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CULTURAL MATERIALIST READING OF *DEALING WITH CLAIR*

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Abstract

Throughout history, an authority with certain rules has governed all societies, and each authority has had different impacts on society. Since theatre is a reflection of society and culture, it carries the traces of the development and changes of political and ideological concepts over time. With the emergence of playwrights such as Edward Bond, Caryl Churchill, and Martin Crimp in the British political theatre after the 1970s, the stagnation of British theatre during the Thatcher period has begun to end. The purpose of this article is to explore the interconnection between the political and social changes of the period through the lens of Martin Crimp's play *Dealing with Clair* (1988). Moreover, in the light of cultural materialist critics (e.g. Alan Sinfield, Jonathan Dollimore, and Raymond Williams), it will put forth Crimp's perspective against power ideologies in the late twentieth century.

Keywords: *Cultural materialism, Neoliberalism, Class distinction, Contemporary British theatre, Martin Crimp.*

DEALING WITH CLAIR'İN KÜLTÜREL MATERYALİST OKUMASI

Öz

Tarih boyunca bütün toplumlar belirli kuralları olan bir otorite tarafından yönetilmişlerdir ve her otorite toplumlarda farklı etkiler yaratmıştır. Tiyatro da toplumun ve kültürün yansıması olduğu için politik ve ideolojik kavramların zaman içindeki gelişimlerinin ve değişimlerin izlerini taşır. 1970 sonrası İngiliz politik tiyatrosunda Edward Bond, Caryl Churchill, Martin Crimp gibi oyun yazarlarının ortaya çıkması ile Thatcher dönemi boyunca İngiliz tiyatrosunun durağanlık dönemi sona ermeye başlar. Bu makalenin amacı, çağdaş bir yazar olan Martin Crimp'in döneminin politik ve sosyal değişimlerin aslında nasıl da birbiri ile bağlantılı olduğunu *Dealing with Clair* (1988) başlıklı oyununda keşfetmektir. Dahası, Alan Sinfield, Jonathan Dollimore ve Raymond Williams, gibi kültürel materyalist eleştirmenlerin ışığında, Crimp'in yirminci yüzyılın sonlarındaki güç ideolojilerine karşı olan bakış açısını ortaya koymaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Kültürel materyalizm, Neoliberalizm, Sınıf farklılıkları, Çağdaş İngiliz tiyatrosu, Martin Crimp.*

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Introduction

In the twentieth century, namely after the Second World War, European society, politics, and science have witnessed radical and critical changes. In the late twentieth century, rapid economic, industrial, and cultural shifts also paved the way for the spread of capitalism. Individuals trying to adapt to these developments faced – and still face – various difficulties. Therefore, theatre – which is about society and its values – reflected those changes. In the British theatrical context, different critics have given late twentieth century playwrights and the genre of works different labels. Feminist critics label this period “New Laddism,” because of the lack of female playwrights, while Gottlieb refers to it as “Cool Britannia” by virtue of the “marketing ploy” (Saunders 2002:5). Many a playwright has presented the realities of British society to their audiences in an uncensored and plain manner. Aleks Sierz claims that young writers who emerged in the 1990s were the pioneers of the in-her-face movement. Citing Philip Ridley, Anthony Neilson, Mark Ravenhill, Sarah Kane and Martin Crimp, Gottlieb notes that young writers from this period “are very much in touch with malaise amongst their generation, all too aware of consumerism, drug culture and sexuality paralyze the plays” (1999: 212).

Martin Crimp, born in 1956, Kent, England, caught the attention of critics such as Kent, Sierz, Angelaki, and Agusti back in the 1990s. They described him as an ‘enigmatic’ and a ‘mysterious’ playwright. Although he writes complex and enigmatic plays, some critics, such as Heiner Zimmermann (2003: 70), Adam Ledger (2010: 122), Mary Luckhurst (2003: 51), praise Crimp’s experimental style and argue that he deserves more praise and attention. Dramaturge Edward Kemp mentions that “Martin is perfectly aware of... developments in playwriting in Continental Europe, especially France and Germany, and his work bridges the gap between the English and Continental traditions” (Sierz, 2006: 205). Moreover, his plays are rather remarkable in terms of the wide variety of topics that he deals with. His body of work – beginning in the 1980s – bear traces of both postmodern and Thatcher-era British theatre. In fact, according to Sierz, British theatre of the 1980s and ‘90s is full of plays criticizing Thatcher’s policies. (2011: xv). Angelaki claims that;

Crimp is not outspokenly political. His name does not come to mind when considering contemporary playwrights who produce work with a clear message, or readily discuss their personal beliefs in the media. But this does not mean that Crimp’s theatre is not strongly characterised by political sensibility, or that Crimp himself is socially detached - far from it (2012: 121).

