

# *God of Carnage*

## Script Analysis

- 1) Where are they
  - a) In what country, city, place, building, room, etc.?
    - i) US, New York City, Brooklyn, near both Cobble Hill and Whitman Parks
    - ii) In the living room of the Novak's apartment. There is a large coffee table with art books and two vases of fresh tulips. Two sets of seating, one for each couple. Access to the front door, to the kitchen, and to the bathroom.
  - b) How do the characters describe the place they are in?
    - i) Veronica: "The irony is, we've always regarded Cobble Hill Park as a haven of security, unlike Whitman Park." (1)
    - ii) Annette: "Those tulips are gorgeous." (2)
    - iii) Annette: "I see you're a great art lover." (14)
    - iv) Veronica: "What are we going to do about the Kokoschka? ...You can't find it! It went out of print years ago! ...It's a reprint of the catalogue from the '53 exhibition, more than twenty years old!" (26)
    - v) Michael: "My home, the doors of which I have opened wide in the spirit of reconciliation, to people who ought to be grateful for it!" (37)
    - vi) Veronica: "Terrible stink of Kouros!" (44)
    - vii) Veronica: "Cigars are not smoked in this house!" (56)
  - c) Is there any special significance to the place they are in?
    - i) It is clearly the Novak's apartment. The Raleighs are visitors, come to work out reparations for their son hitting the Novak's son.
- 2) When are they?
  - a) In what day, month, year, century, season, time of day, etc.?
    - i) Sometime after November 3, probably less than a week later. There's been time to arrange the meeting, and also to have Henry seen by an endodontic surgeon.
      - (a) Veronica: "At 5:30pm on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November...." (1)
      - (b) Veronica: "They're being cautious about the prognosis." (2)
      - (c) Veronica: "Our son, Henry, to whom I was obliged to give two Extra Strength Tylenol last night, is in the wrong?" (59)
    - ii) Play is set in our current time period. Alan uses a cell phone, Annette is in wealth management, Michael runs a wholesale household goods company, Veronica writes about art history. It's late in the fall, possibly with winter setting in.
    - iii) Time of day is not clearly specified. Middle of the day, after lunchtime– Alan keeps taking business phone calls and as he eats the clafouti that he never had lunch. The kids are likely all at school. Early enough that a meeting between Henry and Benjamin could meet that early.
  - b) Do the characters have anything specific to say about when they are?
    - i) Not beyond Veronica's initial statement of when the boys fought and the discussion of having them meet later that evening.
  - c) Is there any special significance to when they are? Is it, for instance, a national holiday?

- i) The significance of the meeting is that the parents are trying to work out how to have their children come to terms with Henry being injured by Benjamin. They do not seem to know each beyond these given circumstances.
- 3) Who are they?
- a) How are they related?
    - i) Michael and Veronica are married and are parents to Henry and Camille.
    - ii) Alan and Annette are married and are Benjamin's parents. Alan has another son from an earlier marriage.
    - iii) The two couples have not previously known one another, although Veronica remembers seeing Benjamin in a play the previous year at school.
  - b) What are their roles in life? Include jobs as well and professions as well as social and economic classes.
    - i) Michael owns a wholesale company specializing in household goods. Veronica is a writer and art historian. Alan is a lawyer with a large pharmaceutical company as a client. Annette works in wealth management.
    - ii) Both couples seem to be fairly well off, at least upper middle class. Alan and Annette are probably wealthier, although that's not clearly spelled out.
    - iii) What do they think of each other?
      - (a) Initially, quite civil, friendly, and tolerant. They plan to work out the problems their sons have had like adults. All four seem to be going out of their way to be polite and understanding.
        - (i) Annette: "We should be thanking you."  
Veronica: "I don't see that any thanks are necessary. Fortunately, there is still such a thing as the art of co-existence, isn't there?"  
Annette: "Which the children don't seem to have mastered. At least, not ours!" (1-2)
      - (b) Even early on, tensions arise, but are deliberately tamped down.
        - (i) Alan: "Armed?"  
Veronica: "Armed? You don't like armed, what shall we say, Michael, furnished, equipped, furnished with a stick, is that all right?"  
Alan: "Furnished, yes." (1)
        - (ii) Annette: "We're very touched by your generosity. We appreciate the fact you're trying to calm the situation down rather than exacerbate it."  
Veronica: "Frankly, it's the least we can do."  
Michael: "Yes!"  
Annette: "Not at all. How many parents standing up for their children become infantile themselves? If Henry had broken Benjamin's teeth, I'm afraid Alan and I would have been a lot more thin skinned about it. I'm not certain we'd have been so broad-minded." (10)
      - (c) As the play continues, tensions rise and fall. Annette gets overwhelmed and vomits on the coffee table and Alan's suit. Alan overhears Michael and Veronica making fun of Alan's nickname for Annette – Woof Woof. They try to defuse the situation by calling one another "Darjeeling."
        - (i) Veronica: "What a nightmare! Horrible!"  
Michael: "Tell you what, he'd better not push me any further."

