of the socioeconomic system; carnivals did not incite political change or restructuring only the temporary subversion of the elite. Literature, on the other hand, has a history of challenging ruling powers. Even today literature is still banned when its potential to corrupt or disillusion exceeds government taste; for example, *The Satanic Verses*, a controversial yet critically acclaimed magical realist novel, is still banned in India, its author's native home. Both the carnivalesque and magical realism have roots in folk culture, but magical realism has an arguably grander, more international scope, whereas the carnivalesque exist not between nations, but within nations. Both literary modes are concerned with truth, but while the carnivalesque exposes a truth it cannot achieve in any real degree (equality and fraternity between the classes), magical realism earnestly seeks to reestablish belief systems. Magical realism and the carnivalesque are not so different that they cannot exist concurrently within the same novel, but magical realism centers on the inclusion of the

supernatural in literature, in the empirical world, while the carnivalesque centers on subversion and rejuvenation through celebration.

The carnivalesque and magical realism are able to coexist because despite their difference, they both seek to retaliate against the upper or ruling classes. The carnivalesque retaliates by parodying the culture of the elite class, while magical realism accomplishes this by championing folk culture and tradition as being as real and as essential as accepted empirical truths. For example, during carnival the practitioners effectively switched places with the elite through the chaos and parody of carnivalesque action, whereas the magical realist challenges the colonizer with every insertion of the supernatural into literature, as in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* when García Márquez writes of a “man who had been turned into a snake for having disobeyed his parents” (32). For the magical realist, subversion hinges on the writer’s ability to present the truth: to show that the supernatural is natural. As Bowers explains, “the root of this transgressive and subversive aspect lies in the fact that, once the category of truth has been brought into question and the category of the real broken down or overturned, the boundaries of other categories become vulnerable” (67-68). In the process of redefining the truth of reality—what is possible in reality—magical realism subverts its elite target (European colonial powers) by undermining the veracity of that target’s culture and weakening the “boundaries” between empirical and cultural perceptions of what is real. A magical realist novel promotes the supernatural phenomena of colonized countries as not in fact supernatural, but absolutely real, and presumes that European colonial powers construct culture on partial truths and re-education that replaces native tradition with colonial ideologies. This presumption leaves hegemonic powers open to criticism about

other facets of their influence. Like the carnivalesque, magical realism contains a certain cyclicity. In belittling colonial nations, the magical realist mode often assumes the very iniquity it desires to combat, treating those colonial powers with the same dismissal initially inflicted upon its authors.¹⁴ More still, both magical realism and the carnivalesque fight against their “superiors” with material taken from those superiors (the language of the colonizers and the lifestyles to be parodied, respectively). For instance, during carnival time, practitioners use the elite class as the subject on which they model parodies; the magical realist novel of Latin America, though critical of Western European empiricism, is written in Spanish, which is the language of the colonizers. This writing in the language of the colonizer can be taken one of two ways: 1) ineffective or 2) subversive, both due to magical realism’s critique of the colonizer using the colonizer’s own language. Because of the ultimate goal of the magical realist mode—the reclamation of status and validity—I argue that this writing is subversive.

Subversion in magical realism, as with the carnivalesque, has its basis in the social distinctions between those ruling and those being ruled—though in the carnivalesque both lower and upper classes are part of the same region and culture, while the opposite is true of colonial powers and the colonized lands giving birth to magical realism. The medieval carnivals consisted largely of participants from within a single society—as carnivals often operated on local traditions and holidays—while Latin American magical realist novels generally deal with issues between colonial populations. According to Bowers, “the critics of magical realism often express their understanding of

¹⁴ It is important to note that this othering is not magical realism’s intention, otherwise the potency of the mode would be dissolved in simple “eye for an eye” revenge logic. See Bowers chapter 5, under subheading “Postcolonial Magical Realism,” beginning on page 95.

the concept in terms of cultural conflict between the ruling classes and those who have been denied power” (68). Magical realists seek to do no more or less than what carnival practitioners did, which is to show those in power—those threatening folk culture or otherwise devaluing the lifestyle of the colonized—that “high” culture is not the only culture and may not even be accurate. As Bowers explains, “The dominant culture remained dominant by denying others the power to govern and the power to challenge the truths that they proposed” (69). Through the magical realist novel the marginalized find an effective method of challenging their self-proclaimed superiors. Because celebrations are a staple of the elite’s extravagant lifestyles and literature is a key weapon of geographical and intellectual distinction and discrimination for the elite, the carnivalesque and magical realism choose ironic methods of retaliation. According to Lindahl, “Mardi Gras . . . relies upon a ruling class for its structures, its rules, even the core of its humour [*sic*]—as well as for a matrix on to which the revellers [*sic*] can project their own, often very serious, alternative vision of society” (67). Magical realist authors enjoy the same liberation as carnival-goers and both do so through the creation of an atmosphere inconsistent with their daily lives. Magical realists do not exclude the world of the colonizer, but infuse that world with their (magical realist) beliefs. Similarly, Karimova writes, “Contemporary carnival is ‘everyday’ life itself. The social environment contains the ambiguous traces of carnival: it resists the ideology of capitalism and, at the same time, reproduces the capitalist social order” (37). While magical realism and the carnivalesque may seek to subvert, they seem strangely indebted to their targets, especially magical realism, which is written in the language of the colonizers and, despite its critique of western culture, is itself an instance of that culture

(written literature, most often in the form of the novel in particular) and is lauded and absorbed by that culture. Thus, like the carnivalesque, magical realism perpetuates a system, the very system it seeks to subvert, though it also perpetuates folk culture by preserving it in written form. Through that subversion and elevation of folk culture, both these literary modes strive for influence, for the authority that has been guarded from them.

