‘Gleaming with history-in-darkness’: An Archival Exploration of Muriel Spark’s Fiction from Poetics to Publishing

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Abstract

The Muriel Spark archive, split across several institutions, has prompted new and insightful criticism on Spark and her work, but no one has yet used the archive to construct a portrait of Spark's craft as a novelist, with detailed analyses of *how* she wrote, including the development of her novelistic aesthetic from her beginnings as a poet, the composition process through which her narrative and prose style emerges, or the paratextual negotiations that have informed and framed the publication and reception of her novels. Using archival material from the National Library of Scotland and the Macmillan Archive, and borrowing from methodologies of manuscript analysis such as genetic criticism, I paint some brushstrokes towards this portrait, or better yet a map, of Spark's novel writing insomuch as 'novel writing' refers to a more expansive conception of Spark's creative practice that encompasses poetry and poetics, theories of the novel, the mechanics of composition, and the necessary branding processes of commercial fiction publishing.

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Introduction

> Rough drafts tell […] a secret tale, almost
> always absent from literary biographies, and
> which nevertheless constitute the crux of
> what we would like to know about the author.
> –Pierre-Marc de Biasi[1]

> How does one explain an act of art?
> –Muriel Spark, *Reality and Dreams*[2]

In May 1954 Muriel Spark was exchanging letters with Frank Sheed (of the Sheed & Ward publishing house) about the former's handwritten draft of a stage play entitled *Warrender Chase*. Spark requested a typescript copy of the draft in order to make alterations, but specifically asked for a copy with large margins because, as she says, 'I like to mutilate the margins!',[3] a turn of phrase that, in many ways, captures the central concerns of the present study.

Firstly, it refers literally to the margins of print or manuscript, the space in which writing and rewriting happens; a literary archive collects and draws attention to the otherwise invisible margins – both literal and figurative – of the published work, and I intend to explore those margins, with the aid of the National Library of Scotland (NLS), that constitute Spark's writing practice. Doing so allows a deeper understanding of how Spark was writing at the margins of literary realism; if not mutilating the conventional form of the novel, then certainly disfiguring it in subtle but provocative ways. How Spark created and refined her novelistic technique and aesthetic can be traced back to her training as a poet, and that phrase, 'mutilate the margins', already betrays a poet's sense for the music and rhythm of

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[1] Pierre-Marc de Biasi, 'What is a Literary Draft? Toward a Functional Typology of Genetic Documentation', *Yale French Studies*, 89.89 (1996), pp. 26-58 (p. 29).
[2] Muriel Spark, *Reality and Dreams* (Constable, 1996), p. 110.
[3] The Muriel Spark Archive (TMSA), letter from Spark to Frank Sheed, 6 May 1954, National Library of Scotland (NLS), Acc. 11621/171.

language (the complete sentence almost scans as a line of iambic pentameter).[4] Finally, the context of the sentence, in a letter sent to a publisher (alongside the commercial sense of 'margins'), speaks to the study's interest in the publishing machine through which Spark's work was disseminated: I look closely at the ways Spark and her work was marketed and circulated – from the paratextual strategies of her book covers to the major critical claims made about her novels – as well as what Spark herself wished to project about her writing, especially in relation to emerging publishing and academic trends promoting 'women's writing'. In a sense, the thesis can be located on the margins of Spark criticism: while I draw on the traditional hermeneutics of literary criticism and its associated analytical methods, I also stray away from familiar ground into the new-fangled territory of archival research, but far from mutilating any given critical position, the result is complementary and expands on the kind of hybrid investigations now emerging around Spark's work.

These research aims fall under the remit of textual scholarship which is a catch-all term for a number of distinct but related disciplines such as bibliography, textual criticism, book history, and genetic criticism, among others. If, as Dirk Van Hulle claims, 'rather than mere pigeonholes these fields are interconnected areas of study',[5] my thesis naturally touches upon, borrows from and contributes to all of these strands in one way or another, but it is the methods and ethos of genetic criticism, 'in which texts are studied with a focus on their development', that gives shape to the present study, and around which the thesis is loosely structured.[6] Genetic criticism takes as the object of its study the *process* of creative writing, access to which can be found – at least partially – in the various documents related to the construction of literary texts. Manuscript research has traditionally assumed a supplementary role in the field of literary studies and textual editing, but pioneering genetic critic Louis Hay argued back in 1967 that literary manuscripts 'could actually find its purpose in itself by trying to elucidate the process of poetic creation'.[7] Rather than use manuscript materials to aid traditional literary criticism (like collecting more data on an author's biography), or as a means to trace the origins and changes of important historical texts through different hands and at different times, genetic criticism is instead interested in the creation and evolution of literary works by the same writer, to learn about and evaluate the labour of writing.

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[4] The quote in my title is taken from a Spark poem, 'The Empty Space', both to honour that otherwise neglected facet of her oeuvre and because it eloquently describes the object (and objective) of my research – the 'history-in-darkness' of the archive which I hope to illuminate or 'gleam' in interesting ways.
[5] Dirk Van Hulle, *Genetic Criticism: Tracing Creativity in Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 3.
[6] Luc Herman and John M. Krafft, 'Fast Learner: The typescript of Pynchon's *V.* at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin', *Text Studies in Literature and Language*, 49.1 (2007) pp. 1-20 (p. 1).
[7] Louis Hay quoted in Van Hulle, *Genetic Criticism*, p. 3.

A lot of the work of literary creation occurs in the abstract, in the writer's mind, through a series of feelings and thoughts and a network of associations that is empirically impossible to recreate fully or exactly, even by writers themselves. Fortunately, however, literary archives contain in their documents concrete traces of that creative activity, hard evidence of decision-making, problem solving and experimentation. As such, while reading a writer's mind is impossible, reading a writer's archive is not, and given the recent developments of the 4Es in cognitive science – theories relating to the embedded, embodied, enactive and extended mind – it is now certain that the material and environmental context of our thinking plays a far larger role in cognition than previously thought (while neuroscience has refocussed attention on the brain as the locus of 'cognitive action', the privileging of the organ at the expense of other 'non-neural bodily and environmental factors' ironically perpetuates the outdated assumptions of Cartesian dualism).[8]

The collected stuff of the literary archive, therefore, should be seen as a material embodiment of the writer's mind *at work*, though the nature of these documents, as textuality, should not be ignored; as in fiction, the language inscribed in the archive is open to interpretation. The genetic critic is tasked with turning this 'stuff' – often disorganised or incomplete – into a readable and coherent history of cognitive activity. Such a 'history', however, is rarely straightforward or entirely linear, and in this respect genetic criticism distinguishes itself from related fields like textual editing: the latter traces the evolution of an original, autographed (and often lost) manuscript through the various extant 'witnesses' that act as copies, and presents this information using a stemma, which is 'an oriented graph placing all extant manuscripts in a family tree descended from a usually lost copy, called the archetype'.[9] Textual criticism is primarily concerned with reconstructing, as accurately as possible, the source of a text and identifying deviations made in subsequent 'versions'. As genetic criticism's name implies, it too is interested in beginnings and origins, as well as versions in the form of drafts, but the metaphor and methodology of a family tree is less useful for a description and analysis of the creative process; as Van Hulle explains, '[…] an arboreal model suggests a 'seed' as the beginning of the writing process' and while 'the metaphor is often used in literary criticism […] the reality of concrete writing processes

[8] Miranda Anderson, Michael Wheeler and Mark Sprevak, 'Distributed Cognition and the Humanities', in *Distributed Cognition in Classical Antiquity*, ed. by Miranda Anderson and Douglas Cairns (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 1-17 (p. 2).
[9] Van Hulle, *Genetic Criticism*, p. 10.

indicates that literary geneses seldom grow from one single 'seed''.[10] In lieu of the linear temporality of a family tree, Van Hulle suggests the spatial metaphor of the map.

Unlike the family tree, maps can allow for multiple points or 'seeds' of development, as well as show the relations between them. For example, discussing the genesis of Beckett's *Endgame*, Van Hulle shows how mapping enables the critic to account for those parts of the writing process that do not necessarily find expression in the published work, and this is important because 'the trials and errors that did not lead directly to a publication, indirectly did contribute to the creative process'.[11] Furthermore, a map represents more accurately the presence of multiple and changing intentions on the part of the author, so much so that 'genetic critics no longer see the writer as a monolithic self but as a succession of selves. The writer who cancels a word is already different from the one who wrote it'.[12] Confirming or denying intentions, however, is not the primary purpose of my analysis, because the study is not driven by a biographical curiosity about Spark's 'succession of selves'; Martin Stannard's biography already provides an accomplished treatment of the many-sided Spark.

All the same, grappling with intentionality and the notion of self is inevitable and indeed unavoidable when dealing with a writer's archive, but it need not force critics into biographical fallacies; armed with the far more mutable and fluid conception of selfhood that Van Hulle identifies above, it is easier and less controversial to talk about the writer behind the writing without falling foul of resuscitating Barthes's author. As such, Spark looms over the thesis in the same way that the Typing Ghost presides over the narrative of *The Comforters* – that is, as a present absence with the same ambiguous claims to authority.[13] But these kind of critical quandaries form part of the appeal of genetic criticism, offering as it does new angles from which to see and assess ongoing literary debates like 'abstract theoretical issues relating to matters of authorship, collaboration, authority, agency, intention, and intertextuality'.[14] Interestingly, Van Hulle claims that 'one's critical perspective in these issues colours one's reading of the genesis',[15] but I would argue that, in the case of Spark, the discoveries within the genesis itself has something to say about – and in some cases even challenges – the interpretive assumptions of those critical perspectives that surround Spark's work.

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[10] Ibid., pp. 10-11.
[11] Ibid., p. 11.
[12] Ibid.
[13] In the fourth section of Chapter Two I discuss in more depth Spark's exploration of self, otherness, dialogue and narrative in *The Comforters*.
[14] Ibid., p, xx
[15] Ibid., p. xx.

Consider, for instance, the kind of material research that is already well underway in Spark studies from scholars such as James Bailey, Simon Cooke, and Helen Stoddart, all of whom recently consulted both the archives at the NLS and the McFarlin Library in Tulsa to broaden and contextualise existing arguments on Spark's work. Given the nature of the archival items consulted (manuscript drafts) and the critical objective (to compare versions), much of this research addresses, indirectly, some of the questions posed by genetic critics.

For example, Stoddart clarifies some misconceptions about the editorial history of *Brodie*'s publication in the *New Yorker* by consulting the altered and abridged manuscript copy that Spark submitted to the magazine. While the manuscript, edited by both Spark and *New Yorker* editor Rachel Mackenzie, sheds light on the literary sensibility of the *New Yorker* (and Spark's own assumptions about North American readers), Stoddart argues that this history 'is less interesting for what it may reveal about the *New Yorker*'s editorial culture than for the way it throws into relief Spark's determined forging of a distinctive and unfamiliar literary aesthetic'.[16] Through a comparative close reading of the *New Yorker* and book publication of *Brodie* Stoddart demonstrates the importance of sparse punctuation for Spark's novelistic aesthetic, defined as it is by a 'combined lightness and precision'; 'a prose style that resonates more for the poise, balance and angles of its composition than the accumulation of detail or force of feeling captured within it'.[17] Stoddart demonstrates that the consistent and extensive addition of commas by Mackenzie (in many cases inserted after conjunctions) upsets the carefully controlled 'balance' of Spark's prose; the 'certainty and ruthlessness' of Brodie's speech, the flow of thought expressed by uninterrupted sentences, and the way the hard logic of determinism, a significant Spark concept, is baked into the style – these effects are either lost or enervated in the *New Yorker* text.[18] Ostensibly a study of cultural translation and authorial compromise, the essay ends up drawing attention to and analyses key aspects of Spark's writing practice, but its contribution to a genesis of *Brodie* is only partial.

Similarly, in the recent monograph *Muriel Spark's Early Fiction* James Bailey uses archival material to gain insight into Spark's novelistic aesthetic, and in doing so occasionally performs, though it is never acknowledged as such, aspects of genetic criticism. Bailey argues that Spark's early narrative experiments 'combine formal innovation with an ethically driven

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[16] Helen Stoddart, 'Muriel Spark and the "Hired Grammarians"', in *The Crooked Dividend: Essays on Muriel Spark* ed. by Gerard Carruthers and Helen Stoddart, Association for Scottish Literature Occasional Papers, 24 (Scottish Literature International, 2022), pp. 161-179 (p. 162).
[17] Ibid., p. 166.
[18] Ibid., p. 168.

and often feminist method of storytelling' by re-evaluating the (often superficial or misguided) connections made between Spark and the *nouveau roman*.[19] To support his claims Bailey unearths several documents from the Spark archive including unpublished notes, correspondence and sections from original manuscripts. To give one example, Bailey highlights a scene in *The Driver's Seat* in which an entourage leaves a hotel, and explains that 'everything is described successively, without the assurance that might be appended to retrospective narration'.[20] In other words, the structuring presence of narrative clarity – a beginning and an end, cause and effect, characterisation – is missing. By contrast, Bailey shows that in the manuscript an earlier version of the scene 'does much of the interpretive work on the reader's behalf'; instead of the vague and imprecise 'important-looking Arabian figure' in the published text Spark originally wrote 'newly-dethroned potentate', a description that contains within it a whole narrative arc.[21] The early draft identifies the wife and daughters of the 'figure' whereas the published text does not. Furthermore, while the published version observes 'black-robed' women, the early draft describes a 'black-yashmaked' woman, betraying an intimate knowledge that the former clearly lacks.[22] 'In removing these specificities', Bailey states, 'Spark is effectively covering her authorial tracks, and confining knowledge and attention purely to the moment at hand'.[23] By comparing versions Bailey comes close to the work of genetic criticism, but these are isolated incidents, and they mostly serve to substantiate his claims about the specific ways Spark appropriates the techniques of the *nouveau roman*.

My research builds upon these fascinating and valuable accounts by stretching the genetic scope wider and deeper, using the archive to explore the many acts of creation through which Spark's fiction is made, 'from poetics to publishing'. What's more, Spark's fiction explores, indeed is driven precisely by, the creation of fictions, and it is because of this meta-textuality that genetics has much to offer in the face of the Spark archive; peeking behind the scenes of a writer whose fiction is similarly committed to exposing the mechanics of fiction-making necessarily reframes how we read Spark's metafictional project.

Like Stoddart and Bailey, then, I incorporate the work and techniques of genetics in service of a broader understanding of Spark's literary aesthetic. Modelled after the

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[19] James Bailey, *Muriel Spark's Early Fiction: Literary Subversion and Experiments with Form* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), p. 5.
[20] Ibid., p. 156.
[21] Ibid., p. 156.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

temporality of genetics, which retraces the birth, growth, refinement and finishing of texts, the present study provides an archival tour from the abstract and speculative unpacking of Sparkian poetics, to the concrete and practical analysis of her novel writing, and finally, to the commercial imperatives of publishing, publicity and branding. More specifically, I aim to answer the following questions: How does poetry figure in the development of Spark's novel-writing practice, and what is the nature of this practice – to what aesthetic ends does Spark use the novel form? Is there a discernible method to Spark's composition of novels; what can be gleaned from the *Reality and Dreams* manuscript? And in what ways did Spark orchestrate, with the help of her publishers, the production of the Spark 'brand', and how does her authorial signature intersect with, or distance itself from, gendered labelling? Using these prompts, which were developed in tandem with my archival explorations, I construct a fresh critical framework through which to appreciate and understand the work and artistry of Muriel Spark.

Structure

The thesis is comprised of four chapters split across two parts; the first half attempts to formulate a theory of Spark's novelistic aesthetic while the second half explores Spark's control of the composition and publishing of her novels. The main areas of interest – poetics, writing and publishing – are discussed in that order but it should be noted that this is a logical arrangement rather than a strictly chronological or linear timeline. That is, each chapter draws on material from different periods in Spark's career and has a distinct focus on a particular set of research questions rather than trace the evolution of a literary career like a biography. Nonetheless, the structure does intend to suggest a throughline that connects each area, namely that they all contribute to the construction of a genetic portrait of a writer at work.

The first chapter identifies key features of Spark's aesthetic and attempts to trace its evolution from poetry. Poetics can be understood in both 'a narrower and more expansive sense'. Traditionally, it refers to 'the compositional principles to which a particular poet subscribes'.[24] More recently, however, the term has been employed in a broader sense, 'as a

[24] Brian M. Reed, 'Poetics, Western' in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Roland Greene, Stephen Cushman, Clare Cavanagh and others, 4th edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 1058-1064 (p. 1059).

label for any formal or informal survey of the structures, devices, and norms that enable a discourse, genre, or cultural system to produce particular effects'.[25] In a sense, Chapter One straddles both meanings in its analysis, as it takes Spark's poetry as a point of departure for considering those 'compositional principles' Spark learned and practiced as a poet before moving on to her work with fiction, primarily the novel, as the form best suited to her evolving aesthetic. I review some of Spark's early and later poetry alongside Spark's commentary on poetry and the key poetic influences on her aesthetic to argue for poetry's significance in Spark's conception of the novel, and conclude with a survey of archival evidence that demonstrates Spark's employment of poetic form in the development of novelistic text.

Chapter Two shows how Spark's figuration of the novel is grounded in that poetic practice, especially in the former's resistance to literary realism through the employment of techniques now associated with a self-reflexive mode of writing called 'metafiction'. To expand on the philosophical implications of her metafictions and offer a fresh approach to Spark's novels I turn to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, which feeds into theories on the instability of language and speech, the problems of authorship, and the dialogical self, all of which appear in and inform my subsequent analysis of Spark's first novel, *The Comforters*.

In Chapter Three, aided by the archive material surrounding the production of *Reality and Dreams*, I perform a close genetic analysis of a Spark novel, and while I do not cover every possible angle or all the minutiae of the process I do highlight the most significant discoveries related to the novel's birth and progress. Split across two sections isolating what genetic critic Pierre–Marc de Biasi calls exogenesis (writing that refers to material *outside* of but related to the composition proper, such as research notes) and endogenesis (writing produced *inside* the composition proper without recourse to exterior matter),[26] my discussion incorporates biographical context, Spark's extensive research, the novel's dialogue with other Spark novels, her repurposing of older and unpublished writing material, her writing method (some of which is surprisingly unmethodical), Penelope Jardine's valuable role as an editorial assistant, and the work of revision. Though it is by no means comprehensive (a fully-fledged genesis requires a book-length study) this chapter represents the first attempt at a detailed genetic analysis of a Spark novel.

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[25] Ibid.
[26] Biasi, 'What is a Literary Draft?', pp. 42–44.

The fourth and final chapter considers the broader context within which Spark started writing and publishing novels. Post-war Britain saw the emergence of many popular woman writers, including Spark, but the latter was never entirely comfortable with the category of 'woman writer', seeing in it a condescending and essentialist set of assumptions about writing by women. Indeed Spark is herself guilty of perpetuating these assumptions, as correspondence reveals that Spark held reservations about hiring woman translators to handle foreign language versions of her work. But given that Spark is undeniably responsible for reinvigorating interest in women's writing with her own fiction, as well as exploring that vexed reality *within* the fiction itself (many of her protagonists are both women and writers), it is worthwhile interrogating what I am calling the spectre of gender in Spark, which argues that her ambivalent resistance to gendered categories comes from a (not unreasonable) anxiety about literary respectability, canonicity and legacy. Through a detour into the paratextual history of Spark's books, some influential Spark criticism and the literary hierarchies erected by modernism, I unravel the commercial and institutional forces informing Spark's attitude, before going on to consider the ways Spark's fiction undoes the notion of 'women's writing' from a less reactionary position.

While the following arguments, theories and conclusions expand the scope of archival research around Spark and add a fresh perspective to Spark criticism, given the limited space of the thesis the current research should nonetheless be understood as a modest excursion into the great depths of the Spark archive; it will be up to future scholars to build larger and comprehensive narratives of what Van Hulle calls the *sous-oeuvre*, 'the entire oeuvre's genetic dossier'.[27]

[27] Van Hull, *Genetic Criticism*, p. 113.

Part 1: Theorising Spark's Novelistic Aesthetic

Chapter One

Towards the 'Stanzas of Prose': Spark as Poet

Spark had no interest in (creative) prose writing at the beginning of her literary career; poetry was the form most alluring and important to this aspiring writer. Indeed Spark harboured a haughty scepticism towards prose in general and the novel in particular, viewing it as 'an inferior way of writing'; Spark remarks in *Curriculum Vitae* that she had to 'square it with [her] literary conscience to write a novel', such was the unexpected and potentially debasing turn in her literary ambitions.[1] Spark's attitude was likely informed by the cultural and economic landscape of the first half of the twentieth-century: the 'paperback revolution', mass marketing, the rise of advertising and consumerism (industries to which Spark would lend her writing), and the institutional promotion and preservation of a British canon of literature against which to measure and dismiss the proliferation of new and popular forms of media.[2] Indeed Spark sought out and read the classics, becoming herself an agent of F. R. Leavis's campaign to uphold the 'great literary inheritance of the nation',[3] writing critical books about (or compiling letters and poems for) Wordsworth, the Brontë sisters and Mary Shelley (the latter of which, *Child of Light*, was instrumental in reshaping attitudes towards Shelley).[4]

In this light, it is not surprising that in the 1940s and '50s Spark felt uneasy about the status of modern fiction and the possibility of contributing to it, wary of its ambiguous relationship to the new entertainment industry. As McDonald says, 'the increased access to books and other cultural forms opened the way for interminable debates during the twentieth-century: is it really art or just entertainment?'.[5] During this period women's writing in particular exploded in popularity, documented in Nicola Humble's study, *The Feminine*

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[1] Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* (Carcanet, 2009), p. 206.
[2] Ronan McDonald, 'Books and the Mass Market: Class, Democracy and Value' in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: The Twentieth Century and Beyond* ed. by Andrew Nash, Claire Squires and Ian Roy Willison (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 593-604 (p. 598).
[3] Ibid., p. 597.
[4] While these writers are now firmly established as authors of prestigious literature, it is important to note that neither the Brontë sisters nor Mary Shelley were granted entry into Leavis's newfound canon, and that Spark's critical work implicitly reviews and resists the prominent gatekeepers of literary culture at the time (Spark's work on John Masefield, for example, refutes any allegiance to the concept of the 'highbrow' as it developed within new literary hierarchies).
[5] Ibid.

Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s, a gendered grouping Spark was, as I explore further in Chapter Four, anxious to avoid.[6] Spark says as much in an updated preface to her study on John Masefield: 'I didn't want to become a 'lady-novelist' with all the slop and sentimentalism that went into that classification (and in that aim, at least, I have the satisfaction of being successful)'.[7] That brand of 'slop and sentimentalism' is lampooned throughout Spark's novels; consider the fiction Sandy and Jenny concoct around Brodie's love life, or the mind-numbing romance novel Anthea Leaver reads in *Territorial Rights*, or the heavily ironised quest for Lise's 'type' in *The Driver's Seat*.

Yet even after Spark had published her first four novels, she still struggled to accept the legitimacy of the modern novel, or at the very least, to reconcile her own designs for the form with what she saw as the harder and thus loftier work of poetry: 'I soon found that novel-writing was the easiest thing I had ever done. […] But because it came so easily, in fact, I was in some doubt about its value';[8] 'I thought in many ways that novels were a lazy way of writing poetry'.[9] In Chapter Three, genetic analysis complicates the extent to which Spark's novel writing was 'easy', but her comments nonetheless speak to a real anxiety about her literary identity, especially when considered alongside her longstanding attachment to the marker 'poet', an identification this chapter takes seriously.[10]

Critics mostly see in Spark's poetry a mine from which to unearth biographical details such as her growing attachment and eventual conversion to Catholicism,[11] or the brief romantic affairs Spark indulged in the 1940s and '50s.[12] When the poems are approached on their own terms, as aesthetic objects, the critical consensus is unfavourable if not outright dismissive. In 1984 Walter Perrie deems Spark's poetry 'undistinguished' with 'little aesthetic merit', characterising its content and form as by turns 'cerebral', 'whimsical' and 'contrived'.[13] By contrast, earlier in 1963, Derek Stanford praises the novelty of her 'new-fangled' poetry: 'the newness and strangeness of certain of these pieces were evident both to

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[6] It should be noted that writers appraised in Humble's study like Elizabeth Taylor, Nancy Mitford, Stella Gibbons and Rosamund Lehmann experimented with the same kind of unsentimental humour for which Spark is known. As such, Spark may be more indebted to those 'lady-novelists' than she cares to admit.
[7] Muriel Spark, *John Masefield*, rev. edn (Pimlico, 1992), p. viii.
[8] Martin Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2010), p. 237.
[9] Spark, *John Masefield*, p. viii.
[10] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, p. 206.
[11] See Martin Stannard, 'Nativities: Muriel Spark, Baudelaire, and the Quest for Religious Faith', *The Review of English Studies*, 55.218 (2004), pp. 91–105.
[12] See Willy Maley and Dini Power, '"Unfortunately you have left out all the love poems": Spark in Love', in *The Crooked Dividend*, ed. by Carruthers and Stoddart, pp. 88–102.
[13] Walter Perrie, 'Mrs Spark's Verse', in *Muriel Spark: An Odd Capacity for Vision*, ed. by Alan Bold (Vision, 1984), pp. 183–204 (pp. 184, 194, 186, 188).

the *affician* of modernism and the old guard'.[14] What Perrie sees as wilful obscurity in Spark's stranger poems is to Stanford symptoms of a 'fund of originality, powerful enough to appear at times alien', and where Perrie dismisses 'whimsy' Stanford observes Spark 'pressing from fancy a wry wine of meaning'.[15] It should be noted, however, that Stanford's commentary, at the time of writing, was inevitably coloured by his personal and professional history with Spark (the first chapter of his book on Spark in which this criticism appears is devoted to 'A Recollection'), so the criticism comes with a level of closeness and perhaps bias that holds back or at least casts suspicion over an otherwise interesting if one-sided evaluation of Spark's poetry.

Although there is little written on Spark's poetry beyond these two fairly old accounts, the critical neglect itself supports the claim that Perrie's analysis is likely representative of scholarly opinion, at least in its judgement if not its tone. Perrie later observes, quite rightly, that 'interest in [Spark's] poetry derives mainly from its relation to her fiction', after which he devotes the latter half of his essay to an explanation of Spark's fiction as an extension of those preoccupations he identifies in the poetry, namely religion.[16] Although my interest in the poetry is similarly motivated by what it can illuminate about the fiction, I go above and beyond Perrie's reductive conclusions to identify a complex Sparkian poetics that informs the fiction, as well as consider how the practice of poetry transfers to the composition of Spark's novels. In doing so, I re-evaluate the critical narrative that has so far dominated Spark scholarship, arguing instead for poetry's significance as it relates to Spark's novel writing, not merely as an early-career literary experiment or a 'literary avowal of a Christian resolution', as Perrie has it, but as a key part of Spark's aesthetic and as a technique and method for narrative construction and composition.[17]

[14] Derek Stanford, *Muriel Spark: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Centaur, 1963), p. 78.
[15] Ibid., pp. 79, 83.
[16] Perrie, 'Mrs Spark's Verse', p. 194.
[17] Ibid., p. 192.

'A Wry Wine of Meaning': A Close Reading of Spark's Poetry

Despite beginning her literary career as a dedicated poet, Spark wrote little poetry after finding success as a novelist,[18] managing to publish only three collections of poetry (with each new book recycling material found in the former) between the publication of twenty-two novels. Spark's first poetry pamphlet, *The Fanfarlo and Other Verse*, published by The Hand and Flower Press in 1952, comes shortly after two pivotal moments: the fallout from the Poetry Society in 1948 and winning the first-place prize in the *Observer* short story competition in 1951. While each of these events likely influenced the direction Spark was to take with her writing, it did not facilitate a rapid transition to prose – Spark would not publish her first novel until 1957. *The Fanfarlo and Other Verse*, then, alongside her work on critical books throughout the decade, marks a point when Spark was serious about poetry (as a primary literary pursuit) and only curious but still wary of prose.

The kind of poetry collected in *The Fanfarlo* is both traditional and experimental, at once formal and self-reflexive. In 'The Grave that Time Dug', a fragmentary narrative spirals outwards as the speaker reveals a new drip of information about the refrain 'the grave that time dug' after each time it is repeated, similar to cumulative songs such as the Christmas carol '12 Days of Christmas'.[19] In this way, the poem rushes forward as the repeated lines become rhythmically familiar and the reader eager to discover the next revelation. Every line succeeding the new line is justified (and each line following the last is justified further in), creating on the page the illusion of a typewriter violently restarting on the left margin as the poem dives downwards to the present; each new enlarged pattern, split across three stanzas, gains momentum and arrives back at the core image and refrain from which the poem began.

Unlike the Christmas carol, however, or other humorous cumulative songs, 'The Grave that Time Dug' is melancholy and perhaps slightly sinister, comprising instead a list of events that are grammatically and literally comprehensible, but narratively obscure and incoherent. Consider the final stanza which relays the 'action' in full:

This is the alderman bound and sworn
that planted the pink deceptive thorn

[18] Although, as I argue later in this chapter, poetic writing is very much present in the construction of Spark's novels.
[19] Muriel Spark, 'The Grave that Time Dug', in *Complete Poems* (Carcanet, 2015), p. 23.

that bled the child an instant born
that lit the stove
that warmed the hand
that rapped on the box
that lay in the grave that time dug.[20]

There are scenes within the whole that allude to recognisable references and events, but taken together the picture is unclear and resists the easy or simple narrative teased by its quick unravelling structure. The first three lines may allude to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the 'alderman' being Pontius Pilate, the 'pink deceptive thorn' referring to the crown of thorns bleeding the young Jesus, 'the child an instant born'. The fourth and fifth lines, 'that lit the stove / that warmed the hand' conjures an image of domestic warmth but alternatively, it may imply cremation. The penultimate line invokes a coffin, the 'rapping' of which signals the ceremonial knock of mourners or, if we follow the latter reading of the previous lines, a much darker image emerges of someone knocking inside the coffin. The refrain, 'grave that time dug', is a fairly common trope personifying 'time' to emphasise its relationship with death.

How, then, to reconcile these discrete parts? The answer lies in how they are presented. The metaphor of digging within the refrain 'the grave that time dug' speaks also to the structure of the poem; the drip-feed of narrative mimics the back-and-forth action of digging, and reading becomes an act of exhumation. Is the grave then a wry symbol for the endpoint of close reading? When such reading is characterised by spatial metaphors like 'depth' – the notion that we mine meaning from texts – the grave that we dig as readers is surely a comment on the lacunae inherent to our interpretive methods, that however much we look to origins or causes (in the way that the poem pursues a beginning) we nevertheless return to the same *dead*-end, an impasse implied by the thudding spondee in the phrase, 'time dug'. Each new line beginning 'this is' promises – with its present tense, assured tone and a rhythm dominated by lilting dactyls and iambs – a sense of closure, a transcendental frame or signifier from which to make sense of the remaining fragments, but it only complicates the narrative further.

Nonetheless, the tension of the formal arrangement opens up possibilities for the otherwise oblique narrative thread. Is the poem's 'dig' a means through which to express the speaker's curious but troubled feelings towards religion or death? Is religious truth or faith

[20] Ibid.

the point to which the speaker is scraping, as the poem shows the journey from a box (self-contained, claustrophobic, a clear metonym for death) outwards onto an 'alderman bound and sworn', an authority figure with loyalty, perhaps to God. Indeed the poem stretches no further than the alderman, suggesting he is the catalyst or starting point for the narrative, and therefore a reassuring, stable symbol for religious awakening (the poem makes several references to beginnings or growth such as the thorn 'planted', the child 'born', and the stove 'lit'). Yet, at the same time, the thorn is deceptive, the child bleeds, and the fire of the stove may well be destructive. Furthermore, the alderman as 'bound' shares similar associations with the unfreedom implied by the box.

The contradictions at play and the frustrations they evoke for both reader and speaker are reflected in the shifting metre and sounds of the final stanza. It begins with a double dactyl into a trochee, followed by two iambic tetrameters, all of which shares two perfect rhymes and one half-rhyme, then three iambic dimeters with no rhymes, returning in the end to an iambic tetrameter with an unrhymed spondaic finish. The opening rhymes communicate a sense of gentle reassurance with the soft assonant sounds of the 'orn' syllables, before breaking the spell, as it were, with the harsh, and unrhymed, consonant sounds of 'stove', 'hand', 'box' and 'dug', as if the shovel of the speaker's mind has encountered a hard, impenetrable surface. The full picture is therefore announced with a regular and quickening metre before interrupting itself with the all too familiar and rhythmically irregular refrain, as if the speaker (alongside the reader) is nearing a point of enlightenment only to be struck by the same, inevitable but nonetheless jarring mental void or barrier. Alternatively, the 'hard, impenetrable surface' implied by the final sounds could equally suggest the discovery (as when a dig first hits buried materials) of the 'box', refigured here not as death but a treasure trove of truth, enlightenment, peace.

As Perrie and Stanford hint at in their respective analyses, there is a sense in which Spark's early poetry expresses a confusion about as well as a desire for religious feeling. As Spark converted to Catholicism three years after the publication of *The Fanfarlo*, it is undeniable that the poetry contains traces (with varying degrees of transparency) of Spark's ambivalent relationship to religion, faith and God. However, to anchor the meaning(s) within 'The Grave that Time Dug' (as well as in the other poems) *only* to Spark's increasing interest in Christianity would surely be to ignore the warning within the poem itself, that the search for reliable, meaning-making origins is like an ever-expanding spiral the root of which is always out of reach. However much this elliptical poem negotiates Spark's internal conflicts, it is also a poem, as I have demonstrated, about reading, context and knowledge as much as it

is 'about' well-trodden themes such as death, time or Christianity, and this type of metatextual play inhabits other poems in this collection, and would continue to haunt the poems written afterwards.

For instance, consider 'Evelyn Cavallo', another short poem in three stanzas, which describes the relationship between the speaker and a fictional character:

> This person never came to pass,
> Being the momentary name I gave
> To a slight stir in a fictitious grave
> Wherein I found no form or face, alas,
> Of Evelyn Cavallo, Evelyn of grass.[21]

Evelyn Cavallo is dismissed as quickly as she is born, an existence 'momentary' and 'slight', by a writer who is nonetheless haunted or disturbed by her creation's potentiality. The caesura in the last line neatly captures the transition from the 'slight stir' of a realised character (Evelyn Cavallo) to the faint echo of a mythologised figure, 'Evelyn of grass'. In the second stanza the speaker complains of Evelyn's persistence at occupying the speaker's mind: 'Why do you assert your so non-evident history | While all your feminine motives make a mystery | Which, to resolve, arise your masculine?'.[22] The strange shift to gendered motives and complex syntax creates a jarring break in an otherwise straightforward poem about artistic creation. For one, these lines are contradictory; despite the speaker's reminder about Evelyn's 'so non-evident history' (an oxymoron in itself, for history must be evident to be history), the next description of Evelyn's 'feminine motives', their 'mystery' and the penetration of said mystery through a 'masculine' resolution betrays the speaker's intimate knowledge (history) of Evelyn. The question of motives, whatever they are, attributes Evelyn with the kind of agency the speaker is trying to suppress. The third stanza, which continues from the final enjambed line of the second, reinforces the sense that Evelyn, and not the speaker/creator, wields control:

> Why will you not lie down

[21] Spark, 'Evelyn Cavallo', *Complete Poems*, p. 62.
[22] Ibid.

> At the back of the neither here nor there
> Where lightly I left you, Evelyn of guile?
> But no, you recur in the orgulous noonday style,
> Or else in your trite, your debonair
> Postprandial despair.[23]

At this point, the speaker is no longer reflecting on a minor annoyance but is actively hostile towards this fictional apparition, 'Evelyn of guile', who refuses to 'lie down' and instead parades within the speaker's mind with spiteful pride ('orgulous noonday style').
Yet, as an unrealised figment of her creator's imagination, Evelyn despairs ('postprandial' perhaps refers to the phrase 'food for thought', of which the mental components comprising Evelyn Cavallo remain undigested). The archive reveals that a 'Miss Cavallo' was indeed a fictional creation of Spark's that was later abandoned, although this Cavallo comes into being four years *after* the poem, as if Spark had anticipated what the poem describes. Two sheets of paper titled 'Notes for the secretary of Miss Aurora Cavallo, Novelist', contain a series of hilarious transcripts of excuses made by a fictional author's secretary as to why Aurora Cavallo is unable to come to the phone, meet for interviews, contribute writing etc:

> Miss Cavallo is regrettably unable to write an introduction to your book "Catholicism or Chaos – Which?" as she is busy writing a novel by command of the Vatican.
>
> Miss Cavallo asks me to express her deep regret that she has provoked your indignation by implying that she actually prefers sitting and writing a novel to seeing you. She will in future offer a more reasonable excuse.
>
> Miss Cavallo […] feels she must decline as she is trying to give up interviews for Lent.[24]

Is Aurora perhaps a projection of Spark's own romantic daydreaming, a year before the publication of her first novel? The two Cavallos suggest – alongside the comic potential of narrative and characterisation – Spark's increasing interest in fictionality, with the figure of

[23] Ibid.
[24] TMSA, Manuscript fragment, 1956. NLS, Acc. 10989/12.

the author emerging as a key metaphor through which to explore the many ways we both author and are subject to others' authoring.

It is entirely possible, then, that Evelyn Cavallo instead represents an alter ego for the speaker, a persona that is helpful but ultimately inauthentic or undesirable. 'This person', not character or idea, 'never came to pass', the latter clause meaning both 'to happen, exist' as well as the less immediate suggestion 'to pass' convincingly as someone else. 'Evelyn' as persona also illuminates further the speaker's rumination on feminine and masculine motives. Mysterious feminine motives characterise the disparaging way men perceive the speaker, the solution to which is to don a more masculine, or assertive, mask. 'Evelyn' is, of course, at least at the time of the poem's composition, an androgynous name, but even back then its male use caused confusion; Evelyn Waugh, for example, a contemporary (and supporter) of Spark, was regularly mistaken for a woman by reviewers and others who only knew him by name, a situation not helped by his first marriage to a woman of the same name. Spark, then, is drawing upon this potential duality when the speaker mentions Evelyn Cavallo's feminine and masculine qualities; notably, Spark uses no gendered pronouns, addressing only a neutral 'you'.

Given Spark's recent fallout with the Poetry Society – an organisation then dominated by men – and her turbulent romantic affairs at the time, it is not unreasonable to interpret 'Evelyn Cavallo' as an expression of frustration towards the way Spark had to navigate and challenge a traditionally patriarchal and conservative institution, 'Evelyn' here figuring as both a necessary, empowering persona and as a diminished, sexist role enforced by her male counterparts. Indeed it relates the movement from one to the other: how bold, authoritative women can quicky be reduced to the hysterical, 'trite' trope of the sensitive, mad woman. The 'Eve' within the name is no coincidence, and the 'postprandial despair' in this sense refers to Eve's eating of the apple and the consequences (the Poetry Society, alongside the formative literary circles Spark settled into, a kind of Tree of Knowledge). Another factor adds a twist and further depth to this reading, and it all extends from the use of that unusual word, 'orgulous'. Spark employs the same word in her section of the 1960 study (co-authored with Stanford) on Emily Brontë:

> Emily was, as we will see, a more forceful proposition at the age of thirty than she was at nineteen. Yet they will have her a silent morose orgulous genius at a time when Emily was patently the most buoyant and accommodating member of the family.[25]

The passage is taken from a chapter titled 'Fact and Legend', in which Spark discusses the ways critics and the public (including Emily's family) have concocted an exaggerated, ambiguous and confused mythology for this Brontë sister, to the point where the reality of her person is difficult if not impossible to discern beyond the reputation created for her. As such, like Evelyn, 'this person never came to pass', a reference both to Brontë's premature death, and the erosion of Emily the *person* ('I found no form and face'). Both 'fictitious grave' and 'momentary name' carry this dual meaning; the former connotes death but signals an entrance into the fictional, while the latter also suggests death but at the same time points to the endurance of the name ('momentary' means both to last only a moment and to recur at every moment). The second stanza's commentary on feminine and masculine motives can be explained by Spark's discussion of the way Brontë's character was described differently before and after her death by M. Héger, a master at her finishing school in Brussels. While Brontë was alive and twenty-four years old, M. Héger wrote to her father about her 'ignorance' and 'timidity', but suggested that these qualities were slowly disappearing; according to Spark, however, this description hides a more negative appraisal and therefore 'was no doubt modified to accommodate a father's pride'.[26] Around fifteen years later, Brontë's death provokes the following startling description from M. Héger: given her 'powerful reasoning' and 'her strong, imperious will', 'she should have been a man—a great navigator'.[27] What is said of Evelyn – 'all your feminine motives make a mystery | Which, to resolve, arise your masculine' – could easily be said of Brontë's posthumous transformation.

Who then is the speaker in this reading? It is both Spark as a critic and the collective consciousness of Emily Brontë's readers, admirers, neither of which can place her name/reputation in the 'neither here nor there' (that is, to separate the legend from the 'fact'). Yet while the poem's tone may immediately evoke an irritable speaker, on closer examination the relationship between the speaker and subject betrays a closeness, even a sensual intimacy. 'Why will you not *lie* down | […] Where *lightly* I left you', beseeches the speaker, while the vocabulary implies a gentleness in the address, a feeling reinforced by the mellifluous

[25] Muriel Spark and Derek Stanford, *Emily Brontë: Her Life and Work* (Arena, 1985), p. 18.
[26] Ibid., p. 14.
[27] Ibid.

consonance of the *l* sounds. The 'alas' in 'I found no form and face, alas', also expresses a kind of pain for the distance held between subject and object. Instead of the reality for which the speaker longs, Evelyn/Emily materialises only in 'the orgulous noonday style / […] 'trite, […] debonair | Postprandial despair'. 'Style' is a key word here, indicating artifice, and 'postprandial despair' is now perhaps an oblique reference to 'consumption', the colloquial term used to describe tuberculosis, the disease which killed Brontë.

Evelyn Cavallo, in each reading, is a fiction trapped in a liminal state, at once a creative object born and rejected, and also figured as a role conjured for an unwilling player such as Spark or Brontë, in different ways and for different reasons. It should be noted that Spark is not arguing against the phenomenon the poem describes (and performs – the reader is complicit in creating Evelyn); on the contrary Spark is fascinated (and will continue to be) by the process. 'Such legend is the repository of a vital aspect of truth', writes Spark, 'and ought not to be swept aside simply because it is not ascertainable; neither, of course, should it be taken as literal truth'.[28] Having published five successful novels up to this point Spark had already kickstarted her journey into myth, and would soon enter the realm of legend more dramatically with the publication of *Jean Brodie* a year after the Brontë study, a novel that itself treats of the same ideas. But the main point here is that long before novel-writing had taken precedence as a creative practice Spark worked into poetry the concepts and preoccupations that would soon come to permeate her fiction in more explicit and expansive ways.

Indeed these two poems contain elements that would become signature tropes and techniques in Spark's most celebrated novels. In 'The Grave that Time Dug', Spark's attraction towards non-linear time foreshadows the prominence of prolepsis in novels like *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *Not to Disturb* and *The Driver's Seat*. 'Evelyn Cavallo', meanwhile, hints towards the metafictional tendencies apparent in *The Comforters*, *Loitering with Intent* and *The Abbess of Crewe*. Spark's poetry, then, to qualify the prevailing opinion amongst critics, was not simply an aborted literary beginning but a significant and indeed necessary stepping-stone in the trajectory towards her more successful experiments with novel-writing. Furthermore, if we take a closer look at the poetic contexts within which Spark was writing and the debates to which she contributed during her time as editor of the *Poetry Review*, we can begin to piece together a kind of Sparkian poetics – forged in the fires of poetry – that offers fresh insights into Spark's novel-writing practice.

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[28] Spark and Stanford, *Emily Brontë*, p. 12.

Poetry and Poetics: Compositional Principles

In Spark's study of John Masefield she makes a comment about the anxiety of influence:

> There is an element of mimicry in all good poets, discernible generally in their early work; and this is only to repeat what many others have said, that the influences of other poets have to be properly assimilated. 'Till then, a poet is a slave, and he has to 'squeeze the slave out of himself' where poetry is concerned, as Chekhov notoriously remarked where life was concerned.[29]

To which poets and flavour(s) of poetics was Spark herself a disciple, or as she puts it, a slave? And to what extent were these influences 'properly assimilated' and then squeezed out into what is now recognised as Sparkian prose? We know she was an admirer of pioneering experimenters and cultural authorities like T.S. Eliot as well as the more popular and realist work of Masefield. Spark edited books for Romantic poets like William Wordsworth (a compilation of letters) and Emily Brontë (a collection of poetry), and she had also planned but never completed a study on the Book of Job, a poem whose importance to Spark is evident in novels like *The Comforters* and *The Only Problem*. The Scottish Border Ballads are yet another well-documented source of pleasure in Spark's childhood and a clear inspiration for novel-writing (*The Ballad of Peckham Rye* is its most obvious but by no means only manifestation).

What, then, of Spark's contemporaries? The 1940s, during which Spark's career as a writer started in earnest, is a strange, transitional and diverse period for British poetry. In the wake of the ominous political manoeuvres of 1939 and the catastrophic consequences of European fascism, John Goodby argues that poets retreated from 'the authority of the Audenesque style which had dominated thirties poetry',[30] a style defined by 'curt, cold,

[29] Spark, *John Masefield*, p. 70.
[30] John Goodby, 'Dylan Thomas and the Poetry of the 1940s', in *The Cambridge History of English Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 858–878 (p. 858).

intense' lines[31] and 'socio-politico engagement'.[32] 'The imminence of [yet more] war', claims Goodby, 'precipitated the shift of emphasis from politics to myth, from cerebral irony to intuition, from collective struggle to the refashioning of the subject at the level of the body, psyche and language'.[33] That shift is reflected in Spark's editorials for the *Poetry Review* issues she oversaw during 1947 and 1948. One claims that 'new findings in psychology alone offer countless possibilities of analytical adventure to the critic who has the necessary knowledge and whose mind is not infested with doctrines',[34] while another argues that 'the world of dream and fantasy bears a direct relationship to art; […] all the experiences to which mankind is subject are inherent in the unconscious mind of the human race' and that the poet 'may now identify his experience […] with the infinitely more significant and accurate imagery of the psyche'.[35] Freud and psychoanalysis had soared in popularity in Britain during and after the two world wars, owing in part to a need to address the collective trauma of a war-torn nation but also as a theory to comprehend a rapidly changing world against which religion and science had lost some authority.[36] Spark's editorials therefore reflect that particular zeitgeist though it is not clear if Spark herself engaged deeply with Freud or whether, at this point, she could not avoid what had become a 'fashionable craze'.[37] Given that psychiatrists and psychoanalysts would soon become a recurring target of satire in the novels, we can safely assume that Spark's consideration of psychoanalysis and its relevance to poetry was only temporary.

