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Experimental Novels of Muriel Spark
(Bachelor's thesis)

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

In Olomouc

I would like to thank to my supervisor Mgr. Ema Jelínková, PhD. for her kind help and advice.

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1. Introduction

I have decided to write my thesis about a woman who changed the point of view in respect of the Scottish literature and culture and who did not want to follow the conventions of the thinking and writing in the twentieth century.

Muriel Spark was one of the most appreciated post-war Scottish woman writers who brought novelty and originality in the literature and who was awarded a lot of prizes. She was one of the most important representatives of the post-war modern Scottish fiction literature. I have chosen just one period of her work, namely five novellas written in the 1970s which are considered to be experimental. I would like to analyse them and find out why are they so different and exceptional.

First of all, I will outline the development of the Scottish literature from the seventeenth century until 1990s, its movements and typical Scottish subject matters. I will very briefly mention movements, trends, and authors which influenced the works of Muriel Spark. She entered the literature in 1950s so I will also mention her literary beginnings.

Secondly, I will introduce the life of Muriel Spark, her relation to Scotland and literature. I think that I also should mention her major literary achievements and awards because there are a lot of them and they are a significant proof of Spark's charisma. Dame Muriel Spark did everything in full details, fairly, and in sophisticated way. I do think that it is important to comprehend the life of this novelist because she claimed that "her life spoke for itself in her books and novels."¹

Thirdly, I will concentrate on the five experimental short novels from the 1970s: *The Public Image* (1968), *The Driver's Seat* (1970), *Not to Disturb* (1971), *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973), and *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974). In these novels Muriel Spark deals with affairs outside the Scotland, so we can call them non-Scottish. However, they are an inseparable part of Scottish literature so I will deal with the typical features concerning 'sense of Scottishness', 'nationality' and 'internationality'. I would like to find out the difference between Scottish and non-Scottish Spark's works and contrast them. I will also mention some historical

¹ Robert Hosmer, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark." *Salmagundi* (Saratoga Springs: Spring 2005., Iss 146/147).

events which meant a direct inspiration for Spark.

I will pay attention to analysis of the protagonists and compare them with the other Spark's characters. As I have already mentioned, Spark hid in her works pieces of her own life so I would like to collect them in selected novels and make one unit of them.

My aim in this thesis is to discover the hidden message between the lines of these experimental short novels from 1970s. I will support my claims by essays, critical references, and papers. But I believe that everyone can see the tidings and also hidden messages about modern civilisation which Muriel Spark gave us. The quality of the literary work is examined in time and Spark's novels have been popular more than forty years and her novels are still in the print. This fact supports the idea that the works of Muriel Spark are 'supertemporal' and unique.

2. Scottish literature and its tradition

When we want to understand the present, we have to go back to the past. This is not true only in a life but in the literature as well. Muriel Spark is considered to be the writer who was finally rooted in the Scottish literary tradition. If we want to understand her work in the context of Scottish literature, we have to go to the beginnings – to the medieval poems, fables, and ballads.

2.1. First Poems, Fables and Ballads

The first works of the Scottish literature shaped the literary thinking not only in the medieval times but they also became the source of inspiration for the twentieth-century writers. The most important work of the Scottish medieval literature is the poem *The Kingis Quair* which is written in "the form of an allegorical dream vision"² which brought new innovative element into the literature. As Gifford says, the medieval literature beginnings had undoubtedly impact upon modern writers, their methods, subject matters, and traditional motives:

Medieval writers often used the dream as a means of entry to a world otherwise unapproachable, a world of imagination where human action and motivation could be symbolically analysed, the normal rules of reality being suspended.³

These features – dreaming, symbols, imagination, and boundaries of the human being – are visible in the works of modern writers.

The medieval Scottish fables are also the important components in the process of shaping the Scottish literature. Robert Henryson gave rise to this traditional genre; he wrote the "boisterous violent stories"⁴ about wolves and foxes, showed us "a world of knockabout farce, violent incidents."⁵

Ballads are considered to be the most important shaping factor of the Scottish tradition in the literature. The term itself has its roots in French and the Scottish

2 see Douglas Gifford, Sarah Dunnigan and Alan MacGillivray, ed. *Scottish literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 10.

3 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 12.

4 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 17.

5 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 17.

"ballat" meant "a dancing song."⁶ Originally, the anonymous ballads reflected the religious, heroic, everyday scurrilous and erotic themes and motives of traditional "folksongs," dealing with the "tragic incidents involving murder; accident; outlawry; ill-fated love; feuds; battles; supernatural visitations [...]."⁷ In the eighteenth century, ballads supported national feelings and sense of Scottishness that was endangered in those days.

According to Douglas Dunn, we can call ballads

[...] sung short stories" which "show supernatural or actual events and persons rendered into what has become permanent fictitiousness" and which "arose from a whole people; their ancestral roots strike deep."⁸

When we take into consideration the fact, that ballads are short stories, we must see the revival of this "oral story-telling"⁹ Scottish tradition which was later on created on purpose by authors like Robert Burns, Allan Ramsay or Robert Fergusson.

6 see Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 67.

7 see Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 80.

8 Douglas Dunn, Introduction. *The Oxford Book of Scottish Short Stories*. Ed. by Douglas Dunn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) IX.

9 see Dunn IX.

3. Scottish Literature in the eighteenth century

The turning point not only in the Scottish literature but in the politics as well was the year 1707 in which *Act of Union between England and Scotland* was passed to form Great Britain. The *Act of Union* had a significant impact on every sphere of life in Scotland; the institutions had their own self-administration, the Presbyterian church dominated and the Scottish law remained. Despite Scotland gained its local autonomy, all significant political power was removed to London. Edinburgh became the centre of local events. It is the period of rebellions of the Jacobites and the feature of the protest against the dominion is apparent in the literature. The language was "anglicized"¹⁰ and the compactness of Scottish oneness, unity and nationality started to loose its character. A deep sense of this loss is apparent ever since, 'Englishness' became a part of everyday life not only in the language but also in the culture, philosophy, religion, politics and thinking. The *Act of Union* made Scotland a languageless, stateless nation which coloured its culture for centuries to come.¹¹

The *Act of Union* and a process of loosing the Scottish identity encouraged writers to stand for their traditions and a right to use their language. These attitudes appeared initially in the poetry. Scottish vernacular poetry is represented by Robert Burns, Allan Ramsay or Robert Fergusson. They also continue in the tradition of ballads and anticipate the attempts of the writers in the nineteenth and twentieth century to recover Scottish unity. According to Gifford, they created verses which were

[...] filled with the vigour of popular speech and song, with grotesque and reductive humour which mocks English pretension and political domination, and which extols the virtues of the homely, the communal and the native.¹²

10 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 106.

11 see Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 105-106.

12 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 107.

4. Scottish Literature in the nineteenth century

Authors of this era were influenced by the events inside as well as outside Scotland – Scottish Enlightenment, American War of Independence, French Revolution etc. Writers like Scott, James Hogg, John Galt, and Susan Ferrier were called Unionists and wanted to support the nationalistic idea,

[...] fashioning – or trying to fashion – narratives of Scotland [...] by showing protagonists representing Scotland struggling with issues of Scottish history and politics, religion and social change.¹³

It was the time of paradoxes and not only major representatives themselves had binary insights and had to "balance their views of the old and new Scotland, [...] the vernacular traditions and the new thinking."¹⁴ The binary comprehension is apparent in every sphere of human life:

Scotland in the age of Scott seemed caught in a struggle between its past and its future, split at almost every level in its own sense of identity, divided in religion, divided in philosophy and divided in politics.¹⁵

Sir Walter Scott's contribution to the Scottish literature was establishing of the novel as a form and psychological insights in his works in a combination with the history which lead to the development of the historical novel. The Scott's heritage can be found in earlier works of Muriel Spark, in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961).

13 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 193-4.

14 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 196.

15 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 196-197

4.1. Doubleness

Marshall Walker defines Walter Scott, James Hogg, John Galt, Thomas Carlyle and John Davidson as ambiguous writers "with the apparent conflict of ideas and attitudes."¹⁶ On the one hand, they were "politically conservative men."¹⁷

Scott's aristocratic predilections are offset by his interest in the Scottish oral tradition and by the respect he feels for the independence of ordinary Scottish folk. Hogg's suspicion of reformism is balanced by sympathy for the common people terrorized by the conservative Presbyterian establishment.¹⁸

Galt displayed his interest in small towns in Scotland and John Davidson showed "his humanitarian anger about the mean life."¹⁹ According to Walker, the clue for a question of doubleness can be found "in the conflict itself and in the proposition that it is this conflict which ignites the humanitarian elements in these writers to burn so brightly."²⁰ These elements are called 'Caledonian antiszygy', a term coined by George Gregory Smith²¹ who said that "'antiszygy' means the conjunction of opposites"²² and it can be traced in almost every sphere of Scottish action. It is in fact an oxymoronic expression,

[...] according to Smith, the sharpest expression of these two aspects are, first, a love of detailed realistic fact and, second, a love of fantasy and the grotesque. [...] It is this doubleness of the antiszygy which allows the humanitarian sympathies of Scott, Hogg, Galt, Carlyle and Davidson to coexist with their conservatism; it underlies Robert Louis Stevenson's interest in the cabinet-making burglar, Daecon Brodie, and his studies of yoked opposites in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).²³

During the nineteenth century, a lot of authors probed into the tradition of duality. We can trace this feature not only in the Scottish works of Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Hogg's *Justified Sinners* (1824), but also in the

16 Marshal Walker, *Scottish Literature since 1707* (London: Longman, 1996) 14.

17 Walker 10.

18 Walker 13.

19 Walker 13.

20 Walker 14.

21 see Walker 14.

22 Walker 14.

23 Walker 14, 15.

other national literatures – in Dostoevsky's *The Double* (1846) and in Wilde's decadent work *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). From the feature of duality is just one step to Gothic feature and demotic conception of horror and terror.²⁴ Muriel Spark's novels definitely continue in the Stevenson's games, dualisms, paradoxes, symbols, contradictions, morals, and ambivalent readings.

It is said that the most important and influencing works are those that we can not describe in few words and ironically that we can describe from whichever point of view because it synthesizes all of them and it is up to us what we find in it.

4.1.1. James Hogg

James Hogg was fond of Scottish oral tradition, folk and supernatural elements which are typical for his work. Despite his lack of education, Hogg is "arguably the first great psychological novelist of Europe."²⁵ *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) is a novel which we call Gothic. The inspiration Hogg found in satirical approaches of Robert Burns's poetry.

The Justified Sinners is a "novel about the atrocities."²⁶ Hogg used innovative approaches; his main character is more anti-hero than hero, contrasts devil and victim, deals with the thoughts from the Bible, uses the technique of time-shifting and tension between supernatural with real. etc. Gifford claims that Hogg

[...] exploited ambiguity and ambivalence. Always he allows two possibilities: that supernatural manifestations may be the product of a diseased imagination; or that the supernatural is real.²⁷

Hogg's border between reality and 'supernaturality' is not fixed. He came up with the idea of the contrast and tension between usual-rational and religious-transcendental events.²⁸ Roger Lewis in the introduction to the *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* adverts to the religious element in Hogg's novel:

24 see Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 409.

25 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 196.

26 see Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 290.

27 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 295.

28 see Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 296.

Hogg's novel is a condemnation of non-benevolent Calvinism – Jean Chauvin (1509-64), or John Calvin, being an influential proponent of predestination: a few of us will be blessed with 'efficacious grace and the gift of perseverance' and will enjoy salvation; the rest of us are damned from the outset and no amount of prayers or good offices will protect us from eternal torment. (The biblical authority is John, 10, 26-9: 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me.') [...] Hogg was never going to believe in a doctrine that branded people with original sin and excluded them from achievement.²⁹

Hogg's novel refers to the "serious and lengthy theological debate – about free will versus predestination"³⁰ which he emphasizes in a non-conventional way:

'If you get rid of evil you get rid of choice. You've got to have things to choose between, and that means good and *evil*. If you don't choose, you're not human anymore. You're something else. Or you're dead.'³¹

The novel was not accepted very well when he published it in 1824. But the opinion on this masterpiece has changed in time. Nowadays, it is highly regarded as one of the most breakthrough and original novels "for its insight into the perversion of the Scottish psyche by Calvinism and its redefinition of the devil as corrupt theology."³²

Roger Lewis develops the idea about the predetermination of human beings in Hogg's novel:

'Human beings are defined by freedom of choice. Once you have them doing what they're told is good just because they're going to get a lump of sugar instead of kick, then ethics no longer exist.' [...] we are each of us a mixture of volatile compounds, 'forepunished' for our wrongdoings, at liberty to carry out 'mixed rape and torture and cannibalism'. It is up to each individual to exert self-control and decide which way to proceed in the garden of the forking paths.³³

Lewis also points out one very interesting finding of Burgess – "virtually a century before it was clinically diagnosed, Hogg's book demonstrates the

29 Roger Lewis, Introduction. *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. By James Hogg (London: Everyman's Library, 1992) xii.

