"Dieu est merde!":
The Wicked and Divine Woman in Muriel Spark's *The Only Problem*

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Abstract

Muriel Spark's novel *The Only Problem* (1984) draws upon the Book of Job in a bizarre tale that reimagines the plight of Job's suffering through her 'modern man' and protagonist, Harvey Gotham. Intrinsic to the narrative, however, is the character of Effie, Harvey's wife, who is the self-appointed leader of an anti-capitalist terrorist organisation. Effie appears to be the tour de force of the narrative, often controlling the direction of the plot, while remaining almost entirely absent from the story itself. By utilising the threefold biblical structure of the *Book of Job* in the novel, Spark simultaneously employs Effie in the narrative role of both Job's nameless wife and God. In Harvey's ideal universe, Effie embodies the caring, meek wife he finds in the beginning of *Job*; while in reality, Effie is a callous, powerful force, not unlike the God of the biblical text. Effie's own biblical 'whirlwind' (Job 38:1) however is signified through her brutal death in the penultimate pages of the novel, and thus connotes the death of Harvey's suffering.

Through analysis of this symbiotic relationship between Effie and her biblical counterparts, my thesis will investigate the complexities of Effie's role in the text. I also will reflect on Spark's own problematic critical reception as a cruel author, particularly to her female characters, and argue that Spark's interest is in the boundaries between the feminine and the divine, in which the exoneration of the masculine and divine is contrasted with the condemnation of the feminine and human.

My argument will begin by analysing how Effie is initially presented as Job's wife in the novel. Due to her intertextual relationship with other biblical characters, I will continue by analysing other problematic female characters both in Spark's work with the women of the Hebrew Bible; then consider the ways in which Effie fits into these respective frameworks. I will subsequently investigate how this allows Effie to inhabit the roles of Job's wife and God simultaneously, and how these readings illuminate the layers of intertextuality present in Spark's biblical tale.

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Please note that due to copyright restrictions, these images have been removed in the electronic version of this thesis. For Figure 1.1, I will provide a link to the image. For Figure 1.2, please if possible consult a copy of the above edition of *The Only Problem*.

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Introduction

‘Surely I would speak to the Almighty,
And I desire to reason with God.’ (Job 13:3)[1]

This verse from the *Book of Job* is the epigraph and subsequent beginning of Muriel Spark’s biblical novel, *The Only Problem* (1984). The novel follows the tale of Harvey Gotham, a man working on a monograph on the *Book of Job,* which claims to deal with the problem of suffering: “the only problem,” Harvey argues, that is “worth discussing”.[2] In a bizarre twist of events, Harvey’s wife, Effie, becomes the leader of anti-capitalist terrorist organisation: a fact which is of great interest of the media, due to Harvey’s status as an extremely rich and wealthy man. In true Sparkian wit, Harvey holds a press conference at his house, spending the entire time pontificating on the theological complications of God. He is subsequently (and wrongly) reported as having said: “Dieu est merde”, or more plainly, “God is a shit”.[3] While the police continue to interrogate him on the whereabouts of his estranged wife, Harvey finds himself surrounded by his own set of comforters, as Job was in the biblical tale. The novel ends with Effie’s tragic yet unavoidable death, while Harvey jokes that he will live, like Job, “for another hundred and forty years.”[4]

Unlike many of Spark’s other wonderful works, this strange, ambiguous novel did not receive much critical interest or acclaim, and it is by no means regarded as Spark’s best work. It was also not the first time Spark addressed the subject matter of *Job*: her debut novel, *The Comforters* (1957) undertook some presentation of the themes found within the text of *Job*, and she had also written an essay as a response to her own issues with Carl Jung’s *Answer to Job* (1952).[5] It is understandable then that, due to its implicit relationship to the *Book of Job,* the novel was not a great success. Spark, a converted Catholic, had been preoccupied with *Job* for a number of years, and had subsequently developed a strange type of obsession with the elusive biblical text. She discussed this in her essay on *The Only Problem,* where she wrote: ‘I could never quite leave the Book of Job alone, and it would not leave me alone.’[6] This becomes clear in Spark’s metatextual execution of *The*

[1] Throughout this thesis I use the NRSV translation unless stated otherwise.
[2] Muriel Spark, *The Only Problem* (London: Triad Grafton Press, 1985), 19.
[3] Ibid. 123
[4] Ibid. 189.
[5] Muriel Spark, “The Mystery of Job’s Suffering” in *The Golden Fleece Essays,* ed. by Penelope Jardine (Manchester: Carcanet, 2014), 192-7.
[6] Muriel Spark, “The Only Problem”, *The Golden Fleece Essays,* 191.

Only Problem, where her protagonist, Harvey, makes many observations about the *Book of Job* that appear to match her own. In his assertion of Job's ultimate problem, Harvey concludes that "Job suffered from the problem of argument,"[7] something that she herself had concluded and emphasised in her 1955 essay, "The Mystery of Job's Suffering".[8] The novel's deep layers of intertextual references match the prowling, playful type of satire found in her other, more accessible novels; yet the novel subsequently appears as a type of passion project that was meant for Spark, and Spark alone.

So, what then did Spark hope to achieve with her short, *Job*-ian tale? Critics have argued that the novel seeks to discuss the meaning of Job's suffering through Spark's creation of her 'modern' rich man and protagonist, Harvey Gotham. In his biography on Spark, Martin Stannard argued that he believed that Spark 'was completing her own abandoned monograph on Job by allowing Gotham to finish it'.[9] Stannard continues to argue that Harvey appears to be made in the image of Spark herself: not only is Harvey 'sceptical yet has abounding faith', he also 'resembles her in other ways: [he] abhors linguistic redundancy [and] refuses to allow his own sufferings to become the subject of public discussion'.[10] These comparisons would naturally invite the reader to question Spark's intention to insert herself into her own novel. With this in mind it would appear that, on the surface, the novel presents itself as Spark's own response to the problem of suffering through the lens of Harvey.

As such, it is quite likely that Spark's primary interest lay in creating a thematic exploration of *Book of Job*, rather than presenting the supposed meaning of the text of *Job*. Spark discussed this in her essay on *The Only Problem*, where she felt that 'the biblical poem is only reflected in my book like a shadow reflected in water.'[11] Spark did not believe it was her intention to rewrite or retell *Job*, and argued that her novel bore 'no literal or exact analogy' to the text.[12] Instead, Spark appeared to focus on creating a *Job*-like narrative in our modern times. For example, she wrote that 'there is a touch of a modern police-interrogation about those nerve-wracking dialogues between Job and his friends thousands of years ago' and it is evident that this idea is conceptualised and presented in *The Only Problem*. [13]

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[7] Spark, *The Only Problem*, 30. From now on, I will abbreviate the title to *TOP* in these footnotes, only using "The Only Problem" when discussing Spark's essay of the same title.
[8] Spark, "The Mystery of Job's Suffering", *Golden Fleece*, 192-7.
[9] Martin Stannard, "A Speck in the Distance" in *Muriel Spark: The Biography.* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009), 456.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Spark, "The Only Problem", *Golden* Fleece, 191.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 191.

However, my own interest in Spark's biblical tale was piqued by the presentation of Harvey's elusive, terrorist wife, Effie. The novel is characterised by Harvey's conflation between his wife and the Job's wife found in Georges de La Tour's magnificent painting, *Job Visited by His Wife* (1625-1650). The more I investigated Effie's role in Spark's biblical text, the more convinced I was of the parallels between Effie's character and the character of God in the *Book of Job*. This idea was confirmed by Stannard's evaluation of the text, who wrote that:

> 'Effie is full of possibilities. Although she apparently cares nothing for [Harvey] and, as the novel progresses, becomes an improbable object of veneration, his love for her increases. She is, then, not merely like Job's wife, but like Job's God.'[14]

Stannard's statement solidified my suspicions of Effie's role in the text, and further investigation led me to the work of Gerardine Meaney, who was arguably the first 'to study Spark's fiction from a feminist point of view', according to Fontini Apostolou.[15] In her book, *(Un)Like Subjects: Women, Theory, Fiction*, Meaney assesses the writings of Spark alongside that of Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, while employing a metatextual analysis of Spark's work. Of *The Only Problem,* Meaney wrote that

> 'Effie is the divine author in *The Only Problem*. She is absent from the action, but determines the plot. She is also an unfaithful wife and a member of a Baader-Meinhof style gang.'[16]

Meaney's claim thus led me to question the implications of Effie's role within the novel: if Effie is God, what does this say about the *Book of Job*? This thesis will therefore seek to evaluate the intertextual relationship between *The Only Problem* and its urtext, particularly by focusing on the presentation of Effie's role in the narrative. I argue that Effie functions as an (inter)textual symbol, used to represent the characters of Job's wife, Eve and God in Spark's modern interpretation of the biblical text. This interdisciplinary analysis will be supported by the work of feminist and literary criticism and will aim to contribute to the marvellous work of biblical reception history and criticism. Although this argument is supported by the viewpoints stated by Stannard and Meaney above, common research on *The Only Problem* is mostly preoccupied either with the motivations of Harvey's character,

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[14] Stannard, "A Speck in the Distance", *Biography*, 458.
[15] Fontini Apostolou, "Prologue" in *Seduction and Death in Muriel Spark's Fiction.* (UK: Greenwood Press, 2001), xv.
[16] Gerardine Meaney, "Something Other" in *(Un)Like Subjects: Women, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1993), 190.

or Spark's authorial intention in the creation of her tale.[17] I believe that comparing Effie to the God of *Job* invites new approaches to reading both Spark's work and the text of *Job*, which I hope to demonstrate throughout this work.

To begin my analysis of Spark's *Job*-ian tale, I will consider the *Book of Job* and how it has been interpreted by various biblical scholars: in particular, whether or how *Job* answers questions both about the theodicy of God and the meaning of suffering. In order to investigate this, I will primarily examine the extensive work of David Clines and other modern biblical criticism of *Job*.

The Theodicy, Structure, and Scholarship of the *Book of Job*

The *Book of Job* is considered a work of wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible and appears to deal with the problem of suffering. David Pechansky argues that 'Job embodies a powerful example of the disparate text, an act of literature that is characteristically unstable, a place of conflict.'[18] This conflict in *Job* exists primarily between its protagonist and the character of God. Job, described as 'blameless and upright', is blessed with wealth as he 'feared God and turned away from evil' (Job 1:1). However, God's Adversary argues that if Job was robbed of his riches, 'he would curse [God] to [his] face' (Job 1:11). In this 'bet' made with the Adversary, God thus allows the 'Satan' figure to kill Job's children and his livestock, and to finally inflict him with 'loathsome sores' (Job 2:7) in order to test Job's faithfulness. After losing everything (and unaware of this 'bet' that was made), Job demands to know of God why he has suffered. After many debates with his friends/comforters, God appears to Job from a whirlwind, declaring his greatness (Job 38-41). In the end, Job admits he was wrong to question God and is thus rewarded, his previous fortunes restored twofold by God (Job 42:10).

The text, already disparate in the narrative and its meaning, has divided scholars and critics on its origin, purpose, and function within the Hebrew Bible. A primary concern still debated is the exact structure of the text, although it is generally agreed that *Job* is separated into three distinct sections. These are known and set out as follows: the narrative prologue (Job 1-2), the dialogues (Job 3-42:1-6) and finally, the narrative epilogue (Job 42:

[17] See Bryce Christensen's '"The Latter End of Job": The Gift of Narrative in Muriel Spark's *The Only Problem* and *The Comforters*', *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* 54, no. 2. (2002) 137-48; Robert E. Hosmer Jr.'s 'The Book of Job: The Novel of Harvey', *Renascence* 39, no. 3. (1987), 442-49; and Anthony Swindell's 'Latecomers: Four Novelists Rewrite the Bible', *Biblical Interpretations* 15, no. 4-5. (2007) 395-404.

[18] David Pechansky. *The Betrayal of God: Ideological Conflict in Job* (USA: Westminister/John Knox Press, 1990), 9.

7-17).[19] Alastair Hunter notes that the prologue and epilogue sections are often questioned due to their conflicting tone from the main body of the text.[20] He argues however, that these sections 'represent the remains of a folk-tale of international origin which has been put to good use as a means of framing and dramatizing what otherwise might have been a rather dense set of arguments.'[21] He argues that the setting of 'the mysterious land of Uz' (Job 1:1) and how 'the names of all but Elihu are resistant to interpretation within the normal Hebrew range of personal names' are reason to consider reading the *Book of Job* through the lens of the folk-tale.[22] The difficulty in this reading however is heightened by the function of the folk-tale itself, which is either to entertain or illustrate a moral point.[23] If *Job* serves to function as a folk-tale, what is the moral point of the text? Furthermore, to what extent does the *Book of Job* concern itself with the problem of suffering?

In his article, 'Why is there a Book of Job, and What Does It Do to You If You Read It?', David Clines questions the problems posed by an incongruent text. He argues that that the *Book of Job*

> 'convinces us to pose the problems of suffering in the terms the book itself offers us, and to profess ourselves more or less content with the answers that it gives. That, at any rate, is the testimony of the ages to the book of Job. Unless criticism of it has been suppressed, or self-repressed, it has had its way with readers—which is, no doubt, what we mean when we call it a great and powerful work of literature.'[24]

Clines' assertion of *Job* as a powerful work of literature is an opinion echoed by Spark, as she claims that the 'the *Book of Job* is a magnificent dramatic poem'.[25] This, of course, is mirrored within *The Only Problem* by Harvey, who declares that Job is the 'most pivotal book of the Bible'.[26] However, Clines argues that the text claims to offer a solution the problem of suffering (when this is evidently not the case), and encourages its readers to be

[19] Alastair Hunter, "Structure and Meaning in Job" in *Wisdom Literature* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 130-46. Though a full analysis of the arguments of this structure is not within the scope of this thesis, it is important to note how this structure influenced Spark and *The Only Problem.*
[20] Ibid, 132.
[21] Ibid., 134.
[22] Ibid. Hunter also highlights the comparison of God and the Adversary's wager as a trickster folk-tale form.
[23] Ibid., "Folktales, Myths and Legends", 243-4.
[24] David Clines, "Why is There a Book of Job, and What Does It Do to You If You Read It?" in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible,* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 23
[25] Spark, "The Mystery of Job's Suffering", *Golden Fleece,* 194.
[26] Spark, *TOP,* 29.

'more or less content with the answers it gives'.[27] Clines instead argues that it is 'innocent suffering' which is the 'problem that concerns Job.'[28] He writes that

> 'if we regard only the question of innocent suffering for the moment, it is hard to escape the conclusion that what concerns Job is much more the injustice of innocent suffering than the suffering itself. He would like to stop suffering, of course, but it is not the pain of suffering, i.e. the suffering itself, that distresses him so much as the injustice that suffering subjects him to.'[29]

Clines argues that the text, while appearing to display the happy conclusion of Job's faithfulness to God, conversely presents the injustice of the suffering that befalls Job. What, then, was the purpose and meaning of this disparate text? Biblical scholars have since argued for various modes of reading *Job*. Both Abigail Pelham and Katherine E. Southwood have argued that *Job* could be read as a comedy, which invites comparisons to the satirical nature of Spark's biblical tale. Pelham writes that

> 'the same events can appear either tragic or comic depending on one's position in relation to the one experiencing the events. We identify with Job, and so we find his situation tragic… if the story were told differently, Job's situation could strike us as comic.'[30]

Pelham continues to state how there are characters in the biblical tale that 'find Job laughable', and as such, Job can be seen as a 'comic figure'.[31] Likewise, Southwood argues that 'comedy in Job is a powerful weapon used to expose and ridicule the idea of retribution.'[32] By reading *Job* through the lens of a 'dramatised comedy', Southwood investigates what *Job* says about illness and pain, and evaluates the 'moralised language of advice' Job receives from his friends.[33] There is also extensive research on reading Job intertextually, not only in relation to other biblical texts, but also how the text of *Job* is retold and reimagined in modernity.[34] In particular, Tod Linafelt likens Job's tale with the

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[27] David Clines, "Does the Book of Job Suggest that Suffering is Not a Problem?" in *Weisheit in Israel: Beiträge des Symposiums "Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne" anlässlich des 100. Geburtstags Gerhard von Rads (1901–1971)*, ed. by David J.A. Clines, Hermann Lichtenberger and Hans-Peter Müller. (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003), 97.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Abigail Pelham. "*Job* as Comedy, Revisited", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35, no. 1 (2010), 95.
[31] Ibid., 95-6.
[32] Found in the Katherine Southwood's abstract to *Job's Body and the Dramatised Comedy of Moralising.* New York: Routledge, 2021.
[33] Ibid., "Introduction and methods", 1.
[34] See Katharine Dell and Will Kyne (ed.), *Reading Job Intertextually* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

1989 movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, and considers the similarities in both the narrative elements and the characters of each media.[35] Similarly to the relationship between Dorothy and the Wicked Witch, Linafelt argues that 'Job is, of course, the biblical character who quintessentially represents the demand for justice in the face of an overpowering authority.'[36] Linafelt's analysis highlights the influence of Job's story in modern culture and its many appearances in art, music, literature and film. However, this representation is not limited to Job's character: Katherine Low's investigates of the development of Job's wife in imagery from medieval works to William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (1826), which is of particular interest to this thesis.[37] Low explores how artistic interpretations of Job's wife reflect (or deflect) the historical and societal understandings of her character in relation to her role the biblical text.

This brings us to the biblical reflection in Spark's *The Only Problem*. As I have previously mentioned, most critical responses of the novel are focused on Spark's use of *Job* in her presentation of Harvey's character. Bryce Christensen compares the influence *Job* in both *The Comforters* and *The Only Problem*, and how Spark 'approaches the dark riddle of suffering' through the characters of Caroline Rose and Harvey.[38] He concludes by stating that Spark sees 'narrative as a key to unravelling that riddle,'[39] and argues that

> 'only as Harvey allows himself to recognize in the Job narrative the pattern of his own life, only as he allows subjective identification with its narrative to supplant his rational objectivity in trying to analyze it, does he actually find personal comfort and meaning. Only then does he begin to fathom the mystery of suffering which has so baffled him.'[40]

I believe that Christensen's observation is a safe conclusion on the presentation of Harvey's character within Spark's tale and summarises how the 'end' of Harvey's suffering is the primary focus of the text. Hugh Pyper takes a much more interesting approach by evaluating the role of 'the reader': this consists of (but is not limited to) the reader of *Job*, Harvey as a reader of *Job*, and finally, the reader of Harvey (as a reader of Job).[41] Pyper argues that Spark intentionally utilises Harvey's role as a reader of *Job* to comment on the nature of the 'suffering' reader, who 'retreat[s] from the real suffering of

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[35] Tod Linafelt, 'The Wizard of Uz: Job, Dorothy and the Limits of the Sublime'. *Biblical Interpretation* 13, no. 1-2 (2006) 94-109.
[36] Ibid., 97.
[37] Katherine Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife.* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
[38] Christensen, "The Latter End of Job", 139.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid. 141.
[4141] Hugh Pyper "The Reader in Pain: Job as Text and Pretext", *Journal of Literature &Theology* 7, no. 2. (1993)

the world.'[42] He also explores Spark's depiction of La Tour's painting and the problems surrounding its interpretation, which I argue is a crucial intertextual tool utilised within the novel.[43]

With this in mind, the question thus remains: how is this strange biblical tale reimagined in Spark's work? In this thesis, I will argue that Spark's presentation is unmistakably unique: not only does Spark create Harvey as a modern *Job*-like figure, but she also intentionally mirrors *Job*'s threefold structure in her own text. I will also evaluate how Spark's use of Georges de La Tour's painting invites further intertextual readings and serves to connect Effie to her biblical counterparts of Job's wife and Eve. Finally, by placing Effie as God in Spark's tale, I will assess the interpretations encouraged by this reading, and will ultimately conclude that this provides new insight on how we can read both Spark's illicit tale, and the *Book of Job.* I will begin by outlining the classic interpretation of *The Only Problem,* which focuses on Harvey's *Job*-like story and the suffering he endures at the hands of Effie. I will also consider the extent of Spark's influence on the text, and how her critical reception as "Catholic writer" influenced interpretations of her work.

"Dieu est merde!": The Theodicy and Structure of *The Only Problem*

It would appear that the primary concern and purpose of *The Only Problem* is to reflect the reality of suffering through the lens of both Job and Harvey's experience. The reader is aware that Harvey textually represents the figure of *Job,* while in the narrative Harvey is so consumed by Job's suffering that he starts writing 'a monograph about the Book of Job and the problem it deals with.'[44] This is further exemplified when Harvey tries to recreate the Job's spartan existence by ridding himself of his possessions in a desperate attempt to understand Job's plight. What transpires, however, is a strange type of claustrophobia that Harvey experiences from the presence of his comforters. Each of the people that continue to surround him seek to lead him away from his predilection to his *Job*-ian lifestyle, causing him to question, in deep frustration: 'How can you deal with the problem of suffering if everybody conspires to estrange you from suffering?'[45]

This question of suffering, and in particular the meaning of Job's suffering, is one that appears to plague Harvey throughout *The Only Problem* because, as the reader is made

[42] Ibid., 123.
[43] Ibid., 119
[44] Spark, *TOP,* 19.
[45] Ibid., 64.

aware, Harvey believes in God.[46] Harvey struggles to reconcile the presentation of the God in the text of *Job* with the God he believes in. The narrator highlights Harvey's struggle in the first section of the novel:

> 'For he could not face a benevolent Creator, one whose charming and delicious light descended and spread over the world, and being powerful everywhere, could condone the unspeakable sufferings of the world; that God did permit all suffering and was therefore by logic of his omnipotence, the actual author of it, he was at a loss how to square with the existence of God, given the premise that God is good.'[47]

This presents itself as the crux of Harvey's difficulty both in his own life, and the implied struggle of the completion of his thesis. It is 'the only problem' Harvey feels is worth discussing.[48] The title of Spark's novel thus highlights the circularity of interpretation: within the novel, Harvey is representative of *Job,* while also functioning as a mouthpiece for Spark's beliefs on *Job,* just as Stannard stated.[49] Hugh Pyper also argues that through Harvey's 'reflections and conversations', 'Spark is able to engage directly with the critical and exegetical problems of the text.'[50] It seems that, for Harvey, the primary problem posed was in the presentation of God's character. Stannard points out that Spark suggests that the dilemma of this problem 'lay not with God but with our construction of Him in the human image'.[51] Spark had also written that 'at the point where human reason cannot reconcile the fact of evil with the goodness of God, an anthropomorphic conception of God breaks down. Is this not the main point of the Book of Job?'[52] This conclusion is emphasised through Harvey's own identification of God in *Job* as fictional character and thus separated from the God he believed in.[53] This aligns with Spark's assertion that the text of *Job* 'is fictional, not historical: that is clear to the common intelligence and the fact also enjoys the approval of the strictest orthodox.'[54] In her essay on the "Unknown Author" of Job, Spark ruminates that

> 'If the *Book of Job* were a true story, one might be struck by the number of times Job asserts God's innocence, refusing to ever attribute to God

[46] Ibid., 19.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Stannard, "A Speck in the Distance", 456. See p. 5 of this thesis.
[50] Hugh Pyper "The Reader in Pain: Job as Text and Pretext", *Journal of Literature &Theology* 7, no. 2. (1993), 111.
[51] Martin Stannard, "Conversion" in *Muriel Spark: The Biography,* 166.
[52] Spark, "The Mystery of Job's Suffering", *Golden Fleece,* 194.
[53] Spark, *TOP,* 135.
[54] Spark, "The Mystery of Job's Suffering", *Golden Fleece,* 194.

> any blame for his agonies. Is this because he is being overheard by God?'[55]

Though on the surface this appears as a funny observation, it is clear that Spark was interested in the narrative intentions of the text, and the tensions this created in the relationship between Job and God. However, Spark makes a distinct difference here between 'truth' and the fictional reading of *Job*, just as Harvey himself finally concludes in the completion of his thesis.

