

Department of English and American Studies

Faculty of Arts

Palacký University Olomouc

**Unreliable Narrators in Muriel Spark's Early Novels**

Nespolehliví vypravěči v raných románech Muriel Sparkové

(Master's Thesis)

Bc. Alexandra Adamčová

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Supervisor: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D.

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I confirm that I wrote the submitted thesis myself and integrated corrections and suggestions of improvement of my supervising professor. I also confirm that the thesis includes complete list of sources and literature cited.

In Olomouc .....

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## Introduction

Muriel Spark is undoubtedly one of the most gifted and ingenious Scottish writers. Unlike the other writers of her time, she is fearless about bringing something new and unseen to her oeuvre – her capability to create a dynamic background in her novels is striking. Thus, the main concern of this thesis is restless formal experimentation Spark often employs in her works in the form of the unreliable narrator. For the purpose of demonstrating the impact this narrative technique has over the overall understanding of the text, I have chosen the framework consisting of six novels: *The Comforters* (1957), *Memento Mori* (1959), *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960), *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974) and *Aiding and Abetting* (2000).

This thesis is divided into three sections. The first chapter is dedicated to the brief biography of Muriel Spark, especially to the events that would later become turning points and influence her oeuvre to a considerable extent, as for instance her conversion to Roman Catholic religion in 1954 was. As it can be observed from her oeuvre, Spark favours the mixing of fact and fiction, therefore, I believe this chapter may lead to a better understanding of her fictional and non-fictional works.

Spark's narrative strategies are intended to disturb conventional reader expectations from the very beginning. Hence, the next section explores the ways of how the authoress engages the unreliable narrator with the aforementioned works. Firstly, I will try to analyse the position and space the unreliable narrator possesses in the plot of each novel. Then, my focus will be directed towards the obscurity and difficulty of understanding the text that may arise by using such a narrative technique.

I also included a short chapter which aims at providing the definition of the unreliable narrator in a context of postmodern literature tradition as well as fiction in general. To illustrate this, I will combine several sources: *The Rhetoric of Fiction* by Wayne C. Booth, *The Author* by Andrew Bennett and *Postmodern Narrative Theory* by Mark Currie. The reason I have chosen these authors and their works is to approach the matter as comprehensibly as possible, for “the art of communicating” and its forms may not be known exactly to everyone.

Finally, there is a conclusion, in which I will clarify and summarize the findings I gathered while writing this thesis.

## 1. The Authoress

Muriel Spark (née Muriel Sarah Camberg) was born on 1 February 1918 in Edinburgh to parents from different backgrounds – her father was a Scottish Jew and mother was English. As a child, she was very observant and fascinated by all sorts of people she had met or had just heard about<sup>1</sup>; her imagination, perception and early childhood experience became the source of how she would portrait the characters and their moral potential in her novels later on.

Spark attended Presbyterian-oriented James Gillespie's High School for Girls, where she was educated by Miss Christina Kay, and who became the stimulus for the creation of her famous character Miss Jean Brodie. Albeit Miss Kay tried to nurture girls in the very best way she could, and Spark was very appreciative of the knowledge she acquired, yet she always preferred to stay independent and think on her own. During the school years, Spark dedicated most of her time to poetry writing (Sproxton 1992, 11 – 13).

After she left school, she sailed to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) together with Sidney Oswald Spark, whom she married in 1937, and a year later, their son Robin was born. Africa became her home for seven years, which were, on the one hand, inspiring for her oeuvre, but on the other, it was as well a sort of lesson for her private life.

It was in Africa that I learned . . . to put in a peripheral place the personal sorrows, frights and horrors that came my way. I knew my troubles to be temporary if I decided so.<sup>2</sup>

As for the inspiration, it was *The Seraph and the Zambesi*, an award-winning short story published in *The Observer* magazine, which further predicted her brilliant career as a novelist.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Judy Sproxton, "Introduction", in *The Women of Muriel Spark* (London: Constable, 1992) 10. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

<sup>2</sup> Ali Smith, *In the Spirit of Spark* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2018) 32. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

Being back in England, London-based, Spark divorced her husband, and in wartime, worked for the Political Intelligence Office. Her main responsibility here was to demoralize the German war effort via broadcasting. After the war, she engaged herself with the *Poetry Society* and established as a poetry editor and biographer. In these years, she published some of her most acknowledged biographies about nineteenth-century figures, among these Mary Shelley, Emily Brontë and John Masefield (Sproxton 1992, 14).

As turbulent as her life was until this time, the fundamental change came with her conversion to Catholicism in 1954, as it provided her with groundwork from which to write. According to many critics, it was also “the art of novel” (Cheyette 2000, 6) that Spark converted to, proved by the publication of her very first novel *The Comforters* in 1957.

From that time [of converting] I began to see life as a whole rather than as a series of disconnected happenings. (Smith 2018, 37)

Even though this religious conversion was to find a sense of identity and a relief at the same time, it was certainly challenging and stressful time for Spark.

In the following years, Spark's oeuvre considerably expanded, yet it was her sixth novel, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), thanks to which she became an internationally recognized authoress. Soon after its publication, she lived in New York and wrote for *The New Yorker* for some time. Nevertheless, she had never settled completely – afterwards she lived in Rome and then in Tuscany, where she died on 13 April 2006 (Cheyette 2000, vii).

Her sense of duality provided her with the ability to create fragmentary characters set in the plots that have their own terms of reference, with typical “Sparkian” irony and satire employed at any point of the story; she believes that such a usage may have a great effect on how we think or perceive the reality, and in some cases, it may also change our understanding. However, it would not be as appealing and satisfactory as it is for readers without her brilliant way of narrating, which was once perfectly described by Sproxton:

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<sup>3</sup> Bryan Cheyette, “Biographical Outline”, in *Muriel Spark* (Devon: Northcote House, 2000) vii. Henceforth cited parenthetically.



Sometimes we marvel at events and reactions, and we feel that, instead of merely manipulating us, the writer is marvelling too. (Sproxton 1992, 15)

Her artistry was and is still highly acclaimed by many critics, described as aesthetic, authentic and provoking. Spark published twenty-one novels in her lifetime.

## **2. The Postmodern Literature and the Unreliable Narrator**

The very term “postmodern” describes a shift in the perspective of the variety of disciplines including literature that has begun in the late 1950's and still probably continues; it is often used as a general term for the post-Second World War developments in literature, as for instance Beat Generation, Magic Realism and Theatre of the Absurd. This somewhat new perception is at once a continuation and a break away from Modernism at the same time. They both gave a significant voice to the 20<sup>th</sup> century world which may be described the best as disintegrated and insecure.

Regarding the purpose of this thesis, however, I will concentrate more on the introduction, in some cases re-introduction, and the employment of the elements, which are typical for postmodern works, specifically the transition of narratology with the unreliable narration or metafiction, fragmentation or intertextuality. These devices often give rise to multiple interpretations, leading to the ambiguity of the text in many cases. In addition to this, the authors of such works frequently employ pastiche<sup>4</sup> or parody as well in order to remind the readers that what they are reading is rather fictitious and thus not referring to reality whatsoever. Whilst Modernists considered the usage of these elements as a tragic, Postmodernism (Poststructuralism<sup>5</sup> respectively) celebrated them and found them necessary for the reader to construct the interpretation on his own:

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<sup>4</sup> Pastiche is an imitation of another's style.

<sup>5</sup> Poststructuralists emphasized the instability of meaning. Poststructuralism is a French school of thought that began in 1960's.

Terms like construction, construal, structuration and structuring were preferred by poststructuralists because they point to the active role of the reader in the construction of the meaning.<sup>6</sup>

Probably the most important move in the treatment of the narratology was that it was no longer perceived as something fixed and solid, but the preferred view was that “narratives were narratological inventions construable in an almost infinite number of ways” (Currie 1998, 3). They even established “a triangle” that may model the narratological change – it is characterised by diversification, deconstruction and politicisation. The postmodern age thus defined the transition from grand narratives to little narratives, for it was no longer proper to have everything standardized. What they wanted was to keep the narratology dynamic and up-to-date (Currie 1998, 6 – 14):

A deconstructionist reads a narrative for contradictions and aims to sustain them, not to reduce the narrative to a stable, single structure or meaning.<sup>7</sup>

Because the authors of postmodern literature felt that the usage of dramatized reliable narrator possessed a sort of inherent limitation, they have started to experiment with unreliable narrators whose characteristics can be changed according to the authors’ intentions throughout the work; it may cause a movement towards or away from values that are dear for the reader.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the reader is being manipulated by the author and his plan he has formulated in advance.<sup>9</sup>

What is more, Booth emphasizes the importance of particular qualities the narrator should acquire in his book, especially intellectual and moral, rather than the choice of the reference (first or second person narrative). He adds: “If he is discovered untrustworthy, then the total effect of the work he relays to is transformed” (Booth 1967, 158).

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Currie, “Introduction: Narratology, Death and Afterlife”, in *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 1998) 3. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Currie, “Terminologisation”, in *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 1998) 40.

<sup>8</sup> Wayne C. Booth, “Types of Narration”, in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) 156 – 157. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Currie, “The Manufacture of Identities”, in *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 1998) 23. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

As for the characteristics and terminology, Booth finds it inadequate, and so he goes for a very much straightforward definition: an unreliable narrator does not speak for or act according to the author's established norms. However, the unreliability does not have to be necessarily connected with a matter of lying; such a narrator can be mistaken or the author may deny the qualities the narrator believes himself to have. What is essential is to consider the way the narrator diverges from the writer's norms – it is a question both of distance and direction. Altogether, the employment of the unreliable rhetoric presents a larger space for readers' response criticism and demands his/her inference (Booth 1967, 159). While Booth finds this bond between reader and fiction as determining for any issues of sympathy the reader may possess, Louis Althusser, a Marxist, claims that literature is “one of the mechanisms which constructs the subject as a slave with delusions of freedom” (Currie 1998, 28).