In any case, aligning Spark's own poetry with her activity at the Poetry Society does not provide a satisfying answer to the question of what kind of poet Spark is, because the makeup of the Society and its *Review* contributors at this point were as varied and conflicting as British poetry in general. Indeed Goodby claims it is 'the variety and openness to different kinds of poetry which is the period's most significant aspect', and is a reminder that 'British poetry demands to be viewed as a dialogue between its components – […] elite and populist, neo-classical and neo-Romantic, Modernist and social-realist – one productive of hybrids that

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[31] Michael O'Neill, 'Auden, Day Lewis, MacNeice, Spender: The Thirties Poetry', in *The Cambridge History of English Poetry*, pp. 844–857 (p. 844).
[32] Goodby, 'Dylan Thomas', p. 858. Spark references this strain of 'thirties poetry' in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* when a visitor to Sandy's convent asks about her influences, 'we boys were very keen on Auden and that group, of course. We wanted to go and fight in the Spanish Civil War.' Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Polygon, 2018), p. 32).
[33] Ibid., p. 859.
[34] Muriel Spark, 'Reassessment', in *Poetry Review* (1948), pp. 103–104 (p. 103).
[35] Muriel Spark, 'Reassessment II', in *Poetry Review* (1948), pp. 234–236 (p. 234).
[36] Graham Richards, 'Britain on the Couch: The Popularisation of Psychoanalysis in Britain 1918–1940', *Science in Context*, 13.2 (2000), pp. 183–230 (p. 189).
[37] Ibid., p. 188.

confound attempts to assert singular narratives'.[38] 'In this sense', he concludes, 'it was forties poetry, not "the English tradition", which set the pattern for today's pluralism'.[39] In the same way that this period resists 'singular narratives' of poetic theory and its practitioners, so too does Spark's eclectic range of poetic influences and interests – both contemporary and old – resist an overarching or comprehensive theory of poetics. Instead we must contend with Spark's own 'pluralism', for indeed the concept of hybridity – whether between poetry and prose, or different literary genres – is a key part of what makes Spark's fiction interesting, strange and, in a sense that will be explored in later sections, poetic.

The following discussion does not therefore attempt to identify a driving 'master narrative' that explains Spark's relationship to and practice of poetry, but it does look at and connect several discrete points of interest that culminate in a useful, if incomplete, picture of Sparkian poetics.

Starting with John Masefield, a poet Spark enjoyed in childhood and later met to interview for her study, there is much to say about what Spark learned from Masefield's ballads and narrative poetry. On Masefield's narrative poetry Spark says, 'it is not the sort of poetry that can be interpreted in several ways; it is the poetry of the surface; and this is not to imply a distinction in merit, but in kind', by which Spark means that 'Masefield's view of the surface of life is comprehensive. There is no limit or stipulation attached to the impressions he is prepared to receive'.[40] Spark's observation here on the value or virtue of Masefield's 'surface' is prescient in relation not only to her own future fictions but for the postmodern fictional landscape that would emerge in decades to come. Indeed Stannard points out later in the Masefield study a remark that appears to foreshadow central postmodern concerns: discussing the relationship between the point of inspiration and the work of art, Spark claims that poetry has 'an organic connection with its physical origin' such that the 'pattern of events and their movement at the visionary instant will be translated symbolically until in the end the work itself becomes the real thing and the events the symbols of it'.[41] Stannard describes this passage as 'an extraordinary statement for a British writer in 1952 – almost a little manifesto of postmodernism'.[42] Surfaces, self-referentiality, signification – Spark was in many ways a precocious and premature theorist of a cultural milieu yet to fully emerge (Willy

[38] Goodby, 'Dylan Thomas', p. 875.
[39] Ibid., 876.
[40] Spark, *John Masefield*, pp. 7–8.
[41] Ibid., p. 85.
[42] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, p. 132.

Maley quips that she was 'deconstructive despite herself, and postmodernist before her time'),[43] and the poems discussed earlier demonstrate that thinking in action.

But the 'surface of life' Spark detects in Masefield's poetry also refers to the concrete imagery, realism and action within his narratives. The way Masefield handles dialogue, for example, is to Spark an impressive aspect of his narrative surface. Spark highlights the following exchange, taken from *The Everlasting Mercy*:

> 'It's mine.'
> 'It ain't.'
> 'You put.'
> 'You liar.'
> 'You closhy put.'
> 'You bloody liar.'[44]

Spark notes the use of 'ordinary speech insofar as it depicts the way in which two country youths of the time and locality might be expected to argue', before observing the 'artistic realism in the conversation which is quite apart from historical accuracy; it is ordinary speech and also poetic speech'.[45] The witty synthesis of the two is what attracts Spark, and what elevates *The Everlasting Mercy*, according to Spark, above the narrow and reactionary responses of its first critics, too busy arguing over 'whether or not it was obscene'.[46] Spark stresses that the success of these lines comes not from 'dialectic strength' (meaning the unfolding of argument) nor the 'mild vituperative language'; instead it is 'a matter of rhythmic balance, where the stresses shift from line to line'.[47] From the punchy iambic monometers to the longer iambic dimeters, 'mood and meaning develop beyond the mere qualifying value of the adjective'. It is the 'aural suggestiveness' of the rhythm rather than, or more than, the 'verbal meaning' that captivates the reader.[48] One of Spark's later poems, written in 2003, carries the spirit of the lessons learned here. 'The Creative Writing Class' presents in 20 lines a heated but incomprehensible exchange between a man and a woman,

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[43] Willy Maley, 'Not to Deconstruct? Righting and Deference in *Not to Disturb*', in *Theorising Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction* ed. by Martin McQuillan (Palgrave, 2001), pp. 170–188 (p, 173).
[44] Spark, *John Masefield*, p. 5.
[45] Ibid., p. 6.
[46] Ibid., p. 5.
[47] Ibid., p. 6.
[48] Ibid.

presumably creative writers, and uses different (and increasingly aggressive) dialogue tags for every individual speech act:

> 'There is,' he declared.
> 'Really?' she grinned.
> 'Undoubtedly.' he stated.
> 'Tomorrow,' she burbled.
> 'A majority.' he chortled.
> 'The statues?' she enquired.
> […]
> 'It's a mere obsession,' she roared.
> 'Develop the wolf,' he demanded.
> 'Done,' she snarled.
> 'On with the job,' he guffawed.
> 'Not unanimous,' she yelled.
> 'You're breaking my jaw,' he groaned.
> 'Silence,' she sneered.[49]

The poem satirises creative writing as a taught discipline, using the different dialogue tags to suggest the overwrought artifice of workshopped writing (''On with the job'' reinforces the extent to which creativity here is standardised or commodified) while the fiery exchange itself, though difficult to follow, implies the unhelpful and potentially spiteful nature of this type of collaborative creativity.[50] The central irony of the poem, of course, is that Spark produces a piece of creative writing – a challenging, opaque and comical one at that – from the raw materials of an institution and a way of writing she finds, this poem suggests, at odds with the task of creative writing. A part of how Spark accomplishes this is through the arrangement of the poem's metre which corresponds neatly with Spark's own analysis of Masefield's technique.

Unlike the sample from Masefield's poem, the rhythm in Spark's exchange is irregular and awkward, but at the same time, the amphibrachic dialogue tags ('he **sta**ted', 'she **burb**led' etc.) of each end-stopped line propel the poem forward with the same

[49] Spark, 'The Creative Writing Class', *Complete Poems*, p. 14.
[50] It is no coincidence that *The Finishing School*, published a year later, follows the frustrations and obsessive behaviour of a creative writing teacher.

momentum as the argument between Masefield's country youths. Note also that while the rhythm is irregular on the whole, lines of equal stress count are clustered together. The first five lines are cast as dimeters, mostly iambic (with one trochee, '**Rea**lly'), while lines 10 to 15 extend to trimeters with varying stress patterns: from straightforward iambic trimeter (''The **Tears** of **Time**,' she **cho**ked', ''De**vel**op the **wolf**,' he de**mand**ed') to more complex rhythms mixing iambs, trochees, anapaests and dactyls – ''The con**fed**er**a**tion,' she **growl**ed. | '**Hos**tile **eth**ics!' he ex**claim**ed. | […] '**Ev**erything en**tire**,' he **warbl**ed.'' The final four lines contain a mix of dimeters and trimeters with varying metrical patterns, but consider the final five lines as a closing quintain and observe the clean symmetry with which three trimeters are enveloped by two trochaic dimeters, echoing too the woman's first trochaic piece of dialogue ('**Rea**lly?'). Rhythmically, it offers a sense of closure that the content does not, but it also illustrates the violence of the line ''You're breaking my jaw'', as if the trochaic stresses in ''Done'' and ''Silence'' mimic the blows presumably struck by the woman to the man (and in so doing silencing him). Thinking through poetic 'mimicry', then, we can detect in this poem techniques that have been 'properly assimilated' from Masefield's own employment of metrical expansion and contraction with dialogue, and furthermore that Spark's interest in dialogue and humour likely facilitated her transition to prose.

Indeed conversation figures as a recurring motif in Spark's poetry, appearing in poems like 'Conversation Piece', 'A Visit' and 'Letters'. The longer poems, 'The Nativity' and 'The Ballad of the Fanfarlo', are made up mostly of interrogations, a nod perhaps to those exchanges which fascinated Spark in the Book of Job. For Spark, then, there is a significant connection between the representation of dialogue and the art of poetry. Spark acknowledges how Masefield's handling of dialogue in prose profits from his craft as a poet: 'As I showed in dealing with the narrative poems […] Masefield uses dialogue with some skill. The practice of this in verse not only proves a salutary discipline when he comes to prose, its effect is near-poetic' .[51] Using a passage of dialogue from Masefield's novel *Sard Harker* – full of the kind of verbal repetition and rhythmical variety shown in his poetry – Spark praises its 'witty terseness' and 'to-and-fro rhythm' before concluding that Masefield constructs his dialogue with 'an economy quite beyond the normal range of prose expression'.[52] In the final section of this chapter I unearth an early version of a dialogue exchange that Spark works into *Reality and Dreams* that recalls the musicality of Masefield's

[51] Spark, *John Masefield*, p. 168.
[52] Ibid.

'rhythmic balance'. For now, I consider the influence of an unavoidable literary movement – modernism – on Spark's conception of poetry and the role of the poet in the 20th century.

Artistic modernism is associated with a kind of radical experimentalism that responded to fast approaching futures heralded by increased urbanisation, consumerism, innovations in technology and transport, and the shock of war. Some artists openly embraced the new industrial landscape, like Filippo Marinetti, who penned a colourful panegyric to modernity in the 'Futurist Manifesto', celebrating 'the beauty of speed', 'feverish insomnia' and other characteristics of the supposedly thrilling machine age.[53] According to Marinetti, art too must change profoundly in order to meet, represent and extol the new, alien present: 'poetry must be conceived as a violent assault launched against unknown forces to reduce them to submission under man'.[54] To that end the conventions of metre, rhyme and eloquent diction are found wanting, and must be discarded in favour of what would become modernist poetry's legacy: the adoption and popularisation of *vers libre*. This, at least, is the most popular and reductive understanding of modernist art and its aims, but it is more accurate to talk of a multitude of modernisms, and it is to a particular split within literary modernism that I now turn in order to place Spark's position within a modernist context.

In response to the kind of rhetoric espoused by Marinetti and other artists eager to move on from the 'useless admiration of the past',[55] Peter Nichols explains that 'on this issue […] modern poetry was to be deeply divided, falling into often quite distinct national groupings, themselves divisible between two broad tendencies that some recent critics […] have distinguished as avant-garde and modernist'.[56] The avant-garde includes those poets and movements interested in devising radical new techniques for representation such as the automatic writing of Surrealism, the collage pieces of Dadaism or the elliptic reveries of German expressionism, to name only a few, and the verse produced was more often than not 'free'.

The 'modernists', on the other hand, launched a '*defense* against what were felt to be the degenerative forces of modernity, the "sculpture of rhyme" still standing firm against the mass-produced "mould in plaster" that the age apparently demanded'.[57] For these poets, such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, a sense of history – an understanding of poetic tradition and the

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[53] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', in *Futurism: An Anthology* ed. by Lawrence S. Rainey, Christine Poggi and Laura Wittman (Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 49–53 (p. 51).
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., p. 52.
[56] Peter Nichols, 'Modernism', in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 889–894 (p. 890).
[57] Ibid., p. 891.

past's relation with the present – was essential for the construction of 'authentically new work'.[58] 'The poem which is absolutely original is absolutely bad,' declares Eliot, 'it is, in the bad sense, 'subjective' with no relation to the world to which it appeals'.[59] An example of Eliot's determination to historicise can be found in his assessment of the concept of free verse, about which he emphasises its French origins: 'The term, which fifty years ago had an exact meaning, in relation to the French alexandrine, now means too much to mean anything at all'.[60] Eliot is being deliberately provocative and somewhat aloof here, but his point is that the supposed originality of free verse – its 'break' with tradition in the 20th century – is actually rooted in a steady, formal development or loosening of verse structures practiced in 19th century France. The wider context is important to Eliot because it informs his conception and practice of free verse, defined in large part by qualifying the extent to which free verse is free: 'the ghost of some simple metre should lurk behind the arras in even the "freest" verse; to advance menacingly as we doze, and withdraw as we rouse'.[61] 'Freedom', Eliot asserts, 'is only truly freedom when it appears against the background of an artificial limitation'.[62] The implication here, as Nichols explains, is that 'good' modern poetry 'reins in the recklessly expansive gestures of avant-gardism: the tone is ironic and impersonal, the mode allusive, deliberately "difficult," and clearly controlled'.[63]

All of which is to say that Spark, an admirer of Eliot, develops a poetic sensibility in line with the modernist rather than the avant-gardist camp. Indeed it was difficult for any poet during the first half of the 20th century to resist or shake off completely the influence of Eliot,[64] but it is clear that Spark sympathised quite readily with Eliot's studious appreciation of poetic traditions. In another editorial for *Poetry Review*, beseeching readers to 'cease railing at the moderns',[65] Spark lays bare her allegiance to the modernism championed by Eliot and Pound. 'Let it be known to adherents of the Olympians', says Spark to sceptical

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[58] Ibid.
[59] T. S. Eliot, 'Introduction', in *The Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* ed. by T. S. Eliot, 2nd edn (Faber and Faber, 1948), pp. 7–21 (p. 10).
[60] Ibid., p. 8.
[61] T. S. Eliot, 'Reflections on "Verse Libre"', in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* ed. by Frank Kermode (Faber and Faber, 1975), pp. 31–36 (pp. 34–35).
[62] Ibid., p. 36.
[63] Nichols, 'Modernism', p. 891.
[64] See Gary Grieve-Carlson, 'Towards an American Avant-Garde: Williams' Quarrel with Eliot', *Modern Language Studies*, 46.1 (2016), pp. 54–69. Fellow American and poet William Carlos Williams was distraught at Eliot's success and influence (across Britain and the US) because it effectively delimited what modernist poetry is and could be, an ideal against which Williams' own poetics – in which he rejects the allusions, intertextual references and metrical traces of Eliot for simplicity, brevity, locality and the 'freest verse' – is diametrically opposed.
[65] Muriel Spark, 'The Catholic View', in *Poetry Review*, 38.6 (1947), pp. 402–405 (p. 402).

classicists, 'that the new poets are in no small sense disciples of the old', that 'the poet of to-day is rich in heritage and cannot but count his new idiom a compound of what has gone before, just as the language in which he writes has Saxon, Greek, Roman, Viking, and Norman for ingredients'.[66] On a more technical level Spark encourages an open-mindedness towards unusual and experimental forms, arguing that 'technique is essential and we must not judge the form of a poem, however unconventional, until we have ascertained what technique is embodied therein, and to what purpose'.[67] Spark's openness only extends so far, though, as is betrayed in the previous paragraph when she argues that 'if the form of a poem is vassal to the theme, the critic is not justified in condemning form as such, but it is his duty to decry an incompatible form (and to denounce complete formlessness)'.[68] That word, 'formlessness', is similar to Eliot's sardonic remark about the 'freest verse', so while Spark in this editorial criticises the purists of the Poetry Society and extols the moderns, she does so with a degree of reservation, highlighting a particular, more respectable strand of literary modernism typified by Eliot, Auden and the late work of Yeats.

Much of Spark's poetry corresponds to the aesthetic position staked out here, with traditional forms such as the villanelle, rondel and ballad appearing alongside looser, freer but by no means radical (as far as the 'avant-garde' is concerned) experiments. In each case, however, the formal structures operate in accordance with the modernist ideal of detachment, working irony, distance, allusions and intertextuality into the poetry. Spark's poem 'A Tour of London', for instance, borrows the structure and the tone if not the scale of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, itself a tour of a sort (through literature as much as London). 'A Tour of London' comprises seven titled sections, some of which signpost a location, either generically ('Suburb', 'The House') or specifically ('Kensington Gardens'), while others zoom in, as it were, on individual scenes ('What the Stranger Wondered', 'Man in the Street'). Like *The Waste Land*, Spark presents a fragmentary vision, or glance, at the city, though in 'A Tour of London', Spark confines the view to a day (and night) of a Sunday.

In each poem there are references to time and the devices that report it, expressed in a manner that laments the machinic, regularised order of urban temporality. In *The Waste Land*, the speaker walks 'To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours | with a dead sound on the final stroke of nine', as if the church is reluctant to keep this new kind of time.[69] Similarly,

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Muriel Spark, 'The Catholic view', p. 403.
[68] Ibid.
[69] T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', in *The Waste Land and other Poems* (Faber and Faber, 2006), pp. 21–46 (p. 25).

from Spark, 'All the discrepant churches grind | Four', the delay of the line break serving to underscore the exhaustion with which the church bells begrudgingly 'grind' out another day.[70] In Eliot's 'Preludes' the relentless and precise timekeeping of the busy metropolis is rendered comic and absurd with the parodic use of strict iambs: 'His soul stretched tight across the skies / that fade behind a city block, | Or trampled by insistent feet / At four and five and six o'clock'.[71] In Spark's tour, there is a moment of reprieve from the hustle and bustle of the city as 'The clock knocked off at quarter to three | And sat there yawning with arms stretched wide, | And it was set going again by nobody, | it being Sunday and we being occupied'.[72] The irony here, of course, is the idea that no one has the time to set the clock going, and it seems like only the clock itself rather than the humans it regulates can afford to sit 'yawning with arms stretched wide'. The following stanza concludes: 'Therefore the day happened and disappeared, / but whether the time we kept was appropriate / To rend, to sew, to love, to hate / No one could say for certain', as if the stopped clock instils an uneasiness or a sense of illegitimacy about the time spent unsupervised.[73]

About those lines quoted from Eliot's 'Preludes' Michael North claims that 'imagery and prosody both confess an utter subjection to empty routine, the only resistance to which is to be found in the very exaggeration of the routine'.[74] Spark's poem too contains within its rhymes and rhythms a kind of wry joke. The stanza of the fifth section, 'Suburb', repeats several words and unravels in a coherent rhyme pattern of *abbabb*:

> It is the market clock that moonish glows.
> Where two hands point, two poplars interlock.
> Night's verities knock
> Normal perspective comatose,
> Proving the moon a market clock,
> The trees, time's laughing-stock.[75]

The words 'market', 'clock' and 'moon' are repeated across two different lines as if being worked into a sestina, and the consonance throughout the poem ('market […] moonish',

[70] Spark, 'A Tour of London', *Complete Poems*, p. 1.
[71] Eliot, 'Preludes', in *The Waste Land and other Poems*, pp. 9–11 (p. 10).
[72] Spark, 'A Tour of London', p. 4.
[73] Ibid.,
[74] Michael North, 'T.S. Eliot', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Poets* ed. by Claude Julien Rawson (Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 491–507 (p. 492).
[75] Spark, 'A Tour of London', p. 5.

'point […] poplars', 'Night's […] knock', 'trees […] time's') is as obvious as the rhymes. The same technique is pushed further in the seventh section by using rhyming couplets and a ballad-like lilt: 'Beside the lamplight longitude. / He stood so long and still, it would / Take men in longer streets to find / What this was chewing in his mind'.[76] Like Eliot, Spark's knowing adaptation of poetic tradition functions, to borrow North's phrase, like a 'self-conscious smirk'.[77] Indeed, at this point, the traditions from which Spark is drawing includes Eliot himself, and one wonders to what extent 'A Tour of London' takes as its target the bleak, exaggerated waste lands of modernist poetry – ode or 'devilish mimicry'?[78] Regardless, Spark's affinity with Eliot and his thinking on poetry is evident, but there is another side to Spark's poetry, a lighter, whimsical and sometimes surreal mode with a feminist undercurrent to which I now briefly turn before concluding.

These poems take as their subject matter everyday concerns, are epigrammatic in form and usually but not always humorous. 'That Bad Cold', for example, sees a speaker complaining about then reflecting on having the common cold. 'That hand, a tiny one, first at my throat; | that thump in the chest'.[79] The third line includes a childish internal rhyme, 'I know you of old, you're a bad cold'. The second stanza, however, expands on the situation as the speaker begins to think through the implications and consequences of their condition. 'Nobody asked him to come. (Yes, | He is masculine, but otherwise | don't try to parse the situation.)' Gender is introduced into the personification, as is the speaker's own awareness of the conceit, cautioning the reader not to read too much into it. Right after this warning, however, the speaker invites further scrutiny by suggesting who 'He' is: 'Everything stops. Perhaps | He is providentially intended to / Make cease and desist an overworking | State of mind'. The cold is a manifestation of God, then, given to the speaker as a sign to rest.

Yet if we return to the very first line, equipped now with the knowledge of the cold as a masculine presence, what reads at first as an innocent visual metaphor – 'That hand, a tiny one, first at my throat' – becomes something more sinister, as does that stanza's last lines, 'Come to stay for a few days, | unwanted visitor–a week perhaps'. Notice also that each mention of a 'He' is located at the beginning of lines, where words are capitalised by default, so there remains an ambiguity about whether this masculine figure symbolises God or not. Of

[76] Ibid.
[77] North, 'T. S. Eliot', p. 493.
[78] Ibid., p. 494.
[79] Spark, 'That Bad Cold', *Complete Poems*, p. 16. All further quotes refer to this citation.

course, if the poem is read as an allegory for an abusive relationship, the metaphor still works – it is merely flipped from a benevolent authority to a potentially violent and oppressive one.

The poem's final line, depending on the choice of interpretation, is either comforting or ominous: 'And the desk diary | lies open with a vacant grin'. On the one hand, the speaker is granted the luxury of a 'vacant' schedule, allowed to relax and recover. On the other hand, given the alternative reading (parsing against the speaker's wishes), the 'vacant grin' of the diary – another personification – hints towards a period of entrapment. The phrase 'lies open' operates also as a pun on lying in the deceptive sense (and 'open' a nod to the transparency of the poem's own 'lies'), and connects back to earlier lines in which the speaker reflects casually on the 'friends' and 'enemies' included as part of the common cold: 'Friends mean merely a bed | and a hot drink. Enemies and all | paranoias, however justified, lose their way | in the fog'. What the speaker understands as 'paranoias', those cracks of doubt about an unhealthy relationship, the emergence of self-belief, are tragically, 'however justified', lost 'in the fog' of manipulation. The speaker receives not a break from an 'overworking | state of mind' but is instead insidiously made to empty (become 'vacant') a state of mind that would otherwise question and challenge a one-sided dynamic. To 'make cease and desist' suddenly reads as an aggressive legal order rather than a light, hyperbolic colloquialism. Likewise, the enjambment in the following off-handed observation – 'Yes, there is a certain / Respite.' – forces a stronger stress on the final word, so that the latter syllable, 'spite', rings clearer, and in that way the word acts as a microcosm for the whole poem: lurking within the casual, indeed seemingly trivial surface of the text is a more complex and darker narrative. The 'bad' of the poem's title, in other words, should be taken morally seriously.

The destabilising tension between the two is what makes Alan Jenkins characterise Spark's poetry as having, amongst other things, a 'Stevie Smith-like whimsy'[80] because Smith's poetry is renowned for its combination of juvenile, 'silly' verse and deeper, sombre themes like death and suffering, realities all the more frightening for being presented in such a jarringly cheery or child-like way – what one reviewer described as an 'ironic unhappiness'.[81] As the above example demonstrates (and there are more), Spark too saw the value in a form of poetics that masquerades as marginal, insignificant or comical in order to

[80] Alan Jenkins, 'Muriel Spark', in *The Oxford Companion to Modern Poetry*, ed. by Ian Hamilton and Jeremy Noel-Todd, 2nd edn (2013) <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy2.lib.gla.ac.uk/display/10.1093/acref/9780199640256.001.0001/acref-9780199640256-e-1138?rskey=nlD2hc&result=1216>

[81] 'Stevie Smith', Poetry Foundation <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/stevie-smith> [accessed 21 October 2021].

more fully represent the tensions between appearance and reality, a formal and thematic concern that bleeds into the novels. Furthermore, 'A Bad Cold' points towards an unequivocally feminist perspective and poetics (joining a rich tradition of subversive feminist poets like Adrienne Rich and Sylvia Path) and foregrounds the extent to which Spark was, as James Bailey convincingly argues about the novels, 'a *woman* writer whose literary innovations have arguably energised the interrogations of female agency (or the lack thereof)'.[82]

Spark's active role in the British poetry scene of the immediate post-war years – as practitioner, critic, editor and administrator – as well as her continued interest in and writing of poetry throughout her career has been treated, for the most part, as a mere curiosity; an interesting, colourful but essentially biographical footnote attached to the story of Spark the novelist. On the contrary, I argue that a Sparkian poetics – that is, an understanding of both the craft and literary context of the oeuvre – profits from a deeper analysis of Spark's poetry activity. From only a brief survey of Spark's poetic and critical output, it is clear that the legacy of that intellectual and artistic engagement, far from hindering or delaying Spark's literary success, is *productive of* the novels that secured it. The remainder of this chapter explores some of the direct ways Spark employs the space and techniques of poetry in the construction of *Reality and Dreams*.

Poetic Vignettes and the Novel

When Spark declared, in the foreword to her *Complete Poems*, that she does not write '"poetic" prose',[83] the claim is difficult to assess not because one suspects Spark is being modest or humble, but because it is unclear exactly what Spark (or anyone) means to denote with the contradictory categorical hybrid 'poetic prose'. Against what criteria can prose be described as poetic? The flowing, dream-like prose of Proust (or the Proust rendered by Moncrieff)? The evanescent lyricism of Woolf? The sharp, laconic prose of Hemingway? The

[82] James Bailey, *Muriel Spark's Early Fiction: Literary Subversion and Experiments with Form* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), p. 28.
[83] Spark, *Complete Poems*, p. xiv. Here Spark echoes Charles Baudelaire's manifesto: 'Who among us has not, in moments of ambition, dreamt of the miracle of a form of poetic prose, musical but without rhythm and rhyme, both supple and staccato enough to adapt itself to the lyrical movements of our souls […]?' Baudelaire, *The Prose Poems and La Fanfarlo*, trans. by Rosemary Lloyd (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 30.

verbose maximalism of Joyce? Any of these prose styles can be (and is) described as poetic,[84] and it is therefore worth asking whether 'poetic' as a qualification functions as a less self-conscious substitute for the more loaded 'literary'. 'Literary prose' is allegedly that which transcends the trappings of convention and genre and as such necessarily assumes a position of superiority in the hierarchy of fiction. To call prose poetic, however, avoids the stuffy judgement of snobbery in favour of what, on the surface, appears as a purely aesthetic assessment – this prose reads like poetry/has the effects of poetry. But to compare prose to poetry nonetheless makes the same implicit claims to superiority that 'literary' does; this mere novelist creates prose *as if* they were a Poet.

Perhaps, then, Spark's comment simply acknowledges, and in turn exploits, this enduring generic dichotomy; not wanting to align her novels with the special quality of poetry, but at the same time suggesting a rapport between poetry and her novels, Spark maintains the distinction even as she borrows the prestige of one form to imply the literariness of the other. 'I do not write "poetic" prose, but feel that my outlook on life and my perceptions of events are those of a poet'.[85] And while it is tempting to read these claims cynically as a novelist bitter about her neglected status as a poet, Spark does take seriously the formal connections between poetry and prose in her own writing: 'Whether in prose or verse, all creative writing is mysteriously connected with music and I always hope this factor is apparent throughout my work'.[86] The musicality of language gets closer to what we mean by 'literary' or 'poetic' prose – perhaps literature is that which makes music, of all kinds, from language – but for Spark there exists a more direct, or less metaphorical, relationship between poetry and the composition of prose; findings in the archive reveal the extent to which Spark employed the art of the poetic vignette, for instance, as a site for novelistic discourse.

At least, in the case of *Reality and Dreams*, parts of the archive pertaining to the creative development of this late Spark novel demonstrate a poet at work. In a file of literary ephemera – defined here as writing that is not or not yet part of the novel's manuscript composition – there are many sheets of loose paper with single lines handwritten on them, ranging from short phrases to paragraphs, containing either snippets of narrative description,

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[84] See Jane Goldman, '"I Grow More & More Poetic": Virginia Woolf and Prose Poetry', in *British Prose Poetry: The Poems without Lines* ed. by Jane Monson (Palgrave, 2018), pp. 91–115; Laura Jok, 'Sounds and Impostures: James Joyce's Poetic Prose', in *James Joyce Quarterly*, 66.3 (2019), pp. 311–332; Verna Kale, 'Hemingway's Poetry and the Paris Apprenticeship', *The Hemingway Review*, 26.2 (2007), pp. 58–73.
[85] Spark, *Complete Poems*, p. xiv.
[86] Ibid.

dialogue, or plot outlines. What is surprising about these notes, however, is that they are then typewritten onto fresh, small and otherwise empty pieces of paper.[87] This action alone changes the ontological status of these notes from inchoate ephemera to intentional drafting. Not only are the hand-written notes preserved and given clarity in their typewritten form, some of them now resemble – with their centred position against negative space – fragments of poetry.

Matthew Harle, as part of his larger investigation into unfinished or abandoned literary projects, wrestles with the meanings and framings of these isolated Spark notes. 'What kind of texts are *The Side Effect*, *The Frugal Charade* [two titled plot outlines], or Spark's untitled dialogic writing? Are they notes, marginalia, or even poems?'[88] Harle's last suggestion is made entirely in passing (he engages no further with the proposed idea, and his phrasing, 'or even poems?', implies a certain level of doubt), but he is more interested in the philosophical question of how to categorise and understand the ontology of these notes as literary objects in themselves rather than as the raw stuff of novel-writing. For my purposes, it is precisely the writing's potential as poetry that I want to investigate, or rather, the strategy of casting prose in the guise of poetry – of effectively writing a kind of provisional prose poetry – for the production of novels. And I do this not to suggest Spark's novelistic practice derives, ultimately, from poetry, but rather to show the generic fluidity at the heart of Spark's writing.

Consider a typewritten note titled 'Novel' (FIG 1), under which appears the following: 'After the shock of being made redundant the mind reorganizes its point of view. Secretly: is it desirable to have the job, anyway? A touch of surrealism'. Given the note's underlined heading, 'Novel', it is expected that the remainder of the text outlines a kind of novelistic premise, scenario or idea. The first clause of the text – 'After the shock of being made redundant' – certainly mimics the formula of a condensed synopsis with its dramatic opening and build towards a central story arc, but the latter half of the sentence turns peculiarly academic in tone, '… the mind reorganizes its point of view'. That new point of view is expressed, informally, by the question of whether work is fulfilling in the first place. Finally, the last part of the note appears unrelated to the stream of thought that comes before and instead reads like an instruction, or stage direction, for 'a touch of surrealism'.

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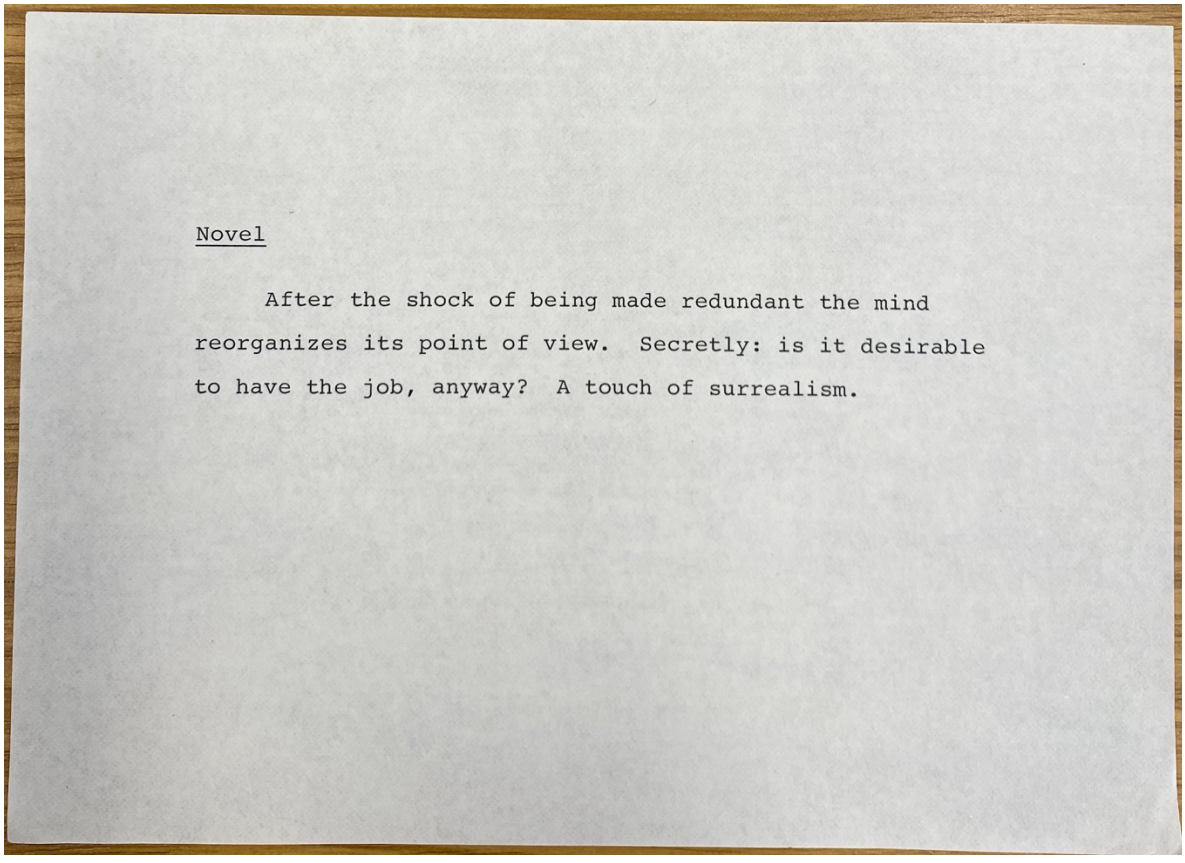
[87] Harle describes these same Spark notes as 'an uncatalogued wad of typed up one-line notes that contain ideas, characters, premises and aphorisms all typed in the centre of a set of otherwise blank A5 pages'. Matthew Harle, *Afterlives of Abandoned Work: Creative Debris in the Archive* (Bloomsbury, 2019), pp. 169-170.
[88] Ibid., 174.

As a scenario or plot outline the note is insufficient, and as a plan hardly helpful. It functions more like a prompt, with the question posed by Spark left open and the final remark, about surrealism, an aesthetic suggestion. But what if we approach it on its own terms? Following Harle, the text can equally be read as the 'material remains of a thought experiment that has been completed and resolved'.[89] Reframing the notes away from the logic of process – where they are defined in relation to a finalised work – Harle interprets the texts as 'completed *movements*' rather than 'imperfect plotlines and dialogue'.[90] In the same way Harle says of a Spark note titled 'PLOT' that it is 'both an unwritten plot and a piece of writing entitled 'PLOT'', so too is 'Novel' an (as yet) unwritten novel and a piece of writing entitled 'Novel'.[91] And as a piece of writing, 'Novel' combines text in a way that approaches the structure of poetry. Three sentences with their own tonal and syntactic identity that together build a cumulative if speculative argument, not unlike the three lines of a haiku.


Novel

After the shock of being made redundant the mind reorganizes its point of view. Secretly: is it desirable to have the job, anyway? A touch of surrealism.

FIG 1. Muriel Spark, typescript note, c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/52. © The Muriel Spark Archive

[89] Harle, *Afterlives*, p. 178.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., 179.

The word 'reorganises' appears at the start of the second line as if enacting the fresh 'point of view' to which the mind arrives 'after the shock of being made redundant', a clause which itself, in its irregular and jarring rhythm (as opposed to the metrical amphibrachic beat of 'the shock of redundancy'), enacts the shock as well as draws attention to the phrase's inherent contradiction and cruelty – to be *made* unnecessary.[92] In the middle of the second line, immediately after the pause of the end of the first sentence comes another caesura in the form of a colon, 'Secretly: is it desirable | to have the job, anyway?' As mentioned earlier, this sentence signals a switch in tone, with the colon acting as an invitation to secrecy as if preceding a whispered message. And while the casual, rhetorical question speaks to the way we rationalise rejection after the fact, the secrecy of the proposition betrays a deeper, more philosophical questioning of the worth and pleasure of work and labour. The closing phrase, 'A touch of surrealism', contrasts in sensation to the aggressive 'shock' of the opening, and hints towards the 'point of view' from which the speaker thinks: as a victim of the drive towards workplace efficiency and cost cutting the speaker reorganises their position vis-à-vis the modern job market, challenging the quantitative, shock-prone economic order within which human beings are organised, and dreaming of a different, gentler (sur)reality.

Of course, 'Novel' is more than an unpublished prose poem, containing as it does the same preoccupation with redundancy that reverberates throughout *Reality and Dreams*. But its dual existence as self-contained literary text *and* the jottings of a novel 'in larva', as Fleur Talbot would say,[93] demonstrates a writing practice free from the rigidity of generic boundaries, or rather, *immersed* in the potentiality of generic hybridity, represented most powerfully by the prose poem.

The emergence of the prose poem in nineteenth-century France speaks to a transitional period in the production and consumption of literature related to larger shifts in society[94] like the development of urban architectures, the fresh but jarring rhythms of modern life, and the rising prominence of prose or the prosaic as the 'clearly preferred genre of the

[92] See the section's end for why it is still appropriate to talk of 'lines' here.
[93] Muriel Spark, *Loitering with Intent* (Polygon, 2018), p. 5.
[94] Novelist Émile Zola argued that the decline of poetry at the time owed to the fact that 'it was no longer able to address the new sensibility being nurtured by the budding contemporary landscape'. Aimée Israel-Pelletier, 'Impressionism and the Prose Poem: Rimbaud's Artful Authenticity', *The Edinburgh Companion to the Prose Poem* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), pp. 23–34 (p. 24).

bourgeoisie' (the 'conspicuous other of aristocratic/poetic discourse').[95] Charles Baudelaire, the French pioneer of what we now identify as prose poetry, was clearly important to Spark; Baudelaire's novella *La Fanfarlo* left a lasting impression to the extent that Spark appropriated its characters for both a long poem, *The Ballad of the Fanfarlo*, and a prize-winning short story, 'The Seraph and the Zambesi', at the beginning of her writing career. That Spark takes a work of prose, authored by a writer famous for his poetry, and translates elements of it into works of both prose and poetry, surely signals a plasticity towards form on Spark's part, where prose and poetry are treated not as conventions of writing but as stylistic possibilities. It is no surprise that Stannard describes 'The Seraph and the Zambesi' as 'a kind of metaphysical prose poem'[96] and *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* as 'ultimately a poem, a chain of interlocking images and verbal echoes'.[97]

But perhaps it is prose poetry's shared sensibility with impressionism that best illuminates its literary value to Spark. Aimée Israel-Pelletier explores the relationship between the impressionist movement in painting and its literary counterpart, following four overlapping threads in the work of poet Arthur Rimbaud: '(1) the effect of incompletion or of the ébauche; (2) a new look to represent the new reality, "strikingness"; (3) the appearance of flatness, in the figurative sense; (4) the representation of movement'.[98] Some of these tendencies could profitably describe Spark's work as a whole, especially the 'appearance of flatness', but the ébauche or 'the effect of incompletion' is most relevant to the present discussion. The ébauche, 'or the sketch-like appearance of Impressionist paintings', scandalised the status quo of the art world, 'for whom a painting's "polished" and "finished" look was a mark of its "quality"'.[99] 'In contrast to the effect of closure desired in the tableau', continues Israel-Pelletier, the ébauche 'manifests incompletion, as well as spontaneity, improvisation and expressiveness'.[100]

In literature the prose poem responded in kind with a poetics of incompletion, with the fragment reframed as an aesthetic choice rather than an unrealised part of something whole; or as Israel-Pelletier puts it, 'the fragment is an impressionist trope and the prose poem its playground'.[101] The loose jottings Spark creates can therefore be understood as an

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[95] Jonathan Monroe, 'Introduction: The Prose Poem as a Dialogical Genre', in *A Poverty of Objects: The Prose Poem and the Politics of Genre* (Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 15–42 (pp. 24, 25).
[96] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, p. 125.
[97] Martin Stannard, 'The Crooked Ghost: *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* and the Idea of the 'Lyrical'', *Textual Practice*, 32.9 (2018), pp. 1529–1543 (p. 1540).
[98] Israel–Pelletier, 'Impressionism', p. 28.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., p. 27.

impressionistic kind of writing where the fragment (as both a material scrap *and* a snapshot of text) is completed to generate further incompleteness. For Georgia Albert the fragment 'poses a problem for any literary scholarship or hermeneutics invested in virtuosity'[102] because it resists capture by the logic of premeditation or systematic plotting, and it is precisely the fragment's capacity for 'spontaneity' and 'improvisation' rather than mastery or closure that Spark harnesses for novelistic purposes.

We can observe Spark's fragments in action in notes such as FIG 2 below, where the self-contained fragment is appended with a character name, thereby sharing with 'Novel' the dual identity of a piece of prose poetry and a design towards a work-in-progress novel; this time, however, we witness a dialogic interaction.

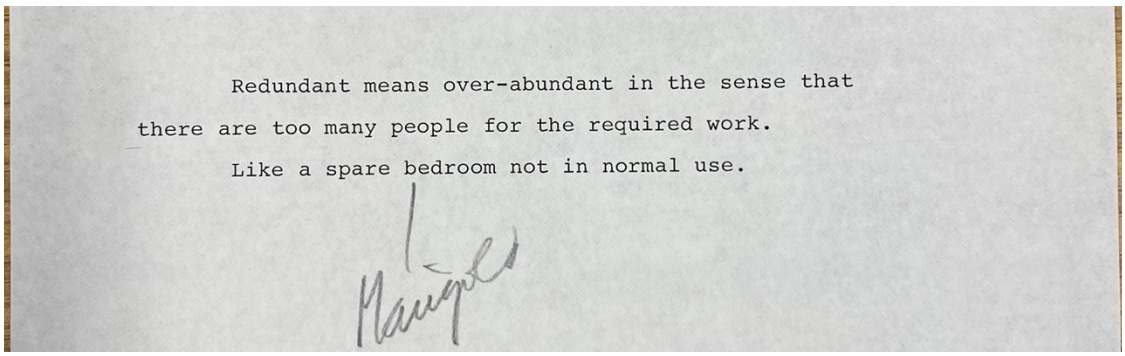
Redundant means over-abundant in the sense that
there are too many people for the required work.
Like a spare bedroom not in normal use.

FIG 2. Muriel Spark, typescript note, c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/52 © The Muriel Spark Archive

Reading this note after having read the novel into which the named character appears it is easy to recognise the text as belonging to the voice of Marigold. But the name is attached to the typewritten text post factum, as if Spark's isolated text experiments generate character rather than character generating text.[103] Marigold, a stickler for bureaucracy and prone to 'philosophising, if not sermonising'[104] about how to navigate the modern labour market, is quite likely to say something as literal as 'Redundant means over-abundant in the sense that there are too many people for the required work'. The simile that follows, however, and the way it charges the text with poetic resonance, is pure Spark.

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[102] Georgia Albert quoted in Harle, *Afterlives*, p. 179.
[103] Spark may well have written this text with Marigold in mind because there are some handwritten notes titled 'Tom', written clearly as aphorisms, thoughts or pieces of dialogue associated with the character. Nonetheless, it seems apparent that Spark prioritised the production of text over the development of character at this stage in the writing.
[104] Muriel Spark, *Reality and Dreams* (Constable, 1996), p. 34.

Treated as another poem, the simplified logic of the first sentence – with redundancy reduced to a mere question of supply and demand – is problematised by the ambiguous analogy in the second sentence: the comparison questions why it is acceptable to possess spare bedrooms but not spare workers, drawing attention to the irony of extending the privilege of uselessness (that is, of not requiring utility to be valuable) to inanimate objects/spaces but not to human beings. Or is the point that spare bedrooms *are* a useless and wasteful luxury in the same way that workers are inefficiently distributed in their 'over-abundance', and as such is critical of any and all manifestations of redundancy? The answer depends on the text's intended focalisation – the latter reading is perfectly compatible with the moral worldview of Marigold, while the former echoes Spark's own comments about the absurdity of our conception of usefulness (inasmuch as the poetic speaker here resembles Spark).[105]

Then there is the series of contrasts between the world of work and the domestic space of rest, the economic misfortune of unemployment and the comfortably bourgeois image of the spare bedroom, creating links between class, décor, the dualistic notion of idleness (as either middle-class boredom or the laziness of the poor). Marigold is herself a wealthy member of the upper crust, being the daughter of a famous film director and the heiress of a biscuit manufacturer, and at one point in the novel she allegedly investigates the reality and effects of redundancy by pretending to be out of a job and homeless, and writes 'idiotic books' on the experience.[106] It would be tenuous to argue that the text of FIG 2 anticipates the trajectory of both the novel and the character of Marigold, but from my brief analysis of the fragment it is clear to see how text like this – a flash of Imagist poetry – was highly generative for Spark's creative practice.

While the text of FIG 2 never reappears in the novel, other scraps do find new context in the narrative. Consider FIG 3, which, given the title, 'Telephone', and the explicitly dialogic structure of the exchange, seems to represent an anonymous conversation over the telephone. To those unfamiliar with the same exchange in *Reality and Dreams*, 'Telephone' reads like a vignette taken from a story of someone seeing, for example, a long lost lover, perhaps a married man, recognisable by his wedding ring. In the novel, however, the dialogue is reframed in three different ways: 1) it does not happen over the phone, 2) the exchange is a retelling of a conversation from the past, and 3) it is comical rather than poignant in tone.

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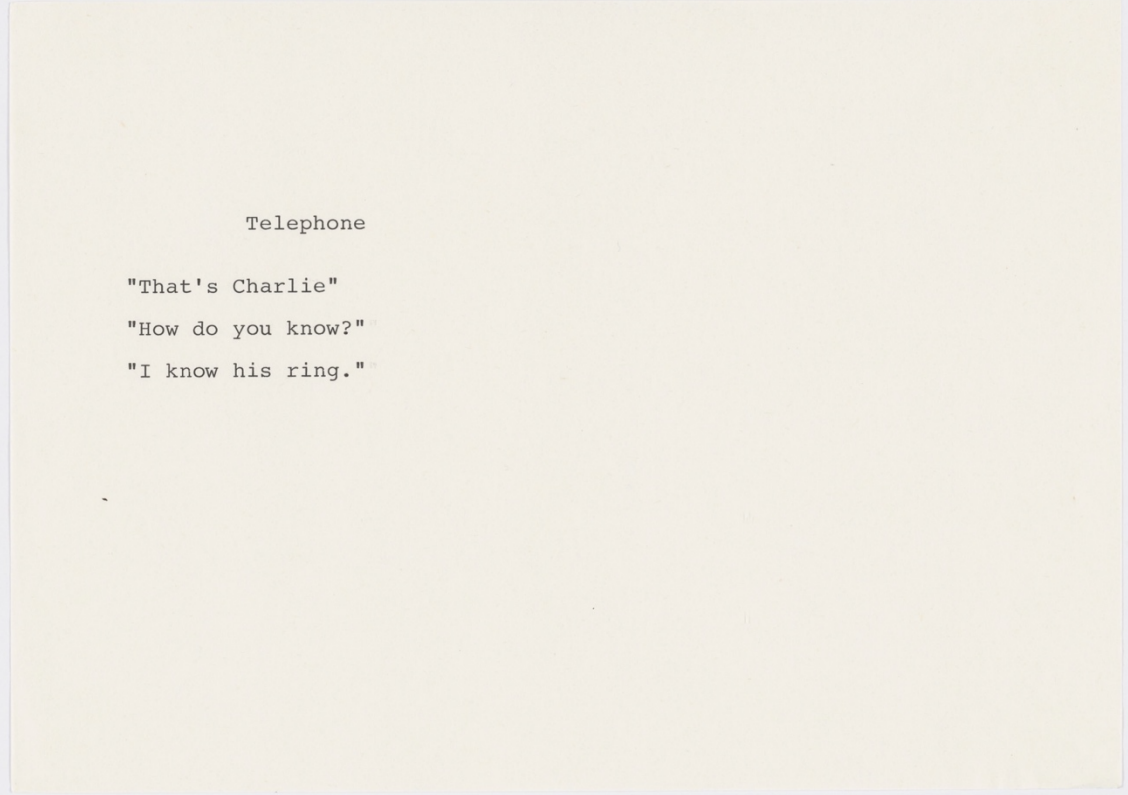
[105] One fragment in the archive says of redundancy that 'the very word is an offence against human nature. If anyone is considered superfluous there must be something wrong with our concepts of necessity of satiety'. The polemical and dramatic tone is characteristic of Tom, but the directness and peculiar turn of phrase ('necessity of satiety') recalls Spark the critic. Spark, typewritten note, NLS, c. 1995, Acc. 11621/52.
[106] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, p. 515.