30 Roger Lewis, Introduction xxi.

31 Roger Lewis, Introduction xxi.

32 Walker 13.

33 Roger Lewis, Introduction xxi.

symptoms of schizophrenia:"³⁴

1. The patient's conversation may be unreal and disturbing.
2. Thoughts and perceptions are odd and distorted and often imply persecution of the patient.
3. The patient may hear voices, see visions, have irrational beliefs and delusion.
4. Behaviour may be bizarre.
5. The patient may be agitated and may behave in an antisocial or violent way.³⁵

Some of Spark's main protagonists, lets say more anti-heroes than heroes manifest schizophrenic inclinations, Lise in *The Driver's Seat* or Elsa in *The Hothouse by the Eastern River* among many, share this dark 'Scottish' predilection.

4.1.2. Gothic novel

Traditional Gothic novels have the distinctive characteristics which we can find in almost every Gothic work:

[...] mystery and horror, intended to chill the spine and curdle the blood. They contain a strong element of the supernatural and have all or most of the now familiar topography, sites, props, [...] wild and desolate landscapes, dark forests, [...] torture chambers, [...] medieval castles [...].³⁶

The form of the Gothic novel developed in time and in the nineteenth century changed not only the form itself, but also its perception. People changed their opinions on the elements in the Gothic novels such as "madness, states of fear, extremes of suffering, cruelty, violence, crime, torture and murder [...] Satanism, possession, black magic, exorcism or diabolic pacts."³⁷ Interpretation of the Gothic fiction is not easy:

Gothic fiction is most narrowly interpreted as a cultural phenomenon of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, initially portraying fear and the supernatural

34 Roger Lewis, Introduction xxii.

35 Roger Lewis, Introduction, xxii. From *Medical Terminology in Hospital Practice*, ed. P. M. Davies.

36 J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1992) 355-356.

37 see J. A. Cuddon 359.

in medieval settings [...] More broadly, Gothic represents the demands of the unconscious, the imagination and desire, transgressing literary and social conventions and provoking unease, and it is difficult to separate from related modes such as 'horror' fiction and fantasy.³⁸

It is apparent that modern authors do not use these original Gothic features and settings in all of their works. The idea of Gothic fiction is in fact widening its definition. It has attached new connotations which involve

[...] a particular attitude towards the recapture of history; a particular kind of literary style; a version of self-conscious un-realism; a mode of revealing the unconscious; connections with the primitive, the barbaric, the tabooed."³⁹ Post-war Gothic fiction is not exactly the same one which appeared at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, it differs in several facts. Writers in the twentieth century use Gothic as a "satirical" and "parodic form."⁴⁰

The position of women within the Gothic fiction has changed as well. Women initially were the victims of monsters, but emancipation and acknowledgement of the position in the society influenced the reception of women in Gothic fiction. "On a wave of psycho-sexual debate the gothic itself seemed to lend itself to feminism as an ideal vehicle for the notations of gender."⁴¹

Initially, Gothic fiction was regarded to be in an opposition to realism, but later on, it ironically appears in the realistic novels. But there are still Gothic features recalled in time and adapted to changes in literature. The themes of Gothic fiction are still dark – "incest, rape, various kinds of transgression of the boundaries between the natural and the human, the human and the divine."⁴² One of the permanent elements of Gothic fiction is fear. As Punter says,

[...] fear is not merely a theme or an attitude, it also has consequences in terms of form, style and the social relations of the texts; and exploring Gothic is also exploring fear and seeing the various ways in which terror breaks through the surfaces of literature,

38 Carol Anderson, "Emma Tennant, Elspeth Barker, Alice Thompson: Gothic Revisited", *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, ed. Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 117-118.

39 David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A history of Gothic fictions since 1765 to present day*, Vol. 1 – The Gothic Tradition, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1996) 4.

40 see Anderson 118.

41 Clive Bloom, "Introduction: Death's Own Backyard", *Gothic Horror, A Reader's Guide from Poe to King and Beyond*, ed. Clive Bloom (London: Macmillan Press, 1998) 8.

42 see Punter 17.

differently in every case, but also establishing for itself certain distinct continuities of language and symbol.⁴³

Earlier novels of Muriel Spark have the Scottish fiction traditional features of historical novel, novel of manners, and Gothic novel; even her later works and novels in the 1970s have the features of supernatural and ambivalent reading. Spark is the continuator of these techniques.

43 Punter 18.

5. Scottish literature in the Victorian and Edwardian era

Conditions of the state, religion, starting urbanisation, stagnation of cultural life and – last but not least – English dominant in Scottish schools and prevailing over Scot and Gaelic influenced the writing in this era. A lot of writers rejected the ‘sense of Scottisshness’ and regarded themselves as English; Carlyle, Stevenson, Davidson and Buchan to exemplify. Their works have the feature of this transformation and ironical and critical opinions on Scotland. This era seemed to be ‘frozen’ in literature and culture, however, "with the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1855 a huge number of new presses and papers appeared across the country."⁴⁴

Despite the decline in the literature, there were authors who stand for the Scottish tradition and influenced the ‘frozen’ "Victorian loss of faith and moral hypocrisy."⁴⁵ George Macdonald's *Phantastes* (1858), Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874) and Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) predetermined the direction of the Scottish literature not only for contemporary era, but for the future writers (Spark among them) as well. These authors do not use romantic themes any more and they set their works to the cities.

There was also "*A School of Scottish fiction*" founded; it kept Scott's, Gait's and Hogg's traditions.

Author of this era wanted to preserve traditions of the Scottish literature, and among their contributions also rank the fact, that they crated and prepared "fresh soil for a different kind of renaissance."⁴⁶

5.1. George Macdonald

Death is usual subject matter in Macdonald's novels, partly because of his personal experiences and partly because he

[...] developed a philosophy of death that entailed looking on it as a friend, as something to be welcomed, a ‘great good’ that is coming. It was an intimate part of his religious faith, in tune with the Christian belief that one must die in order that one may live eternally, but at the same time it was part of his integrating myth involving nature,

44 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 322.

45 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 323.

46 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 324.

love and death in a combined conquest of humanity's deepest psychological fears.⁴⁷

This feature is reflected in his *Phantastes* (1858) where Macdonald used elements of fantasy, dreams, imagination, fear, welcoming death, and ambivalent distinction between good and evil. We can find these elements in the works of Muriel Spark.

5.2. Robert Louis Stevenson

Stevenson's major works are recognizable for the

[...] struggle between good and evil, the difficulties of setting boundaries between them, with the consequent ambiguities of interpretation and their representation through dualism of situation and character.⁴⁸

The purest example of his techniques is a tale *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) which undoubtedly became a source of inspiration for Muriel Spark.

Stevenson set this work in London but the influence of his Edinburgh origins is undeniable. He deals with the "dualism of opposites."⁴⁹ This antagonistic relation can be seen in his relationship with his father which was not good. Stevenson used this feature in his play *Beacon Brodie or The Double life* (1880), a direct connection with Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1969) who as well as her foregoer beacon Brodie leads a double life. She is a respectful person but she is paradoxically mistress and lover of two men and does not give a good example to her 'Brodie girls'.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is a tale without limits, Stevenson uses techniques of repetition and thus also gradation, changes of narrative points of view and narrators themselves, epistolary features, but all in all, it is a complex work. Stevenson, as well as Hogg, questions about the essence of truth, the position of the woman in the society and foreshadows the tabooed topics like sexuality. This work brought the shocking and innovative effect, Stevenson fights not only against the literary conceptions but against the conventions and limits in

47 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 335.

48 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 402.

49 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 403.

the society. The characters advert to the Freudian division of the psyche, the endless struggle between it and ego.⁵⁰ Allusions to Hogg's *Justified Sinners* is apparent in Jekyll's realisation of his deeds, but the most important in the process is a reader who finishes the work. Stevenson shows the moral aspects but does not judge, it is up to us.

Stevenson's techniques of ambiguity, enigmaticity, and duality are the main features of his works, he tries to unit two incompatible states of mind, real and supernatural elements, seeking for the truth are anticipators of Spark's art.

⁵⁰ Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 417.

6. Scottish literature in the twentieth century

6.1. Scottish Renaissance

Hugh MacDiarmid recalled the Scottish themes, myths, rituals, and traditions in his works and preferred Scots language. He published anthologies of works written by pre-war authors (WW1) as well as post war authors. "The writers of the renaissance believed that lasting cultural regeneration must go hand-in-hand with social, economic and political regeneration [...]."⁵¹ In the strict sense of the word, the Renaissance also means "a Scottish manifestation of literary modernism in the posts-1918 period"⁵² which brought the themes of

[...] the philosophical awareness of a civilisation in crisis, exploration of themes through the medium of myth and symbol and an interest in the theories of Freud and Jung in regard to the unconscious mind and the imagination.⁵³

The main tendency of the 'Scottish Renaissance' was "a desire for roots, for Scottish identity defined in terms of traditional language and place."⁵⁴ Writers of this era considered Scotland to be a living country, a living unity of different regional traditions. The sense of traditional writing continued and had a great impact on writers in the 1960s.

6.1.1. Freud, Jung, Frazer and mythology

The era after the First World War was characterized by "psychological and spiritual concerns of many writers".⁵⁵ This approach is logical, when we can not explain insane thing like the war, we look for the answer in the philosophy, history, and traditions. Sir James Frazer and his religious work *The Golden Bough*, Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung offered answers to the questions and helped people to escape from their lives in the war:

51 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 508.

52 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 506.

53 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 506.

54 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 722-723.

55 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 514.

Essentially, Frazer's recognition of recurrent patterns in world legend and myth were to be taken up by thinkers Freud and Jung and modified into theories of the unconscious and subconscious – a recognition that the mysterious world of the hidden mind, and of dreams, held deep significances which we ignore to our loss. [...] Scotland is perceived, often through dream or a version of second sight, as the spiritually barren land, and regeneration is found through acceptance of essential truth in legend and myth.⁵⁶

Scottish writers of the renaissance, namely Gunn, MacDiarmid, Muir, and Mitchison took something from Freud's and Jung's doctrines. They go back to the roots; they look for the identity of their ancestors.

Freudian mythmaking and the relation of consciousness and unconsciousness influenced Scottish writers, they hide something unusual based on the relation of *Id* and *Ego* in their characters. It brings the paradox which creates the dual antipode, rational – irrational state of mind.

Muriel Spark in *Not to Disturb* highlights the link between Heloise's pregnancy and her state of mind, her intuitive sense is empowered.

6.2. Scottish literature between two wars

Inter-war Scottish literature was created by several groups of writers:

Firstly, those older writers who had seen previous revivals come and go, together with those younger yet uncommitted writers who nevertheless worked with more traditional content and form; secondly, those committed to the aims of 'renaissance'; and thirdly, those sceptical regarding the validity of notions of 'renaissance'.⁵⁷

1930s saw the huge increase in the Scottish writing and publications about Scotland. A lot of anthologies, journal articles, essays, and works in general were produced. Not only Scottish writers, but also English ones started to be interested in the themes of nationality, heritage, and national language.⁵⁸

56 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 514.

57 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 703.

58 see Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 507-511.

6.3. Post-war Scottish literature, since 1945

After the Second World War, the literature was influenced by the German National Socialism. This period did not recognize the values of preceding era, mythology and Scottish traditions were thrown aside. Typical features are negation, disillusionment, and satire. Robin Jenkins in his works presented "mocking ideas of Scottish heritage"⁵⁹ and influenced the authors of 1960s. Strong disenchantment can be found in the novels of Edward Gaitens and Dorothy Haynes. Among other disenchanted of this era rank George Fried and James Kelman. This malaise was also reflected in the poetry and drama.

In the 60s, the Scottish National Party achieved that eleven of its members got to Westminster. The reaction of the 'disillusioned writers' was that they refused the idea of Scottish mythology and 'going back to roots' completely. But not every author shifted in this way, as Gifford claims,

[...] outstandingly, *Tunes of Glory* (1965) and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) showed that James Kennaway and Muriel Spark preferred to present central characters who still stood as representative of Scotland and its values.⁶⁰

In the 1970s, there were some 'recallings' of the Scottish tradition but not centred on the tradition and myth itself but dealing with modern subject matters.

1980s were more open to the process of 'going back to past:'

[...] reassessing its older texts, re-examining the place of women in town and country, exploring ways of using a recognisably Scottish perspective in viewing the world outside and simultaneously re-asserting the validity of Scottish fictional and literary tradition.⁶¹

Scottish literature started to find and build its own identity and unity, however, the unity is provided with heterogeneous approaches and genres. It is still in a process which refers to MacDiarmid's heritage but at the same time keeps up with modern movements, trends, and non-Scottish approaches. This diversity enables the authors to find their field and subject matter of writing.⁶²

59 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 725.

60 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 727.

61 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 735.

62 see Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 735-736.

6.3.1. Post-war Scottish Fiction

Modern Scottish fiction is the most prosperous genre in after-war Scottish literature. Douglas Gifford distinguishes three post-war periods in the Scottish fiction:

Firstly, the period from 1945 to the mid 1960s: writers who belonged to the Renaissance, 'survivors' and their post-war writing.

Secondly, the period from the mid 1960s to 1980: writers of 'transitional period', sceptics full of disillusionment with the post-war situation and looking for the new confidence and techniques in their writing. Muriel Spark is considered to be a post-war sceptic writer.

