



CRIMP'S FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE REPUBLIC OF UNHAPPINESS

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ABSTRACT

A shift in the spotlight had occurred on the 1990's British stage. Within this new In-Yer-Face or New Brutalism-dubbed wave, playwrights—in writing and showcasing their plays—preferred a more explicit and uncensored language as a means of conveying what they saw, felt, and thought, as well as exhibiting the cutthroat events and cutthroat people of a modern society. Among the many writers of this wave is Martin Crimp, who openly and ruthlessly reflects the society and culture within which he lives in a rather blunt tone onto his works through his use of uncensored language and his realistic point of view. This paper has examined how the female characters of Crimp's *In The Republic of Happiness* have been reflected through the lens of Materialist Feminist Theory, which has become a popular feminist theory since 1990s. The female characters of Crimp's play have been unable to escape from being barred under the pressure of capitalism, from intervening in the needs of the members of the household within the home environment much akin to being a caretaker, from not receiving a single dime, and from society both turning towards them a blind eye and thus in turn rearing their children as slaves to the social order. Thus, Crimp represents 21st century women as still continuing to being seen for their reproductive role and what is expected thereof. Furthermore, Crimp has moulded female characters that move forward with their lives and whose sense of what a beautiful and well-groomed woman fails to cease in spite of the traumas they have survived.

Key Words: In-Yer-Face, Martin Crimp, Materialist Feminism, In The Republic Of Happiness, British theatre

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INTRODUCTION

"Historically and etymologically the family is a unit of production. Familia in Latin designates the totality of the land, the slaves, the women, and the children who are under the control of (synonym for the property of) the father of the family. The father of the family dominates this unit: the labor of the individuals under his authority belongs to him. In other words, the family is that group of individuals

who owe their labor to one "boss." (*Delphy, 27, The Main Enemy*)

Family is one of the smallest entities within which human beings first begin to socialize, acquire societal norms, and (thus) form society. Crimp, through "In The Republic Of Happiness", describes the members of a morally corrupted contemporary family whose sense of happiness is rooted in materialism. Hence, a woman's place in Crimp's 21st

century capitalist society in terms of how she is projected is going to be interpreted through a feminist lens.

For decades, women have been collectively paving themselves a road towards the protection of women's rights, the awakening of society to female-male equality, and the achieving of women's liberation. Over time, even with the formation of various groups liberal, radical, and socialist-type feminist groups, the core themes across all are freedom and equality for women. In the 1970s Materialist Feminism sprang into existence, which showcased and stood out against the victimization of women under the oppression of patriarchy and capitalism. Those at the forefront of Materialist Feminism, including Annette Kuhn, Anne Marie Wolfe, Michele Barrett, Mary Macintosh, and Christine Delphy, insist that Marxist Feminism was insufficient in its failure to expose the reasons for oppression of women beyond just the economical and the historical, furthermore pointing out material-social inequality as well as every day practices.

According to Hennesy: "*materialist feminist theory has both emerged out of and helped shape the engagement between postmodernism and Marxism.*" (Hennesy, 2012:6). What is meant here is that materialist feminism, which brings traces of postmodernism and Marxism together, has been adapted for postmodern situations under the influence of Marxist feminism. Delphy, like Hennesy, discusses Marxist feminism's broadness of directionality and breadth, noting that: "*It will not leave untouched any aspect of reality, any domain of knowledge, any aspect of the World. As the feminist movement aims at revolution in social reality, the theoretical feminist point of view (and each is indispensable to the other) must also aim at a revolution in knowledge*" (Delphy, 1997:64). In sum, Materialist feminism—in defending the rights of women in a capitalist world—brings to the surface both how a blind eye is turned towards a woman's labours as well as how her body has been carried to the Meta level and consumed.

