The Draft: Rewriting Conflict in Yasmina Reza's *Le dieu du carnage*

Andrea Jonsson
Texas Tech University

Abstract: This article repositions Amanda Giguere's thesis that "characters exist in a world where language fails," arguing that the dramatic tension throughout Yasmina Reza's play, *Le dieu du carnage* (2007) hinges on more than misunderstandings of speech and that writing succeeds where the spoken word has failed. The draft, defined in three distinct ways shows how Reza emphasizes writing in order to both charge the written word with an ephemeral perlocutionary quality and highlight how the spoken word can mimic print.

Keywords: Reza – drafting – performance – signature – language

The quintessential blockbuster dramaturge, Yasmina Reza has understood the craft of intellectual accessibility in a consumer culture. Currently the most often staged living French playwright, her oeuvre is also notably readable, particularly accessible to a broad public in textual form. Reza exploits the contrast between mass popularity and intellectual substance in her two most successful plays, *Art* (1994) and *Le dieu du carnage* (2007). Each of Reza's plays highlights a different style, while containing a signature set of commonalities, such as the play between tragedy and comedy, the 90-minute playing time, and a focus on small everyday struggles that serve as points of access into a discussion of more significant conflicts. *Le dieu du carnage*, the single-set play at the core of this article's analysis, is centered around two couples and their intended civil meeting over clafoutis and coffee to discuss their eleven-year-old sons' fight in the park, which quickly transforms into a series of escalating verbal conflicts.[1]

Though scholarship on Reza is limited, scholars such as Anne Ubersfeld, Alice Bouchetard, Salah El Gharbi, and Denis Guénoun have approached Reza's writing from a literary perspective in an attempt to discover what about Reza's writing has captivated

[1] The award-winning play *Le dieu du carnage* was adapted into English both for London and Broadway productions in the first year after publication and was adapted by Reza and Roman Polanski into the 2011 film, *Carnage*.

audiences and caused her to be the only woman playwright to have won two Tony awards for Best Play. Focus on Reza's relationship to writing and orality has been highlighted by Ubersfeld, who maintains that Reza has created a new type of speech based on long monologues to silent observers onstage that likens a performative lecture. El Gharbi reads Reza through the reception of her works, analyzing her "lisibilité" and accessibility as markers of her success (14). Denis Guénoun states, "Je prenais avec l'écriture de Reza un plaisir de lecture. . . . J'ai décidé d'aller y voir de plus près: ses textes tiennent à l'analyse, la légèreté s'atténue au profit d'une impression de profondeur et de clairvoyance" (12). Reza's theatrical oeuvre, therefore, has drawn attention to a self-referential textuality that mirrors the playwright's own relationship to language. Recently, Amanda Giguere has approached the analysis of Reza's oeuvre from a more theatrical standpoint as a response to the literary criticism Reza's plays have produced. Giguere defines the device that unifies Reza's oeuvre as the *breach* and produces a study that treats each play as a different example of the rupture of expectations. Though her analysis is thorough and effective, Giguere's focus on the production of language as a theatrical device and not a literary device in *Le dieu du carnage* can be enhanced by looking at the emphasis on the writing process that structures orality, action, and conflict, and serves as a paradigm for the relationship between playwright and play.

In this article, I focus on the leitmotiv of the *draft* as a counterpoint to Giguere's breach to demonstrate that the point of convergence between the emphasis on the written word and dialogic conflict provides a condensed *mode d'emploi* for reading how Reza's performative style has evolved to unveil the play between textuality and orality inherent in theatrical writing. The definition of "performative" originates from J. L. Austin's 1962 *How To Do Things with Words,* in which he writes that linguistic acts do not simply reflect a world, but that speech has the power to create a world. The etymology of performance comes from the Greek "to furnish forth," "to carry forward," "to bring into being" (13). I maintain that the most effective performative moments in the play hinge on language in the written form. Because most of the scholarship on Reza mentioned above focuses on plays published before *Le dieu du carnage*, this article extends a literary analysis of Reza's most recent and widely staged play. Though Reza is first and foremost a playwright, her attention to the written word as a legitimate counterweight to the spoken word provides a productive bridge between the stage and performative writing as seen in her emphasis on the writing process.