In many ways, power is the main focus of both magical realism and the carnivalesque. Authors working in magical realism seek to reclaim or create the power lost or denied to them. Though magical realist authors and practitioners of carnival do not outwardly profess to want the power of their opponents—merely to establish that they themselves are and have always been powerful in a different way—their action almost seems to want just that. Magical realist retaliation and carnivalesque subversion are inherently concerned with power and its unequal distribution. Wall refers to carnivalesque subversion as “the collapse of the literal and symbolic boundaries between high and low” (526). Magical realist texts seek this same collapse, this same interruption of power, and it is not just the breakdown of the myth of superiority, but also the transcendence of mind that survives even after the novel ends. Returning to the bird in *Love in the Time of Cholera*, when it performs its carnivalesque action of subverting Dr. Urbino and his wife, he effectively gains power from them by making them laugh and gaining their respect. Similarly, every supernatural phenomenon that appears in a magical realist novel without being questioned by the author or the characters reclaims some power from the colonizers by the inherent assumption that the phenomenon doesn’t need to be explained or singled out because it is as real as anything else; an example is found

in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, when Francisco the Man is described as being “almost two hundred years old” and having “once defeated the devil in a duel of improvisation” (Márquez 50). No one questions the validity of these claims; the people simply accept them. The imbalance of power—the power of education, of government, of wealth, of status—is the catalyst that creates the need for freedom that magical realism and the carnivalesque both address.

There is carnivalesque freedom in magical realism, though it is often more political and grave. Medieval revelers had no power to change their circumstances apart from all-out revolution—which has been a frequent method of large-scale change in Latin American countries—and as a result did not seek that change through carnival. On the other hand, postcolonial magical realists are free to ignore Western cultural concepts of empiricism and enlightenment, and marvel at the beauty of their own cultural assumptions: ghosts, telepathy, and supernatural power. Colonizers labeled most of the cultural beliefs magical realists hold dear as invalid, crude, primitive, nonsensical, and worse; this othering is a pivotal part of the colonizers’ process of oppression and expansion, a phenomenon Wall notes in antebellum America (516-17). Fetishization is equally as damaging, as it objectifies and commodifies cultures for exhibition, sale, and attraction, which belittles those cultures and renders them insignificant. Magical realists recognize the dangers of othering and, to their credit, do not appear to want to reciprocate the derision. Bowers writes, “magical realism relies upon a lack of judgement and distinction between what is ‘savage,’ ‘primitive,’ or sophisticated” (24). Novels in this mode are concerned with creating a harmony between the world of their native beliefs and the world of the colonizers; these authors do not necessarily write that the European

definition of the world is wrong, but that it is incomplete. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude* Márquez writes of the death of José Arcadio by describing how a stream of his blood travels through town, across different terrains, and into his mother's kitchen (133-32). The description of the environment is simple and ordinary, the only fantastic element being the personified blood traveling so far. Magical realism needs this "real," normal world to both contrast with and validate the supernatural. The political critique of Western European empiricism is certainly a part of this mode, but if that critique were the sole intent of magical realist novels then the novels would sacrifice their cultural value for revenge. As it stands, magical realism currently enjoys a freedom afforded to it by the end of colonization—these countries are no longer subject to the rule of colonizers¹⁵ and it is a freedom that is both political and cultural. This freedom makes it possible for magical realism to communicate its important statements about folk culture.

Magical realism makes incredibly powerful statements, but it does so subtly. The most successful examples of this literary mode do not make a habit of clumsy or heavy-handed symbolism, and though it is easy enough to identify the matter-of-factly employed supernatural elements of a novel that make it magically realist, the actual political statements can be more difficult to discern. I draw attention to this distinction because the carnivalesque is not subtle or slow; the carnivalesque explodes in literature with all the excitement and flamboyance of the carnivals that gave birth to it. What requires attention, however, are the supernatural elements—inserted into an otherwise realistic world in a manner that does not draw attention to those "unusual" phenomena—

¹⁵ Of course there are continuing economic ties to consider, in the form of neocolonialism; however, those ties are often less restrictive on individuals' freedom of expression than the repressions of traditional colonialism.

prerequisites for a novel's categorization as magical realism. It is that subtle insertion of the supernatural that communicates the writer's critique of European empiricism. Bowers reiterates, "Not only must the narrator propose real and magical happenings with the same matter-of-fact manner in a recognizably realistic setting but the magical things must be accepted as part of material reality, whether seen or unseen" (31). Below are two excerpts from García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* which illustrate how the magical realist novel addresses the supernatural:

On a certain occasion, months after Úrsula's departure, strange things began to happen. An empty flask that had been forgotten in a cupboard for a long time became so heavy that it could not be moved. A pan of water on the worktable boiled without any fire under it for a half hour until it completely evaporated. José Arcadio Buendía and his son observed those phenomena with startled excitement, unable to explain them but interpreting them as predictions of the material. One day Amaranta's basket began to move by itself and made a complete turn about the room, to the consternation of Aureliano, who hurried to stop it. (35)

Although the author (or translator) chooses the word "strange" and although the characters are "unable to explain" what is happening, the only thing that is truly peculiar about these events is that they have never before happened. Throughout the novel supernatural phenomena like those in the excerpt above are rarely more than irritating or inconvenient, such as the plague of insomnia that began to affect people's memories (Márquez 43). The characters may question how something happens, but they do not

label it as supernatural or unreal, as in the following scene between José Arcadio Buendía and the man he killed, Prudencio Aguilar:

It was Prudencio Aguilar. When [José Arcadio Buendía] finally identified him, startled that the dead also age, José Arcadio Buendía felt himself shaken by nostalgia. “Prudencio,” he exclaimed, “You’ve come from a long way off!” After many years of death the yearning for the living was so intense, the need for company so pressing, so terrifying the nearness of that other death which exists within death, that Prudencio Aguilar had ended up loving his worst enemy. He had spent a great deal of time looking for him. He asked the dead from Riohacha about him, the dead who came from the Upar Valley, those who came from the swamp, and no one could tell him because Macondo was a town that was unknown to the dead until Melquíades arrived and marked it with a small black dot on the motley maps of death. José Arcadio Buendía conversed with Prudencio Aguilar until dawn. (Márquez 77)

This excerpt again shows the matter-of-fact presentation of the supernatural. José Arcadio Buendía killed Prudencio years before this meeting, with a spear to the throat, yet when he sees the dead man the only thing that surprises him is that “the dead also age” and that Prudencio has “come from a long way off.” The fact that Prudencio is dead, is a ghost who has conversed with other ghosts and located his murderer on the “maps of death,” is of no importance at all to José Arcadio Buendía. This is what the magical realist novel must do; present the “supernatural” and the “natural” simultaneously, seamlessly, without

suggesting either does not belong—the novel must accomplish this even amongst its critique of colonizing nations.