In the context of examining Crimp's *In The Republic of Happiness*, its touching upon the untouchable is significant in its portrayal through its

female characters of how women in the 21st century are oppressed and how their bodies are consumed—regardless of Crimp not being a feminist writer. Crimp, following a career in music, shifted into writing plays with sense of magical skill that depicted British life in the 1980s in a sometimes ironic and sometimes realistic manner. According to Vicky Angelaki: "*What makes Crimp's work both challenging and fascinating is its dual and equal focus on the private and the public, the collective and the individual, the humorous and the dramatic, the spoken and the unspoken*" (Angelaki, 2012:1). To add to Angelaki's statement, elements of both himself as well as of society are encountered in Crimp's works. Furthermore, Crimp's plays are received not only for their sense of stark reality, but also for their sometimes dramatic and sometimes comical air. Crimp, at the beginning of the 1990s and when theatre had most certainly surpassed its era of dominance, a movement of playwrights began to emerge onto the scene, who Sierz dubs as "In-Yer-Face". Crimp, in sync with the features of In-Yer-Face theatre, uses provocative language in order to capture his audience's attention, include them into the play in order to heighten its emotional intensity, and to awaken them to the truth.

When we take a glance at Crimp's previous works, we come across the fact that most of his female characters are victims. Moreover Crimp, in his play "*Attempts on Her Life*", lays before us the fact that women are still seen as objects by society. Here, Sierz notes that "*The Woman is still seen as an object, but in a very different way, because the irony of it is much more extreme and it is precisely about how women are viewed within our culture*" (Sierz, 2006:151). From this angle, it is difficult to label Crimp—who we cannot label as being an anti-feminist—as being a feminist, for he with great mastery carries the duty of being a mirror reflecting the role of women in society

In The Republic of Happiness – Synopsis

In the Republic of Happiness was directed by Dominic Cook in 2013 through the Royal Court. The Royal Court's write up of the play describes it as: "*A violent satire, In the Republic of Happiness is a provocative roll-call of contemporary obsessions*".

Jack Farmer of The Socialist Review magazine reveals:

Over the years Crimp has forged a distinctive theatrical style – his plays typically eschew traditional plot, characters or "realistic" dialogues. He seems consistently interested in the way the personalities of individuals are moulded by consumerism, commodification and the sinister gaze of the state.

Just as Farmer notes, Crimp has reflected in his negatively toned play the darkness, hopelessness, and anti-relationship stance that exists in contemporary society.

Crimp's play *In The Republic of Happiness* begins at New Year's with a family—a mother, father, two sisters, grandmother, and grandfather—gathered together in the same room and about share a meal. Crimp, as he has stated at the beginning of his play, almost immediately lays out before the eye the artificiality of the Kodak happy family congregated around an artificial tree. As is very much present in Crimp's other plays whereby the habits and demands of contemporary have changed, in this play too we feel his negative outlook towards humanity. Crimp in *In The Republic of Happiness* uses stark and simple language. However, all though his characters' language is plain, the constant repetition of the same words conveys dialogues that whirlwind around the characters' emotional intensity. The play is comprised of three different acts and a total of 8 characters—five of whom are women. In the first act, or *Deconstruction of the Family*, this members of this family who has collected together for Christmas dinner airs their secrets. The characters Dad and Mum, their two daughters Hazel and Debbie, and their grandparents live together. At the very beginning of the play, we learn that Debbie—who tells of how much she loves her family—is pregnant and that her family does not quite accept this due to her pregnancy being out of wedlock. Hazel, the little sister, is jealous of her elder sister under the excuse that her sister had always wanted to be pregnant and thus scorns her getting pregnant out of wedlock. After Hazel and Debbie quarrel, they reconcile, and at the dinner table as they sing songs

for the other relatives Bob, the uncle, enters. Bob mentions his wife having sent him there and that what he was going to say was his wife's idea. Uncle Bob explains Madeleine hates towards everyone in the family and her wish not to see them ever again. Just as Uncle Bob is confessing this, Madeleine enters and wants to use the lavatory. Each of the family members and Madeleine kindly greet one another first glance. After Madeleine uses the lavatory, she thinks that spotlight is on herself and thanks each of the family members, expressing how ever so kind and thoughtful they are. Here Crimp is openly exhibiting the absence of emotion among people living in the contemporary world, a lack of genuineness—selfish individuals who think about no one other than themselves. This act closes with the displaying of Hazel and Debbie making up and their singing of songs.