Giguere writes that *Le dieu du carnage* is essentially about the failure of language, the breach, the rupture, and the collapse of communication. She compares it to previous plays in which the theme of the breach is more obvious: a rupture in time, space, or reality:

> Instead Reza has turned on her very building blocks – the words she uses to construct her plays – and what appears in *Carnage* is a breach of language. The characters exist in a world where language fails. . . . Reza

> has built a world in which words are inadequate, sentences are slippery, and language fails to achieve progress. (121)

Though I find Giguere's thesis useful in Reza's other plays, I argue that in *Le dieu du carnage*, analyzing language through the breach is incomplete because writing succeeds where the spoken word has fallen short, and that the confrontational tone and dramatic tension throughout the play hinge on more than misunderstandings of speech. While the original conflict remains unresolved, language in *Le dieu du Carnage* does not produce a failure in communication but is remarkably successful at igniting new conflict, and singular words are reiterated to become successful, self-referential objects of escalating provocations and retaliations. The characters read aloud, dictate journalistic drafts, manipulate, and rewrite each other's speech so that in *Le dieu du carnage*, the spoken word is uniquely built to highlight its successful counterpart in writing.[2]

Writing and rewriting in this play distinguishes itself from speech through the leitmotiv of the draft. I define the draft in *Le dieu du carnage* in three distinct but overlapping ways, all with a focus on the process or document of writing within the play. First, the draft is an unfinished document that shows various stages of the writing process, by overlapping omissions, rewrites, and substitutions. Secondly, the draft is a body of words conscripted and stylized to be used as weapons in verbal combat. Finally, the draft is a transaction, a communicative proof of signature or bill of exchange.[3] Reza emphasizes writing in order to both charge the written word with an ephemeral perlocutionary quality and highlight how the spoken word can mimic writing by causing a lasting resonance, seen in the very opening discussion of the word "armé" (10).

The play's opening words are read aloud, drawing attention to the composition of recreating a past act of violence through written narrative. The beginning of the play finds the two couples (Annette and Alain Reille and Véronique and Michel Houllié) seated across from each other in the Houllié's living room. They are in the process of listening to Véronique write up a declaration that resembles a police report, or insurance claim:

> Véronique: Donc notre déclaration… Vous ferez la vôtre de votre côté… "Le 3 novembre, à dix-sept heures trente, au square de l'Aspirant-Dunant, à la suite d'une altercation verbale, Ferdinand Reille, onze ans, *armé* d'un bâton, a frappé au visage notre fils Bruno Houllié. Les conséquences de cet acte sont, outre la tuméfaction de la lèvre supérieure, une brisure des deux incisives, avec atteinte du nerf de l'incisive droite." (10, my emphasis)

[2] Henceforth I will refer to *Le dieu du carnage* as *Carnage* throughout the article, not to be confused with Roman Polanski's film.

[3] The definition and analysis of the *draft* in this article are mine and are unique to this play.

The declaration itself recognizes that words are the instigators to the act of violence – "à la suite d'une altercation verbale," (10) which escalates into an act of brutality, resulting in permanent damage to Bruno's mouth. The mouth remains a focal point throughout the play – eating, drinking, vomiting, and insults bring us back to the original instigating off-stage event of the boys' fight. However, the mouth as producer of a spontaneous idea is anticipated by writing at several key moments in the play. Like Giguere, Alice Bouchetard focuses on speech in Reza's oeuvre, recognizing that the rhythm of Reza's dialogue mirrors the imperfections of the improvised spoken word: a string of unfinished thoughts, fragments, interruptions, and substitutions:

> Yasmina Reza traite la langue comme un matériau vivant et met en scène une langue parlée qui semble parfois s'improviser sur scène. Les personnages s'interrompent, cherchent leurs mots, se reprennent, corrigent au fur et a mesure leurs propos. (37)

However, the written document Véronique is reading is far from improvised, it is instead a previously composed statement that scaffolds the characters' discourse. This engagement between written and spoken language highlights how language can never produce a finished form free of possible edits, omissions, and rewrites, and yet remains a successful and irreversible communicative transaction.

The performed written utterance of *armé* produces a sincere and spontaneous response from the Reille and removes what Austin calls the "hollowness of theatrical performatives" (22). The idea of the elicited affective response adds a unique element to Austin's theory of locution, illocution, and perlocution.[4] With locution, Austin means that by saying a word, "I invoke the capacity of the sounds uttered both to stand for the idea, and to mark out the relevance of why these sounds were uttered" (18). The illocutionary dimension of the act, "denotes the kind of act I was accomplishing or attempting to accomplish in saying these words: warning, threatening, and so on" (18). It is in the perlocutionary dimension that the creation of emotion and the successful communicative transaction becomes important: "If illocution denotes the function performed *in* saying something, then perlocution denotes the effect I produced *by* issuing the utterance" (18). For the Reille, the word *armé* produces a stronger reaction because it is being drafted into the document Véronique is writing, and thus claims a more permanent position in the dialogue.