Spark was also concerned with the structure of the *Book of Job*. In her essay, "The Mystery of Job's Suffering", Spark had reviewed Carl Jung's *Answer to Job* and appeared irked at Jung's decision to reject Job's epilogue.[56] Spark argued that 'on textual grounds there is no justification for absolutely ignoring the prologue and epilogue'[57], and that

> 'without the prologue, we cannot begin to understand Job's first outburst; and in the epilogue we find the only rational words which God is represented to speak in his answer to Job; that is where Job is instructed to pray for his friends and they to offer sacrifices for themselves.'[58]

I believe that Spark's insistence on the necessity of each section is what motivated her to enact Job's threefold structure in *The Only Problem.* This is further demonstrated by Spark's mimicry of *Job*'s epilogue, with Harvey joking that he will live, like Job, for 'another hundred and forty years'.[59] Therefore it appears that *The Only Problem* presents itself as a fictional account that mirrors Spark's own understanding of the meaning of Job's suffering, enacted through the lens of her protagonist. As I have already discussed, Spark was adamant that *The Only Problem* is not a retelling of the biblical tale. She stated that

> 'the story of Job was a starting point but my story is my own. The problem of suffering is indivisible from life itself. It is insoluble, a mystery. It is a reality, both soft and harsh, and I have sought to convey it.'[60]

As such, it appears that Spark's primary focus of *The Only Problem* was to discuss the difficulty of the problem of suffering, not only that which was presented in the biblical text of *Job*, but in its emergence in reality. The use of the *Book of Job* as Spark's pretext thus

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[55] Ibid., "An Unknown Author", 197.
[56] Spark, "The Mystery of Job's Suffering" in *The Golden Fleece Essays*, 196.
[57] Ibid., 195.
[58] Ibid., 195-6.
[59] Spark, *TOP*, 189. Later in this thesis I will argue how this structure supports my argument that Effie can be read both as Job's wife and God.
[60] Ibid. "The Only Problem", 192.

suggests the overt connection between the characters in her novel, particularly in the presentation of Harvey's mysterious wife, Effie. I believe that when both texts are read in conjunction with each other, it seems that Effie structurally and narratively aligns with the character of Job's wife, and also the character of God. Both Effie and God are absent for the main body of their respective plots, yet both characters are undeniably the driving force behind the narrative. Both characters, too, have their corresponding 'whirlwinds': however, in comparison to the biblical text, Effie's whirlwind is characterised through the silence of her death.

Of course, it is debatable to what extent this was Spark's intention; however, I believe that the parallels of the narrative placement of Effie and God cannot be coincidental. Thus, I will argue for a feminist reading of *The Only Problem,* which seeks explore the tensions created by the characterisation and function of Spark's female character in her *Job*-ian tale. This interpretation is somewhat complicated by the critical reception of Spark as a 'Catholic writer'.

The Problem with Spark

One of the primary difficulties faced in the conception of this argument lay in the critical reception of Spark and her authorship style. This primarily lay in her connection to both her Catholicism, and her relationship to the feminist ideals of her time. Though it is important to consider these conceptions of Spark's character and how it affected her work, I ultimately argue that this is a reductive measurement on the influence of Spark's writing style. However, it is inevitable that these critical perceptions impacted my reading of *The Only Problem* and as such it is necessary to consider them in my analysis.

Spark had often attributed her conversion to Catholicism as the reason she was able to write. As a result, this did not encourage a favourable critical reception; her status became that of the "Catholic comic writer", whose position mimicked that of the 'god-like' author who enjoyed 'punishing' their characters.[61] This perhaps began from the conception of Spark's debut novel, *The Comforters,* where David Herman points out that the novel focuses 'metaleptically on a protagonist who gradually comes to realize that she is a character in a novel'.[62] Our hero, Caroline Rose, can hear the clacking of the author's typewriter, describing her movements and thoughts. When Caroline begins to rebel against

[61] See James Bailey's, 'Salutary Scars: The "Disorientating" Fictions of Muriel Spark', *Contemporary Women's Writing* 9, no. 1 (2015) 36.
[62] David Herman, '"A Salutary Scar": Muriel Spark's Desegregated Art in the Twenty-First Century', *Modern Fiction Studies* 54, no. 3 (Fall, 2008) 475.

the type-writer's wishes, she winds up in a car crash: a clear punishment for disobeying the typewriter's wishes.[63] The novel, however, is clearly intended to conflate notions of the divine, omniscient control of the author and the rebellion of its characters, As such, James Bailey questions

> 'Why is Spark so often overlooked, not only as a write of complex, experimental fiction, but as a woman writer whose literary innovations have arguably energised the explorations of female agency that figure so prominently in her work? The answer to both… lies in part with the outdated yet abiding notion of Spark as a "Catholic comic writer," whose literary experiments, however complex, outlandish, or confrontational, are nevertheless reducible to a familiar God-game played out between and all-powerful author and an ensemble of helpless characters.'[64]

This 'god-game' is arguably exemplified through Spark's relationship with her female characters. It seems that many of Spark's characters have problematic traits: Miss Jean Brodie has a fondness for Mussolini, Lise has a chaotic death-drive, and Effie is a terrorist; all characters who then face an untimely end through their deaths and as such, I will revisit Spark's presentation of these women in a further chapter. However, it is not unconceivable that these characters could be punished for their deeds through their death.

Not all of Spark's female characters are problematic: Fleur in *Loitering with Intent* (1981) wishes to help the people of the Autobiographical Association; and Annabel Christopher in *The Public Image* (1968) is a victim to an abusive relationship with her husband. Though these characters are not perfect by any means, it is clear that the situations of their lives, while still enacted through Spark's absurdist fictions, are arguably reflections of women that exist in 'real' life. The question remains to what extent critics can argue that it is Spark that chooses to 'punish' her characters. It is crucial to remember that there is a distinction between the author, Spark, and the narrators of her various tales. However, this criticism of Spark's reputation as a God-like author is inextricably connected to one of the core issues of *The Only Problem*: to what extent can a woman play God? This is something I will consider in my final chapter when consider the metatextual reading of Effie as God.

In conjunction to this, it seems that Spark had a complicated relationship with feminism and as such was not particularly regarded as a feminist, both in practice and as an author of her time. However, Martin Stannard argued that the issue of Spark's feminism lay in its representation. He wrote that '[Spark's] 1950s feminism was closer to that of the

[63] Muriel Spark, *The Comforters* (London: Virago Press, 2009)
[64] Bailey, 'Salutary Scars', 36.

1990s. […] It is the feminism of intellectual and economic partnership in which women are free to indulge in all the conventional manifestations of 'femininity'.'[65] He continues to explain that 'feminism for Muriel began and ended with the claim for economic equality.'[66] Spark herself had said 'I was brought up as an independent woman. […] I'm in favour of women's liberation from an economic viewpoint, but I wouldn't want men's and women's roles reversed.'[67] It seems that Spark's interest in feminism primarily lay in economic equality and not necessarily in the presentation of 'femininity', as Stannard points out how 'she made no apology for loving designer dresses, jewellery, poise, charm'.[68] However, Stannard also concludes that, despite her critical reception, 'no woman could have defended female independence more fiercely'.[69] As such, I argue that whether Spark had positioned herself as a feminist, in practice or as a writer, is irrelevant. Her interest and portrayal of her female characters has since elicited such a strong reaction from modern feminist readers and critics, who can legitimately shape their own reading of her own around their own feminist principles.

So how do we begin to interpret how Spark treats her 'misbehaving women'? I argue that through enacting typical female literary stereotypes of women in her work, Spark explores the historical, cultural and textual reception of women that pervades in literature. As Spark's *Job*-ian novel relies on its biblical text as its pre-text, how does this affect how we read *The Only Problem* and subsequently, Harvey's deviant wife? Through the exploration of Effie's narrative role, I aim to contribute a fresh, comprehensive understanding of the importance of characterisation in Spark's biblical tale.

Methods

In order to uncover these tensions found in the character of Effie, I will employ a feminist and literary reading of *The Only Problem* and of various texts in the Hebrew Bible, primarily focusing on Genesis and Job. While focusing on the Hebrew Bible, my analysis will rely on the techniques of 'reception history', primarily focusing on what Holly Morse refers to as 'reception criticism'.[70] In her book, *Encountering Eve's Afterlives*, Holly Morse describes reception history as the 'study of the ways in which the Bible has been

[65] Martin Stannard, "Kensington", *Biography,* 118.
[66] Ibid." Home and Away", 41.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Holly Morse. "Encountering Eve: A Guide" in *Encountering Eve's Afterlives: A New Reception Critical Approach to Genesis 2-4* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2020, eBook), 4.

translated, transmitted, read, and transformed in different times and cultures.'[71] Cheryl J. Exum argues that

> 'It is not simply a matter of the Bible influencing culture; the influence takes place in both directions. What many people think they know about the Bible often comes more from familiar representations of biblical texts and themes in the popular culture rather than from study of the ancient text itself.'[72]

The approach of reception history, therefore, is crucial to the execution of this thesis: how has the Hebrew Bible, particularly in its presentation of female characters, influenced 'modern' culture, and vice versa? Exum argues that it is evident to see how Delilah's representation has influenced cultural understandings of the *femme fatale* trope, particularly through the paintings of the nineteenth century.[73] As a result, the origin of interpretation can become a confused; and the mode of 'reading' Hebrew Bible women, whether textual or portrayals within popular culture, can become a circular activity.

This deliberately calls into question: to what extent does the Hebrew Bible influence Spark's creation and construction of Effie? It appears that Effie is based on the character of Job's nameless wife: however, it appears that culturally the figure of Job's wife has not only been associated with Eve, but also Satan; their connection highlighted through the implied wickedness of their actions.[74]

Therefore, it is obvious that these feminine types, while still important to Spark's construction of her female characters in *The Only Problem,* do not fully account for the origin of female deviancy within the Hebrew Bible, that subsequently connects Eve, Job's wife, and Effie. In order to account for this, I will consider Morse's evaluation of Eve's reception, throughout history and culture. Morse names this mode of reading 'reception *criticism'* as opposed to 'reception *history*': as reception *criticism* 'can be used in analytical ways that are not necessarily determined by chronological concerns.'[75] Morse argues that she is interested in

> 'analysing the ways in which the overriding *theme* dominating the reception history of Eve, that of Eve as femme fatale and figure of sin,

[71] Ibid., 3.
[72] J. Cheryl Exum, "Preface" in *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women.* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 7-8.
[73] Ibid., "Why, Delilah?", 189-9.
[74] In my following chapter I will explore how Eve and Job's wife are similarly portrayed in art throughout history.
[75] Morse, "Encountering Eve", *Encountering Eve's Afterlives,* 4.

> has emphasized, expanded upon, and embellished textual themes of transgression and sexuality found in Genesis 2–4.'[76]

Through this analysis, I can thus begin to consider how both reception history and criticism influences interpretations of Job's wife; and subsequently, how this affects Effie's role within Spark's *Job*-ian tale.

Layout & Structure

The first chapter will begin by illuminating the parallels and comparisons between the characterisation of Job's wife and Effie. By employing a close reading of both the *Book of Job* and *The Only Problem,* I hope to demonstrate the how the threefold structure of *Job* appears in the novel, which works to align both narratives. I argue that Effie's placement in the novel positions her in the narrative role of both Job's wife and God simultaneously. I argue that Spark's use of intertextual features, particularly George's de La Tour's painting, *Job Visited by His Wife,* connects Effie to her biblical counterparts.

The second chapter of this thesis will seek to explore to what extent Effie is representative of Spark's other female characters from her other novels, which I will call her 'misbehaving' female characters. It is imperative to consider Effie's role as a 'bad' woman within *The Only Problem* and through her connection to her female counterparts, both in Spark' other novels, and those within Hebrew Bible. In comparing the 'good' or 'bad' in both sets of women, I will investigate how thoroughly Effie can fulfil her role of Job's wife in Spark's biblical novel and the how she is thus comparable to Eve. Through this analysis, it becomes evident that the character of Effie's sister, Ruth, is used to highlight the dichotomies of interpretation surrounding the role of Job's wife in the biblical tale.

The third and final chapter will subsequently explore the outcomes caused by reading Effie as a divine signifier; and how the novel aligns her to the biblical character of God. Both characters, God and Effie respectively, function as agents in both the biblical text and Spark's; while they are physically absent for much of the plot, both characters transpire as the driving force behind their narratives. Both God and Effie appear to have their respective whirlwinds: where God appears thunderously declaring his might, Effie's terrorism and life has been brought to an end, after being shot dead by a policeman. As such, this chapter will uncover three different interpretations of Effie as the 'God' of *The*

[76] Ibid.

Only Problem: the theological, metatextual and finally literary implications of Effie ascending to her divine role.

Chapter 1: "Curse God and Die": Job's wife in *The Only Problem*

Though Spark argues that 'Job is the myth from which [her] novel proceeds, and there is no literal or exact analogy' to the *Book of Job*, there are some distinct parallels between the biblical text and *The Only Problem*.[77] In particular, it would appear that Spark utilises *Job*'s threefold structure in the novel. Echoing the common critical understanding of *Job*'s structure outlined in the introduction, Spark herself explains the structure of *Job* as 'prologue and epilogue, written in prose', while the '[dialogues], written in verse, make up the body of the book'.[78] *The Only Problem* is similarly separated into three parts and I argue that each part matches Spark's distinction: Part One is Spark's prologue of Harvey's story, where Part Two follows Harvey's various dialogues with his friends (or his so called 'comforters'[79]), often simultaneously about the *Book of Job* and the whereabouts of his terrorist wife, Effie (who subsequently dies at the beginning of Part Three). This connection is further exemplified in Part Three, *The Only Problem*'s epilogue, which appears to mimic and somewhat mock the biblical story. Considering the use of this structure, I will argue that Effie's placement in the novel therefore reflects that of Job's wife and God in the biblical tale. In addition to this, Spark 'sends' Harvey to see the magnificent painting, *Job Visited by His Wife* by Georges de La Tour, to signify Harvey's casting of Effie in the role of Job's wife in his mind.[80] I will explore how the inclusion of this painting serves to further complicate the interpretation of Effie's character and narrative role in Spark's 'biblical' novel.

As such, through a comparative close reading of the novel and the biblical text, this chapter will particularly examine the ways in which Effie resembles and textually functions as the character of Job's wife in the novel, which is emphasised by the narrator's (and subsequently Harvey's) connection of Effie to La Tour's painting. However, when considering Katherine Low's analysis of paintings of Job and his wife throughout history, it is clear to see that Job's wife is implicitly connected to Eve, and subsequently Satan.[81] Through analysis of this critical reception of Job's wife, exemplified through the

[77] Muriel Spark, "The Only Problem", *Golden Fleece*, 191.
[78] Ibid., "The Mystery of Job's Suffering", 195.
[79] Spark, *TOP*, 48. Harvey says to Ruth, Effie's sister: "That's because you're one of my comforters… Job had his comforters to contend with; why shouldn't I?"
[80] Spark, "The Only Problem", *Golden Fleece*, 191.
[81] Katherine Low, "Introduction", *The Case of Job's Wife,* 3.

intertextual layers of La Tour's painting, this chapter will begin to investigate the ways in which Effie inhabits the role of Job's wife in Spark's biblical novel.

Job's Wife: a Blessing or a Curse?

In *The Only Problem*, Effie only physically appears in Part One and at the end of Part Two, after being found and shot by the police. However, the rest of the novel is characterised by her absence; while Harvey attributes her actions and (mis)behaviour to be the cause of his suffering (just as Job accuses God) the reader is only aware of Effie's misdeeds peripherally. Yet it is specifically her appearance in Part One that aligns her to the character of Job's wife.

In the *Book of Job,* Job's wife is nameless, a characteristic also found of a few women within the Hebrew Bible.[82] Lillian Klein argues that 'biblical literature repeatedly demonstrates that failing to have a name and to pass on one's name is tantamount to not existing.'[83] In spite of this, Job's wife plays a crucial (speaking) role in the prologue, though subsequently remains absent from the rest of the biblical tale. Katherine Low argues that just as her predecessors before her, Job's wife 'exemplifies yet another biblical case of the 'disappearing woman' especially when Job's children were 'born to him'.'[84] This is exemplified in the epilogue of the *Book of Job,* where Job is blessed with double his livestock and more children to replace those he lost, with no mention of his wife, or the mother of his new children.[85] David Clines points out that Job's wife 'suffers, as women do, at the hands of the patriarchy of the book.'[86] He continues by adding how 'the suffering she experiences is ignored, though her husband's is everywhere trumpeted.'[87] Despite this, it seems that Job's wife 'speech' textually functions in order to provoke Job into action. Katherine Low argues that 'no other words spoken by a woman in the Hebrew Bible carry more bite and bafflement than those of Job's wife'.[88] The text reads:

[82] I will explore this further in the following chapter.
[83] Lillian Klein, "Job and the Womb: Text about Men, Subtext about Women" in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature,* ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 192.
[84] Katherine Low, "Introduction", in *The Case of Job's Wife,* 3.
[85] Found specifically in Job 42:12-14.
[86] David Clines, "Why is There a Book of Job?", *Interested Parties,* 8.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Katherine Low, "Introduction", *Job's Wife,* 2.

> ‘Then his wife said to him, “Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God and die.” But he said to her, “You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.’ (Job 2:9-10)

Many feminist biblical scholars have argued that Job’s wife’s seemingly malicious statement has been culturally misunderstood. Claire McGinnis makes a case in support of Job’s wife, arguing that she ‘verbalises the option of cursing God so that Job, ultimately, will not.’[89] This is exemplified in Job 2:10, where the text ascertains that ‘Job did not sin with his lips’. This is idea is echoed and developed by Ellen Van Wolde, who states that

> ‘in 2.10 Job ‘did not sin with his lips’, while in 1.21 ‘Job did not sin’. Neither blessing nor sin crosses his lips, but internal doubt cannot be ruled out here. Because the words used in both cases are exactly identical, the difference made by ‘with his lips’ is conspicuous.’[90]

Therefore, Job’s wife statement functions to verbalise the possibility of Job’s sin: though Job does not ‘sin with his lips’, it is his wife who enacts this potential through her own speech, thereby allowing Job to disregard her sinful words, and thus remain pious and faithful. As a result, Job’s wife is used as a literary scapegoat, to prevent Job from sinning against God.[91] Likewise, David Clines argues that

> ‘in purely narrative terms, her intervention functions as the means of drawing from Job a verbal response to his affliction… her presence thus introduces delay, tension, and finally resolution into this tiny segment of the narrative.’[92]

Clines argues that the presence of Job’s wife also textually functions to relieve the tension created by the reaction Job could have in response to his boil-ridden body. Her outburst distracts from Job’s potential to sin and curse God. This analysis of Job’s wife could be considered as a sympathetic reading of her character, yet historically she has been regarded as a wicked woman who is unsympathetic to her husband’s suffering. As a result of this,

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[89] Claire McGinnis, “Playing the Devil’s Advocate in Job: On Job’s Wife” in *The Whirlwind: Essays on Job, Hermeneutics and Theology in Memory of Jane Morse,* ed. Stephen L. Cook, Corrine L. Patton and James W. Watts (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 136.
[90] Ellen Van Wolde. “The Development of Job: Mrs. Job as Catalyst” in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature,* ed. Athalya Brenner. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 205.
[91] To clarify, I’m aware that the use of *scapegoat* bears a different, technical meaning when discussing the Hebrew bible. The term scapegoat (עֲזָאזֵל) in Hebrew is defined as ‘entire removal’, and is particularly utilised in Leviticus 16:26, in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, in which the sacrificial goat acts as a scapegoat: the entire removal of sin and guilt. However, in this instance, I believe that Job’s wife is characterised as a scapegoat in a literary sense.
[92] David Clines, *Job: 1-20.* (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 50-51.

Job's wife has become culturally entangled with the figure of Eve, the central problem of this reception emphasised in her suggestion to 'curse' God and die.

In Job 2:9, the Hebrew word used for 'curse' is *barek* (בָּרַךְ), which, as Katherine Low points out, 'literally means "bless"' and is used as a euphemism throughout the *Book of Job,* to highlight the dichotomy of God's blessing and Job's potential 'cursing'.[93] McGinnis agrees, and points out that 'a negative assessment of Job's wife and of her words depends on the euphemistic understanding of the word בָּרַךְ in 2:9, as 'Curse' rather than, literally, 'Bless God'.'[94] This becomes complicated when we realise that the first use of *barek* (בָּרַךְ) as 'curse' is found in Job 1:6, by God's adversary. The character known as (*ha)satan* (שָׂטָן) tells God that Job is only faithful to him because God has blessed him.[95] The adversary taunts God, saying:

> "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? … But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will *curse* (בָּרַךְ) you to your face." (Job 1:9-11)

As such, it is not improbable that textually 'the word inextricably links [ha]satan with Job's wife', as Low argues.[96] 'In other words,' Low claims, 'both [ha]satan and Job's wife function as adversaries against Job's supposed integrity.'[97] Furthermore, Klein argues that:

> 'It is not accidental that a women's mouth, however innocently, echoes the Adversary's words. This subtle but unambiguous association of the adversary and Job's wife – evil and woman, both personified – is consistent with and reinforces the derogatory subtext about woman which is conveyed in anomalies of form in an otherwise homogenous text.'[98]

This implicit connection between Job's wife and the Adversary certainly encourages the reception of Job's wife as a 'wicked' woman. However, if Job's wife's statement replaced 'curse' with 'bless', how would we interpret her seemingly scathing words to her husband? Ultimately it is this dichotomy of *barek* (בָּרַךְ) that allows this interpretation of Job's wife to develop. Although, it is important to acknowledge that Job's wife's speech echoes that, too, of God's. Clines writes that

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[93] Low, "Introduction", *Job's Wife,* 3.
[94] McGinnis, "Playing the Devil's Advocate", *The Whirlwind,* 126.
[95] In Hebrew, the word *hasatan* (שָׂטָן) within the context of this verse means 'the superhuman adversary' – though is commonly translated to 'Satan'.
[96] Low, "Introduction", *Job's Wife,* 3.
[97] Ibid. 3-4
[98] Klein, "Job and the Womb", *Wisdom Literature,* 192.

> 'Job's wife does not doubt his integrity (תֻּמָּה; cf. on 2:3) and if in the second half of her speech she echoes the words of the Satan, in the first half she echoes the words of Yahweh (2:3).'[99]

Clines' recognition of this fact, however, does not appear to be widely considered by other critics. It seems fair to assume that this is due to the nature of the patriarchal reception history of women in the Hebrew Bible. As such, Job's wife's speech is understandable when read in conjunction with that of *hasatan:* it is much more palatable that her speech should mimic the adversary, rather than the deity. However, Van Wolde argues that it is

> 'Job's wife [who] forces her husband to choose. [Job] can curse God, which might make God leave him and result in his death… Alternatively, he can bless God and die with that blessing on his lips. …This double force of (barek) shows the nature of the double choice Job faces: the choice between blessing God or cursing him; and between life and death.'[100]

Despite this Job's wife must textually function for this possibility: her statement allows for the potential of 'cursing', which, as a result, allows Job to be saved from the risk of sin and subsequent death.

Thus, the character of Job's nameless wife narratively functions as the supplier of Job's children, but also as a catalyst to provoke and encourage Job not to 'sin with his lips' (Job 2:10). The Hebrew word *barek* (בָּרַךְ) in *Job* textually functions as a euphemism of the notion of the 'blessing' and 'cursing' that haunts the biblical narrative. This is particularly exemplified in Job's wife statement in Job 2:9, where the translation of *barek* (בָּרַךְ) as 'curse' serves to connect Job's wife to the Adversary. This choice of translation encourages the interpretation of Job's wife as a 'wicked' woman. As such, it is interesting to consider how this euphemism is enacted in *The Only Problem*, and how these parallels are thus illumined between the biblical character of Job's wife and Effie.

Job's Nameless Wife and Effie

There are multiple ways in which *The Only Problem* seeks to connect Effie with Job's wife. Further in this chapter, I will examine how Georges de La Tour's painting narratively functions to connect Effie to her biblical predecessor. However, I argue that the biblical

[99] Clines, *Job 1-20*, 51.
[100] Van Wolde. "Mrs. Job as Catalyst", *Wisdom Literature*, 204.

euphemism of *barek* (בָּרַךְ) is recreated both through both Effie's limited dialogue and, surprisingly, her name.

As I have previously argued, the words of Job's wife make her beholden to the euphemism of *barek* (בָּרַךְ). Klein points out that 'there is no irony in the namelessness of Job's wife. Indeed, after her words, she vanishes in and from the text even though she implicitly bears a second round of ten children.'[101] As Job's nameless wife fails to make an appearance in the epilogue of *Job,* Klein argues that it is Job's wife's cursing that leads to her punishment of implied non-existence. Due to her "foolish" words in Job 2:9, this biblical woman must be punished: and her punishment is her namelessness, and consequently, her non-existence. The curse of *barek* (בָּרַךְ) has extended to her own self and subsequently her words have resulted in her own 'textual' death.

Consequently, it is interesting to consider that Spark named Effie thus. It would be unsurprising that the names of Spark's biblical female characters should both be imbued with meaning. It seems unlikely that Ruth's name would not implicitly connect her to the biblical character; although this is not something that we witness in the execution of her character. Likewise, the name "Effie" is shortened from the Greek, "Euphemia", which, according to the *Oxford Dictionary of First Names* is 'derived from *eu* 'well, good' and *phēnai* 'to speak'.'[102] This is an excellent example of Spark's humour: the playful irony of naming Effie as 'well spoken' cannot be overlooked, especially considering her outburst in the novel's prologue. However, it is evident that despite being the main focus for most of the novel Effie does not speak much, but it is obvious that Effie is well spoken *about,* from all surrounding characters in the text, a clear indicator of Spark's wit.

There is also an interesting connection to Saint Euphemia, a pious and devout virgin, tortured and martyred for her unwavering faith.[103] Though the connection between the Saint and Effie is not explicit, I believe it would be unlikely that Spark would have been unaware of Saint Euphemia's story. Effie is an anarchistic martyr in her own right, even if her piousness is enacted through her devotion to her terrorist group.

