

THE FRENCH IN SPARK: MURIEL SPARK'S FRUITFUL
MISREADING OF BAUDELAIRE, PROUST AND THE NOUVEAU
ROMAN

by

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Abstract

There are three phases in Muriel Spark's career as a writer of Catholic surrealist satire. Each of these stages replies to a specific writer, and to an identifiable period within the French literary tradition. Each stage marks a significant shift in the development of Spark's novelistic skills.

In my introductory chapter, I consider her work in the 1950's--both poetry and prose--written in response to a reading of Baudelaire. Her two major pieces in Collected Poems I--"The Ballad of the Fanfarlo" and "The Nativity"--both incorporate and reply to Baudelaire's youthful short story, "La Fanfarlo." In her poetry, she takes an astringent, classical position which denounces, as she considered Baudelaire had done, the false values of Romanticism. In 1953, her first published short story, "The Seraph and the Zambesi," which again has Baudelaire's characters as its cast, marks her final response to the French writer, whose influence has overshadowed her transition from poet to prose writer. From the body of his work, she extracted his method of locating ideal correspondences between objects and people, which provides the

initial impulse for a principle which is to underlie her mature prose--
 "the transfiguration of the commonplace."

From 1953 until the mid-sixties, Spark wrote a series of novels based on a provocative misreading of Proust's A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. To her interest in and application of, Baudelaire's correspondences, she added Proust's technique for extracting the essences of objects, people and moments. She was fascinated with the dual possibilities of "satire" and "exaltation" in his handling of metaphor. In The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, The Girls of Slender Means and The Hothouse by the East River, she fashions her transfiguring techniques into a conceptual and narrative framework which will encompass all of her fictional intentions: allegorical, satirical and transcendental. She called this construction "a time and landscape of the mind."

Since 1970, Spark has been increasingly influenced by the French Nouveau Roman. Between The Public Image (1968) and Territorial Rights (1979), her mental times and allegorical landscapes have shifted from actual places--Edinburgh, London and New York--and specific times in history, to disembodied landscapes of the mind. Her increasing reliance on form rather than verisimilitude, has made particular use of Alain Robbe-Grillet's techniques for manipulating space and time. Spark's novel, The Driver's Seat (1970), can be read as a reply to Robbe-Grillet's Les Gommages (1953), incorporating especially his elimination of the poetic and metaphysical referents from narrative. With the elimination of these elements, her novels become exclusively concerned with language as the purest allegorical "landscape" for modern consciousness.

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INTRODUCTION

Muriel Spark began her literary career in the years after the Second World War as a poet. She tried to compress her already elliptical view of the world into imagery which would both satirize and transcend the commonplace. Her first attempts at metaphorical transformation were orthodox, incorporating a balance of poetry and metaphysic. A subsequent reading of Baudelaire, as it coincided with her conversion to Roman Catholicism, provided both a prose model and a hierarchy of ideas on which she could base her first short stories and novellas. Spark adapted Baudelaire's "correspondances" to her own formula of the "transfiguration of the commonplace", so devising an early form of "magic realism" to facilitate her "psychic allegories." Her fiction incorporated satire, allegory, metaphysics and a highly polished, ornamental style which linked these disparate elements in epigrammatic fashion.

Immediately before writing her first novel, The Comforters, Spark read Proust's A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. From it she extracted his technique for making metaphor essential and timeless, identifying

and adapting the two elements of his process--satire and exaltation. She applied them to her two simultaneous referents for metaphor--Art and God. She responded to Proust's idea that "l'esprit a ses paysages" by devising a "time and landscape of the mind" to serve as an allegorical framework for all of her mature fiction. Her transfiguring metaphors became large-scale conceits, and in the process became increasingly surrealistic, in the sense in which Angus Fletcher refers to the surrealist school in twentieth century art and letters:

it implies obsessional and dream imagery, unexpected and even shocking collocations of heterogeneous objects, psychological emblems (usually Freudian), hyperdefinite draftsmanship, distortions of perspective--with all these working together to produce enigmatic combinations of materials . . . Objects quite "real" in themselves become "non-real", i.e., surreal, by virtue of their mutual interrelations, or rather their apparent lack of rational interrelation when combined within single frames. This deliberately enigmatic, teasing, strange style is to be found . . . in early allegories as well.¹

Spark took, in her imagery, increasing liberties with narrative perspective, temporal continuity, and finally, under the influence of the French Nouveau Roman, with spatial relationships. Allegorized city-scapes were gradually replaced by interiors--rooms and décor as they reflect the disembodied landscape of modern consciousness. In her latest works she is exclusively concerned with landscape as "the mind's eye" might perceive it.

Muriel Spark makes particular use of the "cinematic" technique of Alain Robbe-Grillet, as her novels become increasingly refined formal constructions. The metaphysical dimension has been eliminated from

her fictions, which have become verbal topographic constructions rather than psychic or metaphysical explorations.

Spark's literary career embodies an oblique but productive misreading of a series of major French writers. She seems to have made use of the stages in the development of French literary sensibility, as much as the works of individual authors, in creating her small elegant fictions, which anglicized some of the most significant turnings in another literary tradition.

CHAPTER ONE

Long before she wrote best-selling minor novels, Muriel Spark was a practising creative parodist in her poems. After reading Baudelaire's "La Fanfarlo" in 1951, she produced in oblique but inspired reaction, two long poems, one actually called "The Ballad of the Fanfarlo" and the other, "The Nativity". "The Fanfarlo" also inspired a highly experimental piece of short fiction which was to make her name as a prose writer: "The Seraph and the Zambesi".²

Spark's response to Baudelaire was based on an imaginative misreading: a selective and idiosyncratic appropriation of poetic elements from the French writer's formative text at a peculiarly formative stage in her own career. Harold Bloom, in The Anxiety of Influence and A Map of Misreading, puts forward a theory of literary influence based on precisely this kind of misreading:

Influence, as I conceive it, means that there are no texts, but only relationships between texts. These relationships depend upon a critical act, a misreading or misprision, that one poet performs upon another, and that does not differ in kind from the necessary critical acts performed by every strong reader upon every text he encounters. The influence-relation governs writing, and reading is therefore a miswriting just as writing is a misreading.³

A misreading then involves "an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation."⁴ Although Spark's is an extreme misreading of Baudelaire, even by Bloom's standards, it is nonetheless true that, as she considered her long poem to be a revision or creative critical commentary on her predecessor's work, her response falls within Bloom's anxious category of "influence". Baudelaire influenced Spark to write as she did.

Bloom goes on to argue that strong poets are able to "clear imaginative space for themselves" in the process of misreading one another.⁵ Spark read Baudelaire at the time she was considering writing prose instead of poetry, and considering Catholic conversion from a position of free-lance agnosticism. This point of convergence made up the "imaginative space" which she allowed Baudelaire's text to occupy. She used the text as a point of focus and as a point of departure.

When Spark read and replied to "La Fanfarlo", she was angry at the falsely transcendental posturing of some young neo-Romantic poets, among them Dylan Thomas, in England, after the war and on into the 1950's. In a series of poems in her first volume, Collected Poems I, she called their personality "cult-making", "Delphic insanity" and "Drunkenness and discrepancy".⁶ She approved of Baudelaire's prose piece because she saw it as an exposé of the falsely Romantic: as a piece of "classical thought" set against a Romantic background. In fact "La Fanfarlo" is set in "le bon temps du romanticisme".⁷ Spark sees Baudelaire's central figure, Samuel Cramer, as a fragmented portrait of the Romantic artist

as Byronic cartoon: as bizarrely lacking, but not without redeeming features.

. . . ténébreuse, bariolée de vifs éclairs--paresseuse et entreprenante à la fois,--féconde en desseins difficiles et en risibles avortements. . . . il était à la fois tous les artistes qu'il avait lus, et cependant, en dépit de cette faculté comédienne, restait profondément original.⁸

Baudelaire gives him an alter-ego, which he claims from time to time. It is the feminine Spanish pseudonym, Manuela de Montaverde. Under it he has published his only work to date--"Les Orfraies": "recueil de sonnets, comme nous avons tous faits et tous lus dans le temps où nous avions le jugement si court et les cheveux si longs."⁹

Cramer is a double-man, "le produit contradictoire d'un blême Allemand et d'une brune Chilienne":¹⁰ a man with a built-in alias. Thomas Mann provided Tonio Kröger with the same kind of contradictory artist's lineage: "Consuelo . . . a dark fiery mother who played the piano" and a "dignified" and "respectable" German father.¹¹ Cramer's choices are always double-edged and he fluctuates awkwardly between them, as between his women, who embody the two contradictory fantasies of the failed Romantic. Madame de Cosmelly is both physically and spiritually "la femme comme il faut". She is the fleshier, older version of the young country girl Cramer had loved when she had been "un roman d'une jeunesse."¹² She is, at the time of their reunion, chaste, tearful and spurned by her husband. Baudelaire makes of her a composite parody of feminine Romantic portraiture. La Fanfarlo, on every inch of whom Baudelaire dwells, is the showgirl with whom Cramer becomes obsessed. She is "la femme bêtise",¹³

"brutale, commune, denué du goût."¹⁴ She is nonetheless, "la reine du lieu",¹⁵ "une des plus belles femmes que la nature ont formées pour la plaisir des yeux,"¹⁶ She is unmistakably full of that "charme si magique (que) le vice auréole-t-il certaines créatures."¹⁷

This is Samuel Cramer's supporting cast, his set of creations. As an "artiste manqué"¹⁸ and a "journaliste mordante",¹⁹ he is most redeemed when these "creations," these scattered aspects of his identity, "compose" him. It is art in reverse. He is most a man, for example, when the lustrous Fanfarlo develops a taste for him.

Samuel voulut ouvrir la Fenêtre pour jeter un coup d'oeil de vainqueur sur la ville maudite; puis abaissant son regard sur les diverses félicités qu'il avait a côté de lui, il se hâta d'en jouir. En compagnie de pareilles choses, il devait être éloquent.²⁰

At the end of his story Baudelaire turns his showgirl, the Fanfarlo into the homely and fecund mother of twins, so incorporating her into Cramer's new-found respectability in middle age. He writes a handful of pseudo-scientific texts with forgettable titles, and competes for public honours. In the process, the poetic alter-ego, Manuela, has also been sacrificed to secure the moderate success of his alias. Montaverde, in reaction, takes up politics, founding a slightly disreputable socialist journal. "Il est tombé bas."²¹

Such is Baudelaire's youthfully ironic fable of the Romantic artist: his absurd compromises, his peripheral accomplishments based on psychic delusion and intoxication of the senses. It is to the "strate romanesque", where life and art persistently overlap, "délicatement enlevée, la vie

reparaît",²² which Spark perceived in the text, to which she formulated her reply.

Spark takes Baudelaire's opening sentence as her poem's epigram.

Samuel Cramer, who at one time--in the hey-day of Romanticism--among other Romantic follies had signed himself by the name of Maneula de Monteverde, is the contradictory offspring of a pale German father and a brown Chilean mother.²³

She makes Baudelaire's twice-born hero two-faced, and the focus of her poem. She has him a lying Romantic, whose exotic genealogy, she reduces to "brown marrow" in "white bone".²⁴ London, not Paris, is her "ville maudite" and she sets out to establish that its artists' ego-cults are as foolish as the idea of Byzantium come to Kensington.

In Spark's poem, Cramer is merely a powerless mouthpiece. His assertions are far more interesting and powerful than he is. He claims that he can command both Montaverde, the poet--his "heart's fame (and) praise", and the beautiful Fanfarlo as his mistress. In a scenario worthy of "The Wasteland," Spark leaves no doubt that these figures are Romantic delusions, and that Cramer is a demented imposter.

In place of Baudelaire's lavishly described "nuits dorés"²⁵ in shimmering wicked Paris, Spark substitutes a "tremorous metropolis", with a "settlement of fever" over it, "the smell of gas . . . the taste of withered cress" and a "visible air of metropolitan yellow." The aesthetic centre of Baudelaire's poem had been the Fanfarlo's boudoir.

. . . encombrée de choses molles, parfumées et dangereuses à toucher, l'air chargé de miasmes bizarres, donnait envie de mourir lentement comme dans une serre chaude.²⁶

There is a hint of Montaverde in the room's "volupté espagnole", "un ton violent mais équivoque", "des chairs tres blanches sur des fonds tres noirs. "Spark replaces this centre with its sensuous focus, with the psychic and physical void of the "No Man's Sanatorium" where Cramer is taken for an exploratory operation to see precisely what he is made of. Here his claims to the exotic, to his talent and to his birth-right are negated by unknown surgeons and interrogators. In an antiseptic ward, Spark gives a voice and the last traces of Montaverde's personality to a steel chair. Cramer falls victim to "the ether bowl" and the "little keen knife", and succumbs to an anaesthetic sleep. On investigation of his "feverish heart", they said "He is No Man that we know". Spark concludes that the Romantic artist is a lie: merely one version of non-existence.

In the convalescent ward of the No Man's Sanatorium, Cramer meets others possessed by their alter-egos, all designated--Manuela de Montaverde. Each of them worships his self-appointed chosen image in blasphemous terms. The soldier, the scholar and the industrialist all worship their respective "selves". They all claim to

glorify

Manuela de Montaverde and enjoy him forever

precisely as the Presbyterian Catechism decrees that God shall be worshipped and enjoyed forever. In the name of their alter-egos, the mummified, blinded patients in the ward do battle with one another, trying to eliminate all but their own ego.

And I suppose, so long as I remember
 The glory of man each man will glorify
 Man and destroy him forever.