Writing in *Carnage* is drafted from different directions, forever deferring a finished product or sole contributor. As Véronique is reading, Alain Reille interrupts to take issue with her choice of the word "armé" (10). The Reille's last name already contains the sonic allusion to *rayer,* the verb that means to scratch out, or draw a line

[4] The following quotes are taken from James Loxley's *Performativity* (2007) in which he starts by outlining Austin's speech act theory.

through. This reminds the reader of the physical process of rewriting, but also contains the violent teeth-grating sound of a *disque rayé* or scratched disc, stuck on the same dissonant chord and playing in a loop. Alain is the character who is most concerned with word choice, at several times throughout the play focusing on one particular word, taking it up again, repeating it in order to draw attention to the word's effect.
In the first scene, Alain simply repeats the word as a question, lifting it out of the drafted declaration. Véronique immediately understands that Alain has a problem with the violent objective the word *armé* contains.

> Alain: "Armé?"
> Véronique: Armé? Vous n'aimez pas "armé", qu'est-ce qu'on met Michel, muni, doté, muni d'un bâton, ça va?
> Alain: Muni oui.
> Michel: Muni d'un bâton.
> Véronique: (*corrigeant*). Muni. (10)

In taking issue with Véronique's choice of word, Alain is inserting himself into the writing process and trying to destabilize the permanence of the written word that has affected him negatively. Drafting calls into question word choice, syntax, style, and omission, but it also promotes charging words with the equivalent to a stick to the mouth. Though we do not know why Véronique is writing up the declaration, (is it for her own records? Are the Houllié going to press charges?) Alain recognizes the power a single word can contain and the play becomes more about how the event is rewritten than about resolving the original conflict.

Alain, a lawyer, simultaneously spends the length of the play on the phone with his firm, drafting a response to the allegations published in that day's newspaper accusing his client, a pharmaceutical firm, of knowingly having a dangerous and faulty drug on the market. As a parallel motion to Véronique's performative drafting process, Alain also begins by reading aloud, though he reads to an unseen interlocutor, the person he is speaking to on the phone, a colleague named Maurice:

> Alain: Oui Maurice, merci de me rappeler. Bon, dans *Les Echos* de ce matin, je vous le lis…: "Selon une étude publiée dans la revue britannique *Lancet* et reprise hier dans le *F.T.*, deux chercheurs australiens auraient mis au jour les effets neurologiques de l'Antril, antihypertenseur des laboratoires Verenz-Pharma, allant de la baisse d'audition à l'ataxie." (15)

Away from the office, Alain has to delegate the actual writing of the journalistic response to his colleagues who call him periodically to read him their drafts. He then becomes the proofreader, orally drafting by dictating over the phone:

> Vas-y…Oui…Pas "procédé". "Manœuvre". Une manœuvre, qui intervient à quinze jours de la reddition des comptes etc. … Une étude entre guillemets! Tu mets étude entre guillemets… Tu n'as qu'à me citer: "Il s'agit d'une lamentable tentative de manipulation du cours … du cours et de déstabilisation de mon client", affirme maître Reille, avocat de la société Verenz-Pharma. … A.F.P. Reuter, presse généraliste, pressée spécialisée, tutti frutti… (*raccroche*). (15)

Alain's phone conversation punctuates the stage dialogue throughout the play. Though he is not physically producing a written text, his attention to how the words will be printed, from speechmarks to his own signature are essential parts of the writing process. It is both realistic and symbolic that the journal that published the study is *Les Echos*, emphasizing the way language works in the play. Writing becomes rewriting, echoing the replacement and substitutions of words. The echo becomes the bridge between spoken and written language and both contain an affective resonance that echoes the original shock, just as *armé* cannot be entirely replaced by *muni*. As *armé* echoes throughout the dialogue, both the written and spoken word contain a resonance of the words that are replaced.

Communication in *Carnage* succeeds through a complex styling of the draft process—creating a particular signature for each character that makes use of precision, omission, manipulation, and reflection. Stylized language becomes a way of appropriating discourse, and manipulating its use. Alain's attention to precision is his own style of manipulating previously composed language. The article published in *Les Echos* that morning is disastrous for his client, and could bring serious consequences for his firm and for him as well. His manipulation of language is necessary to remove the authority of the original published statement. Alain must question motive, timing, and scientific process in order to insert at least a seed of a doubt in the readership. Feeling helpless at a distance, he tries to return to his office several times, only to remain at the Houllié's and speak his words over the phone and hear them dictated, forcing an extra step into the writing process.

