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## DOMESTICATING THE TRANSLATOR: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HUMOUR IN YASMINA REZA'S *DIEU DU CARNAGE* AND *GOD OF CARNAGE*

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### Résumé

L'article fait le point sur les défis que présentent à la fois la traduction de l'humour et la traduction des pièces de théâtre. Le traducteur doit identifier l'humour, le ressentir puis le re-crée de telle sorte qu'il soit, non seulement acceptable aux yeux du public, mais également amusant sur scène. Il ne fait aucun doute que les défis sont bel et bien relevés dans le cas particulier du *Dieu du carnage* de Yasmina Reza (2007) dont le succès outre Manche et outre Atlantique est à mettre au crédit du traducteur attiré de l'auteur, Christopher Hampton. Confronté aux doutes émis par Reza quant à la traduction en anglais de « Art », la pièce qui l'a pourtant propulsée sur la scène anglo-américaine, il semble que le traducteur ait adopté une démarche plus prudente et moins créative pour *God of carnage*. C'est ce que fait ressortir l'analyse comparative de l'humour verbal de l'original et de la traduction. Il y a domestication, non pas du texte, mais du traducteur lui-même.

### Abstract

The article reviews the challenges facing translators of humour and of drama. They must identify and experience humour, and then re-create it so that it will not only be acceptable to the target audience, but amusing on stage. Such challenges have undoubtedly been met in the case of Yasmina Reza's *Dieu du carnage* (2007), whose success in Britain and America can be attributed to Reza's regular translator, Christopher Hampton. However, faced with Reza's doubts about the English translation of « Art », the play which made her famous on the British and American stage, the translator seems to have adopted a more cautious and less creative approach for *God of Carnage*. Such is

the result of a comparison of verbal humour between the original and the translation. There is domestication, not so much of the text, but of the translator himself.

**Palabras clave:** Yasmina Reza. Christopher Hampton. *Dieu du Carnage*. Traduction. Humour.

**Keywords:** Yasmina Reza. Christopher Hampton. *God of Carnage*. Translation. Humour.

## I. Introduction

There are many reasons why examining the English translations of Yasmina Reza's comedies represent an interesting project. Both the translation of humour and the translation of plays, a genre usually meant to be performed, present specific challenges unknown to other literary texts. Hence the common notion that both plays and humour are untranslatable. The point here is to review such challenges and assess how they are met in the particular case of *Dieu du carnage* (2007).<sup>1</sup> The play was as much a success in France as in the US and the UK, a sign, not sufficient in itself, but encouraging nonetheless that it has kept its impact in English. Furthermore, the same translator, Christopher Hampton, was commissioned to translate all of Reza's ten plays. The focus here is on a comparative analysis of *Le Dieu du carnage* and *God of Carnage* (2008) with some mentions of « Art » (1996).<sup>2</sup> It is nonetheless possible to 'follow' Christopher Hampton and combat the notorious translator's invisibility (Venuti 1995). In fact, between « Art » and *Le Dieu du carnage*, there is a significant evolution in Hampton's translation strategy, and this is not wholly due to the difference in the type of humour between the two comedies.

## 2. Drama, humour and translation

Compared with other types of literary texts, translating plays is fraught with more dangers due to theatrical texts being written to be performed – setting aside the very few plays written just to be read in silence. This is the reason why the client who requires the translation has to explain whether it is meant for publication or for performance. Dirk Delabastita concludes his analysis of the French translations of Shakespeare's *Henry V* with a call to clarify the

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1. Christopher Hampton's translation was used as the script of Roman Polanski's film, *Carnage* (2011).

2. The French inverted commas (« ... ») are part of the original title. In English the title became 'Art'. A Wikipedia page is devoted to the play [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/«\\_Art\\_»](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/«_Art_») (for the English page: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art\\_\(play\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_(play))). There is a French Wikipedia page for most of Reza's plays, for instance *Le Dieu du carnage* [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le\\_Dieu\\_du\\_carnage](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Dieu_du_carnage).

distinction between translating “for the ‘page’ or for the ‘stage’” (2002: 338), which is not as simple as it might seem. In the latter case, the most common, the translator is meant to reproduce in a foreign language the original’s oral quality, with its simulated naturalness and much departure from the spoken language. Besides even novels can possess an oral quality when they contain numerous dialogues, or adopt a spoken style; then the translator has to “reinvent the novel with the target language’s means and own genius” (Jaworski 2015).<sup>3</sup> Unlike oral novels, however, the lines of a play must be pronounced, and played. As explained by Kevin Windle in his collection of essays on translation for the theatre, speakability, playability and stageability all refer to the central notion of acceptability (2011: 156), that is what the audience feels is a natural language. As a translation norm according to Gideon Toury (1995: 57) acceptability is nonetheless a vague and relative concept, and so is the notion of audience, as we will see below.

In the 60s, the famous French linguist Georges Mounin thought he had solved the issue of the virtual impossibility of translating for the stage by advocating for translation-adaptation. Adapting simply meant separating the textual from the dramatic: supposing fidelity is the aim, then fidelity “is, to the theatrical value of the source text, its theatricality” (1963: 10). Let’s disregard the obsolete idea of fidelity practically banned from modern translation theories. But the theatrical or dramatic value of a text is not a transparent concept either. Gilles Declercq (2010: 222) also makes a distinction between spectacularity – a set of signs aimed at the audience – and theatricality, that is an aesthetic or critical intention. Such a dichotomy is likely to make the task of the translator harder, as she has to spot signs of theatricality, and then separate them from spectacularity and from the text’s linguistic fabric. It looks very much like a revival of the old content/form dichotomy. Finally, we could ponder the exact demarcation between translation, adaptation, even version, which is a bone of contention between authors and translators (Zucchiatti 2010: para. 21). In an interview with Joseph Farrell, Christopher Hampton tells the story of how, in a rage, he sent back to the ‘translator’ from English into French his play’s so-called translation: the play was missing its ending. He had requested a translation and instead got a version (Farrell 1996: 47). The final product might be acceptable, speakable and playable, but there is insufficient equivalence with the source text.