Telephone

"That's Charlie"

"How do you know?"

"I know his ring."

FIG 3. Muriel Spark, typescript note, c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/52 © The Muriel Spark Archive

Here is how Spark expands on the above in the published novel:

> 'My mother has a man,' said Marigold. 'I think his name's Charlie. The phone rang several times when I was there. Once my mother rang to pick up the receiver; she said "That's Charlie." Evidently it was Charlie. And when I asked her how did she know it was Charlie's call, she said, "I know his ring." That means she's besotted'.[107]

Whether this was an inevitable progression from the sparse sketch is impossible to know, but it seems that the significance of the passage (it concludes the fourth chapter of the novel) hinges on the phrase 'I know his ring' and the idea that someone could anticipate a caller from the otherwise impersonal mechanics and noise of a ringing phone. The phrase or idea may not have been so attractive or memorable to Spark had she not preserved it in its original, concentrated dialogic form. There is also a subtle musicality at play in the exchange, with the certainty of an opening iamb ('That's **Char**lie') followed by an enquiring dactylic

[107] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 37.

swell ('**How** do you **know**?), and resolved with two perfect iambs ('I **know** his **ring**'), creating a micro-narrative from metrical variation not unlike the dialogic structures employed by John Masefield. That 'aural suggestiveness' Spark identifies in Masefield can also account for Spark's even smaller scraps like typewritten notes containing nothing but the phrases 'my pyrotechnic rage' or 'Like a defrocked priest'[108] (the latter of which has a big tick across the page in pencil); the former builds to its final stress like a firework and the latter draws out the venom of the insult with its cluster of harsh consonants.[109]

The way these notes are formatted and preserved in type creates for Spark a catalogue of mini poems from which to simultaneously take inspiration (as a collection of ideas, associations, questions) and build towards a prose style. And it is not far-fetched to imagine Spark understanding these notes as poems; a handwritten note by Spark inside the same archival file, addressed to Penelope Jardine, instructs her to 'please type these scraps more or less as they are (*line – endings etc.*) Do your best'.[110] While the qualification 'more or less' suggests a relaxed, non-prescriptive transcription, the parenthetic hint about line endings speaks to the significance of these scraps as texts rather than mere jottings, calling on a device – line endings – that figures not in prose, but in poetry.

It is therefore no coincidence that a poem written in 2003 and included in Spark's *Complete Poems* titled 'The Hospital' calls back to the novel published in 1996:

> I want to fall asleep in the chair
> by the bed.
> Someone calls from the corridor:
> Tom! I must keep her records up
> deck o' cards
> neck of duck
> (That's up to them) I myself
> want to fall asleep on fine sheets,
> don't you think?
> Who will keep my eyes shut?[111]

[108] Spark, typewritten note, NLS, Acc. 11621/52.
[109] In the published novel an alternate version is used as dialogue spoken by Tom: 'My daughter, Marigold, an unfrocked priest of a woman'. Ibid., p. 11.
[110] Spark, handwritten note, NLS, Acc. 11621/52.
[111] Spark, 'The Hospital', *Complete Poems*, p. 42.

Is this not a poetic rendering of the opening scene from *Reality and Dreams*, with Tom waking in hospital, dazed and confused? Using the erratic flow of free verse, with regularly enjambed lines (interruptions in thought), blank gaps (like blinks), and non sequiturs (dream logic), Spark recreates in poetry that which occupies at least six pages of prose in the novel. Furthermore, as I explore in Chapter 3, the narration of *Reality and Dreams* originally employed a first-person perspective and was written as such up until the second chapter; the ghost of that version is preserved here in the lyric mode. When Stannard hails the 'brilliant, surreal opening sequence' of the novel in his biography, he neglects to mention the experimental poetics behind its brilliance.[112]

In a way the poem completes the circle of writing from which *Reality and Dreams* emerged: beginning with poetic vignettes, expanding into prose narrative, and ending with a return to the fragmented but more self-consciously constructed stuff of poetry (where the line endings are unequivocally rather than 'more or less' structured). It is this elasticity that gives Spark's novel writing its edge; not 'poetic prose', but not a prosaic prose either.

[112] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, p. 515.

Chapter Two

The Voices of Fiction and the Fiction of Voices: Spark as Novelist

The literary sensibility detected in Spark's poetry and her writing on poetry can be mapped, quite easily, onto the shape of the novels. The self-referential musings on creativity in the poems give way to playful metafictions; the 'modernist' wing of experimental poetry shows through Spark's appropriation of the history of the novel genre, infiltrating rather than destroying realism; the feminist undertones of the poetry evolve into tightly wound narratives exploring the existential problems of gender, more of which is discussed in Chapter Four; and the Catholic trappings of much of the poetry – the mystical or 'gnomic' qualities Perrie found irritating – find firmer purpose in the novels as a reaction against the Protestant origins of the form. But all these discrete connections between Spark's poetry and her novels – outlined in the next section – should be understood under a broader framework that goes beyond generic boundaries; as I have implied in the previous section on Spark's poetic vignettes, instead of seeing the novels as a break with or an evolution from poetry I want to argue, via Mikhail Bakhtin, that Spark's novelistic practice derives from, and is productive of, an investigation into the very nature of genre, and that the formlessness of the novel, for Spark, allows for a more profound reckoning with the dialogical formations of the self. Spark never abandoned poetry; her poetry abandoned Poetry and embraced the novel.

Metafictions

A far cry from the stuff of realism, Spark's fiction – by turns melodramatic, impassive, generic, experimental, supernatural and surreal – uses the novelistic devices of character, plot, suspense and humour to explore an abiding interest in fictionality, authorial control and the theological and political implications within which art and its making is embroiled. Spark's novels do not often come with the secure and comforting frame of the fictional universe; like the shifting physical environment of the Delfonts' living-room in *Doctors of*

Philosophy, Spark's fiction loosens – sometimes dramatically and explicitly, sometimes subtly and covertly – the scaffolding of novelistic convention.

Nevertheless, Spark's fiction occupies an unusual position within the canon(s) of post-war metafictional narratives. While Spark is given plenty of attention in dedicated studies such as Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction* (1984) or Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), retrospective reviews of the postmodern trend tend to highlight the novels and stories of writers such as John Fowles, B. S. Johnson, John Barth, Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino, at the expense of pioneers like Spark. As James Bailey notes, 'Spark is all too often excluded from critical overviews of innovative writing'.[1] A recent review of the history and legacy of metafiction in the online literary magazine *The Millions*, for example, contains no reference to Spark, even while quoting liberally from James Wood's *How Fiction Works*, a book which draws attention to the metafictional qualities of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.[2]

The probable reason for this is that these writers experimented with metafictional techniques in far more extreme ways so that their contribution to or establishing of postmodern aesthetics was far more obvious and faddish than the comparably 'realistic' or conventional novels of Spark. While Spark's novels clearly resist claims to realism and certainly defy convention, they do so within a literary aesthetic that is still recognisably generic and, on the surface, normative. In other words, as Len Gutkin claims, Spark's metafiction 'does not advertise its reflexivity as bluntly as American metafictionalists tend to do'.[3] What makes Spark's metafictional games distinctive is the subtlety with which they are deployed: 'Spark is unusual not for her means but for the unostentatious way she handles them'.[4] Spark's novels are experiments masquerading as straightforward realist texts, and are arguably all the more powerful for it. Nonetheless, in Spark's oeuvre we can identify a spectrum of metafictionality ranging from the suggestive or allusive (*Robinson*, *The Abbess of Crewe*) to the blatant and extreme (*The Comforters*, *Loitering with Intent*).

Spark's metafiction has provoked many different responses: some cite theology and Spark's Catholicism, others see a commentary on literary realism, and others still find in it a

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[1] James Bailey, 'Salutary Scars': The 'Disorienting' Fictions of Muriel Spark', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 9.1 (2015), pp. 34-52 (p. 36).
[2] Ed Simon, 'King, God, Smart-Ass Author: Reconsidering Metafiction', *The Millions*, 21 October 2019 <https://themillions.com/2019/10/king-god-smart-ass-author-reconsidering-metafiction.html> [accessed 26 October 2020]. There is a conspicuous lack of woman writers featured in this article; the only mention of a woman writer is a passing reference to Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. It is perhaps symptomatic of the ways in which postmodern scholars, despite the phenomenon's emphasis on plurality, privileged white male writers.
[3] Len Gutkin, 'Muriel Spark's Camp Metafiction', *Contemporary Literature*, 58.1 (2013), pp. 53–81 (p. 73).
[4] Ibid.

form of feminist critique. Every Spark novel arguably contains some mixture of these three categories, with some placing emphasis on one or the other. As we shall see, these distinct strands are complementary rather than oppositional.

James Bailey, for instance, argues in favour of the feminist qualities inherent in Spark's metafiction, citing in particular *Doctors of Philosophy*, *The Driver's Seat* and *Not to Disturb*. In these metafictions Bailey identifies 'devices used to interrogate and undermine institutions and social practices that sanction and support violence and oppression' against, among other things, female subjectivity.[5] Bailey reads Spark's technique as an expression of the 'tensions that exist between private selves and public performances', drawing attention to the ways 'bodies [are] neatly inscribed within oppressive cultural narratives', which in turn leads to 'the violent, sinister erasure of the female subject'.[6]

In *Doctors of Philosophy*, Bailey argues, this plays out in the lives of two similar but professionally separate women – former scholar Catherine Delfont and her cousin, established academic Dr. Leonora Chase. Each character represents what was at the time of writing seen as a mutually exclusive choice for women to either prioritise motherhood and marriage or professional advancement in the workplace. However, as the play progresses, Spark asks more profound questions about the roles these women inhabit, and how they rely on each other to prop up and reinforce their own personal fictions: the audience is introduced to Leonora through a sleepwalking sequence in which she begs Catherine's husband, Charlie, for a child, thus confirming for Catherine the virtues of her domestic life and the hollowness of Leonora's independence. Yet later Catherine confesses to Leonora her lack of fulfilment with Charlie and the bitterness with which she regards her thwarted academic career, revealing to the audience the fragility of our own fictional worlds. To make this point clear, Spark goes a step further in Act 2 with a metaleptic manoeuvre in which the stage is exposed as exactly that; instead of the Delfonts' living-room the audience sees a stage 'empty and without scenery except for various pulleys and switches to adjust stage scenery and lighting'.[7] Leonora is afforded an extradiegetic view – that is, a perspective outside or beyond the realist narrative sequence – of the Delfonts' meticulously constructed lives and her role within it.[8] As Patricia Waugh observes, metafiction 'aims to discover how we each "play" our

[5] Bailey, 'Salutary Scars', p. 35.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Muriel Spark, *Doctors of Philosophy* (Macmillan, 1963), p. 46.
[8] Ibid., 41.

own realities' and how we negotiate the 'complicated interpenetration' of reality and fiction, a process that Leonora experiences painfully in the second Act of *Doctors of Philosophy*.[9]

Bailey concludes that 'what is disturbing about *Doctors of Philosophy*', and, I would argue, all of Spark's metafiction, 'is not Spark's treatment of her characters as inert puppets but rather the ease with which these characters come to ensnare themselves, and one another, within preconstructed roles'.[10] Spark satirises not only the limited choices available to women in the early '60s but also the ways in which identity, especially female subjectivity, is bound by 'sinister structures of containment and control', and does so in a way that demonstrates her commitment to feminist critique as well as 'her own resistance to conventional models of realism that only reproduce, rather than subvert, dominant ideologies and structures of power'.[11] Importantly, as was mentioned earlier, Spark's experimentalism *inhabits* realist formulations, so that Spark is not so much interested in abandoning realism as she is in redefining it.[12] The redefinition to which Spark's metafiction aspires is concerned not only with the female experience, but also with more philosophical and theological questions.

While Bailey rightfully bemoans a tendency among scholars to reduce the meanings or impact of Spark's postmodernism to nothing more than a 'God-game played out between an all-powerful author and an ensemble of helpless characters', and highlights that Spark's absence in contemporary accounts of woman writers' experimental fiction owes much to the emphasis on her Catholic identity, it is equally disingenuous to avoid engaging with the religious and theological elements at work in Spark's metafiction.[13] David Lodge discusses the 'method' of Spark's narratorial voice in *Jean Brodie* by first pointing out the relationship in Graham Greene's oeuvre between, on the one hand, omniscient narration and his overtly Catholic novels, and on the other, the more secular perspective(s) in later novels and limited first-person narration: 'looking at the whole canon of Greene's fiction it is not difficult to establish a normative correlation between omniscient authorial narration and an explicitly Christian perspective on events; and, correspondingly, between limited narrators and a more secular, humanist perspective'.[14] Lodge argues that while the theological analogy inherent

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[9] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (Routledge, 1984), pp. 35, 36.
[10] Bailey, 'Salutary Scars', p. 42.
[11] Ibid., p. 49, 42.
[12] Ibid., p. 49.
[13] Ibid., p. 36. According to Bailey, Spark's literary legacy as a 'God-like' author figure toying sadistically with her characters owes much to Malcom Bradbury's influential 1972 essay 'Muriel Spark's Fingernails'.
[14] David Lodge, 'The Uses and Abuses of Omniscience: Method and Meaning in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*', *The Critical Quarterly*, 12.3 (1970), pp. 235–257 (p. 236).

within omniscient narration traditionally served 'as a metaphor for the providence of a just and benevolent God who, in the end […] may be trusted to make an equitable distribution of rewards and punishments', Spark adopts the metaphor for different theological ends, one of which is to express that while a higher authority exists, it cannot be fully known, comprehended or anticipated.[15] Hence Waugh's remark that Spark 'uses the omniscient-author convention, not benevolently to signpost the reader's way through the text, but to express a disturbing authority whose patterns are not quite so easy to understand'.[16] Spark's 'Catholic practice', Gerard Carruthers claims, 'is to acknowledge an omnipotent God, sometimes mimicked in the fabric of her novels by the narratorial or authorial character, whose implied perspective is supposed to overarch all human perspective' but, echoing Waugh, Spark's purpose is not to mimic an all-knowing, divine perspective but to demonstrate how, on the contrary, God, the world and its people are 'not entirely knowable or definable' to human beings.[17]

How Spark does this is by deploying an 'omniscient-author' which is never truly omniscient; instead the telling operates closer to what is called third-person limited narration. Or perhaps more accurately, Spark's third-person narrators shift back and forth between omniscient and limited perspectives as in the case of *Jean Brodie* or *The Driver's Seat* in which the narrator demonstrates, often aggressively, an omniscient grasp of the temporal makeup of the fictional world – with proleptic jumps into the past and future – but fails to offer readers access into the minds, motivations and feelings of Jean Brodie and Lise. A 'disturbing authority' presides over Spark's fictions, but while the narrative structure alludes to the workings of a divine being, the otherwise limited perspective of the narrator foregrounds mystery and resists absolute closure, reaffirming the 'hidden possibilities in all things'.[18]

The theological basis for Spark's metafiction is not only an expression of her relationship to faith, but, according to Cairns Craig, is grounded in a challenge to the 'whole weight of the tradition of the English novel as it was conceived in the 1950s, largely under the influence of F. R. Leavis'.[19] The origins of the 'tradition of the English novel', according to Ian Watt, should be understood in the context of the economic, social and religious values

[15] Lodge, 'Omniscience', p. 238.
[16] Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 74.
[17] Gerard Carruthers, 'Muriel Spark as Catholic Novelist', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed. by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 74–84 (p. 93).
[18] Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Polygon, 2018), p. 80.
[19] Cairns Craig, *Muriel Spark, Existentialism and the Art of Death* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), p. 54.

embedded within Protestantism, with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as the foundational text. As Craig explains, quoting Watt, *Crusoe* gives birth to 'the novel as a genre of "formal realism", in which language is '"much more referential than in other literary forms"', and in which '"the character is to be regarded as though he were a particular person and not a type"'.[20] The 'particular person' depicted in the character of Crusoe, of course, typifies an understanding of human nature born out of the historical context of the Protestant work ethic, material progress and secularisation.[21]

If the English novel and its realist tradition was forged by the masculine, rationalised fictions of Defoe, with *Crusoe* as its mission statement, it is a tradition against which Spark – a Catholic woman – naturally takes issue.[22] Craig interprets Spark's *Robinson* as a direct challenge to the kind of 'realism' which gave the English novel its form, that 'in opposition to notions of isolated individuals' Spark's *Robinson* proposes 'a deliquescent conception of character, of individual identity as constantly mobile and never reducible to a single "cause", because identity forms and reforms in the course of people's interaction with others'.[23] Craig's analysis here is quintessentially Bakhtinian, and I want to expand this point by dwelling on the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin; doing so helps unpack the finer details of Spark's metafiction – what she does with language, speech, focalisation and identity.

Translinguistics, Heteroglossia and Dialogism

Bakhtin's approach to the novel derives from his sociological and philosophical intervention in linguistics in the early 20th century, in which he argues against the assumptions that underpin that discipline's approach to its object, language. Modern linguistics, according to Bakhtin, offers only one perspective on the workings of language – a forensic, scientific approach which treats its object as a given – and promotes that narrow understanding as a form of complete knowledge. Language, Bakhtin claims, should not be the 'object of a single

[20] Ibid., p. 55.
[21] 'The new economic individualism represented in Crusoe judged material success as a sign of God's confirmation that one belonged to the elect'. Ibid., p. 56.
[22] Ibid., p. 58.
[23] Ibid., p. 57.

science–linguistics, and thus be understood through linguistic methods exclusively'.[24] In opposition to linguistics Bakhtin proposes a discipline that both resists and expands upon the former's efforts, and he calls it 'translinguistics'. Tzvetan Todorov explains the difference between traditional linguistics and Bakhtin's translinguistics by describing their respective objects of study, or rather, the different positions from which the same object is viewed: '[…] the object of linguistics is constituted by *language* and its subdivisions (phonemes, morphemes, propositions, etc.) whereas that of translinguistics is *discourse*, which is represented in turn by individual *utterances*'.[25] Where linguistics sheds light on the abstract structures and development of language as a system of signs, translinguistics seeks instead to understand the social context of language *in use*, hence the introduction of terms like 'discourse' and 'utterances' – terms that draw attention to the active and social participation of speakers and contexts.

In language, Bakhtin claims, 'there is no word or form left that would be neutral or would belong to no one'.[26] By this he means that words always already come with a kind of semantic baggage created and maintained not only by the dynamic social context of a speaker and a listener but through the series of associations and echoes that *other* speakers have imbued within the same utterances. 'All of language turns out to be scattered', says Bakhtin, 'permeated with intentions, accented'.[27] It is in this sense that 'discourse is a three-role drama (it is not a duet but a trio)', in which 'the author (the speaker) may have inalienable rights upon the discourse, but so does the listener, as do those whose voices resonate in the words found by the author'.[28] As such, Bakhtin identifies a 'consciousness' that inhabits language; in opposition to 'an abstract system of normative forms' from which we pick and choose in attempts to transmit isolated messages to passive interlocutors, Bakhtin sees 'a concrete heterological opinion on the world', that is, a materially situated and open-ended or dialogical process of competing discourses.[29] 'Dialogue' in Bakhtin's thought therefore describes not simply the exchange of speech between individuals but rather the process through which meaning is realised, sustained and/or contested.

It is within this context that the term and concept 'heteroglossia' emerges as a particular way of thinking about language in use: 'the point about heteroglossia is not merely

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[24] Bakhtin quoted in Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. by Wlad Godzich (Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 24.
[25] Todorov, *Dialogical Principle*, p. 25.
[26] Bakhtin in Todorov, *Dialogical Principle*, p. 56.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., p. 52.
[29] Ibid., p. 56.

that different people speak in different ways', Peter Womack explains, 'it is also that these different people speak *to each other*, and consequently that the diversity is also on the move, […] generating little eddies of semantic agitation'.[30] According to Alastair Renfrew, heteroglossia 'is Bakhtin's way of describing the *internal* condition of any language, its variation and stratification, produced as individual speakers and social groups interact with and against an abstract 'standard' language.[31] It is a more local formulation of a related term, polyglossia, which describes how the presumed self-sufficiency and uniqueness of a national language becomes exposed as illusory when forced to recognise the existence of other languages and cultures. Consequently, 'language is transformed from the absolute dogma it had been within the narrow framework of a sealed-off and impermeable monoglossia into a working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality'.[32] Heteroglossia thus identifies the discourse taking place *inside* national languages as a 'working hypothesis'; a perpetually unstable and unfinished blueprint that people both draw from and contribute to in the making and remaking of language, what Womack describes as 'the dynamic multiplicity of language in use'.[33]

Creative writing, of course, is constructed from and contributes to that same 'dynamic multiplicity': 'Writing a novel or a poem […] does not mean shaping an inert raw material like wood or clay; it means intervening in something that is already noisily going on'.[34] And it is through that intervention that Bakhtin best articulates dialogism's implications for conceptions of the self. Before his focus on Dostoevsky or his 'linguistic turn' he theorised about how 'human beings understand and interact with one another' by thinking through the relationship between the self and the other – a theory that would inform, in one way or another, the rest of his work.[35]

Bakhtin's argument begins, as Ken Hirschkop says, in phenomenology: the way we experience our own thoughts and feelings is completely different to the way we experience the thoughts and feelings of others. Hirschkop elaborates: '*one's own* feelings and thoughts are experienced as a stream, something relentlessly pushed forward by life, by our needs, goals, and intentions, whereas those of *others* appear to us as expressed and embodied'.[36] The

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[30] Peter Womack, *Dialogue* (Routledge, 2011), p. 50.
[31] Alastair Renfrew, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Routledge, 2014), p. 94.
[32] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 61.
[33] Womack, *Dialogue*, p. 23.
[34] Ibid., p. 51.
[35] Renfrew, *Bakhtin*, p. 23.
[36] Ken Hirschkop, *The Cambridge Introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 71, emphasis in original.

implication here is that the only way to be fully self-conscious, to develop recognition of one's own self, is to appeal to the *other*, because only the *other* can perceive or understand, from outside, the 'expressed and embodied' being of one's self: '[…] without the narratives of others my life would not only lack fullness and clarity of content, but would also remain internally dispersed, lacking the value of biographical unity'.[37] 'Narratives' is telling, because Bakhtin then contends that literature can embody these self-other relations in the author-hero dynamic represented in literary texts. That is, to quote Hirschkop, 'because my "I-for-myself cannot *narrate* anything", we must rely on *others* to give our life a coherence and shape […] This may include, among other things, the delineation of a "character"'.[38] Creative writing, according to Bakhtin, simulates the process by which the self achieves identification through the representation or narrativization from an *other*, because the author/other functions in the same way by creating – from outside – the life, history, behaviours, beliefs etc. of the hero, whose identity is now therefore made accessible.

I return to the author-hero relations in my discussion of the ways *The Comforters* complicates this dynamic, but for now it is enough to say that, like the relationship between self and other, all speech and writing is by definition *in dialogue* with other texts.[39] Bakhtin, however, placed a special emphasis on the novel as the literary form best suited to express and explore the condition of heteroglossia; he identifies and champions the heteroglottic nature of the novel form, seeing it as a site upon which the battlefield of discourse is given full expression. The novel, according to Bakhtin, comes closest to realising the *dialogic* nature of discourse in part because of the novel's ability to mix in and interleave different genres, modes of expression and forms of narration. However, a few comments must be made about the uniqueness Bakhtin bestows upon the novel as the true verbal vessel for the forces of dialogism, a claim that relates to a much deeper, more expansive line of inquiry.

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[37] Bakhtin quoted in Hirschkop, *Introduction to Bakhtin*, p. 71.
[38] Hirschkop, *Introduction to Bakhtin*, p. 71.
[39] This observation anticipates the theories of post-structuralism which stipulates that meaning is generated through an endless chain of signifiers behind which no final signified lurks, created as it is from the perpetual delay or 'slippage' of signification. What separates Bakhtin from his post-structuralist successors is that the former's conception of language grants a degree of autonomy to the subject while the latter's more cynical perspective finds the subject hopelessly predetermined (as in Lacan's Symbolic Order).

Monologism and Novelness

In order to refine his concept Bakhtin would, understandably, try to define dialogism against what it is not, which he called 'monologism', a type of discourse that is authoritarian in its suppression of the multiple voices that make up heteroglossia (a situation Bakhtin experienced first-hand in the Stalinist era of the Soviet Union).[40] Given the implied universalism of dialogism in language, however, the very existence of something like 'monologism' is theoretically not possible, which in turn makes dialogism difficult to define in any meaningful sense. The way out of this quandary is to position monologism as an *attempt* to suppress, artificially, the inherently dialogical nature of language use, 'to handle words as if their meaning were unitary and immutable, to prohibit every rejoinder and declare itself to be the final word'.[41] Bakhtin sees this distinction played out between literary genres: the most celebrated discussions of dialogism derive from his analyses of novels by Fyodor Dostoevsky, and because it is in the novel that Bakhtin sources the principles of dialogism he then refines his claims by comparing novelistic dialogism with what he understands as the relatively monological literary genres of poetry and drama.

The argument goes that in lyric and epic poetry there is only ever one authorial voice (that of the 'speaker') and as such they fail to embody dialogic relations which require at least one other competing voice. Drama, too, according to Bakhtin, despite its literal inclusion of multiple voices in a cast of characters, nevertheless falls foul of monologism because of, ironically, the *lack* of authorial presence: '[…] what particularly makes novels dialogic is the manifold interpenetration of authorial and characteral voices in the field of direct speech. In pure drama, on the contrary, there is no authorial voice and all speech is direct'.[42] Consequently, the multiple voices in drama remain 'uninflected, uninterrupted, *single* voiced'.[43] Womack explains, however, that Bakhtin's claims are based upon a narrow and indeed conventional interpretation of drama – what he calls 'pure drama' – albeit one that has been dominant from the Renaissance through to the nineteenth century. The same could

[40] The historical and political context of Bakhtin's work is an important reminder of how concepts like dialogism and heteroglossia are concerned with power struggles and conflict rather than with reconciliation and harmony – as Lynne Pearce notes, some critics have since defanged the political edge of dialogism by representing it as an idealised expression of liberal democracy. Lynne Pearce, *Reading Dialogics* (E. Arnold, 1994), p. 12.
[41] Womack, *Dialogue*, p. 52.
[42] Ibid., p. 85.
[43] Ibid., emphasis in original.

be said for the kind of poetry Bakhtin highlights too, tied in with those Romantic assumptions about individual and original expression, in which the 'speaker' is always one and the same with the poet. Bakhtin's claims, however, are not simply rooted in a categorical error; indeed it is the question of categories that Bakhtin is most interested in questioning and undermining.

As Womack is at pains to explain in his discussion of dialogue and drama, 'one reason drama appears as monologic in Bakhtin is that it is *drama with the theatre left out*'.[44] What Womack means by this is that 'pure' drama relies for its success on the suppression of those elements of theatre it defines itself against. These include, according to Womack, comedy and parody; double-voiced speech; multiple worlds; and self-narration.[45] All are prominent aspects of a kind of theatre, namely the 'low' or 'popular' theatre of the marketplace, that 'pure' drama has since tried to purge from its practice. Far from being inherently monologic, then, drama – unmoored from historically specific conventions – invites and engages with many different forms of dialogism.

As Womack's analysis implies, Bakhtin's genre-specific theory on literary dialogism has since been characterised as a 'red-herring' or 'blind spot' in Bakhtin's thinking, and as Lynne Pearce notes, from the 1980s onwards, Bakhtin's 'theoretical models were used to read (and reread) poetry and drama as well as the novel; to analyse film, music, the visual and performing arts as well as literature'.[46] However, it could equally be argued that Bakhtin critics have betrayed a 'blind spot' of their own if they overlook the profound reasoning behind Bakhtin's claims; a significant development of Bakhtin's argument actually anticipates appropriations of dialogic analysis for other genres when he states that as the novel form developed and grew in popularity it began to exert its influence over other genres – through what Michael Holquist rather colourfully describes as 'the novel's intensifying antigeneric power'[47] – and as a result other non-novelistic literary forms could share more readily in the dialogic mechanisms formerly attributed (by Bakhtin) to the novel alone.[48] 'In

[44] Ibid., p. 100, emphasis in original.
[45] Ibid., p. 99. By 'multiple worlds' Womack means the representation of competing consciousnesses, not simply different opinions: '[Pure] drama is primarily a representation of action, and the dialogue is subordinated to this project. Consequently, different speakers cannot represent different worlds, only different attitudes within the single world that is represented by the play as a whole'. Ibid.
[46] Pearce, *Reading Dialogics*, p. 81.
[47] Michael Holquist, 'Introduction', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p. xxxii.
[48] David Lodge understood this claim – that much of history's great poetry had been novelised and therefore potentially dialogical – as a step too far for the genre-specific argument Bakhtin was making: 'If they are all redeemable through the loophole of "novelisation", then the loophole would seem to be larger than the surrounding wall'. David Lodge, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (Routledge, 1990), p. 90.

the process of becoming the dominant genre', claims Bakhtin, 'the novel sparks the renovation of all other genres, it infects them with its spirit of process and inconclusiveness'.[49] This is what Bakhtin means by 'novelisation'.[50]

Thus while on the surface Bakhtin's focus on the novel form as the one best suited to embody heteroglossia and dialogism appears oddly specific and perhaps arbitrary, it is important to remember that 'novelisation' refers not only to the introduction and then dominance of the novel form we recognise (especially the realist literature associated with the nineteenth century); 'novelisation' is also what Bakhtin understands as 'whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system'.[51] The novel and novelisation, in other words, are two different, but intimately related, things: the former describes an historically situated object that is, according to Bakhtin, the purest literary expression of the latter, a social process that is latent and implicit in any language use. As Alastair Renfrew puts it, Bakhtin's 'novel' signifies 'not [only] a literary genre or mode, but a particular way of conceiving language', and while the latter is by no means foregrounded in the novel alone, it is for Bakhtin 'the genre in which dialogic discourse, a "universal phenomenon", can best be apprehended in all its "complexity and depth"'.[52]

Furthermore, the reason why Bakhtin dismisses the dialogical capacity of poetry and drama in the first place is grounded in an alternative history of literary and theoretical development in the West; as Renfrew explains, Bakhtin understands that 'poetry, […] like epic (whether in verse or not), had already been accorded a canonical position as the predominant literary mode of an *abstractly conceived unitary language*'.[53] That is, because these ancient forms originated and evolved in an era prior to the 'activation of a bilingual or multilingual literary consciousness associated with polyglossia and heteroglossia', they remain relics of a centralizing or monological conception of language.[54] Owing to a tradition of interpretation born out of an 'abstractly conceived unitary language', the novel has been viewed as 'a defective "poetic" genre' by centuries of criticism – it deviates from and therefore fails to conform to the stylistic ideals set by older, established modes (such as 'pure' drama or indeed 'pure' poetry) and the critical consensus which legitimised them. Bakhtin

[49] Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, p. 7.
[50] Not to be confused with the more mainstream and commercial definition of adapting a film or other non-novelistic media into a novel.
[51] Holquist, 'Introduction', p, xxxi.
[52] Renfrew, *Bakhtin*, p. 89.
[53] Ibid., p. 109, emphasis in original.
[54] Ibid.

effectively reverses these stylistic priorities, reframing poetry as 'a defective "novelistic" genre'.[55]

The way Spark centres poetry and worries over the legitimacy of the novel form, as shown in the previous chapter, is a perfect example of Bakhtin's critique. In her autobiography *Curriculum Vitae* she reflects on how she felt 'the novel […] was essentially a variation of a poem' and that 'any good novel, or indeed any composition which called for a constructional sense, was essentially an extension of poetry'.[56] But Spark's deep thinking on the subject, though sympathetic to the hierarchy Bakhtin wishes to undermine, gives way to pronouncements that are remarkably Bakhtinian in their questioning of genre. Consider the following introspective note in which Spark describes the inspiration behind *The Comforters*:

> I had in mind the question of the novel itself, as a literary form. What was a novel? – This piece of work I had undertaken to write, did it possess a form which was true to its own nature, or was it (as I had sometimes suspected) a mere sprawl – something for writers who were too lazy to use words economically and to write short stories and poems? I attempted to work out these questions in *The Comforters*.[57]

In the late 1950s, at least a decade before any of Bakhtin's work was published in English, Spark was making the same kind of literary inquiries, albeit from the very perspective Bakhtin wanted to challenge. Spark's searching for the formal shape of the novel – 'did it possess a form which was true to its own nature, or was it […] a mere sprawl?' – identifies exactly what Bakhtin celebrates in the novel; it *is* a 'mere sprawl', but it is that very boundlessness that embodies the flow and flourishing of dialogism.

As such, the questions Spark attempts to 'work out' in *The Comforters* both benefit from a Bakhtinian analysis *and* help illuminate Bakhtin's project. In the following close reading of *The Comforters* I reframe the relationship between narrator and protagonist through Bakhtin's author-hero dynamic, and in doing so argue that Spark represents consciousness as dialogic, undermines the threat of monologism through parody, and explores the production of the (dialogical) self *as* narrative – all of which amounts to a fresh understanding of Spark's strange blend of realist, postmodernist and parodic aesthetics.

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[55] Ibid.
[56] Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae* (Carcanet, 2009), p. 206.
[57] Macmillan Archive, typewritten note by Spark on the origins of her novels, 22 January 1959, Box. NS017.

Authors and Heroes in *The Comforters*

Often characterised as distant, cruel or God-like, Spark's narrators seem to exert undue control over the narratives, to the point where many critics have, on the one hand, drawn conclusions about the influence of Catholicism,[58] and on the other, made objections to writing that is at once icy, nasty and even 'unfeminist'.[59] These interpretive positions are both too extreme and limiting; the relationship between Sparkian narrators and characters is far more complex and interesting than the kind of strict, top-down hierarchy proposed by some Spark scholars. As Len Gutkin says, 'Spark's irony toward her characters, as expressed in free indirect discourse, in quoted monologues, and in narrative description, is, rather, densely complex'.[60] Indeed, when critics point out how Spark's narrators operate like puppeteers – with prolepsis cutting quickly towards future deaths or misfortune, a technique that creates the impression of an indifferent if not entirely hostile narrator – they take the narrative style at face value and overlook the sense in which these narrators present only the *illusion* of control; an attempt, in other words, to appear monological.

Spark's first – and highly metafictional – novel, *The Comforters*, revolves entirely around this struggle between narrator and character, but while the novel is often read as a satire on the pretensions of novelistic realism and the power dynamic inherent to narration, it can also be read through the context of Bakhtin's work on language, dialogism and especially the author-hero theory which conceives the self as dialogical and embedded within narrative. As Caroline Rose becomes aware of her own fictionality and tries to resist the scriptedness of her life, the 'Typing Ghost' doubles down on its authoritarianism. Yet, because we are privy to the Typing Ghost's intrusive presence, and its insistent pursuit and presentation of plot tropes and character types as represented in the novel, Spark forces us to perceive the *monological ideals* to which the Typing Ghost aspires, and in so doing they are relativised and undone.

The ensuing self-reflexive power struggle between Caroline and the Typing Ghost dramatizes what Bakhtin sees as the necessary dialogue between author and hero which in

[58] For a survey of this treatment see Bailey, 'Introduction: The Desegregation of Spark', in *Muriel Spark's Early Fiction*, pp. 1–25.
[59] Ian Gregson, *Character and Satire in Postwar Fiction* (Continuum, 2006), p. 106.
[60] Gutkin, 'Muriel Spark's Camp Metafiction', p. 74.

turn reflects the 'architectonic'[61] relations of self and other, especially when it is implied, by the end of the novel, that Caroline is the de facto author of the text. From this perspective the playfully metafictional and somewhat hostile relationship between author and characters in *The Comforters* has more to say beyond existing commentary on the 'Derridean tradition of absence and writerly reflexivity'.[62] Of more interest is Spark's articulation of dialogic encounters, specifically the nature of the interaction between literary entities insofar as they are shown to *rely on* each other for narrative identity, and the implications of all this for our conception of subjectivity.

Dialogue, Consciousness and Multi-Voicedness

The Comforters opens, fittingly, with a scene of dialogue, but the nature of this dialogue anticipates much of what the novel will go on to do. Laurence Manders is woken up by his grandmother, Louisa Jepp: 'On the first day of his holiday Laurence Manders woke to hear his grandmother's voice below'.[63] Before any dialogue has begun, it is important to note that Laurence wakes up *to* his grandmother's voice and, as Laurence confirms not long after, *because* of it ('You woke me up'), suggesting, from the outset, that consciousness itself relies on another voice to be 'awakened'.[64] Michael Holquist explains that 'in dialogism, the very capacity to have consciousness is based on *otherness*. […] in dialogism consciousness *is* otherness. More accurately, it is the differential relation between a centre and all that is not that centre'.[65] The following dialogue, which on the surface reads as a simple, scene-setting set-piece is, on closer inspection, a rather complex exchange where the 'centre', so to speak, is difficult to identify: for one, it is a tripartite dialogue involving Laurence, Louisa and a (silent) local baker, and secondly, it shows two different but overlapping conversations with different parties happening simultaneously.

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[61] Architectonics refers to 'how relations between living subjects get ordered into categories of "I" and "another"', as well as to 'how authors forge the kind of tentative wholeness we call a text out of the relation they articulate with their heroes'. Michael Holquist, 'Introduction: The Architectonics of Answerability', in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. by Vadim Liapunov (University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 9–49 (p. 10).
[62] Patricia Waugh, 'Muriel Spark's 'Informed Air'': The Auditory Imagination and the Voices of Fiction', *Textual Practice*, 32.9 (2018), pp. 1633–1658 (p. 1644).
[63] Muriel Spark, *The Comforters* (Polygon, 2017), p. 1,
[64] Ibid.
[65] Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* (Routledge, 2002), p. 18.

> ‘I’ll have a large wholemeal. I’ve got my grandson stopping for a week, who’s on the B.B.C. That’s my daughter’s boy, Lady Manders. He won’t eat white bread, one of his fads.’
>
> Laurence shouted from the window, ‘Grandmother, I adore white bread and I have no fads.’
>
> She puckered and beamed up at him.
>
> ‘Shouting from the window,’ she said to the baker.
>
> ‘You woke me up,’ Laurence said.
>
> ‘My grandson,’ she told the baker. ‘A large wholemeal, and don’t forget to call on Wednesday.’[66]

Louisa talks with the baker, Laurence talks with Louisa, Louisa talks back to Laurence via conversation with the baker. Laurence’s complaints to Louisa about the bread and fads is also, in a sense, directed at the baker, for it is not simply a matter of correcting his grandmother but about asserting his identity or protecting his reputation (in this case, defending against the accusations of being fussy with food or susceptible to trends) in front of others, like the baker. So too is Louisa conscious of this, in a different way, making sure to point out that Laurence is ‘on the B.B.C.’ and the son of her daughter, the titled ‘Lady Manders’.

Curiously, the baker is silent, or rather, his responses are not represented, but, as Spark knows only too well, explicit representation is not necessary; the nature of dialogue is such that it does not require explicit representation in order to make sense, because as long as one interlocutor can be interpreted – especially the intonation of any given utterance – the *relation* of the dialogue if not necessarily the specific contents of the other participant(s) can be inferred. More importantly, Spark silences the baker on the page in order to focus attention on the comical banter between Laurence and Louisa, but their speech is nonetheless informed quite heavily by the presence of the baker, and indeed Louisa does not speak to Laurence at all – her remarks are all addressed to the baker, officially, but also mediated *through* him to Laurence: ‘“Shouting from the window”, she said to the baker’. Louisa’s utterance works both as a gentle reproach to Laurence and as a kind of apology to the baker, all the while conveying her (perhaps delighted) surprise to both that such an action has occurred.

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[66] Spark, *Comforters*, p. 1.

Furthermore, this utterance is the first example of a literary device that will be repeated throughout the novel – the repetition of narratorial discourse through character speech: Louisa's utterance repeats, almost identically, the narrated action 'Laurence shouted from the window'. The significance of this tendency becomes clear as the novel progresses and will be revisited below.

One final point worth noting about this passage is the positions in space of Laurence and Louisa, and the relationship between the two. Laurence is upstairs and Louisa is down below. When we consider that, firstly, Laurence's notorious behaviour as someone who pries quite recklessly and enthusiastically into others' privacy acts as a humorous figure for the concept of (omniscient) authorship,[67] and secondly, that the novel soon centres on the dynamic between an authorial presence 'above' or beyond and a relatively powerless character 'below', inside the fiction, the positions of Laurence and Louisa in this opening dialogue – and the implications of the conversation itself – allude to the novel's overarching metafictional concern with authorship, control and identity. Despite Laurence's shouting, and his lofty position, it is clear Louisa, calm and collected, comes out as the more successful and impressive participant – she skilfully negotiates dialogue amongst the two men and triumphantly collects her wholemeal bread despite Laurence's objections.[68] The implication, then, is that the 'voice below', however much it is contested and reframed (their disagreement constitutes competing narratives), can undermine and undo the supposedly authorial discourse above, a dynamic that anticipates the struggle between Caroline and the Typing Ghost. Like Louisa, Spark carefully and ingeniously accommodates the action of multiple voices on different planes within a novel that could easily have fallen apart in lesser hands.

Spark uses the opening passage – which at first glance appears innocuous and conventional – to mark out the novel's central concerns which, I argue, touch upon key dialogical approaches to language, communication and identity. The link between waking and voices alludes to the way consciousness is activated through dialogue, the tripartite conversation demonstrates the multi-directional and multi-voiced nature of speech, and the contrasting positionality of the characters (and the dialogic ambiguity of the dynamic) hints

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[67] Helena to Laurence: 'It's the only unhealthy thing about your mind, the way you notice absurd details, it's absurd of you', '[…] sometimes you see things that you shouldn't'. 'In his childhood he had terrorised the household with his sheer literal truths'. Ibid., p. 4. Laurence also commentates football matches for the B.B.C. which is itself a form of narration.

[68] The wholemeal bread, of course, has nothing to do with Laurence's fads; it is instead a required component of her diamond-smuggling scheme.

towards the metafictional frame(s) of the novel, in which fixed literary roles give way to blurry and indistinct *movements* between narrative positions. The following discussion honours Spark's claim that her debut novel was written to, as she says, 'work out a novel-writing process peculiar to myself', and concludes that it also functions as a vivid manifesto for the creative and critical nature of her novelistic art.[69]

Travestying Monologism with Metafiction

In his analysis of the *The Comforters* James Bailey pauses over the temporal nature of the characters' changing ontological status – that is, some characters, like Eleanor, are shown to *become* increasingly obvious *as characters* as the novel progresses, rather than behave in blatantly implausible or caricatured ways from the beginning: '[…] the respective behaviours of the Baron, Laurence and Eleanor indicate a gradual descent *into* fiction', while 'Caroline's critical awareness of both the conventions of storytelling and the voice of the Typing Ghost suggests a steady *ascent* towards ontological richness'.[70] On the latter point, even before the Typing Ghost appears Caroline demonstrates a wary and critical attitude towards the powerful and dogmatic (indeed monological) discourse of Catholic orthodoxy: in the cloisters of a religious retreat following her recent conversion to Catholicism, Caroline is disconcerted and irritated by the sycophantic and sanctimonious conversation and behaviour of her fellow Catholics – none more so than the formidable and moralistic nun, Georgina Hogg – prompting her to leave.

For my purposes, the dual directions Bailey identifies in the novel between a 'descent into fiction' and an 'ascent towards ontological richness' can be reframed as the centripetal movement towards monologism on the one hand, and the centrifugal challenge of dialogism on the other. That is, while the voices of the overtly fictional characters appear controlled, predetermined and self-consciously literary, by contrast Caroline's engagement with and questioning of the narrative conventions and tropes surrounding her serves to dialogise the discourse of the Typing Ghost. Obvious examples of the former, as first shown in the novel's opening passage, include the immediate repetition of narratorial description within character

[69] Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, p. 206.
[70] Bailey, *Spark's Early Fiction*, p. 44.

speech, a joke that becomes increasingly absurd: 'The shop door tinkled. "Tinkle," said the Baron'.[71] The cumulative effect of the device foregrounds the sense in which these characters function more like automatons than humans (an impression reinforced by the machinic finality of the typewriter that bookends each italicised moment of narratorial discourse).[72]

Such a show of oppression, however, is satirised by its very representation (authorial control is less authoritative when it is visible), but within the plot it is also undermined by Caroline's awareness of and dialogue with the Ghost.[73] In relation to the Eichmann trial in particular, but to Spark's fiction in general, Patricia Waugh comments that 'the banality of evil is a bureaucratic mimetic monologism that cannot hear the voice of the other. It is thoughtlessness, thought as devocalised solipsism'.[74] It is this 'devocalised solipsism', an isolationist discourse against which the other is excluded, that Spark wants to both expose and ridicule with the conceit of the Typing Ghost, an entity whose control over narrative occurs – as shown by the slavish imitations of its characters – at the expense of the other. In this light, there is a clear ethical orientation to Caroline's listening and to her responsiveness (which, in the diegetic storyworld, is contrasted by the biased and intolerant Catholics of St. Philumena's[75] as well as Mrs. Hogg's guidance by the Blessed Virgin[76] – both indulge in a dangerous solipsism).

The voice Caroline hears, the Typing Ghost, is variously characterised as 'recitative', 'a chanting in unison', 'a concurrent series of echoes', 'a typewriter and a chorus of voices'.[77] A plurality of voices speaking simultaneously ('concurrent', 'chorus', 'in unison'), the Typing Ghost embodies yet another conception of authorship, but this time as a controlled act of ventriloquism in which the author inhabits (or haunts) different voices to produce fictional worlds; the musical imagery ('recitative', 'chanting', 'echoes') places an emphasis on repetition that speaks both to the incantatory, supernatural element of the Ghost's creative control but also to the derivative and predictable narrative the Ghost attempts to impose ('Typing' puns on the verbal form, to make types). And yet, the ghostliness of the authority is

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[71] Spark, *Comforters*, p. 135.
[72] See quote on page 66.
[73] Note that Caroline's hearing of the typewriter and the voices is itself a kind of dialogue; her reactions and evaluations create for the reader a passive dialogue that only becomes active later.
[74] Waugh, 'Auditory Imagination', p. 1637.
[75] One of the Catholics warns that 'Converts have a lot to learn. You can always tell a convert from a cradle Catholic. There's something different'. Spark, *Comforters*, p. 37.
[76] Mrs. Hogg makes a show of how wise 'Our Lady' has been in directing her, but she also abuses the idea of divine intervention to justify unsavoury behaviour (spying, blackmail), as when she intercepts a letter sent from Laurence to Caroline on the grounds of 'duty' – hence the intertextual reference to James Hogg's *Confessions*. Ibid., p. 74.
[77] Spark, *Comforters*, pp. 41–42.

a clue to its vulnerability, and with the amorphous notion of 'voice' as the predominant metaphor over that of the harsher, more oppressive and violent imagery of the typewriter, it is clear that the Ghost's power is at best tenuous and contingent.[78]

Nevertheless, the plot follows the Ghost's pursuit of monological control: '"I think […] that they are really different tones of one voice. I think they belong to one person", says Caroline'.[79] Embedded here is a warning: through the smoke and mirrors of multiplicity lurks a centralised force with dubious intentions: '[…] it's as if the person were waiting to pounce on some insignificant thought or action, in order to make it signify in a strange distorted way'.[80] Of course, and contrary to realist and even modernist sensibilities, there is no way for readers to access Caroline's interiority or witness her actions in a way that would *not* 'signify in a strange distorted way', because it is only through language that Caroline can mean or signify at all; she is, after all, a character in a novel. But that very conceit gets to the heart of what we do with language, and what language does with us. Ken Hirschkop explains, via Bakhtin, that '"expression", which is never fully itself, and always indicates something beyond and within, is what makes personality possible, which is to say that it is *not an externalization of subjective intentions*, *but always an intersubjective fact*'.[81] In other words, we too only mean or signify through a language over which we have partial and limited control, because language is not a neutral system, but rather an active social (and therefore relational) enterprise.