Moreover, the narrative experiments in postmodern novels continued with the employment of metafiction, the novels which Currie described as “written by people who do know how to tell a story but whose narratives turn back on themselves in differing levels of self-consciousness, self-awareness and ironic self-distance”<sup>10</sup>. Despite the fact that being referred to as postmodern still raises many questions, many critics came upon a general agreement that these works are better understood with this reference as to “defending themselves against contemporary theory” (Currie 1998, 64).

Admittedly, as it is with the “art of telling”, the author himself has to make choices – more accurately – choices of degree, not kind. Even with the fallible narrator, the author can choose to what extent it will affect the overall perception of the text. Muriel Spark once said:

With a novel you know the dialogue. It belongs to each character. But the narrative part – first or third person – belongs to a character as well. I have to decide what the author of the narrative is like. It's not me, it's a character.<sup>11</sup>

That said, one should not generalize about a literary text – there are no “musts” or principles when it comes to its understanding. A number of authors suggest that

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Currie, “Theoretical Fiction”, in *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 1998) 62. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

<sup>11</sup> Paddy Lyons, “Muriel Spark's Break with Romanticism”, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) 90.

sometimes we should forget about the aspirations of the author and rather search for the meaning on our own. The only general statement Bennett makes about this and literature in particular in his work is:

Every literature text is, or aspires to be, both unique, singular and general. Literature, we might say, is, in an uncanny, undecidable way, exemplary.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. *The Comforters*

Muriel Spark made her debut as a novelist with witty, experimental metafictional novel *The Comforters*, which is basically a book within a book. It presents a female protagonist, Caroline Rose, who struggles with constraints, which beset the life of a novelist. Although Spark often disagreed with *The Comforters* being referred to as autobiographical, yet in fact, there is an undeniable resemblance between Spark and Caroline.<sup>13</sup> They both dedicated their life to the quest of a unified self, and therefore their fissured beings may be the reason why it is indeed impossible to recognize what are the intentions and where the authoress and her characters lead.

Caroline undergoes a tough “fight” with herself from the very beginning. Firstly, after her conversion to Catholicism, she has to end the relationship with her lover Laurence Manders, simply because he is not an adherer of Catholic belief. Afterwards, Caroline, with her neurosis, ends up in a Catholic convent searching for an immediate help, yet she does not earn it there. Nonetheless, to find a way to cope with her condition, she practises a continual dialogue in her own mind.

Back in her flat in Kensington, working on her book “Form in the Modern Novel”, currently “having a difficulty with the chapter on realism”<sup>14</sup>, she starts to hear mysterious voices, more accurately “a concurrent series of echoes” (C 43). Actually, it

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<sup>12</sup> Andrew Bennett, “The Question of Literature”, in *The Author* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) 126.

<sup>13</sup> Bryan Cheyette, “Half-Worlds: Writing against Conversion”, in *Muriel Spark* (Devon: Northcote House, 2000) 21. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

<sup>14</sup> Muriel Spark, *The Comforters* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963) 57. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *C*.

is the sound of a typewriter writing down her exact thoughts at specific time (consequently, the reader encounters some of the sentences twice):

It's exactly as if someone were watching me closely, able to read my thoughts; it's as if the person was waiting to pounce on some insignificant thought or action, in order to make it signify in a strange distorted way. (C 62)

Spark would frequently draw her stories on the real life experience, this time it is based on her own, not exactly pleasant one, from the early 1950's. It concerned the state of her psychics, and consequently the usage of Dexedrine, which caused her hallucinations and left her unable to read, as the words seemed as if moving on the page.

Yet the voice becomes so disturbing and unbearable that Caroline has to find her “comforters” to ensure herself it is not real, but their explanations only intensify her feelings rather than diminish. This resembles the biblical book of Job (Cheyette 2000, 22 – 23), for he undergoes the same with his “comforters”, and like Caroline, he appears on the verge of choosing between the real and unexplainable.

Later on, Caroline realizes that these voices, produced by a “Typing Ghost” (C 161), have some deeper meaning – they suggest the formation of a novel, where she and all the other characters play a role. As a result of this, her omniscient narrating perspective is no longer presented – it is the “Typing Ghost” that let her “taste” how it feels to be manipulated by someone.<sup>15</sup>

The narrative Spark employs in these and further passages creates madness not only in Caroline's head, but confuses her readers at the same time. Here, in the middle of the story, we are told that “the characters in this novel are all fictitious, and do not refer to any living persons whatsoever” (C 69), which completely changes our assumptions about the development of the plot – it defamiliarizes the reader from what is already familiar. Thus, the reader must “carry” the burden of providing explanations and thinking on his own in this book, because fiction is “a kind of parable” for Spark (Smith 2018, 40). Not only the narrator is unreliable, but the characters suffer mentally as well, so which perspective can we trust?

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<sup>15</sup> Ema Jelínková, “Účtování”, in *Ambivalence v románech Muriel Sparkové* (Olomouc: Periplum, 2006) 18. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

Whilst Caroline understands that the only way how to escape this suffering is to complete the novel, she does not like the fact that her life has been predestined and controlled by the “Typing Ghost”. Therefore, instead of the obedience, she rather chooses to “fight” for her free will. In order to prove her existence is real, she literally goes against the narrator's intentions:

The narrative says we went by car; all right we must go by train. You do see that, don't you, Laurence? It's a matter of asserting free will. (C 97)

But as Caroline discovers that it is a holy day of obligation and hence she must attend the mass, she misses the train. At this point of the story, her moral needs are being recognized and included in the structure of the novel.<sup>16</sup> Coincidence or not, Caroline's decision to spoil the fictional plot leads to the car crash leaving her and Laurence not only injured, but makes Caroline disappear from the plot for some time.

Spark teases us with the status of Caroline's story within a story, about which one can never be sure (Cheyette 2000, 22), but we cannot leave the character of Georgina Hogg out of this convoluted story as well. The antipathy Caroline feels towards Mrs Hogg is evident from the moment they meet at the St Philumena's convent – Hogg's arrogance and annoying comments about Caroline's conversion to Catholicism not only irritate her, but Caroline thinks of her as “the demon of carnal hypocrisy which struck her mind” (C 40). Georgina Hogg is the evil that interferes the life of Caroline and her acquaintances; she only exists to harm and blackmail the others, otherwise she disappears – she is believed to be “not a real-life character, only a gargoyle” (C 140).

Even towards the end of the story, we still do not get to know the truth about the character of Mrs Hogg – is she real or fictitious? After the scene under water, where Georgina and Caroline fight, the latter is more probable:

It was not until Mrs Hogg opened her mouth finally to the inrush of water that her grip slackened and Caroline was free, her lungs aching for the breath of life. Mrs Hogg subsided away from her. God knows where she went. (C 197)

In addition, Caroline's fragmentary being is persistent throughout the whole book; even she dithers whether she is the “author” of her actions or they are being dictated, so she

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<sup>16</sup> Judy Sproxton, “The Mature Woman”, in *The Women of Muriel Spark* (London: Constable, 1992) 23. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

might fit into this “artificial plot” (C 105). Although her autonomy is unclear, as it is with the unreliable narrator himself, Caroline accepts her fate, instantly “grows” as a character and does not hesitate to depict and define the fusion of life. It is the concern of the individual's need for independence and the need to escape the constraints of convention that has become a typical “Sparkian” trait.

In the last passage of the book, Laurence writes a letter for Caroline, but after re-reading it, he tears it up and the wind takes it away. Nevertheless, to Laurence's astonishment, the letter has got into the book. The question that is left for us, readers, is, where has the letter gone? To which book? The narrator provides us neither explanation, nor proper conclusion. Indeed, all of the characters appear as fragments in an existence which can never be fully understood. This novel features a very thin line between madness, desperation and sanity, as we move from Caroline's psychological perceptions, through her religious conversion, and we even approach somehow amusing Laurence's investigations into the affairs of his grandmother.

Another important step Spark makes towards achieving readers' attention is the sequence of events in this novel. At first, the narrative may seem a bit corny, as we come across themes such as a diamond-smuggling grandmother, conspiracy or superstition; yet this serves as a fictional background for more intriguing experiences of a young novelist Caroline Rose. Moreover, the *metalepsis*<sup>17</sup> Spark implements into the text enables her the portrayal of a voice that feels to readers as if it does not belong in the text world. On the one hand, it presents a kind of intrusion into the reader's thoughts and disturbs his/her way of interpretation. On the other hand, Caroline appears to be engaged with the text in the same way as the readers are – she becomes one of them. Notwithstanding the intrusion, it also provides us with a strange feeling that may somehow duplicate the experience of hearing voices.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Metalepsis is a term used for indicating the shifts between narrative levels – between the world of the narrator and the world that is being described by him or her.

<sup>18</sup> John Foxwell, “Enacting Hallucinatory Experience in Fiction: Metalepsis, Agency, and the Phenomenology of Reading in Muriel Spark's *The Comforters*”, *Style* 50, vol. 2 (2016): 139 – 157, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.50.2.0139#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.50.2.0139#metadata_info_tab_contents) (accessed March 4, 2021).

#### 4. *Memento Mori*

The theme of overhearing voices was not a one-time affair for Spark; in fact, she likes to abound her characters with such a clash in her works very frequently, and she does so in *Memento Mori* as well. The story is a perfect depiction of an old age, where Spark draws both on her own experience of watching her grandmother and the time she spent visiting the geriatric ward in a hospital. Its thematic core and at the same time the most alluring part lies in the different reactions of the characters to the mysterious voice they hear over the phone. This novel is yet again another Spark's outstanding attempt to convey her sense of reality via both traditional and conventional fictional methods.<sup>19</sup>

The elderly British men and women from Maud Long Medical Ward are the victims of the anonymous phone caller, whose only words are “Remember you must die”, which is the literal translation of the title of the novel. Whilst this unknown disembodied voice certainly echoes the whole plot, the characters' reactions to it are quite different – it is a reflection of their coping with the defects they have developed in the course of their lives<sup>20</sup> and their spiritual health. On the whole, it is the voice what builds the identity of characters.