Here is the catch then: in order to provide the finished product, the translator gets hold of the written play, nothing more, whereas specialists agree on

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3. Translations of French quotes are all mine.

one thing: the text is just a sketch of the play, a matrix, “a text full of holes” as Anne Ubersfeld put it (1996, t.1:19). Staging, acting, costumes, décor, sound and lighting effects, silences, the audience and even the venue where the play is performed (in Paris, you go to the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, where ‘*Art*’ did its debut, to have a good laugh): all this influences the tone and nature of a play. If the dramatic text doesn’t have the same status – sacred, untouchable so to speak – as the novel since it experiences transformations when being adapted for the stage, this principle seems to further affect the text translated for the proscenium:

The degree of change that occurs in a play script during the transfer from SL<sup>4</sup> text to the stage in the new language as a rule greatly exceeds that visited upon prose works for silent reading, to the extent that the very term ‘translation’ acquires great elasticity of meaning, with some blurring at the edges, and a wide spectrum of correspondence or non-correspondence to the SL text [...] (Windle 2011: 154).

In other words, plays are deemed untranslatable, or more precisely, they are doomed to be badly translated. Translated plays are received with the same suspicion as other translated literary genres, as “imperfect reproductions” (Bhambry 2011: 54), due to what Anthony Pym labels translations’ “axiomatic inferiority” compared with the original (Pym 2001: 130). Whether monolingual or not a given speaker will always suspect that translations diverge from the original text without ever being able to assess the divergence. In an article for the *New York Review of Books*, Tim Parks picked up numerous awkward turns of phrase in Korean Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian*, the 2016 Man Booker International prize winner. However, Parks, who is a reputable Italian to English translator and a translation critic, admits he is not able to determine whether it is the translation or the original that is awkward. Not being a Korean speaker he can’t judge the translation quality, in the same way as the prize-giving jury was unable to say whether the translation is of high standard and the original a great book (Parks 2016). Another example of suspicion is given by Yasmina Reza, who was attending the premiere of ‘*Art*’ in the West End in October 1996, and was shocked by the raucous laughter of the British audience. “Half-amused, half-furious” she had asked Christopher Hampton, who was also there: “What have you done?” (Poirier 2008).

Rather than the common criticism of betrayal, is translation rather “an art of sacrifice”? “A long line of theorists have similarly discussed translation as

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4. SL indicates source language; TL, target language.

an art of sacrifice, of knowing what to omit and what to retain, in a situation of inevitable loss and axiomatic inferiority” (Pym 2001: 130).

Is the translation of humour also affected by inevitable loss and the obvious inferiority of translations? In the same vein as dozens of scholars who cared to think the issue through, Anne-Marie Laurian counters this banal view in a short piece: due to both its linguistic and cultural dimensions “[l’]humour est souvent considéré comme intraduisible, et pourtant on le traduit” (1989: 6) [*humour is often considered untranslatable, and yet it is translated*]. In the introduction of an issue of *Humoresques* on translating humour, Yen-Mai Tran Gervat also states: “traduisibles ou non, le fait est que les textes et supports humoristiques les plus variés circulent et sont traduits ; ce sont ces traductions existantes [...] qui donnent matière à réfléchir, mais aussi à rire et sourire.” (2011: 7) [*whether translatable or not it is a fact that a variety of texts and comic ones at that are available and are translated; these existing translations [...] give food for thought but also make us smile and laugh.*] Likewise, in the introduction of a collection of articles on the subject Delia Chiaro has a more nuanced view on untranslatability: humour is “untranslatable in the sense that an *adequate degree of equivalence* is hard to achieve” (2010: 8). Cases where such equivalence is feasible are as follows:

There will, or at least should be an area of overlap between ST and TT. The greater the area of overlap, the closer the equivalence between the two texts will be. The greater the area of superimposition, the greater the osmosis between Source and Target, and in the case of VEH [verbally expressed humour], the greater likelihood of amusement in the Target Language [...] (Chiaro 2010: 10).

What Chiaro calls overlap are those moments when there is a *kind of* equivalence in the target culture, that is the exception rather than the rule. Humour even limited to verbal humour still relies on lexicon, semantics, phonics, allusions (cultural, political, intertextual), and also contributes to the text’s cohesion. Those elements are rarely equivalent. At most they have an “approximate similarity” (Attardo 2002: 173) in the target culture.