Language, according to Bakhtin, belongs to no one and everyone, and is infused with the (competing, contrasting, colluding or compliant) voices of others: 'there are no innocent starting points: the word has always been already used'.[82] Just as there are no innocent starting points, there are no ending points either, and Spark agrees. Consider, for instance, the following correspondence between Spark and her agent Alan Maclean in 1973 over the possibility of Spark's writing a biography of playwright Noel Coward, in which Spark takes issue with the way James Pope-Hennessy's existing (but not yet published) biography of Coward is marketed as 'definitive':

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[78] Not least because one of the Ghost's many voices includes Caroline's, 'the whispered voice of the other in its own'. Waugh, 'Auditory Imagination', p. 1654.
[79] Spark, *Comforters*, p. 62.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ken Hirschkop, *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 200, emphasis mine.
[82] Womack, *Dialogue*, pp. 51–52.

> I think any biography by Pope-Hennessy is bound to be very good, but "definitive" is surely publishers' jargon? […] Coward has been dead long enough. And "definitive" is now, surely, a terribly old-fashioned and discarded concept. Who on earth ever did write a "definitive" work on anything or anyone in the sense that it was the last word? - Crikey![83]

The Comforters is written against the idea of a 'last word' in at least three different ways. Firstly, the novel's recurring joke – the shared vocabulary between authorial narration and character speech – quite literally demonstrates how 'the word has always been already used', collapsing the artificial border separating distinct discourses. Secondly, words themselves, or the meanings attached to them, are occasionally questioned, like in the following exchange between Caroline and Laurence following the former's attendance at Mass:

> 'The décor of Brompton Oratory makes me ill'
> 'You don't refer to the "décor" of a church […] at least, I think not'
> 'What is it then?'
> 'I'm not sure of the correct term. I've never heard it called a "décor"'"[84]

Caroline is a newly converted Catholic while Laurence is a born (but not practicing) Catholic, so the scene pokes fun at the former's awkward or inappropriate language about the church. Laurence acknowledges, in fewer words, that the decadent or superficial implications of the word 'décor' jars with the lofty and sacred space of a Roman Catholic church, but at the same time he fails to provide the 'correct term', and so the scene also pauses over the idea of 'correct' language,[85] drawing attention to the social dimension that makes language mean what it means: note that Laurence says he has 'never *heard it called*' décor, appealing not to a

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[83] TMSA, letter from Spark to Alan Maclean, 22 August 1973, NLS, Acc. 10607/189. The biography by Pope-Hennessy was never completed or published in the end, owing to his murder in January of the new year. The archive does not show Spark's reaction to this news, but it is tempting to think through the associations of biography and violence with the narrative that unfolds in *Loitering with Intent* published seven years later.
[84] Spark, *Comforters*, p. 105.
[85] The idea of correct language is, for Bakhtin, a symptom of monologism: 'The common language is never given but in fact always ordained, and at every moment of the life of the language it is opposed to genuine heterology. But at the same time, it is perfectly real as a force that overcomes this heterology; imposes certain limits upon it; guarantees a maximum of mutual comprehension; and becomes crystallized in the real, though relative, unity of spoken (daily) and literary language, of "correct language."' Bakhtin quoted in Todorov, *Dialogical Principle*, p. 57–58.

static system of symbols (like a dictionary) but to the force of culture that creates signification. As Bakhtin explains (with typically evocative metaphors):

> Every word smells of the context and contexts in which it has lived its intense social life; all words and all forms are inhabited by intentions. In the word, contextual harmonies (of the genre, of the current, the individual) are unavoidable.[86]

'Décor' relies for its meaning on the bourgeois conception of modern interior design, while 'church' and 'Brompton Oratory' relies on the ancient, spiritual and institutional discourse of Christianity and Catholicism, respectively. Implicit in Caroline's 'mistake' is a piece of satirical commentary on the superficial and haughty attitudes of the fellow Catholics that she earlier described as being 'infatuated with a tragic *image* of themselves'.[87] Caroline recalls one member talking about how '"all the little things that the Protestants hate, like the statues and the medals, they all help us to have a happy life"', and it is no coincidence that later Caroline observes at Brompton Oratory that 'there was a great amount of devotion going on before the fat stone statues'.[88] Spark exploits what Bakhtin calls double-voiced discourse, in which discourse is directed 'both towards the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and towards *another discourse,* towards *someone else's speech*'.[89] 'Décor', in this light, dialogises the speech of religious seriousness in general, and Catholic bias in particular, by activating the latent presence of parody inherent to any genre of discourse.

Finally, the novel resists definitiveness on a formal level. The novel begins, as we have seen, with Laurence's waking in his grandmother's house; by the end of the narrative Laurence experiences a figurative awakening with the realisation of his fictionality (and a corresponding 'ascent to ontological richness'). In the final chapter Caroline says she is 'going away on a long holiday' to 'write a novel' about 'characters in a novel'.[90] When Laurence goes to Caroline's flat to send her some requested books and discovers notes in which Caroline writes about the characters in *The Comforters*, he writes a letter in response objecting to the portrayals (and this letter is represented in the narrative) but quickly changes his mind and rips it into pieces; nevertheless, 'he did not then foresee his later wonder, with a

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[86] Bakhtin quoted in Todorov, *Dialogical Principle*, pp. 56–57.
[87] Spark, *Comforters*, p. 40, emphasis mine.
[88] Ibid., 42, 121.
[89] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 185, emphasis in original.
[90] Spark, *Comforters*, p. 218.

curious rejoicing, how the letter had got into the book'.[91] Waugh astutely observes that Laurence, in a reversal of Caroline's role, is 'a realist trapped in a metafictional novel': he 'approaches the auditory merely as anticipatory clues to a reality to be validated through visual confirmation'.[92] At this point, however, the unapologetic empiricist gives way to something less certain and rational, because the only evidence of this 'book' is the narrative of *The Comforters*, which begins with Laurence waking up, now ambiguously unaware and/or all too aware of his ontological status.

While the novel's conclusion, like any Spark ending, feels, on the surface, satisfyingly tied up and resolved, on a closer look *The Comforters* is clearly constructed in a circular and open-ended way, making it difficult to locate any clear 'starting points'. It is through this narrative indeterminacy – between literary roles, ontological levels, discursive genres – that Spark explores the borders of identity and selfhood; by turning to the unfolding relationship between Caroline and the Typing Ghost, I show that Spark's metafictional plot can be treated as a useful articulation of Bakhtin's theory of the author-hero dynamic and its relation to the production of the *dialogical* self.

Authors, Heroes and The Dialogical Self

A crucial and complex moment in the novel centres around a scene that comes closest to representing an interaction between Caroline and the Ghost. What starts out as a straightforward complaint from Caroline about the Ghost's vulgar and perhaps sexist fixation on Mrs Hogg's breasts on the previous two pages turns into a profound meditation on who exactly is responsible for these literary missteps:

> 'Bad taste,' Caroline commented. 'Revolting taste.' She had, in fact, 'picked up' a good deal of the preceding passage, all about Mrs Hogg and the breasts.
>
> 'Bad taste' – typical comment of Caroline Rose. Wasn't it she in the first place who had noticed with revulsion the transparent blouse of Mrs Hogg, that time at St.

[91] Ibid., 220.
[92] Waugh, 'Auditory Imagination', p. 1644.

> Philomena's? It was Caroline herself who introduced into the story the question of Mrs Hogg's bosom.
>
> *Tap-tap. It was Caroline herself who introduced into the story the question of Mrs Hogg's bosom*.[93]

What makes this passage significant is that the fiction's supposed creator and controller – the Typing Ghost – ironically reveals a *lack of control* in the very attempt to reassert dominance. The Ghost's retort simultaneously acts as a reclamation of power (shutting out Caroline's thoughts and speech with authorial discourse) as well as an abdication of control (conceding that Caroline is in fact exerting influence over the narrative). It is a moment of dialogue that acknowledges, explicitly, the dialogic nature of their relationship.

The episode at St. Philomena's near the beginning of the novel does indeed show Caroline's own fixation on Mrs Hogg's breasts: 'She began to take in the woman's details: an angular face, cropped white hair […] a colossal bosom', 'Caroline realised that she had been staring at Mrs. Hogg's breasts for some time, and was aware at the same moment that the woman's nipples were showing dark and prominent through her cotton blouse'.[94] Because the passage is focalised through Caroline the observation seems – or is certainly intended to appear – to originate from Caroline herself, but there is still room to argue that the Ghost, at this point in the novel's plot, is in complete control and therefore directs Caroline's gaze accordingly. However, at the end of Caroline's conversation with Mrs Hogg she pauses to reflect on their tense psychological dual: '"Caroline thought: […] Perhaps she senses my weakness, my loathing of human flesh where the bulk outweighs the intelligence"'.[95] 'Bulk' being another euphemism for the 'colossal bosom', Caroline's gaze is foregrounded once again, but this time it is enveloped in quotation marks; even though they are employed in the service of conveying a 'thought' rather than direct speech, the marks are used to give the impression of an even greater interiority than the previous description which was focalised but nonetheless *authorial* discourse. Caroline's quoted *thinking* is a far more convincing argument for claiming, as the Ghost does, that 'it was Caroline herself who introduced into the story the question of Mrs Hogg's bosom'.

Yet again, however, because the text repeatedly undermines the authenticity of character speech and thought, it is never certain that even what is represented as interiority is

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[93] Spark, *Comforters*, p. 148.
[94] Ibid., p. 27–28.
[95] Ibid., p. 31.

not also authorial discourse. As if to demonstrate this point, Spark employs the self-referential joke immediately after Caroline concludes her conversation with Mrs Hogg: 'She excelled at packing a suitcase. She told herself "I'm good at packing a suitcase"'.[96] As Ali Smith says, '[…] the most exciting formal subtlety of the novel, carried off with such wit on Spark's part', is the extent to which Caroline and the Ghost 'pass beyond their loggerhead positions in a dialogue between character and form itself to an admittance of something much more fluid – to what you might call a compromise, even an interplay'.[97] The episode relating to Mrs Hogg's breasts, though comical (and perhaps, therefore, overlooked), contains the novel's most serious manoeuvre: in it Spark demonstrates the dialogical complexity or 'interplay' between two consciousnesses – the authorial entity of the Typing Ghost and their troublesome protagonist, Caroline.

At least, Spark attached enough significance to the episode that she had to fight for its inclusion, as correspondence from 1956 reveals. To Alan Maclean Spark writes:

> Another point which I would like you to reconsider: the deletions we made from pages 141-143a. My friends are mostly in favour of leaving this passage in the book. I should like to do so, because it throws further light on the Manders' household as well as elaborating Mrs. Hogg's younger days. I think the objection of mild indecency is covered by Caroline's remark on p.143a.[98]

Spark emphasises points of characterisation – 'the Manders' household' and 'Mrs. Hogg's younger days' – as the key justification for retaining the passage, but given the passage's relevance for the metafictional tête-à-tête that immediately follows it, it is clear that the stakes are higher than the mere addition or subtraction of background information. Indeed Spark implies as much when she says that the 'indecency' is 'covered by Caroline's remark' (the self-aware remark about the Ghost's 'bad taste'), making it plain to her publishers that firstly, the indecency is rejected by the protagonist (thereby turning it into satirical commentary), but secondly, at least according to my argument, that the point of the indecency serves a greater purpose in the metafiction.

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[96] Ibid., p. 32.
[97] Ali Smith, 'The Typing Ghost', *Guardian*, 18 July 2009 https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jul/18/the-comforters-muriel-spark [accessed 4 June 2022].
[98] TMSA, letter to Alan Maclean, 22 April 1956, NLS, Acc. 10607/186.

That greater purpose includes a philosophical re-evaluation of the self. If the authorial discourse of the Typing Ghost is read as the social or ideological discourse of the collective and Caroline's discourse as that of individualism, then what happens is that each category – the social and the individual – is made relative and *responsive* to each other, so that the discourse of the collective is informed by the speech of the individual, but in turn the 'inner speech' of the individual is really a manifestation and refraction of social discourse. 'Rather than contrasting the "internal self" with the "external' society"', explains Hubert Hermans of the dialogical self, 'the self *itself* functions as a social and societal process'.[99] The 'compromise' Smith detects between Caroline and the Ghost embodies the essential feature of the dialogic principle: 'A dialogic world is one in which I can never have my own way completely, and therefore I find myself plunged into constant interaction with others – and with myself'.[100] The porousness of the two entities – conceived alternately as character and author, self and other, individual and society – eventually leads to the implication that Caroline has written the very novel within which she appears, that Caroline is/becomes the Typing Ghost.

Earlier, as Caroline reflects on the strange, 'slick plot'[101] to which she has been subjected (as both witness and participant), Spark reminds us of the ontological instability of the fiction, as the following passage demonstrates with its jarring free indirect discourse:

> Her sense of being written into the novel was painful. Of her constant influence on its course she remained unaware, and now she was impatient for the story to come to an end, knowing that the narrative could never become coherent to her until she was at last outside it, and at the same time consummately inside it.[102]

Conflicting ideas and perspectives inhabit this passage: Caroline experiences the pain of being written or scripted while at the same time remains ignorant of 'her constant influence on its course', simultaneously predetermined *and* agentic; but then that very claim – of Caroline's supposed ignorance – is itself contradicted by her knowledge that the narrative within which she exists will only become clear and comprehensible once she is outside it, in other words, once *she* has finished writing it, all the while wishing for 'the story to come to

[99] Hubert Hermans, 'The Dialogical Self: A Process of Positioning in Space and Time', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*, ed. by Shaun Gallagher (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 654–680 (p. 654).
[100] Holquist, *Dialogism*, p. 39.
[101] Spark, Comforters, p. 108.
[102] Spark, *Comforters*, p. 194.

an end'. The only way to account for these paradoxes, of course, is to interpret the narrator as Caroline herself commenting on her own process of writing.

In this respect Caroline's/the Ghost's critical observation echoes rather closely Bakhtin's own emphasis on the significance of what he calls 'outsideness', that is, the quality of the other's outside perspective to see what a self cannot, in isolation, perceive about themselves – for the self to 'become coherent', in other words, through the structure (or otherness) of narrative. 'In order to be perceived as a whole, as something finished', explains Holquist, 'a person or object must be shaped in the time/space categories of the other, and that is possible only when the person or object is perceived from the position of outsideness'.[103] To perceive someone as a whole requires placing them 'within the context of a complete narrative having a beginning that precedes our encounter and an end that follows it'.[104] As a result, we see others 'bathed in the light of their whole biography', and in turn we see ourselves only through that same light – 'I see my self as I conceive others might see it'.[105] It is worth noting that while the novel, according to my analysis, appears to challenge the very possibility of placing anyone 'within the context of a complete narrative', Holquist is not being prescriptive in his claims. A 'complete biography' is always contingent, with the borders of its beginnings and ends changing with each new encounter, but Holquist's point is that we nonetheless *must* construct, together, these biographies – which are 'complete' only temporarily – in order to understand and be understood by the other. There is an element, therefore, of (co-)authorship in the process of constructing selves, not unlike the practice of writing novels, and it is this process that *The Comforters* dramatises.

In an article discussing 'The Narrative Self', that is, the theory that narrative plays a formative role in our sense of self, Marya Schechtman suggests that 'selves are beings who negotiate the roles of character, author, and critic in their own lives', that 'as critics we interpret what has happened so far in a way that impacts the future authorship of our lives' and 'as characters we enact those choices and have the experiences that generate the significance we appreciate as critics'.[106] In *The Comforters* Caroline occupies and *enacts* each narrative role quite literally: as a critic Caroline reads and evaluates the text as it unravels (as well as writing, on the diegetic level of the fictional world, about 'Form in the

[103] Holquist, *Dialogism*, p. 31.
[104] Ibid., 32.
[105] Ibid., 28.
[106] Marya Schechtman, 'The Narrative Self', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*, ed. by Gallagher, pp. 391–416 (p. 414).

Modern Novel');[107] as a character she tries to make choices in order to escape the ontological status of 'character'; as an author she begins to influence the very course of the narrative (by the end it is implied that she has always had and indeed does exercise authorial power). Of course, given that Caroline is/becomes the Typing Ghost (the ambiguous temporality of the transition is surely part of the point), the same could be said for the latter: despite being the obvious authorial presence throughout the novel the Typing Ghost is also a reader in the way it reflects, critically, on Caroline's supposed interventions, and a character because of the way in which it acts upon them. The difference between the two is but a shift in emphasis that changes across time – initially Caroline's authority is weak while the Ghost's is strong, but by the end of the narrative it becomes clear that the binary is better understood not as a binary at all but as a *dialogue*, where the relation between author and hero is active, ongoing and unfinalizable.

In *The Comforters* Spark unravels the novel form to portray acts of writing or authoring *as being*; the instability of those narrative positions – the 'I' that is 'consummately inside' and the 'I' 'at last outside it' – is what constitutes the dialogic heart of the novel, as well as the architectonic structure of self/other relations. Waugh argues, of *The Comforters*, that 'treating persons as characters is not necessarily an act of colonisation, limiting them and condemning them to a "phony plot", but potentially a liberating challenge to assumptions concerning the metaphysical fixity of the self'.[108] In other words, how Spark conceives of 'character' offers a more dialogical, and potentially more radical, image of selfhood than either the realist conviction in presence or the poststructuralist insistence on absence; instead Spark commits to a fluid and differential vision of the social self, decentring individualist conceptions of the independence of human thought and speech *as well as* drawing attention to the contribution of the self/other to the very heteroglossia from which they spring.

Although Part 2 of the thesis turns towards grounded analyses of Spark's writing process and a sociological inquiry into the mechanics of publishing, the theoretical issues raised here remain pertinent and useful, for the following discussions highlight the many different dialogues through which Spark's writing unfolds (reading as writing, reanimating unpublished material, the dialogicity of composition itself) and through which her authorial legacy is secured (the paratextual dialogue with the marketplace, the development of critical idioms around Spark, and the renegotiation of gendered literary categories). If *The*

[107] Spark, *Comforters*, p. 56.
[108] Waugh, 'Auditoy Imagination', p. 1645.

Comforters shows (perhaps celebrates) the extent to which co-authoring and interdependence feature in our lives as well as our art, the genesis of *Reality and Dreams* and the marketing of Spark's fiction demonstrate the fine balance Spark struck with real Typing Ghosts in the creation and control of her work.

Part 2: Textual Instability in the Creation and Control of Spark's Fiction

Chapter Three

Muriel in Motion: Retracing the Development of *Reality and Dreams*

Genetic critic Pierre-Marc de Biasi has written at length about the obscure and elusive nature of what we commonly call the 'rough draft':

> The rough draft can be considered as a sort of text laboratory in which it becomes possible to piece back together an essential phase of the writer's work by tracing each one of the writing movements, observing, as if at the time they took place, choices, hesitations among the array of invented possibilities, bursts of speed and moments of discouragement or block in the composition, sudden intuitions or happy accidents that sweep aside the difficulties and set the writing off again in a new direction.[1]

Stated as such, the 'rough draft' appears as a straightforward and unproblematic object. But as Biasi goes on to elaborate, the concept of the rough draft 'can only be constructed differentially: it only makes sense, because of its intermediate and heterogeneous nature, when brought into a relationship with a whole set of functions and documents that can hail from quite distinct movements'.[2] That is, the boundaries or limits of what constitutes the rough draft can change depending on the materials against which it is defined as 'rough' and as a 'draft' of something that both precedes and succeeds it. Furthermore, different approaches of genetic analysis may frame the moving target of the 'rough draft' in ways appropriate for their specific requirements. For instance, microgenetics, 'which sets up and interprets the total compositional development of a short textual fragment', and macrogenetics, 'which looks at one or several complete collections of genetic documentation, studying large-scale phenomena', are likely to construct different shapes of the rough draft

[1] Pierre-Marc de Biasi, 'What is a Literary Draft? Toward a Functional Typology of Genetic Documentation', *Yale French Studies*, 89.89 (1996), pp. 26-58 (p. 29).
[2] Ibid., p. 32.

for the same documentary material.[3] While a microgenesis can propose 'an expanded version of the concept of the rough draft (and extend it, for example, to cover development from the initial workplans to textual adjustments made just before publication)', a macrogenesis typically works with 'a tighter definition of the rough draft, conceiving of it exclusively as the compositional space, completely distinct, for example, from manuscripts concerned with the initial planning, the structuring of the scenario, or documentary research'.[4]

As such, rough drafts can be considered both in the general and particular sense, to designate, on the one hand, 'a body of documents that are by nature obviously rather diverse, but that are also equally interdependent, such that they are not really interpretable in isolation', and a 'compositional document that is a specific result of textualizing, and that constitutes a writing step made between the initial scenarios and the definitive manuscript'.[5] My genetic analysis of Spark's twentieth novel, *Reality and Dreams*, draws from both the 'Rough Drafts of the work' (as Chapter One has already demonstrated) and the 'compositional rough draft', the latter of which is comprised of 5 spiral-bound James Thin notebooks, each labelled on the front with the title and the number of chapters contained within. The task of genetics is, in part, to retrace both the action *within* the 'text laboratory' of the compositional rough draft and the ingredients *outside* of but integral to its composition. And this inside/outside dynamic of textual production is refigured through what genetic critics call 'endogenesis' and 'exogenesis'. Endogenesis concerns 'any writing process focusing on a reflexive or self-referential activity of elaborating pre-textual data,[6] be it exploratory, conceptual, structuring, or textualising work', created without consulting 'outside documents or information',[7] whereas exogenesis refers to 'any writing process devoted to research, selection, and incorporation, focussed on information stemming from a source exterior to the writing'.[8] The rest of this chapter is structured around these two distinct but inextricable layers of writing.

Starting with exogenesis, I review the context within which Spark wrote *Reality and Dreams* in the mid 1990s, from unavoidable biographical details like her ill health and regular visits to hospitals, to the economic and political impact of mass unemployment in the

[3] Ibid., p. 27.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid. p. 53.
[6] What Biasi means by 'pre-textual data' is simply any text composed before publication, to distinguish it from the object of textual genetics which is interested in changes made after publication, as in the case of altered editions.
[7] Ibid., p. 42, 43.
[8] Ibid., p. 43–44.

UK, which provokes in Spark a reflective questioning of the value of modern labour and the overinvestment in usefulness, which in turn calls back to earlier Spark novels and her previous engagements with these themes. From there I move on to Spark's extensive research into the film industry, and tease out the discourses and associations that informed her appropriation of the image of the film director. Finally, I confront the peculiar exogenetic object of Spark's abandoned novel *Watling Street* from the 1970s, an historical epic set in Roman Britain that finds new endogenetic expression as a fictional film inside the narrative of *Reality and Dreams*.

From the endogenesis I highlight three different events of writing that all contribute to the text's development, including what I call 'controlled improvisation', in which Spark's writing deviates in ways unanticipated by Spark; the creation of 'character lists' by Jardine during Spark's writing, an emergent tool that helps Spark keep track of the narrative (the impact of these lists is, however, difficult to trace); and revision, of varying types and scope, as it appears throughout the compositional rough draft, from the manuscript onwards.

Though each section is broadly dedicated to different strands of the genesis, it is not possible to discuss one without the other, and as such endogenetic material inevitably appears alongside analyses of exogenesis and vice versa. As Biasi says, 'there is no such thing as a purely exogenetic element: every exogenetic fragment bears the primitive seal of endogenetics',[9] by which he means that any kind of research, selection or recording of exterior material necessarily transfers and transforms the source, by virtue of its newfound context, into writing defined by its relation to, and potential as, endogenesis. The very title *Reality and Dreams* alludes to these states of writing, the referential and fictional, and just like the way the novel blends the two in its narrative, it is from the dialogical interaction between them that my genesis is constructed.

Exogenesis

Context

[9] Ibid, p. 47.

According to Martin Stannard, composition of *Reality and Dreams* began in 1992 during a three-week holiday with Penelope Jardine 'in France, Le Fartoret in the Savoie, […] in an old village house on a plateau above the Rhône'.[10] It is not known how much was produced during this trip, or what it looked like, but the location remains important; references to the Savoie region appear throughout the novel, indeed the inspiration for Tom's 'hamburger girl' film comes from his trip to this part of France. Tom Richards, therefore, is another proxy figure for Spark, and this link becomes stronger when we consider the infirmities that plagued both.

Tom's hospitalisation in the opening of the novel alludes to the health problems of his creator at the time of writing. In the late '80s Spark began to have trouble with her hip, and in 1991 was diagnosed with arthritis and osteoporosis. In December 1992 Spark received a botched operation in Rome which led to several more operations over the next few years.[11] It was not until April 1995 that Spark 'was free from acute pain, […] furiously writing her novel and able to forget herself in it'.[12] However, in early 1996 Stannard reports that Spark 'could scarcely walk for pain and was taken by ambulance to a clinic in Florence where shingles was diagnosed', and that during Easter she nearly died.[13] Pain, exhaustion, and too much time spent in hospitals constitutes the inevitable context from which *Reality and Dreams* emerges.

In September 1994 Spark received what turned out to be an unnecessary operation on her spine,[14] an event to which the novel alludes: 'It was up to Cora, […] to break the news to her father that he had to go back into hospital for a spinal operation'.[15] Fortunately for Tom the surgeons notice their mistake in time, as his nurse, Julia, informs him: 'The good news […] is that you don't have to undergo another operation. There was a misdiagnosis, too hasty […]'.[16] It is not uncommon for Spark to rewrite or transfigure personal history in her fiction – consider the differences between Miss Kay and Jean Brodie, or the audio rather than visual hallucinations of Caroline Rose – but in this case we can detect in Tom's reaction Spark's own frustration: 'As soon as I hear a bit of news these days, […] someone comes along to contradict it. […] First I had to go back to hospital but now I don't'.[17]

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[10] Martin Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2010), p. 503.
[11] Ibid., p. 507.
[12] Ibid., p. 510.
[13] Ibid., p. 511.
[14] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, p. 510.
[15] Muriel Spark, *Reality and Dreams* (Constable, 1996), p. 25.
[16] Ibid., p. 30.
[17] Ibid., p. 31.

For Stannard the novel is a deeply personal fictionalisation of Spark's struggle to remain independent and make art, describing it as 'the story of her artistic spirit's resistance against infirmity and negativity'.[18] Tom can be convincingly placed alongside those other writerly protagonists such as Caroline Rose, Fleur Talbot, and Nancy Hawkins as a character that clearly draws from, and plays with, Spark's authorial persona. Stannard points out that Tom shares with Spark many friendships and acquaintances with famous literary figures (Graham Greene, W. H. Auden, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee); that 'almost everything he [Tom] has to say about art, Muriel had also said in interview'; that both share religious beliefs but defy dogma, and recognise parallels between their art and God's creation.[19] Stannard makes a strong case for the text's autobiographical resonances (which, in his interpretation, informs the overriding 'meaning' of the narrative), but he also notes that Spark had landed on the theme of redundancy 'before her first catastrophic operation', and that this facet of the novel was perhaps influenced by 'the zeitgeist of the 1990s'.[20] The archive reveals this is something of an understatement, because Spark not only researched recent unemployment rates in the UK amidst the fallout of Thatcherism, for instance, but dug deeper into the history, economics and politics of labour.

The archive contains 'Labour Market Statistics' dated from February 1994, as well as a press notice from the same period in which David Hunt, the Secretary of State for Employment at the time, announces that unemployment is trending downwards despite monthly rises, that over the last year 'an average of 370,000 people have left the unemployment count and an average of 355,000 have joined' before explaining that 'the monthly change in number of unemployed people is the difference between these very large numbers', and therefore 'last month's rise in unemployment was due mainly to a fall in the numbers leaving the count'.[21] This kind of circumlocutionary speech, and the sheer economic abstraction of numbers going in and out, surely convinced Spark (if she needed any convincing) of the satirical potential of this political crisis, not unlike the way the Watergate scandal seemed ripe for parody.[22] Indeed mass layoffs lurk in the background of the novel as a kind of uneasy and absurd ambience:

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[18] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, p. 515.
[19] Ibid., p. 515, 516.
[20] Ibid., 514.
[21] TMSA, Employment Department Report press notice, 16 February 1994, NLS. Acc. 11621/ 42.
[22] A typewritten note lays out a clear thematic focus: 'Theme – Justified anger & unemployment'. TMSA, typewritten note, c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/52.

> That was how he found out that since his fall two men and two women of his family had been made redundant besides Johnny, Cora's husband. Incidentally, as he found out later, another relative, a woman personnel manager, had herself made redundant twenty-eight men in her office.[23]

But in the same way *The Abbes of Crewe* is not only (or even primarily) about the deceptive political machinations of the US – it is 'as much about language and modes of communication as it is about the abuses of authority'[24] – so too is *Reality and Dreams* only partially concerned with contemporary economic headlines; mass unemployment is instead used as a comic device to explore more philosophical questions about redundancy, usefulness and purpose.

For instance, the archive also contains photocopies of excerpts from entries in the 15th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* on 'Work, Organisation of' and 'Workmen's Compensation'.[25] One handwritten note copies that seminal piece of labour history, 'Ford replacement of skilled workers with low-cost labour'.[26] And from a 1972 copy of Roget's Thesaurus Spark recorded all the synonyms for words like 'utility', 'inutility' and the phrase 'waste of breath'.[27] Another note simply poses the question 'why should we "work"?'[28] There is thus a subtle but distinct shift in emphasis from Spark's research into the historically specific moment of recession to the more reflective and critical questioning of the concept of work, but this is not novel territory for Spark; *Reality and Dreams* instead represents an explicit engagement with a topic and theme that had heretofore only a latent presence in her fiction. Consider the scene where Jean Brodie and her girls walk through Edinburgh's Old Town and encounter 'a very long queue of men […] talking and spitting and smoking little bits of cigarette held between middle finger and thumb':

> Monica Douglas whispered, 'They are the Idle,'
>
> 'In England they are called the Unemployed. They are waiting to get their dole from the labour bureau,' said Miss Brodie. 'You must all

[23] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 17.
[24] Colin Kidd, 'All the Abbess's Nuns: Muriel Spark and the Idioms of Watergate', in *The Crooked Dividend: Essays on Muriel Spark* ed. by Gerard Carruthers and Helen Stoddart, Association for Scottish Literature Occasional Papers, 24 (Scottish Literature International, 2022), pp. 126–123 (pp. 129–129).
[25] TMSA, photocopes of the Encyclopedia Britaannica, 1977, NLS, Acc. 11621/42.
[26] TMSA, handwritten note by Spark, c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/52.
[27] TMSA, excerpts from Roget's Thesaurus, 1972, NLS, Acc. 11621/42.
[28] TMSA, handwritten note by Spark, c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/52.

> pray for the Unemployed, I will write you out the special prayer for them. You all know what the dole is?'[29]

Brodie's view of the unemployed is typically ambivalent, encouraging her girls to recognise their kinship with them ('they are our brothers') while at the same time casting aspersions on their moral character ('sometimes they go and spend their dole on drink before they go home, and their children starve').[30] In *Reality and Dreams* a similar scene unfolds as Tom and his taxi driver confidante Dave drive past a crowd of 'not very prosperous-looking' people inside an 'electronics emporium':

> 'The less money they have,' said Tom, 'the more home-movie cameras they buy. I don't understand why.'
>
> 'They'll put you out of business,' said Dave.
>
> 'They look unemployed to me,' said Tom.
>
> 'Publicans and sinners.'
>
> 'How do you know? No man has hired them. It's in the Bible that Jesus saw those men idle in the market place, looking for jobs. He said they should get paid just the same as those who had work. They were waiting around all day to be hired, and at the end of the day they said "No man has hired us." According to Jesus, they were entitled to their pay just the same as those who had done a day's work.'[31]

In contrast to Brodie, with her rather sanctimonious pity and praying, Tom's appeal to Christianity (citing the parable of the workers in the vineyard) demonstrates a far more sincere sympathy with the plight of the unemployed. Tom, himself, of course, has been made redundant from his role as director after suffering a fall from a crane, but it hardly affects his finances or his career, so his charitable perspective derives from a nonetheless superficial solidarity with his 'brothers'. But, in his retelling of the parable he lights upon a crucial distinction between the employed and the unemployed; the latter are so only because 'no man has hired them'. The novel is arguably 'about' exposing the arbitrariness of this dividing line, of undermining the association of shame implied by the special category of the capitalised

[29] Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Polygon, 2018), p. 37.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 66.

'Unemployed' in *Brodie* and by extension the ways society organises humans according to their usefulness.

In Jeremy Idle's essay 'Muriel Spark's Uselessness' he reads Spark alongside George Bataille, summarising the latter's central thesis as being that 'every useful act is useless because in the long run we are all dead, and every useless act is useful in that it challenges our slavery to mere necessity'.[32] Idle turns to the *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* as a fictional articulation of Bataille's deconstructive commandment, with the interruptive force of 'arts man' Dougal Douglas threatening the otherwise peaceful but numbing utilitarianism of the factory workforce in Peckham.[33] Druce, the general manager of the factory, recruits Dougal, a kind of human resources hire, to 'make whatever Dougal has learnt at Edinburgh University about the ordinary human emotions to serve the needs of production targets', but Dougal in turn plans to use 'whatever human material exists in the factory to serve the Bacchanalian revelry, the encouragement of absenteeism, the double-crossing of different firms and the abuse of personal confidences'.[34] Michael Gardiner similarly views Dougal as a challenge to the economic and ideological landscape of a post-war consensus defined by 'mass competitiveness' and 'shared public efficiency': 'to the assembly line Dougal brings clumsiness, inappropriateness, redundant movements, failure to streamline, and disobedience to the BPC [British Productivity Council] drive for "variety reduction"'.[35] That phrase, 'redundant movements', refigures redundancy as a positive and decidedly subversive mode of being, for it is through this kind of troublesome excess that 'our slavery to mere necessity' is broken, and from which the mysterious condition of art is made possible.

For Tom Richards, 'redundant movements' form the basis of his art and life. For his film *The Hamburger Girl* (initially inspired by a sighting of a French girl making hamburgers at a campsite), he had considered locating the whereabouts of the eponymous girl in order to 'give her anonymously, just make her a gratuitous gift of, an enormous fortune'.[36] Once the transfer of money is settled (which 'would have to be immense, artistically'), 'she could possibly slip into the part without difficulty'.[37] This scheme, which Tom realises in film but not in reality (though he muses about it as if it is one and the same), represents the 'gratuitous

[32] Jeremy Idle, 'Muriel Spark's Uselessness', in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gemder, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. by Martin McQuillan (Palgrave, 2001), pp. 141–154 (p. 142).
[33] Spark, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (Polygon, 2017), p. 8.
[34] Ibid., pp. 145–146.
[35] Michael Gardiner, 'Spark Versus *Homo Economicus*', *Textual Practice*, 31.2 (2018), pp. 1513–1528 (p. 1514).
[36] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 19.
[37] Ibid., p. 76.

gift' of art, where the means and ends of artistic creation are, in a world beholden to economic utility, defiantly unnecessary. Tom's recovery is about reintroducing rather than curbing the superfluous: 'Tom tried to get back his original "blood-relations" into the act. He was not successful because the screenplay had been changed to eliminate them. They were unnecessary',[38] 'he took […] the ever-recurring phrase "cost-effective" as a personal insult.'[39] Even Tom's physiology is surplus to requirements, as Marigold delights in telling him: 'Your nose is far too long. It sticks out. I'd make it look like a late-comer at a party compared with and joining the rest of your features.'[40] Indeed Marigold is a direct contrast to Tom, with her pedantic, transactional and utilitarian attitude. When she visits Tom at the hospital she says 'don't wear yourself out […] with too much conversation', a common expression which in this context reads differently as Marigold trying to shut down unnecessary chatter.[41] 'I bought you some grapes', says Marigold, and as the narrator points out, 'she said "bought" not "brought"', before commenting on how the clinic likely 'costs a fortune'.[42] And in response to Tom's insult about her 'flat-chested puritanism' Marigold states that 'small breasts are very good under clothes', ensuring no bumps in the smooth road of utility.[43]

It is in this respect that Tom shares with Brodie a captivating appetite for the appreciation of art as a subversive kind of uselessness. As Idle says, 'Brodie makes sure her pupils are informed on "subjects useless to the school as a school", concentrating on art and poetry to the exclusion of the practical and scientific'.[44] But Brodie's rebelliousness against the school's status quo is by no means virtuous, for her lessons in art and poetry are inextricably linked to her political extremism, so that, as Idle argues, Brodie 'opposes the school's stultifying bourgeois order with her own quasi-Fascist one'.[45] Tom is similarly ambiguous as a character who 'points in the direction of excess, exuberance and passion' in the arts, but does so at the expense of others' freedom.[46]

That ambiguity may have swayed closer to a clear satire of Tom as a dictatorial director had Spark kept her original title for the novel, 'The Ravished Porcupine'. The phrase appears near the beginning of the manuscript when Tom's lawyer accuses him of being

[38] Ibid., p. 57.
[39] Ibid., p. 56.
[40] Ibid., p. 74.
[41] Ibid., p. 12.
[42] Ibid., p. 12.
[43] Ibid., p. 73, 74.
[44] Idle, 'Muriel Spark's Uselessness', p. 146.
[45] Ibid., p. 147.
[46] Ibid.

petulant (the dialogue is cut in later drafts),[47] then reappears (and stays) 10 pages later when Claire says of Tom, 'at times you act like a female hedgehog or a porcupine that has been sexually violated. […] A ravished porcupine, that's what you are at such times'.[48] The title change is made on the front cover of the third notebook that continues from chapter 8 (in a novel 16 chapters long, so almost exactly halfway), and suggests that the tenor of the novel had drifted from the openly or straightforwardly comical to something altogether more ambiguous. If, as Tom says of his own practice, 'you can't change the title without changing the film altogether',[49] it is possible to imagine how 'The Ravished Porcupine' would influence our reading of the text as an unequivocal criticism of Tom as a character in a way that 'Reality and Dreams' does not. Recourse to exogenetic material related to the film industry and the role of the film director helps contextualise both titles, as well as the endogenetic transformation of one into the other.

Directing/Dictating

In Spark's construction of Tom Richards we can detect some straightforward translations of the exogenetic into the endogenetic. For instance, Spark takes note of a quote from a Nigerian politician being interviewed on TV: '"Democracy is not a one-man cup of tea." Nigerian politician, 14.8.93 UK - TV interview'.[50] In Chapter 1 Tom sees this snippet of interview on TV before switching it off:

> There was a television in the corner, stuck up on the wall, and a controller by the side table. Tom switched it on. A Nigerian politician being interviewed – 'Democracy,' he said, 'is not a one-man cup of tea.' Tom switched it off.[51]

The quotation is repurposed for the sake of Tom's reaction to its message, which betrays an obvious disdain for the idea of democracy, perhaps not politically but certainly artistically; at

[47] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* manuscript, c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/55, notebook 1, p. 18.
[48] The phrase appears about 10 pages later as dialogue from Claire: '"At times you act like a female hedgehog or a porcupine that has been sexually violated. […] A ravished porcupine, that's what you are at such times."'
[49] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 56.
[50] TMSA, handwritten note, 14 August 1993, NLS, Acc. 11621/52.
[51] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 13.

the end of the chapter Tom reflects on his relation to the rest of his film crew, 'what do they think a film set is? A democracy or something?'[52] In this respect the word 'controller' denotes both a device and a behaviour, and Spark draws attention to the technological power wielded by Tom in the mechanical repetition of that control: 'Tom switched it on […] Tom switched it off'.

Another example of clear exogenetic/endogenetic transfer comes from an advertisement in the *New Yorker* for an exhibition by multi-media artist Doug Aitken. Spark circles the advertisement which describes the ways Aitken 'incorporates aspects of his "day job" into his aesthetic strategy. Mixing up work and leisure, he adds several new wrinkles to the already complicated relationship between "fine art" and entertainment, further blurring the boundaries between art, fashion, and pop'.[53] Whatever relationship Spark had with Doug Aitken and his art is unknown, but beside the point; what interests Spark most about this particular description is the phrase 'aesthetic strategy'. Spark employs the phrase in chapter 6 when a replacement director for 'the hamburger girl' film visits Tom at his home: 'The man came to see Tom to explain his method, which he called his aesthetic strategy, thus outrageing [*sic*] Tom from the start'.[54] Extracted from its exogenetic origins in academic discourse, Spark redeploys the phrase in a parodic context, with Tom (and perhaps by implication Spark) mocking those who intellectualise their own art or art-making processes.

Larger exogenetic material, like books Spark has consulted, proves more difficult to interpret in relation to its endogenetic expression. A potentially pivotal text for the conception of *Reality and Dreams*, for instance, is a 1970 study of film auteurs titled *The Film Director as Superstar* by Philip Gelmis. Spark records no quotes from the book, noting instead only the title and its author. Curiously, the note contains a decidedly Sparkian typo, recorded instead as 'The Film Director as Super*spy*'.[55] It is unclear whether this is a genuine mistake (which is in itself a telling case of parapraxis) or a deliberate amendment, and the book's exogenetic value may extend no further than its title, because, even if Spark intended to, she may never have read the contents of the book. For cases such as these Biasi recommends the tentative category of 'hypothetical exogenetics':

[52] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 14
[53] TMSA, newspaper cutting from the *New Yorker*, 3 October 1994, NLS, Acc. 11621/41.
[54] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p.56.
[55] TMSA, handwritten note, n.d., NLS, Acc. 11621/52, emphasis mine.

> In the absence of any locatable trace in the work's manuscripts, a highly probable source […] could become the object of the same kind of study, but under the heading *hypothetical exogenetics*, in accordance with an analytical procedure that clearly differentiates it from exogenetics per se.[56]

Given Spark's extensive research elsewhere for *Reality and Dreams* and for other novels,[57] Gelmis's book, comprised of sixteen interviews with notable film auteurs of the late '60s, is 'a highly probable source', and I find in these interviews many resonances with Spark's text, but what follows must nonetheless be considered a speculative interpretation of a hypothetical exogenetic object.

When Gelmis asks film-maker Jim McBride how he decided on a 'diary form' for his independent film *David Holzman's Diary*, McBride's response resembles the kind of artistic reflection we expect from Tom:

> It starts out for me as just a need to make a film. And then it comes to images, obsessive images. […] there was always in my mind an image of a guy with a camera on his shoulder filming himself in a mirror. And that image seemed terribly profound to me. I'm not sure I could explain why.[58]

Tom's own obsession is explained in similar terms: 'When I see people in frames I know I want to make a film of just that picture'.[59] On the point of obsession, John Cassavetes comments on the monomaniacal nature of film-making, that 'it becomes impossible to live anything but a hermetically sealed existence. All your energies and all your interests are centred around one thing'.[60] The all-consuming practice of film-making is written into Tom's character with comic absurdity; his artistic craft frames his subjective position to the extent that he regularly sees the people and things around him as potential components for a film. For instance, when interacting with the nurses in the hospital Tom cannot help but see in them 'parts' or 'roles': 'He felt like a casting director. Greta is absolutely built for the part.

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[56] Biasi, 'What is a Literary Draft?', p. 45, emphasis original.
[57] See James Bailey's observation of the 'eccentrically diverse selection of subjects' Spark researched for *The Hothouse by the East River*, including 'the pathophysiology of electric shocks, the specificities of hotel cuisine, the workings of telephone wires and the hatching of silkworm eggs'. James Bailey, *Muriel Spark's Early Fiction: Literary Subversion and Experiments with Form* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), p. 171.
[58] Joseph Gelmis, *The Film Director as Superstar* (Penguin, 1970), p. 42.
[59] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 75.
[60] Gelmis, *Film Director*, p. 123.

But which part?'[61] For Tom the world is quite literally a stage, but this artistic obsessiveness also demands of the world submission to his control.

A recurring theme throughout Gelmis's interviews is the question of artistic control and how independent directors outside – or on the fringes of – the old, Hollywood studio system are beginning to exert greater control over their productions. Spark was deeply protective (perhaps possessive) of her own work, and the notion of ownership over art is often thematised in the novels, so it is likely Spark would have sympathised with the following bold statement from Bernardo Bertolucci, with whom she was commissioned to interview in 1989 (though he cancelled the meeting), about artistic freedom: 'Freedom is the absolute necessity. From the beginning, I've had total control over my films'.[62] Indeed the main arc of the narrative in *Reality and Dreams* follows Tom's struggles to regain control not only over his art but his life. And yet, Spark frequently satirises the tyrannical nature of the auteur. Consider Richard Lester's comments on the importance of directorial control: 'A director's role in this period of filmmaking […] is to be an absolute dictator and produce a personal vision on a subject that he has chosen'.[63] These pronouncements certainly align with Tom's own megalomania, 'it was wonderful to shout orders through the amplifier and like God watch the team down there group and re-group as bidden.'[64]

Lester also complains about the effort involved in maintaining positive relationships with his colleagues in the film crew: 'you have to have a thousand personal love affairs with prop men and with actors to keep them happy'.[65] In *Reality and Dreams* Spark literalises Lester's hyperbole in the plot, as Tom pursues several love affairs, one of which is with the glamorous and famous actress, Rose Woodstock. And the portrayal of Rose's acting reflects rather directly the kind of inauthenticity of 'professional actors' that Milos Forman bemoans in his interview: 'I am not all that excited with the routine that very often professional actors, theatre actors, are bringing on the screen'.[66] Rose's acting is criticised from the same angle: 'Trained by an academy of dramatic art, Rose was an academy actress from start to finish', 'Extremely competent, extremely "Academy". […] She lifted a glass off the table the "Academy" way; she received bad news in the "Academy" style'.[67]

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[61] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 10.
[62] Gelmis, *Film Director*, p. 171.
[63] Ibid., p. 315.
[64] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 14.
[65] Gelmis, *Film Director*, p. 336.
[66] Ibid., p. 188.
[67] Spark, *Reality and Drams*, p. 72–73.

Spark extends her understanding of the delicate relationship between director and actor by consulting another book, *On Filmmaking* by American director Edward Dmytryk. Unlike the Gelmis book, Spark records a more specific citation: 'Plot. P. 221 Dmytryk On Filmmaking. Difficult actors'.[68] The exogenetic relevance of this book is arguably stronger, but at the same time it remains just as ambiguous; the page reference and the summary ('difficult actors') suggests Spark read either the whole book and recorded the part most pertinent to her research or jumped straight to the section where Dmytryk discusses handling actors. Either way, there are no further manuscript traces beyond a page number and a subject, so while there is stronger evidence of Spark's use of the material, the book sits alongside Gelmis's as part of a hypothetical exogenesis.

