

## A Study of the Divine and the Secular in Muriel Spark's Novels

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### ABSTRACT

In Muriel Spark's novels, man's actions occur amid a religious environment. The truth for her is not this phenomenal world, but the divine one. She criticizes the social behavior with an ethical enthusiasm. Spark's work has a consistent factor; the explicit or implicit expression of faith in a divine order. The research shows that expression of faith in addition to her artistic handling of the form of the novel. She tries to unify this world with the other world by introducing supernatural elements. Spark presents her characters satirically but with a degree of admiration.

### وراسة في الدينى و الدينوى في روايات ميوريل سبارك

#### الملخص

ما تقوم به الشخصيات من أفعال في روايات ميوريل سبارك إنما يقع في إطار دينى فالعالم السماوى هو من يمثل لديها الحقيقة و ليس العالم الظاهرى . و هي تنتقد السلوك الاجتماعى بحماس أخلاقى. إن الإيمان بعالم سماوى بشكل مباشر أو بطريقة ضمنية هو عامل أساس فى روايات سبارك لذلك يبين البحث كيف تظهر سبارك إيمانها من خلال الشكل الروائى الذى تتبناه. و هي تحاول أن توفق بين هذا العالم و العالم الآخر من خلال إشراك عناصر ميتافيزيقية فى رواياتها، و تحاول أيضا تقديم شخصياتها بطريقة ساخرة لكنها لا تخلو من الاحترام.

**A Study of the Divine and the Secular in Muriel Spark's Novels****-I-**

Reading Muriel Spark's novels shows openly or in implication that her characters and their thoughts and behavior are religious and secular at the same time. This study aims at showing that Spark's novels clearly reveal these seemingly contradictory tendencies, though they might cause some difficulties in trying to analyze them or to categorize the novelist. The study also aims at showing the fictional art through which Spark presents her religious and secular perceptions. Five novels are tackled in this brief research because they agree with the perceptions of the study more than Spark's other novels do.

The religious matter of Muriel Spark's novels might be a reason for her distinctiveness, for it is known that there is rather no religious interests in the realist novel of her contemporaries in the mid-twentieth century. In her novels, however, man's actions occur amid a religious environment and are drawn in the context of his or her relationship with God.

Muriel Spark is a Roman Catholic convert, and it is known that for any person conforming to Catholicism, the truth is not this phenomenal world, but the divine one. The Catholic disdains phenomena, except as symbolic of God's design. For Catholic writers, the world is not that of experience and experimentation. Their real attention is given to the holy and extraordinary. In Muriel Spark's novels, whenever the ordinary and commonplace is presented, it is to show us that it contains elements of the extraordinary, which form part of a divine pattern. Muriel Spark criticizes the social behavior with an ethical and realistic enthusiasm. However, she seems to use faith rather than submit to it.

A sense of dislocation is disabling to realistic writers in the mid-century because they are challenged by the media and the press. The technological media rivals the fictional act. The camera and the editor replace the author. Moreover, the dislocation might arise from the social, political and ideological conditions of the period which appears more fragmented to its people than any other. Amid these challenges, Muriel Spark has to create her own way.

Muriel Spark's selected novels reflect the assumptions of the French new novel, which, on its part, is influenced by the social realism of the mid-century. She makes use of the French new novel's techniques such as the use of the

present tense, detailed description given in a neutral tone and narrative discontinuity.

The subject matter of her novels is the absurd quality of the modern world. This, however, does not mean that she rejects God. In fact, for Muriel Spark, the elements of reality are integrated by her awareness of God. In The Mandelbaum Gate(1965), her most clearly religious novel among the selected ones, she presents her protagonist's opinion of the social realism as "repetition, boredom, despair, going nowhere for nothing, all of which conditions are enclosed in a tight, unbreakable statement of the times at hand"(p.188). Such a view suggests a nihilistic nature of the social realism. But there is "another world than this" as she mentions in The Ballad of Peckham Rye(1960,p. 202), a world, which contains possibilities of faith and salvation that helps to transcend, or at least, lessen the "boredom" and "despair." Muriel Spark makes use of the French new novel's techniques, but she subverts their function by using them dynamically towards an end. This can be illustrated in a passage from The Driver's Seat(1970) where everything is described neutrally.

