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Muriel Spark's Postmodernism

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the shifting notions of postmodernism developed through Muriel Spark's fiction, and thereby clarifies this artist's own postmodernism. I use Jean-François Lyotard's definition of the notion in his *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), that there is no grand narrative, as my starting point, and deploy various postmodernist theories, which can illuminate Spark's art and can in turn be illuminated by her art, in my arguments. Throughout the thesis, I focus on two of Spark's most important themes as crucial keys to understanding her postmodernism: the theme of individual subjectivity and the theme of the interplay of life and art.

The thesis begins with the claims Spark makes for her individuality and her individual art through the voice of "I." Chapter I considers issues about being a woman and an artist, which Spark raises around the narrator-heroine of a fictional memoir, *A Far Cry from Kensington* (1988). Here I present this heroine as a definition of the strength of Sparkian women who liberate themselves by practicing art. Chapter II discusses *Loitering with Intent* (1981), a fictional autobiography of a fictional woman novelist, alongside Spark's own autobiography and her various biographical works. This section illustrates Spark's notion of the "author" in relation to the "work" – and an author in control in her sense – by investigating the dynamic interplay of life and art in the form of this novel.

Chapter III analyses *The Driver's Seat* (1970), the novel

which most shockingly elucidates the postmodern condition according to Spark and demonstrates her postmodernist narrative strategies. Her concern with the crisis of the “subject” in the world in its postmodern phase is observed in the figure of the heroine, a woman who has tried and failed to be an author in control. I argue that Spark here theorises the notion of subject, by providing her own version of the psychoanalytical “death drive” and also represents the Lacanian real as the unfigurable with this figure. Chapter IV and Chapter V follow the developments of Spark’s discussion of the crisis of the “subject” in two of her later novels. Chapter IV concentrates on the theme of Otherness in *Symposium* (1990). Chapter V discusses *Reality and Dreams* (1996), in which Spark pursues the theme of excess and opens up the contradictions inherent in this notion to bring about a new philosophy of life by art as excess.

Chapter VI and Chapter VII focus on Spark’s performer heroines, who embody variously an interplay of life and art. Chapter VI first examines Spark’s 1971 theoretical manifesto, “The Desegregation of Art,” to introduce the idea of practicing art in life and to clarify her aesthetic and philosophical principles, on which her postmodernism is based. I then illustrate how she theorises performance further by analysing the film-actress heroine of *The Public Image* (1968). Chapter VII brings the heroines of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) and *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974) – women inventing themselves – into the perspective of Spark’s postmodernism. Through re-readings of these novels, I present the Abbess as a Sparkian woman and as the

most self-conscious instance of what I call postmodern subject.

To conclude the thesis, Chapter VIII discusses Spark's latest novel, *The Finishing School* (2004), as her contemplation on the theme of the end and in terms of her postmodern endings.

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References and Abbreviations

Texts by Muriel Spark

All page references in this thesis are to the editions listed in the Bibliography, which appears at the end of the thesis. The date of first publication is given in brackets. The titles are abbreviated as follows.

Novels

<i>C</i>	<i>The Comforters</i> (1957)
<i>MM</i>	<i>Memento Mori</i> (1959)
<i>BPR</i>	<i>The Ballad of Peckham Rye</i> (1960)
<i>PMJB</i>	<i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i> (1961)
<i>PI</i>	<i>The Public Image</i> (1968)
<i>DS</i>	<i>The Driver's Seat</i> (1970)
<i>ND</i>	<i>Not to Disturb</i> (1971)
<i>HER</i>	<i>The Hothouse by the East River</i> (1973)
<i>AC</i>	<i>The Abbess of Crewe</i> (1974)
<i>T</i>	<i>The Takeover</i> (1976)
<i>LI</i>	<i>Loitering with Intent</i> (1981)
<i>FCK</i>	<i>A Far Cry from Kensington</i> (1988)
<i>S</i>	<i>Symposium</i> (1990)
<i>RD</i>	<i>Reality and Dreams</i> (1996)
<i>AA</i>	<i>Aiding and Abetting</i> (2000)
<i>FS</i>	<i>The Finishing School</i> (2004)

Stories

AS *All the Stories of Muriel Spark* (2001)

Non Fiction

TW *Tribute to Wordsworth: A Miscellany of Opinion for the Centenary of the Poet's Death* (1950)

MS *Mary Shelley* (1987)

CV *Curriculum Vitae: Autobiography* (1992)

EB *The Essence of the Brontës* (1993)

Articles

“RA” “The Religion of an Agnostic: A Sacramental View of the World in the Writings of Proust” (1953)

“MC” “My Conversion” (1961)

“DA” “The Desegregation of Art” (1971)

Interviews with Muriel Spark

In this thesis, reference to an interview will cite the letter “I” followed by the date and the source number as listed below. For instance, (I-4, 1970) refers to an interview by Jean Scroggie. Full details of the sources are given in the Bibliography.

- I-1 Interview by Frank Kermode (1963)
- I-2 Interview by Mary Holland (1965)
- I-3 Interview by Ian Gillham (1970)
- I-4 Interview by Jean Scroggie (1970)
- I-5 Interview by George Armstrong (1970)
- I-6 Interview by Philip Toynbee (1971)
- I-7 Interview by Alex Hamilton (1974)
- I-8 Interview by Lorna Sage (1976)
- I-9 Interview by Victoria Glendinning (1979)
- I-10 Interview by Sara Frankel (1985)
- I-11 Interview by Martin McQuillan (1998)
- I-12 Interview by Gillian Bowditch (2001)
- I-13 Interview by Alan Taylor (2004)

INTRODUCTION

THE ARTIST IN ANOTHER DIMENSION

Dame Muriel Spark has been an arcane puzzle in the mapping of contemporary literature. Norman Page, in his *Muriel Spark* (1990), spells out the fascination of her unclassifiable novels:

She acknowledges and owes few literary debts and belongs to no school, group or movement; there is no one quite like her, and one rereads her novels in the hope of coming a little closer to their meaning and in the certainty of repeated pleasure. (Page 122)

Her art of fiction is so entirely new and unique that it has baffled – and indeed even terrified – as much as it has fascinated her readers. Patrick Parrinder’s “Muriel Spark and Her Critics” (1981), for instance, well represents the attitude of those who unfortunately find themselves *disliking*:

a witty, graceful and highly intelligent writer who often fails to provide the emotional satisfactions and to produce the sort of intellectual conviction traditionally associated with novel-reading. (Parrinder 75)

He continues to complain,

Spark is a genuinely disturbing writer – one who disturbs our deepest convictions and prejudices about novel-writing. (Parrinder 75)

but ironically, his complaints confirm her success in breaking with such literary traditions – realist traditions – as he has in his mind.

Spark indeed does not write for any simple “emotional satisfactions” and, rather, her writings aim to disturb any expectation of what novels ought to be.

Joseph Hynes, the editor of *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark* (1992), categorises Spark critics into several camps, under the captions: “Opposition, Loyal and Other” and “The Critical Mainstream.” Their responses to Spark’s radical art are widely divergent, though they are in agreement that they cannot ignore her. *The Cambridge Guide to Women’s Writing in English* (1999),¹ providing an account of this critical trend rather than of Spark’s art, remarks on the opposition to “her quirky, lapidary technique,” which has been sometimes interpreted negatively as frivolous, superficial, or trivial; and her “Olympian attitude” (Moseley 592), which has been deemed cold and harsh. This quite recent *Guide* also tells us that “in her books the issue is the freedom of her characters within the world of a godlike novelist” (Moseley 592). For long time, her critics have addressed this as “the issue” – the main issue, if not the only one – and have discussed her fiction in terms of the analogue between God’s creation and the novelist’s, between life and art. They have become stuck in the static myth of “a godlike novelist,” with her omniscience, her supreme knowledge of an ending, and her Catholic faith. It is time to demythologise the author and to rediscover Muriel Spark in a more dynamic postmodern interplay of life and art.

¹ This reference work was edited by Lorna Sage; the contributor of the section on Spark is Merritt Moseley.

“The Spark Myth” Since the 1960s

Spark’s 1957 debut as a novelist coincided with her conversion to Catholicism, though she had already by then produced poems, short stories, and several biographical and critical works. Her first novel, *The Comforters*,² caused quite a stir, and was welcomed by writers such as Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene. It was Frank Kermode who established her as “the author of *The Comforters*,” setting the tone for what Hynes then registered as “the critical mainstream” in *Critical Essays*. In his interview with Spark, seizing on her statement that “the plot is the basic myth,” Kermode instantly referred to *The Comforters*: “This is a book in which you’ve got your myth” (I-1, 1963, 29).³ In “The Novel as Jerusalem: Muriel Spark’s *Mandelbaum Gate*” (1965), he encapsulated and generalised her fiction as “novels about the novel”: “the control of the writer’s presumptuous providence” (Kermode, 1965, 179-80) is what is at issue; the analogous relation between reality and fiction, the divine plot and the novelist’s, constitutes the basic structure of her novels – “her myth.” In short, Kermode identified the forms of her fiction with the configuration of destiny – the one and only “myth” – with new variations.⁴ Although the pattern of destiny she evokes

² The heroine of this novel is also a novelist-to-be and a Catholic convert; she suffers the experience of hearing typing sounds accompanied by voices that tell her real-life story as if she were a “character” created by an invisible author.

³ As for Spark’s response, she firmly put it down to the fact that she had written a novel about writing a novel because it had been her first exploration of this art form; but for him, her debut novel was “something which is very handy *to the whole discussion*” (I-1, 1963, 29 [my italics]).

⁴ Here is one example how he explains her fiction from the conclusion to one of his essays, “To *The Girls of Slender Means*” (1963): “[her novels] assume a reality unaware that it conceals patterns of truth. But when an imagination (*naturalitier*

in many different ways is indeed an important component, especially in her early fiction, to take it as her “basic myth” comes close to saying that she writes only one novel again and again. Kermode contradicts this implication by his own assertion that “she is always finding new ones [forms]” (Kermode, 1965, 179).

Many critics have followed Kermode’s picture of Spark as “an unremittingly Catholic novelist committed to immutable truth” (Kermode, 1963, 174) with her serious sense of morality and her profound sense of charity, probably because they also share his own immutable, pious view of the world. Despite their constant emphasis on the newness of her art, other critics too have discussed her forms as new ideas for “the myth” – which is, in fact, the Kermode myth – failing to grasp Spark’s capacity to generate wholly new structures, and thereby overlooking larger themes. Despite their emphatic gesture of distinguishing her faith from Catholic dogmas and doctrines, they have continued to speculate as to where the author’s compassion or moral sense lies, and do so by philosophising either through what they (mis)take as an authorial view, or by propounding their own orthodox view of Catholicism. “The critical mainstream,” thus stagnating in an old myth, has not been able to resolve its own contradictions, let alone contradictions this artist deals with so expertly in her

christiana) makes fictions it imposes patterns, and the patterns are figures of truth” (Kermode, 1963, 178). If it were not that he is already talking about “figures of truth” in terms of the pattern of destiny, he might have known that his abstract words hardly elucidate what she famously called “absolute truth” – truth emerging from her fiction, which she admitted is “a pack of lies” (I-1, 1963, 30) – or the forms of her fiction.

novels.

Ruth Whittaker's *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark* (1982) has been an influential study in this genre. Whittaker, as reverential as Kermode, has underlined that Spark's religious faith "is at the heart of her work" and then interpreted "her belief in the supernatural as an aspect of reality" (Whittaker 54) as the essential method for uniting her faith and her fictional forms. The late Alan Bold added further weight to the artist's poetic vision, and paid more attention to her background rather than her faith – her Scottishness, and her literary career before she became a novelist – but without broadening the already settled view of her art. Hynes has remained rather too addicted to paraphrase to be able to bring his account of her kind of reality – which he calls "the real"⁵ – or her "nevertheless principle"⁶ into any theoretical argument. Other "loyal" supporters like David Lodge and John Updike muddied the waters further with irrelevant questions based on their own judgments on the difference between good and evil.⁷

⁵ He discusses this in his book, *The Art of the Real: Muriel Spark's Novels* (1988).

⁶ Spark explains, "nevertheless" is the word she associates, "as the core of a thought-pattern, with particularly Edinburgh," and finds that "much of my literary composition is based on the nevertheless idea" ("Edinburgh-born" 22). Hynes' interpretation of this principle hardly goes further than his idea that she is "a 'both/and' writer, rather than an 'either/or' writer" (Hynes, 1992, 2) in Introduction for *Critical Essays*.

⁷ Lodge expresses his desire to know "Whether I should approve or disapprove of Miss Brodie" (Lodge 158) in his "The Uses and Abuses of Omniscience: Method and Meaning in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*" (1970). Updike in "Topnotch Witcheries" (1975) is baffled by Spark's attitude towards her another tyrannical heroine in *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974): "confusingly, though the author cannot approve of the Abbess Alexandra, she does love her, love her as she hasn't loved a character in a decade" (Updike 211).

When hearing about Updike's doubt as to whether she could provide "a convincing portrait of evil" without presenting "a compelling portrait of the good" – which he thinks her novels lack – Spark airily put her most famous American supporter in his place: "I don't know whether John Updike has given us a

In the early 1970s, however, there were a few studies that did more justice to Spark's avant-garde fiction: Malcolm Bradbury's essay "Muriel Spark's Fingernails" (1972) and Peter Kemp's book *Muriel Spark* (1974). Bradbury ("a very intelligent fellow" (I-11, 1998, 218) according to Spark) gives an impressive textual analysis of *The Driver's Seat* (1970), though he defines her novels as "novels of ending" (Bradbury 189), under the apparent influence of Kermode. Kemp's polished language effectively captures some important technical aspects of her fiction in sharp chapter headings such as "Tense Present" or "Future Conditional." They both brought keen observation to bear on her experiments with *nouveau roman* schemes and with postmodern hyper-reality – each in his way – at the time when appropriate literary theory and its analytic terms had yet to be elaborated.

In Kathleen Wheeler's *A Critical Guide to Twentieth-century Women Novelists* (1997), compiled when the term "postmodernism" had become more prevalent, Spark is placed among "Early Post-modernist Innovations, 1944-1975." Wheeler enthusiastically discusses women novelists' significant contributions to modern literature, mapping them out, apparently, against androcentric notions of the canon which have been called into question along with realist traditions. Her section on Spark might have been more faithful to her own mapping, if she had developed her picture of postmodernist Spark with her overt, self-

convincing portrait of the good, mind you; his characters are just in and out of bed all the time" (I-10, 1985, 452-53).

conscious plotting more in line with Patricia Waugh's reading of Spark in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), or the studies by Kemp and Bradbury. Instead, sadly, the tradition of Spark criticism, namely, Kermode and his "sense of ending," was still all too alive: Wheeler links her own great interest in the element of power relations to the analogous relation between fiction and reality in terms of the competition for authority. Her one-page description of the artist (very short, even as a summary, and much shorter than, for instance, her sections on Doris Lessing and Iris Murdoch) is useful only insofar it seems to confirm that Spark remains a puzzle in many literary mappings.

Spark established a high-economy, high-style writing around 1970, and the change in her fiction was obvious. Since Bradbury and Kemp perceived not only this change but also changes in the world, they could recognise in her new forms the figure of the world at its own moment of moving and changing – as opposed to the Kermodean timeless divine pattern. Spark is not necessarily, not any longer a "godlike novelist" weaving the pattern of destiny out of "truth," "faith," or "imagination." She is a writer who is firmly rooted in the world she lives in. She writes about this world where things happen, people who come her way, and herself – who transforms in the interplay between her life and her art. She keeps inventing new forms not only to represent the world she lives in, but also to discuss issues most relevant to the *here and now*, and in doing so, she theorises her art

and herself, too.⁸ By theorising Muriel Spark, we can identify her contributions to both contemporary literature and contemporary theories.

“Theorising Muriel Spark”

Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction, a collection of “theorised” critical essays edited by Martin McQuillan, came out in 2002. Here, twelve critics undertake the long overdue mission of reading Spark’s works through the new, the most contemporary – and thus the most Sparkian – literary theory. A few contributors use each of their theoretical stances as a starting point, and pose worthy questions to open a way to “theorize Muriel Spark.” Eleanor Byrne’s essay is a careful study of Spark’s post-colonial writing, of her short stories set in Africa. Patricia Duncker’s reading of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, side by side with Brontë’s *Villette*, is suggestive when she touches general aspects of Spark’s fiction-making. Judith Roof’s analysis of Spark’s narrative drive in comparison with Marguerite Duras’s is also a worthy effort, although she seems to attach more weight to Duras. However, on the whole, *Theorizing Muriel Spark* turns out to be disappointing. All too often throughout

⁸ Spark makes this explicit, indeed emphatic, in a lyrical interjection in the course of her 1976 novel, *The Takeover*: “But it did not occur to one of those spirited and in various ways intelligent people round Berto’s table that a complete mutation of our means of nourishment had already come into being where the concept of money and property were concerned, a complete mutation not merely to be defined as a collapse of the capitalist system, or a global recession, but such a sea-change in the nature of reality as could not have been envisaged by Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud. Such a mutation that what were assets were to be liabilities and no armed guards could be found and fed sufficient to guard those armed guards who failed to protect the properties they guarded . . .” (T 91).

these essays, even when they come close to important themes – such as excess, doubleness, or Otherness – narrowness and a lack of flexibility with theory results in readings so formulaic that they fail to illuminate either theory or Spark’s art.

It is two articles (both first appeared in 1968) by Hélène Cixous, and justifiably included in this volume, that demonstrate an open-minded, independent view of Spark’s novels. Her review of *The Public Image* (1968) may be flawed because of her rather too simple interpretation of the heroine’s performance in this novel.⁹ However, what is impressive about her old articles is that, even at this early stage in her career as a critic, she showed a sharp understanding of some of the most fascinating qualities of Spark’s fiction. Willy Maley, one contributor from the younger generation, also provides illumination with his way of “theorizing Muriel Spark.” In “Not to Deconstruct? Righting and Deference in *Not to Disturb*,” proposing that “theory has in fact much to learn from Spark” (Maley 171), Maley at once makes a clear statement about her position in terms of theory – that of Derrida, whom he specifically follows – and shows how her text can be employed to reargue and redefine the aim of deconstruction.

The last chapter of the collection provides an interview with

⁹ Calling the heroine Annabel “an ice-cold little vampire” and regarding her performance – her practice of art – in life as “an art of the hollow” (Cixous 208), Cixous seems to overlook this heroine’s gradual awakening, which emerges from Spark’s subtle handling of the paradox – not the binary – of her heroine’s “character” and her “public image.” Accordingly, Cixous states that “blind female vitality wins a game against male sensitivity”(Cixous 208), but never acknowledges Annabel’s liberation in the end. I will discuss the heroine and her art in Chapter VI.

Spark in which she refers explicitly to herself as “Post-modernist.” Here she gives her own explanation for what she means by the word:

there is another dimension which is a bit creepy, supernatural . . . not supernatural but not necessarily consequential. (I-11, 1998, 216).¹⁰

This is hardly a clear-cut definition of postmodernism, but it makes clear that she introduces “another dimension” – “supernatural” – not only as an aesthetic but also as a theoretical strategy. This “dimension,” which perhaps could be understood as her creative imagination, flourishes on her solid thematising and theorising, in a way that could indeed enlighten contemporary theories and could in turn be enlightened by them. This thesis will examine how Spark carries on her discussions on contemporary issues, with relation to, mainly, postmodernist (a.k.a. post-structuralist) theories, to clarify the artist’s own postmodernism.

As for postmodernism itself – which will become elaborated and mutated in the course of Spark’s career – a useful starting definition for this now almost indefinable notion was given by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979):

I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives.
(Lyotard xxiv)

Thus, there is *no grand narrative*, which can legitimise

¹⁰ Curiously, Spark’s phrase echoes Freud, but McQuillan does not pursue this echo in his interview. Neil Hertz’s “Freud and the Sandman” (1980) offers some interesting and relevant discussion on Freud’s essay, “The Uncanny” (1919).

knowledge or truth.¹¹ In this sense, in her life as much as in her art, Spark can be viewed as an artist who *embodies* the notion of postmodern with her hybrid background, which has been often referred to. She was born of an English mother and a Jewish father, grew up in Presbyterian Edinburgh and became a Catholic convert, and lived in South Africa, London, and New York before she settled in Italy. While all these are important facts that constitute who she is, none of them is the final or defining element: *no single grand narrative explains who she is*. The same can be said about another plain fact that she is a woman.

Spark and Sparkian Women

Being a woman – this is a simple fact to Muriel Spark. It is an initial and essential condition, on which her radical individualism has developed. This simple but significant fact has more often than not slipped out of Spark criticism. Most of her “mainstream” critics seem to think laying stress on her peculiar “faith,” which they distinguish from Catholic dogmas and doctrines, is enough to explain her individualism.

This thesis puts a spotlight on a variety of female characters created by Spark, alongside a portrayal of the author as “a woman, an artist, and an individual.” The intention here is to integrate feminist discussions emerging from her writings – although there

¹¹ Certainly, Lyotard’s definition cannot sum up postmodernism, which is loyal to its own creed of multiplicity and indeterminacy and resists any single, final definition. Yet, in the pronounced irreverence towards any single narrative, Lyotard is best tallied with Spark, whose consistent elaboration on the notion of postmodernism makes her art of fiction one of the best exemplars among various postmodernist projects.

is often a fairly tenuous relation between Spark and some strands in contemporary feminism – into postmodernist discussions around the notion of subject. Since the ultimate aim of my study is to illuminate her individuality and individualism, it will not add any respectively feminist reading of her texts to the few past attempts; these have turned out to be rather too limited and reductive. For instance, there has been Judy Little, who focuses on the figure of a spinster in Spark's fiction, both in *Comedy and the Women Writer: Woolf, Spark and Feminism* (1983) and "Endless Different Ways: Muriel Spark's Re-visions of the Spinster" (1991); Judy Sproxton's arguments in *The Women of Muriel Spark* (1992) too are as limited as her equally simplistic categorisation of Spark's female characters. In contrast, Lorna Sage, perhaps the critic who grasps Spark's art in her interview and reviews better than any Spark critic, has written little about her fiction in terms of feminism. In her *Women in the House of Fiction* (1992), while discussing women writers – such as Doris Lessing and Angela Carter – and opening onto feminist issues with great passion, Sage marginalised Spark in this discussion, as if to imply that Spark's way of discussing women's problems is better called individualism, rather than any kind of feminism.

In this study, I do not deal extensively with many of Spark's early novels written in the 1960s, nor do I approach her successive fictions in the chronological order of publication. Instead, to underline the development of her changing art of fiction, of her postmodernism, I focus on her novels which exemplify her

theorising various contemporary issues. Therefore, the novels selected here are mostly her later works, in which she deals with those issues more explicitly in relation to postmodern phenomena. I return to a few of her early novels – which have been much more discussed than her later novels – to trace the development of her postmodernism and also to reconsider them from her postmodernist perspective. In her earlier fiction and many of her short stories, Spark tends to introduce apparently supernatural elements such as the typing ghost in *The Comforters* and mysterious telephone calls in *Memento Mori* as devices to call into question the reality of the world. Because these elements often appear as if they were the voice of destiny or disembodied agents of the author, the “mainstream” criticism has emphasised Spark as a god-like novelist, has failed to recognise the development of her fiction, and so has not fully discussed her later works. To change this dominant view of her fiction, I concentrate on her later novels. I refer only to a few short stories also because her novels – which consist of many narratives – are more appropriate examples for her formal experiments and innovations.

I begin with the strong claims she makes for the individuality of the artist and her individual art in the voice of “I.” I start from her two novels of the 1980s, which most explicitly consider “life-writing,” to introduce two of her important themes, the theme of the individual subjectivity and that of the interplay of art and life, strands which are always intertwined together in her fiction, and on which her postmodernism developed, and make

this my springboard to open up the artist's postmodernist perspective. It is from this perspective that it becomes apparent how she theorises herself and her own art, and through which I approach the artist and her works. From this point of view, I re-examine *The Driver's Seat* as the novel which elucidates her grasp of the postmodern condition and demonstrates her postmodernist narrative schemes; it is a text which possesses great significance not only in her art of fiction but also in contemporary literature. The thesis then pursues the theme of individual subjectivity which Spark superbly problematises and brings into question in this 1970 novel and which she further explores in her some later novels with different emphases and focus. To clarify her own postmodernism emerging from both aesthetic and philosophical principles, I then discuss Spark's performer heroines, who embody the idea of the interplay of life and art, in relation to the interplay of the artist's life and her art. I conclude this study with an analysis of her latest novel, in which she theorises her philosophy of life and art in terms of the theme of the end.

The thesis begins with attempts to detach Muriel Spark from the myth of the author by examining Spark's own attempts to detach herself from "the author," or "the name," in various forms of life-writing, both fictional and non-fictional. For this mission, Spark takes the issue with the notion of author – not unlike Michel Foucault in his theoretic enquiry into "What Is an Author?" (1969) – and figures her argument into her fiction. Two of her novels in the 1980s – the decade before Spark produced her own non-fictional autobiography *Curriculum Vitae*

(1992) – in which her heroines tell their life stories in the first person, exemplify the way she seeks to affirm the individuality of an artist *and* a woman – and of her writing – through an interaction between her self-exploration and her heroine’s. These novels at once show her concern with themes around women as writing subjects, which she shares with other women writers, and demonstrate her distinct voice, her unique forms: her individual art – beyond feminism, for all the importance of being a woman.

My first chapter examines *A Far Cry from Kensington* (1988), a fictional memoir of women by a woman, to open up questions about being an artist and a woman by relating the heroine’s transformation to the kind of questions raised in Spark’s format: Am I a woman/victim or a monster/criminal?; If a woman speaks truth, is that a crime? The analysis presents this heroine as a figure to define the strength of Sparkian women: women who survive, transform and liberate themselves from the oppressive alternatives imposed on them.

Chapter II discusses *Loitering with Intent* (1981), a fictional autobiography of a fictional author, alongside Spark’s autobiography and biographical works. In this novel, transforming her artist-heroine’s struggle for authorship into the literal pursuit of *her écriture* (that is, her stolen manuscripts – a body of writing), Spark brings the discussion around the “author” and her “work” into what she calls another dimension. The aim of this chapter is to elucidate Spark’s fictional forms both aesthetically and thematically, in relation to the dynamic interplay

of art and life, and thereby illuminate Spark, as well as her heroine, as an author in control in her sense.

Chapter III provides a reading of *The Driver's Seat* as a postmodern fable, which can well clarify the postmodern condition according to Spark, as well as her postmodernist narrative strategies. Here, a decade before Lyotard, the artist gives her purest definition of the postmodern – no matter how enigmatic it might have looked decades ago. In this novel as clearly as in her later novels she observes and articulates the influences of postmodern phenomena – such as those criticised by Guy Debord or Jean Baudrillard – over “individual subjectivity.” Concerned with individuals who are at a loss to grasp the changing nature of reality in the world entering into its postmodern phase, revealing its *fictionality* more than ever, she makes this world frighteningly *real* with all her postmodernist schemes. It is evident in this quite early masterpiece that Spark relates the idea of an author in control to the notion of an individual subject, not by making a simple analogue between art and life, but by her postmodernist perspective on the nature of reality.

It is also evident in the heroine's figure that Spark's voice of “I” as an author in control does not take for granted her individuality, or the truth of her words, without questioning the problematic notion of subject. To represent all the contradictions lying between reality and fiction, the unidentifiable heroine moves around unidentified places, driving to the fate of the exile, to her own death, with her murderous ambition of becoming an author in

control – only to get lost in a grey area between the role of victim and that of criminal, in her own plot.¹² The focus on a woman's failed aggression addresses feminist issues, as always, highlights grand narratives as patriarchal discourses, and serves to deconstruct them. Furthermore, through the figure of the heroine, Spark works out various themes emerging from the problematised notion of subject. Since her theorising and thematising of this notion anticipate theories which are now highly developed around the issue of "the subject" – notably, among a new generation of Lacanian psychoanalysis – it is especially worth contrasting the artist's representations with psychoanalytical accounts.

In this analysis of *The Driver's Seat*, I will argue that the contradictory figure of the heroine is Spark's version of the "death drive," which indeed deconstructs Freud's "masterplot" – as elaborated by Peter Brooks in *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (1984) – rather than substantiating it. Instead, Spark counters and defies the Lacanian notion of the Real as the unfigurable by materialising it in this figure. The

¹² The heroine's figure as an exile – which I will discuss in detail – seems to be another way to explain what Spark means by describing herself as "a constitutional exile" ("Edinburgh-born" 21), for whom the condition of belonging to no place "ceases to be a fate; it becomes a calling" (I-10, 1985, 448). Her heroine tries to create a grand narrative out of her own death – which, ironically, means to create for herself *no place* on earth – whereas the author, belonging to no place (no grand narrative), creates a *real* place out of the world she lives in – wherever it is. This is to say that fiction as a created place is not a "utopian" space, an escape from the real world: no place can be created without living in the world here and now. Interestingly, Spark applies the distinction between "a fate" and "a calling" to the situation of her artist-heroine of *The Abbess of Crewe*: to be the Abbess is not her fate, to make herself the "Abbess" – her own artwork – is her calling. The author amusingly turns her description of the condition of the exile into that of the artist when the Abbess declares, "I move as the Spirit moves me" (AC 247), as the Holy Ghost for Spark is the name for her creative inspiration.

heroine's figure is also examined in relation to a diversity of feminist issues as, for instance, discussed by Julia Kristeva.

The following two chapters look into Spark's later novels, in each of which the author pursues the crisis of the "subject" in the postmodern world, with a particular focus on her key theme, and also creates a female figure in line with the heroine of *The Driver's Seat*. Chapter IV concentrates on the theme of Otherness evolving around a woman who takes the double role of victim and criminal, a figure as an enigmatic Other, an object of desire, in *Symposium* (1990). Setting the figure of the Other at the "centre" in the decentred world, Spark portrays other characters too as objects circulating in their own consumerist value system – like paintings on the art market. To illustrate the whole picture of the novel, regarding the theme of Otherness as its frame, this section puts together seemingly fragmentary plots involving various paintings.

Chapter V discusses *Reality and Dreams* (1996) in terms of the theme of excess, one of Spark's essential themes. Her theorising of "subject" in the postmodern world converges on the excess – evil, violence, desire, Otherness – of a missing girl and on the excess – from extravagance to redundancy – detected in the postmodern world. Bringing an empty space created by this girl, the Other, and the world of film industry, of image-making business, together into the field of vision, the novel explores "the tract of no-man's land between dreams and reality" (*RD* 160). By probing contradictions in the notion of excess, the author transforms her study of "subject" into the "new philosophy of

life” (I-11, 1998, 223) she wishes to offer. I will conclude this chapter with an analysis of an Isak Dinesen short story which shows in fable form the power of a female artist who wishes to offer a parallel philosophy, and to change the world, by figuring her art as excess.

Through Chapter VI and Chapter VII, I aim to clarify how Spark’s postmodernism is based on both her individualism and her aesthetic principles in terms of the idea of practicing art in life, and thus to define Spark and Sparkian women as women inventing themselves – as what I would call a “postmodern subject.” Among the various practitioners of art in life in her fiction, both chapters address issues of performance in three of her most “theatrical” novels, and focus on the most “prima donna” of her heroines: *The Public Image* (1968), *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), and *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974).

Chapter VI introduces the idea of practicing art in life – essential in Spark’s view of art – and charts the transformation of the author and the evolution of her performer heroines in the interplay of her life and her art. To consider her postmodernism, in which art itself plays a more significant part than its object or its medium, it is necessary to return to the artist’s radical manifesto in 1971, “The Desegregation of Art,” and carefully examine this essay side by side with her fiction. What is at stake is to question the “originality” of an individual, as well as of art, and this question has to be asked by dealing with various dichotomous notions (e.g. authentic/fake, natural/artificial). As an important and relevant example here, she upsets the dichotomy

of “surface” and “depth” – according to her own definitions of the words – through her view of art itself as surface.

With her performer heroines, Spark carries out her discussions as to “subject” with an emphasis on the role of art in subject formation, and thus goes far beyond the theory of “performativity” expounded by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). I will explore Spark theorising performance through an analysis of *The Public Image*, attending to the paradoxes that arise between its heroine’s “character” and her “public image.” In this analysis, I will present the heroine as a performer figure to form a contrast with the other two performers, Miss Brodie and Abbess Alexandra. From this heroine, who is just at the beginning of inventing herself, I will then move on a new chapter for women who are more advanced in self-invention.

Chapter VII brings both *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Abbess of Crewe* into the perspective of Spark’s postmodernism, by regarding each of them as its heroine’s real-life drama: Miss Brodie and the Abbess as artists who invent themselves as their own – amoral – works of art. In doing so, this chapter breaks away from the more usual, moralist readings of these novels, on the grounds that they fail to see how Spark’s postmodern artworks aim to change ways of seeing the world, people, and indeed, art.

Spark explores a possible way to affirm the individual subjectivity in her heroines’ arts, in their excesses, and from the paradox represented by Miss Brodie to the paradoxes Alexandra

presents to defend herself. With her controversial Miss Brodie and her Abbess, she enters the field of ethics, offering a new logic, a kind of alternative – such as Joan Copjec seeks for in *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (1994) – for the logic of the superego. As the evolution of Spark's performers arrives at Alexandra the Abbess, this Sparkian woman who gets away with "crime" – that is to say, speaking truth, meaning what she says – stands in her own symbolic order, above and beyond feminism, like her creator.

Endings give grandeur to the narratives they finish off. But postmodernisms as a diversity of projects to question grand narratives are suspicious of attributing grandeur to any narrative. And Spark has experimented considerably with endings and conclusions. In my final chapter, her latest novel, *The Finishing School* (2004), is approached as a meditation on this theme. I consider it not as a "novel of ending," but as her contemplation on the notion of end in a form of fiction, a contemplation which can well correspond to Baudrillard's thesis in *The Illusion of the End* (1992). Spark's *myth of the novel* – its new form *and* theme – is writing a history of the world here and now. It can be argued that here she writes not only another version of the history of the contemporary world, but also another history of her own art.

CHAPTER I

REDEEMING THE TIME

“My crime had been to call him to his face *pisseur de copie*.”

– *A Far Cry from Kensington*

Telling her life story in a variety of ways in many of her novels, Muriel Spark has engaged in a dialogue with herself, in a constant and fundamental exploration of “Who am I?” and “What is my art?”¹³ *Loitering with Intent* (1981) wittily exemplifies such an exploration, taking the shape of a fictional autobiography by a fictional author called Fleur Talbot and elucidating Spark’s view of the relationship between the author and the work. In this autobiographical masterpiece, she returns to the first-person narrative – which previously did not satisfy her because “the narrator can’t be everywhere at once” (I-8, 1976, 11) – for the first time since her second novel, *Robinson* (1958). Spark, with her maturity and confidence, no longer has any problem with “I”: the time is ripe to proceed with her self-exploration in the voice of “I.”

In the same year of 1981, when *Loitering with Intent* was published, Spark was among writers who responded to a question – by curious coincidence, quite relevant to her main concern at the time – posed by *The New York Times Book Review*: which literary

¹³ Answering to a question whether she is conscious of audience when she is writing, she says, “an audience, yes, but people like myself . . . probably I’m writing for the original Miss Jean Brodie or somebody like that. I don’t have a precise idea in my head. It’s got to satisfy me though. I talk to myself: it’s a dialogue with myself largely” (I-11, 1998, 213).

composition would you like to have written?¹⁴ To this, for instance, Margaret Drabble listed *Antony and Cleopatra*, saying, “There are plenty of evasive answers I could have given but why not come straight out with the truth?” (*NY Times Book Review*, 1981, 68). A different truth came from Spark: “In fact, I would not want to have written anything by anyone else, because they are ‘them,’ and I am ‘me’” (*NY Times Book Review*, 1981, 70). This is a straight answer, which spells out why any writer would be tempted to give some evasive answer in the first place. Simply, there is no other truth to Spark; she has no hesitation in claiming for the uniqueness of her writing – of her self.

Since Spark affirms the inseparability of the artist and her work (here, setting aside the material existence she deals with in *Loitering with Intent*), does it matter who is speaking? It does – a great deal, in *A Far Cry from Kensington* (1988), another of Spark’s warm and poignant autobiographical novels. Its heroine,

¹⁴ Referring to *The Book of Job* among books she has admired or been fascinated by, Spark emphasised that she would not want to have written it, but added, “if so, there are points of characterization and philosophy on which I think I could improve” (*NY Times Book Review*, 1981, 70). This little interview might well have led Spark to produce *The Only Problem* (1984), which is based on the idea of *The Book of Job*. Rather oddly situated between the two most affectionate novels by Spark, *The Only Problem* is a dry, logical novel with its unlovable male protagonist – there is something barren about his character despite his material affluence. While he preoccupies himself with his monograph on *The Book of Job*, his creator displays her ability to make *her own* work of *The Book of Job*. Whereas she introduces the missing story of Job’s wife layered by a story of missing wife of the protagonist and the painting by Georges de La Tour, *Job visité par sa femme*, she sticks to the idea of the original as she theorises it: Job’s comforters are “identified only by name,” telling him one and the same thing; “they really are Fascist interrogators and Job just rebels against it and throws them off” (I-11, 1998, 211). Here is also Spark’s contemplation on the unfathomable mystery of human suffering, which resounds through *A Far Cry from Kensington*, and which Spark discussed in her essay, “The Mystery of Job’s Suffering” (1955): the mystery Job “had to come to terms with in order to gain his peace; some wisdom which combines heavenly ideas with earthly things” (“The Mystery of Job’s Suffering” 7).

Nancy – who used to be known as Mrs Hawkins – telling her life story, is not presented as a professional writer like Fleur, but a competent and reliable editor, as was her creator.¹⁵ In this fictional memoir of 1950s Kensington, various tales of names unfold: names of people, alive and dead, good and bad, famous and obscure – names have a magic, Spark says.¹⁶ Together with many precious details, names are little keys to reach lost time, lost people, lost possibilities. What happens as it does is a far cry from what was expected, what could have been. To Nancy, it is “a far cry,” for which she carries out her business of remembrance.

In this novel, the heroine tells her life story around the time of her transformation, taking off her excess weight (by just eating half) and the excess baggage of being “Mrs Hawkins,” a war-widow with a motherly, comfortably bulky figure: she reinvents herself as Nancy. In the last days of her life as “Mrs Hawkins,” one Hector Bartlett comes in her way. He is the hanger-on of a brilliant writer called Emma Loy. This man who “vomited literary matter,” “urinated and sweated,” “excreted it” (*FCK* 46) – as Nancy forcefully describes him – continually tries to exploit her influence as an editor for his futile ambition “to see his name in print” (*FCK* 151). What makes the matter worse is the

¹⁵ As is well known, from 1947 to 1949, Spark had joined the Poetry Society and became General Secretary and editor of the *Poetry Review*. And it is Falcon Press for which she worked in 1951, and of which she says, “Much of this environment goes into my novel, *A Far Cry from Kensington*” (*CV* 197).

¹⁶ At the beginning of her autobiography, *Curriculum Vitae* (1992), Spark mentions key elements in telling her life story – details and names: “Details fascinate me. I love to pile up details. They create an atmosphere. Names, too, have a magic, be they never so humble” (*CV* 11).

influence of intelligent and attractive, but ruthless Emma, who is not just an “Author,” but a big “Name,” whose book any publisher craves for. Emma, ultimately and inevitably realising her mistake in picking up the horrible man who styles himself as an authority on her life and her art, wants to pay him off by helping his writing to be published, to get rid of him onto reliable “Mrs Hawkins.” In the publishing scene where “Names” matter most, Nancy holds her own work ethics, following “the advice of St Thomas Aquinas”: “rest one’s judgement on what is said, not by whom it is said” (*FCK* 102). Exactly because she is true to her conscience, both professional and personal, she cannot separate the man and his work. “Hector Bartlett” as Emma’s “protégé” does not count; his repulsive writing is what he is, and so she cannot help denouncing him and his work equally. She commits a “crime” nobody expects from “Mrs Hawkins”: “My crime had been to call him to his face *pisseur de copie*” (*FCK* 169). She names the name.

For her “crime,” Nancy loses her job, twice, but it is not her, but Wanda Podolak who becomes the *pisseur*’s victim. In Milly Sanders’ house where Nancy lives, Wanda is one of the tenants, a Polish dressmaker, “whose capacity for suffering verged on rapacity” (*FCK* 7). Unknown to anybody, Hector carries on his – ironically – anonymous work on Wanda, trying to use her, first, to approach Nancy, and then, to “punish” her for her “crime” of calling him *pisseur*. Wanda’s downfall is first announced by a “long, loud, high-pitched cry” (*FCK* 29) when she receives a letter warning her about her income tax from an unidentified

“Organiser,” who much later turns out to be Hector. Everybody but Wanda regards the letter as a malicious but harmless joke. Hoping to appease Wanda’s fear by finding the identity of this enemy, Nancy and Milly reluctantly play a Sparkian casting game: who fits the role of “Organiser”? This painful game of suspecting mostly good and decent people brings them a sense of guilt, and “Wanda became almost herself a culprit in our minds: she was guilty of being a victim of the guilty missive lying on Milly’s table, author unknown, exuding malignity all over the kitchen” (*FCK* 38). Nancy thinks of Wanda, “Plainly, she had come from a world of bureaucratic tyranny infinitely worse than ours,” and feels, “she wanted to embrace this suffering; she was conditioned to it” (*FCK* 32). Before she puts things together and finds out that she herself is the link between Wanda and Hector, Wanda jumps into the canal – “Verdict: suicide while of unsound mind” (*FCK* 143).

Hector Bartlett *is* just as much an “Organiser” as he is *pisseur*. He is actually an organiser: a Box-operator of a pseudo-scientific movement called radionics, which claims to cure ailments by working a small black box, in which the hair or the blood of those who are to be cured is placed. Among the remainders of Wanda’s life, there are the Box, grotesque photographs of Wanda and Hector with their faces posed on somebody else’s body, a ridiculous newspaper article about a dubious Box-practice by Wanda the dressmaker, and a piece of Nancy’s hair. The photographs and the article, certainly, are fakes made by Hector. It becomes apparent to Nancy that

“Hector Bartlett had put every sort of pressure on Wanda”; “He had used terror, sex, the persuasions of love, the threats of exposure to induce her to work the Box” (*FCK* 169) – against Nancy. She could not see the poor, middle-aged Polish widow as a woman in love, especially with the vain man who has been haunting the publishing scene. She could not understand why Wanda, a fervent Catholic, became so afraid of a priest, the mild Father Stanislas, and of Nancy herself. Wanda was suffering a sense of guilt, as she was deluded into believing in the Box, which she was working against her Catholic faith and against Nancy, who was actually “wasting” (*FCK* 127) – to Wanda’s eyes – though Nancy was simply getting thin by her diet. Nancy has to accept that she can change nothing by asking if she had known more about Wanda, if she had got the priest to help Wanda in time, if she had not called the man *pisseur* . . . ? And, her suicide, is it Wanda’s “crime” or Nancy’s “crime”? In her memoirs, however, Nancy attempts to settle the account.

A Far Cry from Kensington begins with the heroine’s talk about her habit of insomnia, where Spark is clearly paying playful homage to Proust. Unlike “Marcel,” “Mrs Hawkins” is a big, healthy, motherly woman of twenty-eight:

So great was the noise during the day that I used to lie awake at night listening to the silence. Eventually, I fell asleep contented, filled with soundlessness, but while I was awake I enjoyed the experience of darkness, thought, memory, sweet anticipations. I heard the silence. It was

in those days of the early 'fifties of this century that I formed the habit of insomnia. (*FCK* 5)

Later in the novel, Proust's name is mentioned in a little conversation between the heroine and a would-be-author whose bulky book she has to reject. On her advice to write about "something in particular," this young man, starting to discuss famous books and tripping her up on her own remark on Proust's work, claims that his book is also "about everything in particular" (*FCK* 84). "But it isn't Proust" is her reply, to which he retorts, "So you're looking for another Proust? . . . One isn't enough?" (*FCK* 84). While the scene conveys the good-natured editor's sympathetic air towards the beautiful young man, despite his distorted argument, it also makes it clear that Spark herself does not try or need to be "another Proust." Having formed her own notion of the fundamental idea she found in Proust, Spark knows that she has her way to handle it. In her essay, "My Conversion" (1961), she states, "I always think of ideas as free currency. I only claim the credit for what I do with my ideas" ("MC" 28).

The very important idea Spark shares with Proust is "to redeem the time": "I think that the set-up of my writing is probably just a justification of the time I wasted doing something else. And it is an attempt to redeem the time"; "It wouldn't be wasted if I had my way" (I-1, 1963, 29), she told Frank Kermode. She lucidly explains the idea of time in her article on Proust in 1953:

Proust in many ways anticipated a revised notion of Time which is still in process of formulation. He regarded

Time subjectively, and realised that the whole of eternity is present “now.” Of the span of his life recollected in its eternal aspect, Proust writes “I had at every moment to keep it attached to myself. . . . I could not move without taking it with me.” Proust fixes in our minds that when we use words like “forever,” “eternal,” phrases like “everlasting life,” “world without end,” we refer to an existence here and now, to which we cannot normally approximate.

(“RA” 1)

In *A Far Cry from Kensington*, Spark brings “the eternal aspect” of life, that is, the essence of being, at once the past and the present into a new form, by an act of remembrance – to redeem the time.

Spark, with her unfailing grasp of contradictions in ideas, in people and things (or rather, their representations), calls her Proust essay “The Religion of an Agnostic.” In Proust, she recognises “the insight of a gifted religious and the fidelity of one devoted to a spiritual cause,” but without “the two attributes indispensable in a religious writer, a moral sense and a faith” (“RA”1). She identifies Proust’s readers with “intelligent aspiring souls [embraced in the irreligious milieu of modern Europe] who are nevertheless looking for a ‘religion’ which offers all things beautiful and demands nothing practical” (“RA” 1). For Spark, this “religion” does not contradict her own moral sense and her own faith. However, as she writes, “An involuntary act of remembrance, to Proust, is a suggestive shadow of what a voluntary act of remembrance is to a Christian” (“RA” 1), her

own faith is one of important factors that make her a very different writer from Proust, or any other. (And perhaps, it also makes her a happier person than Proust). The heroine of *A Far Cry from Kensington*, endowed with the moral sense and the faith of her creator (though this does not make her a “Catholic character” any more than it makes Spark a “Catholic writer”), weaves her memories without any trace of copying Proust’s *mémoire involontaire*. The point is that Spark too has devoted herself to offering everything beautiful, regardless of its use: capturing the essence of things – excess in its purest form – in her art, which is excess in itself. But then, she knows well that “excess” has its reverse side, “waste.”

In *A Far Cry from Kensington*, Nancy meets Mrs Hawkins during her insomnia, in a dark, silent time of night, in which the past and the present reside together, as she fills it with her life recollected. She listens to her memories, listens to “a far cry from that Kensington of the past, that Old Brompton Road, that Brompton Road, that Brompton Oratory, a far cry” (*FCK* 6).¹⁷ She begins to realise how she was constructed as the remarkably reliable “Mrs Hawkins” – as everybody calls her, depending on her and heaping their problems on her. The old name, Mrs Hawkins, has been the residue of her brief marriage, of the already lost possibility in her life – an excess baggage, a waste.

A key moment of the heroine’s transformation takes one

¹⁷ Spark repeats again and again that her memories and her imagination are aural, rather than visual, in her Note to *Voices at Play* (1961), in *Loitering with Intent* (as Fleur’s remark), and in her interview. She told Sara Frankel, “I think it’s more true of poets. All poets hear inner voices – words, sentences – rather than seeing visualized scenes” (I-10, 1985, 450).

strange chapter, accompanied by a sudden and entire change in tone. Here, her growing sense of not being herself under the name of Mrs Hawkins sends her on an uncharacteristically depressed tour of London, which makes her feel “like Lucy Snowe in *Villette*” (*FCK* 113) at her somewhat surreal, solitary walk among the festival crowds in Brussels.¹⁸ London suddenly presents itself with a carnivalesque defamiliarisation to her eyes, and to her ears:

There was no such hectic celebration in sober London but I experienced a throb and a choking of hysteria in the London voices around me and in the bland and pasty, the long and dour, the pretty and painted faces of the people. . . . I was tempted to reflect that my diet had the same effect as a drug, but I put the thought from me. I thought about my life as Mrs Hawkins and came to no conclusion whatsoever. “Good evening, Mrs Hawkins,” said our next-door neighbour’s new wife . . . (*FCK* 114)

She remembers the experience in terms of “one of the strangest” (*FCK* 112) periods in her life – the period when “Mrs Hawkins” came to appear as a stranger to herself. It is little wonder that she reached no conclusion about her life as Mrs Hawkins.

The scene of the heroine wandering in London slips further back in 1944, the memory of her married life with Tom Hawkins.

¹⁸ That another fictional heroine is cited here is important. As Spark’s heroine contemplates and tries to grasp her life, the experience of “Lucy Snowe,” rather than that of an actual person, naturally comes to her mind in comparison with her own state. This kind of mental practice, though it is inserted very casually in the novel, is relevant to the author’s view of art, the role of art in life, which I will discuss in Chapter VI, focusing on “The Desegregation of Art.”

Nancy met him in July, married him in August; she was only eighteen, simply in love with the man. They barely lived together, as it was in time of war, and he was a parachutist though he was to be a farmer when the war was over. In September, at the last and only time they saw each other since their wedding, he got drunk, wrecked the place they stayed in, injured her, swearing and shouting, and went back to his camp. All she could do was to settle the bill for the damage. Six days later he was killed in Holland, and several more days later, she got his last letter which did not at all refer to his violent act: "It was a love letter" (*FCK* 118). She guessed that he was "AWOL" and thought, "What a fool he had been . . . to join the parachuters" (*FCK* 116). Despite her unsentimental tone, there is a pain in this memory, in her realisation of an obvious but shocking truth: how little they knew about each other. She can only accept that she will never know about him, what lay in his outburst, what he was thinking, what kind of life she would have had if he had lived, and he never knew about her – he was dead.

Awakening from this memory of the lost, however, Nancy emerges with a full awareness of her new self, with her new good shape. Although she had not only a good heart but also a good mind as Mrs Hawkins, she grows into a new self-knowledge, a new maturity. At the same time, she is rejuvenated, starting her life afresh and looking ten years younger (meaning that "Mrs Hawkins" looked ten years older than she was). This symbolic effect of her act of remembrance (made visible, of course, by the factual effect of her diet), interestingly, corresponds with what

Walter Benjamin detects in time woven by Proust. In “The Image of Proust” (1929),¹⁹ Benjamin speaks of Proust’s theme of eternity revealed in “convoluted time”:

When the past is reflected in the dewy fresh “instant,” a painful shock of rejuvenation pulls it together once more . . . Proust has brought off the tremendous feat of letting the whole world age by a lifetime in an instant. But this very concentration in which things that normally just fade and slumber consume themselves in a flash is called rejuvenation. *À la Recherche du temps perdu* is the constant attempt to charge an entire lifetime with the utmost awareness. Proust’s method is actualization, not reflection. (Benjamin 206-207)²⁰

Certainly, as Nancy is no “Marcel,” there seems to be little resemblance between instinctively evoked moments of recollection in Proust and Spark’s heroine’s primarily intellectual process of remembering. Nonetheless, Spark in her way seizes the moment at which the eternal aspect of life is revealed, and which is exemplified in the heroine’s reflection on her life as Mrs Hawkins, which has led to the actualisation of her life as Nancy – not without Benjamin’s “painful shock of rejuvenation.”

It would also be worthwhile to note Benjamin’s remark on

¹⁹ All references to Benjamin’s essays in this thesis are taken from the Pimlico edition (1990) of *Illuminations* (1970).

²⁰ For this analysis, Benjamin cites from the scene in which Proust [“Marcel”] “roams about the Combray area for the last time and discovers the intertwining of the roads. In a trice the landscape jumps about like a child. ‘*Ah! que le monde est grand à la clarté des lamps! Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit!*’ [Oh, how large the world is in the brightness of the lamps. How small the world is in the eyes of recollection.]” (Benjamin 206-207).

Proust's "radical attempt at self-absorption" with "a loneliness" at its centre: "the overloud and inconceivably hollow chatter which comes roaring out of Proust's novel is the sound of society plunging down into the abyss of this loneliness" (Benjamin 207). In the strange chapter, Spark's heroine, neither the widely admired "Mrs Hawkins" nor the spirited Nancy, is a solitary "I" who has no external relation, listening to "the silence with my outward ears and to a crowding-in of voices with my inward ear" (*FCK* 112). She shuts away the London faces and the London voices that suddenly look and sound altogether unreal, as well as voices chanting "Mrs Hawkins," into the silence. Isolating herself from all familiar surroundings, sinking into her memory, into voices from the past, she is absorbed in her essential being. At this time of exploration, her solitude is underlined by the absence of her landlady and most dearly loved friend, Milly.²¹ "Milly Sanders was away" (*FCK* 112) – the fact is simply recorded, but twice, at the beginning of the chapter, and one page later again.

To signify both her rejuvenation and her maturity, the love of her life, William Todd, enters into Nancy's life. Here, in contrast with her teenage love, the concept of love is revised as a particular kind of knowledge, instead of blindness.²² To Nancy,

²¹ Among all people around her, known and unknown, Spark tells a lot about Tiny Lazzari, in whose house she had lodged for years since the mid-1950s – Tiny's own letter too is reproduced – at the end of her autobiography. Of this friend – who is apparently the original Milly – Spark says, "I could never fully depict Tiny Lazzari. But I have done so partially in my novel *A Far Cry from Kensington*" (*CV* 213). Here is an indication that her fictional memoir could come closer to the truth of Tiny than her autobiography, which necessarily consists of literal truth, could do.