Laurian, whom I mentioned earlier, expands on her idea that humour is translated – if not translatable – but it requires “imagination and creativity” (1989: 6). This is confirmed by Dominique Rolland-Nanoff in an article about the English translation of Raymond Queneau’s *Zazie dans le métro*:

L’analyse comparative met en évidence le fait que le transfert de l’humour s’opère plus aisément si le traducteur ne s’attache pas aux procédés utilisés dans le texte source mais en décolle au contraire pour procéder à une œuvre de récréation et demeurer ainsi fidèle à l’esprit du texte (Rolland-Nanoff 2000, Abstract). [*Comparative analysis brings to the fore the fact that the transfer of*

*humour happens more easily if the translator doesn't stick to the techniques used in the source text but, instead, departs from them and produces a re-creation so as to remain faithful to the spirit of the text].*

Creative re-writing of a work to remain faithful to the spirit of a text is not an easy task, as Chiaro explains with regard to purely verbal humour owing to “an amount of dexterity in the creation of VEH, which exists in no other text type”. This means that the translator “has to also accomplish an emotive feat” (Chiaro 2010: 20). This is the price to pay to “preserve the pleasure of the reader” (Mangano 2011: 6). Only a truly talented and well-known writer like Umberto Eco is brave enough to go even further and turn re-creation into *recreation* as he applied in his Italian translation the transgressive methods used by Raymond Queneau in *Exercices de Style* (cf. Eco 2002).

This review of the translation of humour clarifies the translator's task: she must be able to identify, feel and then reproduce her “own interpretation” (Bhambry 2011: 44) of humour. These three steps merit some further clarification, and will form the basis of our methodology for the textual analysis of the English translation of *Le Dieu du carnage*.

Identifying humour requires a large amount of knowledge, called “knowledge resources” by linguists who have devised a General Theory of Verbal Humour (Attardo 2002: 175). There are six categories of knowledge resources from the most important to the least important: knowledge of oppositions in scenarios (such as intelligent/stupid, normal/abnormal), logical mechanisms, situations, targets, jokes, and finally linguistic knowledge. This fairly closed and descriptive rather than analytical system also emphasises the effort required to correctly transfer knowledge from a culture to another. Should this not be possible for all six parameters at once, Salvatore Attardo advises to translate first the knowledge resources at the top, like oppositions of scenarios (Attardo 2002: 180). Interestingly this view of humour is akin to Antoine Vitez' view of drama. The famous director saw in plays a “hierarchy of signs” (1982: 9).

The second aspect in the process of the translation of humour is feeling, linking translation to psychology rather than linguistics. For instance, irony always runs the risk of not being perceived as such due to the fact that being insincere, irony goes against the basic principle of cooperation in verbal exchanges (Chiaro 2010: 15). Yet irony depends on speakers' cooperation and it doesn't always occur. Maria Pavlicek and Franz Pöchhacker report that during conference interpreting irony is perceived as speakers' strategy to establish their superiority and test the listeners' capability to go along with it (Pavlicek and Pöchhacker 2002: 91). Their research being based on observations and surveys of conference interpreters, it deals with the spoken word rather than the written

word, and therefore could apply to plays. In fact, most of the humour in *Le Dieu du carnage* is made up of irony, and sarcasm to a lesser extent. One source of merriment comes from some characters taking ironic statements at face value. It is a fact that not everyone has a sense of humour, a quality highly praised by society, if we are to believe psychologist Willibald Ruch: “we perceive a sense of humour as high in social desirability” (Ruch 1998: 10). Moreover, being able to understand foreign humour whether in one’s language or not demonstrates one’s openness to the world of the Other (Muhawi 2002: 364). In *Le Dieu du carnage* one of the four characters, Véronique, warns the others: “Je n’ai aucun humour” (2007: 90) [*I’ve got no sense of humour*]. What follows “Et je n’ai pas l’intention d’en avoir” [*And I don’t intend to have any*] proves that being humourless doesn’t prevent unexpected comic effects. In the play’s psychic economy the absence of a sense of humour is a serious personality flaw, and is the source of this character’s ultimate downfall.

Finally, once humour has been detected and felt, it is up to the translator to become creative since even when the “contenu propositionnel” (Vandaele 2002a: 151) of verbal humour is not (fully) translatable, at least its functions and effects are.

Why use humour instead of other speech acts? What is so special about the way humour functions? It is an act sure to “reduce the distance between the participants and create a sense of community [...and] reduce tension” (Pavlicek & Pöchhacker 2002: 389). Relieving tension is the unequivocal social function of humour. But humour is also antagonistic. As mentioned above about irony the speakers intend to establish their superiority, divide and create new alliances between groups. A large amount of research on humour analyses the comic illocutary act, its intention in short, as a “weapon or a shield” (*ibid.*) Following on the footsteps of Giseline Kuipers (1998), Michael Billig even speaks of humour as a means of social coercion (Billig 2005: 2). This is especially true of *Le Dieu du carnage* (Jacomard 2015) with its atmosphere of relentless conflict. Since the speaker can always deny her aggressive intentions – “I was joking; don’t be so touchy; where is your sense of humour?” – irony, incongruity and situational humour are used in that play as a socially acceptable way of attacking a competitor.

This line of reasoning begs the question: how important is it that the translator understands the intentions of a speaker, ironic or not?

we may not always be able to grasp the sender’s intention; we may have our own (conscious or unconscious) agenda whilst grasping intention; many other contextual elements play a role in the interpretation process; original intent may be absent; new contexts may emerge continuously; the humour function of a text may be combined with other functions (Vandaele 2002a: 165).



