**Martin Crimp and The Country**

Martin Crimp (*1956) belongs among the most creative and aesthetically prolific playwrights of our time. His dramatic work consists of twelve major plays, various stage adaptations and translations of playwrights such as Chekhov, Marivaux, Genet, Ionesco, and Koltès, as well as award winning radio plays.

The countryside in Crimp’s *The Country* (2000) is no place of idyll. In five scenes that are loosely connected slices of the lives of the protagonists an altogether inconclusive plotline unravels. The prevailing atmosphere is that of intriguing, creepy menace often reminiscent of the best of Harold Pinter: Rebecca is the intruding stranger, Morris remains an unseen character, the dialogue is clipped, rackingly stichomythic, and even single words run a sinister and enigmatic ring around themselves.

Crimp attacks the rural and pastoral myth inasmuch as the five-scene structure of the play is but a faint echo of the classical five-act tragedy of yesteryear. Such traditional sense of unity is thwarted by the ironical structuring of the succession of the scenes which follows the rather aleatory pattern of the children’s game of rock-paper-scissors – Crimp’s acid commentary on the strategic power games taking place in Richard and Corinne’s dying marriage. Calculation, suspicion, and betrayal are the ingredients of a nightmare future which may be spent, as Corinne ultimately suspects, in a mere simulation of love. Characteristically, the play ends on a Beckettian note of paralysis.

Like other plays of his, Crimp’s *The Country* oscillates between the extremes of social satire and minimalist experiment. It’s recognisably grounded in real life asking questions about responsibility, loyalty, love, and ethos. And yet the satirical laying bare of deficiencies of contemporary, modern life goes without moral finger-wagging. On the contrary, the incoherence of dramatic form, for readers and spectators alike, contains a fertile ground for associations and aesthetic as well as ethical speculation of what it means to be human in the twenty-first century.

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