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MURIEL SPARK'S WAYWARDNESS

Carole Jones

SPARK AS WAYWARD

'Critics are fond of describing Muriel Spark as ruthless', Zoë Strachan points out,[1] and Janice Galloway confirms: 'Malcolm Bradbury is on record as reading Mrs Spark's essence as 'hardness'. Others – mostly chaps – sum her up as 'steely', 'aloof', 'brusque', 'capricious' and 'queer.'[2] I interpret the surfeit of judgemental descriptions as commenting on or targeting Spark's womanliness or, rather, her lack in that area. She is seen as calculating and cold which signify a lack of feminine softness, nurturance and propriety with Ian Gregson going so far as to state that Spark is the 'least feminine of women writers'.[3] My aim in this essay is not to directly dissect or resist the pejorative nature of the assessments often intended in these comments but to engage constructively with an aspect of Spark's writing that they implicitly and hysterically foreground: her refusal to comply with the expectations, in various periods, of the 'woman writer'. In taking this stance I employ the term 'wayward' to describe Spark's work and situate her in a discourse which is not entirely oppositional but aptly describes her askew sensibility, one that has proved adept at irking her critics. The notion of the wayward provides us with a small hand-hold on the inexplicable but brilliant conundrum of Spark's writing that leaves us more often than not, as she says in her lecture 'The Desegregation of Art', 'with a sense of the absurd and a general looking-lively to defend ourselves from the ridiculous oppressions of our times'.[4]

Waywardness resonates with other more penetrating descriptions of Spark's work: with James Bailey's disorientation and obliqueness, Jonathan Kemp's queerness, Gutkin's camp,[5] Marilyn Reizbaum's strangeness, Martin McQuillan's contrapuntality, Patricia Waugh's 'not quite', in her description of Spark as 'familiar and yet displaced; almost realist,

but not quite; seemingly postmodern, but not'.[6] Moreover, waywardness plays merrily in the same discursive playground as Spark's own 'nevertheless': as she writes in 'What Images Return', 'my whole education in and out of school, seemed even then to pivot around this word […] I believe myself to be fairly indoctrinated by the habit of thought which calls for this word […] I find that much of my literary composition is based on the nevertheless idea'.[7] I am associating the 'nevertheless' moment, that quixotic or even perverse point of *turning* in a discourse – the moment of 'however', of 'in spite of what has just been stated I will now state the contrary' – with the wilful disruption of waywardness.

Here I am engaging the notion of wayward as a quality often, but not always, associated with the feminine. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the term signifies 'disposed to go counter to the wishes or advice of others, or to what is reasonable; wrongheaded, intractable, self-willed, froward, perverse […] Capriciously wilful; conforming to no fixed rule or principle of conduct; erratic'. Unreasonable, contrary, perversely turning from fixed rules and principles – many of Spark's texts, with their frequently foregrounded women, are recognisable here. Angela Carter deliberately associates waywardness with females in her edited collection of short stories by women writers *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women* (1986). In the introduction she points out that all the stories she has chosen 'are reflections in some kind of squinting, oblique, penetrating vision',[8] a wayward sensibility situated in the rebellious, constricted feminine position of the patriarchal reality. Carter says of the women in these stories, 'even in defeat, they are not defeated',[9] and though this may not feel entirely true of a character such as Lise in *The Driver's Seat* (1970) Spark's writing and her characters pulse with the clarity and control of the undefeated, even if her vision is one of macabre indifference and indeterminacy. Spark's more difficult feminine representations, such as Lise, Elsa of *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973) and Annabelle of *The Public Image* (1968), present us with intriguing portraits of wayward women, each in their own particular way fulfilling a wilfully perverse snubbing of male reality.

DEFINING WAYWARDNESS

As defined, waywardness involves a wilful and erratic wandering from what is reasonable and the fixed rules of propriety. The precarious position of the straying self is suggestively described by Judith Butler:

> The ‘I’ that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavours to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them. This is not easy, because the ‘I’ becomes, to a certain extent unknowable, threatened with unviability, with becoming undone altogether, when it no longer incorporates the norm in such a way that makes this ‘I’ fully recognizable. There is a certain departure from the human that takes place in order to start the process of remaking the human. I may feel that without some recognisability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable. This is the juncture from which critique emerges, where critique is understood as an interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living; in other words, not to celebrate difference as such but to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life that resists models of assimilation.[10]

Waywardness, a knowing engagement with the disjunction between how things are and how they could otherwise be, creates such a ‘juncture from which critique emerges’ and Spark’s writing inhabits that space.

