

14th International Language, Literature and Stylistics Symposium

Searching for postmodernism in Martin Crimp's *Attempts on her life*

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Abstract

Martin Crimp is regarded as one of the significant playwright in Britain in the last decade of twenty first century. He has written on the changing structures of family, the issue of woman, consumerism and similar topics. Although he wrote most of his initial plays in absurd tradition, he then began to write about the social issues of his time with the beginnings of nineteen nineties. It is certain that this brought a certain change in his topics and style. However, he wrote his masterpieces following his decision on writing postmodern issues. *Attempts on Her Life* is one of his late plays debuted in 1997 and regarded as his masterpiece. The play subjects a woman who meets the audience in different roles such as mother, lover, killer and child throughout the play. Crimp tries to evoke the audience to feel the temporariness and some other features of postmodernism in this play. For this reason, this study will investigate the traces of postmodernism in Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life*.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Dokuz Eylul University, Faculty of Education.

Keywords: Postmodernism; temporariness; the issue of woman; nineteen nineties; in-yer-face.

1. Introduction

Martin Crimp begins to appear in the British stage at the end of nineteen seventies with his absurdist plays as he has been influenced by Beckett and Ionesco during his readings in his university education (Sierz, 2010). He continues writing such plays and some novels till the beginnings of nineteen-nineties determining his flourish as a striking playwright. It is likely that he estimated the approaching way of writing style called as social reality, thus

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he began to write such plays. Besides, the beginning of nineteen nineties was significant in influencing the works of playwrights because the Communism had been collapsed, Thatcher left the seat of prime minister of England and the most striking was the brutality in the society (Buchler, 2008) Although Crimp was not regarded as the typical playwright profile of that time, many of the important playwrights were in their twenties and had rage against Thatcher, Crimp would have produced one of the most crucial play of that decade. Mark Ravenhill, Sarah Kane and Anthony Neilson were the leading figures of 1990s and dominant theatrical movement in-*yer-face*. Therefore, they were likely expected to produce such an influential play. However, Martin Crimp, older than these three and did not call himself as a figure of in-*yer-face*, wrote the long-expected play of the decade. His *“Attempts on Her Life”* was premiered in 1997 and brought an unexpected fame to Crimp. Sierz remarks the importance of this play with the following sentences:

In the dying days of John Major’s Tory government, a sorry tale of sleaze and continuous xenophobic clamour, *Attempts on Her Life* appeared as both a brilliantly original and a distinctly European play, both a comment on the late twentieth century and a vision of what the theatre of the future might be (Sierz, 2010, p. 49).

In this manner, Crimp also brings the European values to British stage by overcoming the insularity of many British playwrights. For this reason, while he has been known in many European capitals as his plays have been performed there, British audiences would know him later and thus he would catch the fame in his country later than other European countries. What is more, Michael Billington draws attention to the play with his article published in *The Guardian* emphasizing on the postmodern features of the play (Billington, 2007). Colin Thomas also desires a special interest to *Attempts on Her Life* and its postmodern context and style:

It’s true. In this 15-year-old script, Crimp assigns no characters; he simply indicates a change of speakers by inserting a dash. (The script has been performed by as few as three actors. Here, there are 15.) The central character, Anne, never appears, nor does a stable depiction of her identity emerge. In the 17 largely unrelated scenes, Anne is everything from an artist who documents her suicide attempts to a new car: the Anny. Characters share their narratives about Anne, but, in doing so, they are creating their own realities (Thomas, 2012, p. 1).

Given the above mentioned statements, this study will discuss the postmodern values incorporated into *Attempts on Her Life* and try to bring a new perspective to this play. The claims will be supported by means of the artistic features of Crimp.

2. Postmodernism and “Attempts on Her Life”

The play consists of seventeen scenes, some of which may be interrelated to each other in a direct way. Although there is not a main character, it is then inferred the presence of a woman as the protagonist (Devine, 2006). This woman is pictured as mother, survivalist, terrorist, activist and a make of car in different scenes. In addition, the lines do not involve any name concerning the characters, and the reader is forced to imagine and establish the events. *Attempts on Her Life* begins with the scene of *“All Messages Deleted”* which consists of eleven phone messages. In this part, Anne is sometimes missed by her husband, sometimes her dad shouts at her on phone, and sometimes she is abused. This short prelude gives us some clues about the strangeness of the play because Anne, who is a postmodern character, is loved, threatened, praised, humiliated, but she can put an end to all these events by touching a button to delete messages in her phone. There are seventeen scenarios in this play and each of these parts mention about different characters and, in fact, all these characters represent the different ages of Anne, or who knows the humanity. In addition, Crimp becomes a bridge between absurd tradition and in-*yer-face* movement, so he combines these two theatrical movements in his *Attempts on Her Life*, since he has written his earlier plays in absurd tradition and he has changed his style with the beginnings of nineteen nineties. Additionally, Crimp states that *Attempts on Her Life* is his best play because he has felt himself fine without sticking to write his play in well-made plot and form naturalistic characters (Sierz, 2010). His this statement gives clue about the postmodern traits of the play because postmodern texts do not concern well-made plots and characters. They are more likely loosened texts indicating different points of unconnected events.

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