



**CIVILITY VS SAVAGERY: MITIGATING VIOLENCE
IN YASMINA REZA'S *GOD OF CARNAGE***

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Abstract

Violence plays a central role in Yasmina Reza's *God of Carnage*, a play that offers a profound look into human nature within the framework of today's society. The play reveals the underlying brutality masked by superficial politeness, showing how civilized behaviour can quickly descend into chaos. The study therefore aims to uncover the layers of violence and show how the characters mitigate the violence inherent in their nature. Through the interactions of two couples, the study shows that beneath their polite surfaces lies a primal instinct of aggression, suggesting that humans have an innate tendency towards violence. The characters' conflicts escalate from a seemingly trivial quarrel over their children to explosive confrontations that reveal deeper frustrations and anxieties. The work highlights the fragility of social etiquette, suggesting that politeness is merely a thin layer over inherent barbarism. Ultimately, *God of Carnage* assumes that violence is an integral part of human nature, reinforced by societal pressures and expectations. The work invites the audience to ponder the duality of human behaviour and ask whether true decency can fully restrain our violent impulses, or whether we are fundamentally ruled by our wild instincts.

Keywords: *civility, savagery, violence, human nature, God of Carnage*

INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes in 1651, the debate on the nature of human violence has persisted, with some experts considering it as a cultural trait (Fry & Söderberg, 2013; Sussman, 2013), while others see it as part of genetic heredity (Hubber & Brennan, 2011; Anholt & Macay, 2012). These views imply that violence is either inherent human nature or a learned trait. Political philosopher Thomas Hobbes was convinced that it is in human inclination to exercise violence as a mode of survival and coping with the short and harsh life (Hobbes, 2006). Hobbes' assertion of human nature resounded what Niccolo Machiavelli believed a century earlier that human beings in general tend to do bad and cruelty is justified if it is for maximum benefits (2014, p. 36). If Hobbes and Machiavelli are more "realistic" in their view on human nature, Arthur Schopenhauer presents a more pessimistic believing that it is a disillusionment for human beings to believe in the nobility of their motives; what motivates them is a directionless will, a will to dominate (1966).

The debate of whether violence is innate or learned rises the question of whether human beings are fundamentally good or fundamentally evil. One of the earliest debates regarding this was between two Chinese philosophers Mencius and Xunzi (Sung, 2016). Mencius believed *xing* (human nature) is fundamentally good, and there are external forces that corrupt the human soul, while Xunzi argued it is fundamentally evil, and thus needs correction (Breyer, 2019). In Aristotle's view, human beings are political animals who possess a natural love or affection for others and a natural desire for society (Aristotle, 2009; Oraldi, 2023), a notion heavily rejected by Thomas Hobbes asserting that by nature human beings compete with each other, are easily influenced by the persuasive words of those who are ambitious, and always think much more highly of themselves than of other people (Gooding & Hoekstra, 2020). For Sigmund Freud, aggression is innate and deeply rooted in the psyche and hence independent of circumstances (Baumeister & Bushman, 2015). Meanwhile, Norbert Elias, while believes in individual inclination for vice, believes that society has the power of moulding individuals' psyches for the greater good (Fletcher, 2005).

Typically, violence has been understood as a phenomenon which is centered on the perpetrator instead of the victim, on the intentionality, and on the time of its occurrence (Bufacchi & Gilson, 2016). In other words, it focuses on who does the act, whether the agent does it intentionally and knowingly, and when it occurs. However, there has been a significant expansion of the acts considered as violent (Murphy, 2012), generally under the categories of structural, symbolic, epistemic, psychological, and linguistic (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2004; Dotson, 2011; Jones, 1994; Galtung, 2009; Powell & Henry, 2017; Richardson-Self, 2021). Although many scholars have shown rejection to this “elastic” use of the term violence (Mardon & Richardson-Self, 2022), the categorization is helpful in understanding the broad spectrum of (the acts of) violence.