In Véronique's signature, language becomes objectified as a bridge between writing and speaking. Véronique sees language as an object—a product of careful composition. Throughout the play she emphasizes print as a necessary form that records and enhances the value of a memory. Her relationship to language hinges on how effectively the physical representation of communication in print can stand in for action. Véronique demonstrates how the draft evolves to become a conscription of language. She strives to manipulate perpetuity into the oral communication of the afternoon, and gives value to successful distribution and readership in her career as a writer and bookseller. Her husband Michel's speech is clumsy and lacks reflection but serves as a foil to Véronique by highlighting the value of each individual part necessary

to compose a working apparatus. Véronique's attention to detail in language is paralleled by Michel's profession selling "de la quincaillerie d'ameublement" and they become allies through their shared view of the importance of life's tools (20). As a writer, Véronique's attention to language as an object causes her to attempt to use writing not only to record history, but also to conscript it to achieve progress. Michel explains to the Reille:

> Michel: Moi je suis grossiste en articles ménagers, Véronique est écrivain, et travaille mi-temps dans une librairie d'art et d'histoire.
> Annette: Ecrivain?
> Véronique: J'ai participé à un ouvrage collectif sur la civilisation sabéenne, à partir des fouilles reprises à la fin du conflit entre Ethiopie et l'Erythrée. Et à présent, je sors en janvier un livre sur la tragédie du Darfour. (16)

Véronique is neither a stranger to the draft, nor to conflict. She demonstrates a fascination with conflict and by writing about it she is putting boots to the ground in the only way possible to her. The document she drafts to reenact the boys' playground fight is a condensed and more intimate version of the books she publishes. Eager to use her writing to advance a cause, Véronique continues returning to the words in her statement. Giguere writes, "instead of focusing on the purpose of the written statement, Véronique seems more concerned with turning the boys' fight into a teachable moment" (122). Aware that the draft is not a resolution to the conflict, but only an unstable response, Véronique uses writing – both in her occupation and in this situation as a mother recording violence inflicted on her son – to counteract a feeling of helplessness and distance. As Michel says mockingly: "Elle se déploie pour la paix et la stabilité du monde" (100). Her words become conscripted to act in the absence of action.

Both Véronique and Alain emphasize the minute parts of speech in their drafts, but to very different ends. Language for Véronique contains an almost sacred power that rivals the brutality of violence, or the calm of pacification. However, though she tries to use her writing to solidify her civility and mask of politeness, Véronique's choice of words ends up causing the façade to come crumbling down around her. Giguere considers that each of the characters return to the offstage "inciting incident" of the playground fight to progressively reveal more of their individual savagery (118). Véronique has invited the parents of the boy who attacked her son into her home to make peace because she believes, as she says, "On ne gagne rien à s'installer dans une logique passionnelle . . . il existe encore un art de vivre ensemble, non?" (11). However, from the very beginning, the choice of the word *armé* sets in motion the momentum of the rupture in civility that builds throughout the play. Véronique's writing then uttering the word *armé* is just as much of an instigator as the original act of violence that

occurred offstage between the two eleven-year-old boys. Though she removes and replaces the word *armé* with *muni*, the original intention has been inscribed into the play's discourse. Having written and then spoken the word has left a scar on the future proceedings of the afternoon. As the conflict rises, Alain brings the disagreement back to that original word:

> Véronique: Il n'y a pas d'origine. Il y a un enfant de onze ans qui frappe. Avec un bâton.
> Alain: Armé d'un bâton.
> Michel: Nous avons retiré ce mot.
> Alain: Vous l'avez retiré parce que nous avons émis une objection.
> Michel: Nous l'avons retiré sans discuter.
> Alain: Un mot qui exclut délibérément l'erreur, la maladresse, qui exclut l'enfance. (69)

In her drafted statement, Véronique emphasizes the consequence of the inciting incident, the damage done to her son's mouth. He has lost two teeth, and in the process, his nerves were exposed, causing potentially permanent damage. Bruno's facial damage is echoed in the exposed nerves of the Reille who find the idea of the pre-meditated intention in Ferdinand's act of brutality hard to swallow. Just as the collision of the stick to the mouth causes lasting pain in Bruno, Véronique's chosen word irreparably imperils potential civility in the relationship between the two families.
Giguere identifies the discussion around the word *armé* as the moment Reza "inserts a tiny rupture in the fabric of the play," stating that it is here "the breach emerges as a seedling as the audience witnesses the first failure of language" (125). However, the focus on how the action is recreated in the written narrative demonstrates Véronique's desire to trigger a feeling of guilt—and in that she is successful. The word choice does indicate a breach in civility, but not in language. Giguere's suggestion that the audience be asked to "reevaluate the relationship between language and truth" is secondary to Reza drawing attention to how an event can be experienced differently through the rewriting process, stressing style, word choice, substitution, and omission. Continually returning to her written version of the instigating event, Véronique is more concerned with the perlocutionary effect produced by the document, and wants the Reille to feel badly about their son's action more than she wants to simply record the event. Even when she is not physically writing, her choice of words leaves its mark in the discourse of the play. In the same way she chose *armé* in her statement, she later uses the word *défiguré* to describe her son's face, this time standing by her chosen word.