²² In her essay, "On Love" (1984), Spark writes: "It is said love is blind. I don't agree. I think that, on the contrary, love sharpens the perceptions. The lovers see especially clearly, but often irrationally; they like what they perceive even if, in

while Milly is a touchstone of reality and of her faith, William becomes a touchstone of her intellect. He sharpens not only her awareness of being Nancy as its constant external reminder, but also her perception of people in love. As she confesses, “I was anxious to impress William with my reasonability and intelligence” (*FCK* 152), these two qualities, above all, are his goodness – “he was tough; but he was also tough on himself” (*FCK* 184) – and, in a way, his uncompromising intelligence is what he represents. For this reason, it seems to be necessary for his character – almost too perfect a match for Nancy – to be functional, to a degree. Nancy, in her dialogue with herself, occasionally appropriates his voice to question herself, testing her reasonability and intelligence by his. Yet, William is neither a mere type nor a mere personified idea: a scene of Nancy in her party dress and William in his pyjamas dancing on a moonlit night is charming; her telling fairy stories to him, whose childhood was lost in his “sub-poor” (*FCK* 177) background, is warmly done.

Eventually, Nancy marries William, but “Mrs Todd” never appears.²³ Besides, in the first place, it is William who induces her to decide to be called Nancy, to make it a public pronouncement of her transformation, as he asks her:

“By the way, were you christened ‘Mrs Hawkins,’ Mrs Hawkins?”

anyone else, they wouldn’t. They see the reality and something extra” (“On Love” 781). Here she also refers to Proust as “one of the greatest writers on the subject of love” (“On Love” 781), taking up Swann’s perception of Odette as an example.

²³ Another casually inserted tale of name is that Nancy’s good girlfriend, Abigail de Mordell Staines-Knight, gets rid of this ridiculous name, this misfortune, by happily marrying Mr Giles Wilson and becoming Abigail Wilson.

“No,” I said, “I was christened Agnes. But I’m called Nancy.” (*FCK* 129)

Taking this as a cue, she becomes resolute in stepping out of her old role, “Mrs Hawkins,” and reinvents herself as Nancy.²⁴ It is not that the change of names completes her transformation; it is by her transformation, by her choice, that a name changes from an arbitrary sign or a social code to the sign symbolising a woman as she is. Although good and honest, unpretentious Mrs Hawkins – perhaps, the most *natural performer* of Sparkian heroines – has not consciously played her role, it has become like a situation in which she has taken on too much weight of other people’s expectations – like putting on weight. The situation of “Mrs Hawkins,” as a matter of fact, is a typical, traditional one for women, where they are expected to show wifely docility, maternal responsibility and affection. Among all Spark’s novels, *A Far Cry from Kensington* most poignantly concentrates on women’s life stories. Where the contemporary woman’s fictional memoir pursues women’s issues, the subtle echoes of Proust’s *recherche* recede.

As usual, without undermining her fundamental individualism, Spark introduces strong feminist discussions into this novel. For instance, Nancy’s transformation – to which the

²⁴ We might find a spell in this name, Nancy, which “may have originally evolved from a medieval form of Agnes” – Spark’s heroine’s Christian name – that comes from “the Greek word, *hagnos*,” meaning “pure,” “chaste” (*Brewer’s Dictionary of Names* 9). “Nancy” is also the name that came to be adopted as a diminutive of Ann, which has the meaning of “grace” (if we recall the sacramental view according to Spark: “the idea that the visible world is an active economy of outward signs embodying each an inward grace” (“RA” 1)).

body matters, as well as the name – can well support Toril Moi’s enthusiastic and tenacious argument in *What Is a Woman? And Other Essays* (1999). Examining the history of feminist theory comprehensively, Moi confirms her stance against biological determinism, criticises the deconstructionist error of equating sex and gender (Judith Butler, above all), and returns to Simone de Beauvoir. To make a case for de Beauvoir’s “feminism of freedom” in Part I of her book, Moi takes notice of de Beauvoir’s claim that the body is a situation. Denouncing some critics’ facile interpretation of this claim as “the body is a social construction,” she emphasises that “Beauvoir’s understanding of situation includes the freedom of the subject” (Moi 67), and goes on to redefine de Beauvoir’s concept of body by linking it to Merleau-Ponty’s:

“The body is to be compared, not to a physical object, but rather to a work of art,” Merleau-Ponty writes (*Phenomenology* 150). Perceived as part of lived experience, the body is a style of being, an intonation, a specific way of being present in the world, but it does not for that reason cease to be an object with its own specific physical properties. Considered as a situation, the body encompasses both the objective and the subjective aspects of experience. To Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir, the body is our perspective on the world, and at the same time that body is engaged in a dialectical interaction with its surroundings, that is to say with all the other situations in which the body is placed. The way we experience – live –

our bodies is shaped by this interaction. (Moi 68)

Spark would agree with “the freedom of the subject” inherent in those concepts of Merleau-Ponty and of de Beauvoir. Their concepts as cited and described above may remind us of Spark’s idea of practicing art in life, of inventing oneself as one’s own work of art (which goes much further than an analogy between an artwork and body).²⁵ It seems that the body – in terms of an embodiment of one’s subjectivity – matters to Spark and de Beauvoir in a similar way. They also share a similar attitude towards sexual differences, as Moi states, “Beauvoir does not believe that sexual differences always and everywhere matter more than other situations: she does not have a pervasive picture of sex” (Moi 68). Where women’s victimised situations are concerned, the two intelligent, independent women may as well share a similar attitude towards other women, in essence, but not altogether.

In “Intentions and Effects: Rhetoric and Identification in Simone de Beauvoir’s ‘The Woman Destroyed’” (1988), an essay contained in *What Is a Woman?*, Moi analyses the contradiction between de Beauvoir’s thematic intention and the effect of the story written in a form of its heroine’s diary. The heroine of “The Woman Destroyed” (1967) is a jealous woman in love, who is “victimised by her own delusions, perversely refusing freedom and responsibility in the face of reason” (Moi 451-52), and so condemned by her creator. Although de Beauvoir contrives the

²⁵ I will return to this radical idea Spark expressed in her 1971 lecture, “The Desegregation of Art,” in Chapter VI.

plot of the story to lead her readers to this condemnation, due to the diary form, the readers identify themselves with the “I” of the heroine, who in no way reflects the author. The concern here is not this contradiction, but that de Beauvoir condemns her heroine for “her principal crime: that of *not* being the bearer of knowledge and truth; that of not being an intellectual” (Moi 468).

In Spark’s fiction, obviously, the author has no sympathy for women who ridiculously and determinedly try to depend on and possess men. As if she could not even take them seriously enough to condemn, she has some fun in naming them “English Roses” and leaves them alone. As for the theme of jealousy, her approach is very different from the French, and it interests her most when it is jealousy over a work of art, rather than over a man or a woman.²⁶ However, she deals with women taking the role of victim – to the extent that they take their lives – with her penetrating insight into this harrowing condition, into this

²⁶ Spark creates the type called “The English Rose” in *Loitering with Intent*. The theme of jealousy, which can be largely interpreted as a male ambition for literary success in her fiction, is most apparent in *The Finishing School*. It is jealous men, rather than women, who appear also in Spark’s autobiography. One of her boyfriends, Howard Sergeant was not only extremely jealous of her other men friends, but also so vain that “he had put on the letterhead his name in enormous type” on his writing paper – to her horror: “‘Letters after his name’ were evidently his idea of glory” (CV 183). And obviously, Derek Stanford enters into some of Spark’s creations: Leslie, Fleur’s boyfriend, who is jealous of her artistic talent, in *Loitering with Intent*; Hector Bartlett, a hanger-on (a.k.a. *pisseur de copie*) of a brilliant woman writer in *A Far Cry from Kensington*. To post-Sergeant Spark, Stanford at first looked refreshing, for he had no men-women jealousy, but then he came to resent her success as a novelist so much that he had a nervous breakdown; the mere sight of her made him ill. He later sold her love letters to a dealer, who was to approach her to buy them back – which she did not do, for she found no reason to do so. What infuriated her was his “shaky ‘memoirs’” (CV 211) of her, about which she also told in an interview: “he doesn’t know anything very much about me . . . So I had a little affair with him, what does he want? . . . I do hope that nobody takes much notice [of his “shaky memoirs”]” (I-10, 1985, 448).

incomprehensible suffering. She takes up such a woman to attack the absurdity of the cult of victim in her study of self-destruction, *The Driver's Seat* (1970), on the one hand. On the other hand, in *A Far Cry from Kensington*, she evokes a figure of woman destroyed, Wanda as a victim, with compassion expressed by the heroine. What is at stake in this novel is not whether those women are intellectuals or not, but that there are those who are conditioned to be victims.²⁷ "Ageing women were seduced by ruthless men every day" (*FCK* 166) – Spark chooses this old and common pattern, the man-woman relationship filled with "terror, sex, the persuasions of love, the threats of exposure" (*FCK* 169), instead of the Beauvoirian pattern of jealous women left by men for younger women. Spark finds the pattern – old and common as it is – not only a valid theme in itself, but also the pattern that can be extended to a broader theme, the devil's pact between the two: the victim and the oppressor.

Concerning the first-person narrative, Spark is perfectly aware that the effect of her heroine, the "I" of the fictional memoir, is to draw the readers' sympathy, and that is exactly what she aims at.²⁸ As the phrase, "I was Mrs Hawkins," recurs, Nancy, who is now tougher with her uncompromising intelligence, and her

²⁷ Spark is likely to have Mary Shelley's example in her mind. In her biography of Mary, she sympathetically records the folly of middle-aged Mary. In spite of her high intelligence, Mary was flattered by a much younger man and later blackmailed by him, who threatened her to expose her letters to him. Paying much attention to Mary's sad nature, Spark also says, "I think that she was very depressed and depressing, pessimistic; she had a touch of never happy unless she was miserable. But of course I think she had a very good mind" (I-11, 1998, 213).

²⁸ She lately told Alan Taylor, "If you want to attract a lot of sympathy to a character, the first person is unbeatable" (I-12, 2004), as she fully knows what she aims at and how to achieve it.

milder and softer past self are always present together. This doubled “I,” essentially the same person in two different modes, allows not only the heroine but also her creator to express her feelings more freely than otherwise. In this way, the “I” is at once subjective and objective, similar to, but not identical with the author, and not split between emotion and intellect. Both Spark and her heroine in this novel have no intention of condemning women destroyed, women falling into the role of victim, from their superior position of being the bearer of knowledge and truth. On the contrary, this memoir is an attempt to come to terms with the impossibility of knowledge about the destroyed, the lost and dead. Furthermore, when it comes to so much suffering that women kill themselves, the stronger women wish to release them from judgment on their “crime” of being victims, of committing suicide.

In addition to Wanda’s death, there is another woman’s death in Nancy’s life recollected. It is her colleague’s wife, Mabel, who has some mental problem, and whose habit is to come into Nancy’s office every morning to unreasonably accuse her of sleeping with her husband. Seeming to be right physically, she dies of physical illness, unexpectedly and suddenly. Like the deaths of Wanda and of Tom Hawkins, her death underscores the heart of the matter: the human failure of a lack of expectancy and the impossibility of knowing about the lost people. In Tom’s case, his death itself is not unexpected (since he is a wartime parachutist), but the thing is that what one does not expect of somebody – such as Tom’s outburst, Mabel’s death, and Wanda’s

suicide – happens, and it is too late to know about the dead. Nancy recognises that the disturbing truth about the human condition – how little we actually know about things or people we think we know – shakes solid and good Milly, as she says more than once, “I wouldn’t have expected it of Wanda Podolak” (*FCK* 163). It is hard to break through the barrier of mentally troubled people, but then, it is impossible to reach them once they are literally on the other side. To Nancy, alongside Tom and Mabel, it is Wanda Podolak, her death, her wild cry, she cannot forget.²⁹

Nancy tries to remember the dead, about whom she knows so little, while staying as true to them as possible. Her act of remembrance is distinguished from reconstructing the dead, the idea associated with Frankenstein’s constructing his monster. The image of *Frankenstein* strikes Nancy, when she is sorting out Wanda’s papers, letters, cards and bills with Milly and Wanda’s sister. Nancy realises what they are doing is trying to reconstruct Wanda by looking for the cause of her suicide in those papers which, after all, do not tell of any motive whatsoever. Like Tom’s last letter which does not explain his mind, but has its value in itself as “a love letter,” Wanda’s papers are nothing if they have

²⁹ There is Spark’s own memory of one woman who took her life. She writes about this woman, Marcelle Quennell, in her autobiography. “Strange, proud Marcelle! I feel she must have suffered, mentally, beyond endurance, even before the period when I knew her. she was one of those people whom there is little one can do to help. She was already, when I met her, on the other side of some invisible barrier which only a stray word of sympathy [which Spark gave her] or a tablet of rare French soap [which she gave Spark] could, for a moment, pass over. Was her despair due to drugs? Drink? Men? Or merely the brittle condition of being Marcelle that pushed her to that last extremity? I have never forgotten, I cannot forget her” (*CV* 159-60). While Spark uses the episode about Marcelle in *The Hothouse by the East River*, Mabel and Wanda also reflect the figure of this woman. Spark’s unmistakably sympathetic tone, too, echoes in Nancy’s.

no value in their own right. Their detective work here is contrasted with Nancy's perception of little insignificant relics: "the grief which is latent in relics like Wanda's pair of worn shoes has no equivalent at all" (*FCK* 146). And the grief in such relics is also contrasted with a more reasonable thought such as she listens to in William's voice: "The motives of suicides . . . are often quite trivial if they exist at all" (*FCK* 143). She understands and resists the thought, repeating in her mind, "Yes, but not to Wanda, not to Wanda" (*FCK* 144). What is really shocking to people who knew Wanda is a policeman's response to William's words: "The motives for any crime can be quite futile," as the word "crime" pops up in terms of her "tragedy" (*FCK* 143). Only *insignificant* details can redeem lost people, resisting any attempt to interpret their inexplicable built-in condition according to some external norms and any verdict on their "crime" of being the victim.

How about the verdict on Nancy's own "crime"? Certainly, it costs her jobs, first, at the Ullswater and York Press, and again, at Mackintosh & Tooley.³⁰ However, as she relishes the moment that the words of truth – "*pisseur de copie*" – come

³⁰ Episodes from these two publishing houses provide subtle backgrounds for some themes of the novel. The younger owner of the crumbling Ullswater and York Press, Martin York, goes to prison for his naïve, almost *suicidal* forgeries to cover the debts. Nancy, recalling his qualities better than those who exploit him at the last minute, feels sorry for the overtly heavy seven-years' imprisonment he receives for his crime. As for Mackintosh & Tooley, it is a good example of the idea of body as a situation. Nancy realises that her colleagues are "deliberately chosen for some slightly grotesque quality" for which others feel sorry, and that she herself is hired because she is "too fat": "no-one who had a complaint to utter or anything against the firm . . . could express themselves strongly to me. It would have been unkind. It would have been like attacking their mother. Above all, it would have looked bad. I was one of the Mackintosh & Tooley alibis" (*FCK* 86).

out in her voice and leave others shocked, the hypocrisy of the whole publishing scene is not less powerfully satirised than its by-product, a fame game, which is exaggerated and represented by Hector *the pisseur*. Nancy cannot help calling him to his face *pisseur*, and even intends to do so again. Jobless though she is, she never loses her own norm. This norm held by her faith is her excess, her essence, that emerges when the excess weight of “Mrs Hawkins” is eliminated – or, in other words, when that imposed role “wastes away.” Justifying her “crime,” her self, in her own terms, she rebels against all pressures, hypocrisies, threats of others, and their verdict – whatever it is.

It is in the last scene that Nancy truly settles the bill for a far cry. She meets Hector Bartlett, not in Kensington in the 1950s, but in Tuscany, more than thirty years later. In a lovely Italian restaurant she visits with William, while he is off to make a phone call, as she pays the bill, she hears a voice uttering something of “the tourist-brochure quality,” and turns to look at the speaker:

Thin, with a grey face and white wispy hair, it was, after all these years, Hector Bartlett. He notices my searching look, and staring back, recognized me. I believe some of the people around him were friends or travelling acquaintances in his group. He looked at them then back at me, and started to laugh nervously.

“Pisseur de copie,” I hissed.

He walked backwards so that the people behind him had to make way for him, still with his short staccato laugh like a typewriter.

William was waiting for me at the car.

“Did you settle the bill?”

I said, “Yes.”

It was a far cry from Kensington, a far cry.

(*FCK* 189)

Thus, settling the bill, Nancy redeems the time for herself, and among all, for Wanda, for that cry of Wanda.³¹ Nancy’s beautiful memoirs reveal her life woven together with other women’s lives, woven by her sorrow for the irretrievable far cry and her joyful art of transformation.

Muriel Spark finds women “most interesting, really – especially strong women, strong bossy women” (I-10, 1985, 451), and the definition of strength among Sparkian women may well be the kindly, good-natured heroine of *A Far Cry from Kensington*.

“Mrs Hawkins, you are a tower of strength, I say it in quotes of course” (*FCK* 131), says Emma Loy (who has noticed her transformation, but has her reasons for sticking to “Mrs Hawkins”). In fact, the “Mrs Hawkins” elements of Nancy are not altogether a waste. She is so strong that she allows other people to depend on her a little too much, to the extent that their burdens are about to wear her out. She is a woman who can understand that not everybody is as strong as she is (she asks herself, “What chance, what protection against herself, had

³¹ Spark provides a good example for ill-matched names, which are not uncommon, as her heroine of *Loitering with Intent* observes. Hector the *pisseur* has nothing to do with his mythological namesake, the Greek hero. What is more different, however, is a woman’s revenge – Nancy’s hissing, naming the name again – from a barbaric male revenge: Achilles’ dragging Hector’s corpse around his friend’s grave.

Wanda?” even though she calls her “the silly woman” (*FCK* 166) in her painful memory). This understanding – sympathy – is her strength and her weakness. Nancy does not lose it, but now it integrates into her knowledge of its limit: there are people, or their situations, she cannot help. Her new knowledge about herself and her new capacity to draw a line where she can be only true to herself make her a survivor, who can change her situation by re-inventing herself. As she means exactly what she says, she says it at any cost: her words are her truth – whether or not anybody else likes it. And whether or not telling the truth is called a “crime,” within herself she does not assign herself to the role of criminal any more than to the role of victim, with which she may well associate the role of “Mrs Hawkins.”

The doubled figure of strong, sympathetic, motherly Mrs Hawkins and even stronger, even more intelligent and still compassionate Nancy, in a way, represents Spark’s alternative answer to a question raised in her short story, “Bang-Bang You’re Dead.” The heroine of this story muses at the ending:

Am I a woman, she thought calmly, or an intellectual monster? She was so accustomed to this question within herself that it needed no answer. (*AS* 76)

The author, too, must be accustomed to this question, a rather peculiar variation on a classic dilemma of professional women: between “a woman” – implying, emotional, as a “woman” should be – and “an intellectual monster.” This echoes the theme of the split between the emotions and intellect Spark observes in her

forerunner, namely, Mary Shelley, both in her life and in her artwork, *Frankenstein*. Spark calls Mary Shelley “a victim of her age” (I-1, 1998, 213), who tormented herself by her conventional self-image as the wife of Shelley and the mother of his son, despite her independent mind and artistic talent that created *Frankenstein*, and knows that she herself is no victim of a sense of wifely or maternal duties. The question seems to need no answer for Muriel Spark, a contemporary woman artist with an independent mind – and a successful career, as it happened – especially, now that she has become a grand dame who can easily afford to be above and beyond feminism.³² Nevertheless, calmly, she has contemplated the question. Even for the contemporary woman artist, telling her life as a woman, an artist and an individual, there is no way to separate women’s problems from those of artists or of individuals.

Spark would not take her freedom for granted, as an automatic, privileged escape of an artist. Nor would she define herself as a natural-born “intellectual monster.” Having struggled with her various relationships – marital, maternal, sexual and professional – with men, she was by no means immune to the problems of women. When she had her “freedom back” (I-12, 2001, 2), as her marriage broke down in the mid-1940s, before her writing career, it was first and foremost a woman’s freedom. She then has put her vocation before anything, and

³² Among Spark’s characters, there is Hilda Damien – this name, appropriately, sounds like “dame” – in *Symposium*, a woman who has become a business tycoon solely by her own effort and wits, and is described: “Hilda was not a feminist. She was above and beyond feminism” (S 50).

declares that she has absolutely no regret, but mentions “big sacrifices”: “I sacrificed my personal life, my sex life and I didn’t see enough of my son” (I-12, 2001, 2). These sacrifices largely refer to her relationships with men, and they were not only sacrifices she had to make, but also problems she had to do away with. She describes herself as “a bad picker of men,” which another woman artist (sculptor) and her companion, Penelope Jardine, aptly interprets as “a form of self-protection” (I-12, 2001, 2) – Spark came to realise that she cannot be tied to a man because she is an artist *and* a woman. She had to protect her independent self from men, who were possessive, jealous of her, and what is even worse, jealous of her success as an artist – including her own son (“A son with a successful mother is bad news” (I-12, 2001, 2), she says).

As for her art, in terms of feminism, Spark has never suffered, for instance, the reception her remarkable fellow writer, Doris Lessing, had for *The Golden Notebook*, her celebrated novel conveniently labelled as an iconic book about the sex-war. Whereas the interesting aesthetic inventions of Lessing’s book were largely ignored because of her readers’ overtly and merely emotional reaction to it, what has been largely missed out of discussions about Spark’s fiction is how she has engaged in her business of writing women, and women’s situations.³³ This may

³³ Hynes’ Introduction for *Critical Essays* mentions nothing about women’s issues in her fiction. And unsurprisingly, in “Mrs Hawkins Strikes Back [Review of *A Far Cry from Kensington*],” an essay included in this volume, Robert E. Hosmer, Jr. finds “suicide, spiritualism, ethnic politics and nights at the opera” – plus his inane discovery of “the element of sex comedy” (Hosmer Jr. 272-73) in Mabel’s accusation of Nancy – but absolutely nothing about women’s life stories in it.

be partly because the seeming lightness and the playfulness of Spark's high-style writings prevent her readers' emotional involvement – whether that of women or men – almost too successfully. And, perhaps, it is mainly because of Spark's tough and hard individualism. Feminist discussions are always there in her fiction, but they are assimilated into the artist's radical individualism, for which any attempt of respectively feminist reading of her works is made to look lame. Yet, her individualism does not aim to efface the plain fact of differences between the sexes. It seeks a woman who actively works on her situation of being a woman, instead of taking her situation for her static identification. A brief look at *Doctors of Philosophy* (1963), which she calls a women's play, would show her great concern with writing *women's* lives as a very straightforward example.

Spark's naming of all the male characters Charlie in *Doctors of Philosophy* might not be just a joke. As she does not give a clear no to her interviewer's question, "is that meant to suggest you see all men as equally superfluous?" (I-10, 1985, 450), she might see men as superfluous where women's essential being is concerned. She only explains, "I didn't mean to make a philosophical statement about men – it's only that men are irrelevant for the purposes of the play" (I-10, 1985, 450-51). In this play, getting straight to the point, she stages and shakes women's situations, women's "realities." Its two central female characters are both "Doctors of Philosophy," each typecast as a married woman who gave up her career for her life with a

husband and a daughter, on the one hand, and an old-maid scholar, on the other. Taking up the women's problem of choosing between a family life and a profession, between *two types of equally frustrated women*, the point of the play is to criticise situations that make such types of each individual woman. These women are to see themselves as dramatic personae on stage as they actually are, enact their expected roles in a deliberately absurd way, challenge their situations – at some points, by literally shaking set pieces – to upset the “realism” imposed on them. To epitomise their blowing-up challenge, a farcical scene of a slapping battle among women, the two women and the daughter against a conventional mother figure who represents social norms, is inserted near the end. The scene can be interpreted as a satirical question: when women try to be free from their established roles, should it be – or rather, be seen as – an act of aggression, of violence – or even a crime? It is the same question Nancy asks herself when she tries to step out of the role of “Mrs Hawkins.”

Spark in many ways challenges women's situations where they are forced to choose between their personal relationships and their vocation; the role of victim and that of criminal; “a woman” and “an intellectual monster.” Not only Nancy but also many of other Spark's heroines carry out the mission of resisting against any such category, fighting to find their own alternative, and becoming a woman as she is. Indeed, as a fight for individual self, it is not exclusively women's mission. Spark also explores men's situations in *The Bachelors* (1960), her early novel about

lives of unmarried men at the edge of the Metropolis, and *not about* relationships between women and men. Nonetheless, the artist herself thinks that she can create female characters better than male characters, and she may be right. Although she has some very interesting male characters – evil Sir Quentin in *Loitering with Intent* is one example given by the author – it is undeniably her women – famous Miss Jean Brodie, just for one – who are most interesting and fascinating. Similarly, if comparing *The Bachelors* with *A Far Cry from Kensington*, though the former is quite a good novel, we might find Nancy's memoirs of women more powerful, more poignant and more joyful.

Since women are unarguably more burdened by their persistent and prevalent, long-established roles, Spark may well be interested in transforming this extra burden of women's situations into extra energy, with which she charges her women and also enriches her theme of excess. With such excess energy, some heroines emerge as truly strong, Sparkian women, going above and beyond feminism while others fail in their mission, or fail to survive their own excess. Spark's individualism is clarified in these figures of women – no matter how controversial they look – to whom such notions as a victim or a criminal, a “woman” or a “monster” do not apply. It is her individualism by which Spark liberates women's minds from their situations, and by which she settles the bill for women.

To be a woman and an artist – and an individual – is a serious

business. It is through her attempt to redeem the time, through many important questions and thoughts around life and art, that Spark has acquired her mature and unique voice of the present, while intently listening to lost voices – “a far cry” – of the past. For all the problems she knows and has experienced as a woman and an artist, the voice which she creates in her fiction is not marked by the pain or the inner split between a “woman” and a “monster.”

Here is an honest and light-hearted voice, in which no doubt the author’s own voice echoes:

What a wonderful thing it was to be a woman and an artist
in the twentieth century. (LI 116)

It is Fleur Talbot, the heroine of *Loitering with Intent*, who says so – she remembers she thought so when she was writing her first book in her poverty, in 1950s London. Such a confident and happy voice of a woman as a writing subject is not often found in novels which are concerned with the struggles of a woman and of an artist. It is by turning these struggles into the interplay of life and art that Spark creates this rare voice: in other words, she brings these struggles into her postmodernist perspective – into another dimension. Hence Nancy’s joyful art of transformation. Similarly, in *Loitering with Intent*, Fleur’s struggle for authorship, the claim she makes for her own “*écriture*,” is going to be brought into another and different dimension. And there, we will find an ever more mysterious voice, or a voice of mystery. Spark transforms the commonplace – any kind of experience, any lived reality – in her fiction, which is – if not stranger than truth – as

strange as truth.

This playful writer is not always keen to explain her unique fictional worlds; however, to show her writer's responsibility, Spark did make a generous offer in one interview:

I think it's good to have to justify your work to the public, because it's the public who buys it, reads it. If the book is not itself justification enough then I suppose an explanation doesn't hurt. It depends which public, my own reading public is a largely literary one; it isn't the great big vast reading public, or the paperback readers. But there's a certain point at which if people don't understand your work, you can't concede anything to them, you can't explain.

They have to take it or leave it. If they really get annoyed I offer them their money back. (I-10, 1985, 457)

Spark knows that we the readers, whether we take it or leave it, can do whatever we like with her book, once it is in our hands. However, the readers are also in her hands since she does not merely sit back to see what the readers would make of the writer and her work; she writes about it. In the next chapter, I will focus on a book, in which Spark's peculiar voice assumes the "I" at a junction of life and writing, and examine how a book stands in its own right.

CHAPTER II

Surviving Écriture

“I always hope the readers of my novels are of good quality.”

– *Loitering with Intent*

What is an author? Is s/he an authority of meaning, or a producer in a consumer society, or dead? In his influential essay, “What Is an Author?” (1969), Foucault discusses an “author” functioning as a discursive site and states that writing, which was once supposed to be a means to immortality, “now possesses the right to kill, to be its author’s murderer” (Foucault, 1969,142). In the shadow of writing, the writing subject’s individuality disappears; “he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing” (Foucault, 1969, 143). What could be a contemporary author’s response to this? We may ask Muriel Spark as a survivor of writing [écriture].

The whole body of Spark’s writing – especially, her life stories – bears witness to a mysterious interaction between the “author” and her “work,” the interaction between life and art she has experienced and written. She published her autobiography, *Curriculum Vitae*, in 1992, and she has frequently written “autobiographical pieces” (CV 14), as she affirmed.³⁴ Above all,

³⁴ To list up a few early examples which are apparently close to the writer’s experience, there are short stories set in Africa, based on Spark’s life in the then Southern Rhodesia from 1937 to 1944; her first novel, *The Comforters*, in which she turns her experience of hallucinations caused by dexedrine into the would-be-novelist heroine’s suffering disembodied voices of the typing ghost; *The Prime of*

Loitering with Intent (1981) – which, she says in an interview by Victoria Glendinning, “sort of sums up my life” (I-9, 1979, 48) – most directly deals with the interaction that takes place both internally and externally to an artist’s life. To consider the complex form and themes of this novel, it is necessary to be “loitering with intent”: looking into Spark’s way of creating life stories both in auto/biography and fiction and handling them with a rigorous distinction between the two forms of writing, between two modes of truth – literal and symbolic.³⁵

Take It Literally: An Artist’s Curriculum Vitae

“All experience is good for an artist” (*CV* 197) – Muriel Spark has a heartfelt belief in this maxim, John Masefield’s words to her.³⁶ The then Poet Laureate’s words are an important part of the memory of her visit to him, which she recounts in her autobiography. This belief may be manifest in the title she chose for her own life story, “Curriculum Vitae”: as an artist, her “course of life” is her “career.” In a totally different sense, too, her autobiography is loyal to its name. It chronicles in detail her educational background at an extraordinary girls’ school and her working experience – jobs at a department store, for the Foreign Office, as well as of an editor. Spark, as usual, plays with common expectations for a likely title for the well-known artist’s autobiography or her likely curriculum vitae. However, the

Miss Jean Brodie, whose titular heroine is a memorable transformation of the author’s much loved teacher in her schooldays.

³⁵ Talking about truth emerging from fiction, Spark calls it “symbolic truth”(I-10, 1985, 455) in the interview for *Partisan Review*.

³⁶ She visited Masefield in 1950, when she planned to write a book on his works.

serious implication of the playful title is that her autobiography is an official record of the truth of her life. Her *Curriculum Vitae* has to be taken literally and as literal truth. This is also to say that she never calls anything but literal truth auto/biography.

In her Introduction to the autobiography, first of all, Spark protests at false and “damaging!” (*CV* 12) versions written by others. She condemns one such damaging lie, which shows her to be “a flourishing hostess” when she was in reality “little known and poor,” adding, “one does not want one’s early poverty mocked” (*CV* 12). She cannot be labelled as, for instance, “the author of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*,” however fitting such an image as “Spark in her prime” – as often described by her critics – seems. She strongly emphasises the accuracy of her own data, including her memories checked and assisted by “documents and trusted friends”; she “determined to write nothing that cannot be supported by documentary evidence or by eyewitnesses” (*CV* 11).

Alongside her insistence on the detected and documented truth, Spark refers to “a sense of enriched self-knowledge” in writing her autobiography, as well as autobiographical pieces, in a more relaxed manner. She introduces this theme of self-exploration with a little anecdote:

I once had a play commissioned in the early days of my vocation. I met the producer for the first time one night to hand over the first act. Next day I received a wire:

“Darling this is what we were hoping for. Ring me at ten a.m. tomorrow, darling.” I duly phoned him at ten the next morning and gave the secretary my name. He came on the

phone. I repeated my name. “Who are you, darling?” he said.

I thought it a very good question, and still do. I resolved, all those years ago, to write an autobiography which would help to explain, to myself and others: Who am I. (CV 14)

Rather than being ironical, she seems to be amused by this episode about her identity unrecognised by her name at that time. It is her name before becoming a “Name” that is precious to her, like most of the names which are “unknown to the public” – “For that very reason they are all the more precious”(CV 11) – in her own account of her life from early childhood till 1957, the year of the publication of her first novel.³⁷ *Curriculum Vitae* is at once her project to detach herself from the name of the author and her contribution to scholarship with the awareness of her well-known name, of the distinction between literal truth and symbolic truth.

Feeling “it time to put the record straight,” Spark’s proclaimed concern in writing her autobiography is more with the damage done to “truth [which] by itself is neutral and has its own dear beauty” (CV 11) and to “scholarship” than with “personal damage” (CV 12). It is no wonder that she is so much annoyed by the damage done to scholarship. In one interview, she reminds us of the fact that she was a critic; to write novels is her “*métier*,” but she was also “enjoying criticism and biography

³⁷ About this decision, Spark comments: “I decided to stop at the point where I started writing novels because in a sense they tell their own story.” (I-11, 1998, 229). The comment itself may show the close relationship between her life and her writing.

which is next door to it” (I-11, 1998, 210). Through her own experience she knows that art and life are inseparable in an artist’s life, and so she has been interested in the life stories of her admired artists. Her introduction to *Tribute to Wordsworth: A Miscellany of Opinion for the Centenary of the Poet’s Death* (1950)³⁸ demonstrates her acute perception about “the species of the artist” (TW 134) in her view of the interdependence of the man and the poet in Wordsworth. Her biographical essays on Emily Brontë, put together in her book on the Brontës, and her pioneering study of Mary Shelley, which consists of two parts, *Biographical and Critical*, both written in the early 1950s, are also good examples to show young Spark as a subtle and studious critic.³⁹

To grasp the essence of the artists, as the title of her book on the Brontës, *The Essence of the Brontës* (1993), suggests, is what Spark has always performed and what she calls “a very big exercise” – to “be really sort of ‘under the skin’ of others” (I-11, 1998, 218). For this exercise she closely studied those artists in relation to the interaction between art and life. She called them back as actual persons with their life stories, from their disappearance behind the name – the legend of the author. In telling her subjects’ life stories, she observes her strict rule of sticking to facts as she does in her autobiography. Nevertheless, this does not mean that she has dismissed everything but fact – or

³⁸ Although the book has a joint introduction by Spark and her co-editor, Derek Stanford, here I mean Spark’s introduction, which is individually written for the section of the twentieth-century critics of Wordsworth.

³⁹ In these biographical works Spark refers to Emily Brontë and Mary Shelley by their first names, and I adopt her departure from the convention in this thesis.

even the legend, which is not literal truth in itself – in her research for writing life stories.

Suggestively Possible: Behind the Legend

Patricia Duncker, in “The Suggestive Spectacle: Queer Passions in Brontë’s *Villette* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*” (2002), rightly pays attention to facts in the writer’s life as a rich and indispensable source of Spark’s art of fiction. She has a good reason to say, “Outside the gossip pages of literary biography it is now peculiarly unfashionable to identify literary characters in fiction with their sources in the writer’s lives. This strikes me as odd” (Duncker 69). She offers a noteworthy line in terms of the relation between the fictional character and its source, between fiction and auto/biography: “Making fiction is a process of building on the suggestively possible” (Duncker 69). She fully understands Spark’s remark that “Miss Kay [her teacher in her schooldays and the original Miss Brodie] was not literally Miss Brodie, but I think Miss Kay had it in her, unrealized, to be the character I invented” (CV 57).

By introducing how “the suggestive spectacle” of Miss Christina Kay inspired Spark to transform it into the spectacular Miss Brodie, Duncker skillfully brings forth her argument.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Duncker suggests latent lesbianism in the problematic relationship between Sandy Stranger and Miss Jean Brodie, specifically in Sandy’s ambivalent feeling towards Miss Brodie. This introduces an interesting perspective on a story about women taking risks. Pointing out many important factors common to Spark’s novel and *Villette*, she highlights paradoxical power games – both revolutionary and oppressive – in women’s communities in the two novels, and focuses on elements such as one-woman performances, the figure of a nun in which potential subversion is inscribed, transvestism and sexual transgression. The propositions – about the

However, the notion of “the suggestively possible” deserves to be extended to the principal idea about life and art in Spark’s writing. Between literal truth and symbolic truth, Spark has cultivated her skill in captivating the essence of things and has adapted it for making fiction. Once her shrewd mind penetrates this essence, she can effortlessly weave and direct many possibilities and potentialities – “the suggestively possible” – into her narrative.

The Essence of the Brontës is an important work that elucidates Spark’s idea of symbolic truth and prefigures her operation of this truth in fiction, between art and life. To reconstruct the life story of Emily Brontë, she makes her stance clear in the first chapter, “Fact and Legend.” She argues, in terms of the legend of a genius like Emily, “Such legend is the repository of a vital aspect of truth; and ought not to be swept aside simply because it is not ascertainable; neither, of course, should it be taken as literal truth” (EB 192-93). She analyses not only the essence of the legend but also the process of legend-making. Emily had something – “the cult of the supreme hero” (EB 251), above all – in her, which was made visible in her work and also became a seed of the legend; consciously or unconsciously, the readers of *Wuthering Heights* and the witnesses of Emily conceived and modified their impression of her upon her new image as the author of the book. In the following chapters, supporting her analysis by documented facts, Spark illustrates how spectacularly this legend transformed Emily; “as the author

theme of sexual substitution, about Sandy’s rejection of her unconscious lesbianism in her betrayal – seem interesting, but maybe not Spark’s point.

of *Wuthering Heights* was discovered in Emily, her reputation underwent a spectacular change” (*EB* 197), and so did Emily herself.

Emily’s life story written by Spark is remarkable for this analysis that takes both the essence of legend and the facts into account, as well as for its skillful storytelling. Spark “made it deliberately read like a story” (*CV* 201) since she finds “gripping narrative value of the Brontë situation” – promoted by “Charlotte as impresario” (*EB* 8) – in “the essence of the Brontës.” She follows the documents of the early life of the extraordinary sisters and the brother to prove that playing out their imagination and creativity was there in their nature, at the core of their daily life. As she reconstructs this actual drama enacted by her subjects, she discriminates between the fact of their dramatising their life and Charlotte’s habitual dramatisation of the facts. In addition to this biography, the life story of Emily was to become a valuable source of Spark’s fiction.

Spark explains why she was “almost haunted” by Emily in a programme for BBC, “At Emily Brontë’s Grave, Haworth, April 1961”: “What impressed me was the dramatic shape of her life. It’s as if she had consciously laid out the plot of her life in a play called *Emily Brontë*” (*EB* 314). Spark lays stress on her significant transformation in the last days of her life from 1847, which tells its story of the artist becoming her work:

Emily had begun to dramatize in her own person the aspirations expressed in her work. If she saw herself in the end as the hero and cult of her own writings, we may

expect to find more or less what we do find, a copy of her self-image, enlarged by the details her friends supplied after her death. (*EB* 251)

In this regard, Spark observes, “Emily Brontë is never so much a child of the Romantic Movement” as in that:

The Romantic poets tended to express in personal conduct the hypotheses underlying their creative writings. It was as if the principles involved in their work amounted to beliefs so passionately held, that it seemed necessary to prove them to others by putting them to the test of action. The result was not always satisfactory so far as the life of the poet was concerned. (*EB* 248-49)

In Emily’s case, the principles were “highly dangerous” and “destructive” (*EB* 251). Concerning her stoic manner of enduring her illness and her resolute refusal of medical care, Spark interprets these facts as “a distorted wish for life – a wish to be observed as an autonomous, powerful sufferer” – rather than as “a wish for death” (*EB* 256). In the spectacle Emily created by enacting the principles of superhuman in her writings, Spark detects “delusions of her own powers” (*EB* 257) – to be able to control her own life and death – which led her, on the contrary, to disappear in “a copy of self-image.” In 1848, after all, she died of consumption, the illness she had heroically endured. Emily the author, in a sense, was murdered by her writing.

Spark has returned to the stimulating figure of Emily Brontë more than once. Her controversial heroines such as Miss Brodie, Abbess Alexandra, or Lise in *The Driver’s Seat* are, each in a

different way, like a woman who “lays out the plot of her own life”: a woman who “performs” her role(s) in her own real-life scenario (whether good or bad). At the same time, Emily’s destructive self-delusion undeniably contains the theme of the lost subject, which is to be developed in the figure of Lise – whose drive to death is not dissimilar to the terrifying sight of Emily’s “perverted martyrdom” (*EB* 256).⁴¹ Yet, none of Spark’s heroines is Emily Brontë. Nor does the shadowy – and unrecognisable if it were not for the life story written – association between the fictional characters and their source – which may not be the only source – suggest that they are mere variations of the Emily figure. It is “the suggestively possible” emerging from the essence of Emily that could not escape Spark’s keen eyes. In *Loitering with Intent*, Emily’s life story echoes, again, in what Foucault calls “the game of writing” between the author and the work. However, there is no space for “a child of the Romantic Movement” in Spark’s narrator-heroine, Fleur Talbot, who is a woman and an artist in the twentieth century.

The heroine of *Loitering with Intent* is a genuinely talented writer like Spark herself. For the background of the novel, the Kensington area in the 1950s – the time when Spark entered into a literary world as a rising novelist – is reproduced with an intimate atmosphere and particular warmth, as in *A Far Cry from Kensington*. With her reflection on being a woman and an artist in the twentieth century, Spark has inexhaustibly invented ways of

⁴¹ Spark has no doubt about Emily’s genius, but she takes her delusion in seeing herself as superhuman as “perhaps the early symptom of some more serious mental disease” (*EB* 257).

posing questions concerning an “author,” a “work” – and a “Name.” Her ideas about a mysterious interaction between life and writing, a strange interplay between an “author” and her “work,” are crystallised in *Loitering with Intent*, whereas her richly conceived ideas about names – its “magic” – comes into full play in *A Far Cry from Kensington*. What does emerge from Spark’s game with life stories – from an unlikely chase she invents between life and writing in *Loitering with Intent*?

Writing on the Grave

Curriculum Vitae is a peculiar autobiography. The book opens with the vivid but fragmentary memories of the “luminous past of my [Spark’s] first infancy” – headed “Bread, Butter and Florrie Forde” – which cannot be fitted in “a single narrative” (CV 17), as “it had its own structure” (I-11, 1998, 229). In addition to following this structure, working within literal truth, Spark had to check all of her memories against the objective evidence. She might well find writing autobiography very difficult (I-11, 1998, 228). To put her life story in *Loitering with Intent* – a book very unlike the autobiography – her pen must have “run away with” (I-11, 1998, 229) her freely as it does when she is writing novels, or so she claims. Within “symbolic truth,” she asserts, “you can do anything you like” (I-10, 1985, 455), and so she is at perfect liberty to invent an even more peculiar structure, which is to express her themes and ideas, including a way to represent a strange course of life itself.

At the beginning of *Loitering with Intent*, Fleur recalls her

casual encounter with a young policeman when she was writing a poem in the graveyard. It was the day “right in the middle of the twentieth century, the last day of June 1950” that she is to mark as “a changing-point” (*LI* 127) in her life. Later in the novel it becomes clear how this was the last day of Fleur’s poverty with her youthful hope and her unshakable belief in her vocation to be an artist, the day before her new life was beginning with the news that her first novel, *Warrender Chase*, was to be published.

The scene is a flashforward to a time when Fleur had made an escape from “the Autobiographical Association (non-profit-making)” founded by one Sir Quentin Oliver. Her literary role in this organisation had been jazzing up boring “autobiographies,” as well as typing, for members of the association unable to write anything comprehensible on their own. Meanwhile, Sir Quentin, who had been gradually appearing as “pure evil” (*LI* 131) rather than a criminal, had manipulated his members by abusing their life stories and Fleur’s novel, by exploiting both literal and symbolic truths. Whereas Fleur had “set them [the members] on to writing fictions about themselves” (*LI* 76), Sir Quentin had plagiarised her fiction, *Warrender Chase* – impersonating its title role himself – in his members’ life stories and called them “autobiographies” – literal truth. Not only Fleur but also her *Warrender Chase* had got involved with his shady business, around which dubious – if not criminal – activities had been lurking. However, she survived the experience of the evil and became a full-time writer, as she had always wished to be, whereas Sir Quentin – like Warrender – was killed in a car crash.

Since then Fleur has become an established novelist, and now is telling the story of her experience with this Autobiographical Association.

Spark narrates at Emily Brontë's grave: "I like to go for walks in graveyards. . . . Sometimes I even write in a churchyard – one has a sense of communion with the dead as people who lived in the same environment as oneself, only at a different time" (*EB* 315). She apparently likes this idea and transforms it into another project of redeeming the time by her heroine of *Loitering with Intent*. Although the young Fleur could not know that the last day of June 1950 would be the changing-point in her life, Fleur at this present moment of her narrative redeems the past, with which she parted on that day, in and by her account of this memory. The scene of Fleur writing a poem, sitting on the gravestone, among the dead and memories buried, assumes a symbolic significance. It is no coincidence that what was forming in her mind at that time was her second novel, "*All Souls' Day*." In this picture of her younger self, she is seeing herself coming to terms with her life between the past struggle with hope and the present success with a little nostalgia, as well as death. The living meet the dead, the present meets the past, in the graveyard and in the act of writing. For Fleur, returning to her younger self, to both living and dead friends – both evil and good – in the poor but spirited early days of her vocation, is the affirmation of her life and her writing. She might not dance on Sir Quentin's grave, as her character, Marjorie, does on Warrender's grave in her novel, but, having disentangled

herself from the Autobiographical Association, she “went on her way rejoicing” – writing on the grave.

The core of the memory of the day that forms the frame of Fleur’s story lies in her encounter with the policeman. This little scene contains subtle contrasts, twists and subversions between the two modes of truth, represented here by law and art.

Towards the end of the novel, Fleur recounts the encounter again, supplementing it with some more details. The policeman came over to inquire of a possible intruder what she was doing in the graveyard, with an almost apologetic air as if he intruded on her. It was Fleur who interrogated him, responding to his reluctant intent under his shy smile:

He was a clean-cut man, as on war memorials. I asked him: suppose I had been committing a crime sitting there on the gravestone, what crime would it be? “Well, it could be desecrating and violating,” he said, “it could be obstructing and hindering without due regard, it could be loitering with intent.” (*LI* 127)

The policeman’s cataloguing these legal terms makes an apparent contrast with Fleur’s poem: an exercise “in a fixed form, such as a rondeau, triolet, or villanelle” or “Alexandrines for narrative verse”; the absorbing and inspiring practice “of metre and form for their own sake” (*LI* 127). Spark may be delighting in making fun of the rigid and literal language of law, as she often does, and she perfectly knows how to use it for any purpose of her own, though she has no intention to offend law – in legal terms. With her usual shrewdness, Spark once answered her interviewer’s

question: “do you think symbolic truth is more important than literal truth?”

No, literal truth in a court of law is the most important. And for everyday life, literal truth is absolutely indispensable, so we don't fool each other, and trick each other – otherwise society can't go on. But it isn't the only truth, otherwise nobody would read novels.

(I-10, 1985, 455)

Like her author, Fleur understands the importance of literal truth – which is not the only truth – and of discerning the two different truths, especially through her experience with the Autobiographical Association.

On the day in the graveyard, the young policeman came over to Fleur, and – without knowing – played a game between the two different languages – of law and art. Yet, in this frame, Spark lets this language game resolve in the amiable meeting and parting between the policeman and the artist. Fleur's answer, of course, satisfied him: she was literally writing a poem, which was no crime. That was all he wanted to know, and what he meant by “loitering with intent” – the words empty of any real content – or if Fleur was “loitering with intent” – *literally*, plotting and planning – was not his concern. Saying that “the grave must be very old” and “it was nice to speak to somebody” (*LI* 11), he also unwittingly but rightly observed her departure from past experience and her beginning career as a successful writer – “somebody” in every sense – as the good luck he wished her was running her way. He “went on his way” (*LI* 127), and she went

on her way – rejoicing. Every disturbing question around the artist and her work arises in Fleur’s story of her experience with the Autobiographical Association, to which Spark provides an intriguing structure with her operation between the two languages, the two truths.

A Chase Materialised

Spark found fascinating drama in Emily Brontë’s life story: the author enacting the principles of her work in her own person; the work taking over the author’s life. Here enters another author, who most likely inspired Spark’s idea about the interplay between an author and a work – a creator and a creation (or/and a creature) – to integrate into the shape of *Loitering with Intent*, the pattern of the chase. Mary Shelley, Spark’s subject alongside Emily in her biographical writing, also may have contributed to a source of her fiction, not directly by her life story, but by the most important fact of her life – *Frankenstein*.

In the critical section of her book on Mary Shelley,⁴² while admitting minor flaws due to young Mary’s inexperience as a writer, Spark recognises her genius in the plot of *Frankenstein*:

The pattern of pursuit is the framework of the novel, *a theme in itself which encloses a further theme*; there, Frankenstein’s relationship to the Monster expresses itself in the paradox of identity and conflict – an anticipation of the Jekyll-and-Hyde theme – from which certain symbolic

⁴² All references are to *Mary Shelley*, the revised edition (1988) of *Child of Light: A Reassessment of Mary Shelley* (1951).

situations emerge. (*MS* 164 [my italics])

Spark estimates Mary as a novelist highly for this ability to express her themes in the form of the novel. A mastery of plot as such is Spark's own genius, and it is with more complexity and without the flaws of the inexperienced. This view of plot-making – or myth-making – is an explicit paraphrase of Fleur's words about her "myth":

Without a mythology, a novel is nothing. The true novelist, one who understands the work as a continuous poem, is a myth-maker, and the wonder of the art resides in the endless different ways of telling a story, and the methods are mythological by nature. (*LI* 91)

Both Spark and her heroine, through the practice of "metre and form for their own sake" in writing a poem, cultivate the skill of making a plot of a novel, and know its importance. In *Loitering with Intent*, Spark tells the story of a work coming into the actual life of its author, like Emily's life story and Mary's novel, but she does so in a totally different way – she makes her own myth. It is evident in her deep analyses in those biographical/critical works that her use of this motif of reality and fiction is no postmodern gimmick; hers is a postmodern artwork, in which her themes are to be expressed in the intriguing pattern between life and writing, reality and fiction.⁴³

⁴³ Besides, Spark more than once mentions that the situation simply happens: "when you're writing something and people just seem to walk into your life. I've had that experience" (I-10, 1985, 455). (Apart from the author's situation, sometimes, we too witness life following fiction. For instance, we are now familiar with a story about a butler who makes money by selling the tale of his dead master to the mass media. The story might remind Spark's readers of her 1971 novel, *Not to Disturb*

Furthermore, the astute writer is quick to appreciate the fundamental significance of “the Jekyll-and-Hyde theme.” Spark analyses the figure of Frankenstein/Monster in terms of the conflict of two fundamental elements, intellect and emotion.⁴⁴ The Monster’s “emotions reside in the heart of Frankenstein, as does Frankenstein’s intellect in him” (*MS* 178): While “Frankenstein is a disintegrated being – an embodiment of emotion and also of imagination minus intellect” (*MS* 165) after the creation, “Frankenstein’s doppelgänger or Monster firstly as representing reason in isolation, since he is the creature of an obsessional rational effort” (*MS* 164). Nonetheless, by “the Jekyll-and-Hyde theme,” she does not talk about a simple dichotomy of intellect and emotion any more than that of good and evil. Her interest is in “the paradox of identity and conflict.”

From the outset, Spark points out what is inherent in the common error about this popular name, “Frankenstein”:

There are two central figures – or rather two in one, for Frankenstein and his significantly unnamed Monster are bound together by the nature of their relationship.

Frankenstein’s plight resides in the Monster, and the Monster’s in Frankenstein. That this fact has received

– with some uncanny impression as if the real-life event followed her fiction. The disturbing twist in her novel is that Lister the butler scripts a scenario of his masters’ disastrous affair followed by their deaths – with his inexplicable knowledge of such future events – and arranges a deal with the media *before* the events.)

⁴⁴ Spark detects the background of the Frankenstein/Monster situation in relation to intellectual and philosophical minds, which were influential both in Mary’s personal life and in her times. She convincingly argues that Mary’s father, William Godwin, “representing scientific empiricism of the previous century” and his friend poet, S.T. Coleridge, “the nineteenth century’s imaginative reaction” (*MS* 159) met in *Frankenstein*.

wide, if unwitting, recognition is apparent from the common mistake of naming the Monster “Frankenstein” and emanates from the first principle of the story, that Frankenstein is perpetuated in the Monster. Several implicit themes show these characters as both complementary and antithetical beings. (*MS* 161)

Although Frankenstein and the Monster are like “two in one,” each of them cannot be an “individual” with any kind of identity any more than being united since they are “both complementary and antithetical beings.”

With her overall concern with the artist’s life and her writing in *Mary Shelley*, Spark looks into further themes beyond the conflict between intellect and emotions, between the eighteenth century’s rationalism and the nineteenth century imaginative reaction represented in Mary’s novel. Observing Mary’s stance towards her character, which shows such deadlock of different discourses of her times, Spark also recognises her independent, philosophical mind in making:

Shelley, for example, would see Frankenstein, in his role of creator, as the perpetrator of human misery and therefore an object of hatred. And, Mary added, he is the sufferer from human misery and therefore an object of pity. But, she also added, he is an amoral product of nature, on whom no responsibility can be attached, towards whom no passion can logically be entertained. (*MS* 166)

Here questions concerning the ambiguous role of creator in terms of his peculiar relation with his creation lie dormant. The

creator/author bound to his creature/work under one name, in some aspects, seems like a curious parable of an “author” discussed by Foucault. In addition to this, Frankenstein in his role of creator and Mary the author overlap in Spark’s observation that “the conflict between the emotional and the intellectual Frankenstein was Mary Shelley’s also” (MS 165).⁴⁵ It is very likely that the two-in-one figure of Frankenstein has been stored in Spark’s mind to be elaborated on, and to combine the theme of the interaction between an “author” and a “work,” as well as between life and art, and the theme of individual subjectivity.

