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9. Muriel Spark and the ‘Hired Grammarians’

HELEN STODDART

On 10 November 1961 John Updike wrote to Muriel Spark, both to thank her for the signed copy of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) which she had gifted him (‘It is a grand book, of course’) and to attempt to establish a writerly esprit de corps via some humorous sniping about the *New Yorker’s* priggish editing practices.¹ The October edition of the magazine had showcased Spark’s most recent novel in full (albeit in a shorter version of 40,000 words) and this had been preceded in the September edition by an enthusiastic review² by Updike who, now furnished with both this and Lippincott’s first edition of the novel, was well-placed to observe the extensive range of omissions, alterations and translations into American English which characterise the relationship between the two versions of the text.³ Since then, these differences have either been overlooked or dismissed as minor and negligible⁴ – a matter of trimming to fit the exigencies of the magazine’s limited space as well as accommodations for the American reader – but Updike’s letter is intriguing for the way it perceives other more substantial issues at stake in the editing of Spark’s original manuscript. While he concedes that the novel was not ruined by the process (‘nothing really crippling or disastrous’), he is amused by the ‘prudery that led them to cut the thingummyjig, Mr Lowther’s stoppage, and the entire indecent exposure episode with Jenny and the consequent fantasy of Sergeant Anne Grey’ and wonders why they removed Brodie’s letter to Gordon Lowther, supposing that the excision of these episodes was the product of a pre-war prudery that stymied a more enlightened editorial outlook (‘they were not quite willing to face up to the extent to which the story is about sex’). He is equally struck, however, by the ‘most annoying’ formal and stylistic ‘fiddling’ with Spark’s paragraphing and style (‘their relentless sprinkling of commas and “clarifying” dashes’) which he satirically (but erroneously) characterises

as the ‘timid and stupid pedantry’ of a bunch of ‘hired grammarians’ of ‘extreme venerability’ who are ‘all called Miss Gaunt and have been with the magazine since 1925.’⁵ The evidence of both these editorial tendencies – towards sexual censorship and a re-shaping of Spark’s literary voice through commas and dashes – is less interesting for what it may reveal about the *New Yorker’s* editorial culture than for the way it throws into relief Spark’s determined forging of a distinctive and unfamiliar literary aesthetic. An analysis of the previously unexamined yellow manuscript, received from Spark and worked on at the *New Yorker*, however, reveals a much more complex story about the history of the novel’s progress at the magazine and challenges many of the suppositions made by Updike about Spark’s role in generating the relative ‘prudery’ of the magazine version of the text.⁶

In fact, Spark’s editor at the *New Yorker* was Rachel MacKenzie who took up her post there in 1956, aged 47, after a career as an academic. She first made contact with Spark on 28 March 1957 following a recommendation from Hamish Hamilton. Editorial copy of *Brodie*, typed on distinctive yellow pages and now part of the Spark Archive at Tulsa University, reveals that MacKenzie herself carried out most of the smaller editorial changes, though the manuscript had clearly been cut significantly before she began her work on it. The changes were accepted by Spark for the purposes of this prestigious publication event, but none made their way into the first (and final) edition of the novel which was already primed for immediate publication by Macmillan (and Lippincott in the USA) once the magazine version hit the racks – the *New Yorker* enforced a contractual obligation stipulating that its fiction must not have appeared elsewhere already. Despite the fact that, following MacKenzie’s initial contact in 1957, Spark submitted several stories for publication (starting with ‘The Ormolu Clock’ in 1960), all were rejected, albeit with strongly encouraging words.⁷ On receipt of the *Brodie* manuscript, however, the telegraphed response was unequivocal: ‘THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE IS MARVELOUS AND WE WANT IT IF MRS SPARK WILL CONSIDER SOME MODEST CUTTING.’⁸ Spark had received excellent reviews for her first five novels – especially *The Comforters* (1957), *Memento Mori* (1959) and *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960) – and had forged a strong critical reputation in the United Kingdom,

but sales of her books remained disappointing and she was still awaiting an American breakthrough on both of these fronts. MacKenzie's offer, accompanied as it was by a payment of six thousand dollars and followed by a long-term 'first-reading' agreement with the magazine giving Spark a regular income for many years afterwards, must have announced itself as exhilarating and irresistible. It meant that finally Spark would be able to focus on making a living as a novelist, no longer reliant on book editing and other distractions.