Thirdly, the period from 1980s up until the end of the century is the era of the writers who found the optimistic approach.

6.3.1.1. Post-war sceptics

1940s saw war disillusionment hand in hand with "industrialisation and economic depression"⁶³ and tragic-comic approaches in the works of Edward Gaitens, J. F. Hendry, Dorothy Hayens, Robin Jenkins and James Kennaway. But these works are not only sceptical but they found their means of reflection, they are also full of wit and deal with the Scottish subject matters like rural themes or nationality. Muriel Spark is also considered to be a sceptic because of her "effective ironic and subtle deconstruction of Scottish teaching"⁶⁴ in the work *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. This work is not only a parody of the education but it also refers to "old Edinburgh traditions."⁶⁵

In 1980s, the most important changes were presented in the works of Scottish authors like Alasdair Gray, Iain Banks, Alan Massie, Ronald Frame and others.

"Their work developed a new kind of imaginative relationship with their country and its culture [...] the idea of a whole modern Scotland, linking past with present and future, began to be emphasised."⁶⁶

63 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 845.

64 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 861.

65 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 861.

66 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 721.

6.3.1.2. Post-war optimists

By the 1990s, there were the turning points in the conception of approaches in the Scottish literature which changed the mood of the literature itself. As Douglas Gifford claims; there was a need to "find different aspects of Scottish tradition and inspiration."⁶⁷ But it does not mean that "the traditional sceptical bleakness of Scottish fiction could disappear overnight."⁶⁸ Authors of the 1980s pushed the Scottish literature towards more international scales. Among writers who contributed to this changes rank Alan Warner, Stuart Hood, Ronald Frame, and Bernard McLaverty. An important attitude which influenced the changes was the defining and crossing gender borders. Women writers like Janice Galloway, Alison Kennedy and of course Muriel Spark start to be more literary emancipated and contributed to these changes.

6.3.2. Broadening of the horizons

In the twentieth century not only literature reflected the social, political, economical and hierarchy change, there were another important factors which helped to shape the Scottish literature. Women emancipation, recaptured sense of Scottishness, and dealing with the taboos in the works are important factors as well. Muriel Spark was one of the innovators who fully participated on pushing the Scottish literature towards more international and unconventional status.

6.3.2.1. Women writers in the twentieth century

An innovative group of authors at the beginning of the twentieth century was created by women who did not write about Scottish subjects, on the contrary, they commented upon the program of the MacDiarmid-male-Renaissance Group which omitted them completely.

These women writers were also innovators, presenting from the inside female experience in the cities, small towns and rural areas of Scotland in a way that was strikingly and confidently new in Scottish writing."⁶⁹ Lumsden and Christianson claim

67 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 937.

68 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 937.

69 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 508.

that "there is an assumption that as women writers share certain agendas and influences, and interrogate the 'space' of Scotland in their own way."⁷⁰

Willa Muir and Catherine Carswell are representatives of this movement. They did not deal with the Scottish-nationalistic topics very much; in the first place, they dwelled on the woman as a subject matter of their works.⁷¹

All these novels by women writers have at their centre the lives of women depicted from the inside, and this, together with their individual innovative approaches to language or setting or complementary themes, brings something new to Scottish fiction.⁷²

They also brought new narrative structures and techniques, experiments and innovative features into Scottish literature so they definitely should not be omitted when we speak about the Scottish Renaissance as MacDiarmid-male-Renaissance Group did.

Muriel Spark partly participated on this movement. Her work is sometimes considered to be feminist-based but I would not generalize it. She is undoubtedly one of the most influencing woman-writers who had to find their position in the literature. She supported the MacDiarmid's 'Scottish element' in her works in the 1960s, but on the other hand, she was involved in the woman-writers emancipation in 1970s; it was because she was a woman and writer and wanted to compact it not because she was a feminist.

By the 1990s, there was a lot of Scottish woman writes but after this interval; new writers brought the ideas and new points of view "that being female and being Scottish are linked and culturally positive"⁷³ aspects. New wave of authoress brought more open opinions which "raised interesting issues about sexuality, gender and nation".⁷⁴ The authors who introduced their works by 1990s continued in publishing simultaneously with the new waves. Women-writers tried to find their own style of writing, either through the feminist movement or by themselves:

70 Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden, Introduction. *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, ed. Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 3.

71 see Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 512-513.

72 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 513.

73 Christianson 1.

74 Christianson 2.

Whether they defined themselves as feminists or not, women writers [...] wrote out of a double consciousness: on the one hand, a newly intense awareness of their role as female artists who had inherited an increasingly great tradition, and, on the other hand, a newly protective sense of their vulnerability as women who inhabited a culture hostile to female ambition and haunted by eroticized images by women.⁷⁵

Scottish woman writers shaped the national literature as well as male writers, thanks to emancipation and new points of view, feministic movement, laws given to them and realisation that ‘the skirts can do the same things as trousers’, they brought to the literature a number of styles, innovations, genres and what is more – needed diversity. "Frequently, it is women writers within national cultures who seemingly disrupt homogeneity."⁷⁶ According to Patricia Craig, it is important to differentiate two stand-points:

They write *as* women (which is inescapable), not *like* women (which carries-still-imposed characteristics of weakness and inferiority).⁷⁷

6.3.2.2. Sexuality and other Taboos

"If the rules of fiction are there to be broken, so too are the rules of society."⁷⁸ The innovative approaches brought new themes to the literature, themes which build the limits to transgress them. Subjects of standard language and the right of the author to write and publish in his dialect, political themes, the world of poor and rich, gaps in the society, violence and sexuality and many others. One of the pioneering authors of this era is James Kelman who touches upon the themes of class hierarchy in the society; Duncan McLean, Alan Warner, Irvine Welsh and others stand for their right to write not in standard English but in slang, which was a kind of ‘Scottish revolt’ against ‘British power’. Alistair MacLean and John Burnside deal openly with the shocking issues of violence and sexuality from the dark side of the matter. Betsy Whyte, Ellen Galford, and Jackie Kay have also

⁷⁵Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, "Contemporary literature", *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, ed. Gilbert, Gubar (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985) 1677.

⁷⁶ Christianson 2.

⁷⁷ Patricia Craig, Introduction. *The Oxford Book of Modern Women's Stories*. Ed. by P. Craig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) viii.

⁷⁸ Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 960.

contributed to the changes; they underline the theme of gay and lesbian in their works. These subject matters brought a shock:

Not only conventional concepts of space, time, authority, and morality but also received ideas about class, race, and gender were dissolved and revised in a world reeling from what social observer Alvin Toffler has called *Future Shock*.⁷⁹

This shock could be found in almost every sphere of the human existence, in biochemical, mathematical, surgical nuclear and others fields which brought a "world of radical instability" and which was reflected also in the literature.⁸⁰

Among the most forbidden taboos rank sex and sexuality. This theme was almost forbidden in the literature in the nineteenth century, but twentieth century made some progress in it. It became the daily topic in the newspapers, literature with 'how-to-do-it advice' was published and the taboo turned to be the conversation topic number one.⁸¹

Sexuality and tabooed sexual themes like rape, violence, 'Hoggian Justified sinners', Stevenson's duality and ambivalent reading are frequent subject matter in the modern Gothic novels. The position of women in the literature changed - "women in male-authored Gothic fiction are often represented voyeuristically as sexual victims of predators"⁸² while female-authored Gothic fiction is very often written from the position of the victim, from the antipodal point. These works denounce the themes of sexual abuse, rape, violation, the position of the women in the society and takes rather feministic point of view. The women as writers of Gothic fiction and women as protagonists of these novels are recognizable and distinguishable. Adrienne Rich's term "process of victimization"⁸³ is significant and appropriate. The perception and position of women characters changed in time:

from 1940 to 1984 images of women were biologized and sexualized as never before. Indeed, the traditional polarities of angel and monster, virgin and whore, lady and madwoman were consistently eroticized in this period. The nineteenth century had praised women for purity and decorum while blaming them for passion and desire, but

79 Gilbert 1666.

80 see Gilbert 1654-1655.

81 see Gilbert 1674-1675.

82 Anderson 118.

83 see Anderson 118.

the second half of the twentieth century virtually reversed those moral principles; contemporary writers blamed women for frigidity and praised them for sexiness.⁸⁴

Many other authors deal not only with the tabooed matters like sexual abuse, violence, and other physical force but also with political power, corruption, and last but not least social themes.⁸⁵

The mood of the Scottish fiction went through a change in time, modern works are more optimistic, however, they preserve the Scottish gothic and supernatural tradition. The subject-matters are also different in the diverse periods, but in general we can say that all Scottish taboos and clichés were surpassed and there are no subject-matter limits for writers. The modern fiction writers fight against the conventional rights and show the weaknesses of the society in different angles, whether by apocalyptic vision or picaresque approach. The results of the innovative movements are successful:

Scottish fiction – and indeed Scottish writing generally – is now more varied in mood, more eclectic, and more willing to challenge Scotland’s traditional beliefs and values than ever before.⁸⁶

6.3.2.3. Nationalism

Muriel Spark’s position in a forming of the Scottish nationalism is unique and ambivalent; Edinburgh cultivated in her the feeling of exiledom so she decided to live in London. She was fighting being considered Scottish which lead her to move from Edinburgh but at the same time she cultivated the Scottish vision and supported the nationalistic movements.

When we want to speak about nationalism and sense of Scottishness, we have to be aware that

[...] they are conducted invariably with reference to other debates on contemporary ‘identity’, such as class, sexuality and gender, globalisation and the new Europe, cosmopolitanism and postcoloniality, as well as questions of ethnicity, race and postnational multiculturalism.⁸⁷

84 Gilbert 1666.

85 see Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 960-962.

86 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 980.

87 Berthold Schoene, "Going Cosmopolitan: Reconstituting ‘Scottishness’ in Post-devolution

On the other hand, Douglas Dunn claims that the liberty should not be limited by the duty to write as a nationalist:

countries remake themselves constantly through their fiction. [...] There is really no getting away from the contrast between one kind of 'Scottish formation' and another. It is a matter of language as well as experience and origin, a matter of 'lexical identity', and of class and national affiliations. It is also a matter of personal liberty, of the writer's freedom to write about who, where, and when, whatever, he or she likes.⁸⁸

Scottish literature is then forming its shape by plurality and democracy, its homogeneity is thanks to its heterogeneity. "Scottish literature is being freed from its traditional shackles and is being interpreted as the expression of a fully modern nation."⁸⁹

Dunn supports this idea when he claims that it is inherent for a writer to deal with national subject-matters but "there need not to be a preliminary national thesis underpinning it."⁹⁰ As we can see in Spark's non-Scottish novels, they "show that stories by Scottish writers need not to be set in Scotland and do not need to be demotic."⁹¹ Dunn exemplifies his claims by Spark's characters:

Full of wit, and full of woe, Spark's characters are like actors and actresses playing the parts of her characters, and it is difficult to see her sportive fiction flourishing without a larger range of experience from which to draw. Cosmopolitan, as well as histrionic she relies on a personality of 'Scottish formation' (Spark's own phrase) more than a precise national identity.⁹²

The Scottish identity is apparent in the literature but it is not the condition. The modern approaches do not have any fixed rules – as it was in the Gothic tradition – and plurality and variability of the works is opening the doors to the international literary world. "Scottish literature continues to make its mark on the international stage."⁹³

Criticism", *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) 2.

88 Dunn XXVII.

89 Katherine Ashley, "Scots Abroad: The International reception of Scottish Literature", *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) 345.

90 Dunn XXVI.

91 Dunn XXVI.

92 Dunn XXVII.

93 Ashley 353.

6.3.2.4. The sense of Scottishness

‘Opening the Scottish doors to the world,’ plurality of genres and themes recall the question of the Scottish identity. This matter of fact can be seen from the different angles which are not limited by the Scottish borders.

According to Katherine Ashley,

[...] there is an a priori definition of ‘Scottishness’ with which most foreign readers are familiar; what makes something Scottish – be it literature, music or film – is its treatment of (stereo)typical, even mythical Scottish themes: bens, glens and whisky, the Highlands, the heather, the brogue, whirling bagpipes and kilted warriors.⁹⁴

It is said that every country has its typical features that we can find either in the cuisine or in the literature. In my opinion, we can find the national features probably in both these fields. The Czech literature is half sweet, half sour like the taste of the national dish - roast pork with dumplings and sauerkraut; Italian pizza is a meal of different sunny tastes and colours, and Austrian schnitzel is shaped and dished out so specifically that we are little scared of the preciseness.