In her own pattern of pursuit in *Loitering with Intent*, instead of the double-like pair of the creator and his creation in *Frankenstein*, Spark introduces the complicated triangle of Fleur and the two “Warrenders”: her *Warrender*, and Sir Quentin, the impersonator of Warrender. Spark materialises a work of art beyond its materiality, a physical copy of manuscript, as if it were a living creature like Frankenstein’s “Monster.” What she materialises is also the idea of *écriture*; she separates a “work” from an “author” by literally giving a body to language – and this “*écriture*” is still a suspect in having an ambiguous and problematic relationship with an “author.”

In the novel, Fleur is very much in love with her *Warrender*

⁴⁵ Referring to the murder of Frankenstein’s baby brother, William, Spark quotes Richard Church’s opinion, with which she agrees: “It is almost inconceivable that Mary could allow herself to introduce a baby boy into her book; deliberately call him William” (MS 165). Spark explains this in terms of Mary’s conflict: “Her[Mary’s]baby, William, we know was the child Mary loved more than any; and when she began to feel her intellect grow under her new task, she automatically identified the child with her threatened emotions” (MS 166).

Chase, the first novel she is working on. Later, this original manuscript is stolen, and her pursuit of her work follows. At her reunion with it, Fleur can recognise her *Warrender* by not only her written words but also its physical features: “My *Warrender Chase*, my novel, my *Warrender*, *Warrender Chase*; my foolscap pages with the first chapters I had once torn up and then stuck together; my *Warrender Chase*, mine. I hugged it. I kissed it” (LI 108). However, in relation to the meaning of *her* book such as “*Warrender’s* motives,” Fleur claims nothing: “How do I know? *Warrender Chase* never existed, he is only some hundreds of words, some punctuation, sentences, paragraphs, marks on the page” (LI 57) – it is no more than language materialised. But then, *Warrender Chase* is further materialised: it comes to life, in flesh and blood, in and by Sir Quentin Oliver.

It is when Fleur is writing *Warrender Chase* that the job at the Autobiographical Association led by Sir Quentin, occupying his mother’s house in Hallam Street, comes her way. This man and his circle suddenly appear as if to embody the quasi-religious sect of *Warrender Chase*, “privately a sado-puritan, who for a kind of hobby had gathered together a group of people specially selected for their weakness and folly, and in whom he carefully planted and nourished a sense of terrible and unreal guilt” (LI 56). To begin with Sir Quentin, people such as his housekeeper, Beryl Tims, his mother, Edwina, and his members all have it in them to be characters Fleur will invent – and some of them are like characters she *has already invented*.⁴⁶ They offer her precious

⁴⁶ For further discussions as to the notion of “character” in relation to the binary

details, each of which – however trivial in itself – is a visible sign of what makes an individual character. Whether due to her sharpened perception for the experience needed for her novel or due to the mystery of a natural course of life, real people who are like her characters begin to fill her life, as if to run parallel to her process of writing. Fleur has her “unfinished novel personified almost as a secret companion and accomplice following [her] like a shadow” (*LI* 42).

When Fleur has completed the book, the interplay between life and writing takes a strange turn. Gradually, her novel enters into her life to the extent that her life seems as if it were following events in her novel. It is a start of the chase of *Warrender Chase*, which is no longer merely its creator’s shadow. Now that the novel has a completed body – not only the original manuscript but also the proofs given by a publisher, Park and Revisson Doe, who has agreed to take it – it is separated from its author, taken off from her mind. Certainly, Fleur – unlike the split of Frankenstein/Monster – retains her intellect, her “best brain” (*LI* 42) she put into *Warrender* and presently puts into her second novel, *All Souls’ Day*. Meanwhile, Sir Quentin induces Dottie, Fleur’s friend and the wife of her lover, Leslie, to steal the original manuscript and obtain a set of the proofs for him. He tries to suppress the publication and destroy the copies – he may well fantasise himself as the “original” Warrender – while stealing “not only the physical copies, but the very words, phrases, ideas” (*LI*

between a personal/private/true self and a cultural construction/social role/ mask, see Chapter VI.

95) in life and in writing his members' "autobiographies."

What is at stake is "the physical copies" of Fleur's book: *Warrender's* material existence. Fleur hangs her higher hope – to be a full-time writer, to realise her vocation – already on the second novel, and still, she is bound to *Warrender*, as well as to Hallam Street, in her plight and in *Warrender's*. The question, "what is a 'work'?" in relation to its author inevitably arises around the possession of *Warrender Chase*. *Warrender* begins to follow a life of its own, and yet, if a work belongs to its author, in what way and on what ground does it do so? Excavating the historical changes of an author-text relationship, Foucault questions "a system of ownership for texts," which started only about two centuries ago, in his analysis of "the author-function," by which he means the "characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society" (Foucault, 1969, 148). Spark's novel too questions an author-text relationship in terms of ownership. In this novel, the modern notion of an author as a professional who possesses copyright is left – perhaps deliberately – in a somewhat gray area by the fact that Fleur has yet to become a professional writer and *Warrender Chase* has yet to be published. Fleur and *Warrender* are "caught up in a circuit of ownership" (Foucault, 1969, 148).

Written words matter – both for literal truth and for symbolic truth. And literal truth in a court of law, according to Spark, is most important, and indispensable for everyday life. It is none other than Sir Quentin who warns Fleur, "Do you know anything about the British laws of libel? My dear Miss Talbot,

these laws are very narrow and very severe” (LI 17). Knowing how to fool and trick others and use the laws for such purpose, Sir Quentin puts a “never-failing” (LI 118) threat of libel, of which he accuses Fleur’s novel, on the publisher, Revisson Doe. He is cautious enough to ask the cooperative publisher, whose interest in Dottie he promises to help to satisfy as a part of their deal, not to make any written record of their meeting. As opposed to his own request, he records all this in his diary – though it is not until later on that Edwina steals it to show Fleur his insanity. There is much in a piece of advice given by Fleur’s dearest friend, Solly Mendelsohn:

“It’s not them sue you for libel,” Solly mused, “it’s you sue them for saying your book’s libellous. That’s *if they put it in writing*. But it would cost you a fortune. Better get your typescript back and tell them wipe their arse with the contract. . . . But get the typescript back. It’s yours by rights. By legal rights. . . .”

(LI 89-90 [my italics])

Young Fleur has no chance against the old, cunning Revisson Doe, who even has “a printing press on which they produced ‘the usual form of contract’ to suit whatever they could get away with for each individual author” (LI 58). Besides, for one thing, whether she has legal rights or not, her only evidence, her written words, her original manuscript itself has been stolen. For another, it is hard to prove either Sir Quentin’s plagiarising her novel or his false allegation of libel, because he essentially puts it in life, rather than in writing.

Any law is as ineffective in Fleur's chase for her *Warrender* as in the surreal chase of *Warrender* in real life. Criminal activities sneak into the gap between legal terms and actual events. Fleur's only hope is to steal back her manuscript from Dottie, who was admitted by a house-boy to her room as a frequent visitor and stole her book while she was out with her present boyfriend, Wally. She in turn cheats Gray Mauser, an obscure young poet for whom Leslie has left his wife, into obtaining the key of Dottie's flat for her, and succeeds in her plan. With Solly and Edwina as her accomplices, she also steals the "autobiographies" of the association, from which she plans to take back her written words plagiarised by Sir Quentin. This whole "exhilarating affair" (LI 95) of stealing can be seen as a mischievous allegory: the actual author, in her own person, comes back to claim her book which has been taken and abused – in the author's absence. Nevertheless, apart from the words written on her foolscap pages and the similar-looking set of "autobiographies," she has no control over *Warrender* living on its own. As Sir Quentin lives out the events of her novel, she is stunned by the situation, feeling "as if I were watching a play I had no power to stop" (LI 116).

A Masquerade

Spark invents the character of Sir Quentin Oliver as a very complex device. Standing between Fleur and *Warrender*, not only literally, but also symbolically, Sir Quentin functions as a third element to separate the author from her work. In doing so, like a distorting mirror, he reflects both an "author" and a "work"

in his figure, in his sinister way. This third element is also to embody an uncanny power of artwork over people in his person, and thereby to provoke questions concerning the role of author/creator in the relationship with a work/creation (with a grudge against an irrelevant criticism and readers' response, at its worst). To illuminate these questions, Spark contrasts Sir Quentin's impersonating Warrender with his other preposterous imitation of John Henry Newman. In addition, like a casual aside, she makes a little analogue between Fleur and Lady Edwina, uniting them in their friendship and in their plight. All through the intricate web of those plots, the problem of individual subjectivity is present in Sir Quentin's figure.

Sir Quentin puts his masquerade on real-life stage, and so does Fleur's fictional character of Warrender Chase. As to this novel of Fleur, occasional quotations provide its content at first hand. In one such quotation, Warrender's nephew, Roland, is playing with Warrender's collection of South American Indian masks, and Warrender's mother, Prudence, tells him, "Roland, stop playing with that mask, just to oblige me. Warrender paid a lot for it. I know it's a fake, and so is Warrender, but –" (*LI* 130). At this point, Roland's wife, Marjorie, rushes in to tell them that Warrender had a car accident and "his face is unrecognizable": "Oh, he'll have to have operations, like wearing a mask for the rest of his life!" (*LI*43). Contrary to her character's "inane helpless" words, Fleur intends her plot to "transpire that he dies and it does in fact transpire that the mask is off, not on, for the rest of life" (*LI* 43), as Warrender's written

documents are left and revealed. In Spark's novel, certainly, Sir Quentin has his own collection of fake masks.

Against Fleur's suspicion that Sir Quentin is "a social fake" (*LI* 21), his education at Cambridge, his membership of three clubs, and his title all turn out to be true. In fact, ironically, his titled name is so right for the man with his tremendous snobbery, arrogance, and a fetish for the "distinguished" class, in contrast with ill-matched names, which Fleur has found not uncommon (as she lists up "those melancholy Joys" (*LI* 12) and so on). She may well perceive his name to be a sign of his insubstantiality. Similarly, she doubts substantial characters of his selected members. Since she thinks, "Contradictions in human character are one of its most consistent notes" (*LI* 31), the very lack of contradictions or paradoxes in their self-representations, in their "autobiographies," strikes her as an idea that "they strained themselves into a consistency and steadiness that they evidently wished to possess but didn't" (*LI* 31). They are all appropriate guests, offering their lives and life stories, for Sir Quentin's masquerade.

From the outset, Spark carefully creates a dubious sort of pseudo-artist for Sir Quentin – deftly linking it to his title fetish – and later degrades this figure as a plagiarist and a fake. With her avid observation and mockery, Fleur does not overlook that Sir Quentin – "far too democratic" in her opinion – sincerely believes that "talent, although not equally distributed by nature, could be later conferred by a title or a acquired by inherited rank" (*LI* 20). What impresses her is his description of his "V.I.P.s," which she

calls his “piece of art”:

I thought of this piece of art, the presentation of Major-General Sir George C. Beverley and all his etceteras, under the aspect of an infinitesimal particle of crystal, say sulphur, enlarged sixty times and photographed in colour so that it looked like an elaborate butterfly or an exotic sea flower.

(*LI* 19)

An infantile play though it is, she finds “numerous artistic analogies to his operation” and “religious energy” in it.

The economy of Sir Quentin’s pseudo-artistic operation, aggravated by his religious energy, lies in copying and faking. He comes to obtain his precious mask out of two sources:

Warrender and Newman. To symbolise his scheme in deranging the distinction between the two modes of truth to manipulate his members, this mask is a patchwork of Fleur’s fiction, *Warrender Chase*, and Newman’s autobiography, *Apologia pro Vita Sua*.

He becomes doubly a fake in the role of creator and in his creation of this patchwork; he becomes Spark’s version of the two-in-one figure with the theme of identity concentrated. Like

Frankenstein’s creature, his mask is made out of fine bits of materials, which have nothing to do with the end result, yet, unlike Frankenstein, he makes it by plagiarising and imitating. Wearing this mask in real life, he represents himself more than ever as a fake, not only in his role of “creator” but also that of “creature,” an object without identity – the inherited title of his name only to suggest its emptiness.

As for Frankenstein and his creature, their split makes it

impossible for them to be “brought to full maturity” (*MS* 178). For Sir Quentin, “maturity” has no place in his character. Fleur imagines the man – “a good thirty-five years my senior” – “in the light of a solemn infant intently constructing his wooden toy castle” (*LI* 19), and obviously enjoys recording his frequent cry at Edwina’s refreshing (for Fleur) and disturbing (for him) intrusion: “Mummy!” Neither through intellect nor emotion does Sir Quentin’s character develop. Merely through plagiarising Fleur’s novel and imitating Newman, he “develops” into a monster: “pure evil” is what Fleur recognises under his mask.

In Fleur’s conflict with Sir Quentin, Spark sets up discussions as to the role of the author and the nature of artwork in terms of the author’s responsibility. Here Sir Quentin appears as a clear joke about the “personification of evil.” In his own circle, it is Fleur who is thought “rather mad, if not evil” (*LI* 12), as she well realises; “evil” and “immoral” are words used by those people to describe her *Warrender Chase*. Sir Quentin calls her “a fiend” (*LI* 122) and Dottie does so too. Dottie swallows all his words accusing Fleur of being “an evil spirit who’s been sent to bring ideas into his life” (*LI* 125). Although Fleur admits that Dottie is no fool, she instantly waves away her trite comment on the character of her novel: “Marjorie is a personification of evil” (*LI* 50). With the same nonchalant air of her author, she says, “What is a personification?” – “Marjorie is only words” (*LI* 50), and so is Warrender or any other character. The point that a work of art – as well as the role of author, fundamentally – is amoral in itself is made clear by the difference between two

Warrenders: the written words of Fleur's novel and Sir Quentin who is literally "a personification of evil."

For Fleur's part, as her life story unfolds, it reveals the process of her writing, for her practice of art has to go on as her life goes. Her position as a subject is placed in her pursuit of self-knowledge, in the interaction between her art and her life. She is always on the move, living one experience after another, writing one book after another, and it is this pursuit of self that makes her what she is. She can explain herself – who this writing subject is – only by her individual experience transformed in her work through her operation between subjectivity and objectivity, between intellect and emotion. If the readers would attribute whatever they make of her words to the "author" or to her "work," that is an external affair to her. So far as the meaning – moral or whatsoever – of the book is concerned, let alone claiming her authority, how can the author take responsibility? Although Fleur's stance in the role of author and her attitude towards her work are quite clear, Spark carries these discussions further.

Fleur comes across her own words used by Sir Quentin as the first hint of his masquerade: "Don't you think you've had delusions of grandeur?" (*LI* 78). He says this to her on one occasion when she loses herself with rage against his pettiness and declares her future success as a professional writer, to her instant regret – for this shows that she is trapped by his provocation. In her confusion, she realises that the phrase is a part of Warrender's letter which she invented. Warrender suggests his housekeeper

(awful, like Beryl Tims) should use the phrase in questioning Marjorie. Now, through Sir Quentin, those exact words return to Fleur, directed at her. Thus the phrase circulates, and the question is, whose phrase is it? At the moment when Sir Quentin appropriates it for himself, Fleur is put outside the words she wrote – and Warrender writes in her novel.

With this moment about one circulating phrase, Spark provokes questions concerning one's subject position, which bear relevance to Foucault's argument. Foucault questions the speaking subject with respect to "a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a viable and complex function of discourse" (Foucault, 1969, 158):

"What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject-functions?" And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: "What difference does it make who is speaking?" (Foucault, 1969, 160)

In the scene of *Loitering with Intent*, Spark suddenly takes the little phrase away from her heroine in the role of "originator," and thereby poses those questions in her own way, throwing them back to Sir Quentin, who now assumes the role of speaking subject. While Fleur may well share Spark's awareness of those questions, as well as her principles in writing, Sir Quentin is "pure

evil,” a mere “personification of evil” wearing his fake mask. Under his name, he authorises the words he plagiarises and fools his believers – with his own “delusions of grandeur.” At the moment of his utterance of the phrase, symbolically, he substitutes Warrender, an objectified being in Fleur’s novel, and exposes the problem of his subjectivity. In a sense, Spark contrasts Fleur as an actual author and such a notion of “author” as Foucault discusses emerging from Sir Quentin’s figure – and he is a dead man at the end of his game.

Fleur finds no reason for a bad conscience about the influence her work has had on Sir Quentin, but she is curious. About Newman’s *Apologia* as well, she wonders “what these people could possibly be making of him,” as there cannot be “any resemblance between Newman and his band of Oxford Anglo-Catholics in their austere retreat at Littlemore, and Sir Quentin with his bunch of cranks” (*LI* 124). Maisie Young, one of the members, unintentionally leads Fleur to see the *Apologia*, which she admires so much, in a new light. Fleur has deeply dedicated herself and much time to studying every aspect of Newman. Maisie, a rather likeable, young girl, now infuriates Fleur by her naïve infatuation with some spiritual argument, knowingly referring to the *Apologia* and citing Fleur’s favourite lines: “Two and two only supreme and luminously self-evident beings, my Creator and myself” (*LI* 64). Hearing her uttering these words, Fleur “felt a revulsion against an awful madness [she] then discerned in it” (*LI* 64). Fleur tells her that the *Apologia* is “a beautiful piece of poetic paranoia” though she knows that this is

“over-simple, a distortion” in her need for “the rhetoric to combat the girl’s ideas” (LI 65). Fleur’s understanding gained by her own effort suggests that the book has this element of paranoia, which is by no means the whole aspect. But, more importantly, that Sir Quentin and his members pick up this particular element in the *Apologia* reveals more about their own paranoia rather than Newman’s book or his life. Setting aside an actual, individual author, who speaks may matter less to consider a text; but perhaps, it matters who this reading subject is.

Fleur did not foresee that anybody reading her book would enact its idea in life any more than Newman would have dreamt of anybody following the course of life as written in his autobiography. This is not to say that, because such foresight is impossible, the influence of artwork over people cannot cause Fleur – let alone the dead author – to feel responsible for the outcome. The point is that Newman could not have changed the truth of his life, even if he had wished. Nor can Fleur change the truth she grasps through her experience and materialises through her art of fiction – whether she (or the readers) likes it or not. Unlike Newman’s life story, indeed, the truth emerging from her novel has nothing but itself to prove its validity, and therefore, she calls it fiction. However, she has no doubt that literal truth and symbolic truth are equally valid in themselves. As for her *Warrender*’s validity, she has no need for the ironical “evidence” provided by Sir Quentin, who materialises Warrender in his life – and in his death, too. To prove her novel literally, as literal truth, is not at all the point. On the contrary, one of the themes of her

Warrender Chase – and of *Loitering with Intent* – is the importance of distinguishing between literal truth and symbolic truth.

All Fleur can do is to hope that “the readers of my novels are of good quality” (*LI* 139). An author cannot choose readers, as one cannot choose blood relatives. It is awful for Fleur, having somebody like Sir Quentin for a “reader,” and as for Edwina, as Wally puts it, “Awful for her, having a crackpot for a son” (*LI* 131). With all the resistance Lady Edwina has shown in her formidable way, her old age has obliged her to live a prisoner’s life in her house, terrorised by her own son and his horrible housekeeper as her prison warder. Although Fleur still returns to Hallam Street for Edwina, without waiting for the end of the masquerade, she quits her job and departs from the Autobiographical Association. Happily again she and her writing start to follow life:

Although in reality I wasn’t yet rid of Sir Quentin and his little sect, they were morally outside of myself, they were objectified. I would write about them one day. In fact, under one form or another, whether I have liked it or not, I have written about them ever since, the straws from which I have made my bricks. (*LI* 126)

If a work of art is like a living creature, *Warrender Chase* is to prove itself standing on its own. Unlike *Warrender*, infantile Sir Quentin never stands as himself, without his fake mask, but like *Warrender*, he dies and his masquerade ends.

In *Loitering with Intent*, literally, Fleur survives *écriture*,

in the mysterious chase between life and writing, and Lady Edwina survives her son, as Prudence does Warrender in Fleur's novel. Finally, published by a respectable publisher, the Triad, *Warrender Chase* gets many good reviews printed everywhere together with Fleur's photo. Outside the printed pages, unbound from each other, Fleur parts company with *Warrender*. Once brought to the public, into the world, the book looks after itself:

In those weeks the Triad sold the American rights, the paperback rights, the film rights, and most of the foreign rights of *Warrender Chase*. Good-bye, my poverty.

Good-bye, my youth. (LI 139)

"It was a long time ago" (LI 139), says Fleur, and she returns from the memory of her youth to the present moment.

A Woman in Love

Fleur admits that she has been "loitering with intent" at the end of the event, when Dottie accuses her of having "plotted and planned it all," saying, "You knew what you were doing" (LI 138). Fleur did, and does, so far as she has "an art to practice and a life to live, and faith abounding" (LI 84). All through the novel, Fleur repeats the phrase, "How wonderful it feels to be an artist and a woman in the twentieth century" (LI 22) and "going on my way rejoicing," the words from the *Life* of Benvenuto Cellini, the book she admires side by side with Newman's *Apologia*. Fleur quotes these words in the ending line, in the very end of *Loitering with Intent*: "And so, having entered the fullness of my years, from there by the grace of God I go on my way rejoicing" (LI 140).

She might not simply quote “his” phrase, simply because it is true to her life. Perhaps, to conclude her own life story with this citation from Cellini’s autobiography is a deliberate choice to show Fleur’s, and Spark’s, strong conviction and faith as an artist and a woman in the twentieth century.

Fleur’s love affair with *Warrender Chase* was over, and she let it go. She also has had love affairs with men. What do they mean to Fleur as a woman and an artist? In terms of love, despite a slight indication of an analogue between her book and the men, there seems to be a peculiar lack of any sexual or erotic charge in Spark’s heroine. It may be worth taking a look at another woman artist in a novel by a woman artist – which is analysed by an intelligent woman critic. Gayatri Spivak offers an experimental reading of Virginia Woolf’s novel in “Unmaking and Making in *To the Lighthouse*” (1980). This novel is totally different from *Loitering with Intent* in its style, form or story, but it is one of beautiful autobiographical pieces written by a woman artist in the twentieth century. Besides, what is interesting is Spivak’s way of adding a new perspective to feminist discussions in her experiment with Woolf’s novel.

Spivak states, “I don’t know how to read a roman à clef, especially an autobiographical one” (Spivak 34), but she deftly and effectively refers to some well-known biographical facts about Woolf for her reading. Her main concern is with the method of art employed by Lily Briscoe, who is Woolf’s persona as an artist, an unmarried woman (not professional) painter in *To the Lighthouse*. She regards the novel as the story of “Mr.

Ramsay (philosopher-theorist) and Lily (artist-practitioner) around Mrs. Ramsay (text)” (Spivak 30). She discusses Lily’s project in terms of “copula”; the metaphor is appropriate in two ways: “the axle of ideal language” and “a sexual charge” (Spivak 31). To analyse how Lily tries to grasp the truth of text – Mrs Ramsay’s subjectivity, in other words – Spivak proposes “a grammatical allegory of the structure of the book: Subject (Mrs. Ramsay) – copula – Predicate (painting)” (Spivak 30). For one more equation, she traces biographical facts to find another source of Lily’s character in Woolf’s sister, the painter Vanessa Bell: “Lily, as she is conceived, could thus be both artist (Virginia) and material (Vanessa), an attempted copula (“the artist *is* her work”) that must forever be broken in order that the artist survive” (Spivak 40).⁴⁷ In Spivak’s grammatical allegory, this copula, attempted and broken, is “the language of madness” (Spivak 31), corresponding to “Time Passes,” Part II of the novel, and also the time of the author’s severe breakdown.

For the other form of copula, Spivak looks into Lily’s sexuality. She wonders if Lily as an artist is androgynous (Woolf’s own aspiration towards “artificially fulfilled copula”), self-sufficient, and has “no use for men” (Spivak 42). Then she makes her point that, in fact, Lily “makes use of them” (Spivak 41) especially in relation to Mr Ramsay, who is “the tool for the articulization of her self-representation: a sort of shuttling instrumental copula” (Spivak 43). Here she applies the Freudian

⁴⁷ Spivak, here, suggests “erotic textuality” in Woolf’s fascination with her sister, too. She presumes the author’s possible view of Vanessa as her ideal “other.”

paradigm, a woman's wish to sleep with her father to make a baby, to the relationship – “rivalry and partnership” (Spivak 31) – between Lily and Mr Ramsay – but, the baby she is to produce is the mother: Mrs Ramsay. To conclude, she tries to promote “a thematics of womb-envy,” the womb as “a place of production,” for Lily's art in the novel is “an attempt to articulate, by using a man as an instrument, a woman's vision of a woman” (Spivak 45). Thus, she attempts to present a possibility of the method of a woman artist by aptly using the Freudian concept with a twist. As for Woolf herself, Freud's influence on her is undeniable to the extent that we can easily find the Freudian imagery in *To the Lighthouse* – and, as is well known, Freud was published by her own Hogarth Press.

Compared with Woolf's woman artist, Spark's heroine does not seem to have any use for men or make use of them *to practice her art*. Spark does not hold the ideas that well fit in Spivak's metaphor of copula, nor is she interested in such an idea as androgyny herself. Here, it should be noted that she makes a remarkable comment on Emily Brontë's vision of the absolute unity between a man and a woman: her point is that such a vision, in Emily's case, was a product of sexless passion.⁴⁸ Calling her “a passionate celibate,” Spark comments, “To a post-Freudian age, it is difficult to convey, without giving rise to scepticism, the nature of the type of celibate it is suggested Emily was, in the

⁴⁸ Interestingly, Spark also observes that “In an earlier age, Emily Brontë would most possibly have thrived in a convent,” without failing to add, “Charlotte compares her to a nun” (*EB* 262), and her own heroine who “lays out the plot of her own life,” Alexandra the Abbess, does thrive in her convent.

context of the term ‘passion’ which rightly adheres to her name” (*EB* 260). Nonetheless, Spark thinks that it is possible with one who has a special calling, a vocation.

Spark’s artist-heroine, Fleur, is by no means a celibate, but she has her vocation. Fleur muses, “That I was a woman and living in the twentieth century were plain facts. That I was an artist was a conviction so strong that I never thought of doubting it” (*LI* 22). For her, being an artist is – almost – no less a plain and inseparable fact of her whole being than being a woman is. Spark displays the nature of her vocation and her radical individualism in the contrast between Fleur’s love for her books – first, *Warrender Chase*, and then *All Souls’ Day* – and her relationships with her fading lover, Leslie, and with her present boyfriend, Wally. The shift of her preoccupation with her writing, from the first novel to the second, roughly coincides with the transition of her affairs with men, from Leslie to Wally. Spark arranges the two cases of Fleur’s parallel affairs to show that the book and the man are neither complementary nor interdependent elements in her life. If seeing a book to write and a man to meet as two alternatives, it is, more or less, a matter of how much time she can spend on them. In this competition, then, it is made clear that her vocation comes first. Moreover, writing, this fundamental activity of the artist’s life, by nature, prevails over all experience, including writing experience itself, whereas a love affair with a man is a part of the whole precious experience.

Fleur’s double affair with the book and the man, in fact, enters into her story in a very peculiar way. As Sir Quentin and

his sect have left for his “property” (*LI* 105) in Northumberland, she is free and has a weekend with Wally at his cottage at Marlow. The motif of this weekend is the irony of situation: “It is as true as any of the copy-book maxims, that love is by nature unforeseen” (*LI* 129). To Wally’s embarrassment, what they find in his cottage is “the evidence of a previous week-end for two” (*LI* 128), for his cleaning lady failed to come. On the one hand, their much expected holiday turns into an unexpected scenario. On the other hand, the evidence displayed before them is undeniably reality, but presents an almost fictional scene “as if by a competent stage-manager,” “overdone from the point of view of scenic production” (*LI* 129). For Fleur’s part, she “didn’t mind because the situation itself was a lively one” and she does “dearly love a turn of events” (*LI* 128).

However, Fleur meets another obstacle to this weekend; the love affair, which has been almost over, preys on her mind – not with Leslie, but with *Warrender*. As her thought rests on the opening scene of her novel, a further irony follows to magnify the fictionality of reality. It turns out that Sir Quentin ends up in the same fate as *Warrender*’s on the same day when Fleur is with Wally, thinking of the very scene, in which *Warrender* is killed in a car crash – one page to reproduce this scene is inserted in her weekend with Wally. The coincidence, the meeting point between the literal truth and the symbolic truth emerging from her fiction, indicates a kind of double-sightedness of the artist. Fleur observes the details of the weekend situation with “a myopic airiness” to be a material for her fiction while she is “*not there*”

(*LI* 129) as her mind's eye is away on her fiction, which is becoming reality. The interplay of art and life inside her is on stage.

Fleur succeeds in getting *Warrender* out of her mind only by telling Wally about her new novel, which seems to interest him. In this regard, her book and Wally sit easily together in her mind. She confesses, in bed with Wally, "Anxious not to be abstracted and 'not there' with Wally, my mind was now only too deliberately concentrated on the actuality of the occasion," and "poor Wally" finally has to say, "I'm afraid I've had too much beer" (*LI* 131). This is not to suggest her sexlessness. It merely proves that she does not need a man to provide a sexual charge to produce her work of art.

In her intuitive practice to capture the essence of a person, Fleur reflects, "It is strange how one knows one's friends more clearly as one sees them imaginatively in various situations" (*LI* 99). When Wally goes to check what has happened to his cleaning lady, she applies her mind's eye to her more general view of him: "I was now so far away in my thoughts that I could only note in his absence that I had a soft spot for Wally, anyway" (*LI* 129). The lovemaking of "poor Wally" is just one actual situation. But then, a love affair with a man – essentially different from that with her book – might be situational in general for her. This is clear in her past affair with Leslie, who is likened to the Cornish pasties she eats with Gray Mauser in one refreshing evening – two diced cubes of steak in hers, only one in Gray's:

And this I find most curious: looking back on it, the idea of

that Cornish pasty, day old as it was, is to me revolting but at the time it was delicious; and so I ask, what did I see in that lard-laden Cornish pasty? – in much the same way as I might wonder, now, whatever was the attraction of a man like Leslie? (*LI* 67)

Still, Fleur may well say, “Wally was a love” (*LI* 100), compared with Leslie, who is a critic and writer himself, self-centred and, as Edwina once observes, jealous of Fleur for her artistic talent.

Fleur can be in love both with her book and a man, but she cannot have a possessive relationship with a man, because her vocation requires her independence and because she is an independent woman. She despises the type she names “English Rose” such as Dottie and Beryl Tims for their characteristic vulgarity, which is deeply related to their possessiveness and the lack of independent mind, especially in their relationships with men. She is used to Dottie’s self-righteousness and material scruples, and is almost fascinated by Beryl Tims’ visible greed and stupid attempts to provoke Sir Quentin sexually. She has no sympathy with them: Beryl Tims is simply horrible and absurd; Dottie, the lesser English Rose, degrades herself more and more by offering her life to get hold of a man, her property. “English Rose,” the name Fleur gives them is a harsh mockery of these women who call this role they are taking a woman, and the characteristics of their type womanly.

While Fleur’s intellect is apparent, her warmest emotion resides in her genuine friendships with Lady Edwina and with Solly, her unforgettable friends who are now gone. She reports

that Edwina died at the age of ninety-eight:

But it is Solly Mendelsohn I mourn for. Solly,
clumping and limping over Hampstead Heath with his large
night-pale face. Oh Solly, my friend, my friend. (LI 139)

These few lines tangibly evoke Fleur's sincere and deep feeling for Solly. Fleur as an undoubtedly genuine artist character is a rare example in Spark's fiction, but even rarer is Solly, a male character who is granted such great admiration – "he was a poet, and a real one" (LI 104). The token of their friendship is some of Solly's books he sent to Fleur during his last illness, and among those books are "a rare edition of John Henry Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua*" and "a green-and-gold-bound edition, in Italian, of my [Fleur's] beloved Benvenuto Cellini's *La Vita*" (LI 53). This friendship between two equally independent, individual artists, regardless of their sexes, must be Spark's ideal – if there is one.

Loitering with Intent is the extraordinary fictional version of Spark's life story, the original reconstruction of the essence of the artist's life. The structure, in which Fleur tells her life story by looking back at the experience in past, is an effective and not unusual operation for an objectifying distance – not only between her life and her art, but also between the heroine and her creator, who are made visibly close by the first-person narrative. However, this operation between the present Fleur and her younger self has a greater significance than a simple, temporal device for objectification. Spark sees to it that the framework, which mediates Fleur as an established author and Fleur as a yet

unrecognised artist on the special day of the middle of the twentieth century, predicts the theme of the author. Fleur's story of her experience is at once an attempt to redeem the time lost in doing anything but writing, which is her vocation, and an attempt to restore her self as a living, individual artist, to explain her being beyond her well-known name. Fleur seeks to establish her individuality by writing her life story, which is a story about her experience of surviving in a chase between life and writing: the author survives, both literally and symbolically.

CHAPTER III

LOST IN A DRIVE

“I’m going to have the time of my life.”

– *The Driver’s Seat*

“A Postmodern Fable”

The Driver’s Seat (1970) is Muriel Spark’s favourite among her own novels. The author comments in an interview in 1998:

I think it’s the best written and constructed, it’s the most interesting. It’s got interesting characters. All the characters have something; there are no subsidiary nonentities. There’s always something about them one way or another. I think it’s probably my best novel to date and it’s the creepiest. (I-11, 1998, 229)

Interviewed in 1970, the year of its publication, Spark confessed that she had frightened herself in writing this shockingly dark tale about a girl looking for her murderer – which she called a study of self-destruction – to the extent that she had to go to hospital to finish it (I-3, 1970, 8).

As for Spark’s narrative technique, *The Driver’s Seat* is her first novel which employs the present-tense narrative with future-tense flashforwards. Spark achieves her particular high economy of writing: her aim to write a novel with the quality of poetry.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ In an interview for *The Observer*, Spark comments: “I like to think, though, that my novels have something of the compression and tidiness of verse. . . . In the early 1950’s there was no Robbe-Grillet, and scarcely anyone had heard of Beckett.

Thematically, around the figure of her heroine, Lise, Spark raises issues pertaining to individual subjectivity – the crisis of the subject – in the postmodern world.⁵⁰ Far ahead of her times, she evokes every question which is to be posed under the postmodern condition. For more than a few decades since *The Driver's Seat* was first published, the concept of postmodernism has been discussed and the time is ripe for a new investigation of this postmodern fable by Muriel Spark.

To re-examine *The Driver's Seat* through a wider perspective, in terms of its postmodern multiplicity and indeterminacy, it is important to abolish the old format applied to Spark's fiction in terms of Catholic aesthetics: a human plot versus the divine plot – plus complications added by the author's plot. In "Muriel Spark's Fingernails," stating that Spark "is turning into a very high stylist" (Bradbury 187), Malcolm Bradbury recognises her aesthetic achievement and pays due attention to significant details and motifs of this novel. For all the interesting points he makes, he is still keen to choose the winner of a competition among the heroine, the author and God – who is the master plotter: the author in control? It is true that the Sparkian play with contingency is fully on display; the pattern of inescapable destiny is conjured up more impressively than ever. Besides, Lise – who plots her own death – is doubtlessly one of

Hardly anyone was trying to write novels with the compression and obliqueness I was aiming at" (I-6, 1971, 73).

⁵⁰ I will explore this theme of the crisis of the subject particularly in relation to the postmodern world since the novel highlights individuals who are equally objectified and buried in the masses due to postmodern phenomena such as an accelerated consumerism and the developed media with flooded images, signs and copies.

the most extreme cases among Spark's "plotters."⁵¹

Nevertheless, the pattern as to mastery of plot is not an ending point, but an opening point for Spark to question authoritative and teleological narratives as such. This is equivalent to the postmodern scheme of questioning *grand narratives*, as defined by Lyotard in 1979.⁵² Lise, it seems, plots her own murder, plays her own game according to her own rules and knowledge as a plotter. Literally and metaphorically, she takes over the driver's seat – from men. However, it is not Lise who is laughing at the end. Who, or what, is to mock Lise in the driver's seat, heading for her final destination? Is it men, or the author – or Someone Else?

Lorna Sage briefly mentions *The Driver's Seat* in *Women in the House of Fiction* (1992), in which she intelligently and expansively examines women writers and their works in relation to the women's movement and feminist politics. In the section on Diane Johnson's *The Shadow Knows* (1974), Sage argues that a double role of victim and criminal is taken by its heroine known as "N." Referring to Lise of *The Driver's Seat* as another example of such double-role heroines in contemporary woman

⁵¹ Spark's novels have a variety of plotters. Frederick Christopher of *The Public Image*, like Lise, plots his own death. Lister, a butler in *Not to Disturb*, fits his master's fate in the plot of his scenario. Alexandra is the plotter and heroine of her drama, *The Abbess of Crewe*. There are rather petty plotters such as Margaret in *Symposium*, who plans to kill her mother-in-law, and Marigold in *Reality and Dreams*, who plots her disappearance and commits a criminal act. The famous Miss Brodie has her own plots for her girls as well.

⁵² Lyotard explains that "Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy" (Lyotard xxiv-xxv).

writers' fiction, Sage – not unlike Spark – gets to the point, and keeps it short:

In *The Driver's Seat* God-like omniscience obtains . . . and the ritual process of mystery and detection is rendered redundant. Spark's concerns are with literary theology, and the way contemporary life looks from the improbable perspective of Almighty irony, but she converges with Johnson because *she unhesitatingly takes women to stand for the human condition, caught up in Someone Else's plot*. In other words, she too outflanks the middle men – detective, murderer – who maintain peace and order and plausibility. (Sage, 1992, 142 [my italics])

Certainly, Spark displays her heroine's problematic challenge to multiple patriarchal discourses – by which society has legitimised and centred itself – and curious subversions of gender roles as fundamental components of *The Driver's Seat* with her particular blend of matter-of-factness and subtlety.⁵³ Yet, as Sage discerns, speaking for women would not be Spark's aim; she goes further, expanding women's predicament to the human condition, to problems of individual subjectivity – whether of a woman or a

⁵³ Just for one example of Spark's sharp political commentaries on gender issues, a social position, an unequal "equality," women have so far achieved is exposed – only with two short sentences – in this novel: in the accountants' office where the heroine works, "she has five girls under her and two men. Over her are two women and five men" (*DS* 426). The numbers of women "under" and "over" Lise form a deceptive symmetry with those of men, but they are apparently and greatly asymmetrical in their power relation. Besides, that Lise, whose average appearance is emphatically repeated, occupies the undistinguished middle position is also highlighted in this pattern. Being an unmarried and mediocre woman in her thirties around 1970, Lise can be seen suspended between older women with resignation and younger girls with hope. The social background of the heroine aptly generates a sense of frustration, of being trapped in the present.

man. In this respect, Sage's observation is very acute. However, perhaps because her main concern here is with the human condition as something universal – absolute truth about it she finds in Spark's fiction – Sage uncharacteristically omits to pay attention to the particularities of the novelistic world of *The Driver's Seat*. Spark, in fact, represents the human condition not as being caught up in "Someone Else's plot," but rather, as being caught up in the impossibility of any single master narrative – even God's plot, which Sage suggests. Here, I specify what entraps Lise by replacing "Someone Else's plot" with the postmodern condition.

A Postmodernist Narrative Drive

Lyotard would hardly expect a better artist than Spark for the war he wages in *The Postmodern Condition*. He rejects modern aesthetics that "puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself," but does so in the totalising unity and the wholeness of the form "for solace and pleasure"; he urges postmodern practices of art, which, instead, aim to "impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable" (Lyotard 81). Regardless of the comfortable, totalising effect, Spark's postmodern art is engaged in issues concerning individual subjectivity alongside gender and sexuality, in social and political contexts, and also explores the domain of unconscious, by her invention of the peculiar plot: a woman wishing to be killed by a man – Lise's death drive.

In *The Driver's Seat*, with the controversial figure of Lise, Spark effectively evokes contradictions through the heroine's

various struggles: between a woman and patriarchy, an individual and a culture, an unknown self and a presupposed free will. Lise embodies all contradictions inherent in those binary oppositions and inevitably ends up as a simulacrum while the author illustrates the impasse of the heroine, and thereby the crisis of the subject. In other words, Lise's figure is designed to play her adversary's game within their territory: this game is to bring various contrasts and also similarities between her "illegitimate" grand narrative and "legitimate" grand narratives – and so to highlight contradictions. This does not mean that her plot is contrived as a simple tool to detach the author from the heroine's futile challenge to patriarchy, society or destiny. Nor does the author assume the position to set a new, comfortable synthesis of such grand narratives. Spark has them fight against and undermine one another through the postmodern perspective, by deploying her postmodern strategies: indeterminacy of meaningful and enigmatic details; various parodic practices of form and character; effective adoption of deconstructionist practices.

To follow Lise's drive to her final destination, first, it is necessary to examine in detail Spark's own narrative drive: her aggressive postmodernist project to change a way of seeing *reality* by opening up questions, discussions – and another dimension.

The Postmodern Condition According to Spark

In *The Driver's Seat*, to compound the darkness of the story, it is the almost violent power of its language and its form that shocks the reader. Willy Maley is quite right to focus on Spark's

command of language and form to illuminate political, radical, and subversive qualities of her writing in “Not to Deconstruct? Righting and Deference in *Not to Disturb*” (2002), which emphasises Spark’s affinity with Derrida. Multiple patterns are overlapped in the structure of *The Driver’s Seat*, and the novel does not fall in any single one of them. As the writer’s mastery and subtlety of language and form generate a satirical effect more than ever, this novel upsets a common expectation for coherent meanings in a story, a common notion of literary genre, and also a common use of language – common meanings of words, too.

At the outset, Lise is well prepared for her master plot, her grand narrative. As Lise “lays the trail” (*DS* 453) by providing witnesses, Spark makes it clear that, as well as Lise’s narrative, the whole system of signifying *reality* – of the world and individuals in it – is at stake. In the opening scene, the heroine appears as a “customer” (*DS* 425). Shopping is the site where Lise’s resistance against established social codes and her incommunicability lucidly show up and where she ostentatiously wins in language games.⁵⁴ Lise is trying a dress, one of three dresses, “identical but for sizes, hang in the back storeroom awaiting the drastic reductions of next week’s sale” (*DS* 425) in one shop. Whether or not she would find an analogue between

⁵⁴ Catherine Belsey’s very accessible *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* has a section about “language games” explained by Lyotard: “a statement of ‘fact’ places making the statement in the position of someone who *knows*, and the addressee as the person who agrees or disagrees. By contrast, a question reverses the roles If I give an instruction, I lay claim to authority” (Belsey, 2002, 97). (Here Belsey adds, in brackets, “No wonder men find it harder to ask for directions than women do!”)

her social identity and the dress left on the shelf, she is tearing it away from herself when she learns that it is stain-resistant.⁵⁵ A salesgirl's logic – which is obvious for her – that stain-resistant is a merit as “there is always the marks that pick up on your journey” (*DS* 426) does not fit to Lise's unusual purpose of leaving the marks. Lise takes the girl's words as insult – shrieking, “Do I look as if I don't eat properly?” – and baffles other people around, but her aim is “her own dominance over the situation” (*DS* 426). In another shop, she finds a dress and a coat, which make an ideal combination of colours – too vivid to others' eyes – for her, but she again argues with a salesgirl who insists, “Of course, the two don't go well together” (*DS* 427). To forestall the girl, to prevent her from saying anything more, Lise speaks first and declares: “These colours are a *natural* blend for me. *Absolutely natural!*” (*DS* 428 [my italics]).

Through Lise's subversive performances, the novel deconstructs the signifying system from inside, questioning who is to make logic obvious; who is to say what is “natural” – who is to set such norms and meanings of words. Lise lays a claim to authority: her statement does not allow any doubt as it is “absolutely” true for her; it is she who knows what is “natural,” who sets the norm. She exposes how groundless and irrational social norms or cultural codes are – by mirroring this construction of identity. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler focuses on the idea of “performative” – identity is constructed through

⁵⁵ Later, she also throws away her old role, her social identity, with a purposeful gesture of leaving her passport in a taxi.

repeated acts, performance – and argues:

Practices of parody can serve to reengage and reconsolidate the very distinction between a privileged and naturalized gender configuration and one that appears as derived, phantasmatic, and mimetic – a failed copy, as it were. And surely parody has been used to further a politics of despair, one which affirms a seemingly inevitable exclusion of marginal genders from the territory of the natural and the real. . . . there is a subversive laughter in the pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects. (Butler, 1990, 146)

Although Butler acknowledges the dilemma that parodic practices would inevitably fall into the very vacuum of the *original*, she still finds in such practices a possible departure for undermining gender norms and opening up feminism as identity politics. Spark – though her concern is not solely with women’s identity – achieves this “subversive laughter in the pastiche-effect” through Lise’s performance, “a failed copy.”

Spark establishes her kind of realism in her set-up of the contemporary world, which is contrasted with *and* represented by Lise. It is the kind of reality that Jean Baudrillard finds in the relation between the loss of realities and the escalation of the *simulacre*. His book, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (1983), argues: “it is a circular process – that of simulation, that of hyperreal: a hyperreality of communication and of meaning, more real than the real. Hence the real is abolished” (Baudrillard,

1983, 99). Bradbury perceives this hyperreality in Spark's novelistic world, observing that the author's skill "turn[s] our familiar world into an exceptional, even a surreal, milieu" (Bradbury 193). He sees her work, which "conveys significant absences," in relation to the hardness of contemporary art – including *nouveau roman* – from which "the psychological centre virtually disappears" (Bradbury 190). He rightly links her aesthetics to her themes in pointing out that while things are "very present in their presentness" in a material world of the novel, "people move among objects, as if they themselves were object-like, in a present shading into a future" (Bradbury 190).⁵⁶

In a world rushing into floods of multiplying images, signs, and copies, it is crucial for Lise's purpose not to be buried in the homogenised masses – to look "original." Lise efficiently subverts socially accepted codes by unusual combinations, adjusts them to her own, which are impossible for anybody to communicate with or decipher. However, images and signs she assumes together with her purchase also suggest that she depends on images and signs which have been already there and reveal that she is devoid of any identity: no original Lise can be found under her abandoned social identity. Her identity crisis is casually made into a general issue in her brief encounter with a woman from Johannesburg, who defines herself by her possessions: she

⁵⁶ Peter Kemp also takes notice of "references to movement and *en masse*: 'July thousands' (p.29) milling round the airport, streams of traffic, mobs of tourists, even a stampede" (Kemp, 1974, 125). His emphasis is with a motif of movement, but perhaps, customers in a department store and a duty free shop should be added to the list of the objectified masses, for Lise is seen shopping in many scenes, including the opening.

has two houses, has a lawyer son, who also has a house, and all the houses have spare rooms and so on. At an airport duty free shop, while Lise chooses a bright-coloured paperback, which she hopes to be a conspicuous signal to her man, the woman tries to buy books whose colours match the décor in her houses, such as green, pink, beige. Next to the vivid and purposeful Lise, the absurdity of the innocent woman appears in her pastel shades, but they share the same problem. It is not goods that circulate among people, but “object-like” people that move and flow around things.

To fill the void of her identity, Lise constantly changes her roles by fortifying her performances with lies according to contingent incidents and chance encounters – till she is found dead, murdered. Her identity is to be established – “followed by Interpol and elaborated upon with due art by the journalists of Europe” (*DS* 453). Like other witnesses, the woman from Johannesburg is to inform the police “all she remembers and all she does not remember, and all the details she imagines to be true and those that are true in her conversation with Lise” (*DS* 435). Consequently, Lise’s figure is emerging from such information, only as in “the likeness constructed partly by the method of identikit, partly by actual photography,” which – the narrator announces in the first flashforward – is “soon to be published in the newspapers of four languages” (*DS* 432). The figure reconstructed out of Lise’s images given to and by the public is what Lise *is* – an incommunicable and unintelligible sign.

In *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1970),

published in the same year as *The Driver's Seat*, Baudrillard scathingly criticises the consumer society, in which the public and social or political events, both absorbed into the order of the sign, merely reflect each other. Here, he too likens “the great Delphic Oracle of Public Opinion” – made by these circulating reflections – to “identikit pictures” (Baudrillard, 1970, 195). In terms of losses of communication and of meaning in the media age, he further discusses information as the *simulacre*: “it [information] exhausts itself in the act of staging the communication; instead of producing meaning, it exhausts itself in the staging of meaning” (Baudrillard, 1983, 98). Spark’s heroine stands for the condition of contemporary society at large – as a patchwork of images, with no substance, as a mere *simulacre*; the contradictory hyperreality of communication and of meaning. Spark, in her *original* postmodern artwork, stages the contradictions inherent in the nature of reality in the postmodern world.

Postmodern Models for Narrative

The patterns appearing in *The Driver's Seat* are all very different from one another, but they are interrelated and converge on the theme of an unknown part of self. Around this theme, Spark creates a polished pastiche out of parodies of two types of “popular” literature, a detective novel and a cheap romance: a story of a woman going on holiday to look for a man, not a lover but a murderer. Among endless ingenious twists, in this parody of a “whodunit,” which disturbingly blurs the line between a victim and a criminal, the police are to trace the unidentified

victim, instead of her murderer. With this figure of the heroine dying for her belief in the *end* of her plot, Spark's "whodunit" is layered by a travesty of Greek tragedy, which also suggests a grotesque parody of martyrdom by the ironical resemblance between destiny and the mechanism of belief – both of which afflict "individual subjectivity."

The Driver's Seat ends with the heroine's death, and with words from a classical definition of tragedy by Aristotle in the *Poetics* – adding the same dictum in a reversed order: "fear and pity, pity and fear" (DS 490). While the reference to tragedy has been acknowledged but generalised in terms of the divine (and/or "Sparkian") plot as an inexplicable mystery, interesting classical parallels emerging from sedulously arranged details have been overlooked. The novel roughly follows the unities – of action, of place and of time – also founded by Aristotle, as events mainly take place somewhere in the South around Lise's plot in the last day of her life. The story of Oedipus would offer the clearest link between this novel and a form of tragedy.

Like Oedipus, Lise looks for a murderer and, as what the novel points to, this totally undignified heroine does not know who she is any more than the tragic king knows who he is. In both stories, destiny plays a significant part: it is a series of contingent events that leads the protagonist to the wanted murderer; the protagonist is to succumb to destiny beyond any human logic of cause and effect. Both Oedipus and Lise are exiles. At his birth, due to the ominous prophecy that he will kill his father, Laius, and sleep with his mother, Jocasta, Oedipus as a

baby should have been done away with, but instead, he was cast away in a foreign country. Later, Oedipus as the king of Thebes, not knowing the truth, lays a curse of exile on the murderer of Laius – which is indeed falling on himself. Lise too appears as a kind of outcast in society from the outset, and then assigns herself for a fate of exile, leaving for the South.⁵⁷

Lise's "tragedy" has its unlikely chorus at the margin of the stage. At her departure, a female porter of her apartment laughs at her for her vivid-coloured dress, saying, "Are you going to join a circus?"

she throws back her head, looking down through half-closed lids at Lise's clothes, and gives out the high, hacking cough-like ancestral laughter of the streets . . . (DS 431)

This spontaneous, unrestrained laughter is followed by another laughter, which is the woman's deliberate insult to Lise, who is mean with her tips. Then there is one more laughing woman on Lise's journey:

"Dressed for the carnival!" says a woman, looking grossly at Lise as she passes, and laughing as she goes her way, laughing without possibility of restraints, like a stream bound to descend whatever slope lies before it. (DS 465)

At least, for these women, Lise is to be mocked at, not to be feared and pitied. They are only exceptions: women who manage to insult her before she can say anything to defeat them verbally. And such "ancestral laughter of the streets" is not

⁵⁷ We might also hear an echo of the name of Oedipus – "swollen-footed" – at one point, when Lise limps into the view with her injured foot.

dissimilar to the female voice of Wisdom in the Bible, which condemns human arrogance with a sarcastic laughter and threateningly warns human beings to realise the supreme knowledge of God.⁵⁸

There is another possible cast for this travesty, which alludes to destiny playing its part behind Lise's back and mocks her arrogant confidence in her knowledge. Although Lise's eccentric performances and the psychedelic colours of her costume, which are ploys to draw the attention of people and make them her unwilling witnesses, scare off most people, she has her temporary travel company, an old lady called Mrs Fiedke. The old lady spends a relatively long time with Lise and should be a top witness of the unidentified victim of the murder, but the narrator unusually tells us nothing about her reporting to police. Instead of being Lise's witness, Mrs Fiedke could be a witness of God and of his plot, destiny – she is a “Jehovah's Witness” (*DS* 460), indeed. Furthermore, like the blind prophet Tiresias, Mrs Fiedke, who takes no notice of Lise's conspicuousness due to her weak eyesight, seems to have second sight. She affirms – for no reason – that her nephew, Richard, is the man Lise looks for – and he really is.

A curious conversation follows Mrs Fiedke's “prophesy”:

“Well, it's your idea,” says Lise, “not mine. I wouldn't know till I'd seen him. Myself, I think he's around the corner somewhere, now, any time.”

“Which corner?” The old lady looks up and down

⁵⁸ Proverbs 1: 20-27

the street which runs below them at the bottom of the steps.

“Any corner. Any old corner.”

“Will you feel a presence? Is that how you’ll know?”

“Not really a presence,” Lise says. “The lack of absence, that’s what it is. I know I’ll find it. I keep on making mistakes, though.” (*DS* 466)

Interestingly, Lise perceives the presence of this man as “the lack of absence.” The phrase, “the lack of absence,” in itself would sound like a deconstructionist joke about a hierarchy – an especially vital one in relation to language as a system of difference – if we recall a concept of absence for Jacques Derrida: “absence,” only by which “presence” can be defined, but the latter is granted a privilege by logocentrism. It would be even more interesting, if we also recall Jacques Lacan’s signifier of signifiers, the phallus as the sign of lack, representing the Law of the Father.⁵⁹ Through Lise’s ambition to be in the driver’s seat, in power, a father whom she is going to challenge seems to emerge from the absence of her father⁶⁰: a symbolic father as “the lack of absence.”

