Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci
Filozofická fakulta

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

The Marriage of the Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Short Stories, and its Catholic Implications

Diplomová práce

Bc. Romana Ryšková

Studijní obor: Anglická filologie – Francouzská filologie

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D.

Olomouc 2023

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma “The Marriage of the Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark’s Short Stories, and its Catholic Implications” vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucí práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne 29. 6. 2023 …….

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D. for her patience and help during the process of writing my thesis. I also want to thank my family and friends for their support.

Contents

Introduction 5

1 Muriel Spark 7

1.1 Introduction to Her Life and Career 7

1.2 The Spiritual Background of Muriel Spark 11

1.3 Spark Was a Catholic, What about Her Books? 16

1.4 Categorizing Muriel Spark 23

1.5 The Short Story Writer 30

2 The Marriage of the Natural and the Supernatural 37

2.1. The Theme of Madness, or the Tragedy of the Mystical Misfit 44

2.2. The Theme of Purgatory, or the Ghost Standing between Life and Death. 52

2.3. The Theme of Pride, or the Catholic Who Rejects the Supernatural 63

2.4. The Theme of Transfiguration, or the Fusion of the Tangible and the Intangible 72

Conclusion 78

Shrnutí 81

Annotation 84

Anotace 85

Bibliography 86

Introduction

The name Muriel Spark, whose bearer is a brilliant Scottish writer, is one that forever marked the British literary canon. It seems that her popularity was unavoidable, given her natural intelligence and undisputable gifts. Spark was simply predestined to earn renown at one point in her life or another. Literature shaped her life in every way, and it was shaped by Muriel in return. Though mostly known for her novel *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, she is anything but a 'one-accidentally-good-book' author. She was very prolific and to fully appreciate her undeniable genius, one should not ignore the rest of her opus which is surprisingly diverse. Her wit is displayed in a myriad of pieces that spread across various genres. Throughout her lifetime, she enriched the world of letters with literary criticism, poems, short stories, essays, novels, and even children's books, so it would be a shame to disregard these other forms, especially the extensive amount of short stories. As will be illustrated later, Spark thought highly of this specific genre, most importantly of its ability to express a lot in just a few words. In fact, she proclaimed about literary writings that: "The longer they become, the more they seem to lose value."[1] This thesis will, therefore, focus on these more obscure pieces.

What made this author worthy of her reputation, was above all her individualistic spirit. She did not set limits to her creativity, and her determination not to conform to any social or literary norms made her a figure that sparked up, and continues to do so, many scholarly discussions. Her messages are profound and not straightforward which is exactly why critics cannot stop talking about her. Her oeuvre seems to offer endless subjects for debate and it is unlikely that the source will run out any time soon.

In general, it seems impossible to fully separate an author from his or her work as it is the very extension of their soul which is exactly what makes literature interesting. It is always fascinating and useful to explore the souls around you as a means of enriching your own. That is why this thesis tries to dive deeper into the fascinating mind of Dame Muriel Spark and tackle the roots of her intriguing ideas.

[1] Quoted in Janice Galloway, introduction to *The Complete Short Stories*, by Muriel Spark (United Kingdom: Canongate Books, 2018), x.

All in all, Muriel Spark is an elusive writer who does not like to paint her stories in black and white because she does not seem to believe in definite categories and conclusions but some reappearing motives are hard to overlook. Spark's personality is a mosaic of many different, and often contradictory identities. Drew Milne said: "Attempts to frame Spark's works ideologically – as representations, for example, of the politics of Scottish, British, Jewish or Catholic identity – scarcely capture the pleasure or interest of her fictions."[2] Still, ignoring these integral characteristics of M. Spark would mean missing out on a huge part of her underlying intentions.

Unfortunately, all of them cannot be dealt with at once. Hence, here, the focus will specifically be on the supernatural layers of her shorter prose which will be treated as the expressions of Dame Spark's core identity as a Catholic. The thesis will argue that the marriage of the natural and supernatural is not only in accordance with her Catholic beliefs but that her faith is, in fact, a necessary bridge connecting the two realities. It will then try to analyze some specific Catholic ideas and their significance. Those do not necessarily include only doctrinal concepts, but also Catholic implications and overall perception. The selected themes include madness, purgatory, pride, and the link between the tangible and intangible. It will not try to derive any universal moral conclusions or axioms. The goal is to comprehend how Spark's religion influenced the way she viewed the world and how it was consequently reflected in the stories.

Interestingly, even though some of the stories were written before her conversion, we can observe some Catholic ideas creeping in which is not surprising, given that her conversion did not collide with her previous way of thinking, quite the opposite, in many ways it confirmed the ideas that were already integrated into the 'soon-to-be Catholic's' mind.

[2] Drew Milne, "Muriel Spark's Crimes of Wit," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed. Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 110. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09xhd.15.

1 Muriel Spark

1.1 Introduction to Her Life and Career

"But in order to write about life as I intended to do, I felt I had first to live."[3]

— Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* —

Despite Muriel Spark's claim that her work can be judged on its own[4], it is not necessarily self-evident that it can. The author herself reveals that her life does serve as a direct inspiration for her fiction: "'I don't see what else you can draw on for fiction but your life,' she said. 'Not only your own life but what you've learned or grasped about other people's. It's one's own experience after all. What else can it be? All writers do this.'"[5] Her time on this earth was eventful, full of unforeseen adventures. There is no doubt that her outer and inner experiences had shaped her writing and to omit this would mean ignoring an important piece of the puzzle, integral to the interpretation of her work. On this account, David Goldie comments:

> Spark's work can, no doubt, be enjoyed and understood in the absence of knowledge of its author. But hers is an *oeuvre* that is so deeply concerned with issues of identity and authority, and so closely identified with the persona of its author, that to attempt to understand it without taking Spark herself into account is to miss a rich, perhaps the richest, element of its intriguing, playful complexity.[6]

For this reason, some insight into the background of the author is not a waste of time. If anything, her personal story is almost as engaging as those of her characters, or maybe more.

The course of this fascinating life began on February the 1st 1918 when a girl named Muriel Camberg was born and it expired on April 13th 2006 when a woman called Muriel Spark departed forever, after leaving her one-of-a-kind mark on the canon of the world's literature.

---

[3] Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae. Autobiography* (London: Penguin Books, c1993), 103.
[4] Quoted in Dorothea Walker, *Muriel Spark* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1988), 105.
[5] Quoted in Galloway, introduction, xii.
[6] David Goldie, "Muriel Spark and the Problems of Biography," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 15. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09xhd.6.

Her personality could be described as a walking contradiction which is reflected in her writing where duality is of the underlying themes. There was no escaping this curse (or blessing, depending on the point of view), Spark being the daughter of a Jewish engineer and a gentile English teacher of music. This meant that she never really experienced a sense of belonging, being always torn between her contrasting and, in theory, irreconcilable identities. But at the same time, she had the advantage of having access to different ways of thinking so these conflicting perspectives on life served as the cornerstone of her unique body of work.

As for her career, it may come as a surprise that "Like many women artists, Muriel Spark found her voice comparatively late in a hitherto difficult life."[7] Her literary voice was indeed heard and appreciated quite late, when she was thirty-nine years old, after she published her first novel called *The Comforters* in 1957. Nevertheless, in actuality, literary endeavors marked her entire life. Already as a child, little Muriel exhibited curiosity about literature, words, and rhymes. She read grand poets such as Swinburne and Browning and her talent and creative spirit showed early when, at the age of nine, young Muriel felt the creative urge to rewrite Browning's poem "The Pied Paper of Hamelin" in order to give it a more happy ending. This episode is ironically funny, given the lack of the 'and they lived happily ever after' endings in her own fiction. The stories came with an apparent ease to this highly intuitive and gifted child which she clearly remembers: "I found I could make up poetry and stories in my head as I whizzed along, ringing my bell to scatter such of the sauntering population, with their little dogs, as were in my way."[8]

As for her education, she first attended James Gillespie's School for Girls where she spent twelve years. She thinks of this period as "the most formative years of my life and in many ways the most fortunate for a future writer"[9]. Religion was one of the many areas in which the school shaped the future author. Officially, Gillespie's was a Presbyterian institution, though "tolerance was decidedly the prevailing religion, always with a puritanical slant"[10] and the school was a home to students of a broad scope of religious background where "the Bible appeared to

[7] Jenny Turner, "Dame Muriel Spark," *The Guardian,* April 17, 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2006/apr/17/guardianobituaries.booksobituaries
[8] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae,* 99.
[9] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae,* 50.
[10] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae,* 53.

cover all these faiths"[11]. Nonetheless, the strongest influence of this time was the crème de la crème of the teaching staff, Miss Christina Kay, "that character in search of an author"[12]. Miss Kay was lucky because she found her author in Muriel Spark and thus lives forever in one of Spark's most acclaimed novels *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Miss Kay surely left an indelible impression on her students who fell under her spell and it is fair to say that Spark's life might have taken a different turn without the impact of this inspiring teacher. As for her own reputation and status in the school, she comments: "Of course, I was already known in the school as a poet."[13]

In general, the author had a tendency not to choose the conventional way of living and that applies to her higher education as well. Unlike many other fellow writers and intellectuals, she decided to miss out on the university experience, one reason being that: "many older girls who were studying at Edinburgh University were humanly rather dull and earnest, without adult style or charm."[14] To be quite precise, the exact reason was rather financial, but Spark's explanation is no doubt more poetic. It is, however, true that her individualistic nature and the controlled environment of academia would not have meshed well. Based on her recollections, she was well aware of the freedom she needed in her pursuit of knowledge and that she was not therefore the best candidate to become a scholar.[15] Instead, she enrolled in the Heriot-Watt College which "had a reputation for practical and businesslike teaching"[16]. Once there, she dedicated her time to practicing précis-writing and she learned about commercial correspondence. The (mostly) technically oriented college strikes one as an unlikely choice for a poet but because Muriel Spark was no ordinary artist, she knew this was exactly what she wanted and needed[17]. The school mainly taught her how to express herself economically which appealed to her greatly and for that reason it cannot be surprising that one of the hallmarks of her prose is the use of effective and precise language and love for shorter forms.

Upon leaving the college, it was time for Muriel to face reality and find employment. She first started working as a teacher and instead of a salary, she

[11] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 53.
[12] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 56.
[13] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 60.
[14] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 102..
[15] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 101.
[16] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 102.
[17] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 103.

received “free tuition in shorthand and typing by the school’s secretarial teacher.”[18] One of the unique traits of Spark is her deep appreciation for different sorts of input that can broaden her horizons. During her lifetime, she always seized the opportunity to learn something new, so she was grateful even for this type of frankly pathetic payment because she recognized its practical use. But as one cannot live purely on the joy of mastering a new skill for long, she was forced to look for a job elsewhere and she found one in a department store as a secretary.

Muriel Spark then ended her late teens in a grandiose manner with an unexpected marriage to a much older Sidney Oswald Spark, aka S.O.S., nomen omen indeed. It may be astounding to learn that the intelligent woman would make such a hasty and reckless decision when it came to an equally important matter as marriage. Nevertheless, in this situation, it was the adventure-seeking and hungry-for-experience part of Muriel Spark that made the call. It was the prospect of starting a new life in Africa where her husband has headed rather than a deep inclination toward the man, that made her agree to the union. It is a fact that Muriel did not attempt to hide: “I longed to leave Edinburgh and see the world. Perhaps that is why I got engaged to Sydney Oswald Spark.”[19] She was likewise promised that she could fully dedicate her time to the pursuit of writing without having many other responsibilities. This was an offer that could not be easily declined by the young artist.

The newlyweds started their life together in Southern Rhodesia and the trip to Africa is certainly a crucial period of her life, though the stay was bittersweet. On the one hand, it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that provided priceless experience and much valuable material for her work. On the other hand, she got to see not only the mysteries of the new continent but of her new man as well. Unfortunately, what she discovered in the latter case, was not all moonlight and roses. Her husband proved to be mentally unstable: “He became a borderline case, and I didn’t like what I found either side of the border.”[20] His disrupted psyche led him to resort to violence more and more but before Muriel could separate from him, they conceived a son Robin.

[18] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 105.
[19] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 116.
[20] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 130.

However, despite the struggles, this period was overall "formative in the long run"[21] for the intelligent but maybe naive or at least a little irresponsible woman:

> It was in Africa that I learned to cope with life. It was there that I learned to keep in mind — in the front of my mind — the essentials of our human destiny, our responsibilities, and 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. There was an element of primitive truth and wisdom, in that existence in a great tropical zone of the earth, that gave me strength.[22]

Unsurprisingly, the two divorced but we cannot forget one more thing that Muriel gained from this relationship, her new last name. It is undeniable that it fits the author perfectly which is a fact she acknowledged: "Spark seemed to have some ingredient of life and of fun."[23]

After the war broke she managed to return to her motherland despite some difficulties, there she wrote propaganda and later worked as an editor. Little by little, she gained more and more recognition for her literary achievements and found financial security. Later in life, she was lured by the beauty and mysteries of Italy prompting her to settle first in Rome, later in Tuscany with a fellow artist Penelope Jardine. On the ground of this southern, sunlit country, she breathed her last breath at the age of eighty-eight.

1.2 The Spiritual Background of Muriel Spark

"Dont's ask me," … "how I feel about things as a Catholic. To me, being Catholic is part of my human existence. I don't feel one way as a human being and another as a *Catholic.*" [24]

— Muriel Spark, *The Bachelors* —

[21]Turner, "Dame Muriel Spark."
[22] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae,* 119.
[23] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae,* 132.
[24] Muriel Spark, *The Bachelors* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963) 79.

In order to interpret the role of the supernatural in Spark's stories, it is more than useful to lay the basis for understanding her own relation to this hidden sphere by analyzing her attitude toward spirituality and religion. It is no wonder that the quest for finding a spiritual home was not easy for her. The ambiguous religious background of the author combined with her nonconforming nature resulted in difficulties during her search for a place where she could feel spiritually comfortable. The feeling of misplacement lasted until she converted to Catholicism. The importance of this religion in her life is a well-known fact, but it would be a shame to overlook other aspects that influenced her journey. Therefore, a few pages will be dedicated to the discussion of the forces that paved her way into the Catholic Church and also her unique interpretation of the new faith.

Concerning Spark's upbringing, she did not receive strong spiritual leadership from her parents due to being born into a family of mixed beliefs. As a matter of fact, neither of them was a fanatic in their faith: "My mother and father were very casual, very free about their religion; they believed in God, and there was no problem."[25] Interestingly, the lack of direct input in the area of metaphysics did not prevet the child from developing some connection to it by her own means. She recollects: "when I was about nine, I had a kind of religious experience."[26]

Nevertheless, she had to look for her role model elsewhere, and she found it in the already-discussed influential teacher Christina Kay. It is more than likely that Spark had encountered other believers before she met Miss Kay but the reason why the devotion of this particular teacher had any effect on the young student, was because "She knew how to apply her Christianity."[27] What appealed to Spark was doubtless Miss Kay's artistic soul that resembled her own. She reminisces: "Miss Kay's scriptural lessons were among her most marvelous. She had a true sense of the poetry of the Bible."[28] As the poetic aspect of storytelling of the Biblical texts was crucial for the early target readers (the Jews), it was no doubt fascinating for a similarly oriented modern scholar of the Holy book. For Spark, it was pivotal to find someone who appreciates and understands the symbolism hidden in it and who is able to convey this to her students. Young Muriel thus developed an appreciation

[25] Dame Muriel Spark, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark," by Robert Hosmer, *Salmagundi*, no. 146/147 (2005): 132. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40549783.
[26] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 63.
[27] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 62.
[28] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 63.

for the sacred texts at school but her religious coming of age was still far from being completed.

When Spark talks about the pre-war years she remembers that at this time she had no particular belief though she was sensitive to the intangible which seems to have always been the case in her lifetime:

> I had no specific religion but at the same time I had a strong religious feeling. There were times when, listening to lovely music on the radio, looking at a fine picture in the Scottish National Gallery, reading or writing a poem, I was aware of a definite 'something beyond myself'. This sensation especially took hold of me when I was writing; I was convinced that sometimes I had access to knowledge that I couldn't possibly have gained through normal channels — knowledge of things I hadn't heard of, seen, been taught.[29]

Gerard Carruthers believes that Muriel Spark was led by a certain "religious instinct rather than any religious certainty."[30] It is also evident that she often felt a connection with the supernatural when dealing with some form of artistic work, consequently, it is not surprising that her own art is filled with supernatural elements. Muriel Spark is not an exception in that matter, a soul of an artist is usually a sensitive one and some inspiration derived from their interest in realms existing beyond our own is not out of the ordinary.

Spark also mentions that she felt particularly attuned to the spiritual in the face of natural wonders. For example, during the challenging time in Africa when she was in the process of realizing that her marriage is bound to fail, and when she was coming to terms with this irreversible fact, she was lucky enough to be surrounded by beautiful nature whose proximity made her feel closer to God. Though she had not given Him a name yet, she was able to feel Him and thus gain some strength needed in order to overcome the pressing weight of the harsh circumstances. Victoria Falls, in particular, had a powerful influence: "Strangely, the experience of the Victoria Falls gave me the courage to endure the difficult years to come. The falls became to me a symbol of spiritual strength. I had no settled religion, but I recognized the experience of the falls as spiritual in kind. They are one of those works of nature that cannot be distinguished from a sublime work of

[29] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae,* 115.
[30] Gerard Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 76.

art."[31] The last sentence shows that there is no need to distinguish between artificial art and natural art which also has a Creator in the eyes of a believer, though not among the mortals.

Needless to say, the most debated part of her religious awakening is her conversion to Catholicism. It is a curious question of how exactly did the half-Jewish, half-gentile girl, educated in a Presbyterian environment, finally decide to accept this specific branch of Christianity. Hynes thinks that "nothing can possibly explain religious conversion–conversion to believing rather than knowing, to awareness of reality as distinct from isolated realism".[32] Surely enough, in accordance with her writing habits, Spark does not provide a clear-cut answer. It is not to keep us in the dark on purpose, it is only that a simplified explanation is truly not possible and she confirms Hynes' thought by saying: "Indeed, the existential quality of a religious experience cannot be simply summed up in general terms".[33] She adds: "why I became a Catholic, I can only say that the answer is both too easy and too difficult. The simple explanation is that I felt the Roman Catholic faith corresponded to what I had always felt and known and believed; there was no blinding revelation in my case."[34] Interestingly, the Catholic Church was not her first choice. Muriel at first tried to become a member of the Church of England which was "more 'natural' and near to home".[35] Though closer to home, it did not feel like home to the writer because she felt uncomfortable about its historically recent foundation.[36]

Later, she spent a lot of time examining different writings by a myriad of Christian theologians. Determined not to give up the search for her spiritual refuge, she dedicated the year 1953 to reading theological studies by John Henry Newman[37] which was the deciding factor that finally convinced her to become Catholic, so her conversion was in reality the result of a thorough process of elimination.[38] Her inquiry had always been in alignment with her strong affinity for the otherworldly: "It took such a long time and it did cover the whole of my life in retrospect, and in

[31] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 128.
[32] Joseph Hynes, *The Art of the Real: Muriel Spark's Novels* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988), 64.
[33] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 202.
[34] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 202.
[35] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 202.
[36] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 202.
[37] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 202.
[38] Dame Muriel Spark, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark," 131.

fact the whole of my life would be a process towards conversion … so you would hardly call it conversion, it was just a moving into a place I was destined for."[39] In 'My Conversion', Spark ponders a little more the actual process of this big change:

> I decided at last to become a Catholic, by which time I really became very ill. I was going about, but I was ready for a breakdown. I think it was the religious upheavel and the fact I had been trying to write and I couldn't manage it, I was living in very poor circumstances and I was a bit undernourished as well. I suppose it all combined to give me my breakdown. I had a feeling while I was undergoing this real emotional suffering that it was all part of the conversion. But I don't know. It may have been an erroneous feeling.[40]

About this revelation, Carruthers notes: "Even in her description of 'conversion' we find a characteristic Sparkian element of dubiety. Her personal experiences are open to contracting interpretations, which she will neither fully accept nor deny."[41]

At last, she was officially received into the Church on the 1st of May 1954. The Catholic Church offered answers to her curiosity but that does not mean that she was blind to its issues which are hard to avoid in any institution of a comparably large scale, and as a consequence, her attitude towards the Church as well as her place in it was not a traditional one:

> Spark is a woman of profound spiritual depth and conviction, if not of the strictest doctrinal orthodoxy. She practices her faith rather on her own terms; it is said that she arrives at Mass after the sermon has been preached, since she considers that "it's a mortal sin to waste time with sermons"; and she does not hesitate to speak out, having once declared that John Paul II is "a Pole first, a Pope second, a Christian third."[42]

Similarly, she did not feel the need to lose her autonomy when it came to decision-making: "She would never become an ultramontane Catholic, one looking to the Vatican for every answer, though she would live most of her subsequent life in Rome and Italy, writing novels of spiritual exploration."[43] On

---

[39] Spark, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark," 131.
[40] Muriel Spark, "My Conversion," in *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. Joseph Hynes (New York: G.K. Hall, 1992), 25.
[41] Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist," 75.
[42] Hosmer "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark," 128.
[43] Terrance Klein, "The Stormy Life of Muriel Spark," *America Magazine*, August 03, 2011, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2011/08/03/stormy-life-muriel-spark.

this account, Carruthers concludes: "However, for Spark, her Catholic faith is no mere set of easily followed dogma or any 'monolithic tradition'. It is an outlook that sees the world, whether physical or in terms of human action, as not entirely knowable or definable and it is informed by a belief related to this apprehension that God's grace (or purpose) is often ineffable."[44] Presumably, it was paradoxically her free-spirited artistic side that both drew her to the Catholic faith and at the same time prevented her from fully accepting its doctrines. Alan Bold remarks: "As a wildly imaginative woman Spark has found the theological certainties of Roman Catholicism both attractive and agonizing;".[45]

To sum up, Spark was a woman who had always been aware of the existence of a realm that transcends the boundaries of her everyday reality, and she likewise knew that "The main values are really spiritual."[46] Although the process of naming this other dimension was not easy, in the end, the author concluded that the teaching of the Catholic Church corresponds the most with her understanding of it.

