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1- Introduction



Yasmina Reza. Photograph: Pascal Victor/ArtComArt

Yasmina Reza was born on May 1, 1959 in Paris. Her mother was a Hungarian violinist and her father was a businessman of Russian-Iranian descent, who was also an amateur pianist. Despite her Iranian and Hungarian roots, she always said she considers herself entirely French. Her parents' love for music and her father's wealth allowed them to instill in their family a love for music but also for all the other forms of art.

I grew up with wonderful parents in cultured and comfortable circumstances. My father never bought anything extravagant or expensive except art, when he had the means. (<http://www.bard.org/education/studyguides/Art/artplaywright.html>)

In spite of the musical influences her parents had on her, she has always been more interested in literature and theater. She studied theater and sociology at the University of Paris X in Nanterre and then attended an intensive actor's training at the Jacques Lecocq International Drama School in Paris. Her professional career started as an actress, when she was rather young and she gained some important roles. But after some years, when she was more or less

twenty years old, she also started playwriting, a decision she had taken because she'd found some difficulties in finding work as a performer.

Early in my acting career I saw it was a life of waiting and dependence. Writing I could do by myself, for myself. Writing helps me survive, I don't write a lot, but I can write anywhere, on anything. It's a strength. [...] I write from my intuition, my sense of freedom, my feeling for words and rhythm. Sometimes from my heart, but not very much. [...] I loved the theatre, and I loved words, so it was logical to write for theatre.

(<http://www.bard.org/education/studyguides/Art/artplaywright.html>)

Thanks to her familiar background, her love for all kind of arts, and her need of independence, she decided to start writing plays instead of only acting in them. In her opinion, in fact, this was an obvious evolution of her interests, studies and natural inclinations. And this choice also revealed the right decision, as we can see from the results, but also the prizes she gained during her career. For more information about Yasmina Reza and her life, read *The Plays of Yasmina Reza on the English and American Stage* by Giguere Amanda.

Her first play was *Conversations après un enterrement* (*Conversations after a Burial*) written in 1987. Then *La Traversée de l'hiver* (which could be translated as: *The Winter Crossing* or *The Passage of Winter*, depending on the meaning we want to give it. In fact the French title leaves some space to ambiguity, not specifying if it is an individual journey in winter, or the passing of the winter season), written in 1989. This play is the only Reza's play which has never been translated in English or produced in any of the major theaters. In between these two plays, she chooses a rather ambitious endeavor: she translated an adaptation of Franz Kafka's novel *The Metamorphosis* for the movie director Roman Polanski. This was probably their first meeting, which led to their more important collaboration on Polanski's screen adaptation of Reza's *The God of Carnage*. In 1988 the work gained a nomination for the Moliere Award for Best Translation.

Conversation after a Burial is a six characters play (the play with the largest number of characters Reza wrote until now) that puts in act a series of conversations between mourners after a family burial. The play is divided in nine vignettes, all taking place inside or outside a country house, in whose garden, the father has been buried. The three sons, an uncle, his new wife and the ex-mistress of one of the sons are all at the burial, with the consequent problems that a family reunion usually cause.

In this play, as much as in the others Reza's plays, the upper class and the “civilization” of the characters has a great role: in fact one of the sons is seen as the black sheep of the family simply because of his inability to keep his rudeness and his “barbaric” side hidden. Nathan, the oldest brother, talking of Alex, the younger brother, says to their sister, after he had made a despicable scene:

We're civilized people, we observe the rules. [...] You and I collaborate in this effort for dignity... We are discreet, 'elegant', we behave perfectly... It's not that Alex is less civilized, but his pride lives somewhere else... (Plays 1, 167)

This is one of the points in which dignity and appearances are pointed out as an important thing for these characters. However, in the middle of the play, we discover that the “civilized” brother had had sex with the “uncivilized” one's mistress, which makes us rejudge this dialogue and the “virtues” of the various characters.

La Traversée de l'Hiver was never translated or produced on the English or the American stages. It is a play which, beginning from the title, can be seen in two different ways: the passage of the winter season or the journey of someone through the winter. Likewise the play that can be considered either the story of these six people that are spending their summer holidays in the Swiss Alps, or the inner story of Avner, the man who has the only inner monologue in the play. It's a long and poetic monologue in which he compares life to a long,

difficult passage through a cold and infinite winter.

After that, in 1994 she wrote « *Art* », a play about how a modern painting could destroy a 15-years-long strong friendship between three friends. In her cynical way, Reza describes how different point of views on such a harmless thing as a painting, but also things not said when they should have been said, could produce a terrible fight. In fact in the play she perfectly describes Marc's and Yvan's reactions in front of the painting Serge bought for an extraordinary high price. They have opposite reactions: Marc is disappointed and classifies the painting as “shit”, causing Serge flying into a rage, refusing Marc's laugh. No irony and no way of playing down his comment. Yvan instead minimizes the thing, giving Serge some satisfaction for his painting and agreeing in saying that Marc was probably envious and not sensible enough to understand art.

The biggest problem, indeed, is the fact that they aren't sincere one with the other in the moment in which they are asked to be, and this “double side” of each character leads to the tragic ending of their friendship. In fact, when the three friends meet together again, the crisis is predictable. Their behaviors will reflect not only their emotions but also their inner frustrations and personal problems.

Moreover the painting becomes the catalyst for their repressed anger and envy. All the problems, misunderstanding and suspects they have buried in years of friendship come out all together, leading to a tragic but realistic end of their friendship.

This play was performed two thousand times in London and six hundred times in New York, translated in 30 different languages, gaining in 1998 the Tony award for Best Play, the Laurence Olivier Award for Best Comedy, the Molière Award for Best Commercial Production, the Evening Standard Award for Best Comedy and the New York Drama Critics'

Circle Best Play. It is also estimated that the play has earned more than \$300 million worldwide.

The year after “*Art*”, she wrote *L’Homme du hasard (The Unexpected Man)* published in 1995. This play is very simply structured, with only two characters and one stylized setting. The absence of stage directions and scenographic elements gives us the idea of being more in their minds, than in the reality. In fact the whole play consists in inner monologues that give the audience the chance to hear thoughts, memories, regrets and desires about the characters life, their friends and their family.

The protagonists are a man, Paul Parsky, and a woman, Martha, that meet in a train going from Paris to Frankfurt. He is a successful writer, who wrote a book called *The Unexpected Man* and she recognizes him, being a great fan of him and loving his books. She thinks about a trick she could use to speak to him. For example fetching his book from her purse and starting reading it, to claim his attention. We, the audience, can hear their thoughts, knowing that they've noticed each other and that each one is thinking of a way to break the ice. In the very end of the play, they finally start speaking and the dialogue, which lasts less than 10 minutes, is long enough to gives us the impression that they are really meant for each other even if we are not sure if it isn't too late for them.

As the woman says in the end, the whole play conveys the sense of “a nostalgia for what's never taken place. A nostalgia for what might happen.” (Plays 1, 109)

In 2000 she wrote *Trois versions de la vie (Life X 3)*, a play about how some little choices we make or some variations in our behaviors could offer an alternative version of what has taken place, also changing somebody's life. Reza shows it, putting on scene the same dinner between the same two couples, for three times.

For three times during the play, the evening begins and the main events are always the same, but the reactions of the characters to these events are each time different from the previous one. In fact I think the French title is better than the English translation: *Trois Versions de la Vie* (three versions of life) perfectly describes the theme of the play.

In the first version, the dinner turns into a great chaos: the boy (whose voice we hear from outside the stage but who never appears physically in the play) screaming the whole evening, the two couples insulting each other, arguing with their mate, practically everybody coming up against everybody else. Their reactions to the events have finally taken out the barbaric side of everyone.

In the second version, the dinner starts as an enjoyable meeting, everyone is calm and nice. The audience also discovers that the hosting wife and the invited husband have a love-relation, obviously hidden. But even if the initial atmosphere is more relaxed, the final effect is rather similar to the first version of the dinner: everybody insulting everybody else, even if in a less dramatic and barbaric way.

The third time instead everything is different. The dinner takes place in a totally relaxed mood, everybody is nice to the others, the child is sweet and calm and the couples don't fight each other. No barbaric instinct comes up and everybody reacts in a civilized way to the unpleasant events that occur in the dinner.

In an interview about *Life x 3*, Reza said:

It is about the smallest things, like chocolate fingers, trivial domestic stuff and also it's a metaphysical play. To my mind it's my most metaphysical play. [...] It's not only about that, it's also about stars. There are phases like: 'We are not insignificant... our time is insignificant, but we are not insignificant.' There are some phrases in this play which I'm very proud of, like: 'Your son has made a

wonderful monument and tomorrow he will destroy it. In this world you destroy everything, even yourself.' (Hattenstone, 3)

Like all her plays indeed, also *Life x3* starts from daily life events to expand to a higher level of significance.

Then, in 2004 she wrote *Une pièce espagnole (A Spanish Play)*. While *Life x 3* is about three version of one evening, *A Spanish Play* is a meta-theatrical play with three separate realities: a play, within a play, within a play. It could be compared to a Russian doll, one reality is contained within the other!

The first reality is the one in which five real actors are going to perform a play, each one having some interviews that only the audience can hear and during which they comment both on their lives and the on characters they have in the play.

The second reality is the play, written by a fictional author, Olmo Panero, who really seems one of Reza's early period plays. Very little happens and all the dialogues are about family life and family fights. The characters are five: the mother, two daughters who are actresses, the husband of one of the daughters and the new lover of the mother.

The third reality comes out when we discover that, one of the daughters has a cast for a Bulgarian play and so she revises some scene with her husband. In this play, she has the role of the piano teacher who falls in love with her male student, played by her husband to help her learning her part.

Finally, in 2006 she wrote *Le Dieu du Carnage (God of Carnage)*, a play that had a great success. It was performed the first time in Zurich, then in Paris, Bucharest, Madrid, Dublin, Puerto Rico, London and Broadway, where the play has run for more than one and a half year. With this play Yasmina Reza won the Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Play and the

Tony Award for Best Play. Moreover Marcia Gay Harden, who had the role of Véronique in the Broadway production, won the Tony Award for Best Actress in a Play and Matthew Warchus, who directed a lot of Reza's plays, won the Tony Award for Best Director of a Play.

This play deals with the meeting of two couples, who discuss about what happened to their children. In fact one has broken the teeth of the other with a stick while they were playing in the park. This is why their parents meet, deciding to have a polite discussion over the consequences of the act. Obviously, as in all Reza's former plays, the meeting won't go in the way it is supposed and hoped by the characters, but it shows how human inner reactions are always, in the end, brutal and impolite. As in *Life x 3*, a “civilized” meeting is transformed in a fight, everybody against everybody.

In 2010 there is the first cinema adaptation of a Reza's play: *Chicas*. The movie was taken from Reza's work *A Spanish Play* and directed by Yasmina Reza herself. The movie, anyway, isn't the faithful adaptation of the original play, but simply takes the characters of the play and puts them in some new situations.

Moreover in 2011, *The God of Carnage*, in the translation by Christopher Hampton, also became in a movie, directed by Roman Polanski and called simply *Carnage*.

In 2011 too, she published a new play entitled *Comment vous racontez la partie (How You Play the Game)*, which hasn't been produced on stage yet. It is a deep psychological work about the strains that arise within a conversation among four people. The protagonist is Nathalie, a novelist who is giving a public interview about her new book in a fictional French town called *Vilan-en-Volène*. The interviewer is a female journalist who goes on for the whole play asking probing questions that unnerve the novelist. A thing that Reza admitted happened also to her:

Too often what are described as interviews are inquisitions. It's not about the work. It's more like, 'Who are you?' which really, really annoys me. (Sciolino, *Celebrated Playwright*, 2)

I guess this play is quite autobiographical; in fact, during an interview, at this question, Reza admitted:

I can't say that I am Nathalie, but I would be dishonest if I said, 'No, it's not me at all.' There certainly are aspects of her character that are truly similar. It's the first time I have deliberately constructed a character with myself in mind. (Sciolino, *Celebrated Playwright*, 3)

But in the main character of this new play, we can also find the struggle between silence and loquacity, the difficulty of controlling herself, a thing Reza had to go through too. In fact talking about televisions interviews she said:

It's degrading. They never give you time to talk. I hesitate. I reflect. I contradict myself. Whenever I've done it, I was very, very bad. A catastrophe. The interview is a game, I try to structure interviews in such a way that I say nothing. It's better for me to be mysterious. (Sciolino Elaine, *Celebrated Playwright*, 3)

Here is an extract of an article about an interview with Yasmina Reza, which gives an idea of how her behavior in front of an interviewer is:

She sips at her tea. Her legs are crossed, defensively. Before I know it my host is telling me how rarely she gives interviews, how journalists distort the truth, how tired she is because she is acting in *Life x 3*, and that combined with the writing, and running a family, looking after her 12-year-old daughter and younger son, giving interviews when you have nothing to say to journalists who will only hear what they want to hear anyway... If I were more chivalrous I'd apologies for my existence and leave. Instead, I just order myself a sad cup of coffee and fantasize about the gourmet meal that won't be. (Hattenstone, 3)

In addition to her plays, Yasmina Reza has also written some screenplays for European movies and she is the author of three novels. She wrote four screenplays: *Jusqu'à la nuit* (*Till*

Night) in 1983 in which she also acted, *Le pique-nique de Lulu Kreutz* (*Lulu Kreutz's picnic*) in 2000, *Chicas* in 2011 and the most famous one, *Carnage* in 2011.

Her novels, considered a bit less important than her plays, are: *Hammerklavier* (the title is a German word that means “piano” used in particular by Beethoven for a late sonata) written in 1997, *Une désolation* (*Desolation*) written in 1999, *Adam Haberberg* written in 2003, *Nulle part* written in 2005, *Dans la luge d'Arthur Schopenhauer* (*On Arthur Schopenhauer's Sledge*) written in 2005 and *L'Aube le soir ou la nuit* written in 2007.

Hammerklavier is an autobiographical novel, as she confesses in an interview:

All the personal questions you ask me are in this book. It is very autobiographical. It was not supposed to be published. It was written for me.” (Hattenstone, 2)

In this interview Hattenstone writes about the novel:

Hammerklavier is astonishing. The tiny chapters were written as scraps of diary, and somehow Reza has convinced herself that the act of stapling these scraps together turns them into a cogent work of fiction. It is occasionally beautiful, often pretentious, always revealing. There is plenty of love in the book - for her dying father, staring at his cancer-stripped body in the mirror and seeing Auschwitz; for her children's demanding whims; for her partner, director Didier Martigny. (Hattenstone, 2)

In 2007 she also wrote *L'aube, le soir ou la nuit?* (*Dawn Dusk or Night*) a book about the year she spent following Nicolas Sarkozy during his campaign for the French presidency. Reza decided to shadow him for a whole year, from 2006 to his election in May 2007 and the book contains her experience and her harsh thoughts about the future president.

Reza has always declared herself and her works apolitical and this book isn't different. In an interview she said:

The book was not at all political. It was an observation of a man, a movement... I can have an opinion about the way he runs the country but it is no more interesting than that of anyone else, of a normal citizen. (Day, 3)

But as much as in her plays, she didn't keep down her sarcasm: whether Sarkozy was or was not to be the future president of France, wasn't so meaningful for Reza, who described him as “a pint-sized egoist driven by a childlike search for approbation.” (Day, 4)

There's a chapter in her book in which Reza describes the future president

[...] grabbing a copy of *Le Figaro* visibly grabbed by an item in the front page. It was not the news story about Iran or the French election that had captured his attention, but an advertisement for a luxury watch. 'That's a nice Rolex,' Sarkozy said. (Day, 4)

Reza is now, in 2012, 53 years old, she has two children but companion, at least as far as is known. In fact, even if the media are always searching for gossips about her life, she is rather reserved and cautious.

Examples of Reza's Plays settings

Conversations after a Burial



Conversations After a Burial, The Questors Theatre, January 2006
From left: Emma Wallace (as Elisa), Gillian Jacyna (as Edith), Cathie Wallace (as Julienne)

La Traversée de l'hiver



La Traversée de l'hiver, Théâtre Espace Icare, January 2001
From the left: Thérèse-Marie Poreye (as Suzanne), Claude Minier (as Avner), Dominique Chevrinais (as Ariane),
Lisbeth Wagner (as Emma), Jacques Démarre (as Mr. Blensk)

'Art'



'Art', Royale Theatre, 1998
From the left: Alfred Molina (as Serge), Victor Garber (as Marc)

The Unexpected Man



The Unexpected Man, Stages Repertory Theatre, 2012
Sally Edmundson (as The Woman) and James Belcher (as The Man)

Life x 3



Life x 3, Broadway, 2003
Clockwise from top, Helen Hunt (as Sonia), Brent Spiner (as Hubert), John Turturro (as Henry) and Linda Emond (as Inez)

A Spanish Play



A Spanish Play, Broadway, 2007
Zoe Caldwell (as Pilar)

2- Reza's style

In Reza's plays there are some recurring characteristics that leap at the reader's or at the audience's eyes, since the first glance. Other characteristics instead aren't so obvious but we have to analyze them more carefully, because they are even more important.

2.1- Characters

All Reza's plays are written for a small number of characters, from two to six actors and, apart in two plays (*'Art'* and *A Spanish Play*), we have an equal division of male and female roles. The repeated choice of small groups of characters could suggest that Reza is more interested in analyzing intimate moments than in exploring extraordinary situations. She always puts her characters in tight clusters, in situations that require physical proximity and mental confrontations. To support this idea, in most of her plays, we could find moments in which the characters have interior monologues: practically they are telling the audience how they feel and what they are thinking of. Doing this, she is focusing on human's mind, the way it works and the way feelings influence our reactions and choices.