Crimp does not write explicitly political plays. Instead, he creates them within the framework of his own political views and criticisms. In one particular instance, the story of a real woman had inspired him to write *Dealing with Clair*, a piece that very much reveals his realistic viewpoint. James Macdonald approves Crimp’s political criticism, asserting that “Martin is a brilliant political playwright precisely because he is prepared to put himself and his own world publicly into question. The writing is both self-critical and clever sleight of hand which turns the tables on a liberal audience” (Sierz 2006: 220). Drawing people’s attention with both his innovative style and implicit critique, Crimp’s audience can find itself at the centre of criticism, because Crimp leans towards creating a dystopic world image in the bulk of his plays. This article, therefore, sets out to reveal the impact of the political structure of the aforementioned period on British society through the lens of Martin Crimp’s *Dealing with Clair*, and through how Crimp’s take on these power relations within a cultural materialist framework. Supporting that, this study touches upon the social and economic developments of the 1980s as well.

1. Cultural Materialism

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Communism in 1989 accelerated the spread of capitalism across Europe. Economic and industrial policies – which, at that point, were already rapidly changing in both the United States and the UK – had a deep impact on most European societies. They also triggered major social problems, such as violence, personal interest, racism, and unemployment. Moreover, Neema Parvini states that “the anti-humanist way of seeing individuals as products of their time and place gave academics - and women, and black people, and homosexuals - a powerful weapon with which to expose and attack the status quo” (2012: 175). Unable to ignore that reality, Parvini argues that the emergence of Cultural Materialism and New Historicism, was necessary in the 1980s as a reaction to the change in economies and human relationships due to the “ideology of the individual, in the triumph of self-belief and self-interest over society.” In this sense, cultural materialism

emerged to counter the unrest and inequality that neoliberalism created within society. Raymond Williams, a pioneer of cultural materialism in the 1980s, defines cultural materialism as:

A theory of the specificities of material cultural and literary production within historical materialism. Its details belong to the argument as a whole, but I must say, at this point, that it is, in my view, a Marxist theory, and indeed that in its specific fields it is, in spite of and even because of the relative unfamiliarity of some of its elements, part of what I at least see as the central thinking of Marxism (1977: 5-6).

In that manner, Williams speaks of the strength of the spiral link between Marxism and cultural materialism. He argues that – on the basis of both cultural materialism and Marxism – people are shaped by ideologies, economic power, and those who are bound to that power. From birth, people are raised in accordance with predetermined ideologies, in terms of thought, culture, values, and belief(s). For exactly this reason, cultural materialists view literature as a unique window through which we can examine both people’s ideologies and politics as well as societal power relations. Therefore, “all literature is history” (Williams, 2013: 169).

Alan Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore assert that, “historical context undermines the transcendent significance traditionally accorded to the literary text and allows us to recover its histories” (Dollimore & Sinfield, 1994: vii). Sinfield argues that literary works contain many clues about the social structure and thinks that cultural materialism is a versatile and very comprehensive approach, citing that its aim is to look for “dissident politics of class, race, gender, and sexual orientation, both within texts and in their roles in culture” (Sinfield, 1992: 9-10). In this regard, we must not ignore both the history of the said period and the culture around when examining texts if we are to reveal the message that the author wants to give and if we want to understand the resisting groups. In *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Barry states there is a valid reason why cultural materialists place so much emphasis on literary works and history: “cultural materialism is much more optimistic about the possibility of change and is willing at times to see literature as a source of oppositional values” (2002: 184). In this context, for cultural materialists written texts represent more than just the imagination or consciousness of the author in question. Therefore, their goal is to create resistance to power by revealing power relations within literary works that are intertwined with history.

In reflecting his experiences, observations, and the structure of British society in his plays, Crimp creates awareness by forcing his audience to confront corruption caused by neo-liberal politics within a socio-economic ecosystem. He “unmasks the social changes brought about by Thatcherite politics” (Sierz et al. 2011: xv) and thus creates a kind of resistance.

2. Dealing with Clair

“A work of art is not one that we read, but one that reads us.”