In truth, once the implicit is duly felt, the translator's fundamental duty is to render the humorous *effects*. According to Vandaele (2002a: 165), who took his inspiration from Anthony Pym's analyses, this duty is an ethical must. This in fact can be linked to the notion of communicative equivalence in Peter Newmark's words: "[a] translator should produce the same effect on his readers as the SL author produced on the original readers" (1982: 22). Theories seem to like neat dichotomies, but separating intentions from effects, illocutionary from perlocutionary, is no easy task, particularly in view of the idea that for translations "fidelity of intent is equal to fidelity of effect" (Vandaele 2002a: 162). The other trap is to make explicit underlying intentions when they are supposed, instead, to remain implicit. Yet Marie-Line Zucchiatti approves the strategy of the Italian translator of « Art ». Giuseppe Manfredi adopted a strong target-oriented strategy and this ends up resolving the play's ambiguities. For instance, Yvan is a nice man caught between two domineering friends. His short temper and "sa personnalité plus marquée s'expriment à travers le registre un peu grossier complété par des explicitations" (Zucchiatti 2010: 64) [*his set ways express themselves in a cruder language register complete with explicitations*]. Making the implicit explicit ruins the effect of the best-loved scene in the play, Yvan's tirade, which usually draws long applause rather than belly laughter (Jacomard 2012: 10). Translating humour is a commitment to produce and embody the same effects of the source text on the target audience, so as to trigger laughter, but not just any type of laughter. We will come back to this point, but first it is important to examine what is meant by the audience, and how translation and humour are similar in their common concern about effects on spectators.

Since the famous *Skopostheorie* propounded by the German linguist Hans Vermeer ([1989] 2000) the reader has become the translator's necessary partner. *Skopostheorie* is predicated on the idea that translating is an action, and like all actions, it has an intention which in this case is to make the original text accessible to a non-speaking audience. Expanded by influential scholars such as Katharina Reiss, Andrew Chesterman or Lawrence Venuti, the theory has dethroned the source text, the original author and her intentions, and the until then prevailing contrastive linguistics. This small revolution in the authority of the agents involved in the translating process in favour of the client who commissions the translation, and the "expert" translator (Vermeer 2000: 222) as well as the reader is often put into practice in non-literary domains (Du 2012: 2193). In factual rather than aesthetic texts, like technical translation or localisation (cf. Gouadec 2007), and provided the client's instructions allow it, the translation may take some liberties with the original text. Such a liberation

thanks to *Skopos* rests however on clear instructions, a well-known audience and well-delineated effects.

Aside from instructions setting out from the onset whether it is a translation, an adaptation or a version, things are not as clear-cut in the case of plays. Audience and effects naturally vary according to places and time periods. Therefore a strategy such as *domestication* rather than *foreignisation* is desirable in the case of spectators who came to have a good time. Keeping traces of the original might run the risk of making the acting look somewhat unnatural and would prevent the audience falling for the comic effects. Yet viewers could also be even more entertained by plays on words and jokes of a play translated literally and unnaturally. One needs only think of the dubbing of the British television series *Allo! Allo!* which amplifies the ridicules and stereotypes entertained by the British about the French (Chiaro 2010: 23). These effects are additions to the source text and those are banned by every translation code of ethics but accepted in some circumstances by *Skopos*.

There are other possible cases as when an interest in the Other draws an audience towards discovering foreign humour but without finding it funny. Even though humorous devices do not give rise to their laughter, this type of audience is satisfied by an increase in their knowledge resources. In this case, at the cost of creating a shock, humour can be translated in an undomesticated manner and foreground a puzzling worldview. Tim Parks, already mentioned for his review of the Man Booker Prize, wondered about the unexpected effects of the Korean novel: “the slightly disorienting effect of the translation can actually reinforce our belief that we are coming up against something new and different” (Parks 2016).

So, faced with the audience’s unpredictability and *their* intentions, it would be illogical to assert that the best translation strategy for theatre is domestication since the translator does not know who exactly they are translating for. The other difficulty in applying *Skopos* to literary texts is that we also know that texts construct their own readership. This is a major finding of reception theory which, as with *Skopos* at the same time, examined the relationship between text and readers. So-called School of Constance’s thinkers Hans Robert Jauss (1978) and Wolfgang Iser (1978) developed a dichotomy between the permanency of the text, a raw and unrealised product, and the impermanency of the reader, the actual producer of meaning drawn from his or her own horizon of expectations. On that point, and restricting our discussion to comedies, the genre’s history tells us that expectations about comedies in France formerly limited to the Boulevard theatre have now turned to non-realistic plays. This is a genre in which Yasmina Reza excels. Reza’s comedies have paper-thin

plots, non-stereotypical characters, no adulteries or sudden turns of events, and lead to anti-climactic endings. Through a dialogical process readers are guided towards the realisation of an unexpected meaning that is subtler than is usually the rule in such plays. This is the hallmark of “tragicomedies” in the words of Mathew Warchus, director of the American staging of ‘Art’. This play has also been labeled a “funny tragedy” (Thurmann 2009: 60).

Let’s pause now for a brief summary regarding translation: fidelity has been replaced by equivalence, itself superseded by more or less approximate correspondence. Drama translation for the stage emphasises playability and acceptability with the added variable of translating for an audience. The translator will therefore have to firstly identify, experience and re-create humour, and then render its effectiveness for the stage (Zucchiatti 2011: 73). Translating a play and its humour *well* combines two difficulties, and courts failure.

What happened with the English translation of *Le Dieu du carnage*?