The best thing about national features in the literature and cuisine is that inhabitants of a certain country do not consider it to be somehow uncommon, only people from different countries and different points of view can see the basic essence native inhabitants are born with. But I do not want to limit these features to the borders of the countries. This feature of a certain country can have everyone brought up with in different parts of the world but in touch with the former country, with ‘the essence’. On the other hand,

[...] many of us feel most conscious of our national difference when elsewhere: I am most Scottish to myself whilst outside Scotland, in unfamiliar surroundings, which is when perceptions of me as a ‘foreigner’ are likely to interfere with my indigenous sense of self.⁹⁵

It is rather hard to define terms like ‘sense of Scottishness’ or ‘nation’. Everybody knows what we mean but it is not catchable. Everyone perceives something Scottish in the Scottish literature except Scottish writers themselves. Is

94 Ashley 345.

95 Schoene 15.

it nationalism and taste of a proudly-looking 'Haggis'? W.R. Aitken claims: "There is a tendency for the Scots writer's nationality to make itself felt, even when writing in English."⁹⁶ But they do not know about it! Harvey Wood defined it in this way:

One can only say, perhaps, that Scottish literature is literature, whether in Scots or English, written by Scotsmen to whom the Scottish habit of mind and Scottish literary conventions were more natural than English.⁹⁷

6.3.2.4.1. The Internationalists

We can find one of the new approaches towards Scottishness in the works of Scottish novelists who set their works outside Scotland but the main protagonists are usually but not necessarily Scots. Among these international writers rank William Boyd, Stuart Hood, Ronald Frame, Alan Massie and Muriel Spark. Their connections with Scotland and Scottish traditions are different but still apparent.

William Boyd was born in Africa and his works are also set abroad, however, we can find in his work "a love of the picaresque, the tragic-comic and the grotesque, together with idiosyncratic moral viewpoints"⁹⁸ which are considered to be features of the Scottish literature.

Ronald Frame in his works

[...] insists on the essential Scottishness [...] and looks widely at Britain [...] with the detached and sceptical analysis of the sophisticated lives of the English South seen from a curious but recognisably Scottish viewpoint.⁹⁹

Stuart Hood's works also exemplify "the new internationalism of Scottish writing, constantly linking Scottish protagonists and inheritance with European politics and culture."¹⁰⁰

Alan Massie in his works focuses on "the morality of twentieth-century

96 William Russell Aitken, Introduction. *Scottish Literature in English and Scots: A Guide to Information Sources*. Ed by W.R. Aitken (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1982) xvii.

97 Henry Harvey Wood, *Scottish literature* (London: Longmans, Green, for the British Council, 1952) 7.

98 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 962.

99 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 963.

100 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 965.

international politics and power,"¹⁰¹ and considers "sensitive accounts of Scotland in history and change."¹⁰²

Features of the new Scottish fiction can be seen in several details, especially in methods and themes the authors dealt with. For the Scottish writing are typical these components: "deliberate play with ambiguities of morality", "manipulations of effects of memory and time", "elegiac and fascinating style", "secrets behind high walls", "hints of the supernatural" which was used by Gibbon and Gunn, "preoccupation with themes of divide loyalties and the examination of the point at which they become betrayal", and last but not least feature can be seen in the "tragedy which emerges with fated inevitability."¹⁰³ All of these features can be found in the works of 'the Internationalists', too. Muriel Spark did not want to live in Scotland but she was influenced by the Scottish features which are reflected in her works.

Spark is but one of a remarkably high number of contemporary Scottish women writers who base themselves and the focus of their work outside Scotland; yet significantly, like Spark, they often share the interest of the home Scots in the possibilities of the supernatural, and in older Scottish fiction, but with a powerful feminist deployment.¹⁰⁴

Spark's 'non-Scottish' works are sometimes classed to be a part of the English literature. Aitken expressed his disagreement with this classing, however, he has to admit that "as to the authors who may be considered to belong to the Scottish tradition, there is no final agreement; and there is never likely to be"¹⁰⁵ so it is hard to divide the authors between Scots and English writers into the classes. We can find the answer in the traditional approaches, because

[...] past defines present; roots are deep and tenacious; contemporary individuals are powerless to resist the effects of tradition, and the will only successfully realise themselves if they move with the grain of 'Scottish' experience.¹⁰⁶

'The International Scottish' authors use Scottish traditions or Gothic and

101 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 966.

102 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 966.

103 see Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 963-966.

104 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 972.

105 William Russell Aitken, Introduction. *Scottish Literature in English and Scots: A Guide to Information Sources*. Ed by W.R. Aitken (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1982) xvii-xviii.

106 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 724.

supernatural Scottish subject matters in their works, the mixture of old approaches and modern narrative experiments, they explore boundaries of gender, sexuality, Scottish unity and identity in the woman frame of perception.¹⁰⁷ It is hard to class their works to the categories of Scottish literature. But their works "are towards a more positive relationship with self and society in Scotland."¹⁰⁸

107 see Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 972-973.

108 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 979.

7. Muriel Spark

7.1. Life

It is said that nobody can depict author's life except the author himself so I completely understand why Dame Spark wrote her own *Autobiography*. In fact, it is not a usual autobiography; it is more valuable remembrance of her childhood and reconciliation of bad experiences she had to undergo and her character. She speaks about her life peacefully and in the course of many years. She created this work because she wanted to discover "the sense of enriched self-knowledge"¹⁰⁹ and another reason was that she wanted to rebut the untrue contentions about her personality so that "she felt it time to put the record straight."¹¹⁰ She decided to do so after the experience that "other writers gave a false account of her."¹¹¹ She declares memorable and wise fact that "lies are like fleas hopping from here to here, sucking the blood of the intellect. [...] Truth by itself is neutral and has its own dear beauty"¹¹². It was my pleasure to get to know the life of this speaker of low-down who carefully verified every little detail of her own life, just to be truthful in her own *Autobiography*.

Muriel Sarah Camberg was born in Edinburgh in 1918 to a Jewish father Bernard Camberg and an English Anglican mother Sarah Camberg (born Uezzell). She had one brother Phillip, five years elder. They both attended the fee-paying James Gillespie's School but this school turned to be James Gillespie's High School only for Girls. Spark claims that the years she spent at this school were "the most formative years of her life, and in many ways the most fortunate for a future writer."¹¹³ Muriel Spark's teacher Miss Christina Kay gave her pupils impulses to write poetry as well as prose and she was also an inspiration for the future character Miss Brodie.¹¹⁴ This marvellous lady formed Muriel's opinion on poetry, theatre, and art in general. "Miss Kay predicted my future as a writer in the most emphatic terms. I felt I had hardly much choice in the matter."¹¹⁵

109 Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae: Autobiography* (London: Constable and Robinson, 1992) 14.

110 Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 11.

111 Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 11.

112 Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 11.

113 Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 50.

114 see Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 56.

115 Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 66.

At the age of seventeen, Muriel Spark had to decide what her job and life would be like. Studying at university was little pointless because there was a crisis in Edinburgh and education did not guarantee better financial situation. Muriel Spark decided to complete her education in English prose at the Heriot-Watt College.¹¹⁶

Later on, she wanted to be independent so she gave lessons, got the job in the office of women's department store to earn some money. She realized that "in order to write about her life as she intended to do, she felt she had first to live."¹¹⁷

Muriel Camberg married a teacher Sydney Oswald Spark called S.O.S. whom she met at the dance and who was very kind and also offered the possibility to see new places. They got married in Southern Rhodesia in 1937. She did not know that he suffered from nervous disorder. After their son Robin was born a year later, their marriage was over. Muriel Spark, in the position of divorced young mother had to undergo a lot of difficulties in Africa which became the basis and inspiration not only for her short stories but also for novels. She finally went back to Edinburgh in 1944, and had seen the end of the World War II.

She got the job for the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office in London. This fact and skills she gained are reflected in her novels. She also worked in several magazines and periodicals (*Argentor*, *Poetry Review*, *Forum*, *European Affairs*) and gained the reputation of a great writer thanks to her poems, short stories and later novels. She lived in London, New York, and Rome. In the end, "she resided in a small village in the hills of Tuscany, where she lived with her companion and assistant, Penelope Jardine."¹¹⁸

Muriel Spark died in 2006 in Tuscany. Roger Kimball in *The New Criterion* wrote about it:

When I heard the sad news yesterday that the Scottish poet and novelist Muriel Spark had died, age 88, in Florence (her adopted home for many years), I thought 'How suitable that it should have been on Good Friday.' As Catholic convert, Spark would doubtless have appreciated the coincidence of dying on the most solemn day in the liturgical calendar. (She would have also appreciated the bonus that many notices of her death, like this one, would have been written on Easter).¹¹⁹

116 see Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 100-103.

117 Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 103.

118 Robert Hosmer, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark."

119 Roger Kimball, "Muriel Spark, 1918-2006," *The New Criterion*: Armavirumque Blog 16 Apr. 2006. <<http://www.newcriterion.com/posts.cfm/muriel-spark-1918-2006-4188>>.

Dame Muriel Spark left behind valuable bequests in her lifelong works. They are never-dying and the originality, abilities, hidden messages and author's tidings will stay with us despite she died. They live their own lives and readers all over the world make the author immortal through them. The quality is always a criterion of the imperishability.

7.2. Belief

Muriel Spark's father was a Jew so that she was a half-Jew half-Anglican but her parents did not bring her up in any specific strict faith. In fact, they were free about their religion, they both believed in God.¹²⁰

The official religion of James Gillespie's School which Spark attended was Presbyterian of the Church of Scotland but in Spark's days.¹²¹ But she decided to find her own way in the religion:

Muriel Spark was received into the Roman Catholic Church on 1 May 1954. It was the central event of her life. She was a woman of profound spiritual depth and conviction, if not of the strictest doctrinal orthodoxy.¹²²

Dame Muriel herself said about the conversion that she "would hardly call it conversion; it was just a moving into a place I was destined for."¹²³

An interesting life-parallel of turning points can be undoubtedly found in the religion and in the professional life. Spark moved towards the prose and towards the new religion and became new life from the beginning but still remembering the past. After the conversion, she started to write novels. Her religion helped her to find the way and defined her split identity which was caused by Jewish, Anglican, and Presbyterian factors. All these religious elements can be found in her novels which have thanks to these motives an extra spin.

Roger Kimball in the interview claims:

In any event, Spark's religious convictions have played a powerful, if somewhat elusive, role in her fiction. It might be said that they form the invisible core or center of

120 see Hosmer, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark."

121 see Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 53.

122 Hosmer, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark."

123 Hosmer, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark."

her work. This had helped to confer depth and psychological complexity to her fiction, but may also account for the disturbing "otherworldly" quality much of it exhibits. Aristotle advised the poet to prefer probable impossibilities to improbable ones. It is an open question whether Spark's impossibilities were always suitable 'probable.'¹²⁴

Spark's Calvinistic point of view can be traced in her works, according to Norguay, Calvinist understanding of the world consists of predestination, in which the know-it-all God has unlimited power over human living.¹²⁵ Aileen Christianson in her study claims that

Spark's fictional modes can also be connected to the medieval Catholic view of literature that the anagogical or highest level of interpretation can only be truly accessible to God. The roots of her fictional concerns are thus both Catholic and Calvinist [...].¹²⁶

It means two parallel ways of incompatible comprehension, typical Sparkish ambivalent method of writing. We can find the predestined death of Lise in *The Driver's Seat*, and the certain death of Byron and Baroness in *Not to Disturb*.

The important clue for the reader is that "Spark's narratorial authority and control is like God's is a critical truism."¹²⁷

124 Kimball, "Muriel Spark, 1918-2006."

125 see Christianson 98.

126 Christianson 98-99.

127 Christianson 102.

7.3. Professional Life

7.3.1. Poetess

Muriel Spark is a well known novelist, however, her ‘pre-novelistic starts’ were in poetry.

Spark herself admits that there stayed something from the ‘poetic spirit’ and flying in her writing so that we can find poetry even in her novels and short stories. As she claims in the Hosmer’s interview, she started to write poetry when she was a small kid:

I was about nine or ten and I never stopped. I never stopped till I started writing novels. It was my main thing and I never thought of myself ever as being anything but a poet, and when I started writing novels and began getting a name for novel-writing, I still thought of myself as a poet and I still do. I can not somehow think of myself as a novelist as such, because I have a poetic way of seeing things.¹²⁸

In 1932 she won a poetry competition with the poem about Sir Walter Scott. This achievement opened her doors to the world of poets, at the age of 14, Muriel was called the queen of Poetry.¹²⁹

She went on writing poetry even in Rhodesia and in the wartime. She successfully took part in the Rhodesian poetry competition and published in magazines.¹³⁰

In the Hosmer’s interview, Muriel Spark was 87 years old and she acknowledged her lifelong love to the poetry:

I am very interested in verse forms, different rhythms, different meters, different compositional types of verse, the formal ones, and different types of rhyme. I think if you master those, practice those, you can then write free verse, because you have got more to throw away. Art is essentially a throw-away activity. [...] A lot of poets have never heard of trochees, iambics, and things.¹³¹

In 1952, the first book of poetry was published: *The Fanfarlo and Other*

128 Hosmer, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark."

129 see Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 65-68.

130 see Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 135.

131 Hosmer, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark."

Verse. Her *Collected Poems I* were published in 1967, *Going Up to Sotheby's and Other Poems* (1982) and finally, *All the Poems* (2004).