However, the most important factor to consider is that connected to "Euphemia" is its connection to "euphemism". Therefore, Effie's name signifies and embodies the 'problem' of Job's wife: the euphemism of *barek* (בָּרַךְ). I argue that it seems highly likely that Spark named Effie thus to directly inhabit this euphemism: considering her status as the driving force of the narrative, and subsequently the cause of Harvey's suffering, Effie

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[101] Klein, "Job and the Womb", *Wisdom Literature,* 192.
[102] Patrick Hanks, Kate Hardecastle, and Flavia Hodges, ed. "Euphemia" in *Oxford Dictionary of First Names,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[103] See Jacobus de Voragine. "Saint Euphemia" in *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012, 567-8).

narratively functions as the 'blessing' and 'curse' of Harvey's life. It is Effie's existence that, for Harvey, calls into question his own problem of suffering.

Finally, it is hard to ignore the phonetic affinities between Effie's name and Eve's. This implication would serve to connect Effie not only to Job's wife, but also to her biblical predecessor Eve. This is exemplified through the inclusion (and the reception history) of Georges de La Tour's painting; however, this is also something I will explore in the next chapter. In order to begin to investigate the connection between Effie and Job's wife, I will now employ a close reading of Effie's first outburst in *The Only Problem*, and how it reads in conjunction with Job's wife's speech in Job 2:9.

The Stolen Chocolate Bar: Effie's "Curse God and Die"

As the translation of *barek* (בָּרַךְ) to mean 'curse' directly influences how the reader interprets the character of Job's wife, we must subsequently understand the ways in which this euphemism is entangled in the presentation of Effie's character. To fully comprehend the parallels between Effie and Job's wife, it is essential to compare Effie's outburst in Part One with Job's wife's statement. I argue that the placement of Effie's speech coincides with that of Job's wife statement in the biblical text. Much like Job's wife's speech takes place at the end of the prologue, Effie's socialist speech occurs near the end of Part One. This follows shortly after the dreaded chocolate bar incident, where Effie, while on holiday in Italy with Harvey, Ruth and Edward, steals a chocolate bar from a petrol station. The text reads as follows:

> 'Effie said, "Why shouldn't we help ourselves? These multinationals and monopolies are capitalising on us, and two-thirds of the world is suffering." She tore open the second slab, crammed more chocolate angrily into her mouth, and, with her mouth gluttonously full of stolen chocolate, went on raving about how two-thirds of the world was starving.'[104]

This marks the reader's first main verbal encounter with Effie, just as Job 2:9 is our primary (and only) encounter with Job's wife.[105] This, of course, is not the only occasion on which Effie speaks although it is arguably the most important. Although her statement is not quite akin to 'curse God and die', it is clear however that Effie's proposal textually

[104] Spark, *TOP*, 15.
[105] It is important to mention that prior to this, Effie says, "Yes, that's what I'd like" (15) when selecting the chocolate – however, prior to this section, Effie had not physically appeared in the novel until this moment – but had been discussed by Edward and Harvey at the beginning of the novel.

mirrors that of Job's wife's account in Job 2:9: Effie's statement also begins with a rhetorical question, followed by a statement. Then, in true Sparkian wit, Effie's outburst is comically juxtaposed with her 'mouth gluttonously full of stolen chocolate'.[106] The narrator utilises this scene to highlight the dichotomy between her implied social consciousness with indulgence and gluttony, which is implied both with her eating of the chocolate bar, and also due to her high social status (thanks to Harvey's wealth). As a result, it is also hard to ignore to the implicit parallels between Effie, and Eve: just as Eve eats the fruit of the Garden of Eden to acquire knowledge, Effie eats the chocolate bar as a defiant, rebellious act against the multinationals and monopolies. As such, the act of eating, in both texts, becomes symbolic of women rebelling against their respective authorities: whether this is the God of Eve's world; or the 'capitalist regime' of Effie's.

Furthermore, it is important to note how the narrator's description of Effie's eating is intentionally composed of particularly aggressive descriptions. Her actions of 'tearing', 'cramming' and 'raving' connote a type of viciousness that can certainly be connected to 'curse God and die' (Job 2:9). I argue that these behaviours are portrayed thus in order to create an implicit connection between Effie and violence: just as Job's wife 'curse' implies 'wickedness' on her part, so does Effie's speech and actions are intended to imply that Effie is capable of violence. This may be self-evident due to her (future) terrorist tendencies however, as I have already mentioned, throughout the novel this incident is viewed by many characters as the precursor to (and proof of) Effie's interest in terrorism. This act of rebellion is understood as Harvey's primary reason for leaving her. This is exemplified through a conversation between Harvey and one of the detectives, Pomfret, later in the novel. Pomfret comments on the situation:

> "She stole, made the easy gesture, on ideological grounds. They call it proletarian re-appropriation. You must have already perceived the incipient terrorist in your wife; and on this silly occasion, suddenly you couldn't take it. Things often happen that way."[107]

Although Harvey initially rejects Pomfret's assertion, it is easy to see that what Pomfret says is correct. Further in the novel, Harvey ruminates on Effie's behaviour and outburst with his lawyer, Stewart Cooper. Harvey says:

> "I couldn't stand her sociological clap-trap. If she wanted to do some good in the world she had plenty of opportunity. There was nothing to stop her taking up charities and causes; she could have had money for

[106] Spark, *TOP*, 15.
[107] Ibid. 165.

> them, and she always had plenty of time. But she has to rob supermarkets and banks."[108]

The narrator thus utilises Effie's 'ridiculous' behaviour purposefully to create the impression that Effie's "sociological clap-trap" is, of course, 'foolish'; much like the way Job condemns his wife in Job 2:10. As a result, when compared to the biblical text, it is clear that Effie's statement textually and structurally functions as the 'logical' explanation for her terrorist behaviour. This is exemplified through the structural use of the rhetorical question, followed by a statement, which mirrors the function of Job's wife's statement. Klein argues that

> 'logical reasoning is implied, not stated. Although the wife may be offering the logical conclusion of her deliberations, Job's chastising response conveys his presumption that her words are not thought out but spontaneous. Job's wife is the only character in the entire book who speaks without verbalising a process of reasoning.'[109]

Although Effie does appear to verbally process her reasoning by justifying why she should be stealing the chocolate bar, Harvey, not unlike Job in the biblical text, must find it to be foolish (Job 2:10). Therefore, it is apparent that the purpose of Effie's statement in Spark's 'prologue' serves to connect her to the character of Job's wife in the biblical tale. Effie's act of stealing is morally reprehensible to Harvey. As a result, she (not unlike Job's wife) forces Harvey to act, and as such, he chooses to leave her. Both statements function as a means for each protagonist, both Job and Harvey respectively, to make the decision to act. It is in this way that both women are essential narrative tools, utilised to progress their partner's respective stories. However, in Effie's case, to simply interpret her role and function in this way is reductive of her character: as I have previously mentioned, I believe that Effie's placement in the novel can also coincide with God's in *Job*, and as such it seems that Effie inhabits the biblical, textual role of Job's wife and God simultaneously.

Yet the parallels between Job's wife and Effie appear to highlight Effie's failings: if Spark had intended for Effie to fully embody the biblical role of Job's wife, Effie should then cease to appear in the novel again, having functioned only to 'prove' Harvey's good moral compass, just as Job's wife necessitated Job's refusal to 'sin with his lips (Job 2:10). The reader is aware however that this is not the case, as Effie becomes a terrorist and dies in a shoot-out as a result. Thus, there becomes a clear distinction in the novel between who Harvey wishes Effie would be, and who Effie really is. In order to play the role of Job's

[108] Ibid., 124.
[109] Klein, "Job and the Womb", *Wisdom Literature,* 189.

wife, perhaps Effie should only textually function to serve Harvey's story, which, I believe, is how she narratively functions within Harvey's imagination. This is revealed through the inclusion of Georges de La Tour's painting, *Job Visited by His Wife*, in the novel, through which the reader is given an insight into Harvey's (mis)understanding of his terrorist, misbehaving wife. To comprehend the role of the painting in the novel, we must understand the characterisation of Harvey and thus how Spark had designed her own 'biblical' protagonist.

The Stolen Chocolate Bar Part 2: Harvey's "Foolish Woman"

It is obvious, despite his protestations, that Harvey wishes to emulate the character of Job. Though he argues that he is 'hardly in the position of Job' and 'intend[s] no personal analogy', it is clear, textually and narratively, that Harvey is attempting to inhabit this biblical role.[110] Spark's rich protagonist, in a vain attempt to rid himself of his possessions (just as Job loses his in the biblical tale), contradictorily purchases a château for himself, Ruth and Effie's child, Clara, to live in. He reflects on this and realises: '"Instead of disabusing myself of worldly goods in order to enter the spirit of *Job* I seem to acquire more, ever more and more."'[111]

However, there are some manners by which Harvey does not emulate the spirit of Job. This is particularly pertinent when considering the comparisons between Job 2:9 and Effie's chocolate bar anguish. In comparison to Job's rebuttal to his wife (found in Job 2:10), Harvey 'sat in silence while Effie ate her chocolate, inveighing, meanwhile, against the capitalist system', before 'leaving the car there on the *autostrada*'.[112] It is interesting to consider how the narrator playfully constructs the scene:

> 'Harvey's disappearance ruined Effie's holiday. She was furious, and went on against him so much that Ruth made that always infuriating point: "If he's so bad, why are you angry with him for leaving you?" […] It would have been a glorious trip if not for Effie's fury and unhappiness.'[113]

This is not unlike other absurd situations that exist in Spark's novels, where Spark playfully constructs a level of ridiculousness in such situations which otherwise should be

[110] Spark, *TOP*, 109.
[111] Ibid., 57
[112] Ibid., 16.
[113] Ibid.

considered distressing. [114] This reminds us of Pelham's assertion that Job can be read as a comedy. At this particular point in the novel, it is unclear who the reader should choose to sympathise with, but nevertheless Harvey's reaction in this situation reads as undeniably comedic. The story is thereby told from Edward's perspective, who ruminates how Harvey had 'simply left [Effie's] life… all over a bar of chocolate. And yet, no.'[115] There is a strange implication here that Effie's behaviour is not an isolated incident,[116] which is confirmed further in the novel, when a policeman informs Harvey, "Your wife has been in trouble before"; and Harvey replies, "I know."[117] However, this chocolate-bar episode appears to mark the end of Harvey's apparent tolerance of Effie's questionable behaviour and actions.

In comparison to the biblical text, it would appear that the expectations of Job's behaviour towards his wife are clearly not mirrored in Harvey's toward Effie. As I previously stated, both Klein and Van Wolde argue that Job's wife statement textually functions so that Job can rebuke his wife, while also connoting that Job's wife can be read as 'evil' as a result. The biblical text arguably sees Job's wife being reprimanded by her husband for her sinful words. However, though it seems that Harvey does not 'sin with his lips' (Job 2:10) by engaging with Effie's behaviour, it seems his refusal to verbally reprimand her and chastise her as Job did with his wife indicates both Effie's control over Harvey, and her ruling of the narrative. Comparatively, in the biblical text Job's rebuttal restores his status as blameless and upright (Job 1:1), and as a result, leaves his wife suitably reprimanded. However, if we were to read this incident as a reflection of the intentions of the biblical text, it could be argued that Harvey becomes blameless and upright by taking the moral high ground, enacted through his refusal to engage with Effie. This is exemplified when we consider that Edward admits how he believes Harvey's 'moral sense was always intensified where Effie was concerned'.[118] In comparison with the biblical text, McGinnis argues that 'Job's response seems to necessitate a reading of Job's wife's comments as in some way impious.'[119] McGinnis' reading is especially pertinent when we consider that Effie's form of piousness functions as the pursuit of her terrorism. As a result, Harvey's response (or lack thereof) is an assertion that Effie's behaviour is socially deviant.

[114] Pelham. "*Job* as Comedy, Revisited", 95.
[115] Spark, *TOP*, 16-17.
[116] Ibid., 124
[117] Ibid., 140.
[118] Ibid., 19
[119] McGinnis, "Playing the Devil's Advocate", *The Whirlwind*, 127.

As such, it seems that *The Only Problem*'s 'curse God and die' both mimics and rejects that of the biblical text of Job 2:9. Not only does this solidify the placement of Effie as Job's wife, but it also calls into question Harvey's ability to inhabit his role as Job. Likewise, Effie is not bound to her role as Job's wife, which proves her power over Harvey, and necessitates her textual transcendence to the narrative role of God. Nevertheless, it is important to consider how Harvey naively interprets both the events of Job 2:9-10, and his separation from Effie, which I will discuss further in this chapter. Regardless, this incident marks the beginning of Spark's comment on the nature of suffering, through utilising Effie as Harvey's biggest weakness.

Job Visited by His Wife by Georges de La Tour

The parallels between Job's wife and Effie are further exemplified through the novel's addition of the painting, *Job Visited by his Wife* by Georges de La Tour. There are multiple intertextual layers to the painting which, when evaluated, give insight not only to the depth of the history of reception of Job's wife, but also the implicit connections between Effie and her female biblical predecessors. The painting illuminates how Effie textually functions as a complex enigma that represents many characters within the Hebrew Bible. How does Effie's narrative role and textual role connect her to the figures of Job's wife, Eve, and God, all at once? By utilising Katherine Low's analysis of the changing reception history of Job's wife in paintings throughout antiquity, we can begin to understand the ways in which Effie inhabits or reflects these historical interpretations of Job's nameless wife. In her short essay on *The Only Problem*, Spark notes:

> 'I was inspired by the beautiful painting, *Job Visited by his Wife* by Georges de la Tour… It is a mysterious fact that I had already started the novel and conceived the characters Effie and Ruth, before I had actually seen this picture of Job's magnificent wife. After seeing it myself I naturally 'sent' my hero Harvey Gotham to see it.'[120]

Spark claimed that seeing the painting became 'the turning point, providing all the impetus and logic [she] needed to continue with [her] story'.[121] Though Spark had already conceived of Effie and Ruth, it is apparent from her above statement that the painting was crucial in the creation and development of Harvey's character. To understand the ways in

[120] Spark, "The Only Problem", *Golden Fleece*, 191.
[121] Martin Stannard, "A Speck in the Distance", *The Biography*, 456.

which de La Tour's depiction was truly unique, we must begin to uncover the intertextual layers behind its interpretation.

It is perhaps obvious to state that portrayals of Job in art changed according to their historical and cultural contexts; and thus that images of Job and his wife reflected the theological conventions of the time. According to David Clines, it seems in spite of his anguished, repetitive speeches, 'in medieval exegesis and iconography in particular, the figure of Job was essentially the Christian virtue of patience'.[122] Throughout time, Job's story became malleable: his piousness and blamelessness were enough to create an image of the 'faithful man'. The figure of Job even has a 'typological connection to Christ',[123] which Spark herself investigates in her analysis of Jung's *Answer to Job.*[124] Such ideals and conceptions of Job's character were reflected through artistic interpretation, often envisioned through the inclusion of particular elements of the biblical text. These include Job's wife, Satan and even the dungheap.[125] When considering *Job Visited by His Wife* however it is particularly important to consider the reception history of Job's relationship with his wife. Through analysis of this and subsequent gender constructs, Katherine Low traces the progression of Job and his wife's image throughout history, from medieval art to Renaissance.[126] It is clear then that each particular textual element was not only included to represent not only Church dogma, but also intertextual connections to other biblical texts. Low begins her analysis by outlining how medieval representations of Job and his wife often compare to those of Adam and Eve, using 'The Fall as an epistemological framework'.[127] Each individual text is already fraught with its own meaning; however, this comparison speaks volumes about the role of both Eve and Job's unnamed wife in their respective stories. Low considers how popular theological texts of the time circulated the comparison in order 'to relate Job's wife to a woman of deviant speech'.[128] Both women represented garrulity; and as such, this became defined as an unfortunate feminine trait. It is thus unsurprising that images of Job and wife in this period are joined by Satan, the artists seeking to make a connection between Job's garrulous wife and the devil.[129]

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[122] David Clines, *Job: 1-20,* lv.
[123] Low, "Introduction", *Job's Wife*, 26.
[124] Spark, "The Mystery of Job's Suffering", *Golden Fleece*,192-3. She asserts that, for Jung, it was 'in the figure of Job that the capricious Yahweh of the OT met his match', that 'Yahweh's intention to become man, which resulted from his collision with Job, is fulfilled in Christ's life and suffering'.
[125] Low, "Eden's Dunghill", *Job's Wife*, 29-55.
[126] Ibid. This is mainly explored in her third chapter, "Satan's Disappearance from the Dunheap and Job's Wife as Renaissance Shrew", 79-111.
[127] Ibid., "Eden's Dunghill", 29.
[128] Ibid., 27.
[129] Low, "The Troublesome Trio", 69. Low analyses an image in the Speculum Humanae Salvationis that portrays Satan whipping 'Job with actual whips, whereas her [Job's wife] words form a bubble which she lashes at Job.'

Low states that the late sixteenth to early seventeenth-centuries marked the emergence of the trend to portray Job's wife as 'shrewish'[130], taking on 'more enigmatic functions'.[131] 'Satan's presence', on the other hand, 'takes on more nuanced forms'.[132] While both figures continued to taunt Job, they were depicted as 'more generic forms of evil' rather than a combined threat.[133] This shift sought to represent cultural ideas on introspection; the importance and obligation of a Christian notion 'to ponder inwardly sin and salvation'.[134] As such, Job's plight became much more poignant, confirming that his deep suffering was an introspective, alienating experience. Artists therefore reflected this, portraying Job's suffering as 'dark, elaborate, dramatic and introspective'.[135] This was conveyed by portrayals of Job's frail, sometimes naked, body, which simultaneously aimed to represent the weight of his traumatic struggle, and 'transience of life and the vanity of pursuing worldly things'.[136]

With this in mind, it appears that *Job Visited by His Wife* is quite unlike any portrayal of Job at this time, and is even surprising within the context of La Tour's own work.[137] His signature was only recognised in 1972, though Jacques Thullier states that 'there was never any doubt concerning the attribution' as only 'La Tour could have conceived such a singular work'.[138] It seems that La Tour, while certainly incorporating certain artistic trends of his time, had created a strangely intimate scene between Job and his wife. It was so unique, in fact, that it was mislabelled as *Saint Peter Delivered from Prison by an Angel* until the 1930s, when Werner Weisbach argued for the change of title.[139] This led to problematic dichotomy, that this 'angelic female presence, changed to fit the iconography of the time', was in fact Job's shrewish wife.[140] However, it is clear to see how, culturally, this painting could have been mislabelled (see fig. 1.1).[141]

What makes La Tour's painting so unique is its ability to both utilise and exclude specific artistic trends and elements according to its time. Not only does he exclude Satan and devilish figures, La Tour entirely 'strays from a stylistic presentation of Job's wife as a hostile woman'.[142] Instead, this fascinating painting portrays Job's wife as a caring,

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[130] Ibid., "Satan's Disappearance from the Dungheap", 99.
[131] Ibid., 97.
[132] Ibid., 99.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid., 100.
[137] Jacques Thullier, "Meditation Shattered" in *Georges de la Tour,* trans. Fabia Claris. (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), 224.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Low, "Satan's Disappearance", *Job's Wife,* 101.
[140] Ibid.
[141] The image can be viewed here: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georges_de_La_Tour_044.jpg.
[142] Ibid.

comforting figure. Job, wearing a loin cloth, is shrunken, appearing weak and frail; his skin is wrinkled, and his collar bones are protruding. He is shrouded in darkness, sitting on a stone, seemingly representing the dungheap, a piece of broken pottery sat at his feet.[143] His hands clasped, he gazes up to his wife, as if he is asking something of her. Job's wife, however, is 'transformed into an enormous mass', taking up two-thirds of the canvas.[144] Her ornate clothes and pearl earring mark a startling contrast to Job's nakedness, each figure portraying the stark difference between their previous wealth and their current state of poverty. This contrast is signified through La Tour's employment of the chiaroscuro style of light, sourced by the candle Job's wife holds in her right hand. Low argues that this style 'brings with it a sense of the "mystical force" of light countered by intense shadows'.[145] However, as the style became overused throughout the seventeenth century, it consequently only became a stylistic device, 'rather than a symbol of transcendence'.[146] In spite of this, and La Tour's repeated use of this style, the light still plays a significant role in the painting: Job's wife not only physically bears this light, but also offers the light to illumine her husband in his spiritual darkness.

Thus, this delicate portrayal of Job's relationship with his wife certainly diverges from common representations of its time.[147] In spite of this, Thullier claims that *Job Visited by His Wife* is 'the boldest and most cruel of all La Tour's works'.[148] Thullier believes that the painting clearly represents Job's wife instruction, to "curse God and die" (Job 2:9). Despite her delicate touch, her expression is certainly difficult to read, as she gazes down at her stricken husband. What makes the work is so cruel, in Thullier's opinion, is not at the hand of Job's wife; instead, it is how 'the sage's steadfastness has been evoked through such extreme means'.[149] The stark contrast between Job and his wife 'hardly suggests that wisdom bring serenity'.[150] Despite this, Thullier argues that the painting was a 'reflection of La Tour's deepest beliefs'.[151] Thullier questions

> 'But why would La Tour have made Job's wife this sharp-profiled figure indignantly questioning in her crimson skirts, why would he have pleated her apron into such powerful verticals or cupped her hand in such a gentle gesture if he were not also on her side, if she were not also the

[143] This follows the text found in Job 2:8.
[144] Thullier, "Meditation Shattered", *Georges de La Tour*, 224.
[145] Low, "Satan's Disappearance", Job's *Wife*, 101.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid, 100.
[148] Thullier, "Meditation", *La Tour*, 224.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

> scolding wife who wants the cowering old man to rise up and set out to recover his health and his fortune?'[152]

As such, it is interesting to consider how Thullier's own interpretation of the painting is contingent on common interpretations of Job's wife's words as cruel, specifically to 'curse' God and die. Frank Kermode argues, again, that the Hebrew euphemism of *barek* (בָּרַךְ) is the cause of this dissonance of interpretation. He debates that perhaps La Tour based his interpretation on Saint Jerome's translation.[153] Kermode muses:

> 'It does occur to me that [La Tour] and his patron may really have read the words '*benedic Deo*' quite literally, and seen Job's wife as tender, however foolish she may be… So far as I can make out her gesture could mean either 'depart' or 'bless'… either of these seems more likely than "curse".'[154]

Kermode appears convinced that there is nothing in the painting that indicates Job's wife as a cruel figure, in contrast to Thullier's understanding of the work. However, as I have previously mentioned, the painting had been previously mislabelled, and as such, the female figure in the painting was mistaken for La Tour's representation of an angel. Kermode illuminates the progression of the painting's interpretation:

> 'It is interesting to note that once people knew what the picture represented they began to see it differently. Hitherto the female figure had been an angel, or compassion personified. No one suggested that she was scowling or scolding. But after 1935 there was a change. The woman's face [was] angry, her gesture [was] cruel; and the interaction of the glances is said to be one of conflict.'[155]

Thullier's interpretation is therefore exactly what Kermode has outlined here. It is the female figure's 'demotion' to Job's wife that marked the change in the painting's common interpretation, which coincided with how the text of Job 2:9 was translated. Despite La Tour's deviation from the common artistic interpretations of the text of his time, it is fascinating to consider how the belief of Job's wife as a wicked woman surpasses his 'intention', previously speculated above by Thullier. Yet despite Kermode's speculation on La Tour's inspiration from the Vulgate translation of the biblical text, it is, of course,

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[152] Ibid. 226.
[153] Frank Kermode, 'The Uses of Error', *Theology* 89, no. 732. (November 1986) 427-8. This is found in the Vulgate, in which Jerome uses '*benedic Deo*' (bless God). Kermode argues that perhaps Jerome felt certain everyone would be aware of the euphemism, but that English translations leave no room for ambiguity on this matter, always translating the *barek* as curse in Job 2:9.
[154] Ibid. 428.
[155] Ibid. 426-7.

uncertain whether the painter read Job's wife's words as 'bless' or 'curse'. Either way, however, Samuel Balentine argues for a sympathetic reading which can certainly be viewed from La Tour's magnificent painting. He writes:

> 'What are the man and woman saying to one another? Only conjecture is permitted. If the biblical folktale inspired the painter, her "Curse God and die" was uttered not in despair but on the contrary with tenderness, albeit infinitely sad, of a nurse who wishes to shorten the suffering of the man she loves. She is asking for his end through the merciful art of theological euthanasia.'[156]

Balentine's interpretation allows us to consider that, whether Job's wife wanted Job to bless or curse God, her primary concern was for her husband's suffering to end. It seems then that Job's wife can also be interpreted in a positive light, and not only as an aggressive figure, despite common interpretations. In fact, as Low points out, La Tour portrays 'Job's wife as a comforter, touching Job's forehead palm-up'.[157] Thus, it is evident that the interpretation of Job's wife in the painting is in direct correlation with the translation of *barek* in Job 2:9. However, when considering the change in interpretation from the figure as a kind angel to Job's cruel wife, Hugh Pyper points out how this is an example of how 'interpretation reveals its circularity'.[158] This is exemplified both through Thullier and Kermode's exploration and analysis of the painting.

