



Yasmina Reza's Plays: A Faithful Picture of Bourgeois in Europe

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation has been composed solely by me and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own.

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Abstract

Bourgeois were always the favorite topic of the philosophers, novelists, poets and playwrights. Some writers have dealt with the subject of bourgeois in a serious manner; on the other hand, some have treated the topic and the bourgeois in satiric way. Bourgeois were well treated in the writing of the satirists, specifically in the play of the satirists. Among them Yasmina Reza's name is worth mentioning because through her plays the bourgeois of the postmodern era have come into light with their values, instinct and limitations. This dissertation paper aims to work on two plays of Reza, namely, *Art* and *God of Carnage* to find out if Reza's plays are faithful picture of Bourgeois in Europe. For better understanding of her plays some theories, such as, Marxism, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism and Deconstruction are applied. In the first chapter of this paper Marxism has been discussed; in the second chapter Postmodernism, Poststructuralism and Deconstruction have been discussed; and in the third chapter, *Art* and *God of Carnage* are discussed in details and theories mentioned above are applied. Through these discussions the result is drawn, that is, Yasmina Reza's plays are faithful picture of bourgeois in Europe.

Key words: Yasmina Reza, Bourgeois, Marxism, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, Deconstruction.

Introduction

“I work like a painter. If painter is doing a portrait of someone, he is not interested in their childhood. He paints what he sees” (Yasmina Reza: ‘There is no point in writing theatres if it’s not accessible’). This statement of Yasmina Reza describes her work aptly. Yasmina Reza, a French playwright of new generation, has marked the arena of theatre, not because of complexity of thought or absurdity, but because of simplicity. The plays of Yasmina Reza are full of humor conveying contemporary truths or the limitations of European society, specifically the bourgeois class. In *The Guardian*, Michael Billington hailed her as ‘a born satirist’. Actually, she has brought back the golden time of Comedy of Manners. The title of the dissertation says that it is a faithful picture of the bourgeois in Europe – bourgeois with all their limitations, triviality, and goodness to some extent. There are too much negative thoughts and views regarding the bourgeois, though nobody can deny the fact that without the bourgeois the society would extinct. The word ‘Bourgeois’ is derived from the French word ‘Bourgeoisie’, which means ‘The trading middle class’ (Communist League Britain). Eighteenth century is the time when this middle class society, consists of professionals from different arena along with literary and political personalities started demanding an active place in politics. Their role was to bring revolutionary changes in the society and to the economics. They did, but not in a heroic way, but by exploiting the proletariats (Encyclopaedia Britannica). That is why, for their significant role in the society they were always a favorite topic of the philosophers, novelists, poets, and playwrights. Different writers approached the topic differently, treated them differently. But they are well treated in the plays of satirists like Yasmina Reza.

This dissertation is dealing with two of Reza's critical and commercial success *Art* and *God of Carnage*. Bourgeois class is represented through these plays with all their values, instinct and limitations, such as, their hypocrisy, collapse of relationship, battle of ego, frustration, and language which never fulfill the need of communication, rather which is the weapon to degrade others. In *Art*, it seems the painting is the only reason for the collapse of the relationship of the friends. But, actually it is their ego, failure of language, and their pretention as art lovers. On the other hand, *God of Carnage* deals with two couples, gathered to resolve a school fight took place between their sons, which very soon turns out to be an ugly fight between them. Though superficially it seems that the reason behind the fight is their sons, there is lot more deep down under, and revealing the realities of modern cultured educated bourgeois class. Thus, Yasmina Reza has portrayed the middle class society in Europe and has a fame of being a moralist. She is "an absurdist moralist because she explains the evil in life showing it plainly and leaving to solve the problem she created. She shows the stereotype of a situation in which she includes all the aspects she wants to talk about" (Ciaramella 6). But she always been in a haze regarding the matter, that is, she neither admitted to be a moralist nor denied it. The aim of this dissertation is not to establish her as a moralist, but to find out to what extent her plays, specifically the chosen two plays, are true reflection of bourgeois in Europe. To do so, these plays are scrutinized through some theories, such as, Marxism, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism and Deconstruction. Marxism is an essential tool to know about class distinction, the bourgeois, and their role in the society, how they brought a revolutionary change in the society, the place of literature in Marxism, and how the prominent Marxists have treated literature. Postmodernism is essential to know about the culture and literary forms and norms of present time. Poststructuralism and

Deconstructive method are essential to know how a text can be decentered and subject to several interpretations. These theories are used for the better understanding of the plays of Yasmina Reza. Not only that these theories lights up the fact that though, Reza's plays deal with trivial happenings of everyday life, these are full of complex ideas. Also, these theories would help to establish that Yasmina Reza's plays are faithful picture of Bourgeois in Europe.

Chapter 1: Classic Marxism

Karl Marx, a German philosopher who belongs to an era of severe industrialization which created everlasting class distinction and inequality in the distribution of wealth. His belief was "that wealth should be distributed more equitably, that class difference should be abolished, that society should be devoted to providing for everyone's basic needs etc." (Rivkin and Ryan 644). This is the base of Marxism and socialism. Karl Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels dreamt of a classless society and socialism as universal truth. Nay, they argued that because of capitalism two classes will emerge – the class of poor proletariats or working class people and the wealthy bourgeois. When the proletariats will increase in number, the number of bourgeois will decrease eventually. And, it will be the reason of a socialist revolution, revolution of a classless society. It was mentioned by Joshua Muravchic in his article Marxism, "it would also assure that the socialist revolution would be the final revolution. Previous triumphant classes had themselves become the new exploiters, but since the proletariat would consist of almost everybody, whom could it exploit? Ergo, its rule would inaugurate the golden era of classlessness" (36). Their assumption proved false as the standard of living of the proletariats never fall, but rose. And the number of bourgeois instead of decreasing, increased rapidly. The second half of the nineteenth century marked something miracle. As mentioned

above, the standard of living of the workers in Europe, instead of falling, become twice better, and as Muravchic says, it continues until World War I. He also adds, “the middle class did not disappear but grew many times larger, and the wealth of the capitalists, although it certainly multiplied, became more dispersed and more concentrated” (36).

Marx and Engels started their *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* with the statement, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (3), while explaining bourgeois and proletariat. Bourgeois society is the phoenix who was born from the ashes of feudal society. Their evolution is worth mentioning. They started from the medieval serfs to medieval merchants. And from this merchant class the very first bourgeois class was developed. According to Marx and Engels, “Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie... has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeois and Proletariat” (4). What makes Marx and Engels angry about bourgeois that they themselves were exploited by the feudal society and through a massive revolution they are now what they are. As middle class they could play a revolutionary part for the Proletariat also, but they had to sway themselves in the pit of capitalism. There is a definition of proletariat in the *Communist Manifesto*, that is, “a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital” (12). The definition leads to another work of Marx, namely *Wage Labour and Capital*.