7.3.2. The short-story-writer

7.3.2.1. Tradition of the Scottish short stories

Alison Lumsden claims that a short story

[...] is, typically, regarded as the little, and often inferior, sister of the novel, a form of exercise on which writers cut their teeth before moving on to more challenging forms.¹³²

We should not have this derogatory opinion on Scottish short stories. It is said that the quality rules over quantity. Short stories have one advantage – they are very often published in periodicals so that they go out of print more frequently than novels. Scottish woman writers have an important role in writing short stories. By 1970s, there was a great amelioration in Scottish short story writing. The key person of this new wave was James Kelman who influenced a lot of authors and authoresses.¹³³

But why are Scottish stories considered to be unique and extraordinary?

Modern stories have their roots in a tradition where stories were told to entertain. This imaginative pact between speaker and audience goes back to the oral tradition of the Highlands and islands and to the great store of ballads [...].¹³⁴

Ballads play an important role in the Scottish writing, they formed traditional narratives – narration in the 1st person with the omniscient narrator is traditional. "It establishes mood and narrows the focus by trapping the reader into seeing the action through the eyes of the character."¹³⁵

Not only Scottish short stories with the heritage of ballads but also novels are

132 Alison Lumsden, "Scottish Women's Short Stories: 'Repositories of Life Swiftly Apprehended'", *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, ed. Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 156.

133 see Lumsden 156-157.

134 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 986-987.

135 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 987.

also typical for their "sense of irony"¹³⁶ and are distinguishable according to the

[...] use of supernatural as a medium for a variety of explorations, a powerful relationship with landscape, and the instantly recognizable, though curiously defined doppelgänger search for identity.¹³⁷

Spark claimed that she thought of herself as predominantly a poet,¹³⁸ however, she wrote short stories as well. She moved from lyric poetry to narrative verse. That was the start of heading towards the short story and the novel.¹³⁹

In 1951, she won the first prize in a story competition announced in *The Observer*. The name of this break-through is 'The Seraph and the Zambesi'. Spark in this story wrote about her experience from Africa: "In that story I felt a compulsion to describe the Zambesi River and the approach to the falls through the mysterious Rain Forest as a mystical experience."¹⁴⁰ This achievement was the most important turning point in Spark's career and her creative writings have achieved international recognition.¹⁴¹ Among her collections of short stories rank *The Go-Away Bird and Other Stories* (1958), collection of short stories and plays *Voices at Play* (1961), *Collected Stories I* (1967), and *Bang-bang You're Dead* (1982). The last book of short stories was published in 2001, under the name *Complete Short Stories* (2001).

7.3.3. Novelist

Despite Muriel Spark thinks of herself to be a poet, she realised that she need more extensive forms. But still, she is a poet in the novel. In the *Curriculum Vitae* she comments on her literary progress:

I felt that the novel as an art form was essentially a variation of a poem. I was convinced that any good novel, or indeed any composition which called for a constructional sense, was essentially an extension of poetry.¹⁴²

136 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 989.

137 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 988.

138 see Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 206.

139 see Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 197.

140 Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 128.

141 see Muriel Spark, *A Far Cry from Kensington* (London: Penguin Books, 1989) 1.

142 Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 206.

When Spark introduced in the Macmillan publishing house her first novel *The Comforters* (1957), she gained the attention and support of Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene and started a great literary career.¹⁴³ This first novel was inspired by the "hallucinatory experience"¹⁴⁴ caused by pills which Spark took not to be hungry. The second novel, which was published in 1958, was the allegoric story of adventure named *Robinson*. This was followed by a novel about elderly people, *Memento Mori* (1959); in which Spark commemorate her grandmother's last years of life. Theological satire *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960) in which Spark deals with the themes of the foolish society in London followed. The other following novels are set in Scotland – *The Bachelors* (1960), *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) which is very popular for the unforgettable character not only in written way but also in its dramatic and film successful adaptations. Among these 'Scottish works' also rank the novels *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963), and *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965). Sequent experimental works are also considered to be the best works, namely *The Public Image* (1968), and *The Driver's Seat* (1970). Rather dark side of helplessness, glibness, and difference between classes Spark depicts in the works *Not to Disturb* (1971), *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973), and the political satire *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974). After Spark's experimental era, there are other nine novels published – 'Italian' *The Takeover* (1976), 'thrilling' *Territorial Rights* (1979), 'blackmailing' *Loitering with Intent* (1981), 'reconciling' *The Only Problem* (1984), 'hazardous' *A Far Cry from Kensington* (1988), 'murderous' *Symposium* (1990), 'careeristic' *Reality and Dreams* (1996), 'hilarious' *Aiding and Abetting* (2000), and the last novel was 'envious' *The Finishing School* (2004).

143 see Hosmer, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark."

144 see Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* 204.

7.3.4. Other works

Spark has also written three children's stories, *The French Window* and *The Small Telephone*, both published in 1993 in a limited edition, and the book *The Very Fine Clock* (1968).¹⁴⁵

Spark's published works also include critical biographies of nineteenth-century figures, biography of Mary Shelley *Child of Light* (1951), *Emily Brontë: Her Life and Work* (1953), and *John Masefield* (1953). She published editions of nineteenth-century letters as well, *The Brontë letters* (1954) for instance.

Spark also wrote a play called *Doctors of Philosophy* which was first produced in London in 1962 and published in 1963. Derek Stanford in his preface to *A Biographical and Critical Study* honours for the play:

Muriel Spark's first stage-play is important because the theatre provides her with the best medium for her gifts of dialogue. [...] All this artist's cultivation of the ear, her brilliant sense of dialogue, seemed to have found its right and best setting.¹⁴⁶

In 1992 Muriel Spark published her autobiographical volume *Curriculum Vitae*. It is not a typical autobiography, she writes her life but it stays covered. We have to find the missing parts in her works.

Candia McWilliams in the introduction to *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* claims that Spark was one of the writers who did not need much explication in her works. Candia McWilliam explains give us reason why:

Partly this is because she is a poet, and partly it is because she makes characters who are at once individuals and archetypes. It is because she is a technician of the highest order. There are few books written this century whose every comma may be said to be set in its place like a star.¹⁴⁷

145 see Muriel Spark, *The Collected Stories of Muriel Spark*. (London: Penguin Books, 1994) 2.

146 Derek Stanford, Preface. *Muriel Spark: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Fontwell: Centaur Press, 1963) 14-15.

147 Candia McWilliam, Introduction. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. By Muriel Spark (London: Penguin Books, 1965) viii.

7.4. Awards

Muriel Spark was elected C.Litt. in 1992 and was awarded the DBE in 1993. Among other awards, she has received the Italia Prize, the James Tait Memorial Prize, the FNAC Prix Etranger, the Saltire Prize, the American Ingersoll T. S. Eliot Award, the David Cohen British Literature Prize in recognition of a lifetime's literary achievement in 1997, and – last but not least – the Golden Pen Award from International PEN. Among her achievements also rank the Order of the British Empire, the first prize in a Scottish Arts Council and Spring Book Award.

Dame Muriel was elected an Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1978 and Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France in 1996.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ see Muriel Spark, *The Driver's Seat* (London: Penguin Books, 1974) 1.

8. Non-Scottish novels of Muriel Spark

Spark's works in 1960s are considered to be a part of 'post-war scepticism' and they are also thematically classed to the literature with the typical 'Scottish features'. We can find in these works "Edinburgh background and values, wartime disillusionment, and a quest for self-knowledge amongst the claims of Judaism, Protestantism and Catholicism".¹⁴⁹ Spark in this period tried to find her way in life, stability and her writing style.

The work of most of the major writers is called experimental because they "survey society and characters from unusual angles."¹⁵⁰ Experimental novels of Muriel Spark

[...] are in the double opposition: firstly, it is an opposition to relative transparent works of the previous years, and secondly, each of them in itself depicts deep inner conflict in which impeaches its integrity (Spark liked to describe the world based on inversion: the victim look for her murderer in a neurotic way, arranging of the funeral wreaths is done while potential dead bodies are still alive and in good health [...]).¹⁵¹

McWilliam claims that Spark as a 'creator of her characters' is "able to find the perfect language for those who can't use language."¹⁵² McWilliams also claims that Spark is one of the very few writers "neither seduced by nor convinced of the seductive effects of *nimiety* or explication."¹⁵³ Why it is like that McWilliams explains simply:

Partly this is because she is a poet, and partly it is because she makes characters who are at once individuals and archetypes. It is because she is a technician of the highest order.¹⁵⁴

149 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 969.

150 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 975.

151 translated from Ema Jelínková, *Ambivalence v románech Muriel Sparkové* (Olomouc: Periplum, 2006) 52.

152 McWilliam vii.

153 McWilliam viii.

154 McWilliam viii.

8.1. Who influenced Muriel Spark?

As I stated before, Muriel Spark is continuator Hoggian tradition, she uses Stevenson's duality element; ironical undertone is a heritage from Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope and Jane Austen.

Muriel Spark claimed that in the experimental period, she was influenced by French authors, she has close to Flaubert, Proust, Simenon and last but not least Robbe-Grillet. She explained her methods in comparison with the Robbe-Grillet

[...] and the nouveau roman he wrote which was rather devoid of emotions; devoid of stated emotions, but not devoid of felt emotions that you read between the lines. [...] All I have from him is a certain detachment. I think my best book, my favourite novel, is *The Driver's Seat*. And that is very Robbe-Grillet, except I have more characters. He likes to have few characters. Clear the world of other people! But I like the passing scene. [...] He got away from the novel of descriptions of people's feelings: 'he felt,' 'he thought' and 'he said.' 'He said' is a fact, actually an outward fact, but 'he felt' and 'he thought' are interpolations by the author.¹⁵⁵

Nouveau roman is the new concept of the conventional writing of 'old novels' which "should be about *things*; an individual version and vision of *things*; a systematized and analytical record of objects."¹⁵⁶

155 Hosmer, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark."

156 J. A. Cuddon 558.

9. Experimental novels

9.1. *The Public Image*

The first experimental novel takes place in Italy at the end of 1960s. In this satirical work, there is the most apparent feature of the experiment in the 'nouveau roman sense', Spark cuts the plot, dialogues and uses limited narrator in the third person, and gives to the reader the messages through the protagonists.¹⁵⁷ This novel also as the first of the experimental period "showed her cleverness in playing narrative tricks."¹⁵⁸

The symbolic title *image* is the base for imagination which means "leading a double life."¹⁵⁹ And it is very significant because the main protagonists have double life.

Annabel Christopher leads public and private life. In public, she started her career with small parts in films and thanks to her eyes which "were not large, but on the screen they came out so, by some mystery"¹⁶⁰ she became well known "English Lady-Tiger" (*PI* 9), became "tiger in her soul" (*PI* 20) and got the public image. Not only public life and conditions changed, but the private life changed as well. Annabel's husband Frederick "tolerantly and quite affectionately insinuated the fact of her stupidity" (*PI* 9). Their marriage is not the ideal one, both of them have parallel love-makings, what is more, Frederick stays at home and reads the books and writes scripts while she works and is the "worker of the family" (*PI* 9). He always thought that she was stupid and untalented so he does not understand her success. "She did not need to be clever, she only had to exist; she did not need to perform, she only had to be there in front of the cameras" (*PI* 11). But Annabel's mind underwent the change "her stupidity started to melt" (*PI* 11). She does not have any friends, just her husband at home whom she treats as her friend. Frederick hates it. "She thinks I'm her letter-box, a solid bright red pillar-box to post her letters in. That's what she wants a husband for" (*PI* 14).

What man at his position would not be ashamed for staying at home unemployed? What woman would tolerate the behaving like this? These questions

157 see Jelínková 53, 54.

158 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 969.

159 see Roger Fowler, ed. *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms* (London: Routledge, 1973) 120.

160 Muriel Spark, *The Public Image* (London: Penguin Books, 1970) 8. Thereinafter *PI*.

are thrown aside when Frederick writes the script and Annabel gets the main role. Frederick does not like it, "he thought, Annabel is a sort of cheat, she acts from a sense of manners only" (*PI* 17). But the public liked it and Annabel became a star, started to meet rich people and lives her own private-posing-acting life within the marriage. Our moral awareness shudder when we get to know that Frederick's play has a message: that infidelity of the husband makes the infidelity of his wife more moral.

Frederick wants to leave Annabel several times but he is too dependant on her, mainly because of money and what is more apparent, he is an envious coward. While they are in Italy because Annabel works there, Frederick is fascinated by Francesca, an Italian girl who is the press secretary of the movie director. She does not want to have anything with Frederick so she makes clever move – she made a public image of the marriage and forces Frederick and Annabel to pretend that they are a happy couple. This hypocrisy is graded by the fact that even the film company asks Annabel not to leave her husband, because of her public image. Frederick became a victim of his wife's fame. Francesca "vicariously made Annabel inextricable from Frederick" (*PI* 24). Every interview, every photo, even gossiping from their private life, everything was arranged in the shiniest way. They gave him a part to play and no way to escape. He started to be an ideal husband, prototype of an English gentleman who "settled into a routine of deciding to break with Annabel, and to wait until they had left these gossip circles" (*PI* 29). Annabel feels that Frederick could leave her so she follows the instruction of her boss and starts to do the 'marital necessities' which result in her pregnancy. Frederick feels that the baby – whose name is Carl but apparently it is not as important as it could be, because it is treated as a *thing* - "fits in Annabel's public image" (*PI* 31). They stay together because of the baby, because their break up could be the end of the career and end of the source of money for Frederick. This cold calculation brings the prevision of the fatal apocalypse which comes soon. Frederick organises party and does not come, he arranged his own last role – while the drug meeting which should destroy Annabel's public image takes place at their flat with desperate Annabel – he commits a suicide. His goal was to destroy the reputation of his wife but Annabel is able to resist the press pressure. When she gets to know what happened, she wants to save her public image – she holds a press conference in which she presents her truth about her husband's

death. This grotesque part is paradoxically intersected by the truthful phrases of neighbour's little daughter: "If that's what he wanted why did he commit suicide and make a scandal for you?" (*PI* 64). The painful fact that only the children can speak truthfully is shocking. Annabel tries to persuade press that it was not suicide, handles to get all perfidious letters her husband left behind. She managed every detail, thought over every possible trap but she did not expect fights against Billy who made copies of the letters and blackmails her. When the victory is within her grasp, she secretly leaves with her baby to start a real life.