Therefore, despite the translation of the biblical text and despite the painting's historical convention, I believe that La Tour's painting does not seek to portray Job's wife as shrewish, or Job only as a suffering man in darkness, despite utilising this stylistic convention. La Tour's complex painting deviates from common interpretations of its time, which I believe had influenced and shaped the message that *The Only Problem* sought to convey on the problem of suffering in Spark's *Job*-ian novel. The dichotomy of Job's suffering – of being blessed and cursed, emphasised by *barek* in the biblical text – was something that Spark had ruminated on in her essay on Job's suffering.[159] As I mentioned in the introduction, Spark felt strongly about the inclusion of the prologue and epilogue to the *Book of Job*, arguing that 'they include indispensable information, without which the poem loses all dramatic significance.'[160] For Spark, the epilogue was however the

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[156] Samuel E. Balentine. "The Baroque Splendor" in *Have You Considered My Servant Job?: Understanding the Biblical Archetype of Patience* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2015), 169.
[157] Low "Satan's Disappearance", *Job's Wife*, 100.
[158] Hugh Pyper "The Reader in Pain", 119.
[159] Spark, "The Mystery of Job's Suffering", *Golden Fleece*, 192-197.
[160] Ibid., 195.

'stumbling block for intelligent readers of Job', as she asks us: 'Can we really imagine our hero enjoying his actual reward?'[161] She concludes her argument thus:

> 'Read aright, the epilogue is not a conventional happy ending; it represents something beyond the reach of discourse which Job, for all he was an upright man, really had to come to terms with in order to gain his peace; some wisdom which combines heavenly ideas with earthly things not the least of which, perhaps, are symbolised by Eye-Paint and her sisters.'[162]

Here Spark is arguing that Job is unaware if this is truly the ending of his suffering at the hands of God. This idea, too, is mirrored by Harvey in *The Only Problem*; when Edward asks of Harvey: "Can we really imagine our tormented hero enjoying his actual reward?"[163] to which Harvey responds: "No, he continued to suffer."[164]

This reading of Job's continuous suffering not only plagues Harvey, but us, as the readers of *The Only Problem.* The reader is aware how the trend of suffering in Harvey's life correlates with the behaviours of his terrorist wife, Effie. Hugh Pyper argues that although Effie's 'response in terrorist activity is certainly ironised in the novel as a childish but murderous revolt', the consequences of these behaviours are not to be taken lightly.[165] He writes that 'the only result of her attempts to redress the sufferings of the world's oppressed is the death of a French policeman, the suffering of whose family is graphically depicted by Spark in a speech given to Harvey's police interrogator.'[166] Spark is thus exploring the consequences and realities of suffering enacted through Effie's behaviour. Though Pyper argues that 'Spark gives ambivalent signals about the realities of Harvey's suffering', I argue that our awareness of Harvey's suffering is produced through the inclusion of de La Tour's painting.[167] The painting thus acts as a signifier for the love and subsequent suffering Harvey's endures at the hand of his wife, Effie.

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[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid., 197.
[163] Spark, *TOP*, 29. Note how Edward's turn of phrase almost exactly mirrors Spark's own in her essay, just previously mentioned.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Hugh Pyper, 'The Reader in Pain', 124.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.

Harvey Visited by His Wife: Effie by La Tour

Spark's use of La Tour's painting in *The Only Problem* highlights the complexities posed by the *Book of Job* twofold. Firstly, on the nature of Job's problem of suffering: within the text, the painting thus acts as a recurring symbol of suffering. Throughout the novel, the reader begins to associate the mention of the painting with the recognition of Harvey's suffering caused by his wife. Secondly, on the problem with Job's wife: how knowledge of the painting's intertext now entangles Effie with the biblical characters of Job's wife and also now Eve. Though this will be explored further in the following chapter, for now it is worth noting that as a result, this complicates the textual and narrative role of Effie as Job's wife. To begin to understand the narrative role of the painting, I will enact a close reading of Harvey's main encounter with it, and the consequences this has on reading Harvey's suffering.

The painting is introduced at the beginning of Part Two in the novel, when Harvey goes to the *Musée* of Epinal to view it.[168] Part Two signifies the beginning of Spark's 'dialogues' section within her biblical tale. It is apt, therefore, that shortly after Harvey views the painting, he is 'frisked' away by the police to begin the process of interrogations on Harvey's knowledge of the whereabouts of his wife.[169] The painting itself does not appear in the novel, although Harvey does describe it plainly to the reader. Although I appreciate the difficulty posed by inserting artwork into a novel for mass publication, I argue that its removal from the text allows the reader to only experience de La Tour's magnificent painting through the lens of Harvey's interpretation. However, in the first edition of *The Only Problem*, there is an illustration of Harvey sitting in front of the painting, yet his head is obstructing the full image (see figure 2.2).[170]

Whether the reader has prior knowledge of the painting or not, they will primarily experience this painting through Harvey's eyes, who is 'struck' by the resemblance to Effie in Job's wife's face.[171] It is through Harvey's inner sob, 'Oh, Effie, Effie, Effie', that the reader becomes aware of the love and subsequent suffering that Harvey endures on Effie's account.[172] The narrator writes:

> 'To Harvey's mind there was much more in the painting to illuminate the subject of Job than in many of the lengthy commentaries that he knew so

[168] Spark, *TOP*, 75-9.
[169] Ibid., 79.
[170] Please consult this version of the novel to view this image: Muriel Spark, *The Only Problem.* 1st edition. (Pennsylvania: The Franklin Library, 1984), 69.
[171] Spark, *TOP*, (Triad Grafton), 79.
[172] Ibid.

> well. It was eloquent of a new idea, and yet, where had the painter found justification for his treatment of the subject?'[173]

Through this passage, I believe that it is implied that Harvey appears to interpret Job 2:9 and its use of *barek* (בָּרַךְ) as "curse God and die". This is demonstrated by Harvey's reaction to the painting: he feels La Tour's artistic interpretation is at odds with Job's wife's speech in the biblical text. He notes that comparatively 'the text… is full of impatience, anger: it is as if she is possessed by Satan.'[174] It is interesting to note here how Harvey's interpretation of the text, presented as a minor observation, quietly links Job's wife (and subsequently Effie) to Satan. However, it is evident that Harvey appreciates the complexities in the interpretation of La Tour's beautiful painting. Furthermore, the painting encourages him to think about Job's response to his impious wife. Harvey ruminates:

> 'And [Job] puts it to her, 'Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' That domestic 'we' is worth noticing, thought Harvey; he doesn't mean to abandon his wife, he has none of the hostility towards her that he has, later, for his friends.'[175]

At this point, Harvey appears to interpret a sense of romance and companionship between Job and his wife, which arguably, the text does not offer. His fascination with the "domestic 'we'" acts a glimpse into Harvey's own life and his naivety concerning his relationship with Effie. Harvey did not mean to 'abandon' Effie, but now faces the repercussions of his own hostility towards his friends. He reckons with La Tour's interpretation, stating that: 'of course, the painter was idealising some notion of his own; in his dream, Job and his wife are deeply in love.'[176] It seems however that Harvey comes to this conclusion while simultaneously reflecting on his own relationship with Effie. Harvey appears to conflate his interpretation of La Tour's idealisation with some notion of his own: in his dream, Harvey and his wife are deeply in love.

However, the height of Harvey's suffering is found in Spark's epilogue, where Effie brutally dies in a shoot-out with the police. It is here that we begin to understand how Spark has utilised her understanding of *Job* and the unpredictable nature of suffering in her biblical tale.

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[173] Ibid., 76
[174] Ibid., 78.
[175] Ibid., 79.
[176] Ibid.

The Epilogue: Harvey's New Life/Wife

The culmination of Harvey's suffering appears in Spark's epilogue in *The Only Problem*. At the beginning of Part Three, the reader is made aware of Effie's death: her gang were found in an apartment in Paris and subsequently killed, and Harvey is thus called upon to identify the body. The narrator describes the scene as thus:

> '*L'Institut Médico-Légal* in Paris. Her head was bound up, turban-wise, so that she looked more than ever like Job's wife. Her mouth was drawn slightly to the side.
> "You recognise your wife, Effie Gotham?"
> "Yes, but this isn't my wife. Where is she? Bring me my wife's body."
> "M. Gotham, you are overwrought. It displeases us all very much. You must know that this is your wife."
> "Yes, it's my wife, Effie."'[177]

In this passage alone, the reader experiences the difficulty Harvey experiences in reckoning with Effie's death. We notice that at first, Harvey refuses to identify the body as his wife, then finally admits that it is her. However, it is crucial to note Harvey's initial reaction sought to compare Effie's dead body to the Job's wife in La Tour's painting. There are a few readings of this interaction which I believe are possible, some of which I will analyse in the final chapter of this thesis. For now, I will focus on the effect Effie's death has on the nature of Harvey's suffering.

As I have previously argued, the painting acts as a symbol to reflect Harvey's suffering throughout the novel. Through Effie's death, Harvey's reminiscence of La Tour's work is an indication of his previous ideations outlined earlier in this chapter. Harvey wishes his relationship with Effie to mirror the idealistic notion he finds in La Tour's interpretation: that Job and his wife were deeply in love.[178] Though the reader knows that Harvey does love Effie, her death thus symbolises the simultaneous life and death of Harvey's ideation. In Harvey's naivety and imagination, Effie could exist as the good wife he imagines; while the reality of her death is a clear reminder that this was not who she was. The death of Effie thus acts as a narrative tool to highlight the climax of Harvey's current life of suffering on Effie's account, which, in turn, mirrors God's whirlwind found in the latter part of *Job*. The whirlwind is the climax through which Job *should* receive answers to his many questions; though, as Robert Fyall points out, 'when God appears he makes it plain that he has not come as plaintiff but as judge; he will ask the questions.'[179]

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[177] Ibid., 186-7.
[178] Ibid., 79.
[179] Robert S. Fyall, *Now my Eyes have seen You: Images of creation and evil in the book of Job.* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 53.

Just as Spark outlines the reader's difficulty in accepting Job's epilogue, so the reader must question the epilogue found in *The Only Problem*, which reads as thus:

> 'Edward drives along the road between Nancy and St Dié […] to the château. […]
> Ruth is there, already showing her pregnancy, Clara staggers in her playpen. […] Harvey is there too.
> [Edward asks Harvey,] "What will you do now that you've finished *Job*?"
> "Live another hundred and forty years. I'll have three daughters, Clara, Jemima and Eye-Paint."'[180]

The satirical epilogue of Spark's novel leads us to remember the consequences of Job's new existence: though Job is blessed with double his livestock, and new beautiful daughters, his wife is not mentioned. Some scholars believe that her existence is presumed through the arrival of Job's new children.[181] However, *The Testament of Job*, 'a Jewish composition from the first century B.C.E. or C.E.', claims that Job's wife is replaced by the biblical figure of Dinah.[182] This conclusion of *The Testament of Job* highlights the playful notion of Spark's own epilogue: that Ruth, both physically and textually, replaces Effie. The inclusion of Ruth, Effie's twin sister, in the narrative complicates the role of 'Job's wife' in the novel, something which I will explore further in the following chapter. It is also important to note how Clara, Effie's illegitimate child from her adulterous relationship has now become Harvey's own child, and his subsequent 'reward' in her death.[183]

The crucial point of Spark's epilogue becomes thus: the absence of Effie does not necessitate the absence of Harvey's suffering on account of her. As Pyper argues, 'Harvey Gotham does survive his engagement with Job and the loss of his wife, but he is not unchanged by the end of Spark's novel.'[184] By utilising the uncomfortable ending of *Job* in her own epilogue, Spark reminds the reader that, just like Job, Harvey's suffering (and human suffering in general) will not end but will continue on.

Despite the complication of Ruth's inclusion, I believe it is fair to argue that Effie's death and subsequent absence from the epilogue could also be seen as the textual fulfilment of her role as 'Job's wife' in *The Only Problem.* Though the role of Job's wife

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[180] Spark, *TOP*, 189.
[181] Karl G, Wilcox, 'Job, His Daughters and His Wife', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 42, no. 3 (March 2018), 311-14.
[182] Michael C Legaspi, 'Job's Wives in the "Testament of Job": A Note on the Synthesis of Two Traditions', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 1 (Spring 2008), 77-8.
[183] Unfortunately, a full analysis of the role of Clara in the narrative has not been possible in this thesis, though I will discuss it slightly in the following chapter.
[184] Pyper, 'The Reader in Pain', 123.

in the biblical epilogue is also dubious, the absence of both women from their narrative endings allows us to draw important parallels to their respective narrative roles. The ending of each text is focused on the narrative outcomes of Job and Harvey respectively and thus, the importance of the conclusions of both texts are centred on the experience of its male protagonists. Is it possible to argue then that the women from both texts are deliberately removed to allow for these male-led conclusions? When reading both Job's wife and Effie's story through a feminist critique, could it be argued that their characterisation as 'bad' women, who 'rebel' against their husbands, must result in their punishment of death? Or, in the case of Job's wife specifically, her implied non-existence? In the following chapter, I will investigate these questions posed by analysing the characterisation of 'bad' (or what I playfully label as 'misbehaving') female characters, both in Spark's oeuvre and in the Hebrew Bible. By employing a feminist critique of these characterisations, I hope to further investigate Effie's role in *The Only Problem,* that focuses on and prioritises her own agency, and not only how she functions in Harvey's narrative. By comparing Effie's characterisation with both her Sparkian and Hebrew Bible counterparts, I will examine the extent to which Effie can be read as a 'bad' character, and thus the subsequent implications of reading her as the 'God' of *The Only Problem*.

Chapter 2: The Creation and Construction of Spark's Misbehaving Women

Despite the problems posed by Spark's critical reception as a 'Catholic writer', I have argued that Spark's interest lay in creating characters that were reflective of real life, encased as they were in the realities of her absurdist fiction. However, Spark was guilty of creating characters of questionable morality, a prime example of which being Mrs. Effie Gotham, the social activist/terrorist. To fully comprehend the role of Effie in *The Only Problem*, I will analyse other 'bad' female characters in Spark's work; and how this compares to characterisations of women in the Hebrew Bible. This will be necessary in order to understand how Effie can inhabit the role of 'God' in Spark's biblical tale and allows us to question to what extent the characterisation of Effie matches the 'God' of *Job*. I will thus begin my analysis by examining the creation of the Sparkian, misbehaving female character and will focus on three particular examples: Jean Brodie from Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), a schoolteacher and fascistic leader of a group of impressionable young girls; Lise from *The Driver's Seat* (1970), a hysteric, whose sole mission is to plan her own murder; and, finally, Effie from *The Only Problem* (1984), the self-appointed leader of an anti-capitalist organisation. Each of these novels present their 'bad' primary female character whose behaviours and motivations are meddlesome, manipulative, and malevolent. As a result, I will attempt to investigate the ways in which Spark has intentionally fashioned these characters to represent certain female stereotypes; and to deliberately call into question the construction of what Holly Morse labels as 'accepted and rejected femininity'.[185]

I will then explore the ways in which the characters of Spark's biblical novel are irrevocably entangled with those present in the biblical pre-text of *Job.* I argue that Effie becomes intrinsically connected with other figures within the Hebrew Bible: not only does she represent Spark's 'modern' hysterical woman, but she also embodies the figure of Job's wife. To recognise the parallels and dichotomies between Effie's modern and intertextual, biblical representation, I will therefore consider what characteristics are present within some female characters within the Hebrew Bible and consequently, how these women function within their patriarchal constructs, historically and textually. As this thesis is focused on exploring each text through a literary lens and method, I will employ

[185] Holly Morse. "Encountering Eve: A Guide" in *Encountering Eve's Afterlives*, 1.

what Holly Morse labels as 'thematic reception criticism'.[186] To further my analysis, I will also rely on feminist biblical criticism to understand how to read these women in the context of their patriarchal framework. I will explore how the characteristics of motherhood, namelessness and the 'exotic' are presented in the women within the Hebrew Bible; and finally, I will particularly focus on the portrayal of Eve, as the Hebrew Bible's primary instance of its misbehaving woman.

I will conclude this chapter by investigating the character of Ruth in *The Only Problem* and evaluate her role within the novel: though Ruth appears to function as an alternative 'Job's wife', there are also other biblical parallels to be found between Effie and Ruth, primarily in their comparison to Rachel and Leah. I argue that the inclusion of Ruth in the novel complicates Effie's role as Job's wife – and will reflect how, instead, Effie inhabits the part of 'God' in Spark's tale.

The Construction of the Sparkian Female Character

As I previously stated, Spark's critical status as a "Catholic-comic writer" allowed for her writing style to be likened to that of a 'god-like' author.[187] In his article on Spark's "Disorientating Fictions", James Bailey argues that there is a 'longstanding critical conception of Spark as a satirical writer of closed-off, caricature-filled fictions, whose authorial cruelty is especially evident in her (mis)treatment of female characters.'[188] Spark's playful fictions, which present absurd realities for their characters, have led to critics accusing Spark of 'toying mercilessly' with her 'authorial puppets'.[189] Ian Gregson argues that as a result Spark creates "flat and two-dimensional worlds"[190], with women who function as 'literary dolls – hollow, lifeless and endlessly expendable'.[191]

However, Bailey asserts that this interpretation of Spark's purpose is reductive of her capabilities as a writer of women. He believes that

> 'Spark's concern [is] how real lives – and specifically *women's* lives – can play out as dull fictions, how human vitality and free will can be occluded by manipulative relationships, inhibitive social conventions, and tightly scripted public performances.'[192]

[186] Ibid. 4.
[187] James Bailey, 'Salutary Scars', 36.
[188] Ibid. 38.
[189] Ibid. 37.
[190] Ian Gregson, "Muriel Spark's Puppets of Thwarted Authority" in *Character and Satire in Postwar Fiction.* (London: Continuum, 2006), 104.
[191] Bailey, 'Salutary Scars', 37.
[192] Ibid., 38.

Bailey focuses on the example of Annabel Christopher in *The Public Image* (1968), the English "Lady-Tiger" actress whose public image has been crafted by her screenwriter husband.[193] Malcolm Bradbury discusses how Annabel's husband's death by suicide 'is an effort to expose, dramatically, the public wealth and private squalor of her life.'[194] As such, Bailey argues that it is evident that

> 'Spark's literary innovations are read alongside her preoccupations with the tensions that exist between private selves and public performances, with bodies neatly inscribed within oppressive cultural narratives (and those deemed to be deviant for existing outside of them), and with the violent, sinister erasure of the female subject.'[195]

Thus, Spark's interest lies not in the punishment of her female characters; but in presenting the cold, harsh and oppressive realities of the women she reflects in her novel.

So how do we begin to account for the Spark's objectively 'bad' female characters, whose behaviours are alarming and problematic? I argue that through these characters, Spark is continuing to explore these tensions: her non-conforming women, and their messily inscribed bodies, are in fact still victims of these oppressive narratives. The problem, however, lies in their fate: in her fictions, these women often are subject to their untimely deaths, which are often brutal in their execution. The question that naturally follows is thus: to what extent is a character's death a punishment, enacted by their author? If we are to compare Spark's authorial intentions to that of 'god-game', as Bradbury argued, do we agree that Spark is exacting moral judgement on her characters?

The nature of these questions assume that authorial intention is the primary focus of literary criticism and negates character agency. Though a full scope of the historical development of literary criticism is not within the realms of this work, I argue that focusing on the authorial intention of (and within) a work undermines both the role of the narrator and the characters within their stories.[196] In his text, *Seduction and Death in Muriel Spark's Fiction,* Fontini Apostolou proposes a postmodern, metatextual reading of her work, and argues that 'in Spark's narratives her characters do not follow the rules obediently.'[197] Apostolou argues that Spark's characters wish to 'escape' from their

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[193] Ibid.
[194] Michael Bradbury. 'Muriel Spark's Fingernails'. *Critical Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1972), 241.
[195] Bailey, 'Salutary Scars', 35.
[196] This thesis, of course, is complicated by my own interest in Spark's authorial intention in her creation of *The Only Problem,* though I believe that this particular instance is made problematic by Spark's injection of her own beliefs about *Job* and the nature of suffering, through the lens of Harvey Gotham. I pointed out in my previous chapter how Harvey's views would match Spark's, often word for word. However, I am more convinced by my own reading of Effie as God, than by Spark's desire to comment on the nature of suffering.
[197] Fontini Apostolou, "Prologue", *Seduction and Death,* xvi.

'structures' that exist for them within the novel.[198] He concludes by stating that 'the fact that many of the characters die before they are able to construct their narratives testifies to this "death of the author" in relation to the work, which stands distant from its creator, autonomous.'[199] Therefore it could be argued that Spark is not necessarily responsible for the outcome of her female characters. Martin Stannard appears to argue for this reading, stating that 'women who degrade themselves thus in her fiction court their own destruction.'[200]

Of course, it is questionable to what extent literary characters can enact agency and thus be responsible for their fate. Nevertheless, it is interesting to consider how these female characters are not presented as 'good' or 'moral', but much the opposite; and there exists an undeniable trend in which the 'bad' female characters within Spark's fiction die. In order to fully explore the connections between by Spark's misbehaving female characters and the literary consequence of death, I will cross-examine the characteristics of three particular examples of women in Spark's fiction: Miss Jean Brodie, Lise, and finally, Effie.

Jean Brodie: The Egotistical Fascist

The first example of Spark's dubious female characters can be found in her title character in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961). Objectively Spark's most famous novel, there is a vast amount of critical discussion into Jean Brodie's character. Crucial to the development of these Brodie's characterisation however is the reader's separation from Miss Brodie's inner self, and how, as David Lodge points out that 'we never, of course, get inside Miss Brodie herself [and] we never see the action from her point of view.'[201] This is a common link between these three novels: each one is written from a narrative perspective that is separated from Miss Brodie, Lise, and Effie. In *Jean Brodie,* Lodge questions the intention of this separation. He states:

> 'I wanted, for instance, to know whether I should approve or disapprove of Miss Brodie, and was baffled by the lack of clear directions towards either of these alternatives. The answer, of course, is that we should do neither – or rather, do both.'[202]

[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Stannard, "Home and Away", *Biography,* 41.
[201] David Lodge, 'The Uses and Abuses of Omniscience: Method and Meaning in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*' *Critical Quarterly 12,* no. 3. (September 1970), 243.
[202] Ibid., 242.

Lodge argues that it appears that the narrative intention of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* seeks to encourage the reader simultaneously to condemn Miss Brodie, while also attempting to mirror the impartial position of the author, just as Hélène Cixous argues that 'Miss Spark often refrains from moralizing.'[203] The reader's perception of Jean Brodie is complicated when we acknowledge that the narrator of the text is Sandy Stranger, whom David Lodge describes as 'the shrewdest, most complex, and most interesting of the Brodie set'.[204] Due to the nature of the problematic relationship between Sandy and Miss Jean Brodie, we, as readers, are aware that our view of Jean Brodie's character is thus not an objective one.

Sandy remarks that 'there was nothing outwardly odd about Miss Brodie. Inwardly was a different matter, and it remained to be seen, towards what extremities her nature worked her.'[205] It seems that Jean Brodie's elusiveness is crucial to her characterisation, as Lodge argues, too, that she 'is a phenomenon, a puzzle, an enigma; and as we try to make some assessment of her, we naturally use Sandy as a point of reference, because she is the only interiorized character engaged in the same task.'[206] Lodge argues that, as a result, Sandy cannot always be regarded as a 'totally reliable' narrator.[207] Thus it becomes evident that the reader's interpretation of Miss Brodie's character is clouded by the lens of Sandy's morality. However, this is not to say that Sandy's 'moral perception' on the negative attributes of Miss Brodie's character is unfounded. Dorothea Walker states that

> 'the dual nature of Miss Brodie can thus be seen in the first glimpse of her teaching. Her wish to broaden the vision of the youngsters is certainly a laudable one; but the determination to broaden it with her distorted version of reality suggests both her authoritarian nature and her desire to control. Her greatest wish is really to reproduce clones of herself.'[208]

Like Lodge, Walker points out the tension created between both Miss Brodie's positive and negative characteristics: though Miss Brodie's care for the youngsters appears as admirable, it is obvious that her actions convey an ulterior motive, to control and create clones of herself through the Brodie set. Walker continues by arguing that

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[203] Hélène Cixous. "Grimacing Catholicism", Muriel Spark's Macabre Farce (1) and Muriel Spark's Last Novel *The Public Image* (2)", trans. by Christine Irizzary, in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction,* ed. by Martin McQuillan. (London: Palgrave, 2002), 205.
[204] David Lodge, 'The Uses and Abuses', 242.
[205] Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), 43.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Dorothea Walker, "*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*" in *Muriel Spark* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), 41.