Structural violence is embedded in the structure of society and manifests in unequal power and consequently unequal life chances (Galtung, 2009), thus usually not intentionally perpetrated by individuals (Frazer & Hutchings, 2020). Unlike personal violence is mostly apparent, structural violence is essentially static and unseen (Galtung, 2009). In this context, the concept of structural violence appears to intersect with the ideas of epistemic and symbolic violence. Epistemic violence refers to efforts aimed at fundamentally reshaping the knowledge system of a group (episteme) (Spivak, 1988) deemed as 'Other' by a dominant subjectivity, resulting in the devastating effect of disappearing of the knowledge of the Other (Dotson, 2011). Frequently intentional, epistemic violence aims at eliminating what the Other knows from their situated perspective (Frazer & Hutchings, 2020) resulting in a reign of truth propagated by the dominant group (Spivak, 1988).

Symbolic violence refers to violence where the agent subjected to violence is complicit in their suffering through participation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2004; Frazer & Hutchings, 2020). This type of violence is structural in the sense that it is the structure that determines the modes, the perpetrator, the victim, and the consequence of the act of violence. Symbolic violence occurs as both the dominator and the dominated naturalize, universalize, and internalize power and domination existing in a structure (Powell & Henry, 2017). Psychosocial violence pertains to specific psychological harms that individuals endure in the absence of physical violence, like fear or emotional distress, as a result of the actions of some agent (Frazer & Hutchings, 2020). Psychological violence can be inflicted by an individual on other individuals (Jones, 1994), by a particular group on other groups (Frazer & Hutchings, 2020), or embedded in social structure (Powell & Henry, 2017). Violence in the form of harassment, intimidation, and ridicule may take linguistic form in targeting oppressed groups, which is commonly attributed as linguistic violence (Richardson-Self, 2021) where the perpetrator systematically abuses victims through linguistic expressions.

Violence is the most dominant theme in modern French literature (Carrol, 2006; Fowlie in Hansen, 2000; Fourny, 1998), and particularly in drama violence seems to be an end in itself (Fix, 2010). *God of Carnage* by Yasmina Reza explores by illustrating the various forms of violence present in our supposedly civilized society. Various layers of violence present in the play underlying causes of violence and questions whether society can manage our inherent aggression. Most violence in the play is covert, hidden, and suppressed under the disguise of civility, and only few are manifested in physical aggression. However, it is conceivable that there is animal within each character (Gaber, 2006), the instinct of violence, making the whole plot a transaction of violence (Jacomard, 2016). Violence in this play undermines its own grand theories by mocking both its advocates and opponents, resulting in a scenario where there are no clear winners or losers in the multiple conflicts it presents. *God of Carnage* exemplifies what Roland Barthes termed “théâtre du malaise,” characterized by “the screams, gestures, noises, and actions, whose mix should create a general carnage on stage.” (Barthes, 2000: 98).

METHOD

This research is descriptive qualitative in nature, aiming to explore the presentation of layers of violence in *God of Carnage*, a one-act play by Yasmina Reza. Built on philosophical, psychological, and social theoretical frameworks on violence, its origins, and its manifestation, the present study discusses how the play illustrates various forms of violence that take in a supposedly civilized society.

The source of data in this study was a play entitled *God of Carnage* (*Le Dieu du carnage*) written by French playwright Yasmina Reza which was published in 2010 and translated into English by Christopher Hampton. Data collection techniques involved reading and note-taking. The reading technique consisted of thoroughly examining the texts to identify the presentation of violence, its layers, and acts of civility as a mode of suppressing violence.