On page 221 Dmytryk highlights an actor's 'insecurity of the ego' as a potential problem for the director, where the actor 'wants to be king of the hill'.[69] Dmytryk gives the example of a renowned actor approaching him on set to question and possibly change some small pieces of dialogue in the script. Dmytryk interpreted this as a kind of test: 'It was the transference of decision-making authority that mattered, not the dialogue'.[70] Dmytryk resists the proposed changes and, in an attempt to restore his power as director, later discusses making changes of his own to his actor's lines, thus winning back the 'decision-making authority'. The power dynamics Dmytryk describes here gives shape to the work relationship between Tom and Rose. One incident in particular appears as if it was informed by Dmytryk's experience. In a scene where Rose receives a gift, Tom takes great issue with the way Rose receives it, and tries in vain to adjust or refine her performance. The incident is relayed by Rose's aunt as she complains to a dress maker:

> 'She had to re-do an action that involved receiving a present from a lover. […] She snatched the jewel case and snapped it open […] with a kind of gasp. Was that good enough for Tom Richards? No, it wasn't.'[71]

The ulterior motive behind Tom's seemingly pedantic and exacting demands is shown when Rose's aunt describes Tom's frustrated approach to the scene: 'And Tom said in front of everyone, "Rose, I have to talk to you. Tonight, before you go home. I'd like you to have a

[68] TMSA, typewritten note, c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/52.
[69] Edward Dmytryk, *On Filmmaking* (Focal, 1986), p. 221.
[70] Ibid., p, 222.
[71] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 68.

drink with me as I've something to explain"'.[72] Like Dmytryk, Tom uses a trivial part of the script to undermine the power of his renowned actor and demonstrate his authority, but unlike Dmytryk, Tom chooses to humiliate Rose sadistically. However, immediately before the section with the aunt we see Tom rehearsing the gift receiving scene with his wife, Claire. Claire succeeds where Rose cannot: '"That's it!" said Tom. "There is a way of accepting a present. The hand should linger. It's been worrying me all day"'.[73] As such, Tom's concerted and cruel stunt can be reinterpreted as a demonstration of his earnest and passionate care towards his artistry; the novel often plays on the tensions between obsessive control and admirable dedication, and Spark saw in the complex and fragile hierarchy of roles within film production a suitable arena through which to explore this friction.

In the context of this (hypothetical) exogenesis, the original title 'The Ravished Porcupine' seems to lean heavily on reducing Tom and his directorial/dictatorial aspirations to a selfish and guarded intolerance of others, like the defences of a small spiky animal. But contained within this comical and deflationary image is a real sense of pathos; 'ravished', after all, denotes violation. Yet, at the same time, 'ravished' can also refer to the notion of being 'transported in spirit or with some strong emotion; entranced, enraptured, captivated',[74] as Tom so often is with his film-making, and it is perhaps this sense, of the mystery of artistic inspiration and creation rather than a parodic takedown, that Spark wanted to foreground in the novel.

When Gelmis questions film-maker Lindsay Anderson about the ambiguity in the final scenes of *If*... (1968), in which a disillusioned group of public school boys rebel against the institution by waging literal war on their masters with guns and grenades, he asks Anderson about the choice 'not to make the usual distinction between the reality and the fantasy in *If*'.[75] Anderson's reply may well be the key to Spark's title change:

> I wouldn't like to say, "Now it's fantasy. Now it's real." Because the whole point of fantasy is that it is real. And that there aren't in life any rigid distinctions between what is real and what is fantasy. Our fantasies are part of our reality.[76]

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[72] Ibid., p. 69.
[73] Ibid., p. 68.
[74] 'Ravished, *Adj*', Oxford English Dictionary <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/ravished_adj?tab=meaning_and_use#26768956> [accessed 27 June 2022].
[75] Gelmis, *Film Director*, p. 156.
[76] Ibid.

Our dreams, Tom reflects, 'are insubstantial; the dreams of God, no. They are real, frighteningly real. They bulge with flesh, they drip with blood'.[77] In here is a warning about the danger of being swallowed by someone else's fantasy, given by a character guilty of subsuming others into his fictions. But alongside this satire is a self-reflective meditation on the notion that art 'is real and not real', just like our 'dreams are reality and reality is dreams'.[78] And within the genesis of *Reality and Dreams* there is nestled another Spark artwork, the abandoned novel *Watling Street*, which is now quite literally 'real and not real', and it is to this peculiar exogenetic source that I now turn.

Creative Recurrence

Dirk Van Hulle describes the unstable temporality that attends modern literary manuscripts as 'a tension between the teleology characterizing any human project and the dysteleological sidepaths, dead ends and reroutings that tend to mark its actual realization'.[79] In other words, the creative process as shown in modern manuscripts is anything but linear or straightforward; instead literary creativity emerges through experimentation, unexpected intrusions and sudden changes. This is so for Spark, and especially for the genesis of *Reality and Dreams*, part of which jumps from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s.

In 1975/6 Spark was committed to the idea of writing an historical novel set in Roman Britain, provisionally titled *Watling Street*. It follows the lives of a Roman Centurion and his clairvoyant Celtic slave in the third century AD. In *Reality and Dreams*, *Watling Street* and its two main characters become a film directed by protagonist Tom Richards. Spark travelled across Italy and researched thoroughly the history, culture, politics and territory of the Roman empire and Roman Britain (with particular interest in the ancient Roman Britain road from which the novel takes its name) in preparation for this project. Matthew Harle observes that the 'depth of Spark's enquiry into Roman Britain is extraordinarily academic in its forensic attention to detail', involving 'numerous maps, lengthy biographies of somber historical works, alongside pages and pages of photocopies from various antiquated encyclopaedias'.[80]

[77] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 64.
[78] Ibid., p. 157.
[79] Dirk Van Hulle, *Modern Manuscripts: The Extended Mind and Creative Undoing from Darwin to Beckett and Beyond* (Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 15).
[80] Matthew Harle, *Aftrerlives of Abandoned Work: Creative Debris in the Archive* (Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 167.

The sheer physical mass of material, as I have seen it, is daunting as an archival object. But that material is most pertinent to a genesis of the unfinished *Watling Street*, not the published *Reality and Dreams*. Chronologically, the abandoned project of the ’70s is the first piece of text written for *Reality and Dreams*, but conceptually the work – in both senses, the artistic project and its labour – did not begin until the ’90s.

This is an explicit example of what Van Hulle calls ‘creative recurrence’, where a writer’s output across time informs the genesis of an individual work. In contrast to ‘creative concurrence’, which draws attention to how writers ‘divide their time between multiple projects’ and whether that simultaneity influences the individual works (the synchronic context of a text’s development), ‘creative reurrence’ highlights the diachronic connections between a text and its material traces from earlier or later in a writer’s career.[81] But what is most compelling about Spark’s repurposing of *Watling Street* is the self-reflexive nature of its inclusion. Spark translates the premise of *Watling Street* the novel into the premise of a fictional film, and in doing so dramatises (and perhaps pokes fun at) her own lengthy production of a novel that never came to be:

> From the beginning of the text Tom has a project in constant development, the title of which changes from chapter to chapter. What starts as a film called *Hamburger Girl* soon becomes *A Near Miss*, which in turn morphs into *The Lump Sum*, then (and I am sure humorously to Spark) *Unfinished Business* – before finally becoming *Watling Street*.[82]

Harle’s summary is a trifle inaccurate because *Unfinished Business* sees release (‘Tom’s film, *Unfinished Business*, was a decided success’) and *Watling Street* is a new project altogether (‘My new film […] is set in Roman Britain’),[83] though the point about ‘constant development’ and Spark’s joke about her unfinished business with *Watling Street* is nonetheless compelling. But it is important to recognise that the idea of *Watling Street* only enters the novel’s narrative in the final twenty pages. It is entirely possible that Spark alights on the idea of incorporating her historical epic *during* the latter stages of composition, a flash of that improvisational quality I later identify in the manuscript. At the same time, however, there is evidence to suggest otherwise, like in the first chapter of the manuscript where Rome

[81] Dirk Van Hulle, *Genetic Criticism: Tracing Creativity in Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 119.
[82] Harle, *Afterlives*, p. 166.
[83] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 114, 125.

is used as a location rather than London in the following sentence: 'He was touched that lovely Cora his daughter by his first wife had flown into London to see him'.[84] The change from 'Rome' to 'London' is not made until the typescript draft,[85] and surely suggests that Rome and by extension the repurposing of *Watling Street* was originally going to come into play earlier than when it does in the published text.[86] At the same time, 'Rome' may simply reflect the location at which Spark received her first operation. As such, it is difficult to pinpoint *when Watling Street* enters the exogenesis, and it continues to haunt the overall genesis with its lack of clear 'starting points', to recall Bakhtin.

We know that Spark regularly draws upon and recontextualises unpublished work for newer projects, what Harle accurately calls 'a process of auto-metafiction'.[87] And though these recurring acts of auto-metafiction represent an efficient creative economy (a structural version of the 'economy' with which her prose is associated), there is more to Spark's combinatory practice than mere writerly resourcefulness. As Harle's discussion of Spark progresses it becomes clear that his primary interest in Spark's abandoned work derives not so much from the material directly related to planned projects, but from the more scattered, fragmentary writing that has no apparent destination: 'This parallel writing practice, directed away from research or prose directly intended for the novel, often proves to be more interesting than otherwise thought and complicates literary archives'.[88] He compares this style of note-taking to the 'fragmented, broken notations' found in Paul Valéry's notebooks, a writer who was, like Spark, preoccupied with the act of creation, where the process is refigured as 'action – as creative act, development or performance – rather than as finished work'.[89] For Harle, the way Valéry reconceives the writing process by centring the 'fragmented act' over against the 'continuous cause and effect production line of drafts' is also what animates Spark's scattered notes.[90] From this perspective, Spark's borrowing from older work for new productions is less interesting for its shrewd economising than it is as a conception of writing as eternally fragmented, where the beginning and ending of writing is delimited only by the necessary telos of publishing.

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[84] Ibid., p. 12.
[85] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* typescript draft, c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/57.
[86] It may also simply reflect the location of Spark's first operation, which was in Rome.
[87] Harle, *Afterlives*, p. 165.
[88] Ibid., p. 169.
[89] Paul Valéry quoted in Harle, *Afterlives*, p. 175.
[90] Ibid., p. 175.

At the start of the novel, while Tom is still bedbound owing to his crane injury, he vents his frustration at the tension between his desire to work and the physical inability to do so:

> 'I want to finish my film but I can't do it. Someone else will do it. I'm in bed. I'm out of work.'
> 'There will be other films', said Claire. 'There always have been.'
> 'My film is not replaceable,' said Tom. 'No work of art can be replaced. A work of art is like living people.'[91]

The original *Watling Street* has not been replaced or even displaced but instead brought into contact with a different kind of textuality, as a fictional passion project for a fictional other, and in doing so Spark memorialises the unfinished project as well as finds closure in its subordinated use. In *Reality and Dreams* the fictional *Watling Street* remains unfinished too; the denouement of the novel takes place on set in the middle of the film's production. 'Later, in London' Tom says 'I'm glad the film is coming to an end. We're just about ready to wrap it up'.[92] But even here Tom's pronouncements are inflected with uncertainty, '*coming* to an end', '*just about* ready', and so Spark remains faithful to the incompleteness of the original, unfinalized (to borrow Bakhtin once more) 'like living people'.

Indeed the unfinished or unrealised, or the condition between the incomplete and complete, is a theme that runs throughout *Reality and Dreams*. When Tom reminisces about his friend, the poet W.H. Auden, he includes a detail about how 'he kept his new work under the sofa. He would scramble under the sofa to bring his batch of poems to read to me'.[93] Such a cavalier and unorganised method of storage is eccentric, perhaps lazy or paranoid, but it also preserves the momentum of possibility (the way he must 'scramble under' to find it, as if by a chance encounter) in a way that a more traditional filing system would not. Tom also reveals that he, alongside Auden, 'thought about making a film of Proust. It's almost impossible. There was a film but it was no good. It wasn't Proust'.[94] Tom and Auden's 'thought' towards a Proust film is likely referencing the director/screenwriter duo of Joseph

[91] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 23.
[92] Ibid., p. 160.
[93] Ibid., p. 46.
[94] Ibid., p. 97.

Losey[95] and Harold Pinter who collaborated, during the '70s, on an ambitious four-hour long film adaptation of Proust's magnum opus before shelving the project because it 'proved too esoteric to lure the required funding and distribution costs'.[96] The 'no good' completed film must be Volker Schlöndorff's *Swann in Love* (1984), a 'conventional attempt', the 'most accessible and explicable' approach according to the *Guardian*'s Peter Bradshaw.[97] That Tom says the task is 'almost impossible', however, leaves room for a chance, however small, at success, and *Reality and Dreams* is, in part, a defence of the drawn-out, ambitious, and ultimately unrealisable effort at creation, in opposition to the prematurely finished work.

And this struggle between finishing and finishing poorly is comically refigured through male sexual prowess. One of Tom's in-laws, Ralph, confesses to Tom that 'redundancy causes sexual disaster. It causes anxiety and inadequate erections […] a brusque fall in sexual activity and reduced desire with the impossibility of having a complete erection'.[98] Later in the novel Tom has the opposite problem: 'But he now made love too fast. He could not keep it going. Rose complained, without embarrassment on her side, or the slightest delicacy, that he made love like he was in a hurry to get home'.[99] The connection between male sexuality and writing is made explicit when Tom talks about Graham Greene: 'Sex was his main subject […] He had a mix-up of women and felt guilty the whole time. Without girls I think he couldn't have carried on. He needed it for his writing'.[100] The narrative of sexual desire is certainly suggestive as a metaphor to describe the ambiguous state of unfinished writing, where anticipation, longing, fantasy, titillation and obsession may or may not lead to consummation. Spark's *The Driver's Seat* is to some extent an exercise in this analogy, as the quasi-romantic plot of Lise's pursuit of a lover, her ideal 'type', propels a narrative that is itself about the ultimate act of finishing, death.

Lise's plotting of her own death is commonly read as both a desperate way to take control of a life that is already immaculately but oppressively finished, as well as a futile

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[95] Losey had been recruited to direct an adaptation of Spark's novel *The Takeover*, with a screenplay by Spark, before his death cancelled the project. See Robert E. Hosmer, 'Muriel Spark: A Glance Through an Open Door', *Scottish Review of Books*, 3 October 2013 <https://www.scottishreviewofbooks.org/free-content/muriel-spark-a-glance-through-an-open-door/> [accessed 14 January 2020].

[96] Harle, *Afterlives*, p. 112. It is worth pointing out that Harle dedicates a chapter to this incomplete production but does not mention its likely reference in his next chapter which explores similar terrain in *Reality and Dreams*.

[97] Peter Bradshaw, 'Remembrance of Things Past: Marcel Proust on Film', *Guardian*, 7 November 2013 < https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/nov/07/remembrance-past-marcel-proust-on-film> [accessed 12 October 2023].

[98] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p.44.

[99] Ibid., p. 72.

[100] Ibid., p. 46.

attempt to metafictionally wrestle control of a narrative from an omniscient narrator. But, as James Bailey argues, the proleptic predictions of Lise's murder and the rape of Lise by her desired murderer – which Lise instructed against – does *not* signal the cruel punishment of an omniscient author for the arrogant crime of narrative control.[101] Instead Bailey demonstrates just how impotent and clueless the narrator of *The Driver's Seat* is, and that, quoting Brian Nicol, 'Lise's actions come across as being observed by someone following her', so that the narration 'resembles a less supernatural, more sinister, voyeuristic practice, like stalking'.[102] For Bailey, 'a narrator who is ''more like a stalker than a deity'' […] is necessarily situated *within* the diegesis'.[103] From this perspective the narrator is relatively powerless and can only 'spiral fascinatedly around Lise, in thrall to her mystery'.[104] As a result the metafictional commentary becomes less about the scriptedness of authorial control and more about incompletion, where the 'unknown and unknowable' subject of a 'narrator-voyeur' remains frustratingly but tantalisingly unfinished.[105]

Valéry is similarly far more invested in the work of the unfinished, its illegibility and deferral, over that which is complete: '[…] critics call what is produced: You – and your work! – my works on the contrary, are those I have not accomplished and to which I have devoted the most thought in the greatest depth'.[106] Consider the way Tom's *Watling Street* preoccupies his (and perhaps Spark's) mind: 'Tom's centurion and Celt continued to amplify in his mind. The story was already like a tree; it put out branches, sprouted leaves', 'As the centurion and his Celt took shape as characters Tom grew more and more enthusiastic […] It made Tom very happy to be once more lost in his profession'.[107] It is difficult to avoid reading these descriptions as autobiographical, and doing so necessarily positions the exogenetic significance of *Watling Street* as a kind of meta-commentary, played out across the endogenesis of *Reality and Dreams*. Of Tom Richards Stannard says 'his relationship to his work is obsessive until it is complete, at which point attention transfers to the next thing. Completion, paradoxically, engenders the work's redundancy'.[108] *Watling Street*, therefore, in its real and fictional states of incompletion, never reaches the point of redundancy, but instead functions as one of Spark's scattered notes, 'suspended in the middle of the page like

[101] James Bailey, *Muriel Spark's Early Fiction: Literary Subversion and Experiments with Form* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), p. 145.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., emphasis original.
[104] Ibid., p. 147.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Valéry quoted in Harle, *Afterlives*, p. 177.
[107] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 127.
[108] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, p. 514.

a crystallized act of unfinishing, expressing narrative incompletion with a confident and resolved motion'.[109]

I would argue that 'narrative incompletion with a confident and resolved motion' also describes the process of writing behind those works that do eventually see completion, and that the clichéd phrasing of being 'lost' in one's work should be taken as a serious point of departure for thinking through Spark's practice; as I demonstrate in the next section, the unpredictable and serendipitous activity of improvisation plays a surprisingly integral part in the compositional phase.

Endogenesis

Controlled Improvisation

Reality and Dreams, a novel partly about the creative struggles and reflections of an ageing artist – and the first novel to succeed Spark's official autobiography – was first conceived from the intimate, confessional mode of first-person narration. In the nascent stages of writing Spark wrote the following note: 'form? Possibility […] Tom (1st person) always seen through his diary […] the other characters 3rd person'.[110] Though the epistolary form was not used, Spark did initially commit to a first-person narrator.

In the manuscript Spark wrote the first chapter in the first-person before revising it in favour of the third. Van Hulle notes that a change in narration from first-person to third-person (and vice versa) 'occurs quite often in the course of literary geneses', citing Franz Kafka's *The Castle* and John le Carré's *Tinker Tailer Solider Spy* as prominent examples.[111] The revision is significant because it implies a radically different text. In Spark's case, the original version of *Reality and Dreams* would have diverged from its future incarnation in the following ways: narration from the sole perspective of Tom Richards would be considerably different in tone; the unsettling ambiguity of the narrator – a technique which informs the overall meaning or reception of the novel – would be lost; finally, without the omniscience of third-person narration large chunks of the novel which take place in Tom's absence would not exist. What is most interesting about this earlier version, however, is not the possibility of an

[109] Harle, *Afterlives,* p. 178.
[110] TMSA, handwritten note by Spark, c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/49.
[111] Dirk Van Hulle, *Genetic Criticism: Tracing Creativity in Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 157.

alternative text, but the way in which this earlier text refused to come into being. That is, the shift from first-person to third appears to happen almost naturally, as if the text resisted Spark's effort to mould the narrative out of Tom's subjective position alone.

There are several moments in the first chapter of the manuscript in which Spark mistakenly writes in the third-person before revising it in the first. Consider the following simple example, in which Tom reflects happily upon his daughter visiting him in hospital: '~~He~~ I was touched that his second daughter by ~~his~~ my first wife Cora had flown into Rome to see him'.[112] From this quote alone it would seem as if Spark had made the conscious decision to change from the third to the first, but elsewhere in the chapter Spark uses a consistent first-person narrative without any corrections – there is clearly an unconscious tension between Spark's intention and what seems to be the interruptive agency of the text itself.

Another example provides some compositional clues as to why Spark naturally fell into the third-person: 'Love and economics, ~~thought Tom~~ I mused. "I have always," ~~he~~ I thought, "considered them as opposites"'.[113] The phrase 'I mused', used to alert the reader to whom these thoughts belong, is a rather awkward and grandiloquent way to accomplish this. While Tom is no stranger to self-aggrandisement and pompous language, the phrase considerably interrupts the flow of the sentence in contrast to the less conspicuous and seamless segue of 'thought Tom'. In the second sentence the first-person again draws too much attention to itself owing to the clumsy repetition of 'I' across dialogue ('I have always') and description ('I thought'). The first revision to these sentences occurs in the typescript draft, recasting it fully in the third-person: 'Love and economics, Tom mused. "I have always," Tom thought, "considered them as opposites"'.[114] It is revised once more to replace the second 'Tom' with a pronoun, cutting away further repetition as well as length (although 'Tom' and 'he' are monosyllables, the subtle temporal differences within the phrases 'Tom thought' and 'he thought' – the hard and closed 't' and 'm' sounds compared to the soft and open 'he' – affect the overall flow of the sentence): 'Love and economics, Tom mused. "I have always," he thought, "considered them as opposites"'.[115] Spark settles on the third-person in part to fix or refine the otherwise inelegant writing of the original narrative voice, but it appears that these 'fixes' had already been anticipated, so that Spark did not so much

[112] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* MS, Notebook 1, NLS, Acc. 11621/55, p. 13. Spark forgets to replace the second pronoun.
[113] Ibid., p. 12–13.
[114] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* TS, c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/57, p. 12–13.
[115] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p.12.

flirt with new ideas as she did realise the suitability or affordances of her first literary instincts.

Instinct plays its part in the development of plot and structure too. Spark has spoken about having 'a sense of structure', a rough, unhewn plan held only in the mind: 'In a novel the narrative runs away with you while you're writing. I have general principles or ideas, a sense of censorship almost, but it does flow'. 'Censorship' is an interesting descriptor here, as if the problem for Spark is not so much finding inspiration or teasing out the details of a story as it is trying to *contain* or manage the plurality of ideas, directions or plots of any given narrative. As I hinted at in the first chapter, there are no dedicated plans or detailed plotlines behind the making of *Reality and Dreams*, only rough sketches recording vague premises or scenarios. There is one note, however, that resembles a plan, outlining briefly the action of the first chapter:

> Chapter One
>
> Tom is in hospital - his thoughts introducing his family and circumstances.
> The purchase of the crane - flashback.
> His artistic point of view quite definitely conveyed - and the fact that it is brilliant, special.
> Discuss the movie script. How not to handle it - with sentimentality. After the ending? – No.[116]

These ideas are crossed out on the note as if rejected, and while the details have been tweaked in the final text, we can identify in this note the skeleton of the first chapter. The novel opens with Tom in hospital, some members of his family are introduced (Claire, Marigold and Cora), as are his general circumstances (Tom is a film director, he has fallen from a crane). What is not included is Tom's 'artistic point of view quite definitely conveyed', although by the end of the chapter it is clear that Tom thinks of his art as well as himself as 'brilliant, special'. There is no discussion of a 'movie script'. The final words in the note –'after the ending? – No' – suggest Spark considered, if only momentarily, using this section as a flashback sequence at the novel's conclusion. Whether there was any 'ending' conceived at the time, however, is unknown. What remains clear is that Spark's development

[116] TMSA, typewritten note by Spark, c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/52.

of structure (at least for *Reality and Dreams*) is peripheral or oblique, prone to change, and perhaps in part extemporary. The latter of these qualities is demonstrated by one of the most prominent structural changes Spark made to the text, and it is to this change that I now turn.

In the published text, the middle section of the novel is centred on the disappearance of Marigold, Tom's resentful daughter. The news sensation of the disappearance begins to intrude on Tom's career as a film maker, jeopardising the success of his latest production and his status as a respected artist and public figure. Marigold is eventually found, and it transpires that she has been living (or performing) as a destitute vagabond in order to investigate and report on the effects of redundancy. Nevertheless, Tom suspects Marigold's stunt was intended to harm his image. At the novel's denouement Jeanne (an inexperienced actress treated poorly by Tom), instructed by Marigold, attempts to injure or kill Tom by taking control of the Chapman crane upon which Tom is filming. Instead, being unfamiliar with the controls and perhaps under the influence, Jeanne clumsily falls to her death. By this point Marigold has once again disappeared, this time to the US, giving interviews disparaging her father.

In the original manuscript, Marigold's disappearance is first conceived as her death. Within the same manuscript Spark later edits out Marigold's fateful end in favour of her going missing. Like Spark's experiment with first-person narration, the alternative original version of Marigold's fate implies a significantly different text; in what direction would Spark take the text without Marigold's reappearance and her attempt to murder her father through Jeanne? The mystery of Marigold's disappearance – its ambiguous cause, whether Marigold is victim or agent of wrongdoing – is in the original version confined to the logic of the 'whodunnit'. In the manuscript it is implied that Kevin Woodstock (Rose's husband) has murdered Marigold: 'He walked a short distance, intending to take the Northern Line to his home at Camden Town, but when a cruising taxi passed him he weakened and took it. ~~Marigold was never seen alive again by anyone but~~'.[117] Kevin's innocence or guilt depends on how we interpret the phrase 'he weakened'; on the surface, the text suggests this is related to his laziness about walking to the subway, but it may also allude to a weakness of character, moral integrity, a surrendering to some murderous instinct. Alternatively, given that an earlier sentence informs the reader that 'Marigold took a taxi assuring Kevin there was no need for him to accompany her', Spark also suggests Marigold's death may have been prevented had Kevin escorted her home.

[117] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* MS, Notebook 2, c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/55, pp. 23–24.

The next reference to Marigold's death uses Spark's signature proleptic technique: 'This was roughly three weeks since Marigold was last seen by Kevin Woodstock in the taxi that bore her from the restaurant, and three weeks before her lifeless body was found'.[118] In the end, it is impossible to know the true killer of Spark's original plan because she never completed it. The last reference to Marigold's death in the manuscript – that is, as narrated fact rather than speculation – happens near the end of chapter 9: '"If it had been Cora, I'd feel less appalled," Tom said to Claire soon after Marigold's death, trying to cope with it as they were'.[119] It is around this point that Spark changes her mind; at the beginning of chapter 11, Marigold is shown to be alive and well.

Rather than ask what made Spark change tack, for which there is no definitive answer, it is more interesting and fruitful to ask what the change says about Spark's writing process. Recourse to past and current pedagogies of creative writing can help unpack what I have so far theorised as Spark's improvisational or makeshift approach to structure. Spark's major structural change here acts as an illustrative example of what modern pedagogy calls process writing. Process writing emerged as a reaction to the traditional ways writing was taught and practiced at schools in the early twentieth century of the United States. Schools emphasised the need to plan extensively before committing any writing to paper, and taught that language is a mere vessel to convey information and ideas, a passive set of tools to serve the writer's intentions. Tim Mayers says 'this stands in stark contrast to what researchers on the writing process have learned, namely that writers most often discover their meanings, or at least portions of them, only *as* they write'.[120] Process writing encouraged a shift in perception towards language and writing; writing is not only or simply the *product* of thought and creativity but is itself the *means* by which intelligent reflection takes place: 'The idea that drafting allows a writer to discover or clarify meaning, as opposed to having it completely grasped before writing begins, was crucial to the early process movement in composition'.[121] Process writing is now a conventional and indeed preferred method of teaching and practicing creative writing at university, where production assumes equal if not more importance than its product.

What this means for Spark is that her decision to revoke and redo a major plot point in the middle of an unfinished manuscript is not so much a mark of directionless improvisation

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[118] Ibid., p.28.
[119] Ibid., pp. 31–32.
[120] Tim Mayers, 'Creative Writing and Process Pedagogy', in *Creative Writing Pedagogies for the 21st Century* ed. by Alexandria Perry and Tom C. Hunley (Illinois University Press, 2015), pp. 57–93 (p. 67).
[121] Ibid., p. 65.

as much as it is an example of using writing to think with. As Dirk Van Hulle says, 'writers' interaction with the paper is part and parcel of the cognitive process […] The nexus mind/manuscript is a constant interplay that helps constitute the mind in the first place'.[122] According to Michael Harle, Spark's fragmented notes constitute 'a process of writing into the unknown', and the same can be said of parts of the manuscript composition.[123] Spark is not exaggerating, then, when she claims 'I write as I go along' or 'I don't always know where I'm going',[124] and the manuscript helps pinpoint those moments where a kind of generative thinking has been fostered by the writing itself, and where, by contrast with older models of composition, we find a compelling demonstration of the claim that 'writing is thought in action'.[125]

In any case, the change from death to disappearance in the manuscript was not particularly difficult to make. Marigold's death is introduced in the abrupt, casual manner characteristic of Spark's writing, with only vague details delivered by short, skeletal sentences: 'Marigold was never seen alive again by anyone but', '[…] three weeks before her lifeless body was found'.[126] These clauses were simply deleted, with no structural or otherwise consequences for that particular section. Any remaining references to Marigold's death before Spark changed her mind in Chapter 11 were also easily changed, usually involving the replacement of only one word: '[…] Tom said to Claire soon after Marigold's ~~death~~ disappearance, trying to cope with it as they were', 'Marigold's ~~death~~ disappearance'.[127] What is conceptually and structurally a major shift for the narrative is in execution rather minimal. Nevertheless, like the decision-making process behind the choice of narrative voice, it is clear Spark chose to revise Marigold's fate only after experimenting briefly with the alternative option. In other words, Spark's narrative emerges not as the pure product of thoughtful consideration, but *through* writing itself.

[122] Dirk Van Hulle, 'The Stuff of Fiction: Digital Editing, Multiple Drafts and the Extended Mind', *Textual Cultures: Texts, Contexts, Interpretation*, 8.1 (2013), pp. 23–37 (p. 33).
[123] Harle, *Afterlives*, p. 178.
[124] Brooker and Saá, 'Interview with Spark', p. 1044.
[125] Richard Menary, 'Writing as Thinking', *Language Science*, 29.5 (2007), pp. 621–632 (p. 630).
[126] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* MS, Notebook 2, p. 24, 28.
[127] Ibid., p. 31–32.

Character Lists and Continuity

Although for the most part Spark appears (in interviews and in manuscript evidence) to rely on instinct and 'general principles' to guide the writing, there is another behind-the-scenes activity which contributes significantly to Spark's 'sense of structure' – the creation of 'character lists'. Character lists are typed documents containing information about every character mentioned in the novel, even the most minor or peripheral figures. There is a list of all the characters in the novel as well as separate lists attached to each character which document their movements and interactions as they appear and reappear in the novel, 'what they say, what they wear, who knows what, who knows whom, and what they do'.[128] Spark delegated this task to her close friend and personal assistant, Penelope Jardine:

> She makes me a character list as I go along, which she types out […]. For each page, she does a character. Everything that moves has a page and their characteristics, so that I can go back and pick it up as I'm writing. It's very useful. I can sort of pick out a characteristic and this is a way you can build up a personality.[129]

These lists are developed concurrently with Spark's writing,[130] so that she has 'a page for everything that wriggles – human beings, dogs, ice cream'.[131] That last item, 'ice cream', may be a joke, but it does speak to the breadth of the task. Included in the lists for *Reality and Dreams*, for example, is an entry for 'God':

> GOD
>
> See pps. 1, 51.[132]

It refers to the few times God is invoked by Tom and as such makes for a short list, but it illustrates the exhaustive meticulousness of Jardine's job. Furthermore, each sentence within

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[128] Stephen Schiff, 'Muriel Spark Between the Lines', *New Yorker*, 24 May 1993, pp. 35–43 (p. 42).
[129] Brooker and Saá, 'Interview with Spark', p. 1042.
[130] Sarah Smith, 'Columbia Talks with Muriel Spark', *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, 30 (1998), pp. 199–214 (p. 211).
[131] Schiff, 'Between the Lines', p. 42.
[132] TMSA, typewritten 'character lists' by Penelope Jardine, c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/54.

each character list has a page number next to it which refers to the location in the typescript from which 'characteristics' and events are drawn. Such a system affords Spark a panoramic perspective on the development of the narrative's players. As Spark says, 'it's all cross-referenced. […] I can fit it all together'.[133] This kind of endogenetic work is what Biasi calls 'structuring', a part of which includes 'the form of summaries or provisional assessments that can be used to take stock of the compositional state of play'[134] With this view, sitting on her proverbial Chapman crane, Spark can identify patterns, recurring motifs and images, dynamics between the main and ancillary cast of characters, and emerging narrative arcs and the structure through which they are presented.

How much Spark relied on and consulted these lists is impossible to measure (there are no markings on the documents themselves), but the fact of their creation, the detail and precision with which they are constructed, confirms their importance for Spark's process. When asked if Spark has ever tried writing on word processers, she answers 'no, it's not my sort of thing […] I don't like the idea of a computer. It doesn't change its mind. And besides, I don't need it' because Penelope 'makes me a character list, which is a kind of continuity', suggesting that the character lists function as a kind of analogue computer, a spreadsheet of narrative information.

It is evident, however, that the lists are not created for the full length of the novel, so it is possible to detect in this gap some endogenetic movement. The final characters mentioned in the character list are 'people on the site where Marigold is found (p.115-117)'.[135] The typescript for *Reality and Dreams* ends on page 139. Similarly, the lists for the major characters – those who enjoy narrative presence from start to finish in the published text – end at around the same point: Tom's at page 122, Claire's at 121, Marigold's at 122 and Cora's at 118. At this point in the narrative Marigold has been found and Tom has begun production on his new historical film, starring Marigold. Spark clearly had no more need for lists at this juncture, having decided on an ending either around the time of the list's closure, or, as is not unusual for Spark, from the very beginning. Perhaps now the note mentioned earlier – 'after the ending? – No' – can be read more confidently as confirming the latter. Nevertheless, Jardine's involvement here, and perhaps from the moment Spark first

[133] Schiff, 'Interview with Spark', p. 42.
[134] Biasi, 'What is a Literary Draft?', p. 48.
[135] TMSA, 'character lists', c. 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/54. The page numbers are a typewritten part of the citation.

befriended and then hired her, invites a series of questions concerning the collaborative nature of some of Spark's novel writing.

Jardine's role in Spark's creative work (at this point in the latter's career) was more than merely administrative; an artist herself, Jardine was invested in Spark's work not only as a friend and secretary, but as a fellow creator. Spark clearly trusted Jardine's judgement, because while we know Jardine was tasked with typing up Spark's manuscripts, there is also evidence of Jardine's diligent proof-reading, replete with edits, corrections and suggestions. The extent of Jardine's editorial activity should not, however, be overstated: textual interventions here are few in number and qualitatively minimal, but they do insert valuable correctives to Spark's writing and secure continuity for the text.

Jardine's appreciation for Spark's economic style, for instance, is evident in the way she marks up sentences that could be improved by further excision. In the typescript draft Jardine writes 'repetition' in the margin for the following sentence, to which Spark responds with a couple of deletions: 'Where does she get that vulgarity ~~from~~? From which of us, from what side, does the street-corner touch come ~~from~~?'[136] Similarly, again in the typescript draft Jardine highlights the following sentence for having 'too many "ins"': 'Claire's investigator, Ivan Simpson, a young, good-looking man not yet thirty, was ~~electrified~~ galvanised by ~~her~~ Cora's beauty into ~~putting in~~ volunteering for longer hours than were normally called for in the search for a missing person'.[137] Spark reduces the repetition by replacing 'putting in' with 'volunteering'.[138] These alterations are minor, but they undoubtedly refine and enhance Spark's already taut, economic prose.

But Jardine also flags up minor gaps and contradictions that require explanation or correction. Though the 'character lists' were primarily for Spark's benefit, writing them likely helped Jardine manage the continuity of the text, to iron out inconsistencies with the smaller details of the narrative. For example, near the beginning in the typescript draft, Jardine reminds Spark that 'Cora [is] still married to Johnny Carr' next to the sentence: 'Cora Richards' life had been fairly easy for the first nineteen years'.[139] Spark deletes the surname in response. In the same vein, when Spark writes the dialogue 'Would you say that Marigold Richards disliked, resented men?',[140] Jardine reminds Spark in the typescript that Marigold

[136] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 74.
[137] Ibid., p. 89.
[138] Jardine also made a note for Spark to change the pronoun 'her' into 'Cora's' to avoid the ambiguity of the phrasing. Ibid.
[139] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* TS, Acc. 11621/58, p. 45.
[140] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* MS, p. 42.

too is married ('what about her married name?').[141] In response Spark adds to the dialogue, explaining the reason behind the detective's use of Marigold's maiden name: 'She didn't use her married name, apparently. Would you say that […]'.[142] Or consider another example in which Jardine draws attention to a gap in the narrative: in the original manuscript Spark describes the 'hamburger girl' campsite to which Marigold goes in hiding as 'anybody's campsite', prompting Jardine to ask, 'so how did Marigold know where it was?'.[143] Spark connects the dots by extending the sentence to instead read: 'It was anybody's caravan, but it was near the village Tom had mentioned so often.'144

Jardine also identifies more complex cases of temporal inconsistency; parts of the text that could easily have slipped through the cracks of inattentive proof-reading. In the proof copy, Jardine points out an inconsistency with Tom's thoughts or attitude towards the idea that Marigold may be mad. In the novel Dave asks Tom, 'Has it occurred to you […] that Marigold has a psychological issue? Really and truly, Tom, she can't be altogether right', to which Tom responds, unsure, 'I never actually thought much of that'.[145] In the proof copy Jardine highlights this exchange and writes 'he *had* thought Marigold might be mad. See p. 98 + 135'.[146] On the two pages Jardine cites we see Tom contradicting himself. Earlier the narrator reports that 'the thought that Marigold might be somewhat out of her mind had taken a hold on Tom' while later on Tom declares to Claire, 'but she's mad, don't you see that?'.[147] While this intervention showcases Jardine's attention to detail, Spark ultimately changes nothing here. There is no trace of Spark's response to Jardine's note, but it is likely Spark was making a distinction between Tom's private and public feelings. To admit to Dave – a friend Tom only made recently – the possibility that his daughter could be mad may reflect poorly (in Tom's mind) on his character as a father or indeed on his own claims to sanity. It is not therefore a contradiction or an error in continuity for Tom to secretly harbour these feelings earlier in the text or to assert his true suspicions to his wife later.

Nonetheless, in Jardine Spark finds a sharp observer and a valuable reader, one who tracks character behaviour and dialogue as well as the consistency of material facts, to the point that her impact on the development of the text must be recognised as a significant contribution to the endogeensis of *Reality and Dreams*. Jardine's presence as a creative

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[141] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* first draft TS, Acc. 11621/57, p. 79.
[142] Ibid, p. 79.
[143] Ibid., p. 84.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 126.
[146] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* proof copy, c. 1996, NLS, Acc. 11621/63, p. 126, my emphasis.
[147] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 98, 135.

collaborator reappears in the next chapter, but for now I take a closer look at the text's construction through Spark's word choice and syntax, revealing both the volume of revision at this level and the particular care Spark put into each sentence.

Revision

Now that the various macrogenetic developments have been discussed – like the form of narration, plotting, research, thematic echoes from earlier published novels, the reuse of unpublished work, and character lists – we can turn to the microgenetic developments on the 'word and phrase level' within the compositional rough draft.[148] Revision on this level is much more frequent than the larger structural changes I have thus far shown, demonstrating not only that Spark was a dedicated if reluctant revisor, but perhaps that she cared more for the details, the subtleties of language, 'the textures of the writing', than she did for the arrangement of plot.[149] In this way the manuscript reaffirms Spark's strong ties to poetry with her practice of meticulous selection and careful composition.

In her study of modernist literary composition Hannah Sullivan identifies different types of revision. On the one hand there are those like James Joyce and Marcel Proust whose work expanded with more words, sentences, chapters as the writing continued, and on the other, writers like T.S. Eliot and Ernest Hemingway who relied on processes of excision as the main tool of revision.[150] Amongst these two extremes Sullivan highlights 'substitution' as another mode of revision, in which writers worry over small replacements and adjustments rather than or as well as addition or subtraction, citing Henry James as a particularly obsessive practitioner.[151] Using these three broad categories of revision as a framework – extension, excision and substitution – we can identify in the *Reality and Dreams* drafts the different types of endogenetic mutation that coalesce towards the text's finalised form, what Biasi terms 'the moment of the work's coagulation'[152] It should be noted that these categories

[148] Robert Hosmer, 'Muriel Spark: A Glance Through an Open Door', *Scottish Review of Books*, 3 October 2013 <https://www.scottishreviewofbooks.org/free-content/muriel-spark-a-glance-through-an-open-door/> [accessed 14 January 2020].
[149] Willy Maley, 'The Right Woman for the Job? Muriel Spark's *The Only Problem*', *The Bottle Imp*, 22 (2017), < https://www.thebottleimp.org.uk/2017/10/right-woman-job-muriel-sparks-problem/> [accessed 4 June 2021].
[150] Hannah Sullivan, *The Work of Revision* (Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 102.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Biasi, 'What is a Literary Draft?', p. 30.

often bleed into each other (additions made in response to subtractions, substitutions in response to additions or subtractions) so the following discussion, while attending to each category in isolation, nonetheless takes account of the dynamic flow inherent to revisionary activity.

Beginning with extension or expansion – in which Spark retrospectively added to the text – the manuscript reveals both small interventions like the addition of words or phrases and more significant supplements like sentences and paragraphs. Small additions usually add further information (physical description, dialogue) or texture (most commonly in the form of a qualifying adjective). FIG 4 below contains several instances where Spark's revision adds only one or two words or, in some cases, a clause, to increase detail or clarity.

i) Edna was nearly black of skin (11621/55, notebook 1, p. 3)

ii) My son-in-law was looking for a job but now he's left my daughter and gone for a holiday in India (11621/55, notebook 1, p. 50)

iii) But let me tell you that for people in the film business, yes, it is life. (11621/55, notebook 1, p. 50)

iv) As his injured back and legs improved […] (11621/55, notebook 2, p. 2)

v) […] handsome Johnny Carr had returned […] (11621/55, notebook 2, p. 43)

vi) 'As Jeanne, the namesake part I played in the movie […]' (11621/57, p. 86).

vii) […] now that she was wanted for questioning about the hit and run attack on Dave (11621/57, p. 116)

viii) He decided to take all the necessary shots of Marigold (11621/55, notebook 5, p. 23)

ix) The Celt was to be assassinated by superstitious zealots in the end. (11621/55, notebook 5, p. 24).

x) He was then considered to be the last person to have […] (11621/57, p. 125).

xi) but someone shot me it seems as a warning to you and they haven't […] (11621/55, notebook 5, p. 33)

xii) I've borrowed a mobile crane~~.~~ ,a chapman. I hope the technicians […] (11621/58, p. 129)

xiii) that he [Kevin] couldn't just go unnoticed into that studio (11621/58, p. 134)

FIG 4. Excerpts taken from *Reality and Dreams* MS and *Reality and Dreams* TS.

These modest interventions perform three distinct functions: to elaborate on description (Edna's *nearly* black skin, the *handsome* Johnny Carr, a *Chapman* crane); to correct partial or misleading information (that Marigold is wanted *for questioning* rather than conviction as in example vii, or that Kevin cannot go into the studio *unnoticed*, as in example xiii); and to introduce ambiguity (the narrator's less certain 'considered to be' over the previously factual report, as in example x). Other small additions in FIG 5 show Spark refining character and introducing a more intrusive narrative voice.

i) Marigold, worthy as any woman or man in the works of George Eliot, unlovely, gracless, sat in an upright […] (11621/57, p. 25)

ii) 'I've got a bachache. ~~Get out.~~ Disintegrate. Drop dead.' (11621/55, notebook 2, p. 22)

iii) 'The century is old, very old' (11621/55, notebook 2, p. 45)

iv) Tom's daughter by his second marriage, Marigold, and her husband, James […] (11621/57, p. 25).

v) Out of boredom she could not stick at any job, even being photographed for magazine covers, ~~out of boredom~~ […] (11621/55, notebook 2, p. 28)

vi) Tom said, studying the photograph. (11621/55, notebook 2, p. 45)

vii) Claire, as he spoke, was busy. He felt a wave of deep affection for her. (11621/55, notebook 5, p. 12)

vii) Jeanne signed up for this part amicably just as though […]' (11621/55, notebook 5, p. 20)

ix) her face prematurely old (11621/55, notebook 5, p. 31)

x) Tom had wanted it; in fact, being thoroughly sulky, she played it well but having seen' (11621/55, notebook 5, p. 32)

xi) What she was doing there. She seemed pleased with herself. Hadn't she been paid off? (11621/55, notebook 5, p. 60)

FIG 5. Excerpts taken from *Reality and Dreams* MS and *Reality and Dreams* TS.

The next time Tom repeats the phrase 'the century is old, very old' (iii) Spark inserts a clause signalling the importance of this sentiment: '"The century is old," said Tom~~,~~ in one of his more lucid moments with Claire, "it is very old"'.[153] Not only does the phrase demonstrate Tom's tendency to philosophise, but with the new clause commenting on its lucidity, we can perhaps read into this a commentary from Spark or the narrator lamenting change (of a political, economic or spiritual nature).

Likewise, most of the other revisions here show Spark extending the reach or inviting further involvement from the narrator. In the first example of FIG 5, in which the narrator likens Marigold to 'worthy' characters in George Eliot novels, Spark adds the qualifiers 'unlovely' and 'graceless' to underline the sardonic irony of the comparison, as if to make clear both the narrator's mocking tone and Spark's opinion on Eliot's fiction. Similarly, the decision to point out that Marigold is Tom's daughter 'by his second marriage' contributes to the narrator's sneering tone, taking advantage of the (now old-fashioned) negative assumptions surrounding those who divorce and remarry, as if Marigold's corruption derives from being born against the ideal Catholic notion of a lifelong marriage. The contrast made with Cora, Tom's first daughter, confirms this reading. Consider the evolution of a sentence cited earlier in which Cora is introduced to the narrative:

> He was delighted that his second daughter by his first wife Cora had flown into Rome to see him.
>
> He was ~~delighted~~ touched that ~~his second~~ lovely Cora his daughter by his first wife ~~Cora~~ had flown into ~~Rome~~ London to see him.
>
> He was touched that lovely Cora his daughter by his first wife had flown into London to see him.[154]

[153] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* TS, 11621/57, p. 72.
[154] Each version can be found in p. 13 of the MS, p. 9 of the TS, and p. 12 of the published text, respectively. Because this sentence occurs in the first chapter there are corrections to the original first-person narration but I

The original sentence contains too much ambiguity (whether 'Cora' is his daughter's or wife's name, and whether Cora is the 'second' daughter of his first wife, or the 'second' daughter to visit him, after Marigold), but the revised sentence reaffirms Spark's eventual plan to oppose these sisters symbolically. That 'lovely Cora' is inserted right before the phrase 'by his first wife' is a calculated move to connect Cora's loveliness and the purity of a first marriage, at least from the narrator's/Tom's perspective. The replacement of 'delighted' with the less neutral, more intimate 'touched' acts to emphasise Tom's somewhat obsessive and perhaps physical attachment to Cora.

Other small additions work in the service of humour. Consider the following sentence describing Tom's increasing inability to satisfy Rose sexually: 'he now made love too fast. He could not keep it going. Rose complained, without embarrassment on her side, or the slightest delicacy, that he made love like he was in a hurry to get home.'[155] What is already a comical situation (the irony of a film director losing control, the way in which Rose draws attention to it without the 'slightest delicacy') is made all the more funny by the tagged on simile making a farce of Tom's sexual performance

The rarest and most remarkable of Spark's comical revisions transforms private, narrated thought into speech. When Tom is presented in hospital with a tray of 'filthy supper' he refuses to eat it and the nurse asks if he would like something else.[156] Originally, Spark writes: 'I strained every muscle in my imagination to think of something else but just failed. "Forget it."'[157] In the typescript draft Spark changes the internal narration into dialogue so that it appears in the published novel as: '"I am straining every muscle in my imagination to think of something else. Forget it"'.[158] Narrating his own thinking out loud sets up Tom's character as the rather ostentatious, self-absorbed thinker he is, but the way Spark settles on this revision – turning what was information for the reader into action within the narrative – speaks not only to Spark's willingness to exploit opportunities for comedy, but to her interest in playing with narrative levels and the limits of fiction.