I would say that above all, my plays are about people who are well-raised but who lose control of themselves. My characters are for the most part impulsive by nature. You could describe my plays as being a theatre of nerves. (Ng, *Playwrights Yasmina Reza*, 2)

Moreover she doesn't write any small role. This is probably because her career started as an actress, training at the Jacques Lecoq International Drama School in Paris. Having experienced how an actor works has probably influenced her choice in writing for the stage.

Every role she wrote is a great work for every actor who had to face with. Her passion for both acting and writing, has developed in the ability to write roles for actors so as to

make it seem to each actor that the part he is playing was written specifically for him. (<http://www.bard.org/education/studyguides/Art/artplaywright.html>)

The characters she invents usually have similar features in all the plays. Indeed all Reza's characters are people belonging to the bourgeoisie: quite rich, well-educated and with an appropriate use of language. Most of them are middle-aged, usually blood relatives and friends. It is quite strange that most of Reza's characters are from 40 to 65 years old with only two exceptions, a 30 years old girl (Ariane in *La Traversée de l'Hiver*) and a 35 years old girl (Elisa in *Conversation After a Burial*), even if she was definitely younger, when she starts writing plays. For example, when she wrote *Conversation After a Burial*, she was only 28 years-old while the characters of the play are all between 35 and 65 years old. But as she explained in an interview, even if youth is thought as positive and desirable, she always preferred to spend her time with older, wiser and more experienced people.

2.2- Minimalism

All the plays have minimal scenery and rare stage directions. Reza prefers abstractions to details. In all the introductions of Reza's plays, we can find the author directions for the setting of the stage. Quite always she chooses a very bare and simple setting. For example:

- *'Art'*: A single set. As stripped-down and neutral as possible. The scenes unfold, successively, at Serge's, Yvan's and Marc's. Nothing changes, except for the painting on the wall. (Play 1, 5)

- *The Unexpected Man*: A train compartment. Nothing realistic. Air. Space. A deliberate absence of stage directions. (Play 1, 75)
- *Conversation After a Burial*: Nothing realistic. A single open space. The woods, the clearing and the house are simply suggested, with different elements. (Play 1, 117)
- *Life x 3*: A living room. As abstract as possible. No walls, no door; as if open to the sky. What's important is the suggestion of a living room. (Play 1, 203)
- *The God of Carnage*: A living room. No realism. Nothing superfluous. (GoC, 2)

She also prefers silences to words. Many critics have pointed out her masterful use of silence, her work with hiatus, essential dialogues and pauses. She herself said:

Most writers don't know that actors are never better than in the pauses or in the subtext. They give actors too many words. In a play, words are parentheses to the silences. They're useful for the actors, but . . . they aren't the whole story.
(<http://www.bard.org/education/studyguides/Art/artplaywright.html>)

2.3- Detailed daily life

Juxtaposing to the minimalistic setting, we can find in the dialogues plenty details of daily life. Usually Reza puts in her plays a lot of minute details, such as the precise description of a recipe for the stew the characters are making for dinner (in *Conversation after a Burial*) or a method of exhaling cigarette smoke (in *Life x 3*).

2.4- The Breach

In all Reza's work we can grasp her intent of destabilizing the audience. The breach, in Reza's plays, has the intent of unsettling the audience and challenging their expectations about her work. It reminds the audience that things are not what they seem.

Reza herself refers to the breach as "the moment in which the rules of the play are rupted."

(Plays of Y. Reza, 6)

This break could be caused for example by the rupture of realistic time, as in *Life x 3* in which we can see the time running back three times during the play. The first time it happens, the audience is confused by the event because it is not what we would expect in such a realistic play. In *The Unexpected Man*, the breach is when the isolations of the two characters break, when the man speak for the first time to the woman, shifting the audience from interior monologues to real time.

We can see the differences between the breach in all her works and the evolution of the idea of breach in Reza's works. Reading the plays in chronological order, we could see that Reza uses similar breach in the next two plays, before changing and revising the idea and the behavior of the breach.

Let analyze her first two plays *Conversation after a Burial* (1987) and *La Traversée de l'hiver* (1989). During the plays, we can simply see a series of conversations between relatives or friends, nothing special happens. The characters are always talking and there is no climax rising through the end of the play. There are very little actions and usually the characters don't show too much about their life and their thoughts, apart from offering a glimpse of their loneliness in what they say. But when we reach the end, the established tone is broken by the

final monologue: one of the characters has a final speech, which is disconnected from the story the audience have witnessed. We could say that this monologue could work as an epilogue even if it doesn't resolve any issue but usually brings up some new and larger questions. Moreover, through these larger questions, the play and the audience can transcend a specific place and time and be more universal.

We could say that each Reza's play offers "a tiny perspective on an enormous idea" (Plays of Y. Reza, 5).

In *Conversation after a Burial*, Alex's post-monologue is very poetic and spiritual, while the whole play is very realistic and full of every day details. This monologue sets the tone for the audience to think of a possible psychic and spiritual connection through the characters of the play.

ALEX - You left... We stayed here, all four of us, sitting here, within the four walls, me here, in this same spot, I didn't move... And then, another strange thing happened, very strange... I was sitting in the Peugeot, in the back, you were in front, Nathan was driving, he'd turned on the windscreen wipers double-speed. [...] And I was, how can I put it, emptied, weightless in the back seat, trusting, protected, a sense of indescribable well-being... (Play 1, 195)

In *La Traversée de l'hiver*, Avner stays a bit distanced from the others for the whole play. But his poetical monologue, at the end of the play, shows his internal struggle to connect himself with those who surround him. Avner's opening up in this monologue reminds the audience that everybody can change and that we don't really know what's in somebody's mind.

The next two plays are *'Art'* (1994) and *The Unexpected Man* (1995). These two plays could be considered as the opposite of the previous one; in fact they are more intimate than the others. Here the breach is not temporal but narrative: jumping from different perspectives of the same scene or events, hearing the thoughts of the characters and the way they react to an

event suggest a sense of openness and gives the audience the freedom to interpret the play, but also the sensation that the story is never definite.

Serge, as if alone.

SERGE - My friend Marc's an intelligent enough fellow, I've always valued our relationship, he has a good job, he's an aeronautical engineers, but he's one of those new-style intellectuals who are not only enemies of modernism but seem to take some sort of incomprehensible pride in running it down... In recent years there nostalgia-merchant have become quite breathtakingly arrogant.

Same pair. Same place. Same painting. (Play 1, 9)

Yvan, alone.

YVAN - Of course it doesn't make me happy. It doesn't make me happy but, generally speaking, I'm not the sort of person who can say I'm happy, just like that. I'm trying to... I'm trying to think of an occasion when I could have said yes, I'm happy... Are you happy to be getting married, my mother stupidly asked me one day, are you at least happy to be getting married? ...Why wouldn't I be, Mother? What do you mean, why wouldn't I be? You're either happy or you're not happy, what's 'Why wouldn't I be?' got to do with it?...

Serge alone.

SERGE - As far as I'm concerned, it's not white. When I say as far as I'm concerned, I mean objectively. Objectively speaking, it's not white. It has a white background, with a whole range of greys... There's even some red in it. You could say it's very pale. I wouldn't like it if it was white. Marc thinks it's white because he's got hung up on the idea it's white. Unlike Yvan. Yvan can see it isn't white. Marc can think what he likes, what do I care? (Play 1, 25-26)

This freedom of interpretation satisfies the essence of the breach, of disrupting the audience.

In those two plays otherwise, the breach is more woven in the play, than in the two before.

Then Reza developed the breach even more, in her next two plays: *Life x 3* (2000) and *A Spanish Play* (2004). In these plays a new kind of breach is present. It is woven into the play too, but it also shows different levels of reality. As she told in an interview, she "wanted to mine the character not through events but through his psychological response to events. It's

like digging a hole and studying the geological layers." (Plays of Y. Reza, page 115)

This digging into her characters' layers is more evident in *A Spanish Play* and its meta-theatrical approach. In fact characters' playing multiple roles in a play, gives the audience the impression of looking at various layers. In *Life x 3* instead, the audience isn't neither given an explanation about what they were seeing or an explanation of why they were looking at parallel worlds.

Evening. A living room. [...] Sonia is sitting down, wearing a bathrobe. She's looking through a file. Henry appears.

HENRY - He wants a cookie.

SONIA - He just brushed his teeth.

HENRY - He's asking for a cookie.

SONIA - He knows very well there's no cookie in bed.

HENRY - You tell him." (Play 1, 203)

Evening. The same room. Sonia is sitting down, wearing a bathrobe. She's looking through a file. Henry appears. An atmosphere of calm.

HENRY - He wants a cookie.

SONIA - He just brushed his teeth.

HENRY - Right.

Pause. She's looking at her file again, he's hovering indecisively.

HENRY - How about a slice of apple?" (Play 1, page 236)

In her last play, *God of Carnage* (2006) we could say that she achieved the goal she had proposed: her attempts to rupture the audience's experience have become gradually more and more integrate in her plays and therefore less noticeable. In fact in this last play, the breach deals with the unreliability of the language. The events are plausible, there are not interior monologues or time reversions. We simply understand since the very beginning that we can't trust on what the characters say. And this reality dismantles the audience's belief that language is the first step to civilization, because, in this play, language brings characters to a collapse,

revealing the savages they truly are.

2.5- "Funny tragedies"

Matthew Warchus, who has been the director of most of Reza's plays on the West End and Broadway, was the first to define Reza's plays as "funny tragedies". This definition probably comes from the difficulty in setting Reza's plays in one category. We can't say they are comedy, but neither can we say tragedy. The audience always laughs, during these performances but there are moments in each play we have analyzed, in which feelings go down deep into the soul and the mind of the characters and of the audience.

Moreover, could we say that those plays are parodies? When we think of "parody" we usually think, at first, of the intent of imitating and ridiculing a classical work or piece of art. But there is also a more complex and modern concept of parody. Parody imperatively implies irony. In the first case irony is used as a destructive and belittling force. But it could also be used as a playful, constructive and demagogic force. Quite more a respectful homage than an unrespectful outrage. A parody needs two levels, a surface and a background, and the success rests in the ability of recognizing both even if they are superimposed.

We could see Reza's work as parodies of real life. As she said more than once in some interviews, she was inspired by everyday events for the stories she tells in her plays.

Moreover we could say that her way of parodying real life belongs to the second type of parody we saw: her aim isn't to ridicolize or belittle everyday happenings. On the contrary she improves them, indeed. But at the same time, her character's reactions are, in some way, emphasized and exaggerated, and here lies the parody.

In an interview, when the journalist affirmed that everybody always laughs at her plays, Reza said:

Laughter is always a problem, laughter is very dangerous. The way people laugh changes the way you see a play. A very profound play may seem very light. My plays have always been described as comedy but I think they're tragedy. They are funny tragedy, but they are tragedy. Maybe it's a new genre. (Hattenstone, 1)

And then she tried to explain her thought with an example about her play '*Art*':

Why is *Art* a tragedy? Because it is a break-up of a friendship, a rupture between people... it's a heartbreaking play if you read it." (Hattenstone, 1)

This analysis of the tragic side of everything could probably come from very far. As she was a child she admitted she was very shy and pessimistic.

I knew as a young child that everyone would die, that humanity was vile. I had no optimism in human beings. I have no faith in humanity. Our first instincts are vile. (Hattenstone, 2)

And this lack of faith in humanity, comes definitely out in all her plays. The fact is that the audience usually notices more easily the funny and ironic side of the events, the jokes and the gaffes of the characters. Probably only after, as it happened to me with *Carnage*, recollecting what they have seen, they can grasp the tragic irony of the modern society she depicted when she was writing her plays.

About the reactions of the audience at "The God of Carnage" there is a great interview in which the London production's actors comment it.

RALPH FIENNES - I laughed when I was disturbed. You laugh because she [Yasmina Reza] strips the skin away, and there's something in that that's funny.

TAMSIN GRIEG - And I don't think you can play it as a comedy. Matthew describes her plays as "funny tragedies". The playing of it has to be deadly serious.

JANET MCTEER - If you play it for laughs, you lose the play.

RALPH FIENNES - Any actor who's played Hamlet will tell you that you get laughs. Not intentionally. They just happen. Hamlet looks at the desperation of his situation, and the audiences just react with laughter at moments.

JANET MCTEER - Some laughter in this is not because it's funny. It's more like recognition or nervousness. I bet there'll be at least six laughs per couple per show whene one persone goes 'Ha ha ha!' and recognises either themselves or their partner. And there'll be a little ripple if [wispering] 'You do that.'

KEN STOTT - A lot of men with arms folded.(Rees, 2)

3- The birth of "The God of Carnage"

In 2005 Reza was in a conceiving period. She had written *A Spanish Play* the year before, but wasn't in the mood of doing any new play. When she was approached by a German theatre director who wanted to commission her a new play she simply answered him "No, I'm tired, I've got too much on; I don't want to do it." (Day, 1)

But after some time, a thing happened, that made her change her mind about writing a new play. As she told in an interview:

There was a little accident in the life of my son. He was then about 13 or 14 and his friend was in a fight with another friend; they exchanged blows and my son's friend had his tooth broken. A few days later, I met with the mother of this boy in the street. I asked her how her son was, if he was better, because I knew they'd had to do something to the tooth, they'd had to operate or something. And she said, 'Can you imagine? The parents [of the other boy in the fight] didn't even call me.' It was suddenly, click! I thought, 'This is an incredible theme. (Day, 1)

This is how *The God of Carnage* came out from Reza's mind.

Then, after this idea, she contacted the German director again, asking him if he still wanted a new work. But the time left was so short that she wrote the entire play in only three months. She admitted she didn't use a specific method, she simply sat down and wrote it, as she does with all her works.

In an interview she said that this is the way in which the majority of her works were born: not from a complex analysis on socio-cultural themes or her interests in psychoanalyzing people. All her works simply come from "a single spark that illuminates something bigger." (Day, 2)

Anyway the analysis of modern culture is implied in all her works, because Reza's theatre is a

mirror of society, a sharp reflection of the instincts of normal people.

This way of writing probably brought her a great popularity both with the critics and with the normal audience. A thing that is more and more difficult in a society in which if a work is acclaimed by the critics, is usually a flop when it is proposed to the normal audience and if it is a success with the normal audience, it is considered frivolous and banal by the critics. Her capability of writing of our society and its problems without being too serious, too psychological, too heavy and moralistic in her analysis, giving instead something fresh, spontaneous and sarcastic to all her characters, is the key idea but also the winning idea of her works.

This way of writing also makes her plays "accessible". Accessible to people of all kind of levels, to people who are not used to go to the theatre and want an easy play but also to people who like more challenging plays. Reza herself has no problem with the word "accessible", as she confesses in an interview:

I love this definition. I am OK with that. Complex ideas but made accessible.
There's no point in writing theatre if it isn't accessible, because no one will see it.
The greatest playwrights such as Shakespeare or Molière – to whom, by the way, I am not comparing myself – they were also accessible.(Day, 3)

Like Shakespeare's plays, which had two levels of comprehension, Reza's plays have two levels too. The first level is the easiest one to gain, the one that everybody who sees her plays can get. The second level is deeper, thin and elusive, harder to grasp. This second level is the one that arise enthusiasm in the critics, and that someone could swallow later. Probably the definition of "funny tragedies" comes also from this double level of comprehension of her plays.

4- Analyzing *The God of Carnage*

A mouthful of grog and,
bam, the real face appears.
(*The God of Carnage*)

God of Carnage can be seen as the exemplification of Reza's style in the way I've analyzed it in the second chapter. In fact all the characteristics that we've seen before, perfectly match within this play.

4.1- Characters in *The God of Carnage*

ALAIN REILLE

ANNETTE REILLE

VÉRONIQUE VALLON (in the French text her surname is Houillé)

MICHEL VALLON (in the French text his surname is Houillé)

There are four characters, which obviously form a small group of people.

There are two men (Alain and Michel) and two women (Annette and Véronique), that is to say, an equal division between male and female roles.

They are two couples of parents (the Reilles and the Vallons) this means that they are tight related to each other and presumably in love with each other, being husbands and wives.

The age of the four protagonists is around forty years old, Reza precise it in the first page of the play. Both these two couples have at least one son. The Reilles have a son, Ferdinand who

is eleven-years-old. Alain Reille also has another son from a previous wedding, being Annette his second wife. The Vallons instead have two children, Bruno who is eleven-years-old too and Camille, who is nine-years-old.

Both couples belong to the bourgeoisie, even if to two different level of the middle class. The Reilles family in fact is healthier than the Vallons: Alain Reille is a lawyer and his wife, Annette, works as a wealth-manager, while Véronique Vallon is a writer specialized in African studies and works part-time in an art and history bookshop and Michel Vallon runs a home goods store. On the other hand, apart from their supposed wealth, their work and way of living are totally opposed: the Reilles are both working with words and detached by the works they produce, while the Vallons are all working with material objects, connected materially with the "fruits of their labor". The Reills could be seen as airy, working with words, computers, mobiles, while the Vallons could be seen as earthy, near to the object they are surrounded with, at home or at work, African manufacts, art books, domestic hardware. Usually legal and finances careers are associated with materialism, on the contrary artists and normal workers reject materialism. But some objects, as much as people's inner wildness are the main theme of the play, as Véronique says:

VÉRONIQUE - Objects can become ridiculously important, half the time you can't even remember why. (GoC, 32)

But this distinction works for their career, not for themselves too; Reza plotted everything perfectly, in this play. In fact, while the play goes on, we see all of them getting mad when the material things they are attached to get broken or ruined: Alain when his mobile is thrown in the vase of water containing the tulips by his wife, Annette when Véronique throws her purse in the air and Véronique when Annette vomits on her precious art catalogues.