### 3. *Le Dieu du carnage*

Yasmina Reza has been writing plays since the late eighties and *Le Dieu du carnage* is her ninth. She was asked to write a play by one of Germany’s foremost theatre directors Jürgen Gosch. It was translated into German by Frank Heibert and Hinrich Schmidt-Henkel as *Des Gott des Gemetzels* and was first performed in 2006 at Zurich’s Schauspielhaus. According to the first stage directions, the décor suggested chaos in an intentionally non-realistic fashion. It was an enormous success and won the Nestroy Theatre Prize,<sup>5</sup> before touring the whole of Germany, including the famous Berliner Theater. It was staged the following year in France in its original French, and was also a huge success, almost as remarkable as ‘Art’ for which Reza had been granted prominent awards in France, the UK and the US. Was this success based on a misunderstanding? During an interview Yasmina Reza complained that her play elicited “bawdy” laughter (Villien 2000: 6). It reduced a finely tuned text to slapstick comedy about modern art. It was her intention to make people laugh but “in a certain way” (Proguidis 2001: 155). Reception of Reza’s works revolves around whether she is a deep or simplistic writer. *Le Monde*’s journalist Brigitte Salino stated:

[Reza] a ses défenseurs – qui lui trouvent un style, un ton et une profondeur – et ses détracteurs – qui la trouvent boulevardière. L’opposition entre les deux est si vive que chacun est presque sommé de choisir son camp [...] ce qui rendrait suspecte toute opinion modérée (2008). [Reza has her supporters

5. This is a prestigious prize awarded by the city of Vienna to a play in German.

*who find she has her own style, tone and depth – and her critics - who find her light and farcical. The divide between the two groups is so profound that one can't but take sides. Failing that, one would be accused of being a moderate.]*

On the other side of the Atlantic the same issue has been raised by Ben Brantley, who for the last twenty years has been enthusiastically reviewing all of Reza's plays staged on Broadway:

But I've never taken claims for Ms. Reza's profundity as a writer very seriously. And in some ways, precisely because it's so overtly farcical, the play [*God of Carnage*] is even funnier now, even if it doesn't sound its more sombre notes as fully (2010).

The lukewarm reception in France explains that the playwright now refuses that '*Art*' be staged in France, and declined several proposals to turn it into a film in whichever language – at last count '*Art*' has been translated into 35 languages. If this demonstrates that the author's authority comes second to the audience's reactions, the anecdote mentioned at the very beginning of this article whereby Reza more or less accused her translator of distorting '*Art*'s humour for the British would show that translations doubly evade the writer. Effects on the audience seemed amplified but so was the author's impression for the French performance. For the Broadway production Reza still trusted Hampton but reworked '*Art*'s script with him, ostensibly to adapt the play to American-English, implicitly to make sure the tone of the play would remain the same as the original. A comparison with the translation in American-English still shows several slippages of register towards vulgar, and even obscene, language. Reza's intervention in the American version is unlikely to have been similar to a duo translation as tried by Marianne Ségol and Karin Serres (2010), where author and translator have equal input. Nonetheless for the translation of *Le Dieu du carnage* Hampton seems to have been more cautious in transferring language registers at the cost of being less creative than in '*Art*'.

*Le Dieu du carnage* is the story of parents who meet to settle between themselves the unhappy consequences of one son hitting the other with a stick. The Reilles are the aggressor's parents and meet the Houillés at their place. Their son Bruno has two broken teeth. As the two couples are about to sign an insurance claim, small conflicts arise as to who is the real guilty party, and generally speaking about children's education and violence in our society. The four adults argue more and more ferociously, between them, or wives against husbands. They throw objects to their heads, drink, smoke, puke (!), in short behave like kids at school recess, except that this 'carnage' happens to take place in a bourgeois salon. Is this absurd progression into irrationality, like

the children's fight, the expression of an instinct that civilisation is not able to control, is it the 'god' of the title? Such is the theory of Alain, the aggressor's father: "at the outset, may I remind you, right was might [...] I do believe in the god of carnage' (2007: 97-98).

As in all Reza's plays the humour derives from well-defined characters whose gift of the gab comes from dialogues written with clockwork precision. Two characters are particularly comic, Michel the host and victim's father who awkwardly tries to counteract the animosity between Véronique his wife and Alain by way of unfunny jokes. An involuntary, incongruous humour comes from Véronique's moral rigidity as she poses as a freedom fighter straight-jacketed by principles. It behoves to Annette, Alain's wife and the aggressor's mother, to act out farcical scenes, such as vomit on arts books, and drown in a vase her husband's mobile phone which never stops ringing. Alain for his part wants to win the debate of ideas and uses sarcasms. The four characters interrupt each other, jump from one subject to another, repeat identical sentences, get worked up, cry, shout, knock each other about.

Table 2 lists below the main humorous lines in the original, ranked by type of humour from the purely verbal to incongruity. There is some subjectivity in this exercise in identifying humour. However the 35 lines selected here should be acceptable to all. These are lines the translator has to find and experience emotionally. A second column includes the English translation, and a third comments on how efficient the translation is. All in all there are five types of equivalencies for the lines in question as shown in Table 1.

<i>Degrees of equivalence in humour</i>	<i>Examples (line numbers as per Table 2)</i>
Equivalence	1, 3, 7, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 30, 31
Amplification	9, 10,11, 12, 18, 22, 23, 29, 32, 34
Diminution	14, 15
Distortion	8, 29, 33, 35
Absence	4, 5, 8, 13, 19, 20, 28

Table 1 – Types of equivalences

What this table tells us is that the translator showed creativity and respect for the source text, and yet despite its high degree of equivalence it is a target-oriented version. It is a domesticated translation as some transfers of cultural allusions demonstrate (lines 2, 10, 12, 17). Anything relating to alcohol and drunkenness (6, 8, 27) has been transposed to other topics as a concession for proprieties regarding drunken behaviour in American society. Unlike the

approach in translating ‘Art’ where philosophical elements were neutralised and erased so as to emphasise situational humour and characters’ ridicules (cf. Jaccomard 2010), instead, for *Le Dieu du carnage*, with line 17 Hampton made more explicit the topic of the play – the origin of violence and society’s powerlessness in containing it. On the other hand line 19 has not been elaborated on to its full potential.