Larger additions to the manuscript – that is, fresh sentences or full paragraphs incorporated later on – are rarer but not uncommon. They are usually inserted to flesh out

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have chosen not to include these here for the sake of clarity and in order to draw attention to the semantic and syntactical changes instead.

[155] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* TS, 11621/58, p. 8.

[156] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 11.

[157] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* MS, p. 10.

[158] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 11.

details related to plot or setting, cast judgement on characters, or extend Tom's internal monologues. Into a description of Tom's film set, for instance, Spark inserts a detail about the film's music composer:

> It seemed that everyone was changing their clothes, or, being young children, being changed by their mothers or minders. In a corner at a table, sat the music man, touching up a piece of music. Along one side of this location-studio a room of dressing tables had been fixed […].[159]

The impact of this detail is minimal but it does serve to emphasise the extent to which, as the narrator claims earlier in the passage, 'work was proceeding seriously. There was hardly a square foot of the shed unoccupied'.[160] But there is also an interesting metatextual irony in Spark touching up her own novel with a sentence describing the same act for a fictional other, as if the very practice of revision prompted her to acknowledge its presence in the filmmaking. Other additions, however, do carry more weight, modulating the text preceding or succeeding the fresh material. Consider the last line added to the first section of chapter 11, where Marigold's newfound lover reacts to his losing a bet against her about whether her parents would look for her at a particular location:

> And on the third day, at five-twenty in the afternoon, look! 'That's my mother and father,' she said, peeping from the window, incredulous.
> 'What a bitch you are!', said the man. With which observation Marigold seemed well pleased.161

A space break separates the end of this section, above, from the beginning of the next, so the choice to add more text here affects the overall balance of the passage in a way that the edit of the previous example does not. Furthermore, the text is added after a line break, drawing even more attention to it. The original conclusion of the section, with Marigold 'peeping from the window, incredulous', ends in a way typical of thrillers, withholding action in a moment of suspense. And although the added text – a piece of dialogue followed by a reaction to that dialogue – does not resolve that suspense, it does deflate it in the service of lingering on Marigold's latent malevolence. The first sentence of the next section – 'The producers of

[159] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* MS, notebook 5, p. 41.
[160] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 150.
[161] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* MS, notebook 4, p. 61.

Tom's film worried about the effect of Marigold's disappearance'[162] – reads slightly differently depending on the two versions of the preceding text; without the addition, the worry of Tom's producers sounds like the worry over the distraction of a tragedy, but with the addition – of Marigold delighting in her villainy – the 'effect of Marigold's disappearance' assumes some dramatic irony, the fear over tragedy becoming instead a question of what, exactly, she is up to.

Some additions serve an expositional purpose, like the following extension of Dave's dialogue while he tries to assuage Tom about the suspicions surrounding him:

> 'Are you sure,' said Dave, 'you aren't imagining things? Not everyone is gossiping about you. They don't all believe in rumours. Far from it.
>
> After a while Dave added, 'In any case maybe the truth is that she left of her own free-will to make a break from you. Your name alone is overpowering. Think of it.'
>
> The press had made much of the 'relations' between Marigold and Tom.
>
> 'All my so-called friends have talked to the press […]'.[163]

Dave's added dialogue reads like a piece of textual analysis as much as it does an organic extension of his thoughts, and the narrated detail about the press acts as substantiating evidence; Spark clearly wanted these ideas foregrounded, and carefully does so with Dave's non-committal but suggestive argumentation ('maybe the truth', 'think of it'). But it also doubles as comedy. Note that Tom's reply – which becomes a meandering monologue reminiscing about his friend Binkie Beaumont, the theatre producer – remains unchanged, so that originally he was responding directly to the comment about gossip; in the altered version, it appears as if Tom ignores Dave's more substantial theory about Marigold to focus instead, selfishly, on his own reputation. As such, Spark's larger edits are not made lightly – they are added with a keen awareness of the tonal shifts and ripple effects they create. It is also worth noting that these more extensive additions occur almost always in the original manuscript rather than in subsequent typescript drafts, which suggests Spark treated the first draft with a sense of finality. What is consistent across all iterations of the compositional rough draft, however, is the type of revision Sullivan identifies as 'substitution' and 'excision', and it is to this style of editing that I now turn.

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[162] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 102.
[163] TMSA, *Reality and Dreams* MS, notebook 2, p. 46.

Given Spark's economical, sharp and to-the-point prose style – and the impression of effortlessness Spark conveyed when describing her writing process – the assumption that revision on the level of word choice must be minimal or non-existent is strong. On the contrary, however, Spark wrestled regularly with the smaller units of her paragraphs and sentences in order to achieve the kind of precision, flow and elegance for which Spark's prose is known and lauded. Consider FIG 6 below which showcases a sample of the revisions categorised as 'substitution'.

i) so ~~badly~~ shabbily produced (11621/55, notebook 2, p. 7)

ii) 'It isn't any ~~duty~~ function of Cora to help anyone over their hump (11621/55, notebook 2, p. 30)

iii) afraid of ~~breaking~~ wrecking (11621/55, notebook 2, p. 44)

iv) she ~~unresentfully~~ submitted without resentment to the idea that she was essentially […] (11621/57, p. 52)

v) very young and ~~impecunious~~ not very prosperous-looking (11621/55, notebook 2, p. 60)

vi) by Tom's ~~neglect of her~~ indifference to her (11621.55, notebook 2, p. 13)

vii) The ~~fancy~~ very fancified menu was (11621/55, notebook 2, p. 56)

viii) driven by ~~envy~~ rancour 82pp. (11621/57, p. 82)

ix) This ~~sounded~~ carried a threatening note. (11621/55, notebook 2, p. 20)

x) Claire only reflected ~~once~~ briefly on what […] (11621/57, p. 95)

xi) continued to ~~sprout~~ amplify in his thoughts and mind. (11632/57, p. 108)

xii) drive into a ~~melancholy~~ sad field next to a cemetery. (11621/57, p. 4)

xiii) She was quite expert, even when mouthing her most ~~boring jargon~~ banal pronouncements (11621/55, notebook 5, p. 22)

xiv) drawing of the ~~wretched~~ desperate Queen (11621/55, notebook 5, p. 31)
xv) Cora had ~~looked in, concerned about~~ come over, appalled by the disaster. (11621/57, p. 139)

FIG 6. Excerpts taken from *Reality and Dreams* MS and *Reality and Dreams* TS.

Each of the above word choice or phrasal revisions serves a particular purpose, and though in isolation they seem insignificant or trivial, taken as a whole the rhetorical effect on the text is profound. Some changes simply correct description to fit the intended scene, like drawing attention to the 'very fancified menu' with its ostentatious descriptions of otherwise common meals rather than 'fancy' food (vii). Other changes use economy to say more with different word choice, as when Claire reflects not 'once' but instead 'briefly' about Marigold's suggestion that her parents should divorce (x), adding depth to the otherwise flat, numerical descriptor. Similarly, the transition from 'this sounded threatening' to 'this carried a threatening note' to describe Jeanne's exchange with Claire (ix) broadens the emotional space of the scene with few textual changes; 'carried a threatening note' contains more ambiguous possibility and emotional capacity than the unequivocal statement 'this sounded threatening'. The opposite technique is at work when Spark swaps the multi-syllabic adjective 'melancholy' for the monosyllabic and comparatively simple 'sad' in the phrase 'drive into a sad field next to a cemetery'. Spark figures less is more here, perhaps seeing in 'melancholy' a rather romantic and even clichéd way to describe a field next to a cemetery, while the less intrusive and flowery 'sad' creates in the scene an altogether moodier atmosphere of abandonment and loss.

Other examples here demonstrate more complex changes in that they involve significant grammatical differences from the original. In example v from FIG 6, both 'impecunious' and 'not very prosperous-looking' sounds appropriate for Tom (whose consciousness this stems from), but the latter refigures the judgement (that these people look poor) in vaguer terms. The stark and factual 'impecunious' turns into the negated positive adjective 'not very prosperous' with the added ambiguity of the hyphenated qualifier 'prosperous-looking', as if to reflect both Tom's distance from such poverty and his reluctance to acknowledge it. In example vii the change from 'neglect of her' to 'indifference to her' is a tonal shift which intensifies Tom's cruelty. Spark accomplishes this by switching verbal forms from passive (Tom's neglect *of* Jeanne) to active (Tom's indifference *to* her); the

first feels incidental, the latter deliberate. FIG 6 represents only a fraction of the substitutions made in the *Reality and Dreams* manuscript and typescript drafts, but from this small sample it is clear that while Spark wrote quickly and often without substantial interruption, drafting and revising was nonetheless a laborious, time-consuming and important part of the writing process.

The final moment of deletion in the manuscript takes place on the last page at the very end of the narrative. Spark's endings – that is, the final sentences and words of the narrative, not the resolution of plot – typically startle 'with a poetic abstraction',[164] usually a long, grammatically complex sentence rich with both a sense of finality *and* open ambiguity. *Reality and Dreams* is no different in that respect, but its original ending, or what we can see of it in the manuscript (it was erased before completion), concludes the novel with a different rhetorical cadence and a different set of implications or meanings which, compared to the finalised version, feel somewhat cliché or belaboured. Spark arrives at the preferred ending after three separate attempts, so for clarity I present it here in FIG 7 as three distinct versions.

i) Claire poured drinks all round. 'Claire had a dream,' said Tom. 'But now we know the reality it's best to-' (11621/55, notebook 5, p. 63)

ii) Claire poured drinks all round. Both Tom and Cora felt her strength and courage supporting them. ~~'Claire had a dream,' said Tom. 'But now we know the reality it's best to'~~ (11621/55, notebook 5, p. 63)

iii) Claire poured drinks all round. Both Tom and Cora felt her strength and courage ~~supporting~~ sustaining them, here in the tract of no-man's land between dreams and reality, reality and dreams. (11621/57, p. 139)

FIG 7. Excerpts taken from *Reality and Dreams* MS and *Reality and Dreams* TS.

In the first, incomplete attempt it is not clear what Spark intended to write to finish the clause in Tom's dialogue. The dream to which Tom refers involves Tom falling from his crane by the malicious design of an unknown agent.[165] What happens in reality is that Jeanne, in her attempt on Tom's life, falls from the crane to her death. Claire's prophetic dream coincides with Tom's film about a soothsayer Celt in Roman Britain, and Claire herself remarks that 'Caesar's wife had dreams'.[166] The eerie coincidence and blending of fictional roles with

[164] Martin Stannard, 'The Crooked Ghost: *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* and the Idea of the "Lyrical"', *Textual Practice*, 32.9 (2018), pp. 1529–1543 (p. 1539).
[165] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 156.
[166] Ibid., p. 155.

'real' characters feeds into the novel's state of diegetic uncertainty; there is a tension, in other words, between the reality of the narrated events and the artistic or imaginative realities being staged throughout the novel. Tom's concluding comments in Spark's first version are therefore a reflection on this state of affairs, though it is not clear what Tom thought it 'best to' do. Best to move on? Was it originally an extended monologue, Prospero-like, drawing attention to the artifice inherent in Tom and Spark's art, concluding that 'we are such stuff | As dreams are made on'?[167]

Whatever Spark had planned, she was clearly unsure and ultimately unsatisfied with it. The second version inserts a sentence in the middle as if to pad out the pace running up to Tom's closing statement(s); the problem, for Spark, may have been that Tom's remarks come too quickly and abruptly. The new sentence, a maternal image of Claire protecting or nurturing her family, builds momentum into the paragraph. Later, however, Spark deletes Tom's speech in favour of ending with the familial image just added. Spark makes this decision, I would argue, because the content of Tom's comments feel too neat or transparent, and the rhythm of the sentence (even though it remains incomplete) lacks the poetic verve with which Spark ends most of her novels. Deciding, presumably, that the closing sentence is still too abrupt and that it needs to retain at least a trace of the first version, Spark's third and final alteration extends the sentence added in version ii so that it reads: 'Both Cora and Tom felt her strength and courage sustaining them, here in the tract of no-man's land between dreams and reality, reality and dreams'.[168] Spark reintroduces but recasts Tom's stiff comments into a shimmering, poetic piece of narration. The liminal spaces implied by 'tract', 'no-man's land', and the deployment of chiasmus ('dreams and reality, reality and dreams') closes with typical elegance a novel whose ambiguities – caught in the violent and unpredictable 'no-man's land' of Spark's metafictional laboratory – remain unresolved.[169]

For Spark, then, composing the prose of a novel is at once both an effortless, efficient and inspired process, but also an effortful and painstaking exercise in revision. The manuscript evidence therefore belies Spark's public pronouncements about writing without or with very little revision or drafting, but at the same time there is truth to Spark's claims, however exaggerated. Large sections of the manuscript are clean, uninterrupted (and remain

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[167] *The Tempest*, IV. 1. 169–170, in *William Shakespeare: Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (RSC, 2007). At the beginning of the final chapter, Tom tells his film crew that 'in our world everything starts from a dream'. Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 157.
[168] Spark, *Reality and Dreams*, p. 160.
[169] Spark was fond of chiasmus, employing it throughout her fiction, most effectively at the end of *The Driver's Seat*.

so through to publication), the writing of which is assured and final. In this sense, Spark's writing practice, and especially her few public pronouncements about it, betrays an attachment to the Romantics and their own idealist theorisations of literary production. As Colin McIlroy shows, Spark's fiction itself echoes certain tendencies of Romantic literature: themes such as the 'centrality and nature of vision', the 'myth of the isolated artist', and the 'reanimation of myth, legend, folklore and oral narratives' recur throughout Spark's fiction,[170] including *Reality and Dreams*, such as the obsessive artistic vision of Tom Richards or the mythical tale of the clairvoyant Celt in Tom's film. It is not therefore surprising that Spark promotes an image of writing associated with the Romantics too.

Hannah Sullivan notes that the 'romantic creed of antirevisionism, premised on a belief in inspiration, spontaneity, and organic form, persisted for most of the nineteenth century', and – at least for some writers – extended into the twentieth.[171] Romantic poetics, according to Sullivan, 'tended to imagine the text existing in its fullest form in the past, in pre-linguistic shape, and even the first rendition on paper as already a transcription of waning imagination'.[172] While Spark may not have sympathised fully with these values – extreme and outdated to the writers of today – she certainly wanted to convey her practice in these terms. Consider, for instance, the *New Yorker* interview with Stephen Schiff, in which Spark shows him the unfinished manuscript for *Reality and Dreams*: 'she has filled every other line and every other page with her rounded, honor-roll penmanship, leaving plenty of room for second thoughts and emendations. What's alarming is that there aren't any'.[173] Schiff also pauses over the tools of composition, framing Spark as a writer with particular quirks and rituals: '[…] using only "virgin pens" – pens she is sure no one else has ever touched – and setting it all down in Bothwell Spiral notebooks from Edinburgh, the same kind she wrote in as a schoolgirl'.[174] The very act of writing first drafts for all her novels in longhand, as late as the 1990s, speaks to a shared sensibility with the Romantics, for as Sullivan points out, 'by the 1950s, most writers—from the ageing modernists […] to young Beat poets, were composing straight onto the typewriter'.[175]

Many of the Romantics did not, however, practice what they preached. When Coleridge cites a dream vision as the genesis for 'Khubla Khan', and laments that he could

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[170] Colin McIlroy, 'Muriel Spark and the Romantic Ideal' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2015), p. 6 < https://theses.gla.ac.uk/6439/> [accessed 28 November 2019].
[171] Hannah Sullivan, *Work of Revision*, p. 31.
[172] Ibid., p. 3.
[173] Schiff, 'Interview with Spark', p. 42.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Sullivan, *Work of* Revision, p. 8.

only remember, to the detriment of the poem, 'some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision',[176] he implies the existence of an artistic ideal in which 'true' creativity is born of sudden and fleeting moments of inspiration; a poetic flair which, through each act of revision, is lost and thus corrupted.[177] Despite this, Jack Stillinger shows how Coleridge was a keen revisor, often reworking many of his major poems: '[…] with Coleridge there was a series of subsequent stages in which Coleridge the poet metamorphosed into Coleridge the critic, as if someone else had written his poems'.[178] In this light Spark was closer to the Romantics than she may have imagined.

Sullivan does note, however, that there were 'good economic reasons why the book industry in the nineteenth-century was inhospitable to revision', namely the invention of the stereotype printing plate, a development in printing technology which cut the cost of reprinting the same books dramatically.[179] The argument follows that, since 'publishers had stronger disincentives than before for allowing authorial revision', so too did writers.[180] Marketing trends played their part too, as when publishers 'printed revised work without mentioning that it had been altered; […] in doing this, they were also helping to market a new concept of the author as a spontaneous, visionary genius'.[181] These dialectic relations between romantic writers, their critical reflections, economics, and marketing led Jerome McGann to conclude that much critical energy has been spent on buying into concocted mythologies of romanticism, producing a poetics 'dominated by a romantic ideology, by an uncritical absorption in romanticism's self-representations'.[182] Spark too may have been similarly seduced, and in turn played her part in perpetuating a romantic ideology.

Spark's position on revision is nonetheless compelling in the context of the contemporary literary practice of constant drafting and redrafting in the age of word processors, but even before technology changed dominant modes of writing Spark's attitude was unusual compared to her contemporaries; consider Vladimir Nabokov's pithy pronouncement that 'I have rewritten—often several times—every word I have ever published. My pencils outlast their erasers', or Truman Capote's witticism, 'I believe more in

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[176] Samuel Taylor Coleridge quoted in N. B. Allen, 'A Note on Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'', *Modern Language Notes*, 57.2 (1942), pp. 108–113 (p. 109).
[177] Sullivan, *Work of Revision*, p. 29.
[178] Jack Stillinger, *Coleridge and Textual Instability: The Multiple Versions of the Various Poems* (Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 107.
[179] Sullivan, *Work of Revision*, p. 31.
[180] Ibid., p. 32.
[181] Ibid., p. 29.
[182] Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 1.

the scissors than I do in the pencil'[183] – this kind of aggressive revisionary practice became the norm in literary composition throughout the 20th century. Yet, despite Spark's touted antirevisionism, the evidence demonstrates a different kind of writer at work, one for whom editing and revision played a major role in the development of the final text. To Spark's credit, there are many passages in *Reality and Dreams* that remain mostly unaltered from the manuscript stage to publication, but perhaps this alleged effortlessness can be attributed to Spark's deep and enduring engagement with poetry, from which she learned 'how to manipulate language and organise sentences and paragraphs (the stanzas of prose) to procure an effect'.[184]

Thus concludes my analysis of the private and (mostly) solitary work of writing, portrayed here as a cross-pollination of the micro- and macrogenetic, the exo- and endogenetic, where the making is entirely in service of the storytelling. After this point we arrive at what Pierre-Marc de Biasi calls the 'bon à tirer' (pass for press) moment,[185] in which the text is ready for publication, ready to be made public. For Biasi, 'this post-textual stage no longer has anything to do with the genetic perspective. Its domain could better be called the criticism of the reception and history of the book'[186] And it is the public side of literature – the paratextual world of cover art, marketing, reviews, critics, academic appraisal and canon-formation – to which I now turn in order to highlight and illuminate the *active* and *authorial* process of Spark's publishing strategy and the effects of post-publication phenomena on Spark's literary identity, especially in relation to the reception of her fiction as a woman writer.

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[183] Vladimir Nabokov and Truman Capote quoted in Emily Temple, ''My Pencils Outlast their Erasers': Great Writers on the Art of Revision', *The Atlantic*, 14 January 2013 <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/01/my-pencils-outlast-their-erasers-great-writers-on-the-art-of-revision/267011/> [accessed 17 Feruary 2020].

[184] Muriel Spark, *The Informed Air: Essays by Muriel Spark*, ed. by Penelope Jardine (New Direction, 2014), p. 85.

[185] Pierre-Marc de Biasi, 'What is a Literary Draft?', p. 33.

[186] Ibid., p. 42.

Chapter Four

The Making of Spark and the Spectre of Gender

The category of the 'woman writer' is not as fraught today as a literary classification as it was back in the post-war period from which it (re-)emerged as a distinct and highly gendered form of marketing for new fiction. The tension at the heart of the phrase derived from a broader political struggle within feminism between, on the one hand, the desire to be taken seriously in spite of one's gender, and on the other, the desire to define and embrace femininity as a source of empowerment.[1] While the former can be accused of being unrealistic or, worse, of trying to assimilate masculine ideals, the latter face charges of essentialism by committing to and reproducing the gender norms (and therefore prejudice) associated with patriarchal conceptions of womanhood. 'Women's writing', then, as a phrase employed to signal, amongst other things, a fiction genre, a particular aesthetic mode, a type of reader or a specialised academic study, is inevitably caught up in the oppositional feminist positions outlined above; some may uphold and celebrate the visibility afforded by a cultural investment in 'women's writing', while others perceive it as a way of ghettoising and stereotyping writing by women.[2]

Spark had an uneasy relationship with the notion of 'women's writing', seeing in it a kind of defeatist and at times paternalistic attitude towards the problem of gender and authorship. Furthermore, women's writing in Britain has a long history of being condemned as commercialised, sensational or superficial,[3] so it is with this bias in mind that Spark casts doubt on its usefulness as a literary category. But Spark's comments on the issue betray a wavering ambivalence. When asked by Robert Hosmer about how Spark responds to being

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[1] See Susan Kingsley Kent, 'Definitions', in *The Routledge Global History of Feminism*, ed. by Bonnie G. Smith and Nova Robinson (Routledge, 2022), pp. 9–22.

[2] For instance, Claire Hanson argues that 'the refusal of writers like [Elizabeth] Taylor to relinquish their "feminine" status is precisely what has made them unpopular among some feminist critics – Elizabeth Wilson […] has written disparagingly about Lehmann, Bowen and Taylor'. Hanson, 'Marketing the 'Woman Writer'', in *Writing: A Woman's Business: Women, Writing and the Marketplace*, ed. by Judy Simons and Kate Fullbrook (Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 66–80.

[3] See Lyn Pykett, 'Women and the Sensation Business', in *Writing: A Woman's Business*, ed. by Simons and Fullbrook, pp. 17–31.

labelled a 'woman writer', she said 'I don't like it because I know myself to be just a writer'.[4] Spark then explains that the people judging the *Observer* short story prize in 1951 were convinced her story was written by a man, an anecdote that demonstrates, firstly, the very real sexism against which writing was judged, but also, subconsciously, Spark's pride in avoiding the negative association with women's writing: 'I don't know why they thought it was. They were quite amazed that it was a woman who had written the story'.[5] Mixed in with the mock confusion and derision is at least a semblance of self-congratulation. At the end of her response Spark returns to her opening statement: 'But I quite like to think that my writing belongs to no particular sex'.[6] This ostensible contradiction, between professing to a genderless kind of writing and having that writing accepted precisely because of its non-conformity to 'women's writing', is resolved when we interpret Spark as really saying that she would much rather have her writing be *seen* as masculine because it is male writing that has historically been considered the default or standard of good, proper, legitimate writing from which women deviate.

Later in the interview Hosmer asks, pointedly, 'what writers — male or female — do you read now with more than passing interest?', to which Spark responds, 'Heinrich Boll, [Gabriel García] Márquez. I still read Newman with great delight for his wonderful prose and his clarity of mind. [Georges] Simenon and Proust. Henry James'.[7] The international scope of the list somewhat distracts from the fact that all her picks are men. Hosmer also asks Spark what she thinks about the 'feminist endeavour to teach courses about literature by women exclusively, or to publish anthologies with the work of women only?'[8] Spark's reply is, like the previous comments, conflicted: 'I think it's a mess. I think for commercial purposes it might be a very good idea. People buy, women buy, women's books, I suppose, but for no other literary purpose. It's not intrinsically a good idea'.[9] Spark identifies a tension between the imperatives of commerce (and the indirect benefits of selling, literally and figuratively, 'women's writing') and the risk of corrupting the value of writing by women – 'intrinsically' the practice is misguided.

Furthermore, as an interesting snippet of correspondence from the 1980s shows, Spark's anxiety over 'women's writing' fed into a somewhat irrational suspicion of

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[4] Robert Hosmer, 'An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark', *Salmagundi*, 146.146–147 (2005), pp. 127–158 (p. 153).
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., p. 154.
[8] Ibid., p. 153.
[9] Ibid.

translation by women translators. For the French edition of *Loitering with Intent* (*Intentions Suspectes*) Spark's UK publisher (The Bodley Head) had commissioned a female translator, but Spark objected and instead requested a male translator, fearing that a woman would 'sweeten' the language of Spark's narrative.[10] Ironically, Spark's objection actually reinforces the notion of an essentialised 'women's writing', contradicting her own stated convictions that gender bears no or little relevance to the work of fiction writing. Or perhaps Spark betrays a kind of writerly exceptionalism here: while other women conform to stereotypes in their writing, Spark does not, and therefore the practice of translation (which is after all an act of interpretation and (re)writing) cannot be trusted with another woman; the typical woman translator would surely fall short of, indeed corrupt, the original, presumably unfeminine or (gender-)neutral prose penned by Spark.

If Spark's attitude seems parochial or regressive to contemporary sensibilities, we must remember the context from which these thoughts emerge. With the increasing commercialism of literature at the beginning of the 20th century came a redrawing of cultural hierarchies along gender lines facilitated in no small part by the marketing and promotional strategies of the publishing circuit. Spark's reservations over the category of 'women's writing' can be traced back to the modernist tendency of bemoaning the emergence of a kind of popular fiction that was eventually dubbed (by the modernists themselves) 'middle-brow'. Characterised as clever and respectable, but accessible and readable, 'middle-brow' fiction was focussed primarily on domestic life and bourgeois concerns, and usually if not exclusively written by women.

Yet the perceived gap in literary merit between modernist and middle-brow fiction is at least partially based on arbitrary (but powerful) market signifiers, because, as Alissa G. Karl argues, 'the commercial coding of the middle-brow novel and its forms ensures the "experimental" or "resistant" coding of less "readable" novelistic works', so that the hierarchy established between the two novelistic forms is dialogic rather than given – 'the "high-brow" requires the "middle-brow" in order to distinguish its own features, and the literary marketplace is where this occurs'.[11] Nevertheless, the cultural divide attached to these market segments (and their differently gendered framings) provides the context for Spark's aversion to 'women's writing', which even extends to those feminist attempts at reclamation

[10] TMSA, letter from Jan Bogaerts (of Dutch publisher Elsevier Boekerij) Alison Gordon (of The Bodley Head), 25 August 1981, NLS, Acc. 10607/17.
[11] Alissa G. Karl, 'The Novel in the Economy, 1900 to the Present', in *Handbook of the English Novel of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, ed. by Christopher Reinfandt (De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 42–63 (p. 48).

by presses such as Virago Books, whose otherwise worthy enterprise – which would eventually publish Spark paperbacks after her death – leads to, for Spark, the ghettoization of female authors.

Having said all that, it is undeniable that Spark's fiction reflexively engages with the fraught relationship between gender and writing; as I will go on to show, while Spark is not interested in the domestic struggles that women writers typically depicted in 'middle-brow' fiction, she *does* stage encounters with gendered being and the woman writer in ways that modernists did not, and as a consequence makes a significant contribution to the common cause (however ill-defined) of 'women's writing'. Spark's disavowal of feminism, the 'women's writing' label, and the role of gender in her own work must therefore be seen as a cautious negotiation with the future arbiters of literary canonicity.

Paratexts and Canonicity

The role of marketing, as a practice dedicated to commercialisation, is often viewed with suspicion and cynicism, and this is especially so in relation to the book industry which – since the invention of print, but especially since the emergence of consumer cultures – has had an uneasy and ambivalent relationship with the imperatives of the marketplace.[12] Writing against the kind of posturing that assumes the book world operates independently of the market, Claire Squires shows in *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* that marketing has not only intensified in the book trade since the post-war period but also that marketing now dictates the terms upon which literature is produced, disseminated and received – effectively *making* that which is written.

The point of Squires' thesis, however, is not to draw hopelessly deterministic conclusions about the state of fiction – that it answers only to market forces – but instead to consider what happens to texts, authors and readers when they enter the vast network of relations – between culture, commerce and politics – negotiated by the marketplace of the book industry (and what, in turn, happens to the shape of the industry itself). Squires reconceives marketing as 'a form of representation and interpretation' that surrounds the

[12] Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody, 'Introduction', in *Judging a Book by its Cover: Fans, Publishers, Designers and the Marketing of Fiction*, ed. by Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody (Ashgate, 2007), pp. i–xiv (p. xiii–xiv).

'production, dissemination and reception of texts', and necessarily influences 'the spaces between the author and the reader'.[13] Marketing is itself – in the more expansive sense of the term used here – a kind of (para)text designed not only to sell products, but to create, organise and cultivate specific forms of relation between product and consumer. Therefore, reductive views of marketing in fiction – typically understood as the necessary evil of a publication process under capitalist modes of production – risk overlooking the critical series of manoeuvres that secure a writer's position in the literary world, especially when the writing, as is so often the case with 'literary' fiction, is positioned beyond or against the logic of markets and marketing.

For instance, modernist literature has been viewed, historically, as the last line of defence against a society swallowed by commerce and consumer culture; delivered through novel literary techniques and unusual approaches to character and plotting, the uncompromising and difficult writing of literary modernism earned a reputation as elitist, counter-cultural, and above all, not marketable. Yet, recent scholarship shows that renowned modernists were more complicit with strategies of marketing than has been assumed: Alissa G. Karl claims 'these authors marketed a "refined, non-commercial, high-art aesthetic" – but marketed an aesthetic nonetheless'.[14] Lawrence Rainey elaborates on the modus operandi of modernist marketing, in which 'the work of art invites and solicits its commodification, but does so in such a way that it becomes a commodity of a special sort', one that is 'integrated into a different economic circuit of patronage, collecting, speculation and investment'.[15] Far from resisting or bypassing the values of market society, modernists capitalised on the system by occupying a particular orientation towards the marketplace; successfully negotiating the otherwise contradictory conditions of being 'constructed and marketed and yet purified and noncommercial'.[16]

Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the 'field of cultural production'[17] – a theory of how cultural items are brought into being and valued by various external agents – is useful for thinking through the implications of marketing's impact on literary value. The 'cultural field' is 'one in which the definition – the "position" – of a literary work is forged through its relation to other literary works, as well as via the multiple agencies that are at work within

[13] Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Palgrave, 2007), p. 3.
[14] Karl, 'The Novel in the Economy', p. 45.
[15] Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (Yale University Press, 1998), p. 3.
[16] Elizabeth Outka, *Consuming Traditions:Modernism, Modernity, and the Commodified Authentic* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 11.
[17] Pierre Bourdieu quoted in Squires, *Marketing Literature*, p. 54.

the field'.[18] Bourdieu's field includes not only 'the direct producers of the work in its materiality' (authors, texts, cover art) but, quoting Bourdieu, '"also the producers of the meaning and value of the work – critics, publishers, gallery directors and the whole set of agents whose combined efforts produce consumers capable of knowing and recognizing the work of art."'[19] The meaning and value of any given book, therefore, depends on its interaction with a wide network of cultural signifiers. For my purposes, I want to look at the cover design of Spark's early novels as well as some influential Spark criticism to show how both the 'direct producers of the work in its materiality' and 'the producers of the meaning and value of the work' conspired to frame Spark as a particular kind of woman writer, one for whom 'woman' is an irrelevant, perhaps misleading, qualifier, and a potential barrier to canonisation.

Cover Design

Let's start with the interesting but little-known history of Macmillan's book covers for Spark's early novels, because it is here, on the material surface of the book, that authors, as Juliet Gardiner suggests, are positioned 'on the boundary of the text's meaning': 'there is no appurtenance more indicative of the text's journey from private to public space, more manifest both of the proprietorship of the text […] and at the very same time, his/her letting go of that meaning'.[20] In other words, the book cover in fiction represents a kind of rupture in authorship and textuality, where the collage of paratextual information – in tandem with other paratextual phenomena – creates (and negotiates between) the dual identities of writer and Author, creative writing and The Work, artistic expression and marketable good. While authors see the cover 'as representing the interior of the book, its content, what has been written – as far as possible its unique nature', the publisher understands that 'it is the book's circulation that must be represented – its destination – the market it is to find by analogy with books of the same genre, the futurity of its appeal'.[21] It is from somewhere in the middle, between authored text and marketed context, that the book cover emerges, and against which

[18] Squires, *Marketing Literature*, p. 55.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Juliet Gardiner, 'Recuperating the Author: Consuming Fictions of the 1990s', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 94.2 (2000), pp. 255–274 (p. 259).
[21] Ibid.

it is interpreted and judged. Macmillan's first edition covers for Spark's early novels are interesting for the way they handle Spark's authorial signature, and especially for how the cover artist, Victor Reinganum, matches Spark's texts with suitably surrealist and non-naturalistic imagery. Moreover, the semiotic action, as it were, that plays across these editions helps set up an image of Spark as a particular brand of woman writer.

For *The Comforters*, Macmillan had the tricky task of releasing a debut novel to bookshelves; bringing new authors to the market is always more difficult and risky than supporting established names. Readers are more inclined to buy books written by authors familiar to them and publishers are therefore incentivised to exploit those reliable audiences; from the perspective of booksellers and the media, famous author names establish 'obvious patterns for representing them to consumers',[22] what James F. English formulates as 'journalistic capital'.[23] Publishers must compensate for the gap in authorial branding when promoting unknown names, and in any case, as Claire Squires explains, 'the author […] does not brand the product only by lending a name to it, but by that name being incorporated into an array of paratextual strategies'.[24] While the first edition of Spark's debut, *The Comforters*, is light on advertisement compared to contemporary dustjackets, Macmillan thoughtfully curates a paratextual display that attaches Spark, 'through alliance and association', to certain literary and cultural discourses.[25]

The book displays only one quoted review placed near the bottom of the front flap, but the name to whom the quote is attributed, Evelyn Waugh, was perhaps deemed sufficient – indeed, as good as it gets – for endorsements. Only four words, 'brilliantly original and fascinating', Waugh's comment is itself generic and unoriginal, but it is not the content of his review that is important. Indeed in a letter to poet and novelist Gabriel Fielding (who passed along an advance copy of *The Comforters* to Waugh), Waugh offers the phrase for exactly this purpose: 'Mrs. Spark no doubt wants a phrase to quote on the wrapper and in advertisement. She can report me as saying: "brilliantly original and fascinating"'.[26] Waugh's reputation as a comic writer, a satirist of bourgeois and aristocratic decadence, aligns *The Comforters* in particular and Spark in general with a known strand of British satire – blackly comic and unafraid of the macabre. At the same time, Waugh's fiction is, at this point in the

[22] Squires, *Marketing Literature*, p. 87.
[23] James F. English, 'Winning the Culture Game: Prizes, Awards, and the Rules of Art', *New Literary History*, 33.1 (2002), pp. 109–135 (p. 123).
[24] Squires, *Marketing Literature*, p. 87.
[25] Ibid., p. 89.
[26] Macmillan Archive, letter from Evelyn Waugh to Gabriel Fielding, 29 October 1956, Box. NS017.

century, associated with the middle-brow – his novels forgo modernist experimentation but contain enough 'literary' pretensions to distinguish them from the pulp sensibility of genre fiction.[27] In other words, Waugh's name, or more precisely, its 'author-function',[28] signals to readers that *The Comforters* is approachable though not easy, entertaining but not unintelligent, funny but also satirical, playful as well as serious.

The novel's blurb, printed on the front flap directly above the Waugh quote, echoes (and therefore capitalises on) these associations (which in turn reflects back on to Waugh's literary status – as the kind of fiction with which he is happy to be associated). Before describing the contents of the novel, we are told that *The Comforters* 'is a first novel by an *Observer* short-story prizewinner' as well as an author 'of several critical works'.[29] The first piece of background information – the flaunting of awards – is an early and unassuming example of what would become a standardised and far more conspicuous marketing tool for the publishing industry. The *Observer* short story prize was awarded to Spark's 'The Seraph and the Zambesi' in 1951, and here it functions as a provisional replacement for the branding typically embodied by the author name. The prize implies that although Spark's name is not yet widely known, it has at least been *recognised* by a cultural authority (in the form of a respected broadsheet newspaper).

Similarly, Spark's non-fictional writing, the vague allusion to 'several critical works', presents Spark as a scholarly and intellectual (and therefore masculine) author, perhaps to distinguish her from the popular women's fiction Nicola Humble defines as the 'feminine middle-brow'[30] – a loosely connected group of successful women writers 'accused of sentimentalising and domesticating their literature'.[31] As such, Macmillan's delicate negotiation with the fraught middlebrow category effectively lets Spark have her cake and eat it: the endorsement by Waugh, a male author (albeit one whose name was frequently mistaken for a woman's), combined with the selective detail about Spark's 'critical works', aligns Spark and *The Comforters* with the accessible and sophisticated nature of middlebrow fiction *but without* the negative, feminised associations.

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[27] Karl, 'The Novel in the Economy', p. 47.
[28] 'An author's name is not simply an element of speech, […] its presence is functional in that it serves as a means of classification', Michel Foucault, 'Authorship: What is an Author?', trans. by Donald F. Bouchard, *Screen*, 20.1 (1979), pp. 13–29 (p. 19).
[29] Muriel Spark, *The Comforters* (Macmillan, 1957), blurb.
[30] Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middle-Brow, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 3.
[31] Karl, 'The Novel in the Economy', p. 47.

The main body of the blurb, in its description of the book's narrative, reaffirms the novel's dual identity as light-hearted entertainment and serious, literary art. While the formal conceit of the novel is mentioned at the outset – 'To the Chinese-box convention of a book-within-a-book, Muriel Spark wittily adds her own twists of surprise'[32] – no further elaboration over the plot or premise is given. Instead the blurb focuses on the main cast of characters, the 'bevy of oddities and neurotics' that populate 'this brilliant eccentric novel':

> Caroline the heroine, afflicted with 'voices'; Baron Stock, the self-deceiving occultist; Laurence, the amiable compulsive and the impossibly pneumatic Mrs. Hogg, warden of St. Philomena's retreat-house, are all, in part, prisoners of their own fantasy. Over against them stands Louisa Jepp, Laurence's indomitable country grandmother, whose sanity has its own trick relaxations.[33]

This list, that reads like a dramatis personae, aims to portray the novel as a comical tour of amusing caricatures: the short, snappy descriptions that accompany each character – 'self-deceiving occultist', 'amiable compulsive', 'impossibly pneumatic […] warden', 'indomitable country grandmother' – flaunt the novel's variety as well as hint at the potential for comedy between these idiosyncratic entities. However, there are turns of phrase in this excerpt that signify something beyond pure entertainment: the characters 'are all, in part, prisoners of their own fantasy', including Louisa Jepp, 'whose sanity has its own trick relaxations'. These betray a degree of sophistication and a sense of importance about the implications of the narrative. The latter clause is especially notable for its colourful, indeed literary, expression: a somewhat convoluted or fanciful way of saying that not everything is quite right or as it appears with Louisa Jepp. The last paragraph of the blurb reiterates both its appeal to the general, so-called middle-brow reader, as well as the mix of levity (literally) and seriousness promised by the category: the novel will 'delight all readers who are prepared to lift at least one foot off the ground'.[34] The notion of preparedness, however rhetorical in its use here, positions the prospective reader as one open to intellectual challenges, who dares to approach the text on its own terms. The levitation metaphor, with 'at least one foot off the ground', signals that there may be flights of fancy, but in the end the novel remains grounded;

[32] Spark, *The Comforters*, blurb.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

an image that neatly and cleverly negotiates the poles of fantastical/realist, novel/traditional and comic/serious that is itself demonstrated by the body of the blurb.

It is Spark, however, with help from Derek Stanford, who shaped many of the details for the blurb. In a letter sent to Macmillan editor Alan Maclean, Spark enclosed a second draft of the blurb composed by Derek Stanford and suggests that 'there are one or two points which I think might profitably be brought out', and proceeds to list four bullet points of key changes.[35] Firstly, to market Spark in a way that hints at an established voice in literature. 'From the sales point of view,' says Spark, the blurb should mention 'the Observer prize, which was rather my widest success', as well as 'the fact that, though it is my first novel, it isn't my first book'.[36] Secondly, to include and foreground the description 'the Chinese box book-within-a-book construction', first written by Stanford in an article for the US publication *The Western Review* (titled 'Literature in England: the Present Condition'),[37] in which he dedicates a page and a half to Spark's debut novel.[38] Thirdly, a change in word choice to control the tonal balance of the advertised narrative: 'I would prefer it to be called an "eccentric" novel rather than a "crazy" one, as I think the latter may give an impression of gaiety more than occurs in the novel'.[39] Finally, and somewhat ironically for a novelist who would soon revel in the display of what 'ought not to be revealed', Spark argues for a plot point to remain hidden: 'I would rather the fact of the grandmother's "criminal gang" wasn't mentioned, because this is part of the plot & ought not to be revealed'.[40]

At the end of the letter Spark assures Maclean that she is 'not at all exacting about these things', and that 'the book will ultimately have to rest on its own merit',[41] but however much Spark wants to distance herself from the crude business of marketing, it is clear that she has thought deeply and carefully about the presentation of her work and recognises the importance of fine-tuning her authorial signature; the comment about 'gaiety', the suggestion

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[35] Macmillan Archive, letter from Spark to Alan Maclean, 19 October 1956, Box. NS017. The original blurb, written by Maclean, was not included in Macmillan's archive files, so it is difficult to reconstruct a full genesis of the published version beyond the phrases in Stanford's article (see below) and Spark's interventions in the correspondence.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Macmillan Archive, typewritten excerpt from Derek Stanford article 'Literature in England: The Present Condition', n.d., Box 1. NS017.
[38] Much of the blurb is taken from Stanford's essay. The final line of Stanford's article states that 'perhaps the reader needs one foot off the ground in order truly to appreciate this work', which is revised for the final line of the novel's blurb. The character descriptions too find their source in Stanford's article, like 'indomitable country grandmother', 'self-deceiving occult researches', and 'genial yet compulsive snooping'. The phrase 'prisoners of their own fantasy' is a concise and eloquent revision of his observation that 'each of them lives, for all their social motion, in the padlocked cell of their private mania'.
[39] Macmillan Archive, letter from Spark to Maclean, 19 October 1956. Box. NS017.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

to mention her previous (critical) books, and the knowing literariness of Stanford's revised blurb all point towards an awareness of market forces as well as the critical forces through which canonicity is eventually bestowed.

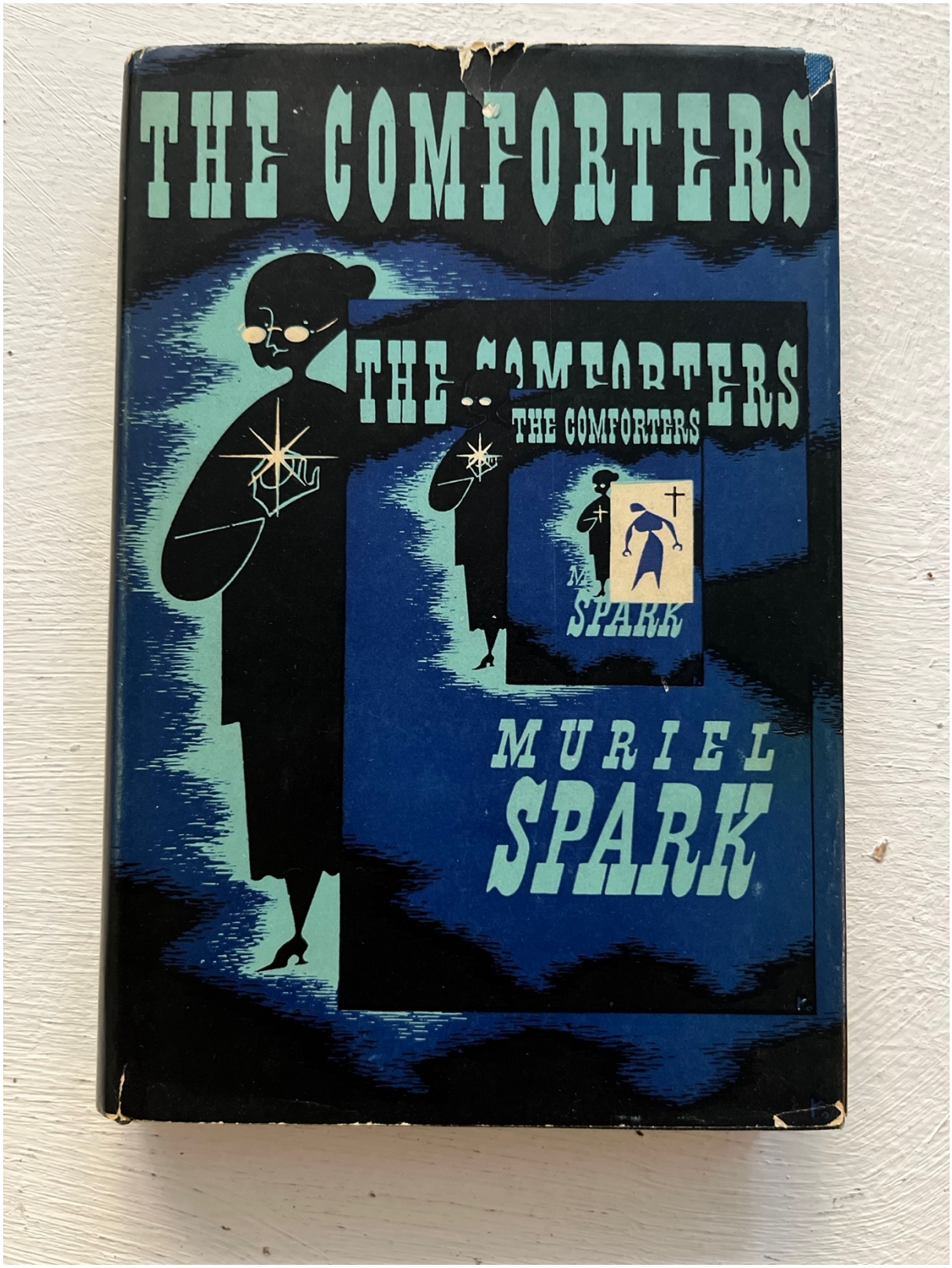

FIG 8. First edition copy of *The Comforters* © Macmillan 1957

The cover art for *The Comforters* (FIG 8) is similarly well thought out. It depicts a stylised silhouette of Louisa Jepp holding and observing a flashing item – the contraband of her diamond-smuggling syndicate – which, as well as her glasses, is contrasted in white. A light teal aura emanates from the silhouette which gives way to a dark blue which in turn fades to a black background. The colour palette creates a brooding and mysterious atmosphere, but the main attraction of the cover derives from its daring and eye-catching employment of *mise en abyme* – the way it repeats the central image inside itself at least twice, a visual representation of the 'book-within-a-book' plot. Within the final and smallest frame a rectangle of white appears containing a figure which could either represent Mrs. Hogg (given the exaggerated bosom and the nearby crucifix), or, more likely, Caroline (given that she is the Catholic protagonist trying, literally, to escape a narrative frame).

The cover art was designed by Victor Reinganum, a British artist and illustrator who would go on to create (for Macmillan's editions) the cover art of Spark's early novels up to and including *Jean Brodie*. In an obituary for the *Independent*, art critic Jasia Reichardt explains that 'Reinganum's paintings are imaginative explorations of form with references to the real world of objects, figures and nature. However abstracted, the images are usually identifiable, characteristically biomorphic and often menacing'.[42] So too are his Spark covers: the trapped figure in the middle of the final Louisa Jepp frame – with its impossibly proportioned body, simultaneously curvaceous and angular, and its eerily inhuman features, such as the pincer-like hands and the oddly drooping head – is both 'biomorphic' and certainly 'sinister'. While the (first and largest) figure representing Louisa Jepp is more cartoonish than it is biomorphic, it becomes coarser and more abstract in each subsequent frame (as if to replicate the descent into fiction), to the point that what previously looked like the flashing reflection of an object in her hand now becomes, in the final distorted frame, a cross, resembling the crucifix right next to it, as if to suggest, provocatively, a relationship between diamond-smuggling and Catholic orthodoxy.