Nonetheless, there is a character who deals with this delicate matter with a greater difficulty and anxiety than the others – and that is Dame Lettie Colston, who usually spends her days controlling others. It is obvious from the beginning of the novel that she has already received such calls in the past, as she knows the message will be always the same. Even though Jean Taylor advises her to obey the message and just start to remember she must die, though she knows “it is difficult for people of advanced years”, Lettie “does not wish to be advised how to think”<sup>21</sup>, and unlike the other receivers, she endeavours to find out the person who is behind these calls. Therefore, she runs her own investigation of the issue, because she thinks it is somebody from her will who is making these calls. Firstly, she suspects their family friend, an aged gerontologist, Alec

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Hynes, “Introduction”, in *The Art of the Real* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1988) 14.

<sup>20</sup> Judy Sproxton, “Women as Victims”, in *The Women of Muriel Spark* (London: Constable, 1992) 123. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

<sup>21</sup> Muriel Spark, *Memento Mori* (London: Virago Press, 2018) 33. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *MM*.



Warner, then Henry Mortimer, the retired Chief Inspector, and finally, she even thinks it might be Eric Colston, the son of her brother Godfrey.

As Lettie delves herself into the matter more resolutely, the nerve-racking condition clearly affects her. She often claims how fit she feels to be, but when she writes to Eric, she notices her shaky writing. Moreover, for Lettie, no one seems good enough as she finds her friends to be rather weak and vulnerable. In fact, her anxious behaviour and arrogance makes Lettie far more susceptible than the others.

In contrast to the character of Lettie, Charmian carries this inner tranquillity and peace within herself. Whilst Dame Lettie claims the voice belongs to “a maniac” (*MM* 2), Charmian, a once famous novelist, seems to be completely untroubled by these calls and thinks of the caller as a polite young man. At first, Charmian feels sorry for her husband Godfrey and wants to help him to cope with his anger and self-righteousness, but she cannot stand his bossy behaviour and Mabel Pettigrew's presence, their maid, and decides to stay in a nursing home instead. However, the caller is not the only cause of Godfrey's anxiety; what he has to struggle with the most is the feeling of guilt that comes from all his wrongdoing and numerous extra-marital affairs and infidelity.

Jean Taylor does not receive these telephone calls, and as readers, we can only assume it is because of the fact that she works in a hospital and is already surrounded enough by the “deathly circumstances”. Despite her suffering both on moral and physical level, she shows the acceptance of her fate. Jean is that “middle character” who “brings together what senses know and what mind or spirit believes in.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, Spark creates a diverse cast of characters with the fearful and hysteric Colstons on the one hand and the rational characters who do not act upon the message they get on the other – Jean, Charmian, Alec or a former Lettie's lover and a poet Guy Leet. That said, what establishes these characters the way they are and how readers regard them is their attitude towards death – whether they perceive it as an imminent part of the “life cycle” or as annihilation.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph Hynes, “Taking and Making: The Page as Looking Glass”, in *The Art of Real* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1988) 138.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Hynes, “Comic Texture: Echoes Golden to Leaden”, in *The Art of the Real* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1988) 99.

For some characters, being reminded of one's death is a call to reflect on one's moral life and daily practices; for others it is an evil to be fought off, and by one, Mrs. Pettigrew, something to put out of mind.<sup>24</sup>

Also, the situations they are facing to, reveal and test their morality, and at the same time, show how fissured they indeed are.

Similarly as in *The Comforters*, the authoress also chooses the omniscient story-teller in this novel, though when it comes to the identity of the caller, the narrative does not offer us a proper explanation on this account. Some of the characters claim the voice belongs to a male, the detective states it sounds more feminine, or there is even a thought that the author of these anonymous calls may be “Death himself” (*MM* 179). It is clear that the voice and accent are being changed according to the identity of the receiver of the call as well as the fact that death has indeed come to several characters as we reach the end of the novel.

What is more, the readers somehow expect the possible motives for these calls to be revealed in the meantime, yet the problem is that Spark keeps wondering and leaves us on the verge of choosing more or less rational options as a solution. Even Henry Mortimer undermines the traditional role of a detective, he refuses to name the culprit, so it would not disrupt the emotional responses of the other receivers of the call.

Regarding the structure, *Memento Mori* is a blackly comedic detective story, where mystery and unpredictability are undeniably the key elements. Nevertheless, this does not mean that our desire for explanation should not be fulfilled, it is rather the form of the surveillance (identifying the culprit or culprits) that should be understood, and which helps to construct both the characters and readers.<sup>25</sup> There is nothing that can be affirmed or denied that is within the range of natural possibility (*MM* 64), responds Eric to Lettie when she asks whether he is the caller, and yet the same can be said about Spark's treatment of truths in this novel, as we are given several characters' insights we might identify with. Moreover, these calls concentrate the minds of readers as well as

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<sup>24</sup> England, Suzanne E., and Marta D. Rust, “Sweet Old Things: Moral Complexities in Old Age in Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori*”, *Journal of Aging Studies* 33 (2015): 76 – 85, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0890406515000328?via%3Dihub> (accessed March 21, 2021).

<sup>25</sup> Allan Pero, “Look For One Thing and You Find Another: The Voice and Deduction in Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori*”, *Modern Fiction Studies* 54, no. 3 (2008): 558 – 573, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/26286983?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/26286983?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents) (accessed March 9, 2021).

characters and reveal their ability and integrity to approach the reality (Sproxton 1992, 122); the best attempts to measure up with that state are those of Charmian Colston, Jean Taylor and Henry Mortimer, as they try to stick to the facts. They soon approach the conclusion that it is not somebody making fun of them but the Death himself reminding them their fate – everybody has to die someday.

Also, the novel is unconventional in its chronological order, which is reversed – the end precedes the beginning. This literary device, known as *prolepsis* or *foreshadowing*, became a feature used very frequently in Spark's oeuvre, as it appears in one of her most honoured novels *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* as well.<sup>26</sup> Readers are given hints of what to expect later in the course of reading, i.e. dying. In *Memento Mori*, it is being employed in the title itself or in the plot events, mostly in the form of the anonymous telephone calls. Although the assumption of upcoming events may provide a sort of pleasant feeling for a reader, it may also create a barrier for further understanding and retard the movement to approach the end, especially when no proper conclusion is being provided. And still, Spark is willing to take such a risk and wants her readers to become conscious-creators of their own truth.

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<sup>26</sup> Marilyn Reizbaum, "The Stranger Spark", in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) 49.

## 5. *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*

Spark owes nothing to her reputation as a postmodernist authoress in *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, where she confirms her unique and individual style, mainly via the employment of distinguishing narrative techniques. Once again, the unpredictability and curiosity of the plot is strengthened by an intrusive omniscient narrator who switches from one point of view to another, although the form is simpler than in *Memento Mori*. Still, Spark accomplishes her artistry very well and creates a “light” yet the funniest novel of hers, where two overly distinct worlds meet. As with the novels written before *Ballad*, the authoress likes to portray things the way they are, as naturally as she can, hence the life of the protagonist Dougal Douglas is drawn on the real life experience of her friend Paul Allen, who was himself employed in a factory.<sup>27</sup>

What is more, with Spark's novels, readers are somehow used to the fact that she uses every possible space in order to confuse and play with the expectations of her reading audience. As Jelínková states in *Ambivalence v románech Muriel Sparkové*, there is such a tendency right from the beginning, as we come across the word “ballad” in the title of the book itself.<sup>28</sup> Calling it a ballad also became a matter of interest in a number of interviews, in which Spark vaguely replied that the novel has occurred to her as a ballad, mainly for its simplicity, structure and a typical blow, yet she has never defined exactly the aspects that has influenced her (Stannard 2018, 1538).

The story opens up with the introduction of the story's major character Dougal Douglas and a great deal of influence his presence possesses over the residents of small London suburb Peckham is being emphasized from the onset of the book. When Humphrey Place is asked whether he will take his fiancée Dixie as a wedded wife, he surprisingly says “no, to be quite frank I won't”<sup>29</sup> and leaves her right at the altar. What followed afterwards is not clear, as there are various versions spreading across Peckham about Dixie – some inhabitants rumour she has committed suicide, the others say she has

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<sup>27</sup> Martin Stannard, “The Crooked Ghost: The *Ballad of Peckham Rye* and the Idea of the ‘Lyrical’”, in *Textual Practice* 32, no. 9 (2018): 1529 – 1543, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asn&AN=133159236&authtype=shib&lang=cs&site=eds-live&scope=site> (accessed March 28, 2021). Henceforth cited parenthetically.

<sup>28</sup> Ema Jelínková, “Narušitelé”, in *Ambivalence v románech Muriel Sparkové* (Olomouc: Periplum, 2006) 32. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

<sup>29</sup> Muriel Spark, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (London: Penguin Books, 1963) 3. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *BP*.

married bridegroom's best man or that Dixie and Humphrey have indeed married. "It wouldn't have happened if Dougal Douglas hadn't come here" (*BP* 3), it is being remarked by a random woman, for it is without doubt that Dougal's existence echoes the whole story.

Whilst it can be said that Dougal Douglas, who is a Scot as the authoress herself, is probably the most appealing character from *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, there is a question that constantly arises when he enters the story, in particular what the purpose of his doing is. When he comes to Peckham, he is asked by Mr Druce, the Managing Director of Meadows, Meade & Grindley – manufacturers of nylon textiles, whether he can "bring vision into the lives of the workers" (*BP* 6) and fight against absenteeism that has widely spread in his company. As Dougal is obviously fond of the idea, he takes the opportunity and decides "to take the pulse of the people and plumb the industrial depths of Peckham" (*BP* 6).