According to Marx, “Wages are, therefore, not the worker’s share in the commodity produced by him. Wages are the part of already existing commodities with which the capitalist buys for himself a specific amount of productive labour power” (660). The workers sell their labor power to the capital, in order to live and for their livelihood,

and eventually exploited by the capitalists, as the capitalists use their labor power for their own benefits. Bourgeois could have brought a revolutionary change for them. Because, whatever was touched by the Bourgeois turned into gold – barbarian nations turned into civilization. Bourgeois made the countries to be controlled by the towns. Not only that they had made the barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized countries; that are nations of the farmers were then dependent on the nations of bourgeois; the East was dependent on the West (Marx and Engels 9). Productive forces developed multiple times than any era or any century before. But, they used all that for their own benefit; they exploited the proletariats instead, for their own interests.

The claim of Marx, “The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production”, gave birth to a time where ideology ruled the world politics. It leads to another statement of Marx, that is, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (quoted in Selden et al. 88). And, the consciousness of an individual social being is dependent on the material motive of the dominant social class, as Selden himself says. (89). This is called ‘Hegemony’. Through this theory Antonio Gramsci explains the relationship between intellectuals and the world of production. He claimed intellectuals as the ‘functionaries’. Gramsci explains, there are two superstructural levels in the society, one is ‘civil society’ or ‘private’ and the other is ‘political society’ or ‘the state’. Now, where, the state or the political society directly dominates; the civil society or private dominates through their ideology, that is, they can dominate the mass with the consent of the mass. (673). These bourgeois did the same. They still hold the control, unlike Marxism claims,

through the consent of the working class, capitalists, and the state, with the help of their ideology.

Literature held a very important place in Marxism and Marxism is a distinctive section of theory in literature. The traditional Marxist model of society is made of ‘Base’ and ‘Superstructure’. Base, which is the material means of production, distribution and exchange; and ‘Superstructure’ which is the overall culture of ideas, art, religion, law, and so on. And, this overall culture is determined by the economic base, which is known as economic determinism, is the central belief of traditional Marxism (Barry 152). Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, in their *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, have come up with some statement regarding the relation between Marxism and literature. Marxism always emphasized on the context of literature, that is, “Marxism begins with the assumption that literature can only be understood if its full context— historical, economic, social, economic, cultural is taken into account.” (644). According to the Marxists, literature can expose the norms of the society which is unjust or detrimental; it can also mend and unite a class-torn society; it can favor the dominant class and it can present the class division as legitimate process; it can also reflect the contradictions between classes, ideologies, and realities which are clear threat for the society. (ibid 644-645). General Marxist criticism on literature views an artist’s or a writer’s social class and ideology has a grave influence on their creation so that they seem more of a propaganda rather than just art (Barry 152). According to George Steiner, there are two stem of Marxist literary criticism – Engelsian and Leninist. Engelsian criticism advocates the necessary freedom of art from political influence; on the other hand, Leninist criticism advocates art and literatures’ loyalty towards politics, banning experimentation, imposing ‘socialist realism’ (ibid 154). French Marxist Louis Althusser is a prominent Marxist, who has

highly influenced the present Marxists. Althusser deviates from the traditional Marxist base/structure model to show how the society works, without denying it thoroughly. He emphasizes ideology which he defines thus, “ideology is a system [possessing its logic and proper rigour] of representations [images, myths, ideas or concepts according to the case] endowed with an existence and an historical role at the heart of a given society” (ibid 157). This definition marks culture including literature having a significant place in a society. Art and culture has a level of autonomy and determined by the economic base ‘in the last instance’. He also reflects that how the State exploit this ideology using ‘State ideological apparatus’, such as, political parties, schools, the media, churches, the family, and art. People are made thinking that they have the freedom to choose, but the reality is what they choose are actually imposed upon them. Thus, Althusser has slightly denied the crude traditional base/superstructure mode of Marxism, without denying the belief of Marxism altogether.

One of the major Marxists is George Lucacs, who is known for his orthodox socialist realism. Inspired by Hegelian Marxism, he claims that literature should reflect the society with all its ‘underlying pattern of contradictions’ as a whole in a social order. He is Marxist in his attitude towards literature because he believed historical forces shapes individual behavior and an artist should connect individual activities to its particular social and historical context (Selden et al. 96). He was Hegelian in his thought as he supported the dialectical view of history, that is, “development in history is not random or chaotic, nor is it a linear progression, but rather a dialectical development” (ibid 95). He was against the modernists and modern literature. For him, modernists deny human existence as a part of dynamic historical environment; rather modernists focus on the individual history of absurd human existence (ibid 96). On the other hand, Bertolt Brecht, another prominent

Marxist and playwright, rejected the orthodoxy of Lucacs. His plays were radical and anti-bourgeois but not anti-capitalist. He rejected the Socialist realism as, it demands realistic illusion, formal unity, and positive hero. He invented a theory of realism which he called anti- Aristotelian. He denied the interconnected plot, formal unity of Aristotelian theatre, and the inevitability or universality of reality. He presented reality as something shocking and unnatural using his alienation effect, so that, audience would develop a critical sensibility regarding reality. He completely denied the ‘eternal aesthetic laws’. He argues that “We shall take care not to ascribe realism to a particular historical form of novel belonging to a particular period” (quoted in Selden et al. 98). He also emphasizes, there is no definite formula or method to represent reality as, “Methods wear out, stimuli fail. New problems loom up and demand new techniques. Reality alters; to represent it the means of representation must alter too” (quoted in Selden et al. 99). His experimental view on aesthetics is apparent from the quote.

Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin belonged to the Frankfurt School of Marxist aesthetics. Whereas, Lucacs and Brecht have different views on realism, Frankfurt school kind of rejected realism, but supported Hegelian social system. Adorno believes that literature should not be directly connected with reality. Aloofness from reality can give an art a significant meaning and critical power, for instance, modernist writings, which do not reflect reality directly, rather use allusions to represent reality. Thus, art should work as an ‘irritant’ within the reality. According to him, “art is the negative knowledge of the actual world” (quoted in Selden et al. 100). That is why he supported modernists’ experimental text, rather than direct critical works. The Hegelian belief is “the development which arises from the resolution of contradictions inherent in a particular aspect of reality” (ibid 101).

Adorno influenced by the Hegelian belief argues that the fragments in modern art focus individuals' loss of conscious control in modern society, or, in the dialectic sense, individuals' loss of autonomy in the massive monolithic market system (ibid 102). Walter Benjamin, a friend of Adorno and also a Brechtian, is a unique kind of Marxist. He kind of prophesied the 'postmodern' culture and forms while arguing his views on art. He argued that modern technology had changed the work of art. He predicted 'simulacra' in art and art being open to politics. He was not concerned about the work of art's position within the social and economic relations of its time; rather he was concerned about the literary production relations of its time. He was concerned about the technologies and techniques an artist should adopt relevant of his time, which will arise as a response to a 'complex historical combination of social and technical changes (ibid 103).

Among the present Marxists, Terry Eagleton and Fredric Jameson is noteworthy. There are different phases in Terry Eagleton's work. He was influenced by Althusser, Brecht, Benjamin, Derrida, Lenin, Frankfurtian school and so on. At first, he was influenced by Althusser and like him argued in his *Criticism and Ideology* that criticism should be like science; but, disagrees with him regarding the relation of literature and ideology. Unlike Althusser, he is not willing to distance literature from ideology; rather, he sees literature as the production of ideology (Selden et al. 110). In the late 1970, his works seems to have a grave influence of poststructuralist thought, also has an influence of revolutionary thought of Brecht and Benjamin, but has contradictory views on deconstructive theory. On one hand, he applauds the theory for its rejection of "all certainties, all fixed, and absolute forms of knowledge", on the other hand, criticizes it for its "petit- bourgeois denial of 'objectivity' and material 'interests'" (ibid 111). Now his works has an apparent influence of Lenin, which is

mentioned in Selden thus, “The Tasks of Marxist Criticism are now set up by politics and not by philosophy: the critic must dismantle received notions of literature and reveal their ideological role in shaping the subjectivity of the readers” (111).