Waywardness in its unreasonableness may offer an opportunity to consider thought, being and action away from the hegemonic constrictions of everyday existence. As Nicola Pitchford argues in relation to Kathy Acker’s writing,

> I have called Acker's novels 'unreasonable' because this word offers a third term, a way out of the binary opposition between the rational and the irrational. To be unreasonable frequently carries connotations of protest, of someone's stubborn refusal

> to acknowledge the superiority of the logic of the person using the term. […] To be irrational, on the other hand, is simply to be incomprehensible or hysterical, to remove oneself from contestation entirely.[11]

Waywardness is just such a useful third term, or in-between concept, that suggests a refusal within the terms of the comprehensible, that works to disrupt from within the power relations of the here and now, and so to expand and mobilise our conceptions of the possible. In this I conceive of it as an analytic tool with which to trouble and perhaps explore escape routes from binary formulations of the contemporary moment.

A wider argument could hypothesise that waywardness is evoked in many aspects of contemporary Scottish women's writing. Such a sensibility may be found in the playful challenges and serious play of Ali Smith's and Jenni Fagan's writing, as well as the gender and genre implications of the work of earlier authors such as Nan Shepherd and Jessie Kesson. In this genealogy, though, Spark stands out as a practised purveyor of the wayward. Most obviously it is evoked in the presentation of unruly, disobedient and rebellious female characters, who challenge authority and the strictures of femininity – women's constrained place in society. However, waywardness is also present in the form of this writing, the jumps and swerves it may take from the present to the future, from the realist to the gothic fantastic, in the reversals of relations, roles and authority, from being to non-being, from the dead to the living and back again, with an oblique engagement with narrative progress and resolution. This is an experimental writing which aims to defamiliarise reality, to challenge and question dominant world views, and to undo our ideas and ideals of identity, subjectivity, the human. Waywardness illuminates possibilities of springing the trap of fixed selves and fixed relations to understand and experience both differently.

This essay aims to celebrate Spark's representations as executing a poetics of waywardness, a literary mode which I contend reveals, in Judith Jack Halberstam's words, 'counterintuitive modes of knowing'[12] such as refusal and failure, to present a cogent critique

of the injustices of the oppressive and constraining pressure of the here and now. This engagement with waywardness resonates with other recent approaches that seek to escape contemporary critical modes and language and the bounds of academic habit that limit analytical imagination and systematically confine. A re-thinking of concepts such as 'the wild', 'willfulness', and the undoing of subjectivity in failure and refusal has produced a rich critical groundswell of contemporary cultural engagement.

Halberstam, for example, drafts in new terms – 'wildness',[13] 'gaga feminism'[14] – to 'attempt to stretch our critical vocabularies in different directions – away, for example, from the used-up languages of difference, alterity, subversion, and resistance, and toward languages of unpredictability, breakdown, disorder, and shifting forms of signification'.[15] Calling on the work of José Esteban Muñoz and Fred Moten, Halberstam aims to engage in cultural analysis which seeks out the spirit of the unknown and the disorderly to find alternatives to the discourses of neoliberalism 'as a normative order of reason'[16] which 'configures all aspects of existence in economic terms'.[17] Halberstam invokes an alternative focus for analysis: on a resistance of mastery that prioritises 'counterintuitive modes of knowing such as failure and stupidity',[18] re-assessing methods of refusal in scenes of negation, absence, passivity, unknowing in order to set forms of 'unbeing' and 'unbecoming' against a positivist complicity with hegemonic discourses of self-realisation and subjectivisation, such as neoliberalism. Halberstam's 'gaga feminism', for instance, 'expresses itself as excess, as noise, as breakdown, drama, spectacle, high femininity, low theory, masochistic refusal, and moments of musical riot'.[19] I contend that all these characteristics can be observed in Spark's writing, in one way or another. For instance, in the excess of Lise, Elsa and Annabel's high feminine style, in the noise of *The Driver's Seat* scenes of civil unrest and the unruly musical riot of the parties and nightlife of *The Public Image* and *The Hothouse by the East River*, all of which present us with drama and spectacle, as does the infamous masochistic refusal of Lise's quest for destruction. As texts that act out rather than psychologise the pathologies of femininity, they can be described as

‘low theory’, a concept Halberstam adapts from the work of Stuart Hall ‘to look for a way out of the usual traps and impasses of binary formulations … in the murky waters of a counterintuitive, often impossibly dark and negative realm of critique and refusal’.[20] In line with this, the characteristics of Halberstam’s gaga feminism signal ‘potentials’[21] for theorising alternatives to the hegemonic ‘within an undisciplined zone of knowledge production’,[22] an interesting label to apply to Spark’s novels. Employed in cultural analysis, then, these terms can evoke and identify oblique ways of reading to refresh, recalibrate and re-vision our sensibilities.