1.3 Spark Was a Catholic, What about Her Books?

"I never think of myself as a Catholic when I'm writing because it's so difficult to think of my-self as anything else."[47]

— Muriel Spark, "My Conversion" —

No matter the spiritual convictions of a writer, it does not inevitably follow that their books must be in alignment with them, and because the goal of this thesis is to focus on Catholic traces in Spark's short stories, it must be established that such an attempt does not go against the nature of her writing. Firstly, it is important to mention that there is no consensus among the critics. In the previous century, it was perhaps more common not to question the Catholic essence of Spark's books as is attested in the following quotation: "In the early 1960s Muriel Spark was regarded as yet another prominent British writer of fiction working from within a

[44] Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist," 76.
[45] Alan Bold, *Muriel Spark* (London: Methuen, 1986), 119.
[46] Muriel Spark, "Muriel Spark – b. 1918," by Jeanne Devoize and Claude Pamela, *Journal of the Short Story in English*, September 1, 2003. http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/328
[47] Spark, "My Conversion," 26.

Roman Catholic sensibility. She was seen as bringing a moral intensity to her novels and short stories, somewhat akin to that of Graham Greene,".[48] On the other hand, nowadays with the decline of organized religion and the overall rise of skepticism, what emerges is another prominent group of critics who take the opposite stand and deny the necessity of reading Spark from the Catholic perspective. McQuillan is one of the adamant opposers of the Catholic method of analysis. Patricia Waugh notices that "McQuillan … seeks to downplay the importance of Spark's Catholicism".[49] Her observation is not incorrect and it is confirmed by Carruthers who summarizes McQuillan's distinction between 'Catholic' and 'catholic':

> The broad materialist presuppositions of modern critical theory, however, represent a particularly stark reappraisal of Spark in relation to her avowed religious predilections. We see this most clearly in the volume edited by Martin McQuillan, *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction* (2001), where none of the contributors has any regard for Spark's religion as representing something tangibly special with which to work. … Arguably, McQuillan, in attempting to open up the definition of Spark's Catholicism, is rather reductive as he suggests that Spark's fictions 'are "Catholic" in the sense that they treat the theological-political issues of the West over the course of the last five decades, which in so far as they are concerns for the West intrude upon the rest of the world and become "universal" or "catholic"'. With the movement from 'Catholic' to 'catholic' we see precisely the evacuation of Spark's religious centre and an insistence on common, secular (especially 'Western'), human experience.[50]

The differentiation is without a doubt an interesting one, nevertheless, it lacks a real substance for there is no evidence that Spark aimed at the redefinition of the word. Thomas F. Haddox called this new broad interpretation "meaningless."[51] John Galvin also downplays the role Spark's Catholicism: "I am convinced that reading Spark through an exclusively Roman Catholic lens induces a sort of myopia."[52] Carruthers seems to be conscious of the tendency to separate Spark from her religion and asks a valid question: "is Spark's confessed spirituality

---

[48] Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist," 74.
[49] Patricia Waugh, "Muriel Spark and the Metaphysics of Modernity: Art, Secularization, and Psychosis," in *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. David Herman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 80.
[50] Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist," 74.
[51] Thomas F Haddox, "RELIGION FOR 'REALLY INTELLIGENT PEOPLE': THE RHETORIC OF MURIEL SPARK'S 'REALITY AND DREAMS,'" *Religion & Literature* 41, no. 3 (2009): 46. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25746542.
[52] John Galvin, "The Mandelbaum Gate: Muriel Spark's Apocalyptic Gag," in *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. David Herman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 157.

now to be disregarded by critics as either irrelevant in her work or, at best, seen as a quaint delusion which brings some thematic structure to her work even though the 'real' or 'most important themes' … lie elsewhere in her fiction?"[53] It is a question without a clear answer but it is fair to say that there are still many scholars who do regard her faith as an integral factor. Mary R. Reichardt, for instance, names Spark as one of the Catholics of the previous century who "created literary art of the highest caliber."[54] Joseph Hynes likewise highlights the value of her religion:

> My point is that some initial emphasis upon the valence of religion in the books will be useful to any reader, because some understanding of this point will bear upon the sort of psychology encountered. Indeed, I find it impossible to read Spark without some elementary attention to Catholicism's role in her writing; religion is for her not a narrowing parochial concern but rather a means of dealing with what I have called her reality principle — her concept of all that is.[55]

Nonetheless, given the lack of unity, it is much more helpful to look for some clues left by the author herself. Of course, Spark does not make it easy to derive any definite conclusion from her comments, which is noticed by Haddox: "Spark's own statements about her religion and art … are fewer and far more guarded."[56] Though Catholicism is at the core of a number of her works, the author's sentiment towards the religion in them is ambiguous. She elucidated it a little by insisting: "I am a catholic and I'm a believing Catholic. … [this is] bound to colour my narrative, inform my narrative approach. … Although I don't set out to be a Catholic apologist in any form".[57] When asked in an interview about the impact of her conversion, she confirmed: "Well, it's had a terrific impact on my life and work. My faith has been strengthened to the extent that I could not believe. It would be impossible for me to lose my faith."[58] She also claimed to believe in an absolute truth, which is in itself a very Catholic idea: "I don't claim that my novels are truth – I claim that they are fiction, out of which a kind of truth emerges. ... there

[53] Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist," 75.
[54] Mary R. Reichardt, introduction to *Between Human and Divine: The Catholic Vision in American Culture*, ed. Mary R. Reichardt (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 5, ProQuest Ebook Central.
[55] Joseph Hynes, *The Art of the Real*, 36.
[56] Haddox, "RELIGION FOR 'REALLY INTELLIGENT PEOPLE,'" 44.
[57] Martin McQuillan, *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 2017.
[58] Dame Muriel Spark, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark," 132.

is absolute truth, in which I believe things which are difficult to believe, but believe them because they are absolute".[59] Last but not least, she maintained: "I wasn't able to work and to do any of my writing until I became Catholic."[60]

Considering the evidence, it is apparent that Spark certainly did not view literature as a means of conveying her religious beliefs which is confirmed by Hosmer: "She is neither polemicist nor propagandist nor homilist".[61] It was also demonstrated that she was destined to be an artist from her birth no matter what, so she did not write because she wanted to promote her religion, but since she happened to be both, a writer and a Catholic the influence of her faith on the shaping of her literature cannot be disregarded. It is also apparent that her decision to convert was not a spontaneous whim of the moment but a result of a well-thought-through embodiment of a deep-rooted conviction and as such, it is highly improbable that it would not have impacted her work in one way or another.

Still, the attempt to understand the precise interconnection between the two fundamental spheres of her life, her faith and writing, is a challenging if not impossible task because as Thomas F. Haddox says: "while references to Catholicism abound in Spark's novels … their significance is more obscure, lacking the portentous intrusions of the divine into everyday life"[62]. He is correct, although only partially. The meaning is indeed obscure but not because of the lack of God's intervention in the everyday. It is quite the opposite, and this topic will be discussed later. The unclarity is perhaps partly caused by the inner tension between her own Catholic and artistic identity. Whittaker rightly questions the possible reconciliation of the two: "As a member of the Church, allegiance is to orthodoxy; as a writer allegiance is to art. Is it possible for an imaginative artist to be both a creator and an adherent of dogma ?"[63] But Patricia Waugh insists that the two parts of her dual identity must be treated together because "one cannot be understood without the other."[64] Whittaker in the answer to her own question agrees with Waugh and to

[59] Frank Kermode, "The House of Fiction," in *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction,* ed. Malcolm Bradbury (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977) 133.
[60] Quoted in Bold, *Muriel Spark*, 36.
[61] Robert E. Hosmer Jr., "Writing with Intent: The Artistry of Muriel Spark," *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed Jennifer Stock, vol. 440, Gale, 2019. link.gale.com/apps/doc/H1100125923/GLS?u=palacky&sid=bookmarkGLS&xid=8d3c88bf.
[62] Haddox, "RELIGION FOR 'REALLY INTELLIGENT PEOPLE,'" 3.
[63] Ruth Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 37, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-04929-5.
[64] Waugh, "Muriel Spark and the Metaphysics of Modernity" 82.

support her claim she leans on the views of Jacques Maritain who believed that "only a Christian, nay a mystic, because he has some idea of what there is in man, can be a complete novelist."[65] He also proclaimed: "Do not make the absurd attempt to sever in yourself the artist and the Christian. They are one if you really are a Christian, and if your art is not isolated from your soul by some aesthetic system."[66] Reichardt likewise understands the interconnection between art and faith: "An enduring connection between religion and art thus exists, and this connection may pertain even if a work of art does not consist of overtly religious subject matter."[67] Finally, to prove that art and faith can go hand in hand from the Catholic point of view, here is a quote by Pope John Paul II who believed that art is "a wholly valid approach to the realm of faith".[68]

Also, if the decision not to read Spark as Catholic is based solely on the obscurity of her religion in the texts, Reichardt emphasizes that lack of direct Catholic allusions is a common approach of recent fiction: "In fact, if any generalization may be made, late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Catholic literature is defined less by its treatment of overtly Catholic subject matter than by a particular Catholic vision applied to its subject matter. This is an important distinction."[69] Muriel was simply a little ahead of her time, or rather she was one of the trendsetters.

It is however necessary to keep in mind that the reflection of her religion in her words is unique and that "her faith is manifested in ways different from what is normally assumed to be religious writing."[70] This is a crucial point. Spark rarely expresses anything straightforwardly. The lack of explicit Catholic imagery does not mean it is not there, it only requires more careful attention in order to be discovered. Some skepticism is, nevertheless, understandable. In comparison with some of the prominent Catholic writers of her time, it is impossible not to see that her work deviates. Bran Nicol mentions, for instance Iris Murdoch or Grahan Greene and observes that, unlike their novels, Spark's works "do not offer a sustained meditation on religion or spirituality (even though the topic of

[65] Jacque Maritain, *Art and Scolasticism*, tr. J. F. Scanlan (London: Sheed & Ward, 1923), 225-6.
[66] Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, 70.
[67] Reichardt, introduction, 1.
[68] John Paul II, "Letter to Artists," 1999, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html.
[69] Reichardt, introduction, 3.
[70] Kucała, "The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction," 65.

Catholicism crops up frequently). God is not one of the 'themes.'"[71] The last point is especially interesting. It may be true that He is not one of the themes, but it is well possible that He is actually the hidden protagonist. She admitted the possibility in one of her interviews: "C: I know that it has been said that your main character is God himself. Do you agree with that? MS: I don't know who said it but it might be. It might well be."[72] Ruth Whittaker is at least sure that Spark's characters are defined by their "relationship, or lack of it, with God".[73]

The role of God would, of course, lead to another debate. In this chapter, the goal is simply to illustrate that the influence of her faith cannot be dismissed. Here are some proposals that may shed light on the actual role of her religion. The first idea is implied by Patrick Swinden and mentioned by John Galvin when discussing the novel Maldelbaum Gate, yet the generalization could apply to a wider range of her works. He says:

> Spark goes beyond pattern-making to produce "something which arises out of plot but which has higher status than plot," something which "provokes correspondence between plots and those real and subsistent truths of which they are held to be the fictional analogues" … This sort of correspondence, Swinden admits, is more likely to attract a Catholic than a non-Carholic reader of the book.[74]

This hints at the existence of some higher agenda that is hidden behind the words which surely corresponds with the Catholic way of interpreting the world. Another important point is brought up by again John Galvin who sees her as the judge of her fellow Catholic believers: "But Muriel Spark is in great pains, in much of her work … to underscore her identity as a "private judging" Catholic."[75] Heo then essentially observes that the Catholic allusions oftentimes have a mocking undertone and serve as the vehicle for her satire rather than apologetics. It was observed that "she has expressed exasperation with the stupidity of other Catholics, the priesthood, and the liturgy".[76] Spark's use of satire will be further discussed in

[71] Nicol Bran, "Reading Spark in the Age of Suspicion," in *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. David Herman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 113.
[72] Muriel Spark, "Columbia Talks with Muriel Spark," by Sarah Smith, *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, no. 30 (1998): 208. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41807892.
[73] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 3.
[74] Galvin, "The Mandelbaum Gate," 159.
[75] Galvin, "The Mandelbaum Gate," 161.
[76] Haddox, "RELIGION FOR 'REALLY INTELLIGENT PEOPLE,'" 44.

the next chapter. It is merely necessary to keep in mind that the often mistrustful and cynical approach serves a purpose.

Next, an interesting link is proposed by David Lodge and summarized by Lewis MacLeod:

> Decades ago, David Lodge figured Spark's achievement in terms of an original manipulation of omniscience, a manipulation, he argues, that is closely linked to Spark's Catholicism. … Crudely, Spark is at pains to differentiate between "spying on" and "watching over" individuals. The former belongs to decidedly worldly blackmailers and con men, the latter to divine care and eternal order. Some mythmakers are moral, some satanic.[77]

This theme of observation from a distance, whether its goal is spying on or watching over someone, is interwoven into many of the stories, mainly via the omnipresent ghosts whose role will be looked into. Another remark about her use of religion concerns the contradictory nature of her narratives: "Identity in Spark's fiction is often hybrid, contradictory even, so that it can be difficult to define with any certainty and this reflects her Catholic outlook that life itself is rather wonderfully mysterious and humans should not presume to define it in very limiting ways."[78] Haddox similarly suggest that the Catholic perspective corresponds with the elusive: "a Catholic lens might well suggest that change is unpredictable, performative, and paradoxical".[79] All of these characteristics are easily found throughout her work. And lastly, Reichardt describes Catholic literature as "experimental and expansive"[80] due to its power of "extend[ing] the Catholic vision into uncharted areas and contested dimensions of experience . . . [and] driven at times to explore volatile and shadowy areas".[81] No description could better fit the puzzling work of Muriel Spark.

In conclusion, the uncertainty of meaning leaves space for various approaches toward interpretation. Despite the integral place that Spark's religion

---

[77] Lewis MacLeod, " Matters of Care and Control: Surveillance, Omniscience, and Narrative Power in *The Abbess of Crewe and Loitering with Intent*," in *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. David Herman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 203-204.
[78] Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist," 77.
[79] Haddox, "RELIGION FOR 'REALLY INTELLIGENT PEOPLE,'" 49.
[80] Reichardt, introduction, 3.
[81] Albert Gelpi, "The Catholic Presence in American Culture," *American Literary History* 11, no. 1 (1999): 202-3.

occupies in her life, it is essential to emphasize that she cannot be considered a Catholic writer, rather she is a writer who happens to be Catholic. This distinction has not always been obvious since there was a tendency to treat Spark as any other Catholic writer who writes in order to convey her religious views but as Dobie says: "Her purpose is to intrigue, not teach."[82] On the other hand, the implications of its impact cannot be neglected either and to omit her faith altogether does not do her work any justice. Therefore, for the sake of this thesis, Spark will be treated as a Catholic writer, even though the term itself is in the words of Josephine Jacobsen "nebulous".[83] She goes on and characterizes a Catholic writer as someone "whose work, whether or not concerned with religious subject matter, springs from and returns to its identity in the church and which sees all things within the focus of its belief."[84] This is a definition that will be applied to Spark here. And to finish with the words of Newman, the one who most influenced her religious journey, Spark is a Catholic writer because she treats all of the subjects "as only a Catholic would treat them".[85]

1.4 Categorizing Muriel Spark

"Sometimes one makes one's own category, you know."[86]

— Muriel Spark —

The aim here is not to scrutinize Spark's writing style. There is an abundant number of resources dedicated to just that. Even so, at least some basic characterization might be interesting as it reflects her inner beliefs about literature and by extension about other important issues of life, thus helping with a better understanding of her worldview. In fact, it will be shown that almost every aspect of her style can be traced back to her belief in the supernatural. Though the available

[82] Ann B Dobie, "Muriel Spark's Definition of Reality," *Critique*, no. 1 (1970), 22-23, 10.1080/00111619.1970.10689963.
[83] Josephine Jacobsen, "A Catholic Quartet," *The Christian Scholar* 47, no. 2 (1964): 139, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41177377.
[84] Jacobsen, "A Catholic Quartet," 139.
[85] J. H. Newman, The Idea of a University (New York: Image Books, 1959), 285.
[86] Quoted in Helen T. Verongos and Alan Cowell, "Muriel Spark, Novelist Who Wrote 'The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,' Dies at 88," *The New York Times, April 16, 2006,* https://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/16/world/muriel-spark-novelist-who-wrote-the-prime-of-miss-jean-brodie-dies-at.html.

analysis focuses mostly on her novels, it is nonetheless possible to derive some observations about her general approach to the creative process.

Expectedly, the desire to put Spark into a prelabeled box can hardly have a satisfying outcome. This is a fact that many critics had to face and consequently conclude, like McQuillan, that "There is something implausible about attempts to position Spark's work in direct dialogue with critical theory."[87] Another vexed theoretic confirmed that "Now no more than the words that are her characters, she continues to disturb and still to haunt and taunt the contemporary world of letters: casting a shadow that never seems quite to fall in expected places, that won't fit tidily into convenient typologies and academic categories".[88] According to Drew Milne, she goes even further. She not only rejects the idea of definite categories, she is "appearing to mock tendencies in critical and literary theory."[89]

That, however, did not prevent many from trying to assign her a well-defined place. To be fair, she did briefly mention where she saw herself: "I think I would belong, in the writing of prose, to a literary tradition which is connected with the belletrists like Max Beerbohm, a humourist. On the level of thought, Pritchett and that sort of fantasy. I am very interested in event, following event, following event. Also, you wouldn't think so, but I owe a lot to Proust."[90] Despite of the vagueness of the comment, it at least elucidates the important influences in her life as an author.

Now, we will look at some of Spark's most prominent labels. The most debated question is perhaps whether she can be considered a representative of the postmodern time in which she was literary active. Haddox is convinced that she can because of her book's "metafictive properties and their flouting of conventional readerly pleasures."[91] Nevertheless, on the face of it, there is again no agreement. For example, Maley believes that Spark is a "postmodernist before her time".[92] Randall Stevenson comments:

---

[87] Martin McQuillan, *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).
[88] Waugh, "Muriel Spark and the Metaphysics of Modernity" 63.
[89] Milne, "Muriel Spark's Crimes of Wit," 118.
[90] Spark, " Muriel Spark – b. 1918."
[91] Haddox, "RELIGION FOR 'REALLY INTELLIGENT PEOPLE,'" 58.
[92] Willy Maley, "Not to Deconstruct? Righting and Deference in *Not to Disturb*," in *Theorizing Muriel Spark*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 175.

> In the literary sense she is. Her fiction in the 1950s and 1960s displayed postmodern characteristics some time before these had become commonplace in anglophone writing. In other ways, though, Spark is a postmodernist exactly *of* her time and *because* of her time, embodying in her work specific stresses which events in the mid-twentieth century had forced upon the imagination of European authors.[93]

Bryan Cheyette thinks that it is the "sense of history, tradition and the avant-garde next to an irreverent and whimsical sense of the absurdity of all human philosophies" which makes Spark the postmodern rejector of absolute truth and natural hierarchies.[94] He mentions her conflicted background in order to prove his point: '[her] hybrid background – part English, part Scottish, part Protestant, part Jewish – [makes] her a diasporic writer with a fluid sense of self."[95] But not everyone agrees that Spark belongs to the postmodern canon. Matthew Wickman claims that though it may appear on the surface like she could fit into the category, when her sources of inspiration are taken into account, she cannot be considered part of it: "her influences – T. S. Eliot and Marcel Proust, to say nothing of Cardinal Newman, gothic fiction, the Celtic Twilight or the Scottish border ballads – are hardly postmodern in any conventional sense."[96] Marina MacKay agrees that labeling Spark in any way is to ignore the unique features of her writing: "a novelist like Spark is scarcely a realist, but to align her unproblematically with the emergent postmodernism of the *nouveau roman* would mean underplaying the capacious sociability, the meticulous curiosity about the specificities of midcentury manners that distinguishes her so clearly from continental counterparts."[97] There is another quotation that proves that Spark is not a postmodernist, and confirms that she occupies her separate sui generis spot: "Hence Spark in effect opted out of the two responses to modernism … called antimodernism and postmodernism. … Spark, however, chose a third path. Her fiction embraces (or rather extends and radicalizes) the modernist emphasis on technique while also projecting complex social

[93] Randall Stevenson, "The Postwar Contexts of Spark's Writing," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 107-108, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09xhd.14.
[94] Bryan Chyette, *Muriel Spark* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2000), 9-10.
[95] Chyette, *Muriel Spark*, 10.
[96] Matthew Wickman, "Spark, Modernism and Postmodernism," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed. Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 64.
[97] Marina MacKay, "Muriel Spark and the Meaning of Treason," in *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. David Herman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 95-96.

worlds".[98] Lastly, Haddox is sure that the postmodern label "does not convincingly apply to Spark".[99]

Spark successfully evades any attempts at classification and even when she pretends to conform, she, in fact, mocks those who continuously try to do it: "'My work is not easy to classify,' … 'It bothers people. Makes them nettlesome.'"[100] To the eagerness of some to fashion her into a postmodernist, the author responds in a typical Sparkian manner. Instead of a mere direct denial, she pretends to cooperate, yet subverts the premise by giving the category her own definition. When asked to define postmodernism, Spark comes up with a witty answer: "Well, I think that it means that there is another dimension which is a bit creepy, supernatural".[101] This last quotation is why the discussion about postmodernism was included. It shows that the idea of there being some sort of another dimension is not relevant only to her personal and religious understanding of reality but it impacts every part of her life, including her writing style. Just because she labeled it postmodernism does not mean that her definition corresponds with the general understanding of the term. In conclusion, the aim of this section was to establish that Spark was not a postmodernist, and if so, she gave the term a new supernatural definition.