- Veronica: "She's dreadful as well."  
Michael: "Not as bad."  
Veronica: "She's a phony."  
Michael: "Less irritating."  
Veronica: "They're both dreadful!" (27-28)
- (ii) Veronica: "What right do you have to say our marriage is fucked? Who gave you permission?"  
Alan: "Wasn't me who said it, it was Frank."  
Veronica: "Michael."  
Alan: "Michael, sorry."  
Veronica: "I forbid you to stand in any kind of judgment over our relationship."  
Alan: "Then don't stand in judgment over my son." (48-49)
- (d) Tensions also arise within the couples. Veronica takes issue with Michael's boasting about his own childhood fights. Alan and Annette argue about Benjamin's understanding of the incident and over Alan's involvement with their son. Michael and Veronica argue about Michael's apparent willingness to not take a stand.
- (i) Annette: "He has to apologize, Alan. He has to tell him he's sorry..." (6)  
Alan: "Madam, our son is a savage. To hope for any kind of spontaneous repentance would be fanciful." (12)  
Alan: "What do you mean made aware of his responsibilities?"  
Veronica: "I'm sure your son is not a savage."  
Annette: "Of course Benjamin isn't a savage."  
Alan: "Yes he is."  
Annette: "Alan, this is absurd, why say something like that?"  
Alan: "He's a savage." (13-14)
- (ii) Veronica: "Why do you keep siding with them?"  
Michael: "I don't keep siding with them, what are you talking about?"  
Veronica: "You keep vacillating, trying to play both sides against the middle."  
Michael: "No I don't."  
Veronica: "Yes, you do." (28)
- (iii) Alan: "What's the matter with you?"  
Annette: "I'm touched by your concern."  
Alan: "It's upsetting me!"  
Annette: "I am sorry. I must have misunderstood."  
Alan: "Oh, Annette, please! Let's not us start now! Just because they're fighting, just because their marriage is fucked, doesn't mean we have to compete!" (38)
- (iv) Veronica: "I think this is the unhappiest day of my life."  
Michael: "Drinking always makes you unhappy."  
Veronica: "Michael, every word that comes out of your mouth is destroying me." (56-57)
- (e) In the end, after several rounds of rising and falling tension, and several drinks, everyone is angry with everyone else.

- (i) Annette: "In my mind, there are wrongs on both sides. That's it. Wrongs on both sides."  
 Veronica: "Are you serious? ... My son, to whom I was obliged to give two Extra Strength Tylenol sat night, is in the wrong?"  
 Annette: "He's not necessarily innocent."  
 Veronica: "Fuck off! I've had quite enough of you. Fuck off!"  
 Annette: "What have I done to you?"  
 Veronica: "There are wrongs on both sides! Don't mix up the victims and the executioners!"  
 Michael: "You're so full of shit, Veronica, all this simplistic baloney, we're up to here with it!"  
 Veronica: "I stand by everything I said."  
 Annette: "Let's get out of here, Alan, these people are monsters."  
 Alan: "Stop it, Annette."  
 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 ass with your bill of rights!"  
 Veronica: "I told you! Didn't I tell you?"  
 Alan: "What di you tell him?"  
 Veronica: "That she was a phony."  
 Alan: "You'd known her for fifteen minutes but you could tell she was a phony?"  
 Michael: "It's true. They don't give a fuck! They haven't given a fuck since the start, it's obvious! Her too, you're right!"  
 Alan: "And you do, I suppose?"  
 Annette: "Alan, let's go! What are we doing staying in this dump?" (58-63)