This essay associates the concept of waywardness with approaches such as Halberstam’s and suggests that it is particularly useful in identifying disturbances in the fabric of consensus and drawing attention to the significance of moments of refusal for the conceptualisation of feminine subjectivity, a specific interest of Spark in these texts. Fred Moten, in his work in relation to blackness, asks an explosive question regarding the implications of *refusing the rights that have been refused to you*, and he extends his crucial interrogation of such refusal: ‘What does it mean to be against or outside of the law of the home and the state, the home and the state that you constitute and which refuses you? What's it mean to refuse that which has been refused you? What new infusion is made possible by such a refusal?’[23] In evoking the condition of living outside of state forms of regulation and governance Moten embraces a concept of fugitivity – the state of flight, banishment or exile, or as Moten would put it, a ‘being separate from settling’[24] – and this route leads him to a counterintuitive call for a ‘being together in homelessness’, where homelessness ‘is a state of dispossession’[25] to be sought and embraced as ‘a way of being together in brokenness’.[26] Spark, the ‘constitutional exile’ who embraced ‘the conditions of exiledom’ as a ‘calling’,[27] would perhaps be intrigued by if not cognisant of this sensibility, one which infuses a text such as *The Driver’s Seat*.

Waywardness is also usefully associated with Sara Ahmed's thoughtful theorising of 'willful subjects' where wilfulness 'is a diagnosis of the failure to comply with those whose authority is given'.[28] As she observes, to be identified as willful is to become a problem; it is thought of as a fault of character, an attribution of error. In contemporary culture the will is transformed into 'willpower', making individuals the problem when they cannot 'will themselves out of situations in which they find themselves'.[29] However, Ahmed asks what it would mean to understand the will as not *residing in* the subject, as this approach implies. Her problematizing of will emanates from her theorizing of emotions as socially and culturally produced, happiness in particular, as that which 'starts from somewhere other than the subject'.[30] Paying attention to how subjects become invested in particular structures, relations and objects causes us to think about the social construction and production of affect, in a challenge to the drive to privatise emotions under the neoliberal order of reason.[31] Ahmed argues that to refuse happiness or refuse to be made happy or hopeful in the 'right way' is to occupy a difficult position. In *The Promise of Happiness* she delineates what she calls figures who become cultural containers for this refusal and in doing so traces resistance to the various hegemonic regulatory effects of happiness. This is a genealogical method enabling a challenge to the 'assumption that happiness follows relative proximity to a social ideal', such as, for instance, the 'happy housewife'.[32] She writes, 'Feminist genealogies can be described as genealogies of women who not only do not place their hope in the right things but who speak out about their unhappiness with the very obligation to be made happy by such things'.[33] In making her 'unhappiness archives' Ahmed offers 'an alternative history of happiness […] by considering those who are banished from it, or who enter this history only as troublemakers, dissenters, killers of joy'.[34] It is 'assembled around the struggle against happiness'[35] to challenge the commands and injunctions of the contemporary 'happiness turn' and dominance of 'positive psychology' from the point of view of those excluded or who exclude themselves.

This essay presents wayward as an equally suggestively mobile term; wayward connotes an erratic, deviationary movement, a turning, wandering or straying from the straight, right path while, perhaps, keeping that path in view. It can be rebellious, harmful, euphoric or celebratory, but there is rarely a satisfyingly logical resolution to the wayward narrative. If waywardness informs Spark's textual productions it does so by repudiating the settled and the housed and embracing the willful. From this perspective wayward femininity in these texts is often working towards an unravelling and an undoing of the unified model of the subject and the whole and wholesome female self.