> Véronique: Et Ferdinand qu'est-ce qu'il dit? Comment il vit la situation?
> Annette: Il ne parle pas beaucoup. Il est désemparé je crois.
> Véronique: Il *réalise* qu'il a *défiguré* son camarade?

> Alain: Non. Non, il ne *réalise* pas qu'il a *défiguré* son camarade.
> Annette: Mais pourquoi tu dis ça? Ferdinand *réalise* bien sûr!
> Alain: Il *réalise* qu'il a eu un comportement brutal, il ne *réalise* pas qu'il a *défiguré* son camarade.
> Véronique: Vous n'aimez pas le mot, mais le mot est malheureusement juste.
> Alain: Mon fils n'a pas *défiguré* votre fils.
> Véronique: Votre fils a *défiguré* notre fils. Revenez ici à cinq heures, vous verrez sa bouche et ses dents. (27-8, my emphasis)

Reza has stacked and repeated the dialogue to the point of being absurd and childlike. Not only are single words repeated (*défiguré*, *réalise(r)*) – entire phrases are parroted back and forth between Alain and Véronique. This time instead of producing an actual written document, the repetition of the performed utterance uses orality to imitate the permanence of print. Mimicking the way children speak on the playground, Alain quotes Véronique's exact phrase several times, in order to cause her to hear the absurdity in her word choice, simultaneously charging the words *défiguré*, *réalise(r)* with a combative force.

In emphasizing the draft of writing, Reza is showing how the written word contains a performative ephemerality that imitates the potential shock and cruelty of the performed utterance, yet causes a lasting resonance by remaining written into the play's discourse. In contrast to spontaneous improvisation, the notion of the draft requires reflection, oftentimes providing a filter for the choice of words, or unveiling the cruelty resonant in each choice. Each word in the written draft remains easily changed or rewritten and follows the rhythm and cadence of the improvised spoken word, yet once shared, the words themselves cannot disappear, causing them to be fixed into the play's discourse in a way that imitates print.

Though Véronique is presented as wanting to solve the world's problems, she is also attached to the production and transmission of the textual products as a bookseller. The opening stage directions make direct reference to the functionality of the books as props that parallels Michel's profession selling "[s]errures, poignées de porte, cuivre à souder, et des articles de ménage, casseroles, poêles..." (20). Words become highlighted in their materiality through the Houllié's professions emphasized by the stage props in their living room. Reza writes: "*Un salon. Pas de réalisme. Pas d'éléments inutiles*" (7). The reader immediately knows that the objects on the table serve a purpose: "*Au centre, une table basse, couverte de livres d'art*." At first the books are used as an icebreaker, though the language they elicit from the women comes out in one-word spurts. Trying to make conversation while her husband talks rudely on the phone, Annette leafs through the books:

> Annette: J'adore Bacon aussi.

> Véronique: Ah oui, Bacon.
> Annette: (*tournant les pages*)… Cruauté et splendeur.
> Véronique: Chaos. Equilibre.
> Annette: Oui. (35)

The books elicit unfinished thoughts, ejections of clichéd one-word commentary. The images in the art books, and the words they elicit, mirror the building tension in the room and the breakdown of civility. The four adults are positioned around the table and Annette's nervous nausea eventually builds through the scene until she cannot control it anymore. When she vomits, it comes out as a violent projectile all over the books on the coffee table: "*Annette vomit violemment. Une gerbe brutale et catastrophique qu'Alain reçoit pour partie. Les livres d'art sur la table basse sont également éclaboussés*" (53). The words in the stage directions repeat the women's interpretive lexicon as though their conversation had continued: "brutale, catastrophique" (53). Though Véronique pretends to be sympathetic to Annette feeling sick, she is mostly horror-struck at the state of her vomit-covered books, emphasizing the importance of the text's presence over the performative body.

While Annette and Alain clean up in the bathroom, Véronique and Michel frantically try to clean off the books, drench them in expensive perfume, and then dry them so the pages do not get wrinkled. The emphasis on the physicality of the books themselves dominates the scene and the value Véronique places in them is both tragic and ridiculous.