... the furniture is all fixed, adaptable to various uses, and stackable, stacked into a panel are six folding chairs, should the tenant decide to entertain six for dinner. The writing desk extends to a dining table, and when the desk is not in use it, too, disappears into the pinewood wall, its bracket-lamp hinging outward and upward to from a wall-lamp. The bed is by day a narrow seat with overhanging bookcases; by night it swivels out to accommodate the sleeper. Lise has put down a patterned rug from Greece. She has fitted a hopsack covering on the seat of the divan. Unlike the other tenants she has not put unnecessary curtains in the window... (pp.19-20)

In this passage there is a sense of firmness and tidiness. The flat's self-containment reflects Lise's self-sufficiency. Thus, a relationship between the world and the individual is established. From a tidy world, we are shown a glimpse of freedom.

In spite of her conforming to formal traditions of the French new novel, Muriel Spark's selected novels are written from a moral standpoint. It seems that in the course of her work, her emphasis has shifted from a revelation of fictional techniques to an ironic observation of the practice of deception in

everyday life. Her work has a consistent factor; the explicit or implicit expression of faith in a divine order.

It is noticed that the moral standpoint in Muriel Spark's selected novels is given in a way that does not "inflict a lot of emotional involvement on the reader" as she answers her interviewer Ian Gillham(p.412). She might rather try to make her reader laugh. Instead of the art of sentiment and emotion, she advocates the art of satire and ridicule. We will see through a few quotations from her novels in this study that she seems to prefer a more deliberate cunning, a more derisive undermining of what she considers wrong.

The research aims at pursuing the tension between feeling and form in Spark's novels; while partaking of realist, experimental and Catholic influences, Spark remains peculiarly independent of any category. Her concept of reality includes the divine and the supernatural. She uses experimental techniques but subordinates them to her religious vision of coherence.

## -II-

In her novel The Comforters(1957), Muriel Spark satirizes the scheme of things and the fallen world. In his commentary on that novel, Frederick Karl (1963)calls Spark "light to the point of froth"(p.280), while Frank Kermode(1968) describes her as "obsessed with her medium," and "a difficult and important artist"(pp.425-6). The problem of reconciling the frothy and serious aspects of her work is related to her attempt to show the absurdity of man in the context of a divine purpose. In The Comforters, Muriel Spark presents a few themes like the interest in blackmailers and plotters, and the allegiance to her Roman Catholic church. The novel presents God as an omniscient author of the world. Reading the life of the novelist, we can easily infer that this novel, which is viewing from a Catholic perspective is firmly rooted in her own experience, extending into her childhood.

Religion is a central theme in Muriel Spark's selected novels. Her protagonists struggle with the demands of religion in their everyday life. It is known that a writer who is conforming to a certain faith or dogma faces a particular problem: whether his allegiance is to his faith or to art. In other words, is it possible for an artist to be both a creator and a supporter of dogma? In his book, Inside the Whale and Other Essays (1957), George Orwell

believes that bad Catholics write good books(p.39), while J. H. Newman, in his book, The Idea of a University(2002), believes that Catholic literature is the writing that includes “all subjects of literature whatever, treated as only a Catholic would treat them”(p.285). there should be certain inadequacy in the relationship between the religious awareness and the fallen world. Therefore, the conforming writer might be less interesting to readers than those who feel the tension between loyalty to the faith and the need to reveal the deviations of man. Nevertheless, Spark’s attitude to her faith is critical. In the few novels tackled in this research, we notice that most of her protagonists are converts and her exposition of her faith is dreary. Moreover, the conforming characters are frustrated at complying with their faith and are irritated with other conforming friends or relatives. The paradox of presenting evil in a work of art is discussed by Jacques Maritain in his book, Art and Scholasticism(1990), in which he says, “The essential question is not to know whether a novelist can or cannot depict such-and such an aspect of evil. The essential question is from what altitude he depicts it and whether his art and mind are pure enough and strong enough to depict it without connivance”(pp.224-5). The situation is that either the novelist sees the world from a distance or he closely sees the evil he describes. Seeing closely means involvement and understanding, or, may be, compassion. It does not seem fair for a novelist to draw a picture of evil without understanding the deprivations and the reasons behind them.