> ‘Miss Brodie appears as a supreme egotist. What she thinks, what she feels, what she pronounces – all this to her represents the truth, and she must convey this truth to others, not in a society of peers, a society in which ideas are examined, but rather in the vulnerable society of six little girls seduced by her attention to them.’[209]

At this point, it appears that Jean Brodie has exerted the following ‘bad’ characteristics: she is guilty of selfishness and egotism, using her position as an authoritative figure to coerce and manipulate the young women of the Brodie set. This naturally leads to an unsympathetic reading of her character.

In comparison to Effie, it seems that throughout the novel, Miss Brodie is consistently flirting with the political ideals of the 1930s Italian fascism of her time. It would appear that both Effie and Miss Brodie are characterised by their attraction to ‘problematic’ political agendas. Sandy recalls Miss Brodie’s ‘admiration for Mussolini’ and the picture ‘she had brought back from Italy showing the triumphant march of the black uniforms in Rome.’[210]. This is not to say that Miss Jean Brodie acts radically in her fascism: unlike Effie, Jean Brodie only appears to promote the political ideals of fascism in her approach towards the Brodie set. This idea is evoked by Sandy, who ruminates how ‘the Brodie set was Miss Brodie’s fascisti, not to the naked eye, marching along, but all knit together for her need and in another way, marching along.’[211] Sandy also notes how the girls were not allowed to join other social groups, like the Girl Guides, and speculates that this was because they ‘were too much of a rival fascisti, and Miss Brodie could not bear it’.[212] However, as I have previously stated, David Lodge also argues that ‘Miss Brodie’s sympathy for the Fascist movements of the thirties is not a reasoned political attitude, but an extension of her egotism and romantic sensibility.’[213] Lodge claims that Miss Brodie’s predication to fascism is what Judy Suh calls an ‘unwitting mistake’.[214] Lodge argues that in

> ‘aspiring to be a charismatic leader herself, [Miss Brodie] naturally admires the successful dictators, Hitler, Mussolini and Franco. The combination of dedication, elitism, bravura style and heady rhetoric characteristic of fascist movements appeals to her.’[215]

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[209] Ibid. 47.
[210] Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,* 31.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid. 32
[213] Lodge, ‘Uses and Abuses’, 247.
[214] Judy Suh, ‘The Familiar Attractions of Fascism in Muriel Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*’, *Journal of Modern Literature* 30, no. 2. (2007) 87.
[215] Lodge, ‘Uses and Abuses’, 247.

Suh points out that Miss Brodie's 'attraction to fascism appears to be motivated by extra-political reasons'; and that she does not 'perceive the violence behind its idealistic rhetoric and aesthetic appeal.'[216] However the problem, Suh argues, is that Spark's focus on Miss Brodie's "fascination" with fascism' leaves Miss Brodie's moral standpoint as a rather dubious one.[217]

Therefore, if we are to consider Lodge's argument that Miss Brodie's sympathy for fascism lies only in its rhetoric and aesthetics, it could be argued that this encourages a reception of Jean Brodie's characterisation as being naïve. Lodge's argument implies that Miss Brodie's devotion to this political system has not been fully realised, as she is not fully aware of the consequences of promoting these regimes. In the context of her role as an educator, this is highly problematic. However, Suh points out that 'Sandy eventually discloses Miss Brodie's proselytization for Mussolini's and Franco's regimes to the conservative headmistress Miss Mackay who promptly fires the teacher armed with Sandy's revelation.'[218]

Though it is Sandy that ultimately 'betrays' Miss Brodie, it could be argued that this thus characterises Miss Brodie as a martyr: to lose her job that she loves is the ultimate sacrifice for demonstrating her beliefs. Likewise, Lodge discusses how

> 'Miss Brodie, [Sandy] realises, has created her own secular religion of which she is simultaneously the God, Redeemer and minister to the elect. She tries to create the girls in her own image, and to direct their destinies according to her own divine plan. Like Christ she is betrayed by one of her own disciples, but unlike Christ she does not know she is going to be betrayed, and never discovers for certain the identity of her Judas. In fact, because she is a pseudo-Christ she cannot be betrayed: that at least is Sandy's self-defence.'[219]

Lodge's comparison of Jean Brodie to a Christ figure is particularly interesting when we consider Effie's textual role as God in *The Only Problem*. The point Lodge makes here encourages the reception that the likening of Jean Brodie to Christ (enacted through her characterisation as a martyr) must necessitate her death. It seems fair to argue, at this junction, that the desire of both women to inhabit God-like status, both in within their characterisations and the metatextual constructs of their narratives, could pose as the catalyst for their death. Ultimately, however, it seems that Jean Brodie has exhibited

[216] Ibid.
[217] Suh, 'Familiar Attractions', 87.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Lodge, 'Uses and Abuses', 252

herself as a 'bad' female character, who follows the Sparkian trend of dying. Fontini Apostolou argues that

> 'Jean Brodie lives her life through her fictions and reformulates her past according to the new fictions she creates… Jean Brodie has never overcome the romantic stage in her life; that is why she has to be killed, and her fictions turned against her.'[220]

It is arguably Miss Brodie's inability to function within her reality, and her insistence on creating and inhabiting within her own fantasies and fictions, that leads to her ultimate downfall. Miss Brodie, however, does not meet a 'violent' death like that of Lise and Effie, but eventually dies from cancer in the Post-War.[221] Instead of meeting her death at the hands of another (like that of Lise and Effie), Miss Brodie is betrayed by her own body. It is thus interesting to further consider the religious critical reception of Miss Brodie's character. Dorothea Walker states that:

> 'Miss Brodie, in Spark's opinion, should have been a Roman Catholic. Catholicism would have tamed the ego that rode roughshod over others' individuality and freedom. Spark infers that an ego run rampant leads to evil (as seen in Satan's downfall).'[222]

There is an implicit connection in Walker's statement that reminds us of the intertextuality that exists in the presentation of Spark's women. Though Walker's statement is focused on Spark's authorial 'control' over Jean Brodie's narrative, it seems apparent that there is a connection to be made between Spark's female characters and their biblical counterparts. Jean Brodie's egotism could naturally connect her to the character of Satan in the biblical text, and arguably, Eve as a result. The connection that Walker makes between Miss Brodie's ego and Satan's downfall shows how the reception history of the biblical Eve's story influences discussions on modern interpretations of literary women. Walker continues by arguing that

> 'The fact that the reader may be seduced into thinking that Spark shows ambiguity in her assessment confirms the artistry of her presentation. If evil were not attractive, one would not choose it; if purveyors of evil were not fascinating, one would not follow them.'[223]

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[220] Fontini Apostolou, "Textasy: Writing and Being Written – Or, Seducing and Being Seduced", *Seduction and Death,* 24.
[221] Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,* 55.
[222] Walker, "*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*", 48.
[223] Ibid., 49.

Walker appears to disagree with Lodge's notion of neither approving, nor disapproving, of Miss Brodie. Walker's attribution of Miss Brodie's 'evil', while not entirely baseless, proves that the 'bad' characterisation of Spark's female characters is effective in eliciting a reaction from the reader. I believe that Lodge's reading of Jean Brodie is only contingent on the critical reception of Spark as an author who refrains from moralising, just as Hélène Cixous argues, and that Jean Brodie does exude characteristics that readers would find problematic.

To conclude, Spark's presentation of Miss Brodie's egotism and fascistic tendencies encourages a negative reading of her character, that is arguably evil. Miss Jean Brodie marks the first of these three examples of Spark's 'bad' female characters to die. Next on our list of Spark's misbehaving women is the eccentric *femme fatale*, Lise.

Lise: The Hysterical *Femme Fatale*

The Driver's Seat (1970) is home to the peculiar Lise, whose primary mission is the pursuit of planning her own murder. The novella is commonly interpreted as Spark's own attempt at the French *nouveau roman*,[224] while Spark herself also likened the 'whole thing [to] a Greek play'.[225] A tight, concise novella, *The Driver's Seat* follows Lise from her home to a holiday destination, where she hopes to find the right man to fulfil her destiny: the pre-planned execution of her murder. Due to the complicated nature of Lise's death, it seems that she embodies both of the nineteenth century literary tropes of the hysterical woman and the *femme fatale*. Through utilising these common literary characterisations of women, Spark explores the notions of female authority and readability, through a patriarchal gaze, primarily signified through the importance of Lise's name.

Despite inhabiting these literary stereotypes, Lise is initially represented as an everywoman figure. The narrator's descriptions of Lise are basic and bland: Lise is thin, five-foot-six, pale brown hair.[226] The narrator describes a perception of Lise as thus:

> 'She walks along the broad street, scanning the windows for the dress she needs, the necessary dress. Her lips are slightly parted; she, whose lips are usually pressed together with the daily disapprovals of the accounts

[224] See in particular Bailey's 'Salutary Scars' (43) and Michael Bradbury's 'Muriel Spark's Fingernails' (248).
[225] Robert E. Hosmer Jr., 'The Chandeliers of the Metropole: A Vivid Glow upon the Just and the Unjust in Muriel Spark's *The Driver's Seat*', *Scottish Literary Review* 9, no. 1. (2017), 86.
[226] Spark, *The Driver's Seat* (UK: Penguin Random House, 2006), 14

> office where she has worked continually… for sixteen years and some months.'[227]

The reader comes to know that the "necessary dress" Lise is looking for is a bright, garish one of many colours, as we realise that her aim is to be recognised and remembered by others before her death. The narrator's presentation of Lise at this moment signifies her as the everywoman and the boring life she leads as an office worker. Unmarried and unremarkable, Lise is the epitome of the 'neatly inscribed body' that Bailey discussed.[228] However, the novel is characterised by the development of Lise's deviancy, which is subtly introduced to the reader through the meaning of her name. James Bailey argues that 'in keeping with her name, which resembles the French *lire*/*lisent* (to read, they read), she is defined by the ease with which she can be comprehended and controlled by others, slotting neatly into the rigid, gender-balanced office hierarchy.'[229] Bailey highlights how the connection to the French, *lisent*, signifies Lise's readability as the everywoman: her body acts as a type of *tabula rasa* that can be influenced, manipulated, and controlled by others. This is also crucial to the novel's ending, as the events of Lise's death are rewritten through the lens of the men that surround her. Martin McQuillan claims that

> 'in *The Driver's Seat* this institutionally patriarchal report writes to type and blames the female victim (whose name is an anagram for 'lies') for being complicit in her own rape and murder… what does this novel have to say about the reporting of women's experience by men?'[230]

Subsequently McQuillan argues that the novel's ending is characterised by the victim-blaming culture women experience and argues that her name, an anagram for 'lies', emphasises this notion. The effect this produces leads to the conclusion that Lise inhabits these feminine stereotypes to question society's acceptance of violence against women.

I argue that Spark utilises common nineteenth century literary tropes of hysteria and the *femme fatale* to complicate the interpretation of Lise's character. Though a full development of these terms is not within the scope of this thesis, I will provide a basic description to illustrate my understanding. Susan M. Gilbert and Sandra Gubar explain the concept of hysteria as thus:

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[227] Ibid. 5.
[228] Bailey, 'Salutary Scars', 39. See p. 47 of this thesis for the full quotation.
[229] Ibid. 45.
[230] Martin McQuillan, "Introduction, 'I Don't Know Anything about Freud': Muriel Spark Meets Contemporary Criticism" in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction* (London: Palgrave, 2002) 3.

> ‘Hysteria… is by definition a “female disease”, not so much because it takes its name from the Greek word for womb, *hyster*… but because hysteria did occur among many women… and because throughout the nineteenth century this mental illness, like many other nervous disorders, was thought to have been caused by the female reproductive system.’[231]

Considered as a ‘socially conditioned epidemic of female illness’, it is clear to see the connection between the manifestation of this nervous disorder and its effect on cultural interpretations of women.[232] Gilbert and Gubar discuss how this illness ‘[elaborated] upon Aristotle’s notion that femaleness was in and of itself a deformity’.[233] As such, the development of this concept of hysteria directly impacted literary traditions of the female characters of its time. The main example Gilbert and Gubar utilise is Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1897), the ‘madwoman’ Rochester keeps secretly locked in his attic. The attribution of hysteria specifically as a “female disease” has allowed for a preservation of a patriarchal control over the interpretations of women. This is proved through their execution: subsequently, the women’s ‘madness’ eradicates their sense of self and as such reduces their readability to their ‘mental illness’.

So how does this effect how we read Lise, within the context of Spark’s twentieth century novel? It is evident that these comparisons are encouraged by the means of Lise’s introduction. In the dress-shop, Lise’s behaviour becomes alarmingly irrational upon her being told the material of dress she is trying on doesn’t stain.[234] Although the reason for Lise’s behaviour becomes obvious further in the novel, with its foreshadowing of Lise’s murder and desire to be recognised, the isolated incident appears so strange and completely nonsensical. Lise’s ridiculous reaction to the salesgirl is highlighted by her ‘shrieking’ and her perceived insult, helping to create an initial perception of Lise as hysteric while implying the possibility of ‘mental illness’.

The other literary trope Spark utilises in her construction of Lise is the notorious *femme fatale*. J. Cheryl Exum describes the *femme fatale* as ‘the woman fatal to man – sexually irresistible, at once both fascinating and frightening, and ultimately deadly.’[235] The *femme fatale* archetype has existed from early Western Culture to the present, though it became particularly fashionable through the nineteenth century paintings of Gustave

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[231] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, “Infection in the Sentence” in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Women Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Yale: Yale University Press, 1979), 53.
[232] Ibid. 55
[233] Ibid. 53
[234] Spark, *The Driver’s Seat,* 3-5.
[235] J. Cheryl Exum, “Why, Why, Why, Delilah?”, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 176.

Moreau, Gustav Klimt and Solomon Joseph Solomon.[236] Exum continues to describe the *femme fatale* as

> 'the woman whose sexuality appears uncontrolled, beyond the strictures of patriarchal authority, she disrupts the social order, and so she gives rise to a certain discomfort, a feeling of apprehension, in the man. And she presents him with the challenge to tame her.'[237]

Reading Lise within this construct does not immediately appear obvious. As I have previously mentioned, Lise is unmarried, and Spark's bland descriptors of her appearance do not insinuate any type of sexual intent within Lise's character. To emphasise this, the narrator highlights that Lise is 'neither good-looking nor bad-looking', arguably eradicating some possibility of her desirability.[238] However, this strange side of Lise slowly becomes apparent through the narrator's repeated use of this descriptor: 'her lips are slightly parted'.[239] This acts to signify tension: there is an unpredictability in what Lise could say or do next; while her parted lips could also present a type of sexual invitation. It is this repeated phrase that signifies Lise's 'danger': a common trope of the *femme fatale* figure. Exum notes that

> 'what is unknown is much more frightening than what is known. This is why the *femme fatale* is so scary. Her unknowableness, her mystery and the secret of female sexuality she signifies, is the *femme fatale*'s most salient trait.'[240]

This is exemplified when Lise, sitting next to a stranger on her flight, asks of him: "You look like Red Riding-Hood's grandmother. Do you want to eat me up?"[241] Spark utilises Lise's abnormal, socially unacceptable behaviour to create a feeling of strangeness: the other man sitting next to her 'looks at Lise in alarm', 'as if recognising her'.[242] This feeling of uncanny permeates the reader's suspicion of Lise, her implied danger, and the simultaneous surplus and lack of her readability.

Lise's status as a temptress is fully demonstrated through the execution of the sexual nature of her death. Vassiliki Kolocotroni notes that 'Lise as femme fatale, 'belle

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[236] See Exum's section within this chapter, 'Delilah Painted as a Prostitute', 189-99. It is important to note that many of these paintings feature women figures from the Hebrew Bible, although this is something I will address further in this chapter.
[237] Ibid., "Delilah", 226.
[238] Spark, *The Driver's Seat*, 14.
[239] Ibid. See: 5, 11.
[240] Exum, "Delilah", 226.
[241] Spark, *The Driver's Seat,* 23
[242] Ibid.

dame sans merci', a bearer of doom, confirms the desire to kill and be killed that underlies (as a kind of primal scene) the encounter between the male and female.'[243] This primal scene is executed when Lise has selected her killer, Mrs Fiedke's murderous nephew. Lise takes him to 'the famous Pavillion', where she knows she will be easily discovered after her death.[244] As such, the eroticism of Lise's role as the *femme fatale* is ultimately enacted through her death.

> '"I don't want any sex," she shouts. "You can have it afterwards. Tie my feet and kill, that's all. They will come and sweep it up in the morning."
> All the same, he plunges into her, with the knife poised high.
> "Kill me," she says, and repeats it in four languages.
> As the knife descends to her throat she screams, evidently perceiving how final is finality.'[245]

The narrator presents the horrifying, piercing end to Lise's life. Lise is not only stabbed in the throat but is also raped by her murderer. Kolocotroni argues that the brutal execution of Lise's murder is an inherently anti-feminist cliché. She goes on to question:

> 'Can we be sure that Lise, having supposedly plotted the act in such meticulous detail and with such chilling conviction, did not dissemble at the point of resistance? Put differently: if Lise planned to be raped, how would she go about it? Scarily, magnificently, Spark here turns the horrific logic of misogyny inside out: the standard line of defence implies that a woman 'asks for it' by saying 'no' ('no' means 'yes', etc.), and that's what Lise does. She instructs the male novice how to kill her and says 'no' to sex with a stranger she has willingly brought to a secluded spot in the park, a performance which in the context of any law court or tabloid newspaper, is tantamount to 'asking for it'.'[246]

Kolocotroni's argument here allows us to grasp the significance of the *femme fatale* trope in the development of Lise's character. By portraying Lise's death from this objective stance, Spark utilises the horror of the male gaze to portray a chilling conclusion: that Lise will be blamed for the violent nature of her death. Bailey, too, argues that

> 'By having Lise be penetrated, against her wishes, by the penis as well as the knife… Spark conflates notions of patriarchal authority, physical and sexual violence, and narrative mastery of a body judged to be deviant and dangerous because of its apparent unreadability'.[247]

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[243] Vassiliki Kolocotroni, '*The Driver's Seat*: undoing character, becoming legend', *Textual Practice* 32, no. 9. (2018), 1547.
[244] Spark, *The Driver's Seat*, 100.
[245] Ibid. 102-3.
[246] Kolocotroni, '*The Driver's Seat*', 1548.
[247] Bailey, 'Salutary Scars', 47.

It is through Lise's affiliation to the *femme fatale* trope that she becomes mysterious and unreadable. However, Spark subverts the expectations of this trope, by performing the play of eroticism through death. Lise's 'inscription' is subsequently rewritten by the men who surround her. The novel ends with Lise's murderer being taken to the police station. The narrator sets the final scene:

> 'the type-writer ticks out his unnerving statement: "She told me to kill her and I killed her. She spoke in many languages, but she was telling me to kill her all the time. She told me precisely what to do. I was hoping to start a new life".'[248]

Bailey discusses how, in the novel's final scene, the intentional 'hyphenated rendering of "type-writer"', as 'the words of Lise's killer becomes the writer of reductive character types'.[249] The factual, indifferent nature in which Lise's killer describes her death mirrors the role of the tabloid newspaper, which forces Lise back into the safe, contained role of the everywoman. Bailey states that

> 'the various aspects of Lise's stage-managed murder can thus be read as a final attempt to re-enact and communicate the death-in life she has already suffered; the man's necktie that renders her immobile is connotative of the shifting patriarchal order that has robbed her of her agency, for instance, whereas the knife that pierces her throat replicates the brutal silencing of her voice that occurred long before the narrative began.'[250]

It is evident that Lise inhabits the behaviours of the literary stereotype of the hysterical women and the *femme fatale* as an attempt to take control over her life, and subsequently, her death. What becomes apparent throughout *The Driver's Seat* is Lise's (metatextual) desire for full authorial control over how she is perceived. Malcolm Bradbury therefore argues that the relationship between Lise and Spark is mutually beneficial.

> 'there is a very decided complicity between Lise, who prefigures and predicts or seeks out the ending, and the novelist, Miss Spark herself, the virtuoso who plants and plays with the plot and the telling, displays and preens its elements, insists, indeed, on its elegant delight.'[251]

[248] Spark, *The Driver's Seat,* 103.
[249] Bailey, 'Salutary Scars', 47.
[250] Ibid., 46
[251] Bradbury, 'Spark's Fingernails', 248.

However, as we are already aware of Bradbury's reception of Spark's authorship, I argue that this is a reductive reading of Lise's role and agency within *The Driver's Seat*, and within the context of her other 'bad' feminine counterparts in Spark's other works. Unlike Jean Brodie's death from cancer, an arguable death of 'natural causes', Lise is driven to her death in a desperate attempt to control her own life. Lise is not necessarily presented as a 'bad' female character in a similar way to Jean Brodie, or even Effie. However, it is the presentation of the negative literary tropes within Lise's characterisation that allow her to belong to the 'bad' stereotype of Spark's other women.

Though Lise's brutal death is complicated by her desire for agency and control over her interpretation, I argue that, through her death, Spark highlights the problematic violence that women experience at the hands of men; despite whether they were 'lured' by the *femme fatale*, or 'forced' by the hysteric.

Effie: The Sexy Terrorist

Both Jean Brodie and Lise are earlier characters of Spark's oeuvre. Her biblical tale, *The Only Problem* (1984) was published fourteen years after Lise's literary death; and twenty-seven years after Spark's debut, *Job*-ian novel, *The Comforters* (1957). What is crucial to consider through Spark's execution of Miss Brodie and Lise's character is how they are portrayed to the audience. Though the reader is shrouded from each women's point of view, both women are the main protagonists of their respective tales.

Effie Gotham, on the other hand, is not. I have argued that it is clear from the *Job*-like construction of her narrative that Spark's interest primarily lay in her portrayal of her 'modern' Job, Harvey Gotham. Effie, however, is the main source of Harvey's frustrations and 'suffering': though not always physically present in the novel, Effie permeates all discussions throughout the novel, her 'presence' lingering on every page. However, I argue that Effie still encompasses a multitude of the literary stereotypes Spark has employed in her execution of her other, misbehaving female characters. But to what extent does Effie exclusively exist as a 'Sparkian' female character? I argue that due to *The Only Problem*'s intertextual connection to the *Book of Job*, Effie's character must be created not only in conjunction to the woman of *Job*, but also, by association, the other women within the Hebrew Bible. To investigate the magnitude of these connections, I will begin by examining Effie's initial presentation within the novel, and subsequently, the construction of the Hebrew Bible woman.

Our introduction to the 'beautiful Effie' is presented through the lens of Harvey's best friend, Edward, who begins by musing on his 'long-ago affair' with Effie.[252] Through Spark's prologue we learn that Edward is married to Effie's older sister, Ruth; and Harvey and Edward have been friends for years, having met at university.[253] It was there that Harvey's obsession with the *Book of Job* began, where Edward and he agreed that it was the 'pivotal book of the Bible'.[254] Returning our attention to Effie, however, the reader is immediately struck by two facts through this introduction: one, that Effie is beautiful; and two, that she is an adulteress. It would already appear that Effie's initial sexual promiscuity suggests her role as the *femme fatale*. This is not completely unfounded: after Harvey leaves her over a 'minor' disagreement, Effie quickly finds a new partner, Ernie Howe, and gives birth to his child, Clara, who is present in Spark's epilogue, then under Harvey's care.[255] She is also suspected to be engaged in a sexual relationship with a young student, and member of her terrorist group, Nathan Fox.

The reader's interpretation of Effie's characteristics is based solely on the views of others: from Harvey, Ruth, Edward, Ernie, Nathan, and the policemen responsible for her 'capture'. Spark consistently switches between the narrative perspectives (particularly of Harvey, Ruth, and Edward) to show how Effie is perceived by those 'closest' to her. Although all characters seem to agree that Effie is 'beautiful', Harvey claims that 'Effie wasn't comparatively anything, certainly not kind. She was absolutely fascinating… anarchistic, aristocratic.'[256] Though he is undeniably an unreliable narrator, it is obvious that Harvey's perception of Effie's 'fascinating' qualities is inextricably connected to her 'anarchistic, aristocratic' nature. It is in this way that Effie's role of the *femme fatale* becomes conflated with her predisposition towards terrorism. However, this marks a crucial difference between Effie and Miss Jean Brodie: though Miss Brodie's interest in fascism could explained away as a mere consequence of her romantic sensibilities, Effie's pursuit of terrorism is unmistakeably practical. Harvey visualises this scene:

> 'The police arrive. Shots fired. Effie and her men friends fighting their way back to their waiting car (with Nathan at the wheel?). Effie, lithe and long-legged, a most desirable girl, and quick-witted, unmoved, aiming her gun with a good aim. She pulls the trigger and is away all in one moment. Yes, he could imagine Effie in the scene; she was capable of that, capable of anything.'[257]

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[252] Spark, *TOP*, 12.
[253] Ibid. 29.
[254] Ibid.
[255] This 'minor' disagreement will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.
[256] Spark, *The Only Problem*, 61.
[257] Ibid., 135-6.

The humour and irony of Harvey's imagination is not lost here: it seems only by his association of Effie as 'lithe and long-legged' is he able to imagine her as a terrorist. This illumines how Spark has moulded Effie in the role of the *femme fatale*.