Magical realism and the carnivalesque are as alike as they are different. Both literary modes address the relationship between oppressed and oppressor, and both modes seek freedom, power, and retaliation. The most resonant similarity is the subversion that both magical realism and the carnivalesque attempt to create; however, these modes have inherent differences. Though they share some key intentions, magical realism's primary objective is to restore the validity of folk tradition, while the carnivalesque primarily seeks to rejuvenate practitioners. In addition, magical realism takes its power from a finely crafted subtlety, but the carnivalesque is only realized through the chaotic spectacle of celebration. One of the fundamental distinctions between the two modes is their tremendous difference in scope; the carnivalesque focuses on relatively small groups (class inequality at the local or regional, level), while magical realism retaliates against nations (sometimes the entire European continent). These two literary modes are similar enough to complement each other considerably, but dissimilar enough to remain separate. With a more intimate knowledge of both the carnivalesque and the magical realist modes, specifically their similar subversive action, it will be easier observe the carnivalesque in a magical realist text and for this observation I have chosen *Bless Me, Ultima*.

3: It is better to write of laughter . . .¹⁶

An ideal text for a carnivalesque observation and analysis is *Bless me, Ultima*, the beloved magical realist novel of Rudolfo Anaya. *Bless Me, Ultima* is narrated by the preadolescent Antonio Marez, who describes his coming of age as he ricochets among the desires of his family, namely his mother's wish that he become a priest and his father's wish that he unite himself with the land of his paternal ancestry. Young Antonio's own wish is to learn the ways of Ultima, the powerful healer whose magic pervades the life of his family and town. The description of the Christmas play in the novel, in which a group of nervous, errant young boys turn a small scale play about the Nativity into a full scale catastrophe, is one of the clearest examples I have read of carnivalesque elements at work in literature. Anaya writes,

“I got to pee,” Abel whispered.

“Shhhhh,” Miss Violet coaxed, “everybody quiet.” She hit the light switch and the auditorium darkened. Only the star of the east shone on stage. Miss Violet whispered for Red to begin. He stepped to the center of the stage and began his narration.

“The First Christmas!” he announced loudly. He was a good reader.

“Hey, it's Red!” someone in the audience shouted, and everybody giggled. I'm sure Red blushed, but he went on; he wasn't ashamed of stuff like that.

“I got to—” Abel moaned.

¹⁶ The entire quote “it is better to write of laughter than of tears, for laughter is the property of man” is from Francois Rabelais, the lauded author in Bakhtin's analysis.

Lloyd began to unwrap another Tootsie Roll and the cow he was holding teetered. “The cow’s moving,” someone in the first row whispered. Horse glanced nervously behind me. I was afraid he would run. He was trembling.

“—And they were led by the star of the east—” and here Red pointed to the light bulb. The kids went wild with laughter. “—So they journey that cold night until they came to the town of Bethlehem—”

“Abel peed!” Bones called from above. We turned and saw the light of the east reflecting off a golden pool at Abel’s feet. Abel looked relieved.

“¡Ah la veca!”¹⁷ “¡Puto!”¹⁸

“How nasty,” Lloyd scoffed. He turned and spit a mouth full of chewed-up Tootsie Roll. It landed on Maxie, who was holding up a cardboard donkey behind us.

Maxie got up cleaning himself. The donkey toppled over.

“¡Jodido!”¹⁹ He cursed Lloyd and shoved him. Lloyd fell over his cow.

“You could be sued for that,” he threatened from the floor.

“Boys! Boys!” Miss Violet called excitedly from the dark.

I felt Horse’s head tossing at the excitement. I clamped my arm down to hold him, and he bit my hand.

¹⁷ “Code, or slang, referring to the penis,” as defined by the Humanities department of Michigan Technological University.

¹⁸ “A sodomite; also, a promiscuous man” (Michigan Technological University). In this instance, the term likely means “faggot.”

¹⁹ “One who is bad off in some way” (Michigan Technological University). Here the term is akin to “pain in the ass.”

“¡Ay!”²⁰

“And there in a manger, they found the babe—” Red turned and nodded for me to speak.

“I am Joseph,” I said as loud as I could, trying to ignore the sting of the horse bite, “and this is my baby’s mother—”

“Damn you!” Horse cursed when I said that. He jumped up and let me have a hard fist in the face.

“It’s Horse!” the audience squealed. He had dropped his veil, and he stood there trembling, like a trapped animal.

“Horse the virgin!” Bones called.

“Boys, Bowoooo-oizz!” Miss Violet pleaded.

“—AndthethreekingsbroughtgiftstotheChristchild—” Red was reading very fast to try to get through the play, because everything was really falling apart onstage.

The audience wasn’t helping either, because they kept shouting, “Is that you, Horse?” or “Is that you, Toni?”

The Kid stepped up with the first gift. “I bring, I bring—” He looked at his script but he couldn’t read.

“Incense,” I whispered.

“¿Qué?”²¹

²⁰ “Oh!” as defined by Michigan Technological University, though the exclamation may here translate to “Ow!”

²¹ “What?” (Michigan Technological University)

“Incense,” I repeated. Miss Violet had rearranged Horse’s robe and pushed him back to kneel by me. My eyes were watering from his blow.

“In-sense,” the Kid said and he threw the crayon box we were using for incense right into the manger and busted the doll’s head again. The round head just rolled out into the center of the stage near where Red stood and he looked down at it with a puzzled expression on his face.