Baudelaire had transcendent sensuality--glittering, loveless sex-- at the centre of his prose piece. The heart of Spark's poem is a deathless battle for significance by the half-alive. Love and Death are the absent centres in each case, and can be seen in some kind of equilibrium based on their author's intentions. Spark's dramatic message is based on a simplistic and not entirely focussed reading of Baudelaire's story. Classicism, she suggests, is some kind of health, and Romanticism clearly indicates disease. Cramer, in Spark's poem, clearly believes himself to be strong and healthy. "I wander the metropolis / In the good year of my prime." In fact, as an observer tells him--"I see you are a man with a fever on you / in the middle of your time." Cramer has arrived at a climacteric of the spirit. He is emotionally middle-aged, spiritually feverish, and still acting as though he is "dans le bon temps du Romantisme." He has become "one of time's laughing stocks."

In the awkward third section of Spark's poem, Cramer faces Manuela, the Fanfarlo and Death, asking each of them in turn to take him away: to provide him with a means of peaceful self-extinction, "A way to depart in peace." None of them knows how this peace is come by. Manuela exists in "a limbo of sympathy", the Fanfarlo in a "limbo of agitation". Death is prepared only to offer non-existence, not peace.

"The terms of departure in the peace treaty"
 Said Death,
 "According to our annals
 Provide for the proper mortality
 Only through the proper channels."

Death can offer merely "a staple amnesia / That leeches to the pith."
 Spark clearly argues in this poem for "the proper channels", that is,
 the Christian faith, as the only way to avoid false significance on
 the one hand, and extinction on the other. It alone guarantees faith.

As an ambivalent act of affirmation, as the least he can do, Cramer
 rejects Death's offer of amnesia. He claims, as a poet, the right to
 know and name the world of phenomena.

"I call you all" cried Samuel Cramer
 "To witness my treachery
 If I contracted the false pact
 That was offered me this day.

And when the hawk shall creep in the earth
 and hogs nest in the sun,
 Then I'll forget the prime estate
 Of all things I have known.

When the lizard mates with Pegasus
 And the lynx lies with the rat,
 Then I'll forget the black and the bright,
 The high delight and the low,
 Manuela de Montaverde
 and the dancing Fanfarlo."

Death withdraws, admitting that it has called at an inconvenient time,
 and the three characters in the poem are left in an unredeemed state.
 Nonetheless, Cramer has refused an offer of extinction in lieu of peace.
 This must be taken as some kind of qualified Christian response. He had
 declared himself

"as fit a man for Heaven
 As I am for Hell in my belief."
 "I'll not go to a limbo" cried Samuel Cramer,
 . . . And I have been gagged and riven
 For nothing less than to go in peace
 To Hell or to Heaven."

This bad and difficult poem has marked a significant transition point in Muriel Spark's literary career, from Christian poet to writer of surrealist prose. It is not difficult to see why a reading of Baudelaire coincided so effectively with Spark's simultaneous formulation of a religious code and an artistic basis of operations. Enid Starkie has written that T. S. Eliot, another Christian, albeit a far superior poet to Muriel Spark, was attracted to "the religious aspect of Baudelaire's poetry, to his spirituality and his revulsion against sins of the flesh."²⁷ In Selected Essays, Eliot says of Baudelaire:

It is not merely the use of imagery of common life, not merely in the use of the imagery of the sordid life of a great metropolis, but the elevation of such imagery to the first intensity--presenting it as it is, and yet making it represent something much more than itself --that Baudelaire has created a mode of release and expression for other men.²⁸

In 1922, in his essay on the French poet called "The Lesson of Baudelaire", Eliot wrote:

All first-rate poetry is occupied with morality. That is the lesson of Baudelaire. As for (English) verse of the present time, the lack of curiosity in technical matters of the academic poets of today is only an indication of their lack of curiosity in moral matters.²⁹

Muriel Spark was certainly endowed with this curiosity. If, as appears likely, she read Eliot's and Starkie's criticism of Baudelaire, she would have found there reference to those elements in the French writer's art to which she responded in such an oblique but effective fashion.

By the time she wrote "The Seraph and the Zambesi", late in 1951, Spark was a converted Catholic, and Cramer had become a far more blasé creation.

He was the same man, but modified. For instance, in those days more than a hundred years ago, Cramer had persisted for several decades, and without affectation, in being about twenty-five years old.³⁰

In Spark's prose sequel, "he was clearly undergoing his forty-two year old phase." He had at this time come to a tacky end. His muse, Manuela, and his mistress, the Fanfarlo, had married, disregarding him, though along with him, making up a sordid little group of expatriates--in both place and time--in the middle of Africa. Cramer now operates the petrol pump near the Zambesi River at the Victoria Falls. He occasionally takes in guests during Christmas week when the hotel is full. He has given up the practices of both verse and belles-lettres "together with the living up to such practices", in favour of Life. He writes only occasional verse when occasion demands it. "The greatest literature is the occasional kind, a mere afterthought" he says.

In keeping with this spirit, he has written a Nativity Masque, for the Fanfarlo, her dancing girls, and assorted natives to present on Christmas Eve. Cramer, as the First Seraph, is to have the longest speeches, and Mannie de Montaverde, "owing to (his) very broken English, . . . had been given a silent role as a shepherd, supported by three other shepherds chosen for like reasons". The Fanfarlo,

Mme La Fanfarlo (Paris, London)
Dancing Instructress. Ballet. Ballroom.
Transport provided by Arrangement

was to give a "representative ballet performance" as the Virgin, while her pupils were to make up an "angel chorus with carols and dancing." Bickering about the cost of the production, and some necessary bullying

of the natives had preceded the event. In an exquisite parody of Baudelairean detail, Spark describes, through her unidentified narrator, Cramer's heat-bedraggled theatrical.

The performance was set to begin at eight. I arrived behind the stage at seven-fifteen to find the angels assembled in dresses with wings of crinkled paper in various shades. The Fanfarlo wore a long transparent skirt with a sequin top. I was helping to fix on the Wise Men's beards when I saw Cramer. He had on a toga-like garment made up of several thicknesses of mosquito-net, but not thick enough to hide his white shorts underneath. He had put on his make-up early, and this was melting on his face in the rising heat . . . I was intent on helping the Fanfarlo to paint her girls' faces. It seemed impossible. As fast as we lifted the sticks of paint they turned to liquid. It was really getting abnormally hot.

The production is subverted once and for all by the appearance of an actual Seraph of the Lord, come to put Cramer in his place. Spark's Seraph is a fine study in "magic realism", and her first attempt to incorporate the surreal and the transcendent into her new prose narrative form. The Seraph, a pious and priggish creature, had come to dismiss this tawdry night-club affair. Cramer tries to bully the angel, as he would a native.

"--this is my show" continued Cramer.
 "Since when?" the Seraph said.
 "Right from the start". Cramer breathed at him.
 "Well it's been mine from the Beginning" said the Seraph
 "and the Beginning began first."

With that, the building burned to the ground, in what seems to have been a pedantic act of repudiation by the Seraph. If the Seraph had stood for no more than this, then Spark's story would have amounted to no more than a biblical joke: a degraded parable about whether or not "invincible ignorance" and blasphemous vulgarity should be punished; and about whether

an innocent and absurd, yet nonetheless sordid Christmas presentation, a tasteless tribute by a cluster of shabby, failed artistes outcast in Africa, constituted an adequate psychic allegorizing for the modern celebration of Christmas. But the Seraph indicates much more. We are intended to take seriously the miraculous dimension which it represents. Spark has begun to transfigure her commonplaces. The Seraph is something of a cartoon pedant, and at the same time, totally supernaturally convincing.

This was a living body. The most noticeable thing was its constancy; it seemed not to conform to the laws of perspective, but remained the same size when I approached as when I withdrew. And altogether, unlike other forms of life, it had a completed look. No part was undergoing a process; the outline lacked the signs of confusion and ferment which are commonly the signs of living things and this was also the principle of its beauty. The eyes took up nearly the whole of the head, extending far over the cheek bones. From the back of the head came two muscular wings, which from time to time folded themselves over the eyes, making a draught of scorching air. There was hardly any neck. Another pair of wings, tough and subtle, spread from below the shoulders, and a third pair extended from the calves of the legs, appearing to sustain the body. The feet looked too fragile to bear up such a concentrated degree of being.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, in his short story "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" describes a remarkably similar figure, which is at once "flesh and blood" and nonetheless an angel.

They both looked at the fallen body with mute stupor. He was dressed like a rag-picker. There were only a few faded hairs left on his bald skull and very few teeth in his mouth, and his pitiful condition of a drenched great grandfather had taken away any sense of grandeur he might have had. His huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked, were forever entangled in the mud. They looked at him so long and so closely that Pelayo and Elisenda very

soon overcame their surprise and in the end found him familiar. Then they dared speak to him, and he answered in an incomprehensible dialect with a strong sailor's voice. That was how they skipped over the inconvenience of the wings and quite intelligently concluded that he was a lonely castaway from some foreign ship wrecked by a storm.³¹

In both Spark's and Marquez' descriptions, any hint of irony or contempt is undercut by a genuine sense of wonder at the mingling of supernatural possibilities with the grotesquely ordinary.

In Spark's narrative, there is something of an artistic commentary implicit in the description as well. The Seraph and the surreal transfiguration of detail which it embodies, is a bewitching and complete way of displacing both Cramer and the false values of traditional art which he embodies, from the narrative focus. Spark is setting up a dialectical model here, which she is to develop throughout her career as a novelist. It is based on an oblique but tightly sustained tension between God and Art. She is unwilling from this point on, to consider one without the other. In this she displays the dualistic curiosity in technical and moral matters which T. S. Eliot had spoken of. The key to Spark's narrative constructions is the simultaneity with which she is to consider these matters. She is to rely on the surreal metaphor to transfigure and to infuse the actual with extraordinary significance, and the Seraph that comes to chastise Baudelaire's Cramer in "The Seraph and the Zambesi" is the first example of this technique.

Then I noticed that along the whole mile of the waterfall's crest the spray was rising higher than usual. This I took to be steam from the Seraph's heat. I was right, for presently, by the mute flashes of summer lightning, we watched him ride the Zambesi away from us, among the rocks that looked like crocodiles and the crocodiles that looked like rocks.

Spark's final response to Baudelaire's "Fanfarlo" took the form of a long poem "The Nativity".³² Cramer, the Fanfarlo and Montaverde appear as occupants of the inn from which the holy family was excluded. Cramer is a disgruntled guest, his reason for being there explained as

"I've come for a story for my paper."
 "I thought there was going to be something big
 according to rumour."

As Cramer in Baudelaire's prose piece had once masqueraded his intentions with the Fanfarlo by reviewing her cruelly in his newspaper, thereby guaranteeing an audience with her, so Spark presents her inauthentic hero only as a journalistic voyeur. In Spark's poem, Cramer is complaining to the Fanfarlo, who is the girl behind the desk at the inn, about bed-bugs. Outside is Montaverde, Cramer's former muse when he had been concerned with art, now a hunted murderer, sensationally tracked down to this point, and neatly coinciding with the imminent birth of Christ.

"They think they've got him here. They say there's
 Blood on his shirt and they were
 three days combing
 The woods for him. A hot coming
 He had of it I'm sure.

Nothing happens, and Cramer becomes aware that he is wasting his time here, but the Fanfarlo dismisses him first.

"Clear Out."
 "You anticipate me," said Samuel Cramer.
 "And pay before you go," said the Fanfarlo
 "I'll see you in Hell" said Samuel Cramer.

He leaves disgruntled, having missed both the point and the occasion. His final comment displays those qualities of ironic but fruitless aware-

ness which we have come to expect from Spark's splintered portrait of Cramer as surreally dislocated dilettante.

"There's a mooing and a bellowing going on
In the cattle shed beneath my window.
You'd think a cow was having a dozen
If it wasn't out of season.
But in this God-forsaken country anything could happen."

Spark has turned Baudelaire's characters into bourgeois outcasts busy masquerading, complaining and evading the law: indifferent witnesses at the site, if not the occasion, of the nativity. They are part of the unruly crowd of humanity who carry on regardless. Cramer's calling card--his artist's awareness, however blighted by inauthenticity and lack of talent--has him as a paying guest at the inn, while his alias, his Romantic alter-ego, is hunted to the spot as a murderer, Montaverde's criminal status reminds us of those murderous peripheral thieves, who in their "legitimate" executions and their broken humanity, qualified and humanized Christ's crucifixion. Cramer, as journalist and failed artist, has come to record for the popular press, not the coming of the saviour of the world, but the pursuit, capture and extinction of his own "other self"--the poet, his "romantic folly".

Spark's reply to Baudelaire, in both poetry and prose, has been anti-transcendentalist.

And what good's a God's eye view of
Anyone to anyone
But God?³³

From her reading of Baudelaire, however, she has deduced the only kind of transcendence she is prepared to admit exists in these godless times.

It is a surreal "transfiguration of the commonplace"; in Baudelairean terms it could be included in the technique for elevating "the imagery of sordid life . . . to the first intensity . . . presenting it as it is, and yet making it represent something much more than itself."³⁴ She is to use Art to establish refracted significance in the commonplace. An inspired misreading of Proust is to further assist her refinement of a narrative formula based on the dualistic possibilities of Art and God.

CHAPTER TWO

MURIEL SPARK'S RESPONSE TO LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU: A TIME AND LANDSCAPE OF THE MIND.