Anyway at the beginning of the play, they are definitely portrayed in two different ways: the

Reilles seems the typical conservative, reserved and a bit less communicative family while the Vallons are described as liberal, earthy and communicative.

They are all definitely well educated, with an appropriate use of language. Think for example to the specific terminology, as much as the juridical terminology used by Alain Reille. Or the passion for art and history of the third world of Véronique, who also is a writer with a book about Darfur coming out soon.

ALAIN REILLE: is cynic and without any scruple of conscience, as we notice when he discusses with the representing of the pharmaceutical company and with his colleague.

ALAIN - In the therapeutic field, every advance brings with it risk as well as benefit.
(GoC, 23)

Every time he speaks you can hear that there is a very deep irony, cinism and provocation in everything he says or points out. He shows his capability of manipulate language, both during his callings and during his dialogues with Véronique.

Otherwise he is the most reliable one of the four characters, the only one that shows his savage and quite sharky side since the very beginning of the meeting. He had another wife before Annette and another child from that wedding, but he has never been the kind of man who is involved in his children's upbringing. His wife reveals, indeed, that he never liked pushing the stroller on the walks with his child.

ALAIN - You stay, Annette, you'll tell me what you've decided, I'm no use whichever way you cut it. Women always think you need a man, you need a father, as if they'd be the slightest use. Men are a dead weight, they're clumsy and maladjusted... (GoC, 14)

ALAIN - Listen, Annette, I'm already doing you a big favor being here in the first place...(GoC, 26)

ALAIN - I really have to go, Woof-woof...

ANNETTE - All right, go on, be a coward.

ALAIN - Annette, right now I'm risking my most important client, so this responsible parent routine... (GoC, 35)

He's not happy of being at the meeting with the Vallons, he would prefer being at work than there and, practically he isn't there, passing most of the time at the mobile. He is the one, being a lawyer, who starts the first "fight", discussing on the work *armed*, then changed with the word *furnished*.

ALAIN - A word deliberately designed to rule out error or clumsiness, to rule out childhood. (GoC, 36)

He is the one who uses his words as arms, wounding, usually in their pride, everyone they are directed to. He is a master in underhand provocations. His idea of what happened, is that all the children are savage, not only his son and that it's normal children behave like that. And not only children.

ALAIN - Madame, our son is a savage. To hope for any kind of spontaneous repentance would be fanciful. (GoC, 14)

ALAIN - They're young, they're kids, kids have always given each other a good drubbing during break. It's a law of life. [...] You have to go through a kind of apprenticeship before violence gives way to what's right. [...] I believe in the god of carnage. He has ruled, uninterruptedly, since the dawn of time. You're interested in Africa, aren't you? [...] As a matter of fact, I just came back from the Congo. Over there, little boys are taught to kill when they're eight years old. During their childhood, they may kill hundreds of people, with a machete, with a 12.7, with a Kalashnikov, with a grenade launcher, so you'll understand that when my son picks up a bamboo rod, hits his playmate and breaks a tooth, or even two, in the Aspirant Dunant Gardens, I'm likely to be less disposed than you to horror and indignation. (GoC, 52)

And, in his opinion, it is also normal that they don't realize, totally, the consequences of their

action.

ALAIN - He realizes what he's done. He just doesn't understand the implications. He's eleven. (GoC, 8)

ALAIN - No. No, he does not understand that he's disfigured his playmate. [...] He understands he's behaved like a thug, he does not understand that he's disfigured his playmate. [...] My son has not disfigured your son. [...] The swelling on his lip will go down, and as for his teeth, take him to the best dentist. (GoC, 13)

He is somehow the dominant one in the couple and, being Véronique the other dominant, they can't really stand each other. He can't stand Véronique's lessons of "humanity", of how to grow their son, how to behave...

ALAIN - What do you mean, madame? What do you mean, 'made aware of his responsibilities'?

VÉRONIQUE - I'm sure your son is not a savage.

[...]

ALAIN - He's a savage. [...] He doesn't want to discuss it.

VÉRONIQUE - But he ought to discuss it.

ALAIN - He ought to do any number of things, madame. He ought to come here, he ought to discuss it, he ought to be sorry for it, clearly you have parenting skills that put us to shame, we hope to improve but in the meantime, please bear with us. (GoC, 16)

ALAIN - Véronique, you're motivated by an educational impulse, which is very sympathetic... [...] Speak to him, read him the riot act, do what you like. (GoC, 20)

ALAIN - You and I have had trouble seeing eye to eye right from the start. (GoC, 36)

ALAIN - Véronique, are we ever interested in anything but ourselves? Of course we'd all like to believe in the possibility of improvement. Of which we could be the architect and which would be in no way self-serving. Does such a thing exist? Some people drag their feet, it's their strategy, other refuse to acknowledge the passing of time, and drime themselves demented – what difference does it make? People struggle until they're dead. Education, the miseries of the world... You're writing a book about Darfur, fine, I can understand you saying yourself, right, I'm

going to choose a massacre, what else does history consist of, and I'm going to write about it. You do what you can to save you.

VÉRONIQUE- I'm not writing the book to save myself. You haven't read it, you don't know what it's about.

ALAIN - It makes no difference. (GoC, 47)

And he also has a precise idea of how women are and how men like them:

ALAIN - You think too much. Women think too much. (GoC, 47)

ALAIN - She's right, stop sniveling, when a woman cries, a man is immediately provoked to the worst excesses. (GoC, 50)

ALAIN - You're part of the same category of woman – committed, problem-solving. That's not what we like about women, what we like about women is sensuality, wildness, hormones. Women who make a song and dance without their intuition, women who are custodians of the world depress us – even him, poor Michel, your husband, he's depressed... (GoC, 65)

He also express the idea that are people as Véronique, with her pedantry, her arrogance and her underhand need of judging the others, who make people prefer violence than peace.

ALAIN - ...we are not social crusaders, (*To Véronique.*) I saw your friend Jane Fonda on TV the other day, I was inches away from buying a Ku Klux Klan poster... (GoC, 65)

He is, as I said before, the most coherent of the characters. Since the very first moment, he showed everyone the real Alain, not a pleasant mask but simply himself.

The only moment in the play in which he loses his temper, is when Annette shoves his mobile phone in the water. It that moment he starts cursing, for the first time in the whole play.

ALAIN - Are you completely insane? Fuck!! [...] You need locking up, poor love! This is incomprehensible! ...I had everything in there! It's brand new, it took me hours to set up! [...] Everything's on there, my whole life... [...] No chance! It's fucked!... (GoC, 56-57)

ANNETTE REILLE: at the first sight she seems very polite and quite shy. She looks like the prototype of the bourgeois woman, well dressed, very compound, a bit too submissive. She also is the most uptight character, giving very few information about herself. She speaks very few words during the first part of the play, usually agreeing with Véronique, trying to recall the attention of her husband or to embank his cynic provocations. She is the weak part of the couple, so she behaves in a friendly and obliging way, try not to quarrel or to fight with anyone.

ANNETTE - Alain, do you mind joining us?" (GoC, 11)

ANNETTE - We're very touched by your generosity. We appreciate the fact that you're trying to calm the situation down rather than exacerbate it. [...] How many parents standing up for their children become infantile themselves? If Bruno had broken two od Ferdinand Teeth, I'm afraid Alain and I would have been a good deal more thin-skinned about it. I'm not certain we'd have been so broad-minded. (GoC, 12)

ANNETTE - We can't get involved in children's quarrels. (GoC, 19)

Only sometimes she loses her control, in the first part of the play, teasing her husband:

ALAIN - Personally, I can't be anywhere at seven-thirty.

ANNETTE - Since you're no use, we won't be needing you. (GOC, 15)

ANNETTE - Listen, we're on a slippery slope, my husband is desperate about all sorts of other thing." (GoC, 21)

But the more the play goes on, the more every character lose their control, the more she starts revealing something of her inner thoughts and losing her temper.

For each character apart for Alain Reille, I think there is a precise moment in the play, in which their change becomes really evident. After she had puked, coming out from the bathroom, Annette changes her way of behaving and this is the passage that, in my opinion,

decrees the change:

ANNETTE - Perhaps we skated too hastily over...I mean, what I mean is...

MICHEL - Say it, Annette, say it.

ANNETTE - An insult is also a kind of assault.

MICHEL - Of course it is.

VÉRONIQUE - Well, that depends, Michel.

ANNETTE - Ferdinand's never shown any signs of violence. He wouldn't have done that without a reason. (GoC, 34)

She had started also before, to take some positions about her way to educate her son, answering to Véronique, who is the kind of woman who things she have the prerogative of the very right way of educating children. But after that moment, everything starts going worse.

ANNETTE - All right...Véronique, if we want to reprimand our children, we'll do it in our own way and without having to account to anybody. (GoC, 25)

VÉRONIQUE - Let's stay calm, Annette. Michel and I are making an effort to be reasonable and moderate...

ANNETTE - Not that moderate.

VÉRONIQUE - Oh, really? What do you mean?

ANNETTE - Moderate on the surface. (GoC, 35)

Also her language changes, at first very polite, then she starts putting some curses in her sentences, that sound very strange, said by that kind of woman:

ANNETTE - That's enough, Alain! That's enough now with the mobile! Will you pay attention to what's going on here, shit!

ALAIN - Yes... Call me back and read it to me. (*He hangs up.*) What's the matter with you, have you gone mad, shouting like that? Serge heard everything.

ANNETTE - Good! Drives me mad, that mobile, endlessly! (GoC, 26)

The more the play goes on the more you also understand her frustration for the behavior of Alain and Véronique. She really can't stand both of them. Her husband's indifference in the upbringing of their son, in everything that has something to do with the house and his totally

dependence to his mobile and therefore, to his work.

ANNETTE - According to my husband, everything to do with house, school or garden is my department. [...] And I understand why. It's deathly, all that. It's deathly. (GoC, 27)

ANNETTE - This is hideous! [...] This goes on from morning to night, from morning to night he's glued to that mobile! That mobile makes mincemeat of our lives! [...] It's always very important. Anything happening somewhere else is always more important. [...] In the street, at dinner, he doesn't care where... [...] I'm not saying another word. Total surrender. I want to be sick again. (GoC, 50)

ANNETTE - The great warriors, like my husband, you have to give them some leeway, they have trouble working up an interest in local events. (GoC, 55)

The very end of play shows her taking revenge of him, throwing his mobile phone in the water, in the vase with tulips, making Alain terribly mad and upset.

ANNETTE - My husband's unhappy as well. Look at him. Slumped. He looks as if someone's left him by the side of the road. I think it's the unhappiest day of his life too. (GoC, 60)

And she makes her longest intervention in the play, dealing on how a man should be. And also in here, arms and the idea of violence are fundamental, as to show that is not peace and submissiveness what really stimulates people's interest.

ANNETTE - Men are so wedded to their gadgets... It belittles them... It takes away all their authority... A man needs to keep his hands free... If you ask me. Even an attaché case is enough to put me off. There was a man, once, I found really attractive, then I saw him with a square shoulder-bag, a man's shoulder-bag, but that was it. There's nothing worse than a shoulder-bag. Although there's also nothing worse than a mobile phone. A man ought to give the impression that he's alone... If you ask me. I mean, that he's capable of being alone...! I also have a John Wayne-ish idea of virility. And what was it he had? A Colt .45. A device for creating a vacuum... A man who can't give the impression that he's a loner has no texture... (GoC, 58)

But she can't stand Véronique too, as much that, after a bottle of rum comes out, giving them the last push to the desegregation of their mask, she strongly opposes to her and her need of controlling and teaching end prevailing on the others.

ANNETTE - Why are you letting them call my son an executioner? You come to their house to settle things and you get insulted and bullied and lectured on how to be a good citizen of the planet – our son did well to clout yours, and I wipe my arse with your charter of human rights! (GoC, 63-64)

VÉRONIQUE VALLON: the very first impression we have of her is that of a woman whose *raison d'être*, is to crusade for peace and justice, both in the world and in the domestic life, and to teach other people how they should behave. She really believes in the redemptive power of language and of civilization, and wants to convince everyone about it. She begins the plays as the warm and apprehensive mother, the peace keeping woman.

VÉRONIQUE - I don't see that any thanks are necessary. Fortunately, there is still such a thing as the art of co-existence, is there not? (GoC, 4)

VÉRONIQUE - Well, we explained to Bruno he wasn't helping this child by shielding him. [...] We said to him, if we were this boy's parents, we would definitely want to be told. (GoC, 6)

VÉRONIQUE - We try. We try to fill the gabs in the educational system. [...] We try to make them read. To take them to concerts and exhibitions. We're eccentric enough to believe in the pacifying abilities of culture! (GoC, 17)

VÉRONIQUE - Let's stay calm, Annette. Michel and I are making an effort to be reasonable and moderate... (GoC, 35)

VÉRONIQUE - No. No. I'm sorry, we are not all fundamentally uncouth. [...] No, not me, thank the Lord. (GoC, 41)

But she also insists on making this happening be a teachable moment for the boys, without thinking that, in the end, they are kids. Instead she treats them as adults, but also tries to

prevaricate on the Reilles, commenting on Ferdinand's education.

VÉRONIQUE - If you're eleven, you're not a baby anymore. (GoC, 8)

VÉRONIQUE - So what does Ferdinand have to say about it? How does he view the situation? [...] He understands that he's disfigured his playmate? (GoC, 13)

VÉRONIQUE - The question is, do they want to talk to one another, do they want to have a reckoning?

MICHEL - Bruno wants to.

VÉRONIQUE - What about Ferdinand?

ANNETTE - It's no use asking his opinion.

VÉRONIQUE - But it has to come from him.

ANNETTE - Ferdinand has behaved like a hooligan, we're not interested in what mood he's in.

VÉRONIQUE - If Ferdinand is forced to meet Bruno in a punitive context, I can't see the results would be very positive. (GoC, 14)

VÉRONIQUE - If Ferdinand is not made aware of his responsibilities, they'll just look at each other like a pair of china dogs, it'll be a catastrophe. (GoC, 16)

MICHEL - They can do whatever they like with their son, it's their prerogative.

VÉRONIQUE - I don't think so.

MICHEL - What do you mean; you don't think so, Ronnie?

VÉRONIQUE - I don't think it is their prerogative. (GoC, 25)

Also after she breaks down, she keeps on playing the part of the woman sincerely interested in the social evolution of the world and horrified by the third word's situation. She could be considered the stereotype of the social-entangled woman, the one who is so concentrate on what happens on the other side of the world, where all she can do is nothing more than been indignant, and on the other hand, totally indifferent of what happens in her daily life, where she could instead do something to improve it. Apart from when it happens something as shocking as a children's fight. In that precise moment, she sees the possibility of using her indignation also in this side of the world.

VÉRONIQUE - Exactly, I'm standing up for civilization! And it's lucky there are people prepared to do that. (*She's on the brink of tears.*) You think being fundamentally uncouth's a better idea? [...] Is it normal to criticise someone for not being fundamentally uncouth? [...] What are we supposed to do? Sue you? Not speak to one another and try to slaughter each other with insurance claims? (GoC, 41-42)

VÉRONIQUE - We're livin in France. We're not living in Kinshasa! We're living in France according to the principles of Western society. What goes on in Aspirant Dunant Gardens reflects the values of Western society! Of which, is it's all the same to you, I am happy to be a member. (GoC, 54)

She is, as Alain, the strong part of the couple, the one who apparently takes all decisions, who has the power in the family. Going on with the play we can notice that she is both the one who speaks about great ideals, but also the one more attached to material things, for example her art catalogues. When Annette vomits over them, cleaning the catalogues is her first thought, not helping Annette. That is the opposite behavior we would expect from a woman who had preached the collaboration, the peace and unselfishness.

She is also very judgmental, deciding since the very first sight how the Reilles have to be. But, obviously, saying it behind their back, speaking with her husband when the Reilles are in the bathroom.

VÉRONIQUE - She's dreadful as well. [...] She's a phoney. [...] They're both dreadful! Why do you keep siding with them?

MICHEL - I don't keep siding with them, what are you talking about?

VÉRONIQUE - You keep vacillating, trying to play both ends against the middle. (GoC, 30)

The turning point in Véronique's behavior is soon after her husband giving up. Her *façade* goes in pieces and she turns out being a selfish, violent and pretty frustrated woman.

VÉRONIQUE - Behaving well gets you nowhere. Courtesy is a waste of time, it

weakens you and undermines you... (GoC, 38)

VÉRONIQUE - I don't give a shit! You force yourself to rise above petty-mindedness...and you finish up humiliated and completely on your own...

MICHEL - We're always on our own! Everywhere! (GoC, 42)

The most hilarious thing is that, after she collapsed, she pointed out her husband as the responsible for all the kindness reserved to the Reilles, as the tulips, and the *clafoutis*. There also is a moment in which she physically attacks her husband; the only violent scene on stage is made up by the woman who stands up for peace and human rights. And is Alain, the cynical one, who divides them.