It seems that the altitude from which Muriel Spark presents evil is high. Her attitude to her characters’ sinful conduct is uncompromising. She does not build up a situation where an understanding of a character’s personality explain or excuse an evil action. Spark is bound by the ordinances of God. Therefore, she seems not to believe in the freedom and independence of character. It is quite probable that she does not share the novelist’s love to his or her character, which is explained by John Bayley in his book The Characters of Love: A Study in the Literature of Personality(1990) as a “delight in their independent existence as other people, an attitude towards them which is analogous to our feelings towards those we love in life”(p.7). Because the characters’ roles are predetermined, Spark neither gives us a psychological view of them nor penetrates their ideas and motives. This lack of information

about her characters makes it difficult for us to sympathize with them. The characters fulfill their potential through circumstances beyond their control.

The matter is not that Muriel Spark creates characters in order to express her disdain for them; rather that the characters embody her view of the fallen world. Spark seems not to feel she has to provide emotional information for the reader. In an interview with Frank Kermode(1963), she said, “Things just happen and one records what has happened a few seconds later”(p.81). it is an aesthetic of detachment.

A metaphoric vision of the world pervades Spark’s selected novels. The external visible world becomes a spiritual manifestation of the spiritual world. When her characters sin, their sin is not wasted for she thinks that people we are presented with are “repositories of invisible grace”(Spark 1955, p.1). In The Bachelors(1960), a character called Ronald Bridges says, “The Christian economy seems to me to be so ordered that original sin is necessary to salvation”(p.90). The theme of this novel is the discrepancy between man’s instinct and divine will. Spark seems to emphasize that we do not pray for the right things: Patrick Seton is on trial for fraud, and his pregnant beloved, Alice, prays that he will be proved innocent, but she is unaware that if he was set free, he would kill her. She says, “It’s a test of God”(p.206), and when Patrick is found guilty she says, “I don’t believe in God”(p. 239). Her participation in the course of life is decided by forces she has never understood.

In the selected novels, evil is necessary as a means to good. In The Comforters, Mrs. Hogg is shown to be necessary for Caroline’s spiritual progress, just as Robinson and Tom Wells are necessary to January in different ways. In The Mandelbaum Gate(1965), Miss Rickward’s hatred to Barbara is beneficial to her, and the forged certificate is enabling rather than preventing her marriage to Harry. In the selected novels, what may have seemed to the reader horrible evil during the course of the narrative is revealed at the end as redemptive. Everything is shown to be part of a divine plan.

From Muriel Spark’s biography we know that she has converted from Judaism to Roman Catholicism. Therefore, her protagonists are mainly Catholic converts. They are intelligent and independent thinkers. These characters suffer because of the conflict between their own desires and the

obligations of their newly adopted church. In The Comforters, Caroline is “an odd sort of Catholic, very little heart for it, all mind”(p.231). it seems that these characters react to the new obligations by intellectualizing.

Muriel Spark admits that there is a clash between sex and religion. In an article entitled “My Conversion” published in Twentieth Century (1961), she says that it is difficult “not being able to have a sex life if you’re not married, but it has its advantages if you have a vocation, a mind obsessed with a certain subject or a job to do in life”(p.61). For the female protagonists of Spark, sexual deprivation is more than difficult. In The Comforters, Caroline has to stop sleeping with her boyfriend, Laurence, who thought “how strangely near impracticable sexual relations would be between them, now that Caroline thought them sinful”(p.104). Being forbidden, sex becomes distorted. Having deserted Laurence, Caroline becomes infatuated with Mrs. Hogg:

Caroline realized 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. The woman was apparently wearing nothing underneath. Caroline looked swiftly away, sickened at the sight, for she was prim; her sins of the flesh had been fastidious always(p.29).