For data analysis, a qualitative descriptive analysis technique was employed, utilizing various perspectives on violence from philosophy, psychology, and sociology. Analysis was conducted in three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, following the steps outlined by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014). The process includes: (1) comparing, coding, classifying, and grouping data into similar categories; (2) categorizing and organizing the data into designated categories; (3) presenting the data in a table for easier interpretation; and (4) drawing inferences based on the categorized and presented data to summarize the research findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Raison d'être of the play is a fight between two eleven-year-old boys, Benjamin Releigh and Henry Novak (Bruno Houllié and Ferdinand Reille in the original version). The root of the fight and how to find a middle ground regarding that matter then become a source of debate between the boys' parents who seek to settle the dispute in a civilized way. Alan and Annete Releigh (Benjamin's parent) decide to visit the Novaks, Michael and Veronica Novak (Henry's parent), who warmly welcome them and are ready to find a viable solution. The seemingly simple juvenile fight soon turns into a series of outbursts manifested in various acts of violence, revealing the true nature of human beings. Taking living room as the setting, the initial mood is described as "serious, friendly and tolerant" (Reza, 2010, p.3), with small talks and *clafouti*, before the two pairs of parent protagonists' descent from civility to brutality, with name-calling, hitting, drunkenness, and throwing objects. Each character performs civility as a mask, hiding what lies within their deepest nature, aggression, and instinct for violence.

Violence as Human Nature

Throughout the play, the nature of human beings is constantly debated, affirmed, and challenged, with each character possesses a distinct role in the discourse. The conflict starts with Benjamin, Alan, and Annette's son hitting Henry, Michael, and Veronica's son, causing Henry to lose several teeth and suffer injury around his mouth (Reza, 2010, p. 2). According to the boys' report, the fight broke out when Henry did not let Benjamin join his gang, and called Benjamin a snitch (p.15). Alan, Benjamin's father, sees nothing serious in boys fighting each other as "kids have always given each other a good beating during recess" (p. 45), which he concludes as "a law of life" (*ibid*). Even Michael, Henry's father, does not disagree with Alan's assertion on boys' life. When he finds out that his son has a gang, his reaction is that of a proud father.

VERONICA. Did you know Henry had a gang?

MICHAEL. No. That's terrific'.

VERONICA. Why is it terrific?

MICHAEL. Because I had my own gang.

ALAN. Me too.

(Reza, 2010, p. 15)

Alan's assertion on fighting as "a law of life" underlines the significant premise in the play, that human beings are prone to violence by nature (Jacomard, 2016; Gaber, 2006). Challenged by Veronica's ideals of human goodness, Alan is compelled to expose the truth of human nature, making the fight between the boys a trivial matter. He acknowledges that the drive to destroy each other is rooted in human psyche, an impulse which is at most times beyond our control. To him morality is elastic, and that is the reason why we should control our impulses, but "sometimes it's good not to control them" (Reza, 2010, p.47), and aggression is one of those impulses (Norman, 1995). This resounds what Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud concluded in their exchange of letters regarding war and human nature. Both great thinkers agreed that human beings have in them a lust for hatred and destruction (Freud, 1950). To Alan human beings are self-centred who put their interest above anything else, even when they are doing something they consider as noble:

ALAN. Veronica, 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? In life, some people drag their feet, it's their strategy, others refuse to acknowledge the passing of time, and drive 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 to yourself, OK, 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 yourself (Reza, 2010, p. 40).

Alan's statement unveils his pessimistic view on human beings and on life in general. In his view, life is nihilism at work, where meanings are not found anywhere, yet we have to continue living in eternal meaninglessness (Tartaglia, 2017; Camus, 2018). Alan does not see the meaning of not acknowledging the ugly side of life as it is the only truth. This pessimistic outlook is a restatement of Schopenhauer's fundamental pessimism, by which he sees man's life "swings like a pendulum backwards and forwards between pain and ennui. [...] After man had transferred all pain and torments to hell, there then remained nothing left over for heaven but ennui." (Schopenhauer, 1966, p. 402). Veronica's fascination with what happened in Darfur is no more than a self-satisfying act than a genuine sympathy for the victims of the massacre. An estimated of 200,000 people were killed between 2003 and 2025 in Darfur, and more than two millions were displaced during the conflict (International IDEA, 2024; Danielova, 2014). Veronica's only defense is that it was not "in our own backyards" (Reza, 2010, p. 47), which further proves the premise that human beings think much more about themselves than about other people (Gooding & Hoekstra, 2020).