Véronique throws herself at her husband and hits him several times, with an uncontrolled and irrational desperation. Alain pulls her off him. (GoC, 53)

MICHEL - She's a supporter of peace and stability in the world. [...] Beating up your husband is one of those principles, is it?

ANNETTE - Michel, this is going to end badly.

ALAIN - She threw herself in you in such a frenzy. If I were you, I'd be rather touched.

VÉRONIQUE - I'll do it again in a minute. (GoC, 53-54)

She is probably the most fake character in the play but, at the same time, she is the most convinced one of her reliability. She doesn't realize that her savage behavior is the worst of the group, and she considers herself better than the others, until the end of the play.

MICHEL VALLON: he is fundamentally a good-natured man, who doesn't want any kind of problems. He could be considered a bit coward, being that kind of person who always pretends that everything is good, simply not to quarrel or to have any problems. He rarely speaks to express his own ideas, in the first part of the play. Usually he agrees with his wife or, rarely, with Annette, a thing that Véronique always remarks as wrong. In the first part of the play you can hear him joking to relax the atmosphere or trying to mediate, even if this way of

behaving makes Véronique mad.

MICHEL: - We haven't offered you anything – coffee, tea, is there any of that *clafoutis* left, Ronnie? It's an extraordinary *clafoutis*. (GoC, 8)

MICHEL - Clafoutis, is a cake or a tart? Serious question? I was just thinking in the kitchen – Linzetorte, for example, is that a tart? (GoC, 18)

He realizes that the two boys behaved like that because they are children and that it could have been the opposite, Bruno striking another boy. He understands that they were playing, that it happened to all the boys to fight, when they were young. It's a kind of "ritual passage" you have to go through!

MICHEL - Because we all know very well it might easily have been the other way round. (GoC, 13)

MICHEL - When I was leader of my gang, when I was, twelve, I fought Didier Leglu, who was bigger than me, in single combat." (GoC, 19)

MICHEL - There's a very big difference.

ALAIN - What?

MICHEL - With Dider Leglu, we'd agreed to have a fight.

ALAIN - Did you beat the shit out of him?

MICHEL - Up to a point. (GoC, 19-20)

MICHEL - I don't keep siding with them, what are you talking about?

VÉRONIQUE - You keep vacillating, trying to play both ends against the middle.

MICHEL - Not at all!

VÉRONIQUE - Yes, you do. Going on about your triumphs as a gang leader, telling them they're free to do whatever they like with their son when the child is a public menace – when a child's a public menace, it's everybody's concerned. (GoC, 30-31)

But then, there is a point, as for the other characters, in which also his mask collapse too.

MICHEL - No, no, I refuse to allow myself to slide down that slope. [...] The deplorable slope those little bastards have perched us on! There, I've said it!

(GoC, 36-37)

MICHEL - Fuck the hamster!

VÉRONIQUE - You won't be able to say that to your daughter this evening.

MICHEL - Bring her on! I'm not going to let myself be told how to behave by some nine-years-old bruiser.

ALAIN - Hundred per cent behind you there.

VÉRONIQUE - Pathetic.

MICHEL - Careful, Véronique, you be careful, I've been extremely restrained up to now, but I'm two inches away from crossing that line. (GoC, 40)

And after that he shows the real Michel, the one who couldn't care less of his wife's ideals. He simply doesn't care of anything at all. Furthermore he could also be considered a bit racist, as Alain. He could be seen as the stereotype of the "miserable", uncouth man.

MICHEL - Let me tell you this, I'm up to here with these idiotic discussions. We tried to be nice, we bought tulips, my wife passed me off as a lefty, but the truth is, I can't keep this up any more, I'm fundamentally uncouth. (GoC, 41)

MICHEL - You're so full of shit, Véronique, all this simplistic claptrap, we're up to here with it! [...] Yes, yes, you stand by what you've said, you stand by what you've said, your infatuation for a bunch of Sudanese coons is bleeding into everything now. (GoC, 63)

The real Michel is not only uncouth, but also worse than Annette and her apathy toward motherhood and domestic things. He pretends to be apathy, simply not to have constant fights with his wife, but when finally he can say what he really think...it's so cynic and mean that is pretty shocky to hear from him. He is probably more cynic and mean also than Alain.

MICHEL - What I always say is, marriage: the most terrible ordeal God can inflict on you. [...] Marriage and children. [...] Children consume and fracture our lives. Children drag us towards disaster, it's unavoidable. When you see those laughing couples casting off into the sea of matrimony, you say to yourself, they have no idea, poor things, they just have no idea, they're happy. No one tell you anything when you start out. I have an old school pal who's just about to have a child with

his new girlfriend. I said to him, 'A child, at your age, are you insane?' The ten or a dozen years left to us before we get a cancer or a stroke, and you're going to bugger yourself up with some brat?

ANNETTE - You can't really believe what you're saying.

VÉRONIQUE - He does.

MICHEL - Of course I believe it. Worse, even. (GoC, 48-49)

VÉRONIQUE - I'm appalled. Why are you choosing to show yourself in this horrible light?

MICHEL - Because I feel like it. I feel like showing myself in a horrible light.

(GoC, 63)

When his anger explodes, it's directed to everybody, but especially to his wife, the woman who had, in some way castrate him, by being the alpha in the couple, the man of the house.

4.2- Minimalism in *The God of Carnage*

As in the other play, there are only few suggestions for the setting: "*A living room. No realism.*

Nothing superfluous." (GoC, 2) Only the very necessary things are described: "*...a coffee table, covered with art books. Two big bunches of tulips in vases.*" (GoC, 3)

Like in a detective story, if something is mentioned, it means that the characters will use it or interact with it. Nothing superfluous is ever mentioned by Reza in the indications.

There are also few stage directions, which give the essential information only at the beginning of the play:

The Vallons and the Reilles, sitting down, facing one another. We need to sense right away that the place belongs to the Vallons and that the two couples have just met. ... The prevailing mood is serious, friendly and tolerant. (GoC, 3)

The other stage directions that Reza indicates in her plays are usually indications to help organizing the sound effects, for example when Alain's mobile rings or when Vallon's phone rings. Or when Annette vomits.

She rarely indicates how or where a character has to move, leaving freedom of interpretation to the actors who are going to interpretate a role. This makes every interpretation a single and personal vision of the character. But this also make reading her plays more hard, not being able since the first sight, to understand how a character is reacting or what he is doing. On the other hand she quite always indicates when actors have to pause: pauses and hiatus are very important in Reza's plays. Anyway reading Reza's works, you can notice that she use a lot less stage directions than other playwrights, leaving in this way more freedom to the interpretation to the actors but also to the stage directors.

4.3- Detailed daily life in *The God of Carnage*

As we have seen, juxtaposed to the minimalistic setting, we can find through the words of the characters, a great profusion of details of daily life. In *The God of Carnage*, there is at the beginning a pretty long discussion about the *clafoutis* that the Vallons offers to the Reilles. In this discussion come out a lot of secrets and tricks about Véronique's recipe of the cake.

ALAIN - What's in the *clafoutis*?

VÉRONIQUE - Apples and pears. [...] My own little recipe.

ANNETTE - Apples and pears, this is a first.

VÉRONIQUE - Apples and pears, it's pretty textbook, but there's a trick to it. [...]

Pears need to be cut thicker than apples. Because pears cook faster than apples.

MICHEL - But she's not telling you the real secret.

VÉRONIQUE - ...Gingerbread crumbs! [...] It's a version of the way they make

clafoutis in Picardy. To be quite honest, I got it from his mother. (GoC, 10)

In my opinion, this is one of the things that make Reza's plays so interesting and well known to the public. In a review of the play, a journalist wrote:

clafoutis (a typically French dessert from the Limousin area, that I often make myself for parties, so I was of course intrigued to hear more about Véronique's recipe!) (Herman, 1)

Then, going on with the play, we assist to plenty of Alain's and Michel's mother phone calls. Alain is a lawyer and at the moment he is dealing with an emergency of one of his client, a pharmaceutical company which had some trouble with a medicine and its collateral effects. His phone calls are full of juridical terms, sharp comments and legal evaluations.

ALAIN - What's the most inconvenient about it as far as I'm concerned is the AGM's in two weeks. Do you have an insurance contingency to cover litigation? (GoC, 6)

ALAIN - Impaired motor skills, stability problems, in short you look permanently pissed... (*He laughs along with his colleague*)...Turnover, a hundred and fifty million dollars...Blanket denial...Idiot wanted to demand a right of replay. We certainly don't want a right of replay. (GoC, 11)

ALAIN - Not 'procedure', 'manoeuvre'. A 'manoeuvre, timed for two weeks before the annual accounts,' etc... [...] A 'paper' in inverted commas! Put the word 'paper' in inverted commas... (GoC, 50)

On the other hand the phone calls between Michel and his mother sounds so normal, so familiar to us, because are the perfect stereotype of the mother-son phone call. The old mother, apprehensive and annoying, complaining about her wealth, and the son irreverent and spiteful, but also protective when he discovers that a doctor has ordered to his mother the medicine which collateral effects Alain's client is trying to hide.

MICHEL - Oh, Mum... Yes, do whatever the doctor wants you to do... They've given

you Antril?! [...] You stop taking that stuff right now. Do you hear what I'm saying, Mum? Immediately...Don't argue, I'll explain later... [...] Why luminous?...So that you can be seen?...That's completely ridiculous...All right, we'll talk about it later. Lots of love, Mum. *He hangs up.* She's hired luminous crutches, so she doesn't get knocked down by a truck. As if someone in her condition would be strolling down the motorway in the middle of the night. (GoC, 37)

MICHEL - Who the fuck's this now?... Yes, Mum... He's fine. I say he's fine, he's lost his teeth, but he's fine... Yes, he's in pain. He's in pain, but it'll pass. Mum, I'm busy, I'll call you back.

ANNETTE - He's still in pain?

VÉRONIQUE - No.

ANNETTE - The why worry your mother?

VÉRONIQUE - He can't help himself. He always has to worry her. (GoC, 46)

MICHEL - All right, Mum, is that clear, stop taking the medication, why you always have to argue, stop taking it, do what you're told, I'll call you back... Lots of love, love from us all. (GoC, 61)

This short "medallions" that are scattered around the whole play, are for me a kind of compass, that help the audience to remember that what is happening is the reality, or at least one of the possible versions of the reality. At the same time, remembering you that what you are seeing is real, puts everything in a tragic light. The characters on the stage could be your friends, your parents or yourself too. And the way they behave isn't so unbelievable, it's unfair, mean, brutal, but surely not unbelievable!

4.4- The Breach in *The God of Carnage*

In *The God of Carnage* the breach is more inner in the play and isn't as evident as an action or a monologue. There isn't any break in the fourth wall, she doesn't manipulate time or space or create multiple identities to her characters as in the previous plays to disrupt the audience.

This time Reza has found a new way to surprise and shock her audience: building a play in which language is totally unreliable.

The language in *The God of Carnage* couldn't be trusted on. The two couples start the play disagreeing on a word, trying to find the right one for the assurance letter. Then they go on trying to achieve the reconciliation through the language and the civil discussion. But the more the play goes on, the more we can see that civil discussions are failing their goal, that language isn't leading them to the path of civilization and maturity as it was supposed, but is giving them the need of acting. And their actions reveal the more inner, savage and brutal part of each of them.

The failing of the dialogue and the collapse of language is the breach in *The God of Carnage*.

5- The story

Metà di me non sopporta l'altra e cerca alleati.

Gesualdo Bufalino

The play takes place in Paris, both in the original play and in the English translation. All the places that are used in the play (Aspirant Dunant Gardens, Montsouris Park, Mouton-Duvernet Market) are located in the south center of Paris, on the *rive gauche* (the left bank of the river Seine), a primarily residential part of Paris.

I've searched also the derivation of the surnames that Reza has chosen, Reille and Vallon. I've discovered that Reille is a surname belonging to the center of France and that is not so diffused. It comes from the ancient Provençal "*relha*" that means ploughshare, the blade of the plough. It is a surname that indicates its rustic roots. While Vallon is a more common surname, that comes from "*vallée*" and indicates the inhabitants of the valley. Probably the rustic roots of both the surnames are a sign of the fact that, independently of the works they do, both the family belong to the same social level and have rustic implication and a connection, at least nominal, with the earth and manual works.

The play opens with Véronique reading the draft of the declaration she had written, probably for the insurance company, about the fight of the two boys. The first character who speaks, after Véronique, is Alain that, as the lawyer he is, comments the inadequate use of the word "armed":

VÉRONIQUE - So this is our statement – you'll be doing your own, of course... 'At 5.30 pm on the 3rd November, in Aspirant Dunant Gardens, following a verbal altercation, Ferdinand Reille, eleven, armed with a stick, struck our son, Bruno Vallon, in the face. This action resulted in, apart from a swelling of the upper lip, the breaking of two incisor, including injury to the nerve in the right incisor'.

ALAIN: -Armed?

VÉRONIQUE - Armed? You don't like 'armed'? – what shall we say, Michel, furnished, equipped, furnished with a stick, is that all right?

ALAIN - Furnished, yes. (GoC, 3)

Since the very beginning of the play, Reza recalls audience's attention, to the gap between words and facts, and to the inadequacy of language, when it has to capture events. Here the breach comes out since the very beginning. As Alain will point out after, during the play, there is a big gap between a boy who was carrying a stick because he was playing, and the pressure of the situations made him act impulsively and a boy who was armed with a stick. This word alone gives the idea that the boy acted intentionally, brutally, aggressively. But what was Ferdinand, in the end? Armed or furnished?

ANNETTE - We're making a mistake not to take into account the origin of the problem.

VÉRONIQUE - There's no origin. There's just an eleven-year-old child hitting someone. With a stick.

ALAIN - Armed with a stick.

MICHEL - We withdrew that word.

ALAIN - You withdrew it because we objected to it.

MICHEL - We withdrew it without any protest.

ALAIN - A word deliberately designed to rule out error or clumsiness, to rule out childhood. (GoC, 35-36)

But from the beginning too, Reza gives us the elements to see that, even if Alain seems the most hateful character, the one that we can't stand from the very beginning of the play, he is the only reliable of the four. He is the one who behaves and speaks coherently with what he thinks.

Véronique instead is probably the most hypocrite one. She elected herself as the "leader" of the reunion, pretending to act as a moderator and to keep peace in it. She answered to Alain, and changed the word simply to please him, but her demeanor cannot be trusted. She believes

that Ferdinand is at fault and, for her, he was armed. As he points out often in the discussion, she is sure there was premeditation in the act of the boy:

ALAIN - Of course I care, Vèronique, enormously. My son ha injured another child...

VÉRONIQUE - On purpose.

ALAIN - See, that's the kind of remark that puts my back up. Obviously, on purpose.

VÉRONIQUE - But that makes all the difference.

ALAIN - The difference between what and what? That's what we're talking about.

Our son picked up a stick and hit your son. That's why we're here, isn't it? [...]

Why do you feel the need to slip in 'on purpose'? What kind of message is that supposed to be sending me? (GoC, 21)

After they read the declaration, Véronique and Michel go into a precise explanation of the damaged nerve of their son's tooth. They speak of the nerve as if it was a person, emphasizing the damages, trying probably to play on the Reilles feelings. Also here, words belonging to semantic sphere of violence as “kill” come out. Instead of explaining the cure, for example saying that they haven't decided yet to do root canal work on the teeth, which is a lexical choice that would be appropriate between four adults, Véronique decides to use the verb “to kill”.

ANNETTE - What's going to happen to the tooth with the affected nerve?

VÉRONIQUE - We don't know yet. They're being cautious about the prognosis.

Apparently the nerve hasn't been totally exposed.

MICHEL - Only a bit of it's been exposed.

VÉRONIQUE - Yes. Some of it's been exposed and some of it's still covered. That's why they've decided not to kill the nerve just yet.

MICHEL - They're trying to give the tooth a chance.

[...]

VÉRONIQUE - So there'll be an interim period while they give the nerve a chance to recover. (GoC, 4)

It is clear that she wants the Reille to apologize, but she doesn't want to ask it. On the other

hand, the Reille are not convinced that it is totally was their son's fault. When Annette tries to change subject, complimenting on the tulips, Véronique is exaggerating her answer, describing everything: the place where she bought them, their price and the number of tulips there are... We could interpret is as if she is nervous because she isn't driving the conversation where she wants: the apology.

Obviously, to regain her position, Véronique directs the conversation again on her son, how brave he was bearing the pain and how noble he was when he refused to say the name of the boy who attacked him. This makes clear that she won't change the subject of the conversation and that she won't be satisfied until she hears them apologizing.

VÉRONIQUE - Impressive sight, that child, face bashed in, teeth missing, still refusing to talk.

MICHEL - He also didn't want to identify him for fear of looking like a sneak in front of his friends; we have to be honest, Véronique, it was nothing more than a bravado.

VÉRONIQUE - Of course, but bravado is a kind of courage, isn't it? (GoC, 5)

When Alain receives the first call from his office, Véronique seems to notice Annette's embarrassment and she decides to reveal a flaw of her husband too: the fact that he left the family hamster in the street the evening before and that their daughter is totally mad at him. Michel has now to explain why he did it, to the Reilles:

MICHEL - Yes. That hamster made the most appalling racket all night. Then it spent the whole day fast asleep. Bruno was in a very bad way, he was driven crazy by the noise that hamster made. As for me, to tell the truth, I've been wanting to get rid of it for ages, so I said to myself, right, that's it. I took it and put it out in the street. I thought they loved drains and gutters and so on, but not a bit of it, it just sat there paralyzed on the pavement. Well, they're not domestic animals, they're not wild animals, I don't know where their natural habitat is. Dump them in the woods, they're probably just as unhappy. I don't know where you're meant to put them. (GoC, 7)

And here we can notice one of the sentences that could resume the whole play: "they're not domestic animals, they're not wild animals". The belongings of the hamster neither to the domestic sphere nor the natural sphere also represent their condition. They would like to be civilized parents but they have some savage behaviors that they can't control. They're neither totally civilized, nor totally savage; they're in the middle, in a chaos of identities and desires.