The second act or *The Five Essential Freedoms of the Individual* is comprised of 5 different scenes: *The freedom to write the secret of my own life, the freedom to separate my legs, the freedom to experience horrid trauma, the freedom to put it all behind me and move on, the freedom to look good & live for ever*. As previously written post-dramatic plays such as *Attempts on Her Life* and *Fewer Emergencies*, here too in the second act of *In the Republic of Happiness*, Crimp once again doesn't indicate character names or turns of talking, and only uses a dash punctuation mark at the head of dialogues to denote post-dramatic theatrical features alongside when speakers change. In the *Freedom to write the secret of my own life* scene, in order for characters to write the scripts of their own lives they are introduced to one another and each person insists that her/his life is ever more interesting and autonomous. In *The freedom to separate my legs*, characters disclose in an ironically apolitical matter what they've learned in school, from books, and from their families, as well as that they have moreover imparted these to their children. Moreover, characters defend that they can survive as they desire throughout their lives and Crimp tries to manifest their nervous breakdowns through the use of capital or uppercase letters. In the short third scene, even after the female characters perform their self-lifting and seemingly

positive roles, they talk about how their flaws and their negativities have dignified them. In the fourth scene the characters recall what they can't let go of and the memories that cause them anguish, as well as reminisce about the heart-to-hearts they shared with and the deaths of their fathers. The depressed characters are nudged to leave their pasts behind them in that they need to carry on with their lives. In the final scene, the characters tell of their eating of fruit, chocolate, and eat as well as their exercise routines in order to appear to be in good health. However at the end of the play, even if they are aware that they'll one day succumb to their deaths, they try to make themselves believe that they'll live on forever.

The third act is about a power struggle between Uncle Bob and Madeleine. Even though Uncle Bob appears strong in order to earn the others' respect, Madeleine in fact dictates how he has to communicate with them. Neither Bob nor Madeleine are content with their lives, however the two of them know that they are forced to continue to act as though they are happy and at the end of the play sing a song describing their merriment.

A Materialist Feminist Reading of Crimp's *In The Republic Of Happiness*

Even despite materialist feminists pointing out that housework in a capitalist world has been split between women and men and that this in turn has been an important measure of change, Hayden Dolores claims that: *housework is a paradoxical activity whose form has remained much the same during the last century – the unpaid housewife as alone in the home as in the domestic workplace...* (1982:12). In Crimp's play, there are three married couples as well as two sisters who are very different from one another, and each female character is found within the domestic sphere. In essence, not one of the female characters works, that is with the exception of Granny—who worked as a physician in her younger years, Peg, and Madeline—who had worked extensively even though what it was that she did precisely is unclear. It was Mum who had prepared Christmas dinner for the family gathering, however it gained no appreciation from Dad—who even so far as to assert that it poisoned him.

In the play after Debbie had expressed that that she very much loved her family, she begins to voice that she'll love her yet-to-be-born baby even more.

Debbie: I wasn't trying to upset people, Dad. I love you. And I love Mum. Plus I love Granny and Granddad – and of course I love Hazel too. I do, Hazel – whatever you think. But the fact is, is I know that I 'll love my baby more. And that's how it should be, Dad... (9)

It seems that Debbie has learned—perhaps from her social environment, or perhaps from her household in terms of it being society's smallest unit—the need to love her baby and her family. Debbie is the reflection of the rules she has acquired from society by which is not limited to words alone. Debbie's Granddad, Terry, seems absolutely no harm in glancing through pornographic magazines, noting that: *"looking is not a crime(10)"*. Moreover, when Granddad tells Debbie to keep quiet, Debbie prefers to keep her lips sealed rather than challenge patriarchal authority. On the other hand, Debbie's mother—who upon saying that her daughter will be fulfilling her duty as a mother as society or patriarchy has drilled into her—also teaches Hazel (like Debbie) what patriarchy expects of her.