In The Bachelors, Spark is so merry when she deals with the question of sex and Catholicism. An Irish Catholic, Matthew Finch, trying to prevent himself from going to bed with girls, eats raw onion before a date, thinking that the smell of onion in his mouth would not encourage girls to go to bed with him, and so providing a strong obstacle to the devil. Unfortunately, the girl from whom Matthew defends himself like the smell of onions, so he yields to her.

Although Spark’s belief is so firmly established, she is satiric to her characters who share her the same belief. Sir Edwin and Lady Manders in The Comforters are well-meaning and their motives are shown to be pure, but the events in their lives reveal a gap between the motives and the efficacy of their actions. Sir Edwin is incapable of dealing with family crisis, and his religion remains separate and ineffectual. In The Mandelbaum Gate, a layman attacks Catholics charging them with being so easily cheated:

‘So many Catholics won’t listen to any other religious writings. It’s killing. And the things they swallow themselves...’

This was nothing new to Barbara; ever since her conversion she had met sophisticated women who, on the subject of Catholicism, sneered like French village atheists, and expected to be excused from normal good manners, let alone intelligence, on this one subject. (p.288)

In The Bachelor, people attack religion in the presence of Ronald. His hostess declares that she is “anti-Catholic,” but she continues,

‘But I don’t mean I’m anti you,’ said Marlene. ‘You’re sweet.’

‘Oh, thanks.’

‘There’s a distinction,’ Tim pointed out, bright with tact, ‘between the person and their religion.’

‘I see,’ Ronald attended closely to his potatoes. (p.46)

Ronald becomes irritated, and when he is asked how he feels about something “as Catholic,” he loses his temper: “ ‘Don’t ask me,’ Ronald shouted, ‘how I feel about things as a Catholic. To me, being Catholic is part of my human existence. I don’t feel one way as a human being and another as a Catholic’ ” (p.83).

It seems that throughout the selected novels, Spark has acquired a confidence in her expression of faith, and in her handling of the form of the novel. One notices that instead of overloading her novel with allegory and symbolism, she had made use of characterization and suspense. She also uses the supernatural as an aspect of reality and as a dynamic moral force. Her physical world is revealed through its spiritual dimension. In The Mandelbaum Gate, Spark has a priest say in a sermon that “there is a supernatural process going on under the surface and within the substance of all things”(p.214). It is a statement of faith at the heart of her work. She tries to unify this world with the other world. To achieve this, she introduces supernatural elements into her novels: an invisible typewriter, a mysterious voice on the telephone. A demonic visitant and a group of souls in the purgatory. The strange happenings are presented without the narrator’s explanation. They are puzzling to the characters as well as the reader. The typewriter might be hallucination, but we are told later by the narrator that there is an author writing about Caroline.

Muriel Spark blurs the boundaries between the tangible and intangible. In an interview with Joyce Emerson 1962, Spark says, “ I haven’t a strong sense of distinction between natural and supernatural; I think we’re all involved in

the supernatural world”(p.14). The characters’ insight and moral growth can be measured by the extent to which they cope with the supernatural. In all the novels of the study, it seems that those characters who accept the possibility of the irrational, and who realize the existence of a world inexplicable to man, find the experience enlightening, while those who cannot cope with the irrational remain trapped in their rational mundane existence.

In The Ballad of Peckham Rye, God is rarely mentioned. This might reflect the spiritual wasteland of Peckham. The only religious voice in the novel comes from Nelly Mahone, an elderly lapsed Catholic, who stands on street-corners declaiming the Bible. Her words act as a commentary on the deeds of the protagonist, Dougal Douglas. He is a half-devil half-angel creature acting as a stimulant to the inhabitants of Peckham disturbing their spiritual condition and making them aware of the narrowness of their lives. In this novel, the word “immoral” is largely used by the characters to describe different activities. It is also shown to be an accurate description of Peckham life. Relationships among people are shown as sterile, but where Dougal is able to show them the possibility of freedom the result is not always enlightening. Their inaction is changed into violence and murder. No one will benefit from Dougal’s ideas, and when he leaves the city, the characters return to their former thoughtlessness and indifference. In the final paragraph of the novel we are offered a vision where by the immorality of Peckham is transcended. We are told that one of the characters “saw the children playing there and the women coming home from work with their shopping-bags, the Rye for an instant looking like a cloud of green and gold, the people seeming to ride upon it, as you might say there was another world than this”(p.202). It seems that what we have seen is not the total sum of man’s condition, and there is still a hope for change.