> Véronique: Ça va gondoler.
> Michel: On peut donner un coup de séchoir et aplatir avec d'autres livres par-dessus. Ou repasser comme avec les billets.
> Véronique: Oh là là là…
> Annette: Je vous le rachèterai.
> Véronique: Il est introuvable! Il est épuisé depuis longtemps!
> Annette: Je suis navrée …
> Véronique: C'est une réédition qui a plus de vingt ans du catalogue de l'exposition de 53 à Londres! (56-7)

The books become like the play's currency, physical representations of value in economic transactions. The books on the coffee table are art books, collections of images, but the textual artifacts have taken on the proper nouns of well-known family members, "Le Foujita," "Les Dolganes," "Le Kokoshka," and Reza uses them as a foundation for her stage décor (60). Véronique and Michel spend longer trying to salvage the books than they spend trying to assure that Annette is feeling better, or whether Alain has something clean to wear. Michel provides the action to accompany Véronique's words, adding power to her statements. Though he is apathetic and

ridiculous, he is allied with his wife in the materiality of language and they work together to rectify the damage in way that is impossible when trying to pacify the Reille: "Michel: Lisse bien, lisse bien … Tourne la page. Tends-la, tends-la bien" (62).

For both Véronique and Michel, the books' value is representational—directly related to an affective memory. In contrast to mass-produced books, these are more like works of art or spoken words, irreplaceable and irreproducible. The pages are compared to physical money, as manipulable as bills: "ou repasser comme avec les billets" (57). Annette, who is a "conseillère en gestion de patrimoine" (18) is an expert in manipulating and securing fortunes, however, she is unable to understand the value Véronique places in these coffee table books. Instead of containing text, they are filled with images, playing with the expression "une image vaut mieux qu'un longue discours" and the rapport between interpretation, social status, and aesthetic taste. Throughout the play words contain different values, as displayed in how the four characters choose to rewrite the playground fight, not in how they try to resolve it. The coffee table books serve as a reminder that language is effective in the play because of the value singular words are given to those speaking them. The reproduced paintings elicit different reactions from the two women that ultimately contribute to their signature styles throughout the play. Alluding to her blockbuster play from 1994, *Art*, Reza is again drawing attention to how the value we place in objects is a subjective process, yet contains the power to produce real societal shifts. In *Art*, Serge has bought a white painting for 200,000 francs, and the price he paid remains the driving force of the dialogue throughout the play. In *Carnage*, the intention behind a chosen word charges it with power while simultaneously fracturing its meaning. The books' value becomes a fluctuating subjective measurement. Here instead of a painting, the coffee table books are representations of already produced works, they are not the works themselves. They become reprinted indications of the commodification of art.

Annette's signature is seen primarily through her speech and body language, becoming apparent after she has had time to be able to reflect upon the degradation of civility that has made her nauseous. Annette recognizes the effort Véronique has gone to, and at first refuses to continue the aggression, praising the Houllié for their graciousness: "Annette: … Si Bruno avait cassé deux dents à Ferdinand, est-ce qu'on n'aurait pas eu Alain et moi une réaction plus épidermique? …" (27). Annette believes her hypothetical reaction would have been quicker to anger and less cordial. Her use of the word "épidermique" refers to the body and its signs, the epidermal flush of anger or cold sweat of anxiety. However, she is also alluding to the surface masks and niceties that she finds impossible to stomach. Once she has vomited and stripped herself of her mask, Annette remains huddled over the *cuvette* vomiting bile, unable to maintain her composure or politeness.

Annette's vomit becomes a leitmotiv throughout the play as the symbol for what links interpreting meaning to affective reaction. At the beginning, Annette is able, through societal filtering, to control which words she utters. However, she cannot

control her feeling of nausea, triggered by anxiety, guilt, tension, and the build up of unspoken thoughts. Her vomit brings her into the dialogue, acting as symbol for reading (ingesting, digesting) and speaking (expelling). In ruminating meaning, she must ingest the words spoken to her, digest them, and expel a response. Mirroring the eating of the clafoutis Véronique has baked, Annette's body takes over the process of dialogue in a Rabelaisian exaggeration. When her body can no longer hold back, it forces Annette to insert herself into the dialogue by means of the mouth. Unable to articulate her true feelings in words, her body provides the opportunity with vomit, charging speech with object (and abject) physicality. Vomiting provides the opportunity for Annette to express herself.

For both Annette and Alain, the stylistic reflection at the center of the drafting process is seen in how they discover value in the spoken word. While cleaning herself up in the bathroom, Annette has had time to think about their children's fight. She comes back and says,

> Annette: […] Je me suis *dit* une chose dans la salle de bain…
> Véronique: Oui?
> Annette: Nous sommes peut-être trop vite passés sur… Enfin je veux *dire*…
> Michel: *Dites*, *dites* Annette.
> Annette: L'insulte aussi est une agression. (65, my emphasis)