Gradually, his works change direction. Though, he was not a supporter of Frankfurt school earlier, his *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* has Frankfurtian touch. His later works are described as work of ‘cultural materialism’ and opens the door of ‘new breadth and dexterity’ and ‘biting humour’ in the postmodern era. (ibid 112). Fredric Jameson’s works are deeply influenced by Frankfurt school and Marxist dialectical criticism. According to him, “in the post-industrial world of monopoly capitalism the only kind of Marxism which has any purchase on the situation is a Marxism which explores the great themes of Hegel’s philosophy” (ibid 113). Through the Marxist dialectic criticism he delineates how deeply connected are literary forms and reality. Also, he is of the view that literature often suppresses the historical truth which is apparent in his *The Political Unconsciousness*. This work is the collaboration of dialectic theory, structuralism, poststructuralism, Freud, Althusser, Adorno, and Marxism. He is also of the view that Narrative is the essential medium to represent history. He is a kind of Marxist who tries to reconcile Postmodernism and Marxism, apparent in his work *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

Literature was always an effective medium to represent the Bourgeois class in all era. It was also used as a weapon against the bourgeois. Marx and Engels have dedicated a chapter namely, “Socialist and Communist Literature” in their *The Communist Manifesto*, regarding the place of literature portraying the bourgeois, which is divided in three parts – i) Reactionary Socialism, which consists Feudal socialism, Petty-Bourgeois socialism, and German or True socialism; ii) Conservative or Bourgeois socialism; iii) Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism. Social

context is very important in literature as literature portrays the society and the culture relative to it. That is why politics is something belongs to the relative culture makes its way anyway in that literature. But question is, if it is controlled by the politics or not. In Elizabethan period and even in Jacobean period literature was highly controlled by the politics. Now, literature is not that much controlled by politics, that is, literature is less bound by politics. But, social context is something literature cannot escape. For example, if the content of Yasmina Reza's plays is considered, her plays are apparently taken from their social context. The two plays *Art* and *God of Carnage* are also based on the social context of the current society. The bourgeois, with their limitations and their hypocrisy are presented very faithfully in her plays.

Chapter 2: Postmodernism, Poststructuralism and Deconstruction

Talking about postmodern era, Jim Powell has been raised an interesting question – “is it POSTmodernISM, postMODERNism, PoStmOdErNism, post-modernism or Postmodernism?” (7). Though, the preface ‘post’ suggests something follows modernism, still there is a doubt regarding if it is a break from modernism or the continuation of modernism. Peter Barry suggests, “They are not two successive stages in the history of the arts, but two opposed moods or attitudes” (80), that is, whatever modernists lamented, postmodernists celebrate. Postmodern tends to experiment more and more; celebrates fragmentation; the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture is marred; and the distinction between ‘reality’ and ‘unreality’ is blurred. It is important to go through the prominent postmodern thinkers for better understanding of postmodernism.

One of the prominent postmodern thinkers is Jean- Francois Lyotard. He belonged to the revolutionary Marxist group, but soon was disillusioned by socialism

and Marxism. In his book *Discourse, Figure*, he argues that unconscious is not like language, but like dream. He has shown difference between ‘seen’ or ‘figural’, the visual and three-dimensional and ‘read’ or ‘discursive’, the textual and two-dimensional (Selden et al. 207). The figural nature of unconscious is unable to represent itself through language. This ‘repression’ is kind of modern element and according to Lyotard, “art which participates in this postmodern awareness of difference and heterogeneity will therefore critique and destabilize the closures of modernity. It will explore the ‘unsayable’ and ‘invisible’.” (ibid 208). His *The Postmodern Condition* became the landmark of postmodernism as it surveyed the status of science and technology and his criticism on the incredulity of metanarratives. According to Lyotard, science cannot legitimize itself and for legitimation it was dependent on two metanarratives – “human liberation associated with the Enlightenment and the revolutionary tradition, or that of the prospective unity of all knowledge associated with Hegelianism” (ibid 208). These two metanarratives lost their credulity during the World War II. For that reason, science sought its shelter to performativity and new experiments. Lyotard unlike other postmodern thinkers argues that postmodern is the continuation of modern and says, “The postmodern is undoubtedly part of the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself” (quoted in Selden et al. 209).

Another prominent and most influential postmodern thinker is Jean Baudrillard, who raised question regarding the effectiveness of Marxism and Structuralism in postmodern era. Though he was influenced by Marxist thought, he found Marxism incapable to reflect the late capitalist society, specifically, the postmodern lifestyle. According to Marx, a commodity has a use value and exchange value; but, for Baudrillard a commodity also have a ‘social value’, that is, a

commodity, in the postmodern era hold consumers' prestige, rank and social position in the society. Now people do not buy things because they are useful, they buy things to distinguish themselves from others. They buy things to achieve a higher position in the society. And interesting fact is, to achieve this position people have to buy a whole system of these commodities. It explains peoples' fetish over the latest fashion and trends. Moreover, His most influential work is *Simulacra and Simulation*. The word 'Simulacra' is the plural of simulacrum which refers to copy without an original; that leads to 'hyperreality, which means, when imitations or imagination took over the place of real. Baudrillard suggests, "signs no longer correspond to, or mask, their real-life referent but replace it in a world of autonomous floating signifier; there has been an implosion of image and reality" (Selden et al. 205); on which Neville Wakefield comments, which "leads into the simulated non-space of hyperreality" (ibid 205). According to Baudrillard, just because people are so surrounded by the simulacra that they have no choice of their own anymore; in fact, postmodern era deleted that notion of 'true copy' (*Postmodernism for Beginners* 54-55). And, since, the signs and codes have no connection with reality; they create their own world of hyperreality.

Baudrillard has brought the example of Disneyland, which is the simulacrum of America itself (Barry 85). Now, simulacra have become 'model' for the postmodern people. For example, 'remixes' are now original; 'remakes' are now original; and people are swallowing these without questioning them. According to Baudrillard, people are actually seduced by the television and media (*Postmodernism for Beginners* 67). In fact, he criticized the television and media vehemently, when he states that the Gulf War was not a real war but a television war; a war "without the symptoms of war" (Selden et al. 205).