Annette is the most shocked by the story of the hamster; in fact she will take it out at least twice in the play, pointing at Michel as a hard-heart man and also as a murder. And the introduction of the word "murder" as much as "armed", belonging again to the semantic sphere of violence, shows again the failure of the language and how it is possible to transform a strange anecdote into a brutal and violent act, as for the boys fight.

Then, finally, Véronique asks directly what she really wants since the beginning: whether Ferdinand will apologize to Bruno. Annette agrees saying that he really has to tell Bruno that he is sorry, but Véronique isn't satisfied yet. She wants to know if Ferdinand is really sorry.

VÉRONIQUE - It is at all possible -forgive me for putting the question so bluntly – that Ferdinand might apologize to Bruno?

ALAIN - It'd be good if they talked.

ANNETTE - He has to apologize, Alain. He has to tell him he's sorry.

VÉRONIQUE - But is he sorry?

ALAIN - He realizes what he's done. He just doesn't understand the implications.

He's eleven. (GoC, 8)

To prevent an argument and to take time, Michel offers to the guests some *clafoutis* and an espresso. These are another sign of nicety that modern society uses and behind which the characters hide themselves. And if *clafoutis* could be considered a metaphor for civilization we have to know that Annette, soon after eating it, vomits onstage, probably as a reaction to a panic attack. As to say that civilization can't be tolerated for long! From this point on, the more the play goes on, the more savage but also childish, the characters behave.

Véronique is unconsciously asking an important question: do we always behave the way we feel? Is there a gap between what we do and what we think? Reza is sure there is and shows it during the whole play. As before, Alain is the one who points out that Véronique's request is ridiculous. Obviously there is a gap between feelings and actions, and he knows it very well. The fact is that Véronique, with her interests in African history, interprets the fight as a metaphor for the brutality in the world and sees a perfect occasion to show that she can resolve it peacefully and civilly. On the other hand Alain simply finds no subtle meaning in the accident and considers the meeting a loss of time.

ALAIN - Madame, our son is a savage. To hope for any kind of spontaneous repentance would be fanciful. Right, I'm sorry, I have to get back to the office. You stay, Annette, you'll tell me what you've decided, I'm no use whichever way you cut it. [...]

ANNETTE - I'm really embarrassed but I can't stay either... My husband has never exactly been a pushchair father!

VÉRONIQUE - What a pity. It's lovely, taking the baby for a walk. And it lasts such a short time. You always enjoyed taking care of the children, didn't you, Michel? You love pushing the pushchair. (GoC, 14-15)

The Reilles expeditiously try to come to a compromise about how the two boys should meet so they could try to escape for the second time. But when Véronique begins to insinuate that they don't care enough about their son, Annette decides to stop some minutes more. If the first time was Michel to stop them, offering the cake as a sign of civilization and peace, this time it is Annette's idea, probably a reaction dictated by her pride, not by a pacific intent. I guess she wants to show Véronique that she is a good mother too and that she isn't even inferior. In fact Annette moves the conversation on the art books that cover the tea table.

ANNETTE - I see you're a great art-lover.

VÉRONIQUE - Art. Photographs. To some extent it's my job.

ANNETTE - I adore Bacon.

VÉRONIQUE - Ah, yes, Bacon.

ANNETTE - (*Turning the pages*) ... Cruelty. Majesty.

VÉRONIQUE - Chaos. Balance.

ANNETTE - That's right... (GoC, p 17)

Again both the women take out words, to describe Bacon's works that belong to the semantic sphere of violence: “cruelty”, “majesty” and “chaos”. Véronique says the only positive word: “balance”, never contradicting herself, or better, the *façade* she has built up. Then Michel has the “bad idea” to ask what started the fight between the two boys.

MICHEL - I was wondering, not that it's at all important, what started the quarrel.

Bruno won't say a blind word about it.

ANNETTE - Bruno refused to let Ferdinand join his gang.

VÉRONIQUE - Bruno has a gang?

ALAIN - He also called Ferdinand a grass.

VÉRONIQUE - Did you know Bruno had a gang?

MICHEL - No. Fantastic!

VÉRONIQUE - Why is it fantastic?

MICHEL - Because I had my own gang.

ALAIN - Me too.

VÉRONIQUE - And what does that entail?

MICHEL - There are five or six kids devoted to you and ready to sacrifice themselves. Like in *Spartacus*. (GoC, 18)

In the first part of the play Michel is, from some points of view, a grown up child. He is ingenuous, rather naïve in his comments: for example he is proud to his son having a gang, which means that Bruno is strong and charismatic, as his father at his age. Instead it is Véronique who realizes the dangers of this discovery: if her son is the leader of a gang, he could be accused of bullying other children. In this way Ferdinand's reaction could be seen as a defensive act. She definitely wants to avoid people reading this version of facts: Ferdinand has to be considered the guilty boy, not the bullied one.

VÉRONIQUE - Anyway, clearly you know more than we do. Ferdinand hasn't been as silent as you led us to believe. And do we know why Bruno called him a grass?

No, sorry, stupid, that's a stupid question. First of all, I couldn't care less, also it's beside the point.

ANNETTE - We can't get involved in children's quarrels.

VÉRONIQUE - And it's none of our business.

ANNETTE - No.

VÉRONIQUE - On the other hand, what is our business is what unfortunately happened. Violence is always our business. (GoC, 19)

Michel doesn't help her that much, showing his ingenuity bragging of how he fought another boy when he was twelve, and falling in Alains's tricks! As a matter of fact Alain's career as a lawyer proved to be very useful for putting the Vallons in troubles for their affirmations, from the very beginning, with the word “armed”, until the end of the play.

After another Alain's phone call, there is a funny moment in which Alain and Michel make fun of each other's careers in a childish effort to restore their own sense of superiority. They provokes each other, and when I first read these scene you could imagine Michel like an orang-outang, beating his breast with his fists and Alain, as a wolf, teeth uncovered, making circles around his prey! They absolutely don't inspire any image of civil and peaceful coexistence.

MICHEL - [...] Funny job you've got.

ALAIN - Meaning?

VÉRONIQUE - Michel, this is nothing to do with us.

MICHEL - Funny job.

ALAIN - And what is it you do?

MICHEL - I have an ordinary job.

ALAIN - What's an ordinary job?

MICHEL - I told you, I sell saucepans.

ALAIN - And doorknobs.

MICHEL - And toilet fittings. Loads of other things.

ALAIN - Ah, toilet fittings. Now we're talking. That's really interesting.

ANNETTE - Alain.

ALAIN - It's really interesting. I'm interested in toilet fittings.

MICHEL - Why shouldn't you be?

ALAIN - How many types are there?

MICHEL - Two different systems. Push-button or overhead flush.

ALAIN - I see.

MICHEL - Depending on the feed.

ALAIN - Well, yes.

MICHEL - Either the water comes down from above or up from under.

ALAIN - Yes.

MICHEL - I could introduce you one of my warehousemen who specializes in this kind of thing, if you like. You'd have to leg it out to Saint-Denis la Plaine.

ALAIN - You seem very much on the top of the subject. (GoC, 23-24)

To calm down the two husbands, Véronique introduces another theme that she feels important: if Ferdinand is going to be punished for what he did, and how he will be punished. This theme is enough for Annette's nerves, in fact she starts feeling sick. A brief quarrel with Alain about his lack of interest on family's and house's problems and the Vallons' insinuation that she doesn't care of her son enough, are the last straw.

ANNETTE - According to my husband, everything to do with house, school or garden is my department.

ALAIN - No, it's not!

ANNETTE - Yes, it is. And I understand why. It's deathly, all that. It's deathly.

VÈRONIQUE - If it's so deathly, why have children in the first place?

MICHEL - Maybe Ferdinand senses your lack of interest.

ANNETTE - What lack of interest?

MICHEL - You just said...

Annette vomits violently. A brutal and catastrophic spray, part of which goes over Alain. The art books on the coffee table are likewise deluged. (GoC, 27)

After Annette vomits onstage, like a nervous child who convinces herself of being ill so strongly that she becomes physically ill, everybody are thrown into a spiral of gut reactions, primitive instincts and childish behaviors.

MICHEL - It's nerves. It's a panic attack. You're a mum, Annette. Whether you want

to be or not. I understand why you feel desperate. (GoC, 28)

As Ralph Fiennes admitted in an interview:

As adults, we all know childish emotional frustrations are just beneath the surface. We might have layers. Being grown-up is a practicing of all the layers to cover up the little child who's still there. (Rees, 4)

Véronique selfishly whines about her ruined art books but leaving the disgusting work of cleaning them to her husband. Michel, trying to calm down his wife, cleans up the vomit, dries the books with a hairdryer and sprays perfume everywhere to mask the stench. In the meantime Alain runs to the bathroom to clean his suit, soon followed by Annette.

But then he comes back onstage just in time to hear the Vallons making fun of their nicknames, insulting and judging them, as only two children could do.

MICHEL - What an asshole. And what did he call her?!

VÉRONIQUE - Woof-woof.

MICHEL - That's right, 'Woof-woof'!

VÉRONIQUE - Woof-woof!!

The both laugh. Alain returns, hair dryer in hand.

ALAIN - That's right, I call her Woof-woof.

VÉRONIQUE - Oh... I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be rude... It's so easy to make fun of the other people's nicknames! What about us, what do we call each other, Michel?

Far worse, isn't it? (GoC, 31)

It is fun to look at Véronique's hypocrisy. The moment before she is insulting Annette and complaining for her art book and some moments after, when she comes back onstage, she is asking her how she feels and apologizing for her indifference.

VÉRONIQUE - It's a reprint of the catalogue from the '53 London exhibition, more than twenty years old!... [...] I can't believe she puked all over my art books! [...]

If you think you're about to spew, you go to the proper place.

[...]

VÉRONIQUE - How's the poor thing feeling, better?

ALAIN - Better.

VÉRONIQUE - I reacted very badly, I'm ashamed of myself. [...] I just steamrolled her about my catalogue, I can't believe I did that.

[...] *Annette returns.*

VÉRONIQUE - ...Ah, Annette! I was worried about you... Are you feeling better? [...] Annette, forgive me, I've taken hardly any notice of you. I've been obsessed with my Kokoschka. [...] The way I reacted, very bad of me. (GoC, 29-33)

If Véronique's instinctive reaction could have been comprehensible and also well accepted by the audience (because I'm sure there are few people who could frankly say that they wouldn't worry about their things more than about an unknown woman) her pedantry and her need of using every situations as an occasion to show how “civilized” she is, to teach the right thing to do, makes her seem very annoying. Likewise her hypocrisy is repulsive and disgusting.

However Annette, coming back onstage after she has vomited, starts to realize that her son, who has always been a calm and peaceful boy, must have been provoked by Bruno and stands finally up for her son against Véronique. Her unexpected reaction creates the first crack in Véronique's *façade*. She can't believe that Annette is insinuating that now is her son the one to blame, that what she was trying to avoid is now happening.

ANNETTE - An insult is also a kind of assault.

MICHEL - Of course it is.

VÉRONIQUE - Well, that depends, Michel.

MICHEL - Yes, it depends.

ANNETTE - Ferdinand's never shown any signs of violence. He wouldn't have done that without a reason.

ALAIN - He got called a grass! [...] If anyone calls me a grass, I'm liable to get annoyed.

MICHEL - Unless it's true.

ALAIN - What did you say?

MICHEL - I mean, suppose it's justified?

ANNETTE - My son is a grass?

MICHEL - Course not, I was joking.

ANNETTE - Yours is as well, if that's to be the way of it.

MICHEL - What do you mean, ours is as well?

ANNETTE - Well, he did identify Ferdinand.

MICHEL - Because we insisted!

[...]

ANNETTE - Well, if you don't think anything, don't say anything. Stop making these insinuations. (GoC, 34-35)

To this affirmation the Vallons, feeling attacked and being unprepared to it, forget their peaceful masks, especially Véronique. Politeness isn't necessary anymore; the necessary thing becomes to self-defend them from the attack. They don't even spend sometimes thinking if it could be true, they simply begin to attack too. Alain comes out again arguing against the word “armed” and Annette insists to try to discover how the quarrel started.

ANNETTE - Ferdinand was insulted and he reacted. If I'm attacked, I defend myself, especially if I find myself alone, confronted by a gang.

[...]

MICHEL - We're people of good will. All four of us, I'm sure. Why let these irritants, these pointless aggravations push us over the edge?...

VÉRONIQUE - Oh, Michel, that's enough! Let's stop beating about the bush. If all we are is moderate on the surface, let's forgive it, shall we! (GoC, 36)

Michel starts losing his control, and Annette taking out again the story of the hamster and Véronique supporting her, gives the final crack to Michel's mask, which falls down, showing all his rudeness.

MICHEL - Go on, go. But can I just say one thing: having met you two, it's pretty clear that for what's-his-name, Ferdinand, there are mitigating circumstances.

ANNETTE - When you murdered that hamster...

MICHEL - Murdered?

ANNETTE - Yes.

MICHEL - I murdered the hamster?!

ANNETTE - Yes. You've done your best to make us feel guilty, but your virtue went

straight out the window once you decided to be a killer.

MICHEL - I absolutely did not murder that hamster!

ANNETTE - Worse. You left it, shivering with terror, in a hostile environment. That poor hamster is bound to have been eaten by a dog or a rat.

VÉRONIQUE - It's true! That is true!

MICHEL - What do you mean, 'that is true'?

VÉRONIQUE - It's true. What do you expect me to say? It's appalling what must have happened to that creature.

[...]

MICHEL - I feel no guilt whatsoever. I've always found that creature repulsive. I'm ecstatic that it's gone.

VÉRONIQUE - Michel, that is ridiculous.

MICHEL - What's ridiculous? Have you gone crazy as well? Their son bashes up Bruno, and I get shat on because of a hamster?

VÉRONIQUE - You behaved very badly with that hamster, you can't deny it.

MICHEL - Fuck the hamster! (GoC, 39-40)

The skirmish goes on likewise for a while until Michel takes out a bottle of rum. Its introduction is the most destructive catalyst of the whole play. However Michel offers it to his guests, to affirm finally his independence from his wife's impositions but also as a way to say that there is no more need of playing a part that is not theirs. The problem is that, as we know, alcohol takes out the inner thoughts and feelings of a person: a drunken man usually forgets rules of social coexistence and behaves and speaks as he desires.

Civilization is finally collapsed, but also the previous alliances are finally broken. There are no more teams in the battle, from this moment on anyone is going to fight alone, or to create new alliances that will be broken in some minutes. In a review of the play, a journalist said:

What is really clever in this play is the way alliances between the four characters keep shifting: sometimes its men against women, sometimes couple against couple. Sometimes we the audience, find ourselves sympathizing with a particular character...only to be repelled by that same character the very next moment.(<http://anokatony.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/god-of-carnage.ipg/>)

If until now both two couple had a silent alliance between its component, wife and husbands supporting each other, from this point everybody will simply try to save himself, allying with who is more similar to them in that precise moment, and then betraying him or her the very next moment. The first couple to explode is, obviously, the Vallons.

MICHEL - Stop it, Ronnie...

VÉRONIQUE - Stop what?!...

MICHEL - You've got things out of proportion...

[...]

VÉRONIQUE - So there we are! I'm living with someone who's totally negative.

ALAIN - Who's negative?

MICHEL - I am.

VÉRONIQUE - This was the worst idea! We should never have arranged this meeting!

MICHEL - I told you.

VÉRONIQUE - You told me?

MICHEL - Yes.

VÉRONIQUE - You told me you didn't want to have this meeting?

MICHEL - I didn't think it was a good idea.

VÉRONIQUE - It was a good idea....

MICHEL - Oh, please!...

He raises the bottle of rum.

Anybody? (GoC, 42-43)

It is funny to see Véronique, the “civilized” woman, who now starts to attack her husband, complaining because it was him who wanted to keep some clafoutis for the guests, who wanted to buy the tulips. Practically she is admitting that all the nice things they did for their guests, were Michel's ideas, pointing out Michel's kindness.

However Michel gives a glass of rum to everyone, but avoids Véronique, refusing to let her drink. And Véronique, as a child, tries to steal the bottle to her husband, jumping to reach it while he is raising it above his head. Finally, after the introduction of the bottle of rum, characters are saying what they really mean and behaving as they would. The language they

use is now reliable...it's a pity that it supports their savagery and not the initial quest of peace and order. This makes clear the failure of the language as a means of civilization and pacific discussion.

As I said before, the alliances from this point on go on changing every minute. Alain and Michel against Annette and Véronique:

ALAIN: When you're brought up with a kind of John Wayne-ish idea of virility, you don't want to settle this kind of problem with a lot of yakking.

Michel laughs.

ANNETTE: I thought your model was Spartacus.

ALAIN: Same family.

ANNETTE: Analogous

[...]

ANNETTE: Don't work yourself up into this state, Véronique, it's crazy.

VÉRONIQUE: The tulips were his idea! Entirely his idea! Aren't we allowed to drink?