Yet Dougal is often perceived as "a devilish figure", mainly because of his appearance. Having two horns surgically removed off his head, in combination with his unusual red hair and a hump shoulder, Humphrey asks him whether he is supposed to be the Devil, but Dougal likes to think of himself as rather "one of the wicked spirits that wander through the world for the ruin of souls" (*BP* 33). Even most of Spark's critics describe him as an utterly diabolical figure and point out his resemblance with traditional satanic-like characters from Scottish Border Ballads, such as the protagonists of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) written by James Hogg or Robert Luis Stevenson's *The Strange Tale of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hide* (1886), which Spark would read as a girl. Hence, what we come across in this novel is the portrayal of the inference of two separate realities – social realism, the most notable via the depiction of middle class in Peckham, as opposed to the surreal mythology coming from previously mentioned Scottish Border Ballads or folk ballads.<sup>30</sup>

As stated above, it may be sometimes difficult to follow the line of the plot, because of the number and variety of events Spark includes in this novel; the one would be the fact that Dougal Douglas suddenly reverses his name in the middle of the story to Douglas Dougal in order to get a job in a rival company, where he actively encourages

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<sup>30</sup> Bryan Cheyette, "Beyond Orthodoxy: Death, Demons and Singularity", in *Muriel Spark* (Devon: Northcote House, 2000) 44 – 45. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

absenteeism he was hitherto devoted to fight against so fiercely. At this point, we cannot decide about the status of his ambivalent character within this story, for there is no clear boundary or categorization of “good and bad doing” provided by the narrator. David Goldie summarizes in his essay:

Her characters are never in any simple sense knowable: she frequently raises troubling questions not only of how far they can ever know each other, but of how far we as readers can ever satisfactorily understand them.<sup>31</sup>

It is apparent that Dougal has a strange influence, even chaotic and devastating here and there, over the residents of Peckham. Right from the beginning, Dougal disrupts the relationship of his flatmate Humphrey, then Miss Fierne, his landlady, suffers a stroke, and last but not least, Mr Druce kills brutally his long-time mistress Miss Merle Coverdale, the head of the typing pool in his company, who herself claims she has been feeling unsettled since Dougal's arrival to Peckham:

He came towards her with the corkscrew and stabbed it into her long neck nine times, and killed her. Then he took his hat and went home to his wife. (*BP* 59)

There are certainly situations when Dougal brings the worst out of people, as with this brutal murder – “Mr Druce liked him and look what Mr Druce has come to” (*BP* 61). Nevertheless, what Dougal truly wants is to teach them a moral lesson, which is a part of his intentioned “human research” (*BP* 29), so it can bring rectification of their lives; the truth is that his trying is rather meaningless. That said, some critics recognized Muriel Spark's interest in the demonic as well as moral philosophy, from which, we may say, the character of Dougal Douglas evolves. There is Frank Kermode, in particular, who defines Douglas as a “didactic demon”<sup>32</sup>. Kane explains this term in his article:

These didactic demons are usually outsiders whose failure to conform to conventional ethics becomes a prerequisite for their attack on the flimsy moral structures society<sup>33</sup> has erected to keep life civilized. (Kane 1990, 3)

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<sup>31</sup> David Goldie, “Muriel Spark and the Problems of Biography”, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) 6.

<sup>32</sup> Richard C. Kane, “Didactic Demons in Contemporary British Fiction”, in *Studies in English, New Series* 8 (1990): 3, [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies\\_eng\\_new/vol8/iss1/6/?utm\\_source=egrove.olemiss.edu%2fstudies\\_eng\\_new%2Fvol8%2Fiss1%2F6&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new/vol8/iss1/6/?utm_source=egrove.olemiss.edu%2fstudies_eng_new%2Fvol8%2Fiss1%2F6&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages) (accessed July 25, 2021). Henceforth cited parenthetically.

<sup>33</sup> The society stands for the citizens of the Peckham Rye in this book.

We must admit that there are certainly passages in this book, where Douglas Dougal tries to make a deep moral statement using a variety of demonic elements, whether we consider his relationship with Mr Druce or Humphrey Place.

On the other hand, Dougal acts as a “catalyst” of events in Peckham and adopts whatever role best suits him. For instance, when he takes Merle for a walk through cemetery, he unexpectedly stands on a grave posing like an angel, but in combination with his appearance, he looks more like “angel-devil” (*BP* 12). However, as Cheyette puts in his book, Dougal's anarchic being presents a sort of “a spiritual substance” they are very much in need of. Thus, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* focuses on the idea of the isolation of the characters, until they are, surprisingly, reunited again by Dougal (Cheyette 2000, 45; Stannard 2018, 1535).

In addition to Dougal, an embodiment of unreliability and a fiction-maker, we cannot forget about Spark's specialty to intrude into one's mind; this time the narrator is being exposed to it as well. In *Ballad*, some of the events are recalled twice, and each time, Spark does not idle about and offers us slightly different versions, particularly with the fate of Dixie and Humphrey's relationship. At the very beginning, the narrator tells us that Mavis knocks Dougal's head off when he comes back and apparently tries to talk to Dixie after leaving her. Nonetheless, at the end of the first chapter, there are recounted several versions based on the local gossips (mentioned above), one of them being that they have indeed married, where reader's uncertain feeling is even empowered by vague expressions, such as “It is wondered”, “It is sometimes told” or “It is generally agreed” (*BP* 5). Even though the narrator resolves the matter by choosing the latter option as “the right one”, we may question the reliability of this choice, for there is so much instability around their relationship throughout the story. It seems that employing such a narrative voice means that readers are free, if not overtly asked by the authoress to create their own judgement. With Spark, nothing is done without reason.

After all, in all likelihood, the curiosity of these events may be enhanced by the fact that Dougal, when in Peckham, is writing an autobiography of Maria Cheeseman. What we stumble upon may be his perception of reality or just another exudation of his fantasy, as he insists on adding a few fictional chapters into the book. Dougal comes and goes, and in the end, we get to know that:

[. . .] he gathered together the scrap ends of his profligate experience – for he was a frugal man at heart – and turned them into a lot of cockeyed books, and went far in the world. He never married. (BP 62)

*The Ballad of Peckham Rye* is reminiscent in some way to Spark's debut novel *The Comforters*, mainly in her portrayal of the protagonists, artists, and their relationship to the world, which is a sort of satire of human frailty (Stannard 2018, 1542). But in this novel, Dougal himself, unlike Caroline, is the one who disturbs everyone around him. His antics makes the narrator to switch between numerous occasions as well as people, leaving him unable to depict them fully, thus his reliability can become a serious concern for readers. With the information we have we “do not quite believe that Dougal is really supposed to be the Devil nor do we quite believe that he is not” (Kane 1990, 10). *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* has, in its nature, the form of the ballad – it is a story where the supernatural and natural elements mingle.



## 6. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

It is necessary to point out, right at the very beginning, the exceptionality and value with which *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* furnishes Spark's oeuvre. Nonetheless, it is not only the fact that by publishing this novel she stepped outside the British literature tradition and gained an international recognition as an authoress, but also the astonishing capacity of hers, which enabled her to create a character that has the ability to blur the way the story is being narrated, and that is certainly its protagonist Miss Brodie. Moreover, as Sproxton writes in her book, unlike Dougal Douglas, there is no one in the position of a “catalyst” in this book, for Spark leaves the role of “intermediary” to the reader. In other words, one must be more than delicate when it comes to the understanding of the motives, behaviour and attitude of characters.<sup>34</sup>

*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is a novel about six girls in their school years – Sandy Stranger, Mary MacGregor, Rose Stanley, Eunice Gardiner, Jenny Gray and Monica Douglas – which may sound rather trite, yet what circulates throughout the whole story and makes it attention-grabbing is the formative but overwhelming impact of Miss Jean Brodie, their teacher at Marcia Blaine School for Girls in Edinburgh. Brodie believes that any girl at an impressionable age can become hers for life<sup>35</sup>, and therefore, she sets out these ten-year-old girls – “the Brodie set” – to become the “crème de la crème” (*JB* 8).

What is more, Spark uses a distinctive narrative style to retold the events, namely *flash-forward technique*<sup>36</sup> mixed with *flash-backs*<sup>37</sup>. Whilst the first device was unknown to her oeuvre until this time, the latter occurred in her works even before this book. Such an employment results in a fragmented and equivocal narrative and complicates its

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<sup>34</sup> Judy Sproxton, “Women of Power – Jean Brodie: *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*”, in *The Women of Muriel Spark* (London: Constable, 1992) 63. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

<sup>35</sup> Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (London: Penguin Books, 2000) 9. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *JB*.

<sup>36</sup> Flash-forward, also known as *prolepsis*, is a literary device that takes the plot ahead of time from the current point.

<sup>37</sup> Flash-back, also known as *analepsis*, is the opposite of flash forward, i.e. it is a literary device that reveals the events from past.

reading to a great depth.<sup>38</sup> As it will be further remarked, the reader occupies a tough position in this novel, as he/she has to decide whether “the certainties” provided by the narrator are indeed certain and trustworthy.

The character of Miss Jean Brodie differs immensely from the common perception we have of how a teacher should act like and what approach should be used in the process of education. Miss Brodie's perception is:

The word “education” comes from the root *e* from *ex*, out, and *duco*, I lead. It means leading out. To me education is leading out of what is already there in the pupil's soul. Art and religion first; then philosophy; lastly science. (*JB* 36; *JB* 25)

It is 1930 and the methods of Miss Jean Brodie are exceedingly personal, as she has no boundaries when it comes to expressing her unconventional self as well as excessive ideas and opinions, such as her obvious support for fascist regimes of Mussolini, Franco or Hitler. She is quite authoritarian and the only way how to succeed in her eyes is to repeat her dogmas. Moreover, she does not hesitate to share her love experiences with the class, which, at first, may seem as done for the sake of good or for the purpose of preventing them from doing the same mistakes as she did. Thus, this teacher-student relationship becomes so deep, or even idyllic from time to time, that the girls have chosen to identify themselves with the personality of their unorthodox mentor – this is exactly why Brodie does this, as she wants to model them on her in order to fulfil her own expectations. She wants to keep an absolute power over the girls, but soon, we get to know how easily one can get mistaken.

Albeit Brodie believes that by this approach the girls will receive the fruits of her prime, the truth being that her teaching just excludes anything they might have an interest for. There are weaknesses within her principles, as they lack any intellectual perspective but contain the own truth of hers only, which can never be questioned (Sproxton 1992, 66 – 67). Joseph Hynes adds on this subject that Brodie's principles are not, according to him, fully calculated and are or may be self-contradictory. Anyone who will attempt to attend the idiosyncrasies contained in her principles “will have to observe that Miss Brodie necessarily contradicts herself and that her followers will have to do the same.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Bryan Cheyette, “Transfigurations: Edinburgh, London, Jerusalem”, in *Muriel Spark* (Devon: Northcote House, 2000) 52 – 53. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Hynes, “Reality's Generic and Structural Range”, in *The Art of the Real* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1988) 70.