Alan (and Michael initially) believes that the boys' fight is part of both juvenile life and boys' instinct. He sees violence as "a kind of apprenticeship before it gives way to what's right" (Reza, 2010, p. 45) to which Veronica replies, "Maybe in prehistoric time. Not in our society" (*ibid*). Sceptically (and sarcastically) Alan asks, "Our society? Explain our society" (*ibid*), validating his view that violence is ever-present and human nature. Alan and Veronica act as the mouthpiece of the philosophical debate prevalent in this play, of whether violence is innate in human nature or it is something nurtured by external forces. Alan is obviously on the former side, that violence in various is embedded in human nature since the very beginning. He believes in the god of carnage who "has ruled, uninterruptedly, since the dawn of time" (p. 45). The boys' fight in Alan's view is part of men's word, a paradigmatic form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2004) in which each conflict should be resolved "man to man" (Reza, 2010, p. 11). When he says, "might is right" (Reza, 2010, p. 45), he is not only referring to the fight between the boys but also to any violence happening around the world. Violence is seen as a mode of survival committed by humans from prehistoric

times in the guise of “killer ape” hypothesis (Ardrey, 1961; Jaccomard, 2016). This ‘gene’ for aggression has been passed on from distant ancestors to modern humans and is prevalent among primates (Wrangham & Glowacki, 2012; Ardrey, 1961). Benjamin’s act of hitting Henry is then viewed as accepted self-defense against other’s aggression. Comparing Benjamin’s action to children in Congo who may kill hundreds of people, he tells Veronica that he is “likely to be less susceptible than you are to horror and indignation” (Reza, 2010, p. 45).

Violence as Unnatural to Humans

If Alan (and Michael) is the supporter of innate violence of human beings, Veronica believes in the opposite. She is strongly against the idea of the unavoidability of violence and despises violence in any form. When Henry refuses to identify Benjamin as the perpetrator, she praises him as “impressive” (Reza, 2010, p. 4). Her husband Michael, on the other hand, sees Henry’s silence as no more than an act of bravado, which connotes negative meaning. Veronica, however, considers the word “bravado” equals to “courage” (*ibid*) to give it a positive meaning. Veronica is Henry’s well-meaning mother, who works part-time as a sales assistant in a bookshop and has authored coffee table books, including one on Darfur. She firmly believes in “the possibility of improvement” (p. 39) and considers herself as “standing up for civilization” (p.14). Her proposed solution to the boys’ fight is to make sure that Benjamin is “aware of his responsibilities” (p.13) and “apologize to Henry” (p.6), further proves her faith in human ability to improve.

Veronica’s views are influenced by the philosophical ideas of Norbert Elias, who describes the triumph of civilization over barbarism through a civilizing process that has been ongoing since the Middle Ages (Jaccomard, 2016). While the exact timeframe may be debatable and Elias has faced criticism for being overly Eurocentric, the transformation that people refer to as ‘civilizing’ is evident, even without moral implications. This process leads to the emergence of an organized, regulated society, which arises not only from external forces but also from internalized self-discipline (Fletcher, 2005). As states became more centralized and authoritative, individuals exhibited greater self-restraint. Essentially, society shapes individuals’ minds for the collective good, teaches and promotes restraints, such as guilt, religion, empathy, and self-control (Baumeister & Bushman, 2004), prompting them to willingly suppress their passions to adhere to the social contract. This is related to what Aristotle believed that the origin of violence is entirely outside, as exo-archy (Mercier, 2020). Thus, violence is not inherent to civilization; there is no god of carnage.