We miss the answer on the question who is a victim? Who represents the good and who represents evil? Both of them, Annabel and Frederick were victims of the public image; difference between them is that Frederick had to die for his desire for revenge. Gilbert and Gubar explain it in the similar way,

That Annabel's husband is driven to stage his own suicide in order to tarnish her image and destroy her career indicates the extremity of his masculinity complex and his sexual antagonism. Frederick pays for his own insecurity, as well as his resentment of Annabel's fame, with his death.¹⁶¹

Despite we feel the Annabel's rottenness, there is the way how to save her soul – through her baby Carl. She has maternal instincts and feels that her baby needs her. "The baby, Carl, was the only reality of her life" (*PI* 35). This is the possibility to be saved, to escape which has religious overtones.¹⁶²

The motives of animals are symbolic, Annabel's turn into the tiger in her heart was gradual and now, she is the beast of prey. Also the surname of the director Luigi Leopardi who claims:

What is a personality but the effect one has on others? Life is all the achievement of an effect. Only the animals remain natural. (*PI* 34).

He made a tiger of Annabel and does not "see any hypocrisy in living up to what the public thinks of you" (*PI* 34). Luigi is in the position of the creator, he decides when is the end of Annabel's public image. He is the Sculptor in the Pygmalion who treats the human being as a cold stone:

161 Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, ed. *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, Vol. 3: Letters from the Front*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 345.
162 see Jelínková 56.

The novel directs attention to society's emphasis on female youth and beauty and explores women's problematic relationship with the visual, especially the objectification of women by film, photography and the media [...]¹⁶³

The novel has its significant place in today's world when we are surrounded by tabloids; gossiping, false eye-appeal which forces us to loose weight, buy modern items and be like the superstars. But do we really need to copy somebody else? Do we need idols of beauty to live full-value life? I think that without these trends and artificial fairy-tales we would be more satisfied. Be ourselves, not to be what somebody else wants us to be. Commercials and film productions are very powerful and we should be careful with them. They are steeling out personalities.

Annabel almost lost her soul and almost destroyed herself; she had to experience all the masquerade and act according her public image. But she decided to live, to stay in the reality, among real people, with her son.

163 Anderson 120.

9.2. *The Driver's Seat*

Sarah M. Gilbert contrasts the *Public Image* and *The Driver's Seat*:

Whereas *Public Image* implies that wily women can outwit men by manipulating traditional roles, Spark's *The Driver's Seat* more pessimistically presents women gaining power over men but only by embracing the role of victim with such intensity that even a murderer is reduced to instrumentality.¹⁶⁴

The Driver's Seat is a novel considered to be the most shocking, dark, and controversial of the experimental novels.

We enter the novel in a scene in which Lise exaggeratedly reacts to the offers of the salesgirl while she is looking for the dress. Soon we get to know approximate age of Lise who works in the accountants' office "where she has worked continually except for the months of illness, since she was eighteen, that is to say, for sixteen years and some months."¹⁶⁵ If we are right, she might be 34 years. But the narrator very soon informs us that "she might be as young as twenty-nine or as old as thirty-six, but hardly younger, hardly older" (*DS* 18). Here start Spark's double talking and mystic clouding. We know that Lise "is neither good-looking nor bad-looking" (*DS* 18) but we still do not know how is she inside.

Lise's history as well as present life are unknown, she lives alone and after the fits of laughter and hysterical reactions she leaves her job to pack for the vacation. We do not have enough information and if we hope to get them, we are disappointed. We just know that she does not have any friends, does not stay with the family.

Lise's changing moods and behaviour are following each other in the quick sequence, when she leaves the office, the 'prison of work' she becomes unpredictable and ambivalent. We know that she buys lurid-coloured dress which attracts attention and evokes astonishment which she does not forget to comment: "People here in the North are ignorant of colours. Conservative; old-fashioned." (*DS* 12) This claim is graduated in the mockery of the door-keepers wife, her laughter is the last thing which Lise hears before her departure.

¹⁶⁴ Gilbert 346.

¹⁶⁵ Muriel Spark, *The Driver's Seat* (London: Penguin Books, 1974) 9. Thereinafter *DS*.

The only detail repeated several times is the movement of her lips – which "are usually pressed together with the daily disapprovals of the accountants" (*DS* 9) but while she is out of the office and shopping, "her lips part, and her eyes narrow; she breathes for a moment as in a trance." (*DS* 11) At the airport, Lise speaks unexpectedly to unknown people, explains them that she can speak four languages and tries to do her best to be in the centre of attention. She claims that she is going on holiday to find the right one. "He is waiting for me." (*DS* 23)

We are just by the way informed that Lisa's portrait will be the other day in the newspaper and police will look for her identity. This is the indicia to the shocking information which follows few lines later:

She will be found tomorrow morning dead from multiple stab-wounds, her wrists bound with a silk scarf and her ankles bound with a man's necktie, in the grounds of an empty villa, in a park of the foreign city to which she is travelling on the flight now. (*DS* 25)

This shock in future, the certain end of the novel and the sureness that will happen give the sequences from now on the graduating declivity. The time shifting is the strong point of Spark's writing. Sooner than we realise that there will be a murder we are back in the plane in which sits Lise alive.

On the plane, Lise is looking for her type, she finds the business man next to her satisfactory. The man is scared of her so much that he has to change his seat. Coincidentally, this business man – Richard will meet Lise later and will also help police to trace Lise's identity after her death. Still in the plane, Lise meets Bill, a man who evidently likes her. We can feel the persistence in his words "I'm your type" (*DS* 35) and his explanation of the macrobiotic diet and principles Yin and Yang in which he has to have one orgasm a day, lead us to the thought that he could be a possible murderer. They meet later in the evening when Bill tries to force her to have a sex and she calls a police to arrest him. At this moment we are sure that Bill is not the murderer, he will be arrested in the time of the murder.

In the unknown town Lise meets an older lady Mrs Fiedke and spends a day with her shopping. The lady is waiting for her nephew who is by chance Richard, the business man from the plane and maniac who is coming back from the six-year medical treatment. He tried to rape and kill woman. Now he is cured but not strong enough to resist temptation when Lise drives him to the Pavilion and

navigates him how to kill her:

I'm going to lie down here. Then you tie my hands with my scarf; I'll put one wrist over the other, it's proper way. Then you'll tie my ankles together with your necktie. Then you strike" (*DS* 105).

Richard does not want to kill her immediately, he wants to have sex with her but she defends against it with words "you can have it afterwards." (*DS* 106)

Gifford sums up the Lise's brutal end and Spark's message in the novel:

Lise is brutally murdered at the end, but only then does the reader realise she has been the driver, and has with grotesque stylishness planned her own death all along, as her final act of self-determination, thus challenging conventional notions of the female as victim. This is arguably Spark's finest work to date in terms of its tight narrative control, its concealment of motive, its feminist agenda and its bleak vision of the emptiness of modern consumer life.¹⁶⁶

Lise is an example of the Scottish tradition of 'the dangerous woman' who are 'perilous' to everybody, all society and even to themselves.¹⁶⁷ She uses the cliché phrase 'You are my type' which gives us the impression that we read romance with love predestination: "I'm going to find him. He's waiting for me" (*DS* 23).¹⁶⁸ But the impression of the romance disappears as quickly as we get to know that she looks for a murderer and not for a lover. The elements of spy novels can be traced in the technique used. The investigation and hearings which are inserted in the novel in the future time indicate so.¹⁶⁹

As Christianson claims:

The Driver's Seat is a novel that proceeds inexorably to the preordained end of Lise's murder, a murder that is being sought by Lise herself, the trajectory of her last days being one of both laying a trail and searching for the suitable murderer as she chooses to leave her alienated and dysfunctional place in modern city and office life, embracing death as a way of gaining control, or the driver's seat.¹⁷⁰

The experimental method is in the unusual shift in the relation between the victim and the murder – between the driver and passenger. It is a shocking

166 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 969-970.

167 see Christianson 100.

168 see Jelínková 58.

169 see Jelínková 58, 59.

170 Christianson 99.

unconventional point of view that leads us to the feeling that the murderer is just half-delinquent and Lise as a victim is the half-murderer at the same time. But the metaphorical 'driving of the car' tells us who is the driver – it is a fate. Lise tried to control her drive and even her death but is considered to be a serious misconduct against the natural flow of events. Christianson supports this idea:

In pursuing her fate, Lise exhibits the usual ferocious control of a Spark narrator, but the control is exercised in a reversion of the norm that the murderess is the 'victim'.¹⁷¹ There are several possibilities how understand Lise's end: either limiting of the male decision and thus evoking "the Helen of Troy syndrome, that is, woman as inspirer and cause of male violence", or the law of nature which says that "women who have the temerity to attempt control of their life and death will be punished with rape."¹⁷²

We can understand Lise in the way that she wanted to rebel against the machinery of life, the black and white everyday dullness within conservative society. Her ambivalence is in several ways: she haunts and is haunted, she does not want to have sex but she is an object of sexual desire; she is not powerful while alive but when she dies, nobody will find the passport she left in a taxi, but this goal is poisoned by the fact she is punished for her will to die, for her desire to extricate from the determinism – she is raped.¹⁷³

The Driver's Seat is considered to be the best Spark's novel, "perhaps, because it most exemplifies authorial control and the violation of reader expectation."¹⁷⁴

171 Christianson 99.

172 Christianson 99-100.

173 see Jelínková 61, 62.

174 Christianson 100.

9.3. *Not to Disturb*

Muriel Spark did not like to explain her novels because she thought that the mystery is more powerful. Despite this fact, in one of her last interviews she said:

In *Not to Disturb* I really have explored the question of whether causality and chronology are identical, and I think not. I think both the future and the past can influence the present – the future as much as the past; and I tried to write a novel to that effect.¹⁷⁵

In Switzerland, Geneva, the prepared plot is taking place: Baron and Baroness, Cecil and Cathy Klopstock with their assistant Victor Passerat gave the orders that: "We don't want to be disturbed by anyone whomsoever"¹⁷⁶ and shut away in the library. The servants headed by Lister strictly obey this command. The certainty that everything will be according to the plan is horrific: We are sure that the death will be according to the plan: "He [Baron] shoots the wife and secretary when they talk too fast. Then he shoots himself, according to the script" (*NTD* 66).

"In the novel, everything seems to be taking place either ahead of schedule or behind the schedule."¹⁷⁷ They are making records in advance, they prepare for the press and photographs. Paradox and sharp irony is hidden in Lester's declaration that "the death of the Baron and Baroness has been a very great shock to us all. It was the last thing we expected" (*NTD* 43). Paradoxically, the Klopstocks with the secretary are still alive, however, Lister speaks about their death in past tense and it is sure that he will use it in future. But still, all timelines meet in the present – present which is waiting for the things to happen. Even the funeral flowers and wreaths are prepared and watered to be fresh at the right time.

Scenes of the time displacement are composed of ironical paradoxes, pregnant Heloise – who said that every visitor of the house can be a father of her child – wants Victor's white coat, water funeral flowers despite the victims haven't arrived yet and gradation of the paradox is striking when they use the funeral flowers for the wedding. The irony can be seen in journalists waiting for the death.

Lister is an interesting person, despite being in a butler, he is in the position of

175 Hosmer, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark."

176 Muriel Spark, *Not to Disturb* (London: Penguin Books, 1974) 23. Thereinafter *NTD*.

177 Jelínková 63.

the superiority: "it is I who decide whether or not we answer any summons, hypothetical or otherwise" (*NTD* 9). This position is also prominent in Heloise's phrase: "Lister can adjust whatever it is. Lister never disparages, he symmetrizes" (*NTD* 58). "He is at the edge of two worlds – the world of the author and the world of the novel."¹⁷⁸ We can feel that Lister has certain power, he can – like the omnipotent god – arrange Heloise's wedding with the mysterious man from the attic to guarantee her children to have rich future with the money of this heir of Baroness. He even decides who is and who is not a part of the script which he has written in advance about the death of his employers. It seems that he can decide about the death; the kitschiness is somehow visible in the death of Alexander and Anna, friends of Victor Passerat.¹⁷⁹ They are waiting under the trees for opening of the gate and "the lighting, which strikes the clump of elms so that the two friends huddled there are killed instantly without pain" (*NTD* 86). Lister knows what is to happen with Baron and Baroness, he rules the events, he is like a novelist in the omniscient narrative. Muriel Spark plays with the reader's expectations of the role of a writer and his characters in fiction.