In the selected novels, we notice the immanence of God in the secular world. Muriel Spark seems to see the physical aspect of reality as a manifestation of God’s purpose. In The Mandelbaum Gate, Barbara Vaughan thinks that “Either the whole of life is unified under God or everything falls apart”(p.308), and the failure of her characters to achieve this unity is the theme of Spark’s selected novels. They refuse to accept that everyday reality has a divine dimension. Other characters in her novels concentrate on the

spiritual, rejecting the material aspects of God's creation. Patrick, in The Bachelors, exemplify the latter approach. He is shocked by Alice's desire for marriage, "as if he were a materialist with a belief in empty forms"(p. 174). For Patrick, marriage is not spiritual, but equal to man-made laws, which are dismissed as being contrary to the life of the spirit. His contempt of mundane matters enables him to plan Alice's murder as if he were doing her a favor: "I will release her spirit from this gross body"(p. 174). For some characters, even bachelorhood is considered graceless. Matthew Finch, who has been educated by the Jesuits, is concerned at being single: "I'm afraid we are heretics," he said, "or possessed by devils... . It shows a dualistic attitude, not to marry if you aren't going to be a priest or a religious, You've got to affirm the oneness of reality in some form or another"(ibid, p.89). Matthew does this by marrying Alice. For Ronald Bridges, who suffers from epilepsy, things are more complicated. The belief in the prophetic power, or may be , in the Satanic possession of epileptics is implied in the way he behaves. His power of perception is related to his illness. Throughout the novel we are shown that he has demonic characteristics. He has a desire to become a priest, but his epilepsy and his evils frustrate that desire. He is told,

"... in the event, you can't be a priest... . But you can do something else."

"I could never be first-rate."

"That is sheer vanity"—it was an old priest speaking—"you were never meant to be a first-rate careerist."

"Only a first-rate epileptic."(pp.6-7)

From a religious point of view, Ronald tries to accept his epilepsy and incorporate its complications with his way of life. But in spite of his conforming to Christianity, he cannot transcend a state of pessimism at what he sees around him. He begins to recite a passage from the Bible(The Epistle to the Philippians):

All that rings true, all that commands a reverence, and all that makes for right; all that is pure, all that is lovely, all that is gracious in the telling; virtue and merit, wherever virtue and merit are found—let this be the argument of your thoughts(p.116).

The narrator comments that Ronald's recital is an "exercise" against his "melancholy and boredom"(p.116), and a "mere charm to ward off the disgust, despair and brain-burning"(p.117). after a bad night involving demonic thoughts, Ronald decides to go to confession the next morning "to receive, in absolution, a friendly gesture of recognition from the maker of heaven and earth"(p.122). This puts Ronald's epilepsy within God's control. Ronald's struggle goes on. He is not going to defeat demons; he is rather going to accept the fact that throughout his life, God and demons will coexist, and with faith, he will be getting on with life.

Being conformed to Catholicism, Muriel Spark seems to like her novels reflect this conformity. Therefore, we notice in her work a divine or a moral system behind the obvious mundane world. There is always a tension between the mundane world and the divine plot behind it. Spark tries to reconcile that tension.

In The Comforters, Muriel Spark makes Caroline a writer who is working on a book called (Form in the Modern Novel) and is "having difficulty with the chapter on realism"(p.59) because she is becoming aware of realities which transcend phenomena. The novel tries to bridge the gap between this world and the next. Caroline struggles with the problem of exercising free will in a divine context. The novel suggests that understanding of our part in this world is imperfect since we participate in it. Caroline, through suffering, finally understands the religious paradox that total freedom needs total submission to God's ordainment. Caroline has accepted the pain of being bound to religious confines, but she understands her acceptance of that pain as means for liberation. Her suffering, her everyday demands of religion combined with other people's lack of understanding, have given her a new insight: She understands now that the fact of her faith does not delete the fact of evil, and this has to be accepted through realizing that the commonplace and the corrupt have an integral relationship with the divine.