Then the Kid stepped back and slipped on Abel’s pee. He tried to get up and run, but that only made it worse. He kept slipping and getting up, and slipping and getting up, and all the while the audience had gone wild with laughter and hysteria.

“Andthesecondwisemanbroughtmyrrh!” Red shouted above the din.

“Meerrrr, merrrrda, ¡mierda!”²² Bones cried like a monkey.

“I bring myra,” Samuel said.

“Myra!” someone in the audience shouted, and all the fifth graders turned to look at a girl named Myra. All of the boys said she sat on her wall at home after school and showed her panties to those that wanted to see.

“Hey, Horse!”

“¡Chingada!”²³ the Horse said, working his teeth nervously. He stood up and I pushed and he knelt again.

²² “Shit!” as defined by WordReference.com.

²³ “The screwed one.” Michigan Technological University explains “the reference is to Doña Marina, the [Native American] girl who served as mistress and translator to the conqueror of Mexico, Hernán Cortés.

The Kid was holding on to Abel, trying to regain his footing, and Abel just stood very straight and said, “I had to.”

“And the third wise man brought gold!” Red shouted triumphantly. We were nearing the end.

Florence stepped forward, bowed low and handed an empty cigar box to Horse. “For the virgin,” he grinned.

“¡Cabrón!”²⁴ The Horse jumped up and shoved Florence across the stage, and at the same time a blood-curdling scream filled the air and Bones came sailing through the air and landed on Horse.

“For the verrrrrr-gin!” Bones cried.

Florence must have hit the light bulb as he went back because there was a pop and darkness as the light of the east went out.

“—And that’s how it was on the first Christmas!” I heard brave Red call out above the confusion and free-for-all on stage and the howling of the audience. And the bell rang and everybody ran out shouting, “Merry Christmas!” “Merry Christmas!” “¡Chingada!”

[. . .]

“What a play,” Miss Violet laughed, “my Lord what a play!” She sat on a crate in the middle of the jumbled mess and laughed. (Anaya 156-58)

The figure of Doña Marina (or Malintzin/La Malinche as she was also known) was traditionally seen as a symbol of betrayal of the indigenous race.” The term likely means “screw-up” here.

²⁴ “Pimp, pander, cuckold; someone who takes advantage of the weakness of others” (Michigan Technological University). Probably “bastard” or “asshole” here.

This scene of the novel, in which the Nativity play becomes a humorous spectacle, is brimming with carnivalesque elements and the analysis of these elements at work will be the goal of this section. I will identify and describe each carnivalesque element—how it is carnivalesque and how it performs its action—and will conclude with an overview of what all the elements accomplish by working simultaneously. There is complete chaos on-stage, which Antonio confirms when he refers to the failed play as “the confusion and free-for-all on stage.” My major focus in this section—aside from my argument for the lasting effects of the carnivalesque and my identification of carnivalesque action—will be to show how the chaos of the ruined Nativity scene both dehumanizes and ridicules religious figures, and debases Christianity by creating a parody of one of the religion’s most revered moments.

Almost any one of the boys could serve as the jester of this scene, and in fact they do work together to become a collective subversive force throughout the play and the novel, but it is Bones who has the greatest claim to the role. Bones is an intriguing character, a boisterous and often vulgar boy who, though always with his friends, does not appear to depend on any other character in the novel. More still, Bones is the quintessential jester: he stands literally above the production, shouting down billingsgate, rousing the audience and confounding and enraging the actors. Working from Bakhtin’s conclusion that jesters are not actors, Bones is even more appropriate for the role because of all the boys he is the only one not participating in the play, not doing what his superior says he must. He is the most boisterous and apparently the one having the most fun. In true jester fashion, Bones wreaks good-natured havoc from above, encouraging the crowd to laugh and mock. He directs the audience to let them know what to laugh at, calling out

“Abel peed!” to draw their attention to the embarrassing and degrading plight of Abel, and also “Horse the virgin” to draw attention to Horse, who is so nervous that he is trembling. His exclamations worsen the plight of the already failing play and welcome mirth from the audience, especially when he cries “Meerrrr, merrrrda, ¡mierda!” Bones doesn’t merely speak this exclamation, but he screams it “like a monkey” and the simile furthers his presentation as a jester by creating a comical image of him so that not only does his speech incite laughter, but so does his manner of speaking. The production fails for more reasons than Bones alone, but he, more than anyone else, represents the carnival spirit, the entity who opens the doors to laughter and to subversion via the complete, yet humorous failure of a serious play. The jester is not merely Bones’s role in this particular scene, for he lives for revelry throughout the novel. The opposite of the jester is the subject of ridicule, in this instance Red, who is as laughable as Bones is entertaining.

Red is the only character on stage who is representative of the austere religious presence in carnival. It is important to remember that the pious were in league with the elite in creating the official feast, Red seems to occupy his own part of the stage away from the thick of the chaos. Red appears clown-like as he tries to remain calm and continue reading as the play breaks down around him, at first ignoring the mishaps completely like the pious who snubbed pure carnivals. Red appears even more comical when he tries to read faster, “AndthethreekingsbroughtgiftstotheChristchild.” As Antonio narrates, “Red was reading very fast to try to get through the play, because everything was really falling apart onstage.” Red tries to retain some dignity by finishing the play amidst shouts and laughter from the audience and the entertaining storm of the collapsing play. In addition, Red’s persistence in reading through the chaos is also symbolic of

religious, official carnivals trying to maintain order while pure carnivals ran amok, an effort Bakhtin describes in the initial pages of his critical work. In even greater embarrassment, Antonio narrates, “the round head [of the infant Christ] just rolled out into the center of the stage near where Red stood and he looked down at it with a puzzled expression on his face.” Red is doing as much as he can to maintain the dignity of the performance, but the play is failing miserably and the head of Christ rolls to his feet, beheaded and scattered, and in the form of a toy, no less. Red is so baffled and surprised that he can only regard it with a “puzzled expression,” as if asking how things could go so wrong. To complete the carnivalesque action, Red closes the play with a final line, “And that’s how it was on the first Christmas!” In closing the play with these words, Red affirms that, yes, these are the events that unfolded the night of Christ’s birth; though this is not what he means, Red’s words are the finishing touch that confirm the entire outrageous unfolding of events as true. This confirmation, because it is untrue, turns the entire play into a parody, a mockery of the Nativity that shows the outline of a solemn series of events in a farcical performance. Red is an ideal embodiment of the pious of medieval times and he has just as little effect on carnivalesque action as they did, his gravity only serving to embarrass him and make the farce even more entertaining. Similarly, Red’s classmate and fellow actor, Lloyd, is also a character who is ridiculed onstage.