Yet the evidence of Spark's career reveals the extent to which this request for cutting must have felt like a Faustian pact: the relinquishing of one power (complete autonomy over her literary discourse) in return for commercial success and the financial independence she had longed for as the magazine's 500,000 distribution promised an opening in the American market (and beyond) for her novels. Spark remains notorious for her claims that she didn't 'correct or re-write' her work⁹ and for the most part she made a career of guarding against editorial meddling, though the archives at Tulsa which contain her hand- and type-written manuscripts contain much evidence of revision and correction as she worked, albeit on a relatively small-scale. Still, editing and correction was not a role she liked to hand over to others. Martin Stannard claims that one of the reasons her archive is 'littered with disputes' is that she 'refused to concede to anyone the power to intimidate and correct her'.¹⁰ He quotes Spark as lamenting: 'I'm paralysed as a writer unless I write according to this queer dictatorial sense that I have' and she said of *Brodie* in particular that 'I had it all in my mind [...] I put it down as if I had dreamed the book'.¹¹ It appears to have been a diktat to which she subjected not only herself but also others. Stannard reports an injunction issued to Alan Maclean, her editor at Macmillan, not to 'alter the punctuation' in the novel (*The Comforters*) which she insists is 'intentionally unorthodox' and requesting the re-instatement of passages removed on the grounds of 'mild indecency'.¹² A galley print of *Doctors of Philosophy* (1962) which had been returned from the printers for checking shows Spark taking great care over the composition of a curt note requesting an end to their stylistic interference¹³ and confirms the sense that her submission to the editorial requests for the Brodie manuscript must have been a painful

concessionary trade-off rather than a relaxing of authority. Publication in the magazine required a temporary relinquishment of authority on the one hand but it simultaneously laid the ground for the flourishing of Spark's writerly reputation and confidence such that she would soon be able to rebuff further attempts to subject her to moral and grammatical rules of convention.¹⁴

Despite Updike's sexist inference about narrow-minded and obsessive spinsters it was, according to Stannard, MacKenzie's editor-in-chief, William Shawn, who was the source of the magazine's fusty reputation as 'a grand institution' which, despite its commitment to publish and reflect upon the best of contemporary writing, was 'something like a church or an Ivy League college, with its own lore, clergy and faculty.'¹⁵ His editorial style was known to be punctilious and insistent: 'Myth has it that, meticulous to the point of obsession, he once traced a writer to the jungle in order to request permission to alter a comma.'¹⁶ Certainly MacKenzie appears to have been loyal to this meticulous culture, though there is no evidence that she was in communication with Spark over the revisions in order to obtain permission to the extent that the anecdote above suggests. Neither does her commitment to scrutinise and revise the presence and/or absence of every separator and terminator in Spark's manuscript necessarily amount to a consistent or entirely systematic editing programme. The changes, however, can be divided into five categories, three of which will form the focus of this argument. The first two are the correction of typos and the fairly straightforward translation from British to American English spelling and preferences ('recognize' for 'recognise', 'gray' for 'grey', 'favorite' for 'favourite', 'learned' for 'learnt', 'Mr.' for 'Mr' and so on) which do not demand scrutiny. Third is the revision of punctuation which mainly consists of adding and subtracting commas but which at times also extends to substituting more emphatic separators such as dashes or semi-colons for commas and occasionally to shortening sentences with full-stops (the first category bleeds into the second through the North American preference for the Oxford comma which is implemented throughout). Fourth is the alteration of Spark's distinctive spacing throughout the text to mark important narrative shifts or breaks and fifth is the excision of text, often resulting in a shortening

of paragraphs or sentences by removing details that are included elsewhere thought to be either insignificant or of obscure significance to American readers, but which at times extends to the removal of sizeable episodes within the text. As the new evidence of the yellow manuscript indicates, however, Spark was, at the very least, involved in the selection of these lost episodes. Thus, the *New Yorker* manuscript is much more extensively edited than previously acknowledged, but what is it that was being amended and what was the 'grammar' that Spark sought so continuously to establish and defend throughout her career?

Separation Anxiety

As Updike notes with amusement, there is barely a paragraph in Spark's yellow *New Yorker* manuscript that has not been edited for punctuation. Occasionally commas are removed, but overwhelmingly they are added throughout the text in a manner that continually, if not consistently, alters the narrative's rhythms, emphases and even signification. This is the most insistent, if not dramatic, difference in the *New Yorker* edition. According to *Cassell's Guide to Punctuation* 'punctuation in the past was much heavier than it is today and [...] personal computers have encouraged changes in punctuation preferences over the last quarter of a century', a change which is coupled with a greater use of shorter, more direct sentences.¹⁷ Clearly in 1961 Spark's was not a style being shaped by computer technology, yet the comment is relevant here both for the way that it suggests Spark is writing in a style that is more in tune with the direction of the prose fiction which dominates the second half of the twentieth century (more direct, less parenthetical), but also for the inadvertent suggestion made about the connection between heavy use of punctuation and a certain weightiness about the prose thus punctuated. For the function of additional punctuation may not only be to clarify, re-balance or re-orientate the meaning of a sentence; in doing so it may also stabilise and lend fixity to a sequence of words which are thus denied a more pliable quickness, energy or ambiguity. Spark often referred to the value of her first vocation as a poet in shaping the economy of her prose style.¹⁸ It has almost become a critical commonplace to refer to the 'brevity'¹⁹ and 'wit' of her prose style using adjectives such as 'economic',²⁰