Fredric Jameson, as mentioned earlier, is a prominent Marxist as well as an influential postmodern thinker. Among other Marxists he is the one who tries to reconcile Marxism and Postmodernism. As he is deeply influenced by Marxist dialectic theory, he while describing the relation between object and individual, takes shelter to historical reality. But, postmodern society made it a little difficult for him. The era is marked with fragmentation, heterogeneity, plurality, ambivalence, lack of permanence. That is why Jameson found it difficult to trust the era, nay, he could not agree with Lyotard that postmodern is the continuation of modern. In his *Postmodernism: or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* he has marked the era as the “intensification and latest phase of a capitalist world” (*Postmodernism for Beginners* 35), where everything and everyone is commoditized. Nay, he found a relation between “electronic and nuclear-powered technology of the multinational global economy and the depthless, fragmented and randomly heterogeneous images of postmodernist culture” (Selden et al. 211). Being influenced by Ernest Mandel, Jameson claimed three cultural periods, each has its own unique cultural characteristics. First one is the age of Realism – age of Bourgeois and historical novel. Second is the age of Modernism – this age was dissatisfied with the world, which was appreciated by Jameson. And, the third age is the age of Postmodernism. While delineating the postmodern cultural forms, he marked the fragmentation of language communities and states – “each speaking a curious private language of its own, each profession developing its private code or dialect, and finally each individual coming to be a kind of linguistic island, separated from everyone else” (quoted in *Postmodernism for Beginners* 37). He also marked the blurred line between ‘high’ culture and ‘low culture – “postmodern fascination with the ‘whole’ ‘degraded’ landscape of schlock and kitsch, TV soaps and Readers’ Digest , advertising motels

the late show, grade-B Hollywood film and pulp fiction” (Selden et al. 211). And, this commercial culture is directly incorporated into postmodern culture, according to Jameson’s belief. (ibid 211). Absence of subject and loss of history has led to disappearance of individual style and loss of originality. That is why, according to Jameson, this era was unable to produce literary forms like parody or satire, but ‘pastiche’ (*Postmodernism for Beginners* 38). Jameson is known for his compromising attitude towards postmodernism. Though he accepted the fragmented and dispersed image of postmodernism, he wishes to retain the dialectic Marxist belief.

Among other postmodern thinkers Terry Eagleton is utterly negative and brutal when it comes to postmodernism. He is an orthodox Marxist like Lenin. According to him, postmodern does not refer to a particular historical period, but it is the product of political and historical failure. It is apparent from his definitions of Postmodernity – “Postmodernity is a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity, and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation” (*The Illusions of Postmodernism* vii) and Postmodernism – “Postmodernism is a style of culture which reflects something of this epochal change, on a depthless, decentered, ungrounded, self-reflexive, playful, derivative, eclectic, pluralistic art which blurs the boundaries between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ culture, as well as between art and everyday experience” (ibid vii). Eagleton states that the politics of postmodernism is marked by enrichment and evasion, simultaneously (24). On one hand, the topic like feminism and ethnicity marks the vital political struggle; on the other hand, these topics are essentially anti-capitalistic, that is, these topics distract people from the topic of class-distinctions and exploitations. At one point, Eagleton argues that, postmodernism is as exclusive and censorious as orthodoxies it resists –

“One may by and large , speak of human culture but not human nature, gender but not class, the body but not biology, jouissance but not justice, post-colonialism but not the petty bourgeois” (26). History of postmodernism is kind of oblivious. According to Eagleton, there is no one in this era to hold the belief that history has a purpose; history has a logic of its own; history is unlinear, progressive, and deterministic (45). The subjects of postmodernism are basically ‘the body’, as identity; and ‘language’, which serves nothing. At last, he talks about both the positive and negative side of postmodernism—

Its rich body of work on racism and ethnicity, on the paranoia of identity-thinking, on the perils of totality and the fear of otherness: all this, along with its deepened insights into the cunning of power, would no doubt be of considerable value. But its cultural relativism and moral conventionalism, its scepticism, pragmatism and localism, its distaste for ideas of solidarity and disciplined organization, its lack of any adequate theory of political agency: all these would tell heavily against it (134).

But he ends his argument by stating, “postmodernism is in the end part of the problem rather than of the solution” (135), that marks his attitude towards postmodernism which is far from being positive.

Like postmodernism, there is a doubt regarding poststructuralism as well. Some believes that it is a continuation of structuralism; on the other hand, some believe that it is an anti-structuralism movement. The latter is true to some extent. Whereas, structuralism originates from linguistics and nurtured by scientific methods, system and reason, poststructuralism originates from philosophy and skeptic regarding the scientific methods, system and reason (Barry 61), that is,

poststructuralism “tries to deflate the scientific pretensions of structuralism” (Selden et al. 150). Terry Eagleton in his book *Literary Theory and Introduction*, while discussing post structuralism argues, “If structuralism divided the sign from the referent, this kind of thinking – often known as ‘post-structuralism’ – goes a step further, it divides signifier from the signified.” (111). Poststructuralism is seen in Saussure’s linguistic theory. Realizing the arbitrariness of the linguistic system he states, “A linguistic system is a series of differences of sound combined with a series of differences of ideas” (quoted in Selden et al. 151). For example, the signifier ‘cat’ is different from ‘hat’, ‘hat’ is different from ‘hot’, ‘hot’ is different from ‘pot’, ‘pot’ is different from ‘cot’; and all of these are signifiers of different signifieds; thus they work as two different system of signs. When a particular signifier is attached to a particular concept, they create a unified whole of a signifier and signified, thus preserves the meaning of that concept. But, Saussure could not realize how complicated the chain of meaning could be. It is apparent from dictionary, as, against one signified there is a chain of signifiers, even a chain of cross-currents of meaning.

Terry Eagleton seems to be concern about that characteristic of language system. He questions Saussure’s view on unified whole of signified and signifier as “meaning is the spin-off of a potentially endless play of signifiers, rather than a concept tied firmly to the tail of a particular signifier.” (*Literary Theory and Introduction* 110). He also come up with the example of dictionary and reminds the same thing mentioned above. According to him, signifiers keep transforming into signified, and signified into signifiers; and it is impossible to come to a fixed signified, as, it would turn to be signifier itself (111). In short, meaning is not actually present in a sign, that is, meaning is deferred. Meaning of a sentence is understandable, when the meaning of the organized words in that sentence modify

each other. According to him, “we can never quite close our fists over meaning, which arises from the fact that language is a temporal process.” (111). It leads to the fact that no sign is ‘pure’ or ‘fully meaningful’. A sign takes up meaningful entity while encountered in different situations. System of language is not stable as structuralists thought it to be. According to Eagleton, language —

Instead of being a well-defined, clearly demarcated structure containing symmetrical units of signifiers and signifieds, it now begins to look much more like a sprawling limitless web where there is a constant interchange and circulation of elements, where none of the elements is absolutely definable and where everything is caught up and traced through everything else (112).

It questions the traditional structuralist thought that function of sign is to present the reality. It also question the prejudice that, spoken signs tend to express more than written signs, or purer than written signs. It questions the western philosophy of ‘transcendental signifier and signifieds’. This web-like complexity leads to the term, which poststructuralists call ‘text’, that is, knowledge are not only made of concepts, but also of words. Indeed, Terry Eagleton is influenced by Jaques Derrida and his ‘deconstruction’ method.

Derrida, as a poststructuralist, questions the very notion of center which structuralists advocates. Deconstruction usually “is a tactic of decentering, a way of reading, which first makes us aware of the centrality of the central term. Then it attempts to subvert the central term so that the marginalised term become central. The marginalised term temporarily overthrows the hierarchy” (*Derrida for Beginners*26). Western philosophy back then was based on the notion of center and this notion of center created binary opposites, with one hierarchical term known as central and the

other is known as marginal. According to Derrida, Western philosophy works in the same way, as it “forming pairs of binary opposites in which one member of the pair is privileged, freezing the play of the system, and marginalizing the other member of the pair” (ibid 25). What Derrida does is, he reverses the system, that is, he changes the hierarchical position within the system. But this new hierarchy is as unstable as the older hierarchy. Thus, a system or a text is open to several non-stable interpretations.

