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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE CHARACTER PORTRAYAL OF MURIEL SPARK AND THEIR UNIQUE PROFICIENCY

Dr. Mousumi Paul

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Abstract

Muriel Spark is considered as one of the most engaging, most tantalizing writers of her generation. What is extraordinary about Spark's achievements is that she is having a large international readership. She manages to engage with many of the most serious intellectual issues of her time. It is typical of her work that it both gestures to words and acknowledges many of the debates and concerns of the age without, ever, being wholly reliant on them. She says:

I possessed one very rare book ... rare books didn't interest me, for their rarity but for their content ... we have all started to write our memoirs, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And we are lodging them for seventy years in a safe place until all the living people mentioned therein shall be living no longer. 1

These works... will be both valuable to the historian of the future ... you should easily be able to rectify any lack or lapse in form, syntax, style, characterization, invention, local color, description, dialogue, construction and other trivialities. 2

Her literary style, therefore, has self-consciously mixed the exactness and intensity of poetic language with the more expansive and relaxed mode of the contemporary novel. Spark, to a large extent, derived her stylistic principles from her neoclassical poetry and she has, in this regard applied the neoclassical tenets of lucidity, precision and formal elegance to her prose. The paper discusses some universal experiences and worldly phenomena which Mrs. spark very beautifully reveals through her characters.

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Introduction:-

Muriel Spark is widely recognized as one of the most important contemporary novelists. She is a writer endowed with extra ordinary perception. The words of Fleur Talbot and sir Question in *Loitering with Intent* are the most explicit introspection of literary qualities of the novelist. The reiterate the "rarity"³ and "truth"⁴ are expression of interesting biographical facts and narrative model. Muriel spark is one of those surviving women novelists, whose literary output documents her struggle with and against her own characters, to find her authorial voice through the exploration of her own characters, to find her authorial voice through the exploration of her role as a writer. To Muriel Spark, the role of the novelist lies in transformation of the commonplace which she believes could be realized through religious faith. Spark says: "how I feel about things as a Catholic. To me, being a Catholic is part of my human existence. I do not feel one way as human being and another as a Catholic.⁵ Describing her books as "a pack of lies,"⁶ Spark regards her novels as poetic fictions "out of which come valuable truths emerge."⁷ The *Comforters*, her first novel, is an experimental foray into the relationship between the author and her character and

through it she is able to explore her own role as a novelist. Such self-consciousness is reflected in her heroine, Caroline, who realizes she is a character in this novel. Her resistance to plot, imposed upon her by the invisible author, turns her into a problem regarding how to exercise free-will from within a pre-ordained existence. In *Loitering with Intent* Spark returns to the interplay between fiction and 'fact', which she introduced in *The Comforters*. Her autobiographical heroine, Fleur Talbot has formed as *Autobiographical Association*, and is a self-conscious celebration of women as an artist during the twentieth century. Spark, often, used to wonder what would happen to her life, because she had been working in the political 'Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office' on anti-Nazi propaganda, and utilizing her knowledge of psychological warfare in the office. This situation is described significantly in *The Hothouse by the East River*, set in New York in 1973. The technique acquired at the Foreign Office of Camouflaging facts, served her with an apprenticeship for the experiment in her novel relating to the truth of fiction. Spark says, "there is metaphorical truth and moral truth and what they call anagogical, you know the different sorts of truth and there is absolute truth in which I believe things which are difficult to believe, but I believe them because they are absolute." 8 In one of her novels of later eighties, *A Far Cry from Kensington*, the narrator says:

Mrs. Hawkins's said Emma, 'I understand your state of mind. I'm not a novelist for nothing. The sordid element in some of the scenes can't be reduced by the seriousness of the subject matter...'9

... And it is true we would have an easier time if we only had the books to deal with ... I was quite aware of this feeling at the same time. I wanted human contact in my work.10

The seriousness of the subject matter11 and 'the human contact'12 are not meaningless coinage, for Spark's novels that fascinate the readers, who find the creative control of characters and situation in which the realities of life have been imagined. It also indicates that Spark looks forward underlying the moral seriousness, which makes her the most stimulating novelist 'within their narrow range.' Muriel Spark's novels in their way incorporate all the fashionable of the modern scene:

Surrealism, existentialism, absurdism, structuralism and feminism. They do not expound them but take them as read. The Spark world is made up of what little the storm has left. The novels focus on the fragments scattered by the trends. Some critics one but she has 'brilliantly utilized her own limitation.' 13

... As if I were another species in which case, she had miscalculated my intelligence or she herself was under some emotional strains and I had noticed before ... that the most intelligent and incoherent under an emotional pressure of real life. 14

Spark, through her narrator, in the same novel envisages that, all the time, the most intelligent and sophisticated authors are not relatively concerned to their experiences, and Spark realities of life, but sometimes appear banal and trivial. Spark's intelligence and merit were miscalculated, whereas excellence has not produced works worthy of their best. Again, in the beginning of her novel *A Far Cry from Kensington*, Spark has come under the severity of emotions and realities with all the complexities of plot and sub-plot, diversity of characters, landscapes and other settings. Sparks suggested to the women writers at a place:

My advice to any woman who earns the reputation of being capable, is to, not demonstrate her ability too much. All that in the end you feel spooky, empty and huned.15

Her narrators gain their authority both from their punctiliousness and from their constant understanding of clichés and looseness of thought most famously with regard of Miss Jean Brodie's habitual description of her girls as the 'Crème de la Crème'. Her memoir *Curriculum Vitae*; an autobiography is an account of her life leading up to the publication of *The Comforters* and covers much the same ground as her 1980s fiction. But, unlike her earlier works, it is a curiously taciturn document and tends to establish what Spark regards as purely factual link between her novels and her life history. As a novelist, Spark does not make easy connection between fiction and reality as her writing constantly redefines the meaning and value of the stories which her characters tell about their world. But her autobiography assumes that there is a simple and unequal relationship between her life and work. In her early years Spark regarded herself as a poet, having written poetry at the age of 9. In 1947, she was appointed secretary of the poetry society and shortly after became the editor of the society's *Poetry Review*. Her advocacy of modernism antagonized members of the poetry society, who eventually invited her decision and later she left the society in

1948, to lay the foundation of the Poetry Magazine Forum. She continued writing her own poetry and published in the year 1952 as the Fanfarlo and other Verses, but her collected poems could not be published until 1967. Later, on the invitation of Macmillan to write a novel for them she took an entry into the world of fiction through an ironic abstract, which from her own novels.

However, being far from the categories of the novelist and story-teller, she entered the Observer's short story competition in 1951, and won it with *The Serepah* and *The Zambasi*. She wrote partly to discover whether she could master a different form. Shortly, afterwards, the Macmillan Publishing House invited her to produce a full-length novel for them. She fulfilled by writing her first novel, *The Comforters* in 1957, in an experimental and detached fashion, and she also admitted in an interview with Frank Kermode and honestly explained the very fact:

I was asked to write a novel and I did not think much of the novels. I thought it was inferior way of writing. So I wrote novel to work out the technique to sort to makes it all right with myself to write a novel at all – a novel about writing a novel sort of thing, you see. 16

Her interest in technique, which is essential to fiction, has never left Muriel Spark; nor has she ever escaped as a novelist from her early affection for the tight, economic form of poetry against the looser genre of fiction. Indeed, all her ideas on the novel as a form reflect her quite profound mistrust of it which is an ironic and ambiguous comment on a writer. Spark has spent nearly forty years on a form, which she regards as "second rate".

This brief survey of Muriel Spark's fine novels leads us to conclude that her main concern in these novels is to reveal universal experiences and moral phenomena, which she conveys through her characters. She also studies the reactions of her characters to the universal experiences. In *Memento Mori* Death, which is an inseparable part of life, is originally presented in the terms of old age. She has tried to depict that death is sure to come to everybody and we should accept it very boldly. In *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, Mrs. Spark is mainly concerned with the hypocrisy, fear and loss of religious faith that have severely affected the lives of British people. *The Bachelors* shows the vices, futility as well as reactions of unmarried people. Here Mrs. Spark as a psychologist analyses the problems and conditions of celibates. *The Public Image* gives a vivid picture of jealousy, hate and deception arising between husband and wife; how the husband is jealous of his wife when he finds the latter superseding in the field where he himself is working. And lastly, *The Only Problem* represents and insists on the significance of suffering in life and it alludes, though not directly to the suffering of Job. Obviously, Muriel Spark has attained a remarkable success in defining universal situation and expressions and the characters' attributing reactions to them.

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