'minimalist',²¹ 'sparkling',²² 'tight',²³ 'light', 'sparse',²⁴ 'slim', 'firm',²⁵ 'precise' to identify a recognisably 'Sparkian' discourse on the basis of these ongoing characteristics in her work which all derive from or relate to an aesthetic of combined lightness and precision; it is writing that is powerful precisely for what it appears to have shed or done without. It startles, amuses and unsettles because of its apparent exactitude and is, therefore, a prose style that resonates more for the poise, balance and angles of its composition than the accumulation of detail or force of feeling captured within it. There is also a clear connection between this spare aesthetic and Spark's characteristic economy of humour. As Freud is careful to stress, humour depends on the sense of 'elevation' from raw worldly trauma to be truly itself (as opposed to comedy and jokes), indeed it repudiates reality by diminishing its force, therefore humorous fiction often hinges on a non-naturalistic twist.²⁶ More than any other fictional mode, humour depends on maintaining a careful balance – between what is said and only inferred, in the construction of a non-sequitur – and in resisting fixity. Both elements of this fragile economy may be thrown off course by the introduction or addition of punctuation which inevitably adds weight, shifts the balance and emphasis of a sentence and alters the tone, syntax or idiom of a purposefully stylised speaker when it occurs within direct speech. Spark's anxiety about interference with her sometimes unconventional punctuation (in this case through the addition of so many commas throughout the text) surely relate to their potential to act as an additional drag on the agility and tone of the development of her distinctive prose style.

There are indeed many examples of additional and more emphatic punctuation from the yellow manuscript which alter the style of the *New Yorker* text without appearing to clarify or sharpen the force or clarity of the prose. MacKenzie appears to embark on a battle of ownership for the manuscript, staking her claim with each newly planted or weeded comma. Occasionally she removes a comma to increase the flow of the prose, for example in Chapter 1 'but Sandy and Jenny got ink on their blouses at discreet intervals of four weeks, so that they could go and have their arms held by Miss Lockhart' (p. 24)²⁷ becomes 'but Sandy and Jenny got ink on their blouses at discreet intervals of four weeks so that they could go and

have their arms held by Miss Lockhart' (pp. 017–18, YMS). Overwhelmingly, however, commas are added to the text, very often through MacKenzie's strict application of the rule that conjunctions such as 'and' must always be preceded by a comma even where the meaning as a whole is sometimes thrown off balance by the addition. In the next sentence two commas create an unnecessary, indeed slightly confusing, parenthesis describing Miss Lockhart. So, 'This long room was her natural setting and she had lost something of her quality when Sandy saw her walking from the school in her box-pleat tweeds over to her sports car like an ordinary teacher' (p. 24), becomes 'This long room was her natural setting, and she had lost something of her quality when Sandy saw her walking from the school in her box-pleat tweeds over to her sports car, like an ordinary teacher' (p. 018, YMS). The swift flow between strangely incongruous associations (fashionable tweeds, racy car and ordinariness), made sense of by the fact that the narrative has already indicated that Sandy's romantic vision of Lockhart dressed in a 'white overall' and surrounded by 'six inches of pure air' in the science room has now become disenchanted. The *New Yorker* interrupts the flow of Sandy's associations as the commas separate off Lockhart's actions from Sandy's humorously odd characterisation of her. The effect is an attempt to impose order and sense on a sentence conceived through the lens of a peculiar adolescent logic which has been warped through lost desire by somehow connecting 'her natural setting' around the parenthesis to 'like an ordinary teacher' in a way that does not now make sense. In another example, 'Sandy said, then "Mr Lloyd had a baby last week. He must have committed sex with his wife." This idea was easier to cope with and they laughed screamingly into their pink paper napkins' (p. 17) becomes 'Sandy said, then, "Mr. Lloyd had a baby last week. He must have committed sex with his wife." This idea was easier to cope with, and they laughed screamingly into their pink paper napkins' (p. 04, YMS). Here the sense of girlish hysteria is weakened by the orderly comma which introduces a more sober pace to the third person narrative voice and marks a separation between spoken dialogue and narrative voice which Spark works hard to de-stabilise in the novel so that Brodie is not simply present as an isolated comic object or character in the narrative, but

is the touchstone for a pervasive, highly flawed and complex shaping (or rather perversion) of youthful female desire, evidence of which is found throughout the third person narration.

But even where Spark follows the conjunction rule, the impact of additional commas on Spark's brisk prose can be deadening. For example: 'Mary Macgregor, lumpy, with merely two eyes, a nose and a mouth like a snowman, who was later famous for being stupid and always to blame and who, at the age of twenty-three, lost her life in a hotel fire, ventured, "Golden"' has three additional commas in the *New Yorker*: 'Mary Macgregor, lumpy, with merely two eyes, a nose, and a mouth, like a snowman, who was later famous for being stupid and always to blame, and who, at the age of twenty-three, lost her life in a hotel fire, ventured, "Golden"' (p. 18, YMS). Further on, towards the end of Chapter 4, a discussion between Brodie and Jenny about the fact that Mr Lloyd has singled out the 'Brodie set' to invite to his studio is seized upon by Brodie: "It is because you are mine," said Miss Brodie. "I mean of my stamp and cut, and I am in my prime." (p. 97). In the *New Yorker* edition the second sentence becomes: "I mean, of my stamp and cut, and I am in my prime." Although the comma before a conjunction rule is followed here, the additional clutter of a comma after 'mean' significantly detracts from the brittle and direct force of Brodie's tone and logic: its certainty and ruthlessness.