- iv) What do they think of themselves?
- (a) Each character seems convinced of the rightness of their opinions. Early on, they seem to be patting themselves on the back over their willingness to be adults about the situation. As the play goes on, people become entrenched in their position. Michael defends himself from Veronica's attack, Alan sticks by his assertion that Benjamin is a savage, Veronica remains convinced of Annette's phoniness and bad intentions, and Annette concludes that Henry is as much in the wrong as Benjamin. With Annette's destruction of the tulips and the call from Camille, they stand in relative silence, seemingly shocked by their actions and words.
- v) Under what form of government do they live? What are their attitudes about the form of government under which they live?
- (a) None of the characters explicitly mentions the government. Since the play is set in the current era, the political system is a representative democracy. In a way, this is reflected in the play as each character is free to express their opinions. Overall, however, government is not an important part of this play.
- vi) What role does religion play in their lives? Which religion? What are their attitudes about their religion?

- (a) As with government, not expressly discussed by the characters. Rather than being driven by specific religious morality, the characters instead seem to be more concerned with societal norm. They all seem to have a desire to present themselves as good, modern parents who are meeting to resolve a fight between their sons. They try to rise above their children's dispute and act as they believe good parents should in their social circle.
- vii) What are the prevailing attitudes toward sex, family, marriage, and ethical conduct? Do they live within or rebel against these attitudes?
- (a) Sex is not discussed in the play.
- (b) As for family, it is apparently they all at least wish to give them impression of being concerned about, since they're meeting to talk about their sons' fight. In reality, Alan seems less concerned with family life (Annette says that he was never a "stroller dad.") Veronica and Michael both talk of the joys of raising children.
- (c) The attitudes toward marriage appear to change over the course of the play. At the start, they are all projecting an image of happily married couples, especially Michael and Veronica. Both couples have pet names for each other (Woof Woof and Darjeeling). In the end, there are serious strains apparent with both couples. Alan and Annette argue over her drinking during the play and Veronica and Michael argue about Michael's attitude toward the Raleighs, smoking in the house, the hamster.
- (d) Everyone seems to be horrified about Michael's treatment of the hamster, except for Michael who is convinced that he's in the right since he didn't want the hamster around in the first place. Alan's ethics are questionable, since he appears to be more interested in protecting his pharmaceutical client than whether they were in the wrong with their drug. Annette and Veronica have different takes on the ethics of their sons' actions surrounding their fight. They do all seem to be trying to find a way to work out the differences in an amicable fashion at first, but then it breaks down. However, in the end, they seem to be trying to at least be somewhat civil to one another.
- 4) What happened before the play began?
- a) Two eleven year old boys, Henry and Benjamin, have a fight over whether Benjamin will be included in Henry's group of friends. Benjamin hits Henry in the face with a stick, and two of his teeth and lip are injured. The Novaks have taken Henry to be examined by a specialist, however the prognosis for his teeth is uncertain. At some point, the Novaks and Raleighs have decided to meet to determine a civilized way to handle the outcome of the fight.
- b) Veronica, without Michael's knowledge, has bought a hamster for their nine-year-old daughter, Camille. Michael claims to have a fear of rodents and doesn't like the hamster. The night before the couples meet, he has released the hamster on the street so it won't interfere with Henry's health.
- c) Alan's client, a large pharmaceutical company, has released a drug, and are now accused on knowing that it has deleterious effects on patient health. Alan's law firm is working with the company on damage control. Michael's mother is having problems with her legs, and her doctor wants to put her on this medication.
- 5) What is the function of each character in the play?