Now, rather than describing her by what she is not, let's focus on what she is. This is why the importance of the satirical element will be briefly touched upon. The fact that Spark is a satirist more than anything else is nothing new. Her fiction is filled with every shape and form of mockery of human vices. Milne says that: "Qualities of satirical wit are critical to the way her writing is entertaining, delightful and intelligent."[102] If Spark was hesitant about her postmodern identity, she is, on the contrary, a proud satirist. The reason why she is an advocate of this approach is that, in her view, anything else falls short of the ability to effectively link literature and actual life experience. It is only through a satirical lens that one can see the true colors of reality: "the art and literature of sentiment and emotion, however beautiful in itself, however striking in its depiction of actuality … cheats

[98] David Herman, "Introduction 'A Salutary Scar': Muriel Spark's Desegregated Art in the Twenty-First Century," in *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. David Herman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 1.
[99] Haddox, "RELIGION FOR 'REALLY INTELLIGENT PEOPLE,'" 58.
[100] Quoted in Galloway, introduction, xi.
[101] Muriel Spark, "'The Same Informed Air': An Interview with Muriel Spark," by Martin McQuillan, in *Theorizing Muriel Spark*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).
[102] Milne, "Muriel Spark's Crimes of Wit," 111.

us into a sense of involvement with life and society, but in reality it is a segregated activity. In its place I advocate the arts of satire and of ridicule. And I see no other living art form for the future."[103]

At the same time, it is perhaps useful to mention that her satire does not try to ridicule certain systems as a whole, and that "her readers are … allowed to enjoy the privileges of their complicity with the values satirized."[104] The target which is relevant for this thesis is the Catholic Church. It is evident that she does not depict it in a very good light. In Whittaker's words: "she is closely and critically scrutinising her faith before rejoicing in it.[105] The purpose of the satire is not to make fun of those who belong to this institution (after all, that would apply to her as well). Alan Bold comments on her use of satire and assures that its aim is not to subvert the validity of her value system:

> Spark's fiction treats nothing created by man, or woman, as entirely sacred. Her satirical scepticism casts doubt, in her novels, not only on the moral quality of human schemes but on the two things that matter most to her: the private practice of religion and the public art of fiction. … Yet, she remains a woman with a religious creed and genuine faith in art.[106]

The fact remains that her oeuvre is filled with imperfect, unlikeable, and even evil Catholics and that "Mrs. Spark … is as likely to satirize Catholics as anyone else"[107] but that does not prove a hidden anti-Catholic agenda or hostility directed toward the Church. Hynes believes that the Christian and comic features of Spark's fiction are completely compatible because "Spark's duality is by definition emphatically inclusive rather than exclusive".[108] The humor based on satire is implemented for its ability to "spot stupidity, venality, silliness, kindness, courage, and any number of other vices and virtues—but without succumbing to hubris or despair or mockery of various characters."[109] In other words, she accentuates the flaws of her characters in order to give them a chance for improvement. Her concern about the future of the Church is honest: "What seems

[103] Muriel Spark, " The Desegregation of Art," in *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. Joseph Hynes (New York: G.K. Hall, 1992), 35.
[104] Milne, "Muriel Spark's Crimes of Wit," 113.
[105] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 38.
[106] Bold, *Muriel Spark*, 119.
[107] Baldanza, "Muriel Spark and the Occult," 202.
[108] Hynes, *The Art of the Real*, 102.
[109] Hynes, *The Art of the Real*, 102.

… to underline the fiction are genuine doubt and fear about the Church as spiritual force and guide in the modern world."[110] She believes that the status quo should be challenged and changed, even if it paradoxically results in taking a hostile stand towards her fellow Catholic believers. The fact that she considers the Church her home does not mean that she thinks of it as perfect. It is within the family circle, where one is the most acutely aware of the corruption of the others. Constructive criticism is an appropriate reaction when one notices a decadence of a loved one or even of the family as a whole. The same goes for the Church. Spark's adopted means of intervention is unsurprisingly her best weapon – her words. She resorts to the use of satire as a way of pointing out the shortcomings of her spiritual kin. By doing so, she draws attention to the problematic areas that the Church ought to face and warns against further degradation. Spark does not exclude her own persona from being the target of her ridicule: "she sees an appalling abyss between the realms of God and man. Her comedy, while suggesting a superior attitude to the rest of mankind, is really a method of covering her fearful vision in which she, too, is on the wrong side of the abyss."[111]At the same time, she does not go as far as to propose moral guidelines for the Church: "Mrs. Spark's satire consists, then, of an amused and detached observation of vice and folly, in which the author herself espouses no clearly discerned, systematic set of values."[112]

As for her general writing style: "everything about Muriel Spark has to be read in between the lines. Nothing about her is straightforward."[113] In *The Edinburgh Companion*, Marilyn Reizbaum dedicates a whole chapter to "Muriel Spark's eccentric narrative style"[114] which she entitles "The Stranger Spark". This is how she explains this strangeness: "It is not just that she is unconventional in her techniques and topics. We may see her in the company of modernists and mystery writers alike. There is a quality to the writing that is hard to assess – something eerie that might conform to the mystery genre and also alluring aversive, as in a horror story."[115] Thus Reizbaum again confirms that there is something mysterious

[110] Hynes, *The Art of the Real,* 112.
[111] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 145.
[112] Baldanza, "Muriel Spark and the Occult," 202.
[113] Stephen Schiff, "Muriel Spark Between the Lines," *New Yorker,* May 24, 1993, 36.
[114] Marilyn Reizbaum, "The Stranger Spark," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed. Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 40, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09xhd.9.
[115] Reizbaum, "The Stranger Spark," 40.

and otherwordly not only in her themes but in her way of writing as well. In the "Introduction" to *The Complete Short Stories,* Janice Galloways gives a summary that alone can provide an almost perfect characterization of the writer: "She specialises in paradox, danger, assumption, the Great Unseen."[116] It seems that the style Spark adopts is decided by something that transcends the ordinary means of categorizing literature which is why she cannot be considered a representative of any defined movement from the twentieth century though she borrows from them. This was also noticed by Whittaker who elaborates on this idea:

> She has adopted twentieth-century technology, as it were, to deal with eternal truths; and, having suited her techniques to a sceptical and materialistic age, seeks to persuade us that angels and demons are neither metaphoric nor outdated conceits, but exist here and now in convents, classrooms and on the factory floor. In doing this she has remained peculiarly independent of pressures from both realism and the experimentalism of post-modernist fiction. But she has acknowledged them, felt them in her work, and it is worth looking briefly at these pressures in order to understand that the maintenance of a balance between them is a very considerable achievement.[117]

In summary, it is clear that her belief in the supernatural cannot be separated from any of her occupations in life, and her approach to writing is no exception. Her faith does not have merely a marginal influence, it predetermines her style. This is also affirmed by Jacobsen who claims that "The manner in which Miss Spark serves her religious vision is by and in her style".[118] Whittaker then specifically declares that the endeavors to assign her an identity as a realist or a proponent of experimental methods are faulty because "Her Christianity overpowers both endeavours".[119] Spark herself claims: "I didn't get my style until I became a Catholic because you just haven't got to care, and you need security for that. That's the whole secret of style in a way. It's simply not caring too much, it's caring only a little."[120] It is true, that Spark often exploits some of the techniques and concepts from different movements, however, at the same time, she "negates their original functions by subordinating them to her own, religious vision of coherence."[121] This

[116] Galloway, introduction, viii.
[117] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 2.
[118] Jacobsen, "A Catholic Quartet," 140.
[119] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 11.
[120] Spark, "My Conversion," 3.
[121] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 17.

is also why Spark was not able to write novels before her conversion, it was only her new faith that "gave her a sense of unity".[122] This idea is confirmed by the author herself: "from that time I began to see life as a whole rather than as a series of disconnected happenings."[123] All in all, she has her own individualistic slot within the literary canon and whether or not she can be unmistakably defined is of no importance because her work is loved regardless, and as Schiff observes, some of Spark's sentences could be considered the best in English literature.[124]

1.5 The Short Story Writer

"I've come to learn for myself how little one needs, in the art of writing, to convey the lot, and how a lot of words, on the other hand, can convey so little."[125]

— Muriel Spark, *Loitering with Intent* —

The economy of words and expressions has always been a staple characteristic of Spark's prose. She dedicated much of her creative time to writing short stories and there is no wonder. Though often overshadowed by her brilliant novels, the stories do not lack in quality as there are some ideas that can only be conveyed by a shorter piece of work, for they might get otherwise lost among the many characters, events, and dialogues of a novel. The total number of her short story fiction is not fewer than forty-one and they were published in several volumes over her lifetime. Spark's short stories are unique in many aspects, the most important of which for this thesis is their constant reminder of the supernatural which will be analyzed in the main part of this work.

To begin with, it is suitable to define her general relationship with this beautiful literary form. An interesting fact is that, despite being praised as a novelist, Spark valued poetry above the other expressions of art and felt mostly like a poet: "My poetry was rather more sophisticated than my prose. I was deeply interested in rhythms and curious about what one could make them mean in poetry."[126] A

[122] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 126.
[123]Muriel Spark, "How I became a Novelist," *John O'London's Weekly* III, no. 61 (1960): 683.
[124]Schiff, "Muriel Spark Between the Lines."
[125] Muriel Spark, *Loitering with Intent* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1995), 60.
[126] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 97.

question naturally arises: If that is the case, where exactly is the place for the short story within her body of work? It may be shocking to learn that the acclaimed novelist was mercilessly harsh, even hostile towards the very genre for which she was known, describing it as a "lazy way of writing poetry".[127] In contrast, a short story enjoyed a higher status in Spark's hierarchy, due to its closeness to poetry: "No, in a way, I feel the short story is superior, it's more difficult. If one is a perfectionist — it's not that I am exactly a perfectionist — but I like to get the very best out of every form. I really do think the short story is something by itself and it's superior to the novel in many ways. It's nearer to poetry and likely to have a longer life sometimes."[128] Janice Galloway explains Spark's predilection for shorter forms in that they represent "The bigger picture in fewer words."[129] It is perhaps the case that sometimes a long narrative may cause a loss of perspective, one unable to see the tree for the forest. Within her entire oeuvre, a short story then essentially serves as a transitional stage in her creative process. Whittaker sees that "Muriel Spark evolved from a poet to a novelist through the practice of short-story writing, and her novels still bear this stamp."[130] Spark provided a specific time when her interests moved towards the so far unexplored genre:

> I had written the previous winter to Masefield and was asked to come and see him at Burcote Brook, near Oxford. I went on a freezing day, Wednesday, 6 December 1950. It was a thrilling visit, to a poet I much admired. I was now moving, myself, from lyric poetry to narrative verse. This was the start of my move in literature towards the short story and then the novel.[131]

This seems to suggest that there were three separate, distinct stages during her career, each dedicated to a specific genre. In reality, there was no such clearcut boundary. She indeed favored one of them throughout different periods of her life but she surely did not start writing short stories, never compose another poem again, nor did she abandon the short story completely in favor of a novel. In fact, she insists:

---

[127] Muriel Spark, "Keeping It Short," by Ian Gillham, *Listener* 84, no. 4 (1970): 411-413, quoted in Alan Bold, *Muriel Spark* (London: Methuen, 1986), 30.
[128] Spark, "Muriel Spark – b. 1918."
[129] Galloway, introduction, xiii.
[130] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 128.
[131] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 197.

> I can't think that I won't write always two or three short stories every year. Something occurs to me that has got nothing to do with the novel I am writing. It occurs to me in short story form. Or a title. One idea. One single theme. And I'll elaborate on that. I think "Oh, that would make a good short story." And I make a few notes and play with it.[132]

If one does want to know more specific timeline, Adam Mars-Jones claims that: "There is a sense in which the 1950s were the heyday of Spark's activity as a story writer, since almost half the stories were published then (her rate of production slowed almost to nothing in the 1970s, but has recovered since)."[133] He adds: "Certainly it is in these earlier stories that her most casually inventive effects are to be found".[134] Above all, she was able to use the skills and techniques typical for one genre to enrich the others and a short story fits into her writing effort as a form that has the capability of bringing together prose and poetry in a unique way. Alan Bold summarizes: "It has been Muriel Spark's singular achievement … to synthesize the linguistic cunning of poetry with the seeming credibility of prose."[135]

What is more, the genre likewise played a crucial role in the life of the author as a gateway into the spotlight of the literary world and it is not a coincidence that she owes her first public recognition to it. Struggling financially, in 1951 Spark decided to enter the literary Christmas competition in the Observer with "The Seraph and the Zambesi" for which she won the first prize. This is her amusing recollection of her learning about the victory: "For, near Christmas, I had a phone call from Philip Toynbee of The Observer. My story had won first place out of six thousand seven hundred entries. 'We thought it was written by a man until we opened the envelope,' said Philip. I don't know if I was supposed to be flattered by that."[136] This triumph was apparently pivotal: "As I won this prize, I thought it was a good idea and I got more and more interested in the short story."[137]

It is not a secret that Spark had to face many unforgiving critics determined to make her understand that the world of a short story is not for her. Maley observes

---

[132] Spark, "Muriel Spark – b. 1918."
[133] Adam Mars-Jones, "The flickering of the Spark," Review of *The Complete Short Stories*, by Muriel Spark, *The Observer*, September 30, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/sep/30/fiction.murielspark.
[134] Mars-Jones, "The flickering of the Spark."
[135] Bold, *Muriel Spark*, 11.
[136] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 199.
[137] Spark, "Muriel Spark – b. 1918."

that "Early reviewers of Spark's short stories were often unsure how to respond, or they were just plain hostile."[138] Luckily, Spark never paid much attention to the criticism. The arguably main feature that triggered the critics is the illusive superficiality which can be perceived and interpreted in numerous ways. To illustrate, here is a complaint made by David Lodge: "If she does not consistently impress one as being a short-story writer of the same calibre, it may be because the bold economy of her novelistic technique sometimes seems like a cutting of corners in the more confined space of the short story."[139] Others also expressed their opinion, claiming about the stories that "most of them clever and accomplished, none staking a claim to classic status."[140] Or: "But skill glitters from all her fiction – from her new novel, *The Public Image,* as from her *Collected Stories: 1*. Does it do more than glitter?"[141] Nevertheless, it would be truthful to say that nobody recognized the value of Spark's contribution to this genre. Mambrol proclaimed: "Critics regard Spark's novels as her strongest genre, but her short stories are also well constructed and intriguing."[142] Even bigger admirer is Maley who came to prefer the stories to her novels: "Another colleague, at a time when I had read only a handful of her short stories, said he thought Spark was actually a better short fiction writer than she was a novelist, which I felt could only be a backhanded compliment or a putdown. Having read all the stories I know different now. She is."[143]

The following paragraph focuses on some characteristics of Spark's short stories. In general, they vary in topics as well as length, still, the overall impression is often similar. It is one of nonconclusion, leaving the reader often puzzled by the lack of a decisive ending, or disturbed by a shocking one. As mentioned, Spark rarely reveals more than is necessary, and some may argue that she does not even do that. But it is exactly this austerity of expression that serves as a vehicle for conveying profound meanings. Spark possesses the talent of using the exact amount

---

[138] Willy Maley, "Tall Tales and Stilettos: Muriel Spark's Short Stories," *Edinburgh Review* 134 (2012): 19.
[139] David Lodge, "Marvels and Nasty Surprises," *New York Times,* October 20, 1985, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/01/03/11/specials/spark-stories.html.
[140] Mars-Jones, "The flickering of the Spark."
[141] Christopher Ricks, "Extreme Instances," *The New York Review of Books,* December 19, 1968, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1968/12/19/extreme-instances/.
[142] Nasrullah Mambrol, "Analysis of Muriel Spark's Stories," Literariness, November 2023, 2019, https://literariness.org/2019/11/23/analysis-of-muriel-sparks-stories/.
[143] Maley, "Tall Tales and Stilettos," 7.

of thought-provoking words. To insist on a hidden meaning behind every sentence is perhaps faulty, but the judgment of some critics that her fiction is superficial and without any real message, cannot be justified. The very heart of their complaint seems dubious, as the genre is itself defined by brevity. But of course, they are not referring to the economy that applies to the length, the objection relates mostly to the lack of psychology. Adam Thirwell clarifies: "This deadpan lack of explanation or emotion can scare some critics."[144] And his explanation goes as follows: "The reason for Muriel Spark's concision is this – character is much less complicated than we like to think. Everyone is so much simpler."[145] Maley comments on this reasoning: "I follow Thirlwell up to a point, but the idea of character for Spark isn't that it's simple, or that characters behaving badly are acting 'out of character'. No, for Spark, character is not just an invention, a fiction, it's a front and even an affront to God."[146]

Paradoxically, the apparent absence of psychological depth can provoke a profound psychological inquiry on the part of the reader: "Her tales are psychologically interesting because Spark was reluctant to reveal all that her characters think and feel; in consequence, readers are forced to evaluate the stories, think about issues from a different perspective, and try to fill in the gaps."[147] This little game with the reader is nothing out of the ordinary for Spark, the queen of paradoxes. Spark does confirm that this is indeed her objective: "One should really leave something for the reader to construct, something individual so that every reader should get something special for himself, I think. I hope so."[148] Even though this could be applied to her novels as well, Spark is aware of a short story's uniqueness in this respect: "What I think about the short story is that it leaves more also to the reader's imagination."[149] It means that she has trust in her reader as someone capable of such a task, thus giving him great autonomy and making him a co-author of the text. Fascinatingly, the economy itself can be again linked back to her faith, which is something noticed by Whittaker:

[144] Adam Thirwell, "On Muriel Spark," *Areté* 14, 2004.
[145] Thirwell, "On Muriel Spark."
[146] Maley, "Tall Tales and Stilettos," 22.
[147] Mambrol, "Analysis of Muriel Spark's Stories."
[148] Spark, "Muriel Spark – b. 1918."
[149] Spark, "Muriel Spark – b. 1918."

> For the novelist who is also a Catholic, truth is arrived at through what is originally an act of faith: that, because God's order is immanent, there is the artistic possibility of turning contingency into pattern. This viewpoint appeals to Mrs Spark's sense of economy, since it means that nothing is wasted, either in real life or in the novel; what appears accidental is, in fact, purposeful.[150]

A detail worth mentioning, because it differentiates her short stories from her novels, is the use of first-person narration. The narrative voice in the novels is usually detached and its role is quite complicated, serving as a subject for endless analysis. Interestingly, in the short stories, the narrator is often identical to one of the characters but even this does not always help with better understanding of the inner processes as "none of her voices 'tells all.'".[151]

Now it is time to highlight once more the importance of the knowledge of the author's experience. To view the stories specifically through the lens of her life is a more than desirable approach since she overtly affirms the direct link between her creation and her life: "Most of the memorable experiences of my life I have celebrated, or used for a background in a short story or novel."[152] She frequently admits to using real-life events as material for her fiction. She was certainly a keen and gifted observer which helped her to make up such extraordinary works of imagination with an emphasis on bizarre little details. This episode illustrates her ability to gather useful data: "I kept an ear out for her voice and her terms of expression, as I always do with people. Monty's way of speech was a treasure-house to me. I was not yet writing stories and novels, but I was working towards the narrative art, and saved up 'voices' in my memory-file."[153] This confirms that she derived many topics from her own life or intellectual occupations of her mind.

Concerning the subjects, given the fact that she wrote the stories over a long period of time, it is not surprising that there is much diversity. Yet, some recurring themes can be found. Here is a brief overview of the topics that tend to come back. Firstly, one of the major events reflected in her shorter writing is undoubtedly her African experience. She discusses the issue of race as well as the influence of the burning heat. The setting for most of the stories is, however, the UK. In general, some themes concern everyday human problems including adultery, revenge, and

[150] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 127.
[151] Mambrol, "Analysis of Muriel Spark's Stories."
[152] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 120.
[153] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 193.

relationships in their numerous forms. Others are of a supernatural origin such as the existence of ghosts and other unexplainable phenomena and the last category of themes, like death or madness, is somewhere in between. There is often great mixing of the two realms, and the border between them is blurry. A more in-depth analysis of the boundary will be given now, in the main part of this thesis.