It would appear however that it is Effie's 'zeal in the sociological industry' that is intended to imply her predilected interest in terrorism.[258] Prior to her full execution of it through terrorism, however, Ruth tells the reader of the 'social work' Effie was doing, when Ruth had first married Edward.[259] Yet in the prologue, Harvey and Edward are seen to be laughing at Effie's attempts of social-consciousness, as she was 'writing a thesis on child-labourers in Western democracies, basing much of it on Kingsley's *The Water Babies*.'[260] These examples, and in particular, the stealing of the chocolate bar, are showcased as evidence of the intention behind her terrorism. The chocolate bar incident, which I analysed in the previous chapter, could also be viewed as the introduction of Effie's presentation of hysteria.[261] When first faced with police questioning, however, Harvey responds as thus:

> '"My wife is suffering from an illness, kleptomania. She needs treatment. You are hounding her down as a terrorist, which she isn't. Effie couldn't kill anyone."'[262]

Although we are aware that Harvey subsequently changes his mind about Effie's terroristic tendencies, it is interesting that Harvey's initial reaction to the policemen's accusations of Effie's involvement is to defend her, by claiming that she has an 'illness': kleptomania. It is evident that Harvey's appeal to this type of 'mania' serves to connect Effie to a somewhat acceptable type of hysteria. This attribution works for Harvey twofold: it simultaneously portrays Effie only as 'unhinged', which Harvey consequently acknowledges would suit him better: it is much easier to have a kleptomaniac for a wife rather than a terrorist. However, Harvey's confusing conflation of Effie's kleptomania, 'sociological clap-trap', and her terrorism leaves the reader disorientated and disconnected from who Effie really is.[263]

As such, it is crucial to consider is the ways in which the Spark further separates the reader from Effie's own experience. The chocolate bar incident aside, the reader's knowledge of Effie's involvement in terrorist activities is, at best, a basic representation.

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[258] Ibid. 31.
[259] Ibid. 45
[260] Ibid. 31.
[261] This is perhaps an obvious assertion, considering her inclination to terrorism.
[262] Spark, *TOP*, 164.
[263] Ibid., 124.

This is highlighted by Spark's use of the media and newspapers as a narrative tool to further separate the reader from the main 'action' of the novel, and subsequently, from Effie. An excerpt from a headline story in the novel reads as thus:

> 'Playboy Harvey Gotham, 35, […] has been questioned in conjunction with hold-ups and bombings of supermarkets and post-offices in that area. It is believed that his wife, Mrs Effie Gotham, 25, is a leading member of FLE, an extreme leftist terrorist movement.'[264]

The newspaper presents its events simultaneously in a basic and salacious manner. The inclusion of this article naturally recalls the 'reductive character "types"' Bailey highlighted in relation to Lise's death.[265] Unlike Lise, however, the reader is removed from Effie's intentions behind her actions. On the other hand, it is safe to assume that, similarly to Miss Jean Brodie's predilection towards fascism, Effie's devotion to her socialist ideologies becomes fully realised through her pursuit of terrorism. As a result of this, Effie is caught in a shoot-out with the police and dies, her death acting as the inevitable consequence of her (mis)behaviours.

It is evident that Spark's depiction of Effie is often characterised by how she is read through the lens of her husband and this also extends to her death. Harvey is constantly conflicted by the notion of what Effie is, and what he wants her to be. Cairns Craig argues that

> '[Harvey] wants [Effie] not as she was in time but as she might be, or might have been, in another time, at a different stage of life. She has made him a writer of theological works who cannot take her seriously and thereby – and in her case quite literally – 'signed her own death warrant'.[266]

Due to her zealous interest in terrorism, it seems inevitable that Effie would die at the end of the novel. Her death, like Lise, is brutal and unremarkably reported: she is just simply shot dead by a policeman. However, her death is significant: as I argued in the previous chapter, Effie's death symbolises Harvey's reckoning with the problem of suffering. Yet it also serves to connect her to her biblical predecessors, as I will further investigate in the following part of this chapter.

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[264] Ibid., 94-5.
[265] Bailey, 'Salutary Scars', 47; See pages 58-9 of this thesis.
[266] Cairns Craig. "Repetition" in *Muriel Spark, Existentialism and The Art of Death.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 125.

Previously in this chapter, I analysed Malcolm Bradbury's conviction that Spark enjoyed the 'god-game' enacted between her and her subjects and argued that this was a reductive reading of her authorship.[267] However, when considering the characterisation and fates of Jean Brodie, Lise, and Effie, Bradbury's argument may become more understandable. It seems that each character exhibits questionable traits and behaviours, which I have thus crudely labelled as 'bad' characteristics. It could be argued then that the negative qualities and actions of these women have resulted in them meeting their untimely ends, through death. Thus, to what extent is Spark responsible for these deaths, and can we, as readers, characterise these deaths as punishment for their 'bad' behaviours?

However, I believe that these deaths are not punishments at the hands of Spark specifically. Like Bailey, I believe that Spark intended to reflect reality within her fiction. Although *The Driver's Seat* is a self-contained, self-aware literary work, it is clear that the novel discusses the problem of male violence inflicted against women. Although we are aware these characters exist within fiction, it is not inconceivable that women such as Jean Brodie and Effie reflect those in the 'real' world. As such, I believe that the deaths of these women act as narrative signifiers: to preserve the narrative order of their respective texts, each woman must die. Therefore, there exists a clear distinction between the narrator and Spark, the author.

Though Effie meets her timely end in a similar manner to Jean Brodie and Lise, it is important to consider to what extent Effie can be considered as an isolated 'Sparkian' female character. Due to her connection to the biblical text of *Job*, we must understand that Effie is naturally intertextually intertwined with other characters within the Hebrew Bible. How then does Spark utilise the literary stereotypes of the women of the Hebrew Bible in her creation of Effie? To analyse how these women are portrayed through the patriarchal lens of the Hebrew Bible, I will rely on feminist biblical criticism to uncover the key character tropes that exist within the Old Testament.

Female Character Tropes in the Hebrew Bible

When considering the characteristics of women in the Hebrew Bible, we must begin by considering this question: what are the specific characteristics that make these women 'good' or 'bad'? What transpires is how the construction of a 'good' or 'bad' woman in the Hebrew Bible is largely influenced by its dominating patriarchal culture. Feminist Hebrew Bible scholar, Suzanne Scholz, explains that

[267] James Bailey, 'Salutary Scars', 36.

> ‘scholars of all ideological stripes generally agree that ancient Israelite society was patriarchal and men dominated private, and public life. But an attendant, and still unanswered, question is how precisely biblical texts reflect this reality.’[268]

Of course, as modern readers, we can never fully answer this question. However, Scholz argues that through employing the methodology of literary criticism to the Hebrew Bible (as opposed to the historical or cultural), we can begin to uncover the ‘structural patterns, verbal sequences, and stylistic devices of biblical texts.’[269] By applying this method of reading we can begin to become aware of the patriarchal influences that exist within the text. Alice Bach writes:

> ‘I want to suggest a mode of reading in which one imagines the biblical narrator as a storyteller with whom the reader must contend… Instead of being seduced by the narrator’s version, I am attracted to a strategy that allows the reader to step outside the reader’s appointed place in order to defy the fixed gaze of the male narrator.’[270]

Bach argues that being aware of this fixed gaze thus allows the reader to witness the injustices that exist against women of the Hebrew Bible and how they have been constructed as Biblical ‘literary dolls’. Bach continues to argue that ‘in a male-driven plot, the functions of female agents are going to be limited’.[271]As such, it is crucial to evaluate how (some) women of the Hebrew Bible are used as narrative devices, who exist primarily to further the story of their male counterparts.

What female characteristics, then, are consistent in the Hebrew Bible; and which of these are ‘desirable’ to the men of the texts they inhabit? In order to investigate this question, I will utilise the work of multiple biblical feminist scholars to show three ‘main’ types that Hebrew Bible women represent: the matriarch, the absent (or ‘disappearing’) woman, and the role of exotic, foreign woman. It is imperative to remember how these ‘desirable’ characteristics of Hebrew Bible women are primarily focused on the presentation of their obedience to God and to their husbands; and, subsequently, how this signifies their dedication to the prevalence of Israel, primarily through the birth of sons.

Feminist biblical criticism has often focused on the presentation of the matriarchs within the Hebrew Bible, whose primary examples can be found within the text of Genesis.

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[268] Suzanne Scholz. “Gendering the Hebrew Bible: Methodological Considerations” in *Introducing the Women’s Hebrew Bible: Feminism, Gender Justice and the Study of the Old Testament*. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 72.
[269] Ibid., 68.
[270] Alice Bach. “Signs of the Flesh: Observations of Characterisation in the Bible” in *Women in the Hebrew Bible.* (London: Routledge, 1999), 351.
[271] Ibid., 356.

Eve, the Mother of Earth, features prominently in feminist biblical criticism, as Holly Morse points out that Eve's name has become 'synonymous with titles such as temptress, *femme fatale*, and fallen women', and she 'has been repeatedly portrayed as the inferior of men and the mother of death.'[272] In light of this, I will undertake a further exploration of Eve's characterisation and reception history in the next part of the chapter. However, although Eve may be conceived as the 'first' matriarch, there are a number of other women presented as 'mother figures' in the Hebrew Bible; including, but not limited to, the four Matriarchs of the tribes of Israel: Sarai, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel. Suzanne Scholz writes that 'the question for feminist critics is what to do with the abundance of mothers in biblical literature'.[273] She continues by questioning whether 'the Hebrew Bible contains a "depatriarchalized" strain in which women are prominent, autonomous and strong.'[274] Though there are instances of Biblical women exerting some narrative control (a particular example could be Rebekah in Gen. 25-33)[275], Esther Fuchs argues that these mother-figures primarily 'serve androcentric purposes that centre on male characters.'[276] Fuchs writes that

> 'Mother-figures – prospective, actual or surrogate mothers – are frequently valorised as male-controlled wives or widows successful warding off the threat of patrilineal disruption. While the biblical narrative has much to tell us about motherhood as a patriarchal institution whose aim is to ensure patrilineal continuity, it has little to tell us about motherhood as experience or political privilege.'[277]

Despite this, Fuchs points out that 'mimetically, mother-figures are more likely than other gynotypes to be characterised as resourceful, courageous, active and autonomous.'[278] Fuchs also highlights how 'procreative contexts are the only ones in which women address Yhwh and hold a dialogue with him.'[279] She argues that, 'as mothers, women are also most often shown to act in accordance with a broader divine plan.'[280]

This is exemplified particularly through the story of Hannah (1 Sam. 1-2). As the LORD had 'closed Hannah's womb', Hannah pleads with God for a son, and promises that

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[272] Holly Morse, "Encountering Eve", *Encountering Eve's Afterlives*, 1.
[273] Scholz. "Gendering the Hebrew Bible", *The Women's Hebrew Bible*, 75.
[274] Ibid.
[275] In Gen. 27, Rebekah encourages her son, Jacob, to 'steal' Isaac's blessing from her firstborn son, Esau, as "Rebekah loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:28).
[276] Esther Fuchs. "The Biblical Mother: The Annunciation and Temptation Type-Scenes" in *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 76.
[277] Ibid. 44.
[278] Ibid. 45. This is also evident through the story of Rebekah.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid.

in exchange that she will dedicate her son's life to the LORD (1 Sam. 1:6-11). The LORD then 'remembers her' and she conceives a son, Samuel, a pivotal character in God's divine plan (1 Sam. 1:10). Despite Hannah's role as a mother-figure, it is clear that her prior barrenness is crucial in the development of the story. Fuchs argues

> 'Narratives about barren women… serve patriarchy because they portray barren women as lacking control over their fertility. Barrenness signifies that women are not agents of their own lives but depend on external forces such as God.'[281]

As Fuchs argues, in the Hebrew Bible, mother-figures are only more likely to be 'autonomous' in the execution of their narratives. Considering the example of Hannah, if the LORD had not 'opened her womb', how important would she be to the story? Would she feature at all, is God had not exerted this control over her womb? To conclude, it seems therefore that motherhood appears as the most 'desirable' characteristic for Hebrew Bible women. Fuchs concludes by arguing that these 'Biblical narratives limit women to traditionally accepted roles in patriarchal societies – motherhood – and warn women to conform to this role'.[282]

The two other character types present themselves as the unfortunate alternative to the more desirable Matriarch characteristic in the Hebrew Bible. This brings me to the second character type prominent in the Hebrew Bible: the 'disappearing' or 'nameless' woman. These are women who are either absent from the main 'plot' of a specific text, or women who are not named at all. A particular example of an absent woman is Sarah, in Genesis 22, the story otherwise known as the 'Binding of Isaac'. Abraham is called upon by the LORD to sacrifice their son, Isaac; and although Sarah has featured (arguably quite dominantly) in the chapters prior to this, she is now missing from this particular narrative. Feminist critics have argued that Sarah's absence implies that she is not important in the execution of this story, despite the possibility of her son's death. As such, readers of the text are entirely separated from Sarah's experience of this incident.

The other side of this type are the women that are rendered nameless. This has crucial to the analysis of Effie's biblical counterpart, Job's wife. As I have previously mentioned, not only has Job's wife been rendered nameless, but she is also absent from the *Book of Job*'s epilogue. It could be argued that her namelessness (and subsequent absence) could be read as punishment for telling her husband to "curse God and die" (Job 2:9). I have outlined how feminist readings of Job's wife show how she narratively and textually

[281] Ibid. 78
[282] Ibid. 77

functions primarily to stop Job from 'sinning with his lips' (Job 2:10), thereby acting as a (literary) scapegoat. Job's wife is thus the primary example of this second type of characteristic, who inhabits both the disappearing and the nameless woman. Despite these women being absent from the texts in which they inhabit, and namelessness being equated with non-existence, it is imperative to remember that these biblical women *do* exist, while also acknowledging how their primary role within the Hebrew Bible is supplementary to the experience of the men that surround them.

The final character type I aim to explore is that of the 'other' woman: the women that are considered either as 'exotic' or 'foreign'. The primary example within the Hebrew Bible is the story of Delilah (Judg. 16). Exum writes that the story of Delilah is 'so infamously famous'; Delilah, using her sexual power over Samson, tries to discover the source of his weakness: his long, flowing locks.[283] Mieke Bal explains that within the text, Delilah is implied to be a 'Philistine woman, who lives among "the uncircumcised".'[284] This highlights how Delilah's status as a 'foreign woman' (and potentially a Philistine) excludes her from the possibility of becoming part of God's divine plan for Israel.[285] Bal also maintains that 'Samson marries for "love," or to be more precise, for sexual attraction'.[286] Exum argues that it is for this reason that Delilah has become 'a trope for the *femme fatale*'; and how Delilah's betrayal of Samson, has allowed Delilah's name, 'in common parlance', to be linked 'with treachery and deceit'.[287] Thus it is her status as a 'foreign woman' has become synonymous with her role of the *femme fatale*. This equation, particularly within the Hebrew Bible, has encouraged the connection between female sexuality simultaneously to deviancy, and to danger.

It is clear to see how these three character types and tropes have been used to identify and separate the women within the Hebrew Bible. Although we are aware that women are primarily used as narrative devices in the Hebrew Bible, it is arguable that the Matriarch is therefore the most desirable characteristic a female character can possess in the text. Although the Matriarchs do not always exhibit 'good' qualities, [288] I argue that, by

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[283] Exum, "Delilah", *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 180.
[284] Mieke Bal, "Delilah Decomposed: Samson's Talking Cure and the Rhetoric of Subjectivity" in *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories*. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 42.
[285] In Judges 16:4, Samson meets Delilah "in the valley of Sorek", which Exum argues "lies between Israelite and Philistine territory" (181). However, the text does not explicitly state that she is a Philistine, though it is implied in the context of the text.
[286] Bal, "Delilah Decomposed", *Lethal Love*, 42.
[287] Exum, "Delilah?", *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 176.
[288] Two examples of this can be found in Genesis: in Genesis 18:9-15, Sarah (arguably) doubts God's ability make her bear a child, signified by her 'laugh'. This doubt, of course, is wrong as she should trust in God. Rebekah's encouragement of Jacob to steal Esau's birthright (Genesis 25:28) could also be read in this manner.

contrast, the qualities of the 'nameless' and 'other' women are not to be favoured in the text.

I have argued that Spark also utilised negative literary feminine tropes in the presentation of her 'bad' female characters; but due to Effie's intertextual relationship with Job's wife, I argued that this necessitated an understanding of the types of women (negative or otherwise) that exist within the Hebrew Bible. Further in this chapter, I will analyse how these characteristics are also reflected in Effie, and her sister Ruth. However, when analysing both the speeches of Job's wife and La Tour's painting, there exitsed an implicit connection between the character of Job's wife, and Eve. As such, I will now utilise Holly Morse's mode of reception history and criticism to investigate the complicated nature of Eve's characterisation.

The Story of Eve: The Beginning of Hebrew Bible Women Behaving Badly

The tale of Genesis 2-3 has been well and often (re)told, however Exum questions: to what extent is the cultural representation of 'The Fall' based on interpretations found in popular culture, rather than the ancient text itself?[289] Throughout history, Eve has been used to embody multiple stereotypes, particularly that of the *femme fatale*. Biblical scholar Katie Edwards discusses this how these notions still exist in modernity, by investigating the extensive use of Eve's imagery in contemporary advertising.[290] Eve's image is so culturally recognised that she has become the ultimate, deviant everywoman.

As a result, Morse argues that Eve being framed as a negative 'everywoman' has resulted in 'countless interpreters claiming Genesis 2–3 as a prooftext for viewing women as inherently more sinful than men.'[291] Morse, however, wishes to question this interpretation. She argues that 'the conceptualization of Eve as a monolithically negative character is, in fact, a *myth* and does not constitute the definitive *meaning* of her story.'[292] However, it is seems that culturally this *myth* of Eve does prevail, and consequently Eve's actions have been presented as negative: not only by the author of Genesis, but through her interpretation throughout history. Eve's interaction with the serpent, a signifier for the figure of Satan, has led this interpretation: through Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit, and her 'conspiring' with the serpent, she has deliberately disobeyed God, and dragged her

[289] Exum, "Preface", *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 8.
[290] See Katie Edwards, *Admen and Eve: The Bible in Contemporary Advertising*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012)
[291] Morse, "Gallery Two: Sin", *Encountering Eve's Afterlives*, 10.
[292] Ibid.

husband into it. Gale Yee points out that 'whatever dangers to the state the snake represents, it is through the woman that the snake accomplishes the rift between human beings and God and, by analogy, between the people and their king.'[293] By listening to the words of the serpent and eating the fruit, Eve thus becomes responsible for the Fall of mankind. Yee continues by arguing that 'by having the woman, instead of the man, respond to the snake, the subtext also implies that women are the ones most susceptible to these forces.'[294] Yee outlines how, in the story, Eve is much more susceptible to temptation than her male counterpart, Adam; although he, too, eats of the fruit. Yee points out although 'the text does not narrate any conversation between the woman and the man when she gives him the fruit (3:6)',[295]

> 'the main point in the divine qualifier is that the man did not listen to *God's* voice, which commanded the man not to eat of the fruit (2:17). The notion of the woman as the temptress or seducer of the man away from God's commandments […] is implied in God's statement, highlighting her mediation between the "before" and "after" of the man's existence. Because of the danger she represents […], the woman must be brought under the strict control of her husband.'[296]

Reading Eve's character as the temptress or seducer naturally assigns her to the role of the *femme fatale*, who is responsible for Adam's disobedience of God's commandments, which is an unforgivable sin.[297] This disobedience must result in punishment: Eve, and subsequently all women in the Hebrew Bible, must be dominated exclusively through patriarchal control. Morse argues that

> 'the precise nature of the penalty placed upon the woman can be seen to strengthen the physical associations between femininity and transgression, as well as providing further justification for viewing the hierarchy between men and women as the result of sin.'[298]

Morse explains that the notion of femininity and female sexuality, particularly within the Hebrew Bible, has thus became entangled with disobedience. As a result, Eve has become

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[293] Gale A Yee. "Eve in Genesis" in *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 73.
[294] Ibid., 74
[295] Ibid., 76
[296] Ibid.
[297] Roche Coleman, 'Was Eve the first *femme fatale*?' *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42, no. 1 (2021) 1-9. Coleman evaluates the development of Eve as a *femme fatale* figure; and argues that despite current feminist theology approaches, Eve's identity is the 'first *femme fatale*.' (8)
[298] Morse, "Gallery Two: Sin", *Encountering Eve's Afterlives,* 23.

the feminine signifier, interpreted throughout history as the woman who conspired with the serpent (historically interpreted as the Satan) to cause the downfall of man.

By engaging with the reception history and criticism of Eve, we can begin to understand the ways in which Eve's characterisation has affected the literary presentation and reception of female characters within the Hebrew Bible. Although Eve is the first Matriarch in the text, she is also interpreted as a temptress. It is thus interesting to consider how then the interpretations of Eve's character could have influenced other literary women, and in particular, Spark's presentation of Effie.

Effie and her Biblical Counterparts

When we consider Katherine Low's analysis of Job's wife in art, we can uncover the comparisons between the figure of Eve and Job's wife. Low outlines how this began in medieval Christianity through 'the developing literary sources' that sought to 'explain the marriage of Job and his wife in terms of Eden and a verbal interaction between Adam and Eve'.[299] Though an analysis of this is not within the scope of this thesis, it is important to note how this initially entangled the character of Job's wife with Eve. Low demonstrates how this was thus developed in the subsequent imagery of Job's wife; just as Eve had been artistically portrayed as conspiring with Satan, so did Job's wife.[300] This is also exemplified by the connection made between Job's wife and the adversary through the use of *barek* in the text, which I analysed in the previous chapter.

As such, I argue that Effie's association to Job's wife intertextually connects her to the character of Eve. In this section, I will argue how Effie reflects some of the characteristics found in the women of the Hebrew Bible, and how she can be read comparatively to Eve. I will also investigate the consequences of Spark's inclusion of Effie's sister Ruth, who also appears to textually function in the role as Job's wife. By analysing the presentation of the feminine biblical characteristics, I will conclude how Ruth, too, can be positioned as Job's wife, and Effie can thus inhabit the role of 'God'.

[299] Low, "Introduction", 27.
[300] Ibid., "Satan's Disappearance from the Dungheap", 77-111.

Effie as Eve

Through the analysis of Eve's characterisation, it was evident that Eve inhabited the biblical role of the Matriarch, while also mirroring the qualities of the later found *femme fatale* trope. This is also true of Effie: previously in this chapter I argued how Effie could be read as a *femme fatale*, yet Effie is also known to be mother to her illegitimate child, Clara. Though analysis of Effie's role as the Matriarch will be explored further in this chapter, however I found interesting comparisons could be made between Effie's introduction and Eve's sinful behaviour. Both Effie and Eve are condemned by their action of eating something forbidden: for Eve, the forbidden fruit of knowledge and for Effie, the chocolate bar of social injustice.

In Genesis, the serpent tells Eve that upon eating it, 'your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil' (Gen. 3:5). The fruit thus symbolises the acquirement of god-like knowledge – and consequently after eating, Adam and Eve become aware of their nakedness and hide from God (Gen. 3: 7-10). The reader recognises that this act of rebellion is what forces Adam and Eve's banishment from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3: 23), but also resulted in Eve's punishment both of her pain in childbirth, and her subordinance to her husband (Gen. 3: 16). Feminist biblical scholars have evaluated the motivations of Eve and the symbolism of the fruit, as I have previously alluded to in this chapter. This also extends to other retellings of Eve: Amy Tigner evaluates the significance of Eve's eating within John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, arguing that 'Milton's Eve works to transcend her social position by means of both food preparation and consumption.'[301] Despite this, it is clear that Eve's action is precisely what necessitates her downfall.

In a similar manner, Effie's eating of the chocolate bar marks the beginning of her own downfall. I have argued how Effie's behaviour in Spark's prologue not only caused Harvey to leave her but is also utilised as the starting point to Effie's pursuit of terrorism. I thus believe that the act of 'eating' a forbidden food further seeks to entangle Effie with Eve and highlights the further biblical intertexts that exist in Spark's biblical tale.

Ruth as Job's Wife

It is crucial to further investigate how the Hebrew Bible is reflected in the presentation of Effie's character. Though Effie primarily reflects Job's wife (and is thereby entangled with the character of Eve), this is complicated by Spark's inclusion of Ruth, Effie's less

[301] Amy L. Tigner, 'Eating with Eve'. *Milton Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2010) 239-253.

attractive, but more practical, twin sister. By comparing the presentation of Effie and Ruth in *The Only Problem*, I will argue that Ruth functions more efficiently as Job's wife, which can allow Effie to inhabit the role of God in the text.