Culture is then for the darker sides of human nature, making individuals and life more civilized. Veronica believes that arts have “soothing powers” (Reza, 2010, p.14) to condemn violence and to “fill the gaps in the education system” (p.15). Her remark on Bacon’s paintings ad “Cruelty. Majesty. Chaos. Balance” (*ibid.*) illustrates her view that art can counteract brutality. Human beings are innately good, have the ability to do good, and can be led to virtue. Xunzi defines goodness as “what is correct, put into order, impartial, and orderly,” and badness as “being partial, dangerous, contrary to the right, and disorderly.” (Sun, 2016; Breyer; 2019), showing that violence and aggression are not natural to human beings. Veronica detests Michael and Alan’s claim about human nature saying “we are not all fucking Neanderthals” (Reza, 2010, p.34) because “We’re living in America. We’re not living in Kinshasa! We’re living in America according to the principles of Western society” (p.46). This statement testifies her alignment with Norbert Elias’ philosophical thought who believes that human beings progress in a civilizing process, yet detestable as being Eurocentric (Jaccomard, 2016).

Veronica positions herself as a “social crusader” (Reza, 2010: 54) who sees it as her job to make the world a better place. What happened to the boys is contrary to what should ideally happen in a civilized society and thus needs correction. She considers all people are “citizens of the world” (p. 47) and should not “give up struggle” (*ibid*) for any brutalism happening anywhere in the world. Responding to Alan and Michael’s indifference to the

boys' and to the violence happening in Africa, deeply appalled, she reminds them, "One day you may understand the extreme gravity of what's going on in that part of the world and you'll be ashamed of this inertia and your repulsive nihilism" (p. 54). Violence is "our business" (p.16) and what Benjamin did to Henry, whom she sees as "public menace" (p.26), is "everybody's concern" (*ibid*), and it is not his parent's prerogative to educate and punish him (p.22).

Veronica does not believe in the natural state of human beings to be violent because in her eyes her son Henry is a good boy and even convinces Alan and Annette that Benjamin "is not a savage" (Reza, 2010, p.13) as the parent believe. She sees in human beings what Steven Pinker calls "better angel" (2011), empathy, reason, and self-restraint that counterbalance inner demons and aggression (Jacomard, 2016). Aureli and de Waal suggest that human beings possess numerous natural mechanisms for cooperation that help manage conflict, direct aggression, and resolve disputes (quoted in Ury, 2002). This is exactly why Veronica despises words and phrases like "savage", "indecent", "Neanderthals", and "impolite society". She believes that everybody should contribute to the betterment of society, to make violence "our business" (Reza, 2010, p. 16) and it must start from backyards.

Savagery vs. Civility

The play begins with a display of civility, the fathers and the mothers of two fighting boys trying to find the best solution for the incident, with dish as a symbol of acceptance and tulips as a symbol of beauty and civility. The meeting is initially aimed at releasing the parents (and the boys) from "emotional cul-de-sac" (Reza, 2010, p. 3) through dialogue, as civilized individuals would do because they believe "there is still such a thing as the art of co-existence" (*ibid*). Despite the parents' efforts to uphold a facade of bourgeois respectability and civility, Reza suggests that "parents standing up for their children become infantile themselves" (p.12). He offers a "grotesque" (p. 41) depiction of the primal, animalistic traits within those we expect to be "the custodians" (p.65) of modern society. The play uncovers our "savage" (p. 16) instincts, using a Freudian lens, that remain unaffected by the social constructs of language, sex, gender, and etiquette, which the Raleighs, the Novaks, and the audience strive to enforce to maintain a shared illusion of acceptable behaviour. Ultimately, the play illustrates that society is underpinned by an ever-present force: the ominous "God of Carnage" (p. 52).

It is in the name of civility that the violence committed by the boys is not staged, but narrated in (initially) polished manner. Veronica and Michael, whose son Henry was hit by Benjamin, even agree to compromise to change the term "armed with stick" to "furnished with stick" (Reza, 2010, p.1) referring to the act of hitting done by Benjamin, further showing the state of civility. The severity of injury suffered by Henry is covered by the talk about the "gorgeous tulips" (p. 4) sent directly from Holland at "forty dollars for a bunch of fifty" (*ibid*). Small talks about each other's job (p. 5), "hamster" (p. 6), "clafouti" and "espresso" (p.7) give the impression that the fight between the boys seems easily resolvable. The play does not give hints, at least at the beginning, that those courteous words will turn into "phony" (p.26), "bastard" (p.31), and "executioners" (p. 53).