2 The Marriage of the Natural and the Supernatural

" there is a supernatural process going on under the surface and within the substance of all things"[154]

— Muriel Spark, *The Mandelbaum Gate* —

Across Muriel Spark's oeuvre, the supernatural plays a fundamental role, though its exact interpretation may be again rather obscure. Judy Sproxton explains that Spark's "presentation of a fragmentary and bafflingly mysterious life will awake in the reader an admission that we see through a glass darkly."[155] The author is very vague about her exact intentions and does not provide an explicit explanation which may, according to Anne Dobie, cause some puzzlement on the reader's side.[156] Whatever the function of the mysterious, its presence certainly cannot go unnoticed. For example, in a review of one of Spark's novels, Michiko Kakutani pointed this out, though in a somewhat mocking tone:

> Here is the recipe for a typical Muriel Spark novel: take a self-enclosed community (of writers, schoolgirls, nuns, rich people, etc.) that is full of incestuous liaisons and fraternal intrigue; toss in a bombshell (like murder, suicide or betrayal) that will ricochet dangerously around this little world, and add some allusions to the supernatural to ground these melodramatics in an old-fashioned context of good and evil. Serve up with crisp, authoritative prose and present with 'a light and heartless hand'.[157]

Maley later comments that "Kakutani is perhaps a little light on the supernatural here, and a little hard on Spark"[158] which is a valid observation, for the representation of the supernatural goes far beyond mere allusions. This is true notably for her short stories, many of which use the unknown as their foundation: "the existence of seraphs, ghosts, and re-incarnated beings is largely restricted to short stories and radio plays".[159] Maley also remarks that Kakuni is not alone in the

[154] Muriel Spark, *The Mandelbaum Gate* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), 199.
[155] Sproxton, Judy, "The Women of Muriel Spark Narrative and Faith," *New Blackfriars* 73, no. 863 (1992): 432–40, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43249186.
[156] Dobie, "Muriel Spark's Definition of Reality," 20.
[157] Kakutani Michiko, "Her Serene Tyranny, A Mistress of Mayhem," *New York Times,* May 16, 1997, 29.
[158] Maley, "Tall Tales and Stilettos," 7.
[159] Baldanza, "Muriel Spark and the Occult," 192.

criticism: “Reviews of Spark’s stories usually begin by lamenting that the form is neglected, remarking the obsession with the supernatural, and praising the most ‘realistic’ ones.”[160] But rejecting the supernatural layer equals rejecting Spark. There simply cannot be one without the other. Her short stories play an especially pivotal part in establishing the relationship between the author and the unknowable. For example, Frank Baldanza claims that “Spark’s short stories can attest to her absorbed interest in the occult”.[161] The word ‘occult’ here has a broader definition, encompassing all that goes beyond reason. It will surely be a fascinating quest to find out her exact attitude towards the supernatural elements.

Of course, it might be difficult to validate the usage of the supernatural with conclusive confidence, but some judgment can still be made. One proposition is that she uses it “for immediate and simple shock value”[162]. Though the claim cannot be confirmed nor refuted with absolute certainty, her intention to shock, especially in an immediate and simple form, is hardly her primary driving motive, and therefore more profound insight is needed. Strangely, it may help to first establish what was NOT Spark’s aspiration. Tom Hubbard, who is one of those who see the real value behind the use of the supernatural, can help with that. He clarifies that: “Muriel Spark is not an escapist. Her work cannot be dismissed on the grounds of irresponsible frivolity or pseudo-mysticism. She believes in a dimension beyond the human, yet that impels her not to deny human life but to criticize it.”[163] Maley agrees that: “Spark never ran away, never hid, from nature or the supernatural”.[164] And finally, Baldanza sees that: “What she is in fact doing, over the trajectory of her entire career, is experimenting with a series of solutions to the aesthetic problem of accommodating both the supernatural and the naturalistic in her works”.[165] So, in conclusion, Spark did not implement the supernatural in so many of her works as a way of escaping reality. It may be a matter of debate about what exactly constitutes this reality but let’s suppose that we talk about that which exists, is observable, and can be explained by reason.

[160] Maley, “Tall Tales and Stilettos,” 15.
[161] Baldanza, “Muriel Spark and the Occult,” 191.
[162] Baldanza, “Muriel Spark and the Occult,” 192.
[163] Tom Hubbard “The Liberated Instant: Muriel Spark and the Short Story,” in *Muriel Spark: an Odd Capacity for Vision,* ed. Alan Bold (London: Vision Press, 1984), 178.
[164] Maley, “Tall Tales and Stilettos,” 25.
[165] Baldanza, “Muriel Spark and the Occult,” 195.

If Spark did not attempt to flee the pressing weight of the 'real' in this sense, it is possible to infer that in her understanding the real must transcend the observable and that the natural and supernatural go hand in hand without one having precedence over the other. This is Hosmer's view: "Crucial and axiomatic to all Spark's fiction is an understanding that this world and the world beyond, the temporal and the spiritual, the quotidian and the transcendent, are inseparably integrated. No parallel reality theories ever captivated Spark. The natural and the supernatural are complementary, not contradictory."[166] This is one of the key concepts necessary to grasp in order to comprehend Spark's treatment of the two worlds.

Others were likewise aware of the importance of this fusion, Kucala, for example, believes that "This peculiar interpenetration of the natural on the one hand and, on the other hand, the supernatural, the bizarre and the extraordinary was to be a hallmark of Spark's many … novels and short stories."[167] Randall Stevenson notices then that "much of Spark's writing continues to show the supernatural entering into the quotidian or hints at other 'planes of existence' that may sinisterly influence the immediate one."[168] Joseph Hynes acknowledges that "Spark sees human life to be: one leg must be rooted in the mundane realm, the other leg in the extramundane, the whole person properly attentive to both realms."[169] He also believes that "What one discovers in this larger realm may indeed be evidence of greater mystery, but such discovery is more, not less, human".[170]

If all this is true, what is then the role of a human (even a fictional one) according to such philosophy? Gerard Carruthers sees it like this: "Spark recognizes both the human aspiration toward transcendence over everyday materialist reality and the faulty, fallen human propensity toward selfishly motivated articulations."[171] Again, longing for transcendence does not equal the desire to find an escape away from this world, but it signifies the search for a fuller and more complete way of

[166] Robert Hosmer, "The Short Stories of Muriel Spark," in *A Companion to the British and Irish Short Story*, eds. Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2008), 457.
[167] Kucała, "The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction," 66.
[168] Stevenson, "The Postwar Contexts of Spark's Writing," 99.
[169] Hynes, *The Art of the Real,* 38.
[170] Hynes, *The Art of the Real,* 38.
[171] Gerard Carruthers, " Fully to Savour Her Position: Muriel Spark and Scottish Identity," in *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. David Herman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 22.

living and being. That is probably why she does not feel the need to provide a lengthy explanation for each of her references to something that diverges from our definition of the normal. To her, there is nothing more normal than the mixture of the natural and the supernatural. It is not a coincidence, that the word supernatural itself bears the meaning of an elevated state of the natural, so it describes it in its most perfect version.

Also, as Kucala proclaims, her "characters weave their own plots, which are typically at some point thwarted by other characters, fate – or perhaps a superhuman agency."[172] This indeed applies to the short stories. The characters often live unaware of anything beyond their immediate worldly experience and "Usually their coexistence is realized at the point of their intersection, especially in the short stories".[173] The realization must inevitably lead to some sort of transformation which, as Anne Dobie concludes, can be "ultimately creative or destructive".[174] Survival in this world then depends on the ability to reckon with the unpredictability of our environment and the ability to accommodate unforeseen events, whether of ordinary or extraordinary nature, into our lives without letting them cause much disturbance, especially to our state of mind. The idea that there are countless inexplicable phenomena that lack rational explanation is not at all farfetched. All Spark does, is that she gives them a concrete form. To put it simply, one needs to be prepared for the surprises that are an inevitable part of life which is in itself a fairly Catholic concept.

Overall, what Spark strives for is "defying and challenging habitual modes of perception"[175] as Kucala puts it. The reality which is the basis for the current understanding of realism, one in which there is no space for divine intervention, is challenged. She wants to paint a much fuller and more real picture of reality where the spiritual and the physical meet and complete each other. Spark paints this new reality as infinite. Dobie observes that Spark's finite characters are by definition unable to grasp this concept, still "with each additional degree of understanding he experiences a kind of rebirth."[176]

---

[172] Kucała, "The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction," 72.
[173] Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, *Vocation and identity in the fiction of Muriel Spark* (United Kingdom: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 131.
[174] Dobie, "Muriel Spark's Definition of Reality," 21.
[175] Kucała, "The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction," 65.
[176] Dobie, "Muriel Spark's Definition of Reality," 27.

Now, it is time to look more deeply at how her Catholic vision fits into this this reality. Of course, Spark depicts the supernatural in her own individualistic manner, and for someone without the knowledge of her religious background, it seems to be a challenging, if not impossible, task to deduce her belief system. Surely enough, based on her work alone, Spark being an occultist, Protestant, agnostic, or an atheist, all appear to be valid assumptions. The appaent contradiction between her Catholic membership and her representation of the supernatural inevitably leads to confusion on the part of the reader. Dobie is aware that a reader ignorant of the religious background of Spark could hardly guess her Catholic affiliation[177] because she observes that "her presentation of the supernatural does not conform to traditional religious definitions."[178] Hynes thinks that "Muriel Spark consistently struggles to find and present a position that is at once inside and outside of her own belief."[179] And lastly, when discussing Spark's approach towards the supernatural, Baldanza concludes that "it would not be looked on hospitably in many Catholic circles."[180]

The fact that her treatment of the anomalous phenomena is peculiar in the eyes of an ordinary reader is indisputable. But to say that she struggles to find her place inside and outside of her faith does not seem to be a justifiable hypothesis. This thesis will, on the contrary, attempt to demonstrate that the equal status of the natural and the supernatural is in correspondence with the Catholic view. Kucala attests that her Catholicism is not a source of conflict, on the other hand, it is the stable foundation on which she carefully builds her narrative: "Spark's vision of reality, underlain by her Catholicism, is based on her conviction that empirical reality coexists with the supernatural world; therefore, interactions with the supernatural, however strange they may seem, are presented in her fiction as compellingly plausible."[181] According to Reichardt, it is because of Catholicism that one is able to extend the boundaries of his understanding in order to encompass the supernatural: "a defining feature of a Catholic vision and one that sets it apart from strictly deterministic theories is that it is open to supernatural mystery, the existence of another world beyond that of the senses to which human beings are

[177] Dobie, "Muriel Spark's Definition of Reality," 22.
[178] Dobie, "Muriel Spark's Definition of Reality," 23.
[179] Hynes, *The Art of the Real,* 135.
[180] Baldanza, "Muriel Spark and the Occult,"192.
[181] Kucała, "The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction," 65.

ultimately oriented."[182] Thus, it is not in spite of her religion that she writes about the mysterious, but because of it. This work will therefore explore some specific examples of Catholic ideas in her treatment of the supernatural. The sole fact that her means of application of the Catholic elements is a bit untraditional cannot alone be the proof of their nonexistence. In fact, it is the opposite. As Kucala remarks, this way of seeing reality is a direct result of her Catholic belief, it is not in opposition to it: "Spark's conversion, which by her own admission triggered her creativity by providing her with a comprehensive framework of beliefs, also determined her notion of reality."[183] Whittaker sees that Spark repeatedly provides an "explicit or implicit expression of faith in a divine order".[184] The case is only that one sometimes must rely more on the implicit ones when analyzing the short stories. And finally, Edgecombe looks directly into the Catholic doctrine to discern if her portrayal of the two realms corresponds with the Church's teaching and illustrates that it matches perfectly:

> Yet that very gratuitousness is meaningful, imaging as it does the way eternal life is inseparably attached to the natural. All the time it runs alongside daily life, above and beyond its irrelevancies, but still providing the undeclared source of meaning. Orthodox Catholicism takes pains to distinguish between the two kinds of life, and, as so often in Spark, it is orthodoxy which inspires her best efforts.[185]

Also, if the reluctance in accepting the fiction as Catholic comes from the uneasiness evoked by Spark's use of disturbing and macabre imagery such as "sudden deaths, the characters' erratic behavior, twists in the stories"[186] etc., Fitzgerald proposes an explanation: "Such "interruptions," … are "a reminder of the vast unseen presences on which our lives are dependent or contingent".[187]

Besides redefining the essence of real, her other goal is the subversion of the current state of affairs, especially within her own Church. Although, as will be illustrated, these two goals are only two sides of the same coin. Here becomes relevant her passion for satire. It almost seems as if Spark takes it upon herself as

[182] Reichardt, introduction, 4.
[183] Kucała, "The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction," 65.
[184] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 12.
[185] Edgecombe, *Vocation and identity in the fiction of Muriel Spark,* 130-131.
[186] Kucała, "The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction," 65.
[187]Penelope Fizgerald, "A Character in One of God's Dreams," review of *Reality and Dreams*, by Muriel Spark, *New York Times Book Review,* May 11, 1997, 7.

her vocation to portray the Catholics in all of their depraved glory. The imperfect Catholics are abundant in her writing, especially her novels, but can be found in the short stories as well. Her strategy of showing their faulty folly is again directly linked with her understanding of reality, more specifically, she is once more "challenging their limited perspectives."[188] Baldanza believes that "the occult was employed … as a scaffolding on which to range the multiple, complex ironies that constitute Mrs. Spark's primary aesthetic effect."[189] The satire is mostly based on one paradox – a Catholic who does not truly believe in the power of the supernatural in this world. Or if he does, he is only inclined to accept it only if it corresponds with his presupposition of how the supernatural should operate. His true colors are then revealed in a case of deviation from his personal set of norms for the divine. Dobie writes about the characters who decide to reject the new real because the "experience is too unpleasant".[190] In her view "Such characters react in two ways: either they remain two dimensional by ignoring the supernatural intrusions or they lose touch with reality altogether by having a breakdown or by renouncing the world."[191]

Interestingly, she criticizes the other extreme as well. Whittaker writes about Spark's distrust towards some Christians who, on the other hand, give precedence only to the spiritual while ignoring the mundane.[192] She dislikes this dualistic approach and encourages "a sacramental view of life which is nothing more than a balanced regard for matter and spirit".[193]

To conclude, the supernatural is inseparable from Spark's fiction. A crucial point is that Spark never creates special worlds to accommodate her supernatural elements. There is no Middle Earth, no Narnia, no Wonderland in which the mysterious characters and forces are easily accepted. But her insistence on the intervention of the outwardly in a recognizable setting serves a purpose. She proposes a new understanding of reality where the natural and the supernatural are two complementary forces and in her worldview, the only possibility to fully experience this reality is to see it as a marriage of these two forces where both are

[188] Kucała, "The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction," 66.
[189] Baldanza, "Muriel Spark and the Occult," 200.
[190] Dobie, "Muriel Spark's Definition of Reality," 25.
[191] Dobie, "Muriel Spark's Definition of Reality," 25.
[192] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 60.
[193] Muriel Spark, "The Religion of an Agnostic," *Church of England Newspaper*, November 27, 1953.

of equal value and its rejection may result in unforeseeable consequences for the characters.

2.1. The Theme of Madness, or the Tragedy of the Mystical Misfit

"Only the very mad … can come out with the information "The lord is risen", in the same factual way as one might say, "You are wanted on the telephone", regardless of the time and place."[194]

— Muriel Spark, "Come Along Marjorie" —

Mental illness reappears in Spark's narratives in many shapes and forms, whether it is only perceived or real, though who can tell the difference? When the theme emerges, Spark, according to her cunning habit, keeps her reader on the edge until the very end, only to leave him again without any real answers and the final diagnosis is ultimately often up to him. But the question is how exactly the concept of madness relates to the Catholic doctrine and what is its supernatural significance. The Catechism certainly does not state that one has to be proclaimed mad in order to be accepted into the Church, nonetheless, it is more or less a fact that a real and committed member sometimes appears a little deranged in the eyes of others. At least that is the stand that Spark repeatedly takes.

Firstly, it could be enlightening to stop for a moment and consider her rationale behind her inclination for coming back to this subject. Her life story is the revealing source and as Galloway says: "Mrs Spark grasps her own life and those of her characters with the same hands."[195] She was able to witness the daunting effects of an unhealthy mind firsthand after she married her husband Oswald. Her own psyche betrayed her later and she suffered a mental breakdown, as a result of her usage of a medical drug called Dexedrine. This episode is crucial in her process of forming an attitude toward mental problems. Most importantly she also partly attributed the origins of her troubles to her conversion and by doing so she implied that there are ties between our spiritual and emotional sides, let's call them the spirit

[194] Muriel Spark, "Come Along, Marjorie," In *The Complete Short Stories* (United Kingdom: Canongate Books, 2018), 396.
[195] Galloway, introduction, xii-xiii.

and the soul. The former is linked with the transcendent which goes beyond our experience, the latter is the expression of inner and natural impulses.

She was also in direct contact with more knowledgeable people in the area of the mind's inner workings. While experiencing her breakdown, she sought the help of a priest and a Jungian, though later she vocalized some criticism of the famous psychologist (Jung), precisely his dealing with God "as a psychic concept, rather than as a theological subject."[196] This affirms that she certainly thought of God as a real entity. She was also alive in "the heyday of psychoanalysis"[197] and even made acquaintance with the daughter of Freud. Besides, she had always been able to see through others, her extraordinary observational capabilities were already mentioned. She was fascinated by human nature manifested in behavior. Beveridge mentions that already "As a child, she spent many hours observing the eccentricities and foibles of the numerous visitors to her parents' flat in Edinburgh."[198] All in all, she could be called a literary psychologist. She was able to gather her findings and exploit them in her writing in a masterful way.

Before scrutinizing the short stories, it is worth mentioning some cases of mental struggles in her novels which will facilitate a more in-depth exploration of the subject. They can serve as a useful starting point thanks to their wider popularity as compared to the short stories. Her very first novel, *The Comforters*, is a vast study of the mental reaction to the supernatural. The protagonist is a woman named Caroline who believes that voices are speaking to her through her typewriter. Here, art imitates the life of Spark. The described events lived by the fictional character, parallel the life experiences of her author. In both cases, the conversion to Catholicism is at least one of the roots of their instability. The question is whether this correlation should be regarded in a negative light. The mere fact that Caroline now has new abilities launched by her new spiritual journey, does not mean that she is insane. She must accept that the time one has on earth does not have to consist

[196] Muriel Spark, "The Mystery of Job's Suffering," in *The Golden Fleece*, ed. Penelope Jardine (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2014), quoted in A.W. Beveridge, "The secular and the supernatural: Madness and psychiatry in the short stories of Muriel Spark," *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh* 45 (2015): 306, doi: 10.4997/JRCPE.2015.411.

[197] A.W. Beveridge, "The secular and the supernatural: Madness and psychiatry in the short stories of Muriel Spark," *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh* 45 (2015): 305, doi: 10.4997/JRCPE.2015.411.

[198] Beveridge, "The secular and the supernatural: Madness and psychiatry in the short stories of Muriel Spark," 305.

only of a boring mundane routine and that the occasional intervention of the unknown is more natural than one might have previously believed.

Another unique novel that deals with the supernatural while alluding to the matter of madness is her haunting *Memento Mori*. Of course, the attribute haunting depends on the perspective. The plot revolves around several elderly people who are regularly reminded of their mortality via anonymous phone calls. From the point of view of this thesis, the most interesting is the wide range of reactions that the constant announcement of the truth incites. Most of the characters are rightfully and expectedly disturbed by the message despite their advanced age and the no doubt inevitable and quite self-evident nature of the information. But not all of them find it hard to accept the simple axiom of life:

> Apart from the policeman, whose conclusion that Death himself makes the telephone calls is derived from his humbling experience of the limitations of human cognition only two other characters treat the message seriously and, at the same time, stoically. It is probably no coincidence that these two – Charmian and Jean Taylor – happen to be Catholics. Yet, ironically, their sensible attitude to the intimation of mortality is interpreted by others as a symptom of insanity. Alec Warner, an amateur researcher of senility and arch representative of the empirical attitude in the novel, admits: "The more religious people are, the more perplexing I find them."[199]

So again, we are presented with the Catholic and at the same time mad characters, or that is at least how the world views them. The only reason for deserving such a label is apparently their unperturbed calm in the face of an inescapable certainty of the approaching end of their physical existence. Indeed, according to their faith, death does not equal the cessation of their spirit, a much more important component of their being. They are not perplexed by the means in which they receive the warning either, because they already know that a little supernatural interruption of the ordinary is possible every now and then. It is this simple acceptance which gives others the impression that they surely cannot be quite alright.

Now, let's move on to the short stories. There, Spark frequently includes the topic which Beveridge reflects upon: "Spark approaches the subject of madness in a variety of ways: she relates it to the supernatural, to writing fiction, and to religion.

[199] Kucała, "The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction," 68.