But the physical features of place surely had an effect as special as themselves on the outlook of the people. The Castle Rock is something, rising up as it does from pre-history between the formal grace of the New Town and the noble network of the old. To have a great primitive black crag rising up in the middle of populated streets of commerce, stately squares and winding closes, is like the statement of an unmitigated fact, preceded by "nevertheless".

Muriel Spark

L'esprit à ses paysages dont la contemplation
ne lui est laissé qu'un temps.

Le Temps Retrouvé

Muriel Spark read Scott Moncrieff's translation of A la Recherche du Temps Perdu immediately before writing her first novel, The Comforters, in 1953. In an article published in the Church of England Newspaper in November of that year, she clarified her critical interest in Proust's epic. She called the article "The Religion of an Agnostic: A Sacramental View of the World in the writings of Proust."¹ She goes on to define the Sacramental tradition in literature, in which she includes

herself along with Proust, as "an idea that the visible world is an active economy of outward signs embodying each an inward grace . . . [a] conception of matter that is hierarchical."

Spark argued that Proust had, through Art, embraced a "religion" that was both secular and aesthetic. At the heart of its transposition into literature was his technique for creating a sense of temporal transcendence through metaphor, while at the same time doing justice to things as they were in minute realistic description. She isolated these moments of transcendent metaphor as the points of ultimate synthesis in Proust's work, where all matter was rescued from time; where narrative was provided with artistic design and saved from fragmentary insignificance.

Spark saw this highlighting of "essences" both as a useful patterning device and as potentially providing the reader with a permanent anagogical measure, if one wanted to equate essence with truth. She called this aesthetic of Proust's "pagan" and substituted her own Christian view of Art. She is to base her own narratives on the kind of metaphoric notation suggested to her by Proust's transcendental method: "an acceptance of that deep irony in which we are presented with the most unlikely people and places and things as repositories of invisible grace . . . that outward and changing forms might be invisibly and peculiarly possessed, each after its own kind in spiritual embodiment."

Spark's "transfigurations" loosely follow Proust's model. They rely on "the moment out of time" and the metaphoric transmutation of

detail; on a concordance of idea, character and place; on a delicate balance of satirical realism and extraordinary significance. As a twentieth-century cynic, however, one as much influenced by the Nouveau Roman as by Proust, Muriel Spark is compelled to make of her transcendent moment, a surreal vacuum, based on the inevitable unreliability of human truths. Her perspective is relentlessly relativistic. This harsh view, with its curious overlay of "sacramental" faith in the autonomy and significance of people, places and objects, opens the door for her to introduce the surreal and the fabulous in her moments of fictional transcendence, as some kind of metaphorical solution to otherwise sordid and untenable twentieth-century living.

Fiction to me is some kind of parable. You have got to make up your mind it's not true.² Some kind of truth emerges from it, but it's not fact.

One of Spark's artistic axioms is that "if fiction is not stranger than truth then it ought to be."³

Spark was intrigued with Proust's ability to satirize and to elevate "to the first intensity" at the same time. She perceived this technique as yielding a kind of ironic simultaneity, one which answered the double referents of Art and Eternity. In one gesture he was able to

satirize his monsters immersed in Time . . . in the flesh, by the same method that here exalts their essence, under that aspect of eternity which is also an aspect of art.

For Art and eternity Spark firmly substitutes Art and God. She replaces Proust's elaboration on memory as the supremely redeeming and transcending

force, with one based on moments of unlikely Christian grace. In her novels God is the measure of time and experience. She idiosyncratically extends this assumption to include the supernatural and the extraordinary in the documentary presentation of time, thus forcibly dislodging the reader and disrupting conventional chronology. In her novels, she incorporates a sliding surrealism with unexpected moments of transcendence through lateral time shifts, synchronic puns, cinematic flashbacks and wild glimpses into the future. By these means, she can "satirize" and "exalt" simultaneously, thus reconciling her artistic and metaphysical intentions.

Proust had taken up the medieval idea, at its richest in Dante's Divine Comedy, that the visible might be read as a kind of text in itself. This idea contributed to Muriel Spark's intense and expanded use of metaphor, where an entire novella can be one elaborately crafted conceit.. It suggested above all, the joined possibilities of surrealism and metaphor as the necessary, the only conceivable, dialectical elements in creating transcendence in modern fiction; and it suggested one narrative structure which might adequately fuse them--"a time and landscape of the mind."

In an awkward full-length novel written in mid-career, Spark attempted her most "Proustian" designs. The novel fails, but not because of them. The Mandelbaum Gate has its heroine make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to recover and reconstruct her identity from her own past and from the idealized Biblical past she sees embodied in the landscape. In the

attempt, Barbara Vaughan is caught between times and landscapes precisely as she is caught between faiths. One set of circumstances is paradigm for the other. Only in the totality is her composite identity redeemable, and transcendent, coherent faith conceivable:

Barbara on the summit of Mount Tabor, conscious of the Holy Land stretching to its boundaries on every side, reflected wearily on her reflections . . . she thought, my mind is impatient to escape from its constitution and reach its point somewhere else. But that is in eternity at the point of transfiguration. In the meantime . . . memory circulates like the bloodstream. May mine circulate well, may it bring dead facts to life, may it bring health to whatever is to be born . . . She had a sense of temporal displacement . . . the end of Lent 1939 . . .³

There follows a virtual paradigm, albeit unsuccessful, for Proustian manipulation of metaphor, as Spark chose to adhere to it. She "de-actualizes" sensory information, breaking down the separateness of objects as if from solid to liquid. She then "transfigures" detail and relocates it harmoniously within a predetermined hierarchy of actual and poetic experience. She melts together time, place and the individuality of the senses. Details run into one another, transfigured by memory until they constitute new wholes, new units of experience, described in a tense that is timeless. Their basis is poetic rather than actual.

. . . Lent . . . 1939 . . . The lawn lay beautiful as eternity . . . the warmth of the spring oozed in through the French windows as if the glass were porous . . . the air was elusively threaded with the evidence of unseen hyacinths . . . There was a stir in the beech leaves like papers being gently shuffled into order. The drawing in of an English afternoon took place, with its fugitive sorrow.

What follows is a description of a remembered Passover feast that took place on the same day in 1939. It is at this point that the sensory

detail in the recollection is quickly drawn into sharp design. Spark patterns it into a signification of faith. What might have remained actual time becomes, in sensory translation, ritual time. Faith and the senses are made to intersect and sustain one another, and a kind of conceit--that of the feast--is constructed around them. The memory of the ritual becomes the ritual of memory, as Spark uses Proust's technique for the revelation of essences to intercede between her characters and God.

. . . on this night every morsel stood for something else, and was food as well. The children drank wine and deliverance with it. . . . the unleavened bread, crisp matzo that made crumbs everywhere, was uncovered. "This is the poor bread which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt!"

Barbara's grandfather, who conducts the ritual, seems at this moment to be "unaging".

. . . the room was warm with mesmeric ritual as much as with actual heat . . . here and now they were suddenly children of Israel.

There's the human soul, the individual. Not 'Jew, Gentile' as one might say 'autumn, winter'. Something unique, unrepeatable.

Spark has treated this remembered occasion as an encapsulating moment in the identity continuum. Details are fluid within it. It is what they signify that matters. Proust on the other hand, treats the symbol as essentially static, subject to its own laws and internal transmutations. It is the sheer kinetic energy of Spark's symbolic treatment here which makes the incident coherent within the allegorical structure of the novel: the pilgrimage in search of identity. Her

pattern of correspondences, necessary for the arresting of time and for fixing meaning to experience, is nonetheless, in accord with Proust's paradigm for recovering time. It begins and ends with the transfigured landscape, both psychic and actual, in which every spatial sensation corresponds to a similar distance in time.

As both Dante and Proust had done, Spark maps psychic terrain to fix material manifestations of grace.

If you asked me how I remember the island, what it was like to be stranded there by misadventure for nearly three months, I would answer that it was a time and landscape of the mind if I did, not have the visible signs to summon its materiality.⁴

Allegorical landscape provides the one, large harmonious design which Muriel Spark needed to provide an intellectual equivalent for aesthetic experience.

Walter Benjamin suggests that allegory is already a kind of conceptual primeval landscape.⁵ In this light, Spark's Edinburgh, London and New York, like Proust's salons, Combray and Balbec, act as allegorical visual surface for their works, providing the same kind of telescoping effect as can be seen in medieval religious paintings where none of the painting can be ignored.

For the suggestiveness and intensity of ambiguous metaphorical language allegory substitutes a sort of figurative geometry.⁶

Narrative topography is both psychic and actual, underlining the connection between the material world of the senses and the imagined world beyond space and time. Viewed from Benjamin's ironical perspective

Every person, every object, every relationship can stand for something else. This transferability constitutes a devastating though just judgement on the profane world . . . Details are transferable thus insignificant. They are not banished from art . . . On the contrary--precisely in art--descriptive detail is often an extraordinarily sensuous, suggestive power.⁷

Both Proust and Spark qualify as "modernist symbolists" in their attempts to substitute for experience still points of revelation which will structure reader perception. Proust searches for a state of existence that embodies an "authentic present." Spark's transfigurations are, by comparison, hard, bright, witty and duplicitous. They convey arbitrary, surreally dislocated "bits of time" rather than portraying time as a continuum. These units of time and the non-temporal exist both in interior and spatial dimensions, which together make up the "landscape" of the fiction. Spark takes up Proust's use of closed image systems, or contained narrative worlds, in her novels. It is implicit in the texts--both Spark's and Proust's--that the reader and author are in "structural complicity" in establishing and accepting the parameters of the fiction. It is understood, for example that

Combray is a closed universe . . . (it) is the vision shared by all the members of the family. A certain order is superimposed over a reality and becomes indistinguishable from it. The first symbol of Combray is the magic lantern whose images take on the shape of the objects on which they are projected and returned in the same way to us by the wall of the room, the lampshades, and the doorknobs . . . Combray is a closed culture . . . 'a little closed world' the novelist calls it. The gulf between Combray and the rest of the world is on the level of perception.

There is the same circular vision, the same internal cohesion sanctioned by a system of ritual gestures⁸ and words . . . a way of seeing, feeling, judging.

Sparks adapts this narrative model for schematizing narrative information, subject to her own stylized and idiosyncratic laws of perspective. At the centre of her slight, oblique and satirical novels are carefully selected communities. She depicts with wit and inevitability their minutely observed inhabitants, recording with relentless accuracy the absurdities of their speech, and the flaws and inanities of their public and private rituals. She takes up those "revelatory tones and gestures"⁹ while at the same time subjecting them to those laws of Proustian and Catholic "economy" which she had devised for her own writing, which allowed "figurative meaning (to be) piled upon the literal."¹⁰ Spark's times and landscapes of the mind become, like Combray and Balbec, closed fictional worlds, taking on a microscopic quality and resonance which the inhabitants may not understand. Spark works on a small scale, making disturbingly large-scale statements. She has learned via Proust to work an image until it has yielded all possible significance. Her thoroughness in this regard was established early. In Robinson, her second novel, where she first describes "a time and landscape of the mind", she elaborates exhaustively, if awkwardly, on the idea and the conceit of man as island. Robinson, the character, is both.

"Where am I?"
 "Robinson" he said.
 "Who are you?"
 "Robinson."¹¹

Robinson's actual and psychic topography make up the action and structure of the novel, their image patterns overlapping and drawing on one another.

Robinson becomes a "sea-bound hero . . . A pagan pre-Christian victim of expiation" in the eyes of the heroine. The island she sees as "apocryphal . . . a trick of the mind . . . a truth of the mind." It resembles "a locality of childhood both dangerous and lyrical."¹² Spark writes "always in the hope that everything will be said and done more clearly and appropriately than in real life. . . . life as a whole rather than a series of disconnected happenings."¹³ She shapes these wholes into allegorical superstructures, so making the image legible and the allegory visual.

Spark's technique is based on a systematic distortion of the real by the metaphysical. Where Proust is almost mathematically analogical in his search for those aspects of experience which essentially and permanently connect, Muriel Spark begins with the assumption that perception is imperialistic, arbitrary and unreliable. Proust deals in visual and verbal architecture, evoking and capturing his times and landscapes--Balbec, Combray, Guermantes and Venice--by applying as templates in each description fixed architectonic elements: spires, dungeons, roofs, terraces, and gardens, thus formulating the laws of correspondence which are at the basis of his symbolism.¹⁴

In mid-career, Muriel Spark, with conscious or unconscious intent, produced a unit of fiction--three novels which absorb and act upon Proust's symbolic techniques and narrative structures, reduced to a workable paradigm to produce a vastly different kind of fiction. In The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,¹⁵ The Girls of Slender Means¹⁶ and The

Hothouse by the East River,¹⁷ Spark chooses times and locations with political and aesthetic resonances which perfectly embody her themes. There is an interlocking of image and information, so that each novel is both consummately historical and lifted right out of chronology. The novels are symbolic, allegorical works validated by a wealth of precise, salient detail of place and period. The temporality and geography of Edinburgh in the thirties, London at the end of the war, and New York at the end of the sixties are both naturalistically and metaphorically caught. Time and place match.

The first of the novels was The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, in which, Spark presented a larger-than-life spinster, a charismatic teacher and creator of a school-girl élite, as her symbol for the fascist thirties. The novel's scenario is Calvinist Edinburgh in the wake of the depression. Both Jean Brodie and the fascist movement are in their prime. Her armies are the little girls whom she has selected to refine in her image. They are zealous and obedient and finally they too become corrupt, and Jean Brodie, their leader, is dispossessed, dying "the year after the war from an internal growth."¹⁸ The theme of the novel is élitism, both political and religious. It is about the nature of faith and the consequences of power. Calvinism is actually and symbolically part of the landscape in Edinburgh in 1936.