Elsewhere in examples of shorter sentences the effect is sometimes more dramatic. In Chapter 3 the proleptic leap to Sandy's visit to a sixty-five-year-old Brodie in the last year of her life changes from 'This was her last year in the world and in another sense it was Sandy's' (p. 56), to 'This was her last year in the world, and, in another sense, it was Sandy's' (p. 0006, YMS). Here the additional separators slow down the pace and make the sentence seem more ponderous than it need be, almost over-egging the poignancy of the contrasting yet strangely parallel momentum of their relationships to worldliness. It also lends a sense of ending to a sentence that, although it belongs to the end of the story, has been purposefully shifted to the middle of the plot to provide an enigmatic narrative spike, an effect which is weakened by the way the commas slow the sentence down. To illustrate the impact of the application of this rule consistently in Spark's discourse,

imagine what would happen to one of Spark's famously brutal short sentences from 'The Portobello Road': 'He looked as if he would murder me and he did' (p. 520).²⁸ Under Mackenzie's hand this would have become: 'He looked as if he would murder me, and he did'. The pace slower, the tone more thoughtful, it moves from indicating an irrevocable, pre-emptive and fatal logic (between looking, murder and the inevitable fact of her death) to an almost reflective separation of his murderous look from his (not necessarily inevitable) act of murder. Yet the concept of a world determined by inescapable predeterminations (above all death) is one that underwrites not only 'The Portobello Road' and *Brodie* but Spark's body of work as a whole; thus, Spark's widespread avoidance of separating punctuation may fall foul of strict 'grammarian' practice, but it does so in the service not only of a more agile and 'sparkling' aesthetic, but also an understanding of human lives underwritten by unfathomable predeterminations.

As the example of Sandy's view of Miss Lockhart above demonstrates, the absence of commas also functions at times to speed connections past the reader, the logic of which does not bear rational scrutiny. For example, in Chapter 1 Spark's text has: 'Sandy looked at it with her tiny eyes which it was astonishing that anyone could trust' (p. 100), whereas the *New Yorker* has: 'Sandy looked at it with her tiny eyes, which it was astonishing that anyone could trust' (p. 0056). Clearly the prejudicial association between facial characteristics and ethical confidence is a vehicle here for the text's sharp irony, of which there are many other examples throughout; the ironic humour is delivered with a swift, cold edge in Spark's which the *New Yorker* is missing as it works to separate out material observation from interpretation, as though it were the work of considered reflection rather than unquestionable and cruel fate. As well as the difference of punctuation the *New Yorker* edition also reduces the impact of this line by changing the spacing around it. The following line, which starts a new paragraph ('The portrait was like Miss Brodie') is brought up into the preceding paragraph in a way that inevitably drains some of the discomfort and impact from the statement about Sandy by extending the paragraph back round to an observation about Miss Brodie's relationship to the painting. In another example, 'If the authorities wanted to get rid of her she would have to be assassinated'

becomes, 'If the authorities wanted to get rid of her, she would have to be assassinated' (p. 10, YMS): again the comma in the *New Yorker* edition lends the content of the sentence a respectability – a sense of having been contemplated and narrated by a thoughtful if questionable overview – whereas Spark's narrative voice in *Brodie* is characteristically given to such bursts of quick, bright absurdity which reflect Brodie's warped thinking as well as the young minds she has bent towards it.

It is at points such as this that Brodie's characteristic idiom – of colourful, compelling and breathless instructions which mask a sinister and manipulative logic – leaks into, or rather mirrors, the text's third person narrative voice. But even this voice, which is so famous for its pronouncements, is less present through direct rather than reported speech (within the third person narration or in the girls' imagination and reportage), and is weighed down by the addition of commas. So 'If only you small girls would listen to me I would make of you the crème de la crème' (p. 14) becomes 'If only you small girls would listen to me, I would make of you the crème de la crème' (YMS, p. 18); 'But in this your last year with me you will receive the fruits of my prime' (p. 47) becomes 'But in this, your last year with me, you will receive the fruits of my prime' (YMS, p. 00011); 'That is the truth and there is no more to say' (p. 60) becomes 'That is the truth, and there is no more to say' (p. 000014, YMS); 'Cleopatra knew nothing of the team spirit if you read your Shakespeare' (p. 78) becomes 'Cleopatra knew nothing of the team spirit, if you read your Shakespeare' (p. 000017, YMS); 'I shall remain at this education factory where my duty lies' (p. 112) becomes 'I shall remain at this education factory, where my duty lies' (p. 0000073, YMS); 'I am his Muse but Rose shall take my place' (p. 120) becomes 'I am his Muse, but Rose shall take my place' (p. 181, YMS). Each of these examples shows how MacKenzie's impulse to follow proper conventions of punctuation by observing pauses and shifts in syntax which might normally be marked within a narrative voice are applied to Brodie's speaking voice in a way that modifies it, albeit gently, by reducing the sense of brittle certainty and sharp dictatorial style. In Brodie's own terms, the commas introduce a 'lump' to the 'leaven', though the 'leaven' (which refers to Sandy in this case), is shown to be a mysterious and treacherous thing indeed.