Finally, we can say that Muriel Spark's characters who try faithfully to understand and live by the laws of religion are shown to be absolutely right in their efforts, even if they do not quite well apply their faith to their lives. Those who live outside the laws of religion are shown to be wrong even if their intentions are honest.

**- III-**

It becomes clear that the action of Muriel Spark's novels is centered on Faith, towards which her characters aspire. However, in certain situations and certain phases in the lives of particular characters, the emphasis on the force of faith is decreased, and evil is shown through the action of the characters or through the faithlessness of people, leaving it to the reader to discern the extent of violation in the moral system. Moreover, Spark does not present a specific faith from which to take our moral judgments or rather prejudices.

In The Mandelbaum Gate, Muriel Spark sees God as essential to the life of the protagonist, but she does not affirm her faith; she rather re-examines it. An increasing pessimism about the role of religion in everyday life is noticed in the novel. The heroine, Barbara Vaughan has converted from Judaism to Catholicism. She falls in love with an archaeologist named Harry Clegg. Her Judaism—which she associates with her sexuality—strengthens her life of love, but her Catholicism creates a conflict between her desires and those prevented by her older religion. Her lover is a non-Catholic and she is forbidden to marry him unless he is able to annul his former marriage. This crisis between her Judaism and her Catholicism causes Barbara to travel to Jerusalem to re-establish her identity. While she is there she discovers that her being a Jewess prevents her from making a pilgrimage to the shrines in Jordan. The novel does not offer the Catholic faith as a solution. Other factors force themselves into consideration, such as Jewish heredity and culture, the demands of sexual love and marriage, and the powerful need to be a wholly integrated person at rest with inherited and new faiths. The novel seems to be an attempt to attain freedom.

This means that it is possible to associate Muriel Spark with her heroine Barbara, and we can see the novel as a version of a similar quest in the life of the author. But this does not mean that there is an exact correlation of motives between the author and her heroine. The novel suggests an attempt by Muriel Spark to assert some kind of independence of faith. In the other novels tackled in this research, sexual and spiritual fulfillment are made incompatible. The enjoyment of one implies the destruction of the other. Barbara considers sexual deprivation a distortion of her true personality. The author frequently draws an

analogy between Barbara's existence and that of a nun: "Barbara described bits of her love-affair with Harry Clegg, and her life before that, how it now seemed that she had been living like a nun without the intensity and reality of a nun's life"(p.302). Barbara realizes that, to her relatives, "she was a settled spinster of thirty-seven... one who had embraced the Catholic church instead of a husband, one who had taken up religion instead of cats"(p.36). Once Barbara is rescued from a convent in Jordan, where she was in danger for political reasons. The dramatic escape and its location are symbolic. The message we conclude is made clear: "it was not any escape from any real convent, it was an unidentified confinement of the soul she had escaped from"(p.174). this denial of the escape makes it clear that it is inappropriate to label her "nun-like." Barbara's liberation is described in terms of "escape," whereas in the other novels of the research, liberation is described in terms of submission within the confines of the Faith, and the protagonists struggle, but they never yield to the temptation of thinking whether their faith is right or not.

In The Mandelbaum Gate, Barbara not only finds that her religion is intolerable, but actually doubts its relevance to her own life. This is clear in her love affair. Because she has slept with Harry, she feels she should repent and confess, but she also feels that she cannot do this: "it is impossible to repent of love. The sin of love does not exist"(p 45). Human love is given precedence over faith. We know that Barbara is tormented because she cannot marry Harry unless it is done outside the church. Finally she tells Harry that she will marry him anyway, with or without the blessing of the church.