Not to Disturb deals with the determinism in which the human beings can not escape their fate. The servants passively obey the orders which become a parody on the determinism. Givenness of the thing which should take place in the library, simplifies the fate of Klopstocks and their assistant, lover of the Baroness, are left in their fate.¹⁸⁰ This certainty is signaled in Lister's words: "But what's done is about to be done and the future has come to pass" (*NTD* 9).

The novel *Not to Disturb* can be seen as a parody on tradition gothic genre. In the novel are undoubtedly the features of the gothic genre: secret wall-safe for money, somebody mad in the attic, dark night cruised by thunders, mysterious house, strong wind and in general, and the gothic atmosphere runs through the novel: "The phone crackles amok while a double crash of thunder beats the sky above the roof. A long wail comes from the top of the house [...]" (*NTD* 60).

We can find the parody on Freudian psychoanalysis which Lister links with Heloise's pregnancy and his respect: "‘Only as regards your condition,’ says Lister. ‘Normally, you are not a bit intuitive. You're thick, normally. It's merely that in your condition the Id tends to predominate over the Ego’" (*NTD* 18).

178 translated from Jelínková 64.

179 see Jelínková 64.

180 see Jelínková 64.

The novel shows the changes in the society, the servants got the money and wealth but they became the same sort of snobs as their dead Baron. It was "the revolution that kept everything in its place"¹⁸¹ – just their financial position changed, they are new elite now, as Vilfredo Pareto proclaimed – one elite ascends while the previous one lapses. But they are as immoral and as the old ones, nothing has changed, no morality can be derived from this ‘revolution’.¹⁸²

Gifford claims that the novel *Not to Disturb*

[...] saw Spark’s textual trickery reach new heights; echoes of Sartre’s *Huis Clos* (1943) emphasize the hellish entrapment in shoddy morality of victims and destroyers. Such textual trickery could overplay itself, however; *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973) and its ghostly protagonists hover between moral satire and fictional confusion.¹⁸³

181 see Jelínková 65.

182 see Jelínková 65.

183 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 970.

9.4. *The Hothouse by the East River*

In this novel, the elements of the existentialism can be found. The inspiration for Spark was Sartre's *Huis Clos* (1944).¹⁸⁴ "Her imaginings are frequently extravagant. It is a business as usual in Sparkland to find a story narrated by a ghost."¹⁸⁵

"*The Hothouse by the East River* is similarly as two previous novels consist of the inversion of the time."¹⁸⁶

The novel is set in New York, in the house with the marvellous view on the Upper New York Bay. Elsa and Paul Hazlett are a married couple in the middle age.

She sits all the time by the window and watches the river. When they have a conversation, they do not look into each other's eyes, she watches the river. While shopping, Elsa recognizes in the salesman in a shoe store Helmut Kiel, the spy and prisoner she used to know. This event is according to Paul out-of-the-way but when he goes to the shoe shop and verifies his wife's suspicion, he starts to be nervous, even paranoiac

Elsa seems to be mentally unstable, laughing without reason and sitting by the window and Paul is not certain if she is not mad:

She tells him everything that comes into her head at this hour of the evening and it is for him to discover whether what she says is true or whether she has imagined it.¹⁸⁷

There is something strange about Elsa's shadow – "She is casting a shadow in the wrong direction" (*HER* 15). Paul is scared of this and

[...] he will not sleep beside her in bed any more. Never again, never again. No man can sleep with a woman whose shadow falls wrong and who goes light or something from elsewhere (*HER* 16).

Their children Pierre and Katerina are not the ideal ones, they are not interested in their parent's life much, they need them just for money.

184 see Jelínková 52.

185 Kimball "Muriel Spark, 1918-2006."

186 translated from Jelínková 65.

187 Muriel Spark, *The Hothouse by the East River* (London: Penguin Books, 1975) 7. Thereinafter *HER*.

The author mocks at the need of people to have psychiatrists and analysts. Spark set this novel in New York, big city in which almost everybody needs support and help of educated professional and does not hesitate to pay for anything:

New York, home of the vivisectioners of the mind, and of the mentally vivisected still to be reassembled, of those who live intact, habitually wondering about their states of sanity, and home of those whose minds have been dead, bearing the scars of resurrection" (*HER* 11).

This statement brings two possible readings of the novel – firstly, that those who need analysts are insane dead minds, secondly, paradox of big cities is shown in this saying, people in big cities and communities are losing their identities so that they need the help. The more they are in the community, the more they lose their privacy and become dead bodies. I would say that both readings are suitable for Elsa and her husband who have their analysts.

Elsa has an aristocratic friend Princess Xavier who has the eggs of silkworms on her bosom and who also worked in England in war time but still, she needs an analyst. Her analyst Garven Bey uses special methods how to help her but she enjoys making fun of him. Sometimes we are not sure who the analyst is, we can recognize it according to the fact that one of them is paid and the patient is paying.

The plot is interwoven with the war events which create the memoirs of Elsa and Paul. They met in war-time England "at the Compound" which was "a small outpost of British Intelligence" (*HER* 22). They worked secretly on the 'black propaganda,' as Muriel Spark did in the war-time. The meaning of this secret work is explained in the novel:

What they are engaged with in this particular Compound is known as black propaganda and psychological warfare. This is the propagation of the Allied point of view under the guise of the German point of view; it involves a tangled mixture of damaging lies, flattering and plausible truths. (*HER* 52)

Elsa goes for a walk with German spy soldiers and also with Helmut Kiel who later on deserted. The Colonel Tylden is investigating the case and suspects Elsa that she had an affair with Kiel, however, she is a girlfriend of Paul. This aspect brings the uncertainty and doubts in Paul who never asks Elsa if she cheated on

him. He has the gnawing doubt in his head for the rest of his life.

All of them meet in the house with broken heating so that there is too hot inside. Elsa seems to be more stable, calm and well-balanced but Paul starts to be paranoiac and hysteric about Kiel from the shoe shop because the men leaves the messages on the shoe soles and because Paul was one of those who sent Kiel to the prison. Garven comes to the house and becomes a servant for some burlesque time in which almost everyone is near a fit of nerves. Elsa is having fun and she is sure that "he'll do anything for us so long as he gets material for book about ma case" (*HER* 48). Garven decided to write a book about Elsa's shadow-problems. In the novel, the symbol of the shadow plays an important role. Pierre remade the play *Peter Pan*. In this tale, there were also problems with the wrong shadow which was escaping the body it belonged to. This imaginary feature tells us that something is not all right with the shadows. The parallel between Peter Pan and Elsa is apparent; he never grew up, so what is wrong with her? Is her real? Soon we get to know that Elsa never had the life we are reading about. Her shadow enables her to be different from others. Alighieri in his *Divine Comedy* indicates the exceptionality of the person with different shadow, with exceptional abilities.¹⁸⁸

Spark uses the technique of repeating the same situation but in different order during the plot in the novel and she creates gradation. When Elsa is buying the first shoes, we are not aware of the fact who the salesman could be. But when we are said about Kiel and she goes to do the shopping to the same place, we feel that there must be some breaking point. Elsa can not bear Paul's uncertainty and goes with Kiel (his current name is Mueller) to Zurich. She wants to sleep with him to discover if he is or is not Kiel. The fact that she can recognize it makes Paul sad because Elsa shows that she cheated on him before and now again. Elsa comes back in different mood, she is a different person. Paul is mentally unstable and after the fiasco in the theatre, when Elsa started to throw tomatoes on actors because she did not like son's play, Paul is near to collapse. He even admits: "Those people are not real. My son, my wife, ma daughter, do not exist." (*HER* 93) After his fit of nerves, Paul shouts at his wife: "Go back, go back to the grave from where I called you" (*HER* 95). Elsa tries to explain him that they are not real. At this point it seems that Elsa's psychic condition improved and Paul's worsen.

¹⁸⁸ see Jelínková 67.

He absurdly claims that "I dreamt her [Elsa] up. I called her back from the grave. She's dead, and all that goes with her. Look at her shadow" (*HER* 107). They at the same level, both of them really need the help of analyst. But the author prepared the shocking revelation for us. When Paul watches his wife with her friends he realises that all the people around the table are their former friends from war-time and all of them died. He tries to escape with Elsa from their out of their sight.

The revelation is shocking: in another flashback from war-time we get to know that they are all dead:

A V-2 bomb hits them direct just as the train starts pulling out. The back section of the train, where they are sitting, and all its occupants, are completely demolished (*HER* 126).

Paul does not want to believe and it helps us to think that this story is just fantasy of Elsa's imagination but when he admits that he remember the dead body of his wife, we – as readers – we are betrayed. The cruel play which the author prepared for us is unacceptable the first moment. But then, we realise all suspicious fancies which were in the novel from the beginning and they start to make sense.

The author continues and leads this betrayal ad absurdum when she gives her dead characters humour. When a man wants to rob them, Paul says: "You can't kill us, we're dead already" (*HER* 133). And the absurdity continues when Paul informs their children that he and Elsa are dead and the children do not exist. And the reaction of his son? "Don't be vulgar" (*HER* 134). It is absurdity of absurdities.

Elsa and Paul tried to escape from the sight of their dead friends but they can not. They are a part of them; they can not escape their dead fate which was given to them. Is it predestination? Can we speak about predetermination to die again? In Spark's novels it is possible.

The inspiration by Sartre is prominent in the conception of endless human suffering which continues even after their death and which is the result of the unsolvable and unbearable situation while they were alive. They have their own

suffering inside them and nobody can help, neither analyst nor dead friends.¹⁸⁹

It is hard to class this novel and name it according to the genre. It is something between absurd drama, psychological novel, spy novel, and nouveau roman. Spark does not like to class her characters and works, she likes the mystery.

¹⁸⁹ see Jelínková 67.

9.5. The Abbess of Crewe

We enter the convent in Crewe under unusual circumstances, in the time when the "Britain's national scandal of the nuns"¹⁹⁰ cries from the front pages of the prestigious newspapers. The reason which caused all this tumult is simple – the theft by false pretence, the theft of a silver thimble. But nothing is as simple as it seems.

It is clear that this satirical novel is a parody on the American Watergate scandal in 1970s. The political outcry started when the Republican administration officials broke into the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate office in Washington. The investigation revealed that president Richard Nixon had a recording system in his office and made secret recordings. The scandal resulted in president's resignation. The reason why Nixon and his administration officials did so is not clear. A lot of speculations were made up.¹⁹¹

Spark's novel tries to draw our attention to the absurd fact of secret recording. She used the simple facts from the American scandal and to set her novel in Abbey which brought a humorous tension.

Alexandra is in the shoes of president Richard Nixon. Both of them lost their position. Another parallel can be found – Sister Getrude is in the position of Nixon's counsellor Henry Kissinger.¹⁹² Both of them were too busy to give a good advice on time.

Spark wrote the novel in a humorous way, it is apparent in the hyperbole and allusion of Alexandra's comment and myth-making which in fact leads us to the clue that

[...] such a scandal could never arise in the United States of America. They have a sense of proportion and they understand Human Nature over there; it's the secret of the success. A realistic race, even if they do eat asparagus the wrong way (*AC* 19).

Spark uses her technique of time shifting, so the novel is the closing circle, we know what happened, we know the result of the events but we do not know the process so we have to go back and examine the events. Same techniques are used

190 Muriel Spark, *The Abbess of Crewe* (London: Penguin Books, 1975) 18. Thereinafter *AC*.

191 see "Watergate scandal." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 11 May 2010. Web. 12 May 2010. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watergate_scandal>.

192 see Jelínková 69.

in the detective stories and spy novels but in the Sparkian version – without surprise – it loses its seriousness and becomes a parody, parody on the spy novels¹⁹³, the story about the theft of a silver thimble and honour of the Abbey.

We go back to the period in which the election of a new Lady Abbes is being prepared. There are two rival parties: ‘The Holy Trinity Party’ headed by Alexandra and their opponents ‘Embroidering and Free Love Party’ headed by Felicity and believing in "love in freedom and freedom in love" (AC 49) who want to make a "love nest right in the heart of this Abbey" (AC 40). She has an affair with Jesuit and it is a public secret.

Alexandra can not even hear the possibility that Felicity could be new Abbess: "Unless I fulfil my destiny my mother’s labour pains were pointless and what am I doing here?" (AC 32) Her ancestors were at important positions of convents so she is predestined to be the Abbess. She looks for help in Machiavelli’s *Art of War*. She uses his tactics several times:

If you suspect any person in your army of giving the enemy intelligence of your designs, you cannot do better than avail yourself of his treachery, by seeming to trust him with some secret resolution which you intend to execute, whilst you carefully conceal your real design; by which, perhaps, you may discover he traitor, and lead the enemy into an error that may possibly end in their destruction [...] (AC 52).