The tone and syntax are not only altered by the addition of commas. Elsewhere pauses become more emphatic as they are upgraded to dashes or full stops. For example: 'Take Helen of Troy. And the Queen of England, it is true she attends international sport, but she has to, it is all empty show, she is concerned only with the King's health and antiques' (p. 78) becomes 'Take Helen of Troy. And the Queen of England. It is true she attends international sport, but she has to – it is all empty show. She is concerned only with the King's health and antiques' (p. 0000017, YMS). Here the addition of full stops for two of the commas again introduces a grammatical formality to sentences that in the original are dominated by Brodie's characteristic voice with all its attendant drama and questionable reasoning.

Cutting the 'thingummyjig'

As Updike observes, the *New Yorker* edition of the novel is not only punctuated very differently, but is also without several significant passages from the original which concern sex, most notably the lengthy episode in chapter three, 'Towards the end of the Easter holidays [...] and the fact that she had told her class first thing' (pp. 66–70) and 'What about [...] was very thrilling' (p. 72) in which a man exposes himself to Jenny at the Water of Leith. Jenny's discussion of this with Sandy, and her subsequent interview with the policewoman, Anne Grey, is thus also removed. Having cut out this episode, all further references to it have been excised, and with this goes the important idea of Sandy and Jenny now sharing for the first time a sexual secret, an episode which then sets up the possibility of Sandy's further sexual secret from Brodie: her sleeping with Mr Lloyd. But beyond this, Sandy and Jenny's fictional letter from Brodie to Mr Lowther ('The last letter in the series [...] With fondest joy, Jean Brodie', pp. 73–74) is also missing from the *New Yorker*, as are several much shorter, paragraph-length (or less) sections: for example, 'For the war-time romance of her life [...] would get Monica Douglas into trouble' (p. 53) which relates Monica's witnessing of Brodie and Mr Lloyd's art room kiss to the girls' incredulity about a younger pre-war Brodie, 'hardly flesh and blood'; Jenny and Sandy's discussion about Mr Lowther's short legs around Miss Brodie ('When she was well out of the way [...] with a housekeeper', p. 59) and a reference to the Silver Jubilee

which is mixed in with a discussion between Brodie and Rose about her sitting for Mr Lloyd and Sandy's visit to this studio ('In the summer of nineteen-thirty five [...] said Miss Brodie', p. 105). In fact, the reference to 'Mr Lowther's stoppage' is a very brief one (three lines of dialogue), as is the reference to the 'thingummyjig' (p. 20) on the naked statue in the art gallery (two lines). Yet not all the cuts indicate a bodily or sexually censorious inclination. The final section of Chapter 2 (from 'A very long queue of men lined this part of the street', pp. 39–41) which describes a dole queue of men and depicts the unsettling effects of the depression on the girls is absent, as is the account of Brodie's social group and their activities ('They went to lectures [...] holidays at North Berwick', pp. 42–43), Sandy's Pavlova fantasy ('Pavlova nodded sagely [...] will carry on the torch', p. 63), a passage about the diminishing impact of the novelty of the girls' experience of the 'Modern' and 'Classical' 'sides' ('A few weeks later [...] in passing on the wireless', p. 76), Brodie wondering with Sandy whether it was Mary who betrayed her ('And Miss Brodie [...] should have been kinder to Mary', p. 77), a passage about several of the girls' academic progress ('Even Monica Douglas [...] for her chemistry notes', pp. 82–83), a reference to Sandy's lack of understanding of social class ('She did not at the time [...] social class at all' p. 108), a comment on the school houses ('Nominally [...] For their own part and [...]', pp. 111–12), and the Brodie set's rejection of Joyce Emily ('but they [...] discredit Miss Brodie', p. 117). What is so startling about MacKenzie's editorial work in the yellow manuscript, however, is that the most significant of her cuts, certainly the ones which are most overtly sexual, had already been made before MacKenzie started her work. Whereas she has clearly crossed out some of the passages identified above for removal (Mr Lowther's 'stoppage', which would have required glossing for a North American readership, the Silver Jubilee, about the classical and the modern, the possibility of Mary Macgregor's having betrayed Miss Brodie, the girls' relative academic progress, the school houses, Miss Brodie's social circle), others (most notably the exposure episode, the girls' inability to imagine a 'flesh and blood' Brodie, Mr Lowther's legs around Miss Brodie, Jenny and Sandy's imagined letter from Brodie to Mr Lowther and the reference to the 'thingummyjig') are simply missing from the yellow manuscript she

edited. This evidence throws a very different light on Updike's comments and begs a number of new questions, not only about Spark's relationship with the *New Yorker*, but also about her sense of her own writing – its perception by the wider reading public (especially a North American one) and its own internal priorities.