The most elusive aspect of the play is the escalation in crudeness. This is dealt with by several transfers of language registers. At the start of the play Veronica and Alan in the English version do not speak in the same formal register as Véronique and Alain in the original. Two-thirds into the play, when the four characters have lost all pretences of civility, the slippage into rude language by Veronica and Alan, although shocking, is less brutal than in the original.

On few occasions Hampton chose to ignore a nuance, a group of words (line 8 for instance), possibly in order to facilitate “an immediate comprehension [...] and reproduce the efficacy of a message which needs to be understood instantaneously” (Zucchiatti 2011: 66). This erasure serves the text’s illocutionary force well, and therefore evidences the translator’s “know-how [...] not his incompetence” (Léchauguette 2011: 147). Moreover Hampton added a degree of humour in some cases as a way to compensate for a translation loss he had to accept in other lines.

Evidently such a close textual analysis is doomed to also bring about some small botches (line 20, or the inexplicable 16). Sarcasms, the main source of humour of *Le Dieu du carnage*, presented difficulties demanding transpositions, explicitations and transfers. Sarcasms in *God of Carnage* are sometimes told in a more direct, and less comic, fashion than in the original. Sometimes crude in French, they become more neutral in English; but the reverse phenomenon also occurred as for example 17, which in the play’s hierarchy of signs is over-important. Nonetheless this line’s translation succeeds in delivering a semantic and lexical *tour de force*. The increase in crude language follows the original’s progression without sarcasms’ register being always rendered accurately. But a play is a whole set, and in the end an equilibrium is achieved between the variations of language registers.

If the play is more direct, more explicit, this is a choice by the playwright rather than by the translator. Hampton got his fingers burnt when the author reacted to the British translation of ‘Art’. For *Le Dieu du carnage* he seems to have chosen a translation sparing both source and target, and ensuring the play would be taken seriously as Reza wishes since there is scepticism on the philosophical import of her works. It can be said that Hampton used his own talents as a playwright to produce a natural and fluent translation.

It is obvious that examining a whole text rather than isolated segments provides much nuance in the assessment of the equivalence between a source and a target text. What is equally interesting is to measure the impact of the translation's reception, that of 'Art' in this instance, on the translator's subsequent strategies. Our argument is that the translator-playwright is the ideal reader of a play, one of its first imaginary audience so to speak. The translator's intention – what Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere call the "translator's desire" (1998: 91) – matters as much as that of the author.

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## Annex

Type of humour	Identification de humour in the original	English Translation	Efficacy in terms of degree of equivalence
Puns	1. Annette : Mon mari n'a jamais été un père à poussette.	Annette: My husband has never exactly been a stroller dad.	The light humour is as efficient in both texts.
	2. Michel : et d'où ça vient, toutou ? <i>surnom donné par Alain à sa femme</i> Alain : D'une chanson de Paolo Conte qui fait wa, wa, wa Michel : Je la connais ! Je la connais ! ( <i>Chantonne</i> ) Wa, wa, wa... Toutou ! Ha ! ha !	Michael; Where does Woof-woof come from? Alan: How much is that doggie in the window? Michael: I know it! I know it! ( <i>he hums it</i> )	Skilful transfer of a cultural trait used for comic effects. Paolo Conte is unknown in the US and is replaced with a 1952 song by Patti Page.

	3. Alain : Quand on est élevé dans une idée johnwaynienne de la virilité, on n'a pas envie de régler ce genre de situation à coup de conversations.	Alan: When you are brought up in a kind of John Wayn-esque idea of virility, you don't want to settle this kind of problem with a lot of yakking.	A true brainwave for a portmanteau word; bolstering the meaning with a derogative verb, <i>yakking</i> ensures the whole line is humorous.
	4. Alain : Vous faites partie des [...] femmes investies, solutionnantes.	Alan: You are part of women [...] committed, problem-solving.	<i>Problem-solving</i> is a recognised word, missing an opportunity to render the coinage ' <i>solutionnantes</i> ' in an original and mischievous way.
Crude language/ Expletives	5. Alain : Mais qui fait la veille media chez vous ?... Oui, c'est très emmerdant... non, non mais moi ce qui m'emmerde [...]	So who <i>the hell</i> is your media whatchdog... Yes it's very goddam inconvenient... No, what's most inconvenient as far as I am concerned [...]	Transposition of crude language ( <i>emmerdant</i> , <i>emmerder</i> ) on a collocation in the previous sentence ( <i>the hell</i> , <i>goddam</i> ). At the start of the play the translator prefers to soften the character's vulgarity at the cost of not making Alain's two sides, civilised and violent, obvious.
	6. Alain : en gros tu as l'air bourré en permanence.	Alan: In short you look completely retarded.	Change of image to adapt to the target culture.
	7. Michel : Oh tu fais chier Véronique, on en a marre de ce boniment simpliste ! [...] ça déteint sur tout maintenant ton engouement pour les nègres du Soudan.	Michael: You're so full of shit, Veronica, all this simplistic baloney, we're up to here with it! [...] your infatuation with a bunch of Sudanese coons is bleeding into everything now.	Crudeness is rendered with accuracy and originality ensuring a shock-effect on stage.