In the novel, we are told that Barbara is a mixture of Jew and Catholic who seeks to know her own identity. It seems that Barbara is aware that she must not take her decision only from the church's point of view. She also feels that "it is possible to do things for their own sake, not only possible but sometimes necessary for the affirmation of one's personal identity"(p.90). She seems to feel that she has to have her own moral judgments, hoping that God will confirm her own decisions.. The main point of the novel is that Barbara makes up her own mind before the church's opinion, thinking that this is essential to build up her own identity. Barbara also incorporates both Jewish and Christian doctrine in her faith and behavior. It might be through Freddy Hamilton that

she begins to evaluate the liberating possibilities of this paradox. Freddy is an English diplomat she meets in Jerusalem, a quiet, reserved man. He has had a brief unhappy marriage. Barbara tells him that she will never see her fiancé again if Rome does not annul his former marriage. Freddy who is “afraid she had some tiresome deep conviction”(p.15) discusses with her the extremity of this action. Barbara answers quoting from the Book of the Apocalypse “Being what thou art, luke-warm, neither cold nor hot, thou wilt make me vomit thee out of my mouth”(p.16). Throughout her relationship with Freddy, Barbara begins to understand that paradox may be compatible with wholeness and unity: “She had caught a bit of Freddy’s madness and for the first time in this Holy Land, felt all of a piece, a Catholic Jewess, a private-judging Catholic”(p.173). Barbara attends Mass at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and listens to a sermon preached by an English priest to a group of pilgrims, and his text is from the Epistle to the Hebrews: “We have an everlasting city, but not here,; our goal is the city that is one day to be”(p.210). The priest warns the pilgrims against false shrines and assures that it is impossible to have total accuracy in religious sites: “If you are looking for physical exactitude in Jerusalem it is a good quest, but it belongs to archeology, not faith”(p.213-4). We are reminded that Barbara’s fiancé is an archeologist. This might remind us that his methods of knowing truth are different from hers. The priest speaks about the unity that Barbara wishes for very much: “In the Jerusalem of history we see the type and shadow of that Jerusalem of Heaven that St. John of Patmos tells of in the Apocalypse... . This is the spiritual city that is involved eternally with the historical one”(p.214). From this sermon it is revealed to Barbara that through faith, the disparate elements of Jerusalem can be united. The sermon solidify the issues that have been previously presented to us as Barbara’s unresolved thoughts. Now she understands that thoughts should not be worrying, since they accompany faith; without them faith would be irrelevant.

Barbara’s efforts to be free from the confines of religion are reflected in the form of The Mandelbaum Gate, which is longer than any of the other novels of this research. In this novel, she allows her characters more freedom than usual. In addition to the religious options, secular offers are presented to the characters as alternatives. What distinguishes this novel from the other novels

is that its unity and coherence come from the characters' experience through their struggle to approach success or freedom. It may not have a tidy conventional plot, but it is full of descriptions—sights, sounds, smells and tastes—and with characterization. In his essay, "Journey to Jerusalem," Angus Wilson(1965) remarks that this novel represents a departure in Spark's work: "I am delighted at the change and I admire her courage in making it. ... I have increasingly felt that her books were on the edge of becoming machine-made essays in sprightly Catholic paradox"(p.28). In an interview with Mary Holland(1965), Spark said about this novel: "It 's a very important book for me, much more concrete and solidly rooted in a very detailed setting"(p.10).

Muriel Spark's impatience with the confines of religion might not be surprising. What is more surprising is the dramatic shift in her beliefs which she expressed in an interview with George Armstrong(1970): "I don't believe in good and evil so much anymore. No one makes pacts with the devil, as they did in the Middle Ages. Now, there is only absurdity and intelligence"(p.8).

To substitute "absurdity and intelligence" for "good and evil" seems a form of profanity coming from Muriel Spark.

#### - IV -

In Muriel Spark's novels, the structure, style and content are inseparable. She uses her art to express her religious perceptions. It seems that she feels she has to show God's unifying purpose in her art. Spark also seems to feel a similarity between divine and novelistic structure. In her interview with Joyce Emerson(1962), she said, "I believe events are providentially ordered"(p.14), and her novels reflect this belief in the way she makes the reader aware that her novel's events are similarly ordered. This does not mean that she denies the existence of contingency but, while she shows the arbitrary appearance of happenings, she frequently reminds us of a divine order behind them. For her, truth is arrived at through an act of faith, so there is a possibility of turning contingency into an order. This awareness is reflected in the form of her novels. What appears accidental is, in fact, purposeful. The form for Spark is tightly structured. Some of her characters resist the inevitability of plot or order and explore the contingent world. But ultimately, she suggests that even trivial incidents will be relevant by the end of the novel.

