



# White People Problems

Polanski's one-note nastiness rings hollow

**CARNAGE:** Directed by Roman Polanski. Screenplay by Polanski and Yasmina Reza, based on the play *God of Carnage* by Reza. Cinematography, Pawel Edelman. Editor, Hervé de Luze. Music, Alexandre Desplat. Starring Kate Winslet, Christoph Waltz, Jodie Foster and John C. Reilly. Sony Pictures Classics, 2011. R. 79 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

If you've seen your fill of obnoxious-rich-white-people movies for the month, year, decade, eon, you may want to take a pass on *Carnage*. The posters bill the film as "a new comedy of no manners," but the laughs are fewer than that tagline might suggest. Whatever subtleties existed in Yasmina Reza's award-winning play *God of Carnage* — which she adapted for the screen with director Roman Polanski — are obscured in *Carnage*, which feels like an anthropological dip into a section of culture you'd prefer to scrub from your hands.

Two couples, the Longstreets and the Cowans, are having a civilized afternoon meeting as the film opens. Their children brought them together: Young Zachary Cowan smacked Ethan Longstreet with a stick. The altercation plays neatly behind the credits, emphasizing how what actually happened between the kids is far simpler, and less relevant to the film, than what subsequently takes place among their parents. Graciously bored Nancy Cowan (Kate Winslet) and cell-phone junkie Alan Cowan (Christoph Waltz) drop by the absurdly spacious and well-appointed Brooklyn apartment of Penelope Longstreet (Jodie Foster) and Michael Longstreet (John C. Reilly) for a discussion. It should be brief. It is not.

The Cowans' several attempts to leave the Longstreets' home feel forced, but what occurs between those attempts veers between enjoyably nasty farce and tiresome familiarity. It isn't long before the veneer wears off the uptight Cowans (he's a lawyer, she's an investment broker)

and the faux-zen calm fades from the Longstreets' faces (he sells hardware, she works part time in a bookstore).

These couples are by turns churlish, calming, destructive and laughable, but the actors rely heavily on one note apiece: Reilly is blustery, Winslet elegantly grows disheveled, Foster remains overwrought in her misplaced passions and Waltz displays his usual creepy decorum. As the barbs, the ugliness and the weak gestures toward conciliation trade hands, the four characters come off like four facets of the same self-absorbed jackass.

The dialogue supports the notion that the couples live differently — when Nancy vomits on Penelope's art books, she offers to replace them, something Pen deems impossible — but there's nothing worn or stretched about the Longstreets, from clothing to couch cushions. The details meant to define the characters are slippery and imprecise. So Alan's always on the phone. So Penelope can't see her privilege through her bleeding heart. These are types, not characters, and the specifics are blurry even before the bottle of Scotch makes its appearance (it takes very little time for these four to get a good afternoon drunk going).

*Carnage* can't quite step out of its theatrical past. The blocking is stagey and overdrawn, and even as the single location works to create a sense of stifling airlessness, the film collapses into itself, a puddle of loathing that, a few laughs notwithstanding, seems smugly satisfied to sit back and point at what selfish, narcissistic cretins these ostensibly well-meaning people are — over and over again. Once the tone hits a feverish pitch it stays there, wearing out its welcome like a horrid houseguest. **EW**

*Carnage opens Friday, Jan. 13, at the Bijou; info at bijou-cinemas.com*

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	<p>Jodie Foster John C. Reilly Kate Winslet Directed by Roman Polanski</p>								
	<p><b>MOZART'S SISTER</b> 5:20 4:45 4:45 4:45 4:45 4:45 4:45</p>								
	<p><b>MELANCHOLIA</b> A LARS VON TRIER FILM starring KIRSTEN DUNST 8:00 7:45 7:45 7:45 7:45 7:45 7:45</p>								
<p><b>HOUSE OF PLEASURES</b> 2:00 2:00</p>				<p><b>COMING SOON: SHAME</b> <b>FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST</b> <b>AN EVENING WITH DON HERTZFELDT</b> 7:30</p>				<p><b>AN ECOLOGY OF MIND</b> co-sponsored by the Cinema Pacific Filmmaker Dialogues &amp; the Energy Village Think Tank (followed by Director Q&amp;A) 7:30</p>	

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WAR HORSE (PG-13)  
Fri. - Sat. (1135 245) 635 950

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Fri. - Sat. (150) 440 740 1035

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