She does not wish the girls neither to become a proper part of the society nor show their individual personalities.

The role of the narrator and his presentation of events are, of course, crucial for the reader, and what defines his capacity in this novel is the illusion he creates about the character and status of Miss Jean Brodie within this story. From the beginning, it may seem as if the only intention of Miss Mackay, the headmistress, is to fire Miss Brodie just because Mackay does not incline to her unusual attitude, especially to her “experimental methods” (*JB* 48): “I am afraid she put ideas into your young heads” (*JB* 124). Also, Brodie's love life is being recounted as miserable, as her first love Hugh Carruthers dies in the First World War. Furthermore, she is pictured as “a scapegoat” – Brodie vehemently denies any kind of relationship with teachers from school, particularly masters of music and art, Gordon Lowther and Teddy Lloyd, despite their feelings for each other (or at least she tells the girls so). Hence, we, readers, are asked to deplore the fate of Miss Brodie, for she feels as if she has been “betrayed” (*JB* 60). She spends the rest of her life wondering who could be the possible traitor.

Though, as the story develops, we find out that this perception is obviously in contrast with the underlying truth (except for the betrayal). It all starts with Sandy Stranger, who, despite being the closest to Miss Brodie, and unlike the other girls from the set, decides not to absorb everything what Brodie says. What is determining at this point of the story is the depiction of Sandy's development as a character – a little adherent girl becomes an independent rational being, often portrayed as the most intelligent from the set, being able to make conclusions on her own. Hence, she is willing to reveal the true character of Miss Jean Brodie.

Sandy's distrust of her teacher starts with the fact that Brodie fictionalizes as well as romanticizes everything she encounters. After being taught by Brodie for six years, Sandy, together with Jenny Gray, start to realize that she is “making her new love story to fit the old”, and therefore, with each new memoir of hers, they rather listen with “double ears” (*JB* 72).

Sandy was fascinated by this method of making patterns with facts, and was divided between her admiration for the technique and the pressing need to prove Miss Brodie guilty of misconduct. (*JB* 72)

However, that need becomes stronger than her devotion, and as it persists within Sandy, she decides to put “a stop to Miss Brodie” (*JB* 125). It is no longer about Brodie's “innocent” love stories, but rather the way she treats the girls and her self-righteousness, which leads, in some cases, to lethal outcomes. Brodie believes “she is Providence”, and consequently “the God of Calvin” (*JB* 120), and therefore, she thinks it is appropriate to interfere into other people's lives, as when she encourages Rose Stanley, whom she perceives as “an extension of herself”, to take her place as Teddy Lloyd's lover or urges Joyce Emily Hammond to fight for Franco in the Spanish Civil War, from which she, unfortunately, never comes back alive. Nevertheless, Brodie does not mourn for her death, but for the unfinished vision of hers, for Emily dies in a train collision even before joining the act of war. The perception of the girls as “a body with Miss Brodie for the head” (*JB* 30) is condemned by Sandy, as she wishes to end the prime of her teacher, for “it is only possible to betray where loyalty is due” (*JB* 127).

Thus, the theme of doubleness prevails in the story, which, in combination with the way of how Spark retells the events create a text, where “one must draw one's own conclusions” (*JB* 93). Firstly, there is the ambivalent character of Miss Jean Brodie – she is attractive yet dangerous, which makes her similar in a way to Dougal Douglas from *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*. As we come further, we realize several inconsistencies – though her strong and obvious disapproval of Roman Catholics, the narrator juxtaposes this fact with the claim that the Roman Catholic Church “could have embraced, even while it disciplined, her soaring and diving spirit, it might even have normalized her” (*JB* 85). However, Brodie is her own God and what has driven her to many inexplicable actions is “an excessive lack of guilt” (*JB* 85) and humility; the only moment of regret comes to her when she realizes how badly she treated and blamed Mary Macgregor. As stated above, what decides her fate is that she has never “released from her illusion that her own judgement could provide her with an absolute truth” (Sproxton 1992, 70). Brodie keeps wondering why the reality has diverged so much from her intended plans.

Then, it is Sandy herself, who becomes Teddy Lloyd's lover instead of Rose, a plan she previously wished to disrupt, yet now, she is a part of it. What is more, the narrator suddenly breaks in with the information that Sandy has left Lloyd but embraced his Catholicism. She has become a nun, known under the name of Sister Helena, who is

famous for her psychological treatise – *Transfiguration of Commonplace*. Similarly as with Jean Brodie, the narration does not provide us with any commentary on her inner qualities or ideas, as there is explanatory information missing from time to time<sup>40</sup>. We are uncertain about the possible reasons for Sandy's becoming a Roman Catholic as well, although Sandy's feelings and beliefs complete much of the novel. The only thing that remains unchanged throughout the story is the undeniable influence of Miss Jean Brodie:

What were the main influences of your school days, Sister Helena? Were they literary or political or personal? Was it Calvinism? Sandy said: There was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime. (JB 128)

Spark leaves almost no space for the readers to be assured with anything in the course of reading, and the very last passage of the book makes them even more confused. Whether asked directly or indirectly, the question that naturally arises is why would Sandy betray and end career of loving Brodie who dedicated the prime of her life to them? Sandy keeps the answer to herself.

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<sup>40</sup> Paddy Lyons, “Muriel Spark's Break with Romanticism”, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) 90. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

## 7. *The Abbess of Crewe*

The fact that Muriel Spark decides once again to revolve, as some would say, her modern morality tale, around a group of female protagonists certainly guarantees us a pleasing reading experience – it is a provocative yet elegant story as only she knows how to write. Similarly as the character of Miss Jean Brodie, the protagonist of this story, the would-be Abbess Alexandra, can be described as a “mythomaniac” (*JB* 54), who thinks not only that she has entered the sphere of mythology, but also that she is above the others: “It is useless to tell me not to worry since I never do”<sup>41</sup>. But whereas in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* the rhetoric is aimed at the disposal of Brodie's influence as we reach the end of the novel, the narrator in *The Abbess of Crewe* keeps the side of Alexandra, for she is “completely endorsed”<sup>42</sup> by him. It is the extent to which she domineers over the narrator I shall discuss further in this chapter.

This piece of fiction gives us an insight into the Abbey of Crewe in England, where we meet with Sister Alexandra and her devoted colleagues, Sisters Mildred and Walburga, her counsel Sister Gertrude and her superior – Sister Winifrede. It is the time of the election of the new abbess (readers get the information shortly before and after it as Spark uses flash-backs again), and although it seems, at first, that the “competition” between her and her rival, Sister Felicity, is balanced, Alexandra unfairly wins, leaving Felicity, now the “enemy”, excommunicated. Nonetheless, as with every win, there is a reversed side as well, which I will comment on throughout.

It has become typical for Spark to make references in her plots to some wider context of events, which holds, unsurprisingly, for this novel as well. The authoress links *The Abbess of Crewe* to the Watergate scandal of 1973, featuring Richard Nixon, President of the USA. However, Spark does not want to make any comment on the American political history, but this employment rather serves her to show that these apparently different worlds are indeed similar, where “truth and integrity are so obscured”<sup>43</sup>. Therefore, the story cannot be interpreted as to specific events and characters, it is more

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<sup>41</sup> Muriel Spark, *The Abbess of Crewe* (New York: A New Directions Bibelot, 1995) 81. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *AC*.

<sup>42</sup> Bryan Cheyette, “International Messes: Between Life and Art”, in *Muriel Spark* (Devon: Northcote House, 2000) 88. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

<sup>43</sup> Judy Sproxton, “Women of Power – Alexandra: *The Abbess of Crewe*”, in *The Women of Muriel Spark* (London: Constable, 1992) 72. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

tied to the common themes they share, such as bugging, break-ins, editing of evidence (the tapes), falsehood or so, portrayed with a great dose of humour as usually. And yet, what an observant reader does not miss is that Alexandra certainly acts out the role of Nixon, perhaps more than Spark has ever admitted.

Nevertheless, it is Alexandra's personality that disturbs our interpretations in this novel in the first place. Although one would call her behaviour arrogant and immoral, the narrator constantly tries to offset this perception thereof, as when he describes her beautiful face, “wonderful head” (AC 8), aesthetic mind, and last but not least, dignity and respect that arises from how she speaks and acts. Alexandra feels it is her destiny, though alarming, to become the Abbess of Crewe:

Unless I fulfil my destiny my mother's labour pains were pointless and what am I doing here?  
(AC 32)

We get to know her character mostly through the portrayal of her living in the abbey and her relationships and status within the community of nuns – it is also the point of the story where the satire is being employed by Spark. It looks, at first, as if things were in order, but soon we get to know that the rival relationship of Alexandra and Felicity is what drives the plot and establishes the conflict of the book. It all starts when Alexandra and her devoted Sisters prepare “an assault strategy in dealing with Felicity” (AC 55), which is a part of their campaign in order to make sure it is Alexandra who wins the election: “We had to have you elected Abbess, Alexandra” (AC 85). As Joseph Hynes states in his book, there is “an underlying confusion in the principal characters and in the very texture of the narrative itself”<sup>44</sup> concerning this election, which is caused by Alexandra's opposing behaviour. Notwithstanding the fact that she knows that such a campaign is not permitted and is against the Rule (as she constantly keeps on reminding them), she also participates in these Machiavellian schemes, even if not directly. “Sisters, be still; to each own source of grace.” (AC 82)

In addition, at this point of the story, readers have probably identified Alexandra as a vengeful character, despite the numerous attempts of the narrator to prove the opposite. Since Spark likes to provide real clues to the narrative, she employs the omniscient narrator, as she does within much of her oeuvre. This time, although, it seems that the

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<sup>44</sup> Joseph Hynes, “Comic Texture”, in *The Art of the Real* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1988) 111. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

narrator has chosen his favourite at the very beginning of the novel – the narrator literally “applauds her” (Lyons 2010, 95). Spark creates Alexandra, a character that is indeed so hypnotizing and possessing such an eccentric manners, which reminds Miss Jean Brodie and Douglas Dougal, the protagonists from previously mentioned works. What is wrong about their vision is that they want to control the others.