In this, Spark's wayward writing takes its place among other provocative explorations of femininity in the work of Scottish women writers from the early twentieth century on: for example, Violet Jacob's 'Thievie' (1922), Nan Shepherd's *The Quarry Wood* (1928), Will Muir's *Imagined Corners* (1931), and Jessie Kesson's *The White Bird Passes* (1958). However, in the period in focus here Spark lights the touch paper on explosive versions of femininity in part by embracing experimental writing strategies, specifically those which caught her imagination in her formative period of the 1950s such as the *nouveau roman* and the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet, and other metafictional techniques that would become pervasive in postmodern fiction. It is fair to say that she took advantage of these movements in fiction in developing them for her own purposes but without becoming overwhelmed by them. As David Herman argues, Spark 'chose a third path' in relation to the clashing antimodernist realists (such as Kingsley Amis) and postmodernists (such as John Barth) of her time: 'her fiction embraces (or rather extends and radicalizes) the modernist emphasis on technique while *also* projecting complex social worlds.'[36] However, in the years surrounding 1970 Brian Cheyette proposes that Spark 'utilizes the anti-novel [the *nouveau roman*] as a means of substituting conventional concerns with the inner self for a more chilling and dehumanized account of the "times at hand"', in a 'pitiless and heartless tone' described by Angus Wilson as 'machine made'.[37] It is this 'heartless and chilling' Spark that I find wayward in her refusal to enact heart-warming feminine proprieties in her fiction and,

consequentially, in creating some of the more incendiary representations of femaleness of her time.

READING SPARK AS WAYWARD

In reading Spark as wayward, novels from that vigorously creative period around 1970, including *The Public Image*, *The Driver's Seat* and *The Hothouse by the East River*, are prime examples. Lise, the central character of *The Driver's Seat*, exemplifies this waywardness, spending the narrative seeking and organising her own murder. Not only wayward in character and content, the form of the narrative is also adeptly dissonant. Narrated in the present tense by an extra-diagetic narrator who never accesses the inner lives of the characters, the text often reads like a police report in its objective observational style. It is also an infamous example of Spark's use of prolepsis; we know the end from near the beginning – from page 14 in the Penguin edition – creating the effect that Lise's violent demise appears to be fated and fixed all along. Also, crucially, this writing strategy undermines the reader's drive to know, to get to the end of the story. There is 'rather', writes Judith Roof, 'a drive to narrate – to inhabit the point of tension, the middle, the *détour*, the deviance'.[38] This deviation providing intimate knowledge of Lise's predetermined fate, the predetermined script that is outside her control, illustrates Lise's choice to be complicit with this fate; as Gerardine Meaney argues, 'She is a figure for the feminine subject whose options are no options. She can either choose a subjectivity which kills her or lose subjectivity and all ability to act.'[39] Spark strongly hints at that lack of subjectivity near the beginning of the text when she refers to Lise's job in an accounts' office where 'her lips […] are normally pressed together like the ruled line of a balance sheet' and her one room flat which is 'clean-lined and clear to return to after her work as if it were uninhabited'.[40] In her life Lise is a silent absence until she chooses to take control, to take a holiday and have 'the time of my life' (*DS*, 10).

Lise's choice of 'a subjectivity which kills her' is enacted as a position of excess in relation to accepted behaviours of the humdrum everyday, signalled through unnerving demonstrations of intemperance. At the start of the text, Lise's reaction to the offer of a non-staining dress is extreme in its affront – 'I won't be insulted!' (*DL*, 9) – and her subsequent choice of outfit is seen as outlandish: 'a dress with lemon-yellow top with a skirt patterned in bright V's of orange, mauve and blue' (*DS*, 10) topped with a 'summer coat with narrow stripes, red and white' (*DS*, 11).

> The girl is saying, 'You won't be able to wear them together, but it's a lovely coat over a plain dress' […]
>
> 'They go very well together,' Lise says […] 'Those colours of the dress and the coat are absolutely right for me. Very natural colours.' […]
>
> 'If only you knew! These colours are a natural blend for me. Absolutely natural.' (*DS*, 11, 12)

Her refusal of sartorial propriety delineates her waywardness, and here her repeated assertion of the suitable 'naturalness' of her choice, in defiance of the judgement of expert others, demonstrates her determination to perversely overturn and undermine acceptable norms of behaviour within their own terms. Her refusal of normative constrictions is also expressed in her excessive laughter: she 'laughs hysterically' (*DS*, 10), 'heartily' (*DS*, 13), giggles 'merrily' (*DS*, 22), 'laughs harshly' (*DS*, 42) and 'very loudly' (*DS*, 51), 'longer than expected' so that 'Mrs Fiedke looks frightened as the voices of the bar stop to watch the laughing one' (*DS*, 56). Such laughter is associated with unconstrained women, such as the 'hacking cough-like ancestral laughter of the streets' (*DS*, 17) of the female porter as she ridicule's Lise's outfit, or that of the passing woman whose laughter at Lise is 'without possibility of restraint, like a stream bound to descend whatever slope lies before it' (*DS*, 69). This lack of inhibition in both the laughing and being laughed at gives Spark's narrative an edge of abandon, hinting at a wild, bubbling, underlying danger which is also exposed in scenes of riot that unexpectedly catch up Lise in their chaotic flow.