-- Wystan Hugh Auden

Dealing with Clair attracted the attention of the public and theatre critics alike when it first hit the stage back in 1988. *The Independent’s* Georgina Brown called the play a cross between ‘a delicious satire on yuppie moral and emotional bankruptcy and a bleak, black comedy thriller’ (Sierz, 2006: 24). Stating that the play has a very dominant political side, Middeke noted that “Crimp acidly asserts that something is indeed rotten in the state of Britain that will sooner rather than later pull the rug from under a nation’s feet” (2011: 84). *The Evening Standard’s* R. Henry Hitching (2018) criticised the end of the play: “The play is chilly and clever, perceptive about the hollow language of greed and suburban conformism. A weak ending aside, it’s a disquieting experience” (*Evening Standard*). The play consists of five acts and does not end in the way most audiences are familiar. Crimp succeeds in surprising them in this play – as he does in other plays – and consciously wraps it up with “a false happy ending” (Sierz, 2006: 96).

In *Dealing with Clair*, Crimp does not allow the audience to sit back and be passive. During the play, his effective use of pauses and hesitations stimulates both their curiosity and ability to ask questions. His language is far from ordinary and simple. Sierz advocates that “[a]t the time [Crimp] was interested in psychological disorders and a clang disorder is when people pick up words by rhyming association, which figured in the play’s

language” (2006: 3). This is perhaps why he does not avoid playing with language, and peppering it with irony, humour, and repetition. At the beginning of the play, Clair – talking to her mother – unconsciously blurts out, “Who knows what I’ll do? Maybe make a killing and just-... - disappear “(Crimp, 2018: 9). Clair’s terrible joke takes place at the end of the play and the audience catches onto Crimp’s ironic and enigmatic language explicitly. In the play, the mechanical train sound and the house constitute important symbols. At the beginning of the play, the mechanical train sound keeps Clair from talking to her mother about Clair’s anger, her boyfriend’s selfishness and buying a mansion for her parents. In this regard, Crimp initially uses the mechanical train sound to emphasise the negative changes in the middle class. At the end of the play, it prevents the phone call between Clair’s mother and James, so it covers the insidious act of James. In this sense, the mechanical train sound (used at the beginning and end of the play) refers to the degenerated British society. As for the house: “[...] itself an object of desire, becomes a central symbol of the perverted, decaying system of Thatcher’s ideology” (Middeke, 2011: 84).

The names of Crimp’s characters are common among the middle class, so these names are familiar to anyone unfamiliar with his other plays. He also uses the same names (i.e. Clair, Liz, and Anne) in his other plays such as *No One Sees the Video*, *Attempts on Her Life*, and *The Country*. Therefore, it can be deduced that the characters bearing these names, in a way, reveal a stereotype. Crimp often uses middle-class characters in his plays – *Dealing with Clair* is no exception – to question their changing societal values, their struggle for survival, and their conflicts with each other.

When Crimp wrote *Dealing with Clair*, Margaret Thatcher (1926 – 2013) reigned over the United Kingdom as its prime minister. Many criticised Thatcher over her economic policies – both when and after she was prime minister. European countries that experienced economic stagnation due to the aftermath of The Second World War and the oil crisis in 1973 followed a different direction in their economic policy. “In the United States and Britain, the economic crisis led to a sustained and committed effort to cut taxes, spending levels, and the role of the state in overseeing industry - neoliberalism” (Prasad, 2006: 2). Thus, with the spread of neoliberalism, privatization came back to the agenda, as in capitalism. Moreover, the rich got stronger and more laws were introduced to protect their rights, thereby driving a wedge in society in terms of class distinction. Clair, the protagonist, who had bought a small house close to the railway line for investment, and Ashley, a plumber, who also resides near the same railway track, represent Britain’s middle class. In the 1980s in England, a new “social group with particular forms of employment and consumption” emerged and “their existence is due to the rise of non-manual and especially managerial and professional categories of employment” (Short, 1989: 175). This new social group is called yuppies. In the play, the Walsums, who want to sell their five room-house with [large] gardens, represent yuppies. Lastly, an immigrant, Anna, who works as a nanny for the Walsums, reveals the exclusion of Britain’s immigrant class.