The whole situation escalates even more when an unexpected scandalous event weaves the story – it is when Felicity finds out that her sewing box, full of the letters from her Jesuit lover Thomas, has been broken into by some members of the Jesuit order. At the same time, it leaks out that Sister Alexandra, together with her confidantes Mildred and Walburga, have installed recording devices in the abbey, so they can gather compromising information about Sister Felicity and thus lower her chances to get elected as the abbess. As a consequence of their manipulative behaviour, Alexandra is asked to provide an explanation of the paradox between “ancient” practises and modern electronic devices installed in the abbey in front of the bishops in Rome:

Our revels are now 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 [...]. (AC 107)

There are many other inconsistencies and fissures to be found between the narrative of *The Abbess of Crewe* and the attitudes of its characters. Alexandra's character is that of an egomaniacal “performer” (Lyons 2010, 95), which speaks mostly of her ability to invent the irrational answers, when she feels as if losing the argument. Thanks to this, the book takes on a different dimension, as it provides freedom for readers to come up with their own answers to help them interpret the story. In fact, Spark equips the reader with a role that is even more difficult – the reader is asked to establish the borderline between “deception and confusion” (Hynes 1988, 111) in this story.

What is more, it has been proved multiple times in the course of reading that readers cannot rely neither on the narrator nor they cannot categorize the events as good or bad only, without any other possibility left. Regarding the relationship of Alexandra and Felicity, a patient reader observes that the cause of the tension between them is most likely their opposing approach to faith. Felicity's belief in the power of love and the goodness of mankind as the basis for faith not only irritates the future abbess Alexandra, but also leads to Alexandra's biggest mistake so far – it is when she underestimates



sister Felicity. Alexandra thinks that Felicity's human approach could not let her expose the things she has witnessed in the abbey, but Felicity's rage comes to “shrieking point” (AC 61) and she starts to talk. At the same time, in this passage, readers are free to decide whether it is moral principles that these two women act upon to or not. Hynes adds:

We must try to choose between an intelligent and hypocritical snobbish totalitarian on the one hand and a small-minded and equally hypocritical espouser of a drab-looking new day on the other. (Hynes 1988, 112)

*The Abbess of Crewe*, unlike *The Prime of Miss Brodie*, is marked by “a praise of manipulative skills” (Cheyette 2000, 89), which are not necessarily that of Alexandra, but of the whole community of the abbey – all supported by the narrator of the story. The narrative does not refute anything that Alexandra does, she stays glorious despite the intrigues and she even considers herself as “an object of art, the end of which is to give pleasure” (AC 105). The iconic portrayal of Alexandra certainly overshadows and hardens reader's work with facts.

That said, the ambivalent and sometimes absurd portrayal of the abbey, the principles and approach to Christianity, with the character of Alexandra at the very top, is what calls for a discussion in this book. As Sproxton writes in her book, Alexandra has the power “to mystify” (Sproxton 1992, 81), which she possesses over the narrator as well. Not only we are never allowed to see in her mind, but the narrator totally adheres to her, in a way that we may never gain a proper and clear picture of the events that take place in this story, such as Alexandra's machinations or the accusation of Sister Felicity.

## 8. *Aiding and Abetting*

Throughout her career, critics tried to fit Muriel Spark into several categories – they saw her as a Scottish authoress, a postmodernist or Catholic convert. However, categories, in her regarding, possess a sort of limitation to one's imagination, and therefore, she finds a way how to defy elegantly all these classifications, even within this story. Some would consider Spark, according to her more didactic novels, as the authoress with a moralist bent, whereas the others find her oeuvre to be anarchic from time to time. However, *Aiding and Abetting*, her twenty-first novel, has both and it can be said that it is a summation of her work, in particular of her “fictional concerns”<sup>45</sup>. As it has been pointed out many times in this thesis, it is not exactly difficult to recognize that Spark's fascination with doubleness, with this outrageous novel being no exception.

At the very beginning of the book, Spark reminds us that the story is based on hypothesis yet drawing the plot on the parallels from the real story of the seventh Earl of Lucan. It is twenty-five years after the brutal murder of his children's nanny and the attack on his wife, whom, it is assumed was an intended target of the murder, of which Lord Lucan was found guilty, but he mysteriously disappeared thanks to the influence of his wealthy acquaintances – “the aiders and abettors”<sup>46</sup>. At the time when he is proclaimed dead, readers appear in the consulting room of Dr Hildegard Wolf, the most sought-after psychiatrist in Paris, who is approached by somebody who claims himself to be Lord Lucan:

I have come to consult you, [...] because I have no peace of mind. Twenty-five years ago I sold my soul to Devil. (AA 1)

Nonetheless, the bizarre fact is that Dr Wolf has already a patient with the name of Robert Walker, “who also claims that he did the murder; in fact, is almost proud of it” (AA 17). Hildegard is intrigued, for she does not know whether either of the men is the real Lord Lucan.

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<sup>45</sup> Bryan Cheyette, “Postscript: The Facts of Blood”, in *Muriel Spark* (Devon: Northcote House, 2000) 126. Henceforth cited parenthetically.

<sup>46</sup> Muriel Spark, *Aiding and Abetting* (London: Penguin Books, 2000) 72. Henceforth cited parenthetically as AA.

Yet, in the course of the story, it turns out that Dr Wolf, whose character is actually based on the real person as well, has a whole other history – her past identity is what makes her character unusual when compared to the other Spark's heroines, such as Caroline, Miss Jean Brodie or the Abbess Alexandra. Born as Beate Pappenheim, she grew up in Munich, when, during her studies in feminist psychology, she managed to escape extreme poverty by becoming “a fake stigmatic” (AA 16), who disappeared with millions of marks stolen from the Pappenheim Catholic Fund, which belonged to impoverished Catholics.

Every monthly menstrual cycle she covered herself in blood and bandaged her hands so that blood appeared to seep through. She was stricken every month, as the phenomenon is traditionally represented, with at least one of the five wounds of Christ. [...] Miracles did happen, as in fact they sometimes do. (AA 22; 24)

Thus, with her dual self, and the men, both claiming to be Lord Lucan, it is apparent that readers have to be more than careful when it comes to their response and interpretation of the events from this story, for in *Aiding and Abetting*, everything is doubled. This is again reflected in the narrative itself, as the ambivalent features in the story provide a space for narrator's intentions to be changed throughout the novel, hence empowering the incoherent feeling of the text – it is something that could be named as a typical postmodern literature trait. Spark uses such discrepancies because it is her way how to constantly challenge their activity and judgment throughout. The authoress reminds us that nothing is given for free.

However, Lord Lucan does not only seek out Dr Wolf because of her professionalism, but what he sees or wants to see, in fact, is how they resemble each other; he believes they are “in this blood-business together” (AA 123), referring to Pappenheim's blood ritual and the “pools” (AA 36) of blood that flowed from Sandra Rivett, the girl he bludgeoned in his London flat. While they are both “fugitives from the law” (Cheyette 2000, 127), who had to leave their lives and pursue another identity, with Wolf-Pappenheim being “an obvious feminine counterpart”<sup>47</sup> to Lucan according to some, I would argue these are only frivolous similarities, and apart from those mentioned above, their personalities rather differ to a considerable extent.

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<sup>47</sup> Graham Ranger, “Tall, Tall Stories: Identity and Generic Instability in Muriel Spark's *Aiding and Abetting*”, in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 440 (2019): 246, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjco&AN=edsjco.BPQZLJ142545100&lang=cs&site=eds-live&scope=site> (accessed April 27, 2021). Henceforth cited parenthetically.

What distinguishes them the most is, perhaps, the way they seize the opportunity of the new life after they escaped. Whilst Pappenheim's newly established identity suits her well and she tries to make the best of it, Lord Lucan, and eventually his companion – “döppelgänger” (AA 127) Walker, continue carelessly in practising all these “immoralities”. They visit the psychiatrist with an ulterior motive – to blackmail her. Feeling untouchable, they threaten her with revealing her real identity, which results in a situation Hildegard can bear no more, for “she had never for the past twelve years been obliged to consider the question” (AA 25) of her previous self. Fearing exposure, she flees to London without telling anybody, not even her companion – Jean Pierre Roget. Hildegard plans revenge there, though when pulling her thoughts together and strolling the notes from their sessions, she paradoxically realizes certain admiration for them.

Nevertheless, their wrongdoing evidently does not pay off, as the Lucans are being chased for the rest of the novel – this time it is the group of so-called friends, Lacey Twickenham and Joseph Murray, whose dilemma is whether to write a book about Lucan or turn him in to the police. Thus, in a search for a safe place, the Lucans end up in Kanzia, a fictitious country in Central Africa, thanks to Dr Karl Jacobs, a former patient of Dr Wolf. They infiltrate there as teachers of Delihu's children, the Chief of the community. With Lucan-Walker, as neither of them has a full and proper identity, Spark complicates the role of her narrator very significantly.

That being said, the narrative voice employed in *Aiding and Abetting* can be defined as unpredictable and constantly shifting. There are numerous passages in the novel, where it is without doubt readers have the difficulty to identify who is the person addressing to them, as for instance in: “I sold my soul to Devil”, which is followed by “Once in my life,” she said, “I had a chance to do that [...]” The next paragraph then starts with “He had heard that she would do just this” (AA 2). In addition, even though much of the story features the perspective of Hildegard Wolf, the narrator intermingles the text with the views of the others as well, which means that one must read the novel with a good dose of attention.

It is very well-known that Spark always tries to create an outstanding and unseen (up to that time) piece of work, which she does by incorporating either her personal experience, such an employment can be seen in her very first novel *The Comforters*, or the experience of her acquaintances, as with the character of Dougal Douglas from *The*

*Ballad of Peckham Rye*. This time her mastery lies in how she combines fiction with facts, appearing in the book mostly in the form of various extracts from newspapers. Spark explains in her preface that:

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)

Graham Roger describes this mixture of authentic and fictional sources as “*faction*”, as the imaginary dividing line between those two is certainly hard to distinguish in this novel. Moreover, he points out that since the novel possesses elements from various genres (a detective story, a love story or even a story of a psychiatrist), its postmodernist extravagance may disturb readers' expectations as well (Ranger 2019, 248 – 249).