There are notable ways in which Ruth and Effie differ characteristically. Ruth notes that she 'often wondered when [she and Effie] had separated in their attitude to life'.[302] Ruth is initially presented as religiously devout in a way that Effie is not, despite their upbringing, as the narrator informs us that Effie and Ruth's father was a clergyman. The narrator also informs us that 'for most of Ruth's life…religion was her bread and butter'.[303] Ruth had also married Harvey's best friend, Edward, for the very reason that he, too, was a clergyman. Harvey himself notes that he believes that Ruth feels 'safer' being with 'someone who's in the God-business'.[304] On the other hand, Effie textually presents both the *femme fatale,* and the hysterical women. The narrator remarks that while Ruth was invested in the so-called 'god-business', whereas 'Effie, meanwhile, went off the rails.'[305]

Despite their characteristic differences, the narrator reveals that Effie and Ruth look strikingly similar. Harvey notes that he often 'saw Effie's features in Ruth'.[306] Likewise, Ruth is repeatedly said to 'greatly resemble' Effie, a fact noted by Harvey and a policeman investigating Effie's crimes.[307] Both the words 'resemble' and 'resemblance' are repeated often throughout the novel, the primary instance of which appearing when Harvey is viewing *Job Visited His Wife*:

> 'In order to have a better look at Job's wife's face, Harvey put his head to one side. Right from the first he had been struck by her *resemblance* to Effie in profile. She was like Ruth, too, but more like Effie.'[308]

I believe it is not coincidental that this word was used in conjunction with Spark's primary female signifiers. The term 'resemblance' connotes likeness, while simultaneously implying the dissimilarities that lie within that likeness. Therefore, the concept of 'resemblance' becomes fundamental to *The Only Problem*, in three distinct ways. This is firstly exemplified by the way Spark's novel resembles the *Book of Job.* Spark discussed this in her essay on *The Only Problem,* where she felt that 'the biblical poem is only reflected in my book like a shadow reflected in water.'[309] The second marks the ways in

[302] Spark, *TOP*, 43.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Ibid. 48.
[305] Ibid. 45
[306] Ibid. 47
[307] Ibid. 157
[308] Ibid. 79
[309] Spark, "The Only Problem", *Golden Fleece,* 191.

which Effie and Ruth resemble each other, and therefore Job's wife by proxy. The resemblance of all three women calls into question to what extent they are similar; or whether they are only unified within Harvey's psyche. For Harvey, Ruth's physical resemblance to Effie automatically associates her to the figure of Job's wife in the painting. I argue that Spark uses this physical similarity of the sisters to highlight the conflation of each woman in Harvey's mind. Finally, and consequently of this, Spark utilises this 'resemblance' to connect Ruth and Effie to La Tour's painting and interpretation, which recalls the reception history of Job's wife, Eve and Hebrew Bible women in general.

As a result, this leads me to believe that Spark utilises the Jungian concept of the *shadow* in her creation of Ruth and Effie.[310] Jung defines the *shadow* as 'the face we never show to the world', a person's '*persona*, the mask of the actor'.[311] He writes that 'the unconscious is commonly regarded as a sort of incapsulated fragment of our most personal life – something like what the Bible calls the "heart" and considers the source of all evil thoughts.'[312] Though the full presentation of Jung's thoughts is truly not within the bounds of this thesis, it seems that Effie and Ruth's physical similarities aim to present both women as, for lack of a better phrase, two sides of the same coin. Ruth's pious and religious disposition places her in the role of the 'good' woman, whereas Effie's terrorist tendencies mark her as the 'bad' or 'evil' woman. This is exemplified when Harvey notes that 'it struck him frequently that [Ruth] was what Effie should have been.'[313]

However, the conflation of Effie and Ruth highlights a dichotomy between their desirability: not only through their physical appearance, but also in their ability to demonstrate opposing feminine archetypes. The voice of the narrator notes that

> 'The sisters looked very much alike in their separate features; it was one of those cases where the sum total of each came out with a difference, to the effect that Effie was extremely beautiful and Ruth was nothing remarkable; perhaps it was a question of colouring and complexion.'[314]

As I have previously mentioned, the text's assertion of Effie's beauty naturally assumes her in the role of the beautiful but dangerous *femme fatale*, fully executed through her predication towards terrorism. Ruth, on the other hand, is 'nothing remarkable', an admission by Harvey himself. Harvey muses:

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[310] See "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure" in Jung's *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconsciousness*. 2nd ed, 255-272. Trans. by R. F. C. Hull. (London: Routledge, 1980)
[311] Ibid., "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious", 20.
[312] Ibid.
[313] Spark, *TOP*, 47.
[314] Ibid., 45

> ‘How could two sisters be so physically alike and yet so totally different? At any moment Ruth might come in and reproach him for not having the Christmas spirit. Effie would never do that. Ruth was thoroughly bourgeois by nature; Effie, anarchistic, aristocratic. I miss Effie, I miss her a lot, Harvey told himself.’[315]

Here we note how Harvey seems repulsed by Ruth’s ‘bourgeois’ nature, while simultaneously overlooking that it was Effie’s ‘anarchistic’ nature that made him leave her on the *autostrada.* This acts as further presentation of Harvey’s naivety: in Harvey’s daydream, he and Effie are united; where in reality, he is living with Effie’s baby and less attractive sister, with Effie absent from his life.

How do Ruth and Effie therefore reflect the characteristics of each other, but also of their biblical counterparts? Before I begin to analyse the ways both women exhibit the recognised characteristics that belong to the women of the Hebrew Bible, I acknowledge that there are more intertextual connections between Spark’s sisters and the Hebrew Bible. I believe that the relationship between Effie and Ruth can also resemble the biblical tale of Rachel and Leah (Gen. 29-35). Alice Bellis notes that ‘the story of Rachel and Leah is, on one level, the story of the rivalry between two sisters for the love of one husband.’[316] Bellis continues by adding that ‘beneath the rivalry is the story of the struggle for self-esteem’, as ‘Leah is not as beautiful as Rachel’.[317] However Bellis also argues that ‘Rachel is more outwardly beautiful, but Leah is more sensitive and kind’.[318] There are thus notable similarities between the story and the characters of Rachel and Effie, and of Leah and Ruth. Though the bounds of intertextuality should not be narrowly set, the biblical text states that Rachel is barren; though it is Ruth that is childless in Spark’s biblical tale. These comparisons highlight the intertextual nature of *The Only Problem*, and the many ways in which the Hebrew Bible is reflected in Spark’s Jobian tale. To conclude my analysis, I will focus on how some of the characteristics of the Hebrew Bible woman are reflected in the character of Effie and Ruth. I argue that by giving up Clara to Ruth, Effie fulfils role of the ‘failed’ Matriarch, while also exhibiting the qualities of the aforementioned *femme fatale*. Ruth is thus elevated to the role of Matriarch and replaces Effie as both Harvey and Job’s wife in the text, allowing Effie to become ‘God’.

As I have previously mentioned, Ruth is initially presented to the reader as childless. However, it is evident that she plays the role of a surrogate mother to Effie’s

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[315] Ibid., 61.
[316] Alice Ogden Bellis, “The Women in Genesis” in *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women’s Stories in the Bible*, 2nd edn. (Westminister: John Knox Press, 2007), 72.
[317] Ibid.
[318] Ibid.

illegitimate child, Clara. The narrator informs us that 'Ruth had offered to take the baby when Effie decided she wasn't in love with Ernie anymore… At any rate, Ruth had known that, somehow, she would have to take on Effie's baby. It rather pleased her.[319] This implies that Effie would never present as a mother-figure, and thus fail in her role as a Matriarch. This difference between Effie and Ruth's capabilities are discussed by Harvey and his lawyer, Stewart Cowper[320]:

> '"Would you like to have Ruth back?" said Stewart.
> "Not particularly. I would like to have Clara back."
> "With Effie?"
> "No, Effie isn't a motherly type."
> "Ruth is a mother?"
> "She is a born children's nurse."
> "But you would like to have Effie back?" …
> "Yes, I would; in theory," said Harvey …
> "Then you would be willing to take Ruth back if she brought Clara. But you'd prefer to have Effie to make love to?"
> "That is the unattainable ideal."'[321]

This quotation is necessary in discovering Harvey's differentiation between both sisters. Harvey's admission here emphasises Effie's lack of maternal characteristics, while Ruth is a 'born children's nurse'. This dialogue highlights Harvey's conflation and preference of each sister's 'positive' attributes: Effie's beauty and sexual prowess (the *femme fatale*), and Ruth's maternal instincts (the 'new' Matriarch).

Spark's inclusion of Ruth in *The Only Problem* complicated the possibility of reading only Effie as Job's wife. This is exemplified by the epilogue of the text, where Effie is absent, but Ruth appears as Harvey's partner, pregnant by him. I previously argued that Effie's absence allows her to inhabit the role of Job's wife. The inclusion of Ruth may suggest an alternative reading that coincides with other interpretations of the text: that Job receives a new wife in his epilogue. However, I mentioned earlier in this chapter that the bounds of intertextuality should not be narrowly set,[322] and thus I argue that it is possible that both women can both be read as Job's wife, simultaneously. Nevertheless, I believe that the narrative placement of Effie within the text elicits comparisons between her, and the character of God in the biblical text. In the following chapter, I will begin to analyse Effie's role as God in Spark's novel, and the consequences of this reading.

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[319] Spark, *TOP*, 40.
[320] At this point in the narrative, Ruth has gone to live with Effie's abandoned lover, and father of Effie's child, Ernie Howe. It seems these two sisters are rivalling for the love of more than one shared man!
[321] Ibid., 130-1.
[322] See the previous page on Rachel and Leah.

Chapter 3: The Death of Effie, The Death of God

This final chapter will aim to explore the implications of placing Effie in the role of 'God' within *The Only Problem.* I argue that when read comparatively with the biblical text of Job, Effie's placement in the text coincides with God's character in *Job*: both characters are present in their prologues, while absent from the main body of their texts. I believe then that both characters enact their respective 'whirlwinds', which acts as the climactic revelation of both texts. These comparisons led me to question: what are the consequences of a 'bad' female character aligning with the character of God in the Hebrew Bible, and specifically the *Book of Job*?

This chapter will thus seek to investigate three different readings of Effie inhabiting the role of God: the theological, the metatextual and the literary. By reading Effie as God theologically, I will rely on feminist biblical criticism to investigate the extent the God of the Hebrew Bible inhabits feminine characteristics and attributes. What are the consequences of placing a misbehaving female human in the role of God, the masculine divine? Within this reading, I hence concluded that Effie's death was necessary to prioritise the exoneration of the masculine and divine and the subsequent condemnation of the feminine and human. However, I found both Fontini Apostolou and Gerardine Meaney's readings of Spark's work compelling, and so felt encouraged to consider how Effie could function as God metatextually.[323] The question surrounding this reading became: how does reading Effie as a God compare and connect her to Spark? By utilising both Apostolou and Meaney's work, I will explore the tensions created by the relationship between authorship and character agency and will consider how Effie then attempts to procure divine authorship and agency over the text.

The final reading considers the consequences of Effie as God in a literary manner. This I found was the most persuasive, and the one which most succinctly clarified my own need to research Spark's strange, nonsensical biblical novel. By comparing the characterisation of Effie to both her Sparkian and Hebrew Bible counterparts, I argued that these women exhibited behaviours and motivations that were meddlesome, manipulative, and malevolent. I believe that these characteristics are also to be found in the God of *Job*,

[323] Here I am particularly referring to Apostolou's *Seduction and Death in Muriel Spark's Fiction* (2001) and Gerardine Meaney's *(Un)Like Subjects: Women, theory, fiction* (1993) that I have previously referred to in this thesis.

which reminded me how, like Harvey, we are discussing 'a fictional character in the *Book of Job*, called God.'[324] By reading *Job*'s God and Effie only as fictional, literary characters, the reader can evaluate the effects they have upon their respective narratives. To begin my analysis, I will compare Effie's placement within *The Only Problem* with God in the text of *Job*, to begin to uncover how Effie can inhabit the role of God in Spark's biblical narrative.

Effie Almighty

Both Effie and God feature significantly in their respective prologues. The prologue of *The Only Problem* is the only section of the novel in which Effie speaks. Though Effie is present in the novel's epilogue, it is only her physical body, as Harvey is called to identify her after her violent death. God, on the other hand, is present and vocal in the latter section of *Job*'s 'dialogues', where he appears from a whirlwind to chastise Job and his friends (Job 38- 41). He is also present in the epilogue, instructing Job's friends to make a sacrifice to him (Job 42:8).

However, the most significant parallel between both texts is emphasised through God and Effie's absences from the main part of their narrative plots. In the text of *Job*, God is absent from the 'dialogues'; however, his characteristics are discussed at length by Job and his friends. God's cause for Job's suffering is the central focus for Job's deliberations; though, at this point in the text, God does not care to contribute to the conversation. Likewise, Effie does not physically appear throughout Part Two of Spark's novel yet is the central focus of the plot. Effie's actions, primarily enacted through her terrorism, propel the narrative: and, as a result, the central characters are developed in reaction to Effie's deeds. This is particularly true of our understanding of Harvey, and to a certain extent Ruth, who appears to fill Effie's 'gap' in the narrative. Every character is thus defined by their relationship to Effie, and the direction of the plot is motivated by her (bad) actions. Harvey moves to a secluded house near St Dié, both to emulate the spartan lifestyle of Job,[325] but also to hide his whereabouts from Effie.[326] Although Effie is absent, her terrorism and its motivations are discussed throughout the main body of the text, just as God's motivations are questioned by Job and his friends.

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[324] Spark, *TOP*, 135.
[325] Ibid., 13. Edward explains how Harvey had 'the minimum of stuff to keep him going' through writing his thesis on *Job*.
[326] Ibid., 20-1. The narrator illustrates how Effie finds his address 'in a quite unpremeditated way'.

So, what are the implications of employing Effie in the role of God? It could be argued that Effie's divine narrative role invites questions surrounding the nature of divine responsibility of suffering that arise from the text of *Job*. The reader is aware that Job's suffering is caused by God's bet with the Adversary (Job 1), whereas Job is unaware. When read comparatively with *The Only Problem*, this leads us to question: if God is to blame for Job's suffering, is Effie solely to blame for Harvey's? This question is considered by Harvey himself before Effie's death:

> 'Is it only by recognising how flat would be the world without the suffering of others that we know how desperately becalmed our own lives would be without suffer? Do I suffer on Effie's account? Yes, and perhaps I can live by that experience. We all need something to suffer about.'[327]

Though I have previously argued that, like Job in his epilogue, Harvey's suffering would not end with Effie's death, it seems that this is the catalyst through which Harvey can consequently conclude his thesis, and thus understand the 'only problem' of suffering. As a result, it seems that the ending of Spark's novel has been praised for this supposed resolution. Bryce Christensen believes that

> 'The ending of the novel, like the ending of *Job*, conveys a genuine sense of the satisfaction Harvey finally finds through his belated recognition that the beneficent God in whom he believes has shaped his own life into a *Job*-like narrative.'[328]

It is debatable whether the ending of *Job* truly conveys a genuine sense of satisfaction, and I argue that Harvey is fully responsible for shaping his life into a *Job*-like narrative. However, Christensen's argument highlights the metatextual implications of who the 'beneficent God' is within the text of *The Only Problem.* Though she is not 'beneficent', if Effie is playing God, has she shaped Harvey's life into a *Job*-like narrative? Likewise, it could also be argued that Spark, in creating the novel to mimic the *Job*-ian form, plays the metatextual role of Harvey's God(-like author) who has shaped his life in this way, although this is something I will discuss further in this chapter.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that this interpretation of Effie's role in Harvey's life, divine or otherwise, aligns with the textual, patriarchal function of the female characters in the Hebrew Bible, that serve only to further the tale of their male counterparts. However,

[327] Ibid., 153.
[328] Bryce Christensen. '"The Latter End of Job", 143.

what happens when Spark's 'bad' female character does seem to assume the divine role of God in the text, and what are the subsequent theological implications of reading Effie this way? To what extent does the God of the Hebrew Bible present as 'feminine', and consequently, can the feminine divine exist? To answer this question, I will focus on Athalya Brenner's examination of God's gender performance within the Hebrew Bible; and subsequently, the text of Job 38:29, in which God discusses the presence of his 'womb'.

The Womb of God: The Theological Reading of Effie as God

This reading is primarily concerned with the presentation of the feminine divine. If Effie is defined by her negative feminine characteristics, is it possible that, as a woman, she can be elevated to the role of God? In my previous chapter I argued that the patriarchal context and framework of the Hebrew Bible necessitated the prevalence of men over their female counterparts. But to what extent does God himself present as feminine, and for what means? By analysing Brenner's work on God's 'femininity', I will investigate the theological complications that arise through Effie's attempt to inhabit the role of God in Spark's novel.

In the Hebrew Bible, God is presented primarily as a Male figure, although it may be obvious that he is 'not simply a male', as Athalya Brenner points out.[329] She argues that the presentation of God's 'gendered' attributes is exhibited through the nature of his relationship with his people. In the Hebrew Bible, Brenner argues that, to his people, 'God is primarily depicted as a single M parent, cast and stereotyped from the outset as the Great Father.'[330] This depiction began in Genesis, when God, the father, 'exiles Adam and Eve, his rebellious children, from the original homestead after they have eaten from the forbidden tree of knowledge'.[331] Brenner explains that despite this, there are 'some instances [in which God] is likened to a woman, and specifically, to woman-as-mother',[332] however that the 'references to the motherhood of God […] are still rare.'[333] She continues by adding that although the existence of these references 'cannot be denied, it should neither be overstated nor magnified out of proportion. Accrediting YHWH with

[329] Athalya Brenner, "The Hebrew God and His Female Complements", *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies,* edited by Timothy K. Beal and David M. Gunn. (London: Routledge, 1997), 56.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Ibid.
[332] Ibid. 69. Brenner notes that these specific examples can be found in Numbers 11:12, Psalms 123:2, Hosea 11, but mainly in Isaiah 40-66.
[333] Ibid.

motherhood is but another stratagem for filling his F lack.'[334] Thus Brenner argues that any attribution of motherhood to the God of the Hebrew Bible is a mere strategy used to ascribe to him some token feminine characteristics. In doing so, God presents as wholly 'omniscient, omnipotent, immanent' and self-reliant.[335] This is clearly within the interests of the text, as Brenner reminds us that 'it is not too far-fetched to expect the social realities of the patriarchal order to be reflected in the design of the of the biblical construction known as the Hebrew god.'[336] By presenting some feminine characteristics, God thus negates the need for a feminine counterpart, and thus the exoneration of the masculine divine is preserved. Likewise, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz asserts that 'the deification of masculinity justifies the social order even as it interprets and shapes the meaning of masculinity.'[337] The social order Eilberg-Schwartz discusses is found through the patriarchal prevalence of (upright) men's stories over women's.[338] This is a common trend throughout the Hebrew Bible, as I previously explored in my previous chapter on the presentation of its women.

With Brenner's argument in mind, it is interesting to consider the multiple instances in which the *Book of Job* discusses the 'womb'. The most obvious example of this exists within *Job*'s prologue, when Job declares: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21-2) Lillian Klein points out how, in the text of *Job*, 'both life and death are identified with the woman's womb, decried by males but claimed by both earthly man and the male God.'[339] She continues to argue that 'woman is either a womb that gives birth to a man's grief or a failed womb. It is hard to know which is better. Either way, there is no potential for a woman to be righteous in this text.'[340] Klein's argument recalls the interpretation of Job's wife's speech in the prologue, and further develops how she cannot be seen as righteous.[341] However, what becomes apparent is the prevalence of God's divine 'womb' over the human woman's womb. The existence of God's 'womb' is presented to the reader when God emerges from the whirlwind. God questions of Job:

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[334] Ibid.
[335] Ibid. 56
[336] Ibid. 57.
[337] Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, "Feminism, Freud, and the Father God" in *God's Phallus: and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 15
[338] I use 'upright' as a tongue-in-cheek reference to Job, but also to account for the fact that the Hebrew Bible focuses primarily on the stories of Patriarchs who fear God.
[339] Klein, "Job and the Womb", *Wisdom Literature*, 199.
[340] Ibid., 200.
[341] This subsequently begs the question: if Job's wife cannot be righteous, can Effie?

‘“Has the rain a father,
or who has begotten the drops of dew?
From whose womb did the ice come forth,
and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?
The waters become hard like stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen.”’ (Job 38:28-30)

When we consider Brenner’s exploration of God’s ‘gender performance’, it is clear to see in this section how the text features both the opposing attributes of God as the father, and the imagery of ‘God’s womb’, within a few sentences. God is presented as the father of the rain, which is immediately contrasted by his ‘womb’ that gives birth to the hoarfrost of heaven (Job 38:29). Thus, this passage merely serves to highlight the notions of begetting and creation: and subsequently, God’s possession of a ‘womb’ within this context only functions as a literary metaphor for creation. Nevertheless, it appears that God’s ‘womb’ does not function in the same manner as the one of the human, Hebrew Bible women. Through its specific inclusion in the context of the whirlwind (in which God clearly displays his might), it is evident that the implication is that God’s ‘womb’ is always powerful. In this way, I argue that God’s personification as F (through the attribution of his womb) acts simultaneously to prove the ease with which he can inhabit the role of mother and Creator. The ease of this personification is marked by the absence of God’s physical body. Eilberg-Schwartz argues that we ‘think of God the father as lacking a body and hence as beyond sexuality. Without a body, God obviously can have no sexual organ.’[342] This further exemplifies the use of God’s ‘womb’ as a metaphor in the text. As such, both God’s ‘disembodied’ and ‘incorporeal’ form, and his ability to obtain both M and F attributes, suggest that God is beyond the constructs of sexuality.[343] Eilberg-Schwartz discusses to what extent this idea ‘has been generated’, both historically and culturally, through a ‘discomfort in the idea of God’s penis’.[344] That being said, it is clear that this exoneration of God’s desexualised masculinity has prevailed throughout antiquity.

How does this then effect how we read Effie as a feminine deity? As I have previously mentioned, Effie fulfils the role of the ‘failed’ Matriarch by giving up her child, Clara. When considering Klein’s above comment on the ‘failed womb’, can Effie’s ‘human’ womb therefore symbolise the birth of Harvey’s grief and suffering?[345] This reading is confused by the metatextual notions of Effie’s authorship (and therefore, divine responsibility) of Harvey’s suffering. However, if Effie represents the ‘failed’ Matriarch,

[342] Eilberg-Schwartz, “Introduction”, *God’s Phallus,* 1.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Ibid.
[345] Klein, “Job and the Womb”, *Wisdom Literature,* 200.

and embodies the negative feminine characteristics, is it possible for Effie's to reflect the character of God? I argue that due to Effie's implied sexual deviancy, and her refusal to inhabit the role as Mother-figure, this eradicates the possibility of the continuation of her status of the feminine divine. This is fulfilled by her death in the penultimate pages of the novel, which serves to act as her own biblical 'whirlwind'.

The Whirlwinds Compared

To grasp the devastation of Effie's divine fallout, it is imperative to compare the respective whirlwinds of each text. In the *Book of Job*, God's appearance from the whirlwind is cacophonous and chastising, while Effie's whirlwind however is marked by silence. The biblical whirlwind is presented as thus:

> 'THEN the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:
> "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
> Gird up your loins like a man,
> I will question you, and you shall declare to me.
> "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:1-4)'

The whirlwind of *Job* appears to be a particular interest of Harvey's ruminations on the text, both in his discussions and thesis. At the beginning of the novel, he and Edward discuss the presentation of God's characterisation in the whirlwind. Harvey claims that

> '"God as a character comes out badly, very badly. Thunder and bluster and I'm Me, who are you? Putting on an act. Behold now Leviathan. Behold now Behemoth. Ha ha, among the trumpets. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? And Job, insincerely and wrongly, says, 'I am vile.''[346]

Harvey believes that God as a character does not come across well, and thus argues that Job's response to God is not only wrong, but insincere. In the text, Job says to God: "I had heard you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5-6) David Clines appears to agree with Harvey's assertation, arguing that 'it was no beatific vision of the deity that Job wished for, but a face to face confrontation that would lead to his exculpation. What has happened now is the worst of outcomes.'[347] As I previously mentioned, Harvey argues that, despite his

[346] Spark, *TOP*, 30.
[347] David Clines. "The Wisdom of Job's Conclusion (Job 42:1-6)" in *Goochem in Mokum, Wisdom in Amsterdam: Papers on Biblical and Related Wisdom Read at the Fifteenth Joint Meeting of the Society of*

plump reward, Job 'continued to suffer'.[348] This mirrors Harvey's own epilogue: though it seems that Effie's death should mark the 'genuine sense of satisfaction' Christensen discusses, its implication suggests it is likely that Harvey should still suffer on account of Effie, through the mourning of her death and his continued existence without her.[349] Despite his unsatisfactory response and 'thunder and bluster', God has naturally prevailed in *Job*'s ending. Conversely, the presentation of Effie's whirlwind is characterised by her deafening silence. I believe that of a theological reading of the text would prioritise the prevalence of the masculine deity over the feminine, and as such, Effie must die. Effie's whirlwind is thus symbolic of her inability to fully inhabit the role of God of Spark's biblical tale.