The outsides of old Edinburgh churches frightened her, they were of such dark stone, like presences almost the colour of the Castle rock, and were built so warningly with their upraised fingers . . . these emblems of a dark and terrible salvation which made the fires of the damned seem very merry to the imagination by contrast . . .¹⁹

The most treacherous of Miss Brodie's protégés becomes a rather tortured nun, who writes an "odd psychological treatise on the nature of moral perception, called 'The Transfiguration of the Commonplace'".²⁰ This young woman had comprehended most fully the dangerous combination of Jean Brodie and Calvin, Edinburgh and the thirties.

Sandy recalled Miss Brodie's admiration for Mussolini's marching roops . . . It occurred to Sandy . . . that the Brodie set was Miss Brodie's fascisti, not to the naked eye, marching along, but all knit together for her need . . . marching along . . . a body with Miss Brodie for the head, in unified compliance to the destiny of Miss Brodie, as if God had willed them to birth for that purpose . . .²¹

Spark incorporates an ironic, multi-layered assessment of power, of "election", in her intricate portrait of the charismatic Miss Brodie as a benevolent despot, bewitching lovers and disciples alike. It is a double parody: a political one in that her career parallels the historical rise and fall of the fascist movement; and a religious one in that it satirizes through Jean Brodie's moulding of the little girls' characters, man's unceasing vulnerability to corruption. It is also a parody of any élite based on sensibility, the idea of a "crème de la crème."

"Hold up your books" said Miss Brodie quite often that autumn, "prop them up in your hands, in case of intruders. If there are any intruders we are doing our history lesson . . . our poetry . . . English grammar." . . . "Meantime I will tell you about my last summer holiday in Egypt . . . I will tell you about the care of the skin, and of the hands, . . . about the Frenchman I met in the train to Biarritz . . . and I must tell you about the Italian paintings I saw. Who is the greatest Italian painter?"
 "Leonardo da Vinci, Miss Brodie."
 "That is incorrect. The answer is Giotto, he is my favourite."²²

The girls became a kind of aesthetic militia.

The portrait of Jean Brodie is a model for the novel's multi-surfaced precision. Detail is always at least double-edged. Jean Brodie is the historical and personal tyrant figure of the work, and at the same time she is a victim, and a figure of romantic parody. She tells her girls in fairy-tale fashion of her fiancé killed at Flanders.

He fell the week before Armistice was declared. He fell like an autumn leaf . . . Hugh was one of the Flowers of the Forest, lying in his grave.²³

Miss Brodie had elected herself to grace in so particular a way and with more suicidal enchantment than if she had simply taken to drink like other spinsters who couldn't stand it any more . . . there was a whiff of sulphur about the idea . . .²⁴

Historically, "Miss Brodie was an Edinburgh spinster of the deepest dye," one of a generation of young women whose lovers were killed during World War One.²⁵ They were an unlikely generation of spinsters, dispossessed of the normal channels for their energies.

There were legions of her kind during the nineteen-thirties, women who crowded their war-bereaved spinsterhood with voyages of discovery into new ideas and energetic practices, in art or social welfare, education or religion.²⁶

Miss Brodie had devoted all her energy to her prime, and its recreation in her girls. She is a heroine of her own construction, a living fiction.

"I met a poet by a fountain. Here is a picture of Dante meeting Beatrice."²⁷

As her charges grow, the years add layers to her fictionalizing, and it becomes difficult for her to distinguish between the real and the imagined.

A longstanding teaching technique of Jean Brodie's for example, had been to incorporate her love affairs with the Art master, Teddy Loyd, and the Music teacher, Gordon Lowther, into her instruction of how to conduct one's prime. This embodies the idea in the novel, that reality is simply an accretion of fictions.

That Spring . . . there was no rain worth remembering, the grass, the sun and birds lost their self-centred winter mood and began to think of others. Miss Brodie's old love story was newly embroidered under the elm, with curious threads.²⁸

This theme of perceptual confusion underlines the further themes of developing consciousness and its manipulation.

By the time their friendship with Miss Brodie was of seven years' standing, it had worked itself into their bones, so that they could not break away without as it were, splitting their bones to do so.²⁹

In as much as the novel is a study in perception, it also concerns itself in the Proustian manner, with the familiar Sparkian themes of spying and betrayal. Sandy Stranger betrays Jean Brodie to the headmistress as having taught fascism to her girls; for she wants to put a stop to her as an entity.

"She thinks she is Providence . . . she thinks she is the God of Calvin, she sees the beginning and the end."³⁰

The girl is able to betray her mentor by virtue of what she has learned.

Sandy was fascinated by this method of making patterns with facts, and was divided between her admiration for the technique and the pressing need to prove Miss Brodie guilty of misconduct.³¹

Sandy learns and embodies the "economy of method" which comes with

the "transfiguration of the commonplace" in the hands of both Jean Brodie and Muriel Spark. The girl learns to extract the essence from people and time, and to turn it to her advantage. During her affair with Teddy Loyd

. . . she was curious about the mind that loved the woman . . . Jean Brodie . . . By the end of the year it happened that she quite lost interest in the man himself, but was deeply absorbed in his mind, from which she extracted, among other things, his religion as a pith from a husk. Her mind was as full of his religion as a night sky is full of things visible and invisible. She left the man and took his religion and became a nun in the course of time.³²

She and Spark apply this transfiguring technique consummately to the figure of Jean Brodie as she comes to stand for Edinburgh and the thirties.

Miss Brodie looked beautiful and fragile, just as dark heavy Edinburgh itself could suddenly be changed into a floating city when the light was a special pearly white and fell upon one of the gracefully fashioned streets. In the same way, Miss Brodie's masterful features became clear and sweet to Sandy when viewed in the curious light of the woman's folly.³³

The woman's folly itself becomes the major design of the novel as we come to rely on her bizarre perspective. Spark reminds us only late in the fiction, that Jean Brodie, like her other protagonists, is not necessarily to be trusted.

"Who was Miss Brodie?"

"A teacher of mine, she was full of culture. She was an Edinburgh Festival all on her own. She used to give us teas at her flat and tell us about her prime."

"Prime what?"

"Her prime of life . . . she wasn't mad . . ."³⁴

The key to the novel's design is the poetic correlation of the landscaping of place and time with the leading character's consciousness. The text comes to stand as a diagram or map for a state of mind and a stance in the world. It follows the Proustian formula of a closed community in the Marcia Blaine School for Girls, and within the larger community, the Brodie set, itself some kind of distillation of the larger situation. Each of these communities has its own laws of perception and its own code. As in Proust's salon, there is an intruder, (at least in spirit,) who acts as a betrayer.

The time-scape of the novel is also an elaboration of Brodie consciousness. Miss Brodie's fictions lift her, of course, out of time, which displeases her in actuality. She provides her own chronology.

"These years are still the years of my prime. Here is my tramcar. I dare say I'll not get a seat. This is 1936. The age of chivalry is past."³⁵

In history lessons she moves easily from one narrative present to a point six years before and from there to the death of her fiancé in World War One. Time becomes an eccentric continuum in the novel, in the hand of one woman's agitated sensibility. Narrative time follows the same shifting sequence in chronology as Jean Brodie's sense of time. This fabrication of time contributes to the systematic undoing of realistic norms in the novel. Insertions of the fantastic, the ideal and the unlikely add to a sense that narrative reality is made up of travestied fantasies. Jean Brodie sees herself as the Lady of Shalott at one stage, for example. She overlaps personalities and destinies, especially those

of her girls, one of whom she prepares to take her place as Teddy Loyd's lover. The "transfiguration of the commonplace" describes Jean Brodie's life and Spark's procedures as well as Sandy's treatise.

The actual city-scape of Edinburgh is faithfully evoked, complete with Fabians, Calvinist discomfort, and long lines of the Idle or Unemployed.

. . . the slow jerkily moving file . . . all of a piece like a dragon's body which had no right to be in the city and yet would not go away and was unslayable.³⁶

The novel is schematic, precise and astringent, and enriched by its active reconstruction of time. One of Mrs. Spark's stated artistic intentions is "to restore the proportions of the human spirit."³⁷ In this, the first of her intensely poetic novels, this concern for proportion acts as a sealing agent on the narrative, its imagery and thematic concerns. There is a polished verbal finish to the novella, making it a kind of prose mosaic. Its design is pure contemporary allegory: a landscape of time and consciousness. In reply to Proust's paradigm for writing "transcendent" prose--a metaphorical concordance of time, place, character and idea--Spark has produced in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, the first in a series of poetic novellas, to represent a kind of psychic map.

The Girls of Slender Means, written in 1963, further refines Muriel Spark's very particular pattern for city-scape.³⁸ With the novel's opening description of war-ruined London, she declares her intention to make "unusual demands on the mind's eye." We are given an appropriately surreal landscape to match the intentions of the novel.

Some bomb-ripped buildings looked like the ruins of ancient castles until, at closer view, the wallpapers of various quite normal rooms would be visible . . . most of all the staircases survived, like a new art form, leading up and to an unspecified destination . . .³⁹

The novel's central image is of another closed community: the May of Teck Club, a hostel for well-bred but financially reduced young women. The span of the novel is the heady time between VE and VJ days. The club becomes an emblem for London and the time. The novel's theme is austerity of one kind or another, and its tone is appropriately spare. In this novel Mrs. Spark makes tighter and more controlled efforts to translate historical and sensory information into allegorical design, into a specifically Christian frame of reference.

Spark, like Rilke, has described the artist as one who "changes actuality into something else."⁴⁰ In this novel she prepares us for multiplicity and transformation in the title. The expression "Slender Means" has three connected meanings in the narrative. It can mean financial impoverishment, ethical impoverishment, or more flippantly, it can refer to the elegant physical dimensions needed to slide in and out of the club's narrow upper window to sunbake on the roof. All three possibilities are intricately worked into the fabric of the novel. To offset the blighted circumstances of London and its inhabitants in 1945, Spark introduces a wry "fairy tale" tone.

Long ago in 1945 all the nice people in England
were poor . . .⁴¹

The community of survivors at the May of Teck Club is certainly reduced, ethically and financially. The loss Spark suggests may be the price of

survival; nonetheless they too are slightly fabular.

. . . few people alive at the time were more delightful, more ingenuous, more movingly lovely, and as it might happen, more savage than the girls of slender means.⁴²

The entire tone and slant of the novel is caught in that elusive, curiously slanted qualification, "as it might happen."

Spark develops in this novel a technique for "fixing" social landscapes and for freezing images much as Proust had painted them and as Robbe-Grillet is to "stop" them. Spark makes a fresco out of an ebullient crowd on VE night.

They became members of a wave of the sea, they surged and sang . . . Only the St. John's Ambulance men, watchful beside vans, had any identity left . . . Many strange arms were entwined around strange bodies. Many liaisons, some permanent, were formed in the night . . . The next day everyone began to consider where they personally stood in the new order of things.⁴³

She is concerned with the power of war to dissolve identity, and with the consequent problems of reconstructing that identity, when the defining factor of the enemy is removed. One of the novel's protagonists quotes Cavafy:

And now what will become of us without the Barbarians?
Those people were some kind of solution.⁴⁴

It becomes ironically clear, that in this case, even the Barbarians had never been any kind of solution whatever.

The community of ethically slender girls is infiltrated and disrupted in the Sparkian (and Proustian) manner, by a young man called Nicholas Farrington, a vague British writer whose sensibility has been temporarily displaced by the war. As a visitor to the club, he is struck

by the "beautiful aspects of poverty and charm amongst the girls."⁴⁵ He falls in love with their corporate spirit. There is more than a suggestion of authorial self-parody in this paradigm of the infiltration of a closed community by a disruptive outsider who is an observer and translator of information. What Farrington does with his vision of the young women is central to the purposes of the book.

He discerned with irony the processes of his own thoughts, how he was imposing upon this little society an image incomprehensible to itself.⁴⁶

Muriel Spark has taken as one of the premises for this work, the idea, particularly as it relates to war, that "a vision of evil may be as effective to conversion as a vision of good."⁴⁷ The novel's climax involves the explosion of a long dormant bomb in the club's garden and a subsequent fire which consumes the building. The novel takes on apocalyptic overtones. One girl, a minister's daughter dies almost a mystic in the fire, while Selina Redwood, the most beautiful and savage of the young women, in an episode full of Proustian resonance, rescues only an expensive dress. The sight of this provides precisely the "vision of evil" needed to altar Farrington's view of the world. It was said later that the fire "probably turned his brain."⁴⁸ Selina had been in his eyes the most perfect embodiment of the club and its code. Just as Proust focuses on the discrepancy between apparent civilization and the real savagery underlying the artifice of social behaviour, Spark's character is revealed here as a savage, and Farrington's ideal construction collapses.

One of Spark's main concerns in this novel is to disrupt any glib

equations of moral and aesthetic worth in the minds of readers. They do not she suggests, necessarily co-exist, nor do they mirror one another. Farrington, the poet-figure in the novel, is searching as one of James' artist-heroes might have done, for a "lovely frozen image" of the club and its inhabitants which will incorporate the aesthetic and the ethical. For him, Joanna,, the elocution teacher and private mystic, embodies the latter, while Selina Redwood, "floating . . . in a Schiaparelli rustle of silk . . . a high disregard of all surrounding noises," is the essence of the former.⁴⁹

Ironically, both young women are lost at the end of the novel, and it is Jane Wright, a fat, yearning and persistent editor's assistant, who furnishes Farrington's final image of the place and time. She is neither the best nor the worst of the May of Teck Club. Yet she is its only final representative in the VJ day crowd.