The process through which these cuts was decided upon, however, is not clear. What is the provenance of the yellow manuscript? Following on from this, do the omissions in this manuscript represent Spark's decisions about what should be removed from the narrative, or was she directed towards certain cuts on advice from MacKenzie? The yellow manuscript itself provides some evidence to help address these questions. The name and address of her literary agent's firm (Christy & Moore Ltd. of 52 Floral Street, Covent Garden) is typed on the title page and a comparison of the typeface used in the yellow manuscript and Spark's typescript for the first edition reveals differences and confirms that it was typed on a different machine; it also uses a completely different page numbering style.²⁹ The yellow manuscript, therefore, must have been produced for Spark through John Smith, her agent at Christie & Moore, and the dominance of British spelling and presentation conventions in the yellow manuscript confirms this, as well as the presence of many more typos than are characteristically present in Spark's own typewritten scripts. Unfortunately, despite Spark's conscientiousness about keeping correspondence, there is nothing in the Tulsa or Edinburgh archives which would explain the processes and conversations that shaped this manuscript. Did MacKenzie recommend or specify the longer cuts that are evident here? Or did she simply ask Spark to produce a shorter version of the novel to fit into the space available in the *New Yorker* and leave it up to her to decide which episodes should go? Did Smith, as her literary agent, play any role in this process? As evidence from the Edinburgh archive shows, he was certainly involved in relaying information from MacKenzie to Spark, but there is no suggestion that he was informed or consulted about the cuts.³⁰ For her part MacKenzie was clearly keen to establish a more personal relationship with Spark and wrote to her directly; this correspondence shows that she was very keen to obtain Spark's approval for the style and content of the new version of the text.³¹ MacKenzie went

on to carry out many further cuts (several of which are listed above), but the final version of the text was sent to Spark for rapid approval ahead of publication and was not met with objections or suggestions for alternative changes. Two things are clear: MacKenzie's cuts do not appear to be driven by any overt or covert puritanical agenda; they encompass a variety of subject matter and are mainly driven by a desire to trim away certain kinds of contextual information rather than censor entire episodes; the excision of the sexual episodes identified by Updike and confirmed above had already taken place since they are clearly absent from the yellow manuscript which means that Spark must have played a central role, if not the sole role, in their identification and removal. Any explanation of the rationale for the removal of these passages must remain speculative since there is no correspondence that would illuminate Spark's thinking about her textual priorities. They do not simply represent clearly freestanding episodes which could be cut without harming the central Sandy/Brodie plot because although the exposure episode, and Jenny and Sandy's letter arguably fall into this category, the short lines about Mr Lowther's legs around Brodie and the 'thingummyjig' do not and these constitute the most physical and sexual, if somewhat comical, references in the novel. Perhaps in removing them Spark was simply second-guessing MacKenzie's preferences on the basis of her knowledge of the *New Yorker's* old school reputation under William Shawn, a reputation which Updike's letter certainly confirms must have been widespread amongst its contributors. Or perhaps the cuts represent an assumption of more widespread cultural prudery which Spark was projecting onto her North American readership. Yet, there is no evidence that any specific directions came from the *New Yorker* to downplay or remove the sexual content of the novel and MacKenzie's further excisions from the yellow manuscript, as the list above demonstrates, show no inclination to further edit this aspect of the novel, focusing instead on removing personal, cultural and historical material of a contextual nature, some of the detail of which MacKenzie may have judged either less crucial to the plot or less interesting to a North American readership. The evidence of this yellow manuscript, however, strongly indicates that Spark, despite her emerging reputation for rebuffing editor's attempts to direct or dictate to

her about the shape and style of her work, appears to have either colluded in or initiated a set of excisions, several of which speak of a sensitivity about the novel's direct and humorous approach to the early sexual imaginings of the girls of Marcia Blaine School for Girls. There is no further correspondence in either the Tulsa or Edinburgh archive to indicate how or whether Spark explained any of this to Updike, but it does suggest that Spark's response to reading his mischievous letter of congratulations, with its haughty joke about the spinsters who missed the point of the novel, may not have been received with the sense of mutual self-congratulation he must have anticipated.