In terms of the figure of the absent father, Lise’s unspecified destination somewhere in “the South” may invite a guess that it could be Rome, the papal city. Then, there are Lise’s enigmatic gifts, black neckties for “Papa” (*DS* 475) – the

⁵⁹ For related discussions, see “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” in Derrida’s *Writing and Difference* (1978) and “The Meaning of the Phallus” in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne* (1982) edited by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose.

⁶⁰ Let alone her father, none of her family is mentioned.

Pope in Italian, indeed, if not her absent father – and a black and white scarf for “Olga” (*DS* 476) – the name derives from the word “holy.”⁶¹ These gifts match the equipment for her death: her murderer’s necktie to bind her ankles and her vivid orange scarf to tie her hands. They could be simple gifts, could be her mockery at “Papa” (Father, or Pope, or God?), or on the contrary, could be gloomy offerings which signify her perverse belief. The significance of those gifts, or of her destination, is indeterminable, but such indeterminacy opens up questions as to Lise’s “free will,” and the complex theme of the subject. As well as her murderer, the absent Father could be found at “Any corner,” “Any old corner” (*DS* 466) – perhaps, especially where the accepted signifying system is concerned. Lise breaks up with this system, the social codes; she refuses to be subject to long-established, patriarchal laws.

Here, apart from the travesty of tragedy, Mrs Fiedke also plays the part of a caricature of an outmoded patriarchal discourse. She claims that men are demanding equal rights with women who are superior to them, and gives her pseudo-feminist speech:

they [men] will be taking over the homes and the children, and sitting about having chats while we go and fight to defend them and work to keep them. They won’t be content with equal rights only. Next thing they’ll want the upper hand, mark my words. Diamond earrings, I’ve read in the paper. (*DS* 467)

Mrs Fiedke’s view seems to be shared with her late husband, Mr

⁶¹ The name also means “healthy” (*Brewer’s Dictionary of Names* 390).

Fiedke, who “knew his place as a man” (*DS* 467). (Again, this might remind us of the hermaphrodite prophet.) As Mrs Fiedke merely inverts women over men in the same discourse, the novel, from the view of deconstruction, indeed aims to ridicule not only patriarchy but also such hierarchical order as can be found in some feminist positions. This implies that Lise is taking over the driver’s seat from a man, but, in his car, she is deeply caught up in her own contradictions. On the one hand, this marginalised woman heading for “the center of the foreign city” (*DS* 455) is to appear to challenge patriarchy and social hierarchies; on the other, assuming one mask after another, her figure inevitably appears as an ever-deferred sign – with no origin.

The man Lise looks for – her male counterpart – enters in a dark parody of a holiday romance, as another empty space outside herself, where her unknowable self is projected. On her journey, from the outset, Lise spots the right man; he has never met her before, yet, he somehow recognises her – though it is not love, but fright at first sight. As they happen to take the same flight for the South, this young man, Richard, suddenly looks at Lise sitting next to him, “opens his mouth, gasping and startled, staring at her as if she is someone he has known and forgotten and now sees again” (*DS* 438). He flees in panic far away from her, to another seat where he looks relieved “as if he had escaped from death by a small margin” (*DS* 439). It is not revealed that Richard – if not “a sex maniac” – has been put in prison for two years and spent six years in a clinic for having stabbed a woman (*DS* 487-88) until Lise finally catches him. This is again a shrewd parody, which

combines a common format of a romance with a murder mystery, and thereby applies an irrational, blind state of falling in love to the uncanny mutual recognition between the heroine and her murderer – and alludes to complicated, interlocked psychological “drives.”⁶² Lise and Richard mirror each other’s unknown self, and so cannot know each other. Lise says to herself aloud, “I wonder who he is?” (*DS* 440); Richard says to her, “I don’t know who you are” (*DS* 487). They are not to be united to make a whole, but to remain as each other’s double-image of victim and criminal in a pattern which consists of countless simulacra.

Around Lise or/and Richard, more and more mirror images proliferate in the hallucinatory symmetry of the pattern – images, reversed, but one and the same. Sometimes, Lise’s image is diminished in a smaller frame, and sometimes, caught in a larger frame. As Lise comes across wrong men on her way to the right one, she confronts them in terms of the sexual difference; at the same time, they appear as her copies to a different degree and in different ways. Boarding the airplane, Lise is already following Richard, and also followed by a man called Bill, a self-appointed “Enlightenment Leader,” who assumes a mission of propagating the macrobiotic diet based on the concepts of “Yin” and “Yang,” parallel to negative/female energy and positive/male energy.⁶³

⁶² This is the basis for the scenario of Lister, who is selling his masters’ story, in *Not to Disturb*. About his pre-written scenario about his master, who is to kill his wife, her lover, and himself, Lister sardonically says, “How like . . . the death wish is to the life-urge!” (*ND* 209). To give grandeur to the story of the aristocratic masters, he insists that “Sex is not to be mentioned”; “On their sphere sex is nothing but an overdose of life. They will die of it” (*ND* 209).

⁶³ Here is another enigmatic purchase of Lise: “a cheap electric food-blender” (*DS* 459). This may show her mockery at Bill’s “Yin” and “Yang,” or reflect the

Bill is Lise's male caricature: as if to imitate her pursuit of her plot and of Richard, he chases her single-mindedly for his other principle, "one orgasm a day" (*DS* 445). Like Lise, he lays a trail – a trail of wild rice, good food belonging to "Yang," dropped from a plastic bag he always carries with him. Later Lise responds to his principle accusing him of an assault on her and getting away with his car while he is taken to the police.

Lise's mirror images reflect the ambiguity of her double-role of victim and criminal, the irony of her situation. There is a hidden hunter who awaits "big game" (*DS* 477): following a smell of its prey killed and kept in a bush, and waiting for the predator's return. This allegory comes from a sick-looking man, who was sitting between a young girl and a plump woman, symmetrical with Lise sitting between Richard and Bill, in the airplane. It is no wonder that Lise, at some point, thinks this stranger could be her man. Although he seems to be in a high social position, his identity, including his name, is never revealed. He looks like a passive version of Lise, sharing "some sort of mental distance from reality" (*DS* 443) with her, as well as some similar expressions such as his tight lips, his eyes absently wide open. In the figure of this man, Richard's image overlaps Lise: the man follows the plump woman to a car waiting for him "as if bound for the scaffold" (*DS* 447) – as if to simulate the game, which is to be played between Lise and Richard, inside one person.

Eventually, Lise catches Richard, or he catches up with her,

doubled image of Lise/Richard, or could be another ironical sign for Lise's problematic challenge.

as the concierge of her hotel told her, who was somehow lost at her arrival: “you left part of yourself at home . . . That other part, he is still en route to our country but he will catch up with you” (*DS* 449). Lise insists that she wants to be killed, but no sex. Richard insists that he does not want to kill her – but “‘Sex is normal,’ he says, ‘I’m cured. Sex is all right’” (*DS* 488). Richard denies Lise’s view that many women are killed because they look for it. Lise denies his assumption that women look for sex, not being killed. Lise’s dubious argument about a murder victim imitates that about a rape victim; and Richard’s scenario of rape emerges here and confronts her scenario of murder:

“You’re afraid of sex,” he says, almost joyfully, as if sensing an opportunity to gain control.

“Only of afterwards,” she says. “But that doesn’t matter any more.” (*DS* 488)

Instead of pursuing the argument, Lise instructs and even performs how he should kill her, and emphasises that she does not want sex – “All the same, he plunges into her, with the knife poised high” (*DS* 490). Thus he kills her, observing her instructions except for that one point – he refused her order to tie her ankles before the murder/rape, but does not forget doing so afterwards. As a result, each of them seems to get what they claim – death for Lise, sex for Richard. He passively follows her plot, but makes an alteration by inserting his own. This alteration hinders the fulfillment of Lise’s plot rendered into her own death. Not in unity, but in discord, of their doubled scenario, each of them takes the double-role of victim and criminal, led to

the same end and looking the same in the end. Lise subverts social codes, changes her images, carries on her plot, but her death changes nothing. Richard repeats his past, stabs the woman – to death, this time – and is to be arrested at the end of his hope for a new life. Both Lise and Richard end up as simulacra and such oppositions as victim and criminal futilely fall into ambiguity, indeterminacy.

A Drive to Death

Spark calls the heroine of *The Driver's Seat* a “destiny-driven creature” in an interview by Sara Frankel:

Lise knows exactly what she's going to do, although she sniffs around a lot, looking for it – but in fact she's just going straight to see a man who's got tendencies to kill, and he will kill her. In the end she just goes up to him and says, “You're coming with me,” it's nearly midnight by that time. *The Driver's Seat* is a book about that sort of destiny-driven creature: a girl who didn't realize what she was doing, but who was in fact going direct.

(I-10, 1985, 451-52)

This suggests enough to associate what Lise represents with the unknowable realm within us – especially in terms of her “drive.” Spark materialises the unfigurable in the figure of Lise, whose murderous plot comes into view through its effect, but its cause remains ever in the dark. Spark's writing has no dogmatism and so provides no answer to Lise's story as a “whydunnit in q-sharp major” (*DS* 487), the name Lise ironically gives to her vivid-

coloured paperback. Instead, Spark offers a concrete, individual study of self-destruction – without a rhetorical deadlock of theory.

The Economy of Lise's Drive, and Excess

From the beginning, Lise is presented as an empty inanimate object, an empty space. The novel begins with one of Lise's shrill performances, followed by a kind of hysterical outburst, which is also repeated afterwards, to mark her eccentricity. In this first chapter, however, Spark inserts a detailed description of Lise's flat – with its deathly silence – in the apartment, which was designed by an artist who has now become an award-winning architect:

The lines of the room are pure; space is used as a pattern in itself, circumscribed by the dexterous pinewood outlines that ensued from the designer's ingenuity and austere taste when he was young, unknown, studious and strict-principled. (*DS* 429)

Spark exhibits this space both as an admirable work of art – very much like her own – and as the emptiness of Lise. Lise is like her room, this inscrutable empty space – “not closely overlooked” (*DS* 429) from the outside – to which she has added nothing unnecessary. We can find no memories of people, events or herself added to her life story – her personal history:

Lise keeps her flat as clean-lined and clear to return to after work as if it were uninhabited. The swaying tall pines among the litter of cones on the forest floor have been subdued into silence and into obedient bulks. (*DS* 430)

This scene beautifully and icily conjures up the preordained end of a silent and obedient object, a “destiny-driven creature,” and ironically contrasts this work of art with Lise’s plot in terms of “economy.”

The scene somehow indicates Lise’s sense of economy, which looks similar to the architect’s. However, it highlights differences between her plot and his minimalist artwork, rather than similarities. She merely imitates the high economy of the artist, as well as the act of plotting. Her senseless, noisy improvisation on her image for the death-plot is opposed to the architect’s work which is aesthetically and carefully devised for all purposes and activities of daily life. Moreover, despite her full knowledge of her ending, it is not Lise who exploits the contingency of destiny as materials for her plot, but it is destiny that does its job and makes her an object – like pine trees subdued to obedient bulks. Lise is an empty space on which destiny inscribes its pattern.

An inexplicable pattern of destiny is reflected upon a mechanical system of Lise’s economy, for she is in fact economical – much more literally than aesthetically. The scene of Lise’s apartment refers to a material world, in which everything and everybody are reified, evaluated, and equally become objects, including Lise, her apartment, its material, and even its designer. For Lise and other tenants who has lived for a long time, fortunately, “Pinewood alone is now nearly as scarce as the architect himself, but the law, so far, prevents them [landowners] from raising the rents” (*DS* 429). Lise conforms to this kind of

materialistic view. While she is estimated, for example, rated low “on the spending scale” by the “built-in computer system” (*DS* 475) of a doorman of the Hilton Hotel, like a “precision instrument” (*DS* 426), she also examines things and people and estimates them. She spends her money only on what is useful to mark her path to death, what is relevant to her plot. She pays attention only to some people who can have parts in her plot, but simply eliminates others who are irrelevant, “with her lips straight as a line which could cancel them all out completely” (*DS* 427), as if they have never existed.⁶⁴ As she takes a shortcut to death, driven by destiny, her economy meets her excess. Rather, her excess regulates her economy and appears through it, the system in which she mechanically acts, not realising what she is doing.

Thus Lise’s excess emerges at the surface as visible but unintelligible signs. These signs of her excess produced and reproduced through her extreme image-making, based on her economy, reflect society as a whole, the society of spectacle and of prevalent reification. Lise becomes both an object as a product of such society and an object as an unknown Other, on which people project fear and desire.

The Detour of Lise’s Drive, and Desire

When Lise arrives in the South, where people have different social norms from those in the North, she invariably gives other people a

⁶⁴ We see Lise trying to *settle her account* with her lips suitable for her profession: “Her lips, when she does not speak or eat, are normally pressed together like the ruled line of a balance sheet, marked straight with her old fashioned lipstick, a final and a judging mouth, a precision instrument, a detail-warden of a mouth” (*DS* 426).

shocking impression, but here, her imagined identity is brought into a focus in terms of sexuality and gender.

Skirts are worn shorter here in the South. Just as, in former times, when prostitutes could be discerned by the brevity of their skirts compared with the normal standard, so Lise in her knee-covering clothes at this moment looks curiously of the street prostitute class . . . (*DS* 453).

Lise happens to meet a garage owner called Carlo, when she is involved in a riot caused by a student demonstration, and she is going to take a car from him. This man elaborates on her image linked to prostitutes. He at first mistakes her as a troublesome student, and swears at her, imaginatively making up her history of illegitimacy: “He advises her to go home to the brothel where she came from, he reminds her that her grandfather was ten times cuckolded, that she was conceived in some ditch and born in another” (*DS* 469). What could have been labelled as a repressed desire of a frustrated spinster in the North turns into an excess of desire, a promiscuity of a prostitute, in her image interpreted, or misinterpreted, by people in the South.

Carlo’s sexual desire for her is aroused with his dismay. He finds a role of “temptress in the old-fashioned style” (*DS* 471) in Lise, who on this occasion assumes a false identity as “a widow” and “an intellectual” (*DS* 470) – a woman who offers a different kind of availability from that of a prostitute in Carlo’s view. After so much hesitation, “with an air of helpless, anticipatory guilt” (*DS* 471), he decides to sleep with her though later her violent protest proves his misunderstanding. Even Bill,

Lise's odd caricature, uncomfortably copes with her frustrated outburst when she fails to catch the right man. He tries to appease her when she suddenly begins to cry, and says, "What's the matter? I don't get it" – "as if to affirm that the incomprehensible needs must be a joke" (*DS* 447). (He is unlikely to realise that his ridiculous need for "one orgasm a day" – another alternative regulation – can be a joke, though.) Psychoanalysis can well link her figure to desire, repressed and destructive.

In *The Driver's Seat*, we are to witness the convergent point of Eros and Thanatos through the specific representation of the "death drive." Although Lise seeks a shortcut to death, her plot is not a simple suicide. She has to follow a detour to her destination. Her contradictory plot, her drive to death, may remind us of "the paradoxical situation" Freud laboriously tries to resolve in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), to locate the instincts of self-preservation in relation to death, which is life's aim, its return to the inanimate state:

They are component instincts whose function it is to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death, and to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself. We have no longer to reckon with the organism's puzzling determination (so hard to fit into any context) to maintain its own existence in the face of every obstacle. What we are left with is the fact that the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion. Thus

these guardians of life, too, were originally the myrmidons of death. Hence arises the paradoxical situation that the living organism struggles most energetically against events (dangers, in fact) which might help it to attain its life's aim rapidly – by a kind of short-circuit. Such behaviour is, however, precisely what characterizes purely instinctual as contrasted with intelligent efforts. (Freud, 1920, 614)

This death “in its own fashion” echoes Lacan’s concept of desire, as Jane Gallop explains in *Reading Lacan* (1985):

Lacan sees in the sexual drives a primacy of recognition over the attainment of the goal desired. In order for the desire to be recognizable, it must pursue its aim “only in its own fashion.” It is more important that a desire pursue the correct path – that is, its own path – to fulfillment than that it be fulfilled. (Gallop 103-104)

The analyst defines desire, so complicated and paradoxical, as what cannot be signified. Spark’s heroine desperately needs “her type” of man, the man to kill her and so to represent her unrecognisable, repressed wish which is leading her to destruction. Lise senses his presence all the time as “the lack of absence” and she can recognise him if she sees him though she cannot articulate what the man of “her type” is. In her drive to death, meeting wrong men, she ponders, “I make a lot of mistakes” (*DS* 479), and her frustration arises from those failures to find “her type,” this sign of recognition. Spark, with her extraordinary command of language, proves what artists – and only a few of them – can do about the unfigurable, with which analysts would muddle.

Spark further “outflanks” what Sage calls “the middle men” such as the detective and the murderer (Sage, 1992, 142) – and also the analyst. In “Two Ways to Avoid the Real of Desire” (1991), Slavoj Žižek pays attention to the form of narrative common to psychoanalysis and the detective novel as “the logic and deduction story” (Žižek, 1991, 108), comparing the detective with the analyst, both supposed to be capable of reading hidden signs. He leads his argument to the *film noir*, in which the detective gets involved in the real of desire (“the ‘impossible’ real, resisting symbolization” (Žižek, 1991, 117)), represented by the “femme fatale.” Unlike the Sherlockian type, who avoids the real by retaining the position of the professional analyst and being paid for his job, the hard-boiled detective (the Philip Marlowe type) can do so only by rejecting the “femme fatale.” Concerning roles the “femme fatale” takes, Žižek distinguishes the role of “the pure subject fully assuming the death drive” from the role of objectified woman as the mere projection of male fantasy, “the boundless enjoyment” (Žižek, 1991, 124). He points out that the “femme fatale” becomes the real menace to men when she takes the role assuming the death drive. His distinction is right, but to distinguish is not enough for Spark, who sets Lise’s death drive aggressively against male fantasy, an androcentric discourse of sexuality.

Spark leaves somewhat calculated ambiguity about Lise’s response to her image as an object of sexual desire. The author shrewdly juxtaposes Lise’s awareness of her image as such and her emphatically claimed indifference to sex. In this respect, as

well as the author, Lise plays with a common assumption – she says no, but she wants it. Lise loudly says to Bill, “You look like Red Riding-Hood’s grand-mother. Do you want to eat me up?” (DS 438), which he delightedly takes as a provocation. She lets him kiss her as he tries, though this is accompanied by her harsh laugh and raised eyebrows (DS 448). Similarly, Carlo’s anticipation is triggered as she puts her injured foot on his desk, asks him if he is married, and makes up her identity (DS 470-71). When she makes it clear that she does not want sex because she has something else – indeed, her drive to death – on her mind, these men in no way listen to it. In both cases, getting away with their cars, to her sardonic satisfaction, she proves that they are wrong – sex is irrelevant.

Lise’s “drive” to death appears as if it were a parody of Freud’s “masterplot”; Peter Brooks’ *Reading for the Plot* (1984) offers an intertextual reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* with fictional plots in the section, “Freud’s Masterplot: A Model for Narrative.” Brooks illustrates an analogy between a narrative function and that of human psyche as deftly as he accumulates examples – from the *tradition* of nineteenth-century novels – that serve to his desire for emphasising Eros, “Narrative Desire” (the title of another section), which virtually appears as “male plots of ambition” (Brooks, 1984, 39). He finds “a dynamic model that structures ends (death, quiescence, nonnarratability) against beginnings (Eros, stimulation into tension, the desire of narrative) in a manner that necessitates the middle as detour” (Brooks, 1984, 107) in Freud’s text, which he calls “metapsychology” and

“metapoesis” (Brooks, 1984, 106). Lise’s encounters with the men form a detour, a deviation from her shortcut to death; Lise, figuratively “assuming the death drive” herself, resists and overrides the pleasure principle postulated and represented by the men. Here, however, comes the ironic end of the novel with the disturbing ambiguity. Lise’s ambition of her masterplot fails, and there is neither the fulfillment of desire for meaning nor a consoling simulation of discharge of all tension; there is only the perception of her actual death: “how final is finality” (*DS* 490).

Freud’s masterplot indeed has a totalising closure, as Brooks observes: “Freud, in a remarkable gesture, turns toward myth, the myth of the Androgyne in Plato’s *Symposium*, which precisely ascribes Eros to a search to recover a lost primal unity that was split asunder” (Brooks, 1984, 106). Spark’s novel does not resort to such mythic obscurity. In its ending, the author brings about a gender issue, a battle between the sexes – and between the victim and the criminal – which cannot be dissolved into such notions as androgyny. In this social and political context, Sage’s suggestion that “Spark is mocking a forensic fashion of the time – victimology, the investigation of the active role of the victim” (Sage, 1992, 142) is veritable and important. Irony emerges from the murder investigation that screens off the confrontation between Lise’s death drive and the sexual discourse represented by the men; that covers up the rape scenario and therefore the failure of Lise’s grand narrative. In flashforwards in the future tense, we see policemen investigating her murderer, Richard. As a murder case, evidence “coming in seems to

confirm his story” – the victim takes him to the spot she has marked and instructs him to kill her – and causes the investigators “their secret dismay” (*DS* 489). There is no mention of Richard’s rape of Lise, though. The rape scenario, absorbed into the murder scenario, is missing while these “middle men” are muddled in their redundant investigation of the murder. The detective will have no clue to this “whydunnit in q-sharp major”; no matter what effect they trace back, they do not get to the cause.

To see Spark’s mockery at “victimology” in ethical terms, we may briefly look into Žižek’s “femme fatale”: “the pure subject fully assuming the death drive.” To elevate “a tragic figure” to “an *ethical* figure” in line with Lacan’s reading of Antigone, Žižek also refers to “Peter Brooks’ version of Bizet’s Carmen”⁶⁵ (Žižek, 1991, 122) as a justifiable example. From the Lacanian perspective, Žižek explains the “subjectification” of Carmen, who “assumes an ethical status, accepting without reserve the imminence of her own death”; who “is herself the victim of fate . . . but also fully accepts her fate by not ceding her desire”:

Carmen was an object for men, her power of fascination depended on the role she played in their fantasy space, she was nothing but their symptom, although she lived under illusion that she was effectively “pulling the strings.”

When she finally becomes an object *for herself also*, i.e.,

⁶⁵ Žižek contrasts Bizet’s original version (Carmen, in love with the traitor Escamillo, is killed by the rejected and desperate José) with Brooks’ version (Carmen, who has lost her love as Escamillo is killed by the bull, is broken, and offers herself to José to be stabbed) (Žižek, 1991, 123).

when she realizes that she is just a passive element in the interplay of libidinal forces, she “subjectifies” herself, she becomes a “subject.” (Žižek, 1991, 122-23)

To detect a kind of heroism, “an ethical status,” in such a female figure seems a rather insidious business. In *The Driver’s Seat*, the author strips the heroine of such attributes as the grandeur of a Greek tragedy or the glamour of an operatic heroine and presents her self-destruction as absurd. From the Sparkian perspective, there is nothing heroic or ethical about a “destiny-driven creature,” who tries to turn her passive role into an active one in the inescapable scenario of mortality. This is not so much to say that the analyst aestheticises the idea of self-destruction. Rather, the problem lies in the way they nullify any specific context and reduce fictional figures into their own masterplot. In such case studies of fictional figures, often slyly exploiting the image of woman, they obscure the distinction between the act of “not ceding desire” at the cost of life – as the power of resistance – and its representation, the distinction between life and works of art.⁶⁶

If the analyst could escape Spark’s mockery at “the middle men,” her art of fiction makes the analyst’s masterplot and sliding signifiers – abstract, totalising and mythic (i.e. persistent return to archetypes such as the Oedipus scenario, Plato’s Androgyne) – redundant. However, now, we can consider another tangible figure provided by a female analyst and writer, Julia Kristeva: the

⁶⁶ Here I only point out that Spark brings this issue concerning differences between life and art into her big theme of practicing art in life (with her pseudo/artist characters), as I will discuss in Chapter VI, while psychoanalysis, in short, tries to explain an artistic practice in itself as one of substitutes for a pursuit of desire.

foreigner. In *Strangers to Ourselves* (1988), Kristeva deftly deploys various metaphors around the foreigner with her poetic language, while Spark creates her foreigner in her study of self-destruction.

A Fate of Exile

Concerning *The Driver's Seat*, Spark comments: "There is a tendency for everybody when they come from a repressed or puritanical society, to go abroad to sin. You can see tourists doing things here in Rome which they wouldn't dream of doing at home as if the cork had been taken out of the bottle" (I-5, 1970, 8). In the novel, far from this casual and rather commonplace comment, she explores deep into the unknown domain of the unconscious. Leaving the North for the South, Lise aggravates her incommunicability, becomes a threatening Other, brings with her the dangerous liberty – the other side of it is the poignant alienation – of the foreigner, whose strangeness is familiar to ourselves. The drastically artificial and exaggerated figure of Spark's foreigner emerges with carnivalesque subversions – resounding in Lise's loud laughter and also the unrestrained laughter of passing women. This "universe of strangenesses" (Bradbury 193), about which there is nothing *realistic*, appears frighteningly *real*. For Lise, who intensifies her alienation not only from others but also from herself, to be an exile is destiny which drives her to destruction.

Lise frequently looks at herself in a mirror, but nobody can know what she sees there. When she does so in her total

isolation, curiously, her attempt of self-identification and also her alienation from herself are evoked. A telephone call she makes at her departure strengthens the sense of a split within her:

When she is ready to leave she dials a number on the telephone and looks at herself in the mirror which has not yet been concealed behind the pinewood panels which close upon it. The voice answers and Lise touches her pale brown hair as she speaks. "Margot, I'm just off now," Lise says. "I'll put your car-keys in an envelope and I'll leave them down stairs with the door-keeper. All right?"

The voice says, "Thanks. Have a good holiday. Have a good time. Send me a card."

"Yes, of course, Margot."

"Of course," Lise says when she has replaced the receiver. (*DS* 430)

A similar conversation with "the voice" on the telephone occurred on the previous day, and also at that time, Lise said to "the mute telephone, 'Of course. Oh, of course'" (*DS* 429), after having hung up, laughed and laughed. "Margot," who seems to be the owner of Lise's useless car-keys – which Lise fails to leave with the porter because of her insolent laughter at her dress – is addressed only as "the voice" by the narrator, and her identity – and even her existence – remains as obscure as Lise's. We observe Lise's absorption in automatic, repetitive acts of picking up her belongings for the journey from her bag, scrutinising them, putting them back, one by one, and there is always a looking-glass at such moments as she is alone in her hotel room or in a dressing

room. Her distance from reality and from herself is uncannily noticeable when she touches her hair as she speaks to the somewhat unidentified voice, as she looks at herself in a mirror – as if to confirm her imaginary identity and even her existence.

However, to other people, Lise boasts, “I can speak four languages enough to make myself understood” (*DS* 434). This fact most ironically highlights her fundamental incommunicability, and most obviously symbolises her lack of national identity, as well as any. As she repeats to Richard, “Kill me,” in the four languages (*DS* 490), she chooses this rootlessness. She well exemplifies Kristeva’s account of the foreigner’s “empty confidence, valueless, which focus on his possibilities of being constantly other, according to others’ wishes and to circumstances”:

Without a home, he disseminates on the contrary the actor’s paradox: multiplying masks and “false selves” he is never completely true nor completely false, as he is able to tune in loves and aversions the superficial antennae of a basaltic heart. A headstrong will, but unaware of itself, unconscious, distraught. (Kristeva, 1988, 8)

In this novel, there is also an ironical example of an indulgent but indifferent attitude towards foreigners in a modern cosmopolitan city. Lise finds “a small oblong box bearing three pictures without words to convey to clients of all languages which bell-push will bring which room attendant” (*DS* 450). She figures it out “with a frown, as it were deciphering with the effort necessary to those more accustomed to word-reading” (*DS* 450), but none of

those bells brings an attendant. Communications break down both outside and inside her. Although she wishes to resort to her solitary liberty, wailing, "I want to go home and feel all that lonely grief again" (*DS* 483), as an exile, she has no home and keeps wandering in a foreign city till she will have reached her destination, her death.

In order to describe the loss of the exile, Kristeva returns to the Oedipus triangle:

the exile is a stranger to his mother. He does not call her, he asks nothing of her. Arrogant, he proudly holds on to what he lacks, to absence, to some symbol or other. The foreigner would be the son of a father whose existence is subject to no doubt whatsoever, but whose presence does not detain him. Rejection on the one hand, inaccessibility on the other: if one has the strength not to give in, there remains a path to be discovered. (Kristeva, 1988, 5)

Lise could have been again a very fitting example for this section, "The Loss and the Challenge," but Kristeva finds a better one, Camus' Meursault, to make case for the scenario of matricide, the lost mother, the motherland and the mother tongue. Kristeva's return to this matricide scenario seems to be a rather reductive move. Certainly, also for *The Driver's Seat*, to regard the complete absence of Lise's mother itself as a sign of her repressed desire can be one possible interpretation among many, but we can allude to the figure of mother only outside the text. Spark seems to part ways with Kristeva when the latter lays too much stress on bodily differences between sexes or on motherhood.

Nevertheless, rather than some female critics' readings of *The Driver's Seat*, which tend to fix the heroine in one category or another, Kristeva's writing still has much more in common with this novel.

At the beginning of "Women's Time" (1981), Kristeva deliberately and convincingly highlights a conception of time to discuss women's struggles with the time of history, "time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression, and arrival" (Kristeva, 1981, 863) – and masculine, which corresponds with the concept of grand narratives. In this regard, Lise's remark – when she is going out of the door she stares "as if to see beyond it" (DS 429), leaving her empty room for her destination – would sound even more meaningful: "I'm going to have *the time of my life*" (DS 427 [my italics]).

Kristeva argues that women fought to gain a place in the "masculine" time, but then, have reached a new phase, in which they revolt against their contract with this time which is not of their own. She detects both dangers and possibilities in such a new attitude: women "are attempting a revolt which they see as a resurrection but which society as a whole understands as murder. This attempt can lead us to a not less and sometimes more deadly violence. Or to a cultural innovation. Probably to both at once" (Kristeva, 1981, 869). She further suggests that women who are in a subaltern status may well be apt for a paranoiac pursuit of counterpower, as is seen in a shape of terrorism – and in *The Driver's Seat*, in the figure of Lise – which actually imitates

their enemy's power structure.

Finally, like Spark, Kristeva aims to pose questions concerning every individual, both women and men. Kristeva expects "aesthetic practices" – by which she means "the modern reply to the eternal question of morality" – to take an important role:

In order to bring out – along with the *singularity* of each person and even more, along with the multiplicity of every person's possible identifications . . . the *relativity of his/her symbolic as well as biological existence*, according to the variation in his/her specific symbolic capacities. And in order to emphasize the *responsibility* which all will immediately face of putting this fluidity into play against the threats of death which are unavoidable whenever an inside and outside, a self and an other, one group and another, are constituted. (Kristeva, 1981, 876)

In *The Driver's Seat*, a radical individualism Spark always evokes in her fiction comes into view only in a shockingly harsh way as she renders the heroine's challenge against patriarchy and her alienation from society, reality and herself on her journey as an exile. The novel remains silent about the prehistory of the subject, provides no universal pattern, and leaves the space for us to communicate with ourselves: what answer will each of us find in this "whydunnit"? Revealing the absurdity of giving up on communicating with reality, others, and oneself, of being lost in a predestined drive, Spark concerns herself with the pressing problem of the present – the crisis of the subject in the

postmodern world. In terms of the “aesthetic practices,” still, can we take it only as a dark and bleak manifestation of the impossibility of the subject with any conscious self?

“The World – Where Is It Going?”

In *The Driver's Seat*, the omniscient narrator, focusing on Lise, observes every detail of events around her in the present tense, and inserts flashforwards in the future tense to tell us what is going to happen. By employing this present tense, Spark “makes it [*The Driver's Seat*] more immediate and terrifying” (I-5, 1970, 8). She took so much interest in the present tense that she kept exploring this technique in the following novels. In *Not to Disturb* (1972), which intelligently plays with the materiality of theatre, representations of people are distributed like any other commodity. *The Abbess of Crewe* (1973) offers another real-time and real-life drama directed and performed by its heroine. According to the writer, *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973), set in a New York inhabited by ghosts, was very difficult to write in the present tense, “Particularly, perhaps, if one is living in a city where everything is either in the past or round the bend” (I-5, 1970, 8), as George Armstrong supposed – and it might have been the same for *The Driver's Seat*. As in the eerie New York ghost story, in the immediate and terrifying drama of *The Driver's Seat*, the present is lost not only to the heroine, but also to everybody, inasmuch as they are all lost in the postmodern world. With this present-tense novel, Spark brings back the lost present by observing it attentively and ruthlessly.

As is well known, Spark was attracted to the *nouveau roman* though she by no means accepted the theory of the anti-novel – her storytelling has such drive. Her writing knows no boredom. The economy of her writing allows no time – or no space in terms of her form – or even no single word for anything irrelevant to her themes. She keeps it short, and makes us laugh.⁶⁷ She admires Robbe-Grillet, as she states, “His novels have a special kind of drama – perhaps the drama of exact observation” (I-6, 1971, 73). For *The Driver’s Seat* as her own “drama of exact observation,” a “destiny-driven creature” turns out to be a perfect subject. Later she makes it clear that for this novel “it was from the point of view of someone who doesn’t know what anyone is thinking, but who can see, who can observe” (I-10, 1985, 454). Since the author can see even the future from this point of view, Bradbury supposes that “no author could be surer where things are going. . . . Her people arise at the last, *from* the last; what has withered is a world of motive, purpose, aspiration. The curious inescapability of plot is her subject, in some real sense her satisfaction” (Bradbury 189-90). Like Frank Kermode, Bradbury lays too much stress on “the sense of an ending.”⁶⁸ Certainly, the author knows what is going to happen

⁶⁷ In an interview, Spark says: “I like purple passages in my life. I like drama. But not in my writing. I think it’s bad manners to inflict a lot of emotional involvement on the reader – much nicer to make them laugh and to keep it short. And then so many writers have already done it, why repeat it? It’s better just to speak in a kind of shorthand” (I-3, 1970, 412).

⁶⁸ “Frank Kermode tells us that *endings in fiction and apocalypse in history* are analogues, that a problem of fictional art is to relate the time of the world, that endings attach significance to time” (Bradbury 189). Kermode also tells us that: “Mrs Spark is even somewhat arrogant about the extent of the novelist’s power: knowing the end of the regular climatic moments she fudges them, simply because

to her heroine. However, is the “inescapability of plot” her subject, and even her satisfaction? Does she say that things should be happening as they are in this novel?

In relation to the mindless masses moving around, Kemp rightly pays much attention to the artificial, mechanical, modern world, and every individual swallowed up in that machinery in *The Driver’s Seat*. He suggests that a lecture called “The World – Where Is It Going,” which Bill, the ridiculous “Enlightenment leader,” is planning to give, could be a fitting subtitle to the novel (Kemp, 1974, 125). “The World – Where Is It Going?” – apart from the motif of movement, and even more suitable as a subtitle than he would have thought – is an urgent and fundamental question of the novel. In his own ingeniously titled section, “Future Conditional,” Kemp discusses Spark’s narrative technique in *The Hothouse by the East River*:

The fiction, like all fictions and as its initial statement underlines, is a hypothesis: and, furthermore, a most extreme example of one, in that what it is concerned with is a speculative future being shattered by internal and proliferating possibilities – a kind of conditional civil war. There is, therefore, steady avoidance of the definite, indicative, or positive. The book begins with the word “if” and ends with a reference to “unknowing”; its narrative draws heavily on the subjective and conditional mood; doubt-indicators like “perhaps” and “possible” and

the design of her world, like God’s, has more interesting aspects than mere chronological progress and the satisfaction of naïve expectation in the reader” (Kermode, 1965, 179).

“probably” pervade the text; it is a work in which questions are continually being asked and left tactically unanswered.

(Kemp, 1974, 153)

There are many points which can be applied to the narrative of *The Driver's Seat*.

The narrator of *The Driver's Seat*, despite her/his exact knowledge both about the present and the future, is no less puzzled by Lise than other characters are, and frequently utters rhetorical questions where her thoughts are concerned: “Who knows her thoughts? Who can tell?” (DS 452). The novel is strewn with doubt-indicators and – instead of “if” – “as if.” This use of “as if” is crucially related to the important theme of the subject: uncertainty about knowledge. The narrator does not know what anybody thinks, because, in the first place, individual consciousness of every character is in question. In the extreme case of Lise, her plot appears as her own grand narrative with her own *telos*: death. In keeping with Lyotard's definition of “*postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard xxiv), no transcendental meaning or legitimate knowledge is to emerge from Lise's narrative. Besides, making straight for her end, Lise as a destiny-driven creature stands for the unconscious, and she becomes a series of effects without any fathomable cause. As for other characters, it is lucidly revealed that each of their individual subjectivities is constructed within the dominant discourse of society; there cannot be so much *subjective* views as legitimate *objective* knowledge. This leads to the position of deconstruction, as Catherine Belsey puts it: “What is outside the

subject constitutes subjectivity; the subject invades the objectivity of what it knows” (Belsey, 2002, 73). As if to be well aware of this position, not only because of the problematic subjectivity of the other characters, but also because of that of her/himself, the narrator shows uncertainty and indeterminacy with “as if.”

The ending of *The Driver’s Seat* is told from the *future* view of the murderer/victim: Richard runs to a car, “taking his chance and knowing that he will at last be taken”:

He *sees already* the gleaming buttons of the policemen’s uniforms, hears the cold and the confiding, the hot and the barking voices, sees already the holsters and epaulets and all those trappings devised to protect them from the indecent exposure of fear and pity, pity and fear.

(*DS* 490 [my italics])

What is this trick about the tense in the last paragraph? It is not the narrator’s flashforward or what Richard is thinking, but the future he “already sees.” Losing the sight of the present, he sees his future told by Lise: “You’ll get caught, but at least you’ll have the illusion of a chance to get away in the car” (*DS* 490). He takes in his destiny, driven by destiny, and now already sees its destination though he could have chosen another way. It is Richard who sees his destructive drive ending – and it will end – in this way, but, as a narrative, it is a “speculative future” – “future conditional.”

The author does not say at all that this ending should be taken as the final judgment on the world, on us. On the contrary, “We are invited to supply the ending we should like the story to

have – and in the process to suppose ourselves superseded by something unimaginable” (Belsey, 2002, 106), as Belsey talks about “A Postmodern Fable” by Lyotard. His postmodern fable also begins at the end of the story, renders the subject as “an incidental by-product of a transitory condition of matter” (Belsey, 2002, 106) in the world which is not designed to work for any human assumption of its goal. Belsey does not consider the fable “pessimistic” because “it leaves the future open”: “We are not at the mercy, it indicates, of a malignant force, any more than we are the creation of a benevolent designer. Instead, what is become of us is to some degree in our hands” (Belsey, 2002, 107). Spark’s postmodern fable as well leaves the future open, compels us to reflect upon it.

This extraordinary study of self-destruction by Spark offers the intelligent reply Kristeva expected in “Women’s Time,” and it also answers to the writer’s own declaration in “The Desegregation of Art” (1971).

We have in this century a marvelous tradition of socially-conscious art. And especially now in the arts of drama and the novel we see and hear everywhere the representation of the victim against the oppressor, we have a literature and an artistic culture, one might almost say a civilization, of depicted suffering, whether in social life or in family life. We have representations of the victim-oppressor complex As art this can be badly done, it can be brilliantly done. But I am going to suggest that it isn’t achieving its end or illuminating our lives any more,

and that a more effective technique can and should be cultivated. (“DA” 34)

In *The Driver’s Seat*, if the heroine – criminal/victim – is to stand for the human condition, how to take her figure is not for the narrator to say. And, where the world is going, it is not for the author to say. It depends on each individual, every individual. Spark’s concern is not with “good” and “evil”: she states that “Now, there is only absurdity and intelligence” (I-5, 1970, 8). She has always believed in intelligence and carried out her resolution, her hope, to sharpen intelligence of people by her art of fiction, which necessarily has an aggressive and rebellious power, as she pronounced in “The Desegregation of Art.” Nevertheless, to Spark, a study of self-destruction is certainly not the only way to explore her themes. Spark creates not only a woman as the subject in the postmodern world but also some women, who can constitute the postmodern subject, who are no less controversial than Lise, but play their games. Yet, before opening a new chapter for these Sparkian women, the artist’s study of the “subject” in crisis has to be further examined.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAKING OF THE OTHER

“Absolutely immersed in the philosophy of *Les Autres*.”

– *Symposium*

Since Muriel Spark announced “a sea-change in the nature of reality” (*T* 91), the world going into the postmodern phase, in *The Takeover* (1976), she has kept a tight grip on her honourable weapon of satire. She has kept her penetrating eyes on people who get lost, more and more, in the postmodern era in her later works such as *Territorial Rights* (1979), *The Only Problem* (1984), *Symposium* (1990), and *Reality and Dreams* (1996). Among the works of Spark, these novels have been hardly discussed and may be particularly difficult ones to “read well.”⁶⁹ However, if we look at them together, retrospectively, there are strong echoes among them. We may find in the writer’s train of thought, which has been more theorised or developed at each turn, a persistent motif of the Other.

As postmodern phenomena have intensified the disconnections among people and the decentrings of the world, Spark has been handling problems of the contemporary subject in

⁶⁹ In her sharp, concise review of *Symposium*, Lorna Sage points out the writer’s theorising herself in her later works: “Here it’s a matter of echoes of earlier novels – for example, the part played by the servants, as in *Not to Disturb*” (Sage, 1990, 278). In mentioning this, Sage warns us not to imagine that Spark writes the same book again and again. Together with other critics like Kermode and Norman Page, she emphasises “how hard she [Spark] is to read well” (Sage, 1990, 278).

relation to its alterity. The incomprehensible, impenetrable Other in her later novels no longer takes the shape of the supernatural – like a mysterious telephone call – but may appear in a guise of a servant, a wife, a son, or a daughter. Somebody one knows but does not know becomes a threatening enigma. In other words, it is this shift from the supernatural to the Other embodied in one person or another and often going down to the underworld that explicitly characterises the writer's great interest in the subject in the postmodern world in her late novels. Through questioning what is the Other or who is the Other, a variety of issues arise as to the constitution of subjectivity of each individual in terms of postmodern phenomena.

It is the nature of the subject in those late novels that increases the intricacy of Spark's fiction: to reflect its thematic concern, the subject in the postmodern world, the narrative is divided, almost fragmented, in many small sections especially and most obviously in *Territorial Rights* and *Symposium*, as well as in *The Takeover*. Spark dexterously weaves themes she deals with into the pattern of disconnection and decentring, the elaborate pattern of which every narrative sequence – even when it seems perplexingly whimsical or disjointed – is in fact a significant component.

Furthermore, Spark is a writer who never adheres to the same narrative style, no matter how extraordinary it is. Questioning the subject in the postmodern era, and in relation to the Other, she has found an appropriate voice for her theme in a new narrative style, which might seem, at first glance,

conventional or less innovative. Using one of the traditional narrators of realism, the “confiding gossip” voice, to give the effect of ingenious pastiche in *The Takeover*, Spark started moving on from her remarkable experiments with the present-tense narrative and the *nouveau roman* scheme of apparent detachment from thoughts and feelings. In her late novels, she explores the possibilities of making a unique narrative out of omniscient, third-person narration and its use of free indirect style.

After *The Takeover* – with the exceptions of *Loitering with Intent* and *A Far Cry from Kensington* – Spark also continues to choose rather lacklustre types of character. In both *The Only Problem* and *Reality and Dreams*, where Spark inclines to theorise her themes, there is a male character addicted to philosophising whose point of view the narrator often deploys, but this focus confers on her protagonist neither outstanding personality nor the status of a norm. In these male-centred novels, there is also a figure of dubiety, of whom all other characters think and speak, but none of those dubious figures arrests so much attention from the readers as it does that of the characters. Such figures appear as the Other and the enigmatic focal point for other characters, but they are not the focal point of the novel. The deliberate absence of any definite centre leaves the reader in an even deeper mystery.

Among Spark’s later novels, *Symposium* may be the most amusing, yet disturbing example of her harsh satire on individuals obliviously absorbed by the “sea-change in the nature of reality,” lost in the postmodern world. In *Symposium*, centring on the

theme of Otherness, Spark creates a woman who embodies “the Other” and holds “the philosophy of *Les Autres*” (S 35) in her plotting. The author plays on this “philosophy,” that is, the idea of focusing on *the others*, to deal with the paradoxical “central” figure of the Other: “one” is lost while focusing on “the Other.” Accordingly, the figure of the woman emerges from the various sketches of the other characters, as well as the images of the Other which they evoke and conceive. Similarly, the woman’s plotting is not only revealed as, but also framed in the discourse of the Other in its various guises. *Symposium* illustrates and discloses this deceptive discourse that blinds one from seeing realities of the present, the world, others and oneself, that makes the Other of one, from various angles.

Open Up the Present

Spark attaches two epigraphs, cited from two different versions of *Symposium*, to her *Symposium*. As if to display her shrewd capacity to belie common expectations, before the quotation from Plato’s *Symposium* – which is likely to be known to most readers – she puts the words from the much less familiar *Symposium* of Lucian.⁷⁰ She may well show a gesture of defying such an idea of literary genre, as she always does in practicing her art of fiction. It would not be hard to read connotations of the second epigraph cited from Plato: Socrates’ assertion that “the genius of comedy was the same with that of tragedy, and that the true artist in

⁷⁰ *Symposium* (tr. Loeb: *The Carousal*) of Lucian and *Symposium* (Jowett translation) of Plato are cited by Spark to preface her *Symposium* (S 5).

tragedy was an artist in comedy also.” In this novel that kind of dichotomous way of thinking in general is to be ridiculed.

However, the actual events of the novel follow the first epigraph from Lucian more or less literally: “the party was finally broken up by the shedding of blood.”

The main plot revolves around a party given by a happily unmarried couple, Chris Donovan, a wealthy Australian widow and Hurley Reed, an American painter. To assist the party are Charterhouse from the Top-One School of Butlers and a handsome student, Luke. Among the guests, Margaret Damien, née Murchie, is the centre of attention, because of her past which has made her “the passive carrier of disaster” (S 143), and because of the money of Hilda Damien, an Australian tycoon, whose only son Margaret recently married. The hosts and some other guests, talking and thinking a lot about this striking red-haired, Scottish girl, suspect her of evil intentions. Hilda too, who has planned to give the newlywed couple a picture by Monet as a surprise gift, is afraid of her daughter-in-law. Believing that Margaret knows about her acquisition of the picture but does not know that it is a wedding present, Hilda even has a premonition that the girl may kill her for the picture. Certainly, Margaret is tired of being suspected only because she has always happened to be close to unfortunate events, feeling guilty for nothing. Margaret is plotting to kill Hilda, not for the picture but for becoming an active agent of evil; Hilda is murdered for her Monet though not by Margaret but by robbers and indirectly by their domestic informers, the butler and Luke.

Thus in *Symposium*, there is a party, and there is a robbery, going on at the same time, in the present tense. As if destiny joined a masquerade, the party is on stage, the robbery – except for a glimpse of the crucial moment – off stage. All events preceding the time of the party and the robbery – October 18th, St Luke’s day, to be precise – are narrated in the past tense. This temporal structure invites scrutiny as a device for us to gain a perspective, to get the whole picture of the novel. There is always a quasi-divine touch about how Spark manipulates narrative time for various effects.⁷¹ In *Symposium*, the narrator traces back characters’ lives to various points in the past, and also gives away the end at the early stage of the novel – not in future-tense flashforwards (as in *The Driver’s Seat*) or in an preternatural scenario by a character (as in *Not to Disturb*), but in the present-tense framework. The question is why it is this present moment to which characters and past events around them are directed.

The point of the novel lies in a separation of characters from the actuality of the present. The main problem is their incapacity to see what is happening in reality rather than their incapability to foresee the end of an event. Only the omniscient, omnipresent narrator knows exactly both what is happening and what is going to happen, and can impart information – sometimes with apparent relevance, at others times with seemingly capricious irrelevance – to the reader. The connection between the party and the robbery in question is gradually revealed, though it has been suggested

⁷¹ There is a complex use of time-shifts in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, as well as in her present-tense novels. For details, see my discussion of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* in Chapter VII and the chapter on *The Driver’s Seat*.

from the outset. The first chapter consists of a scene of a house wrecked by a gang of thieves and the party scene. As this robbery in the first chapter, a prelude to the robbery at the end, takes place one week before the party, it is a scene in the past tense. The motif of robbery bridges the time gap between the two separate scenes, but there remains a wider gap as an actual robbery becomes mere talk. Moreover, when put into words, the robbery at this beginning is already removed from actuality, very noticeably so, forged into something remote and different from what it is, by the ridiculous owner of the wrecked house, a Lord Brian Suzy. Here already is a pattern of characters blind to what is going on under their noses.

Lord Suzy opens the novel with his hysterical cry, "This is rape!" though "it was not rape, it was a robbery" (S 7), as the narrator sardonically corrects. By chance, Lord Suzy and his wife Helen were sleeping during the robbery and did not notice at all what was going on just downstairs, and so escaped a possible consequence of being murdered by the thieves. In the following party scene, Lord Suzy, as one of the guests, dominates conversations with tedious accounts of his robbery. He and his fellow guests are talking, unaware of another robbery, which is simultaneously taking place. Similarly, a little later in another party scene, when they are mentioning Hilda, who is to join the party after the dinner, the narrator intervenes and informs the reader that this Australian magnate will not come because "she is dying, now, as they speak" (S 45). Finally, with the news of Hilda's murder, the reality of the present hits them as the

inevitable destiny of the event, smashes their false assumptions, and leaves them with irretrievable possibilities for a different ending.

“Seeing Things from the End,” the title of Lorna Sage’s review of *Symposium*, aptly points to a vital motif of the novel, this playing with possibilities and destiny. Sage discerningly quotes the scene describing the menu at the party, which the two hosts have chosen after lots of consideration, as a witty “joke about freedom” (Sage, 1990, 277):

The menu could so easily have been hot salmon mousse, not cold, followed by that thin-sliced duck, or lobster on a bed of cabbage with raspberry vinegar. . . . The homely pheasant . . . their final triumphant choice, is delicious.

(S 45)

“The sense of patterning is inexorable,” as Sage emphasises: “Things could have been different, but it so happens they’re not. If you see events from the end (like their author) you catch a glimpse of our true unfreedom” (Sage, 1990, 277). It is true that each individual choice itself can be a contingent factor in the destiny of an event, and that this end cannot be different from what it turns out to be once it has come. Nonetheless, *things could have been different* because there are choices before the end. Human assumptions are doomed to be futile before destiny, but what is more futile is to live the present moment not in terms of the reality at hand, but in terms of a false idea about destiny, which in any case is unforeseen. And if we see this novel from the end we notice that the end of the party is not the end of the

story.

In the last chapter, leaving the characters at the presently broken-up party, the narrator soon moves to the brief final section that tells about the next morning for a minor character, a rich businessman who recently met Hilda on his journey, and here the narration moves into the future tense. Hilda and her likely suitor instantly recognised a suitable companion in each other, and might have expected a happy consequence to come. But this story of Andrew J. Barnet and Hilda is no longer going to happen. There is a certain ironic ambiguity about the ending that describes the anticipated reaction of the devastated Mr Barnet. Are we to assume the narrator knows a story after the day of the party as well as stories up till the present moment? Probably. And whether the answer is yes or no, it seems that the additional story in the future tense is meant to be more like a parody of the act of assuming. The man of the story looks not only like a suitable partner for Hilda, but also a suitable member for the party. However sincerely he feels for Hilda, the section concentrates on his reaction and what he will do, rather than getting into his thoughts. Above all, the last sentence, “He will want more than anything to talk, to tell them [his friends] how he had met Hilda Damien” (*S* 192), sounds as much an ironic commentary on him as on the other characters in the context of the novel. Instead of the reality of Hilda’s unfortunate death, he may well choose his lucky chance story – whose happy end is no longer possible – as his only resort.

The last scene in the future tense leaves a subtle open space.

Whether or not Andrew Barnet is going to do what the narrator foretells, unlike Hilda, his life is still going on and it is up to him how he places the expectation shattered by her unfortunate death, as well as the fortunate encounter with her, in the whole course of his life. When he met Hilda on the plane, he might have known that he had the present moment at hand, if he meant what he said – even if it were simply presumed with ease of the rich. To Hilda's remark that she used to be afraid of flying but got over it, he said: "One does. Best not to think about it. Destiny is destiny, after all. Just relax, as you say. At least, there's nothing we can do, so we might as well enjoy it" (*S* 170). In a sense, destiny is nothing but the way of seeing, seeing things from the end. The novel itself, telling things from the end, effectively creates the sense of destiny, but that is not to say it is about destiny, a future that people cannot see. Rather, what the author actually suggests is that people have a problem of not seeing, not grasping the present which they inhabit; that they are out of touch with their own here-and-now.

In *Symposium*, the narrator allows the reader to see what characters cannot see and do not see. Besides, thanks to the frequent and deliberate use of free indirect style, what they think or feel is very much transparent, so much so that it produces an effect of irony. In their inner thoughts and feelings, the notion of the Other enters. The more the narrator shows these characters fiddling with questions about "the Other," the more disturbingly each thinking/feeling self is destabilised. Although many characters have a false pattern of one versus the Other in mind, no

one is set up as the central one to define the Other within the whole picture of the novel. There is no simple, overall pattern of dichotomy. The use of free indirect style makes an apparent contrast between characters' assumptions and the narrator's knowledge, but the important difference between characters' perspectives – or rather, a lack of any – and the narrator's perspective deserves further more careful attention.