One of Reinganum's art works from 1939 – a collage called 'Diagram' – was bought by the Tate Modern in 1984, and the Tate website reprints an excerpt from letters sent by Reinganum in the year of the purchase: 'I have indulged in abstract painting on and off since the early 30s, interspersed with my more usual semi-abstract or slightly surrealist work. My rather "tight" and carefully thought-out manner […] derives from the strict discipline of

[42] Jasia Reichardt, 'Obituaries: Victor Reinganum, *The Independent*, 30 January 1995 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituaries-victor-reinganum-1570445.html> [accessed 12 August 2023].

illustration'.[43] Reinganum was clearly inspired by the avant-garde schools of modernist art, but in this brief piece of autobiography he is at pains to emphasise his artistic restraint, that his 'usual' work is only '*semi*-abstract' and '*slightly* surrealist'. In *Surrealism in England – 1936 and After* (1986), a book resulting from an exhibition and symposium of the same name (itself inspired by the 1936 Surrealist Exhibition in London), Michel Remy cites Reinganum amongst others as 'fellow travellers' of British surrealism, names that are 'repeatedly associated with the British surrealists' but 'never belonged to the movement' (Remy 1984 6-7).[44] A similar claim could be made for Spark's aesthetic commitments, travelling in-between novelistic modes but rarely settling.

Reinganum's subsequent art work for Spark's novels develop and extend the aesthetic first showcased with *The Comforters*. *Memento Mori* (FIG 9), for instance, depicts a hand reaching towards a rotary telephone, each object of which is again silhouetted. A flashing symbol in yellow appears in the middle of the telephone to animate its ringing, not unlike the flashing illustration of Louisa Jepp's diamond. Against a purple background two blocks of colour, trapezoids in white and yellow, frame the hand and telephone respectively, with the transparent yellow – like tracing paper – affecting the hue of the purple and white upon which it is superimposed. The novel's title, arranged in Gothic lettering, is printed on a ribbon-like strip that unravels across the left side to reveal the author name (also in Gothic lettering) at the bottom, the change in text and background colour between the two names rendering the ribbon as a three-dimensional object. Indeed there is a stark materiality in the cover, and the abstract assemblage of the various parts – texts, objects, backgrounds – clearly draws on Reinganum's interest in and practice of collage, employed here in reference to the (existential) puzzle of the detective story at the heart of the novel. Spark thought this cover an 'excellent wrapper', but had reservations around the Gothic font. 'Perhaps my name, at least, might be plain-lettered? I think this might help to mitigate a slightly too funereal note in the conception (since the book is not entirely tragic in nature)'.[45] Maclean and Reinganum had considered this too, but came to the conclusion that 'to change it would spoil the design'.[46]

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[43] Victor Reinganum, letters from Reinganum to the Tate Gallery, 20/28 August 1984, Tate <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/reinganum-diagram-t03891> [accessed 12 August 2023].
[44] Michel Remy, 'Introduction', in *Surrealism in England – 1936 and After* ed. by Toni Del Renzio and Duncan Scott (Canterbury College of Art, 1986), pp. 1–8 (pp. 6–7).
[45] Macmillan Archive, letter from Spark to Maclean, 15 September 1958, Box. NS017.
[46] Macmillan Archive, letter from Maclean to Spark, 16 September 1958, Box. NS017.

FIG 9. First edition copy of *Memento Mori* © Macmillan 1959

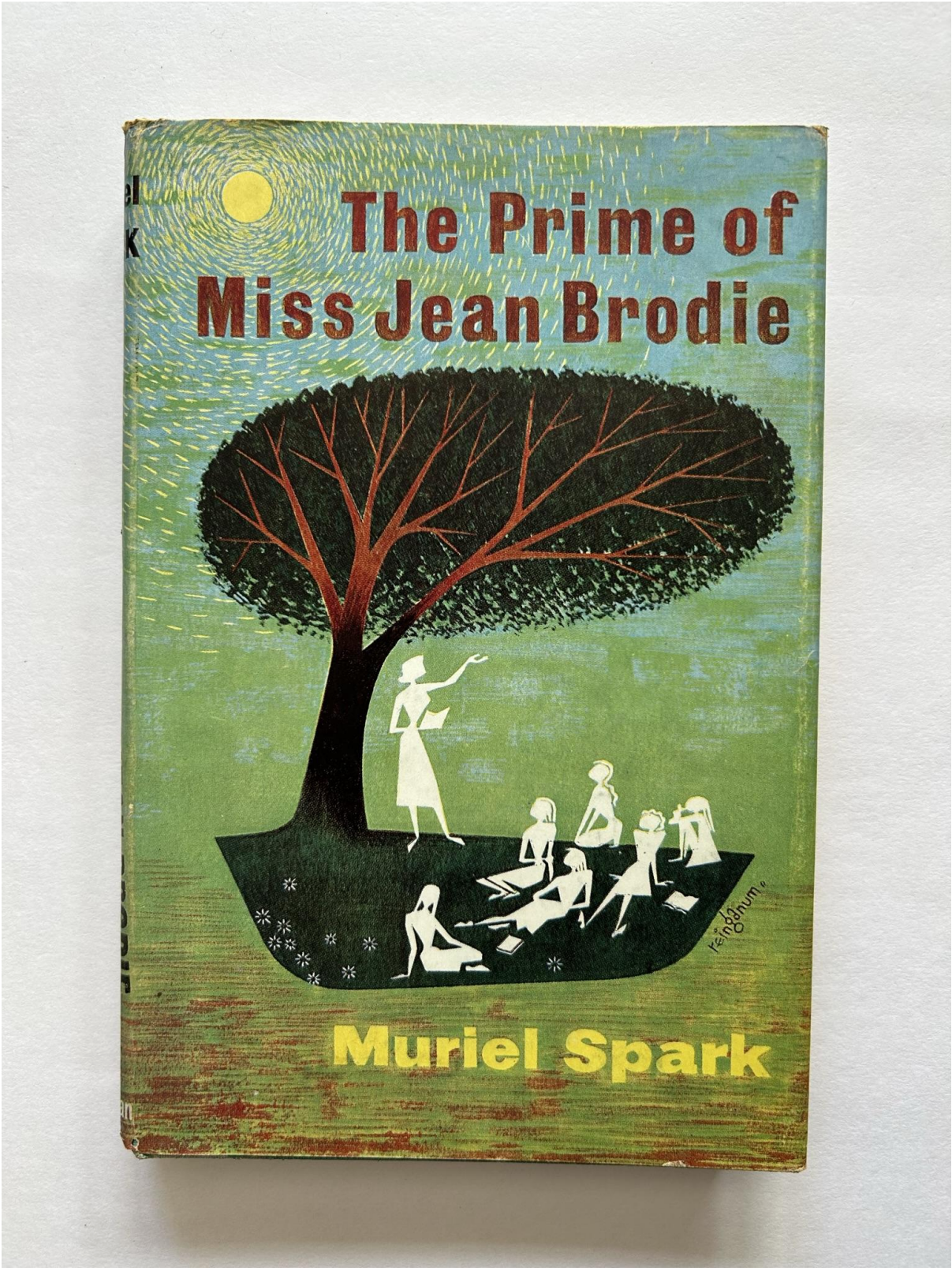

FIG 10. First edition copy of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* © Macmillan 1961

For *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (FIG 10) Reinganum's by now signature motifs reappear, including the stylised human figures (this time silhouetted in white) to represent Brodie and her Brodie set in the middle of a lesson taking place outside, sheltered by a tree. The tree itself, and the grass below, is illustrated in a simplistic, biomorphic style, its shape cropped so that only the tree and the patch of grass below it are visible, as if to emphasise the closed world within which Brodie secures her crème-de-la-crème. These two illustrations are set against a painterly background, an imitation of impressionism with its shimmering blend of layered colours, in part a tribute to Brodie's love for the arts but also a reference to the illusions that surround and sustain Brodie's fantasy of control. Correspondence shows that this cover was trickier to design than the others due to the novel's school setting. Maclean informs Lynn Carrick, an editor at Lippincott (Spark's US publisher at the time), that 'the jacket for Miss Jean Brodie is not yet ready. We have run into a spot of bother here as any jacket with school-girl trappings on it looks like something by Ronald Searle'.[47] The implication here is that illustrations of school-girls risks looking cartoonish and therefore geared towards younger audiences, but the final result, with the blank white figures superimposed upon an otherworldly background, conveys a degree of sophistication and strangeness in line with the text's own complicated layers and enchanted reality.

It is therefore not controversial to say that the covers produced by Reinganum for Spark's early work demonstrate a subtle but concerted effort at branding, not unlike the consistent and quirky designs made for Woolf's novels created by her sister, Vanessa Bell. After *Brodie* the majority of first edition Spark covers in the UK would be designed by different artists and as a result they share little in common beyond, for the most part, generic references to key narrative components; when looked at side by side, there is no coherent visual aesthetic that connects them besides the attached author name.[48] And Spark recognised this; correspondence in 1995 between Spark/Jardine and the director of UK publisher Constable, Ben Glazebrook, concerning the cover art for *Reality and Dreams*, confirms as much:

[47] Macmillan Archive, letter from Alan Maclean to Lynn Carrick, 21 April 1961, Box. NS017. Ronald Searle is the creator of the St. Trinian's School comic strip series which portrayed the unruly behaviour of its school-girls.

[48] One notable exception is the design for *The Hothouse by the East River* which features Henry Moore's biomorphic statues from his sculpture 'King and Queen', further cementing the links between Spark and the avant-garde.

> […] Before you begin on a cover however I do hope the aesthetic side will be considered important and that you have in mind a really good artist-designer for the jacket? I attach press-cuttings which I hope you will find encouraging. Muriel and I are both enormously unimpressed by the usual feeble art-school and art departments' efforts which are generally shown to us and more than one critic wrote that they had hardly ever seen such an artistic disaster as the cover of *Symposium*.
>
> Please see what you can do for *Reality and Dreams* […].[49]

As if to reinforce the message Jardine encloses two newspaper clippings featuring articles by Campbell Green and Raymond Hawkey on the commercial and artistic importance of cover art for novelists. Green's piece is a profile of Chip Kidd, a prominent figure in graphic design at the time known for his unusual, eye-catching book cover art, while Hawkey's article discusses the difficulties authors face when trying to negotiate cover art with publishers. Glazebrook meets this pressure by offering to commission distinguished British painter and pop art pioneer David Hockney, with whom Glazebrook has a connection via his brother, an art gallerist. As Jardine reports, Spark was on board: 'Muriel thinks David Hockney a genius and your idea an excellent one. She is very happy if he will do the wrapper for *Reality and Dreams*'.[50]

Hockney, however, was not available, and in his place Glazebrook suggests the impressionistic landscape paintings of J.M.W. Turner, and in particular his sunset landscape 'The Scarlet Sunset', to match the novel's citation of the opening lines from Eliot's 'Prufrock': 'Let us go then, you and I,/When the evening is spread out against the sky | Like a patient etherised upon a table.'[51] The painting depicts a crimson, almost pink evening sky with a faded outline of a bridge and buildings in the far horizon. The blurry, dreamlike texture of the painting (as with many Turner watercolours) suits the novel's own preoccupations with surface, illusion and fantasy, and accommodates, though tenuously, the imagery of Eliot's lines. But as a straight reproduction of Turner's painting the cover lacks the creative wit of Reinganum's work, and the intended reference to Eliot is far from obvious. As a result it feels

[49] TMSA, letter from Spark/Jardine to Ben Glazebrook, 18 December 1995, NLS, Acc. 11621/73.
[50] TMSA, letter from Jardine to Glazebrook, 16 January 1996, NLS, Acc. 11621/73.
[51] T.S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', in *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (Faber and Faber, 2006), pp. 3–8 (p. 3). In the first edition of *Reality and Dreams* the cover art credit mistakenly cites a different Turner watercolour, 'Tours, Sunset'.

rather uninspired; James Bailey recently joked that it resembles 'something from a holiday brochure for senior citizens'.[52]

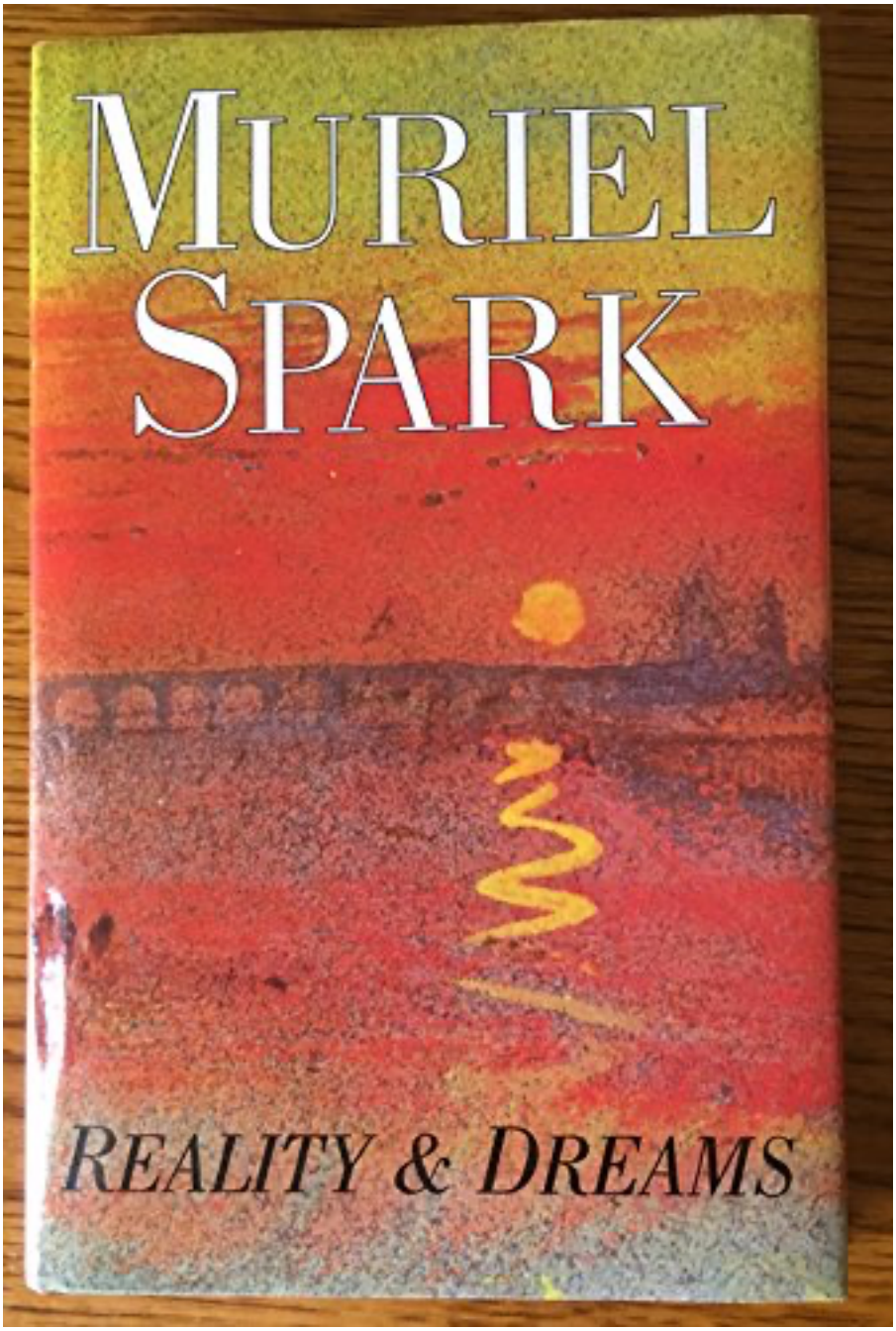

FIG 11. First edition copy of *Reality and Dreams* © Constable 1996

[52] James Bailey (@james_j_bailey}, 'Yikes. Some of the later editions of her books are just downright bizarre in their blandness. This looks like something from a holiday brochure for senior citizens', Twitter, 26 March 2023 <https://twitter.com/james_j_bailey/status/1640044414960631808> [accessed 15 August 2023].

Nevertheless, the discussion surrounding this design is symptomatic of an interesting shift in priorities for book production at this point in time, namely the emergence of an authorial presence in book cover art. Chip Kidd, for instance, hailed as 'the closest thing to a rock star in graphic design' in 2003,[53] earned a reputation during the '90s as an auteur in graphic design with his unusual and stark cover designs, and quickly became a highly sought after cover artist with some authors even attaching Kidd to their book contracts.[54] The appeal of David Hockney similarly derives from his undeniable talent as a visual artist – especially his vibrant use of colour and minimalistic arrangement of space – but the considerable cultural capital attached to his name is surely also attractive on its own. Kidd's cover art and Hockney's pop art are, in different but related ways, intimately linked with the commercial world of advertising, but they have successfully managed to turn a pop culture sensibility – namely, the postmodern age of the image – into a prized artistic aesthetic. And therein lies the subtext of Spark/Jardine's letter: to find a cover designer whose name and style can present Spark as both cutting edge, novel, marketable *and* respectable, literary and canonical.

Of all the first editions of Spark's fiction in the UK Reinganum's art stands out for its considered design, and most clearly confers certain literary if not entirely avant-garde framings through which to approach Spark's fiction. Combined with Spark's own interventions in the textual makeup of the covers (as shown with *The Comforters*), the early books helped launch Spark as a writer of comic but serious fiction, commonly grouped alongside Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene, thanks in no small part to their consistent appearances on the books as advertisement. The most prominent and most remarked upon link between these writers is their Catholicism, but what differentiates them is equally as significant – being closely associated with two male heavyweights of contemporary fiction surely distanced Spark's name from the creeping notion of women's writing. In any case, Spark's critical reception would go on to enshrine her authorial signature within a literary tradition that has historically deemphasised the woman in women's writing.

[53] Ravi Somaiya, 'Warning: Graphic Material', *The Independent*, 14 November 2007 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3669045/Warning-graphic-material.html> [accessed 13 September 2023].
[54] Ibid.

Literary Criticism and the Ivory Tower of Modernism

As Spark established her name with the prolific output of her early novels (culminating in the extraordinary success of *Jean Brodie*), the heightened visibility and critical attention came along with a developing reputation – or literary brand – that would characterise Spark's fiction, and by extension, herself, as harsh, cruel, cold or unsympathetic. In 1963 Frank Kermode reviewed Spark's latest novel, *The Girls of Slender Means*, for the *New Statesman*, but the piece is written as a retrospective (titled 'The Prime of Muriel Spark'), and in it Kermode calls out (and argues against) some of the stereotypes that had started to characterise Spark's fiction. During his discussion he employs the metaphor of purity: 'It's true that there is an unfashionable element of pure game in these books', Kermode says in relation to their metafictional play, 'but that is simply part of their perfectly serious way of life'.[55] The qualifier – 'pure' – is not used trivially either, because Kermode invokes it again, this time in relation to Spark's prose: 'And there is another rather moral objection […] to the effect that Spark lacks charity', but this reading is superficial, 'since the concept [of charity], cleared of cant, may be entertained in precisely the gratingly unsentimental way in which this *pure-languaged* writer understands it'.[56] In each case, Kermode hints at but does not elaborate on the idea that Spark's fiction, in form and content, is pure from something that must therefore be seen as impure in modern fiction, but what are the missing details of this implicit value judgement?

Some answers can be found in Malcom Bradbury's essay on Spark almost a decade later, in which purity is once again deployed to redraw certain literary parameters. As Bradbury writes about Spark's latest phase of fiction influenced by the *nouveaux roman*, he ponders whether, given the strict, tight and almost oppressive self-reflexivity of the narratives, 'a certain relaxation will occur and some of the impurities—themselves, one always felt, carefully invigilated impurities—of the previous books will return'.[57] It becomes clear throughout Bradbury's essay that his notion of purity, which functions on the surface as a description of Sparkian brevity, is informed by the predominantly masculine tradition of

[55] Frank Kermode, 'The Prime of Miss Muriel Spark', *New Statesman*, 1 July 1963.
[56] Ibid., emphasis mine.
[57] Malcom Bradbury, 'Muriel Spark's Fingernails', *Critical Quarterly*, 14.3 (1972), pp. 197–286 (p. 241).

literary modernism, an elite into which Bradbury grants Spark access following her newer – and 'brief, brittle, nasty' – fiction of the early '70s.[58]

Bradbury's title, 'Muriel Spark's Fingernails', derives from Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* ('indifferent, paring his fingernails'),[59] while the epigram is taken from Henry James: 'The sense of a system saves the painter from the baseness of the *arbitrary* stroke, the touch without its reason'.[60] Each citation contributes to the (since contested) thesis that Spark enacts a God-like level of control over her narratives, but they also function to locate Spark within a prestigious and male canon of modernist novels. In 1972, well past the heyday of modernism, the aesthetic advances of modernist novels were still seen as the gold standard against which to measure the worth of contemporary literary fiction. As Nicola Humble explains, modernist interventions in the novel effectively necessitated the construction of new categories and hierarchies within fiction: 'the influence of Henry James and the coming of modernism concentrated the attention of the avant-garde on the novel […] and there was an increasing need to distinguish between such radical remakings of the form, and more conventional fictional narratives'.[61] Spark's fiction, as was discussed in Part I, can be said to straddle both ends of the spectrum, inasmuch as her 'radical remakings of the form' are contained within, or disguised as, 'conventional fictional narratives'.

Indeed the difficulty in categorising Spark at all, of historicising her work within literary movements, has become a critical commonplace. Ruth Whittaker marvels at the way Spark 'has remained peculiarly independent of pressures from both realism and the experimentalism of post-modernist fiction'.[62] Almost 30 years later, David Herman echoes Whittaker when he claims that Spark 'opted […] out of the two responses to modernism that David Lodge has called antimodernism and postmodernism'.[63] Antimodernists hoped to revive but expand on the realist traditions that modernism had so forcefully rejected, whereas postmodernists admired and continued the modernist project but took issue with the modernist tendency to cling to 'the promise of meaning, if not of a meaning'.[64] For Herman, Spark 'chose a third path': 'Her fiction embraces (or rather extends and radicalises) the

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[58] Robert Nye, 'Gloria Deplores You Strikes Again', *Guardian*, 11 September 1971.
[59] James Joyce, *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, ed. by Marc A. Mamigonian and John Turner (Alma Classics, 2014), p. 182.
[60] Bradbury, 'Spark's Fingernails', p. 241.
[61] Humble, *Feminine Middle-Brow*, p. 11.
[62] Ruth Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark* (Macmillan, 1982), p. 2.
[63] David Herman, '"A Salutary Scar": Muriel Spark's Desegregated Art in the Twenty-First Century', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 54.3 (2008), pp. 473–486 (p. 474).
[64] David Lodge quoted in Herman, 'Spark's Desegregated Art', p. 474.

modernist emphasis on technique while *also* projecting complex social worlds'.[65] This 'third path' complicates the neat categories between the high-, middle- or low-brow into which fiction had been newly sorted, and this is also reflected in Spark's treatment of gender.

For women writers in the first half of the 20th century, formal commitments – between 'radical remakings of the form' and 'conventional fictional narratives' – largely determined the perspective from which gender was treated. Where the 'daily, contingent, bodily experience of women'[66] is characteristic of the 'feminine middlebrow', modernists wanted to reject gender norms outright and sever the ties between biology and gender, emboldened by the emergence of the 'New Woman' against the longstanding Victorian ideal of the feminine.[67] For instance, Maren Tova Linett recognises that for women modernists 'gender was inhibiting art'[68], citing writers like Charlotte Perkins Gilman who argued that 'the true artist transcends his sex, or her sex. If this is not the case, art suffers', and Virginia Woolf, who declared 'it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex'.[69] Instead, women modernists 'had to be androgynous, so that consciousness of sex did not weigh down the work of art'.[70]

It is therefore no accident that the kind of woman writer that *did* 'think of their sex' – that is, represent and explore rather than resist and dismantle gender norms – has been excluded from the modernist canon. As Clare Hanson argues, in an essay that explores the feminine and feminist novels of Elizabeth Taylor and other woman writers in that milieu, 'the transcendent art of modernism […] presents particular problems for the woman artist because of its occulting of the female body'.[71] 'Woolf herself acknowledged', says Hanson, 'that she had failed to solve the problem of', quoting Woolf, '"telling the truth about my own experiences as a body"'.[72] Taylor, on the other hand, is preoccupied with bodily existence, its daily demands and biological quirks: as Namara Smith notes, 'Taylor's characters are accident-prone and harried by errands, their reveries are interrupted by the quotidian—running out of toilet paper, washing the dishes, thinking about food', and in her novel *A View*

[65] Herman, 'Spark's Desegregated Art', p. 474.
[66] Clare Hanson, 'Marketing the 'Woman Writer'', in *Writing: A Woman's Business*, ed. by Simons and Fullbrook, pp. 66–80 (p. 74).
[67] Patricia Juliana Smith, 'Gender in Women's Modernism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers*, ed. by Maren Tova Linett (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 78–94 (p. 78).
[68] Mara Tova Linett, 'Modernist Women's Writing: An Introduction', in *Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers*, ed. by Mara Tova Linett (2010)pp. 1–16 (p. 1).
[69] Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Virginia Woolf quoted in Linett, 'Modernist Women's Writing', p. 2.
[70] Linett, 'Modernist Women's Writing', p. 2.
[71] Hanson, 'Marketing the 'Woman Writer'', p. 74.
[72] Ibid.

of the Harbour, Taylor covers, 'in its first two chapters, […] diarrhoea, astigmatism, paralysis rheumatism, bronchitis, and depression'.[73]

Of course, separating middle-brow and modernist fiction into a Cartesian split between body and mind, respectively, oversimplifies an otherwise complicated and relational lineage of 20th century writing. Late modernist Jean Rhys, in her novelistic depictions of post-colonial and patriarchal oppression, for instance, represents what Tyrus Miller calls 'a detour into the political regions that high modernism had managed to view from the distance of a closed car', thus complicating enduring literary histories of modernism as a movement dedicated to aesthetic form.[74] And Dorothy Richardson, it should be said, used experimental techniques like stream-of-consciousness narration to represent what she understood as a specifically 'feminine prose'[75] or feminine consciousness, so that her modernist aesthetic did not so much transcend gender as it did double down on it, a prototype of the kind of writing Hélène Cixous would later identify with the essentialist concept of 'écriture féminine'. Meanwhile, authors like Evelyn Waugh and May Sinclair, popular writers typically associated with the middle-brow, now play a role, if only a small one, in the story of British modernism.[76]

Nevertheless, it is true that the image of each group is distinguished by an aesthetic commitment to either embodiment or transcendence, where the contours of gender are either solid and centred, or elastic and peripheral, and it is my contention that the critical apparatus surrounding Spark at the peak of her career has, by implication, placed her fiction in line with the kind of androgynous modernism championed by Woolf and other women modernists (epitomised in novels like *Orlando* or Gilman's *Herland*), in which the utopian urge towards genderlessness takes priority over the concrete experiences of womanhood. It is telling, for instance, that Robert Hosmer follows up a question to Spark about how she perceives 'her relationship to great writers of the past' with the prompt, 'What about Virginia Woolf?'.[77] And if it was not already obvious, Bradbury betrays an obvious allegiance to the modernist high-brow, tracing what he perceives as Spark's trajectory from light and clever comedy to serious art: 'Muriel Spark has always struck me as an interesting and decidedly amusing

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[73] Namara Smith, 'How the Other Elizabeth Taylor Reconciled Family Life and Art', *New Yorker*, 16 June 2015 <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/how-the-other-elizabeth-taylor-reconciled-family-life-and-art> [accessed 25 August 2023].
[74] Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism:Politics, Fiction and the Arts Between the World Wars* (University of California Press, 1999), p. 13.
[75] Susan Gevirtz, 'Into Ellipse: Geographic and Grammatic Disappearance in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*', *Women's Studies*, 26.5 (1997), pp. 523–533 (p. 531).
[76] Karl, 'The Novel in the Economy', p. 47.
[77] Hosmer, 'Interview with Spark', p. 153.

writer, but not always a particularly distinguished one; yet something has been happening in her recent work that makes her increasingly approximate to that condition'.[78] Bradbury is at pains to canonise Spark in these terms, admiring the 'high aesthetic achievement and poise' of her recent novels.[79]

While these positive commentaries happily ignore the woman in Spark as a woman writer, negative reactions to Spark's work *highlight* the extent to which the woman in her writing is apparently missing. Carole Jones, for instance, notes how critics, 'mostly chaps', have characterised Spark as 'steely', 'aloof', 'brusque', 'capricious' and 'queer', descriptions Jones interprets as 'commenting on or targeting Spark's womanliness, or, rather, her lack in that area'.[80] For Jones these commentaries draw attention to Spark's 'refusal to comply with the expectations, in various periods, of the "woman writer"'.[81] But that non-conformity is conducive to, indeed necessary for, being seen as a producer of the type of transcendent art Hansen associates with modernist literature and the canon at large.

Yet, at the same time, as Stannard makes clear in his biography, femininity was an important, indeed constitutive, part of Spark's sense of self. When Stannard mentions Spark's secretarial work for William Small (of women's department store William Small & Sons), he draws attention to Spark's comments, published in *Curriculum Vitae*, on the women who managed the company's accounts:

> Miss Ritchie, the middle-aged chief accountant, 'was by far the most sexy. In fact, she was rather vulgar and told dirty jokes. For that alone, I fairly despised her, and was merely astonished at the abnegation of all femininity in the other three'.[82]

Spark is disarmingly (and controversially) upfront about her disapproval of the different ways these women fail to embrace femininity. Though comic and somewhat snobbish, Spark's comments suggest a weariness with certain feminisms. Spark admires Miss Ritchie as the 'most sexy' before implying that she was perhaps *too* sexy (sexual and sexualised to a fault) and therefore vulgar, while the peculiar but deliberate phrasing used to describe the other three women – 'abnegation of all femininity' – implies, provocatively, a refusal of the *rights*

[78] Bradbury, 'Spark's Fingernails', p. 241.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Carole Jones, 'Muriel Spark's Waywardness', in *The Crooked Dividend: Essays on Muriel Spark* ed. by Gerard Carruthers and Helen Stoddart, Association for Scottish Literature Occasional Papers, 24 (Scottish Literature International, 2022), pp. 25–42 (p. 25).
[81] Ibid.
[82] Martin Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2010), p. 41.

to femininity. Consequently, Spark's identification with a particular, prudish and feminised version of womanhood comes across as decidedly stereotypical. 'She made no apology for loving designer dresses, jewellery, poise, charm'.[83] But Stannard suggests the word 'sexy' 'recurs as a positive term in her autobiography', evoking 'a sense of those women (and men) who enjoy the power of their sexuality as an art form, as performance'.[84]

There is a close affinity, Stannard detects, between Spark's conception of the feminine and her own writing: 'Elegance in clothes, as in writing, was for her the perfect control of aesthetic expression; it was rhythm, style'.[85] That 'perfect control' begins to waver, however, when the personal and the literary overlap in the marketing of her fiction; Stannard reports that 'when Penguin described the pieces in their 1966 *Voices at Play* as "playful, feminine, catty"' Spark's US agent sent 'a stiff note: "Muriel says she may be all of these things, but the stories certainly are not."'[86] Performing the 'woman' in 'woman writer' is therefore a delicate balancing act, for as Martin McQuillan says, 'even an explicit disavowal of feminism does not stop Spark being a female writer in a man's world'.[87] Much of Spark's fiction, of course, in its own oblique way, is precisely about 'being a female writer in a man's world', and it is to this dynamic that I now turn, starting with a theory on Spark's employment of otherness.

'My own shadowy way': Spark's Dark Frame of Reference

The woman writer is a recurring trope in Spark's fiction, as is writing itself. Assumptions that underpin and sustain concepts like 'woman' (what a woman *should* or *ought* to be) and 'writing' (namely, its depiction of reality and the inevitability of plot) are routinely satirised and undermined by Spark, but the question of women's writing in Spark's fiction – or of the relationship between gender and writing – merits further exploration. Contrary to some celebrations of Spark's many writerly heroines, the woman writer in Spark is not a straightforward figure of liberal feminism;[88] instead she belongs to the tradition of the

[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid., p. 330.
[87] Martin McQuillan, 'Introduction: "I Don't Know Anything About Freud": Muriel Spark Meets Contemporary Criticism', in *Theorising Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. by Martin McQuillan (Palgrave, 2001), pp. 1–32 (p. 8).
[88] See Judy Sproxton, *The Women of Muriel Spark* (Constable, 1992).

Gothic, writing from a place of darkness, where identity is disturbed, unsettled, and almost haunted. A look at Spark's flirtations with gothic imagery – specifically, a motif I am calling Spark's 'dark frame of reference' – provides a series of suggestive metaphors for understanding the counter-intuitive and subversive perspectives from which Spark's characters see and engage with the world. It is from this vision, through a glass darkly, that Spark negotiates the complex relationship between writing and gender.

Loitering with Intent, for instance, opens in 1950 with the protagonist, woman writer Fleur Talbot, composing a poem in a graveyard. So far so gothic. Later in the novel we find out that a graveyard scene is incorporated into Fleur's novel, *Warrender Chase*, completed before Fleur's time in the graveyard. When Fleur reads out some passages from *Warrender Chase* (in which a character, Marjorie, appears suspiciously cool about Warrender's death) to her friend Dottie, the latter shows concern for the motives behind Marjorie's reaction, saying, '"Marjorie seems to be dancing on Warrender's grave"', an image Fleur borrows and literalises 'for that scene, towards the end of the book, where Marjorie dances on Warrender's grave'.[89] In the graveyard, where Fleur 'sat on the stone slab of some Victorian grave writing my poem',[90] she does not dance, physically, but makes words dance in poetry, and in the final chapter of *Loitering*, she elaborates on the type of poem she was writing: 'I forget what poem I was writing at the time, but it was probably an exercise in a fixed form, such as a rondeau, triolet or villanelle', and how she found 'the practice of metre and form for their own sake very absorbing and also, all at once, inspiring'.[91] Again in the final chapter, Fleur reveals more of the details of the opening scene in her *Warrender Chase*, including a piece of dialogue that renders the noise of car engines in the form of poetic metre:

> Then I made my character Charlotte go to the window. "I can hear his car coming." Roland says, "No, I'm sure it's Marjorie's car. Warrender's car goes *tum*-te-te-tum. Marjorie's goes tum, tum, *tum*-te-te like this one."[92]

These noises read like fragments of poetic rhythm; '*tum*-te-te-tum' can be figured as a trochee followed by an iamb, 'tum, tum, *tum*-te-te' can be translated as a spondee followed by a dactyl. There is surely an eerie connection between the poetry Fleur writes 'in a fixed

[89] Muriel Spark, *Loitering with Intent* (Polygon, 2018), p. 52.
[90] Ibid. p, 1.
[91] Ibid., p. 151.
[92] Ibid., p. 155.

form' (while sitting on a gravestone), Marjorie's dancing on Warrender's grave, and the unlikely (or all too likely) manifestation of poetic metre in the form of mechanical onomatopoeia within *Warrender Chase*; car engines, dance and poetry are animated – given life – through rhythm, but here they are all tied to death, suggesting that Fleur's writing can be likened to a kind of *danse macabre*.

Indeed when Fleur goes dancing with Wally in a nightclub, the décor alludes to a ghostly present absence: 'We went on to Quaglino's, whose décor then was picture frames without any pictures on the dark walls, and we danced til four in the morning'.[93] This image, of empty or dark frames, is a recurring motif in Spark's work. In *The Comforters*, published 24 years earlier than *Loitering*, the nightclub Caroline and Laurence visit shares the same decoration: 'Round the walls of the Pylon, so far as the walls could be discerned, were large gilt picture frames. Inside each, where the picture should be, was a square of black velvet'.[94] 'The black velvet is death', says the speaker of Spark's surrealist poem from 2002, 'What?', in a bid to dissect a dream that involves 'A black velvet embroidered handbag full of medium-sized carrots | All of which said "Good morning" in one voice'.[95] In the same year, and in response to the theft of many of Jardine's paintings,[96] Spark wrote a poem called 'The Empty Space', the first two lines of which describe how 'A square space on the wall | marks the memory of that picture'.[97] As an ode to the stolen art the poem itself marks the memory of the picture, describing both a painting and the labour behind its production. Fittingly, the poem inhabits a kind of insistent darkness: the artwork is 'painted at night, stolen at night, | worked on at night'; it depicts 'Castel St. Angelo | in her night picture, gleaming with / history-in-darkness'; 'the artist's home was full of midnight', 'She painted til dawn, having thought | to herself one night'.[98]

There is one instance where enjambment is tied to a phrase aligned to the right of the page, drawing attention to two words:

worked on at night, in Rome, from the

[93] Ibid., p. 80.
[94] Muriel Soark, *The Comforters* (Polygon, 2017), p. 86.
[95] Muriel Spark, *Complete Poems* (Carcanet, 2015), p. 10.
[96] Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, p. 525.
[97] Spark, *Complete Poems*, p. 43.
[98] Ibid. To go full circle, the ancient Roman building depicted in the painting, Castel St. Angelo, once housed Benvenuto Cellini as a prisoner, the artist whose autobiography Fleur cites admiringly in *Loitering*.

artist's window.[99]

Several windows occupy this highlighted signifier: the physical window in the room by which the artist worked at night, the square painting as a window onto a night-time scene, but also the enigmatic and imaginative window of artistic vision itself. As much as the poem laments the loss of an artwork, it also sees the emptiness of the 'empty space', by virtue of its being the subject of poetry, as a compelling and seductive condition of possibility. Read outside the context of the burglary, the poem takes on new meaning as a meditation on the transitional phase between the completion and beginning of work.

For instance, though the artist, referred to in the third-person, and the speaker, using the first-person, are supposed to represent Jardine and Spark, respectively, the poem also plays with this distinction when the speaker describes how 'She painted til dawn, having thought | to herself one night, I will paint | that scene', and similarly in the lines 'How I remember Castel St Angelo | in her night picture', thereby hinting that the 'I' and 'she/her' may be one and the same. In this scenario, 'she/her' represents an earlier version of the 'I', a version whose identity is attached to the finished and lost artwork. The final lines, which initially read like a frustrated sigh for a lost object, can now be seen as a deeper articulation of the artist's relationship to their art: 'My honest close companion on the wall: | It is all over now. The thieves came by night'.[100] What is 'all over now' is the closeness of the artist to the art; once gone out into the world, it is no longer *hers*. In this context thieves may be curators, collectors, dealers, gallerists, the public; those who inevitably interpret, reframe, recontextualise – in a word, steal – from the 'artist's window'.

At the same time, what if the speaker is addressing not the missing painting, but the empty space itself? What if the speaker is instead welcoming back that empty space, as if to say, the worst is over? After all, the square space on the wall marks the *memory* of the picture, which includes the hidden process of its development, that 'history-in-darkness' that the poem attempts to recreate and conserve. Of the painting we learn that the artist 'patiently full-heartedly pursued it | and did it completely', and perhaps what is being acknowledged here is not so much the grief of work lost, but the exciting potentiality of work yet to begin.

[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

The dark frame of a different kind of 'artist's window' materialises in *The Hothouse by the East River*.[101] Paul worries over his wife, Elsa, owing to her quiet and mysterious obsession with the view from the east window of their upper-floor Manhattan apartment: '[…] it is evening and her husband has come in. She sits by the window, speaking to him […] but looking away – out across the East River as if he were standing in the air beyond the window pane';[102] 'She is looking for something out there. The sun has gone down';[103] 'There is no beam of light coming in from the East River or the sky. But she goes on looking and receiving'.[104] When, exasperated, Paul asks Elsa why she sits by '"the bloody window all day"', Elsa makes a point of correcting him: '"Not all day […] I sit here mostly late afternoon, mostly in the evening"'.[105] Elsa's night watch is interpreted by Paul as a form of madness: '"I must pull myself together. She is mad"'; 'He speaks again, meaning to […] fetch her back to reason, presuming she is departing from reason once more'; he dismisses her conversation as 'the cunning answers of the crazy…'.[106] Of course, when it is revealed that the narrative takes place in a liminal kind of purgatory created by Paul in denial of his and his wife's death from a V-2 bomb, it transpires that Elsa's supposed departure from reason actually demonstrates her knowing foresight – the hothouse she spies from the window betrays an awareness of her and Paul's fate.

It is Paul, as well as Elsa's therapist, Garven, who are deluded in their attempts to pry Elsa away from her shadowy 'cloud of unknowing'.[107] When Paul observes, gazing out the window, that there is '"a lot of mist this evening"', Elsa replies, '"Really?" […] as if she cannot see for herself the heat-fog that has lowered over the city of New York all day'.[108] That Elsa 'cannot see *for herself* the heat-fog' hints that she sees *through* the obfuscating mist of Paul's fantasy, but the phrase 'as if' also implies that she may well see the mist, but from a different perspective; Elsa sees *with* the mist, embracing a lack of clarity and a predilection for the transitional, in direct opposition to the systemic, black-and-white thinking of those who attempt to 'therapeutise' all lived experience.[109] In this respect, Elsa's window represents a similar state of potentiality as the aforementioned poem's 'artist's window', and like the painting, Elsa's

[101] As does the imagery of the *danse macabre* when the novel reaches its surrealist denouement, as when Elsa quips 'This deadly body of mine can dance, too.' Muriel Spark, *The Hothouse by the East River* (Polygon, 2018), p. 118.
[102] Ibid., p. 1.
[103] Ibid., p. 6.
[104] Ibid., p. 11.
[105] Ibid., p. 10.
[106] Ibid., p. 5, 6.
[107] Ibid., p. 136.
[108] Ibid., p. 24.
[109] Ibid., p.126.

life is completed and stolen (in several senses: through murder, through Paul's manufactured fantasy, and through the psychoanalytic urge to diagnose and control human behaviour).

Smaller windows, in the form of spectacles, assume the role of the darkened frame in the 1961 short story, 'The Dark Glasses', in which Spark foregrounds vision – figured alternately as sight, perception, imagination – and a lack of vision in a narrative constructed around a dubious optician (or 'ocularist'). Joan, the first-person narrator, recounts her visits to a childhood optician, Basil Simmonds, which includes the latter's inappropriate flirting and sexual advances, a plot to forge his ill mother's will, and attempts to blind his sister, Dorothy (who works with him at the opticians) through the deliberate mishandling of eyedrops. The truth of some of these events, like the forgery and the blinding, is contested by other characters like Joan's aunt and grandmother (which in turn, possibly casts doubt on Basil's licentiousness).

The beginning and end of the story takes place in the future, when Joan is a historian, and coincidentally meets Dr. Gray (whom Joan knew, in childhood, as a general practice doctor, and, later, as a lover to Basil), who has since switched her discipline to psychology, as they stroll the grounds of the summer school at which they are enlisted to lecture. At this meeting, Joan puts on her 'dark glasses', to 'shield my eyes from the sun and conceal my recognition from her eyes'.[110] Dr. Gray converses with Joan about why she became a psychiatrist, citing her husband's 'breakdown' following his sister's removal to a home, and a newfound urge to 'understand the workings of the mind'.[111] Basil's sister, having 'went off her head completely' according to Dr. Gray, had started accusing Basil of maliciously blinding her: 'she said she had seen something that he didn't want her to see, something disreputable. She said he wanted to blind the eye that saw it'.[112] That 'something disreputable' could refer to Basil's treatment of Joan or the attempted forgery. Even when Basil, himself struck with madness at the height of his breakdown, confesses to the blinding, Dr. Gray dismisses his admission, regurgitating psychoanalytic diagnoses to explain (and excuse) Basil's behaviour.

As with *Hothouse*, psychologists are met with the force of Spark's satire, especially when, at the end, Joan boldly states 'you know he's guilty', to which Dr. Gray replies, 'as his wife, I know he's guilty, […] but as a psychiatrist I must regard him as innocent'.[113]

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[110] Muriel Spark, 'The Dark Glasses', in *The Complete Short Stories* (Canongate, 2018), pp. 464–481 (p. 464).
[111] Ibid., p. 480, 481.
[112] Ibid., p. 479.
[113] Ibid., p. 481.

Psychology, for Joan, is seen as an elaborate and misguided (not to mention boring) exercise in obfuscating and complicating the obvious. At one point Joan removes her sunglasses: 'But she didn't recognise me. These fishers of the mind have no eye for outward things'.[114] It is only Joan, with her dark glasses, and Dorothy, the blind woman (an unmediated kind of darkness), who see and understand the horrors of their small town; they inhabit the blind-spots of accepted knowledge rather than the supposed enlightenment of Dr. Gray's 'reason'.[115]

Darkness is welcomed too by Nancy Hawkins in *A Far Cry From Kensington*.[116] 'So great was the noise during the day that I used to lie awake at night listening to the silence. Eventually I fell asleep, contented […] but while I was awake I enjoyed the darkness, thought, memory, sweet anticipations'.[117] Nancy approaches darkness with intention, use: 'Insomnia is not bad in itself. You can lie awake at night and think; the quality of insomnia depends entirely on what you decide to think of'.[118] And while her sleep is 'filled with soundlessness', she *listens* to the lack of sound: 'At night I lay awake in the darkness, listening to the silence'.[119] To hear silence is the audio equivalent of a frame without a picture; both frame a nothingness, but by virtue of framing it becomes material, visible – a present absence. As if to confirm as much, Nancy then explains her 'night-watch' with reference to the dark canvas of a television screen: 'You can sit peacefully in front of a blank television set, just watching nothing; and sooner or later you can make your own programme much better than the mass product'.[120] Like in *Hothouse* and 'The Dark Glasses', the dark frame is presented as an alternative and almost superior ('much better than the mass product') way of seeing.

Indeed, the bulk of the novel hinges on Nancy's adventures in the quirky world of publishing, and this includes the conniving advances of Hector Bartlett, a sycophantic and parasitic literary poseur (and conman) for whom Nancy gives the epithet, '*pisseur de copie*', 'a urinator of journalistic copy'.[121] Bartlett is representative of the 'mass product' – writing as

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[114] Ibid., p. 479.
[115] Ibid., p. 481.
[116] And another reference to the *danse macabre*, as when William Todd dances with Nancy under the 'large bright moon': 'He took my hand and put his other arm around my large waist as far as it could reach, and danced me all over the lawn to the sound of the music, he in his cotton pyjamas and I, Mrs. Hawkins, in my black lace party dress'. Muriel Spark, *A Far Cry From Kensington* (Polygon, 2017), p. 56, 57.
[117] Ibid., p. 1.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid., p. 39.

he does gossipy articles for 'popular papers', attempting to adapt and capitalise on novels for the silver screen, promoting snake oil pseudoscience like radionics – which Nancy, in her various editorial roles, attempts to thwart. Nancy's narrative, recounted as it is during the evening while she lies awake staring into the darkness and listening to the soundlessness, can be interpreted as her 'own programme', and therefore perhaps not entirely true or accurate, but a kind of shadow version of the truth which provides an alternative perspective to the 'copy' that produces the glitz and glamour of the publishing industry, typified by Bartlett's own romanticised memoir, '*Farewell, Leicester Square*'.[122]

The 'small black box' from which one operates the power of radionics – and in Bartlett's case, the malevolent urge to control – requires the physical properties, like a 'piece of hair or blood-smear', [123]of the person targeted. Similarly, Bartlett's writing, and by extension a certain male tradition of 'literary matter', is represented, bodily, as being 'vomited', 'urinated' and 'sweated'.[124] Juxtaposed against the black box of Nancy's figurative 'blank television set', where writing assumes a kind of agency beyond the limits of 'journalistic copy', Spark reconceives the writing of her male rivals in the literary world as primitive, vulgar and, in a move that reverses a typically sexist charge, hopelessly biological.