When it comes to the theory of ‘deconstruction’, Derrida mostly deals with some text or non-concepts consists of double meanings or several meanings. In his essay *Differance*, he deals with the same. In this essay, Derrida alludes to Saussure. According to Saussure’s view, “all language consists of differences... all elements of language have identity only in so much as they are produced by a network of differences, and each element will itself consist of further differentiations, endlessly” (*Differance* 278). Identity of a sign depends on its difference from other signs, which are hanging in some space and time; and the meaning of that particular sign will present itself when the space and time will be crossed. So, differance does not only mean to differ, but also “to defer, to delay or put off till later” (*Derrida for Beginners* 118). While explaining differance, Derrida says —

Differance is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be ‘present’, appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element... in order for it to be, an interval must separate it from what it is not; but the interval that constitutes it in the present... constituting itself dynamically dividing itself, this interval is what could be called spacing; time’s becoming spatial or space’s becoming temporal (*Differance* 287).

Derrida concludes this essay by arguing that “all things are signs and all realities are ‘textual’, in that all parts refer to or signify other parts, which are themselves signifier of other parts” (ibid 279). He also argues that literary critics often mistake deconstruction as a technic of subvert the binary opposites, but deconstruction is a tactic to question the values and assumptions of the metaphysical philosophical tradition (ibid 279).

Now, in his *Of Grammatology*, he explains how in the West speech is regarded central and natural and writing is marginal and unnatural; and exposes how this binary opposite deconstructs itself. This bias towards speech is known as logocentrism. Logocentrism is derived from ‘logos’; which, according to Greek thought, is “a cosmic principle hidden deep within human beings, within speech and within the natural universe” (*Derrida for Beginners* 33). And, according to Western philosophy, these logos, which are regarded as central of all expression and words, involve metaphysics of presence. This metaphysics of presence is the belief which says, “there is a transcendental signified, a God-Word that underlies all philosophical talk and guarantees its meaning” (ibid 36). For the Western thinkers, speech is present, it is immediate, and that is why it is central. On the other hand, writing is somewhat haunted with absence, somewhat distant. Logocentric metaphysics regards writing as a ‘defective addition to presence’ (*Of Grammatology* 301). Derrida says, “The epoch of logos debases writing considered as mediation of mediation and as a fall into the exteriority of meaning” (ibid 308). He also quotes Aristotle, “spoken words [ta en te phone] are the symbols of mental experience [pathematates psyches], and written words are the symbols of spoken words” (ibid 307). Like Aristotle, Saussure hails speech as the sign of inner meaning and writing as the sign of speech; also adds, writing used in the absence of speech (*Derrida for Beginners* 40). According to

Saussure, sign is the play of difference which creates sounds and meanings. And this play of difference is same in both case of speech and writing. For example, 'cat' is different from 'hat' in both sound and meaning. And it is applicable to both speech and writing. While marginalizing writing, Saussure forgets that "an inside of language that is speech from an outside that is the realm of writing and graphic notation" (*Of Grammatology* 301). On the other hand, Jean JaquesRousseu, though, prioritized speech over writing, confessed that he must take shelter to writing to express his innermost thoughts, as he is a writer, and declared writing as the 'dangerous supplement of speech' (*Derrida for Beginners* 51). Now, Derrida grabs attention to the fact that 'supplement' in French has two meaning; to add on to and to substitute (ibid 51). If speech needs a supplement, whether it means to add or to substitute, it is not full of presence, that is, there is a lacking somewhere in it. Derrida points out that fact and reverse this binary opposite of speech/writing. It seems that this supplement is also nothing but play of difference. Thus, he applied his deconstructive method explicitly on the writers and proved his point.

Chapter 3: Peeping through *Art and God of Carnage*

Christopher Hampton, the English translator of Reza's plays sees her plays as satires on bourgeois values, behavior and hypocrisy. (Dawson 8). Reza's plays are essentially based on social context as she herself says, "Theatre is a mirror, a sharp reflection of society. The greatest playwrights are moralists." (Yasmina Reza: 'There's no point in writing theatre if it's not accessible'). Earlier, in the first chapter, how literature held a crucial place in Marxism and how Marxists treat literature, was discussed. Marxism always gave preference to the overall context of literature, that is, historical context, economic context, social context and cultural context. Marxism also believes literature can expose what is unjust and detrimental in society; it can

mend the class-divided society; even can favor the dominant class and present class-distinction as a legitimate process. According to General Marxist criticism, a writer's social class and ideology has a grave influence on their work that it seems more of a propaganda rather than art. In case of Yasmina Reza, this statement is true to some extent. Of course her social position and ideology has a grave influence on her works and those are propaganda to some extent as she herself said that the greatest playwrights are moralists. It is quite apparent from the earlier discussion that more or less all prominent Marxists agreed on the influence of social and cultural context in literature; but they could not agree with one another on the way of representing reality. It is very interesting to see how Reza has represented the Bourgeois in Europe. Of course her plays are very much connected with social context but she skips orthodoxy of socialist realism. She presents reality as simply as possible, as she sees it around her society as she says "there is no point in writing theatre if it's not accessible"(Yasmina Reza: 'There's no point in writing theatre if it's not accessible')

The subject matter of *God of Carnage* is derived from a fight between two boys from her son's school, as she explains—

There was a little incident in the life of my son...He was then about 13 or 14 and his friend was in a fight with another friend; they exchanged blows and my son's friend had his tooth broken. A few days later, I met with the mother of this boy in the street. I asked her how her son was, if he was better, because I knew they'd had to do something to the tooth – they'd had to operate or something. And she said, 'Can you imagine? The parents [of the other boy in the fight] didn't even call me.' (Yasmina Reza: 'There's no point in writing theatre if it's not accessible').

And, fetish over collecting famous painter's paints is not a distant reality as it is seen in *Art*. She neither presents reality as something unnatural or shocking like absurd plays, nor, her plays are aloof from reality. Her presentation is saturated with 'biting humour', though reflects some complex ideas. Her plays are essentially the products of time as she applied the methods and the technologies as per the time demands. Her plays are anti-bourgeois of course but not anti-capitalist. It seems she was not happy with the role played by the bourgeois in the society like Marx and Engels. That is why, she portrayed the bourgeois from a satiric light, represented them with all their limitations. Though she was never clear about her position as moralist, she acts like one through being a satirist.