She frequently juxtaposes secular and supernatural explanations of mental disturbance."[200] It is thus clear that a purely rational psychological mode of analysis cannot suffice. She makes the closeness of the natural and the supernatural too blatantly obvious to be ignored. The perceived madness is not the way of reaching the supernatural, it is proof that the supernatural has been reached. It is evidence of a higher level of enlightenment: "Spark's fiction ostensibly blurs the boundary between nonsense and truth, between madness and faith. What appears absurd may, if viewed from another perspective, be perfectly congruous with the unpredictable nature of the world; seemingly insane behaviour may in fact be based on wisdom and insight."[201]

Spark displays a broad interest in the mysteries of the sound and deranged mind. Naturally, she is curious about the patient and his internal struggle, but she also shows interest in the approach of the professionals in this field. But though psychiatrists and psychologists play an important part in several of her stories, this thesis will focus mostly on the mad character in question. "Come Along Marjorie" is the name of the short story which probably deals with the topic the most overtly. Also, it is a suitable story for the sake of this analysis whose goal is to operate within the Catholic framework, because the setting is altogether Catholic. Galloway provides a comment about this specific story: "Mrs Spark, famously Catholic and somewhat nervous, has fun even with the religious and the 'highly strung'."[202] So once more, the two seem inseparable.

The story takes place in a religious retreat where the narrator Gloria goes to recover "from nerves"[203] just like the other visitors. Once there, she encounters a peculiar figure called Marjorie Pettigrew who is the only one labeled insane, despite living among neurotics. The reasons for this harsh categorization are the following: Miss Pettigrew "never spoke at mealtimes … She never joined the rest of the community except for meals and prayers"[204] and last but not least "She was often in the chapel praying".[205] Such behavior would surely appear abnormal in any other setting but one wonders what is so strange about it in an abbey. Still, the others

[200] Beveridge, "The secular and the supernatural: Madness and psychiatry in the short stories of Muriel Spark," 305.
[201] Kucała, "The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction," 68-69.
[202] Galloway, introduction, xiv.
[203] Spark, "Come Along, Marjorie," 384.
[204] Spark, "Come Along, Marjorie," 388.
[205] Spark, "Come Along, Marjorie," 388.

cannot forgive her for an open display of these eccentricities: "She was thought to be genuinely touched in the head."[206]

Overall, the presence of this woman is the source of uneasiness for her fellow tenants as well as the monks in charge of the abbey. Gloria gets the sense that Miss Pettigrew was "either feared or disliked".[207] She likewise mentions attempts of the monks to intervene and get Miss Pettigrew on the right track. For example, one approaches her with the words: "Now tell us what's the trouble, open your heart, poor Miss Pettigrew. This isn't the Catholic way at all."[208] But, of course, it is a vain effort. Miss Pettigrew, as well as the reader, can easily discern the insincerity of the proposal of help and the reference to her non-Catholic conduct as a way of manipulation. The problem is that "everyone except Marjorie follows an essentially secular lifestyle."[209] That is the reason why no one understands her and the not-unusual practice of faith ironically alienates her from the other Catholics.

Gloria is at first fascinated by the unapologetic individualism of Miss Pettigrew. She portrays herself as the only one who in a way understands her. She says: "Indeed, she did seem sane. I got the instant impression that she alone among the lay people, both pilgrims and Cloisters, understood the purpose of the place. I did get that impression."[210] She even concludes that "Perhaps she was very mystical."[211] Gloria also admires and envies her resistance to conformity and repeatedly expresses the importance of diversity. She is therefore deeply irritated by another tenant who keeps insisting that "we're all the same."[212] Ironically, Gloria proves her right. Gloria's feeling of originality and therefore superiority, though this is not explicitly uttered, is never justifiably manifested in her actions. She ends up being just the same as everyone else. Despite her strong belief that she is different from the crowd, in the end, she also condemns Miss Pettigrew and places her into the category of madness. The original phrase should be therefore changed to: 'We are all the same and if you differ, you are insane'. All things considered, Miss Pettigrew seems to be the only one who takes her stay seriously. The others

[206] Spark, "Come Along, Marjorie," 389.
[207] Spark, "Come Along, Marjorie," 387.
[208] Spark, "Come Along, Marjorie," 390.
[209] Kucała, "The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction," 69.
[210] Spark, "Come Along, Marjorie," 385.
[211] Spark, "Come Along, Marjorie," 389.
[212] Spark, "Come Along, Marjorie," 386.

think of it more as an escape from their problems than a chance for the restoration of their spirit.

The climax of the story comes along with the utterance of a short and straightforward statement. It all happens when Gloria expects a (not very important) phone call. However, she describes the necessity to receive this call with the utmost pressing urgency. In her eyes, nothing could possibly take precedence over this call. Gloria is very restless while waiting and into this comes the so far mute Miss Pettigrew and addresses her, saying that she has got a message for her. Believing that it concerns the phone call, Gloria is shocked and disappointed after hearing its actual content. All Miss Pettigrew utters is: "The Lord has risen."[213]

Obviously, the sentence must bear some serious meaning. What exactly it is, is hard to establish, but it is possible to derive some hypotheses. First of all, the information is presumably not a universal message for the whole of humankind. Indeed, those who call themselves Christians build their belief upon this very truth and they hardly need a new revelation about this matter by some Miss Pettigrew, so she cannot be considered a prophet of her times. The likelihood is that the message is addressed to Miss Pettigrew personally. She seems to be undergoing an important spiritual battle, she is very likely in the middle of a conversion which is why she does not want to be disturbed by mundane distractions. She is in the process of accommodating the idea of the supernatural reality into her life until at one point she finally reaches the epiphany which does not primarily reside in the information about the resurrection, but in the fact that she has come to the point where she is ready to accept it as natural. But to Gloria, the only logical explanation is that the others were right after all, and she concludes that: "she has a religious mania. She is different from the neurotics, but not because she is sane."[214] She also thinks that she discovered the difference between her and Miss Pettigrew: "Neurotics never go mad".[215]

The circumstances of the whole event are crucial. Gloria's agitation caused by her preoccupation with the mundane prevents her from being sensitive to something that might transcend the current moment. Her final certainty that only the truly insane could utter similar nonsense in such a situation proves that she is

[213] Spark, "Come Along, Marjorie," 393.
[214] Spark, "Come Along, Marjorie," 396.
[215] Spark, "Come Along, Marjorie," 396.

someone who does not count with the extraordinary in her every waking second as only the truly enlightened is able to do. At the same time, Gloria's final judgment may not be necessarily negative. Beveridge recognizes that "She also suggests the mad have a special affinity to the religious realm."[216] It is true that whether she realizes it or not, she implies that her access to the spiritual is limited due to her neuroticism and that it can be reached only by the mad.

In the end, the condemnation by her only ally seals Miss Pettigrew's destiny and she stops eating after the incident. Of course, the practice of fasting is one of the pillars of the Judeo-Christian faith and Jesus himself is known to give up food for extended periods of time in order to achieve greater unity with his Father and he urged his followers to do so as well. Nevertheless, to the lukewarm Catholic, the loss of appetite once more proves insanity. Finally, the goal of the residents of the abbey is reached and Miss Pettigrew is taken to a mental hospital. There is perverted joy in viewing the spectacle. Gloria who participates in celebrating the triumph remembers the event clearly:

> Insanity was my great sort of enemy at that time. And here, clothed in the innocence and dignity of Miss Pettigrew, was my next-door enemy being removed by ambulance. I would not miss it. Afterwards I learned that Jennifer too was lurking around when the ambulance arrived. So were most of the neurotics.[217]

So at last, they have gotten rid of the mystical misfit and are able to continue living their dull existences filled with secular troubles and pleasures. In the story, Spark depicts the current state of the Church where the mythical experiences, which should be at the core of the Catholic practice, are instead viewed with suspicion and even fear. Many Catholics, including the representatives of the faith, are living fully secular lives despite their formal adherence to the Church. According to Reichardt, the negative portrayal of those who live consecrated life in modern literature is not extraordinary: "If priests or nuns appear in contemporary fiction, they are typically depicted as more-or-less ordinary folk, merely other fellow strugglers in life."[218] In contrast to them stands Miss Pettigrew. In her case, there is a visible tension between the two different realms. Her body is in one place, but her spirit is

[216] Beveridge, "The secular and the supernatural: Madness and psychiatry in the short stories of Muriel Spark," 307.
[217] Spark, "Come Along, Marjorie," 396-397.
[218] Reichardt, introduction, 7.

somewhere else, so "the persistent juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane centres on the assessment of Marjorie".[219] At the same time, Spark suggests that the others were in no position to judge Marjorie because only God can fully understand each person as the Creator. Carruthers provides an interesting commentary of this particular idea:

> Muriel Spark's practice as a Catholic novelist is to warn us against too readily judging the moral status of others. Her characters are sometimes presumptous in their belief that they can read the moral nature of others, or that their constructed narratives of their own and other people's lives are properly definitive. … Ultimitely, her Catholic practice is to acknowledge an omnipotent God, sometimes mimicked in the fabric of her novels by the narratorial or authorial character, whose implied perspective is supposed to overarch all human perspective. … Even here and throught her oeuvre, however, her message is Catholic in being reelentlessly 'pro-life', where the message for the reader is never to believe that in the real world understanding of others or ourselves is ever fully ours, or that the larger presence of God can be dismissed. Complete and final meaning lies always beyond the ken of human beings and the life that He has engendered is to be loved, as unselfishly as we can.[220]

To conclude, the moral of the story is that sane equals same, and that any deviation will not go unnoticed and certainly not unpunished. The alleged madness is "something to be shunned".[221] Nonetheless, the mere fact that somebody is able to access the unseen realm in a way that others do not approve of, cannot automatically lead to the conclusion that the person lost her senses. If such a person is classified as mad, then the word itself must be redefined to mean 'somebody with the ability to merge the sacred and the profane'. Spark describes and judges the world where there are so many neurotics and so few "mad" Catholics.

[219] Kucała, "The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction," 69.
[220] Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist," 83-84.
[221] Beveridge, "The secular and the supernatural: Madness and psychiatry in the short stories of Muriel Spark," 207.

2.2. The Theme of Purgatory, or the Ghost Standing between Life and Death

"Then in the distance, at the far end of a vast plain, there he would be, a speck on the horizon, always receding and always there, and always a necessary and mysterious component of the picture; always there and never to be taken away, essential to the picture – a speck in the distance, which if you were to blow up the detail would simply be a vague figure, plodding on the other way."[222]

— Muriel Spark, "The Executor" —

The short stories of Muriel Spark often have an unsettling effect on their readers. They are capable of evoking laughter and sending chills down their spine at the same time. The reason is mostly her predilection for dark themes, often revolving around death and all it entails. Galloway gives a warning: "Do not be surprised if you laugh even as death surrounds you".[223] Spark's specialty is her propensity to efface the boundaries between the world of the living and of the dead and she does so in her shorter writings even more than in her novels. To illustrate the closeness of the two spheres, she often chooses a character whose domain is in between the two – a ghost.

Maley writes: "this author wrote ghost stories. Indeed, on closer inspection, all her stories are ghost stories."[224] The intent of this chapter is therefore to analyze the role of Spark's ghostly beings. Their presence is hard to ignore because she enjoys "weaving into her stories experiences and characters which are more ingenious specters."[225] The conclusions drawn are not to be treated as the only possible approach to the study of Sparkian ghosts. There is a myriad of phantoms, diverse both in portrayal and function, just like her other characters. It will propose only one of the possible ways of examination, linking it once more with her religion.

On the account of the relationship between the ghosts and faith, Adam-Mars Jones said: "Religion impinges matter-of-factly on a number of stories but can't quite account for the profusion of ghosts, usually no more than the shadows of

[222] Muriel Spark, "The Executor," In *The Complete Short Stories* (United Kingdom: Canongate Books, 2018), 253.
[223] Galloway, introduction, xiv.
[224] Maley, "Tall Tales and Stilettos," 15.
[225] Maley, "Tall Tales and Stilettos," 15.

shadows, fading away after imparting their faint frisson".[226] The author of this statement believes that there is no explanation for the presence of ghosts from a religious point of view, but does not elaborate on why exactly the two cannot go hand in hand. The following analysis will look at the Catholic significance of a ghost from two perspectives, firstly from the point of view of the person who encounters the specter and then of the ghost in question.

First, let us focus on the reasons for the existence of ghosts from the point of view of the one who meets them. One of their function corresponds again with Spark's effort to intertwine the natural and the supernatural. It comes back to the Catholic belief that one should be aware and beware of the forces from beyond that can manifest themselves in every waking moment of the day. Jesus warned his followers to be always ready for his second coming, and Spark's texts illustrate that people must be prepared even for a supernatural intervention on a smaller scale, for instance, in a form of a ghost. Taking this into consideration, the narratives have a metaphorical significance like a parable or a fable, where the ghosts stand for anything supermundane whose interruption is if not probable, then certainly possible. Spark is simply depicting the possible outcomes of an encounter with the uncanny in more general terms. A similar idea is mentioned by C. S. Lewis: "The hypothetical probability is brought in to make the strange events more fully imaginable. Hamlet is not faced with a ghost in order that his reactions may tell us more about his nature and therefore about human nature in general; he is shown reacting naturally in order that we may accept the ghost."[227] The author herself once more clarifies her reasoning and confirms her unwavering position on the topic: "I treat the supernatural as if it was part of natural history. If I write a ghost story it wouldn't come under the heading of ghost story necessarily because I treat it as if it was a natural thing."[228]

Maley believes that: "ghostliness is for Spark bound up with faith and fiction in a way that makes her see things – as a writer and a convert – in ways distinct from the would-be rational reader."[229] Thus the ghost stands for something that she sees as possible though it is not yet there. It is at the same time something that the

[226] Mars-Jones, "The flickering of the Spark."
[227] C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 66.
[228] Muriel Spark, "Interview with Dame Muriel Spark," by James Brooker and Margarita Estévez Saá. *Women's Studies* 33, 8 (2004): 1036.
[229] Maley, "Tall Tales and Stilettos: Muriel Spark's Short Stories," 14.

would-be rational atheist is altogether blind to. His limited vision would disconcert him when confronted with the improbable. Galloway concludes: "Most of us, Spark implies, see what we want to see, and what we want to see is not necessarily what's there."[230] Not only that, sometimes we do not expect to see anything at all, and there is something anyway leading to the strictly realistic perception to be shaken, the consequences of which may be fatal.

One of the best examples of the effect on an unprepared realist is to be found in Spark's arguably finest short story (according to the author's own judgment) called "The Portobello Road" about which she declared: "I think, is my best."[231] This story is one of the longest short stories and hence it provides space for the display of her wit and propensity for dark humor. The plot revolves around a woman called Needle who earns her nickname after she finds a needle in a haystack during an afternoon spent in her youth with her other three friends Kathleen, George and Skinny. This is a memorable event for the group and "Everyone agreed that the needle betokened extraordinary luck."[232] Little does she know that the unlikely moment would foreshadow the course of the rest of her life, as well as predestine its ending.

Later, when distance and different life goals separate these school friends, the inevitable alienation is not handled well by George. His attempts to make sure that they stick together cannot meet with much success. George blames everyone but himself for his miserable life, especially his friends from the past. He keeps coming back to the day of the discovery of the needle which for him represents the highlight of his existence. He desperately tries to return to these simpler happy times and so he does in the end. Needle is found in the haystack once more, many years later.

All this is background information that is little by little revealed, but the story actually begins with the encounter of Needle, George, and his wife Kathleen. This is how Needle describes the situation: "It was not for me to speak to Kathleen, but I had a sudden inspiration which caused me to say quietly, "Hallo, George." The giant of a man turned round to face the direction of my face. There were so

[230] Galloway, introduction, xiii.
[231] Spark, " Muriel Spark – b. 1918."
[232] Muriel Spark, "The Portobello Road," In *The Complete Short Stories* (United Kingdom: Canongate Books, 2018), 496.

many people – but at length he saw me."[233] George's reaction to meeting his friend seems a bit exaggerated: "He looked very ill, although when I had said "Hallo, George" I had spoken friendly enough."[234] Only a few lines later is his bewilderment partially clarified. The reader finds out that this is no ordinary reunion because Needle has departed the world of living five years prior and keeps loitering the streets as a ghost.

For that reason, no one can blame George for his reaction. Coming face to face with a ghost surely messes with one's head. However, it is only at the end of the story that the whole truth is revealed and it illuminates to the reader why George was able to see his friend in the first place. It was George who hid Needle in the haystack five years ago after he strangled her. The incident is summarized briefly: "He looked at me as if he could murder me and he did. He stuffed hay into my mouth until it could take no more".[235] Needle then draws this conclusion: "I suppose that was why he looked so unwell when I stood, nearly five years later, by the barrow in the Portobello Road and said in easy tones, "Hallo, George!"[236]

No wonder his feeble realistic mind cannot cope with the simple "Hallo" coming from a place he believed to be nothing but void and reconcile this with his limited understanding of reality. The realization that the unseen dimension which cannot be observed under normal conditions is nevertheless there, destroys his worldview while at the same time, the repercussions of his deed dawn on him. This is all more than he can wrap his head around and he ends up in a state for which he must be taken into a "nursing home".

What exactly happens in this story is that George's conscience is suddenly awakened and begins to function for the first time which means that confrontation with the hidden reality of the unknown is alone capable of putting a sinner on the right path or at least causing the onset of the realization of his sin. The story is essentially a warning that the consequences of our actions, though delayed, will catch up with us, and our crimes (legal or moral) will necessarily come to haunt us. It is all because George in his short-sided manner did not see the possibility that the punishment may come from beyond the grave. Maley describes the human endeavor to erase the ghost as follows:

[233] Spark, "The Portobello Road," 497.
[234] Spark, "The Portobello Road," 498.
[235] Spark, "The Portobello Road," 520.
[236] Spark, "The Portobello Road," 520.

> the fiercest and perhaps the founding bigotry of all: the illusion that the living may eradicate the dead through burial, cremation, and forgetfulness. It is to protect the living from the dead that our culture insists upon their opposition, policing those extravagant and erring spirits who refuse to be confined to either realm.[237]

If people knew that there is punishment awaiting them even after the physical evidence is long gone (for instance in a form of a cadaver), it is not a stretch of the imagination that they would think twice about breaking the ten commandments. They might realize that their sins do not die with their victims. This is very much in accordance with the Catholic understanding of the causality of human actions. An interesting perspective on the role of specters is provided by Jorge Sacido-Romero, who links them with the genre of short story: "Ghosts, therefore, undermine the alienating solidity of a status quo whose preservation, we are made to understand, is undesirable. Revealingly, the spectre's reinvigorating potential is akin to that of the short story as a literary genre".[238]

In this case, the status quo is disturbed by the realization of evil, which is a concept present in almost everything Spark wrote. Velma Bourgeois Richmond explains that: "The vision of evil is not softened or migitated. Long ago Dante definitely made clear that such an experience can lead to conversion as surely as a vision of good."[239] George became aware of his malevolence and this epiphany leads to a certain type of conversion, at least from a state of unknowing to knowing and what he does with this is ultimately up to him. Spark does not give an answer concerning his ultimate end. It is well possible that he comes to God. The use of evil is also not arbitrary. Brian Horne contemplates the disappearance of this old subject from contemporary literature including the Christian one:

> it would seem that few contemporary writers are interested in, or even aware of, the lost paradise of transcendental metaphysics; their concern is the imaginative reconstruction of the conditions of human life in poetry and prose that is no more than an attempt at rendering, in as truthful a way as is possible, the texture of felt experience in a self-contained universe,

[237] Maud Ellman, "The Ghosts of *Ulysses*," in *James Joyce: The Artist and the Labyrinth: A Critical Evaluation*, ed. Augustine Martin (London: Ryan Publishing , 2010), 194.
[238] Jorge Sacido-Romero, "Ghostly Visitations in Contemporary Short Fiction by Women: Fay Weldon, Janice Galloway and Ali Smith," *Atlantis* 38, no. 2 (2016): 94, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26330846.
[239] Richmond, Velma Bourgeois, "The Darkening Vision of Muriel Spark," *Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 15, no. 1 (1973), 80, doi: 10.1080/00111619.1973.10690045.

> a universe which not only excludes the supernatural but also seems seldom to include any perception of evil.[240]

The author notices that "There are many Christian thinkers for whom the concept of evil has very little theological content, especially when it is related to a supernaturalist view of creation." [241] And that "goodness, by implication is there, but not evil"[242]. This is undoubtedly a fascinating observation since the very idea of Christianity is based on the belief in the existence of evil and it is, therefore, hard to account for its absence in Christian literature. He then gives credit to Spark for not abandoning the topic like many others:

> Now it is true that some of the writers who come under his scrutiny are prepared to use the vocabulary of good and evil and to incorporate into their fictions elements of the inexplicable — even the supernatural, but I am not convinced that there is any real profundity in their treatment of the subject with the exception, possibly, of G.K Chesterton and Muriel Spark.[243]

He then concludes that the erasure of evil from modern works is connected with the prevalent secular interpretation of the world: "It is argued that the rejection of a metaphysics of transcendence, of any religious interpretation of the world, has led to the rejection of the category of evil as a valid and convincing means of interpreting that world."[244] This is not surprising since the predominantly postmodern culture does not have a coherent means of determining what is right and what is wrong. Thus, the unapologetic inclusion of evil in Spark is another proof of her Christian perspective. Bold argues that "Spark's vision, then, confronts evil as a force that motivates humankind."[245] Evil is often illustrated as an act of violence, which, Jacobsen says Spark is never far from.[246] She also describes violence as "another aspect of the point of jointure of heaven and earth".[247] The role of the ghost here is then that of a messenger whose aim is to bring the assurance

[240] Brian Horne, "On the Representation of Evil in Modern Literature," *New Blackfriars* 84, no. 983 (2003): 30, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43250679.
[241] Horne, "On the Representation of Evil in Modern Literature," 30.
[242] Horne, "On the Representation of Evil in Modern Literature," 31.
[243] Horne, "On the Representation of Evil in Modern Literature," 31.
[244] Horne, "On the Representation of Evil in Modern Literature," 31-32.
[245] Bold, *Muriel Spark*, 31.
[246] Jacobsen, "A Catholic Quartet," 139.
[247] Jacobsen, "A Catholic Quartet," 153.

that evil is still a valid category with real consequences which George seems to realize.