Conclusion

Close analysis of the relationship between the first edition of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and the shorter version of the novel published in the *New Yorker* demonstrates that the differences between the texts are not minor, nor does it seem likely that Spark would have regarded them as 'modest', as Rachel MacKenzie had hoped, since they involve meaningful and widespread changes to both the novel's plot and style. While the evidence of the previously unexamined yellow manuscript reveals that not all the textual excisions can clearly be attributed to MacKenzie, her zealous application of grammatical rules, especially the introduction of commas and additional forms of separation, not only changes the syntactical balance of Spark's prose, but demonstrably alters its meaning and impact in several places, weighing down and thus undermining the humorous impact of the text. The value of these editorial interventions for an understanding of Spark's aesthetic more broadly, however, is that they throw into sharp relief some of the distinctive qualities of what has come to be identified as the 'Sparkian discourse': a light, spare prose style marked by precision, wit and 'sparkle' in equal measure. Her more sparing use of commas reflects Theodor Adorno's caution in relation to commas, those 'most inconspicuous' of punctuation marks, which he regards as always in danger of 'making claims one would hardly expect of them' and of building in a separation between writing and voice and should therefore be 'thoughtfully avoided', where possible.³² The additional commas in the *New Yorker* edition of the novel slow down

the quick-witted prose, at times lending it a ponderous, hesitant quality that not only lets some of the air out of it, but also threatens the powerful sense throughout the novel that Brodie's brisk and absolutist approach to life and ethics has infiltrated the narrative voice of the novel as a whole. It is this style which, in speeding between observation ('tiny eyes') and assumption (untrustworthiness) ushers in a fiction of inescapable or fatalistic logic which emerges in *Brodie*, punctuated as it is by the certainty of its regular prolepses (Brodie's and Mary's deaths), and thus underlines the way that Spark's distinctive aesthetic at times echoes the logic of her plots. At the same time the yellow manuscript reveals a previously unacknowledged side to Spark who jealously guarded her reputation as an author whose work came to her through a form of authorial dictation and who fiercely protected her work from editorial interventions. Zadie Smith identifies Spark as one of three female writers who inspire particularly intense devotion amongst followers because of the apparently 'total control (over their form) they display'.³³ The yellow manuscript shows that even a writer like Spark, who was uncommonly protective of her work, felt the need to relinquish some of her authority to secure the *New Yorker* publication in a publishing world in which she felt undervalued in comparison with contemporary male writers whose work was being promoted and sold above hers. It also demonstrates that, even as publishing culture in Britain was taken up with working-class realism (Alan Sillitoe, John Braine, David Storey) firmly founded on the authenticity of voice based on the concepts of class and regional idioms, at stake in Spark's writing is an equally important concern: not to preserve and honour a neglected class or regional voice but rather to invent and defend a distinctive new narrative discourse unimpaired by grammarian orthodoxies.

Endnotes

- 1 Letter by John Updike to Muriel Spark, 10 November 1961. Copyright © 2021, John Updike, used by permission of The Wylie Agency (UK). National Library of Scotland, Spark Archive (Acc.10607/91, no. 127).
- 2 John Updike, 'Creatures of the Air', *New Yorker*, 30 September 1961, pp. 161–67.
- 3 At this point Lippincott & Co. published Spark in the United States while Macmillan were her British publishers.
- 4 See for example, Lisa Harrison, "'The Magazine That is Considered the Best in the World": Muriel Spark and *The New Yorker*', in *Modern Fiction Studies* 24.3 (Fall 2008), pp. 595–616.
- 5 Letter from Updike, 1961, op. cit. Miss Gaunt is the strict teacher from the Western Isles who shocks the Brodie set with her insistence on 'industrious learning' (*Jean Brodie*, p. 57).
- 6 The yellow manuscript is held in the Muriel Spark archive at the Department of Special Collections & University Archive Repository, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa (UT), 1983.003.2.60. Referred to henceforth as YMS.
- 7 Harrison, 'Muriel Spark and *The New Yorker*', pp. 599–601.
- 8 Telegram from Rachel Mackenzie, cited in Harrison, 'Muriel Spark and *The New Yorker*', p. 600.
- 9 Quoted in Stephen Schiff, 'Muriel Spark Between the Lines', *New Yorker*, 24 May 1993, pp. 36–43 (p. 36).
- 10 Martin Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2009), p. xxiii.
- 11 Stannard, op. cit., p. 161 and interview with Nan Robertson, 'The Prime Time of Muriel Spark', *New York Times*, 14 May 1979, A-16.
- 12 Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography*, p. 176, also an early clash with William G. Smith, the editor of *Books & Bookmen* who 'updated' her text for the 1960 BBC radio talk 'How I became a Novelist' for publication the following year. Claiming she was 'passionate about principle and justice' she insisted that no one was therefore permitted 'to touch a punctuation mark' without her approval. Stannard reports that Spark forced Smith to make a charity payment to her local church organ fund when he defied this order (pp. 237–38).
- 13 13 The following handwritten advice on the *dramatis personae* page: Note to the printer from the author:—The author thanks the printers for their queries on various points of style in her dialogue-prose, but respectfully requests them to cease from this practice when dealing with her work in future as she finds it more distracting than useful. The author suggests that the typographical sides stands in some need of attention & refuses to pass the proofs until satisfied in this respect.' (Muriel Spark, Manuscript, UT, 1983.003.3.16). This is the third and most polite version of this request, the two other drafts also being preserved in the archive.
- 14 Much later correspondence between Spark and Charles McGrath, a later editor at the *New Yorker*, however, reveals a more receptive Spark who responds positively to his request that she re-works and extends the ending of her short story, 'Going Up and Coming Down' (letter from Charles McGrath, 3 May 1994, NLS Spark archive (Acc. 11621/93)). But when Spark duly faxes a re-worked ending 5 days later with the expressed hope that 'you will find this version of GOING UP AND COMING DOWN