As well as gestures of protest, Lise's actions also signal a refusal to live within the law; she stuffs her passport down the back seat of a taxi (*DS*, 52), an action interpreted as one of the clues she leaves throughout the narrative regarding her presence, her journey and her fate. However, such an action is symbolic of her position outside the state, in relation to her stunted citizenship as a woman, and outside the home as a single woman. In this moment we could say that she is embracing homelessness or a state of dispossession or, in Fred Moten's words, stepping into fugitivity. Her refusal of what she's been refused – full selfhood or subjectivity or agency as a woman – is staged in her pursuit of her own murder. Such an end, the text suggests, is the only possible outcome of taking control in the present circumstances. Ultimately, what Lise is refusing, as a woman, is vividly demonstrated in the novel – it is the objectification of women, specifically their sexual objectification, and the demand for their sexual availability to men. Twice in the narrative she escapes rape – with the macrobiotic man and the garage mechanic. She is less successful with her murderer who, contrary to her wishes that 'I don't want any sex', 'all the same, plunges into her, with the knife poised high' (*DS*, 106). The phrase 'all the same', a 'nevertheless' turn in the narrative, signals the moment of the re-imposition of hegemonic authority. *The Driver's Seat*, then, is an unreasonable rather than an irrational narrative, in Pitchford's terms, demonstrating the full implications of a fundamental misogynist narrative: that 'she was asking for it'. The text provokes the reader with the implications of how it looks and feels when that particular social script is followed through to its conclusion. By 'asking for it' Lise paradoxically stages her protest at the objectification of women by exposing the ultimate consequences of such a view of femininity. She constitutes a spectacle of masochistic refusal of the conditions for female survival, characterising an 'antisocial feminism', in Halberstam's words, that 'refuses conventional modes of femininity by refusing to remake, rebuild, or reproduce and that dedicates itself completely and ferociously to the destruction of self and other'.[41] In relation to this Halberstam refers to a notion of radical passivity which has the power to unravel the subject and dramatize unbecoming in order to resist mandatory, liberal, patriarchal formulations of the self. However, though we can

conceive of Lise's end as a sacrifice, it is less radically passive and more aggressively protesting and strident in illustrating the difficulty of controlling the journey to unbecoming within the scripts of femininity, exposing as it does the 'invisible contracts we make with violence'[42] in just being ourselves.

The Driver's Seat's extreme nihilism in the face of the feminine condition is present but more tempered in the next novel, *The Hothouse by the East River*, by an uncanny narrative which incorporates Spark's wartime experiences in a tale of life after death in contemporary Manhattan. To begin with, though, it is madness not death that is undoing subjectivity here, with strange interruptions in the fabric of reality creating dissonant hauntings of the present by the past. The central female character Elsa and her husband Paul met when they worked for 'a small outpost of British Intelligence'[43] during the Second World War. Nearly thirty years later characters from that time pop up in the environs of their New York lives causing tensions over uncertain events in the past; most significantly a German collaborator, Helmut Kiel, now apparently works in a shoe shop nearby. Kiel's appearance, as well as other uncanny unexplainable events, are associated with Elsa. Her 'excess' is marked in other ways: she is characterised by extravagance and extreme wealth, is a lavish consumer and wayward performer of femininity. Spark's attention is once again drawn to sartorial excess, revelling in the detail of Elsa's choice of outfit for attending a fringe theatre 'away downtown':

> Elsa comes into the drawing-room. Paul gasps. She is wearing a flame-coloured crepe evening dress with dark beads gleaming at the hem and wrists. She wears a necklace and earrings made of diamonds and rubies. Her fingers are a complex of the same sparkling stones. She is wearing a diamond bracelet […] Elsa is wearing a long coat of white fox fur. (*HER*, 81, 84)

Like laughter in the *The Driver's Seat*, Elsa's clothes signal an elemental connection to something wild and dangerous: the 'flame-coloured' dress; a sable coat, 'the furs, mysterious and rich, spilling over the brown satin lining' (*HER*, 113). The frisson of threat around her is magnified in her most uncanny characteristic; her shadow falls the wrong way, 'falls the way

it wants' (*HER*, 59). It is 'unnatural' (*HER*, 3), 'like a webby grey cashmere shawl' (*HER*, 30), 'trailing at the wrong angle, like the train of an antique ball-dress' (*HER*, 32), 'like a flung coat' (*HER*, 75), the clothing associations reverberating with the sartorial excesses. Paul's panic is total: 'He will not sleep beside her in bed any more. Never again, never again. No man can sleep with a woman whose shadow falls wrong and who gets light or something from elsewhere' (*HER*, 12).