Race and profession play a part in this scene, particularly with the humiliation of Lloyd, who is a white, European-American character on stage and whose father is a lawyer. Along with Miss Violet, he is almost completely ignored in this scene. More still, Lloyd has only two short lines. The son of a lawyer, Lloyd frequently reminds the

others of offenses for which they can be sued and each assertion is as comical and ignored as the last. Lloyd represents American law—the pride Americans have in the Constitution and the regulations derived from it—so as he is shoved to the floor, reminding Maxie, “You could be sued for that,” the author seems to be having a laugh at the expense of Western legislature. This laugh mirrors carnival’s mockery of the restrictions and bureaucracy of the elite. Lloyd’s threatening Maxie from the floor is great imagery of subversion: Maxie, the Latino, has been spit on by Lloyd, the white European, and in the chaos degradation of the play Maxie shoves Lloyd and shifts the power structure. Furthermore, Lloyd issues his threat from the floor, literally under Maxie, who was previously kneeling beside Lloyd. The subverted Lloyd is also the butt of a joke by the author even before he is shoved; Lloyd is holding a cow and as he unwraps his candy, “the cow . . . teetered.” Here is a play on words that makes Lloyd’s presence on stage completely silly, especially while Lloyd is putting something in his mouth, as the language suggests that Lloyd is a dependent suckling at the teat of American law. He is simultaneously a child and a laughingstock. As if to drive home the point of Lloyd’s humiliation, Maxie is “holding up a cardboard donkey,” which is of course meant to represent one of the Nativity animals, but is also representative of a person with asinine qualities. The donkey also recalls the image of the carnival fool, who is the target of many of the jokes and pranks, and although Maxie is holding the donkey, it is worth emphasizing that as the donkey falls so, too, does Lloyd. Through all of the above action, Lloyd is ridiculed, as is the image of the white, educated professional. Abel and the Kid are also embarrassed onstage, but their humiliation comes almost completely in the form of the material bodily principle, more so than anyone else in the scene.

Abel and the Kid are two actors on the stage who have small, but nonetheless important roles. The Kid is reminiscent of the lower class practitioners because he is illiterate, a fact that Anaya highlights with the description, “He looked at his script but he couldn’t read.” Abel represents the material bodily principle²⁵ by urinating on stage and then remaining in the “golden pool.” Together the two are a humorous and almost complete concentration of carnivalesque action: Abel’s urination and the Kid’s slipping in it together subvert the Nativity play, and their ridiculousness as characters in the play becomes parody. Their plight brings laughter from the audience, especially the Kid’s slipping in the urine. It is the urine, thus the material bodily principle, that causes the greatest embarrassment and generates the most laughter in the miniature chaos of Abel and the Kid. The material bodily principle is best represented by the pool at Abel’s feet, by the result of process in Abel’s lower bodily region. The Kid’s hysteria is reminiscent of madness (exhilarated state of mind) and though he is certainly not celebrating, his situation allows him to become agitated and to react instinctually. The boys’ costumes are the masks, permitting them to hide themselves; though the boys are still recognizable, they can perform their parts because they do not have to present themselves truthfully. The boys together act as a minor jester, their actions generating laughs—an even closer look reveals Abel as the jester and the Kid as the victim of the jest because of his being in the urine. Not to be forgotten is that Abel’s fear is dispelled once he’s urinated and there’s nothing left to make him nervous. Antonio says “Abel looked relieved” and Abel himself confirms this when he simply says, “I had to.” Abel and the Kid perform their own carnivalesque action in the midst of the larger chaos on stage, further subverting the

²⁵ See page 47 for in-depth analysis of this principle at work in the Nativity play.

play—undermining religious and educational values—but their nervousness does not rival Horse’s.

Horse is arguably the most nervous boy on stage and his embarrassment at being dressed up as the Virgin Mary, as well as his anxiety at being discovered, causes him to act very much like a horse; it is his becoming horse-like that turns Horse into a parody within the larger parody of the failed play. Throughout the scene Horse is characterized by language reminiscent of his namesake; he is presented like a horse just shy of being spooked. Antonio narrates, “Horse glanced nervously behind me. I was afraid he would run. He was trembling.” Here horse is the animal sensing danger, ready to flee at the first opportunity. Horse’s nerves, along with his instincts, threaten to get the better of him. Antonio narrates, “I felt Horse’s head tossing at the excitement. I clamped my arm down to hold him, and he bit my hand.” Horse is explicitly characterized with language filled with clear equestrian allusions. Horse is losing himself to his anxiety, a process his gestures and actions betray: for example, Horse becomes feral and bites Antonio. Anaya is rather heavy-handed in writing of the unnerved Horse that “he stood there trembling, like a trapped animal.” By this point, Horse has lost his courage and thus relinquished himself to his emotion, arriving at a state in which he can only act instinctually; in sporadic moments of fear, when he feels most threatened, Horse punches Antonio and shoves Florence. In true carnivalesque fashion, Florence taunts Horse with a grin on his face, saying, “for the virgin.” In this scene, Horse is also describe as “working his teeth nervously,” another characterization that helps render the image of a skittish animal. Together, the various equestrian descriptions of Horse reduce and degrade the Virgin Mary, thus turning Horse’s portrayal of her into the most well-represented individual

parody on stage. The Virgin Mary is removed from her pedestal, stripped of her purity, and turned feral, aggressive, and visceral. This dehumanization of the Virgin undercuts the religious gravity of the play and ridicules centuries of religious deference. Horse's transformation is one of the carnivalesque moments of parody that the other boys on stage don't get to see, as the description is only made available to the reader. What is available to other characters in the play, however, is the experience of hearing the boys' marketplace language.