The previous part looked at the general significance of the narrative from the perspective of a skeptic. It was concluded that the ghost is an entity that stands for any supernatural occurrence with the capability of disturbing the secular mode of life, especially by reminding us of the existence of evil. The next few paragraphs will be dedicated to Needle, the ghost herself, and her new way of "living". Nonetheless, before doing so, because it concerns the dead, it might be informative to understand death from Spark's point of view. Hynes sees that: "Spark is writing a fiction about death, that most obvious fact of life which, like all facts in her view, escapes the manner of realistic fiction and calls for a method to do justice to mysteriousness."[248] Universally, it is not uncommon for death to play a significant role in fiction. However, it is predominantly treated as something to be avoided, postponed, feared. In the eyes of Spark, it is the most uninteresting matter-of-fact event. There is nothing extraordinary about dying and in an oxymoronic fashion, it is viewed as the most natural part of life, regardless of the manner of departing the world. Whether the soul is forced to leave its body due to natural causes or a brutal act of violence makes no difference. Both are within the daily range of possibilities and should be anticipated in one way or another. In fact, Spark often incorporates some violent episode without intending to evoke sympathy for the victim. Whittaker notes that the characters often "quietly kill one another"[249] and that "Sudden deaths occur frequently, but are always related with conspicuous coolness."[250] Nevertheless, death is not fascinating in itself for "the end does not have explanatory force."[251]

Instead, it is merely recognized as a necessary step on a journey into a much more enthralling and substantial state of being that awaits everyone after their heart stops beating. Its role as an important gateway cannot be downplayed and must be remembered. The novel *Memento Mori*, as the title suggests, is fully dedicated to this topic and its message is that we should never forget about its inescapable coming: "'It's difficult"', said Miss Taylor, "for people of advanced years to start

[248] Hynes, *The Art of the Real,* 92.
[249] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 12.
[250] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 12.
[251] Reizbaum, "The Stranger Spark," 51.

remembering they must die. It is best to form the habit while young.'"[252] For all that, death is at the same time the least and the most meaningful event. In the same novel Henry Mortimer insists: "Death, when it approaches, ought not to take one by surprise. It should be part of the full expectancy of life. Without an ever-present sense of death life is insipid."[253]

Now, let's focus on the ghost. It can be treated just as a metaphorical idea like before, but Spark believed in their actual existence, and when asked about the topic she answered:

> Yes, I do. But not in the sense that one could possibly describe it. I have never seen a ghost. I have never had a real psychic experience that I felt a ghost in the room although I am sensitive to atmospheres, vibes as they call it. … Ghosts exist and we are haunted, whether we like it or not in the sense that it can only be expressed by a physical presence, or a ghost, but in fact, I do believe in the presence of something that you can call a ghost but not in the physical outline. I don't see any other way in which you can express this actuality, and I can't deny the actuality simply because there is no other way to express it. [254]

But why exactly is Needle, like many other ghosts, allowed to wander in the world of the living? There is no simple answer. Spark is certainly interested in what comes after death which does not indicate that she attempts to give an insight into heaven or hell and her last goal is to convince the reader of their existence. In fact, she does not mention them at all. She is rather fascinated by the state in between, the one before the final judgment where the fate is not yet fully determined. In more general terms, Patricia Waugh notices that Spark's works "in various ways, circle peculiarly around absence, an awareness of a lack of fulness, an orientation toward a beyond."[255] This description fits a ghost perfectly, as he/she is by definition existing already beyond this world and lacking in many ways compared to a human on earth or a saint in heaven. The position of this thesis is that this state is equivalent to the Catholic idea of Purgatory.

Again, it is not to say that Spark aimed at giving an exact portrayal of this concept. Yet, she must have believed in a dimension that follows death but precedes the conclusiveness of heaven or hell. She also introduces it to destroy the

[252] Muriel Spark, *Memento Mori* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), 39 .
[253] Spark, *Memento Mori*, 150.
[254] Spark, "Muriel Spark – b. 1918."
[255] Waugh, "Muriel Spark and the Metaphysics of Modernity" 67.

preconceptions about the meaning of time. Alice Bennett talks about the relationship between time, Purgatory, and art:

> Purgatory demanded an art form that knew about time and, moreover, about the new kinds of time that had appeared: time that could be taken away in response to a crime; the time of investment, interest, debt and return; or time that was non-apocalyptic, and therefore not imminently ending.[256]

She continues: "Purgatory shares plots memory of the future, and adds a supplement to life in which plot formations can, in Le Goff s words, 'continue after death'. A plot continuing after death is also continuing in search of death: seeking out the correct end".[257] Spark's way of representing this eerie realm is via entities whose ambiguity resides in their unclear state of existence. Bennett wrote an intriguing and insightful analysis where she compares the idea of Purgatory with the narrative genre and claims that: "The narrative logic of the ghost story, the tale of a *revenant*, can be traced to the belief in Purgatory, and the need for reinforcement of that belief."[258] Therefore if somebody wants to polemize about its existence and function, the best tactic is to use a ghost.

The purpose of the Sparkian specter is not primarily to haunt, well maybe only spook a little, but to convey more philosophical speculations about what comes after death. Certainly, her ghost does not cause demonic possession, quite the opposite, the elusive phantoms do not differ from the living all that much and they possess many human faculties, interests, and ideas, so it is not possible to create one restricted category of all her ghosts. Indeed, like humans, they all have their individualistic characteristics which make them unique. What unifies them is their very presence in the narratives. To overlook them is not possible: "Ghosts are everywhere, some on buses or in office-blocks, some (the catching kind) in doctors' surgeries, and others wave innocuous hellos on the Portobello Road."[259]

What is striking about "The Portobello Road", is that the sharp contrast between the physical and metaphysical is represented in a very detached and nonchalant manner. Needle describes her usual occupations as a ghost which do not

[256] Alice Bennett, "Anticipated Returns: Purgatory, Exchange and Narrative after Life," *Oxford Literary Review* 31, no. 1 (2009): 34, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44030860.
[257] Bennett, "Anticipated Returns," 39.
[258] Bennett, "Anticipated Returns," 33-34.
[259] Galloway, introduction, xiii.

differ that much from when she was alive. For example, she still finds pleasure in looking at ordinary objects, even though she does not need them:

> I wander up and down the substantial lanes of Woolworth's as I did when I was young and visible. There is a pleasurable spread of objects on the counters which I now perceive and exploit with a certain detachment, since it suits with my condition of life. Creams, toothpastes, combs and hankies, cotton gloves, flimsy flowering scarves, writing-paper and crayons, ice-cream cones and orangeade, screwdrivers, boxes of tacks, tins of paint, of glue, of marmalade; I always liked them but far more now that I have no need of any.[260]

This suggests that there is still some important connection between the two worlds and that Needle is not ready to let go of the remnants of her past life. This is not surprising because Bennett writes that "Purgatory also indicates that life is not complete and sufficient within itself, and requires this supplementary annex of time and space which is also after life by being *in imitation of* life."[261] Bold also observes that "The narrator … perceives herself as a revenant rather than a disembodied ghost: though the victim of a murder and definitely dead".[262] In this short story, it is the ghost herself that partially explains the purpose of her new bizarre way of living: "I must explain that I departed this life nearly five years ago. But I did not altogether depart this world. There were those odd things still to be done".[263] Derrida confirms that it must be so for "[W]e know better than ever today that the dead must be able to work."[264]

People typically imagine purgatory as a place of suffering. It is not necessarily so, purgatory is simply a phase into which one enters because there is something left to be done, it is essentially an opportunity for catharsis. Its purpose is to provide a chance for the soul to understand its life in its entirety and thus be able to leave it behind and move on. Patricia Waugh also mentions the notion of ipseity. She says: "Ipseity, the feeling of self-presence, of being a subjective center, comfortably held in and part of the world, is so assumed that it goes unnoticed unless or until it is no longer there."[265] This fits the concept of a ghost whose

[260] Spark, "The Portobello Road," 498-499.
[261] Bennett, "Anticipated Returns," 39.
[262] Bold, *Muriel Spark*, 26-27.
[263] Spark, "The Portobello Road," 274.
[264] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, tr. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 97.
[265] Waugh, "Muriel Spark and the Metaphysics of Modernity" 66.

individuality is deeply fragmented. The purpose of purgatory is to deconstruct the very idea of what it means to BE and put together a perfect version of the individual. It is therefore above all a transitional stage. Needle needs closure regarding the sudden end of her life and the one who took it. That this so is evident from this monologue:

> I would not have spoken had I not been inspired to it. Indeed it's one of the things I can't do now – to speak out, unless inspired. And most extraordinary, on that morning as I spoke, a degree of visibility set in. I suppose from poor George's point of view it was like seeing a ghost when he saw me standing by the fruit barrow repeating in so friendly a manner, "Hallo, George!"[266]

She does not precise the source of the inspiration, but it must be something powerful that watches over her life, presumably God. It is apparently crucial that she become visible at this specific moment in order to face her murderer. As a consequence, she is able to achieve at least a little bit of justice in the form of him confessing to the horrible act. Interestingly, even in the purgatorial state, this revelation is not an instant matter. It comes in small doses that are easier for the ghost to digest, so this state is again characterized by a certain amount of mystery, just like the life before:

> If we think of life on earth as plagued with doubts, loose ends, questions, problems, unresolved issues … , we imply our opinion that to be able to ask is reasonably to expect answers. To die then and to find unanswerability eternal might well cause one to wish oneself out of "is-ness." But surely this is purgation is needed: it is not normal, these characters learn, to expect always to know when and what you want to know. It is in fact grotesque, hyperhubristic, to insist, not that there must be a reason or a cause for effects, but that since reason and causes exist we ought to know them. Mystery is natural.[267]

It is also important to mention that Needle was herself a Catholic: "I thought of my type of luck after I became a Catholic and was being confirmed. The Bishop touches the candidate on the cheek, a symbolic reminder of the sufferings a Christian is supposed to undertake. I thought, how lucky, what a feathery symbol to stand for the hellish violence of its true meaning."[268] Although she seems to be using a rather ironic tone, her life is proof there is indeed some luck in suffering because another unfinished business concerns her career as a writer, specifically her

[266] Spark, "The Portobello Road," 499-500.
[267] Hynes, *The Art of the Real,* 95.
[268] Spark, "The Portobello Road," 512-513.

desire to write a story about "life": "I was waiting to write about life and it seemed to me that the good fortune lay in this, whenever it should be."[269] Her brief and temporary suffering allowed her to achieve her goal because she was able to, if not write, then at least tell a story about life which she could fully grasp only thanks to her uninterrupted opportunity for observation as a ghost.

There is one more explicit allusion to Catholicism: "Sometimes as occasion arises on a Saturday morning, my friend Kathleen, who is a Catholic, has a Mass said for my soul, and then I am in attendance, as it were, at the church."[270] This remark is also tightly linked to the concept of Purgatory. The belief in Purgatory helps the mourners because it gives them "something constructive to do with their feelings of grief and confirmed their feelings of reciprocity that survived, at least for a limited time, the shock of death."[271] Masses for the souls in Purgatory are an example of such a constructive occupation.[272] Spark never reveals whether these have any impact on the fate of Needle or are just a vain effort. But it is possible to conclude that they do have an effect, most likely in the form of the mentioned divine inspiration that Needle feels in crucial moments. Overall, it is difficult to understand God's way and how exactly He operates in one's life. That's what Purgatory is for because it is a place where all things and events are revealed in their full context.

2.3. The Theme of Pride, or the Catholic Who Rejects the Supernatural

"Who in hell are you?" … "The same as in Heaven," … "a Seraph, that's to say."[273]

— Muriel Spark, "The Seraph and the Zambesi" —

As previously outlined, a substantial part of Spark's Catholic journey consisted of the criticism of her newfound religion, the traces of which are prevalent across her body of work and the short stories are no exception: "Mrs. Spark says

[269] Spark, "The Portobello Road," 512.
[270] Spark, "The Portobello Road," 499.
[271] Quoted in Bennett, "Anticipated Returns," 38.
[272] Quoted in Bennett, "Anticipated Returns," 38.
[273] Muriel Spark, "The Seraph and the Zambesi," In *The Complete Short Stories* (United Kingdom: Canongate Books, 2018), 128.

that her own conversion might have occurred much earlier in her life (when she began reading Cardinal Newman) if she had not been repelled by the idea of association with individual Catholics whom she encounter."[274] Dobie also asserts that "As a convert to Catholicism the author was struck with the number of Catholics who misuse religious faith to achieve their own gain: money, social position, personal pride."[275] One of the ways of exposing the vices and other flaws of Catholics is via their reaction to the supernatural. The topic was already tackled in the chapter on madness where the one who had access to it was deemed as mad. However, there are other types of believers who face the unknown themselves and yet are unable to leave their prideful Phariseic mode of life. This is the worst kind because they outright reject God if the manifestation of his power does not fit into their preconceptions of how the supernatural should operate. If God dares to clash with their ways, they reject him rather than change.

In this section, two stories will be considered because they are both equally representative. The first blatant example of this is in the famous short story to which Spark owes her successful career, "The Seraph and the Zambesi". The fact that the text predates her conversion does not have any deep effect on its final message for it was already established that her Catholic feeling long preceded the moment of her formal acceptance into the religion. Certainly, at least two major characteristics of her worldview that are crucial for this particular narrative remained the same, meaning her critical attitude towards the Church and the amalgam of the natural and the supernatural. The story is "a paradigmatic example of both her juxtaposition of natural and supernatural plots and her peculiar intersection of realism and fantasy."[276] About the root of the inspiration for the story Spark said: "I do not know what gave me the idea for the story, but certainly I believe in angels, and I had been up the Zambesi on a boat."[277] Whittaker believes that "Her assurance in acknowledging as inspiration both angels and boat-trips is characteristic, and her statement economically introduces the theme of all her work."[278] By that she means "the relationship – shown openly or implied – between the secular and the divine,

[274] Baldanza, "Muriel Spark and the Occult," 193.
[275] Dobie, "Muriel Spark's Definition of Reality," 23.
[276] Kucała, "The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction," 70.
[277] Quoted in Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 1.
[278] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 1.

between man's temporal viewpoint and God's eternal vision."[279] Mars-Jones then describes it as "a fiercely imagined if oddly constructed piece of work that contains one supernatural element from the beginning".[280]

The events take place in Africa. You can feel the agitation and anticipation that hover over the whole community which is busy preparing for a Christmas pageant. Everyone awaits the Nativity play written by an amateur playwright Samuel Cramer. Stannard emphasizes the significance of it being a Christmas story and suggests an important point: "And this, we must remember, is a Christmas story. The vision of the Seraph riding the Zambesi takes place at midnight on Christmas Eve, at the very point of Christ's birth. Christ was at once God and man, the mediator between the human and the divine, substantial and insubstantial. The artist, Spark felt, should imitate this intercession".[281]

In the play, the author himself is to perform the most important role: "Cramer's part was the most prominent, for he had the longest speeches, being the First Seraph. It had been agreed that, since he had written the masque, he could best deliver most of it."[282] It is not specified who exactly came to this agreement but it becomes clear that everyone was not on board with the idea because the event takes an unexpected turn once a real biblical Seraph appears on the stage demanding to play the part that rightfully belongs to him.

Surprisingly, or maybe not, neither the majestic six wings nor the multiple eyes of this celestial being, are enough to intimidate the author. He is determined not to let anyone steal his thunder, not even a real angel. The exact reason for the intervention is not clarified but presumably, he does not appear in this seemingly insignificant circumstance to hinder the work of a few ordinary people but to point out their hypocrisy and give them a chance to humble themselves and become better. According to the Christian faith, God does not stop looking for the lost sheep and waiting for the prodigal sons. Nonetheless, he never forces them to accept him and he leaves them free will to do with their lives as they please. In the end, however, he cannot leave their sins unpunished. In the short story, Spark condemns

[279] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 1.
[280] Mars-Jones, "The flickering of the Spark."
[281] Martin Stannard, "Nativities: Muriel Spark, Baudelaire, and the Quest for Religious Faith," *The Review of English Studies* 55, no. 218 (2004):103, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3661392.
[282] Spark, "The Seraph and the Zambesi," 126.

the so-called Catholics who only care about their appearance and have no idea what their faith actually entails and what is its true core. Carruthers says about the story: "In this text, the appearance of a real, ostentatiously six-winged angel in a Nativity play being staged by expatriate Europeans beside an African river represents a typical Sparkian collision of the (spiritual) sublime and the (everyday) mundane. Comically, the Europeans are outraged at the unscripted intrusion and drive the celestial being away."[283]

So once more, the problem is the unwillingness to accept the supernatural. It was apostle Thomas who needed to see to be able to believe, but for some people, even that is not sufficient which Cramer is not at all ashamed to admit: "I can't conceive of an abnormality like you being a true Seraph." "True," said the Seraph."[284] Stannard notices that through the dialogue "All that is established is the limitation of Cramer's conceptual powers. The material world melts."[285] Then, in the attempt to chase him away, Cramer destroys his own stage which is a telling example of people who prefer having their lives destroyed rather than letting go of a little bit of control. This short ridiculous exchange then highlights the unbelievable hypocrisy people (not only Cramer) suffer from: "Are you insured?" one of Cramer's friends asked him. "Oh yes," Cramer replied, "my policy covers everything except Acts of God – that means lightning or flood." "He's fully covered," said Cramer's friend to another friend.[286]

It confirms that their minds are preoccupied only with the mundane trivial problems and no wonder there is no space for the unexpected. Spark's aim is to subvert, if not the entire Catholic tradition, then surely its wicked and rotten current habits, in order to cause "the disruption, at least, of the way of the world. Not the end of time, but the end of the present."[287] John Galvin, the author of this quote continues:

> I suspect it's the subversive drive in horizontal apocalypse that anchors its appeal for Spark. From "The Seraph of the Zambesi" onward — the kinetic, elusive angel igniting the tawdry, banal Nativity pageant — her most characteristic, memorable writing celebrates subversion

[283] Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist," 75.
[284] Spark, "The Seraph and the Zambesi," 128.
[285] Stannard, "Nativities: Muriel Spark, Baudelaire, and the Quest for Religious Faith," 103.
[286] Spark, "The Seraph and the Zambesi," 130.
[287] Galvin, "The Mandelbaum Gate," 165.

> and the subversive, undercutting every orthodoxy, every claim to authority, every canon and icon, particularly those of the self-proclaimed sort.[288]

Another story that embodies perfectly Spark's proclivity for satire is called "The Black Madonna" because it "helps us obtain some purchase on her apprehension of the Catholic experience".[289] Unlike the previous text, this one was written after the conversion which proves the consistency in her regard of the followers of this religion. Lodge comments on it: "In this story there is a streak of that authorial vindictiveness toward her own characters"[290] It is ultimately a warning about the consequence of hidden pride. It features the perfect Catholic couple Lou and Raymond Parker, or at least that is how they perceive themselves. They are active members of their Church, participating in "various guilds and confraternities"[291] and they assent to the doctrine of original sin.[292]

Of course, the reader is not easily fooled and their sense of superiority does not go unnoticed. The narrator plays a funny role here, it is one of the devil's advocate. He acts as their accomplice despite the evident use of irony. For example, there is Lou's incessant reassurance that she is not a snob, only sensible[293] and the narrator indeed confirms her delusion: "For no one could call Lou a snob, and everyone knew she was sensible."[294] It is this type of little remark that serves as a building block for the satirical purpose of the narrative.

The only flaw the couple has is their inability to conceive an heir. Their infertility, however, does not seem to bother them beyond the fact that Lou does not, as a consequence, qualify for the mother's group. But this is only a small hindrance. On the contrary, the absence of a child gives them the luxury of time that enables them to develop very refine tastes in activities, ideas, and people. The story is set in a time of still prevalent racism, and the couple is proud of their progressive views concerning skin color. They let two Jamaican men, Henry and Oxford, frequent their social gatherings while professing "We're all equal".[295]

---

[288] Galvin, "The Mandelbaum Gate," 165.
[289] Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist," 81.
[290] Lodge, "Marvels and Nasty Surprises."
[291] Muriel Spark, "The Black Madonna," In *The Complete Short Stories* (United Kingdom: Canongate Books, 2018), 529.
[292] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 528.
[293] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 529.
[294] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 529.
[295] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 530.

Now, what does the Black Madonna have to do with all that? The life of their parish becomes a little more animated due to a new statue of Black Madonna which is at first the target of criticism for its contemporary looks but it is sought after when its miraculous powers are confirmed. Its renown spreads even beyond the boundaries of the Catholic Church: "Sometimes people came from London especially to see the Black Madonna, and these were not Catholics; they were, said the priest, probably no religion at all, poor souls, though gifted with faculties."[296] Here Spark's disapproval is targeted at the Catholics who do not acknowledge the capacity of the infidels to reason. The Parkers likewise succumb to the lure of the miraculous object. First, Lou decides to intercede for their poor black friends. For one she hopes that he reverts to his faith because "the poor fellow had lapsed."[297] Concerning the other one, she wants him to find a job, but it is because she secretly wants to get rid of him.