Thatcher had accelerated the spread of neoliberalism in Britain, leading us to witness profound changes in British society – not only in economic but also in social terms. David Harvey asserts that “the process of neo liberalization has entailed much creative destruction of... divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart” (2005: 3). In that sense, neoliberalism supports society’s ownership and consumption motives, thereby triggering individuality to come to the fore, as there is no solidarity between anyone. Rather, everyone has to work harder if they want to fulfil their dreams.

Crimp confronts his audience with fundamental social changes to society from the very beginning of the play through the symbolic use of the sound of high-speed train. He integrates features from the new generation of British society into Clair, the protagonist. He also bases his play on an actual event. In 1986, Suzy Lamplugh, a real estate agent, unexpectedly disappeared after meeting one of her clients. Suzy’s body was never found and, as required by law, her death was announced in 1994. In this context, Crimp maintains his objectivity and avoids making a clear comment on Clair’s death. His neutral approach takes the play to a more realistic level.

Clair, a single real estate agent, represents a middle-class woman trying to make a living in a neoliberal society. At the beginning of the play, Crimp presents the difficulties of living conditions and the lack of communication of individuals directly through Clair’s phone conversation with her mother. The mechanical sound of the train

makes it difficult for the two to hear one another properly. When her mother points out that her daughter is unhappy and aggressive, Clair angrily denies it and replies, "... [w] ell I'm sorry. I'm sorry if I don't sound happy. Just tell me what 'happy' sounds like..." (Crimp, 2018: 9). Clair is an example of an individual trying to survive alone in consumer society, and condemned to a life mechanised by the neoliberalist system. Clair's anger stems from loneliness and fear of failure and – in a way – reflects her unhappy and dissatisfied life.

Inan states that *Dealing with Clair* is "an alarming portrayal of the UK housing market ..." (2012:104). In the 1980s, there was a sudden explosion in England's housing market thanks to bank support. According to Ball, there were some crucial characteristics of this boom "financial systems were being liberalised so that credit was easy to come by; consumer spending was rising fast; and there was widespread optimism..." (1994: 671). Even though it appeared as an outstanding opportunity at first, the outcomes were tragic such as "tumbling prices for property, huge debts held by households and ... the greed and ridiculous optimism of developers..." (1994: 671). During that time, the property boom shift benefited the rich and the middle class. In this sense, the small house that Clair bought for investment represents her first step towards fulfilling her dream of becoming rich. In his play, Crimp criticises both the privileges provided to the middle class, their greed and lifestyle by addressing that explosion in the housing market. Two other characters, Mike and Liz Walsum, negotiate with Clair, who is a broker, to sell their big house. Clair has no trouble finding two customers who would like to buy the house. The prospective purchasers are the Harraps, a well-to-do family, and James, who pretends to be rich and has treacherous plans.

Alan Sinfield claims that "[r]elations between the strong and the weak - in the household, at school, at work, in the local community and the state - were characterised by personal cruelty and the exercise of autocratic power" (1992: 167). In this sense, we see that class differences negatively affect social relationships. In *Dealing with Clair*, Crimp reveals this cruel relationship between the upper and lower class through Anna, the nanny of Liz and Mike's child. Anna represents the alienated immigrant woman whose attitudes come off to the Walsums as weird. Although the Walsums have many rooms, they force Anna to sleep in a small room without windows. Anna's relationship with Liz and Mike is cold – she is merely their child's babysitter. Owning a phone among lower classes became a privilege among Britain's lower class after the government privatised British Telecom in 1984. Crimp does not hesitate to emphasise this inequality. Anna asks Mike for permission to phone her family, and while he agrees to her request, he does not hesitate to mock her in disdain at the same time. Thus, Crimp exposes the oppressive and condescending view that Britain's upper class [generally] held towards the lower class in the 1980s. He also criticises the racist air of Thatcher's policies. Early 1980s Britain saw a flood of immigration that the Thatcher administration viewed as a threat:

We are a British nation with British characteristics. Every nation can take some minorities, and in many ways, they add to the richness and variety of this country. But the moment a minority threatens to become a big one, people get frightened. (Witte, 2014: 54).

After Thatcher's speech, racist violence exploded across Britain. In Crimp's play, the alienation of Anna reflects British society in the 1980s. Throughout the play, Anna's negative and strange attitudes are emphasised by both Liz and Mike. Anna walks around the house wearing "a kind of Chinese dressing gown, one of these... kimonos" (Crimp, 2018: 39) and smokes cigarettes, but no one cares about her. Moreover, Anna would rather communicate with her household less than learn and communicate in English. Sinfield states, "English was not thought just as a foreign language but was the means of imposing a culture, a cluster of ideologies, a way of being and seeing..." (1992: 35). Thus, she rejects not only the English language but also British culture. This is exactly why the Walsums both ignore and belittle her. While she does not mind communicating with Liz and Mike, she prefers to talk about everyday issues with Ashley, a plumber and someone from her class who comes to fix the ceiling of the house.