Mum: Look I know I'm just your mother, Hazel. And I know that means I 'll shop and cook and clean for you for ever and ever....yes, I'm just your mother, and as such I expect to be trodden on and trodden on – I expect to be worn away like a stone step- and I'm prepared – like the stone – to endure it. But that doesn't mean I've no feelings, Hazel. My heart isn't stone too. (15)

The character of Mum, Sandra, lives under the oppression of the characters of Granddad and Dad who represent household patriarchal authority, she is devoted to her own children, she is trapped at home, and she gives voice to a female character who neither requests even a penny her household productivity nor is appreciated for any of the housework she does. During family conflicts even when she rises to the role of intermediary, her spouse Tommy shows her absolutely zero respect. Thus, Crimp projects a female character who is oppressed, entombed within the homesphere, and who has internalized the rules of traditional patriarchy.

The youngest sister Hazel is a female character who knows how using her sexuality can influence men. Hazel, in trying to persuade Uncle Bob, who catches the family members off guard during a spontaneous visit, is shrugged off by her mother, her sister Debbie, and Granny. This underscores that sexuality is powerful, both in that it is a forbidden fruit in the eyes of society and that it influences the opposite sex. It becomes apparent that the lyrics of the song sung by the two sisters actually reveals how they internalized the patriarchal rules.

Debbie/Hazel:

We're going to marry a man
(going to marry a man)
The man will be rich
The man will say bitch:
I'll make him pay for my meals
I'll strut and fuck him in heels –
That's our incredible plan
Yes our incredible plan... (18-19)

Marriage is the best imposed ideology that keeps women and their productivity under a firm grip of control. Women either learn beforehand or have an idea about the necessities of marriage in terms of things like housework and looking after children. Once again, Crimp brings to light that patriarchal oppression still continues even in the 21st century. Furthermore, regardless of what century we have arrived at, housework and childcare not being seen as a productive activity is why these fundamental duties have remained adhered women. Christine Delphy asserts that: "Women do not have the option of improving their services in order to increase their standard of living. The only solution for them is to provide the same services to a richer man: the logical consequence of the non-value of their work is the competition for a good marriage" (1980:34). Even if the dream of marrying to a man with money is seen as the only and the easiest means of changing a woman's status, patriarchal oppression that they have to endure, is the same.

According to Hayden Dolores, *in industrialized societies the oppression of women is no longer restricted to the labor force alone, but now has found place in the economy in terms of being consumers of manufactured goods* (1982:12). Debbie, who is aware of her reproductive body,

does not keep away from using her reproductivity to her own benefit. She wants a car, diamond earrings, a radio and a hat as New Year's gifts, and whether these desires make her sister, Hazel, uncomfortable, or bringing a fatherless child into the world is seen as being against the grain of societal norms, in fact she is a submissive consumerist character created by contemporary society. Furthermore, even if Debbie, who encourages consuming in the capitalist world, obtains the material goods using her own femininity, she submits patriarchal oppression. In other words, in a capitalist society, even if a woman works, in order to get hold of what she wants as a consumer, she uses her reproductive qualities as well as becomes the fish bait of both patriarchal and capitalist oppression. Crimp has exhibited this reality through the character of Debbie.

On the other end of the spectrum, Granny—a woman who has worked as a physician—has been involved in financially supporting her husband throughout her life, being productive in carrying on the family unit in giving birth to her son, and in being a house worker without pay. Actually, Crimp has portrayed the character of Granny as being a submissive female model of both capitalism and patriarchy. Loomer and Sanchez advocate "*Women have a largely unacknowledged power over their children, significantly over their sons*" (2016:46). Granny is the only woman in the play who has power over Tommy, her son. Tommy, who is Debbie's father, becomes angry upon discussion of the unborn baby and slams the table. Sandra, his wife, upon warning him, is given this response: "*Dad? I'll bang how the fuck I like*" (12). On the flip side of coin, when his mother warns Tommy, he says: "*Yes, Mum – okay – I take your point – I'm sorry*" (12). Even if Granny has power over her son, Tommy, it is neither accepted nor is any gratitude shown by Granddad for his wife's financially supporting him.