- an improvement, as in fact I do' (Acc. 11621/93) he finally rejects the new version too (Letter from Charles McGrath, 30 June 1994, NLS, (Acc. 11621/93)), leaving Spark to publish the amended version of the story later in the year in the *Daily Telegraph*.
- 15 Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography*, p. 275.
 - 16 *Ibid.*
 - 17 Loreto Todd, *Cassell's Guide to Punctuation* (London: Cassell & Co., 1995), p. 23.
 - 18 'It's being aware of the value of words [...] in a very quick flash as one is going along. That I can do quite easily. That is a sort of poetic method' in Stephen Schiff, 'Muriel Spark Between the Lines', *New Yorker*, 24 May 1993, pp. 41–42.
 - 19 Emma Hogan claims, 'Her Brevity often perplexed critics, but it let her strip away the flab. Leaving what Updike called a "sweet sting"' in *Economist* digital magazine, 11 March 2015, www.1843magazine.com/content/arts/emma-hogan/muriel-spark [accessed 24 November 2016].
 - 20 Peter Kemp introduces her work as 'thrifty, frugal, economic' in *Muriel Spark* (London: Paul Elek, 1974), p. 7. Marilyn Reizbaum refers to the 'economy and compression' of her writing in 'The Stranger Spark' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, eds. Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 40–51 (p. 41).
 - 21 Hope Howell Hodgkins refers to Spark and Barbara Pym's style as characteristic of the austerity of the post-war period, 'saying more for less through rhetorical minimalism' in 'Stylish Spinsters: Spark, Pym, and the Post-War Comedy of the Object', in *Modern Fiction Studies* 54.3 (Fall 2008), pp. 523–43 (p. 526).
 - 22 'She was peerless, sparkling, inventive and intelligent [...]', Ian Rankin quoted on the cover of *Symposium* (London: Virago, 2006).
 - 23 Evelyn Waugh describes *Brodie* as a 'tight little tale' in 'Love, Loyalty and Little Girls', *Cosmopolitan* 152, February 1962, p. 38.
 - 24 A. L. Kennedy refers to the 'compression of her narratives and her 'sparse and simple vocabulary' in her introduction to *Memento Mori* [1959] (London: Virago, 2011), p. x.
 - 25 In a review of *The Only Problem*, John Updike describes Spark's 'sudden, wilful largesse of image and wit, the cunning tautness of suspense, the beautifully firm modulations from passage to passage' in 'A Romp with Job', *New Yorker*, 23 July 1985, p. 104.
 - 26 Sigmund Freud, 'Humour', in *Art and Literature: Pelican Freud Library*, trans. James Strachey, 15 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), xiv, pp. 427–33 (p. 429).
 - 27 Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (London: Penguin, 2000). All references are to this edition.
 - 28 Muriel Spark, 'The Portobello Road', in *The Complete Short Stories* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011), p. 520.
 - 29 For example, the capital 'M' has a longer mid-point on Spark's manuscript for the first edition. The numbers appear at the top and middle of the page in the yellow manuscript but the top right in Spark's first edition manuscript. The latter proceeds from 1–201, whereas the yellow manuscript starts at 01 and moves through 001, 0001 etc. for each chapter, with the final chapter having handwritten numbers at the top right of the page.
 - 30 See Letters from MacKenzie to John Smith (19 September 1961) and Spark (12 September 1961), NLS Spark Archive (Acc. 11621/93), regarding the author's proof of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.
 - 31 *Ibid.*

- 32 Theodor W. Adorno and Shierry Weber Nichol森 (trans.), 'Punctuation Marks', in *The Antioch Review* 48.3 (1990), pp. 300–305, www.jstor.org/stable/4612221 [accessed 5 May 2021]. As Lee Clark Mitchell points out in his analysis of the deployment of commas in the work of James Baldwin, however, commas are not deterministic in themselves and can 'alternatively weave together moods and unsettle ideas [...] to generate harmonious rhythms – or to disrupt them.' *Mark My Words: Profiles of Punctuation in Modern Literature* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), p. 23.
- 33 Zadie Smith, 'Zadie Smith: dance lessons for writers', *Guardian* magazine, 29 October 2016, www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/29/zadie-smith-what-beyonce-taught-me [accessed 29 April 2021].