In a relatively short time, her wishes are granted and the success gives her confidence in the Madonna's powers. There are so many other reports that the parish magazine dedicates a column to the Blessed Mother: "While not wishing to make excessive claims … many prayers answered and requests granted to the Faithful in an exceptional way".[298] One significant group blessed with God's grace in this way are childless couples. Reading this gives Lou an idea to ask for a child herself, not really because of a deep desire to have one, it appears that she simply wants to try it. Her husband responds to the suggestion: "You have to be careful what you pray for," he said. "You mustn't tempt Providence."[299] Little does the poor fella know how correct his intuition is. But sure enough, six weeks later Lou has "her first sick turn."[300] Her first thought is: "I'll join the mother's Union,"[301] This reveals where her heart is really at. Nevertheless, the mother is aware to whom she should pay the tribute for this miracle so she says to Raymond, "If it's a girl we must have Mary as one of the names. But not the first name, it's too ordinary."[302] Thus again, her hypocrisy is confirmed.

[296] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 526.
[297] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 531.
[298] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 539.
[299] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 541.
[300] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 541.
[301] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 542.
[302] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 544.

In accordance with Spark's usual narrative structure, the reader is confronted with an unforeseen turn of events which was nevertheless foreshadowed in the title itself. The infant turns out to look slightly different than the couple imagined. When Raymond finds his wife very upset after the birth, he learns about the disturbing situation when a nurse introduces his daughter: "You see, the colour. She's a beautiful baby, perfect. It's a question of the colour."[303] The color, as expected, happens not to match the color of her parents. Notwithstanding, the situation has a profound impact on the couple. The twist is "a typically Sparkian manoeuvre of sinister humour".[304] They both feel contempt towards their child. Their first shock is understandable, but their following behavior is purely evil. The father, for example, destroys his daughter's cot in a rage:

> Raymond went home, avoiding the neighbours who would stop him to inquire after Lou. He rather regretted smashing up the cot in his first fury. That was something low coming out in him. But again, when he thought of the tiny black hands of the baby with their pink fingernails he did not regret smashing the cot.[305]

Lou likewise rejects the baby: "I can't take to the child. Try as I do, I simply can't even like it." "Nor me," said Raymond. "Mind you, if it was anyone else's child I would think it was all right. It's just the thought of it being mine, and people thinking it isn't."[306] Keeping their good name unstained takes precedence over the well-being of their perfectly healthy biological daughter. Spark shows the dark side of calculating Catholics who care for nothing but their appearance and who are willing to sacrifice their eternal future for their good reputation in this temporary and fleeting state of existence.

What naturally follows is an investigation of the possible causes of the unusual circumstance. The doctor suggests the possibility of a colored ancestor in the bloodline of the parents, the very idea of which disgusts Lou. Surely, this nightmare indeed proves to be true. Lou's sister, the target of Lou's judgment for having many children and lacking any social grace, summarizes the irony of the situation with a perfect and not-so-innocent remark: "Dear Lou Raymond is asking if we have any blacks in the family well thats funny you have a coloured God is not

[303] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 545.
[304] Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist," 81.
[305] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 547.
[306] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 550.

asleep."[307] This ironic twist is to be expected since Spark "often uses her craft to portray life as a divine comedy that often collapses into farce when events overwhelm expectations."[308]

Lou's comment gives ground for the interpretation of the story. Of course in the eyes of the couple, the whole affair must seem like a cruel joke from the Almighty to whom they gave everything. But who are they to judge his ways? Unsurprisingly, the incident cannot stay secret for too long and when the priest finds out, he reminds the new mother: "In the name of God," said the priest, "if you're a Catholic Christian you've got to expect to suffer."[309] This has no effect and in the end, their pride wins and they give the baby up for adoption. The author does not fail to give her view via a dialogue filled with a proper dose of irony: "Oh, he said it was a good thing?" "No, not a good thing. In fact he said it would have been a good thing if we could have kept the baby. But failing that, we did the right thing. Apparently, there's a difference."[310]

Lou and Raymond's misfortune naturally brings forward the old story of Job and the question of his long journey of suffering, one of Spark's favorite subjects of the Bible. Carruthers regards the short story as "a version of one of Spark's frequently resorted to pieces of scripture, The Book of Job."[311] It is not a coincidence that it is the first written story of the Holy Book, predating even Genesis. It indicates that God wanted his people to understand the meaning of their struggles more than anything else, or rather explain that the suffering cannot be fully understood and therefore full trust in his plan is necessary.

It is likely that the meaning of this trial is simply to test the real character of the protagonists as he "bestows on them a gift which is perfect, except in the eyes of a mean-minded society."[312] Carruthers insists that: "the point is not that they have brought this upon themselves, but lies in how they respond to their 'misfortune', that is whether or not they can rise above a racist society."[313] To think of it as a test suggests that God cruelly brings evil upon whomever he chooses. It is clear, this is rather an opportunity to reconsider their prejudice that is hidden not

[307] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 548.
[308] Bold, *Muriel Spark*, 12.
[309] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 547.
[310] Spark, "The Black Madonna," 550.
[311] Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist," 82.
[312] Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist," 82.
[313] Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist,"82 .

too much below the surface. They do not recognize the possibility of moral improvement. Their reaction also "reveals how weak is their faith in miracles."[314] Indeed, Lou does not truly believe that the power of the Almighty is channeled through the statue. She has faith, but only in her own ability to manifest her preferred image of reality into being, and the statue is a mere talisman that could help her in an occult fashion to achieve this goal. However, as Whittaker asserts, the message here is that God is not to be mocked. [315] He has to step in and show her that her belief is built on sand instead of rock and that a light breeze is enough to make it crumble and thus He "asserts his absoluteness in a highly mischievous way". So again, there is a conflict between the two realities and the protagonists choose to "conform to the standards of the world rather than to those of God".[316] The underlying theme is not unique to the story. When discussing *The Bachelors,* Whittaker mentions that there is an "ironic discrepancy between human desires and divine will, and it emphasises that in our partial understanding of the divine purpose, we do not always pray for the right things."[317] She also sees that "the way to God is not always through conventional channels, and an especial stress is put on the notion that there is a kind of divine satire being practised when God mocks the rational expectations of those committed to piety. This is the theme of Mrs Spark's short story 'The Black Madonna'."[318] Jacobsen assures that: "It is not the Black Madonna who has intruded so devastatingly into Lou's life; it is Lou's unconscious hypocrisy, self-delusion and, above all, ignorance of the impossibility of bargaining with the power of love, which have caused her to tamper with a force which grants her prayer according to its own, rather than Lou's, law."[319]

In conclusion, in Bold's words: "As a novelist Spark uses Roman Catholicism as an ideal against which lesser concepts can be judged. If individuals are generally unworthy of Spark's True Faith then she shows they have little trouble adjusting to a series of false faiths".[320] In the two stories, the false faiths include the egotistic belief in one's superiority, snobbism, and racism. Jacobsen also sees that what Spark "fears is that the inability to transfigure the commonplace will force

[314] Kucała, "The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction," 70.
[315] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 48.
[316] Carruthers, "Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist," 82.
[317] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 45-
[318] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 46.
[319] Jacobsen, "A Catholic Quartet," 142.
[320] Bold, *Muriel Spark*, 23-24.

upon the famished heart and mind the pseudo-splendor of the inflated ego."[321] In the discussed examples, it is apparent that when the ego wins and the characters fail to accept God's supernatural plan, what necessarily follows is destruction.

2.4. The Theme of Transfiguration, or the Fusion of the Tangible and the Intangible

"Obligingly, the saucer settled in a corner; it hung like a spider a few inches from the ceiling."[322]

— Muriel Spark, "Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse" —

It is true that some of the topics above could be interpreted in a larger framework of the Christian faith, so in this part, the focus is on a more unique reflection of Catholicism which Spark comes back to – the pattern of assigning ordinary objects the role of a gateway for a supernatural force. Objects have always been an essential channel for connecting the natural and the supernatural in the Catholic liturgy, where the climax of the mass is represented by the bread becoming the flesh of the Messiah. Catholics believe that the act of transubstantiation takes place literally. In their eyes, a little miracle like this cannot pose a real problem since the premise of Christianity is that there is a powerful God. Reichardt comments on the role of this sacrament:

> Catholicism's central sacrament, the Eucharist, strongly conveys the faith's emphasis on God's immanence in the world rather than absence from it: the Real Presence of God is palpable in the world, here and now. A sacramental sensibility finds significance in all of creation at the same time that it constantly draws a line from that creation back to the Creator. Such an anagogical, integrative habit of mind characterizes the Catholic perspective.[323]

Interestingly, the insistence of the Catholic faith on the necessity of the mixture of the physical and the metaphysical is what Protestants protest against.

[321] Jacobsen, "A Catholic Quartet," 142.
[322] Muriel Spark, "Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse," in *The Complete Short Stories* (United Kingdom: Canongate Books, 2018), 285-286.
[323] Reichardt, introduction, 4.

They wanted to keep the spiritual and the material more separated lest they commit idolatry, unlike the Catholics who use an abundance of symbolism. Indeed, in Catholicism, there is no reason to fear the tangible. Its high importance is highlighted by God's most significant decision to become a man: "The cornerstone doctrine of that repository is the Incarnation: the Son of God became man by the power of the Spirit".[324] Reichardt asserts the importance of this idea: "incarnational approach to the world … is essential to Catholic thought".[325]

Here, however, the interest is not in finding a theological basis for either of the arguments, but in understanding Spark's position on the topic and its exploitation in her works. According to Christ. Robert E. Hosmer Jr., her take on the matter is clear: "In an article on Proust, written in 1953, Spark criticized 'present-day Christian writing' for 'a dualistic attitude toward matter and spirit … the tendency to equate matter with evil.'"[326] Whittaker confirms that this is how Spark perceives her surroundings: "She sees the external visible world not as distinct from the spiritual world, but as a sacramental manifestation of it."[327]

So she maintains that it is crucial not to disregard the physical in favor of the supernatural. She repeatedly demonstrates the necessity of fusing the two in unexpected imagery. In her writing, Spark typically does not exploit traditional Catholic symbols. She works with the idea of linking the tangible and intangible but creates her own set of representations. This does not prove any deviation from a Catholic perspective because "all things, events, and experiences can "tell" of God and have the power to communicate something of God."[328] In her fictive world, anything common can be transfigured according to the example of Christ. Hosmer notices this tendency: "Christ's embrace of matter in his own person and in his earthly activity established a sacramental economy, a system whereby ordinary elements, transfigured by divine power, become not only signs but substance of another, transcendent reality."[329] Here we are talking about "transfiguration of the commonplace" which is a process with which Spark has operated since the beginning.[330] Whittaker also notices, "whenever our attention is drawn to the trivial

[324] Hosmer Jr., "Writing with Intent: The Artistry of Muriel Spark."
[325] Reichardt, introduction, 4.
[326] Hosmer Jr., "Writing with Intent: The Artistry of Muriel Spark."
[327] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 45.
[328] Reichardt, introduction, 4.
[329] Hosmer Jr., "Writing with Intent: The Artistry of Muriel Spark."
[330] Hosmer Jr., "Writing with Intent: The Artistry of Muriel Spark."

and commonplace in her novels, it is invariably to show us that they contain elements of something extraordinary, that is to say, they function in her work not to establish a familiar world, but as demonstrably part of a divine and unfamiliar pattern."[331] This concept is essential to comprehending Spark. She finds it necessary to constantly transfigure the ordinary and this is why: "The commonplace unillumined is stifling … by transfiguration, the materials of the commonplace come into their proper radiance."[332]

Hynes differentiates between two types of reality and the dual nature of objects and explains the significance of Spark's capability to merge them: "She … not only resists discarding the literary realist's idea of what *is*, but she in fact works … to achieve a noncondescending dual view of literary *realism's* reality (sand, flower, hand, hour) *and* her own (in this case Christian) romantic's reality (sand, flower, hand, hour, all contained *within* world, heaven, infinity, eternity)."[333]

As a result, in Spark's fiction the common objects often "loom with strange significance"[334] because she frequently "blurs the boundaries between the tangible and intangible, and it is difficult to say where one ends and the other begins. She herself sees nothing remarkable in this."[335]As for the novels, it is mainly the famous typewriter in *The Comforters* which is used by the voices from beyond as a medium for transmitting their message. There is no reason why the voices have to use a typewriter in order to communicate. Nevertheless, by using a familiar object, it is easier to accept the supernatural and if it is not yet fully accepted, it is at least not so easily discarded as a mere illusion or hallucination. The other most known example is *Memento Mori* where death itself reminds elderly people not to forget its imminent approach. To deliver this warning, it opts for the use of a telephone, a common means of communication among mortals. Reizbaum mentions the idea of Nicholas Royle who "makes the case for the telepathic function of the telephone. What he demonstrates figurally as well as discursively is that the telephone performs the function of medium of 'uncanny transmission'. But 'medium' in these terms may take on several meanings – a technological or spiritual enabler, for

[331] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 5.
[332] Jacobsen, "A Catholic Quartet," 142.
[333] Joseph Hynes, *The Art of the Real*, 35.
[334] Waugh, "Muriel Spark and the Metaphysics of Modernity" 73.
[335] Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*, 54.

example."[336] To conclude, when the supernatural tries to reach you, it is undoubtedly wiser to use something that is known to you as a mediator, and thus anything of physical substance can become a spiritual enabler.

Concerning the short stories, the role of objects is at the core of many. Several of them even carry the name of the central object, hence highlighting its importance. To name some, there is "The Curtain Blown by the Breeze", "Dark Glasses" or "The Ormulu Clock", where the items in the titles have a deterministic function. There are others in which the course of the narrative is at least to some extent built around objects such as a compass in "The Pawnbroker's Wife" or photos in "A Hundred and Eleven Years Without a Chauffeur". However, in all of these cases, their influence has no reach beyond the natural. Nevertheless, in others, the metaphysical is more explicitly acknowledged. These stories include for example, the comically bizarre case of flying saucers in "Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse" or the hauntingly humorous "The Executor".

The following analysis will be dedicated to the former of the two stories. Within Spark's oeuvre, similar imagery is not very surprising as one starts to expect almost anything. The story features a couple whose calm evening is disturbed by a startling apparition: "they agree that it was a small round flattish object, and that it flew. "It's a flying object of some sort," whispered George eventually. "It's a saucer," said Miss Pinkerton, keen and loud, "an antique piece. You can tell by the shape."[337] Their immediate reaction is not what one would expect given the peculiarity of the situation. They proceed to discuss the authenticity of their unusual guest: "It must be a forgery," George said unfortunately. For, unfortunately, something familiar and abrasive in Miss Pinkerton's speech began to grind within him. Also, he was afraid of the saucer."[338] The last sentence reveals that the out-of-place argument is only a coping mechanism used to control the true emotion which is fear. The visitation is not long and the saucer finally flies out of the window again.

The awestruck husband and wife decide to recount the episode to the press that very night. Despite the fact that the story is not explicitly Catholic and the way

[336] Nicholas Royle, "Memento Mori," in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 193, quoted in Marilyn Reizbaum, "The Stranger Spark," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed. Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 44.
[337] Spark, "Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse," 284.
[338] Spark, "Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse," 285.

the supernatural is portrayed seems to be a playful and amusing product of the author's imagination rather than a channel for a profound message, a valuable and ultimately Catholic lesson can be found between the lines. In an ironic way, an encounter with the unexpected should again be expected. As already established, God operates in various unpredictable ways in order to test people's faith. The name of the story itself suggests that such an event can have apocalyptic consequences for the unprepared.

It is clear that the couple, especially George, is not ready for a similar encounter: "George continued, "I'm not up in these things. I'm extremely sceptical as a rule. This was a new experience to me."[339] However, he is surprisingly confident in his own senses regarding the experience and when asked about it, he does not deny that it was all very real in spite of its improbability: "Was the object attached to anything? No wires or anything? I mean, someone couldn't have been having a joke or something?" George gave a decent moment to the possibility. "No," he then said. "It struck me, in fact, that there was some sort of Mind behind it, operating from outer space. It tried to attack me, in fact." "Really, how was that?"[340] The capital M in the work Mind could be likely seen as an allusion to God, so it is possible that he already accepts the idea of the existence of higher power.

The wife has her own version of the event. She explains: "Mr Lake was not attacked," Miss Pinkerton stated. "There was no danger at all. I saw the expression on the pilot's face. He was having a game with Mr Lake, grinning all over his face.""[341] This is her husband's reaction: "You said nothing about any pilot at the time," said George. "I saw no pilot."[342] His comment shows that his faith reaches only as far as his senses do. It is an attitude that many Catholics share. The reporter decides to side with the husband: "I must say," said the reporter, "that I favour Mr Lake's long-range theory. The lady may have been subject to some hallucination, after the shock of the saucer."[343]

Some may perhaps see a feminist idea lurking there, however, the argument presented here is rather that Spark is showing the limits of individual faith. Mr Pinkerton's belief in the supernatural ends where the idea of the existence of a tiny

[339] Spark, "Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse," 288.
[340] Spark, "Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse," 289.
[341] Spark, "Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse," 289.
[342] Spark, "Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse," 290.
[343] Spark, "Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse," 290.

pilot begins. It is well possible that he actually did see him but he was unwilling to broaden the borders of his faith to encompass him. On the other hand, Miss Pinkerton did not create any such arbitrary artificial boundaries and therefore she has no problem accepting him as real. After she realizes that her husband will not believe her and what is more, that he attempts to ridicule her, she turns the tables and mocks him instead: "Flying saucer? George is very artistic," she would say, "and allowances must be made for imaginative folk." Sometimes she added that the evening had been a memorable one, "Quite a party!"[344] Though she appears to throw herself under the bus as well, she does so to make him taste what it feels like to have your belief questioned. To prevent any doubt about the truth here, the reader is assured by the narrator that Miss Pinkerton was correct: "I believe the story, with a preference for Miss Pinkerton's original version. She is a neighbour of mine. I have reason to believe this version because, not long afterwards, I too received a flying visitation from a saucer. The little pilot, in my case, was shy and inquisitive. He pedalled with all his might. My saucer was Royal Worcester, fake or not I can't say."[345] As always, the last sentences are a work of art that does not disappoint.

In the story, Spark ultimately demonstrates that the physical and the spiritual can and, in fact, have to work together. Their fusion is sometimes unprecedented which should not unsettle the observer but the use of something familiar helps in accepting the supernatural. At the same time, she shows the different scopes of human faith and warns that skepticism, when the actual truth is involved, has consequences which is why it is Miss Pinkerton who has got the last laugh in the end. Only the faith which accepts even a tiny pilot on a flying saucer is what counts.

[344] Spark, "Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse," 292.
[345] Spark, "Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse," 292.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the short stories of Muriel Spark offer a lot of material for analysis and reflection despite being overshadowed by her more famous novels. Spark herself, however, held this genre in high regard and as a result produced many unique and captivating shorter narratives. Due to their considerable number, it is not surprising that there is much variation in their topic, but it is still possible to observe some unifying themes. The goal of this thesis was to focus specifically on the abundant supernatural elements through the lens of her Catholic faith and prove that their treatment is in accordance with the religion.

This work consists of two main sections. The first one provides a theoretical background that serves as a basis for subsequent analysis. It is further divided into five parts which are, nevertheless, interconnected. To begin with, a small tour through her life and career is included in order to paint, hopefully, a more accurate picture of the author in question. It was shown that she was already born a literary genius who could manipulate words as she deemed necessary. Also, some of her highs and lows are mentioned because they constitute the cross that she had to bear which shaped her as a person and as a writer.

Two sub-chapters are dedicated to her identity as a Catholic and as a Catholic author. There have been many attempts to prove or disprove the significance of her religion without reaching a consensus. The aim here is, therefore, to demonstrate that Spark's conversion did have a profound effect on her life as a whole, especially her literary endeavors. It is shown that the influence of Catholicism is indisputable as Catholic allusions are omnipresent throughout her work. On the other hand, to use it as religious propaganda was never her aspiration. She enjoys exploiting her faith in a subtle way and ultimately leaves the final judgment up to the reader. It is important to emphasize that she was always above all an individual and her conversion did not change this fact which is why her messages are often hard to decode.

The next part attempts to place her within literary theory which proves to be an impossible task. Though she often exploits techniques and ideas from various movements, she never does so in a way that would unmistakably make her their member. And finally, her fondness for shorter pieces and economical language is

discussed in order to prove that her short stories are of great value and that they occupy an irreplaceable spot among her other writings.

The main section then deals with her treatment of the supernatural in relation to the natural. It is established that the marriage of the two is integral to the interpretation of many of her stories and that this fusion is Catholic at its core. By merging the seen and the unseen realm in a unique way, Spark wanted to propose a new view of reality where they can coexist with equal status. There are altogether four chapters, each focusing on one or two stories that were selected because they illustrate this concept well.

Firstly, in "Come Along, Marjoire," Spark associates the supernatural with the topic of madness. The story portrays a character who is perceived as mentally unstable only because she has access to the spiritual dimension. It is a criticism of the secular Catholics who judge their fellow believers, especially if their practice of faith deviates from their own by having a supernatural reach.