Madeleine is the most different, and perhaps the most powerful of all the female characters in the play. What Madeleine did in terms of employment is not revealed, however her spouse Uncle Bob, notes that Madeleine has been working long and hard. Madeleine directs Uncle Bob to be with his relatives on Christmas day in order to

(indirectly) disclose her negative sentiments about them, and then later onwards in dropping by to use the bathroom belittles the family members in the place they have gathered in. She requests that Uncle Bob kiss her in front of everyone and, as Uncle Bob gives her a kiss, she suddenly pushes herself onto him and shows her holding of sexual power. At the end of the first act, the song that Madeleine sings depicts what a powerful character she is.

Madeleine: I don't need a woman to unzip my zip Or a man with a white arse cracking the whip Or some kind of what? Fixed human relationship?... (36)

These lyrics express that Madeleine doesn't need anybody and that she is a standalone free and self-fulfilling powerful woman. Actually, in the closing act we witness that Madeleine is not just the cause of sexual power, but also of the oppression over Uncle Bob. Uncle Bob can never complete a sentence and generally forgets what he is about to say. Madeleine speaks, thinks, and acts on his behalf.

Madeleine: ... it has to make sense, Robbie – don't you see how important that is? There have to be rules.

Uncle Bob: Whose rules?

Madeleine: Well my rules, of course – don't you see how important that is? (80)

Throughout the course of the play Uncle Bob's dependence upon Madeleine is made evident several times over. Crimp reverses the role of women and men extremely successfully, and has loaded onto a male character not only significant oppression over women but also society's responsibility in amplifying that.

In *The Five Essential Freedoms of the Individual Act*, which is peppered with post dramatic elements, Crimp conveys what feminists express by spotlighting that women are caught in capitalist and patriarchal oppression's grip, and that their effort goes without reward. In *The Freedom to write the Script of my own Life*, neither the names of the characters are definitive nor the dialogue queues. Female characters living under pressure squabble among themselves to be first to write their own script.

-I write the script of my own life. I make myself what I am. This is my unique face- and this is my unique voice. Nobody – listen

– speaks the way I do now. Nobody looks like me ...

-I said I am the one who makes me what I am – okay? I've got my own voice: I don't repeat what other people say.

-No way do I repeat what other people say. I am the one who writes the script.

-Yes I am the one writing the script of my own life now. It's me who makes me what I am – not Mum, not Dad. (41- 42)

Even if most of the characters insist that they are not influenced by their families or they have not internalized the social etiquette of societal pressure, one of the characters accepts that they have become virtual slaves living under pressure and it is impossible to stand up against capitalist oppression. Furthermore, they depict that they learn how to behave as women from their family members. Kate Millet in this context states that gender *is the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression* (1971:31). Through the characters of Hazel and Debbie, Crimp attempts to convey women's lives are not as they desire, and he shows women have been shaped by and forced to live under the pressure of family and society.

The second scene, *The Freedom to Separate My Legs*, discusses the effects of sexual oppression places upon women.

- I've nothing hidden inside my anus. My vagina is empty. I let my vagina be searched. The deeper you reach into my vagina the safer we both feel – it's nothing political – there is nothing political about my body. (48)

- Don't give me that crap about rich and poor-

Stop droning on about what constitutes a just war –

Don't you come here telling me what my life's supposed to be for-

I said get that foot of yours out of my fucking door!

YOU'RE SO FULL OF SHIT!

YES YOU'RE SO FULL OF SHIT YOU CAN KEEP YR NOSE OUT OF IT!!! (53)

In this scene, the characters touch upon how a different sense of body has been created under political oppression although everyone has the same body, and how they have been materialized as sexual objects. In this direction, in such a kind of society, sexual power on women, who are seen as sexual objects, belongs to patriarchy. Moreover, Crimp's female characters illustrate that women—like men—own the same bodies, and it makes absolutely no sense that biological nuances should make them submissive. At the end of this scene, Crimp's characters boycott both social as well as capitalist pressure. They blame the system for interfering in women's lives and imposing expectations on them in terms of how they have to act as well as for categorizing people into "women" and "men", just in much the way that it (the system) is at the root cause of dividing society into rich and poor.

In the third scene, Crimp explores the pressure, exclusion, and sexual abuse, and their trauma that the female characters have endured throughout the course of their lives.