Jane mumbled, "Well I wouldn't have missed it really." She had halted to pin up her struggling hair, and had a hair pin in her mouth as she said it. Nicholas marvelled at her stamina, recalling her in this image years later in the country of his death--how she stood --sturdy and bare-legged on the dark grass, occupied with her hair--as if this was an image of all the May of Teck establishment in its meek, unselfconscious attitudes of poverty long ago in 1945.⁵⁰

In this final, frozen crowd scene, Spark reminds us that the spectacle of war does not exhaust the human capacity for violence. A seaman

observed only by Nicholas, slid a knife silently between the ribs of a woman who was with him. The lights went up on the balcony, and a hush anticipated the Royal appearance. The stabbed woman did not scream, but sagged immediately.⁵¹

The novel is suspended between the two crowd scenes. Its time-span has distilled the behaviour of the war-hysterical crowd.

In the last of these scenes Nicholas Farrington performs one of the functions of an author: he turns a commentary on the situation into an image, and takes it out of time. This kind of division of labour is one of the narrative sleights of hand Spark is to perfect. Ironic self-consciousness in construction is to be a recurring element in her allegorical designs.

The commonplace is more clinically and finely transfigured in this novel than in her earlier novels. The peripheral and essential alike are constantly drawn into shape, in order to construct the conceit of the novel. Every detail is functional and becomes contingent within the allegorical frame. This requires an eccentric harmony between the stated formality of the allegory and the satiric, instructive direction of the work. Spark makes information work both ways --allegorically and satirically-- especially in characterization. Nicholas Farrington is the reader's witness in the novel, as he possesses the most coherent and reliable perspective. At the same time he embodies the spirit of an intellectual twilight-zone common to England's intelligentsia in the thirties and forties. Therefore he too, is not entirely to be trusted.

"He is a mess by the way . . . always undecided about whether to live in England or France, and whether he preferred men or women . . . he could never make up his mind between suicide and an equally drastic course of action known as Father D'Arcy . . . Nicholas was a pacifist up to the outbreak of war . . . then he joined the army . . . he said . . . the war has brought him peace . . . next thing he is psychoanalysed out of the army . . . and he is working for Intelligence.⁵²

Spark presents this character through a favourite technique, as a pastiche of the post-war, "barely presentable" intellectual. Like Jean Brodie, Nicholas is the embodiment of a whole generation of people of displaced sensibility and no clear vocation. He does, however, perform the valuable function in the novel, of perfecting the transfiguration of the commonplace, echoing the author's own designs and actively reinforcing the symmetry of the novel.

Other key themes in the novel are the processes and implications of memory. Farrington, for example, is introduced into the narrative some time after his obscure death while on a remote island, as a missionary. His fate has overtones of T. S. Eliot's poetry and plays. It is rumoured that he died violently. Now he is a shadowy figure discussed on the telephone.

"What a long time ago that was . . .
It brings everything back."

"How has he died, by the way?" said Rudi.

"He was martyred, they say." said Jane.

"In Haiti. How is this?"

"I don't know much, except what I get from the news sources. Reuters says . . ."

"I can't hear you, it's a rotten line . . ."

". . . How he died . . .?"

". . . a hut . . ."

"I can't hear . . ."

". . . in a valley . . ."

"Speak loud."

"in a clump of palms . . . deserted . . . it was a market day, everyone had gone to market."

"I can't hear a word. I ring you tonight, Jane. We meet later.⁵³

There are decided resonances of Celia's mysterious and apparently barbaric death at the hands of natives on a remote island in Eliot's The Cocktail Party.⁵⁴ This conversation, and, in effect, Farrington's

death marks the point at which the novel begins. Throughout the novel he is described as one half-remembered.

This other one who smiled was Nicholas Farrington, not yet known or as yet at all likely to be.⁵⁵

His characterization then amounts to a set of collective recollections, none of them necessarily true or even reliable, given that Farrington himself was our steadiest witness. The telephone conversation with which he is introduced echoes the personification of Death in an earlier book, Memento Mori, who actually telephones people to warn them that they are going to die.⁵⁶ This is how death comes, it seems, in the technological age, and it is all the more sinister for it.

In The Girls of Slender Means, Spark has refined significantly her technique for spelling out absolutes in what at first may appear to be the commonplace. She has with this novel begun to distil the elements of her fictional architecture in a particularly Proustian way. She now appeals to the "mind's eye" of the reader. She combines ruthlessly clear fictional lines with an elegant visual surface. She is now able to synchronize in her characterizations those elements of the real and the metaphorical which were the basis of her designs of the time and landscape of the work. She has learned to balance character, time and landscape in a state of suspended tension.

III "New York was beginning to decay." Mrs. Spark said explaining her move to Rome. "It was beginning to get dangerous and dirty."

Daily Telegraph, Sept. 25th, 1970.

The Hothouse by the East River⁵⁷ is a piece of purgatorial fiction, much like Jean Paul Sartre's Huis Clos. Although it is ostensibly set in modern-day New York, its entire cast was killed in London during a World War II bombing raid. Spark's plot is an arbitrary fictional construction of their intended lives in America after the war.

The novel extends the methods used in Spark's other poetic novels. She begins with the same fictional premises, methodology and structures of ideas; her images are more exotic, however, and their refinement and synthesis more exacting. The action of the novel is suspended between two actual and allegorical landscapes and times--Europe, 1944 and New York, 1970. Both are "death-scapes". Europe is a scene of actual war-time death and New York allegorizes purgatorial "death in life". The latter is described as something of an hallucination or abstract painting. From the odd aerial slant of the protagonists' window, the lines of the city are ominously silent and clinically geometric. It could be an abstract canvas.

The window bay of the room, jutting out fourteen stories above everything is considered to be a luxury. These great windows cover a third of the east wall which overlooks the river, the whole of the north wall towards the street, and the adjoining corner of the west wall from where can be seen the length of the street with the intersection of avenues diminishing in the distance as far as the Pan Am building.⁵⁸

Spark echoes here, the narrative style of Robbe-Grillet with its focus on surfaces, angles and lines of vision. The city is a psychic abstraction, with fluid laws of actual and metaphoric perspective.

New York, home of the vivisectors 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: New York heaves outside the consultant's office, agitating all around her about her ears.⁵⁹

The novel is structured on a formula of inversion: the characters are dead, not living, lunacy is the most authentic state of existence in the novel, and the past is more real than the author's uncertain present tense. Shadow is literally more substantial than what appears to be actual. Imagined realities are the only facts provided in the fiction. The novel abstracts the essences of the commonplace and uses them to create a new kind of landscape of the mind.

As in preceding works there is a community, which forms a closed unit with its own perceptual laws. Here it is Elsa and Paul's Manhattan apartment, a luxuriously-equipped skyline glasshouse, silent but for the purr of the temperature control. It offers the perspective of one "standing in the air". Elsa sits in the bay window a good deal of the time, looking out over the East River. The Manhattan skyline reminds her of Carthage waiting for St. Augustine,

. . . where there bubbled around me in my ears a cauldron of unholy loves.⁶⁰

The community based around the apartment consists of Elsa and Paul, the spectral New York children of the house and various associates from the past, including a lavishly paid therapist. Again there is an echo of Eliot's deistic therapist who supervizes the action in The Cocktail Party. Spark uses the physical unit of the apartment as a kind of

compression chamber. She confounds and puts into a vacuum the traditionally reliable information of narrative, by first making it pass through the filter of "purgatorial reality" as contained in the apartment. The novel's sensory data can only be interpreted correctly within its insane laws. This apartment, in its isolation and irrationality, becomes Spark's symbol for the psychic state of modern man. The novel is relentless in its scrutiny of this bizarre state.

"You know, Poppy," she says, "I've been thinking. My psyche is like a sky-scraper, stretching up and up, practically all glass and steel so that one can look out over everything, and one never bends."⁶¹

Spark sees the human sensibility as unprecedentedly devalued and commercialized. When Paul looks at his wife he sees her as

. . . real estate like the source of her money. She sits, well-dressed with her pretty hair-do and careful make-up, but sits solidly, as on valuable land property painted up like a deteriorating building that has not yet been pulled down to make way for those high steel structures, her daughter and son.⁶²

Elsa is the character least adjusted to death, an unwilling Eurydice figure. She has in fact, begun to materialize in the actual world, in the form of an unnaturally cast shadow, falling at odd angles, regardless of the light. Her husband, in Spark's parody of the paranoia-ridden state of modern marriage, regards this shadow-casting as an insane display of will to torment him. Her hypothetical children treat it as cheerful madness. For the reader this shadow is proof that Elsa is the closest to a self-realizing character in the novel. She is, however, by virtue of her death and instability, Spark's usual "unreliable witness".

The psyche is a transparent, unbending glass and steel structure; and the New York landscape is intended to allegorize the "real world" in which it must survive. As the novel opens, heat and mist descend on the city, oppressing and distorting perspective.

"... a lot of mist this evening."

"Really?" she says as if she cannot see herself the heat fog that has lowered over the city of New York all day.

... she shudders.

"Are you cold?" he says. "Those air conditioners are too old. They aren't right."

"The temperature touched a hundred and one at noon.

The highways have buckled, many places."

"You are suffering from the heat, your imagination . . ."

he says, her face still turned to the dark blue river where it quivers with the ink-red reflection of the Pepsi Cola sign on the opposite bank.

"It's affected you, Paul." she says in her tranquillity.

"You've been standing there in that spot since you came in."

"Today's been the hottest on record for twelve years.

Tomorrow is to be worse. People are going mad in the streets. People coming home, men coming home, will have riots in their hearts and heads, never mind riots in the street."⁶³

Spark's diction takes on an odd, almost drugged neutrality which performs the same function in the prose as the nullifying air temperature control in the apartment, sealing the unit off from the outside.

It is winter time in Elsa Hazlett's apartment; the rushing summer purr of the air conditioner has ceased; the air quivers with central heating that cannot be turned off very far, and which is augmented by heat from the flats above and below and in the northern flank.

... the central heating quivers in the air and, outside the window, snowflakes begin to fold into clouds, descending as they have done, on and off, for

so many weeks . . . the East window looks out on the dark twilight full of snow, a swirling grey spotted muslin veil, beyond which, only by faith and experience, can you know, stands the sky over the East River.⁶⁴

Manhattan is presented as the central, metaphoric landscape of the novel. War time Europe, an "actual" deathscape is "hyper-real", rather than metaphorical.

The norm in the air about Elsa and Paul is the war with Germany.⁶⁵

Paul and Elsa are, at this time, strong, young, langorous and in love with one another. They are employed at an Intelligence Compound in the middle of the English countryside . . . "in the green depths of England . . . the robot bombs which are already screaming down over London cannot be heard."⁶⁶ For some of the characters, this time of actual devastation represents the only reality they are prepared to accept.

"Back in 1944 when people were normal and there was a world war on."⁶⁷

"What is now? Now is never, never. Only then exists. Where shall I turn next? New York is changing. Help me!"⁶⁸

"We really lived our life . . . You don't seem to take in how real it all was . . ."⁶⁹

Elsa tries to recover her lost "Europeanness" by fleeing New York and going to modern-day Switzerland. From a first-class Zürich hotel, she confronts the sleek, antiseptic, moneyed place which Europe has become. Her husband telephones her, begging her to return to New York, which is at least, a comprehensible deathscape.

"Why go back all that way where your soul has to fend for itself and you think for yourself in secret while you conform with others in the open? Come back

here to New York the sedative chamber, where you don't think at all and you can act as crazily as you like and talk your head off, all day, all night."⁷⁰

Spark creates an Orpheus/Eurydice parody, with Paul's attempts to lure Elsa back to "life".

The final moments of the novel see this metropolis of the mind's eye as a purgatorial landscape, like Camus' Amsterdam in La Chute. Death finally re-overtakes Paul and Elsa in New York's night-club district. The entire supporting cast that had died with them pursues the couple through a series of hellish night-clubs and dark city streets. The cast is driving a hypothetical Rolls Royce, as if to pick them up for a night on the town. Once more, Paul is Orpheus trying to lead Elsa away from pink-lit clubs with mirrored walls. "Come away, love, they're all dead . . . Don't look back or answer . . . walk on, Elsa, our life's our own to do what we like with."⁷¹ At the close of the novel, having eluded their dead friends, they return home to find that death has started to demolish their building, the "edifice" they had "set soaring" to keep them from the grave.

They stand outside the apartment block, looking at the scaffolding. The upper stories are already gone and the lower part is a skull. A demolition truck waits for the new day's shift to begin. The morning breeze from the East River is already spreading the dust.⁷²

The East River has become Lethe to New York's Hell.

A Hothouse by the East River is Muriel Spark's least chronological novel. In it, time is arbitrary, because imagined. Often it is a joke. "Oh God, what was 1944? It never happened to me."⁷³ Given its erratic

chronology, the novel requires architectonic elements that are more poetically consistent than in Spark's other landscape novels to order it. Symbolic motifs she uses as celluloid transparencies to overlay, connect and alter each of the narrative's times and landscapes. Elsa's death-defying shadow, for example, falls across the paths of all the characters, and in all their rooms. It reminds us, cinematically, that the reality we are observing is purely artificial. The shadow

. . . falls across the grand piano and on to the floor like a wobbly grey cashmere shawl that has been left to trail and gather dust untouched for a hundred years.⁷⁴

She leaves the room, trailing the shadow at the wrong angle, like the train of an antique ball dress.⁷⁵

The shadow has the visual power to be real; it is Elsa's objective correlative in the world. It alone can displace the photographic negatives, the death details, that make up the visual surface of the novel.