For instance, in his “A Bit of the Other: *Symposium*, Futility and Scotland” (2002), Alan Freeman rightly chooses Spark's *Symposium* as displaying people who are disconnected in a seemingly stable assemblage and the world in a state of flux. As he suggests, characters in this novel betray their solipsism, despite their cosmopolitan life style and attitudes, and they appear to have no means to reach more certain knowledge of another world unknown to them. Discussing “otherness” as a key component in any central or teleological discourse, he labours to show how this “otherness” – in this case, Scottishness – is imposed on Margaret, who thereby embodies “the relation of metropolitan centrality and Scottish marginality” (Freeman 138).

Unsurprisingly perhaps, he concludes that the novel “points to the futility of any attempt to impose” the general label of “otherness” (Freeman 137), rather than the specifics of Scottishness.

Freeman is right to point out the futility of the dominant class who interpret reality and attempt to include and assimilate the otherness into their discourse – but thereby intensify division and hierarchy among individuals and cultures. It is easy to say that here, on a nasty, authorial canvas, is the picture of collapsed

human assumptions, which can be generalised in a neat pattern of colonial discourses and construed identities. However, Freeman's way of seeing this novel, fitting it into a single discourse of postcolonialism, seems as deductive and reductive as the practice of the cosmopolitan elite he criticises. *Symposium* offers a much more complicated picture, and inside the frame of this novel we literally find various pictures, which subtly expose problematic discourses affecting their owners or authors. If we pay attention to how the characters buy, lose, value, paint, see or do not see those pictures, the richly layered theme of Otherness emerges in quite different perspectives.

On the Market

In *Symposium*, freely introducing various paintings and skillfully linking them to her theme, Muriel Spark exposes an ever-growing consumer culture in contemporary life. She had already given a small but important part to one painting in *The Takeover*, the novel set around the year 1973, when – according to the narrator – the complete mutation of the meaning of money and property came about. A painting by Gauguin owned by an American multimillionaire, Maggie Radcliffe, gives rise to a fuss: is “Maggie's Gauguin” genuine or fake? (*T* 116). Spark finds the painting, which reproduces the relation between the owner and his/her property both figuratively and symbolically, a suitable motif to bring into play the obsession with ownership, as John Berger had done in his *Ways of Seeing* published in 1972. Berger provides great insights and raises worthy questions; he takes the

traditional oil painting – from 1500 to 1900 – to probe “the relation between property and art in European culture”(Berger 109). He convincingly argues: “Oil painting did to appearance what capital did to social relations. It reduced everything to the equality of objects. Everything became exchangeable because everything became a commodity” (Berger 87). Because of demands of the art market, the oil painting formed its peculiar tradition, within which marketable works at once made property tangible and hid the obsession of ownership behind impersonal, moral masks. Berger points out that only some exceptional painters individually struggled against, broke up with the tradition of the average painting, and thereby fractured this tradition coerced by the art market.

Spark shows that the Gauguin painting still occupies its significant place to illustrate the relation between art and property in the contemporary world, and it is the world where the value of the exceptional painting as an artwork is already retranslated into its market value of a commodity. Like those who belong to a bourgeois circle in *The Takeover*, a smart circle of people in *Symposium* knows the market value of paintings in one way or another, and a few of them can even afford “a Monet.” Entering the last decade of the twentieth century, they simply seem to have become used to such mutation in the meaning of money and property so well – or rather too well – that they cannot see what is going on around them any better than those who were at a loss in the changing world of 1973. These rich people do not yet realise that they are placed on the market as well: the painting as a

commodity reflects its owner as a commodity.

Around two valuable paintings, *Symposium* tells two anecdotes of a loss of individual subjectivity with an ironical contrast. The opening account of Lord Suzy and his Francis Bacon painting may draw a mocking laugh, the tale of Hilda and her Monet may cause pity and fear, but both meet in the absurdity of a situation in which each individual stands insulated from every reality, from others, and from him or herself. At the beginning, a gang of thieves take minor valuables from the Suzys, wreck and urinate all over their house, but leave behind a very expensive picture by Francis Bacon on the wall. At the end, the same gang kills Hilda to steal her Monet. In each case, the ownership of the painting is symbolically related to a state of the owner's subjectivity.

From the beginning, Lord Suzy appears as a man devoid of interiority: his hereditary title is empty, and so is his identity. As if to confirm that he has nothing but this title, the narrator – unusually in this novel – records his words only in direct speech and does not use free indirect style to show his thought or feeling. However, if only for his title, Lord Suzy's name must have been promising to the gang, though what they actually took was mostly wedding presents, which “don't seem to keep marriages together” (S 10) in the opinion of the third Lady Suzy. William, Hilda's son, may be right when he thinks “that they [thieves] express contempt only when they don't find much to steal” (S 187). This offers a possible explanation for why Lord Suzy's house is urinated all over by the thieves. In this context, the expensive

painting left on the wall assumes a satirical meaning, especially alongside the fact that Lord Suzy is going to keep this surviving property in a bank. The owner and the gang are one and the same in their consumerist value system, in their disregard of the value of the painting as an artwork. No painting to steal is found on the wall; no “subjective self” to lose is found in Brian Suzy.

To this man of purely titular identity, his family is even more unknown to and unconnected with him than thieves in whose value system and operations Brian Suzy participates but never understands as his own. Significantly, it is from his young wife Helen that the reader learns that he is going to put the painting in the bank. Helen corresponds with Pearl, Brian’s daughter from his second marriage, for they were schoolmates. In the text, Helen’s letters are twice inserted, casually and almost as if at random, and just as casually, the painting is mentioned in both her letters. She complains frankly about Brian’s miserly and ridiculous attitude, but above all, it is in his plan of putting the painting in the bank that she perceives an unbridgeable gap between herself and her husband. Such obsession with money and property makes no sense to her, while she is willing to wheedle money from Brian for Pearl or to persuade him to take her on a trip. Knowing nothing about such exchanges between his wife and his daughter, he is cut off from his next of kin. To him, this younger generation is the Other, an Other which constitutes a real threat to his imaginary identity sustained by the hereditary title.

In many aspects, Hilda Damien is a complete opposite to

Lord Suzy. Compared with the man for whom everything depends on his title, she is an independent businesswoman who, starting as a poor widow, has made money – great wealth – on her own. However, this does not mean that, unlike him, she has a genuinely stable identity. Despite being a practical and substantial woman, Hilda appears as drastically disconnected from her sensible, strong self once she begins to perceive herself as an object of the Other's gaze. Her problem, in fact, is that she is so substantial that she can be identified with the prospering consumer culture. Owning five newspapers – she herself used to be a journalist – plus a chain of department stores, she has traded in every kind of commodity, including information. It is a simple matter of fact for her to see things in a consumerist value system. In her secret dream of finding an “equal” companion, her perfect match should be somebody who has an equal value to her own – of which she is well aware – so that she can reasonably feel at ease with him, as she would with a fair exchange. She is too much used to such a way of seeing her relations with herself, with others, with the world in which the consumer culture is overtly dominant: she is a triumph of the consumer culture herself.

That Hilda dies for her Monet does not necessarily mean that she is to be condemned for her consumerist view. The point is that it is simply absurd to see things – let alone herself – only in that way. In a consumerist value system that reifies every social relationship, it could be easy for Hilda to see herself as an object, distancing herself from who she is. The gaze of the Other is

inherent inside her though she may well fear Margaret's malicious gaze, for this daughter-in-law actually desires to kill her. Threatened by the gaze of the unknowable Other, Hilda develops her idea of Margaret as an embodiment of evil and comes to see herself through "the evil eye" of Margaret. Since there is no access to the viewpoint of the incommunicable Other – and besides, it seems merely an abstract idea misconceived in a shape of Margaret – Hilda inevitably misconceives her self-image as well. She starts to ask an impossible question of herself: what Margaret wants from her. In her confused mind, Hilda returns to her familiar consumerist view and decides that it must be the Monet – only to increase her irrational fear of destiny and for her destiny. The narrator comments: "Why Hilda, an even-headed woman, should imagine herself to be in danger because of the Monet, merely, can only be explained by the panic that Margaret provoked in her" (*S* 176). Hilda mixes up her self-image as the object of the Other with another self-image, that is, herself as the object for the acquisitive consumerist view.

Hilda's lost sense of subjectivity and the theft of her Monet, the expensive picture by the great Impressionist, appear to have an ironical connection. However, her case is not like that of Brian Suzy which is concerned with his obsession with property and his ridiculous aristocratic act of hoarding an artwork in the bank. What is at stake is rather that she sees herself reduced to a commodity exchangeable with her Monet, not just in the list of the rich for thieves, but in her own mind. In doing so and by doing so, she underestimates herself. Chris, Hilda's "equal" but also

her truly caring friend (a friendship between women seems the best possibility of relationship in this novel), notices that Hilda is not herself and advises: “If I were you, . . . I would keep the picture and go right back home. You’re a sensible woman, you’re a brilliant woman I’ve never known you like this before” (S 181). But Hilda cannot recognise herself as the woman Chris describes, and instead adheres to her plan to give the painting to the couple in the hope that it may sweeten up Margaret: “what more can she want?” (S 182). By this unconscious calculation, Hilda trades her gift into an offer to exchange the Monet for herself.

To Margaret, who aspires for her “subjective self” – that is, according to her distorted vision, to become an active agent of evil – obviously, the Monet is not at all enough for what she wants: Hilda as the object of her desire to kill. The currency in Margaret’s mind is subjectivity, which paradoxically proves to be ever unattainable between objects, as it is irreducible to the equality of exchangeable objects. Margaret tries to gain her subjectivity in exchange for taking Hilda’s life, but her objectification of Hilda backfires. Before her plot of Hilda’s murder can get underway, Hilda becomes the object in every sense, loses her subjectivity and also her life. Consequently, nothing remains for Margaret to take to be a “subject.”

That the Monet costs Hilda’s life in the end is an ironically fair exchange. No doubt, as a commodity for thieves, the name of Hilda Damien is as valuable as that of Monet. The owner imitates the work of art in the same fate to be reduced to the

market value, the exchange value, the object. Among the exceptional artists Berger mentions, Monet as a master of Impressionism once upon a time undermined the traditional relation between art and property. In *Symposium*, the London painting by Monet undermines the contemporary consumer value system by making the loss of its owner's subjectivity tangible.

The seemingly secure and stable circle of people at the party, as a whole, is put to the test, its relationship with reality questioned, and its disintegration exposed, though in a less drastic way than that worked out for Hilda. While each of them has his or her own solipsistic thought, or self-delusion, or assumptions, both the hosts and the guests depend on a deceptive sense of connection around the illusory centre the party provides. As exchanges replace relationships, the inevitable necessity of the Other and the instability of the subject as a result echo in their small community, and those echoes converge on the occasion of the party. Concerning the nature of the party, a crucial question arises. At some point, Chris reflects upon the "parable in the Bible about sending out to the highways and byways to make up a dinner party – there was a question of the host being at a loss because none of his guests could come" (S 85).⁷² Here Chris comes close to perceiving what is lacking in their view: what the host is without the presence of the guests; what one can be without the Other.

Insofar as the party is a parable, in this novel, what one can be to oneself, not to the Other, is at issue. It questions one's

⁷² Luke 14: 15-24.

subjective self, which is lost in a mechanical calculation and exchange according to the consumerist value system. There is always an undercurrent of expectation; nothing is really gratuitous. As the good hosts think over the course menu to entertain their selected guests, this selection of guests itself too has to be given lots of thought: the Untzingers can give an intelligent touch, Annabel Treece is a television producer and her programme which is to feature Hurley as an artist would count, young Roland Sykes can even talk to a tree, and so on. These guests indeed come to form a charming mask/masque for a miniature network of the exchange value and to unite as one stable community, which needs the Other anywhere outside – such as Margaret as a newcomer, or servants. Mutual reification among “equals” maintains a relatively smooth surface owing to their apparent bourgeois mores though not so much in the younger generation of their own society. The crack inside them is evident when “the party is virtually over” (*S* 189), almost coinciding with the arrival of young people led by Pearl, even before the news of Hilda’s murder.

Following the parable in the Bible, in their private talk, Chris and Hurley go so far as to contemplate inviting the lower classes in case the original guests, the host’s equals, become unavailable. Expressing much affection for the lower classes, both of them seem to transform the necessity of guests into a favour to the poor and so fall into the fallacy of thinking themselves as providers. But, as Margaret’s mad uncle says, “Providers are often disliked, often despised” (*S* 159), probably

because they have little to provide, or they are not providers at all – as in the particular instance of Margaret, to whom Hilda cannot be a provider. Accordingly, Charterhouse and Luke serve flawlessly at the party, while behind the scenes, rather than expecting a favour, they have already summed up the value of each guest.

The servants participate in the same commerce as their employers', a common trade between an object and an object, but in a different market. Under a professional criminal like Charterhouse – whose name cannot be his own any more than are his documents – Luke takes on as a fruitful part-time job the work of selling his employers through selling another commodity – his information – and to the extent that this indirect, mediated act obscures any feel of guilt. As if to make this exchange between employers and their employee strictly equal, the value of the Untzingers, Luke's original "providers," only lies in that they enable him to have access to more valuable objects such as Chris, and a real magnate like Hilda.

To define themselves as respectable providers to the self-supporting student, Ernst and Ella Untzinger pretend to offer a kind, patronising relationship – meals or drinks but not money – to Luke. To a degree he is a substitute for their daughter, who has married and left, but underneath he is the object of desire and fear to both of them. While he gets along well with his own shady business, they suspect him of getting a large sum of money in return for sexual favours. They each fantasise about him as a "whore" (*S* 184) in their repressed sexual obsessions and think

that it is best not to act on their fantasies – however much they fancy such an exchange. They are united mainly by their fear of Luke – explicitly linked to their fear of AIDS – as the dangerous Other. They do not actually know him. Rather, they conceive the idea of the unknown Other as remote and abstract. And perhaps, as they suspect, Luke does not know himself either, and he ends up a petty criminal.

To calculate the price of an artwork in his mind is Ernst's habit: "Ernst knew it was a frightful habit, but he told himself it was realistic; and it was too exciting altogether ever to give up, this mental calculation of what beauty was worth on the current market" (S 26). This is no surprise since it is the way of seeing things, others, and oneself that permeates the community to which he belongs, and may well be realistic according to the reality in their community. As they continuously focus on the images of the Other to have one exchange after another, relationships between each other and with oneself are forgotten and lost.

In the Asylum

In the middle of the novel, the author inserts one chapter which stands on its own, totally different from every other section, and provides a decidedly ridiculous counterpart to the party with one of the oddest locations. This chapter about the Anglican convent of Mary of Good Hope seems as if it were a brief, whimsical interlude – though it is given almost the same coverage as the divided party scenes in total – only to highlight Margaret's questionable past. The modest convent run by Marxist nuns is

apparently an extreme opposite to the rich circle of Islington, but the two communities have some similarities in structure and in their fate related to intruding others. Instead of a gang of thieves, a television crew come to make a documentary film of the unconventional convent. It is around the time when Margaret, then Miss Murchie, was also admitted into the nine-nun community as a novice, years before the dinner party for ten, to which she is to be invited as William's spouse. Like the party, the nunnery falls apart because of a death, the murder of a young nun. And there is also an artist: like the host of the party, the Novice Mistress is a painter.

Sister Marrow – a.k.a. the four-letter nun – and her unfinished mural painting on the refectory wall form a lucid contrast, both as a reflection and a reversed image, with Hurley Reed and his paintings. Their paintings carry quite different values according to quite different systems, and they have quite different styles – though both lay claim to realism. The two artists and their works curiously represent how they see the world in each of their communities, and how they are seen in the world. These representations, brought together into another intriguing picture by and through the eye of intruders, overlap with the theme of the subject in terms of the Other.

Most clearly, the contrast between Sister Marrow's painting and Hurley's aims at a criticism of the consumerist value system. The mural painting by the female artist is, indeed, not for sale or on the market: it is outside the consumerist art-market relation between art and property. Her work of art is given great

significance in the convent where everybody makes herself useful, in the way Marxism proposes a space for what is outside the use value. But then, it is regarded as important not purely for art, but more as propaganda – it is “a depiction of the scene at the railway station in St Petersburg on 16 April 1917, when Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov known as Lenin arrived from Switzerland to be met by a great crowd of comrades” (S 113), as Margaret explains with an excessive degree of precision.

The subjects of Hurley’s paintings are much closer to the life in the convent – for instance, a nurse of the Red Cross. His choice of such subjects could be a facile solution for his dilemma: “If the public thinks you’re too well off they figure the art must be superficial, and if you’re poor they think there’s something wrong with the art, and why doesn’t it sell?” (S 58). This might be an unconscious expression of his ambivalent view, or his suppressed cynical view, of the consumerist value system. Whether Hurley is aware of the ordinariness of his talent or not, Chris’ abundant financial support has established him as a successful painter, and perhaps, he might try to make up for his commercial success with a subject that shows no interest in consumerism. He might envy the freedom of Sister Marrow’s artwork.

Regardless of this remoteness of the subject to his own life, Hurley’s painting style reflects the reality of the community he belongs to, of a world where the reality is equivalent to the appearance. Any realism in Hurley’s painting is a kind of photographic exactitude, which gives the impression of a noticeably artificial, wooden flatness. This artificiality of his

realism seems to suggest that Hurley unwittingly reproduces the unreal reality of the world in his paintings. The reported fact that Hurley is “an anti-Canaletto” in his painting and “anti lots of things” (S 32) in general indicates a fundamental uncertainty about the reality he paints. In his conveniently authoritarian view, what looks right is real and what looks real is right, and he has to be “anti lots of things” to define and believe that his reality is real and right.

The realism of Sister Marrow’s painting is very different from that of Hurley’s. Interpretations of her painting give rise to questions as to what a process of image-making does to the relation between the reality and the appearance, and specifically as to how the world sees the odd nunnery. A most hilariously satirical scene occurs in a conversation about the mural painting between the nuns and a young television producer, Rita Jones:

“Is that a dragon?” said Miss Jones, avid for symbolism.

“No, it’s the sketch of a train. A steam train,” said Sister Lorne loud and clear.

“Oh, a train,” said Miss Jones. “Would that be Freudian?”

“Freudian my arse,” said Sister Marrow in a booming voice from the doorway.

“Are those saints?” said one of the camera crew, a slight and sensitive-looking youth.

“Saints? What do you mean?” said Sister Lorne.
(S 112)

Here Margaret, a competent new novice, interrupts with her

rigorous explanation, but then the conversation goes on about Lenin's comrades mistaken as saints:

“You give them haloes, then?” said Miss Jones.

“Those are fur hats, you silly cow,” muttered Sister Marrow. (*S* 113)

Rita's final attempt to find a religious significance in a God-like figure turns into confusion as the figure in question turns out to be Karl Marx. It is a matter of an expectation. The world of the majority outside the convent is eager to pin them down as the Other in symbolical or religious terms. The television crew and their audience draw on these terms of speculation in their effort to interpret Sister Marrow's masterpiece. In reality, the practical life of nine nuns can lay claim to a stark realism: the nuns are as much realistic in their activity as the painting is realistic in its representation. The very word “realism” has entered a postmodern phase of multiplicity.

As the television crew also follow the nuns to film their main activity of hospital visiting, staff and patients resist the intrusion that changes the supposedly gratuitous act into a commodity. Working to a different purpose, the active, independent community as a whole is now reified by the media and served up to the public as an object. The convent is no longer an “asylum from the capitalist-consumer system” (*S* 115), on the one hand. On the other hand, significantly, Sister Marrow's mural still escapes the consumerist value system. Her four-letter speeches cannot be totally modified for the public either, even in the film with its editing process. Yet, the mural is

to remain unfinished, and so is the Marxist mission, which the painting propagates and Sister Lorne, the deputy Superior, takes in her hands. The disintegration of the convent is triggered by the intrusion though it has little to do with reification, and it is Sister Lorne who admits them into the community and presents its self-image as the Other.

Through the camera, the convent is at once fixed in its public image and is stabilised in its self-image by this public image: the public image of the convent as the Other to the world of majority is in parallel with its self-image as the opposition to the capitalist-consumer system. From the marginalised but stable place of the Other, the nunnery, whose unconventional order has already been opposed to that of the Church, takes an opportunity to spread the Marxist mission to the outside world. However, it is not the mission but the solidity of their activities and duties by which those different individuals are united. The younger nuns, though they do not find themselves in the same self-image, dutifully follow the older, politicised nuns, who hardly care about their vows or the discipline.

When the mural in the refectory is exposed to the public, both Sister Lorne and Sister Marrow persist in the authentic – which is, in their cause, authorial – interpretation of the painting. Sister Marrow's rigour essentially derives from her wild temperament, from her rage at any view of "the crapulous public" (S 111). Supporting Sister Marrow, against Rita, Sister Lorne insists that "You must get your points of reference right" (S 113). In Sister Lorne, the undisciplined individualism she shares with

Sister Marrow turns into her authoritarianism; she is not unlike Hurley who regards himself as an authority both on art and artists. Sister Lorne backs up Sister Marrow's mural or her four-letter words to back up the mission, and does so through her own authorial voice.

Sister Lorne, between her undisciplined individualism and her authoritarianism, falls into solipsism at its extreme. The reality of life in the convent comes close to being lost in her almost unreal ambition for the Marxist mission. Now using the media doing the profile of the convent for her campaign, she adopts the use value instead of the exchange value, but the nunnery ruled by her Marxist discourse is not different from the Islington circle dominated by their bourgeois/aristocratic/consumerist discourses in that they are equally under the threat of the gaze of the Other. Preoccupied with the self-image, she sees others only in the light of their use for her and admits them under such guises into the convent, but does not see these intruders so as to return their gazes. Not only the television crew behind the camera, but also her own husband, a farmer dressed as a curate on his visit to the convent, is among the intruders. She justifies the fact that she has a husband by her unconvincing and unsophisticated rhetoric: "Ecology comes before vows" (S 116). Her vows to God are dismissed, and a man and more men intrude the female community. And here is Margaret under a nun's veil, too.

The position of Margaret in the convent is the biggest difference from the party scene. Although she is filmed together

with the nine nuns, within this community she is not the centre of attention; for the first and the last time in the whole novel, she is off-centre. The convent, instead, is the object of her observation, about which she writes to her father behind the scenes. The lack of descriptions about the characteristics of her appearance in this chapter may explain her relative obscurity in the convent. For one thing, her striking red hair is under her nun's veil. For another, the nuns are unlikely to notice her protruding teeth, which are elsewhere linked to sexiness. A good few men are obsessed – and if not sexually, certainly fascinated or attracted – by Margaret or by her image. In contrast with her feeling of alienation and a kind of homesickness at the party, she seems to feel at home in the nunnery, enjoying being an observer rather than the object of observation. Moreover, there she has a female guru, instead of her uncle.

Margaret comes to attend to the Mother Superior. Reading Margaret's letter, Magnus somehow imagines this old woman being in an attic. Whether he sees madness in her or not, mad Magnus and the Mother Superior are similar in kind, their inner thoughts inaccessible even to the narrator, or indeed to anybody, including themselves. But with their enigmatic words, each of them plays a part as one who moulds Margaret's view. For some unknown reason, the Mother Superior imbues the novice with the theme of "the maiden all forlorn who milked the cow with the crumpled horn," alluding to Sister Lorne and her "imputed spouse" (S 117). In response, like a good student, Margaret keeps "an eye open for a curate with large round eyes" (S 117),

which look back like a cow at a looker if the Mother Superior's words can be taken literally. Her words imply that the gaze of the Other, whom Sister Lorne thinks she uses, will instead rebound on her authoritarianism.

The convent goes through another objectification by an authorial Other when lovable Sister Rose is murdered shortly after the television camera penetrates the convent. The murderer with a pair of large hands is never found. The mysterious case is closed with the Mother Superior's incredible confession of the murder. At this point, inspectors step in the place of the Other beyond the camera. They watch "the whole film with predatory attention" (*S* 120), seeking some clue to the murder case. In doing so, even though these inspectors never believe the old woman's confession, they come to accept her sinister image to the extent that "Even the toughest of the detective inspectors felt a slight shiver" at her allusive words or deliberate emphases — though they might not have noticed any of this without their expectations being aroused by her "confession." The inspectors set an eye on their prey and try to make a causal chain to appease their own fear of the unknown Other, unaware of the fact that, as an institution, they are themselves the Other. In the reality of the human world, theirs is the eye of the futile investigation.

One strange thing is that the interrogations of the television crew, the other male intruders, are never mentioned. Like Sister Lorne, the inspectors take no notice of the intruding observer behind the camera while they closely interrogate all the nuns and frequent male visitors, including Sister Lorne's husband.

Margaret may well consider the Mother Superior's enigmatic lesson on the hollow eye of the Other: the common fact about the male objectifying, sexualising gaze on a woman. She writes to her father about this murder: "I can't help feeling it all has to do with that television programme. One of the crew left a letter on my pillow asking for a date. Of course that proves nothing. Just his cheek" (S 121). None of this proves anything, but it implies a more possible, a more plausible scenario of the young nun murdered by a man, one of the camera crew: some banal aspects of reality can be overlooked by focusing on mere images.

There seems to be another lesson, which Margaret might not understand or misunderstand. She might be impressed by the Mother Superior, who takes over the murder case by her incredible confession – which could be called her mad discourse – as a model plotter. However, she could not see another pattern in it: behind the young woman falling in the role of victim and the old woman taking the role of criminal, there might be a man getting away with a murder – helped by the other hollow eye of the investigators. This scenario is to be reflected –and refracted through a false idea about destiny, the objectifying process of image-making, and the gaze of the Other – in Margaret's plotting.

Under the Disguise

Returning from her strange hiding place, Margaret keeps practicing her sugared philosophy of *les autres* ("we have to centre our thoughts . . . entirely on to other people" (S 35), she preaches), which is supposed to be a mask to cover up her evil

plotting, “the evil eye.” Ironically, her *reality* is to emerge from this disguise, which she makes up, somewhat clumsily painting over the images of her conceived by the others.

From the beginning, William is the only one who never doubts Margaret’s sweet nature. When the couple tour the artworks in Venice on honeymoon, “She was so carried away by the famous *Assumption* in the Frari that it was on the tip of William’s tongue to beg her not to levitate” (S 33). To his disapproval, “she liked art to have an exalted message” (S 33), and if she gets a message at all from the great Renaissance painting, she must read it as her “assumption” of power on her own “assumption.” He maybe sees a “Titian-haired beauty” (S 30) emanating from her conscience in Margaret with her trademark red hair, which is such a striking red that nobody fails to notice and wonder if it is natural. But, she determines to get rid of her bad conscience, starts plotting, and has assumed a mask of her sweet philosophy of *les autres*.

Margaret’s father, Dan, notices that “Margaret was now cultivating an exterior sweetness which was really not her own. Why? What was she covering up?” (S 143). For Hurley, at the first meeting with her, what strikes him is also her oddness and artificiality in appearance:

Margaret had filled the sitting-room with autumn leaves from the florist. She was wearing a longish green velvet dress with flapping sleeves. Hurley was wondering what she had to pose about in that pre-Raphaelite way.
(S 33)

With regard to the figure of Margaret in her pose, there is an interesting observation about Pre-Raphaelitism, which Slavoj Žižek offers in his *Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality* (1994). Žižek pays attention to how the revival of the Pre-Raphaelites – which declined as “the epitome of damp Victorian pseudo-Romantic *kitsch*” (Žižek, 1994, 113) when Impressionism loomed in France – roughly coincided with the emergence of postmodernism. He links the Pre-Raphaelites’ breakup of perspective-realism to the notion of postmodernist “hyperrealism.” He illustrates how the Pre-Raphaelites’ intended “natural” way of painting results in an artificial flatness, which can be seen as “a sign of clumsiness”:

it is as if the very “reality” these paintings depict is not a “true” reality but, rather, a reality structured as in bas-relief. (Another aspect of this same feature is the “dollish,” mechanically composite, artificial quality that clings to the depicted individuals: they somehow lack the abyssal depth of personality that we usually associate with the notion of “subject.”) (Žižek, 1994, 114)

This bracketed formula about individuals in Pre-Raphaelite paintings approximates Margaret’s pose. In Hurley’s view, her appearance is, in short, “pseudo-Romantic *kitsch*.” Is this image “artificial” or “natural”? Can there be a “subject” under such a “disguise”?

At her last visit to Uncle Magnus before the party, Margaret says, “Compared with the evil eye, what I have in my mind is just healthy criminality” (S 159). She insists in her wish to be a

“subject” by making a plot of her own, and demands help from the elusive uncle.

“All those suspicions have fallen on me,” said Margaret. “Why shouldn’t I really do it? I’m tired of being made to feel guilty for no reason. I would like to feel guilty for a real case of guilt.”

“Generally speaking,” said Magnus, “guilty people do not feel guilty. They feel exalted, triumphant, amused at themselves.”

“That’s fine. I’d like that.”

“Like it or not,” Magnus said, “destiny might do it for you.” (S 160)

This conversation reveals that Margaret is trapped in a double misrecognition. She has internalised the evil eye idea imposed on her, inasmuch as she identifies her self-image with her public image, “a passive carrier of disaster.” In her attempt to change “passive” into “active,” she is only to assume the same image she challenges – the image of the Other: she becomes, more and more, the Other to herself. Besides, while craving for a mundane criminal plot, she has deluded herself to believe in her exalted power of evil – though it has been so far uncontrollable. She does not realise that “the evil eye,” the idea with which Magnus has inoculated her, is something external, that is, her destiny. What she suffers is not a split between her self and her image, but destiny. Since destiny does the job for her, as an actual result, there is neither her plot of healthy criminality nor her “natural” self to hide under her “disguise” – the artificiality of her Pre-

Raphaelite pose represents the reality of subject absorbed in the image of the Other.

At the end, at the news of Hilda's death, Margaret is seen being *not herself*, shrieking, "It shouldn't have been till Sunday!" (S 191) – driven by destiny, driven mad. Like her "victim," Margaret too is lost between destiny and her image she sees through the eye of the Other. Whereas she confuses her destiny with her plotting and assumes that she can be "an author in control" with her uncle's aid, it is the uncle, more than anybody else, who objectifies her and cunningly controls her misrecognition for his own mad narrative. "O . . . was it a man or a vile woman, / My true love that mis-shapit thee?" (S141), recites Magnus, greeting Margaret with these verses from the ballad. He enjoys showing off his obsession with her, or "a sex fixation" (S 141), as her sister spitefully puts it. Meanwhile, her father – so enamoured of her that "his eyes followed her as far as they could" – sees his own passion for his favourite daughter – which "he mutely controlled" (S 75) – made visible in his mad brother: "Dan was frightened; of himself, of Margaret, and of Magnus" (S 140). It is, above all, the obsessive male gaze that "mis-shapit" her, fixed on her and fixing her in the image of the Other, an object of desire and of fear, whereas the female members of the family – more self-centred for better or worse – also alienate her. Her mother and two elder sisters, who are totally different from her, can never hide their fear of her. In fact, in her mother's thought, Dan and Magnus become equally "they"; madness is the weakness of "those Murchies" (S 80), to which

Margaret belongs. “Margaret is a Murchie” (*S* 107): she is a Father’s daughter.⁷³

What is as ambivalent as – yet, may be even stronger than – the daughter’s affinity with Magnus is the fraternal alliance between the father and Magnus. To Dan, who often consults Magnus about Margaret, the mad guru declares: “Out of my misfortune, out of my affliction I prognosticate and foreshadow. My divine affliction is your only guide,” adding another verse from the ballad, “None but my foe to be my guide” (*S* 81). Apparently, Magnus *is* the Other. At the same time, he assumes the authorial figure of father, replacing, or rather, doubling Dan – and perhaps, playing the divine Father in his game of re-inscribing Margaret’s destiny with his cryptic words – as if it were *his* plot.⁷⁴

⁷³ “The Fathers’ Daughters” (1959) is Spark’s short story, which focuses on Dora (interestingly, the same name as Freud’s famous patient’s), a middle-aged daughter and her father, who used to be a famous writer. This pair, “shrewd in their love for each other” (*AS* 210), is contrasted with another, a young daughter and her father, who is a famous writer. Dora, obsessed by her father and painfully (especially because of a lack of money) devoted to him, has internalised her father’s discourse inasmuch as she cannot live without it. By a skillful use of free indirect style, her thoughts often take a form of question to him in her mind: “Do you remember, Father, how in the old days we disliked the thick carpets – at least, you disliked them, and what you dislike, I dislike, isn’t it so, Father?” (*AS* 201). Actual conversations supposedly recurred in the past and in the present between the daughter and the father are also often inserted without inverted commas or only with dashes, as if to blur, cover up, or prevent herself from showing her own feelings. Spark gives a “happy ending” to the story: Dora finds a man to marry, who would solve financial problems and who is “a born disciple” (*AS* 210) necessary for her father. This story has a sequel “Open to the Public” (1989), which is about Dora and her husband, both haunted by the father even after his death.

⁷⁴ Oddly and symbolically, what Magnus “prognosticates” and “foreshadows” out of his “divine affliction” are related to the death of the mother, which consequently serves to the patriarchal tradition. He seems as if he foresaw that Margaret’s mother-in-law is to be murdered, leaving all *her* fortune to her only son. In the past, when he was with Dan and Margaret, he suggested that his mother should change the will to leave all her fortune – which is *hers*, not inherited from her late husband – to Dan, the eldest and the only sane son, instead of equally among the two sons and three daughters. Mrs Murchie Sr did so. In Margaret’s account, she

As a mad man, Magnus is legitimately on the other side and so he can resolve his own contradiction.⁷⁵ In contrast, denying himself the excess embodied by Magnus, the father remains sane, but impotent to stop this excess to be duplicated by Margaret; the daughter falls into the ambiguous double role of victim and criminal, possessed by the Other/Father. “Undoubtedly,” says Magnus, “In families, one never knows” (S 81) – whether “the other” is a friend or a foe.

In Muriel Spark’s *Symposium*, the dichotomy of one and the Other is broken into tautological images of the Other; the party, the seemingly stable community, is broken up by the shedding of blood. Among all kind of communities, it is the family, the traditional core unit of society, that is disturbed most. The shedding of *blood* might be a very aggressive form of the message: an individual self should come before family, or any kind of group; an individual self should be sought in relation to oneself, not to the Other.

asked her to call the family lawyer and happily changed her will – just before she is murdered, by a madwoman, who escaped from the mental hospital Magnus lives in. Though Dan is horrified by the affair, suspecting the involvement of both Magnus and Margaret, his mother’s fortune helps him “keep the house” (S 72), keep his family.

⁷⁵ The important contrast between Magnus, the mad man, and the Mother Superior, the (probably) mad woman, should be noted. While he will not get caught for anything, she chooses to get caught (probably) for nothing.

CHAPTER V

SOMETHING EXCESSIVE

“It’s unfinished business.”

– *Reality and Dreams*

In Muriel Spark’s twentieth novel, *Reality and Dreams* (1996), several plots develop around a film director, Tom Richards, and the story is mainly set in the film industry, a modern agent of producing and selling dreams – or virtual realities. Its simple title might lead us to expect a direct concern to deal with the postmodern question about *reality*. What is reality? – is what we think of as reality only a dream? – this is one of the big questions postmodern fiction has ever raised without waiting for Lyotard’s statement in 1979. Spark has always been one of the postmodern artists, who are – according to Lyotard – necessarily “in the position of a philosopher,” seeking new presentations of reality, engaging in the “business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented” (Lyotard 81).

In *Reality and Dreams*, however, instead of raising a direct question about reality, it seems as if Spark is theorising her own art of fiction, which indeed explores “the tract of no-man’s land between dreams and reality, reality and dreams” (*RD* 160), somewhat as Tom the film director philosophises his art of filmmaking with a degree of professional accuracy. This is a very

puzzling novel, which provides few clues. At first glance, it may be hard to get to the point, the relevance of art to the other big issue in this novel: redundancy – maybe because Spark is reluctant to “plug away at an idea too much, to hammer home things, it’s better to let them diffuse” (I-11, 1998, 223), as she remarks in the interview included in *Theorizing Muriel Spark*. Yet, in the same interview, she makes it clear that she wanted to write about this problem of redundancy which people in this contemporary world actually have because “the issue is to have a whole new philosophy of life where usefulness is questioned” (I-11, 1998, 223).

Something excessive – whether positive or negative, from extravagance to redundancy, certainly including art itself – can be one focal point from which to consider *Reality and Dreams*, and it is a point on which Tom the film director fixes his gaze within the novel. Spark gives the shape of a woman to an unfathomable excess element. However, as this woman is Tom’s missing daughter, she is an invisible focal point to Tom, a character in the novel, or “the tract of no-man’s land between reality and dreams,” in other words. While Spark’s art operates reality in this “no-man’s land,” Tom’s art only casts shadows of his dreams there. For all his philosophising, he does not yet know what his “art” has produced, or rather, re-produced. He has to face those shadows of his dreams when his daughter goes on to claim over the control of the “no-man’s land.”

Reality and Dreams

A Sleeper in the World of Vision

“He often wondered if we were all characters in one of God’s dreams” (*RD* 7). Thus *Reality and Dreams* begins; it is a recurrent phrase and the essential thought that haunts Tom Richards:

Tom often wondered if we were all characters in one of God’s dreams. To an unbeliever this would have meant the casting of an insubstantiality within an already insubstantial context. Tom was a believer. He meant the very opposite. Our dreams, yes, are insubstantial; the dreams of God, no. They are real, frighteningly real. They bulge with flesh, they drip with blood. My own dreams, said Tom to himself, are shadows, my arguments – all shadows. (*RD* 63-64)

While he entertains such an idea, he enjoys playing God’s part in directing his film. He delights in sitting up on a great crane, looking down his staff moving below at his order. In reality – in one of God’s dreams – he is to pay a heavy price for this self-complacent game. He has had a bad fall from the crane and ended up in hospital, though he narrowly escaped death. The first chapter drags us into Tom’s confusing and confused “hospital dreams.” In this sequence neither he nor we can be sure which fragmentary scene is dream or reality. After this first chapter, we follow events, as Tom is convalescing, this is a move, it might seem, towards “reality” away from “dreams.” However, the apparently more solid reality soon shifts into “a tract of no-man’s

land between reality and dreams.” The principal “plot” consists of every possible speculative story suggested by characters about Tom’s daughter, Marigold, who mysteriously disappears.

Among all the media gossiping and futile investigations, most of possible stories about Marigold are told in Tom’s monologues, thoughts, memories and dreams. This, of course, does not mean that the whole story is meant simply as his dream. Here, it is the writer’s subtle device to weave her plots into the composition of dream that guides us to the same grey area between reality and dreams.

Having too much money is the Richards’ problem. It allows them “too many possibilities, endless options” (*RD* 120) for the truth about Marigold’s disappearance: let alone simply starting a new life, she could be murdered, kidnapped, or on the contrary, could afford criminal activities herself – whatever her motive is. Everything is possible, and so Tom and everyone else fabricate their stories by deducing the cause of her disappearance from its effect on their present situations. Connections among all those stories, as well as among actual events taking place, are hardly revealed throughout the novel. Such conditions as destroyed causal relations and juxtaposed alternatives are among points Freud tries to make in terms of representations in dreams in his essay, “On Dreams” (1911):

A causal relation between two thoughts is either left unrepresented or is replaced by a *sequence* of two pieces of dream of different lengths. Here the representation is often reversed, the beginning of the dream standing for the

consequence and its conclusion for the premise. An immediate *transformation* of one thing into another in a dream seems to represent the relation of *cause and effect*.

The alternative ‘*either – or*’ is never expressed in dreams, both of the alternatives being inserted in the text of the dream as though they were equally valid. I have already mentioned that an ‘*either – or*’ used in *recording* a dream is to be translated by ‘*and.*’ (Freud, 1911, 158-59)

Nonetheless, in contrast with the psychoanalyst’s purpose here to restore destroyed connections and to bring dreams to the logic of the waking world, Spark as an artist, apparently, does not seem to feel obliged to give any interpretation of her story. None of the mysteries about the missing girl is explained beyond a few hints about her involvement in criminal activities. In her fictional world, Spark is at liberty to expose the unreality of the real world, which could be even more unreal than dreams – the world built in abundant images.

With regard to how the writer presents problems concerning the world that hinges on visual images, Tom’s profession as a film director takes on a greater significance. All Tom’s film is about is “Pictures inside frames” (*RD* 75). In the Freudian theory of dreams, key components such as condensation and, especially, displacement have to do with representations in dreams, in other words, “modification into a pictorial form” (Freud, 1911, 162). An analogy between the process of Tom’s film-making and the formation of dream heightens its effect around the field of vision. From the outset, in the surreal opening, Tom’s “hospital dreams”

consist in a sequence of fragmented scenes. There, visual images are indexes of his thoughts, and the director's casting-game is at work. Nurses come and go as one image or another, which is for some unknown film part he would cast them in. Also in his drugged mind, he yet discerns that his perception of time is confused, and thinks, "So does our trade direct our perceptions and our dreams Cut into the scene of the morning with the scene of the evening" (*RD* 8). As a film director, he can "cut," "save" and "scrap" (*RD* 75) this image or that image, as he likes. However, the process of his image-making becomes particularly problematic as it comes to face an empty space. He is far from the position of God, of omniscience. When Tom starts to seek for images of his missing daughter, like an immobile sleeper, he is fixed to the point from which he stares only into this absence.

"Like a patient etherised upon a table"

An attempt to figure out the absent girl, Marigold, is not dissimilar to the process of Tom's film-making, the most essential part of which, he thinks, is to cast people according to his images: "It was a surrealistic process, this casting and creatively feeling at the same time. At the initial stages faces and shapes affected the form of his movies much more than the screenplay itself" (*RD* 74-75). Marigold emerges only as a patchwork of images, which other people reconstruct still more on the images of her which they have already conceived and the roles they have cast her in. It is this group of images that forms and dominates a story about

Marigold. This process also echoes in Tom's reciting of his favourite lines from T.S. Eliot's poem⁷⁶:

*Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table; . . .*

A taxi driver Tom befriends offers a fitting interpretation for these lines: "here's these people going out for a walk in the evening and they're going to discuss a third person, *someone not there*. And these two are going to talk about that third person, the patient" (*RD* 67 [my italics]). Around the missing girl – nobody has ever bothered to think about her before her sudden disappearance – everybody begins to tell his or her version of a story, what kind of person Marigold could be. Not only people in the film business or the mass media – whose job is to tell a story, to live on images – even the police or a private investigator cannot provide any solid information. On the contrary, at a variety of Marigold's sightings reported by witnesses – Honolulu, Amazon or wherever – "dazzling place-names had waylaid the bored investigators from visualising Marigold in some funk-hole nearer home" (*RD* 135), where she is actually to be found. Despite numerous interrogations or sophisticated technological equipment, every investigation is doomed to be a wild-goose chase.

We can never reach the figure of Marigold beyond Tom's image of her. As this image is fused into Tom's newest film and Marigold is actually cast as its protagonist, the novel gets even deeper into "the tract of no-man's land between reality and

⁷⁶ "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

dreams.” In this no-man’s land, Marigold entraps Tom in her power game. It is his methods of film-making that she appropriates for her manipulations not only of images but also of real people to the extent that she crosses the border between practicing “art” and controlling life. Her own absence is at stake in her ingenious manipulations. While she is invisible herself, she is certainly watching others, presumably keeping some superior knowledge or secrets to herself, and maybe foreseeing the success of her unknown “business.” However, after all, what can be found in her absence, this empty space – anything but images?

Among artist figures in Spark’s fiction, Tom receives extremely charitable treatment from his creator. There are a string of male characters who are unsuccessful artists, from untalented writers or poets in her novels such as *Memento Mori*, *Loitering with Intent* and *The Only Problem* till “a pisseur de copie” in *A Far Cry from Kensington*. In contrast, Tom is a very successful director with fame, a certain charm, an attractive lover, another beautiful daughter, and a wealthy and generous wife. There are only a few of his sort. No doubt Luigi Leopardi in *The Public Image* and, though he is a dubious case, Lister in *Not to Disturb* are both successful directors, and vice versa – successful directors are men in Spark’s novels.⁷⁷ Since these directors are presented as artists as businessmen and exploiters, this choice of men for that

⁷⁷ I exclude Alexandra in *The Abbess of Crewe* here, though she is qualified more than enough to be regarded as a successful director. Some crucial qualities of this larger-than-life figure cannot be discussed in this line of investigation.

part is very much intentional. If not the main theme, existing asymmetrical patterns between men and women in their power relations are always crucial factors, to which Spark attends.⁷⁸ Moreover, these factors enrich concepts about her diversity of artist figures.

In Tom's case, after all, Spark gives little credit to him as an artist. Although he boasts, "My film is not replaceable. . . . No work of art can be replaced. A work of art is like living people" (*RD* 23), his work remains a shadow of shadows, a reproduction of images. Spark emphasises the film as an art form which has flourished and developed hand in hand with economic and technological developments during the last century. Because of its obvious but offstage alliance with material affluence, Tom's art form, film, presents postmodern phenomena in the context of late capitalism, which has culminated in the overgrown image-making business – and in endemic redundancy. Spark finds this artistic medium a rich ground to let the notion of excess expand in various directions.

Already in 1967, in his *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord had identified spectacle as "the very heart of society's real unreality. In all its specific manifestations – news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment – the

⁷⁸ The opening of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* gives an impressive example: "The boys, as they talked to the girls from Marcia Blaine School, stood on the far side of their bicycles holding the handlebars, which established a protective fence of bicycle between the sexes, and the impression that at any moment the boys were likely to be away" (*PMJB* 11). The girls, famously known as "the Brodie set," are led by the proud, stately Miss Brodie to leave the boys shortly after this opening. The potential subversive power, which the heroine embodies all through the novel, shows a subtle sign through "a protective fence between the sexes."

spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life” (Debord 13). Tom, like Spark’s other film directors, is as well aware of and articulate about this phenomenon as Debord, but, unlike Debord, is indeed without “deliberate intention of doing harm to spectacular society” (Debord 10). In his real life, Tom is a glamorous image provoking envy, a celebrity figure publicising consumer culture, and a useless extravagance generating the waste necessary to maintain the capitalist economy.⁷⁹ Also in his professional life, his art form and its inevitable big budget leave him unable to escape economic principles and the system of producing illusions.

To make *his* film means that Tom must *own* the film, in other words, must have money to invest in it. Luckily enough, his wealthy wife always provides him with enough money to claim for, at least, a part ownership of his film so that he can have his say and his way. For his part, continuous struggles and compromises between him and producers, between his aesthetics and commercial success, are no more than ritual pretence in this film business. Practically, he can ignore any claim of others in the long run. With regard to Tom’s positive and habitual reliance on a marketable image of a box-office actress like Rose Woodstock, from the beginning, nobody opposes him. It is Tom’s own passion for Rose that throws him into another

⁷⁹ This emphasises Tom’s being in a position of power that is parallel to his dictatorship in film-making. John Berger pertinently argues the relation between effects of publicity and the illusory system of power in his *Ways of Seeing*: “the envied are like bureaucrats; the more impersonal they are, the greater the illusion . . . of their power. The power of the glamorous resides in their supposed happiness: the power of the bureaucrat in his supposed authority” (Berger 133).

negotiation, another power game. Rose is no victim of the exploiting male director. The glamorous star actress needs not sleep with the director to get a part, but wants to sleep with him, for she thinks of it as “a way of directing the film herself” (*RD* 143). As a result of his affair with her, which, he declares, is at once “part of [his] profession” (*RD* 29) and “not professional” (*RD* 80), he often willingly gives in to her demands – for more “close-ups” – even against his aesthetics.

As Tom chooses actors for their appearances and this casting is essential to him, the primary aim of his art is, to materialise his idea, to make a visual image out of a flesh and blood person. The plot of his film, *The Hamburger Girl*, has an almost allegorical part in this novel. He had a glimpse of a girl making hamburgers at a camping site in France, and later this image of a nonentical girl became his obsession. He keeps thinking over what his hamburger girl – called Jeanne in the film – would do if an unknown benefactor were to give her an unimaginable sum of money. At one of their cruising nights, Tom asks for an opinion of Dave, the taxi driver:

“Do you think,” said Tom to Dave, “that she would know what to do with that sort of money? Would she ever learn?”

“It depends on the girl,” Dave said. “It seems to me you’ve forgotten that the girl has a character, a personality, already functioning before you saw her dishing out hamburgers. She was already a person. It depends on her what she would do.”

“The charm of this girl is that she has no history,”

Tom said.

“Then she isn’t real.”

“No, she’s not real. Not yet.”⁸⁰

Like a patient etherised upon a table; . . . (RD 77-78)

Clearly, Tom uses the word “real” differently from Dave. Tom the director has no intention to give “a character” or “a personality” to his hamburger girl, who embodies and *is* a mere idea. If she got any personality or any idea herself, she could not be the idea of nonentity, that is, nobody, any longer. All he needs is the living embodiment on screen, the visualised image of the original image of his hamburger girl. She should become “real” in the discourse of the field of vision and remain insubstantial as ever in the context of the real world. To fill in this insubstantial image, he has cast an insignificant and hopelessly undistinguished actress, whose name is also Jeanne. As she is herself a nobody, the little actress seems perfect, tailor-made for the role, embodying, as well as projecting, a plausible visual image of the hamburger girl. Meanwhile, Rose is to play the part of the benefactor’s girlfriend, the part written into the film solely because of her own star quality as a box-office draw.

“Plausibility . . . is what you aim for as a basis for a film.

Achieve that basic something, and you can then do what you like”

⁸⁰ The mediocrity of Tom’s idea could be traced back to “the theme of *Pygmalion*” and imply a common relationship between an exploiting male director and an objectified actress. This is not dissimilar to Luigi’s case in *The Public Image: A rising actress, Annabel Christopher’s casual comment on his script, “Well, isn’t that the theme of *Pygmalion*?”* offends Luigi, who “refuted the imputation that any idea of his was not absolutely original” (*PI* 34).

(*RD* 57), according to Tom. Nonetheless, it seems, he does not really know what he then wants to do on that plausible basis. Now that he has had a plausible image for his hamburger girl, he needs plausible acting (which is not the director's problem, anyway) – and a plausible story. Is it a story which has a reasonable causal relation and so seems real that he looks for? About a work of art, there is a different opinion, which contradicts Tom's. Spark has a formidable scenario writer, Abbess Alexandra in *The Abbess of Crewe*, and lets her say that scenarios "need not be plausible, only hypnotic, like all good art" (*AC* 302). The two women seem to share the view that a work of art is irrelevant to plausibility or a causal link: Spark remarks, "one thing doesn't necessarily lead to another inevitable thing, although it does lead to something else in actual fact" (*I-11*, 1998, 216). Then what is Spark's trick in *Reality and Dreams*? Tom's film is originated in "his wish-dream to settle a lump sum on that young, poor hamburger woman," and he longs to see "what would be the consequence to her" (*RD* 75). He transforms this dream into the film, in which he substitutes himself for the super-rich benefactor who, unlike Tom, has no problem in producing "a lump sum" and has a girlfriend played by Tom's real-life lover, Rose. In the film, he tries to fulfill his wish and also provide a plausible consequence to make sense of his dream. In this respect, his practice of art looks more like a psychiatrist's practice of interpreting dreams.

The novel does not let us know what story Tom eventually chooses for his film. Instead, as an explicit irony, his film turns

into another story that reflects “society’s real unreality,” in which an individual is drowned and effaced in an image. As an actual fact – even more ironical for Tom – something else beyond his imagination happens to the other hamburger girl, Jeanne the little actress. Jeanne can get into this job to play the minor part, which is actually the essential element of the film, as she is a nobody. Totally failing to understand this paradox, resentful Jeanne gradually deludes herself that she is a star, while becoming a copy of the image of the image of the original hamburger girl. She comes to put forward an absolutely unreasonable claim against Tom: “I am the one who’s going to inherit, to be a millionairess” (*RD* 110). At this point, Tom’s wife Claire, who has usually been in charge of handling the poor actress and so far sympathetic, reasonably thinks that the girl is mad. In reality Jeanne remains a nothing, “a throw-away item” (*RD* 78): she is redundant.

For Tom Richards, everything, and indeed everybody, is at his disposal and can be disposable. In the film business, reification of individual people – the labour force as commodity – is altogether visible. In practicing his art form, both his materials and productions are evaluated on a strictly utilitarian economic basis. This is, for example, evident as he budgets how to achieve his “wish-dream,” calculating on which scale money should matter:

Suppose he should now say to his wife: “Claire, I need X millions to give away to a girl as an experiment,” what would she do? It would be like her answer to his

request for the Sèvres dinner plates in order to break them in a mood of exasperation. She had sent to his room a pile of plates from the supermarket, absolutely useless for his purpose. It would be like that. Instead of X millions for his experiment Claire would, perhaps, suggest a few, some X hundreds; interesting, but another story altogether, a mere kindly act, not at all to the point. What he needed was all Claire's millions, every last million. (*RD 77*)

If this kind of extremity is what Tom needs for his art, it only amounts to extravagance – huge waste to fulfill a small illusion. However, between extravagance and utility stands Tom's rich wife, in whom he can identify a somewhat contradictory antithesis to the over-inflated value system.

Claire, Tom's second wife, coming from a flourishing family in New York, is a really wealthy woman. Her looks and life style materialise the perfect propriety of her status, that of the moneyed bourgeoisie. She holds the idea of class differences, but she is no hypocrite. She accepts her public image as "essentially a money person" (*RD 65*) without resentment, and "It's my money, not yours" (*RD 53*) is what she frequently says to her family. But she is absolutely generous with her money. This does not mean that she is careless with her money, either. All of her charitable transactions are recorded in "two old-fashioned leather-bound ledgers" (*RD 65*), then computerized, and dealt with by her efficient secretary. Furthermore, together with her charity activity, when she is asked for her money, she is "very clever at

discriminating between fraudulent attempts at rip-off and genuine appeals” (*RD* 65). She is willing to offer financial help to a redundant family member whatever he would use the money for, and would support Tom, whether he is a celebrity director or a temporarily redundant one.