ANNETTE: Yes, Véronique, and I would like one too. (GoC, 44-45)

VÉRONIQUE: Shut up! Will you shut up?! I detest this pathetic complicity! You disgust me. (GoC, 47)

Also the improbable alliance Véronique and Alain:

VÉRONIQUE - Alain, we're not exactly soul-mates, you and me, but, you see, I live with a man who's decided, once and for all, that life is second rate. It's very difficult living with a man who comforts himself with that thought, who doesn't want anything to change, who can't work up any enthusiasm about anything...

MICHEL - He doesn't give a fuck. He doesn't give a fuck about any of that. [...]

He's the last person you should be telling this.

VÉRONIQUE - I'll talk to who I like, for fuck's sake! (GoC, 46)

The play continues on a destructive direction, the characters are gradually destroying everything they are rounded with: the objects of the room, their relationship and also their marriages.

ALAIN - Oh, Annette, please! Don't let us start now! Just because they're quarrelling, just because their marriage is fucked, doesn't mean we have to compete!

VÉRONIQUE - What right do you have to say our marriage is fucked? Who gave you permission?

ALAIN - [...] ...wasn't me who said it, it was François.

VÉRONIQUE - Michel.

ALAIN - Michel, sorry.

VÉRONIQUE - I forbid you to stand in any kind of judgment over our relationship.

(GoC, 51-52)

VÉRONIQUE - Michel, every word that comes out of your mouth is destroying me. I don't drink. I drank a mouthful of this shitty rum you're waving about as if you were showing the congregation the Turin Shroud. (GoC, 60)

The very last step in Véronique's breaking down, is when she definitely abandons her mask of civilized woman, showing that she prefers physical action and primitive instincts, when she start punching her husband who has already said that marriage and sons are the worst thing that could happen in somebody's life.

ALAIN - I don't doubt it. Anyway, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court has opened an inquiry on Darfur...

VÉRONIQUE - You think I don't know about it?

MICHEL - Don't get her started on that! For God's sake!

Véronique throws herself at her husband and hits him several times, with an uncontrolled and irritational desperation. Alain pulls her off him. (GoC, 53)

VÉRONIQUE - We're citizen of the world. I don't see why we should give up the struggle just because it's on our doorstep.

MICHEL - Oh, Ronnie! Do stop shoving these thoughts for the day down our throat.

VÉRONIQUE - I'm going to kill him. (GoC, 55)

She shows her inner “love” for violence also when she takes Annette's handbag and throws it towards the door, Annette's personal things scattering all around, broken or ruined. Annette instead lets her mask fall when, after she has drink too much, she reveals her dark side so forcefully that she nearly seems funny:

ANNETTE - Let's get out of here, Alain, these people are monsters!

She drains her glass and goes to pick up the bottle.

ALAIN - (*preventing her*)... Stop it, Annette.

ANNETTE - No, I want to drink some more, I want to get pissed out of my head, this bitch hurls my handbag across the room and no one bats an eyelid, I want to get drunk!

ALAIN - You already are.

ANNETTE - Why are you letting them call my son an executioner? You come to their house to settle things and you get insulted and bullied and lectured on how to be a good citizen of the planet – our son did well to clout yours, and I wipe my arse with your charter of human rights.

MICHEL - A mouthful of grog and, bam, the real face appears. (GoC, 63-64)

The vase of tulips that Reza describes in the stage directions at the beginning of the play has a big role too; bigger than the art books' role. In fact Annette, tired of her husband calls and to the importance he gives to them, steals it to Alain, in the middle of an important call, runs through the living room looking for some a place to hide it and, finally, drops it into the water. After her action, Alain seems losing all his vitality, but just for some moments. In fact some minutes later he is joking, speaking at the phone with Michel's mother about the medicine he was defending as a lawyer. He is less active, it's true, but anyway I think he is the one who reacts better than the others to whatever happens in the play.

The very last action of the play is Annette's again. She is going toward the door of the flat, calling her husband but there's a moment in which she seems to think over and decides to come back in the living room, simply to lash violently the flowers, that fly everywhere in the living room.

She makes to leave, then returns towards the tulips which she lashes out at violently.

Flower fly, disintegrate and scatter all over the place.

ANNETTE - There, there, that's what I think of your pathetic flowers, your hideous tulips! ...Ha, ha, ha! (*She bursts into tears.*) ...It's the worst day of all my life as well. (GoC, 66)

And with the destruction of the tulips and the cell phone, respectively symbols of sophistication, civilization and communication, progress, the savagery has definitely won. Not only over the four characters, but also on the objects.

But, as in all Reza's plays, the curtains don't close now. The four characters are all collapsed because of the mental and physical fight, exhausted and emptied. They don't even finish the sentences now. Alain starts picking up the flowers, but Michel tells him not to bother. Michel picks up a spectacle case from the floor and gives it to Annette, who takes out of it a pair of glasses which are luckily not broken.

Then the Vallons' phone rings. It's their daughter who calls to ask if they've found the hamster. Véronique answers her that they didn't find it but that she's sure the pet will be fine.

VÉRONIQUE - Yes, darling... Oh, good... Will you be able to do your homework at Annabelle's?... No, no, darling, we haven't found her... Yes, I went all the way to the supermarket. But you know, my love, Nibbles is very resourceful, I think you have to have faith in her. You think she was happy in a cage?... Daddy's very sad, he didn't mean to upset you... Of course you will. Yes, of course you'll speak to him again. Listen, darling, we're worried enough already about your brother... She'll eat...she'll eat leaves...acorns, conkers...she'll find things, she knows what food she needs... Worms, snails, stuff that drops out of rubbish bins, she's like us, she's omnivorous... See you soon, sweetheart. (GoC, 67)

The call, which ends the play, gives different emotions and impressions to the audience. On one hand, we notice that the language is unreliable again, that Véronique herself is unreliable, and for example when she says to the daughter that her father is sorry for what he did. In fact we know he isn't sad at all! So will the future be like what we have already seen, designated to the destruction of civilization? On the other hand the other thing that I noticed is what Véronique said of the ability of the hamster of surviving and feeding herself. The survival instinct, she admits, is strong and will help the hamster. And here we understand that it is the

survival instinct which has shown up in the four characters' actions. They have been dumped in an unfamiliar territory, forced to divide it, attacked by the others, practically forced to behave in a savage way, to survive.

The very last dialogue instead, gives some hope.

MICHEL - I dare say that the creature's stuffing its face as we speak.

VÉRONIQUE - No.

Silence.

MICHEL - What do we know? (GoC, 67)

It is Michel who, in the end, leaves us wandering if there could be some hope. Perhaps the hamster will survive, perhaps their marriages will endure, and perhaps the two boys will make peace. Véronique's "no" could reveal her pessimistic vision of the future, or that their marriage is over, for her. But as Michel ends, we can't know.

We can see a lot of examples of unequal divisions of power throughout the play. The most important one is the one on which the play is based: when Bruno refuses to admit Ferdinand in his gang, he is asserting his power. And Ferdinand reacts hitting him with a stick, asserting in this way his power too. Also in the two couples the power isn't equally divided. Alain and Véronique are the most powerful in their couple, while Annette and Michel are the subdued ones. And in the end Annette breaks Alain's mobile phone and Michel mortifies Véronique. When Véronique wants to instruct the Reilles on how to punish and grow their child, she is trying to usurp their power. And unequal power isn't a good thing: as we can learn from the ends of these examples, even the most subdued and civilized person, if provoked for a long time, ends up becoming a savage.

5.1- Christopher Hampton's translation

Christopher Hampton was born in Azores (Portugal) in 1946 to British parents. His father was a marine telecommunications engineer for Cable & Wireless and, because of his job, the family moved first in Aden and Alexandria (Egypt), then in Hong Kong and Zanzibar. Later, with the Suez Crisis they had to escape and went back to Great Britain. In 1964 he attended New College, Oxford, to study German and French and graduated with a starred First Class Degree in 1968.

As a student he wrote his first play *When did You Last See My Mother?* which deals with adolescence homosexuality. With this play he became, in 1966, the youngest writer to have a play performed in the West End. Hampton also won some prizes, including an Academy Award in 1989 for his adaptation of *Dangerous Liaisons*. He went on writing plays, ten until 2012, some of which he also directed. He also wrote lyrics for some Broadway musicals as *Sunset Boulevard* (1993) and *Dracula* (2001-2004), and more than 20 screenplays as *A Doll's House* (1973), *The Honorary Consul* (1984), *Mary Reilly* (1996), *Cheri* (2009), and *A Dangerous Method* (2012).

But is his work as translator that we are interested in. In fact he translated Ibsen, Molière, Chekov, and most of Reza's plays for the British and the American stages. He translated: *Conversation after a Burial*, *'Art'*, *The Unexpected Man*, *Life x 3* and *The God of Carnage*.

There are many interviews with the two authors, commenting their work together. Their work-relationship began more than 10 years ago when Hampton's agent, Margaret Ramsay, send him Reza's *Conversation after a Burial*, thinking he might be interested. He was, but no English theater wanted to produce it. "It is very hard to get foreign plays produced in London." (Romano, 1). Then, few years later, he was in Paris when, walking past a theater, he

saw they were putting on '*Art*' by Yasmina Reza. He tried to buy a ticket the play was sold out for weeks and weeks. He managed to find a return ticket and saw the play, which he definitely loved.

When I went back to London, I asked my agent to try to get the rights. He looked into it and reported back to me that they belonged to Sean Connery. I told him, 'Don't be ridiculous.' A few days later, Sean Connery rang me up and asked me if I would like to translate it, and I said yes. (Romano, 1)

The first time they met, Reza didn't know English very well, but she didn't trust Hampton at all! She isn't a blindly trusted, as she confesses. Because of this, she assiduously controlled Hampton translation, being very meticulous and precise. During the years she studied English and now she speaks it pretty well, at least well enough to stress Hampton more than before.

She's meticulous. That's as it should be. Sometimes she becomes exasperated and says, 'Well, English isn't a very rich language is it?' I have to point out that it's actually incredibly rich, It's just that there isn't any way of saying this or that particular thing in a way that will suit an actor! (Romano, 2)

Hampton and Reza had worked together in all the translations, writing everything more times until she is satisfied. For Hampton, '*Art*' was his first time translating a living writer, which is a great difference from translating a death one.

I remember the first time we met, he had translated '*Art*' into English and I called him up and said, 'I received your first draft.' He said, 'What do you mean, my first draft? It's the play. It's the translation. It's not a draft.' I said, 'Yes it is. There's work to be done.' (Day, 3)

Reza is very specific about everything: she doesn't want anything that she didn't write to appear in front of the audience. This caused a lot of trouble at the beginning when she didn't know English very well, because during her plays the Great Britain and the American audience usually laughed a lot more than the French audience which seemed to take them in a

somber way. At first Reza was convinced that Hampton had slipped in some extra jokes, but then she realized that it wasn't the truth. Simply the way the sentences are turned or manipulated, just strikes more the English or the American audience. But we could also say that Reza's cynic humor and sarcasm was better acclaimed by the English and American stages than by the French stages.

In all the translated plays they usually decided to keep French names, surnames and the French set unchanged.

They asked me if I would set in London, but I said no, because it's a very French play [*Art*]. I didn't think that an audience would believe that three Englishmen would get into a tremendous row over a painting. It just wouldn't work. All of her plays that have been presented in London and New York exist in two versions: an English version and an American version. American is a different language, and you wind up making five or six changes per page. The sentences are constructed differently. Typically, we get together with the actors a few days before the rehearsals, go through the play and translate it into American. (Romano, 3)

In an interview the cast of the London production (Ralph Fiennes, Tamsin Grieg, Ken Stott and Janet McTeer) discussed about this choice of keeping the French names, instead of translating the scenario to an English city. Their reaction, as mine, was that the play would be comprehensible in every city of the Western Society, would it be Rome, London, Berlin, New York or Los Angeles. The play isn't a "French play" and this is also why Reza is so famous outside French; it is a play about modern society, about us.

KEN STOTT - We wanted to preserve the Frenchness of it, but it's not uniquely French, is it? It's universal in terms of – for want of a better word – class.

RALPH FIENNES - I like playing obnoxious people. I think the English can be just as obnoxious. We're not trying to play French types. It would be possible to interchange names with English ones, and it would be the same. (Rees, 3)

Even if Hampton drew attention more to the changes that he and the American cast did to the

English version, also during the rehearsal of the London production, the actors have been a bit involved in the translation:

RALPH FIENNES - That's a big part of the rehearsals: her trying to participate with Christopher on the translation, because there were some phrases and sentences we all felt didn't sit quite right as colloquial English. She was strong on pressing that, in French, there is a succinctness in the way she writes that she often felt English couldn't offer her – even though I think Christophe's is a fantastic translation. So, we've been spending a lot of time fine-tuning, nuancing little sentences, phrases, expressions.

TAMSIN GRIEG - There's a really bizarre thing that happens in translation where French uses English. They say, 'Je n'ai pas le self-control.' When you try to put it into English, it doesn't mean 'I have no self-control.' You get this bizarre Chinese whispering of a phrase that cannot be translated back into English. So it's just trying to find the emotional heart of a phrase. (Rees, 2)

5.2- The London production

The London production isn't the earlier one, there have been a Zurich and a Paris premiere before it, but it surely is the most famous one in Europe. The London production in fact made the play a great success thanks to the combination both of its expert technical and artistic team and of a highly recognized cast of actors.

It was directed by Matthew Warchus (winner of a Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play with his production of *The Norman Conquests*, winner of an Academy Award for his production of *Ghost: The Musical*, a theater adaptation of the movie *Ghost* and many other prizes) and presented in London on March 8th 2008 at the Gielgud Theatre. The cast has been very important too for the success of the play: Ralph Fiennes (as Alain Reille) and Tamsin Greig (as Annette Reille), Janet McTeer (as Véronique Vallon) and Ken Stott (as Michel Vallon).

Ralph Fiennes is world-wide known for his roles as "the bad guy": he portrayed Amon Goeth, a Nazi war criminal in *Schindler's List*, Count Almásy in *The English Patient* and Lord Voldemort in the *Harry Potter saga*. But he is also well known as a theatre actor; in fact he won a Tony Award for playing *Hamlet* on Broadway and has been nominated twice for the Academy Award. Tamsin Greig is pretty known in England, principally for her roles in two television comedies (*Black Books* and *Green Wing*) and two sitcoms (*Episodes* and *Friday Night Dinner*). She is also famous for her comedic role on the British radio show *The Archers*. She won a Laurence Olivier Award for Best Actress in 2007 for *Much Ado About Nothing*. Janet McTeer is well-known too, for her works in television, film and theater. She won the Olivier Theatre Award for her performance as Nora in a West End production of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. She also received a Tony Award, Theatre World Award, and Drama Desk Award as Best Actress in a Play. Ken Stott is a Scottish actor, famous in Great Britain both for some TV series and some radio show. He also played various roles on the big screen. In 1997 he was nominated for Best Actor at the Olivier Awards for his role in the Yasmina Reza's play *'Art'*.

So thanks to the well-known cast, the opening night the theater was full. But, in the middle of the play, a power outage interrupted the performance. The cast obviously went on with the play, with apologizes of the theatre owner.

We were about an hour into Yasmina Reza's new play when most of the stage lighting went down. The cast soldiered gallantly on, but from my seat in the stalls it was possible to see the stage manager in the wings, wildly signaling at the performers to stop with desperate throat-slitting gestures. Eventually they did, the curtain descended and Cameron Mackintosh, the theatre owner and David Pugh, the producer, came to the front to apologize, with Mackintosh gamely insisting he had not forgotten to feed the electricity meter. Pugh, in the great tradition of backstage dramas, insisted the show would continue, with the auditorium lights on to help illuminate the stage. (Spencer, 1)

The comedy went on and was a complete success. And the lights going out probably gave the occasion to reflect more on the themes of the comedy, in fact the *Daily Telegraph's* critic said:

There was something appropriate about the lights going out, for the comedy's somewhat grandiose theme is the fragility of western civilization. (Spencer, 2)

Warchus as a director, decided to emphasize the language breach that Yasmina Reza used in this play, through the juxtaposition of design elements, on stage silences and moments of pure and exaggerate savagery. In face the aesthetic of the scene, as always, is very important.

At the entrance of the audience, before the beginning of the play, the curtains that covered the stage were totally white with an enormously big red drawing on them. Three figures were painted with what could be an enormous red crayon: a small boy standing between his two parents. The draw was immediately recognizable as a child-like paint: disproportionate figures, oversized football-shaped eyes, thin lines for mouths... And a thin red line enclosed the family in a hand-made rectangle. This bloody red portrait gave a preview of the theme of the play, but also prepared the audience for the set designed by Mark Thompson, for the play.

When the lights went down, the darkness was filled with jungle sounds and drums beating. The flat was designed to remind to a jungle, full of lush foliage, handmade African objects and with a preponderant dominance of the color red. The set had a blood-red backdrop and blood-red floors: a color that inspires passion and desire. But the blood shade of red, obviously reminds also of rage, violence and revenge. On the stage there were a white sofa, a black tea-table, raw wooden chairs and a brown table with the vase of white tulips on it. And a smaller wall, which runs in diagonal, red but patterned with lines, reminding of dried blood.