Engels examined the change in family structure due to the capitalist system and asserted that "monogamous marriage is the cellular form of civilised society, in which the nature of the oppositions and contradictions fully active in that society" (2010: 35). He notes that power relations already exist between husband and wife – meaning that conflicts and contradictions between husband and wife only become more aggressive. In Crimp's

play, we also notice the contradictory reflection of the values held by families of different classes and of the relationship between husband and wife in British society.

Ashley expresses how much he is fond of his children and shows Anna a photograph of them as a sign of his love and interest. In contrast, Liz and Mike do not interact with their daughter throughout the play.

A baby's crying.

Liz! Anna (Louder.) Anna, she's awake. She goes to the hall doorway and calls. Anna, she's awake.

She's about to go out, when the crying stops.

MIKE returns.

Mike What is it?

! Anna, she's awake.

Mike Won't Anna go

Liz! She just has.

They embrace (Crimp 2018: 12).

After Anna hushes their baby, Liz and Mike recklessly continue to bargain for their house. Actually, although Liz has enough time on her hands, she prefers shopping over looking after her daughter. Here, Crimp reveals the corrupt and artificial family ties of the upper class. For them, the sale of property and the struggle for class advancement are more interesting than meeting the needs of their baby. Throughout the play, Crimp also highlights the contradictions in Liz and Mike's marriage. William Perkins asserts: "a couple is that whereby two persons standing in mutual relation to each other are combined together, as it were, into one. And of these two the one is always higher and beareth rule: the other is lower and yieldeth subjection" (Sinfield, 1992: 44). In the Walsum family, Liz is the submissive one; Mike is the oppressor. Liz accuses Mike of his sexual interest in Clair after noticing a mark on Mike's neck. Mike seriously denies this accusation but does not hesitate to harass Anna in the meantime openly. Thus, Crimp criticises both the institution of marriage in the neoliberal society in the context of loyalty, and he examines Liz's silence over her husband's adulterous behaviour. On the other hand, Clair – a lone working woman – prefers to remain silent in the face of both Mike's and James' harassment.

Neoliberalism sustains society's desire to consume. The more people desire to consume, the more motivated they become to purchase, and thus they work harder. On the contrary, that same desire to consume and the class difference has a negative impact on society as a whole. According to Raymond Williams, this "Inequality in the various aspects of man is inevitable... The inequality that is evil... Such inequality, in any of its forms, in practice rejects, depersonalises, degrades in grading, other human beings" (1977: 317). In other words, individuals' desire to satisfy their desire to consume can trigger them to commit violence, theft, and even fraud. Crimp creates the character of James to put that negative change in society out there. Although the Walsums promise to sell the Harraps their home, they change their mind after they hear that James will pay for it in raw cash. Witnessing the Walsums' immoral action, Clair calls James to arrange an appointment with him. After the appointment, the Walsums feel relieved because they just agreed to sell their home at a very good price. However, James is just a greedy and demonic actor who pretends to be rich. He chooses Clair as his prey to satisfy his desire to belong to the upper class. Under the pretext of buying the house, no one is aware of James' insidious plans as soon as he discovers that Clair lives alone and has a small house. During their conversation, catching a hint from Clair's glance, gestures or movements James articulates her feelings, so he gains her confidence and makes her believe that he is just a trustful customer with cash and a gentleman who is respectful of women's rights. Even though James is a sneaky character, he is an obvious echo of Crimp's thoughts on the corruption of society:

James ... And I think there's a lot of nonsense spoken about cities, don't you. Because yes yes yes, we all know that strangers live next door to strangers. We've all passed friends in the street because the moment of

recognition has occurred too late, and you're both too embarrassed – or something else – too... fixed, too fixed in your mind to turn. And yes yes yes, we've all, as strangers, woken up in the morning to find our faces inches away from the open eyes of another stranger. We get up. We dress on opposite sides of the bed. Then we fold the bed away maybe... A little ashamed perhaps, or at any rate too preoccupied to speak. But what does any of that matter? Because surely the great advantage is, that since we don't know each other, since we've never seen into each other's hearts, then we respect each other. (Crimp, 2018: 31).