Alexandra does not want to dirt her hands: "I must remain in the region of unknowing. Proceed but don’t tell me. I refuse to be told, such knowledge would not become me; I am to be the Abbess of Crewe" (AC 62). So she gave an impulse to her helpers Winifrede, Walburga and Mildred to cooperate with Jesuit Fathers to destroy the enemy – Felicity who spattered not only convent in Crewe but the Jesuit Order as well. Two young Jesuits rob the "Felicity’s sewing-box which is the precise measure of her love and her freedom" (AC 31). Felicity caught them red handed and made a fuss of it. They read her love letters and stole the thimble.

Alexandra gives a marvellous pre-election speech in a convent in which appeals to lower instincts of the nuns, despite she claims that she speaks to their higher instincts. She cleverly differentiates the difference between a ‘Lady in the Abbess’ and ‘Bourgeoise’: "A Lady may secretly believe in nothing; but a

193 see Jelínková 53.

Bourgeoise invariably proclaims her belief, and believes in the wrong things" (AC 75). It is clear that these women vote for their right to be a 'Lady'. Alexandra is elected new Lady Abbess. Sister Felicity "fled the Abbey of Crewe to join her Jesuit lover and to tell her familiar story to the entranced world" (AC 16).

The circle is closing; the press is full of theories and Rome demands explanation. The motive of listing incriminations from Thesaurus is the same as in the *Hothouse by the East River*. Felicity wrote this pleading to discredit Alexandra and to make the police to investigate all of these wrongdoings. But behind these official statements, she thirsts after a personal revenge.

Rome wants to know why the nuns in Abbey of Crewe keep the traditions of the old order while using the modern electro techniques. Alexandra is able to respond to Rome in the very clever way: "That Religion is founded on principles of Paradox" (AC 26). She explains that they have electronic machines which are a part of their

[...] watchfulness, the which is a necessity of a Religious Community; we are told in the Scriptures 'to watch and to pray', which is itself a paradox since the two activities cannot effectively be practised together except in the paradoxical sense (AC 26).

Just few people know about the fact that everything in the Abbey goes on record and almost every space is bugged except from confession booth. These devices helped Alexandra to be elected.

Sister Gertrude foretells Alexandra her sentence "you may have the public mythology of the press and television, but you won't get the mythological approach from Rome, they deal with realities" (AC 104). Alexandra leaves for Rome, nothing good is waiting for her there but she is not afraid.

Alexandra, the noble Lady Abbess is a typical Sparkian protagonist who tries to control everything. "I am Benedictine with the Benedictines, a Jesuit with the Jesuits. I was elected Abbess and I stay the Abbess and I move as the Spirit moves me" (AC 10). We can feel her superiority in almost every detail:

The Abbess leads the way from the chapel to the house in the blue dusk. The nuns, high nuns, low nuns, choir nuns, novices and nobodies, fifty in all, follow two by two in hierarchical order [...] (AC10).

They follow her as sheep follow their herdsman, faithfully, resignedly, obediently and listlessly. The apathy of these nuns is noticeable also in the course of their meal, when one of the nuns always reads the Rule of St Benedict immediately followed by physical laws about frequency and recording. Both teachings are important to them and both are without notice ended by 'amen'. Initially, we find it very funny but when we realise that this irony is meant seriously, the word 'amen' loses its religious meaning and is more judgement than consent.

Hypocrisy in the Abbey can be seen in the split between the dogma and deeds the nuns do. They do not behave according to the dogma, they drink wine, use vulgar expressions and even in the chapel, they do not sing the psalms but their own words. There is more idea of crossing the limitations than preserving traditions.

Gifford thinks of the novel to be one of the best satirical political works:

The Abbess of Crewe, where Catholicism, theatricality and artifice come together most potently in one of Spark's most successful satirical novels, which astonishingly transplants the events of the Watergate scandal to a North of England nunnery¹⁹⁴

The link and influence of the Scottish tradition is apparent and undeniable:

Perhaps the novel's success stems from the scheming abbess of the title being a descendant of Jean Brodie; unconventional (reciting English poetry in place of the standard liturgy), devious (bugging the nunnery) and tragically, dramatically attractive. In the end, and having apparently circumvented the scandal that threatens the abbey, the abbess orders the transcription of her tape-recordings, albeit heavily edited:¹⁹⁵ Remove the verses that I have uttered. They are proper to myself alone and I should not be cast before the public. Put "Poetry deleted" (AC 106).

194 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 970.

195 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 970.

10. Conclusion

Spark's novels of 1970s are different. They are set outside Scotland and they do not have Scottish protagonists and they do not deal with Scottish subject matters. Some literary scholars consider these five novels to be non-Scottish, what is more, they are sometimes classed into English literature. In my opinion, they should be called Scottish because they have the features and methods typical for the 'Scottish sense.' The ambivalency, 1st person narrative, ironical overtone, Gothic darkness, supernatural elements etc. and "weave in references to the ballads, Scott, Hogg and Stevenson [...]." ¹⁹⁶ Spark considered herself to be an international writer with the Scottish roots.

Spark's experimental works are not Scottish concerning the setting and characters but the author's childhood spent in Edinburgh influenced them. All of them have "dark, cynical core" ¹⁹⁷ with the principle of disharmony. "

Good and evil, truth and lie, profane and sacral motivation, real and supernatural world in novels of Muriel Spark do not rival in standard methods but more in the oxymoronic principle: one does not exist without the other and bilateral contention is presumption of their existence. ¹⁹⁸

Muriel Spark shows us usually more than one line of vision in her novels and uses 'Ingardenian technique' in which she leaves the places of indeterminacy in her works and it is up to the reader to fill them in. She uses the omniscient narrator who leads us through the novels with typical sharp satirical wit.

This question recurs throughout Spark's work: what is the relationship between the artistic mind and the dystopian universe it oversees? Spark's narrators are, perhaps closest to the Calvinist God of Brodie, who implants the certain people 'an erroneous sense of joy and salvation, so that their surprise at the end might be the nastier'. ¹⁹⁹

Spark deals with "pluralistic identity" ²⁰⁰ in her works and in experimental period she uses the method of negation of the statements, the techniques of

196 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 969.

197 translated from Jelínková 101.

198 translated from Jelínková 101.

199 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 970, 971.

200 translated from Jelínková 48.

paradoxes, unexpected turns, breaking points, and she balances at the edge of presumption. Her work is full of ambivalences and inverses, which where new techniques in the context of 1970s and which meant diversion her works of the realism in the literature.²⁰¹ Her characters are 'esprit forts' who are trying to control everything and everyone. They want to decide about their fate and they are sophisticated intriguers who are trying to break the barriers but the fate and the predestination can not be ruined and the apocalyptic disaster is a punishment for their arrogance.

Spark writes in the mysterious way, uses time shifts and does not forget to give us the message that "the life is a mystery, [...] the more we know, the more we don't know. And that is the truth."²⁰²

Among Sparkian techniques ranks also 'oxymoronic art' or if we use words of Marshal Walker - "The Caledonian antisyzygy."²⁰³ It is in a direct link to Hogg and his theme of merging two opposite and parallel principles of good and evil into one concept, however, they remain divided.²⁰⁴ This feature also recalls the Scottish theme of duality within one character, the internal fight of two antagonistic poles which create the complexity of the character and lead us to the extremity of the human psyche. Spark never forgets to show us both sides of the extreme human thinking. Inspiration for her was not only James Hogg and his *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, but also William Brodie who led double life and became an inspiration for Scottish writers.

Candia McWilliam says: "So distinguished a technician is Muriel Spark that one may take practically any section of the book and it will provide a metaphor for the entire book itself."²⁰⁵ Spark uses clever techniques to accomplish so. Irony plays an important role in Spark's novels. She found the source of inspiration in the works of Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope and Jane Austen.²⁰⁶

Other Sparkian powers are sharp satire and shock which result in ambivalence, paradox, and complex – but still antagonistic – fusion of two different poles within one unit. This technique evokes nervousness and makes us to be sure that

201 see Jelínková 10.

202 Hosmer, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark."

203 Walker 14.

204 see Jelínková 13.

205 McWilliam vi.

206 Jelínková 12.

"Spark always has the last laugh."²⁰⁷ "It is also the recourse of writers, as laughter is one of the writer's means of getting the reality of the inescapable across to his reader."²⁰⁸

We are in a shock because we loose all conventional ideas about the violence, cruelty, innocence, and the truth that we considered to be the truth. But Spark herself claimed that "[...] certainly the novel is not truth. It is lies, officially. Fiction is not truth. But through these lies some truth emerges."²⁰⁹

Another important fact we should take into account is that throughout Spark's novels, fiction in fiction or the "metafictionality"²¹⁰ can be found. Flexible borders between real and fictionalized, good and evil, truth and supernatural show us that she is a good intriguer. She gained this experience while she was working for the Foreign Officer's disinformation unit where she cooperated in the Black Propaganda. In her novels, "divisions between fiction and non-fiction become debatable."²¹¹ In fact, Spark is playing with the reader and leaves the door to the conclusion open. Actually, there is just one door we enter the novel in but several stay opened behind us when we finish the reading.

The turn of events comes usually unexpectedly and brings the ambivalent solutions who is the victim and who is devil. It s not easy to decide who is in her novels representant of good and evil because her characters are not only black and white, they are complex, with they bright and dark sides. The conventional values of the society and literature are fictionalized, "in Spark's fiction violent death and grisly events occur suddenly and with laconic understatement in the narrative."²¹²

As Spark said,

[...]devil is a very useful personification of what we really do see in the world. Evil exists. Evil is in the world and we know it because we are born with a knowledge of good and evil.²¹³

Spark's "characters overpoweringly illustrate how humanity goes wrong, and the ubiquitous lack of transforming moral belief."²¹⁴

207 Christianson 103.

208 McWilliam x.

209 Hosmer, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark."

210 Christianson 96-97.

211 Christianson 98.

212 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 970.

213 Hosmer, "An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark."

214 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 971.

Roger Kimball defined another Spark's technique:

What seems at first like caricature often turns out to pass, for the moment anyway, as unvarnished reportage. Generally, the reports are not encouraging. Perhaps, deep down, 'the facts' themselves express a species of caricature; and perhaps, on reflection, one realizes this. Spark's trick is to coax us into musing that, if one were to go deeper still, maybe... The presentiment often terminates in an ellipsis, a feeling of uneasiness, anxiety.²¹⁵

We have to keep on mind the message which Muriel Spark has hidden in her novels:

Our life on earth is a pilgrimage, a prolegomenon, and one mustn't forget it: This basic conviction figures prominently, through undogmatically, in all Spark's work, infusing it with the ambition of allegory. But the vertiginous effect of her fiction is not simply a coefficient of faith. It is also the product of a literary gift, a sensibility.²¹⁶

Muriel Spark was one of the most significant and unique fiction writers whose impact and influence on the Scottish literature and its tradition will remain in the top of the Scottish works.

Spark remains one of the most complex and challenging of contemporary writers in English. There is no doubting her astonishing ability to fictionalise fiction, and to reveal through a wealth of narrative strategies the short-comings of modern society. But for many readers the principal question regarding her work is one of final and moral meaning.²¹⁷

Spark's experimental novels are still shaping the literature and influencing the writers, they are a part of the tradition, ambivalently supporting the traditional Scottish approaches but on the other hand, they can exist by themselves, in the international way. As Walker claims, "Spark's novels spin in an orbit of their own."²¹⁸ Her novels have their place in the context of the Scottish literary history and the chance that they will be surpassed by something more complex and unique is impossible.

215 Kimball, "Muriel Spark, 1918-2006."

216 Kimball, "Muriel Spark, 1918-2006."

217 Gifford, Dunnigan, MacGillivray 971.

218 Walker 324.

11. Anotace

Ve své práci "Experimentální romány Muriel Sparkové" jsem se soustředila na pět románů, a to právě z období sedmdesátých let dvacátého století. Abych mohla romány kontrastovat a určit jejich jedinečnost a unikátnost, vrátila jsem se zpět po trajektorii skotské literatury až k baladám a tradici gotického románu, jehož prvky, i když v obměněné podobě, Sparková hojně používala. Nejprve jsem se zabývala skotskou literaturu obecně a zaměřila jsem se na prvky, přístupy a autory na které Sparková navázala. Nastínila jsem život, obrat ke katolicismu a dílo Sparkové, její romány, které podporovaly skotskou tradici v pravém slova smyslu – tedy romány situované do Skotska se skotskými hrdiny. Dále jsem definovala typické prvky skotské literatury a jejich proměny v čase. Experimentální romány, tedy *The Public Image (Mediální obraz)*, *The Driver's Seat (Místo za volantem)*, *Not to Disturb (Nerušit, prosím)*, *The Hothouse by the East River (Skleník u East River)* a *The Abbess of Crewe (Abatyše z Crewe)*²¹⁹ jsem zařadila do skotské literatury, protože nesou důležité tradiční prvky, které je do této kategorie bezpochyby řadí. Samotné romány jsem analyzovala na základě tezí o predestinaci, dvojnictví, ambivalenci, a v neposlední řadě experimentálních, alegorických a ambivalentních postupů Muriel Sparkové.

219 titles translated from Jelínková, *Ambivalence v románech Muriel Sparkové* (Olomouc: Periplum, 2006) 12.

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