	8. Annette : vos droits de l'homme je me torche avec ! Michel : Un petit coup de gnôle et hop le vrai visage apparaît. Où est passée la femme avenante et réservée ?	Annette: I wipe my ass with your bill of rights. Michael: A mouthful of rum, and bam, the real face appears. [ <i>the last sentence is left untranslated</i> ]	The second meaning of <i>se torcher</i> (to get drunk) disappears in the translation. Annette's language is more tawdry in English than in French, with rum less vulgar than <i>gnôle</i> [hooch]. Omitting Michel's last, ironic, sentence, leaves the audience with the feeling that Michel is an uncultivated man.
	9. Michel : Ce n'est pas du tout évident un bon clafoutis	Michael: Good clafouti is an endangered species.	Hampton adds a pun in keeping with an anodyne conversation at the start of a comedy.
	10. Michel : on va lui mettre une prothèse [au genou] [...] Elle se demande ce qui va en rester quand elle se fera incinérer. [...] elle veut être incinérée et placée à côté de sa mère qui est toute seule dans le Midi. Deux urnes qui vont discuter face à la mer. Ha, ha !...	Michael: They're going to insert a [...] prosthesis. [...] She's wondering what's going to be left of it when she's cremated. [...] she wants to be cremated and put next to her mother's who is all on her own in Florida. Two urns, looking out to sea, trying to get a word in edgewise. Ha, ha...	Equivalence even in the cultural transposition (Florida for <i>le Midi</i> ). However the last sentence develops a barely sketched image of two urns talking to each other by adding the idea of gossiping women.
Joke	11. Michel : C'est vrai que le costume [d' <i>Alain éclaboussé de vomissures</i> ] a écopé.	Michael: Looks like your suit ate most of it!	Another case of an addition of a comic effect ( <i>vomir/ate</i> )
	12. Michel : Elle [sa mère] a loué des béquilles rouges pour ne pas se faire écraser par des camions. Au cas où dans son état elle irait se balader la nuit sur une autoroute.	Michael: She's rented glow-in-the-dark crutches, so she doesn't get knocked down by a truck. As if someone in her condition would be strolling down the BQE in the middle of the night.	Amplification of the humorous situation with the clutches now glow-in-the-dark instead of being simply red; cultural assimilation by the mention of a specific New Jersey street

	13. Michel : [Alain] n'est pas à poil !	Michael: Well, he isn't naked, is he?	More polite in English <i>starkers</i> would have been of a similar language register.
	14. Alain : Laissons-les [les deux enfants] entre hommes. Annette : entre hommes, Alain, c'est ridicule.	Alan: Just let them do it man to man. Annette: Man to man, Alan, don't be ridiculous.	Annette's comment is more direct and aggressive in English than in the impersonal turn of phrase in French.
Sarcasm	15. Alain : [...] vous avez visiblement des compétences qui nous font défaut, nous allons devoir nous améliorer mais entre-temps soyez indulgente.	Alan: Clearly you have parenting skills that put us to shame, we hope to improve, but in the meantime please bear with us.	The sarcastic show of humility is rendered more overt in English.
	16. Véronique : L'honnêteté est une idiotie.	Courtesy is a waste of time.	There is no equivalence here, neither in terms of meaning nor in terms of language level.
	17. Michel : ma femme m'a déguisé en type de gauche, mais la vérité est que je n'ai aucun self-control, je suis un caractériel pur.	My wife passed me off as a liberal. But I can't keep this bullshit anymore. I am not a member of polite society. What I am and have always been is a fucking Neanderthal.	Many modifications here: adaptation to the political context, but focus on the main theme of the play, the fight between barbarians and civilised; rather than translating a psychological expression (un caractériel, <i>disturbed</i> , <i>emotional</i> ), the translator returns to the theme. There is also a transfer down a rude language register ( <i>bullshit</i> , <i>fucking</i> )
	18. Michel : Pas toi darji pas toi, toi tu es une femme évoluée, tu es à l'abri des dérapages	Not you, Darjee, not you. You're a fully evolved woman, you are stain-resistant	Whereas <i>dérappages</i> could easily have been rendered by <i>slip-ups</i> or <i>gaffes</i> , the translation adds a touch of humour thanks to verbal inventiveness ( <i>stain-resistant</i> ).

19. Véronique : Que Bruno se fasse casser deux dents est lié à notre vie conjugale !? Michel : Evidemment. [...] les enfants nous nous entraînent au désastre, c'est une loi.	Veronica: There is a connection between Henry having his teeth broken and our marriage!? Michael: Obviously. [...] children drag us towards disaster; it's unavoidable.	<i>C'est une loi</i> alludes to the theme of the play: <i>unavoidable</i> renders the meaning but misses the opportunity to discreetly remind us of the fight between barbarity and civilisation.
20. [ <i>Véronique se jette sur son mari, Michel, et le tape</i> ] Alain : Je commence à vous trouver sympathique, vous savez. [...] Michel : Elle se déploie pour la paix et la stabilité dans le monde.	Alan: You know what. I am starting to like you! [...] Michael: She is a supporter of peace and stability in the world.	<i>Se déployer</i> juxtaposes a martial meaning with the idea of peace which exists in English ( <i>deploy</i> ); <i>supporter</i> implies a loss.
21. Annette : Les grands baroudeurs comme mon mari ont du mal, il faut les comprendre, à s'intéresser aux événements de quartier.	Annette: The great warriors like my husband, you have to give them some leeway, they have some trouble working up an interest in local events.	The translator chose to amplify the idea of <i>baroudeur</i> with <i>great warriors</i> achieving humorous efficacy.
22. [ <i>devant Michel en train de sécher le portable, comme il avait séché les livres d'arts souillé plus tôt</i> ] Véronique [ <i>riant de bon cœur</i> ] : Mon mari aura passé son après-midi à sécher des choses.	[ <i>laughing heartily</i> ]: My husband will have spent his entire afternoon blow-drying!	The concision of <i>blow-drying</i> and the ridicule attached to hairdressing add to the rhythm and the humour.
23. Véronique : Je n'ai aucun humour. Et je n'ai pas l'intention d'en avoir.	Veronica: I don't have a sense of humour and I have no intention of acquiring one.	Hampton chose explicitation and exaggeration, which is funnier.
24. Annette vomit violemment : une gerbe brutale et catastrophique [...] Les livres d'art sur la table basse sont également éclaboussés. [didascalie]	Annette vomits violently. A brutal and catastrophic spray [...] The arts books on the coffee table are likewise deluged.	<i>Eclaboussé</i> is usually translated with <i>splashed over</i> , <i>splattered</i> : <i>deluged</i> suggests a lot of liquid and might compensate the slight loss of <i>spray</i> for <i>gerbe</i> .