Mark Tompson's expressionistic set gives a dramatic hint of the trouble to come by painting the Vallon's living-room rage-red, from floor to ceiling, with decorative, engraved panel the same, almost bloody color." (De Jongh, 2)

About the performance of the actors, there are enthusiastic reviews, principally about McTeer's Véronique. On stage she was wearing a dark skirt with floral pattern, a dark sweater, a patterned scarf tied as head-band to restrain her blond curls, a lot of jewels, rings, bangle bracelets and a pair of black fishnet stocking:

A kind of Parisian Polly Toynbee, bewailing 'Africa's martyrdom,' a bossy control freak, fauxhemian in her silk headscarf, she is humorless, self-righteous and utterly ghastly. (Hart, 1)

Janet McTeer gives a towering performance, physically and emotionally, as the do-gooding, Darfur-loving Véronique. When she loses her temper and fires off salvos of sarcasm at her husband, many men in the audience must have felt deeply threatened. (Callan, 2)

Janet McTeer in an interview talks about her opinion on Véronique:

Véronique is always right. It's her greatest failing. As Yasmina rightly said, Véronique is the character we would all like to be. She's the one who cares deeply about the adults children are going to grow up to be. The only reason she becomes insufferable is that she's making a really big effort to turn this into something positive, and she's not listened to. (Rees, 2)

Ken Stott, who plays Michel, wore a pair of dark pants with a pink and blue shirt and a dark jacket. There is a great visual difference between the two actors who played the Vallons: Stott is much shorter than McTeer, who seemed an Amazon warrior, dominating an emasculated husband.

In the opposite corner is Michel (Ken Stott), with his limitlessly fascinating face, his grimly downturned mouth and his Mr. Punch nose, which, in this context, strikes you as authentically Gallic. He bristles with a small man's anger, unsurprising when you consider his wife. (Hart, 2)

In an interview with the entire cast, Ken Stott said about Michel:

Michel is a self-made man, who has made his money with a wholesale company, selling domestic goods. A practical man, I would say, and that's probably something Véronique found attractive – his grounded, earthy quality. [...] I don't like Michel. I wouldn't want to be him. Which does make me wonder why I was asked to play him. (Rees, 1)

Annette, played by Tamsin Greig, had short and conservative hair and wore a black dress, a blue wrap-top, black tights and a pair of very high heeled black shoes. The shoes have been chosen by the actress who explained in an interview that, being Annette unsure of herself, she wanted the heels to help her feeling unsure too. In this way she thought she could represent better the role of the subdued and shy wife.

Greig also explodes into life after a quiet start, deploying her considerable talent for (frequently unpleasant) physical comedy and showcasing a maniacal cackle. (Jones Alice, 2)

Miss Greig is to be congratulated on a most convincing chunder scene. Really remarkably horrid. (Letts, 1)

Ralph Fiennes's Alain, wore an expensive suit, had his hair slicked back and his way of behaving was flat, uncaring, unpleasant but honest.

Fiennes's hypnotically unpleasant Alain, a languidly outspoken man who believes in a god of carnage and life as a rough-house, casts a worldly, supercilious air over the couples' meeting. Thanks to this actor's clever, beautifully pitched, black comedy performance Alain emerges as the sort of morally superior, unconcerned husband who incites wives to contemplate murder. (De Jongh, 2)

I never previously suspected Ralph Fiennes of being funny, but his boorish lawyer, constantly taking calls on his mobile and secretly proud of his psychotic son, is sheer joy. (Spencer, 2)

Fiennes radiates contempt (his mouth and legs are always open) as a shark-faced lawyer who, wrapped up in defending a dodgy medicine, is like a MP in a sex scandal, compelled to spend time with his family. (Clapp, 2)

Fiennes himself said in an interview with the whole cast that he liked Alain's honesty, but quite all the cast agreed with him.

RALPH FIENNES -I like Alain. I like his honesty.

JANET MCTEER - Not very cuddly, is he?

RALPH FIENNES - He might be.

JANET MCTEER - He really isn't. But, in his defense, he's the one parent who is honest about the psychopathic tendencies of his son.

RALPH FIENNES - I think his son might be disturbed, but how do you interpret that?

None of us has witnessed the act, none of us is exactly sure. It's a childish spat – that's what happens with kids. He wants to move on. But Véronique wants a metaphorical pound of flesh, exactly how she sees it should finish. And it pisses him off. (Rees, 1-2)

It is very funny, reading some interviews, to see how the actors play their roles, in some way also in their real life. They are influenced by the role they play in judging the main events in the play.

INTERVIEWER - To what extent do you actors debate the arguments of the play among yourself?

JANET MCTEER – Endlessly. We spent pretty much two weeks doing just that. We do it less now, simply because we are going to have to get on and do it. And, if we sat around and really argued the toss about who was right, we would probably disagree. (Rees, 2)

5.3- The New York production

The actor James Gandolfini, famous for his role as Tony Soprano in the television series *The Sopranos*, was in Great Britain in 2008 to shoot a film, when *The God of Carnage* was launched. He was really impressed by the play but much more impressed by the audience's reaction: they spent the whole play laughing, left the theater still laughing and saying to each

other how great the play was. He took some information about a possible Broadway transfer of the play and he learned that it was already decided the play would run in Broadway in the spring of 2009. So he secured himself the part in the New York version.

He asked to be in the play immediately after seeing it in London's West End, when he impulsively called his manager and said, 'I don't know if they're going to move it to New York. But if they do, I'd love to audition for it.' (Heilpern, 2)

Marcia Gay Harden, Hope Davis and Jeff Daniels were later hired to complete the cast of the opening run of the play. The creative team was, instead, the same: Matthew Warchus was the director and Mark Thompson the designer of the set and the costumes. As in the London Production, the chosen actors are all famous and well known.

James Gandolfini is world-wide known for his role in *The Sopranos*, in which he is a crime boss, struggling to keep on the same level family and the career in the mafia. For this role he won a lot of prizes, as the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series. Apart for it he also produced two documentaries with HBO: *Alive Day: Home from Iraq* and *Wartorn: 1861-2010*. The first one focused on the injured Iraq veterans, their memories and the capability or inability of going back to their daily life. The second one focused on the effects of the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder on the soldiers, through some letters of American Civil War soldiers and World War I and interviews with soldiers affected by it. But he has also been a stage actor before becoming famous on TV: he played the role of Mitch in a 1992 production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Marcia Gay Harden is a very famous actress too. She took part in more than 50 movies and Television programs. She won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her roles in the movie *Pollock* and many other prizes. Jeff Daniels is a well-known actor too, who played a role in more than 50 movies or television film and is also well known on the stage, having founded the nonprofit Purple Rose Theatre Company in 1991. He played every kind of roles, from the idiot in *Dumb and*

Dumber to the smart intellectual in *The Squid and the Whale*.

Having a famous actor as James Gandolfini in the play, have drew a lot of attention to the play. But it was also a problem: the role of Tony Soprano has been a great obstacle in the way the audience reacted to his presence.

Nobody involved with *God of Carnage* considers Mr. Gandolfini's previous embodiment of Tony Soprano to be anything more than a mechanism for attracting audience members who will then, they hope, eject it from their minds once in the theater. 'Certainly he has a strong signature physically and in the fact that he has been associated with that one role for so long,' Mr. Warchus said. 'But he's a real actor of great quality.' (Sontag, 4)

Names and sets instead, changed in the American version. These changes have never happened in another Reza's play, at least until now.

When we got together just before Christmas, somebody – I don't quite remember who – said, 'Why don't we set this one in America?' At first Yasmina and I both said, 'Oh no, no, no.' We automatically rejected the idea. Then both of us thought about it, and realized that there isn't actually anything that localizes it in France. If it were set in the United States, the actors would feel more comfortable, the audiences would feel more comfortable. (Romano, 3)

The names of the characters became Michael and Veronica Novak and Annette and Alan Raleigh. If in London the original French names and places could be accepted, this seemed impossible to the American actor. The new surnames introduce also a race and class distinction, more evident to the American audience than the French ones. Novak implies a working-class family and both actors have dark hair and a bit darker skin. While Raleigh gives the idea of old money, so both the actors belong to the WASP group, blond and fair-skinned.

In an interview, Marcia Gay Harden remembers the time they spent with Christopher

Hampton and Yasmina Reza to review the play together:

We all just discussed language, it was glorious. We'd talked about the French expression for going to the 'toilettes'. I'd say: 'To me, it should be restroom. Bathroom seems vulgar.' And James is like: 'Give me break. It's bathroom. You go to the bathroom.' [...] At one point we were looking for the right word for what became 'Neanderthal' in the script. Yasmina was hysterical. And James was genius at this. Jeff too, but no one knew that James had such a sensibility with words. (Sontag, 3)

After the names, also the places were changed and relocated, thanks to the help of one of the actors who lived in Brooklyn and gave good advices. Instead of the Aspirant Dunant Gardens, we have the Cobble Hill Park; the tulips were bought in a Korean deli on Smith Street. The metro which Alain refers to becomes "the F train" and a lot of other little changes were decided. Marcia Gay Harden, about the American version, said:

It's not a museum piece that's taken from the UK and brought here, and then we do what they did. We're finding our new story to tell and our own way of telling it... There are lots of outrageously funny things that happen, but in different ways, so we're trying to find our own truths. (Giguere, 143)

Even if the director and the designers were the same, there are some differences also in the aesthetic of the set. Instead of the red wall, on the Broadway stage, against the blood-red backdrop, there is a big cracked wall, the color of the caked earth, as if it was made of dried mud. It recalls the African land or the huts which walls are made of mud. There also are piles and piles of art books everywhere on the stage.

Obviously also the interpretation of each roles changes from the London cast. Harden's Veronica was sugary, well intentioned; you can see that she is trying extremely hard to make everybody like her. And the transformation reveals the childishness and stubbornness of her character. James Gandolfini's Michael, with his imposing presence and his deep voice, seems

a wild bear turned domestic. In this version, nevertheless their marriage takes sense, more than in any of the other versions: a peace-loving writer can be married to a racist and apathetic salesman because both of them, in the core, love to yell, stomp and throw things. In an interview Marcia Gay Harden commented the scene in which Veronica hits Michael.

At one moment in the play Ms. Harden punches on Mr. Gandolfini like a rabid terrier and begins pummeling him, or so it looks to the audience. Mr. Gandolfini, she said, suggested that she really hit him. 'It was the only moment where Tony Soprano came to mind,' she said. 'He said: 'It's not going to hurt me. I promise you can take it.' So I did.' Mr. Gandolfini changed his mind, she said. (Sontag, 3)

We can find a lot of reviews and comments about Gandolfini, who was the very star of the play, and whose role as a *mafioso* is difficult to forget.

...a sweet, dimpled, likable husband. [...] When pushed, his eyes go dangerously dead and you find yourself staring into the core of a cornered monster." (Jones Chris, 1)

He is a huge guy, whose size is as imposing as the brooding melancholy that makes him a dangerous presence. When Alan drops bits of clafoutis on the carpet – 'I have no manners,' he says – Michael watches him from the sofa in electrifying silence, like an alligator eyeing an egret. (Lahr, 2)

In the play itself, what I like is that, until he (James Gandolfini) reaches a certain breaking point, his character is a mediator, a very mild, soothing, almost feminine presence. (Sontag, 4)

Hope Davis's Annette was blond, elegant and anxious. Her voice was nasal and high but she is great in the gesture, during the silences. Her Annette was defined as: "an elegant package of repressed nastiness." (Lahr, 2) Jeff Daniels's Alan instead was loud, argumentative and arrogant, a lot more aggressive than Ralph Fiennes's Alain. Reviewers defined him "deliciously detestable as an immoral lawyer happy to keep a defective drug on the market"(Jones Chris, 1) and "an executive shark type" (Brantley, 2)

In an interview, James Gandolfini and Jeff Daniels commented their roles, describing their characters as:

JEFF DANIELS - “the arrogant ass”: a cellphone-attached lawyer married to a well-heeled blonde who works in wealth management.

JAMES GANDOLFINI - “the yelling ass”: a schlumpy small-business owner married to an artsy brunette who has just finished a book on Darfur. (Sontag, 1)

The New York version was a success too, being nominated for six Tony Awards, a surprising high number: Best Play, Best Director and nomination for each cast member. Marcia Gay Harden won the Best Leading Actress in a Play, Matthew Warchus won the Best Director award and *The God of Carnage* received the Best Play award.

The play was scheduled to run from March 22nd to July 2009 but in the end it was changed into an open ended run. It finally was closed up on June 2010 after 24 previews and 452 regular performances during which the casts had a lot of changes and replacement.

The second cast appears in November 2009 and was made by Christine Lahti as Veronica, Jimmy Smits as Alan, Annie Potts as Annette and Ken Stott as Michael (as he did in the London production). Then it changes again and Janet McTeer came back to pair Ken Stott as Veronica (both acted the same roles in the London production).

The third cast is composed by Jeff Daniels who came back, taking the role of Michael, Janet McTeer as Veronica, Dylan Baker as Alan and Lucy Liu, at her debut on Broadway, as Annette.

Yasmina Reza described the American production as “entertainment, without any judgment on that word. It was in the tradition of American comedy”, while the French one “was longer, more aesthetic, more analyzed in the solitude of the characters. There were more silences. It was very French.” (Ng, *Reza discusses her life*, 2)

The London Production



The God of Carnage, Gielgud Theatre, 2008

From the left: Ralph Fiennes (as Alain), Tamsin Greig (as Annette), Janet McTeer (as Véronique) and Ken Stott (as Michel).





The New York Production



God of Carnage, Broadway, 2009
Jeff Daniels (as Alan), Hope Davis (as Annette), James Gandolfini (as Michael) and Marcia Gay Harden (as Veronica)









God of Carnage, Broadway, 2009
Dylan Baker (as Alan), Lucy Liu (as Annette), Jeff Daniels (as Michael) and Janet McTeer (as Veronica).



6- *Carnage*: the play on the big screen

Adaptations are not a novelty of our time; neither are limited to the literature-movie relation. For example in the Victorian period, they were used to adapt everything to every kind of media: the *tableaux vivants* were the major form of entertainment in the bourgeois salons. Now we are used to see every day every kind of adaptations, from the most obvious one like novels to movie or TV series, to the less recognizable like theme parks or historical enactments. Also the theatrical productions could be considered an adaptation of a written text.

Adaptations are always analyzed in relation to another work, the one they are taken from. But it often happens that they are considered as "secondary, derivative, belated, middlebrow, or culturally inferior" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation*, 2) compared to the prior texts, also called "sources". But they are not: they are separate entities, obviously different from the sources but without being inferior. An adapted text is interpreted, transposed not only in a different media, but also changed to represent better temperament and tastes of the adapter.

According to Linda Hutcheon, there are three main ways through which adaptation can be interpreted and described. In my opinion *Carnage* belongs to the first one: this adaptation is an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable work (*The God of Carnage*) that involves a shift of medium (from a play to a film). Anyway the shift from a play to a film is usually less complicated because they are both belonging to time and space, both are performance media. Film is said to be the most complete form of art, having inherited photography, music, movements, sounds...

In *Carnage* the author and the adapter are the same person: Yasmina Reza. This made the analysis easier, because she keeps faithful to her play. In fact we don't have any changes in the *fabula*, the plot order remains the same in the movie as it is in the play. Likewise there aren't any changes in the point of view; the focalization is external in both the play and the movie. In an interview Yasmina Reza discusses about her decision of transforming her play *The God*

of *Carnage* into a movie. It is the first time that she sold film rights of any of her plays, because it is the first time that she is really interested in the work they proposed her.

YASMINA REZA - It's not my goal to have film adaptations made of my plays. What can convince me is the proposal from a director that I admire. Roman had seen the production that I had directed in Paris and asked me a month later if the film rights were still available. I immediately said yes, simply because it was him. He is a genius at telling stories set in confined spaces, with dramatic tension, and I really like his brand of humor. (Morton, 1)

Furthermore Polanski proposed her to write the screenplay together, since they had already worked together with a translation of Kafka's novel *The Metamorphosis*. Obviously Reza wrote also the screenplay in French and then it was translated in English; but it wasn't a problem for their collaboration since Polanski is French-Polish born, so their collaboration was very close and intense, as Reza said in an interview:

We had the play in one hand and Roman would say to me, here this is great, or what about erasing this sentence and putting in another one. Or this scene would be better in the bathroom. So it was page after page, but I was the only one who was writing. (Ng, *Reza discusses her life*, 3)

The screenplay has been written in Polanski's Swiss chalet and in an interview Reza admitted that it has been a lovely period. When they disagreed on a scene, they played out the roles to try to convince the other, but they came to the final version in a very short period of time. They finally added some elements that there weren't in the play: some dialogues and some scene, in the kitchen and in the bathroom. But the main characteristic of the play has been maintained: the play proceeds in real time and the movie keeps this principle.

Dealing with the screenplay, Polanski and Reza had made other changes in it. First of all, the play is set in Brooklyn as was the American production of the play. Reza in an interview said:

God of Carnage is the only play of mine that I agreed to change the location of the story. [...] Roman Polanski wanted to shoot the film with English-speaking actors. Since I had already had the experience with Broadway, I didn't object. That being said, I would not have had the same resistance to changes with a film, since films are inherently adaptations. (Morton, 1)

The park becomes the Brooklyn Bridge Park, near the Hudson River and the florist is up the Henry Street. The newspaper that reports accuse against Alan's client isn't Le Monde, but the Journal, and Alan the day after has to go to Washington, having the Pentagon as client. Michael's employee who is fond of toilette flushes, lives in Jamaica, Queens not in Saint-Denis la Plaine; both districts with an high level of immigration.