As I have previously argued, both Effie and Lise's deaths are presented as factual and devoid of emotion, highlighting the cold nature in which they are reported, and re-inscribed, by their surrounding male counterparts in the narrative. This is also exemplified through the narrator's presentation of Effie's body. This focus on Effie's physical form functions in two manners: the first emphasises how Harvey relates Effie's dead body to the figure Job's wife in the painting. Fontini Apostolou argues that:

> 'Harvey's eros is directed toward his wife through her identification with the wife of Job in the painting, therefore killing her in her resemblance to the dead signifier, long before Effie is actually murdered by the police. Her dead body finally comes to foreground the unique union of death, eros, and the work of art.'[350]

In the first chapter of this thesis, I argued that Spark utilised La Tour's beautiful painting to textually signify the deep love Harvey seems to have for Effie. However, as Apostolou points out, Effie is consequently re-written in her death. Harvey's conflation of Effie with La Tour's portrayal of Job's wife mimics the patriarchal motivations and interests of the Hebrew Bible and through her death, Effie returns to her status as Harvey's wife. Effie's death not only demotes her from her divine status but re-writes her as a well-behaved woman, or what Bailey calls 'a neatly inscribed body'.[351] The secondary focus is on Effie's face. Her mouth, 'drawn slightly to the side', highlights the symbolic silence of her whirlwind: there are no declarations in Effie's brutal death.[352]

Old Testament Study and the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap, Amsterdam, July 2012, ed. by George J. Brooke and Pierre van Hecke. (Leiden: Brill, 2016) 42.

[348] Spark, *TOP*, 29.

[349] Christensen, "The Latter End of Job", 173.

[350] Fontini E Apostolou, "Deadly Desires: The Inscription of the Body as Initiation into Narrative", *Seduction and Death*, 36.

[351] Bailey, 'Salutary Scars', 39.

[352] Spark, *TOP*, 186-7. See p. 41 of this thesis for the full quotation of Effie's death.

I argue that the theological reading of Effie as God thus necessitates Effie's death to prioritise the exoneration of the masculine and divine, which naturally coincides with the condemnation of the feminine and human. By exploring God's presentation and relationship to his people within the Hebrew Bible, I concluded that Effie, as a deviant woman, could not be placed in the role of God. Her death is arguably utilised as a punishment for trying to become God, however it is not clear who would be punishing her: God, or the God-author, Spark? This question led me to investigate the reading Effie as God metatextually. In what way does Effie seek to gain agency over the narrative, and does this make her divine? To explore this reading, I will further consider the work of Meaney and Apostolou, and the metatextual nature of Spark's work.

The Death of Author: The Metatextual Reading of Effie as God

Though Effie's death could be read as her whirlwind and subsequent downfall, it could, metatextually, be considered as her victory. When considering the metatextual implications of a character's death, Apostolou argues that 'the one who masters death is the one who constructs the master-plot, destroys all other fictions and dominates the narrative.'[353] This statement thus encouraged me consider the extent to which authorship and the divine were conflated in Spark's novel, though this could be influenced by the critical reception of Spark as 'god-like author', as I have previously discussed many times in this thesis.[354] However, Gerardine Meaney argues that 'if the author is God in Spark's novels, then the author surrogates would indicate that God is female, omniscient, violent and unreliable.'[355] This assertion directly contrasts with presuppositions proposed by the theological reading of Effie as God. Nevertheless, Meaney concludes that it is 'Effie [who] is the divine author in *The Only Problem*.'[356]

This metatextual reading however, necessitates the recognition of the idea of the death of the patriarchal God known to us through the Hebrew Bible. Though a full exploration on the origin of the concept of 'the death of God' is not within the scope of this thesis, it is interesting to consider how it affects the metatextual reading of Effie's role within *The Only Problem.* To give a brief, basic definition, "God is dead" was a phrase that was explored extensively in the Enlightenment era, particularly by the German philosophers Hegel and Nietzche. The phrase had two significant meanings: firstly, that it

[353] Apostolou, "Deadly Desires", *Seduction and Desire,* 37.
[354] Bailey, 'Salutary Scars', 36.
[355] Meaney, *(Un)like Subjects,* 190.
[356] Ibid.

metaphorically symbolised the lack of society's *need* for God's continued existence, through the practice of self-enlightenment; and secondly, it suggested the literal death of the Christian God, who, at one point, is argued to have physically existed. It is thus interesting to consider how the phrase can be considered in conjunction to a reading of *The Only Problem*, which naturally relies on the biblical text of *Job* as its source material. It is clear, too, that the God found in *Job* is most certainly not dead.[357] However, it is evident that both Apostolou and Meaney's reading of Effie as the divine author (or, the master of death) necessitates the death of God. Through the death of God, the patriarchal signifier, Effie can (meta)textually fulfil and maintain her role as the feminine divine.

This subsequently calls into question the metatextual implications of Spark's role as Effie's 'God-like' divine author. To what extent does Effie become 'the divine author' of *The Only Problem*, as Meaney argues? When read comparatively with *Job*, could it be argued that Effie and Spark together act as Harvey's own God and Adversary, conspiring together to cause Harvey to suffer?[358] These are all viable readings however, in order to develop the analysis of this metatextual reading, it is imperative to consider how Roland Barthes' twentieth century essay, 'The Death of the Author', simultaneously supports and complicates the relationship between Spark and the elusive Effie.

The Death of Spark, the Author

In his ground-breaking essay, 'The Death of the Author' (1967), Roland Barthes concludes that 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.'[359] Barthes argues against the traditional mode of reading that necessitates the intentions of the author. He explains that 'it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is […] to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'.'[360] Barthes advocates for the transformation from 'The Author' to 'the scriptor': through the entitlement of 'The Author', Barthes conflates notions of authorship and authority, likening this mode of reading to the 'single "theological" meaning' and '"message" of the Author-God'.[361] He thus compares 'The Author's' relationship to his work as 'the same antecedence […] as a

[357] Though is also amusing to consider how closely "*dieu est mort*" resembles Harvey's infamous "*dieu est merde*".
[358] I was unfortunately unable to further develop this idea in my work but felt it was an interesting possibility and worth mentioning!
[359] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* 2nd edition, ed. By W. E. Cain and others. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010), 1326.
[360] Ibid. 1323.
[361] Ibid. 1324.

father to his child'.[362] The 'scriptor', however, is 'cut off from any voice', his hand 'traces a field without origin' other 'than language itself […] which ceaselessly calls into question all origins'.[363] Barthes concludes by stating that 'Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing.'[364] He argues that it is through the liberation from the text's ultimate meaning that this mode of reading becomes a revolutionary activity. Barthes' essay thus promotes the prioritisation on the interpretation of the reader, rather than authorial intent. So, how does Barthes' argument affect the reader's interpretation of Effie's role within *The Only Problem*? I argue that the knowledge and application of 'The Death of the Author' encourages fruitful discussions on the metatextual methods behind Spark's *Job*-like novel. It could be argued that the employment of Effie within a divine authorial role seeks to disrupt the patriarchal readings of texts based on the Hebrew Bible. This is emphasised through Effie's presentation as a problematic female character mastering death to become divine.

Though I have demonstrated how Spark has utilised female literary archetypes and typecasts in her novels, particularly in her creation of Jean Brodie, Lise, and Effie, I argued that these were utilised in order to pose questions on the societal expectations of women's behaviour, and that their deaths were not to be specifically read as punishment at the hands of Spark. Instead, Apostolou discussed how 'all her characters seem to share a compulsion to repeat, as they continuously pursue […] death' as a means of escaping from their narrative, societal structures. [365] He elaborates by writing:

> 'Who could deny the death impulse immanent in all novelistic characters? Or, who can deny the death drive that leads authors to writing? Undoubtedly, the author is dead as soon as the work of art comes into being, but Spark is also interested in what takes place before that death, before the end of the work of art, during the process of writing, or even before it begins.'[366]

Apostolou adds that 'the author-characters' relationship with their works is a relationship of love and hate, death and life, presence and absence'.[367] His argument suggests that Spark and Effie both have similar motivations: their immanent death drives. Not only are they similarly motivated however, but do they become synonymous with each other. By

[362] Ibid.
[363] Ibid.
[364] Ibid. 1325.
[365] Apostolou, "Prologue", *Seduction and Death*, xvi.
[366] Ibid., "Textasy: Writing and Being Written", 29.
[367] Ibid.

placing Effie in a divine role, Effie subsequently acts a signifier for Spark herself; and as such, Spark must face her own divine, authorial death.

The question that remains is this: to what extent does Spark's association with her critical reception as a Catholic author influence this reading? It is arguable that Spark's insistence on the importance of her conversion on her ability to write her novels has necessitated this interpretation. In her own discussion her conversion, she wrote: 'I'm quite sure that my conversion gave me something to work on as a satirist… I never think of myself as a Catholic when I'm writing because it's so difficult to think of myself as anything else. It's all instinctive.'[368] Here Spark is claiming that her role as a Catholic, and as a novelist, is merely an extension of herself. This is different from her critical reception as a meddlesome, cruel author, motivated to 'punish' her characters. Yet I argue that these patriarchal notions of the divine, The Author, and God, thus become complicated in Spark's writing. Gerardine Meaney seems to agree with this and argues that 'Spark is often read as a novelist who revitalizes and validates the assumption of authorial omniscience.'[369] However, Meaney writes how '*The Driver's Seat* insists on quite a different reading. In the figure of Lise, Spark parodies the aspiration to authority, particularly her own aspiration to authority as a woman writer.'[370] Meaney's statements remind us that this metatextual evaluation of Spark is extended to all of her characters, not just Effie. Meaney's connection between Spark and *The Driver's Seat* alludes to the drive of Lise's existence: not only that Lise could control her death, but that she could also control how she was perceived. This is how, Meaney argues, that 'Spark focuses on the feminine as death and the end of representation.'[371] Through the death of her female characters, Spark thus attempts to promote their divine agency, not only in how they are represented, but their ability to 'construct their master-plot', just as Apostolou argued.[372]

The difficulty of Spark's authorial omniscience is complicated through her status as a woman, entrenched within the patriarchal signifiers: not only intrinsically to her the patriarchal nature of her religion but also in her pursuit of her role as a writer, which historically was a male endeavour. However, Meaney writes that

> 'The consistent metaphor of the author as God within her own text has lent weight to such an identification. That the author is a woman and that her relationship to the novel form is one of the radical interrogation already puts the metaphor into question. However, Spark's attempt to

[368] Spark, "My Conversion" in *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. by Joseph Hynes. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1992), 26.
[369] Gerardine Meaney. "The Power of the Ending", *(Un)like Subjects*, 185-6.
[370] Ibid.
[371] Ibid., "Unknowing and the True-Real", 162.
[372] Apostolou, "Deadly Desires", *Seduction and Death*, 37.

> breach the self-reflexive circularity of metafiction confronts a similar impasse to that confronted by the woman who must speak, but finds subjectivity in language entails subjection.'[373]

This self-reflexive circularity that Meaney describes is arguably made apparent through Spark's relationship to her female characters: through enacting and portraying their deaths, Spark enters the cyclical interpretation of her motivations as inherently feminist, or anti-feminist. This difficulty lies in the subjectivity of her role as both a woman and a writer of women. This is thus the problem with the interpretation of 'The Death of the Author': is it only the male author who becomes elusive and free from subjectivity? Is it possible for Effie, a signifier of the 'bad' woman and the divine author, to be fully free from interpretation? Is it possible for Spark?

I argue that these questions raised from this metatextual reading are better to remain unresolved. While I am aware that no author or their work is free from the interpretation of its readers, I argue that the purpose of a metatextual reading is to invite us to question the relationship between the author, reader, and the character. In exploring the methods of this reading, primarily through the works of Apostolou and Meaney, I investigated Effie's elevation to the divine author of *The Only Problem* and argued that this created a symbiotic relationship between Effie and Spark. Although I found the metatextual reading compelling, I felt it did not adequately align with my analysis and beliefs of Effie's presentation in the text. This led me to explore the literary reading of Effie as God: by comparing the characteristics of Effie and *Job's* God, I argue that this approach allows us to evaluate the narrative effects these characters have on their (biblical) tales.

Effie as Harvey's God: The Literary Reading of Effie as God

In the previous chapter, I analysed the qualities present in Effie's characterisation. Due to Effie's intertextual relationship to Job's wife, I considered the traits present in the women of the Hebrew Bible and concluded that Effie could represent both the 'failed' Matriarch and the disappearing woman.[374] When read in comparison to her female counterparts in Spark's other novels, I argued that Effie could also be read as the *femme fatale* and the hysteric. These comparisons led me to question: to what extent could Effie represent God

[373] Meaney, "Something Other", *(Un)like Subjects*, 190.
[374] As I have previously argued, the intertextual connections between Effie and Job's wife thus account for Effie's absence in the epilogue. It is in this way she presents as the disappearing woman.

in *The Only Problem*? By employing the literary reading of Effie as God, I argue that, when read comparatively, Effie and the God of *Job* present very similar characteristics. With the use of biblical literary criticism, I will begin my analysis by investigating the presentation of God's characterisation in the text of *Job*.

T. C. Ham correctly points out that 'the character of God in the book of Job appears to defy coherent portrayal.'[375] This is due, in part, to the differences between God's actions in *Job*'s prologue, and God's presentation of himself in the whirlwind. Ham argues God initially appears as 'capricious', who 'puts Job through inconceivable pain and loss over a cosmic wager against the Adversary.'[376] Then, 'when Job asks for an answer, he receives an angry rebuke' through the whirlwind. [377] Harvey, too, states that 'it is God who asks the questions in Job's book.'[378] In Job 38-41, God postulates his greatness, which is displayed in his creations displayed across the earth. Leonard Mare investigates how

> 'God is portrayed here as the Creator, the Almighty, the Omniscient, the one who holds everything in his hand has everything under his control. The image that the author provides for God here is that of the sovereign, holy God who is answerable to no-one'.[379]

Mare highlights the tensions created by God's assertion of his own characteristics. However, this exoneration goes unquestioned by the biblical text, and thus prevails through Job's defeat and admission that he was wrong to question God. We are thus reminded how, in Spark's biblical tale, Harvey argued that "God as a character comes out badly, very badly."[380] Ham concludes, 'seems boastful, callous and sardonic.'[381]

Though these readings of God's character are valid, Mare argues that there exists a distinct difference between God, and the character of God in the biblical text. He states that 'Old Testament descriptions of God should not be understood of aspects of his self-revelation, but as human depictions of God.'[382] As I have previously argued, the biblical text was written in order reflect the societal conventions of its time, yet we are aware that we have no way to truly ascertain the authorial intention of the authors of its stories. There thus exists an author (or authors) that sought to depict the character of Job and God in this manner. David Clines argues 'the book of Job exists, that is, because its author needed it to

[375] T. C. Ham, 'The Gentle Voice of God in Job 38.*' Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, no. 3 (2013) 527.
[376] Ibid.
[377] Ibid.
[378] Ibid. 180
[379] Leornard Mare, 'The God of Job.' *Verbum et Ecclesiastia* 33, no. 1. (2012) 4.
[380] Spark, *TOP*, 29.
[381] Ham, 'The Gentle Voice of God', 527.
[382] Mare, 'The God of Job', 5.

exist: that is the implication of a book that consists of such a narrative.'[383] Clines further argues how the text could be regarded as a dream belonging to its author, that 'creates the character Job as an image of himself; or rather, he dreams himself as Job.'[384]

Regardless of the text's intention, which will remain unknown to us, it is important to understand how God functions as a character within the text. Mare argues that

> 'It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the characterisation of God in the Bible and the character of God in reality. Consequently, it is required that we differentiate between the 'textual God' and the 'actual God'. The textual God is a literary representation; the actual God is a living reality.'[385]

Mare explains that 'the textual God is thus a literary creation of the author and consequently God becomes a fictional character in a story.'[386] He concludes his argument by stating that 'the portrayal of God should thus not be understood as a revelation of who God really is, but he is a literary construct created by a human author to fulfil a specific role in the narrative.'[387] Although I agree with Mare that this distinction is necessary when evaluating God in a literary sense, it seems only necessary to separate the textual from the 'real' God if you believe in him, which subsequently is 'the problem' that 'torments' Harvey throughout Spark's tale.[388]

However, Harvey does make a distinction between the God of Job and God the Creator. After the press conference that Harvey holds, where he is accused of blaspheming that "Dieu est merde*"*,[389] the narrator presents a heated conversation between Harvey and his reverent Auntie Pet:

> '"I saw you on the television and it's all in the paper. How could you blaspheme in that terrible way, saying those things about your Creator?" "Auntie Pet, you've got to understand that I said nothing whatsoever about God, I mean our Creator. What I was talking about was a fictional character in the *Book of Job*, called God."'[390]

This observation of Harvey's thoughts marks the beginning of his detachment of the God in *Job,* from God, the 'Creator'. However, this also exemplifies the importance of reading

[383] Clines, 'Why is There a Book of Job?', *Interested Parties,* 13.
[384] Ibid.
[385] Mare, 'The God of Job', 5.
[386] Ibid.
[387] Ibid., 6.
[388] Spark, *TOP,* 19.
[389] Ibid., 123.
[390] Ibid., 135

God as a fictional character within the text, and the implications this has on how we can read Effie as God.

Mare argues that the problematic characterisation of God in the *Book of Job* is not concurrent with the reality of God. However, I argue the characterisation of God in the text of *Job* is consistent in its portrayal. Through his actions in the prologue and his speech in the whirlwind, God is thus read as capricious, boastful, callous and sardonic.[391] This aligns with the presentation of Effie in *The Only Problem*: though Effie exhibits the various qualities of the women she reflects intertextually, she, too, is consistent in her presentation. Although our awareness of Effie's qualities is often through the lens of Harvey or other characters in the text, it is clear that Effie is defined by and condemned for her 'bad' characteristics, particularly her pursuit of terrorism. When read comparatively, it is evident that both Effie and God are negatively interpreted by the presentation of their 'bad' characteristics.

What is crucial to this reading is the distinction between the character and the reader: to Harvey, Effie resembles the character of Job's wife. To the reader, Effie plays the role of God in Spark's biblical text. She is the (main) cause of Harvey's suffering, whose death is symbolic of Harvey's continuous suffering, just as God's whirlwind symbolises the continuation of Harvey's suffering. Thus, I believe that Effie can inhabit the literary role of God in Spark's biblical text.

[391] Ham, 'The Gentle Voice of God', 527.

Conclusion

"The book of Job will never come clear.
It doesn't matter; it's a poem."[392]

This sentence marks the conclusion of Harvey Gotham's thesis in *The Only Problem.* Here, Harvey illustrates an exegetical point that mirrors Spark's own writing: that 'the construction of the Book of Job is a poetic joy'.[393] In her essay, 'An Unknown Author", Spark reminds us that *Job* 'is the one book of the Bible that we are not invited to take literally'.[394] Spark argues that this is suggested to the reader due to the text's presentation. It seems then that Spark appeals to the impenetrability of the poetic form, arguing then that the *Book of Job* should not make sense, and we should not try to make sense of it. Of course, this may present itself as a hypocritical standpoint. To what extent was Spark motivated to make *Job* 'come clear' in her execution of *The Only Problem*?[395] In my introduction, I illustrated the ways in which Harvey became a mouthpiece for Spark's own critical views of the exegetical problems found within the biblical text. However, it is clear that Spark's work contributes to a longstanding cultural investigation into the elusive, slippery meaning of the biblical book of *Job*.

Throughout this thesis, I have sought to explore Spark's unique presentation of *Job*, and have argued that Harvey's problematic, terrorist wife, Effie, can be read simultaneously to reflect the characters of Job's wife and God from their biblical text. In my analysis, I have utilised feminist and literary criticism, and have concluded that the negative characteristics found in the presentation of Effie's character matches that of the capricious, sardonic God found in *Job.* To fully reflect my findings, I will summarise my arguments found in each chapter.

In the first chapter, I have sought to uncover the ways in which Effie represents the character of Job's wife in the biblical text. The main similarities appeared when I aligned the structure of the biblical text and Spark's elusive, biblical tale, while assuming that if Harvey represented Job in the biblical text, Effie must act as Job's wife. Through comparison of the speeches of Job's wife and Effie in their prologues, there appeared to be distinct parallels between how each woman was understood as having rebelled from their

[392] Spark, *TOP*, 132.
[393] Spark, "An Unknown Author", *Golden Fleece*, 199.
[394] Ibid., 198.
[395] Ibid., 132.

husbands. These comparisons were further evaluated by examining Spark's use of Georges de La Tour's painting, *Job Visited by His Wife* in *The Only Problem*. I found that the inclusion of this enigmatic painting was crucial to the plot: not only does it symbolise Harvey's hope to emulate Job, but it also connects Effie to her multiple biblical counterparts, including Job's wife and Eve. The painting's intertextual layers are thus entangled in Spark's biblical tale, while simultaneously introducing the deep love and suffering Harvey endures on account of Effie. His constant assertion of the physical 'resemblance of Effie in Job's wife's face' is symbolic of his naïve hope that Effie would 'resemble' the wife of Job found in La Tour's painting.[396] The exploration of La Tour's painting allowed me to conclude that Effie's death and absence from the epilogue was crucial to Harvey's plot. However, this absence still connected Effie to Job's wife, who is also missing from Job's epilogue. I also came to recognise that Effie's role as Job's wife is further complicated by the inclusion of her sister, Ruth. Thus, I began to question to what extent Job's wife and Effie's exclusion from their epilogues could be read as necessary: both in order to prioritise the narrative of their male counterparts, and additionally to punish both women from rebelling against their husbands in each of their prologues.

I concluded that the primary reading of Effie within *The Only Problem* focused on her role in Harvey's life, and how Harvey begins to reckon with the plight and problem of suffering. However, the more I analysed Effie's characterisation, the more apparent the ways in which the 'bad' qualities of Effie were seemingly reminiscent of Spark's other problematic female characters and other women of the Hebrew Bible. This led me to question: what are the consequences of Effie reflecting the characteristics of both her Sparkian and Hebrew Bible female counterparts? How does it affect her role in *The Only Problem*, and, as a result, is it possible for her to play the role of God in Spark's biblical tale? In order to answer these questions, I sought to investigate how the negative attributes of both the women of the Hebrew Bible and the women of Spark's other novels were presented in the characterisation of the elusive Effie Gotham in the second chapter.

Through analysis of the reception history and criticism of female characters in the Hebrew Bible, it was clear to see how the female 'archetype' had evolved (or not evolved) from the ancient text to the 'modern' representations of women that exist within Spark's fiction. I explored the female archetypes that existed in her novels, specifically *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Driver's Seat,* and by extension the women of the Hebrew Bible. This was necessary in order to discover the influence these characterisations had on the presentation of Effie, and to further explore the vast layers of intertextuality entangled

[396] Spark, *TOP*, 49.

in Spark's biblical novel. I argued that Effie reflects characteristics present in the women of the Hebrew Bible, and that of the more modern, *femme fatale.* Due to her connection to Job's wife, I researched Eve's presentation in the Hebrew Bible, and thus compared the ways in which Effie and Eve resemble each other. Finally, I discussed how Spark's inclusion of Ruth could complicate Effie's role as Job's wife. I considered how the sisters could be read in conjunction to the women of the Hebrew Bible, and thus likened them to Rachel and Leah. I concluded that both women could be seen to represent Job's wife in Spark's tale. Due to both the narrative and structural parallels between *The Only Problem* and the *Book of Job*, I argued then that Spark's placement of Effie within the narrative aligned her with both the character of Job's wife, and also *Job*'s God. I thus sought to compare the similarities between Effie and the character of God in the *Book of Job,* and analysed the subsequent readings that arise from this interpretation.

By focusing on the theological, metatextual and literary readings, the third and final chapter examined the consequences of understanding Effie as God in *The Only Problem*. The theological reading focused on God's gender performance in the Hebrew Bible, and thus concluded that Effie's negative, feminine characteristics prohibited her from being elevated to a divine role in the text. I compared the presentation of both God and Effie's 'whirlwinds' and argued that Effie's attempt to play God must necessitate her death. I then explored the metatextual implications of reading Effie as God, and how this reading created a symbiotic relationship between Effie and Spark, presenting both parties as what I have called 'the authorial divine'. Both the theological and metatextual readings, though helpful in reconciling Effie's role as God, I felt did not work to make *The Only Problem* 'come clear' for me, just as Harvey wishes to make sense of the *Book of Job*.[397] However, I realised that reading Effie as God does not necessarily mean that Effie acts a divine figure, and thus began to explore the literary reading of Effie as God. By comparing the characteristics of Effie with the character of God in the biblical text, I argued that both characters are similarly presented in their respective tales. Therefore, I argued that the importance of Effie's narrative role is not defined by Harvey, but how she is perceived by the reader.

To conclude, I believe that this analysis contributes an innovative mode of reading *The Only Problem.* By focusing on Effie's character instead of Harvey's, I believe there are further intertextual connections and readings of *Job* that become illuminated in the novel. However, as readers, we can recognise that, just like the *Book of Job, The Only Problem* will never come clear, and so indeed reveals the circularity of interpretation.

[397] Spark, *TOP,* 132.

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