The fury with which Nancy rails against her male counterpart can be understood as a straightforward expression of indignant feminism, especially when the novel draws upon Spark's own experience of the male-dominated literary scene in London, with Bartlett partly modelled on Spark's former literary companion and colleague, Derek Stanford. Indeed most of the texts mentioned in this section have something to say about the imbalance of power between men and women in one way or another, and the 'dark frame of reference' could symbolise an undercurrent of radical feminism in Spark, but evidence in the archive complicates this otherwise easy relationship between Spark, feminism and gender.

The vexed issue of woman translators for Spark – her preference for men over women – demonstrates an urge to downplay femininity as a defining component of her work, but at the same time it betrays, ironically, just how important gender is to the presentation of that work. It is here, where presence and absence coexist in constructions of the gendered self that the richness of Spark's dark frame of reference finds full expression as a kind of queerness, with gender figured as potentiality, alterity, ways of seeing; essentially enigmatic, gender

[122] Ibid., p. 49.
[123] Ibid., p. 70.
[124] Ibid., 40.

haunts Spark's fiction like an unanswered question or an unfinished script, loitering with intent like the process of writing itself.

The Writer as Gender Enigma in *Loitering with Intent*

When Fleur Talbot declares 'how wonderful it feels to be an artist and a woman in the 20th century',[125] her blithe confidence – what Judy Sproxton celebrates as Fleur's '*joie de vivre*' and 'essential independence'[126] – disguises a central tension and ambiguity. Why, for instance, does Fleur separate the words 'artist' and 'woman'? Instead of 'female artist' or 'woman writer', Fleur chooses to place emphasis on both the conditions of being an artist *and* a woman, not allowing either word to qualify the other. At first it signals that Fleur's artistry has little to do with her being a woman, and furthermore that she constructs a hierarchy between the two identities, with 'artist' preceding 'woman'. But this surely begs the question: why mention gender at all? Fleur's womanhood is clearly important, and her otherwise joyful expression – which initially appears as yet another of the narrator's quotable and carefree catch-phrases – contains within it a tension between the urge to conceal gender, on the one hand, and to make it visible, on the other. As we can see with correspondence related to translations of *Loitering with Intent*, Spark herself wrestled with this dilemma.

Spark's worries over the gender of her translators feeds into long-standing discourses and metaphors surrounding the act of translation, theorised as it has been through the lens of sex and gender for centuries. As Pilar Godayol explains, this can be traced back to 17th century France, when '[French critic] Gilles Ménage minted the expression *les belles infidèles* to define the free translations of the classics carried out by Nicolas Perrot D'Ablancourt'.[127] The phrase essentially characterises D'Ablancourt's French translations of ancient Greek classics as beautiful or elegant but inaccurate or unfaithful, and does so by punning on a sexist French adage that assumes women, like translations, 'can be comely or faithful but never both'.[128] For Goyadol, the phrase articulates values of the period relating to faithfulness and property, where men's relations with women and authors with original texts

[125] Spark, *Loitering with Intent*, p.15.
[126] Sproxton, *Women of Muriel Spark*, p. 47.
[127] Pilar Godayol, 'Metaphors, Women and Translation: from Les Belles Infidèles to La Frontera', *Gender and Language*, 7.1 (2013), pp. 97–116 (p. 100).
[128] Mark Polizzoti, *Sympathy for the Traitor: A Translation Manifesto* (MIT Press, 2018), p. 49.

were based on ownership: 'Both in marriage and in translation only a promise of faithfulness can guarantee legitimacy; that is to say, the paternity of the newborn child. What is questioned in both cases is the authority of the father/author'.[129] For her part, Spark goes a step further by linking the well-worn position of *les belles infidèles* with women translators in particular; in other words, Spark is not only uneasy with the potential deviations of translation per se, but distrustful of a specifically feminine (re)writing.

Unfortunately for Spark, some of her international publishers had already commissioned women translators for *Loitering with Intent*, and as a result these publishers were at pains to assure Spark of the quality of their translators. For instance, Jorge Naveiro of Argentinian publishing house Emecé Editores explains that Lucrecia Moneno de Saenz is 'a very good translator and a fervent admirer of Mrs. Spark's work', that 'she was in London when the book appeared and bought a copy there, being already familiar with the novel by the time we asked her to do the translation', and that Saenz has translated other renowned writers like Philip Roth, John Updike and Mary Gordon.[130] Jan Bogaerts of Dutch publisher Elsevier Boekerij is more direct in his response to The Bodley Head's request:

> Unfortunately Mrs. Spark's request reached us too late. One of our best translators, Pauline Moody, is [sic] working on *Loitering with Intent* since the middle of July. We are certain Moody does not 'sweeten' any novel. We shall inform her of the fact that Mrs. Spark does not want any 'sweetening'.[131]

This exchange is the only available evidence that directly cites the nature of Spark's preference, a fear over a possible 'sweetening' of the text.[132] The word is suggestive but not definitive in its meaning: it could mean sweetening Fleur's voice, to be less brusque and snarky; or sweetening Spark's prose in the form of decoration, expansion, a loosening of Spark's angular tautness; or, in a more interventionist sense, a sweetening of the ambiguities and uncertainties of the plot, risking the very thing Fleur rails against in the novel, of 'helping the reader to know whose side they were supposed to be on'.[133] All or some of which is more likely to happen, implies Spark, given a woman's touch.

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[129] Goyadol, 'Metaphors, Women and Translation', p. 99.
[130] TMSA, letter from Jorge Naveiro to Alison Gordon, 28 August 1981, NLS, Acc. 10607/171.
[131] TMSA, letter from Jan Bogaerts to Alison Gordon, 25 August 1981, NLS, Acc. 10607/177.
[132] There is no available correspondence from Spark/Jardine or The Bodley Head that explains her preference in more detail.
[133] Spark *Loitering with Intent*, p. 52.

Spark is misguided and somewhat paranoid in her rather reductive view of women translators but, at the same time, correct to assume that gender, like any other social perspective, will inform the task of translation. Spark's mistake is in assuming 'sweetening' in translation is exclusive to women, or impossible for men.[134] But what this reveals, besides a misunderstanding of the nuances of translation, is that gender – especially in dialogue with 'the woman writer' – is important for *Loitering with Intent* (and by extension, all of Spark's work). What Spark fears in translation, the risk of 'sweetening', is a shift towards rigidity, in which the ambiguity of Spark's gendered creatives (an ambiguity borne of, exacerbated by and navigated through the role and identity of the 'artist') is resolved and fixed.

For Lewis MacLeod, Fleur understands her status as an artist or writer 'not so much as a talent or career, but as an elevated mode of being'.[135] MacLeod's argument is drawn in favour of seeing Fleur as a sinister figure of omniscient power (and his analysis of surveillance and privacy is certainly compelling), but I want to show that while writing is a 'mode of being' for Fleur, it is far from 'elevated'; Fleur's artistic method and way of life (which seem increasingly interchangeable) is profoundly dialogical, and she says as much early in the novel: 'The process by which I created my characters was instinctive, the sum of my whole experience of others and of my own *potential self*; and so it always has been'.[136] This writerly reflection could be written by Bakhtin as much as by Spark – Fleur's self is 'potential' precisely because of her 'whole experience of others', and the text *Loitering with Intent*, which acts as autobiography in a novel about autobiography, uses the development of narrative and character to show the fictional construction of selves.

In one of Fleur's many meditations on fiction, for instance, she compares (and collapses) the task of literary invention and biographical reportage: 'In a novel the author invents characters and arranges them in convenient order. Now that I come to write biographically I have to tell of whatever actually happened and whoever naturally turns up'.[137] The joke, of course, is that Fleur *is* an invention and her narrative is arranged in a convenient order. And the use of the word 'biographically' instead of 'autobiographically' hints at the notion Fleur is writing a narrative about 'Fleur', suggesting that all autobiography is, in some sense, inescapably fictional (inasmuch as autobiography relies on the shaping of

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[134] C. K. Scott Moncrieff's acclaimed translation of Proust – the version Spark read and admired – has since been criticised for its florid prose and twee Englishness. Is it not too a victim of 'sweetening'?
[135] Lewis MacLeod, 'Matters of Care and Control: Surveillance, Omniscience, and Narrative Power in *The Abbess of Crewe* and *Loitering with Intent*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 54.3 (2008), pp. 574–594 (p. 585).
[136] Spark, *Loitering with Intent*, p. 14, emphasis mine.
[137] Ibid., p. 41.

narrative). But it is through that very slipperiness – between the 'actually happened' and 'convenient order' – that gender makes itself both known and unknown in Spark.

Consider one of the many altercations between Fleur and Dottie. When Fleur reads out some passages from her work-in-progress novel *Warrender Chase* to Dottie she finds them 'far too cold' and is uncomfortable with the lack of signposting for 'what the reader should think', and consequently says, 'there's something a bit harsh about you, Fleur. You're not really womanly, are you?'.[138] That Dottie's remarks on Fleur's womanliness are prompted by the latter's writing demonstrates, quite literally, the connection between gender and language, and furthermore that the ambiguity of the writing speaks to an ambiguity of gender.

Fleur's reply, which begins 'to show her I was a woman […]', swapping Dottie's softer adjective ('womanly') for a solid noun ('a woman'), suggests both the level of offense Fleur takes (the accusation of not being a woman) but also the level of irony with which Fleur interprets and responds to the comment (the comic notion of proving her identity as a woman, as with an ID card). 'I was really annoyed by this. To show her I was a woman I tore up the pages of my novel and stuffed them into the wastepaper basket, burst out crying and threw her out, roughly and noisily'.[139] As a satirical joke, it is straightforward: Spark parodies the emotional or hysterical conception of women implied by Dottie's remark through Fleur's exaggerated conformity to it. But at the same time, Fleur does take umbrage at Dottie's comment ('I was *really* annoyed'), and the dramatic destruction of a section of her novel – a symbolic erasure of that which threatens her normative womanliness – overcompensates for a perceived lack of femininity, and so her performance (hinted at with 'show' but confirmed as such when she recovers and reassembles the fragments of writing the next day) is serious as well as parodic; a part of Fleur wants to be affirmed as a woman (or indeed a particular type of woman) and fears the notion of stepping entirely out of bounds.

Earlier in the novel Fleur makes the same assessment of Beryl Tims: 'It seemed that as she was being overlooked as a woman she was determined to behave as a man. Naturally she succeeded in drawing everyone's attention to herself, with her clatter and thumping, I forgot what about'.[140] Beryl's womanliness is also put into question (or worse, barely registered at all), but instead of acting the part (like Fleur) Beryl apparently relinquishes ('abnegates', perhaps) femininity altogether. But this is from Fleur's perspective, and her derision is palpable. As such, Fleur's later outburst against Dottie loses some of its irony and

[138] Ibid., p. 52.
[139] Ibid., p.53.
[140] Ibid., p. 27–28.

becomes instead an echo of and reaction against her earlier disgust at Beryl; Fleur is decidedly *not* 'determined to behave as a man'.

Note also that the action of the two women whose gender performance apparently shifts to the masculine and the feminine – Beryl and Fleur, respectively – is described in similar terms: where Fleur throws Dottie out 'roughly and noisily', Beryl draws attention to herself 'with her clatter and thumping'. Although they are located in different, and differently gendered, contexts, there is nonetheless an implicit mockery of essentialised gender norms in these descriptions (that heightened shows of femininity and masculinity draw on shared signifiers). For Fleur, however, whose view of Beryl anticipates and informs her own reaction to the same charge (a provocative kind of interpellation), gender norms *are* meaningful and therefore difficult, perhaps even painful, to resist.

As a writer, Fleur is constantly observing and absorbing the language, dialect, and behaviours of those around her. 'Many of the rich […] still chose to buy Utility, bestowing upon it […] the inevitable phrase "perfectly all right". I have always been on the listen-in for those sort of phrases'.[141] Most encounters with other characters are for Fleur a part of her 'process of artistic apprehension'.[142] She 'enjoyed' Sir Quentin's words, while Beryl Tims 'already fed my poetic vigilance' and Dottie confirms 'a character forming in my own mind'.[143] Indeed some of Fleur's relationships appear decidedly transactional, as when Sir Quentin bestows upon Fleur 'his *gift* to me of the finger-tips of his hands touching each other', or when, after Fleur gives her brooch to Beryl, 'the glint in her eyes, the gasp of her big thick-lipped mouth, *rewarded* me'.[144] But Fleur's 'poetic vigilance', a heightened form of everyday interpretation, also helps form the character of 'Fleur' by identifying what Fleur is not: 'I learned a lot in my life from Dottie, by her teaching me some precepts which I could usefully reject'.[145] This is especially so when it comes to gender, as Fleur abstracts women like Dottie and Beryl into types against which to claim her own sense of selfhood as a woman.

For instance, Fleur sardonically reduces the two women to a category of woman – the 'English Rose'. The label is given with a heavy dose of irony; to Fleur these women are meek, 'simpering', overly sensitive and too concerned about what men think.[146] These

[141] Ibid., p. 6.
[142] Ibid., p. 8.
[143] Ibid., p. 11, 15, 18.
[144] Ibid., p. 8, 16.
[145] Ibid., p. 18.
[146] Ibid., p. 15.

women, according to Fleur, attach themselves to an archetype that eludes them: 'Not that they resembled English roses, far from it; but they were English roses, I felt, in their own minds'.[147] Fleur mocks Beryl and Dottie not only for idealising a specific and restrictive image of English femininity (natural, pretty, virtuous) but for failing to live up to it. Soon after, a couple of suspiciously coincidental details confirm Fleur's theorisation. Beryl tells Fleur, 'I always get admired for the colour of my lipstick. It's called English Rose', while Fleur finds a perfume bottle in Dottie's bathroom also called 'English Rose'.[148] While these 'coincidences' allude to Fleur's writing process and progress (the uncanny way by which the humans inspiring much of Fleur's work are simultaneously the very characters they are supposed to have inspired), it also draws attention, generally, to the material embodiment of femininity. But more specifically, the shared name between product and 'type' suggests a uniformity or coherence between performance and reception – at least, 'in their own minds'.

Fleur, on the other hand, is not so settled, and in fact makes a point of rejecting the potential English Roseness suggested by her own name at the beginning of the novel: 'Fleur was the name hazardously bestowed at birth, as always in these cases before they know what you are going to turn out like'.[149] But in what can be identified as a Sparkian 'nevertheless' moment, Fleur comes to terms with her nominative destiny, citing a comical list of names whose personalities clash rather than cohere with their Dickensian shorthand:

> Not that I looked too bad, it was only that Fleur wasn't the right name, and yet it was mine as are the names of those melancholy Joys, those timid Victors, the inglorious Glorias and materialistic Angelas one is bound to meet in the course of a long life of change and infiltration.[150]

As with 'English Rose', naming invests meaning in the people or objects so named, and Fleur's reckoning with the imposed meanings of a name – Fleur 'wasn't the right name', and yet it was hers – demonstrates, at the novel's opening, her conflicting feelings about the normative parameters governing her gendered self, where 'Fleur'/flower belongs ('it was mine') and does not belong ('wasn't […] right') simultaneously.[151] Furthermore, that last

[147] Ibid., p. 15.
[148] Ibid., p. 16, 17.
[149] Ibid., p.3.
[150] Ibid.
[151] The name Fleur is also French, and thus taps into a network of associations quite distinct from the English symbolism of the rose.

word, 'infiltration', articulates Fleur's resistance to her floral namesake in a disarmingly ambivalent way – change figured as insidious, a betrayal or violation.

Indeed *Loitering with Intent* highlights as much as it satirises the significance of surfaces. Sir Quentin is an obvious caricature of snobbishness and vanity with his obsession over titles and honours. Of the cup from which Sir Quentin drinks his tea Fleur suspects 'he really believed that the Wedgewood cup […] derived its value from the fact that the social system had recognised the Wedgwood family, not from the china that they had exerted themselves to make'.[152] Fleur is memorable for the way she confidently flouts and mocks the stuffy – superficial – social systems surrounding her. For example, when Dottie confides in Fleur about her husband Leslie's new romantic relations with a man using the euphemism 'the love that dares not speak its name', Fleur replies, baldly, '"A homosexual affair," […] daring to speak its name somewhat to Dottie's added stress'.[153] In this naming – which appeals to another, and specifically scientific, category or 'type' – Fleur cuts through Dottie's prim sensibility, but later in this exchange Fleur pushes back against a 'type' levelled against her when Dottie explains how she felt differently about Fleur's affair with Leslie:

> 'I didn't suffer so much when I knew you were his mistress, Fleur, because –'
> I interrupted her to cavil at the word 'mistress' which I pointed out had quite different connotations from those proper to my independent liaison with poor Leslie.[154]

While Fleur's intervention can be read as a feminist rebuttal to the old-fashioned and sexist trope of the 'mistress' as a subservient and deviant partner in the relations between married men and single women (the joke being, from Dottie's perspective, that this kind of affair is at least traditional and proper), it can also be read more generally as an example of Fleur's resistance to the constrictive power of stereotyping, of being absorbed into a trope with limited narrative possibilities (hence the linguistic reference to 'connotations'). Near the end of the novel, however, when Fleur takes a weekend holiday to a cabin in Marlow with her casual boyfriend, Wally, she finds herself cast in a similar role after encountering the traces of another lover in Wally's uncleaned cabin. It is worth quoting Fleur's reaction in full, with its lingering and detailed Proustian sentences:

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[152] Ibid., p. 13.
[153] Ibid., p. 39.
[154] Ibid.

> I think what annoyed him [Wally] most was my seeing the evidence of a previous weekend for two. I really didn't mind because the situation itself was a lively one; I do dearly love a turn of events. But I couldn't help wondering who the other girl had been and, observing the mouse-nibbled, greenish crusts of the last breakfast toast on the floor, the black-rimmed green milk in the jug, the two coffee cups and saucers on the draining board, caked with hardened coffee, dry and old, I calculated the age of this evidence; how many weekends ago, and what had I been doing with Wally the weekdays in between? […] The bed was very much crumpled for two, and, as if by a competent stage manager, Wally's blue cotton pyjama-top hung on the bed-post while the trousers lay, neat and unfolded, on top of the chest of drawers. A near empty bottle of whisky and two glasses, one lipstick-stained, were decidedly overdone from the point-of-view of scenic production, but they were there.[155]

Fleur finds herself either as another 'mistress' or indeed in Dottie's position, as a cuckold (to use another term traditionally used to blame only women in the event of unfaithfulness). It is not explained who the 'the other girl had been', leaving Fleur unsure of her relation to Wally's other partner – 'how many weekends ago, and what had I been doing with Wally the weekdays in between?' The material trace of the 'previous weekend for two', described meticulously, demonstrates Fleur's writerly curiosity ('I do dearly love a turn of events'), but also the extent to which she feels like a character in another's story, with the scenario appearing like the work of a 'competent stage manager', the empty whisky bottle and two glasses 'overdone from the point-of-view of scenic production'. Fleur's writing (of *Warrender Chase*) may exert undue influence on the narrative of *Loitering with Intent* – and for MacLeod this shows Fleur is 'every bit as egocentric (if not as destructive)'[156] as other controlling Spark narrators – but it is naïve to disregard the moments, like here, where Fleur's purported control is taken away from her, and she is no longer the transcendent creator but instead beholden to another 'competent stage manager' as a player.

But at the same time, Fleur is not distressed by this possibility; by contrast she 'really didn't mind because the situation itself was a lively one'. Lively as in exciting, strange or mysterious – in other words, unexpected, novel, narratively open. It is closure, in the end, that

[155] Ibid., p. 153.
[156] MacLeod, 'Matters of Care and Control', p. 586.

Fleur despises above everything else. Fleur's writing, for instance, is always geared towards the future; though the novel is primarily focussed around *Warrender Chase*, Fleur regularly mentions and longs to work on projects yet to be completed: 'I had sat up many nights working on *Warrender Chase* and already had a theme for another novel at the back of my mind', 'I was also well ahead with my second novel, *All Souls' Day*, and had already planned my third, *The English Rose*'.[157] Mark Currie has written about how 'future acts of writing and unwritten futures operate in a kind of system with contrasting images' in Spark's work, where finished writing – 'futures for which there already exists a complete and written version' – competes with 'a whole spectrum of intermediate positions or texts which exists in a state between the already complete and the yet to be written'.[158] Fleur's writing, of course, attaches to the future in a literal way, prefiguring or producing the events which make up the narrative of *Loitering with Intent*, but the continuousness of Fleur's writing, the way it inhabits the liminal space Currie identifies, speaks also to the continuous and unending development of character/self. Consider one of Fleur's poems, 'Metamorphoses', the first verse of which she reads out:

> This is the pain that sea anemones bear
> in the fear of aberration but wilfully
> aspiring to respire in another,
> more difficult way, and turning
> flower into animal interminably.[159]

Sea anemones are forms of marine life, often attached to rock, that resemble flowers. They are covered in petal-like tentacles which are used to sting and paralyze prey, to be consumed by a mouth at the centre. It is certainly a rather obscure vehicle for a metaphor, but in the context of the novel and especially for Fleur's sense of self, the sea anemone articulates a melancholy yet hopeful meditation on change. Fleur cites sea anemones because of their dual identity as pretty and striking flowers of the sea, and deceptive and deadly animals. Their 'pain', a 'fear of aberration', derives from the coexistence of two seemingly oppositional

[157] Spark, *Loitering with Intent*, p. 56, 152.
[158] Mark Currie, 'Already and Not Yet Written: Unfinished Acts of Writing in the Novels of Muriel Spark', in *The Crooked Dividend*, ed. by Carruthers and Stoddart, pp. 180–203 (p. 82).
[159] Ibid., p. 18.

conditions, and the insistent pull of one into another, 'wilfully | aspiring to respire in another, | more difficult way', from 'flower into animal interminably'. The last word, 'interminably', enacts the friction of the metamorphosis with its jumbled multisyllabic awkwardness, but, at the same time, it rhymes with and helps match the number of syllables of the second line; 'aspiring to respire' confers a similar effect in reverse, where an otherwise pleasing rhyme is offset and undone by its closeness ('Too feeble. Bad sounding', as Leslie claims). The verse aspires towards harmony, but, like Fleur, chooses a 'more difficult way'.

Like Fleur's earlier reflections on her namesake, the poem feeds into the idea that Fleur sees herself as wilfully *other*, at least compared to the feminine associations of flowers. To be 'animal', in Fleur's case, signals something other than delicacy, elegance or submissiveness. But the last line, taken on its own, sees 'flower' used as a verb rather than a noun: 'flower into animal interminably'.[160] In this reading the transformation into 'animal' is figured as progression, a natural blooming, a mature development, and as such implies a sense of inevitability if not necessarily an end point; Fleur flowers indeed, but interminably.

A corollary of Fleur's continuous flowering is that it is incompatible with the traditional notion of becoming settled, indeed happy. Carole Jones, in her essay about Spark's 'waywardness', which situates Spark's work 'in a discourse which is not entirely oppositional but aptly describes her askew sensibility', cites Sarah Ahmed's theory on the construction of happiness and the imperatives to be happy in particular ways: 'Ahmed argues that to refuse happiness or refuse to be made happy or hopeful in the "right way" is to occupy a difficult position'.[161] In her genealogy of historical models of happiness Ahmed creates and thinks through what she calls the 'unhappiness archives', in which she traces people's, namely women's, 'resistance to the various hegemonic regulatory effects of happiness', such as the 'happy housewife'.[162] In doing so Ahmed levels a critique at 'the commands and injunctions of the contemporary "happiness turn" and dominance of "positive psychology" from the point of view of those excluded or who exclude themselves'.[163] According to Jones, the critical edge in Spark's fiction, its waywardness, is sharpened by just such a resistance to the 'regulatory effects of happiness'.

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[160] The poem, in the fictional world of *Loitering with Intent*, is unpublished and has been 'rejected eight times', but it is taken from a poem Spark did publish under a different title, 'Flower into Animal' (which emphasises the verbal form of 'flower'). It is also therefore a perfect example of a Spark text that 'exists in a state between the already complete and the yet to be written'.
[161] Jones, 'Muriel Spark's Waywardness', p. 25, 31.
[162] Ibid. 31.
[163] Ibid.

In *Loitering*, for instance, Spark provocatively contrasts the idea of an interesting and fulfilling life with the conventional ideal of happiness. When Wally urges Fleur to quit her job with Sir Quentin, stressing that she would 'be happier', Fleur pauses over the conditions of the happiness Wally foresees and decides to keep the job: 'I preferred to be interested as I was than happy as I might be. I wasn't sure that I so much wanted to be happy, but I knew I had to follow my nature'.[164] What Fleur implies is that the concept of happiness, which is always directed towards the future ('happy as I might be'), is predicated, as Ahmed argues, on one's 'proximity to a social ideal', and for Fleur, as a woman in mid-century Britain, this means marriage, motherhood, housewifery.[165] When Beryl asks if Fleur will marry, Fleur replies, 'I want to write. Marriage would interfere'.[166] Beryl protests by suggesting the two can coexist, 'you […] could write poetry after the children had gone to bed', at which Fleur only smiles in response, disdainful of the implication that her writing is a trifling after-thought.[167]

But the notion that marriage interferes is not only a criticism of old-fashioned sexual politics; Fleur, and Spark, see marriage – understood as a major step towards that enduring model of happiness – as a symbol of closed narratives, of being written (absorbed into a dominant consensus reality), rather than the one writing. It is in this sense that, at the end of the novel when Fleur is writing in the present during the 1970s, Dottie accuses Fleur of 'wriggling out of real life, unlike herself' (Dottie having been 'divorced and married so many times I forget what her name is now'),[168] because Fleur commits to the unreality of fiction as a practice and as a way of life, inhabiting the shadowy – ambiguous, liminal, unsettled – styles of being excluded and discredited by the cult of happiness; Fleur is not happy, but she *is* 'rejoicing'.[169]

[164] Spark, *Loitering with Intent*, p. 81.
[165] Jones, 'Muriel Spark's waywardness', p. 31.
[166] Spark, *Loitering with Intent*, p. 15.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid., p. 167.
[169] Ibid.

Conclusion: Creativity Deconstructed

My aim throughout this project has been to use the Spark archives in aid of answering a series of questions that, at the outset, were determined by a vague understanding of the yet unseen contents of the archive itself. That is, while I was aware of the kind of material I would be looking at (novel manuscripts, correspondence, stray notes) and the kind of research questions I would be asking in response (specific but unfocussed critical sights pointed in the direction of Spark's poetry, her novel-writing, and her experience in the publishing industry) it was not until I got my hands on the stuff of the Spark collections that I knew with greater clarity the kind of research I was conducting, and the kind of writer I was researching. But even then, approaching an archive is no straightforward task; as an object of study the archive provokes as many questions as it does provide answers.

Simon Cooke reflects on his similarly perplexing experience with the 'Muriel Spark Papers' held in the McFarlin Library, toying with a series of questions related to his reading of the manuscript for *A Far Cry From Kensington* where he discovers, amongst other things, a quickly corrected typo in which Spark inadvertently revives a dead character (Wanda Podalok) and a straight diagonal line marked across a blank page:

> Dabbling among Spark's literary remains, I was puzzling over all this in the back of my mind: How to read "WanGreta"? Who, or what, was in control here, and how could one know? How to read the page paradoxically marked blank—observed silence, mark of the unknowable, line in the sand? How to read these archived marks alongside the published novel?[1] (Cooke 106)

Like all literary criticism interpretation is at the core of inquiry, but with research into a literary archive there is an assumption, despite a legacy of New Critical and structuralist rallies against the hermeneutic value of intent, that the gap between reader and author and therefore between interpretation and truth is dramatically reduced. As Lisa Stead says, quoting Carole Gerson, 'literary criticism has wrongly tended to regard "the archive as a neutral zone, untouched by the questions of selection, evaluation and subjectivity that they

[1] Simon Cooke, 'Literary Remains: Muriel Spark, Auto|Biography, and the Archive', *Auto/biography Studies*, 36.1 (2021), pp. 105–137 (p. 106).

apply to their own more self-conscious interpretive activities"'.[2] However, as Cooke goes on to demonstrate, the literary archive, and especially Spark's, complicates the notion of archives as authentic or authoritative sources of knowledge:

> It is intrinsic in the very grammar of the word that "evidence" is dependent on narrative, interpretation, and context: pointing beyond itself via a preposition, evidence is always "of" something other than itself, always concerned with absence as well as presence. Spark's archives are full of these absences and, in being transformed into narrative, something else again is made—like the reconstruction of Wanda from her effects.[3]

The 'something else again' that I have made in the course of the thesis is a portrait, or better yet a map, of Spark's novel writing insomuch as 'novel writing' refers to a more expansive conception of creative practice that encompasses poetry and poetics, theories of the novel, the mechanics of narrative and prose composition, and the necessary branding processes of commercial fiction publishing. To discuss Spark's 'writing process', which was a key objective of my project at the beginning, now seems comically narrow and misguided in scope; my attempt to grasp and explicate this thing called a 'writing process' instead prompted investigations into broader literary, cultural and social contexts. In the final analysis, it is debatable whether I have succeeded in translating the 'process' behind Spark's creative output, and perhaps beside the point; what if 'process' or 'practice' is a convenient fiction, 'transformed into narrative'?

Toby Litt, a contemporary writer who once interviewed Spark in 2000, recently published a blog post about his 'Writing Process', in which he confesses 'there are some ways of talking about writing that make me feel a little nauseous. Sometimes, I admit, I've caught myself talking about *my writing process* or, even worse, *my creative process*'.[4] To Litt there is something 'wrong' or 'off' about these phrases and the concepts they express: 'I'm not a thing that processes. I'm not a computer and I'm not a royal cavalcade. I'm less

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[2] Lisa Stead, 'Introduction', in *The Boundaries of the Literary Archive: Reclamation and representation*, ed. by Carrie Smith and Lisa Stead (Ashgate, 2013), pp. 1–12 (p. 4).
[3] Cooke, 'Literary Remains', p. 119.
[4] Toby Litt, 'On My Writing Process', Substack, 7 February 2024 <https://awritersdiary.substack.com/p/on-my-writing-process?r=tmp4e&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&triedRedirect=true> [accessed 20 February 2024].

definitive than that'.[5] And in typical creative writerly fashion, Litt describes his 'process' instead as an adventurous mess:

> I'm a thing that lollops across the hours of books and fields of speech, picking out words and chewing words and digging out their roots and dropping words. I'm a thing that runs scared into the undergrowth and squats there as the evening gets darker and the strange sounds start up. […] I'm a thing that gazes at other kinds of thing, all other kinds of better thing [sic], wondering how I could become that kind of thing. Can you call that a process? These wild images? Perhaps, perhaps not.[6]

Given the discoveries I have made about Spark's acts of writing, such as the flashes of writing on the nearest piece of paper (envelopes, post-it notes, loose leaf papers), or the frequency with which accidents, chance and improvisation feature in her text's development, Litt's anti-process panegyric seems a fitting image for the wandering creative energy that fuels Spark's writing. And yet, other discoveries, like the dedicated periods of reading and research, the 'character lists' so thoughtfully curated by Penelope Jardine, the paper scraps that turn into typewritten and therefore significant fragments, the regular and considered moments of revision throughout several drafts, and the incorporation of previously unpublished material, all of this reflects a writer for whom 'process', or at least the operation of certain processes, is important. A mix, therefore, of the haphazard on the one hand, and the systematic on the other. Is this a creative process? Perhaps, perhaps not.

But what is especially intriguing about this quest towards the heart of Spark's creativity is that she was on a similar quest, played out across her metafictional oeuvre, and as a result I have been in the odd position of researching acts of creation by an author whose work is preoccupied with acts of creation. Yet, in hindsight, this is perfectly appropriate, because both discourses – the critical and the fictional – have illuminated each other in ways I did not anticipate. For one, my reading of *The Comforters* alongside Bakhtin is as much about understanding Spark as a novelist as it is about offering a fresh analysis of her debut novel; the Typing Ghost is not only a quirky metafictional conceit, but, as is evident from my analysis of the *Reality and Dreams* manuscript, a real dialogical presence in the writing. To the question Cooke asked earlier – 'who, or what, was in control here, and how could one

[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

know?' – we can reasonably offer the Typing Ghost as a serious answer, inasmuch as Spark occasionally loses control of the writing in ways that nevertheless produce interesting and unexpected results.

Losing or gaining literary control constitutes the central drama of *The Comforters*, and the extent to which Spark weaves this dynamic into the fabric of the novel is sometimes overlooked by critics. In Allen Massie's introduction to *The Comforters* he qualifies his admiration with some comments on the 'weaknesses' of this debut novel: 'There are lines which belong to an inferior and more ordinary way of novel-writing with the careless use of signifying adverbs: for instance, "She remarked ruefully" and "Caroline seized the phone angrily"'.[7] It does not occur to Massie that these signifying adverbs are employed deliberately to coincide with the 'inferior' and 'more ordinary way of novel-writing' governed by (and parodied through) the Typing Ghost. Recall that adverbs like these are later openly mocked through their excessive presence in Spark's comical poem, 'The Creative Writing Class'. Far from 'careless', Spark's clumsy adverbs are chosen with knowing purpose. The 'weaknesses' here are rather of an existential kind, where, as Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky's characters, 'the other's words actively influence the author's speech, forcing it to alter itself accordingly under their influence and initiative'.[8] Consequently, as James Bailey concludes of the Typing Ghost, 'the authorial figure is more ghostly than godly, and as capable of *being* haunted as haunting others'.[9] Spark has often thematised the notion of haunted authors; in a poem titled 'Created and Abandoned' the speaker worries over the condition of mysterious entities they have envisioned but left behind:

> Did something not happen to you after my waking?
> Did something next not happen? Or are you
> limbo'd there where I left you forever like characters
> in a story one has started to write and set aside?
>
> However bad-mannered you were, however amazing
> In your style, I hope you're not looking for me
> Night after night, not waiting for me to come back.
> I feel a definite responsibility for your welfare.

[7] Allen Massie, 'Introduction', in *The Comforters* (Polygon, 2017), pp.i–xviii (p. xvi, xvii).
[8] Mikhail Bakhtin quoted in Lynne Pearce, *Reading Dialogics* (E. Arnold, 1994), p. 53.
[9] James Bailey, *Muriel Spark's Early Fiction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), p. 48.

Are you all right?[10]

The act of authoring is by necessity a haunting, for in order to create a self one must also paradoxically abandon the self; as Michael Holquist says, 'in order to forge a self, I must do so from outside. In other words, I *author* myself' (punning, of course, on 'other'). Spark's self-reflexive fictional project is significant for the way it explores the dialogical reality of our being forever 'limbo'd there'.

And it is through the same intersubjective hijinks that Spark works through the complications of gender. My analysis of *Loitering with Intent* alongside the wider and contentious context of women's writing was prompted in part by snippets of correspondence relaying Spark's problems with translation. But, equally, rereading *Loitering with Intent* as a woman writer's anxiety about this very identity sheds light on Spark's remarks and attitude towards this literary category which, in turn, reframes the novel as a profound exploration of the dialogical tension through which gender is negotiated.

In this respect Spark anticipates Judith Butler's articulation of performativity which proposes that subjects only ever *become* gendered beings rather than experience gender or indeed sexuality as an *a priori* phenomenon. Some feminists have since took issue with how Butler's performative conception of gender appears to support both deterministic *and* open-ended or radical interpretations of human agency. On the one hand, as Moya Lloyd explains, Butler's performativity 'suggests a limited, discursively constituted subject' trapped in the confines of convention, and on the other, 'it implies "a voluntarist subject capable of exerting a parodistic will"', and therefore somehow free from those same constraints.[11] According to Lloyd, Butler's theory avoids the 'free will–determinism binary' upon which these criticisms are based; instead Butler reconceives human agency in a way that collapses and incorporates the opposition.[12] For Butler 'the practices that produce gendered subjects are also the sites where critical agency is possible', so that agency is not some innate quality that escapes the strictures of discourse, but is in fact born from or concretised through the very constraints that produce gender.[13] It is from this paradoxical position – both determined and free – that Fleur neither embraces nor rejects the signifier 'woman', which is instead kept in play but at a critical distance (not woman writer, but 'a woman and an artist'). And it is through Fleur's

[10] Muriel Spark, *Complete Poems* (Carcanet, 2015), p. 70.
[11] Moya Lloyd, *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics* (Polity, 2007), p. 57.
[12] Ibid., p. 60.
[13] Ibid., p. 6.

vocation as an artist, with writing as a key metaphor for both agency and entrapment, that she enacts and exposes the real fiction or fictional reality of gendered being.

The formal innovations through which Spark makes possible (and entertaining) these adventures in philosophy derives, at least in part, from a generic hybridity at the heart of Spark's novel writing. In her capacity as a disciple of poetry Spark infiltrates the novel form (that form that is no form – a 'sprawl') and makes of it something other, an uncanny reflection of itself. In his deconstructive analysis of *Not to Disturb* Willy Maley argues that the 'unsettling effects' of the novel are a symptom of 'textual disturbance', which is 'an undercurrent of a text that in some way upsets the equilibrium of a surface reading and creates a disturbance at the deepest levels of language'.[14] Hyperbolic pronouncements such as these populate Maley's essay, and they are typical of the irreverent and playful post-structuralist critiques that were fashionable (if declining) at the time, but Maley is correct to emphasise Spark's disturbing the 'deepest levels of language'; much of her fiction is precisely about 'deconstructing, dislocating, displacing, disarticulating'[15] the stale stickiness with which language – in all its various discourses – is held together, and it is thanks to what Vassiliki Kolocotroni calls Spark's 'poetic perception' that her novels succeed in doing so.[16]

Spark theorises her 'poetic vision' in an interview with Stephen Schiff: 'It's being aware of the value of words, sometimes in their etymology, in two or three senses, in a very quick flash as one is going along. […] That is a sort of a poetic method'.[17] Furthermore, in a different interview, when asked how she titles her novels Spark explains it comes from 'some sort of act of inspiration but maybe it is unconscious. I go on repeating the title until I've got the sort of feel of it. It's poetic in process, really'.[18] Maley observes of *Not to Disturb* that 'the very title itself, with its odd grammar, like a phrase taken out of context, is already unsettling. It recalls the "be not disturbed"| of the Psalms, but it has the opposite of a calming effect'.[19] Indeed many of Spark's novel titles are remarkably allusive; although both *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Girls of Slender Means* are now overfamiliar (with the former existing as a bundle of Brodie clichés in the public consciousness), it is worth reiterating the strangeness of their titles, the way they invite questions and court ambiguity in

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[14] Willy Maley, 'Not to Deconstruct? Righting and Deference in *Not to Disturb*', in *Theorising Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction* ed. by Martin McQuillan (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 170–188 (p. 172).
[15] Ibid., p. 184.
[16] Vassiliki Kolocotroni, 'Poetic Perception in the Fiction of Muriel Spark', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed. by Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 16–26.
[17] Stephen Schiff, 'Muriel Spark Between the Lines', *New Yorker*, 24 May 1993, pp. 35–43 (p. 41–42).
[18] Sarah Smith, 'Columbia Talks with Muriel Spark', *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, 30 (1998), pp. 199–214 (p. 211).
[19] Maley, 'Not to Deconstruct?', p, 173.

spite of, or because of, their mellifluous structure. Even those stylistically simple titles like *The Driver's Seat*, *The Public Image*, *Loitering with Intent* and *Aiding and Abetting* startle in their repurposing of idiomatic and colloquial language while titles like *The Comforters*, *Robinson*, *Memento Mori* and *Symposium* flaunt their intertextuality in ways both obvious and subtle. It is no wonder that so much Spark criticism puns on these titles; they remain endlessly evocative in conversation with the narratives they head.

And this is why the fragment occupies an important rather than peripheral place in Spark's novel writing; the poetically charged image often acts as a kernel from which narrative emerges. James Bailey notes that Spark 'composed strange fragments of poetic verse' during the unusually long development of *The Hothouse by the East River*, and that while these poem fragments 'may seem to be little more than a scrap of marginalia, and thus inconsequential to the end result of Spark's years-long project', one in particular seems to anticipate the nature of the novel, containing within its lines 'a subject that would become central to the published novel: the destruction of a seductive ideal by a force of "profound contagion"'[20]. But poetry functions not only as a catalyst for novelistic ideas and plots, it also shapes the prose with which these novels are composed. Indeed while this kind of fragmentary writing helped Spark tease out the conceptual foundations and narrative space of *Reality and Dreams* it is also responsible for much of the work behind the development of character voice, dialogue and style.

Given these insights into the poetic sensibility that informs Spark's novel writing, not only practically but conceptually, there is cause to re-evaluate her literary identity to better reflect the generic instability her novels represent; it is arguably more productive to appreciate Spark as a poet-novelist or novelist-poet rather than a minor poet and a major novelist. Alas, the publishing industry and academic specialisation encourage and indeed rely on the hard boundaries of categorisation, and it is as a novelist first and poet second that Spark will remain in the marketing and canonisation of her work, but there is much to be gained from an investigation into the machinations of the commercial and cultural institutions through which Spark's fiction was and is made available to the public. As Jeremy McGann says, 'every part of the productive process is meaning-constitutive—so that we are compelled, if we want to understand a literary work, to examine it in all its multiple aspects'.[21] My discussion of the paratextual phenomena surrounding Spark's work, from the

[20] Bailey, *Spark's Early Fiction*, p. 170–171.
[21] Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 33.

literal ('peritextual' elements like cover design) to the figurative ('epitextual' framings like the trajectory of Spark criticism), goes some way to expanding our understanding of Spark's fiction 'in all its multiple aspects'.

Moreover, it appears that Spark was keenly aware of the fact that, as Gerard Gennette claims, 'the literary work […] rarely appears in its naked state, without the reinforcement and accompaniment of a certain number of productions, themselves verbal or not', and was eager to involve herself in parts of the 'productive process' that other authors may have left (voluntarily or not) to the publisher.[22] These kind of critical detours from existing archival research into Spark (which often if not always extend or complement traditional literary critical positions) offer fresh perspectives on questions related to the emerging visual culture of commercial publishing, the segmentation and marketing of modern fiction genres, strategies behind authorial branding, and the processes through which canonisation occurs; in a word, a book history approach to the making of 'Muriel Spark'.

But my research is far from definitive and represents only a fraction of the possible routes from which to enter and extend investigations into the formidably vast Spark archive. On the level of genesis, there is still much work to be done on the manuscript materials surrounding Spark's other novels (and I have by no means exhausted the genetic story of *Reality and Dreams*), as well as further study of the relationships *between* her writing projects. Dirk Van Hulle encourages critics to 'consider a work's genesis within the development of the author's oeuvre in its entirety, and consider all the geneses of its components, including vestigial notes, drafts and unpublished works'.[23] This is an especially intriguing and promising idea for the Spark archive, because much of Spark's published work references and incorporates unpublished material. As Michael Harle says, 'a genetic study of Spark's abandoned work could periodize her process into different stages of composition, and look at her textual production across novels',[24] creating a more expansive 'genetic dossier' from which to broaden our understanding of the ways she repurposes and recombines different periods of writing, what Harle calls a 'stylistics of self-editing'.[25] But within this larger scope of genetic cross-referencing we must not forget the microgenetic movements on the level of the sentence, and it would be worthwhile comparing the extent to which revision features in the compositional phases across her novel writing, and whether there is any link

[22] Gérard Genette, 'Introduction to the Paratext', *New Literary History*, trans. by Marie Maclean, 22.1 (1991), pp. 261–271 (261).
[23] Dirk Van Hulle, *Genetic Criticism: Tracing Creativity in Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 113.
[24] Michael Harle, *Afterlives of Abandoned Work: Creative Debris in the Archive* (Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 176.
[25] Ibid.

between certain revisionary practices and particular stylistic tendencies in any given narrative. Furthermore, on this same microgenetic level, it may be profitable to investigate the impact of Spark's lessons in précis writing on her prose style; many critics have commented on the relationship between précis writing and Spark's economic prose, but only in passing, so a longer study of the course and materials Spark engaged with at Heriot-Watt University (whose archives contain the curriculum) could lead to greater insights into the significance of this commercial or non-literary discourse for Spark's burgeoning novelistic aesthetic.

Alongside this ambitious genetic proposal I would include investigations into the kind of background work performed by Penelope Jardine that I have uncovered in relation to *Reality and Dreams*; do character lists appear for all the Spark novels written after Jardine was enlisted as a permanent administrator? Does Spark's novel writing look different before and after Jardine's involvement in the process? How important was Jardine's own artistic medium (as a painter and sculptor) to Spark? To what extent is the collaboration between these two artists more significant than is normally assumed? In an article I published for the NLS I claimed that the archive shows how 'Spark's writing is borne of, and animated by, dialogues with others', and while Bailey calls for research into Spark's 'archived correspondence with contemporaries including Christine Brook-Rose and Doris Lessing',[26] there is also far more to be said about the creative relationship between Spark and her close companion.

In the event of publishing, a different kind of collaboration (or negotiation, depending on perspective) rears its head, and there is still much to explore of the publication and post-publication phases of Spark's fiction. My discussion only touched upon Macmillan's first edition covers produced by Victor Reinganum in connection with arguments about specific marketing strategies at the time. But what of the many paperback print and reprint runs (produced in turn by Penguin, Virago and Canongate in the UK) which have framed Spark in slightly different ways according to the aesthetic, commercial or even ideological demands of certain imprints? Or the four omnibus collections published by Constable throughout the 1990s; how did Spark curate her novels for these volumes (without context they look like a random assemblage of early and later fiction), and do the selected texts within each volume speak to the others in ways previously unacknowledged? This type of retrospective publishing deal is made not only in the interest of *selling* Spark, but in *canonising* her.

[26] Bailey, *Spark's Early Fiction*, p. 183.

And questions of canonisation are thrown into sharp relief when it comes to posthumous publications. Consider the centenary editions of Spark's novels published by Polygon books throughout 2017 and 2018, with commissioned introductions by various prominent figures in the Scottish literary landscape alongside other Spark critics and admirers. The hardback cover design – a pastel coloured dust jacket with the numbers 1 through to 22 displayed as the keys of a typewriter at the bottom – is repeated across all twenty-two novels, the only difference being the colour and the highlighted number at the bottom.[27] As Claire Squires observes of the rationale behind this strategy, 'branding delivered through design can be crucial in the establishment of the writer's oeuvre, rather than a perception of their work as a collection of disparate titles – a factor which arguably contributes to the author's (potential) canonisation'.[28] The purpose of these editions, beyond its historically specific celebration of Spark's centenary (which forms only one part of a year-long campaign of events in her honour), is to confer prestige on to Spark's authorial brand by self-consciously elevating her fiction into Works (a publisher's own 'transfiguration of the commonplace'). Investigations into publisher archives may shed further light on the design choices, marketing, the commissioned writers, and the future of Spark reprints; does this slick branding of the oeuvre change how we or posterity approach Spark, and is there a possibility that this kind of canonisation reduces rather than strengthens the impact or potency of a writer's work?

In the end it is perhaps enough to say that, as Spark does, 'there is far more to creative writing than just to sit down to write and simply vent your feelings'.[29] The promise of archival research is that we can now unearth the 'far more' of Spark's career in creative writing, and from there open new critical avenues and perspectives from which to study and appreciate the prolific output of a giant of Scottish letters. Of her desired readership Fleur Talbot says 'I always hope the readers of my novels are of good quality. I wouldn't want to think of anyone cheap reading my books'.[30] It is time now for good quality readers of the Sparkives.

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[27] At the top of the spine a different letter is printed for each book, and when they are all arranged together in chronological order the letters spell out 'The novels of Muriel Spark', thereby incentivising buyers to complete their collection.

[28] Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Literature* (Palgrave, 2007), p. 88.

[29] Muriel Spark, *The Informed Air: Essays by Muriel Spark*, ed. by Penelope Jardine (New Direction, 2014), p. 84.

[30] Muriel Spark, *Loitering with Intent* (Polygon, 2018), p. 166.

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