The repetition of the words "dire, dit, dites" is not an accident in her revelation. Annette, having stayed apologetically silent on the subject of her son's aggression, reveals that she does not believe he is to blame for the altercation. Annette states what has come to the forefront of her thought, namely that Bruno calling her son "une balance" is the reason Ferdinand retaliated with physical violence, which fires up the conversation between the four adults once again (66). Ironically, being called a *balance* or tattle tale, means Ferdinand must have told someone about something Bruno did, further complicating the origins of the fight. Action and language are blurred once again into a process of rewriting the event through performative narration. Annette strips off her mask of false pleasantness and begins voicing her true cruel thoughts. Echoing the previous scene in which she vomited, Annette begins to vomit words, each statement more shocking than the last:

> Annette: Quoi Annette? (*À Michel.*) Vous pensez que mon fils est une balance?
> Michel: Je ne pense rien du tout.
> Annette: Alors si vous ne pensez rien, ne dites rien. Ne faites pas ces réflexions insinuantes.
> Véronique: Annette, gardons notre calme. Michel et moi nous efforçons d'être conciliants, et modérés…

> Annette: Pas si modérés.
> Véronique: Ah bon? Pourquoi?
> Annette: Modérés en surface.
> Alain: Toutou, il faut vraiment que j'y aille…
> Annette: Sois lâche, vas-y. (67)

Annette's time in the bathroom away from the group afforded her the possibility to reflect on the subject of the boys' fight. Having had time to collect her thoughts before she speaks, choose her words, and structure her utterance, her reflective oral drafting process produces a surprising, improvisatory, and sharp spoken style. She recognizes that her speech is a result of a thought process and the strength of an opinion that needs to be voiced. This realization causes her to use language as a weapon for aggression.

Both written and spoken words have representatives among the stage props. The coffee table books are fixed objects in the Houllié's home, however, their presence and physicality highlight the portability of the written word and provide a physical representation of the value Véronique places in print. Contrasting the incident with the textual object of the books, Alain's *portable* becomes the representative object of the spoken word. After the vomiting incident, the Reille stay with the Houllié even though Annette is continually dry-heaving into a bucket. Annette's nausea prevents her from escaping the cause if it. Alain is on his phone again, still drafting the response to the *Echos* article.

> Annette: Je vis ça du matin au soir, du matin au soir il est accroché à ce portable! Nous avons une vie hachée par le portable.
> Alain: Heu…Une seconde… (*couvrant le téléphone*)… Annette, c'est très important.
> Annette: C'est toujours très important. Ce qui se passe à distance est toujours plus important. (94)

As the conversation heats up, the dialogue mirrors Annette's "vie hachée" by the *portable* (94). Alain's conversation punctuates the stage dialogue serving as a climactic counterpoint that builds throughout the scene. Though Alain is talking to someone on the phone, he remains a part of the stage dialogue, still trying to control Annette and overlapping his responses to work in both conversations. His ability to pass between conversations is exclusively because of his phone, whose presence becomes a catalyst linking action with language, at the hand of Annette.

> Alain: Vigilance…Oui…Annette, c'est absurde de boire dans ton état…
> Annette: Quel état? Au contraire.

> Alain: C'est intéressant cette notion… (*portable*)…Oui, non, aucune interview avant la diffusion du communiqué…
> Véronique: Monsieur, je vous somme d'interrompre cette conversation éprouvante!
> Alain: … Surtout pas… Les actionnaires s'en foutront... Rappelle-lui la souveraineté des actionnaires…
> *Annette se dirige vers Alain, lui arrache le portable et… après avoir brièvement cherché où le mettre…le plonge dans le vase de tulipes.* (105)

Having realized in the bathroom that words and violence are equalized, Annette now takes silent action against the object of her irritation, the *portable*. In doing so, she deprives Alain of the possibility of dictating his draft over the phone demonstrating how the realism of the stage objects acts more like an acoustic actor in the play – the surroundings and props become mere objects to bounce words off of, or to engulf a tense silence. Here, the role of silence is overturned by the recognition of the objectified and portable language. The objects on stage are featured in the dialogue in the same way the objects incorporate the dialogue.

Each character uses citation as a destabilizing mockery, a way of echoing words in order to rob them of their authority. In focusing on the parts of speech themselves each character undermines the stylistic signature of the other. Even the eloquence of Alain's speech containing the origins of the title of the play is broken into its nuts and bolts, its meaning lost on the pettiness of how Alain pronounces the names of the weapons. In an example of Ubersfeld's recognition of Reza's *quasi-monologue*, Alain speaks at length to his silent audience:

> Alain: Véronique, moi je crois au dieu du carnage. C'est le seul qui gouverne, sans partage, depuis la nuit des temps. Vous vous intéressez à l'Afrique n'est-ce pas … Il se trouve que je reviens du Congo, voyez-vous. Là-bas, des gosses sont entraînés à tuer à l'âge de huit ans. Dans leur vie d'enfant, ils peuvent tuer des centaines de gens, à la machette, au twelve, au kalachnikov, au grenade launcher, alors comprenez que lorsque mon fils casse une dent, même deux, à un camarade avec une tige de bambou, square de l'Aspirant-Dunant, je sois moins disposé que vous à l'effroi et à l'indignation.
> Véronique: Vous avez tort.
> Annette: (*accentuant l'accent anglais*). Grenade launcher !...
> Alain: Oui, c'est comme ça que ça s'appelle. (98-99)

In immediately picking apart his speech and ridiculing his pronunciation, Annette counteracts Alain's eloquence but proves his belief in the god of carnage.