It was mentioned earlier that the Bourgeois were always the favorite topic of the writers, poets, and playwrights. There are some modern and postmodern plays which were based on the contemporary social context and hence the faithful portrayal of class relationships. For example, the famous play of Eugene O'Neill namely *The Hairy Ape*. The protagonist Yank, the fireman of a ship searches for a belonging in the society controlled by the bourgeois and the capitalists when the daughter of a rich industrialist Mildred calls him a 'filthy beast'. The ship itself is the metaphor of class distinction, upper deck or promenade deck is for the upper class people like Mildred and the firemen's forecastle is for the lower class people or the labor like Yank. Even their dialect is not same. Another labor namely Long is thoroughly Marxist in his thought when he says, "I wants to convince yer she was on'y a representative of 'erclarss. I wants to awaken yer bloody clarss consciousness. Then yer'll see it's 'erclarssyer've got to fight, not 'er alone" (O'Neill 35). Ultimately, Yank's search for a belonging in the society disheartens him, crushes his self-respect, and eventually leads him to death by the embrace of a gorilla. Another important play is *Look Backin*

Anger by John Osborne. The play is based on the angry young man generation who were frustrated by the bourgeois society. The protagonist Jimmy Porter, owner of a small sweet shop, seems to be frustrated by anything which has a connection with bourgeois. He seems to be frustrated by the newspapers when he says, “Do the Sunday papers make you feel ignorant?” (Osborne 11). He feels those newspapers are in Bourgeois’ favor. He gets frustrated by church bell – “Oh, hell! Now the bloody bells have started!” (ibid 25). He believes the church serves for the Bourgeois. He seems to be true in his belief when he makes a remark on the Bishop – “Ah yes. He’s upset because someone has suggested that he supports the rich against the poor. He says he denies the class distinctions. ‘This idea has been persistently and wickedly fostered by – the working classes!’ Well!” (ibid 14). He taunts his wife who is the daughter of a retired military officer, and mock her friend and his soon to be lover Helena Charles who is a dancer and whom he hates because she entertains the bourgeois class. These two plays explicitly expose the tension between classes. But there are some other plays which are not explicit as these two plays regarding portrayal of class distinction and bourgeois.

There are an absurd play of Samuel Beckett, namely, *Waiting for Godot*. Here, the much debated Godot is portrayed as a capitalist. According to the Boy, Godot owns sheeps, goats and lands, and he seems to favor the goat-herd boy over the shepherd boy. He acts like a capitalist who promise to meet the tramps Estragon and Vladimir, but never meets them, rather sends a boy as a messenger. On the other hand, Pozzo, is the perfect example of a Bourgeois. Pozzo imitates the capitalist, exploits Lucky, claims Lucky to be dependent on him – “He wants to impress me, so that I’ll keep him” (Beckett 70), or when he says, “He imagines that when I see him indefatigable I’ll regret my decision. Such is his miserable scheme. As though I were

short of slaves!”(ibid 71). But, soon the scenario changes, Pozzo becomes blind and dependent upon Lucky; but the condition of Lucky does not change. There is another play of Harold Pinter, namely *The Caretaker*. Pinter is the contemporary playwright of Reza. Davies was a trump, always denied a place among the Bourgeois – “Ten minutes off for a tea break in the middle of the night in that place and I couldn’t find a seat, not one. All them Greeks had it, Poles, Greeks, Blacks, the lot of them, all them aliens had it. And they had me working... treating me like dirt” (Pinter 2). Moreover, Davies who is the caretaker now and Mick who is one of the two brothers, in their pretensions and lies simply reveals the characteristics of the Bourgeois. These plays actually focus on the existential crisis and absurdity of human existence more than class distinction or Bourgeois related problems. Yet, there are glimpse of all these, as a piece of art could not escape its social context.

Yasmina Reza’s plays are little different from all these plays. Her plays neither exhibits class distinction explicitly, nor explores existential crisis. Her plays simply represent the Bourgeois as they are, with all their limitations, hypocrisy, pretensions, ego, and in some cases goodness as well. It is apparent from the play *Art*, where two friends, Serge and Marc, argue over a painting. Serge bought a modern paint of a famous artist, namely Antrios, by two thousand francs, which Marc thinks as an utter stupidity. This attitude of Marc is obviously not liked by Serge, as the painting is for him ‘Antrios’, though the painting does not make any sense, and Marc is like to him, “one of those new-style intellectuals, who are not only enemies of modernism, but seem to take some sort of incomprehensible pride in running it down” (*Art* 6).

Actually, Serge is considering him as a collector of modern paintings or ‘fashionable’ paintings, as Marc says to Yvan, “You don’t see that suddenly, in some grotesque way, Serge sees himself as a ‘collector’ ” (ibid 11). This pretension is one of the

characteristics of European Bourgeois of present time. Again, they are being so pretentious when they fight over classic painting and modern painting, hardly knowing well about these two. Hypocrisy is seen in them, through their monologues, or each of them talks with Yvan. Even, Yvan is seemed to be hypocrite, though he is not. He was just trying to bring reconciliation between his two friends. Ego is something Marc and Serge cannot escape. But, it seems, Marc is more plagued by ego than anyone else. It is apparent from Serge's monologue, "Could buying the Antrios have triggered his feeling of constraint between us? Buying something... without his approval?" (ibid 22). And, it is true as he himself admits that he is not happy about Serge buying this painting without his approval. Or, when he says Yvan has no opinion of his own, or he is 'spineless', because Yvan does not agree with his opinion. Serge is also filled with ego, when he talks about art. He seems to be egoist when he talks about modern art; or about 'deconstruction', as Marc points in his monologue, "it wasn't so much the word deconstruction that upset me, it was the air of solemnity you imbued it with" (ibid 23); or when he suggests Marc to read Seneca. Actually, it was not the painting but their ego which worsened their relationship. Serge, Marc, and Yvan represent Bourgeois class. These Bourgeois are portrayed with all their limitations, but, not completely in a negative light. Reza concludes this play positively, three friends ultimately reconciled, suggesting Bourgeois are not totally devoid of human qualities.

The play *God of Carnage*, also portrays two bourgeois couple – Novaks and Raleighs; educated, cultured, trying to resolve a school fight taken place between their sons. The play begins within an uncomfortable atmosphere. Their ego and hypocrisy has been projected through their conversation from the very beginning. It is apparent that the couples are just trying to be nice with each other. The Raleighs have come to

visit the Novaks as Novaks' son Henry was struck by the Raleighs' son Benjamin. There was no greeting from each other's part, rather their conversation starts with Veronica saying – "So this is our statement... you'll be doing your own, of course" (*God of Carnage* 2). Also, Veronica while describing the situation uses the word 'armed' – "Benjamin Raleigh, eleven, armed with a stick, struck our son Henry Novak in the face" (ibid 2). Veronica's first statement is very much stuffed with ego. It is apparent that Veronica some way or the other tries to show that she is well-educated, well-read, cultured more than anyone else, as she is a writer – "I contributed to a collection on the civilization of Sheba, based on the excavations that were restarted at the end of the Ethiopian-Eritrean war. And I have a book coming out in January on the Darfur tragedy" (ibid 5); again she says, "We try. We try to fill the gaps in the education system... We're eccentric enough to believe in the soothing powers of culture" (ibid 15). On the other hand, Alan tries to show how much he can spend as he is a lawyer – "The swelling on his lip will go down, and as for his teeth, take him to the best dentist, I'm prepared to chip" (ibid 11). At first, it looks like Veronica and Alan are the characters stuffed with ego, but eventually it becomes clear that not only them but every character is stuffed with ego, even their sons, and this ego leads to a hideous fight between them. Alan's hypocrisy is very much apparent from the phone calls. He is trying to save his client Verenz- pharma inspite of knowing that his client is absolutely wrong; and he is thinking about his profit only, misusing his profession. Alan is being the perfect representative of bourgeois by favoring his capitalist client. Veronica's hypocrisy is seen when she was pretending to be caring about Annette, but could not stop remarking her as 'phony' when Annette was not nearby; also, were laughing on her nickname 'Woof-woof' given by her husband (ibid 26-27). Actually everyone is hypocrite here, being nice in front of each other only, ultimately revealing

their true face. They are hypocrite, pretending to be cultured and educated, which they are not. Annette and Veronica are not what they show; they are not educated or cultured enough; they use slangs and throw each other's staff. Michael and Alan are not proper gentlemen. They are all run by their instinct. Their ego and hypocrisy lead them towards an ugly fight ultimately. This play does not end with a positive note as it is full of complex ideas.