25. Michel : On essaie de donner une chance à la dent	Michael: They are trying to give the tooth a chance.	Identical personalisation of the tooth, same slightly comical effect.
26. Michel : Ce hamster fait un bruit épouvantable la nuit. Ce sont des êtres qui dorment le jour.	Michael: This hamster makes the most god-awful racket all night, then spends the whole day fast asleep.	Michael's retort translates the meaning in a concise, explicit and colloquial way.
27. Alain: On ne va pas retirer le médicament parce qu'il y a trois types qui marchent de travers !	Alan: We're not going to take the medicine off the market just because 2 or 3 people are bumping into the furniture!	Substitution of a colloquial locution often associated with drunken people, with a lively image, better adapted to blind people (but <i>blind drunk</i> exists in English)
28. Véronique : Tu savais que Bruno avait une bande ? Michel : Non. Je suis fou de joie. Véronique : pourquoi tu es fou de joie ? [...] Ça consiste en quoi ? Michel : Tu as cinq, six gars qui t'aiment et qui sont prêts à se sacrifier pour toi. Comme dans <i>Ivanhoé</i> .	Veronica: Did you know Henry had a gang? Michael: No. It's terrific. Veronica: Why is it terrific? [...] And what does that entail? Michael: There are five or six kids that follow you and are ready to sacrifice themselves, like in <i>Spartacus</i> .	Michael's reaction is softened. <i>Fou de joie</i> denotes an excessive, slightly incongruous reaction, whereas the formulation in English is impersonal and banal. <i>Overjoyed</i> , <i>deliriously happy</i> would have been more effective.
29. Alain : Vous l'avez amoché [ <i>le chef de l'autre bande</i> ]?	Alan: Did you beat the shit out of him?	In terms of lexis Alan is cruder but also more comical.
30. Michel : Ils [ <i>les laboratoires pharmaceutiques</i> ] te fourguent leur camelote sans aucun état d'âme. Alain : Dans le domaine thérapeutique, toute avancée est associée à un bénéfice et à un risque.	Michael: They dump any old crap on you without giving it a second thought. Alan: In the therapeutic field, every advance brings with it risk as well as benefit.	The translator kept the amusing contrast between rude and technical language.

31. Annette : L'insulte aussi est une agression. Michel Bien sûr Véronique : Ça dépend Michel. Miche : Oui ça dépend.	Annette: An insult is also a kind of assault. Michael: Of course it is. Veronica: Well, that depends, Michael. Michael: Yes, it depends.	Michel's efforts to play for time backfire; his rapid change of opinions remains comic in English.
32. Michel : qu'est-ce qui est ridicule ? Tu deviens folle toi aussi. Leur fils tabasse Bruno et on me fait chier pour un hamster. [...] Je me fous de ce hamster ! [...] Je ne vais pas me faire dicter ma conduite par une morveuse de 9 ans ( <i>sa fille</i> ).	Michael: What's ridiculous? Have you gone crazy as well? Their son beats up Henry and I get shit on because of a hamster? [...] Fuck the hamster. [...] I am not going to let myself be told how to behave by some nine-year-old snot-nose.	Same language register with the choice of <i>snot-nose</i> , rarer et therefore more comical than, say, <i>brat/snotty-nose</i>
33. Michel : C'est disproportionné. Véronique : Je m'en fiche.	Michael: You're blowing things out of proportion. Veronica: I don't give a shit.	To show that Véronique does blow things out of proportion, Veronica is cruder in her retort.
34. Alain [à Véronique] : Vous écrivez un livre sur le Darfour, bon, je comprends qu'on puisse se dire, je vais prendre un massacre, il n'y a que ça dans l'histoire, et je vais écrire dessus. On se sauve comme on peut.	Alan: You're writing a book about Darfur. Fine, I can understand you saying to yourself, OK, I am going to choose a massacre, what else does history consist of, and I am going to write about it. You do what you can to save yourself.	The nasty attack is in the end more powerful due to <i>you</i> having a higher chance of personalising the cutting remark than the French <i>on</i> .
35. Alain : Leur couple est déliquescent, on n'est pas obligé de leur faire concurrence.	Alain: Just because their marriage is fucked doesn't mean we have to compete.	Lowering of language register from formal, even precious, down to vulgar, and less sarcastic.

Table 2 – Verbal Humour in *Le Dieu du carnage* and *God of Carnage*.