Despite their disagreement, Annette and Alain both realize that weapons and words are interchangeable, and they become unified in their use of them.

In conclusion, throughout the play, the ephemerality of speech is contrasted with the permanence of print through documentation, drafting, and exaggerated affective reactions. This demonstrates how Reza's relationship to language as a theatrical device relies on the tension between the written and the spoken and unveils the writing process of the playwright through diegetic writing in the play. According to Austin, theatrical discourse is inherently hollow, and the move in Reza's plays toward unidirectional speech such as monologues, soliloquies, or fragmented overlapping utterances could point to a failure of communication as noted by Giguere. However, though the play's undulating climaxes and dips in tension build toward an ultimate failure to resolve the original conflict, the conspicuous absence of the boys who brought their parents together demonstrates how language has been called upon to achieve different results. They play does not center around the boys' fight, but rather how the event is rewritten, and how the violence produced by the original event permeates the characters' stylistic signatures throughout the drafting process. Thinking about language as a portable but unfinished product contributes to how one reads dramatic writing by using the overlaps between speech and writing to bridge the ephemerality of speech and the perpetuity of print. The signature becomes the way of ascribing and transferring value between the textual and the performative world. In this way, style – as seen in the various overlapping drafts – becomes a process of textual marking unique to each character's signature.

Reading the play with a focus on the leitmotiv of the draft shows how language does function productively in the play. Temporary alliances and moments of constructive communication are produced because of how the characters see language work in parallel ways. Alain's rewriting of *armé* is not only a breach in civility but also an acknowledgement to Véronique that they must rewrite the event together. Words, which contain the possibility to shock and incite violence, cannot be transferred effectively without attention to the textually stylistic structure they are drafted into, whether uttered or written. In this play, the strong focus on writing shows how communication becomes a transaction with traceable origins and an ability to affect and elicit actions. Language is not only a tool, however objectified it is to Véronique and Michel, nor is it entirely a weapon as seen by Annette and Alain. It is an agreement to carry out a linguistic transaction and engage with another character's style and composition technique.

Though the leitmotiv of the draft is specific to this play, Reza's focus on the link between diegetic writing and theatrical writing can be extended as a unifying characteristic of how she deals with conflict in her other plays, while opening up the dialogue of the evolution of the *théâtre de la parole* in contemporary French theatre. Seen explicitly in this play, Reza's readability and accessibility thus become qualified through

an engagement with textual agency, extending the reception of her plays to include a legitimate literary component that also enhances the stage performance.

WORKS CITED

Austin, J.L. *How to do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. Ed. J. O. Urmson. Oxford: Clarendon, 1962. Web.

Barbedette, Sarah. "Yasmina Reza: La clé, ou l'absence de clé des choses." *L'Esprit Créateur* 47.2 (2007): 60–70. Print.

Bouchetard, Alice. *Yasmina Reza, le miroir et le masque*. Paris: Léo Scheer, 2011. Print.

El Gharbi, Salah. *Yasmina Reza ou le théâtre des paradoxes*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010. Print.

Giguere, Amanda. "The God of Carnage and the Failure of Language, 2006–2009." *The Plays of Yasmina Reza on the English and American Stage*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010. 116–49. Print.

Guénoun, Denis. *Avez-vous lu Reza? Une invitation philosophique*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2005. Print.

Hellerstein, Nina. "Entretien avec Yasmina Reza." *French Review* 75.5 (April 2002): 944–54. Web.

Isenberg, Noah, and Rob White. "Carnage and all: A Discussion." *Film Quarterly* 65.3 (Spring 2012): 44–48. Web.

Karkowski, Michael. "Yasmina Reza: from *Art* to *The God of Carnage*." *Contemporary Review* 291.1692 (Spring 2009): 75-87. Web.

Loxley, James. *Performativity*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.

Reza, Yasmina. *Art*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1994. Print.

---. *Le dieu du carnage*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2007. Print.

Ubersfeld, Anne. "Le quasi-monologue dans le theatre contemporain: Yasmina Reza, Bernard-Marie Koltès." *Études Théâtrales* 19 (2000): 88-97. Web.