Elsa's shadow falls brown in the photograph, grey white in the negative; it crosses his shadow and the children's as if to cancel them with one sharp diagonal line.⁷⁶

Elsa's renegade shadow says above all that she exists on both sides of the hothouse glass. She sits in the Bay window, smiling as if "in company with the Nothing beyond the window."⁷⁷ She is halfway between death and life. Much of the novel's imagery is photographic: if all the characters are dead, they can be looked on metaphorically as photographic negatives. Elsa's shadow then becomes an inverted photographic "positive."⁷⁸

Still within the formula of inversion, lunacy in the novel is real, while so-called reality is bloodless and insubstantial. Elsa and Paul

for example, are employed by their Intelligence unit during the war, to secretly and systematically promote absurdities: they professionally garble information to confuse the enemy. In the novel good behaviour is a matter of respecting another's lunacies and wayward perceptions. In an early novel; The Comforters, one character had speculated an "good behaviour" of this kind:

Is the world a lunatic asylum then?
Are we all counted as maniacs discreetly making
allowances for everyone else's derangement?⁷⁹

"I know he's Kiel," Elsa says. "I know it very well. I wish you would be more obliging, Poppy and pretend he's someone else . . . It's a matter of persevering in the pretence."⁸⁰

The novel is both satirical and analogical in accord with the Proustian landscapes of the mind. But at the basis of its method is a surrealistic premise that is to assume greater significance in Spark's later fiction: that fact is arbitrary and often spurious. This is the key to the novel's extraordinary equilibrium between the satiric and the godly. The inversion which underlies and provides a metaphor for this equilibrium centres on the healthiness of war-time compared with the degradation and inadequacy of the present peace.

"Back in 1944 when . . . there was a world war on . . .
life was more vivid . . . everything was more distinct.
The hours of the day lasted longer . . ."⁸¹

Present-day New York is the drugged, defused antithesis of this former state. This adds an elegaic dimension to the work. At the centre of the novel is the image of the hothouse. It embodies the dangerous, glassy psychic state of modern living. Life in it is not only godless,

but also "lifeless". Fact and sensory detail in the novel are the least reliable, least substantial elements in the narrative. The images and allegorical superstructure, the "glass and steel" are far more important. It is the spirit, the metaphor, the transfiguration of naturalistic elements which create the substance of the work.

Technically, the novel is an ironic collage of anti-novelistic methodology, of reworked fictional conventions and clichés. It is fiction written "in bad faith" in Sartre's sense, but on the other hand, it is at the same time, an intensely poetic work. As a result there is a fine integration of the literal, the metaphorical and the metaphysical. When Elsa and Paul turn to face death, her shadow encompasses the resonances of all three elements to reflect, if not peace, then at least solution.

"Come Elsa," Paul says, "we can go back . . . they've been very patient really."
 She turns to the car, he following her, watching as she moves how she trails her faithful and lithe cloud of unknowing across the pavement.⁸²

The surface of the novel is highly finished and the prose is layered with semantic nuance and extra-temporal language referents. It is written in a relentless present tense, frequently undercut by a conditional mood of existential proportions. It is an elegant, damning work, probing in the nervous system of both modern living and modern fiction. Its fundamental concern is with the terrifying isolation of individuals in the most spectral of landscapes, the metropolis. Death and memory are again attendant upon one another and act as a permanent stage setting in the

novel. It is the novel's central claim that perception, comprehension and connection with others is a finite and fragmentary affair, often sinister and frequently absurd. Paul and Elsa have been closest, for example, when under interrogation for a supposed misdemeanour at the Intelligence Compound. This episode encapsulates the possibly baseless faith necessary to connect with another individual, and the shared fear which might well be the most tangible and confirming aspect of the rapport.

"All that matters is that we've been brought together at short notice, without chance of rehearsal. It's something," Paul thinks "to know suddenly how much trust there is between us. After all this experience is something."⁸³

This underlies the novel's large-scale analogy. This potentially baseless faith in another individual is analogous to the requirements of religious faith. Both are strategies for survival with death as the enemy and self-surrender as the price.⁸⁴

The work incorporates a new filmic quality, which indicates the degree of influence the Nouveau Roman is to have on her writing in subsequent novels, and encapsulates neatly Muriel Spark's heavily qualified view of reality. The only view of the world she is prepared to admit in fiction from now on, is the elliptical and poetic visual and verbal code, which is developed in this novel. A cinematic perspective is ideal for her fictional purposes. It removes the omnipresent author, while affirming the primary significance of form and structure. It can create a multi-surfaced visual aspect where, as in cinema, simultaneous angles of vision can deal with a number of themes and perspectives. This is

precisely the technique which Spark needed to incorporate her literary satire and its transfiguration into metaphor and metaphysical landscapes.

In this novel we see the city-scape recede as her basic allegorical structure. Here "exteriorization" of detail--here, New York, 1973--gives way to the atemporal and disembodied inner landscape of "the mind's eye"--here, an apartment suspended in the air, a room and its décor now taking the weight of psychic significance.

Early in her career, Spark had dismissed realistic fictional norms as subject to the "dissembling powers of the flesh". From The Hothouse by the East River onwards, she proceeds, by virtue of her new landscaping techniques, to, as one critic has put it, "extract the clean bones of narrative."⁸⁵

CHAPTER THREE

MURIEL SPARK AND THE NOUVEAU ROMAN

Since 1973, Muriel Spark has reassembled "the clean bones of narrative" in the shadow of the French Nouveau Roman. Indirectly, influenced by the works of Michel Butor, Nathalie Sarraute and especially Alain Robbe-Grillet, she continues to reply to Proust. She has responded to these contemporary French writers, both for the Proustian resonances in their works, and for the anti-realistic models their novels offered. She made use of the new novelistic methods in France in the process of relocating the emphasis of her works, away from the anagogical perspective implicit in her allegorical constructions to date, and towards a sense of form and structure, stripped of its poetry and metaphysical dimension.

In her later novels, Spark sought out narrative structures for examining space and time without necessarily providing a moral or metaphysical context for them. She incorporated techniques basic to the French "new novel" to further her fictional aims: a strictly anti-psychological basis to characterization, exact attention to the "surfaces" of objects and people, so weighting their significance equally, and a

clinical and precise sense of "the" narrative task. These replaced her earlier paradigms for transcendence based on metaphor, essence and correspondence, which she had collectively called "the transfiguration of the commonplace."

Spark's later fiction deals with a time and landscape that is universal contemporary urban living. Landscapes, people and objects are now deliberately and ornamentally disconnected from reality in these narratives, in order to make them yield a new, revised version of their "permanent essence". Until this stage in her career, Spark had been able to sustain both an unequivocally surrealistic visual frame of reference and an uncompromised Christian metaphysic within the same fictional structures. She used them dialectically, to consider the universal and the particular simultaneously, by making her plots and characters answer to these antithetical referents. In so doing she salvages a poetic schema for saving daily realities, the surreally banal, from insignificance and metaphysical irrelevance. Gradually, between The Public Image,¹ published in 1974 and Territorial Rights² in 1979, she cancelled the metaphysical referent from her narrative.

In her later novellas, Mrs. Spark moves from an identifiable city and time into the timeless and international beau monde, populated with Cramer look-alikes:

that circle of international people . . . who are interconnected with interchangeable artistic professions. These were the young and aging actor-painters, painter-architects, architect-writers, writer-guitarists, and other more ramified combines, puttering away their inheritance of grace with an occasional poem, a job in an art gallery . . .³

We have moved from the city and its landmarks to the room and its décor for allegorical significance. Actual landscape and historical time as an objectification of consciousness have been replaced by "indoor" structures which interiorize and isolate consciousness in largely anonymous settings. Spark is increasingly concerned with the disembodied landscape of the mind. Her focus incorporates the elaboration of surfaces common to both Baudelaire and the Nouveau Roman, despite their differences in focus. She brings a surrealist's sense of artifice to bear on the expensive camouflage which sets the stage for her interiorized mock-dramas. The novel, Not to Disturb, for example, features a parquet floor which

once belonged to a foreign king. He had to flee his throne. He took the parquet of his palace with him, also the door knobs. Royalty always do, when they have to leave. They take everything like stage companies who need their props. With royalty of course, it is all largely a matter of stage production. And lighting.

Royalty are very careful about their setting and their lighting. As is the Pope. The Baron resembled royalty and the Pope in that respect at least. Parquet flooring and door handles.⁴

All is cosmetically arranged illusion and artifice and the cast of these novels--so many fleeing kings.

The tone of these narratives is that of an expatriated sensibility. They are harsher, more astringent and more casually violent than their predecessors. There is no authorial loyalty to time, place or portraiture. If there is any investment of detail with extraordinary significance, any suggestion of Christian grace about these novels, then it is a significance in absence. The novels are clever but ambiguous seeming-totalities. They

are intensely-wrought works full of elegant, flat statements. The only point at which one is allowed doubt, breathing space--the room for grace to intervene--is the familiar moment of simultaneity, of ironic transcendence, first extracted from Proust. It becomes however, more and more, a matter of form.

Even redemption, one of Spark's most insistent concerns, becomes a very structural matter. In the past, she has had a tendency to end her novels compassionately, with some kind of metaphoric resolution. The Public Image, published in 1974, is a transitional work in Spark's career in several senses. Her method of resolving the narrative illustrates the transition; it incorporates both the harshness and dislocation of all of her later fiction, with perhaps the last attempt to end one of her novels with a "saving grace", an image which redeems with significance something and someone who would otherwise be wasted. It is necessarily an ironic redemption of course, given the cynical nature of the work, which exposes the spiritual and even the perceptual gaps between public and private images in Italian cinema circles. Spark's final transcendence here has more to do with style and balance than good will. Her intention is no longer primarily metaphysical. The novel has provided a verbal "landscape" and its resolution acts as a kind of 'grace note'.

It is simply a matter of ending the novel on a poised note rather than a coarse and thoroughly damning one. She concludes with one of her clean and timeless images for regeneration, an attempt to morally clear the air, after a veritable tabloid of contemporary evils. The image she chooses

is in fact a deft reworking of an earlier image used by the heroine's husband to describe her. In his hands it had been a hack expression in a sham suicide letter. There he compares Annabel to

a beautiful shell, like something washed up on the sea shore, a collector's item, perfectly formed, a pearly shell--but empty, devoid of the life it concealed.⁵

Annabel redeems herself at the end of the novel, after her husband's actual suicide, by abandoning her image and turning into an anonymous, self-sustaining woman with child, unnoticed in an airport lounge, waiting for a plane to Greece. Spark takes Frederick's vulgar mismanagement of this image and invests it with new style and life, redeeming it and her heroine in the process.

She was pale as a shell. She did not wear her dark glasses. Nobody recognized her as she stood, having moved the baby to rest on her hip, conscious also of the baby in a sense weightlessly and perpetually within her, as an empty shell contains, by its very structure, the echo and harking image of former and former seas.⁶

It is a harsher, "purer-language" Muriel Spark since her move to the Continent. The elegant non-partisan surfaces of these works have decided European resonances. She has developed a taste for the techniques of the Italian Cinema Vérité: there is a deliberately depthless quality to the novels, a polished though hallucinatory format which actively prevents any irrational associations or sympathies from the reader. The only landmarks she allows us are verbal. Spark forcibly dissociates our sensibilities with her reworked clichés and renewed turns of phrase. This makes for highly ornamental satire. Her characters, for example, are more or less entirely the creations of their public relations officers. That belonging to the film-star couple in The Public Image would

arrange with a photographer to take a picture of Annabel lounging on her bed in her nightdress, one shoulder band slipping down her arm and her hair falling over part of her face . . .⁷

The same enterprising publicity person, a young Italian woman named Francesca, who was fighting the Italian social and sexual code in the only way she knew, would

disarrange the bed. She sat Frederick on the edge of the bed in a Liberty dressing gown, smoking with a smile of recent reminiscence. Or else Francesca had them photographed with a low table set with a lace-edged tray of afternoon tea, and the sun streaming in the window. Frederick held his cup and seemed to be stirring it gently and gravely. While Annabel, sweet but unsmiling, touched the silver teapot with a gracious hand. "We must get the two sides of your lives" Francesca explained in the case there should be any doubt.⁸

This apparition of artifice is Spark's innocent, showy version of the Italian proverb which she quotes, and which might well underlie all of her later writing--"Se non è vero, è ben trovato." What begins as subject matter in her novels--rampant deception and distortion as current behavioural norms, quickly influences and finally constitutes the fictional forms she chooses to embody that subject matter. This point of transition is precisely the moment when the duplicitous techniques of the Nouveau Roman, where what you see becomes how you see it, is now relevant for Spark.⁹ She begins with verbal echoes and visual after-images, still essentially allegorical in the old way. In this one transitional novel, however, she moves away from actualizing her landscapes in the familiar ways, towards a more abstract and verbal topography. In the old style there are dark and dangerous backstreets directly adjacent to the sunlit piazzas where everything only seems to be happening.