At this point, it is crucial not to forget the fact that the name of the protagonist, Beate Pappenheim, was not chosen by accident. Spark's character is literally a beatification of one of the most distinguished patients in the history of psychoanalysis Bertha Pappenheim, also known as Anna O., who appears in Breuer's and Sigmund Freud's *Studies in Hysteria* from 1895 (Cheyette 2000, 133). Both Cheyette and Ranger see their resemblance as substantial for the further context in *Aiding and Abetting*, as they both dedicate themselves to the others while making “creative use of their femininity” (Ranger 2019, 249). On the one hand, I would agree with Ranger's claims concerning the difficulty of reading such “intertextual games” (Ranger 2019, 249) may possess, on the other, I think this feminist perspective only broadens the scope and allows the reader to interpret the story from yet another point of view.

As we approach the end of the novel, we never doubt again the moral aspect that Spark implements in *Aiding and Abetting*. Lucan's thinking is similar in a way to that of Miss Jean Brodie – they both come to think about themselves as if they were about the others:

Lucky Lucan believed in destiny. By virtue of destiny he was an earl. His wife had been destined to die, according to his mad calculation. [...] He understood she was destined to die and did not for one moment reflect that this destiny arose merely from his own calculations and plans. His 'needs' dictated fate itself. (AA, 131)

Although Lucan obviously wants to dictate his own fate, the narrator provides us with a totally different conclusion than the one he desires, whereas Hildegard's inference into his storytelling, for instance recalling the events from the night Lucan had murdered the girl, is usually accepted as a natural part of the narrative. The last chapter reminds us of the beginning of the story, as we appear in Dr Wolf's office again, where Dr Jacobs comes to inform her that "Lucan is dead, not buried; he was roasted and consumed by all the male children of Delihu" (AA 181). Moreover, he gives her a message, instructed by Walker, which says she is the fraudulent stigmatic, which, she better tears up. This confirms my previously stated argument that the characters of Hildegard and Lucan rather differ to a great extent, because she apparently surpasses him much more than she realizes.

## Conclusion

Muriel Spark and her capability to constantly surpass the expectations of her reading audience is the main concern of this thesis – my focus is oriented towards the experimentation within the narratives, which, in her novels, has the form of the unreliable narrator. The thesis begins with a short chapter on the authoress, for it has become a typical “Sparkian” trait to intermingle her fiction with her own life experience, some of which later became the main themes for her oeuvre.

The sense of her novels being ambiguous, fragmented, dynamic and most of all unexpected, has its origin in Spark's numerous national and religious identities that emerged, most of all, from her conversion to Catholicism in 1954 – she is often referred to as “a diasporic writer”. Not only she could write on different cultural matters, but the engagement with postmodernism enabled Spark to occupy perhaps more space in her fiction than the modernist authors could in their works.

Despite the fact that the authoress did not like to be categorized in any way, it is essential to emphasize the influence of postmodernism in her novels. As for the narratology, a particular transition could be observed, for it was no longer preferred to keep the narrative fixed and standardized. What postmodernists, including Spark, did frequently include in their works instead, was fragmentation, metafiction, unreliable narrator or they even favoured parody or pastiche.

The very first postmodern “experiment” is certainly Spark's literary debut – *The Comforters* – a book that is obscure not only for its narrator but the characters as well. The novel is autobiographical to a certain extent, with its protagonist Caroline Rose and her lifetime struggle – the quest for a unified self – reminding the fissured being of the authoress herself. Moreover, Caroline, who is overhearing strange sounds, is currently writing a novel, and thus, this is “a book within a book”, or as postmodernists would say – a metafictional novel. This all creates madness that is being undeniably reflected into the role of narrator as well, whom one simply cannot trust for obvious reasons and hence, the reader has to make his own assumptions about the development of the plot. In *The Comforters*, readers are being reminded that the characters are only fictitious personas in the artificial plot, which makes its understanding more complicated; even Caroline does not really know her status within this story. Typically, Spark does not

provide us a proper conclusion, she rather wishes her reader to become active and “establish” his own truths in the course of reading.

The theme of overhearing voices appears again in yet another novel with the title of *Memento Mori*. What the residents of Maud Long Medical Ward hear over the phone is the literal translation of its title – “Remember you must die” – the voice being changed according to the identity of the receiver of the phone call. Nevertheless, it is not just a phrase, it is what divides the characters into two groups – those who fear the death, as for instance Lettie, and those who act rationally and accept it as a part of their life – Jean, Charmian or Alec. Although their reactions to the phone calls certainly build their identities, we never discover the identity of the caller, as there are no clues provided by the narrator, just few characters' guesses who think it might be the Death himself calling them. Furthermore, Spark enhances this somewhat fragmented narrative by its reversed ordering of reality, known as *prolepsis*, which she employs in her most famous novel, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, as well. In this novel, all of the characters fight for their life.

The plot of *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* is especially difficult to follow, because not only the narrator seems to be untrustworthy from the very beginning, but its protagonist Dougal Douglas, or Douglas Dougal, is similarly as Caroline from *The Comforters* or Miss Jean Brodie from *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Spark's another ambivalent and split creation. There are various contradictory opinions about his chaotic being in Peckham, as no one knows exactly what to expect from him – starting from the narrator, readers, to the residents of Peckham or even the critics who could not agree on this matter, some of them calling him “a didactic demon”. One can hardly deny the fact that it would be much easier to understand the story, if Spark went for the traditional omniscient reliable narrator in *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*. However, by refusing the traditions as such, she calls for a completely different position for readers, i.e. to invent contexts to interpret the story themselves. Apart from the postmodern features *Ballad* has, Spark also plays with the tradition of Scottish ballad here, where the supernatural and natural mingle, supporting the pervasive theme of doubleness employed in this story.

Whilst Dougal is perceived as “a catalyst” of events in Peckham, this role is shifted to the reader in *The Prime of Miss Brodie*, a novel which made Spark an internationally



recognized authoress. Here, the narrator's reliability and credibility, unlike in the previous novels, is being questioned because of his obvious preference over one character – Miss Jean Brodie, who is a teacher of six girls, so-called “Brodie set”, inspired by Spark's own teacher Miss Kay. Similar approach can be observed also in *The Abbess of Crewe*, where the narrator favours the future abbess Alexandra. Though it may be difficult sometimes, the reader has to resist the persistence of the narrator and make his own judgements about both characters. In addition to this, we are asked to deplore the fate of Jean Brodie at the same time, who has been betrayed by her former student – Sandy Stranger. Yet, towards the end of the novel, a clever and observant reader, who knows the authoress a bit at least, has to answer whether this was indeed a betrayal, for Spark is rarely interested in the explanation of her characters' motives.

As it is stated above, there are some similarities to be found between *The Abbess of Crewe* and *The Prime of Miss Brodie* both in terms of their protagonists and the behaviour of the narrator, from whom the readers never get a proper and full image of what is going on in the abbey. What calls for a discussion in this novel in particular is a disproportion of space the narrator and the character of Alexandra obtains. While in *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* the narrator tries to point on “the bad doing” of the protagonist at least, though he does not really distinguish between bad or good, here the narrative only intensifies and celebrates the being of Alexandra, despite her involvement in the schemes aimed at the disposal of Sister Felicity, her rival at the election. In addition, Alexandra is a character who loves to make up myths and control the others, which she finds out, sooner or later, that it does not pay off, as she is asked to explain her absurd practices in front of the bishops in Rome.

The reason for Spark's another novel, *Aiding and Abetting*, to appear at the end of this thesis is very clear – it is a perfect summation of her work. Because Spark has obviously the difficulty to retell one's life story straight, the incoherence can be recognized on the very first pages of this novel, caused mainly by her ambivalent treatment of the protagonists. If there was a novel to choose, where the ambivalence pervades throughout the whole story, it would be probably *Aiding and Abetting*. By establishing the dual identities of Dr Wolf, born as Beate Pappenheim, and Lord Lucan who exchanges his identity with his companion Walker, Spark significantly hardens the work of both her reader and the storyteller. The narrative in *Aiding and Abetting* is

special and disturbing at the same time, for it allows a combination of various genres, as for instance a detective or a love story, as well as switching of the narrator's perspectives. Muriel Spark, as one of the few Scottish authors at that time, shows that to achieve mastery within oeuvre does not mean to follow what is already established, but it is rather the willingness and “bravery” to disengage with the tradition. As many years as passed, the novels written by Muriel Spark and the reality presented in them is still open to question.

## Resumé

Muriel Sparková a její schopnost neustále překonávat očekávání čtenářů je základním tématem této práce – s hlavním zaměřením na experimentální prvky v rámci vyprávění, které mají v jejím díle formu nespolehlivého vypravěče. Diplomová práce začíná krátkým představením autorky, jelikož jednou z typických vlastností její tvorby je míšení fikce s její vlastní životní zkušeností, z nichž se některé později staly hlavními tématy pro její knihy.

Fakt, že romány Sparkové jsou přijímané jako nejasné, fragmentované, dynamické a především nečekané, má počátek v jejích několika národních a náboženských identitách, které vyplynuli především z její konverze ke katolicismu v roce 1954 – často je označována jako „diasporická spisovatelka“. Nejenom že dokázala psát o různých kulturních problémech, ale její zapojení do postmoderního proudu jí umožnilo „obsadit“ více prostoru ve svých knihách, než se podařilo předcházejícím autorům.

Vliv postmodernismu na její tvorbu je nutné zdůraznit i přes její negativní postoj vůči jakékoli kategorizaci jejího díla. Z hlediska naratologie, může být ve tvorbě Muriel Sparkové pozorován určitý přechod, ve chvíli kdy autorka přestala preferovat pevný a standartní vyprávění. Postmodernisti, včetně Sparkové naopak často zařazují fragmentaci, metafikci, nespolehlivého vypravěče, či dokonce upřednostňují parodii nebo pastiš.