Muriel Spark usually shows the morality and conventions of her community, which becomes a microcosm of the larger world. In the interview with Frank Kermode(1963), she reveals how her vision of reality is presented:

When I become interested in a subject, say old age, then the world is peopled for me—just peopled with them. And it is a narrow little small world, but it's full of old people, full of whatever I'm studying. They're the centre of the world, and everyone else is on the periphery. It is an obsession until I've finished writing about them. And that's how I see things(p.133)

Spark's technique is to explore her subject on a detailed scale aiming at arriving at the truth as she believes in. Through describing her small community, larger truths about society and human nature are revealed. One can find levels of meanings in Spark's work of which the surface is symbolic only, and which needs exploration.

The structure of Spark's novels is affected by her concept of time and her handling of the tenses in the narrative. In The Driver's Seat, spark uses the present tense with hints and anticipations to the future to emphasize that the protagonist's future is already determined. The present tense gives immediacy and tension to the incidents. It might also show the protagonist's lack of important past.

In her interview with Kermode, Spark describes chronological time as "vulgar chronology," and for her the act of writing is what she has called "an attempt to redeem the time"(p.64). The happenings of everyday life are caught by her and given moral implications. It seems that her art functions as a means for divine redemption. The chronological time in her novels is not so important, that is why she sometimes gives the ending so early, then the reader's attention will not be given to the linear stream of action. It will go to speculation on the moral order of things. This is all done through a technique of precision and economy in words and sentences. Spark's description of Lise in The Driver's Seat illustrates her way of creating a mood through diction and syntax.

She, whose lips are usually pressed together with the daily disapprovals of the accountants' office where she has worked continually, except for the months of illness, since she was eighteen, that is to say, for sixteen years and some months. Her lips, when she does not speak or eat, are normally pressed together like the ruled line of a balance sheet, marked

straight with her old-fashioned lipstick, a final and a judging mouth, a precision instrument, a detail-warden of a mouth (p.12). In The Ballad of Peckham Rye, the narration perfectly shows the gloomy and dull quality of Peckham Rye. In the following scene, two lovers are spending their evening together, but there seems to exist a dull wasteland in their love relationship: "She sat in her chair and took up her knitting. He perched on the arm. She pushed him with her elbow in the same movement as she was using for her knitting. He tickled the back of her neck, which she put up with for a while"(p.69). After the couple have made love, the scene ends unromantically: "She went into the scullery and put on the kettle while he put on his trousers and went home to his wife"(p.71).

Muriel Spark's economy in description is so clear in The Bachelors. This economy makes her description full of implications. It will neither be witty nor resonant if the implications are spelt out. This can be, for instance, shown in this passage about Isobel Billows: "Isobel had been three years divorced from her husband and always said to her new friends 'I was the innocent party,' which they did not doubt, and the very statement of which proved, to some of her friends, that she was so in a sense"(p.107).

Throughout her work, Spark has avoided jargon and abstract thoughts. In The Comforters, Dougal Douglar is Spark's scrutinizer of language. He is writing the autobiography of an actress, and in his notebook he collects suitable clichés like,

I thrilled to his touch.

He was always an incurable romantic.

I had no eyes for any other man.

This can be an ironic disapproval of jargon.

To conclude, we can say that Muriel Spark's style can show more than the words can say. At the heart of her work is her belief in God, which directs the angle of her vision. She believes that this world is within the control of God's purposeful plan. Her novels include characters who are adapted to a godless world. She presents these characters satirically but with a degree of admiration. In her work there is a tension between God's eternal state and man's temporal thoughts and prejudices. In addition to revealing her characters as part of a divine pattern, she pays attention to their mortality.

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