They drove around a deserted piazza with a fountain playing heartlessly, its bowl upheld by a group of young boys, which was built by the political assassin to placate his conscience; and past the palace of the cardinal who bore the sealed quiet of the whole within his guilt; with that girl now binding his body with her long hair for fun; while he lay planning, with a cold mind, the actions of the morning which were to conceal the night's evil; calumny, calumny, a messenger here and there, many messengers, bearing whispers and hints, and assured, plausible eye-witness accusations; narrow streets within narrower . . . the camera swung around to the old ghetto . . . Fixed inventions of deeds not done, accusations, the determined blackening of character.¹⁰

The concept of "a time and landscape of the mind" still has significance as a structural element in these novels, but there has been a shift in Spark's particular skills at psychic topography, away from the literal translation of ideas into an actual time and place, towards the spatial sense which Beckett, Sartre and Robbe-Grillet might allot consciousness. Her new style, that of the disembodied landscape of consciousness, has begun to appear in this novel. Anonymous beau-monde parties, unnamed airports, and décor more particularized than streets, constitute exactly the kind of world that Italian scandal papers would dream up. This extends the idea developed in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, of the time structures in the novel as virtually identical with the heroine's, forming a chronology of consciousness. In this novel it becomes a chronology based on a thoroughly fantastic and caricatured sense of existence. Her new scenarios are arbitrary, and of no individual significance whatever, except that they set the scene for "scandals" and image-making, in other words, for purely verbal constructions of reality.

If our only landmarks are verbal, then the "geography of action" which has become a standard fictional design in Spark's works, is now located almost entirely within behaviour and dialogue, making up a verbal and optical after-image for strikingly simple plots. Cast and plot then make up a perceptual unit, the streamlined, "dissociated" version of the closed communities of earlier novels. Each work "landscapes" the horror and corruption implicit in modern cosmopolitan living. In these hallucinatory settings, where facts ring as true as bad opera plots, Spark charts again the fall from grace in our times. She indicts the endemic lies, the profit-making, the daily treacheries and the ruthless banalities of success and survival.

There is a point of sardonic stasis in her presentation of detail, between the form of the information--its generally intricate enclosure--and the surreal arbitrariness of its content. In fact, the more squalid Spark's exposé, the purer her prose becomes.¹¹ This point of stasis also allows for a certain non-partisanship valuable in satire. Spark turns a cold eye on the grotesque and the scandalous without lecturing or harping. Where her characters are loud and vain, the author is quiet and deadly. Her diction is most perfect when detailing the loosest kind of Italian squalor. This stasis represents Muriel Spark's bizarre version of the counterpointing of form and content. As she simultaneously foils and illuminates, her authorial tone and language have never been so cunningly appropriate. She puts her familiar colloquial disdain to new and intricate purpose.

Within a few weeks, throughout Italy and beyond, it was decidedly understood, thoroughly suggested, hinted and memorized, that in private, inaccessible to all possible survey, and particularly in bed, Annabel Christopher, the new star who played the passionate English governess, let rip.¹²

With Not to Disturb,¹³ The Driver's Seat¹⁴ and The Abbess of Crewe,¹⁵

Spark takes this crafted dislocation of language further out of actual times and landscapes. Language and narrative structure alone constitute the map of the novel. These novels make up a series which parodies the novelistic form: the gothic murder, the Victorian detective and ghost story, the quest myth and contemporary political satire. As the formal precision of the works increases, so Spark reduces the verifiable particulars of the narrative, leaving the reader without bearings, and faced with an intricately enclosed anonymity. Characters are put in unspecified International airports, hotels, bars and nameless department stores. Nationalities and native tongues are left ambiguous. We are sure only of the glaring contemporaneity of the novels. All other detail appears to be interchangeable. Décor, the new psychic landscape for these ambiguous times, is standard, international good design. Its features are quite arbitrary and without any individual significance. It is still the commonplace on which Muriel Spark focuses her attention. The process of transfiguration, however, has shifted into a kind of surreal illumination; it is a toneless documentation of what is surreal in the actual. Spark continues in her new style in The Driver's Seat, where, in Lise's flat

the furniture is all fixed, adaptable to various uses, and stackable. Stacked into a panel are six folding chairs, should the tenant decide to entertain six for dinner.

The writing desk extends to a dining room table and when the desk is not in use, it too, disappears into the pinewood wall, its bracket lamp hingeing outward and upward to form a wall lamp. The bed is by day a narrow seat with overhanging bookcases; by night it swivels out to accommodate the sleeper. . . . A small pantry-kitchen adjoins the room. Here, too, everything is contrived to fold away into the dignity of the unvarnished pinewood . . . The swaying tall pines among the litter of cones on the forest floor have been subdued into silence and into obedient bulks.¹⁵

Living objects have been abstracted and neutralized. This condition of sterility appears, from the heroine's travels, to be international. The novel is full of vacuous, abstracted crowd scenes, of the world it seems, virtually travelling en masse, painlessly and pointlessly.

July thousands . . . milling around the airport, streams of traffic, mobs of tourists, even a stampede . . . dingy women teeming into the departure lounge.¹⁶

In this stream of people, Lise is going "Nowhere special" to look for what she calls "the lack of an absence".¹⁷ Her bizarre quest as it turns out, for a lover/murderer, shapes the narrative into a savage, contorted parody of the quest form and of the Nouveau Roman, by virtue of the French novel having provided the arbitrary time shifts and synchronic patterns of significance needed to make the heroine's search parodically non-sequential. Intermingled is a chilling and grotesque series of pastiches of other literary clichés--the single girl on holiday looking for her ideal man, the gothic horror story with its omens and clues, and the Jacobean death drama, with its ghastly, darkly comic and inevitable end. The novel is a hideous cartoon of modern unnaturalness, extending out from the synthetic décor to the perverse lack of moral intent in modern behaviour. Spark manages to be both obsessive and wry in documenting

it. Her multiplicity of purposes makes for an even more estranged and particular style than before. Reality is at an even further remove from her subject matter and audience, making a peculiar perceptual triangle, if one is to understand her intentions. In this narrative, objects, actions and motives are void of all but visual significance. It is all a cinematic joke. The heroine meets a woman at an airport bookstore, looking for books that are "predominantly pink or green or beige" to match her bedrooms.¹⁸ The visual surfaces of things have been designed out of all significance.

Lise is looking for someone to fill "the driver's seat". In fact, she is an existentially disoriented driver who only thinks herself a passenger. She has great and macabre powers of organization, choreographing her own death with considerable skill. She even organizes the car. The novel is unremittingly grim, the "deathscape" acting as the only force for order in a surreal survey of life in international limbo. In past works, Spark had made an odd and useful unit of time and landscape--temporal space and spatial time. It had been an ordering device. In this work the pattern is deliberately synesthetic, consciously disordered. "Look at the noise . . ."¹⁹

The novel also provides the "blackest" of Spark's sardonic artist's parables. Lise arranges the facts and circumstances of her death with minute artistic attention to detail.

. . . it's a why'dunnit in q-sharp major and it has a message: never talk to the sort of girls that you wouldn't leave lying about in your drawing room for the servants to pick up.²⁰

The works in this most recent stage of Spark's career are, above all, technical accomplishments rather than "entertainments". In this novel,

for example, she has constructed a microscopic version of the quest form she wishes to parody. She works and reworks it, offering increasingly odd and elegant variations on a theme. Within this intense patterning, the strict relevance of detail is even more tightly controlled than usual, though surreal and poetic resonances--here so busily gothic--are channelled away from the particularity of detail and into the elegant superstructure. By the time of writing The Driver's Seat, Spark was clearly preoccupied with one of Robbe-Grillet's concerns: that the quality of social observation and the method of presentation are inseparable, and mutually determining.

Muriel Spark's moments of transfiguration had always been (timeless) "moments out of time". Apart from these, however, she had relied on a certain unity of time--a weekend, a night--to provide her otherwise "tilted" narratives with coherence. In response to the atemporal Nouveau Roman, Spark too becomes concerned with "existential" time, and she sets about undoing even as much linear, chronological reality as she had relied on in the first place. "Let us not split hairs when discussing the past, present and future tenses" says one of her characters, when announcing "what is to come or has already come, according as one's philosophy is temporal or eternal". He dismisses chronology as "vulgar".²¹ And so does Spark from now on.

Her new balance of actual and "existential" time is best seen in The Driver's Seat, as a kind of imitation of and reply to Robbe-Grillet's Les Gommes.²² Reality has always had an unavoidable metaphysical dimension for Spark, even when that reality had to take the form of

"magic realism" to confront characters. In taking up some of the narrative propositions and structural elements of the French novel, however, Spark abandons her previous metaphysical referent, along with any redeeming effects of actual time. As Robbe-Grillet refuses psychology in his text, Spark must refuse "commonplace" time and the anagogical if her novel is to embody consciousness as she now sees it.

In an early dust-jacket description of his novel, Robbe-Grillet said that

the subject is a definite, concrete essential event: a man's death. It is a detective story event--that there is a murderer, a detective, a victim. In one sense, their roles are conventional: the murderer shoots the victim, the detective solves the problem, the victim dies. But the ties which bind them only appear clearly once the last chapter ends. For the book is nothing more than the account of the twenty-four hours that ensue between the pistol shot and the death, the time the bullet takes to travel three or four yards--twenty-four hours "in excess."²³

Spark's novel is a modified version of this narrative based on the idea of a "time-bubble"--unlived time. Her knowing protagonist also brings to pass what is inevitable. The only reliable structure in the novel is that of the circle of time closing around the protagonist. Time exists only as an accretion of the observer and his situation. External reality, like external time, becomes shifting, hypothetical and uncertain--"vingt-quatre heures en trop"--the time between the protagonists' choice of death and their actual self-realized deaths, here called "murders".²⁴

The sequence of actions, the periphery of characters and the "props" in these deathscapes are described with abnormal clarity. There is a preoccupation with "stopped movement"--Robbe-Grillet's murderer frozen

on the stairs before the act, and Spark's heroine arranging her possessions and her body in tableau, to ritualize the death and the murder-site. These moments, if they had been lyrically or morally endowed, would have been epiphanous. Here, in these narratives, they are valueless moments, simply clearer than the rest. The clearest of all in each case, is the moment of death and the extinction of personality altogether. Both novels have "landscaped" this consciousness of death as it exists, and is largely absorbed by modern living. For Spark, it marks a significant translation of her fictional concerns away from transfiguration into that atonal, amoral level of pure existence which can only be represented by surfaces without depths, time without saving moments of transcendence. This process has forced her to consider new narrative structures.

She does not dispense with allegory; she simply "deforms" it in the surrealist manner of deforming to reconstruct, so providing herself with a new surface texture for her fictions. It is depthless, existential and without transcendence.

In her most recent works, Spark has created "prose mosaics" which successfully facilitate the dual referents of Allegory and Surrealism. Angus Fletcher in Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode has described an artistic plane where the two are considered simultaneously.

An allegorical world gives us objects all lined up as it were, on the frontal plane of a mosaic, each with its own "true" unchanging size and shape. Allegory perhaps has a "reality" of its own, but it is certainly of the same sort that operates in our perceptions of the physical world. It has an idealizing consistency of thematic content, because, in spite of the visual absurdity of much allegorical imagery, the relations between ideas are under strong logical control.²⁶

The texture of allegory is curiously inwrought. It is worked in ornamental detail. It is not realism but surrealism.²⁶

This same critic has drawn the useful distinction between what allegorical painting for example, actualizes, and what allegorical literature leaves to the imagination to "see". The visual clarity of allegorical imagery "is not normal".²⁷ It does not coincide with what we experience in normal life. In her recent fiction, Spark capitalizes more than ever before, on the surreal possibilities that arise from and between the traditionally disjointed meanings involved in allegory: the need for at least two attitudes of mind to interpret two or more levels of meaning. The text is inevitably duplicitous. There must be a double attention to the surface of the works, and the psychic significance which resides purely there, given that she has discounted image-making as a fictional base.

The Takeover, published in 1976, intended as a parable of the pagan seventies, is set in another version of the surreally abstracted landscape--materialistic, polyglot, Euroland.²⁸ Like The Mandelbaum Gate, her only other full-length novel, The Takeover has a precise historical sense, which provides a certain meta-fictional complexity. It was intended in 1976--referring to 1973--to be a novel of our times, that is another study in contemporary depthlessness. To sustain reader interest, she necessarily makes the surface texture of the novel very rich, incorporating a surreal mythological past into her allegorical present, and depicting the whole on one plane, as mosaic. In this novel Spark is landscaping her version of the second Dark Ages.

. . . at dinner they spoke to Hubert of Nemi to where they were all planning shortly to return. It was not in their minds at this time that this last quarter of the year they had entered, that of 1973, was in fact, the beginning of something new in the world: a change in the meaning of money and property.²⁹

Spark does not here simply refer to inflation or the effects of war, although both are implied in

. . . a sea change in the nature of reality . . . such that what were assets were to be liabilities and no armed guards could be found and fed sufficient to guard those armed guards who failed to protect the properties they guarded.³⁰

The novel's richly crowded surface is underscored by the Diana of Nemi myth. Its sexual proclivities and silly spectacles strangely similar to those "cosmic happenings" of the early seventies, do much to conceal slight though sincere concern from Spark, to qualify modern caricatured existence, with genuine, if ambiguous, mythic resonance. The allusion is a joke to begin with. The novel's setting and the myth's, is the Lake of Nemi in the Alban hills, famously described by Sir James Frazer in the opening chapter of The Golden Bough, as the site for a macabre pagan custom which launched him on his quest for the sources of religion and magic. The living incarnation of the myth in Spark's hands is Maggie, fabulously rich, glamorously American and with "a floodlit look up to the teeth".³¹ In her keeping, the myth becomes a pernicious mixture of fraud, superstition and public relations.