Next, in "The Portobello Road," the one who encounters the supernatural is most likely an unbeliever. The supernatural is represented by a ghost and the meeting serves as an initiation into a new concept of reality where the two spheres coexist. It is done by opening his eyes to the evil that rules in this world, unfortunately for George, it is evil committed by himself. This epiphany causes him a deep disturbance but this is a necessary step so that in the end he is able to see the true nature of things. The presence of the ghost is then explained via the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, meaning that its existence is allowed because there is still some unfinished business that needs to be dealt with.

On the other hand, in "The Seraph and the Zambesi" and "The Black Madonna," the protagonists are already believers and they should expect the extraordinary, which they actually do. The fact that something out of the ordinary happens is not what unsettles them. The problem is that God does not act in alignment with their prideful wishes. This is why George is in an arguably better position, despite committing an objectively more despicable crime. For him, there is still hope.

The very last part which talks about "Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse" demonstrates that the commonplace cannot be transformed only metaphorically in the realms of ideas but that the actual physical reality plays a significant role. God sometimes chooses to use a real and familiar object to show his involvement in the

tangible world and to transmit his supernatural message, just like when he became human.

All in all, even though the stories differ on the surface, it is evident that Spark follows a certain pattern that unifies them. The use of the supernatural as a reflection of her faith is what gives her work its on-of-a-kind character, and the reader is forced to sit on the edge, not knowing what to expect which is exactly the effect Spark wants to reach because it was already established that only by expecting the unexpected one can be truly free. Most importantly, the destiny of her characters is always determined by their reaction to the supernatural and their ability to modify their preconception of the meaning of “reality”.

Shrnutí

Závěrem lze říci, že povídky Muriel Sparkové nabízejí spoustu materiálu k analýze a zamyšlení, přestože jsou zastíněny jejími slavnějšími romány. Sama Sparková však měla tento žánr ve velké oblibě, a také proto dala vzniknout mnoha jedinečným a strhujícím vyprávěním kratšího rozsahu. Vzhledem k jejich značnému počtu není divu, že se zabývají rozličnými tématy, přesto se najdou myšlenky, které slouží jako sjednocující prvek napříč vícero povídkami. Cílem této práce bylo zaměřit se zejména na mnohé nadpřirozené prvky z pohledu její katolické víry a dokázat, že jejich použití je v souladu s tímto náboženstvím.

Práce je rozdělena na dvě hlavní části. První z nich poskytuje teoretický základ, ze kterého vychází následná analýza. Dále se dělí na pět menších částí, které jsou však vzájemně propojeny. Pro začátek je zahrnuta malá exkurze jejím životem a kariérou, která má za úkol vytvořit přesnější obraz dané autorky. Bylo dokázáno, že se už jako literární génius narodila, a že odjakživa uměla manipulovat se slovy dle svých potřeb. Také jsou zde zmíněny některé z jejích vítězství a pádů, protože tvořily kříž, který si musela nést, a který ji formoval jako člověka i jako spisovatelku.

Dvě podkapitoly se následně věnují konkrétně její identitě jakožto katoličky a jako katolické autorky. V průběhu let se mnozí kritici snažili dokázat nebo vyvrátit význam jejího náboženství, přesto nedošli ke shodě. Cílem je zde tedy dokázat, že konverze Sparkové měla hluboký vliv na její život jako celek, zejména pak na její úsilí v oblasti literární tvorby. Ukázalo se, že vliv katolicismu na její dílo je nesporný, protože katolické narážky jsou v něm všudypřítomné. Na druhou stranu, použít její dílo jako náboženskou propagandu nebylo nikdy jejím cílem. Sparková raději aplikuje svou víru velmi rafinovaným způsobem a konečný úsudek nechává na čtenáři. Je ale důležité zdůraznit, že byla vždy především individualistou a její obrácení na tom nic nezměnilo, což také vysvětluje, proč je často obtížné její narážky dekódovat.

V následné části je zde snaha zařadit Sparkovou do kontextu literární teorie, což se ukázalo jako nemožné. Přestože často používá techniky a myšlenky vycházející z různých směrů, nikdy to nedělá způsobem, který by ji neomylně učinil jejich členem. Na závěr teoretické části je nastíněna její láska ke kratším formám a

ekonomii v jazyce, aby bylo prokázáno, že její povídky mají velkou hodnotu, a že zaujímají nezastupitelné místo v rámci celého její tvorby.

Hlavní část se pak zabývá jejím použitím nadpřirozeného ve vztahu k přirozeném. Sňatek těchto dvou sfér je evidentně nezbytný pro interpretaci mnoha jejích příběhů a toto spojení je ve svém jádru katolické. Sparková chtěla především navrhnout nový pohled na realitu, ve které obě sféry koexistují a mají rovnocenné postavení. Jsou zde zahrnuty čtyři kapitoly, z nichž každá se zaměřuje na jeden nebo dva příběhy. Ty byly vybrány, protože dobře ilustrují tento koncept.

V první řadě, v povídce nazvané „Come Along, Marjoire," Spark spojuje nadpřirozeno s tématem šílenství. Příběh vykresluje postavu, která je vnímána jako psychicky labilní jen proto, že má evidentně přístup do neviditelné sféry. Jedná se především o kritiku sekulárních katolíků, kteří soudí své spoluvěřící, zvláště pokud má jejich praktikování víry nadpřirozený přesah.

Dále, v „The Portrobello Road", postava, které se setkává s nadpřirozenem je s největší pravděpodobností nevěřící. Nadpřirozeno je reprezentováno pomocí ducha a setkání s ním uvádí postavu do reality, kde existuje přirozené spolu s napřirozeným. Je toho dosaženo prostřednictvím zaměření pozornosti na zlo, které vládne v tomto světě, bohužel pro George je to zlo spáchané jím samotným. Toto uvědomění je důvodem jeho hlubokého rozrušení, musí si jej ale prožít, aby viděl pravou podstatu věcí. Přítomnost ducha je pak vysvětlena prostřednictvím katolické doktríny očistce, což znamená, že existuje, protože je zde ještě nějaká nedokončená záležitost, kterou je třeba vyřešit.

Na druhou stranu v povídkách "The Seraph and the Zambesi" a "The Black Madonna," jsou hlavní postavy již věřící a měli by tedy nadpřirozené očekávat, což také dělají. Skutečnost, že se stane něco neobvyklého, není to, co je zneklidňuje. Problém je v tom, že Bůh nejedná v souladu s jejich pyšnými přáními. To je důvod, proč je George pravděpodobně v lepší pozici, přestože spáchal objektivně opovrženíhodnější zločin. Pro něj stále existuje naděje.

Závěrečná kapitola mluví o příběhu s názvem „Miss Pinkerton's Apocalypse" a ukazuje, že všední realitu nelze přetvářet pouze metaforicky, ale že významnou roli hraje také fyzické. Bůh se někdy rozhodne použít skutečný a známý předmět, aby upozornil na své zapojení do hmotného světa a předal tak své nadpřirozené poselství, stejně jako když se vtělil do člověka.

Celkově vzato, i když se příběhy navenek liší, je evidentní, že Spark sleduje určitý vzorec, který je sjednocuje. Použití nadpřirozena jako odraz její víry je to, co dává jejímu dílu zvláštní charakter a čtenář jen napjatě očekává, což je přesně ten efekt, kterého chtěla Sparková dosáhnout, protože je již jasné, že pouze očekáváním neočekávaného může být člověk skutečně svobodný. Nejdůležitějším motivem je potom fakt, že osud jejích postav je vždy určován jejich reakcí na nadpřirozeno a schopností pozměnit své předsudky o tom, co znamená pojem „realita“.

Annotation

Author: Romana Ryšková

Faculty and department: Faculty of Arts, Department of English and American Studies

Title: The Marriage of the Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Short Stories, and its Catholic Implications

Supervisor: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D.

Number of characters: 188 471

Number of appendices: 1 CD

Keywords: natural, supernatural, Catholicism, madness, ghost, Purgatory, pride, tangible, intangible

Description: Muriel Spark is a fascinating author who was very prolific during her literary career. Her life was forever marked by her conversion to Catholicism in 1954. The author talks openly about her faith, nevertheless, her oeuvre could hardly be considered Catholic propaganda. Her books, especially her short stories, are also filled with mysterious elements that are omnipresent in otherwise realistic settings. This thesis argues that the most important role of her Catholicism is that of a bridge between these two different realities, meaning the natural and the supernatural.

Anotace

Autor: Romana Ryšková

Fakulta a katedra: Filozofická fakulta, Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Název práce: Spojení přirozeného a nadpřirozeného v povídkách Muriel Sparkové a jeho katolické důsledky

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D.

Počet znaků: 188 471

Počet příloh: 1 CD

Klíčová slova: přirozeno, nadpřirozeno, katolicismus, šílenství, duch, očistec, pýcha, hmatatelné, nehmatatelné

Popis: Muriel Spark je fascinující autorkou, která během své literární kariéry napsala mnoho děl. Její život byl navždy poznamenán konverzí ke katolicismu v roce 1954. Autorka o své víře mluví otevřeně, nicméně její tvorbu lze jen stěží považovat za katolickou propagandu. Její knihy, zejména pak povídky, jsou také plné tajemných prvků, které jsou všudypřítomné v jinak realistickém prostředí. Tato práce tvrdí, že její katolická víra slouží jako most mezi těmito dvěma odlišnými realitami, tedy přirozenou a nadpřirozenou.

Bibliography

Baldanza, Frank. “Muriel Spark and the Occult.” *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 6, no. 2 (1965): 190–203. doi: https://doi.org/10.2307/1207258.

Bennett, Alice. “Anticipated Returns: Purgatory, Exchange and Narrative after Life.” *Oxford Literary Review* 31, no. 1 (2009): 33–48. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44030860.

Beveridge, A.W. “The secular and the supernatural: Madness and psychiatry in the short stories of Muriel Spark.” *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh* 45 (2015): 305-312. doi: 10.4997/JRCPE.2015.411.

Bold, Alan. *Muriel Spark*. London: Methuen, 1986.

Bran, Nicol. “Reading Spark in the Age of Suspicion” In *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives,* edited by David Herman, 112-128. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Carruthers, Gerard. “Fully to Savour Her Position: Muriel Spark and Scottish Identity.” In *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives,* edited by David Herman, 21-38. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Carruthers, Gerard. “Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist.” In *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark,* edited by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley, 74–84. Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Chyette, Bryan. Muriel Spark. Tavistock: Northcote House, 2000.

Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York and London: Routledge, 1994.

Dobie, Ann B. “Muriel Spark’s Definition of Reality.” *Critique*, no. 1 (1970): 20-27. 10.1080/00111619.1970.10689963.

Edgecombe, Rodney Stenning. *Vocation and identity in the fiction of Muriel Spark*. United Kingdom: University of Missouri Press, 1990.

Ellman, Maud. “The Ghosts of *Ulysses*.” In J*ames Joyce: The Artist and the Labyrinth: A Critical Evaluation*, edited by Augustine Martin. London: Ryan Publishing, 1990.

Fitzgerald, Penelope. “A Character in One of God’s Dreams.” Review of *Reality and Dreams*, by Muriel Spark. *New York Times Book Review*, May 11, 1997.

Galloway, Janice. Introduction to *The Complete Short Stories*, by Muriel Spark, vii-xiv. United Kingdom: Canongate Books, 2018.

Galvin, John. “The Mandelbaum Gate: Muriel Spark’s Apocalyptic Gag.” In *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, edited by David Herman, 153-172. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Gelpi, Albert. “The Catholic Presence in American Culture.” *American Literary History* 11, no. 1 (1999): 202-3.

Goldie, David. “Muriel Spark and the Problems of Biography.” In *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, edited by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley, 5–15. Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Haddox, Thomas F. “RELIGION FOR ‘REALLY INTELLIGENT PEOPLE’: THE RHETORIC OF MURIEL SPARK’S ‘REALITY AND DREAMS.’” *Religion & Literature* 41, no. 3 (2009): 43–66. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25746542.

Herman, David. “Introduction ‘A Salutary Scar’: Muriel Spark’s Desegregated Art in the Twenty-First Century.” In *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century*

Perspectives, edited by David Herman, 1-18. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Herman, David. *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Horne, Brian. "On the Representation of Evil in Modern Literature." *New Blackfriars* 84, no. 983 (2003): 30–42. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43250679.

Hosmer, Robert E., Jr. "Writing with Intent: The Artistry of Muriel Spark." *Contemporary Literary Criticism,* edited by Jennifer Stock, vol. 440, Gale, 2019. link.gale.com/apps/doc/H1100125923/GLS?u=palacky&sid=bookmarkGLS&xid=8d3c88bf.

Hosmer, Robert. "The Short Stories of Muriel Spark." In *A Companion to the British and Irish Short Story*, edited by Alexander Malcom and David Malcom. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2008.

Hubbard, Tom. "The Liberated Instant: Muriel Spark and the Short Story." In *Muriel Spark: an Odd Capacity for Vision,* edited by Alan Bold, 167-182. London: Vision Press, 1984.

Hynes, Joseph. *The Art of the Real: Muriel Spark's Novels*. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988.

Jacobsen, Josephine. "A Catholic Quartet." *The Christian Scholar* 47, no. 2 (1964): 139–54. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41177377.

John Paul II. "Letter to Artists." 1999. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html.

Kakutani Michiko. "Her Serene Tyranny, A Mistress of Mayhem." *New York Times,* May 16, 1997.

Kennedy Maev. "London parish's descent from glamour to grime charted in exhibition." *The Guardian*, May 16, 2011. Accessed March 5, 2020.

https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/may/16/london-parish-glamour-grime-rookery-exhibition.

Kermode, Frank. “The House of Fiction.” *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction,* edited Malcolm Bradbury, 111–135. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977.

Klein, Terrance. “The Stormy Life of Muriel Spark.” *America Magazine,* August 03, 2011. https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2011/08/03/stormy-life-muriel-spark.

Kucała, Bożena. “The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark’s Fiction.” *Studia Litteraria Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis*, no. 1 (2011): 65-73. https:/doi/org/10.1080/1540496X.2015.1046337.

Lewis, C. S. *An Experiment in Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961.

Lodge, David. “Marvels and Nasty Surprises.” *New York Times*, October 20, 1985. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/01/03/11/specials/spark-stories.html.

MacKay, Marina. “Muriel Spark and the Meaning of Treason.” In *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives,* edited by David Herman, 63-93. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

MacLeod, Lewis. “Matters of Care and Control: Surveillance, Omniscience, and Narrative Power in *The Abbess of Crewe and Loitering with Intent*.” In *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives,* edited by David Herman, 203-223. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Maley, Willy. “Not to Deconstruct? Righting and Deference in *Not to Disturb*.” In *Theorizing Muriel Spark*, edited by Martin McQuillan, 170-188. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.

Maley, Willy. “Tall Tales and Stilettos: Muriel Spark’s Short Stories.” *Edinburgh Review* 134 (2012): 7-32.

Mambrol, Nasrullah. “Analysis of Muriel Spark’s Stories.” Literariness. November 2023, 2019. https://literariness.org/2019/11/23/analysis-of-muriel-sparks-stories/.

Maritain, Jacque. *Art and Scolasticism*. Translated by J. F. Scanlan. London: Sheed & Ward, 1923.

Mars-Jones, Adam. “The flickering of the Spark.” Review of *The Complete Short Stories*, by Muriel Spark. *The Observer*, September 30, 2011. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/sep/30/fiction.murielspark.

McQuillan, Martin. *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.

Milne, Drew. “Muriel Spark’s Crimes of Wit.” In *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, edited by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley, 110–21. Edinburgh University Press, 2010. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09xhd.15.

Reichardt, Mary R. Introduction to *Between Human and Divine: The Catholic Vision in American Culture*, edited by Mary R. Reichardt, 1-14. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Reizbaum, Marilyn. “The Stranger Spark.” In *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, edited by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley, 40–51. Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Richmond, Velma Bourgeois. “The Darkening Vision of Muriel Spark.” *Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 15, no. 1 (1973), 71-85. doi: 10.1080/00111619.1973.10690045.

Ricks, Christopher. “Extreme Instances.” *The New York Review of Books*, December 19, 1968. https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1968/12/19/extreme-instances/.

Royle, Nicholas. “Memento Mori.” In *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, edited by Martin McQuillan, 189-203. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001. Quoted in Marilyn Reizbaum. “The Stranger Spark.” In *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, edited by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley, 40–51.

Sacido-Romero, Jorge. “Ghostly Visitations in Contemporary Short Fiction by Women: Fay Weldon, Janice Galloway and Ali Smith.” *Atlantis* 38, no. 2 (2016): 83–102. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26330846.

Schiff, Stephen. “Muriel Spark Between the Lines.” *New Yorker,* May 24, 1993, 36-43.

Spark, Dame Muriel. “ An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark.” By Robert Hosmer. *Salmagundi*, no. 146/147 (2005): 127–58. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40549783.

Spark, Muriel. “Columbia Talks with Muriel Spark.” By Sarah Smith. *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, no. 30 (1998): 199–214. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41807892.

Spark, Muriel. “Come Along, Marjorie.” In *The Complete Short Stories*, 384-398. United Kingdom: Canongate Books, 2018.

Spark, Muriel. *Curriculum Vitae. Autobiography*. London: Penguin Books, c1993.

Spark, Muriel. “How I became a Novelist.” *John O’London’s Weekly* III, no. 61 (1960): 683.

Spark, Muriel. “Interview with Dame Muriel Spark.” By James Brooker and Margarita Estévez Saá. *Women’s Studies* 33, 8 (2004).

Spark, Muriel. “Keeping It Short.” By Ian Gillham. *Listener* 84, no. 4 (1970): 411-413. Quoted in Alan Bold. *Muriel Spark*. London: Methuen, 1986, 30.

Spark, Muriel. *Loitering with Intent*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1995.

Spark, Muriel. *Memento Mori*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961.

Spark, Muriel. “Miss Pinkerton’s Apocalypse.” In *The Complete Short Stories*, 284-292. United Kingdom: Canongate Books, 2018.

Spark, Muriel. “Muriel Spark – b. 1918.” By Jeanne Devoize and Claude Pamela Valette. *Journal of the Short Story in English*, September 1, 2003. http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/328.

Spark, Muriel. “My Conversion.” In *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, edited by Joseph Hynes, 24-28. New York: G.K. Hall, 1992.

Spark, Muriel. *The Bachelors*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963.

Spark, Muriel. “The Black Madonna.” In *The Complete Short Stories*, 525-550. United Kingdom: Canongate Books, 2018.

Spark, Muriel. “The Desegregation of Art.” In *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, edited by Joseph Hynes, 33-37. New York: G.K. Hall, 1992.

Spark, Muriel. “The Executor.” In *The Complete Short Stories*, 252-263. United Kingdom: Canongate Books, 2018.

Spark, Muriel. *The Mandelbaum Gate*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967.

Spark, Muriel. “The Mystery of Job’s Suffering.” In *The Golden Fleece*, edited by Penelope Jardine, 192-196. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2014. Quoted in A.W.

Beveridge. “The secular and the supernatural: Madness and psychiatry in the short stories of Muriel Spark.” *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh* 45 (2015): 305-312. doi: 10.4997/JRCPE.2015.411.

Spark, Muriel. “The Portobello Road.” In *The Complete Short Stories*, 495-524. United Kingdom: Canongate Books, 2018.

Spark, Muriel. “The Religion of an Agnostic.” *Church of England Newspaper*, November 27, 1953.

Spark, Muriel. “‘The Same Informed Air’: An Interview with Muriel Spark.” By Martin McQuillan. In *Theorizing Muriel Spark*, edited by Martin McQuillan, 210-229. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Spark, Muriel. “The Seraph and the Zambesi.” In *The Complete Short Stories*, 121-131. United Kingdom: Canongate Books, 2018.

Sproxton, Judy. “The Women of Muriel Spark Narrative and Faith.” *New Blackfriars* 73, no. 863 (1992): 432–40. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43249186.

Stannard, Martin. “Nativities: Muriel Spark, Baudelaire, and the Quest for Religious Faith.” *The Review of English Studies* 55, no. 218 (2004): 91–105. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3661392.

Stevenson, Randall. “The Postwar Contexts of Spark’s Writing.” In *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, edited by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley, 98–109. Edinburgh University Press, 2010. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09xhd.14.

Thirwell, Adam. “On Muriel Spark.” *Areté* 14, 2004.

Turner, Jenny. “Dame Muriel Spark.” *The Guardian*, April 17, 2006. https://www.theguardian.com/news2006/apr17/guardianobituaries.booksobituares.

Verongos, Helen T. and Cowell, Alan. “Muriel Spark, Novelist Who Wrote ‘The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,’ Dies at 88.” *The New York Times, April 16, 2006.* https://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/16/world/muriel-spark-novelist-who-wrote-the-prime-of-miss-jean-brodie-dies-at.html.

Walker, Dorothea. *Muriel Spark.* Boston, MA: Twayne, 1988.

Waugh, Patricia. “Muriel Spark and the Metaphysics of Modernity: Art, Secularization, and Psychosis.” In *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives,* edited by David Herman, 63-93. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Wickman, Matthew. “Spark, Modernism and Postmodernism.” In *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark,* edited by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley, 63–73. Edinburgh University Press, 2010. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09xhd.11.

Whittaker, Ruth. *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*. London: Macmillan, 1982. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-04929-5.