Elsa's 'cloud of unknowing' (*HER*, 136), as her shadow is dubbed in the final line of the novel, is 'a radical disruption of all discourse' and a challenge to dominant ideology, argues Meaney: 'It defies the laws of physics and disrupts the specular economy in which power resides in the gazing subject rather than the object gazed upon'.[44] This wayward shadow, a simple but fundamental adjustment in the fabric of the world, signals for Meaney Elsa's 'truth-telling' and her challenge to the labels of madness and schizophrenia levelled at her and their implication that she is beyond reason. Instead she is the agent of exposure of Paul's anxious delusions. The truth she is telling is of death as the fated end of everyone, the final undoing of the sovereignty of the subject in relation to which Paul is in denial. Elsa reminds him that they were both killed by a V2 bomb near the end of the war and that he is the author of this present haunted place: 'It was you with your terrible and jealous dreams who set the whole edifice soaring' (*HER*, 91).

> 'You died, too,' says Elsa. 'That's one of the things you don't realise, Paul.'
>
> 'Don't be silly,' he says. 'I remember standing by the side of the track when they pulled your body out of the wreck. I remember too many things to be dead.'
>
> 'No, Paul,' says Elsa. 'That was your imagination running away with itself.' (*HER*, 122)

Elsa, it would seem, is fully a part of Paul's imagined world, where he believes himself to be the rational, sovereign subject, diagnosing his wife's schizophrenia and committing her to an asylum sometime in the past. However, Elsa's waywardness exposes the limits of this world; she stages a refusal of his values and proprieties, his control: '"She's not my original conception any more. She took a life of her own. She's grotesque. When she died she was a

sweet English girl"' (*HER*, 104). Elsa's 'grotesque' excess is a logic that runs counter to the masculine imagination. Behaving inappropriately and unreasonably, she undoes this male-defined world and they finally leave it and embrace the unknown.

Conversely, in Annabel, the successful actress of *The Public Image*, we have a conclusion other than death. The final lines see her escaping her perfect public image, waiting for a flight with her baby son: '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, the echo and harking image of former and former seas'.[45] Though acknowledging Susan Sellers' reading of these closing line as Annabel's 'escape into maternal plenitude',[46] we can also read her as a wayward character in touch with the ineffable, the inexpressible, the unpresentable, an exemplar of a waywardness which defies the hegemony, the regulatory matrix and normativity predicated on patriarchal certainty, predictability and control. Annabel is refusing her carefully honed 'public image' as the 'English Lady-Tiger' film star, a perfect blend of wife and lover, where surface domesticity gives way in private to an underlying sexual passion. This image is responsible for her major success in the Italian film industry, manipulated as it is in the popular media of the day to engage with the hegemonic feminine stereotypes scripted and promoted by this media. Annabel, of all these three heroines, is the most obviously trapped within the constricting discourses of femininity as Spark spells out the parameters, demands and effects of this public image and its construction. However, Spark also demonstrates the waywardness which characterises Annabel's refusals.

Annabel is another heroine who refuses to engage with masculine values and ideals. From the beginning she is described as 'stupid', principally by her husband Frederick:

> In those earlier times […] she had no means of knowing that she was, in fact, stupid, for, after all, it is the deep core of stupidity that it thrives on the absence of a looking-glass. Her husband […] tolerantly and quite affectionately insinuated the fact of her

stupidity, and she accepted this without resentment for as long as it did not convey to her any sense of contempt. (*PI*, 5)