The Raleighs, particularly Veronica, see "civilization" (Reza, 2010, p.41) and "courtesy" (*ibid*) as desired and necessary for a healthy society. Unfortunately, all characters rely on a fragile social construct that serves as a guide for human behaviour; Veronica embodies harmony, Michel represents diplomacy, Annette focuses on sex and gender, and Alain emphasizes language. As the play progresses, the ineffectiveness of these social codes to regulate human action is apparent. The instability of these norms makes every character ill-equipped to navigate a society ruled by the "God of Carnage" (p.52). The Vallons attempt to use a "charter" (64) of social etiquette to manage the "nightmare" (30) unfolding in their apartment. Veronica from time to time often interrupts herself and takes "hiatus[es]" (p. 22) to cut short her attempts to articulate her perspective, believing that suppressing her own

interpretative experience through self-censorship has “pacifying abilities” (p. 17). Michel, in turn, employs the social lubricants of food, drink, and refreshments to foster a symbolic—and metonymic—sense of diplomacy in the “grotesque” (p. 41) and “fundamentally uncouth” (*ibid*) environment.

The vulnerability of social norms and codes such as courtesy is shown when one of the characters reveals what has been hidden in her psyche. Appalled by Veronica’s sense of moral superiority claiming to be “reasonable and moderate” (Reza, 2010, p. 30) and continuously calling Benjamin a snitch, Annette snaps and proclaims that all those moderation and courtesy are only “on the surface” (*ibid*). It is ironic that Veronica, a character who deeply believes in innate human goodness, who suggests not to be “so formal” (p. 17) is the first character to fall short of her own ideals, instead reinforcing Alan’s theory of the god of carnage. When Annette vomits on her cherished art books, Veronica loses her composure, focusing solely on how to save the books saying “You can’t find it! It went out of print years ago!” (p.25). She sees everyone is against her ideals of civilized society, and when Michael reminds her that her rants about civilization is out of proportion, her reaction is that of linguistic violence of “I don’t give a shit! (p.36). As the tension grows heated, linguistic violence replaces courtesy, with Veronica and Michael as the dominant perpetrators, revealing what lies beneath superficial civility.

Harassment, intimidation, and ridicule as forms of linguistic violence (Richardson-Self, 2021) are used as a mode of channeling the animal within each character (Gaber, 2006). Michael and Veronica call Annette a “phony” and “dreadful” (Reza, 2010, p. 26), Annette accuses Michael of being a “killer” (p. 33) and calls her husband “never exactly been a stroller dad!” (p.16) and not “man enough” (p.50) because he is always tied to his phone. Alan is a master of using language as a weapon, not by swearing and profanity, but by sarcasm, with Veronica as the usual target. When Veronica fervently beats her husband, Alan responds by saying “Beating up on your husband is one of those principles, is it?” (p. 46) and sarcastically tells Michael “She threw herself on you in such a frenzy. If I were you I’d be flattered” (*ibid*). Facing Alan’s verbal abuse, Veronica, who does not believe in violence, frantically threatens Alan “I’m going to kill him!” (p.47).

Linguistic violence, expressed through vilification, often takes the form of words that demean, resulting in psychological harm and emotional abuse that erode a victim’s sense of personal integrity and self-worth (Jones, 1994), a notion that intersects with violence (Mardon & Richardson-Self, 2022). The characters in *God of Carnage* employ demeaning verbal utterances to degrade each other’s sense of self and inflict psychological and emotional damage. Linguistic violence is exactly what breeds physical violence. Annette slams Alan’s phone and dips it into the vase of tulips as an act of taking Alan’s “authority” (Reza, 2010, p. 50). Physical violence refers to acts of non-consensual force by a perpetrator occasioned against a subject which causes suffering of some kind (Bufacchi, 2009). The aim of physical violence is to inflict physical injury on the victim.