The most typical example of Claire’s quality is that she finances an investigation of her missing daughter to be undertaken by Ivan, a handsome detective, and the extremely beautiful Cora, Tom’s daughter by his first marriage. As the couple’s lengthy investigation becomes an excuse for them to prolong a romantic affair, Tom calls it “a useless extravagance,” to which Claire answers, “Let them enjoy themselves a little longer” and he knew “she meant by this to put in a plea for Tom not to be a spoil-sport” (*RD* 128). Claire’s character seems to present the best possible option, a utopia such as Marx might dream of.⁸¹ She uses money – because she can afford to – as a tool to make life very livable, better and more pleasant, and with this as her basic rule, transforms useless extravagance into something useful. With her substantial means, her fundamentally compassionate nature and solidity secure Tom in his unstable and inconsistent world between reality and dreams.

Along with Claire, Tom has another confidante – and informer, with all his indulgence in monologue, which is often addressed to

⁸¹ In this novel, there are two Jeannes and also two Claires. Claire the wife almost loyally keeps a Hungarian cook called Claire despite Tom’s complaint about her horrible cooking and his claim that “Once a communist always a communist” (*RD* 29). These two coincidences also can be signs for Spark’s increasing concern with the theme of the double, which appears in *Aiding and Abetting* (2000).

nobody and falls into solipsism. Dave, the taxi driver, is Tom's "expensive but true friend" (*RD* 75). The relationship between the two men is fairly complex. As it is a true friendship, this personal aspect of their relationship fills in a gap between their social status and buries latent problems deep in that gap. Certainly, their night-cruising in Dave's taxi is a fair exchange to both of them. Dave profits by Tom's extravagance, privileged by the friendship with the interesting, famous director. It is also a good bargain for Tom. To gain a friend is more than what he pays for, namely, Dave's utility as a taxi driver. They even enjoy each other's wife's affection, insomuch as Dave's wife likes Tom "tremendously" (*RD* 136) and Dave can occasionally spend an evening with Claire at home (*RD* 147) though there is no further implication to those amiable affections. At the point when Dave is shot, most likely as a surrogate for Tom, and then partly shares Tom's experience of "dream[ing] of the hospital" with "the lovely nurses" (*RD* 119), it seems as if Dave is taking on the role of Tom's double. However, this is not the case. This attack on Dave indicates something else.

First of all, what makes Tom take it for granted that he is safe with Dave? Like Claire, Dave is a kind of touchstone of the real world, and at once awakens Tom to the real world and protects him from grim realities. Dave impresses Tom with his brave but pitiful sight in the hospital. Although, like Claire, he is so faithful to Tom, he could have been dangerous. "In his wisdom" (*RD* 133), the taxi driver provides a penetrating insight into the world and individuals, but also gives Tom good

information about criminal activities or police investigations. He knows so much about the other world, that of the lower class, miles away from Tom's own world. Moreover, he has acquired enough knowledge about Tom that he could use for blackmail, if he liked. But Dave has never done that. Is it only because of their friendship, of Tom's fair treatment of the taxi driver as his equal? It does not seem so simple. Society does not allow them to be really equal, and there might be a mechanism of containment by bourgeois ideology at work.

There is a suggestion on Tom's part of hypocrisy: Tom can be, "so rich as he was, so democratic" (*RD* 75) that he does not mind sitting beside Dave in his taxi. The police investigation after the attack on Dave shows no such hypocrisy, interrogating the victim:

Had he any enemies, debts? No, he hadn't. They searched his house from top to bottom, much to his wife's indignation: "We're the victim and they treat us like the criminal." The police found no drugs, no evidence of handling drugs, – they found nothing. (*RD* 118)

If Tom were the victim – as he should have been, perhaps – it would be quite a different story. Tom and Dave, they are different. Dave, "the driver, of second-generation West Indian origin" (*RD* 64) is the Other to the society which is dominated by the class Tom belongs to. Consciously or unconsciously, for his new film, Tom conceives an idea, which reflects a colonial discourse. He starts to think about a story of a Roman centurion and his servant, "a Celt, a native of Britain" (*RD* 125) in Roman-

occupied Britain. Although a little twist makes the centurion modeled on Tom himself an occupier, instead of an immigrant, and his servant a native, this idea of the Celt who is granted the intimacy with his master is very much like Dave. A hierarchical relationship between the Roman and his Celt, and so between Tom and Dave, is lucidly present though the Roman centurion is – if not gay, as Tom denies Dave’s suspicion: “Is he gay?” – “devoted to his Celt” (*RD* 125).

The attack on Dave ripples a smooth surface of his relationship with Tom. It turns Dave, literally and symbolically, into a figure of victim, the colonised, the tamed Other. Their friendship is not destroyed, but there is no more night-cruising. Here Marigold enters as the one who triggers this separation. At least, the novel tells us the facts that it was Kevin Woodstock, Rose’s husband, who shot Dave, and that Marigold hired him as a hitman. Kevin tries to believe that he wanted to threaten his wife’s lover, Tom, but this is an unconvincing reason because her lover at the time of the attack was another man, and Rose and Kevin have been already proceeding with their divorce. He simply wanted money and did this job. In this respect, Dave has an uncannily good guess: “someone shot me it seems as a warning to you, and they haven’t got the man. Kevin Woodstock seems to me to fit the part. I’m going on my way, Tom” (*RD* 146). So Dave quits the night-cruising when Tom resumes his affair with Rose, from which he has checked himself during the scandal of his daughter’s disappearance.

As for Marigold, wise Dave has no clear answer. He

thinks that she is likely to blackmail Tom though he says nothing about in which way. It is suggestive that he says to Tom, “she left of her own free-will to make a break from you. Your name alone is overpowering” (*RD* 95). Another guess of his that she puts words around to accuse her father is quite possibly right, as he sagaciously observes, “she could set the tone in a number of ways, Tom. Word of mouth is the strongest method I know, always has been” (*RD* 114). Above all, one thing Dave is very sure of is that Marigold does not like Tom: “Dave stated this so much as a matter of fact that Tom wondered if he had some certain source of knowledge” (*RD* 114). We now have to carefully examine Marigold, this inscrutable girl, together with her relationship with Tom and also the strange triangle including Dave.

Marigold Missing

Marigold is a gloomy element disturbing various relationships around her. She is a redundant daughter and wife. After many failures to make her an appropriate family member, Tom and Claire have already passed through a stage of blaming themselves for this frightfully mannered daughter. While the couple is more united “like birds in a storm” (*RD* 85) mainly because they have this appalling child to discuss, the loving girl Cora satisfies the role of daughter not only to Tom, but also to her stepmother Claire. The world outside makes it apparent that Marigold is an odd extra of the radiant family, as many magazines later report Marigold’s disappearance with her hideous photo and those of the gorgeous

family members side by side. Marigold has lived almost alone, living a secretive life, during her marriage to James, a travel writer who has been so often away. It takes many weeks for anybody to notice that Marigold is missing.

The final statement that Marigold is a “redundant wife” comes from her mother Claire, who gets tired of her “bitching” (*RD 87*) about Tom’s affair with Rose. To this, the daughter unreasonably responds, “A mother shouldn’t talk to a daughter like that” (*RD 87*). With such a horrible girl, even for compassionate Claire, motherhood does not work. Curiously, Marigold, who is supposed to be “too satisfied with herself for envy, jealousy or the like” (*RD 87*) in Tom’s view, turns out to be really embittered by the fact of being made redundant. She believes, it seems, that she is made redundant in spite of her valuable knowledge, information, and rightness. She preaches that people, respectively her parents, should “examine their utility, their service ability, their accountability, their duties and commitments” (*RD 37*) no matter whether she herself believes in doing that. As Tom cynically thinks, “Marigold knows everything” (*RD 52*), particularly about the infidelities of her family members. She has no doubt about being right to convey her information to others, but, instead of appreciating it, they take it as unpleasant – or unnecessary, of no use. She is an unlikely person to sympathise with men who are made redundant because of their “poor performance” or whatsoever, and it is a cunning move getting herself a job to write about redundancy, with her false identification with jobless men. Then, in the middle of her

research about redundancy, Marigold suddenly disappears.

A Copy or the Other Inside?

To both Tom and Claire, Marigold is “a murky proposition” (*RD* 147). Marigold’s existence makes many negative propositions concerning myths of family bond, of class consciousness, and opens up issues of causality in this novel. To her parents’ continuous wonderment, neither their blood nor their class can explain her character. Supporting her well financially as usual, Claire cannot understand why Marigold “can be so *common*” and wonders, “Where does she get that vulgarity? From which of us, from what side, does the street-corner touch come?” (*RD* 90). Indeed, this is a vulgar assumption on Claire’s side, snobbishness of a moneyed person. Privileged because of her class, she blindly believes in such a system, and is unable to question it. However, in her way, she is innocent. She is perplexed by the fact that having a lot of money does not work in a better way. Marigold is the incomprehensible and incommunicable Other inside the family.

Nevertheless, Marigold shows some resemblance to Tom, maybe more than he is aware. The narrator suggests that “Perhaps Marigold’s only resemblance to Tom was that she indulged in monologues” without failing to add, “But was this inherited or only copied?” (*RD* 34). Then there is Tom’s obsession. His dream of giving some X millions to his hamburger girl has its consequences. In hospital, under the influence of drugs and injections, he dreams of murdering Claire

to inherit her money and realise this “wish-dream.” While he does not concede that he can possibly have such a dream in a sober state, he can almost instinctively discern, as if known to him already, this dangerous excess in the Other, who is his daughter. The latent excessiveness in him comes to the surface and to some realisation through Marigold in the mode of violence: from moral blackmail to criminal assault. She manoeuvres potential violence prevailing among negotiations and struggles both in family life and in social life. Marigold, in many ways, copies Tom and embodies the Other within him, the dimension which can conceive the dream of murdering Claire, in his half-awake, half-asleep drugged mind – her frightening excess mirrors, echoes, and replicates his own.

Knowing well that materialising the dream in real life is completely different from doing so in his film, Tom is even horrified by the excess of his own dream. Although either frustration or indignation sometimes leads him to “act like a female hedgehog or a porcupine that has been sexually violated” (*RD* 25-26), all the extravagance allowed to him in his profession, including an unnecessary director’s crane, largely sustains Tom’s equilibrium. His private illusion of being God through producing illusions for the public satisfies and contains him. This is not the case for Marigold, who is more ambitious and far more unscrupulous than he is. Whereas he needs art as a substitute, to reproduce images of his dreams, she practices this “art” of his in life, and it is the author who represents their excesses in a disturbing interplay between their “arts” and their

lives, in the “no-man’s land,” a space created by art.

Claire says of Marigold, “there’s a feeling of frustration, of unfinished business. I think of her face, the tragic mask. Why?” (RD 87-88). Tom eventually chooses “*Unfinished Business*” for the title of his film, *The Hamburger Girl*. He can at last finish it and move on to a new film idea. Around the complicated relationship between the father and the daughter, the unreal and unstable world of the image-making takes over the real world. Tom’s dream and Marigold’s desire – the desire of the Other within him – come to meet in Tom’s vision, his film. Marigold becomes his obsession, his image. In this strange connection between his film and her figure, there remains Marigold stepping into “unfinished business” to make a dream real.

Although Marigold’s illusion is to betray her ambivalent and ultimate aspiration for Tom in the position of God, what is hard to detect is her jealousy for Tom in an erotic or sexual context.⁸² If Freud, the accepted authority on sexuality, as well

⁸² It is this presentation of an erotic scenario as subsidiary that disappoints some critics. In “Muriel Spark’s Uselessness” (2002), Jeremy Idle pays attention to Spark’s “interest in extravagance” (Idle 143) and takes up topics such as evil, money, death, and sex, in relation to Bataille’s concept of the diabolical nature of art. Although he seems to find a key to open some questions as to her ideas of art and of excess, he ends up discussing Bataille’s art rather than Spark’s, missing the author’s point and how the notion of excess takes the shape of desire or anything else in her fiction. Idle remarks, “Spark is not always good on desire, and where she is best at it, the desire is strongest for a dress rather than a person” (Idle 152), referring to one episode in her early novel, *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963). The novel is about girls living in poverty, in the postwar England, in dormitories called the May of Teck Club. In its garden, it is said that a bomb lies dormant. One day, a bomb explosion really occurs and it starts a fire; girls are trapped in a bathroom only with a small skylight. Among them, Selina, a beautiful and slender girl easily escapes from the skylight. However, she takes a risk to go back to the building on fire, where bigger girls are still stuck in fear and panic – Selina goes back to rescue a

as on dreams, made an attempt at interpreting the ambiguous father-daughter relationship in this novel, his possible scenario of cause and effect might merely add another speculative story of the missing girl. Spark the artist has her plots to explore the notion of excess in a much broader perspective; she shows all the dynamics of excess, which generates the interaction between extravagance and redundancy, and the power game inflamed by something excessive in Tom and Marigold.

The Art of Hypocrisy

Marigold at one point sends her parents a home video cassette. It records a simulated job-interview, in which she plays the part of a nasty, prospective employer and she looks so suitably hideous. Tom and Claire laugh and laugh. But it is as if the amateur production were a self-parody of her image designed to mock them. To Tom's great amazement, later in her professional jobs she proves to have real, marvellous skill in acting, which for him is "fundamentally the art of hypocrisy" (*RD* 52). Her hypocrisy is made very explicit by the discrepancy between her self-righteous "sermonising" (*RD* 34) and her contradictory vicious practices. She takes to any available means for her pseudo-revolutionary acts directed against her father. She happily capitalises on proletarian denunciation of bourgeois ideology or on feminist accusation of exploitative men, while cushioned by her ample means received without thanking her rich mother.

fantastic Schiaparelli dress, which belongs to one of the girls. The Schiaparelli dress is an interesting introduction to Spark's vision of excess, a hilarious display of the writer's excess, her various ways of materialising something excessive.

Marigold turns everything into a moral question and then uses the moral high ground. This allows her a weapon to justify herself and to condemn others. Tom's observation that she is "very puritanical" (*RD* 105) is both right and wrong: her rigid utilitarian norm does not permit others any unnecessary pleasure or anything amoral – such as a work of art – to others, while at the same time she seems to assume that she herself can transcend any moral question, and thus she herself *is* immoral. In her research into redundancy, she constructs herself as dedicated to helping redundant people. But, in practice, she stirs up only frustration in these redundant people, feelings of failure and of the guilt of being useless. Her norm is nothing but the same value system of capitalist economics that counts an individual to be a useful part of the labour force, a mere "throw-away item." What she uses is not this system but the way it works. It can be said that she must have learnt about this from Tom's lifestyle and his profession. She knows well how to manipulate people by appearance. By her skill in acting, her hypocrisy, she conceals herself and her self-assigned authority under what she seems.

In the course of the story, many characters carry on and break off affairs. The rich can afford those affairs as one of their usual, pleasurable pastimes as they can afford any other thing. In contrast, men made redundant go through the problem of lost virility, and their wives find some romantic flirtation – whether compensation or exploitation – with a man like Tom, to whom Claire tellingly compares insurance salesmen: "I have heard . . . that insurance companies move their door-to-door salesmen into

areas where redundant workers live, hoping to profit by their lump-sum severance pay” (RD 63). Unsurprisingly, Marigold never fails to censure her parents for “womanising and manising” (RD 37) and at the same time she herself is ready to have sex with male interviewees to document her case study of the redundant. Marigold’s interests in men and in sex are duly reported, though what she actually has to do with the matter of sex is fairly obscure. There is only a slight hint as to this. She concerns herself with the connection between the two male prowesses: of their working performance and sexual activity. She also persistently probes a female interviewee about a connection between redundancy and women’s refusal to sleep with men in the office. For one thing, these connections well fit the common ideas of men as exploiters and of sex as a thing of exchange value. For another, personally, Marigold may try to prove herself able and “useful” not only as a kind of social-welfare worker but also for sexual activity. However, she might not think the possibility that those men slept with her, not for her person, but because she is the daughter of the famous Tom Richard, which is true of one man’s case – or she just might not care. So far as she *seems* useful, she would not mind that she is not useful.

For Tom, there is a puzzling fact that Marigold has not slept with one of her interviewees in particular, Kevin Woodstock. As she hires him to shoot Dave, unlike Tom, she might well be sensible enough and more professional not to allow the man to have his own way. She copies – Tom and his methods – but outwits the original.

An Invisible Viewer

The inspector investigating Dave's case rejects Tom's proposal to think "*Cui bono* as Cicero said": "We're a long way from Cicero's time. He probably didn't give much thought about the motiveless crime" (RD 120). So far as Marigold is concerned, looking for a motive is futile. Nobody can know her because, in a sense, there is no Marigold. Tom's conviction that "if she was still alive she had lost her memory" (RD 98), as well as his another conviction that "a person consists of memories" (RD 95),⁸³ is to be validated in a different way and more than he thinks. Tom no longer recognises the younger Marigold of old photos in the present Marigold, who might leave the sphere of reality and become a girl with no history like his hamburger girl. Marigold disappears and stirs up her presence in people's mind by her very absence, but that presence consists solely of images.

Darian Leader's *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us from Seeing* (2002) provides us with many perceptive insights into the act of seeing in relation to a work of art – and empty space. Why so many people went to see the empty space when the Mona Lisa was stolen in 1911 is Leader's starting point to discuss issues concerning the visual field by using Lacanian psychoanalysis. The story about a living person's disappearance makes a different

⁸³ The theme of memories in relation to a way to materialise the essence of the individual, with references to Proust, as is seen in *A Far Cry from Kensington*, is echoed here. In another part in this novel, Tom's monologue about details of memories of his friends in past leads him to a conversation with Dave. The taxi driver's opinion that insignificant details tell "something about the person" pleases Tom, who excitedly responds, "You're absolutely right. But I wouldn't have expected you to feel that way. In fact I think they wanted to create a memory of themselves – Earl Grey tea and white kid gloves" (RD 117-18).

case from the theft of an artwork. However, both stories are about the *created* emptiness. Arguing through Lacan's concept of sublimation, Leader focuses on the idea of an empty space created by the failure of the linguistic mechanism, of the mechanism of representation, and he emphasises "the distinction between an object and a place or zone" (Leader 60). The point is that, in an empty space once occupied by an object, the object finds itself as a new, elevated figure, which becomes absolute and inaccessible, "emptied of all substance" (Leader 63). In *Reality and Dreams*, as if following such a process, Marigold transforms herself into an inaccessible figure, though this undesirable girl's empty space is more related to its threatening power than to the viewer's desire.

The point that "a dynamic of looks" involves three agents – "the viewer, the object and the third party who is viewing the viewer" (Leader 14) – is important. What causes us uneasiness or discomfort, or even threatens us, is this gaze of the third party. Unlike the Mona Lisa or any portrait, in *Reality and Dreams*, the gaze looking back at the viewer is that of a living person, Marigold, full of malicious intentions. That Marigold has disguised herself as a jobless "man" and experienced the plight of the unemployed to write on the issue during her missing period is only the surface story. She has been observing the mass media picking up on her disappearance, and watching her family get a bad press, assailed by their old guilt that they might have neglected her. And in this look beyond emptiness, there is "the strange, enigmatic desire of the Other" (Leader 33). Marigold

becomes a complete stranger, the Other to anybody more than ever. Then, what is the desire of this Other? Stopping being a real person and becoming an image?

An Image on an Empty Space

Marigold has disguised herself as a jobless man, and lived among jobless men, and she returns, putting on a new mask, a hero of the working class; assuming a new image of “hermaphrodite” (*RD* 140). She manipulates the mass media, as well as publicising her book, so successfully that she enters “the national consciousness” (*RD* 141). The scandal of her disappearance has not only terrorised Tom to begin changing his lifestyle, but also caused him to become obsessed with her image. It may not be enough for her to “impersonate” the hamburger girl of his original obsession, as Tom and Claire imagine (*RD* 98): replacing this image of his dream, of which she is so resentful, now, Marigold is his obsession.

Tom begins to crave for Marigold’s particular “*look*,” and names it “nemesis in drag” and “the Last Judgment” (*RD* 106), which are not so far from what she would like to be. Finally, he gives her the image, the male role – which she is to play opposite his lover, Rose, as the female leading role – in his new film. This does not necessarily imply her lesbian tendency any more than Tom’s intimacy with Dave necessarily suggests a gay relationship. Instead, there is a fusion, or confusion, of Marigold’s identification with Tom. On Tom’s part, in terms of narcissism, there might be “the fascination with the mirror image”

(Leader 28) reflected in the empty space. “The man in drag theory” (Leader 30), a male artist’s desire to put his own image on a female figure of his work – like a suspected da Vinci image on the Mona Lisa – might be also applicable, though with a twist. What takes place in making Tom’s new film is a number of complicated displacements.

As though he would like to reside in the security of the past and its historical memories as facts, Tom thinks of a story set in Roman-occupied Britain. Following Dave’s advice, “Stick to fact” (*RD* 145), Tom plans to let his Celt, who is gifted with second sight, predict only actual historical moments, not fictive ones. In his original plan, Marigold’s image is put in another character, the centurion’s jealous and fierce daughter. However, eventually he abandons this daughter figure and assigns Marigold to play the part of his Celt, “a young man sent mad by complete knowledge of the future, and yet with little control over his own life, belonging as he did to his centurion” (*RD* 132). Some mysterious chemistry creates this ironical shift. If the figure of Tom’s Celt could be traced back to the hermaphrodite prophet or the tragic king’s daughter gifted with second sight, the figure of himself remains in the position of power here. In his dream, Tom puts his daughter in her place like his taxi driver who serves him, and even puts her to the end. This makes a very fitting example of Leader’s argument that an artist creates an image, a mask, to ward off “the evil eye”: “The evil eye has to be tamed” (Leader 39).

For her part, Marigold takes over Dave’s image in the film,

parallel to her attempt to get rid of him in life. If to get Tom through Dave and replace Tom with herself were her wild dream, she might as well like to replace Dave – who once literally plays Tom’s substitute. But then, the taxi driver who, with some curious insight, always has the right clues to her doings is also her own reversed image in their shared secondary status as the Other in relation to Tom: the *tamed* Other. Regardless of the fact that she is tamed, at least, in Tom’s dream, that her unknown self is lost in the sea of illusions, she would be still pleased with her new empowered androgynous image. Even though the Celt is to be killed, putting on her “part-smile as she pronounced the word ‘suicide’” (*RD* 143), this tragic figure that “belongs to the world of legend” (*RD* 133) may be suitable for her own illusion of aggrandisement.

In real life, “I can’t cast Marigold in the role of victim” (*RD* 94) says Tom: the role of wrecker is there for her. Wishing to cease to be “Father’s daughter” passionately and violently, she extracts his methods, appropriates his art form of image-making – and even outwits the original to some extent. In the end, Marigold as the untameable Other abets crazy Jeanne to finish Tom off, to wreck his crane and destroy him with it, but this last job results in Jeanne’s death, not Tom’s. Marigold is to leave with “unfinished business,” with “the tragic mask” still on her face. Obsessed by her father’s obsession, she remains his negative copy, ends up as his illusion and in his illusion. After all, she is no work of art, and has no substance to occupy any place, either:

It is an empty place into which we project certain images, and the doubts about an object's authenticity serve to accentuate this difference between an object and a place. An artwork – or the image of a person – may go into this place, but it cannot become identical with it. (Leader 87)

The doubt about Marigold's equilibrium shown by people who have seen her indicates a trace of madness, which leads to destruction or self-destruction. In this novel's ending, vague fear of madness, of unreal reality, echoes:

Claire poured drinks all round. Both Tom and Cora felt her strength and courage sustaining them, here in the tract of no-man's land between dreams and reality, reality and dreams. (RD 160)

In *Reality and Dreams*, as in *The Driver's Seat* and in *Symposium*, the irony of the human condition – represented by a woman trying to be “an author in control,” but instead, caught up in her own plot – is subtly accompanied by the irony of fate. However, as Spark theorises the complicated and contradictory notion of excess with particular focus, *Reality and Dreams* may even more sharply display her concern with contemporary issues arising from the postmodern condition, from which not only individuals but also art suffers. As to the big theme of excess, what matters, above all, is art as excess. The failed aggressions such as Lise's illegitimate grand narrative, Margaret's aborted healthy criminal plot and Marigold's unfinished business can be called pseudo-revolutions – or practices of pseudo-art. Before further

exploring Spark's philosophy of life conveyed through her art of fiction, it would be interesting to take a brief look at "an anecdote of destiny" suitable for artists, who aim to change ways of seeing the world, reality and life, turning destiny into a calling by a really revolutionary power of art as excess.

An Anecdote of Destiny

By a curious coincidence, Isak Dinesen (a.k.a. Karen Blixen) shares some life experiences with Muriel Spark: living in Africa, a failed marriage, a late debut as a professional writer. "Babette's Feast," Dinesen's short story contained in *Anecdotes of Destiny* (1958), shows a certain philosophical affinity between her writing and Spark's – with some important and relevant motifs here: artist figures, possibilities of life, and something excessive. In Babette a destitute French woman and a great chef – unlike more familiar artist figures in her stories such as a spectacular performer or a wise storyteller – Dinesen orchestrates vital elements and evokes a sonorous image of an artist through a simple third-person narrative, which is unusual for her style, and with almost Spark-like economy.

"Babette's Feast" is a story about a miracle that happened in a small Norwegian village, where a group of people lived, following a certain Dean who founded their Lutheran sect. After the Dean's death, his two daughters, Martine and Philippa remain as living relics to barely unite his disciples. Both having been unearthly beautiful, unattainable by anything or anybody from the secular world, the sisters once broke the hearts of men from the

great world – Lorens Loewenhielm a young officer and Achille Papin a great singer – and silently let these lovers go. Besides Papin, Philippa let go of her possible future to be a great singer, too. However, in 1871, Babette is sent to the two sisters by Papin, or by a strange fate.

Babette, who lost everything but her art in supporting the Paris Commune, is herself a revolution against every established set of values. In the same way that nothing prevented her from fighting against the very people who admired her as the greatest cook or denouncing these rich people as “evil and cruel” (Dinesen 67), the people in the small village can never “convert” this French woman to be one of them. If the villagers’ belief that this “real” world is only an illusion and the only “reality” is the New Jerusalem were once more profound, their philosophy of life itself has been shackled by moral and economic principles. Their puritanical way of living is not only because of their actual poverty but also their blinded, rule-bound mind. It is a mechanical fear to make any mistake that leads them to shut up the great world outside, to throw away all pleasure outside necessity as a sin. Without giving a moment’s thought to the “real” world or a “real” pleasure, they bottle themselves up in the safety of their small world and so they bottle up their true feelings. To them, Babette is something more than a mere image of witch or a heathen; an ever foreign – symbolically she never really learns Norwegian – threatening, unpredictable element. This element, only Philippa, who would have been a great singer, exactly discerns as the quality of an artist at the end.

Although Babette magically saves housekeeping and becomes such a useful, necessary servant for the sisters, she is not one to live for utility and necessity. Nor is she one to seek for the *juste-milieu* between extravagance and honourable poverty. We hear her cry, “only one long cry from the heart of the artist: Give me leave to do my utmost!” (Dinesen 68). It is twelve years after her arrival when she finally has this chance to do her utmost, to cook the dinner celebrating the late Dean’s hundredth anniversary, into which she puts all ten thousands francs – the “grand prix” she miraculously won in a lottery – and all her art. Any way of living ruled by economics is as irrelevant to her art as the moral cause she fought for, and even contemptible in spite of her sympathy for the poor. In this sense, the two mistresses, as they wonder, “for the very first time . . . become the ‘good people’” (Dinesen 44) to her when they grant her the chance to cook the real French dinner. She carries out a revolution, not as a “pétroleuse,” but as an artist.

“It is Fate” (Dinesen 37), says Babette, to have to suffer her losses of her past days. However, to give her a chance to use her art, even Fate works in favour of her – and she seems to be sure of this, as if to say it is *her* fate to be an artist: her calling. Whatever her religious belief is, she knows that “divine grace” is there for her and that it is she who materialises this grace. Babette’s lavish feast, substantial as it is, is calculated as unimaginable extravagance in terms of money and of food to live, but what she really creates is an effect on life. The artist who is off stage at the dinner, also makes her guests forget about the

dinner itself to the extent that they realise “when man has not only forgotten but has firmly renounced all ideas of food and drink that he eats and drinks in the right spirit” (Dinesen 58). Similarly, a noble guest in the past said, “this woman is now turning a dinner . . . into a love affair of the noble and romantic category in which one no longer distinguishes between bodily and spiritual appetite or satiety!” (Dinesen 58). This is Babette’s triumphant moment when she becomes at once a true servant and conqueror: people she makes happy with her art belong to her. Under her work of art, like divine grace, everybody is the same. She simply surpasses any barrier such as a class system or a religious sect. Her own values invalidate them. Sharing the dinner, feeling its miraculous effect, and drunk on their best spirit and the best wine together, the villagers and the man visiting again from the great world – now General Loewenhielm – are united and understand each other though the languages they use are different.

In the end, shaking off any other possible word to define her, Babette looms over the two sisters simply as a great artist. Beside perplexed Martine, Philippa, whose heart is now listening to “forgotten cords vibrated” (Dinesen 67), trembles in exhilaration. Babette’s art opens people’s eyes to every possibility in life and confirms that it always awaits them, whether they would take it or not. The past is redeemed by the present, and the present is redeemed by “the fulfillment of an ever-present hope” (Dinesen 62). Babette’s art comes from and leads people beyond the principles of necessity and utility, where one may find the deep core of a philosophy of life in something excessive,

without which one can live, but for which one wants to live.

Despite the significance of the given historical dates, the simple narrative that has a touch of fairytale gives “Babette’s Feast” some timeless quality, which is similar to that of the eternalised hour of the feast in the story. And it is in the small, secluded village of Berlevaag, where the miracle happens to the “good people,” whereas, to change the world, Babette in the past fought with arms, not with her art, against the oppressors in the great world of Paris. Probably, as a tactful storyteller, Dinesen chooses the exceptional simplicity of the form for this particular story to focus on its philosophical kernel, for all the little too utopian ending and the straightforwardness – as straightforward as Babette’s declaration: “I am a great artist.”

Muriel Spark says:

I would hope that everything I write changes something, opens windows in people’s minds, something. I do want to do *that*, to clarify. (I-11, 1998, 222)

Spark always does *that* with her art of fiction, as she does in *Reality and Dreams* with her way of questioning usefulness to offer another new philosophy of life, which she hopes might change the world. She also creates women who share the excess of the artist, who are on stage in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER VI

PRATICING ART IN LIFE

“Life is all the achievement of an effect.”

– *The Public Image*

Muriel Spark has always declared herself a poet. Being a poet is her essential mode of being, for which and by which she tries to explain who she is: “‘Who am I?’ is always a question for poets” (*CV* 14), she says, in her autobiography, *Curriculum Vitae* (1992). This is to say that, for her, the question, “Who am I?” is inseparable from another question: “What is art to me?” – or “What is *my* art?” In this formula, the question of individual subjectivity is more specified as an artist’s quest, which in many ways leads to the combination of two of Spark’s greatest concerns: the theme of individual subjectivity and the theme of the interplay of art and life. However, if considering her whole view of art in terms of the problematic concept of subject, the two inseparable questions – “Who am I?” and “What is my art?” – might become as relevant to any individual as to the artist.

Practicing “the Desegregation of Art”

In 1957, starting with *The Comforters*, a novel about writing a novel, Spark reinvented herself as a novelist who, admittedly, has never belonged to a school, and whose novels create a new kind – “the novels of a poet” (I-3, 1970, 412), in her words. Through

the first experiment of writing a novel, Spark astutely found it her *métier*. Her debut novel, which calls into question the boundary between reality and fiction, was also a decided first step in her own postmodernism. In *The Comforters*, Spark at once explored and practiced a new art form, the novel; she examined and produced effects of this art. To perform these double acts, she chose an artist-heroine, Caroline Rose (becoming a novelist at the end), and raised an important question around her – rather, *a question about her character*. Like her author, Caroline is working on a book concerned with “Form in the Modern Novel” (C 160), but then she begins to hear mysterious typing sounds accompanied by voices, which tell her life story. Trapped in the author’s play between reality and fiction, Caroline asks a telling question: Am I a *character* written in someone else’s fiction? (What is a “character,” then?) The novel, at its end, resolves the question by hinting that this novel is a book written by its heroine. Caroline survives her suffering, her fear of being a “character” of someone else’s plot, by turning into an artist, who is going to write a novel about “Characters in a novel” (C 288). Caroline Rose, both inside and outside the book, in a symbolic way, appears as an inventor and her own invention: a “character” who invents herself.

Is the ending of *The Comforters* a clever but merely technical solution, and a rather euphoric, privileged escape for an artist? The following account of the heroine’s survival may give an answer. As Caroline leaves the stage of fictional world, with her laughter, to become an author, her former boyfriend – “the

character called Laurence Manders” (C 288) – plays the last scene. He writes a letter to her; it is a letter she will not know of, because:

He took it out of his pocket and tore it up into small pieces, scattering them over the Heath where the wind bore them away. . . . and he did not then foresee his later wonder, with a curious rejoicing, how the letter had got into the book. (C 290)

What this ending provides is a wonder and a great joy to Laurence. It is a feeling of liberation brought by the revelation of “the book” about the existence of his letter. “The book” takes Laurence outside “the book,” which is *The Comforters* – in which he enters the last scene as “the character called Laurence” and his letter is actually reproduced – but now, is also implied as incorporated in Caroline’s book about “Characters in a novel.” This vertiginous device symbolises the liberating effect of art on both Caroline, a novelist who practices the art of fiction, and Laurence, a reader of her work of art.

Concerning the effect of art, Spark did not stop at being satisfied with representing the power of practicing art *symbolically* in this heroine’s transformation into an artist: the whole view of what is art was still at stake. Thanks to the Chinese-box structure of *The Comforters*, Caroline has “the book” as her justification for being called an artist (*in reality*, this debut novel – “the book” – made Spark a recognised novelist). Yet, Caroline is one of the very few – and always female⁸⁴ – characters

⁸⁴ In *Memento Mori*, Charmian Colston, though she is not at all Spark’s kind of

Spark has ever granted such justification among her professional artist figures: poets, novelists, painters, actors and film-directors. Caroline is actually becoming a novelist by profession, but, more importantly, the novel refers to the effect of her practice of art: her liberation from being a “character,” her change from a written object to a writing subject. Caroline’s transformation into an artist is marked not only by her work of art, but also by this practice – suggested largely by the structure of the novel, though – to invent herself. Thus, in her first novel, Spark already conceived the idea of characters inventing themselves, an idea which was later to be developed much further inasmuch as it has formed one big theme about practitioners of art in life. She brought this idea along with her conviction that art must be effective both in itself and in life, which was to be crystallised in “The Desegregation of Art” (1971), her extraordinary manifesto as an artist.

In “The Desegregation of Art,” elucidating what is meant by this title, Spark passionately urges us to regard art as an activity to connect with real life, communicate with each other, and thereby influence the world:

Literature, of all the arts, is the most penetrable into the human life of the world, for the simple reason that words are our common currency. . . . in order to

novelist, has her wisdom as an artist. She compares the art of fiction with “the practice of deception” (MM 644), knows that this practice is very different in life, and also survives her bullying husband when her novels get revived attention. Most notably, Fleur Talbot in *Loitering with Intent* is a sort of the author’s persona. Emma Loy in *A Far Cry from Kensington* is an awful but fascinating woman, praised as a brilliant novelist, whose books “look after themselves” (FCK 98).

communicate; we talk, we write to each other.

(“DA” 33)

She promotes art as a way of communication, which is to be practiced by everybody, in everyday life. Nonetheless, to make a distinction between the general idea inherent in all the arts – any art using “our common currency” – and the particular example of literature, she explains:

the art of literature is a personal expression of ideas which come to influence the minds of people . . . Literature infiltrates and should fertilize our minds. It is not a special department set aside for the entertainment and delight of the sophisticated minority. (“DA 34)

It is in this way that the art of literature also should be “penetrable into the human life,” into everybody’s life. She then goes on to define what is the effective art for “the desegregation of art,” that is, “the liberation of our minds” (“DA” 36). Here comes her famous definition: “Ridicule is the only honorable weapon we have left” (“DA” 35) – “the satirical, the harsh and witty, the ironic and derisive” (“DA” 36), and “elegant” (I-6, 1971, 74), she adds in her talk with Philip Toynbee in the same year. She concludes:

To bring about a mental environment of honesty and self-knowledge, a sense of the absurd and a general looking-lovely to defend ourselves from the ridiculous oppressions of our time, and above all to entertain us in the process, has become the special calling of arts of letters.
(“DA” 36-37)

This is a peculiarly aggressive, radical definition of the writing profession. What she thinks is the purpose of art and the essence of her own art is all here in this 1971 lecture. Her conviction of her view of art is as strong as her conviction of her vocation to be an artist and it has never wavered.

Around this time, more than ever, Spark had reasons to be particularly aware of the development of her own art of fiction. After her hard-laboured, uncharacteristically long novel, *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965), she established what has become her high-style and high-economy writing in a succession of novels: *The Public Image* (1968), *The Driver's Seat* (1970), and *Not to Disturb* (1971). These novels appeared with some of the most disturbing characters who also show developments of their – very much dark – “arts” they practice in real life. In *The Driver's Seat*, Lise heads for her own murder in her attempt to make a master plot of her death – so does Frederick Christopher in *The Public Image*, carefully preparing for his suicide plot. Lister the butler in *Not to Disturb* pre-scribes in advance the murderous and suicidal scenario, which *will* later happen as the inevitable consequences of his masters' affair. Keeping her discussion on-going, Spark has speculated upon possibilities and potentialities – for better or worse – in the idea of practicing art in life, which she encouraged in her way (and as one who is by no means “under the illusion that we are all essentially aspiring, affectionate, and loving creatures” (“DA” 36)). Consequently, Spark's fictional world has been populated by characters playing parts and/or transforming, casting and recasting themselves – and often others

as well – in their own real-life scenarios by various means and to various ends.

The diversity of Spark's practitioners of art in life is each to pose the question whether they are fictional inventions or inventors, or inventions *and* inventors. The fundamental question here is whether their arts –and so themselves as their artworks – are inventions or, say, imitations. Intertwined themes, the interplay of art and life and the issue of individual subjectivity, are both key elements in this question, as in *The Comforters* – the “character” called Caroline is thrown into the doubt about being an “individual” as an agent of free will, and to a degree, invents herself as *her own character*. Spark has produced inexhaustible variations on the question, playing upon the hazy line between reality and fiction, moving between dichotomies contrasting and intertwining the notions of art and of the individual – depth/surface, natural/artificial, authentic/fake, original/copy.

In her novels, inventing and casting practitioners of art in life, Spark challenges and disturbs these problematic dichotomous notions, and goes beyond the dividing line between them, which she breaks, beyond their arbitrariness and ambiguities, which she exposes. To see how – and how far – she can go it is necessary to look into her fiction side by side with “The Desegregation of Art.” Concerning the idea of practicing art in life, her whole view of art expressed in this lecture and her discussion carried on in her novels seem to reflect and further clarify each other. Here, taking Spark's 1971 manifesto as the norm of her aesthetic principles, I will compare her characters who practice art in life,

analyse their arts, and thereby examine the way those characters, in return, illuminate the idea of “the desegregation of art.” In doing so, as well as highlighting her view of art, I hope to clarify what Spark may offer as possibilities for the “individual,” which might emerge from her idea of characters inventing themselves.

As the main protagonists of my argument, I choose Spark’s performer heroines, whose effectiveness to express her themes regarding art and individual subjectivity seems outstanding even among other practitioners of art. The heroine of *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974) can well be nominated as a key character, for Alexandra the Abbess is not only a terrifying scenario writer, but also a terrific performer – making a spectacle of her life. It is worthwhile considering the figure of Alexandra alongside Miss Jean Brodie, another larger-than-life performer and the popular star of Spark’s fiction, on the one hand; on the other hand, alongside Annabel Christopher, a puny, professional actress, central figure of *The Public Image*. To begin with, it may be serviceable to underline the fundamental idea that lies in Spark’s creation of performer heroines, and also to trace back the transformation of the artist, who invents herself.

The Transformation of the Author

Putting it mildly, Spark is profoundly sceptical of “profundity,” the assumption of “depth” underneath anything that can be *seen* as “surface.” It is a perfectly logical attitude for an artist who recognises art as what is expressed outwardly – as surface. Before starting her career as a novelist, she clarified her idea of art

as the surface in her own terms in “The Religion of an Agnostic: A Sacramental View of the World in the Writings of Proust” (1953), which heralded her materialist and deconstructionist stance. This is an important essay, as well as explaining her particular idea of art, containing an explanation for her later creation of performers – in terms of her notion of surface.

In this essay, lobbying for Proust in the *Church of England Newspaper*, Spark relates his writings to the Church on the ground of “a sacramental view of life,” which she explains is “a balanced regard for matter and spirit” (“RA” 1). She convincingly argues against the common, dualistic – and “moralist” – view, which makes binary oppositions of matter and spirit and regards the latter as higher in its hierarchy.

It could be abundantly demonstrated that present-day Christian creative writing, that is most involved in an attempt to combat materialism, reflects a materialism of its own; this takes the form of a dualistic attitude towards matter and spirit. They are seen too much in a moral conflict, where spirit triumphs by virtue of disembodiment.

This is really an amoral conception of spirit. (“RA” 1)
In contrast, she suggests, “by its very lack of moral concern,” Proust’s art “escapes the tendency to equate matter with evil” (“RA” 1). (At the same time, she cheerfully calls Marcel Proust – the unlikely subject – “agnostic, hedonist, self-centred neurotic, exotic darling of the aristocratic *salons* . . . the hypochondriac turned chronic invalid, the insufferable hot-house plant” (“RA” 1). That her cunning, ironic assault on the Christian moral attitude

was printed in this paper shows her terrifying rhetoric.) As her justification of canvassing not only for Proust but also art in general, she emphasises the idea of sacrament, “the idea that the visible world is an active economy of outward signs embodying each an inward grace” (“RA” 1). To establish her aesthetic principles, she elaborates on this argument.

Spark’s conversation with Philip Toynbee of *The Observer* (who played his part in her winning *The Observer* Christmas story competition in 1951 as one of the editors, and now her friend and fellow writer) adds an interesting point to “The Desegregation of Art.” When Toynbee describes himself as a “*superficial* writer” and asks her if she also tends to “shy away from the whole concept of profundity” (I-6, 1971, 74), her response goes further than an expected affirmation. She positively attacks and overthrows the whole concept:

What I’d really like to see is the *desegregation* of art – the liberation of our minds from the comfortable cells of lofty sentiment (what you call profundity) in which they are confined and in which they can never really feel satisfied.
(I-6, 1971, 74)

The added point here is that “the comfortable cells of lofty sentiment,” against which she sets her aesthetic principles, is “profundity” by her definition. What she suggests is that those emotions and sentiment called profundity are – if not insincere and untrue – an illusion/delusion: a prison of the mind. Exactly as she does in her manifesto, she dismisses a kind of art that appeals to “profundity,” induces simulated emotions, creates an

illusion as if there were some true nature hidden in depth and as if those emotions enabled us to be connected with it, and blocks “the liberation of our minds.” By her own art, she wishes to liberate our minds to see what is really there on the surface – and on the body of her writing. Meanwhile, the appearance of this artist also fascinates the public. Spark herself became quite a spectacle.

“The Prime of Muriel Spark” or “Muriel Spark in Her Prime” – this couple of phrases have been frequently attached to the author of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), while the name of her heroine, “Miss Jean Brodie,” has become almost a popular term. Spark’s sixth novel brought her a huge success, and also, probably, one of the most stimulating experiences of the interplay of art and life. In the endless interplay, the very experience of becoming publicly known – becoming a “Name” – was likely to provide more good material for her future novels. From Miss Brodie to Alexandra, it may be interesting to consider the evolution of Spark’s performer heroines in relation to the evolution of the author’s own.

Compared with her first breakthrough with her third novel, *Memento Mori* (1959), the huge commercial success of *Miss Jean Brodie* could be still a very different kind of experience for Spark.⁸⁵ It was accompanied by a world-wide recognition, her even more mobile life, and her transformation. Mr Toynbee referred to this change in their conversation: “You’ve got a

⁸⁵ Spark had a promising start with *The Comforters*, which drew the attention of a literary scene, including Evelyn Waugh. But it was *Memento Mori* that brought her the first financial success.

marvellous flat, a lot of gorgeous clothes, a vigorous social life; quite a change from Grub Street, and the dumpy Bohemian girl I then knew. Now you're slender, almost svelte? – a sensational transformation” – to which, “A transformation I've thoroughly enjoyed” (I-6, 1971, 73) was her reply. It was Lorna Sage who detected Spark's transformation as a conscious operation on her image – as an act of inventing herself. This is no wonder. Sage's preoccupation with writers who “invent themselves,” especially, in terms of writing about the lives of women, is evident in her writings, as is confirmed in the introduction for her posthumous selected journalism, *Good As Her Word* (2003) (one review rightly gives a caption: “The woman who lit up literature”).

In her interview, “The Prime of Muriel Spark,” Sage remarks with customary sharpness:

She [Spark] does have a slight patina that people seem to develop through being often photographed or much described, but along with it she's soft-spoken and surprisingly undecided – as though she has further metamorphoses in store. (I-8, 1976, 11)

Certainly, in this interview article Sage wrote about Spark's books – *The Public Image* in relation to her life in Italy, the film adaptation of *The Abbess of Crewe*, and *The Takeover*, which just came up. However, interestingly, she seemed to be even more fascinated by the artist's “metamorphoses,” wondering what this artist would make of herself next in her life, and maybe, in her art. She observed, “about 1965, critics had to dig pretty deep to detect

signs of moral earnestness” in Spark, who had become “irretrievably grand” but kept an air of “determined lightness” (I-8, 1976, 11). Instead of “digging deep,” Sage focused on what was before her eyes, Spark’s transformation – material, physical, or whatever visible – and what she expressed by that. In one small paragraph, Sage summarised the figure of artist Spark invented and performed in her flesh and blood, linking this performance to the artist’s aesthetic principles – and to “moral earnestness” in her sense:

In short, her style (in every sense) is an offence against a whole set of conventional pieties: against the feeling that the wealth and fame you get by writing is somehow different from that of movie stars or politicians; or that creative people should be fumbling, retiring and unworldly. (I-8, 1976, 11)

Sage got the point: Spark invents herself, and does so with style, for it is an art and she is an artist.

Back in the 1960s, Spark must have been amazed and amused, seeing herself in her newly-acquired role of the author of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and Miss Brodie on the stage and on the screen, carrying around her original “stage” of a girls’ school in the 1930s Edinburgh. At the same time, the creation she had unleashed on the world now led her creator to New York. There and then, Spark talked about “the tension and energy” (I-2, 1965, 10) of the city she enjoyed (in another interview titled “The Prime of Muriel Spark”). Nonetheless, later she reflected: “I had three years in America; but I found I simply couldn’t stand the

party line – I mean the way there was always a right and approved reaction to every situation” (I-6, 1971, 73). In 1967, she left New York, and moved to Rome. As for this transition from New York to Rome, her experiences and keen observations of two different new worlds, her novels “tell their own story” (I-11, 1998, 229), indeed.

In *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973), her novel set in New York, Spark reproduced its tension in a world of dead people, who restlessly try to live up to their lives as they should have been – which, in any case, are going awry, with many problems lurking. The novel might be her commentary on the conformity to what was expected, “a right and approved reaction to every situation”; the ghosts’ play of living might be a supernatural and surreal rendition of the “naturalistic” or “realistic” performance – minus imagination and spectacles.⁸⁶ The operatic spontaneity Spark found in Italy could not be more different from the strong sense of “the party line” in America. When she chose Rome as the setting for *The Public Image*, the novel came to underline a mirthful mixture of imaginative sensationalism and “*bella figura*” – the “principle of *appearance* appropriate to an occasion” (PI 72 [my italics]). By the time when she wrote this novel, she might have given much thought on her expected part as a well-known author – between her individual identity and her public image.

⁸⁶ Besides, in spite of its vigorous energy, it was the 1960s New York with its decay that she witnessed. In an interview, Spark mentioned, “New York was beginning to decay; it was getting dangerous, dirty,” and she also compared the city with Rome in relation to their passion for music: “music-lovers in New York tend to be musicologists, they haven’t got this spontaneous, great, almost naïve love of music [of people in Rome] . . . a response, a real response” (I-4, 1970).

Before going to Italy, Spark made another journey to Jerusalem, to the Eichmann trial for *The Observer*; preceding *The Public Image*, she wrote *The Mandelbaum Gate*. As *The Mandelbaum Gate* took her two years to write, the contemplative, half-Jewish heroine of the book too makes a long quest for “who she is” into Jerusalem (“Barbara Vaughan’s Identity” is the title for the second chapter). The novel did not turn out to be a story about three generations of women as Spark had planned, and she was exhausted: “I felt I had done my *Passage to India*. I felt I’d got out of myself what I wanted to say, but I certainly didn’t want to go in for more sociological books” (I-11, 1998, 215). This was a correct decision for her writing style. In contrast with her previous long labour, *The Public Image* just sprang from a dream, according to the author.⁸⁷ In this compact novel, Spark is very much in her element in dealing with the problem of identity. Annabel Christopher, a minor actress is an unlikely heroine, whose stupidity and shallowness shine through her cloudy eyes, which magically transform into those of “English Lady Tiger” once she is on the screen. Following her unexpectedly successful career, her main concern is with the role of this “Lady Tiger” image in her life, rather than in a film. She keeps polishing her public image, doing anything for it to survive, but at the end, it is she who is to survive this image. Spark elegantly and entertainingly theorised “the public image” through the progress of the actress heroine in her book, while she was learning

⁸⁷ Spark states: “I had been in Rome, and then I was back in New York, and I was going to move to Rome – I dreamt the whole thing in New York, and when I arrived in Rome I wrote the book. It was the easiest book I ever wrote” (I-10, 1985, 453).

about the image-making business through the transformation in her own life.

By 1974, Muriel Spark in her prime was ready to create Alexandra the Abbess, a performer as spectacular as Miss Jean Brodie, as professional as Annabel, and with the great savvy and style – of her creator.

Performers and Open Secrets

Am I a *character* written in somebody else's plot? – this question posed by Spark's first heroine has continued to be important in her fiction. Various contemporary theories too have been engaged in promoting doubt about an individual as an agent of free will, the problem of individual subjectivity. The point that any individual born into society is inevitably constructed as a subject by being subject to social norms, to the dominant discourses of society, has often been made and argued. Within this argument, in search of an agent of free will, another problem has emerged between the dichotomy of a private, personal or individual self and a cultural construction. Hence the questions such as raised by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) in terms of "performativity," and by Spark in terms of art. Should there necessarily be a "real" individual under a "mask" of social role? Can one "have character" or only "be a character" inscribed in a social format? Spark's performer figures have presented such questions well before Judith Butler advanced her arguments around the keyword: "performativity."

As the title of her book suggests, Butler focuses on the

culturally constructed category of gender from a feminist perspective – therefore, the question is: what is “woman”? – and brings the issue into identity politics. Butler carefully analyses how discourses about gender and sex operate, alongside the most influential and relevant discourses of psychoanalysis – calling psychoanalysis itself into question – and leads the issues to cultural constructions signified and practiced on the surface of body. She deftly deconstructs the binary frames – such as the real in depth and effects on the surface – to make a case for her argument that “there need not be a ‘doer behind the deed,’” but “the ‘doer’ is variably constructed in and through the deed” (Butler, 1990, 142). Looking for a way of subversion of the established categories through and within them, in her conclusion, she proposes “parodic practices in which the original, the authentic and the real are themselves constituted as effects” (Butler, 1990, 146) as a strategy – intentional and performative.

Butler’s theory of “performativity” is suggestive and notable, but it cannot escape its limitations. It seems to be her particular brand of feminist stance that traps her argument. For instance, because of the significance of her theory and because of its focus on how to signify “woman,” Joan Copjec in *Read My Desire* (1994) criticises Butler’s “illegitimately derived” (Copjec, 1994, 204) conclusion: “*woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end” (Butler, 1990, 33). Copjec accuses her of discussing the identity of a sexed subject – who already exists – in terms of the unfigurability of sex, the failure of the system of signification,

by replacing the actual “being” of women with “the changing concepts of women” (Copjec, 1994, 204). Copjec raises “a *philosophical objection*” to this mixing up “the level of the concept” with “the level of being” (Copjec, 1994, 205), which, as a result, denies any stable existence of the identity of women.

As for Butler’s “parodic practices,” apart from examples rather restricted to gay and lesbian cultures, an actual figure of individual – or “woman” – produced through this practice seems to remain unfigurable, invisible. In contrast, to challenge the fundamental categories of identity, Spark takes a versatile position from which she questions various myths constructed upon facts and conditions of an individual being – such as gender, class, or ethnicity. Her argument on identity includes the fact of sexual difference, but it is not exclusively for “sexed” beings. Indeed, her fiction too deals with feminist discussions, commenting on social realities of inequality between men and women or satirising her characters muddled up about “concepts of women.”

However, otherwise, her general stance towards being a woman is regarding that as a plain fact, a plain difference from men, visible on the body. In her novels, the artist demonstrates the practice of art in life in different ways; she materialises her women who perform and practice their arts, in which the possibility of individual identity is pursued and could be realised.