- *Make me pregnant on my birthday. Make me pregnant at age sixty-eight or still in a little dress age nine...*
- *Fuck and abduct my child plus bring me in for tests – tests my blood – test my saliva – I have a right – swab my mouth. (54 – 55)*

Initially, these women, who talk of how exploited their bodies and reproductivity, despise themselves for looking down upon themselves as guinea pigs being used for experimentation, and this causes their trauma. MacKinnon notes that:

Marxism teaches that exploitation and degradation somehow produce resistance and revolution. It's been hard to say why. What I've learned from women's experience with sexuality is that exploitation and degradation produce grateful complicity in exchange for survival. They produce self-loathing to the point of extinction of self, and it is respect for self that makes resistance conceivable. (1987:61)

According to MacKinnon, women, in the name of protecting themselves from pressure and

exploitation, either end up hating themselves, enter depression, or commit suicide—from one angle, is a respectable action. In this play, Crimp hits the nail on the head and nakedly exposes what women endure and the reason behind their sense of self-disgust.

In the fourth act, we witness the dialogues of female characters void of father figures. Here, however, the father figure symbolizes the whole of patriarchy. The female characters talk about how they—in the face of patriarchy—have each had to overcome the unspeakable and their problems. As a result, they loathe patriarchy; however they have come to terms with continuing on with their lives despite what they have put with. In the final act, these females, who have accepted the dominance of capitalist society and of patriarchy, elaborate on how their desires have guided their lives. They exercise, eat chocolate, wear make-up, and diet in order to appear more beautiful, thinner, more erotic, and more eye-catching. During this scene in fact, not only does Crimp attempt to show how patriarchy has made the women submissive, but also he tries to subtly point out how the capitalist system has submissified women and brought them to their objective states of being, too.

CONCLUSION

Consequently, In *The Happiness of the Republic*, by using the theme of the family which is the society's smallest entity, Crimp-as-a male playwright - reflects that even in the twenty-first century for women, it is not possible to escape from patriarchal and capitalist oppression. First of all, Crimp introduces us to four women trapped in the homesphere—to two girls, a mother, and their mother in laws. Debbie, using her out-of-wedlock baby in order, wants to possess material goods. In this sense, we are introduced to a woman living under capitalist oppression. At first glance, although Debbie appears as if she is against the patriarchal order, she is unable to leave home, and is forced to live in the shackles of her authoritative father, and silently withstands her father's negative view about her pregnancy. On the other side, Hazel, who is younger than Debbie, is the image of a female who has learned how to manipulate the patriarchal world by using her sexuality. Moreover, just as the capitalist

hierarchy demands, she must marry a man with money. The character of Mum is a woman who lives like a slave within the homesphere, and has most likely learned from her own mother how to survive passively under patriarchal oppression, so that's why she has imparted the same upon her children. Furthermore, Mum character is not appreciated by those around her for her self-sacrifice and is an unwaged worker trapped in the house. On the contrary, unlike the other women in the house, Granny works and has obtained her material freedom, but she spends her earnings on pornographic magazines in order to make her husband happy. Pornography is, in fact, used symbolically in order to highlight how Granddad approaches women. Granddad symbolizes both how women are still seen as being sexual objects, as well as how males view women as existing to fulfill male pleasure. Furthermore, granddad, like his son, persistently ignores his wife and does not admire her self-sacrifice. That's to say, Granny is also another female slave of both capitalism and patriarchy. Crimp finishes his play with a song sung by Madeleine, his unusual female character. Madeleine is different from all of the others, because she is aware of her sexual power and gives Uncle Bob permission to kiss her when *she* pleases, and stops him as she pleases. Madeleine, who prepares food for herself, does nothing for her husband and thus within the sphere of the home she is not regarded as a trapped slave, but rather as a woman who controls and puts pressure on her husband.

To conclude, when Crimp began his career in the 1980s as a playwright, that is when "*In the public mind, feminism meant bra-burning*" (Sierz, 2006:7), we realize his exposure of women as still being victims within the social order. Crimp has demonstrated that a large proportion of women in the contemporary world still continue to be enslaved within the capitalist system as well as patriarchal order, and that women akin to Madeleine, who can stand on their own two feet and reject being a part of the regime of pressure, are much rarer.

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