Marketplace language abounds in the Nativity production and although it is largely, and most vulgarly, present in Spanish, there are some significant exclamations in English. In Spanish the marketplace language is at its strongest and most vulgar, which is intriguing because Spanish here serves to marginalize Miss Violet and to provide a kind of sanctuary on stage for the Mexican boys. As the nervous boys have been forced onto the stage they retreat to their native tongue for comfort, allowing them to speak as they please since Miss Violet cannot admonish them if she cannot understand their words. Still, the Spanish does not completely overshadow the English. When Antonio refers to Horse as "my baby's mother," Horse is enraged and responds with "Damn you!" which is a pejorative that not only shouldn't be expressed in front of an audience, but also shouldn't be spoken in school or by a child. Following in the manner of carnivalesque billingsgate, "Damn you" is an expression frowned on by the socially-conscious and those adhering to rules of decency and good conduct. Abel's repeated insistence that he has "got to pee" is also billingsgate because of its indecency, as are Bones's interjections, "Abel peed!" and "Horse the virgin!" Yet the language that truly stands out in this excerpt are the boys' Spanish exclamations.

Under the cover of the language of their culture, the boys speak some of the most insulting and vulgar expressions of the novel. Early in the play, the insults “¡Ah la veca!” and “¡Puto!” are directed at Abel after he urinates onstage. Miss Violet does not understand Spanish and thus even as she hears the insults cannot understand them or admonish the boys. Similarly, Maxie curses Lloyd with “¡Jodido!” when he shoves Lloyd. Horse yells “¡Chingada!” in his nervousness, cursing Antonio or perhaps the entire auditorium, and repeats it another time before he leaves the stage—this is Horse’s favorite expression in the novel and he says it virtually every time his character is present. All these insults are not only marketplace language, but are also subversive because the teachers—all of whom seem to only speak English, especially Miss Violet, who is in charge of the play—cannot understand these exclamations and thus don’t know how to exert their power over the boys. This failure to understand and to act allows the carnivalesque action unfolding onstage to further subvert the teachers, who don’t even recognize that they are being subverted. What is also subverted are the rules of the school and of socially acceptable behavior. Horse also yells “¡Cabron!” when Florence teases him. The humanities department of Michigan Technological University gives the definition of this term as “a pimp, pander, cuckold; someone who takes advantage of the weakness of others;” however, WordRefernece.com offers the additional interpretations “bastard,” “scumbag,” “asshole,” and “lowlife,” and these definitions are more intuitive of Horse’s angry and humiliated state, and his intention when he speaks. These profanities are exactly the kind of indecent phrases that Bakhtin insisted were relegated to the familiar marketplace; Horse’s vulgar insults cannot be openly spoken in front of his teachers or in any formal social context and thus must be spoken in Spanish, increasing

the terms' power by transforming them from merely indecent to subversive because of their intelligibility to the teachers. Finally, there is Bones's exclamation "¡mierda!" which he "cried like a monkey." Here is not only marketplace language, but also the material bodily principle—what is new and being brought forth is energy in both Bones and the audience. "Mierda" translates to "shit" and because Bones "cried like a monkey," the language brings to mind the image of the feces-throwing monkey—a popular image, expression, and insult in contemporary culture. Bones's cry is essentially verbal flinging, which he directs at the audience, the actors onstage below him, and the girl whose name is confused with his exclamation. The Spanish expletives shouted on stage are examples of carnivalesque marketplace language in the text and of the way that language works in the midst of carnivalesque chaos. Bones's "¡mierda!" is only one of the representations of the material bodily principle in the play.

The material bodily principle plays a large part in the disastrous scene, crudely degrading an already failed production, yet working with other elements create more laughter and memories, thus more lasting effects of the carnivalesque action of the scene. Unable to hold his urine any longer, Abel relieves himself on-stage and is left standing in the "golden pool." The Kid slips in the urine and is literally brought down by it again and again, thus both Abel and the Kid are degraded by their relationship to the urine—though it is important to note that degradation must bring something new forth and that novelty in this scene is the audience's laughter and Abel's relief. Since the material bodily principle is concerned with the body's physical needs, it also includes Lloyd chewing and spitting of the Tootsie Roll, the only example of eating in the excerpt. This principle not only draws focus to the body, but celebrates it; the only bodily reference in the scene is

the sensual reference to Myra, who “sat on her wall at home after school and showed her panties to those that wanted to see.” Because the female body is always connected with birth, it is worth noting that with Samuel’s fumbled line and the subsequent shout of “Myra!” from the crowd, a sense of excitement and deviousness is born in the audience as “all the fifth graders [turn] to look at a girl named Myra.” The material bodily principle is at work in the larger intention of the Nativity play, which is indicative of the birth and subsequent death of Christ, the “second life” offered to sinners through salvation, Christ’s resurrection. In the material bodily principle the lower body, through the womb and birth, represents potential, just as Christ’s birth brought with it the potential to save the repentant. Nowhere in the novel is the idea of cyclicity better represented than in the Nativity play, with the presentation of Christ, suggestive of his eventual death and conquering of death resulting in his return to life, a perfect embodiment of Bakhtin’s conception of the process of death resulting in life. The material bodily principle is present in the many references to the virgin, suggestive of the female body, sex (by virtue of the lack of), and the womb; these images which recall the female body allow the material bodily principle to become fully realized on stage and bring forth laughter, celebration, new energy in Bones and the audience, relief for Abel, and eventually tolerance from Miss Violet. In addition, as I’ve already shown in some instances, this failed production parodies the many religious figures it presents, as well as the entire Christian religion.