Like the set, also the names were changed. Vèronique Vallon (Novak in the American theatrical version) becomes Penelope Longstreet and Michel becomes Michael Longstreet. Annette Reille (Raleigh in the American theatrical version) becomes Nancy Cowan and Alain becomes Alan Cowan. Also the names of the sons change: instead of Ferdinand, Bruno and Camille, they are named Zachary, Ethan and Courtney. The names of Alan's two colleagues, Maurice and Serge have been changed in Walter and Dennis and the name of Didier Leglu, the boy Michel beat up, has been changed in Jimmy Lich. Another change concerning names is the nick name that Alan uses for his wife. In the play, the nick name is "woof-woof" that comes from the song "How much is that doggie in the window?" by Patti Page. In Polanski's version, her nick name is "doodle" that comes from the song "A Bushel and a Peck", from the musical *Guys and Dolls*.

Likewise the role that Zachary played in the school's Christmas play is that of Ebenezer Scrooge, taken from the well-know and often used novel *The Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. In the play Ferdinand had the role of Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, the main role too of the homonymous comedy by Molière. The fact that the main role in the school

performance was assigned to the Cowan's son, is surely an indication of the fact that the boy is neither a savage nor a maniac, but a good and gifted student.

Also Nancy's profession is different: she is an investment broker, a role that is funny, in an absurd way, since United States and Europe are now in the middle of a financial crisis. There are also other differences, for example the bottle which Michael took out in the middle of the movie is a bottle of Scotch, instead of Rum.

There are also two big differences in the vocabulary: Nancy referring to Bacon describes him and his style with the words: "Cruelty and splendor." While Annette in the play uses "Cruelty. Majesty." Likewise Alan, describing his son Zachary, calls him "a maniac" instead of "a savage", a word what is stronger but also more malicious. But the way he pronounces the sentence, with a sardonic and ironic smile, gives it a totally different meaning: my son could be considered a lunatic, but your son is coward and weak.

6.1- Polanski's style

Roman Polanski was born in Paris from Polish parents, in 1933. His father was a Jewish, so he has been considered half Jewish. In 1936 he and his parents moved back in Poland, precisely in Krakow, shortly before the World War II. He had to live in the Ghetto, persecuted by the Nazi purity laws. He saw his father taken away by the Nazi, while he was hiding to escape them. His father was taken in Mauthausen, while his mother to Auschwitz, where she was killed as soon as she arrived. In 1943 he succeeded in escaping from the Krakow Ghetto, assuming the name Romek Wilk, to survive; he was only ten. Luckily his father survived to the concentration camp and they reunite after the end of the War, in 1945.

His passion for cinema began very early and, when he was old enough, he attended the National Film School in Lodz. But the life in the Communist Poland, especially for artists, wasn't easy since they had to adhere to a state-sanctioned ideology. So in 1961 he left Poland for Paris and started producing his movies. He directed plenty of movies and won a lot of awards; his most famous movies are *Knife in the Water* (1962), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *Chinatown* (1974), *The Ninth Gate* (1999), *The Pianist* (2002), *The Ghost Writer* (2010).

Most of his movies are thrillers or black comedies, but he moved freely through different styles, throughout his career. His terrible childhood, the violence he had to witness, the fear that followed him until the end of the War, have surely contributed to the dark atmosphere, the violence and the claustrophobic ambiantation of his movies.

ROMAN POLANSKI - When I was a teenager, I was really struck by Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet*, with its strange castle full of stairs, terraces and corridors, and also by Carol Reed's fabulous *Odd Man Out* with James Mason. It's a film with such a strong impact that I often tried to imitate later. In fact my first film, *Knife in the Water*, was filmed on a boat with three people. So I wasn't afraid of the constraints of a confined space like an apartment. I find it really exciting, in fact, even if it isn't easy. (Combs, 1)

His life was very tormented and turbulent, also after he left Poland for the United States. In 1969 his pregnant wife, Sharon Tate, was killed by some followers of Charles Manson, while she was in Polanski's house with some friends, while he was in London to shoot *Rosemary's Baby*. She was eight month and 2 weeks pregnant, ready to give birth to their son. Polanski was consumed by their murder; for the second time in his life he "escaped" death, and was safe while his loved ones were killed.

In 1977, when he was 43 years old, he was arrested in Los Angeles, accused of the rape of a 13 years old girl. After some interrogations, it came out that Polanski had sex with the girl, but he didn't rape her. The sentence for it should have been light, but when Polanski

discovered that the judge didn't want to follow that line, he escaped in London and then in Paris to avoid the sentence, practically exiling himself. In 2009 he was arrested in Swiss at the request of United States authorities, which asked for his extradition. But Swiss rejected and released him from custody. During his detention, he partly wrote the screenplay of *Carnage*, as he told in some interviews.

Most of Polanski's movies are stories of victims and victimizers, about guilt and either deserved or undeserved punishment. Raped heroines who meet again their rapist and torturer, husbands who look for their kidnapped wives, suspecting she had betrayed him. A deep pessimism about human relationship permeates everything, like also an intense interest for psychological a moral dynamics of the human mind. And over everything the masochistic guilt of a survivor whose salvation is for him ridiculous, when who was more intelligent, virtuous and loved died violently. He blames himself for being a survivor, to the Holocaust and to his wife; movies as *Macbeth* and *The Pianist* embody this feeling perfectly. Macduff's monologue and weeping on the slaughtered body of his wife and children, recalls to our mind the way Polanski himself could have behaved in front of his wife's murder. Moreover the story of Wladislaw Spilman, a Polish-Jewish pianist, who survived the Nazis, escaped the deportation and random mass executions, remembers the story of Polanski's childhood. Spilman is not a hero, he didn't fight against the war, he simply did what he could to save himself, helped by a Nazi officer, Wilm Hosenfeld who hide and feed him.

In Polanski movies we can never find a clear distinction between good and evil. For example *The Pianist* is different from *Shindler's List* that could be considered more an historical document where the line between the victims and the guilty are clear. In *The Pianist*, there are good Jews and bad Jews, good Germans and bad Germans...like in real life: both sides are capable of evil and of piety.

Carnage we can find a lot of Polanski's stylistic main themes. The whole movie is filmed in a flat, most of it in the living-room, in a place that in the end results claustrophobic and from which two of the protagonists try to escape repeatedly. There are also here a victim and a victimizer, both between the boys and also between the two couples. And again, there is not a clear distinction between them since, as Michael says: "We all know very well it could have been the other way round." (*Carnage*) On the other hand, Alan pessimistic philosophy is near to Polanski's one after her wife death. "I believe in the god of carnage, the god who'd ruled from the time immemorial." (*Carnage*)

6.2- *Carnage* in pieces

As in the two theatrical main productions, the cast is very outstanding.

ROMAN POLANSKI - Jodie Foster was the first one cast. Then I met Kate Winslet to discuss the film and there it was. It turns out I have the same agent as Christoph Waltz, who had expressed a desire to meet me. It was during my sabbatical year, during my arrest. I was working on the script and it seemed like a good idea. I thought it'd be more interesting to meet him than the police chief in Bern. As for John C. Reilly, he was chosen last, because it was a tough role to assign. I was really lucky to have four actors of such acclaim. Not only because of their talent, but because they're very well understood. There wasn't any animosity among them, which isn't always the case. They have a great affection and respect for each other. None tried to be the star. It helps. (Combs, 1)

Jodie Foster is a universal know actress, who started acting since she was very young. Her first nomination to an Oscar was when she had only 13 years old, for the role of the prostitute in *Taxi Driver*. She won several Academy Awards, one also for her role in the movie *The Silence of the Lambs*. John C. Reilly is a well-known artist as well: actor, singer and comedian.

He has appeared in more than 50 movies, as *Chicago*, *Gangs of New York* and *The Hours*.

Kate Winslet is an English actress, who became world-wide famous for her role of Rose in *Titanic*. She gained an Academy Award with *The Reader*. Christoph Waltz is an Austrian-German actor, who portrayed the SS general Hans Landa in Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds*, gaining international acclaims.

There are some odd similarities between the actors chosen for the two main theatrical versions and the movie. All the three actors who played the role of Michel/Michael are large, strong and not very handsome. Instead both Ralph Fiennes and Christoph Waltz became famous for their interpretation of a Nazi, and are mentally recognized as "bad guys".

Foster's Penelope is dressed in a sober and a bit shabby way. A purple round neck t-shirt, a dark red skirt below the knee, brown cardigan and thighs, with low heel shoes. She doesn't wear any make up, any kind of jewels, any trinkets at all. Her long and straight hairs are tied back in a low pony-tail. The sum is sober, shabby, but also gives the idea of a strict and severe woman. Foster's mouth is quite always bent in an unsatisfied expression, or tight-lipped in a grimace of reprobation.

Reilly's Michael is dressed with a pair of grey trousers, a light blue shirt and a maroon pullover. His curly hairs are a bit messy and his large face is friendly and benevolent. He says that Penelope dressed him up like a liberal, a style that should give him an intellectual shade. At first sight the pair seems perfectly balanced: both the Longstreet seems intellectual, progressist, social committed. But after a while it is clear that Michael is just too lazy to fight back with his wife, he simply goes along with her to avoid problems. He is friendly with everyone because he doesn't want to be annoyed. He feels trapped in his marriage and when he finally burst out, he is cynic and ironic.

Winslet's Nancy wears an elegant outfit made of a black skirt, a white blouse, a black cardigan, nude thighs and black high heel shoes. A black coat and an electric blue scarf, complete her outfit. Her blonde hairs are put up in a bun and she looks very refined and composed. Her eyes are very expressive: it is funny to see the way she communicates with her husband simply looking at him. She is essentially the perfect wife for a big earner: beautiful, well educated, a bit shy and passive.

Waltz's Alan wears a black suit, with a white shirt and a black tie; a black coat and a grey scarf. His hairs are combed back and he looks elegant too. He is pathetically attached to his mobile and his work. His voice is sharp and dry and his smile is usually sardonic and arrogant. You can see from his posture that he loves quarrelling and teasing Penelope.

Dealing with the story, the movie obviously has some differences and additions to the original play. The opening and the closing scenes of the movie weren't in the play and take place outside, in the Brooklyn Bridge Park: both are long scenes, filmed with a fixed camera. There are no noises or voices, but only classical music and the opening and the closing credits passing slowly. In the opening scene we can see how the fight between the two boys took place. Half a dozen boys are playing together in the background, in a park. Then they come nearer and we can see one of them pushing angrily another boy and showing him to go away. The other boy, who has a wooden stick in his hand with which he was playing, pushes him back and goes a bit far, while all the other boys are making fun of him. After few steps he turns and hit the boy, who pushed him, with the stick.

In the closing scene instead we can see at first the hamster, in the foreground, sniffing around in the grass. He survived and is pretty safe in the park. Then the camera moves, framing the two boys who are now playing together, as if nothing has occurred. They are laughing and looking together at something on a mobile; this times the technology brings them together

instead of isolating them, as it was for Alan. Then after a while they cluster with the other boy and start playing. Choosing this end, Polanski wanted to show that the two boys proved to be more mature than their parents, not nursing any grudge against each other. Then, with the boys in the background, a dog appears on the foreground that sniffs around and then pisses on the trunk of a tree and then is dragged away on the leash. Just a way to sum up the whole story: we can hold our nature on a leash, but nature has to come out sometimes, or we would probably explode!

These two scenes have been filmed against a green screen in a studio in France, because of Polanski's troubles with the law in the United States. Then, thanks to some special effects, they were transposed in Brooklyn Bridge Park. Also the flat in which the entire film is set, was in Paris and has been designed by Dean Tavoularis, an American designer who had also won an Oscar for the design of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather Part II*. He was chosen by Polanski to recreate a typical Brooklyn flat in Paris. The music has been composed by Alexandre Desplat, which has collaborated twice with Polanski but also with other big productions. There isn't a lot of music in the play, because there isn't room for it between the dialogues. There is like an overture and a finale, to open and close the movie so the music brings the audience in and out of the story, keeping the tone and the mood for what will follow.

There are other two scenes that Polanski and Reza added to the screenplay: the scene of the kitchen and the one of the bathroom. The scene in the kitchen takes place after Michael asked the Cowan to stay for a coffee; the couple goes into the kitchen and Penelope looks for the cake. She starts complaining because the house maid put the cake in the fridge while it should be served with an ambient temperature. Then she also complains because she left the cakes out of the fridge. These scenes simply increase the annoyance for Penelope, who boasts about being so "civilized" and then behaves as a normal bourgeois, who swears against the maid.

The scene in the bathroom takes place after Nancy has thrown up; Penelope takes Alan, who is soaked by the vomit, to the bathroom. In this scene Penelope shows her interest to appear perfect. In fact it is to notice how she tidies up the bed, hides the box of Tampax and pulls down the toilet seat before he can see the mess.

With all these additions, I think that Polanski would like to underline that this movie is a story about rich white people who can buy their culture. Penelope defines culture as "a powerful force of peace" (*Carnage*) but all of them are wealthy enough to have granted access to the saving grace of culture. And as Alan says to Penelope: "you do what you can to save yourself" but, obviously, those four people don't need to be saved. They are far enough from the war to be able to use a tragedy as a way to morally soar over the others or to gain more money.

There is also the final scene that Polanski decided to change to give, as Reza said in an interview, some hope. In the movie, the last scene in the living-room is a close-up on Alan's mobile which starts vibrating, showing that it survived to the bath in the tulip's vase.

In the movie there are three little cameos made by the Polanski's family: the boy who plays the role of Zachary is Roman Polanski's son, Elvis, 13 years old; the old man who opens the door on the corridors, to complain about the noises made by the two couples is Roman Polanski himself; the dog that appears in the final scene is the Polanski's family dog.

The whole movie was filmed in few weeks, after only two weeks of rehearsal, made as if it was a theatrical performance. It has been filmed following the chronological order of the scene.

KATE WINSLET - By the end of the first week of rehearsals, Roman sent us home and said, 'I want you to learn the whole screenplay this weekend, and on Monday morning let's not have the script in our hand. The second week of rehearsal we are just going to run it and run it, and stage it.' So we staged it exactly like a play,

every single detail was mapped out – that was new for a lot of us who haven't been on stage for a very long time. [...] The whole thing was shot in story order from start to finish, which I don't think any of us had experienced on film before.

(Zimbio, 3)

Polanski is very precise in directing his movies, as the actors and the staff which worked with him, testify in some interviews.

CHRISTOPH WALTZ – Polanski is not just a master of where to place the camera, he's also a master at creating very specific atmospheres and guiding you to a very specific behavior. [...] This overly precise, 100-percent concrete, to-the-point and, in a way, almost pedantic approach to what it is that we're doing. It does make a difference whether you're here or there, even if the distance between the two is half an inch. It does make a difference. It's up to you to decide how far you want to get into the details. (Rosen, 2)

ALEXANDRE DESPLAT - It's so obvious when you see this film what a genius Roman Polanski is. The way you never see the camera or feel the camera moving – you think you are watching a play or a real live performance. Roman just puts the camera in the right place and creates the right space and directs the actors with such grace and precision. It's incredible. (Cerasaro, 2)

The movie premiered at the 68th Venice International Film Festival, during the autumn 2011, and was released in the United States in December of the same year, by Sony Picture Classics.

The movie won the Little Golden Lion award at the Venice International Film Festival and was nominee for several other awards.

The movie has received positive reviews by the critics, which have generally appreciated both the play and the movie.

One apartment holds two bourgeois New York couples meeting to discuss their sons, one of whom has knocked out the other's front teeth, and to effect some kind of settlement between the boys. Add Polanski to this toxic cocktail of passive-aggressive PC liberalism (Jodie Foster) vs. Darwinian corporate sharkiness (Christoph Waltz), clueless blue-collar schlubhood (John C. Reilly) and screaming

uptightness (Kate Winslet), the settle in for a joyously unpleasant ride. The Bourgeois Proprieties don't survive the first half hour. [...] Loyalties fall apart, unlikely alliances form and abruptly dissolve (wives vs. husband, men versus women, three on one), masks are torn off and violence is ever latent. [...] Cruelty, splendor, chaos and balance: four things that Roman Polanski knows all about. (Patterson, 1-2)

Carnage



Carnage, Sony, 2011

From the left: John C. Reilly (as Michael), Jodie Foster (as Penelope), Christoph Waltz (as Alan) and Kate Winslet (as Nancy).







7- Conclusions

Yasmina Reza is a French playwright, who has been acclaimed more in the English-speaking world than in France.

The Antoinette Perry Award for Excellence in Theatre, more commonly known as the Tony Award, recognizes the achievements for Broadway productions and performances. They were founded in 1947 and, since the beginning, only 4 translated plays have won the award against 80 English plays. In 1961 won Jean Anouilh with his play *Becket*; Peter Weiss in 1966 with his play *Marat/Sade* and Yasmina Reza, who won it twice, in 1998 with '*Art*' and in 2009 with *The God of Carnage*.

Yasmina Reza is the first French playwright to gain such recognition. It's clear, after the analysis, that she had more success with her plays in English-speaking nations like Great Britain and United States, than in France or the rest of Europe. Why this happened it is not possible to define precisely, but I tried to find out the most interesting aspects of her career, especially on the English and American stages and market. Surely Christopher Hampton's translations have increased and helped her celebrity.

I've tried to show how her themes and the irony that Reza uses to deal with them, have made her plays universal, not necessarily linked to a Nation or a culture. Everybody in the Western world could understand my psychological analysis of the characters because they behave in a way that is common to our society.

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