He explicitly depicts the dreadful dimension of alienation and destructive artificiality of relations in the British society. At the end of the play, we see James talking to Clair's mother on the phone at Clair's house. He states that "... Clair and her colleagues – those boys of hers – they do feel soiled after a day of buying and selling, selling and buying. They feel a kind of ... filth, quite frankly." (Crimp, 2018: 48). In this regard, Crimp obviously refers to the materialist relationships of the people involved with in the property boom. Even though they feel "a kind of disgust with themselves" (Crimp, 2018: 48), they keep up with the necessities of the consumerist culture and unconsciously deprive themselves. No matter how much Clair's mother insists that he gives the phone to her daughter, he devilishly distracts her by telling her that Clair will call her back later. Even though the audience has a strong suspicion that James killed Clair, Crimp avoids making this explicit. One might say that Crimp has attempted to reveal how human nature can succumb to consumption ambitions and effectively turn monstrous.

In the final act of the play, Crimp heightens the audience awareness by criticizing how the middle class attaches importance to human values. The Walsums cannot get the news they have been waiting for from Clair and James, and they cannot understand why or how Clair suddenly disappeared:

Mike ... Let's be realistic about this. What are we supposed to imagine he took her by the throat and dragged her off...

Liz: No obviously not.

Mike: Dragged her off in broad daylight - this was what, lunchtime - to his... whatever it was.

Liz: BMW.

Mike: BMW.

Both faint laugh. They relax a little. (Crimp, 2018: 79).

Liz and Mike's rather sharp dialogue implies that Clair's disappearance actually makes no sense. Sierz feels that the Walsums' "sheer greed encouraged by Thatcher's ideology of a property-owning democracy, but also captures perfectly the essence of contemporary English identity" (2006: 24). In this context, we see that what is important for the Walsums is selling their house at a good price and buying themselves a more comfortable and beautiful home. They believe that more comfort and luxury is proof that they are of high class. Without thinking twice, they call Toby, another negotiator, who then contacts another buyer, the Baldwins. The play ends with Toby leaving the stage to make the Walsums' dream come true.

3. Conclusion

In *Dealing with Clair*, Crimp exposes the negative impact that capitalism [can] have on society by drawing from actual event. Thus, the play stands out from traditional theatre because of its innovative approach. According to Crimp, class segregation, degenerating human relations, desire, ambition, and violence are all negative by-products of neoliberalism in British society. He clearly criticises power ideologies and their dire effects on the individual. The social class differences between his characters are obvious. Aware of their social privileges, Clair and Toby are mere tools through which Walsums try and sell their home. The possibility that Clair may have died after her disappearance does not arouse their curiosity at all.

On the other hand, Anna, the babysitter, is negligible, worthless, and has strange habits, both because she is an immigrant and because she hails from Britain's lower class. Clair and Toby are middle-class people who work

to fulfil their dreams, and are unhappy with power ideologies. In fact, Anna, an immigrant, is a marginalised, alienated, and subordinate victim of society's ideologies.

Crimp slates what neoliberalism has done to individuals, focusing on alienation and marginalization. In a sense, none of Crimp's characters is satisfied with their lives and does not know how to be happy. In *Dealing with Clair*, Crimp also highlights moral corruption in society. Liz, Mike, and James are characters who appear normal, but in fact they harbour disturbing feelings below their normality. When the Walsums hear about James's cash offer, they forget their promise to the Harraps altogether. James – who belongs to the lower class – harms Clair and ruthlessly takes over Clair's home in order to satisfy his desire to consume. Thus, Crimp reveals that neoliberalism has played a major role in the spike in violence in society. According to Crimp, the more people desire to consume, the more violent society gets.

Crimp also emphasises submissive female bodies in male/female relationships. All the female characters in the play get their share of the pressure of patriarchal hegemony. Liz and Anna's labour go underestimated; whilst high-class Liz lets herself get crushed to maintain the privileges she has through her husband. Clair's disappearance at the end of the play, in a way, reveals Crimp's despair. Consequently, he draws a picture of a corrupt contemporary society riddled with immoral, cruel, and alienated individuals. All of his characters are actually victims of various power ideologies. Crimp implicitly blasts such problems as class segregation, dissatisfaction, and increased violence faced by British society, in turn revealing its negative attitude towards neoliberalism.

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