There are several interesting facts about physical violence presented in the play. First, physical violence is directed toward inanimate objects rather than humans. Annette breaks Alan’s phone (Reza, 2010, p. 48) and vomits on Veronica’s catalogue collections (p. 23), Veronica smashes Annette’s purse (p. 53), and later Annette lashes out at the tulips (p.56). Second, the violence done by Benjamin (and probably by Henry too) is told by characters on stage. This can be interpreted as either an act of keeping civility or a fulfillment of the play’s thesis that “parents standing up for their children become infantile themselves” (p. 10). Third, apart from Benjamin hitting Henry with a stick, physical violence in the play is committed by female characters. This is in contrast to the belief that men are more likely than females to engage in physically aggressive or violent behaviour (Padgett & Trembley, 2020) as a trait of masculinity (Whitlock, 2014). This presentation, however, is in line with the premise of the play, that violence and aggression are inherent in human beings, albeit their gender. Deep down in the psyche, human beings are “savage” (Reza, 2010, p. 12), “hooligans” (*ibid*), and “Neanderthals” (p.35).

Various types of violence occur in *God of Carnage* under the guise of civility. Structural and epistemic violence manifested in injustice and oppression in Darfur, Congo, and other parts of the world are reduced into courtesy of small talks. Symbolic and structural violence committed by big industries (big pharma) is considered as justified as it brings “benefit” (Reza, 2010, p.19), while the risk faced by the public is seen as unavoidable. Every character engages in various rage and aggression as Veronica thinks that “Behaving well gets you nowhere. Courtesy is a waste of time, it weakens you and undermines you” (p.32). These acts of uncivil behaviour sabotage the characters' efforts to resolve both interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts, proving that civil etiquette is oftentimes misleading and disconnected from our more genuine, though “irrational” (p. 53) inclination toward chaos. The play highlights the inadequacy of maintaining appearances of normative propriety as futile attempts to satisfy our longing for control, autonomy, and relative authority, all centred around the elusive and unavoidable aspiration of being “good citizen” (p.44). This futility is satirized by Reza, paralleling the characters' ridiculous efforts to mask vomit-stained books with hastily sprayed perfume (p. 24-25). In conflict-laden social scenarios, we are merely “clumsy and maladjusted” (p. 65) beings. The following dialogue best summarises how underneath civility, savagery is ever-present:

MICHAEL. Let me tell you something, I'm up to here with these idiotic discussions. We tried to be nice, we bought tulips, my wife passed me off as a liberal, but I can't keep this bullshit up any more. I am not a member of polite society. What I am and always have been, is a fucking Neanderthal.

ALAN. Aren't we all?

(p.35)

CONCLUSION

God of Carnage displays the futility of human effort to mitigate innate violence instinct triggered by a childish dispute. The play serves as a tragicomic comedy of manner, minus the manners. Ranging from sarcasm to satire, from hyperbole to hysteria, the uncontrolled behaviour of the four upper-middle-class characters creates a farcical portrayal of the brutal and catastrophic instincts that underlie the fragile civility of bourgeois society. As a comedy, the play seems to present resolution to any of the issues it raises, but in the end, it does not. The boys' fight which serves as *raison d'être* of the conflict is never resolved. The audience never knows if Benjamin will apologize to Henry or face punishment or be taught self-control instead. More systemic violence such as white-collar crime (the dangerous drug), animal cruelty (Nibbles the hamster abandoned in suburbia), male dominance, and African genocides are all hung in the balance. All characters are dragged by their natural instinct of aggression, making civility and courtesy as social norms and codes succumb to the barbaric nature of human beings.

In *God of Carnage*, Yasmina Reza presents a theatrical depiction of contemporary society, where the “law of life” is that humans are “not domestic animals” but rather “wild animals”. Social crusaders soothe themselves with the illusion of courtesy to mask the wildness of our fundamentally savage instincts. By exaggerating and satirizing the normalized hypocrisies that permeate the norm of “behaving well” for the sake of societal order, Reza illustrates how commonly accepted behaviours disintegrate behind closed doors in private spaces. The primal instinct always overshadows the goodwill of all characters in the play, making civility a fragile social construct.

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