In the first thesis that Halberstam proposes for engagement with 'subjugated knowledges', the exhortation to 'resist mastery' prescribes stupidity as a 'counterintuitive mode of knowing'[47] along with failure; 'stupidity could refer not simply to a lack of knowledge but to the limits of certain forms of knowing and certain ways of inhabiting structures of knowing'.[48] What is remarkable about Spark's Annabel is her lack of upset at the accusation of stupidity, her calm indifference to its provenance: 'In those early days when she was working in small parts her stupidity started to melt; she had not in the least attempted to overcome her stupidity, but she now saw, with the confidence of practice in her film roles, that she had somehow circumvented it' (*PI*, 7). Stupidity here is not the binary opposite of cleverness; its circumvention is a wayward movement which renders it insignificant and undermines its power to oppress: 'She did not need to be clever, she only had to exist' (*PI*, 7). In fact, this oblique, nullifying relation with stupidity is signalled from the very beginning of the novel when on the first page we are informed of Annabel's 'calm achievement' (*PI*, 1) in her practical approach to organising accommodation in Rome. The novel goes on to similarly undermine masculine logic and priorities, much as Elsa cuts through Paul's certainties in *The Hothouse by the East River*. Frederick's preoccupation with 'depth' – 'he was exasperated, seeing shallowness everywhere' (*PI*, 7) believing acting should be 'from the soul outward' (*PI*, 12) – is countered by Annabel's comfort with the superficial: 'He continued to enunciate. "Please do not talk of 'significance', because you do not understand it. And that is because you are insignificant yourself." Annabel said immediately, "D'you think so? Oh, well, minority opinions are always interesting"' (*PI*, 12). In such ways she unravels the power of the discourse of Enlightenment reason by waywardly skirting its binary traps.

As well as her nulling of the effects of stupidity, Annabel also refuses to be made happy, in Sara Ahmed's words, by her 'proximity to the social ideal'[49] signalling a resistance to the various hegemonic regulatory effects of happiness. The constructed image of the

happy marriage does not satisfy either herself or Frederick, another jealous husband who kills himself as part of a plot to bring about Annabel's downfall. In one of those quixotically surprising 'nevertheless' plot-turns that populate many of the conclusions of Spark's novels, Annabel gives up her public image rather than give in to blackmail. In contrast to the accusation of emptiness consistently voiced by Frederick, particularly in his suicide note addressed to her – 'You are a beautiful shell […] but empty, devoid of the life it once held' (*PI*, 85) – those closing lines finally and elegantly counter such a characterization in what has been the typical wayward style of the novel. At the end the 'empty shell' that Annabel is compared to 'contains, by its very structure, the echo and harking image of former and former seas', as she is conscious of her baby son 'perpetually within her' (*PI*, 116). If death in the case of this novel is associated with Frederick and his violent and selfish self-murder, Annabel undoes the subject in a different manner, through breaking down the boundary of the one, the sovereign individual, the oppositional relation of self and other. This breakdown goes beyond herself into the breakdown of language itself as 'she felt both free and unfree' (*PI*, 116). This is a 'new infusion', in Moten's words, that sees and hears and feels and understands the world differently.

CONCLUSION

Of the novels I have explored here, *The Public Image* was the first to be published and in it Annabel enacts a constructive waywardness that constitutes an opening optimistic engagement with the difficulty of femininity in a patriarchal world. This is a problem not to be circumvented in the later novels where it is addressed principally through death. It is perhaps interesting to note that, published between 1968 and 1973, these texts suggest that as the counter-cultural 'sexual revolution' of that period proceeded so did Spark's scepticism increase regarding the tenets of freedom made possible in extant feminine identities. Spark's representations, though, are not fully oppositional, conflictual, aggressive, angry or mad; wayward in all aspects – from sentence construction to character to invented world – this

writing demonstrates and enacts her hopes for the deployment of ridicule as a more politically incisive way to engage the reader in critique, as she sets out in 'The Desegregation of Art'. What is ridiculed here are the male centred narratives that dominate patriarchal culture. Such radical female refusals as she sets out in these texts are resistant but not actively, positively oppositional. Instead, such tactics posit the possibility of undoing binary conceptions of social being and action that 'opposition' putatively takes part in. Waywardness in these texts facilitates such an undoing, asking questions of contemporary conceptions of gendered selfhood. These female characters veer away from the straight and narrow yet, like Lise, leave traces in their wanderings; they expose certainties as existential conundrums as they leave the regular routes of female selfhood and contest the destinations they make possible. The danger involved in moving out of sight, of losing the recognition of others through these detours creates a precarious position for the straying self, as suggestively meditated on by Butler in her earlier quoted observation that 'the "I" becomes, to a certain extent unknowable, threatened with unviability, with becoming undone altogether, when it no longer incorporates the norm in such a way that makes this "I" fully recognizable'. In running towards and inhabiting this dissonance, Spark's wayward women present us with what Butler terms a 'juncture from which critique emerges'. Her critique of the terms of feminine life resonates profoundly through our own postfeminist epoch.