- a) Protagonist / Antagonist
- i) All characters function as the protagonist and antagonist as the play progresses. There doesn't seem to be one specific person in each role, as it varies on a moment-by-moment basis. Alan initially seems to be antagonistic in his apparent disconnectedness from the proceedings (continually being interrupted, lack of engagement with parenting). As the play develops, the characters seem to be constantly shifting. Veronica becomes the antagonist to Michael's protagonist in their scene without the Raleighs as she accuses him of vacillating. Michael attacks Veronica later for bringing the hamster home, and also for dumping Alan's phone in a vase. Annette and Alan argue about Benjamin's savageness and the effects of Annette's drinking.
  - ii) At the same time, there are changing alliances throughout. At the beginning of the play, the couples each seem to be mutually supporting, supporting their partner's point of view. Michael does, in Veronica's eyes, vacillate on this, however they make an effort to pull together when Alan reenters. After a stage of early antagonism, Michael and Alan seem to bond over the rum and cigars, while Veronica and Annette at times seem to join forces. As the tensions boil over, for a time it seems that it's every person for themselves before the couples return to supporting one another, although in a more adversarial context than earlier.
  - iii) The notion of changing character functions is carried to the offstage characters as well. Initially, it seems that Henry is the clear protagonist in their encounter, while Benjamin is the antagonist. Later we learn that Henry had called Benjamin a snitch and wouldn't allow him into Henry's gang.
- 6) What kinds of dialogue do the characters speak?
- a) The characters speak in a fairly natural and realistic dialogue that seems correct for persons of their socio-economic stature. Because the play is a translation from the French, it does have a slightly elevated diction. Grammar is more formal than colloquial speech, although not excessively so.
- 7) What happens in the play?
- a) The play begins with the two couples having met to down to talk about arranging an apology from Benjamin to Henry. Both sets of parents attempt to be conciliatory and accommodating of one another. They talk about the fight, their occupations, and Veronica serves clafouti. Tensions begin to show when Annette says that the cause of the fight was that Henry wouldn't allow Benjamin in his group. Veronica initially takes issue, then backs down to keep the peace. The discussion continues, coming to the boys' fight and its consequences, then veering into safer territory while Alan continues to be interrupted by his firm and client, a pharmaceutical company whose drug is under examination for possible deleterious effects. Tensions rise, resulting in Annette vomiting violently on Alan's suit and Veronica's art books. After the clean up, the couples reassemble and continue the conversation and phone interruptions. At one point, accusations begin to fly when Michael's mother calls, changing the tension to the medication she's on, made by Alan's client. Alan and Annette prepare to leave when the conversation turns to Michael's treatment of the hamster. From this point on, the battle is joined in earnest as more and more vicious things are said by and about all the characters. Fed up with Alan's phone calls, Veronica tosses his phone in a vase,

destroying it. Alan is forced to talk with Michael's mother and tells her not to take the medication. Annette tries to refocus the conversation to the boys' meeting, and the final argument begins, ending with Annette sweeping the coffee table clear as she makes her way to the door. In the ensuing silence, the phone rings – Camille asks about the hamster.

- 8) What is the play's theme?
  - a) The play is in constant motion. The action does not move in a straight line from exposition through rising action to a climax. Rather, it is composed of many small rising actions and climaxes. Tensions build and are defused, frequently by a phone call which interrupts harsh words. Each beat does seem to gather momentum over the previous and the characters seem less able to bring the level of tension back to its initial low state. Alliances form and reform as the couples begin to argue amongst themselves as well as with each other. The play builds to an explosive climax with Annette sweeping the coffee table clear. Silence ensues, broken by a final phone call.
- 9) What are some relevant metaphors or similes to describe the play?
  - a) *God of Carnage* is like a tag team wrestling match. In the beginning the teams are the two couples who seem reluctant to engage in battle. As the action builds, the couples first argue with each other, and then characters begin to attack their partners. The teams reform several times, as the participants in the bout find common ground. There are several rounds in the match, interrupted by phone calls, snacks, vomiting, drinks, and cigars. In the end, the match is a draw.