Reza's plays are postmodern from the core. Though, according to Jameson, postmodern era is incapable of producing any other literary forms but pastiche, Reza's plays are perfect satires. In fact her plays can be termed as postmodern Comedy of Manners as her plays satirizes norms and manners of the bourgeois. Moreover, the two plays which are discussed in this dissertation not only reveal bourgeois limitations but also postmodern limitations. As Baudrillard claimed, in the postmodern era a commodity has a 'social value'. Commodity holds consumers' prestige, rank and social position in the society. People buy things to distinguish themselves from others; to achieve a higher position in the society; to maintain that position in the society. And to do all these they pursue new fashion trends blindly. In the play *Art*, Serge buys the white painting with two hundred thousand bucks only to maintain a distinct social position; not because of his love for arts. The painting of the famous artist Antrios raised him in a higher position, distinguished him from others. It seems that he was thrilled that he could snatch the painting from Jean Delauney, owner of a gallery and could beat him in the race. When Marc tells Yvan that Serge bought a white painting with two hundred thousand bucks; Yvan questions, "Is he fashionable?" (*Art* 10). That means, if the artist is famous and fashionable, the money is worth-spent. Reza seems to question "whether aesthetics is now inextricably confused with market value: when we read that a painting has been sold for countless

millions in the auction room, do we somehow rate it more highly? (Blank Canvas: the enduring appeal of Yasmina Reza's Art). It leads to Jameson, as he claimed the era is the latest phase of capitalist world and everyone is commoditized here; also there is a relation between market value and sense of culture (Selden et al. 211). Also, as it is discussed earlier, Jameson points out the blurred line between 'high' culture and 'low' culture in postmodern era; fascination over schlock and kitsch, TV soaps and Readers' Digest, advertising motels, the late show, grade-B Hollywood film and pulp fiction are culture now. In the play *God of Carnage*, Veronica is obsessed over her priceless 'limited edition' Kokoscha catalogue. When Annette offers her compensation she says, "You can't find it! It went out of print years ago! ... It's a reprint of the catalogue from the '53 London exhibition, more than twenty years old!" (*God of Carnage* 25). These are some evidence of postmodern bourgeois lifestyle and culture.

While discussing postmodern limitation, language as a postmodern element cannot be skipped. Jameson, while delineating the postmodern cultural forms, marked the fragmentation of language communities and states – "each speaking a curious private language of its own, each profession developing its private code or dialect, and finally each individual coming to be a kind of linguistic island, separated from everyone else" (quoted in *Postmodernism for Beginners* 37). Language is never sufficient to serve as a communication tool. In both the play *Art* and *God of Carnage*, the use of language is devastating; leading towards unnecessary argument, misunderstanding, even to an ugly fight in the case of *God of Carnage*. On the other hand, Jean-Pierre Ryangart has observed in the modern and postmodern dramatic writing an imbalance – absence of proportion. According to him, this kind of trend emerges in 1980s and now has become rule or as he says, "hallmark of writing that could not abide technical constraints and rejected all rules... there could now be a

very great deal of talking – or very, very little.” (Ryangart 18). He also points out that in 1950s the brevity in speech simply means failure of language, but from 1970s it is just the way it is, that is, “Brevity now, as in such authors as Joseph Danan or Catherine Anne, or even Yasmina Reza (*Art*), does not necessarily have any immediate discernible meaning” (ibid 18). Both the plays *Art* and *God of Carnage*, support Ryangart’s view. There is no proportion in the dialogue of any of the characters of both plays. Some are too brief, some are too lengthy. For example, Yvan’s speech on his marriage is too lengthy to understand properly. Also, the note of counselor Finklezohn does not make any sense at all.

Reza’s plays are postmodern products. It seems that she has something to do with modernism, though she has never been ‘Terry Eagleton like negative’. Modernism was much more for the elite class and the scholars, that is, there was a clear difference between ‘high’ culture and ‘low’ culture. Modern art was very much incomprehensible to the common people. Art was for art’s sake, not everyone’s sake. But postmodernism, shakes off this orthodoxy. Reza, being a woman of her time, is far away from such orthodoxy. It is not certain that she is totally against modernism, but she has something more or less bitter for modernism. In the play *Art*, Marc says, “... and as you know culture is something I absolutely piss on” (*Art* 29). And, in *God of Carnage*, Annette vomits in a pile of art books, literally. Reza, herself says, “In *Art*, there is a phrase about ‘culture that I vomit over’. In *God of Carnage*, I put it literally: she vomits on a pile of art books” (Yasmina Reza: ‘There is no point in writing theatres if it’s not accessible’). She did not explained her statement, rather she grins, as if she enjoyed the idea thoroughly (ibid).

In his article *Defining Postmodern Theatre* Yamomo Mele described some characteristics of postmodern theatre. According to him, in a postmodern theatre there

is an influence of historical and cultural context in language; historical and cultural traditions are vital source of signs; there is pluralism and multiplicity in style; also the practice of inter-text, even multi-dimensionality and simultaneity; other theatrical elements such as lights, visual design, music etc. are as important as characters; role of the director is more prominent than the playwright; mode of production is different from other previous theatres as postmodern theatre is for mass consumption; Aristotle's notion of catharsis is something obsolete and full of obscurity; and lastly text takes shelter to theory to articulate itself. Of course, there is the influence of historical and cultural context in Reza's plays. Her plays portray the behavior and limitations of the bourgeois in postmodern era. The language is utterly postmodern, conversational, day to day language, does not have any immediate discernible meaning as Ryangart said. Also, the bourgeois hypocrisy, pretensions, fascinations mark the contemporary culture. Stage directions and theatrical elements play a very important role in her plays. The set of *Art* is so simple, a single room, only the painting changes in accordance with the character, emphasizing the importance of painting in this play. The set of *God of Carnage* is a living room, devoid of realism and superfluousness. As any other postmodern theatre, her plays are for mass consumption, wrote and staged keeping in mind the acceptability of the audience, and in that case both the playwright and director is successful. Also, her plays do not follow Aristotelian norms. Nay, do not necessarily articulate through theory, but can be observed from theoretical perspective. She does not use any inter-text in her plays, and free of plurality in style. On the other hand, in the article, *Learning from the Arts: Comparing Postmodern Theatre and Postmodern* Dr. Raymond Saner has emphasized on fragmentation and deconstructive method in postmodern theatre, specifically in Off-off Broadway theatre. Reza's plays *Art* and *God of Carnage* are

performed on Broadway. *Art* was performed on Broadway at the Royal theatre, by David Pugh, Sean Connery, and Joan Cullman, on the first of March 1998 (*Art* 3); and *God of Carnage* was performed on Broadway in 2009, which brought it a Tony and became the third-longest-running production of the decade (Yasmina Reza: ‘There is no point of writing theatre if it’s not accessible’). Of course Saner is discussing the characteristics Off-off Broadway theatre, but he is discussing postmodern theatre as well. Though, Reza’s plays are essentially postmodern product, specifically the plays are being discussed, do not show any fragmentation. But, as it is mentioned above, it can be observed from theoretical perspective; it can be observed from the perspective of deconstructive method.