NOTES

[1] Zoë Strachan, 'Muriel Spark,' *The Dangerous Women Project*, 2013, http://dangerouswomenproject.org/2016/07/31/muriel-spark/ [consulted June 2019].

[2] Janice Galloway, 'Introduction', in Muriel Spark, *The Complete Short Stories* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011), p. xi.

[3] Ian Gregson, *Character and Satire in Postwar Fiction* (New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 107.

[4] Muriel Spark, 'The Desegregation of Art', in *The Golden Fleece: Essays*, ed. by Penelope Jardine (Manchester: Carcanet, 2014 [1970]), p. 30.

[5] Len Gutkin, 'Muriel Spark's Camp Metafiction', in *Contemporary Literature*, 58.1 (2017), p. 55.

[6] James Bailey, 'Salutary Scars: The "Disorientating" Fictions of Muriel Spark', in *Contemporary Women's Writing* 9.1 (2015), p. 47; Jonathan Kemp, '"Her Lips are Slightly Parted": The Ineffability of Erotic Sociality in Muriel Spark's *The Driver's Seat*', in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 54.3 (2008), p. 545; Len Gutkin, 'Muriel Spark's Camp Metafiction', in *Contemporary Literature*, 58.1 (2017), p. 55; Marilyn Reizbaum, 'The Stranger Spark', in *Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed. by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 40; Martin McQuillan, 'Introduction: "I Don't Know Anything About Freud": Muriel Spark Meets Contemporary Criticism', in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. by Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 14; Patricia Waugh, 'Muriel Spark and the Metaphysics of Modernity: Art, Secularization, and Psychosis', in *Muriel Spark: Twenty-first-century Perspectives*, ed. by David Herman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), p. 66.

[7] Muriel Spark, 'What Images Return', in *Memoirs of a Modern Scotland*, ed. by Karl Miller (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 152.

[8] Angela Carter, *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women* (London: Virago, 1986), p. xii.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 3-4.

[11] Nicola Pitchford, *Tactical Readings: Feminist Postmodernism in the Novels of Kathy Acker and Angela Carter* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 103.

[12] Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 11.

[13] Jack Halberstam, 'Wildness, Loss, Death', *Social Text*, 32.4 (2014), pp. 137-148.

[14] Jack Halberstam, 'Go Gaga: Anarchy, Chaos and the Wild', *Social Text*, 31.3(116) (2013), pp. 123-134.

[15] Ibid., p. 126.

[16] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), p. 9.

[17] Ibid., p. 17.

[18] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 11.

[19] J. Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), p. 125.

[20] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 2.

[21] Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism*, p. 126.

[22] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 18.

[23] Fred Moten, 'Gestural Critique of Judgment', in *The Power and Politics of the Aesthetic in American Culture*, ed. by Ulla Haselstein and Klaus Benesch (Munich: Bacarian American Academy, 2007), p. 105.

[24] Stephano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), p. 11.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., p. 12.

[27] Spark, 'What Images Return', p. 151.

[28] Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 1.

[29] Ibid., p. 7.

[30] Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 1.

[31] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 12.

[32] Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, p. 53.

[33] Ibid., p. 59.

[34] Ibid., p. 17.

[35] Ibid., p. 18.

[36] David Herman (ed.), *Muriel Spark: Twenty-first-century Perspectives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), p. 2.

[37] Brian Cheyette, *Muriel Spark* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2000), p. 72. He is quoting Angus Wilson, 'Journey to Jerusalem,' *Observer*, 17 October 1968, p. 28.

[38] Judith Roof, 'The Future Perfect's Perfect Future: Spark's and Duras's Narrative Drive', In *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. by Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 59.

[39] Gerardine Meaney, *(Un)Like Subjects: Women, theory, fiction* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 185.

[40] Muriel Spark, *The Driver's Seat* (London: Penguin, 2006 [1970]), p. 15.

[41] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 138.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Muriel Spark, *The Hothouse By The East River* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2018 [1973]), p. 18.

[44] Meaney, *(Un)Like Subjects*, p. 181.

[45] Muriel Spark, *The Public Image* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2018 [1968]), p. 116.

[46] Susan Sellers, 'Tales of Love: Narcissism and Idealization in *the Public Image*,' in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. by Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 46.

[47] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 11.

[48] Ibid., p. 12.

[49] Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, p. 53.