Like the carnivals of old, the ruined play is turned into a subversive parody of all the serious themes behind it, most notably Christian solemnity and the reverence of the figures of the play, including Joseph, the Virgin Mary, the Wisemen, and the infant

Christ. This scene is reminiscent of carnival's desire to escape the austerity and ritual of the church. The scene is littered with the destruction and disrespect of the Christian tradition: the beheading of the infant Christ; the reduction of the star of the east to a light bulb; the abusing of Joseph; the unfinished/forgotten words of the wise man; the defeminizing, enfeebling, and debasing of the Virgin Mary; the attack on the Virgin; the proximity of urine to the place of Christ's birth; the cheapness of the wise men's gifts; the rushed reading of the events of the Nativity; and, the culminating action, the extinguishing of the star of the east. The play becomes a mockery of religious tradition, an entertaining parody of the grave conventions that characterize the expression and solemnity of faith. In any other circumstance, the boys might resist the urge to disregard religion, yet in the midst of their freedom on stage, which they receive from the carnivalesque chaos, they are also freed from strict adherence to respectful religious observance. One of the most powerful symbols of the carnivalesque in the scene, the parody and debasement of the Christian religion also points to Anaya's subversive postcolonial critique of the imposition of religion on native cultures. Overall, the scene works to subvert authority and leaves a lasting memory for the revelers to consider. Of course the carnivalesque action is incomplete without an all-encompassing spirit that is dedicated to including everyone.

In the auditorium is the pervading universal spirit of the carnivalesque, which affects not only the young audience but also Miss Violet. This universal spirit brings mirth initially to the audience, who also lift their voices in the scene. Antonio frequently relates how boisterous and disruptive the audience are, though to their credit they behave exactly as they should within the carnivalesque, laughing and becoming a part of the

chaos in front of them. Antonio describes how “everybody giggled” and how “the audience had gone wild with laughter and hysteria.” The comical disaster unfolding on the stage entertains the audience (which is mostly young children) and encourages them to laugh. The audience often disrupts the play by whispering to the performers they recognize and commenting on the props the actors use. Antonio goes so far as to say “the audience wasn’t helping either, because they kept shouting.” The universal spirit also reaches Miss Violet. After the dust has settled, Miss Violet simply says “What a play . . . my Lord what a play!” and sits down to laugh. Miss Violet’s exclamation brings the carnivalesque action full circle; for all their shenanigans, the boys have only temporarily upset the system and school will continue, productions will still be performed, they will still have to respect and learn from Miss Violet, and the Christian religion will continue to proliferate. In the end, even Miss Violet laughs, realizing that it is all just a joke, one that, while disastrous, is all the same good-humored. Most important to my argument that carnivalesque effects outlast carnivalesque action is that after the chaos of the play, Miss Violet “sat on a crate in the middle of the jumbled mess and laughed.” The play is over, the carnivalesque action has ended, yet Miss Violet is still laughing, has in fact just begun to laugh. The pandemonium that passed on stage gave birth to both humor and understanding in her—these are part of her sentiments, exhilarations, and memories—so that even when the play is over and the boys are gone, Miss Violet can still indulge in a laughter that is descended from physical carnivalesque action, but not dependent upon it. As a result of this independence, Miss Violet’s sentiments can outlast the play just like any other effects of carnivalesque action.

Miss Violet is an example of the position of the elite class in the midst of carnival action, both its subversion and its tolerance toward that subversion. Her usual authority has been suspended and mocked, yet because she understands the loss of her power is temporary, she can and must laugh. At the start of the play, she has control, and she tries to regain order: “Shhhhh,” Miss Violet coaxed, “everybody quiet.” Her instructions are followed, and soon after quieting the boys, she “whispered for Red to begin” and the play starts at her command, but after this the boys ignore her completely. Miss Violet pleads with the boys, first with “Boys! Boys!” and later with the more emphatic “Boys, Bowoooo-oizz!” The boys’ antics are not impeded by Miss Violet’s pleas and they never even respond to her. Just like the elite during carnival, Miss Violet’s power is mocked and erased with the upset of the power structure. The boys cannot assume dominion over her, but while the play lasts she cannot control them either. In fact, the play dissolves and Miss Violet’s authority with it, to the extent that to get Horse back on stage she has to literally push him back out onto the stage. The boys ruin her production and ignore her pleas—effectively taking control of the play away from Miss Violet and conducting themselves their own way—yet she ultimately laughs anyway because her control will be reasserted when those fleeting moments of rebellion have concluded, like the elite returning to their unassailable status with the close of carnival. Worth noting is the fact that it is natural for Miss Violet and the elite to ultimately retain their power because although the effects of carnival are lasting, the subversion and the shift between classes is temporary. Celebration and freedom are also temporary, but they have an undeniable presence onstage.

The pandemonium of the play-gone-terribly-wrong is the celebration of the ludicrousness of youth and liberation from the Catholic school structure. While the freedom the boys experience onstage is not from the severe suppression from which carnival practitioners suffered, it is, nonetheless, freedom. For the brief moments of the failed play, the boys are liberated from the controlling, pedantic, demanding education structure. They ignore their teacher and all rules for decency: Abel pees, Bones and Horse curse, and Maxie shoves Lloyd. I would go as far as considering the boys liberated from the manipulation of an education system and the celebration of religion, both imposed by the colonizers of their region. In ruining the play—decapitating the infant Christ, defeminizing the Virgin Mary, destroying the star of the east—the boys disregard not only the religion the play represents, but also the institution where the play is taking place. While it is true that the play ends and the structures—school, Miss Violet’s authority, the boys’ deference, Christian solemnity, etc.—resume their austerity, what results from the mayhem of the failed play can be neither ignored nor forgotten. After the production is over and everyone has gone, Antonio is still thinking of the play: “It was strange how everything had been so full of life and funny” (159). Carnival represents, more than physical entertainment, an idea of rejuvenation and laughter. Carnavalesque subversion is the process in which *power* is temporarily transferred and the social structure subverted, but whatever sentiments, exhilarations, and memories come out of that subversion will last beyond carnival’s end because they are internal. Physical actions, such as Bones jumping from the rafters or Horse punching Antonio, may arrive at definitive ends and exist no more in carnival or in the carnivalesque, but feelings and triumphs continue to exist on in the boys, such as Bone’s victory over his classmates or

Horse's embarrassment. I return to Miss Violet for my best evidence of the lasting effects of carnival.