It is known that “deconstruction often involves a way of reading that concerns itself with decentering – with unmasking the problematic nature of all centers” (*Derrida for Beginners* 21). Centers create binary opposites, while emphasizing one item, it marginalizes the other. Nicholas Royle is also of the same view – “one of the poles of the opposition is, in a specific context which must itself be demonstrated, privileged over its supposed opposite” (5). And this opposition can be reversed with the help of deconstruction method, which is applied in *Art* and *God of Carnage*.

About *Art* Behnaz Amani, in her article, argues –

The text has no stable meaning and its ending is deferred, which is like a floating signifier always postponed. Moreover, there are some words in the play which change their place as they reach each character in the play and are thus constantly deferred. There are many contradictions in the play which make the text indeterminate and undecidable to interpret and this paves the way for the various interpretations one can have of the play (1).

The color of the painting is all confusing. Three characters see the color of the painting differently. For Marc, it is all white; for Serge, there is a tinge of grey and red too; and for Yvan, the white lines are not completely white, but yellowish. The color here is a sign, with no certain signified. It is surrounded by the chain of floating signifiers. It is like dictionary, searching for a meaning of a word, and get lead to various other words and meanings. The meaning is always deferred. It happens because language itself is unpredictable. Language is not sufficient to communicate. And, for its unpredictable nature, a text from the very beginning, when it is written, even when it is in mind, is already deconstructed. According to the Yale deconstructionist J. Hillis Miller “Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself” (quoted in Amani 2). Moreover, Reza seems to believe that “words are utterly ineffectual since, rather than making relationships closer, they wreck them” (ibid 3). This statement is applicable not only to the three friends of *Art*, but also to the couples of *God of Carnage*. Their words are far away from serving the purpose of reconciliation, rather made the situation much worst.

Like floating signifier, the endings of Reza’s plays are also floating. It feels, there is no ending, that is, ending is deferred. There is no closure of any discussion, whether it is about *Art* or *God of Carnage*. Before reaching any conclusion of a discussion, another discussion begins, as if previous discussion is postponed and left for the next discussion or some other interpretation. In *Art*, the discussion on painting jump up to the verbal attack, then Yvan’s problem with his wedding, soon on intellectual fight between classicism and modernism, then on Yvan’s doubtful role as a reconciler, and again on the painting, ultimately the discussion reaches to reconciliation. On the other hand, *God of Carnage*, begins with the couples discussing

on the fight took place between their sons, then goes to their profession, then to appear clafouti, Alan's phone calls, jumps to a fight between husband and wife, soon becomes the fight between the couples. Moreover, the ending of both plays are very confusing. It can be said, the plays conclude without any conclusion. *Art* ends with a poem recited by Marc. It is not certain, what is it actually about and what is the purpose of such an ending. On the other hand, *God of Carnage*, ends with Michael's dialogue, "what do we know?" (*God of Carnage* 57), commenting on the hamster, after a big fight between the couples. The play, ends with a trivial issue, especially after such a big fight, is really confusing. And, the last speech of Michael makes it look like something more is coming about, that is, the ending is not satisfactory.

Derrida says, "the center is not in the center" (quoted in Amani 5). On which Amani says, "When a center is deconstructed, everywhere in a text can substitute the previous center and becomes a center which can make many centers possible, which results in the free play of meaning" (5). A text has no fixed center and it can be interpreted from different perspectives. The center of play *Art* seems to be the painting brought by Serge, which somehow becomes the foundation of friendship between Serge, Marc and Yvan. All the discussion, meeting, fight is revolving around it. On which Reza herself says, the title "refers to the art of words, the art of keeping up human relationships, friendship" (quoted in Amani 3). Now, from another perspective, Yvan, also can be the center of the play. Yvan, seems to be a marginalized character at first. But it can be realized later that it is Yvan, who is responsible for the fight between Serge and Marc. It is his nature of a reconciler, actually infuriates the fight between Serge and Marc. Even, Serge seems to warn him against his nature (*Art* 40). Again, Yvan's not being himself is another reason that he is been attacked by the other two. Moreover, lastly he has been accused of driving the other two crazy with

the talk of wedding and the problems he is facing due to it. It is apparent that, not only the painting, but Yvan too is the reason behind the tension between Serge and Marc. *God of Carnage* too can be read from different perspectives. The center of the play is the school fight took place between two boys and both of their parents have been gathered to resolve the fight. The couples Novaks and Raleighs, in the course of solving their children's problem, themselves entangled in an ugly fight. So, the school fight between the two boys seems to be the reason of dispute between their parents. From another perspective, the dispute between the two couples is resulted from their ego and pretensions, which is apparent in the whole play, whether they are talking about their professions or how they treat each other. Again, the play can be read from feminist perspective, though Reza is not a feminist playwright at all. The two women, Veronica and Annette do not seem to be happy in their marriage. But, the play is not about the school fight between two eleven year old boys or their parent's bourgeois pretensions only, it is about something deeper too, as Australian director Edwards says, "... small group of individuals who find conflict resolution near-impossible. How, then, can communities, nations and society be expected to come together? It is going on between Palestine and Israel, only in microcosm." (Dawson 11). The play reflects something grave happening in the world. These two plays are like prism, spreading different shades of lights. Whatever shade of light it spreads, it is apparent that it reflects the bourgeois limitations anyway.

Conclusion

This dissertation is a theoretical study of Yasmina Reza's plays. The aim of this paper is to establish that though, Reza's plays deal with simple subject matter, are succulent with complex ideas. Reza, with her mastery has marked a significant place in the arena of theatre. She has created her masterpieces denying the mainstream

norms of theatre and literature. What is more appealing about her is, in spite of being a woman in the male dominated European theatre she never used 'feminism' to retain her position, rather her plays deal with everyday trivial happenings of the life of middle class people and she excelled it in every way. These everyday trivial incidents seem to be comic if superficially taken, bears ugly truth of modern life, a tragedy in itself. And, of course the moral disposition her plays subtly reflects unlike other postmodern theatre, that is, her plays have the qualities a true satire should have. In her plays, pretension, hypocrisy and emotions are presented accurately. Social context is something that cannot be ignored and her plays reflect the social context aptly. As she said she works like a painter, she portrayed the postmodern bourgeois of Europe with devastating accuracy. Serge with his pretension as an art lover or Allan as a hypocrite lawyer; every character is portrayed as perfect bourgeois. This dissertation has focused on Reza's two masterpieces *Art* and *God of Carnage* to find out to what extent her plays are true record of postmodern bourgeois of Europe. These two plays are scrutinized through the theories like Marxism, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism and deconstruction. And, by judging through these theories and all the instances it is firmly established that Reza's plays are indeed a faithful picture of bourgeois in Europe.

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