The novel is finally, however, an ironic appraisal of those who have the wit to survive pervasive moral anarchy, by whatever means. At the close of the novel, the heroine, steeped in moneyed adversity and dressed in rags to avoid kidnapping, survives, cheerfully and resourcefully as people always have, by fair means and foul.

. . . gleaming through it all she was . . . she said goodnight very sweetly. And lifting her dingy skirts picked her way along the leafy path, hardly needing her flashlamp, so bright was the moon, three quarters full, illuminating lush lakeside, and in the fields beyond, the kindly fruits of the earth.³²

There is in this novel a familiar Sparkian equilibrium, elegant and contradictory, which manages to sustain both the socially nihilistic reading and that which says "myth lives."

The most perfect and recent of her mosaic creations is Territorial Rights. Its central structure is a Venetian mosaic, once more on the theme of empty Western decadence as a shattered fragmentation of the real. Technically, it is a study in the inverted significance, or the complete insignificance, of the moment. Time in Spark's novels is still the arbitrary continuum suggested by Robbe-Grillet.

Robert and Anna were having a drink in a bar in Trieste, smiling at each other. A middle-aged man in a business suit approached them.

"What do you want?" Robert said.

"I'm a talent spotter. You two have got everything. You've got style. You can make the top."

As a result of this meeting Robert and Anna were sent to the Middle East to train in a terrorist camp.³³

Thus Spark dispenses with her protagonist. She dispenses with narrative detail, the aesthetic "imperative claims of Venice" for example, in the same ruthless fashion.³⁴

When detail is elaborate or evocative, it is to make perspective even more precarious than usual. The surreal and the allegorical meet head on, and there are no clear visual equivalents for the constructions that result. Her style has become disembodied, sensory baroque.

Lina Pancev lived in a room perched at the top of one of these narrow houses. From the street, this room projected like a long bird, a dangerous piece of masonry, yet not dangerous presuming the bird could fly. The beak protruding from its small window was at the moment devoid of its washing, and the small black mouth was shut, unlike the windows underneath it, set further back in the building. To reach the hovering attic it was necessary to climb in the first place five twisting flights of stairs, each step of which was worn to a thin curve in the centre.

The iron banister, wrought in curly patterns on the lower floors, soon became a rusty, twisting strip, too shaky and broken to depend upon. The sight and smell of rats, cats and garbage at the entrance, changed as the climber proceeded, to the smell of something or other more frightful. Then with the staircase left behind, came the testing part; the challenge: a pair of builder's planks about three feet in length led from the landing, itself slanting by a few degrees, across to the threshold of Lina Pancev's eyrie . . . the building was at least three centuries old, and the planks themselves looked as if they had been there for at least ten years; and how the jutting room where Lina lived defeated the law of gravity to the functional extent it did, perhaps not even the original constructors had known.⁵⁵

Although Spark's narrative detail adheres to a certain kind of naturalism in its "hyper-real" observation, it is also opaque, its organization fundamentally disjointed. The "hovering attic" is both a perfect allegorical representation of the heroine's precarious existence, and a fitting container for the otherwise disembodied narrative facts which make up the mosaic of the novel.³⁶

The familiar landmarks of Spark's plots are still visible: murder, intrigue, endless spying and blackmail. They are now neutralized, however, quite disqualified from reality by their new coding in the mosaic form. They are intended to "defamiliarize" rather than verify the reader's perception of actual objects and sequences of events. Only form is reliable. There are no longer individual items, people or moments of "essential" significance. The work must be read all of a piece as a poly-semantic work of chronologically and spatially displaced images connected by logic and polish.

. . . the canals lapped at the sides of the banks, the palaces of Venice rode in great state and the mosaics stood with the same patience that had gone into their formation, piece by small piece.³⁷

In an interview in 1970, Muriel Spark described one of her poems, "The Card Party," thus:

"I think it's a little bizarre and grotesque, and it hasn't got any moral noticeably. It's just a little bit of surrealist fact."³⁸

After forays into various novelistic techniques, incorporating, by stages, the allegorical, the satirical, the transcendent and the surreal, Spark finally returns in her recent novels, to her initial point of departure in poetry--"a little bit of surrealist fact."

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

- ¹ Angus Fletcher, Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1964), p. 379.
- ² Muriel Spark, The Go-Away Bird and Other Stories (London: Macmillan, 1958).
- ³ Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 9.
- ⁴ Harold Bloom, A Map of Misreading (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), p. 10.
- ⁵ Bloom, Anxiety, p. 11.
- ⁶ Muriel Spark, "Against the Transcendentalists," in Collected Poems I (London: Macmillan, 1952).
- ⁷ Charles Baudelaire, La Fanfarlo (Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1957).
- ⁸ *ibid.* p. 48.
- ⁹ *ibid.* p. 57.
- ¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 47.
- ¹¹ Thomas Mann, "Tonio Krüger," in Stories of Three Decades (London: Secker and Warburg, 1946), pp. 87-88.
- ¹² Baudelaire, Fanfarlo, p. 60.

- 13 *ibid.* p. 75.
- 14 *ibid.* p. 77.
- 15 *ibid.* p. 79.
- 16 *ibid.* p. 77.
- 17 *ibid.* p. 71.
- 18 *ibid.* p. 51.
- 19 *ibid.* p. 50.
- 20 *ibid.* p. 90.
- 21 *ibid.* p. 94.
- 22 *ibid.* p. 52.
- 23 Muriel Spark, "The Balad of the Fanfarlo," in Collected Poems I.

All further references will be from this edition.

- 24 *ibid.* p. 16.
- 25 Baudelaire, Fanfarlo, p. 51.
- 26 *ibid.* p. 87.
- 27 Enid Starkie, From Gautier to Eliot, the Influence of France on English Literature, 1851-1939 (London: Hutchinson, 1960), p. 167.
- 28 T.S. Eliot, "Baudelaire," in Selected Essays (London: Faber & Faber, 1932), p. 43.
- 29 T.S. Eliot, "The Lesson of Baudelaire," in "Notes on Current Letters," Tyro, London, I (Spring 1921).
- 30 Spark, "The Seraph and the Zambezi," in the Go-Away Bird and Other Stories, p. 174. All further references will be from this edition.
- 31 Gabriel Garcia Marquez, "A very Old Man with Enormous Wings," in Leaf Storm and Other Stories, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 105.

- ³² Muriel Spark, "The Nativity," in Collected Poems I.
- ³³ Spark, "Against the Transcendentalists," in Collected Poems I.
- ³⁴ Eliot, "Baudelaire", Selected Essays, p. 43.

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CHAPTER TWO

¹ Muriel Spark, "The Religion of an Agnostic: A Sacramental View of the World in the Writings of Proust," Church of England Newspaper, 27 Nov. 1953.

² Muriel Spark, "My Conversion," Twentieth Century, Autumn 1961. p. 63.

³ Muriel Spark, The Mandelbaum Gate (London: Macmillan, 1965), p. 151.

⁴ Muriel Spark, Robinson (London: Macmillan, 1958), p. 9.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977), pp. 159-235

⁶ Benjamin, p. 163.

⁷ *ibid.* p. 181.

⁸ René Girard, Desire, Deceit and the Novel, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), p. 195.

⁹ Peter Kemp, Muriel Spark (London: Elek, 1974), p. 9.

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 10.

¹¹ Spark, Robinson, p. 10.

¹² *ibid.* p. 12.

- 13 Muriel Spark, "How I Became a Novelist," Books and Bookmen,
Nov. 1961. p. 683.
- 14 Girard, Desire, p. 195.
- 15 Muriel Spark, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (London: Macmillan,
1962).
- 16 Muriel Spark, The Girls of Slender Means (London: Macmillan,
1963).
- 17 Muriel Spark, The Hothouse by the East River (London: Macmillan,
1973)
- 18 Spark, Jean Brodie, p. 72.
- 19 *ibid.* p. 43.
- 20 *ibid.* p. 42.
- 21 *ibid.* p. 38.
- 22 *ibid.* pp. 9-10.
- 23 *ibid.* p. 12.
- 24 *ibid.* p. 40.
- 25 *ibid.* p. 30.
- 26 *ibid.* p. 31.
- 27 *ibid.* p. 58.
- 28 *ibid.* p. 93.
- 29 *ibid.* p. 90.
- 30 *ibid.* p. 152.
- 31 *ibid.* p. 135.
- 32 *ibid.* p. 165.
- 33 *ibid.* p. 148.

- 34 *ibid.* p. 31.
- 35 *ibid.* p. 8.
- 36 *ibid.* p. 49.
- 37 Muriel Spark, "Speaking of Writing," The Times, 21 Nov. 1963,
p. 18.
- 38 Spark, Girls of Slender Means, p. 1.
- 39 *ibid.* p. 2.
- 40 Spark, "Speaking of Writing".
- 41 Spark, Girls of Slender Means, p. 1.
- 42 *ibid.* p. 14.
- 43 *ibid.* pp. 18-19.
- 44 *ibid.* p. 74.
- 45 *ibid.* p. 89.
- 46 *ibid.* p. 180.
- 47 *ibid.* p. 152.
- 48 *ibid.* p. 114.
- 49 *ibid.* p. 183.
- 50 *ibid.* p. 181.
- 51 *ibid.* p. 63.
- 52 *ibid.* pp. 85-86.
- 53 T.S. Eliot, The Cocktail Party (London: Faber & Faber, 1950).
- 54 Spark has progressed from awkward pilfering from Eliot in her early poetry--"A hot coming/He had of it I'm sure"--to a sophisticated incorporation of his motifs in this example of her mature fiction. One is further reminded of her awareness of Eliot's plays in her article, "The Dramatic Works of T.S. Eliot" in Women's Review No. 5., 1949.

- 55 Spark, Girls of Slender Means, p. 18.
- 56 Muriel Spark, Memento Mori (London: Macmillan, 1959)
- 57 Spark, Hothouse, p. 2.
- 58 *ibid.* pp. 15-16.
- 59 *ibid.* p. 13.
- 60 *ibid.* p. 101.
- 61 *ibid.* p. 4.
- 62 *ibid.* p. 33.
- 63 *ibid.* p. 30.
- 64 *ibid.* p. 63.
- 65 *ibid.* p. 139.
- 66 *ibid.* p. 44.
- 67 *ibid.* p. 59.
- 68 *ibid.* pp. 34-35.
- 69 *ibid.* p. 90.
- 70 *ibid.* p. 160.
- 71 *ibid.* p. 167.
- 72 *ibid.* p. 34.
- 73 *ibid.* p. 40.
- 74 *ibid.* p. 42.
- 75 *ibid.* p. 42.
- 76 *ibid.* p. 42.
- 77 *ibid.* p. 19.
- 78 Peter Kemp, Muriel Spark, p. 148.

- 79 Muriel Spark, The Comforters (England, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 44.
- 80 Spark, Hothouse, p. 44.
- 81 *ibid.* p. 34.
- 82 *ibid.* p. 168.
- 83 *ibid.* pp. 135-6.
- 84 Peter Kemp, Muriel Spark, pp. 152-3.
- 85 *ibid.* p. 36. In The Mandelbaum Gate, musing on such writers, Barbara Vaughan mentally characterized their productions as "repetition, boredom, despair, going nowhere for nothing, all of which conditions are enclosed in a tight, unbreakable statement of the times at hand," (p. 188)-- an observation that provides an accurate summary of The Driver's Seat (and later novels). As in the Nouveau Roman, there is constant and meticulous description, repeated catalogueing of external details, "the drama of exact statement." (Observer Colour magazine, Nov. 7th, 1971. p. 73).

NOTES

CHAPTER THREE

- ¹ Muriel Spark, The Public Image (London: Macmillan, 1968).
- ² Muriel Spark, Territorial Rights (London: Macmillan, 1979).
- ³ Spark, Public Image, p. 58.
- ⁴ Muriel Spark, Not to Disturb (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 45.
- ⁵ Spark, Public Image, p. 141.
- ⁶ *ibid.* p. 192.
- ⁷ *ibid.* p. 32.
- ⁸ *ibid.* p. 41.
- ⁹ *ibid.* p. 92.
- ¹⁰ Peter Kemp, Muriel Spark, p. 122.
- ¹¹ Spark, Public Image, p. 42.
- ¹² Muriel Spark, The Driver's Seat (New York: Knopf, 1970).
- ¹³ Muriel Spark, The Abbess of Crewe (New York: Viking, 1974).
- ¹⁴ Spark, Driver's Seat, pp. 19-20.
- ¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 80.
- ¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 105.
- ¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 75.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.* p. 151.

- 19 Spark, Not to Disturb, p. 17.
- 20 Alain Robbe-Grillet, Les Gommages (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1953).
- 21 Bruce Morrisette, Alain Robbe-Grillet (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1965. p. 34.
- 22 *ibid.* p. 35.
- 23 Angus Fletcher, Allegory, pp. 104.
- 24 *ibid.* p. 108.
- 25 *ibid.* p. 102.
- 26 Muriel Spark, The Takeover (London: Macmillan, 1976).
- 27 *ibid.* p. 14.
- 28 *ibid.* p. 32.
- 29 *ibid.* p. 51.
- 30 *ibid.* p. 223.
- 31 Spark, Territorial Rights, p. 238.
- 32 *ibid.* p. 41.
- 33 *ibid.* pp. 16-17.
- 34 *ibid.* p. 18.
- 35 *ibid.* p. 240.
- 36 Derek Stanford, Muriel Spark; a Biographical and Critical Study (Sussex: Centaur Press, 1963), p. 25.

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- . The Driver's Seat. New York: Knopf, 1970.
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