Spark cuts through the limitations which afflict Butler’s theory by effects of art and for effects of art. This does not simply mean that as a novelist she can provide subtle and concrete examples of performers in her fiction: she not only brings her

discussions into her practice of art, but also brings the role of art in life into the whole discussion concerning identity. Both inside and outside her practice of art, her emphasis on the role of art adds a significant dimension to this discussion, and it is the problem of the binary thinking common to the notion of art and the notion of individual that serves her well to discuss them together. Her performers, in their actions and in their figures, provoke all the questions about art and about individual subjectivity: they are themselves postmodern embodiments of these two notions. She brings various figures of the individual into the equally unlimited scope of art, without generalisation. She creates her performer “character” each as a unique example of the operation and the dynamics between effects produced by a performer and a performer as effects. With them, she explores the field of visible effects, of performance: the “artificial,” “surface,” “outer.” And this field, after all, is that of art, according to a sacramental view of the world in the writings of Muriel Spark.

A Paradox of “Character” and “the Public Image”

Spark chooses a professional image-maker as a suitable figure to offer his version of theory – of “performativity” – of the self and its acts in terms of effects. In *The Public Image*, Annabel counts on Luigi Leopardi, an Italian film director, because “He was not at all concerned or cynical about the difference between her private life and her public image; he did not recognize that any discrepancy existed” (*PI* 33). Luigi lectures Annabel:

He said, “What is personality but the effect one has on

others? Life is all the achievement of an effect. Only the animals remain natural.” He told her that personality was different from a person’s character, but even character could change over the years, depending on the habits one practised. “I see no hypocrisy in living up to what the public thinks of you,” he said. (*PI* 33-34)

Although the voice of this businessman of the image-making industry should not be taken as the author’s, his lecture is not far from her view. Spark sees irony, if not hypocrisy, in badly living up to an image one claims to be true, for the very self could be as visible as its badly-made image: a transparent, cracked, or fake mask – a work of a bad art or a pseudo-art, in other words.⁸⁸ In this sense, no discrepancy exists. If we are not blind, we can see people as they are. Spark sees hypocrisy rather in conceding that there is always some true “character” hidden under the effect called “personality” –or “the public image” in Annabel’s case.

The evolution of Spark’s performer heroines runs parallel to the development of their awareness of the self and its acts – and the image as its effect. Miss Brodie has none of such awareness: she is a “natural” performer. Alexandra, perfectly aware of everything about her performance, is an expert in calculating and manipulating its effect – herself as effect. In terms of this

⁸⁸ Spark has some of her characters – Lise of *The Driver’s Seat*, or Sir Quentin in *Loitering with Intent*, for instance – reveal nothing but such masks, nothing under them. For another example, there is an invention of the type called “English Rose” in *Loitering with Intent*. A couple of female characters, who put on this role of “English Rose” as their idea of feminine, virtuous and righteous women, betray their vulgarity, snobbery or greed in their words and actions, as well as their “English Rose” perfume and “English Rose” lipstick left on a rim of a cup.

awareness, the figure of Annabel fits in the gap between the other performers. Through her professional career and her business sense, Annabel's eyes gradually open to the effect of her public image and how to handle it – and her handling of the image is ingenious but haphazard, for her own awareness is still inarticulate. Through her performance of the “English Lady Tiger” in films and in life, she mimes, improvises – even reinvents it, to a degree – and finally grows out of it. *The Public Image* illustrates the process of building up one's “character” on possibilities and potentialities in a certain situation, instead of searching or denying any prediscursive structure.

Annabel, at first, is perfect material as an object of Luigi's art. His “Lady Tiger” unfailingly evokes the marvelous erotic image in Italian melodramatic films with somewhat moral endings; even if her fiery tiger-eyes look back at the male gaze, her sexual desire in them is confined within marriage. Annabel, supposedly a professional and a great actress, is actually a film star by luck: “she only had to exist; she did not need to perform, she only had to be there in front of the cameras” (*PI* 11), as she herself realises.⁸⁹ The audience interpret what they see in her image as they please: “tiger-sex” (*PI* 101) in the conjugal bed, her *secret* passion under her English callousness. To Luigi's

⁸⁹ Laura Mulvey's “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975) discusses, in terms of psychoanalysis, how cinematic form and its representation have been structured by the patriarchal order. Annabel is objectified by “the active male gaze” precisely in the way Mulvey argues in this pioneering article of feminist film theory: “The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation”(Mulvey 442).

amazement, she lives up to her role of “English Lady tiger” almost too well; she appears as a fierce tiger in living up to this public image, and is indifferent, or rather, callous to sex. In a different way he and his press secretary have contrived, Annabel gradually proves herself to be a tiger, ruthlessly using her husband and his mistress, her neighbours and even her baby to maintain her public image, improving her performance – in life. She may have something in her to be a “lady tiger” – “so ruthless about life, so squeamish about death” (*PI* 93) in essence, as Luigi puts it – or/and become one through her practice.

Simply fitting in an image, in a part, Annabel’s malleability is her ability. It is the economy of her art of image-making. She practices this art instinctively both on the screen and in life. For this economy of method, her husband, Frederick, becomes jealous and resentful.

Frederick was continually overcome by a dazzled exasperation at her capacity for achieving the most impressive effects by the most superficial means. He was infuriated that anyone should be deceived by her. He was firm in his opinion that an actor should be sincere in the part he played and should emotionally experience whatever he was to portray, from the soul outward.

(*PI* 17)

As an actor himself, no matter how he theorises the acting skill, he has never had a chance to display his ever-untried talent – if he has any – and his wife, who cannot act but exist, is a star. Embittered Frederick endlessly reproaches the gap between

Annabel's "private life" and her "public image," of which he is a necessary part as the ideal husband of the "Lady Tiger." His belief that nobody but he knows her "inside out" (*PI* 17), that is, her stupidity, shallowness, deception, is his only perverse satisfaction. When her stupidity starts to melt away, he stands as a kind of a mirror, through which she can see how the public image is growing, and which offers a negative exemplar for her. While "Annabel was entirely aware of the image-making process in every phase" (*PI* 27), "Frederick hardly knew what was going on" (*PI* 25), involved in her public image much deeper than he realises.

For all his criticism of Annabel's superficiality, insincerity, and deception in a film and in life, ironically, it is Frederick who fails to see the gap in his dual life and his own hypocrisy. He begins to cultivate his self-image of seriousness on his public image: the intellectual and attractive husband of the "Lady Tiger." Holding up the seriousness of his image against his shallow wife, he refuses to see the truth that he now enjoys a carefree intellectual life he has always dreamt of, which Annabel's earning, with her public image, has realised. It is the arrival of their baby that breaks the last bit of his equilibrium between his concept of himself and his actual way of living. The regained sense of unity Annabel feels with her baby changes her and destroys Frederick's curious satisfaction with their ambivalent, mutual dependence. The baby serves her public image better than he does; he is no longer the only part of her "private" life, as he has presumed⁹⁰:

⁹⁰ Psychoanalysis may find the desire for the imaginary unity with the mother in

The baby, Carl was the only reality of her life. His existence gave her a sense of being permanently secured to the world which she had not experienced since her own childhood had passed. . . . She felt a curious fear of display where the baby was concerned, as if this deep and complete satisfaction might be disfigured or melted away by some public image. (*PI* 35)

Frederick is 'jealous of the baby' (*PI* 96), as Annabel acutely perceives and later confidently declares. He carries out his suicide scenario to destroy her public image. He deliberately sends a wild set of people to her flat to create a scandal that she organises an "orgy" when he kills himself, and leaves letters accusing her. In addition, his old friend and hanger-on, Billy, swiftly – he might anticipate or have some knowledge about this suicide plot – gets hold of these letters to blackmail her.

Annabel practices her art – at its best – to survive, to defend

both Annabel and Frederick. First, both of their mothers are already dead. Second, there is Frederick's letter to his dead mother. Annabel is bewildered when she at first mistakes the letter addressed to "Mrs W. A. Christopher" for one to her, and then finds that he calls her "Mamma" unusually. Writing, "Since the birth of our son she [Annabel] has changed towards me entirely" (*PI* 85), apart from his plan of contriving an Italians' favorite letter from a son to a mother, he seems to replace the loss of the mother by that of Annabel. Last, Gelda, a daughter of the family doctor appears like Frederick's agent. When the doctor comes to tell of Frederick's death, he takes his wife and his daughter. For her age Gelda is excessively attached to her mother. She disturbs Annabel's plot to preserve her public image by pointing out her insincere tears and indicating as if she had organised the "orgy." In the voice of this "cynical enemy," Annabel "discerned an echo of Frederick's voice, for ever questioning her sincerity, taunting" (*PI* 66). Against Annabel's fury, Gelda "stumped three steps closer to her mother as if to protect herself from Annabel" (*PI* 64). To this gesture, holding "her baby like a triumphant shield," Annabel protects herself "with a protective movement towards the baby" (*PI* 64). Here we may also recall Freud's observation in "On Femininity": "Under the influence of a woman's becoming a mother herself, an identification with her own mother may be revived" (Freud, 1933, 597).

herself from Frederick's death plot. Right after his death, Annabel tactfully arranges the best picture for the press conference. It is a picture of a grieving widow with her baby surrounded by sympathetic neighbours, "like some vast portrayal of a family and household by Holbein" (PI 72), who is also famous for his series of woodcuts taking the motif of "the dance of death" – the motif Frederick was obsessed by. She changes the grotesque motif into a "*bella figura*" (PI 73) as if she mocked the effect of his death upon her. There is another very different picture which also symbolises her fighting back against his death: a portrait of a mother and a child. In one scene, with Billy, Annabel sees a toy balloon, which has "a head, body and legs, but no arms, like an embryo ghost" (PI 87), bobbing in and out the window. It is a grotesque but comical apparition like a parody, again, of the motif of "the dance of death." Whereas Billy is almost neurotically frightened by this apparition, Annabel playfully bats at it, holding the baby absorbed in this sight.

Annabel the "Lady Tiger" outwits all the male plots – the exploitation of the film director, Frederick's suicide, and Billy's blackmail – by stepping out of this role. Against all the odds that she could not give up the public image, she beats the men like a lady tiger in her own terms. Although Frederick used to say, "I might throw myself out of a window" (PI 43), he falls in the "profound pit" (PI 56), "alone and dead" (PI 58). It is Annabel who walks out of a window, the binding frame of the film screen, of the patriarchal cinema world and of the disastrous marriage. Instead of gazing "out through the open window at the stars,"

hearing Billy's voice saying, "she's only a woman" (*PI* 118), she walks out to survive. *The Public Image* ends at this point when Annabel stops being somebody else's art object and survives the public image. She is no longer the "Lady Tiger," only a woman.

Annabel says, "I want to be free like my baby. I hope he's recording this noise" (*PI* 123), responding to her male lawyer, who tells her that babies hear people's voices "as record noises" and then "they sort of remember afterwards" (*PI* 121). She may begin to articulate herself and be no longer such an "empty shell" as Frederick – who used to put her into her place, with his words – calls her, though still feeling "neither free nor unfree" (*PI* 123). In the last scene, leaving for Greece, Annabel and her son look more like fellow survivors than a mother and a baby⁹¹:

Waiting for the order to board, she felt both free and unfree. The heavy weight of the bags was gone; she felt as if she was still, curiously, pregnant with the baby, but not pregnant in fact. She was pale as a shell. She did not wear her dark glasses. Nobody recognized her as she stood, having moved the baby to rest on her hip, conscious also of the baby in a sense weightlessly and perpetually within her, as an empty shell contains, by its very structure,

⁹¹ Spark does not often deal with the theme of motherhood, but Annabel and her baby seems to be a rare example expressing the author's view of the mother-son relationship – between two newly-born individuals, free and unfree – with a genuine affection. Spark's autobiography has a brief account of her son's birth: "When I was expecting a baby, my husband suggested, very earnestly, that I have an abortion. He was beginning to feel uneasy and unstable. I refused. My son, Robin, was born . . . after a labour of a day and half . . . I was at the end of my strength and didn't expect that either I or my baby would survive, and, indeed, it was a miracle that we both emerged strong and healthy" (*CV* 127).

the echo and harking image of former and former seas.

(*PI* 124-25)

Annabel genuinely loves the baby. She *is* a woman and a mother, and in the process of becoming what she has yet to invent for herself.

The novel does not tell if Annabel could perform any part of her own, if she could invent herself. Like her baby, Annabel has only possibilities and potentialities: it is her new beginning. The subtle change in the expression of her feeling, “neither free nor unfree” to “both free and unfree,” may add a little light to it. She is a professional actress, a star, but in the last scene, abandoning the “Lady Tiger” role, she stands unrecognised, as a little nobody. In terms of art – the art of inventing herself as her own art object – she makes a contrast with Miss Brodie and Alexandra, who are no professional actresses, but great heroines both in their lives and in their arts. Spark brings the inseparability of life and art to its extremes in these two figures.

CHAPTER VII

INVENTING THEMSELVES

“Sandy was fascinated by this method of making patterns with facts...”

– *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

The Paradox of Miss Jean Brodie in Her Prime

Among all novels by Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Abbess of Crewe* are the only novels named after their heroines.⁹² Both novels have been adapted for the cinema, made into a film – and in the case of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, an adaptation for the screen followed on an adaptation for the stage. Not only are the eponymous heroines the stars of these spectacles, but also “The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie” and “The Abbess of Crewe” are their own plays, which they make out of their lives. Apart from the magnetism of their visual presence as performers, their arts are so different that the two works form a vivid contrast on the theme of practicing art in life, for which Spark also discovered an inspiring real-life example: Emily

⁹² I must admit that there is a male character who plays the “title-role”: Spark’s second novel, *Robinson* (1958). However, of course, this novel as “a kind of adventure story” (CV 210) refers to the genre of Robinsonade. “Robinson” is also the name of the island in which the story is set, and which is contrived to represent a mental topography of isolated individuals. I differentiate this novel from *Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Abbess* not for convenience, but for the whole point of the latter novels: how each of the heroines can be unmistakably Jean Brodie and the Abbess Alexandra.

Brontë.⁹³ In inventing her characters who practice art in life, her imagination seems to have flourished over the figure of Emily, who looked as if she “had consciously laid out the plot of her life in a play called *Emily Brontë*” (EB 314). Her remarkable analysis of Emily Brontë, which illustrates how the excess of the legendary genius had taken a dramatic shape of real-life spectacle, in turn, has taken various shapes in her novels. By her art of fiction, Spark has had Miss Brodie and Alexandra stage their spectacles, suitably dramatic representations of the excess made visible in the field of art – and of art itself as excess. Spark’s vision of excess in terms of art seems to have a significant place in her fiction, from which she sets out to realise a possibility of the individual subjectivity – through the paradox of Miss Brodie in her prime to the defense – plus *Confiteor* – of Alexandra.

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, by the economy of her art, Spark presents her heroine in romantic attire. Miss Brodie has a passion for overtly emotional, romantic artworks – from *The Lady of Shalott* to her self-image; a far cry from Emily Brontë’s or Spark’s radical high fiction. Her almost naïve passion as such nonetheless is expedient, for it effectively impresses her audience, girls of an impressionable age, and enhances her dramatic appearance as her own work of art. Besides, Miss Brodie has her veritable association with the Romantics: their tendency to enact principles in their works, which “amounted to beliefs so

⁹³ As to Spark’s argument on the Emily figure, see the section, “Suggestively Possible: Behind the Legend,” in Chapter II.

passionately held, that it seemed necessary to prove them to others by putting them to the test of action” (*EB* 249). Miss Brodie who enacts her principles of larger-than-life heroine and elects “herself to grace in so particular a way and with more exotic suicidal enchantment” (*PMJB* 97) does not fall short of the figure of Emily, who enacted the cult of superhuman as she endured her last illness in a heroic but suicidal way. Miss Brodie invents herself on the principles of no ordinary excess, to the point of destruction, to the point of absurdity – and so comes the end for the prime of Miss Jean Brodie, as well as for the life of Emily Brontë.

The “prime” of Miss Brodie can be well translated into the “originality” of her art. The ephemeral nature of being in one’s prime and of being original is both a possibility and a limit. Spark’s autobiography tells how she herself worked on this possibility in creating Miss Brodie and also refers to the limit on the part of her character. Talking about Miss Christina Kay who has been well known as *the original Miss Brodie*, Spark does credit to her originality as a teacher, as a sole performer in a classroom, which is “essentially theatre” (*CV* 57). Spark frankly admits that Miss Kay’s quality as an excellent teacher/performer entered into her fictional character and enriched it with some details. Yet, she also states that “Miss Kay was nothing like Miss Brodie”:

But children are quick to perceive possibilities, potentialities: in a remark, perhaps in some remote context; in a glance, a smile. No, Miss Kay was not literally Miss

Brodie, but I think Miss Kay had it in her, unrealized, to be the character I invented. (CV 57)

Spark built up “the character” on “possibilities, potentialities” she had perceived in Miss Kay. Her creation is what Miss Kay could have been and – exactly because it is the *possibility* – what she was not. Miss Kay was never this character called Miss Brodie, in whom Spark’s creative imagination carried this *possibility* into *effect*. The character as the effect is no copy of Miss Kay, or of anybody else – but original Miss Brodie.

There can be always a new beginning, a possibility to create something original – different even from its “origin” – but one has to keep beginning. This is why Spark assures her readers that none of Miss Kay’s former pupils has failed to recognise their adored teacher “in the shape of Miss Brodie *in her prime*” (CV 57 [my italics]). Despite her taste for a rather unoriginal art, Miss Brodie makes herself her own original work of art – and an original individual: Miss Brodie in her prime. However, at the end, she takes her prime as an absolute state of being, instead of a series of activities in her practice of art and in her life. Moreover, in the pursuit of her own originality, paradoxically, she comes to try to produce a copy of her self-image.

It is the excess proper to the great-heroine principles that makes Miss Brodie move from her grandeur to her absurdity. So original is she that she establishes an institution of original individuals, based on her originality. She not only turns herself into a great heroine standing above common nobodies, but also encourages her pupils to become heroines – “*original*” like

herself. Above all, she elects six girls to “the Brodie set.” Each of them, showing some “originality,” is famous for something – such as gymnastic ability, sex, extremely tiny eyes, and even, stupidity (the Brodie set is no elitist group by any conventional standard). The girls benefit by Miss Brodie’s excess in a shape of art, in a shape of pleasure, as it transfigures an ordinary life into an extraordinary drama. Because they are Miss Brodie’s girls, they become special: entitled to a more exciting and more exhilarating school life than any other girl’s and destined to form “one big Miss Brodie” (*PMJB* 91) – or to be her little copies.

Spark once said of her heroine, “completely unrealised potentialities – that’s what Jean Brodie represents” (I-3, 1970, 411). Jean Brodie is not only Spark’s character built up on the unrealised possibility but also the character who builds up herself on her “unrealised potentialities.” She practices her art in life to realise her unrealised potentialities – unrealised, also in a sense that she herself is unaware of – by instinct and insight. She acts more and more on this effect over the girls – and herself under this effect – to the extent that they look predestined to realise her unrealised potentialities. This, most lucidly, appears in her desire for seeing her possibility to be a great lover in one of her girls, Rose Stanley, whom she assigns to be “a girl of instinct.” Similarly, she assigns Sandy Stranger to be “a girl of insight,” who is expected to inform her about Rose’s accomplishment in her role. Miss Brodie declares, “my prime has brought me instinct and insight, both” (*PMJB* 95), for these girls are *hers*.

Here arises the controversy surrounding Spark’s heroine.

Miss Brodie has been often compared to a justified sinner (she elects herself to an object of art, a larger-than-life heroine) and even to the God of Calvin Himself (she elects her girls as well to their fate to be *hers* in practicing her art). The irony is that the general concern with *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* has been to judge Miss Brodie in the light of innocent and guilty, right and wrong, or good and evil while her popularity has justified her as a delightful work of art.⁹⁴ The moral concern with the controversial heroine has not much changed since criticisms in the 1970s. Those criticisms, more or less, repeat the argument constructed in the novel itself and also follow the view of Sandy Stranger, who is the most significant observer of Miss Brodie and her betrayer. The critics seem to have fallen into the same defective vision as Sandy's though they acknowledge that they cannot trust Sandy – “with her tiny eyes which it was astonishing that anyone could trust” (*PMJB* 89). However, a more contemporary theory might catch up with the significance of what this avant-garde artist started in her 1961 novel, including her argument in the field of ethics.

⁹⁴ For instance, David Lodge, pondering over whether she is “a good teacher or a bad teacher,” or “a good woman or a bad woman” (Lodge 161), explains how Miss Brodie “misapplies a private fiction” and “turns it into a myth” (Lodge 170). In short, her unawareness mixes up something false with something absolute. In this regard, he compares the heroine with her creator to suggest that Jean Brodie’s assuming the God-like omniscience is “dangerous,” but that of the author, who can tell a human plot from the divine plot, is “useful” (Lodge 170). He concludes that Miss Brodie is “a dangerously innocent one”: “dangerous and volatile because ignorant of real good and evil” (Lodge 171). In his skillful book, *Muriel Spark*, Peter Kemp too concedes that Spark had to face the problem, as Miss Brodie’s girls did: “Attempting authorship in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Sandy and Jenny were said to be faced with the problem of presenting their teacher in both a favourable and unfavourable light” (Kemp, 1974, 92).

Joan Copjec, through her reading of Lacan, comes up with an important suggestion at the end of *Read My Desire*: “Another logic of the superego must commence” for “an ethics proper to the woman” (Copjec, 1994, 236). In search of a new theory of sexual difference, Copjec meticulously examines Lacan’s formulas of sexuation⁹⁵ to demonstrate how Lacan has exposed the failures of language to represent the *existence* of both women and men on a different basis.⁹⁶ She takes notice of the analogy between “the Kantian account of the dynamical antinomies and the Lacanian account of the male antinomies” as they “both align themselves with the psychoanalytical description of the superego” (Copjec, 1994, 235). What she points out by this, in short, is a kind of sophistry, which makes a concept of a thing – such as the world, the male subject, and the superego – possible at the expense of its existence.

⁹⁵ A translation of this used by Copjec is as follows: The male side of the formulas – “There is at least one x that is not submitted to the phallic function” / “All x ’s are (every x is) submitted to the phallic function”; The female side – “There is not one x that is not submitted to the phallic function” / “Not all (not every) x is submitted to the phallic function” (Copjec, 1994, 214).

⁹⁶ Copjec starts with “The Female Side: Mathematical Failure,” in which she demonstrates the mode of logic in terms of the mathematical antinomies first given by Kant and how it is applied to discuss women (compared to phenomena of the world and signifiers themselves). Then she moves on to “The Male Side: Dynamical Failure” to reveal the other mode of logic that illegitimately affirms the existence of men. She interprets the impossibility to signify woman as the whole concept into the lack of a limit, endless differences of its being that escapes the system of signification within the system: the failure of “a judgment of existence” (Copjec, 1994, 225). Although she faithfully returns to Lacanian term, the Other, to say that “the woman is a product of a ‘symbolic without an Other’”; “She, or the symbolic that constructs her, is fraught with inconsistencies” (Copjec, 1994, 227), she seems to find this failure concerning the female side less negative than the prohibition to the existence of men. The whole concept of man is made possible by imposing a limit that excludes inconsistent and heterogeneous phenomena, that is, includes everything “*except being*” (Copjec, 1994, 231). The male subject, in short, is a big fraud: “the universe of men” is “an illusion fomented by a *prohibition*” (Copjec, 1994, 235).

To elucidate the phrase, “a fearful object of which we actually have no fear,” Copjec cites from Immanuel Kant, from his *The Critique of Judgment*:

He means that from our position in the phenomenal world, we can formulate only the *possibility* of this terrible force and not its *existence*, just as we can formulate only the possibility and not the existence of God, freedom, the soul. This possibility of a realm beyond, unlimited by our phenomenal conditions, is precisely dependent on the foreclosure of the judgment of existence.

(Copjec, 1994, 236)

She argues that the prohibitive father figure of the superego elevates itself to “this possibility of a realm beyond” in the same way. This unfigurable figure at once rules and escapes from the system of signification: “it merely imposes a limit that makes everything we do and say seem as naught compared to what we cannot” (Copjec, 1994, 236). The logic of the superego – denoting the prohibition to men and the impossibility to women – works to maintain the assumption of the existence of the male subject by imposing a limit, whereas it excludes woman from this limited universe of the possible. Since this logic has been led to “the notorious argument that presents woman as constitutionally indisposed to developing a superego and thus susceptible to an ethical laxity” (Copjec, 1994, 236), there needs to be a new logic.

As if to foresee developments of current theories decades before, Spark has long developed her own theory of individual difference – rather than sexual difference – for a new ethics proper

to any individual. In terms of demythologising and subverting the logic established on the psychoanalytical account of the superego, Miss Brodie is one of the best examples among her characters. The artist knows no failure of representation. Besides, she is a brilliant logician. One of Spark's characters in *Not to Disturb* points out, "When you say a thing is not impossible, that isn't quite as if to say it's possible"; "Only technically is the not impossible, possible," and another replies, "We are not discussing possibilities today" (ND 203). Nor is Spark. She returns her version of superego figure to the world of phenomena – the artist's own system of signification – by setting a symbolical time and a symbolical place. Representing unrealised possibilities and potentialities, Miss Brodie exists in her prime, on her stage.

Spark drags the unfigurable figure that is supposed to signify the unfigurable into the field of vision, most notably, in the figure of Lise, the heroine of *The Driver's Seat*. Lise represents the domain of the unconscious, the unknown desire, the inaccessible Other in her attempt to create her master narrative, in her death drive, and ends up a simulacrum. Although Miss Brodie too displays this dangerous side of excess, self-destruction, which Spark pursues in *The Driver's Seat*, this novel here focuses on "the prime" of Miss Brodie, the realised possibility in excess of life – in art practiced in life. With her unaware antinomianism and her excess, the figure of Miss Brodie apparently aligned herself with the superego. She has nothing but her belief in her excessive principles to authorise herself, and still, she has such a

great influence over the girls that “her actions were outside the context of right and wrong” (*PMJB* 77). Miss Brodie in her prime, unlike the inaccessible figure of Lise as a simulacrum, elevates herself to an object of art as her own original creation, the larger-than-life heroine to whom no moral laws apply.

Furthermore, (not unlike the “lack of moral concern” of Proust’s writings) “an excessive lack of guilt” of Miss Brodie – as her own artwork – is said to have “the side-effects” that are “exhilarating” (*PMJB* 77) to her girls.

What is really radical about *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is the artist’s attempt to change the way of looking at people, life, the world, rather than the controversy surrounding the “dangerous” Miss Brodie. In this novel Spark introduces the figure of the performer, an individual as effects and an artwork on the surface. For this idea, she develops on the essence of the individual, Miss Kay who was “the ideal dramatic instructor,” but “never acted at all” (*CV* 57), and integrates it into the broader view of what makes each individual. She provides a formation of individual – a possible version of a *natural* performer – in a dynamics of uncalculated effects; Miss Brodie produces, perceives, and responds to herself as such effects. Through the figure of this heroine, Spark criticises the ineffectiveness of judgment according to good and evil, and opens up a new dimension, namely, that of art, in the field of ethics. What she offers is the way of seeing things, as well as art in the light of intelligence and absurdity.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Spark states this clearly in one interview: “I don’t believe in good and evil so

That *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* as a radical experiment has been largely overlooked by no means invalidates Spark's careful device in the making of her most popular heroine, who is to appeal to intelligence – not to emotions called “profundity” – and also to give “pleasures” she mentions as follows:

I don't write very emotional novels but in describing emotions I tried to get across the pleasures of childhood especially, and this extraordinary school I went to.

(I-11, 1998, 229)

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, she produced all the “pleasures” she talks about here, and they have obviously entertained her readers. Nonetheless, whether the novel would appeal to intelligence or not, after all, had to rest with her reader's intelligence. It is useful to take a look at one of Spark's earlier experiments to reconsider the performer figure of Miss Brodie as a great invention to get across “the pleasures” without making the book an “emotional novel.” Spark has been always clear about her aim in each experiment and has got her economy to develop on any previous experiment in inventing a new one.

By the time when Spark wrote *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, she had rapidly and energetically produced five novels, each of them as a new experiment, for no more than several years. In terms of the theme of practitioners of art in life, *The Ballad of*

much any more. No one makes pacts with the Devil, as they did in the Middle Ages. Now, there is only absurdity and intelligence. I'm sure that whoever was responsible for that massacre in Bel Air had no sense of actually doing evil, but rather they were vindicating something which was precious to themselves. They had a code which they were vindicating. If we are intelligent, we will call it absurd” (I-5, 1970, 8).

Peckham Rye (1960) might be the most interesting and, though seeming unlikely, most relevant to *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. In *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, Spark explored her way of employing the scheme of the *nouveau roman*:

What I loved about Robbe-Grillet – I tried it of course in *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* and I think it came off – he would write a book without once saying “he or she thought” or “he or she felt.” Thoughts and feelings not mentioned but they are there: he mentioned only what they said and did. . . . It has a strange atmospheric effect.

With *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* I never once mention thoughts and feelings, only what people say and do.

(I-11, 1998, 216)

In addition to the effect of this scheme, she materialised the effect of art through a strangely protean character, Dougal Douglas, who functions to disturb the community of Peckham Rye and expose its residents as they are. He is catalytic in essence, like an embodiment of a “demon” inside an artist, as Fleur Talbot, the artist-heroine of *Loitering with Intent*, calls it: “a *demon* inside me that rejoiced in seeing people as they were” (LI 12).

Spark developed and combined the two effects – aesthetic (the *nouveau roman* scheme) and thematic (about the effect of art itself) – in the spectacle of Miss Brodie. Everything that is Miss Brodie is on the surface; what she says and what she does, and its effect, make Miss Brodie:

And it was not a static Miss Brodie who told her girls,
“These are the years of my prime. You are benefiting by

my prime”, but one whose nature was growing under their eyes, as the girls themselves were under formation. It extended, this prime of Miss Brodie’s, still in the making when the girls were well on in their teens. And the principles governing the end of her prime would have astonished herself at the beginning of it. (*PMJB* 42)

Unlike Dougal Douglas, who is the elusive, somewhat supernatural, *demon*-like figure, Miss Brodie is a concrete, individual woman in the making. She is “growing,” changing, but not in such a symbolically literal way as Dougal Douglas “changed his shape” (*BPR* 518), his part to play (or even his name to Douglas Dougal). And also, unlike him, what this woman rejoices in seeing is not people as they are, but herself as she is – as she appears on the surface.

Spark employs an acrobatic time shift, inserting flashforwards of different points of future into the present of the girls’ schooldays with Miss Brodie; her effect on girls and herself as the effect unfolds, interacting, growing, merging together in the making of the heroine. Seeming rather contrived at first glance, this time shift is essential and true to the title: the novel is about Miss Brodie performing in the present tense in her own on-going show, “The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie.” Those flashforwards, in which she is past her prime, “off stage,” and already ended, are thrown into like asides of her girls, and in effect, do not break the flow of the show. The flashforwards emphasise the lack of distinction between her performance and her life, and her figure as the uncalculated effect. To construct the rise and fall of the

heroine, its cause and effect – and the author does not think that chronology is causality, anyway – or a balanced view of her is not the primary concern of the novel. Nonetheless, the time shift efficiently works to integrate the argument as to judging Miss Brodie, with the girls who are inside the show and also her original audience. Among them, the narrative voice mainly refers to thoughts of Sandy Stranger, who forms and changes her view of Miss Brodie, responding to her changing effect.

Sandy's futile combat against Miss Brodie in terms of art is the vital structure of this novel. From the outset, while Miss Brodie casts her girls in her real-life scenario, Sandy and Jenny also cast and recast their teacher, and write "the true love story of Miss Jean Brodie" (*PMJB* 40). Outside the secret collaboration with Jenny, Sandy keeps observing, analysing, spying on her teacher. She has her own world of stories, largely learned from Miss Brodie, and in her mind she plays the part of the great heroine, largely mimicking Miss Brodie. Above all, like an apprentice artist, she studies her teacher's economy of art, and later, finds a similar method of an art teacher, Mr Lloyd, who cannot paint anybody's portrait without making his subject look like Miss Brodie:

Sandy was fascinated by the economy of Teddy Lloyd's method, as she had been four years earlier by Miss Brodie's variations on her love story, when she had attached to her first, war-time lover the attributes of the art master and the singing master who had then newly entered her orbit. . . . the most economical was the best . . . the

most expedient and most suitable at the time for all the objects in hand. Sandy acted on this principle when the time came for her to betray Miss Brodie. (*PMJB* 90)

Sandy is fascinated by Miss Brodie's "method of making patterns with facts" (*PMJB* 66) when her life story and her performance bloom with new elements: Mr Lloyd and Mr Lowther, the singing master. In fact, Mr Lloyd becomes Miss Brodie's renounced love, for he is married, a Catholic with his wife and many children, whereas she starts an affair with Mr Lowther, a shy bachelor who wants to have a cosy married life, which she does not want.

The change in Miss Brodie's practice of her art, which is accompanied by the change in Sandy's view of her, is signified by the development of Miss Brodie's love story, which is juxtaposed with the sex "research" by Sandy and Jenny. In addition to Miss Brodie as the main subject of their research, a wonderful policewoman, who questioned Jenny when she was frightened by a man exposing himself, enters into Sandy's world of stories. Sandy enjoys imagining herself as a right-hand woman to this policewoman in the investigation of Miss Brodie's affair. The new developments in Miss Brodie's story and in her own fantasy lead Sandy to be "divided between her admiration for the technique [Miss Brodie's economy of art] and the pressing need to prove Miss Brodie guilty of misconduct" (*PMJB* 66). Her ambivalence towards the teacher takes this new shape of conflict. This is about the time when Sandy perceives an "unfinished quality about Miss Brodie" (*PMJB* 65), who begins to show signs of a further development of her real life scenario – especially, the

sign of seeing herself in Rose. It is also the time when both Sandy and Jenny grow out of seeing everything in the sexual context, out of the interest in sex as a pure phenomenon: “it was now rather a question of plumbing the deep heart’s core” (*PMJB* 72).

Sandy persuades Jenny not to tell their teacher the incident of the man exposing himself – perhaps, fearing that her teacher might perceive her perception, which has resulted in her policewoman-fantasy of exposing Jean Brodie affair. Sandy is now interested in investigating Miss Brodie’s “deep heart’s core,” finding out her secret, secretly. As “a girl of insight,” in spite of her attempt to contradict Miss Brodie’s scenario by taking over Rose’s part to be Mr Lloyd’s lover, she improves her “original” part to be “an excellent Secret Service agent, a great spy” (*PMJB* 97), as Miss Brodie predicts. Instead of seeing Miss Brodie as effects, looking for a cause of this woman, she also turns into an amateur psychologist. She finds that “many theories from the books of psychology categorized Miss Brodie” (*PMJB* 105) – this, mentioned as if the author fended off such categorisation. Sandy compares Miss Brodie to the God of Calvin, makes her a case of psychoanalysis, and puts her into the context of right and wrong – to find out nothing. Rather, she blinds herself:

It was twenty-five years before Sandy had so far recovered from a creeping vision of disorder that she could look back and recognize that Miss Brodie’s defective sense of self-criticism had not been without its beneficent and enlarging effects; by which time Sandy had already betrayed Miss

Brodie and Miss Brodie was laid in her grave. (*PMJB* 77)
After all, in later years, when defeated Miss Brodie confides in Sandy, she reveals nothing that her spy and betrayer has not yet known or seen.

Sandy may well be jealous of the uncalculated effect Miss Brodie can achieve, as Frederick is exasperated by the similar effect Annabel – another natural performer – achieves in *The Public Image*. Sandy's betrayal is much smarter – and nastier – than the suicide plot of Annabel's jealous husband: she again mimics Miss Brodie, the economy of her art, to “put a stop to Miss Brodie” (*PMJB* 109). Sandy uses the fact informed by Miss Brodie herself: “sometimes I regretted urging young Joyce Emily to go to Spain to fight for Franco, she would have done admirably for him” (*PMJB* 108). The girl tried to practice the idea, and on her way to Spain, she was killed in the train when it was attacked. Sandy knows that her teacher's infatuation with Fascism is merely an absurd extension of her romantic vision, but she goes to Miss Mackay, the conventional headmistress, who has craved for any information to get rid of radical Miss Brodie. Sandy tells her that Miss Brodie teaches Fascism. Miss Brodie is defeated, her prime ends.

Does Sandy congratulate herself on the economy of her method in the betrayal? Mr Lloyd, not knowing her final betrayal, but being aware of how she had induced him to take her, instead of Rose, congratulated her on the economy of her counter plot against Miss Brodie's. Thinking of this art master, whose “canvases on which she had failed to put a stop to Miss Brodie”

(*PMJB* 109), she concludes, “if he knew about my stopping of Miss Brodie, he would think me more economical still,” and is “more fuming, now, with Christian morals, than John Knox” (*PMJB* 109). This echoes Spark’s Proust essay, which criticises “Christian creative writing” for its “attempt to combat materialism, [which] reflects a materialism of its own,” its own “dualistic attitude towards matter and spirit” due to the moral concern. Sandy judged and betrayed Miss Brodie by dragging her into the context of right and wrong. Sandy did so by placing herself outside of the context of right and wrong, which was what Miss Brodie’s uncalculated effect had achieved and was the very cause of Sandy’s betrayal. As if to come to terms with her own contradiction, Sandy enters the Catholic Church, and becomes Sister Helena, famous for “her odd psychological treatise on the nature of moral perception, called ‘The Transfiguration of Commonplace’”:

She clutched the bars of the grille as if she wanted to escape from the dim parlour beyond Sandy always leaned forward and peered, clutching the bars with both hands, and the other sisters remarked it and said that Sister Helena had too much to bear from the world since she had published her psychological book which was so unexpectedly famed. (*PMJB* 36)

Sandy’s practice of art in life does not take her anywhere but behind the bars of confinement.

“The Transfiguration of Commonplace” is, indeed, Miss Brodie, and also what she does for her girls. She is a liberating

work of art. She has her art to invent herself. The narrator tells that “It is not to be supposed that Miss Brodie was unique at this point of her prime” (*PMJB* 41), that she is just one of well-learned spinsters, “great talkers and feminists” (*PBJB* 42), in 1930s Edinburgh. However, she does not compromise on common options for the “war-bereaved spinsterhood” (*PMJB* 41). She becomes unmistakably Jean Brodie, by taking a risk, choosing a traditional school like Marcia Blaine’s, rather than progressive schools which would have been suitable for her kind, fighting all the way through. As well as fighting against Miss Mackay, Miss Brodie – “always a figure of glamorous activity” (*PMJB* 99) – on stage, grandly and gracefully, treads on her colleagues such as the appropriately gaunt Miss Gaunt and the two sewing sisters who represent “the effect of grim realism” (*PMJB* 54). She is an artist, “a changer of actuality into something else” (“DA” 33), in Spark’s words. Jenny testifies, “she was always so full of fight” (*PMJB* 110). Even Mary Macgregor, a scapegoat inside and outside the Brodie set (as she is “famous” for her stupidity), recalls her years with Miss Brodie as the happiest time that has “nothing to do with the ordinary world” (*PMJB* 19) in her disappointing life.

Miss Brodie gives the girls their own peculiar and beautiful Edinburgh evolving around her – different from “other people’s Edinburghs” (*PMJB* 34) – as well as herself in her prime: the woman as she is and the woman Sandy sees at times:

Sandy felt warmly towards Miss Brodie at those times when she saw how she was misled in her idea of

Rose. It was then that Miss Brodie looked beautiful and fragile, just as dark heavy Edinburgh itself could suddenly be changed into floating city when the light was a special pearly white and fell upon one of the gracefully fashioned streets. In the same way Miss Brodie's masterful features became clear and sweet to Sandy when viewed in the curious light of the woman's folly, and she never felt more affection for her in her later years than when she thought upon Miss Brodie as silly. (*PMJB* 98)

"Can't you see she's ridiculous?" (*PMJB* 107) – Sandy once nagged at the art master, and he admitted that he could see that she was ridiculous. Now, it is Sandy who must admit that she could see that she was ridiculous – and beautiful.

Sandy's "art" based on her cold-hearted logic is symbolised and summed up in "her odd psychological treatise on the nature of moral perception," which is what she can make of "the transfiguration of commonplace" practiced and represented by Miss Brodie. Unlike her teacher, she can make neither a great heroine nor an artist, not even a passionate art-lover. She ends up a nun clutching the bars of the grille, that is all she can invent for herself. When Jenny, at her visit to the convent, mentions Miss Brodie as "sinner," "'Oh, she was quite an innocent in her way,' said Sandy, clutching the bars of the grille" (*PMJB* 111). Miss Brodie's innocence proves to be dangerous to herself because she is ignorant of her jealous enemy within, Sandy the betrayer. As for Sandy, she defends herself very well against the charge of betrayal: "It's only possible to betray where loyalty is

due” (*PMJB* 111). Nevertheless, the defeat of Miss Brodie and Sandy’s confinement tell the ineffective effects of Sandy’s “art.”

Apart from Sandy’s betrayal, this seems to be the reason why the prime of Miss Brodie must go. In “The Desegregation of Art,” Spark talks about a “socially-conscious art,” which represents “the victim-oppressor complex” and involves its audience emotionally, arousing “the sympathies and the indignation” (“DA” 34). She argues against the cathartic effect of this kind of art, which makes the audience either “more determined than ever to be the overdog” or engrossed in “the heroic role of the victim” – “a cult of the victim” (“DA 35”). Even if the art is done brilliantly, she suggests:

we have to give up some of the good manifestations of art. Good things, when they begin no longer to apply, also must go. They must go before they turn bad on us. There is no more beautiful action than the sacrifice of good things at the intelligent season and by intelligent methods.
 (“DA” 34).

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie is Spark’s example of the effective art “at the intelligent season and by intelligent methods.” The charismatic teacher with her little fascisti compared both to Mussolini and a Girl Guides mistress causes a sense of absurdity, rather than public indignation at her tyranny. Her defeat causes a kind of disappointment at the end of a show, rather than sympathy. As for Miss Brodie’s socially *unconscious* art, for all its effect, it begins no longer to apply, since her “passionately held belief” –

“Belief is not intellectual” (I-10, 1985, 446) – pushes her to absurdity. For the sake of intelligence, “The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie” must go even though “It was a good prime” (*PMJB* 52). Spark, congratulating herself on her success, has simply repeated that she got bored with Miss Brodie. However, the creation of Alexandra the Abbess might be a kind of reply – if not reprisal – to Sandy’s moralistic judgment of Miss Brodie in her prime. Delightfully and delightedly styling herself a justified sinner, the Abbess is not innocent in the way Miss Brodie is, and is too happy with her convent – her stage and her creation – to clutch the bars of the grille.

“Think up your best scenarios, Sisters.”

– *The Abbess of Crewe*

“A Paradox You Live with”

In *The Abbess of Crewe*, for its epigraph, Spark cites from

“Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” by W. B. Yeats:

Come let us mock at the great . . .

Mock mockers after that

That would not lift a hand maybe

To help good, wise or great

To bar that foul storm out, for we

Traffic in mockery.

Here, it may be also fitting to cite Spark’s words concerning

“traffic in mockery” from “The Desegregation of Art”:

If someone derides me, I don’t like it. But at least I can begin to understand the mentality of mocker. I can mock back in such a way that he might understand mine. And so there may be room for a mutual understanding. But if he slides a knife between my ribs I’m unlikely to understand anything at all any more. (“DA” 35)

Therefore, we need the art of ridicule. Through *The Abbess of Crewe*, Spark demonstrates and proves how deadly and effective this honourable weapon is. And so does her heroine by the play she writes, directs, edits, and stars in.

Writing *The Abbess of Crewe*, apparently, Spark “had some fun with” transforming the Watergate episode into “a nun’s

quarrel over a thimble” (I-10, 1985, 444). Yet, she claims that the figure of Alexandra has little to do with Nixon, understandably, for her heroine is elected not only to be the new Abbess of Crewe, but also to carry out an artist’s task. Spark told her interviewer, “Nixon was very foolish in his handling of the thing, trying to cover it up and then all those tapes that came out – it was too hilarious for words” (I-10, 1985, 444). Then she put it all into her words in her hilarious novel to show off how a good artist can make a real spectacle of “a nun’s quarrel over thimble.” She sent Alexandra to carry out the artist’s task: “To bring about a mental environment of honesty and self-knowledge, a sense of the absurd and a general looking-lovely to defend ourselves from the ridiculous oppressions of our time, and above all to entertain us in the process” (“DA” 36-37). *The Abbess of Crewe*, as clear as “The Desegregation of Art,” is her manifesto in a fictional form.

The Abbey of Crewe scandal starts with a conspicuously trivial incident shortly before the election for the Abbess. Alexandra, “who brought to the community no dowry but her noble birth and shrewd spirit” (AC 264), and of whom late Abbess Hildegarde approved, and Sister Felicity, whose hope is to make “a love-Abbey” (AC 268) with her Jesuit lover, are the candidates. Alexandra has no doubt that she is to be the Abbess, which is her vocation. Nonetheless, she feasts herself upon “secret” operations for the election with her two reliable associates, Sister Walburga, the Prioress, and Sister Mildred, the Novice Mistress. Useful and stupid Sister Winifrede and two Jesuits serve her

purpose, too. The Jesuits send a couple of their young men to steal Felicity's love-letters, and they steal her thimble instead. As Felicity fusses over the theft of her thimble, this "scandal" draws so much attention from the press and the public that Alexandra is amazed and amused. In the end she succeeds in being elected the Abbess.

The figure of Alexandra emerges from some curious blend of the figures of Miss Brodie and Sandy Stranger, or rather, fills in the void of "mutual understanding" between them. Spark, who can create her character on the possibilities and potentialities of an actual person, might as well create another on those of her own fictional character. It is Sandy who seems to have some possibilities, potentialities, to be Alexandra – though they must have been enlarged a great deal to the grand and noble Abbess; nobody would dream of calling Alexandra by its diminutive, Sandy. With her skill in logic and her taste in spying, Sandy could have climbed up the hierarchical order of nuns to the tyrannical Abbess. Alexandra's command of language is characterised by her powers of logic – even more ruthless and colder than Sandy's – which, however, melt into her passion for poetry. In addition to this, Alexandra has Sister Gertrude – "my devout logician" (*AC* 304) – as her consultant and her foe, who is herself in line with the Sandy figure. For spying as well, Alexandra has her much advanced *intelligence*: her entourage and her modern electronic equipment for bugging, tapping and taping the Abbey. Her spirit is – neither petty nor mean – much shrewder and more ruthless than Sandy's. Nevertheless, if

Sandy had Alexandra's honourable weapon of ridicule, she need not have "assassinated" Miss Brodie ("If the authorities wanted to get rid of her she would have to be assassinated" (*PMJB* 15)).

Alexandra's association with Miss Brodie is a simple fact that each of them is a performer, an artist and an object of art. As her own original work of art, Miss Brodie cannot be more different from Alexandra – even an extreme opposite in terms of the author's view of the effective art. (A faint reminder of the romantic Miss Brodie can be found, rather, in Sister Felicity, with her propaganda for "love and freedom," with "her insufferable charisma" (*AC* 252).) Miss Brodie turns herself into a larger-than-life heroine, based on her passionate belief and in an uncalculated way, whereas Alexandra does so by her cool intelligence and in a well-calculated way. The difference in the awareness of their own effects provides a vital contrast between "innocent" Miss Brodie, betrayed – "assassinated" – and Alexandra with her armour of intelligence, unbetrayable and unslayable.

While Miss Brodie's excessive lack of guilt explains why she is innocent – or rather, ignorant – in her way, Alexandra's mockery at a sense of guilt makes her prepare for justifying any of her words and deeds. It is their lack of moral concern, though in different ways, that enables them to bring about a particular kind of innocence, to let their imagination and creativity playing freely. And it is the moral concern that has misled some critics to presume, for instance, that the theme of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is "certainly the loss of primal innocence" (Lodge 172).

David Lodge follows the reverential view he borrows from Frank Kermode – “the justified Miss Brodie presiding calmly over a lost innocence” (Kermode, 1963, 177) – and goes on to regard “Sandy’s nostalgia for a lost primal innocence” (Lodge 172) as the theme of the novel. However, all the joy evoked by the novel seems to point to something quite opposite – *innocence regained*.

So far as emotions are concerned, instead of evoking the nostalgia for a lost innocence, Spark brings back the innocence of childhood anew, with its pleasures and excitements, joys and wonders, both in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and in *The Abbess of Crewe*. In an interview in 1970, talking about *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, she compares children’s perception of things to artists’ and refers to a poem by Thomas Traherne, which expresses “intimations of immortality” (I-3, 1970, 411) in childhood. In another interview, again, she repeats Traherne’s verses and explains that childhood is important for an artist:

because everything seems so wonderful that you see everything as being new. There’s a poem of Traherne’s . . . that describes this feeling . . . “The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting.” It’s the most beautiful bit. The wonder of childhood, at seeing things, seeing a field of corn – the excitement over quite little things. *I suppose it’s probably something that’s clearer in retrospect . . .* (I-10, 1985, 443 [my italics])

Spark evokes these images of Traherne’s poem in the ending of

The Abbess of Crewe as Alexandra sets out on her new performance, her new adventure⁹⁸:

Our revels now are ended. Be still, be watchful.
She sails indeed on the fine day of her desire into waters exceptionally smooth, and stands on the upper deck, straight as a white ship's funnel, marvelling how the wide sea billows from shore to shore like that cornfield of sublimity which never should be reaped nor was ever sown, orient and immortal wheat. (*AC* 315)

The comparison between artist and children in discovering marvels is not a new idea. For instance, a writer (whose works have nothing similar to Spark's) such as J.R.R. Tolkien theorises this idea in his essay on fairy stories: "We should look at green again, and be startled anew" for "a re-gaining – regaining of a clear view" (Tolkien 49). Here, then, appears Spark's particular focus on the merit of adult's mature view in this "regaining" – something that's *clearer* in retrospect. She seems to praise an intelligence acquired through experiences more than an innocence of childhood, since it is by the intelligence that an artist not only gains a clearer view of things, but also gives an expression to creative imagination playing upon this view.

In *The Abbess of Crewe*, the regained innocence – where imagination meets intelligence – makes Alexandra to be at once terrifying and joyful, and a woman who can keep inventing herself as her own object of art – with her ever clearer view of

⁹⁸ The paragraph opens with the first line of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Act IV, Scene I.

herself: self-knowledge. The Abbess of Crewe is not merely a position she obtains by unsurprisingly beating Sister Felicity, but also her creation. With her hyper-self-awareness, her self-referentiality as her own artwork – “I am become an object of art, the end of which is to give pleasure” (AC 313) – Alexandra can be called a postmodern subject.

Alexandra satisfies Spark’s definition of the effective art by her work of art, “The Abbess of Crewe” –and *The Abbess of Crewe*, its unabridged version. In this novel that employs the present-tense narrative, one paragraph written in the present perfect is added as an epilogue:

She has given the orders for the selection and orchestration of the transcripts of her tape-recordings. She has gathered her nuns together before Compline. “Remove the verses that I have uttered. They are proper to myself alone and should not be cast before the public. Put ‘Poetry deleted’. Sedulously expurgate all such trivial fond records and entitle the compilation *The Abbess of Crewe*.” (AC 315)

On the whole, the narrative voice perfectly matches Alexandra’s in its style and its contents. Glorifying her figure without reservation and relentlessly mocking her nuns, this voice is satirical, harsh and witty, ironic and derisive, and elegant – the qualities of the effective art given by Spark.

The novel occasionally employs free indirect style, and in a way it shows a gesture of affirmation of Alexandra’s subjectivity, underlining this heroine as a character and an author. These free

indirect speeches in Alexandra's exalted tone tell that she knows what she is doing, namely, practicing her art: "What a piece of work is her convent, how distant its newness from all the orthodoxies of the past, how far removed in its antiquities from those of the present!" (AC 246). The author endows the heroine with her own command of language, as well as her intelligence. Besides, Alexandra is omniscient; she has her nunnery bugged and videotaped – except for the confessionals.

Why not the confessionals? – "Strange as it may seem, I thought well to omit any arrangement for the confessionals" (AC 246), says the Abbess, without giving any reason. She is most unlikely to take any interest in sins – terrible secrets – of her lesser nuns, but, apart from that, she may share her creator's sceptical idea of secrets.

In an interview in the year of the publication of *The Abbess of Crewe*, Spark suggested that the Watergate scandal, side by side with her recollection of her job at the Foreign Office and her experience of being "blackmailed," had put things together to make "her realise what secrets are" (I-7, 1974, 10). Compared with the Watergate business, she might again admire Sefton Delmer's operation of psychological warfare at the Foreign Office: the world of Black Propaganda in which she played a little part in the last year of the war. There she learnt to use a green-painted telephone, "scrambler," to gather information from the Allied spokesman. The Black Propaganda was a tremendously impressive art of deception, gathering information, inventing lies based on facts, and sending them to a German radio station to

demoralise the enemies. Then, there is the famous story of Spark's refusal to buy back the love letters, which she had written to Derek Stanford and this man sold to a dealer. The story begins with her shrieking, "Oooh!" "Blackmail!" and ends with her finding that the letters are "mostly about Wordsworth" (I-7, 1974, 10). There were no embarrassing or shocking secrets she would have liked to keep to herself.

The power of secrets lies in a myth, a belief, that they are some hidden truth *nobody else knows*, and if nobody knows, they might as well be lies, fictions, returning to their own myth.⁹⁹ The other side of the myth of secrets is the idea of open secrets: truths known to anybody, but believed to be unknown – a fake innocence, or ignorance, in other words. As to how "The Americans created a great big national thing of" the Watergate episode, Spark remarked, "if they lived in Europe and knew about corruption – all governments are corrupt – they would realize that it was like a nun's quarrel over a thimble" (I-10, 1985, 444). Implying that they behaved as if they had known nothing about corruption, there seems to be a subtle criticism of their naïveté, or hypocrisy – whether aware or unaware – in her tone.