An excellent example of the effect of the carnivalesque outlasting carnivalesque action is Miss Violet, who does not even start to laugh until the play is over, although it was the chaos of the play that inspired that laughter. Anaya does not return to the play in his novel, which means the only mention of the catastrophic production is in the above excerpt; this is crucial to note, for this failure to return to the play means that all the effects of the carnivalesque action on stage rests on Miss Violet, the only character other than Antonio who alludes to the play after its end and the only character to substantially demonstrate the lasting effect of the carnivalesque. Nevertheless, Miss Violet demonstrates this lasting effect brilliantly by performing the action most critical to the completion and full realization of the carnivalesque: she laughs. I have argued that what is temporary in the carnivalesque is the subversion of the superiors and that what is lasting is the effect of that subversion—not the change between the positions of the classes, but what is inspired within the practitioners. I can only speculate—rather logically, I believe—that the embarrassment, triumph, anxiety, confusion, humiliation, and anger of being onstage while the play irrefutably failed will remain with the boys for the rest of their lives. I can only infer that the memories of that terrible situation will continue to live on in the boys and the audience. Yet what is incontrovertible and explicit in the text is it is not until the carnivalesque action has ended that Miss Violet is inspired to laugh and to take on lightheartedness and tolerance. “‘What a play,’ Miss Violet laughed, ‘my Lord what a play!’ She sat on a crate in the middle of the jumbled mess and laughed.” The failed play represents carnival and the action that takes place there, and

Miss Violet represents everything inspired by carnival that does not rely on the festival's limits—including the sentiments of the boys not explicitly alluded to in the text. Miss Violet may need the carnivalesque chaos to inspire and motivate her, but she does not need it to perform the seminal action of the carnivalesque, which is laughter. This excerpt of a failed Nativity play has presented carnivalesque elements in action and, especially through Miss Violet, has furthered my argument that sentiments, exhilarations, and memories fostered by the carnivalesque are not dependent on the physical actions that give birth to them.

4: An Eternal Train

Bakhtin crafted an expansive critique of the carnivalesque in literature, and he was persuasive on almost every point; however, my critical point of departure from his analysis insists upon the lasting effects of carnivalesque subversion. There is no other explanation for the reoccurrence of carnivals—not merely with regard to a single festival, but all the festivals that reoccurred on a cycle. The mirth and freedom born during carnival are what encouraged the people to want to hold the festival again. In *Love in the Time of Cholera*, there is a Poetic Festival “whose thunder sounded through the Antilles every April 15” (Márquez 193). During the festival’s hiatus, there is talk of restarting the event. Florentino Ariza awaits this recommencement anxiously. Márquez writes, “What most attracted Florentino Ariza’s attention . . . was the possibility of reviving the Poetic Festival. . . He had to bite his tongue to keep from telling [Dr. Urbino] that he had been an assiduous participant in the annual competition” (191). Florentino Ariza anticipates the return of the event because it means something to him and has, in past times, inspired sentiments in him that he wishes to experience again—this is the reason Florentino Ariza was not merely a spectator, but an “assiduous participant.” These sentiments were born during the festival as a result of the experiences had there, but did not end with the close of the festival. If those sentiments had ended, Florentino Ariza would not have continued to return to the festival and Dr. Urbino would not be considering the “possibility of reviving” the festival. Like the carnival-goers of medieval times, Florentino Ariza encounters things during festival that he does not find in his daily life and must therefore seek in carnivals and in subsequent occurrences of those carnivals. Bakhtin’s ignorance or dismissal of carnival’s inherent inspiration is peculiar, as the first section of my thesis

identifies the many references in Bakhtin's own language to the carnivalesque's ability to outlast carnival. Notable instances of this ability include Bakhtin's analysis of the material bodily principle (with its message of reproduction and cyclicity) and marketplace language (which never ends, existing before and after carnival in the everyday lives of the people). These elements, along with the others, perform the carnivalesque actions that ultimately facilitate lasting sentiments and memories of subversion, liberation, celebration, and laughter.

I have observed the carnivalesque in literature, including its chaotic actions and enduring effects. My first section identifies and describes every crucial element of the carnivalesque--subversion, parody, laughter, a universal spirit, communication, marketplace language, the material bodily principle, madness, masks, diffusion of fear, and jesters—and gives evidence of each within contemporary literature while also explaining the implications of these elements. The first section also includes a brief discussion of the history of medieval carnivals as it relates to the birth of the carnivalesque literary mode. My second section provides explanations of the goals and functions of magical realism, outlining the points at which magical realism and the carnivalesque converge and diverge. My third section offers an extensive and detailed close-reading of an excerpt from Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, analyzing the performance of carnivalesque elements in the scene. The goal of this thesis is to argue that although carnivalesque action ends, and although the subversion within carnival is temporary, the inspired sentiments, exhilarations, and memories—the totality of the unmeasurable, internal feelings of carnival-goers—continue to live on in the people. These sentiments are unquantifiable, but I have provided textual evidence not only of

carnavalesque action unfolding in literature, but also of these sentiments being born in carnivalesque action still existing after it has finished. The title for this final section is taken from a passage near the end of García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* which tells of a man who "bought an eternal ticket on a train that never stopped traveling" (403), which symbolizes my view of the unending ability of carnivalesque effects. The carnivalesque in literature is a powerful and humorous force that seeks to temporarily and jovially subvert those professing themselves to be superior, allowing those labeled inferior to laugh and celebrate as they are liberated from the conditions of their everyday lives. That liberation and subversion will not be retained, but everything they inspire in the revelers lasts; the inspiration outlasts the adamancy of jesters, the inversion of parody, and the comfort of masks, lasting from one chaotic, liberating celebration to the next.

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