Prvním postmoderním experimentem je bezpochyby literární debut Sparkové – *Utěšitelé*<sup>48</sup> – kniha, která je nejasná a nestandardní nejenom pro svého vypravěče, ale i pro jednotlivé postavy. Kniha je do jisté míry autobiografická, s hlavní protagonistkou Caroline Rose a jejím životním bojem za nalezením vlastního sjednoceného já, který připomíná rozpolcenost autorky. Caroline, která často slýchává podivné zvuky, navíc právě píše knihu, tedy knihu ve knize, neboli – v postmoderní terminologii – novelu obsahující metafikci. Tato společně vytváří šílenství, které je nepopíratelně reflektováno také do role vypravěče, kterému tedy nelze ze zřejmých důvodů věřit, proto musí čtenář utvářet své vlastní domněnky o vývoji děje. V *Utěšitelích* je čtenář upozorňován, že postavy v knize jsou pouze vymyšlení jedinci ve vymyšleném příběhu, což znesnadňuje uchopení celého děje. Dokonce Caroline si není jistá svým postavením v rámci příběhu.

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<sup>48</sup> Překlady titulů jsou převzaty z titulu *Ambivalence v románech Muriel Sparkové* (viz literatura).

Obvykle Sparková nepodává čtenářům řádné rozuzlení děje, spíše nutí své čtenáře zvýšit pozornost a najít mezi řádky svou vlastní pravdu.

Téma slýchání podivných hlasů se znovu objevuje v románu, který se jmenuje *Memento Mori*, jehož přesný překlad – pamatujte na svou smrtelnost – slyší v telefonu pacienti nemocničního oddělení Maud Long. Tajemný hlas se mění v závislosti na identitě příjemce telefonního hovoru. Tento slogan však není pouze frází, je základním parametrem rozdělujícím postavy do dvou skupin – ti kdo se smrti bojí, jako například Lettie a ti kteří jsou racionální a přijímají smrt jako součást života – Jean, Charmian nebo Alec. Přestože reakce na telefonní hovory jasně vybudovaly identity jednotlivých postav, identita volajícího nebyla nikdy odhalena, jelikož ani od vypravěče nedostaneme žádné nápovědy, pouze několik postav hádá, že by to mohla být sama smrt, která jim volá. Fragmentace vyprávění je dále posílena obráceným řazením reality, známému jako *prolepse*, kterou používá také ve své nejznámější knize – *Nejlepší léta slečny Jean Brodieové*. V tomto díle bojují však za svůj život všechny postavy.

Zvláště děj *Balady z předměstí* je velmi těžké následovat, protože nejenomže vypravěč příběhu se zdá být nedůvěryhodný od samého počátku, ale dokonce hlavní protagonista Dougal Douglas, či Douglas Dougal, je podobně jako Caroline z díla *Utěšitelé* nebo slečna Jean Brodieová z díla *Nejlepší léta slečny Jean Brodieové*, velmi rozpolceným stvořením. Existují různé protichůdné názory na chaotické bytí hlavního hrdiny na předměstí Peckhamu, jelikož nikdo neví, co přesně od něj očekávat – ať už vypravěč, čtenáři, obyvatelé Peckhamu, či dokonce kritici, kteří se nemohou shodnout na povaze hlavního hrdiny a nazývají ho „didaktickým démonem“. Nepopiratelným faktem je, že pro větší jasnost a přesnost pochopení příběhu *Balady z předměstí* by pomohlo zvolení vševědoucího spolehlivého vypravěče. Nicméně odmítnutím tradičních postupů psaní Sparková podněcuje jinou čtenářskou pozici, jelikož úkolem čtenářů je také domýšlet kontext a interpretovat děj po svém. Kromě postmoderních prvků, můžeme v *Baladě* najít také prvky skotských balad, ve kterých se propojuje reálný svět s nadpřirozenem, což podporuje převažující téma dvojakosti, prostupující tímto příběhem.

Zatímco Dougal je vnímán jako katalyzátor událostí v Peckhamu, tato role je přesunuta na čtenáře v *Nejlepších letech slečny Jean Brodieové*, románu, která udělala ze Sparkové mezinárodně uznávanou autorku. V této knize je na rozdíl od předchozích děl

vypravěčova spolehlivost a důvěryhodnost zpochybňována z důvodu zjevné preference jedné postavy a to právě slečny Jean Brodieové, učitelce šesti děvčat, které jsou její oblíbenými. Hlavní postava je inspirována učitelkou Muriel Sparkové slečnou Kayovou. Podobný jev může být pozorován také v díle *Abatyše z Crewe*, kde vypravěč upřednostňuje budoucí abatyši Alexandru. Přestože to může být v některých chvílích obtížné, čtenář musí odolat vytrvalosti a pevnosti názorů vypravěče a vytvořit si své vlastní názory na obě postavy. Navíc jsou čtenáři žádáni o projevení lítosti nad osudem slečny Jean Brodieové, která byla zrazena jednou ze svých bývalých studentek – Sandy Strangerovou. Čím blíže se však pozorný čtenář, který alespoň lehce zná autorčino dílo, dostává ke konci knihy, tím jasněji poznává odpověď na otázku, jestli opravdu šlo o zradu, či ne. Tento soud musí čtenář vykonat sám, jelikož autorka jen velmi zřídka vysvětluje motivy svých postav.

Jak už bylo řečeno, mezi dílem *Abatyše z Crewe* a dílem *Nejlepší léta slečny Jean Brodieové* je možné najít určitou podobnost – jako například u hlavních hrdinek a postavení vypravěče vůči nim, díky kterému čtenář nikdy nedostane celý obraz toho, co se v opatství opravdu děje. U této knihy vyvolává diskuzi především nepoměr prostoru, který dostává vypravěč a postava Alexandry. Zatímco v *Baladě z předměstí* se vypravěč alespoň snaží upozornit na protagonistovo špatné chování, přestože zcela nerozlišuje mezi dobrem a zlem, v této knize vypravěč pouze oslavuje Alexandřino bytí, i přes její zapojení v intrikách směřujících proti sestře Felicity, která je její rivalkou ve volbách. Alexandra je také postavou, která si velmi ráda vymýšlí mýty a kontroluje ostatní. Dříve či později však zjistí, že se jí tyto praktiky vymstí, jelikož je požádána o vysvětlení svého absurdního chování přímo před biskupy v Římě.

Důvod k zařazení dalšího románu Muriel Sparkové – *Záhadný případ Lorda Lucana* na konec této práce je velmi jasný – tato kniha je totiž velmi přesným shrnutím její práce. Nechť Sparkové pro vyprávění jasného a soudržného životního příběhu postav je vidět už na prvních stránkách, především z důvodu dvojakého uchopení protagonistů. Kdyby mělo být vybráno jedno autorčino dílo, ve kterém tato dvojakost přetrvává po celou dobu příběhu, bylo by to velmi pravděpodobně dílo *Záhadný případ Lorda Lucana*. Právě stanovením dvojích identit doktorky Wolfové, narozené jako Beáta Pappenheimová, a lorda Lucana, který si vyměnil identitu se svým druhem Walkrem, Sparková výrazně ztěžuje práci čtenáře a také vypravěče příběhu. Vyprávění je v této knize speciální a

znepokojující zároveň, jelikož umožňuje kombinaci několika žánrů – jako například detektivního a milostného příběhu, a také střídání perspektivy vypravěče. Muriel Sparková, jako jedna z mála skotských autorů té doby ukazuje jak dosáhnout mistrovství v rámci díla bez dodržení předem stanovených pravidel a tradic. Její dílo poukazuje spíše na ochotu a odvahu opustit tyto tradice. Přestože už uplynuly desítky let od vzniku novel napsaných Muriel Sparkovou, realita v nich prezentovaná je stále otázkou k diskuzím.

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## Abbreviations Used

<i>C</i>	<i>The Comforters</i>
<i>MM</i>	<i>Memento Mori</i>
<i>BP</i>	<i>The Ballad of Peckham Rye</i>
<i>JB</i>	<i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i>
<i>AC</i>	<i>The Abbess of Crewe</i>
<i>AA</i>	<i>Aiding and Abetting</i>

## Annotation

Author: Bc. Alexandra Adamčová

Department: Department of English and American Studies

Title of The Thesis: Unreliable Narrators in Muriel Spark's Early Novels

Supervisor: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D.

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### Abstract:

This thesis deals with the employment of the unreliable narrator in Muriel Spark's early novels written in the period from 1957 to 2000, particularly: *The Comforters*, *Memento Mori*, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *The Abbess of Crewe* and *Aiding and Abetting*. In the first part of the thesis, there is a short chapter on the biography of the authoress. This thesis focuses on the postmodern transition of narratology as well. The next part is dedicated to the actual analysis of the aforementioned works, where I shall attempt to establish the position of such a narrator in the plot of each novel and the difficulty of understanding that may arise from it for a reader at the same time.

### Key words:

Muriel Spark, Scottish literature, postmodernism, narrative technique, unreliable narrator

## Anotace

Jméno a příjmení: Bc. Alexandra Adamčová

Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Název práce: Nespolehliví vypravěči v raných románech Muriel Sparkové

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### Abstrakt:

Diplomová práce se zabývá využitím nespolehlivého vypravěče v prvotních románech Muriel Sparkové napsaných v letech 1957–2000, jmenovitě: *Utěšitelé*, *Memento Mori*, *Balada z předměstí*, *Nejlepší léta slečny Jean Brodieové*, *Abatyše z Crewe* a *Záhadný případ lorda Lucana*. Součástí práce je krátká kapitola o autorce. Práce se rovněž zaměřuje na změny ve vyprávění v rámci postmodernismu. Další část je věnována samotné analýze děl, kde se pokusím zjistit postavení nespolehlivého vypravěče v každém románu a obtížnost porozumění, která z toho může pro čtenáře současně vyplýnout.

### Klíčová slova:

Muriel Sparková, skotská literatura, postmodernismus, narativní technika, nespolehlivý vypravěč