In *The Abbess of Crewe*, to symbolise the art of war around secrets and lies, "scrambler" returns as a green line, which connects Alexandra to Sister Gertrude, who is always away in

⁹⁹ Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana* (1958), is a funny and witty novel about this idea. The main character, Mr Wormold, selling vacuum-cleaners at his shop, is hired as a secret agent in Havana to send secret information to MI6. Taking his friend's advice, "If it is secret enough, you alone know it. All you need is a little imagination" (Greene 57), he begins to send fake stories, which haphazardly come true, thanks to others' belief in them.

some uncivilised corner of the world for her mission. Both the press, who exploit – like a dealer – the much ado about no secret, and the public, who buy it, are cast as “the chorus” (AC 254) in Alexandra’s scenario. As for her nuns and confessionals, she may well presume that they are too transparently stupid to have any secret and that, in the first place, they are incapable of committing any sin which is good enough to confess. Although she bugs everywhere else, all the tapes and videotapes for her are not merely to gather information, but, more essentially, to gather materials for her piece of work, “*The Abbess of Crewe.*”

What Spark, and her heroine, offer is indeed a very aggressive way to “a mutual understanding”: “Traffic in mockery.” Alexandra practices her art of ridicule to defend herself from enemies, understand them – almost internalise them – mock and offend them. Inside the Abbey, her nuns, including Felicity, who are eternally mocked, are no enemies: their timid hypocrisy is an easy target of her ridicule. She can negotiate and manipulate the outside world – the public, the police or the media – quite effortlessly, too. Sister Gertrude is her only possible enemy, an invisible companion of the justified sinner, and her own kind – her favourite verse goes: “I am homesick after mine own kind.” Creating Alexandra, Spark had politically powerful and important Abbesses in the Middle Ages in her mind. Especially, “The German Abbesses [who] were great scholars” (I-7, 1974, 10) also seem to merge with a kind of Kissinger figure (Spark was rather intent on making him her character) in the richly complex figure of Sister Gertrude. While Gertrude engages in her

somewhat dubious mission anywhere far from Rome, Alexandra's main aim is revelling in rebelling against the Vatican – a figure of ultimate authority. Alexandra's paradoxical figure is likened not to the fallen angel, but to "blessed Michael the Archangel" (*AC* 310). Come let us mock at the great . . .

Spark observed, "Nixon had been carrying on according to the old Benedictine rule, whereby what the superior has said is the justification for everything," and asks, "What other authority had he?" (*I-7*, 1974, 10). Transforming "the big national" scandal of the male politicians into a nun's quarrel over a thimble is a hilarious idea even for the commonplace expectation that those who represent authority are subverted by, presumably, being *diminished* into nuns. What has turned out to be really hilarious about this novel is that such figure of authority is at once ridiculed and magnified by the formidable Abbess, who is not to be ridiculed herself. Spark's heroine loves to stick to the old Benedictine rule: what she has said is the justification for everything. Playing a part of her nuns' authority, Alexandra announces, "The ages of the Father and of the Son are past. We have entered the age of the Holy Ghost" (*AC* 247). As a woman and an artist, for whom the Holy Ghost is one of proper representations, can she get rid of the paternal figure of authority and surpass it by her own figure? And then, how has the paternal figure represented itself in relation to its authority?

The Americans' outcry against Nixon, the guilty master whose justification was liquidated with the self-authorised authority, appears to contrast with their love for Reagan. In

psychoanalytical terms, however, they become one and the same father who interdicts excess enjoyment. The law of power such as represented by Nixon's groundless authority can be also instituted by Reagan as the impotent master – under the name of democracy. In her elaborate argument on democracy in America, Copjec links Reagan, the “innocent” and fallible master, to Freud's concept of the ideal father.¹⁰⁰ To examine the particular kind of totalitarianism following democracy as a modern form of power, she detects “America's sense of its own ‘radical innocence’” (Copjec, 1994, 146) in its belief in democracy. Of numerous paradoxes of democracy, Americans confront their paradoxical relation to their master, whose universalising role of representing them inevitably abolishes individual differences – which democracy is supposed to promise. Therefore, Copjec suggests, they solve this dilemma by choosing the ideal father, the impotent father, whose *failure to respond* to their *demand* on it to represent them, paradoxically, saves their differences, lets them be indeterminate.¹⁰¹

A society governed by the law of the ideal father, “founded on a nonrecognition of the contradictions it contains” cannot last

¹⁰⁰ In *Totem and Taboo* (1912-1913), Freud explains the shift from the primal father to the ideal father in the parricide scenario: the band of brothers – exiled sons – kill and devour the father, by which each of them equally identify himself with the powerful father, and then installs the ideal father that represents the absence of the primal father. Freud reads the repressed wishes of the Oedipal scenario in the totem meal, the sacrifice of sacred animal in place of the dead father, and the incest taboo, the interdiction that fends off conflicts among the brothers to maintain their equality and the new installment.

¹⁰¹ Copjec lays stress on “the differential between demand and response” (Copjec, 1994, 150), analysing Americans' love for their master in Lacanian terms the object *a* – something absolute and indeterminate, which the Other is but does not have, and which keeps the subject's desire alive.

forever, and the primal father returns. Copjec's point is that this totalitarianism coming back with the primal father is "a specifically modern form of power . . . because it is dependent on the democratic revolution's privileging of the individual, of the people rather than the king, or some other leader" (Copjec, 1994, 158). She makes this point as a significant insight into politics, into the modern forms of power, enabled by Lacanian psychoanalysis (which she defends here against Foucault).

While she deftly returns to Freud according to her purpose, Slavoj Žižek argues something similar, though from a very different angle and with a very different focus, in fully Lacanian terms.

The figure of father appears as an even more complicated and phantasmagoric construction in the section titled "Fathers, Fathers Everywhere" in Žižek's brief study, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway* (2000). He discusses two films, Roberto Benigni's *Life Is Beautiful*, in which an Italian-Jewish father protects his son from an unbearable reality of a concentration camp by turning it into a fantasy game, and Thomas Vinterberg's *Celebration*, which describes a brutal rapist father. He parallels Benigni's maternal, benevolent father to Vinterberg's father, who represents a lawless enjoyment as "*the ultimate guarantee that there is somewhere full, unconstrained enjoyment*" (Žižek, 2000, 31). In a perverse way, the violent father too protects his children from the real horror of the lack of enjoyment. Žižek then points out: "What is missing is the father as the bearer of symbolic authority, the Name of the Father, the prohibitory 'castrating' agency that enables the subject's entry

into the symbolic order, and thus into the domain of desire. The two fathers, imaginary and real, are what is left over once the paternal symbolic authority disintegrates” (Žižek, 2000, 31). Not unlike Copjec, he finds “strangely de-realized or, rather, de-psychologized subjects, as if we were dealing with robotic puppets” (Žižek, 2000, 31) in the aftermath of this disintegration of “the paternal symbolic authority.”

The difference between Nixon and Reagan is, indeed, a moral matter, and Spark would see them in the same position from her ethical view. In her novel, Alexandra carries on the old Benedictine rule, as Nixon did. But then, Alexandra is also an actress, who excels professional actors (such as Reagan), and puts on what coincides with Reagan’s “psychological make-up”: “the unwillingness to ‘meddle’ in administrative affairs, the inability or unwillingness to recall details” (Copjec, 1994, 147). Only with her word, she plays an “innocent” part, since she perfectly understands what game she is playing: all that matters is her word. Playing a power game, she translates it into its most proper form: a language game, for a structure of power is to correspond to a structure of language. Language – whatever it is represented by itself: the Other, the symbolic order, the law of the father – is self-authorized power. Alexandra studies the illogical logic of power to gain powers of logic; she learns how to handle paradoxes of power – paradoxes of language made by and in itself – to enmesh this power in its own paradoxes by her art. She presents all the paradoxes in theory and in practice, following Gertrude’s “very short seminar”: “A paradox you live with” (*AC* 258).

Entering the Abbey of Crewe, where Alexandra insists on observing the ancient Benedictine rules and learning uses of modern technological equipment (except for its purpose), the nuns enter into the symbolic order of Alexandra's own. To Winifrede, her scapegoat, she declares, "I'm your conscience and your authority. You perform my will and finish" (*AC* 246), without any conscience or any belief in her own authority – she calls it "My tyranny" (*AC* 270), as it is. She uses her pretence of innocence, her "hypocrisy," to attack the hypocrisies and snobberies of those who are on moral high ground with the idea of conscience and piety, of democracy which is akin to "bourgeois individualism."

In the middle of the Abbey scandal, waiting for the imminent election for the Abbess, Alexandra contrives her formidable speech. She tells the nuns, "I am exhorted to appeal to your higher instincts" (*AC* 291), referring to this as Sister Gertrude's advise, which in fact is to appeal to their "lower instincts." She goes on to make a distinction between "a Lady" and "a Bourgeoise": "A Lady may secretly believe in nothing; but a Bourgeoise invariably proclaims her belief, and believes in the wrong things"; "A Lady is free; but a Bourgeoise is never free from the desire for freedom" (*AC* 292). She implies that all the distinction is applied to that between Alexandra and Felicity, and that "a Lady" is to be aspired to, in a way even the dimmest nun can perceive the implications. Thus, she campaigns for herself while she clearly pronounces that nuns including herself should not participate in any campaign and each of them will have to vote

“according to her own conscience” (AC 290). Mildred rightly remarks, “You struck the right note, Alexandra. Novices and nuns alike, they’re snobs to the core” (AC 292).

At the end of her speech, Alexandra states, “I don’t speak of morals, but of ethics. Our topics are not those of sanctity and holiness, which rest with God; it is a question whether you are ladies or not, and that is something *we* decide” (AC 292). If this sounded like blackmail – if not voting for Alexandra the Lady, you are not a lady – to the nuns, that is the problem of their conscience, of their proclaimed belief – they may believe in the wrong things. If they had a clear moral conscience, they could not feel blackmailed. Therefore, Alexandra herself has no problem with her conscience. She takes advantage of their hypocrisy that they are subject to the religious doctrines and the moral standards lest that they should feel a sense of guilt. She manipulates the nuns on this sense of guilt implanted by their authorities who have set those rules while she discredits such higher authorities in her own view. Similarly, she aims at the nuns’ snobbery by using the Lady/Bourgeoise distinction, which is just a figure of speech. She titillates the nuns’ bourgeois individualism, which does not recognise their class consciousness in their idea of democracy. Besides, she is not so democratic as to believe that people can be ladies equally by birth, as “a Bourgeoise” evidently alludes to Felicity – whose birth is in fact as noble as her own.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Fleur Talbot in *Loitering with Intent* gives an example of Spark’s use of the word “democratic.” Fleur says of one Sir Quentin: “His snobbery was immense. But there was a sense in which he was far too democratic for the likes of me. He

Alexandra's speech appeals to the nuns' lower instincts, as is expected. However, it could have appealed to their higher instincts (as she claims), only if they had any. Literally, she tells no lie, and she means all that she says, whether it appeals to higher instincts or lower instincts. Speaking of ethics, she speaks of freedom: there is something *we* decide. By one speech, Alexandra finishes Felicity off with her campaign for love and freedom and becomes the Abbess of Crewe.

For Felicity's followers – sewing nuns with no imagination or intelligence – her cheap fantasy of “a love-Abbey” was a sufficient idea of enjoyment, and skipping the services and running off to sleep with her Jesuit, as well, might be a sufficient idea of freedom. However, they already displayed their discontent – “a trace of individualism at long last” (*AC* 282) – about her disproportionate fury at the theft of her thimble. Then Alexandra puts her “love and freedom” campaign in its place, by cunningly suggesting that it is simply un-ladylike morals. In her conversation with her closest nuns, Alexandra sums up Felicity:

Her sewing-box is her alpha and her omega, not to mention her tiny epsilon, her iota and her omicron. For all her talk, and her mooney Jesuit and her pious eyelashes, it all adds up to Felicity's little sewing box, the norm she departs from, the north of her compass. (*AC* 262)

Alexandra points out why Felicity's campaign is impossible: “One who has never observed a strict ordering of the heart can never

sincerely believes that talent, although not equally distributed by nature, could be later conferred by a title or acquired by inherited rank” (*LI* 20).

exercise freedom” (*AC* 262). There is no desire where there is no repression, in psychoanalytical terms. But then, celibacy is not written in Alexandra’s orders. To her, sex is only a practical matter, and so she has hit on an idea of restoring the traditional system of having lay brothers, instead of domestic nuns, to provide her nuns with “each her Jesuit” (*AC* 272).

In her own symbolic order, Alexandra cunningly performs the role of authority. When Alexandra forces frightened Winifrede to sign the confession, she calmly and threateningly accuses her: “I would be quite horrified to think you had been a hypocrite all these years and hadn’t meant them”:

“Even the Pope,” says the Abbess, “offers the very same damaging testimony every morning of his life; he admits quite frankly that he has committed sins exceedingly all through his own grievous fault. Whereupon the altar boy says: “May almighty God have mercy on you.” And all I am saying, Winifrede, is that what is good enough for the Supreme Pontiff is good enough for you. Do you imagine he doesn’t mean precisely what he says every morning of his life?” (*AC* 310)

As a matter of fact, Alexandra brings forward the charge of being either a hypocrite or a sinner, against the Pope himself. Her language is constructed on her recognition of contradictions of authorised power, and she chooses her logic according to not only people she addresses, but also each of their relationships with their authorities. The consciously tyrannical Abbess composes a shrewd parody of the authorial figure to each of them in her own

authorial figure.

The Abbess of Crewe is the figure that neither interdicts nor commands excess enjoyment, but is excess enjoyment. Her language is the language of art, as she says, "I'm in love with English poetry, and even my devotions take that form, as is perfectly valid in my view" (*AC* 305). Her Abbey, her creation, to which she devotes herself, is to take the form of art – even though deleting her loved verses by great poets of past. She calls this art from that is "based on facts" scenarios: "A good scenario is a garble. A bad one is a bungle. They need not be plausible, only hypnotic, like all good art" (*AC* 302). Her language of art is her art of war, which needs no justification but her words, her myth:

Garble is what we need, now, Sisters. We are leaving the sphere of history and are about to enter that of mythology. Mythology is nothing more than history garbled; likewise history is mythology garbled and it is nothing more in all the history of man. (*AC* 300)

Entering into the symbolic order of Alexandra is entering into her scenario, in which all nuns play *themselves*, and they are supposed to know "the Eyes of God are upon us" (*AC* 279). Of the practice of the three-hourly ritual strictly observed in the Abbey, Alexandra says:

It is absurd in modern times that the nuns should have to get up twice in the middle of the night to sing the Matins and the Lauds. But modern times come into a historical context, and as far as I'm concerned history doesn't work.

Here, in the Abbey of Crewe, we have discarded history.
We have entered the sphere, dear Sisters, of mythology.
My nuns love it. Who doesn't yearn to be part of a myth
at whatever the price in comfort? (*AC* 251)

“An unconscious sense of guilt” (Freud, 1907, 123) Freud detects in religious practices in his “Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices” (1907) may apply to many nuns, but not to Alexandra. Her joy in the practice is visible – “How lyrically move her lips in the tidal sway of the music!” (*AC* 307) – and she includes her nuns in it, whether they like it or not. In her logic, this practice is an absurd excess and a pleasure, rather than a rule, and in Catholic terms, indeed, “interdict” means an order not to join those services.

Consciously tyrannical though she is, Alexandra enjoys her sisterhood with her loyal nuns. Although Walburga and Mildred show some fear of Alexandra's art, the excess to make themselves of a myth, they collaborate in her creation, resting their hopes on her. They chose her art to articulate and realise their excess dreams, to which sexual scenarios of desire do not apply. Walburga gained her strength, “her virginity of heart” (*AC* 263), by educating herself through her lovers, invariably greatly learned men, in her youth. Mildred rejected Felicity's Jesuit lover, who first fancied her, because her dreams “ran far ahead of the Jesuit, far beyond him” (*AC* 264). Thus, the three nuns come to entertain themselves “in such an evident happiness of shared anxiety that they seem not to recognize the pleasure at all” (*AC* 264). After Alexandra's triumphant speech, “they join hands,

the three black-draped nuns, Walburga, Alexandra and Mildred. They dance in ring, light-footed; they skip round one way then turn the other way” (AC 293).

Even though there is no guarantee of loyalty to Walburga and Mildred on the part of Alexandra (who is ready to scapegoat Winifrede), Gertrude seems to supply some contrast to the Abbess with her female community. Gossiping about “Blessed Mother Gertrude,” the three nuns agree that she “should have been a man” with “her moustache,” “bursting with male hormones” (AC 256). When pestered with Gertrude’s “should nots” and “ought nots,” Alexandra airily points out the gap in her logic: it is not dissimilar to that of the papal – paternal – authority with its moral system, of which Gertrude is disdainful. In the last call, Alexandra defeats her “devout logician” and philosopher by telling her that she is going to Rome to “plead her cause” (AC 313), bringing with her the nuns’ *Confiteor*. Gertrude is quick to respond to Alexandra, knowing what she is up to: “I am outraged . . . to hear you have all been sinning away in Crewe, and exceedingly at that, not only in thought and deed *but also in word*” (AC 314 [my italics]). Indeed, that is Alexandra’s point, as she happily replies, “Yes, we have that in the confessions, Gertrude, my trusty love. *O felix culpa!*” (AC 314) – O happy fault.

Alexandra’s scenario and herself as an object of art have proved to be good art, giving pleasure and successfully hypnotising. When she went on television, it “was a complete success while she lasted on the screen”; “The audience goggled with awe at this lovely lady” (AC 312). The hypnotising effect

worked on the bishops of the English Catholic Church: they had got “soothed feelings” at their meeting, but later they had “a curious sense of being unable to recall what explanation Alexandra had given” (*AC* 313). They can wait for the publication of transcripts of her tapes and likely staging and screening it, though. Alexandra’s nuns are working on editing the tapes, following her orders. Reviewing these tapes, they may have a sense of guilt, or a chance of self-knowledge – or a joy in having become a part of the myth. Alexandra is on her way to the next act, to play herself anew through her clearer consciousness, for she is not subject to anybody else’s symbolic order. She is an object of art and a subject who commands her own language: a postmodern subject who invents herself.

CHAPTER VIII

ENDINGS

“As we go through this evening and into tonight...”

– *The Finishing School: Conclusion*

For nearly half a century, wishing to liberate the mind and liberate the novel, Muriel Spark has written twenty-two novels. With her latest novel, *The Finishing School* (2004), just off the press, the now eighty-six-year-old artist looks back at – and talks about “looking back” – her life and her art:

With hindsight, . . . which is a wonderful thing, I could rewrite my life entirely. I can see motives that I couldn't see at the time for having done things. I can see very good motives, very good reasons, why I acted as I did.

Generally speaking, I must say I approve of what I did. I often look back and think, “Should I have done that?” I think, “Given the circumstances, yes I should.” And also, you know, looking back – if one must look back – it's sometimes good to look back – one can over-simplify.

(I-13, 2004)

In the same confident manner, she also approves of what she wrote. She speaks of her conviction that she has actually done what she has always wished to do by her writings:

I believe I have liberated the novel in many ways . . . showing how anything whatsoever can be narrated, any

experience set down, including sheer damn cheek. I think I have opened doors and windows in the mind, and challenged fears – especially the most inhibiting fears about what a novel should be. (I-13, 2004)

Spark's tone is simply factual in her retrospection and in her response, too, to the speculation that *The Finishing School* could be her last novel – probably it would be, maybe it is, she thinks, though not quite with an air of the Last Judgment, as she has another new novel at hand (she feels lonely without a novel, she claims).

Spark is not affected by a thought of the end, but she has given a great deal of thought to the end, this problematic concept. The theme of the end is apparent in her new novel she titled *The Finishing School*,¹⁰³ and her poet's accuracy is always applied to the whole novel, indeed, including its title: the very first one or few words to herald her themes both most clearly and mysteriously. In her latest novel, looking back on life, art, and this postmodern world, Muriel Spark tells her version of history of today, of here and now – with hindsight.

Seeing things from the end – the phrase Lorna Sage chose for the title of her review on Spark's *Symposium* (1990) would gain the novelist's approval for its pertinence not only to this particular novel, but also to her general concern. Sage's emphasis on "the geometrical and end-directed nature" (Sage, 1990, 278) of her

¹⁰³ The title of this novel was reported to be *The Mobile Finishing School* in an interview by Gillian Bowditch in 2001.

novel points to something totally different from a certain “mainstream” criticism, which has often linked the “end-directed nature” of Spark’s fiction to an authorial knowledge of the end in terms of religious transcendence. Sage’s point is that the artist’s interest is closely tied to events in life and in this world, which she sees from the end and rewrites to open up a new perspective – another dimension. No matter how palpably the configuration of destiny is felt in her fiction, she is not trying to evoke a pious view or awe of Providence. Sage’s remark that “Muriel Spark these days is cutting corners, looking back, re-writing herself” (Sage, 1990, 278) does not merely refer to autobiographical pieces such as *Loitering with Intent* (1981) and *A Far Cry from Kensington* (1988). This, lightly touching on the relation between high economy of Spark’s writing and her hindsight, curiously corresponds with the writer’s rather enigmatic understatement, “one can over-simplify” by looking back.

Sage’s review title sounds like a rare piece of good advice from the critic endowed with what Spark calls “a literary sense.”¹⁰⁴ It is useful, following her words, to see things from the

¹⁰⁴ In her autobiography Spark explains this idea of “literary sense” as a kind of sixth sense, saying, “it was by this ‘sense’ that one should judge literature” (CV 138). Here, I might add a fact for a general interest – though it is not my concern here – in Spark’s attitude to psychoanalysis. Spark conceived the idea of literary sense, triggered by her literary discussion with Marie Bonaparte, Freud’s prominent pupil, at the time of their intellectual friendship in Southern Rhodesia. (Spark later met Anna Freud, too, in London for her mission to carry a letter from Marie Bonaparte.) Marie Bonaparte’s approach to literature from a psychological point of view was new to her then. Spark was “intrigued,” but she “felt it left too much unsaid” (CV 138), and she named what lacks from this approach “a literary sense.” At her remark, “I’m really not very versed in Freud” (I-11, 1998, 218), one may wonder how much she actually knows. She came to know a few things about psychoanalysis and, it seems, she decided that she did not need it. I think she can work out subject matters, which both her fiction and psychoanalysis deal with, on

end, to look back to her talk with Spark in 1976. Here is her observation of this writer almost fifteen years before the publication of *Symposium*:

It's worldliness that enables her to absorb public events, and "do" fashions in feeling almost before they've happened. What's hard to take is not any literary remoteness, but simply her attitude to human failing -- which she described (gently, amusedly, bleakly) as "a lack of expectancy." (I-8, 1976, 11)

What intrigued Sage at that time was the compatibility of Spark's ability to "do" fashions in feeling almost before they've happened" with her serene acceptance of "a lack of expectancy," human failing which does not exclude the writer herself. Both in Spark's novelistic world and in the real world, while mindless masses of people are left behind by the times, the artist illuminates the present and even farther ahead. This is not only to say that the artist's mind, ever so quick, never fails to keep pace with the times, but also to say that her art, ever so *avant-garde*, never fails to find a new shape to represent it. The significance of Lorna Sage's observation now emerges more clearly: in a similar way each new novel by Spark adds a new, clearer picture to her previous works. And again in her review, her grasp of "the geometrical and the end-directed nature" of Spark's novel, indicating its pure form which has something similar to a mathematical precision, proves itself to be valuable.

The year of Sage's interview, which reported that Spark

her own, and she does.

found herself having become “more historically-minded” (I-8, 1976, 11), saw the publication of *The Takeover* (1976). This novel is one of earliest examples that articulate the world entering the postmodern phase (therefore, “the passing of an era” (*T* 9), too), as Rod Mengham claims in his article, “1973 The End of History: Cultural Change According to Muriel Spark” (1999). Around this time, the 1970s onward, what became more and more visible was a change in how Spark represents the *reality* of the world by bringing about a different dimension, or “supernatural” elements. She began to let postmodern phenomena present itself as something supernatural – hyper-reality of reality. With every kind of virtual reality trafficking in endless information, simulacra, and reified objects including people, her characters begin to suffer their own illusions of destiny, rather than mysterious agents from another sphere, mysterious voices that dictate destiny.

Another suggestive fact in Sage’s conversation with Spark is that the writer then had an idea for her new novel: a story of a foresighted Celt in the Dark Ages. This story, in fact, was to come up much later and indirectly in *Reality and Dreams* (1996),¹⁰⁵ but the essence of the idea, though differently, was spelled out in *The Takeover*. As the postmodern era has arrived with the collapse of grand narratives, of concepts of the authentic or the original, many characters in *The Takeover* cling to, or resort to the past, seeking for lost myths of origin – and an illusory

¹⁰⁵ The idea appears as its film-director character’s idea for his film, which renders a Celt into a legendary prophet figure, who is “sent mad by complete knowledge of the future, and yet with little control over his own life” (*RD* 132), as is referred to in Chapter V.

knowledge of end, of destiny, on its reverse side – to recycle, like everything else. In Spark’s fiction, apart from recycled myths or self-made grand narratives, the legendary Celt’s foresight leads nowhere. If not tragedy, madness is what Spark associates with “foresight,” namely, the illusion of destiny, like the legend of the soothsayer itself. It is delusions of identifying oneself with destiny, elevating oneself beyond human condition, which Spark deals with harshly and ruthlessly, whereas she treats “a lack of expectancy,” this human failing, “gently, amusedly, bleakly,” as Sage precisely described.

Spark is not one who tries to or wishes to assume the role of prophet. Even when she sends supernatural voices of destiny into lives of characters in her earlier novels, such voices do not come as authorial power to condemn her creations to destiny. For instance, in *The Comforters* (1957), the heroine is to liberate herself from her painful experience of hearing typing sounds accompanied by voices that prescribe her life; in *Memento Mori* (1959), a group of old people receive anonymous telephone calls telling them “Remember you must die,” and the reminder of death is to intensify the awareness of what they have at the present moment, life. For the artist, to live and write here and now, a lack of expectancy is something to come to terms with, and hindsight is a wonderful thing – with which she can rewrite her life entirely.

In her review, crisp and all to the point, Ali Smith rightly remarks, “*The Finishing School* is its own historical novel” (Smith). In

this contemporary history written by Spark, the finishing school of the title – named College Sunrise – is “by its foundation, free and mobile” (*FS* 117), floating in a frame of misty sky. Rowland Mahler and his wife, Nina, run the school presently on the fees of nine pupils from wealthy European families. Since Nina largely looks after their business, Rowland is allowed to dedicate most of his time to writing a novel, which is his ambition – though his novel has been unmaterialised for a few years. Now, he is disturbed by one of the pupils, a “threat” to his creative writing: seventeen-year-old, red-haired Chris, who is also writing a novel, a historical novel about Mary Queen of Scots, with easy self-assurance. Rowland’s “writer’s block” turns into “jealousy.” Inside the small school, a process of creative writing, of finishing a novel, revolves on a psychodrama between the pair of would-be novelists. As this drama unfolds, Nina, among others, keeps watching the dark cloud of tension, fearfully waiting some catastrophe to come, waiting her speculation “to be possible, quite probable, altogether real” (*FS* 32).

The Finishing School not only adds another more contemporary history by Spark, but also, in a way, compiles the history of the artist’s own exploration into the postmodern world. Its structure is as tight and dense as ever. And more than ever, many life stories she has told in her fiction echo in this slim book, and many important themes she has dealt with converge on it.¹⁰⁶ It is no surprise to find her constant big themes – e.g. the interplay

¹⁰⁶ For example, as a writer herself, Smith finds that *The Finishing School* “has a lot in common” (Smith) with Spark’s first novel, *The Comforters*, in relation to the theme of “art” intruding life.

of art and life – in the new novel as in others. However, what is interesting here is that Spark seems to play jokes on the characters by some gesture – or rather, mimicry – of recycling details and motifs of her previous works. To suggest that this is a conscious gesture, a sharp satire on the postmodern age, and its relevance to the theme of the end, first, the subtle framework of the novel should be examined.

The voice Spark introduces into this novel – neither the voice of destiny nor that of legend – is a pleurably witty one. As if to symbolise her attitude towards human failing, a lack of expectancy, “the dear voice of Hazel forecasting the weather on Sky News” tunes in *The Finishing School*, singing a leitmotif, “As we go through this evening and into tonight . . .” (FS 156). Whereas this voice of forecasting the weather resounds at the end of the novel, in its opening, we hear Rowland telling his creative writing class:

“You begin,” he said, “by setting your scene. You have to *see* your scene, either in reality or in imagination. For instance, from here you can see across the lake. But on a day like this you can’t see across the lake, it’s too misty. You can’t see the other side.” (FS 1)

No sooner has Rowland heaped more gibberish on the theme of “setting the scene” than Spark has the narrative voice display how to set the scene, how it can be done, by adding simple three lines:

It was early July, but not summery. The sky bulged, pregnant with water. The lake had been invisible under the mist for some days. (FS 3)

Thus, the scene of *The Finishing School* is set impressively, in its – say, weather-bound (in every sense) – framework; Rowland’s nonsense is transformed, bulging with themes of the novel, pregnant with events to come, though the other side, the end, is yet invisible.

The voice forecasting the weather is, indeed, radically different from the voice of destiny, but at the same time, it is a very suitable and ironic substitute for the latter – in times like ours. As to the meteorological framework of *The Finishing School*, it would be helpful to take notice of the distinction between Destiny and Chaos made by Jean Baudrillard in *The Illusion of the End* (1992). All through his book, he argues the impossibility of the end, as well as any kind of real, and also its Idea. Because every thing has been immortalised and every Idea has been literally materialised into simulacra/virtual realities/ illusions, the world has become one big illusion. Discussing the disappearance of the end – as we have already reached beyond it – in terms of the disappearance of the causal relation, he goes on to explain the notion of predestination. To begin with, he warns us not to confuse predestination with “sensitivity to initial conditions”; it is “much rather, a *hypersensitivity to the final conditions* of a process”:

In predestination, the end is there before the beginning and every effort to move away from the end brings that end closer: this is why it is tragic and ironic in character, and not merely eccentric or catastrophic, as in the patterns of chaos. Meteorology is chaotic; it is not a figure of

destiny. . . .

Chaos is a parody of any metaphysics of destiny. . . .

Destiny is the ecstatic figure of necessity. Chaos is merely the metastatic figure of Chance.

(Baudrillard, 1992, 112-13)

Baudrillard criticises the world where Chaos spreads over the void of Destiny. The world is condemned to chaotic phenomena, which are inorganic and indifferent in essence, which are all effects without causes; we are the silent masses watching the timeless and endless recycling of the event, that is, the emptiness between a sign of catastrophe and its virtual reality.

Spark seems to share Baudrillard's argument in *The Finishing School*, particularly concerning the idea that there is no longer an origin or an end, or any fixed point in this postmodern world. The framework that is so casually established in the opening, alongside Hazel's voice and her repeated phrase at the end, is an essential, satirical device to illustrate the postmodern substitute for destiny, to reflect the system of the world as a formation of chaos. Within such a frame, the mobile finishing school – preposterous though it seems – is a perfect close-up of and a perfect metaphor for the world simulating its own system. Importantly, it is Rowland who hits on the idea of their school being mobile (running a finishing school was Nina's idea) in the hope that he can start his novel afresh and finish it by moving one place to another.¹⁰⁷ His novel in effect has stayed, and still is, at

¹⁰⁷ The outcome of Rowland's mobile school idea is close to the effects of what Baudrillard terms "exponential instability" and exponential stability" (and they are also the title of a chapter). These terms are referred to as versions of Chaos Theory.

the same zero point, in the void. No matter how he wants to finish it, it is always in the progressive form with no progress. Furthermore, it is revealed that he had one play, one success – “a young-person success” (*FS* 54) he wishes to have again – as a playwright, when he was a graduate student: he already had the end, and now is beyond it. An ironical turn is that Chris’ entry as a catastrophe “interrupts” his creative writing and, instead, makes him write a book of observation, a re-production of mere responses to circumstances.

The pattern of recycling that inevitably emerges from the world beyond the end, in the form of *College Sunrise*, is as clear as in Baudrillard’s thesis: History, as “its own dust bin,” “has only wrenched itself from cyclical time to fall into the order of the recycle” (Baudrillard, 1992, 26-27). A finishing school, according to Rowland, is “a place where parents dump their teenage children” (*FS* 46), and these children are supposed to be “really and truly finished,” in Nina’s more civilised expression, “like the finish on a rare piece of furniture” (*FS* 5). They are an extravagant waste circulating with their rich parents’ money; already a commodity – whether “polished off” (*FS* 46) or not – passing through the school in a process of recycling. Similarly, the school’s curriculum, including Rowland’s creative writing

He explains “exponential instability” as a catastrophic event interrupting the linearity of history, making history impossible by its unpredictability and incalculability, by its uncontrollable effects. As for “exponential stability,” it is a state in which “everything tends towards the Zero point” because “everything has already taken place.” The two incompatible hypothesis, he claims, are combined in the system of our world, in “an excess of ends: the transfinite” (Baudrillard, 1992, 111-12).

class, consists of “all text-book stuff” (*FS* 53); visiting lecturers are put in order of the fees in Nina’s list, despite her awe of scholars whose worth is “priceless” (*FS* 37), asked to give “the same or a similar lecture” (*FS* 43). College Sunrise is really an education *factory* – without the paradox of Miss Jean Brodie.¹⁰⁸

Certainly, the work of art, inseparable from life, the world, and its times, suffers the same consequence, as Walter Benjamin discussed in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936). In Benjamin’s terms, the work of art lost “the aura,” and so did the event, as Baudrillard elaborates. Benjamin defined the aura as “the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be” (Benjamin 216). What eliminates the aura of the “original” is reaching beyond this distance, by coveting the perfection of reproduction in a technological frenzy. Transgressing the limit of the work of art by means of reproduction, “Any man today can lay claim to being filmed”; “At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer” (Benjamin 225). Anybody can be an artwork or an artist.¹⁰⁹ Spark elegantly puts this issue on the cat-walk, inviting the readers to a school event, a fashion-show at College Sunrise.

This school fashion-show is not a mere fashionable sketch of contemporary life, but an “event” in “the age of mechanical reproduction.” The little scene of several pages also has Spark’s

¹⁰⁸ In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, this progressive teacher of a girls’ school calls the school “an education factory” (*PMJB* 14). The paradox is that, while she encourages her pupils to be original, great heroines, she herself becomes an institution of original individuals to make her own copies of her girls.

¹⁰⁹ Spark’s “The Desegregation of Art” is an extraordinary discussion as to this issue. About this lecture, see Chapter VI.

expertise to express the theme of excess – with high economy of her own writing – all on display. For the fashion-show, everything is prepared well to create an “authentic” setting around the cat-walk (converted kitchen table tops), decorated by paper flowers and bed-covers, and unnecessary luxurious fire. The “authenticity” of the show is, indeed, underlined by the home-movie, in which it looks “quite the real thing” (*FS* 73). Except for a few visitors, everybody is to participate in the show. All the staff and, particularly, the teenage students are perfectly at ease to coming out of their audience seats to step on to the cat-walk. Rowland (the lighting director) and Chris (“the Master of Ceremony” (*FS* 74)), with another boy student (Rowland’s assistant), take their seamless triple role of spectator, model, and show-maker. Reproducing “the real thing” is so easily done.

As the student models, each in a costume reflecting her or his self-image, appear in turn, the extravagant spectacles on stage draw the attention of the audience – and the readers – while a latent catastrophe grows off stage. In the shadow of the succession of excess images illuminated by the artificial lighting, another pattern woven by excess illusions lies dormant. The pattern takes a shape of an odd triangle among central characters. Nina, as usual, watches her husband and notices his jealous fury with Chris. Rowland’s gaze is, as usual, fixed on Chris all through the show. Meanwhile, Chris observes Nina exchanging little intimate smiles with Israel Brown, a guest and her lover-to-be. What each of them is looking at is an empty space occupied by an object that projects their illusions.

Among the three, Nina is to make an escape from the triangle. She has realised that what she married was her aspiration towards the scholarship, which she hoped to be materialised by Rowland, who is no longer even a person, but “a state of mind” (*FS* 56), as she puts it. She concentrates on coping with the present though she knows that she is leaving her husband. In contrast, the present is lost to the two men since they live in the recycling of illusion, into which the past and the future as well have vanished. Chris is to join divorced Rowland in “a Same-sex Affirmation” (*FS* 155), replacing Nina and running the mobile school with him, after a strange turn of event. They join together in their shared illusion of destiny, that is, the illusion of authorship they wish to eternalise by their books, to reach beyond the end. Deterring each other from finishing a novel, they are playing the endless end game between the mirror images, doubly tautological as they are identified with their books. The matching pair is absorbed in the recycling of illusion, in a series of displacements – parallel to the idea of a mobile school.

Spark’s fiction has revealed the excess illusion as such in a form of madness, which Baudrillard also discusses as specific to the whole culture of our times and defines as “identity syndrome”:

. . . a delirium of self-appropriation – all the monstrous variants of identity – the delirium not of the schizophrenic but of the isophrenic, without shadow, other, transcendence of image – that of the mental isomorph, the autist who has, as it were, devoured his double and absorbed his twin brother (being a twin is, conversely, a form of autism à

deux). (Baudrillard, 1992, 109)

In relation to various aspects of postmodern phenomena and from various focal points, Spark has clarified, as well as other essential themes, the figure of this contemporary form of madness. A history of the madness by the artist can be found in the “story” of double figure of Rowland and Chris.

The double figure in *The Finishing School*, in fact, rings a bell loudly: Spark’s hilarious invention of two Lucans, the original missing Earl and his impersonator ending up a pair of copies, in her previous *Aiding and Abetting* (2000). Her two latest novels make a contrast between “the aristocratic illusion of the origin and the democratic illusion of the end” (Baudrillard, 1992, 123), two forms of illusion of destiny. Both illusions derive from groundless belief in destiny: the claim for blue blood – which Spark compares to “the madness of a gambler” (*AA* 131) – and that for the authorship. In *Loitering with Intent* these illusions merge together in the madness of Sir Oliver Quentin, who impersonates the protagonist of the novel written by its artist-heroine. If paying attention to such motif as the figure of father and *unfinished* business, the illusion of destiny can be traced back to the madness of the missing daughter (who would dream of Lucky Lucan whose disappearance has made himself a legend) in *Reality and Dreams* and that of the girl “with evil eye” in *Symposium*. The Rowland-Chris relationship is also an innovative variation on the theme of *The Takeover*: a futile fight over the ownership between people possessed by possession. This time, the pair is driven mad by the fight over the authorship,

possessed by possession – of jealousy.¹¹⁰

The Finishing School, blessed with the Sparkian compatibility of contradiction, juxtaposes a contemporary history of the world in the order of recycle and a history of her own writings with every kind of metamorphoses. Hence the playful gesture of “recycling”: she seems to send her readers signals to tell the difference between re-productions and new inventions, especially, concerning the contemporary creative writing. To mention only one of most obvious signals as such, Chris shares his trademark, striking red-hair with Margaret in *Symposium*, and nonetheless, that she is obviously a kind of his predecessor figure does not cause anybody to categorise the two novels as the same or a similar type.¹¹¹ Instead, this “recycling” gesture creates two different satirical effects. On the one hand, it directly satirises the world where both people and works of art become recycled objects. On the other, particularly aiming at the would-be-novelist pair, it shows how to tell things differently, even if using same materials.

To write “a historical novel,” fiction based on facts, was a pronounced project in *Aiding and Abetting*. For this project,

¹¹⁰ Chris says, “I need his [Rowland’s] jealousy. His intense jealousy. I can’t work without it” (*FS* 101). The question is whose jealousy is it – Rowland’s or Chris’?

¹¹¹ Among other pupils, Joan Archer, a Daddy’s girl writing to her father to ask for money, is a blend of also Margaret in *Symposium* and Isobel in *A Far Cry from Kensington*; Mary Foot would remind us of another hopeless, stupid Mary in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Mr Fergusson is an editor with paternal authority, who has the same name as the similarly father-figure policeman in *The Bachelors*. Visitors of the school, Giovanna and Israel Brown are an aunt and her older nephew like Lister and Eleanor in *Not to Disturb*. Many more examples of this minor kind (in most characters, in fact) and also more important recycled motifs, which I will refer to in my argument, can be found.

Spark took up a material fairly worn out by the mass media: the famous case of the seventh Earl of Lucan, who went missing after his alleged murder of his children's nanny and attempted murder of his wife, side by side with another fact-based "story" of a fake stigmatic woman. In Note to Readers, the author states, "What we know about 'Lucky' Lucan, his words, his habits, his attitudes to people and to life, from his friends, photographs, and police records, I have absorbed creatively, and metamorphosed into what I have written" (AA vi). In *The Finishing School*, to write a historical novel becomes itself a theme, and it comprises the whole structure of the novel. The omniscient, third-person narrator seems to be somebody who knows very well about not only a process of creative writing, but also writing a historical novel. Its voice with an informative air, sometimes addressing to the readers, is a shared characteristic in Spark's later works.

The narrative voice of *The Finishing School*, ironic and knowing, is distinct from other characters in its point of view, tone and style. This voice makes it clear –almost shows it off– that it can tell things differently – with icy disdain for Rowland and Chris. By employing free indirect style in a deliberately oblique way, Spark has her narrator appropriate other characters' thoughts, as well as their words, for the main narrative to heighten irony. In other words, the fundamental narrative device here – and a theme in *Loitering with Intent* – is to put the same thoughts and the same words into a different perspective with a sudden change.¹¹² Similarly, though gradually, the two novels –

¹¹² The opening scene quoted earlier is the most impressive instance for such

supposedly in progress – by Chris and Rowland are fitted into the main narrative.

Chris, at first, seems to follow the creative writing process Spark explains in the Note to *Aiding and Abetting*, tackling his material which has been used more than the Lucan story: the murder of the husband of Mary Queen of Scots. He is even entrusted with his creator's own theory on this subject.¹¹³ However, for all his own successful publicity and the marketing value of the coming historical novel by a seventeen-year-old genius, it turns out to be “a lot of shit” (*FS* 124) in a tough worldly editor's view. As his historical novel is withering, his life, a “story” of Chris, spirals into his creator's historical novel. As for Rowland's “*The School Observed*,” *The Finishing School* as a creative *novel* is itself the sharpest satire on the *book* he eventually manage to write by accumulating mere observations and trite comments. The artist can metamorphose ideas and observations of facts into a creative novel, and also a historical novel of its own times.

Here, it may be interesting to have a look at Benjamin's more old-fashioned (old as it is) essay, which seems to validate and be validated by the aura of Spark's postmodern art of fiction. As Benjamin values the archetypal quality of the story in its traditional form, specifically Nikolai Leskov's works, with nostalgia in his tone, there is a similar quality about his insight in

change.

¹¹³ Explaining her theory about the Mary Queen of Scots' story, which is told by her character, Chris, in the novel, Spark comments, “I have only touched on it in my novel as a valid theme” (I-13, 2004).

“The Storyteller” (1936). He distinguishes the novel and the story as different art forms in terms of their relations to time: temporal elements such as memory, death, and history. He contrasts “the perpetuating remembrance of the novelist” with “the short-lived reminiscences of the storyteller” (Benjamin 97). The novel operates by the remembrance because it resists time and transcends life to grasp its meaning, and therefore, it has its own death. In the story death of reminiscences occur, one after another, but it always has a beginning, and therefore, it has its continuity.

Actually there is no story for which the question as to how it continued would not be legitimate. The novelist, on the other hand, cannot hope to take the smallest step beyond that limit at which he invites the reader to a divinatory realization of the meaning of life by writing “Finis.”

(Benjamin 99)

In short, Benjamin favours many small narratives in the story over, say, one (teleological) grand narrative of the novel. Besides, he finds a historian in the storyteller who is rooted in actual people, the world, life in his/her own times, and tells all the experience. When he appreciates “co-ordinates” (Benjamin 98) of the two art forms, it rather means the element of the story in the novel: some little scene of the novel expanding and embracing the essence of anybody’s experience (one might think of Proustian moment).

Benjamin concludes the essay with his idea of “the aura” about the storyteller who can offer a life story and a sort of philosophy for an everyday life:

He [the storyteller] has counsel – not for a few situations, as the proverb does, but for many, like the sage. For it is granted to him to reach back to a whole lifetime (a life, incidentally, that comprises not only his own experience but no little of the experience of others; what the storyteller knows from hearsay is added to his own). His gift is the ability to relate his life; his distinction, to be able to tell his entire life. (Benjamin 107)

If this is the basic condition of the aura about the storyteller, Spark definitely has it, though there is more to say about her art form. She can well write her entire life, but more importantly, she says, she can *rewrite her life entirely* – telling it entirely differently.

When Spark metamorphoses life into her writings, she does so with hindsight that enables her to “over-simplify.” The paraphrase of this procedure may be found in her talk with Philip Toynbee, in her explanation for her highly stylised novels such as *The Driver’s Seat* (1970) and *Not to Disturb* (1971): “What I am trying to do is to pare everything away which I feel to be superfluous” (I-9, 1971, 74). This seems to have made Toynbee wonder how, for instance, the exotic theme and the exotic setting of *Not to Disturb* – “an element of extravaganza” (I-9, 1971, 74) in the author’s words – could fit in such principle. But then, what Spark talks about is the purity of the form, described as “the geometrical nature” by Lorna Sage. The artist’s business is to clarify the essence of things through its purest form. To do so, she needs to look back, and the fixed point to look back to. This point for Spark happens to be her conversion to Catholicism.

If Spark's Catholicism had anything to do with her writings, it is as "a point of departure," as she states:

It's very important to me to have a point of departure, because in the modern world nobody has any fixed belief or fixed idea of anything, and in a world like that a fixed point is very important. (I-10, 1985, 445)

Her faith, indeed, is neither a convenient choice for the norm nor an intellectual decision. As she often claims, she cannot *not* believe because of her understanding of what she believes, and because of the paradoxical truth she has found in it through her own understanding (which is intellectual), as Lorna Sage points out, again, with her astuteness:

What Mrs Spark values in the Church is its sophistication – all those centuries of expertise in human failing, the sensible way it acknowledges that the unfathomable tangle of motives *is* unfathomable, and concentrates on thoughts, words and deeds. *Her faith means that she's shockingly sceptical about everything under the sun.*

(I-8, 1976, 11 [my italics])

For this faith/scepticism, Spark looks back to her point of departure, that is, her own conviction (not doctrines and dogmas of the Church). Through such practice, she has become what she is and her own norm by which she grasps herself, life and the world.

Spark's kind of belief and its relation with truth can well be brought into the field of philosophy. Introducing Alain Badiou's philosophy in his comprehensive and perceptive book, *Badiou: a*

Subject to Truth (2003), Peter Hallward explains that to this philosopher truth is “a matter of *conviction* first and foremost”:

The word truth (*vérité*), as Badiou uses it, connotes something close to the English expressions “to be true to something” or “to be faithful to something.” What Badiou calls subjectivization essentially describes the experience of identification with a *cause*, or better, the active experience of conversion or commitment to a cause – a cause with which one can identify oneself without reserve.

(Hallward xxvi)

Subjectivization in Badiou’s sense, as truth procedure, lays stress on its singularity (distinguished from “particularity” for the latter’s connotation of specific attributes), and any singular truth must be generic (understood as a kind of “purity” by Hallward). The most notable distinction of Badiou’s philosophy that pursues purely subjective truth, its procedure, is “subtraction”: “the first task of any generic practice of thought is the “subtraction” of whatever passes for reality so as to clear the way for a formalization of the real” (Hallward xxxi). Spark’s philosophical thinking would agree with the idea of pure formalisation. However, as the artist, she would defy the philosopher’s radical indifference to representation (rather, “representation” in his view, to underline specifying signification of its procedure) – or simply leave it to her artworks.

To be an artist is Spark’s conviction and vocation. She by no means claims to be a philosopher. Nonetheless, her art of fiction aims at provoking a thought “to have a whole new

philosophy of life” (I-11, 1998, 223) in various ways. In her life, she has her own norm by which she questions any kind of existing norm, order, system, or way of thinking in the world. In her art, too, she has her own form by which she can upset the order of signification with her revolutionary, almost anarchic spirit. She is fully in control of her language, showing “how anything whatsoever can be narrated,” including the unfigurable, the real.¹¹⁴ In this regard, how she can express the theme of excess – often and in many forms such as desire, evil, extravagance, death, art, things outside the *normal* order or use – exemplifies her mastery. Her art communicates, liberates the mind to see truth, and relates it to reality of life, offering a new philosophy of life.

Spark’s twenty-second novel, *The Finishing School*, has essential, original qualities of her fiction. Ali Smith concludes her review with her joy:

Lithe and blithe and philosophical, it [*The Finishing School*] makes it possible to dismiss the malevolent; how *The Finishing School* finishes with such a revelation of reassuring cohesion is itself a joyful mystery. It is Spark at her sharpest, her purest and her most merciful. (Smith)

“A joyful mystery” sounds fitting to Spark’s extraordinary ability to invent a new shape, a pure form. The novel may well be regarded “Spark at her sharpest, her purest,” and also “her most merciful,” maybe because of “the dear voice of Hazel.”

It is the voice dear to Nina. Before she leaves the school,

¹¹⁴ The figure of the heroine in *The Driver’s Seat* is its best example.

she has been tired of the tension between Rowland and Chris, of the mobile quality of the school, its clean and austere environment – as if it were inhabited. She longed for *life* even with its messiness. Like the school routine, the never-changing voice forecasting the ever-changing weather might offer her a comfort as a semblance of a fixed point – in the world like College Sunrise. Nina herself has well adjusted to such world as an able businesswoman, guiding her pupils with her hilariously implausible – but practical – “*comme il faut*” lessons. Nevertheless, she coped with the “present” then, knowing that “there was a life to be lived as comfortably and pleasantly as possible” (*FS* 69). For her effort and her attitude towards life here and now, and the author’s merciful gaze on her lack of expectancy, the voice may take the edge off its satire.

“As we go through this evening and into tonight . . .”

This ending is a fantastic display of the essence of Spark’s art, of Spark the poet – we may call it in her famous phrase: “the transfiguration of the commonplace.” Turning the set phrase of the weather forecast into the leitmotif of the novel, the author vividly brings out the point of her satire on “the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction”: the work of art is different from recycled objects; it is a creation of an entire metamorphosis. To take the world, people, and indeed language itself – even the most commonplace words – into another dimension, with the sweep of her poetry, is this postmodernist artist’s speciality. In his review of *The Finishing School*, Peter Kemp rightly observes this quality

of Spark's in the novel's ending: "Always keen to end her novels on a lingeringly resonant note, she does so here with especial ingenuity by turning the routine words of a television weather girl . . . into haunting and affecting intimations of mortality" (Kemp, 2004, 52).

Certainly, as the weather forecast transforms into Spark's leitmotif, a factual description of the transition from day to night turns into the theme of the end. But, here, this theme seems to expand to the notion of time – at its eternal moment. It would be fruitful to recall Spark's own distinctive interpretation of eternity: "when we use words like 'forever,' 'eternal,' phrases like 'everlasting life,' 'world without end,' we refer to an existence here and now" ("RA" 1). In this sense, what resounds in "the dear voice of Hazel" at the end of *The Finishing School* may be, rather, amusedly gentle "intimations of *immortality*" (I-3, 1970, 411 [my italics]), which are the words Spark uses to describe Thomas Traherne's line: "The corn was orient and immortal wheat." She in fact turns Traherne's verse into one of her ingenuous, poetic endings, that of *The Abbess of Crewe*: "that cornfield of sublimity . . . orient and immortal wheat" (AC 315). *The Public Image* too ends with a similar motif, as well as the artist's peculiar lyricism: "an empty shell contains, by its very structure, the echo and harking image of former and former seas." (PI 125). It is no coincidence that the endings of those novels evoke a sense of everlasting time at the heroines' departures for future: Alexandra the Abbess sails off for Rome to give her new performance; and Annabel begins her journey to find her own role,

ceasing to be “an empty shell.” Like these women, Nina in *The Finishing School* also leaves the mobile finishing school and starts on her new life. The present of the ending is an open space for another morning, a future to come.

Spark’s endings conjure up this open space, even when she focuses on characters who are entrapped in the illusory “reality” of the world, and to whom the present is lost, rather than women who are liberated from such “reality” and living lives here and now. For instance, in the last scene of *The Driver’s Seat*, the author points to the absence of the present moment through the viewpoint of Richard the murderer, his vision of his ending¹¹⁵:

He sees already the gleaming buttons of the policemen’s uniforms, hears the cold and the confiding, the hot and the barking voices, sees already the holsters and epaulets and all those trappings devised to protect them from the indecent exposure of fear and pity, pity and fear. (*DS* 490)

This vision not only indicates the lost present in itself, but also tells of lost reality: “those trappings” by which policemen maintain their “reality” and conceal the *reality* of the frightening “murder” case of the heroine. There are elsewhere, too, forms of words for this open space of the present: “the tract of no-man’s land between dreams and reality, reality and dreams” (*RD* 160), the ending words of *Reality and Dreams*. It is the space of here and now – life – that Spark creates by her art and in her art. While it is easy to say that an ending contains a new beginning, what Spark does in her endings is to represent this idea – like any

¹¹⁵ See Chapter III for the detailed argument of this ending.

idea – as lyrically recycled truth, which may lead to a philosophy of everyday life. As much as she qualifies as the storyteller according to Benjamin's definition, her novels also have the quality of the story in his sense, that is, many small narratives with continuous endings and beginnings, instead of one grand narrative with its grand finale, telos. Spark's endings represent not only her postmodernist art itself, which belongs to no grand narrative, but also her postmodernist philosophy of life and art. Wishing to change the world by liberating our minds from illusions, delusions, or oppressions of any grand narrative which governs the world, her art of fiction leaves the present open as a space in which we can practice art in life, inventing ourselves, between past and future. And in this space, there is no end to Muriel Spark's metamorphoses of here and now.

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